‘Mechanic art and elocutionary science’:

Speech Production in British Literature, 1770s-1820s

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Abstract

This thesis argues that studies of speech, whether physiological, political, or poetic, saw increased attention and took on new significance in British literature in the politically turbulent period from the 1770s to the 1820s. I focus on Erasmus Darwin, John Thelwall and Percy Bysshe Shelley, three writers whose work encompassed science, politics, and poetry, and drew charges of radicalism and materialism. From a speaking machine built by Darwin in 1770, to the work of Thelwall, whose career as orator, poet and finally speech therapist was punctuated by the 1795 'Gagging Acts', to Shelley's poetry, voiced by revolutionary volcanoes and inhuman spirits alike, speech production becomes a focal point for radical writers to explore politically and philosophically unorthodox ideas. In this thesis, I argue that through their specific engagements with the mechanics of speech production these writers are able to present utterance as a form of physical and effective action. This in turn implicates their writing in politically-loaded contemporary debates about materialism and what I suggest was a developing and similarly politicised conception of Literature and Science as distinct modes of thinking and writing.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References. A portion of the material presented in chapters one and two has previously been published by the author in: Alice Rhodes, '"Transcripts of the heart": John Thelwall and Romantic Era Shorthand Writing', *European Romantic Review* 31, no. 3 (May 2020): 339-349 and Alice Rhodes, 'Radical Birdcalls: Avian Voices and the Politics of the Involuntary', *Essays in Romanticism* 27, no. 2 (October 2020): 101-114.

Introduction

'Mechanic art and elocutionary science'

In 1810, after nearly ten years lecturing on elocution, orator, poet, and elocutionist, John Thelwall published one of his most substantial treatises on 'the treatment of impediments of speech', *A Letter to Henry Cline*. In the *Letter*, Thelwall describes the conviction, held at the outset of his investigations into speech production, that 'mechanic art and elocutionary science might triumph over every other difficulty'.[1] In combining these two notions, that speech is an 'art' and a 'science', he suggests that elocution is not only a skill, but a system of knowledge founded on theoretical principles. Thelwall goes on to explain that he soon came to disapprove of the 'mechanic art' of crafting oral prosthetics which, he argued, were uncomfortable and inconvenient for the wearer and carried a serious risk of choking. However, as this thesis will argue, the idea that speech might be, to some degree, 'mechanic' appears throughout his writing, and has as much to do with Thelwall's 'science' of speech, as it has to do with its practice.[2] Moreover, concern with the 'mechanic' and scientific aspects of speech production is a feature not only of Thelwall's writing, but also, I argue, Romantic-era treatments of speech more broadly. The term 'mechanic' was heavily loaded in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and could variously refer to manual work or craft (and those, such as prosthetics makers, who carried it out), machinery, or 'physical properties, agents, forces'.[3] What all these senses have in common,

[1] John Thelwall, *A letter to Henry Cline, Esq on imperfect developments of the faculties mental and moral, as well as constitutional and organic on the treatment of impediments of speech* (London: Printed for the Author, 1810), 47.

[2] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 48.

[3] 'mechanic, adj. and n.', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed May 6, 2021, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115543?rskey=BrW90k&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

however, is a concern with physical movement, whether of the human hands, a constructed machine, or the material world.

In this thesis, I make a case that three Romantic-era writers, Erasmus Darwin, John Thelwall, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, each engage with the mechanics of speech production in their work, and, in doing so, present utterance as a form of motion – of bodies, of machines, and of matter itself. From an artificial speaking machine built by the doctor and poet, Erasmus Darwin, to Thelwall's theory of elocution, founded on the 'law of all reiterated or progressive motion, organic or mechanical', to Shelley's poetry, voiced by both the 'heart and brain' and the 'inorganic voice' of the Earth, each of these writers demonstrates a sustained interest in the physical operation of speech.[4] Over the course of the following chapters, I examine the wider implications of this focus on speech and suggest that discussions of speech production become a medium through which each author explores politically and philosophically unorthodox ideas. Ultimately, these writers use approaches to speech which are both physiological and 'materialist' to suggest and support radical political views. And, I argue, their attention to the material speaking body allows them to position speech, and by association poetry, as, not merely movement, but autonomous, unstoppable, and effective action. By investigating these writers' material treatments of speech, I contend, we can come to more fully understand their sustained references to and pronounced faith in the use of the voice as a form of political action.

While scholarship has long treated the poetry, reformist politics, and scientific interests of Darwin, Thelwall, and Shelley individually or in relation to the writers' immediate circles, reading all three authors together remains rare. As such, this thesis also aims to demonstrate how a shared concern with the production, operation, and effects of

[4] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 24; Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', *The Poems of Shelley*, vol. 3, ed. Jack Donovan et al. (Harlow: Longman, 2011), line 370; Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound,* in *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.1.134.

vocal utterance represents a previously unacknowledged connection between the writing of Darwin, Thelwall, and Shelley and examines, for the first time, how ideas about the mechanics of speech bridge the poetic, scientific, and political thought of all three writers. While Darwin's particular influence on Thelwall's and Shelley's physiological and philosophical thought has been noted by critics including Desmond King-Hele, Martin Priestman, Yasmin Solomonescu, and Catherine Packham, the resultant similarities between Thelwall's and Shelley's writing on matter, the body, and voice have remained largely unobserved.[5] As Priestman makes clear, there is still a great deal of work to be done on the influence of Darwin's writing which, he argues, 'had a truly massive impact on Shelley, permeating both his thought and imagery in ways which have still not been adequately grasped'.[6] Similarly, although there has been a marked interest in recent years in Thelwall's elocutionary writing, as demonstrated by the work of Solomonescu, Judith Thompson, and Julia S. Carlson, his work on speech remains, as Thompson writes, 'an untapped resource for the study of Romantic literature' and has rarely been read alongside poetry from outside the Wordsworth-Coleridge circle.[7] In offering a re-reading of Shelley's poetry in the context of both these bodies of work, this thesis thus aims to further our understanding not only of Shelley's voices, but also the reach and potential applications of Darwin's and Thelwall's physiologies of speech. A concluding reading of Mary Shelley's

[5] Desmond King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 187-226; Martin Priestman, *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin: Enlightened Spaces, Romantic Times* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 242-244; Yasmin Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and The Materialist Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 10; Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 173.

[6] Priestman, *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin*, 244.

[7] Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination*; Julia S. Carlson, *Romantic Marks and Measures: Wordsworth's Poetry in Fields of Print* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Judith Thompson, 'Re-Sounding Romanticism: John Thelwall and the Science and Practice of Elocution', in *Spheres of Action: Speech and Performance in Romantic Culture,* ed. Alexander Dick and Angela Esterhammer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 26.

Frankenstein extends this argument, demonstrating the widespread effect of such mechanic models of speech on the literature of the Romantic period.

Writing about Speaking

In beginning this discussion of speech in the Romantic era, it is important to address the issue of how to write about historical speech when its most direct evidence, utterance itself, is lost. Sarah Zimmerman notes the challenge facing literary studies of speech in her recent work on Romantic period lecturing, noting that for the lectures of 'extemporaneous speakers like Thelwall' 'not only is the event itself ephemeral, but unlike most plays, it may leave no texts behind'.[8] It is perhaps for this reason that instances of Romantic speech remain relatively understudied, despite the cases that have been made by scholars such as Zimmerman, Thompson, and Alexander Dick and Angela Esterhammer in their 2009 collection *Spheres of Action*, for the importance of 'listening to Romanticism *speak* with its mouth'.[9] While lectures, speeches, and the material conditions of performance form a vital set of sources for my analysis of speech production in the era, and particularly my treatment of Thelwall in chapter two, this thesis remains alert throughout to the fact that written accounts of utterance, even those claiming to be direct transcriptions, cannot be considered synonymous with the original instance of speech. Speech, after all, is not only unrecoverable, but in an era before sound recording technology, unrecordable.

For Thelwall, the difficulty posed by this disjunction between speech and writing was a continual cause for concern, yet an acknowledgement of the essential differences

[8] Sarah Zimmerman, *The Romantic Literary Lecture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 16.

[9] Alexander Dick and Angela Esterhammer, 'Introduction: Romantic Spheres of Action', in *Spheres of Action: Speech and Performance in Romantic Culture,* ed. Alexander Dick and Angela Esterhammer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 4; Thompson, 'Re-Sounding Romanticism', 21-45.

between speech and writing underpins his poetic theory and provides the basis for his frequent references to the vocal origins of his, ultimately published, lectures. This thesis, then, is necessarily concerned with *writing* about speaking. In adding my voice (for want of a better idiom) to scholarship which calls for a greater appreciation of the place of speech in Romantic culture, I consider not only Thelwall's writing on speech in his lectures, his reflections on lecturing and his publications on elocutionary theory, but also make the case for a pervasive concern with speech in the poetry, poetics, medical texts, political pamphlets, and letters of Darwin, Thelwall himself, and Shelley. Ideas about spoken utterance and the means and conditions of its production, I argue, are equally central to Darwin's theories of body and mind in his medical treatise, *Zoonomia* and to his vision of scientific and societal progress in his 'poem, with philosophical notes', *The Temple of Nature*. Similar ideas likewise underscore and valorise Shelley's attempts to define the work of the poet in *A Defence of Poetry* and to imagine an 'eloquent, oracular' revolution in 'The Mask of Anarchy'. For all these writers, then, ideas about speech are not limited to one type of writing or treated from one perspective, but proliferate though their entire bodies of work.[10]

Although the following chapters thus examine the role of the voice in Romantic prose and poetry, it is important to distinguish poetry of and about speech from the familiar trope of the poetic voice. The conventional metaphor which treats written poetry as spoken utterance has often gone unchallenged in criticism of literary composition. Susan Eilenberg, for example in her 1992 investigation of poetic possession and ventriloquism, *Strange Power of Speech: Wordsworth, Coleridge and Literary Possession*, seeks to address 'what happens when the poet opens his mouth and somebody's else's voice comes out'.[11]

[10] Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', line 366.

[11] Susan Eilenberg, *Strange Power of Speech: Wordsworth, Coleridge and Literary Possession* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.

Eilenberg's identification of ventriloquism as a key facet of Romantic-era writing is convincing, and the issue of what happens to the agency of a speaker when utterance is figured as involuntary is a thread which will run through this thesis. However, rather than taking the relationship between voice or speech and writing for granted, I want to challenge the metaphor of the poet 'speaking' when they are writing – a metaphor that is so pervasive that critics such as Eilenberg can extend it so far as to figure the poet putting pen to paper as 'open[ing] his mouth'. By analysing references to spoken utterance in the poetics of Thelwall and Shelley, this thesis aims to re-examine the metaphor of the poetic voice. Ultimately, I suggest that for these authors, the apparent correspondence of poetry and speech is deliberately and self-consciously founded on their understandings of the mechanics of speech production.

The focus of this thesis, then, is not language or expression more broadly, but the particular act of speaking. In this respect I take a different approach to the essays collected in *Spheres of Action*, which examines spoken utterance via 'theories of language and performativity' and to Esterhammer's earlier monograph, *The Romantic Performative*, which uses 'philosophies of language' to draw a through line from Romantic-era concepts of language to the twentieth century theory of 'Speech Acts'.[12] Rather, my thesis makes the case for another contemporary model for understanding speech as a form of action. Rather than drawing on linguistic philosophy, I consider how Darwin, Thelwall, and Shelley engage with physical and physiological theories in their treatment of speech, considering the operation of the human body and the inanimate world, and the potential for these two things to impact and affect each other in physical ways. When referring to speech, I thus mean the 'mechanical' act of speaking; the process though which speech sounds are

[12] Dick and Esterhammer, 'Introduction: Romantic Spheres of Action', 13; Angela Esterhammer, *The Romantic Performative: Language and Action in British and German Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1.

physically produced. Yet although speech is not synonymous with language, language does have an important role to play in my argument. In determining *how* the authors at the centre of this thesis write about speech, I make the case that in expressing their ideas, they engage with linguistic and semantic issues, including the instability of philosophical terminology and figurative language and discipline-related questions of style.

Elocution and the Speaking Body

While of the three authors discussed in this thesis, only Thelwall would describe his work on speech as elocutionary, the history of the study of elocution lays important foundations for all three. Abigail Williams has noted that, by the mid-eighteenth century, studies of language had 'become preoccupied with the ability to communicate through speech and with the social context of speaking', giving rise to a trend for elocution.[13] By far the most influential of these new elocutionists was Thomas Sheridan, whose lectures on elocution were immensely popular during the 1760s.[14] For Sheridan, the term 'elocution' did not just refer to the voice but to the role of the whole body in oral communication. 'Elocution', he writes in his printed 1762 *Course of Lectures on Elocution* 'is just and graceful management of the voice, countenance, and gesture in speaking'.[15] In the later decades of the century this idea that aesthetically pleasing and, as Sheridan writes, 'persuasive, or forcible elocution', relied on the combined action of body and voice was taken up by the

[13] Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2017), 15.

[14] For more on Sheridan and other contemporary elocutionists see: Williams, *The Social Life of Books,* 14-21; Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 91-113; Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 339-355.

[15] Thomas Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (London: A. Millar, R. and J. Dodsley, T. Davies, C. Henderson, J. Wilkie, and E. Dilly, 1762), 19.

elocutionist John Walker.[16] On the title page of the 1799 edition of his 1781 *Elements of Elocution*, for example, Walker advertises 'a complete system of the passions, showing how they affect the countenance, tone of voice, and gesture of the body'.[17] By the nineteenth century, then, elocution had long suggested more than a concern with the voice, but rather a system of speaking which employed the entire body.

It is against this backdrop of a culture of what Lucy Newlyn terms 'bodily eloquence' that Darwin conducts the 'Analysis of Articulate Sounds' which concludes *The Temple of Nature*'s additional notes.[18] While Darwin references the role of 'gesture' in speech in the main text of the poem, considering how it affords 'the enthusiast orator […] Force to the feebler eloquence of words', his notes are less concerned with how the bodily motion might enhance the style, grace, or persuasiveness of speech, than they are with deducing the role that the movement of the body plays in producing speech sounds themselves, showing 'by what parts of the organs of speech they are modulated and articulated'.[19] Darwin thus suggests that bodily action is not just a facet of an utterance's effect, but is also essential to understanding how speech is produced in the first place. For Darwin, all speech is body language. Attention to the body is also at the heart of Thelwall's elocutionary writing. Thelwall's 'science and practice of elocution' is both informed by and is developed in opposition to the culture of elocution teaching exemplified by Sheridan and Walker.[20] In *A Letter to Henry Cline*, which acts as a sort of manifesto for what he hopes he

[16] Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures on Elocution*, 1.

[17] John Walker, *Elements of Elocution* (London: Cooper and Wilson, 1799), title page.

[18] Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism*, 339.

[19] Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*; *or The Origin of Society* (London: J. Johnson, 1803), note XV, 347.

[20] Thelwall describes himself as 'a professor of the science and practice of elocution' on the title page of most of his elocutionary texts. Thelwall, *A letter to Henry Cline*, title page; John Thelwall, *The Vestibule of Eloquence* (London: Printed for the Author, 1810); John Thelwall, *Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions on the Rhythmus and Utterance of the English Language* (London: Printed for the Author, 1812). Thelwall frequently cites Sheridan, Walker, and Darwin

'may venture to call *the New Profession*' of elocutionary science and practice, he is keen to emphasise how his approach to elocution differs from those which came before. Pointedly addressed to the renowned surgeon and medical lecturer Henry Cline, Thelwall's text offers the understanding of physiology and anatomy as a ground-breaking addition to the study of elocution as he draws attention to 'the importance of that connection [he] had discovered, between Physiological and Elocutionary Science'.[21] In this respect, Thelwall clearly, and in places explicitly, builds on the work of Darwin – not only his work on speech sounds in *The Temple of Nature*, but his anatomical and philosophical ideas more broadly – as he makes the case for the importance of studying the human body.

While Darwin stops short of considering what the anatomy of speech might mean for ideas of elocution or rhetorical power, Thelwall makes the case that these two 'sciences' are intimately connected, through a concept which he terms 'rhythmus'. Inspired, in part by the work of another mid eighteenth-century elocutionist, Joshua Steele, who suggested that speech followed the same system of rhythm and cadence as music, Thelwall's theory of rhythmus is based on the idea that all speech should follow a rhythm of thesis and arsis or heavy and light weight.[22] However, where Steele's work ascribed the pattern of thesis and arsis to 'voluntary taste and harmonic invention', Thelwall sought to prove that these same rhythms were a matter of physiology, and indeed physics.[23] For Thelwall, rhythmus is a 'universal principle of action and re-action' which operates on both the human body and the inanimate world around it and, as this thesis will argue, this

among his influences. See: Thelwall, *Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions,* lxviii, xxiii, lxix, xxxvi.

[21] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 14.

[22] Joshua Steele, *Prosodia Rationalis: or, an essay towards establishing the melody and the measure of speech* (London: J. Nichols, 1779).

[23] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 23.

theory allows him to unite the idea of the speaking body with concepts of rhythm and music, leading him to a concept of poetics that treats speech and poetry as essential to one another.[24] Although Shelley does not explicitly engage with these debates, questions of what role the body has to play in both poetic and spoken utterance run through many of his works, from his assertion that poetry is the 'uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound', to the refrain of 'The Mask of Anarchy' which rings 'through each heart and brain'.[25] And, I want to argue, he follows Darwin and Thelwall in previously unexamined ways in his fascination with the rhythm and the physiology of speech which plays out in the poetics of the *Defence of Poetry* and his treatment of the speaking voice in the poems themselves.

Scholarship on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century elocution has mostly been divided into works which emphasise this central role that the body has traditionally played in elocutionary writing, and works that present attention to anatomy as a later innovation which arises at the turn of the century, driven predominantly by Thelwall's writing. Lucy Newlyn, for example charts the sustained interest in the application of 'bodily eloquence' to public speaking and reading aloud from Sheridan to Thelwall, while Paul Goring similarly notes that 'from the beginning of the eighteenth century there was a major movement to develop public speaking in Britain, in the course of which project appeared some of the century's most explicit writing on the eloquence or potential eloquence of the body'.[26] On the other hand, 'the body' and 'anatomy' are not necessarily synonymous and scholars including Denyse Rockey and, more recently, Judith Thompson have argued that Thelwall 'could claim novelty […] for drawing attention to the relevance of physiology, a subject

[24] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 24.

[25] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 678; Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', line 370.

[26] Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism*, 339; Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility*, 11.

hitherto neglected by elocutionists'.[27] Building on Rockey and Thompson's work, I want to make a distinction between the earlier elocutionary culture which emphasises the importance of body language (i.e. the deliberate movement of the body involved in gesture) and the focus on anatomy and physiology, and thus the physical production of speech, which is evident in Darwin, Thelwall, and Shelley's writing.

While Newlyn uses the phrase 'speaking body' to characterise the interest in 'performative utterance' which she traces back to the elocutionists of the mid-eighteenth century, several studies of Thelwall's writing, including work by Solomonescu and Carlson, make reference to the 'speaking body' in explaining the particularly physiological dimension of his theory of rhythmus.[28] The term 'speaking body' in this latter sense, is consequently one which I employ throughout this thesis, not only in descriptions of Thelwall's practice but also in my discussions of Darwin's and Shelley's writing, to highlight each of their treatments of speech as a bodily act, rather than an abstract concept. And while Solomonescu and Carlson discuss the term exclusively in relation to Thelwall's elocutionary work, I extend this reading backwards to consider how the idea of the speaking body manifests in his earlier political writing. Diverging from the approaches of elocutionists like Sheridan and Walker, the authors at the centre of this thesis, I argue, do not aim to instruct the body, but rather attempt to use physiological knowledge of the body and its operation as a foundation for deciding what speech should sound like. Moreover, as these writers repeatedly seek to understand the human in relation to the universe around it, their understanding of the body's role in speech, as I will demonstrate, forms part of their wider political and philosophical understandings of the world.

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[27] Denyse Rockey, *Speech Disorder in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 46; Thompson, 'Re-Sounding Romanticism', 23-25.

[28] Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism*, 339; Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and The Materialist Imagination*, 12; Carlson, *Romantic Marks and Measures,* 272.

In its sustained focus on the speaking body, this thesis also draws on work on Romantic-era embodiment from within the fields of both history of medicine and disability studies. Darwin, Thelwall, and Shelley all had some degree of medical training, from a formal medical degree in the case of Darwin, to Thelwall's membership of the Physical Society and frequent attendance of medical lectures at Guy's and St Thomas's Hospitals, to Shelley's brief, yet, as Sharon Ruston argues 'concerted effort to become a surgeon', the impact of which 'persisted throughout his life'.[29] Over the past few decades there have been several important studies into the role that medical knowledge played in Romantic writing. Ruston for example, in her 2013 book *Creating Romanticism*, makes the case that 'some Romantic authors and texts not thought of in this way in fact participated in scientific and medical debates', while James Robert Allard and Gavin Budge have assessed how poets, including Thelwall and Darwin respectively, use a specifically medical lens in their writing on the human body.[30] However I suggest that for the authors I consider here, concern with the speaking body is more nuanced than what could be described as a strictly medical approach. Each writer engages with concepts of life sciences and theoretical physiology which, as I will go on to discuss, were considered to be outside the scope of medical practice in the period.

Furthermore, these writers deal with both normative and non-normative embodiments and ways of speaking and do not always pathologise physical, mental, and vocal difference. Darwin, for example, discusses speech impediments in his educational, as

[29] John Thelwall, 'Prefatory Memoir', in *Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement* (London: R. Phillips, 1801), xx; Sharon Ruston, '"One of the 'Modern Sceptics": Reappraising Shelley's Medical Education', *Romanticism* 9, no. 1 (2003): 1.

[30] Sharon Ruston, *Creating Romanticism: Case Studies in the Literature, Science and Medicine of the 1790s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 11; James Robert Allard, *Romanticism, Medicine, and the Poet's Body* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Gavin Budge, *Romanticism, Medicine and the Natural Supernatural: Transcendent Vision and Bodily Spectres, 1789-1852* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

well as his medical texts, while Thelwall emphasises the 'Impotency of mere medical treatment of Impediments'.[31] As such, this thesis is also informed in places by recent scholarship in disability studies, including the work of Emily Stanback, Michael Bradshaw and Essaka Joshua, particularly the emphasis that these scholars place on how theory which understands disability according to a 'social', rather than a 'medical model' can enhance our reading of the body in Romantic-era texts.[32] As Bradshaw and Joshua summarise: 'disability studies challenges the assumption that disability derives solely from an individual's impairments, suggesting instead that it derives from a combination of the impairment and the social and physical context of a person'.[33] Thus, while it is anachronistic to suggest that Darwin, Thelwall, or Shelley might have conceived of disability in this way, modern disability theory can provide a useful lens through which to consider the ways that their texts present speech and speechlessness not as a matter of physiology alone, but of the way that the speaking body interacts with the external world, both physical and social.

Materialism

Highlighting the need for closer scholarly attention to Romantic-era speech, Thompson has noted that 'Romanticism has come down to us as an imaginative rather than a performative movement, a movement of mind rather than of mouth'.[34] This thesis, like Thompson's chapter, aims to challenge this assumption about Romantic writing. Yet rather

[31] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline,* vi.

[32] Emily Stanback, *The Wordsworth-Coleridge Circle and the Aesthetics of Disability* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Michael Bradshaw ed., *Disabling Romanticism: Body, Mind, and Text* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Essaka Joshua, *Physical Disability in British Romantic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[33] Michael Bradshaw and Essaka Joshua, 'Introduction', in *Disabling Romanticism: Body, Mind, and Text,* ed. Michael Bradshaw (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.

[34] Thompson, 'Re-Sounding Romanticism', 22.

than trading an imaginative and mental understanding of Romantic texts for a performative and oral one, I want to suggest that Shelley, Darwin and Thelwall each, in different ways, break down the distinction between imagination and performance, mind and mouth. Moreover, Thompson's use of the term 'movement' is, perhaps deliberately, provocative in this context. Referring, on the surface, to the notion of the 'Romantic movement' in the sense of a shared set of artistic ideals, the word also holds connotations of physical motion. And while we might more closely associate motion with performance than with imagination, or more readily conceive the mouth moving than the mind, this, I argue, is not the case for the three authors dealt with in this thesis. For Darwin, who states in *Zoonomia* that the 'organs of sense possess a power of motion, and that these motions constitute our ideas', mind and imagination can be explained using the same system of physical movements which describes the action of limbs or lips, and both Solomonescu and Richard Sha have discussed the ways in which Thelwall, and Romantic-era writers more broadly, conceived the imagination in particular as material.[35] Across the following three chapters I suggest that this idea of the connection or even equivalence between mental phenomena and physical action, the process of thought and the movement of the lips, tongue, larynx and lungs, can be traced throughout Thelwall's and Shelley's writing on speech and is drawn both directly and indirectly from Darwin's physiological and philosophical texts.

The idea that traditionally immaterial aspects of a person, including mental phenomena and life itself, might in fact be ascribable to the physical motion of matter suggests, as many contemporary and modern commentators have argued, a belief in materialist philosophy. Materialism, as Priestman succinctly writes, is, in its broadest sense,

[35] Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; Or the Laws of Organic Life*, vol. 1 (London: J. Johnson, 1794), 14; Solomonescu, *Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination*; Richard Sha, *Imagination and Science in Romanticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018).

'the view that nothing exists except matter, which is inherently capable of motion'.[36] Taking a materialist approach to the human body was controversial as, to some, it appeared to suggest that humans were no different from machines and, as a result, was thought to deny the existence of the soul and undermine the role of God in human life. There has been a significant amount of critical interest in how such materialist conceptions of life and mind developed during the eighteenth century, with studies by scholars including John W. Yolton and Packham tracing the impact of debates around materialism on the century's literature and culture.[37] And while Yolton, Packham, and others treat materialism as a particularly eighteenth-century phenomenon, superseded in Romantic writing by idealism and 'fully fledged Romantic organicism', there has been a recent shift, most notably in the work of Ruston and Solomonescu, to investigations of how Romantic writers (Shelley and Thelwall respectively) continue to engage with materialist philosophy into the nineteenth century.[38] In Ruston's influential book *Shelley and Vitality,* she reads Shelley's writing on life and the body from a materialist perspective, arguing 'for Shelley as a materialist thinker'.[39] Drawing on Ruston's work, Solomonescu uses Thelwall as a case study 'to challenge the longstanding critical view that Romanticism marked the triumph of various forms of anti-materialist , notably idealism and its scientific corollary, vitalism'.[40] In essence, this thesis

[36] Martin Priestman, *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1780*-1830 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 260.

[37] John W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*.

[38] Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*, 2. See also: Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination*.

[39] Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality*, 10.

[40] Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination*, 5.

aims to further make the case for the materialist character of Darwin's, Thelwall's, and Shelley's work, and as such is indebted throughout to these two works of scholarship.

However, I want to be careful not to play down the ambivalence and contradictions involved in each writer's engagement with materialist ideas. All three writers, variously at different points, avow and deny the materialist implications of their writing on the human body, life, and mind. For example, although Darwin proposes in the opening chapter of *Zoonomia*, that 'motions of matter' constitute 'all the motions of the animal and vegetable world; as well those of the vessels, which circulate their juices, and of the muscles, which perform their locomotion, as those of the organs of sense, which constitute their ideas', he elsewhere states that 'Mind is not Matter'.[41] Similarly, while Thelwall asserts that his overall conception of life is founded on 'the simple principles of materialism' in his 1793 lecture, *An Essay Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality*, by 1813 he is keen to emphasise that materialism has 'nothing to do' with the investigations of body and mind which he conducts as part of his elocutionary work.[42] Shelley too appears to recant an earlier materialist stance in his later writing, stating that despite being 'early conducted' to it, 'materialism is a seducing system to young and superficial minds'.[43] Consequently, modern criticism is largely fraught over the issue of whether Darwin, Thelwall, or Shelley can accurately be described as a materialist. Darwin's precise philosophical stance remains contested, as I will explore in detail in chapter one, while critics, with the notable exception of Ruston, have tended either to characterise Shelley's inconsistency on the subject as a

[41] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 5-6; Erasmus Darwin to Richard Gifford, 15 October, 1768, in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 96.

[42] John Thelwall, *An Essay Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality* (London: G.G. J. and J. Robinsons, 1793), 13; John Thelwall, 'Defence of Mr Thelwall on the Criticisms against his three Publications', *New review: or Monthly analysis of general literature* 1, no. 6 (1813): 690.

[43] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'On Life', in *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 634.

straightforward move away from materialist ways of thinking in the latter part of his life, or, alternatively, have tried to identify a coherent philosophical stance in Shelley's work that would account for his apparent contradictions.[44] However, I want to argue that the frequency with which accusations of materialism were used in broader contemporary critiques of their writing and thought is significant, and to suggest that, as a result, explicit references to materialism in Darwin's, Shelley's, and Thelwall's work are often couched in defensive language. Rather than assuming each writer's materialism and analysing their writing from this perspective then, this thesis will instead pay attention to how their uses of language including moments of ambiguity, evasiveness, or defensiveness, can help us pinpoint their philosophical positions. An investigation of materialism is thus central to my focus and methods, but it is not the endpoint of my argument. The wider aim of this thesis is to show how, for the writers in question, materialism allows for an embodied view of speech. This in turn, I argue, enables Darwin, Thelwall and Shelley to present speech as a form of action which is both imaginative and performative, a movement of mind *and* of mouth. Furthermore, this suggestion, as we will see, has political implications.

Radical Politics and Speech as Action

For the writers considered here, the human voice and its mechanics are also central to their discussions of political oratory and freedom of speech. It is no coincidence, then, that the period covered in this thesis includes two major flashpoints in the history of radical

[44] For discussions of Darwin's, Thelwall's, and Shelley's materialism, or lack of it, see: Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*; Budge, *Romanticism, Medicine, and the Natural Supernatural*; Edward S. Reed, *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology from Erasmus Darwin to William James* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Priestman, *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin*; Angela Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Cian Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Madeleine Callaghan, 'Shelley and the Ambivalence of Idealism', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 64 (2015); Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

oratory and its suppression: the 1794 trials of a number of London Corresponding Society members, including Thelwall, and subsequent passing of The Treasonable Practices Act and the Seditious Meetings Act or 'Gagging Acts' which extended the legal definition of treason and proscribed both meetings of over fifty people and lectures on political subjects; and the 1819 'Peterloo Massacre' of peaceful protestors gathered at St. Peter's Field in Manchester to call for reform and listen to radical orator, Henry Hunt. John Bugg has explored the way in which the political landscape in Britain after 1795 led to 'the presence in early Romantic writing of as much silence as there is speech, as much fragmentation and stuttering as there is transcendence'.[45] Yet, for Darwin, Thelwall, and Shelley, I argue, speech remained a consistently powerful political tool for the cause of radical reform. For example, while the events of 1819 motivated Shelley's most well-known poem on political utterance, 'The Mask of Anarchy', a belief in the political power of speech can also be seen much earlier in his writing. In a passage from his 1811 *Poetical Essay on the Existing State of Things*, discussing the reformist efforts of politician Francis Burdett, Shelley describes how:

> A powerful hand unrolls the guilt-stain'd veil
> A powerful voice floats on the tainted gale,
> Rising corruption's error from beneath,
> A shape of glory checks the course of death;
> It spreads its shield o'er freedom's prostrate form[46]

Here, Shelley places a physicalised model of speech in a political context, drawing an equivalence between voice and hand in terms of their capacity for force and action. Oratory here has the power to expose and overturn government corruption through a metaphor of physical movement and such instances of speech as political, and specifically radical, action recur throughout the texts discussed in this thesis.

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[45] John Bugg, *Five Long Winters: The Trials of British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 3.

[46] [Percy Bysshe Shelley], *Poetical Essay on the Existing State of Things* (London: 1811), lines 61-65.

I use the term 'radical' often throughout this thesis to describe the politics of Darwin, Thelwall, Shelley, and other figures discussed in relation to them and, in doing so, I draw on two different, yet connected, meanings of the word. The term 'radical', or 'radical reformist' is generally used to indicate a political position consistent with late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century radicalism in its broadest sense of any movement in favour of extensive political reform. Yet we may now consider the term 'radical' even more broadly, to signal any extreme deviation from an orthodox position, and I also invoke this connotation when using the term in relation to materialist philosophy.[47] These two senses overlap, as the aspects of materialism which were most immediately heterodox in the period (its undermining of the existence of the soul and the authority of God) led it to become associated with political radicalism in its potential to undermine hierarchy altogether.[48] Many scholars have noted the way that Darwin's, Thelwall's, and Shelley's contemporary critics and antagonists consequently accused the writers of materialism and radicalism (and, by extension, atheism and republicanism) in tandem.[49] Building on this, I want to argue that each writer's approach to speech, and particularly their conviction that spoken utterance can have profound and potentially world-changing physical effects, sits at the intersection of these two -isms.

There has been a great deal of discussion about the politics of language in the period between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Critics including Olivia Smith, Linda C. Mitchell, William Keach, and Susan Manly have all explored how debates

[47] See: 'radical, adj. and n.', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed May 25, 2021, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/157251?rskey=d6QtA7&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

[48] For more on the links between materialist philosophy and radical politics see Allison Muri, *The Enlightenment Cyborg: A History of Communications and Control in the Human Machine, 1660-1830* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

[49] See: Priestman, *Romantic Atheism*, 29; Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination*, 21; Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*, 151-152; Muri, *The Enlightenment Cyborg*, 120.

around language, its use, and its theory, were entwined with politics in the period, particularly with regard to the way that both prescriptivism (in the case of Smith and Mitchell) and the notion of language as 'arbitrary' (in the case of Keach and Manly), became tied to ideas of agency, authority, and the dynamics of power.[50] Equally influential is the work of Jon Mee and Mary Fairclough who argue for two models of communication – enthusiasm and embodied sympathy respectively – which underpin ideas about political oratory in the period and were often considered to suggest and incite 'impulsive' or 'instinctive' transmission and action.[51] This thesis draws on both these fields, as I consider how the physical and physiological act of speech as a form of communication, distinct, as I have shown, from language, is also politicised in the period, and examine some of the ways in which a materialist understanding of speech informs ideas of agency and authority, instinct and impulse, autonomy and control.

(Inter)disciplinarity

In the introduction to his 1799 text *Contributions to Physical and Medical Knowledge*, physician and friend of Darwin, Thomas Beddoes writes:

> The science of human nature is altogether incapable of division into independent branches. Books may profess to treat separately the rules of conduct, of the mental faculties and the personal condition. But the moralist and the metaphysician will each to a certain point encroach upon the province of the physiologist.[52]

[50] Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791-1819* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Linda C. Mitchell, *Grammar Wars: Language as Cultural Battlefield in 17th and 18th Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001); William Keach, *Arbitrary Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Susan Manly, *Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s: Locke, Tooke, Wordsworth*, *Edgeworth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

[51] Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 61; Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 108.

[52] Thomas Beddoes, *Contributions to physical and medical knowledge, principally from the West of England* (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), 3.

Beddoes's introduction places the physical body at the centre of all studies of humanity, from human behaviour and morality to philosophy and the mind, as he asserts that none of these fields can be properly understood 'without reference to the body'.[53] Yet, as the passage above demonstrates, such emphasis on the role of physiology in the study of traditionally abstract concepts does not necessarily reduce everything to a matter of medicine. 'The moralist and the metaphysician' may 'encroach' upon the field of medicine, but that does not mean that their work is that of a physician. Rather, as Beddoes suggests, a fundamentally physiological understanding of humanity will challenge the entire notion of the 'division' of knowledge. However, Beddoes's approach to an indivisible 'science of human nature' built upon physiological foundations was not a typical point of view. As several studies have noted, his aim to democratise knowledge by arguing against its compartmentalisation into specialised fields was considered, both by his critics and Beddoes himself, to be an extension of his radical democratic politics.[54] And while Beddoes was not conventional in his treatment of human nature, Darwin, Shelley, and Thelwall, I want to argue, take a similar approach to blending fields of enquiry when they put anatomy at the heart of their writing on speech.

It is important here to acknowledge the extent to which the division of knowledge and the boundaries between ways of writing and thinking in the years around 1800 differed from the ways in which we now conceive them. Medicine, for example, as Mike Jay has noted, was not yet firmly considered a science, but was often rather seen as a practice, separate from the theoretical 'aspirations to scientific progress' which characterised other

[53] Beddoes, *Contributions,* 4.

[54] See: Jan Golinski, *Science as Public Culture: Chemistry and Enlightenment in Britain, 1760-182*0 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Trevor Levere, Larry Stewart, Hugh Torrens and Joseph Wachelder, *The Enlightenment of Thomas Beddoes: Science, Medicine and Reform* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); Mike Jay, *The Atmosphere of Heaven: The Unnatural Experiments of Dr Beddoes and his Sons of Genius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

fields of intellectual study.[55] Similarly, as Jon Klancher has argued, 'mechanic art' (broadly defined as a range of 'useful', 'mechanical' or 'artisanal' practices), although treated together with 'elocutionary science' in Thelwall's *Letter to Henry Cline*, was increasingly being seen as distinct from scientific knowledge-making in the early nineteenth century.[56] Approaches to physiology that treated it from a philosophical perspective such as those of Beddoes and, as we will see, Darwin and Thelwall, were therefore innovative in a way that it is now easy to overlook. Moreover, as many scholars including Klancher, Packham, and Michelle Faubert have observed, the lines between what we would now call 'disciplines' were beginning to 'solidify' (in Faubert's words) at the beginning of the nineteenth century, particularly through processes of institutionalisation and professionalisation.[57] While this notion of disciplinary stratification is almost unanimously accepted in scholarship of the early nineteenth century, a number of critics have warned against placing too much emphasis on 1800 as a watershed moment in the formation of disciplinary thought. Jan Golinski, for example, in his study of chemistry in the period, 'aim[s] to avoid the risk of teleology that lurks in the use of notions like "specialization" and "professionalization"' which 'subsume historical change under some supposedly universal process'.[58] And while Golinski is hesitant to universalise a process of disciplinary formation which developed, as Klancher writes, 'unevenly' during the period, Luisa Calè and Adriana Craciun build on Golinski to make the case for a 'predisciplinary lens' which simultaneously acknowledges the 'possibilities opened and closed upon the threshold of the nineteenth century' and

[55] Jay, *Atmosphere of Heaven*, 31.

[56] Jon Klancher, *Transfiguring the Arts and Sciences: Knowledge and Cultural Institutions in the Romantic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 230.

[57] Klancher, *Transfiguring the Arts and Sciences*; Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*, 207-216; Michelle Faubert, *Rhyming Reason: The Poetry of Romantic-Era Psychologists* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009).

[58] Golinski, *Science as Public Culture*, 10.

considers the 'overlapping boundaries' still discernible at the turn of the century.[59] Following the work of Klancher, Golinksi, and Calè and Craciun, this thesis makes the case that Darwin, Thelwall, and Shelley continued to take a polymathic approach to their investigations of human speech in the run up to, and in the case of Shelley and Thelwall's later work, two decades into the nineteenth century, despite increasing trends towards disciplinarity.

Furthermore, I want to argue that although the 'uneven' process of disciplinary formation makes it reductive to divide the period between the 1770s and the 1820s into predisciplinary and disciplinary eras, work that drew on polymathic, or what we might now term interdisciplinary, methods and epistemologies gained new resonances from the 1790s onwards. Just as Beddoes's science came to be seen as emblematic of his radical politics in the wake of the French Revolution, so too did the discipline defying and materialist writing of Darwin, Thelwall, and Shelley. The terms 'disciplinarity' and 'interdisciplinarity', as should now be apparent, are therefore anachronistic when applied to the writing and thought of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Additionally, such terms potentially fail to capture the extent to which the writers discussed here were doing more than combining types of knowledge in their writing on speech. Rather they were, as this thesis argues, blending knowledge-based fields of study with traditionally non-theoretical practices including medicine and elocution. Although I do refer to 'disciplinarity' and 'interdisciplinarity' in this thesis, in my engagement with scholarship on nineteenth-century disciplines and in lieu of a more precise and contemporary terminology, it is important to acknowledge the instability of the concepts that these terms refer to.

In addition to broader critical discussions of emergent disciplinarity, there has been significant interest in the particular relationship between science and poetry, with recent

[59] Klancher, *Transfiguring the Arts and Sciences*, 127; Luisa Calè and Adriana Craciun, 'The Disorder of Things', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45, no. 1 (2011): 6, 2.

studies by Ruston, Sha, Dahlia Porter, and Tim Fulford all addressing the ways that scientific and poetic approaches to issues of the imagination, form and composition intersected in the Romantic period.[60] Sha and Fulford both explicitly identify materialism as a common feature of work that combines science and poetry since, as Sha writes, 'Romantic conceptions of embodied minds […] refused anything like two cultures of art and science'.[61] This strand of thought plays an important role throughout this thesis, as I make a case for the way that theories of speech which combine science and poetry are both founded on, and indicative of, materialist philosophies in the work of Darwin, Thelwall, and Shelley. However, Sha argues that the 'historicist critique of imagination and the understanding of materiality that historicism relies upon' 'make the options starker than they actually are', preferring instead to analyse the imagination from a Kantian perspective.[62] In contrast, this thesis hopes, by combining close analysis of language and style with attention to the specific historical conditions of each text's composition, to demonstrate an understanding of the materiality of speech, poetry, and the imagination which is not generalised, but nuanced, and, although influenced by history and culture, specific to each of the authors I discuss. Darwin's, Thelwall's, and Shelley's work on speech is distinctive, I argue, not in its focus on physiology alone, but in the way it incorporates investigations of the speaking body with science, metaphysics, and poetry and through the way that this interdisciplinary approach supports and is supported by their materialist philosophies and political aims.

Mechanics, Physiology, Poetry

[60] Ruston, *Creating Romanticism*; Sha, *Imagination and Science*; Dahlia Porter, *Science, Form, and the Problem of Induction in British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Tim Fulford, 'Science and Poetry in 1790s Somerset: The Self-Experiment Narrative, the Aeriform Effusion, and the Greater Romantic Lyric', *ELH* 85, no. 1 (2018).

[61] Fulford, 'Science and Poetry', 86-87; Sha, *Imagination and Science*, 8.

[62] Sha, *Imagination and Science*, 13.

Discussions of how speech informs and is informed by mechanics, physiology, and poetry run throughout this thesis, and while my chapters bring each of these concepts into focus in turn, my argument in each chapter is inevitably about all three. Alongside introducing many of the key ideas and debates concerning materialism which influence the philosophy of all three authors, Chapter One uses the case study of Darwin's speaking machine to argue that such projects on the mechanics of speech were both new and controversial in the period in their potential to undermine the religious, political, and philosophical status quo. In Chapter Two I move to suggest that Thelwall variously engages with, exploits, and attempts to avoid these heterodox implications of materially figured speech, yet ultimately relies on materialist physiology to support his life-long conviction that speech and its effects should not and cannot be suppressed. Chapter Three presents a reappraisal of Shelley's poetry of speech which, I argue, likewise draws on a Darwinian materialist understanding of the body and can thus be read alongside Thelwall's theory of rhythmus in its figuring of speech as unstoppable action. Finally, I conclude with a brief reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, suggesting that Shelley draws on Darwin's, Thelwall's, and Percy Shelley's depictions of materialist, active speech in the novel's portrayal of speech production. Through this reading of Shelley's novel, I show how the models of speech discussed in this thesis operate beyond the work of my three central writers, and beyond poetic and political texts. Together, these chapters make the case for a theory of spoken and poetic utterance, traceable from the physiological and philosophical writing of Darwin to the oratory and poetry of Thelwall and Shelley, which attends not only to style and substance but also to the bodily conditions of its production, and attests to the fundamental, material, and reciprocal connection between the speaking body and the physical, social, and political worlds around it.

Chapter One: Erasmus Darwin and the Mechanics of Speech

Introduction: 'Analysis of Articulate Sounds'

Like his earlier and more well-known work *The Botanic Garden*, Erasmus Darwin's final publication *The Temple of Nature* (1803), published a year after his death, consists of a poem accompanied by a series of prose 'additional notes' explaining the scientific theories broached in the verse. The poem, which aims to trace the progress of nature and society from the first emergence of life to the present day, makes up only half of Darwin's text, as the notes, as James Robert Allard observes, 'virtually match the poetic text in number of words'.[1] And while these notes cover topics as diverse as electricity, amphibious animals, and hereditary diseases, around a quarter of the 40000 words of additional notes are dedicated to 'The Theory and Structure of Language' and the 'Analysis of Articulate Sounds'. Although Darwin's theory of speech production does not take centre stage until the final two notes of his final poem, this thesis argues that studies of human speech are far more than a footnote to his career. In this chapter I make the case that Darwin's concern with speech is evident across his writing. And moreover, I contend that the way he speaks and writes about speech production poses serious and historically fraught questions about the potential physicality of the mind, the relationship between the animate and inanimate world, and the propriety of combining ways of thinking and writing drawn from different fields of study.

The most striking example of the extent of Darwin's fascination with speech production was his construction of an artificial speaking machine in the early 1770s. Built in the shape of a head or mouth and made of wood, leather, and silk ribbon, this speaking machine bookends Darwin's career. He does not describe it publicly until the *Temple of*

[1] James Robert Allard, 'Darwin, Paratext and the Modes of Knowing', *Literature Compass* 13, no.10 (2016): 597, accessed May 27, 2021, DOI:10.1111/lic3.12346.

Nature's 'Analysis of Articulate Sounds' and yet its actual construction predates all of his major works. In this chapter I want to trace how the ideas about speech embodied in Darwin's invention manifest across his writing, analysing not just *The Temple of Nature*, but also *Zoonomia* (1794-6), his treatise on the science and cure of diseases and his 1791 poem, *The Botanic Garden,* which brought together his 1789 *The Loves of Plants* with the newly published *Economy of Vegetation*. In this chapter I argue that when Darwin conducts his analysis of the voice through the construction of a machine, he not only literalises the mechanical aspect of speech, but also runs the risk of mechanising thought as he draws comparisons between humans and machinery which echo throughout his poetry and prose. Understandings of human life and mind which suggested that these phenomena could be explained in physical or mechanical terms were seen in this period, by proponents and detractors alike, to indicate a materialist philosophy.[2] And for conservative commentators this philosophy was considered subversive in its potential to do away with the need for the soul or God and so undermine traditional notions of hierarchy in religion and by extension government.[3] Consequently, as Paul Elliot notes, Darwin's 'psychophysiology excited philosophical and political attacks from politically hostile opponents'.[4] The contemporary

[2] A notable example of this is Joseph Priestley's 1777 *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit*, in which he advocated a 'system of materialism' that made the case for the materiality of the human soul and mind. Priestley's work was quickly subject to criticism which labelled 'the supposition of materialism extravagant and absurd'. Joseph Priestley, *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* (London: J. Johnson, 1777), 41; John Whitehead, *Materialism philosophically examined, or, The immateriality of the soul asserted and proved, on philosophical principles. In answer to Dr. Priestley's disquisitions on matter and spirit* (London: James Phillips, 1778), 46. See also: Caulfield, *An Essay on the Immateriality of the Soul* (London: J. Dodsley, 1778).

