



eCOMMONS

Loyola University Chicago
Loyola eCommons

Dissertations

Theses and Dissertations

2017

Romantic Ends: Death and Dying, 1776-1835

Andrew J. Welch
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Welch, Andrew J., "Romantic Ends: Death and Dying, 1776-1835" (2017). *Dissertations*. 2874.
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/2874

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.
Copyright © 2017 Andrew J. Welch

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

ROMANTIC ENDS: DEATH AND DYING, 1776-1835

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN ENGLISH

BY

ANDREW JAMES WELCH

CHICAGO, IL

AUGUST 2017

Copyright by Andrew James Welch, 2017.
All rights reserved.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In which several debts are acknowledged, &c. The first I owe to the Loyola University Chicago English Department, and the second to the University at large. A Pre-Doctoral Teaching Scholars Fellowship and an Arthur J. Schmitt Dissertation Fellowship provided the material base upon which this airy superstructure has come to balance.

Thanks to Tom Kaminski for sharing his erudition, which extends far, far beyond the British Isles, and for tolerating my unenrolled presence in his classroom on many occasions. I've benefited from his provocative ideas about the history of British verse. Thanks to Steve Jones, who is an exemplary scholar and a symbol of possibility, as well as the reason I'm a Romanticist.

There are a lot of people in the world I don't know, but it's hard to imagine many of them read better than Jack Cragwall. I used to think he was generous with his energy until I realized it was limitless. Nonetheless, I feel preposterously lucky he has been willing to serve as the director of this dissertation. My committee: thank you.

I owe Heath Valentine—and yet refuse to pay—for what's approaching a lifetime of thought. It is a marvel to be doing this, after all.

I'm grateful to Miriam Piilonen for ancient sagacity, for revolutionary ardor, for never shying from the asymptotic task of wording the unspeakable, and for indefinite life.

My final thanks are to Allison, Jessica, Zachary, and Christine, and to Timothy, who taught me, in spite of himself (through the very force of his striving to prove otherwise), that there is no adequate recompense for death.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	vi
INTRODUCTION: THE STORY OF DEATH	1
CHAPTER ONE: THE THEATER OF THE FINAL MOMENT	18
CHAPTER TWO: DAVID HUME'S SECOND DEATH	54
CHAPTER THREE: WORDSWORTH AT DEATH'S END	112
CHAPTER FOUR: BLAKE, NATURAL RELIGION, AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF DEATH	142
CHAPTER FIVE: THE DEVOTIONAL POETRY OF FELICIA HEMANS	173
CHAPTER SIX: SUPERANNUATED GOVERNESSES AND IMAGINATIVE EUNUCHS: THE STERILITY OF <i>ENDYMION</i>	215
BIBLIOGRAPHY	248
VITA	271

ABSTRACT

Romantic Ends reinterprets of the origins and legacies of romantic death, the cultural spectacle exemplified by the dramatic deaths of young poets like John Keats. Against the widespread belief that romanticism ushered in a uniquely theatrical vision of death, *Romantic Ends* traces a long history of death as rhetorical performance, from the early modern *ars moriendi* (“art of dying”) to the neoclassical obsession with the good death. The poetic deaths of the romantic period established a new repertoire of tropes and figures out of these longstanding and disparate deathbed traditions, set within the emerging discursive arena of “poetry.” Yet while romantic death is a recognizable and potent archetype, an underexplored strain of romantic-period writing evinces a deep suspicion toward the conventions and meaning-making logics of death. The precise function for which romanticism has been credited and blamed—the exploitation of death as shorthand for the “poetic”—is in fact subject to strategies of evasion and disruption in romantic poetry.

INTRODUCTION

THE STORY OF DEATH

In its “List of Deaths for the Year 1750,” the *Gentleman’s Magazine* included one

Mrs Reed of Kentish Town, aged 81. She had kept a mahogany coffin and shroud by her 6 years, when thinking she should not soon have occasion for them she sold them, and dy’d suddenly the same evening. (20:188)

This brief obituary captures a world of death remarkably distinct from our own. We could begin with the common practice of keeping articles of burial near to hand, signaling constant preparedness for death. Coffin and shroud are inmates, privileged with domestic intimacy. When it comes, death too will arrive like an intimate relation returning home¹—until Mrs. Reed disposed of these accessories on the assumption that she would live. Though no agency is directly attributed, the significance of the fact that death came as soon as she ceased to fear it was powerful enough to be left unstated. Readers would understand what her lapse in preparation had cost her: sudden death remained an object of terror well into the nineteenth century, as it denied the deceased the benefit of last rites. Death may be unknowable, but it seems to have an eye for formal irony and narrative resolution. Where we nod, the *Gentleman’s* suggests, it comes winking.

¹ Margaret Spufford’s study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century chapbooks shows that “Death was a figure who was very well-known by, and very close to, their readers” (201). Historical demography bears out Spufford’s claim: life expectancy fell throughout the seventeenth century, hit a nadir in the 1680s, began to rise precipitously from 1691 to 1706, and then declined again until the 1730s. Taking a longer view, it was not until the seventeenth or eighteenth century that the English population recovered to its fourteenth century peak prior to plague and famine (Smith 200, 212-13; Wrigley and Schofield 240-244; Houlbrooke 5-6). Of the forty-six chapbooks Spufford surveys, seven even purport to be written from the deathbed.

Ars Moriendi in the Periodical Age

As Mrs. Reed's example shows, the early obituary was less a posthumous biography than a brief narrative of death.² Seventy years after the passing of Mrs. Reed of Kentish Town, the *New Monthly Magazine* bore witness to the death of the poet John Keats:

There is something very impressive about the death of genius, and particularly of youthful genius. Poets, perhaps, have shared most of this feeling from mankind; indeed their labours which survive themselves are for ever creating it. Not only
 By fairy hands *their* knell is rung,
 By forms unseen *their* dirge is sung,
 but the beautiful, the tender, and the wise, are perpetual sorrowers over their obsequies.
 (3:258)

The space between these two obituaries seems to reflect a sea change in the representation of death, from austere description undergirded by a vast eschatology bound to preparation for death to the pathetic spectacle of a beautiful, wilting boy-poet. The *New Monthly* even suggests that the capacity to feel sorrow for Keats is itself a mark of beauty, tenderness, and wisdom, apportioning Keats's own poetic genius out to his perpetual mourners, who inherit the mantle of poetic sensibility simply by grieving his death—an apt demonstration of sensibility's trade in what Robert Markley calls the “affective spectacle of benign generosity” (211). The gap between Mrs. Reed and Mr. Keats thus registers a transformation from the solemn devotional paradigm of the *ars moriendi* (“art of dying”) to an emerging aestheticization of death, which valorized vicarious suffering and the performance of grief. Keats is the child of a sentimental revolution that continues into our present.³

² In the eighteenth century the term *obituary* meant “register of deaths,” and was originally synonymous with *necrology*, “An ecclesiastical or monastic register containing entries of the deaths of persons connected with, or commemorated by, the church” (*OED*).

³ Placing Keats's death within a long history of sensibility, I follow Christopher Nagle, Adela Pinch, Jerome McGann, Elizabeth Fay, and others who have argued, in Pinch's words, “It may be more accurate

And yet there are important continuities between these two endings. Keats had sought “a grander system of salvation than the chrystain religion,” and had laughed at his friend Benjamin Bailey’s attempts to woo “with the Bible and Jeremy Taylor under his arm” (*Letters* 2:102, 2:67), but on his deathbed, he asked Joseph Severn to find a copy of Taylor’s 1651 *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying*, the central text in the English *ars moriendi* tradition. It came recommended by William Hazlitt as “more like fine poetry than any other prose whatever,” and was, as Severn recorded, “the book he has set his mind upon” (*Complete Works* 6:342; *Keats Circle* 1:181). Though they do not mention Taylor, his devotional discourse reverberates throughout Keats’s obituaries. Taylor framed the suffering that accompanies death as an opportunity to demonstrate submission to God’s will, and to share in the glory of Jesus’s suffering. “Sickness,” he writes, “is that agony in which men are tried for a crown” (3:327). Dying is a test of election: remain tranquil, detach yourself from worldly concerns, and resign yourself to judgment. Keats’s obituaries mute Taylor’s eschatology but amplify the sense of deathly suffering as a mark of election—to Parnassus, if not precisely heaven. Aglow with the fetching pallor of consumption,⁴ the poet “often talked of his approaching death, with the resignation of one who contemplated its certainty without anxiety, and seemed to wish to ‘steal from the world’ into silence and repose” (3:257). The tranquil, otherworldly resignation of the

to see Sensibility as a literary movement that preceded, enabled, and coexisted with Romanticism. And perhaps Romanticism ought to be seen as simply one phase of a longer Era of Sensibility” (Nagle 4, 16; Pinch, “Sensibility” 50; McGann, *Sensibility* and Fay *passim*). James Chandler’s *An Archeology of Sympathy: The Sentimental Mode in Literature and Cinema* extends the era of sensibility into the twentieth century, positioning the sentimental mode’s virtualization of feeling as “a deep principle of intelligibility in the aesthetic and ethical structuring of experience” that recurs in ostensibly the anti-sentimental modes of romanticism and modernism (330).

⁴ See Clark Lawlor’s *Consumption and Literature: The Making of the Romantic Disease*, which finds its paradigmatic figure in Keats.

New Monthly's dying Keats was as much a signature of the older tradition of holy dying as of the newer currents of sensibility.

Like the dead themselves, discourses of death do not vanish, but rather disperse, haunt, circulate in new shapes. The Keats myth (and myth it was⁵) reveals shades of still-older traditions, hearkening all the way back to Christ, and to Socrates behind him. (Whether the Hellene or the Hebrew offered the better model of dying was a hushed but pressing question throughout the eighteenth century.) What was distinctive about Keats's era was the way it made dying integral to the work of poetry, and poetry a kind of prophecy of death. Keats's obituaries substantiate their portrait of dying resignation not through reportage, but by appealing to the "Ode to a Nightingale," recast in the *New Monthly* as conversation: "He is said to have wished to 'drink of the warm South,' and 'leave the world unseen,' and his wish was accordingly fulfilled" (3:257). In the *London Magazine*, Barry Cornwall invoked the same lines for the same purpose: "His sad and beautiful wish is at last accomplished: it was that he might drink 'of the warm south,' and 'leave the world unseen'" (3:426). Keats's poetry reads his death in advance. It is, moreover, a partial reading, abridging the ode's dialectical movement—which both entertains and challenges the possibility of relief in death—to leave a tidy equation of life and text. Death

⁵ While the obituaries pictured Keats dying "with the resignation of one who contemplated [his end] without anxiety," the letters Joseph Severn wrote from Keats's deathbed offer a very different perspective: "Keats is wanting to say something or have something done every minute in the day...he may become irritated—for I can assure [you] his mind is bordering on the insane—" (*Letters* 2:373). Severn's account suggests a devastating, almost illegible deterioration, in which Keats's anticipation of death reflects not peaceful resignation but rather the unbearable anguish of his condition:

the mucus is collecting in such quantiti[e]s and the body & the extremity receive no nourishment—and above all poor Keats's mind is determined on being worse and worse—nearer and nearer his death—that he cannot possibly last but a short time—Keats is desiring his death with dreadfull earnestness—the idea of death seem his only comfort—the only prospect of ease—he talks of it with delight—it soothes his present torture—The strangeness of his mind every day surprises us—no one feeling or one notion like any other being—. (2:373)

concludes the narrative begun in verse, neatly sealing the casket of the Keats myth for mass consumption.

Of course, Keats did not leave the world unseen, but the idea that he wanted to leave it unseen was compelling enough to ensure that his departure would be prolifically advertised. The wider public event of his death thus recapitulates a tradition of elegiac irony that extracts poetic value from the trope of obscure death, in turn publicizing it. Instances run from the “short and simple annals of the poor” valorized in Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” to Wordsworth’s “She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways” (“She lived unknown, and few could know / When Lucy ceased to be”) to Keats’s self-epitaph, “Here lies One whose Name was writ in Water.” In an unjust world of obscure elegiac objects, posthumous recognition offers recompense—not in a heavenly afterlife, but in poetic posterity. The phenomenon of romantic death trades in this kind of give and take, bemoaning the conditions it depends upon.

Disenchantment, Romanticization, Denial

The cultural currents we’ve come to call “romantic” hold a notorious place in the historiography of dying. As Paul Fry writes,

Nearly everyone agrees that something happened on both sides of the Atlantic in the eighteenth century.... Matter-of-factness gave way to the sort of nervous emotion that was euphemistically evasive and yet at the same time helplessly attracted to miasmal charnel atmospheres. There was plenty of precedent for the hideous side of this fascination; nothing could be more gruesome than the countless medieval *artes moriendi*, and the writers of the northern European Renaissance were no strangers to morbid excess. But in the eighteenth century there began to appear a squeamish delicacy in people’s preoccupation with death and decay that we have never really outgrown. (*Defense of Poetry* 182)

This “something” Fry describes is the backdrop of *Romantic Ends*: a transformation in the way that death signified and was represented, in the kinds of significance that could be attributed to

death. Though Fry endeavors to distinguish romanticism—especially Wordsworth’s—from the broader shift he delineates around the turn of the century, the romanticization of death, with romantic poetry at its center, features prominently in the wider historiography of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as the more recent emergence of the field of death studies. The influential work of Philippe Ariés finds its lapsarian moment in the emergence of a “Romantic, rhetorical treatment of death,” wherein a luridly sentimental vision of death as a beautiful spectacle displaces the sensible, homely, and intimate early modern approach to death “with no theatrics” (*Western Attitudes* 56, 13). Romantic theatrics are then steadily codified into the decadent choreographies of Victorian mourning practice. As death is captured by pageantry over the nineteenth century, its homely actuality is derealized, leading inexorably toward what Freud would term the modern “denial of death”—death controlled and sanitized, removed from common experience in the domestic sphere, and psychically disavowed. These cultural shifts are thought to coincide with the transferal of authority over death from ecclesiastical to civil powers, driven by what Foucault called the “clinical gaze,” in which the body is reconceptualized as legible matter. Death loses its metaphysical drama and becomes a medical problem. In the wake of these narratives, writers as distinct as Zygmunt Bauman and Jean Baudrillard can affirm a transition from, in Bauman’s terms, a world in which “one had no reason to be puzzled or unduly excited when death, for the umpteenth time, struck in one’s close vicinity” to a world, as Baudrillard writes, organized around the categorical “exclusion of the dead and of death” (97; 126).

Walter Benjamin gives the broad social and structural outlines of this story, focused in the nineteenth century:

In the course of the nineteenth century bourgeois society has, by means of hygienic and social, private and public institutions, realized a secondary effect which may have been its subconscious main purpose: to make it possible for people to avoid the sight of the dying. Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual and a most exemplary one; think of the medieval pictures in which the deathbed has turned into a throne toward which the people press through the wide-open doors of the death house. In the course of modern times dying has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living. There used to be no house, hardly a room, in which someone had not once died.... Today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death, dry dwellers of eternity, and when their end approaches they are stowed away in sanatoria or hospitals by their heirs. (93-94)

According to this story, death's passage from the intimacy of common life to medical quarantine and psychical repression is recouped in the form of poetic spectacle. Death vanishes from daily life and loses its eschatological drama to flourish in literature, and its literary representations become the standard against which its banally dreadful real-world occurrences are measured. Marred by misery, bodily discharge, and dementia, death in its reality begins to look like a bad copy. Poetry is the tribute paid for this denial, a virtual representation of what was formerly lived. If the denial of death relies upon poetry, poetry in turn needs death. Charles Taylor in particular has preserved M. H. Abrams's reading of romanticism as a desire for post-secular transcendence anchored in the profundity of death. In this view, romantic culture seizes upon death as the singular event that can generate and guarantee significance in a world where meaning must manifest itself within what Taylor calls the "immanent frame." Death names human finitude: it is the condition against which writing takes place and from which it derives its significance. In this epoch, poets do not simply die, they fulfill their vocation in death—a schema applied not just to Keats but also, in various forms, to the preceding deaths of Chatterton, White, Cowper, and Burns, the subsequent deaths of Shelley and Byron, and fictional deaths like Goethe's Werther.

Numerous facets of this broader narrative of disenchantment, romanticization, and denial have been challenged. Methods and conclusions have been disputed, as has the heavily leveraged concept of denial of death in the twentieth and twenty-first century.⁶ Still, there is little doubt that, as Fry suggests, something happened in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, something related to the cultural developments we've come to call "romantic," incarnate in text-life composites like "Keats." If the clinical gaze never evacuated death of its metaphysical drama, if disenchantment never truly arrived, then how should we understand the emergence of romantic death? *Romantic Ends* argues that the deathbed had long been conceived as a kind of theater, and dying as a kind of performance. Romantic death was a late variation on this longstanding motif. And yet romantic poetry, including the poetry of Keats himself, evinces a deep discomfort with the immense signifying burden this culture placed on death. This poetry often wonders whether death can mean anything in particular—or anything at all.

At Death's Limits

However distinctive the late-eighteenth-century culture of death, the sense of death as rhetorical or theatrical spectacle was not, contra Ariés and his peers, the invention of romanticism. The first two chapters of *Romantic Ends* challenge this notion that romanticism

⁶ Jonathan Dollimore rejects the premise of "denial of death," from Freud onward, arguing that death "has not been repressed so much as resignified in new, complex, and productive ways," and that death has never been "tame" in the way that Ariés and the many scholars influenced by his work have supposed. On the contrary, he writes, "we can begin to understand the vital role of death in Western culture only when we accept death as profoundly, compellingly and irreducibly traumatic" (126). Thomas Laqueur has argued that the emerging medical and legal discourses of the eighteenth century gave rise to "a new enchantment of the dead," wherein "the work of the dead in modernity was put on a new foundation through a vertiginous number of new and newly reconfigured rituals and practices" (186). "The presence of the dead," he concludes, continues to enchant "our purportedly disenchanting world" (14). See Whaley and Smalls for further challenges to Ariés's historiography, and Cannadine and Ramsay on the question of denial of death.

pioneered, for better or worse, a uniquely rhetorical treatment of death. Instead, I propose a broader genealogy of death as a rhetorical event, following a course from the *ars moriendi*, with its fixation on the “final moment,” to the Earl of Rochester’s sensational deathbed conversion in 1680, to Joseph Addison’s neoclassical conception of the good death as “the winding up of a well-written Play,” to David Hume, the “Great Infidel” who (quite self-consciously) died in the manner of a saint. The first chapter gathers these various cultural strands in order to suggest the fitful persistence of the past in the phenomenon of romantic death, as when representations of Keats’s death filtered the austere idiom of the *ars moriendi* through the luxuriant lens of sensibility. Tracking the decline of the funeral sermon and the rise of the obituary and the elegy, I follow the devotional energies of holy dying as they are adapted and reoriented into these new generic contexts. Despite shifts in the discourses of dying, the cultural investment in death was unwavering, and only intensified over the long eighteenth century. Yet not everyone could abide the cultural obsession with the manner of death, as figures from Samuel Johnson to Lord Byron proved variously skeptical of the immense interpretive burden loaded on to what was at core, as Spenser suggested in the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, an absence: “Death with most grim and griesly visage seene, / Yet is he nought but parting of the breath” (7.46).

Sectarian theater found a home on the deathbed, which became a site where theological convictions were tested and debated—signally, in the flurry of conflicting accounts that emerged out of the deathbed of Martin Luther. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the rhetorical power of the deathbed was seized by a small but influential lineage of skeptics and freethinkers who used the prodigious cultural investment in the meaning of death to demonstrate their own arguments. The confrontation with death was a longstanding justification for the necessity of

Christianity: it was widely asserted that while one could live without God, dying without him was another matter. Facing the prospect of eternity, any “unbeliever” would become a pitiful convert. However, it soon became clear that unbelievers could perform tranquil resignation just as well as the devout, hollowing out a major pillar of Christian orthodoxy. The second chapter makes a case study of Hume’s deathbed performance as a moment of crisis in the interpretation of death. His death was a collaborative performance, enacted through a series of letters and documents passed and published between his friends and allies that aimed to establish his serene, saintly, and unperturbable identity even in death—an identity all the more constant for its lack of dependence upon the supernatural fiction of grace. The fallout from this spectacle was swift and fierce. Hume’s clerical opponents impugned the carefully constructed account of his death that emerged from his circle and scorned his attempts at self-canonization. But the image of a virtuous infidel who died in tranquility persisted to haunt the cultural imaginary, even as it did little to convert the faithful to Hume’s extraordinary persuasion. Hume’s philosophical death did not validate a skeptical worldview so much as destabilize the significance of the moment of death, as Christian apologists steadily abandoned the deathbed as an ideological front.

It was in this climate—in which death was suffused with surplus cultural energy but voided of stable interpretive procedures—that romantic death arose. Romantic culture did not transform death from a homely and intimate affair into a melodramatic spectacle, but it did reorient the spectacle of death from theological dispute toward a developing sense of the “poetic” as a space for exploring and aestheticizing profound uncertainties. In a general sense, then, it is true that poetry, broadly conceived, became a vehicle for the recovery of death’s significance. In this respect, the story of death is bound up with the emergence of poetry’s distinctive

epistemological status as what Wordsworth called “the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge” (*Prose Works* 1:167). So even if romantic death, as a poetic trope and historical spectacle, was not a unique phenomenon in any strict sense, we might still see romanticism as the apotheosis of a long-thriving motif of theatrical death. The second leg of my argument, taken up over the final four chapters, is dedicated to challenging this notion—the notion that a reliance on death as a reservoir of significance pervades, and perhaps even defines, romantic writing. Instead, I draw attention to a sensibility of deep suspicion toward death, in its conventions, tropes, and meaning-making logics, scattered throughout romantic-period poetry. This textual cluster—too heterogeneous to call a tradition—is especially skeptical of the poetic vision of death as the “sad and beautiful wish” that Barry Cornwall imagined on Keats’s behalf.

It is a commonplace that an enlightenment-materialist conception of death as a return to inexistence echoes, traumatically, throughout romantic writing. In a world bound strictly to the immanent frame, to face death is to face the prospect of nothingness, and so the romantic offers a regenerated appeal to transcendence. Yet the writing focused in the second part of *Romantic Ends* often evinces a different—even diametrically opposed—anxiety about death. It is not that death leads to nothingness, but rather that death will not deliver the absolute conclusion it promises. Too much survives beyond death, whether in the material persistence of a decomposing body, the psychical, cultural, and economic persistence of a legacy, or the spectral remains of history that persist to haunt an emerging modernity. These concerns are manifested even in the most paradigmatic moments of the romance of death. For example, on this reading, Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” looks rather different than it did to his obituarists, who found it a perfect divination of Keats’s own end. In fact, the poem outlines a desire for an eradication far

more absolute than death. The ode's "viewless wings of Poesy" may suggest a uniquely imaginary discursive realm—a space accessible only through the thinking and feeling practice of verse, emblemized by the vexing adjective "viewless"—but my interest lies in the ode's construction of poetry as a movement toward replete inexistence:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
 What thou among the leaves hast never known,
 The weariness, the fever, and the fret
 Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
 Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies (21-26)

Fading, dissolving—these are the tropes of poetic death, which the speaker casts as antithetical to human aging. This contrast between the nightingale's perfect dematerialization and the banal horrors of human death qualify the speaker's various expressions of desire for death. To be "half in love with easeful Death / [...] / To cease upon the midnight with no pain" introduces a subtle gap between death and cessation (52-56). Pain functions here as not just a feeling but also a proxy for materiality. What arises is a sense that human death is simply the all-too-worldly subsumption into the material passage of time. The incorporeal dissipation the speaker projects onto the nightingale is what he desires, but it's not on offer in this world, or any other. The "Ode to a Nightingale" is less a romance of death than an illustration of death's insufficiency.

This approach to Keats's ode represents one strategy pursued in *Romantic Ends*: a rereading of the legacy of what I call either romantic death or poetic death, suggesting how the rhetorical, optative dimension of the figure of desire for death evades its own fulfillment. The first part of the argument demonstrates how romantic death refashions and synthesizes disparate traditions of deathbed performance within the shifting discursive arena of poetry. The second part proposes that while romantic death is a recognizable and potent archetype, an underexplored

strain of romantic-period writing attempts to withdraw from rhetorical reliance upon death. In the writings taken up here, the precise function for which romanticism has been credited (and blamed)—the deployment of death as a transcendental signifier that invokes the “poetic”—is in fact tested, unsettled, and disrupted. Readings of William Wordsworth, William Blake, Felicia Hemans, and Keats himself spotlight a deep suspicion of death’s capacity to create significance or ground a cultural legacy. Among the various invocations of death in romantic writing, my emphasis will reside with a series of minor variations on the trope of death that forgo both sovereign self-assertion and morbid obliteration in favor of gestures of evasion, deferral, forgetting, and withdrawal. At times this withdrawal takes the form of skepticism towards death as a unified complex of material, ontological, and social processes. At other moments, death appears incomplete and unsatisfying in the face of a desire for a more absolute form of inexistence.

Wordsworth is, if nothing else, a poet of mourning—a student of the psychological and affective consequences of loss. The third chapter argues that he is also preoccupied with ontological dynamics of death: that his poetry seeks to understand not only what death means *for us*, but what it is *in itself*. Death proves elusive in early poems like “We are Seven” and “Lucy Gray,” which in different ways refuse death’s finality, yet outsource that refusal to a “rustic” world at once contemporary and antique that enraptures, but cannot wholly persuade, the Cambridge poet.

These reflections upon Wordsworth’s lyrical ballads open an alternate route into what Frances Ferguson called his “epitaphic mode,” which has long been identified with a tradition of profound confrontation with mortality running from Hamlet to Heidegger. However, in its drive

to extrapolate from the phenomenon of human loss to a world of ubiquitous death, this tradition of reading finds itself immersed in a vision of death so pervasive and unceasing that death, astonishingly, appears nowhere in particular. I argue that Wordsworth's lyrics anticipate this problem and leads him toward a robust critique of death that sets his lyric voice in very close proximity to the naïve rustic voices ventriloquized in his ballads. And, if the exhaustively funereal *Excursion* affirmed Wordsworth's reputation as a poet of death, here too a problem emerges. It lies in the relationship between the deathly theorizing of the Wanderer, who insists upon a universal logic of consolation in faith alone, and the more various and more pliable ruminations of the Pastor, whose graveyard tales often escape the master narrative which they are ostensibly conjured to support. Wordsworth remains a poet of mourning, but this is a mourning that continually unsettles the very nature of the death it would grieve.

The fourth chapter identifies a vision of death as a failed promise in William Blake's *Book of Thel*. Blake's later prophetic books develop a psychological critique of modern materialisms from hard empiricism to natural religion. All of these perspectives, Blake will argue, are at core devastated by a fear of death, which they can only consistently conceive as what he will call "Eternal Death": perfect inexistence. Yet Thel identifies a different problem with death under natural religion. She finds herself in a world of seamless and aggressively happy pastoral reproduction. This happiness, she discovers, is predicated on utility: everyone and everything is valued insofar as, in the mechanistic discourse of natural theology, everyone is useful. However, Thel does not want to be used. She seeks instead to die, but discovers that the same organic economy she resists in life will consume her in the grave, decomposing and recirculating her remains. It turns out that death is not the end, but simply one node in the cycle

of material interchange. Thel can only resist absorption into her world's natural and narrative economies by fleeing the frame of the text—and Blake's corpus—never to reappear.

Yet Thel also suggests a means of radicalizing incompleteness into a melancholic but potent reconstruction of identity. She likens herself to a series of bare existences—ephemeral, illusory, and useless: “Thel is like a watry bow,” a “parting cloud,” a “reflection in a glass,” “shadows in the water” (1.8-9). Though this apparently depressive spell has given even her most sympathetic readers pause, I find in Thel's similes, which assert likeness rather than perfect correspondence, a fantastic and yet uncannily prescient sense of self, built through elective affinities with other incomplete, transient beings. The likenesses she imagines cannot be reduced to shared function or biological kinship, and instead highlight purposeless commonalities based in transience, illusion, and lack. Without teleological purpose, patched together out of ephemeral images, the self Thel images is formidably useless. It traces a limited existence that falls short of projecting an agential, substantial life, but while deathly, it will not resolve in death. This denaturing of the self counters the totalizing material-symbolic system of interlocking functions that governs her world.

The late devotional poetry of Felicia Hemans is the subject of the fifth chapter, which draws especially on 1834's *Scenes and Hymns of Life*, written in the year before her death. The 1830s were a period of denominational flux: while the radical dissenting cultures of the revolutionary era were eventually absorbed into the mainstream of respectable Victorian nonconformity, this rearrangement was still very much in process when Hemans entered the field of devotional poetry. Like Wordsworth, Hemans plays on resonances between the ancient poetic trope of inspiration and the inspired rhetorics of sectarian religious dissent, juxtaposing the

classed and classical with the vulgar and energetic. The problem was that Anglican practical piety did not make for good poetry. Inspiration and enthusiasm did, and were backed by a distinguished poetic heritage, but in religious contexts these rhetorics smacked of bathetic vulgarity and political radicalism. Genre choice proves decisive in this negotiation, as the affects and rhetorics of her first-person lyrics are more constrained than those of her dramatic poems, which shelter heterodox sentiments behind the veil of character.

Hemans's devotional lyrics declare their prophetic aspirations only to steadily attenuate their own desires. These poems arc toward inspired devotion, but fall instead into elegiac contemplation of a despiritualized age, ending in "holy quiet" rather than holy ardor, seeking relief from "self-accusing thought" rather than prophetic transcendence. As an ambivalent prophet, Hemans proves more anti-skeptical than positively Christian, exerting so much energy warding off doubt that there is precious little room left for belief. Dramatic verse, however, seems to loosen the denominational entanglements that knot her lyrics. By diffusing authorial sentiment through the multiple perspectives of dialogue, Hemans is able to risk depicting a range of religious impulses from enthusiasm to doubt and loss of faith. Crucially, the deathbed is the sole space where polite and prophetic rhetorics merge. Through the representation of the deathbed, Hemans finds her characters empowered to assert their proximity to the divine, or express their absolute despair. *Scenes and Hymns of Life* thus traces a special refuge from orthodoxy, accessed through the presence of death. In the following year, as her own death approached, Hemans's lyrics began to assert the prophetic privilege of the dying—a privilege she had previously depicted, but heretofore declined to inhabit.

Keats, the subject of the sixth and final chapter, has become the byword for Romantic death. And yet in *Endymion*, his calling card in his short life, death seems impossible: its eponymous protagonist “dies,” over and over again, and yet cannot seem to find his end. *Endymion*’s Keats is not the poet of aestheticized morbidity that haunts many of the odes and sonnets, nor the poet of the *Hyperion* poems prepossessed by a yearning for an impossible immortality. Instead, *Endymion* evacuates death of its significance, rendering death at once inconclusive and meaningless—just another change of state in a world of continuous flux. The emptiness of death becomes a point of departure for a world bereft of teleology, procreation, and patrimony.

Yet what critical potential could the escapism of Keats’s self-consciously juvenile poem possibly hold in reserve? I argue Keats’s fantasy of a world without teleology was a retort to the real-world discourse of poetic patrimony, in which the Wordsworth of the *Excursion* was patriarch and Keats, the suburban medical student, wasn’t poetic material (not, at least, until he was dead). But Keats’s reaction to the logic of poetic patrimony soon outstrips itself, as *Endymion* attacks the social teleologies of maturity and reproduction, as well as the narrative teleologies of progression and coherence. Indeed, both the attacks on and defenses of *Endymion* are animated by the same logic of poetic procreation and entailment that the poem vigorously rejects. In this respect, *Endymion* might be read as a preemptive critique of Keats’s own arch-romantic legacy, organized, as it was, around the prolific significance of death. In the sense that it was absorbed into the mythology of his death, *Endymion* failed. Yet *Endymion* nonetheless opens onto a different Keats, one we are asked to read, perhaps impossibly, without the benefit and burden of his death.

CHAPTER ONE

THE THEATER OF THE FINAL MOMENT

The story of death underwent a dramatic shift in the eighteenth century. In his influential account of the rise of sensibility, G. J. Barker-Benfield notes that death was formerly mediated by the tradition of *contemptus mundi*: this world is transient and insignificant by contrast with the boundless eternity that awaits. Loss and grief remind us to relinquish our earthly concerns, since all tends inexorably toward the grave. Barker-Benfield argues that the culture of sensibility turned this eschatological worldview upside down by foregrounding the present tense experience of loss, centered in an ambivalent combination of “pain and the relief of being alive” (223). As Mary Wollstonecraft wrote,

The imagination renders even transient sensations permanent by fondly retracing them. I cannot, without a thrill of delight, recollect views I have seen, which are not to be forgotten, nor looks I have felt in every nerve, which I shall never more meet. The grave has closed over a dear friend, the friend of my youth. Still she is present with me, and I hear her soft voice warbling as I stray over the heath. (*Letters from Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* 61)

The grief Wollstonecraft gauges is “so near akin to both pleasure and pain” (61). This admixture does not detach the mourner from her earthly bonds, but instead anchors her all the more firmly in the sensations of this world. Loss gives way to its own kind of permanence—not in eternity, but in the experience of the grieving subject, who can return to this wellspring of feeling at her leisure. Whenever elegiac transport carries her into the past, her return to the present is charged with the electric pathos of nostalgia, highlighting the vividness of life through the felt possibility

of its end in the death of the other. Death is no longer a call to eternity, but rather a focalization of the psychological and affective dynamics of human sympathy.

The novelty of Wollstonecraft's reading lies in the way it explicitly theorizes the spectatorial dynamics of grief, intimating the outlines of an aesthetics of loss. Barker-Benfield identifies these logics as the unique contribution of the culture of sensibility, which find its apex and recapitulation in romanticism. In the broader historiography, this period is thought to transform death from an affair that was intimate and homely, yet suffused with the metaphysical drama of a yawning eternity. By the turn of the nineteenth century, both the earnest intimacy and the eschatology that lay behind it had supposedly disappeared, to be replaced by the spectatorial drama of bereavement and haunted by a deep discomfort with the actual process of dying in its bodily particulars.¹ And yet, the late eighteenth century's theatrical, elegiac visions of death are less distinct from their precursors than this historiography of sensibility suggests. In this chapter, I argue that death was never unworldly in the way that accounts of death like Barker-Benfield's presuppose, and never became worldly in quite the way they assert. From the *ars moriendi* onward, the meaning and value of deathbed performance was explicitly theorized in the terms of spectatorship and affective transference. In the Restoration era, the outward expression of inwardly turned grace prescribed by the *ars moriendi* joined an expanding print culture to create a textual audience for deathbed performance. The cultures of sensibility and romanticism were late-breaking innovations in the theatrical history of death.

Following some of the motifs that give shape to the encounter with death over the long eighteenth century, I measure both the changing terms of engagement with death and the

¹ Ariés describes this transformation as a shift from “the death of the self,” preoccupied with the fate of the soul, to “the death of the other,” focused on the performance of mourning.

recurrent vision of death as a kind of performance. The corpus treated here reflects a persistent need to make sense of death, and to understand how to die, to control it and give it definitive meaning. Yet these discourses often recognize that death generates a surplus of significance, and thus that appeals to death are both potent and suspect. Death was not a neutral theological or philosophical problem, since, as these writings suggest, conceptions of death have living consequence. Whether directed at a heavenly afterlife or a worldly posterity, whether invoked to guarantee transcendental meaning or to proclaim the finitude of human endeavors, death was a site where competing cultural forces staked their claims. Though these debates complicated any specific interpretation of death, they collectively intensified its cultural power. The long purview of this account reflects the extended temporality of deathbed performance, whose shifting repertoire conserves and refashions old tropes into new narratives over the long eighteenth century. Across these discourses, the aura of universality that suffuses death seems to render all the wisdom of human history present and available for counsel. In the time of eternity, antiquity is not so distant, and modernity is not so recent. And yet death's traditions are transformed when they are summoned into new cultural worlds.

The Cult of the Final Moment

In the period following Charles II's restoration to the throne, the deathbed became a site of intense public fascination. Print culture provided the material infrastructure for this development: funeral sermons, death-centric biographies, and deathbed narratives offered a new kind of vicarious spectacle centered on the performance of death as represented in text. Though the literature of the *ars moriendi* had proven enormously popular since the fifteenth century, it was in during the Restoration that, especially for important persons, the act of dying began to

enjoy its own posterity. Yet this transformation relied upon a preexisting investment in the eschatological significance of the deathbed: “pray for us now and at the hour of our death.” The terms of this investment would prove decisive for the subsequent cultural history of death in England. Where Catholicism held that the vast majority of the dead wind up in purgatory, to be sped toward heaven by way of intercessory prayer, the Reformation annihilated purgatory in favor of immediate, eternal judgment upon death. As Richard Wunderli and Gerald Broce have demonstrated, one consequence was a new interpretation of the relationship between death and judgment: the notion that salvation (or damnation) depended upon the state of one’s soul at the moment of death (260). A range of Protestantisms already interpreted confidence in one’s salvation as itself a sign of salvation. Such confidence mattered most on the deathbed, which was understood to be life’s final trial. As the *ars moriendi* taught, the process of dying was a crucible of suffering beset with temptations. Displays of despair, anger, resentment, fearfulness, impatience, pride, or doubt all portended damnation. The cost of salvation was to be paid by graceful forbearance and tranquil resignation up to the moment of death.

While Calvinism had conceived of grace as an act of God, it was also the goal of the proliferating spiritual exercises that sought to cultivate a right-thinking discipline of the soul. Grand sociological narratives from Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* to Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* have traced how this Protestant internalization of spiritual dicta generated the idea of the bounded, self-governing subject of secular society. However, the cult of the final moment challenged the general shift toward self-discipline by promising to upend a life’s spiritual trajectory at the conclusion. Whatever its total course, a life could be redeemed by a good death or destroyed by a bad one. And since it gathered all of life’s

eschatological stakes into its conclusion, the fixation on the moment of death undermined the devotional consistency and rigor at the core of so much Protestant teaching. Though there was no theological warrant for the saving power of a good death (Wunderli and Broce 261), the idea was nonetheless broadcast throughout the *ars moriendi* literature and persisted across the sectarian divisions that wracked the seventeenth century.² *Ars moriendi* authorities Jeremy Taylor and William Perkins were Anglican clerics. Oliver Heywood was an arch-Puritan who painstakingly recorded every death he chanced to hear of, and Samuel Clarke, whose *Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in this Later Age* (1683) relishes deathbed depictions above all, had been ejected from the Church of England. The deathbed's utter importance, if not its precise doctrinal import, was a rare point of consensus.³

In the early incarnations of the cult of the final moment, what was at stake was the soul of the dying. But as deathbed accounts proliferated, it became clear that deathbed performances could reverberate well beyond present company, affecting the souls of the living. This sense of publicity reached critical mass in the deathbed repentance of the notorious rake-courtier-poet John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, whose conversion and death was documented by Gilbert Burnet (1680). In the estimation of the Archbishop of Canterbury John Tillotson, Rochester's conversion was "the greatest instance any age hath afforded" of repentance (Walker, "Rochester and the Issue of Deathbed Repentance" 22). Yet despite its influence in the cultural imaginary,

² Wunderli and Broce note that the language of death literature was echoed in "innumerable" wills, suggesting the degree to which early modern England not only read but internalized the *ars moriendi* (264). The *ars moriendi* program was disseminated as a series of captioned woodcuts as early as 1450, which, alongside its prevalence in sermons, ensured a reach beyond the literate subset of the population.

³ Allan Pritchard's "The Last Days of Hobbes" describes a culture uniformly eager to "find the significance of the whole life in the manner of death" (181).

the theological value of deathbed repentance was hotly contested, since imminent death gave the convert little opportunity to perform works of atonement.⁴ Such conversions might seem opportunistic, even mercenary—conveniently delayed until the penitent was too infirm to practice his preferred vices. How, then, could so ardent a sinner as Rochester have any hope of salvation if he had no opportunity to make good on his repentance? Via Burnet, Rochester would answer: through posthumous works.

In Burnet's account, Rochester proves his contrition when he relays

some messages, which very well became a dying penitent to some of his former friends, and a charge to publish any thing concerning him, that might be a mean to reclaim others; praying God, that as his life had done much hurt, so his death might do some good. (77)

The funeral sermon delivered by Robert Parsons strikes the same note, highlighting

“[Rochester's] commands to me, to preach abroad, and to let all men know, (if they knew it not already) how severely God had disciplined him for his sins by his afflicting hand” (121).⁵

Rochester speaks to a new temporality of Christian works, in which death is the ultimate work—not simply a cessation but a kind of action, echoing long after its end and shaping the world it leaves behind. Because Rochester's example lives beyond his life, he is able to posthumously continue his work for the salvation of others. Charles Taylor describes an early modern religious sensibility in which “the locus of death, as the place where one has given everything, is the place of maximum union with God; and therefore, paradoxically, the source of most abundant life”

⁴ Jeremy Taylor's sermon “The Invalidity of a Late, or Death-bed Repentance” (1651) argues that repentance can only be achieved through the “habits” of devotion. Regret must be transmuted by works into true repentance, or it remains mere sorrow.

⁵ Parson's funeral sermon was frequently affixed to Burnet's *Life*; the pairing had reached fourteen editions by 1730, and in the latter eighteenth century, Johnson's *Life of Rochester* was attached as well. See Walker's “Rochester and the Issue of Deathbed Repentance” 22-27.

(“Immanent Counter-Enlightenment” 395). The Rochester phenomenon literalizes this sense of abundant life in death by making death the source of his greatest worldly efficacy.

The meeting of print culture and deathbed conversion had immediate consequences for the theological question of repentance. As the story of Rochester’s death spread, what was mere deathbed sorrow was retroactively transformed by Rochester’s posthumous work into true repentance. Deathbed repentance had gained its theological warrant. The textual echo of Rochester’s performance of death—his posthumous work—now enters into the balance of judgment. The weighing of works is deferred to the future, where the consequences of one’s actions will continue to reverberate long after death. Posthumous textual publicity on Rochester’s model reshaped the deathbed from a crucible of private salvation into an arena of public evangelism. The fate of the dying was bound up with the souls of the reading nation. Paradoxically, through its newfound potential as a vehicle for disseminating salvation, the deathbed became a more worldly affair. The state of one’s eternal soul was now linked to one’s afterlife on earth, through that burgeoning organ of earthly memory—print culture.⁶

Final Moments, Devout and Polite

In the standard trope of dying revelation, employed in Rochester’s case and throughout early modern depictions of death, the soul was supposed to become manifest in one’s final breath. (This figure has ancient Judaic roots, processed through a specifically Christian

⁶ This emergence of a worldly afterlife within evangelical discourse had a long posterity, and ultimately changed the constitution of heaven. Geoffrey Rowell’s *Hell and the Victorians* describes the consolidation within Victorian evangelism of “an immortality of self-realization, rather than an immortality of salvation” (15). Rowell’s comment speaks to a changing sense of the soul, defined less by its need for redemption from sin than by its self-consciously narrated becoming. But the shape of heaven itself is shifting, too: the afterlife is increasingly imagined as an extension of worldly life, focused on reunion with loved ones, continuing service and social progress, and intimacy with a familial God. See, for example, Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang’s *Heaven: A History* 228-275.

conception of the relationship between matter and spirit.) So Isaac Walton wrote that as George Herbert died he “breathed forth his divine soul, without any apparent disturbance,” while in Wordsworth’s *Excursion* we read that

Mortality’s last exercise and proof
Is undergone; the transit made that shows
The very Soul, revealed as she departs. (5.667-669, discussed in chapter three)

This motif had its pagan precedents; a maxim of Seneca’s, often cited in the eighteenth century, held that what is revealed at death is not the contents of an inner soul, but rather the truth of a life’s narrative: “What you have done in the past will be manifest only at the time when you draw your last breath” (*Epistles* 1:191). Seneca’s maxim was not simply narratological—it extended to the composition of the face, thought to resolve into its true character in death. The neoclassical interpretation of death thus had its material correlate in the death mask. Johann Kaspar Lavater, the father of physiognomy, wrote of the dead, “Their settled features are much more prominent than in the living, and the sleeping. What life makes fugitive, death arrests. What was indefinable is defined” (2:38-39).⁷ Though the neoclassical interpretation is closely related to the Christian trope of the departing soul, there is a telling distinction between these two models. In Wordsworth’s self-consciously retrospective *Excursion*, steeped in the *ars moriendi* tradition, the soul that discloses itself at death has the power to revise the passing life. So it was in Burnet’s account of Rochester’s deathbed: death revealed the true penitent inside the false rake. What Seneca’s maxim offers by contrast is not transformative revelation but narrative closure—the same logic that led the Athenian reformer Solon to declare, “Call no man happy until he is dead.” Estimations of virtue are merely provisional as long as one’s life (and works)

⁷ Lavater’s statement was cited as an inspiration by Laurence Hutton, the great nineteenth-century collector of death masks, whose collection is now held by the Princeton University Library.

remain incomplete. At death, judgment can begin in earnest.⁸ Seneca, Solon, and their eighteenth-century heirs are preoccupied with narrative consistency and uniformity. Death can *verify* life, but cannot *redeem* it. Meanwhile, the logic of deathbed conversion grants life's conclusion a revisionary force. Each perspective, however, allows the performance of death to arbitrate the truth of life.

The most important eighteenth-century proponent of the Senecan interpretation of death was Joseph Addison. Addison was a chief advocate of the pragmatic commercial class that would see its fortunes rise dramatically in Hanoverian England. His writing with Richard Steele in *The Spectator* helped rally business interests toward a tolerationist platform tuned to the emerging credit economy. We might expect a figure like Addison to view the seventeenth-century preoccupation with the deathbed, with its tendency to epitomize life by the happenstance of death, as a reactionary superstition antithetical to an enlightened modernity. Instead, Addison updated and consolidated holy dying. His stated influences were classical and stoic rather than Puritan, and his Christianity was politely Anglican rather than prophetic. But while he

⁸ Vivasvan Soni's *Mourning Happiness* uses Solon's aphorism to explore the transformation of happiness from a narrative principle to an interiorized feeling. On Soni's reading, Solon's statement is a formal injunction to attend to the contingency of life and the importance of each moment in its minute particularity, because every moment contributes to the totality of a life. Only a narrative vantage of the whole can determine happiness, understood as "not a passive emotion, but the practice of living well," and this is why one's happiness cannot be judged prior to death (15). Solon's model, which does not "search for meaning beyond the condition of finitude," is "destroyed" by what Soni calls the trial narrative, which comes to predominate in the eighteenth-century, in which happiness as an ideal is first suspended by a series of narrative crises and then reconstituted on denarrativized emotional or affective grounds (28). By defining happiness in the terms of narrative totality, Soni's Solonian reading makes death the very mechanism by which happiness becomes legible. By extension, the narrative drive to make death signify is only amplified, and the austerity of Solon's interpretive model begins to look continuous with the theatricality of Joseph Addison's, discussed below.

overhauled the cultural trappings of the deathbed, the practical result was strikingly similar to that of his generation's disavowed sectarian forebears.⁹

“The End of a Man's Life,” Addison wrote, “is often compared to the winding up of a well-written Play, where the principal Persons still act in Character, whatever the Fate is which they undergo.” The performance of death discloses the truth of a great life, and that inner truth, paradoxically, can be affirmed only by continuous performance unto the end. Thus a “good Man” must maintain “Uniformity in his Actions, and preserve the Beauty of his Character to the last”—or be exposed as a fraud (*Spectator* no. 349). Addison's lexicon (virtue, beauty, character) and his classical references place his model of dying on newly-cleared secular ground: no longer “holy dying” but simply the “good death.” This idiom was not irreligious, but sought to deemphasize its religious investments as a matter of taste, principle, and politics. This route had been unlocked, ironically, by Rochester's death, which, in its evangelical appeal, ushered the deathbed into the arena of cultural politics. Addison's innovation was to combine Seneca's basic premise that death revealed life's truth with an explicit formulation of what was only implicit in the Rochester affair: the controlling metaphor of the theatre. It is this metaphor that makes him a perfect representative of the moment of the Hanoverian succession. Fittingly, after he compared a good death to the conclusion of a well-written play, Addison composed a well-written play concluding with a good death in *Cato* (1712). However, in a stroke that would have been improbable thirty years prior, Cato's good death was a heroic suicide in defiance of tyranny—an

⁹ The case of Alexander Pope follows a similar trajectory to the Anglican Addison from a Catholic perspective. Like Addison's (and Hume's), Pope's death was a carefully orchestrated affair modeled above all on that of Socrates, and like Addison, the significance Pope attributed to the moment of death was “secular and public rather than religious, a pronouncement on the past rather than a prediction of the future” (Grundy 258, see also Brownell, “‘Like Socrates’: Pope's Art of Dying”).

extravagance licensed by the pre-Christian source material.¹⁰ In Rochester's moment, the theological value of a holy death was in dispute, but there was little doubt what such a death looked like. Now, the neoclassical vogue was altering death's stylistic parameters, with ideological consequences.

However, despite the neoclassical injection of pagan aesthetics, Addison's emphasis on earthly posterity unfolded in the name of Christianity—just as Rochester had, in the name of evangelism, unwittingly helped to secularize the deathbed. Addison's own death is a case in point. It took place in just the manner he had advocated in the pages of *The Spectator*. As Samuel Johnson tells the story, when Addison felt his end nearing he called for a young lord “of very irregular life, and perhaps of loose opinions,” and told him, “I have sent for you that you may see how a Christian can die” (165).¹¹ In his serene Christian comfort, he outdid his own adulatory vision of the pagan Cato.

Yet this Christianity was a polite, latitudinarian Anglicanism, relatively unbothered about doctrinal content. At stake was a more generalized sense of virtue: the dissolute young noble (who was in fact his stepson, the Earl of Warwick) is both beneficiary of and witness to Addison's virtue. In Edward Young's account, Addison's words are aimed beyond their

¹⁰ Half a century later, Adam Smith recorded that Cato's last soliloquy before committing suicide was recited and parodied as often as Hamlet's “To be or not to be” soliloquy (*Lectures* 115). Cato's suicidal rebellion against Caesar's tyranny was, in Smith's view, a sublime expression of “manly fortitude” (*Theory of Moral Sentiments* 58).

¹¹ In Edward Young's account, Addison's words are “See in what peace a Christian can die” (102). Young's account also suggests how the neoclassical vogue reasserted gender distinctions that had been blurred in seventeenth-century deathbed treatments, which often gave prominent place to women. For example, we are told that Addison dismissed his physicians “after a long, and manly, but vain struggle with his distemper” (101). In 1857, Henry Havelock helped himself to Addison's line on his own deathbed, enjoining his son to “see how a Christian can die” (*Final Triumph* 29).

immediate audience: “May distant ages not only hear, but feel, the reply!” (102). Young, though not present at the deathbed, becomes the vicar of Addison’s example, blazoning its pathos and virtue to the “distant ages” in a text that phenomenalizes its reading as hearing and feeling. Young insists that a glorious death like Addison’s is in fact “of no great consequence to the dying individual”; it is “granted chiefly, for the sake of the surviving world, which may profit by his pious example” (100). The question of the soul’s fate has begun to dissipate; posterity now lies at the fraught intersection of public morality and fame.

Despite its pious punch line, Addison’s art of dying was earthly in its preoccupations, and the accounts of Young and Johnson only advance the worldliness implicit in Addison’s carefully orchestrated passing.¹² *The Spectator* returns to the figure of the theatre almost compulsively, brazenly acknowledging the importance of reception—or more precisely, “Applause,” to the construction of the good death: “It is no Matter what Hour, what Day, what Month, or what Year we dye. The Applause of a good Actor is due to him at whatever Scene of the Play he makes his Exit” (*Spectator* no. 153; nos. 133, 289, 292, and 317 also treat the interpretation of death). It is a small step from this view to Young’s proto-romantic declaration, which replaces the figure of the theatre with the figure of a text: “His compositions are but a noble preface; the grand work is his death: That is a work which is read in heaven”—and, thanks to Young, on earth (104). Addison’s

¹² Not everyone was convinced by Addison’s performance. Horace Walpole supposed that “he died of brandy—nothing makes a Christian die in peace like being maudlin” (1:406), and Lucy Aiken’s 1843 *Life of Joseph Addison* found the story implausibly theatrical. Peter Smithers, Addison’s twentieth-century biographer, accepts the deathbed account relayed by Johnson and Edward Young on the basis that the “whole of Addison’s life in its consistency pointed to such a studied ending” (448). The terms of Smithers’s analysis are derived from Addison’s own contribution to the *ars moriendi*, which centered on “consistency” and “uniformity” unto the last; of Thomas More, Addison wrote in admiration, “[h]is death was of a piece with his life. There was nothing in it new, forced, or affected” (*Spectator* no. 349).

emphasis fell on posthumous life in this world, carried forth into futurity by a receptive public—the kind of afterlife Johnson and Young grant Addison’s death by broadcasting it.

Addison’s resonant example signals how death would change in meaning without losing significance over the eighteenth century. This point is crucial because, viewed at a certain distance, the transformations in question have encouraged historians to posit a decline in the culture of death—a thesis which maps neatly onto the conventional view of a seventeenth century of gloomy sectarian enthusiasms set against the clubbable commercial culture of the eighteenth century. The trajectories of funeral sermons and epitaphs can be adduced to support the conventional centurial thesis. Eighteenth-century sermons became steadily more circumspect in their accounts of the minutiae of dying, deemphasizing deathbed homilies and narratives of tested faith in favor of more general tributes to the courage and self-possession of the deceased (Houlbrooke 323). Maintenance of the moral order overtakes devotion to God for its own sake. Concomitantly, the motif of conversion was increasingly used to absolve known sinners—at least, those who were members of the post-1688 elite. White Kennett’s funeral sermon exonerating the notorious Duke of Devonshire in 1707 particularly offended the devout (see for example John Dunton’s rejoinder *The Hazard of a Death-Bed-Repentance* [1708]). But even before that inflection point, the funeral sermon was developing a reputation for sycophantic apologetics. A 1703 “Hymn to the Funeral Sermon” often attributed to Daniel Defoe begins,

Thou Great Preserver of Men’s Fame,
 Arise and Vindicate thy Name,
 Some nearer diffinition give
 Between the *Darlings* and the *Sons of Shame*,
 Quickly thy sinking Pow’r repair,
 Shew us both who, and what they are,
 That build on thy *Prerogative*:
 Record the *Wonder* in each Honest Breast,

How Men of Infamy should rise,
By *Ladders* to Ascend the Skys? (1-10)

The hymn's point of departure is the funeral sermon's power to define posthumous reputation, effectively acting as a ladder to heaven in a figure that mixes earthly and eternal posterities. The sermon's power is acknowledged in the first line only to be swiftly turned against itself, as the writer challenges the sermon to vindicate its own name by recalling how to distinguish between the virtuous and the vicious. It was clear to this writer that the evangelical force of Rochester's conversion was now licensing aristocratic decadence, just as the skeptics of deathbed conversion had feared it would.

