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A Northern "Ode on Melancholy"?: The Music of Joy Division

Caroline Langhorst

Even decades after its sudden demise, Joy Division undeniably remains one of the most seminal proponents of post-punk. Ian Curtis's early suicide, being almost too reminiscent of the Romantic notion of the prematurely deceased and tormented artist which began with Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, and Lord Byron and extends to 1960s' icons such as Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and Jim Morrison, certainly contributed to the band's posthumous cult status, eventually leading to a fetishization of Curtis's dead persona similar to that of Byron's.¹ While the continuing significance of Joy Division's artistic output cannot and should not be reduced to this tragic circumstance, at the same time, Curtis's fate undoubtedly serves as the band's most evident link to Romanticism and therefore requires at least some critical consideration. As this chapter attempts to demonstrate, the Romantic context for Joy Division manifests itself on two different, yet interrelated levels: on the personal level in terms of the Romantic "mythos of the doomed young artist"² and on the textual level in terms of the music itself. The chapter is subdivided into three parts: given Joy Division's northern

C. Langhorst (✉)
Department of Film Studies/Media Dramaturgy, Institute of Film,
Theater and Empirical Cultural Studies, University of Mainz,
Mainz, Germany

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roots and the specific impact of Manchester's sociocultural and urban environment on their distinctive sound, the first part takes a brief look at life in 1970s' Manchester and its ongoing struggles against rising unemployment and poverty that were severely aggravated by Britain's ongoing economic recession, which eventually culminated in the infamous "Winter of Discontent" of 1978–1979, as well as the haunting burden of its industrial past, and a resulting sense of rootlessness, alienation, and despair.

The second part of the chapter sets out to investigate the enigmatic persona of Curtis. In this regard, the myth surrounding the band will be scrutinized as part of a twentieth-century pop-cultural mythology whose signifiers of "authenticity, death and youth"³ find its roots in the Romantic notion of the artist. This and the Byronic fetishization of Curtis will be further examined via a critical reading of the decidedly mythicizing portrayal of the singer as a "tortured poetic genius"⁴ in Anton Corbijn's biopic *Control* (2007). Bearing Curtis's status in mind, the last part takes a closer look at the songs of Joy Division. Since the band's music evokes a unique melancholy and "hollow claustrophobic landscape in a state of decay, where the subject is hopelessly doomed,"⁵ it has recently been read through a Gothic lens (see Bibby 2007; Lockwood 2010). Consequently, the loss of self and constant feelings of melancholy, isolation, and alienation abound both on *Unknown Pleasures* (1979) and *Closer* (1980), which were released against the backdrop of economic and sociocultural strife and political change at the beginning of the Thatcher era. Furthermore, the songs are likewise marked by a pronounced hauntological effect,⁶ "absences" that are directly linked to the Freudian model of melancholia and a recurring gothicizing of "historical atrocities."⁷ Highlighting Gothic's disruptive potential and considering how post-punk and Gothic both "exult in extremes, in ruination, in dislocation and disquietude,"⁸ Lockwood describes Joy Division's music as "a Gothic figuration of self-undoing."⁹ Given its susceptibility to a range of different readings,¹⁰ Romantic elements such as the traits of the Romantic artist and parallels to Romantic poets such as Byron and Keats—the latter's poems are, for instance, at times confronted with the painful loss of an "autonomous masculine self"¹¹—will therefore be explored here alongside a number of other Gothic elements.

"WE GOTTA GET OUT OF THIS PLACE"?: JOY DIVISION AND 1970S' MANCHESTER

The band's immediate sociocultural environment of 1970s' Manchester constitutes the bedrock of Joy Division's unique sound in that "[t]he urban empty spaces in their lyrics function as an analogy of psychological empty spaces."¹² Joy Division was founded in the crisis-ridden mid-1970s—first as Stiff Kittens, then as Warsaw—by Bernard Sumner (guitar) and Peter Hook (bass) who had grown up in the 1960s. By that time, the sociocultural atmosphere had undergone a drastic change as the exuberance of the early 1960s and the colorful dandyism of early 1970s' glam rock had been substituted for a feeling of frustrated anger and a loss of direction that was fittingly articulated by the emergent British punk scene. Punk's sudden eruption, its impulsive nature, and do-it-yourself manner had—partly thanks to two influential concerts by the Sex Pistols that inspired quite a few audience members to pursue their own musical careers—by then already spread its influence from London to other parts of the country such as Manchester.¹³