[3] *The Anti-Jacobin* in particular drew associations between materialism, atheism, and Jacobinism in satirical poems like 'The Progress of Man' and 'The Loves of the Triangles' which attacked Priestley and Darwin, among others. 'The Progress of Man', in *The Anti-Jacobin: Or, Weekly Examiner* no. 15 (Feb 19, 1798): 524-528; 'The Loves of the Triangles', in *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*, (London: J. Wright, 1799), 120-128.

[4] Paul Elliott, '"More Subtle than the Electric Aura": Georgian Medical Electricity, the Spirit of Animation and the Development of Erasmus Darwin's Psychophysiology', *Medical History* 52, no.2 (2008): 196.

tendency to label the work of Darwin and similar thinkers as 'materialist' has meant that many recent critical discussions have consequently focussed on the extent to which Darwin's work exhibits materialist thought.[5] Materialism thus provides an important context for understanding the significance of the speaking machine, but, as I will argue, judgements on just how far Darwin subscribed to such a theory are complicated by the instability and ambiguity of both philosophical terminology and poetic language.

Darwin describes both his poetry and prose as 'medico-philosophical' throughout his letters and I will adopt the term in this chapter, as it suggests the way in which Darwin's work combines medical practice with philosophical thought in unique and, as I will argue, often contentious ways. [6] I argue that Darwin attempts to obscure the radical implications of his medico-philosophy by using purposefully oblique language and that in doing so he creates a space which allows contemporary criticisms of language and poetic style to blend with concerns over 'scientific' accuracy and religious and political scruples. This in turn, I suggest, situates criticisms of Darwin's writing and thought within broader late eighteenth-century debates about the relationship between 'science' and 'poetry', practice and knowledge. While his simultaneous role as 'scientist' and poet has long been noted, recent studies of Darwin have sought to develop a greater understanding of exactly how, and through what means, the fields of science and literature interact in Darwin's work. Devin Griffiths, for example, suggests that Darwin uses the conflation of allegory and analogy to combine poetic and natural philosophical writing, ascribing Darwin's 'extraordinary generic

[5] See: Gavin Budge*, Romanticism, Medicine and the Natural Supernatural: Transcendent Vision and Bodily Spectres, 1789-1852* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 54; Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 15; Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 151; Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 139.

[6] For Darwin's use of the term 'medico-philosophical' see: Erasmus Darwin to Benjamin Franklin, 24 January 1774, in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 126; Erasmus Darwin to James Watt, 19 January 1790, ibid. 358.

hybridity' to his 'consistent effort to collapse poetic allegories into more immediate analogies that tie human experience to nature's organization'.[7] Dahlia Porter similarly considers the indefinite boundaries that Darwin draws between allegory and analogy to be instrumental in his blending of types of writing. For Porter however, this feature is not present from the outset of Darwin's poetry. Darwin's first major poem, *The Loves of The Plants* (1789), she argues, demonstrates an 'uneasy relationship between the styles (prose and verse) and modes (science and poetry) of knowing' and it is only in his subsequent poetry that he attempts a more complete mixing of 'styles' and 'modes' in which 'the philosophical analogies of science might be actuated in allegory and the bifurcated system of *Loves* be brought to unity'.[8] Griffiths's and Porter's nuanced assessments of the often unstable relationship between 'poetic' allegory and 'scientific' analogy in Darwin's poetry are convincing, and, indeed, much of the analysis of Darwin's writing and reception in this chapter will focus on instances of analogy, figuration, and, significantly, moments of comparison in which the lines between literal and metaphorical similitude are uncertain. However, the 'hybridity' of Darwin's writing, I argue, does not just come from his mixing of diverse subject matter, or ways of writing (including style, language, and form), but also suggests an approach founded on an amalgamation of different ways of thinking. Furthermore, I contend that speech is particularly suited to being studied from such variously, and indeed simultaneously, theoretical, practical, mechanical, physiological, poetic, philosophical perspectives, and thus provides such a productive subject for Darwin's experiments in blending different modes of writing and enquiry.

[7] Devin Griffiths, *The Age of Analogy: Science and Literature Between the Darwins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 57, 53.

[8] Dahlia Porter, *Science, Form, and the Problem of Induction in British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 74, 104.

I begin this chapter with a study of Darwin's speaking machine in which I argue that the machine is emblematic of Darwin's approach to the physiology of speech as he draws variously and equally on medicine and mechanics. Building on this, the second and third sections of this chapter explore how Darwin's simultaneous investigations of anatomy and machinery are suggestive of a materialist approach to the human, and particularly the speaking, body. I go on to argue in part four that the materialist model of speech production identified in the first half of this chapter simultaneously allows and is allowed by Darwin's dual identity as philosopher and physician which informs the interdisciplinarity of his thought and practice. Finally, I conclude by making the case that Darwin's multidisciplinary approach to speech underpins both politicised reactions to his work and his own account of the role that a materialist understanding of speech and the voice can play in the development and improvement of society. This chapter, then, aims, for the first time, to offer an insight into why Darwin dedicates so much space to the analysis of speech sounds in the *Temple of Nature* and how his construction of the speaking machine is integral to his investigations, not merely practically, but theoretically. The vocal, I argue, is fundamental to Darwin's idea of progress in its unique capacity to be understood both physiologically and mechanically and, in turn, to disseminate knowledge through these physical and embodied means.

'A wooden mouth with lips of soft leather': Erasmus Darwin's Speaking Machine

Relatively little is known about the speaking machine which Darwin built at some point between 1770 and 1771. Written accounts in Darwin's letters and poems describe the invention as a wooden mouth or head which imitated human speech sounds via the

combined action of leather 'lips', vocal chords formed of silk ribbon and a set of bellows.[9] Unlike other inventions proposed by Darwin, such as a system of canal locks or a steam powered chariot, there are no models or drawings of the speaking machine.[10] Despite (or perhaps because of) the dearth of surviving material, the speaking machine is frequently held up by biographers as Darwin's most remarkable and compelling invention. In his 1963 biography, Darwin's most extensive biographer, Desmond King-Hele, describes the machine as 'one of the most famous of Darwin's inventions, which still seems impressive', while Jenny Uglow writes that 'Darwin's famous speaking machine proved once again that mechanics could have all the allure of magic'.[11] However, for all its appeal as an example of Darwin's imaginative ingenuity and as an object through which 'mechanics' becomes associated with 'magic', critics have yet to take an in-depth look at the speaking machine. The speaking machine is both a mechanical feat and a medical one, as I will demonstrate through analysis of Darwin's writing around its conception and construction, and it suggests an association not only between the mechanical and the magical but also (and perhaps more significantly for a materialist thinker such as Darwin) between the machine and the human body. I argue that the speaking machine warrants greater investigation for its role not as a curiosity but as a serious scientific instrument for the study of speech. As Darwin uses comparisons between humans and machines to understand the workings of both, he uses a methodology which simultaneously, and as this chapter will go on to argue, controversially draws together his identities as mechanic and physician. Moreover, I argue,

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[9] Erasmus Darwin to George Gray, 9 May, 1791, in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 382; Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*; *or The Origin of Society* (London: J. Johnson, 1803), 138-39.

[10] Desmond King-Hele, *Doctor of Revolution: The Life and Genius of Erasmus Darwin* (London: Faber, 1977), 89. For sketches of Darwin's inventions see Erasmus Darwin to Matthew Boulton, [1764?], in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 59.

[11] Desmond King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin* (London: Macmillan, 1963), 153; Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men: The Friends Who Made the Future* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), 137.

Darwin's approach, which literalises the mechanical aspect of speech, also unavoidably raises the question of whether less traditionally physical elements of speech production, such as the human mind and will, can likewise be understood as mechanical in their operation.

Darwin's first extant reference to the speaking machine, albeit not explicitly his own, appears in a 1772 letter to Benjamin Franklin, who was at that time in London. In a style typical of Darwin's correspondence, the letter jumps from one topic to another before concluding with the remark 'I have heard of somebody that attempted to make a speaking machine, pray was there any Truth in any such Reports?'[12] It is unclear whether this question demonstrates anxiety on the part of Darwin at the prospect of a rival or enthusiasm at the prospect of a collaborator; however, it would appear that the latter interpretation is more likely. As part of the 'Lunar Society', a philosophical society which brought together thinkers from across the Midlands and North of England, Darwin's philosophical and mechanical ideas and projects were inherently collaborative. This collaboration can be seen in his letters which contain lengthy and often illustrated exchanges with Lunar Society members Matthew Boulton, James Watt and Josiah Wedgwood outlining his plans for machines ranging from windmills to carriage axels.[13] Even Darwin's speaking machine itself, although not discussed by him until twenty years after its construction, becomes an object to spark collaborative thought and around which to build intellectual relationships. In a 1791 letter, upon learning that a friend of a friend has developed an interest in articulation, a term which, for Darwin, appears to refer specifically to the study of the physical production of speech sounds, he writes:

[12] Erasmus Darwin to Benjamin Franklin, 18 July, 1772, in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 118.

[13] See Erasmus Darwin to Josiah Wedgwood, November 1767, in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 84; Erasmus Darwin to James Watt, 18 August, 1767, ibid. 80.

> But if He comes this way at any time, I would shew him what I have some years ago done on articulation, as I once made a wooden head, which spoke distinctly p. a. and m. so that it said pam, map, papa, mamma; as plain as most human heads.[14]

Here we can see that the speaking machine is not a purely academic demonstration of Darwin's mechanical skill but a practicable teaching tool for studies of human speech which he does not only 'shew' to, but shares with, likeminded students of articulation, not unlike the elocutionary texts which John Thelwall would later write as 'instruction for the improvement of human utterance'.[15] Darwin does not consider the 'wooden head' a curiosity or a magic trick, then, but a practical, physiological, social, and, as this chapter will go on to argue, socially beneficial invention.

Darwin continues to recall the construction of his speaking machine infrequently, but with increasing detail, across his career, culminating in the final note to *The Temple of Nature*. The note, attached to a section of poetry on the development of human language, describes the machine as:

> A wooden mouth with lips of soft leather, and with a valve over the back part of it for nostrils, both of which could be quickly opened or closed by pressure of the fingers, the vocality was given by a silk ribbon about an inch long and a quarter of an inch wide stretched between two bits of smooth wood a little hollowed; so that when a gentle current of air from bellows was blown on the edge of the ribbon, it gave an agreeable tone, as it vibrated between the wooden sides, much like the human voice. This head pronounced the p, b, m, and the vowel a, with so great nicety as to deceive all who heard it unseen, when it pronounced the words mama, papa, map, and pam; and had a most plaintive tone, when the lips were gradually closed.[16]

Again, Darwin's account of his machine is in the language of the mechanic, not the magician. In leading with details of the machine's construction and function, Darwin emphasises method over effect and thus any eerie or supernatural element that may be

[14] Darwin to Gray, 382.

[15] John Thelwall, *Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions on the Rhythmus and Utterance of the English Language* (London: Printed for the Author, 1812), vi.

[16] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, 138-139.

suggested by the description of the machine's 'plaintive tone' is undercut by the material and presumably reproducible facts of its operation. When encountering the speaking machine through the text of *The Temple of Nature* we know how the trick is done before we see it in action. In building his machine Darwin's main concern is not the production of utterance, then, but the replication of the process through which utterance arises.

This prioritisation of the mechanical over the magical when presenting machines that replicate human functions is relatively unusual for the period. In their book *Minds, Bodies and Machines, 1770-1930,* Deirdre Coleman and Hilary Fraser discuss how 'in the eighteenth century attempts to understand life by reproducing it mechanically resulted in life-like automata'.[17] However, as Paul Crosthwaite goes on to say in a further chapter, makers of eighteenth and early nineteenth century automatons 'were united in manipulating the outwardly visible form and function of their machines in order to effect an illusion of interior organic process, irrespective, to some degree at least, of the actual process employed'.[18] Darwin's speaking machine certainly seems to fit more easily with the first category of automatons, described by Coleman and Fraser, than with Crosthwaite's description of machines designed to 'effect an illusion'. For Darwin, an understanding of 'the interior organic process' *is* the effect and ultimate object of the project. To create a machine that imitates the product of speech without imitating the process would defeat Darwin's purpose.

Darwin was not the only one who attempted to recast magic tricks, particularly those disguised as machines, as a practical way of acquiring knowledge about the natural and physical world. Henri Decremps, a French magician, natural philosopher, and later

[17] Deirdre Coleman and Hilary Fraser, *Minds, Bodies, Machines, 1770-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4.

[18] Paul Crosthwaite, 'Clockwork Automata, Artificial Intelligence and Why the Body of the Author Matters', in *Minds, Bodies, Machines, 1770-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 86.

pedagogical reformer for the Republic, produced a number of works, published widely in Britain as well as France, which used explanations of magic tricks and fake automata as educational material.[19] In the preface to the third English edition of *The Conjuror Unmasked,* Decremps writes that the tricks explained within the text 'will not only divert, but improve even the philosophic mind, as their causes will be deduceable [sic] by physical, mathematical and philosophical demonstrations'.[20] This goal of improving scientific knowledge through the investigation of magic tricks becomes even more explicit in Decremps's later work, *Philosophical amusements; or, easy and instructive recreations for young people*. Published in Britain by Joseph Johnson in 1790 and advertised alongside children's educational literature, *Philosophical amusements* contains instructions for experiments which blur the lines between science and illusion such as optical illusions and 'the oracular head' (a plaster bust containing concealed metal 'speaking trumpets' which could carry sound across or even between rooms).[21] For Decremps then, even illusions can be educationally improving, once they have been uncovered and any real mechanics displayed. Yet unlike Darwin's project, Decremps's attempts to demystify natural and physical phenomena still privilege effect over process, presenting the illusion before the explanation and, in instructing readers on how perform the tricks to others, propagating the deceit as well as the explanation.

Another way in which Darwin's project differed from the work of less scrupulous automaton makers, whose creations relied on trickery rather than machinery to produce their effects, was that Darwin never claimed to be able to mechanically replicate thought or

[19] Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 256.

[20] Henri Decremps, *The Conjuror Unmasked* (London: C. Stalker, 1790), iii.

[21] Henri Decremps, *Philosophical Amusements; or, easy and instructive recreations for young people*, (London: J. Johnson, 1790), 43.

reason. The most famous of these fraudulent automata was 'The Turk', a human operated but supposedly mechanical chess-player which was exhibited widely throughout the eighteenth century by its creator, Wolfang von Kempelen. Kempelen's 'machine' was supposed by its more credulous spectators to demonstrate 'inanimate reason' or proof that even thought could be occasioned by purely mechanical means.[22] Despite the fact that Kempelen was also a competent mechanic who would go on to create a genuine speaking machine similar (and indeed superior) to Darwin's, many publications aiming to uncover the trickery behind Kempelen's chess-player also denounced the trend for so called 'speaking figures' which appeared to talk without any input by a human operator.[23] Among these critiques the main argument for the fakery of these figures was that while machines might be able to speak, only humans can reason. John Herries, for example, in his 1773 'essay on the human voice', *Elements of Speech* repeatedly likens the function of speech organs to the operations of a machine.[24] Conceiving of the speaking human body in a way which, as we will see, is strikingly similar to Darwin, Herries states that the bodily organs are 'like the parts of a curious machine, each of them performs the peculiar office assigned to it' and suggests that 'we can as it were, dissect the vocal machine'.[25] Yet Herries makes it clear that thought cannot be produced by such mechanical means. Describing an 'unvaried and unexpressive' speaker he asks 'but are his ideas gone? Is he converted into a speaking machine?'.[26] For Herries then, there is a decisive distinction between the human speaker

[22] Karl Gottlieb Windisch, *Inanimate reason; or a circumstantial account of that astonishing piece of mechanism, M. de Kempelen's Chess-Player* (London: S. Bladon, 1784), title page.

[23] For details of Kempelen's speaking machine see: Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 351; Péter Nikléczy and Gábor Olaszy, 'Kempelen's Speaking Machine from 1791: Possibilities and Limitations: Recovering a 200 Year-Old Technology', *Grazer Linguistische Studien* 62 (2004): 111-120.

[24] John Herries, *The Elements of Speech* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1773), iv.

[25] Herries, *The Elements of Speech*, 235, 53.

[26] Herries, *The Elements of Speech*, 210.

and the speaking machine. While both can produce speech sounds via the physical motion of interacting 'parts', the 'ideas' which inform speech are exclusive to humans. In privileging method over effect when describing his speaking machine and thus dissociating his invention from illusionary speaking figures, Darwin too suggests that there are limits to the human machine and that mechanics cannot replicate mental process. However, despite Darwin's suggestion that only speech, and not thought, can be mechanically reproduced, as this chapter will go on to demonstrate, his frequent comparisons between bodies and machines left him open to attacks on his supposed belief in the mechanism of mind.

The tendency for illusion to be read as mechanics in the eighteenth century and the attempts by sceptical writers to expose those processes which are impossible to replicate via machinery also created the potential for mechanics to be read as magic or illusion. Consequently, not all genuine speaking machines were free from association with the magical or supernatural, as an account of one particularly renowned nineteenth century speaking machine demonstrates. First exhibited in America in the mid-1840s, Joseph Faber's 'Euphonia' was constructed along the same lines as Darwin's speaking machine, utilising bellows, pedals and rubber tubing to recreate the parts of the human body involved in speech production. Yet despite the visible mechanics of Faber's machine, one spectator, John Hollingshead, describes its otherworldly effect:

> He explained its action: it was not necessary to prove the absence of deception. One keyboard, touched by the Professor, produced words which, slowly and deliberately in a hoarse sepulchral voice came from the mouth of the figure, as if from the depths of the tomb. It wanted little imagination to make the very few visitors believe that the figure contained an imprisoned human – or half human – being.[27]

The process and product of the machine here do not seem to match up. It is somehow clearly mechanical, yet the ghostly sound that the machine produces conjures up ideas of illusion ('an imprisoned human') or the supernatural (a 'half human'). Steven Connor

[27] John Hollingshead, *My Lifetime* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1895), 68-69.

proposes an explanation for this inconsistency, writing 'what is disturbing, perhaps, is the very obviousness of the mechanism, in which appearance is heightened into apparition'.[28] However, I would argue that the reluctance to accept that 'Euphonia' is purely mechanical despite visual evidence does not necessarily come from a belief that it is un- or supernatural for a machine to speak like a human, but rather an expectation that a machine should be able to sound naturally human. It is the *un*human nature of the voice's sound which is unsettling. In stark contrast to Euphonia, Lunar Society member Richard Lovell Edgeworth writes to Erasmus Darwin in 1798: 'I placed one of your mouths in a room near some people in 1770, who actually thought I had a child with me, calling papa and mamma'. [29] Whereas the illusionary automatons produced by charlatans replicate the product of human speech without replicating the process and are thus simply magic tricks, and Faber's unsettling machine replicates the process without accurately imitating the product and thus appears supernatural, accounts of Darwin's machine represent it as convincingly human in operation and effect.

The object of Darwin's recreation of human mouths and vocal chords in wood and silk is not, then, to mystify human speech but is to try to, in Coleman and Fraser's words, 'understand life by reproducing it mechanically'. Darwin thus represents the mechanical not as supernatural, but natural as he uses machines to replicate bodily processes. He does not disembody speech in his construction of the speaking machine but rather embodies and organicises the machine. Such representations of mechanical action as 'organic process' and organic process as mechanical action can be found throughout Darwin's writing and, I argue, are often enacted through Darwin's uses of figurative language. In a 1771 letter to Wedgwood discussing the construction of a system of canals, Darwin writes

[28] Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 355.

[29] Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth Esq.* (London: Richard Bentley, 1844), 356.

'those great Trunks are like the large Veins [in] animal Bodies and must be indebted to numerous Ramifications of smaller Vessels, to be supply'd with vital Fluid for the purposes of Circulation'.[30] Here Darwin compares the canals to the animal circulatory system through a simile that clearly illustrates the functional similarity between the mechanical and the medical, the artificial system of small canals feeding into larger and the natural system of blood vessels feeding into major veins. Mary Fairclough argues that 'scientific analogy' can 'shift into less systematic figurative relations' for eighteenth century writers and thinkers including Darwin.[31] This movement between different types of figuration can be seen even in the syntax of Darwin's simile. His use of the word 'and' as opposed to 'which' reattributes the description of vessels circulating blood to the 'great Trunks', further blurring the line between constructed objects and natural bodies and demonstrating the ease with which Darwin's literary comparisons by simile can suggest a more literal correspondence between the anatomical and artificial systems.

Another, albeit more complicated, example can be seen in *The Botanic Garden* in a passage which describes the operation of steam engines in a succession of bodily terms. The machines are formed from 'large limbs', 'brazen nostrils', 'forceful fingers', 'flinty teeth' and 'iron lips'.[32] Martin Priestman highlights the less bodily aspects of this passage, drawing attention to the pantheon of nymphs, sylphs and gnomes who preside over the physical phenomena and processes described in the poem. Priestman writes that 'Darwin's supernatural personifications lend poetic wings to his descriptions of the new machinery'.[33]

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[30] Erasmus Darwin to Josiah Wedgwood, [16? – 18?] October, 1771, in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 112.

[31] Mary Fairclough, *Literature, Electricity and Politics 1740-1840: 'electrick communication every where'* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 20.

[32] Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden, a Poem*. *In two parts. Part I. Containing the economy of vegetation. Part II. The loves of the plants. With philosophical notes,* 4th edition, vol. 1 (London: J. Johnson, 1799), lines 262-281.

[33] Martin Priestman, *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin: Enlightened Spaces, Romantic Times* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 95.

However, I would argue that it is the 'poetic' rather than the 'supernatural' that more significantly informs the role of mythical beings in Darwin's account of the physical universe in *The Botanic Garden*. Darwin is fully aware that despite the lack of strict demarcation between disciplines and types of writing in the eighteenth century, poetry has its own conventions which are less prevalent in other modes of writing. In the advertisement to the poem he states his intention to 'inlist the Imagination under the banner of Science; and to lead her votaries from the looser analogies, which dress out the imagery of poetry, to the stricter ones, which form the ratiocination of philosophy'.[34] This interlacing of 'imagination' with 'science' and 'poetry' with 'philosophy' is a recurring feature of Darwin's work which can be seen not only in the diverse subject matter of his writing but in his methodologies and uses of language – his ways of thinking and of writing. I will discuss the implications of this interdisciplinarity for Darwin's study of the speaking body later in this chapter. In this case, however, Darwin's supernatural beings appear to belong to the poetic aspect of the work, rather than the philosophy of it. In fact, the passage on the steam engine perfectly enacts the poem's aim to move from 'looser analogies' to 'stricter ones'. Priestman reads the steam engine's personification in terms of gender, writing that 'in contrast to the fire-nymphs who set the whole process going, steam power itself is now decisively male: a single, giant-limbed body'.[35] Yet, depicting the machine as a litany of body parts does not simply shift the representation of the steam engine from female to male, but also from ethereal and mythological to corporeal and human. The mechanical drags the poem away from the supernatural and towards the natural through a process of embodying, leading

[34] Erasmus Darwin, 'Advertisement', in *The Botanic Garden, a Poem. In two parts. Part I. Containing the economy of vegetation. Part II. The loves of the plants. With philosophical notes,* 4th edition, vol. 1 (London: J. Johnson, 1799), iii.

[35] Priestman, *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin*, 95.

the passage from the 'looser analogies' of a machine driven by nymphs to what Darwin would consider the 'stricter ones' of the machine as the human body.

The anthropomorphism of Darwin's account of the steam engine is also reminiscent of the speaking machine, in which the metaphors of 'brazen nostrils' and 'iron lips' become semi-literalised as the 'lips of soft leather […] with a valve over the back part of it for nostrils'. Although the lips and nostrils of the speaking machine are not literally human they mechanically replicate both the bodily processes and products of speech and so are not entirely metaphorical. Reading the steam engine of *The Botanic Garden* alongside Darwin's speaking machine, the 'brazen nostrils' and 'iron lips' of the steam engine also, then, lose some of their figurativeness. If a nostril can be functionally replicated by a valve, then one made of brass, if it fulfils the same air-releasing purpose, can accurately be described in the same terms.

Although Darwin does not write about his speaking machine until after its construction, the thinking behind its conception can be found in his letters as early as 1767. In a letter to an unknown recipient Darwin makes the case that air being found in a new-born's lungs does not provide evidence that the child was born alive, as air can be introduced to the lungs artificially. He writes:

> The cavity of the Breast is well resembled by a pair of Bellows, the bones of the breast and Ribs are so contrived, that when they are lifted up, the cavity of the Breast is enlarged; precisely as the common Bellows when the top is lifted upwards; and the air rushes into this incipient Vacuum, is received into an open Chest in the Bellows, and into innumerable minute Pipes in the animal lungs.[36]

Darwin is not describing the process of breathing here, but the manipulation of the deceased body by a medical dissector. Darwin's analogy between the chest cavity and the pair of bellows, pre-empting Herries, who would draw the same comparison in *Elements of*

[36] Erasmus Darwin to Unknown Man, 7 February, 1767, in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 75.

Speech, is again a 'strict' one.[37] In Darwin's argument the bellows do not approximate the action being described but operate in 'precisely' the same way. In death at least, when the lungs can only be operated artificially and externally, they are no longer significantly distinguishable from bellows. Darwin therefore does not only figure the machine as the human body in his role as mechanic, but in his role as physician he figures the human body as the machine.

Darwin's thinking about the speaking machine, in which he would eventually use bellows to replicate the lungs' role in speech production, develops as the letter continues. He advises that:

> To ascertain the Truth of what is here said, any one may easyly [sic] try the following Experiment. Cut off the Head of a Cock, and by lifting up the Breast-Bone or pressing the Ribs with one's Fingers, it is easy to make him produce a Noise like Crowing.[38]

Here Darwin demonstrates that in moving the chest cavity in the same way as bellows the experimenter is able to produce life-like sound from the non-living and dissected animal (a phenomenon which is suggestive not just for Darwin but, as we will see, for Thelwall too as he invokes it to explore the politics of involuntary utterance in his *King Chaunticlere* fable.) The medical context of dissection thus appears to be an important influence on Darwin's mechanisation of the body. For the chest to become bellows it must be separated from the living body in order to be broken down, operated externally and analysed in terms of the mechanical interplay of different parts. The way that dissection allows the body to be conceived as machine can also be seen in Darwin's letter about the speaking machine itself where Darwin describes the wooden head as speaking 'as plain as most human heads' as opposed to 'most humans'. The machine does not speak like a human in a holistic sense, but like part of one – a dissected and therefore mechanised head and, vice versa, the

[37] Herries, *Elements of Speech*, 107.

[38] Erasmus Darwin to Unknown Man, 75.

steam engine of *The Botanic Garden* is, although not disembodied, dissected. For the body to become a fitting analogy for the machine it must be broken down and anatomised as the separate yet mechanically interactive parts of limbs, nostrils, fingers, teeth and lips. Darwin's dual identity as mechanic and physician is thus instrumental in his construction of the speaking machine which demonstrates both the mechanical operation of human speech organs and the anthropomorphic potential of the machine. It is true that there are limits to Darwin's representations of the body as a machine and, significantly, he never conceives a machine which can mechanically produce the thoughts needed for speech. Despite Darwin's reluctance to suggest that mind could be replicated by machinery, however, exploring the similitude of anatomy and mechanics, whether through personification in poetry or the construction of automata, held radical implications for his more conservative critics and, as I will go on to demonstrate, signalled to these readers a mechanist philosophy, associated with atheism and Jacobinism.

'Matter of a finer kind': Darwin's Medico-Philosophy

In order to fully understand the heterodoxy of Darwin's approach to speech it is important to consider how he writes about the body more broadly and how his treatment of physiology draws on and responds to existing debates about the potential materiality of the mind. To equate human or animal bodies with machines, even imaginatively in poetry, often drew charges of materialism and mechanism within the period and, as a number of critics have demonstrated, these accusations were almost always politically and religiously inflected.[39] Furthermore, the precise ontological differences and similarities between

[39] See: John W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Martin Priestman, *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

materialism and mechanism, and indeed between materialism and the theory of vitalism with which it was seen to be in opposition, are often unstable, difficult to navigate or ignored by interested critics both then and now. I argue however, that discussions about the extent of Darwin's materialism in particular are often in fact debates about language. I contend that Darwin aims to downplay radical interpretations and enables this shift from philosophical to linguistic analyses of his work through his use of purposefully obscure or unconventional language.

Although no two writers or thinkers can be said to exactly share a philosophy, eighteenth-century materialism in its most general sense is the theory that the universe is composed of matter and that even intangible aspects of it, such as life or thought, are products of the organisation and/or motion of this matter rather than formed of a separate, immaterial substance. Likewise, the definition of mechanism shifts depending on who is using the term, but can broadly be described as the philosophy that all phenomena, from bodily processes to thoughts or the workings of the extracorporeal universe can be reduced to automatic physical and chemical processes. The distinction is subtle and in the eighteenth century concern over either theory's incompatibility with the traditional Christian doctrines of free will and an immaterial and immortal soul led to their conflation in their detractors' minds. Additionally, as John W. Yolton writes:

> With knowledge and understanding of the human physiology increasing, the notion of the *mechanism* of the body was becoming familiar. For many, the one definitive safeguard against mechanizing the mind was the assurance that the mind is immaterial. […] To suggest that thought might be a property of the brain, or to suggest that man is one, not two substances, was for most people unacceptable not only because of the force of tradition, but also because of the fear of turning man into an automaton.[40]

[40] Yolton, *Thinking Matter*, 125.

Here Yolton demonstrates how, for a philosophically orthodox eighteenth-century audience, a medical approach to human bodies which tried to understand them in terms of the mechanical interplay of material organs or parts was the beginning of a slippery slope towards turning thought into a purely physical or chemical process and thus humans into machines.

The atheistic implications of mechanist or materialist philosophy range from the denial of an immaterial soul and free will to the suggestion, imaginatively realised in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, that a functional, living body could be constructed by a human rather than a divine hand.[41] Yolton's summary of the concerns surrounding these philosophies and the conflation of a materialist medico-philosophy of the body and a mechanisation of the mind also show just how many strands are involved in the labelling of a writer as materialist. Investigation of the extent to which the body employs mechanical processes, theorisation of the mind as material, contention that the brain is the organ of thought, arguments for humans consisting of one (material) substance and wholesale automatism are all related yet ultimately separable stances which may appear in a given writer's work in virtually any combination. In this context, then, Darwin's construction of a machine which replicates human speech and his writing on the relationship between body and mind can be seen not as individual projects but as closely and provocatively linked components of his medico-philosophy.

Gavin Budge attempts to locate Darwin's medico-philosophy within a tradition of philosophical theories about body and mind, characterising *Zoonomia* as the 'culmination' of the thinking of both John Locke's and David Hartley's philosophies.[42] It was not only Darwin, but also notably his friend and later Lunar Society member, Joseph Priestley, who

[41] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[42] Budge, *Romanticism, Medicine and the Natural Supernatural*, 52.

sought to build on the work of Hartley. In 1775, Priestley published an edited version of Hartley's *Observations on Man* as *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind*. In 'exhibiting [Hartley's] theory of the human mind, as far as it relates to the doctrine of *association of ideas* only, omitting even what relates to the doctrine of *vibrations*', Priestley's work aimed to separate a material conception of the mind from Hartley's unambiguously mechanist model in which thoughts are occasioned by physical 'vibrations' and 'each Action results from the previous Circumstances of Body and Mind, in the same manner, and with the same Certainty, as other Effects do from their mechanical Causes'.[43] Priestley went on to publish *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* in 1777, further separating materialism from mechanism. *Matter and Spirit* introduced the idea that although 'we have no reason to suppose that there are in man two substances so distinct from each other' as material matter and immaterial spirit, the matter which constitutes life or mind is not the 'impenetrable' and '*inert* substance' supposed by Cartesian dualists and mechanists, but rather active and penetrable.[44] Edward S. Reed contends that Darwin was 'no follower of Priestley's'.[45] However, Darwin certainly agreed with Priestley's concept of active matter and, as I will go on to argue, it is within the context of this definition of materialism that Darwin is most often read in recent scholarship. It is important to note, however, that neither the distinction between mechanism and materialism presented by Priestley's theory of active matter nor the differences Reed registers between Priestley's and Darwin's philosophy mattered to their contemporary critics. For example, *The Anti-Jacobin*'s satirical

[43] Joseph Priestley, *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind, on the Principle of the Association of Ideas; with essays relating to the subject of it* (London: J. Johnson, 1775), iii; David Hartley, *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations*, vol. 1 (London: James Leake and Wm. Frederick, 1749), 500.

[44] Priestley, *Matter and Spirit*, xxxviii.

[45] Edward S. Reed, *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology from Erasmus Darwin to William James* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 39. Reed writes in reference to mind/body relationships here but might have in mind their disagreement over oxygen, see Desmond King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986), 19.

poem 'The Progress of Man', which takes aim at a range of radical philosophy, cites Priestley and Darwin together along with William Godwin, Thomas Paine and 'All the French Encyclopedists' in a note to lines describing the material mind and its atheist implications.[46] Here we can see that to a conservatively biased audience, Priestley and Darwin, materialism and mechanism, and philosophy and Jacobin politics all become conflated.

As a result, in part, of Priestley's theory of active matter it is not only the line between materialism and mechanism which can become blurred in philosophical writing of the late eighteenth century but also the distinction between materialism and vitalism and, as a survey of recent critical literature demonstrates, these debates are still being played out. Alan Richardson argues that Darwin's model of body and mind 'was a materialist one, or at least one thoroughly compatible with materialism, and it was attacked as such'.[47] Richardson qualifies his argument here, and indeed goes on to suggest Darwin and thinkers like him 'were vitalists of a sort'.[48] For Richardson then, Darwin's philosophy cannot with absolute certainty be called materialist, but it absolutely can be and was read as materialist. Gavin Budge, however, in explicit opposition to Richardson, argues that Darwin is a materialist but is often not read as such, writing that 'it is the very consistency of Darwin's materialism which makes his medical thought a productive source for Romantic poetics – which does not necessarily imply that Romanticism itself is intrinsically materialist'.[49] However, the opposition of these theories, as has frequently been noted, was not solidified until the early nineteenth vitalism debate between surgeons John

[46] 'The Progress of Man', lines 9-14.

[47] Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 15.

[48] Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of Mind*, 30.

[49] Budge, *Romanticism, Medicine and the Natural Supernatural,* 54.

Abernethy and William Lawrence, in which Abernethy argued for a vitalist theory of life as an immaterial principle superadded to the body and Lawrence took the materialist view that life was a property of organised material substances.[50] As Catherine Packham argues, with reference to Richardson, there was not such a clear distinction at the time Darwin was writing and 'in the 1790s they were much more closely intertwined, and often (as Darwin's own case implies) difficult to distinguish'.[51] Despite acknowledging the difficulty of disentangling materialism and vitalism, Packham argues for a firmly vitalist Darwin, going on to write that 'the reception of Darwin's vitalist accounts of plant and animal life as "materialist" itself demonstrates […] the confusion of terms'.[52] Countering Packham, however, Yasmin Solomonescu makes the case that 'materialism and idealism (including vitalism) were neither interchangeable nor mutually exclusive traditions' in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[53] What all these critics appear to agree on however, is that Darwin is no mechanist, but rather writes in accordance with Priestley's theory of active matter and this, I argue, certainly seems to be the case. What differs is the terminology with which they define this philosophy. Darwin's alternative to mechanism which Packham terms 'vitalism' is described by Richardson as 'more than materialism' and as 'fluid materialism' and 'English, spiritualized' materialism by Reed and Paul Hamilton respectively.[54] It is notable that by the time Darwin published the first volume of *Zoonomia* in 1794, Priestley had already been forced to leave the country by political and religious

[50] See Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[51] Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*, 151.

[52] Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*, 151.

[53] Yasmin Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 6.

[54] Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*, 208; Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of Mind*, 89; Reed, *From Soul to Mind*, 41; Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 139.

backlash. With this in mind, I argue that the 'confusion' of terminology which both Packham and, as will be discussed later in this chapter, contemporary readers of Darwin's work register in discussions about his medico-philosophy is the result of a self-conscious and politically self-preserving concern with language on Darwin's own part.

From Darwin's early letters it is clear that his materialist conception of the human body is not developed prior to its criticisms by both periodical reviewers and private correspondents, but alongside them. Although his theories are compatible with materialism, Darwin, conscious of the consequences an explicitly materialist stance could hold, never writes *as* a materialist. For example, in 1768 Darwin enters into philosophical discussion with theological writer Richard Gifford. Responding to Gifford's criticisms of a medico-philosophical paper sent to him by Darwin (which no longer survives), he writes:

> But for H – n's sake, my dear Sir, why are you so provoked at my using the Words "animal System" instead of Mind? You really alarm'd me much about Identity, and Unity of Person; but I here solemnly declare, I do not mean to attack the christian Religion; and that I do not mean to go up to the first Cause of any thing, but endeavour to trace it but one Step higher than others have done.[55]

Darwin certainly appears 'alarm'd' in this passage at Gifford's objection on theological grounds to the description of consciousness as the materially figured 'animal System' of parts and motions as opposed the immaterial and divinely bestowed 'Mind', although there is perhaps a faux-naivety to his coupling of his claim to not understand the reason for Gifford's criticism with the oath 'for H – n's sake'. Darwin's attempts to reconcile his theory of animal systems with a religious and philosophical orthodoxy which sanctifies the immateriality of the mind can be seen here in his declaration that he only aims to investigate the immediate cause of life and not the original cause (explicitly leaving room for the Christian belief of God as first cause) and such qualifications continue to develop along with his materialist medico-philosophy. In a further letter to Gifford, Darwin

[55] Erasmus Darwin to Richard Gifford, 4 September, 1768, in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 92.

acknowledges 'your observations on other parts of my papers have made me consider them more distinctly, and I have altered or enlarged the manner of expressing myself in many Places, and have confirmed others which were too undetermined'.[56] He goes on to claim that 'in respect to the Materialists, and the modern Sceptics, I am ignorant of their arguments, but I suspect the former only dispute about words'.[57] Together these two statements suggest that however materialist Darwin's ideas about the human body may be, he does not deliberately build his theories on an existing canon of materialist thinking. In fact, it is conservative criticism of his incidental materialism which more consciously informs the early development of Darwin's theories.

Darwin continues the letter by theorising what humans might have to separate them from the 'inanimate World' of physical and chemical forces, the vegetable world of 'Irritability' (i.e. physical response to external stimuli) and the animal world of 'Sensibility' (i.e. the capacity for 'Pleasure or Pain'). He writes:

> Men have reason or the voluntary Exertion of the Mind. Now this Mind has a Property different from all that is in any Language called Matter. Therefore unless they [materialists] use that Word in an unusual Sense, the Mind is not Matter but something else, that is, Immaterial.[58]

It would seem then that when it comes to the operation of the mind, Darwin's theory is explicitly not a materialist one, despite the reputation as such that it would gain following the publication of his medico-philosophical work on diseases, *Zoonomia* in the 1790s.[59] However, his claim for the mind's immateriality is unstable here on two counts. Firstly, as I

[56] Erasmus Darwin to Richard Gifford, 15 October, 1768, in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 96.

[57] Erasmus Darwin to Richard Gifford, 15 October, 1768.

[58] Erasmus Darwin to Richard Gifford, 15 October, 1768.

[59] *The Edinburgh Review*, for example, references 'that hypothesis of materialism, which is everywhere assumed by him with the utmost confidence'. 'The Temple of Nature; Or the Origin of Society', *The Edinburgh Review* 2, no. 4 (Jul, 1803): 499.

have argued, the conclusion Darwin comes to in this passage is part of a direct response to a particular critic of his apparent materialism and an attempt to pacify him. Secondly throughout the letter, Darwin shifts the focus away from philosophical disputes and towards semantic ones. He writes that Gifford's criticism has induced him to reconsider his *expression,* not his ideas, and introduces the suggestion that it would be possible to call mind matter simply by changing the definition of the word. In this focus on language, Darwin highlights the ease with which materialism and other philosophical stances can be confused and deliberately blurs the lines. If, as Darwin semi-facetiously proposes, material is just an incorrect or 'unusual' term for immaterial, it becomes impossible to confidently level accusations of materialism at anyone.

The model of 'Irritability', 'Sensibility' and 'voluntary Exertion' as the motions which are found variously in the living parts of the universe, from plants to animals and humans, which Darwin proposes in his letter to Gifford anticipates the medico-philosophical theory of mind and body which Darwin would later use as the basis for *Zoonomia*. In Z*oonomia,* Darwin bases his classification of diseases and their cures on the assertion that every human function, be it bodily or mental, is caused by some combination of four types of motion: irritation, sensation, volition and association. As Priestman summarises, 'something impinges on our bodily nerves (irritation), our mind processes it (sensation), we do something in response (volition), and that response often involves others linked to it by habit (association)'.[60] Together these motions act on or within a substance which Darwin terms the 'sensorium'. In his description of sensorium, Darwin once again pays careful attention to language but with the effect of obscuring rather than clarifying his meaning. He writes:

> The word *sensorium* in the following pages is designed to express not only the medullary part of the brain, spinal marrow, nerves, organ of sense, and of the

[60] Priestman, *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin,* 128.

> muscles; but also at the same time that living principle, or spirit of animation, which resides throughout the whole body.[61]

Although Darwin elucidates the meaning of 'spirit of animation', writing 'the spirit of animation is the immediate cause of the contraction of animal fibres, it resides in the brain and nerves', the exact nature of this spirit or the sensorium is vague. In defining the word 'sensorium', Darwin side-steps the question of whether the 'spirit of animation' is material or immaterial by positioning this spirit alongside and comparable to the material body parts of brain, nerves and muscles, yet paradoxically residing within them. The word 'designed' also belies the deliberateness with which Darwin performs this sleight of hand, as he purposefully coins a word which, like the imaginary 'unusual' use of the word 'Matter' can have two, apparently incompatible, meanings – physical 'medullary' substance, and spirituous 'living principle'.

It is therefore not surprising that modern critical analysis of *Zoonomia* comes to contradictory conclusions about Darwin's 'spirit of animation'. Richardson, for example, argues that 'its materiality, its habitation in the brain and nervous system, and its functional differentiation […] keyed into various bodily organs breaks down the distinction between body and mind'.[62] Packham, on the other hand, contends that it is 'a vitalist theory: one which attempts to theorise life's operation on principles specific to organic matter, often by invoking an unknown and mysterious principle'.[63] Both analyses are well justified by Darwin's text. The 'spirit of animation' is vitalist in so much as it is, at least currently, invisible and ill-defined and unique to living bodies (thus precluding a mechanist philosophy which would argue that living beings are operated by the same chemical and physical forces which operate the inanimate universe). Yet the spirit also conforms to

[61] Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; Or the Laws of Organic Life*, vol. 1 (London: J. Johnson, 1794), 10.

[62] Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of Mind*, 13.

[63] Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*, 151.

several of the hallmarks of materialism discussed by Yolton. It is materially located in the brain and, as the 'spirit of animation' is, together with the body's organs and muscles, subsumed under the heading of 'sensorium', Darwin is able to set up a linguistic model which allows him to treat humans as comprising one substance, while claiming they consist of two.

Darwin's carefully constructed ambivalence about the materiality of life and of mind continues throughout the first part of *Zoonomia.* He begins with the assertion that an exclusively mechanistic approach to the workings of the body has been detrimental to the study of medicine and that 'the Whole of Nature may be supposed to consist of two essences or substances; one of which may be termed spirit, and the other matter'.[64] However, as his argument develops and he begins to detail the way in which both bodily and mental functions arise from the same four motions of irritation, sensation, volition and association his subscription to the theory of material matter and immaterial spirit begins to waver. When he reintroduces the theory a hundred pages later, he writes:

> Some philosophers have divided all created beings into material and immaterial: the former including all that part of being which obeys the mechanic laws of action and reaction, but which can begin no motion itself; the other is the cause of all motion, and is either termed the power of gravity, or the specific attraction, or the spirit of animation.[65]

Darwin is already more equivocal here in his ascription of the two-substance theory to 'some philosophers'. Like the arguments of the materialists who, in his letter to Gifford, Darwin claimed ignorance of, his reluctance to name the philosophers he references allows Darwin to avoid associating himself with any particular philosophical school. Again Darwin breaks down the distinction between substances under the guise of reinforcing it. In Darwin's description, the spirit of animation may be immaterial, but it becomes conflated

[64] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 5.

[65] Darwin, *Zoonomia,* vol. 1, 108.

with forces such as gravity which operate on the living and non-living parts of the universe alike. Yet Darwin immediately undermines his assertion of the spirit's immateriality. He writes:

> I beg to be understood, that I do not wish to dispute about words, and am ready to allow, that the powers of gravity, specific attraction, electricity, magnetism, and even the spirit of animation, may consist of matter of a finer kind; and to believe with St Paul and Malbranch [sic], that the ultimate cause only of all motion is immaterial, that is God.[66]

Again, Darwin attempts to reframe disputes over philosophy as quarrels about language in order to play down the materialism and consequent religious unorthodoxy of his medico-philosophy. Whether Darwin's phrasing that he is 'ready to allow' that these traditionally immaterial forces are in fact material represents genuine hesitation or, as I would argue, ironic understatement, the above demonstrates an admission on Darwin's part that when he writes of 'spirit', he may actually mean 'matter'. Darwin quickly downplays the atheistic implications of this materialism by emphasising the place of God in this system of matter in motion and lending it further religious legitimacy by ascribing the theory, in the first place, to St Paul and the priest and philosopher Nicolas Malebranche.