A related development was the publication of the order and ceremonies of prominent funerals, chiefly in the 1720s. In their most austere form, these would consist of an itemized catalog of the procession, "with an Exact LIST of the Names of All who are to assist at that Ceremony," as the title page of the 1722 procession orders for the funeral of John, Duke of Marlborough reads. In other words, the publication worked to venerate the prominent and publicize new trends in funeral and mourning fashion:

VIII. The Body under a Canopy, in an Open Chariot; a compleat Suit of Armour, Steel gilt, lying on the Coffin, Vizer clos'd; and at the Head Mr. *Ridley*, at the Feet Mr. *Mitchell*; A Horse of Honour, led by Captain Reed on Foot, in Soldiers Mourning, assisted by two Grooms. (5)

Demonstrating rigorous attention to the performance and paraphernalia of mourning, these documents gesture toward a new emphasis on the spectacle of bereavement, at the expense of the final moment and its eschatological implications. 1722 also saw the republication of excerpts from Francis Sandford's 1677 *Genealogical History of the Kings of England* detailing the first post-Restoration state funeral, given for George Monk, Duke of Albemarle, who had played an

instrumental role in restoring Charles II to the throne. The 1722 republication thus offered a nostalgic historical and anthropological vantage at a moment when funerary politics were being renegotiated in accordance with a new model of polite, commerce-friendly gentleman. It follows that the interest lies in the pageantry. There's no deathbed narrative here: the Duke is seen out of this world by the third clause of its eleven-clause opening sentence. On, then, to the lavish description which is its true occasion:

Upon the Bed was placed a Coffin covered with a fine Holland Sheet of eight Breadths, and eight Ells long; and over that, a Pall of black Velvet of eight Breadths, and eight Yards long, and thereupon the Effigies of the Duke in a Buff Coat, and over that compleat Azure Armour with gilt Nails, a Cravat about his Neck; his Ducal Coronet and Cap turned up with Ermine on his Head, invested in his Ducal Robe of Crimson Velvet, about his Neck a Collar of the Order and George; under the Head a Cushion of Crimson Velvet, with Fringe and Tassels of Gold; his Sword girt about him, and a great fringed Taffata Scarff, fringed with Gold, about his Waste; upon his Left Leg a Garter of blue Velvet; the Buckles and Letters of Gold, and a gilt Truncheon in his Right Hand. (5)

After submerging the reader in its inventory, the account pivots into eleven pages of diagrams representing the marching formations of the procession. Albermarle's service to the state threatens to recede into the litany of details, which could now generate a popular interest independent of their political aims and ends. We can observe in this short-lived genre the symptoms of a transformation in the art of dying, in two senses: first, toward a ceremonial formalism untethered from doctrinal or eschatological content, and second, from dying to bereavement—a phenomenon typically associated with Victorian Britain.

While funerals were losing their evangelical force outside of the dissenting community, epitaphs were focusing on virtue and achievement, rather than the eschatological concerns of afterlife, resurrection, and reunion to come. These shifts allow Ralph Houlbrooke to conclude that "Appraisal of the [deceased] individual was increasingly concerned with the balance of the

life as a whole” (219). But while Houlbrooke’s induction helpfully draws out the worldly emphasis of the emerging eighteenth-century culture of death, this conclusion risks mistaking shifts in the function and representation of death for a diminution in its importance. By the same token, the emphasis on earthly posterity and virtue at the expense of heaven and the resurrection does not necessarily reflect a decline in religiosity. One of the architects of this shift was the devout Samuel Johnson, whose 1740 “An Essay on Epitaphs” declared, “The best Subject for EPITAPHS is private Virtue; Virtue exerted in the same Circumstances in which the Bulk of Mankind are placed, and which, therefore, may admit of many Imitators” (*Gentleman’s Magazine* 10:595). Indeed, when weighed against a seventeenth-century counterpart like Samuel Clarke’s *Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons*, Johnson’s *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* is remarkable for its relative lack of interest in its subjects’ ends, and for its refusal to moralize those ends. Instead, the deaths he records appear contingent and often grotesque in a manner that “levels the best with the unsatisfactory, extinguishes personality, and shifts the emphasis of the story away from distinctiveness onto common humanity” (Grundy 264); his admiring treatment of Addison’s death is in fact a notable exception. Skeptical of attempts to extract meaning from death, Johnson is a surprising precursor to the romantic-centered corpus of this study, which has been commonly understood to define itself in cultural and aesthetic opposition to Johnson’s influence. This suggests how, as a problem of representation, death cuts across the cultural and aesthetic boundaries that shape literary history: the question of how death signifies produces unexpected alliances and surprising divisions, registering at a deep cultural level the complex relationship between religion and the public sphere. While from the present Johnson’s demystifying approach to death may appear as an instance of the tectonic reorganizing process of

secularization, he in fact treated death as he did for religious reasons, just as Addison saw his worldly neoclassical death as distinctively Christian.

The Obituary

The deep transformation in the culture of death finds another symptom in the decline of the published funeral sermon. This was one of the primary genres by which conversion phenomena like Rochester's were disseminated in the latter seventeenth century. Just as life writing was dominated by accounts of death, so the funeral sermon was often less concerned with the life lived than the terms of its conclusion. This approach had a certain moral and theological coherence since, as exemplified in Jeremy Taylor's twin volumes *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* and *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying*, living and dying shared a program. Vigilant preparedness for death, acceptance of one's fate, anticipation of salvation, and steady tranquility in the face of witnesses and mourners—this cluster of behaviors and affects guided both life and death. These terms and norms would mutate away from this aggressively eschatological vision over the first quarter of the eighteenth century, especially among the class of commercial and gentry interests that Addison was attempting to organize. With the mutation toward a benign, meliorist religiosity (especially in the elite corners of society) came the decline of the funeral sermon—a point only emphasized by the fact that such sermons remained popular among dissenters, which surely sped their decline among the Anglican gentry.¹³ And as Houlbrooke notes, staunchly radical dissenters felt that even the funeral sermons of their fellow nonconformists were falling under the pernicious influence of a mollifying politeness (325).

¹³ The remaining Anglican funeral sermons were shifting to a more practical and moralistic idiom with reduced doctrinal emphasis. Some funeral sermons came to have little to do with death, and even less with theology, as exemplified by John Graile's sermon on the death of Rev. William Helyet, titled *Vigorous Longevity; or, A good old age, and the best way, both to Attain it; and to Improve it* (1720).

However, if the eschatological content of Jeremy Taylor's art of dying diminished over the eighteenth century, one of my central contentions is that the deep structure of holy dying persisted in apparently secularized and antithetical contexts. It has become a scholarly commonplace that, in Pat Jalland's words, "the fervour of the *ars moriendi* tradition was in decline in the age of Enlightenment, to be rekindled by the Evangelical revival [of the nineteenth century]" (19). (And, indeed, Taylor's book was in the bedrock of the nineteenth-century Evangelical imaginary as well as that of the High Church Tractarians, the conventions he codified "deeply rooted in the corporate memory of the faithful" [Wheeler 32; see also Jalland 10].) But the *ars moriendi*, holy dying, and associated concepts and practices did not simply vanish into an eighteenth-century hiatus. Their impulses were channeled into new forms, in some cases producing decisive transformation, in others facilitating deep continuity under the veil of novelty. One such connection between apparently distinct or antithetical forms can be drawn between the fall of the funeral sermon and the rise of the obituary. The early obituary could be described as a secular phenomenon in the sense that the periodical was institutionally distinct from the church in a way that the funeral sermon was not.¹⁴ However, the obituary preserved the cultural energy of the theology of the final moment in a new discursive guise. If the obituary was often divested of crucible-of-faith narratives that now smacked of sectarianism, the manner of death remained the decisive narrative feature.

¹⁴ Jose Casanova's *Public Religions in the Modern World* disaggregates the commonplace coupling of modernization and secularization into a series of distinct propositions that both analytically and in practice need not entail each other. From this perspective, the early periodical might be seen as a secularizing force in the sense that it represents the dispersion of cultural authority, but this version of the secular does not necessitate any decline in religious belief or practice.

Moreover, the rise of the obituary in no way signals a decline in religious belief or practice on the part of its readers. What it did register was a reorganization of cultural function and authority that opened new avenues for production, consumption, and monetization. Understood in these terms, we can recognize the development of a constellation of commercial practices that might be called the death industry, which would reach its apex in Victorian Britain. By transforming deaths into narratives packaged into a salable print object, both the published funeral sermon and the obituary advance the “work of mourning,” if we allow in Freud’s phrase an inflection of commodity fetishism (14:245). To begin to suggest the shape of the death industry’s give and take: where the grave plot and funeral services must be purchased on behalf of the deceased, the obituary gainfully employs the dead as news for distribution in the increasingly competitive periodical market. There is a self-sustaining circularity to these relationships.

The obituary originated in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, founded in 1731 by Edward Cave. As the first monthly digest, the *Gentleman’s* featured copious announcements of birth, marriage, promotion, death, and burial. Most of these entries went unadorned beyond name and residence. Some, like that of the Mrs. Reed who opened this study, gave a brief account of the circumstances of death, with scarce mention of the deceased’s life. It is worth noting that this approach is the inverse of the contemporary British obituary. James Fergusson, obituaries editor of *The Independent* from 1986-2007, has argued in print and practice that obituaries should be understood as “documentaries of lives, not deaths”: the reason such documentaries wait for death is that death closes life—Seneca’s logic again—thereby presenting a unified whole for biography to work upon. Under this directive, the circumstances of death are treated at decorous distance.

But such decorum would have been foreign to eighteenth-century Britain, for which death did not merely end life. It *was* life's story. Indeed, the early obituary was nothing more than an account of death. The model of obituary as biography did not emerge until John Nichols assumed the editorship of the *Gentleman's* in 1778, transforming the obituary into a descendent of John Aubrey's *Brief Lives* (1669-96) tuned to the imperatives and interests of coffeehouse culture—with a special focus on the emerging category of “news.” Deaths could partake of news when they were especially odd, especially apt, or especially ripe for allegorizing. Funeral sermons and biographies sought to edify and make holy, while periodicals cultivated news by prioritizing novelty and curiosity. Their sensationalism was rarely mitigated by religious commitments. Thus, a *Gentleman's* entry for December 26, 1736 records the death of one Craven Kinnerfley, Esq.,

late High Sheriff for *Staffordshire*, of a Shot in his Thigh from a Gun which the Keeper of his Park having laid down, was discharg'd by a Greyhound running over it. His Thigh was cut off, and his Groom's Arm, which was Shot thro' by the same Bullet, but he is recover'd. (6:55)

If not for the improbable grotesquerie of his end, it seems unlikely that Esquire Kinnerfley would have made the *Gentleman's* pages.

The sensationalized narrative of Kinnerfley's death might represent one stray filament of the unraveling *ars moriendi*, which lost its specific ideological aims but retained its affective force as it unspooled into the modish world reflected in the coffee house periodical. This is not simply a matter of trading in devotion for lurid fixation, since that exchange would assume that the two forms of investment are distinct, rather than interrelated. In fact, the lurid, the morbid, and the holy were not antithetical categories under holy dying, but rather interdependent aspects

of a culture of death formidable in its reach and persuasive power.¹⁵ As death narratives were embedded in new formats and genres for a mutating consumer base, the mandate to proselytize fell away, reapportioning affective and sentimental emphases and thereby opening new orientations toward death and new ways of dying. We can understand Kinnerfley's obituary, then, as a symptom of the process by which the print culture of death was decoupled into discrete elements. The shocking—and its polite, gentlemanly cousin, the curious—had value even where (*or because*) shorn of its salvific aim.

Philosophical Death

Print culture facilitated what Robert G. Walker has called “the era of public death” (“Public Death” 22), transforming death into a testing ground for moral philosophy, an extension of and demonstration of the care of the self, and, not least, an evangelizing technology. As dying became a kind of argument, it migrated from Rochester's evangelizing example to ascendant sensational media like novels and periodicals, and to the political stage. As debates within Christianity became debates about the necessity of Christianity, the program of holy dying was increasingly appropriated to polemical ends by skeptical enlightenment philosophers, who rechristened the practice “philosophical death.” While the philosophers often claimed the death of Socrates as their model, the self-conscious publicity of their deaths owed as much to

¹⁵ Early eighteenth-century publications often traced an arc from the sensational to the edifying, in which the latter justified the inclusion of the former. These instances often emphasize the sensational selling point while subordinating the improving material. Consider, for example, the narrative relayed in the long title of one 1710 publication printed by the notorious Edmund Curll: *The Case of John Atherton, Bishop of Waterford in Ireland; Who Was Convicted of the Sin of Uncleanness with a COW, and other Creatures; for which he was Hang'd at Dublin, December the 5th, 1640. With A full Account of his Behaviour after his Condemnation, and the Letters he sent to his Wife and two Daughter the Night before his Execution. To which is added The Sermon Preach'd at his Funeral, in St John's Church, Dublin; with some farther Account of his Life.* The moral may be clear by the end, but it's less certain how many were still reading at that point.

Rochester. Philosophical death was no less theatrical than holy death, and relied upon the same dispositions and affects, namely resignation and consolation. This continuity is clear in the painting that recapitulated a long-running philosophical obsession with the death of Socrates, Jacques Louis David's *La Mort de Socrate* (1787). David's canvas features the philosopher serenely pointing upward as he accepts the cup of hemlock, surrounded by distraught disciples. His followers give expression to the grief that he disregards: buttressed by their performances of loss, Socrates can ignore them, tranquilly awaiting his abundant recompense. In exchange, his example assures his disciples that when the time comes, they too may die like philosophers.¹⁶ Indeed, some troublesome skeptics wondered whether Christ himself had died such a good death, accusing his father of forsaking him and all that. Surely, they hinted, Socrates wore it better.

At stake was the longstanding claim that only faith—and the promise of the hereafter that lay behind it—could ease the terrors of death. Religion was essential to one's eternal fate, but it was also a pragmatic psychological necessity in this world. A common argument held that there were no true atheists, only parlor speculators who denied God in good health but would run back to him as soon as the prospect of death arose. Skeptical arguments had to be uttered with dying breaths to achieve any practical authority. The philosophers were complicit in this framing, since they too had a stake in death. Baron d'Holbach argued that state ministers had long used the afterlife as a tool to manipulate their subjects, promising compensation for injustices suffered and regulating conduct under threat of damnation. He insisted that there is nothing mysterious or sublime about death—it is an intelligible biological transformation, and as such, “if [man] were

¹⁶ Socrates was equally a model for the bereaved: upon the death of his wife, Henry Fielding asked himself, “How would Socrates have acted on this Occasion?” (Thomas, *Henry Fielding* 223). I discuss the eighteenth-century inheritance of Socrates's example at length in chapter two.

to form a true idea of it, he would cease then on to fear it” (*Nature and Her Laws* 1:207). Yet any “true idea” of death is occluded by the nexus of church and state power, a nexus sustained by the fear of death: “All human institutions, all our opinions, conspire to augment our fears and to render our ideas of death more terrible and more revolting” (1:209).¹⁷ These arguments were not enough by themselves, however. Skeptics needed to offer a practical alternative to Christian consolation to answer the existential demands of mortality. The strategy here was to decouple the bodily rhetorics of the good death from their Christian superstructure—demonstrating that serenity, consolation, and resignation did not depend upon devotion. The greatest British theorist and practitioner of the enlightened death was David Hume, who claimed, via James Boswell, that “he was no more uneasy to think he should *not be* after his life, than that he *had not been* before he began to exist” (*Life of Johnson* 1:362). This was the wager of the philosophical death: to die well without God.

Skeptics like Hume performed their own versions of holy dying with heightened discipline and vigor, as I discuss in the second chapter. Hume’s death concluded a lineage of sectarian deathbed controversy that dates back to the death of Martin Luther, and received a grotesque coda in the death of Thomas Paine (on Luther see Laqueur 187-189; on Paine see Walker, “Public Death” 21-23). Pamphlet wars over the circumstances of death followed the passing of great sectarians, freethinkers, skeptics, and atheists—and sometimes began while they were still breathing. The belief systems these figures represented were profoundly shaped by debates over their deaths (see Israel 295-301). Spinoza, for example, was transformed by his

¹⁷ A visitor to d’Holbach’s salon reported that the Baron’s atheism was in fact rooted in the experience of death: “I was told that the baron’s *System* and his passion in sustaining his views originally came from having seen his first wife die and the thought of an eternity of horrors and torments for her. This sorely moved his heart and marked a new era for him” (*Christianity Unveiled* lvi).

followers' deathbed narratives into a simulacrum of Christ, "approach[ing] death in a serene, indomitable spirit...almost as if elated to sacrifice himself for those who had scorned and persecuted him" (Israel 296). His opponents meanwhile saw only vanity, pride, and self-deception in the dying philosopher's refusal to accept God. Death had become infidel propaganda. As Hannah More argued, "the boastful accounts we sometimes hear of the firm and heroic deathbeds of popular but irreligious characters" were fabrications designed solely to eclipse eternity (2:159).

The furor surrounding Spinoza's death set the template for the very public afterlife of David Hume. Faced with his own end, Hume sought to prove that religious belief was not only unnecessary but antithetical to a tranquil death. He saw death as a means to advance his larger contention: Christianity was a hindrance (at best) to the development of a polite, commercial society. Hume's skeptical, probabilistic epistemology was revolutionary, and his naturalistic genealogy of morals was radical, but each concluded with a conservative reaffirmation of the status quo, based not in innate or divine truth but rather in habit and convention.¹⁸ Similarly,

¹⁸ Especially in his political writing, Hume often sounds positively Burkean:

It is not with forms of government, as with other artificial contrivances; where an old engine may be rejected, if we can discover another more accurate and commodious, or where trials may safely be made, even though the success be doubtful. An established government has an infinite advantage, by that very circumstance of its being established; the bulk of mankind being governed by authority, not reason, and never attributing authority to any thing that has not the recommendation of antiquity. To tamper, therefore, in this affair, or try experiments merely upon the credit of supposed argument and philosophy, can never be the part of a wise magistrate, who will bear a reverence to what carries the marks of age; and though he may attempt some improvements for the public good, yet will he adjust his innovations, as much as possible, to the ancient fabric, and preserve entire the chief pillars and supports of the constitution. ("The Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," *Essays* 512-513)

And he consistently disavowed "patriotism" (which he associated with oppositional factionalism) and "liberty":

The frenzy of liberty has taken possession of us, and is throwing everything into confusion. How happy do I esteem it, that in all my writings I have always kept a proper distance from that

Hume's death was his most forceful rhetorical performance of the virtues of a secular worldview because it replaced the specific ideational contents of the good death but maintained and perfected its formal structure. While figures like d'Holbach and Hume managed to break up the Christian monopoly on deathbed consolation, their tactics of demystification relied upon a redoubled investment in the myth-making function of death. Accordingly, death's signifying power was further amplified by philosophical attempts to renegotiate the politics of the afterlife.

An irony here is that while he perfected the good death, in his youth Hume's all-encompassing skepticism led him even to doubt death, which makes him an early ancestor in the genealogy traced in the following chapters. However, taken collectively, enlightenment skepticism worked to consolidate rather than oppose the ideology of death by transforming the deathbed into a privileged stage for political theatre. Rochester's death had inaugurated a new kind of evangelical politics of death, and Hume turned evangelical death against itself. Christian apologists responded with a pyrrhic effort to dissolve the argumentative force of public death, and by the early nineteenth century, the deathbed was no longer viewed as an arena for Christian polemic. But while Robert Walker claims that this period saw the end of public death, I argue that it simply changed forms—freed from immediate and obvious theological consequence into a more nebulous cultural realm, and ultimately, into narratological and aesthetic territory. Keats's death remains the signal example of this phenomenon. His friends anticipated the capacious poetic value of his death well before it happened; it was diligently recorded by his companion Joseph Severn as it unfolded; and it was memorialized and monumentalized by his circle after

tempting extreme, and have maintained a due regard to the magistracy and established government.... (*Letters* 2:191-192)

the fact. J. H. Reynolds offered an apt vision of the peculiarly social transcendence to which his friend would graduate in the afterlife of “fame”:

The dead have become blended with, and spiritualized in, their poetry;—and they are no longer mortal men. They have passed into fame, and we can only hear their names echoing about the air-clad world, day after day, and for ever. (*Selected Prose* 232)

While death became a stage for the ambitions of rationalists and skeptics, even those who believed they were living in a new dawn of Reason found a limit in death. William Godwin, despite his belief in human perfectibility, acknowledged that the dead “have an empire” over the mind that cannot be overcome. His proposals on the subject of death have a surprisingly Burkean inflection, including a plan for an “Atlas of those who Have Lived, for the Use of Men Hereafter to be Born” that would document the burial sites of “the illustrious Dead of all ages.” The arch-utilitarian Jeremy Bentham—who had his body dissected and preserved so that his corpse could continue to preside at University College London—admitted as his death neared that the “subject of ghosts has been among the torments of my life” (10:18). Nor, in the case of death, was there any clear opposition between Christianity and enlightened materialism. John and Charles Wesley, founders of Methodism, drew parallels between Newton’s gravity and ghosts: both were unseen and inexplicable forces that nonetheless acted in this world (Laqueur 77). The rise of worldly posterity I have described is itself a rather spectral phenomenon, birthed in the performative space where lives (and deaths) enjoy an afterlife of circulation in text.

Samuel Johnson was one of the few eighteenth-century figures to downplay the significance of deathbed performance. But while he did not foreground it in his *Lives of the Poets*, he was not personally unconcerned with death. In fact, he was famously terrified of dying, and admitted to feeling that “the whole of life is but keeping away the thoughts of [death]”

(Boswell, *Life of Johnson* 320). The enigma of death haunted him, portending “an entrance into a state not simply which [‘man’] knows not, but which perhaps he has not faculties to know,” and he equally feared the judgment it heralded, “the final sentence, and unalterable allotment” (*Works* 4:47). Still, Johnson did his best to find his terror salutary, recapitulating the language of the previous century’s *ars moriendi* heritage even as he rejected the notion that there could be any suitable or fitting death: “Nothing confers so much ability to resist the temptations that perpetually surround us, as an habitual consideration of the shortness of life” (*Works* 2:470). James Boswell was endlessly anxious that Johnson would fail to die as well as Hume the infidel, thus proving Hume’s point that piety (and the fear of judgment that lay behind it) was inimical to the good death. Boswell pestered Johnson on this score to the point of harassment—needlessly and counterproductively, since Johnson, one of the century’s great melancholics, was more than capable of sustaining his own fear and anxiety.

But Johnson was equally capable of transmuting fear and anxiety into theological argument: as far as he was concerned, fear was a surer sign of piety than complacent serenity, which could only betray an overweening confidence in the sinner’s grace. He was deeply skeptical of deathbed theater, Hume’s performance included, which Johnson viewed as obnoxious, deceitful vanity. As he lamented, “[s]carce any man dies in publick, but with apparent resolution; from the desire of praise which never quits us” (Boswell, *Letters and Journals* 3:154). Better to face God in terror than blithely turn away. But Johnson’s campaign against the good death was a lonely one, and it was read symptomatically by his contemporaries. Joseph Towers’s early biography of Johnson offers a characteristic view:

It is related by Mr. Boswell, that Dr. Johnson once said, that “he believed hardly any man died without affectation.” When he made this declaration, he seems to have been

influenced by his own habitual dread of death, which was certainly beyond what men ordinarily experience. There can be no reasonable doubt, but that men of great and noble minds have often died, even on public scaffolds, and especially in causes of the justice of which they were fully persuaded, with firmness, and even with cheerfulness, without affectation. It is dishonorable to human nature, and injurious to some of the most illustrious characters that ever existed, to suppose otherwise. (3:415-416)

From this perspective, the good death represents a uniquely human capacity to transcend the vicissitudes of biology. It expresses our capacity for will, resolve, and reason. To doubt it is to “dishonor” human nature. Despite his unparalleled influence, Johnson could not disturb the century’s regime of what Lawrence Lipking has aptly termed “competitive dying,” which only speaks to the phenomenon’s ubiquity and power (296).

Death the Leveler

I have noted that Johnson believed epitaphs should deal in “private virtue”—the sort applicable to “the Bulk of Mankind,” as opposed to the modes of virtue specific to heroic action in public life. Here Johnson was not alone, but while in principle anyone could die well, in fact the art of dying applied some rather stringent means-testing. If examples of good deaths could be drawn from all walks, there was no doubt that the Addisonian play of life concluding in the good death was written for the gentleman.¹⁹ By default, almost everyone died in obscurity, as Samuel Pepys had observed in his diary: “even to die well, the prise of it is not considerable in the world,

¹⁹ Addison’s neo-stoic approach to death was in fact more gender-restrictive than the Puritan model it sought to replace. Longstanding tradition held that the perils of childbirth necessitated preparation for death, and for the women who survived it, labor was understood as kind of trial run at dying. Women were thus thought to have a special intimacy with death before the fact. For example, the long title of William Perkins’s *Salve for a Sicke Man* (1595) specifies that the text “may serve for spirituall instruction to 1. Mariners when they goe to sea. 2. Souldiers when they goe to battell. 3. Women when they travell of child.” Moreover, insofar as they could not speak in church, the deathbed allowed women to offer declarations of faith with profound authority in a semi-public venue. These speeches were frequently recorded, as when Oliver Heywood documented the “strange extacy” in which his “modest” wife Elizabeth fervently urged continuing faith in God before her death of consumption (1:66-68).

compared to the many in the world that know not nor make anything of it” (4:338-339). This is because dying well was not simply a spiritual matter: it required an audience, with all the material resources entailed therein. The familiar iconography of the thronged bedchamber was a privilege of the gentry and the wealthier of the middle sort, since the lower orders did not have a household of servants and unoccupied relations to see them through to the end.

Moreover, as many recognized, the manner of one’s death was decided primarily by one’s social station and the nature of the affliction, rather than the innate poise or determination of the sufferer. Graceful self-possession was the exception, since, as Houlbrooke writes, “[I]ethargy, delirium, excruciating pain, and sudden death made countless thousands of people incapable of anything resembling a model deathbed performance” (218). Pat Jalland has argued that actual examples of the good death, which “demanded an unusual mixture of prolonged but painless illness, fortunate family circumstances, and virtuous life,” were extremely rare (11). Indeed, the sages of the *ars moriendi* made sure to qualify their prescriptions in order to account for the instability of terminal illness. William Perkins encouraged his readers to be willing to discount the “rauings and blasphemings,” “frenzies,” and “vnseemly motions and gestures” of the dying as “the effects of diseases” (26, 168), while Henry Montagu, Earl of Manchester cautioned that

Raving, and other strange passions, are many times rather the effect of the disease, rather than moving from the minde. For upon Deaths approaches, choler fuming to the braine will cause distempers in the most patient soule. In these cases the fairest and truest judgement to be made, is, that sins of sicknesse, occasioned by violence of disease in a patient man, are but sins of infirmity, and not to be taken as ill signes or presages. (100)

Lastly, Jeremy Taylor enjoined,

make no judgment concerning the dying person by his dying quietly or violently, with comfort or without, with great fears or cheerful confidence, with sense or without, like a

lamb or like a lion, with convulsions or semblances of great pain, or like an expiring and spent candle: for these happen to all men, without rule, without any known reason, but according as God pleases to dispense the grace or the punishment for reasons only known to Himself. (4:435-436)

But in such moments of nuance, these writers were paddling against a powerful cultural current that they themselves had helped to generate. The discursive force of holy dying easily overpowered the genre's subtler reflections on its own limits.

One antidote to the good death was the death-the-leveler trope, which had a classical pedigree via Diogenes and Lucretius (and some warrant in Socrates), as well as powerful scriptural corroborations. This figure became a site of debate—and rhetorical play—over the politics of the afterlife. Thomas Gray offered its best-known eighteenth-century formulation in his tribute to the anonymous “mute inglorious Miltons” of a country hamlet, the “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” which cautions against overvaluing worldly distinction:

The boasts of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave
Awaits alike the inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave. (33-36)

Equally present was Hamlet's pithier version: “your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service—two dishes, but to one table. That's the end” (4.3.23-25). *Hamlet's* vastly influential engagements with death, from the “undiscovered country” to Yorick's skull, tend to drive toward the shared existential burden of human mortality. But if kings and beggars meet in finitude, this invocation of shared fate softens—perhaps even licenses—the brutal disparity between the opulence of kings and the indigence of beggars. The destination may be the same, yet causes of death were thoroughly classed: beggars did not die of gout, and kings did not die of exposure. Though it seems to challenge the hubris of worldly power, the death-the-leveler trope can thus

function as a textbook form of mystification, in John Berger's sense of a "process of explaining away what might otherwise be evident" (*Ways of Seeing* 15-16). It assured readers that what looks like lordly privilege is a mere hallucination—just one of the phantasms we encounter in our brief, delusive time on earth.

These dynamics course through Anna Lætitia Barbauld's "To the Poor" (1795), which tries to unbind the afterlife from its repressive worldly functions:

But when thou feel'st the great deliverer nigh,
 And thy freed spirit mounting seeks the sky,
 Let no vain fears thy parting hour molest,
 No whispered terrors shake thy quiet breast,
 Think not their threats can work thy future woe,
 Nor deem the Lord above, like Lords below.
 Safe in the bosom of that love repose
 By whom the sun gives light, the ocean flows,
 Prepare to meet a father undismayed,
 Nor fear the God whom priests and kings have made. (13-22)

Cleaving the Lord above from Lords below, Barbauld seeks to disarm the church-and-crown appeal to divine judgment as a mechanism for social control. The poem did not see publication until 1825, the year of Barbauld's death, and its 1790s radicalism felt uncomfortably prescient amid the bank panic of 1825 and the rising social pressure that would eventually wring a reform bill out of parliament. In a typical response, Henry Colburn's *Literary Gazette* worried that "Mrs. Barbauld's fiery democracy sometimes carried her almost the length of profanation" (24:611). But Barbauld knows the limits of her prophetic voice, which can offer only an alternative promise of future peace that has no traction in the very world of all of us. And that promise can come only after she urges resigned forbearance: "Bear, bear thy wrongs, fulfil thy destined hour, / Bend thy meek neck beneath the foot of power!" (11-12). What remains is a desperate hope

displaced entirely onto the hereafter, a hope that must also bear the weight of retrospectively redeeming the present.

Perhaps the most striking interrogation of death as leveler comes in Blake's "Little Black Boy." Born into slavery, the boy receives a consolatory lesson from his mother meant to help him endure his existence: the mark of subjugation that is "black bodies" will be transcended in heaven, where race will disappear.

And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love,
And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

For when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear
The cloud will vanish we shall hear his voice. (13-18)

The boy misunderstands and universalizes her lesson, projecting a similar marking onto the white boy he serves. Both, he imagines, must transcend shade in death, in an astonishing denaturalization of whiteness:

And thus I say to little English boy.
When I from black and he from white cloud free
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy:

Ill shade him from the heat till he can bear,
To lean in joy upon our fathers knee. (22-26)

His vision of the afterlife, however, is an afterlife of service, a heavenly facsimile of the slave economy that casts doubt on the promise of Christian transcendence. Yet if heaven remains a slave state, there's a powerful current of transvaluation here, in which the white boy's need for "shade" becomes a kind of weakness that must be overcome, an obstacle to God's love. What emerges is a remarkably dense exploration of what the idea of the afterlife can and cannot offer, and to whom, in the way of transcendence.

Byron's *Don Juan* takes up this problem in rather different tone, reworking Hamlet's we-are-all-food-for-worms figure in a running skeptical engagement with the Prince of Denmark's well-ventilated musings. As Byron's narrator jests, even the "sublimest of mankind" are ultimately

Consigned
To those sad hungry jacobins the worms,
Who on the very loftiest kings have dined (6.13)

To its opponents, the French revolution was a catastrophically "unnatural" event (Burke returns again and again to this charge), but Byron turns this notion on its head, wryly intimating a Jacobinical order of nature down to the very soil. For if the order of nature is radically egalitarian, how natural is the human hierarchy of kings and beggars, and the residual legacy of divine right from which the constitutional monarchy draws its authority? But this is far from *Don Juan*'s last word on the subject; four cantos later Byron will absorb the leveling work of the worms into the prerogative of a traditional image of kingly Death:

And Death, the sovereign's sovereign, though the great
Gracchus of all mortality, who levels
With his Agrarian laws the high estate
Of him who feasts, and fights, and roars, and revels,
To one small grass-grown patch (which must await
Corruption for its crop) with the poor devils
Who never had a foot of land till now,—
Death's a reformer, all men must allow. (10.25)

Yes, death curtails high estates into burial plots, but only because death is a tyrant, demanding universal submission to its power. We are all serfs in the fiefdom of death. From the sovereign's sovereign to the Jacobinical worms, *Don Juan*'s construals of death suggest that contemplation of death is less an object of high philosophy than a parlor game of fine analogizing.

Yet Byron is not always at play in *Don Juan*. In the preface to cantos six, seven, and eight, he addresses his refusal to suppress his posthumous attacks on Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh, who was loathed by radicals for his violent repression of Ireland and role in the restoration of the European monarchies after Napoleon's defeat:

In the course of these cantos, a stanza or two will be found relative to the late Marquis of Londonderry, but written some time before his decease. Had that person's oligarchy died with him, they would have been suppressed; as it is, I am aware of nothing in the manner of his death or of his life to prevent the free expression of the opinions of all whom his whole existence was consumed in endeavouring to enslave. That he was an amiable man in *private* life, may or may not be true; but with this the public have nothing to do; and as to lamenting his death, it will be time enough when Ireland has ceased to mourn for his birth. (*Major Works* 589)

Byron distinguishes between the temporalities of public and private life: insofar as public works generate a legacy that outlives the deceased, the public person remains subject to “free expression” even after death. Whatever his private graces, Castlereagh must be measured by the aggregate of his worldly consequence. This is the long ramification of the logic engineered by Gilbert Burnet in his account of the Earl of Rochester's conversion, which extended life and works beyond death to account for the deferred temporality of print culture. Rochester's death made it possible to conceive of the cultural posterity of dying as a kind of redemptive work. Castlereagh, after all, committed suicide, and his death was fashioned in the Tory press as a sentimental sacrifice in the idiom of romantic death.²⁰ As he was honored with a state funeral, Byron railed:

²⁰ The conservative *New Times* wrote,

He laboured for thirty years in the service of the country. In this service he ruined a robust constitution, broke a lofty spirit, destroyed a first-rate understanding, and met an untimely death, without adding a shilling to his patrimonial fortune. What the country gained from him may never be calculated—what he gained from the country was lunacy, and a martyr's grave. (*Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh* 1:88)

Of the manner of his death little need be said, except that if a poor radical, such as Waddington or Watson, had cut his throat, he would have been buried in a cross-road, with the usual appurtenances of the stake and mallet. But the Minister was an elegant Lunatic—a sentimental Suicide—he merely cut the ‘carotid artery’ (blessings on their learning) and lo! the Pageant, and the Abbey! and ‘the Syllables of Dolour yelled forth’ by the Newspapers—and the harangue of the Coroner in an eulogy over the bleeding body of the deceased—(an Anthony worthy of such a Caesar)—and the nauseous and atrocious cant of a degraded Crew of Conspirators against all that is sincere and honourable. (589-590)

The machinery of poetic death, mantled in “learning,” licenses a profound revision of Castlereagh’s end. His fine manners are expressed in the medical precision of his suicide; his sacrifice wraps him the burial shroud of sentimentality and crowns him the “Werther of Politics” (590). The vogue of poetic suicide first flowered in the wake of the archetypal garret poet, Thomas Chatterton. Goethe wrote his Werther into the marginalized middle sort, and Werther’s downfall begins in earnest when he is humiliated by the aristocratic set of Fräulein von B.²¹ Yet now, Byron sensed, the idyllic cultural afterlife promised by poetic suicide was being seized as justification by the Caesarian tyranny of the counterrevolutionary state.

Within *Don Juan*’s verse, Byron remains deeply skeptical of the romance of death—a romance his own Byronic heroes had helped to spawn. But he won’t let go of the subject, returning again and again to muse on what provokes and resists musing, blowing and popping the bubble of death:

You know, or don't know, that great Bacon saith,
 ‘Fling up a straw, ’t will show the way the wind blows;’
 And such a straw, borne on by human breath,
 Is poesy, according as the mind glows;
 A paper kite which flies ’twixt life and death,
 A shadow which the onward soul behind throws:
 And mine’s a bubble, not blown up for praise,
 But just to play with, as an infant plays. (14.8)

²¹ As Georg Lukács declared, “Werther’s tragedy is the tragedy of bourgeois humanism” (45).

Suggesting a directive for a self-consciously directionless poem, this stanza fancies the play of poetry as a shuttling through a string of metaphors—a kite, a shadow, a bubble. Though it reflects the depths of the soul and navigates perilously “twixt life and death,” poetry is, in truth, an ephemeral toy. Death floats in and out of the play space of the poem, where, like everything else, it proves at once absorbing and meaningless.

CHAPTER TWO

DAVID HUME'S SECOND DEATH

In April of 1776, some five months before his death, David Hume left his home in Edinburgh for the waters of Bath. He was traveling at the behest of Adam Ferguson and Andrew Stuart, fellow Edinburgh luminaries who hoped he might recover from the digestive ailment that had withered away his famously corpulent frame. When his doctor Joseph Black objected to the journey, Hume quipped, “Have you no reason against it, but an apprehension that it may make me die sooner? – that is no reason at all” (*Early Responses to Hume* 9:278).¹ To Ferguson and Stuart, whose insistence on the trip to Bath he held “answerable for shortening his life one week a-piece,” he cited the “good authority” of Xenophon: “suppose a man is dying, nobody has a right to kill him” (*ibid.*). Hume was determined to die jesting.

This “ease,” “gaiety,” and “cheer” was not simply a reflection of the dying philosopher’s temperament (*ERH* 9:291, 300, 278). It was his last argument, an unmistakable polemic directed at the conventions governing the art of dying in the latter eighteenth century. It was rooted in a naturalistic interpretation of death as a simple biological cessation, stripped of sublimity, mystery, and transcendence. When his cousin John Home begged him to leave off the subject, Home reports, “he did so; but seemed surprised at my uneasiness, which he said was very nonsensical” (*ERH* 9:280). For the skeptic, the currents of morbid solemnity surrounding the deathbed reeked of superstition. Beyond its attempts to rethink the criteria of the good death,

¹ James Fieser’s *Early Responses to Hume* is hereafter abbreviated to *ERH*.

Hume's polemical death aimed to undermine the repertoire of belief and practice that gave dying its fundamental logic: Christianity itself.

This project depended on the theatrical power of Hume's dying performance. That is to say, it traded in one variety of credulity in order to dispel (what Hume saw as) another. The performance consisted simply in Hume continuing to be himself—refusing to allow the process of dying to influence the remainder of his life. He spent the last few months of his life entertaining, visiting, and editing his works. We know this because it is extremely well documented in the correspondence of the period. Samuel Jackson Pratt wrote that “for some weeks before his death, his situation became the universal topick of conversation and enquiry,” noting that “the most minute circumstances respecting his exit” were considered matters of public interest (*ERH* 9:310, 305). Interest in Hume's exit was not limited to Edinburgh; updates on his condition traveled quickly to London and beyond. Among his friends, such reports were not simply news. They were recorded with an eye toward posterity, in the understanding that Hume's remaining time on earth would be scrupulously analyzed and judged as evidence in the public trial of religious skepticism, as a persuasion, worldview, and way of life. Throughout the eighteenth century there was immense interest in the deaths of the famous and the notorious—wherein the approach to death was scrutinized for edification, for salacious intrigue, or, in most cases, for some inextricable combination of both. Death was the ultimate testing ground of theological and moral theory, and moreover, for all varieties of Christianity, it was the portal to eternal life. Hume and his contemporaries understood that the stakes would be significantly higher in his own case, since he was making a case for the existential viability of confronting extinction, in a death that portended no future. They planned accordingly.

Collaborative Dying

First and foremost, these concerns entailed that Hume must die as he had lived. Hume, like most of the infamous skeptics of his era, drew on the classical tradition as a kind of counter-scripture to the Bible. As such, he wholeheartedly embraced the neoclassical credo of the maintenance of character unto death—what Addison termed “uniformity”—on the assumption that one’s true character was revealed by the confrontation with death (see chapter one). In its structure and aim, this ideal was wholly at odds with the logic of deathbed conversion so influential in the latter seventeenth century; it was nonetheless adopted by mainstream Anglicans like Addison who took their religion pragmatically as a buttress to social norms. In this line of thought, unless he died avowing his positions, Hume’s rivals and opponents were free to dismiss the entire edifice of his thought. If his philosophy and his character could be sustained in death, on the other hand, then they must be taken as the unassailable truth of who and what David Hume was. The preacher William Agutter captured this sense of death as the testamental seal of a life’s ethos when he noted how skeptics “are anxious to affix the dignifying stamp of their death to the avowed principles of their lives” (7).

But it was not sufficient that Hume continue to profess “infidelity”—or what we might more accurately call skepticism, since, though he was frequently accused of atheism, he remained at philosophical odds with the genuine atheists he had met in Paris. The viability of skepticism was not simply a matter of belief or unbelief. Hume had to show that his worldview could facilitate a good death, at the same time that he subtly renegotiated the criteria of that concept. The aim was to show that the demystifying naturalism of the Scottish Enlightenment was better suited to the behavioral norms of polite gentility than even the most polite and

privileged forms of Anglicanism. What Hume's death sought, then, was to map specific dispositions and behavioral orientations onto an epistemological outlook. It worked to demonstrate—quite counterintuitively in 1776—that skepticism was more congenial than religion to the cultivation of a mannered and moral life.

In this context, “levity” was calculated to disrupt the solemnity of holy dying, which often and easily shaded into terror. As an opponent writing in *The Christian's Magazine* recognized,

If [death] were nothing more than a separation from all that we love in this world; the dissolution of our bodies; and the termination of our present mode of existence; there would be sufficient reason for approaching it with tender and solemn reflection. But when we add those anticipations of which very few, if any, can wholly divest themselves; that scene of “untried being,” which lies before us; and especially *that* eternity which the Christian revelation unfolds, death becomes an object of unutterable moment; and every sober thought of it bears upon the heart with a weight of solicitude which it is not in the power of unaided reason to remove. (1:419)

While it might be admitted that Christian revelation supplies a particular and “unutterable” gravity to death, this writer goes on to insist that the mere possibility of life after death is reason enough to dismiss the “light and ludicrous speculations” of skeptics as signs of “the insanity of wickedness” (*ibid.*). Disputing this characterization would require precise maneuvering. The skeptic had to show that death was theologically and existentially *nothing*—James Boswell reports Hume declaring that the idea of annihilation made him “not the least” uneasy, “no more than the thought that he had not been,” referencing Lucretius (*ERH* 9:287). At the same time, such a demonstration had to tacitly admit that socially, in this world, death was *everything*. While logically compatible, these two notions would be difficult to hold together in practice. Hume's performance had to recognize the argumentative import of his death at the same time that it denied its metaphysical freight. This is why levity comes to define Hume's disposition

toward death. Levity could acknowledge death and disarm it in the same breath. By strenuously making light of death, and by ensuring that he was recorded doing so, Hume could leverage the political potency of death as public spectacle while subverting the solemnity and dread that were expected to attend it.

I have highlighted the recording and reporting of Hume's death, from John Home's comprehensive description of the trip to Bath referenced above to the epistolary flurry that followed every visit to Hume's home, because I view his death as the collaborative performance of the Edinburgh literati. It was a closing statement delivered by the circle that found its center in Hume. The aim of this performance was not to categorically overturn the Christian art of dying as practiced by the polite classes, but rather to show how a naturalistic and skeptical worldview could offer a surer foundation for the performance of the good death than even the most refined forms of Christian belief. This new model of death had to recognize and emulate the way the Christian good death "structured the grieving process within a coherent framework" for both the dying and the bereaved (Jalland 12), to ensure that this skeptical alternative would fulfill the same social functions. To this end, Hume's death retained the general structure of holy dying but reapportioned its ideological contents and affective balance.

The controversy that followed Hume's polemical death transformed the ideological significance of dying: the good death was no longer the special prerogative of the faithful. Subsequently, the unified standard of the good death fragmented into holy deaths and "happy deaths"—to use the term of disapprobation Hannah More employs in *Practical Piety* (1811).²

² More is well known as a counterrevolutionary and Evangelical figure, less so as an aficionado of deathbed scenes: "I know of nothing so interesting...as the closing scenes of a champion of righteousness." She was no less interested in the deaths of infidels; Robin Furneaux writes that "she positively wallowed in the delicious agonies of the death-bed" (347).

Hume's death thus consolidated a shift in the art of dying that began in the early eighteenth century with the introduction of classical (especially Stoic) influences, which had coexisted, sometimes uneasily, with devotional conventions working in the service of evangelism. After Hume, the evangelical potential of deathbed performance was thrown into dispute. But this shift did not lead to diminished interest in death and dying—only a destabilization of death's theological ramifications.

But Hume's performance of death also clarifies the nature of his own philosophical transformation, from the sublimely obscure radical skeptic of the *Treatise of Human Nature* to the polite ease of the man of letters.³ Hume's death distills this transformation because it relied upon a consolidated sense of identity, of persistence and “constancy” over time. Hume died well insofar as he remained absolutely himself—that is, he continued to perform his sociable public character—up until the moment he was no longer able to speak. This identity was authenticated and purified by the trials of dying: it confirmed the philosopher as a true skeptic. It is a deep and telling irony that Hume came to make his unwaveringly authentic identity the crux of his closing argument, because self-identity was the precise focus of the young philosopher's most searching and scathing critique.

Socrates the Humean

Hume died on Monday, August 26th, 1776, likely of colon cancer. He departed in “a happy composure of mind,” without voicing “the smallest expression of impatience” and “free from... feelings of distress,” as Black wrote in a letter to Adam Smith. Of Hume's death,

³ Jon Mee's *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* places Hume at the center of the installment of “conversation” as an ideal and practice governing conduct, but also traces how Hume's commitment to candid rational inquiry could threaten decorum (57-67).

“nothing,” the doctor insisted, “could have made it better” (*Letters* 2:449). It was not enough for Hume—“the Great Infidel,” as frenemy Boswell christened him—to die at ease. Hume’s death had to be unsurpassably tranquil. It had to go beyond the century’s great performances of Christian consolation, to sever any necessary bond between faith and forbearance, and to reveal the terror of eternal judgment as nothing more than a relic of enthusiastic delusion. For many of Hume’s critics viewed him as a kind of parlor skeptic, more interested in provocation than edification, with no true attachment to the views he fancifully professed. This was a view he himself did little to dispel: an early nineteenth-century commentator could look back nostalgically at the “infidels” of Hume’s era who, unlike the Jacobins and Painites of the revolutionary era, had the good sense to “addres[s] themselves solely to the more polished classes of the community”—those who knew well enough to treat skepticism as a kind of intellectual game.⁴ In the world of the salon and the rarified, genteel public sphere, convictions and propositions could be traded like currency. Hume was admittedly vain and iconoclastic, even confessing to a love of “literary fame” (Mossner 615, “My Own Life” §21). Surely, some critics supposed, he did not *believe his disbelief*.

Death would test all such vain conceits. As Isaac Disraeli wrote, “When a great man leaves some memorial of his days, his deathbed sanctions the truth, and the grave consecrates the motive” (*Miscellanies* 102). These dynamics ensured that Hume’s departure from the world

⁴ This reading of Hume’s intentions was commonplace. A 1778 publication titled *A Philosophical and Religious Dialogue in the Shades* has a repentant “Hume” lament from hell,

My free and paradoxical thoughts were not intended for the ordinary tribe of mankind, but for men of ingenuity and reflection, who are capable of judging for themselves. I well knew that the vulgar were not to be regulated by the principles of pure theism or philosophy. I did not mean to abolish those pious arts and ideas, which are found so useful and salutary in managing that class of men, I was only desirous to reduce them nearer the standard of probability, reason and truth. (*ERH* 10:86)

would be carefully observed and interpreted, shaping his legacy, eternal judgment

notwithstanding. Hume's opponents were hopeful. Surely the approach of death would dispel his affectations, such that

all the subtlety of a skepticism, avowed in the vigour of gay and glowing youth; and of arguments to support them, written when the pulse was full, among the ardours of science, and for the sake of singularity, would, upon the bed of a lingering distemper, all fly off, as the prospect of dissolution became apparent, and leave their author in the agonies of terror-struck repentance, or in the horrors of overwhelming despair. (*ERH* 10:12)

The afterlife of Hume's skeptical empiricism lay in the balance of his death. It was not enough for philosophy to prove theoretically persuasive. It would have to prove itself livable, which was in the era of "competitive dying" as it was for Montaigne: to philosophize meant learning how to die.

It was in this context that the Edinburgh professor of chemistry William Cullen could derive not just relief but positive "satisfaction" in comportment of his dying friend. Reflecting a few weeks after the fact—"now that the curtain has dropped," as he put it—Cullen declared Hume "truly an example 'des grands hommes qui sont morts en plaisantant' [of great men who died in jest]" (*Letters* 2:449). The reference is to the book by André-Francois Deslandes translated as *Reflections on the Deaths of Free-Thinkers* (London, 1713), and it distills Cullen's underlying contention: Hume died in good spirits *because* he was an unbeliever, not in spite of the fact. His death was "truly agreeable, to me," Cullen explains, "who have been so often shocked with the horrors of the superstitious on such occasions" (*ibid.*). Hell was the crux of the matter. Skeptics and rationalist dissenters were wondering how a just God could damn vast sums of souls to eternal torment. Why was it, moreover, that the morally rigorous seemed to suffer most from the anxiety of judgment? Samuel Johnson's fear of damnation was legend: he averred,

“as I cannot be *sure* that I have fulfilled the conditions on which salvation is granted, I am afraid I may be one of those who shall be damned.” When his interlocutor asked what he meant by damned, he shocked his company by responding, “Sent to Hell, Sir, and punished everlastingly” (Boswell, *Life of Johnson* 2:554-555). By the mid nineteenth century, this concept of hell as eternal punishment was increasingly difficult to reconcile with emerging understandings of proportionate justice that shaped benevolent, mainstream Christianities. Hell, by contrast, seemed downright medieval, modeled on the spectacular punishments meted out by the tyrants of yore, and ill-suited to a polite, reforming society.⁵

But in 1776, if Johnson’s outlook seemed grim and overbearing, it was nonetheless far closer to the theological center of lettered opinion than Hume’s. Hume and his peers understood that his death had the potential to shift this center, and it is partly for this reason that his last days were focused on worldly matters, rather than what might lay beyond. As Rousseau wrote in *La Nouvelle Heloise*, “The preparation of death, is a good life; I know of no other” (4:203). If death was to be understood not as a metaphysical transformation, but rather as the decommissioning of biological machinery, it required no particular spiritual preparation beyond the maintenance of character in what Hume called “common life.” Cullen devotes special attention to this emphasis on “common life”: “It is perhaps from trifles that we can best distinguish the tranquillity and cheerfulness of the philosopher, at a time when the most part of mankind are under disquiet, anxiety, and sometimes even horror” (*ERH* 9:292-293). Hume is placed at the vanguard of an enlightened elite distinguished by tranquility and cheer. Cullen refers here to the last words of

⁵ Where hell persisted, it was conceptualized more abstractly as separation from God (Jalland, “Victorian Death and its Decline” 235-237, and see more generally Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* and Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology*).

Socrates, which the philosopher used to make good on his debt of a cock to Asclepius. This attention to common life represents a surer sign “of the tranquillity of Socrates, than his Discourse on Immortality” (*ERH* 9:293). Cullen’s preference for the suit of the cock over the state of the soul suggests an important distinction. Socrates could be a problematic reference for skeptics, since in the *Phaedo* he makes clear that the reason he does not fear death is that he is certain he will survive it in some form. In doctrinal terms, Socrates lands closer to the bishops than to Hume, especially if we consider Hume’s posthumously published essay “Of the Immortality of the Soul,” in which he denies the very sense of life beyond death Socrates had expounded. Thus what is “philosophical” in Socrates’s approach to death, according to Cullen, is not his theoretical position with respect to immortality, but rather his disposition as a dying man. He spent his last moments immersed in the discrete particulars of this world, not the next. It is here, in his tranquility, and in the maintenance of common life even at life’s end, that Socrates becomes a Humean.⁶

A “perfectly wise and virtuous man”

Cullen’s letter is dated September 17, 1776. Eight weeks later, Adam Smith brought out the definitive statement on Hume’s life and death in the form of a letter to Hume’s publisher William Strahan. Smith had proposed the letter to Hume during his last days as a supplement to

⁶ Donald Siebert has recently gone beyond Cullen and Smith to suggest that Hume’s death may actually compare favorably to that of Socrates. Siebert finds it ultimately irrelevant whether Hume truly felt the sense of serenity he performed: even if Hume was faking it, the fact that he “could create such a picture, or text, of what good death is—indeed of his own death—is itself a tribute to human dignity and worth” (*Mortality’s Muse* 67). What we find here, in this modern view of death as a test of human dignity, is a refurbished Addisonian perspective where performance goes to the very nature of truth. If a character can be performed unto death, then the mask fits. What this perspective leaves out is the sense of Hume’s death as a collective project, buttressed by an extensive network of support and parceled out across a great variety of reports and responses throughout the Edinburgh literary culture.

Hume's brief autobiographical piece "My Own Life." We know that both John Home and Strahan himself reviewed drafts of the letter, and while it is written from Smith's perspective, its portrait of Hume's last days draws on anecdotes that must have been reported to him, featuring members of the Edinburgh circle including Colonel James Edmonstoune, Alexander Dundas, and the aforementioned Joseph Black. Accounts like Cullen's might be seen as preliminary drafts of Smith's letter insofar as the latter elaborates some of the earlier documents' claims and analogies, and quotes other accounts in part or in full.

Hume's "My Own Life" and Smith's "Letter to William Strahan" were first published together as a pamphlet, with the understanding that they would preface future editions of Hume's works. Smith had made the case to Hume that an account of the philosopher's death could serve as both advertisement and testament to the value of his writings: "You have in a declining state of health, under an exhausting disease, for more than two years together now looked at the approach of death with a steady cheerfulness such as very few men have been able to maintain for a few hours, tho' otherwise in the most perfect Health" (*Correspondence* 206). The wisdom expressed in Hume's art of dying would retroactively authenticate the wisdom of his works.

Smith's letter is shadowed by the model of Christian death from which it departs, in the way that texts can generate significance through negation by departing from the horizon of expectations invoked by genre. The rhetorical aim was tacit but transparent: "The dullest observer cannot but perceive his design to compare Mr. Hume dying an infidel, with a Christian dying in the faith of Jesus" (Mason 3:369). Indeed, Smith's manuscript contains an inflammatory comparison between Hume's "real resignation to the necessary course of things" and the "Whining Christian...with pretended resignation to the will of God"—this, needless to say, went

unpublished (*Correspondence* 203). In case anyone might miss the point, Smith reiterates no less than five times that Hume died cheerfully. He shows us Hume's friends repeatedly entertaining hope of his recovery, which Hume in each case playfully but firmly extinguishes. Hume is quoted here and elsewhere insisting, "I am dying as fast as my enemies, if I have any, could wish, and as easily and cheerfully as my best friends could desire" (*ERH* 9:297). The recurrence of this *bon mot* in the archive suggests that it had become a kind of mantra, and yet Smith appears eager to temper any air of flippancy:

though Mr. Hume always talked of his approaching dissolution with great cheerfulness, he never affected to make any parade of his magnanimity. He never mentioned the subject [of his death] but when the conversation naturally led to it, and never dwelt longer upon it than the course of the conversation happened to require. (*ERH* 9:298)

If Hume was perfectly comfortable discussing his death, if he appears to enjoy it even, he was by no means preoccupied with dying, nor did he gratuitously unsettle any of his less enlightened company.

Having nuanced his image of Hume's temperament to his satisfaction, Smith proceeds to his central anecdote, which is staged as a counter-devotional scene. We find that Hume has taken Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* for his deathbed reading in place of the Bible, trading Christian sublimity for pagan satire. But if in the structure of the deathbed scene Lucian plays the role of counter-scripture, Hume of course does not "believe" his Lucian. It is not revelation; he reads the *Dialogues* as an entertaining fiction that offers the desired ambiance for his coming journey across the river Styx. The implication here is that the Bible, too, is such a fiction, read in such a context to psychologically prepare for death's approach. However, Smith intimates that while Lucian generates a sociable levity, the Bible generates antisocial affects of awe and terror. Hume imagines himself before Charon, not quite ready to board the ferry to the underworld, and yet

“I could not well imagine,” said he, “what excuse I could make to Charon in order to obtain a little delay. I have done every thing of consequence which I ever meant to do, and I could at no time expect to leave my relations and friends in a better situation than that in which I am now likely to leave them; I, therefore, have all reason to die contented.” (*ERH* 9:297-298)

The ethical responsibility of the dying is wholly oriented toward the bereaved. Preparation for death is a social and economic endeavor; with these responsibilities met (and with such ease), Hume is free to jest, and to die. He goes on to invent “several jocular excuses, which he supposed he might make to Charon” in order to delay his passage:

“Upon further consideration,” he said, “I thought I might say to him, ‘Good Charon, I have been correcting my works for a new edition. Allow me a little time, that I may see how the Public receives the alterations.’ But Charon would answer, ‘When you have seen the effect of these, you will be for making other alterations. There will be no end of such excuses; so, honest friend, please step into the boat.’” (*ERH* 9.298)

This jest is an apt emblem: Hume’s bid to continue living relies on his need to continue narrating himself. The picture of interminable revision becomes particularly acute when we consider that Hume himself saw his entire philosophical career as the distillation and re-presentation of the book he published before he was thirty, the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40). Robin Valenza notes how this episode discloses the “intersection and interchangeability” of self and story (139): we might say that Hume embeds the rewriting of his corpus within the carefully composed narrative of his death—a narrative which would in turn compete with the counter-narratives of his opponents.⁷

⁷ Valenza argues that Hume understood consciousness and literary narrative as isomorphic processes, and organized not only his autobiographical writing but also his philosophical writing according to narrative development: “Hume sought patterns for his own literary narrative in the endlessly self-revising cognitive processes of the human mind itself, and, in turn, found in written narration a model for explaining everyday mental habits” (137-138). By consolidating bodily memory into a mental narrative that organizes our sensations, we provide coherence and unity to our recollected experience. Where Valenza attributes this narratological consciousness to Hume’s sense of autobiography and philosophy, it applies nowhere more consequentially than in his approach to his own death.