Northern England of the 1970s was directly affected both by Britain's severe economic crisis and its own continuously deteriorating industrial urban wasteland that coincided with a rise in poverty and a comparatively low standard of living.¹⁴ Furthermore, the weight of the inescapable industrial past and a certain sense of rootlessness were felt by the city's hybrid community that resulted from various migration waves in the nineteenth century as well as in the 1950s and 1970s.¹⁵ This sense of rootlessness, in turn, coalesced with the feeling of modern urban alienation and an unflinching desire to escape the surrounding bleakness and prevailing atmosphere of hard labor and lack of opportunities. This reputation originated from its industrial heyday during and after the Industrial Revolution and the associated labor strife of the desolate working class.¹⁶ During the nineteenth century, the industrial city was undergoing economic and social changes that the "Romantic" mentality was generally said to avoid: more precisely, the harsh urban reality of the day and the severe plight of the working class were far removed from a utopian English and Romantic pastoral idyll. Hence, a specific form of Romanticism comes to the fore that is primarily defined by its focus on class and urbanity. Additionally, Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre classify some forms of Marxism as a form

of Romanticism.¹⁷ It is therefore hardly surprising that the hardship of the working class, especially but not solely in northern industrial cities, found literary expression in various accounts such as Friedrich Engels's famous *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) or the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell such as *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855), with George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) devotedly continuing this specific line of enquiry. Noting Manchester's allegedly still-existing bleak image and the ongoing interplay and collision between past and present, Dave Haslam nevertheless also stresses the creative aspect of despair, alienation, and its resulting yearning to liberate oneself that has endured over centuries.¹⁸ Joy Division's music was undoubtedly influenced by this predominant condition.

During their further musical evolution, Ian Curtis composed lyrics that were—in contrast to punk's forthright aggression—more introspective and melancholy. By this means, an additional, more thoughtful layer was added to punk's feeling of frustration, disillusionment, and loss of direction. Therefore, the resulting retreat into the self and the explicit musical expression of conflicted and at times contradictory personal sentiments, or mental states close to emotional numbness, are indeed reminiscent of the acute perceptiveness of the Romantic poet and his or her ruminations on the vicissitudes of life and love as well as the extremely volatile condition of the self in Gothic fiction.

A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A TRAGIC POET?: ROMANTICIZED MYTH-BUILDING IN *CONTROL* (2007)

Joy Division's collaboration with Dutch-born rock photographer-turned-director Anton Corbijn played a decisive role in consolidating a mythic atmosphere surrounding the band.¹⁹ It originally found its beginning in the famous and pointedly minimalistic 1979 photo sessions that presented the musicians in various seemingly cold and urban environments (e.g. on a snowy bridge), thereby enduing them with a pensive mood and a certain otherness in relation to their surroundings. Particularly the by now iconic photographs of Ian Curtis wearing his famous trench coat and holding a cigarette can be seen as belonging to a myth-ridden pop-cultural iconography of a troubled and potentially rebellious youth. Unsurprisingly, the young Ian explicitly modeled himself on a variety of already deceased idols such as James Dean.²⁰

This pop-cultural mythology of the twentieth century, which includes Dean, a number of rock singers, and their signifiers of "authenticity, death and youth,"²¹ originate in Romanticism's notion of the artist's tragic position. In its extreme, the relevance of an individualistic stance is famously visualized by Caspar David Friedrich's seminal painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818). Being somewhat removed from his rationalized and industrialized surroundings, the Romantic artist is regarded "as an outlaw or a troubadour, or possibly both, defined as embracing passions over reason, as being guided by emotions—thus allowing him or her to experience life in the most authentic manner."²² Hence, according to Jennifer Otter Bickerdike, a central role is attributed to the artist's corporeality as a means of authentic expression, with death being its epitome.²³ This stance correlates to the Romantics' appraisal of an early death as is exemplified both by an actual historical incident—the suicide of the English poet Thomas Chatterton (1752–1770)—and one of the most pivotal literary classics of the *Sturm und Drang* era, namely Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774).²⁴ The following numerous dramatizations of Chatterton's suicide in different art forms such as poetry, drama, opera (e.g. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Monody on the Death of Chatterton," 1790, Keats's "Sonnet to Chatterton," 1815, Alfred de Vigny's tragedy *Chatterton*, 1835, or Ruggero Leoncavallo's eponymous opera, 1896), and art (Henry Wallis's painting *The Death of Chatterton*, 1856), followed by Keats's death in 1821 and the "cult of biography"²⁵ surrounding his and Byron's legacy, and then finally the death of Percy Shelley in 1822 and his elegiac lament for Keats in *Adonais* (1821) corroborate its lasting appeal. In the twentieth century, rock music then in a way "inherits the mythology of Romanticism, casting a new set of members in the role of tragic icon..."²⁶

