ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: MELANCHOLY'S WAKE: LOSS AND LITERARY IMAGINATION IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

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If the centuries preceding and following it are known for their revolutionary character (the seventeenth century for its regicide and the Romantic period for the French Revolution), then the eighteenth century in Britain has seemed in many accounts to be an age of progress rather than upheaval. As a period of refined sensibility and rapid economic growth, the British eighteenth century appears to be marked by an insistence on social stability and thus to have little room for melancholy, the sadness that does not end. In "Melancholy's Wake," however, I contend that the politically revolutionary spirit that seems otherwise missing in the eighteenth century is located instead in the melancholic language of loss deployed by the graveyard poems and the sentimental novels, among other genres. Across a range of genres, loss works as a synecdoche for cultural crises figured by the rise of commercialism and sociability. While modernity offers the promise of a prosperous future for the upwardly mobile, some literary writers see modernity instead as the erasure of opportunity for the lower-rank. In dwelling with the spirit of loss, literary writers see a trace of the revolutionary spirit in the quiet expression of melancholy, as such expressions cannot be assimilated within the project of modernity. Such quiet expressions also reveal, however, that some aspects of revolutionary thought are fundamentally inoperative. Melancholy sees utopic thought as a dream not accessible to the present, but the articulation of such a dream offers an alternative to modernity when no other alternative presents itself.

MELANCHOLY'S WAKE: LOSS AND LITERARY IMAGINATION IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

By

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Introduction: Melancholy's Wake

Melancholy is a sadness that does not end. From Aristotle (for whom melancholy is the very condition of creative thought) to Robert Burton (who cannot find any way to cure his melancholy so he instead indulges it by writing about it) to Sigmund Freud (who argues for melancholy as an unhealthy attachment to loss), melancholy differs from other feelings because of the manner in which it lingers with one.[1] Up through the Renaissance, melancholy is inborn: one has naturally within oneself an excess of black bile, and melancholy thus has little or nothing to do with the ways that external circumstances press upon one.

In this dissertation, I tell the story of melancholy's standing as a figure for both imagination and passivity in the eighteenth-century literary archive. How do literary writers represent melancholy in the eighteenth century? What does melancholy signify in the eighteenth century, and to what end do writers deploy it? In the eighteenth century, a narrative of melancholy begins to emerge that is slightly different from the Renaissance story, and this narrative, as we shall see in the pages that follow, is often made manifest in the literary archive: melancholy is not always a biological condition, but is often brought on by external circumstances. Whether it emerges from the death of a loved one, from unrequited love, or from the oppressive conditions of modernity that prevent upward mobility, melancholy is a sign of the ways that the outside world can press down upon an individual. In the eighteenth century, then, conceptions of melancholy are both similar to and different from prior ages' conception of the

[1] See Aristotle's "Problemata XXX.I," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, *Vol. 2*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), 1498ff; Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1927), 8-10; and Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 1917, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. XIV*, ed. James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson (London: Hogarth, 1971), 243-58.

feeling. Where the eighteenth century is unique in seeing melancholy as originating from outside the body rather than from inside, its representation of the feeling as unending sadness extends from the thinking of prior historical periods.

The British eighteenth century has long been described as a period of novelty and change. From a new conception of the monarchy to developments in commercialism and consumerism, from its rapid economic and industrial growth to its development of the civic values of sociability and politeness, the eighteenth century introduces new cultural and social ideals, and departs from the past in a nearly unprecedented fashion. The term "melancholy" appears to have little truck with any of these terms. It would seem that melancholy is a sign of debilitation rather than insight. One of the tasks of this dissertation, however, is to tell the story about how eighteenth-century literary writers deploy melancholy as a figure for resisting modernity.

As I show in the pages that follow, the personal losses to which melancholy is a response allegorize a discontent with the turns of modernity. The eighteenth-century values of politeness, commercialism, and sociability offer possibilities for progress, but they can also relegate to the margins of society those of lower rank and status. Where the terms that define modernity fail to account for those on the margins, writers deploy melancholy so as to bring back the marginalized from the margins. And yet, as I argue, this expression is never fully operative, because it cannot in fact reverse the terms of the present moment. The literary expression of melancholy signals an effort both to articulate the terms of present history and to imagine a time that once was but is not anymore. Melancholy figures a resistance to the present that is not fully representable, because it orbits around a lost and thus not fully accessible object. Literary representations of melancholy in the eighteenth century demarcate the language of an imagined past but they also mark the limits of that imaginative language, as such language hinges necessarily upon absence

and registers the irretrievability of a lost past. Melancholy language thus also, importantly, registers an attempt to understand the dynamics of the historical present while simultaneously registering the ways in which the subject is fundamentally and perhaps irreversibly blocked from fully understanding or fully intervening in the course of the historical present. Melancholy is both a sign of blindness and of insight, both a sign of the subject's resistance and of the subject's being obscured from history.

A number of recent scholarly accounts have seen the eighteenth century as marked by the discourses of sentiment and sociability. By and large, these strains of criticism understand their dominant terms as indicative of forward social progress in the eighteenth century. Since John C. Mullan's landmark 1988 book *Sentiment and Sociability*, there has been a movement in eighteenth-century studies to see the two terms of Mullan's title as inherently linked to one another, especially since Mullan himself solders them together. "Sociability," Mullan writes, "depends upon the traffic not only of opinions, but of harmoniously organized feelings. Thus the particular importance of the word 'sentiment,' a word which can stand for both judgement and affection."[2] Sentiment draws people together, such that the feeling of one belongs not just to oneself but also to everyone else in that person's circle. For Mullan, positive sentiments are more productive than negative ones: when speaking of negative feelings such as melancholy, Mullan describes it as a feeling that debilitates and paralyzes: nothing good can come of it.[3] *Sentiment and Sociability* is nearly 30 years old by this point, but its central emphasis on positive feeling continues to pervade current eighteenth-century scholarship. Critics such as Hina Nazar, James Chandler, and Vivasvan Soni have all published recent work that link together the terms

[2] John C. Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 7-8.
[3] See Mullan, 201-40. Mullan reduces melancholia to the twinned notions of hypochondria and hysteria, which in his account do not enlighten but rather limit the subject.

"sentiment," "sympathy," and "feeling," each of them in their own way focusing on the methods by which feeling is a bonding agent between persons.[4] For Nazar, sentiment is a standard for making judgments; one uses sentiment to compare one's beliefs with the beliefs and opinions of others, and in so networking with others, learns to moderate and perfect one's standard of judgment.[5] Chandler, in a phrasing that resembles Mullan's, defines sentiment as "distributed feeling."[6] Feelings become the signs of mutual spectatorship; they are the ways by which characters interact with one another. In his important recent study of the eighteenth-century history of happiness, Soni defines sentimentalism in terms of its relation to happiness. Sentimentalism is a concern for others' happiness, a desire to relieve the suffering of others.[7] Despite the differences between these accounts' descriptions of sentiment and feeling (Nazar tethers feeling to judgment, Chandler to spectatorship, Soni to the history of happiness), what they have in common is a shared commitment to the importance of positive feeling to eighteenth-century culture. In one way or another, positive feeling binds people together. In critical narratives such as these, there is little room for melancholy, as melancholy would seem to debilitate rather than provide an outlet for the positive improvement of society.

Melancholy speakers and characters in the eighteenth-century literary archive focus more on a backwards gaze toward an object of loss than on productive communion with others in the present. Melancholy's effect thus appears to be not the building of bonds between persons, but rather the dissolution of them. Such a conception of melancholy as debilitating rather than

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[4] See Hina Nazar, *Enlightened Sentiments: Judgment and Autonomy in the Age of Sensibility* (New York: Fordham UP, 2012); James Chandler, *An Archaeology of Sympathy: The Sentimental Mode in Literature and Cinema* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2013); and Vivasvan Soni, *Mourning Happiness: Narrative and the Politics of Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2010).
[5] Nazar, 2-4.
[6] Chandler, 11-12.
[7] Soni, 290-334.

invigorating is evident in much of the scholarly work on the feeling's status in the eighteenth century, which sees melancholy in pathological terms—as illness—rather than as productive of anything. The central figure for critical accounts of eighteenth-century melancholy, such as those by G.J. Barker-Benfield and Anita Guerrini, is George Cheyne, who famously sees melancholy as interchangeable with hypochondria.[8] In many ways, we might say that the view of melancholy as medical disease (for which Cheyne is a synecdochic figure) has won the public relations war in scholarly history of the eighteenth century. Melancholy exists as an illness to be diagnosed, and thus appears to be all negative.

The task of this dissertation is to ask after the long-neglected status of literary melancholy as a figure for imaginative and critical thought in eighteenth-century studies of feeling: Is melancholy always as static or as debilitating as its definition might make it seem? Does melancholy bind people in the same way that other feelings more commonly associated with the eighteenth-century language of sentiment does? In the readings of eighteenth-century poetry, fiction, and dramatic criticism that make up the following pages of this dissertation, I demonstrate a counter-narrative of melancholy in the eighteenth century. While melancholy is an illness across much of the medical archive, there is another strain of melancholy that pervades eighteenth-century literary writing. Many eighteenth-century literary representations of melancholy, while they might not contribute to Enlightenment narratives of progress, are often enlivening and not just debilitating. By looking to the literary archive of melancholy in the

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[8] See, most notably, G.J. Barker-Benfield's G.J. Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). When Barker-Benfield considers melancholy, he considers it in pathological terms, looking at it through the eyes of George Cheyne's nerve-based theories of medical science (7-9 and throughout). For an extended discussion of Cheyne's theories, see Anita Guerrini, *Obesity and Depression in the Enlightenment: The Life and Times of George Cheyne* (Norman, OK: U of Oklahoma P).

eighteenth century rather than to the medical archive, we see that, in many accounts, melancholy is representative of a means for perceiving the imperfections of modern life. One feels melancholy because one can do nothing to reverse one's lot in life or the current state of society; in this way melancholy is a way of figuring the limit of subjectivity. It is not always simply an illness to be pathologized. At the same time, however, melancholy opens up a new, if compensatory and inoperative, avenue of subjectivity where other avenues fail. If the provide nothing else, losses provide paths for imaginative thought. Where the object of loss is absent, poets, novelists, speakers, characters, and critics step in to give shape to what is gone, sometimes imagining the contours of a lost past and at other times imagining the future restoration of losses in the afterlife. This brand of imagination enables one to perceive a sense of control over the present where other forms of control fail. Imagination is a substitutive and compensatory act when seen through the lens of melancholy: through the imagination of objects of loss, one feels a sense of control over the present where control seems otherwise beyond possibility.

Via their plaintive laments, the protagonists of this dissertation reveal to us that the emergent discourses of commercialism, consumerism, politeness, and sociability cannot offer the salvation that they might propose to. Melancholy imagination is thus sometimes the only way of resisting—even if indirectly—the directions of present ideologies. In an important recent study of the development of literary imagination in the eighteenth century, John Brewer argues that in the eighteenth century the arts—and thus also literary imagination—reinforced cultural norms of politeness and sociability. According to Brewer, "Taste in the arts was considered a sign of refinement, cultivation and politeness, qualities it was believed were best nurtured in towns and

cities."[9] Both literary and fine art flourished in urban environments as they had a ready-built market, such that the very existence of the "pleasures of the imagination" for which Brewer names his book is a reflection of urban prosperity. In his own account of the rise of sentimentalism (which I have previously mentioned), Chandler writes in a similar vein that the discourse of sentimentalism grows out of the ideological discourses that govern eighteenth-century life as a whole:

> The sentimental indeed owes much to the prior literary and cultural modes, genres, and contexts among which it took shape. These include not only that 'new species of writing' called the novel, but a host of other developments as well: the transformed conventions of the theater, the burgeoning epistolary culture, modern notions of decorum, Enlightenment theories of taste and style, coffee-house culture and other elements of the new public sphere, the emergence of what would later be called the social sciences, and so on.[10]

Sentiment and feeling bind subjects not only to one another, in Chandler's account, but also to the world that these subjects share with one another. Sentiment is at its core a reflection of modern culture.

As I show in this dissertation, however, to linger with the losses that pile up in the present is to gesture toward a form of imagination that is not a reinforcement of the discourses that Brewer and Chandler catalog, but rather a corrective to them. By representing the feeling of melancholy, literary writers in the eighteenth century find ways not only to process present history but also to think past it (even though the projects of processing and resisting are simultaneously fraught by their doubles). In this way, I uncover in the eighteenth century what Raymond Williams has famously termed a "structure of feeling"[11]—the set of experiences that

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[9] John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1997), 3.
[10] Chandler, 4.
[11] See especially Williams' *Marxism and Literature*, 1977 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990). Here, Williams defines structures of feeling as ways of examining the "affective elements of consciousness and relationships" (132). Williams claims that an understanding of history

might not reflect the ideals and values of those in power, but of those who reside on the margins. By looking to melancholy and the structure of feeling that it scaffolds through the language of loss and absence, we might see that a culture is defined not by what it is but by what it is not—and perhaps never can be. It is this curious mixture of absence and possibility that melancholy—for all its paralyzing qualities—leaves in its wake.

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In the history of Western thought, melancholy is notable among other feelings because of the varying conceptions regarding what exactly it is, but in the classical tradition there are two schools of thought. One sees melancholy as enlivening, as the very condition of insight. The other views the feeling as debilitating and crippling. Even within these two schools, there are varying ideas about what melancholy actually does to the psyche. Perhaps the paragon of the first school is Aristotle, whose *Problemata XXX.I* views melancholy as a form of genius that mobilizes despair as creative inspiration.[12] "Why is it," Aristotle opens, "that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly of an atrabilious temperament, and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile, as is said to have happened to Heracles among the heroes?"[13] In other words, why is intellectual depth so often accompanied by melancholy?[14] In addition to Heracles, Aristotle also

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emerges from an attention to structures of feeling instead of from a top-down investigation of cultural institutions themselves.

[12] For the sake of citational convenience, I attribute this text to Aristotle, as do many other scholars, but the authorship of *Problemata XXX.I* is anything but certain. Drew Daniel, for one, claims that the text was written not by Aristotle but by his student Theophrastus (Drew Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* [New York: Fordham UP, 2013], 19).

[13] Aristotle, 1498-99.

[14] In a more contemporary context, this question also animates Eric G. Wilson's 2009 book *Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2008).

mentions Empedocles, Plato, and Socrates, among others, as notable melancholics.[15] While Aristotle views melancholy as a disease, as would other major classical figures—most notably Galen and Hippocrates—it is also more than a disease. It is the very condition of creative thought. This is because melancholy and creativity both originate from the same substance: black bile. According to Drew Daniel, this means that for Aristotle melancholy is not to be condemned but welcomed—if with reservation.[16]

Galen and Hippocrates become the two figures most readily associated with the classical conception of melancholy as an illness. As Mary Ann Lund notes, however, while their views have in common a pathologizing impulse with regard to the condition, they diverge in their differing ideas of the relation between melancholy, the melancholic, and the best modes of treatment. Galen is more of a universalist: treatment of melancholy requires a rigidly systematic response with little room for variation. The differences between persons themselves are less important than the singular nature of melancholy itself; thus, one should privilege unvarying modes of treatment over individuality of persons.[17] Hippocrates, on the other hand, gives more attention to one's individual experience: melancholy does not affect everyone in the same way, and so its treatments must vary from case to case.[18]

Strains of each of these narratives—from Aristotle to Galen to Hippocrates—find their ways into the Renaissance, most notably in Robert Burton's enormously important *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). Burton's influence would extend far past his immediate moment. Samuel

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[15] Aristotle, 1499.
[16] Daniel, 19.
[17] Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine, and Religion in Early Modern England: Reading* The Anatomy of Melancholy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 82-85.
[18] Lund, 42, 83.

Johnson, the story went, would wake up two hours early each morning simply to read from it,[19] and John Keats was deeply influenced by the work.[20] Part medical treatise, part theological treatise, part philosophical musing, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is captivating in part because it resists any effort at definitive categorization. While Burton clearly defines melancholy as an illness, his description of the disease, as Lund points out, is diffuse and capacious. At times, Burton seems to be channeling Galenic medical theory with his use of rigid "synoptic tables,"[21] giving strict and unambiguous causes and cures for melancholy illness. This interest in rigid partitioning is borrowed, Lund tells us, from Galen.[22] At other times, however, Lund notes, he seems to suggest that melancholy differs from case to case, and that a doctor's "personal observation and experience and the particular circumstances of the individual case"[23] should dictate how one responds to melancholy.

At moments in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, melancholy looks not to be a disease at all but rather a source of enlightenment. This movement is more consistent with the pseudo-Aristotelian definition and thus also foreshadows eighteenth-century representations of ennobling and virtuous melancholy. Burton's treatise opens with a poem titled *The Author's Abstract of Melancholy* that alternately defines melancholy as "damn'd," "harsh," "sour," and yet also "sweet."[24] It can be both pleasing and painful. It is painful because it calls to mind an agonizing loss. But it is also pleasurable for the same reason: it reconnects one, if only in mind, to that exact same lost yet desired object. At about the midway point of the book, Burton

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[19] James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (London: 1791), 339.
[20] Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Trauma, Paranoia, and Melancholy, 1790-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 376.
[21] Lund, 85.
[22] Ibid., 84-85.
[23] Lund, 83.
[24] Burton, 8-10.

interrupts his detailed and labored description of the causes and cures of melancholy to instead begin a "Digression of the Air." Here, Burton abruptly and without notice switches gears, imagining himself soaring above the earth and heavens so as to take in the geography of the earth and the layout of the surrounding galaxies. This digression seems on first glance strange and confusing, precisely because it is a digression.[25] Much like Samuel Johnson's fantasy of flight in *Rasselas*'s famed "A Dissertation on the Art of Flying,"[26] Burton seems to transcend any bodily restrictions in the service of seeing the universe from afar, taking in everything at once. This section seems to be about anything and everything but melancholy. But we might say too, however, that this digression is in fact a logical outgrowth of Burton's melancholy. If melancholy can be, as Burton has termed it, "sweet," one of its sweetnesses is most likely the manner in which it inspires imaginative thought. Burton's dreamlike and fantastical digression reveals that melancholy, while crippling, also allows for a soaring imagination. Melancholy forces the mind to work in overdrive, but the more the mind works, the more likely it is that the mind will expand its horizons.

While Burton's vision of melancholy is without question double-edged, its painful edge lives on in eighteenth-century medical explorations of splenetic disorders. George Cheyne, perhaps the best-known of the eighteenth-century thinkers to classify gloom as a disease, writes in *The English Malady* (1733) that the human psyche is constituted by external factors—by the weather, by food, by crowded spaces. The human body for Cheyne is, as Gilles Deleuze and

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[25] For critical discussions of the "Digression of the Air," see Richard G. Barlow, "Infinite Worlds: Robert Burton's Cosmic Voyage," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34.2 (1973): 291-302; and Lawrence Babb, *Sanity in Bedlam: A Study of Robert Burton's* Anatomy of Melancholy (Lansing, MI: Michigan State UP, 1959), 61.

[26] Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*, 1759 (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2000), 12-13.

Félix Guattari might call it, part of an assemblage, existing in a networked relation to the outside world.[27] Moreover, the body is purely mechanical in Cheyne's account:

> …the Human Body is a Machin of an infinite Number and Variety of different Channels and Pipes, filled with various and different Liquors and Fluids, perpetually running, glideing, or creeping forward, or returning backward, in a constant *Circle*, and sending out little Branches and Outlets, to moisten, nourish, and repair the Expences of Living. That the intelligent Principle, or *Soul*, resides somewhere in the Brain, where all the Nerves, or Instruments of Sensation terminate, like a *Musician* in a finely fram'd and well-tun'd Organ-Case; that these Nerves are like *Keys*, which, being struck on or touch'd, convey the Sound and Harmony of this sentient Principle, or *Musician*.[28]

The brain is an instrument, and the nerves are the keys. When all is in proper working order, the brain and the nerves work in tandem, and both body and psyche are healthy. Problems arise when the body is pressed upon by outside factors.[29] Bodily injuries can weaken the nerves (23). As can bad weather (24, 31). When circumstances such as these arise, the nerves are thrown out of joint and the psyche is affected: the result can be lowness of spirit, melancholy, or nervous disorder. Cheyne's prototype of the nervous subject finds literary corollaries in Tobias Smollett's Matthew Bramble, who suffers from all manner of psychological torment in part because of the filth of the London air,[30] and in Henry Fielding's The Man of the Hill from *Tom Jones*, who relates that when he was young he was taken to the waters at Bath to cure his psyche.[31]

Perhaps the most enigmatic account of the nature of the spleen is Anne Finch's whose short ode titled *The Spleen* frames melancholy and hypochondria in epistemological terms. As a direct address to the spleen, the speaker admits not to know what the spleen is; the opening line,

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[27] For a description of the notion of the assemblage, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1980, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 1987), esp. 4-5 and 97.
[28] George Cheyne, *The English Malady* (Dublin: 1733), 4. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.
[29] Sometimes, Cheyne notes, a person may be born with naturally bad nerves, but these occasions are rare (20).
[30] Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, 1771 (London: Penguin, 2008).
[31] Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*, 1749 (London: Penguin, 2005).

"What art thou?"[32] suggests that it cannot be "fixed" in one "shape" (line 4). One cannot see the spleen; one can only see its effects. One sees the coquette who assumes a "soft and melancholy air" (line 103) but not what is beneath the appearance. The spleen thus resists scientific inquiry and empirical thought, as one cannot see how it works on the inside of the person. What is for Cheyne and Mandeville the subject of objective inquiry becomes for Finch a phenomenon that resists all attempts at objectivity.

Finch's suggestion that the spleen resides beyond the bounds of empirical or objective knowledge returns us in many ways to Burton's double-edged vision of melancholy. As the spleen is unknowable for Finch, so too does it resist easy classification in the Burtonian model, due to its odd combination of pleasure and pain. Finch is not the only figure to represent melancholy as unknowable and beyond objective knowledge in the eighteenth century. In his *Ode for Music*, William Collins praises the goddess "Pale Melancholy"[33] for playing a "sweet" tunes on her horn (line 60), even as the tunes are "mellow" enough (61) to inspire gloom as well. At the end of the book "Autumn" in his sprawling poem *The Seasons*, James Thomson sings of a "Philosophic Melancholy"[34] which is its own mix of pleasure and pain. This "Philosophic Melancholy" is pleasing because it brings to mind the joys of seclusion but also mourns the corruption of society. Or more specifically, it brings to mind the joys of seclusion precisely because seclusion means distance from a corrupt society.

The status of melancholy as a Janus-faced mood shapes later critical and theoretical thought, perhaps most interestingly in the twentieth century in the work of Julia Kristeva.

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[32] Anne Finch, *The Spleen* (London: 1709), line 1. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.
[33] William Collins, *Ode for Music* (London: 1746), line 58. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.
[34] James Thomson, *Autumn* (London: 1730), line 1005.

Kristeva's account of melancholy is psychoanalytic in nature and deeply indebted to Freud. Freud famously defines melancholy as an attachment to a lost object in which the subject both loves and hates the lost object: the subject loves it because of the fantasies of desire associated with it, but hates it precisely because it is lost. The subject then internalizes the lost object such that loss comes to define the subject's ego, and the ego becomes pure negation, defined by an absence rather than by a presence.[35] While melancholy in Freud's account is defined by loss, it is also defined as interminable: it becomes the very condition of the melancholic's psyche. Kristeva appropriates the Freudian definition of melancholy in the service of thinking of melancholy as the grounds upon which creative thought might emerge. She writes that, in response to a feeling of melancholy, the subject develops a sign system, a mode of expressing that which cannot otherwise be expressed (precisely because it is lost, and it is difficult to express something that is not there). Kristeva writes that:

> Literary creation is that adventure of the body and signs that bears witness to the affect—to sadness as imprint of separation and beginning of the symbol's sway; to joy as imprint of the triumph that settles me in the universe of artifice and symbol, which I try to harmonize in the best possible way with my experience of reality. But that testimony […] transposes affect into rhythms, signs, forms. The 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic' become the communicable imprints of an affective reality, perceptible to the reader (I like this book because it conveys sadness, anguish, or joy) and yet dominated, set aside, vanquished.[36]

In this sense, melancholia inspires creativity; it inspires one, out of necessity, to create one's own sign system. And, considered in this light, the opening sentence of Kristeva's book—"For those who are racked by melancholia, writing about it would have meaning only if writing sprang out of that very melancholia"[37]—allows for a vision of melancholy as the very condition of creativity (similar, we might say, to the inspirational qualities of melancholy that allow Robert Burton to

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[35] Freud, 243-58.
[36] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989), 22.
[37] Kristeva, 3.

digress on the air). It is a testament to the pervasiveness of the mood across historical time that, over 350 years after Burton, Kristeva would theorize melancholy in roughly the same way, even as her theorization is inflected by the language of psychoanalysis. When Kristeva opines that, "There is meaning only in despair,"[38] it becomes evident that for her, as for Burton, melancholy is the means by which one might make sense of the world.

While Burton's and Kristeva's conceptions of melancholy bear similarities to one another, we might also say that the development of history itself also gives different shapes to the ways in which melancholy signifies meaning. One of the tasks of this dissertation, then, is to show that an attention to the eighteenth century, with all its historical uniqueness, reveals melancholy itself to be both a reaction to and an outgrowth of particular historical movements, specifically developments in the politics of social relation. The chapters that make up "Melancholy's Wake" pursue the development of a double-edged melancholy that is both painful and pleasurable across eighteenth-century poetry, fiction, and criticism. While the eighteenth-century medical archive is undoubtedly key to the history of melancholy, the eighteenth-century literary archive is important to "Melancholy's Wake" precisely because it presents the possibility of a pain that is not always explicable simply through the language of the science of the period. In many texts in the eighteenth-century literary archive, melancholy is not always a disease to be cured (that is, it resists pathologizing language); rather, melancholy is sometimes necessary to the development of insights about social relations, family relations, and inequalities of rank and status. That is, in an echo of Aristotle, melancholy in many eighteenth-century literary texts is the condition of creativity, but in a move that is specific to the eighteenth century, such creativity

[38] Ibid., 5-6.

leads to the exposure of the oppressive nature of facets of modernity such as relations of rank and status.[39]

As is clear from the genealogy I have sketched out, eighteenth-century thinking about melancholy is deeply indebted to representations of the feeling from prior historical periods. In the eighteenth century, though, the referent for melancholy changes, because the world itself is undergoing change, and the changes in the world impinge upon subjects' psyches. According to some, such as Henry Mackenzie and Thomas Gray, as we shall see, the aristocracy appears to be in decline,[40] and what would later become apparent as bourgeois ideology is in its infancy. Politeness and sociability emerge as terms of social interaction. The divide between the country and the city becomes more pronounced, and peasants see themselves becoming more alienated from urban culture, with its emphasis on the elite notion of politeness. Literary writers of the period utilize the figure of literary imagination as a means of dwelling with such losses and isolation, refusing to give themselves up to modern history even if modern history appears ready to move on without them. To dwell with loss then, is to inhabit the same mood that Aristotle and Burton describe, but it also means finding a new, historically specific referent for the mood.

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[39] In this way, my conception of melancholy differs from Slavoj Žižek's, in whose account melancholy need not—in fact by definition cannot—have an object. Rather, for Žižek, melancholy orbits around a general lack that manifests itself as a void, in the manner of the Lacanian *objet petit a* (Slavoj Žižek, "Melancholy and the Act," *Critical Inquiry* 26.4 [2000]: 657-81, 662-63). For Žižek, the represented object of melancholy is merely a façade for a general and unrepresentable emptiness. In contrast, I argue that for eighteenth-century writers the object is all too apparent, and the critical ambiguity lies not in whether or not the lost object does or did ever exist, but in whether or not the subject can in fact do anything to recover the lost object.

[40] John Guillory, for one, sees Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* as the charting of the move from aristocratic to bourgeois ideology (John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Modern Literary Canon Formation* [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993], 95). And in *The Man of Feeling*, Henry Mackenzie depicts his tragic protagonist Harley as an emblematic figure for the modern weakness of the aristocracy. I deal at length with Guillory's account of the aristocracy in Chapter Two of "Melancholy's Wake," and with Mackenzie's in Chapter Three.

The work of this dissertation, with its emphasis upon reading cultural history by reading feelings, would appear to run on a parallel track with recent scholarly work in affect theory, even as it pushes against some of the critical assumptions traditionally associated with affect theory. Recent work by critics such as Lauren Berlant, Sara Ahmed, and Nigel Thrift, for instance, positions affects as indices for understanding the subject's relation to a rapidly changing society. Affect, in these accounts, transforms subjects' interactions with the world around them.[41] But where much recent work in affect theory by thinkers such as Patricia Ticineto Clough and Brian Massumi is grounded in mapping the transformative potentials of the human body, literary melancholy places more emphasis on disembodied (sometimes radically so) sign systems.

Crucially, affect theory places the notion of embodiment front and center. The human body is a feeling body. Patricia Ticineto Clough, for instance, defines affect as "bodies' capacities to affect and be affected or the augmentation or diminution of a body's capacity to act, to engage, and to connect."[42] One of the reasons for affect theory's emphasis on the body is that for some affect theorists (such as Clough and Brian Massumi), the body offers up a loophole to get around the static nature of traditional modes of signification. As perhaps the most prominent recent advocate for this view, Brian Massumi writes that an attention to bodily affect proves to be more critically generative than other critical methodologies that have dominated twentieth-century discourse. Massumi does not specify whether the discourses to which affect theory responds are Derridean deconstruction, Frankfurt School ideology critique, Hegelian dialectics, Marxist thought, or Butlerian performativity, but he likely intends affect studies to respond to all

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[41] See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011); Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (London: Routledge, 2008).

[42] Patricia Ticineto Clough, "Introduction," in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. Clough and Jean Halley (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 1-33, 2.

of these and others. Characterizing the tradition of twentieth-century critical thought, Massumi draws attention to the practices of mediation and signification, and sets the practice of affect theory as over and above the former:

> [A] thoroughly mediated body could only be a 'discursive' body: one with its signifying gestures. Signifying gestures make sense. If properly 'performed,' they may also unmake sense by scrambling significations already in place. Make and unmake sense as they might, they don't *sense*. Sensation is utterly redundant to their description. Or worse, it is destructive to it, because it appeals to an unmediated experience. Unmediated experience signals a danger that is worse, if anything can be, than naïve realism: its polar opposite, naïve subjectivism. […] It was all about a subject without subjectivism: a subject 'constructed' by external mechanisms.[43]

Critical discourses across the twentieth century, in other words, seek to stabilize the category of the subject by subordinating it to all manner of signifying structures. In this way, meaning could be predictable. The problem with this logic, Massumi contends, is that it not only stabilizes the subject: it also freezes it. It leaves no room for the messy unpredictability of real life. Affect theory, in response, allows for unpredictability. There is no telling how the body will respond to any number of situations, and affect theory allows for a radically free notion of the human subject. In Massumi's thought, the body itself is preeminent above any kinds of "signifying gestures" that might seek to rationally explain it, because in trying to rationally explain the body, such signifying gestures cut off any other possibilities that might not fit within the rubric of a given critical methodology.[44]

Massumi thus sets up, whether intentionally or not, a binary between signification on one side and the body on the other. This mode of affect theory sees signification as a mode of stifling

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[43] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002), 2.

[44] Lauren Berlant characterizes Massumi's thought thusly: "Massumi is also quite interested in […] seeing the situation as a genre of unforeclosed experience" (Berlant, 5). In this model, any number of possibilities might arise from any number of situations, and the range of affective experiences that cannot be categorized in advance account for such radical unpredictability.

the subject—indeed, of stifling expression. The body, though, for Massumi—considered in all its unknowability—lies beyond signification. The possibility that "Melancholy's Wake" proposes, however, it that "signifying gestures" are not always stifling, but rather that they are sometimes enlivening. Enlivening thought is not merely a function of the feeling body, I contend, but also a function of the language that communicates feeling. Burton and Kristeva, after all, along with the poets, novelists, and critics that comprise this dissertation, tie melancholy specifically to the act of writing and not merely to embodiment. Massumi speaks of the possibility of an unmediated body, a body that is pure presence, but one of the contentions of "Melancholy's Wake" is that, for the eighteenth-century subject responding to loss, mediation is instead the condition of meaningful expression. In "Melancholy's Wake" there is no such thing as an unmediated body, as in many cases, melancholy mourns bodies that are lost, inaccessible, or even dead; rather, an attention to feeling reveals the inescapability of mediation.

"Melancholy's Wake" sees language as an index for the workings of the relationship between feeling and culture, such that the mediating project of language is at the center of expression and not something to be bypassed. In his short piece titled "On Lyric Poetry and Society," Theodor W. Adorno writes that the genre of the lyric poem figures an attempt to place the subject outside of the bounds of society, within a pure form of individualism that has no connection to culture, but that this attempt is always also fundamentally social for two reasons. In attempting to resist culture, the lyric subject draws attention to the social space from which he or she steps away. And in using the medium of language, the lyric subject uses a fundamentally social medium. The tools of society aid the lyric subject in stepping away from society.[45]

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[45] Theodor W. Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," 1957, in *Notes to Literature, Vol. 1*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 37-54.

I find Adorno's framework for approaching lyric poetry useful to a thinking of melancholy literature in the eighteenth century for two reasons. One, Adorno's reading of lyric poetry speaks to the fundamentally linguistic nature of all expression—whether this expression is represented in the literary work as social or anti-social. All expression is mediated through culture. In the works that I read in this dissertation, the language of melancholy allows for speakers and characters to express their distaste for society, but it also reveals that their thoughts are always mediated through society. Expression and critique always depend in some measure on their opposites. Two, for Adorno, despite its social character, the language of the lyric is nevertheless enlivening and imaginative. Its mediating character is not necessarily a sign of its failure. Rather, mediation allows for fuller expression. To this I would add that in the poetry of Thomas Warton, the fiction of Sarah Fielding, and the eighteenth-century critical responses to *Hamlet*, for instance, this expression is both an expression of resistance and an expression of pure vulnerability. As Adorno tells us, there is no getting out of the mediating project of what Massumi, for one, has referred to as "signifying gestures," but this dependence on mediation is not a failure of expression but rather its very foundation.

As such, "Melancholy's Wake" utilizes close reading as its primary interpretive method. If melancholy is communicated via language, then the contours of melancholy come into relief when its language is held up to the light and examined from multiple angles. As Paul de Man notes in "The Return to Philology," the discipline of "mere reading" as a practice prior to any critical methodology has the capacity to produce provocative as well as precise thought.[46] Where

[46] Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986), 24. In many ways, "The Return to Philology" is a panegyric to Reuben Brower, who taught at Harvard in the 1950s. Brower, de Man writes, was a hyper-formalist in the classroom: "Students, as they began to write on the writings of others, were not to say anything that was not derived from the text they were considering. They were not to make any statements that they could not support by a

the de Manian practice of rhetorical reading is not always overtly politcal or historically inflected, however, "Melancholy's Wake" presents a mode of close reading that illuminates the representative capacity of melancholy as well as the historical, political, and social dimensions of such modes of representation. Language illuminates both mood and history, and shows—indeed, enables—the ways that the two speak to one another.

In her 2011 book *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant argues that affect is the means by which subjects perceive the present moment. For Berlant, "the present is not at first an object but a mediated affect, [and] it is also a thing that is sensed and under constant revision, a temporal genre whose conventions emerge from the personal and public filtering of the situations and events that are happening in an extended now whose very parameters […] are always there for debate."[47] As a collection of a number of different factors—be they personal, economic, sexual, or otherwise—the present is best understood by the affects and feelings that it produces within an individual and that are then represented via different mediums. Berlant's study is focused not on the eighteenth century but on the twentieth and twenty-first, and not on melancholy but rather on optimism, but her interest in the relation between affect and history speaks to the structure by which subjects immerse themselves, however uncertainly, within the cultural moments that envelop them, regardless of the historical era that they inhabit. Where Berlant argues that affect is a means of processing, "Melancholy's Wake" suggests that the specific feeling of melancholy is a means not only of processing the present but also of resisting it. This resistance might not in

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specific use of language that actually occurred in the text. They were asked, in others words, to begin by reading texts closely as texts and not to move at once into the general context of human experience or history" (23). For de Man, such close reading—or "mere reading," as he refers to it (24)—"is able to transform critical discourse in a manner that would appear deeply subversive to those who think of the teaching of literature as a substitute for the teaching of theology, ethics, psychology, or intellectual history" (24).

[47] Berlant, 4.

fact look like such: imagination of loss would seem to be a mere passive wish for restoration of loss with no hidden or ulterior motive. But the very fact that melancholics imagine a world different from the one that they actually inhabit bespeaks a dissatisfaction with the current world that can voice itself solely through the medium of the passive wish.

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I begin "Melancholy's Wake" by unearthing the ways in which eighteenth-century melancholy inherits Renaissance notions of pensive solitude. I then proceed to excavate this understanding of melancholy in literary genres that have long been considered characteristic of the eighteenth century: graveyard poetry, the sentimental novel, and literary criticism. In the first chapter, "The Penseroso in the Eighteenth Century: Thomas Warton's Miltonic Melancholy," I look to Sir Thomas Warton as a synecdochic figure for the reception of an ennobling melancholy transmitted from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century. For Warton, John Milton—the poet to whom he is most deeply indebted—becomes a representative figure for the melancholy of the Renaissance that carries an important legacy in the eighteenth century. Warton is important because he becomes perhaps the clearest avatar for Milton and Miltonic melancholy in the eighteenth century. From Milton, Warton inherits a genial and ennobling melancholy, which he represents in his 1747 poem *The Pleasures of Melancholy* as a means for retreating from the literary trends of the present, figured by the supposed vanity of Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712). Warton's speaker is melancholy for the loss of a past literary tradition and its burial beneath Pope's poetry of sociability. For Warton's speaker, Milton's melancholy is a better subject for poetry than Pope's vice and luxury in *The Rape of the Lock*. Miltonic melancholy provides Warton with a language for critiquing the present, even as he admits that this language cannot actually turn the tide of contemporary literary taste. Warton's twinned

posture of resistance and powerlessness toward modern literature typifies the paradoxical logic of melancholy that animates eighteenth-century appropriations of the feeling.

In the middle two chapters of "Melancholy's Wake," I show how the eighteenth century's fascination with the kind of isolationist melancholy as represented in Milton and Warton manifests itself in contemporary fascinations with death. Specifically, loss as figured through death leads poets and novelists to imagine a link between the rich and the poor that would have been otherwise unthinkable. The two chapters are distinguished by genre, poetry and the sentimental novel: the former focuses on modes of posthumous remembrance, and the latter gives attention to the moments just prior to death, when death is in view but has not yet been experienced. In Chapter Two, "'Mindful of the Unhonored Dead': Anonymous Fame in Gray, Parnell, and Blair," I turn to the eighteenth-century convention of graveyard poetry to show how melancholy produces literary genres and does not merely perpetuate the literary genres of the past. Specifically, it produces memory, even as it also reveals the difficulties of remembering the dead. I argue that, in Thomas Parnell's *A Night-Piece on Death* (1722), Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1743), and Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751), a melancholic attachment to the lower-rank dead is the grounds for a subtle critique of emergent bourgeois ideology, but that it also registers the difficulty or even the impossibility of converting such critique effectively into language. Memorialization of the deceased who never attained wealth or status is both enlivening (in that imagines them as if they were not obscure, but famous), but it is also stifling, as the language of its critique depends upon bourgeois terms that it seems to reject. Melancholy enables speech, but when this speech carries political undertones, melancholy also prevents such speech from sounding too revolutionary. And, as I argue in this chapter, an

attention to melancholy and memorialization reveals that some forms of political critique contain elements that language simply cannot fully contain.

Chapter Three, "Deathly Sentimentalism," places the pairing of melancholy and death into extended narrative. The graveyard poets talk about death after the fact; sentimental novelists such as Sarah Fielding and Henry Mackenzie, on whom this chapter focuses, narrate the process leading up to death. In so doing they produce what I call deathly sentimentalism, by which affective bonds are produced between subjects as an awareness of the fact of death. Death allegorizes for these novelists the loss of a past history. In the cases I examine, this history is a distinctly aristocratic one that appears to be receding in the face of a proto-bourgeois sense of upward mobility. The sentiment that bonds in the face of death is melancholy, and such a melancholy bond between subjects allows for a speaking of loss that is also an imagination of the restoration of loss. In these cases, restorative imagination takes on a revolutionary hue, as it involves a looking forward to heaven as the space in which the injustices enacted by ideologies of upward mobility are reversed. Crucially, though, I argue, such melancholy imagination involves a revolutionary thought that is divorced from action or even any possibility of action. One cannot act when one is dying. One can only talk of losses because one can do nothing else. The melancholy bonds of a deathly sentimentalism figure a deep relationship between resistance and passivity. The passive posture of doing nothing is also, via the melancholy words of a dying sentimental subject, a form of resistance to present history.

In the final chapter, I turn back to the past while also remaining firmly grounded in the eighteenth century. Chapter Four, "*Hamlet*'s Eighteenth-Century Afterlife and the Birth of Literary Criticism," shows not simply how melancholy resists eighteenth-century cultural discourses but also how it produces them. In particular, melancholy helps to shape the fledgling

discipline of literary criticism in the eighteenth century. As critics such as Elizabeth Montagu, George Stubbes, and William Richardson, among others, look back to *Hamlet*, they see Hamlet's melancholy as the means by which modern audiences might sympathize with the fictional character of Hamlet. This formula figures a curious slippage between two equally true but seemingly opposed statements. On the one hand, Hamlet figures a form of universal humanity. We are all, in some ways, like Hamlet, according to these critics. On the other hand, however, Hamlet is, according to these critics, completely isolated from the world of his own play. His melancholy places him at odds with every other character in *Hamlet*. In advocating equally for both of these claims, *Hamlet*'s eighteenth-century readers present melancholy as both enlivening and arresting: it arrests action within the world of the play, but this arrestment leads to enlivening and imaginative reading practices, whereby the acts of reading and viewing lead characters to form imaginative sympathetic bonds with Hamlet the character.

Finally, a word about the title of this dissertation: the title "Melancholy's Wake" contains an implicit question. What is it, exactly, that melancholy leaves in its wake? In many ways, the brand of critical melancholy that I trace across this dissertation appears to leave precisely nothing in its wake. Characters, elegists, and speakers each, as we will see, utilize a melancholy register to imagine a revolutionary upheaval of the world—a restoration of an egalitarian order that they perceive to have been lost—but nothing comes of this. To be entirely literal, we might say that melancholy words produce the concept of Romanticism, but even Romantic poets, in their attempts at revolutionary language, fail to reverse the tides of history. It seems that "melancholy's wake" is—put bluntly—nothing. But there is more to this nothing than meets the eye. I propose that the "nothing" that melancholy produces is, by its very nothingness, actually something. In other words, we might think of "nothing" as a category of meaning and not a

complete and utter void. When W.H. Auden writes, for instance, that, "poetry makes nothing happen,"[48] one can read his statement as in fact saying that poetry produces the concept of nothing as an imaginative category. It makes possible what otherwise seems to be impossible. Poetry makes happen that which seems to be nothing—but only as a function of the imagination, if not in real life. Circling back to melancholy, we might say that melancholy language also makes nothing happen, but on two levels. On one level, it does not change anything about the world. On another level, though, it produces a form of imaginative thought that otherwise seems to mean "nothing" to the real world. This imaginative thought might not change the world—seeming thus to be nothing—but it does figure imagination as a form of resistance. Melancholy's wake may not be praxis: rather, as we will see in the pages that follow, it is thought, creativity, and speech.

[48] W.H. Auden, *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*, 1940, *W.H. Auden: Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage, 1991), pp. 247-48, line 36.

Chapter 1: The Penseroso in the Eighteenth Century: Thomas Warton's Miltonic Melancholy

"Solitude sometimes is best society."
—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

The task of the first chapter of this dissertation is to outline the shape of the intellectual history of ennobling melancholy that, as we will see over the coming pages, is key to an understanding of eighteenth-century life and literary culture. We see the workings of eighteenth-century ennobling melancholy most apparently in the retirement poetry of the mid-century. This poetry, exemplified by Thomas Warton (on whom this chapter will focus most of its attention), James Thomson, William Collins, and Edward Young, among others, depicts melancholy not simply as ennobling but also as pleasing.

As I show in this chapter, the pleasing melancholy of eighteenth-century retirement poetry has roots directly traceable at least to Milton, and more specifically, to *Il Penseroso* (1645). By focusing on Milton's influence on the mid-century sentimental poet Sir Thomas Warton, I show how melancholy's pleasures are part of a rich historical lineage on the one hand and how they are more complicated than they initially appear to be on the other. Many of the mid-century poems of melancholy retreat have been described by critics as dull, uninspired, unoriginal, and hackneyed, in part because they do not seem thematically complex or self-aware. Warton's 1747 poem *The Pleasures of Melancholy* seems on its face to embody this description, perhaps even more so than any of the other sentimental poems of the mid-century. His reliance on the Miltonic style is so obvious that it appears to sap the poem of any inspirational quality. More so than most other poets of his generation, he seems possessed by an urge not simply to imitate the Miltonic style but actually to impersonate Milton himself. As is show, however, the

poem's seemingly unoriginal quality is important to an understanding of the logic of melancholy in the eighteenth century.

In cultivating a persistent yet pleasing gloom, the speaker of Warton's *The Pleasures of Melancholy* finds himself caught in an ambivalent relationship to society itself—an ambivalence that the language of the poem does not and cannot resolve. The problem of the poem's relation to society originates from the following conundrum: if Warton's speaker wants to continue to feel melancholy so as to continue to indulge its pleasures, he must have something to feel melancholy about, which means he must fixate upon the perpetrators of loss in order to feel the melancholy pleasures that come from focusing on loss. He chooses then to feel melancholy about developments in the modern world, specifically about contemporary literary trends, exemplified by Alexander Pope's poetry of sociability which, in Warton's speaker's mind, privileges vain luxury over spiritual enlightenment. The speaker thus mourns the loss of a past literary tradition (for which Milton is the figurehead) that emphasized spiritual pleasures over corporeal ones. Importantly, then, Warton's speaker needs the existence of an ill social world in order to continue to feel the pleasures of melancholy. He both treasures and despises the world upon which he turns his back, all in the same move. In a strange twist, then, the material world, which is the object of his rejection, is in fact more interesting and developed than the spiritual world upon which he claims to fixate.

The first part of my argument is a contention that the extended gloom that characterizes melancholy is also historically aware. It looks back to past history as an object of loss so as to speak out against developments in present history. The melancholy posture is one of retreat—in this case, a retreat from the present into the past. But at the same time (and this is the second part of my argument in this chapter), this retreat is always deferred, precisely because the present

moment is equally enticing, if only because it inspires the pleasing melancholy at the loss of the past itself. If Warton's speaker can only speak in favor of a past literary tradition with an enthusiasm that reads as flat, it is because his fascination with the object of his rejection (the trends of the modern literary world) precludes him from fully committing himself to a spiritual world of muses and solitude. A gulf presents itself between the language of melancholy (the speaker says he has no room in his mind for society) and its logic, thus generating a corresponding gulf in the practice of reading the poem. The implication of these two parts is that melancholy generates an imaginative vision that resists the present by retreating into the object of loss, but this imagination is produced in the absence of a capacity to change the present. Imagination demarcates the difficulty of knowing how to speak to the present or even how to change the present. Even so, imagination allows for a brand of resistance that is not predicated on the necessity of changing the present immediately. What looks like passivity is in fact resistance. Sometimes the act of sitting and pondering the state of present history using one's imaginative faculties is resistance in its own right.