Since revision will never end, it can be no grounds for delay. Hume thus tries another tack:

“‘If I live a few years longer, I may have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of some of the prevailing systems of superstition.’ But Charon would then lose all temper and decency. ‘You loitering rogue, that will not happen these many hundred years. Do you fancy I will grant you a lease for so long a term? Get into the boat this instant, you lazy loitering rogue.’”

If the epithet “superstition” was commonly reserved for Catholics and vulgar enthusiasts, Hume was notorious for his arguments dissolving polite, reasonable Christian into its superstitious others. He had closed his trenchant attack on Christian revelation in “Of Miracles” with the withering assertion that the only miracle is religious faith itself: the “Christian Religion”

even at this Day cannot be believ’d by any reasonable Person without [a miracle]. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is mov’d by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience. (*Philosophical Essays* 203)

As long as it insists upon the resurrection, the arch-miracle that “subverts” all understanding, even the most rational Christianity slides into crude superstition. Given Hume’s history, there was no mistaking what was intended by “superstition,” as George Horne, President of Magdalen College, declared in a thunderous rejoinder: “We all know, Sir, what the word SUPERSTITION denotes, in Mr. HUME’s vocabulary, and against what Religion his shafts are levelled, under that name” (*ERH* 9:390).⁸ Blithe paganism and mockery of death were galling enough. But this smugly enlightened attack on Christianity was beyond the pale, and ran afoul of even the

⁸ All pretenses are dropped in Cullen’s version of the anecdote, which gives the full phrase “Christian superstition”—though the word “Christian” was omitted from John Thomson’s transcription of the letter in his 1832 biography of Cullen (*ERH* 9:292, see also Mossner 601). Smith’s manuscript is even more offensive: Hume pleads with Charon to “have a little patience only till I have the pleasure of seeing the churches shut up, and the Clergy sent about their business” (*Correspondence* 163).

sympathetic *London Review*: “We do not indeed much approve an apparent levity here ...

[which] on so serious an occasion seems unbecoming and frivolous” (*ERH* 9:273).

If this were not enough, Smith closed his encomium with an extravagant tribute that proclaimed Hume “as approaching as nearly to the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man, as perhaps the nature of human frailty will permit” (*ERH* 9:300). This line was widely recognized as an echo of Plato’s epitaph for Socrates in the *Phaedo*—Socrates, who was, “we may fairly say, of all those whom we knew in our time, the bravest and also the wisest and the most upright man” (98, §118a). Cullen’s direct reference to Socrates has become a thinly veiled allusion, striving to canonize Hume as a secular saint. In the most generous reading, Smith has uncoupled wisdom and virtue from any necessary relationship to religion; alternatively, if these ideals were most fully realized in Hume, then Smith could be taken to suggest that irreligion enabled wisdom and virtue, or was inherently wise and virtuous. It was incendiary: James Fieser records thirty separate attacks on Smith’s letter (*ERH* 9:295). Ten years later, Smith recounted,

A single, and as I thought, a very harmless Sheet of paper which I happened to write concerning the death of our late friend, Mr. Hume, brought upon me ten times more abuse than the very violent attack I had made upon the whole commercial system of Great Britain [i.e. *The Wealth of Nations*]. (*Adam Smith as Student and Professor* 283).⁹

⁹ Whether coy or naïve, Smith was wise enough to keep his distance from Hume’s posthumous publications, the *Essays on Suicide and on the Immortality of the Soul* (1777) and the *Dialogues on Natural Religion* (1779). Hume left his nephew in charge of their publication in Smith’s stead. Their appearance nonetheless made matters harder for him. The *Essays*—a defense of the right to suicide and a refutation of the immortality of the soul—were so toxic that the editor of the 1783 edition felt obliged to include “*Remarks, Intended as an Antidote to the Poison Contained in These Performances,*” as the title page indicated. In other words, Hume turned out to be exactly who everyone thought he was. Hannah More’s *Practical Piety* (1811) used these publications to undermine Smith’s depiction of Hume, pressing the apparent incoherence of a Hobbesian materialist’s appeal to virtue, that “rich embalming of so noble a compound of ‘matter and motion’” (*ERH* 10:173).

A more temperate respondent granted Hume his manners and learning but wondered how Adam Smith could possibly “think any man ‘perfectly wise,’ who is not *wise unto salvation*” (ERH 9:383, original emphasis). Others, like Horne, were apoplectic:

Is it right in you, Sir, to hold up to our view, as “perfectly wise and virtuous,” the *character* and *conduct* of one who seems to have been possessed with an incurable antipathy to all that is called RELIGION; and who strained every nerve to explode, suppress, and extirpate the spirit of it among men, that it’s very name, if he could effect it, might no more be had in remembrance? Are we, do you imagine, to be reconciled to a character of this sort, and fall in love with it, because it’s owner was *good company*, and knew how to manage his *cards*? Low as the age is fallen, I will venture to hope, it has grace enough yet left, to resent such usage as this. (ERH 9:390)

Horne’s characterization of Hume’s attitude toward religion is hyperbolic, but his anger targets the very real displacement of grave and exalted Christian virtue by sociable politesse. The naturalistic theories of morality that emerged from the Scottish Enlightenment took social stability, a pleasure and pain calculus, and the expedition of commerce as their main criteria. Virtue needed no recourse to the timeless or transcendent; appeals to these latter were in practice more likely to upset civil norms than to uphold them, which is why Hume could view such appeals as inextricable from the dangers of vulgar superstition.

Competitive Dying

We are now in a position to identify the specific contours of Hume’s performance of death. Politeness as a social and economic value system came into ascendancy through a careful rapprochement with Anglicanism. The achievement of figures like Joseph Addison was to make this bond seem natural: to make politeness look like religion, religion look polite, and to make the dissenters who rejected the connection between the two appear deviant. Hume’s performance of death sought to finish the project of politeness by rescuing it from this rapprochement, and to sacralize its freshly secularized norms by commandeering the tropes and framing of the Christian

death ritual. Opponents understood what was at stake here, arguing that the fundamental concepts of holy dying became incoherent when expropriated out of the religious framework: “In the mouth of a Christian, ‘composure,’ ‘cheerfulness,’ ‘complacency,’ ‘resignation,’ ‘happiness,’ in death, have an exquisite meaning. But what meaning can they have in the mouth of one, the very best of whose expectations is the extinction of his being?” (Mason 380). Such arguments recognized that the prized affects and dispositions of holy dying were not universal properties, but rather emerged out of specific correspondence with the belief system they expressed and affirmed. While the devout saw Hume’s secularized performance of holy dying as a grotesque parody, in historical perspective it is remarkable how the structure of the Great Infidel’s death remained pervasively Christian.

Though Smith’s interpretation of Hume’s character was contested and his motivation impugned, the event undeniably muddied the significance of the Christian good death. To be clear, there is no evidence that Hume’s death led to greater unbelief in any direct sense; Pat Jalland has shown that the ideal of the good death persisted into the late Victorian era in normatively Christian terms.¹⁰ What Hume’s death *did* do was challenge the widespread assumption that Christian faith was essential to the good death, and more generally, it unsettled the grounds of death’s interpretation. In this respect, the sheer variability of romantic-era

¹⁰ T. H. Huxley spoke to the continuing marginalization of skepticism and agnosticism—the term Huxley coined—in 1893, lamenting,

I go into society, and except among two or three of my scientific colleagues I find myself alone on these subjects, and as hopelessly at variance with the majority of my fellow-men as they would be with their neighbours if they were set down among the Ashantees. I don’t like this state of things for myself—least of all do I see how it will work out for my children. (*Life and Letters* 1:258)

What separates Hume from this late Victorian sense of alienation is his attempt to link skepticism and sociability. Unlike the pugilistic Huxley, Hume thought that unbelief could contribute to a detached, disinterested worldview conducive to polite conversation and culture.

representations of death, especially in contrast to the carefully maintained standards of the eighteenth century, owe an indirect debt to Hume's example. Some of Hume's opponents were ready to simply dismiss the significance of the controversy, but this would entail surrendering the Christian monopoly on dying, and with it, one of the central practical rationales for belief. Despite his cordial relationship with Adam Smith, Edmund Burke found Smith's letter to Strahan mere propaganda, written "for the credit of their church, and the members of no church use more art for its credit." As for Hume's death itself, "here was a man at a great age, who had been preparing all along to die without showing fear, does it, and rout is made about it. Men in general die easily" (*Boswell in Extremes* 270). This line of argument might win out, but only at great cost. If Hume's death meant nothing, if it was that simple to die easily, then death was just another social performance, without any unique revelatory power.

Samuel Johnson was equally skeptical of the skeptic, but took a slightly different angle. Pestered by James Boswell for comment, he declared, "[Hume] lied. He had a vanity in being thought easy" (*Life* 3:153).¹¹ It was one thing to die publicly with "apparent resolution," fueled by "that desire of praise which never quits a man"—especially an admittedly vain one. But how, Johnson asked, "is the dread of death to be supported in solitude?" (*Boswell in Extremes* 155). Like Burke's, this strategy risked pyrrhic victory. By rendering solitude the true test of death,

¹¹ This approach to Hume's death remained popular well into the nineteenth century. Thomas Dick's 1833 *On the Improvement of Society* synthesized several lines of argument in its attack on Hume's death—questioning the jocular tone of the Charon anecdote, the authenticity of Smith's letter, the plausibility of Hume's views on the afterlife, and the sincerity of Hume's performance itself:

It is, indeed, altogether unnatural for a man who set so high a value upon his literary reputation, and certainly very unsuitable to the momentous occasion, to indulge in such childish pleasantries, as Hume is represented to have done, at the moment when he considered himself as just about to be launched into non-existence; and, therefore, we have some reason to suspect, that his apparent tranquillity was partly the effect of vanity and affectation. (336)

Johnson erected a firewall between death's truth and public discourse. If a death entered into publicity, then it was marred by vanity and thereby falsified. Death was only meaningful insofar as it was sealed away from representation and dissemination. (We might want to ask Johnson, is it really easier to die serenely in the face of public pressure, with one's legacy at stake, than to die serenely in private?)

Boswell's writings on the affair are perhaps most revealing of the particular threat Hume's virtuous death posed to a mainstream Christian conscience. Having missed church one Sunday, Boswell decided to pay the philosopher a visit and see how he was dying. It soon became clear that Hume "persisted in disbelieving" and appeared undaunted by his coming "annihilation." As they rallied over doctrine, Boswell found himself equally engrossed and repulsed, embarrassed by his own "good humour and levity" at so grave a moment and lured by the temptations of Hume's reasoning into a temporary crisis of faith. The encounter left him "with impressions which disturbed me for some time" (*ERH* 9:288). This account comes from Boswell's private journal, unpublished until 1931. His public treatment of the visit in the *London Magazine* was quite different:

I myself visited a celebrated infidel when he was dying, and when I tried to raise the pleasing hope of a future state, he said, "You never see it but through the medium of Tartarus, or Phlegethon, or Hell." I concluded that he must in his early years have had the idea of Religion so associated with that of misery, that he was instigated to exert himself against it as an enemy, without ever having candidly examined if it might not be a friend. A friend he would have found it. But vanity, as a fascinating mistress, seized upon his fondness, and never quitted her dominion over him. ("On Religion," March 1782, No. 54)

The currents of persuasion have reversed polarity. In Boswell's private account, his queasy doubts induce "a sort of wild, strange, hurrying recollection," a phantasmagoria of memories punctuated by visions of his "excellent pious mother" and the "noble" Dr. Johnson: "I was like a

man in sudden danger eagerly seeking his defensive arms” (*ERH* 9:287). In the public version, Boswell instead psychologizes Hume, as speculation about Hume’s childhood associations replaces Boswell’s confrontation with his own past. Hume has become “fond” instead of resolute and self-contained. And it is Hume, not Boswell, who is seduced—by the “fascinating mistress” vanity, who exercises her “dominion” over him.¹² These seduction games have a uniquely Boswellian inflection, but they also convey the peculiar illegibility of the infidel’s virtuous death.

The upshot is that by attempting to dismiss Hume’s death, Burke and Johnson were also dismissing deeply naturalized conceptions of death’s significance that, for someone like Boswell, had become wholly intuitive. Hume’s death could not be argued away, and many like Boswell could not simply ignore it. But even if the Burke-Johnson route proved persuasive, it threatened to take the devotional legacy of holy dying down with it. Christians might lose by winning. Sophisticated thinkers could still recover theological value from the process of dying, but it would require a good deal of subtlety, and subtlety was anathema to the very argumentative power of the Christian good death. The prospect of death had been a clear, substantial, and

¹² In the *Life of Samuel Johnson* Boswell turns this trope around again, puffing himself in front of Johnson and the Rev. William Adams by insisting that no quarter is due to “infidels” like Hume:

If a man firmly believes that religion is an invaluable treasure, he will consider a writer who endeavours to deprive mankind of it as a *robber*; he will look upon him as *odious*, though the infidel might think himself in the right. . . . An abandoned profligate may think that it is not wrong to debauch my wife; but shall I, therefore, treat him with politeness? No, I will kick him down stairs, or run him through the body; that is, if I really love my wife, or have a true rational notion of honour. An Infidel then shall not be treated handsomely by a Christian, merely because he endeavours to rob with ingenuity. (*ERH* 10:158)

The threat to Boswell’s personal faith is displaced onto the feminized abstraction of religion, which then becomes analogous to Boswell’s wife. The skeptical philosopher in turn becomes the seducer who would cuckold the knight of faith. Yet Boswell’s comments elsewhere record how his violent resolution seemed to weaken in Hume’s presence: “I always lived on good terms with Mr. Hume, though I have frankly told him, I was not clear that it was right in me to keep company with him. ‘But (said I) how much better are you than your books!’” (*ERH* 10:148).

practical rationale for Christian belief: choose the hope of salvation, or you're stuck with annihilation at best and damnation at worst. Now, things had fallen into a muddle.

This uncertainty in turn amplified the polemics as believers sought to recover stable ground for a distinctively Christian practice of dying. In the era of what Lipking has called "competitive dying" (296), theological rejoinders to Hume's death naturally took the form of comparison, amounting to a genre in miniature that emerged in the 1780s. Hume would be paired with a devout counterpart in order to show that, however tranquil or fearless, a skeptic's death would always prove inferior to the death of a believer. George Horne appealed to the death of the sixteenth-century theologian Richard Hooker (306); John Mitchell Mason looked to Samuel Finley; and William Agutter, in the most ambitious and refined of these arguments, sought to demonstrate, against all appearances, that Samuel Johnson had died better than David Hume.

Agutter's sermon *On the Difference Between the Deaths of the Righteous and the Wicked* (1800, based on a 1786 sermon) depends upon a profound revision of the terms of Christian death. He quickly admits, "It must be obvious to every reflecting mind, that Religion does not always triumph over the fears of death," and likewise, the infidel "may enjoy an apparent peace, or display a real indifference, at the close of life" (4). In fact, this was not at all obvious prior to Hume. The names of Diderot, Rousseau, and Voltaire had become bywords for the bad death that inevitably awaited unbelievers, no matter how confidently they broadcast their convictions while in health. (Whether each of those figures had in fact died badly is beside the point, as counter-enlightenment representations of their deaths carried the day.) Dying opened the soul to eternity, where truth would inevitably be revealed. Yet in light of Hume's death, the notion that righteousness (and righteousness alone) would lead to a peaceful end "has been weakened

because overstrained” (*ibid.*). Instead, Agutter sets out not to guarantee the blessed death of the believer, but to undermine the ostensible virtue of the skeptic’s death. The argument is narrower and more precise, the position fundamentally defensive. According to Agutter, Hume’s death was not courageous. It reflected only a “stupid indifference” mistaken for “fortitude,” in the same way that we can walk blithely along the edge of a precipice in the dark if we do not know it is there (5-6). Ignorant recklessness is not bravery, nor virtue. Examples abound of hopeful, triumphant, or ecstatic deaths among “The patrons of idolatry and superstition, of enthusiasm and heresy, of rebellion, ambition, and assassination” (7). We do not mistake such delusions for grace. Conversely, fear—even terror—is an understandable and appropriate response to the prospect of entering the abyss beyond life. Fear acknowledges the existential gravity of death, which Hume’s superficial levity had denied.

Agutter thus admits the full extent of Samuel Johnson’s anxiety and despair—his “morbid melancholy” and “horrible hypochondria,” well-documented in footnotes (17, citing Robert Anderson’s *Life of Samuel Johnson*)—but denies the implications that Hume’s advocates had drawn. According to Agutter, Johnson’s suffering was the fruit of his profound devotion, and his suffering thereby places him in the company of Christ crucified. This reasoning extends to the manner of death, which may, rather than expressing the sign of grace, appear the most onerous and terrible of trials: “As the righteous then are not distinguished by marks of earthly favour in their lives, it may be but consistent with the same comprehensive system of Divine Wisdom, that they should not be more distinguished in their deaths” (14). The process of dying is no prefiguration of the ascent to heaven nor, for that matter, the descent to hell. Reward awaits the believer only *after* death, and from this view, how one dies cannot be read as a preview of

eternal fate. Taken collectively, Agutter's arguments disarm the threat posed by Hume's death by throwing all moral and eschatological interpretation of the mode of death into doubt. "Rather than judging of others, and drawing doubtful conclusions from their latter ends," he counsels, "our only business is with ourselves" (17). We are left with a sublime, mysterious vision of Christian death, aimed at fortifying the faithful. This vision saves death's theological force, but it offers little to believers seeking hope and reassurance in the face of death, still less to those unconvinced of the virtues of suffering, and nothing at all to the skeptics Agutter is ostensibly trying to persuade.

The Impartial Spectator and the Buffered Self

Samuel Jackson Pratt may have overstated the case when he declared, "Never were the pillars of Orthodoxy so desperately shaken, as they are now, by [Hume's death]" (*ERH* 10:11). But the collaborative performance of Hume's death did tell a persuasive story about what kind of person Hume had been, with consequences for the theological and argumentative significance of death. The story of Hume's death was, at core, that he had been consistent and uniform in his beliefs and his conduct—and implicitly, that he had been thereby more himself, and more authentic, than prominent Christian contemporaries like Johnson. From Hume's "My Own Life" to Smith's "Letter to William Strahan" to Pratt's *Apology for the Life and Writings of David Hume* (1777), each representation of Hume's life and death attested to his magnanimity and consistency of character. Hume's opponents largely accepted the basic outlines of this story and focused the debate on its meaning and possible inferences; challenges to the facts were belated

and marginal.¹³ And indeed, this version of the story continues to appear in unqualified form in most contemporary treatments within and without academia.¹⁴

Though he drew on the resignation and complacency of holy dying, Hume also appealed to neoclassical virtues to position his death as the antithesis of a conversion narrative, shunning the conventions of guilt and repentance, of faith surviving the crucible of doubt, in favor of a placid “constancy.” He was, Pratt argued, a “*uniform Philosopher*” who “died in the practice of his precepts, which he laid down in the earliest periods of a speculative life.... [E]very touch corresponds, corroborates, and confirms those which precede it” (*ibid.*). Hume’s tranquil consistency was tuned to counter the common picture of the volatile unbeliever that Burke would

¹³ A rumor emerged in the early nineteenth century that Hume’s entire performance was a sham—that he was, in fact, seized by mortal terror and barely succeeded in putting on a brave face for his guests. It was first printed in Benjamin Silliman’s 1810 travel journal, and the *Quarterly Review* then picked up Silliman’s anecdote, “related upon the authority of a gentleman old enough to have known the fact, and respectable enough to be entitled to full belief” (*ERH* 9:317). Hume’s nephew Baron David Hume demanded a retraction, to which the *Quarterly* diffidently acquiesced: it had never claimed the story was true, since it was run merely as an unverified rumor. But it reemerged in the *Christian Observer* in 1831, with expanded detail. The story had a “respectable looking woman” enter a stagecoach in which a group of gentlemen were discussing deathbed consolation. The example of Hume, an “acknowledged infidel” who died peaceably, inevitably arose. Here the woman spoke up: she wished she could assent to this story of easeful death, but she had in fact been his housekeeper and attendant, and while it was true that he was “jocular and playful” with his friends, in truth he was terrified. She is reported to have described his violent trembling and “mental agitations,” his intense fear of the dark, his refusal to be left alone, and “involuntary breathings of remorse” (*ERH* 9:324). This story recurs in Robert Haldane’s *The Evidence and Authority of Divine Revelation* (1834) and in his relative Alexander Haldane’s *Memoirs of Robert Haldane* (1852). These later retellings go further: Hume is said to have “observed on one occasion to the person who attended him, that he had been in search of light all his life, but that now he was in greater darkness than ever” (*ERH* 9:326). Adam Smith, too, gets drawn in: Hume supposedly promised Smith that in the afterlife they would meet in a shady run of meadows behind George Square near Hume’s house. As a result, “no persuasion” could convince Smith to walk the meadows at night (*ERH* 9:330). Each of these accounts appeals circuitously, through several sets of mouths and ears, to one or other unnamed “gentleman” said to be present in the stagecoach. It is perhaps a heavy load for a single carriage ride to bear. My aim is not to adjudicate between Smith’s and Silliman’s accounts, but rather to understand how they disclose the cultural import of narrating Hume’s death.

¹⁴ The primary narrative given by Smith is repeated in the *Wikipedia* and the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entries, as well as in Simon Critchley’s *Book of Dead Philosophers* and Stephen Miller’s *Three Deaths and Enlightenment Thought: Hume, Johnson, Marat*.

later put to such effective counterrevolutionary use: “Of all men, the most dangerous is a warm, hot-headed, zealous Atheist” (*Collected Works* 4:50).¹⁵ This insistence on Hume’s consistency extended to portrayals of his philosophy: I have noted how in *My Own Life* Hume presents his philosophical career as an extended rewriting of his first book, the 1739 *Treatise of Human Nature*. This is true in almost every respect—excepting the case of the self. While his uniquely undeviating character served as the lynchpin of his dying argument, Hume’s *Treatise* had prosecuted a rigorous critique of identity. This earlier argument denies the very possibility of a persisting selfhood over time. For Hume to live as a polite man of letters and die a model of principled uniformity, he had to abandon this early critique and the styles and affects of its philosophizing. In other words, the elder Hume used his death to rewrite the relationship between death and the self.

The neoclassical ideal of uniformity represents an important moment in the history of what Charles Taylor has called the “bounded” or “buffered self.” This model of the self posits a boundary between what is inside and outside the self, and locates the materials of emotional life within the self. Taylor views this concept as a desideratum of modernity, contrasted with premodern “porous” models that conceive the self as vulnerable to cosmic forces or spirits—“person-like powers” that shape the core of emotional life from outside the self, and, in so doing, preempt any strong sense of boundary between inner and outer space (*Secular Age* 36). The modern bounded self is also buffered because its logics explain the vicissitudes of experience in ways that deemphasize their significance: feelings are a byproduct of the way we process (e.g.)

¹⁵ Though this caricature became especially influential during the revolutionary era, it was recognizable throughout the eighteenth century. As Ralph Heathcote suggested in 1767, “[t]he term *Fanatic* has usually been applied to the Religionist, when disordered, and not in his right mind: may it not, under the same circumstances, suit as well the Philosopher?” (*ERH* 9:158)

hormonal fluctuations, which have no spiritual or ontological meaning in themselves. Humoral psychology might seem similar to this modern perspective but actually differs in a crucial sense. Black bile does not *cause* melancholy, it *is* melancholy—the physiological avatar of a spiritual malady (36-38). By contrast, there is no ontologically necessary relationship between biochemistry and first-person experience. Contingency and accident abound. The contingency of the relationship between cause and effect demotes modern feelings down the ontological ladder, and thereby provides a psychological buffer against them: “It’s just my body chemistry.” While this contemporary line of explanation was not available to eighteenth-century neoclassical culture, we can see that the Stoic cult of self-consistency aims at the same psychological and behavioral goal of buffering between the self and its circumstance. The buffered self thus opens the possibility of “taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind” (38).

Though Taylor does not discuss it in this context, the whole design of Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) is to produce a naturalistic explanation of the buffered self that nonetheless remains sensitive to the flux of emotional experience. It sets out to explain how we experience vicarious pleasure and pain, and by what mechanisms we reproduce (or fail to reproduce) the joy or suffering of others in ourselves. Smith’s term of art here is the “spectator,” invoking a theatrical metaphor that conceives the transmission of feeling as a matter of representation and mediation. Crucially, Smith insists it is not the *feeling* but the *situation* of the other that affects us as spectators, and so we are not subjected to the other’s feelings in any direct sense:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can,

carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. (11, §1.1.1.2)¹⁶

Locked into our own sensoriums, we can enter the position of the other only virtually, through an act of imagination: “the emotions of the by-stander always correspond to what, by bringing the case home to himself, he imagines should be the sentiments of the sufferer” (13, §1.1.1.4). This explains why we can feel embarrassed for someone who evinces no embarrassment of their own, or feel pity for a madman, even though “the poor wretch... laughs and sings perhaps, and is altogether insensible to his own misery” (15, §1.1.1.11). Sympathy thus reinforces the boundaries of identity and the distance between self and other, as the spectator’s pity serves to emphasize the gap between his consciousness and that of the madman. The spectator exercises his (normatively *his*) volitional imagination to experience compassion for the other, but such compassion can only be derived from an acute awareness of the madman’s violation of behavioral norms. Smith’s theory thus admits a powerful prescriptive and normative dimension at the same time that it promotes expansive “fellow-feeling.” This dual functionality allows Smith to assert that sympathy is morally benevolent while ensuring that our capacity to identify with others does not confuse social norms or undermine social stability.

As a repertoire of sympathetic identifications develops, these instances aggregate upward into an imaginative construction of “society.” This generalized social sense in turn revolves downward into a newly detached perspective on personal conduct, as if one were simultaneously, yet distinctly, both first-person person performer and third-person spectator. As Michael McKeon explains, this imaginative projection of society *buffers*: it is “a means by which we

¹⁶ All citations of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* are to Knud Haakonssen’s Cambridge University Press edition (2002). Page number is followed by book, part, section, and paragraph number.

refine or distance ourselves from our own sense impressions” (377). Smith calls this internal sense of oneself as seen from the view of society the “impartial spectator.” This figure is impartial not because it emanates from a Platonic moral ideal theorized *a priori*, but rather because it identifies an emergent center of morality and manners out of the lived experience of social and commercial modernity.¹⁷ We cultivate a virtual representation of society within ourselves, through which we continuously evaluate our conduct. Revealingly sliding into a disciplinary metaphor, Smith writes, “I divide myself, as it were, into two persons...I the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of” (131, §3.1.6). The trial motif hardens the structural opposition between self and other, as the “impartial spectator” transforms into an “awful and respectable judge” (169, §3.3.25). On trial, Smith’s self operates “under the constancy necessity” of controlling “not only his outward conduct and behaviour, but, as much as he can, even his inward sentiments and feelings” (169-170, §3.3.25). And he is judged not according to a transcendental moral law, but to the immanent law of society itself. Our ostensibly private interiority answers to our own virtual incarnation of the public. The imperative to self-uniformity opens directly onto disciplinary society.

A “funeral oration of myself”

Once we internalize society in the form of the impartial spectator, we can modulate our own sympathetic fluctuations against the actuality of our experience. And once we learn to measure our own feelings and conduct against this virtual standard, we are no longer entirely

¹⁷ John Money writes of an increasing awareness especially among the commercial classes that, despite widespread belief in its providential ordering, civil society was “a human artifice,” predicated on “the collective imitation and communication of human example rather than on the obedient mimesis of transcendental order and divine ordinance” (“The Masonic Moment” 360).

dependent upon the sympathetic responses of others, since we have an internalized ideal other—a “man in the breast”—to judge their judgments. Virtual society comes to stand in for, and can be counterposed against, actual society.

These dynamics offer a revealing perspective on Hume’s depiction of himself in “My Own Life,” which was intended as an epigraph to his works and an epitaph to his life. It features “little more than the History of my Writings; as, indeed, almost all my life has been spent in literary pursuits and occupations” (Mossner 611, §1).¹⁸ Sublimating his self into his writing, Hume translates Smith’s model of sympathy into a theory of literary production and reception. Absorbed in learning, he is pictured as the attractor at the center of a series of external contingencies, none of which leave any lasting impression. In Hume’s telling, his “literary pursuits and occupations” are uniformly met with indifference and disapproval. And yet he remains unalterably himself, unaffected by external praise or censure, until by sheer persistence he has achieved renown. His literary career is defined by his decision to follow his conscience—his impartial spectator¹⁹—over and against the whims of the public, which eventually comes to recognize his genius. His success is thus predicated on a sublime individuality that is not iconoclastic or antisocial, but rather appeals to a higher, more refined sociability latent in polite culture. Actual society ascends to its virtual potential by learning to appreciate Hume.

Hume’s literary disappointments begin with the *Treatise*, which, he claims, “fell *dead-born from the press*, without reaching such distinction, as even to excite a murmur among the

¹⁸ Citations of “My Own Life” refer to the appendix to Ernest Campbell Mossner’s *The Life of David Hume* (1980), given as page number followed by paragraph number.

¹⁹ Hume anticipated Smith’s concept: “The intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general unalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners” (*Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* 166).

zealots” (612, §6). This is a misleading claim, as Mary and David Norton have shown that the *Treatise* received a significant amount of attention for a work of its kind. By comparison, George Turnbull’s *Principles of Moral Philosophy* (1740) went unnoticed by the periodicals that reviewed Hume’s *Treatise*. The reviews Hume did receive were, however, uniformly negative.²⁰ This is to say that “My Own Life” sees Hume carefully modulating the narrative of his disappointments to fit the story of selfhood he needs to tell. It is important that the *Treatise* be ignored rather than rejected because, as he explains, he determined its failure “had proceeded more from the manner than the matter,” refining the “remote and abstruse” centrally by abandoning the critique of identity (612, §8; *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 12). If the problem was not the content but the presentation, then the *Treatise* could be simply rewritten, and the subsequent writings are staged as nothing more: as he recounts, “I... cast the first part of [the *Treatise*] anew in the *Enquiry* concerning Human Understanding,” and soon after he refers to his “*Enquiry* concerning the Principles of Morals, which is another part of my treatise, that I cast anew” (612, §8-9).²¹ These publications are portrayed as repetitions of the same argument, newly attuned to a genteel reading audience but without compromising its interior constitution.

²⁰ The most comprehensive bibliography of responses to the *Treatise* is in Fieser’s *Early Responses to Hume* (10:318-19). Fieser records six notices with editorial comment and six incredulous reviews. The first review in *The History of the Works of the Learned* is typical: it concludes that though the anonymous author of the *Treatise* “deals mightily in *Egotisms*, he is no less notable for *Paradoxes*,” assuming throughout “the Air of a Sphinx” (3:32, 18).

²¹ The *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* accordingly opens by distinguishing between “easy and obvious” philosophy intended to cultivate the manners and “accurate and abstruse” philosophy engaged in the business of what Kant will call critique. Speaking in the personified voice of “Nature,” Hume describes the obstacles to the pursuit of the latter: “Abstruse thought and profound researches I prohibit, and will severely punish, by the pensive melancholy which they introduce, by the endless uncertainty in which they involve you, and by the cold reception which your pretended discoveries shall meet with, when communicated” (3-4). Hume’s aim is thus to translate the profound researches of the *Treatise* into an “easy style and manner” (3)

The point is that Hume has always been a fully realized self; what changes is simply the way he modulates the zone of contact between himself and the public.²²

In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith uses the figure of attunement to describe sympathetic negotiations between spectator and performer. Drawing on the example of a man who has lost his son, Smith posits that the bereaved “longs for that relief which nothing can afford him but the entire concord of the affections of the spectators with his own.” He moves the spectators to reflect his grief (note that this is already a public scene) by “flatten[ing]” and “lowering his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him” (27, §1.1.4.7). The sufferer thus sympathizes with his spectators, recognizing and anticipating the gulf between their affective positions, and modulating his performance of grief so as not to overwhelm his onlookers (28, §1.1.4.8). Emotional performance is standardized—“tuned”—through this process of reciprocal identification. Hume’s narrative of recasting the *Treatise* is a dilated and textualized version of this process. Accordingly, it emphasizes the immutable core of his thought alongside his rhetorical and generic turn to the mediating distance of polite letters, set against the cloister of arcane metaphysics.

The text’s litany of disappointments serves to spotlight Hume’s placid temperament, and in this respect it advances his preparation for (public) death. Though his revisions of the *Treatise* into the *Enquiries* are said to initially fail, the author, “being naturally of a cheerful and sanguine temper,” continues in kind. Additional disappointments, he insists, “made little or no impression

²² A *Weekly Magazine* obituary suggests how successful this strategy was—at least in certain quarters. Hume is described as the “author of the History of England, essays moral and political, &c.” It continues: “It would be altogether superfluous to give a panegyric upon an author, whose character is so well established, and whose merit as a *political* writer is universally acknowledged” (original italics, *ERH* 9:333).

on me,” and, “not being very irascible in my temper,” he reports having refrained from “all literary squabbles”—though he learns “by Dr. Warburtons railing, that the books were beginning to be esteemed in good company” (612, §9). This well-placed dart suggests some experience at squabbling, and in fact, Hume did not passively endure through the controversies his writings occasioned, but was an avid controversialist and “hardy combatant,” as the sympathetic *Analytical Review* called him in 1795 (22:469). He lived under the ongoing threat of official church censure, he had been publicly denied a philosophy chair on two occasions,²³ and he had engaged in a farcical and very public controversy with his erstwhile friend Rousseau.²⁴ Privately, he was often neither disinterested nor sanguine, decrying that the English were “relapsing into the deepest Stupidity, Christianity and ignorance” (*Letters* 1:498). However, these aspects of Hume’s life are left out of the “History of my Writings,” presumably because they would undermine the sense of sublimely unperturbable detachment that makes for the text’s core argument. Hume must remain perfectly himself, but without seeming intransigent or defensive. Where history cannot balance these imperatives, it is omitted.

²³ Hume continued to arouse appointment controversy from beyond the grave. In 1805, a candidate for the Chair of Mathematics at Edinburgh University named John Leslie came under attack for the offense of praising Hume’s theory of causality in a footnote. A pamphlet war between the clergy and Leslie’s supporters ensued, and Leslie’s supporters “won” by successfully refuting the notion that Hume’s theory of causality necessarily led to atheism. Nonetheless, it is astonishing that thirty years after his death, the mere mention of Hume in certain settings was sufficient to start a pamphlet war. On the Leslie appointment controversy, see Henry Cockburn’s *Memorials of his Time* (1856), as well as John G. Burke, “Kirk and Causality in Edinburgh, 1805,” J. B. Morrell, “The Leslie Affair: Careers, Kirk, and Politics in Edinburgh in 1805,” and Ian Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 133-135.

²⁴ Hume had escorted Rousseau to England so that he might escape sedition charges, but Rousseau in his “infinitely resourceful paranoia” soon imagined that Hume was in league with his persecutors and publicly accused him (Critchley, *Dead Philosophers* 155). Even though most of those aware of the situation saw Rousseau as deeply unstable and delusional, Hume could not resist publishing a pamphlet defending his own conduct in the matter, damaging the reputations of both figures. Hume’s feud with James Beattie also goes unmentioned: Beattie’s vitriolic attacks on Hume were so widely praised that was awarded a £200 pension by King George III for championing the cause of Christianity.

Hume's unwavering focus on his own narrative of resilience makes the causal links between the events of his life difficult to follow. In his own account, his *History of England* is initially even more obnoxious than his philosophical work, uniting "English, Scotch, and Irish, Whig and Tory, churchman and sectary, freethinker and religionist, patriot and courtier" in "one cry of reproach, disapprobation, and even detestation" (613, §11). Despite the reaction to the *History* and the lackluster response to his new philosophical writing, which comes "unnoticed and unobserved into the world," he somewhat inexplicably admits to becoming immensely successful, "not only independent, but opulent" (614, §17). It is altogether unclear how he becomes known as perhaps the preeminent historian of his age, but the deep implication seems to be that the public has slowly but steadily come to appreciate the value of what it previously ignored or despised.²⁵ The portrayal of his terminal illness introduces another careful negotiation, this time between an insistence on his abiding happiness coupled with the Stoic art of dying's emphasis on detachment. To the former end, he states that he has, "notwithstanding the great decline of my person, never suffered a moment's abatement of my spirits; insomuch, that, were I to name a period of my life, which I should most choose to pass over again, I might be tempted to point to his later period." But, despite his replete happiness, "it is difficult to be more detached from life than I am at present" (615, §20). This detachment rises into an astonishing self-epitaph in which Hume converts references to self into the past tense:

To conclude historically with my own character. I am, or rather was (for that is the style I must now use in speaking of myself, which emboldens me the more to speak my sentiments); I was, I say, a man of mild disposition, of command of temper, of an open, social, and cheerful humour, capable of attachment, but little susceptible of enmity, and

²⁵ Liz Stanley uses the causal obscurity of Hume's account to connect it to his philosophical critique of causality, presenting life itself as a discontinuous series of happenings from which we can derive *succession* but not *cause and effect*: "events simply follow earlier events, with Hume writing no 'explanation' of the how and why of these" (12).

of great moderation in all my passions. Even my love of literary fame, my ruling passion, never soured my temper, notwithstanding my frequent disappointments. (615, §21)

This conversion from present to past tense transports the narrative from the time of writing to the time of reading. Hume the historical actor, the “character,” is committed to the past, while Hume the author speaks in the present whenever the text is read. The shift from present to past, author to character, offers the removed vantage of an impartial spectator, imbuing his assessment of his own character with a sense of objectivity. It is an emblem of perfect detachment, at the same that it “emboldens me the more to speak my sentiments.” In the terms of sympathy, this gesture sees Hume identifying with his audience—his judges in the future—whom he joins to evaluate Hume the historical personage. But by affecting to become a member of his audience, he also preempts their judgments with his own.

Sympathy, Passion, Porousness

Hume’s performance of death was modeled on Adam Smith’s theory of self and sympathy, which negotiates between self-consistency and detachment on one hand, and, on the other, a scrupulous anticipation of the thoughts, feelings, and responses of the audience. Smith’s theory is in fact a refinement of Hume’s own take on the relationship between identity and sympathy, developed in the early *Treatise*. However, there is good reason why the late Hume would come to present his dying self in Smithian rather than Humean terms. For Hume’s early thinking on identity and sympathy does away with the self altogether. Not to put too fine a point on it: Hume’s early writing had *killed* the self, and, in the same volume, Hume had rehearsed his own spectacular textual dissolution—a bad death that anticipates and inverts the virtuous self-epitaph of “My Own Life.” The early argument about identity was so publicly noxious and personally distressing that he left off further philosophizing on the subject, even deflecting

criticism of the *Treatise* by noting that he had never claimed authorship of the anonymous book. This did not stop his critics from seizing on it as the definitive statement of his thought, and it loomed over his work beyond his death. I am proposing that Hume's virtuous death in 1776 was an attempt to rewrite his own logic of identity—to counteract the death of selfhood he had already performed in text forty years prior.

The relationship between sympathy and personal identity in the *Treatise* can be helpfully contrasted with Smith's work. We recall that in Smith's theory of sympathy, I do not directly experience the feelings of the other; instead, I experience what *I would feel* were I in their situation. Only after constructing an imaginative model of the situation of the other that is nonetheless centered on myself instead of the other do I experience "fellow-feeling." This is effectively fellow-feeling for myself as myself, since Smith takes it as given that I have no access to the contents of the other's interiority. And crucially, this imaginative reconstruction of the feelings of others must be willed by Smith's spectator. The very terminology presumes a sealed, bounded subjectivity.

Hume's theory by contrast eliminates much of the mediation present in Smith's model.

According to Hume,

The minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations, nor can any one be actuated by any affection, of which all others are not, in some degree, susceptible. As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature. (1:368, §3.3.1.7)²⁶

²⁶ Citations of the *Treatise of Human Nature* refer to David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton's 2007 Clarendon edition. The volume and page number are followed by book, part, section, and paragraph number.

Invoking the Aeolian harp, Hume figures “the minds of all men” as sensitive matter vibrating in correspondence. Through sympathy, the affections of others touch us from the inside, effecting a kind of corporeal exchange at a distance. It is an anti-volitional model of mind in which the affections are the agents, “readily pass[ing]” between persons. Hume is moreover profoundly skeptical of the anthropocentric “imagination” at the core of Smith’s theory—a point underscored by the grammatical reduction of the “human” to a type of the “creature.” Where Smith privileges the situation of the other over the feelings they perform, Hume’s model of sympathy allows either the situation or the performance of feeling to do the work of transmission. Like Smith, Hume assumes that we are in principle epistemologically barred from the thoughts and feelings of the other.²⁷ But even though “No passion of another discovers itself immediately to the mind” (*ibid.*), the preconscious linkage between internal feelings, outward expressions, and situations is so powerful that the epistemological problem of other minds has no practical consequence:

When I see the effects of passion in the voice and gesture of any person, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms such a lively idea of the passion, as is presently converted into the passion itself. In like manner, when I perceive the causes of any emotion, my mind is convey’d to the effects, and is actuated with a like emotion. (*ibid.*)

The bodily “external signs” of passion can lead us, by association, to the situation that produced it, or if we encounter a situation that should evoke passion, we “immediately” find the passion itself reconstructed within us. Any part is sufficient to reproduce the whole, as feelings translate

²⁷ Nancy Yousef highlights the tension in Scottish Enlightenment moral philosophy between its deep sense of epistemological uncertainty and its absolute confidence in the benevolence and efficacy of the sympathetic communication of feeling. Smith’s approach is unique in its untroubled conjunction of “the fact of compassion alongside the fact that we cannot know what others feel” (31). The rhetoric of Hume’s *Treatise* is by contrast rife with anxiety on this front.

seamlessly into situations and situations into feelings. There's no conscious judgment and no mediating imagination to be found. Where Smith's sentimental subject is like a thermostat, adjusting the temperature of emotional performance upward or downward to meet the spectator, the seamlessness of affective exchange in Hume's theory suggests an intensifying feedback loop:

Where friendship appears in very signal instances, my heart catches the same passion, and is warm'd by those warm sentiments, that display themselves before me. Such agreeable movements must give me an affection to every one that excites them. This is the case with every thing that is agreeable in any person. (1:386, §3.3.3.5)

Passions and hearts are the movers here, and affection is not given to others, but surrendered automatically.

Described thusly, the *Treatise* could be seen as a high-water mark of moral benevolence in Enlightenment thought, projecting an altruistic world where sympathetic passions are “contagious” and universal, “produc[ing] correspondent movements in all human breasts” (1:386, §3.3.3.5). But the apparent optimism of human hearts beating in concert is undermined by the way the universal synchrony of the passions threatens individual identity. Aptly, the text that makes these arguments is as tonally volatile as the sympathetic world it imagines. I noted above that Charles Taylor has described various premodern visions of the self as porous, while suggesting that Enlightenment secularisms began to theorize what would eventually become an intuitive sense of the self as buffered. In a porous view of the self, “emotions which are in the very depths of human life exist in a space which takes us beyond ourselves, which is porous to some outside power, a person-like power” (*Secular Age* 36). Taylor's examples of such person-like outside powers include the evil spirits, Holy Ghost, Aphrodite, Fortune, the devil, and so forth. This historical schema would naturally position Hume's theory of selfhood on the bounded and buffered axis of modernity, since it dispenses with the personification of unknown causes,

and even mocks those “children, poets, and the antient philosophers” who superstitiously “personify every thing” (*Treatise* 1:148, §1.4.3.11). But in fact, the Hume of the *Treatise* treats emotions themselves as “person-like powers” that constitute human interiority from a radically exterior position. One consequence, Adam Potkay notes, is that Hume’s “own prosopopoeia mirrors, however darkly, religion’s prosopopoeia, as passion replaces the God he would extirpate” (186-187). At the apex of Enlightenment reason, the buffered self involutes into radical porosity.

The Humean self is porous to the point of its own extinction in several senses. First, Hume attests that the feelings of others strike him more forcefully than the feelings that seem to originate in him:

A chearful countenance infuses a sensible complacency and serenity into my mind; as an angry or sorrowful one throws a sudden damp upon me. Hatred, resentment, esteem, love, courage, mirth and melancholy; all these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natural temper and disposition. (§2.1.11.4)

Where *My Own Life* had staked its claim on the philosopher’s intrepid indifference to the passions of others, which allowed him to persist in his work despite continual rejection, in the *Treatise* passions only become real and vivid when performed by others. Hume feels passions “from communication” because he experiences a gap between the other’s performance of passion and his own “disposition.” Because this passional difference is what makes possible the experience of passions, passions should not be understood as positive entities unto themselves. Instead, they circulate in a differential economy. If in Smith’s thought the passions of others function to attune and self-regulate our own passions, for Hume the theatrical performance of passion is the very precondition for passion itself, since it is only through performance that passion can be communicated.

The radicality of Hume's vision of sympathy among the eighteenth-century moralists is evident here, with the result that, in Jacques Khalip's terms, "the difference between external influence and inner integrity becomes murky, and notions like 'self-identity' and 'otherness' in Hume's account appear unstable and approximate" (101). Given as much, Terry Eagleton wonders, "if my identity is caught up with yours, and yours with another's, and so on in a perpetually spawning web of affiliations, how can I ever know that your approving glance is *your* glance, rather than the effect of an unreadable palimpsest of selves?" (75). And Miranda Burgess has provided an influential gloss of Hume's version of sympathy as a "contagious form of affective migrancy," "immediate, involuntary, and transpersonal" in contrast to Smith's "imagined, volitional, and individual" model (298, 300). Sympathy here is not the product of interaction between pre-existent individuals, but rather the flow of sympathetic commerce and conversation out of which individuals are produced. Given this consensus view of Humean sympathy, and given his critique of personal identity (discussed below), on what grounds can Hume continue to distinguish between self and other at all? Further, how does Hume account for the way we intuitively experience feelings as belonging to us, given, as he readily admits, that the "impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us"? (1:206-7, §2.1.11.4).

He proposes that our intuitive impression of self is produced through reflexive passions—feelings about ourselves, which produce selves as objects. First, when we admire an object or action, our admiration transfers by way of association to the object's possessor or the action's performer. Then, if we feel admiration for a possessor or performer that turns out to be our own self, we experience the reflexive passion of pride. (Pride's contrary, humility, works the same way.) Pride and humility produce the self as the indirect object of admiration or shame; this is

how passion “turns our view to ourselves, and makes us think of our own qualities and circumstances” (1:188, §2.1.5.6).²⁸

Consider the order of operations here. Pride is a derivation of admiration for others, reflected, in an exceptional case, back on ourselves. We identify others as responsible for their attributes and possessions, and only for that reason can we feel self-esteem. Hume thinks others supply us with an image of personhood that we can then attribute to ourselves, as a backformation. In Annette Baier’s words, “I must be to what is mine whatever I take you to be to what is yours, and what you take me to be to what is mine” (*Progress of Sentiments* 136). As our passions respond to objects and actions, they generate owner-operators. The movement of passion thus fixes others in place as subjects in possession of objects, and those subjects reflect back to us an intuitive impression of selfhood that we can attribute to ourselves. Once we have ourselves, then the passions we experience appear to belong to us.

The ramification is that we do not *have* passions in any rigorous sense. We become temporary lodgings for passions that we mistake for our own possessions. It would be better to say they have us. This confusion is reflected in the grammar of feeling: we say *my* anger, *my* joy, *my* sadness, but in fact the feelings in question give rise to very possibility of a possessive self. It is for this reason that Hume defines identity as “sensitive” rather than “cogitative”: without the feelings, there is no self (1:123, §1.4.1.8). In order to reverse this commonsensical logic of possessive selfhood, Hume instead treats passions as conceptual and grammatical subjects (akin to Taylor’s “person-like powers”), and, by turn, treats the self as an object. This intervention

²⁸ See Amélie O. Rorty’s “‘Pride Produces the Idea of Self’: Hume on Moral Agency,” as well as Annette Baier’s *A Progress of Sentiments* 130-134 and Pinch’s *Strange Fits of Passion* 21-24 for further discussion of the relationship between pride and the self.

occasions a profound rewriting of the grammar of the self. The nature of this rewriting will become clear in the context of the critique of personal identity.

Of Personal Identity

How did Hume come to question personal identity? Descartes had taken the self-evidence of his own existence as the irreducible foundation of knowledge, and Locke had located his self in the reflexivity of perception, “[i]t being impossible for anyone to perceive without *perceiving* that he does perceive” (*Essay* 302, §2.27.9). If our perceptions, minds, and bodies are always changing, why, Locke asks, do we experience ourselves as a constant “I”? Because the self is part of those changing perceptions, and thus we cannot help but be continually aware of it. Hume reverses Locke’s claim to argue that it is precisely because the impression of the self attends all of our experiences that we can never actually perceive it. The self appears as a subcomponent of experience: “I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception” (*Treatise* 1:164, §1.4.6.3). Because our self is always in ideas and impressions, and because our ideas and impressions vary continuously, whatever “personal identity” is must be variable and inconsistent rather than “simple and individual” (1:399, §11). And because Hume can arrive at no “notion of any thing we call substance, either simple or compound” on which to ground the “I”, he determines that perceptions must “*compose* the mind, not *belong* to it” (1:414; §28). I do not *have* perceptions, I *am* perceptions. Yet even if the idea of the self cannot be separated from the mutability of perception, the idea of the self remains with us—as a fiction. Amid the teeming variability of experience, the idea of the self spackles together a semblance of continuity: “we feign the continu’d existence of the perceptions of our

senses ... and run into the notion of a *soul*, and *self*, and *substance*, to disguise the variation” (1:166, §1.4.6.6).

Accordingly, the self is both more and less than it seems. The self is not autonomous from experience and does not transcend experience, so there is no singular thing that can be called the self. Perception itself is radically discontinuous, such that consistent identity must be projected out of continual difference in an unceasing performance of belief. The mind, Hume will write, is “kind of theatre” through which perceptions “pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations” (1:165, §1.4.6.4). The remarkable thing about experience is that we intuitively believe in the constancy of the objects we perceive, even though the perceptions themselves are in continuous flux. This feature of experience demonstrates that we do not subject our perceptions to rigorous tests of reason, arbitrating whether each object we perceive has always appeared precisely as it does at this moment. Instead, we simply know things are real, which means they persist, self-identically, through time. This knowledge arises from a certain quality attached to certain perceptions that Hume calls “vividness,” which sustains the gaps between distinct perceptions to produce an apparently stable world we can believe in. As Jonathan Lamb writes, “the truth of a proposition or a feeling will be determined not in the application of the criterion, but in the degree of vividness with which it is felt” (86). This vividness—not reason, not the *cogito*—is the foundation of knowledge. What is original is not “I think” but rather the connective tissue that weaves together distinct perceptions into continuous experience. While Hume denies the self as continuous object, he asserts a radically formative consciousness, charged with shaping coherent experience out of discrete sensations.

This is the sense in which Humean consciousness exceeds the self: consciousness is an imaginative connective apparatus. Perceptions must be linked together so that from their relative similarity they give the impression of indicating self-identical objects in an apparently continuous world. The faculty of perceptual association that creates this sense of continuity is *grammatical*. Its principles are the grammar that organizes experience into coherence. As the fundament that undergirds the possibility of a thinking judging self-consciousness, the faculty of association renders experience far more imaginary than previous philosophers had imagined. At the same time, this grammar of perception shrinks the thinking judging “I” to an after-effect, inseparable from and thus dependent upon perception for its constitution. Interiority is exteriorized into a series of perceptions and feelings—in Hume’s notorious phrasing, the self is “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (1:165, §1.4.6.4). In their absence, the self as we know it disappears: “Ourself, independent of the perception of every other object, is in reality nothing” (1:221, §2.2.2.18).

Hume’s First End

Perception is organized by a grammar of association that produces the appearance of continuity. But under scrutiny, it is clear that perceptions vary continuously. And since we have access not to things but to perceptions, “[a]ll the nice and subtile questions concerning personal identity can never possibly be decided, and are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties” (1:171, §1.4.6.21). Just as perception is organized by an experiential grammar, so linguistic grammar produces its conceptual corollaries. Words reify perceptions into things. Sameness and difference are determined by the contingency of ordinary language.

Because “we have no just standard” for deciding when a transitioning entity is officially something new, “disputes concerning the identity of connected objects are merely verbal,” subtended by “some fiction or imaginary principle of union” (1:175, §1.4.6.21). Ever-changing and yet still somehow intuitively persistent, the self is a paradigm case of this phenomenon. We experience continuous identity because the imagination feigns it, constructing the illusion of stability amid richly or chaotically variable experience. Such nuance is ill-used by language, whose conventions buttress this imaginative feigning. Nouns remain constant while their referents shift. This gap is especially precarious where referents are persons. I, you, she, we—pronouns cannot capture the continually self-differing beings they mark. Perception thus proceeds according to a grammatical logic, and identity is one of the byproducts of this grammar.

Hume prosecutes this argument at the close of the first volume of the *Treatise* in a section titled “Of personal identity” (§1.4.6). He has already undermined belief in an external world or an immortal soul. Personal identity is the last vestige of superstition he will eradicate from what he imagines will be a truly modern philosophy—a science of human nature. At this moment of apparent triumph, however, the gravity of his own argumentation seems to precipitate a crisis. In the conclusion to his volume, he suddenly declares himself “forelorn,” bemoans his “weakness,” “doubt,” “ignorance,” and “wretched condition,” finds himself “inveron’d with the deepest darkness,” considers burning his books, entertains a “resolve to perish,” and imagines himself transformed into a “strange uncouth monster” (1:172-5, §1.4.7.1-10). These threats—literary, existential, and biological—are eventually dispelled by “nature herself,” leading Hume to a chastened skepticism haunted by unresolved doubts. The conclusion’s flagrant mixture of arch melodrama and lurid gothicism could not be further from the genial and cheerful tone of the

philosophical account that precedes it. Yet its elegiac treatment of self as object rather than subject, down to its very grammar, represents a philosophical experiment on par with the “funeral oration of myself” that closes “My Own Life” (Mossner 615, §21).

At the close of his critique of personal identity, Hume surveys the course of his argument in the first-person plural: “we” stand between the critique of causality, external world, soul, and self that precedes this moment, and the opening of the second book (1:171, §1.4.6.23). The author of this final paragraph is genial and inclusive, precise yet carefree, the Hume of “easy clarity” that John Richetti describes as “a modest observer careful to affirm a world of custom and habit even as he politely demolishes philosophical expectations” (184). This Hume explains that “[w]e...in our miscellaneous way of reasoning have been led into several topics” which will be found to elucidate what has come before, and “prepare the way for our following opinions” (1:171, §1.4.6.23). We’ve simply followed Hume following the natural course of his reasoning, which finds us conveniently stopped at a resting place between two volumes and two realms of inquiry.