Both in the music video for *Atmosphere* (1988) and in his feature film *Control*, the construed romanticized myth and legacy of Joy Division, which are inextricably intertwined with other existent myths (rock star, poet, or troubled young male), are further maintained and consolidated. Accordingly, the video contains footage of Ian Curtis while several hooded figures are presented carrying large memorial pictures of him. The film *Control* is likewise predominantly focused upon the character of Curtis (perf. Sam Riley) as he is directly introduced in the first scene. As Shaw rightly remarks, the film was aimed at a "nostalgic audience"²⁷ and does therefore emphasize a certain visual aesthetic: the decidedly reverent mood of the

music video is upheld and in a way even intensified. *Control* sets in with a voice-over narration by Riley that is focused on the pointlessness of human existence. By presenting the singer as an apparently introverted and thoughtful young person, the overall intention of portraying him as "tortured poetic genius,"²⁸ "tragic hero,"²⁹ and even "martyr"³⁰ is being, one could argue, almost *too* explicitly foreshadowed. Notwithstanding, by this means a Romantic context is being constructed, even if only—at least at this very moment—on the personal level. At the same time, the outspoken interest in and explicit foregrounding of the person to the point of fetishization bears a strong Byronic quality. Regardless of Lord Byron's complicated and shifting position in the Romantic canon, the apparent impossibility of separating discussion of his poetry from his public persona is repeated in the case of Ian Curtis and Joy Division.³¹ As a result, a persistent fascination with the enigmatic myth inevitably causes a desire in the reader or listener to unveil the prevailing mystery. After applying Freudian and Marxist readings of the fetish to Byron's body, Ghislaine McDayter proclaims the failure of "many critical attempts to uncover the truth of Byron ... because what we find 'buried' is not Byron at all, but the phantasmatic embodiment of our own desire."³² More specifically, this astute observation can be applied to the cinematic portrayal of Curtis's persona in *Control*.

Bearing this aspect of the phantasmatic in mind, the singer's primary role as a projection screen for the audience is visually underscored by Corbijn's black-and-white aesthetic that evokes a markedly nostalgic, melancholic, and even elegiac feeling. Moreover, this stance is consistently sustained throughout the entire film. Ian's artistic influences, interests, and the composite nature of his persona are alluded to very early in the film: *Control* does not hesitate to unabashedly present Curtis's bookshelf, one that features J.G. Ballard, whom he would also openly reference in the song "Atrocity Exhibition," beat writers Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, a book on military uniforms, another on World War II, and a memorial poster of Jim Morrison that serves as another foreshadowing of later tragedy to ensue. The cinematic portrayal of Curtis's persona as a suffering artist or—in this case poet—who is bound to succumb to his pain in the end is extended by means of one significant scene. After stealing pills with dizzying side effects, Ian is singled out again and starts reciting Wordsworth's "My heart leaps up..." (1802) while glancing, lost in thought and apparently unaware of his

surroundings, through a window. His spontaneous recitation and change of mood leave his astonished audience, consisting of his future wife Debbie (perf. Samantha Morton) and a friend, in silent awe as if they had not expected such profundity from Curtis who is later shown composing his own lyrics in his room. In the film, he is portrayed as an incredibly gifted young artist, whereas the other characters are contained within their dreary realm of ordinariness and one-dimensionality, merely admiring his talent while being seemingly unable to truly comprehend him. Furthermore, it is Wordsworth who is deliberately chosen in this instance, not Keats, Byron, or Percy Shelley. However, Wordsworth's contemplative poem, which employs nature imagery, neither deals with inner torment, urban alienation, nor loss of identity as many of Joy Division's songs do. Instead, the gray urban environment and its accompanying sense of utter estrangement are purposely counterbalanced by the poem's discussion of simple daily joys such as watching a rainbow.³³