However, despite Darwin's careful qualifications and attempts to evade identifying with any particular philosophy, in the eyes of many conservative readers and particularly, as I will go on to argue, the Tory-leaning parts of the periodical press, the damage had been done and Darwin had outed himself as a materialist. It is perhaps less productive, then, to try to accurately situate Darwin's medico-philosophy within overly generalised schools of thought than to approach his ideas, as I aim to do, through their contemporary reception as 'materialist' - a reception which informed criticism not only of *Zoonomia,* but also of his poetry, both in terms of its philosophy and its style. And, as this thesis will go on to explore,

[66] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 109.

this reception had a strong impact on how Thelwall and Shelley engaged with Darwin's work on the speaking body.

'Next to each thought associate sound accords': Ways of Speaking

Nowhere perhaps is the materialist potential of Darwin's medico-philosophy more fully realised than in his treatment of speech production. And while, as we have seen, the speaking machine serves to illustrate and reify such an understanding of speech it is by no means the only example of Darwin's materialist approach to the human voice. Throughout his work, I argue, Darwin's accounts of speech are both mechanised and medicalised in the cues they take from materialist and associationist theories of body and mind. Moreover, Darwin's approach to speech production is particularly remarkable (and as I will go on to show, controversial) in his promotion of the application of such theories of speech production to the professional practice of both medicine and education.

Describing the development of human language in *The Temple of Nature,* Darwin, presents an overwhelmingly materialist account of speech production which draws on both his own Z*oonomia* and the work of other thinkers, most notably Hartley. Darwin writes:

> Thus the first Language, when we frown'd or smiled,
> Rose from the cradle, Imitation's child;
> Next to each thought associate sound accords,
> And forms the dulcet symphony of words;
> The tongue, the lips articulate; the throat
> With soft vibration modulates the note;
> Love, pity, war, the shout, the song, the prayer
> Form quick concussions of elastic air.[67]

In these lines Darwin repeatedly emphasises the physical process of speech acquisition over the role of the mind, even as he describes the connection between 'thought' and 'words'. Imitation gives rise to language without any explicit mental input and thought and

[67] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, canto 3, lines 363-370.

sound are not made to accord through the active effort of a speaker, but rather appear to combine spontaneously. And when Darwin goes on to locate speech production in the human body, he dissects and dismantles the process of speaking as he describes it in terms of the interacting but individual parts of the tongue, lips and throat. Again, he makes no reference either to the mind or to the human speaker in a holistic sense. This passage therefore unavoidably hints at the sort of automatism which Darwin's critics feared a materialist conception of life would lead to. As Darwin aims to understand the process of speech by breaking it down into physical and functional components, the sense of overarching human agency or will is lost.

The apparent materialism of Darwin's description of speech becomes even more pronounced as he lists the various products of the voice. In breaking down traditionally abstract or intangible concepts, such as 'love', 'pity' and 'war', into 'concussions of elastic air', he represents them in terms of physical movement and material properties. Speech is therefore presented as a process through which the immaterial can become translated into materialist matter in motion. This concept, although touched on only briefly by Darwin, would later be picked up by both Thelwall and Shelley and, as I will go on to argue, forms an integral element of their figuring of speech as a form of physical action. Yet, by reading Darwin's lines together with a discussion on vocal communication in *Zoonomia*, we can see that despite his physicalised depiction of speech production he does attempt to draw a line between the mechanics of speech and mechanism of the mind. He proposes that:

> As the muscles and cartilages of the larynx are employed in producing a variety of tones by mechanical vibration: so the muscles and bones of the ear seem adapted to increase or diminish the tension of the tympanum for the purposes of similar mechanical vibration. […] But though the vibration of the air is the immediate object of the sense of hearing, yet the ideas we receive by this sense, like those received from light, are only as a language, which by acquired associations acquaints us with those motions of tangible bodies.[68]

[68] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 118-119.

Darwin explains how speech is produced through physical 'mechanical vibrations' of the bodily organs involved in speaking which set off a mechanical chain reaction of movement, first in the particles of the air, and then in the 'muscles and bones of the ear' of the listener. However, these entirely mechanical steps in the production and reception of speech sounds are bookended by a process of association which, while compatible with materialism, is distinguishable in Darwin's work from the explicitly physical sequence of vibrations. Before the tongue and lips can articulate, first 'to each thought associate sound accords', and for vibrations of the air or of the body to become meaningfully understood as sound or speech they must be combined with 'acquired associations'.

Darwin's terminology of vibration and association when describing speech draws heavily on Hartley's *Observations on Man*. Presenting an avowedly mechanist model of mind, Hartley's 1749 text theorises that physical vibrations, strengthened by repetition or habit, provide the medium through which humans associate together various sensations and ideas.[69] Despite not engaging with *Observations on Man* as directly as Joseph Priestley, the influence of Hartley's work can be seen across Darwin's writing. Furthermore, whereas Priestley's reworking of *Observations on Man* edited out Hartley's provocatively mechanist theory of vibrations, favouring a slightly more ambiguous model of associationism, Darwin's writing on speech conspicuously incorporates both parts of Hartley's doctrine.[70] Darwin does not present a clear description of the connection between the roles of association and vibration in speech production, in either his poetry or his prose. Darwin's expression is restricted by poetic form in *The Temple of Nature* and he exploits such restrictions to gloss over the details of the process. For example, in the lines:

Next to each thought associate sound accords,

[69] Robert B. Glassman and Hugh W. Buckingham, 'David Hartley's Neural Vibrations and Psychological Associations', in *Brain, Mind and Medicine: Essays in Eighteenth-Century Neuroscience,* ed. Harry Whitaker, C.U.M. Smith and Stanley Finger (New York: Springer, 2007), 178.

[70] Priestley, *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind*.

> And forms the dulcet symphony of words;
> The tongue, the lips articulate; the throat
> With soft vibration modulates the note;[71]

the physiological or psychological process which links the associative formation of 'the dulcet symphony of words' to the 'soft vibration' of the throat which produces speech sounds becomes represented simply by a semi colon in order to fit the metre. However, Darwin's reticence appears to be more calculated than a prioritisation of poetic form over philosophical content. The poem's notes, after all, specifically provide space for such detail, yet in this instance Darwin does not elaborate. Moreover, in *Zoonomia*, the means by which the vibrations of the air which constitute sound initiate a process of association within the body or mind of the listener is similarly hard to pin down. In his typical style, Darwin uses comparison to explain his theory. Sounds are heard and given signification through a process which is not described on its own terms, but as being 'like those [ideas] received by light' or 'as a language'.[72] Moreover, Darwin's simile is somewhat circular here. The physiological process of aural communication, which includes hearing and understanding spoken language, is itself compared to a language in its operation.

It should be noted, however, that although he provides no solid explanation of the relationship between vibrations and association in speech production, Darwin distances himself from the Hartleian idea that associations are driven entirely by physical vibrations. Darwin's repeated use of the word 'mechanical' to describe the vibrations of the voice or ear in *Zoonomia,* suggests a concern to distinguish the specific movements of the body or air that he discusses from Hartley's more general system of vibrations. Elsewhere in *Zoonomia,* Darwin also attempts to differentiate his materialist matter-in-motion account of 'sensorial power' from a mechanist system of vibrations. Although he asserts early on

[71] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, canto 3, lines 365-368.

[72] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 118-119.

that 'our ideas are also associated together after their production precisely in the same manner as our muscular motions', he goes on to argue that:

> The sensorial motions […] are not here supposed to be fluctuations or refluctuations of the spirit of animation; nor are they supposed to be vibrations or revibrations, nor condensations or equilibrations of it; but to be changes or motions of it peculiar to life.[73]

It is clear then, that although Darwin does not wish to suggest that the motions which cause the association of ideas are Hartleian 'vibrations or revibrations', he does regard them as material and, like those of the muscles, located in the physical body as opposed to an immaterially conceived mind. His 'sensorial motions' are, 'peculiar to life' and therefore not the same as the mechanical laws of motion that operate on inanimate parts of the universe, yet they are still physical bodily forces. Like Priestley, then, Darwin adopts Hartley's doctrine of associations without subscribing to his theory of vibrations. However, when considering the physiology of speech production and reception, which is a process that necessarily involves the successive action and interaction of the mind, the body, and the extracorporeal universe, the lines between mental, bodily and mechanical processes become blurred. As Darwin applies the laws of 'mechanical vibrations' to the organs of speech and hearing and follows a chain of causation back and forward to the formation and association of ideas, he unavoidably links together association and vibration even as he argues for their separation.

Although Darwin's engagement with the doctrine of vibrations is unstable, on the whole his treatment of speech production in *Zoonomia* corresponds closely with Hartley's writing on speech. In the third section of *Observations on Man*, after introducing his doctrines of vibration and association, Hartley begins a discussion of 'automatic and voluntary' muscular motions and their dependence on the preceding theories.[74] Hartley

[73] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 24, 33.

[74] Hartley, *Observations on Man*, vol. 1, 85.

argues that both voluntary and automatic movements of the body stem from the association of ideas, and that association also allows voluntary motions to become automatic and vice versa. He proposes that 'association not only converts automatic Actions into voluntary, but voluntary into automatic'.[75] As evidence of this theory Hartley introduces 'a short Account of the Manner in which we learn to speak'.[76] He explains that new born babies will only produce sounds if 'the Muscles of the Trunk and Larynx be stimulated thereunto by the Impression of Pain', but that, as the child develops, the stimuli needed to occasion movement in the organs of the speech become increasingly slighter until 'mere Sensations' and 'associated Circumstances' will produce the same effect.[77] The child then begins to associate the 'Action of the Muscles of the Trunk, Larynx, Tongue and Lips' first with the sound of their own voice, then with the sounds made by others and finally with 'visible objects, actions, &c'.[78] Hartley proposes that it is by this process of successive associations that the automatic response of crying out in pain becomes the voluntary action of speech. He concludes his investigation into speech acquisition with the assertion that 'in like manner, Speech, after it has been voluntary for a due Time, will become secondarily automatic, *i.e.* will follow associated Circumstances, without any express Exertion of the Will'.[79] Hartley's model of speech production, in which the materially conceived process of association transforms voluntary and automatic movements of the body into one another, suggests that the will is likewise material. Although Hartley later goes on to argue that the first human language was imparted by

[75] Hartley, *Observations on Man*, vol. 1, 104.

[76] Hartley, *Observations on Man*, vol. 1, 105.

[77] Hartley, *Observations on Man,* vol. 1, 105.

[78] Hartley, *Observations on Man*, vol. 1, 106-107.

[79] Hartley, *Observations on Man*, vol. 1, 107.

God, the explanation of voluntary and automatic motions that he lays out here demonstrates a theory of speech acquisition which, like Darwin's 'sensorial power' or 'spirit of animation', relegates God to a first cause and does not require an immaterial conception of mind.[80] Hartley's theory of speech production therefore bears all the hallmarks of materialism. And, as he draws on Hartley throughout his writing, Darwin's work on speech is similarly suggestive of a materialist understanding of the speaking body.

In *Zoonomia*, Darwin picks up Hartley's model of voluntary and involuntary actions linked by association and applies it not only to speech production in general, but also to an investigation of speech impediments such as stammering. Darwin once again draws on his theory of 'volition' to explain the occurrence of stammering. 'Volition' and 'voluntary', as Darwin makes explicit in his text, are terms which he uses to incorporate both 'voluntary' and 'automatic' actions. He states that although the 'power of choosing, whether we shall act or not, is in common language expressed by the word volition, or will', his use of the term will denote 'simply the active state of the sensorial faculty in producing motion in consequence of desire or aversion; whether we have the power of restraining the action or not'.[81] Likewise, he explains, his use of the word 'voluntary' will cover such unconscious or unstoppable actions which 'in common language […] would be called involuntary'.[82] Darwin clearly engages with and applies Hartley's associationist and materialist model of voluntary and involuntary speech production when he aims to understand stammering in terms of volition and association. He explains:

> In the common impediment of speech, when the associations of the motions of the muscles of enunciation with the idea of the word to be spoken is disordered, the great voluntary efforts, which distort the countenance prevent the rejoining of the broken association.[83]

[80] Hartley, *Observations on Man*, vol. 1, 297.

[81] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 416.

[82] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 416.

[83] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 189.

He then goes on in the second volume of *Zoonomia* to classify stammering as a disease of association and suggests that it can be caused by 'associations of the motions of the organs of speech being interrupted or dissevered by ill-employed sensation or sensitive motions, as by awe, bashfulness, ambition of shining, or fear of not succeeding '.[84] For Darwin then, whose model of irritation, sensation, volition and association assimilates mental and bodily processes under a materialist system of 'sensorial power', stammering is a wholly physical condition. We can thus see that in Darwin's investigations into speech impediments, and in his broad engagement with Hartley's doctrine of associations, he takes his physical and even mechanical analysis of speech production further than the 'muscles of enunciation'. The theory of association provides Darwin with a physical model even for those parts of speech production that take place within the mind.

The fact that Darwin does not simply repeat or adapt Hartley's associationist model of speech production in *Zoonomia,* but applies it to speech impediments, also demonstrates another key feature of his approach to speech – his concern with uniting medical theory and practice and his conviction that doing so will be beneficial to society at large. Darwin makes the case for the socially beneficial powers of a knowledge-based approach to physiology and medicine throughout *Zoonomia*. For example, in the preface to the first volume he writes 'by that busy crowd, who either boldly wade in the darkness, or are led into endless error by the glare of false theory, [medicine] is daily practiced to the destruction of thousands'.[85] For Darwin medicine which is 'daily practiced' without any or adequate theorisation is equally detrimental to health and society. Thus, it is by combining

[84] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 2, 505.

[85] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 2.

knowledge and practice that Darwin envisages a form of medicine which will most successfully effect social improvement. The preface continues by suggesting that:

> A theory founded upon nature, that should bind together the scattered facts of medical knowledge […] would thus on many accounts contribute to the interest of society. It would capacitate men of moderate abilities to practice the art of healing with real advantage to the public.[86]

Darwin here argues that it only possible for medicine to be of significant public benefit by adding 'theory' and 'knowledge' to the practical 'art of healing'. This attitude to medicine was uncommon for the late eighteenth century. As Mike Jay notes, besides a handful of physicians including Darwin and Thomas Beddoes, 'the world of medicine, particularly in Britain, remained a curious exclusion zone from the aspirations to scientific progress that had characterised the philosophies of the eighteenth century'.[87] Beddoes, like Darwin, suggests in his 1799 *Contributions to Physical and Medical Knowledge* that 'as medical philosophy gains more of the public attention, medical practitioners will become more and more the devoted servants of their art'.[88] What differentiates Darwin and Beddoes from other medical practitioners in the period, and what allows them to consider medicine's progressive potential, is their shared belief that medicine could and should be not only a practical art but also a system of knowledge. With this in mind, Darwin does not set out a theory of speech production for the sake of theorisation itself, but as the foundation for practically treating and improving speech impediments. And equally, such treatments cannot be developed without first investigating and understanding the theoretical underpinnings of the human body and its processes. Darwin must first explain sensation,

[86] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 2.

[87] Mike Jay, *The Atmosphere of Heaven: The Unnatural Experiments of Dr Beddoes and his Sons of Genius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 31.

[88] Thomas Beddoes, *Contributions to physical and medical knowledge, principally from the West of England* (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), 12.

volition and association before he can instruct the reader on 'the art of curing this defect'.[89] Thus, Darwin positions abstract philosophical knowledge as essential to the physical practicability of his work on articulation. And it is an associationist and materialist understanding of speech production which, in its similar tendency to unite the mental and the physical, to 'accord' 'each thought [with] associate sounds', provides Darwin with the most fitting theoretical foundation.[90]

Zoonomia is not the only one of Darwin's works in which he investigates the physiology of speech. Concern with speech production and impediment can be found not just in his medical writing but also in his poetry and educational texts, demonstrating just how far 'a theory founded on nature' may 'contribute to the improvement of society' on 'many accounts', including in applications beyond medicine.[91] In the *Temple of Nature*, for example, he reiterates the idea that speech production is learned by a process of association. We encounter the lines:

> As the soft lips and pliant tongue are taught
> With other minds to interchange the thought;
> And sound, the symbol of the sense, explains
> In parted links the long ideal trains.[92]

Darwin's associationist model of speech production is evident here, as he describes a process in which 'trains' of ideas are associated together. These lines also suggest the materialist approach to speech which pervades his writing. Darwin, as I have argued, regards associations as physical bodily motions, and his conception of ideas is similarly

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[89] Darwin's practical treatment involves getting the patient to repeat the words they find most problematic without the first letter in order to repair the 'broken association' between the first and subsequent letters and encouraging 'much commerce with mankind' in order to desensitise the patient to the emotional states such as 'bashfulness' which cause the disruptive 'sensitive motions'. Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 2, 505.

[90] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, canto 3, line 365.

[91] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 2.

[92] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, canto 3, lines 395-398.

material, as he defines them in *Zoonomia* as 'a contraction, or motion, or configuration, of the fibres, which constitute the immediate organ of sense'.[93] Again, poetic form heightens the materialist connotations of Darwin's argument. As Darwin must use the phrase 'other minds' to refer to the minds of other people in order to fit the line to the poem's iambic pentameter, he draws an equivalence between the body and the mind. There is no initial 'mind' in the first line from which the 'other minds' of the second line are distinguished, only the 'soft lips and pliant tongue'. Additionally, Darwin continues the trend of dissecting the process of speech production, focussing individually on the operation of lips, tongue and mind and omitting reference to the complete human. As Darwin uses poetry to communicate physiological theory, the phrase 'other minds' is more than synecdoche for other people; it refers specifically or even exclusively to the part of a person termed the mind. Thus, as Darwin breaks down the process of speech into the associated motions of interacting parts of the body, he treats speech as a specifically material physiological process.

In 1797, having completed the second volume of *Zoonomia* the previous year, Darwin turned his attention to education, publishing *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools*. From the beginning of the text, Darwin approaches education from the perspective of the medico-philosopher, arguing that 'the advantages of a good education consist in uniting health and agility of body with chearfulness and activity of the mind'.[94] Here, education is explicitly a matter of 'health' which will attend to the body, the mind, and most importantly, the relationship between them. As Darwin's *Female Education* progresses, he deals with increasingly medicalised subjects, beginning with sections on music, dancing, reading, and writing but moving towards discussions of lisping,

[93] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 11.

[94] Erasmus Darwin, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* (Derby and London: J. Johnson, 1797), 10.

stammering, squinting, and involuntary motions which would be equally at home in *Zoonomia*. Indeed, the chapter on stammering paraphrases and explicitly cross-references *Zoonomia*. Darwin reintroduces his theory of speech impediments, explaining that:

> Association is dissever'd by the ill-introduced sensation of awe, bashfulness, desire of shining, or fear of not succeeding; and the violent voluntary efforts are in vain employ'd to re-join the broken association, and give rise to various distortions of countenance, as explained in Zoonomia, vol. II. class iv. 2. 3. I. [95]

In introducing this technical and theoretical description of the causes of stammering into his treatise on schooling, Darwin emphasises that attention to the role of physiology in speech is not solely the purview of the physician but rather has far broader applications. Stammering is a medically inflected 'disease of the mind' in one paragraph, but a morally inflected 'bad habit' in the next. Yet 'bad habit' is a phrase which has medico-philosophical connotations of its own, as 'habit' is the method through which associations are formed in Darwin's system.[96] Finally, after blending physiological and educational theory at the beginning of the section, Darwin breaks down the boundaries between medical and pedagogical practice as he repositions the 'Materia Medica' or remedy for stammering suggested in *Zoonomia* as an exercise to be carried out in school. He writes:

> This, together with an hourly attention to speaking and reading slowly, and practising in this manner every word which is not readily spoken, both in private and in company, I am inform'd is the principle, on which those masters cure this impediment.[97]

Medicine and education become thoroughly combined, as it is not a physician who will 'cure' stammering here, but a 'master' or teacher who has studied and understood Darwin's theories of material mind and associationist speech. Just as Darwin was relatively unique in the period in applying philosophical or what we might now term scientific

[95] Darwin, *Female Education*, 96.

[96] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 13.

[97] Darwin, *Female Education*, 98.

principles to medical practice, his application of such theoretical physiology of speech to the field of education was similarly novel. In fact, such blending of theoretical, practical, medical, and educational approaches to speech production and impediment is usually considered an innovation of elocutionary work produced by Thelwall between 1801 and 1834.[98] Emily Stanback discusses how Thelwall shared similar concerns to Darwin about medical practice insufficiently supported by theory and 'sought to provide a rigorous and "scientific" alternative to the services offered by credentialed medical professionals'.[99] And Thelwall does this by incorporating a highly theorised, and, as I will go on to argue, similarly materialist understanding of anatomy and physiology into the teaching of elocution which draws, explicitly in places, on Darwin's writing.

Darwin's closer contemporary, Beddoes, also brought together the fields of medicine and pedagogy in considering an understanding of mind, and a materialist understanding in particular, to be essential for effective education. Moreover (and again, as Chapter Two of this thesis will show, pre-empting Thelwall's elocutionary work), Beddoes suggests that such an approach to the mind has the potential to lead to the improvement of society and the spread of radical ideals. In his 1792 *Extract of a Letter on Early Instruction,* Beddoes argues that any system of education must be based on the workings of a child's mind. Mike Jay notes that, like Darwin, 'the system that specifically underpinned Beddoes' scheme, and indeed much of his thought, was the psychology of David Hartley' and that the implications of this were distinctly 'revolutionary' as they allowed Beddoes to argue against teaching children religious subjects.[100] Beddoes uses the example of speech

[98] Denyse Rockey, for example, argues that Thelwall played an instrumental role in the origins of speech therapy by 'harmonizing the many facets of speech correction: medicine, linguistics, drama, education, and, more subtly, psychology'. Denyse Rockey, 'John Thelwall and the Origins of British Speech Therapy', *Medical History* 23 (1979): 156.

[99] Emily Stanback, *The Wordsworth-Coleridge Circle and the Aesthetics of Disability* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 56.

[100] Jay, *Atmosphere of Heaven*, 55-56.

production to position Hartleian associationism as an antidote to conservative dogmatism. He suggests that 'the habit in the CHILD of hearing and pronouncing certain sounds without any movement of the mind, will dispose the MAN to hear the same sounds with the same vacancy of thought' and continues by lamenting that 'we can all repeat our constitutional, much better than our church, catechism, and in the same parrot style'.[101] For Hartley, it is associations which separate the sounds made by animals from human spoken language, with the speech of parrots being 'almost devoid of all proper Connexion with Ideas', despite their 'greater Command of the Muscles of the Throat' than other animals.[102] As Beddoes applies the concept of sounds produced purely by the organs of speech without the interaction of associative motions in the mind to the mindless repetition of constitutional and church catechisms, he presents utterance based on theories of association as an alternative to a form of parroting speech which prevents political enquiry or reform – an idea which, as the following chapter will argue, also underpins Thelwall's discussions of reformist utterance. It is thus that Darwin is able to address speech impediments in both *Zoonomia* and *Female Education.* By combining theories of materialism and associationism which together suggest that the mind is material, Darwin, like Beddoes and Hartley, argues that the mind can be treated medically in the same way as, and alongside, the body. While Darwin, unlike Beddoes, does not himself make an explicit connection between the material mind and reformist politics, we have already seen how such materialist conceptions of life and mind were considered an indication of political and religious unorthodoxy in the period. And moreover, as I will argue in the next part of this chapter, the blending together of different ways of writing and thinking, which

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[101] [Thomas Beddoes], *Extract of a Letter on Early Instruction, Particularly that of the Poor* (n.p.: Printed for the Author, 1792).

[102] Hartley, *Observations on Man*, vol. 1, 263.

Darwin's mechanical, anatomical, poetic, and educational work on speech exemplifies, could be and was seen as equally subversive.

'Correctness of taste, and depth of research': Ways of Thinking and Ways of Writing

The carefully chosen, yet purposefully vague, terms in which Darwin presents his materialist medico-philosophical theories did not go unnoticed by contemporary reviewers of his work. Yet, presumably contrary to Darwin's intentions, the ambivalent language which Darwin uses in *Zoonomia,* and later in *The Temple of Nature* (a poem which one critic in *The Edinburgh Review* deemed '"Zoonomia" done into verse'), does not allow his theories to conform to each individual reader's political and religious bias.[103] Rather, I suggest that the ambiguity of his terminology, and his assertion that understanding *Zoonomia*'s argument requires some degree of linguistic analysis, creates the interpretive potential for a reader to find confirmation for any existing suspicions about Darwin's own political and religious leanings which they may have. In turn, I argue that the literary and linguistic interpretation of Darwin's medico-philosophy, which his concern with language encourages, opens his work to criticism drawn from debates over the compatibility of poetry, medicine and philosophy which were becoming increasingly widespread from the 1790s onwards.

For example, the radical periodical, *The English Review* praises the attention which Darwin gives to terminology in *Zoonomia*.[104] The article notes how Darwin 'carefully avoids the use of terms that belong to mechanics or to chemistry, which sometimes introduced

[103] 'The Temple of Nature; Or the Origin of Society', *The Edinburgh Review* 2, no. 4 (Jul, 1803): 493.

[104] *The English Review*'s early contributors included Thomas Holcroft, Thelwall's co-accused in the 1794 treason trials and William Godwin and in 1796 the periodical merged with *The Analytical Review,* published by Darwin's own radical publisher, Joseph Johnson. See Derek Roper, *Reviewing Before the Edinburgh, 1788-1802* (London: Methuen, 1978), 22.

into medicine and metaphysics in their literal sense, and sometimes figuratively, have been the fruitful source of error, confusion, and dispute'.[105] The reviewer here, in addition to judging successful Darwin's attempts to distance his materialism from a mechanism which reduces life and mind to 'mechanics' or 'chemistry', upholds his assertion that philosophical disputes on the subject are simply due to a confusion of terms and an inconsistency between literal and metaphorical usages. For the *English Review,* the 'error, confusion, and dispute' surrounding materialist 'medicine and metaphysics' is, as we have seen Darwin himself argue, due to incorrect terminology rather than any disagreement of philosophical theory.

For the author of an 1804 review of *The Temple of Nature* in *The Universal Magazine,* however, Darwin's equivocation is not the sign of a writer concerned about refuting atheist interpretations of his work but of one insidiously promoting them. The review cites a note to the poem, lifted verbatim from *Zoonomia*, in which Darwin defends materialism, claiming that it 'so far from leading the mind to atheism, would strengthen the demonstration of the existence of a Deity'.[106] The reviewer is not convinced, commenting, 'we believe it woud [sic] require all the Doctor's ingenuity, and no small portion of his sophistry, to demonstrate that the cause of theism is strengthened by such a view of the creative power'. The reviewer goes on to suggest that Darwin's philosophy, related in 'inconsistent jargon', 'bears a greater resemblance to one of those cloaks in which infidelity is apt to shroud itself, in order to gain admission among those whom, were its form exposed, its deformity would at once alarm and terrify'.[107] Here, Darwin's language, at once

[105] 'Zoonomia; or, the Laws of Organic Life', *English Review, Or, an Abstract of English and Foreign Literature* 24 (Sep, 1794): 176.

[106] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature,* canto 4, line 147n.; Darwin, *Zoonomia*, 533.

[107] 'The Temple of Nature; Or the Origin of Society. A Poem, with Philosophical Notes', *Universal Magazine* 4 (Apr, 1804): 395.

too specialised (it is 'jargon') and too elusive (it is 'inconsistent') is interpreted as purposefully malicious. Far from preventing confusion, the reviewer accuses Darwin of a 'sophistry' calculated to misdirect conventionally theist readers into accepting an atheist model of existence.

As similar concerns about Darwin's terminology and its relation to materialism and atheism echo across reviews of his writing, it becomes clear that contemporary receptions of his work were informed by a number of complicated and often deeply connected concerns. Debates over the 'correct' way to communicate ideas relating to medicine, philosophy, technology or the natural world incorporate questions about language, its potential to deceive, intentionally or otherwise, and its capacity to be either literal or figurative. This concern with language, as I will discuss later in this chapter, in turn opens up wider questions about modes of writing and thinking and their compatibility both with each other and the ideas contained within them. Furthermore, as philosophical arguments become recast as 'dispute[s] about words' stylistic evaluations of Darwin's work become increasingly inextricable from both moral and intellectual assessments of his writing. Finally, it is important to note the changing political context within which Darwin was writing. Between his early celebrated works, *The Loves of the Plants* in 1789 and *The Botanic Garden* in 1791, and the posthumous publication of *The Temple of Nature* in 1803, the development of the French Revolution and resultant growing political tension in Britain gave new significance to the radical implications of Darwin's ideas. As Packham writes, 'what had changed in the meantime is not only a more explicit unveiling of Darwin's scientific beliefs […] but also the political context in which such beliefs were received and appraised'.[108] The distinctions between criticisms founded on philosophical orthodoxy, 'political context' or linguistic and formal propriety are not always clearly demarcated.

[108] Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*, 149.

Darwin's 1791 publication of *The Loves of the Plants* together with *The Economy of Vegetation* as *The Botanic Garden* was initially almost universally acclaimed both for its style, and for its conceit of combining scientific subject matter and notes with poetic form. *The English Review,* for example, praises 'the same musical sweetness, the same nervous strength of versification, the same brilliance of thought, correctness of taste, and depth of research, that never seems to leave our author for a moment'.[109] Here, emphasised by the repetition of 'the same', the poetics, aesthetics and philosophical or scientific merit of *The Botanic Garden* are given an equal and perhaps even equivalent share of the credit for the poem's success. Likewise, despite some misgivings about Darwin's philosophy, even a 1792 review in the Tory leaning *Critical Review* concludes that *The Botanic Garden* is a 'truly elegant and philosophical poem'.[110] The poem's success lies in the 'correctness' of both its poetry and its science; its capacity to be as 'elegant' as it is 'philosophical'.

By the end of the century, however, reactions in the press to *The Botanic Garden* had become increasingly politicised. Darwin's text, of course, had remained the same, but, read towards the end of the French Revolution, the politics of a poem in which the natural workings of the universe and their discovery by men of science could make 'Tyrants tremble on their blood-stain'd thrones' became all the more contentious.[111] For some, the progressive politics of *The Botanic Garden* was another mark of Darwin's genius. For example, a hyperbolic biographical article on Darwin, published in *The Monthly Visitor* in 1800, claims:

> *The Botanic Garden* is the most scientific and poetic production that ever came from the pen of any human being […] Nor does Dr. Darwin merely confine himself to scientific discussions, he touches on other subjects with an equal degree of energy and beauty. The infernal slave-trade he reprobates; the agonies of its

[109] 'The Botanic Garden; a Poem', *English Review, Or, an Abstract of English and Foreign Literature* 20 (Sep, 1792): 161.

[110] 'The Botanic Garden', *The Critical Review, Or, Annals of Literature* 6, (Oct, 1792): 170.

[111] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden*, canto 1, line 252.

> victims he commiserates, and boldly calls on the British legislature for their liberation.[112]

Again, as the poem is held up as a paragon of 'scientific and poetic production', the article suggests an idea of 'correctness'. Here, the 'scientific' and the 'poetic' are not broad categories for describing types of writing, but are quantifiable attributes with the potential to appear in a perfect or correct form. Alongside praising Darwin's literary and intellectual skill and decorum or, as *The English Review* puts it, 'brilliance of thought, correctness of taste', the article in *The Monthly Visitor* also introduces the idea of moral propriety. Many reviewers of *The Botanic Garden* lauded what *The Monthly Review* describes as the poem's 'pleasing miscellaneous form'.[113] For the author of the *Monthly Visitor* article, however, the wide-ranging miscellany of Darwin's writing is not merely a sign of its literary tastefulness but a tool for introducing moral and political ideals. As the 'miscellaneous form' allows Darwin to move suddenly from explanations of lightning rods or the formation of rocks to revolutionary and abolitionist sentiments, questions of taste and poetic value become intertwined with those of scientific or philosophical accuracy and moral or political propriety.

Yet critiques of Darwin's poetry post-1793 were rarely so generous, and, as the reception of Darwin's politics became increasingly critical, so unavoidably did assessments of his works' intellectual and poetic merit. This is particularly clear from the number of mock and parody Darwin poems which began to appear in the conservative press which, in responding to Darwin in like poetic form and language, implicitly criticise not only the

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[112] *The Monthly Visitor* was printed for Henry Symonds, who had formerly been imprisoned for seditious libel for the publication of radical writing. See James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade 1450-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 212; 'Sketch of the Life and Writings of Erasmus Darwin, M. D. F. R. S.', *The Monthly Visitor, and Pocket Companion* 10, (Aug, 1800): 327.

[113] 'The Botanic Garden; a Poem, in Two Parts', *Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal* 11 (Jun, 1793): 186.

content of Darwin's work but the style. Published over three issues of *The Anti-Jacobin* in 1797, the *Botanic Garden* parody, *The Loves of the Triangles* imitates Darwin's Augustan couplets and personifications of natural beings and phenomena to criticise not only the apparent pro-revolutionary ideals of his writing, but also his natural philosophy, his poetic style and, significantly, the relationship between them. The poem begins:

> Stay your rude steps, or e'er your feet invade
> The Muses' haunts, ye Sons of War and Trade!
> Nor you, ye Legion Fiends of Church and Law,
> Pollute these pages with unhallow'd paw
> […]
> For *you*, no Tangents touch, no angles meet,
> No Circles join in oscillation sweet![114]

Priestman notes the way in which the poem's satire focusses on a supposed 'complete incompatibility between the emotional, artistic sphere of love poetry and the heartless scientific sphere'.[115] However, there is also another ironic incompatibility at play here. The poet does not just portray Darwin as a writer who improperly combines poetry and 'the scientific sphere', but also as one who values a radically inflected scientific discourse over the establishment powers of 'Church and Law'. For the mock Darwin, these institutions 'pollute' the page and undermine the muse-inspired poetic value precisely through their unscientific nature, devoid of the 'tangents' and 'angles' which are supposed to be both indicative of mathematical preciseness and 'correctly' tasteful poetry. It is clear, then, from *The Loves of the Triangles*' satire of Darwin as a Jacobin sympathiser who mistakenly believes that good poetry and accurate science can be the same thing, that *The Botanic Garden*'s 'miscellaneous form' could draw together attacks on Darwin's poetry, philosophy and politics.

[114] 'The Loves of the Triangles', lines 1-10.

[115] Priestman, *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin*, 204.

Nowhere, perhaps, is the supposed incompatibility of poetry and science more clearly seen than in attitudes to the 'ingenuity' of Darwin's work. The word 'ingenious' appears again and again in both positive and critical reviews of Darwin's writing and carries similarly positive and negative connotations. While those publications which are most sympathetic to Darwin's politics use the term as a broadly complimentary epithet, for more ambivalent reviewers, ingenuity belongs firmly to the field of poetry or literature and has no place in 'correct' science. For example, a 1794 review of *Zoonomia* in *The Monthly Review* suggests that Darwin's work will find its audience in readers who 'feel great pleasure in following all the mazes of plausible and ingenious speculation, even if they cannot admit its truth' and goes on to claim that it will not comment on Darwin's theory specifically but recommends the work to 'such of our readers as are disposed to take pleasure in viewing the progress of an ingenious fancy in working up a little fact with abundance of conjecture'.[116] Here ingenuity is not presented as wholly negative, but its merits are literary rather than scientific. The ingenious nature of Darwin's work is aligned with 'fancy' and the 'pleasure' of its readership but to the detriment of factual accuracy. What particularly alarmed critics was Darwin's move from writing poetry to prose, without sufficient change in his manner of writing and thinking. A reviewer in *The British Critic* writes that readers of *Zoonomia* will find that 'great ingenuity will be displayed in many parts, and that every thing related will be delivered in a pleasing manner, must also be expected from the author of the Botanic Garden'.[117] Again, ingenuity, pleasure, and poetry are aligned, yet this 'correctness of taste', to use the *English Review*'s phrase, becomes antithetical to 'depth of research'. A poet should be ingenious but a scientist should not. *The British Critic* notes that in *Zoonomia* they find 'rather the author of the Botanic Garden

[116] 'Zoonomia; or the Laws of Organic Life. Vol. I', *Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal* 15 (Sep, 1794): 1, 12.

[117] 'Zoonomia; or, the Laws of Organic Life. Vol. 1', *The British Critic* 5 (Feb, 1795): 122.

than the physician: the poet accustomed to delight […] than the strict and sober physiologist'.[118] The poet and the physiologist cannot be one and the same, the reviewer suggests, because ingenuity and the pleasure that it effects is properly the domain of literature and not serious scientific investigation.

Although *The Botanic Garden* became the target of parody some years after its publication, *Zoonomia* and *The Temple of Nature* faced criticism from the outset and, as Packham observes, 'it is difficult not to feel that it is an affront of disciplinary transgression, as much as a challenge to religious orthodoxy, which is being registered in these reviews'.[119] Once Darwin writes *Zoonomia*, both his poems and medical or scientific treatises become transgressive in their similitude to each other. I would argue, however that the perceived 'disciplinary transgression' critiqued by the reviews is more nuanced than a distaste for the intermixing of the broad and somewhat anachronistic categories of 'scientific and poetic production'. Jon Klancher writes that by the 1830s:

> the scientific field had organised itself into the capacity to make knowledge […] ; 'science' appeared far more the legitimate claimant to 'knowledge' than did either the fine arts, including poetry, or the now well-demarcated and confined territory of the 'mechanical' or 'practical' arts.[120]

Although these fields were yet to stratify at the end of the eighteenth century, reviews of Darwin's later work show an increasing concern with the separation not only between 'science' and 'the fine arts, including poetry' but also of 'knowledge' and '"practical" arts'. Darwin's 'disciplinary transgression' does not just manifest in his blending of different types of knowledge and practice, but in his failure to register the distinction between knowledge and practice themselves.

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[118] 'Book Review', *The British Critic* 5 (Feb, 1795): 115.

[119] Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*, 148.

[120] Jon Klancher, *Transfiguring the Arts and Sciences: Knowledge and Cultural Institutions in the Romantic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 230.

It is not only science and poetry which become incompatible for Darwin's critics, but theory and practice. An 1803 review of *The Temple of Nature* in *The Edinburgh Review* demonstrates the way in which misgivings about the orthodoxy of Darwin's philosophy become translated into comments on the boundaries between different types of enquiry. The review claims that it does not take issue with Darwin's materialist stance per se, but rather the methods of enquiry that lead to it, suggesting that 'it is by thus confounding the investigations of physiology and of metaphysics, that he appears to us to have lost himself in that gulph which will probably for ever separate the sciences of matter and of mind'.[121] Here Darwin's materialism is presented as the consequence of an erroneous conflation of 'physiology and metaphysics'. Paul Elliott acknowledges the effect which criticisms such as this had on the developing boundaries between what would come to be seen as different areas of investigation, writing that 'the attacks, in effect, condemned the interdependency of Darwin's natural philosophy and medical practice, helping sever the two'.[122] The term 'medical practice' is revealing here as it acknowledges that medicine is indeed a 'practical art' when used for its immediate purpose of healing the sick, a purpose which critics of *Zoonomia* in particular believed the working physician Darwin to be neglecting. Even a relatively positive article in *The Monthly Review* expresses concern that Darwin's philosophical approach to medicine will be detrimental to its application. The reviewer suggests that *Zoonomia*:

> elevates medicine from its humble rank of an experimental art, to that of a true and full-formed science. This state, indeed, is that in which every friend to its progress would wish to view it, and that which every man of genius will attempt to acquire for it: — but the misfortune is that such attempts, if premature or inadequate, interfere with the humbler effects of practical utility, and mislead by false views as much as they instruct by true conceptions. It is not easy to imagine

[121] 'The Temple of Nature; Or the Origin of Society', *The Edinburgh Review* 2, no. 4 (Jul, 1803): 500.

[122] Elliott, 'More Subtle than the Electric Aura', 216.

> an arrangement of diseases less applicable to common purposes than that in the present work.[123]

Practice-based 'experimental art' is not completely separated from 'science' here, since the author implies that there is potential for the former to lead to or develop into the latter. However, Darwin's 'inadequate' philosophising of medical art or practice, however admirable from the point of view of a scientifically-minded 'man of genius', is fundamentally at odds with 'practical utility'. The implication is that science such as Darwin's cannot produce practical and observable results, only knowledge. Medicine's supposed incompatibility with 'metaphysics' or 'natural philosophy' is indicative then not simply of an arbitrary thematic division between areas of study, but of a fundamental epistemological incompatibility between knowledge and practice.

It is clear then that in contemporary assessments of Darwin's work, the concept of 'correctness' does not apply to the accuracy of the content or the appropriateness of expression separately, but to the compatibility of the two under increasingly stringent ideas about disciplinary boundaries. Allard proposes that Darwin's 'seemingly indiscriminate blending of genres and disciplines, and the self-reflexive concern with the nature of language itself point to an epistemological anxiety […] a concern with *how* we know'.[124] However, as I have argued, the relationship between types of writing, language, and knowledge-making in Darwin's work is more complex. Darwin's intermixing of different types of writing does not just *signal* a concern with ways of knowing but *incites* an 'epistemological anxiety' which originates, primarily, outside his own texts and rather in the work of his commentators. Darwin then attempts to reframe these concerns as a linguistic dispute. These disciplinary boundaries do not then simply delineate scope and style but aim

[123] 'Zoonomia; or the Laws of Organic Life. Vol. II', *Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal* 20 (Aug, 1796): 388.

[124] Allard, 'Darwin, Paratext and the Modes of Knowing', 599.

to separate knowledge from practice, the conflation of which was seen to enable Darwin's materialism. For Darwin's critics a physician and a philosopher cannot be the same thing due to the incompatibility of knowledge- and practice-based ways of working.

But to which of these categories does Darwin's mechanical work such as the speaking machine belong? The answer, I argue, depends on whether machines are designed to further knowledge or to create products and effects. Klancher suggests that over the course of the eighteenth century 'the expression "arts and sciences" can be roughly and unevenly mapped onto a relationship between "practices and knowledges"' but that in the years surrounding 1800 the arts, including mechanical work, moved 'decisively further from what was now counting as knowledge'.[125] Towards the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, however, as has been widely argued, Newtonian mechanics and advances in instrument-making enabled mechanical work to play a greater role in scientific knowledge-making.[126] By the early nineteenth century, then, the mechanical arts were based primarily on practice and, as such, were no longer part of the knowledge-making scientific sphere with which they had come to be identified a century before. Contrived and written about against this backdrop of the secession of mechanical arts from the field of 'science', the case of Darwin's analyses of human speech and the role of the speaking machine in particular is a complicated one. As I have demonstrated, the machine played down effect and was instead designed to further knowledge of the principles underlying articulation. Yet, as investigation of illusionary or otherwise spectacular speaking figures and automata in the period has shown, prioritisation of process and the knowledge that its study affords over effect was not always the aim in the construction of humanlike machines. As Simon Schaffer argues, 'the

[125] Klancher, *Transfiguring the Arts and Sciences*, 148.

[126] See Joseph Drury, *Novel Machines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 28.

figure of the automaton […] had major epistemic and economic consequences' due to its nature as a productive ground for 'catchpenny theatrics, materialist theorizing, and industrial management'.[127] We can see then that in the eighteenth century mechanical human figures could variously and simultaneously create superficial effects, philosophical knowledge, and physical products.[128] Automata conspicuously cross the disciplinary and epistemological boundaries between science and mechanical art, knowledge and practice. In constructing and writing about mechanical bodies Darwin too defies any separation of these fields.

Just as Darwin's theorisation of medicine in *Zoonomia* turns to materialist models in its focus on understanding and discovering principles as opposed to observing and correcting the effects of diseases, Darwin's use of mechanical bodies as producers of knowledge rather than effects likewise suggests a materialist understanding of life. Indeed, as Darwin treats both medicine and mechanics as sciences in their potential to create knowledge, he enables the theory suggested by the study of each of these fields to become applicable to the other. As Daniel Black summarises, 'a belief that bodies are like machines motivates the simulation of the body using machinery' which in turn promotes 'a view of the body that further entrenches the idea that it is machine-like in nature'.[129] We can see then that, for Darwin, it is his tendency to approach different fields of study from the point of view of the knowledge they afford rather than their practical effects which allows him to enact what Packham terms his 'disciplinary transgression'.[130] Furthermore, as Darwin uses

[127] Simon Schaffer, 'Enlightened Automata', in *The Sciences in Enlightened Europe*, ed. William Clark, Jan Golinski, and Simon Schaffer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 126-127.

[128] For the role of automata in industrialisation see: Daniel Black, *Embodiment and Mechanisation: Reciprocal Understandings of Body and Machine from the Renaissance to the Present* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 68; Schaffer, 'Enlightened Automata', 129-148.

[129] Black, *Embodiment and Mechanisation*, 62.

[130] Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*, 148.

both medicine and mechanics to inform his understanding of life and the human body, he invokes a philosophy of materialism that lies at the intersection of these two fields. Thus, the conservative concern about the propriety of mixing poetry and science, medicine and metaphysics, and anatomy and mechanics is founded on a politically-inflected 'epistemological anxiety' about the way in which blurring the boundaries between knowledge and practice can facilitate a radical and atheist materialism. And while, as we have seen, Darwin is keen to deflect accusations of materialism, his engagement with reformist politics, and the role that the speaking body has to play in societal and political change is significantly more overt.

'Shake the senate with the voice of truth': Progress through Speech in *The Temple of Nature*

As the contemporary responses to Darwin's work coupled with his own guardedness on the issue of materialism show, politicisation of his interdisciplinary medico-philosophy is largely found in interpretations of Darwin's writing. Yet that does not mean that this connection between 'disciplinary transgression' and progressive or reformist politics is not equally apparent within the texts themselves. In the final part of this chapter I want to suggest some of the ways in which Darwin himself turns an approach to speech which combines arts and sciences, machines and bodies to social and political ends. I argue that, in *The Temple of Nature* in particular, Darwin holds up forms of technology which combine mechanical and vocal modes of communication as the most effective way of spreading knowledge and, consequently of enacting progress. Moreover, as Darwin's materialist approach allows him to mix and unite studies of machinery and anatomy in his analyses of communication technology including written language, the printing press, and the speaking machine, he suggests that the human body will always be central to any vision of mechanical progress. As we have seen, knowledge is not only the potential product of

machinery for Darwin, but also essential to its construction and development. In *The Temple of Nature*, he introduces a section on the history of mechanical innovation with the lines:

> The plans of Science with the works of art;
> Give to proud Reason her comparing power,
> Warm every clime, and brighten every hour.[131]

Here, Darwin presents a model of technological development which relies on the collaboration between scientific knowledge and its implementation as mechanic art. Furthermore, as such progress will go on to 'warm every clime' and 'brighten every hour', Darwin registers the belief that forms of mechanisation which combine knowledge and practice are ultimately useful and progressive and that the development of these fields will contribute to the improvement of human society as a whole. Darwin's anthropomorphic machines therefore both create physiological and mechanical knowledge and have themselves been created by a combination of scientific knowledge and mechanical art. Yet the speaking machine also goes one step further to *spread* both knowledge and political message. Darwin considers that the machine 'if built in a gigantic form might speak so loud as to command an army or instruct a crowd'.[132] And although he does not specify what this giant speaking machine might say in such a situation, his consistent support for the spread of revolutionary ideals, from his celebration of the American and French revolutions in *The Botanic Garden* to his hope, expressed in a 1792 letter to Richard Dixon, that the latter would 'spread the holy flame of freedom over Europe', indicates the likelihood of such commands and instructions being radical in nature.[133]

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[131] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, canto 4, lines 224-226.