The flatness of the rhetoric of mid-eighteenth-century sentimental poetry has long been a subject of critical interest, even if critics have never quite known what to do with it. There have typically been two kinds of responses to the rhetoric of this kind of poetry. The first is to reject it as simply unredeemable. The second is to claim that this poetry is better than it might appear to the sensibilities of modern readers, and that it reveals invaluable truths about the priorities of eighteenth-century thought. Many scholars who follow the first school of thought have easily dismissed eighteenth-century melancholy poetry wholesale in part because it seems not to belong definitively to any historical period, not even to its own. Arthur Scouten, for instance, aligns the melancholy quality of mid-eighteenth-century sentimental poetry with the evolutionary model of

"literary Darwinism,"[1] in which Romantics such as Wordsworth perfect the ideal of poetic melancholy in a sort of Whiggish model of historical progress. In their sprawling and hugely influential historical overview of Western melancholy from Aristotle to the Romantics, Erwin Panofsky and Raymond Klibansky dismiss the majority of eighteenth-century poetic representations of melancholy as derivative, unimaginative, and unoriginal. In a damning critique, Panofsky and Klibansky write that, "poetic expression of the melancholy mood did in fact become more and more of a convention, while the feeling itself became more and more emasculated."[2] In essence, the poetics of a pleasing melancholy retirement do not have any real referents, but are merely uncritical perpetuations of generic norms inherited from past writers. As a result, Panofsky and Klibansky claim, there is no "content" (237) to the representation of melancholy. It is all form. It seems that melancholy expressions do not sincerely refer to any genuine or personal mood. They are mere formal repetitions of expressions already spoken by earlier—and for Panofsky and Klibansky, superior—poets.

More recently, though, critics have attempted to redeem the themes and the language of the genre of the mid-century sentimental poem. These efforts can be traced back to Marshall Brown's *Preromanticism*, which places the language of poets such as Collins and Young under the care of the accommodating term "urbane sublime." For Brown, the urbane sublime names the

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[1] Arthur Scouten, "The Warton Forgeries and the Concept of Preromanticism in English Literature." *Etudes Anglaises* 40.4 (1987): 434-47, 444.

[2] Erwin Panofsky, Raymond Klibansky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (New York: Basic, 1964), 237. Panofsky and Klibansky do not specify what they mean by their suggestive and problematic use of the figure of emasculation as a metaphor for uninspired writing. One might read this metaphor as a suggestion that eighteenth-century melancholy is not generative, in that it does not appear to transform or further develop already-established conventions of pleasing melancholy. Furthermore (while I do not pursue this possibility in this chapter), the metaphor of emasculation ties the melancholy tradition explicitly to gender, in that melancholy appears, according to the logic of this metaphor, to signify the absence of masculinity.

ways in which poetic interest in ghosts, muses, and spiritual matters across the eighteenth century does not remove the poet-speaker from society, but seeks to link all of human consciousness under a generalized, expansive ideal of spiritual union.[3] The reason that the poetry of Collins, Young, Thomson, and others, appears to be possessed of an "artificial and inflated rhetoric"[4] is because the ideals that this poetry represents must be broad enough to accommodate the entirety of human consciousness. What's more is that the generalized and vague language allows readers a large degree of freedom to interpret the poems on their own.[5] "What passes for artifice and inconsistency," Brown writes, "is thus more adequately understood, at least in the better poetry of the century, as the easy, 'musing' acceptance of shifting orders and fluid hierarchies."[6]

The admiring quality of Brown's language anticipates more recent critical accounts by Margaret Koehler and David Fairer. Koehler, arguing that eighteenth-century poetry is more formally and linguistically complex than the critics of the 1960s such as Panofsky and Klibansky acknowledge, tells us that eighteenth-century poetry demands our attention by its very complexity.[7] Fairer argues that the specters of Milton and Spenser that hang over the mid-century poets such as Warton and Thomas Gray should not lead us to dismiss these poets, but rather to see them as committed to developing a national literary tradition that simply has its roots in the past. Fairer writes that:

> It is implied [by many critics] that Spenser and Milton's 'children' were helpless and unable to find their own voice or direction. This model will no longer do. Once we widen the issue and speak of a national tradition of English poetry ('English' in linguistic terms

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[3] Marshall Brown, *Preromanticism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991), 24.
[4] Ibid., 24.
[5] Ibid., 27.
[6] Ibid., 32.
[7] Margaret Koehler, *Poetry of Attention in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1-14 and throughout.

> only, as it tended to be British in outlook) we can see the poets' engagement with it as a token of their curiosity and confidence rather than their weakness.[8]

Where Panofsky and Klibansky in the 1960s saw the eighteenth-century poets as "weak," Fairer and Koehler both see curiosity and complexity, echoing Brown's sentiment of confident philosophical musing. All three accounts (Brown, Koehler, Fairer), despite their differences, have in common a theme of unification. For Koehler, poetry is thematically and formally unified; for Fairer, it signals a unification of British identity; for Brown, poetry depicts a union between a number of different social orders.

In this chapter, I inquire into accounts such as Brown's, Koehler's, and Fairer's by asking how unified the consciousness of mid-eighteenth-century spiritually inflected poetry actually is. By looking to the representative example of Warton's poetry and prose, which appropriates spiritually oriented Miltonic melancholy to a degree that is unique among his eighteenth-century cohorts, I show that this kind of poetic musing does not bespeak ease or unification so much as it suggests a deep and irreconcilable struggle to come to terms with the trends of sociability and luxury that shape the modern world. What critics such as Klibansky and Panofsky see as pastiche and lack of inspiration in eighteenth-century melancholy poetry is the sign of the difficulty of language to accommodate the complexities and seeming contradictions of the melancholy mood. Warton's speaker's melancholy is anything but easy. It is a deeply haunted attachment to the world that cannot admit to such a fixation. The language of rejection covers over the speaker's desire to gaze. Warton's speaker appears to hate the world because it has erased a past literary tradition (typified by Milton and Spenser), but also clings to the vanity of the modern world precisely because of the "pleasures" of its melancholy. He is gloomy over the state of modern affairs, and his gloom simply continues on into perpetuity—but not in an easy musing way. The

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[8] David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2014), 148.

speaker can never reconcile the tension between the two spaces, regardless of how hard he tries. This inability to reconcile leads Warton's speaker to rely heavily on the language of others—Milton in particular—as he does not know how to articulate the world to which he retreats on his own terms, signaling the ways in which melancholy enables and stifles imagination, articulation, and resistance to the present all at once. Such a reading of melancholy allows for a rethinking of the contours of resistance: sometimes resistance assumes the shape of ambivalence on the one hand and quiet thought on the other.

This chapter has four sections. In the first section, I examine Milton's *Il Penseroso* as an important text to the prehistory of eighteenth-century melancholy. I show how the melancholy mood that Milton proposes is not an absolute separation from the world, but is constituted by a dependence on the worldly mirth from which it retreats. In the second section of this chapter, having set the seventeenth-century backdrop for eighteenth-century poetic representations of melancholy, I turn to a close reading of Warton's *The Pleasures of Melancholy*, which Amy Louise Reed, for one, has referred to as a "loving imitation"[9] of *Il Penseroso*. In channeling the imaginative melancholy that defined Milton's poem, Warton also channels Milton's paradoxical fascination with the mirth from which he retreats. In the third section, however, I show that in Warton's hands, this brand of paradoxical melancholy assumes a unique eighteenth-century application, specifically to ideas of judgments about literary taste. Warton's fascination with Pope develops as a contemporary application of Miltonic melancholy and turns Miltonic melancholy into a barometer of standards of literary taste. Unable to change modern taste, Warton's speaker instead imagines a spiritual vision that he borrows from Milton. I conclude the chapter by applying the theory of melancholy taste that Warton portrays in *The Pleasures of*

[9] Amy Louise Reed, *The Background of Gray's Elegy: A Study in the Taste for Melancholy Poetry, 1700-1751* (New York: Columbia UP, 1924), 182.

Melancholy to his remarks on the eighteenth-century reception of Milton in his 1785 edition of Milton's shorter poetry, titled *Poems Upon Several Occasions*. In his preface to the poetry, Warton approaches the whole of eighteenth-century literary history from the perspective of its response to Milton and to Milton's melancholy, such that literary history might potentially be also thought of as the history of melancholy.

I. *Il Penseroso* and the Duality of Melancholy

Where eighteenth-century medical writers such as George Cheyne see melancholy's perpetuity on the subject's psyche as a sign of its debilitating quality,[10] the poets borrow from John Milton a belief that melancholy's quality of persistent gloom is the apotheosis of moral refinement. Melancholy figures (as Milton claims in *Il Penseroso* and as Warton too will claim over a hundred years later) are of strong moral fiber because the gloom that shapes their entire approach to life has as the object of its critique a sick world full of people too short-sighted to understand the pleasures of moral living. The sign of moral fortitude thus is a refusal to stop being pessimistic about the world, such that unresolvable gloom and moral uprightness converge. And yet, as we will see, these poetic critiques of worldly pleasures are tenuous enough so as to seesaw between disgust and fixation.

Thomas Warton was drawn to Milton (and to *Il Penseroso* in particular) throughout his life, and his brand of melancholy is distinctly Miltonic. Warton sees Milton's life as divided between a sublime and spiritually oriented poetic vision and an uncreative Puritanism, and prefers the first trajectory over the second, as the first trajectory is poetically dynamic and the second falls flat. In his preface to his 1785 edition of Milton's shorter poems, titled *Poems upon Several Occasions*, which I deal with in more detail at the end of this chapter, Warton writes that

[10] See George Cheyne, *The English Malady* (Dublin: 1733).

the political turmoil of the mid-seventeenth century did more than simply fragment the English nation: it also fragmented Milton's creative mind. Warton suggests that, while in the first part of his life, in poems such *Il Penseroso*, *L'Allegro*, and *Comus*, Milton had an unfettered creative vision with an unobstructed access to sublime matters, all of this became severely compromised when he turned his attention to political matters in the 1640s. "Smit with the deplorable polemics of puritanism," Warton writes, "[Milton] suddenly ceased to gaze on *such sights as youthful poets dream*."[11] The spiritual dreams of youth collapsed under the weight of religious and political faction. Instead of gazing on sights above, Milton contented himself with things below, thus blunting the creativity of his mind.[12] Warton writes:

> Yet in this chaos of controversy, amidst endless disputes concerning religious and political reformation, independency, prelacy, tythes, toleration, and tyranny, he sometimes seemed to have heaved a sigh for the peaceable enjoyments of lettered solitude, for his congenial pursuits, and the more mild and ingenuous exercises of the muse. (*Poems*, xiv).

Much recent scholarly work has focused on the political nature of Milton's poetry and prose. Sharon Achinstein has claimed that Milton's political work refashions the act of reading as populist because it allows readers to choose where their allegiances lie,[13] and David Loewenstein sees Milton's poetry as tinged with the same "polemical edge"[14] that characterizes his political

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[11] John Milton, *Poems Upon Several* Occasions, ed. Thomas Warton (London: 1785), xiii. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text as *Poems*.

[12] While he does not name any specific texts from the middle of Milton's career, he likely has in mind Milton's political tracts, such as *Eikonoklastes* (1649), *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649), and *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660), all of which directly denounce the English monarchy.

[13] Sharon Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), 3 and throughout. Achinstein writes that writers such as Milton "demand[ed] that their audiences make political choices and that they participate in the political process; in sum, they invoked a revolutionary idea of a reader" (3).

[14] David Loewenstein, *Representing Revolution in Milton and His Contemporaries: Religion, Politics, and Polemics in Radical Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 4.

tracts.[15] This, though, is not the Milton that Warton admires. He is more interested in the Milton of *Il Penseroso* who communes with the heavens instead of with the human masses.

While it may not have been as popular in the eighteenth century as *Paradise Lost*, *Il Penseroso* enjoys a rich afterlife in the eighteenth century and becomes formative to the foundation of the melancholy mood.[16] *Il Penseroso* succinctly describes the melancholy mood and is easily imitable. Many scholars, including Amy Louise Reed and R.D. Havens, have pointed out the fascination of many eighteenth-century poets, including Thomas Gray, Elizabeth Rowe, James Thomson, and Isaac Watts, with *Il Penseroso*, to the extent that we might say that *Il Penseroso* belongs as much to the eighteenth century as to the seventeenth.[17]

Il Penseroso was originally a companion poem to *L'Allegro*. Both were published in Milton's 1645 folio, *The Poems of Mr. John Milton*. The speaker of *Il Penseroso* imagines melancholy as an insight into heavenly glory, as opposed to the speaker of *L'Allegro*, who thinks of melancholy as born "In Stygian Cave forlorn/ 'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy."[18] (*L'Allegro* 3-4). *Il Penseroso* is a landmark text in the history of representations of melancholy. It departs from the mood characterized in *L'Allegro* that melancholy is a disease, and instead uses melancholy as a descriptor for the virtues of solitude. If *L'Allegro* espouses a

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[15] For other readings on Milton as a political writer see, for instance, Steven Zwicker, *Lines of Authority: Politics and English Culture, 1649-1689* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993): 37-59, 90-129; and more famously, Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977).

[16] *Paradise Lost* was certainly formative to eighteenth-century thought as well. Consider Sanford Budick's recent *Kant and Milton* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010), which focuses heavily on *Paradise Lost*'s influence on Kant's thought.

[17] See Amy Louise Reed, *The Background of Gray's Elegy: A Study in the Taste for Melancholy Poetry, 1700-1751* (New York: Columbia UP, 1924); and R.D. Havens, *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961).

[18] John Milton, *L'Allegro*, 1631, *John Milton: The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), pp. 22-25, lines 18-19. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text as *L'Allegro*.

view of melancholy as disease, *Il Penseroso* sees it as the very condition of spiritual awareness. As Gordon Teskey notes in his recent survey of Milton's poetry, the speaker of *L'Allegro* is not content to toss melancholy to hell, but instead exiles it to the realm of the Cimmerians and, as Teskey notes, "what is banished to the periphery will of course return."[19] Since he does not kill melancholy but rather sends it to the periphery, Milton's speaker opens the door for melancholy's return in *Il Penseroso*. In this section I show that in many ways, Milton's anticipation of Wartonian melancholy is a function of the grammatical constructions that he uses to represent his shift from the world to the space of melancholy retreat itself. Milton's melancholy is marked by two different movements: it attempts to move away from worldly vanity and toward the heavens, but cannot reject worldly pleasure without first representing a deep fascination with it.

If the subject of *Il Penseroso* is melancholy, melancholy is only born out of its opposite: vain mirth. Oddly—and importantly, for the purposes of my reading—*Il Penseroso* does not begin with melancholy at all:

> Hence, vain deluding Joys,
> The brood of Folly without father bred!
> How little you bested,
> Or fill the fixed mind with all your toys!
> Dwell in some idle brain,
> And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess,
> As thick and numberless
> As the gay motes that people the sunbeams,
> Or likest hovering dreams,
> The fickle pensioners of Morpheus' train.[20]

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[19] Gordon Teskey, *The Poetry of John Milton* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2015), 79. The Cimmerians, Teskey writes, are "a strange, remote people who live in perpetual twilight in the wilderness ('desert') at the edge of the world" (79).

[20] John Milton, *Il Penseroso*, 1631, *John Milton: The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), pp. 25-30, lines 1-10. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text as *Il Penseroso*.

This poem opens as a conventional critique of vanity and folly, with little hint in its first ten lines that the subject of the poem is not indeed vanity, but melancholy. Moreover, Milton's references to "vain deluding Joys" and "Folly" remain ambiguous, both in these opening lines and throughout the rest of the poem. What exactly are those "vain deluding Joys" or "fancies fond with gaudy shapes"? Milton does not tell us, but leaves vanity and folly as an open category, a universal principle without a particular referent. It seems that the only consistent description of these terms lies in the fact that the objects of vanity and folly are objects that present themselves to the senses and to the senses alone. Incapable of "fill[ing] the fixed mind with all [their] toys," these objects do not cross the border between the exterior sensory organs of the body and the interior mind. The poet-speaker senses these objects without contemplating them. With descriptors like "thick" and "gaudy," the first ten lines of the poem are preoccupied with the senses of touch and sight. The shapes are thick in texture and overbright to the sight. In "filling" or overwhelming the senses, the shapes cannot "fill" or occupy the mind. In the first ten lines, Milton, sets up a mind/body dichotomy, in that the mind is not able to think on that which is accessible to the body's sensory organs. By describing the mind in this passage as "fixed," Milton's poet-speaker indicates that the vain mind does not have the capacity to think on anything beyond what is immediately present to it. It remains locked in one place, capable only of directing its attention to the toys of "vain deluding Joys." These toys, being products of vanity, seem to bring an instant pleasure that prevents the mind from transcending the immediate moment of that pleasure.

Milton finally gives his invocation to the muse of Melancholy after ten lines of descriptions of vanity and corruption:

> But hail thou goddess, sage and holy,
> Hail divinest Melancholy,

> Whose saintly visage is too bright
> To hit the sense of human sight.
> And therefore to our weaker view
> O'erlaid with black, staid Wisdom's hue;
> Black, but such as in esteem
> Prince Memnon's sister might beseem … (*Il Penseroso*, lines 11-18)

Where vanity and folly transmit signals to the senses that do not lead the mind to think, melancholy transmits signals that are too strong for the "weaker view" of the sense of sight. Its signals are too bright for the eyes to process, and yet they still strike the mind. Instead of focusing on a bright visage that it cannot fully see, the mind compensates by translating these bright images as darkness. Even if the mind develops an imperfect image of Melancholy's bright visage, it nevertheless performs a work of imagination in an attempt to understand the meaning of Melancholy. The mind steps in where the senses fail. The mind thus dwells on melancholy for a more extended period than it would dwell on those "vain deluding Joys" because it must perform more work in imagining the shape of Melancholy's visage than it would have exerted processing the dull shapes that vanity and folly assume. In performing this work, the mind is no longer fixed, or stationary, but rather moves out of itself

One of the reasons that Melancholy works on the senses in a less immediate way than the "toys" of vanity from which the poet retreats is that Melancholy belongs to a different world than the world to which the "gaudy shapes" of vanity belong. It comes from the heavens. For Milton, melancholy manifests itself as a sensitivity to the fact that the material world is fleeting and subject to decay. Melancholy figures sublimate their understanding of the instability of the material world by instead focusing on an immaterial, or spiritual, realm that is immutable and not subject to decay. The poet-speaker's imagination of the immutable divine realm then allows him in turn to imagine "all heaven [brought] before mine eyes" (*Il Penseroso*, line 166). Such an imagination of the perfection of heaven is only possible for the melancholy subject by the act of

retreating from the world that contains those "gaudy shapes" whose pleasure belongs to the lower material order instead of to the higher spiritual order. Milton's speaker is represented as invisible, presupposing a vision of retreat from the physical world. When Milton's poet-speaker claims, for instance, to enjoy "walk[ing] unseen/ On the dry smooth-shaven green" (165-66), the notion of being unseen presupposes solitude. The speaker is unseen because there is no one present to see him. As such, the religious enchantment of melancholy is only possible through an act of retirement from the world.[21]

The "hence" that characterizes the first ten lines of the poem makes possible the "hail" that characterizes the invocation of melancholy. Milton's bidding of vanity hence precedes a retirement from the social world. Moreover, Milton's invocation to the goddess Melancholy is introduced by the coordinating conjunction "but." The goddess does not emerge spontaneously from the poet's imagination; rather, she appears only as a reaction to those aforementioned principles of vanity and folly.[22] There exists in these opening fourteen lines a paradoxical and co-dependent relationship between melancholy and vanity. Melancholy represents a perfection of thought, an ideal toward which the pensive poet should strive, but this ideal is conjured into being by the vanity that opposes it. The poet-speaker cannot bid an ill world hence without first describing it to his readers. In this sense, bidding hence is also, paradoxically, a form of fixation,

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[21] As we will see in my reading of Warton's *The Pleasures of Melancholy*, this trope of retirement as central to melancholy is one that eighteenth-century inheritors of Miltonic melancholy will pick up on.

[22] Milton's personifying of melancholy as a goddess invites questions about what it means to personify a mood. For a discussion of Miltonic personification, see Steven Knapp, *Personification and the Sublime: Milton to Coleridge* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985). Knapp suggests that personification delineates a correspondence between self-knowledge and knowledge of an idea, and writes that in personification, a "total dependence *on* its idea is matched by a reflective consciousness *of* its idea; the personification is self-consciously obsessed with the grounds of its own allegorical being" (3). Personification for Knapp is the apotheosis of self-reflexivity.

because in order to bid vanity hence, Milton's speaker must first conjure it up to his and his readers' imaginations so that his reader will understand exactly what he is escaping by his act of retreat and he is attempting to escape it. He describes it in such a way that he appears to be transfixed by that which he is rejecting. Milton's melancholy is not simply a rejection of a vain world, but is also a hailing of that vain world, since he cannot reject something unless he first hails it. Thematically and tropologically, the two poems constitute a chiasmus. It is often difficult to tell which comes first, mirth or melancholy.

R.D. Havens has suggested that Milton's dependence on the values articulated through the term "hence" constitutes one of his eighteenth-century legacies. Listing the Miltonic "hence" as one of fourteen points that characterizes the eighteenth-century interest in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, Havens defines "hence" as "an execrated personified quality (or qualities) [that] is described by implication and bidden to flee."[23] While I would suggest, contra Havens, that those "execrated qualities" are not implied by the poet but made explicit, we might say that *L'Allegro* opens by bidding melancholy to flee, such that the melancholy of *Il Penseroso* can only be called after the poet has first bidden the mirth of *L'Allegro* to flee.

In the commentary to his 1785 publication of *Il Penseroso*, Warton goes so far as to speculate that Milton's melancholy contains the same ingredients as the mirth that he advocates in *L'Allegro*. In making this contention, Warton points out that *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are both descriptive poems, in that they both rely on vivid descriptions that inspire the imagination. "Both poems," Warton writes, "are the result of the same feelings, and the same habits of thought" (*Poems*, 97). In a similar vein, Thomas Newton writes of the relationship between *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* that the two poems "appear much more beautiful when they are

[23] Havens, 440.

considered as they were written, in contrast to each other. There is a great variety of pleasing images in each of them; and it is remarkable, that the poet represents several of the same objects as exciting both mirth and melancholy, and affecting us differently, according to the different dispositions and affections of the soul."[24] Thus, even if the melancholy mood is constituted by a desire to bid worldly vanity hence, it cannot fully follow through on that desire, because both mirth and melancholy fixate on the same objects, just from the different postures of absence and presence. For Warton, Milton's interest in painting vivid natural landscapes in both *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* suggests that there is not much of a difference between the two moods. Warton writes, for instance, that, "Many a pensive man listens with delight to the milk-maid *singing blithe*, to the mower *whetting his scythe*, and to a distant peal of village-bells" (*Poems*, 97). This is a reference to the following lines from *L'Allegro*: "And the milkmaid singeth blithe,/ And the mower whets his scythe" (65-66). The village-bells of this line are of course a synecdoche for society, which melancholy should in theory be rejecting—even though it seems here that the pensive man finds pleasure in the sounds of society when he should be rejecting society. The melancholy figure, for Warton, could just as easily find solace in these objects as in the "pealing organ blow[s]" (*Il Penseroso*, 161) of heaven.[25]

As the poem continues, the distance between melancholy and worldly pleasure collapses even further. While Miltonic melancholy's opposition to worldly vanity seems to enact a mind-body split, in that Melancholy's inspiration goes beyond the realm of the human senses, Milton

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[24] *The Beauties of Milton, Thomson, and Young*, ed. Thomas Newton (London: 1783), 1.
[25] C. Harold Hurley suggests that Warton is one of the quintessential eighteenth-century advocates for the view that the moods of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are not all that different from one another. The other, in Hurley's reading, is Francis Peck, who, in his *New Memoirs of the Life and Poetical Works of Mr. John Milton* (1740), speculated, like Warton, that both poems were influenced by Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (C. Harold Hurley, *The Sources and Traditions of Milton's* L'Allegro *and* Il Penseroso [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1999], 19-20).

is unable to sustain this split as *Il Penseroso* progresses. At the beginning of the poem, the human senses seemed associated with worldly mirth and vanity, and the mind seemed associated with melancholy, because the goddess Melancholy belonged to a heavenly order that was not simply material in composition. Whether intentionally or not, Milton complicates this strict dichotomy toward the end of the poem. Whereas at the beginning of the poem, Melancholy's face was "too bright/ To hit the sense of human sight" (13-14), Melancholy appears by contrast to be perfectly suited to the sense of human sight as the poem concludes:

> There let the pealing organ blow,
> To the full-voiced choir below,
> In service high, and anthems clear,
> As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
> Dissolve me into ecstasies,
> And bring all heaven before mine eyes. (161-66)

Ecstasy describes a numbing of the faculties of sensation in favor of spiritual insight, but Milton's description of ecstasy is in fact fully sensory, as if he cannot disavow the senses without also conjuring them.[26] Heaven comes to the speaker first via the ear, then via the eye. The organ is the precursor of a coming glory that will soon overwhelm his entire field of vision. By having his ears overcome by heavenly sounds, the speaker is prepared for heaven's gradual takeover of his entire sensory experience. The spiritual world, by the end of the poem, seems just as sensual as the world of gaudy shapes was at the beginning of the poem. Milton returns to the human senses even after he has appeared to reject them as insufficient for true knowledge of the spiritual realm. He seems drawn to the same immediacy of "ecstasy" that he bade hence in the poem's opening lines. Why does Milton perform such a move?

According to the logic whereby melancholy focuses on the world that it rejects, Milton's

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[26] To this end, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "ecstasy" as "the technical name for the state of rapture in which the body was supposed to become incapable of sensation, while the soul was engaged in the contemplation of divine things" (def. 3a).

speaker has no choice here but to prioritize the sensory organs. Milton is performing here a move central to the work of melancholy, depending upon a fascination with the world that he has rejected in order to render the insights of melancholy retirement more palpable. Here, even as Milton idealizes a world where he is not beholden to his sensory organs, he still needs to depend on these sensory organs to access the higher-order spiritual insights.[27] Milton might idealize Melancholy's visage as "too bright/ To hit the sense of human sight," but once he pursues the spiritual enlightenment of melancholy, he finds melancholy's objects striking his senses of sight and hearing anyway. Milton presents a rhetoric wherein melancholy is anti-sensual, but this rhetoric exists in tension with actual practice, according to which he finds himself still dependent upon his senses. The senses themselves operate as an interlocutor between the spiritually inflected space of retirement and the social space of fleeting gaudy shapes.

This networked relationship wherein the senses bridge the two realms continues in eighteenth-century receptions of Miltonic melancholy. In his *Ode on Melancholy* (1763), for instance, William Mason laments that "Beauty's eye [cannot] supply/ A charm so suited to [his] mind"[28] even as he goes on to describe in vivid detail the beauties of twilight and ivy-covered groves. Mason rejects sensory beauty even despite his vivid descriptions of scenes of natural beauty. In his poem *The Enthusiast* (1744), Joseph Warton sees natural landscapes "lessening to

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[27] For a discussion of the relation between mind and sense, see Rei Terada, *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatidsfaction, Kant to Adorno* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009). For Terada, phenomenal appearance inaugurates a crisis of knowledge about the world. When we are made aware of a person or thing's appearance, we are also led to inquire into the relationship between appearance and essence. "[T]he discourse of mere phenomenality," Terada writes, "registers surreptitiously the difficulty of opining about the given. 'Appearance' here carries the Nietzschean connotation of 'mere' appearance, of pejorative attenuation. We think about appearance in this way when we want to create distance between ourselves and the given world, and this distance reads as a failure to endorse the given world" (3).

[28] William Mason, *Ode on Melancholy* (London: 1763), lines 9-11.

the Sight,"[29] and yet, like Mason, he describes the sights of caves and the sounds of the roaring sea.[30] Finally, the senses' negotiation between melancholy and mirth continues in Warton's *The Pleasures of Melancholy* and plays a key function in Warton's juxtaposition of Spenser and Pope, as we will see in the next section.

Regardless of the historical circumstance, melancholy appears on first glance to represent a universalized ideal of retirement that includes pensive reflection on the inevitable decay of the social world from which one retreats. Since Milton does not tell us what kind of vanity or folly he has in mind, one might infer that the descriptors of vanity and folly can be mapped onto numerous specific principles, which makes it easily applicable to numerous different referents for its eighteenth-century inheritors. In her brief reading of *Il Penseroso*, Joanna Picciotto has suggested that Milton is advocating a melancholy whose historical moment has in fact not yet arrived. "The prophetic poet who can spell of creation will be embodied decades later," Picciotto writes, "as a speaker who can 'see and tell/ Of things invisible to mortal sight,' […] but [in *Il Penseroso*] that source is thinly imagined, associated with a personification of melancholy whose gifts are anticipated rather than known."[31] In Picciotto's reading, the pensive poet intends to seek out insight through his pursuit of melancholy, but the product of such an intention is located not in *Il Penseroso*, but thirty years later, in *Paradise Lost*.[32] While Picciotto sees the historical fulfillment of Milton's poetic vision in *Paradise Lost*, we might also read Milton's representation of melancholy in *Il Penseroso* as an anticipation of the eighteenth century, particularly as an

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[29] Joseph Warton, *The Enthusiast* (London: 1744), line 8.
[30] Amy Louise Reed claims that *The Enthusiast* is an imitation of *Il Penseroso* (182-83).
[31] Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2010), 412.
[32] As such, Picciotto's reading of *Il Penseroso* is at its core a prelude to her much more extended reading of *Paradise Lost* as a poem that realizes the enlightenment of which *Il Penseroso* only dreams.

anticipation of the poetic melancholies of William Collins, Thomas Gray, Elizabeth Rowe, James Thomson, and Thomas Warton. In particular, Milton's practice of implicitly fixating upon that which he intends to bid hence is echoed in Thomas Warton's poetic representation of melancholy over a hundred years after *Il Penseroso*.

II. Warton's Melancholy

Thomas Warton famously published *The Pleasures of Melancholy* when he was only nineteen years old, but the poem would turn out to be perhaps his most famous. R.D. Havens refers to Warton as the "high priest of the eighteenth-century Milton cult,"[33] in part because, even at the age of nineteen, his familiarity with the nuances of Miltonic verse seemed to leap off the page. *Pleasures* is an important poem because it does not simply advocate for the cultivation of the melancholy mood, but it also situates the melancholy mood within a historical tradition and reflects an interest in past literary history, most notably *Il Penseroso* and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. While the young Warton seems possessed in his poetry of a solitary gloom, it seems that his actual life was much more sociable. As John A. Vance puts it, Warton's reputation among those such as Lord Eldon of Oxford University, where Warton went to school, was that of a carefree student "wandering about the university and its surrounding area, returning in the evening to lead his companions in joke-telling and drinking ale."[34] Regardless of the young Warton's reputation, however, his poetic mind was much more solemn. In 1823, Henry Francis Cary speculated that Warton's poem simultaneously revealed his dependence on Milton

[33] Havens, 463.
[34] John A. Vance, *Joseph and Thomas Warton* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983), 8. Vance speculates that the stories of Thomas Warton's laziness, including those told by Lord Eldon, may have been exaggerated (8).

and spoke to his grief over the death of his father.[35] "In this poem his imitations of Milton are so frequent and palpable," Cary writes, "as to discover the timid flight of a young writer not daring to quit the track of his guide."[36]

Whatever the mind of the writer behind the poem, Warton's *The Pleasures of Melancholy* represents a particularly important inheritance of the Miltonic tradition of poetic melancholy. This is because, in a more self-conscious manner than any other poetic representation of the Miltonic melancholy tradition in the eighteenth century, it employs the melancholy mood as a tool for marking and judging standards of the modern literary market. Thomas Warton held a deep interest in the literature of past historical periods, which he demonstrated in both his poetry and criticism. Warton's two most famous critical works, *Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser* (1754) and *The History of English Poetry* (1774-81), both reflect a preoccupation with England's literary past. Building on René Wellek's claim that "Warton was the first historian of English literature in the full sense of the term,"[37] Lawrence Lipking contends that Warton believes, as especially evidenced in *The History of English Poetry*, that readers must understand the histories of literary trends if they truly want to understand the ways that poetic imagination works.[38] According to Lipking and Wellek, one of Warton's abiding legacies resides in the ways

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[35] Henry Francis Cary, "Memoirs of Thomas Warton." *The Portfolio*, vol XVI, ed. John E. Hall (Philadelphia: 1823), 353-62. Thomas Warton the elder died in 1745, two years before the publication of *Pleasures*. There is little evidence other than speculation to suggest that *Pleasures* was directly influenced by his death. Joan Pittock points out, however, that Warton the elder was himself "a staunch admirer of the minor poems of Milton" (Joan Pittock, *The Ascendancy of Taste: The Achievement of Joseph and Thomas Warton* [London: Routledge, 1973], 125).
[36] Cary, 354. Cary also acknowledges a nineteenth-century debate about the authorship of *Pleasures*, claiming that some readers attributed the poem to Mark Akenside rather than to Warton (354).
[37] René Wellek, *The Rise of English Literary History* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1941), 201.
[38] Lawrence Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 354.

that he links literature to history, marking past historical periods according to the kinds of literature that their poets produced. In this section, I show that Warton's fascination with the poetry of the past (particularly his fascination with the poetry of Milton) influences his paradoxical fascination with contemporary poetry—exemplified by *The Rape of the Lock*—with which the speaker of *The Pleasures of Melancholy* claims to have no fascination at all. In claiming that Miltonic melancholy marks a literary tradition that is better than current day poetry of sociability, Warton's melancholy speaker is given an excuse to talk about the social poetry that Miltonic poetry is supposedly better than, such that he spends as much time fixating on the pleasures of supposedly inferior poetry as he spends talking about spiritually superior poetry. Warton's speaker's resistance to the present moment is articulated as a fixation with it. The implication of these claims is that resistance to the present takes the form of imagination rather than direct intervention in the present, and that resistance is never easy. It sometimes appears passive and ambivalent, such that the appearance of ambivalence is central to the definition of resistance.

The question that frames my reading of *The Pleasures of Melancholy* is similar to the one that describes the previous section's examination of *Il Penseroso*: are the pleasures upon which Warton's speaker focuses the pleasures of a higher heavenly realm, or are they in fact earthly pleasures that are merely disguised as heavenly ones? In her book-length study of the theme of attention in eighteenth-century poetry, Margaret Koehler offers up an analysis that leads to a similar question. Koehler's reading contends that the sublime poets of nature in the mid-eighteenth century employ the figure of night or evening as a rhetorical device wherein the senses fade away in favor of more cerebral insight. Early eighteenth-century poets would claim,

Koehler argues, that "night amplifies the senses,"[39] where by mid-century night performs the opposite gesture.[40] Even so, Koehler writes, "These same [mid-century] poets, however, frequently find themselves unable to shake off the senses and instead enact vivid restorations of sensory attention and more intense immersion in surroundings."[41] *The Pleasures of Melancholy*, along with, among others, Thomson's *The Seasons*, figure a prominent role in Koehler's reading. Her argument begs the question, though: why are these poets so deeply incapable of performing the self-removal from the realm of the senses that they speak of doing?

What I want to suggest is that Warton's references to the social world, the realm of the senses, and the poetry of sociability all in fact figure a slippage between interest and disinterest in the social sphere. More specifically, the melancholy mood uniquely necessitates an unbridgeable gap between rhetoric and performance. For one thing, it relies, as we will see, on the rejection of an evil object that has precipitated the lost object of the melancholic's desire. This rejection looks like an attempt to evacuate the evil object from one's mind, but it is also necessary to keep the evil object at the fore of one's consciousness because it reminds one why one is so attached to the lost object—the lost object in this case being past literary tradition that has faded out of the public's collective consciousness. Melancholy thus seems to make absent the evil object even as this making absent precipitates a continued gaze upon that object. For another thing, the rhetoric of resistance to the world belies the fact that Warton's speaker cannot in fact do anything to change the world. He merely wishes for the recovery of the past, such that

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[39] Koehler, 111.
[40] For another important reading of the importance of the evening poem in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Christopher R. Miller, *The Invention of Evening: Perception and Time in Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006). According to Miller, "evening in eighteenth-century poetry became an *aesthetic* occasion, as Kant defined the word in his *Critique of Judgment*—that is, a sensory experience that informs or underlies a cognitive idea of beauty or pleasure" (15).
[41] Koehler, 111.

powerful feeling opens up the possibility for a poetic vision even if it prevents one from direct intervention in the world. Poetic vision might not change the world, but it does resist the world by critiquing modern trends, and yet this resistance is deeply complicated and carries an uncertain future. No one, not even Warton's speaker, knows what his melancholy imagination will generate, and such unknowability about the nature of imagination's generative quality is the very condition of imaginative thought.

Numerous scholars have observed the influence of *Il Penseroso* on *The Pleasures of Melancholy*, to the point that the evidence of *Il Penseroso*'s influence might lead one to wonder how original Warton's own composition is. Eleanor Sickels has suggested that *Pleasures* is the first in a wave of eighteenth-century poems on pleasing melancholy, and that it borrows themes both from *Il Penseroso* and from *Paradise Lost*.[42] In perhaps the most meticulous account of *Il Penseroso*'s direct influence on *Pleasures*, R.D. Havens lists numerous moments where Warton's language and themes directly echo Milton's.[43] For Havens, Milton's declarative "These pleasures, Melancholy, give" (*Il Penseroso*, 175) is echoed in Warton's, "Yet are these joys that Melancholy gives."[44] Robert Griffin has suggested that Warton's poem draws upon both *Il Penseroso* and *L'Allegro*, in that *Pleasures* spends sufficient time describing the same brand of

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[42] Eleanor M. Sickels, *The Gloomy Egoist: Moods and Themes of Melancholy from Gray to Keats* (New York: Columbia UP, 1932), 79. Sickels mentions, for instance, Samuel Rogers' *The Pleasures of Memory* (1792), Thomas Campbell's *The Pleasures of Hope* (1799), and Mark Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination* (1744) as representative examples (79).

[43] Among many other examples that Havens notes, one of the more prominent is the interest that both poets share in observing heavenly choirs singing and angelic organs playing (*Il Penseroso*, 161-66; *Pleasures*, 196-201), images that wash the soul in "ecstasies" (*Il Penseroso*, 165; *Pleasures*, 200) after the melancholy poet-speaker has retired from the world.

[44] Thomas Warton, *The Pleasures of Melancholy* (London: 1747), 297. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text as *Pleasures.* John T. Shawcross, like Havens, discusses the impact of Milton's style of blank verse on eighteenth-century poets like Warton (John T. Shawcross, "The Deleterious and the Exalted: Milton's Poetry in the Eighteenth Century," *Milton and the Grounds of Contention*, ed. Mark R. Kelley, Michael Lieb, and John T. Shawcross [Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2002], 11-36).

mirth that Milton describes in *L'Allegro*, only to reject mirth for its incapacity to bring anything more than a momentary pleasure.[45] Oliver W. Ferguson, in a decidedly pre-Romantic vein, sees Warton's poem as a bridge between Milton and Keats, claiming that Warton is prophesying Keatsian melancholy just as much as he is echoing Miltonic melancholy.[46]

In 1801, the English poet Henry Kirke White presents a deeply complex view of Thomas Warton's importance to literary history, one that informs my own reading of the poem. With *The Pleasures of Melancholy* specifically in mind, White praises Warton in *Monthly Mirror* for his love of Milton and for his resistance to the "frivolities" of the kinds of verse that dominated the eighteenth-century literary landscape. Importantly, for White, Warton's interest in Milton and his resistance to modern frivolity are related. This is because modern taste in poetry, typified by Popean wit (that is, influenced by the Pope of *The Rape of the Lock* and not the Pope of *Eloisa to Abelard*),[47] cannot find any room for the grand imaginative landscapes that had characterized Milton. White writes:

> It has, with much justice, been observed, that Pope, and his imitators, have introduced a species of refinement into our language, which has banished that nerve and pathos, for which Milton had rendered it eminent. Harmonious modulations, and unvarying exactness of measure, totally precluding sublimity and fire, have reduced our fashionable poetry to mere sing-song. But Thomas Warton whose taste was unvitiated by the frivolities of the day, immediately saw the intrinsic worth of what the world then slighted. He saw, that the ancient poets contained a fund of strength, and beauty of imagery, as well as diction, which, in the hands of genius would shine forth with redoubled lustre. Entirely rejecting, therefore, modern niceties, he extracted the honied sweets from these beautiful, though neglected flowers. Every grace of sentiment, every poetical term, which

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[45] Robert J. Griffin, "The Eighteenth-Century Construction of Romanticism: Thomas Warton and the Pleasures of Melancholy." *ELH* 59.4 (1992): 799-815, 803. Havens backs Griffin's claim by pointing out that *L'Allegro* and *Pleasures* both make similar references to the kinds of pleasures associated with the divinities Euphrosyne (Havens, 598; *Il Penseroso*, 12; *Pleasures*, 285) and Bacchus (Havens, 598; Milton, 16; Warton, 291).

[46] Oliver W. Ferguson, "Warton and Keats: Two Views of Melancholy." *Keats-Shelley Journal* 18 (1969): 12-15.

[47] I deal later in this chapter with Warton's own complex relationship to Pope—specifically, his simultaneous adulation for *Eloisa to Abelard* and distrust of *The Rape of the Lock*.

> a false taste had rendered obsolete, was by him revived and made to grace his own ideas; and though many will condemn him, as guilty of plagiarism, yet few will be able to withhold the tribute of their praise.[48]

According to White, while many of the words, phrases, or images that Warton uses in his poetry echo or even reproduce Miltonic verse, those words do not necessarily correspond to the same referents in Warton as they might have in Milton. As White puts it, Warton uses Miltonic language "to grace his own ideas." Moreover, according to White, Warton's interest in Milton is not as simple as a love for the genius of his poetry. Rather, Warton cannot love Milton unless he also, as White puts it, "rejects" the "modern niceties" of dominant eighteenth-century poetry. To love and imitate Milton is in fact a double move, because a move toward Milton is necessarily a move away from the "sing-song" poetry of the contemporary literary market.

For White, the kind of imagination associated with Milton and supposedly forgotten during the period between Milton and Warton is also associated specifically with melancholy. After praising Warton's dependence on Milton, White quotes from *The Pleasures of Melancholy* to demonstrate Warton's interest in descriptive poetry,[49] an interest that was not always shared by other eighteenth-century poets. Of *The Pleasures of Melancholy*, White writes, "The gloomy tints with which he overcasts his descriptions, his highly figurative language; and, above all, the antique air which the poem wears, convey the most sublime ideas to the mind."[50] In short, the sublimity that Warton borrows from Milton produces in the mind a melancholy that arises from a thoughtful acknowledgement of one's irreversible estrangement and isolation from sociable "modern niceties."

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[48] Henry Kirke White, "Remarks on the English Poets," 1801. *The Remains of Henry Kirke White*, ed. Robert Southey (London: 1808), 205-6.
[49] White quotes lines 150-62 of *The Pleasures of Melancholy*, in which Warton juxtaposes Pope's Belinda with Spenser's Una. I deal directly with these lines later in this chapter.
[50] White, 206.

In essence, White suggests that Warton's poetry in general, and *The Pleasures of Melancholy* in particular, is a hybrid of old and new. Warton's own melancholy necessarily depends upon the prior existence of a past poetic tradition that has been largely forgotten by the modern age. Particularly striking about White's reading of Warton is his suggestion that Warton's melancholy is simultaneously his own and not his own. He cannot depict a supposedly genuine feeling without falling back on the language of prior poets. In attempting ingenuity and independence from the present age, he instead stumbles headlong into a codependent relationship with dead poets.[51]

At the same time (and the following claim seems nearly irreconcilable with the previous), White's reading also implies that Warton is rendered elite and exclusive by the mere refinement of his literary taste. He is estranged from the world—his "taste…unvitiated by the frivolities of the day"—because he is better than anyone else of his age. He belongs not to his own period but to a prior one. As we will see, the feeling of melancholy in *The Pleasures of Melancholy* is depicted in exactly this fashion. It is a means of separating wheat from chaff. Those who are good—such as the poem's speaker—are melancholy, because they have their sights set on a morally superior brand of poetry that has been lost to the current age. Those who are worldly are possessed of a blind frenzy for worldly pleasure, and thus have no conception of the high-minded moral ideas that have been lost to literary history. Melancholy is a litmus test for a distinct brand of self-righteousness. The better one is, the more melancholy one will be, since virtuous poetry that focuses on spiritual matters appears to be an object of loss in the modern age.

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[51] Lisa Steinman makes a similar claim about the relationship of poetry to history. Writing about James Thomson's fascination with Milton, Steinman suggests that Thomson's attempt to think on spiritual matters is not a movement upwards toward the heavens so much as it is a move backwards into the past. Lisa M. Steinman, *Masters of Repetition: Poetry, Culture, and Work in Thomson, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Emerson* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 9-50.

The tension between the elitism and the derivative quality of Warton's poem speaks to the erratic nature of the rhetoric of the melancholy mood itself. How elite is one if one actually leans so heavily on the past that the past threatens to consume one's own literary vision? Is one really a literary elite, or is one in fact simply unoriginal? Warton's speaker's melancholy does not really belong to him, after all. It is also Milton's (and to some degree Spenser's, as we will see). If there is anything original about Warton's melancholy, it lies not in the language of the poem, which seems at points almost interchangeable with Milton's language. The originality of Warton's melancholy is in fact not its content at all; rather, it is the historical moment in which it is written and against which it reacts. Warton's melancholy might belong to Milton, but Warton's melancholy reacts against contemporary eighteenth-century institutions that Milton's does not. Melancholy becomes modern in that Warton activates it as a means for criticizing contemporary literary taste—even though he seems inextricably tied to contemporary literature, marking a tension within the rhetoric of melancholy that threatens to tear Warton's poetry apart at the seams. Warton's melancholy is Miltonic by way of being (oddly) Popean. Pope provides the material against which to speak; he is guilty of the charge of destroying the old tradition of poetry by his depiction of luxury and sociability. And he is therefore responsible for provoking Warton's retreat to Milton, such that Warton's melancholy, instead of having any original content on its own, straddles both modernity and the past from one perspective and Milton and Pope from another.

The logic of attachment to the world that one rejects thus describes not only *Il Penseroso*, but also *The Pleasures of Melancholy*. We see this from the opening image of the poem. Contemplation rests in a tower in Teneriff, listening to a storm rage below. In turn, Warton's poet-speaker asks Contemplation to whisk him away to those groves "Where thoughtful

Melancholy loves to muse" (*Pleasures*, 22). In this construction, contemplation begets melancholy. The relationship that Warton constructs between melancholy and contemplation mirrors the speaker's priorities in *Il Penseroso*: in both poems, melancholy is synonymous with extended periods of thought, and thus also with an endless gloom over the state of the modern world. But in trying to think his way out of the world, the speaker only thinks himself further in to it. Apostrophizing Contemplation in the poem's opening, Warton writes:

> …murmurs indistinct
> Of distant billows sooth thy pensive ear
> With hoarse and hollow sounds; secure, self-blest,
> Oft too thou listen'st to the wild uproar
> Of fleets encount'ring, that in whispers low
> Ascends the rocky summit, where thou dwell'st
> Remote from man, conversing with the spheres. (12-18)

From the opening lines, Warton is clear that he is writing a poem about two separate worlds. First, there is the world of "hoarse and hollow sounds," the world where "fleets" encounter one another at the base of Teneriff. This world is depicted as violent and chaotic, in a constant state of war. Second, there is the world that Contemplation (and later, Melancholy) inhabits. This world is distant, removed, solitary. It is more peaceful than the first world, and seems to figure pure quietude. Similar to Lucretius' famous description in *De rerum natura* of viewing a shipwreck from afar and gleaning pleasure not from the suffering of another but from the reassurance that the danger is far off, the world of Contemplation is a space of elitism, reserved for the select few who are aloof and detached enough to remain above the fray.[52]

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[52] Lucretius writes in the opening of Book II of *De rerum natura*:

> How sweet it is to watch from dry land when the storm-winds roil
> A mighty ocean's waters, and see another's bitter toil—
> Not because you relish someone else's misery—
> Rather, it's sweet to know from what misfortunes you are free. (Lucretius, *The Nature of Things,* trans. Alicia Stallings [London: Penguin, 2007], II.1-4)

Strangely, however, while Contemplation is at a safe remove from this first world and claims to have no interest in the violence with which that world's fleets quarrel with one another, she also appears oddly invested in the activities of that first world despite her contentions otherwise. Particularly striking is the poet-speaker's insistence that the noise of that world is "soothing" to Contemplation's ear. How can one who courts pensive solitude be "soothed" by the noise of quarreling armies? It would seem on first glance only logical that Contemplation would attempt to distance herself from the quarreling armies, rather than be soothed by them. Later in the passage, Warton's poet-speaker emphasizes that Contemplation "dwell'st/ Remote from man, conversing with the spheres" (17-18). In these lines, it appears that Contemplation is soothed by the spheres and not by the sounds of armies. Within the space of seven lines, Warton has depicted Contemplation as inspired by two seemingly diametrically opposed sources: the spheres of the second world and the raging armies of the first. How does one reconcile this opening tension?