In this case, however, the mere evocation of a natural image combined with Wordsworth's general outspoken penchant for nature and the continuing impact of childhood prove to be vital. Accordingly, the aspiring musician and poet is explicitly associated with the previously outlined Romantic notion of the sensitive and exceptionally perceptive artist who pursues a genuine relation to nature and has to struggle and work in solitude. The line, "So is it now I am a man,"³⁴ could therefore signify the foretelling of a new stage in his life that is about to set in: the band is making progress rather quickly, as is suggested by the elliptical narrative structure, and Ian's acquaintance with Debbie also leads to an early marriage. These incidents mark the beginning of the protagonist's personal struggle with the artistic challenges of songwriting and, from his point of view, the monotonous and restrictive demands of everyday life in Macclesfield as a husband and father.

Curtis's recitation of Wordsworth's famous "the Child is father of the Man,"³⁵ on the other hand, forcefully underlines his contradictory state of mind and mood-swing-ridden, at times even infantile, behavior. It also stresses the artistic necessity of not rigidly suppressing all impulses. As Baudelaire has pointed out emphatically, a certain degree of childishness is required in terms of artistic creativity, and for him, the child's perception is comparable to a state of drunkenness.³⁶ We can conclude that the depiction of Curtis as a tragic and inwardly torn poet is supported by the black-and-white cinematography to which Shaw ascribes a "poetic"³⁷

quality; live performances that present Ian's intense and potentially overwhelming aura and idiosyncratic robotic dancing, or as John Orr puts it, "shamanistic onstage projection"³⁸ that was in fact influenced by his epilepsy; the explicit poetic reference to Wordsworth, and a comparable first-person point of view both in "My heart leaps up..." and *Control's* voice-over narration insertions.

"HEART AND SOUL" OR "NEW DAWN FADES"?:
MELANCHOLY AND LOSS OF SELF IN *UNKNOWN PLEASURES*
(1979) AND *CLOSER* (1980)

The Romantic context that has been established via Corbijn's myth-building in *Control* will be extended in this section to Joy Division's music. Since it displays both Gothic and Romantic qualities, the relationship between these terms needs to be defined. Although the two similarly problematic terms used to be distinguished from each other as the former has been deemed "a reaction against neo-classicism and a stage in the journey to Romanticism,"³⁹ an examination of their interplay has been undertaken since the 1970s and 1980s by Robert Kiely's discussion of Gothic novels and their Romantic elements (1972), G.R. Thompson's edited collection on "Dark Romanticism" (1974), and more recently by Michael Gamer's *Romanticism and the Gothic* (2000)⁴⁰ and Emma McEvoy's essay "Gothic and the Romantics" (2007). In addition to the passionate appeal of Romantic poetry's and Gothic fiction's display of at times unrestrained sentiment, another prominent similarity, for instance, lies in the pronounced propensity for an unstable mental condition or the ultimate loss of one's already fragile identity in Gothic fiction or in some of Keats's poems. As Fred Botting remarks, "Gothic figures suggest that fragmentation and instability form the constituent features ... of normal subjectivity ... Objects of horror are necessary in the anxious, cultural dynamic of subjectivity and otherness."⁴¹ This is equally true of the classics of eighteenth-century Gothic fiction by Sir Horace Walpole, William Beckford, Matthew Gregory Lewis, or Ann Radcliffe, as well as later examples of the Romantic (e.g. Percy Shelley's *Zastrozzi: A Romance*, 1810) or Victorian period (e.g. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*, 1864, *In a Glass Darkly*, 1872, or Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, 1897). Regarding the interrelation between the Gothic and Romanticism, it seems particularly important that Romantic poets such as Byron and Percy Shelley engaged

more directly with the Gothic.⁴² More notably, with regard to Joy Division's evocation of extreme subjective mental states and images of horror, the "Gothic in this period sees the exploration both of extreme subjectivities and of the problematic nature of sympathy in relation to selfhood. It is the period in which we see horror take centre-stage: many of these texts are filled to repletion with violence, imprisonment, torture, murder, parricide..."⁴³ The remaining part of this essay attempts to interweave these two possible readings (Gothic and Romantic) in relation to the overall atmosphere of *Unknown Pleasures*, *Closer*, and some of Joy Division's iconic songs.