Except book one does not end here. On the next page, a conclusion appears seemingly from beyond the text’s planned architecture, interrupting the path of argument that Hume has set out for the reader. The resting-place paragraph that closes “Of personal identity” now dilates into a multi-page monologue. The generic transformation is striking, as the skeptical reasoner becomes an intrepid explorer, suddenly overwhelmed by the scale of his voyage:

Methinks I am like a man, who having struck on many shoals, and having narrowly escap’d shipwreck in passing a small frith, has yet the temerity to put out to sea in the same leaky weather-beaten vessel, and even carries his ambition so far as to think of compassing the globe under these disadvantageous circumstances.... (§1.4.7.1)

This language shares more with the tumultuous test-of-faith narratives of Puritan life writing

than with the lettered neoclassicism Hume will come to champion.²⁹ It is an enthusiastic idiom issued, as Hume himself will admit, from the disequilibrium of a “heated” “brain” (§1.4.7.8).

And its confessional energies only escalate:

My memory of past errors and perplexities, makes me diffident for the future. The wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties, I must employ in my enquiries, encrease my apprehensions. And the impossibility of amending or correcting these faculties, reduces me almost to despair, and makes me resolve to perish on the barren rock, on which I am at present, rather than venture myself upon that boundless ocean, which runs out into immensity. (§1.4.7.1)

Where the *Treatise* to date has followed the “way of reasoning,” this conclusion’s author is led by an “inclination” which abruptly turns the course of his thought and the genre of his text.

Drawing on the conventions and affects of religious melancholia, he’ll evaluate the practical significance of the epistemology he’s developed, namely by dramatizing the porousness he’s theorized.

When Hume “considers,” “comprehends,” “suggests,” or “observes” in his philosophical voice, his verbs indicate a convergence between the authorial persona and the person composing the text. These verbs map the narrative present tense onto an image of verbalized thought, such that the narrative can stand in for the author’s thinking. The trope of the present tense generates the bond that allowed Montaigne to declare “myself am the matter of my book.” Thought and voice are phenomenalized in writing, such that when we read that “Hume” “considers” or “observes” we project a fusion of narrator and author. Hume regularly uses his philosophical narrative to reinforce this fusion of text and self by, for example, offering an image of his scene of composition to demonstrate how the faculties of association generate a consistent world out of

²⁹ While Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* is the model for the *Treatise* as a whole, Adela Pinch marks the conclusion’s connection to spiritual autobiography, and Hume’s early critics (namely Thomas Reid and James Beattie) attacked it as grotesquely hybrid philosophical-gothic romance.

limited perceptions:

I am here seated in my chamber with my face to the fire; and all the objects, that strike my senses, are contain'd in a few yards around me. My memory, indeed, informs me of the existence of many objects; but then this information extends not beyond their past existence, nor do either my senses or memory give any testimony to the continuance of their being. When therefore I am thus seated, and revolve over these thoughts, I hear on a sudden a noise as of a door turning upon its hinges; and a little after see a porter, who advances towards me. This gives occasion to many new reflexions and reasonings. First, I never have observ'd, that this noise cou'd proceed from any thing but the motion of a door; and therefore conclude, that the present phaenomenon is a contradiction to all past experience, unless the door, which I remember on t'other side the chamber, be still in being. Again, I have always found, that a human body was possest of a quality, which I call gravity, and which hinders it from mounting in the air, as this porter must have done to arrive at my chamber, unless the stairs I remember be not annihilated by my absence. But this is not all. I receive a letter, which upon opening it I perceive by the hand-writing and subscription to have come from a friend, who says he is two hundred leagues distant. 'Tis evident I can never account for this phaenomenon, conformable to my experience in other instances, without spreading out in my mind the whole sea and continent between us, and supposing the effects and continu'd existence of posts and ferries, according to my memory and observation. (§1.4.2.20)

This passage wondrously transforms the substructures of the republic of letters—servantry, transportation, the post, the “hand-writing and subscription” that authenticates the letter, the entire world beyond the door—into variously spectral phenomena whose existences must be imagined by the philosopher seated before his fire. As Hume sits in his chamber musing the text into existence, he passes these material infrastructures through the looking-glass of alienated labor into a phantasmagoria of philosophical projection. The phantoms of the world outside the study are rendered in contrast to Hume himself, *cogito*-like in his chamber, anchoring reality.

This fictional conjunction of author and narrator, composing his thoughts just before we read them, gives way to something different in the conclusion of the *Treatise*. The dramatic historical failure of this conclusion can be partly attributed to its refusal to replace the epistemological safeguard of the author/narrator bond with any new foundation. Instead, we

depart for the seas of romance. The narrative perch takes on an allegorical quality that breaks the immediacy of the image of the philosopher transforming his thoughts into the volume in your hand. His text still issues from his “present station,” but the figural setting is “the barren rock, on which I am at present” (§1.4.7.1). This image dispels the coherence that grounded the text in the bond between author and narrator, united in the same person, seated in his chair writing each thought just as it comes to mind. The present tense of the narrative is now divided from the presence of the writer. Dorrit Cohn calls this form of narrative rupture between the act of writing and the events it depicts the “fictional present tense” (96-108). We are in the fictional present tense whenever a present-tense narrator claims to perform an action that is logically incompatible with the act of writing, e.g. “I am sleeping.” When Hume asks us to picture him on a barren rock, we have entered a different order of fiction, introducing a gap between the act of writing and the narrative it relays.

Self-consciously isolated, Hume no longer employs the inclusive “we” he has used to guide the reader through the topography of his thought. Instead, in the conclusion, he speaks for himself alone. Now reflexively authorial, he “finds” himself, but only through the effect of being “inclin’d,” locating his self through his inclination, through which he decides—or which decides for him—that he will stop and ponder. This whimsy is demonstrative: he is writing himself as a passionate subject, which is to say, an object. Inclination pauses him. The caprice of this decision emphasizes the sense that it comes from outside, that it is not, in fact, a decision. In Hume’s philosophical romance, the self is formed and reformed by phenomena that can only be written as its possessions, and yet seem to possess it. Hume finds himself reduced to the moods and attitudes that correspond to the skepticism he’s discovered. His own meticulous argumentation

begins to exact a psychological cost, rearing up and romping violently through his mind. The form of the text follows the shape of his theoretical habitus. “Discover’d” by its own thoughts and “led” by its own passions, Hume’s syntactical displacement of “I” figures its metaphysical displacement from subject to object, and from object toward inexistence. He has followed the self to its philosophical death, and now this loss forebodes textual and psychological death.

Hume’s “desponding reflections” reflect his “forelorn solitude”—forelorn, with its etymological bearing of disgrace and depravity, because as Hume argues the fiction of the self is only sustainable through the medium of sympathetic exchange (1:172, §1.4.7.2). To be forelorn is to be shut out of (if not God’s love) the immanent self-making economy of feeling. In isolation the passional rhythms of sympathy become deregulated, and the fictioning of the self unravels. In one sense, Hume’s theatre of sympathy favors continuous conversation over the trope of virtuous retirement. Here a revealing contrast with Addison emerges.³⁰ Addison held that “those Retired Hours,” “destitute of Company and Conversation,” offered their own opportunity for virtue in “that Intercourse and Communication which every reasonable Creature ought to maintain with the great Author of his Being” (*Spectator* no. 93). Solitude does not suspend conversation, but rather redirects it toward the divine. (This was in fact an original, rather than derivative, usage: prior to the eighteenth century, “conversation” primarily signified religious communion or sexual intimacy.) Hume’s sense of solitude, unmitigated by prayer, was less optimistic. As he writes in the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), “Reduce a person to solitude ... and he loses all enjoyment...because the movements of his heart are not forwarded by correspondent

³⁰ Though Hume deemed Addison’s essays mere “agreeable *Trifling*,” their form, and the mode of politeness they elaborate, proved enormously influential for Hume and for the culture of Edinburgh more generally (*Letters* 2:257; Phillipson 235, see also Dwyer 17 and Mee, *Conversable Worlds* 57-58 on the Addisonian inheritance of the Scottish Enlightenment).

movements in his fellow creatures” (43, §5.2.3). But the picture of solitude in the polite and refined *Enquiry* has nothing on the apocalyptic *Treatise*:

I am first affrighted and confounded with that forelorn solitude, in which I am plac'd in my philosophy, and fancy myself some strange uncouth monster, who not being able to mingle and unite in society, has been expell'd all human commerce, and left utterly abandon'd and disconsolate. (1:172, §1.4.7.2)

The grammatical passage from the subject, “I,” to the object, “myself,” is the deforming crucible, and monstrosity lies on the other side. If these shifters indicate merely verbal unities, the shifting shape of “I” and “myself” will depend upon the turn of the fancy. In solitude, the fancy deranges itself, and thus deforms the self. This is where he is “plac'd” and thereby contained in and determined by his philosophy. Undisciplined by the sympathies of others, the “chimeras” of metastasized reason run amok.

“Human commerce” indicates not just human contact but polite conversation—the elegance and gallantry alien to this desexed and dehumanized “uncouth” being.³¹ “Uncouth” ties etymological resonances of “unknown” and “unusual” to the more familiar senses of “unfriendly, unkind, rough,” linking impolite vulgarity to alienation and deformation. It is in this sense that “to mingle” in society is also to “unite:” the presence of the other, sentimentalized and

³¹ In “Of Essay Writing,” Hume represents himself as “a kind of resident or ambassador from the dominions of learning to those of conversation” (*Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* 533-534). In this role, he proposes a trade agreement that will add substance to the realm of conversation and polite refinement to the domain of learning. Conversation is figured as international diplomacy, the nation is a commercial corporation, and the division of conversational labor recapitulates the “Balance of Trade.” But the central figure is gender. The “Fair Sex,” we learn, are “the Sovereigns of the Empire of Conversation,” and their resources are needed to soften and polish masculine learning, which otherwise tends toward the “totally barbarous” (534-535). While Hume presents himself as an intermediary to female company, the larger effect of the essay is to reify the gender distinctions it proposes to negotiate between. It is not simply that learned masculinity must be polished by the “manners” of “virtuous women,” but that conversation must in the first place produce the connection between masculinity and learning—the “man of letters”—as its other. I am suggesting that the language of Hume’s transformation “strange uncouth monster” suggests an exclusion from *gendered* commerce, not just isolation in the abstract.

naturalized in the “human breast” but implicitly classed as polite, conveys the “harmoniously organized feelings” (Mullan, *Sentiment* 7) that in turn produce self-recognition. Without commerce in feeling, self is revealed in its horrific mutability and becomes unrecognizable. By contrast, where the self perdures, it is through the commerce of sympathy. The *Treatise* offers a clarifying perspective on the detached, self-consciously posthumous narrative voice of “My Own Life,” which comes into being at the nexus of conversation. The bounded, autonomous self that text affects is a collaborative product emerging against its isolated, deformed other.

Reading Hume as Romance

Hume’s sophistry, Thomas Reid was certain, depended upon grammatical sleight of hand. Reid insists that “we find in all languages the same parts of speech, the distinction of nouns and verbs, the distinction of nouns into adjective and substantive, of verbs into active and passive” (*ERH* 3:289). This (specious) linguistic uniformity conforms to a universal and commonsensical understanding of human agency affirmed by ordinary language. But now Hume tells us that our actions are impressed upon us by feelings, that our very sense of self is an illusion engendered by passion. This gothic fantasy perversely rejects the plain truth of subject and object, reflected in every language, all “grounded upon common notions, which Mr HUME’s philosophy opposes, and endeavors to overturn” (*ERH* 3:290).³² Reid remains one of Hume’s most perceptive readers

³² Blacklock issued a similar complaint in more dire terms:

If consistent with himself he must neither be active nor passive, neither conscious nor insensible, neither an existence nor a non-entity, neither a medium between any, nor a compound of all these opposite extremes; for, from every one of these situations, some principle, positive or negative, must arise; and absolute negation or affirmation are both equally and essentially destructive of his doctrines. (*ERH* 9:211)

Hume theorizes activity and passivity, self and other, as reified fictions that emerge from a primordial perceptual flux. And his language resubmerges notions of activity and passivity into that primordial confusion.

because he recognizes how Hume manipulated grammar to undermine any commonsensical order of nature. This gesture also suggests its inverse: the order of nature relies upon grammar for its affirmation, which Hume himself recognized, and which is why Hume must be read at his word, grammatically.

But if Reid refuses Hume's grammatical inversions as violations of common sense, he winds up picturing science itself as a kind of romantic fantasy, where rational inquiry and natural philosophy "open to my mind grand and beautiful scenes, and contribute equally to my happiness and power" (*ERH* 3:162). Reading Hume, however, threatens to dispel these pleasures with a fantasy of a different order:

But when I look within, and consider the mind itself, which makes me capable of all these prospects and enjoyments; if it is indeed what the Treatise of human nature makes it, I find I have been only in an enchanted castle, imposed upon by spectres and apparitions. I blush inwardly to think how I have been deluded; I am ashamed of my frame, and can hardly forbear expostulating with my destiny. (*ibid.*)

Reid no longer finds himself atop his magisterial summit surveying Nature's beauties below. Instead he is trapped in the "enchanted castle" of his mind, which now sympathetically resembles Hume's mind—flush with gothic delusion and shame and distress.

In "Of the Study of History," Hume recounts a request from "a young beauty, for whom I had some passions, to send her some novels and romances for her amusement." He instead sends her Plutarch's *Lives*, "being resolved not to make use of poisoned arms against her" (*Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* 564). Because they deform truth and disorganize the passions, novels and romances are "poisoned arms" in a metaphor field of courtship-as-combat that suggests the friction between vestigial codes of courtesy and modern civil politeness.³³ In Reid's

³³ Rebecca Tierney-Hynes's *Novel Minds: Philosophers and Romance Readers, 1680-1740* (2012) offers a signal treatment of this essay and the surrounding issues in a chapter titled "Hume: Reading Romance,

encounter with Hume's text, it is Hume that plays the part of poisonous romancer, whose ostensibly hypermodern facade covers up his latent allegiance to the aims and affects of medieval sorcery. Like Boswell in his encounter with the dying Hume, Reid is poisoned by Hume's skeptical fantasy and finds himself imitating Hume's histrionics in the sentimental lexicon of shame and blushes, brought on by epistemological rather than sexual transgression.³⁴ Hume contaminates philosophy with romance, transforming the scholar into an image of the "tender and amorous Disposition" he projects onto susceptible female readers. And crucially, Hume poisons the reader by making an afflicted spectacle of himself, with which his readers are enjoined to sympathize. The monstrous deformation of the *Treatise* is a consequence of his

Writing the Self" (116-140). I am also gesturing toward Anna Bryson's important *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (1998). In "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," Hume offers an anthropological exposé of the gallant mock-deference that Burke would call "proud submission" and "dignified obedience" (*Reflections* 170), and that Hume himself espouses in "Of Essay Writing":

As nature has given man the superiority above woman, by endowing him with greater strength both of mind and body; it is his part to alleviate that superiority, as much as possible, by the generosity of his behaviour, and by a studied deference and complaisance for all her inclinations and opinions. Barbarous nations display this superiority, by reducing their females to the most abject slavery; by confining them, by beating them, by selling them, by killing them. But the male sex, among a polite people, discover their authority in a more generous, though not a less evident manner; by civility, by respect, by complaisance, and, in a word, by gallantry. (*Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* 133)

³⁴ Another early reader, one James Wodrow, commented on the resonance between Hume's writing and romance: "One after having read such a book finds himself pleased and Entertained (much in the same way as by a modern romance) from the Propriety of the Language Harmony of the Periods & the Novelty & oddness of some of the thoughts" (Letter to Samuel Kendrick, 1752, *ERH* 9:8). Moreover, the trajectory of Hume's arguments mirror the emotional tumult of romance reading, which Hume complained has "no Propriety in the Expression nor Nature in the Sentiment":

His Arguments & reasoning never or seldom produce any solid conviction, but leave the mind some way loose & more uncertain than when you began. He uses an argument to establish a point then he throws out some thing on the other side which overturns all he said & leaves you just as you were, then he sets it up; then down with it & at the end you don't know what to think. (*ibid.* 9:9)

Hume's text by way of Wodrow's pen becomes a flurry of verbs and prepositions, sending the reader through a series of gyrosopic convolutions until we finally end up "just as [we] were," only more nauseous. Convictions dissolve amidst a frolic of indulgent argumentation.

romantically flighty feminine susceptibility, which is at the core of his radically discontinuous vision of self.

As philosopher and protagonist fold into each other, Hume's effusions seem to do double duty, participating in the continuation of his argument at the same time that they advance the plot of his romance. "When I turn my eye inward, I find nothing but doubt and ignorance"—is this a sentimental plea, or, given its distinct echo of his claim that "[o]urself, independent of the perception of every other object, is in reality nothing," is it an attempt to epitomize the metaphysical evacuation of the self? (1:221, §2.2.2.18). As his plot grows bleaker, it seems to gain cogency as theoretical drama: "All the world conspires to oppose and contradict me; tho' such is my weakness, that I feel all my opinions loosen and fall of themselves, when unsupported by the approbation of others" (1:172, §1.4.7.2). This meld of paranoid grandeur and self-erasure in turn becomes evidence for theory, representing precisely the dynamics of his own account of sympathy. Philosophy causes melancholy, which is assuaged by philosophy—but at the cost of generating new sources of melancholy. Hume finds his own critique of causality as a habitual projection especially depressing:

how must we be disappointed, when we learn, that this connexion, this tie, or energy [the principle of causality] lies merely in ourselves, and is nothing but that determination of the mind, which is acquir'd by custom, and causes us to make a transition from an object to its usual attendant, and from the impression of one to the lively idea of the other? Such a discovery not only cuts off all hope of ever attaining satisfaction, but even prevents our very wishes; since it appears, that when we say we desire to know the ultimate and operating principle, as something, which resides in the external object, we either contradict ourselves, or talk without a meaning. (§1.4.7.5)

Sounding like a classical Freudian melancholic, Hume internalizes the lost object (our intuitive sense of causality) into the self, which not only obstructs his grief but forces him to disavow the very possibility of its meaningful expression. This dejection sends him veering between radical

skepticism and naïve belief, “betwixt a false reason and none at all” (§1.4.7.7):

Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? And on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me? I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ’d with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv’d of the use of every member and faculty. (§1.4.7.8)

Hume is now in the realm of spiritual despondency, a transparently infidel writer trading in the language of religious melancholy—the discourse on which Hume’s self-diagnosis of “philosophical melancholy and delirium” clearly tropes.³⁵ His epistemic enclosure gives way to an image of bodily debilitation, as the materialist philosopher’s spiritual crisis is channeled into physical and cognitive impotence. This stasis, so complete it verges on inexistence, is suddenly disrupted not by some rational introspective resolution, but by the *deus ex machina* of “nature herself.” Nature relieves Hume’s “philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras” (1:175, §1.4.7.9). These fanciful chimeras are the spawn of “refin’d or elaborate reasoning,” a “bent of mind” that echoes the *Frankenstein*-esque disfigurement of his “strange uncouth monster.” Philosophical solitude powers a dysfunctional economy of sympathetic exchange “bent” inward, “confounded” in form and identity.³⁶ Nature’s resolution to the drama is a passional or sensory intervention that simply dissolves Hume’s preoccupations. The underworld of “deepest darkness” into which Hume had descended suddenly vanishes.

³⁵ Jeremy Schmidt draws a connection between eighteenth-century hypochondria and the older language of “afflicted conscience” prominent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, insofar as each indicated a kind of election: the afflicted evinced a unique “spiritual sensitivity to sin” while hypochondria was widely understood as a disease of sensibility and privilege (152-154).

³⁶ Compare to Addison: “the Mind never unbends itself so agreeably as in the Conversation of the well chosen Friend” (*Spectator* no. 93).

Sociability Regained

And then nature shuttles Hume off to dinner, replacing his chimeras with “lively impressions”—in other words, more genial chimeras: “I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends” (1:175, §1.4.7.9). This conversable turn is the only moment in the conclusion where Hume’s syntactic and semantic agency coincides. It marks the end of his textual breakdown, and fittingly, a sense of agency emerges through commerce with others. Momentarily freed from his reflexive nightmare, he entertains the idea of killing off the philosopher within him: “I am ready to throw all my books and papers into the fire, and resolve never more to renounce the pleasures of life for the sake of reasoning and philosophy” (§1.4.7.10). But he knows that this readiness is a long way from realization, that it simply reflects “that splenetic humour, which governs me at present” (*ibid.*).

Contemporaries had no idea how to read what was either a sophisticated demonstration of psychological theory or a catastrophically discrediting mental breakdown. The easiest response to this sentimental zigzagging was to declare it all a ruse. Certainly, it contaminated Hume’s science of human nature with a sickly strain of romantic drama, punctuated by intimations of suicide too palpable to be ignored yet too histrionic to be fully credited by early readers.³⁷

Reading this passage left George Horne irate:

Now, Sir, if you will only give me leave to judge, before dinner, of Mr. HUME’S philosophy, as he judged of it after dinner, we shall have no farther dispute upon that

³⁷ This tonal and generic confusion extends to the text’s reception. Hume’s first reviewer began by mocking his theatrics—(“What Heart now would not almost bleed? what Breast can forbear to sympathize with this brave Adventurer?”)—and recommended “very serious Reconsideration” to the anonymous author. However, at some point the sarcasm trails off, replaced by concerned avuncular encouragement. The writer closes incongruously by suggesting that history will view the *Treatise* “in the same Light as we view the JUVENILE Works of MILTON, or the first Manner of RAPHAEL” (*ERH* 3:38-39). Unsure of how to read Hume’s despair, this review’s unstable mixture of condescension and admiration absorbs the inscrutabilities of Hume’s own text.

subject. I could indeed wish, if it were possible, to have a scheme of thought, which would bear contemplating, at any time of the day; because, otherwise, a person must be at the expence of maintaining a brace of these metaphysical Hobby-Horses, one to mount in the morning, and the other in the afternoon. (*ERH* 9:389)

Indeed, Reid intoned, “it was only in solitude and retirement that he could yield any assent to his own philosophy” (*ERH* 3:169). If Hume was as depressed as his conclusion suggested, his friends “would have the charity never to leave him alone”—though Reid had never heard “him charged with doing anything...that argued such a degree of skepticism” (*ibid.*). Reid’s implication, reiterated by contemporaries, is that the suicidal currents in Hume’s text must be merely for show, since if he really felt the way he wrote, he’d be in Bedlam or dead, not hosting polite entertainment.³⁸ If the *Treatise* wasn’t a suicide note, it must be parody—in any case, it certainly wasn’t philosophy. Reid thus inaugurated a long tradition of skepticism toward Hume’s conclusion, upheld by much recent scholarship.³⁹ It is remarkable that Horne and Reid (among

³⁸ On this implication in Reid, see Pinch 40. James Beattie (1770) levels a version of the same charge: “If a man were to speak and act in the evening, as if he believed himself to have become a different person since the morning, the whole world would pronounce him in a state of insanity” (*ERH* 3:207). Like Reid, Beattie affects uncertainty about whether Hume truly believes his “extraordinary paradox” (*ERH* 3:234). Hume must be joking, and yet doesn’t seem to be joking: “nothing could make me believe its author to have been in earnest, if I had not found him drawing inferences from it too serious to be jested with by any person who is not absolutely distracted” (*ibid.*). Thomas Blacklock (1771) takes up the same line, writing that Hume

dashes one principle against another, till both seem annihilated; or (which has the same effect) till the intellects of his readers are so irrevocably confounded, that they cannot distinguish light from darkness, or truth from falshood. Is this situation of mind more adapted to rational life, or to Bedlam? (*ERH* 9:211)

³⁹ John Passmore regrets Hume’s “lapse into a stagey, melodramatic tone,” riddled with “inconsistencies of the most startling character” (133). For Donald Siebert, this Hume is perhaps “playfully theatrical” or perhaps has “lost his wits,” while M. A. Box refers to Hume’s “notorious histrionics” and “profound dithering,” and A. D. Nuttall finds Hume fallen into “a kind of schizophrenia” (Siebert, “Ardor” 181-182; Box 98, 104; Nuttall 105-106). In an ingenious reading, Adela Pinch argues that readers historical and contemporary have found Hume’s melodrama strained and exaggerated because “Hume’s understanding of the relationship between passions and persons, his emphasis on sympathy and the passage of feelings, makes the expression of one’s ‘own’ feelings a hard thing to render automatically” (43). Hume’s performance is incredible to the precise degree that he depicts himself beside himself—in fidelity to his

others) tried to debunk the carefully curated presentation of Hume's death by recurring to the conclusion of the *Treatise*, published almost forty years prior. A rarely read "metaphysical *choke-pear*" (the term is William Hazlitt's, used endearingly [17:113]), it nonetheless continued to shadow his public figure. Its vision of radical porosity at the limits of reason remained the most effective antidote to the persuasive force of Hume's philosophical death.

As his death approached in 1776, it offered Hume the opportunity to reinvent the self, and to monumentalize that reinvention for posterity in the way that only death could. The writing that emerged out of his death strives to make coherent a life whose major work challenges the possibility of self-coherence. The very bad death Hume had theorized, figured, and threatened in his early work—a complete dissolution of all sense of persisting character—lingered in unresolved tension with the apotheosis of selfhood he achieved in his last days. We know that the dying Hume conferred with Smith, Home, Blair, Black, and the rest of the Edinburgh literati to determine how to present himself, and by extension, how to present the project of polite, skeptical, empirical naturalism that has come to be called the Scottish Enlightenment. The perfectly uniform picture of Hume's character broadcast out of Edinburgh was in this sense a collaborative invention. In a more fundamental sense, Scottish sentimental theory understood the possibility of such a bounded self as an artifact of conversation. This vision of bounded selfhood, sustained by conversation and vindicated by his own death, offered Hume a chance to repair to permanence the sense of self that his own *Treatise* had decomposed into nothingness.

own conception of the relationship between the passions and the self. As his text treats his self both formally and argumentatively as the passive object of his feelings, his expressions of feeling become incoherent and unbelievable.

CHAPTER THREE
WORDSWORTH AT DEATH'S END

William Wordsworth's poetry has long been recognized for its sensitive engagements with death, dying, and bereavement. As Geoffrey Hartman wrote in 1964, Wordsworth's poetry announces that "man stands in communion not only with the living but also with the dead" (321); Duncan Wu has more recently argued that "the force that exerted the most influence on his poetic life was grief" (*Wordsworth: An Inner Life* 309). Yet for a poet so closely identified with what Frances Ferguson called the "epitaphic mode" (155), Wordsworth offers no clear or consistent sense of what death is. Our accounts of death in Wordsworth—figuring death as writing, and writing as death,¹ exploring death's anthropological prehistory,² or its role in the constitution of community³—foreground death's effects upon the living. But death is not simply the motive force of Wordsworth's poetry, the first cause of a poetics of effects. Death is also a problem in its own right, whose significance is everywhere qualified. I will argue that this poetry trains its critical intelligence on not just the psychology and sociology of mourning, but also the

¹ In his seminal reading of Wordsworth's *Essays Upon Epitaphs*, Paul de Man declares that death is "a displaced name for a linguistic predicament" (81). If language "is indeed not the thing itself but the representation" (80), then language encounters its fundamental crux in death, since here it is tasked with representing an absence. This vision of writing as a figure for death can then become romanticism's specific remit, as in Mark Sandy's *Romanticism, Memory, and Mourning*, where the "'unnameable, shapeless, faceless' figuration of Romanticism finds a haunting affinity with the ultimate 'nothing' that figures, and stands in for, the reality of death" (8).

² Alan Bewell's *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment* sees Wordsworth's poetry exploring how death takes shape as an idea, from the phenomenological encounter with the human corpse to the anthropological emergence of myth.

nature of death itself. This inquiry takes on a distinctive inflection in each of Wordsworth's poetic modes: the folk anthropologist of the *Lyrical Ballads*, the lyric sonneteer of the new nineteenth century, and the endlessly grave obituarist of *The Excursion*. Wordsworth's poetry begins by attempting to recruit death into social, spiritual, or rhetorical service, and ends in the realization that it has disrupted the ground it sought to build upon.

In brief, I argue that Wordsworth is skeptical of death. This skepticism has been read as a symptom of troubled mourning: when Wordsworth questions death he is actually dramatizing grief, which includes the denial that seeks to divert mourning but ends up prolonging it. The core concern from this perspective is how persons orient themselves toward the inevitability of death, and how they live on in the face of loss. The tradition of rhetorical reading jettisons this psychological current but nonetheless finds Wordsworth's poetics circling a representational impasse that is taken to figure and anticipate death. By contrast, this essay follows moments in Wordsworth's poetry where death is constituted less by vacancy than by a transformed sense of presence. This Wordsworth is beset by an anxiety that death will not deliver the permanence and transcendence it promises.

³ In *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from Enlightenment to Victoria*, Esther Schor develops a sense of Wordsworthian mourning "as a force that constitutes communities and makes it possible to conceptualize history," extending well beyond private personal grief (4). Schor's Wordsworth negotiates between competing theories of the relationship between mourning and morals, from an elegiac emphasis on the redemptive potential of traumatic loss to, by 1814's *The Excursion*, a view of moral sensibility as grounded in "a tranquility immanent within nature" (149). Kurt Fosso's *Buried Communities: Wordsworth and the Bonds of Mourning* follows an early commitment to the community-forming power of "interminably indebted grief," such that "it is not community that leads to a connection with the dead so much as it is the dead, and more specifically the relationship of the living with them, that leads to community" (23, 7). For Fosso, *The Excursion* marks Wordsworth's departure from a community of interminable mourning, toward a new insistence on consolation, sacralized by "cultural tradition and institutionalism" (215).

Phenomenologies of Death: “We are Seven” and “Lucy Gray”

In “My First Acquaintance with Poets,” William Hazlitt recalls the young Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s disappointment that his collaborator Wordsworth “was not prone enough to believe in the traditional superstitions of [the Lake District]” (*The Liberal* 2:39). By the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth had figured out how to turn this belief gap between enlightened Cambridge poet and local rustics into a dramatic poetry of encounter between incommensurate worldviews. His disenchanted poet persona wanders about the Lake District like an amateur anthropologist: he is inoculated from the superstitions he encounters by education and privilege, yet some combination of frisson and nostalgia finds him captivated by what he cannot believe. The subjects he meets on the road act as vicars, granting mediated contact with a world of enchantment the poet has surrendered as the price of his sophistication. The unstable mixture of admiration and condescension that pervades these poems is a byproduct of this trade in credulity. And the most pervasive credulity of “common life” (783) in the *Lyrical Ballads* is the belief in persistence after death—not in what the narrator of “There was a boy” will call “that uncertain heaven,” but rather in the form of an immanent, material, ongoing life (24). This poetry carries with the idea that the dead do not transcend or disappear—do not even die—but simply change.

Doubting death was not merely superstitious—it was deeply heterodox, and so had to be staged vicariously. In orthodox Anglican theology, death was absolute and irreversible, ensuring that Christ’s Resurrection expressed a truly divine power of redemption. This mortal absolutism is disturbed by the rustic epistemologies Wordsworth encounters on the roads and in the villages of the Lake District, where the nearer one gets to “primitive” belief, the less reliable the

boundary between life and death becomes. The absolute distinction between life and death, so intuitive to the educated poet, comes to look like a cultural artifact.

Ground zero for the conflict between reasonable Anglican orthodoxy and rustic heterodox superstition is “We are Seven,” an impromptu debate between a Wordsworthian narrator and as near an incarnation of nature as might be found in Herefordshire: “She had a rustic, woodland air, / And she was wildly clad” (9-10). The picture is more forest sprite than eight-year-old girl; we are in the vague and evocative realm of projection. Asked about her siblings,

She answered, “Seven are we,
“And two of us at Conway dwell,
“And two are gone to sea.

“Two of us in the church-yard lie,
“My sister and my brother,
“And in the church-yard cottage, I
“Dwell near them with my mother.” (18-24)

On the contrary, the narrator responds, “If two are in the church-yard laid, / “Then ye are only five” (34-35). When the girl insists that she can count, this mathematical argument quickly becomes a metaphysical argument: she argues that her dead siblings still exist, or more precisely, still fall under the copula that holds existence together—*are*. She turns out to be on good psychological and phenomenological ground. Her siblings at Conway and at sea are gone. What part do they play in her life? How do we know that they are still alive? Even if they are, will she ever see them again? If these unavailables nonetheless “are,” then surely her dead siblings, with whom she spends every day, must also count:

“Their graves are green, they may be seen,”
The little Maid replied,
“Twelve steps or more from my mother’s door,

“And they are side by side. (37-40)

Graves and grass offer conflicting readings of death. The graves signal absence, and their epitaphs, if they are marked, would relegate the entombed to the past tense. Though these grave signs of cultural authority proclaim the absolute distinction between life and death, the girl surely cannot read them. Yet the grass, nourished by the bodies of the dead, marks the ongoing worldly presence of her siblings. This text of nature openly declares their continuing vitality, with all of the rhetorical force that nature possesses.

Like the grass on the unweeded graves, the girl’s beliefs have sprung up in the midst of the churchyard cottage where she lives—infertile ground for heterodoxy, the narrator might have hoped. But her conviction is really too primitive and spontaneous to register as *doxa* of any kind. It’s closer to uncultivated belief: nature, in other words. And nature, in the shape of an untutored and “wildly clad” “woodland” child, proves astonishingly resistant to the logic of the institution that houses her.⁴ She is, then, a living sign of institutional decay, of Anglican theology’s estrangement from the natural grounds of belief. Paul Fry has argued that Wordsworth’s poetry at its core seeks “to make the primitive an object of phenomenological reflection” (*What We Are* 66). The primitivist vision of “We are Seven” is akin to that offered by the early twentieth-century archaeologist V. Gordon Childe, who, working in an enlightenment lineage that runs back to Vico and Rousseau, insisted that we should not “imagine early hominids elaborating an

⁴ Mainstream Anglican theology was broadly allied to “nature” insofar as it depended upon the argument from design, which held that God’s existence could be proven from the observation of nature. Given paradigmatic form in the “watchmaker” argument of William Paley’s *Natural Theology* (1802), the argument from design was less a theological system than a “set of intellectual and emotional habits” working to synthesize polite religion and empiricism, as Colin Jager has argued (*Book of God* 11). “We are Seven” by contrast worries that closer to nature is further from theology. Theology begins to look unnatural.

eschatology and then acting on it.” The experience of death “found expression in no abstract judgments, but in passionate acts. The acts were the ideas, not expressions of them” (13). This schema suggests the way Wordsworth’s narrator understands the girl’s round circuit to and from the graves—as the embodied, impassioned conception of her buried siblings’ living persistence. Theologies and eschatologies are sophistications of this primordial phenomenology. “We are Seven” worries that a phenomenology of the primitive offers no basis for an Anglican Christian conception of death, and instead threatens to dissolve death altogether.

This is how the sophisticated narrator finds himself callously badgering an eight-year-old: “But they are dead; those two are dead! / Their spirits are in heaven!” (65-66). His senseless protest reflects his dawning awareness that natural experience cannot yield or even comprehend a metaphysical distinction between life and death: “Twas throwing words away” (67). Nature will not commit this wild child’s siblings to the afterlife, and it offers no basis for any heaven, no matter how uncertain. The death nature offers is not absence but deeply rooted presence. The dead remain right where they are, grounded, in the present tense.

Ted Underwood has highlighted the uniquely material bearing of the ghosts that haunt many strands of romantic-period writing. James Macpherson’s Ossian poems are a key forerunner of this development, depicting a world in which antiquity’s own prehistory lingers in the naturalized, materialized form of “ghosts [that] fly on clouds and ride on winds” (*Fingal* 24). What Ossian offered was a way of imagining immortality through material transmission, where the words and deeds of poets and heroes would be preserved in the elements of nature. Underwood cleverly describes the cultural investment in such heterodox visions of the afterlife as a form of insurance: believers might hedge their bets on Christian eternity, given that “it is not

uncommon for human beings to hold several conflicting ideas about the afterlife” (241). This is why Macpherson, a devout Christian, could write with untroubled enthusiasm of ancient Celtic religion. Wordsworth, however, has a marvelous penchant for locating his own psychic contradictions and gently inflaming them to the point of quiet combustion. Wordsworth’s anthropological poems trade in just this kind of Ossianic, material presence of the dead to depict a contemporary antiquity—distanced from cultural modernity and thereby, in the enlightenment schema, temporally “backward.” But that backwardness is also, curiously, from the future. The deep threat that haunts “We are Seven” is the eclipse of transcendent Christianity, which might be reduced to a brief historical interval sandwiched between a primordial materialist prehistory and an emerging materialist modernity. The elfin adversary of “We are Seven,” a living fossil, is both a primitive anachronism and a sign of the times.

“We are Seven” performs the tension between Oxbridge reasonability and natural superstition in psychological and phenomenological terms, throwing nature in the face of an ostensibly naturalistic Anglican theology. This poem finds a sequel of sorts in “Lucy Gray,” which explores the transformation of the wild child’s natural psychology into communal superstition. One powerful narrative of modernity, vividly incarnate in poems like *The Prelude*, concerns the internalization of the supernatural. As Terry Castle has argued, when an emerging rationalism sought to explain away supernatural experience as an artifact of the human mind, it wound up “displac[ing] [the spirit world] into the realm of psychology.” “By relocating the world of ghosts in the closed space of the imagination,” Castle writes, “one ended up supernaturalising the mind itself” (161). The “invention of the uncanny,” exemplified by the gothic, emerges as a “toxic side effect” of the forced migration of ghosts and specters to the inner

world of the mind (8). “We are Seven” and “Lucy Gray” are, in different senses, faux-relics of a world yet to be touched by this interiorization of the supernatural. “Lucy Gray” is what happens when the lone heroine of “We are Seven” survives childhood to be integrated into the local community: we move from the simple assertion of continuing vitality of the dead (“Their graves are green”) to the more elaborate vehicle of undead perdurance that is myth, which is the product of collective ingenuity.⁵ Haunting remains an externalized social phenomenon—a participatory event. In both poems, the survivors will not allow the dead to disappear to heaven:

Oft I had heard of Lucy Gray,
And, when I cross'd the Wild,
I chanc'd to see at break of day
The solitary Child.

No Mate, no comrade Lucy knew;
She dwelt on a wide Moor,
The sweetest Thing that ever grew
Beside a human door!

You yet may spy the Fawn at play,
The Hare upon the Green;
But the sweet face of Lucy Gray
Will never more be seen. (1-12)

These opening stanzas do the narrative work of framing and the conceptual work of containing the poem’s narrative core, which is the quotidian story of the girl’s disappearance. This frame is communal second-order reading, laboring to give meaning to Lucy’s death. Lucy, we are told, is solitary and wild. Set in parallel with fawn and hare, she is a Rousseauvian child of nature that grew not *in* but “*Beside* a human door!”

⁵ Alan Bewell has argued that through the “interpolative layers” of mythopoesis contained within the poem’s narrative, we discover “how a commonplace event, which can be explained without reference to supernatural intervention, has been taken up and revised over the course of its history by an interpretive community” (205).

Yet when we turn to the narrative of Lucy's disappearance, the *fabula* archeologically prior to the mythical framing, it quickly becomes clear that the frame doesn't fit. Indeed, as Pamela Woof suggests, the precise, earthy narrative details of the central story "seem to belong to a different poem": "The particularity of fact might be thought to confer a believable reality on to the more mythic component of the poem, but the two aspects do not sit perfectly well together" (30). I propose that this mismatch is exactly the point: "Lucy Gray" reveals the gap between the source narrative and its interpretive frame, illuminating how disappearance becomes myth. As the central stanzas plainly explain, Lucy is in fact no wild child and no solitary. She is a farm girl with a mother and a father, and she participates in the domestic economy of rural life. At her father's behest, she travels to town with a lantern to guide her mother's evening return, gets lost along the way, and disappears. After her parents search fruitlessly through the night,

And now they homeward turn'd, and cry'd,
 "In Heaven we all shall meet!"
 When in the snow the Mother spied
 The print of Lucy's feet. (41-44)

At the moment that Lucy's parents are ready to entrust her to God, they receive an indexical sign of her presence on earth. The providential machinery is in place, but it doesn't lead to heaven. They follow her footprints to the middle of a bridge where the trail disappears, and the poem reverts back to the mythic voice:

Yet some maintain that to this day
 She is a living Child,
 That you may see sweet Lucy Gray
 Upon the lonesome Wild.

O'er rough and smooth she trips along,
 And never looks behind;
 And sings a solitary song
 That whistles in the wind. (57-64)

This closing frame begins by perfectly inverting the rhyme sequence of the first stanza, as if to insist on the tale's immaculate closure within the mythical apparatus. In the poem's first stanza, the narrator had claimed he himself "chanc'd to see" Lucy, yet by the third insists she "[w]ill never more be seen." Her haunting is at once verified and committed to the past. Yet in the conclusion, she once again becomes a "living Child"—at least, so "some maintain." In this equivocal gesture, the poem joins the compelling formal closure of the myth to its semantic openness as a living legend. Life and death become entangled at the nexus of first-person reportage and communal storytelling.

So while the poem is narrated in the first person, the speaker is only a node in the dissemination of myth, even as he revises and renews the myth by inserting himself into it. The proper author is the village. It is the village that keeps Lucy alive and translucently, evasively, in presence. But in order to achieve indefinite life, she must join the heroine of "We are Seven" and become the text of nature. And like that heroine, the community is effectively denying the transcendental afterlife in favor of immanent life, however spectral. Lucy will not be committed to the deathly alteriority of heaven. However, this is not—or not only—a generalized melancholia that cannot bear to confront death. It is equally a phenomenology of the afterlife, tracking how the dead are rebirthed and nurtured in their passage through the cultural imaginary.

But Wordsworth does not simply dramatize the emergence of legend. By expanding the title to "Lucy Gray, or Solitude" in the 1815 edition, he adds a final stage to the process of abstraction, transforming Lucy into an emblem of fashionable contemplation. The subtitle thus heightens the tension between the quotidian story of Lucy's disappearance and her ascension into the afterlife of discourse. "Solitude" works to "spiritualise" Lucy Gray, which is the term

Wordsworth used to describe his aim in the poem to Isabella Fenwick. And as he admits in the Fenwick note, he first heard the story from Dorothy—“The body however was found in the canal” (*Lyrical Ballads* 385). But this spiritualization doesn’t abstract Lucy Gray to a transcendent heaven—it abstracts her out of her class: “solitude” is a variation on pastoral retreat, the privilege of a voguish melancholic subjectivity. It is not dying alone in a snowstorm. While the myth of Lucy as a “living Child” is produced and consumed by the rustic village, the parallel myth of Lucy as “Solitude” circulates from polite author to polite reader.

From the psychology of “We are Seven” to the anthropology of “Lucy Gray,” Wordsworth depicts a natural history of the afterlife that forsakes heavenly transcendence for immanent, still-vital existence. If, as Hazlitt’s Coleridge lamented, Wordsworth could not partake of this belief world, we can now identify what so fascinated him about the broken rural communities of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth himself could not deny death’s irrevocable transcendence. But he could project onto the marginalized milieu of these poems a sense of death’s limits—or more precisely, a deeply heterodox sense that nature does not believe in death.

Lyric Beyond Death: “These chairs they have no words to utter”

Wordsworth may allow his rustics to subvert the “world of death” (*Peter Bell* 338; *The Prelude* [1850] 4.249; cf. “A Universe of death,” *Paradise Lost* 2.622), but we have grown accustomed to reading his lyrics as testaments to death’s absolute terminus. This is especially true of *Excursion*-era sonnets like “Surprized by joy.” In the tradition of Milton’s “Methought I saw my late espoused saint,” the speaker of “Surprized by joy” momentarily forgets his bereavement, and, upon remembering, is forced to relive the loss:

Surprized by joy—impatient as the Wind
I turned to share the transport—Oh! with whom

But thee, long buried in the silent Tomb,
 That spot which no vicissitude can find?
 Love, faithful love, recalled thee to my mind—
 But how could I forget thee? Through what power,
 Even for the least division of an hour,
 Have I been so beguiled as to be blind
 To my most grievous loss!—That thought's return
 Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore,
 Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,
 Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more;
 That neither present time, nor years unborn
 Could to my sight that heavenly face restore. (*Major Works* 334)

There's no space to entertain folk thanatologies amidst this suffocating grief. She—
 Wordsworth's daughter Catherine, dead at age three—is gone, and the only escape from death's
 permanence is forgetting. The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is internalized: memory recalls her
 from the underworld, but as the speaker instinctively turns to lay eyes on her, she has already
 vanished. Her loss returns with a self-incriminating vengeance once it is recalled. This fleeting
 relief from death is worse than futile: it ensures that death must be relived, and damns the living
 for forgetting the dead. Her “heavenly face” conveys not just her beauty but also her
 transcendent alterity in death. She is immutably severed from life, surviving only in the memory
 that must kill her again every time it forgets her loss.

“Surprized by joy” showcases the epitaphic mode that tends to become a synecdoche for
 all of Wordsworth's writing, even for romanticism as such—a lyric tarrying with an ultimately
 withheld sense of presence. Mary Jacobus's *Romantic Things* offers a shining example of
 Wordsworth read from this angle. For Jacobus, Wordsworthian lyric becomes a nexus of thought
 and thing, as the poetic apprehension of things generates a surplus of sense out of their very
 resistance to thought. In this lyric excess of sense, Jacobus sees a transvaluation of the limits of
 representation: language neither adequately represents nor categorically alienates but mediates,

as a thing between things. One virtue of this perspective is its profound generosity toward the nonhuman and the inanimate. In the lyric time Jacobus theorizes, these categories do not come predefined. It is the work of the poem to reconstruct relations between thoughts and things, such that ontology emerges through the movement of verse. Yet there is one significant exception to this rule that Jacobus's reading shares with de Man's otherwise skeptical protocols, one phenomenon that both critics posit prior to the work of verse: death. Death is the organizing abyss around which Wordsworth's lyric gravitates, and his epitaphic mode registers the movement of all beings toward death. As Jacobus writes, "both human and nonorganic life end in the grave, muted and stilled": "Even breathing becomes breathing toward death, just as the gift of a poem becomes a form of conversing with the dead" (3). However, the very ubiquity of death Jacobus identifies in Wordsworth's poetics threatens to negate death's meaning, opening, by a slight turn of the screw, onto a world beyond death. "Death" as human mortality slides into "death" as perpetual change. This perpetual orientation toward death forestalls any arrival. Jacobus's Wordsworth generates a world in which death is at once everywhere and nowhere.

Paul Fry's *Wordsworth and the Poetry of What We Are* similarly depends upon and yet undermines death. Fry is interested in a strand of Wordsworthian poetics that reveals the "ontic, unsemantic self-identity of things," which the poet "constantly touched upon yet shied away from, masked at various times in more acceptable—but less original—pantheist, quietist, and idealist registers" (7). From this perspective, Wordsworth's most original insight lies in a tacit but ever-present sense of poetry as the disclosure of the sheer being of all things. Hazlitt recognized that Wordsworth's muse "proceeds on a principle of equality, and strives to reduce all things to the same standard," yet for Fry this "levelling" impulse is primarily ontological,

rather than political (thus the fortuitousness of Hazlitt's "*all things*" [11:87]). Subtending the vision of mind as lord and master, the Wordsworthian lyric discloses existence in its inhuman, indifferent, unmeaning core:

The disclosure of things as things, not as entities in a vertical chain of being ranged from inanimate to animate to reflective to celestial but as these varied entities in their inanimate or suspended moment: that is the sole function of the Wordsworthian imagination. (139)

However, this inanimate moment undergirding all existence, which comes fleetingly into focus through lyric evocation, cannot be allowed to remain in "pre-significant" unmeaning. As for Jacobus, it is the idea of death that roots existence, and Fry too draws on Heidegger's existential analysis of being-toward-death: "'Nature' really is a being toward one's own death, one's existence in a universe of death" (140). The shared condition of all bare unmeaning existence lies in its impending end.

Yet there's a slippage here between the monist equality of all things stressed by Fry and the more specific Heideggerian notion of a human horizon defined by "being toward one's own death." This is Hamlet's tragic sense (often cited by Wordsworth [e.g. *Lyrical Ballads* 753]) that what distinguishes "man" from "beast" is the burden of "looking before and after"—living in "ecstatic" temporality, in Heidegger's language (*Hamlet* 4.4.37). From the phenomenological perspective, it is not death's ubiquity, but rather *awareness* of death's ubiquity, that establishes finitude as the mode of human consciousness. Heideggerian being-toward-death is the rarefied mode of reflective consciousness that recalls and anticipates, standing outside the present moment. Such futural projection, such awareness of death, is for Heidegger exclusive to humanity; it is what allows him to claim that humans "die" continuously until the moment of their actual demise (*Being and Time* 290-296). Death, then, is less an empirical event than the

horizon that gives consciousness its peculiarly tragic flavor. But Fry's Wordsworth, in his ontologically-egalitarian monism, radically diminishes the value of temporal consciousness. High reflection is submerged back into low undifferentiated being. The Heideggerian armature, constantly endeavoring to define the unique sense in which "Man" inhabits time, is in fact entirely incompatible with the leveling thrust of Fry's reading, which denies any particular privilege to consciousness—even to life, just as Fry finds Wordsworth deviating from the monist core of his own insight.

Consider the Hamlet soliloquy cherished by Wordsworth:

What is a man,
 If his chief good and market of his time
 Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
 Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
 Looking before and after, gave us not
 That capability and god-like reason
 To fust in us unused. (4.4.33-39)

The temporal ecstasy of human consciousness is useless and impotent, or worse, it is a curse. Knowledge, however painful a spur, cannot produce action. And "large discourse"—the abstractive capacity that allows the human to step out of the present—cannot in practice distinguish man from "bestial oblivion." However experientially enriching or harrowing, temporal ecstasy and "god-like reason" are destined "To fust in us unused." Insofar as Wordsworth tends toward this radically austere view, knowledge is out of the question. Everything perishes. It does not grant us any ontological privilege to know as much.

These readings take Wordsworth brilliantly beyond the impasse of representation to the creation of sense (Jacobus) and to the meaningless core of existence (Fry), in the process rediscovering Wordsworth's epitaphic mode and with it, the preeminence of death. But this death

is a transcendental condition of all existence, rather than a transcendent repository of the deceased. Under this dispensation, death's domain is stretched so severely that it loses all signifying force. By radicalizing a humanist vision of death to encompass the universe of things, these readings actually wind up disclosing death's insignificance. Take Jacobus's reading of the 1802 lyric "These chairs they have no words to utter":

These chairs they have no words to utter,
No fire is in the grate to stir or flutter,
The ceiling and floor are mute as a stone,
My chamber is hushed and still,
And I am alone,
Happy and alone.

Oh! who would be afraid of life,
The passion the sorrow and the strife,
When he may be
Sheltered so easily?
May lie in peace on his bed,
Happy as they who are dead. (*Major Works* 255)

For Jacobus, the "impenetrability" of the chairs, "neither figurative nor metaphorical but hardened and resistant to (being) thought," tests the value of thought itself as it encounters an "insensibility" that "inhabits life as its other" (122, 117). The chairs "become placeholders for things that resist being thought yet, through their resistance, provoke it": they are measured into meaningfulness precisely insofar as they withhold meaning. This process of measuring thought's value against that which is thoughtless places the lyric, though "ostensibly life-affirming," within the framework of Wordsworth's epitaphic mode (122). Writing takes place against insensibility, and insensibility elides into death.

I see "These chairs" responding to Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," with its evocative and uncanny calm that "vexes meditation"—facilitated by Coleridge's "dim sympathies" with

the film “fluttering” on the grate of the poet’s fireplace. Wordsworth’s poem obstructs all of Coleridge’s animism, offering a direct retort to his sympathetic imagination: “No fire is in the grate to stir or flutter.” There is no catalyst here for the kind of imaginative journeying that shapes what M. H. Abrams called the greater romantic lyric. There are only prosaic chairs, unworthy of even the barest description. In the second stanza, however, Wordsworth’s speaker finds the place where he and the resistant chairs will meet: in the insensibility of death. The very stillness of the scene takes on a subtle terror, as the speaker realizes that a life of pure peace extrapolated from this silent moment—a life without “the passion the sorrow and the strife”—verges dangerously on death. It may even be a form of death, a catatonic tranquility that renders him “Happy as they who are dead.” This last line, a variation on Solon’s injunction to “call no man happy until he is dead,” injects vivifying anxiety into the midst of total serenity. The poem’s perfect happiness is indistinguishable from perfect insensibility: without the vexation that spurs and disturbs thought, existence dissolves into absolute relief. Facing the prospect of such absolute relief, the speaker recognizes that he would *become dead*.

Freud defined the death drive as the allure of “inorganic stability,” a desire tasked with “lead[ing] organic life back to the inanimate state” (“Masochism” 163, *Ego* 40). The poem’s second stanza recognizes that its desire for perfect peace closely resembles a desire for death. But death is less an absence than an insensitive form of bare existence, devoid of all vibrancy. These chairs are simply, indifferently there. The sense of just being there suggests an inanimate, senseless presence that remains beyond the limits of thinking life. Where Jacobus sees an “ostensibly life-affirming” lyric shadowed by the grave, I see a quiet, almost silent reimagining of death.

“Surprized by joy” and “These chairs they have no words to utter” represent two distinct modes of the Wordsworthian lyric. “Surprized by joy” registers the effects of transcendent loss as the speaker’s bereavement escapes from and returns to memory: this is a poem of certain death, death that can be suspended only by Lethean delusion. This elegiac model has provided the basis for critical reconstructions of the aims and assumptions of the Wordsworthian lyric. By contrast, “These chairs” tests a vision of death as senseless existence rather than absence, a mode of being where chairs and poets meet. In the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth played up his troubled distance from the death-skeptical superstitions of the Lake District, yet poems like “These chairs” see him closing that distance in lyric terms. In “Memorial Verses: April 1850,” Matthew Arnold laurelled Wordsworth an English “Orpheus” for reviving “spirits that had long been dead” (38, 55)—a perceptive gloss of poems like “Surprized by joy,” which depicts the Orphic journey to the underworld as a psychological event. “These chairs” is an Orphic poem in a different sense, attuned to the mythological poet’s other career as the lyrist who sings inanimate nature to life. However, in Wordsworth’s revision of this other Orphic myth, the lyrist instead sings himself into inanimate insensibility. This underside of the Wordsworthian lyric finds a space of senseless existence between—or perhaps beyond—life and death.

Necropolitics in *The Excursion*

If there is an authentically epitaphic Wordsworth, we might expect to find him in 1814’s *The Excursion*, which, as Geoffrey Hartman protested, deteriorates “into a massive communion with the dead” (296). This is where Edmund Burke’s influence emerges in its most direct form, provoking William Hazlitt to charge Wordsworth with “apostasy” for forsaking the revolutionary

ideals that guided his best-known poetry in favor of crown-and-church conservatism.⁶ The explicit aim of *The Excursion* is to establish a means of living with death—the deaths of loved ones, and one’s own future death. It insists upon a providential acceptance of death, and is at times ruthless in its demand that grief be overcome. As Wordsworth puts it in his first “Essay Upon Epitaphs” (attached to *The Excursion* as a note), monuments to the dead must be freed from “that weakness and anguish of sorrow which is in nature transitory,” rejecting “transports of mind” and “quick turns of conflicting passion”—the same dramatic techniques that so distinguished his early poetry (*Prose Works* 2:59-60).

One register of the shift from 1793 to 1814 lies in Wordsworth’s sense of the political nature of the bond between the living and the dead. Where in 1793 he had found something grotesque in Burke’s veneration of the dead, by 1814 he condensed his hopes for national reconciliation into a figure of corpse-cherishing.⁷ *The Excursion*’s Burkean necrocracy charts the reintegration of the traumatized individual psyche into the local and national community through Christian consolation. But if consolation is the high-level argument prosecuted by the poem, its local particulars remain discontinuous and conflicted. I will argue that Wordsworth himself recognized as much, evidenced by lifelong revisions that work to discipline *The Excursion*’s

⁶ Markers of this shift include Wordsworth’s renunciation of the French Revolution, hostility toward Napoleon, newfound devotion to King George III, return to the Anglican fold, and acceptance of a patronage position as distributor of stamps for Westmoreland. Robert Ryan has noted that because in his revolutionary period Wordsworth rejected the Christianity of his youth, Wordsworth’s return to the Church in fact represents his second apostasy, “repudiating an apostasy that more truly deserved the name” (83).