[132] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, 368.

[133] Erasmus Darwin to Richard Dixon, 25 October, 1792, in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 225.

The huge anthropomorphised machine that Darwin imagines here does not only recall *The Botanic Garden's* 'Giant-Power' of the steam engine with its 'large limbs' and 'forceful fingers', but also his depiction of the French Revolution in the same poem.[134] Described in conspicuously similar terms to the steam engine, Darwin presents an image of the French people amalgamated into one large-limbed 'Giant-form' who is awakened by the French Revolution and:

> High o'er his foes his hundred arms He rears,
> Plowshares his swords, and pruning hooks his spears;
> Calls to the Good and Brave with voice, that rolls
> Like Heaven's own thunder round the echoing poles;
> Gives to the winds his banner broad unfurl'd,
> And gathers in its shade the living world![135]

Here the populace is embodied in the same way and using the same language as Darwin used to personify industrial machinery one canto earlier. Moreover, in giving the people a single, magnified body in this passage, Darwin also gives them a unified and amplified voice which, like that of the proposed 'gigantic' speaking machine, has the ability to instruct and rally its audience. We can see then that speech and action become aligned throughout Darwin's writing on bodies and machines. It is the dual action of 'arms' and 'voice' which both personifies and enacts revolution, while the speaking machine does not just communicate, but commands and instructs. It does not only perform the physical act of speech but incites action in its human listener. This notion that spoken utterance can be a form of effective action, as we will see, is central to both Thelwall's and Shelley's treatments of speech, while for Darwin, comparisons between and conflations of bodies and machinery allow him to imagine human-like machines as tools for enacting political

[134] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden*, canto 1, line 263.

[135] Darwin, *The Botanic Garden*, canto 2, lines 377-394.

and social improvement. Moreover, these machines are at their most radical when they are making knowledge which is both embodied and vocal.

Darwin's conviction that both mechanical innovation and medical theory could lead to social and political improvement is evident across his writing. And it is often through combining mechanical and vocal forms of communication that he imagines radical progress. *The Temple of Nature*'s passage on volition and the development of machinery ends in an extended discussion of the printing press, positioning communication technology as the most highly progressed (and indeed progressive) form of mechanisation. Darwin writes:

> Ages remote by thee, VOLITION, taught,
> Chain'd down in characters the winged thought;
> With silent language mark'd the letter'd ground,
> And gave to sight the evanescent sound.
> Now, happier lot! Enlighten'd realms possess
> The learned labours of the immortal Press;
> Nurs'd on whose lap the births of science thrive,
> And rising Arts the wrecks of Time survive.[136]

Initially, Darwin traces the development of spoken language into the visual forms of the written and then the printed word. Yet it is not just the vocal and the visual that combine when Darwin discusses the way in which written language adds the sense of sight to sound. In Darwin's model of linguistic evolution, the mechanical again combines with the physiological as the bodily act of speech develops into and is enhanced by the technology of printing. As with the speaking machine, this technological progress then leads to the 'happier lot' of social progress, not through the machine alone, but through the combination of the mechanic and the knowledge it produces. As Darwin remarks in a note to the lines, it is 'by the diffusion of knowledge' enabled by the invention of the press that 'the public mind has been improved'.[137] Furthermore, Darwin presents this as a self-

[136] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature,* canto 4, lines 265-272.

[137] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, canto 4, line 270n.

sustaining and unstoppable system of progress. Advances in science and arts lead to technological advancement, such as the invention of the printing press, which then itself contributes to the further development of arts and science.

As the passage continues, Enlightenment progress in science and arts develops into radical political reform. Darwin writes:

> Ye patriot heroes! in the glorious cause
> Of Justice, Mercy, Liberty and Laws,
> Who call to Virtue's shrine the British youth,
> And shake the Senate with the voice of Truth;
> Rouse the dull ear, the hoodwink'd eye unbind,
> And give to energy the public mind
> […]
> And guard the freedom of the immortal Press!
> So shall your deathless fame, from age to age,
> Survive, recorded in historic page;
> And future bards, with voice inspir'd prolong
> Your sacred names, immortaliz'd in song.[138]

In these lines, as Darwin links the printing press and its freedom with radical 'patriot heroes', he increasingly uses the language of speech. Systems of writing and printing may progress language beyond speech for Darwin, but when describing the power of a free press to disseminate radical political ideals the lines return to a focus on the vocal. The 'patriot heroes' 'call' and speak with 'the voice of Truth', acting upon both the eye and the ear equally. Printing may increase the longevity of 'the evanescent sound' by recording it on the page, but it is through translation back into speech or the 'voice inspir'd' that Darwin imagines the continued transmission of 'the glorious cause'. Printing may give permanence to utterance, but speech, which has not been 'chain'd down in characters', is harder to restrain or regulate and so the vocal becomes a fitting point of comparison for a free press. Darwin does not then present progress as taking place through the replacement of embodied, vocal communication by newer mechanical forms of communication, but rather through a reciprocal combination of bodies and machines, speech and print.

[138] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, canto 4, lines 273-290.

Darwin discusses the origins of spoken language at length in the *Temple of Nature'*s third canto on 'The Progress of Mind' and, in doing so, emphasises the part that speech has to play in the development of society. Darwin begins by arguing that language began as imitative gestures. This gestural form of communication, despite continuing to add 'force to the feebler eloquence of words', is presented as a nascent system of language.[139] He describes how 'the first Language' of facial expressions and gestures 'rose from the cradle, Imitation's child' before developing into speech.[140] The discovery of vocal communication by humans is clearly a central step, not only in the development of language, but in the 'Progress of Mind' which Darwin presents over the course of the canto and the 'progress of society' which forms the subject of the poem as a whole.[141] Yet, as 'silent' language progresses into spoken language, Darwin continues to focus on the importance of the physical body for speech acquisition and production. He describes how:

> The tongue, the lips articulate, the throat
> With soft vibration modulates the note.[142]

Here Darwin prioritises the role of anatomy in speech production, as he describes speech in terms of the functions of the tongue, lips and throat. The importance of the physiological aspects of spoken language for the general progress of humankind is made explicit in the additional note to these lines, in which Darwin conducts a thorough 'Analysis of Articulate Sounds'.[143] He introduces the note:

> It is much to be lamented, that the alphabet, which has produced and preserved almost all the improvements in other arts and sciences, should have itself received no improvement in modern times; which have added so much elucidation to almost every branch of knowledge, that can meliorate the condition of humanity.

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[139] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature,* canto 3, line 362.

[140] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, canto 3, lines 363-4.

[141] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, preface, 1-2.

[142] Darwin, T*he Temple of Nature*, canto 3, lines 367-368.

[143] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, 347.

> Thus in our present alphabet many letters are redundant, others are wanted; some simple articulate sounds have two letters to suggest them; and in other instances two articulate sounds are suggested by one letter.[144]

Darwin again suggests that humanity can be improved through knowledge-based 'arts and sciences'. In this case, he traces the production and preservation of this knowledge further back than the printing press, to the alphabet itself. For Darwin however, the apparent imperfection of the current alphabet hampers the dissemination of knowledge and therefore the progress which it facilitates. He concludes his note with the hope that 'the active and ingenious of all nations will attend again to those sciences, which better the condition of human nature; and that the alphabet will undergo a perfect reformation'.[145] The reformation which Darwin suggests here is for the alphabet to correspond more accurately with the 'articulate sounds' of speech. Therefore, for written language to be improved and improving, it needs to be modelled on the physiological capabilities of the tongue, lips and throat and these capabilities will be discovered not only through anatomical investigation but through the mechanical means of the speaking machine. For Darwin, then, machines can produce knowledge, but, as his treatment of the printing press and the speaking machine show, he cannot imagine this knowledge being spread without reference to the human body.

Darwin was not alone in his proposal to adapt written language to better represent spoken language and such attempts at alphabet reform often went hand in hand with broader reformist intentions. Benjamin Franklin, who was both a central figure of the American Revolution and one of Darwin's earliest correspondents on the subject of articulation, draws an explicit connection between phonetic spelling and social and political

[144] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, 347-348.

[145] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, 368.

change.[146] In an essay on 'A Reformed Mode of Spelling', written around 1768, Franklin aims:

> to give the Alphabet a *more natural Order*; Beginning first with the simple Sounds formed by the Breath, with none or very little help of Tongue, Teeth, and Lips; and produced chiefly in the Windpipe […] Then to those, formed more forward […] And lastly, ending with the shutting up of the Mouth, or closing the Lips while any Vowel is sounding. [147]

He proposes that to improve the alphabet, it must first be reordered from an arbitrary sequence of letters to a sequence based on as fluid a movement as possible of the parts of the body involved in producing the speech sounds. Franklin's concept of an improved alphabet is thus 'more natural' which, in this case, means grounded in both spoken language and the workings of the human body. The essay continues by proposing a new set of characters and using this alphabet to write a response to a correspondent, allaying her doubts about its practicality. Franklin writes:

> [The objection you make to rectifying our alphabet, "that it will be attended with inconvenience and difficulty" is a natural one; for it always occurs when any reformation is proposed; whether in religion, government, laws, and even down as low as roads and wheel carriages. – the true question then, is not whether there will be no difficulties or inconveniences; but whether the difficulties may not be surmounted.][148]

His discussion of alphabet reform becomes a model for thinking about political reform 'in religion, government, laws'. His study of articulation thus provides a platform from which to advocate the pro-revolutionary idea that change is always for the better even when the drastic or fundamental nature of the change in question presents challenges. For both Darwin and Franklin, radically inflected discussions of societal progress involve making

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[146] For their correspondence on articulation see Erasmus Darwin to Benjamin Franklin, 18 July, 1772, in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 118.

[147] Benjamin Franklin, *Philosophical and Miscellaneous Papers* (London: C. Dilly, [1787]), 468.

[148] Transliterated from Franklin's text, originally in his own reformed alphabet. Franklin, *Philosophical and Miscellaneous Papers*, 473.

improvements to systems of communication, from alphabets to the press, by increasing their similarity to spoken language and attending to the physiology of speech production.

Even on a structural scale, *The Temple of Nature* presents the progression of communication towards speech. Whereas Darwin's *Botanic Garden* used a system of gnomes, nymphs and sylphs to provide the poem's structural and imaginative framework, the 'machinery' (to use Darwin's term) of *The Temple of Nature* is based on a system of Egyptian hieroglyphics.[149] The histories of life and of society are revealed, in the first canto, on 'the pictur'd walls' of the temple of nature itself.[150] Yet despite using the visual language of hieroglyphics to introduce his narrative of progress, it is with an extended discussion of speech production that the poem concludes in its final additional note on the analysis of articulate sounds. Even within the first canto of the poem, visual language gives way to tactile and verbal communication as the process of progress is initiated. Darwin calls upon the Muse 'with pausing step to press / Each sun-bright avenue, and green recess' of the temple and 'led by thy hand survey the trophied walls, / The statued galleries, and the pictur'd halls'[151] These images are then 'waked by thy voice, transmuted by thy wand, / Their lips shall open and their arms expand'.[152] Here, visual language gives way to a combined language of speech and touch, 'lips' and 'arms', and, similarly to *The Botanic Garden's* personification of the French Revolution, the world is awakened to begin a process of progressive change by 'hand' and 'voice'. Thus, once the origins of life have been described and we leave the temple at the end of canto one, progress is no longer foretold

[149] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, preface, 2.

[150] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature,* canto 1, line 76.

[151] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, canto 1, lines 173-176.

[152] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, canto 1, lines 181-182.

through silent 'pictur'd' hieroglyphics but, through the lips and voices of moving statues. The Muse's wand inspires Darwin's poem, we might say, by producing speaking machines.

Priestman observes Darwin's 'almost obsessive fascination with Egyptian hieroglyphics' and argues that his use of metaphor, personification or 'pictorializing practice fits well with his idea that modern alphabetical writing was preceded by a truer, pictorial writing'.[153] Yet however reliant Darwin's poetry is on visual imagery, it is through the verbal that he envisages language, science and society reaching perfection. He does not aim to fix the imperfections of the modern alphabet by reinstating its associations with visible objects but by making it more accurately correspond with the verbal sounds of the words. He concludes his final note to the *Temple of Nature* by considering that his proposed changes to the alphabet:

> May indeed make it more difficult to trace the etymologies of words, but will much facilitate the acquisition of modern languages; which as science improves and becomes more generally diffused, will gradually become more distinct and accurate than the ancient ones; as metaphors will cease to be necessary in conversation, and only be used as the ornaments of poetry.[154]

Darwin, it would seem, does not follow his own advice. Although he appears to advocate for the separation of poetry from other types of writing and thinking, as this chapter has demonstrated, his own work is informed both stylistically and epistemologically by the intermixing of different disciplines. Darwin needs 'the ornaments of poetry' to draw the comparisons between bodies and machines which are instrumental to his depiction of progress. We can see then that Darwin's model of human progress is enacted through the theorisation of the traditionally practical fields of physiology and mechanics and through ways of writing which allow bodies and machines – the subjects of these two fields – to be compared and associated. The theorisation and conflation of bodily and mechanical

[153] Priestman, *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin*, 41.

[154] Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*, 368.

processes once again points to a materialist medico-philosophy which provides further rationale for Darwin's, and, as this thesis will go on to suggest Thelwall's and Shelley's, repeated references to the voice as a catalyst for radical political change.

For Darwin, progress, whether discussed and depicted in the poetry of *The Botanic Garden* and the *Temple of Nature* or in his prose notes and medico-philosophical treatise *Zoonomia,* is thus almost always driven by the intermixing of different ways of thinking and of writing about speech, the body, and the relationship between them. Darwin suggests that humanity has developed and will continue to progress through variously combining knowledge and practice; arts and sciences; medicine and mechanics. His dual interest in theorising bodies and machines allows him to see similarities in the workings of both, while the traditionally poetic or literary tropes of personification and anthropomorphism provide him with a language in which to explore these likenesses. As this chapter has argued, such blurring of disciplinary boundaries became fuel for assessments of Darwin's work as suggestive of an atheist and radical philosophy of materialism. As anthropomorphised machines become central to the development of society, so then does a materialist conception of life and mind. Furthermore, as Darwin draws attention to the importance of the transmission of both knowledge and radical politics, machines which communicate become instrumental in his vision of progress. Machines with both bodies and voices, whether metaphorically or, as in the case of the speaking machine, more literally, therefore become fitting tools through which Darwin can imagine humanity's improvement. Yet speech does not just provide a means for Darwin to personify the mechanical. His materialist medico-philosophy and his attention not only to the physiology but also to the mechanics of speech production demonstrate a materialist conception of spoken language. This, I argue, is what allows the idea of the vocal to become integral to Darwin's radically inflected model of progress. Darwin's discipline defying and materialist investigations of speech hint at a scientific understanding of the world in which the human voice can effect

progressive social change. And, as this thesis will go on to argue, the concept that utterance can wield not merely political, but physical, power would go on to become central to the work of two of Darwin's most careful readers – John Thelwall and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Chapter Two: John Thelwall and the Physiology of Speech

Introduction: 'the tongue of a political lecturer'

Thinking back on the past 58 years of his life in the comic 1822 poem, 'Auto-Biography', John Thelwall reflects that 'his ways of life / Have been no little various'.[1] This self-assessment is by no means an exaggeration, as throughout his working life, Thelwall tried his hand at a number of professions, including tailor's apprentice, law clerk, physician, poet, journalist, political orator, farmer, elocution teacher, and newspaper editor, each with varying success.[2] It was his talent for speech (or as he self-deprecatingly suggests in 'Auto-Biography' his 'gift of the gob'), however, which underpinned his most successful and long standing endeavours.[3] As Sarah Zimmerman writes in her study of the Romantic lecture, Thelwall 'remained an ardent advocate of oral culture who, after the collapse of the parliamentary reform movement, turned to teaching what he had learned in its fires'.[4] And it is Thelwall's role as lecturer, first of politics, and later of elocution, which provides a continuing strand through his changeable and, in his own words, 'precarious' career and which will form the main focus of this chapter.[5]

Yet despite the continuity afforded by Thelwall's enduring concern with the power of speech, it is easy to approach his career as one of two halves, not least due to his own deliberate (if, as this chapter will argue, not entirely sincere) attempt to distance his role as

[1] John Thelwall, 'Auto-Biography', in *John Thelwall: Selected Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Judith Thompson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), lines 20-21.

[2] Thelwall, 'Auto-Biography'; Cecil Thelwall, *The Life of John Thelwall* (London: John Macrone, 1837).

[3] Thelwall, 'Auto-Biography', line 155.

[4] Sarah Zimmerman, *The Romantic Literary Lecture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 61.

[5] Thelwall, 'Auto-Biography', line 24.

elocutionist from his past identity as radical reformer and 'acquitted felon'.[6] Over the past few decades, scholarship on Thelwall has sought to reconcile these distinct phases of Thelwall's interest in oratory, by teasing out the political implications of his elocution work. Emily Stanback, Julia S. Carlson, Yasmin Solomonescu, Judith Thompson, and Michael Scrivener have all, among others, drawn convincing attention to the way that Thelwall's elocution teaching, which aimed to help the population achieve equitable access to the power of speech, provided him an alternative outlet for his reformist and 'democratic' ideals.[7] Although this chapter will approach Thelwall's writing broadly chronologically, analysing his political and elocutionary texts in turn, I follow previous scholarship in treating both these phases of Thelwall's work as parts of an overarching project on free speech and the power of the voice. Moreover, while arguments for a coherent approach to Thelwall's writing have thus far tended to emphasise the impact of his earlier politics on his elocutionary career, I aim to read Thelwall's elocution work backwards in this chapter, suggesting that Thelwall's physiological approach to the speaking body does not just emerge in his later writing, but provides a foundation for much of his political writing in the 1790s. In her book *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination,* Solomonescu persuasively offers Thelwall's 'materialist understanding of the imagination as a faculty rooted in embodied sense perception' as the underlying principle of his writing, and, as such, suggests that 'the continuity of Thelwall's career before and after 1800 has not only to do with his reformist end, but also with his materialist means'.[8] Taking up Solomonescu's

[6] Steve Poole ed., *John Thelwall: Radical Romantic and Acquitted Felon* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 1-4.

[7] Emily Stanback, *The Wordsworth-Coleridge Circle and the Aesthetics of Disability* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 55; Julia S. Carlson, *Romantic Marks and Measures: Wordsworth's Poetry in Fields of Print* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 284; Yasmin Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 98; Judith Thompson, *John Thelwall in the Wordsworth Circle: The Silenced Partner* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 173; Michael Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall & Jacobin Writing* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 192.

[8] Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination,* 7, 98.

position on the consistently materialist roots of Thelwall's thinking, and applying it to his treatment of the physiology of speech, this chapter examines how materialist understandings of the human body are central to both Thelwall's political and elocutionary writing in the way that they allow him, in both these phases of his career, to present speech as physical action with the power to bring about similarly physical effects.

The previous chapter of this thesis considered how, for writers such as Darwin, materialist philosophy could transcend and blur the boundaries between different fields of study and, conversely, how interdisciplinary approaches to the speaking body could suggest a materialist understanding of human life and mind. Thelwall's own work on speech draws strongly and explicitly on that of Darwin, as he cites *The Temple of Nature*'s 'Analysis of Articulate Sounds' repeatedly in his elocutionary writing. And Thelwall likewise treats the study of speech as essentially interdisciplinary as he brings together elements of oratory, anatomy, and poetry in a system which draws equally from the fields of science, mechanic art, and fine art. As such Thelwall's elocutionary work is not just revolutionary in its practice, but also in its theory. Critics including Stanback, Zimmerman, and Thompson have discussed the practical radical significance of what Stanback terms Thelwall's 'inclusive therapeutic approach' which, Zimmerman argues, 'aimed to foster self-representation by teaching effective speaking'.[9] In this chapter, I argue that this idea of 'self-representation' can be traced to the materialist understandings of action and reaction which underpin Thelwall's approach to speech and which intersect with inherently political notions of authority and autonomy. Materialism thus provides Thelwall with his overarching theory of vocal power. Building on Solomonescu's identification of Thelwall's 'materialist imagination', this chapter, in its emphasis on speech, will therefore make the case that

[9] Stanback, *The Aesthetics of Disability*, 72; Zimmerman, *The Romantic Literary Lecture in Britain*, 4; Thompson, *John Thelwall in the Wordsworth Circle*, 173.

materialism for Thelwall is a philosophy which is not merely capable of being *applied* to political, physiological, and poetic practice, but which instead eliminates the distinction between these disciplines and the divide between theory and practice itself.

I begin this chapter by highlighting the significant presence of the speaking body in Thelwall's political work of the 1790s, drawing out the essential connection that Thelwall makes, even at this earlier stage of his lecturing career, between physiology and the practice of oratory. I argue that Thelwall's writing simultaneously demonstrates a politicised notion of the speaking body and a physiological and sometimes pathologised understanding of oppression and political silencing. Building on this argument, the second part of the chapter considers the materialist medico-philosophy (to borrow Darwin's term) which underscores Thelwall's treatment of political speaking bodies and goes on to suggest the way in which such materialist approaches allow Thelwall to present speech, and particularly pro-revolutionary utterance, as a form of physical and spontaneous action which is not subject to external influence or control. The final two sections move to consider Thelwall's post-1800 elocutionary work alongside unpublished later poetry from the 'Derby manuscript'. I make the case that Thelwall's elocutionary work develops the concern with embodied speech which underpins his more overtly political writing, resulting in a theory of speech production and impediment which remains suggestive of a radical politics in its materialist conception of the human body's operation and agency. Finally, I consider how this notion of a materialist speaking body leads Thelwall to form a theory of prosody, applicable to both poetry and speech, which defies disciplinary boundaries. As he positions the elements of elocution as a fundamental physical law, as opposed to a set of practical or cultural rules, he gives credence to the idea of speech as a physical action and a materially potent force. Thelwall, I argue, thus conceives of a materialist model of

involuntary but autonomous utterance which, in turn, attests to his belief in the necessity of free and active speech.[10]

The *Tribune* and the Body of the Orator

Ideas of the living body, its composition and its health, are central to Thelwall's work, and concepts of embodiment run through not only his later elocutionary writing, but also his earlier political texts, both written and spoken. Much critical analysis of Thelwall's preoccupation with embodiment has been focussed on his sustained metaphors of the body politic which represent a key element of his rhetorical arsenal.[11] However, as Mary Fairclough notes, Thelwall's engagement with the physiological 'goes beyond the image' of the body politic, to consider the more literal or material role of the body in political discussion.[12] Studies of writing around the 1794 treason trials by critics including John Barrell and Michael Scrivener also explore the movement of the literary, textual, or figurative (imagination and allegory respectively) into the bodily (the perceived threat, commensurate to the act, of regicide.) [13] Moreover, Barrell and Scrivener both show that this shift is as important in the period, and for Thelwall, as the movement from body to metaphor demonstrated in the body politic trope.[14] In this chapter, I make the case that

[10] I use the term 'necessity' here in the sense of a crucial need, but also the more specialised philosophical sense, used by writers including Priestley and Godwin, of determination as a result of external conditions and physical laws. Although Thelwall does not explicitly engage with these debates in his elocutionary work, his materialist model of unstoppable utterance draws on similar ideas of material inevitability.

[11] See: Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination*, 13-33; James Robert Allard, *Romanticism, Medicine, and the Poet's Body* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 63-85.

[12] Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 109.

[13] John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories*.

[14] Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, 40; Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories*, 127.

the actual, individual bodies involved in politics are as significant for Thelwall's arguments as the figurative body politic and that this is particularly evident in his treatment of spoken language. I argue that the links Thelwall draws between physical and moral health are not only found in his metaphorising of society as the body, but are also fundamental to his descriptions of the speech of specific political figures, from George III and William Pitt, to Thelwall himself. Prefiguring the elocutionary theory put forward in his 1810 *Letter to Henry Cline,* which aims to understand the relationship between 'the faculties mental and moral, as well as constitutional and organic', the moral value of political speech for Thelwall is often inextricable from the physical health of the orator, and the bodily condition of the speaker directly affects the style and content of their productions.[15] Through analysis of Thelwall's work produced between 1793 and 1796, primarily the *Tribune* lectures, I argue that an embodied model of spoken language is a central feature of his political rhetoric and is visible long before his move to elocutionary writing. Thelwall's projects in speech, from oratory to therapy, thus suggest a sustained belief in the correlation between physical liberty and freedom of expression.

Thanks to their publication, first in periodical format and then in three collected volumes, the *Tribune* lectures which Thelwall delivered during the brief window between his acquittal in December 1794 and the introduction of the 'Gagging Acts' a year later are the closest surviving source to a record of Thelwall's political oratory. Kenneth R. Johnston suggests that although reordered and reframed for publication, Thelwall 'took great care in turning his live performances into print' in his employment of a shorthand writer for the purpose of 'scrupulously recording and transcribing his every word'.[16] It is important to

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[15] John Thelwall, *A letter to Henry Cline, Esq on imperfect developments of the faculties mental and moral, as well as constitutional and organic on the treatment of impediments of speech* (London: Printed for the Author, 1810).

[16] Kenneth R. Johnston, *Unusual Suspects: Pitt's Reign of Alarm and the Lost Generation of the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25.

note, however, that the essays printed in the *Tribune* are not the lectures themselves, however faithfully Thelwall claims to replicate them for a reading audience. The 'Farewel Address [sic]' to the third collected volume of the *Tribune,* which he writes in April 1796 as he moves from lecturing on overtly political themes to the more covertly radical topic of classical history, highlights some of the key differences between the spoken and the written lectures. After detailing the ideological and pragmatic reasons for publishing the lectures (to extend the reach of his ideas on the one hand and as an ostensible legal precaution against their misrepresentation on the other), Thelwall concedes that the text of the volumes differs from the spoken lectures in style, if not in substance. He writes:

> It is only by practice, application, and the habit of revision, that we are able to give to oral effusion the consistency and unity essential to a printed discourse. The rest, it must also be admitted, have undergone some slight corrections; but these alterations are either merely critical, or have been adopted not to soften, but to increase the force and strength of the expression, and to supply the defects which tone and gesticulation might cover in the delivery.[17]

Thelwall first explains that these revisions are 'merely critical', suggesting that the edits are primarily driven by judgements on style, taste, and differing conventions or expectations regarding spoken and written texts. As the passage continues, however, the emphasis shifts from a concern with improving the 'consistency and unity' which is lacking in spoken discourse to a concern with what is lost in the written text – that is the body of the orator. For Thelwall, 'tone and gesticulation' are essential to the impact of the lectures and cannot be removed without substituting a textual replacement, since in spoken language stylistic effects are not produced by words alone, but also by the modulation of these words by the body of the speaker. It is clear then that Thelwall's central object in revising his *Tribune* lectures for publication is to reconcile the oral and the written text in a way which does not edit out, but rather preserves the presence of the physical orator.

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[17] John Thelwall, 'Farewel Address', in *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall,* vol. 3 (London: Printed for the Author, 1796), 323-324.

From the outset of the three-volume edition of the *Tribune,* Thelwall foregrounds both the method of the lectures' preparation for publication and the importance of their oral and therefore embodied origins. The title page to the first volume outlines the revision process, stating that the material has been 'taken in short-hand by W. Ramsey, and revised by the lecturer', and adds the epigraph, originally from William Hayley's poem *An Essay on History,* 'to paint the voice, and fix the fleeting sound'.[18] In framing the collection in this way, Thelwall explicitly acknowledges the increased distance between the speaker and the audience which is introduced through the interceding processes of transcription, revision, and publication. Furthermore, the epigraph highlights the way in which the role of the body is diminished in the written lectures. 'To paint the voice' does not just suggest a move from the vocal to the visual, but also a move from the physical speaking body to an artistic or artificial reproduction. The published *Tribune* is to Thelwall's spoken lectures, what a portrait is to its subject. However, as Georgina Green writes, Thelwall 'deployed print media in tandem with literally oratorical and embodied practices'.[19] Green suggests here that the physical bodies of the speaker and his listeners remain essential to the production and successful communication of Thelwall's ideas. I argue that once Thelwall has recognised and drawn attention to the way in which the printed lectures necessarily minimise the place of the body, he is able to consciously reintroduce references to physical bodies into the text in a way that does not play down the distance between the spoken and the written lectures, but rather emphasises the continued importance of 'oratorical and embodied practices' to both the production of the *Tribune* and the ideas contained within it. The body is not just the source, but often the subject, of Thelwall's rhetoric.

[18] John Thelwall, *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall,* vol. 1 (London: Printed for the Author, 1795), title page.

[19] Georgina Green, *The Majesty of the People: Popular Sovereignty and the Role of the Writer in the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 52.

It is no coincidence, then, that the essay that Thelwall chooses to place first in the collected edition of the *Tribune* is a passage from a lecture containing perhaps his most sustained use of the body politic metaphor. Although delivered near the beginning of the course of lectures, the extract 'On the Distresses of the Industrious Poor. *From the Lecture "On the proper means of averting National Calamities*"' was not the first of Thelwall's *Tribune* lectures and, as the achronological nature of the volume shows, the ordering of the printed lectures represents an editorial decision.[20] The body is at the centre of Thelwall's rhetoric here as he sets up the argument that 'the body politic of Britain is not only diseased: It is suffering daily amputation' and continues the metaphor of the nation as a diseased body in need of a 'political physician' throughout the extract.[21] Critics including James Robert Allard and Solomonescu have explored the way in which such metaphors of the body politic develop out of and are rendered more powerful by Thelwall's engagement with explicitly medical writing, particularly in his 1793 *Essay on Animal Vitality*.[22] Building on this, I argue that the literalising of metaphorical bodies is as important for Thelwall's rhetoric here, and throughout the *Tribune*, as the metaphorising of physiological ideas.

Throughout 'On the Distresses of the Industrious Poor', Thelwall juxtaposes metaphors of the nation as a single body suffering under political corruption with examples of the effect this metaphorical sickness has on the real, physical health of the country's inhabitants. For example, the 'daily amputation' of the body politic which Thelwall describes, refers to the fact that Britain's 'most important members are hourly lopped

[20] John Thelwall, 'On the Distresses of the Industrious Poor', in *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall*, vol. 1 (London: Printed for the Author, 1795), 1. For details of the timings, selection, and omission of the lectures see Thelwall, 'Farewel Address', 320.

[21] Thelwall, 'On the Distresses of the Industrious Poor', 2, 6.

[22] Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination*, 14; Allard, *Romanticism, Medicine, and the Poet's Body*, 71.

away by depopulating war'.[23] What first appears as a figurative 'amputation' of the nation thus becomes refocussed on the literal loss of life and limb brought about by the ongoing war with revolutionary France. It is on a similar literalisation that the entire structure of the extract hinges. At the midpoint of the essay Thelwall moves from describing the impact of war and emigration on the body of the nation to detailing the effects of low wages and high food prices, exacerbated by war, on the *bodies* of the nation. He writes 'Yet, Citizens, thinned as the population has been, by the operation of these two-fold causes, what is the fate of those who yet remain?'[24] Again, the word 'thinned' first refers to the population in aggregate, but as Thelwall goes on to describe how 'the peasant languishes and the manufacturer starves' it becomes clear that the individuals who make up the remaining population are also wasting away. Furthermore, they have not just grown thin but have been actively 'thinned' by the government's pursuit of military action. The image of a thinning population is not necessarily metaphorical in the first instance, but as Thelwall again shifts the audience's attention from diminishing numbers to deteriorating bodies, he ensures that the image of the body politic does not occlude investigation of the effect that this political corruption has on the tangible and physical health of the people.

In selecting 'On the Distresses of the Industrious Poor' as the opening piece of the three-volume *Tribune*, Thelwall reasserts the central role of the body in the lectures. Moreover, he makes it clear that the focus on the body is not just thematic. Nor is it limited to the bodies of his audience or the general population. As Thelwall juxtaposes and associates textual or figurative bodies with real ones, he echoes the way in which the 'paint[ed]' voice of the written lectures is, although distinct from his own spoken voice, indebted to and intertwined with the 'oratorical and embodied'. The trope of the body

[23] Thelwall, 'On the Distresses of the Industrious Poor', 2.

[24] Thelwall, 'On the Distresses of the Industrious Poor', 4.

politic in particular sets up the idea that political, moral, or societal health is inseparable from physiological and individual health and that each has an impact on the other and, I argue, this idea is central to Thelwall's construction (and textual reconstruction) of the body of the orator – both his own and those of his opponents.

Thelwall's 1795 lectures are punctuated by often regretful references to the state of his own health, as he suffers increasingly from chronic asthma and the lasting physical effects of his imprisonment the previous year.[25] But these asides and apologies are not merely anecdotal. In fact, Thelwall presents the condition of his own body as a fundamental influence on the form of the lectures at every level, from the structure and length of the course as a whole, to the style and content of the individual lectures. Thelwall repeatedly cites his health as a major reason for curtailing his lectures. For example, as he closes his lectures for the summer in June 1795, he announces that 'it is neither good for your health nor mine, that for the whole of that hot weather which we must now expect, we should so frequently be cooped up within the walls of this place', while in his 1796 *Prospectus of a Course of Lectures* on classical history, he suggests that if the Two Acts hadn't ultimately brought an end to his *Tribune* lectures, his deteriorating health would have.[26] With considerable irony, Thelwall credits government oppression with the improvement of his health in his *Prospectus*, suggesting that the exertion of his lecturing in the winter of 1795 would have proved fatal had he not been interrupted by the Two Acts and writing:

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[25] For Thelwall's asthma, see Cecil Thelwall, *The Life of John Thelwall*, 14-16. For Thelwall's account of the effects of his imprisonment on his health see John Thelwall, 'The Address of J. Thelwall to the Audience at the Closing of his Lectures for the Season', in *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall*, vol. 1 (London: Printed for the Author, 1795), 330.

[26] Thelwall, 'To the Audience at the Closing of his Lectures for the Season', 330; John Thelwall, *Prospectus of a Course of Lectures, delivered during the season of lent, in strict conformity with mr. Pitt's Convention Act.* Second edition (London: Printed for the Author, 1796), 25.

> My first course of lectures, begun in November 1793, and continued without interruption for more than five months, reduced me to a feeble skeleton, and might perhaps have terminated in a decline, if the minister, anxious to preserve me from such a catastrophe, had not provided for the restoration of my health, *by a country lodging, in the Tower*.[27]

However, just as 'On the Distresses of the Industrious Poor' demonstrates the way in which political oppression impacts the bodily health of those suffering under it, Thelwall makes it plain in his closing address of June 1795 that government persecution is equally to blame for his own illness. His suggestion that it is unhealthy to 'be cooped up within the walls' of the lecture theatre, prompts him to reflect on the more catastrophic confinement of his imprisonment as he asserts:

> When you consider that for several weeks I was thus immured, and debarred from all possible resources of exercise and cleanliness, you will not be surprised to find that I have not recovered from the injuries my health sustained in that noxious dungeon. I think it necessary therefore to seek, for a while, the shades of retirement.[28]

The term 'retirement' in this passage suggests more than the retreat from urban political life which the word would go on to signal in his 1801 collection *Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement.* Rather, Thelwall's 'retirement' here carries connotations of health which are not at odds with continued political engagement. It is a curative measure which provides him with a means of regaining control of his body and voice. Thelwall's descriptions of the effect of the government's actions on his bodily health and subsequent ability to lecture therefore introduce the idea that the restriction or removal of freedom of speech is not just a legal matter, but also a medical one. And it is this idea, I argue, which goes on to underpin Thelwall's later interest in elocution and speech therapy. As Thelwall uses his own example to explicitly link governmental and physiological impediments to free speech, he demonstrates the fundamentally political nature of his later elocutionary work.

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[27] Thelwall, *Prospectus*, 24.

[28] Thelwall, 'To the Audience at the Closing of his Lectures for the Season', 330.

In considering concepts of freedom of speech from the perspective of physical health, Thelwall also argues that speech restriction can result or manifest in personal and physical suffering. This then lends force to his arguments for free speech by rendering the effects of speech restriction both immediate and observable to his audiences. The way in which the 1790s saw state oppression encroach upon 'spaces traditionally considered private' has been discussed in depth by Corinna Wagner and others and Thelwall takes this to its logical extreme by demonstrating the influence such oppression has had on his own body.[29] Thelwall was not, however, the only one to imagine such control in terms of the physical and physiological obstruction of speech. Visual satires drawn in response to Pitt's 1795 'Gagging Acts' such as 'A freeborn Englishman' and 'A lock'd jaw for John Bull' represent the increased restrictions on freedom of speech as padlocks on the mouths of the nation's citizens (see figures one and two).[30] Although neither of these images makes explicit reference to Thelwall, Thomas Spence associates the symbol of the locked mouth with him on a 1796 political halfpenny token featuring a bust of Thelwall on one side and a version of the 'freeborn Englishman' caricature on the other (see figure three).[31] Similarly, Thelwall himself describes the Acts in personal and bodily terms when he supposes that they were 'framed for the express purpose of stopping my mouth'.[32] Thelwall presents the

[29] Corinna Wagner, 'Domestic Invasions: John Thelwall and the Exploitation of Privacy', *in John Thelwall: Radical Romantic and Acquitted Felon* ed. Steve Poole (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 95; John Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[30] *A freeborn Englishman, the admiration of the world, the envy of surrounding nations*, 1793-1798, etching, 159 x 110 mm, The British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-6328; *A lock'd jaw for John Bull*, 1795, Etching, 354 x 249 mm, The British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-6479.

[31] 'SSB,237.70', *The British Museum Collection*, The British Museum, accessed Mar 9, 2019, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_SSB-237-70.

[32] John Thelwall, 'Advertisement', in *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall*, vol. 3 (London: Printed for the Author, 1796), 142.

legislation as both an individual attack and a physical one in his use of the word 'mouth' as opposed to 'lectures'. In this context, the word 'stopping' also gains another meaning, suggesting both prevention and the physical act of gagging. Although Thelwall describes his assumption that the Acts were aimed specifically at him as 'vain', he clearly aligns himself with the 'lock'd jaw' images, casting himself as the symbol of the silenced people, and offering a physical embodiment of the metaphor of the locked mouth.[33]

[33] Thelwall, 'Advertisement', 142.

Figure 1: A freeborn Englishman, the admiration of the world, the envy of surrounding nations. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 2: A lock'd jaw for John Bull. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 3: 1796 Thomas Spence halfpenny token. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The body of the orator and its health does not just affect Thelwall's ability to lecture but also impacts the style and content of his speeches. In 'A further enquiry into the Calamities produced by the System of Usurpation and Corruption', he says:

> I forget that I am but the shattered feeble remnant of a man, partly destroyed by the corruption and wickedness of a daring administration, who, upon a charge which they knew to be groundless, crammed me into a common receptacle for the putrid carcases of felons, where my constitution was undermined, and the seeds of disorder sown in my vitals which every strenuous exertion brings back upon me. I forget this and cannot help that warmth which exhausts my spirits. Pardon me therefore if I do not always preserve that uniformity and animation which should give life to these lectures.[34]

Although ostensibly an apology for his performance, Thelwall's deeply emotive and visceral description of his ill health and its causes makes it absolutely plain who is to blame for the stylistic limitations of the lectures. Both those rhetorical elements which are unique to spoken discourse, such as 'animation', and those which translate into the printed lectures,

[34] John Thelwall, 'A further enquiry into the Calamities produced by the System of Usurpation and Corruption', in *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall*, vol. 3 (London: Printed for the Author, 1796), 137.

such as 'uniformity' are influenced by the bodily conditions of the speaker and, ultimately, the physical impact of 'a daring administration' on the speaker's body. When Thelwall describes how his 'constitution was undermined', he again presents a kind of reversal of the body politic metaphor. He recasts the violation to his constitutional rights suggested by his 'groundless' imprisonment, enabled by the suspension of Habeas Corpus, as an attack on his physiological constitution. In Thelwall's frequent references to what he cannot say or cannot say well enough due to the condition of his health we therefore find a kind of physiological version of the internalised silencing that John Bugg sees as characteristic of the writing of the second half of the 1790s under Pitt's 'Reign of Terror'.[35] Even if he is not yet engaging in conscious self-censorship, the impact of the government's attempts to silence Thelwall can be seen in the style of his lectures insomuch as his performance is affected by his physical capacity for 'strenuous exertion'. However in revealing, rather than hiding, the degree of success this form of silencing has had, Thelwall is able to display himself and his own body as testimony of the damage which political oppression does to both the moral and physical health of the population.

Furthermore, in a lecture delivered just under three weeks previously, Thelwall illustrates how, when it comes to spoken texts, such stylistic considerations regarding delivery can have a knock-on effect on content. He begins by saying that although his health has improved since his last lecture, he is still 'very far from being in a condition to make the wished-for exertions' and continues:

> All however that I shall be able to do this evening will be to enter into a statement of facts and principles, and the conclusions that result from them, in as methodical a manner as I am capable, and with as little exertion as possible: because it will be entirely imprudent for me to enter into digressions which would rouse my passions and feelings, and occasion me to speak with particular warmth and animation.[36]

[35] John Bugg, *Five Long Winters: The Trials of British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

[36] John Thelwall, 'The Connection between the Calamities of the Present Reign, and the System of the Borough-Mongering Corruption', in *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall*, vol. 3 (London: Printed for the Author, 1796), 17.

Style, content, and bodily health all become contingent on each other here. In the spoken lectures, several elements of style, such as 'warmth and animation' are created through physical 'exertion' and are therefore dependent on the bodily condition of the speaker. When Thelwall isn't healthy, such rhetorical features are either impossible, or, as is the case here, 'imprudent' for his continued health. Thelwall then avoids or favours other stylistic or structural features, such as digressiveness or methodical organisation, based on how likely these are to occasion the physiologically dangerous characteristics of 'warmth and animation' and these features in turn impact the content of the lectures. Jon Mee has noted the way that contemporary critics, and to a certain extent Thelwall himself, express a concern that the 'warmth and animation' of his speech have the potential to incite his audience to revolutionary violence.[37] Here then, as Thelwall presents warmth as a risk, not to his audience, but to his own personal health, he once again draws a connection between political and bodily threat and the effects that both of these conditions have upon a text. What might have been said had Thelwall 'enter[ed] into digressions' as opposed to 'a statement of facts and principles' remains unsaid. Moreover, as Thelwall retains such references to his health in the printed editions of the *Tribune,* he suggests that the effects of the body on the composition of the lectures have not been edited out. Allard suggests that 'Thelwall establishes the body and, by extension, life as textual phenomena', yet here, as Thelwall deliberately preserves and highlights the text's original dependence on the condition of the body, he does the inverse, firmly establishing the text as a series of bodily phenomena.[38] Moreover, as this chapter will go on to discuss, the idea that literary style

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[37] Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 119-120.

[38] Allard, *Romanticism, Medicine, and the Poet's Body,* 66.

has its foundations in the body would become a fundamental strand of Thelwall's elocutionary theory.

Thelwall's attention to the role of the body in the production of politicised speech extends to the treatment of his opponents and interlocutors within his political work, once again recasting the figure of the body politic as a discussion of physical political bodies. Judith Thompson sees Thelwall's simultaneous concern with real and figurative political bodies as a key feature of his elocutionary career, writing that 'Thelwall consistently draws a parallel between intellectual, moral, and physiological impairment such that, ultimately, his speech theory emerges as part of a total system to reform the body politic'.[39] Such parallels between 'intellectual, moral, and physiological impairment' do not, however, appear only in Thelwall's elocutionary theory, but can be traced back to his earlier political writing. Furthermore, as Thelwall criticises and satirises the political establishment through medically inflected references to the quality of their speech, he demonstrates that bodies do not have to be metaphorised as the body politic to have a bearing on societal health.

Despite Thelwall's frequent references to the medically induced inadequacies of his own speech, he repeatedly positions his body and voice as superior to those of his opponents, both physiologically and morally. In a passage on 'The Terrors and Violence of Alarmists', printed in the second volume of the *Tribune*, Thelwall asks:

> What, are not the sublime rhetorical flourishes of Burke, the metaphysical harangues of Wyndham, the flowing eloquence of Pitt, and the effrontery of Dundas – are not all these combined in one harmonious concert of panegyric, and assisted with the full chorus of all the authority, power and wealth of the country, potent enough to overwhelm the feeble voice of one unconnected individual – Is it necessary, with such a combination united together to protect, as they say, to support our blessed and glorious constitution, to impose coercive silence upon the solitary Lecturer, lest with two hours discourse per week, he should talk down the venerable walls and massy pillars of this ancient edifice, and, out-doing Sampson

[39] Judith Thompson, 'Re-sounding Romanticism: John Thelwall and the Science and Practice of Elocution', in *Spheres of Action: Speech and Performance in Romantic Culture*, ed. Alexander Dick and Angela Esterhammer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 24.

> himself, overthrow the Lords of Gaza and their temple together, not by the strength of his muscles, but his voice?[40]

Here Thelwall presents political debate not as a battle of ideas or even of words but as a clash of voices which are either 'potent' in the case of the Government and its supporters or 'feeble' in the case of Thelwall himself. His characterisation of these voices is, of course, ironic, however the irony here is not straightforward. On the surface, Thelwall sarcastically asks whether the Government supposes he could bring about their downfall 'not by the strength of his muscles, but his voice' which he positions as physically weaker than that of his opponents. However, there is a double irony here, since, as Thelwall well knows, this is exactly what the Government fears. Furthermore, as Thelwall's unwavering commitment to using speech as the main tool of his political and professional careers demonstrates, he too believes that the voice can be as effective an agent of change as more overtly physical action. Thelwall's ironic double bluff thus plays off the Government's fears about the relationship between voices, bodies and political power and this is made particularly clear when he describes his opponents' voices. Burke et al.'s speech is not only morally deficient, as suggested by the pejorative terms 'harangues' and 'effrontery', but inadequate without amplification by extracorporeal 'authority, power, and wealth', and Thelwall frequently portrays such inadequacy of speech in medicalised terms which reference both the body and the mind.