This tension, as we will see, is necessary to the logic of the poem's representation of melancholy. As with Milton in *Il Penseroso*, Warton needs these raging armies to exist because by representing the folly of violence, he is able to render contemplation and melancholy more desirable by their contrast. It is only by comparing her peaceful state to that undesirable state of the quarreling armies that Contemplation comes to fully understand the pleasure of her own melancholy solitude. Like Milton, Contemplation bids these armies hence while still remaining

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Lucretius' speaker in this passage sounds much like Warton's speaker in *The Pleasures of Melancholy*, even though there is no evidence that Warton was directly influenced by Lucretius. Both derive peace from an awareness of chaos. For important recent accounts of Lucretius' reception, see Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011); and Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: Norton, 2011).

unable to shove them from the periphery—or perhaps even the forefront—of her consciousness. Contemplation depends on the continued imagination of the quarrel that she has escaped in order to render her own conversation with the heavens more pleasing. Just as Milton's pensive poet-speaker must construct, or "hail," a vanity from which to escape, a vanity that occasions the grammatical interjection "hence," in order to contemplate higher things, Contemplation has to represent to herself the quarrel in which she has no part in order to converse with the heavens instead of with the quarreling armies.

Melancholy makes present to the mind that which is not actually physically present—in this case, the vain world. Moreover, this set of lines in the poem speaks to the double-edged—or even functionally erratic—nature of representation as it relates to the melancholy mood. Representation here relies on absence. To represent an idea is to attempt to make visible that which is otherwise not visible. Even though the world of the raging armies is not immediately present within the bounds of these lines, they persist as an idea through the means of representation. Their absence allows for a space within which the speaker might imagine them as the negative inspiration for his melancholy. He defies their literal absence by bringing them present to his mind, only so that he might have the power to attempt to dispel them once more. And even when he is claiming to dispel them, it remains unclear, as we will see, whether he is actually bidding them hence or whether he is merely using the rhetoric of disavowal to cover over the fact that he cannot actually escape them at all.

The image of turning one's back on the world only to continue to imagine an evil world represented to one's senses resonates throughout *The Pleasures of Melancholy* when the figure of Contemplation is replaced by the figure of a poet-speaker who describes himself as ghostly. The poet-speaker asks Contemplation to carry him from the "green vales" and "embroider'd

meads" (*Pleasures*, 29) of summer to "solemn glooms/ Cogenial with my soul, to cheerless shades,/ To ruin'd seats, to twilight cells and bow'rs" (19-21). However, even in his state of reflective solitude, one of the poet-speaker's more profound insights involves his imagining the world from which he has retired: "O then how fearful is it to reflect,/ That thro' the solitude of the still globe/ No Being wakes but me!" (57-59). Even at the height of a desired escape from others in the world, Warton's poet-speaker cannot help but imagine those in the world who are not awake. In imagining "no being" awake, he is instead imagining those beings asleep, and their own lack of knowledge of his existence allows the poet-speaker to imagine himself fading from existence. The poet-speaker, in representing the thoughts of others, is also representing his own absence and dissipation. In turning his back on others, he must still conjure them, along with their deficiencies, to his imagination in order to understand the height of his own privilege.

Warton's description of waking unnoticed, like Milton's description in *Il Penseroso* of walking unseen, involves, as we have seen, an imagination of the dissolution of the self with reference to the rest of the world, but this imagined dissolution is unsustainable precisely by its being placed within the medium of writing. Milton's speaker is seen by the reader, so he cannot walk unseen, just as Warton's speaker is read by a waking reader, which likewise means that the claim "No Being wakes but me!" cannot in fact be true, because the reader wakes so as to read Warton's speaker's poetic account of himself even if no one else does. Warton's speaker is imagining here an existence predicated on pure thought and reflection, a world divorced from the senses. It thus should not matter whether anyone else is able to see him or know about him or not, since awareness of empirical reality is not as important as the purity of reflective spiritual thought, which should be its own reward whether others can see the speaker or not. But in representing himself as unnoticeable, the speaker in fact utilizes the rhetoric of self-dissipation to

draw attention to himself. The speaker is still a speaking self; his words proceed from a source, such that the presence of the words also marks the presence of the one speaking those words. The reader becomes all the more aware of the speaker's presence along with the networked relation by which the speaker exists with the outside world, regardless of how much the speaker claims to wish to disappear. The rhetoric of invisibility only makes both the speaker and the world that he disavows all the more visible.

Warton's rhetoric makes visible too the interaction of present and past tradition. Warton openly references both Spenser and Milton as exemplars,[53] in that they too sought out the same vision of melancholy that he seeks out for himself:[54]

> But let the sacred Genius of the night
> Such mystic visions send, as *Spenser* saw,
> When thro' bewild'ring Fancy's magic maze,
> To the bright regions of the fairy world
> Soar'd his creative mind: or *Milton* knew,
> When in abstracted thought he first conceiv'd
> All heav'n in tumult, and the Seraphim
> Come tow'ring, arm'd in adamant and gold. (*Pleasures*, 63-70)

In these lines, it seems that the poet-speaker's retreat is intended as a quest for poetic imagination. The dissipation of self is in fact a transference of self into a past tradition—or, in a

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[53] It is worth noting that not everyone has historically been impressed with the Spenserian influence on Warton's poetry. Noting that Warton's own poetic form preferred the *ababcc* stanza form, Herbert Cory notes that "[Warton's] imitations … are so frigid and remote from their model that were they our only evidence, as is the case with so many of our other poets, we might suspect, according to current argument, that Warton had no first hand acquaintance with Spenser" (Herbert E. Cory, "Spenser, Thomson, and Romanticism." *PMLA* 26.1 [1911]: 51-91, 60-61).

[54] Warton certainly held a captivation with Spenser that mirrored his captivation with Milton, devoting an entire essay to a description of Spenserian poetics, titled *Observations on Spenser* (London: 1754, 1762). Lawrence Lipking has suggested that, while Warton clearly admired Spenser and preferred him to many other writers of his own age, he was not entirely sure how to defend Spenser, as *The Faerie Queene* was characterized by an excessive length and sprawling vision that was unusual for Warton to prefer since, in Lipking's reading of Warton's own poetic theory, Warton preferred more compact economical literary expressions (363).

more melancholy register, the complete transference of self into an object of loss. He is looking to gather up poetic images, to harvest images from dead poets of a past age whose works are particularly meaningful to him.

The melancholy mood contributes to an aesthetic vision that "soars," as opposed to one that, to borrow language from *Il Penseroso*, generates a "fixed mind" (4). If melancholy is synonymous with sustained contemplation on the conditions of the short-lived nature of earthly life, then its cultivation leads the mind to "soar" beyond the temporal and spatial limitations of the human body and instead to fixate on poetic visions of eternity. Warton's speaker believes in this passage that the spiritual, the immaterial, and the eternal are the best subjects for poetry, as these topics call on the mind to soar, or to perfect its imaginative capacities by working to seek out visions beyond those immediately present to it. The wrench that lodges itself in the gears of the trope of soaring, however, has to do with the relation between the trope of fixedness and the function of language. Warton's aesthetic vision can only soar as far as the medium of language will allow him to. Language is itself a form of fixing more so than it is a form of soaring. It fixes ideas onto words—in Warton's case in particular, it fixes Warton onto Milton's words, such that Warton's speaker is not soaring entirely freely, but soaring only as far as the medium of Miltonic language allows him to.

And as such, Warton's speaker finds himself soaring not to the heavens but to the earth. Like Milton in *Il Penseroso*, Warton appears, at least in the first half of *Pleasures*, to fixate on a vague descriptor of vanity from which he purports to escape, a vanity that does not seem at first glance to have any particular referent.[55] The reason for this may be that the poet-speaker, in

[55] The concept of vanity is also of course important to *Paradise Lost*. When Eve recounts her initial coming to consciousness, she finds herself (like Ovid's Narcissus in *The Metamorphoses*)

attempting to outline the pleasures of a lost tradition that seems irretrievable by the present age as preferable to the pleasures of the corporeal world, wants to represent the corporeal world in the least attractive terms possible. The more description that is granted to the material world, the more shapely and seductive it may appear. It does, after all, enter in through the senses, as we know from reading Milton. As we will see in the coming pages, however, this ideal will not sustain itself. To reject, he must first represent, and the danger inherent in representing the world is that vivid description, as we shall see, just might render the world enticing.

Particularly crucial to the poet-speaker's construction of the melancholy mood as constituted by an obsessive fixation on the content it rejects is his emphasis on the word "let." Just as he "let[s] others love the Summer-ev'ning's smiles" (*Pleasures*, 71) he also "let[s] [his own] contemplative thought explore/ This fleeting state of things" (81-82). In his opening invocation to Contemplation, he also pleads:

> Beneath yon' ruin'd Abbey's moss-grown piles
> Oft *let* me sit, at twilight hour of Eve,

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too easily seduced by her own image as she recognizes herself in the reflecting pool. Eve says of the image she sees in the pool that:

> …I started back,
> It started back, but pleased I soon returned,
> Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
> Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed
> Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
> Had not a voice thus warned me, What thou seest,
> What there thou seest fair creature is thyself,
> With thee it came and goes: but follow me,
> And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
> Thy coming…(John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1667, 1674. Ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg [Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003], 4.462-71)

The intrusion of the unnamed voice who helps Eve to identify herself saves Eve from her own vanity. That is, the voice (be it God or Adam—it is never quite clear) saves Eve from becoming Narcissus. Thus, the voice plays a role similar to the role of melancholy in Warton's poem. Where the voice strives to bring Eve out of herself, melancholy strives to bring Warton out of a vain world.

> Where thro' some western window the pale moon
> Pours her long-levell'd rule of streaming light. (30-33; italics mine)

Milton's poem is also littered with "lets": from "let my due feet never fail" (*Il Penseroso*, 155) to "let the pealing Organ blow" (161). Milton's poem, though does not contain anything comparable to *The Pleasures of Melancholy*'s passive concession to "let others" live the life of vanity that they must lead. For Warton, "let" appears to serve as a marker both of imperative fiat and of passivity. When he is calling on Contemplation or Melancholy to "let" him explore higher matters, the verb takes on an imperative tone. When he is resolving to "let" others pursue worldly pleasures, the verb seems a passive admission of disinterest in what those others are doing. What is particularly striking about the passive "let," however, is that, when considered in conjunction with the other "lets" of imperative fiat scattered across the poem, the passive "let" takes on a new possibility of meaning altogether. What if the speaker's "let others" is not an admission of passivity at all, but is just as much an act of fiat as his other "lets" are?

Indeed, it is just as easy to read "Let others love the Summer-ev'ning's smiles" as a statement of fiat—that is, as a performative command—as it is to read it as a statement of passivity. This is because, according to the logic of Wartonian melancholy (and Miltonic melancholy, for that matter), it would make sense to read this "let" as a statement of fiat. For if the melancholy mood of retirement depends upon a fixation with the world that one rejects, then Warton's poet-speaker would in fact need others to "love the Summer-ev'ning's smiles" in order to appreciate the solace and quietude of his own melancholy. The more that others indulge typical mirth that he describes as an enjoyment of summer and an enjoyment of "mad shouts" (*Pleasures*, 78) the more that the speaker has something against which to conceptualize his own melancholy retreat. The imperative "let" gives "others" permission to indulge in those mad shouts or summer evenings, but it is also an acknowledgement that, unless others perform what

the poet-speaker is letting them perform, there will be no mirthful space from which to retreat, no excuse to retreat into the object of loss.

Eric Reid Lindstrom, writing about the jussive "let" in Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Percy Shelley, has suggested that there exists in the Romantic period a slippage between jussive statements of fiat such as "let there be" and passive statements such as "let be."[56] By looking to Warton's use of imperative fiat in *The Pleasures of Melancholy*, we see that the slippage might also be responsible for the creation of certain moods, specifically the creation of melancholy mood. Warton's speaker employs grammatical ambiguity to the service of calling into being activities related to sociable mirth so that he can also, as a reaction, call into existence the melancholy mood that he prefers. Just as Milton's "hence" in *Il Penseroso* is inseparable from the "hail" that it enables, Warton's "lets" conjure up to the speaker's, and by extension the reader's, consciousness an image of mirth if only to bid that image hence by the hailing of the melancholy mood.

To read the "let" of "let others" as a jussive fiat is to read it as a sign of the poet-speaker's fixation with the mirthful society upon which he claims to turn his back. In other words, the poet-speaker implicates himself in the mirthful and even vain lifestyles of the members of the community from which he retreats. His own fate as a practitioner of pleasurable melancholy is inextricable and inseparable from the fate of those nameless and faceless others, because he needs them to be mirthful if he in turn is going to be melancholy. The fates of the melancholy subject and the mirthful subject are intertwined. This erratic shuttling back and forth between retreat on the one hand and fascinated engagement on the other sets the stage for Warton's puzzling discussion of Alexander Pope, to which I now turn.

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[56] Eric Reid Lindstrom, *Romantic Fiat: Demystification and Enchantment in Lyric Poetry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1-24 and throughout.

III. The Pleasures of Pope

As *The Pleasures of Melancholy* progresses, Warton's descriptions of worldly vanity become more specific. Where in the first half of the poem we were given vague language such as "Mirth's mad shouts" (78) or "False Folly's smiles" (86)—terms that could mean anything or nothing at all—in the second half of the poem, Warton gives shape to the world. This is an odd move: if Warton's speaker wishes to reject worldly pleasure, it would appear that his description of worldly pleasure would become less defined and less significant as the poem wears on, not the other way around. Warton's turn to Pope, though, extends from the construction of the melancholy attachment to a lost object (in this case, a lost literary past) that depends for its shape upon an extended representation of its opposite. If the speaker cannot continually call to mind the perpetrator for the burial of the past (which is in his mind modern poetry, exemplified by Alexander Pope's famous mock-heroic poem *The Rape of the Lock*), he has no reason to feel melancholy, and thus will also never feel the pleasures of melancholy for which the poem is named in the first place. But this conjuring, as I show in this section, is equal parts rejection and accommodation of an ill social world. His imaginative vision is thickened out by its absorption of what he sees as vain literature.

Using the Miltonic structure, the speaker claims to bid "hence" the aesthetic of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* and thus attempts to expunge its traces from his own mind. Pope's mock-heroic poem famously alludes to Milton's *Paradise Lost* at several points, perhaps most notably in his description of the sylphs, the magical spirits who protect the aristocratic Belinda from

harm and who bear a resemblance to Milton's angels.[57] Despite Pope's own reliance on Milton, however (which I deal with at more length in the concluding pages of this chapter), Warton's speaker decries *The Rape of the Lock* for the manner in which it treats worldly vanity. It makes worldly vanity appear too seductive, even if it reverts to Miltonic tropes to do so.[58]

Even as he attempts to forget Pope, however, Warton's speaker's conception of Pope's Belinda will come also to inform his conception of Spenser's Una, whom he claims is the true paragon of melancholy poetry. The poet-speaker will let others enjoy *The Rape of the Lock*, even as he claims to be himself above the taste of those who enjoy the poem. While claiming a position of superiority with regards to his taste for Spenser and Milton, Warton's speaker puts into practice the same tenuous relationship between the "let there be" of jussive fiat and the "let be" of passive indifference that characterized his relationship with the "others" of the earlier portion of the poem. On the one hand, he claims to be indifferent to the tastes of others who approve of *The Rape of the Lock*. On the other hand, he needs the existence of this "inferior" taste for *The Rape of the Lock* because it affects his representation of Spenser's Una, whose melancholy in turn inspires a pleasing melancholy in the poet-speaker. The struggle to articulate a melancholy skepticism with the present moment, however, is revealed by the speaker's

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[57] For descriptions of Pope's indebtedness to Milton's angels, see Kent Beyette, "Milton and Pope's *The Rape of the Lock,*" *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 16.3 (Summer 1976): 421-36. See also Reuben A. Brower, *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1959); and R.D. Havens, *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1922).

[58] Whether Pope is actually in favor of vain beauty is another question. One might easily make the argument that Pope, in *The Rape of the Lock*, is just as skeptical of the corporeal world as Warton's speaker is in *The Pleasures of Melancholy.* My interest in addressing *The Rape of the Lock* is in reading the poem the way that Warton's speaker reads it. Whether or not Pope is speaking out against vanity, Warton's speaker represents him as depicting it in an enticing manner, and whether Pope is critiquing the world or not, the seductive language with which he describes it nullifies, in Warton's speaker's mind, any critical force that Pope's language might have otherwise had.

inability to let go of the very object of his critical skepticism: Pope's Belinda. The simultaneous condemnation of and obsession with Pope's Belinda reveals the unpredictable nature of the melancholy mood.

Warton's poet-speaker specifies his vanity and folly as connected to contemporary trends in literary taste, for which Pope's Belinda is a synecdoche. In discussing Pope, Warton gives a contemporary application to the vanity and folly from which he claims to retreat. Since the best kinds of literature in the speaker's view are characterized by long, extensive stretches of thought, melancholy's capacity for provoking the mind to pensive reflection can also provoke the mind to pursue thoughtful and pensive literature. Most important, this thoughtful literature is associated with a past literary tradition rather than the present. In discussing Pope, Warton's poet-speaker juxtaposes the images of two "fated Fairs" (*Pleasures*, 157): Spenser's Una and Pope's Belinda, such that Belinda is Spenser's Duessa made modern. He writes:

> Thro' POPE'S soft song tho' all the Graces breath,
> And happiest art adorn his Attic page;
> Yet does my mind with sweeter transport glow,
> As at the foot of some hoar oak reclin'd,
> In magic SPENSER'S wildly-warbled song
> I see deserted Una wander wide
> Thro' wasteful solitudes, and lurid heaths,
> Weary, forlorn, than when the fated Fair,
> Upon the bosom bright of silver Thames,
> Launches in all the lustre of Brocade,
> Amid the splendors of the laughing Sun.
> The gay description palls upon the sense,
> And coldly strikes the mind with feeble bliss. (*Pleasures*, 150-62)

Warton's direct reference is to the opening lines of Canto II of *The Rape of the Lock*, in which Belinda sails across the River Thames, headed for Hampton Court Palace. It is on this journey that the evil Baron first becomes enraptured by Belinda's beauty and decides that he must have a lock of her hair. Belinda is described here in a manner that echoes Enobarbus' ekphrastic

description of Cleopatra in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*.[59] Pope writes:

> Not with more Glories, in th' Etherial Plain,
> The Sun first rises o'er the purpled Main,
> Than issuing forth, the Rival of his Beams
> Lanch'd on the Bosom of the Silver *Thames*.
> Fair Nymphs, and well-drest Youths around her shone,
> But ev'ry Eye was fix'd on her alone.[60]

Here, we see an uncanny return of the word "fixed": recall that in *Il Penseroso*, Milton decried the vulnerability of the "fixed mind" to vain pleasures. Here, the eyes of Belinda's spectators are also "fix'd." Like the "fixed mind" of *Il Penseroso*, these spectators' respective fields of vision begin and end with Belinda. The sight of Belinda is so entrancing and stunning that it prevents her spectators from thinking on anything else but the immediate sight of her and her train. It is as if, in the hundred intervening years between Milton's poem and Warton's poem, the descriptor "fixed" is searching for a definitive referent to attach itself to, and finally finds it with the advent of Pope's Belinda.

If "fixed" describes Belinda, then "transcendent" describes Una. Warton's reference to Una is likely from Book I, Canto iii of *The Faerie Queene*, in which Spenser refers to Una as a "woeful, solitary maid"[61] after the Redcrosse Knight, mistakenly thinking that Una has had relations with another man, has left her to instead keep company with the evil Duessa. Of Una, Spenser writes that, "Long she thus travelèd through deserts wide,/ By which she thought her

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[59] See William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, 1623. *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller (New York: Penguin, 2002) 1651-1700, lines 2.2.200-28. Wolfgang E.H. Rudat has documented the similarities between Pope's description of Belinda on the Thames and Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra on her barge in *Antony and Cleopatra*. See "Belinda's 'Painted Vessel': Allusive Technique in *The Rape of the Lock*," *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 19 (1974): 49-55.

[60] Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, 1717. *Alexander Pope: Selected Poetry*, ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998): 55-64, lines 2.1-6. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

[61] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 1590, 1596, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. (London: Penguin, 1987), I.iii.3. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

wandering knight should pass,/ Yet never show of living wight espied" (I.iii.10). Una is described as lingering with the loss of the Redcrosse Knight, but her own attachment to Redcrosse is immediately transformed within the bounds of Warton's poem to become an allegory about the loss of past literary history. The fled Redcrosse Knight is the specter of a vanishing past literary history, and Una stands in for Warton's virtuously melancholic speaker, aiming to transcend the present evil moment so as to resurrect a seemingly irretrievable past.

Una and Belinda are vastly different from one another in Warton's reading: Una wanders alone across an empty landscape and Belinda sails along the Thames in the company of others. Una's setting is wide open, with nothing but images of desolation crowding the frame; Belinda's setting is crowded with images of gayness and mirth. But they are also similar, in that they are figures painted onto a landscape, and their respective placements within a landscape inspire affective moods. Una's artistic description exudes melancholy, and Belinda's effects, as Warton puts it, gayness and bliss. What this turn to Una (alongside all of the Miltonic imagery that animates Warton's poem) tells us is that Warton's speaker sees Milton and Spenser as easily collapsible into one another. This is, of course, a strange move. Milton is of course indebted to Spenser, but he is also a much different writer than Spenser. For Warton to move so seamlessly between the two is to reveal that melancholy has a flattening effect on the literary past. All past literature is rendered the same in the collapsing of Milton and Spenser. Melancholy becomes the line along which edifying literature and vain literature are separated from one another. All of the other differences between literary works and periods are rendered inconsequential in the face of the rhetoric of melancholy. Via melancholy, Milton and Spenser collapse into one another as the monoliths of a pure and forgotten literary past.

For Warton's poet-speaker, the Pope of *The Rape of the Lock* epitomizes the brand of

contemporary social poetry that emphasizes immediate sensual pleasure instead of sustained contemplative pleasure. Pope himself also describes Belinda as an object of sensual pleasure. Warton's speaker sees the sight of Belinda as a phenomenon that "palls" (*Rape of the Lock*, 161) or fades in beauty across time, incapable of providing lasting pleasure. Tita Chico has argued that the figure of Belinda represents an aesthetic challenge for Pope, and that in his struggle to develop into one of the prime poets of his time he also struggles to find a way to "manage" Belinda; that is, to objectify Belinda as an object of the gaze of others.[62] In Warton's reading, Pope has "mismanaged" Belinda, depicting her in such a sensuously beautiful fashion that she entrances the reader, leaving the reader unable to dwell on higher things. She strikes only the outer sense of sight and does not linger on the mind (as Miltonic or Spenserian fashion would have it) after her immediate impression has faded.

Belinda is a striking representation of worldly vanity and luxury.[63] In exhibiting gayness and bliss, Warton's Belinda is also exhibiting the appeal of sociable living. Belinda is a synecdoche for contemporary sociable life. The manner in which Belinda "coldly strikes" the minds of those who gaze on her "with feeble bliss" is symbolic of the way that the sight of luxury and vanity in general can coldly strike the mind in general with images of bliss. As Belinda sails the Thames, she becomes bound up within a society of others who view her as a function of a luxurious and sociable lifestyle. Belinda consumes commodities (Warton mentions, for instance, the brocade fabric that she wears), even as she becomes a commodity for others in

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[62] Tita Chico, "The Arts of Beauty: Women's Cosmetics and Pope's Ekphrasis." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 26.1 (2002): 1-23, 3.

[63] See, for instance, Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace's *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997). Using the example of china as her representative motif, Kowaleski Wallace points out that Belinda inhabits the place of both consumer and object of consumption, indulging in luxury while also being represented "like a precious piece of china, ready to be broken at any moment" (52).

her world to gaze upon. In making a one-to-one comparison between Belinda and Una, Warton also renders Belinda a synecdoche for the vanities of modern poetry in addition to rendering her a synecdoche for the vanities of modern sociability.

And yet there remains a gulf between what the speaker suggests and what he actually performs. While suggesting that Belinda is not a noble poetic subject and while claiming to have no interest in this morally inferior poetry, he cannot help but gaze on her as well in much the same way as the vain worldly agents that he condemns. In setting Warton's description of Belinda side-by-side with Pope's, we see that Warton nearly plagiarizes Pope's description of Belinda. While rejecting Pope, his speaker in fact becomes Pope's avatar for a moment and absorbs Pope's language for his own melancholy purposes. Recall Henry Kirke White's claim in 1801 that many would accuse Warton of plagiarizing the ancients. Here, any hypothetical charges of plagiarism would come oddly enough in relation to Pope and not Milton. We are left wondering at this moment why Warton's speaker is choosing to retreat to nature at all. Is he retreating so as to escape from the sociable poetry of Pope? Or is he retreating so as to have a better vantage point from which to gaze on Pope's Belinda and to appropriate Pope's language even though he is condemning it?

This seems to be not an either/or but a both/and case. With the entrance of Pope and Belinda into the poem's landscape, the speaker's fixation on the past and on the past's fascination with heavenly things begins to collapse under its own weight and lends a sense of confusion as to the best way of indulging what is seen as a lost past. We are left with an image of Warton's speaker not as a figure in the present looking back to a lost past, but of the speaker as looking from the past into the future and finding himself transfixed by it. The beginning of the poem sees the poet-speaker trying to identify with a lost past, mourning its loss and unable to

release it from his consciousness. By the second half of the poem, Warton's speaker has, in a complex move, found himself just as attracted to the supposed perpetrator of such loss as he is to the object of loss itself. Part of the attraction of a lost literary past is the very fact that it is lost, since its lost status implies that it is simply too good for the world. In order to remain attracted to the lost-ness of the lost object, Warton's speaker must also harbor a deeply ambivalent attraction for the evil present world that has caused such loss, because the evil world is responsible for assigning the attractive status of loss itself to the lost object.

Furthermore, in choosing to gaze on Una and Belinda together, Warton's speaker inhabits a melancholy mood that does not actually involve any pain at all. When he gazes on Belinda, he feels no pain: he feels only an urge to purge his mind of the worldly and vain bliss that she represents. When he gazes on Una, he sees her pain, but does not in fact feel it. There seems to be nothing pleasurable about Una's melancholy: her gloom is all pain with no silver linings. And yet, when Warton—and for that matter, Spenser—describe her, they describe her not solely in terms of her own pain, but in terms of the pleasure that the act of gazing upon her provides. Spenser writes of Una that, "Her angel's face/ As the great eye of heaven shinèd bright/ And made a sunshine in the shady place./ Did never mortal eye behold such heavenly grace" (I.iii.4). Una's pain becomes Spenser's pleasure—and 150 years later it becomes Warton's speaker's pleasure. She might feel deep devastation, but in a troubling and deeply problematic move she is beautiful to gaze upon in her pain. Una thus becomes the filter through which Warton's speaker sanitizes the feeling of melancholy and transforms it from pain to pleasure. In allowing himself to feel pleasure by the idea of gazing on Una as a symbol of pure freedom from an evil world, the speaker also uses melancholy as a way of forgetting Una's pain. She becomes a surrogate through whom the pleasures of melancholy are filtered. She absorbs all the pain herself and thus

releases to the spectator (i.e., the poem's speaker) a melancholy that has no pain—only the pleasure of isolation from the world. This is a melancholy without price or risk for the speaker. It allows him to linger with the specter of a lost literary past for which Una is a synecdochic figure without having to feel the sorrow of true loss, only pleasure. This is because even though the literary past might be lost to the present, it is not lost to Warton's speaker himself because he has purportedly divorced himself from the current age and has so fully engrossed himself with the lost object that it seems present to him even if it is absent to the rest of the world.

As if to reinforce the tenuous nature of the melancholy mood to which Warton's speaker has subjected himself, he must be reminded by the intrusion of an outside voice that it is strange and counterintuitive to stare for too long at the image of Pope's Belinda. Warton writes:

> The voice of Melancholy strikes mine ear;
> "Come, leave the busy trifles of vain life,
> And let these twilight mansions teach thy mind
> The joys of Musing, and of solemn Thought." (*Pleasures*, 167-70)

In this moment, the melancholy mood has collapsed upon itself. The "voice of Melancholy" suggests that melancholy is a departure from the present to muse and think—or to dwell with the vision of a lost literary past. But even within the melancholy mood, Warton's speaker has to be reminded by the voice of Melancholy what melancholy actually is. And the constitution of melancholy here involves not merely a rejection of the world and not merely an embrace of the world, but rather the attempt at self-management of the positions of rejection and embrace. Any turn toward the world must correct itself in order for melancholy to continue to deserve the name, even if such self-correction is incomplete.

Despite the speaker's claim to have banished the image of Pope from his poetic vision, Pope returns in a surprising fashion—not in the form of *The Rape of the Lock*'s Belinda, but in the form of *Eloisa and Abelard*'s Eloisa. While Warton's speaker refuses Pope's Belinda, he

upholds Pope's Eloisa as a paragon of pleasurable melancholy, allowing Pope to sneak back in from below even after he has claimed to eject all things Popean.[64] Toward the end of *Pleasures*, Warton writes:

> Thus Eloise, whose mind
> Had languish'd to the pangs of melting love,
> More secret transport found, as on some tomb
> Reclin'd she watch'd the tapers of the dead. (*Pleasures*, 97-100)

Here, Eloisa seems to occupy a position similar to the one that Una occupies in Warton's consciousness. She wanders alone, apart from society. She is melancholy. She is the antidote to modern poetry of sociability. In her steadfast love for her lost Abelard she allegorizes Warton's own attachment to the lost literary past. She seems in all senses to be the modern reincarnation of Una. The question thus arises: how can Pope be both melancholy (as in his representation of Eloisa as allegory for Warton's own attachment to loss) and anti-melancholy (as in his representation of Belinda)?

I deal with this question at greater length in the concluding section of this chapter, but here, I want to suggest that Warton's speaker's profound ambivalence toward Pope is also a figure for his ambivalent stance toward the world from which he purports to retreat in his melancholy state. To focus on Eloisa is to provide himself with a safe and manageable avenue for focusing on Pope, without having to go through the rhetorical motions of saying that he is abandoning Pope, as in the case of Pope's Belinda. Warton's poet-speaker cannot admit his fascination with Belinda, but the extended treatment that he gives her suggests a connection to the figure of Belinda that he cannot bring himself to admit on the surface. He needs her, after all, because her existence gives him something to feel gloomy about, as she is a stand-in for the

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[64] See Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*, 1720, *Alexander Pope: Selected Poetry*, ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 137-46.

failings of all of social life. If Belinda is the negative factor that necessarily exists as the evil to reject in order to cultivate the perfected melancholy mood, Eloisa (like Una) represents the positive side of this formula. If he rejects Belinda and accepts Una even as he gazes on Belinda, then Eloisa gives Warton's speaker a reasonable excuse to gaze upon the works of Alexander Pope without having to feel as if he is committing some form of wrong. In gazing on Eloisa, he tells himself, he is in fact gazing on a version of Una, even though he is also gazing without guilt on the figure of Pope whom he had earlier struggled to cast out of his mind.

And thus we have in the figure of Thomas Warton a composite sketch of a diverse and unlikely cast of characters: Milton, Pope, Spenser, Una, Belinda, and Eloisa. Each one of these figures, to varying degrees, functions as an object of the poet-speaker's melancholy, for he finds himself drawn to each one of them in separate yet related ways. The multiplicity of objects for the poet-speaker's melancholy is one way of ensuring that melancholy never leaves but always lingers, for it never has any shortage of directions toward which to turn. This is also, however, one way of ensuring that melancholy remains unpredictable, moving in any and all directions at any time. Throughout the poem Warton's speaker attempts to depict melancholy as easy, luxurious, simple musing, involving a simple unidirectional move away from society and into nature. In reality, however, the language of the poem reveals that melancholy is anything but simple, and Warton's attempt to represent it as easy and simple is merely an attempt to paper over the wildly chaotic logic of the mood. Melancholy accomplishes a fascination with the world that it says it does not want to possess. And in this sense it is not the easy musing of Marshall Brown's mid-eighteenth-century urbane sublime. For Brown, the urbane sublime is all unification and ease. For Wartonian melancholy, sublime poetry is a difficult and unacknowledged attachment to the object of his rejection.

Via the struggle to admit this irreversible attachment to the world, melancholy also marks thus the struggle to know how to speak of the conditions of modern life. Warton's speaker attempts to use melancholy over the present as a means of finding a way to describe the shortcomings of modern literary trends, such that melancholy becomes one of the conditions of critical speech. For all its imperfections, Warton's speaker's melancholy remains important and valuable precisely because it figures imagination of the past as a resistance toward the present, and allows us to see the ways in which imaginations begets a relationship between passivity and resistance. Warton's poem resists the present not by seeking to change it, but by passively gazing on it as a perpetrator of loss, even if his resistance to the present is erratic, unpredictable, and imperfectly constituted.

In the closing lines of her immensely important study of William Wordsworth's use of poetic language, Frances Ferguson remarks that language marks the limits of personal control while also allowing for an illusion of control. Ferguson writes of the act of reading that it "neither reconstitutes the self as a whole nor gives words any full or stable meaning, but reading does figure the temporary illusion of doing so."[65] The context and the content of Ferguson's claim is much different from my own, but we might think of the term "melancholy" as occupying a similar place within the argument of the present chapter as the term "reading" occupies in Ferguson's. Melancholy resists wholeness for Warton. It does not allow him a unified vision of reality or culture, in that it wildly shuttles back and forth between objects. It does, however, allow him to believe in a concept of control. While this concept is an illusion, it figures the very condition and the very possibility of literary writing. It allows for a vision of singularity that, while never actually achieved, is important because of the possibility of perfect

[65] Frances Ferguson, *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977), 250.

reflection—however unrealized that possibility might be—for which it is a figure.

Such a conception of resistance allows us to think of melancholy as imbuing revolutionary thought not with an immediate imperative to act to change the conditions of life, but as a mode of contemplating and dwelling alone in thought. Thought itself, when abstracted from the demand to act immediately, becomes itself a revolutionary act, as thought is the space where revolutionary ideas gestate, regardless of whether those ideas find immediate applicability or whether those ideas struggle with a fascination with the objects of their resistance. These ideas might never find wholeness, just as Warton's melancholy resists ease or unification, but this does not mean that their resistant impulses toward the present are not shapely or nuanced. If anything, their fascination with the objects of their resistance, make them, as we have seen, even more shapely than they might have otherwise been. Milton closes *Il Penseroso* with a similar statement of dwelling: "These pleasures *Melancholy* give,/ And I with thee will choose to live" (175-76). To dwell with melancholy, while involving dwelling mysteriously with the vain world that has brought about the loss of the past, also involves, crucially, dwelling in thought. And to dwell in thought comes with no immediate imperative to intervene in the world. Thinking is itself a mode of resisting the world, even if thinking is also a signifier of the struggle to demarcate one's fixative relationship with the world that one resists.

IV. Warton's Miltonic Criticism

Warton's obsession with the influence of past literature upon the present birthed both his poetic and his critical imagination. In 1785, Warton publishes an edition of Milton's shorter poetry, which he titled *Poems upon Several Occasions*, and it is with this edition that I conclude this chapter, as it brings together Warton's fascination not only with Milton and Pope, but with the melancholy that defines his own thought. More than simply an edition of Milton's work,

Poems is also Warton's justification for Milton's centrality to English literary history. Havens regards *Poems upon Several Occasions* as one of the preeminent editions of Miltonic poetry to appear in the eighteenth century, in part because Warton's discursive footnotes point out the literary influences undergirding Milton's thought.[66] In his preface to the edition and in his footnotes to the individual poems in the volume, Warton echoes some of his sentiments from *The Pleasures of Melancholy* concerning the literature of the past in relation to that of the present age. One of the distinguishing factors of past literature is its melancholy and the imaginative vision that its melancholy inspires, a characteristic that was buried beneath the ideals of politeness and leisure across the first half of the eighteenth century. Approaching Warton's literary critical remarks on Milton's works in the context of having read his poetry, we see that, as in *Pleasures*, Warton can only conceive of the perfections of past literature by juxtaposing them to a present tradition that he despises and yet is infatuated with. Edifying literature is defined by its negative.

In Warton's reading, Milton seems to belong neither to the religiously factious seventeenth century or to the polite eighteenth century. In Warton's reading, Milton was a literary misfit from the mid-seventeenth century through the first half of the eighteenth, largely because his sublime visions were so grand that the mind of the reader could not fathom them. Critics including William Kolbrener have argued convincingly that Milton (and *Paradise Lost* in particular) was in fact immensely popular in the eighteenth century,[67] but Warton relates a version of literary history in which Milton's minor poems were obscure and largely unnoticed

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[66] Havens, 463.

[67] William Kolbrener, *Milton's Warring Angels: A Study of Critical Engagements* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1997), 1-7. Kolbrener's argument is that critics across the eighteenth century were particularly drawn to *Paradise Lost* because it was a launchpad for larger debates about reason and legitimate political authority.

during the first half of the eighteenth century, only to be resurrected and made popular by the intervention of Pope. While Milton's minor poems become popular over the course of the eighteenth century, they begin the century in relative obscurity:

> In succeeding years [following the civil wars of the seventeenth century], when tumults and usurpations were at an end, and leisure and literature returned, the times were still unpropitious, and the public taste was unprepared for their reception. It was late in the present century, before they attained their just measure of esteem and popularity. Wit and rhyme, sentiment and satire, polished numbers, sparkling couplets, and pointed periods, having so long kept undisturbed possession in our poetry, would not easily give way to fiction and fancy, to picturesque description, and romantic imagery. (*Poems*, iii-iv)

In Warton's view, the first half of the eighteenth century was more concerned with formal meticulousness and satire. Wit and satire became too traditional to be toppled, and the general readership was too comfortable with tradition to read a writer of Milton's ilk who, in Warton's mind, would have broken that mold in his emphasis on sublime vision. In other words, Milton was too dangerous to the fixed mind. Milton threatened to unfix the mind from politeness, to the extent that he simply raised in the mind a degree of discomfort. Warton's brother Joseph Warton makes a similar distinction between modern and classical literature in his *Essay on Pope* (1782), contending that, "For Wit and Satire are transitory and perishable, but Nature and Passion are eternal."[68] In Joseph Warton's reading, Alexander Pope symbolizes satire, wit, and the formal perfection of those "pointed periods" that his brother would also associate with contemporary literature.

Underlying Thomas Warton's argument about Milton's uneasy reception in the eighteenth century is an assumption that, in the wake of such a violent period like that just prior to the Restoration, the reading public demanded a form of literature that would not "disturb" or

[68] Joseph Warton, *Essay on Pope* (London: 1782), 344.

unsettle their collective imagination.[69] The reading public wanted stasis; readers did not want their imaginations to be transported to such far-off romantic scenes such as those of an *Il Penseroso* or a *Comus*. A turn to such imaginative and descriptive literature that relies on the motif of transportation to romantic settings would require a change in thinking on the part of the collective readership, and would not accommodate the readership's desire for stasis. The collective readership, in Warton's view, had become comfortable with what White later calls the "sing-song" quality of modern poetry and thus were not in a position to welcome a change to the status quo that Miltonic description would have represented. As satire and the literature of leisure became institutions in the literary archive, it became more difficult for the descriptive poetry of a Milton to break in and unsettle the waters.

Ironically, however, there are two Popes. It is Pope who, in Warton's eyes, is also responsible for Milton's resurgence in the eighteenth century. Warton's father, also named Thomas, was a friend of Robert Digby, one of Pope's associates. In Warton's account, Thomas Warton the Elder once had a conversation with Digby in Oxford during which he praised Milton's minor poetry, especially *Il Penseroso* and *Comus*, and Digby wonders aloud why Pope has never mentioned to him any of Milton's minor poetry. Digby then passes on to Pope knowledge of what Warton calls the "hidden treasure" (*Poems*, x) of Milton's shorter poems.

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[69] Warton's claim that eighteenth-century literary taste emerges as a reaction to seventeenth-century political and religious strife finds an analogue in Lee Morrissey's recent book-length account of eighteenth-century literary criticism. In Morrissey's account, eighteenth-century writers, including Pope, learned from reading seventeenth-century pamphleteers and literary writers, including Milton, that the written word could be dangerous in its capacity to incite political violence. Thus, they attempted to find ways to immunize the act of reading from its violent potential (Lee Morrissey, *The Constitution of Literature: Literacy, Democracy, and Early English Literary Criticism* [Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008], 1-24). Warton does not make the claim that Morrissey makes about the dangers of reading, but he does see eighteenth-century "polite" literature as a response to the violence of the seventeenth century. I deal at more length with Morrissey's account of the rise of the discipline of literary criticism in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

"Accordingly," Warton writes, "we find him soon afterwards sprinkling his 'Eloisa to Abelard' with epithets and phrases of a new form and sound, pilfered from 'Comus' and the 'Penseroso.' It is a phenomenon in the history of English poetry, that Pope, a poet not of Milton's pedigree, should be their first copier" (*Poems*, x). The way Warton tells this story, *Eloisa to Abelard* is the epitome of eighteenth-century Miltonic poetry.[70] It is something entirely new, possessed of a "new form and sound," but it is new precisely because it is old enough and irrelevant enough to the modern age to have been largely forgotten by the public. Moreover, the "new form and sound" that Pope borrows (and almost plagiarizes, in Warton's account) from Milton, has a distinctly melancholy tone. Warton writes that, "[Pope's] experiment was happily and judiciously applied, in delineating the sombrous scenes of the pensive Eloisa's convent, the solitary Paraclete" (*Poems*, xi). Eloisa is a pensive figure modeled after the melancholy speaker of *Il Penseroso*.

Thanks in large part to Pope, Warton says, Milton's poetry becomes more and more popular as the eighteenth century progresses. As Warton puts it, "the school of Milton rose in emulation of the school of Pope" (*Poems*, xii). Handel writes a score for *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* (1741), Richard Bentley publishes an infamous edition of *Paradise Lost* in which he rewrites numerous passages that he thinks Milton did not intend to write, William Mason writes an imitation of *Lycidas*, and John Philips appropriates the blank verse techniques from Milton for his own purposes in his burlesque poem *An Imitation of Milton: The Splendid Shilling*. In short,

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[70] R.D. Havens challenges the veracity of Warton's assertion that Pope became familiar with *Il Penseroso* only just prior to composing *Eloisa to Abelard*, arguing that long before Pope supposedly appropriating themes from Milton in *Eloisa to Abelard* (1717), he was appropriating them instead in his *Pastorals* (1709) and in *Windsor Forest* (1713). Havens' assertion is that Warton's suggestion of plagiarism is "unfair" to Pope (115). My critical interest is not in investigating the truth of Warton's claims, but in thinking about the implications for the literary influence of melancholy that his claims raise.

Warton writes, "the whole of Milton's poetical works, associating their respective powers as in one common interest, jointly and reciprocally cooperated in diffusing and forming just ideas of a more perfect species of poetry" (*Poems*, xii). In the end, it is the melancholy of Milton's *Il Penseroso* that makes Milton current to the eighteenth century, in that *Il Penseroso* influences *Eloisa to Abelard* and sets the ball rolling for other literary writers to emulate Milton. Milton's representations of private melancholy pensiveness come to shape public literary taste. Because of Pope's interest in Milton, the public readership becomes more attracted to the language and imagery of Miltonic thought, and a public taste for "sing-song" poetry is transformed into a taste for the "new form and sound" of Miltonic thought. Put simply, private retirement becomes, whether intentionally on Milton's part or not, a form of public rhetoric. Even though Milton, according to Warton, appears to idealize a fully realized private retirement, he accomplishes something much more than a mere turning of his back on society. In turning his back on the world, he instead becomes a public figure. As a reverse mirror image of the way that the public world of Pope's Belinda, in Warton's mind, gives shape to the private retreat of Spenser's Una, the private retirement of Milton's melancholy poet-speaker gives shape to the public literary world of the mid-eighteenth century.

R.D. Havens has suggested that Warton is unique among eighteenth-century critics of Milton in claiming that Pope only comes to Milton's verse as he is composing *Eloisa to Abelard*. "As a matter of fact," Havens writes, "Pope knew these poems long before 1717, when his *Eloisa* appeared."[71] It seems that Warton's fascination with the relationship between Milton and Pope is almost unmatched among eighteenth-century readers. One cannot help but notice the condescension with which Warton describes Pope in his preface to Milton. He makes clear that

[71] Havens, 115 n.2. Havens does, however, contend that Pope cited Milton's shorter poetry with greater frequency than other poets of the period did (115).

he believes Pope to be nowhere near the poet Milton was, suggesting that Pope nearly had to plagiarize Milton to approach the level of Milton's genius. Warton's ambivalence to Pope in his preface echoes his ambivalence to Pope in *The Pleasures of Melancholy*. While Warton implicitly condemns Pope as being inferior to Spenser because of his departure from classical themes of melancholy in approaching the sociable Belinda as a subject for poetry, he also in the same poem upholds Pope's Eloisa (who, of course, according to Warton's preface to Milton, is a Miltonic figure) as a paragon of melancholy. One might also consider Warton's competing references to Belinda and Eloisa as emblematic of the description I have proposed of melancholy as a paradoxical fascination with an object of rejection. By defining Pope as simultaneously an advocate for the Miltonic Eloisa and the sociable Belinda, Warton makes it impossible to conceive of the melancholy figure Eloisa without also considering Belinda at the same time, because both are products of Pope's doubled imaginative vision.

By calibrating his view of eighteenth-century literary history according to the eighteenth century's reception of Miltonic melancholy, Warton proves that, while writers represent melancholy as an idealization of privacy and retreat, this representation of privacy has very public effects. Representations of private feeling alter the direction of public literary taste. While Warton opens up the possibility that melancholy is socially conscious in *The Pleasures of Melancholy*, he explicitly theorizes this possibility in his 1785 commentary on Milton's poetry. The representation of Miltonic melancholy, for Warton, accomplishes something that exceeds its rhetoric of disavowal. It imbeds itself in the discursive practices by which literature circulates in the eighteenth century, being passed from Milton, to Pope, to Georg Frideric Handel and William Mason. Ironically, while it assumes a posture of disavowal of the world, authors

circulate its disavowal and disseminate it to the reading public, such that pleasing melancholy never completely accomplishes its ideal of disavowal.

Chapter 2: 'Mindful of the Unhonored Dead': Anonymous Fame in Gray, Parnell, and Blair

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I demonstrated that eighteenth-century poets such as Thomas Warton perfected their own ideas of melancholy by looking back into the depths of literary history, to the work of Spenser and (especially) Milton. In the following two chapters, I turn to two genres long characteristic of the eighteenth century—the graveyard poem and the sentimental novel—to show the ways that melancholy does not simply call for a backwards gaze into the past. It also generates new literary genres and looks forward to the universal inevitability of death. Melancholy helps writers to speculate on what happens to one after one dies and on what happens to one who survives those who have already died.

The next two chapters of this dissertation, then, focus on the generative capacities of death, and see death as an organizing trope for transforming melancholy into political critique, however vexed such critique might be. For Thomas Gray, Thomas Parnell, and Robert Blair (upon whom this chapter focuses), such links between melancholy, death, and critique come together in the genre of graveyard poetry. These poets represent the melancholy mood as a response to the deaths of others, specifically to the deaths of the poor about whom they might not know much, since there is little information about them in the historical record. If the primary characteristic of melancholy is that it is an unending sadness, then graveyard poetry manifests this characteristic as an attempt not to forget loss, but to dwell with it. In a somewhat surprising move, these poets cannot move on from the lost dead precisely because they know little to nothing about them.