⁷ In 1793 Wordsworth would leave off his long-held plan to enter the clergy (Ryan 83) and pen his furious “Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff,” which diagnosed Burke’s famous reverence for the dead as a diseased necrophilia. According to the young Wordsworth, Burke would have Britain “bound to cherish a corse at the bosom, when reason might call aloud that it should be entombed” (*Prose Works* 1:67).

churchyard tales to better accord with the poem's stated aims. These revisions act as a running commentary on the tension between the theory and practice of consolation.

The Excursion is about the Solitary, a bereaved and disillusioned radical who refuses to accept divine providence, and the two cooperating (and competing) priestly figures that attempt to save him. The Solitary is a figure of crisis, having failed to complete the work of mourning for his lost family and lost ideals in the wake of the French Revolution. His rehabilitation falls to the Wanderer, a nature's-son-cum-sage who expounds a pitiless discourse of divine consolation:

One adequate support
For the calamities of mortal life
Exists, one only;—an assured belief
That the procession of our fate, howe'er
Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power,
Whose everlasting purposes embrace
All accidents, converting them to Good. (4.10-17)

Raised in the Scottish church “with strictness scarcely known on English ground” (1.133) and sympathetic to the Covenanters, those “brave Progenitors, who rose / Against idolatry with warlike mind” (4.916-17), the Wanderer's severity renders him a bit of an alien—framed to be admired, but not without reservation.⁸ Susan Wolfson suggests that the Wanderer's dismissal of tears as “the weakness of humanity” is a “disquieting comment on what it means to achieve natural wisdom and to possess its comfort” (99). Sally Bushell links his “calm acceptance of others' suffering” to his professional itinerancy: as a “Pedlar” (his name in early manuscript versions) who “loved to pace the public roads / And the wild paths” (1.417-18), the Wanderer moves in and out of his subjects' lives, granting him “a literal ability to just ‘walk away’” (228-

⁸ A generation prior, Samuel Johnson had decried the rise of Presbyterianism in Scotland as “an epidemical enthusiasm, compounded of sullen scrupulousness and warlike ferocity,” a description which might double as a caricature of the Wanderer (*Collected Works* 9:6).

229). He can demand total submission to his providential view because he is curiously detached from the everyday fabric of domestic and social life (Bushell 164; Fry 151, 155).

The Wanderer's consolatory work is thus supplemented by the Pastor, who appears in Book V to minister on behalf of orthodoxy by way of concrete particulars—the “authentic epitaphs” of the dead in his own churchyard. The Pastor's local histories are meant to complement the relentless universality of the Wanderer's inspired theology, to balance the Wanderer's airy truths with the gravity of the grave. Jane Stabler observes that “Graves yield up a number of life histories in *The Excursion*, but the lesson of each one is the same” (145). For Kurt Fosso the graveyard eulogies, set in parallel and tending toward the same place, “signify the surrender of [‘private, tenacious grief’] to tradition” (216). Yet though these life histories may be intended to convey the same lesson, in their very particularity they veer the poem off its universalizing narrative and away from the consecrated tradition toward which it drives.

The Pastor's most persuasive illustration of social rehabilitation ends in a deathly embrace. Among the deceased parishioners in the Pastor's churchyard is a pair of unlikely friends: a Jacobite highland chieftain who fought at “Culloden's fatal overthrow” (6.437), escaped into exile, and, upon return to Britain, found his way to the Pastor's quiet “nook,” where he met a Hanoverian Whig who blew his estate in a losing campaign for a parliamentary seat and “slunk from the world” to this same hamlet (6.470). This pair, “flaming Jacobite / And sullen Hanoverian,” proceeded to argue their way to a friendship whose “very bickerings made them love it more” (6.474-475, 490). In this parable of national unity risen from the ashes of civil strife, partisan violence dissolves into sociable conversation. The solvent of strife is the churchyard itself, wherein,

One Spirit seldom failed to extend its sway
 Over both minds, when they awhile had marked
 The visible quiet of this holy ground
 And breathed its soothing air;—the Spirit of hope
 And saintly magnanimity; that, spurning
 The field of selfish difference and dispute,
 And every care which transitory things,
 Earth, and the kingdoms of earth, create,
 Doth, by a rapture of forgetfulness,
 Preclude forgiveness, from the praise debarred,
 Which else the Christian Virtue might have claimed. (6.496-506)

Casting off “selfish difference and dispute” as transitory trifles silenced by the “Spirit of hope,” the odd couple decides to share a monument upon their own deaths. Its inscription reads,

“Time flies, it is his melancholy task
 “To bring, and bear away, delusive hopes,
 “And re-produce the trouble he destroys.
 “But, while his blindness thus is occupied,
 “Discerning Mortal! do thou serve the will
 “Of Time’s eternal Master, and that peace,
 “Which the World wants, shall be for Thee confirmed.” (6.531-537)

Civil strife diminishes to a mere artifact of the “blind” mutability of time, overcome by the eternal rest to which these partisans have graduated. Beyond mutable appearances lies God’s eternal mastery and the promise of providential resolution. The transformation of civil strife into national cohesion takes on this same providential inevitability.

The skeptical Solitary will usually counter appeals to providence by appealing to his own metaphysics of radical contingency—“The sport of Nature, aided by blind Chance” (3.130). But gathered before the tomb of the pacified partisans, even the Solitary is moved by a sense of deeper coherence. His vision of nature seems to lose its flighty contingency and becomes a wellspring of eternal truth: he intones that the grave’s inscription

Accords with Nature’s language;—the soft voice
 Of yon white torrent falling down the rocks

Speaks, less distinctly, to the same effect (6.539-542)

From the “blended influence” (6.543) of this shared tomb emerges a vision of reconciliation modeled on nature, as time-bound historical traumas—civil war in 1745, global war in 1814—are eroded by the timeless “soft voice” of mountain torrents.⁹ The bond of friendship, established through reverential conversation under the watchful eyes of the departed, ends in an embrace held for perpetuity in the grave. This epitaphic conversation is translated by death into “Nature’s language,” and in Nature’s language it returns from secular time back to eternity.

The lesson is compelling, and the hard-hearted Solitary seems to acquiesce to this vision of consolation wrought from death. But as he absorbs the Pastor’s tale, he quietly radicalizes it, discerning a morbid subtext in which the only true solution to humanity’s lot of “dread strife” and “ruthless destiny” is death (6.570, 572). Elaborating on his theme, the Solitary contends that human life incarnates the myths of Prometheus, Tantalus, and Oedipus, “Fictions in form, but in their substance truths” (6.560). These pagan myths evoke a sense of providence without benevolence, a world of order that is nonetheless deeply hostile to logics of salvation and redemption. Humans sojourn on earth to suffer, “made desperate by ‘too quick a sense / Of constant infelicity’” (6.548-549)—a citation of Jeremy Taylor’s 1651 *ars moriendi* classic *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying*.¹⁰ But where the epitaph of Hanoverian and Jacobite folds

⁹ *The Excursion*’s “Summary of Contents” suggests how the episode is meant to transcend its particulars—the partisans are described simply as “two Men of opposite principles, who had encountered agitations in public life” (45).

¹⁰ Wordsworth and Coleridge both deeply admired Taylor. Duncan Wu’s *Wordsworth’s Reading, 1800-1815* notes that Lady Beaumont relayed that both Wordsworth and Coleridge “highly approve the writings of Dr. *Jeremiah Taylor*, who had also the feelings of a Poet” (208). Hazlitt’s “My First Acquaintance with Poets” mentions Coleridge’s regard for Taylor’s “richness of style and imagery,” and in *The Friend*, Coleridge described the passage quoted here by the Solitary as “among the most *sublime* passages in English Literature” (*The Liberal* 2:44; *The Friend* 199).

historical difference into eternity, Taylor's dire seventeenth-century orthodoxy strains against the ameliorating impulses of Anglicanism in 1814. In the passage the Solitary cites, Taylor reminds the "careless merry sinner" of the litany of torments under which humanity suffers, declaring, "we should be glad to be out of the noise and participation of so many evils. This is a place of sorrow and tears, of so great evils and a constant calamity: let us remove from hence, at least, in affections and preparation of mind" (38). This radical *contemptus mundi* is affectively and politically estranged from the Pastor's polite Anglicanism, and he tries to guide the Solitary toward a more temperate conclusion: "these be terms," he gently chides, "Which a divine philosophy rejects" (6.573-574).

But the Solitary has understood the Pastor's tale too well. If reconciliation can only arise from the grave, then the Pastor's message hides a deeper morbidity than the Solitary's own "bitter language of the heart" (3.462). *The Excursion* may, as Nicola Trott suggests, "figure an overriding wish to subdue mortality" (246), but moving beyond death into communal reconciliation seems to require an ever-deepening immersion in death. The Solitary's Tayloresque despair expresses the inner logic of the Pastor's Burkean vision of social reproduction through sepulchral reverence. First a means to an end, death becomes an end unto itself.

Though not without its difficulties, the tale of the partisans offers the Pastor's strongest case for consolation. The next episode is far more vexed, as the Pastor tries to stay on message but struggles against his source material. It tells the story of a formidable and melancholy woman, with "power of mind, and eloquent discourse," who bears an uncanny resemblance to both Milton's Satan and the Wordsworth of *The Prelude* (6.692). In youth, we are told, she split

her time between books and nature, estranged from her peers like an “imperial Thistle” amidst a vale of “humble Flowerets” (5.702-703). Her proud, regal sense of self-sufficiency carries a whiff of sulfur from the start:

Even at that age, she ruled as sovereign Queen
 Among her Play-mates; else their simple sports
 Had wanted power to occupy a mind
 Held in subjection by a strong controul
 Of studious application, self-imposed. (6.707-711)

The poem’s controlling aim is to deflate this satanic fantasy of subjection to oneself alone, and to replace it with the recognition of our subjection to the dead, and to the divinity with which they are joined. So, like the young Wordsworth of *The Prelude*, she must be disciplined by “Nature.” But her more fundamental transgression lies in her cooptation of *The Prelude*’s keywords of poetic privilege. And unlike the poet, her chastisement proves more destructive than edifying:

Two passions, both degenerate, for they both
 Began in honour, gradually obtained
 Rule over her, and vexed her daily life;
 An unrelenting, avaricious thrift;
 And a strange thralldom of maternal love,
 That held her spirit, in its own despite,
 Bound by vexation, and regret, and scorn.
 Constrained forgiveness, and relenting vows,
 And tears, in pride suppressed, in shame concealed,
 To a poor dissolute Son, her only Child.
 —Her wedded days had opened with mishap,
 Whence dire dependance.—What could she perform
 To shake the burthen off? Ah! there she felt,
 Indignantly, the weakness of her sex,
 The injustice of her low estate.—She mused;
 Resolved, adhered to her resolve; her heart
 Closed by degrees to charity; and, thence
 Expecting not Heaven’s blessing, placed her trust
 In ceaseless pains and parsimonious care,
 Which got, and sternly hoarded each day’s gain. (6.728-747)

Her avarice and her immoderate devotion to her son result from the obliquely sketched marriage that “opened with mishap,” apparently by way of out-of-wedlock pregnancy. However, she does not resign herself to nature’s discipline. She escapes poverty through the limited means available to her gender and station—thrift—and thus reasserts her “unsubdued” independence, without need for “Heaven’s blessing.” Yet her satanic ambition leaves her “intolerant of lasting peace” (6.753), and when she eventually falls to her deathbed, she lies in immense agitation:

She prayed, she moaned—her Husband’s Sister watched
 Her dreary pillow, waited on her needs;
 And yet the very sound of that kind foot
 Was anguish to her ears!—“And must she *rule*,”
 This was the dying Woman heard to say
 In bitterness, “and must she *rule and reign*,
 “*Sole Mistress* of this house, when I am gone?
 “Sit by my fire—*possess what I possessed*—
 “Tend what I tended—calling it her own!” (6.771-779, emphasis added)

We are supposed to observe the sign of her fall in the rhetoric of sovereignty that pervades the passage. Because she denies her interdependence, she can only see her worldly demise as an injustice. Her recompense for this failing is a bad death—at least, that is the lesson the Pastor intends to convey. But to reach this interpretation, he has to make her revolt against coverture a symptom of her refusal to submit to death. Social resistance to gendered property law becomes indistinguishable from metaphysical defiance of providential will. Providence guarantees both the law of property and the law of death. But the equation costs death some of its rarefied eschatological significance: the whole ordeal begins to look like a crass transaction.

The Pastor quickly becomes uncomfortable with this argument—“Enough; I fear, too much.” He moves to redeem the episode by finding a kernel of orthodox virtue in her character. The attempt is strained:

Of nobler feeling
 Take this example.—One autumnal evening,
 While she was yet in prime of health and strength,
 I well remember, while I passed her door,
 Musing with loitering step, and upward eye
 Turned tow'rds the planet Jupiter, that hung
 Above the centre of the Vale, a voice
 Roused me, her voice; it said, "That glorious Star
 "In its untroubled element will shine
 "As now it shines, when we are laid in earth
 "And safe from all our sorrows."—She is safe,
 And her uncharitable acts, I trust,
 And harsh unkindnesses, are all forgiven;
 Though, in this Vale, remembered with deep awe!" (6.780-793)

In every edition published during Wordsworth's lifetime, these lines are followed by a horizontal rule. There are none of what the poem calls "closing words" (7.311). On the other side of the rule, we find that "The Vicar paused," and the party relocates as if to escape its implications before the Pastor begins a new tale. This episode (and only this episode) seems to require bibliographic closure to compensate for the glaring deficiency of its conclusion.

For as far as submission to providence goes, this is unconvincing. Her juxtaposition of a grandly indifferent astronomy with diminutive human "sorrows" is not properly providential—it's fatalistic. Moreover, routing eternity through Jupiter is decidedly unchristian, and it affirms her ambition and pride by way of the planet's mythological associations. Here we recall that Jupiter is the star under which Wordsworth was born—his "own beloved star" in *The Prelude*—soliciting both identification and censure ([1805] 4.239). The Pastor has tried to read her stoic, skeptical indifference as evidence of resignation, but it remains a long way from the "assured belief" of the Wanderer, which, he makes clear, is the *only* "adequate support" for the "calamities of mortal life" (4.10-11). Fittingly, the Pastor must "trust" that the woman's transgressions are forgiven, but he equally trusts they are not forgotten.

The Pastor's struggles in this episode were Wordsworth's own struggles. The poet thoroughly revised its conclusion for over thirty years, making significant changes even between the 1836 and 1845 editions to reconcile the woman's tale with the moral the Pastor sought to derive. By 1845, five years before Wordsworth's death, the passage arrives at an apparently more viable demonstration of submission and repentance:

With a sigh
 She spake, yet, I believe, not unsustained
 By faith in glory that shall far transcend
 Aught by these perishable heavens disclosed
 To sight or mind. Nor less than care divine
 Is divine mercy. She who had rebelled,
 Was into meekness softened and subdued;
 Did, after trials not in vain prolonged,
 With resignation sink into the grave;
 And her uncharitable acts, I trust,
 And harsh unkindnesses are all forgiven,
 Tho', in this Vale, remembered with deep awe." (p. 216)

The Pastor has grown much more liberal with his doctrinal keywords, constructing a smooth narrative arc from satanic "rebellion" to "meekness" and "resignation." In the most revealing instance, 1814's reference to Jupiter has become a problem in need of correction. The observable heavens are now no longer eternal but "perishable," juxtaposed with a "faith in glory" that "far transcend[s]" the stars. Wordsworth has the Pastor project his orthodoxy onto this sole example of her "noble feeling." He now insists that at the core of her stoic musing, there must be a true faith beyond "sight or mind," even if she gives no evidence of it.

Yet even this movement toward properly Christian eternity is tripped up by choice Wordsworthian equivocations and double negatives—"I believe, not unsustained. . . ." Indeed, the 1843 Fenwick note to this episode describes the real-life model for the episode, and reveals the woman's deathbed conversion as an invention:

She was a most striking instance how far a woman may surpass in talent, in knowledge, & culture of mind those with & among whom she lives & yet fall below them in Xtian virtues of the heart and spirit. It seemed almost, & I say it with grief, that in proportion as she excelled in the one she failed in the other. How frequently has one to observe in both sexes the same thing. & how mortifying is the reflection! (*The Excursion* 1221)

The poem has clearly toiled to correct its source material, as there's little hint of the 1845 reading to be had in this character sketch. The antithesis between "talent," "knowledge," "culture of mind" and "Xtian virtues of the heart and spirit" takes on a gendered resonance, verging on the much-discussed notion that intellectual cultivation would "unsex" women. But then, as if on second thought, Wordsworth extends his reflection to "both sexes." The gender play runs in the opposite direction in the poem's summary of contents, which lists the episode as "Instance of an unamiable Character, a Female" ("a Woman" in 1845). The syntax poses a question: what happens to an "unamiable Character"—unsexed and thus implicitly male—when he becomes "Female"? The stakes are higher when the unamiable character in question is a female doppelgänger of the author who, rather than ascending the Alps (and Parnassus), is dragged by coverture into despair. The episode's revisions find Wordsworth working through this uncomfortable identification to find an appropriate idiom for her discipline. Thus the heavily worked manuscript experiments with "Heavens chastisement," a "trial prolong[ed]," and ultimate acceptance of "her redeemer," before slightly softening into the 1845 text. This version ends the negotiation between fixed doctrinal imperatives and intransigent source material, as, in a fanciful departure from her real-life model, she is finally absorbed into the poetic texture of Wordsworth's consolatory agenda.

Jane Stabler has noted how the Wanderer, with the "pounding rhythms and urgent emphases of a lay preacher," "swamps the other speakers, makes no concessions to his listeners,

and scarcely needs an interlocutor” (142). But where the Wanderer seems a personified system, “hermetically sealed against accident and impossible to divert” (143), the Pastor’s demonstrative stories evade doctrinal capture. William Hazlitt was the first to recognize this gulf between “particular illustration” and “general principle” (*The Examiner* 348:555). Hazlitt’s dynamic registers a fundamental problem in the poem’s logic of consolation: death is the absent center of its spiritual and social polity, and yet the more consolatory and conciliatory work death is asked to perform, the less stable its meaning becomes. This poetics, in its very immersion in death, constantly loses track of its object. We have understood death’s elusiveness in Wordsworth as the sign of incomplete mourning, but it also signals the endurance of death itself as a living problem.

CHAPTER FOUR

BLAKE, NATURAL RELIGION, AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF DEATH

William Blake's hostility to natural religion runs throughout his corpus of illuminated printing, from the two 1788 pamphlets simply titled *There Is No Natural Religion* to 1804's *Jerusalem*, which charges,

Bacon. Newton. Locke
Deny a Conscience in Man & the Communion of Saints & Angels
Contemning the Divine Vision & Fruition. Worshiping the Deus
Of the Heathen. The God of This World. & the Goddess Nature
Mystery Babylon the Great (93.30-34)¹

These accusations would be quite surprising to the figures named, and to their eighteenth-century adherents. While proponents of natural religion would admit to worshipping “The God of This World,” they understood their practice of seeking God in nature as diametrically opposed to the decadence of Babylonian (that is, Catholic) mystery, and would hesitate to accuse even Catholics of “Deny[ing] a Conscience in Man.” The God of nature was remote but nonetheless knowable through the genteel methods of empirical observation. Indeed, studying nature was the surest way to grasp God's ingenuity and benevolence—and rather more stable and sociable than appealing to revelation. In Blake's eyes, however, a whole range of religious phenomena from high church mystery to natural religion collapsed into the sinkhole of deism, which is why “nature worship” is ultimately irreligious:

Deism, is the Worship of the God of this World by the

¹ All citations of Blake's poetry are taken from David Erdman's *Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*.

means of what you call Natural Religion and Natural Philosophy, and of Natural Morality or Self-Righteousness, the Selfish Virtues of the Natural Heart. This was the Religion of the Pharisees who murdered Jesus. Deism is the same & ends in the same. (*Jerusalem* 52.33-37)

For Blake, this formula had all the limpid truth of a logical proof—or more, since proofs were tainted by their claim to a debased universality. Northrop Frye offers a still-compelling account of the Blakean genealogy that follows natural religion to murder with all the inevitability of gravity. When religion is conducted through nature, reality is reduced to what is objectively sensible. All transcendence, including the afterlife, becomes doubtful. The result is the threat of absolute inexistence—what Blake will come to call “Eternal Death.” Eternal Death, both idea and grim ethos, is one of the principal catastrophes of Blake’s mythography. If death is absolute and permanent, then Blake thinks we are driven to cling desperately to life. By anxiously coveting life we are led, paradoxically, to jealous and fearful violence: in Frye’s memorable words, “The end of all natural religion, however well-meaning and good-natured, is a corrupt and decadent society rolling downhill to stampeding mass hysteria and maniacal warfare” (73). If this is where Blake ends up on natural religion, however, his critique begins in very different terms. *The Book of Thel* pictures a significantly distinct relationship between natural religion and death, in which death does not lead to eternal inexistence, but instead promises the endless recirculation of the body in the economy of nature. One does not truly leave the world, but simply becomes insensible to it—a resource to be perpetually reused. For Thel, the problem with death is that it leaves too much behind.

How to Live in a Natural World

Natural religion proposes that because the world is God’s creation, God can be known through the examination of the world. To read nature is to read God’s work; design indexes the

designer. This premise has the benefit of assimilating empiricism into religious practice. As Francis Bacon wrote, empiricism is the hermeneutic method appropriate to nature, which “is the book of God’s works, and...a kind of second Scripture” (8:368-369). Even as the textual and natural scriptures are held in analogical relation to each other, the practical consequence of the focus on natural phenomena is a diminishing emphasis on doctrine—which suited an Anglican church averse to doctrinal quarrels just fine. Natural religion thus functioned as an alternative and sometimes rival to revealed religion, the direct experience of God’s presence through inspired revelation. In place of a divine presence given up in ecstatic revelation, natural religion discloses the signature of a remote God, legible only to disciplined study. This was the predominant theoretical and rhetorical mode of the Anglican orthodoxy in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and was equally popularly among rationalist factions of dissent. Blake despised it.

Yet rather than attack its theoretical premises, Blake psychologizes natural theology. In Blake’s diagnosis, if the microscope yields us as much of God as the Bible does, it becomes difficult to insist that the unavailable God of scripture in his distant heaven is more real than the stuff of the world that signs for him. For the natural theologian, God is evidenced by Lockean empirical observation, which is centered on “a consensus of normal minds based on the lower limit of normality” (Frye 22). This epistemological mood clashes with the notion of a hazily transcendent otherworld, which is defined by its resistance to empirical scrutiny. Bacon’s second scripture sows doubt upon the first. The deep psychology of natural religion reveals a despairing acknowledgment that nature is all there is. Doubt is installed as a central component of faith, schismatically insisting on both the epistemological priority of this world and the ontological

priority of the inaccessible beyond. Organized by deferral and fantasy, split between the hard ground of “Nature” and the obscure heaven that allegedly awaits, the psyche of natural theology is structurally preordained to oscillate between belief and skepticism. And whatever it might profess, it instinctively lends greater credence to its skepticism, since skepticism is the epistemological motor of its empirical methods. Natural religion thus ineluctably descends into deism, which for Blake is not religion at all. There is no natural religion.

Due to its self-evacuating tendencies, Blake thinks that underneath its polite, mannered façade, natural religion is constitutionally anxious. A chief source of anxiety lies in the theodicy of natural religion. Of course, any monotheism that insists on a benevolent God may struggle to account for evil and suffering. But the problem is especially acute if the whole theological edifice rests on an interpretation of the world as an expression of God’s very nature. We may assert in ontological terms that the world reflects God’s nature, but in practice we have reversed the equation and made the world responsible for what we can infer of God. If, for example, we see the world as an unfolding catastrophe, God becomes at best a flawed designer and at worst a sadistic tyrant. To this end, William Paley offers a novel and audacious natural-theological solution, declaring that the world is a kind, healthy, bounteous, and joyous place. In his words, “The air, the earth, the water, teem with delighted existence” (238). Paley wrote the book on natural theology (titled, of course, *Natural Theology* [1802]), synthesizing a long tradition of thought into hugely influential form. While Paley’s effort postdates some of Blake’s engagements with natural theology, his arguments are both representative and symptomatic, distilling precisely what Blake opposed.

Paley strives to impart his vision of a delightful world through the effervescence of his prose. Observing newborn flies, he finds that “Their sportive motions, their wanton mazes, their gratuitous activity, their continual change of place without use or purpose, testify their joy, and the exultation which they feel in their lately discovered faculties” (238). It is this excess—the sportive, wanton, and gratuitous—that expresses the experience of joy throughout the exultant natural world. Paley finds it everywhere, in cats, fish, shrimp, and bees, on down to the smallest fly. Astonishingly, Paley is quite comfortable granting to animals the capacity for disciplined, goal-directed behavior and the sense of temporal awareness that had long been regarded as humanity’s distinction.² Paley’s animal kingdom is governed by leisure, hedonic satisfaction, and contemplative retreat: “At this moment, in every given moment of time, how many myriads of animals are eating their food, gratifying their appetites, ruminating in their holes, accomplishing their wishes, pursuing their pleasures, taking their pastimes?” (241). But while these animals seem in many ways remarkably human, their hedonism remains blameless, and Paley’s descriptions often slide enthusiastically into Eros, as when he imagines plants “covered with aphides, greedily sucking their juices, and constantly, as it should seem, in the act of sucking.” For the aphids apparently trapped in the oral stage, “It cannot be doubted but that this is a state of intense gratification” (238).

Of course, there is suffering in this world. We are scarred by “calamity.” But Paley ingeniously uses our awareness of suffering as evidence of the world’s benevolence, since “the very notice which calamities excite” demonstrates that “the common course of things is in favor of happiness” (241). If tragedy defines our lives, it is only because it is novel: “happiness is the

² The tradition of thought that identifies the human with a distinctive relationship to time is discussed in relation to Wordsworth’s lyrics in chapter three.

rule; misery, the exception” (241). Paley’s theodicy thus has two prongs that may arrive at cross purposes. First, he declares that the world is on balance unequivocally happy. Second, he acknowledges that we may not feel ourselves to be happy, but that is only because we are too consistently happy to notice it, and so mistake ourselves for unhappy: “Were the order reversed, our attention would be called to examples of health and competency, instead of disease and want” (241). Accordingly, he can insist that unhappiness is a human delusion, and as evidence point to the happiness of nature. It’s crucial that Paley is very confident in his capacity to interpret the feelings of nature, and yet has little faith in the capacity of other people to interpret their own feelings.

Thinking Matter

The question of whether nature is happy may seem an unlikely philosophical crux for a theology developed to accommodate empiricism. But if religion is understood as both Blake and Paley intuited it, that is, as a conceptual and practical repertoire for self-orientation, then the relationship between religion and the projection of feeling matters decisively. The connection (or chasm) between humans and animals recurs throughout Blake’s early poems. A notable example is “The Fly,” which addresses itself not directly to natural theology, but to the mechanistic empiricism that Blake locates at natural theology’s core:

Little Fly
Thy summer’s play,
My thoughtless hand
Has brush’d away. (1-4)

A Paleyesque anthropomorphic frame is in place, as the speaker addresses the fly, and reads it at “play.” However, this is after the fact. A prototypical apostrophe, the poem is addressed to an absent being, because the fly is already gone. Both the metonymy of “thoughtless hand” and the

euphemism of “brush’d away” witness the speaker distancing himself from the act. If he had initially engaged the fly in the terms of the poem, he would not have killed it.

This realization elicits reflection:

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

For I dance
And drink & sing:
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing. (5-12)

Mortality and vulnerability link the speaker to the fly—both live and joy until they cease, crushed by some vast indifferent power. The analogy hinges on the intuition of the fly’s capacity to experience pleasure, which becomes a source of quiet, noble, and hopeless resistance in the face of death’s inevitability. But as the analogy is pushed further, complications arise:

If thought is life
And strength & breath
And the want
Of thought is death;

Then am I
A happy fly,
If I live
Or if I die. (13-20)

The governing “If” sets the terms of the speaker’s relation to the fly. If we read its questions rhetorically and interpret the opening “If” as a “Since” or an “Insofar as,” then a radical leveling identification follows: I am a fly like thee. Humanity no longer has a monopoly on “thought,” which is redefined as life and strength and breath. If living is thinking, fly and speaker become equal bearers of life, as each lives until “some blind hand” intervenes. The poem thus recalls

King Lear: “As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods / They kill us for their sport” (4.1.38-39).

Paley’s own flies close the analogical loop, as their “wanton mazes” of flight transvalue *Lear*’s world of irreversible depravity into a world of constantly-consummated joy. This reorientation turns on contrasting connotations of “wanton”—the violently incontinent and the joyfully excessive—and is equally suggested by Paley’s optimistic usage of “mazes,” over and against Milton’s famous image of fallen angels reasoning to “no end, in wandering mazes lost” (*Paradise Lost* 2.561). Blake’s treatment of the fly-human analogy catches and suspends these two traditions, defined respectively by original sin and universal benevolence. Here the analogy allows the speaker to identify with the fly’s vulnerability, recognizing the value of the fly’s life in the same terms as the speaker’s own. Both beings, the speaker can now say, are valuable precisely because they are fragile. Yet the value attached to this sheer existence is also an indifferent sort of value, reflected in the mechanistic framework that generated the initial equivalence between fly and speaker:

Then am I
A happy fly,
If I live
Or if I die.

From this perspective, the fly has not been elevated toward the human; instead, the human has been diminished toward the fly. “Happy” bundles several etymological resonances—fortunate and content, but also blithe. The blithe contentment wrought by a mechanistic worldview may in fact prove apathetic toward life: alive or dead, the speaker will remain happy, since life is just biomechanical animation. In one sense, speaker and fly are both valued for simply existing, but in another sense, simple existence in a mechanical universe is fleeting, indifferent, and ultimately meaningless. Why not kill a fly—or oneself?

Yet this indifferent mechanism can suggest belated guilt: the fly's life provokes philosophical reflection, which leads to the revaluation of the fly's value, but only after the speaker has ended it. Stopped short by the realization of what he has done, the speaker has incentive to conclude that it didn't matter either way. Both of these possibilities follow from the argumentative path that takes "Am I not / A fly like thee?" as a rhetorical question and takes the "If" that opens the third stanza ("If thought is life / And strength & breath") as a viable premise: I am a fly like thee, and thought is (nothing but) life and strength and breath. But what if we take the opening question earnestly and challenge the premise that follows? What if I am *not* a fly like thee, and thought is *not* reducible to mere bodily vitality? Isn't the consciousness that poses this kind of question fundamentally different from its supposed likeness, the thoughtless fly? By identifying self with fly, by reflecting upon the relationship between thought and bodily life, hasn't the speaker gone beyond the dumb animation of mere life and strength and breath? Doesn't this thought, this recognition of similitude given verbal form, add something to existence? The performative declaration "I am like a fly" goes well beyond species difference, crossing whole phyla to generate a likeness that only the human mind, and not the fly's, can recognize. This version of the speaker might intone, *It is most unlike a fly to compare oneself to a fly*. From this angle, the mechanistic equivalence of human and fly is only the first step in a dialectical movement that reaffirms the transcendence of human consciousness as that which can construct analogies and imagine likenesses.

But who can say, as this version of the speaker assumes, that the fly doesn't "think"? If the fly has life and strength and breath, then surely the speaker is right to believe the fly "thinks" in some sense, too? More damningly, didn't the speaker begin the poem by identifying his own

hand as equally “thoughtless”? If the faculty of thought couldn’t prevent the speaker from killing the fly, then what good is the privilege of human consciousness? How could this ineffectual, phantasmal thought qualify the speaker as “alive” in any sense that wouldn’t apply to the fly? Is human life uselessly distinguished by the capacity to feel guilty after the fact?

“The Fly” thus dramatizes an impasse. At the outset, the fly is insignificant, so the speaker can thoughtlessly kill it. Once killed, the fly triggers a chiasmus in which speaker becomes fly and fly becomes “man,” as cohabitants in the abstract category of the living. However, this recognition actually ensures that the speaker is not “A fly like thee” because only the speaker, and not the fly, has posited this likeness. We could say that the speaker was like the fly up until the moment when the speaker recognized this likeness, awakened from thoughtlessness into fated knowledge by an accidental animal sacrifice. By transvaluing the fly, the speaker renegotiates both speaker’s and fly’s place in the world. This kind of identification uproots the complacent assumptions that separate human and fly. And yet the performative act of claiming identification with the fly will in turn differentiate the speaker from the fly, though this difference cannot be recognized within the materialist framework that first enabled the identification. This tension between what the poem says and what it does is reflected in the tension between the playfully skipping iambic dimeter and the logical hypotaxis of the *if/then* argument structure. The syllogism that closes the poem seems an alien presence within the poetic form that houses it. Materialism permits the speaker to imaginatively identify with the fly on the basis of shared existence, but this same materialism denies imaginative identifications any significance. It is in this sense that the speaker can be happy “If I live / Or if I die.” This happy

indifference, Blake's poem suggests, underlies the exuberant joy of the happy animals in Paley's mechanistic natural-theological universe.

Place and Identity

What "The Fly" dramatizes, what makes it such an apt partner to Paley's text, is the violently oscillating psychology underlying the empiricism Blake locates at the core of the natural-theological worldview. The logical movement of "The Fly" has no end, because every conclusion performatively subverts itself. That poem's minimal exposition of the problem of consciousness in a material world receives elaboration in *The Book of Thel*. *Thel* and Thel ask how to relate, as a thinking thing, to death.

An adolescent woman, Thel finds herself in the perfectly engineered world of natural theology, where everyone is happy. But unlike her cheerful neighbors, Thel, burdened with consciousness, finds herself deeply unhappy, so unhappy that she longs to "gentle sleep the sleep of death" (1.13). Her fellow residents of the Vales of Har—a lily, cloud, worm, and clod of clay—are baffled by her discontent. If they can be happy, why can't Thel, the "mistress of the vales" and "virgin of the skies," appreciate her existence? Even the "lowly" lily, though "very small" and destined to be "melt[ed]" by the summer heat, nonetheless has an important ecological niche. She purifies honey, feeds lambs, "revives the milked cow, & tames the fire breathing steed" (2.8, 2.10). True, she does not live a life of hedonic frolic like Paley's flies. Paley's vision of nature is defined by surplus enjoyment. His world is an immaculate machine, but it runs on currents of pleasure that exceed mere function. For Blake's lily, by contrast, there's little doubt the pleasure-pain balance comes out in the negative. Yet she remains content, since "he that smiles on all" has promised that once the world consumes her she will "flourish in

eternal vales.” If the lowly lily is provided for, “then why should Thel complain”? (1.15-25).

However, the lily ends her speech smiling but “in tears,” suggesting that her suffering cannot be fully satisfied by the apologetics she recites.

The story the lily tells is repeated by each of the vale-dwellers Thel encounters. Because every being is useful, every being is valuable, and because everyone is valued, everyone is happy. The sheer complexity of the natural system that governs the vale is evidence of purpose and design. Every node within the natural-theological system is essential to the system, and its efficiency is evidence of its virtue. Underwriting the pastoral economy is the metaphor of the family, headed by a patriarchal God. God is father to the lily, officiant to the marriage of cloud and dew, and husband to the clod of clay. Bathing all his children in “milk and oil,” “cherish[ing]” even the helpless worm, he elegizes every death and midwives every rebirth (5.10, 11). The incessant turnover of dust to dust thus takes on an all-encompassing significance—the book of nature recast as family saga. This narrative does not even need to be understood by its subjects, as the clay’s uncomprehending acceptance suggests: “But how this is sweet maid, I know not, and I cannot know, / I ponder, and I cannot ponder; yet I live and love” (5.5-6). This metaphor system powers the symbolic economy that endows meaning upon the material economy of *Thel*’s world. Because there is no figural alternative to the family, the image of God as father or husband stands as a total identification, rather than an analogy that might be qualified by difference or interpreted otherwise. The theological narrative cannot be recognized as a narrative within the Vales of Har because it reads unopposed.

Nature’s theology guarantees a sense of purpose and identity, comprehended in *Thel* by the word “place.” “Place” is niche—the array of points where each entity meets another entity in

the ecological cycle. These connections generate an immanent sense of significance, as each being comes to identify itself through its relationships to other beings. *Thel's* world thus models what Mark Lussier calls an “ethos of interdependence” (55), where constant transformation ensures, as Kevin Hutchings writes, “the very identity of *each* living thing is infinitely deferred” (171). Defined by reproduction and death, these relationships are equally creative and destructive. Yet the balance of experience is not equal. To this end, Schopenhauer offers “A quick test of the assertion that enjoyment outweighs pain in this world”: simply “compare the feelings of an animal engaged in eating another with those of the animal being eaten” (42). The triumph of pain over pleasure must be explained away by an ideology of sacrifice. Suffering on behalf of others becomes a virtue, transvaluing the preponderance of pain into a mark of the world’s holiness. This theology of nature, translating suffering into sacrifice, works to lubricate the material ecology of *Thel's* world. A supplementary transcendence, in the form of God’s love and the promise of the afterlife, buttresses the immanent identities generated within the ecological frame.

However, neither the comfort of “place,” with the hard satisfactions of sacrifice, nor the promise of divine love is available to *Thel*. As the narrative begins, *Thel* has already rejected her place:

The daughters of Mne Seraphim led round their sunny flocks.
All but the youngest; she in paleness sought the secret air.
To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day (1.1-3)

Throughout her book, *Thel* declines to join the “round” of the day’s work within the larger round of the lifecycle. This abstention clarifies an important feature of this world: identities are determined by vocation, and vocations are assigned according to kind. This species logic is

governed by strict control of analogy and likeness. To be a lily is to function like a lily, which is to be wilted, consumed, circulated, and reborn. Everything is engaged in the work of reproduction. For Thel's kind, as "daughters of Mne Seraphim," reproduction entails husbandry of "sunny flocks" and, as the book's conclusion reveals, sexual procreation. To opt out of reproduction is to forfeit likeness and thus surrender identity.

The relationship between kind, identity, and value was the object of "The Fly," which queried an expanded sense of what it means to be like something else, transcending species difference to explore an underlying likeness rooted in shared mortality. As soon as Thel abstains from the work of the world, she has no kind. She retreats to the "secret air" where she might "fade away," and soon she will long to "gentle sleep the sleep of death," which might release her from her delicate cage (1.2-3, 1.13). This desire for nothingness resembles Freudian melancholia, the internalization of loss into a sense of one's own emptiness; in this case, Thel's lost object is, recursively, her own sense of self. But *Thel* also draws on the Renaissance sense of melancholia as a mode of being—the phenomenon that led Richard Burton to claim, "They get their knowledge by books, I mine by melancholizing" (22).³ Cast into the wilderness outside of the vale's symbolic order, she can no longer "hear the voice / Of him that walketh in the garden," the God of nature that blesses her neighbors but never appears to Thel (1.14). This thoughtful loss renders her painfully immune to the theocratic apologetics of natural religion, predicated on likeness, utility, and reproduction. It also costs her identity, if identity as self-sameness requires a

³ Anca Violeta Munteanu develops the connection between *Thel* and melancholy, noting that Blake kept a print of Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I* above his own engraving table, which was the only item he retained when he was forced to sell his collection of prints in 1820.

mirror, since Thel has nothing to affirm her reflection. She gestures instead toward a less substantial and yet perhaps more sustainable way of placing herself:

Ah! Thel is like a watry bow. and like a parting cloud.
 Like a reflection in a glass. like shadows in the water.
 Like dreams of infants. like a smile upon an infants face,
 Like the doves voice, like transient day, like music in the air (1.8-11)

The analogical work of “The Fly” explodes into fragments of abbreviated comparison. These are apparently depressive figures, reflecting a lack of confidence and a deteriorating sense of self. They trade in ephemerality and weakness. A long tradition of twentieth-century criticism cited passages like these to chastise Thel for withdrawing from the lifecycle of the natural world, often in vituperative terms: Thel was “indolent” and “hysteric,” defined by “consummate ignorance,” “wallow[ing] in self-pity and cynicism,” and at core “ugly, cold, mean, dark” (Fisher 206, Read 167, Behrendt 78, Gleckner 168). Recent criticism has upended the masculinist assumptions undergirding these assessments, but even Thel’s most sympathetic readers do not look fondly on these similes. For Deborah McCollister, Thel’s soliloquy reveals that though she is “essentially selfish, she does not possess identity” and “does not realize her essence”—weaknesses which render her vulnerable to seduction by the vale-dwellers (91). Gerda Norvig’s sensitive reading is focused upon Thel’s “liminal identity,” and yet Norvig finds in Thel’s similes a “plethora of grafted discourses” that “function as a kind of background glossolalia or echolalia calculated to confuse rather than define” (260). Curiously, even as Norvig depicts Thel as a “self-reflexive theorist,” her argument does not attempt to recuperate the reflexive work of these similes (257, 266). The adolescent, depressive trappings of Thel’s unhappiness remain a problem across diverse critical accounts. I suggest we turn the issue around: unhappiness problematizes in *Thel*—it is Thel’s way of knowing.

This is not to dismiss Thel's confusion and anguish. She at once is haunted by transience and enchanted by death ("Why fade these children of the spring? born but to smile & fall" [1.7]). But Thel's depressive position does not render her "thoughtless" like the speaker of "The Fly." Instead, it offers a lucid picture of the problem of identity in a world that has no place for her. "Thel is like a watry bow" in the sense that she is an image, an epiphenomenon, a haphazard appearance without utility. Ensnared in the melancholic "secret air," Thel is displaced within her own narrative world, having left behind its identity-producing order. When she compares herself to a "parting cloud," she pictures herself straddling the nebulous boundary that divides existence from inexistence. Combining these similes gives us less, not more, of Thel, combining the barely-there transience of the parting cloud with the illusory bearing of the rainbow reflected in water. When Thel casts herself "Like a reflection in a glass, like shadows in the water," she identifies herself as an index without a referent, likening herself to likeness as such. She appears as a figure of representation, a blurry copy of what Blake will call "unnam'd forms," with no original (*Marriage* 15.18). By figuring herself "Like dreams of infants, like a smile upon an infant's face," Thel imagines herself as essence without appearance, and then as appearance without essence. If dreaming is a fundamentally private form of experience, this should be especially true for infants, who may not have much use for conceptual distinctions between dreams and reality, and who lack the means to express, record, or convey their experience. However vivid, the infant's dream leaves no trace. The infant's smile inverts this scheme: it's a visible material event, but the infant's smile has no certain relationship to any interior experience. It might reflect happiness, contentment, and Blakean "infant joy," or it might be a superficial phenomenon, skin deep. The dream figures Thel as a definitive but unrepresentable

being. The smile casts her as a visible appearance unmoored from essence, a representation that may signify nothing at all.

Taken collectively, these similes offer variations on what Elizabeth Effinger calls Thel's "co-emerging and co-fading" (127). Thel's figures are negations that do constructive work, replacing the hard ground of an ecological "place" with abstract identifications linked by transience and vulnerability. Crucially, these resemblances are not based in species, natural kind, reproductive relationships, or metonymical connections within the ecosystem. Her similes have no reference to biological or ecological function. Nelson Hilton registers the link between identity and place when he characterizes Thel's lament as "not going anywhere, not standing firm, but assimilating everything to its vision. Narcissus-like, lamentation centers on itself and so defeats its fulfillment" (30). This is especially interesting since the similes of "reflection in a glass" and "shadows in water" seem designed to dissolve the rapturous image of self that engrosses Narcissus. These images indeed defeat fulfillment, but I will argue that for Thel the defeat of fulfillment is a means of survival. There's a vital dimension to wishing for disappearance without actualizing it.

Exploded Intimacy

Thel's account of self is unmoored from the familial-ecological matrix, but it also evades the logical bind that ties life to thought in "The Fly." To exist—even as a mere optical illusion dependent on a perceiver, even in the mind of a sleeping infant—is to share something with Thel. It no longer matters whether one is biologically alive, or how one apprehends the vexed relationship between life and consciousness. In Thel's world, likeness is governed by species, a logic upended by "The Fly" in favor of the more fundamental likeness of life to life. For Thel at

this moment, likeness goes even further, expanding beyond life to the very limits of language and thought. When Thel hazards her similes, she challenges her world's single regulating analogy of nature as family. This response to natural theology's use of analogy is quite distinctive, as we can see by comparison to the era's most important argument vis-à-vis natural religion and analogy, David Hume's posthumously published *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779).

In Hume's account, natural religion argues as follows: Machines are self-evidently designed. This means they must have a designer. The world is like a machine in that it evidences design, so it too must have a designer. Finally, the nature of that designer must be revealed in the nature of his design, since the capacities and sensibilities of human designers are evident in human designs. In the *Dialogues*, Hume's representative skeptic Philo launches a devastating series of attacks on this reasoning. For example, "design" in the human sense is not creation but rather the manipulation of materials that already exist. Human design, then, is a weak point of reference for a creator who is supposed to have created the world *ex nihilo* and then organized its materials. Should we suppose a distinction between the creator and the designer? To that end, human designs are often collaborative, so why should we assume there is only one creator/designer as opposed to many? Moreover, human designs often go through several imperfect attempts. We have no other world with which to compare our own, so why should we assume ours is the sole and final version? Indeed, all experience suggests it is more likely a faulty unfinished prototype. And finally, "does not a plant or an animal, which springs from

vegetation or generation, bear a stronger resemblance to the world, than does any artificial machine, which arises from reason and design?" (53).⁴

For Hume's Philo, these arguments expose natural theology's promiscuous use of analogy. The world is only like a human-designed contrivance if we use "like" in a grossly irresponsible manner, without attending carefully to the similarities and differences of the two terms. For every way in which the world is "like" a machine, there are countless other ways in which the two terms are extremely unlike. Under scrutiny, the argument from design can't support the cascade of inferences that its practitioners derive from its controlling analogy, leaping from the evident design of commonplace objects all the way up to the designer of the universe. Philo's arguments thus work to radically constrain the use of analogical reasoning, with the larger aim of dissolving empirical apologetics for Christian belief. Keep your faith, Hume seems to say, but do not appeal to nature to affirm what you already believe about the biblical God.

Like Hume's Philo, *The Book of Thel* trains its critical focus on the use of analogy in theological justification. *Thel* is preoccupied by the figure of nature as family, which is leveraged to imply that the violence of the lifecycle is necessary and ultimately motivated by patriarchal love. But Thel's strategy is the opposite of Philo's: rather than attempting to sever the figure from the referent and disqualify the analogy, she appropriates the theological apparatus of

⁴ Though readers historical and modern have assumed that Philo speaks for Hume, and though Philo's arguments appear decisive, he ultimately turns about-face and accepts a version of the natural-theological argument. This may be a perfunctory gesture of conciliation, but Colin Jager has argued that the actual terms Philo assents to—namely "*that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence*" (Hume 101)—are so attenuated that natural theology in this form has no consequence for human conduct. Accordingly, Philo's concession implies that "If this is all that natural theology amounts to...it's not an enemy worth fighting" (Jager, *Book of God* 64).

figuration for her own use. Her soliloquies consist of rampant and promiscuous analogizing. In *The Rule of Metaphor*, Paul Ricouer argued that metaphor “re-describes reality” by transforming the meaning of the copula *to be*: “The metaphorical ‘is’ at once signifies both ‘is not’ and ‘is like’” (24, 6). Ricouer offers an alternative to the substitution theory of metaphor, which conceives metaphor as a “purely rhetorical” operation that posits a proper word, then replaces the proper word with a figurative word, and finally asks the audience to perform a “restitutive paraphrase” by deriving the proper word from the figure (52). According to this conventional theory, metaphor provides no new information and is strictly decorative in function (49). By contrast, Ricouer proposes a tension theory of metaphor defined by “split reference,” in which “*what is* is re-described” by the irresolvable splitting of its predication into, simultaneously, “not” and “like” (351, 292). This split predication is not narrowly ornamental: “it says *that* things really are this way” (292). The tension dynamics that propel metaphor become explicit in simile, which does not even rhetorically assert the pure equivalence of its terms, but claims they are merely “like” each other.

Thel’s declarations of likeness project a split identification in Ricouer’s sense. There is no proper word that might substitute for any figure to make it whole—my own explications of her similes suggest the difficulty of achieving a satisfactory account of their descriptive or referential work. Because they are similes, each figure explicitly sustains the gap between tenor and vehicle. Thel is *like* a watry bow, and thus *not* a watry bow. The figure is constitutionally incomplete. But moreover, each figure is displaced by the next, such that none is allowed to assert its own self-sufficiency. The similes compound, qualify, or interfere with one another. One

likeness gives way to the next, such that any replete identity is indefinitely deferred. Identity derived from natural kinds gives way to similarity hazarded through incomplete comparisons.

And unlike the speaker of “The Fly,” Thel does not need to determine whether her figures are descriptively adequate. To borrow Nancy Yousef’s terms, Thel appeals to “intimacy” rather than “sympathy.” Unlike the eighteenth-century motif of sympathy, Yousef argues that “intimacy need not and rarely does, entail a symmetrical relationship between one another; need not, and rarely does, involve the discovery of similitude between one another” (2). Intimacy thus circumvents any demand for “intersubjective symmetry” with its attendant notions of equality and reciprocity. The problem of intersubjective symmetry is the wrench thrown into the gears of “The Fly,” sending the poem into infinite regress, and it is a problem Thel sidesteps by asking less of her comparisons in order to give and receive more. While Yousef limits her study of intimacy to the interpersonal realm, the “asymmetrical and nonreciprocal forms of relation, attention, and appreciation” she theorizes inevitably disturb the category of the human even as they presuppose it (3).

Thel’s figures imagine a vexed intimacy. But there is a second, distinct layer of figuration in *The Book of Thel*: the representation of nonhuman beings—lily, cloud, worm, and clod of clay—that converse in English, maintain religious beliefs, and participate in human institutions like marriage. These verbal representations are supplemented by a visual text that depicts, for example, the lily as a young woman looking and playing the cultural role of the “gentle maid” (1.22). Tilottama Rajan suggests that *Thel* (alongside *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*) invites confusion between “literal” referents in the social world and the “figurative” drama of Blakean

mythology.⁵ Kevin Hutchings has argued that there is a fundamentally exploitative current to reading *Thel*'s nonhuman beings *as*, whether as allegories of human epistemological questions, as props in the Blakean drama of Innocence and Experience, or as unconscious mouthpieces of a repressive natural order. Marjorie Levinson has claimed that these creatures are best understood as *Thel*'s ventriloquized projections: "she projects her answers into them, listening to them as to an 'other,' and so hearing what it is she knows, and thus getting a glimpse of what she does not know" (289). In a distinct but compatible interpretation, Hutchings sees *Thel*'s personifications as a product of "discursive conditioning" rather than "narcissistic compulsion," evidenced by *Thel*'s own obsession with the question of utility (169). In each case, *Thel* appropriates the vale creatures as material for her own projections, staging confrontations with othered versions of herself that repeat her own disavowed knowledge back to her.

But there is another way to approach the poem's anthropomorphism. As Paul de Man proposed,

'Anthropomorphism' is not just a trope but an identification on the level of substance. It takes one entity for another and thus implies the constitution of specific entities prior to their confusion, the *taking* of something for something else that can then be assumed to be *given*. (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 242)

One entity can be taken for another only after each has been constituted as distinct. This prior constitution is the more fundamental work of the trope. The similes of *Thel*'s lament are not

⁵ As Rajan notes, *Thel* may be about female identity, but not in the sense that, say, Mary Wollstonecraft's novels are about female identity. This is because *Thel* doubles as a person and a symbol. She asks to be interpreted ("who will find my place?"), marking her identity as an irresolvable question. *Thel* might be at once a young woman circa 1789, a figure in the drama of innocence and experience, a wandering Neoplatonic soul, and so forth. This continual crossing between the personal and the symbolic marks *Thel*'s figuration as a "site of resistance to any attempt to fit it into the system," where the eternal visionary dimensions of Blake's thought are disrupted by the vividness of its historical particulars (243). The irruption of history means that in *Thel*, unlike the late prophecies, Blake is still making art for "an audience composed of men and women instead of sheep and goats" (252).

anthropomorphic in this sense, since they question the nature of the difference between Thel and her figural vehicles. These figures do not perform the prior constitution of their terms, but instead work to unsettle and displace both Thel and her others in the Ricouerean play of “like” and “not.” Anthropomorphism only emerges once the same beings with whom Thel analogizes herself are summoned into the literal dramatic space of her world to talk to her. Here the pre-constituting process of anthropomorphism de Man describes is rendered visible and subject to explication. The dialogues actively differentiate Thel from the same beings to whom she has claimed likeness—they work to shut down her thought.

Even as Thel shares with the lily a vulnerable existence within a gendered ecosystem, the lily is conjured forth to explain that they are not in fact alike. They have different roles in the natural economy, and moreover, Thel is unhappy while the lily is content—even if her tears say otherwise. The imaginative link between their positions is severed. The lily has a defining purpose, “But Thel is like a faint cloud kindled at the rising sun: / I vanish from my pearly throne, and who shall find my place” (2.11-12). Thel’s invocation of the cloud summons forth the same, and he appears “hovering and glittering on the air before the face of Thel” (3.6). Like the lily, however, the cloud refuses to stand as Thel’s likeness. Yes, they are both ephemeral—the cloud is daily burned apart by the sun—but in perishing, he disperses and falls to earth, where he is gloriously reborn in marriage to the “fair eyed dew.” (Described as a “weeping virgin, trembling,” the dew is unavailable for comment [3.6, 13, 14]). Against this one-sided picture of marital bliss, Thel is forced to admit, “I fear that I am not like thee.” The cloud nobly contributes to the lifecycle, while Thel’s distinction is for naught: “all shall say, without a use this shining woman liv’d, / Or did she only live. To be at death the food of worms” (3.17, 22-23).

This remark in turn calls forth the weeping infant worm, a “helpless form” so pitiful it cannot speak, embraced by a maternal clod of clay, who attests to the care and love they receive for their sufferings (5.10).

Through these exchanges, Thel’s world prosecutes her similes. It subjects them to the weighing of similarity and difference, striking down each of Thel’s figural attempts to establish intimacy with the other beings of her world. Put differently, Thel’s world reasserts control over the technology of analogy—the technology responsible for the generation and maintenance of identity. The world literalizes and then litigates Thel’s figures, rejecting any commonality or solidarity with Thel, and by extension refusing the Ricouerean splitting of predication that would unmoor both Thel and her metaphorical vehicles from their signifying place. Lily, cloud, and clod understand their existence as defined by continuous sacrifice for those beings with whom they are in ecological contact. These material relationships are the hard ground of value in this world, whereas Thel’s imaginative likenesses rely upon abstract affinities (weakness, transience, illusion) that her interlocutors compel her to relinquish. In the voices of her likenesses, Thel encounters a single overriding analogy that denies its own figural status.

The dialogues thus reeducate Thel, convincing her to forfeit her own figures and adopt the incumbent religion of nature modeled on familial sacrifice. Eventually Thel herself is supplying the family metaphor, self-consciously transforming the worm from an “image of weakness” into the image of an infant: “Art thou a Worm? image of weakness. art thou but a Worm? / I see thee like an infant wrapped in the Lillys leaf” (4.2-3). This image is distressing, as the worm “lay helpless & naked: weeping, / none to answer, none to cherish thee with mothers smiles” (4.6). But here the clod of clay materializes to play the role of mother, stabilizing the

narrative picture and reassuring Thel that the infant worm receives appropriate care. This sentimental image leads Thel to relent, persuaded that God's "milk and oil" softens the pains of continual sacrifice. She agrees to enter the house of clay and accept her place in the grave.

The Impossibility of Death

From the outset of her book, Thel has sought "To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day," to "gentle sleep the sleep of death" (1.3, 1.13). Why, exactly, must Thel be persuaded to enter the land of the dead? A central thrust of Blake's critique of natural religion, as described by Frye and updated by Laura Quinney, holds that natural religion deteriorates into a form of mechanistic deism that extinguishes the afterlife. Of course, we won't find this in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, but for Blake it's the place toward which the belief structure that worships the "God of this World" inexorably slides. According to this reading, the name Blake will use for the threat of perfect inexistence that haunts the materialist psyche is "Eternal Death." As Quinney writes, "Nature worship, although it seems benign, actually conceals submission to the truth of Eternal Death, and a submission of this kind, however tacit, leads to self-centered anxiety and desperation" (30). *The Book of Thel* is ground zero for this problem—a poem which insistently asks, "How can a thinking being be integrated into a world that apparently has no use for thought?" (31). The prospect of losing consciousness is, paradoxically, all the more devastating for the empirical subject who knows it has never really existed.