Joy Division's music largely stands out due to its distinctive sound and its melancholy atmosphere marked by an introspective retreat into fragile and conflicted states of mind. It is this very disposition that resulted in the post-punk band being retrospectively adopted by the Gothic subculture. According to Isabella van Elferen, "this appropriation and inscription process itself has Gothic overtones. Whether in literature, film or scene, the rewriting gesture of nostalgia creates Gothic out of retrospective gloom."⁴⁴ More precisely, the retrospective attribution of innate Gothic elements to bands such as Joy Division or The Velvet Underground echoes the artificial restoration of buildings such as Walpole's famous Strawberry Hill House (1749), which "in turn became icons of the Gothic novel."⁴⁵ Furthermore, the haunting effect in Joy Division's music is forcefully underscored by van Elferen, Bibby, and Lockwood alike. Moreover, haunting and the related themes of spectrality, the uncanny, mental instability, or even madness are all essential concepts commonly associated with the Gothic. For van Elferen then, the song "Dead Souls" serves as a prime example of the band's musical style. Accordingly, the haunting effect is called forth by presenting "ghostly imagery to express feelings of being haunted in an empty world"⁴⁶ and accompanying musical devices such as Curtis's monotonous voice and musical and lyrical repetition.

Other Gothic characteristics further align as "the combination of paranoia, spectrality and direct address allow the listener to share the anxiety expressed in what is by all means a classically Gothic text—but one in which the haunted persona calls out directly to his audience."⁴⁷ "Dead Souls" also follows the characteristic structure of Joy Division's music as it sets in with a distinctive instrumental introduction dominated by bass and drums. At a later point, Curtis embarks upon singing about the illusionary and ultimately futile nature of dreams and an inner torment that is necessarily afflicted by a distorted vision. The up-building of the respective haunting

and paranoid atmosphere is further emphasized by his repetitive lyrical variations of a key aspect—in this case, several paranoia-ridden exclamations—and varying degrees of vocal intensity. At the same time, as van Elferen notes, the achievement of a “musical intensification of the temporal dislodgment caused by the presence of ghosts”⁴⁸ by means of the employed musical repetition “underlines Derrida’s observations with regards to spectral temporality.”⁴⁹ Spectrality is also observed by Dean Lockwood in his comparative analysis of the hauntological effect of post-punk music and the Gothic. Considering hauntology as a form of “Gothicised temporality,”⁵⁰ Lockwood also draws upon Jacques Derrida’s concept of hauntology originally discussed in *Specters of Marx* (1993) as well as its application to popular culture by Mark Fisher and Simon Reynolds.⁵¹ Unlike van Elferen, however, he juxtaposes Derridean hauntology with several writings of Gilles Deleuze.⁵² Even prior to referring to Derrida, he applies Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s notion of the potentially subversive nature of a “minoritarian’ identity”⁵³ in relation to the “‘majoritarian’ culture.”⁵⁴ Consequently, post-punk likewise acts in a subversive manner as it aims to “experimentally estrange the present, to put its insertion into a known trajectory into question, opening up a cartography of the ‘not yet’...”⁵⁵ Accordingly, he highlights post-punk’s oscillating position as its proponents “are neither past nor ever fully present, but rather, in between, in peripheral vision, ghostly. The Gothic, of course, is also intimately connected to anxious presence, to strange, unstable and simulacral spaces and times.”⁵⁶