Graveyard poetry links loss and death with political commentary. Individual losses allow

writers to comment on the politics of rank, status, humility, and ambition. These poems use the occasion of death to reflect on the intersections of anonymity and epistemology. The lower-class dead are anonymous because they reside beyond the bounds of fame, and their anonymity represents for the poets a struggle to speak of those about whom they do not know much. Without knowing many specifics about the dead to memorialize, poets instead turn the dead into embodied allegories for other political qualities such as vanity or virtue.

These poets thus set up an antinomy between anonymity and fame, but this antinomy does not sustain itself across the poems, such that melancholy reflection reveals both the power and the imperfections of political critique. Lower-rank subjects are abstracted into signs of virtue, in part because they are anonymous. The higher-rank, on the other hand, are abstracted into signs of vanity, in part because they are famous. Poets do not know how to grasp the specifics of the losses of the unknown dead, so their melancholic philosophizing is a way of using loss to talk about other matters that the thought of loss inspires. As a consequence, as I argue in this chapter, these poets' universalizing melancholy moods create the possibility for a deeply vexed egalitarian politics. Their poems speak against the pursuit of material wealth and worldly fame, but in the process they transforms persons into signs. The dead become depersonalized symbols for larger ideas, such as vanity, vice, modesty, or quiet country life. To craft a politics of equality, graveyard poets must attach themselves to the dead in a way that actually empties the dead of any personhood. The speakers of these poems dwell endlessly on death and are enlivened by an imagination of the fate of the dead. But sometimes this imagination requires graveyard poets to appropriate the cultural terms of modern bourgeois ideology that they reject in the service of critiquing that ideology. Imagination of the dead is a displacement of radical political action. Imagination becomes a space for political critique, even

as the melancholy that enables such imagination shows the difficulty of transforming critique into meaningful language. The medium of language reveals that the critique that arises out of melancholy over the dead is never easily voiced. It is always marked by a struggle for articulation, and the medium of poetry replicates such struggle even as it attempts to transcend it.

Graveyard poetry uses the medium of verse to bind personal experience to larger history. Recent critics such as Kevis Goodman and Thomas Pfau have performed pioneering work combining deconstructive and historicist methodologies to show how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry utilizes feeling or affect to mediate historical change to its readers.[1] Despite their shared emphases on deconstructive method, however, each of these studies in their own ways advocate for a method of reading poetry that reveals rather than obscures the workings of history. Pfau, for one, argues that late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century poetry uses feeling as a register for expressing both the self and the impoverished nature of modernity.[2] Feeling equals expression of one's place in the historical matrix.[3] Similarly, Goodman sees poetry in the

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[1] See Kevis Goodman. *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Meditation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004); and Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005). For another important recent account of the relationship between history, feeling, and subjectivity, see Orrin N.C. Wang, *Romantic Sobriety: Sensation: Revolution, Commodification, History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2011).

[2] Pfau, 15 and throughout. Pfau's methodology is deeply influenced by the thought of Martin Heidegger. Pfau's concept of "mood" is analogous to Heidegger's idea of *Dasein*. Pfau writes that, for Heidegger, *Dasein* "is the horizon wherein all conscious practice—including the whole spectrum from hyperrational pursuits to vehement passions—is being transacted, a horizon that therefore can never come into view as such" (10). For Heidegger, then, *Dasein* is a mode of being that is always there but never visible. Similarly, Pfau says, a historical mood is a mode by which we might retroactively read history, even if this mood is never entirely at the forefront of one's experience of history as it is actually happening.

[3] Perhaps Pfau's most compelling reading of the relation between self, feeling, and history (with "feeling" intentionally placed as the middle term in this catalog) is of Keats's early poetry, often dismissed as unoriginal and trite. For Pfau, on the other hand, Keats's early poetry signals a profound expression of melancholy toward the triteness of post-Waterloo literary culture, which for Keats has no originality or authentic value (309-78).

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as utilizing affective discomfort so as to communicate to its readers a vision of the historical present not accessible through other mediums.[4] For Goodman, poetry helps to illuminate history through the mediation of affect—however painful such illumination may be.[5] For both Goodman and Pfau (as well as for others, including but not limited to Shaun Irlam and Lisa Steinman), poetry shows how the gears of the historical moment turn.[6] This chapter uses the figure of the graveyard to ask after poetry's contribution to the excavation of politics and history: what if poetry instead shows the difficulty of articulating one's relationship to present history just as much as it illumines such a relationship?

In these poems, melancholy remembrances of the dead signal the poets' difficulty knowing how to speak of the relationship of the subject to contemporary historical developments. Linking melancholy with death, R. Clifton Spargo tells us that, "The melancholic person [imagines] an impossible recovery of the dead, sometimes quite literally a retrieval of the dead body."[7] This, for Spargo (taking a cue from Freud), marks the difference between mourning and melancholy. The mourner does not linger interminably with the dead; the melancholic does.[8] The poets in this chapter do not try to bring the dead back to life or retrieve a dead corpse, but they do hold on to the dead in a way similar to the process that Spargo describes. In putting death

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[4] Goodman, 3-4.
[5] Goodman's literary examples range from James Thomson, William Cowper, and William Wordsworth, among others.
[6] See Shaun Irlam, *Elations: The Poetics of Enthusiasm in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999); and Lisa M. Steinman, *Masters of Repetition: Poetry, Culture, and Work in Thomson, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Emerson* (New York: Macmillan, 1998).
[7] R. Clifton Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004), 12.
[8] Spargo draws heavily on Sigmund Freud's definition of melancholia as a refusal to loosen one's grasp on a lost object, tying this specifically to ethics. To hold on to the dead, for Spargo, is to reenact an imaginative protection of the dead from the forces of the outside world (Spargo, 1-13 and throughout). See also Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 1917, rpt. in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XIV*, trans and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1971), 243-58.

at the forefront of consciousness, these poets frame all of life in terms of loss. All living bodies are simply bodies waiting to die. Crucially, however, this preoccupation with death both obscures and illuminates the dead's relation to the living, to history itself and, more specifically, to politics. It signals a lack of knowledge about the lower-class dead, and while these poets try to use the theme of death to illuminate political injustice, they also illuminate their own difficulties in knowing how to speak about death and about the dead's relation to the historical present, such that melancholy both enables and limits poetic expression.

This chapter opens with a survey of the rise of graveyard poetry as a distinct eighteenth-century genre, and then moves on to individual readings of graveyard poems by Parnell, Blair, and Gray (in that order). As I show in the following pages, Parnell's, Blair's, and Gray's poems are exemplary within the genre because of the ways in which they attempt to find a way to speak definitively about the dead, only to realize that the dead's anonymity forecloses any attempt to talk about the dead knowledgeably. The term that I use for these three poets' navigation between this conundrum is "anonymous fame." While recognizing that the dead are anonymous, poets assign them some degree of fame within the bounds of the poem. In my use of the term "fame" to describe the ideological work being done by these poets, I am thinking not of the brand of fame associated with the rise of the figure of the celebrity in the eighteenth century. Critics such as Laura Engel and Matthew Kinservik have done important work outlining the implications of celebrity in the eighteenth century, but such a definition of fame is not what this chapter teases out.[9] This chapter is more invested in fame in the ways that Blair and Gray use the term. When

[9] See Laura Engel, *Fashioning Celebrity: Eighteenth-Century British Actresses and Strategies for Image Making* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2011); and Matthew J. Kinservik, *Sex, Scandal, and Celebrity in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For a genealogy of the concept of fame in Western history, see Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

Blair's speaker talks of "Deathless Fame"[10] and Gray's elegist mourns his nameless "youth, to fortune and to fame unknown,"[11] they refer to fame as related to the ways that one is remembered by posterity. In refusing to forget the dead, these poets reconcile their struggles to articulate the significance of the dead by imagining the dead as if they were of a higher social station.

I. Graveyard Tours

More than anything, what graveyard poems have in common is the use of the trope of the gravestone as a way of imparting the message that death is the "great leveler."[12] Eric Parisot, appropriating this term in his own book study of graveyard poetry, contends that death eliminates social distinctions, but is also a prerequisite to the afterlife, in which differences are again restored, but in religious rather than economic or status-based terms.[13] Numerous other critics, including Lorna Clymer and Henry Weinfield, have also deployed the term to discuss the resonances of eighteenth-century graveyard poetry.[14] Against Parisot, Clymer argues that graveyard poets are so insistent on the inevitable passage from life to death that they sometimes

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[10] Robert Blair, *The Grave* (London: 1743), line 188. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

[11] Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, 1751. *Gray: Poems Selected and Introduced by John Rodgers,* ed. John Rodgers (The Grey Walls Press, 1953), 50-55, line 118. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

[12] The term "death as the great leveler" perhaps originates from *The Odyssey*. Athena says, "But the great leveler, Death: not even the gods/ can defend a man, not even one they love, that day/ when fate takes hold and lays him out at last" (Homer, *The Odyssey*. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*, 2nd ed., ed. Peter Simon, trans. Robert Fagles [New York: Norton, 2009], pp. 274-563, 3.269-71).

[13] Eric Parisot, *Graveyard Poetry: Religion, Aesthetics and the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Poetic Condition* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 64-72, 106-7.

[14] Lorna Clymer, "Graved in Tropes: The Figural Logic of Epitaphs and Elegies in Blair, Gray, Cowper, and Wordsworth." *ELH* 62.2 (Summer 1995): 347-86, 363; and Henry Weinfield, *The Poet Without a Name: Gray's* Elegy *and the Problem of History* (Carbonville, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1991), 67.

shortchange the passage from death to the afterlife.[15] The readings that compose my analysis see the graveyard genre as interested too in the time after death, but not in terms of the afterlife. Rather, my readings look to the ways that those who survive the dead work to remember them. Gray, Parnell, and Blair are as interested in the problem of how to remember the dead as they are in the path toward the grave itself.

The poetic strategy of using death as an occasion for philosophizing is of course not new to the eighteenth century. Any reader of John Donne's *Anniversaries* (1611, 1612) or John Milton's *Lycidas* (1637), for instance, can attest to the seventeenth-century interest in abstracting the dead and mapping them onto other ideas.[16] As Ramie Targoff points out, Donne's *The First Anniversarie* sees the entire world as worthless in the face of Elizabeth Drury's death, and *The Second Anniversarie* uses death as an occasion to reflect on the theological relationship between soul and body.[17] Similarly, while Milton's *Lycidas* is an elegy for his close friend Edward King, the poem moves away from speaking of King to speaking instead of religious and political matters.[18] In the eighteenth century, however, the poetic trend of using death as a mechanism of abstraction for talking about all sorts of other ideas besides death itself takes on a status-inflected valence that is historically unprecedented. Donne wrote for a family of Parliament and Milton's

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[15] Clymer, 363.

[16] John Donne, *The Anniversaries*, 1611, 1612. *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, Vol. 6*, ed. Gary A. Stringer (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995), 5-102; and John Milton, *Lycidas*, 1637. *John Milton: The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 39-44.

[17] Ramie Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2008), 80-81. Donne composed the *Anniversaries* as elegies for Elizabeth Drury, daughter of Donne's patron Sir Robert Drury. As Targoff notes, Donne never actually met Elizabeth Drury (80-81). We might say then, that Donne's lack of knowledge about the dead that he memorializes automatically turns the elegiac project into a task of abstraction. Donne can speak only in abstract terms about Drury since he never in fact met her.

[18] The second half of *Lycidas* sees the entrance of St. Peter, the "Pilot of the Galilean Lake" (109), whose presence may speak to the religious strife in seventeenth-century England.

King was an aristocrat, but the graveyard poets of the eighteenth century seek to impart the message that status is useless in the face of death.

Certainly, the eighteenth century saw a heightened interest in theme of death as an enactor of equality in its eradicating of social distinctions, and such an interest defined graveyard poems by writers from Mark Akenside to Edward Young to Elizabeth Rowe, among others. This interest extended from a criticism of worldly vanity and ambition. In Book II of Mark Akenside's *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1744), for instance, a "more than human form"[19] addresses the speaker in a way that links vanity with the impending nature of death:

> Vain are thy thoughts, O child of mortal birth,
> And impotent thy tongue. Is thy short span
> Capacious of this universal frame?
> Thy wisdom all-sufficient? Thou, alas!
> Dost thou aspire to judge between the lord
> Of nature and his works?[20]

Vanity is neutralized by death. While Akenside may not define vanity in anything other than abstract terms, other graveyard poets in the eighteenth century link vanity with wealth. In his 1760 *Elegy*, James Beattie suggests that death and wealth stand in opposition to one another, as the former negates the latter:

> Be taught, vain man, how fleeting all thy joys,
> Thy boasted grandeur, and thy glittering store;
> Death comes, and all thy fancy'd bliss destroys,
> Quick as a dream it fades, and is no more.[21]

More famously, Edward Young juxtaposes the riches of the world with the riches of eternal life in *Night Thoughts* (1742-46), going so far as to give *Night VI* the descriptive subhead, "Where,

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[19] Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: A Poem in Three Books* (London: 1744), line 226.
[20] Ibid., 242-47.
[21] James Beattie, *Elegy* (London: 1760), lines 33-36.

among other things, glory and riches are particularly considered."[22] While death consumes everyone, as Young suggests in *Night Thoughts*, it also transports Christians to another realm of more lasting riches.

Elsewhere, William Shenstone riffs on the motif that death renders everyone equal in *Stanzas to the Memory of W.G.* (1737) with sentiments such as, "Death makes the stoutest Mortal start,/ Few are courageous then."[23] The deictic "then" seems to refer simultaneously to the moment of death and to the moment when the "stoutest Mortal start[s]" upon realizing the reality of his or her future death. The motif even infiltrated James Macpherson's Ossian poems, specifically *A Night-Piece*, the title of which echoes Parnell's *A Night-Piece on Death*.[24] For some poets, though, the looming fact of death did not completely silence the dead. Elizabeth Rowe's *Friendship in Death: In Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1728) imagines the dead speaking to the living from beyond the grave and, as I discuss later in this chapter, Parnell allows the dead to speak celestial wisdom.

Gray's *Elegy* was clearly the most famous of the graveyard poems, judging from the myriad imitations and homages it inspired. William Mason's *Elegy VI: Written in a Church-yard in South Wales* (1787) speculates on the kind of life that the deceased young man at the end of the *Elegy* might have lived.[25] The *Elegy* was also an easy target for parody: there were no fewer than 29 parodies of Gray, all of them using Gray's phrasings but in different settings.[26] Parodies abounded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Gray's "The breezy call on incense-

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[22] Edward Young, *The Complaint: or, Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (London: 1744).
[23] William Shenstone, *Stanzas to the Memory of W.G.* (London: 1737), lines 9-10.
[24] James Macpherson, *A Night-Piece* (London: 1760).
[25] William Mason, *Elegy VI: Written in a Church-yard in South Wales* (London: 1787).
[26] See Eleanor Sickels, *The Gloomy Egoist: Moods and Themes of Melancholy from Gray to Keats* (New York: Columbia UP, 1932), 96-97.

breathing morn" (line 17) becomes in Henry Headley's 1786 *A Parody on Gray's Elegy*, "Th' unwelcome call of business-bringing morn."[27] Gray's "A youth, to fortune and to fame unknown" (line 118) becomes in Colin Maclaurin's 1814 *Parody on Gray's Celebrated Elegy*, "A youth to Business and to Law well known."[28]

While many poets used the graveyard as a source of poetic inspiration, this chapter focuses specifically on Parnell, Blair, and Gray because they have long been viewed as exceptional within the graveyard tradition. Ever since the second half of the eighteenth century, critics have placed the three figures in conversation with one another. Oliver Goldsmith writes in *The Life of Thomas Parnell* (1770) that Parnell's *A Night-Piece* was one of the best of the churchyard genre.[29] This is quite a statement of praise, especially considering the widespread popularity of Gray's *Elegy* at the time. In his *Lives of the English Poets* (1779-81), Samuel Johnson, responding to Goldsmith's praise of Parnell, writes that Gray's *Elegy* is better because of the "originality of [its] sentiment."[30] William Lyon Phelps remarks in 1893 that Parnell's *A Night-Piece* marked the beginning of the graveyard school, influencing not only Blair and Gray, but also Wordsworth.[31] Edmund Gosse even sets up Parnell as a bridge "between Milton on the one hand and Gray and Collins on the other,"[32] praising Parnell for his deftness with octosyllabic

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[27] Henry Headley, *A Parody on Gray's Elegy* (London: 1786).
[28] Colin Maclaurin, *Parody on Gray's Celebrated Elegy* (London: 1814).
[29] Oliver Goldsmith, *The Life of Thomas Parnell* (London: 1770), 47. Goldsmith writes that, "*The Night Piece on Death*, deserves every praise, and I should suppose, with very little amendment, might be made to surpass all those night pieces and church-yard scenes that have since appeared" (47). Goldsmith does not specify why Parnell's poem is so superior.
[30] Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets* (London: 1779-81), 10.52.
[31] William Lyon Phelps, *The Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement: A Study in Eighteenth Century Literature*, 1893 (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1899), 26.
[32] Edmund Gosse, *A History of Eighteenth Century Literature (1660-1780)* (London: Macmillan, 1897), 137.

verse.[33]

While Parnell's preceded Gray's and Blair's poems, the latter two had a shared reception history. In 1787, Scatcherd and Whitaker booksellers distributed the two poems together under the title, *The Grave; By Robert Blair, To which is added Gray's Elegy in a Country Church Yard. With Notes Moral, Critical, and Explanatory*.[34] The cover illustration depicts a group of mourners in a churchyard surrounding a burial plot, with a passage from the Old Testament book of Job above their heads: "The grave is mine house."[35] It is unclear whether the deceased buried in the earth or to the group of mourners surrounding the burial plot are intended to be the ones speaking this line, but in short, the illustration and accompanying Old Testament text are a reminder that one day everyone will inhabit this "house."

These poets are not content to stop at saying that death levels all, however. Everyone might very well be anonymous in death since everyone ends up buried below the same earth, but even in the wake of this dark equality these poets continue to seek out methods for reversing the anonymity that extends from the idea of death as an equalizer. The function of melancholy in these poems, as it takes gloom over the fact of death and molds cultural significance out of it, is to perform a fluctuation between anonymity and fame, perhaps even without the poets' conscious knowledge of these movements.[36]

In the following sections I show that, in their simultaneous advocacy for the seemingly

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[33] Ibid., 137.
[34] Robert Blair, *The Grave; By Robert Blair, To which is added Gray's Elegy in a Country Church Yard. With Notes Moral, Critical, and Explanatory* (London: 1787).
[35] The King James Version translation of Job 17:13 reads, "If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness" (*The King James Bible: Quatercentenary Edition*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010).
[36] For another take on the theme of anonymity in Romantic literature in particular, see Jacques Khalip, *Anonymous Life: Romanticism and Dispossession* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009). Khalip argues that the prototypical Romantic subject "resists the requirement to inhabit a social category and remains open to change and redescription" (3).

incompatible categories of anonymity and fame, these poets make room for a third way between those two categories: anonymous fame. The term "anonymous fame" refers to the ways that Parnell, Blair, and Gray use knowledge that death eradicates class distinctions to transform corpses into poetic signs for larger ideals if not into subjects with voices of their own. Even though the dead are given no names, poets make them famous by upholding them as emblems for larger ideals such as virtue or modesty. In the absence of specific knowledge about the anonymous dead that they memorialize, poets resort to the language of abstraction, transforming the dead into signs of either lower-class virtue or upper-class vice. The language of the melancholy mood universalizes the particular, causing the specifics of loss to stand in for the general principles of virtue. These poets seek to deploy grief over specific losses toward higher intellectual insight. The problem, as we will see, is that melancholy's drive toward intellectual insight transforms persons into signs and thus unsettles the poets' attempts to grant true subjectivity to the poor and lower-class.

II. Night of the Living Dead: Parnell

Thomas Parnell's *A Night-Piece on Death* (1722) is a pathbreaking poem in the graveyard tradition, even as it has been subsumed in recent critical tradition by more famous poems by writers such as Gray and Edward Young. Calling the poem a modern revision of the medieval genre of the *ars moriendi*, Rodney Stenning Edgecombe claims that the poem was a model for Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742-44),[37] and Lorna Clymer has suggested that Robert Blair was heavily influenced by *A Night-Piece* as he composed his own poem *The Grave*.[38] At first glance, it appears that Parnell is using the melancholy mood as a means for

[37] Rodney Stenning Edgecombe. "Thomas Parnell's 'Night-Piece on Death' and Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*." *ANQ* 20.4 (Fall 2007): 6-7.
[38] Clymer, 362-63.

advancing a politics of radical equality, as Parisot suggests in associating Parnell with the notion of "death as the great leveler."[39] Since he cannot expunge the thought of the dead from his mind, he appears to mobilize that thought in the service of making a political statement about equality. If status is not a sign of equality, bodily decay is. It is for this reason, I suggest, that his politics of equality depends upon the depersonalization of its subjects.

The poem opens with a late night tour through a deserted graveyard, the speaker treading over the earth, gazing both down at the graves beneath his feet and up at the stars in the evening sky. In a move that Spargo would find familiar in his definition of melancholy as a refusal to forget the dead, the speaker's walk inspires gloomy remembrances about the loss of the deceased. These reflections in turn give way to a larger meditation on the universality of death. In the second half of this short 90-line poem, the speaker's voice is intruded upon by an initially unidentified voice, referred to only as the "King of Fears."[40] This voice, which subsumes the poem's second half to the point that the speaker's own voice completely drops out, belongs to death, and assures the speaker that the path of death is also a path toward heaven, where people will be judged according to the degree of virtue they possess and not according to how many material possessions they own.

A Night-Piece introduces the theme of posthumous equality via the specter of loss. Speaking as the voice of death, Parnell writes, "Death's but a Path that must be trod,/ If Man wou'd ever pass to God" (67-68). Death consumes everything, including the speaker's own consciousness. The speaker's use of the passive voice, wherein "death" is the grammatical subject of the sentence instead of "Man," mirrors the tenuous relationship throughout the poem

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[39] Parisot, 64.
[40] Thomas Parnell, *A Night-Piece on Death* (London: 1722), line 62. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

between humanity and mortality. Before being able to pass to God, "Man" must first become a passive subject, acted upon by death. The tension between active and passive informs and affects the meaning of the poem as a whole, as the dead passively submit to the authority of the metonymic grave itself before rising again.

In the first half of the poem, as Parnell's speaker cannot stop himself from obsessing over the dead, he describes the dead who belonged to lower social ranks as anonymous:

> Those Graves, with bending Osier bound,
> That nameless heave the crumbled Ground,
> Quick to the glancing Thought disclose
> Where *Toil* and *Poverty* repose. (29-32)[41]

These graves house the poor. The graves themselves are nameless, and require nothing more from the viewer than "glancing thoughts," or fleeting and momentary attention. This does not mean that the subjects themselves have no names; rather, it means that their names are not as important as the categories of labor and poverty that their lives represent. The dead here are caught up within a political economy whose ideology is so pervasive that it subsumes their names under their position within the social order.

Gray will also make the namelessness of the lower-class dead an important theme to his *Elegy*, but in Parnell's poem, one of the reasons that the dead call for nothing more than quick glances has to do with the fact that there is in fact nothing to see: the graves are blank. The blankness of the grave leads one to dwell on death in a different way, by assigning those deceased persons different names: Toil and Poverty. The gravestone creates a void, a vacuum of meaning that the poet-speaker cannot help but attempt to fill on his own with replacement names. Put another way, imagination replaces knowledge. By assigning the dead the names Toil and Poverty, the poet-speaker is both remembering the dead of lower social status and revealing the

[41] Some editions of the poem read "crumpled" instead of "crumbled" in line 30.

impossibility of remembering them as people (or in other words, the impossibility of remembering them as anything other than signs for abstract ideas of toil and poverty). The figures of these names signal the dead's transformation from living subjects to mute members of a low social status.

Soon enough, the names "Toil" and "Poverty" become figures of juxtaposition, markers of difference. They are the speaker's means for contrasting the lower-class dead with the upper-class dead who are buried in ornate tombs. The speaker goes on to contrast the anonymity of the lower social ranks with the fame of upper ranks:

> The Marble Tombs that rise on high,
> Whose Dead in vaulted Arches lye,
> Whose Pillars swell with sculptur'd Stones,
> Arms, Angels, Epitaphs and Bones,
> These (all the poor Remains of State)
> Adorn the *Rich*, or praise the *Great*;
> Who while on Earth in Fame they live,
> Are senseless of the Fame they give. (39-46)

Oddly, as he did with the lower-class laborers, the speaker does not assign names to the dead who belonged to the higher classes either. They are still simply the "Dead" (line 40), and are defined by their arches and pillars rather than by their actual names. In death, upper-class subjects become like the lower-class subjects were in life: they become anonymous. Bones and epitaphs mingle together in a cluttered mass, and the dead become an undifferentiated heap. Above the ground, the graves of the rich might look different from the graves of the poor, but below the earth, the bodies of the rich and the bodies of the poor are exactly the same. The gravestones serve a double function. On the one hand, they keep the lower-class dead anonymous, because they do not list their names. On the other hand, they merely disguise the fact that beneath the earth, the bodies of the rich and poor look alike and are subject to the same natural processes of decay. By this reading, the entrance of the term "fame" halfway through the

poem becomes particularly loaded. If "in Fame they live" (45), then fame is associated primarily with life and not death. Fame defines the rich in life. But fame subsumes the famous in death. The famous are buried beneath graves that mark them as famous, but in death, fame is merely a pretense, a strategy for hiding the fact that the bodies of the famous are now subject to the same forces of decay to which the bodies of the poor are subject.

After distinguishing the graves of the rich from the graves of the poor while also acknowledging that rich and poor both belong in death to the same rank, Parnell's speaker sees an ominous vision that almost undoes the logic of death. It seems to occasion a resurrection. After briefly glancing at the graves of the poor and fixing his gaze on the graves of the rich, the speaker exclaims:

> Ha! while I gaze, pale *Cynthia* fades,
> The bursting Earth unveils the Shades!
> All slow, and wan, and wrap'd with Shrouds,
> They rise in visionary Crouds,
> And all with sober Accent cry,
> *Think, Mortal, what it is to dye*. (47-52)

The interjection "Ha!" that introduces this ghostly resurrection indicates that the ensuing moment resists linguistic representation, if only for a moment. As Cynthia (i.e., the Greek goddess Artemis) disappears, night seems to become day, and in "unveiling" the dead, the soil of the graveyard is transformed into a stage curtain, drawing back to reveal a group of living dead. The dead in this passage are part of a collective, and they remain without names, referred to only by the plural pronouns "they" and "all." But despite their continued anonymity in death, the dead no longer seem completely dead, even if their resurrection is brief, for they possess the capacity for speech. The words the resurrected dead speak stand in contrast to the speaker's exclamatory "Ha!" that opens the passage. The dead possess an agency for speech that momentarily exceeds the speaker's own. Even if they are anonymously indistinguishable from one another, the dead

become sages in their moment of resurrection. They can speak to "what it is to die" in ways that the living cannot.

In speaking words that living humans do not have the experience to be able to speak, the resurrected dead of this passage ascend to a position of privilege, and their ascension renders them a spectacle. They have a privileged insight available only to a select few, even if their privilege comes at a steep price. By "rising" (line 50), the dead assume a posture of dominance above the living. Earlier, the graves were spectacles; now, the dead themselves have replaced the graves as spectacles. Earlier, the lower class dead, being unnamed and anonymous, were worthy only of a passing glance; now, they call for a sustained gaze. In short, the anonymous dead have achieved a measure of spiritual glory that they were missing in life. Even though they have no voices of their own, the dead speak as extensions of the poet-speaker's own voice. They speak on the inevitability of death at the moment when the speaker himself can only say "Ha!" because he has not experienced death and cannot thus speak on what it is like to die.

This moment typifies the paradoxical nature of isolation that characterizes much eighteenth-century graveyard literature. The dead are removed from the rest of the world: they exist in a state of permanent separation and isolation in a place beyond the social. At the same time, their irreversible removal and isolation becomes the means by which they communicate with and thus forge a connection with the living from whom they are isolated. The language of the poem creates an atmosphere of gloom that pervades the graveyard: the poem is a grim and obsessive response to loss. And yet this gloom does not allow the speaker to connect directly with the dead about whom he speaks, because the dead are nameless and exist only as a crowd—either a crowd of decaying corpses or of divinely inspired prophets. The gloom leads the speaker to speak abstractly if persistently about the dead, talking of them as if they were ideas (those

ideas being toil, poverty, anonymity, and fame, for instance) and not people.

There is the potential in this theme of radical posthumous equality for a similarly radical politics of melancholy. The compulsion of the melancholy mood is to universalize, to dwell on loss to such an obsessive extent that it becomes an allegory for all of reality. This too is Freudian, as in Freud's formulation melancholy comes to subsume the melancholic's entire perception of life.[42] *A Night-Piece* universalizes the individual losses of the dead in an attempt to show that all people are equal. And yet, in showing that all people are equal, *A Night-Piece*'s melancholy mood also treats the dead as something other than human, as mere abstractions or vehicles for other ends. The dead are depersonalized in the speaker's compulsion to universalize the terms of loss.

The entrance of the unnamed voice infuses the poem with religious undertones: the voice declares that in order to achieve eternal life, one must first die.[43] Parnell's continued interest in social status underpins his theological emphasis, such that even religion is merely an allegory for culture when placed under the terms of melancholy. On the exquisiteness of the funeral ceremony, the voice of death asks the speaker:

> 'Why then thy flowing sable Stoles,
> Deep pendent Cypress, mourning Poles,

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[42] Freud, 246, 251. Freud's richest descriptions of melancholy have to do with either death or the loss of a love object. Writing about the intense emotional reaction to loss, Freud writes, "In melancholia, the occasions which give rise to the illness extend for the most part beyond the clear case of a loss by death, and include all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed" (251). In other words, melancholy begins with a response to immediate loss and then expands outward to include all other real or imagined losses that one has suffered, such that the first loss allegorizes myriad others.

[43] As a voice that seems initially to have no speaker, the words that proceed from death's mouth initially seem an example of what Jacques Derrida refers to as "absolute presence" (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 1967, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998], 16-17). The voice seems an example of "self-presence" (Derrida, 16), in that the voice is the only part of the being that is present to the speaker. Initially there seems to be neither a name nor a body to mediate between the voice and the speaker's ear.

> Loose Scarfs to fall athwart thy Weeds,
> Long Palls, drawn Herses, cover'd Steeds,
> And Plumes of black, that as they tread,
> Nod o'er the 'Scutcheons of the dead?' (71-76)

This is an incriminating question. It suggests that the human tradition of subjecting memory to material ceremonies is ultimately a futile process and that the materials used to memorialize the dead are just as subject to decay as the dead themselves are. The subjects of this criticism are, of course, the rich, as no one would be mourning the deaths of the laboring poor with long hearses or "sable Stoles." In criticizing the rich for the material excess with which they mourn, Parnell's speaker implies that the rich should strive for the kind of anonymity that marks the graves of the poor. The nameless poor do not need to account for this question. They mark the standard that the voice of death seems to uphold.

Death renders everyone anonymous, but it does not mitigate the desire of the living to glorify, gaze upon, and attach themselves to the objects of loss anyway. In placing those of high and low rank alike in positions of posthumous glory, Parnell's speaker grants the dead an anonymous fame. This is an uneasy fame, because it relies on the persistence of anonymity. The dead become famous because they hold a collective wisdom, speaking together as one voice. But to speak as one voice means that their individual voices each fall by the wayside. The agency of individual persons drops off in favor of the agency of the collective of deceased sages, and what is known about the individual dead is less important than what the dead themselves know. The dead become famous by being assigned a spiritually inflected wisdom, but wisdom replaces their actual identities. They no longer have names; the chorus of their collective voice replaces their individual names with another name not their own: wisdom. This is the product of poetic remembrance: a restoration of voice to the dead but a continued erasure of identity.

In the graveyard, the only agent who has a name or an identity is death itself. Death both

kills and resurrects. Death swallows up the names of all others, and subsequently leads to wisdom. When the dead speak, they speak through the mouth of death, such that death restores their voices even as it robs them of their individualities. In restoring voice, it also restores equality. But it is unclear what this equality in fact signifies. It only occurs in a graveyard; it arrives belatedly, not in time to do anyone any good in the real world. If it had arrived in time, it would not deserve the name of death. Parnell's imaginative vision of the dead suggests that to refuse to move on from the dead is to dream of equality, even if such a dream is the sign of the difficulty of converting critique into praxis. Parnell's poem provides us with a dark vision of equality: an equality that resides in imagination—specifically in the imagination of the resurrection of the dead—even if such imagination cannot convert to praxis. Imagining the restoration of the dead's voices is evidence of a spirit of resistance toward the status inequalities of the present age, even if it cannot find immediate practical application. Literary writing thus stands as a powerful form of resistance, even as it delineates in its paradoxical silencing of the dead's respective identities the ways in which resistance struggles to find pure application. And just as much as imaginative melancholy is an expression of resistance, it is also an expression of the difficulty of knowing how to resist the status inequalities of the present.

As the century progresses, poets such as Blair and Gray will continue to gaze upon the anonymous dead. Instead of focusing on assigning the anonymous dead a degree of fame, Blair's speaker sets his sights on the opposite move that those who were famous in life will make. Whereas in Parnell's poem subjects of low rank gain in death what they did not have in life, in Blair's the famous will lose the fame they had during life.

III. 'From the wreck of names to rescue ours': Blair

In Robert Blair's *The Grave*, humanity is nothing more than a collection of bones. While

funeral ceremonies might conceal the true "Mode and Form" (line 148) of the human, Blair's poem seeks to strip the outer layer away to reveal the naked form that lies beneath. Blair's poem compares the ceremony of the funeral service to the disgrace of digging up a grave. All is rot and stench: "Why this ado in earthing up a carcass/ That's fall'n into disgrace, and in the nostril/ Smells horrible?" (169-71). Different people obsess over loss in different ways, and Blair obsesses over it by violently exposing the ugly depth beneath the gaudy surface of memorialization. Paul Fry refers to *The Grave* as "stand[ing] midway between tomb and topography."[44] By "topography," Fry means that the poem maps out the entire earth as a potential tomb or house of the dead, the perfect illustration of a melancholic mode of being overtaken by loss.[45] If all of the earth is a map of loss, there is no way to detach oneself from loss. That is, an awareness of death renders melancholy one's default mood. Blair might be even more preoccupied than Parnell is with the idea that death erases social distinctions. While Parnell's speaker's interest in personal salvation allows him to see death as something that glorifies, Blair's poem suggests that death only degrades.

What Fry does not point out, however, is the uncertainty of Blair's speaker's allegiances. The speaker finds himself drawn to the dead, but he does not know how to represent this attraction (and its related critique of social practice) within the bounds of language. Blair's speaker condemns funeral undertakers for the methods by which they conceal knowledge about the dead, but at the same time he unwittingly aligns himself with the undertakers. The

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[44] Paul Fry, "The Absent Dead: Wordsworth, Byron, and the Epitaph." *Studies in Romanticism* 17.4 (1978): 413-33, 418.

[45] Fry quotes the following lines from *The Grave* to prove his point:

> […] What is *this World*?
> What? but a spacious *Burial field* unwall'd,
> Strew'd with Death's Spoils, the Spoils of Animals
> Savage and Tame, and full of Dead Mens Bones! (483-86)

undertakers conceal the ugliness of the deceased body, while Blair's speaker in turn conceals the fame that the deceased may have had during life. For both the poet and the undertaker, the act of concealment is, as I show, an aesthetically minded project. Blair takes the anonymous dead in this poem and crafts aesthetic figures out of corpses—like the funeral undertakers. Like Parnell, Blair uses melancholy as a way to transform the dead into signs of a larger theme of decay. His rendering of the dead as signs anticipates the similar move that Gray makes eight years later in his *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

Blair opens his poem by referring to the dead as travellers, and to the grave as "Th' appointed Place of Rendezvous, where all/ These Travellers meet" (6-7). This "Place of Rendezvous" represents a space beyond the social. Life is a trek that ends at the grave. The dead do not travel on to heaven in Blair's poem (or at least he is not interested in charting such a journey). The terrors and the gloom of the graveyard are more interesting than the serenity of the heavens. In this poem the celestial sublimity of Parnell's heavenly reassurance of life after death has given way to an aesthetics of horror. Death hunts everyone down, and it is unclear what exactly happens after death.

The question framing Blair's speaker's speculations on death is whether the pomp and circumstance that attend our memorializations of the dead are worthwhile. As he fixates further on death, Blair's speaker sees that ceremony only serves to disguise the corpses that it purports to honor. Early in the poem, Blair writes:

> *Arabia*'s Gums and odoriferous Drugs,
> And Honours by the *Heralds* duly paid
> In Mode and Form, ev'n to a very Scruple;
> Oh cruel *Irony*! These come too late;
> And only mock, whom they were meant to honour.
> Surely! There's not a Dungeon-Slave, that's bury'd
> In the High-way, unshrouded and uncoffin'd,
> But lies as soft, and sleeps as sound as He.

> Sorry Pre-eminence of high Descent
> Above the vulgar-born, to rot in State! (146-55)

The irony of this passage lies in the disjunction between the intent of the funereal pomp and its effect. Honor becomes mockery because no amount of honor can reverse the dishonor of a deceased body that lies rotting beneath the earth. In a move that echoes Parnell's comparison of the graves of the rich and poor, Blair's speaker compares the dead body of the famous subject with the dead body of a "Dungeon-Slave […] unshrouded and uncoffin'd" (151-52). Blair's poem is a poem about the human body, unexalted and undignified, reduced to a mere object whose ugliness is irredeemable. There is no difference between prisoners and bourgeois subjects.

Blair's speaker equates the task of preparing a body for burial to the task of an artist. But the kind of aesthetic vision that he assigns to the undertakers is vain and one-dimensional. The speaker specifically addresses the undertakers:

> […] Ye *Undertakers!* tell us,
> 'Midst all the gorgeous Figures you exhibit,
> Why is the Principal conceal'd, for which
> You make this mighty Stir? 'Tis wisely done:
> What would offend the Eye in a good Picture
> The Painter casts discreetly into Shades. (171-76)

In this passage, the speaker compares the labor of the undertaker to the task of the painter. Painters must discriminate, drawing the viewer's attention away from the unattractive and unpleasing aspects of the scenes they paint by placing them out of the light. In the same way, the undertakers must place the dead human body far from the viewers' eyes, even though the human body is the occasion for the pomp and circumstance in the first place. The undertakers are responsible for creating "Figures" (172), and their figures please the senses. Oddly, though, the function of these figures is to "conceal" (173) the deceased body that awaits burial. The figure is something other than the subject of the painting, and the figure's function is to detach the viewer

from the subject of the painting. If the figures that the undertakers create are gorgeous enough, then they will distract the viewer's attention from the grotesqueness of the human body. While Blair's speaker realizes that death reduces human nature to its ugliest and basest essentials, he also reveals in this passage that it is equally natural to seek to use beautiful images to distract the eye from the foundational ugliness of human nature.

Blair's speaker seeks to overturn the aesthetic practices that he sees at work in the labors of the undertakers. His aesthetic vision is not to reveal beauty, but to show that some forms of beauty, specifically in this case the beauty that accompanies the funeral ceremony, only serve to obscure knowledge about the fates of the dead. But even as Blair's poetry seeks to reveal knowledge about the dead, it also shows that some forms of knowledge about the dead are useless. It does not matter what state the deceased occupied during life. As such, the speaker aims to conceal what the dead were like during life, because once one is dead, one's accomplishments during life no longer mean anything. He laments:

> Absurd! to think to over-reach the *Grave*,
> And from the Wreck of Names to rescue ours!
> The best concerted Schemes Men lay for Fame
> Die fast away: Only themselves die faster.
> The far-fam'd *Sculptor*, and the lawrell'd *Bard*,
> Those bold Insurancers of Deathless Fame,
> Supply their little feeble Aids in vain. (183-89)

In his use of the term "Deathless Fame," the speaker renders fame a classificatory category.[46] It is a means for distinguishing and grouping people. There are famous people, and there are anonymous people. By critiquing the categories of fame and glory, Blair's speaker is also

[46] Again, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I am not thinking of fame in terms of celebrity, but as a category by which the dead are remembered by the living.

critiquing material wealth.[47] The grave becomes an obstacle that humans think they can leap over, even when they cannot. In claiming that "The best concerted Schemes Men lay for Fame/ Die fast away" (185-86), the speaker demonstrates that he is interested in drawing out not one form of death, but two. Not only do human beings die; fame also dies, despite its qualifying adjective "deathless," which turns out to be a mere lie. Blair's speaker expresses no conscious interest in discussing the details of the fame that one might have achieved during life. It does no good for the reader to know about the level of fame that the dead enjoyed before they were dead.

His aim is to relegate the knowledge about what the dead were like before they were dead to the shadows of the painting, like the painter who places the unattractive parts of a painted scene at the margins of the canvas. Blair's speaker seeks to make the dead anonymous. He seeks to keep his reader from knowing more about the dead other than the fact that their death renders their past fame useless. In a sense, by concealing the fame of the famous, the speaker of the poem is attempting to ensure that fame dies. After all, fame only dies as long as the survivors of the dead choose not to speak of them. The poet finds himself with the same power that it seems only death can possess: both the poet and death can kill fame. The undertakers have the activity correct (concealment); it is just that their aim, in this poem's view, is misplaced.

Blair's task is an aesthetic one. His speaker expresses an interest in *The Grave* in the "Mode and Form" (line 148) of memorialization. His mode is to give the dead the form of figures, in a manner similar to the undertakers who transform the corpses of the dead into "gorgeous Figures" (172)—or signifiers of beauty. But where the undertakers render the dead figures that symbolize beauty, Blair's speaker renders them figures that symbolize the shortcomings of cultural practices relating to ambition and glory. The dead become

[47] Critics of Gray's *Elegy*, as we will see, also identify Gray's distinction between rich and poor using similar descriptors such as "fame" and "ambition" as a critique of bourgeois materialism.

memorialized in their posthumous anonymity, the carriers of a lesson about vanity. Just as the gravemarker is a figure that memorializes the dead by communicating to a reader what lies beneath the earth, Blair's poem also practices a macabre form of memorialization, because it too, in the service of moralizing, reminds the reader of the corpse that lies beneath the earth. But this corpse is also itself abstracted. It is a material reminder of the immaterial and abstract notions of ambition and vanity. And in order to allow the dead to become cautionary figures to the reader for the shortcomings of worldly vanity, the speaker has to render them faceless, nameless. This is because their own names and faces do not matter to the poem as much as the abstract lessons that they represent. In essence, Blair's speaker has to make the deceased anonymous. The dead's figuration as symbols of life's vanity leaves them caught between the poles of anonymity and fame, tools for the poet's own aesthetic vision. In a move that a critic such as Parisot would find familiar in his own critical emphasis on "death as the great leveler," *The Grave*'s politics thus appear to be radically egalitarian in that they speak against materialism and bourgeois vanity in favor of an immaterial brand of equality that only exists insorporeally. The side effect of this obsessive nature of the melancholy mood, however, is its aestheticization of persons,[48] to the extent that the losses of individual persons do not matter as much as the abstract moral lessons for which their losses are merely the occasions.

In seeking to make the dead anonymous, Blair's speaker appropriates the same

[48] My phrasing here echoes the famous closing lines of Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility." Benjamin writes that, "[Humankind's] self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure. *Such is the aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicizing art*" (Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," 1936, in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin [Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2008], 19-55, 42; emphasis in original). Just as Parnell's speaker places aesthetics above the individual, so too does Benjamin's version of fascism.

techniques of concealment that he observes and critiques in the undertaker. The project of *The Grave* is to blur the distinctions between the bourgeois the lower status, between the poor and rich, between "Dungeon-Slaves" (151) and those of high rank. But in order to accomplish this blurring of distinctions, Blair's speaker must engage in a task of figuration that capitalizes on the dead's lack of voice. Blair's speaker's poetic voice is constituted by the dead's absence of voice. He does not restore the dead's capacity to speak, but uses their own lack as the source of his own poetic inspiration. In seizing upon the dead's lack of agency, Blair's speaker makes them mute signs of the larger categories of vanity and ambition. He imbues them with meaning, even if that meaning depends upon their being powerless. As the speaker is drawn to loss, the terms of loss do not come into clearer focus; rather, they seems to fall out of focus. The more that the speaker of the poem imagines a politics of equality, the more it becomes clear that this politics of equality can only exist as an idea. It cannot be realized; the realm of imagination alone is the space of radical equality, and this vision has no other corporeal outlet.

In the following section, in turning to Gray's *Elegy*, I show that Gray's speaker has something in common with those in Blair's poem who "think to over-reach the *Grave*,/ And from the Wreck of Names to rescue [theirs]" (183-84). Gray's speaker, like Blair's, finds himself lost in the aesthetic practices of figuration against which he speaks. But where Blair's focus is on revealing the horrors of the grave, Gray's is on finding a way to elegize those about whom he knows little. Gray takes the aesthetics of graveyard poetry advanced by writers earlier in the century such as Blair and Parnell and uses them to craft an elegy, linking the tropes of anonymity and memorialization. As we will see, Gray's deployment of melancholy as a vehicle for rendering the anonymous dead signs of abstract and universalized ideals allows him to imagine a space of equality, however vexed that ideal might be.

IV. Naming the Nameless: Gray

In a letter to his friend Richard West,[49] dated 27 May 1742, Thomas Gray refers to his own personal melancholy as something almost pleasurable:

> Mine, you are to know, is a white melancholy, or rather leucocholy for the most part; which though it seldom laughs or dances, nor ever amounts to what one calls joy or pleasure, yet is a good easy sort of state, and *ça ne laisse que de s'amuser*. The only fault of it is insipidity; which is apt now and then to give a sort of ennui, which makes one form certain little wishes that signify nothing.[50]

Gray distinguishes white melancholy, which is only a mild gloom, from black melancholy, which is debilitating depression and more similar to the scientific definition of melancholy as an illness that permeated eighteenth-century medical discourse. According to the definition advanced in this letter, white melancholy is defined by the capacity to wish for something, even if the something for which one wishes is actually nothing. While Gray does not specify what these "certain little wishes" actually are, his description is portable to his *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

In this section I contend that the genre of the elegy bears witness to a collapsing of distinctions between white and black melancholy. In his *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751), Gray depicts a speaker whose mode of memorializing signals an obsessive fixation with the dead, similar to the attachment figured by black melancholy. But at the same time, his memorializing impulse is represented as one of those aforementioned "certain little wishes that signify nothing" that characterizes white melancholy. Gray's elegist fixates on the loss of the

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[49] Scholars have long speculated that the *Elegy* was in fact addressed to West. Odell Shepard went so far as to argue that the "thee" in the line "For thee, who mindful of th' unhonour'd dead" (93) is actually West (Odell Shepard, "A Youth to Fortune and to Fame Unknown." *Modern Philology* 20.4 [1923]: 347-73, 361). For a recent reading of West's possible influence on Gray's poetry, see Robert F. Gleckner, *Gray Agonistes: Thomas Gray and Masculine Friendship* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997).

[50] Thomas Gray, "Letter X. Mr. Gray to Mr. West." *The Poems and Letters of Thomas Gray: With Memoirs of His Life and Writings*, ed. William Mason (London. 1820), 153-57, 153.

lower-status villagers, but depicts such fixation as a wish that means nothing: specifically the wish that they had been famous and thus more widely remembered.

Perhaps Gray's most important poetic choice in his composition of the poem is his decision to use the elegy form to memorialize the lower-status dead who seem forgotten to history, instead of using it to memorialize those of higher status about whom much is already known. This refusal to let go of the losses of the anonymous dead contains an implicit critique of the vanity of the rich and a defense of the poor. And yet, the critical problem that this choice of subject poses is that, if the deceased subjects who rest in the country churchyard are unknown to history, then the speaker has little information to utilize in his attempt to elegize. Thus, he must speculate on the kinds of lives the dead might have lived had circumstances been different. He must formulate "certain little wishes" for them that in fact better enable him to attach himself to their memory without letting go. In the process, as we will see, the elegist must appropriate bourgeois social ideologies of memorialization he claims to disavow. This appropriation seems to "signify nothing" on first glance; it seems to be nothing more than a whimsical fantasy about what might have been for the nameless dead. But it is in fact the very condition by which the elegist finds the language to speak about loss. The poem's elegiac speculation suggests that even politically conscious acts of memorializing can appropriate the ideologies they purport to critique. When the elegist's melancholy feelings about the dead become occasions for critique, they reveal to readers the difficulty of accommodating critique to language.