However, the deistic vision of Eternal Death as inexistence is not on offer in *Thel*, though such inexistence is perhaps what Thel seeks. Blake first references "Eternal Death" in 1793's

America a Prophecy, and may have drawn the phrase from the *Book of Common Prayer*'s burial rites:

MAN, that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.

In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succor, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeas'd?

Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death. (105)

We can observe here the full range of *Thel*'s preoccupations: the theme of procreation, flower and shadow as figures of ephemerality, the elision of ephemerality into death, sin, and punishment, a "merciful Saviour" who nonetheless must be begged for mercy, and finally, the peril of eternal death characterized by "bitter pains." The torments of hell imagine the persistence of life in death, the resilience of consciousness as a vessel of suffering beyond the death of the body. Eternal Death is suffering rather than extinction, a kind of survival against one's will. Sleep, fading away—these motifs imply a sense of death as pure dematerialization that has nothing to do with what happens in the grave.

For there will be no fading away into gentle sleep in *Thel*'s world. This is why, though she seeks something like death, she also defers it. In *Thel*, death is less a deep terror than a broken promise. To die, *Thel* discovers, is to find oneself all the more implanted in the world since, as Blake will later write, "You cannot go to Eternal Death in that which can never die" (*Milton* 33.25). Death is complete absorption into the very economy of nature *Thel* has sought to escape. This is what *Thel* finds when she enters the earth:

She saw the couches of the dead, & where the fibrous roots
Of every heart on earth infixes deep its restless twists:
A land of sorrows & of tears where never smile was seen.

She wanderd in the land of clouds thro' valleys dark, listning
 Dolours & lamentations: waiting oft beside a dewy grave,
 She stood in silence listning to the voices of the ground (6.3-8)

The land of death is not properly eternal but rather sempiternal—it extends infinitely within time, rather than transcending time altogether. Nor does death open onto perfect inanimation; indeed, the corpses of the dead, “infixd” yet “restless,” are wracked by a continuous material interchange that will never cease. The benevolent God of nature reveals himself in death as the tyrant of a regime founded on suffering and endeavoring toward perpetual exploitation. This was the God Thel suspected might underlie the vale’s ideology of self-sacrifice.

The core of *Thel*’s critique of God as nature is this: death offers not eternal relief but sempiternal sacrifice. Eternal Death thus captures the conceptual paradox haunting the notion of death as a passage to absolute inexistence. Maurice Blanchot uses the limit case of suicide to render this point:

Just as the man who is hanging himself, after kicking away the stool on which he stood, the final shore, rather than feeling the leap which he is making into the void feels only the rope which holds him, held to the end, held more than ever, bound as he had never been before to the existence he would like to leave. (*Thomas the Obscure* 36)

As the point of transition to inexistence, one’s death cannot be experienced. It lies just beyond, and so the sense of death as nonbeing arrives only after it is too late to be had. For Blanchot, suicide offers not escape but instead a heightened immersion in the body, in the materiality of the world. Here emerges a second, related paradox: the will to die is located in the desiring self—it is in fact a desire for control over experience. In Simon Critchley’s words, “*the ‘I’ wants to give itself the power to control the disappearance of its power*”:

The desire of the suicide is too strong and too hopeful because it conceives of death as the action of an ‘I’ in the realm where the ‘I’ and its action no longer pertain. The

contradiction of the suicide is analogous to that of the insomniac, who cannot will him or herself to sleep because sleep is not an exercise of the will. (*Very Little* 80)

Thel, by turn, always places emphasis on the wanting, desiring dimension of her death wish.

Blake's idiosyncratic take on a conventional diction—"fade away like morning beauty," "gentle sleep the sleep of death"—introduces a interval of figuration into the desire it announces. Her seeking and wishing are set in the optative mood, condensing grammar and affect. This mood is an expression of desire, "the action of an 'I,'" directly opposed to the cessation of both desire and the "I" in death. Thel's death wish is in fact a way of life, taking place in the space of fantasy.

Thel asks for new figures, and her world responds with actualities. Thel is disconsolate, and the world offers her a grave. This paradox of actualizing death underlies the realization that the land of the dead leads not to the end of existence but instead to the fulfillment of materiality. Death is only a pivotal moment in an endless cycle of circulation from which there's no exit.

Indefinite Flight

In the same vein, the land of the dead is not a quiet space of melancholic retreat. Death is downright voluble. It is the living Thel who is silent, transfixed by the perpetual lamentations of those who have gone to grave. As she winds her way through the underworld, she finds herself before "her own grave plot"—the place marked for her, the place she was seemingly seeking—which emits a "voice of sorrow" (6.10). This voice seems to represent knowledge or experience, but in fact offers a fantasy of dismembered sense organs deluged by violence and agony:

Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction?
Or the glistening Eye to the poison of a smile!
Why are Eyelids stord with arrows ready drawn,
Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie?
Or an Eye of gifts & graces, show'ring fruits & coined god!

Why a Tongue impress'd with honey from every wind?
 Why an Ear, a whirlpool fierce to drawn creations in?
 Why a Nostril wide inhaling terror trembling & affright. (6.11-18)

These dizzying, claustrophobic figures harken back to the chain of similes centering this chapter. But crucially, while the similes of Thel's "gentle lamentation" were provisional and self-qualifying, the grave plot's formulae collapse into outright equation: eyelids are stored with arrows, the ear is a whirlpool, a nostril inhales terror. Simile, Anahid Nersessian writes, "puts into language the desire for two things to be identical, only to show that they might never be so" (*Utopia, Limited* 97). By contrast, there is no such room for the cohabitation of "like" and "not" in the grave plot. The senses are pictured as autonomous, warring agents, each asserting their own totalizing truth. The sheer incommensurability of their images serves to terrify the consciousness which the senses ostensibly serve. The result, as Tristanne Connolly suggests, is "an impression of lack of control over the body's borders, of being helplessly overwhelmed by one's environment" (22).

This is the endpoint of the mechanism that organizes the ecology of the Vales of Har. The discourse of the grave is at once overwhelming and oblique, picturing a total violence that exceeds coherent representation. We can think here of Edmund Burke's definition of the sublime as "astonishment": "that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" as "the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it" (*Enquiry* 57). Overwhelmed by sense data it cannot process, the subject of the Burkean sublime loses control of thought, and the grave plot similarly seeks to paralyze Thel into acquiescence.

But while for Burke the sublime instills “admiration, reverence, and respect,” the grave’s attack on Thel’s consciousness is strictly grotesque. It does not “astonish” her into submission, as the image of the infant worm embraced by the mother clod had (4.1). Instead, as the voice climaxes, Thel starts, shrieks, and flees:

Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy!
 Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?
 The Virgin started from her seat, & with a shriek.
 Fled back unhindered till she came into the vales of Har (6.19-22)

This burning boy erupts into the poem as if from a different world. He is the underworld counterpart of the smiling father God, veiled until now by the peaceful pastoral narrative that organizes the world aboveground. The gendered ecology of natural religion, with its omnipresent motif of familial sacrifice, finds its hidden telos in this unaccountable figure. The natural order seems to exist for his satisfaction, so that he might burn through Thel’s “curtain of flesh.”⁶ The message of the vale is that this is where she belongs: this is who she is like, and from whom she should derive her identity. When Thel recoils and flees, her flight must be understood not only as a refusal of sexual exploitation, but also as a refusal of identity wholly predicated on biological kind, gender difference, and reproductive function. Importantly, Thel does not swoon or faint, as the major tropes of sensibility might have it. Her depressive sensitivity does not render her prone, but is in fact the source of the violent revulsion that provokes her to escape back whence she came.

⁶ In versions I and J of *The Book of Thel*, both printed in 1789 and held respectively at the Bodleian and Houghton Libraries, the two lines depicting the burning boy were effaced from the paper after printing. Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi speculate that the deletions may have followed from Blake’s interpretation of his customers’ sensibilities (110). The excisions have left a visible smear that, in a sense, acts as a curtain behind which the burning boy remains perpetually concealed. In these copies, the reader is shielded from the culminating figure Thel must confront, and yet solicited to project the object of Thel’s terror into the visible absence.

Against the natural-theological impulse to derive divinity from nature, Blake's prophetic works will ultimately declare that both God's predication and self-predication cannot be constrained to nature, but rather to the limits of what can be imagined, because the human imagination *is* God. In Blake's profoundly concise formula,

God Appears and God is Light
To those poor Souls who dwell in Night
But does a Human Form Display
To those who Dwell in Realms of day. ("Auguries of Innocence" 129-132)

The "Human Form" is itself a moving target, whose contours become visible not at the blinding limits of dark sublimity, but instead take whatever form can be traced—and made intimate—by figuration.

Thel's flight is the tactical counterpart of Thel's figures. It opens onto an indefinite form of life animated out of a death wish. By upholding the gap between desire and satisfaction, Thel can go on persisting even with no place to go—a rigorous form of bare but uncompromising persistence. *The Book of Thel's* last word is more modest than the grand Blakean motifs of self-annihilation and apocalypse to come. It promises little, offering the at-best restricted resolution of withdrawal into minimalist quietude. As Thel flees the grave and the boy, she makes a permanent exit from Blake's mythology. It has been the argument of this chapter that Thel's quiet resistance by figure and flight, precisely insofar as it remains incomplete, is just enough.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DEVOTIONAL POETRY OF FELICIA HEMANS

For much of the nineteenth century, Felicia Hemans was regarded as the quintessential poetess—“by far the most feminine writer of the age,” as George Gilfillan wrote in 1847 (*Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 14:360). Modern critics have highlighted the remarkable tension between the reception of Hemans as the ideal female poet and her sympathetic dramatizations of women's suicide, infanticide, and murderous revenge. Even poems that became cornerstones of Victorian domestic ideology like “The Homes of England” and “Casabianca” now seem to subtly evacuate the model of domestic affection they helped to establish. Hemans similarly managed to both perfect and hollow out the early nineteenth century paradigm of “Female Poetry,” as defined by Francis Jeffrey:

It is infinitely sweet, elegant, and tender—touching, perhaps, and contemplative rather than vehement and overpowering; and not only finished throughout with an exquisite delicacy, and even serenity of execution, but informed with a purity and loftiness of feeling, and a certain sober and humble tone of indulgence and piety, which must satisfy all judgments, and allay the apprehensions of those who are most afraid of the passionate exaggerations of poetry. (*Edinburgh Review* 50:34)

Jeffrey's overbearing syntax, shot through with negations and qualifications, pictures the precarious balancing act of the female poet. Both descriptive and prescriptive, his account settles on the management of “passionate exaggerations” as a chief imperative of female poetry.

Gilfillan drags the shadowy subtext of Jeffrey's argument into plain sight: reading Hemans, “you are saved the ludicrous image of a double-dyed Blue, in papers and morning wrapper, sweating at some stupendous treatise or tragedy” (“Mrs. Hemans” 234-235). Female gender performance

was set in primordial contradiction to the pathos of the masculine sublime and the agon of intellectual labor. Moreover, the female poet's responsibility was negative in structure, organized around "saving" the male reader from any displeasing mental images her text might evoke from his fancy. However, there was one exception to poetess's modest remit—a form of potentially transcendent work which female poets could depict, and female protagonists could perform, without bruising the projections of the male intelligentsia: dying.

Death is Hemans's central trope. It's a dramatic affordance, one that amplifies the emotional and existential dynamics of female experience: the lone vessel of sublimity available to a female poetry. Death raises domestic affection to the status of the literary. As Anthony John Harding has written, Hemans's poetry seems to accept that "a woman's life is more worthy of memorializing the more it is played out against the backdrop of another's death and most especially if it finds its *own* highest realization in death" (138-139, original emphasis). According to this reading, Hemans relentlessly celebrates sacrifice as the source and sign of female value. Death, as the ultimate sacrifice, becomes the "guarantee of the significance of a life" (138). But where Harding finds Hemans wholly and complicitly absorbed in this logic, scholars like Susan Wolfson see her poetry reporting the collapse of the domestic ideal amid endemic male failure, backgrounded by a vacant social order that pathologically devalues female labor to the point of eradication (*Borderlines* 58-64). Hemans's heroines may perform incredible feats of gender transgression, but an inexorable "'feminine' calculus" always pulls them down to earth—or more precisely, into the ground: "the more rebellious a woman, the more vivid the aesthetic fireworks, the more necessary her death" (67). Yet death is not just punishment for

gender transgression. It also releases women from the world-historical order that determines their fate. As the ultimate female burden, death is the problem and the solution of Hemans's poetry.

Put differently, death allows Hemans to dramatize the limits of the gendered imaginary. Readings of Hemans's treatment of death tend to focus on the middle period of her career, centered on 1828's *Records of Woman*, a volume that traces a forgotten history of the interplay between domestic affection and female suffering. In this chapter, I take up the devotional poetry that Hemans wrote near the end of her life, especially 1834's *Scenes and Hymns of Life*. My interest is in how Hemans's double-edged sense of domesticity variously facilitates and complicates her negotiation of denominational politics. Religious devotion is everywhere implicit (and sometimes explicit) in Hemans's visions of domesticity, but when devotion comes to the thematic foreground in this late volume, it proves an equivocal and sometimes contentious partner to domestic affection. Death can help to synonymize devotion and domesticity, but can also wedge these terms apart.

Hemans's devotional project faced considerable denominational challenges. She was broadly allied to the Anglican paradigm of practical piety, which was largely indifferent to doctrine but strict in its emphasis on polite behavior and affect. But she also wanted to court nonconformist readers outside of the Anglican church, who demanded the kind of authentic, inspired devotion that their Anglican counterparts continued to view as a vulgar threat to social stability. She was, moreover, deeply invested in the lyric tradition of the prophetic poet, which was not always distinguishable from the religious tradition of the poetic prophet. For this reason, her lyric poems become embattled sites of denominational perplexity. Just as Hemans had introduced death to catalyze her complex vision of domesticity, she uses death here to resolve

denominational conflict. In particular, Hemans relies on the conventions and logics of the deathbed to outline a rhetorical space that could accommodate both the Anglican mainstream and enthusiastic forms of Protestant dissent.

The Right of Private Judgment: Devotional Poetics after Wordsworth

Hemans's devotional poetry is "recognizably Anglican" in its broad outlines, as Emma Mason notes, but it also evokes a sense of "spiritual strength" and "intense religious feeling" that goes beyond "the dictates of denomination" (14). Its inspired tropology of "high office," "fiery trials," "immortal longings," and the "suffering spirit" trades in the outré mixture of high conceit and low enthusiasm that Wordsworth pioneered and ultimately normalized ("German Studies" 2). By the latter half of the nineteenth century, these aggrandizements could scan as harmlessly metaphorical, the very marks of the poetic. The itinerant lay preaching that fueled the dangerous enthusiasms of the revolutionary era had begun to decline by the 1830s in favor of professional evangelism and an emphasis on missionary work, as new dissent was largely institutionalized and destigmatized into a tributary of mainstream Victorian evangelicalism.¹ But in 1834, the

¹ See Lovegrove 55-57 on the decline of itinerant preaching. The Victorian assimilation of nonconformity was a vexed, uneven process. In a study of nonconformist obituaries from 1830 to 1880, Mary Riso writes,

With a shift towards the middle classes within their own ranks, a movement towards social respectability within their denominations and the passage of national laws that encouraged participation in higher education and the civil service, [nonconformists] began to find a home on earth. They found themselves increasingly fitting into a world in which their ancestors had been strangers and pilgrims. (111)

But while dissent was normalized in some spheres of life, death remained a site of denominational strife. Even if they did not attend the parish church—and even if they were not particularly religious—nonconformists often sought burial in the churchyard as a sign of belonging in the national community. Meanwhile some Anglican clergymen, particularly in rural parishes, claimed the power to decide who could be buried in the churchyard and under what terms. For these clergy, the right to refuse burial to dissenters was essential to the very integrity of the national church. As Thomas Laqueur details, legal (and extralegal) skirmishes over burial rights broke out regularly until 1880, when the Burial Amendment Act opened state churchyards to all (160-181).

social menace of popular religion was not yet ended. The Reform Bill of 1832 may have indefinitely postponed any general insurrection, but still left the working and lower classes disenfranchised. These excluded populations were bastions of religious nonconformity. So long as there was a strong connection between religious and social identity, religious dissent would remain social dissent—a form of “class struggle without class,” to use E. P. Thompson’s phrase—and dissenting rhetoric would remain dangerous.

Back in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth had pictured poetry as an omnipresent but curiously spectral force, “the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge” (*Prose Works* 1:167). One of Wordsworth’s many aims here was to defend the purview of literary language, and especially its license to employ enthusiastic and prophetic rhetorics, by crafting a vision of poetic knowledge as both universal and supplemental. In the wake of the French Revolution, it became harder to separate literary from religious usage, as counterrevolutionary forces seized upon the regulation of sensibility as a matter of national defense. In the Lake Poets’ experiments with vulgarized poetic diction and subject matter, critics heard intimations of insurrection. By the 1830s, however, the terms of a Wordsworthian covenant were beginning to solidify. The clearest example is Arthur Hallam’s 1831 essay “On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry: and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson.” Hallam provides a guiding interpretation of Wordsworth’s legacy, and particularly of the Wordsworthian idiom of egotistical sublimity that had been intuited by readers as different as Francis Jeffrey and John Keats (even as Wordsworth’s most controversial pronouncements lay hidden from public view in the unpublished *Prelude*). While Jeffrey saw in the Lake School’s enthusiastic rhetoric a thinly coded revolutionary program—a “sect” of “*dissenters* from the established systems of poetry and

criticism”—Hallam instead translates Wordsworth’s conceits of personal election and salvific power into an aesthetic principle defined by its social *inconsequence* (*Edinburgh Review* 1:65). He proposes that the core insight of Wordsworthianism, “the right of private judgment,” outstrips even Wordsworth’s poetic preferences, just as “the right of private judgment was stronger than the will of Luther” (1191). The will of Wordsworth was a preoccupation with “reflective” and “profound” poetry, which mistakes truth for beauty by imposing moral criteria on creation: “Whenever the mind of the artist suffers itself to be occupied, during its periods of creation, by any other predominant motive than the desire of beauty, the result is false in art” (1191). Wordsworth’s insistence on the reflective and the profound threatened to entangle poetry with the public faculty of reason, undercutting his own analysis of poetry as a matter of private conscience. The real truth of Wordsworthianism, contra Wordsworth himself, is that there are no universal poetic truths.²

Hallam’s Luther analogy borrows from Jeffrey’s critical diction, positioning Wordsworth’s Reformation (or heresy) as the poetic analog of a revolutionary Protestantism taken all the way to its self-anointing messianic conclusion.³ But if Hallam’s analysis mirrors

² Hallam’s reading thus categorically banishes Wordsworth’s emphasis on the importance of “*accurate taste*,” an “*acquired* talent, which can only be produced by thought and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition” (*Prose Works* 1:157, original emphasis).

³ Coleridge detected the same danger in Luther himself, comparing the latter to Rousseau as instances of an archetype that “referred all things to his own ideal” (*The Friend* 118). Unlike Rousseau, Luther was rescued by his grounding in the Bible, but his “inflammatory” pronouncements nonetheless verged on declaring a “holy right of insurrection” (122, see also Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, Regulation* 8-9). In a similar vein, Jeffrey mocked Wordsworth as “a sincere convert to his own system,” who sought (and found) evidence for his beliefs within his own mind (47:3). Wordsworth, for his part, was so anxious to regulate claims to inspiration that he had to write all of *The Prelude* before he could justify to himself the public religious intervention of *The Excursion*.

Jeffrey's to this point, Hallam draws opposing inferences. The Lake Poets' belief that they could reinvent the laws of poetry according to their own private spiritual dictates was, for Jeffrey, the reflection of a social disease. Poetic revolutions promoted social revolutions; the logic here was sensible enough. But Hallam deftly contains the social implications of private judgment, severing any connection between poetry and religious or social realities. Poetic revolutions, for Hallam, were always private affairs: poets, as members of an aristocracy of feeling, have always "constantly expressed, because they constantly felt, sentiments of exquisite pleasure or pain, which most men were not permitted to experience" (1193).

This elite idiosyncrasy annexes aristocratic distinction for a bourgeois-professional milieu. What emerges is not social levelling but a counter-aristocracy of the literary, reconfiguring the eighteenth-century vision of a republic of letters, which was populated, as Isaac D'Israeli imagined it, by men who would act as "the sovereigns of reason, the legislators of morality, the artificers of our most exquisite pleasures" (*Essay 2*). The interplay of literature and criticism was central to this eighteenth-century vision of "letters," quite distinct from Wordsworth's sense of "Poetry."⁴ Yet from Hallam's perspective, reviewers employing their reason had no business attempting to arbitrate poetic value. Review culture is a category mistake, an expropriation by the public sphere of a fundamentally private phenomenon. Hallam insists that the "errors," "inaccuracies," and "visionary" effusions of great poets only prove that "there is a barrier between these poets and all other persons so strong and immovable, that, as has been said of the Supreme Essence, we must be themselves before we can understand them in the least"

⁴ The development of literature as a professional domain with its own epistemological parameters is detailed in Paul Keen's *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s*, Brian Goldberg's *The Lake Poets and Professional Identity*, and Clifford Siskin's *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830*.

(1193). Such godlike poets are beyond judgment, especially by vulgar reviewers who mistake Wordsworth's prophetic rhetoric for some kind of levelling social agenda. On the contrary, the true essence of Wordsworthianism lies in the poet's beautiful and solitary sensorium, as harmless as it is magnificent. Such arguments, Paul Keen writes, assert "the power of the poet to give voice to anything of enduring human importance, but in a safely internalized world of individual subjectivity" (238). While Hallam defends poetic license, he confines his poets to the visionary sphere in which he grants them free rein. Supreme Essence indeed, in a world that knows not to read such figures literally—that is, to read them as poetry.

But if the synthesis of license and regulation suggested by arguments like Hallam's was to prove influential, it was just barely emergent when Felicia Hemans published *Scenes and Hymns of Life* in 1834. Low religious rhetorics were not as incendiary as they had been in 1800, but the denominational politics of the revolutionary period had not yet waned. Sensibility and enthusiasm remained valuable yet unstable resources, essential to poetic and devotional authenticity but easily corrupted into vulgarity, or worse. Hemans's entry into devotional verse offers an excellent barometer of the literary-religious complex of the 1830s, in part because Hemans was a far savvier negotiator of politics in verse than Wordsworth. The example of Wordsworth's misadventures can nonetheless help to clarify the denominational and political challenges Hemans faced when she turned to devotional poetry. Wordsworth's 1814 epic *The Excursion* is fundamentally a poem about consolation—about the institutions, social practices, and beliefs that sustain life in a world of death. Yet it routes these issues through the device of character, using a series of representative figures (the Wanderer, the Solitary, the Pastor, the Poet) to perform and debate differing perspectives. Dialogue replaces dictum, as the authorial

voice is distributed across the poet's speakers. In a medium-as-message sense, the poem's answer to the problem of consolation is its omnipresent form rather than any particular argument: what the poem offers to counter despair is interminable polite conversation.⁵

However, Wordsworth's early readers saw the matter somewhat differently. The mask of character did little to mollify critics like Jeffrey. *The Excursion*'s most verbose character, the Wanderer, is a representative enthusiast whose airy and idiosyncratic theology is curiously detached from the earthy concerns of his companions. But despite the Wanderer's blatant ineptitude in human matters and the presence of competing voices in the poem, Jeffrey was quick to identify this "*old Scotch Pedlar*" as the poet's "chief prolocutor" and "chief advocate of Providence and Virtue"—a circumstance so obviously loathsome that Jeffrey allows his italics to carry the burden of objecting, at least for the moment (*Edinburgh Review* 47:5).⁶ If enthusiasm was dangerous even in character, it was especially perilous when the poet spoke in his own voice. Jasper Cragwall has argued that Wordsworth suppressed *The Prelude* until his death because its enthusiastic tropes were particularly noxious in the context of autobiography, which, in addition to bonding textual sentiment to its author, was a genre notoriously dominated by

⁵ See chapter three for fuller discussion of this argument.

⁶ Twenty-five pages later, Jeffrey returns to the subject of the Wanderer with an astonishing rant that begins,

What but the most wretched and provoking perversity of taste and judgment, could induce any one to place his chosen advocate of wisdom and virtue in so absurd and fantastic a condition? Did Mr Wordsworth really imagine, that his favourite doctrines were likely to gain any thing in point of effect or authority by being put into the mouth of a person accustomed to higgle about tape, or brass sleeve-buttons? (47:30)

William Hazlitt was less certain that the Wanderer was Wordsworth's sole spokesman. Hazlitt thought the cast of the poem were not actually distinct characters, but thinly veiled versions of the author himself, "three persons in one poet" (4:113). The fact that Jeffrey and Hazlitt could disagree about who was speaking for Wordsworth (and to what degree) suggests that character did indeed complicate authorial perspective, even if the general tendency of Wordsworth's devotional epic was clear enough to both critics.

Methodist print culture in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, *The Prelude*'s project of generating endlessly expansive meaning out of the poet's most mundane and trivial experiences would smack above all of Methodist self-accounting. Wordsworth's quotidianism was less likely to be read as a sophisticated poetics of the everyday⁷ than a self-debasing appropriation of the Methodist's tendency to interpret even the most banal events in spiritual terms (Cragwall 93-94).

The Lyric "I" and the Devotional Subject

While the reception of *The Excursion* demonstrated that the mask of character could not protect the poet from charges of transgression, it was still a safer bet than speaking in one's own voice about oneself. In *Scenes and Hymns of Life*, Hemans wisely forgoes the embarrassing length of Wordsworth's epics. The Lake Poet is, however, the volume's dedicatee, the source of seven epigraphs, and its preeminent influence. Julie Melnyk, Emma Mason, and Jonathan Roberts have detailed the conceptual resources that Wordsworth's devotional poetry offered Hemans ("William Wordsworth and Felicia Hemans"; "Felicia Hemans's *Sonnets on Female Characters of Scripture*"). Wordsworth's example also provided formal resources. From *The Excursion*, Hemans absorbed a method for negotiating denominational politics, carefully modulating theological issues through representative speakers. As Gary Kelly writes, Hemans hoped her late poetry would unite fractious Britain into "a single devout reading public...transcending sectarian divisions" ("Introduction" 73). But the challenge of negotiating the schisms between Anglicanism and the various faces of dissent would not be easily surmounted. Moreover, this unifying aim came into tension with the intensely personal vision

⁷ Explored, for example, in Markus Poetzsch's *Visionary Dreaminess: Readings in Romanticism's Quotidian Sublime*. Jeffrey had damned *The Excursion*'s airy quotidianism as at once "exceedingly dull and mystical" (47:8).

she outlined before she began the project, writing to William Rowan Hamilton, “I am going soon to employ myself upon a volume of sacred poetry, upon which I shall earnestly desire to pour out my whole heart and mind” (Graves 1:603). Contra this effusive ideal, her lyrics turn out to be aggressively self-regulating, as if her poetic “I” was tasked with shouldering the entirety of the British devotional state. These poems evince the difficulty of sustaining a devotional orientation at once polite and profound, furnished with affects and rhetorics that might prove acceptable to all walks of religious life.

Many critics have commented on the way Hemans uses the “generic” subjectivity of the lyric form to construct an “outside position” that distances the voice of the poem from any authorial platform (Jackson and Prins 524-525). Indeed, I don’t mean to imply that lyric voicing expresses an unmediated, authentic inner world, but rather that this sense of expressive interiority is the rhetorical trick of lyric, and a dangerous trick at that. Accordingly, the first-person lyrics in *Scenes and Hymns* reveal an extreme sensitivity to social and theological implication. Hemans saw her own voice as intertwined with her lyric personae, or at least knew very well that her poetic “I” would be understood to “pour out my whole heart and mind.” Following her lead, I will treat the speaker of Hemans’s lyrics as Hemans herself. These poems are enamored of the tradition of the prophet-poet, but wary of its vulgar and even insurgent resonances in early nineteenth-century Britain.

Just as Hemans was beginning the project in 1832, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, in his short-lived editorial capacity at the *New Monthly Magazine*, had declared her the English poet “most suited to religious subjects,” with a “muse peculiarly adapted to the serious and august strains

that belong to human worship.” His program for religious poetry accurately forecasts Hemans’s approach, while also situating that approach as a response to the pitfalls of denominational strife:

there is in her a certain soft and tender spirit which would free religious effusion from the ascetic and small bigotry which so frequently mars its music. There is always something offensive in religious poetry when you see the devotion, but not the benevolence—when the religion grows harsh and fierce, and you recognise the sectarian in the worshipper. (35:150)

Bulwer-Lytton’s notion of “religious effusion” freed of “ascetic and small bigotry” suggests a devotional aesthetics stripped of specific denominational content, an enthusiasm without enthusiasts. This sense of practical piety is exactly what is at stake when Hemans’s preface declares that her religious poetry will be “enlarged” by the “active influences upon human life” (vii). While her tone is less contentious than Bulwer-Lytton’s, it is clear she detects the same narrowness in religious poetry that trades in “meditative joys and solitary aspirations . . . the poetic embodying of which seems to require from the reader a state of mind already separated and exalted” (*ibid.*). “Separated” and “exalted” code for sect: already ensconced in God’s grace, such a self-aggrandizing poetics can only reach similarly presumptuous saints. The challenge for Hemans is to construct a sense of transcendent grandeur that goes beyond a merely didactic Christianity, but equally avoids the contentious vulgarity of the enthusiast—to be a “worshipper” but not a “sectarian.” One solution is to write religion through drama, which can deemphasize theological niceties by focusing on setting, character, action, and devotional affects rather than doctrinal dictates. But she does not give up on the lyric, even though the terrain will prove almost impossible to navigate in a first person authorial voice. Hedged in between competing discourses, Hemans’s lyrics engage in a fascinating struggle to construct a viable scene of devotion.

The sonnet “The Sacred Harp” offers a clear sense of the denominational and generic challenges of writing as oneself. In the terms laid out by Madame de Staël, whose extensive influence on Hemans has been well documented,⁸ the poem is a prototypical lyric:

Lyric poetry is expressed in the name of the author himself; he no longer assumes a character, but experiences in his own person, the various emotions he describes.... In order to conceive the true grandeur of lyric poetry, we must wander in thought into the ethereal regions, forget the tumult of earth in listening to celestial harmony, and consider the whole universe as a symbol of the emotions of the soul. (1:296-97)

De Staël’s high romantic reading suggests an affinity between the ritualistic elements of the lyric and the devotional technologies of prayer, bonding subjective interiority to the book of nature.

“The Sacred Harp” performs a troubled longing for such a union, lamenting poetry’s loss of its prophetic calling:

How shall the Harp of poesy regain
That old victorious tone of prophet-years,
A spell divine o’er guilt’s perturbing fears,
And all the hovering shadows of the brain?
Dark evil wings took flight before the strain,
And showers of holy quiet, with its fall,
Sank on the soul:—Oh! who may now recall
The mighty music’s consecrated reign?—
Spirit of God! whose glory once o’erhung
A throne, the Ark’s dread cherubim between,
So let thy presence brood, though now unseen,
O’er those two powers by whom the harp is strung—
Feeling and Thought!—till the rekindled chords
Give the long buried tone back to immortal words! (215)⁹

The distance between “prophet-years” and the fallen present riddles the sonnet with a combination of fervor, anxiety, and doubt—all of which might seem the artifacts of a disenchanting modernity. In fact, as Jonathan Culler notes, “skepticism about the efficacy of lyric

⁸ See for example Wolfson, *Borderlines* 73-75.

⁹ Citations of *Scenes and Hymns of Life* refer to the page number of the 1834 edition.

discourse” is already present in the earliest extant examples of lyric poetry (6). Hemans unequivocally establishes herself as an inheritor of a lyric tradition, signaled by the figures of poet as harpist (or lyrist) and verse as music. And yet, though a convention of the lyric, the poem’s disenchantment has local historical coordinates. For example, the vision of prophecy it describes is significantly constrained. Hemans is less concerned with heralding the return of divinity than with assuaging psychological trauma—what the volume elsewhere terms “self-accusing thought” (39, 50). Instead of holy ardor, she yearns for the return of “holy quiet.” Quiet devotion was a common motif in eighteenth-century Anglican theology, which defended a pacific style of worship engineered to quell rather than arouse. Yet this motif chafes against the promise of prophetic inspiration. A prophecy of quiet suggests an ambivalent commentary on the poetic vocation and the Christian belief it queries, as the desire for inspiration gives way to the desire for relief.

In the poem’s closing sestet, Hemans hazards an apostrophe to no less than the “Spirit of God,” asking divinity to “brood” over her poetic utterance. But if the rhetorical grandeur tends toward enthusiasm, its affect is ultimately closer to polite. At the invisible center of the problem is the unseen “Spirit of God,” who no longer materially intervenes in the world, and may not even feel up to the more limited miracle of poetic inspiration. As Maureen McLane writes, “Intimacy happens if apostrophe works. Where apostrophe is, intimacy may be” (436). In “The Sacred Harp,” Hemans has hedged her bets: this apostrophe does not anticipate success. Its desire for intimacy with God is foreclosed by the passing of ages. Enthusiasm is quickly troped into failure, recalibrating the heat of the spirit toward the cool of polite elegy. As J. G. A Pocock has explained, in the wake of the English Civil War, Anglican theology increasingly espoused

“an independently existing God, who made himself known by the wonders of his works, seldom by direct revelation, and never by his immanence or inherence, which he had made the human mind incapable of grasping” (17). At the far end of this trajectory, “The Sacred Harp” tacitly accepts the anti-enthusiastic vision of a heavily mediated relationship with a remote God. What Hemans adds to this discourse is an elegiac postscript. It will take a miracle to reconcile “Feeling and Thought,” and, as Hemans intones, the age of miracles is over.

However, the poem also tests the miraculous on a smaller scale. Underneath the question of God’s presence lies the question of lyric presence. The precondition for “intelligibility in lyric poetry,” Paul de Man argued, “depends on the phenomenalization of the poetic voice” (“Lyrical Voice” 55). To make lyric make sense, de Man claimed we must imagine that text is voice and reading is hearing. Phenomenalization is crucial to the performative, incantatory nature of the genre, rendered explicit in this poem by the apostrophic invocation of divinity. Several critics have discussed the way the phenomenology of reading takes on specific shapes in romantic writing, where the figure of the spontaneous voice seeks to repair the alienation of an expanding print culture.¹⁰ The trick of “The Sacred Harp” is to treat the minor miracle of text as voice as a *fait accompli* by demanding the more elaborate miracle of divine inspiration—or more precisely, divine accompaniment, which would return the “long buried tone” of “rekindled chords” to “immortal words.” Hemans smuggles her blessings under the convention of lyric failure.

¹⁰ These issues have been developed in Lucy Newlyn’s *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception*, Timothy Clark’s *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing*, Angela Esterhammer’s *Romanticism and Improvisation, 1750-1850*, and Andrew Bennett’s *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*.

Superstition and Enthusiasm

This pattern of demystification and remystification appears again in “Angel Visits,” which can be read as an elaboration of the vexed interplay between devotional desire and elegiac disenchantment that drives “The Sacred Harp.” But where “The Sacred Harp” entangles itself in the discourse of enthusiasm, “Angel Visits” takes up superstition. These complementary terms continued to circulate in the 1830s; especially popular were the definitions given in George Campbell’s 1762 *A Dissertation on Miracles*, which was republished in 1824 and widely quoted:

it is evident, that the terrors of superstition imply weakness or imbecility of mind; as they arise from ignorance of God, and of one's self, a vitiated understanding, frequently accompanied with a perverted conscience. But the same cause produces different effects on the temper, as it happens to be differently allied. In the apprehensive and timorous, the effect is *Superstition*; in the arrogant and daring, it is *Enthusiasm*. *Ignorance* is the mother of both by different fathers. The second she had by *Presumption*; the first by *Fear*. Hence that wonderful mixture of contrariety and resemblance in the characters of the children. (148)

Campbell’s explanation was a refinement of the religious-psychological map drawn by Joseph Addison in the pages of *The Spectator*, which designated one pole for superstitious Catholicism, the other for enthusiastic Protestant dissent, and placed the moderate, virile Church of England squarely between the two (no. 201, 2:289).¹¹ Enthusiasm was the more combustible half of this

¹¹ Wordsworth, writing to the Anglican minister Francis Wrangham in opposition to Catholic emancipation in 1809, offered a version of the same schema, but retuned the established church’s virility toward honored poverty:

With the Methodists on one side and the Catholics on the other, what is to become of the poor Church and people of England, to both of which I am most tenderly attached, and to the former, not the less on account of the pretty little spire of Brompton Parish Church, under which you and I were made happy men, by the gift from providence of two excellent wives. (*Middle Years* 1:313)

In Wordsworth’s hands, the sprawling national bureaucracy of the state church becomes “poor,” its majoritarian power incongruously shrunk down to the “pretty little spire” of the local parish church, which sealed and consecrated the poet’s domestic bond. Catholic emancipation is thus cast as an attack on the local community, the “people,” and the family.

twinned discourse in England through the eighteenth century, the “monstrous alter ego of eighteenth-century civility,” as Jon Mee writes (*Romanticism, Enthusiasm, Regulation* 24). But the period from 1791 to 1829 was bookended by controversial relief acts that steadily dismantled the legal barriers obstructing Catholics from participation in public life. Hemans herself resided in Catholic Dublin from 1831 until her death, where she had ample exposure to the religion that had long functioned as the continental other of proper English Protestantism.¹²

This is to say that while “Angel Visits” is not a specifically Catholic poem, Catholicism represents one reference point for the trans-denominational sense of traditional belief it explores. Like “The Sacred Harp,” “Angel Visits” begins in wistful, apparently rhetorical questions that establish both an epistemology and an elegiac orientation:

ARE ye for ever to your skies departed?
 Oh! will ye visit this dim world no more?
 Ye, whose bright wings a solemn splendour darted
 Through Eden’s fresh and flowering shades of yore?
 Now are the fountains dried on that sweet spot,
 And ye—our faded earth beholds you not! (194)

While the first four lines seem to supply their own answer (yes, the angels have departed and will visit this dim world no more), the questions, however rhetorical, leave open the possibility of angelic presence. In the devotional context, we can imagine that the apparently forgone conclusion is only a feint, and the poet will surprise us with the angel visits the title promises. This possibility is teased, and then foreclosed by the last two lines—“our faded earth beholds

¹² Hemans’s engagements with the question of superstition date back to an aborted experiment in syncretic theology, 1820’s *Superstition and Revelation*. As Nanora Sweet has shown, the poem was abandoned when Reginald Heber, an associate of the Tory *Quarterly Review* known for his massive edition of the works of Jeremy Taylor, severely criticized Hemans’s attempts to draw archeological connections between Christianity and “superstition” (“Hemans, Heber, and *Superstition and Revelation*,” see also Mason, *Women Poets* 42). “Angel Visits” treads much more carefully on the same ground.

you not!”—which firmly situate the poem in a desiccated, self-conscious modernity. Hemans then leaps back to that lost age, as five central stanzas eloquently rehearse the biblical exploits of the angels. As this fancy takes over, she becomes increasingly engrossed in a world that the opening stanza has already dispelled. These central stanzas acknowledge the allure of beliefs that a reasonable religiosity can no longer maintain. When the transport ends, we make a sudden temporal and epistemological leap from the age of miracles back to the sophisticated, elegiac present.

Now have ye left us for the brighter shore,
Your presence lights the lonely groves no more. (195)

This present without presence appears all the dimmer in contrast to the miraculous world we have just left behind. Unable to bear the contrast, Hemans then attempts to close the distance between the age of miracles and her leaden “Now.” Disenchantment soon revolves into a new sense of hope, as angels are reconceived in de-literalized, dematerialized terms, as a supplement to a human economy of feeling:

Are ye not near when faith and hope rise high,
When love, by strength, o’ermasters agony? (*ibid.*)

Devotional virtues are naturalized miracles, signs of the unseen “sweet influence” of angelic presence. Perhaps we are still in the age of miracles, if we only learn to read the Biblical exploits figuratively. This is a way of translating the miraculous into compatibility with a polite, modern religiosity, in the form of metaphor—coded to suspend the very belief it expresses. The angelic presence is quarantined to the province of poeticism. It is a trope, rather than a superstition endowed with the weight of literalistic belief. The miraculous dissolves into the everyday, which

may permit but by no means requires supernatural explanation. Angels are back on the belief menu, but as a wholly superfluous option.

So far, the poem's attempts to pull angels into the present world have risked enervating the whole discourse, with very little to show for it. However, Hemans begins to strengthen her case by turning to death. As the point of intersection between the natural and the supernatural, the human and the divine, death could remain a site of mystery—and holiness—in even the most reasonable Christianity. In this thinking, as Charles Taylor explains, “the locus of death, as the place where one has given everything, is the place of maximum union with God; and therefore, paradoxically, the source of most abundant life” (*Secular Age* 726). “Angel Visits” thus finds its perfect synthesis of nature and revelation in martyrdom and “unrepining” holy death:

Are ye not near when sorrow, unrepining,
 Yields up life's treasures unto Him who gave?
 When martyrs, all things for His sake resigning,
 Lead on the march of death, serenely brave? (196)

How can such deaths be explained without angelic intervention? These demonstrations of faith in the face of death are surely nothing short of miraculous. This is the strongest form of the poem's conceit: even a skeptical modernity must greet these holiest of deaths with wonder and awe.

And yet the next word instantly dismisses the whole edifice: “Dreams!” The discourse of angels is dispelled, a mere bubbled illusion. Hemans shockingly rejects even the naturalized figure of angelic presence recast as “gentle promptings” and “sweet influence”—would-be miracles, modest to the point of harmlessness. And even death, which, in all its unthinkable transcendence, so often functions as the linchpin of consolatory arguments, is unable to secure the miraculous. But as “Dreams!” gives way to the astonishing closing couplet, it becomes clear

that the purpose of this demonstration has been to establish the poet's skeptical credentials so that she can credibly affirm God's presence:

Dreams!—but a deeper thought our souls may fill—
One, One *is* near—a Spirit holier still! (196)

Angels are sacrificed to save God, and the virtues that had been attributed to the angelic presence are retained and transferred to an unnamable higher author. All of the poem's disenchanting gestures work in the service of this moment of replete devotion.

Yet the gesture is a troubled one, since this God is "deeper" and "holier" than angels but conceived in the same logic of presence, as one who is "near." As a belief-object, God differs from angels in degree but not in kind. Sublimity, in a word, is what differentiates this holier spirit from the angels that came before, and this same sublimity demands the poem's instant termination. Spinning from an ejaculation of sudden disenchantment back to renewed belief, the speed and force of the revelatory closing couplet seems to repel this kind of analysis. But its vexed affirmation of presence is carefully coded to permit—and perhaps even encourage—a skeptical reading. For the poem implicitly defines and contains the "One" of its unnamed divinity as a "thought," and thought may be the limit of that divinity's jurisdiction. Just as angels were naturalized into "sweet influence," God is naturalized into a very deep idea. We are left with superfluous supernaturalism, however vigorously avowed. "Angel Visits" is a deeply defensive poem, whose energies are chiefly devoted to establishing an ethos of skeptical reasonability. Belief seems to levy a severe argumentative and epistemological tax, demanding new offerings and oblations to protect its shrinking territory.

Polite Revelation and the Good Death

These poems are especially revealing because they run counter to the declared purpose of *Scenes and Hymns of Life*. Both are lyric contemplations of theological questions, centered (as J. S. Mill wrote) on “feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude” (359). Yet in the volume’s preface, Hemans proposes to “enlarge... the sphere of Religious Poetry by associating with its themes more of the emotions, the affections, and even the purer imaginative enjoyments of daily life” (vii). The preface envisions a devotional poetry that would move away from a cloistered lyric solitude, “not alone in its meditative joys and solitary aspirations,” but set in dynamic lived situations, including “the gloom of the prison and the death-bed” (viii). Hemans’s emphasis on practical religion seeks to shift the focus away from doctrinal questions that might lead to denominational entanglements—precisely the sorts of entanglements that entrap “Angel Visits.” Accordingly, most of the poems in the volume are verse dramas or monologues voiced by situated speakers (e.g. the sonnet sequence *Female Characters of Scripture*), under the theoretical assumption that dramatic settings will make devotional discourse relevant to daily life. But in practice, it is not simply that a poetry tuned to the everyday trials of living has more consolatory traction than theological meditations. As I have argued with respect to “The Sacred Harp” and “Angel Visits,” Hemans’s theology founders when left in solitary to its own devices. The introduction of dialogic dramatic contexts loosens the political, denominational, and spiritual knots that bind her lyrics. Hemans’s devotional poetry needs dramatic exigencies to gain purchase on the practical work of consolation, but more importantly, to provide the mask—or veil¹³—of character. Released from the burden of writing as herself, Hemans explores a more

¹³ In 1829 she admitted, “I have so often found a kind of relief in throwing the colouring of my own feelings over the destiny of historical characters, that it has almost become a habit of my mind” (Chorley

various and even heterodox theology in her dramatic poems. These dramatic poems represent a range of religious feeling from enthusiastic impulses to doubt and loss of faith, while her lyrics are by comparison highly constrained and carefully modulated.

In “Angel Visits,” we saw that holy death, even martyrdom, could not generate a credible basis for the presence of angels. Yet death remains abstract in that poem, an ephemeral image in a poetic montage, produced as the crux of a theological argument. The situation changes considerably once death takes on the particularity of a life, a name, a body. The clearest example of the distinction between lyric and dramatic devotions is found in “Flowers and Music in a Room of Sickness,” whose title plays up the juxtaposition between worldly sensuality and impending death. Set in an “English Country-House,” the poem focuses on a terminally ill adolescent girl nursed by her mother and sister. This classed, homosocial domestic setting, rendered in stately blank verse, furnishes a controlled environment for testing various affects and rhetorics of consolation. In the opening, the ailing Lilian sleeps while her sister Jessy arrives with flowers from the surrounding woods. Their mother worries that the flowers will disturb Lilian’s recovery:

Dost thou forget the passion of quick tears
 That shook her trembling frame, when last we brought
 The roses to her couch? Dost thou not know
 What sudden longings for the woods and hills,
 Where once her free steps moved so buoyantly,
 These leaves and odours with strange influence wake
 In her fast-kindled soul? (20)

2:50-51). Kevin Eubanks proposes that the recurring figure of the veil in Hemans’s poetry “functions as a metaphor for the outward, socially-constructed gender identity of woman, a screen interposed between the self and the outside world” (346). The dramatic mode is one such screen, buffering the author from the ideological and theological currents that run through her poems.

She frets that the flowers will “wake” Lilian’s yearning for what she has lost: the mobility of her “free steps,” and the scent and tactility of nature. But Lilian overhears her mother, and assures her otherwise:

Nay, fear not now thy fond child’s waywardness,
My thoughtful mother!—in her chasten’d soul
The passion-colour’d images of life,
Which, with their sudden startling flush awoke
So oft those burning tears, have died away;
And night is there—still, solemn, holy night,
With all her stars, and with the gentle tune
Of many fountains, low and musical,
By day unheard. (21)

“Chasten’d,” Lilian speaks of herself in the third person to signal her detachment from the sensuality of worldly existence, cast in softly erotic terms. Yet this detachment is not anaesthetic. Rather, Lilian enters into a new sensory array, figured by the heretofore unheard “gentle tune” of night. Dying is a kind of sensual revelation. By extension, as this new sensuality enters into language, the dying person’s speech takes on the status of revelation. For good Anglican subjects, the deathbed was perhaps the sole context in which prophetic speech could be welcomed.¹⁴ But her mother is not yet ready to give her over to death, insisting she “yet shalt rise” from her “couch of sickness.” Lilian swiftly divests her mother of this hope:

Hope it not!
Dream it no more, my mother!—there are things
Known but to God, and to the parting soul,
Which feels his thrilling summons. (21)

The “passion” and “flush” of the lifeworld are succeeded by the “thrilling summons” of God. Death promises to replace the stimulations of life with its own rich sensuality, yet the erotic

¹⁴ As noted in chapter one, the convention of deathbed prophecy had particular consequence for women as a rare venue for authoritative religious speech.

currents are defused by the homosocial devotional context and the stiff, dignified blank verse. Christopher Stokes has argued that throughout *Scenes and Hymns and Life*, the deathbed features as a site where the personal “prayer of deep interiority” receives a viable social outlet that can be “reconciled with domestic intersubjective duty”: in deathbed prayer, “the inner, anti-worldly voice can hypothetically become the socially proper, structured voice” (106). The deathbed enables the play of revelatory inspiration by binding it to an expiring body, whose unsettling desires can be interpreted under the auspices of deathly transcendence. But while Stokes treats the “anti-worldly” deathbed prayer as a transdenominational phenomenon, it nonetheless retained an audible dissenting resonance, as Mary Riso’s study of evangelical deathbed narratives makes clear: “Nonconformists often spoke as if they were already citizens of heaven and hence expressed their desire to depart for this new spiritual world” (194).

Even as Lilian moves beyond the world, Hemans makes clear that she does not disdain it. From a liminal space between earth and heaven, Lilian conducts a studied negotiation between the sweetness of life and the relief of death. Presented with Jessy’s flowers, Lilian shows that she can index each to its precise origin amid the “garden bowers” and “wilder haunts,” from the spot where “golden willow bend” to the “cool green shadowy river nook” (22). Her remembrances begin to intensify until she is hushed by her mother. She is apologetic, but won’t relent:

In my soul the thoughts
Burn with too subtle and too swift a fire;
Importunately to my lips they throng (24)

These effusions of memory do not, however, represent a refusal or denial of her fate, for she insists that her sense memories are “purified” into a beautiful counterpart to Wordsworth’s sublime “characters of the great apocalypse”:

God hath purified my spirit's eye,
 And in the folds of this consummate rose
 I read bright prophecies. I see not there,
 Dimly and mournfully, the word "*Farewell*"
 On the rich petals traced: No—in soft veins
 And characters of beauty, I can read—
 "*Look up, look heavenward!*" (25)

We can find an effective point of comparison for this moment in Anna Lætitia Barbauld's 1773 "Address to the Deity." After the French revolution Barbauld embraced a prophetic poetics, but in the 1770s she was committed to a polite, conciliatory version of dissent. She was at that time nonetheless quite comfortable raising natural religion into intimate revelation:

Nor less the mystic characters I see
 Wrought in every flower, inscrib'd in every tree;
 In every leaf that trembles to the breeze
 I hear the voice of GOD among the trees. (59-62)

Sixty years later, Hemans's "bright prophecies" mirror Barbauld's "mystic characters" only to a point. The trope is doubly veiled on Hemans's side, first because Hemans gives the words to Lilian while Barbauld addresses her God directly in the first person, and second because Lilian's imminent death contextualizes her revelation as a deathbed convention. Moreover, the transformation of sensuality into revelation suggests a pathway to divinity that does not neglect the world it departs; in Lilian's words, "the loveliness of earth / Higher than earth can raise me!" (25). This is a good example of what Jeffrey Robinson terms Hemans's "poetry of expiration," in which the dissolution of the self "recovers in new forms which can include an accounting of elements of the referent, the world" (186). Robinson finely describes this process as "the conversion of the implication of an expiring breath—an emptying out, an entropy, dying itself—into a filling and celebrating" (185). This poetics resolves what Robinson views as a tension between "the call of holiness and the call of poetry," spurning monumental idols for an ethic of

the ephemeral, but it also has distinct rhetorical advantages as theology (188). In this case, the sensible elevates Lilian toward divinity by degrees, merging devotional and sensual currents within the discursive stream of sensibility. There are risks here, however, as at moments the result verges on the erotics of spurious modern saints:

There are hearts
So perilously fashioned, that for them
God's touch alone hath gentleness enough
To waken, and not break, their thrilling strings!—
We will not speak of this! (26)

Leigh Hunt, pilloried in the Tory press as a purveyor of “Cockney” vulgarity and imprisoned for libeling the Prince Regent, was nonetheless eager to police the sensuality of popular religion. Female converts, he declared, “are acknowledged to possess the greater bodily sensibility, and it is the women who chiefly indulge in these love-sick visions of heaven” besotted with “bridal sensuality” (*Methodism* 55). Hemans's Lilian gestures toward the sort of “amatory” devotion denounced by Hunt, but pointedly breaks off where she reaches the boundaries of decorum, submerging the remainder of the fantasy in the unspeakable. This erotic excess is then quickly sublimated into other senses. Synaesthetic hallucinations transform the visual into the aural:

By what strange spell
Is it, that ever, when I gaze on flowers,
I dream of music? Something in their hues
All melting into colour'd harmonies,
Wafts a swift thought of interwoven chords,
Of blended singing-tones, that swell and die
In tenderest falls away. (26-27)

This musical hallucination leads her to ask her sister to play a song on the harp, and Jessy provides a list of options, from an “Italian Peasant's Lay” to Sicilian madrigal, “Moorish melody,” “the old ditty left by Troubadours,” and an Alpine strain “which pierce the exile's heart

/ Even unto death” (27-28). This is a recapitulation of Hemans’s own cosmopolitan verse catalog, which Lilian promptly repudiates. She instead pleads for “a loftier strain, / A deeper music!” and settles on a decidedly British hymn,

that antique strain which once I deem’d
Almost too sternly simple, too austere
In its grave majesty!

The hymn is not in fact an antique but rather a Hemans original, widely reprinted in standalone form throughout the nineteenth century, titled “The Saviour’s dying hour.” In it, Christ appears as both “Son of Man” and “Son of God,” linking “God” and “Man” not because “Man” is made in “God’s” image, nor through the shared faculty of reason, but rather because the “Man” and “God” in Christ both suffer

All the deep gloom
The desolation and th’ abandonment,
The dark amaze of death (29)

It is precisely Christ’s “gloom” and doubt as a mortal being—those elements of Jesus’s death that troubled eighteenth-century neoclassical theorists of the good death—that bond him to man. As “Thou that didst love, / Thou that didst weep and die,” Christ’s struggle to detach himself from his earthly ties is what makes him a model for human destiny (32). As his anguish proves, he is a being of exquisite sensibility, whose “Mother-tears were mingled / With thy costly blood-drops” (30). In place of relentless stoicism, this sensitive Christ’s vision of holy dying encourages “tearful eyes,” “passionately bent / To drink earth’s last fond meaning from our gaze” (31). Hemans gives this hymn the final word, grafting Lilian’s particular story onto the template of the “Saviour,” but also subtly reframing Christ on the model of Lilian.

“Flowers and Music in a Room of Sickness” advances a model of holy dying that negotiates between the materialist discourse of sensibility and the devotional imperatives of the afterlife, allowing the dying Lilian to reflect fondly on earthly pleasures without clinging to existence or sinking into despair. Death opens space for Hemans to play with prophetic and erotic verse in a safe context. The poem’s prophetic impulses are defanged by the country house locale and the dying woman’s privileges of spirit. The erotic impulses, meanwhile, are governed by the exclusively familial and female *dramatis personae*—men, as in so many of Hemans’s domestic poems, are never mentioned.¹⁵ Strip away the veil of character and the ideological security of the genteel domestic setting, and the revelations of “Flowers and Music” might smack of sectarian zeal. While Hemans’s devotional lyrics are more anti-skeptical than positively Christian, “Flowers and Music” offers an affirmative vision of the otherworldly and transformative elements of belief, unshaken by theological quibbles and doubts. In this instance, doubt pales in the face of Lilian’s death.