Overall, “Dead Souls” and the two albums *Unknown Pleasures* and *Closer* “present a world devoid of hope and filled with horror.”⁵⁷ Their structure implies “a descent into a personal hell—only on *Closer* the ‘hell’ seems to be literal.”⁵⁸ Hence, the initially listed structural device of “absences” in connection with the Freudian notion of melancholia as an insatiable yearning for an unknown object turns out to be crucial at this point: “As Freud describes it, the melancholic ... stages loss itself as the focus of its affection, making absence its object of longing. The melancholic ego turns on itself.”⁵⁹ With regard to the melancholy music of Joy Division, in turn, these resulting absences evoke “a sense of dread, nihilism, and funereal mystery.”⁶⁰ Contrary to Henry David Thoreau’s “lives of quiet desperation,”⁶¹ however, Joy Division’s songs may be considered a sincere articulation of despair. Despair, however, is not tacitly acquiesced to despite the songs’ introspective retreat into the self and their recurrent motifs of loss of self, hope, and balance alongside feelings of alienation, melancholy, anxiety, isolation, and references to shock or trauma.

Instead, the authentic rendering of disillusionment and anguish and the sheer persistence regarding their selected subject matter in combination with Curtis’s electrified movements deliberately set out to provoke the audience. Even if the lyrics often depict a mental state close to emotional apathy (e.g. in “Disorder,” “Insight,” “New Dawn Fades,” “Decades,” and “Love Will Tear Us Apart” to name only a few), the specific manner of performance aptly stresses that it is rather one of being *uncomfortably* numb. Apart from the loss of emotions and hope, varying levels of extreme mental states such as despair, division, or, as pointed out with regard to “Dead Souls,” blurred boundaries which may relate to a distorted perception can be found in other songs from *Unknown Pleasures* and *Closer*. Whereas in “Shadowplay,” the metaphorical image of the vast ocean is used as an expression of melancholy, endless searching, and eventual futility, “Decades” discusses trauma, *Weltschmerz*, and cruelly crushed opportunities while “Day of the Lords,” “She’s Lost Control,” “Passover,” and “Twenty-Four Hours” deal with the loss of control and crude shattering of one’s existence. In these songs, loss of control and personal balance are depicted as expected occurrences (e.g. at the beginning of “Passover”) that are nevertheless linked to an inner disunity, even turmoil, which temporarily disrupts the otherwise stated emotional numbness.

The discomfort with the outer world expressed in Joy Division’s music becomes most apparent via the band’s gothic “rendering of melancholia through allusions to the horrors of history”⁶² as, for instance, in “Atrocity Exhibition.” Finding its predecessors in punk’s use of Nazi iconography and the even more provocative bearing of the experimentally inclined English group Throbbing Gristle that was co-founded by fellow Mancunian Genesis P-Orridge, Joy Division’s repeated reference to the Holocaust on multiple levels (in the song, during their early stages as Warsaw, and in relation to the etymological origin of their band name) is undoubtedly highly problematic.⁶³ Moreover, in this case, the Romantic roots of fascism (e.g. a heightened sense of nationalism, particularly in Germany) encounter punk’s and partly post-punk’s deliberately shocking appropriation of Third Reich symbols and references. However, as Roger Sabin aptly remarks, the stance of many punk or post-punk bands with regard to fascism tended to be rather—and perhaps even precariously—ambiguous and highly conflicted and should therefore not generally be reduced to its mere shock value or a seemingly postmodernist ironic (and potentially decontextualizing) pop-cultural appropriation of Nazi ideology.⁶⁴ The matter is further complicated by the ongoing, and especially at the time of

Joy Division's heyday prevalent, British fascination with World War II and the home front. According to Sonya O. Rose, the latter "continues to be a source of both fascination and nostalgia"⁶⁵ since World War II is often "remembered as Britain's 'Finest Hour'"⁶⁶ when the country temporarily overcame its social differences and stood together. The nostalgic component seems especially vital as has already become apparent with regard to Joy Division's use of melancholia. Furthermore, it may have been nurtured by the increasing popularity of films about World War II in general as well as wartime Britain (e.g. Guy Hamilton's star-studded *Battle of Britain*, 1969). Cinematic engagements with the Third Reich then display the same controversial ambiguity as later punk's or post-punk's use of Nazi iconography. They range from genre and exploitation fare (e.g. *Salon Kitty*, 1976) to art cinema and have contributed to the public's cultural memory of the war period. Productions such as *The Night of the Generals* (1967), starring Peter O'Toole and Omar Sharif, or the Richard Burton/Clint Eastwood vehicle *Where Eagles Dare* (1968), are primarily focused on their male stars.