The elegist's solution to the problem of elegizing those about whom he knows nothing is to imagine the nameless dead as if they were famous. In assigning the dead fame, Gray's elegist opens up the possibility for a politics of equality, an abstract space beyond culture in which rich and poor are equally famous. In the end, though, the politics finds itself unsettled by its own

double. Its vexation emerges because its politics of equality must objectify the lower-status dead, transforming persons into signs. When the anonymous dead become famous in Gray's hands, they simply become figures either for the abstract ideal of modest virtue or for the voices of past historical figures such as Milton or Cromwell. They have no identities outside of their functions as signs. In using the melancholy mood to find a way to wish up some meaning out of the loss of persons, Gray's elegist ends up being unable to speak about the specifics of loss and unable to think of a way that his politics of equality might apply to empirical reality. But for all its imperfections, as we shall see, imagination becomes the only space for critique when critique has no other outlet.

The *Elegy* carried important cultural significance throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. John Guillory and Catherine Robson have both given accounts of the *Elegy*'s eighteenth-century popularity. Robson writes that the poem was "First published anonymously as a sixpenny quarto pamphlet [but] was rapidly reprinted in the months that followed, appearing in both authorized and pirated editions and a wide variety of magazines and miscellanies."[51] Robson goes on to say that the poem was popular not only in the city, but also in the country. Edmund Gosse, Robson writes, would say in 1882 that, "Everybody read it, in town and country."[52] In this sense, the poem is both elite and populist, transcending social boundaries so as to be read by everyone. In a related sense, Guillory has famously claimed that the poem figures an attempt to form a national vernacular language, in that anyone of any social station could read

[51] Catherine Robson, *Heart Beats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012), 134.
[52] Edmund Gosse, *Gray* (New York: Harper, 1882), 105. Robson notes that Gosse pays special attention to William Shenstone's interest in the poem. In Gosse's account, Robson writes, Shenstone comes across the poem at his home in Shropshire only a month after the poem's initial publication (Robson, 134; Gosse 105).

the poem and be affected by it.[53] While the poem seems the epitome of isolation, it instead, in Robson's and Guillory's account, becomes a glue that holds society together. Judging from the tone of an undated letter from Gray to Thomas Warton, it would seem that Gray himself did not in fact desire this kind of fate for the poem. "I mean not to be modest," Gray writes of the *Elegy*, "but I mean, it is a Shame for those, who have said such superlative Things about [the poem], that I can't repeat them. I should have been glad, that you & two or three more People had liked them."[54] Gray's admission to Warton reveals a discomfort with the idea of literature being made public; it would be better for literature to edify only a few.[55] But the poem was made public, though, as we know from accounts such as Robson's, Guillory's, and Gosse's. The tension between public circulation and Gray's own wish for private edification that frames the poem's reception history comes to allegorize, as we will see in the reading of the poem that comprises this section, the ways that the poem's language of melancholy grief shuttles uneasily between public space (the city) and obscure space (the country).

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[53] John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993), 121. Guillory writes, "To every common reader is given the pleasure of the commonplace and the common language, and at the same time, the pleasure of withdrawal from the (urban) place—the scene of Ambition, Luxury, and Pride—where this language is formed as the product of a specific kind of struggle, the agon of social mobility" (121). In other words, for Guillory the poem idealizes retreat only instead to bring all stations of people together under another ideal of a common national language.

[54] Thomas Gray, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1935), 335. For an account of Gray's anxiety about the poem's publication as articulated to Warton, see Robert L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000), 412-13.

[55] More recently, Marilyn Butler has suggested that the mid-eighteenth-century poets' varying postures of retreat are merely performative poses, and that these poets are in fact deeply invested in being remembered. "[A]ny reader," Butler writes, "must want to examine with more detachment the kinds of professional pressures that lead some writers to promote this view of themselves" (Marilyn Butler, *Mapping Mythologies: Countercurrents in Eighteenth-Century British Poetry and Cultural History* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015], 57).

Recent critics of the poem have seen the *Elegy* as rather straightforward in its politics. From Suvir Kaul, who argues that the poem is an attempt to articulate a difference in standards of value between country and city,[56] to Guillory, who suggests that the poem represents an attempt to form a national vernacular English,[57] critical attempts to explicate the poem have been preoccupied with the poem's relation to politics and history. Each of these readings has attempted to reconcile the poet's relation to his historical moment with his deeply sorrowful tone, suggesting that the language of melancholy is the means by which the poem's political allegiances are revealed. Kaul, for one, claims that the poem draws clear lines of opposition between country and city, and that the poet uses the tone of melancholy to articulate a kind of value beyond the practice of commodification (which is associated with the bourgeois ideologies of the city). The poet tries to solve the problem of status inequality that marks his historical moment by propping up the country as the location of a new, de-commodified standard of value.[58] Rather than being flummoxed by history, the poet actively shapes it.

And in one of the more influential readings of the poem of the past 25 years, Guillory also sees the poet attempting to shape history. Guillory claims that the *Elegy* was an attempt to form a national vernacular language, in that anyone of any social station could read the poem and be affected by it.[59] While the poem seems the epitome of isolation, it instead, in Guillory's account, becomes a glue that holds society together.[60] The poem is not, as John Sitter would have

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[56] See Suvir Kaul, *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority: A Study in Ideology and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992), 111-65.
[57] See Guillory, 87, 111-21.
[58] Kaul, 120-22. Kaul writes that "the larger attempt in Gray's poem [is] to designate and sanctify emblems or locations of value that could stand in opposition to the contemporary forms of reified social relations" (120-21).
[59] Guillory, 121.
[60] In a reading that sees Gray's elegist as more bravely resisting history rather than trying to shape it from within (as Guillory would have it), Henry Weinfield argues that poetry for Gray is

it, merely a case of pure escape from the world.[61] For Guillory, the poem idealizes retreat only instead to bring all stations of people together under another ideal of a common national language.[62] Through the formation of a national vernacular literary language, Gray's *Elegy* allows for a new vision of a universal humanity that transgresses the bounds of modern bourgeois ideology, and which delicately holds in its grasp all manner of rank and status positions.

In their shared commitment to explaining (or explaining away) the politics of the poem's withdrawal from the outside world to the graveyard, critical responses to the *Elegy* such as these speak to the question of the knotty relation between poetry and the perception of history. Does poetic language illuminate the workings of history and the question of individuals' relation both to literary history and to each other (as critics such as Guillory and Kaul claim), or does it merely obscure one's relation to history? In trying to clarify the terms of history for his readers, Gray's elegist must imagine the dead as something other than what they were. Rather than asserting active control over his historical moment, as scholars such as Guillory or Kaul might claim, Gray's elegist finds himself not knowing quite how to speak of or to history precisely because he does not know quite how to speak about the dead.

Kaul has articulated the *Elegy*'s division between the churchyard and the outside world as

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an activist project, and that the *Elegy* is a courageous attempt to confront head-on the injustices of present history, described as a "thematic constellation of poverty, anonymity, alienation, and unfulfilled potential" (Henry Weinfield, *The Poet without a Name: Gray's* Elegy *and the Problem of History* [Carbonville, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1991], xi).

[61] John E. Sitter, *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982), pp. 97-100. Sitter argues that the *Elegy* presents a speaker isolated from the city and thus ensconced in the solitude of the graveyard. The genre of elegy marks Gray's detachment from the world, because in making the conscious choice to elegize the poor, he also chooses to turn his back on the social world, which has no interest in hearing his memorializations.

[62] Guillory, 121.

a division between the city and the country.[63] He tells us that the wild and unchecked ambition of the city's "madding crowd" (*Elegy*, line 73) threatens to render obsolete the quiet virtue of the country's agriculturally oriented way of life. For Kaul, the city is a space of "bourgeois humanist ideologies,"[64] rendering the country a space of peasant labor. But what is a "bourgeois humanist ideology"? What does it signify, and what are its ends? To answer this question, we might begin with William Empson's classic reading of the poem, to which Kaul's analysis is heavily indebted. Writing about a famous stanza in the poem in which Gray compares the poor to a flower that blossoms without ever being seen (a stanza to which I return later in this chapter), Empson writes:

> The tone of melancholy claims that the poet understands the considerations opposed to aristocracy, though he judges against them; the truism of the reflections in the churchyard, the universality and impersonality this gives to the style, claim as if by comparison that we ought to accept the injustice of society as we do the inevitability of death.
> Many people, without being communists, have been irritated by the complacence in the massive calm of the poem, and this seems partly because they feel there is a cheat in the implied politics; the 'bourgeois' themselves do not like literature to have too much 'bourgeois ideology.'[65]

There is something almost conspiratorial about Empson's reading. For Empson, the degree to which Gray's speaker does not sound bourgeois is in fact a sign of how bourgeois he actually is.[66] And for Empson, to be bourgeois is to be modern. It is to believe in the modern ideals of

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[63] Kaul, 140.
[64] Kaul, 141.
[65] William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, 1935 (New York: New Directions, 1974), 4-5.
[66] Henry Weinfield criticizes Empson's reading, and draws special attention to Empson's claim about lines 53-56 of the *Elegy* that "a gem does not mind being in a cave and a flower prefers not to be picked" (Empson, 4). Empson is suggesting that Gray is being presumptuous with regard to his depiction of the lower-rank dead, because for Empson, Gray assumes, perhaps incorrectly, that obscure figures are happy to remain obscure and simply let the bourgeois pursue their own ambition. Weinfield, on the other hand, suggests that Empson's critique is, in actuality, a prime example of the pathetic fallacy, since "neither the gem nor the flower would have any feelings in the matter at all" (84).

upward mobility, which in fact suppresses the peasants, who perform hard labor without any real monetary reward for their work.

Giving further shape to Empson's description of the relationship between the bourgeois and the aristocracy, Guillory writes that a "bourgeois ideology" is related to the gamble associated with the phenomenon of upward mobility in mid-eighteenth-century England. As the "'estate' system of feudalism"[67] begins to wane, more opportunities arise for those not born into the aristocracy:

> The fact of increased upward mobility is at once the premise of 'bourgeois ideology'—that anyone can succeed—and its prime source of social anxiety. Hence the continuous appropriation by the bourgeoisie of aristocratic caste traits, precisely in order to reinforce and stabilize a class structure founded upon a necessary degree of instability or fluidity. Needless to say, this functional instability of social hierarchy requires complex practical and discursive strategies in order to maintain the structure as a whole; there must be neither too little nor too much social mobility.[68]

In other words, bourgeois ideology sells itself as a discourse of liberation when it is in fact only that for a select group of people. The path toward financial success and security is commerce, usually associated with the realm of the city.

Kaul furthers Guillory's point, referring to the middling sort as creating the ground upon which bourgeois battles are waged.[69] Observing in mid-eighteenth-century culture "an increasingly hegemonic bourgeois-entrepreneurial ideology,"[70] Kaul suggests that the rise of commercialism makes for a greater competitive spirit than existed in prior historical ages. Kaul's own reading is indebted to John Brewer, who writes that:

> The broadening of the market involved a change in social and economic values; a transformation of the relationship between producers, distributors and consumers. Of course the patricians were still a vital part of the clientele … but, increasingly, the

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[67] Guillory, 95.
[68] Ibid., 95.
[69] Kaul, 112-13.
[70] Kaul, 113.

> aristocracy constituted the top end of a large market rather than the market *tout court*. They could no longer exercise complete control or command through their purchasing power and patronage.[71]

This description of the aristocracy's alienation within the market system itself points to what Kaul later refers to as a replacing of the figure of the aristocrat with the figure of the entrepreneur, who makes money on his own through commerce rather than inheriting it.[72] If, to return to Guillory's language, "anyone can succeed,"[73] then it is equally true that anyone can fail. And some, namely the peasants in the country, are left out altogether. Whereas before, the country dwellers might have lived under the purview of the aristocracy, they are now in danger of being forgotten by everyone. Those who cannot succeed are the rural peasant laborers. In a law of equilibrium, they must remain subservient to the commercial bourgeoisie, because not everyone can succeed economically. Some must be the sacrificial lambs for others.

Empson's reading of the term "bourgeois ideology" with respect to the poem has been enormously influential, and there is something critically seductive about his suspicion of the poem's politics. Gray's politics and poetics are without question unclear. But, as I show in this section, the crisis of clarity in Gray's poetics runs deeper than an ambiguity of political allegiances. Why exactly do his politics seem so ambivalent? Empson sees Gray as secretly bourgeois himself. What I see at work in the poem is a much more basic crisis of relation

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[71] John Brewer, "Commercialization and Politics," in *Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985), 197-98.

[72] Kaul, 113. See also Neil McKendrick, who writes in *The Birth of a Consumer Society* that the middling sort rose in the Industrial Revolution in an attempt to emulate those in the economic stations above them: "In imitation of the rich the middle ranks spent more frenziedly than ever before, and in imitation of them the rest of society joined in as best they might—and that best was unprecedented in the importance of its impact on aggregate demand" (Neil McKendrick, *Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb [Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985], 11).

[73] Guillory, 95.

between melancholy and articulation. Gray's poetics are unsettled not because of any secret bourgeois allegiances on his part but because he simply does not know how best to memorialize the dead, and can only use the language of memorialization when he falls back on the language of bourgeois ideology. Gray's elegist finds himself drawn to and unable to move on from the specter of loss, but the more he is drawn to it, the more he finds himself not knowing what to say about it, because his subjects defy epistemological inquiry. Thus, in imagining alternate lives for them, he appears to be covertly advocating for the bourgeoisie, when in fact his appropriation extends from a problem of not knowing exactly how to memorialize.

At its core, the *Elegy* memorializes not one person but many. While the poem concludes with an epitaph inscribed for a deceased and unnamed youth, it also gives attention to the numerous deceased persons buried in the churchyard through which the speaker wanders. After sunset, the speaker embarks on an evening walk through the graveyard and meditates on the graves of the (mostly poor) persons that he comes across. He wonders what lives they may have lived, and what lives they might have lived had they been born into different social classes than the ones to which they actually *were* born.

The architecture of the *Elegy* is thus grounded in the simultaneous opposition and fusion of rank. Cleanth Brooks has articulated this opposition in terms of the theme of choice, or rather the lack thereof. For Brooks, the "rude forefathers of the hamlet" (Gray 16) have no say as to their social status; thus, they have no say as to where they will be buried.[74] We might go so far as to say that the graveyard of the poem itself is not merely a final resting place for the dead; it is also a signifier of continued division between social rank, since this graveyard in particular

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[74] Cleanth Brooks, "Gray's Storied Urn," 1947, rpt. in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Gray's* Elegy*: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Herbert W. Starr (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 23-32, 27-28.

seems to be reserved solely for the humble, the modest, and the poor—and not for the rich.

One gets a sense of the opposition between the humble and ambitious from the very first mention of the hamlet's forefathers as "rude." The descriptor "rude" can signify either that the forefathers are commoners or that they are untouched and untainted by the outside social world. Gray writes:

> Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
> Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,
> Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
> The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep. (13-16)

The speaker wavers in this passage between describing the hamlet's deceased forefathers as living souls on the one hand and describing them as nothing more than dead bodies on the other. Seeming to prove the former view, the forefathers "sleep." The implication is that they still possess some degree of life or vitality. Seeming to prove the latter, however, they have been reduced in their death to "many a mould'ring heap" of turf. In death, the forefathers are indistinguishable from the earth that covers them. Earth and body mingle together in death such that the human has been literally consumed by the nonhuman. In the end, nonhuman matter (or, in this case, "turf") dominates human life.

The subjugation of the human to the nonhuman unexpectedly sets the backdrop for the sense of division between social statuses in the two stanzas that follow shortly afterward:

> Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
> Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke:
> How jocund did they drive their team afield!
> How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!
>
> Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
> Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
> Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
> The short and simple annals of the poor. (25-32)

Here it becomes clear that the subjugation of the human body to the earth in the graveyard is in

fact a reversal of the prior relationship between the human and the earth. In life, the rude forefathers subjugated the earth by cultivating it, whereas in death the relationship is the exact opposite. In breaking the earth with their plows, the forefathers are exercising dominion over the earth, and the reason that they seek to exercise this type of dominion is because it is a way of making themselves "useful" (line 29). There is also a cruel irony to this passage, in that breaking the soil of the earth to cultivate it also calls to mind the act of breaking soil to dig a grave. The forefathers in a sense dig their own graves by their agricultural labor.

The two above-quoted stanzas constitute a thematic chiasmus, the second stanza a reversal of the first. Whereas in the first stanza the forefathers are in a position of power over the earth, the second stanza shows just how little power the forefathers possess in relation to the ideologies of "ambition" and "grandeur." The forefathers are vulnerable to public mockery for their simplicity and their "obscurity." Usefulness goes hand-in-hand with obscurity. The forefathers devote all of their attention to hard agricultural labor, but since such labor has no ambition toward the attainment of worldly glory, it means that those who do pursue worldly wealth and glory may not take them seriously. In exercising a direct agricultural power over the earth, the forefathers are simultaneously obscuring themselves from the political power of the city beyond. As we will see, though, the hamlet's anonymous laborers are not as isolated from the ideologies that shape the outside world as they seem to be here.

In the following stanza, we see that the poor are not the only ones to visit the grave:

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

What Gray described in the previous stanza as "ambition" he describes here as "paths of glory." Those who pursue ambitious paths will have the same meeting with the natural earth that the

hamlet's laborers will have. By claiming that "The paths of glory lead but to the grave" (36), Gray is suggesting that ambition itself ends only in death. There may be many paths of glory, but only one end destination toward which all of these paths converge.

In the previous stanza, the concept of ambition had been a precursor to laughter or mockery at the obscure. Even more generally, in honing in on the obscurity afforded to agricultural laborers, it had been a marker of the separation between the country and the city, to use Kaul's schematic. The temporality is different in this stanza. The speaker has taken a longer view of time than he had previously. In laughing at the obscure, the ambitious are trying to forget the inevitability of their own deaths, such that mockery simply becomes a defense mechanism or even a deflection. While ambition puts the ambitious at a remove from figures such as the hamlet forefathers who live "obscure" or anonymous lives, its removal of the ambitious from the space of obscurity is in fact simply an anticipation of the moment when the ambitious too will die. That is to say, everyone "awaits *alike* th' inevitable hour" (line 35; italics mine). In death, there is no real distinction between the body of a ploughman and the bodies of the wealthy or bourgeois. Both have been consumed by the earth.

Although they have been overtaken by the earth, however, the dead are still on the poet's mind, even if it is unclear in what way. Most directly, they seem to be on his mind in a strictly metaphorical sense. In one of the more famous stanzas of the poem, Gray writes that:

> Full many a gem of purest ray serene
> The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air. (53-56)

Not knowing how exactly to speak about the villagers, the speaker transforms them into metaphors. Just as a flower may bloom without anyone to see and appreciate its beauty, members of the village labor without anyone ever appreciating their work. Empson, as we have seen, uses

this stanza as evidence that the *Elegy* contains "latent political ideas,"[75] but for Empson those political ideas involve a repressed support of bourgeois culture. By feigning interest in the suppression of the obscure, Empson suggests, Gray cuts off debate about the vanity of bourgeois ideology and obscures any useful action about the social problems he comments on.

Whereas Empson sees Gray as content to allow the anonymous figures on the margins of society to remain anonymous, however, my reading sees Gray as invested in trying to remove those figures from the realm of anonymity. In Empson's reading, Gray oppresses marginal figures by remaining passive. But in fact Gray is interested in making these marginal and anonymous figures "great" and famous like those ambitious figures who flourish in mainstream culture, even if his attempts at bringing them fame cannot fully succeed. Gray's interest in the dead compels him to wish something for them, and this wish consumes any other poetic or aesthetic aim he might have in the work.

Perhaps it is true that "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen" (55), but the irony of this passage (for which Empson does not account) is that Gray's speaker does not in fact seem content to let them blush unseen. He violates the terms of his own metaphor. If he were happy to treat the subjects of his poem as unseen flowers or gens, there would be no poetry left to write, no elegizing left to perform. The poem would have ended here. But it does not. And in seeking to know what kinds of lives these anonymous figures do or did lead, Gray is also seeking to record them in the annals of his own poetic history. Gray is far from a passive poet in this stanza. Rather, he is desperately trying to find the words to use to bring the dead into cultural consciousness and to find a way to render them equal to the rich. It falls to the speaker to try to memorialize them here with "short and simple annals" (33) that would tell the reader

[75] Empson, 4.

who they were while also speculating on what they could have been.

Gray's elegist, by the mere practice of elegizing the poor, seeks to glorify the poor even as he marks glorification as a sign of vanity. There is no question, as I have already demonstrated, that Gray's primary target in this line is the ambitious and worldly figures who seek out "The boast of heraldry [and] the pomp of pow'r" (33). However, by seeking to memorialize the humble residents of the hamlet and by trying to understand what their lives may have been like, Gray's speaker also subjects them to the same kind of glory that he speaks against when talking of worldly ambitious subjects. By assigning them fame he at least finds the words to use to memorialize the poor.

The intermingling of human and nonhuman actors in the poem—headstones, deceased laborers, yew-trees, unseen flowers—imbues the atmosphere of the poem's landscape with loss. And yet the speaker of the poem seems to exist in an uncertain relationship with the loss itself. He does not know those whom he mourns; neither does he know anything about them. As a result, his interest in the deceased involves more than his discussion of lost persons. It also involves a discussion of the more general concept of loss as an abstract category as it hangs over the individual losses framing the poem's progression. A line such as "The paths of glory lead but to the grave" (36) generalizes the particular deaths of particular persons, such that the poet-speaker is not merely grieving the loss of the individuals buried in this particular churchyard, but the eventual loss of everyone. The speaker's melancholy transcends the particular circumstance and instead uses the particular as a way of thinking about general principles.

The speaker thus sets out across the narrative of the poem to cure his lack of knowledge about the dead, even as he continues to indulge the melancholy mood afforded to him by the

graveyard. Prior to the passage about unseen flowers, Gray laments:

> Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
> Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
> Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
> Or wak'd to extasy the living lyre. (45-48)

The use of the metaphor of pregnancy in this passage is particularly striking: a poem about death comes close, if only for a single line, to becoming a poem about birth. The true tragedy of the person buried in the "neglected spot" is that his or her present condition of death is irreversible and that his or her potential cannot ever be restored. The word that holds the rest of the stanza together while also threatening to tear the logic of its collection of images apart, however, is the seemingly innocuous adverb "perhaps." By qualifying everything that follows in the stanza with a "perhaps," the speaker is admitting that his metaphors of pregnancy and his imaginations of this person's influence on some unnamed empire are all nothing more than speculations. That is, they proceed from the starting point of the speaker's ignorance of what lies beneath that spot of earth. In an attempt to reverse this ignorance, the speaker puts his imagination to work, trying to use his uncertainty as license for creative speculation. Of course, by saying that "perhaps" the person buried in this spot might have been great, the speaker is also admitting at the same time that perhaps they might not have been great. Any use of a qualifying term such as "perhaps" also implies a "perhaps not." By prefacing all of the sublime images of the stanza with a qualifying term of uncertainty, Gray's speaker runs the risk of negating what follows the "perhaps."

As the poem progresses, the elegist's imagination about the dead becomes more specific. He imagines what it might have been like had a historically famous figure been buried here:

> Some village Hampden, that, with dauntless breast,
> The little tyrant of his fields withstood,
> Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,

Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood. (57-60)

This stanza stands out because it is the only place in the poem where Gray's speaker lists any proper names.[76] Whereas the rest of the poem is littered with images of nameless and faceless figures who either labor in the fields or lie in their graves, this passage catalogs the names of famous historical figures. The theme of uncertainty, signified earlier with the adverb "perhaps," carries over into this stanza with the speaker's use of the auxiliary verb "may."[77] Gray's elegist here uses historically famous figures to demonstrate the fraught relationship between anonymity and fame. Just as in the previous stanza, the possibility of what might be underscores the reality of what never was. If the dead might be Milton or Cromwell, then it is just as likely (and in this case, more likely) that the dead might not be Milton, or anything close to Milton. The auxiliary verb "may" threatens to undermine all of the historical possibilities that the speaker is imagining for the dead in this stanza. By using "may," the speaker refuses to accept the losses of the dead as losses, in a mode similar to Spargo's description of melancholy as a refusal to acknowledge that the lost are irrecoverable.

Seeking to find a way to speak definitively about the dead—or to give language to his attachment to the dead—Gray shifts between the poles of anonymity and fame by building a tension between specificity and indefiniteness. He neutralizes the specificity of the proper

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[76] The only exception to this claim is the final line of the poem, where Gray directly names God (line 128).

[77] Critics have understandably been quick to read this moment as a commentary on seventeenth-century English politics. Kaul, for instance, sees the allusion to Milton, Cromwell, and Hampden as "historical shorthand, their individual specificity subordinated to the evocation of a particular period of English history whose transformative politics are seen as socially divisive and morally dubious" (139). Richard Sha speculates that "Perhaps Gray's awareness of the important role literacy and pamphleteering played in the English Civil War compels him to speak of a 'mute inglourious Milton' [59]; a silent and unknown Milton would neither have written a defense of the regicide of King Charles nor have published praise of Cromwell" (Richard C. Sha, "Gray's Political *Elegy*: Poetry as the Burial of History." *Philological Quarterly* 69.3 [1990]: 337-57, 344).

names in this passage by prefacing them with the indefinite adverb "some." He refers to the nameless dead by turns as "Some village Hampden," "Some mute inglorious Milton," or "Some Cromwell." The overuse of "some" across these four lines only reinforces that Gray's speaker does not know much, if anything, about who is buried in this spot. By saying "some Milton," the speaker is suggesting, in the most general terms possible, that the person buried in this spot might be of the same status as Milton without being able to go far enough to say that this person is in fact Milton. The speaker cannot be specific enough to equate fully the deceased with Milton in a one-to-one correlation; he can only be specific enough to say that the deceased might be vaguely like Milton. By saying "some Milton," he speaks in both specific and vague terms, rendering the dead anonymous and famous all at once.

By giving the dead real and historically specific names, the speaker renders them easier for his mind to grasp. Gray's poetic project reveals that melancholy is marked both by a fixation with the dead and by an attempt to put that fixation into words. It is a problem of epistemology, imagination, and articulation all at once. Where Parnell's poem replaces the names of the unknown dead with the names Toil and Poverty, Gray's reverts to actual history in imagining names for the nameless. The hitch in the elegist's strategy in this stanza is that the more that he compares the dead to famous figures, the more he draws attention to the fact that the dead are not—and for that matter cannot be—famous on their own terms at all.

The nameless dead in the *Elegy* become signs. Their bodies are transformed into figures for abstractions. They figure the larger abstract virtues of country living and the abstract vices of bourgeois ambition. By making the nameless dead subjects for poetry, Gray's poet-speaker paradoxically transforms them from corpses to embodiments of incorporeal ideas. The disembodied notion of equality counteracts the relentless materialism of wealth. As such, the

nameless dead take on an importance in death that they never had during life, as they are vehicles for criticizing rank and status divisions. But their importance as figures for political criticism of worldly riches relies on their continuing not to have any names or identities of their own. Poetry creates a third way beyond the binaries of country/city, poor/rich, obscurity/glory, and thus does not simply rely on a strict opposition between country and city, but it comes at the cost of the continued suppression of the lower-status dead's actual identities. It creates an imaginative literary space in which the dead are both anonymous and famous all at once. Poetry awakens the dead, but it awakens them not as themselves, but as functions of what they might have been in another lifetime.

More than anything, Gray's speaker's granting of anonymous fame to the dead attunes us to the relationship between political critique and figuration. By making the nameless dead subjects for poetry, Gray's speaker transforms them from corpses to holding vessels for his own political ideas. Moreover, the ideas that animate the corpses remain vague and nebulous. Ambition and "the paths of glory" are the vague nemeses for these ideas. These terms could mean any number of things, or nothing at all. They are counteracted by the equally vague terms of modesty and usefulness. This is a politics whose content remains uncertain, as ambition, glory, modesty, and usefulness could mean any number of things.[78] They only assume tangibility by their attachment to corpses, such that the function of the dead is merely to prop up descriptive terms that would otherwise be too unspecified to have any meaning at all. It is as if, to deal with the loss of those of low rank, the speaker must deploy a form of imagination that objectifies the

[78] For an important reading of the ways that vagueness might actually be mobilized in the service of political action, see Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005). For Laclau, cultures and communities with different political hopes might organize around empty terms such as freedom and liberty—what Laclau refers to as "empty signifiers" (96 and throughout)—that allow for political action rather than paralysis.

dead. The nameless dead then take on significance in death that they never attained during life, and this significance depends on the continued poetic erasure of their actual bodies (as their bodies actually become the bodies of Milton, Cromwell, and Hampden). Their importance as figures for the criticism of the country/city or poor/rich divide relies on their continuing not to have any names, faces, voices, or agency of their own. The poetry that arises from the speaker's melancholy contemplation recasts the dead not as themselves, but as functions of the speaker's own political thought. As a result, the poet-speaker replicates the object of his criticism.

Such a gulf also casts into relief the relationship between melancholy, critique, and language. When the speaker attempts to transform his melancholy into critique, his language falters, shuttling between condemnation of status politics on the one hand and acceptance of those status politics on the other. Poetic language here marks the difficulty of knowing how to use melancholy over the dead in the service of speaking against the conditions of modern life. But such difficulty also reveals the ways in which imagination becomes a form of resistance to the present, even if such resistance is always vexed and imperfect in expression. By imagining the lower-status dead at all, the elegist speaks against culture in lieu of being able to act in any other tangible way. This critique occurs in a graveyard after all, signaling that action taken to remedy the injustice done to the dead is now impossible. Help would arrive too late, leaving imagination about who the dead could have been as the only course of resistance. Imagination opens up critical possibilities for political ideals that cannot be achieved elsewhere. Where praxis is closed off, the avenue of imaginative thought steps in to take its place. Whatever the shortcomings of this imaginative vision might be, they are productive: they contain the political dreams of equality that reality itself cannot contain. Melancholy poetry itself thus becomes a genre of unfulfilled dreams, of fantasies that can never be realized, and imaginative thought

opens up a way for these dreams to be at least partially fulfilled through the medium of language if not through any other medium.

The tension between knowing and not knowing, anonymity and fame, imagination and epistemology, reaches its apex at the end of the poem. In the poem's final stanzas, the poet introduces the figure of a young man who, according to the word of "some hoary-headed swain" (line 97), would walk aimlessly across the landscape day in and day out until his sudden and unexplained death. The swain points us to the epitaph on the young man's headstone. This epitaph might read initially as cheap, cliché, and unoriginal, but its navigation of the themes of anonymity and fame, along with the question of whether or not it is meant to serve as an extension of the poet-speaker's voice, render it more puzzling than trite:

> Here rests his head upon the lap of earth
> A youth, to fortune and to fame unknown:
> Fair science frown'd not on his humble birth,
> And melancholy mark'd him for her own.
>
> Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
> Heaven did a recompense as largely send:
> He gave to mis'ry (all he had) a tear,
> He gain'd from heav'n ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.
>
> No farther seek his merits to disclose,
> Or draw his frailties from their dread abode
> (There they alike in trembling hope repose),
> The bosom of his Father and his God. (117-28)

The epitaph here echoes Elizabeth Carter's *Epitaph on a Young Lady* (1735). Carter's *Epitaph* expresses a wish that the deceased "Rest undisturb'd till Jesus bid thee rise,/ Then quit the tomb, and wake to endless joys."[79] It is unclear how seriously Gray intends the reader to take the epitaph that concludes the *Elegy*, especially since it is not certain that the epitaph is meant as an

[79] Elizabeth Carter, *Epitaph on a Young* Lady, 1735. *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, with a New Edition of Her Poems* (London: 1807), p. 354, lines 5-6.

extension of the poet-speaker's own voice. The poet-speaker never instructs us whether we should read the epitaph as composed by the speaker or by someone else. He also thus never clarifies to whom the epitaph is addressed.[80]

The problem of the epitaph's addresser and addressee coalesced in twentieth-century criticism around what became known as the "Stonecutter Controversy." In the lines directly leading up to the epitaph, Gray's speaker addresses an unspecified "thee": "For thee, who, mindful of th' unhonour'd dead,/ Dost in these lines their artless tale relate" (93-94). It is unclear who this "thee" stands in for. For his part, Cleanth Brooks claims that the "thee" is actually the speaker himself. In Brooks' reading, the speaker refers to himself in the second person.[81] According to this reading, the epitaph at the end of the poem, addressed to the "thee" of these lines, is actually an epitaph for the speaker himself. John Guillory and David Fairer are among the more recent critics who appear to hold to this view.[82] In a different but equally speculative reading, Frank Ellis claims that the "thee" is a stonecutter who inscribes the epitaph at the end of the poem on the gravestone itself.[83] The speaker of the poem, in this reading, would be suggesting that the stonecutter is the one who is "mindful of the unhonour'd dead," and that "these lines" are the epitaph and the inscription on the gravestone.

Even more recently, Brian McGrath has written that the Stonecutter Controversy

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[80] Cleanth Brooks, while conceding the difficulties of identification when reading the epitaph, insists that readers approach the epitaph in terms of its context and not as an isolated engraving on an isolation tombstone. Brooks refers to the epitaph as coextensive with the reflective mood that structures the *Elegy* as a whole (30-31).

[81] Brooks, 28.

[82] See Guillory, 116; and David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century, 1700-1789* (London: Pearson, 2003), 158. Guillory writes of the epitaph that, "[these] lines are caught in the abyssal trap of having to quote the swain on the death of the poet who is himself writing the lines the swain speaks" (116).

[83] Frank H. Ellis, "Gray's *Elegy*: The Biographical Problem in Literary Criticism," 1951, rpt. in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Gray's* Elegy*: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Herbert W. Starr (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 51-75, 60.

illuminates—indeed, is produced by—a crisis of reading. The lines leading into the epitaph tell the reader to "Approach and read (for thou can'st read)" (line 115), but the problem of address in fact reveals that the reader cannot know how to read the epitaph.[84] For McGrath, there is no resolving the issue of address: the epitaph teaches us the difficulty of knowing how to interpret more so than it reveals anything else. McGrath's implication is that critical responses to the epitaph have reproduced a problem of knowing how to read. But we might also say that such critical attempts to identify the epitaph's subject reproduces the poem's problem of melancholy as well. As we have seen, the poet-speaker's melancholy leads him to want to know more about the dead, because not to want to know more would be to move on from the dead, and melancholy is nothing if not a desire to linger with loss. The gaps in his knowledge thus lead him to try to give shape to the dead—specifically through the act of naming (naming the dead Cromwell, Milton, Hampden). The more recent critical desires by Brooks, Ellis, Guillory, Fairer, and others, then, to name the unnamed deceased youth—either as the stonecutter or as the elegist himself—extend from a similar desire to know more about the dead than the information given. That is, in a move that shares a formal similarity to poetic melancholy, such critical desire is an impulse to remember the dead in the most specific terms possible. In struggling to articulate the identity of the unnamed youth, critics such as Brooks and Ellis in fact impersonate the elegist himself. But instead of speculating on whether Milton or Cromwell is buried beneath the headstone, these critics choose to speculate on whether or not it is the poet himself who is mourned. The transference of this problem of knowledge from the poem to its critics does not tell us who the epitaph is for: no critic has been able to definitively solve the riddle. Rather, it tells us that an interest in loss, in a mode that Spargo for one would refer to as

[84] Brian McGrath, *The Poetics of Unremembered Acts: Reading, Lyric, Pedagogy* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2013), 59.

melancholy, makes definitive statements about the dead difficult if not impossible to make.

Regardless of its authorship, the epitaph reproduces the same tensions between anonymity and fame that animate the rest of the poem. We do not know much about the deceased young man, even after reading the epitaph. We know that he was melancholy, and we can surmise that, since "all he had" (123) were tears, he must not have possessed much. We know that, like the rude forefathers of the hamlet, he was "unknown" (118) to the rest of the world. This young deceased man seems, in short, to be a perfect example of the kind of virtuous deceased whom Gray has been praising throughout the rest of the poem. But for all that we do not know about deceased youth, we also get the sense that both the *Elegy*'s speaker and the person who composed his epitaph (whoever that might be) have a deep urge to know more than the scant amount of information provided about him. The only demand that the epitaph makes of its reader is to "No farther seek his merits to disclose,/ Or draw his frailties from their dread abode" (125-26). In essence, the epitaph asks the reader not to seek out any more knowledge about the youth.[85] Another way of saying this is that the epitaph is a command to let go of a melancholy attachment to the deceased. What might we make of this odd request? Why would the epitaph ask its reader to remain content with not knowing anything about this already-unknown youth?

The epitaph is a microcosm of the speaker's own struggle across the rest of the poem to memorialize the anonymous or "unhonour'd" dead (93). The epitaph's author feels compelled to grant this particular deceased person the same kind of anonymous fame that the speaker has granted to the dead across the rest of the poem, because the function of the genre of epitaph, like that of the genre of elegy, is to make the dead known to others. When one does not know much

[85] As we will see in Chapter Three of "Melancholy's Wake," this sentiment is echoed in the final lines of Sarah Fielding's *David Simple* (1744, 1753).

about the dead, as is the case with this particular epitaph, one cannot really say anything with certainty about the dead. Paul Fry has suggested that the epitaph is a genre of writing that is simultaneously expressive and nonexpressive: its brevity and reduction of life to a few general remarks end up "burying" true expression.[86] In other words, one can write an epitaph without really revealing any details about the deceased. The writer of this particular epitaph, with the imperative that the reader think "no farther" about the deceased's life, understands the reader's desire for the kind of expressiveness that is antithetical to the epitaphic genre. At the same time, even as the writer speaks against too much expressiveness, he finds himself indulging his own desire to express the qualities of the deceased.

Epitaphs shuttle between anonymity and fame because they are simultaneously general (in that many epitaphs do not reveal specifics about the deceased's life) and specific. An epitaph refers directly to one person, even if it is not specific about the life of that one person. In the figure of the grave marker, then, the dead inhabit a new space; this third space is neither the anonymous country nor the ambitious city, but one in which the ideologies of both spaces become entangled. If the country equates to anonymity and the city to fame, the epitaph performs both anonymity and fame. Its vagueness is a sign of anonymity: the epitaph could be about anyone and offers no definitive indication who its subject might be (regardless of critical attempts to identify the subject of the epitaph as the speaker himself). And yet its acknowledgement of a readerly impulse to inquire into the nature of the deceased is a sign of a desire to grant the dead some degree of renown.

The epitaph's writer, whomever it is meant to be, acknowledges for us the nature of melancholy itself, which compels the one reading the epitaph—and perhaps also the one writing

[86] Fry, 414.

the epitaph—to seek to inquire and relate more information about the dead. In short, it compels one to name and thus better grasp the lost object, even as the lost object cannot be named or fully articulated. Epistemological deficiency is replaced with imagination. Gray's epitaph (and the poem as a whole) reminds us that melancholy and the imagination that it enables are both ideological. The free-ranging capacity of the faculties of imagination reinforces the interplay between anonymity and fame that has informed the poem. Gray's speaker imagines endless possibilities for the subjects of his memorializations. And even though the epitaph tells us not to speculate on the young man's fate, the poem's own speculations throughout on the fate of the dead are invitations to do just what the epitaph forbids us to. The reader is free to imagine endlessly at the behest of the poet-speaker, to imagine the dead as Milton, Cromwell, Hampden, or as someone completely anonymous. It is as if the epitaph sees the ideological dangers both of imagination and of melancholic fixation with the dead as depicted across the rest of the *Elegy* and thus asks us not to replicate the poet-speaker's own imaginative project.

By asking the reader not to imagine, however, the writer of the epitaph opens readers' minds to the possibility of doing just the opposite. We are asked to let the deceased young man rest in peace and not to bother him, but his presence in a poem places him squarely in the middle of literary history and practically begs future readers to imagine his life, death, and identity. No critical reader can resist the urge to inquire into his story in the same way that the elegist himself models throughout the poem's first 29 stanzas. Another way of putting this is that the previous 29 stanzas allegorize the kind of imaginative inquiry against which the epitaph speaks. The only model for thinking of the dead depicted across the poem is the exact opposite of what the epitaph requests. And by being tempted to replicate the memorializing task of the rest of the *Elegy*, the reader runs the risk of bourgeois appropriation that has characterized the

poet-speaker's own memorializing impulse.

The reader's imagination about the past lives of the dead reinforces the dead's continued lack of agency. The dead have no control over the alternate lives that the reader or elegist may imagine for them. The dead's lack of agency instead becomes the occasion for the elegist's voice and for the reader's freedom to imagine. Since the dead cannot be themselves awakened or have their own agencies restored, they become vehicles for the development of the agencies of the poet and reader. By virtue of symbolizing at all, the dead—both the young man of the epitaph and the villagers who are assigned the names of famous historical figures—become tools of a politics of equality without being able to enjoy the privilege of participating in that politics as actual speaking subjects. In the graveyard, a politics of equality is evacuated of practical meaning (for better or for worse) because the dead cannot reap any kinds of benefits from the recognition of equality. We are all equal once we are all no longer conscious, but this equality comes too late. The dead die twice, their second death a metaphorical martyrdom produced by the poet-speaker's melancholic attachment to them. The dead are not merely corpses; they posthumously become zombified symbols for the speaker's political critique without necessarily even intending to act as figures for the articulation of any political message at all.

The speaker's encounter with the nameless headstones provokes a sense of powerlessness: in the absence of knowledge, he does not know what to say about the dead. And yet, even though he cannot speak in an epistemological register, he can speak instead in an imaginative one, indicating that imaginative thought occurs not merely on its own terms but as a substitution for other forms of thought that are simply not possible. Imaginative articulation thus communicates a dream of equality and it also articulates its own deficiencies—specifically, its epistemological deficiencies. When the poet has no other recourse, he reverts to imagination,

which makes one all the more aware of both the strengths and imperfections of imagination. Imagination enables a dream of equality, but also reveals the impossibility of acting to perform that dream, such that imaginative melancholy feeling emerges as one of the only politically resonant outlets when all other outlets of political action have failed. Imaginative melancholy feeling is the only true evidence of powerful political thought, even if its expression remains imperfect and ideologically vexed.

Kevis Goodman argues, as we have seen, that history is understood through the imparting of affect across time and space,[87] but Gray's *Elegy* shows us that sometimes the posture of melancholic lingering is a sign of the impossibility of knowing anything and the impossibility of communicating anything other than itself. As Gray's speaker attempts to know the dead, his sorrow is a sign of a desire to understand the workings of modernity, to critique modernity, and to come to terms with loss. In the end, however, these attempts only obscure the relation of the peasants to history even further. We learn from these attempts that the mode of political critique that the *Elegy* typifies tells us as much about language as it does about the object of its critique. In the *Elegy*, language resists the impulse toward critique, indicating that critique, when put into language, sacrifices some of its critical thrust in the service of communicating its message to readers. If language communicates critique to readers, it does so in the *Elegy* by way of analogy—by comparing the poor to the rich. Such a move toward analogy makes critique more readily understandable, but also calls into question the power of the poem's critique of the rich. What the *Elegy* teaches us is that critiques of history must stoop to language in order to communicate, but that such descents into language often reveal that there might be a kernel of revolutionary political thought that is always beyond the power of articulation.

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[87] Goodman, 3-4 and throughout.

Coda: Waking a Lay

Even if Gray's poem does not awaken the dead, it does awaken the possibility for future poetry. In 1787, sixteen years after Gray's death, William Mason publishes *Elegy VI: Written in a Church-yard in South Wales*, one of the more overt responses to Gray's poem.[88] In replicating the elegy form, Mason's *Elegy* inherits from Gray's a back-and-forth motion between the terms of anonymity and fame. In his poem, Mason consciously names his speaker as part of the lineage of the graveyard tradition as linked specifically to Gray's *Elegy*. Mason's speaker begins by gazing upon bays "where Commerce furls her wearied sails,"[89] (line 5), and then turns his attention to a graveyard, where instead of fixating on the world of commerce, he can fixate instead on ghosts—or, more precisely, on the ghost of Thomas Gray:

> Take then, poor Peasants, from the friend of GRAY
> His humbler praise; for GRAY or fail'd to see,
> Or saw unnotic'd, what had wak'd a lay
> Rich in the pathos of true poesy.
>
> […]
>
> Like Tadmor's King, his comprehensive mind
> Each plant's peculiar character could seize;
> And hence his moralizing Muse had join'd,
> To all these flow'rs, a thousand similies.
>
> But He alas! in distant village-grave
> Has mix'd with dear maternal dust his own;
> Ev'n now the pang, which parting Friendship gave,
> Thrills at my heart, and tells me he is gone. (57-72)

In an ironic twist, Gray has become, in death, one of those figures of anonymous fame about whom he wrote. He lies alone in a graveyard, reduced to a mere body with no voice of his own, just like the nameless laborers he elegized in his poetry. He has become in some senses

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[88] Mason, of course, was a friend of Gray's. See *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray and William Mason* (London: 1853).
[89] Mason, line 5. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

anonymous in death, as his own body is indistinguishable from the earth that consumes him. He rests in a space distant from Commerce's "weary sails" (line 5). He is safe from the bourgeois culture against which both he and Mason write. One can almost imagine Gray here as the deceased for whom the epitaph at the end of the *Elegy* was inscribed—even as our imagining of Gray himself as the unnamed youth reproduces the critical impulse to identify the dead that I have earlier traced in critics of the epitaph such as Brooks and Ellis. Mason's absorption of the *Elegy*'s mode of remembering the dead who have no place in cultural norms of commerce or ambition allows us to see the epitaph that concludes the *Elegy* as written not for one solitary young man. Rather, it serves as a model for future poets who choose to linger with death. The *Elegy*'s young man becomes not a corpse, but an idea: he is an inspiration for future poetry.

Mason's placing of Gray beneath the same earth as both the peasants and the rich brings us to circle back finally to the notion of "death as the great leveler." According to this trope, the entire earth is nothing but a vast burial ground, such that any corpse becomes exchangeable for another, and any corpse can be thought of as analogous to any other: the *Elegy*'s deceased young man is interchangeable in death with Gray himself. Gray has, in Mason's vision, become anonymous and famous all at once. His body is just a body, no different from the body of any other. Yet he is famous for having been the one to so richly develop the notion of anonymity to which his own body is now itself subject. Gray enjoys fame in death, even though his corpse is mere dust, because his *Elegy* "wak'd a lay/ Rich in the pathos of true poesy" (59-60). Mason's own *Elegy* is simply built upon the tradition of melancholy pathos already activated by Gray almost forty years earlier.

Chapter 3: Deathly Sentimentalism

What happens when the brand of melancholy that we see at work in poems such as Gray's *Elegy* is depicted in extended narrative form? Melancholy and narrative seem by their very logics to be at odds with one another: melancholy is a sadness that does not end, but narratives by contrast must end. How can novelists depict that which is interminable and thus resists closure within the bounds of a form of writing that by definition is predicated on the promise of closure? In looking at eighteenth-century poetry, we see that melancholy looks to the past—either to prior literary periods or to the dead. Novels (for the purposes of this chapter sentimental novels in particular) deal with the issue of melancholy's endlessness by looking less to the past and more to the future. The future, these novels claim, may provide a closure for melancholy, even though these novels also depict this future closure as unrepresentable.[1] Narrative endings imagine a future for melancholy, even though they cannot see this future through to its fruition. Like the poems of the previous chapter, the sentimental novels on which this chapter concentrates—Sarah Fielding's *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744, 1753) and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771)—concern themselves with loss, specifically with the loss of wealth and human life. Unlike the poems of Gray, Parnell, and Blair, however, the narratives of Mackenzie's and Fielding's sentimental novels are not overcome by a death-oriented melancholy until their final pages. Melancholy comes to describe the language of narrative endings in these sentimental novels, as well as the impossibility of an ending being definite, as endings look forward to an unrepresentable future.