The Inconsolable

The success of “Flowers and Music” lies in its development of a synergistic relationship between domestic affection and devotion. The carefully staged setting allows these discursive formations to reinforce each other. But though domesticity and devotion might seem like natural allies, such synergy was by no means inevitable, especially outside the sanctuary of the gentry

¹⁵ The absence of men from the homes of Hemans’s poetry has been widely recognized: as Norma Clarke notes, *Records of Woman* is “eloquently empty of adequate men,” while Jerome McGann declares that “Hemans’s central myth represents a home where the father is (for various reasons) absent” (71; 76). This dynamic takes a unique form in the devotional context of *Scenes and Hymns of Life*. Emma Mason and Jonathan Roberts find in the volume’s sonnet sequence *Female Characters of Scripture* “a circularity of female identity that effectively closes the ‘male’ out of the loop” (72). The two exceptions—Wordsworth and Jesus—are, according to Mason and Roberts, represented as “beyond gender,” allowing Hemans to imagine a sisterhood with room for these two men (82).

home. This point becomes clear in “Burial of an Emigrant’s Child in the Forests,” which leaves behind the polite milieu of “Flowers and Music” for exile in America. In this Dantesque setting, a “fever-dream” of “gloomy woods” with “dark giant boughs,” the imperatives of devotion and domestic affection come into open conflict.

As the poem begins, a mother, Agnes, holds her child and fantasizes that they are back in England, she listening to his “wild, singing tones.” As she kisses him and feels his “strange damp thrilling touch,” it becomes clear that he is dead, and has been dead for some time—a gothic shock set up by the stage direction’s foreshadowing: “AGNES *sitting before the tent with a child in her arms, apparently sleeping*” (63). Her husband then returns to inform her that he has dug the child’s grave, but she refuses to part with her son. He reminds her that she peaceably gave her deceased first-born over to God and said “His will be done!” (65). Yet that was in England, she protests, where that “household grave”

lay beside our home,
And I could watch the sunshine, through all hours,
Loving and clinging to the grassy spot,
And I could dress its greensward with fresh flowers—
Familiar, meadow flowers. O’er *thee* my babe,
The primrose will not blossom! (65)

Agnes’s first bereavement was softened by the connection between the home and the grave, accessible at “all hours,” solaced by the “familiar” flora that decorate her grief ritual in “happy, happy England!” (63). This pastoral leisure is set in sharpest contrast with “the desolation and the agony” of the new world (63). It turns out that the family has fled England, as her husband begs to know if she regrets following “an exile’s fortunes” across the ocean. His name is Edmund, but his speech is simply tagged “Husband,” and in the same vein, the poem’s title refers to the burial of a singular “Emigrant’s Child,” though both Agnes and her husband are

emigrants. These omissions suggest that the husband plays a strictly functional role in a poem that takes Agnes's experience as its subject.

He plays two roles, in fact: he generates problems for which Agnes must answer, including the task of relieving him of his guilt for their fate, and he ensures that her answers are appropriately orthodox, guiding her toward rhetorics of consolation and domestic peace. When he demands to know if she regrets joining him, she promptly begs forgiveness for her grief-induced resentment.

My Edmund, pardon me! Oh! grief is wild—
 Forgets its words, quick spray-drops from a fount
 Of unknown bitterness! Thou art my home!
 Mine only and my blessed one! Where'er
 Thy warm heart beats in its true nobleness,
There is my country! *there* my head shall rest,
 And throb no more. Oh! still, by thy strong love,
 Bear up the feeble reed! (66)

Under coverture, the figure of husband as home is metaphor made law: as a legal entity, she resides in him. But this moment reveals spiritual and emotional inadequacy of the trope by pitting the domestic law of coverture against the domestic affection of love for child. When Agnes's grief makes Edmund unbearably aware of his own guilt, he can only interpret her grief as reproach, and thus a violation of the marital bond. She then has to repair her transgression by absolving him of his burden of guilt. Whatever may have transpired to lead to the burial of their child on foreign soil, the sin and the guilt are now charged to her account. This transference frees him to perform supportive strength, with her feminine "feeble reed" leaning against his virile fortitude. But these roles are only viable after her lucid resentment of her husband has been reinterpreted as her own failing.

Agnes's transgressive despair requires forgiveness not just from her husband, but also from God. She pleads,

If nature hath rebell'd,
And from thy light turn'd wilfully away,
Making a midnight of her agony,
When the despairing passion of her clasp
Was from its idol stricken at one touch
Of thine Almighty hand—oh, pardon me!
By thy Son's anguish, pardon! (67)

This speech reconceives the tragedy from a divine perspective. Her refusal to give her son to God becomes the work of a motherly “nature,” whose bonds of affection threaten to turn the sufferer away from the truer affection of God's light. To adopt this perspective, Agnes has to recognize her child as a mere “idol”—an “ark / Fraught with mine earthward-clinging happiness.” This ephemeral “treasure” is not hers to hold; it belongs to “Him who gave, and might resume” (67). Yet she reminds God that it's not easy to overcome earthly attachments and inhabit the view from eternity, as evidenced by the “anguish” of God's own son. Here Christopher Stokes suggests that “Agnes revokes her grief entirely” as “a cry from the wilderness becomes a cry for pardon” (96), but I see her petition as quietly contentious. She suggests first that her attachment is an effect of “nature” and thereby indirectly the work of God himself, and second, that her covetous love for her son links her to *the* Son, who struggled to let go of his own worldly bonds.

Having offered both apology and justification, she can now hand her son to his father and declare, “I yield thee to thy Maker!” (67). Edmund praises her “meek holiness” and begins to take the child away. But she stops him: “where— / Where wilt thou lay him?” (68). His description of the grave plot leads to reminiscences, and it becomes clear that Agnes has simply

adopted a new strategy for deferring the burial. Finally, she asks Edmund to bury the child by himself, admitting, “my woman’s nature is still weak— / I cannot see thee render dust to dust!” (69). She will remain alone, attempting to “still my soul with prayer.” The poem does not, however, transcribe this prayer. Instead it offers a closing “Funeral Hymn,” which declares that even though “England’s field flowers may not deck [the child’s] grave,” even though “Woods unknown receive him,” “yet with God we leave him” with “hearts of trust” (71). This plural “we” seems to speak for Agnes and Edmund together, but the hymn closes with imperatives directed to Agnes alone. One implication is that she is only a reluctant partner in the “we” that leaves her child to God:

Turn thee now, fond mother!
From thy dead, oh, turn!
[...]
Only kneel once more around the sod,
Kneel, and bow submitted hearts to God! (73)

The voice of the hymn, a collective social voice, might initially be seen to give voice to Agnes’s inaudible prayer. But the nature of this closing command to a “fond” (that is, waywardly affectionate, even foolish) mother, who is enjoined to “submit,” reveals that Agnes has not reached acceptance, and that the hymn does not trust her to get there on her own. The orthodox language of the hymn is shadowed by its silent counterpart, a mother’s defiant failure to mourn. Her undying affection for her child will not yield to the devotional injunction. If, as Emma Mason writes, the conclusion of the poem “shift[s] the reader from the apparent subject of the lamentation into a focus on God as he who both enables mourning and ultimately evokes a stronger emotion in its place,” this transformation is not without violence (45). The consolatory mandate, with its dictates of resignation and acceptance, seems to foreclose rather than enable

Agnes's mourning. Insofar as mourning is replaced with devotion, it is at the cost of forgetting Agnes's silent prayer amid the noise of the hymn.

The function of this closing hymn is thus very different from the closing hymn of "Flowers and Music in a Room of Sickness," which worked to provide a generalized theological rationale for the deathbed rhetorics of that poem. Here, the hymn sits in dialogic contrast—even contradiction—to its poem's protagonist. "Burial of an Emigrant's Child in the Forest" closes in unresolved tension between the hymn's public ethic of acceptance and the private conscience of Agnes's unheard devotion. There are effectively three voices here: Agnes's, Edmund's, and that of the hymn, which canonizes Edmund's perspective as theological dictum with the authority to command, as demonstrated in the final stanza. The poem as a whole encompasses each of these voices, and while it gives the last word to the view from orthodoxy, it nonetheless protects Agnes's conscience by shrouding it in undepicted silence. Public and private discourses are never reconciled. Anne Nichols suggests that *Scenes and Hymns of Life* proposes that "the depth and intimacy of spiritual experience make its expression above law and regulation" (570). While I have argued that this reading cannot apply to Hemans's devotional lyrics, which prove strenuously legalistic and self-regulating, it fits a verse drama like "Burial of an Emigrant's Child" perfectly. Agnes's sublated prayer suggests how the dramatic form allows Hemans to represent the kind of limit-case spiritual experience Nichols describes, a spirituality that makes room for disconsolation and outright despair. The devotional ecology of the poem leaves space for both Agnes's privately despondent spirituality and the officious public work of the funeral hymn—discourses which may even depend on each other at a structural level. This is majoritarian religious toleration in action. But the structural rapprochement between silent prayer

and public hymn, it must be noted, offers no relief to Agnes. It only offers her a refuge in which her unrelenting grief can prevail.

Inhabiting Revelation

Agnes's unvoiced prayer highlights the limits of consolation orthodoxy, but its inaudible critique proved very easy to ignore. *Scenes and Hymns of Life* was met with excitement in the Tory press, which found what it wanted: practical piety in broad strokes, without too much concern for any dissonant tones in the margins. Consider, for example, the terms of the *Athenaeum's* praise:

The religion of daily life—of art—and of nature, has been sung, as it were, sparingly, and with timidity, while the *religionism* of sect has had its hundred zealous minstrels. But the day of these last is going by: we cannot but hope and believe that, with so much enlightenment and benevolence as are everywhere spreading abroad over the earth, a purer and more comprehensive faith will increase among men—a spirit of love and intelligence which shall mingle with our pleasures, as well as our devotions, and teach us to discern the intellectual from the frivolous, the spiritual from the sensual—which shall show us, not only how to endure life, but also how to enjoy it. (353:566)

Hemans's poetry trades in a moderate, refined religiosity, freed of "sect" and "zeal," capable of dividing pathos from bathos. What is meant by "religion" here is a cluster of reverential affects, moods, and postures, rather than any specific faith, creed, or tenet. Indeed, from this perspective doctrinal religion is a disputatious "*religionism*," and under religionism, even seemingly benign quibbling could quickly morph into menacing righteousness. These dynamics were not far from what worried Erasmus as he watched the emergence of what would become the Protestant Reformation: "Do they not make more for sedition than for piety? Are not riots common among this evangelical people? Do they not for small causes betake themselves to force?" (Smith, *Erasmus* 392). The key to composing the affective and rhetorical potency of sect into a secure establishment poetics is the amalgamated "religion of daily life—of art—and of nature," whose

syntax distributes the energy of devotion across a range of objects, so that it may be prevented from metastasizing into a pathological fixation on any specific sphere. From this universalizing Anglican perspective, Hemans was capable of sacralizing everything because she contended nothing in particular.

However, her aim was too broad to hit the mark for some readers—especially the nonconforming Protestants that *Scenes and Hymns of Life* sought to assimilate into a generalized Anglican spiritual community. While the dissenting *Eclectic Review* approved the publication as a whole, it hazarded that “Mrs. Hemans does not understand the true character of *the hymn*”:

There is more of the poetic spirit than of the religious spirit in her most sacred pieces;—they breathe more the religion of the woods and mountains than of the sanctuary; and approach nearer to the piety of the magdalen muse of Moore, than to the genuine devotional inspiration which distinguishes the hymns of Charles Wesley and Montgomery. Mrs. Hemans is the professional poet of the cathedral, of “the banner and the shrine,” of the crusade and the pilgrimage. (12:180)

Contra the *Athenaeum*, the religion of nature is no substitute for “genuine devotional inspiration.” What Hemans is offering amounts to religious pageantry, richly sensual but lacking the authentic (or sectarian) devotion of the Methodist Wesley and the Moravian Montgomery. From a dissenting perspective, her universalizing Anglicanism remained, well, Anglican.

There was, in other words, a certain impersonality in Hemans’s religious verse that undermined its devotional aspirations. One feature of a poetry at home in the “woods and mountains,” as the *Eclectic* notes, is its dramatic character. By contrast, Hemans’s lyrics carefully approach—and perhaps stop short of—the “sanctuary” of theological meditation, where she is clearly less comfortable. This distinction underwrites the epithet “professional poet”: she earns her keep depicting antiqued crypto-Catholic historical fixtures. The *Eclectic* would make its case in more explicit terms after her death:

Although Mrs. Hemans's poems contain some occasional and somewhat indistinct references to the doctrines of Christianity, it must be admitted that they are deficient in that tone of Scriptural piety and devotional feeling which would indicate the ascendancy of religious affections in her own heart. (16:40)

Though a fine dramatist, Hemans is no inspired prophet of present Britain. That is to say, she effuses best when she's not effusing as herself.

However, Hemans's devotional lyrics took on a markedly different character after the 1834 publication of *Scenes and Hymns of Life*. The difference is best exemplified by the poem that ran in the May 1835 issue of *Blackwood's* under the title "Despondency and Aspiration: A Lyric. By Mrs Hemans." This is a personal prayer of exactly the sort that Hemans's more skeptical reviewers thought beyond her studied grasp. What it shares with previous lyrics like "The Sacred Harp" and "Angel Visits" is the intuition of a metaphysical chasm dividing then from now, past from present. In the earlier poems, the past was the time of revelation, and the present could only be understood privatively, through revelation's withdrawal. Consolation in a fallen age was the theme. The argumentative burden of those poems is to find ways to nuance this self-evident reality in order to make space for divinity. By contrast, "Despondency and Aspiration" juxtaposes a fallen past with a revelatory present. The movement no longer follows the historical passage from a prophetic age toward modernity, but instead takes up the soul's eschatological passage from earthly life to holy death and ascension. Hemans now lyrically *inhabits* the subjectivity of the dying she had dramatically *represented* via characters like Lilian in "Flowers and Music."

The opening gambit of "Despondency and Aspiration" is to interpret doubt, skepticism, and despair as spiritual states of false revelation. Where in the earlier poems divine presence was depicted as a supplemental force that imbued bare existence with the glow of eternity, in this

poem doubt and fear are supplements—“dark shadows”—obscuring a fundamentally divine world: “My soul was mantled with dark shadows, born / Of lonely Fear, disquieted in vain” (793). The poem arcs from this enclosed, solipsistic lyric interiority to an exploded self in unity with God. The key here is that the world’s darkness seems like plain truth but is in fact pathetic fallacy, whispering sham revelation:

And when the solemn Night
Came with her might
Of stormy oracles from caves unknown,
Then with each fitful blast
Prophetic murmurs pass’d,
Wakening or answering some deep Sybil tone,
Far buried in my breast, yet prompt to rise
With every gusty wail that o’er the wind-harp flies. (793)

The long chain of metonymies obscures the provenance of these “Prophetic murmurs,” which are either the cause or effect (“wakening or answering”) of Hemans’s corresponding “Sybil tone.” This causal confusion is symptomatic of the soul’s darkness, since the sufferer cannot tell if the world is whispering in her ear, or if she is speaking to herself. From this angle, the problem of disenchantment that provoked the previous lyrics was deeply mischaracterized—false prophecy taken for bald fact. This false prophecy reports doubt and failure, “outward ill and wrong, / And inward wasting fires!” Human attachments are first among the vain encumbrances it denounces:

No power is theirs, and no abiding place
In human hearts; their sweetness leaves no trace,—
Born only so to die! (793)

This begins a startling rebuke of the idols of domesticity Hemans had venerated and disturbed throughout her career, mounting into a violent vision of the “blessed wreath / Of household charities” reduced to a “trampled flower,” “pale and withering on the barren ground.” The prophetic murmurs conclude,

“So fade on, fade on! thy gift of love shall cling,
 A coiling sadness, round thy heart and brain,
 A silent, fruitless, yet undying thing,
 All sensitive to pain!
 And still the shadow of vain dreams shall fall
 O’er thy mind’s world, a daily darkening pall.
 Fold, then, thy wounded wing, and sink subdued,
 In cold and unrepining quietude!” (793-794)

This is the dark simulacrum of Christian resignation, a despair altogether beyond aspiration. The sibylline voice performs a series of reversals, transfiguring love into a snakelike Satanic force coiling “round thy heart and brain.” Love is the engine of procreation but appears paradoxically “fruitless,” in a moment reminiscent of Agnes’s recognition that her child is nothing but an earthly idol in “Burial of an Emigrant’s Child.” Trapped in the claustrophobic confines of “thy mind’s world,” the prophecy insists that there is nothing left but to die.

Then comes the turn: Hemans “yields” to despair, “Mutely and hopelessly,” until she is suddenly saved. The “vain bodings of the night” are simply dismissed in favor of a “happier oracle within my soul” (794). The process is entirely mysterious—a miracle. The relationship between the dark prophecy and the redemption remains opaque: it’s not clear whether she overcame despondency, or entered into despondency so completely that it transformed into its opposite. Her doubts are now banished, but the poem seems to allow them a place in the devotional ecology. The title plays on the same ambiguity, since the conjunction of “Despondency and Aspiration” declines to specify the relationship between the two states. One implication is that the despondency of a world bereft of divine presence is only a temporary nadir within a longer salvific trajectory. The ersatz revelation of despondency is what we understand as history, which assures us that the age of miracles is long gone. But on the contrary, this poem intones, history itself meets its end in death, where another logic prevails.

Having passed through despondency, Hemans moves on to aspiration, ascending through a montage of phallic sublimities on her way toward heaven:

And then a glorious mountain-chain uprose,
 Height above spiry height!
 A soaring solitude of woods and snows
 All steeped in golden light! (794)

On her way, she surveys each of the miracles she had struggled to recuperate in *Scenes and Hymns of Life*. Her poetic lyre, “Faithful though faint,” can now confidently echo the divine music. Angels appear in the most literal sense, “dread wings” and all—a host of “Seraphim” singing a “grand Creation-Hymn.” But Hemans ecumenically includes the naturalized reading of angels as facilitators of virtue she tested in “Angel Visits,” casting “earthly love, all purified” in figurative terms as “An angel of bright power” (795). The revelatory and the natural, the literal and the figurative are no longer mutually exclusive, or even distinct. The sublimity of this vision tramples over the theological questions that vexed the earlier poems.

Poetic challenges begin to subside along with their theological counterparts. Anxious apostrophe to an absent God gives way to a supremely confident, even dangerous intimacy, which Hemans briefly acknowledges: “Forgive, O Father! if presumptuous thought / Too daringly in aspiration rise!” (795). She concludes by imploring God to transform her into “a living shrine,” monumental yet mobile:

O make *me* Thine,
 So shall I too be pure—a living shrine
 Unto that spirit, which goes forth from Thee,
 Strong and divinely free,
 Bearing thy gifts of wisdom on its flight,
 And brooding o’er them with a dove-like wing,
 Till thought, word, song, to Thee in worship spring,
 Immortally endow’d for liberty and light. (795)

Hemans boldly aspires toward a heavenly posterity, but she also has her eye on a poetic afterlife, where she can spread God's "gifts of wisdom" in the form of a unified prophetic utterance that fuses "thought, word, song." It turns out that salvation also solves the problem of lyric address, seamlessly translating thought into voice into music. This immortal endowment recapitulates a history of posterities, earthly and divine, by opting for all of the above, blending enthusiastic transcendence with earthward glances.

In short, the visionary rhetoric of "Despondency and Aspiration" looks like a shocking departure from the circumspect lyrics of *Scenes and Hymns of Life*. More to the point, it looks like textbook enthusiasm, for which David Hume offered an especially relevant definition:

a full range is given to the fancy in the invisible regions or world of spirits, where the soul is at liberty to indulge itself in every imagination, which may best suit its present taste and disposition. Hence arise raptures, transports, and surprising flights of fancy; and confidence and presumption still encreasing, these raptures, being altogether unaccountable, and seeming quite beyond the reach of our ordinary faculties, are attributed to the immediate inspiration of that Divine Being, who is the object of devotion. In a little time, the inspired person comes to regard himself as a distinguished favourite of the Divinity; and when this frenzy once takes place, which is the summit of enthusiasm, every whimsey is consecrated: Human reason, and even morality are rejected as fallacious guides.... (*Essays* 74)

Hemans's sublime transports, indifference to contradiction, and prophetic presumption would seem to mark her with the stigma of the inspirited—what Samuel Johnson's 1755 *Dictionary* defined as "A vain belief of private revelation; a vain confidence of Divine favour or communication" ("Enthusiasm"). John Wesley, too, labored to discipline the very movement he inaugurated by distinguishing Methodism from enthusiasm, though he was constantly accused of the latter:

I dislike something that has the appearance of enthusiasm: overvaluing feelings and inward impressions: mistaking the mere work of imagination for the voice of the Spirit;

expecting the end without the means, and undervaluing reason, knowledge, and wisdom in general. (4:193)

On Wesley's account, enthusiasm lays claim to a grace it hasn't earned. Hemans, however, could unimpeachably assert her intimacy with the spirit when she wrote "Despondency and Aspiration," for the simple fact that she was terminally ill. She died of consumption on May 16th of 1835, the same month the poem ran in *Blackwood's*. The poem thus enjoys the expressive privilege granted to the dying within the Anglican consensus—the same privilege Hemans could give Lilian in "Flowers and Music in a Room of Sickness," but shied away from in her earlier devotional lyrics.

"Despondency and Aspiration" was widely celebrated, always in connection with the supplemental text of her death. Her friend and biographer Henry Chorley hailed it as the "last and greatest of her lyrics," while the *Athenaeum* called it "the song of the swan—its sweetest and its last!" (2:299; 395:392).¹⁶ More recently, Duncan Wu has highlighted the poem (her "last great work") as an example of her facility with the "visionary experience" of the sublime, a discourse, according to Wu, that critics have usually understood as a conventionally masculine prerogative (*Romanticism* 1293, *xliii*). But Hemans's apparent gender transgressions must be understood in relation to the politics of dying. In a world where social geographies were drawn by religious rhetorics, dying persons spoke from beyond the map, transcending the boundaries between the

¹⁶ Further examples abound. The *Ladies' Repository* found "Despondency and Aspiration" the equal "in eloquence of diction and fervor of soul, with the best productions of the best of British bards" (9:12), and the *Eclectic Review*, while generally skeptical of Hemans's devotional poetry, called it the "noblest production" in the posthumous *Poetical Remains* of 1836 (16:43). The *Literary Gazette* made the most revealing connection between the transcendent rhetoric of *Poetical Remains* and the circumstance of Hemans's death, announcing that "The volume now before us was chiefly written while passing through the valley of the shadow of death. What a touching and yet solemn truth does this give to its aspirations for the purer air which is beyond the grave!" (1000:177).

orthodox and the heterodox, the polite and the vulgar. As an emissary from eternity, the dying person was expected to express an intimacy with God that, in other contexts, would mark her with the stigma of enthusiasm. The devotional fervor of Hemans's last poems signaled true religion to dissenters, while the circumstance of her decline ensured the appreciation and respect of Anglicans. Hemans was at last able to inhabit the personal voice of the lyric in an address to a unified spiritual public, precisely because she was leaving that fiction behind.

CHAPTER SIX

SUPERANNUATED GOVERNESSES AND IMAGINATIVE EUNUCHS:

THE STERILITY OF *ENDYMION*

Keats was accruing a deathly cultural legacy even before he died, even before he fell terminally ill, in part due to his own preoccupation with “posthumous existence” (*Letters* 2:359). Such timely investments in posterity ensured that when his death came at age 25, it made Keats. He quickly proved a more vital symbol dead than alive. Martyred by bloodthirsty reviewers, or so the story held, he became an expedient proxy in the poetic and political strife of Regency literary culture. As the *Metropolitan Magazine* wrote, the poet

might have prospered, though his birth was humble, and his means straitened, had not an enmity, as gratuitous as it was wanton, as cruel in act as it was malignant in spirit, met, tore, and trampled him to the earth! (14:61)

This victim Keats represented less a closed, extant body of work than a lost future for a literary culture far more invested in weaponizing the virtual Keats than in coming to terms with the Keats that lived, wrote, and died. For Keats’s elegists, that lost potential measured the failings of the republic of letters, which rather resembled the aristocracy of yore.¹ Yet even his defenders were more likely to imagine literary posterity on the aristocratic model as a patrimonial estate, to be figuratively inherited by birthright or won by courtship of the muse. Keats was never going to cut the figure of the Wordsworthian patriarch, but by dying, he fell into a different sort of

¹ William Hazlitt protested that “it is name, it is wealth, it is title and influence that mollifies the tender-hearted Cerberus of criticism. . . . This is the reason why a certain Magazine [*Blackwood’s*] praises Percy Bysshe Shelley, and villifies ‘Johnny Keats’” (12:208).

posterity that secured the place “among the English poets” he imagined for himself (*Letters* 1:394). Yet *Endymion*—his major poem in life, if not in literary afterlife—is dedicated to draining the blood out of inheritance and dismantling an order rooted in births and deaths. It is a reaction against the system of literary valuation that would bar him in life and prize him in death. That is to say, *Endymion* is a revolt against posthumous Keats.

The myth of Keats is a construction poised between “prospective and retroactive reading,” determined, as Andrew Bennett has argued, “by a certain prescience of posthumous renown” (*Culture of Posterity* 141). On the far side of periodical martyrdom emerged readings like Paul de Man’s, which saw Keats’s poetics “haunted by a dream that always remains in the future,” each of his projects encountering a crux that would leave it conceptually or literally unfinished (*Selected Poetry of Keats* xii). The traces of victimology have become more diffuse, but prematurity, death, and futurity remain central to de Man’s assessment. Keats’s canonical work often imagines an impossibly sonorous poetry, “images of a virtual music,” from the various evocations of “unheard melodies” in the odes (“spirit ditties of no tone”) to Apollo’s song in *Hyperion*:

A living death was in each gush of sounds,
Each family of rapturous hurried notes,
That fell, one after one, yet all at once (Clune 32; *Hyperion* 2.281-283)

These images of phantom poetry blend with his premature death to generate a Keats always still to come. The specter of this virtual Keats transforms the poet into a fragment-poem imbued with glimmers of an impossible totality. F. R. Leavis offered a representative distillation of the place of Keats in 1936:

Keats has become a symbolic figure, the type of poetic genius, a hero and martyr of poetry, with claims to greatness such as can hardly at any time have, for the devout,

invested the symbolic Chatterton; and there is a general consensus that the greatness is a matter of promise and potentiality rather than achievement. (241)

The greatness of this Keats lies in possibility itself—at least according to the “general consensus” that Leavis neither challenges nor fully owns. This logic turns on the figure of a “claim,” which positions the poet as a claimant to a throne, a patrimony, or a “place” of the sort Keats imagined for himself (*Letters* 1:394). The possessor of a legitimate but unconsummated claim, Keats’s story is one of usurpation and betrayal, while Chatterton (*Endymion*’s dedicatee) remains merely “symbolic” since he was never a true pretender. The death that intervened between promise and achievement becomes the sign of Keats’s unrealized entitlement.² And so his greatness depends upon the reiteration of his death, over and over again. *Endymion* intuits how the game of poetry was figuratively patterned on genealogy—birthrights and good deaths—a game the living Keats was ill-qualified to play at, much less win. If dying solved the problem, *Endymion* remains Keats’s clearest protest against the estate of literary posterity in which he would eventually take an honored place.

Reproducing Poetry

The story of Keats’s emergence as a “poet of death” (Robinson, *My Ended Poet* 4) is well known. Caught in the crossfire between the Tory reviews and Leigh Hunt’s circle of poetic reformers, Keats became an object of what began as nonchalant derision and steadily veered toward intensely invested rancor. When he fell ill and died of consumption, friends, admirers, and fellow travelers lionized the young poet as a martyr of culture war. He left behind a body of poetry shot through with anxious deviations and experiments in gender, sexuality, maturity,

² While the image of lost potential remains influential, recent assessments affirm that despite his early death, as Jack Stillinger writes, “the imagined poet of promise was in fact a poet of enormous accomplishments” (*Romantic Complexity* 113).

education, politics, and class. These vectors often conspired to produce an entrancing and discomfiting spectacle of “embarrassment” (Ricks), “solecism” (Bennett), and “badness” (Levinson), and yet the writing of the “mature” Keats often ascends to the very pinnacle of poetic form (Vendler). Such tensions within Keats’s body of work only emphasize his status as an incomplete poet, reinforcing the tragic dimension of his loss.

Less understood—but no less crucial to the making of Keats—are the omnipresent motifs of patrimony and procreation. Literature functioned as a mechanism for the management of social reproduction, defining and contesting logics of class with respect to readership, education, and taste. It makes sense that procreation could figure prominently in a world explicitly fixated on logics of social reproduction, since procreation could offer a biological, “concrete” reference point for the cultural work of literature. Nor is it surprising that, despite the heavily worked trope of the “republic of letters,” review culture could just as readily appeal to breeding and blood—older discourses of distinction that had become mild anachronisms, yet still resonated in the wake of the eighteenth-century refashioning of gentility as a more cultural, less hereditary formation. In the case of Keats, a poet perfectly situated to irritate the discursive zones where social and sexual reproduction overlap, procreation became the sign of his failure. The trope runs, in one way or another, throughout his reception.

Consider the first of John Gibson Lockhart’s several lavish condemnations in *Blackwood’s*, which placed Keats among a rash of “farm servants and unmarried ladies” taken to writing poetry. Writing as “Z,” Lockhart complained that “there is scarcely a superannuated governess in the island that does not leave a roll of lyrics behind in her band-box” (3:519). What these figures share, what makes their poetic pretensions self-evidently absurd, begins but does

not end with their social marginality. The problem is more precise: each is variously unmarried and unmarriageable, excluded in different ways from the sanctioned avenues of procreation. The aspersions that follow—Keats is “prurient and vulgar”; he won’t stop penning “amorous scenes”; he’s a “boy of pretty abilities, which he has done everything in his power to spoil” —posit a bond between poetic and sexual potency that Keats cannot fulfill (3:521, 523, 522). He is not simply premature but hopeless, constitutionally incapable of consummation, a pretender in the worst sense. Failed filiation is the bedrock of this attack.

Blackwood’s hard line on Keats’s reproductive prospects began to waver in the ensuing years. First, there was a shift from the spectacle of the critical pillory to a milder discourse of censure as rehabilitation. In 1819 *Blackwood’s* professed,

We alone like him and laugh at him. He is at present a very amiable, silly, lispng, and pragmatcal young gentleman—but we hope to cure him of all that—and should have much pleasure in introducing him to our readers in a year or two speaking the language of this country, counting his fingers correctly, and condescending to a neckcloth. (6:240)

What emerges throughout this discourse is an abiding sense of the poet as gentleman-patriarch and poetic language as inheritance, subject to the law of patrilineal descent. *Blackwood’s* claims to have chastised Keats to secure his future by purging him, through ridicule, of the Cockney plague. After his death, the magazine’s attitude toward Keats became frenetically divided, claiming the high ground of well-intentioned sympathy only to regularly descend into fits of finger-pointing seasoned with astonishing vitriol:

Keats possessed from nature some “fine powers,” and that was the very expression we used in the first critique that ever mentioned his name. We saw, however, with mixed feelings of pity, sorrow, indignation, and contempt, that he was on the road to ruin. He was a Cockney, and Cockneys claimed him for their own. Never was there a young man so encrusted with conceit. He added new treasures to his mother-tongue,—and what is worse, he outhunted Hunt in a species of emasculated pruriency, that, although invented in Little Britain, looks as if it were the product of some imaginative Eunuch’s muse

within the melancholy inspiration of the Haram. Besides, we know that the godless gang were flattering him into bad citizenship, and wheedling him out of his Christian faith. In truth, they themselves broke the boy's heart, and blasted all his prospects. We tried to save him by wholesome and severe discipline—they drove him to poverty, expatriation and death. (*Blackwood's* 19:xxvi)

It is remarkable how close the “mother-tongue” and “citizenship” lie to lascivious oriental sterility, and how vulnerable the former are to the latter. Keats's castrated poetics are not simply laughable but dangerous, even deadly.³ These reactions reveal a thoroughgoing analogy between linguistic and social reproduction that undergirds the defense of literary nationhood: on one hand, counting one's fingers correctly and speaking the mother tongue, on the other, banishing the superannuated governesses and imaginative eunuchs from the republic of letters.

However, establishing a bond between nation, language, and reproduction was not solely the pet project of *Blackwood's* and its senior associate, the *Quarterly Review*. This was a longstanding, deep-seated motif advanced in different terms by Keats's friends and Keats himself as readily as his opponents. Keats arrived as a child—the romantic child, as theorized by Rousseau, sentimentalized by Joshua Reynolds, and elegized by Wordsworth in the *Intimations Ode*.⁴ This reception vector was present in Keats's life, and became predominant in death. To

³ Even these claims would only be allowed to stand momentarily, as the author quickly moves to dismiss *Blackwood's* entire history of attacks on Keats: “we thought these common-places of quizzing were quite well understood, and of course harmless” (19:xxvi). If Keats and friends were gentlemen, they would have understood that they weren't really being insulted for their middling status.

⁴ The infantilizing and feminizing currents of Keats's reception have been much discussed: the juvenile, libertine, and effeminate valences of the Cockney slur (Cox 24), the “puerilising rhetoric” in which Leigh Hunt introduced his protégé to the public (Wolfson, “Feminising Keats” 95), William Hazlitt's claim that Keats lacked “the manhood of poetry” (8:254-255), Keats's own flamboyant developmental anxieties in his 1817 *Poems*, a volume obsessed “with the question of Keats's career as a poet” (Stillinger, *Hoodwinking* 13), and Percy Shelley's fraught, competitive elegy *Adonais*, which pictured Keats not as suitor to the muse—that would be Shelley himself—but rather as her neglected and vulnerable son: “Where wert thou, mighty Mother, when he lay, / When thy Son lay, pierc'd by the shaft which flies / In darkness?” (10-12). These constructions, evoking potential, futurity, nurturance, betrayal, and reproductive failure, all belong to the procreative matrix.

take one example, John Hamilton Reynolds's case against the *Quarterly Review's* treatment of Keats revolves entirely around the figure of filicide. According to Reynolds, "Reviewers," who should act as faithful guardians to the aspiring youths of English letters, "are creatures 'that stab men in the dark:'—young and enthusiastic spirits are their dearest prey" (*Examiner* 563:648). Childlike Keats was entrusted to the care of these literary guardians, who whimsically decided "to crush [his promise] in its youth, and forever" (563:649). Predatory exploitation damns the hopes of poetic succession. By cutting down potential before it can bloom, these "*soi disant* guardians of public taste" (as Charles Cowden Clarke termed them) end up devouring England's literary future (Barnard 44). The English line of literary succession has been betrayed—not by the outré experiments of its youthful heirs, but by the cannibalistic jealousy of an outmoded and illegitimate literary patriarchy. The *Victorian Magazine* put an especially vivid spin on this tropology, remembering Keats as "the Daintiest of Poets" while heaping motherly scorn on his assailants:

What shall we say of the malicious, the utterly brutal criticism, the hand of the cloddish boy tearing the myriad-hued fragile butterfly to fragments! No words can express the loathing every honest educated Englishman must feel for the ruffian tasks which inaugurated a long career of prosperity for the two Quarterlies. (67)

This reading inverts *Quarterly's* image of Keats as a deviant child in need of discipline from right Englishmen. Here, destroying Keats was rather the work (or play) of sadistic children, distinguished only by its instrumental role in securing "prosperity" for the perpetrators. The elegiac conclusion is straight out of the *Intimations Ode*: "Glory and loveliness have passed away."⁵

⁵ Barbara Garlitz's "The Immortality Ode: Its Cultural Progeny" and Lawrence Kramer's "The 'Intimations' Ode and Victorian Romanticism" both explore the vast impact of Wordsworth's poem on

These representations of Keats as an abandoned and betrayed child sustain the procreative literary imaginary governed by the logic of property, only to turn it against his assailants. Literary and biological fecundity were the founding figures of poetic posterity, rendered as a sovereign domain, a territorial nation-estate, perhaps subject to patrimonial bequest via education and station (if not blood), or perhaps to be won by those properly endowed to woo the muse.⁶ Though this metaphor system was often unstable, and was plied to various ends, it consistently worked to Keats's disadvantage.

Degenerate Verse

Endymion's slapdash, "slip-shod" versification has received much attention.⁷ My contention is that *Endymion* does have a high argument, if not in the Miltonic or Wordsworthian

nineteenth-century elegiac thought, making the case that it was Wordsworth's best-remembered and most influential work. Its language resonates throughout Keats's reception.

⁶ In his defense of Keats, Reynolds writes, "Poetry is the coyest creature that ever was wooed by man: she has something of the coquette in her; for she flirts with many, and seldom loves one" (*Examiner* 563:649).

⁷ "Slip-shod" was Keats's own assessment, a deprecation that through the mid-nineteenth century could still mean "wearing slippers or very loose shoes" and "of shoes: Loose or untidy, in bad condition; down at the heel" in addition to the more familiar "casual, slovenly" (*Letters* 1:374; *OED*). Even the most sympathetic early readers found *Endymion*'s verse awkward. Benjamin Bailey complained of the "forced rhymes" and "the apparent effort, by breaking up the lines, to get as far as possible in the opposite direction of the Pope school" (*Keats Circle* 2:269). Judged against the carefully crafted effect of ease prized in the Popean couplet, Keats's loose, haphazard treatments seemed unwieldy and, as even Leigh Hunt put it, "unnatural" (*Letters* 1:213). The most important recent work on *Endymion*'s versification includes William Keach's *Arbitrary Power* and Simon Jarvis's "Archaist-Innovators: The Couplet from Churchill to Browning." Jarvis's comments on Keats's cataloging practices in *Endymion* are especially salient:

Because it is so often paratactical, rather than (as Milton's so generally is) hypotactic, the forward movement which pushes us over line endings is often aggregative rather than logical. On several occasions here Keats begins a new line simply by adding to a list which has been begun earlier.... The lists themselves not only mingle imaginable objects with quite abstract phrases, so that the verse yields no pictorially constructible scene...subjected to a series of blurrings and minglings. The poem as a whole, in fact, concertedly assaults the very framework for discriminating high,

senses, insofar as it endeavors to dismantle the patrilineal authority that issues “high arguments.” The most fundamental venue for this argument is the poem’s verse. Critics immediately recognized that the poem treats rhyme and meter with a dangerous laxity, deepens the poem’s subjection to the suggestive power of words. In his lordly strength, Byron could play at this kind of subjection as itself a form of mastery. So *Don Juan*’s narrator, after rhyming “milk” with “as the Scotch say, whilk,” quickly faux-apologizes: “The rhyme obliges me to this; sometimes / Monarchs are less imperative than rhymes” (5.615-616). By contrast, it wasn’t clear if Keats was playing submissive, or just *was* submissive. Even if he wasn’t simply an incompetent delinquent, he didn’t have any lordly currency to play with.

By apparently ceding compositional intention to the arbitrary play of rhyme, Keats was neglecting what Coleridge in the previous year’s *Biographia Literaria* had called “the best part of human language”: the “voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols to internal acts, to processes and results of imagination” (7:54). Meter must be organized “by a supervening act of the will and judgment,” and as such, “traces of present volition” should be “discernible” throughout (7:66). By contrast, Keats seemed pliant and passive before his own material, just as his protagonist surrendered his agency to desire. This failure to exercise control was profoundly classed, as in Byron’s objection to the poetry of the Hunt circle: “You see the man of education, the gentleman, and the scholar, sporting with his subject,—its master, not its slave” (*Works* 5:592). The sexual dimensions of this figure were no accident, as implied in John Wilson Croker’s complaint that *Endymion* was essentially authorless, “composed of hemistichs which, it is quite evident, have *forced themselves* upon the author by the mere force of the catchwords

middle, and low which the couplet had turned into as Pope’s flexibility, after his death, was made to harden into a series of molds for style. (36)

on which they turn” (*Quarterly Review* 19:206). Keats, it seems, can only manage a curtailed half-line at a time, and worse, he can’t even claim responsibility for these diminutive discharges. They’re forced upon him by the “mere” force of his catchwords. Rhyme is the arena in which *Endymion*’s procreative energy is captured and dissipated by its own material.

While Z’s attacks in *Blackwood’s* provide the sociological matrix for Keats’s reproductive failings by placing the poet alongside superannuated governesses and unmarried ladies, Croker’s assessment in the *Quarterly Review* demonstrates how Keats’s deviations in verse were linked to a queering of reproduction. Keats is accused of propagating, “with great fecundity,” a degenerate language. We’re told that Keats “spawns” verbs from nouns and nouns from verbs. He births new verbs by “cutting off their natural tails” and “affixing them to their foreheads”—i.e. “up-followed,” “up-blows,” “down-sunken.” And yet, “if he sinks some adverbs in the verbs he compensates the language with adverbs and adjectives which he separates from the parent stock” (19:207). (Here Croker cites the Keatsian coinages “whispers pantingly,” “hushing signs,” and “refreshfully.”) Keats has forced English to birth grammatically alien offspring, shifted from their native part of speech toward foreign significations. At the level of the word, *Endymion* is built up out of Calibanesque monstrosities. Such unnatural hybrids overwhelm what Croker terms “our English heroic metre,” suggesting that these mutations in the reproduction of language were an attack on the nation, centered, as Burke wrote, upon “our hearths, our sepulchers, and our altars” (*Reflections* 120). Croker’s scolding thus reveals how the bond between language and nation was sustained by the metaphor of reproduction within the broader topos of poetry as patrimony. What is especially notable here is that Croker’s reading of

Keats is in fact the polar opposite of *Blackwood's* accusations: It's not that Keats leaks sterile dribble, but that he is monstrously fertile, pouring out heinous verbal grotesqueries.

The divergent censures of Lockhart and Croker suggest how Keats's literary-reproductive deviance was widely recognized yet inconsistently rendered. The Tory reviews could damn Keats for his effeminate submission to the power of language, and, in the next breath, charge that he was brutishly taking liberties with language, deforming it according to monstrous whims. Nor were these charges limited to the Tory press. Even Leigh Hunt pictured Keats as a tyrant victimizing his verse: "Mr. Keats, in the tyranny of his wealth, forced his rhymes to help whether they would or not: and they obeyed him, in the most singular manner, with equal promptitude and ungainliness" (*Imagination and Fancy* 253). This didn't stop Hunt from suggesting in the same paragraph that Keats's "tendency to pleasure... sometimes degenerat[ed]... into a poetical effeminacy"—excepting only the appropriately phallic "gigantic grandeur" of his *Hyperion* (*ibid.*). Such fissured readings of *Endymion's* rhymes, alternately brutish and girlish, suggest the illegibility of Keats's verse deformations—at once superabundant and impoverished, profuse and devoid of sense. These responses help to clarify what is profoundly distinctive about the poem: it is a poem of broken births and incomplete deaths, where the trajectory of life no longer obtains.

Ganymede Grown

Endymion is a response to this figural system of validation and valuation. That is to say, *Endymion* recognizes the terms in which it would be judged, not because Keats divined the future, but because he accurately read the reception politics of the present and understood the motifs that organized poetic legitimacy. Moreover, he recognized that the vision of poetry as patrimony was arranged to delegitimize people like him. *Endymion* is his ambitious and often

incoherent counterproposal, his attempt to imagine a world of poetry unbound by filiation and bequest, severed from the logics of procreation and inheritance. While many scholars have seen the poem as an expression of Keats's multifarious sexual and social anxieties, I think Z was quite right about the mood of *Endymion*: "the phrenzy of the 'Poems' was bad enough in its way; but it did not alarm us half so seriously as the calm, settled, imperturbable drivelling idiocy of 'Endymion'" (*Blackwood's* 3:519). It is a strangely assured and uncompromising text, blissfully committed to outraging good sense. *Endymion* was also, as Marjorie Levinson notes, the poem "that would, literally, *make* [Keats]," and, we should add, make him in its own image (7).

His declared intention to "make 4000 lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry" should be understood as a narrative experiment in the suspension of time (*Letters* 1:170). This is crucial because the genealogy of patrimony depends upon linear, definable chronology. If this logic holds in the social world, *Endymion* will insist that it need not hold in poetry. *Endymion* thus seeks to interrupt the logic of inheritance by imagining what Herbert Marcuse termed "the liberation from time": the renunciation of the future's claims on the present (162). In place of futurity, Keats writes a world of continuous passage without progress, dilating "the slow move of time" (4.922), or eddying and looping back on itself, repeating without advancing. It is a poem about the postponement of growth and the deferral of ends. It strategically abandons the narrative teleologies of climax and resolution and the social teleologies of birth, maturation, and death. *Endymion*, then, is an escapist fantasy that is also a precise reading of the cultural world into which it would be unhappily released.

From his introduction, the eponymous hero is marked by a curiously uneven maturation:

His youth was fully blown,
Shewing like Ganymede to manhood grown;

And, for those simple times, his garments were
 A chieftain king's: beneath his breast, half bare,
 Was hung a silver bugle, and between
 His nervy knees there lay a boar-spear keen. (1.169-174)

Crowded with discordant sexual signifiers, this picture distills a certain sexed and gendered illegibility—a permanent adolescence that variously transcends and falls short of manhood. Youth “fully blown” might be peak youth or youth concluded, wrapped any which way in the still-loose trappings of a “chieftain king.” At the center is the paradox of a Ganymede grown to manhood, since Ganymede was granted eternal youth for his service as cupbearer to the Olympians. Endymion is not poised between boyhood and manhood on a maturational spectrum; instead, he occupies both positions at once. This perplexity is quickly overwritten by two phallic markings: first the vaguely suggestive bugle hanging round his neck, and then, as if to insist, the unequivocal “boar-spear keen” between his “nervy knees.” An eternal youth in the shape and garb of a man wielding too many phalli, Endymion makes for an unseemly assemblage of undersold and overblown parts.

The sexual subtexts of horn and spear only become clearer in hindsight. For though Endymion styles himself a hunter, he shows no interest in his erstwhile profession, leaving these items to hang on their symbolism. Instead, Endymion's proper vocation is dreaming, since it is dreams that open onto the countertemporal logic the poem prizes. Crucially, his dreaming practice is clearly distinguished from that of his peers. While his fellow shepherds busy themselves trading reveries of the Elysium to come within the confines of homosocial ritual (“all out-told / Their fond imaginations”), Endymion sits in a “self-same fixed trance,” internalizing his fantasy and indulging a luxurious, melancholic solitude (1.371-372, 403). The shepherds' daydreaming is regulatory, future-directed, and defined by its very distance from present

realities. By contrast, Endymion takes his dreams so seriously that they become indistinguishable from the waking world, suspending the march toward an agential, militant manhood. Ultimately, the poem will affirm Endymion's decision to pursue his idiosyncratic fantasy over the continuation of his patrimony. This is a commitment to perpetual aspiration over arrival.

Endymion's desire to suspend the reality quotient of waking life and its reliance on an orderly chronology of past and future does not go unchallenged. Endymion's sensible sister Peona speaks on behalf of the logic of patrimony, chastising her brother for foregoing worldly ambition in favor of fantastic delusions. When he confesses that he is in love with a goddess who visits his dreams, Peona tries to shame him back into his birthright by imagining what will be said of him if he doesn't stop dreaming. Though he has the potential to "leave / His name upon the harp-string" for posterity, he risks becoming a mere cautionary tale, unmanned into "simple maidenhood" by unrequited love, only to be killed by a "sprig of yew tree"—a symbol of cyclical death and resurrection, planted in churchyards since the early middle ages (Bevan-Jones 40-41). Endymion's dreams threaten to feminize him into abject vulnerability that speeds directly toward pathetic death. The remedy Peona prescribes is a regular dose of virile hunting and trumpeting, and an end to sickly, insubstantial dreaming:

how light
 Must dreams themselves be; seeing they're more slight
 Than the mere nothing that engenders them!
 Then wherefore sully the entrusted gem
 Of high and noble life with thoughts so sick?
 Why pierce high-fronted honour to the quick
 For nothing but a dream? (1.754-760)

Contrasted with the eminent substance of ancestry, dreams are nothing born from more nothing. By dedicating himself to the nothingness of dreams, Endymion sullies and sickens and pierces

the “high-fronted honour” that blazons and defends patrilineal descent. Peona’s hard boundary between dream and reality runs from the “high and noble life” to the firm ground of property. To refuse patrimony in favor of the dream world is to wilt into a girlish death, crossing oneself out of one’s legacy. “Melting into [love’s] radiance”, as Endymion desires, means melting out of the hereditary order of the social economy.

Growing Sideways

In response, Endymion will stake himself to the “higher hope” of a “self-destroying love” beyond the “myriads of earthly wrecks”—imagining a world where history and futurity no longer exercise power over life (1.774, 799, 776). As citizens of the waking world, we may be compelled to agree with Peona that this on some level puerile and preposterous. Yet Richard Marggraf Turley has persuasively recuperated the immaturity that pervades Keats’s writing, arguing that his juvenility is a strategy through which he contests mature, established forms of authority. ““Boyishness,”” Turley writes, “is a coherent—or at least coherently incoherent—position of contestation, power, and personal liberation for Keats” (6). Against “maturational” accounts of the poet’s trajectory as a “predominantly uni-directional exertion towards self-determination of one kind or another—creative, personal, prophetic, historical,” Turley sketches a Keats whose persistent “strategic infantilism” poses an often fraught yet compelling challenge to the logic of poetic maturation (6). One implication of Turley’s argument is that Keats’s poetic strategies aim to disrupt the mythology of lost promise constructed in his wake, since the trope of lost promise relies upon the very sort of (tragically suspended) trajectory of maturation that Keats’s strategic infantilism works to preempt.

Keats's immaturity is not mere ignorance. If Keats was indeed inexperienced in many senses, he was not unfamiliar with death, and I will argue that death is the site of *Endymion*'s most far-reaching transformations. He had lost his father at eight years of age; his mother left at ten, returned, and died when he was fourteen; and his brother Tom was declining over the course of *Endymion*'s composition, only to die within a month of publication. He knew plenty of death, and yet was able to engage the phenomenon, in verse at least, as a metaphysically pliable and contestable concept. However, Keats's poetry often speaks a different language from his prose. Where the poems variously resist and endorse maturational narratives, such narratives are consistently supported by his prefaces and letters, which are fairly obsessed with schemas of development and progress. Indeed, the reading of *Endymion* as a pathologically immature poem began with Keats himself. In his preface, Keats "castigated" the text as "a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished." He declared its foundations "sandy" and deemed it best "that this youngster should die away" while he works at "plotting, and fitting myself for verses fit to live" (*Poems of John Keats* 102). The language recalls the program of Wordsworth's preface to *The Excursion*, which Keats had recently read, and which sought to arrange his corpus of poetry on the model of a "gothic church." But where Wordsworth architecturally framed his early poems as "little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses" within the larger edifice (*Excursion* 38), Keats presents *Endymion* as a living youth disposed to "die away," forecasting his own poem's disappearance. Keats, then, hopes for *Endymion* what its text denies: a conclusive death. Instead, *Endymion* would dominate Keats's reception until the latter nineteenth century, despite his own subsequent attempts to position the poem as a necessary but flawed experiment on the path to greater achievement.

In this respect, *Endymion* chafes against Keats himself. After its composition, he recommitted himself to the logic of development he had broadcast before and after, representing his “castigation” of his own poem as a sign of his maturation.⁸ Keats had a divided relationship to these maturational schemas, which seemed to tow images of procreative virility in their wake. Even as he resisted logics of manhood, he could not entirely forgo the metaphor systems organizing the social and literary world he inhabited. If this world seemed to reject him following the publication of his 1817 *Poems*, *Endymion* would be sure to preemptively reject it. As Marjorie Levinson has argued, Keats was finding ways to make his social alienation the scene of his poetry. *Endymion* is his foremost example of an attempt to carve out a poetic reprieve from the organizing figures of maturation, a massively long epic poem that strives, perhaps hopelessly, to void itself of birth, growth, development, and death.

While Turley makes his case for Keats’s strategically arrested development through concrete particulars (e.g. Keats’s fetishistic fixation on anatomical [rather than metrical] feet), I see *Endymion* invested in a wholesale reprogramming of temporality. What this requires is a conceptual alternative to linear maturation that ties together sexual and narrative deviation. In *The Queer Child*, Kathryn Bond Stockton elaborates the temporal paradoxes that inhere when we

⁸ *Sleep and Poetry*, the concluding statement of 1817’s *Poems*, had declared Keats’s intention to progress from pastoral romances (e.g. *Endymion*) toward mature tragedy (95-125). Keats reprises a version of this schema in *Endymion*’s preface and in his letters, most notably the famous letter to Reynolds that pictures life as “a large Mansion of Many Apartments” (*Letters* 1:280). In life’s second “Chamber of Maiden-Thought,” he explains, “we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight” (1:281). Beyond the second chamber lies confrontation with social and existential plight, the subject of the mature Wordsworthian poet. Keats’s letter seems to place himself in the second chamber, but it also affects an external perspective, surveying the mansion from without. *Endymion*, meanwhile, is dedicated to the absolute supremacy of the second chamber. Indolent “delay” is the poem’s platform: “ardent listlessness,” *Endymion* claims, “might bless / The world with benefits unknowingly”—therefore, best to “let occasion die” (1.825-827, 823). *Endymion* denies the very terms of progression implicit in the chamber metaphor and evacuates the teleology of maturation that grounds it.

try to think about gay childhood, which she likens to a problem of “backward birth.” The child, she reasons, cannot present itself as “gay” since it cannot claim a sexual identity—as James Kincaid among others has argued, sexuality is a central organizing cleavage between the categories of “child” and “adult.” The gay child, then, can only be aware of an embryonic difference, a strangeness that will have become gay only in retrospect. This reversed temporality becomes a paradigm for childhood at large: the temporality of backwards birth “begins to outline, in shadowy form, the pain, closets, emotional labors, sexual motives, and sideways movements that attend all children, however we deny it” (3). “A gay child,” she concludes, “illuminates the darkness of the child,” since, the child as an object of mature discourse is nothing other than adult “*future retroaction*,” nothing other than “the act of adults looking back” (3, 11, 5). Carolyn Steedman’s history of the emergence of psychological interiority converges with Stockton’s account:

The idea of the child was used both to recall and to express the past that each individual life contained: what was turned inside in the course of individual development was that which was also latent: the child *was* the story waiting to be told. (11)

For Stockton, once the adult can say what it has been, the gay child no longer exists. And once sexuality can be named and claimed, the richly confused particularities by which the child experienced and figured its own queerness are extinguished. Those particularities of expression, in the form of metaphorical substitutions and imaginative ploys, define Stockton’s notion of “growing sideways,” which locates “energy, pleasure, vitality, and (e)motion in the back-and-forth of connections and extensions that are not reproductive” (13).

“Growing sideways” thus explores the figuration of polymorphous perversities that are variously restricted from or incapable of mature sexual consummation, including fetishism. This

phenomenon resonates with the phenomenon of Keats since, although it would be distortive in numerous senses to term Keats “gay,” James Najarian has argued that his poetics did provide a language for male writers working through various forms of vexed desire over the course of the nineteenth century and beyond. William Michael Rossetti, for example, worried that Keats was “manifestly tending to the irregular,” finding in his “minor poems” an “unmistakable twang of erotic laxity” (132). This sensuality conveyed only “a specious interest in heterosexual participation,” as Najarian suggests: “Keats is made to seem aroused and unclassifiably indecent” (33). Keatsian indecency was variously canvassed as gender instability, as immaturity, and as infection—his death read backwards into his verse. In the process of mythological consolidation, Keats’s consumption was translated into a consequence of his sensuality and effeminacy, which were circularly found to be the symptoms of his disease.⁹ He was his own etiology. In this context, Keats’s “indeterminate and free-flowing eroticism” became the diseased medium through which a tradition of male Victorian writers formed and articulated their own “irregular” desires (37). It is for this reason Najarian argues that Keats “has an important role in the invention of the homosexual” (25).

Against Education

These schemas of retrospective construction are foundational to the Keats myth, which imagines an alternate history of what might have been to elegize what never was. While the Keats myth assumes a consistent trajectory of maturation, its own chronological movement is supremely irregular, which is why the promise of Keats is, in a strict sense, the stuff of fantasy.

⁹ Charles Brown, Joseph Severn, and Charles Cowden Clarke all understood Keats’s disease as a manifestation of emotional and psychological strain (whether professional, romantic, or otherwise), rather than a matter of epidemiology and infection. See *Keats Circle* 2:239, 1:166, 1:201, 2:129-130.