The relationship between speech and bodily, mental, and moral health forms the centre of one of Thelwall's relatively rare explicit satires of George III. In a poem from his 1793 'series of politico-sentimental journals' *The Peripatetic*, Thelwall satirises the king in the lines:

> And, What! what! what! with thick, short speech, he cries;
> But could no more, for choler choak'd his tongue,

[40] John Thelwall, 'The Terrors and Violence of Alarmists, an impolitic confession of the injustice and absurdity of their System', in *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall*, vol. 2 (London: Printed for the Author, 1795), 303-304.

And what! what! what! thro' heaven's wide concave rung.[41]

Here Thelwall engages with a common trope of caricaturing George III through reference to his idiosyncratic speech and its assumed connection to his mental health.[42] Yet, Thelwall traces the 'thick, short speech' to both mental and more bodily-mechanic causes. George III's tongue is described as physically 'choak'd' by 'choler', an emotional state which carries physiological resonances due to its etymology in the theory of humours.[43] Furthermore, the physical quality of the king's speech directly influences the content of his utterances as the poem continues. The passage concludes:

> Thro' Britain's empire spreads the sacred ire,
> Prints every gate-house, post, and village spire,
> Whence gazing Rustics, wondering what is meant,
> Read dreadful words of treason, discontent,
> Sedition rumour'd, enemies to peace,
> And dread commands, *that Reason's voice should cease*.[44]

Here the image of medicalised speech impediment transforms into political silencing as the king's impeded speech pronounces restrictions on the free speech of the people or 'Reason's voice'. Thus, whereas Thelwall demonstrates the way in which government policy impacts the bodies of the nation in the *Tribune*, in the above lines he suggests that the physical health of those in charge directly affects policy. It is clear then, from Thelwall's

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[41] John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic,* ed. Judith Thompson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 316.

[42] Vincent Carretta, *George III and the Satirists from Hogarth to Byron* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 268. George III's repetitive speech is a recurring feature in both caricatures and written satires, particularly those by Peter Pindar (John Wolcot). For further examples see: Peter Pindar, *The Rights of Kings; or, loyal odes to disloyal academicians* (London: J. Evans, 1791), 39; Peter Pindar, *The Royal Sheep. A tale* (Glasgow: Stewart & Meikle, [1795]), 3; Charles Pigott, *A political dictionary: explaining the true meaning of words* (London: D. I. Eaton, 1795), 148-149.

[43] In its earliest uses, the word 'choler' denoted 'one of the four cardinal humours, […] identified as bile (or as present within bile) and described as hot and dry in nature, and supposed when predominant to cause irritability or irascibility of temper'. This etymology is still evident in the late eighteenth century uses of the word to variously mean 'anger' or 'bile'. 'choler, n. and adj.', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed Apr 28, 2019, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/32161?redirectedFrom=choler.

[44] Thelwall, *The Peripatetic,* 316.

portrayal of George III in these lines, that he considers freedom of speech a physiological issue at every level of the nation's hierarchy and as Jared S. Richman notes, he makes 'a case for free speech, for full representative government, by painting the king as diseased with the same type of affliction as his subjects: speechlessness'.[45] Richman argues that both king and people are rendered speechless by Pitt in his attempts to control both. However, while George III and the people certainly suffer from the same 'affliction' in these lines, the source of this speechlessness may not necessarily be Pitt. For Thelwall, diseased or restricted speech is contagious, and Thelwall positions the king and his body as the source of this disease. And not even Pitt is immune.

A particularly striking example of contagious speech impediment can be seen in Thelwall's account of his examination before the Privy Council on his arrest in 1794, as printed in the *Tribune*. Thelwall constructs his account in the manner of a playtext, allowing him not only, as he suggests, to convey the gestures of the actors, but also to emphasise their various voices.[46] Here, in stark contrast to the 'flowing eloquence' ascribed to William Pitt in 'The Terrors and Violence of Alarmists', Thelwall gives the Prime Minister a voice which is markedly similar to that of a caricatured George III. Pitt was widely considered to be skilled in oratory by commentators on all sides.[47] Here, however, Thelwall writes:

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[45] Jared S. Richman, 'The Other King's Speech: Elocution and the Politics of Disability in Georgian Britain,' *The Eighteenth Century* 59, no.3 (2018): 300.

[46] John Thelwall, 'Facts relative to the Seizure of J. Thelwall', in *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall*, vol. 1 (London: Printed for the Author, 1795), 92.

[47] The *Anti-Jacobin's* 1806 obituary for Pitt notes that 'his oratorical powers were, as has been truly observed, *sui generis*', while several radical publications, including Thelwall's *Tribune* describe Pitt's eloquence or tongue as 'glossy' or 'smooth', suggesting that he speaks not just with skill, but with physiological ease. 'Summary of Politics', *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine, Or, Monthly Political, and Literary Censor* 23, no. 150 (Jan, 1806): 109; John Thelwall, 'Civic Oration on the Anniversary of the Acquittal of the Lecturer', in *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall*, vol. 3 (London: Printed for the Author, 1796), 246; *Pitt's ghost. Being an account of the death, dissection, funeral procession, epitaph, and horrible apparition, of the much lamented late minister* (London: T.G. Ballard, [1795]), 3; 'Sale Extraordinary', in *Exhibition Extraordinary!!: Radical Broadsides of the mid 1790s*, ed. John Barrell (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2001), 32.

> *Pitt*. What is it? – What is it? What? [*fiercely.*]
> *Att. Gen.* He says he does not mean to answer the questions.
> *Pitt.* [*After a pause, abruptly*.] He had better consider of it. – He had better take time and consider of it. – Give him a little time.
>
> […]
>
> *Pitt.* What's that? What's that? [*to the Chancillor.* [sic]]
> *Chancellor* [*half whispering in Pitt's ear*.] he says he is bold in consciousness of innocence; but he will answer no questions.
> *Pitt*. [*fidgeting about upon his seat; His lip quivering, and his whole countenance convulsed with rage*.] – A strange reason that, for answering no questions, Mr. Thelwall. – A strange reason, being bold in conscious innocence. – A strange reason for not answering.[48]

As with the 'choler' of George III, Thelwall presents a conception of anger which treats the emotion as having simultaneously physical, mental, and moral causes and effects, as central to the quality of Pitt's speech. Pitt's 'rage' is not a purely immaterial mental state, but is physically and corporeally manifest not only in his speech but in the accompanying 'fidgeting', 'quivering' lip and convulsing 'countenance', while Thelwall's assessment a few pages later that such 'deportment' was not 'consistent either with good manners or humanity', represents a moral value judgement.[49] However, the vocal similarities between the king and Prime Minister go further than their shared ire. Pitt's repetitive, disjointed speech mimics satires of George III's stutter, right down to the verbal tic of 'what'. Thelwall thus presents a variation on the image of the king as a mouthpiece for an overly controlling ministerial power which can be seen in a later *Tribune* lecture, when he criticises:

> The language in which Pitt assumes to himself, as his own, the sentiments and expressions of the speech delivered from the throne, of which he made the chief magistrate the organ, but which he publicly avows as his speech, and thus assumes the dignity of the regal character, making his royal master but his puppet.[50]

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[48] Thelwall, 'Facts relative to the Seizure of J. Thelwall', 93-94.

[49] Thelwall, 'Facts relative to the Seizure of J. Thelwall', 95.

[50] John Thelwall, 'A Civic Oration in Commemoration of the Acquittal of Thomas Hardy', in *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall*, vol. 3 (London: Printed for the Author, 1796), 204.

Although in the latter example, Pitt appears to speak through George III and in the former, the king's voice appears to emanate from Pitt's mouth, Thelwall's point is the same – Pitt is assuming the role of monarch but he is doing so through a form of ventriloquism which enables the transmission of physically, mentally and morally 'diseased' speech.

Thelwall would go on to consider contagion or mimicry a potential source of wholly literal speech impediments in his elocutionary writing and he lays explicitly political foundations for this idea in his depictions of George III and Pitt earlier in his career. [51] Throughout his political work, Thelwall suggests that medically and vocally figured corruption from those in positions of power leads to the stifling of the physical and vocal freedoms of those who are not. For Thelwall, impeded, restricted or repressed speech is thus endemic to the 1790s and political silencing both originates in and acts upon the physical body. This focus on the bodily origin and impact of speech restriction is critical to both his political and elocutionary work. In the first case, it allows Thelwall to present oppressive government policy as a threat not merely to the figurative health of society, but to the real lives and bodies of the people within it. In the second case, it demonstrates that in Thelwall's move from political to elocutionary lecturing he does not replace a political understanding of freedom of speech with a medical one. For Thelwall, these two senses have always been inextricably linked. And, as I will go on to argue, this allows him to make a common case for the improvement of both.

'Mere mechanical impulse': Materialism, Speech, and the Politics of the Involuntary

Thelwall's attention to the role of the body throughout his early political work allows him to approach freedom of speech from simultaneously medical and political perspectives.

[51] See: John Thelwall, 'Plan and Objects, &c.', in *Results of Experience in the Treatment of Cases of Defective Utterance* (London: Printed for the Author, 1814), 5; Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 59.

This in turn provides a model for exploring the relationship between the physical functions of the body and concepts of authority and autonomy in a way which, I argue, is suggestive of a materialist philosophy. Materialism, as we have seen with Darwin, is itself associated with radical politics and several critics, most notably Solomonescu, have noted the vein of materialism that runs through Thelwall's medical, elocutionary and political work.[52] Yet, recalling again the debates surrounding Darwin's medico-philosophy, the extent of Thelwall's materialism is not clear-cut, partly due to Thelwall's later resistance to the label with regards to his elocutionary career.[53] Thelwall's medical and philosophical views are further complicated by the lack of clear delineation, in both contemporary and more recent assessments, between a mechanist view of the human body, which undermines all individual autonomy and is therefore unsuitable for radical political analogy, and a Priestleyan materialist view, which disavows the authority (if not necessarily the existence) of God and the hierarchy of mind over body without rendering the body a passive object of mechanical forces. However, through analysis of Thelwall's portrayals of voluntary and involuntary speech and action in his political writing, I argue that Thelwall's radical engagement with freedom of speech is not just material in the way he brings ideas of speech restriction to bear on physical bodies but decidedly material*ist* in the way that these living, speaking bodies function. Furthermore, this materialist model of spoken language allows Thelwall to position speech as a form of autonomous action which is both unstoppable and capable of effecting change.

[52] Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination*. See also: Nicholas Roe, '"Atmospheric Air Itself": Medical Science, Politics and Poetry in Thelwall, Coleridge and Wordsworth', in *1798: The Year of the Lyrical Ballads,* ed. Richard Cronin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[53] John Thelwall, 'Defence of Mr Thelwall on the Criticisms Against his Three Publications', *New Review: or Monthly analysis of general literature* 1, no.6 (Jun 1813): 690.

Thelwall's first and most explicit account of his materialism can be found in his 1793 *Essay Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality*. Originally delivered as a lecture to the Physical Society, the essay makes a clear case for a materialist understanding of life, arguing that life is not 'an *imaginary something* – a phantom of the brain , which, perhaps, has no real existence'.[54] Rather, Thelwall argues, it is '*that perfect harmony of organized parts, by which the animal frame is rendered so far susceptible of the proper stimuli, as to have its functions, or any of them, induced upon such stimuli being applied*'.[55] Thelwall's philosophy of life here bears all the hallmarks of materialism as identified in the previous chapter of this thesis. Life is not an immaterial 'phantom' added to the body, but an 'organized' and responsive or 'susceptible' state of matter. External stimuli, Thelwall makes clear, are not able to direct or animate matter; they can only awaken its inherent latent potential. Thus, Thelwall does not consider such reactions to stimuli purely mechanic, but ascribes agency to matter, arguing that its organization enables 'it to preserve itself in a given state, and resist its own dissolution'.[56] In addition to the usually radical implications of materialism as undermining ideas of hierarchy, Thelwall's emphasis on matter's agency here and particularly his use of the word 'resist' heightens its radical suggestiveness. We can see then that materialist belief in active matter is not a move from an atheistic model of mechanism towards a more orthodox vitalist model but a philosophy which extends mechanism's potential for politically radical interpretation, by advocating matter's capacity for self-governance and resistance.

In their introduction to *Animal Vitality*, Robert Lamb and Corinna Wagner suggest that 'his emphasis on rationality and reform within the scientific realm reveals how

[54] John Thelwall, *An Essay Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality* (London: G.G. J. and J. Robinsons, 1793), 7.

[55] Thelwall, *Animal Vitality*, 33.

[56] Thelwall, *Animal Vitality*, 33.

Thelwall's challenge to the medical establishment mirrored his challenge to the political status quo'.[57] Similarly, critics including Solomonescu and Allard have drawn attention to the way that Thelwall's early materialist physiological work provides him with a 'model' and 'metaphors' respectively for his reformist arguments.[58] This direct mirroring, modelling, or metaphorising of political statement as materialist physiology is evident throughout his *Tribune* lectures and, moreover, Thelwall often attempts to use comparisons between a materialist natural world and a radical political one to legitimise both. For example, in a passage discussing the fear surrounding the word 'revolution', Thelwall asks:

> What is the universe but a scene of eternal revolution? What is fire to-day, may be earth to-morrow; and what is earth to-day may to-morrow mount in the element of fire, which in the revolutions of matter shall spread into air, condense into vapour, fall in some shower, or flow in some fertilizing stream to feed the freshening verdure of the field; that grass eaten by some ox or cow may be transformed into beef-stake[sic], and the next stage in this eternal revolution may metamorphose it into the muscle, or perhaps into the tongue of a political lecturer.[59]

In this extract Thelwall uses the theory that everything is composed of perpetually changing matter to explicitly position revolution as a natural and therefore legitimate phenomenon. Furthermore, in describing such revolutions as 'eternal' he suggests an unstoppable process of change which happens of its own accord, without intervention from external, immaterial power. This cycle of transforming matter goes on to incorporate 'the tongue of a political lecturer', drawing a (literally) tongue-in-cheek, yet provocative, connection between 'revolutions of matter' and the political revolution that the government feared Thelwall's speeches would incite. The corporealizing of speech as 'tongue' and 'muscle' also draws connections between words and actions. Recalling his faux-ironic supposition in an

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[57] Robert Lamb and Corinna Wagner, *Selected Political Writing of John Thelwall,* vol. 1 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 10.

[58] Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination*, 14; Allard, *Romanticism, Medicine and the Poet's Body*, 71.

[59] Thelwall, 'The System of Usurpation and Corruption', 61.

earlier lecture that he might bring down the government 'not by the strength of his muscles, but his voice', Thelwall again gestures towards the idea that speech can have all the power of action.[60] Moreover, in highlighting the physiological equivalence of 'tongue' and 'muscle', he makes the case that there is no material difference between speech and action. The materialist model of 'eternal revolution' then allows Thelwall to suggest that such speech-as-action is inevitable. And it is a similar model, I go on to argue, that Shelley invokes in his writing on the active power of speech in texts such as *Prometheus Unbound.* Materialism therefore provides the scientific or philosophical framework behind the previously discussed instrumental role of the body of the orator in the production and spread of political, and in this case overtly radical, speech.

The *Tribune* lectures are not, however, the only instance where Thelwall uses materialism to represent reformist or revolutionary political opinion as ontological and physiological fact. In 1793, less than a year after *Animal Vitality* appeared in print, radical publisher Daniel Isaac Eaton printed a report of another of Thelwall's speeches, this time delivered to the Capel Court Debating Society, *King Chaunticlere; or The Fate of Tyranny*. In *King Chaunticlere*, Thelwall argues that loyalty to authority is 'mere mechanical impulse', which can be overcome by mental volition.[61] He then goes on to demonstrate the physiological bases for this claim with an anecdote about a tyrannical game cock who 'would never let my farmyard be quiet' and who Thelwall, overriding his own loyalist mechanical and involuntary impulses or 'aristocratic prejudices', beheads in an overt allegory of regicide.[62] Chaunticlere, however, continues to move after death, exhibiting 'the continuance of the habitual muscular motion after (by means of the loss of his head) he

[60] Thelwall, 'The Terrors and Violence of Alarmists', 304.

[61] John Thelwall, 'King Chaunticlere; or The Fate of Tyranny', in *Selected Political Writing of John Thelwall,* vol. 1, ed. Robert Lamb and Corinna Wagner (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 34.

[62] Thelwall, *King Chaunticlere*, 34.

was no longer capable of knowing what he was about', thus proving that certain physical actions are entirely automatic and unconnected with rational thought or deliberate mental action.[63] Thelwall therefore makes at least two different points about the nature of involuntary actions here: one, demonstrated by the character of Thelwall himself, which highlights the ability of voluntary mental action to intercede in involuntary habits and another, demonstrated by the character of Chaunticlere, which conversely highlights the fact that some action is purely involuntary. Scrivener outlines these two separate and potentially contradictory, arguments thus: 'the gamecock had some hectic physical movements immediately after its beheading, thus proving the autonomy of "muscular action"' and 'By beheading the gamecock, then, [Thelwall] exercises moral choice, overcoming mechanical coercion'.[64] As Scrivener's reference to 'moral choice' makes evident, Thelwall's fable suggests that moral, mental, and physiological action can all operate on each other and that both mind and morality are tied to the body.

Furthermore, the interaction of mind, body, and morality is not necessarily a hierarchy of mind over body as Thelwall's supremacy of mental volition over 'mechanical impulse' alone suggests. For Chaunticlere, it is violence against the body that eliminates his capacity for mental and moral action, leaving only involuntary physical movement. When Thelwall writes that 'the instant the brain is separated from the heart […] pain and consciousness are at end', he presents a materialist and embodied concept of mind in which 'consciousness' is located in the brain and is reliant on the brain's physiological connection to the heart, in other words, the 'harmony of organized parts'.[65] It is therefore apparent that although Thelwall, on the one hand, presents radical or revolutionary action

[63] Thelwall, *King Chaunticler*e, 34.

[64] Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories,* 114.

[65] Thelwall, *King Chaunticlere*, 34-35.

as the triumph of mind over matter, this mind is itself materially and physiologically conceived. As Scrivener's point above shows, physical action can simultaneously suggest 'autonomy' and 'coercion'. The difference for Thelwall, I argue, lies in the distinction between materialist self-governance and mechanist automatism. Just as Priestley and Darwin reworked Hartley's mechanist associationism into a theory of active matter Thelwall, as Solomonescu notes, 'endorsed the doctrine of association and sought to reconcile it with individual agency'.[66] Solomonescu makes the case that Thelwall is fully aware that purely mechanical action suggests that the individual is subject to coercion from extracorporeal forces. In order to align a material conception of life with a belief in freedom from external control, matter must be capable of autonomous action or, as Thelwall writes in *Animal Vitality,* 'subtile' and 'powerful' as opposed to 'dull' and inert.[67] However, as I will go on to argue, this does not mean that there is no place for the involuntary in Thelwall's physiologically figured model of radical action.

Packham offers an alternative analysis of the role of involuntary motion in *King Chaunticlere*, suggesting that although Thelwall aligns 'mechanical impulse' with unthinking loyalism, the tale 'might just as easily be seen to illuminate, and even celebrate, the existence of fundamental, instinctual, involuntary powers in our natures which pursue liberty before and beyond any subsequent acts of reasoning'.[68] Despite the two contradictory examples of involuntary action which Thelwall's fable presents, I would argue that neither the references to involuntary loyalism nor the decapitated Chaunticlere's mechanical muscular movements, even when taken individually, obviously suggest a model in which involuntary action results in a politically radical pursuit of liberty. In both cases the

[66] Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination,* 28.

[67] Thelwall, *Animal Vitality*, 41.

[68] Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism*, 131.

body remains entirely subject to coercive mechanical forces. However, by reading *King Chaunticlere* together with Thelwall's subsequent poem *John Gilpin's Ghost; Or, The Warning Voice of King Chanticleer* we can see the way in which Thelwall reworks and transforms the gamecock's mechanical movements into a channel for radical spoken utterance.

The poem, 'written before the late trials' but not published until after Thelwall's acquittal in 1795, satirises his loyalist antagonists or 'treason-hunters' and their anxieties about the prospect of revolution.[69] The poem ends with a spectre of impending revolution appearing before the treason-hunters in the form of the (still headless) Chaunticlere. Thelwall concludes:

> And still he spurn'd and flapp'd his wings
> And shook his spurs of steel,
> While trembling joints and haggard looks,
> The council's fears reveal.
>
> For thus prophetic flow'd the strain
> That pierc'd each wond'ring ear […]
>
> 'My crowing speaks the envious light
> 'That soon must clear the sky;
> 'For *kingcraft's, priestcraft's night* is past.
> 'And *Reason's dawn* is nigh.
>
> 'In me behold the fate to which
> 'All tyranny must bow,
> 'And those who've long oppressed the poor
> 'Shall be as I am now'.
>
> He spoke – they would have stopp'd his voice,
> And kept him close confin'd;
> But ah! He 'scap'd their anxious care,
> As flits impassive wind.
>
> And still he stalks abroad, the fate
> Of tyrants to display;
> *Nor can the Attorney General's self*

[69] John Thelwall, 'John Gilpin's Ghost; Or, The Warning Voice of King Chanticleer', in *Selected Political Writing of John Thelwall,* vol. 1, ed. Robert Lamb and Corinna Wagner (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 103.

The headless spectre lay.[70]

Although Lamb and Wagner note that here Chaunticlere has 'thrown off his habitual behaviour to recite a republican message', the significance which Thelwall's return to the Chaunticlere fable has for his model of involuntary action has received little critical attention.[71] I would argue that the reappearance of the headless, yet still moving and, perhaps more importantly, now speaking, Chaunticlere does not suggest the final triumph of the bird's mental volition over habitual mechanical motion which appeared to be missing from the *King Chaunticlere s*peech.[72] Thelwall instead, continues to present an ambivalent view of the involuntary in which we begin to see hints of the celebration of 'instinctual, involuntary powers' that Packham registers in the original Chaunticlere anecdote. Although Chaunticlere heralds the dawn of 'Reason' which is at odds with both unthinking action and the habitual rule of 'kingcraft' and 'priestcraft', Thelwall does not necessarily suggest that the gamecock is himself acting as a result of voluntary mental powers. Thelwall presents a 'spectre' which is not as immaterial or disembodied as might be expected. Instead, Thelwall's emphasis that the gamecock 'still […] spurn'd and flapp'd his wings' depicts the ghost in corporal terms, suggesting that it may be animated by physical means. Chaunticlere's subsequent actions therefore seem to be involuntary.

Fairclough argues that 'Thelwall attempts to correct the condemnation of instinctive behaviour in his lectures'.[73] In the Chaunticlere tales, I suggest, this takes place through a focus on speech which gives meaning to involuntary action, allowing the gamecock to simultaneously champion 'Reason' while acting unconsciously. The bird's

[70] Thelwall, *John Gilpin's Ghost*, 111-112.

[71] Robert Lamb and Corinna Wagner, *Selected Political Writing of John Thelwall*, vol. 1, 102.

[72] Since the gamecock is still without a head, it presumably still has no access to conscious thought which, as Thelwall makes clear in *King Chaunticlere*, is supposed to be an action of the brain.

[73] Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd*, 108.

involuntary movements do not only constitute the aimless kicking and flapping that could be expected from a decapitated animal. Chaunticlere also speaks and it is in this move to vocal, not voluntary, action that Thelwall presents the triumph of revolutionary over loyalist ideals. Thelwall draws attention to the gamecock's newfound voice both through the reference in the title to Chaunticlere's 'Warning Voice' and through the caesura of 'He spoke –' in the penultimate stanza, positioning speech as central to the poem's punchline. Moreover, contrary to the model of mechanical loyalism which Thelwall sets out in *King Chaunticlere*, the radical republican content of the gamecock's speech in *John Gilpin's Ghost* is not undermined by the involuntary nature of its production. In fact, it is precisely the spontaneity of the bird's utterance that enables the effective spread of its message. Just as Chaunticlere's involuntary movements could not be stopped, even in the severing of body from mind, the automatic voice of 'the headless spectre' cannot be restrained or silenced.

Thelwall's materialist understanding of animal life enables him to position speech as action by allowing him to imagine a version of spoken utterance which is involuntary and therefore entirely physical. Johnston suggests that Thelwall's later *Tribune* lectures, delivered under the shadow of the impending Gagging Acts, are 'less a call to future action, than, so far as speech and writing can be considered forms of action, a kind of 'speech-in-action' by [themselves]'.[74] I argue that Thelwall certainly considers speech to be action in and of itself and, as I have demonstrated, it is materialist physiology that underpins and corroborates this. Materialism therefore provides a physical validation for his faith in the power of his lectures to effect change. Yet whereas Thelwall presents involuntary and unstoppable speech as action as a viable means for change in *John Gilpin's Ghost*, for others, even those on the side of reform, it could be understood as a reckless call to arms.

[74] Johnston, *Unusual Suspects,* 28-29.

Commentators on Thelwall's lectures, most notably Godwin and Hazlitt, characterised his own preference for extempore or unpremeditated speech as both mechanical and provocative, revealing a fear that spontaneous speech is both action in itself and capable of leading to further action. In Godwin's *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's Bills*, which condemns both the Two Acts of 1795 and Thelwall's preference for delivering his political messages in speech rather than writing, he expresses concern that 'The London Corresponding Society is a formidable machine; the system of political lecturing is a hot-bed, perhaps too well adapted to ripen men for purposes, more or less similar to those of the Jacobin Society of Paris'.[75] When it comes to political lecturing, Godwin positions the 'machine' as something dangerous or 'formidable' in its potential to incite action. Furthermore, whereas Thelwall's Chaunticlere simultaneously advocates 'Reason' while communicating unconsciously, Godwin considers this mechanically figured, unintended, and unstoppable speech-as-action at odds with voluntary reason or the 'consent of wills' that he suggests represents the proper channel for reform.[76]

As Fairclough notes, Hazlitt, like Godwin, is critical of Thelwall's relatively positive approach to involuntary action.[77] Again, it is the prospect of 'mechanical' speech that is particularly concerning for Hazlitt. In his 1820 essay 'On the Difference between Writing and Speaking', which, like Godwin's *Considerations,* includes a thinly veiled attack on Thelwall's lectures, Hazlitt suggests that 'without the stimulus [of applause] he has no motive or power of exertion left'.[78] Here Hazlitt figures Thelwall's speech a mechanical and,

[75] [William Godwin], *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr Pitt's Bills, Concerning Treasonable and Seditious Practices, and Unlawful Assemblies* (London: J. Johnson, [1795]), 22.

[76] Godwin, *Considerations*, 17.

[77] Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd*, 131.

[78] William Hazlitt, 'On the Difference between Writing and Speaking', in *The Fight and Other Writing*, ed. David Chandler and Tom Paulin (London: Penguin, 2000), 463.

moreover, a mechan*ist* physical reaction to a 'stimulus'. Unlike Thelwall's own materialist view of the body and its functions, which supports the idea that the physical body can have agency of its own without requiring the command or control of a distinct and immaterial mind, Hazlitt paints Thelwall's speech as an entirely automatic reaction to external forces or stimuli with no inherent 'motive or power'. For Hazlitt, Thelwall's listeners also react mechanically. He suggests that the practice of 'common-placing', or speaking in what we might now term sound bites, 'operates mechanically, and opens an instantaneous and infallible communication between the hearer and speaker'.[79] As Thompson notes, Hazlitt here criticises the way in which such automatic communication requires 'no intellectual exercise from an audience'.[80] Hazlitt thus renders both the orator and audience as passive mechanical bodies who are incapable of mental volition.

Although he is not unaware of the potential for audience reaction to influence the direction of his lectures, for Thelwall himself, purely mechanical action is adequate only for passive loyalism.[81] In an extract from the *Tribune* that pre-empts Godwin and Hazlitt's criticisms, Thelwall makes it clear that he expects his audiences to both think and speak for themselves. He tells his audience:

> If you will idly listen with implicit confidence to any man, it matters not who he is – whether priest, prime minister, or political lecturer. […] Think not, therefore, that I wish you to take for granted everything I tell you. You must have your knowledge not as the parrot has his by rote; but from the labours of your own minds; from the feelings and conviction of your own hearts.[82]

[79] Hazlitt, 'On the Difference between Writing and Speaking', 463.

[80] Thompson, 'Re-sounding Romanticism', 40.

[81] Thelwall admits, for example, that he feels 'the danger and the temptation of being carried by the tide of popularity from the direct course of independent principle'. Thelwall, 'The Address of J. Thelwall to the Audience at the Closing of his Lectures for the Season', 335.

[82] John Thelwall, 'On the probable Consequences of continuing the present System of Ambition and Hostility', in *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall,* vol. 1 (London: Printed for the Author, 1795), 62.

Here Thelwall suggests that his listeners must do more than parrot the opinions they receive in the lectures, otherwise they are no different from those acting from the habitual loyalism that he discusses at the start of the original Chaunticlere tale. Instead, conclusions should be drawn from 'the labours of your own minds'. Yet, as the discussion of Hartley and Beddoes in chapter one of this thesis has demonstrated, for those who subscribe to a materialist conception of mind, the mental action that separates the meaningless noise of parrots from intelligent human speech can take the form of associative motions which are physical and spontaneous, yet not reliant on external power or influence. It is this distinction between mechanical and materialist involuntary action that allows Thelwall to align the involuntary with loyalism in *King Chaunticlere* and radicalism in *John Gilpin's Ghost*. When the gamecock returns in the later tale, he has no access to conscious reason, but his newfound radicalism is neither habitual behaviour nor obviously the result of any external control. Chaunticlere's revolutionary prophesies therefore present an alternative both to action governed by voluntary reason and to 'mere mechanical impulse'. His materialist speech is involuntary, yet entirely autonomous.

Thelwall explores the idea that revolutionary action can take the form of involuntary motion further in his lectures. In the final collected volume of the *Tribune*, Thelwall directly refutes the fear, made manifest in the impending 'Gagging Acts', that his speeches will lead to further action. Instead, he suggests that freedom of speech can prevent more overt forms of action from taking place. He supposes that the government 'cannot but know, that when men are no longer permitted to use their voices, madness and desperation too frequently succeed; and, their voices being gone, they begin to feel whether they have the use of their hands'.[83] Here Thelwall argues that if the population has

[83] John Thelwall, 'The Lecture on the Revolution in 1688', in *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall*, vol. 3 (London: Printed for the Author, 1796), 162.

no recourse to voluntary reason, the same sentiments will manifest as involuntary physical action. Yet, as Thelwall invokes the threat of violence to undermine the efficacy of restrictions on speech, he does not necessarily present the preference of voluntary speech to involuntary action as his own opinion, but rather as the assumed preference of the government. The crux of Thelwall's argument is that attempts to silence reformers are futile or even counter-productive. Both here and in the Chaunticlere tales, Thelwall suggests that if the capacity for voluntary action is cut off, the involuntary will take over and this will be just as, if not more, effective as a way of bringing about radical reform. In revisiting the story of Chaunticlere in *John Gilpin's Ghost*, Thelwall therefore reclaims the involuntary for the side of reform, presenting a defiant vision of unstoppable radicalism. And it is a materialist philosophy of active, self-governing matter, distinct from 'mere mechanical impulse', that allows him to do so.

Materialising Articulation and Articulating Materialism

In 1801, four years after increasingly violent attempts to disrupt his lectures had led him to abandon overt political activity, Thelwall returned to lecturing as a teacher of elocution. Much critical debate surrounding Thelwall's later career has been concerned with the extent to which the democratising effects of his 'enfranchisement of fettered organs' can be understood as an extension of his political work whereby Thelwall, in lieu of advocating for a representational voice of the people, refocusses his attention on the actual voices of individuals.[84] Yet, as I have shown, freedom of speech has always been connected to the body for Thelwall, and the literal health of individual bodies and the figurative health of

[84] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 10. See: Zimmerman, *The Romantic Literary Lecture in Britain,* 61; Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination,* 98; Thompson, 'Re-Sounding Romanticism', 24; Andrew McCann, 'Romantic Self-Fashioning: John Thelwall and the Science of Elocution', *Studies in Romanticism* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 217; Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories*, 191-194.

society are not merely connected by metaphor, but impact one another in real and physical ways. I argue, therefore, that Thelwall's ongoing concern with free speech in his elocutionary work remains political not despite his increased focus on the body but because of it. Furthermore, as with his more explicitly radical texts, the political implications of Thelwall's physiology of speech are tied to a specifically materialist understanding of the body, its functions, and its agency.

The degree to which Thelwall's elocution teaching can be read as radical is complicated, however, by his own concerted efforts to present the work as apolitical and the extent to which his apparent transformation was a calculated measure should not be underestimated. For example, in an 1801 letter to Joseph Strutt, Thelwall writes:

> You would smile to see me in my metamorphose[sic] – for I am really quite transformed. Nothing of the plain out-of-fashioned singularity of the old republican remains, but in my heart – & there it is smothered in silence, except when with a chosen few I can indulge my native energies. In dress, in manners, &ct. I assimilate myself with all possible diligence to the fashion of the times; assume ~~to myself~~ the pride and port of a man of some importance & aspire to the reputation of every aristocratical accomplishment. In short as persecution would not suffer me to crawl upon the earth, I am trying what can be done by soaring into the clouds. Hitherto I like the experiment vastly. Flying is certainly a more salubrious exercise than creeping – I was not formed to creep.[85]

Thompson has noted that Thelwall's autobiographical writing is often 'alternately self-aggrandizing and self-mocking' and, as this letter shows, the line between these two modes of self-presentation can be difficult to discern.[86] Thelwall begins with self-deprecation not only of his 'out-of-fashioned' republicanism, but of his 'metamorphose' as he suggests that Strutt would be amused by the incongruity of his new 'aristocratical' aspirations. Although the letter becomes increasingly self-confident in the assertion that he 'was not made to creep', Thelwall's hyperbolic language and the ironic tone with which he introduces his

[85] Birmingham, The Library of Birmingham, Letters from John Thelwall MS 3101/C/E/5/47/1.

[86] Judith Thompson, *John Thelwall: Selected Poetry and Poetics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 249.

transformation suggest a degree of mockery of his own self-aggrandisement. It is clear, then, that neither Thelwall's disavowal of his radical past nor his reinvention of himself as a reputable member of fashionable society is entirely sincere. Thelwall actively and explicitly outwardly 'assume[s]' the guise of respectability in response to persecution. Thelwall's elocutionary work is therefore both an act of defiance and a self-conscious and, to a certain extent cynical, attempt to establish a new apolitical identity. It is an identity, however, which is easily internalised, as Thelwall's deletion 'to myself' reveals. Moreover, even though Thelwall claims to remain inwardly radical, political repression has extended beyond the stopping of his mouth to, at least publicly, 'silence' his 'heart'.

Thelwall's avoidance of political matters also affects the way he presents the physiology of his elocution work, particularly its connection with materialism. Judith Felson Duchan observes that Thelwall's writing on speech production counterintuitively combines seemingly incompatible materialist and dualist stances, variously suggesting that speech impediments are wholly physical or, on the other hand, consistently traceable to 'mental and moral' causes.[87] Duchan goes on to argue that these opposing claims can be reconciled as they are used in different places by Thelwall 'to achieve different discursive agendas'.[88] I argue, however, that Thelwall deliberately obfuscates the philosophical underpinnings of his elocutionary system in the interest of supposed political neutrality. In 1813 Thelwall published a defence of his elocutionary theory in response to criticism of *A Letter to Henry Cline*, *The Vestibule of Eloquence* and *Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions on the Rhythmus and Utterance of the English Language* printed in the *Monthly Review.* The *Monthly Review* article, written by frequent poetry reviewer and staunch

[87] Judith Felson Duchan, 'The Conceptual Underpinnings of John Thelwall's Elocutionary Practices', in *John Thelwall: Radical Romantic and Acquitted Felon,* ed. Steve Poole (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 144.

[88] Duchan, 'The Conceptual Underpinnings of John Thelwall's Elocutionary Practices', 144.

Christian Francis Hodgson, specifically highlights Thelwall's potential materialism as the major flaw in his work, claiming that:

> we cannot greatly esteem Mr. Thelwall's brief and unconnected speculations; especially as he does not seem to be fully aware of those wild absurdities into which several physiological theorists have been led, by their perpetual tendency to materialize the operations of the human understanding. On this subject we shall not here dilate: but we strongly suspect, from the vagueness and inaccuracy of Mr. T.'s language on metaphysical matters, that he is imperfectly acquainted both with the earlier and the later state of the inductive science of mind.[89]

As we have seen with regards to Darwin's medico-philosophy, debates about materialism could easily be reframed as linguistic disagreements. Thelwall himself expresses a similar idea to Darwin's suggestion that materialists 'only dispute about words' in an annotation to his copy of Coleridge's 1817 *Biographia Literaria*, noting that 'materialism and immaterialism are but a strife of words'.[90] Although the *Monthly Review* article suggests that the 'vagueness and inaccuracy' of Thelwall's metaphysical language is the result of an insufficient awareness of the potentially dangerous implications of a materialist approach to mind, linguistic imprecision, as we have seen, could be a calculated defensive measure, allowing writers to simultaneously explore and deny materialist physiological theory. Far from demonstrating naivety of the 'science of mind', Thelwall's response to the *Monthly Review* in his article for the *New Review* reveals an acute awareness of what is at stake in being seen to 'materialize the operations of the human understanding'. He writes:

> As for the metaphysical subtleties of materialists and immaterialists, I have not entered into them; they have nothing to do with my subject; nor would, I believe, either the theoretical reasoning or the practical inferences of my system be at all affected, by the complete establishment, or the absolute overthrow, of either hypothesis; but I may safely refer it to the plain sense of every reader, whether this be the language of a physiological theorist likely to fall into wild and mischievous

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[89] 'A Letter to Henry Cline, Esq., on Imperfect Developments of the Faculties, Mental and Moral, as Well as Constitutional and Organic; and on the Treatment of Impediments of Speech', *Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal* 70, no. 3 (1813): 293-294.

[90] Erasmus Darwin to Richard Gifford, 15 October, 1768, in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 96; John Thelwall, 'Thelwall's Marginalia in a copy of *Biographia Literaria,*' ed. Burton R. Pollin, *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 74 (1970): 79.

> absurdities by a perpetual tendency *to materialize the operations of the human understandin*g. Had I been accused, on the contrary, of carrying to enthusiasm my ideas of the sovereignty of mind over matter, the accusation would have been less extraordinary.[91]

Thelwall's choice of words here is not neutral. In writing about the 'complete establishment, or absolute overthrow' of materialist and immaterialist philosophies, he tacitly acknowledges the extent to which materialism could be seen to undermine faith in a higher supreme power, whether religious or political. His reference to 'the sovereignty of mind over matter' draws a more explicit connection between immaterialist supremacy of mind and sovereign rule. In his denial that his new profession is in any way connected with 'metaphysical subtleties', and his claim that, even if it were, it might more easily suggest immaterialism than materialism, Thelwall does not only seek to counter the *Monthly Review's* criticism that his elocutionary theories are inaccurate. He also aims to distance himself from anything which might suggest a continued concern with the overthrow of sovereigns. It is not just materialism, but his 'old republican' identity with which Thelwall no longer wishes to be publicly associated.

However, despite Thelwall's apparent outrage at the insinuation that his elocutionary work is materialist in its understanding of the mind, the language of his response is still equivocal. In suggesting that the differences between materialism and immaterialism are merely 'subtleties' he blurs the distinction between the two systems, allowing him to make the case for their interchangeability as foundations for his elocutionary theory and practice and to therefore avoid confirming or denying either stance. Furthermore, as Thelwall asks his audience, albeit sarcastically, whether his is the language of a materialist, he recasts philosophical disputes as 'a strife of words' and, like Darwin, hands over the responsibility for imputing meaning to the interpretation of the

[91] John Thelwall, 'Defence of Mr Thelwall on the Criticisms against his three Publications', *New review: or Monthly analysis of general literature* 1, no. 6 (1813): 690.

reader.[92] Such evasiveness on the subject of materialism is, I would argue, a recurrent feature of Thelwall's later work which is often played out at the level of word choice. Thelwall's partially unpublished 'Derby Manuscript', begun around the time he embarked on his elocutionary career, demonstrates the way in which anxieties surrounding the materialist 'language of a physiological theorist' are focussed on individual words and reveals the extent to which 'vagueness and inaccuracy' can be a considered linguistic choice.

In addition to new compositions, the Derby notebooks include many of Thelwall's previously published poems which he copies out and reworks for potential republication. And it is 'An Anatomical Meditation', originally published in *The Peripatetic* as part of 'A Digression for Anatomists', which includes some of Thelwall's most significant revisions. The poem includes these amended lines on the operation of the lungs:

> And, ere again the imprison'd gales retire,
> ~~Draw from their souls the pure electric fire~~ –
> *Instruct the etherial vivifying fire*
> The ~~electric~~ *etherial* fire the passing streams impart
> (Life's first great mover) to the swelling heart.
> Should rude disaster these or that confound,
> Life and Life's hope fly rapid from the wound:
> Here 'scape the currents whence we life receive,
> The ~~zephyrs~~ *essence* there by which those currents live.[93]

In the original poem, these lines repeat the idea, first put forward by Thelwall in *Animal Vitality,* that life is stimulated by electricity contained within the air and circulated round the body in the blood. This model of life is, for Thelwall, explicitly materialist, as he argues that '*Spirit,* however subtile, however refined, must still be material' and 'that more subtile

[92] This argument that it is the reader who imbues a text with any illicit meaning echoes John Gurney's successful defence of Daniel Isaac Eaton at his trial for seditious libel following his publication of Thelwall's *King Chaunticlere*. See: John Barrell and Jon Mee, 'Introduction', in *Trials for Treason and Sedition, 1792-1794,* vol. 1 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), xxii.

[93] Thelwall's superscript substitutions are indicated here by italics. Derby, Derby Local Studies and Family History Library, Derby MS vol 1.

matter can act upon that which is more gross and inert, we have sufficient evidence in the action of the air and the electric fluid'.[94] At first glance, Thelwall's substitution of 'etherial' for 'electric' would seem, then, to be a move away from the materialism of both the original poem and *Animal Vitality*. However, the connotations of neither word are straightforward. Fairclough notes that electricity could itself be understood as aether and that doing so could have both materialist and immaterialist implications.[95] Furthermore, as Fairclough continues, Thelwall himself associates electricity with 'an ethereal medium' at the end of *Animal Vitality*, 'suggesting its essential obscurity'.[96] In thus amending the poem, Thelwall therefore expands the poem's potential to be understood as immaterialist without necessarily either undermining his original physiological theory or removing the possibility of its continued materialism. In changing 'zephyrs' to 'essence' Thelwall achieves a similar effect. Thelwall uses the word 'essence' six times throughout *Animal Vitality* and although in five of these cases he uses the word to indicate an immaterial vital principle, the sixth instance refers to a 'fine and subtile, or aeriform', and therefore material, substance.[97] Thelwall therefore corrects the poetic and physiologically inaccurate word 'zephyrs', i.e. the west wind, to a term which, although more technical, is no less vague in its philosophical significance. Thelwall's careful alterations to one of his most explicitly materialist poems suggest a real concern with how the philosophy and physiology behind his elocution work was perceived. However, rather than clarifying his position, Thelwall exploits the inherent instability of supposedly materialist and immaterialist language, choosing terminology

[94] Thelwall, *Animal Vitality,* 36.

[95] Mary Fairclough, *Literature, Electricity and Politics 1740-1840: 'electrick communication every where'* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 39.

[96] Thelwall, *Animal Vitality,* 41; Fairclough, *Literature, Electricity and Politics 1740-1840*, 159.

[97] Thelwall, *Animal Vitality*, 36.

which is general enough and vague enough to obscure any 'tendency to materialize the operations of the human understanding', without denying it.

These tactics are particularly evident in Thelwall's 1814 *Results of Experience* which demonstrates, explicitly in places, a continued defensive reaction to the *Monthly Review's* accusation of materialism.[98] For example, in a comparison between the causes of speech disorder in two pupils, he writes: 'in one, those faculties, tho not actually extinct, were an inert and unvivified mass, that required the Promethean torch; in the other, they seemed to exist only in scattered particles; or, at best only in fragments, or disjointed parts, that needed the articulation of connective ligament'.[99] Again, Thelwall, pays close attention to language, in this case metaphor, in order to complicate materialist readings of his work. He immediately criticises his presentation of the above comparison, continuing: 'but I beg pardon. Where rational induction and practical inference are the objects, minute detail is better than metaphorical illustration'.[100] In negatively drawing attention to his use of figurative language here, Thelwall apparently dismisses what he has written as inaccurate, downplaying the significance of the philosophy suggested by the two metaphors. Yet both the models of mind which Thelwall describes are distinctly materially figured. In the first metaphor, he presents the mind as susceptible, yet 'inert' matter which, like the body in *Animal Vitality*, requires some stimulus or 'Promethean torch', presumably representative of, or contained within, Thelwall's teaching, to animate it. In the second metaphor, Thelwall describes the mind as material, but 'disjointed'. Thelwall's depiction of mind here is explicitly physiological as he uses the word 'articulation' not in the sense of speech production, but in the specific anatomical sense of 'to attach or unite (esp. a bone) by a

[98] See John Thelwall, *Results of Experience in the Treatment of Cases of Defective Utterance* (London: Printed for the Author, 1814), 33.

[99] Thelwall, *Results of Experience*, 64.

[100] Thelwall, *Results of Experience*, 64.

joint'.[101] And as Thelwall puns on these two senses of 'articulation', he thus draws a fundamental association between speech and the physical body. Furthermore, at no point does he make clear exactly how far his metaphors extend. While his dismissal of these examples as 'metaphorical illustration' might suggest that his invocation of materialism is itself a metaphor – a way of writing rather than a way of thinking – he leaves room for a narrower interpretation of his use of figurative language, in which the only instances of metaphor are his use of 'Promethean torch' for stimulus and 'ligament' for some more precise connective material. In this second reading, the materialist significance of his language is not merely preserved, but strengthened, as he suggests that the mind is best understood through accurate and detailed description of the physical operations of the body.