In this chapter I thus demonstrate the distinctly melancholy tincture of the genre of the sentimental novel. The past 30 years or so have seen no shortage of critical work on the

[1] For one of the more influential twentieth-century accounts of the idea of narrative closure, see Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984).

discourse of eighteenth-century sentimentalism, many of these accounts representing sentiment as a currency between persons. That is, sentimentalism in many accounts suggests that feeling molds the ways that humans interact with each other. Some readers, such as Lynn Festa and Vivasvan Soni, view sentiment as allowing one to bond with any number of people regardless of whether they have ever had any prior interactions with them.[2] Others, such as John Mullan and (more recently) Hina Nazar, see sentiment as the basis for making moral judgments: proper moral judgments can become a basis for proper sociability.[3] Regardless of the different approaches between them, critics are in general agreement on two things. The first is that sentimentalism names the means by which feelings organize and bring people together. The second is that sentiment is positive and forward-looking. Sentiment helps us to improve this physical world that we all share. In other words, sentimentalism shapes society, hence the

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[2] See Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006); and Vivasvan Soni, *Mourning Happiness: Narrative and the Politics of Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2010). Festa, for instance, sees sentiment's capacity to act as a bonding agent between persons as important to the British imperial project in the eighteenth century, as sentiment allows British subjects to sympathize with others across the globe (2 and throughout). And Soni writes that sentimentalism allows for persons to use feeling as a means of bonding with each other in the wake of a rapidly expanding world, as, "The modern conditions of anonymity, social fragmentation, and population mobility demand a new mode of ethical relationality, one that is not predicated on the narrative intertwining of lives in more customary, face-to-face communities" (293).

[3] See John C. Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988); and Hina Nazar, *Enlightened Sentiments: Judgment and Autonomy in the Age of Sensibility* (New York: Fordham UP, 2012). For Mullan and Nazar, sentiment is a mode of judgment. Mullan ties sentiment to the related eighteenth-century discourse of sociability: "Sociability depends upon the traffic not only of opinions, but of harmoniously organized feelings. Thus the particular importance of the word 'sentiment,' a word which can stand for both judgement and affection" (7-8). For Nazar, sentiment is a standard for making judgments; one uses sentiment to compare one's beliefs with the beliefs and opinions of others, and in so networking with others, learns to moderate and perfect one's standard of judgment (2-4).

importance of the term "sociability" to critical accounts of eighteenth-century culture.[4] In the readings that make up this chapter I propose another interpretive implication for the discourse of sentimentalism. Sentimentalism is not merely a discourse about learning how best to interact with other people or how best to improve society: sentimentalism is also a discourse about learning how to die.

In one sense, death is the most isolating of events and would seem to distance persons from one another and from the world at large rather than bond them. It is, as Jacques Derrida describes it, "that which no one can undergo or confront in my place."[5] How can one create a sentimental bond with another when one is nearing death? In another sense, though, death creates fellowship. When the protagonists of sentimental novels find themselves facing death, they commune with their fellow humans using the feeling of melancholy as a bonding sentiment. As a sadness that does not end, melancholy seems the least productive of feelings, and yet on deathbeds in sentimental novels, it produces bonds where all other attempts at human bonds have failed. Looking to Sarah Fielding's *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744, 1753) and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), I propose then a dark sentimentalism that mediates between the certainty of death and the possibility of revolutionary politics, with the primary sentiment at work being melancholy. Deathly sentimentalism reveals that, in the face of death,

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[4] See G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996); and James Chandler, *An Archaeology of Sympathy: The Sentimental Mode in Literature and Cinema* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2013). For Barker-Benfield, sentiment can call into being the human as a creature of sociability and is constitutive of eighteenth-century culture at large (xix and throughout). More recently, Chandler has pointed out that sentiment was the grounds for all sorts of distinctly eighteenth-century social institutions, including "the transformed conventions of the theater, the burgeoning epistolary culture, modern notions of decorum, Enlightenment theories of taste and style, coffee-house culture and other elements of the new public sphere, the emergence of what would later be called the social sciences, and so on" (4).

[5] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*. Trans. David Wills (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995), 41.

typically negative sentiments such as melancholy can bring persons together just as effectively as any other sentiment might. Virtuous characters bond over a shared inability to do anything except mourn losses or wait for death. Often, these losses and deaths are the result of social injustices, and the sentiment of melancholy affords characters on their deathbeds the opportunity to imagine a future egalitarian political order in which losses will be restored. Such an egalitarian order can only be uttered when one is facing imminent death. In other words, it is spoken when one can do nothing else to improve one's world. Death ushers one into a heavenly utopia, such that death becomes the realization of a dream of equality. This imagination remains always just beyond the horizon of one's perception however, such that visions of a world in which losses are restored and equality is realized resist full representation: these novels give vague and unspecified pictures of what such restoration would look like. Deathly sentimentalism reveals utopian utterances to be both the beginning and end of action, and thus creates the possibility for the speaking of a radical politics through the language of melancholy feeling, even if such politics is always, necessarily, inoperative.

There are three parts to this chapter. In the next section of this chapter, I outline the contours of melancholy sentiment against its prime object in these novels: a charitable code that these novels represent as having been buried under present ideologies of commerce and consumerism. In the final two sections, I turn more explicitly to the novels: first to *David Simple*, then to *The Man of Feeling.* Both novels see the replacement of charity with terms such as vanity and selfishness, but *The Man of Feeling* goes a step further than *David Simple*, tying such a loss more explicitly to the decline of the aristocracy than Fielding's novel does. In these novels, death rescues one from the evils of the present, but it also allows one to speak sentimentally of the loss of charity and its supposed restoration.

I. The Ends of Charity

In *David Simple* and *The Man of Feeling*, losses pile up, and they come to metonymize the more pervasive cultural losses of virtue, charity, and kindness at the hands of the bourgeoisie. Such losses lead to melancholy reflection, which symptomizes two phenomena at once: the inability to act to recover a past history on the one hand, but the capacity to imagine the recovery of that past history in the afterlife on the other. It also, as we shall see, equates to the term "sentimentalism" in these novels, such that the most genuine sentiments transmitted between characters are essentially melancholy ones. It seems that the only event that can put an end to melancholy is death, and even then, the melancholy is simply transmitted from the dead to the living, such that it continues on, even after the novels end.

In these novels, melancholy survives in place of its supposedly dead object: that is, a code of hospitality and benevolence that appears to have no place in modernity. In these novels, benevolence is codified under the heading of charity, as charity entails not merely kindness, but kindness to those of low social rank. Charity stands as a distinctly political institution in these novels, and its supposed cultural loss thus fuels sentimentalism's critique of the present. The giving of material goods to those in need of assistance represents the trait of kindness. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines charity as "Benevolence to one's neighbours, especially to the poor,"[6] and cites for this definition Samuel Johnson's remark in *The Idler*, no. 4, that "Charity, or tenderness for the Poor, which is now justly considered, by a great part of mankind, as inseparable from piety, and in which almost all the goodness of the present age consists, is, I think, known only to those who enjoy, either immediately or by transmission, the light of

[6] "charity," n. *OED Online.* November 2014 (Oxford: Oxford University Press), def. 4.

Revelation."[7] Some, such as Adam Smith (as we will see later in this section) use the term "hospitality" to describe such assistance, but they articulate hospitality in the same way that the *OED* for instance articulates charity. For the sake of consistency, then, I will refer throughout this chapter to such demonstrations of kindness as "charity." Those who give see themselves as morally responsible for the well-being of others, but in the novels I examine in this chapter, they do not always possess the means to give because they too are often impoverished. The gap between ability to help and desire to help becomes a cause of crisis. The charitable code, represented as the residue of a past historical age, is also represented as inextricable from the past's political and economic institutions. By functioning as practitioners of an obsolete code of charity, the protagonists of Fielding's and Mackenzie's novels reveal themselves to be deeply imbedded in political discourse, as their versions of virtue act as correctives to modern norms of trade and commerce.

The story of the erosion of the code of charity is often tied to the story of feudalism's tenuous status in the eighteenth century, and this narrative animates Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* and Fielding's *David Simple*. Mackenzie's novel presents Harley as the last of a declining aristocratic family who sees the obligation of his social status not as a consumer but as a giver, even when the economic conditions of modern life leave him with nothing to give anymore. For Harley, aristocratic families have a duty to give, even when they do not possess the means to. In *David Simple*, the eponymous character, while not an aristocrat, sees his social role as that of giver and not consumer, inhabiting the ethos of a charitable tradition that seems to have no place in the modern commercialized world. These novels suggest that modernity, in its emphasis on commerce, consumerism, and middle-class upward mobility, has quashed charity.

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[7] Samuel Johnson, *The Idler in Two Volumes*, vol. 1 (London: 1767), 17.

These novels' commentaries on the cultural decline of charity reflect what many see as the condition of eighteenth-century economic life. In his book-length study of the history of the English aristocracy, M.L. Bush writes that one of the expectations of the aristocracy was to exercise charity.[8] Helping others by the spreading of wealth becomes an expectation of the aristocratic lifestyle.[9] Catherine Keohane is even more emphatic than Bush is in drawing a connection between aristocracy and charity. For Keohane, charity is not constitutive of the definition of the aristocracy so much as the opposite: aristocratic ideology is central to the definition of charity. Writing about Frances Burney's 1782 novel *Cecilia*, Keohane says that charity "combines pleasure and an understanding of social duty that, reminiscent of older models of aristocratic hospitality and spiritual indebtedness, considers social obligations a debt."[10] One gleans the pleasure of self-satisfaction by giving to others and by being hospitable, but in the pre-eighteenth-century world, this notion of giving proceeds from a historically aristocratic foundation. Moreover, the idea that capacity to act charitably means a moral obligation to do so has its roots, for Keohane, in the aristocratic link between affluence and obligation.[11]

Many accounts see the charitable ideal dying in the wake of eighteenth-century

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[8] M.L. Bush, *The English Aristocracy: A Comparative Synthesis* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984), 75. See also David Owen's *English Philanthropy, 1660-1960* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1964) for an account of the history of charity and philanthropy.

[9] For Bush, aristocratic charity becomes almost completely obsolete by the 1960s because of the Labour Party's emphasis upon welfare (166). In this scenario, welfare takes the place of aristocratic charity.

[10] Catherine Keohane, "'Too neat for a beggar': Charity and Debt in Burney's *Cecilia*." *Studies in the Novel* 33.4 (2001): 379-401, 379.

[11] For a sense of how charity could also serve as a form of control, see Gary Harrison, "Wordsworth's 'The Old Cumberland Beggar': The Economy of Charity in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Criticism* 30.1 (1988): 23-42; and James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984). For Harrison and Chandler, charity reinforces status hierarchies (Chandler 85, Harrison 23). Harrison develops this claim by saying that charity and philanthropy operate as ways of developing sentiment and good will in society; thus, without the inequalities that necessitate giving, the notions of sentiment and sympathy would be threatened (26).

developments in commercialism and consumerism. Preeminent among these accounts is Donna Andrew's. For Andrew, the eighteenth century sees a reformulation of the definition of charity such that it is not explicitly tied any longer to property ownership. According to Andrew, pre-eighteenth-century culture required that those who owned property provide for the less affluent.[12] Of those who owned property and possessed means, Andrew writes that:

> Premodern charity […] accepted as providentially given that there would always be people who were poor, whether through their own fault or not. […] The existence of poverty being eternal, and the benefits of charity great, a little wasted largesse did not seem very important. In God's eye, the intention of the giver, not the worth of the recipient, was the salient feature.[13]

Some in the pre-eighteenth-century world possess "largesse," as Andrew puts it, and to be of largesse is to be obligated to help those in poverty. In the later decades of the eighteenth century, however, Andrew writes, charity became decoupled from property. One did not need to own property in order to behave charitably toward others.[14] In another account, David Owen sees charity by individuals being replaced in the early eighteenth century by philanthropic institutions such as charity schools, these institutions originating from what Owen refers to as "middle-class origins."[15] And as David Cannadine has shown, the eighteenth century, with its rise of the

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[12] Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 197-200.
[13] Andrew, 197.
[14] Andrew, 200. According to Andrew, "No longer did the ownership of property inherently oblige and entail the duties of charity" (200). It instead "consisted of acts of grace toward the poor and needy, which, unlike acts of justice, were totally voluntary and entirely nonobligatory" (198).
[15] Owen, 13. While many writers see the eighteenth century as bearing witness to a decay of charity, others see charity recast as philanthropy. Ann Jessie Van Sant's *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) remains perhaps the most compelling account of the importance of philanthropic thought to eighteenth-century literature and culture. Writing about institutions such as the Magdalen House and the Philanthropic Society, Van Sant contends that, "Eighteenth-century writers and speakers frequently refer to their own time as the age of humanity, benevolence, or charity" (17). Whereas this brand of charity was urban, however, the charity of the prior age was tied explicitly to feudal

importance of urban life, placed the aristocracy in a tenuous position: the aristocracy was forced to adapt to the economic primacy of the city.[16] Cannadine suggests that the aristocracy sees itself in decline as the eighteenth century progresses and thus becomes more invested in consumerism and entrepreneurship, such that the aristocracy is no longer dominant over the world, but is merely imbedded in the discourse of commercialism.[17]

With the decline of individual charity in the eighteenth century, there were just as many opportunities for consumerism to suffocate charity as there were for private charitable institutions to rise up.[18] Keohane, for instance, uses *Cecilia* to point out the possibility that modern emphases on "consumer spending"[19] come to function as the object of social obligation. Whereas the object was once charity, it is now the expectation of contributing to the economy by

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obligation. In Van Sant's account, the charity of the eighteenth century emerges from a different source than the charity of prior ages that writers such as Bush and Andrew see at work.

[16] David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990), 25.

[17] Cannadine, 25. For more on the relationship between the aristocracy and the commercial classes, see William B. Willcox and Walter L. Arnstein, *The Age of Aristocracy, 1688-1830* (Independence, KY: Cengage, 2000). For Willcox and Arnstein, the proliferation of wealth via trade (rather than by inheritance) becomes the prerequisite in the eighteenth century for the purchase of a country estate (58-60). See also John Guillory's account of the shift in economic power in the eighteenth century. As part of his seminal reading of Thomas Gray's 1751 *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, which we encountered in Chapter Two of "Melancholy's Wake," Guillory notes that the aristocracy becomes, in the eighteenth century, swallowed whole by bourgeois consumer ideology. Not only does the bourgeoisie assume "aristocratic caste traits" (95), but the "'estate' system of feudalism" (95) in turn begins to wane, meaning more opportunities arise for those not born into the aristocracy.

[18] While, according to many accounts, the aristocracy as an institution was still very much alive and well in the eighteenth century, many, such as Adam Smith (as we will see later in this section), and Henry Mackenzie are convinced of its decline, and see its decline accompanied by a decay of charity. For one account of the relevance of the institution of the aristocracy into the twentieth century, see Cannadine. For the purposes of the argument of this chapter, I am not interested in weighing whether or not the aristocracy was actually in decline so much as I am interested in pursuing the implications of the possibility that some writers, including Smith and Mackenzie, saw it in decline. In other words, I am more interested in literary and imaginative representations of the state of the aristocracy in the eighteenth century.

[19] Keohane, 379.

consuming. Approaching the topic from a slightly different angle, Lisa Zunshine contends that the eighteenth-century idea of an ever-expanding world beyond the intimate closed-off communities of prior centuries makes it hard to know whether someone is deserving of charity.[20] In other words, when one tells a story of how they came to be in poverty, there is no way of knowing whether this story is true, because the eighteenth century's "increasing dissolution of traditional communal ties"[21] which were a marker of the feudal structure means that one often does not even know anything about the prospective recipient of one's charity. In Zunshine's reading, the communal past had a built-in charitable mechanism, as the intimacy of its communities made charity all the more easier, as one knew that another was a deserving object of charity in ways that were impossible in the more urban and more expansive eighteenth century.[22]

In a major eighteenth-century account of the history of economic development, Adam Smith explicitly ties the fall of hospitality to the alleged fall of the aristocracy. What the *OED* defines as charity—that is, "Benevolence to one's neighbours, especially to the poor"[23]—Smith refers to as hospitality. In the past, Smith writes, the absence of commerce meant an abundance of hospitality. "Before the extension of commerce and manufactures in Europe," Smith writes, "the hospitality of the rich and the great, from the sovereign down to the smallest baron,

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[20] Lisa Zunshine, "Caught Unawares by a Benefactor: Embodying the Deserving Object of Charity in the Eighteenth-Century Novel." *The Eighteenth Century Novel* 5 (2006): 37-65, 39.
[21] Zunshine, 39.
[22] For an account of the problem of the poor in the eighteenth century, see Dorothy Marshall, *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Social and Administrative History from 1662 to 1782* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).
[23] "charity," def. 4.

exceeded every thing which in the present times we can easily form a notion of."[24] Hospitality began with the feudal lords, Smith writes. As their tenants were dependent upon them for sustenance and provisions, the feudal lords became the paragons of hospitality, but in a cynical move, Smith sees this rise of hospitality not as a sign of the feudal lords' natural benevolence, but as an expression of the fact that they simply had nothing else to spend their money on. The institution of hospitality itself was a sign of the capacity to be hospitality and not a sign of the feudal lords' inherent goodness. Things began to change, however, Smith writes, with the burgeoning of commerce:

> [Foreign commerce and manufactures] gradually furnished the great proprietors with something for which they could exchange the whole surplus produce of their lands, and which they could consume themselves without sharing it either with tenants or retainers. All for ourselves, and nothing for the people, seems, in every age of the world, to have been the vile maxim of the masters of mankind. As soon, therefore, as they could find a method of consuming the whole value of their rents themselves, they had no disposition to share them with any other persons. For a pair of diamond buckles perhaps, or for something as frivolous and useless, they exchanged the maintenance, or what is the same thing, the price of the maintenance of a thousand men for a year, and with it the whole weight and authority which it could give them. The buckles, however, were to be all their own, and no other human creature was to have any share of them; whereas in the more ancient method of expence they must have shared with at least a thousand people. (388-89)

Land, wealth, and power are prerequisites to hospitable action, but problematically, they are also prerequisites to the indulgence of vanity, metonymized here in the figure of the diamond buckles.[25] Landed interest and monetary power act as a double-edged sword, affording one the capacity to perform both good and ill.

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[24] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 1776, ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: The Modern Library, 1965), 385. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

[25] Wolfram Schmidgen reads this moment in *The Wealth of Nations* as "emphasiz[ing] the violence of the initial encounter between two different forms of property" (Wolfram Schmidgen, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Law of Property* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002], 135). In Schmidgen's reading, land as immobile property clashes with the diamond buckles as mobile property.

Smith's depiction of hospitality and feudalism is rather cynical with regards to its view of human nature. The feudal lords are not naturally benevolent; they simply behave hospitably toward their tenants because there is nothing else for their money to go towards. Hospitality as an institution thus keeps human nature in check. With the rise of commodities that corresponds to the rise of commerce, the feudal lords find themselves distracted. Smith goes on to tell us that, as the proprietors shifted their attention from hospitality to commodities, they became less capable of supporting their tenants, since all of their money was going toward merchants and not toward their own tenants. They were forced to raise rents, and their tenants only agreed to higher rent on the condition that the proprietors would offer them longer leases. Longer leases, Smith explains, afforded tenants a greater degree of independence, since they came to develop a kind of intimacy with their land and treated it as if it were their own property. The evolution of the tenants' independence, Smith says, rendered the proprietors "as insignificant as any substantial burgher or tradesman in a city" (391). Hospitality becomes a sign of one's power, because one must possess wealth and a degree of privilege in order to successfully display hospitality to others. Moreover, hospitality allows for the proprietors to maintain their authority and privilege. The display of hospitality thus becomes simultaneously a way of demonstrating wealth and privilege. Generosity is more than simply mere kindness. Generosity is also a display of dominance. Indeed, it seems that the possession of the means to be kind is a sign of dominance and authority, such that kindness can very nearly be a suppressing mechanism.[26]

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[26] For a nuanced account of the ways in which the supposed decline of the aristocracy in the eighteenth century holds important implications for theories of literary genre, see Michael McKeon's enormously influential *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), 131-75. McKeon famously sees the genre of the novel arising out of a tension between aristocratic and commercial—for which he uses the term "progressive"—ideals. While McKeon does not explicitly discuss charity, his interest in an anxiety about the power of the aristocracy as influencing literary genre in the eighteenth century sees the concept of virtue

In sentimental novels such as *The Man of Feeling* and *David Simple*, the brand of generosity that thinkers such as Donna Andrew and Catherine Keohane describe becomes a sign of a lost past that is in danger of extinction even if, as Smith tells us, that lost past might not be as rosy as it would seem on first glance. *The Man of Feeling*'s Harley is a member of an old aristocratic family who has the desire to practice charity if not also the means to. In Fielding's *David Simple*, David is not in fact a member of an aristocratic family, but belongs to the gentry. While he and his brother Daniel are not aristocrats, the expectations of hospitable living trickle down to them. As David Owen points out, the eighteenth century sees a transference of the charitable code from the aristocracy to the nonaristocratic elite, even though, as Owen says, "the great aristocratic donor by no means disappeared."[27] Whether or not this is in fact true, it is not the task of this chapter to uncover. These novels represent a sense of a lost past that might or might not square with actual lived experience in the eighteenth century, and the readings that make up this chapter interrogate the representation of a lost charitable code rather than an interrogation of whether or not charity actually was lost. The problem for David Simple, for instance, as we will see, is that other modern ideals—such as commerce and consumerism—clash with and threaten the ideal of benevolence that the gentry elite have inherited from the aristocracy.

While eighteenth-century thinkers such as Smith and contemporary critics such as Andrew very clearly see the eighteenth century marking a point of crisis for the charitable way of

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itself thrown into question. The fall of the aristocracy begins, McKeon tells us in *The Origins of the English Novel*, with the inflation of honorifics under James I and Charles I (151). Before, aristocratic heritage had equaled virtuous behavior, but under James and Charles, McKeon writes, we begin to see a new development. As honors become commodities to be bought, honor-as-virtue shifts from what McKeon calls an "inherited characteristic" (131)—inherited specifically through primogeniture—to something to be traded. Virtue is no longer passed down strictly via the inheritance of aristocratic familial titles.

[27] Owen, 13.

life, their accounts do not engage with the workings of feeling with the same resonance as novels such as *David Simple* and *The Man of Feeling*. These novels also depict charity in decay, but this decay becomes the object of a deep melancholy that is missing in historical accounts such as Smith's, Andrew's, and Keohane's. These novels grieve the loss of the past, but their grieving over the past remains unresolved, aligning it more with what Freud would call melancholia than with mourning. The novelists of this chapter express a fear that they might be unable to restore the old charitable way, and yet they also believe that the only way to redeem the current system involves waiting passively for the tide to turn back in the direction of charity and benevolence. That pendulum-swing back in the other direction may very well only take place, these authors suggest, in the afterlife. The language of melancholy informs this relationship between passivity in the present and hope for the future, for the melancholic looks exclusively toward the time after death as the time when all losses that caused the mood in the first place will be redeemed. The resistance enabled by the melancholy mood depends for its existence on a posture of passivity, since this resistance waits for change to occur in the future instead of acting to change things in the present. Melancholy allows for the articulation of the problem of the loss of charity in these novels, but as I show, this articulation circles back on itself. Melancholy articulation strives toward revolutionary thought, but it is simultaneously the articulation of the inoperability of revolutionary thought to the present moment. Melancholy articulation of resistance only becomes operative in heaven, but even so, it gives resistance a voice where resistance might otherwise have no voice, such that voice itself becomes the only brand of resistance possible in the present.

In his pathbreaking study of the vanishing of happiness from narrative in eighteenth-century thought, Vivasvan Soni writes that the promise of a heavenly afterlife free of suffering often has no place within eighteenth-century narrative. It is difficult if not impossible to

represent what happens after death.[28] Moreover, for Soni, marriage in the landscape of eighteenth-century fiction functions as an allegory for death, for marriage offers the happy promise of wealth and status, and this form of happiness "eludes representation."[29] A similar dream of wealth and status, Soni suggests, might await the subject in the afterlife. But it can only be gestured toward as a form of futurity, too abstract and nebulous to be specified within narrative. For Fielding and Mackenzie, death plays a similar role in outlining a future return of the charitable way of life. But where in Soni's rendering, this unrepresentable future reproduces eighteenth-century status politics in that it offers a vision of "happiness as status and wealth,"[30] Fielding's and Mackenzie's novels see this future as a liberation from the values of modernity. For the novels, death offers a return of the charitable code, but one that can only be spoken of and not acted upon. When all one can do on one's deathbed is talk, and when one's speech does not have to be tethered to action, one instead communicates the feeling of revolution to those around them, such that sentiment takes the place of revolutionary action.

II. The Tragedy of the Second Son: *David Simple*

The values represented in Sarah Fielding's mid-century novel *The Adventures of David Simple* allow for characters to imagine a future order that would represent a radical and forward-thinking departure from modern commercial ideology. The invocation of melancholy at the end of *Volume the Last* (published in 1753, nine years after the publication of the first volume of the

[28] Soni writes that, "[Heavenly] happiness, impossible for a finite being, is guaranteed to the virtuous […] by an omnipotent god in an afterlife: heaven. Heaven is therefore not the end of life, but the end of narrative as trial. […] Heaven signals nothing but the advent of happiness in its plenitude and presence (the presence of God himself), although the kind of happiness one will experience in heaven is often unspecified" (270).
[29] Ibid., 279.
[30] Ibid., 279.

novel) works to transform the crippling grief extending from personal loss into a restoration of loss. At the same time, though, the melancholy of the novel's conclusion also excuses one from the obligation of acting to achieve such restoration. By novel's end, David Simple feels a sense of melancholy over his losses, but his melancholy is also the sign of his inability to do anything to reverse the tide. Instead, then, he imagines the restoration of the world's charitable spirit—a spirit that has been lost to modernity—and the speaking of imaginative thought is a sign both of revolutionary thought and of absolute passivity.

Eighteenth-century sentimental novels such as *David Simple* often pose a relationship between the personal and the political, and their convergence of personal and political produces feeling. In his landmark study of eighteenth-century sentimental texts, John C. Mullan claims that the term "sentiment" is a politically charged term and stands for both judgment and feeling.[31] The sentimental novel for Mullan depicts a world in which feelings are the standards by which one makes value judgments and choices about the best course of action. Often, however, Mullan says, the judgments that feelings might lead one to make are thoroughly apolitical: inner virtue cannot be a guide for how to behave in the social world, because for many writers, sentimentalism is not a tool for political critique. "[I]t is not possible," Mullan writes, "to identify the virtue of feeling as represented in the novel of sentiment with any particular social class, nor yet with antagonism to any class."[32] For Mullan, virtue has few political valences by the end of the century. Similarly, Janet Todd suggests that sentimentalism's development of feeling coincides with an attempt to avoid politics.[33] Describing *The Man of Feeling* and *David*

[31] Mullan, 7-8.
[32] Ibid., 132.
[33] Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), 94-101.

Simple as two of the exemplary sentimental novels of the eighteenth century,[34] Todd claims that sentimental novels privilege feelings over both morals and politics. For Todd, sentimental novelists spend so much time trying to incite feelings from their readers that there is no room for extended or meaningful focus on political debates. Feeling and politics are almost mutually exclusive. Thus, while sentimental novels might be generally "anti-capitalist,"[35] they are also not particularly interested in politics at all.[36] For Todd, sentimental novels exude political apathy. While being anti-capitalist, Todd's version of the sentimental novel is also oddly anti-political.

Mullan's and Todd's descriptions of the sentimental novel rank among the most influential twentieth-century accounts of the genre, and have given scholars tools for thinking about the ways that feeling helps to navigate the gap between self and society. We might ask, however, with other scholars such as Lynn Festa and Markman Ellis—both of whom argue that sentimentalism is deeply invested in politics—whether the feeling subject is as separate from political debates as critics such as Todd and Mullan claim that it might be.[37] As Ellis argues, sentimentalism becomes the battleground for political debate in the eighteenth century (3-4 and throughout),[38] as writers utilize sentiment in the service of trying to persuade readers on political

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[34] Todd, 89.
[35] Ibid., 97.
[36] The term "capitalism" here is Todd's term, not mine. I am not interested in using this chapter of the dissertation to argue whether the eighteenth century sees the emergence of capitalism. I am more interested in the ways that Todd sees the sentimental novel as setting up the subject in full retreat from modern political and economic institutions.
[37] Festa, for instance, argues that sentiment functions as a way of establishing bonds between persons that transcend national and commercial boundaries. "In an era of imperial and commercial expansion," Festa writes, "sentimentality invites readers to dabble in the emotional lives of others, while seeking to secure the continuity and unity … of the metropolitan subject" (14-15).
[38] Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 3-4 and throughout.

matters.[39] In *David Simple* (and in *The Man of Feeling*, which I examine in the next section), sentimentalism utilizes reflection on loss to make deeply nuanced political statements. These politically and affectively charged statements of loss also become reflections on the capacity of political critique to enact actual change in the empirical world.

David Simple is one of the most tragic among the genre of the eighteenth-century sentimental novel. David is the eldest son of the Simple family. The Simple family does not belong to the aristocracy but rather to the gentry elite. After the death of his father, David's younger brother Daniel steals their father's will, bequeathing to himself the estate that should have been reserved for the elder son David. This leaves David with £500, a ridiculously small inheritance that would probably not even be enough for a second son (which David now is, according to the will) to make his entrepreneurial way in the world.[40] Having been all but written out of the will, David sets off in the beginning of the novel in search of true friendship and companions who will not betray him. After a journey in which he encounters all manner of corruption and vice, David meets (and then parts with) the virtuous Cynthia who, like David, was unjustly written out of her family's will. They part when Cynthia senses that David is romantically attracted to her, a feeling that she does not return. After joining with the equally virtuous brother-sister pair Valentine and Camilla, David is reunited with Cynthia, and the four live together, forming a community that is supposedly more virtuous and less self-interested than any other community in which any of them have ever lived before. Camilla and David marry, as

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[39] Ellis's primary political topics include eighteenth-century slavery debates and debates over canal building.

[40] For a discussion of eighteenth-century inheritance laws, see Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 23-28. According to Perry, "laws regulating inheritance increasingly facilitated the accumulation of wealth for the eldest son, from whose estate settlements on daughters and younger sons began to be resented as a drain" (24).

do Valentine and Cynthia, and the first half of the novel ends happily.

Volume the Last, however, represents Fielding's attempt (as an unnamed friend puts it in the preface to the volume) to show "how such a Man would support himself under the worldly Misfortunes and Afflictions to which human-kind is liable."[41] The aim of *Volume the Last*, in other words, is to put these characters' virtue on trial and see how it holds up under the weight of intense suffering. And the suffering in *Volume the Last* is nearly unbearable. David is sued over his estate, Camilla and Valentine both pass away, David's house burns down, and other misfortunes continue to pile up. In the closing pages of the novel David, on his deathbed, sees his friend Cynthia one last time (as everyone else is dead) and comments on the difficulty of remaining morally good in such a corrupt world.

In the prefatory note to the first volume of *The Adventures of David Simple*, Sarah Fielding refers to the novel that follows as a "Moral Romance" (xlv). One might take this descriptor to mean that the novel is a romance about morals (i.e., a romance with morality as its topic). One might also take this descriptor to mean that *David Simple* is a typical romance that also happens to be preoccupied with morals. One could make an argument for either reading of the term, but both readings raise the question: what are the novel's morals, exactly? How might one describe the brand of morality with which Fielding seems so preoccupied in her prefatory note? John Richetti, for one, has argued that the novel presents us with a Christian version of morality and that, moreover, its Christian morals are incompatible with the conditions of the modern world. Richetti points to the novel's final pages, during which David discourses while on his deathbed about the futility of pursuing wealth and about the values of Christian virtue. Wealth is fleeting, while virtue sets one up for eternal happiness in heaven. The function of

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[41] Sarah Fielding, *The Adventures of David Simple*, 1744, 1753, ed. Peter Sabor (Lexington, KY: U of Kentucky Press, 1998), 242. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

Christianized hope in the novel, for Richetti, is to provide some modicum of relief in the aftermath of the onslaught of evil typified by selfish characters such as Daniel.[42] In other words, there exists a partition between heaven and the world. The two are completely incompatible. In a similar argument, Stuart Sim claims that there exists a strict binary opposition between the heavenly and earthly realms. "It is clear that religion is failing to provide the support needed to keep the character going," Sim writes; "all it can do is make it easier for him to accept death."[43] Religion exists to provide an escape hatch from the world, and this, according to Sim, is its only function. Thus, the morals of Fielding's "Moral Romance," according to Richetti and Sim, are anti-worldly morals.

What if there is something more to the novel's morals, though? What if these morals represent more than simply a total disavowal of the world and its politics? In the following pages, I contend that David's heavenward gaze in the novel's conclusion—borne out of his gloom over his excessive losses—is not a refusal to care about politics at all. Rather, it is driven by a fierce criticism of the world's politics; the heavenly order stands as a model for what the earthly political order should resemble, and the representation of heaven works as a critique of the modern world. Heaven is more than simply a relief of suffering, as Richetti and Sim portray it as. It is a mirror in which one sees an image of the world restored to its old codes of virtue, and it is the fixation with loss that allows the lost code of charity to remain at the forefront of these characters' heavenly visions of the future. This melancholy only reveals itself most fully in the novel's final pages, such that the gloom of David's trials is best described as a slow build.

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[42] John Richetti, *The English Novel in History 1700-1780* (London: Routledge, 1999), 250-51.
[43] Stuart Sim, "Despair, Melancholy and the Novel," *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century: Before Depression, 1660-1800*, ed. Allan Ingram, Stuart Sim, et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 114-41, 133.

In the opening pages of the novel, we see the traditions of the past begin to recede into obsolescence. As Ruth Perry explains, primogeniture (or the tradition of leaving one's estate to one's firstborn son) was originally an aristocratic practice, and was itself passed down in the eighteenth century to the gentry.[44] Daniel's bequeathing to himself the inheritance that should have been left to David signifies, then, a resistance to and refusal to acknowledge both aristocratic and gentry traditions. That is, not only is Daniel turning his back on David. He is also turning his back on history. In one sense, his act of thievery might seem entirely justified in that it calls into question the perhaps unjust hierarchical politics of inheritance: why should an eldest son get the largest share of an estate simply due to the fact that he is the firstborn? Why should the gentry choose this particular tradition of primogeniture to inherit from the aristocracy? In another sense, though, Daniel's act merely perpetuates injustice by perpetuating selfishness. For as he turns his back on tradition, Daniel also refuses to act charitably. As tradition goes out the window for Daniel, so too does a feeling of obligation toward others. Recall that the gentry inherits the charitable code and not simply the tradition of primogeniture from the aristocracy. He turns the house's servants against David, and refuses to share with David any of the money left to him. David tells the reader that his own love for his brother transforms into resentment (13), and eventually he chooses to leave the home and see what kinds of opportunities might exist for him in the outside world. In leaving David just £500 for his inheritance, Daniel is dooming him to go out into the world as if he were an entrepreneur or a merchant without even giving him the means to behave as an entrepreneur or merchant.

Moreover, though, David is simply more interested in helping others and in the pursuit of

[44] Perry, 213. See also Perry, 23-28. According to Perry, "laws regulating inheritance increasingly facilitated the accumulation of wealth for the eldest son, from whose estate settlements on daughters and younger sons began to be resented as a drain" (24).

friendship than he is in being an entrepreneur. He resists the norm of entrepreneurship, but his resistance to entrepreneurial ideology is characterized by its passivity. He does not actively speak out against the ills of entrepreneurship, but resists by instead choosing to embrace other values—i.e., the values that inhere in friendship. His resistance to entrepreneurial norms via his interest in friendship is also a resistance to modernity. Perry emphasizes that the eighteenth century brought a number of opportunities for second sons, a category into which the forged will has placed David. Perry writes that, "[Younger sons] began to make their own way economically. The state provided many avenues for them to make their fortunes, such as the East India Company, the clergy, the navy, or the army. Law and business also provided lucrative opportunities."[45] In choosing friendship over economic opportunities—both out of the difficulty of pursuing economic opportunities because of his meager inheritance and out of his simple preference for friendship over money—David stands out among what Perry describes as the younger sons of his age.

The cause of David's despair in the opening of the novel is human cruelty. David despairs not merely because he leaves the Simple estate with an inheritance of only £500, but because it seems that there are no good people left in the world. Upon their respective entrances into the narrative, however, Cynthia, Camilla, and Valentine act as the antidotes to Daniel. Where Daniel is interested in money, David's new companions are interested in nothing more than companionship as such. Like David, they do not seem to fit in with the world, and the reason that they don't fit is because of the unequal power relations created by the unequal distribution of wealth. Cynthia tells David that, before joining up with him, she had been reduced to what she calls a "Toad-eater" (89), a transformation that occurred alongside her loss of

[45] Perry, 34.

personal wit. Cynthia tells David that she had once been full of wit, but having refused to marry the man her father had desired her to, her father wrote her out of his will and left her to wander the world. Her effective banishment from her family drained her of all her wit, and put anxiety in its place. This state of exile also resigned her to a state of servility. The lady with whom Cynthia is travelling has given Cynthia all sorts of luxuries in the service of leading her across Europe to display Cynthia as her companion, but Cynthia feels as though she has been forced by circumstance to sacrifice her wit for luxury. It is this replacement of wit with luxury that describes the state of being a Toad-eater. She tells David that this term is:

> …a Metaphor taken from a Mountebank's Boy's eating Toads, in order to shew his Master's Skill in expelling Poison: It is built on a Supposition, (which I am afraid is too generally true) that People who are so unhappy as to be in a State of Dependance, are forced to do the most nauseous things that can be thought on, to please and humour their Patrons. And the Metaphor may be carried on yet farther, for most People have so much the Art of tormenting, that every time they have made the poor Creatures they have in their power *swallow a Toad*, they give them something to expel it again, that they may be ready to swallow the next they think proper to prepare for them: that is, when they have abused and fooled them, as *Hamlet* says, to the top of their bent, they grow soft and good to them again, on purpose to have it in their power to *plague them the more*. (89)

The definition of the term "Toad-eater" is an acknowledgement of the unequal power relations inherent in social practices. The powerful—such as the lady with whom Cynthia travels—gain power by behaving generously toward those of lower rank. But the condition of this generosity is that it makes the persons toward whom they are generous appear servile and helpless, to the point that the objects of their generosity would go so far as to swallow a toad as a sign of their submission.

The Toad-eater episode provides us with a vision of generosity devoid of friendship, and the void around which it orbits is framed by the language of loss. The woman in whose service Cynthia becomes a Toad-eater shows Cynthia a kind of generosity that only speeds up the process of the loss of Cynthia's wit that had been set into motion by her father's writing her out

of the family will. Their shared absorption of personal loss and their lack of power in a cruel world are the engines that bring David and Cynthia together. Friendship becomes the compensation for personal loss, and helps one to steel oneself against despair.

Thus, where the opening of the novel is concerned with questions of the value of inheritance rights, the focus soon shifts to a concern with questions about the value of less material matters like friendship, honor, and dignity. Both sets of questions are social and political in nature. But the second set focuses on the relation between one's heart and society, whereas the first set focuses on the relation between one's things and society. As David and Cynthia transform their personal losses into occasions to meditate on social and personal ills writ large, they transition from dwelling on their particular sufferings to dwelling instead on general questions about dignity. They are attempting to consider the category of person apart from the objects and commodities that surround the person. Friendship, in other words, seems to survive and even to thrive in the absence of material wealth. And, as we will see later, friendship gives a form of pleasure even more powerful for David than the pleasures of wealth.

The question that emerges at this point, then, is whether the novel allows us to see kindness as separable from wealth. Is the sharing of material wealth the only way of practicing kindness? Is it truly possible to think of wealth and kindness as mutually exclusive? According to *Volume the Last*, at least, the answer to this question is no. In *Volume the Last*, the terms "kindness" and "generosity" that had in the first volume of the novel characterized pure friendship evolve into another term: charity. David becomes committed in *Volume the Last* to behaving kindly not only to his friends, but also to those whom he does not even know. David's brand of expansive kindness to others involves generosity toward those in the neighborhood into which he moves, and takes the form of monetary assistance toward others. Of course, as we will

see, he cannot sustain this degree of generosity for purely pragmatic reasons—that is, he does not have the monetary means to sustain himself, much less the means to sustain others. David's inability to fit into the modern social order, characterized by the selfishness of figures such as Daniel and the vain moneylender Nichols (whom we will soon meet) extends from his lack of material wealth and his lack of ability and interest in pursuing wealth. The side effect of David's misfit status is that he also does not have the capacity to act charitably toward others. Money is the prerequisite for charitable behavior, but it also functions as a prerequisite toward vanity and selfishness, as in the case of Daniel and of Cynthia's benefactor. David cannot resist the modern social order that is grounded upon vanity and selfishness without also resisting the urge toward the attainment of wealth. Counterintuitively, then, his failure to attain wealth means that his attempts at charity in *Volume the Last* must also fail, since charity, in order to be successful, presupposes the possession of wealth. One of the reasons that the gentry is able to inherit the tradition of charity from the aristocracy, after all, is that the gentry often possesses the requisite material means to be charitable.

By the end of the first volume of the novel, David and Camilla have married, and so have Valentine and Cynthia. They all choose to live together in a communal arrangement, each of them committed to a friendship that should theoretically survive without the presence of wealth. The first volume of the novel ends on a happy note, and thus *Volume the Last* also begins on the same kind of happy note. Fielding warns her readers, however, in her prefatory note to *Volume the Last*, that the volume will not be a happy narrative. Taken as a whole, in other words, the novel assumes a chiastic shape, with the first volume's structure of an unhappy beginning leading to a happy ending being reversed in *Volume the Last*. Fielding tells her readers that the last volume of the novel is written to put her characters' endurance on trial.

Volume the Last, in other words, is a volume of loss. It centers around a barrage of personal losses that David must endure, culminating in his own death. But it also centers around a much more pervasive loss—the loss of the institution of charity. The series of losses leads to an irreversible sense of melancholy by the novel's end, which in turn retroactively imbues the rest of the novel with a sense of melancholy. The only feasible response to this gloom is a turn toward heaven as a utopic realm that reflects the kind of charitable model that the world itself should resemble. As such, the turn toward heaven effected by melancholy is not a mode of ignoring the world, but of critiquing it, even as this critique also means that David cannot act to change the world, but must passively wait on things to improve.

The beginning of *Volume the Last* is, however, anything but melancholy. Rather, melancholy approaches slowly. David, Camilla, Valentine, and Cynthia all live together, and even though they are not wealthy, they are happy with one another's company. Pure friendship seems to have won out over wealth. David says as much when he speaks of his family's small house as a source love and not vanity:

> For every thing in this small Cottage, tho' poor and plain, yet was preserved in so neat a Manner, as visibly proved that the Owners of it could not think themselves debarred of every Comfort, whilst they enjoyed each other's Company. Those People, whose Love of Property arises from the vain Desire of making a Figure in the Eyes of others, generally degenerate into Filth and Nastiness, when they can no longer gratify that Desire: whereas the Desire of Property only as far as may contribute to comfort in a Family, truly united by Love, always actuates every Individual to contribute by Labour and Industry to one another's Comforts. (293)

According to this passage, modern culture is tainted by a performative impulse. Vain subjects are interested in accumulating material goods, because it is by the collection of things that they make "a Figure in the Eyes of others." Those consumed by vanity are so concerned with the ways that they appear to others that they unable to be driven by pure selfless love. When one is motivated by pure love, as the members of the Simple community are, it does not matter whether one has

amassed an abundance of things that reflect one's status. David finds himself in debt throughout the volume, but right now that is of no consequence to him. All that matters to him is love, in part because love furthers his own pleasure, as we will see. Love replaces status. Prioritization of the immaterial replaces prioritization of the material.

This seems simple enough. As we look closer, however, we find it to be anything but. For throughout *Volume the Last*, David insists on material expression of the immaterial traits of kindness and generosity. The name, of course, for this relationship between material and immaterial is charity. Charity is the material performance of an intangible impulse toward generosity and kindness. David's spirit of kindness and generosity extends not only to his family, but also to those in his neighborhood. As we will see, however, David does not really possess the material means to behave charitably. He behaves like a benevolent feudal lord, even though he does not have enough to give. In the same way that he lacked the means to be an entrepreneur in the first volume of the novel, he also lacks the means to relieve the suffering of others in the second. Another way of putting this is that he refuses to acknowledge the lost object of institutional charity as lost. He is living as if it is not lost, even though the novel has presented us with a version of present history that would seem to indicate that it is in fact gone, and perhaps gone for good.

David makes it a priority to relieve others in his modest neighborhood in Heddington from their states of "extreme Indigence" (247); in an important plot turn in *Volume the Last*, David takes it upon himself to take a beggar whom he and Camilla meet into his home to rest for an evening. Fielding writes of the next morning:

> [The beggar] found himself revived to such a Degree, that he was capable of labouring with his Hands, and intreated *David*, that he would, for that one Day at least, give him Leave to exert the Strength he had by his means acquired, in his Service; and he would shew him some Methods of Gardening, which he would hereafter save both Expence and

Trouble, and make every Foot of his small portion of Land much more profitable. (314) David is behaving here like a benevolent property owner, assuming the obligation to use his small piece of property as a means by which he might care for others. Where earlier in the novel, Daniel had used his own property and material possession as a way of shutting David out, David uses his property as a way of expressing sympathy. Where Cynthia's lady had used her monetary means as a way of taking advantage of Cynthia and making her assume the role of a "Toad-eater," David uses his limited means as a way of showing forth a genuine concern.

But in order to behave charitably in a truly effective way, one must possess means—and David does not. Or at least he does not possess enough means. When word gets around to Orgueil, David's own benefactor in the neighborhood, David's behavior begins to look more like foolhardiness instead of generosity. "This Report had no other Effect on Mr. *Orgueil*," Fielding writes, "but to make him shake his Head, and say, 'There could be no End to *David Simple*'s imprudent Actions, whilst he entertained his own Romantic Notions, and would take no Advice'" (315). To behave beyond one's station is unwise, according to Orgueil. Orgueil's objection raises the question, though: why is it that David has to be the one to step in and care for the beggar? Why has no one else shown any care for the beggar up until this point? In addition to proving David's potential "imprudence," Fielding's point in giving us this episode is to show us that the modern age has brought with it a void where generosity once was. David has to come in to the picture to behave as if he were of privilege precisely because no one else—aristocratic, gentry, or otherwise—has. Those with wealth and/or land in the modern age are too preoccupied with the accumulation of luxury items as a performance of their wealth, or with the ruthless impulse toward the accumulation of more wealth, as figured in the character of Daniel.

Orgueil's suspicion of David's charity reinforces the ways in which David stands out as a

lone voice in the wilderness, choosing to behave charitably on his own despite—or because of—the fact that charity does not seem to be a priority across the rest of the culture in which he is immersed. David's refusal to acknowledge the pragmatic impossibility of a person of his standing hiring a servant makes him, in Orgueil's mind, a romantic. His dreams and visions do not square with objective reality. He is refusing to see loss as loss, instead deluding himself into believing that the lost spirit still exists. He is, as Julia Kristeva says in her description of melancholia in *Black Sun*, "tak[ing] refuge"[46] in the lost object. And of course, even though the reader might be inclined to empathize with David's benevolent spirit more so than with Orgueil's cynical take, Orgueil's words turn out to be true. He is entirely correct that David simply cannot perform this kind of charity. In the modern world, an abundance of commercial opportunities obscure any possibility of generosity, such that the possibility of personal gain completely neutralizes any spirit of generosity. It is surely a damning sign of the hopeless state of the modern world when the novel's voice of truth and reason is also its voice of cynicism: Orgueil speaks against the brand of selfless sympathy that the reader is meant to find so attractive in a character of David's caliber. Charity is not a cultural priority, and when it does survive in small pockets (i.e., in the character of David) it is doomed to fail.