Other films attempted a more critical approach to Nazism which, however, could result in a still deeply conflicted, ambiguous portrayal, via the European art cinema mode. Prominent examples include Bernardo Bertolucci's treatment of Italian fascism in his 1970 Alberto Moravia adaptation *The Conformist*, Luchino Visconti's *The Damned* (1969), or Rainer Werner Fassbinder's Vladimir Nabokov adaptation *Despair* (1978), whereas Liliana Cavani's depiction of a sadomasochistic relationship between a former Nazi officer (perf. Dirk Bogarde) and one of his former concentration camp prisoners (perf. Charlotte Rampling) in *The Night Porter* (1974) fuses art cinema aesthetics with exploitation elements. The film and former matinée idol-turned-character actor Bogarde also had a direct impact upon 1970s' and 1980s' British popular music as both, for example, inspired Adam and the Ants' song "Deutscher Girls" (1978/1982)⁶⁷ as well as the title of their debut album *Dirk Wears White Sox* (1979). More importantly, however, Visconti's portrayal of fascism could shed further light upon its evocation in the music of Joy Division: *The Damned's* tale of the Krupp dynasty-inspired industrialist family the von Essenbecks, which is situated against the backdrop of the 1933 *Reichstag* fire, is the first part of Visconti's German trilogy that further consists of the Thomas Mann adaptation *Death in Venice* (1971) and *Ludwig* (1973), starring Helmut Berger as the legendary troubled, decadent, and later delusional and reclusive Bavarian king Ludwig II and

Trevor Howard as Richard Wagner. Essential motifs of German Romanticism such as "the German Romantic *Todessehnsucht*, or 'yearning for death'"⁶⁸ come repeatedly to the fore in Visconti's trilogy and *The Damned's* conflicted and ambivalent depiction of fascism, for instance, which make an explicit, yet still problematic and often criticized,⁶⁹ reference to Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (1865).⁷⁰ The repeated filmic fusion of the isolated, alienated, and hopelessly longing individual then is paradigmatically exemplified by Gustav von Aschenbach's (perf. Dirk Bogarde) *Weltschmerz* and sense of paralysis in the elegiac *Death in Venice*, while the monarch's eventual downfall in *Ludwig* articulates Dark Romanticism's (and Gothic's) penchant for madness, (self-) destruction, excess, and the forces of Eros and Thanatos. Accordingly, the evocation of extreme states—in Joy Division's case "a world in which torture and murder are spectacles for entertainment"⁷¹—may be linked to Gothic's previously illustrated affinity for extremes and boundary transgressions which is at times also shared by Romantic poetry.

Besides, the haunting presence of the past addressed in "Dead Souls" also constitutes an important characteristic both of Gothic fiction and of the Byronic hero who is burdened by the weight of his past and former deeds. Similar to the paralysis that is repeatedly expressed in several songs, the haunted protagonist of Byron's poem "The Giaour" (1813), for instance, is defined by the recurrent metaphor of stoniness.⁷² In this regard, the growing alienation from the outer world, and especially from a formerly close relationship, in the song "I Remember Nothing" seems to be of particular interest as its portrayal of interpersonal estrangement in a crumbling relationship also bears a slight resemblance to Byron's poem "When We Two Parted" (1815): lamenting the separation from a former lover, the loss is mourned solely by the speaker who remains until the very end caught in a dismal state of mind that is characterized by "silence and tears."⁷³ Not unlike the loss of control and personal balance in the music of Joy Division, the personal burden of sorrow and the destroyed emotional balance are furthermore highlighted in Byron's poem while the other person is accused by the speaker of being not only reserved and forgetful, but deliberately deceitful.⁷⁴

Additionally, there are also parallels between Ian Curtis and John Keats, their art, and notions of melancholy to be noted: as in the case of Curtis, Keats's contemporaries, for instance, also placed an at times derogatory emphasis upon his youthfulness in relationship to his artistic expression.⁷⁵