Moreover, Thelwall's metaphor of articulating the mind is a sustained one, which he introduces earlier in *Results of Experience* with an explicit reference to its materialist overtones. Discussing the effect on speech of what he terms 'diseased and broken association', he writes: 'In such cases, the task imposed upon the tutor, is (if I may venture, without being suspected of the horrible crime of materialism, to apply the anatomical term to a mental operation) to *articulate the disjointed faculties*'.[102] Although, in his sarcastic aside, Thelwall attempts to downplay both the materialism of his work and the seriousness of being suspected of it, he simultaneously acknowledges that his suggestion that mental ideas are associated with one another in the same way that bones are connected by joints is fundamentally materialist. Therefore, although Thelwall repeatedly makes the case in both his reply to the *Monthly Review* and *Results of Experience* that, when it comes to speech production or impediment, the mind has 'as absolute, and sometimes extensive an

[101] 'articulate, v.', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed Aug 21, 2019, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/11190?rskey=ugaP5c&result=2&isAdvanced=false

[102] Thelwall, *Results of Experience*, 38-39.

operation on the physical system as physical causes have upon the attributes and phenomena of mind', he conceives or at least presents this mind as material.[103] Thus, although he frames his belief in the mind's ability to affect the body as evidence against 'the horrible crime of materialism', Thelwall's anatomical figuration of mind undercuts the immaterialism of this model of mind over matter. And, it is through his exploitation of the unstable terminology surrounding materialism and his complex uses of metaphor and irony that he is able to present his theory of speech production as variously or even simultaneously materialist and immaterialist.

However, Thelwall's claim that his theory and practice of elocution would not 'be at all affected, by the complete establishment, or the absolute overthrow' of materialism or immaterialism is not only significant for the way it allows him to downplay the differences between these two systems. As Thelwall presents his arguments regarding 'the sovereignty of mind over matter' with calculated ambivalence in response to accusations of materialism, he also reiterates the point that such 'metaphysical subtleties' are not the central concern of his elocutionary work. His main aim across his elocutionary writing, I argue, is not to suggest whether mental or physical phenomena play the greater part in controlling speech, but rather to make the case that healthy speech requires an individual's mind and body to work as an autonomous unit, without being overly influenced by external forces. And while this focus allows Thelwall to avoid presenting a clear stance on the hierarchy of mind and body, it nevertheless draws and even relies on the materialist and politically inflected ideas about internal versus external control and individual agency which he sets out in earlier works such as *Animal Vitality* and the two Chaunticlere tales.

Throughout his writing on elocution, Thelwall suggests that physiological freedom of speech is often more significantly restricted by the effect of external forces on the

[103] Thelwall, *Results of Experience*, 72.

individual than by any inherent attributes of their body and mind. As evidence for his assertion of the effects of 'mental, moral, and educational' factors on speech, Thelwall frequently draws on instances in which imitation of, mismanagement by or excessive restriction or control from parents, guardians, doctors, surgeons and teachers constitute the 'original circumstances' which lead to or exacerbate impeded speech.[104] As Stanback argues, 'Thelwall consistently demonstrates that non-normative embodiments themselves are separate from – and often less disabling than – the social responses to those embodiments'.[105] And, I would argue, as Thelwall focusses particularly on the impact of those who aim to 'manage' children, patients or pupils, he presents a model in which society's speech inhibiting behaviour towards the individual and their body is specifically tied to systems of hierarchy and control. For example, Thelwall remarks in his 1810 *Letter to Henry Cline* that speechlessness is commonly 'a malady of non-developement [sic] of faculty, assignable to educational causes,— or, in other words, to negligence or mistaken management' and he continues this emphasis on the way in which speech is restricted by those in positions of power four years later in *Results of Experience* when he suggests that 'the parents are sometimes the disease'.[106] Here Thelwall suggests that speechlessness does not necessarily originate internally, but can be traced back to poor guardianship or inappropriate attempts to control the body from those who consider it their responsibility to 'manage' others. And, as we have seen, this argument is not unique to Thelwall's elocutionary writing. While Thelwall's political texts and speeches of the 1790s draw attention to the restriction of the speaking body by those in power in order to emphasise the physiological impact of political silencing, his elocutionary texts of the 1810s draw

[104] Thelwall, *Results of Experience,* 73; Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 58.

[105] Stanback, *The Wordsworth-Coleridge Circle and the Aesthetics of Disability*, 74.

[106] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 128; Thelwall, *Results of Experience*, 7.

attention to this same model in order to emphasise the social causes of supposedly physiological speechlessness. Thelwall thus moves from pathologising political silencing to politicising speech impediment. Yet in both cases, it is not the bodies which are pathologised but the systems of power which act upon them. The 'cure' in both instances is for bodies to act for themselves, again drawing an equivalence between free speech and free action which runs through Thelwall's writing from the Chaunticlere tales to his elocutionary writing.

However, Thelwall's elocutionary texts also function as advertisements for his lectures and his Institution in London and despite his concerns about the ill-effects of 'educational causes' on physiological freedom of speech, he does not appear to consider his own practice to be liable to produce such effects. *A Letter to Henry Cline*, for example, ends with 'a brief enumeration of the several descriptions of Pupils, that may be accommodated, by domestication, in the Institution' and Thelwall also produced a comprehensive educational prospectus of the Institution's 'Plan and Objects', which he would go on to bind into copies of both his 1810 collection of poetry 'intended as exercises in recitation', *The Vestibule of Eloquence*, and *Results of Experience*'.[107] In detailing the methods employed in his work within the institution and with private pupils, Thelwall highlights the recitation of poetry and frequent conversation and debate between pupils as the central elements of his practice, along with a disapprobation for the use of corporal punishment and surgical intervention in speech impediments.[108] Thelwall's challenge throughout his elocutionary writing, then, is to present his own 'superintendence' of pupils as desirable without undermining his fundamental assertion that free and healthy speech

[107] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 250; John Thelwall, 'Plan and Objects &ct', in *The Vestibule of Eloquence* (London: Printed for the Author, 1810), 1; Thelwall, *Vestibule of Eloquence*, title page.

[108] Thelwall, 'Plan and Objects &ct', 2-11; Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 54-55.

comes from inside the body and not outside powers.[109] He does this, I argue, by drawing a distinction between the terms 'management' and 'stimulus' which recalls the theory of organised and responsive matter which he lays out in *Animal Vitality*. In a letter to 'The Editors of the Medical and Physical Journal' which he reprints in *A Letter to Henry Cline*, he writes that, as evidence for the success of his elocutionary practice 'instances are adduced of children rendered speechless, by mis-management in their early education; and of mutes who have been brought to the full exercise of the powers of speech, by the application of proper stimuli'.[110] In a similar way to the later figuring of his teaching in *Results of Experience* as a 'Promethean torch', Thelwall here presents 'stimuli' as the counter-point to 'mis-management'. The solution to mis-management is not to replace harmful systems of control with a more benevolent form of management, but rather to replace the system of external control entirely. Instead, Thelwall advocates a materialist model of stimulus which relies on and acknowledges internal agency and responsiveness.

Thelwall provides further explanation of the role of stimulus in his treatment of speech impediments in *Results of Experience*, through the case of one particular pupil at his Institution. Again, Thelwall emphasises that it is not the supposedly non-normative body of the pupil that is the most direct cause of his speechlessness, but rather the inappropriate attempts of others to manage or control him. Thelwall writes: 'the child was, undoubtedly, of feeble constitution; and, perhaps, to the mistaken management that had resulted from this feebleness, the greater part of the phenomena are to be ascribed'.[111] Here Thelwall suggests that 'mistaken management' plays a far greater role in the occurrence of speech impediment than the individual's 'constitution'. Thelwall continues by describing that while

[109] Thelwall, 'Plan and Objects &ct', 7.

[110] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline,* 183, 190.

[111] Thelwall, *Results of Experience,* 41.

the child's speech developed, 'the dislike of all effort, mental or bodily, yielded progressively only to the stimuli which incessant attention and superintendence applied to his dormant faculties'.[112] While, on the surface, it seems as if Thelwall has merely replaced the pupil's previous ineffective system of management, with his own effective one, this is not necessarily the case. His 'superintendence' is not a power in itself, but a medium through which the 'stimuli' are applied and the child's inherent yet 'dormant faculties' are awakened. Thelwall thus inverts the pattern he originally encounters, whereby management is presented as a power responding to and acting upon the body, and suggests instead that the body contains an active power within itself which responds to the stimulus, but not the control, of 'superintendence'. Thelwall's elocutionary system, therefore, does not aim to give a voice to the voiceless but to remove the external forces of suppression which prevent people from accessing their own unused, but extant and potentially powerful, voices.

However, as discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to the Chaunticlere tales, speaking freely and autonomously benefits from and indeed requires a certain degree of involuntariness for Thelwall and this remains the case in his elocutionary writing. While he argues that external control must be removed for the individual to speak freely, he also makes it clear that the alternative should not be speech controlled entirely by internal will. Notably, it is the work of Erasmus Darwin which particularly informs Thelwall's thinking surrounding the role of the will in the production of speech. McCann and Solomonescu have both noted the way in which Thelwall's suspicion, raised in his 1820 'Essay on Human Automatism', that 'we are nothing but mere machines – speaking automatons whose very words are breathed thro' us, as thro' an organ-pipe inflated by some exterior agency',

[112] Thelwall, *Results of Experience*, 42.

invokes the idea of Darwin's speaking machine.[113] McCann and Solomonescu see the essay as indicative of an eventual faltering of Thelwall's belief in autonomous as opposed to automatic utterance.[114] However, despite the apparent ambivalence of the 1820 essay, later writings of Thelwall including, as I will go on to argue, his poem 'Musalogia' composed between 1822 and 1827, demonstrate a continued faith that speech and poetry are active and undictated, albeit unconscious and responsive powers. Moreover, earlier and more frequently in Thelwall's work, Darwin's ideas provide a model not of automatism or mechanism, but of materialist speech which is involuntary, yet still autonomous.

In the 'Introductory Essay' to his 1812 *Selections*, Thelwall cites Darwin's work on speech as a key influence on his own elocutionary theories.[115] Furthermore, he notes that one of his previous lectures on elocution has dealt with the subject of 'Sensorial Power', a term which, as we have seen, was coined by Darwin to describe a materialist, but explicitly non-mechanist, understanding of the living body.[116] And it is on the subject of speech impediments that Thelwall draws most strongly on Darwin's materialist medico-philosophy. In *A Letter to Henry Cline,* Thelwall suggests that too much 'volition' can lead variously to stammering and affected sounding speech, criticising 'the injudicious application of an overstrained volition to which, I trace the gradations of harsh and ungraceful utterance; and from irregular and inconsiderate efforts for their counteraction, all impediments of speech'.[117] Here, as Thelwall suggests that internal efforts to control speech can be as

[113] John Thelwall, 'An Essay on Human Automatonism', in *Selected Political Writings of John Thelwall*, vol. 4, ed. Robert Lamb and Corinna Wagner (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 184.

[114] McCann, 'Romantic Self-Fashioning', 230; Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination,* 73.

[115] John Thelwall, *Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions on the Rhythmus and Utterance of the English Language* (London: Printed for the Author, 1812), xxxvi.

[116] Thelwall, *Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions*, lx. See also Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; Or the Laws of Organic Life*, vol. 1 (London: J. Johnson, 1794), 10.

[117] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 181.

obstructive as external ones, he uses Darwin's materialist understanding of stammering, in which 'the great voluntary efforts, which distort the countenance prevent the rejoining of the broken association'.[118] And the materialist philosophy that drives Thelwall's assertion that too much volition can be harmful is made even more explicit in the 1812 *Selections,* when he writes:

> The simplicity of the laws of Nature, even in her most complicated operations, may be illustrated in the laws of Gravitation; of Chemical Attraction; of Mechanic Impulse, and of Organic Action. Animal volition is limited by the primary laws of physical necessity. Consequences the most destructive of the grace and facility of elocutionary utterance, are perpetually recurring from irregular efforts inconsistent with those laws. The generality of Impediments of Speech are nothing more than consequences of such irregular efforts.[119]

While this passage could be considered to be verging on mechanism, with its privileging of 'the laws of Gravitation; of Chemical Attraction; of Mechanic Impulse, and of Organic Action' over 'Animal volition', it is important to note that these forces may limit, but do not prevent voluntary action. While Thelwall suggests that overreliance on individual will poses problems, the solution is not for automatism to take over, but rather for the individual to exert only as much volition as is consistent with the material conditions of 'Nature'.

Thelwall's elocutionary work, I argue, struggles both to materialise articulation (that is to present free and coherent speech as physical, sometimes involuntary, but always autonomous action), and to articulate materialism in a period when an overt admission of materialist ideas would have been professionally and personally dangerous. Yet, despite Thelwall's apparent ambivalence over the materiality of the mind, his elocutionary texts consistently advocate a materialist model of speech, where both external power and internal will stand in the way of unimpeded utterance. As Julia Carlson writes, with reference to Thelwall's theory of Rhythmus, which I discuss in the next section of this

[118] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 189.

[119] Thelwall, *Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions*, xxxvii-xxxviii.

chapter, 'to put it simply, under- or overwillfulness impaired vocalization'.[120] And despite Thelwall's claims to the contrary, this model of speech has decidedly political resonances. As the passage from the 1812 *Selections* in particular shows, Thelwall's materialism, however veiled, suggests that freedom of speech is not just a right, but a fundamental physical law. Societally imposed 'irregular efforts' of control, whether Gagging Acts, parental mismanagement or even 'overstrained volition' are not just harmful to the individual and their body, but incompatible with 'the laws of nature'.

'Rouse, and Agitate and Impress': The Science of the Body and the Practice of Poetry

Although Thelwall makes concerted efforts to establish not only a new career, but a new reputation, post 1801, he frequently frames his elocutionary work as the culmination of, rather than a departure from, his past lives. In the early pages of *A Letter to Henry Cline*, he writes**:**

> The treasured remembrances of anatomical and physiological facts, mingling with the impressions that had resulted from the oratorical habits of twelve preceding years, and the yet unquenchable devotion to poetical composition (my only solace of my retreat!), led me, if I mistake not, to the development of some of the most hidden mysteries of the Science of Human Speech. In short, my dear Sir, from the accidental association of this mass of diversified, and (as it might, perhaps, at first appear) incongruous impressions, – I was led.[121]

It is through his writing on rhythmus in particular, I argue, that he combines and reconciles these 'diversified' and 'incongruous' fields of anatomy, oratory, and poetry. Throughout his elocutionary texts, Thelwall proposes a theory of rhythmus, whereby all utterance, whether spontaneous oratory or recited poetry, should follow an instinctual pattern of thesis and arsis – heavy and light weight or 'poise' – which defines the rhythms of both human and non-human animal bodies and the extracorporeal world. Several critics,

[120] Carlson, *Romantic Marks and Measures*, 270-271.

[121] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline,* 3.

including Solomonescu and Carlson, have noted the way in which this equation of the movements of the body with the 'primary laws of physical necessity' contributes to the materialism, and by extension the pro-democratic radicalism, of Thelwall's theory of speech.[122] What has received less emphasis, however, is the way in which the blending of 'diversified' fields of enquiry underpinning Thelwall's conception of rhythmus is itself a significant factor in his materialising of speech. We have already seen how, for Darwin, blurring the boundaries between science and both mechanic and poetic art, and between knowledge and practice, could facilitate materialist approaches to the living (and speaking) body. Similarly, in the final section of this chapter, I argue that Thelwall not only combines theoretical and practical approaches to elocution but also complicates the distinction between them. I suggest that Thelwall's embodied and materialist conceptions of speech and rhythmus incorporate ideas about the transformation of knowledge into practice and about the role of the body in poetry and vice versa. Finally, through analysis of unpublished material from the Derby Manuscript, I make the case that this approach to elocution allows him to describe a process through which the mind becomes physicalised and abstract thoughts and feelings become action.

Across his later work, ideas of rhythmus provide Thelwall with the theoretical foundations upon which to base his elocutionary practice. And although attention to prosody in the teaching of speech was by no means an innovation, Thelwall's elocutionary texts aim to redefine rhythmus as a physical law as opposed to an arbitrary cultural rule. As Denyse Rockey writes: 'he could claim novelty for defining [elocution] as a science as well as an art'.[123] In both *A Letter to Henry Cline* and his 1812 *Selections*, for example, Thelwall comments on the inadequacy of previous investigations of elocution. Thelwall takes aim at

[122] Thelwall, *Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions*, xxxvii; Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination,* 119; Carlson, *Romantic Marks and Measures*, 261.

[123] Denyse Rockey, *Speech Disorder in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 46.

the 18th century culture of speaking (and specifically recitation), most notably propounded by elocutionists Thomas Sheridan, John Walker, and Joshua Steele which considered elocution an art or skill which could be perfected by attending to a set of universal, but essentially artificial conventions. Sheridan, for example, suggested that the 'principles of elocution' could only be taught by 'a sufficient number of skilful masters, and a well digested system of rules', while Walker's *Elements of Elocution* advertised 'some plain practical rules in a scholastic and methodical form, that would convey real and useful instruction'.[124] For Thelwall, however, such approaches were 'erroneous' and 'perplexing' 'misconceptions'. [125] And it is the work conducted by Joshua Steele in his 1779 essay *Prosodia Rationalis,* which Thelwall engages with most extensively. Steele did in fact frame his own treatment of prosody as both science and art, dedicating it to the president of the Royal Society and suggesting that 'it is in the power of our universities to bring this science (and the arts under it) into some better degree of note'.[126] But for Thelwall, Steele's work, however influential for his concept of thesis and arsis, was firmly based in the human construct of art as opposed to scientific investigation. He complains that:

> Mr. Steele was, obviously, unacquainted with every thing that relates to the physiology of speech: so much so, indeed, as to have referred that specific and fundamental difference in the qualities of syllables – (the Thesis Δ and Arsis ∴) which results from the pure physical necessities of organic action, to voluntary taste and harmonic invention[127]

Thelwall himself, on the other hand, proposes in the 1812 *Selections* that rhythms of speech, including metre in poetry and cadence in prose, are not governed by 'the rules of

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[124] Thomas Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (London: James Dodsley, 1798), 307; John Walker, *Elements of Elocution* (London: Cooper and Wilson, 1799), vii.

[125] Thelwall, *Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions,* lxviii, xxiii, lxix. For more on Sheridan, Walker, and Steele see Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 11-35.

[126] Joshua Steele, *Prosodia Rationalis: or, an essay towards establishing the melody and the measure of speech* (London: J. Nichols, 1779), xvi.

[127] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 23.

inventive and imitative art' but are drawn from 'the primary principles of nature, and the physiological necessities resulting from the organization of vocal beings'.[128] Thelwall gives specific examples of these 'primary principles' and 'physiological necessities' two years earlier in *A Letter to Henry Cline*, when he describes the vocal rhythmus of thesis and arsis as part of:

> that universal principle of action and re-action, which forms the paramount law of all reiterated or progressive motion, organic or mechanical; from the throb and remission of the heart, to the progress of the quadruped or the reptile to the sway of the common pendulum.[129]

The strongly materialist implications of this argument have been identified by both Solomonescu and Carlson who describe Thelwall's revised theory of rhythmus respectively as a treatment of prosody which demonstrates a 'connection with his own materialist views on the coordination of mind and body', and 'a materialist reworking of eighteenth-century conceptions of emphasis'.[130] While Thelwall, as I have argued, generally attempted to downplay the 'metaphysical subtleties' of his elocution writing, his novel approach to prosody thus provides a key example of his work's continuing materialism.

Yet, maintaining a belief in active and responsive matter, which we have traced from *Animal Vitality*, through the Chaunticlere tales and *Tribune* lectures, to his analyses of physiological speech impediment, rhythmus for Thelwall is not, or at least should not, be the result of 'voluntary taste' nor purely mechanical action. On the one hand, as he unites both 'organic' and 'mechanical' motion, the beating of a living heart and the movement of a non-living pendulum, under the same 'universal principle of action and re-action', he comes surprisingly close to suggesting that everything, from human speech and poetry to

[128] Thelwall, *Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions*, i-ii.

[129] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 24.

[130] Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination,* 104; Carlson, *Romantic Marks and Measures*, 261.

animal life itself is, to borrow a phrase from *King Chaunticlere*, 'mere mechanical impulse'. However, it is significant that, in describing motion as *either* 'organic or mechanical', he positions these two types of action as distinct from one another. The movements of living and non-living matter may follow the same rhythms, but they are not the same thing and the latter cannot control the former. Furthermore, when Thelwall refers to 'the primary principles of nature, and the physiological necessities resulting from the organization of vocal beings' in the 1812 *Selections,* he once again presents a model of speech whereby matter must be organised in order to be susceptible to external stimuli. Thelwall's very complaint that so many people do not use correct rhythmus in their speech, following instead 'that system of erroneous mechanism so generally applied to the act of reading our English poets', confirms his belief that the voice instinctively keeps time with, but cannot ultimately be controlled by, the 'primary principles of nature'.[131] For Thelwall it is not the effect of a 'universal principle of action and re-action' on the voice which is mechanic, but arbitrary rules of prescribed metre and prosody, in other words, 'inventive and imitative art'.

The materialism of Thelwall's system of prosody is thus tied up with questions about disciplinarity and the boundaries between knowledge and practice. As Thelwall makes the case for a materialist, but not mechanist, understanding of elocution, he presents his theory of rhythmus not as an art, but as a science.[132] It is grounded in the analysis and theorisation of the 'principles of nature' rather than in the production and reproduction (or invention and imitation) of practical effects. Yet Thelwall does not simply

[131] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 164; Thelwall, *Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions,* viii.

[132] Thelwall states this aim explicitly in his 1805 *Introductory Discourse on the Nature and Objects of Elocutionary Science,* when he writes that he 'shall attempt to establish [his] doctrines upon the settled principles of Science, and demonstrate the essential elements of Elocution as a branch of Natural Philosophy'. See John Thelwall, 'An Introductory Discourse on the Nature and Objects of Elocutionary Science', in *The Trident of Albion* (Liverpool: Printed for the Author, 1805), 2.

reject an artistic approach to speech rhythms in favour of a scientific one. Rather, he combines these two approaches in a way which, I argue, pushes against the growing separation of science, poetic art, and mechanic art, discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis. In *Transfiguring the Arts and Sciences*, Jon Klancher traces the disappearance of mechanic or practical arts in the early 19th century from the fields of both theory-based, knowledge-making science and 'fine arts, including poetry' which were themselves growing more distinct from one another.[133] Thelwall, however, despite privileging a theoretical science of rhythmus over a 'system of erroneous mechanism', amalgamates the three fields which Klancher describes. He presents existing understandings of prosody as a mistaken treatment of the liberal arts of poetry and speech as mechanic arts, reducible to prescribed and replicable rules. And the solution he offers is to redefine the study of the rhythms of poetry and speech as a kind of art which can instead be treated as a science. Furthermore, it is a science which uses the tools of and informs the practice of both the fine art of poetry and the mechanic art of physical creative action or process. When Thelwall writes in the 1812 *Selections* that he hopes to one day trace his system of rhythmus 'from its primitive root in the facts and principles of physiological science, thro' all the ramifications of relative art, to the ultimate graces of harmonic expression', he demonstrates how each of these fields has a place within his elocution work. Thelwall's elocutionary theory is founded on theoretical knowledge of the body ('the principles of physiological science'), which combines with the corresponding practice of physical motions ('relative art') to produce both tangible effects ('ramifications') and aesthetic value ('graces'). It is not just anatomy, poetry, and oratory then that Thelwall suggests are less 'incongruous' with one another than it first appears, but the broader fields of knowledge, practice, and taste.

[133] Jon Klancher, *Transfiguring the Arts and Sciences: Knowledge and Cultural Institutions in the Romantic Age*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 230.

In his 1805 *Introductory Discourse on the Nature and Objects of Elocutionary Science,* Thelwall maps out the way in which scientific knowledge, mechanical art, and aesthetic taste combine in his concept of elocution. He writes:

> ELOCUTION, then, is partly a Science, founded on *ascertainable principles,* and susceptible of *palpable demonstrations;* partly an Art, attainable by *imitative application* and observance, and subject to such Laws as result from comparison of general principles with practical Experience; and partly an object of Taste and Sentiment, dependent on acuteness of Perception, and delicacy and refinement of Feeling.[134]

McCann glosses Thelwall's definition here by presenting elocution as a trajectory which can be followed from its foundation in 'Science' to its product of 'Taste', suggesting that 'the development of elocution as a science, as a field of inquiry and therapy covering the anatomical structure of the "elocutionary organs," phonetics and philology, leads to the dissemination of elocution as an art, that is, as a practice one can master, which also involves the acquisition and actual practice of taste'.[135] I would argue, however, that Thelwall's intermixing of science, practical arts, and the cultivation of taste is not necessarily a linear progression from knowledge to practice, and rather blurs the boundaries between these disciplinary categories and the epistemologies and methodologies that they employ.

Thelwall goes on in the *Introductory Discourse* to give further details of the different elements of science, art, and taste which make up elocution. He explains that, 'as a Science', it is built on understandings of music, philology, and 'physiology; – that is to say, in the Anatomical Structure of the Elocutionary Organs, and the Laws of Physical Necessity, by which their actions are regulated and circumscribed'.[136] 'As an Art', he writes, 'the Laws of Elocution are […] partly Mechanical, or Experimental, – as relating to the motions and

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[134] Thelwall, *Introductory Discourse,* 12.

[135] McCann, 'Romantic Self-Fashioning', 220.

[136] Thelwall, *Introductory Discourse,* 12.

positions of the respective Organs'.[137] Finally, Thelwall suggests that 'as a matter of TASTE', the study of elocution should include 'all the finer Arts' and that the elocutionist should have an '*Eye*' for visual arts, an '*Ear*' for music, 'a *perception* of the vital graces of look and attitude and motion' and a '*Soul* tremblingly alive to all the enthusiasm of Poetry'.[138] Here, I argue, Thelwall does not just describe a multidisciplinary system which draws on different categories of study, but a transdisciplinary understanding of elocution which allows for the application of scientific and philosophical principles to mechanical practice and poetic art. Moreover, it is specifically through Thelwall's enduring focus on the body and its essential role in speech that the boundaries between these ways of thinking and working begin to break down. Science, Art, and Taste are all ways of understanding the body for Thelwall. The function of science is to understand the physical laws by which the speaking body operates, and the function of mechanic art is to analyse and replicate the movements which the body produces as a result of these laws.

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, even the 'finer' art of taste, is based on the body for Thelwall – it is a quality of the '*eye*' and the '*ear*'. And, as Thelwall continues to outline the role of fine arts in elocution, his treatment of embodied taste within the text becomes increasingly materialist. As Thelwall italicises '*perception*' as he does '*eye*' and '*ear*' he implies that he uses this term in a similar way, i.e. metonymically, with the original reference point being a physical aspect of the body. The idea that perception is a specific component of human physiology has precedent in Thelwall's writing and is perhaps another example of his engagement with Darwin's medico-philosophy. In *Zoonomia*, Darwin lays out a precise definition of his use of the term, writing:

> The word *perception* includes both the action of the organ of sense in consequence of the impact of external objects, and our attention to that action; that is, it

[137] Thelwall, *Introductory Discourse*, 14.

[138] Thelwall, *Introductory Discourse,* 14-15.

> expresses both the motion of the organ of sense, or idea, and the pain or pleasure that succeeds or accompanies it.[139]

Here, Darwin explains perception as bodily action stimulated by outside influences and the physicalised qualities of 'pain or pleasure' connected with these actions. For Darwin, then, the concept of perception has the potential to class taste as a physiological phenomenon and this idea underpins Thelwall's simultaneous figuring of elocution 'as a Science', 'as an Art', and 'as a matter of Taste'. In *A Letter to Henry Cline*, he uses an embodied understanding of perception to unite these three ways of approaching elocution. He writes:

> The necessary action and reaction of the primary organ of vocal impulse, once comprehended, – the law of universal sympathy between the executive and the perceptive organs, exhibited in all the phaenomena of vital action and vital perception, once considered, – and the necessary reference of all imitative art, (however modified and improved) to the primary principles of organic nature, once admitted, – the mystery may be easily explained.[140]

Thelwall presents perception as part of the living, or 'vital', body, which is materially described through reference to physical 'perceptive organs' which are responsive to universal laws.[141] Embodied perception then becomes a reference point for 'all imitative art', in other words the practice of elocution, and, as Thelwall suggests in *Introductory Discourses* 'vital graces'. The fact that he uses the term 'vital' across the two texts to describe action, perception, and the graces which this perception leads to, further reveals the extent to which Thelwall considers grace or taste a physical attribute of the living body.

Meanwhile, in his repeated use of the word 'necessary', Thelwall suggests that tasteful 'finer arts' are not just embodied, but involuntary. When Thelwall reaches the crescendo of his argument – that elocution requires a '*Soul* tremblingly alive to all the

[139] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, vol. 1, 12.

[140] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline,* 179.

[141] Thelwall's use of the phrases 'vital action' and 'vital perception' here closely follows his use of the term in *Animal Vitality*, in which he argues that the term 'vital' can only properly be applied to the movements and functions of the body, as vitality is a state of being and not a distinct substance.

enthusiasm of Poetry' – he represents speech, soul, and poetry alike as consistent with a theory of active matter. In *Animal Vitality,* Thelwall was fairly unequivocal about the materiality of the soul, if it exists at all, stating that rather than comprising three distinct parts of 'Body, Soul, and Spirit', humans, along with non-human animals can be considered 'in an individual point of view only; as consisting of a simple organised frame, from the susceptibility and preference, or the non-susceptibility, or absence of stimuli in which arises the whole distinction between the *living* body and the *dead*'.[142] Here, Thelwall's italicising of '*Soul*', in line with '*Eye*', '*Ear*', and '*Perception*', again subtly hints at a continued belief in a material soul. While the soul is physical, it is nonetheless 'alive' and capable of moving or trembling. The soul here is therefore respondent and susceptible matter and the stimulus it responds to is poetry, which, as we have seen is based on the universal system of action and reaction which defines all motion. Thelwall's use of the word 'enthusiasm' is also significant. Jon Mee has noted Thelwall's ambivalence to the term in his earlier political works, arguing that while it 'is never simply condemned', he often expresses unease with the incompatibility of 'enthusiasm' with 'self-regulation'.[143] Mee goes on to argue that Thelwall is more comfortable applying the idea of 'enthusiasm' to the poetry of his 'retirement' than to his earlier political oratory, because 'only in the chamber of the aesthetic can his innate enthusiasm be brought into a harmoniously regulated form'.[144] By the time Thelwall develops his theory of rhythmus, however, it is clear that he no longer considers poetry or the aesthetic to be a distinct category consisting of a unique set of principles. Instead, as his work on speech destabilises the boundaries between, art, science, and taste, he suggests that everything, from anatomy to oratory, to poetry, can be

[142] Thelwall, *Animal Vitality,* 11-12.

[143] Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation,* 123.

[144] Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 124-125.

analysed and understood in accordance with theories of universal physical laws or stimuli and susceptible matter. In this passage from his *Introductory Discourses* Thelwall is able to celebrate the 'enthusiasm of Poetry', then, as he makes the case that poetry is not a matter of 'voluntary taste' but of involuntary yet autonomous physical response.

Thompson writes that 'For Thelwall, elocution (a concept that includes but extends beyond poetry) was not simply an "elegant art," but an act', and as Thelwall himself states, it is not only art and act, but also science.[145] In the 1805 *Introductory Discourse,* he writes both that 'ELOCUTION may be regarded, either as a Science, or as an Act' and that '*Elocution is the Art, or the Act, of so delivering our own thoughts and sentiments* […] *to excite and impress*'.[146] In Thelwall's science of active and reactive elocution, speech is thus more than physical action, stimulated by physical laws, but also has the power to 'excite and impress' further action in the listener. It is this idea, which is at the centre of his description of the power of poetic utterance in the concluding poem of the Derby Manuscript, 'Musalogia', the composition of which Thompson dates to circa 1822-1827.[147] In the poem, I argue, Thelwall uses his elocutionary theory of rhythmus, in which the materialist science of the body informs the practice of poetry, to present the transformation of immaterial thought and feeling into physical movement, and to once again, as in his earlier political writing, make the case for speech as action and stimulus. Thelwall writes:

> Giv'st thou, with intuition warm,
> To dim Abstraction sentient form –
> Embodying to the outward sense
> The tongueless mind's signifficance [sic] ? –
> Thy shapes & influences illume
> The labyrinths of the ideal gloom;
> While trope and metaphor compress

[145] Thompson, *John Thelwall in the Wordsworth Circle*, 172.

[146] Thelwall, *Introductory Discourse,* 4-5.

[147] Thompson, *John Thelwall: Selected Poetry and Poetics*, 272.

Induction's slow diffusiveness,
And stamps, with prompt energic art,
Truth's glowing image on the heart; –
Darting, in winged race of soul,
Thro feeling to the purpos'd goal;
While prosing Dulness plods behind,
Seeking the phrase he cannot find;
Or measuring slow the process o'er,
Till tir'd attention heeds no more:
Or heeding, yields the cold assent
That to no action gives the bent.[148]

Although this passage, as Thelwall goes on to reveal, describes the poetic imagination in particular, it is clear that he is also describing his concept of materialist elocution more broadly in these lines. The poetic imagination, he claims, will give 'form' to 'Abstraction', 'Embodying to the outward sense / The tongueless mind's signifficance', echoing a passage from the 1805 *Introductory Discourse* in which he terms elocution 'the embodying Form' of 'Discourse'.[149] Furthermore, as Thelwall outlines a process by which the 'tongueless' mind becomes embodied, he specifically presents a move from immaterial thought to physical and sensible matter which is carried out through the act of speech. As the poem continues, Thelwall describes this materialised speech as 'energic', once again undermining any distinction between speech and action. Among contemporary definitions of the term 'energic', the *OED* lists 'Of written or spoken language, or rhetorical style: characterized by force or power of expression; capable of impressing an idea upon or arousing emotion in an audience' and, more generally, 'that engages in work or action; that produces effects; operative, active'.[150] Engaging both of the meanings, Thelwall presents a model of speech that does not just act but acts affectively upon others. However not all utterance is materialist elocution, and speech which does not correspond with Thelwall's universal

[148] Derby, Derby Local Studies and Family History Library, Derby MS vol. 3, 968.

[149] Thelwall, *Introductory Discourse*, 5.

[150] 'energic, adj.', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed Feb 29, 2020, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/62076?redirectedFrom=energic.

rhythmus prompts no such effects. The 'prosing Dulness' and 'measuring' of artificial prosody and metre, if submitted to, 'yields the cold assent / that to no action gives the bent', or in other words, leads only to inaction.

In the 1805 *Introductory Discourse* Thelwall states that 'the genuine objects of Elocution' are to 'rouse, and agitate and impress'.[151] As we have seen, however, not every system of prosody has this power. For Thelwall, speech must be materially conceived to have material effects. And it is through his discipline crossing theory of rhythmus that he reworks the arbitrary rules of prosody into a materialist universal law of action and reaction whereby the recitation of a poem is as capable of instigating physical action as the movement of a muscle or the swing of a pendulum. What's more, Thelwall's language of rousing, agitating and impressing is heavily loaded with revolutionary connotations. The term agitation, for example, suggests not only physical movement, but also political discussion and 'social unrest'.[152] Indeed, the 1794 introduction to his printed lecture *On the Moral Tendency of a System of Spies and Informers,* Thelwall recalls how previous lectures had been disrupted by spies branding him and his audience as 'Jacobins, agitators, assassins, traitors, and villains'.[153] Similarly, Thelwall would have been all too aware of the martial definition of the word 'impress', meaning coerced enlistment in the military, due to repeated attempts in the late 1790s to halt his lectures by press-ganging him into the Navy.[154] Thelwall's consistent faith in the physical power of speech, be it oratory or poetry, to 'rouse, and agitate, and impress' thus suggests a fundamental belief in the power of

[151] Thelwall, *Introductory Discourse,* 21.

[152] 'agitation, n.', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed Feb 8, 2021, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/4011?redirectedFrom=agitation.

[153] John Thelwall, *On the Moral Tendency of a System of Spies and Informers* (London: Printed for the Author, 1794), iv.

[154] John Thelwall, *An Appeal to Popular Opinion, Against Kidnapping and Murder* (London: J.S. Jordan, 1796), 41.

elocution to stimulate action which has the potential to be revolutionary or even militant in its effects. It is Thelwall's materialist understanding of the universe, and, most significantly, its capacity to cross and subvert disciplinary boundaries, I have argued, which sustains this belief and stays with him throughout his career, allowing him to present the autonomous utterance of speaking bodies, whether orators, gamecocks, pupils, or poets, as political action, affective art, and, above all, physical necessity. However, Thelwall was not alone in considering the role which the physiology of speech could play in politics and poetry. In the final chapter of this thesis, I draw attention to the striking affinity between Thelwall's interdisciplinary theory of rhythmus and Percy Shelley's figuring of poetic utterance, and explore how the notion that speech-poetry exists within a materialist cycle of action and reaction plays out in Shelley's descriptions of world-changing 'universal sound[s] like words' and 'eloquent, oracular' revolutions.[155]

[155] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound* in *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.1.518; Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', in *The Poems of Shelley*, vol. 3, ed. Jack Donovan et al. (Harlow, Longman, 2011), line 366.

Chapter Three: Percy Bysshe Shelley and the Poetry of Speech

Introduction: 'a heart to feel, a brain to think, and a tongue to utter'

In his 1812 pamphlet, *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists,* Percy Shelley asserts that

> Man has a heart to feel, a brain to think, and a tongue to utter. The laws of his moral as of his physical nature are immutable, as is every thing of nature; nor can the ephemeral institutions of human society take away those rights, annihilate or strengthen the duties that have for their basis the imperishable relations of his constitution.[1]

Written while Shelley was engaging actively in Irish politics, *Proposals for an Association* makes the case for a political society to, in the first instance, promote 'Catholic Emancipation, and the Repeal of the Act of Union', and eventually to combat, 'whatever moral or political evil, it may be within the compass of human power to assuage or eradicate'.[2] As the passage above illustrates, Shelley's argument for such an association rests on his belief in not only the importance, but also the necessity or inevitability of free discussion. Like Thelwall before him, he draws on a materialist understanding of the mental, moral, and bodily aspects of 'Man' and the relation of these to the extracorporeal world, to present free speech as a fundamental law, not of constructed human 'institutions', but of 'nature'. Shelley locates utterances, along with the feelings and thoughts with which they are connected, in the physical body here. And, moreover, as he suggests that the bodily organs of heart, brain, and tongue are the essential foundations of speech, he sets material speech at odds with 'ephemeral' external systems of oppression. Shelley's point that speech, and its moral impetus, should be governed by physical and physiological principles rather than parliamentary laws culminates in his play on the word

[1] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists*, in *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley,* vol. 1, ed. E.B. Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 49.

[2] Shelley, *Proposals for an Association*, 41.

constitution, in which the organised body replaces the idea of a written or imagined legal constitution as the source of an individual's rights and duties.

Scholarship which reads Shelley's work together with that of Thelwall is relatively rare and is mostly confined to passing observations on specific points of similarity in texts by the two writers.[3] In this chapter, however, I want to argue that Shelley's writing demonstrates a sustained engagement with the mechanics of speech and the material speaking body, and, as a result, takes up and extends many of the concerns treated by Thelwall in his political and elocutionary work on the voice. Although there is limited evidence to suggest direct interaction between the two writers, they share several correspondents and interrogators, most notably William Godwin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose philosophies and (intermittent) friendship had a significant influence on the thinking of both Thelwall and Shelley.[4] There are also striking similarities in the shape of the two writers' careers. Shelley, like Thelwall, showed an early and a serious interest in physiology, attending a number of medical lectures, which sparked an interest in materialism and, as Sharon Ruston argues, 'continued to influence him and his work

[3] Michael Scrivener, for example, has written extensively on each author independently but does not consider both Shelley and Thelwall together at length. See: Michael Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Michael Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall & Jacobin Writing* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001). See also: Yasmin Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 60; Judith Thompson, 'Re-sounding Romanticism: John Thelwall and the Science and Practice of Elocution', in *Spheres of Action: Speech and Performance in Romantic Culture,* ed. Alexander Dick and Angela Esterhammer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 32.

[4] One likely place where Shelley may have directly encountered Thelwall's writing on speech, although potentially unwittingly, is in *Rees's Cyclopaedia*. In their commentary on *Queen Mab*, Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat note Shelley's use of the volume containing entries for the letter 'M', but had Shelley read the volume covering the letter 'E', he would have encountered anonymous entries by Thelwall on the topics of 'element; elocution; emphases; emotion; energy; enthusiasm; enunciation; euphony; expression'. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 660; John Thelwall, *Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions on the Rhythmus and Utterance of the English Language* (London: Printed for the Author, 1812), xv.

throughout his life'.[5] And, as we can see from the passage from *Proposals for an Association*, Shelley's developing interest in materialist physiology coincided with a period of active engagement in politics. It is this dual concern with political activism and the material body, I would argue, which prompts him to discuss political utterance through reference to speaking bodies. However, in a sequence of events again reminiscent of Thelwall's experience in the 1790s, Shelley's activity in Ireland drew the attention of the Home Office, leading to a period of surveillance and itinerancy lasting roughly until his elopement with Mary Godwin in 1814.[6] After leaving England permanently in 1818, Shelley necessarily drew back from overt political activity. His interest in the power of speech, however, was not diminished. Focussing on his later writing in this chapter, I suggest that Shelley aligns poetry with physical speech, as he turns to material poetic voices as both a central concern in texts such as 'Julian and Maddalo', *Prometheus Unbound,* and 'The Mask of Anarchy', and as the primary, and as he proposes, most effective, medium for expressing political ideas, arguments, and beliefs.

While the parallels between Shelley's and Thelwall's treatments of speech and the trajectories of their engagements with medicine, materialism, politics, and poetry are significant and due further examination, this chapter does not aim to simply trace the similarities between the two writers. In many cases, the differences in their approaches to materialist speech are as significant as the moments where their ideas converge. One key difference between Thelwall's and Shelley's writing on speech is the emphasis they place on the direction of influence between the speaking body and the extracorporeal world. Both writers understand the universe in terms of what Thelwall describes as 'a scene of

[5] Sharon Ruston, '"One of the 'Modern Sceptics": Reappraising Shelley's Medical Education', *Romanticism* 9, no. 1 (2003): 1.

[6] Michael Scrivener, 'Politics, Protest, and Social Reform: Irish Pamphlets, Notes to Queen Mab, Letter to Lord Ellenborough, A Philosophical View of Reform', in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley,* ed. Michael O'Neill and Anthony Howe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 167.

eternal revolution', that is perpetually cycling matter, which moves between the individual body and the world around it.[7] Yet, as each writer explores the place of speech within this system, they attend most closely (although by no means exclusively) to different parts of the cycle. As we have seen, Thelwall demonstrates a sustained concern throughout his career with the impact that external factors, including both the physical principle of rhythmus and, to borrow Shelley's term, 'institutions of human society', can have on speech. For Shelley, however, the focus is much more often on the way speech can affect the outside world, from the environment-disrupting curse uttered in *Prometheus Unbound,* to the 'accent unwithstood' of 'The Mask of Anarchy'.[8] Although, as I suggest, Thelwall and Shelley more thoroughly investigate alternate aspects of the relationship between the speaking body and the world, their materialist understanding of the universe as cyclical means that the other half of the cycle is always implied. I have shown how Thelwall's model of a speaking body, attuned and respondent to external influence, presents speech as action and thus points towards the potential effects of speech on the environment. In this chapter I will make the case that as Shelley takes instances of the physical impact of speech as his starting point, he likewise treats speech as environment-influencing action, but that Shelley's writing points towards the eventual return of speech to the body.

For Shelley, the work of Erasmus Darwin is again particularly important, providing a foundational influence for his early materialism, most notably his 1813 poem *Queen Mab.* Shelley models the poem on Darwin's *Botanic Garden* and *The Temple of Nature* both formally and intellectually, combining philosophical poetry with extensive endnotes. The full title of the poem is also a nod to Darwin. Shelley subtitles *Queen Mab* 'a philosophical

[7] John Thelwall, 'A further enquiry into the Calamities produced by the System of Usurpation and Corruption', in *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall*, vol. 3 (London: Printed for the Author, 1796), 61.

[8] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', in *The Poems of Shelley*, vol. 3, ed. Jack Donovan et al. (Harlow: Longman, 2011), line 145.

poem with notes', recalling Darwin's description of *The Temple of Nature* as 'a poem with philosophical notes'. Throughout the poem, Shelley presents a depiction of ever-cycling matter, which can be traced back to Lucretius, and which directly draws on and develops Darwin's materialist model of 'transmigrating' atoms in *The Temple of Nature*.[9] In the earlier poem, Darwin relates how:

> With ceaseless change how restless atoms pass
> From life to life, a transmigrating mass;
> How the same organs, which to day compose
> The poisonous henbane, or the fragrant rose,
> May with to morrow's sun new forms compile,
> Frown in the Hero, in the Beauty smile.[10]

Shelley picks up this idea a decade later in *Queen Mab*, writing:

> There's not one atom of yon earth
> But once was living man;
> Nor the minutest drop of rain,
> That hangeth in its thinnest cloud,
> But flowed in human veins.[11]

Here Shelley goes one step further than Darwin's suggestion that 'atoms pass / From life to life' to present a materialist universe in which it is not only living things which are connected to one another by cycles of matter. The system that Shelley puts forward explicitly incorporates both organic and inorganic substances – the 'living man' and the 'drop of rain'. Moreover, whereas Darwin focusses on the transformation of plant into human animal life, Shelley positions the human body as the starting point of the cycle of matter. Shelley thus shifts the emphasis of the materialist theory of atoms from its implication that living bodies are made of the same matter as inanimate objects, to the

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[9] For Shelley's engagement with Lucretian materialism see Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 140.

[10] Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature; or The Origin of Society* (London: J. Johnson, 1803), canto 4, lines 420-425.

[11] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Queen Mab*, in *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 2, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), part 2, lines 211-215.

suggestion that all matter has, at some point, been part of a living human body. While this is just one example of how Darwin's poetry provided an important source for Shelley's early thinking, Martin Priestman notes that *The Temple of Nature* 'had a truly massive impact on Shelley, permeating both his thought and imagery in ways which have still not been adequately grasped'.[12] One such aspect of the poem's influence on Shelley which has yet to be considered is its extensive analysis of the physical speaking body which I have discussed in detail in the first chapter of this thesis. In this chapter, I make the case that although Shelley may not explicitly or even consciously invoke Darwin's writing on articulation and the speaking machine in his own poetry, the conception of speech as a materialist physiological action which is so central to *The Temple of Nature,* can also be found time and again in Shelley's writing.