Alongside *Volume the Last*'s tenuous depiction of charity, we get a mirror depiction of the ideal of the optimistic commercial endeavor. In a hopeful attempt at becoming upwardly mobile, Valentine (who is now married to Cynthia) chooses to go to Jamaica to pursue his fortune. Fielding tells us that Valentine had been acquainted with the governor of Jamaica since his childhood, and that the governor had promised Valentine his own estate "as another Chance

[46] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 10.

of providing for his Wife and Family" (263).[47] David himself comes to rely on the prospect of Valentine's being generous with whatever money he might make on his journey.

We see here the ways in which David sees charity as relying on commercialism, and also the ways in which he is wrong to think of it in such terms. David is deluded in thinking that charity can emerge from commercialism. In David's mind, whatever income Valentine might make from his commercial endeavor would help to fund David's lifestyle, and would also by extension fund David's impulse toward charitable practice. In the modern system, this instance suggests, commercialism props up charity. The problem with this alliance between commercialism and charity is that commercialism is vulnerable to the phenomenon of risk—which Valentine's episode makes painfully clear. Valentine might make his fortune by moving to Jamaica; he just as easily might come back empty-handed (in reality, he actually passes away in Jamaica before succeeding in his venture). In the moment when one makes a decision predicated on risk, the future remains necessarily unknowable. Without unknowability, risk would not deserve the name. Charity, on the other hand, revolves around promise. One promises to give money to another instead of taking risks to make money for one's self. When a system based on risk is made to prop up a system of charity—which is based on certainty and the straightforward gift of money, goods, or housing—charity becomes much more tenuous and uncertain than David depicts it as when he confidently helps those in his neighborhood. In the end, the risk never pays off. The fragility of commercial risk comes to mirror the fragility of the charitable ideal that David is desperately trying to keep alive.

We get a clear sign of David's precarious financial state—and the ways in which it limits his desire for sustained charitable practice—when we meet a moneylender by the name of

[47] Edward Trelawny was the British governor-general of Jamaica from 1738-1752 (*David Simple* 390 n.1; footnote by Peter Sabor).

Nichols. Being deep in debt because of his spending habits, David chooses to ask Nichols for a loan. At this point, David himself is relying on the prospect of Valentine's being generous with the money he has promised to make on his commercial expedition to Jamaica. The reason that David is in such dire financial straits is his "imprudent" (as Orgueil would term it) insistence on charitable care for those in poverty. He promises Nichols that he will be able to pay back any loan that Nichols gives him with the money with which Valentine returns from Jamaica. In the same way that David has shown unconditional generosity to others in the past, he is now expecting the same from both Valentine and Nichols. Nichols' reflections on David's outlook are sobering. Fielding writes that:

> The Trust and Confidence *David* expressed in *Valentine*'s Friendship, sounded as nonsensical in his Ears, as if he had affirmed he could safely trust a Fox with the Care of his Poultry. For Mr. *Nichols* was fully satisfied that *Valentine*'s friendship was mere Pretence, and had been hitherto counterfeited, in order to make an Advantage of *David*'s Credulity; and he doubted not but that as soon as *Valentine* found the desperate State of his Circumstances, he would wisely cast him off, and avoid the Expence of endeavouring to prove himself what such a Fool as *David* would call a real Friend. (291)

Despite having never met Valentine and knowing nothing about him aside from what David has said about him, Nichols assumes that Valentine must be a trickster. The reason that he assumes this is because he has never met a commercial agent who was anything other than a trickster. Such a degree of distrust reflects the pervasive suspicion with which many in the period viewed the very idea of credit. According to J.A.W. Gunn, for instance, there was concern in the eighteenth century, particularly among Tories, that the evolution of credit might signal a conflict between Parliament and the Bank of England.[48] In turn, Gunn says, commerce revolving around credit "posed a danger to the rural society of the squires and the clergy."[49] The Tory fear was that

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[48] J.A.W. Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property: The Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1983), 46-47.
[49] Gunn, 46.

the idea of credit might render obsolete the idea of pure landed interest as the foundation for economic exchange.

In Nichols' eyes, one's profession makes one selfish and deceptive, and selfishness is the defining trait of the modern age. This moment, narrated from the perspective of Nichols and not from the perspective of David, is a stark reminder of the degree to which David is an outlier. No one, in Nichols' mind, is interested in either charity or benevolence. As such, the few who do act charitably will be chewed up and spit out by a ruthless modern world. Nichols finds David's philanthropy entirely laughable and untenable, especially considering that David has so little money of his own.

From this point forward, things begin to slide rapidly downhill for David. Valentine dies without ever making his fortune. David loses his house in a fire. David's debt continues to pile up, in part because his interest in charity exceeds his capacity for charitable practice. In the closing pages of the novel, David has lost everything. Valentine, Camilla, and their children are all dead. David himself is dying as well, and seems finally unable to protect himself from grief, despite his claims over and over again throughout the novel to have been happy despite his circumstances. There emerges here a disjunctive relationship between loss and representation: it is difficult and nearly impossible, Fielding says, to represent the grief brought on by loss. After his children have passed away, Fielding tells us that "*David* was, on every Occasion, motionless with Grief" (326), but also tells us that she must pass "quickly over all the Sorrows that affected *David* and his *Camilla*" (326), for the sole reason that "Words cannot reach it—the sympathizing Heart must imagine it—and the Heart that has no Sympathy, is not capable of receiving it" (326). Fielding here admits to the enormity of loss. The fact that there are no words that can adequately describe the magnitude and amplitude of losses that David and his friends have suffered across

the novel speaks not to the imperfection of language so much as it speaks to the exceptional nature of the losses themselves. Some losses are simply too much for words, and they thus seem to be isolating. If sentimentalism is a discourse that binds people, it seems here that sentimentalism runs up against its limits in the face of loss. Loss seems to leave David out on his own.

Until the very end, that is. For when death is an absolute certainty—that is, as David lies on his deathbed—he has nothing else to do *but* talk. He talks about his personal losses, and he talks about the loss of an antiquated notion of charity for which his personal losses are an allegory. The audience for this version of David's "talking cure" is Cynthia. As he lies on his deathbed, Cynthia comes to visit, and David unleashes all sorts of melancholy reflections on the injustices of modern life. David admits here that his poverty was a prime cause of his suffering. He spent money beyond his means, which only intensified his financial woes:

> When poverty broke in upon us, I found, that to bear the poverty of many, was almost insupportable.—Then, indeed, my mind began to be seized with Fear—I was no longer my former Self—Pictures of the Distress of my Family began to succeed each other in my Mind, and Terror and Timidity conquered my better Judgment. The Necessity I found for a Friend, made me admit, as such, Persons more Properly called Persecutors; and my staggering Mind catched hold of every rotten Plank, in Hopes of a Support. Thus my fancied Friends became my Plagues, and my real ones, by their Sufferings, tore up my Heart by the Roots, and frightened me into bearing the insolent Persecutions of the others—I found my Mind in such Chains as are much worse than any Slavery of the Body—Still, whilst my *Camilla* was spared to me, I struggled for Chearfulness; I hid my Sorrows within my own Breast…(341)

David admits here that the causes of his poverty are multifaceted. On the one hand, as mentioned above, David simply does not have the same kind of worldly impulses as others. He is not as interested in the accumulation of wealth or glory, which in turn led him to a life marred by financial difficulty. On the other hand, though, his poverty was made worse by his insistence on "bearing" others' poverty, even when he did not have the means to bear others' financial

burdens, much less the means to bear his own.

The result of this twofold cause of poverty is, as David puts it, persecution. Particularly striking in this passage is the relation between feeling and persecution. In the same breath, David mentions several different feelings: cheerfulness, sorrow, fear. Each of these feelings emerge out of the powerlessness that extends from David's persecution. It is as if, in the absence of any power to do anything to reverse his fortune, all that David is actually capable of doing is cultivating feeling. The problem with the feelings of this passage is, however, that neither fear, sorrow, nor cheerfulness are productive for David. Fear simply paralyzes him. Despair makes him feel as though he is in chains. His attempt at cheerfulness is doomed to fail, because he cannot truly find anything to be cheerful about.

The recognition of the failure of the charitable spirit represents for David the end of pleasure. And what response can there be to a recognition of the ending of pleasure other than melancholy? David here must learn how to sublimate his gloom, how to reanimate this loss of personal pleasure into a promise of a future pleasure, such that he can allow loss to shape his entire psyche on his deathbed. David chooses in the novel's closing pages to cultivate a melancholy that echoes the Milton of *Il Penseroso* that we encountered in Chapter One of this dissertation, for he turns toward the promise of heaven and imagines heaven as a perfection of the kind of virtue that has been lost on earth.

Ennobling melancholy assumes the shape of an enlightened view of a heavenly utopia, but this heavenward turn also necessarily means that he must refuse to stop thinking about his losses, as heaven embodies the concept of the full restoration of loss. Feeling becomes a replacement for action: one feels because one cannot act. One imagines a restoration of loss that does not depend on the capacity to perform action to change the cultural tide against charity.

David says:

> But, with a strong and lively Hope in the Revelation God has been pleased to send us, and with a Heart swelling with Gratitude for that Revelation, I can carry my Prospect beyond the Grave; and, painful as my Distemper is, I can now sit in my Bed with a calm Resignation, to which my conquered Mind has been long a Stranger.—That I have lost *Camilla* is my Pleasure,—that she has gained by that Loss, softens every Pain. (342)

David's priorities move now to the heavenly prospects that lie "beyond the Grave" (342). According to this passage, we "gain" by our losses because our losses place us in view of heavenly rewards. Appropriately enough, this reward is the regaining of a lost object: Camilla waits for him in heaven. David appears in these final moments to turn his gaze toward the eternal and spiritual and away from the earthly. But he is in the same breath turning his attention to the material figure of Camilla, who has been reappropriated by the spiritual. His turn toward heaven indicates at the same time, then, a profound pessimism toward the emerging economic ideology centered around the trait of selfishness. If modern culture cannot help but take advantage of virtuous persons like himself, then perhaps heaven will typify a realm of pure justice and fairness. Heaven will erase the pain of loss by reversing it. The novel's Christian ending is a sign of David's insistence on turning losses into occasions or opportunities. Specifically, the promise of heaven becomes his occasion to use the language of Christian theology as an excuse to continue to dwell both on his losses and on the cultural conditions upon which those losses might be blamed.

This brand of melancholy holds out for heaven as the realization of a vision of fairness and justice that the modern world seems unable or unwilling to contain. In David's vision of heaven, one is judged and rewarded based not on what one does or does not own, but based on whether or not one is virtuous. The standards for success reside in the heart and not in things, just as David wished they would in the earthly realm at the beginning of the novel. David suffered in

this life because his virtue made him unable to thrive in a world of sharks. He was too good for it. In heaven, though, this goodness of heart will finally find its place. In this sense, the heavenly order is forward-thinking and egalitarian because it resists the commercial code, both of which judge one's worth based on what one owns. At the same time, however, by looking forward, David is also looking back to a pristine past that has been taken from him, leaving revolutionary thought as a vision that must gaze back at lost history in order to look ahead toward a hopeful utopia.

David's final vision thus seems to work as a corrective to the oppressions of modernity. And yet, the catch in placing one's dreams in the promise of an afterlife is that this kind of hope opens up the possibility for a code of virtue and equality but not necessarily the possibility for action. Writing about *David Simple*'s depiction of a potential utopia that in fact cannot happen in the modern world, James Kim has suggested that the novel provides us with a sense of melancholy in the Freudian sense, a melancholia that "…begets a fractured narrative of failure, ambivalence, and open-endedness, thereby keeping the revolutionary possibilities of loss indeterminately and indefinitely active."[50] Kim's reading begs a question, though: what to make of the relationship between melancholy and passivity? Heaven makes possible an order based in equality, but by holding out for heaven, David embraces a revolutionary vision that is lost to the present and that thus does not involve any call to action. Since David dwells so obsessively on loss in these closing pages, his vision revolves around an absence that cannot be retrieved by human effort, and which thus relies on passivity. Radical resistance to the new code of

[50] James Kim, "Mourning, Melancholia, and Modernity: Sentimental Irony and Downward Mobility in *David Simple*." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22.3 (Spring 2010): 477-502, 495. In this sense, Kim's reading of the novel applies Freud's version of melancholia, which has strictly to do with the loss of a love object, to present history instead. I share with Kim a commitment to the transferability of the object of Freudian melancholia. Melancholia need not be limited to the loss of a love object, but can also have past history as its object.

selfishness that has displaced the old code of charity reaches its culmination only here, at the very end, with death an absolute certainty. The promise of imminent death, coupled with the recognition of an irretrievably lost purity, is what allows one to be revolutionary. It is as if it is now too late to avoid pain and suffering, such that there is no risk in speaking against the oppressions of modernity. To articulate critique when one is on one's deathbed does not bring the threat of pain and suffering, because pain and suffering are already unavoidable. Resistance takes the form of death, since death both provides an escape hatch from a hopelessly corrupt world and also ushers one into a heavenly existence that, by its presence as a rewarder of heart-centered virtue, neutralizes the temporary pleasures of the corporeal realm.

Melancholy, in its fidelity to a lost vision of charity, is central to this vision. David chooses to indulge this melancholy vision of a happiness that has been taken from him because in reality this choice is the only choice he actually has the ability to make. He cannot choose to reverse the current social trend that bends toward selfishness. Selfishness has become institutionalized, in that it seems to be the dominant social drive and has swallowed up the cultural ideals of charity and generosity. The catch in David's heavenward turn is that melancholy allows for articulation but not action. David is afforded here the capacity to articulate a critique of the world, but its close relation to the idea of death as imminent completely divorces words from praxis. Melancholy assumes the shape of the looping of critique. It sets critique in an endless circle: the critique does not translate to anything other than itself. It cannot, in other words, translate to institutional change. In fact, by fixing his eyes toward the heavens, he does not even need to act to make this vision reality. Action is not only impossible; it is also completely unnecessary. The imperative to action belongs to God and God alone, because God is the only one responsible for rewarding good people who suffer with

eternal bliss. The spiritual turn brought about by melancholy makes possible a revolutionary ethos that is emptied of persons, because persons need not (and cannot) do anything to act on their revolutionary visions.

But this imagination, for all its positive qualities, also carries traces of narcissism reminiscent of the feudal lords' selfishness in Adam Smith's account in *Wealth of Nations.* In his last words, David seems to understand that he was living beyond his means for much of his life. He reveals something surprising about his own psyche here. He claims that his charitable practice made him—oddly enough—worldly. He claims to have enjoyed this kind of recklessly benevolent lifestyle, and says, "I thought myself at home in this World, and attached my Heart to the Enjoyment of it, as strongly, though in a different way, as does the Miser or Ambitious" (341). In other words, David's life was the reverse mirror image of interest lenders such as Nichols or treacherous wealth-seekers such as Daniel. Surprisingly, David admits here to his worldly impulses. He "thought [himself] at home in this World": but David's brand of worldliness manifested itself via generosity and charity and not as consumption. He shared worldly resources like money with those around him. Nichols and Daniel, on the other hand, consumed worldly resources. There are two brands of worldliness at work: David's worldliness is centered on sharing, but Nichols' and Daniel's worldliness is centered on consuming. While he resisted the brand of modernity that these figures typified, his life was also uncannily similar to theirs in that it was a pursuit of pleasure—albeit a virtuous pleasure.

One might even go so far as to say that David's admission to his worldliness and pursuit of pleasure places him on a similar track of selfishness as his enemies. In one sense, he is nothing like Adam Smith's feudal lords who want to keep everything for themselves and share nothing with others. In another sense, though, he is exactly like them, in that his, like theirs, is a pursuit

of his own pleasure, if only a pleasure that is experienced vicariously through others. In relieving others of their burdens, David brought pleasure to his own psyche. As such, the failure of charity at large in the modern age also signals a failure of David's own narcissistic spirit. This kind of narcissism has no place in the modern world, it seems. The only narcissism that belongs in the world is the narcissism of commercialism and consumerism.

Fielding reinforces David's religiously inflected pessimism about the world in the novel's final lines, after David's death:

> But now will I draw the Veil, and if any of my Readers chuse to drag *David Simple* from the Grave, to struggle again in this World, and to reflect, every Day, on the Vanity of its utmost Enjoyments, they may use their own Imaginations, and fancy *David Simple* still bustling about on this Earth. But I chuse to think he is escaped from the Possibility of falling into any future Afflictions, and that neither the Malice of his pretended Friends, nor the Sufferings of his real ones, can ever again rend and torment his honest Heart. (342)

Fielding's final turn in the novel is, like David's final words, a turn toward heaven as a restorer of losses, and it is also a conscious turn away from the corruption of the world.[51] She is asking her readers to think of David as a heavenly creature instead of an earthly one, to imagine him as living in a perfect world that has erased all of the losses that he suffered in his life. Crucially, though, in choosing to close her novel with a direct address to her readers, Fielding is admitting that the nature of escape that death provides is more than simply an escape. It is in fact the means by which the escapee communicates with the living. David's accumulated losses and his subsequent departure from this world are meant to serve as an example to the reader of both the wickedness of the world and the relief of heaven from suffering. Fielding presents David's

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[51] David Brewer has suggested in *The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2005) that eighteenth-century readers were particularly invested in imagining futures for literary characters beyond the bounds of their original narratives (2 and throughout). Fielding's plea to her readers may be a preemptive response to the kind of imaginative phenomenon that Brewer describes.

escape from the world as a means by which David operates as an active witness to the shortcomings of modern society. His responses to losses and his eventual death transform him into a receptacle into which Fielding pours her own pessimism about the modern age. As the embodiment of loss itself, David becomes a corpse that Fielding might reanimate in the service of political critique. He becomes a vessel for Fielding's political ideology, and his physical absence from the world is transformed into his abstract presence in the world as an example of virtue and charity on the one hand, and of the ramifications of the evil of others on the other hand. David becomes an exemplar of the promises of heavenly fulfillment of personal virtue precisely because he passively waits for the relief that death will surely bring him. In presenting us with an image of David being dragged from the grave, Fielding admits to us that one never moves on from loss. One simply finds different ways to talk about it.

The deathly sentimentalism of *David Simple*'s ending bonds David, Cynthia, and even the reader in shared despair over loss, proving that bonds might emerge from typically negative sentiments just as easily as they do from positive ones. Sentiment, when it is inflected by death and melancholy, works in two directions. It offers up critique but also outlines the limits of critique, as critique resides in the passive expectation of death. In his important account of the political valences of sentimentalism, Markman Ellis has commented in a similar fashion that sentimentalism both enables and obscures political critique. Writing about sentimental critiques of the eighteenth-century slave trade, Ellis suggests that sentimentalism allows for the description of suffering but cannot offer up any real calls for change, since "Sentimentalist writers found it difficult to cross certain limits in their portrayal of the victims of social and economic change without endangering the entire system of values by which their world was

ordered, and this they were disinclined to do."[52] In other words, sentimental writers could not be too critical because to do so would upset the apple cart in uncomfortable ways. Ellis thus depicts a version of sentimentalism that approaches critique but never arrives at it. By looking at *David Simple*'s sentimental mourning of the loss of charity, we see that sentiment does indeed arrive at critique but sees the difficulty of transforming critique into something that would resemble praxis, precisely because sentimental critique is inseparable from the moment of one's death.

In *The Man of Feeling* as well, melancholy and loss enable a revolutionary vision of equality that cannot actually be seen through to fruition. Published in 1771, eighteen years after Fielding's *Volume the Last*, Mackenzie's novel bears witness to the imminent death of the aristocracy more urgently than Fielding's novel does, and struggles to articulate the proper way to mourn the inevitable passing of the ancient aristocratic code. Where Fielding's novel depicts David behaving benevolently even when he does not have the means to do so, Mackenzie's depicts an actual aristocrat whose charitable and virtuous impulses seem to have no place in modernity. That is, where Fielding only uses language of charity and virtue that might be associated with the aristocracy and thus does not directly address the role of the aristocracy as such in eighteenth-century British culture, Mackenzie directly confronts the problem of the aristocracy's relevance in an emerging commercial society. The loss of the distinctly aristocratic code of virtue perpetuates Mackenzie's model of heavenbound melancholy.

III. Aristocracy in Crisis: *The Man of Feeling*

In the penultimate chapter of Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, the novel's narrator visits the room where Harley has died to look upon his lifeless body. The narrator's

[52] Ellis, 86.

description of his feelings upon seeing this sight captures Mackenzie's version of melancholy. "I looked earnestly in [Harley's] face," the narrator writes. "[H]is eye was closed, his lip pale and motionless. There is an enthusiasm in sorrow that forgets impossibility; I wondered that it was so. The sight drew a prayer from my heart; it was the voice of frailty and of man! the confusion of my mind began to subside into thought; I had time to weep!"[53] The narrator does not specify exactly what impossibility his sorrow over Harley's death allows him to forget. One can only guess. In this section, however, I suggest that *The Man of Feeling* deploys deathly sentimentalism so as to frame a relationship between melancholy, loss, and the forgetting of impossibility.

Melancholy allows one to dwell for so long with the lost object that one actually sees losses as reversible—even if they are not. Specifically, the sentiment advanced by the novel's conclusion is best described as melancholy, and signifies an attempt to forget the impossibility of a resurgence of the ideal of aristocratic charity. It is only via death that sentiment here transforms itself into politically conscious critique. Even more so than *David Simple*, the political critique of *The Man of Feeling* reveals the novel's protagonist to be deeply invested in the world that he leaves behind in death, even as this world has no place for him. As his world shrinks (he can only share sentiment with those who surround his deathbed), its shrinking also becomes an occasion for him to imagine the restoration of the entire world. Moreover, this brand of deathly sentimentalism depicts the formation of affective bonds between persons that, as in *David Simple*, sees passivity as, paradoxically, the most politically revolutionary act. In the face of death, all that is left to do is talk. *The Man of Feeling* presents this heavenward turn as a critique

[53] Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, 1771, ed. Laura Mandell (New York: Pearson, 2006), 205. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

of the modern world, and the heavenward turn allows for one to imagine the possibility for a restoration of the code of charity that might occur without any effort on the part of the subject. God, not the human subject, will be the one responsible for this restoration. Unlike *David Simple*, however, Mackenzie's novel specifically ties the possibility of egalitarian vision to the aristocracy. It is only via aristocratic ideology, the novel indicates, that any cultural return to charity—and hence also any cultural return to virtue writ large—can occur.

The Man of Feeling was wildly popular upon its publication in 1771. As Janet Todd notes, its initial success was followed several decades after its publication by mockery and ridicule,[54] perhaps because the expressions of emotion came with such frequency that they may have appeared to be not entirely genuine. Even if the novel were mocked in the years following its publication, it has become an important text in recent years for critics of the genre of the eighteenth-century sentimental novel. Many of these readings have as their implicit concern the relationship of the prototypical "man of feeling" to the outside world, whether that outside world is framed in terms of sociability, imperialism, or commercialism. Critics such as Vivasvan Soni and G.J. Barker-Benfield have performed readings of the novel that aim to show the link between sentimental literature and social discourses of sympathy for the other.[55] Lynn Festa suggests that the novel is representative of the relation between sentimentalism and eighteenth-century discourses of imperialism.[56] And in one of the more influential twentieth-century critical accounts of eighteenth-century sentimentalism, John C. Mullan argues that the novel articulates an impassable divide between the sentimental hero and politics. The "world" stands opposed to

[54] Todd, 3.
[55] Soni, 299-304; Barker-Benfield, 143-44.
[56] Festa, 62-64.

"feeling" in Mullan's analysis.[57] The feelings of the virtuous sentimental subject are not necessarily politically inflected, and they do not aim at producing political change in the world.[58]

Mullan's account remains important and central to more recent critical conversations about Mackenzie. In Soni's account of sentimentalism, for instance, sentiment is less a tool for speaking out against the conditions of the modern world than it is a way of forming a communion with others. When one tells others of one's suffering or when one hears tales of the suffering of others, one utilizes sentiment merely to fellowship with others and not to critique the world as a whole.[59] However, as we shall see, *The Man of Feeling* is too invested in the idea of commenting on social politics to be able to follow through on the ideal of total separation from the world. Instead, the novel invokes melancholy as a way of expressing despair over the practices of the modern world and of imagining a rediscovery of the lost visions of aristocratic virtue—even if that rediscovery is not fully representable. Through a death-inflected sentiment, characters resist the world through speech if not through action, and this resistance—produced by an awareness of mortality—allows characters to bond with one another.

The Man of Feeling tells the tale of young Harley, a member of a once-wealthy and powerful aristocratic family. Hearing that he might increase his family's fortune by acquiring a lease for some land adjacent to his own, he sets out for London to attempt to secure the lease. Along the way, he visits Bedlam, is scammed out of the lease by a corrupt gauger, and reunites

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[57] Mullan, 121.

[58] Mullan, 120-21. G.J. Barker-Benfield gives an account that challenges Mullan's. Barker-Benfield suggests that Mackenzie is more interested in using the cultivation of sensitive feeling as a means by which merchants and businessman might become more ethical and sympathetic in their dealings (144-48). Sentiment makes for better modes of commerce in Barker-Benfield's account. It does not necessarily separate one from the world.

[59] Soni, 320-21. Of *The Man of Feeling*, for instance, Soni writes that, "…sympathy takes one out of oneself and places one in the situation of the other. The test by adversity is precisely the test of one's ability to endure suffering for the sake of a sympathetic communion that no longer has happiness in view" (321).

with his old childhood friend, Old Edwards who has lost his entire family. Harley eventually returns home to find that his friend, Miss Walton, whom he loves even though he has never expressed his affection to her, is betrothed to be married to Harry Benson, who comes from a rich family. Even though Miss Walton's betrothal is broken off, Harley still cannot express his love for her and dies of an unspecified illness in the novel's final pages.

In a near-mirror image of David Simple, Harley's unflagging virtue is represented both as a strength and weakness throughout the novel. It allows him to act benevolently, but it also reinforces his naïvete about the attempts of others who exploit him by taking advantage of his impulse toward sympathy. As such, it appears that the novel is a critique of the ambitious, who will stop at nothing to achieve wealth and status. As they make their way up the social ladder, they leave virtuous subjects such as Harley in their wake as collateral damage. As Gerald Newman notes, the 1760s began to signal a power shift in England from the aristocracy to what he refers to as the "'new' men,"[60] specifically traders, bankers, and financiers.[61] Mackenzie seizes on this development by implying that the survival of true virtue depends upon the survival not of the "new men," but of the aristocracy. For Mackenzie, the rise of ambition seems to produce the death of true virtue.

The novel is thus not simply a parable about the fall of virtue itself, but about the fall of virtue as a specifically aristocratic code. In the aristocratic tradition, the novel proposes, virtue is communicated to others through benevolence and charity. To this end, the specter hanging over the novel is one Edward Coke, whose *Institutes of the Lawes of England* (1628-1644) had a

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[60] Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740-1830* (New York: St. Martin's, 1987), 29.

[61] Newman writes that the French aristocracy was facing similar challenges during the same time period (29). He also suggests that the struggles of the aristocracy were perhaps a cause of England's conflict with the American colonies, as the aristocratic elite saw America as a place to send their dependents (23-24).

profound impact on English understanding of feudal property law and feudal ethics. Early on in *The Man of Feeling*, Harley's guardians attempt to acquaint him during his youth with the history of English property law by assigning him to read Coke's *Institutes*, but Harley shows little interest (Mackenzie, 112). Coke thus represents an absent center in the novel's narrative. He hangs over the novel as a name that is important without having to be explained. Even though Harley does not care to read Coke, he acts like the kind of feudal lord that Coke describes anyway. It is as if he has internalized Coke's principles of the charitable aristocratic proprietor on his own, such that he does not actually need to learn what it means to be a charitable lord because it is already his natural inclination to behave like one.

The first volume of Coke's *Institutes* is often regarded as one of the most important legal treatises in English history, and its investment in the relationship between aristocracy and honor throws into relief the themes of Mackenzie's novel. The volume is at its core a straightforward commentary on Thomas de Littleton's *Treatise on Tenures* (1481?), and addresses the nuances of feudal property law. Hastings Lyon and Herman Block refer to Littleton's text as "the first important law book that is thoroughly English and wholly free from Roman influence."[62] While Littleton's treatise is a historical first according to Lyon and Block, Coke's text is for them the authoritative collection of the finer points of English law,[63] as it collates all of the diffuse ins and outs of English common law.[64] In his text, Coke explains that one can lawfully acquire land via

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[62] Hastings Lyon and Herman Block, *Edward Coke: Oracle of the Law* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1929), 343.
[63] Lyon and Block, 346.
[64] Despite the historical importance of the first volume of the *Institutes*, it was also, according to Catherine Drinker Bowen, an immensely difficult text to understand. Daniel Webster, for one, Bowen writes, claimed that he found it almost incomprehensible (Catherine Drinker Bowen, *The Lion and the Throne: The Life and Times of Sir Edward Coke, 1552-1634* [London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957], 443). The text's density may help to explain why Harley seems to have little interest in studying it.

either primogenitary descent or by purchase.[65] The lords who own the land often allow merchants to live on their property (2b), and the lords collect rent from their tenants (43b). The relationship between feoffor (the giver of the fief) and feoffee (receiver of the fief) is thus one of mutual trust. The feoffor trusts the feoffee to pay rent in a timely fashion, and the feoffee also trusts the feoffor to honor the terms of the lease. This relationship of trust reinforces the sense that the feoffor is a virtuous person, one who can be relied upon to give land and not to exploit the feoffee.

Moreover, the feudal lord acts in Coke's account as God's representative on earth. Coke writes that:

> For as the heavens are the habitation of Almightie God, so the earth hath he appointed as the suburbs of heaven to be the habitation of man: […] All the whole heavens are the Lord's, the earth hath he given to the children of men. Besides, every thing, as it serveth more immediately or more meerly for the food and use of man (as it shall be said hereafter), hath the precedent dignity before any other. And this doth the earth; for out of the earth commeth man's food, and bread that strengthens man's heart, *confirmat cor hominis*, and wine that gladdeth the heart of man, and oyle that makes him a cheerful countenance... (4a)

The relationship between God and the "children of men" is analogous to the relationship between feoffor and feoffee. As the feoffor give the feoffee land to hold, so too does God give the earth to humanity to care for in his name. The feoffor acts as the steward of the earth, and thus also as steward of the food, drink, and natural resources that come from the earth. In this sense, the feoffor, owning the land from which these resources come, is the earthly manifestation of God as provider.

The spiritually inflected language of ancient feudal property law and its relation to the

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[65] Edward Coke, *The First Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England: Or, a Commentary upon Littleton*, 1628 (Philadelphia: Robert H. Small, 1853), 2a. To this end, Coke also says that one can acquire land unlawfully: "For a disseisor, abator, intruder, usurper, *&c.* have a fee simple, but it is not a lawful fee. So as every man that hath a fee simple, hath it either by right or wrong" (2a). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

obligation of the feudal lord to act as a provider speaks to the central crisis of *The Man of Feeling*. Harley, who is, in Maureen Harkin's words, an "impoverished aristocrat,"[66] sees himself as a benevolent provider at the start of the novel, and while his outlook is not religious in the novel's opening, he sees himself by the end of the novel—as he nears his death—to be an emissary of heavenly virtue. The problem that he diagnoses in modern culture at the end of the novel is thus at once corporeal and spiritual. He sees ambitious public figures seeking wealth and glory, forgetting that the traits that should be valued the most in society are the ones that God values, i.e., sensitivity, charity, benevolence. And one of the ways in which he demonstrates his positive virtues is through his standing as an aristocrat. He sees himself as responsible for showing charity to others by sharing his land.

Ironically, though, Harley seems to have no interest in studying or understanding Coke. Even in the absence of his knowledge about Coke, however, he acts in the same charitable and virtuous manner that Coke's prototypical feudal lord might. One way of explaining Harley's ambiguous relationship to Coke's text would be to think of the *Institutes* as interested in two complementary but (importantly) not identical aspects of aristocratic ideology. Harley, as we shall see, eschews the first but embraces the second, which proves to be his tragic flaw. The first is the technical legal aspect of feudal property law. The second is the ethical aspect, by which the feudal lords have a moral obligation to care for and provide for those who live on their land. We might say that Harley is deeply invested in ancient property law, but only in its ethical aspect and not necessarily in its legal aspect. Harley has evacuated ancient property law of its technical and legal aspects and is instead focused solely on the kind of charity that feudal property law makes possible for members of the aristocracy. Of course, though, at least in the view of the novel, he

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[66] Maureen Harkin, "Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*: Embalming Sensibility." *ELH* 61.2 (1994): 317-40, 321.

needs the status and heritage of the aristocratic name in order to be able to practice charity toward others.[67]

The tragedy is that the charitable way of life to which Harley is so committed is dying off in favor of the selfishness of modern commercialism and consumerism. Arguing that *The Man of Feeling* is a story about "the passing of a way of life,"[68] Maureen Harkin says that "[Harley's] position is that of guardian of an older order, a benevolent semi-feudalism, complete with devoted retainers … and provision for incapacitated tenants."[69] Feudal lords are ethically responsible for the well-being of their tenants. The novel makes clear within its first few pages that, while Harley is a member of the old aristocratic guard, his family was once rich but is not anymore. Mackenzie explains that most of the neighborhood land now belongs to merchants and stewards, and that Harley's family, while still in possession of their estate, only brings in a meager £250 per year (108-9). Harley's birth conflicts with his current social status; his aristocratic heritage is at odds with his current dire financial state. At the end of the novel, after Harley has lost out on both the property he is pursuing and on his love for Miss Walton, his aunt laments to him that "now-a-days, it is money, not birth, that makes people respected; the more shame for the times" (187). If the aristocracy represents the value of birth, then the increasing power and influence of the middling sort represents the ascendance of the power of money. And this shift, for Harley's aunt, makes for a shameful modern world. If the novel is thus about "the

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[67] Of course, as I have noted earlier in this chapter, the view of the novel does not necessarily square with reality, as the eighteenth century saw charity as alive and well through the existence of public charitable institutions. This world, though, is not the world that *The Man of Feeling* represents. The world of the novel is a world in which commercialism operates as an evil that squashes the possibility of feudal charity.

[68] Harkin, 322.

[69] Harkin, 327.

passing of a way of life,"[70] Harley's melancholy at novel's end is an attempt to grasp this passing.

The cruelty of Harley's aunt's maxim about money and birth, however, is that it comes too late. For the first two-thirds or so of the narrative, Harley himself seems completely oblivious to this cultural shift. Harley does not realize, for instance, that he must "endeavour to get a lease of some crown-lands, which lay contiguous to his little paternal estate" (113) on his own. He instead has to have others tell him that the pursuance of the lease is his only truly feasible option for increasing his fortune. The fact that Harley cannot understand these things on his own reinforces his naïvete and shows the reader just how much of a misfit he is in the modern world.

Harley wants to continue to play the part of the charitable feudal lord, but has little sense of how to maintain his own status in order to be able also to continue to demonstrate charity and hospitality to others. When he leaves for the city, he is uncertain as to how exactly he is going to acquire these crown lands that lie contiguous to his family's property. Rather, he seems more connected to the people he is leaving than to the task he sets out to accomplish in London. As he leaves the estate, we are introduced to Peter, an orphan that Harley's father had taken in as a child, "sav[ing] him from being cast on the parish" (118). Harley walks out the door, and Mackenzie writes that:

> Harley shook him by the hand as he passed, smiling, as if he had said, 'I will not weep.' He sprung hastily into the chaise that waited for him; Peter folded up the step. 'My dear master, said he, (shaking the solitary lock that hung on either side of his head) I have been told as how London is a sad place.'—He was choked with the thought, and his benediction could not be heard:—but it shall be heard, honest Peter!—where these tears will add to its energy. (118)

In the pages leading up to this moment, as Harley prepares to leave to acquire the lease, the affect seems oddly flat. There are no moments of tenderness relating to the possibility of the

[70] Harkin, 322.

acquisition of property since, as we have seen, Harley seems uninterested in understanding the nuances of modern property law. Rather, he is seeking the lease on this land because it is just what one does. He is more interested in caring for others than he is in being a savvy negotiator of the politics of landed interest. Rather, Mackenzie saves up his affective energy for this moment, choosing to show us the deep emotional connection between an aristocratic benefactor and the subject of his charity instead of showing us any urge on Harley's part to pursue the crown lands. The reason for this storing up of feeling for this moment is that Harley's passion is for those for whom he is a benefactor; his passion is not for property. He is deeply enthusiastic about one half of aristocratic ideology (the half that relates to charitable practice) but indifferent about the other half (the half that relates to the maintaining of status by pursuing more land in addition to the land already owned).

The novel idealizes the country as a vision of innocence whose virtue the modern world threatens to eradicate. As April London puts it, the country is a sign of a pristine historical past, untarnished by whatever social problems the present might bring.[71] Immediately after saying goodbye to Peter, Harley also says goodbye to his property. The proximity of Harley's farewell to the orphan Peter with his farewell to the countryside signals a convergence between landed interest and benevolence. The second is a function of the first, but Harley does not fully realize the relationship between the two. Leaving the estate to head toward London, he stops to look

[71] April London, *Women and Property in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 67-68. For London, the obsession with a pure past represented by the country is in fact deeply misogynistic: "In *The Man of Feeling*, pastoral stands for the consolations of an exclusively male communion what can be discovered only by repressing awareness of present exigencies and focusing on the past. […] Mackenzie also identifies women with all that he finds suspect" (67). London reads Mackenzie to be saying that the pastoral past belonged solely to the figure of the virtuous male. In the present, though, the property on which the country stands is irreversibly intertwined in misogynistic fashion with Miss Walton, and hence also with Harley's unfulfilled desire for her.

back on his home, seeing it from an outside perspective for perhaps the first time in his life. "He walked out on the road," Mackenzie writes, "and gaining a little height, stood gazing on that quarter he had left. He looked for his wonted prospect, his fields, his woods, and his hills: they were lost in the distant clouds! He pencilled them on the clouds, and bade them farewell with a sigh!" (118). Mackenzie's equating of Harley's home with the "distant clouds" gives the impression that the country signifies the kind of heaven that Harley will eagerly welcome at the end of *The Man of Feeling*. The country signifies beauty and innocence. The difference between David and Harley is that Harley willingly leaves his own heaven out of necessity in order to save his relation to it. David can only imagine heaven on his deathbed.[72]

The irony of this passage, however, is that Harley misreads the landscape as immune to politics when in fact it has the politics of both past and present "pencilled" onto it. When Harley looks back on the landscape he has left, he does not think he sees a landscape implicated in the politics of the city. He thinks he sees pure innocence. The irony, however, is that this vision of the countryside is in fact thoroughly politicized. In the modern world, the city is the place where country affairs are settled, and its danger is that it is populated by selfish figures such as the corrupt gauger who eventually takes the land out from under Harley's feet. But Harley thinks he

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[72] In this sense, Harley becomes willfully vagrant. For a discussion of the ways in which the motifs of vagrancy and walking carries over into the Romantic period, see Celeste Langan, *Romantic Vagrancy: Wordsworth and the Simulation of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995). For Langan, walking itself is a form of freedom for the Romantics and is not necessarily teleological. Langan writes that:

> For most of us, the freedom to go and to return would seem to suggest an intention relative to origin and destination: I am here, I wish to go there as a consequence of some interest or antipathy; if I am allowed to pursue my project, I am free. In the Romantic *patois*, coming and going becomes, *in itself*, the pure form of freedom, an absolute unmarked by origin and destination, by interest or antipathy. (20-21)

One might say that Harley's journey to the city represents a similar anti-teleological impulse. He does not seem to have any sense where he is going or why he is leaving. He is completely decontextualized from the circumstance.

is looking at an idealized vision of an innocent country without realizing that this innocence—associated with the benevolence of aristocratic ideology—is in danger of dying off in favor of what the novel represents as the selfish tendencies of the city. He is not merely bidding his home "farewell with a sigh"; he might also be bidding the aristocratic past "farewell with a sigh," even though he does not yet realize it. There is a disjunction between Harley's apolitical worldview and his fully political reality that he refuses to acknowledge.

This disjunction between apolitical worldview and political reality leads Harley to think of charity as itself not dependent upon its monetary value. In one of the more famous episodes in the novel, which comes shortly after his departure from London, after failing to secure the lease, Harley comes across Old Edwards, a former inhabitant of Harley's childhood neighborhood who, after a run of bad luck, has been left to wander the country alone. Edwards tells Harley that he had once lived on a farm in South-hill, but that the squire to whom he paid rent would not renew the lease, "because, he said, he did not chuse to have any farm under £300 a year value on his estate" (172). A number of other tragic events involving his being impressed into military service in place of his son have left Old Edwards without a place to live. The novel clearly sets up this nameless squire as an example of a bad modern proprietor, someone more interested in monetary value than in good will and generosity. Old Edwards saw the farm in a way completely divorced from its monetary value: it was merely a place to live, and for that reason it was necessary to his and his family's well-being.

Harley similarly thinks of land as detached from its exchange value: for Harley, land is an outlet for his own charitable behavior toward Edwards. Harley convinces Edwards to accompany him on the rest of his journey home, and upon returning home, he tells Edwards that, "'I was thinking of you […] and your children: I learned last night that a small farm of mine in the

neighbourhood is now vacant: if you will occupy it I shall gain a good neighbor and be able in some measure to repay the notice you took of me when a boy; and as the furniture of the house is mine, it will be so much trouble saved'" (182). If we set Harley's remarks next to the sentiments of the squire who declined to renew Edwards' lease so many years earlier, we begin to see a difference emerging between charity on the one hand (typified by Harley) and political interest on the other (as exemplified by the squire). The squire's obsession with the monetary value of his leases prevents him from being able to show kindness toward Edwards. Harley's remarks carry no trace of any interest whatsoever in money or exchange value. Harley is thinking of Edwards and his children rather than of money. This speaks to the harsh fact that, in the squire's case, money takes the place of people. He could not care for people because he cared too much for money. For Harley, the terms are reversed. He does not really care about money; instead, he cares about the well-being of people. This disjunction between sympathy and monetary interest typifies Harley's version of virtuous aristocracy. The best types of aristocrats are the ones who look at the land on their estates and see people rather than monetary value. Land becomes a means by which one practices generosity. It is merely something to share with those who might need it.

As pleasant as this vision might sound, though, the novel also makes it clear that Harley's way of seeing his own privilege as a means for showing unconditional and unselfish kindness toward others is not really the way of the future. Harley's virtuous instincts are instead part of a lost way of life. They are dinosaurs to the modern world. As examples of a modern trend, Edwards' squire has little patience for benevolence and the gauger who pulls the crown lands out from under Harley's feet is interested in his own financial prospects instead of in the well-being of others. Indeed, before either of these episodes, Mackenzie forecasts the pervasiveness of

cultural vanity and selfishness, providing a sense of the terms that are replacing Harley's old-guard brand of aristocratic charity. Upon arriving in London, Harley walks toward Grosvenor Square:

> [H]e began to ruminate on the folly of mankind, who affixed those ideas of superiority to riches, which reduced the minds of men, by nature equal with the more fortunate, to that sort of servility which he felt in his own. By the time he had reached the Square, and was walking along the pavement which led to the baronet's, he had brought his reasoning on the subject to such a point, that the conclusion, by every rule of logic, should have led him to a thorough indifference in his approaches to a fellow-mortal, whether that fellow-mortal was possessed of six, or six thousand pounds a year. (122)

Whereas others in the world are interested in bringing money in, Harley is interested in approaching the category of the person apart from any relation to money. Seen from this angle, Harley's naïvete about politics and property law is more than mere ignorance. What might seem like naïvete from one perspective is in fact a sign of virtue. It is just that this kind of charitable virtue is so clearly out of place in a modern setting like Grosvenor Square that it looks like foolishness to the rest of the world. His vision is one of equality. Considering that this endorsement of equality proceeds from the mouth of an aristocrat, it seems that for Mackenzie, egalitarian politics and aristocratic politics are meant to go hand-in-hand. Virtuous aristocrats care for everyone equally and do not look down on others. Instead, they seek to care for others.

Whether it is foolishness on Harley's part or not, this instance, coupled with the others I have mentioned, is testimony to the fact that, in the world of the novel, the charitable code is dying. As the charitable code suffers at the hands of modernity, so too does Harley, revealing just how deeply Harley's body and fate are linked to the code that he practices. Most obviously, he loses the lease to the corrupt gauger. When Miss Walton becomes betrothed to Sir Harry Benson, prompting his aunt's declaration that "now-a-days it is money, not birth, that makes people respected" (187), Harley finds himself overcome by despair. He pens a pastoral by the

title of *Lavinia*, of which April London has noted lingering misogynist undertones.[73] In this pastoral, Harley yearns for the leisurely innocence of the past and worries that it has been lost forever. To this end, London suggests, the pastoral form becomes a mode of critiquing the present, even though the beliefs it forwards are ideologically regressive.[74] Keeping in mind, then, London's claim that the pastoral is a mode of political critique (however vexed and unacceptably misogynistic its critique might be) in *The Man of Feeling*, I would suggest that, while this pastoral is about unfulfilled romantic love, one might also read this despair as a general sorrow over the fact that, as Harley's aunt puts it, money and not birth greases the social wheels. After all, if the world were run by the aristocratic tradition of birth, Harley would not have had to leave the village and thus would not have had to leave Miss Walton to be courted by Benson in the first place. The misogyny of the *Lavinia* pastoral of course problematically assumes that Lavinia is an object to be acquired, but its tone of lost love also becomes the occasion for Harley's aunt's commentary on birth and money.

All of these misfortunes begin to alienate Harley more and more from the world, even as his suffering increases. Finally, Harley finds himself near death. Miss Walton and the narrator come to visit him on his deathbed, and Harley launches into a lengthy reflection on modernity:

> There is a certain dignity in retiring from life at a time, when the infirmities of age have not sapped our faculties. This world, my dear Charles, was a scene in which I never much delighted. I was not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the dissipation of the gay: a thousand things occurred where I blushed for the impropriety of my conduct when I thought on the world, though my reason told me I should have blushed to have done otherwise.—It was a scene of dissimulation, of restraint, of disappointment. I leave it to enter on that state, which I have learned to believe, is replete with the genuine happiness

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[73] London, 69-70. London points to the line from Harley's pastoral that reads, "Perhaps, when she smil'd upon all,/ I have thought that she smil'd upon me" (Mackenzie 193; qtd. in London 70). London contends that lines such as this from the pastoral indicate that Harley misogynistically sees Miss Walton as duplicitous, and that the pastoral thus sees true bliss as a state that can only exist in the absence of women (70).

[74] London, 70-71.

> attendant upon virtue. I look back on the tenor of my life, with the consciousness of few great offenses to account for. There are blemishes, I confess, which deform in some degree the picture. But I know the benignity of the Supreme Being, and rejoice at the thoughts of its exertion in my favor. My mind expands at the thought I shall enter into the society of the blessed, with the simplicity of children. (202)

The tone of this monologue is a mixture of gloom and relief: gloom at suffering, but relief at the possibility of leaving it behind. His gloom is an imagination of a restoration of loss, of "enter[ing] into the society of the blessed."[75] It appears that Harley has realized too late that he is a complete misfit in the earthly realm, and that despite his best efforts he will never be anything other than a misfit. This passage seems to admit the death of aristocracy and the failure of an earthly politics of virtue and charity.

These reflections also seem on their face, like other moments in the novel, to be thoroughly apolitical. Harley appears to be eschewing politics and instead concentrating his attention on heavenly redemption. Seeming, though, is not necessarily the same as being. For as Harley's reflections continue, one notices that he seems far from uninterested in the world that he is leaving, perhaps because the world he leaves is one inflected by loss, and loss is the very condition of his imaginative thought:

> There are some remembrances […] which rise involuntary on my heart, and make me almost wish to live. I have been blessed with a few friends, who redeem my opinion of mankind. I recollect, with the tenderest emotion, the scenes of pleasure I have passed among them; but we shall meet again, my friend, never to be separated. There are some feelings which perhaps are too tender to be suffered by the world. The world is in general

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[75] In this sense, Harley's melancholy might be termed specifically as religious melancholy, even though it departs from many accounts of religious melancholy in the century. As Jeremy Schmidt points out, much religious melancholy involves a feeling of gloom over one's own depravity (Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul* [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007], 12); Harley's by contrast is gloom over the depravity of the world around him. Some of the more notable accounts of religious melancholy (at least in the sense that Schmidt describes it) include William Wishwell's *A Cure for Melancholy* (London: 1777) and Hannah Allen's *A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings with that Choice Christian Mrs. Hannah Allen* (London: 1683). The concept of melancholy over one's own sinfulness also famously frames John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (London: 1678).