Moreover, artistic struggle and suffering, loss of self, numbness, and an oscillation between contradictory and at times extreme inner landscapes—or a “simultaneity of pleasure and pain, joy and sadness”⁷⁶—can also be located in Keats’s poetry. In the unfinished *Hyperion* (1820), loss of self is combined with a Gothic tendency as “the poet-spectator-scriptor of the *Hyperion* fragments finds barely concealed versions of himself mirrored in the various characters spectralized or entrapped in gothic scenarios.”⁷⁷ While in “Lamia” (1819) the female self is crushed,⁷⁸ the male subject in *Hyperion* is deprived of its heteronormative status: “Through recurrent displays of physical and psychic shattering in pain and/or pleasure, Keats abdicates the power associated with an agential or autonomous masculine self.”⁷⁹ In “Ode to a Nightingale” (1819), in turn, “the poet’s condition at the beginning of the poem is defined by a potentially contradictory state of heartache and numbness.”⁸⁰ Moreover, the constitution of an identity in Keats’s poetry is also greatly shaped by the act of suffering.⁸¹ However, due to his embrace of the utterly arbitrary course of life and its hidden mysteries via his famous concept “Negative Capability,” these states of mind assume an ambivalent role in Keats’s body of work. Thus, melancholy and despair can also be read positively: in “Ode on Melancholy” (1819), for example, melancholy’s ambiguity is exposed. Hence, “[t]he ‘wakeful anguish of the soul’ is to be cherished rather than escaped.”⁸² The overall implication then “is to find ways of experiencing this melancholy at its most rarefied and extreme.”⁸³ Despite their pronounced longing to escape, Joy Division’s devotion to a grave—even lugubrious—atmosphere seems to follow exactly this dictum: although at times seemingly met with a certain acceptance, often through the feeling of numbness or loss of self, their musical evocation of melancholy likewise seeks direct confrontation with extreme states of mind, including a prolonged state of painful suffering.

To conclude, it may be stated that, following Dave Haslam’s emphasis upon the creative aspect of despair that emanates from Manchester’s troubled past, sentiments such as melancholy and anxiety are openly enunciated through music, which is also of a rare genuine and poetic nature that has often been emulated but seldom surpassed. Additionally, the preceding analysis of the interplay between the rather problematic concepts of Romanticism and the Gothic in relation to rock music—in this case post-punk—has not only demonstrated but also further intensified the intricate nature of categorizations. As McEvoy highlights, the dialogue

between Gothic and Romantic elements is defined by a certain degree of flexibility.⁸⁴ As a consequence, the broader notion of Romanticism analyzed in this essay can be said to equal the manifold appearance of the Gothic since the eighteenth-century as variations of both exert a significant impact upon the present. As this essay endeavored to illustrate, the relevance of Romanticism’s mythological implications to twentieth-century rock music therefore becomes especially apparent in the post-war period, particularly between the 1960s and 1980s.

NOTES

1. Jennifer Otter Bickerdike, *Fandom, Image and Authenticity. Joy Devotion and the Second Lives of Kurt Cobain and Ian Curtis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 47.
2. John Orr, *Romantics and Modernists in British Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 180.
3. Bickerdike, 43.
4. Caitlin Shaw, “Known Pleasures: Nostalgia and Joy Division Mythology in *24 Hour Party People* and *Control*,” in *Cinema, Television and History: New Approaches*, ed. Laura Mee and Johnny Walker (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 172.
5. Atte Oksanen, “Hollow Spaces of Psyche: Gothic Trance-Formation from Joy Division to *Diary of Dreams*,” in *Nostalgia or Perversion? Gothic Rewriting from the Eighteenth Century until the Present Day*, ed. Isabella van Elferen (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 126.
6. Dean Lockwood, “Dead Souls: Post-Punk Music as Hauntological Trigger,” in *Twenty-First-Century Gothic*, ed. Brigid Cherry, Peter Howell, and Caroline Ruddell (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 103–107; Isabella van Elferen, *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), 142.
7. Michael Bibby, “Atrocity Exhibitions: Joy Division, Factory Records, and Goth,” in *Goth: Undead Subculture*, ed. Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 234 and 251.
8. Lockwood, 100.
9. *Ibid.*, 107.
10. See for example Seamus Perry, “Romanticism: The Brief History of a Concept,” in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 3–11; or Peter Cochran’s introduction to his study “Romanticism” and *Byron* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), ix–li.