Endymion's sideways growth, shaped by cyclical and reversion, is an extreme instance of dynamics intrinsic to the romance genre, which Patricia Parker has characterized as "a form which simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective, or object" (4). However, whatever its whimsies and caprices, the conventional romance is not without pedagogical or didactic value—it is, essentially, a narrative of growth striving toward consummation. *Endymion* by contrast is organized to defeat any possibility of learning from experience, which is how it proceeds with actually progressing. At the opening of the second book, with 3,000 lines still to come, the narrator is already gently mocking the aimlessness of his "Brain-sick shepherd prince":

What promise hast thou faithful guarded since
The day of sacrifice? Or, have new sorrows
Come with the constant dawn upon thy morrows? (2.43-46)

Teasing the prospect of some development, however minor, in the form of "new sorrows" to mourn, the next line quashes those hopes: "Alas! 'tis his old grief" (2.47). The next 80 lines illustrate this cycle of frustrated development. As Endymion idly wanders through a luxuriant, synaesthetic glade, a "wild rose tree" suddenly "Pavilions him in bloom" (2.55-56). He is hopelessly subject to stimulation, less an observer moving through an object world than just one object among others, driven by an agentless inertia that lacks any of the predictability of Newton's gravity. Once the tree's bud "snares his fancy," he plucks it and dips it in the water, and it blooms into a golden butterfly. Enrapt, Endymion absorbs the butterfly's lightness and becomes suddenly buoyant, following it for 25 lines to a "splashing fountain," from which it drinks and disappears. This is the theory of "sympathetic touch" in action: desire provokes transformative contact, subject and object trade positions and agencies. In place of the carefully

orchestrated feints, juxtapositions, and ironies of the odes to come, *Endymion* revels in a discomfiting, claustrophobic lack of distance and control. After the golden butterfly's capricious appearance and disappearance, a nymph materializes, assuring Endymion that she would give anything to help him. Unfortunately, all she can do is tell him that he must "wander far"—as he has been—to transcend "mortal steps, before thou canst be ta'en / [...] / Into the gentle bosom of thy love" (2.123-127). Why? How? She doesn't know. "Farewel!" He thus resumes the "brood[ing]" this interlude had interrupted (2.132). This is an example of what Andrew Bennett describes as the relinquishing of "end, objective, or object," giving rise to a "scandal of exploded form," a "*reductio ad absurdum* of the dilation of narrative" (*Keats, Narrative and Audience* 74). There is nothing to be gleaned in the form of knowledge from this episode, nothing Endymion can take with him on his journey. It just happens.

The next episode, the poem's absurdist take on the trope of the journey to the underworld, is expanded in scope but similar in structure to the butterfly passage. In the midst of Endymion's brooding, a voice "borne" from a "deep cavern" strikes him, and he is "froze to senseless stone" (2.199-200). The voice commands him to descend, and he obeys. At first he is beguiled by the underworld's sublime scenery and sumptuous treasures, but when the "new wonders" cease, he soon finds himself trapped in an unbearable intimacy with a "hated thing": "The journey homeward to habitual self!" (2.274-280). The next line revises this journey into "A mad-pursuing of the fog-born elf," paring away the all-too-familiar "self" to glimpse a fugitive core of fairy deception (2.277). This existential scheme—the elf inside the self—is represented through the arbitrary serendipity of language at the level of the word. The iconic resemblance in play here is doubled by the verse's descent (we are in the underworld, after all) down the line

from self to elf. This profoundly uneventful trip then quickly concludes, as Endymion desperately petitions his moon goddess, and by her blessing, he soon discovers the exit. If in the classical tradition the journey to the underworld orients the hero with a sense of destiny and self-knowledge, here Endymion finds only confusion and self-evacuation.

As the text nears the lip of its 4,000-line container, its methods of deferral become increasingly baroque. By the fourth book, Endymion has helplessly collided with an “Indian maid,” the human incarnation of a goddess who happens to be the moon (though he doesn’t know this), and he falls in love yet again. All that remains is for him to realize that each of these figures is in fact the same being. In the midst of this indirection, Endymion and the Indian maid are flying toward the heavens on winged horses. Meanwhile the deity Sleep has been dreaming of Endymion’s marriage in heaven. Upon waking, Sleep flies in the same direction as the lovers in order to dutifully make his appearance, soon overrunning the couple. As Sleep engulfs them in his mists, they’re knocked unconscious and sent adrift, suspending the very event Sleep had foreseen. The narrative circles into a constricting loop, distending toward its line-count goal by consuming itself. Approaching the finish line, the narrative nods.

Knowledge assumes a certain degree of stability: things that are true must remain true, or change in consistent ways, or according to a consistent inconsistency. Yet no law, moral or physical, seem to govern the worlds through which Endymion passes, beyond the movement of desire toward its objects—and even this proves halting. Thus, the poem’s “events” have little apparent relation to what precedes and what follows. Anything might transform into anything else, guided and constrained by the play of language rather than worldly relations. Processes of development are shattered by contingency, suggestive of a Humean nightmare in which causes

are disjointed from effects. The situation evokes Anahid Nersessian's discussion of "nescience," rendered as

the cognitive expression of irony: the painful or unsettling sense that there is no meaningful link between what is known and what can be known, or what has taken place and what might take place. ("Two Gardens" 215)

Nescience accompanies the onset of calamity, as a disruption of certitude that might yet open a space for the remaking of knowledge, especially in its relationship to action. It is an interval of unlearning, which *Endymion* dilates as far as it can. The result is a rigorously unstable world that curtails the possibility of knowing in advance.

In a world of calamitous metaphysical instability, birth and death come unmoored from their defining biological and hereditary frameworks to become generic figures of transport. *Endymion* frames an antitype to the *Bildungsroman*, the genre charged with narrativizing maturation into an ultimately coherent process. Franco Moretti has argued that the *Bildungsroman* is a "comfort of civilization," generating a historical justification for the world as it is, and thus fashioning the world as a home for both characters and readers. Yet *Endymion*'s depiction of the present state of affairs withholds any reconciliation to the shared world of common experience. It opts out of the narrativization of growth that, according to Moretti, anchors life in a homely world held in common. Often, the poem's deviations are staged by quite literally uprooting that ground, scrambling cardinal directions in a riot of inversions. Height and highness were especially sensitive notions for Keats,¹⁰ and he depicts the puffed ascendancy of the powerful in aggressively vertical terms:

¹⁰ Exhibits include his admission to Marian and Sarah Jeffrey, "I being somewhat stunted am taken for nothing," and his complaint about a positive review of Byron's work ("you see what it is to be six foot tall and a lord!") set against his own self-conscious measure: "Mister John Keats five feet high" (*Letters* 1:291, 1:342).

time, to engage in real agon, to actually assert himself—perhaps even heroically. And the bare bones of Glaucus’s subplot suggest the outline of a cautionary tale, warning Endymion of the dangers of seduction, infidelity, and especially female sexuality. But the episode ends up dissolving any redeemable pedagogical value. What remains is a challenge to the sexual and poetic distinction between mastery and submission fetishized not only by the Tory traditionalists, but also by Keats’s allies like Hunt and Reynolds.

When he first comes upon Glaucus—ancient in “forelorn hermitage,” with wand at hand—Endymion is terrified (3.227). Glaucus’s cloak is especially foreboding, pictured as a densely-confused text,

O’erwrought with symbols by the deepest groans
 Of ambitious magic
 [...]
 Were emblem’d in the woof: with every shape
 That skims, or dives, or sleeps, ‘twixt cape and cape. (3.198-204)

But as he approaches, Endymion sees that Glaucus weeps, and sympathy takes over: “Lo! his heart ‘gan warm / With pity” (3.282-283). It’s not that Endymion learns to read the markings of Glaucus’s cloak, or that he arrives rationally at some basic recognition of his humanity. Instead, Glaucus’s tears induce an automated change of heart via the mechanisms of sensibility, guaranteed by the absolute fidelity of the body—as John Mullan writes, thought to be “powerful because it is not spoken,” unlike speech, with its infinite capacity for deceit (61). Glaucus then tells his tale: he had loved the nymph Scylla, and pursued her to no end. Distressed, he sought the enchanter Circe’s aid, but when he went to find Circe he instead awoke in a bower, enrapt by “The fairest face that morn e’er look’d upon” (3.424). Henceforth, “I bow’d a tranced vassal,” and Scylla was forgotten (3.460). One morning, Glaucus comes upon his new lover on a throne

of roots, surrounded by deformed minions, and discovers her to be none other than the enchanter Circe. He flees, and she taunts him in feminizing, infantilizing terms that anticipate Keats's critics:

Ha! Ha! Sir Dainty! there must be a nurse
 Made of rose leaves and thistledown, express,
 To cradle thee, my sweet, and dull thee: yes,
 I am too flinty-hard for thy nice touch:
 My tenderest squeeze is but a giant's clutch.
 So, fairy-thing, it shall have lullabies
 Unheard of yet; and it shall still its cries
 Upon some breast more lily-feminine. (3.570-577)

Glaucus's retelling makes it sound as if he should have known he was being deceived "with tears, and smiles, and honey-words"—he should have known that his seducer was a mere "arbitrary queen of sense," and should have remained faithful to Scylla (3.426, 3.459). But Glaucus's seduction is no different from Endymion's sexual (or quasi-sexual) encounters, which in each case lead to self-torment over his love for Diana, the goddess of the moon. These encounters unfold in the same vocabulary of tears, smiles, and "the honey-feel of bliss." They similarly dispossess Endymion of rational sense and suspend his agency, weaving, just as Circe does, "A net whose thralldom was more bliss than all / The range of flower'd Elysium" (3.427-428). It just happens to turn out that each of Endymion's lovers is a differing incarnation of the moon goddess to whom he has dedicated himself, so he has been faithful by accident. To refuse what seemed like adultery would have in fact been a mistake. Judgment is out of the question. Similarly, where Glaucus's tears reveal his beneficent nature to Endymion, Circe's tears work to entrap Glaucus. No less than speech, the natural language of the heart is subject to counterfeit.¹¹

¹¹ Cf. *Ecclesiastes* 7:26: "And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her." Glaucus's fate is indeed "more bitter than death," and his recounting dwells on the language of "snares

What follows is equally devoid of instruction. Glaucus's punishment is to live enchained for a thousand years before perishing, to "live and wither, cripple and still breathe," and Circe kills Scylla for good measure (3.597). Glaucus buries her under the sea and bides his time until he receives a prophecy that tells of Endymion's coming. Endymion qualifies for this role by virtue of being "*A youth, by heavenly power lov'd and led*" (3.708). He is chosen because, tautologically, he is already chosen. The same susceptible bent that Circe mocks in Glaucus renders the duly-bound Endymion the "*youth elect*" (3.710). Endymion in turn redeems Glaucus because he is his repetition: "We are twin brothers in this destiny!" (3.713). There is nothing Endymion can learn from Glaucus's suffering. Everything is fated, nothing is consequential. Despite its repeated engagements with the theme of subjugation, *Endymion* is aggressively uninterested in making any conceptual distinction between glorious masochistic pleasure and mere abject servitude. There is nothing to distinguish Diana's benevolent arbitrary power and from Circe's tyrannical arbitrary power—beyond the fact that the former is desired and the latter is not. Bondage and imprisonment are certainly not the issue, as the climax of the Glaucus episode demonstrates. After he and Endymion perform an obscure ritual, Glaucus is returned to youth, and his love Scylla is revived along with all of the sea's drowned lovers. A revelry ensues, featuring reenactments of Glaucus's thousand-year bondage:

In harmless tendril they each other chain'd,
And strove who should be smother'd deepest in
Fresh crush of leaves (3.935-937)

and nets." Keats would have found one classical setting for the link between sweetness, enchantment, and death in George Chapman's translation of *The Odyssey* (1616), which Keats extolled in his famed sonnet "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer." Chapman gave the sirens "sweet accents that made charms so strong," rendering their singing "the sweetest strain / That ever open'd an enamour'd vein" (414). Keats's Circe is of course modeled on Homer's Circe, and the latter tells Odysseus how to survive the sirens, so these passages were very likely in the mix as Keats wrote the third book of *Endymion*.

Glaucus's tragedy is repeated as Dionysian farce. Love emerges not as the antidote to enslavement, but as its authentic form.

Worlds without Death

The revival of the drowned lovers is only one instance of *Endymion's* thoroughgoing disregard for the permanence of death. This indifference to death is the central mechanism of its refusal of posterity. Indeed, as the poem ambles toward conclusion, Keats hazards a parodic rewriting of the supreme representation of Death in English poetry—Milton's depiction in *Paradise Lost*, upheld by Edmund Burke as the paradigm of poetic sublimity:

The other shape,
If shape it might be call'd that had none
Distinguishable in member, joynt, or limb,
Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,
For each seem'd either; black it stood as Night
Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,
And shook a dreadful Dart; what seem'd his head
The likeness of a Kingly Crown had on. (2.666-673)

But where Death's obscurity is wrapped in black on black, supplemented by the iconography of the sovereign, Keats offers instead a vision of Sleep in rose and amethyst:

His litter of smooth semiluculent mist,
Diversley ting'd with rose and amethyst,
Puzzled those eyes that for the centre sought;
And scarcely for one moment could be caught
His sluggish form reposing motionless. (4.385-389)

Translating monochrome death into technicolor sleep shifts Death's sublimity ("terrible as Hell") toward the innocuous, feminine beautiful, while retaining the indistinction and obscurity of the sublime. Sleep thus retains death's form without its grand finality, substituting harmlessly

“puzzled” respite for the sublime terror of demise. There is no death, only sleep, and by extension, no end, only suspension and deferral.

Endymion has long been read as an anticipation of Percy Shelley’s *Adonais*—or rather, *Adonais* is understood to trope Keats in terms that Keats had developed in *Endymion*. In Lucy Newlyn’s view, for example, when Shelley’s *Adonais* made “death at the hands of hostile reviewers the signifier of eternal life at the hands of sympathetic readers,” Shelley was seizing on a tendency toward self-effacement already present in Keats’s text (32). More broadly, Keats’s artful diffusions of identity—his “Negative Capability”—invited the martyr makeover Shelley administered with such righteous ardor. “He is a portion of the loveliness / Which once he made more lovely”: Keats becomes his own thing of beauty, to be enjoyed forever—on Shelley’s terms (379-380). Shelley’s version of Keats’s immortality, beaconing from the “inmost veil of heaven,” is wholly predicated on death’s finitude. *Endymion* by turn develops a sense of beauty beyond life and death that runs on its own indifferent rhythm. *Adonais* consolidates the shifting sexual and maturational logics of *Endymion* into an image of Keats as abjectly infantile and feminine. It seizes upon *Endymion*’s imagery but discards its metaphysics, in the process affirming the framework of Keats’s Tory critics.

Shelley pictures the fading Keats in Rome,

where kingly Death
Keeps his pale court in beauty and decay,
He came; and bought, with price of purest breath,
A grave among the eternal.—Come away!
Haste, while the vault of blue Italian day
Is yet his fitting charnel-roof! while still
He lies, as if in dewy sleep he lay;
Awake him not! Surely he takes his fill
Of deep and liquid rest, forgetful of all ill. (55-63)

Keats has become the Adonis he depicted in *Endymion*. That sleeping, embowered Adonis was, in Karen Swann's words, "one in a series of boys, boys, boys—mute, self-enclosed, and infinitely seductive, all officiously displayed to the filled sight" (23). In the sexualized logic of prone, fainting beauty, Keats's proximity to death's door is itself a spur to desire. Keats's friend Benjamin Bailey complained that *Endymion* adopted "that abominable principle of *Shelley's*—that *Sensual Love* is the principle of *things*" (*Keats Circle* 1:35). But the Shelley of *Adonais* shades this sense of desire as "that unrest which men miscall delight"—an unrest most damaging to frail Keats, whom death in effect saved from the torment of desire: "Can touch him not and torture not again" (354-355). In Shelley's vision, death delivered Keats from himself, even as it foreclosed his future. This is to read Keats back to front, as a "poet of death" whose life becomes a monument to its own end.

But if death is already with Shelley's Keats, it never arrives for *Endymion*. Keats's poem eludes Shelley's "kingly Death" and the "charnel-roof" of Italian sky, along with the many readings of Keats that follow in Shelley's funereal footsteps. When *Endymion* revives the thousands of lovers drowned at sea, the poem seems to preempt Shelley's passage:

And, as he pass'd, each lifted up its head,
As doth a flower at Apollo's touch.
Death felt it to his inwards: 'twas too much:
Death fell a weeping in his charnel-house.
The Latmian [*Endymion*] persever'd along, and thus
All were reanimated. (3.785-790)

Now it's not Keats but death alone who occupies the "charnel-house." Death ceases to bind; death *dies*. The charnel house is the place where individual skeletons become indistinct piles of bones. When *Endymion* revives the drowned lovers, he reconnects dissolving matter to its individual particularity. The drowned are repersonalized.

This undoing of death repeats throughout the poem—Endymion is said to die or nearly die twelve times, plus another five or six “swoons” that threaten fatality. Endymion himself is perplexed by his uncanny persistence:

Why am I not as are the dead,
 Since to a woe like this I have been led
 Through the dark earth, and through the wondrous sea? (4.89-91)

The answer is that death does not exist in any recognizable sense. It’s simply another change of state, variously linked to sleep, distress, and sexual climax, sapped of stability and finality. The narrative, by turn, is evacuated of the drama of mortality. In chapter four, I argued that Blake’s *Book of Thel* pictures a world in which death is horrifically incomplete. Thel cannot bear the prospect that though death might extinguish her consciousness, the stuff of her material being will persist, to be churned through the gears of nature’s machinery until the end of time. In *Endymion*, the problem takes a different form. Keats’s poem is aggressively indifferent to the philosophical distinctions between thought and matter that Blake’s critique engages. The very idea of life as a linear, closed interval of time ending in death has little purchase in a world without causality, where chronology comes unbound from the figures of line or circle that have traditionally defined its operations. With every “death” Endymion awakes unchanged and resumes his vocation, which consists solely of experiencing desire.

Keats is playing with a tradition of interweaving Eros and Thanatos that would include (in its English incarnations) Shakespeare’s sonnets and *Paradise Lost*, and features prominently in the culture of sensibility. In Milton’s epic, Adam announces to Eve,

I with thee have fixt my Lot,
 Certain to undergoe like doom, if Death
 Consort with thee, death is to mee as Life. (9.952-954)

Adam must have Eve in order to live, yet in having her he must die. The conceptual inversions brought on by the Fall knot together desire, life, and death. *Endymion* takes the proximity of these concepts very, very seriously, to the point that they become interchangeable. The poem retains the aesthetics of deathliness but severs its link to finitude, outlining a vision, in Marlon Ross's words, of "mortality without the finality of death" ("Beyond the Fragmented Word" 115). With Milton, *Endymion*'s love is conceived as a kind of death, but this is a death that reverts immediately back into life:

there's not a sound,
Melodious howsoever, can confound
The heavens and earth in one to such a death
As doth the voice of love: there's not a breath
Will mingle kindly with the meadow air,
Till it has panted round, and stolen a share
Of passion from the heart!— (4.79-85)

Love's voice confounds the gap between the heavens and earth, edging the lover toward death. However, the conventional verse procession from breath to death is reversed, as Keats's phrasing rushes breathlessly through two enjambments, stopping not at death but at love.¹² Breath takes on its own living autonomy, mingling and circulating until it claims its share "Of passion from the heart!" It is love and not the lover that speaks. Lovers appear only as the shadows of the breaths, pants, loves, and deaths that do the grammatical work. In the poem's thesis, love is "self-

¹² Cf. Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* 929-930 (both titular figures feature in *Endymion*) and Wordsworth's "We Are Seven" 1-4 (discussed in chapter three). In both cases breath rhymes into death, which is to say that death is the breath of life's inevitable counterpart and destination. The trope appears again in *Romeo and Juliet*, where Romeo addresses the (seemingly) dead Juliet: "Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath, / Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty" (5.3.92-93). Death is pictured as a rival suitor whose consummation nevertheless fails to impinge upon Juliet's desirability—indeed, death might easily be read as a catalyst of desire in this scene. And since Juliet's death is at this point a ruse, attention is focused not on the empirical actuality of death, but rather on the way that the idea of death structures love.

destroying” (1.799). Life is thus propelled by the repetition of “deaths,” ambiguously sexual and yet neither strictly figurative nor final. Death is not an absolute, but rather a rhetorical and figural opening. If this moment draws on the convention of *la petite mort*, the poem also reverses the figure to transform death into a kind of orgasm. Endymion’s love vows take on “a most fearful tone, / Like one repenting in his latest moan,” sprinkling the solemnity of the last rites with erotic excess (4.323-324). In a world of disordered and incessant creation, desire becomes a force of conception detached from human biology, and even from life. Birth and death lose all metaphysical privilege as organizing principles, collapsing into markers of change in a world of constant change.

Disjointing causes from effects, *Endymion* frustrates mechanisms of aperture and closure, birth and death. *Endymion*’s world disarms the sociosexual schema that distributed poetic authority through figures of procreative virility. Measured against these criteria, Keats knew he was doomed. By evacuating sexuality of consummation and procreation, and voiding death of finality, *Endymion* offers a prescient challenge not only to the politics of reception in his present moment, but also to the logics of poetic posterity that would birth his own “posthumous existence” (*Letters* 2:359). If recent scholarship has sought to replace the virtual Keats of lost promise with an actual poet of real achievement, *Endymion*’s unworking of time suggests a more outlandish possibility. By imagining existence without beginning or end, *Endymion* encourages us to ask—impossibly—what it might mean to read Keats in the absence of his death. It wonders how the time of poetry might scan beyond the rhythms of living and dying, extending outward to the moment “when this planet’s sphering time doth close” (2.251).

REFERENCE LIST

- Addison, Joseph, and Richard Steele. *The Spectator*. Ed. Donald F. Bond. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965. 5 vols.
- Aikin, Lucy. *The Life of Joseph Addison*. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1843. 2 vols.
- Ariés, Philippe. *The Hour of Our Death*. Trans. Helen Weaver. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1981.
- . *Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*. Trans. Patricia M. Ranum. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.
- Arnold, Matthew. *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*. Ed. Kenneth Allot. New York: Barnes, 1965.
- Bacon, Francis. *Novum Organum*. Ed. and trans. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath. *The Works of Francis Bacon*. Vol. 8. Boston: Taggard and Thompson, 1863.
- Baier, Annette. *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Barbault, Anna Letitia. *Selected Poetry and Prose*. Ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2002.
- Barker-Benfield, G. J. *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Barnard, John. "Leigh Hunt and Charles Cowden Clarke, 1812-18." *Leigh Hunt: Life, Poetics, Politics*. Ed. Nicholas Roe. New York: Routledge, 2003. 32-57.
- Barnard, Nicolas. *The Case of John Atherton, Bishop of Waterford in Ireland; Who Was Convicted of the Sin of Uncleanness with a COW, and other Creatures; for which he was Hang'd at Dublin, December the 5th, 1640*. London: Edmund Curll, 1710.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Trans. Iain Hamilton Grant. London: Sage, 1993.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Mortality, Immortality, & Other Life Strategies*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.

- Beattie, James. *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism*. Edinburgh: Kincaid and Bell, 1770.
- Behrendt, Stephen C. *Reading William Blake*. London: MacMillan, 1992.
- Bell, Jeffrey. *Deleuze's Hume: Philosophy, Culture, and the Scottish Enlightenment*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.
- Bell, Martin. "Transcendental Empiricism? Deleuze's Reading of Hume." *Impressions of Hume*. Ed. Marina Frasca-Spada. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 95-106.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov." *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.
- Bennett, Andrew. *Keats, Narrative and Audience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- . *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Bentham, Jeremy. *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*. Ed. John Bowring. Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.
- Bevan-Jones, Robert. *The Ancient Yew: A History of Taxus Baccata*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002.
- Bewell, Alan. *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
- "Biographical Particulars of Celebrated Persons Lately Deceased." *New Monthly Magazine* 3 (1821): 255-258.
- [Blacklock, Thomas.] Letter. *Weekly Magazine* 13 (25 July 1771): 97-102.
- Blackstone, William. *Blackstone's Commentaries*. Philadelphia: Burch and Small, 1803.
- Blackwell, Mark. "Preposterous Hume." *Theory and Practice in the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Alexander Dick and Christina Lupton. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008. 87-108.
- Blake, William. *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*. Ed. David Erdman. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.---. *The Early Illuminated Books*. Ed. Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi. London: William Blake Trust, 1993.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *Thomas the Obscure*. Trans. Robert Lambertson. New York: Station Hill

Press, 1988.

Boswell, James. *Boswell in Extremes, 1776-1778*. Ed. Charles M. Weis and Frederick A. Pottle. New York: McGraw Hill, 1970.

---. *Boswell's Life of Johnson*. Ed. G. B. Hill and L. F. Powell. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-64. 6 vols.

Box, M. A. *The Suasive Art of David Hume*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Brown, Thomas. *Observations on the Nature and Tendency of the Doctrine of Mr. Hume*. Edinburgh: Mundell, 1806.

Brownell, Morris R. "Like Socrates': Pope's Art of Dying." *SEL* 20 (1980): 407-429.

[Bulwer-Lytton, Edward.] "The True Spirit of Religious Poetry." *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 35 (1832): 147-153.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Ed. J. T. Boulton. London: Routledge, 1959.

---. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien. New York: Penguin, 2004.

Burke, G. John. "Kirk and Causality in Edinburgh, 1805." *Isis* 61.3 (1970): 340-354.

Burnet, Gilbert, Robert Parsons, and Samuel Johnson. *Some Passages in the Life and Death of John Earl of Rochester, Written by his own Direction on his Death-bed by Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury. With a Sermon, Preached, at the Funeral of the said Earl, by the Rev. Robert Parsons, To this Edition is prefixed Some Account of the Life and Writing of the Earl of Rochester, By Dr. Samuel Johnson*. London: T. Davies, 1782.

Burton, Richard. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Ed. Holbrook Jackson. New York: New York Review of Books, 2001.

Bushell, Sally. *Re-Reading The Excursion: Narrative, Response, and the Wordsworthian Dramatic Voice*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2002.

Byron, George Gordon. *Don Juan. The Major Works*. Ed. Jerome J. McGann. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. 373-879.

---. *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals*. Ed. Rowland E. Prothero. London: Murray, 1898-1901. 6 vols.

- Campbell, George. *A Dissertation on Miracles*. London: Thomas Tegg, 1824.
- Cannadine, David. "War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain." *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*. Ed. Joachim Whaley. New York: Routledge, 1981. 187-242.
- Casanova, Jose. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Castle, Terry. *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Caulfeild, James. *Memoires of the Political and Private Life of James Caulfeild*. Ed. Francis Hardy. London: Cadell and Davies, 1810.
- Cavendish, A. P. *David Hume*. New York: Dover, 1968.
- Chandler, James. *An Archaeology of Sympathy: The Sentimental Mode in Literature and Cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Cheyne, George. *The English Malady: or, a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of All Kinds*. London: 1733.
- Childe, V. Gordon. "Directional Changes in Funerary Practices During 50,000 Years." *Man* 45 (1945): 13-19.
- Chorley, Henry F. *Memoirs of Mrs. Hemans*. London: Saunders and Otley, 1836. 2 vols.
- Christensen, Jerome. *Practicing Enlightenment: Hume and the Formation of a Literary Career*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.
- Clark, Timothy. *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001.
- Clarke, Charles Cowden. *Recollections of Writers*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1878.
- Clarke, Norma. *Ambitious Heights: Writing, Friendship, Love: The Jewsbury Sisters, Felicia Hemans, and Jane Carlyle*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Clarke, Samuel. *Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in this Later Age*. London: Thomas Simmons, 1683.
- Clune, Michael. *Writing Against Time*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.

Cockburn, Henry. *Memorials of His Time*. Edinburgh: Black, 1856.

“Cockney, n. and adj.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2015. Web. 18 September 2016.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Collected Works*. Ed. Kathleen Coburn. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971-2002. 16 vols.

---. *The Friend: A Series of Essays*. London: 1812.

[Conder, Josiah.] “Poetical Remains of the Late Mrs. Hemans.” *The Eclectic Review* 16 (1836): 31-45.

---. “Scenes and Hymns of Life, with Other Religious Poems.” *The Eclectic Review* 12 (1834): 178-180.

Connolly, Tristanne J. *William Blake and the Body*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Cox, Jeffrey N. *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Cragwall, Jasper. *Lake Methodism: Polite Literature and Popular Religion in England, 1780-1830*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013.

Critchley, Simon. *The Book of Dead Philosophers*. New York: Vintage, 2008.

---. *Very Little... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

[Croker, John Wilson.] “Endymion: A Poetic Romance.” *The Quarterly Review* 19 (1818): 204-208.

Culler, Jonathan. *Theory of the Lyric*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.

D’Israeli, Isaac. *An Essay on the Manners and Genius of the Literary Character*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1795.

---. *Miscellanies; Or, Literary Recreations*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1796.

“The Daintiest of Poets—Keats.” *Victoria Magazine* 15 (1870): 55-67.

De Man, Paul. “Introduction.” *The Selected Poetry of Keats*. Ed. Paul de Man. New York: New American Library, 1966. xi-xxxvi.

- . "The Lyrical Voice in Contemporary Theory: Riffaterre and Jauss." *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*. Ed. Chaviva Hošek and Patricia Parker. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985. 55-72.
- . *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- De Staël-Holstein, Anne Louise Germaine. *Germany*. Vol. 1. London: John Murray, 1813.
- [Defoe, Daniel.] *A Hymn to the Funeral Sermon*. London, 1703.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*. Trans. Constantin V. Boundas. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Deslandes, André-Francois. *A Philosophical Essay: Or, Reflections on the Deaths of Free-Thinkers*. London: Baker, 1713.
- Dick, Thomas. *On the Improvement of Society by the Diffusion of Knowledge*. London: W. Collins, 1833.
- Dollimore, Jonathan. *Death, Desire, and Loss in Western Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Duncan, Ian. *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Dunton, John. *The Hazard of a Death-Bed-Repentance*. London, 1708.
- Dwyer, John. *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland*. Edinburgh: Donald, 1987.
- Eaves, Morris. "On Blakes We Want and Blakes We Don't." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 58.3 (1995): 413-439.
- Effinger, Elizabeth. "Or Wilt Thou Go Ask the Mole': (Con)Figuring the Feminine in Blake's *TheL*." *Blake, Gender, and Culture*. Ed. Helen P. Bruder and Tristanne J. Connolly. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012. 123-131.
- Elfenbein, Andrew. *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Eubanks, Kevin. "Minerva's Veil: Hemans, Critics, and the Construction of Gender." *European Romantic Review* 8 (Fall 1997): 341-359.
- Fay, Elizabeth. "Introduction: Passion in a Barren Field." *Romantic Passions*. Ed Elizabeth Fay. Romantic Circles Praxis Series, 1998.

- Ferguson, Frances. *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.
- Fieser, James, ed. *Early Responses to Hume*. Bristol: Thoemmes, 2005. 10 vols.
- Final Triumph, or Dying Sayings of Saints, Martyrs, and Men and Women of Note, from the Second to the Nineteenth Century*. London: Nisbet, 1893.
- Fisher, Peter F. *The Valley of Vision: Blake as Prophet and Revolutionary*. Ed. Northrop Frye. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961.
- Fosso, Kurt. *Buried Communities: Wordsworth and the Bond of Mourning*. New York: SUNY Press, 2003.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Economic Problem of Masochism." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 19. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1957. 157-170.
- . *The Ego and the Id*. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 19. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1957. 12-66.
- . "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 14. Trans. and Ed. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1957. 14:243-258.
- Fry, Paul. *A Defense of Poetry: Reflections on the Occasion of Writing*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- . *Wordsworth and the Poetry of What We Are*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Frye, Northrop. *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947.
- Furneaux, Robin. *William Wilberforce*. London: Hamilton, 1974.
- Garlitz, Barbara. "The Immortality Ode: Its Cultural Progeny." *SEL* 6.4 (1966): 639-649.
- Gibbon, Edward. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1840.
- Gilfillan, George. "Female Authors. No. 1.—Mrs. Hemans." *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 14 (1847): 359-363.

- . "Mrs. Hemans." *Modern Literature and Literary Men: Being a Gallery of Literary Portraits*. New York: D. Appleton, 1850. 229-239.
- Gleckner, Robert F. *The Piper and the Bard: A Study of William Blake*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1959.
- Goldberg, Brian. *The Lake Poets and Professional Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Graile, John. *Vigorous Longevity; or, A good old age, and the best way, both to Attain it; and to Improve it*. London: John Wyat, 1720.
- Graves, Robert Perceval. *Life of Sir William Rowan Hamilton*. Vol. 1. Dublin: Dublin University Press, 1882.
- Grundy, Isobel. "A Writer of Lives Looks at Death." *Modern Language Review* 79.2 (1984): 257-265.
- Hallam, Arthur Henry. "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry: and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson." *Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*. Ed. Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundle. Orchard Park: Broadview Press, 2005. 1190-1205.
- Harding, Anthony John. "Felicia Hemans and the Effacement of Woman." *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*. Ed. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995. 138-149.
- Hartman, Geoffrey. *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.
- Hazlitt, William. "Character of Mr Wordsworth's New Poem, The Excursion." *The Examiner* 348 (August 1814): 555-558.
- . *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*. Ed. P. P. Howe. London: Dent, 1930-34. 21 vols.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996.
- Hemans, Felicia. "Despondency and Aspiration." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 37 (1835): 793-795.
- . "German Studies." *New Monthly Magazine* 40 (January 1834): 1-8.
- . *Scenes and Hymns of Life, with Other Religious Poems*. London: Blackwood and Cadell, 1834.

- Heywood, Oliver. *The Rev. Oliver Heywood, B.A., 1603-1702: His Autobiography, Diaries, Anecdotes, and Event Books*. Ed. J. Horsfall Turner. Bingley: T. Harrison, 1882-5.
- Hilton, Nelson. *Literal Imagination: Blake's Vision of Words*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983.
- [Horne, George.] *A Letter to Adam Smith LL.D. on the Life, Death, and Philosophy of his Friend David Hume Esq. By One of the People Called Christians*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1777.
- Houlbrooke, Ralph. *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480-1750*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- House, Erwin. "Sketch of Mrs. Hemans." *The Ladies' Repository* 9 (1849): 10-13.
- Hume, David. *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*. Ed. Dorothy Coleman. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- . *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. Peter Millican. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- . *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Ed. Tom Beauchamp. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- . *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*. Ed. Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985.
- . *The Letters of David Hume*. Ed. J. Y. T. Grieg. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. 2 vols.
- . *My Own Life*. In Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980. 611-615.
- . *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*. London: Millar, 1748.
- . *A Treatise of Human Nature: A Critical Edition*. Ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. 2 vols.
- Hunt, Leigh. *An Attempt to Show the Folly and Danger of Methodism*. London: John Hunt, 1809.
- . *Imagination and Fancy; Or Selections from the English Poets*. London: Smith, Elder, 1844.
- . *Lord Byron and some of His Contemporaries*. London: H. Colburn, 1828.

- Hutchings, Kevin D. "Every Thing that Lives...": Anthropocentrism, Ecology, and *The Book of Thel*." *Wordsworth Circle* 28.3 (1997): 166-177.
- Huxley, Leonard. *The Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley*. London: D. Appleton, 1913. 2 vols.
- Iser, Wolfgang. *The Fictive and the Imaginary*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
- Israel, Jonathan. *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Jackson, Virginia and Yopie Prins. "Lyrical Studies." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27.2 (1999): 521-530.
- Jacobus, Mary. *Romantic Things: A Tree, a Rock, a Cloud*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Jager, Colin. "Literary Enchantment and Literary Opposition from Hume to Scott." *Secular Faith*. Ed. Vincent W. Lloyd and Elliot A. Ratzman. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011. 168-196.
- . *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
- Jalland, Pat. *Death in the Victorian Family*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Jarvis, Simon. "Archaist-Innovators: The Couplet from Churchill to Browning." *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*. Ed. Charles Mahoney. Oxford: Blackwell, 2011. 25-43.
- Jeffrey, Francis. "The Excursion, Being a Portion of the Recluse, a Poem." *The Edinburgh Review* 47 (1830): 1-30.
- . "Felicia Hemans." *The Edinburgh Review* 50 (1830): 32-47.
- . "Thalaba, the Destroyer." *The Edinburgh Review* 1 (1802): 63-83.
- Johnson, Samuel. "Enthusiasm." *A Dictionary of the English Language*. London: Strahan, 1755. 2 vols.
- . "An Essay on Epitaphs." *Gentleman's Magazine* 10 (1740): 593-596.
- . *Lives of the English Poets*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905.

- . *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*. Vol. 9. Ed. Mary Lascelles. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971.
- Kames, Lord, Henry Home. *Elements of Criticism*. 1785. New York: Garland, 1972. 2 vols.
- Keach, William. *Arbitrary Power: Romanticism, Language, Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Keats, John. *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1818*. Ed. Hyder Edward Rollins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- . *The Poems of John Keats*. Ed. Jack Stillinger. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.
- Keen, Paul. *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Kelly, Gary. "Death and the Matron: Felicia Hemans, Romantic Death, and the Founding of the Modern Liberal State." *Felicia Hemans: Reimagining Poetry in the Nineteenth Century*. Ed. Nanora Sweet and Julie Melnyk. New York: Palgrave, 2001. 196-211.
- . "Introduction." *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters*. Ed. Gary Kelly. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2002. 15-85.
- Kennett, White. *A Sermon Preach'd at the Funeral of the Right Noble William, Duke of Devonshire*. London: H. Hills, 1707.
- Khalip, Jacques. *Anonymous Life: Romanticism and Dispossession*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- King, James. *William Blake, His Life*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.
- Kramer, Lawrence. "The 'Intimations' Ode and Victorian Romanticism." *Victorian Poetry* 18 (1980): 315-335.
- "L." "Town Conversation. No. IV." *London Magazine* 3 (1821): 426-427.
- Lamb, Jonathan. *The Rhetoric of Suffering: Reading the Book of Job in the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Laqueur, Thomas. *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.
- Lavater, Johan Kaspar. *Essays on Physiognomy; for the Promotion of the Knowledge and the*

- Love of Mankind*. Trans. Thomas Holcroft. London: Robinson, 1789. 2 vols.
- Lawlor, Clark. *Consumption and Literature: The Making of a Romantic Disease*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Leavis, F. R. *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1936.
- Leland, John. *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers of the Last and Present Century*. London: B. Dod, 1755-1756. 2 vols.
- Letter. *Common Sense: or the Englishman's Journal* (5 July 1740): 1-2.
- Levinson, Marjorie. "The Book of *Thel*: A Critical Reading." *ELH* 47 (1980): 287-303.
- . *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.
- "A List of Deaths for the Year 1750." *Gentleman's Magazine* 20 (1750): 188.
- "Literary Pocket-Book." *Blackwood's Magazine* 6 (1819): 235-247.
- Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. Roger Woolhouse. London: Penguin, 1997.
- [Lockhart, John Gibson.] "Cockney School of Poetry No. IV." *Blackwood's Magazine* 3 (1818): 519-524.
- Lovegrove, Deryck W. *Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent, 1780-1830*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Lukács, Georg. *Goethe and His Age*. Trans. Robert Anchor. New York: H. Fertig, 1978.
- Lussier, Mark. *Romantic Dynamics: The Poetics of Physicality*. New York: St Martin's Press, 2000.
- [Macpherson, James.] *Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem*. London: 1762.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1998.
- Mason, Emma and Jonathan Roberts. "Felicia Hemans's *Sonnets on Female Characters of Scripture*." *Yearbook of English Studies* 39.1-2 (2009): 72-83.

- Mason, John M. *The Writings of the Late John M. Mason, D.D.* Ed. Rev. Ebenezer Mason. New York, 1832. 4 vols.
- McCollister, Deborah. "The Seduction of Self-Abnegation in *The Book of Thel*." *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 30.3 (1996): 90-94.
- McDannell, Colleen and Bernard Lang. *Heaven: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.
- McGann, Jerome. *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- McKeon, Michael. *The Secret History of Domesticity*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- McLane, Maureen. "'Why Should I Not Speak to You': The Rhetoric of Intimacy." *Intimacy*. Ed. Lauren Berlant. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. 435-442.
- Mee, Jon. *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- . *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- . *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Meek, Heather. "'[W]hat Fatigues We Fine Ladies Are Fated to Endure': Sociosomatic Hysteria as a Female 'English Malady.'" *Diseases of the Imagination and Imaginary Disease in the Early Modern Period*. Ed. Yasmin Haskell. Turnhout: Brepols, 2011. 375-396.
- Mellor, Anne K. *Blake's Human Form Divine*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974.
- Melnyk, Julie. "William Wordsworth and Felicia Hemans." *Fellow Romantics: Male and Female British Writers, 1790-1835*. Ed. Beth Lau. Surrey: Ashgate, 2009. 139-158.
- "Memoirs of the Life, Studies, and Writings of the Right Reverend George Horne, D. D. Late Lord Bishop of Norwich." *The Analytical Review* 22.5 (1795): 466-471.
- Mill, John Stuart. "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties." *Autobiography and Literary Essays*. Ed. J. M. Robson and Jack Stillinger. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981. 341-365.

- Miller, Stephen. "The Death of Hume." *Wilson Quarterly* 19.3 (1995): 30-39.
- Milton, John. *Paradise Lost. The Riverside Milton*. Ed. Roy Flannagan. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 296-710.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. *Blake's Composite Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.
- Money, John. "The Masonic Moment; Or, Ritual, Replica, and Credit: John Wilkes, the Macaroni Parson, and the Making of the Middle-Class Mind." *Journal of British Studies* 32.4 (1993): 358-395.
- Montagu, Henry, Earl of Manchester. *Manchester Al Mondo. Contemplatio Mortis, & Immortalitatis*. London: Henry Frowde, 1902.
- More, Hannah. *Practical Piety; or, The Influence of the Religion of the Heart on the Conduct of Life*. Boston: Munroe and Francis, 1811.
- Moretti, Franco. "The Comfort of Civilization." *Representations* 12 (1985): 115-139.
- Morrell, J. B. "The Leslie Affair: Careers, Kirk and Politics in Edinburgh in 1805." *The Scottish Historical Review* 54.157 (1975): 63-82.
- Mossner, Ernst Campbell. *The Life of David Hume*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- "Mrs. Hemans." *The Athenaeum* 395 (1835): 391-392.
- Mullan, John. "Hypochondria and Hysteria: Sensibility and the Physicians." *The Eighteenth Century* 25 (1984): 141-174.
- . *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Munteanu, Anca Violeta. *William Blake and the Transformations of the Renaissance Notion of Melancholy*. Diss. University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1999. Ann Arbor: UMI 9952688, 1999.
- Nagle, Christopher C. *Sexuality and the Culture of Sensibility in the British Romantic Era*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Najarian, James. *Victorian Keats: Manliness, Sexuality, and Desire*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- "Necrology, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2017. Web. 11 April 2017.

- Nersessian, Anahid. "Two Gardens: An Experiment in Calamity Form." *Modern Language Quarterly* 74.3 (2013): 307-329.
- . *Utopia, Limited: Romanticism and Adjustment*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Newlyn, Lucy. *Reading, Writing and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Nichols, Anne. "Glorification of the Lowly in Felicia Hemans's Sonnets 'Female Characters of Scripture.'" *Victorian Poetry* 48.4 (2010): 559-575.
- Norvig, Gerda S. "Female Subjectivity and the Desire of Reading in(to) Blake's 'Book of Thel.'" *Studies in Romanticism* 34.2 (1995): 255-271.
- Nuttall, A. D. *A Common Sky: Philosophy and the Literary Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.
- "Obituary, n. and adj." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2017. Web. 11 April 2017.
- The Order of the Procession at the Funeral of his Grace John, Duke of Marlborough*. London: J. Roberts, 1722.
- Paley, William. *Natural Theology*. Ed. Matthew D. Eddy and David Knight. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Parker, Patricia A. *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- Pascoe, Judith. *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry and Spectatorship*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- "Passion, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2014. Web. 9 January 2016.
- "Passion, v." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2014. Web. 9 January 2016.
- Passmore, John. *Hume's Intention*. 3rd ed. London: Duckworth, 1980.
- Patmore, Coventry. *Principles in Art*. London: George Bell and Sons, 1889.
- Pearce, Donald R. "Natural Religion and the Plight of Thel." *Blake Studies* 8 (1978): 23-35.
- Penelhum, Terence. *Hume*. London: Macmillan, 1975.
- Pepys, Samuel. *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A New and Complete Transcription*. Berkeley and

- Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970-83.
- Perkins, William. *A Salve for a Sicke Man. Or, A Treatise Containing the Nature, Differences, and Kindes of Death as also the Right Manner of Dying Well*. London: John Legat, 1611.
- Pinch, Adela. "Sensibility." *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*. Ed. Nicholas Roe. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 49-61.
- . *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- Plato. *Phaedo*. Trans. Hugh Tredennick. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961. 40-98.
- Pocock, J. G. A. "Enthusiasm: The Antiself of Enlightenment." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60 (1998): 7-28.
- "Poetical Remains of the Late Mrs. Hemans." *The Literary Gazette* No. 1000 (March 19, 1836): 177-178.
- Poetzsch, Markus. *Visionary Dreaminess: Readings in Romanticism's Quotidian Sublime*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Porter, Dorothy, and Roy Porter. *In Sickness and in Health, The British Experience 1650-1850*. London: Fourth Estate, 1988.
- Porter, Roy. *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment*. New York: Norton, 2000.
- Potkay, Adam. *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- "Preface." *Blackwood's Magazine* 19 (1826): i-xxx.
- Pritchard, Allan. "The Last Days of Hobbes." *Bodleian Library Record* 10 (1980): 178-187.
- Purcell, John. *A Treatise of Vapours or Hysteric Fits*. London, 1702.
- Quinney, Laura. *William Blake on Self and Soul*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Rajan, Tilottama. *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Ramsay, Paul. "The Indignity of 'Death with Dignity.'" *Hasting Center Studies* 2.2 (1974): 47-

62.

- Read, Dennis M. "Blake's 'Tender Stranger': Thel and Hervey's *Meditations*." *Colby Quarterly* 18.3 (1982): 160-167.
- Reid, Thomas. *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. Edinburgh: J. Bell, 1785.
- . *An Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense*. London: Millar, 1764.
- [Reynolds, John Hamilton.] "The Quarterly Review—Mr. Keats." *The Examiner* 563 (1818): 648-649.
- . *Selected Prose of John Hamilton Reynolds*. Ed. Leonidas M. Jones. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966.
- Richetti, John. *Philosophical Writing: Locke, Berkeley, Hume*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Ricks, Christopher. *Keats and Embarrassment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Ricouer, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*. Trans. Robert Czerny, with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Riso, Mary. *The Narrative of the Good Death: The Evangelical Deathbed in Victorian England*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Robinson, Jeffrey C. *Reception and Poetics in Keats: "My Ended Poet."* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- . *Unfettering Poetry: The Fancy in British Romanticism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Roe, Nicholas. *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
- Rollins, Hyder Edward, ed. *The Keats Circle*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Ross, Marlon. "Beyond the Fragmented Word: Keats at the Limits of Patrilineal Language." *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender[ed] Criticism*. Ed. Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990. 110-131.
- Rossetti, William Michael. *Life of John Keats*. London: Walter Scott, 1887.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Eloisa; Or, a Series of Original Letters*. Trans. William Kenrick. London, 1761.

- Rowell, Geoffrey. *Hell and the Victorians: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century Theological Controversy Concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Afterlife*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Ryan, Robert M. *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789-1824*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Sandford, Francis. *The Order and Ceremonies Used at the Funeral of His Grace, George Monk, Duke of Albemarle, Earl of Torrington, &c.* London: J. Roberts, 1722.
- Sandy, Mark. *Romanticism, Memory, and Mourning*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2013.
- “Scenes and Hymns of Life, with Other Religious Poems.” *The Athenaeum* 353 (1834): 566.
- Schiesari, Juliana. *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Schmidt, Jeremy. *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. *Essays and Aphorisms*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Penguin Books, 2004.
- Schor, Esther. *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from Enlightenment to Victoria*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Scott, William Robert. *Adam Smith as Student and Professor*. Glasgow: Jackson, 1937.
- Seneca. *Epistles*. Trans. Richard M. Gummere. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917. 3 vols.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Adonais. Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat. New York: Norton, 2002.
- Siebert, Donald T. “‘Ardor of Youth’: The Manner of Hume’s *Treatise*.” *The Philosopher as Writer: The Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Robert Ginsberg. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1987. 177-198.
- . *Mortality’s Muse: The Fine Art of Dying*. Lanham: University of Delaware Press, 2013.
- Siskin, Clifford. *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

- Sisson, C. H. *David Hume*. Edinburgh: Ramsay Head, 1976.
- Small, Neil. "Death and Difference." *Death, Gender, and Ethnicity*. Ed. David Field, Jenny Hockey, and Neil Small. London: Routledge, 1997. 202-221.
- Smith, Adam. *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*. Ed. Ernest Campbell Mossner and Ian Simpson Ross. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- . *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*. Ed. J. C. Bryce. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- . *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Ed. Knud Haakonssen. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Smith, Norman Kemp. *The Philosophy of David Hume*. London: Macmillan, 1941.
- Smith, Preserved. *Erasmus: A Study of His Life, Ideals, and Place in History*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1962.
- Smith, R. M. "Population and Its Geography in England, 1500-1730." *An Historical Geography of England and Wales*. Ed. R. A. Dodgson and R. A. Butlin. London: Academic Press, 1978. 199-237.
- Smithers, Peter. *The Life of Joseph Addison*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954.
- Soni, Vivasvan. *Mourning Happiness: Narrative and the Politics of Modernity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010.
- Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*. Ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. and C. Patrick O'Donnell, Jr. New York: Penguin Books, 1978.
- Spufford, Margaret. *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England*. London: Methuen, 1981.
- Stabler, Jane. "Byron and *The Excursion*." *Wordsworth Circle* 45.2 (Spring 2014): 137-147.
- Stanley, Liz. "The Writing of David Hume's *My Own Life*: The Persona of the Philosopher and the Philosopher Manqué." *Auto/Biography* 14 (2006): 1-19.
- Steedman, Carolyn. *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930*. London: Virago Press, 1995.
- Stillinger, Jack. *The Hoodwinking of Madeleine, and Other Essays on Keats's Poems*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971.

- . *Romantic Complexity: Keats, Coleridge, and Wordsworth*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006.
- . "The 'Story' of Keats." *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*. Ed. Susan J. Wolfson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 246-260.
- Stockton, Kathryn Bond. *The Queer Child: Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.
- Stokes, Christopher. "Prayer, Discipline, and Secrecy in Felicia Hemans's Late Poetry." *Women's Writing* 21.1 (2014): 91-109.
- Swann, Karen. "Endymion's Beautiful Dreamers." *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*. Ed. Susan J. Wolfson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 20-36.
- Sweet, Nanora. "Hemans, Heber and *Superstition and Revelation*: Experiment and Orthodoxy at the Scene of Writing." *Romantic Passions*. Ed. Elizabeth Fay. Romantic Circles Praxis Series, 1998.
- Taylor, Charles. "The Immanent Counter-Enlightenment." *Canadian Political Philosophy: Contemporary Reflections*. Ed. Ronald Beiner and W. J. Norman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. 386-400.
- . *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Taylor, Jeremy. *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Jeremy Taylor*. Ed. Rev. Reginald Heber. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1851. 10 vols.
- The Book of Common Prayer, Reformed According to the Plan of the Late Dr. Samuel Clarke Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David and a Collection of Hymns for Public Worship*. London: J. Johnson, 1793.
- Thiry, Paul Henri, Baron d'Holbach. *Christianity Unveiled*. Ed. and trans. David Holohan. Kingston upon Thames, Surrey: Hodgson Press, 2008.
- . *Nature and Her Laws: As Applicable to the Happiness of Man, Living in Society; Contrasted with Superstition and Imaginary Systems*. London: James Watson, 1834.
- Thomas, Donald. *Henry Fielding*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990.
- Tierney-Hynes, Rebecca. "Hume, Romance, and the Unruly Imagination." *SEL* 47.3 (2007): 641-658.

- Towers, Joseph. *Tracts on Political and Other Subjects, Published at Various Times*. London: Cadell and Davies, 1796. 3 vols.
- “A Treatise of Human Nature.” *History of the Works of the Learned* 2 (1739): 353-404.
- “Trivial, adj. and n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2014. Web. 20 January 2016.
- Trott, Nicola. “*The Excursion*: Types and Symbols of Eternity.” *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* 79 (1992): 239–252.
- Turley, Richard Marggraf. *Keats’s Boyish Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Underwood, Ted. “Romantic Historicism and the Afterlife.” *PMLA* 117.2 (2002): 237-251.
- Valenza, Robin. “Editing the Self: David Hume’s Narrative Theory.” *The Eighteenth Century* 43.2 (2002): 137-160.
- Vane, Charles, ed. *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh*. London: Henry Colburn, 1848.
- Vendler, Helen. *The Odes of John Keats*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Wagenknecht, David. *Blake’s Night: William Blake and the Idea of Pastoral*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.
- Walker, Robert G. “Public Death in the Eighteenth Century.” *Research Studies of the State College of Washington* 48 (1980): 11-24.
- . “Rochester and the Issue of Deathbed Repentance in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century England.” *South Atlantic Review* 47.1 (1982): 21-37.
- Walpole, Horace. *Correspondence of Horace Walpole*. London: Henry Colburn, 1837. 3 vols.
- Watkins, Margaret. “Delicate Magnanimity: Hume on the Advantages of Taste.” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 26.4 (2009): 389-408.
- Wesley, John. *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*. Ed. John Telford. London: Epworth Press, 1931. 8 vols.
- “W. G. T.” “The Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley.” *The Metropolitan Magazine* 14 (1835): 53-66.
- Whaley, Joachim. “Introduction.” *Mirrors of Mortality*” *Studies in the Social History of Death*.

- Ed. Joachim Whaley. New York: Routledge, 1981. 1-14.
- Wheeler, Michael. *Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Whytt, Robert. *Observations on the Nature, Causes, and Cure of those Disorders which have been Called Nervous, Hypochondriac, or Hysterick*. Edinburgh: 1765.
- Wodrow, James. Letter to Samuel Kendrick, 21 Jan. 1752. In Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, vol. 9. Bristol: Thoemmes, 2003.
- Wolfson, Susan J. *Borderlines: The Shiftings of Gender in British Romanticism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.
- . "Feminising Keats." *Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley*. Ed. Peter J. Kitson. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996. 92-113.
- . "Keats Enters History: Autopsy, *Adonais*, and the Fame of Keats." *Keats and History*. Ed. Nicholas Roe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 17-45.
- . *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in English Poetry*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*. London: Cassell and Company, 1894.
- Wordsworth, William. *The Excursion*. Ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.
- . *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*. Ed. James Butler and Karen Green. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- . *The Major Works*. Ed. Stephen Gill. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- . *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*. Ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill. New York: Norton, 1979.
- . *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*. Ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974. 3 vols.
- . *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth II: The Middle Years, 1806-1811*. Ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Mary Moorman. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.
- "*The Works of Anna Lætitia Barbauld. With a Memoir by Lucy Aikin.*" *Literary Gazette* 24

(1825): 611.

Wrigley, E. A. and R. S. Schofield. *The Population History of England, 1541-1781: A Reconstruction*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Wu, Duncan. *Romanticism: An Anthology*. Blackwell Publishers, 2012.

---. *Wordsworth: An Inner Life*. Malden: Blackwell, 2002.

---. *Wordsworth's Reading, 1800-1815*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Wunderli, Richard and Gerald Broce. "The Final Moment before Death in Early Modern England." *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 20.2 (1989): 259-275.

Young, Edward. *Conjectures on Original Composition. In a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison*. London, 1759.

Yousef, Nancy. *Romantic Intimacy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.

VITA

Andrew Welch graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Minnesota (Twin Cities) in 2007, and completed a Master of Arts in English at the University of Minnesota (Duluth) in 2010. In August of 2017, he received a Ph.D. in English Literature from Loyola University Chicago. He was the recipient of a 2015 Pre-Doctoral Teaching Scholars Fellowship and a 2016 Arthur J. Schmitt Dissertation Fellowship.