By the time we reach Shelley's poems of 1819-1820, his preoccupation with voice appears to intensify. However, at the same time, the body seems to be much less present in these later works than in earlier texts such as *Proposals for an Association* and *Queen Mab*. In fact, many of the voices of Shelley's poems from this period are conspicuously *dis*embodied, such as *The Mask of Anarchy's* 'voice from over the Sea', the many 'inorganic voice[s]' of the spirits of *Prometheus Unbound*, or the 'unbodied joy' of the bird's song in 'To a Skylark'.[13] While such unembodied speech could be seen to indicate that Shelley abandoned materialism in the second half of the 1810s, this chapter will follow critics such Sharon Ruston and Paul Hamilton in challenging the notion traditionally held by critics that Shelley moved to an idealist, as opposed to a materialist view of the universe in his later

[12] Martin Priestman, *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 244.

[13] Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', line 2; Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, in *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.1.134; Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'To a Sky-Lark', in *The Poems of Shelley*, vol. 3, ed. Jack Donovan et al. (Harlow: Longman, 2011), line 15.

work.[14] In this chapter, I push against arguments, such as that put forward by Angela Leighton, that 'there is a shift of emphasis in Shelley's thinking' from a materialist perspective which considers everything, even thought, to be a product of matter, to an idealist perspective which treats everything, even matter, as a product of thought.[15] More recent assessments of Shelley, including criticism by Cian Duffy and Madeleine Callaghan, have persuasively contested this movement 'to an increasingly apolitical idealism' by making a distinction between idealism and scepticism, and aiming to find continuity in Shelley's thought by tracking the second of these stances back though Shelley's writing to his early work.[16] More closely following Ruston and Hamilton, however, this chapter will rather trace the continuing materialist implications of Shelley's later writing to support the argument that he 'can be read consistently from a materialist point of view', even in his writing of 1819-1820.[17]

In her book, *Shelley and Vitality,* Ruston makes the case for the pivotal role which the vitalism debate between surgeons William Lawrence (who was a friend and doctor to Percy and Mary Shelley) and John Abernethy played in influencing Percy Shelley's philosophical and scientific thought. Between 1814 and 1819, Abernethy and Lawrence engaged in a heated debate, played out in publications and lectures, over the question of whether life was 'something of an invisible and active nature' – an immaterial principle 'superadded' to the body, as Abernethy supposed, or, as Lawrence argued, a property of

[14] Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality*; Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[15] Angela Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), vii.

[16] Cian Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6; Madeleine Callaghan, 'Shelley and the Ambivalence of Idealism', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 64 (2015); Duffy describes the difference between idealism and scepticism thus: 'while idealism wholly denies the extra-mental existence of the material world, the sceptic merely argues that there is no possibility of knowing anything about that world (even the fact of its existence) directly'. Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime*, 66.

[17] Hamilton, *Metaromanticism*, 140.

organised matter, illustrated by 'the dependence of function on structure'.[18] While Abernethy's proposal can be considered an immaterialist stance, Lawrence was branded as materialist, or as Abernethy would put it a 'modern sceptic', a term which, as my analysis of Darwin's usage of it in chapter one of this thesis shows, was synonymous with materialism.[19] It is not only the content of this debate, I would argue, which provides an important context for Shelley's writing, but the way it was conducted, specifically the fact that both surgeons drew on the same source material, John Hunter's theory that life might be located in the blood.[20] The Lawrence-Abernethy debate, in which both materialist and immaterialist conclusions can be drawn from the same source, thus acts as a striking testament to the continuing indistinctness of the boundaries between the two stances. This chapter, then, rejects a linear reading of Shelley's philosophical and scientific thought as moving straightforwardly from materialism to immaterialism, instead proposing that, throughout his work, Shelley engages with, sometimes grapples with, and sometimes exploits the instability of the distinction between the two theories and the language used to express them. I argue that, just as in *Queen Mab* Shelley asserts that all the atoms of the universe were once living man, even the 'unbodied' voices of his later poems are founded in the physical. In his writing, Shelley presents speech as moving beyond and between bodies, but it is still materially figured and relies on an understanding of the universe in

[18] John Abernethy, *An Enquiry into the Probability and Rationability of Mr. Hunter's Theory of Life* (London: Longman, 1814), 94; William Lawrence, *An Introduction to Comparative Anatomy and Physiology* (London: J. Callow, 1816), 172.

[19] It Important to note that Lawrence denied these claims, although, as I have already argued, the association of materialism with republicanism meant that few writers in Britain felt it safe to openly avow materialist views, especially in moments of heightened political oppression such as the suspensions of Habeus Corpus in 1794 and 1817. See: William Lawrence, *Lectures on Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man* (London: J. Callow, 1819), 5-6; Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality*, 57. For use of the phrase modern sceptic see: Lawrence, *Lectures on Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man*, 5; Erasmus Darwin to Richard Gifford, 15 October, 1768, in *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 96.

[20] Significantly, Hunter's theory also forms the basis of Thelwall's discussion of life in *Animal Vitality*.

which body and extracorporeal environment are connected and respondent in and through their shared materiality.

While Shelley's engagement with ideas about communication and the voice has often been noted, the subject of speech itself, as distinct from writing and song, or the much broader categories of language or sound, has received surprisingly little attention. Criticism on the verbal and vocal aspects of Shelley's work has tended to focus either on language theory, as in William Keach's *Shelley's Style* and Stuart Peterfreund's *Shelley Among Others,* or on the particular role of the voice in and as music, which need not necessarily be articulate, as can be seen in the work of Jessica K. Quillin and Paul Vatalaro.[21] One Shelley text in which spoken language has been analysed in more detail is *Prometheus Unbound*, with Leighton and, later, Karen Weisman describing the lyrical drama as 'a drama about revolutionary speech' and 'an extended meditation on voice, language, and the peculiarities of communication' respectively.[22] Both critics go on characterise the spoken voices of *Prometheus Unbound* as essentially immaterial, abstract, and even inaudible mental phenomena. My aim, however, is to reassess Shelley's voices, in *Prometheus Unbound* and elsewhere in his writing, to present an alternative reading of speech in Shelley, as I have done throughout this thesis, as physiological and physical action.

So far, this thesis has explored some of the ways in which materialism, speech, and a materialist approach to the speaking body are deeply connected with political activism. When it comes to Shelley's politics, however, criticism is split between interpretations of his political writing as (to use Matthew Arnold's much quoted description of Shelley)

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[21] William Keach, *Shelley's Style* (New York: Methuen, 1984); Stuart Peterfreund, *Shelley Among Others: The Play of Intertext and the Idea of Language* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Jessica K. Quillin, 'Shelley and Music', in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Michael O'Neill and Anthony Howe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Paul A. Vatalaro, *Shelley's Music: Fantasy, Authority, and the Object Voice* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

[22] Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime*, 97; Karen A. Weisman, *Imageless Truths: Shelley's Poetic Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 83.

'ineffectual', and work which seeks to demonstrate a more direct and effective political engagement.[23] Debates over Shelleyan politics have, especially in recent years, often been focussed on *The Mask of Anarchy*, with commentators such as Susan Wolfson, Matthew C. Borushko, and Philip Connell reading the poem as coming dangerously close to passivism in its apparent calls for pacifist, non-violent protest, while others, including Seth T. Reno, maintain that the poem should be understood as an endorsement of active revolution.[24] Although this chapter does not aim to deny the importance of non-violence for Shelley, I suggest that Shelley's materialist approach to the speaking body, which allows him to present speech as action in and of itself, supports a radical, active, interpretation of his political writing. This thesis, then, seeks to present a re-reading of Shelley's poetry, which suggests that he constructs a materialist poetry of speech in his work and argues that to read Shelley's voices and his belief in the social power of poetry as wholly intellectual, abstract, immaterial, or passive is to overlook the importance, and the consequence, of speech as a physical action for Shelley.

'Uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound': Poetry as Speech in *A Defence of Poetry*

In 1821 Shelley began writing what we might call his manifesto on the power and purpose of poetry, *A Defence of Poetry*, the ideas of which, this chapter will argue, underpin much

[23] Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism Second Series* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1888), 252.

[24] Susan Wolfson, '"Romantic Ideology" and the Values of Aesthetic Form', in *Aesthetics and Ideology,* ed. George Levine (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Susan Wolfson, 'Popular Songs and Ballads: Writing the "Unwritten Story" in 1819', in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Michael O'Neill and Anthony Howe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Matthew C. Borushko, 'Violence and Nonviolence in Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy*', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 59 (2010); Philip Connell '"A voice from over the Sea": Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy*, Peterloo, and the English Radical Press', *The Review of English Studies* 70, no. 296 (September 2019); Seth T. Reno, 'The Violence of Form in Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy*', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 62 (2013).

of his work of the previous decade. In this chapter, I want to suggest that Shelley characterises poetry as active and physical in *A Defence* and that in doing so draws comparisons between poetry and speech which go beyond metaphor to suggest that poetry and spoken language are functions of the same materialist system. Throughout *A Defence,* Shelley's concepts of imagination and 'the poetical faculty', are repeatedly understood through reference to ideas about language, action, and the relationship between the two, as he argues both that 'language itself is poetry' and that poetry is 'the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature'.[25] What's more, Shelley's valorisation of poetry is, as has been well noted, decidedly political. Scrivener, for example, emphasises that 'as a document in the history of aesthetics, the *Defence* has long been considered a major text, but it also announces a social and political aesthetic'.[26] It is Shelley's focus on physiology – and the speaking body in particular – I would argue, which acts as a link between the 'aesthetic' and the 'political', as Shelley theorises both as motions of the human body in relation to its environment. Bringing to mind Yasmin Solomonescu's assessment of Thelwall's 'materialist understanding of the imagination as a faculty rooted in embodied sense perception', Ruston observes that in the *Defence*, Shelley too uses 'a number of physiological and anatomical metaphors […] to describe and define poetry and the imagination'.[27] There is a striking affinity between Shelley's treatment of embodied imagination, which, I would again argue, goes beyond mere metaphor, and Thelwall's elocutionary work, which blends speech and poetry, anatomy and aesthetics, in a universal materialist system. Like Thelwall's speakers, Shelley's poets are respondent, active, and vocal bodies which are attuned, but not passively subject, to external influence.

[25] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 676, 679.

[26] Scrivener, *Radical Shelley,* 248.

[27] Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination*, 7; Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality*, 164.

And, like Thelwall's approach to elocution, Shelley's poetic theory is applicable far beyond the narrow category of 'literature' or even 'arts', as he rejects disciplinary boundaries in his expansive definition of what makes a poet, which includes 'the institutors of laws and the founders of civil society'.[28] When Shelley argues that 'all the authors of revolutions in opinion are not only necessarily poets as they are inventors, […] but as their periods are harmonious and rhythmical, and contain in themselves the elements of verse; being the echo of the eternal music', he breaks down any distinction between aesthetics, politics, and physical and physiological sciences.[29] Here, Shelley draws a direct comparison between poets and revolutionary actors, and understands both as being characterised by the corresponding movements of bodies and the universe, connecting everything, as I will demonstrate, through a materialist conception of universal harmony or rhythm. Thus, it is the enduring materialism of Shelley's thought, even as late as the *Defence*, I argue, which enables his poetry to transcend discipline, allowing poets to become legislators.

The language of anatomy plays a significant role in the *Defence*, and comparisons with physiology do not just provide Shelley with a way to write about poetic composition, but also suggest a way of thinking about poetry which explicitly locates imagination in the body. Although Shelley begins the essay with the assertion that 'reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance', his identification of the poetic imagination with spirit does not necessarily imply a straightforward understanding of poetry as immaterial and extracorporeal in origin.[30] As Shelley's analogy likens reason to both 'the body' and 'the shadow' and imagination to 'the spirit' and 'the substance', he rejects the strict classification of body as material and spirit

[28] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 677.

[29] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry,* 679.

[30] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 675.

as immaterial. Moreover, as he describes imagination as a spirit which is not only 'substance', but 'agent', he suggests a belief in the theory of active matter as proposed by thinkers like Darwin and Joseph Priestley.[31] Shelley's concern with materialist physiology continues as the essay develops, as he argues that a poet is 'more delicately organized than other men', demonstrating what Timothy Clark describes as his 'notion of the poet as a distinct physiological type'.[32] Here, as Shelley positions poetry as a function of a specifically arranged body, he physicalises imaginative poetic composition and suggests that poetry can be understood, in the same way as materialist conceptions of life or mind, as dependent on susceptible, organised matter.

This model of embodied imagination, in which poetry is produced by and has the capacity to act physically upon the body, provides the foundation of the *Defence*'s central claim – that poetry is capable of having tangible effects on the world. When Shelley contends that 'poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb', he not only makes the case that poetry can impact the body, but claims that the body, once affected by poetry can influence human society. As Shelley writes, 'the great instrument of moral good is the imagination'.[33] Shelley's use of the phrase 'in the same manner', I would argue, does not suggest merely a figurative connection between the exercise of limbs and morals but a more literal correspondence between the way each operates. Even before the reference to strengthening limbs, Shelley describes 'the moral nature of man' in distinctly anatomical language. In his use of the word 'organ', Shelley presents morality as a physical and locatable part of the body, while the term 'faculty', especially in conjunction with 'organ',

[31] See chapter one for a discussion of Priestley's and Darwin's theories of active matter.

[32] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 699-700; Timothy Clark, *Embodying Revolution: The Figure of the Poet in Shelley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 47.

[33] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 682.

carries similarly physiological connotations. Although the word can be used in a general sense to mean any power or capacity it may also suggest 'an inherent power or property of the body or of one of its organs; a physical capability or function', with *Rees's Cyclopaedia* referencing the 'digestive faculty in the stomach' and the 'motive faculty in the nerves' in its definition of the term.[34] Shelley's concept of a poetically strengthened moral faculty (which he subsequently refers to as the 'poetical faculty') thus characterises poetry as a physical stimulus.

Yet Shelley's association of poetry with bodily systems like the 'motive faculty in the nerves' goes beyond the use of this particular term. Across the essay, Shelley emphasises that one of the primary roles of poetry is to communicate 'pleasure', and he again does so with reference to physiology. For example, Shelley's 'delicately organised poet' is also more 'sensible to pain and pleasure', while poetry itself can be understood as 'motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them'.[35] As Shelley repeatedly invokes concepts of sensation, motion, impression, and excitement to describe poetry he engages with the idea, most notably put forward by David Hartley, that external sensations and mental 'impressions' could both lead to physical excitement of the nerves. In *Observations on Man*, which Shelley read and annotated, Hartley argues that 'the subtle motions excited in the sensory Nerves, and medullary Substance of the Brain, during Sensation and intellectual Perception, must, of whatever Kind they be, pass into the motory Nerves'.[36] In the *Defence,* then, Shelley picks up Hartley's language of excited

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[34] 'faculty, n.', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed Aug 6, 2020, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/67547?redirectedFrom=faculty; Abraham Rees ed., *The Cyclopædia;*
or, universal dictionary of arts, sciences, and literature (London: Longman, 1819), s.v. 'Faculty'.

[35] Shelley*, A Defence of Poetry*, 700, 675.

[36] Shelley requested a copy of Hartley's *Observations on Man* from Thomas Hookham in 1812 and volume 1 of this book, including Shelley's manuscript annotations survives in the Pforzheimer Collection of the New York Public Library. See Percy Bysshe Shelley to [Thomas Hookham], 29 July, 1812, in *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Vol. 1: Shelley in England,* ed. Frederick L. Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 319; Ann Wroe, 'Shelley's Good Vibrations: His Marginal Notes to

motions and applies it to poetic production, to create a paradigm of material, embodied poetry. Moreover, Hartley's influence also provides a model by which feeling (sensation, pleasure, pain) and mental phenomena such as 'perception' or 'imagination' (terms which Shelley equates in the opening paragraph of the *Defence*) become action through internal bodily process. As Shelley embodies imagination, he thus suggests the means by which the seemingly abstract or purely aesthetic concept of 'poetry' can become action.

Yet despite these gestures towards Priestleyan or Darwinian theories of active matter and Hartleian sensation, Shelley's *Defence* has often lent itself to readings of the poet as passively inspired subject as a result of its insistence that poetry acts 'beyond and above consciousness'.[37] As this thesis has already demonstrated however, arguments which make the case for the importance of the unconscious are not always incompatible with materialism and do not necessarily undermine individual agency. In her discussion of Thelwall's elocutionary writing, Thompson examines the prevalence of the image of the Aeolian lyre in Romantic writing, suggesting that in the majority of applications, including Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind':

> the harp is a symbol of random, unconscious inspiration in which the recipient (instrument, audience, poet, or reader) is merely a passive vessel for an outside force […] In Thelwall's anatomical formulation, however the perceptive organ is not simply a passive recipient of external impulses but an active, co-creating, co-responding instrument in turn.[38]

Yet, I would argue that the difference between Shelley's and Thelwall's treatments of the harp is not as stark as this characterisation suggests. When Shelley revisits the lyre in the *Defence,* he makes it clear that an inspired human (or animal) is not a 'passive vessel' but

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Hartley's Observations on Man', *The Wordsworth Circle* 41, no. 1 (2010): 36–41; David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, His Expectations*, vol. 1 (London: James Leake and Wm. Frederick, 1749), 86.

[37] Shelley*, A Defence of Poetry*, 680.

[38] Thompson, 'Re-Sounding Romanticism', 29.

something more akin to what Thompson describes as Thelwall's 'active, co-creating, co-responding instrument'. Shelley writes:

> there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them.[39]

In this passage, as Shelley takes reference points from both physiology and music, he emphasises the active role of the body in the production of inspired poetry. The poet may be stimulated by external influences but they do not merely echo them. The stimuli or 'impressions' which the poet receives instead spark a process of 'internal adjustment' within the body, enacting a model in which the poet does not simply relay outside influence, but receives and responds, harmonizing or 'co-responding' through a process in which the body actively attunes itself to the world around it. However, although the composition of poetry is by no means entirely passive for Shelley, it 'has no necessary connection with consciousness or will' and 'is not subject to the control of the active powers of the mind'. [40] As Thelwall's work, from the Chaunticlere tales to his elocutionary writings, demonstrates though, unconscious reaction to stimuli does not equate with external control from physical environmental forces or social systems of governance. Shelley acknowledges the importance of this distinction himself at the end of the *Defence* when he casts poets as 'the influence which is moved not, but moves'.[41] Poetry, Shelley thus suggests, cannot be either commanded by internal will or moved by external force, but is rather the unconscious yet autonomous response of organised and susceptible bodies to outside impressions.

[39] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 675.

[40] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 699.

[41] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 701.

Throughout the *Defence*, Shelley's materialist and embodied depiction of the poet draws close connections between poetry and language, voice, or speech. For example, it is through comparison with the vocal that he illustrates the harmonizing principle of poetry. Shelley continues his passage on the lyre by noting that 'it is as if the lyre could accommodate its chords to the motions of that which strikes them, in a determined proportion of sound; even as the musician can accommodate his voice to the sound of the lyre'.[42] And as the essay continues, it becomes clear that Shelley is not just suggesting that the imagination and the voice act similarly, but also that poetry and spoken language are both part of the same system. Shelley's analogy between poetry and speech continues through the opening paragraphs of the *Defence* as he discusses how:

> a child at play by itself will express its delight by its voice and motions; and every inflexion of tone and every gesture will bear exact relation to a corresponding antitype in the pleasurable impressions which awakened it; it will be the reflected image of that impression; and as the lyre trembles and sounds after the wind has died away; so the child seeks, by prolonging in its voice and motions the duration of the effect, to prolong also a consciousness of the cause.[43]

Shelley uses speech development here to track the development of the 'poetical faculty', arguing that both can essentially be understood as expression 'awakened' by impression. Moreover, as Shelley makes a subtle move from claiming that the lyre is like the voice, to claiming that the speaking body is like the lyre he shifts the focus of the comparison from the instrument as a medium of poetry to the body as a medium of spoken language, further breaking down the divide between poetry and voice. By the end of the next paragraph the distinction disappears entirely as Shelley argues that 'every original language' (i.e. languages in their initial spoken form) 'is in itself the chaos of a cyclic poem' and that 'in the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language

[42] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 675.

[43] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 675.

itself is poetry'.[44] Like Thelwall before him then, Shelley considers poetry as much more than an aesthetic object or abstract theory – it is a form of physical reaction to the material world, cognate with speech in its capacity to respond to stimuli through communicative bodily action.

As Jessica K. Quillin notes, Shelley often links speech and poetry through the intermediary category of music. Commenting on Shelley's assertion in the *Defence* that:

> the language of poets has ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its influence, than the words themselves[45]

Quillin observes how 'utilizing the idea of the common origin of speech and song that was popularized in part by Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, Shelley defines language as inescapably musical' and that this 'musico-poetic conception of language […] can inspire and effect change'.[46] However, as Shelley writes 'poets, or those who imagine and express this indestructible order, are not only the authors of language and of music' and, as we have seen, Shelley does not approach poetry exclusively as part of the category of fine arts, but considers it to be fundamentally tied to the sciences of life, anatomy, and the material world.[47] The 'uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound' which Shelley considers essential to effectively communicative poetry does not just, then, suggest a concern with the aesthetic rhythms of music, but with the physical and physiological rhythms of animate bodies and the inanimate universe. In this way, Shelley's characterisation of poetry as sound which follows a regular and respondent or harmonious rhythm is remarkably similar to Thelwall's multidisciplinary theory of rhythmus, which also draws on both music and

[44] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 676.

[45] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 678.

[46] Quillin, 'Shelley and Music', 536.

[47] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 677.

physiology to develop a theory of 'action and re-action […] throb and remission' which underpins everything from the pendulum, to speech, to poetry.[48] And like Thelwall, Shelley suggests that this idea of 'harmonious recurrence' is not unique to poetry, but constitutes a law of nature, when he claims:

> that what is called poetry, in a restricted sense, has a common source with all other forms of order and of beauty, according to which the materials of human life are susceptible of being arranged, and which is poetry in an universal sense.[49]

As Shelley equates 'order and beauty' with the arrangement or organisation of the 'materials of human life', he presents a distinctly materialist picture of both poetry (in the 'restricted sense' of formal literary composition) and life, which can also be considered poetry in the 'universal sense' of a function of organised, respondent matter. It is this materialist, discipline defying understanding of poetry, which takes its cues from models of speech-production, I would argue, which then allows Shelley to present poetry as an effective agent of social and political change. Shelley describes poetry in the *Defence* as 'the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature', and as the 'principle by which a series of actions of the external universe and of intelligent and ethical beings is calculated to excite the sympathy of succeeding generations of mankind', suggesting that the poet does not just respond to external impressions, but creates further actions which impress upon future audiences, thus continuing a cycle of respondent action.[50]

For Shelley, then poetry is not a product of culture, taste, or aesthetics (although it can influence these things), but is founded in the material body and, as a result has the power to affect the extracorporeal world. Peterfreund has argued that 'for Shelley, poetry

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[48] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 24.

[49] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 700.

[50] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 679, 692.

is a species of linguistic master text that constructs the world artistically, intellectually, and socially'.[51] Yet, it is the role of the body in the production of utterance – poetry's resemblance to speech, rather than text – which is central to Shelley's figuring of poetry as a force for change, which allows him to blur the boundaries between art and science, aesthetics and politics, the internal and the external, and, as this chapter will go on to argue, underpins his poems themselves.

'But from my lips the unwilling accents start': Unconscious Utterance in 'Julian and Maddalo'

While Shelley's engagement with the physical body allows him to figure poetry as spoken language and vice versa in *A Defence of Poetry*, a similar concern with the composition of body and mind can be found in 'Julian and Maddalo', written between 1819 and 1820 and first published posthumously in 1824. The poem contains one of the most clearly physicalised representations of speech in Shelley's writing and, pre-empting his claim in the *Defence* that language in its most 'original' form is poetry, Shelley presents an image of the speaker as poet. 'Julian and Maddalo' is a poem about speech, as Shelley makes apparent in his subtitle, 'A Conversation'. Yet the eponymous Julian and Maddalo, whose dialogue on the subject of 'freewill and destiny' begins the poem, are not the text's only speakers.[52] As the poem continues, the reasoned conversation of the two debaters gives way to the 'wild talk' of the figure known as the 'maniac'.[53] The discussion of whether humankind has agency or is, as Maddalo suggests, a 'passive thing', is sustained throughout the poem and, as I will go on to argue, becomes dramatised through the maniac's dual role as speaker and

[51] Peterfreund, *Shelley Among Others,* 2.

[52] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation', in *The Poems of Shelley,* vol. 2, ed. Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews (Harlow: Longman, 2000), line 42.

[53] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', line 200.

poet.[54] In his depiction of the maniac, Shelley positions speech as the outward expression of internal mental state, and physicalises both speech and mind as he describes them through reference to interactions between brain, nerves, and lips. And, in thus presenting mind and body as connected, I argue, Shelley again uses a materialist approach to physiology which allows him to explore forms of utterance which are both physical and spontaneous. Several critics have suggested that Shelley's identification of the maniac's 'unwilling' and largely incomprehensible utterances with poetry reveals an uneasiness on Shelley's part about the communicative power of speech-poetry. For example, Timothy Clark notes that the maniac's speech 'is a poetry of intermittent bursts, from a source beyond voluntary control', while Simon Bainbridge argues that 'as a poet, the Maniac has lost touch with both any potential audience or any voice other than his own'.[55] In this chapter, however, I will consider how the idea, present in 'Julian and Maddalo' and throughout Shelley's writing, that the communicative power of voice is not only intellectual, but can be felt as a physical form of action or movement, challenges readings of Shelley's poems as depicting what Leighton describes as an 'awareness of the imaginative failure in the very act of speaking', or, in other words, the inefficacy of the voice as a medium for communicating poetry.[56] In 'Julian and Maddalo', speech-poetry has the power to affect its listeners not, or not just, through the words it conveys, but through the physical force of the very act of utterance.

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[54] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', line 161. For the maniac's role as a poet figure see: Kelvin Everest, 'Shelley's Doubles: An Approach to Julian and Maddalo', in *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983), 85; Anthony Howe, 'Shelley's "Familiar Style": *Rosalind and Helen*, *Julian and Maddalo*, *and Letter to Maria Gisborne*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Michael O'Neill and Anthony Howe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 322.

[55] Simon Bainbridge, '"Other Voices Speak": The Poetic Conversations of Byron and Shelley', *in A Companion to Romantic Poetry,* ed. Charles Mahoney (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 201.

[56] Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime,* 110.

Although the poetic voice is taken over by the maniac's monologue in the second half of the poem, as readers, we encounter his voice as sound and action long before Shelley reveals the content of the man's speech. Initially Julian, and the reader, experience the maniac's voice as wordless sound. As Julian and Maddalo approach the asylum, Shelley writes:

> We disembarked. The clap of tortured hands,
> Fierce yells and howlings and lamentings keen
> And laughter where complaint had merrier been,
> Moans, shrieks and curses and blaspheming prayers
> Accosted us. We climbed the oozy stairs
> Into an old court-yard. I heard on high
> Then, fragments of most touching melody,
> But looking up saw not the singer there.[57]

Here, Shelley combines the vocal and the physical, as he describes forms of utterance which rely not on coherent words, but on sound and touch. In beginning with 'the clap of tortured hands', Shelley blurs the distinction between hearing and feeling, as the word 'clap' suggests the physical action of striking with the hand (either against one's own hand or someone else's), and the noise made by such an action. While the subsequent 'yells', 'moans' and 'shrieks' initially encourage us to read this 'clap' as primarily referring to sound, the verb 'accosted' reminds us of the action's physical dimensions and, at the same time, physicalises the range of vocalisations, which also 'accosted' Julian and Maddalo with the same force. This parallel that Shelley draws between the impact of hands and sounds then allows him to emphasise the potentially overlooked metaphor in the words 'touching melody', reimbuing the phrase with connotations of physical contact.

Shelley thus introduces the idea of voice as physical movement. He goes on to describe the maniac's utterances, which have changed from song to speech, in more detail a few lines later. He writes:

> His head was leaning on a music book
> And he was muttering, and his lean limbs shook;

[57] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', lines 215-222.

His lips were pressed against a folded leaf
In hue too beautiful for health, and grief
Smiled in their motions as they lay apart –
As one who wrought from his own fervid heart
The eloquence of passion, soon he raised
His sad meek face and eyes lustrous and glazed
And spoke – […][58]

Shelley draws an association between the action of limbs and lips in these lines, emphasised by the repeated syntax of 'and he was muttering, and his lean limbs shook'. Speech is presented purely as movement in the beginning of this passage as it is described in terms of 'motions' of the lips which enact, rather than tell, the maniac's distressed mental state. It is the physical action of speech, not its linguistic content which thus communicates 'the eloquence of passion'. Furthermore, even when the maniac's utterances become distinct to Julian and Maddalo, as he moves from muttering to more explicitly speaking – the poem continues to withhold the maniac's words themselves from the reader, instead focussing still on the communicative power of the bodily aspects of speech. We read:

[…] then his speech
Was lost in grief, and then his words came each
Unmodulated, cold, expressionless, -
But that from one jarred accent you might guess
It was despair made them so uniform[59]

Shelley's description of grief and despair leading to 'unmodulated' (i.e. without variation of tone or pitch) speech interspersed with 'jarred accent[s]' recalls Thelwall's theory that 'mental causes' could disrupt speech rhythms. Unlike Thelwall however, Shelley suggests there is communicative value even in disordered speech, as physiologically produced features of speech like the presence or absence of rhythm and modulation can convey mental and emotional states more powerfully than language alone. The force of the

[58] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', lines 278-286.

[59] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', lines 290-294.

maniac's non-normative, physicalised speech becomes clear when comparing Julian's relation of the maniac's words to his retelling of his conversation with Maddalo. In contrast to the maniac's voice, which is clearly located in the speech organs (his lips are referred to numerous times throughout the poem), Julian and Maddalo's dialogue appears to bypass speech altogether, as Shelley writes that their thoughts 'lingered not, / But flew from brain to brain'.[60] Yet despite the ease with which Julian and Maddalo apparently communicate, Julian cannot reproduce the conversation accurately. He admits: 'I recall / The sense of what he said, although I mar / The force of his expressions'.[61] By comparison, Julian alleges to be able to replicate the maniac's speech exactly, despite the obscurity of its meaning and the inconsistency of its delivery. He claims: 'I yet remember what he said / Distinctly: such impression his words made'.[62] In 'Julian and Maddalo', then, the impression or effect and impressiveness or force of spoken language, and as I will go on to argue speech-poetry, is not tied to the content of an utterance, but to its expression though the movement of the body.

While Thelwall suggests that harmonious, easily comprehended, and as a result relatively normative, speech requires a loosening of the grasp of individual will on the voice, for Shelley's maniac, spontaneous utterance has no such regularising effect on speech. Yet, as we have seen, vocal irregularity does not undermine the effectiveness of speech for Shelley in 'Julian and Maddalo' and so he is similarly able to make the case against overreliance on the will. Although Shelley, through Julian, argues against Maddalo's characterisation of man as a 'passive thing', he also suggests that self-determination, while extant, can often be detrimental. He argues: 'it is our will / That thus enchains us to

[60] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', lines 29-30.

[61] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', lines 130-132.

[62] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', lines 298-299.

permitted ill'.[63] With this in mind it's significant that the maniac's impressive speech takes the form of 'unwilling accents'.[64] Although the maniac's reluctance to speak stems from his sense that words are 'vain', Shelley's own belief in the power of unconsciously produced poetry, the evidence of which we have seen in his treatment of the will in *Defence of Poetry*, again suggests that Shelley might consider this form of spontaneous utterance as something desirable and capable of enacting change on the world beyond the speaker.

The idea that speech which is both unwilled and incoherent can impact society recurs frequently in Shelley's writing, from the 'harmonious madness' with which the poet aspires to speak 'Till the world is wrought / To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not' in 'To a Skylark', to his claim in the *Defence* that poets are 'the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire'.[65] And in 'Julian and Maddalo', the maniac's words are significantly less 'vain' or ineffectual than he imagines. Anthony Howe observes the dominating role that the maniac's voice plays within the poem, arguing that 'any claim for a philosophical outcome to the poem, moreover, needs to account for the presence of the Maniac, whose defining psychological abnormality, and its compelling expression, again works to displace the poem's organizing "conversation" (Julian confesses that in the latter's presence "our argument was quite forgot")'.[66] It is true that it is not reasoned conversation, but the maniac's voice, which prevails within the poem, and it is significant that such displacement, while undermining the communicative power of the framing conversation, does not equate to a wholesale failure of spoken communication. Rather, Shelley, in leaving Julian and Maddalo's conversation unresolved, offers speech-poetry as the more

[63] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', lines 170-171.

[64] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', line 475.

[65] Shelley, 'To a Sky-Lark', lines 104, 39-40; Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 701.

[66] Howe, 'Shelley's "Familiar Style"', 322.

effective or 'compelling' form of utterance. It is Julian who cannot, in fact, communicate as well as the Maniac, despite his educated command of language, as the poem ends with Julian failing to or refusing to relate the end of the story and so failing to transmit its impact to the wider world leading to the final lines: 'I urged and questioned still, she told me how / All happened – but the cold world shall not know'.[67] By contrast the maniac's words have a lasting impact on Julian. He admits that he 'never was impressed so much' as by the maniac's clearly effective and affective speech.[68]

Towards the end of the poem, Shelley associates this sort of spontaneous and physical speech with poetic utterance in a way that seems to anticipate the model of poetic composition he sets out in the *Defence*. Describing the maniac's speech, he writes: 'the wild language of his grief was high / Such as in measure were called poetry'.[69] In these lines, as Shelley draws comparisons between the maniac's 'wild' speech which arises, unwilled, in response to the stimulus of his grief, he prefigures his claim in the *Defence* that poetry can be understood as a kind of instinctual and responsive utterance which has 'no necessary connection with consciousness or will'.[70] It is this similarity between Shelley's treatment of speech and poetry in 'Julian and Maddalo' and in the *Defence*, I would argue, which provides the strongest evidence for reading the maniac's speech as an example of successful, rather than failed poetic communication. Bainbridge suggests that 'as a poet, the Maniac has lost touch with […] any potential audience'.[71] Yet this assumes that poetry should resemble the sort of conversational speech which begins the poem – that it should

[67] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', lines 616-617.

[68] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', line 517.

[69] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', lines 541-542.

[70] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 699.

[71] Bainbridge, '"Other Voices Speak"', 201.

be consciously uttered by a poet who is aware of their audience and who can be satisfied that that audience has received and understood the poet's words through a similarly conscious process. While the maniac himself considers his grief 'incommunicable', it is significant that he is literally unaware of his audience – Julian and Maddalo are described as 'stealing his accents from the envious wind unseen'.[72] The maniac is in fact communicating, then, albeit unknowingly. And, as Shelley makes explicit in the *Defence*, self-awareness, on the part of the speaker or the audience, is neither a necessary or indeed a desirable feature of socially effective poetry. Discussing the beneficial effects of poetry's association with 'pleasure' (which for Shelley, includes 'sorrow, terror, anguish, despair'), he writes that 'a Poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why'.[73] This passage is strikingly similar to Julian and Maddalo's encounter with the maniac, whose monologue is preceded by his unseen 'touching melody', suggesting that in 'Julian and Maddalo', too, the poet need not speak either directly or comprehensibly to their listeners to have an impact on them.

William Keach summarises the poem's movement from conversational to poetic utterance, in its shift in focus from Julian and Maddalo to the maniac, writing that 'Shelley sets the poem's prevailing gentlemanly idiom against itself before subjecting it to passions that contort it beyond intelligibility, and yet produce a deeply compelling "melody."'[74] We might, then, consider the key question of 'Julian and Maddalo' to be whether the purpose of poetry is to be 'intelligible' or to be 'compelling'. Through analysing the poem itself and

[72] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', lines 298-299.

[73] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 680.

[74] William Keach, *Arbitrary Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 88.

the way that Shelley picks up and develops the ideas within it in the *Defence,* I have suggested that Shelley considers impressiveness – the capacity to move and affect listeners physically and emotionally – to be a far more important element of poetry's communicative power than intelligibility. As Shelley highlights the way that the voice can be understood as a form of physical action or movement rather than simply an intangible medium for similarly immaterial ideas, he creates an expansive definition of communication which acknowledges the potential force of spoken utterance outside of what might be considered normative speech. Thus the poem may, in fact, not be one about the failure of poetry or spoken language, but about the capacity of poetry or, to use the terminology of the *Defence,* 'the expression of the Imagination', to communicate more than words and of the way that speech-poetry is both composed, and acts upon its audience, in ways that are physical and unconscious.[75] Moreover, as analysis *of Prometheus Unbound* will show, Shelley's physicalised model of vocal poetic utterance has the potential to influence not only human society, but also the non-human world.

'The measure of the universe': Universal Harmony in *Prometheus Unbound*

Shelley's 'Lyrical Drama' *Prometheus Unbound* is full of voices, which emanate from an extraordinary range of speakers, from aerial and (seemingly) immaterial spirits, to the physical yet 'tongueless' mountains of the 'inorganic' Earth, to the corporeal, yet immortal Prometheus.[76] Despite the fact that the drama was not designed for performance, I argue that the voices of *Prometheus Unbound* are nevertheless perceptible as Shelley positions speech as physical, and potentially political, action. Leighton has argued that 'revolutionary

[75] Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 675.

[76] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 1.1.107, 1.1.135.

action in this work is an act of mind, not of hand, and essentially it is an act of the imagination'.[77] Yet, we have already seen some of the ways in which Shelley figures imagination and poetry as embodied through their connection to spoken utterance in both 'Julian and Maddalo' and the *Defence.* This vocal, physical understanding of poetry as an act not just of mind but of tongue, I want to suggest, is similarly fundamental to the world-altering action of *Prometheus Unbound*. Critics have often come to the conclusion that since *Prometheus Unbound* was not written to be performed formally on stage, but to be read, and consequently visualised in the readers' minds, the voices should be treated as silent mental phenomena. Weisman, for example, suggests that:

> The Drama that cannot be publicly performed also calls emphatic attention to the absence of *heard* voices. Since *Prometheus Unbound* exploits the idea of speech more than any other form of communication, and since audible speech is necessarily excluded from lyrical, closet drama, the poem exposes the virtual impossibility of its own mode of articulation.[78]

Interpretations such as this, however, assume that the poem is being read silently. Abigail Williams has argued that although silent reading became increasingly widespread over the course of the eighteenth century, the simultaneous 'craze for elocution' encouraged consumers of literature to read aloud.[79] As Lucy Newlyn has argued, and as the success of Thelwall's elocutionary career demonstrates, this practice continued into the Romantic era.[80] And there is significant evidence for the prevalence of social recitation of poetry within the Shelley circle in particular. Mary Shelley's journals, for example, record over two hundred occasions on which she, Percy Shelley or Claire Clairmont read aloud to one

[77] Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime*, 87.

[78] Weisman, *Imageless Truths*, 86.

[79] Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 25.

[80] Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17-18.

another between 1814 and 1822.[81] Considering this, it seems probable that Percy Shelley would have envisaged at least some of his readers speaking the words of the lyrical drama aloud.

The case for Shelley imagining the voices of *Prometheus Unbound* becoming audible through the mouths of his readers is supported further by the fact that the poem draws heavily on John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a poem which was notably not written, but dictated, owing to Milton's blindness.[82] While Shelley's use of Milton has been much discussed, the significance of *Paradise Lost's* oral composition and the influence of this aspect of the poem on Shelley's writing has been comparatively overlooked.[83] It is worth noting that for Thelwall, this sense of orality was essential to the appreciation of Milton's writing and he repeatedly cites *Paradise Lost* as evidence for the importance of reading poetry aloud, writing: 'Give to the verses of Milton (what all verses ought to have) the easy flow of a spontaneous and oratorical utterance – the objections advanced by silent, inapprehensive, finger-counting monastics, will disappear'.[84] And Shelley seems to have shared this sense of *Paradise Lost* as a text to be read not only with the eyes and mind, but with the lips. During 1818 and 1819, the years in which he was writing *Prometheus Unbound*, Mary Shelley records the pair reading both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* aloud on multiple occasions.[85] Shelley's treatment of *Paradise Lost* as a spoken text thus

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[81] Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814–1844*, vol. 1, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[82] In particular, according to Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews, there are 'dense Miltonic echoes throughout Prometheus's opening speech'. Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews ed., *The Poems of Shelley*, vol. 2 (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 447n.

[83] For Shelley's engagement with Milton see: Lucy Newlyn, *Paradise Lost, and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Jonathon Shears, *The Romantic Legacy of Paradise Lost: Reading Against the Grain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Madeleine Callaghan, 'Shelley and Milton', in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Michael O'Neill and Anthony Howe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[84] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 164-165.

[85] Shelley, *Journals*, vol. 1, 146-147, 258, 294-295, 319-320.

demonstrates a belief in the value of voicing poetry and suggests the extent to which thinking about poetry orally influenced his own Miltonic project of *Prometheus Unbound.* Here I want to draw new attention to the role of the speaking body in *Prometheus Unbound*. It is not only real-world readers, as suggested above, but also the listeners within the poem, who may experience the drama's voices more audibly and corporeally than has sometimes been supposed. I argue that the prevalence of these instances of embodied speech within the poem reveals how Shelley considers vocally figured poetry to be an act of tongue, lips, breath, and brain, which, in its physicality, has the ability to materially affect both the environment and human society.

For Shelley, speech in *Prometheus Unbound* cannot be produced without reference to the body but such speech is frequently shown to move beyond the body, impacting and reverberating within the material and spiritual environments, leading to a poem in which voices repeatedly appear to move between organic and corporeal speakers (i.e. living bodies) and inorganic and extra- or incorporeal figures (i.e. elements, spirits, and the dead).[86] This movement, however, is not straightforward. It is far from the easy communication between Julian and Maddalo, for example, in which thoughts fly 'from brain to brain' and criticism has unanimously emphasised the difficulty of effective communication within *Prometheus Unbound*.[87] Ruston suggests that the fraught communication between the immortal Prometheus, 'who knowest not the language of the dead' and the Earth and her elements who 'dare not speak like life' indicates that 'the

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[86] For Shelley the terms 'organic' and 'inorganic' appear to signal a particularly materialist distinction between living and non-living beings, in which life is understood as a property of specifically organised and functional body parts, i.e. organs. The *OED*, for example, cites *Prometheus Unbound* as one of two sources for its definition of 'inorganic' as 'not furnished with or acting by bodily or material organs'. 'inorganic, adj. and n.', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed Sept 29, 2020, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/96434?redirectedFrom=inorganic.

[87] See: Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality*; 119-121; Paul Hamilton, *Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2000), 50; Weisman, *Imageless Truths*, 82-87; Leighton*, Shelley and the Sublime*, 73-74.

world of *Prometheus Unbound* imagines distinct boundaries between the living and the dead, the organic and the inorganic, the immortal and the mortal'.[88] Shelley certainly sets a divide between organic and corporeal voices and inorganic and incorporeal ones in *Prometheus Unbound*. But, I would argue, this disjunction is specifically one of comprehension which, as we have seen again in 'Julian and Maddalo', does not necessarily equate with a failure of communication in Shelley's writing. Speech need not be consciously understood to communicate with and impact both society and the environment, living beings and the non-living world they inhabit. Instead, speech can be and is felt as physical force in *Prometheus Unbound*. Moreover, there is often slippage between the corporeal and the in- or extracorporeal in Shelley's descriptions of the physical qualities of the poem's ostensibly inorganic speakers. As Ruston notes, despite speaking the language of the dead, 'the world and its natural elements are figured as animate beings' and Shelley repeatedly refers to the material body in his presentation of living, speaking beings.[89] Spirits have tongues and the Earth, breath. In his depictions of these figures' speech, Shelley ascribes bodies to, and thus, as I will show, materialises, supposedly immaterial beings and draws comparisons between the mechanics of the speaking body and the interplay of the earth's physical elements, suggesting that both organic and inorganic matter follow the same universal laws. This materialising, and indeed materialist, treatment of speech, I argue, ensures that the voices of *Prometheus Unbound* are neither transient nor ineffectual, but instead supports a model of reaction, transmission, and reverberation which gives speech some of the permanence of writing and effectiveness of action. It is this model of poetic speech as long-lasting and far-reaching in its effects which is central to many of Shelley's claims, not only in *Prometheus Unbound*,

[88] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 1.1.38-40; Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality*, 121.

[89] Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality*, 121.

but in the *Defence* and, as I will go on to argue, 'The Mask of Anarchy', that words, specifically in the form of poetic utterance, can have social and political force.

In the preface to *Prometheus Unbound* we can see Shelley already formulating the ideas about materialist poetic production that he would go to develop in the *Defence*. His claim, for example, that 'a poet is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others; and of such external influences as excite and sustain these powers' anticipates his suggestion in the *Defence* that human productions, including poetry, are formed 'by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them'.[90] While Shelley refines and clarifies the materialism of his point in the *Defence*, as he develops his vague reference to 'internal powers' into the clearly physicalised actions of 'sounds' and 'motions', his characterisation of the poet in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound* is still decidedly materialist in its suggestion that poetry results from the modification of and response to external stimuli by the internal faculties of the human body. And this understanding of poetry goes on to influence Shelley's treatment of speech in *Prometheus Unbound* as a similar pattern of stimulus and response which underpins many of the utterances within the poem. Reading *Prometheus Unbound* as evidence not for Shelley's materialism, but his idealism, Stuart Curran, like Weisman, suggests that lyric mode changes the nature of the poem's claims to 'drama', as it suggests 'that all action is subordinate to the preliminary mental conceptions that spur it' and stresses 'the priority of lyric, as the province of psychological states, to drama, the action that ensues from them'.[91] However Shelley's approach to the vocal complicates this privileging of mental phenomena over action. We have already seen how Shelley, in his engagement with writers like Hartley and Darwin, considers thought as a form of bodily

[90] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, preface; Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 675.

[91] Stuart Curran, 'Lyrical Drama: Prometheus Unbound and Hellas', in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley,* ed. Michael O'Neill and Anthony Howe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 292.

motion, undermining any clear distinction between the mental and the physical. It is also worth noting that the term 'lyric' in its most literal sense means like or of the lyre. As this chapter has previously demonstrated, the lyre acts as a symbol of materialist vocal composition in the *Defence,* in which the body of the poet responds to external physical 'impressions'. This dimension of lyrical poetry disrupts the hierarchy of abstract thought engendering concrete action by emphasising the role that the material world and its motions have in stimulating 'psychological states'. Shelley thus places action and the body not as subordinate to thought, but intertwined and potentially inseparable from it.

This is illustrated in Act II of the poem in which Shelley discusses speech and its Promethean origins. He writes:

> He gave man speech, and speech created thought
> Which is the measure of the universe;
> And Science struck the thrones of Earth and Heaven,
> Which shook, but fell not; and the harmonious mind
> Poured itself forth in all-prophetic song[92]

In this passage, we discover that in Shelley's version of myth, it is not fire which Prometheus gives humankind, and which acts as catalyst for our development of knowledge, but speech. The Prometheus myth is in itself fundamentally materialist, and indeed republican, in Shelley's retelling and elsewhere in the literature of the period (for example Thelwall's description of his elocutionary system as a 'Promethean torch'). Prometheus does not simply bestow the power of thought, but rather provides physical stimulus (fire or speech) which prompts humans to access to the inherent 'birthrights of their being, knowledge, power' which have been denied to them by the tyrannical Jupiter.[93] Moreover, Everest and Matthews suggest, albeit sceptically, that this extract 'appears to imply an extreme materialism in prioritising the physical capacity for speech over thought

[92] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 2.4.72-76.

[93] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 2.4.39.

itself'.[94] Everest and Matthews go on to consider how reading 'speech created thought' as the noun phrase 'speech-created thought' might temper the materialism of the passage, by suggesting that thought was bestowed simultaneously with and is recreated externally by speech, rather than suggesting a process of cause and effect in which speech leads to thought. Yet in either reading it is clear that Shelley is positioning the speaking body as absolutely central to the human world and that speech and thought, knowledge and its expression as physical vocal action, cannot be separated. And speech, as the external manifestation of thought, gives knowledge the physical impetus to bring about revolutionary action for Shelley. He describes 'Science' striking and shaking 'the thrones of Earth and Heaven', in a line which brings to mind Darwin's call for 'patriot heroes' to 'shake the senate with the voice of truth', in *The Temple of Nature.*[95]

In light of such emphasis on physicality in the passage, we might also consider how Shelley's suggestion that 'speech created thought' is 'the measure of the universe' could be understood in a sense other than an idealist conception of thought as the entire extent of the universe. Shelley's subsequent references to the 'harmonious mind' expressed in 'all-prophetic song' suggest a model of poetic spoken utterance, which we have seen in both *Defence of Poetry* and 'Julian and Maddalo', in which mind, body, and the external world are attuned to one another and follow the same rhythmical patterns. Shelley's term 'measure' may thus be understood in the poetic sense, as a rhythm which characterises speech, thought, and the universe. External physical actions including speech are therefore not subordinate to internal thought processes; rather they have a reciprocal and cyclical relationship in *Prometheus Unbound*, and are intimately and inextricably connected

[94] Everest and Matthews, *The Poems of Shelley*, 561n.

[95] Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*; *or The Origin of Society* (London: J. Johnson, 1803), canto 4, lines 273-276.

through universal rhythmical principles, recalling Thelwall's theory of rhythmus or 'universal principle of action and re-action'.[96]

Shelley develops this idea of a uniting 'measure' in Act IV and aligns it with a republican vision of society when, following the overthrow of the tyrannical Jupiter by Demogorgon, 'A Voice' calls the Spirits and Hours to 'Unite!' and 'weave the mystic measure / Of music and dance and shapes of light'.[97] Here, the voice is literally calling for the Spirits to keep time as it asks them to coordinate with the Hours to create 'measure' and 'harmony'. Shelley then goes on to suggest that this rhythm applies to everything, from the mind to the body, from organic beings to the inorganic earth. The Spirits come from both thought and the physical world simultaneously. They 'come from the mind / Of human kind', yet Shelley's metaphors throughout the passage continually figure the mind and its phenomena first as the material environment and then as the physical body.[98] 'Wonder and bliss' are constructed from 'caverns and crystal palaces' and 'Wisdom' is located in 'azure isles', while 'Poesy' can be found in 'the temples high / Of Man's ear and eye'.[99] In this last example, spirit, body, and the non-living world are collapsed in a single word, as 'temples' first suggests a physical building housing a spiritual being, but, as the second line places these temples alongside the 'ear and eye', the sense of the word expands to include the anatomical definition of 'temples' as the part of the head between the eyes and the ears. It is through this concept of a 'measure of the universe', and, on a more practical level, through the potential of poetic language to unite seemingly conflicting images in a single metaphor, then that Shelley is able to unify the disparate worlds of the

[96]Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 24.

[97] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 4.1.77-80.

[98] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 4.1.93-94.

[99] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 4.1.100-113.

organic, the inorganic, and the corporeal. Furthermore, as the placement of this particular passage at the beginning of Act IV following the burial of 'the corpse of the King of Hours' (i.e. Jupiter), emphasises, Shelley presents this universal law of measure as a direct replacement for monarchical rule. Jupiter, it seems, has disrupted this universal measure, but once he is no longer in control of time, all aspects of the universe are able to return to a single essential rhythm.

For Shelley, this unifying principle also allows speech, although initially located in the body of a speaker, to move beyond the limits of the individual body and, in the words of the poem's preface, 'modify the nature of others'. This is particularly apparent in the way Shelley treats the phenomena of the echo in the poem. In Act II, when Asia and Panthea are led to Demogorgon's cave by the sound of 'Echoes', Shelley writes:

> *Panthea*
> The crags, this clear spring morning, mock our voices,
> As they were spirit-tongued.
>
> *Asia*
> It is some being
> Around the crags. What fine clear sounds! O list!
>
> *Echoes (unseen).*
> Echoes we: listen!
> We cannot stay:
> As dew-stars glisten
> Then fade away –
> Child of Ocean!
>
> *Asia*
> Hark! Spirits speak! The liquid responses
> Of their aerial tongues yet sound.[100]

Here, the 'echoes' are presented as material and corporeal, despite being identified as spirits, in the repeated assumption that the sounds must be made by the tongue. And the voices here are, in fact, not echoes at all, but, as Asia emphasises, 'responses'. They do not mechanically repeat Asia and Panthea's words but reply to them, demonstrating a model in

[100] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 2.1.163-172.

which speech is capable of stimulating response in a corporeally figured universe. Furthermore, Shelley's complex image of 'spirit-tongued' 'crags' obfuscates any distinction between the living body, the inorganic earth, and the spiritual environment as the voices appear to come simultaneously from tongue, crag, and spirit. As the speaking body thus exists in harmony with, and is indeed difficult to distinguish from, the extracorporeal world, Shelley positions speech as a principle which is capable of stimulating responses not only in intelligent listeners, but also in the physical environment.

Shelley draws on physical and physiological sciences in this paradigm of harmonious response. As Quillin observes:

> Shelley's readings of scientific works acquainted him with the wave theory of sound as well as medical theories on the processes of the human body and mind. These sources fed his interest in the idea of the fundamental harmony or vibrations of the human body and mind.[101]

It is specifically a Hartleian understanding of sound, the body, and the anatomically conceived mind, as producing and responding to physical vibrations, I argue, which informs Shelley's assertion that speech can have tangible effects on the world and that it is both motion and action in and of itself and a catalyst for further action. This is particularly evident in Shelley's treatment of avalanches, which feature prominently in *Prometheus Unbound*. In their letters and journals both Percy and Mary Shelley describe encountering avalanches during a journey through the Alps in 1816 – an experience which would influence their writing for years to come. In a letter to Thomas Love Peacock describing one such avalanche Shelley anticipates his figuration of the Earth as comprising 'stony veins' through which 'Joy ran, as blood within a living frame'.[102] He writes:

> From the precipices which surround it the echo of rocks which fall from their aerial summits, or of the ice & snow scarcely ceases for one moment. One would think

[101] Quillin, 'Shelley and Music', 542.

[102] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 1.1.153-156.

> that Mont Blanc was a living being & that the frozen blood forever circulated slowly thro' his stony veins.[103]

And it is the vibration of sound waves in particular, Shelley learns, which has the potential to prompt the avalanche. He records that 'the guides desired us to pass quickly, for it is said that sometimes the least sound will accelerate their fall'.[104] In *Frankenstein*, as Victor ascends the Alps for his first conversation with the creature, Mary Shelley draws on the same experience and gives further insight into the emphasis on speech in her and Percy's conversation with their guides. She writes that 'the slightest sound, such as even speaking in a loud voice, produces a concussion of air sufficient to draw destruction upon the head of the speaker'.[105] For Percy Shelley then, the avalanche both demonstrates a similarity between the structure of the inorganic and organic bodies and suggests a cycle of sound and vibration which moves perpetually between these bodies. Sounds made by the living body, including speech, have a physical impact on the 'bodies' of mountains, causing avalanches which themselves 'echo' in the ears of human listeners. And in *Prometheus Unbound* this cycle of sound and action is associated with revolutionary political change. In Act II Asia compares the 'sun-awakened avalanche' which accompanies the spirit-voices that lead her and Panthea to Demogorgon, to a revolution and vice versa, concluding with the lines 'the nations echo round, / Shaken to their roots: as do the mountains now'.[106] Although it is the sun, rather than sound, that initially prompts the avalanche here, the revolutionary avalanche 'echo[es] round' multiple nations, suggesting an unstoppable chain

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[103] Percy Bysshe Shelley to Thomas Love Peacock, 25 July, 1816, in *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 1, ed. F.L. Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 500.

[104] Percy Bysshe Shelley to Thomas Love Peacock, 25 July, 1816.

[105] The original manuscript reveals that the word 'produces' here is Percy Shelley's replacement for Mary Shelley's original word 'is', suggesting that both writers were giving careful consideration to the physical mechanism behind the effect of the voice on the avalanche. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*, in *The Original Frankenstein*, ed. Charles E. Robinson (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 120.

[106] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 2.3.37-42.

reaction of sound which will spread throughout and change both the geological earth and the geopolitical world.

It is this revolutionary image of poetic speech as ever-cycling physical action which replaces hierarchical rule and unifies and moves in measure with every other part of the universe which triumphs at the end of *Prometheus Unbound*. At the very end of the poem Demogorgon, the force that overthrows Jupiter, speaks to the earth, the moon, spirits, the dead, the elements, and living human and non-human animals with 'a universal sound like words'.[107] In Shelley's emphasis that the sound is 'like' but not necessarily identical to words he positions speech as the foundation for this universal sound or rhythm, but suggests a model of vocal utterance in which communication is possible not just through intelligible 'words' but through the act of vocalisation itself. Additionally, in these concluding lines, this unifying measure becomes reflected in the metre of *Prometheus Unbound* itself. Each of Demogorgon's listeners replies with a single line which both matches the iambic pentameter of Demogorgon's stanzas and rhymes with his last preceding line. We read, for example:

> *Demogorgon*
> Spirits whose homes are flesh; ye beasts and birds;
> Ye worms and fish; ye living leaves and buds;
> Lightning and wind; and ye untameable herds,
> Meteors and mists, which throng air's solitudes:
>
> *A Voice*
> Thy voice to us is wind among still woods.[108]

Here then, the voices representing all parts of universe speak in time and in tune with one another, following the same poetic principles of metre and rhyme scheme. And, moreover, this harmonising response has been prompted by a voice which operates as physical motion. Like the 'concussion' of air which transforms speech sounds into avalanches,

[107] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 4.1.518.

[108] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 4.1.544-548.

Demogorgon's 'voice to us is wind among still woods'. Lastly, before Demogorgon delivers the final three stanzas of the poem, we encounter the line 'Speak: thy strong words may never pass away'.[109] This is the first and only line in the poem to be spoken simply by '*All*', suggesting the final reconciliation of every aspect of the world as all speak in a single unified voice. And in this triumph of universal measure the effects of speech are rendered permanent even once they have left the mouth of the speaker. Demogorgon's 'strong words may never pass away' because they enter a perpetual cycle of utterance and response, action and reaction which affects every part of the universe. Thus speech for Shelley is more than expressive sound. It is also impressive action. By the end of *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley makes it clear that such a model of speech provides a republican alternative to oppressive systems of government and, in his references to speech-created Science and avalanches causing thrones and nations to shake, he hints towards a more direct understanding of speech as capable of enacting political revolution. In the final part of this chapter, I suggest that Shelley's 'Mask of Anarchy' composed between Acts III and IV *of Prometheus Unbound*, responds to and pre-empts these ideas of effective political utterance. But, as I will go on to argue, in the repeating, 'ringing', and 'unwithstood' voices of 'The Mask of Anarchy', he more fully realises the revolutionary potential of physicalised, active speech.

'Deeds not words': Speech as Action in 'The Mask of Anarchy'

In 'The Mask of Anarchy', Shelley's poetic response to the events of the 1819 'Peterloo' Massacre in which cavalry militia attacked peaceful protesters gathered to call for reform

[109] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 4.1.553.

at St Peter's Field in Manchester, the poet urges that 'deeds not words express' the 'exceeding loveliness' of 'Freedom'.[110] Several critics, however, have accused Shelley's poem of failing to live up to this claim that actions will speak louder than words. Marc Redfield, for example suggests that 'if the masque produced nothing but an oration, the oration produces nothing but itself'.[111] Wolfson has similarly questioned the poem's effectiveness as a form of political activism, arguing that the problem of whether poetry can have 'political agency or is it "supererogatory" to political action' is present throughout 'The Mask'.[112] In the concluding section of this thesis, however, I want to suggest that Shelley figures vocal and embodied utterance, whether poetry or oratory, as, fundamentally, an act in its own right in the 'Mask of Anarchy', in keeping with the treatment of speech we have encountered in his other works, from *Prometheus Unbound*, to the *Defence of Poetry*. Yet, while *Prometheus Unbound, The Defence*, and 'Julian and Maddalo' all use fictional or theoretical frameworks to consider the relationship between speech-poetry and action, 'The Mask of Anarchy' which recalls and reacts to real-world events, enacts the cycle of speech and action which Shelley can only describe in the other texts. In 'The Mask of Anarchy', I argue, Shelley considers speech as more than a medium for words, but as a deed in and of itself, as the very utterance of the poem is a direct and, as I will go on to argue, physicalised, response to the political action which has gone before.

More recently, critics including Reno and Fairclough have pushed against Wolfson's argument that the poem's visionary and idealist qualities undermine the text's active engagement in politics, and Wolfson has gone on to extend her reading to acknowledge the

[110] Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', lines 264-265.

[111] Marc Redfield, *The Politics of Aesthetics: Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 159.

[112] Susan Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 195.

rhetorical power of the poem's ability, if not to act, to at least imagine and potentiate action and 'make hope conceivable'.[113] Reno, however, is unequivocal in his description of the poem as 'not only a form of action but a call to action', while Fairclough also considers the significance of the poem's status as a response to real-world events, reading Peterloo as 'a catalyst of poetic and political activity in the speaker'.[114] Together, these two perspectives demonstrate not only that Shelley's composition of the poem can be understood as a political act, but, as I will go on to suggest, also draw attention to the position that the poem holds as both a call and response which operates within a physicalised cycle of action and reaction. Throughout his work, Shelley presents spoken utterance, whether poetic, political, or, as is the case with many of the texts examined in this thesis, both, as a deed which has impressive power beyond that conveyed by intelligible words and immaterial language. As we have seen regarding 'Julian and Maddalo', for Shelley, speech need not operate consciously or intelligibly to be considered effective. Furthermore, the voices of 'The Mask of Anarchy', like those of *Prometheus Unbound*, move cyclically between and amongst bodies and the earth, making the identities of the poem's speakers and the origin of their utterances difficult to discern. Critics including Wolfson and Ian Haywood have cast the poem's cyclical nature as self-reflexive or 'self-addressed', implying a communicative failure in which the poem, like the maniac in some readings of 'Julian and Maddalo', essentially talks to itself, affecting (and effecting) nothing beyond its own textual boundaries.[115] Yet, here, I offer an alternative

[113] Susan Wolfson, *Romantic Shades and Shadows* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 123.

[114] Reno, 'The Violence of Form in Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy*', 93; Mary Fairclough, 'Peterloo at 200: The Radical Press, Simultaneous Meetings and *The Mask of Anarchy*', *The Keats-Shelley Review* 33, no. 2 (2019): 162.

[115] Wolfson, *Formal Charges*, 196; Ian Haywood, 'Pandemonium: Radical Soundscapes and Satirical Prints in the Romantic Period', *Republics of Letters* 5, no. 2 (2017).

interpretation of what Haywood terms the poem's 'eerie proleptic loop'.[116] I consider instead how the repeating, cyclical, and uncertainly located voices of 'The Mask of Anarchy' suggest a materialist and decidedly active model of speech in which the poem's voices need not be ineffectual echoes, but are rather stimuli and responses which follow physical laws and universal principles of action and reaction, which place poet and people, poetry and protest, and voice and action as inseparably linked and eternally co-respondent.

There are a number of apparently distinct voices which speak across the 376 lines of 'The Mask of Anarchy'. Firstly, and most contentiously, there is the 'voice from over the Sea' which has no clear speaker, yet reaches the sleeping poet in the opening lines of the poem.[117] As the poem continues, we hear the voice of the establishment, including 'hired murderers', 'lawyers and priests' who speak in unison, proclaiming their deference to Anarchy 'in one accord' by reading aloud or repeating the words inscribed on Anarchy's brow.[118] And while the source of this voice is relatively clear, the rest of the voices within the poem have as ambiguous an origin as the 'voice from over the Sea' with which the poem begins. We hear 'an accent unwithstood' which arrives following the intervention of a mysterious 'Shape' between Anarchy and Hope and which sounds, uneasily, 'as if' the Earth were speaking.[119] Yet, in attending closely to the passage, we find no details of the voice's production, only its reception and, even then, the voice's auditors remain obscure. Shelley writes:

> A rushing light of clouds and splendour,
> A sense awakening and yet tender
> Was heard and felt – and at its close

[116] Haywood, 'Pandemonium', 2.

[117] Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', line 2. For further discussion of the identity of this voice see: Redfield, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 157; Haywood, 'Pandemonium', 1-2; Fairclough, 'Peterloo at 200', 169.

[118] Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', lines 60-66.

[119] Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', lines 139-145.

These words of joy and fear arose[120]

Here Shelley describes a 'sense' which is both voice and action – it can be 'heard and felt'. Yet, both subject and object are hidden in these lines as Shelley's use of the grammatical passive voice – the sense 'was heard and felt' – conceals the speaker entirely, allowing the voice to exist independent of its site of production. At the same time, although we know that the voice has been received by *something* (i.e. it *has* been 'heard and felt') we do not know the identity of the listener or listeners. What's more, as the 'words' don't arise until after it has been 'heard', Shelley suggests that the voice has already had an aural and physical impact before becoming language, emphasising his familiar point that speech need not be intelligible to be effective and further obscuring the identities of speaker(s) and listener(s). The grammar of the stanza makes it impossible to say for certain whether the 'words of joy and fear' are the last thing produced by the 'sense' or whether they are spoken by auditors who have been stimulated by the sense's impact. And while the word 'awakening' suggests some sort of model of stimulus and response it gives no clearer indication of the direction of such cause and effect. Shelley's use of the word is ambiguous as it could signal that the sense itself is in the process of awakening or, equally, it might indicate that the sense awakens the listeners who encounter it. Here then, as Shelley obscures the identities of and blurs the distinctions between speaker and listener, he once again posits speech as a cyclical universal force of action and reaction – an 'awakening' power which exists everywhere yet has no clear origin or end. And this in turn, I will go on to argue, allows Shelley to suggest that reform is both inevitable and unstoppable. It will not be directed by a single individual voice, but will arise spontaneously.

Shelley uses the phrase 'these words' to refer to a similarly obscure voice in the final stanzas of the poem. He writes:

'And that slaughter, to the Nation

[120] Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', lines 135-138.

Shall steam up like inspiration,
Eloquent, oracular;
A volcano heard afar.

'And these words shall then become
Like oppression's thundered doom
Ringing through each heart and brain,
Heard again – again – again –

'Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number –
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you –
Ye are many – they are few.'[121]

Critics have failed to agree on, and have indeed emphasised the challenge posed by, or even the impossibility of, discerning precisely what utterance 'these words' refers to in these lines.[122] While they would most immediately appear to refer to the 'rise like lions' refrain, the blurring and layering of different voices and moments of utterance throughout the poem complicates this reading. As Redfield summarises, the words are 'undecideably and equally the ringing refrain, the stanza that announces the refrain's repetition, the internal oration, the masque dreamed by the dreamer, and finally the entire poem'.[123] In these closing lines and throughout the poem, then, there is a continual difficulty of identifying specific speakers and intelligible utterances, despite Shelley's repeated and sustained references to a 'voice' or 'voices'. Utterances seem to come from many sources at once or from no source at all and multiple voices speak as one yet, as Emily Sun has argued, also appear to be ' a voice that emerges from a process of self-examination and deliberation, in which the assembly as collective national body seems to consist of

[121] Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', lines 364-376.

[122] See: Redfield, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 159; Borushko, 'Violence and Nonviolence in Shelley's *Mask*', 113; Emily Sun, 'Shelley's Voice: Poetry, Internationalism, and Solidarity', *European Romantic Review* 30, no. 3 (2019): 242.

[123] Redfield, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 159.

individual subjects of resonant interiority'.[124] This idea of 'resonant interiority' brings to mind the materialist model of respondent internal organisation that we have seen Shelley utilise in the *Defence* in his depiction of the embodied poet as a lyre susceptible and attuned to external influence. For Shelley, such responsiveness is not automatic; it requires some degree of 'interiority', 'deliberation', or, in Shelley's words, 'internal adjustment'.[125] Yet, the propensity of the poet's body and voice to respond to and resonate with external forces, including the voices of others, allows multiple individuals to become attuned and connected to one another in the way that Shelley indicates in these final stanzas of 'The Mask of Anarchy'. Thus the ambiguous identity of poem's speakers, I want to argue, does not represent a flaw, problem, or ambivalence in Shelley's voices. Rather, as the voices of 'The Mask of Anarchy' resist being solely identified with particular speakers or individual instances of speech, Shelley presents a version of speech which reaches beyond the boundaries of individual speaking and listening bodies to become a universal harmony of voice, like that which closes *Prometheus Unbound* – a physical vocal atmosphere of call and response. It is this treatment of utterance as material and impressive, I argue, which allows Shelley to amplify the rhetorical power of poetry and oration, positioning speech as action.

Several critics argue that the difficulty of finding and isolating Shelley's 'own' voice amongst the vocal atmosphere of the poem, suggests a lack of conviction in radical politics and an unwillingness to commit to the call for action that the 'rise like lions' stanza otherwise proposes.[126] Haywood, for example raises the possibility that the poem's 'unstable' voices reflect 'Shelley's ambivalence about the lava-like power, the explosive volcanic potential, of radical discourse' and goes on to suggest that this vocal uncertainty is

[124] Sun, 'Shelley's Voice: Poetry, Internationalism, and Solidarity', 243.

[125] Shelley, *Defence of Poetry*, 675.

[126] See: Wolfson, '"Romantic Ideology"', 207; Wolfson, *Formal Charges,* 195-204; Haywood, 'Pandemonium', 2.

'symptomatic of the problem of poetically impersonating or authorizing' such a discourse.[127] Yet I want to suggest that Shelley is not necessarily attempting to echo existing radical discourse or to authorise future revolutionary active voices in the final lines of the poem, but is rather responding to the events that have gone before, positioning the poet himself as one of 'heart[s] and brain[s]' which relay and harmonise with the voices of the Peterloo protesters. The poet's voice, like the majority of other voices in the poem, becomes part of a universal call for reform in which no one voice is privileged above others.

In the second half of his preface to *Prometheus Unbound,* written between October and December 1819 at the same time that he was waiting for confirmation from Leigh Hunt (which never came in his lifetime) that 'The Mask of Anarchy' would be published, Shelley states 'didactic poetry is my abhorrence'.[128] For Shelley then, it is not necessary or even desirable for political poetry to be instructional. Consequently, the difficulty of pinning down voice and speech in the poem suggests not an unwillingness on Shelley's part to use his voice to support revolutionary action, but rather an acknowledgement that to use his voice to direct or speak for those conducting the action has the potential to undermine their agency. This is further reflected in the fact that the only utterance within 'The Mask of Anarchy' with a clear source is the establishment refrain of 'Thou art God, and Law, and King' which the institutions of the state read directly from Anarchy's brow.[129] When voice is ascribed authority in 'The Mask of Anarchy', therefore, it becomes liable to enact systems of oppression and autocratic rule.

Furthermore, as Shelley renders the poet figure literally unconscious at the beginning of the poem, the speaker becomes receptive to and empowered to transmit

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[127] Haywood, 'Pandemonium', 2.

[128] For the dates of Shelley's composition see: Jack Donovan et al. ed., *The Poems of Shelley*, vol. 3, (Harlow: Longman, 2011), 28; Everest and Matthews, *The Poems of Shelley,* 460.

[129] Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', line 61.

vocally figured political force without making any false claims to authority. The first stanza of the poem reads:

> As I lay asleep in Italy
> There came a voice from over the Sea,
> And with great power it forth led me
> To walk in visions of Poesy.[130]

Wolfson argues that this dream frame presents the poet as 'a figure of self-imposed alienation from the world he would influence and of the estrangement of writing from its social events'.[131] Yet, as we have seen elsewhere in his writing, from the affective yet 'unwilling accents' of 'Julian and Maddalo's' maniac, to the claim in the *Defence* that poetry, 'has no necessary connection with consciousness or will', Shelley presents unconsciousness as a prerequisite for, not a barrier to, socially engaged poetry.[132] Following this pattern, I argue, Shelley's casting of himself as the unconscious poet figure laying 'asleep in Italy', does not necessarily suggest that the poet's voice is removed or isolated from the events of 1819 and the cycle of action and response which the Peterloo Massacre has incited. Rather, Shelley's consistently held belief that world-altering poetry is not produced by individual will, but by unconscious internal adjustment of external stimuli suggests that the sleeping poet's unconscious state has the potential to heighten their receptiveness to external events by removing the barrier of conscious thought. Like Thelwall's and Darwin's theories of stammering, overwillfullness can be an impediment to utterance. Thus, in 'The Mask of Anarchy', Shelley emphasises that speech-poetry does not originate fully in the conscious mind but comes instead from the combination of external action and a response within the poet which is not purely mental, but physical. The poet's mind has no originary power which would place them outside the universal system of

[130] Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', lines 1-4.

[131] Wolfson, '"Romantic Ideology"', 207.

[132] Shelley, 'Julian and Maddalo', line 475; Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 699.

action and reaction. For Shelley, the poet does not have the authority to call for and create action out of nothing. As the poem begins with a response to events which have already taken place in the real world, but, in an inversion of real-life chronology, don't occur until the end of the poem itself, Shelley instead places the poet in the middle of a physical cycle which is already in motion. 'The Mask of Anarchy' sets out a model of the relationship between voice and action, then, which if we subscribe to it, valorises the notion that the poem itself is a political act, but neither superior to nor separable from other forms of action.

From this perspective, 'The Mask of Anarchy' presents not so much an 'eerie proleptic loop' of 'peculiarly excessive self-reflexivity' in which Shelley's own ambivalent voice is start and end, but a material cycle in which utterance holds the same status as other physical motions.[133] And materialist understandings of the human body and its relation to the extracorporeal world underpin this idea throughout the poem. Drawing on the same conception of the correspondence and interaction between the speaking body and the physical elements and atmosphere which we have seen in *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley erodes the boundaries between the human body and other forms of matter in motion as he metaphorises the earth as body, and bodies as earth. For example, Shelley describes the effects of the 'Shape's' intervention between Hope and Anarchy in the lines:

> As flowers beneath May's footstep waken,
> As stars from Night's loose hair are shaken,
> As waves arise when loud winds call,
> Thoughts sprung where'er that step did fall.[134]

In these lines, as Shelley's figurative language blends references to the body with references to the extracorporeal natural world, he engages with materialist ideas in which bodily motion, including thought, acts in response to external physical forces and vice

[133] Haywood, 'Pandemonium', 2; Redfield, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 158.

[134] Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', lines 121-125.

versa. There are two layers of figurativeness in this stanza. While the first three lines constitute three analogies for the awakening process of the 'Shape's' movement, each of these lines also contains its own metaphor associating the body with the environment. Together, these two forms of figuration combine to present a materialist model of the world in which bodily and extracorporeal matter are functionally similar and operate via a cycle of stimulus and response. The environmental conditions of the seasons, embodied in May's footsteps, stimulate or 'waken' the blooming of flowers; the stars are 'shaken' from a night sky which is comparable with 'hair'; the waves respond to the wind whose movement of the air is personified as a 'call' or voice (recalling Mary Shelley's description of voice as 'a concussion of air' in *Frankenstein*); and thoughts are stimulated by the motion of the 'Shape's' steps. This mutual motion of body and environment then goes on to stimulate an explicitly revolutionary voice. The first instance of the 'rise like lions' refrain shortly follows as another result of this awakening and arises, as if the earth:

> Had turned every drop of blood
> By which her face had been bedewed
> To an accent unwithstood, –
> As if her heart had cried aloud[135]

Here distinctions between the body and the earth are once again broken down. The earth has a face and a heart, while the blood that has been shed is dew. And both body and action, the heart and bloodshed, speak in these lines. It is worth noting that Shelley uses the metaphor of dew to refer to blood twice in the poem, in addition to the transformation of chains into dew described in the refrain. Wolfson is unconvinced by Shelley's use of the 'dew' metaphor, suggesting that 'the simile for chains is a tad fantastic: mere dew, just shake it off. It's as if Shelley, the schoolboy who liked to concoct chemical explosions, thought political change could work this way, too, by sudden transformation'.[136] Yet, as we

[135] Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', lines 143-146.

[136] Wolfson, *Romantic Shades and Shadows*, 100-101.

have seen, the notion of the limitless capacity of forms of matter to transform into one another represents far more than youthful fancy for Shelley, but a serious and long held ontological belief. The cyclical transformation of matter is not merely metaphor in Shelley's writing, but physical scientific fact. For Shelley, who in *Queen Mab*, asserts that

> There's not one atom of yon earth
> But once was living man;
> Nor the minutest drop of rain,
> That hangeth in its thinnest cloud,
> But flowed in human veins,[137]

blood and chains can literally, and will indeed inevitably, become dew. Moreover, this unifying system based on revolving matter presents Shelley with an alternative way of organising the universe to the governance of 'God and King and [the institution of] Law', providing a persuasive basis for republican reform. And, through this same process, recalling Thelwall's materialist description of the transformation of rain into 'the tongue of a political lecturer', the dew-blood of 'The Mask of Anarchy' transforms into political speech. It becomes an 'accent unwithstood', which implies an utterance that has the full force of inevitable, spontaneous, responsive action behind it.[138]

It is at the very end of the poem that this cyclical and material understanding of the universe becomes most apparent, in the final stanza's evocation of a voice which simultaneously calls to future action and circles back to the beginning of the poem to stimulate or 'inspire' the unconscious poet. We read:

> 'And that slaughter, to the Nation
> Shall steam up like inspiration,
> Eloquent, oracular;
> A volcano heard afar.
>
> 'And these words shall then become
> Like oppression's thundered doom
> Ringing through each heart and brain,

[137] Shelley, *Queen Mab*, part 2, lines 211-215.

[138] Thelwall, 'The System of Usurpation and Corruption', 61.

Heard again – again – again –[139]

In these lines, the events of Peterloo return to poetry, and action becomes speech, as the physical act of 'slaughter' becomes poetic 'inspiration'. And this transformation occurs via a physical model, in which action and speech move between physical bodies and material environment, between volcanos, hearts, and brains. Inspiration is not an immaterial or abstract principle, but is rather figured as steam from a volcano, allowing it to be physically inhaled and transformed into the speech or poetry of 'these words'. The poem is then able to become a political force which will bring about revolution and the end of oppression as the words return to the air and enter each materially figured 'heart and brain' of the readers. Speech thus becomes part of a cycle of matter, like that suggested in *Queen Mab* or Thelwall's passage on 'eternal revolutions', in which the revolutionary ideas circle 'again – again – again'.

Throughout his work composed between 1819 and 1821, from 'Julian and Maddalo' to *Prometheus Unbound*, to the *Defence*, Shelley consistently considers speech to be cognate with both poetry and action. For Shelley, vocal utterance gains physical power as part of a material, universal rhythm or measure of action and reaction which underpins everything from aesthetics and human society to the movement of the living body and the natural elements. And in 'The Mask of Anarchy' Shelley gives this theory explicit political application, blending speech-poetry with real world political events in a cycle of call and response which both rejects any hierarchy between utterance and action and posits voices which eternally ring through 'heart[s] and brain[s]' in time with laws of nature as an alternative to the 'anarchy' of existing systems of government. Shelley suggests that you do not need to understand speech to feel it and to be moved by it because utterance, whether in the form of poetry or oratory, is a physical force which can bypass the consciousness.

[139] Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', lines 364-371.

Speech and poetry are thus, for Shelley, part of an unconscious cycle of reciprocal stimulus and response which allows spoken utterance to have agency but not authority. As Shelley combines speech and steam, poetry and thunder, he therefore makes the case for a physical and impressive vocal atmosphere which renders speech unstoppable, uncontrolled, inevitable and politically effective action. Shelley's response to the voices of Peterloo was not published until 1832 and, as a result, 'The Mask of Anarchy' could not, in Shelley's lifetime, practically fulfil its role as a call to action. Yet materialism nevertheless provides him with a framework for his conviction that utterance can make an impact on the world even when the chain of cause and effect, action and reaction, appears to have been broken or is unapparent. As he writes in *Queen Mab*, active matter 'knows no term, cessation, or decay' and, although 'all seems unlinked contingency and chance', 'even the minutest molecule of light, / That in an April sunbeam's fleeting glow / Fulfils its destined, though invisible work, / The universal Spirit guides'.[140] For Shelley the cycle of matter and the effects of its motion are eternal and stimuli and response which seem 'unlinked' may merely be 'invisible'. Materialism thus allows Shelley to conceive of his speech-poetry as ultimately effective even when its impact cannot be observed.

[140] Shelley, *Queen Mab*, part 4, lines 149, 170, 174-177.

Coda: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the Speaking Body

In *A Letter to Henry Cline*, John Thelwall describes the development of his system of rhythmus as a moment of discovery which 'burst upon [him], at once, in a flood of light; in all its novelty, and all its extent of application'.[1] He recalls:

> That night, when (cheering the solitude of my rustic hearth – sometimes resounding, and sometimes silently analysing, the exquisite verses at the commencement of Dryden's translation of the Aeneid) the first glimpse of this subject seemed to burst upon me : – when, comparing those verses with some criticisms, in which (with the most strange and illiberal affectation) that great master of mellifluous rhythmus prides himself as enveloping in eternal mystery the secret of his versification, I persuaded myself – that I had discovered not only the critical nature of that secret, but (what was perhaps more than Dryden himself had comprehended) the physical principles upon which the critical application of his secret, in reality, depended.[2]

Thelwall's description here of the moment of his theory's inception as a 'flood of light' which suddenly illuminates his solitary analysis and leads him to discover a previously unknown 'secret' of nature is remarkably similar to Mary Shelley's depiction of Victor Frankenstein's discovery of the causes of life, published eight years later. Shelley writes:

> I paused, examining and analysing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke upon me – a light so brilliant and wondrous, yet so simple, that while I became dizzy with the immensity of the prospect which it illustrated, I was surprised that among so many men of genius, who had directed their inquiries towards the same science, that I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret.[3]

The similarity between Thelwall's and Shelley's texts becomes even more striking as Thelwall goes on to describes how he came upon his theory of rhythmus through a process of dissection as a precursor to creation. He writes that he made his discovery:

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[1] John Thelwall, *A letter to Henry Cline, Esq on imperfect developments of the faculties mental and moral, as well as constitutional and organic on the treatment of impediments of speech* (London: Printed for the Author, 1810), 16.

[2] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 4-5.

[3] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 34.

> With the pen in my hand, preparing for the execution of a long-meditated poetical project, – it was, while comparing and dissecting, the different effects and different principles of versification, in those great masters of the epic lyre, our Dryden and our Milton.[4]

McCann and Zimmerman, in their respective studies of Thelwall's writing, have briefly noted *Frankenstein's* resonances with *A Letter to Henry Cline*. And while McCann argues that 'the similarities are suggestive, if a bit fanciful', Zimmerman contends that Shelley is explicitly influenced by Thelwall's text, suggesting that 'if Thelwall's account sounds familiar to those who have not read the Letter to Cline, it may be because Mary Shelley almost certainly drew upon it in her tale of Victor Frankenstein'.[5] Following Zimmerman, I would argue that it is certainly plausible that Shelley could have been influenced by Thelwall's text. Shelley's father, William Godwin, who played an active role in his daughter's education, made several visits to Thelwall in 1809, at the time that he would have been preparing the *Letter to Henry Cline*.[6] Moreover, Shelley was familiar not only with the *Letter*'s author, but also its addressee, as she visited Cline himself for medical treatment in 1811 and 1812.[7] And while McCann and Zimmerman focus exclusively on the Shelleyan qualities of Thelwall's discovery of his elocutionary system, I want to go further, to make the case that, if Shelley is indeed drawing on Thelwall's *Letter to Henry Cline*, she does so not merely in her figuration of scientific discovery, but also in her depiction of the creature's acquisition of speech.

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[4] Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline*, 5.

[5] Andrew McCann, 'Romantic Self-Fashioning: John Thelwall and the Science of Elocution', *Studies in Romanticism* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2001), 231; Sarah Zimmerman, *The Romantic Literary Lecture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 74.

[6] William Godwin, '20 March 1809', '5 April 1809', '13 April 1809', and '11 May 1809', *The Diary of William Godwin*, ed. Victoria Myers, David O'Shaughnessy, and Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford Digital Library, 2010), http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk.

[7] William Godwin, '13 May 1811' and '5 March 1812' *The Diary of William Godwin*, ed. Victoria Myers, David O'Shaughnessy, and Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford Digital Library, 2010), http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk.

Although the influence of Thelwall's writing is harder to pin down than that of Darwin and Percy Shelley, whose work Shelley explicitly acknowledges in her novel, I suggest that she engages with and dramatises the concerns of all three of these writers in *Frankenstein.*[8] This thesis has argued that Darwin, Thelwall, and Percy Shelley each present speech production as a physical and active motion of the human body which can be understood through a discipline defying materialist system of mechanics, physiology, and poetics. And, as we have seen, such materialism provides the model by which these writers are able to position spoken utterance as autonomous power and political action. To conclude this thesis then, I offer a reading of *Frankenstein* from this perspective, to suggest some of the ways that a materialist conception of speech-as-action can be applied to Romantic literature beyond the work of Darwin, Thelwall, and Shelley, and even beyond explicitly poetic or political texts. I argue that the Romantic concerns with physicalised models of impressive vocal power, that I have traced throughout this thesis, present a new way of reading the creature's speech as a radical act of self-governance.

The production of speech in *Frankenstein* is a thoroughly interdisciplinary project. While the creature's living body is the product of 'science and mechanics' – chemical theory and the practical art of anatomy – his power to produce sounds that he and his auditors understand as speech is developed through educational practice and the study of literary and poetic art.[9] It is not until the creature encounters the De Lacey family and hears them reading aloud to one another and to Safie, to whom they are teaching French, that he begins to understand the difference between sound and speech – 'the harmony of the old man's instrument or the songs of the birds' and the 'method of communicating [our] experience and feelings to one other by articulate sounds'.[10] Furthermore, as the creature

[8] Mary Shelley, 'Author's Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition', in *Frankenstein*, 195.

[9] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 35.

[10] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 86-88.

continues to develop 'the science of words [and] letters', he draws not only on the books that the De Laceys read aloud, but on three further texts that he finds in the woods: *Plutarch's Lives,* Goethe's *Sorrows of Werter*, and the text which makes the deepest impression on him, Milton's *Paradise Lost*.[11] This last text is particularly significant in the way that it shapes the creature's understanding of himself as comparable to both Adam and Satan and indeed Shelley's narrative as a whole, as references to *Paradise Lost* run throughout the novel from its epigraph to its closing pages.[12] As we have already seen, Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley considered *Paradise Lost* to be a distinctly oral text which demonstrates an essential connection between poetry and speech. And for Thelwall, Milton unites poetry, speech, and the physical world in 'true perfection of operative harmony', making his writing an exemplary source of rhythmus and impressive elocution.[13] As the creature hones his elocutionary skill upon *Paradise Lost*, Shelley thus invokes a model of speech, encountered throughout this thesis, which blurs the boundaries both between disciplines, and between the body and the world around it. Physiology and mechanics bring the creature to life, but it is the interaction of these fields, and the body they construct, with poetry, literature, and the voices of others which leads him to speech.

Shelley's interdisciplinary model of speech acquisition is, I would argue, a specifically materialist one which resonates with what we have seen of Darwin's, Thelwall's and Percy Shelley's treatments of the speaking body. While the creature's body and mind are physically and materially conceived, speech is not an automatic function of his construction, and Shelley thus makes it clear that the creature should not be understood as

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[11] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 86, 103.

[12] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 1, 188-189.

[13] John Thelwall, *Selections for the Illustration of a Course of Instructions on the Rhythmus and Utterance of the English Language* (London: Printed for the Author, 1812), xxii.

wholly mechanical in his operation. As Chris Baldick observes: 'the monster has no mechanical characteristics, and is a fully human creature' whose 'most convincingly human characteristic is of course his power of speech'.[14] Although the creature has been constructed according to a Darwin-like combination of medicine and mechanics, he is no speaking machine and does not produce speech sounds according to, to use Thelwall's phrase, 'mere mechanical impulse'.[15] But despite the creature's initial impression that spoken language is a 'godlike science', speech is not something which can be bestowed by a creator either.[16] Articulate speech is not something that the creature (or indeed any of us) is proficient in from birth. In fact, far from imbuing his creation with a quasi-divine knowledge of how to speak, Victor in his role as both creator and parent contributes to the creature's initial speechlessness. When Victor abandons the creature, he affords him no opportunity of learning to speak as the first stage of this process, as we have seen Darwin discuss, is 'imitation'.[17] Dramatising the complaint made by Thelwall throughout his elocutionary work that speechlessness and speech impediment are exacerbated or even caused by negligence on the part of those in positions of power over the individual, Victor's failure to fulfil his parental or divine duty towards his creation impedes the creature's acquisition of speech.

The model of speech acquisition and production which Shelley presents in *Frankenstein* is therefore drawn neither from mechanist philosophy nor from a vitalist or immaterialist standpoint. The creature's speech is instead a materialist autonomous

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[14] Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 44-45.

[15] John Thelwall, 'King Chaunticlere; or The Fate of Tyranny', in *Selected Political Writing of John Thelwall,* vol. 1, ed. Robert Lamb and Corinna Wagner (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 34.

[16] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 88.

[17] Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature*; *or The Origin of Society* (London: J. Johnson, 1803), canto 3, lines 364.

response of susceptible organs, of the kind suggested in Darwin's *Zoonomia*, Thelwall's *Animal Vitality* and elocutionary writings, and Percy Shelley's *Defence*. As Frankenstein's creature begins to find his voice, he observes: 'my organs were indeed harsh, but supple; and although my voice was very unlike the soft music of their [the De Laceys'] tones, yet I pronounced such words as I understood with tolerable ease'.[18] In referring to the specific construction and mobility of the creature's 'harsh, but supple' organs of speech, Shelley demonstrates that he has been built in such a way that provides him with inherent potential and physical predisposition towards speech. Yet, despite this prior organisation, he realises this vocal potential through his own responsive power. His encounter with the De Laceys and the access to literature and poetry, both written and recited, that this episode provides, acts as stimulus for his acquisition of speech. Yet as the De Laceys have no knowledge of the effect their words have, they can make no claims to direct, manage, or control the creature's newfound voice.

The 'Modern Prometheus' of the novel's subtitle is usually (and accurately) understood to refer to Victor Frankenstein, as the creator of human life. Yet, prefiguring Percy Shelley's positioning of speech, not fire, as the primary Promethean gift to humankind, Mary Shelley's depiction of the creature's acquisition of speech explores another element of the myth of Prometheus and its materialist implications. When it comes to the creature's speech it is the De Laceys, not Victor, literature, not science, which acts as Promethean impetus. While Victor provides physical organisation and responsive 'supple' 'organs', the De Laceys provide what Thelwall describes as the 'Promethean torch' of stimulating literary education.[19] Speech is thus not bestowed upon the creature by

[18] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 91-92.

[19] John Thelwall, *Results of Experience in the Treatment of Cases of Defective Utterance* (London: Printed for the Author, 1814), 64.

anyone. It is stimulated by external sources and potentiated by his anatomical construction, but his speech is his own autonomous response to these conditions.

And he does not merely learn to speak, but learns to speak eloquently and impressively. As Victor warns his auditor Walton towards the end of the novel: 'He is eloquent and persuasive; and once his words had even power over my heart'.[20] In the episode alluded to by Victor here, the creature convinces him, through the power of his voice, to build him a companion. While, as the creature reminds Victor, he could easily overpower him physically as 'thou hast made me more powerful than thyself', he chooses instead to persuade Victor verbally, suggesting that for the creature speech is not only action, but also both the most effective course of action and a deliberate choice.[21] Moreover unlike his strength and stature, the impressive force of the creature's speech cannot be attributed to Victor's construction. Shelley thus presents her own version of speech as a physically powerful act which both signifies, and demonstrates the desire for, self-governance. Mary Shelley's depiction of the creature's autonomous speaking body may not display the same conviction in the revolutionary and world-changing power of materialist speech as we have seen in Darwin's, Thelwall's and Shelley's senate shaking, rousing, agitating, impressing, eloquent and oracular voices. But it does demonstrate just one of the ways that an attention to the mechanics of speech in Romantic-era writing can shed new light on the relationship between the voice and agency and between the human body and the physical and social world that it inhabits. Mary Shelley's novel thus shows that this model of speech, when we can recognise and understand its features, can inform, enrich, and extend our readings of spoken utterance not only in the work of Darwin, Thelwall, and Percy Shelley, but across Romantic-era writing.

[20] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 178.

[21] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 77.

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