> selfish, interested, and unthinking, and throws the imputation of romance or melancholy on every temper more susceptible than its own. I cannot think but in those regions which I contemplate, if there is any thing of mortality left about us, that these feelings will subsist;—they are called,—perhaps they are—weaknesses here;—but there may be some better modifications of them in heaven, which may deserve the name of virtues. (203)

Harley's involuntary remembrances exemplify the definition of melancholy as a mode of dwelling interminably with loss. His recollections render immediately present to his vision that which is either already absent or soon to be so. By remembering the past, he is thrusting himself forward into the future, in which past is reborn and made more perfect. That is, by thinking on the possibilities available to him after his own death, he is able to transform death into a reimagining of life rather than thinking of it as the ultimate loss. Gazing on death gives him an excuse to continue dwelling on loss in non-pathological terms. Harley's pessimism toward the world echoes Robert Burton's own formulation of religious melancholy, which is sober and even pleasurable in nature. It is characterized by a despair over the extent to which the world at large appears to be evil, corrupt, and ignorant of the goodness of God. Burton refers to this kind of religious melancholy as *ecstasis*, or ecstasy. "Ecstasis is a taste of future happiness," Burton writes, "by which we are united unto God, a divine melancholy, a spiritual wing, Bonaventure terms it, to lift us up to heaven."[76] Melancholy is an index by which we come to anticipate a "future happiness" in which the cultural loss of godliness will be reversed.[77]

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[76] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1927), 894.

[77] Earlier in his section on religious melancholy, Burton digresses on the evils of his age, and these evils are religiously inflected. Almost all of the world, Burton laments, is hostile to Christianity: "Divide the world into six parts, and one, or not so much, is Christians!" (876). Only in Europe, Burton laments, does Christianity still have a foothold, but even in Europe, evil is at work. Burton writes that, "That which remains is the Western Church with us in Europe, but so eclipsed with several schisms, heresies, and superstitions, that one knows not where to find it" (877). Christianity is itself divided among all sects of Catholics and Protestants, a sure sign that the devil is at work in the world. Burton, then, has no choice but to cultivate this divine

That Harley's fond "remembrances" of the virtues of friends like Miss Walton and the narrator come to him "involuntarily" suggests that his turn toward heaven is not necessarily also a full turning away from the material world. While the previously quoted first half of Harley's deathbed speech indicates a disinterest in the physical world, the involuntariness of his memories suggest that Harley's relationship to the world he is leaving is far more knotty. For Harley does not respond to these involuntary memories of the world by trying to erase them from his mind; rather, he indulges these memories and imagines them as forecasters of the kinds of pleasure to which he looks forward in heaven. He refuses to leave his losses behind. While the pleasurable memories of friends like Miss Walton and the narrator sustain Harley on his deathbed, they are also correctives to the unhappy memories of the parts of the world that are "selfish, interested, and unthinking" (203). Presumably, these descriptors apply to figures including the gauger and baronet, who knew how to exploit and navigate the ins and outs of modern property law better than Harley ever could have. What these figures see as weaknesses in Harley's character, heaven will see as virtues.

But not only will heaven see Harley's earthly weaknesses as virtues; heaven will also "modify" (203) those weaknesses into virtues. In other words, the vices of the world are necessary to the formation of Harley's virtue. Heaven is imagined in these final pages of the novel as a realm in which political hierarchies are overturned: the weak are considered strong and the foolish considered wise. Heaven is imagined as a political utopia in which the heart is a better judge of character than money is, and it is constructed out of the remains of the earthly world. That is, Harley's earthly life is a trial that builds his character and forms his virtue so that he will be fully prepared for success and happiness in the just heavenly realm. When walking

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melancholy, turning his attention to the beauties of God, which transcend all internal religious divisions.

through Grosvenor Square earlier in the novel, Harley idealized a world that "should have led him to a thorough indifference in his approaches to a fellow-mortal, whether that fellow-mortal was possessed of six, or six thousand pounds a year" (122). This politics would have privileged the heart over the attainment of material possessions. In other words, in looking forward to a heaven that privileges virtue over possessions, Harley tells us that the heavenly paradise toward which he looks forward is a recasting of the old aristocratic past. If this is a novel that grieves over the loss of the old charitable aristocratic code, then heaven restores that charitable aristocratic code. The imagination of heaven gives Harley an outlet through which he might re-access a lost past and forego having to move on from it. Considered this way, Harley's seemingly apolitical endorsements of aristocratic ideology are in fact rhetorical flourishes on the author's part. Aristocratic politics cures the modern politics of selfishness precisely because it does not look like a sinister ideology in the same way that modern commercial politics does.

As with David at the end of Fielding's novel, Harley's heaven-oriented melancholy affords him the luxury of not having to act to bring about equality. He must simply lie and wait for death; as a non-action, death is in fact the most revolutionary act, as it ushers in the new order of pure equality. Rather than being the ultimate loss, death restores all losses, and a preoccupation with death excuses Harley from having to expunge his losses from his consciousness. Thinking of the promise of death allows him to continue to think of his losses. Ironically in Harley's mind, the non-action of dying (as death is the end of any capacity to do anything) becomes the means by which utopia might be brought to fruition. Articulation of a future in which losses are restored becomes both the beginning and the end of political action. In this way, Harley's melancholy (like David's at the end of Fielding's novel) is simultaneously dynamic and static. Its dynamism lies in its impulse to move toward a better world by speaking

it, but this dynamism is also caught up in a slog by which melancholy leads to nothing more than the act of speaking itself. The melancholy that ends the novel transforms suffering into political awareness, even as this political awareness is accompanied by recognition that awareness signals an imaginative thought that comes as a substitute for action. In another context, Steven Goldsmith has written that *The Man of Feeling* presents emotion in a way that swings back and forth between sincerity and irony, such that it is always unclear whether the reader should trust Harley's emotional responses.[78] Goldsmith's question is whether feelings are "a reliable basis for action,"[79] but by looking further in the novel at its closing scenes of melancholy, we see a shift in the terms of Goldsmith's question. The end of the novel asks not whether feelings should guide action, but rather what kinds of actions are possible through the feeling of melancholy.

Harley's deathbed speech is nothing if not prolonged. In fact, he speaks more at the end of the novel than he does at any other point. This is not the kind of melancholy in which speech is arrested and in which the depressive cannot find the words to say, as Julia Kristeva describes.[80] Rather it is a melancholy where all one does is speak. Harley cannot stop talking because he cannot stop thinking about loss. The more that Harley speaks, the more he is able to give shape to and throw into relief his losses. He becomes better able to imagine his own relationship to loss. This is the most imaginative moment in the entire novel. Whereas before, Harley struggled simply to know how to relate to the world around him that, in all its commercial and bourgeois guises was radically unfamiliar to him, he now knows how to give shape to a world through language. But this language is also a language of deep struggle. While it can speak of a world, it

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[78] Steven Goldsmith, *Blake's Agitation: Criticism and the Emotions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2013), 275-77. Goldsmith's focus is on Harley's encounter with the prostitute Emily Atkins. Mackenzie, Goldsmith writes, leaves us unsure whether Harley's enthusiasm for assisting Atkins should be commended or not.
[79] Goldsmith, 275-76.
[80] Kristeva, 33.

cannot speak the world into existence. Only a radical passivity, figured in the reality of death, can do that. In this sense, agency does not reside in the ability to perform actions, but in the ability to imagine that which is not actionable. We have here an agency divorced from action, with the figure of imaginative clinging to loss providing a workaround for the problem of the oppressed figure's inability to act. In this sense, melancholy is the cure for inaction. It does not reverse the problem, but provides another mode of being—imagination—that compensates for such a problem.

Harley's melancholy becomes contagious, and by the end of the narrative, it becomes the means by which Harley shares with his friends. When he no longer has anything else to share with others, he instead shares his melancholy vision of a heavenly utopia. After his death, Harley is buried in an old churchyard and the narrator occasionally goes to sit by the grave. He writes that when he visits, "every nobler feeling rises within me! every beat of my heart awakens a virtue!—but it will make you hate the world—No; there is such an air of gentleness around, that I can hate nothing; but, as to the world—I pity the men of it" (206). The presence of his grave, like the presence of the epitaph at the end of the *Elegy*, communicates melancholy, imparting it from the dead to the living.

Harley's impulse to share with others thus continues on even after his death, and becomes a sign of his continued participation in the material world, even when it appears that he has no place in the world. Here, he speaks from beyond the grave to those still living in it. The presence of the grave leads the narrator to pity the world (or to hate it, depending on one's perspective) in the same tone with which Harley pitied it. While the narrator sits distant from the world, his separation from the world is only physical and not spiritual. For in sitting at a remove from the world, it seems that the world is in fact all that the narrator can even think about. The melancholy

contemplation of Harley's death leads the narrator to obsess over the world, if only from a distance. Harley himself becomes an object of loss for others, such that after indulging melancholy, Harley becomes the figure for the narrator's melancholy. The world took Harley from him; thus, in his melancholy, the narrator finds himself focusing on the world as evil. Much like with Harley's melancholy, though, the narrator's feeling of pity does not lead to action—in the narrator's mind, it does not need to. The narrator resists the selfishness of the world by passively pitying it, such that the articulation of pity stands as both the beginning and end of resistance.

Finally, Harley does not merely transmit feeling to the novel's narrator, but he also transmits melancholy to its readers. According to the story told in the frame narrative, the author of Harley's tale is anonymous. The narrator of the frame narrative merely acts as the collector of the anonymously written manuscript, even as some chapters are irretrievably lost. In a particularly striking moment just before the text of Harley's story begins, the collector reflects on the affect of this anonymous document:

> When I returned to town, I had leisure to peruse the acquisition I had made: I found it a bundle of little episodes, put together without art, and of no importance on the whole, with something of nature, and little else in them. I was a good deal affected with some very trifling passages in it; and had the name of a Marmontel, or a Richardson, been on the title-page—'tis odds that I should have wept: But
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> One is ashamed to be pleased with the works of one knows not whom. (107)

The novel's fragmentary form is a symptom of its anonymous authorship. Had Marmontel or Richardson authored the story, it never would have fallen into obscurity. Indeed, the collector seems intent on resisting whatever feeling might be transmitted to him from the text, precisely because the text is not authored by Marmontel or Richardson, and "One is ashamed to be pleased with the works of one knows not whom" (107). But despite his efforts to resist, he cannot help but be "a good deal affected" (107) with what he reads. The melancholy tenor of Harley's story

escapes the bounds of the page upon which it is anonymously written, such that the collector cannot help but find himself pulled in by its aura. It seems that the only thing preventing the collector from fully replicating the mood of pensive melancholy that the narrator of Harley's story performs at the end of the novel is the fact that the story comes to him without a name.

The emphasis on anonymity that the frame narrative provides stands as a reminder of the degree to which the novel's ethics are at their core inoperative. The text itself does nothing for years but collect dust and serve as gun wadding. Mackenzie's upholding of the old aristocratic code of charity has no effect until the collector comes across the pages. And even then, the collector does not do anything with the melancholy thoughts that the text inspires in him. Rather, he seems unable to know what to do at all, in part because he does not know to whom he should attribute this text, and thus also does not know how to account for the origins of this melancholy that the text inspires in him. The text awakens him to the gloom of tragedy, but it leads (at least within the bounds of the novel) nowhere. And in this way, the collector reflects the ways in which melancholy feeling allows for articulation of a social problem even if it does not allow for any further action besides the cultivation of feeling. Perhaps the "enthusiasm in sorrow that forgets impossibility" (205) at the end of the novel is an enthusiasm over the possibility that this melancholy dream of equality does not necessarily have to include a mandate for action.

IV: Agency, Action, Loss

In recent years, the field of eighteenth-century studies has witnessed a heightened interest in the relationship between agency and theories of action in eighteenth-century poetry, fiction, and philosophy, and such a building critical interest carries important implication for the question of whether melancholy heightens or detracts from agency in the sentimental novel. It is

with a meditation on the relation between such theories of action and melancholy that I close this chapter. A number of recent critical works from scholars such as Sandra Macpherson, Jonathan Kramnick, and Scott Paul Gordon have asked from various angles what kind of relationship exists between persons and the things that occur in the world surrounding them.[81] Are persons agents? Do their actions matter? Do their actions affect society? Do they affect anything? As we have seen in this chapter, an attention to melancholy allows for another vantage point from which to view these questions, an angle that is not empirical but abstracted, an angle that depends not upon embodiment as much as upon speech.

Kramnick, for one, looking at the relationship between actions and events in the eighteenth-century sentimental novel (specifically in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*), tells us that the sentimental novel presents us with the possibility of events that are not actions. Clarissa's death is something that happens, and yet it is not an action, as "Clarissa dies without any special causal role for her mind."[82] The mind simply allows the world to encroach upon it, and does not really act to affect the world. From a slightly different perspective, Macpherson's account asks whether, in the eighteenth-century novel, characters can be considered responsible for unfortunate or evil events that occur. For Macpherson, one can be innocent of having done anything wrong, and still be held culpable for what has occurred.[83] The most obvious example for Macpherson is, as for Kramnick, Richardson's Clarissa. Clarissa causes bad things to happen,

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[81] See Sandra Macpherson, *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009); Jonathan Kramnick, *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010); and Scott Paul Gordon, *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature, 1640-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).
[82] Kramnick, 229.
[83] Macpherson, 10-12.

Macpherson suggests, despite her intentions being the exact opposite.[84] She writes that, in the eighteenth-century realist novel, "who or what a 'person' is is worked out by way of her relationship to and responsibility for the action that engenders her."[85] Macpherson's claim has its classical roots in Aristotle's *Poetics*. For the Aristotle of the *Poetics*, Macpherson writes, characters exist merely to drive a plot forward (7-8).[86] Their interiority is of little or no consequence.

Kramnick's and Macpherson's respective works are emblematic of a critical interest in eighteenth-century materiality, and their applications of eighteenth-century materiality to the genre of the eighteenth-century sentimental novel have particular implications for a consideration of the role of the person. It seems for both that what persons can and cannot do has exclusively to do with the physical world immediately around them. For Kramnick, the outside world acts upon the person; for Macpherson, the person is just another object in the world, propelling the action forward, with no interiority. In both formulations, persons are more passive than active, existing at the whims of the larger plot. While Kramnick and Macpherson eloquently articulate the gulf that exists between persons and outside world, the readings of Fielding and

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[84] Macpherson, 12-14. Macpherson's suggestion about Clarissa is clearly disturbing and uncomfortable. She likewise acknowledges the deeply troubling implications of this claim. Her interest is more in the fact that Clarissa takes responsibility upon herself: "If Clarissa is the exemplary modern moral subject, […] it is because she is less a subject than a cause—because she accepts responsibility for a tragic plot that much as we might want to believe exceeds and is distinct from character, in fact, embodies it. Clarissa is the person who did those things" (14).

[85] Macpherson, 10.

[86] Macpherson, 7-8. Macpherson also points out here that the Aristotelian notion of plot over character goes against Ian Watt's famous work on the rise of the novel. For Watt, the rise of the novel depicts a universe where "the Aristotelian priority of plot over character has been wholly reversed" (Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* [London: Chatto and Windus, 1957], 280; qtd. in Macpherson, 7). For Macpherson's purposes, there is no reversal of the Aristotelian paradigm in the eighteenth-century realist novel. Plot is still more important than character, as characters have no interiority and are just agents that cause actions to happen.

Mackenzie that I have given in this chapter leads us to another set of questions: Can characters possess agency even in the absence of being able to perform actions? If so, what form does that agency take? Is it located primarily in the body or rather (as Kramnick and Macpherson do not in fact account for) in the mind? Fielding and Mackenzie—in accounts unlike those provided by Kramnick and Macpherson—present us with an immaterial and abstracted form of agency that emerges when material physical action in the wake of oppression is impossible. Where there is nothing left to do in the world itself, characters instead perform their melancholy as their agency. Melancholy manifests itself as an imagination of heavenly restoration. Imagination allows characters a form of immaterial power, even if the material circumstances seem to render them materially unable to exert their will on the world. Melancholy links the material with the immaterial: characters' attachment to a physical and material loss in the real world leads to an abstracted imagination of a not-yet fully representable better world (unrepresentable because it can only be articulated in the vaguest of terms).

In its tracing of a deathly sentimentalism, this chapter reveals that passivity is sometimes in fact a form of agency. Within the bounds of a deathly sentimentalism, passivity is the posture one must assume in order to develop one's imaginative capacities. When one's body can do nothing (because it is dying), melancholy sets up the mind as a performer of action, even if the imaginative actions of the mind might resist any instrumentalizing impulses. An attention to deathly sentimentalism teaches that doing nothing rather than something is sometimes the most powerful and enigmatic way of performing one's subjectivity.

Chapter 4: *Hamlet*'s Eighteenth-Century Afterlife and the Birth of Literary Criticism

> "We love, we almost revere the character of Hamlet; and grieve for his sufferings."
> —William Richardson, *A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters*

Through the first three chapters of "Melancholy's Wake," we have seen the ways in which eighteenth-century literary genres (in a tradition that, as I explored in Chapter One, dates back at least to Milton) deploy melancholy as a means for resisting the political and cultural institutions of the age. In the final turn of this dissertation, I posit that melancholy is not simply a tool for resisting cultural institutions but also for shaping them. In particular, melancholy becomes crucial to the development of the institution of literary criticism in ways that, as we will see in the coda to this dissertation, still haunt our current-day notions of criticism. In this chapter, I show how the birth of the discipline of literary criticism in the eighteenth century is shaped by its confrontation both with the feeling of melancholy and with the famous dispossessed Danish prince Hamlet. The challenges and possibilities opened up by a critical engagement with Hamlet's melancholy speak to the purposes of eighteenth-century literary criticism, and tell us something about the ways in which melancholy works on readers and audiences. If eighteenth-century criticism is tasked with the responsibility of understanding Hamlet's character, then an understanding of melancholy is crucial to an understanding of Hamlet, as Hamlet's melancholy seems to be the grounds for the totality of his being. Critics form a sympathy with the character of Hamlet and see Hamlet as a mirror to his readers and audiences, but such a mirroring effect only emerges out of Hamlet's isolation within the world of the play. Hamlet's melancholy appears to prevent him from acting, but this prevention in turn enables his character to inspire

creative critical thought outside of the world of the play. Hamlet's paralysis becomes the critics' generativeness.

Hamlet the character becomes for his eighteenth-century readers the ideal fictionalized embodiment of melancholy. There is perhaps no better example of melancholy as endless gloom than Hamlet, "inky cloak" and all. Drama places melancholy into narrative and, as I show in this chapter, it becomes the task of the literary critic in the eighteenth century to uncover a moral or cultural meaning behind that melancholy. Melancholy expressions and melancholy scenes carry an implicit call to be decoded, precisely because those in the world of the play are unable to decode them. In another context, Thomas Pfau has written that melancholy "has long puzzled those inquiring into its constitution"[1] because it appears as an inability to speak definitively of or to come to terms with loss. More than any other feeling, melancholy is difficult to represent, because it can be simultaneously stunting and inspiring, paralyzing and generative, and it is difficult to reconcile such opposing terms to one another. No other feeling is as epistemologically or interpretively complex as melancholy. Because of its seemingly opposing qualities, melancholy practically asks to be interpreted (more so than other feelings), but it also resists easy interpretation. But as Hamlet's melancholy appears puzzling in that it signifies his difficulty in knowing how to reconcile himself to the world in the wake of loss, it also shows the generative quality of such puzzlement. If melancholy generates nothing for Hamlet the character, it generates criticism and creative critical thought for *Hamlet*'s readers. Hamlet's isolation is in fact the sign of a form of cultural production. In becoming illegible to and isolated from the world of his play (his melancholy is a sign that he is too good for this world), he also

[1] Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 309. Similarly, Pfau writes that melancholy is "Born of an excess of knowledge that ultimately renders it incommensurable with *any* form of representation" (309).

paradoxically becomes legible to anyone outside of the play who reads criticism, in that the world of eighteenth-century readers and theatergoers understand his character in a way that those within the play do not. When audiences view or readers read *Hamlet*, they see virtue reflected back to them through the expression of melancholy, and in many cases, they identify with Hamlet's virtue, communicated via melancholy. Hamlet's melancholy might not produce anything definitive within the fictional world of the play (it appears as an inability to act), but out of such inaction, critics find melancholy to be productive of interpretive insight beyond the world of the play.

The task of excavation, of turning up the surface to see what lies beneath, describes both the task of criticism and the task of interpreting melancholy. As such, the burgeoning field of literary and dramatic criticism in the eighteenth century, upon which is placed the burden of the interpretation and exegesis of art, finds an apotheosis of its project in the task of interpreting melancholy. Melancholy is totalizing in its effect on character: it comes to pervade a character's entire life and set of desires. In Hamlet's case, melancholy is an isolating mechanism. He is gloomy for any number of reasons, but for eighteenth-century critics such as William Richardson, Henry Mackenzie, and others that we will encounter in this chapter, one of the reasons for Hamlet's melancholy is that there seems to be no virtue or goodness left in the world. The death of Old Hamlet also means the loss of morality. Hamlet is the only moral one left in his world, and his response to his moral isolation is melancholy. And his melancholy in turn looks like weakness to those around him. But his melancholy is also an invitation: it is an invitation for critics to inquire and speculate. Where everyone in the world of the play seems baffled by or uninterested in Hamlet's melancholy, critics simply cannot get enough of it. Where those in the world of the play see surface, the critics see only depth. The critics reveal themselves to be

readers of depth precisely by presenting themselves as able to do something that no fictional character in the world of the play is able to do: understand who Hamlet is.

The eighteenth-century critics that I read in this chapter are not as invested, however, in discovering why Hamlet is melancholy so much as they are interested in understanding why Hamlet's melancholy is important to the formation of character. In other words, their work on Hamlet's melancholy differs from the later work of critics such as T.S. Eliot or Douglas Trevor, who seek to unearth the reason(s) for Hamlet's melancholy. In his famous reading of the play, Eliot contends that *Hamlet* is deficient largely because Hamlet the character has no "objective correlative" for his melancholy.[2] In other words, his melancholy has no referent. There is no good reason why he should be as fed up with the world as he is.[3] Stephen Greenblatt would later approach this dilemma with a plot-centered answer. Through a form of "radical excision," Greenblatt argues, Shakespeare creates a mystery regarding a character's motivations: a mystery that may have no answer but that advances the plot and renders it entertaining and pleasing to the viewer.[4] Douglas Trevor associates Hamlet's melancholy with his being a scholar.[5] The more learned one is, the more skeptical one becomes of the world, leaving one vulnerable to gloom. Margreta de Grazia, arguing that *Hamlet* has become so familiar to readers that we miss what is most obvious about it, tells us that Hamlet is melancholy because he is literally dispossessed

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[2] T.S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems," 1920. *The Sacred Wood and Major Early Essays* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998), 55-59, 58.

[3] Marshall Grossman claims that Eliot's reading of *Hamlet* is not a suspicion of feeling itself but a dissatisfaction that such representation of feeling leaves readers feeling that the play lacks resolution: "What is pathological of Hamlet is not the feeling but its tenacious resistance to artistic catharsis, its refusal to suture completely the shadow cast by the ineffable reality of the material world" (Marshall Grossman, *The Story of All Things: Writing the Self in English Renaissance Narrative Poetry* [Durham: Duke UP, 1998], 261).

[4] Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: Norton, 2004), 323-24.

[5] Douglas Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 64-74.

from the throne of Denmark.[6] Harold Bloom points to Hamlet's constant references to the theater to make the claim that Hamlet's melancholy and anxiety is due to his recognition of himself as a "dramatist."[7] He is anxious about playing certain parts and playing them well because he is at his core of the theater, and such an obsession with simulation leads him to seem anxious, melancholy, or mad.[8] And in a particularly dark reading, Francis Barker argues that there is no reason at all for Hamlet's melancholy.[9] There is simply a void in his psyche. "At the centre of *Hamlet*, in the interior of his mystery," Barker writes, "there is, in short, nothing."[10] In essence, the recent critical tradition has been invested in the question of why Hamlet is melancholy.[11]

As I show in this chapter, however, such critical interest in the reason for Hamlet's melancholy is relatively new, as in the eighteenth century critics were more invested in the twinned notions of enjoying the display of Hamlet's melancholy and of deciding its significance. That is, the question of why Hamlet is melancholy is not of central import. Critics certainly had their ideas about the causes of Hamlet's melancholy, as we will see, but those ideas were secondary to other questions. Eighteenth-century critics also ask questions about the critical

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[6] Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet without Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 1 and throughout.
[7] Harold Bloom, *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* (New York: Riverhead, 2004), 11.
[8] Bloom points, for instance, to Hamlet's instructions to the players in 3.2 to make his point (11).
[9] Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1995), 37. In a similar move, Terry Eagleton that there is nothing beneath the surface of Hamlet's melancholy. The more that Hamlet refuses to act, the less of a psyche or a self he has (Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* [Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1986], 72).
[10] Barker, 37.
[11] For other important critical accounts of Hamlet and his melancholy, see, for instance, Linda Charnes, *Hamlet's Heirs: Shakespeare and the Politics of a New Millennium* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 238-72; Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin In Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 11-37; Julia Lupton and Kenneth Reinhard, *After Oedipus: Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993), 11-118; Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010), 25-76; and Drew Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* (New York: Fordham UP, 2013). 120-54.

significance of melancholy. What does Hamlet's melancholy produce? What does it symbolize? Is it a sign of Hamlet's virtue? How does it affect the character's relation to the world of the play itself?

The question of Shakespeare's eighteenth-century reception continues to interest modern readers, with a number of critics taking up the position that the eighteenth century's critical responses to Shakespearean works and characters show just how dynamic and universal Shakespeare's characters were. Shakespeare's characters, according to the critics of the eighteenth century, were intended to speak to all times and all places. According to Jack Lynch, for instance, Shakespeare gives us a true picture of human nature by writing characters that are profoundly realistic, such that, by the end of the eighteenth century, "rather than judging Shakespeare by his ability to depict human nature, critics had come to explore human nature by reading Shakespeare."[12] Through his characters, Shakespeare tells us exactly what humanity is like, and it is for this reason, Lynch says, that in the eighteenth century Shakespeare is the great master of depicting humanity.[13] Expounding on the notion of Shakespeare as a great communicator of the human condition, David Bevington writes that eighteenth-century critics such as Samuel Johnson view Shakespeare as a "great moralist."[14] Shakespeare, Bevington suggests, utilizes the mechanism of character to teach moral truths to his audiences.[15] And the best example of Shakespeare's didactic qualities, Bevington writes, is Hamlet. Hamlet teaches his readers and audiences how to behave. He is a moral exemplar. For Bevington, critics such as

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[12] Jack Lynch, "Criticism of Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Fiona Ritchie and Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 41-59, 42.
[13] Lynch, 54.
[14] David Bevington, *Murder Most Foul: Hamlet through the Ages* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 103.
[15] Bevington writes that eighteenth-century critical writing on Shakespeare reveals the period to be the "Age of Johnson" (103), while on stage the eighteenth century was the "Age of Garrick" (103).

William Richardson, Elizabeth Montagu, and Henry Mackenzie (each of whom we will encounter in this chapter) "feel it their duty to offer moral judgments of Hamlet according to the codes of decorum, propriety, and poetic justice."[16] Hamlet, it seems, according to Bevington, illuminates such codes of morality and decorum and make them easily transportable to audiences.[17] According to these accounts, Shakespeare seems to know just what the human condition is, and not only that, he knows how to communicate human nature to anyone who might read or view him.[18] Jean Marsden takes Shakespeare's relation to humanity a step further, referring to him as a sort of proto-populist. In the eighteenth century, Marsden writes, "Anybody and everybody could write criticism."[19] That is, Shakespeare's truths are so easily communicable that they can be understood or even appropriated to whatever ends writers and readers might see fit.[20]

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[16] Bevington, 104.

[17] See also Gefen Bar-On Santor, "Looking for 'Newtonian' Laws in Shakespeare: The Mystifying Case of the Character of Hamlet," in *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Sabor and Paul Yachnin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 151-64. Santor writes that, "[Editors of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century] rest their case for Shakespeare's superiority on his ability to apply his understanding of human nature to the creation of individual characters" (154). Shakespeare, in other words, fleshed out characters who were paragons of humanity at large.

[18] Such a view, as we shall see later in this chapter, is consistent with Samuel Johnson's view of Shakespeare in his famous *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765).

[19] Jean Marsden, *The Re-Imagined Text: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory* (Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1995), 105. Marsden argues that the act of Shakespearean appropriation in the eighteenth century reveals the importance of the original text even as it renders the original irrelevant, erasing it beneath new contexts and themes current to the eighteenth century (2-3). In a sense, the original text exists merely to be written over as if like a palimpsest. Eighteenth-century writers and critics could craft any meaning they might want out of Shakespeare's plays.

[20] In an account similar to Marsden's, Jonathan Bate explains that Shakespeare's eighteenth-century appropriation is a testament to the active—as opposed to passive—nature of critical reading. Shakespeare's language resonates beyond the immediate narrative of the play, and has applications for all times and for all ages. For Bate, the term "appropriation" is inherently political, and critics could appropriate Shakespeare in the service of advocating for greater political liberty (Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theater, Criticism, 1730-*

My account in this chapter of the eighteenth-century reception of Hamlet asks after these critical possibilities. Accounts such as Marsden's, Lynch's, and Bevington's view the reception of Shakespeare's literary works as liberating. They see Shakespeare's characters as critically generative. In this chapter, though, I demonstrate that the generative quality that the critics of the eighteenth century find so liberating also possesses a dark underbelly. The introduction of melancholy into the reception of Shakespeare's works—the reception of *Hamlet* in particular—reveals that Shakespeare becomes the poet of humanity precisely by isolating one human (Hamlet) from others. Melancholy reveals a tension in the notion that, as Jack Lynch puts it, Shakespeare is the "champion of humanity itself"[21] through his writing of characters who are a perfect representation of human nature. Loss allows Hamlet to become a symbol for virtue, but it also leaves him torn apart, unable to know what to do in or how to interact with the world of his own play. Hamlet can only become the perfect demonstration of human nature when he is utterly isolated and unable to perform any real action. Such paralysis is the condition of melancholy, but it compensates for the other condition of melancholy: its status as a sign of unflagging virtue that has been lost to the rest of the world. Virtue breaks Hamlet, but this breaking is the condition for criticism. In her immensely important recent account of character in the eighteenth century, Deidre Lynch writes that, in the late eighteenth century, Hamlet acquires an "inner selfhood,"[22] and that critics assigned him this selfhood by looking at Hamlet's surface actions and words as coded inscriptions of a bottomless depth of self. By looking to melancholy in this chapter, we

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1830 [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989], 5-7). See also Michael Dobson's *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992). Dobson also takes up—or "appropriates"—Bate's notion of appropriation in examining how eighteenth-century critics and playwrights adapt Shakespearean plays and themes to their own political ends, making Shakespeare into a commenter on contemporary historical moments.

[21] Lynch, 54.

[22] Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998), 137.

see, I claim, that Hamlet's selfhood is only constituted by his separation from the world around him, and only communicable to his future readers and audiences outside of the play when it leaves him stranded and alone, alien to his own present.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first sets up a link between the three terms that guide this chapter's line of thought—criticism, melancholy, and the play *Hamlet*—and shows how the emergence of the discipline of literary criticism in the eighteenth century makes interpretive promises for which the melancholy mood of *Hamlet* raises a knotty set of questions. The second section applies these questions to particular readings of the play by numerous eighteenth-century critics including Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Griffith, William Richardson, and Henry Mackenzie, among others. As many of these critics find themselves in awe of Hamlet's melancholy, they struggle to translate it from the world of the play to the world of the audience. They seek to transform melancholy, which seems like pure paralysis on first glance, into a positive and productive feeling. The concluding section of the chapter applies these same issues of translating feeling from play to audience to the act of viewing *Hamlet* on the stage. As critics transition from studying the printed page to studying the performances of David Garrick, for instance, they reveal that melancholy becomes legible via performance, such that melancholy becomes performative. It is both a performance of isolation (for Hamlet the character), but its performance by actors also becomes a performance of pure acting skill, such that the performance of melancholy becomes inseparable from technical expertise.

I. Criticism, Melancholy, *Hamlet*

Arguably the most famous character in Western literary history, Hamlet's fame persists both in the eighteenth century and in the present despite or perhaps because of the enigmatic quality of his psyche. Where, for critics such as Eliot and de Grazia, the issue is with knowing

Hamlet's psyche, the issue for the eighteenth century lies with knowing the nature of melancholy itself. Critics such as William Richardson, George Stubbes, and Henry Mackenzie do not doubt that Hamlet is melancholy, just as they show little interest in unearthing the cause of his melancholy. Rather, they are interested in understanding what melancholy itself actually does—what it does to Hamlet, what it does to *Hamlet*, how it acts upon the play's audiences and readers, and what it does to the institution of criticism itself. The critic seeks to understand melancholy and then to communicate it to readers. Melancholy presents a mystery to critics. As it lingers on Hamlet's mind, so too does it linger on critics' minds. But where it is isolating and stunting for Hamlet, it is nothing but generative to critics. It begs for exegesis. By looking to the specific ways that melancholy speaks to readers, we might begin to see a new narrative for the rise of professional criticism in the eighteenth century, a narrative in which criticism learns moral lessons from literary works but in the process also reveals that virtue and morality can sometimes be inoperative terms. Melancholy teaches critics that sometimes virtue and morality do not in fact lead to action—but this does not make virtue any less virtuous.

The eighteenth century signaled a major turn for the modernization of criticism. Eighteenth-century literary criticism might be described by terms such as "exegesis" and "explanation," but to define it more simply, criticism is the institutionalization of reading method. As Jonathan Kramnick puts it, literary criticism in the eighteenth century gives rise to what we now refer to as field-specific specialization.[23] In order to achieve the best and most detailed knowledge of a literary text, critics focus on a small subset of texts, striving for "slender

[23] Jonathan Kramnick, "Literary Criticism Among the Disciplines." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35.3 (Spring 2002): 343-60, 343-44.

depth."[24] Another way of thinking about criticism is to see it as the application of rules to the act of reading. Lee Morrissey argues that to see criticism as reading institutionalized is also to see it as reading politicized. Morrissey argues that criticism as an institution emerges in the eighteenth century not as an extension of a democratized public sphere, as Jürgen Habermas (or more recently, George Justice) would have it,[25] but as a way of trying to minimize dissension and argument in a post-civil war and post-Restoration age.[26] Criticism keeps the act of reading literature safe, in that it decreases the possibility of readers using literature to entertain politically disruptive ideas. Criticism accomplishes this minimization of politically dangerous reading practice by transforming the act of reading into a science.[27] Noting that the periodical writings of Addison and Steele represent in the typical narrative the beginning of literary criticism, Morrissey points to Addison's claim in *The Spectator* no. 291 that "it is in Criticism, as in all other Sciences and Speculations."[28] Morrissey writes that, "By aligning criticism with the

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[24] Kramnick, 346. Kramnick's argument is envisioned as an attempt to make the eighteenth-century discipline of criticism relevant to the current-day institution of criticism. By looking to the rise of the phenomenon of specialization in the eighteenth century, Kramnick writes, we might begin to ask ourselves what the object of modern criticism actually is. To this end, Kramnick closes his piece with a haunting question: "What is the object of literary study today and where is its place in the division of knowledge?" (357).

[25] In his book *The Manufacturers of Literature: Writing and the Literary Marketplace in Eighteenth-Century England* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2002), Justice remarks that literature emerges in the eighteenth century not as the product of myriad ideological clashes, but that it is a productive and active shaper of culture (18-23). In other words, literature for Justice is proactive and not reactive. See also Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT, 1989). Habermas claims that critics help to create a bourgeois culture that resists the aristocracy (1-13).

[26] Lee Morrissey, *The Constitution of Literature: Literacy, Democracy, and Early English Literary Criticism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008), 4-6.

[27] Importantly, though, Morrissey claims that, while eighteenth-century critics desired reading to look like a science, the process was anything but simple, as critics quarreled endlessly over what institutionalized reading should look like. There were many different opinions, Morrissey tells us, over what institutionalized reading should look like, and many of these opinions were at odds with one another (1-24 and throughout).

[28] Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 291, in *The Spectator, Vol. 4* (London: 1712), 161.

'sciences,' Addison follows Sprat's Restoration intervention in the treatment of words. After the intervention of the Royal Society, the question for anyone, such as literary critics, interested in linguistic issues will be in figuring out how to make the study of writing as organized as the study of the natural world claims to be."[29] Criticism is like a science because it adopts rules for the act of reading in an attempt to come up with a definitive, authoritative interpretation of a text. Similarly, Kramnick claims in his aforementioned piece on literary criticism in the eighteenth century that literary criticism in its infancy took a cue from science, as both were "categor[ies] of restricted knowledge."[30]

But what kinds of definitive, authoritative, indisputable readings were critics moving toward in the eighteenth century as they navigated this relatively new genre of writing? According to some, the institutions of critical reading and writing attempt to draw virtue out from the depths of literary work. For Jack Lynch, the critic attempts to delineate the markings of good and evil in a literary text. If "Shakespeare was the great master of character,"[31] these characters often contained a mixture of good and evil, such that the task of the critic is to tease out the lessons of these characters from a work.[32] By looking to literature in such a way, Lynch writes, critics learn to separate good works of literature from bad ones.[33] Criticism becomes an evaluative project. Similarly, John Osborne has pointed out that one of the "constants in dramatic criticism in Europe" during the eighteenth century is "the question of the moral or didactic

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[29] Morrissey, 88-89.
[30] Kramnick, 343.
[31] Lynch, 42.
[32] Ibid., 42. For Jean Marsden, this method of reading is especially popular with regard to Shakespeare, as "most discussions of Shakespeare [in the eighteenth century] incorporate the question of moral instruction" (48). One of the primary tasks of eighteenth-century critics, Marsden says, is to take the emotional appeal of Shakespeare's plays and mold a moral out of them (115). The critic mediates virtue between writer and audience.
[33] Lynch, 43.

function of drama."[34] For European critics such as George Lillo and Louis Sebastien Mercier, drama is not just entertaining, but also instructive.[35] As a corollary, then, criticism is at its core didactic and pedagogical; virtue is what it is meant to teach. If the text encodes virtuous meanings, criticism decodes those meanings. Criticism perfects the literary/dramatic text.

For Lynch and Osborne, characters teach readers and viewers how to avoid vice and how to pursue virtue, and by extension, literary criticism teaches how best to understand the lessons communicated by literary works. The formula, then, goes something as follows: literature and drama depict characters who communicate virtue; critics are tasked with the responsibility of using their own skills to uncover such displays of virtue; readers and audiences are then better equipped to appreciate and benefit from literary and dramatic works. This seems like a fairly clean and uncomplicated formula, and puts the critic in a position of power, as the critic's voice is perhaps even more important than the characters' voices: the audience learns virtue even more directly from the critic than from the fictional character. The critic is the decoder of a literary text's language. One of the tasks of this chapter is to show that, when the feeling of melancholy is involved (as virtue is often, as we will see, communicated via the feeling of melancholy, at least with regards to the reception of *Hamlet*)—this formula sometimes reveals what Deidre Lynch has referred to as a character's "inner selfhood"[36] to be deeply tortured and anguished. Absolute critical meaning comes at a steep cost. It isolates Hamlet from the world of the play so that the audience might feel sympathy for him and better understand him. It reveals Hamlet to be

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[34] John Osborne, "Drama, after 1740" in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Volume 4: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H.B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 184-209, 185.
[35] Lynch, 185, 204. In regards to Mercier, Osborne writes that, "sentiment is held to provide the basis for a committed social and political drama whose function is to intervene in public life on behalf of oppressed humanity" (204).
[36] Lynch, 137.

simultaneously strong and weak: strong in virtue but unable to act. The more that critical writing attempts to understand the workings of Hamlet's melancholy, the more that it finds itself having to confront paradoxes of meaning. But Hamlet's weakness and melancholy in turn produces critical vigor.[37] Critics find their own minds invigorated by the torture of Hamlet's mind. Such a view of criticism as simultaneously enthusiastic, creative, and paradoxical adds another layer of depth to our understanding of literary criticism in the eighteenth century. It is not merely an extension of objective science (even though some strains of it certainly are). It relies also on critics' and readers' deeply subjective and imaginative responses to what they read or view (in the case of this chapter, subjective and imaginative responses to Hamlet's melancholy). Hamlet's critics find themselves imagining possibilities for the importance of Hamlet's character and trying to understand how his loneliness might also make him the prime example of a universal human nature.

Shakespeare's powerful representations of human feeling energize numerous eighteenth-century critics, but the enthusiasm he inspires is often tempered in the eighteenth century with a level of caution. Some critics do not entirely trust Shakespeare's level of feeling, finding it manipulative and thinking that it might detract from the possibility of moral instruction. The most well-known of these cases is of course Samuel Johnson, who is famously ambivalent about Shakespeare and about Shakespearean feeling. His conflictedness about the virtues and drawbacks of Shakespeare's literary approach is analogous to and connected with the complexity of the representation of Hamlet's melancholy. Johnson's reading of Shakespeare shows us that the discourse of feeling in eighteenth-century critical circles is complex, and in beginning with

[37] For a view of the importance of weakness to literary thought, see Forest Pyle's discussion of Keats in *Art's Undoing: In the Wake of a Radical Aestheticism* (New York: Fordham UP, 2013), 67-104. For Pyle, Keats displays a weakness in that he subjects himself to literature, showing that literature reads the subject as much as the subject reads literature.

Johnson, I show a critical discourse of feeling that many other critics of *Hamlet*, from Elizabeth Montagu to William Richardson, set to work against. Johnson is the foil for many of the protagonists of this chapter.

Does feeling in fact have a virtuous register? This question haunts Johnson and animates the bulk of the present chapter. For Johnson, Shakespeare is exceptional because he possesses a unique talent for communicating the emotions of his characters to his audience, but this exceptionality is tempered by the fear that he seems at times to have no particular moral lesson to communicate through his depiction of feeling. For Johnson, Shakespeare was more than simply a writer; he was a hypnotist. He writes that:

> *Shakespeare*'s mode of composition is […] an interchange of seriousness and merriment, by which the mind is softened at one time and exhilarated at another. But whatever be his purpose, whether to gladden or depress, or to conduct the story without vehemence or emotion through tracts of easy and familiar dialogue, he never fails to attain his purpose; as he commands us, we laugh or mourn, or sit silent with quiet expectation, in tranquillity without indifference.[38]

For Johnson, authorial intent is inseparable from the meaning of the work. Shakespeare's intentions as an artist are expressed not merely as dialogue but as "commands," sometimes serious, sometimes merry. Shakespeare makes direct demands of the audience by having his characters speak to the audience's feelings. Any expression spoken by characters is a thinly veiled command to the audience to laugh, to mourn, to sit "in tranquillity without indifference." Shakespeare reaches through to the audience using character and dramatic language as a medium. Moreover, the purposes of Shakespeare are not necessarily to instruct. His purposes are instead to move the minds and to affect the behavior of his audience in the theater.

For Johnson, Shakespearean characters entrance the readers and audiences who encounter

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[38] Samuel Johnson, *Preface to Shakespeare*, 1765, in *Johnson on Shakespeare: Essays and Notes Selected and Set Forth with an Introduction*, ed. Walter Raleigh (London: Henry Frowde, 1908), 9-63, 18. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

them because they are universal figures; they are just like anyone else. Johnson writes that: "His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion. In the writing of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of *Shakespeare* it is commonly a species" (12). In other words, when audiences view Shakespeare's characters, they see a general depiction of humanity. They do not see extraordinary characters in extraordinary situations, but they see characters who are of the same type as them, both in passion and principle. Characters and feelings are universal.[39] The feelings he represents are feelings that anyone can recognize and identify with. We might infer from Johnson's claim that feeling pervades humanity with no regard with rank or status distinctions. This universality, Johnson writes, "is pursued with so much ease and simplicity, that it seems scarcely to claim the merit the claim of fiction, but to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation, and common occurrences" (13). In short, Shakespeare's plays seem more like real life than fictional narrative.

But within this "ease and simplicity," Johnson writes, lies a danger. Shakespeare almost accomplishes his art too easily, so easily that audiences can become so captivated by what they see that they do not learn any morally edifying lessons from Shakespeare's work. The danger of Shakespeare's skill, Johnson says, is in its capacity to overshadow what should (in his mind) be the true purpose of theater: to teach. Johnson bemoans that, "[Shakespeare] sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct that he seems to write

[39] In another context, Brian McGrath, speaking of Johnson's reading of Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, which I examined in Chapter Two of this dissertation, says that Johnson sees Gray's poem as simultaneously exceptional and unexceptional. The emotions of the *Elegy* are common to all, but he communicates them, according to Johnson in a particularly moving way (Brian McGrath, *The Poetics of Unremembered Acts: Reading, Lyric, Pedagogy* [Evanston IL: Northwestern UP, 2013], 56). Similarly for Johnson, the greatness of Shakespeare is in his unique expression of common feeling.

without any moral purpose" (20-21). When the audience members are so taken in by the prospect of enjoying feelings reflected to them on stage, they sometimes forget the moral lessons of the theater. The communication of feeling can sometimes limit the communication of virtue, as if virtue and feeling are nearly at odds with one another. When Shakespeare commands his audience, he is sometimes more interested in commanding his audience to feel pleasure than in teaching them a "moral purpose." Johnson worries that Shakespeare, knowing that the communication of feeling is the best way to reach his audience, sometimes uses his power to communicate feeling in negligent ways.

Out of Johnson's unease with Shakespearean feeling we see emerge an important set of questions for eighteenth-century Shakespearean criticism. These questions continue to remain important in our present day as they might be asked not merely of Shakespeare but of any literary representation of emotion: what is the relationship between feeling and virtue? By what means are readers and audience members linked to the characters they read about or view on stage? What exactly does the language of feeling accomplish? Does it teach us virtue? Does it teach us a sense of universal humanity? And what are the costs of the communication of feeling? These questions are not unique to Johnson in the eighteenth century. They inform many of the writings of eighteenth-century moral philosophers, including of course Adam Smith and David Hume.[40] My point in opening with Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare* is to show that Shakespeare's expression of feeling comes at a cost. Many of the writers I discuss in the following section, such as Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Griffith, George Stubbes, William Richardson, and Henry Mackenzie are not as suspicious of the language of feeling as Johnson is,

[40] See Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* 1759, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009); and David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009).

but their readings of Hamlet's melancholy show that the ways in which feelings communicate lessons of virtue do not occur easily. They are part of a complex and paradoxical movement in which feeling and virtue means isolation, even if such isolation might be immensely pleasing to behold.

II. Wonderful Appearances

Hamlet famously opens with a question: "Who's there?"[41] This line, spoken by the sentinel Barnardo to his fellow sentinel Francisco whom he has come to relieve of his duties, speaks to the fact that he cannot recognize Francisco in the darkness, and is followed by a similar request from Francisco to "Stand and unfold yourself" (1.1.2). These are relatively innocuous lines, but they allegorize the mystery of Hamlet's self-presentation within the play, a self-presentation shaped by melancholy and with which eighteenth-century critics find themselves fascinated. Eighteenth-century dramatic critics constantly seek to discover what is "there" in Hamlet's psyche and to make Hamlet "unfold" the mystery of his melancholy to his readers. For Thomas Keenan, these lines speak to the difficulty of knowing anything, not simply in the play, but also in existence itself.[42] And yet the mystery of what Hamlet's melancholy means and how it might speak to modern readers and audiences do not paralyze the critics of the eighteenth

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[41] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1603. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, J.J.M. Tobin, et al (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 1183-1245, line 1.1.1. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text. In quoting from the play itself, I am using *The Riverside Shakespeare* (2nd ed.). Throughout this chapter I will often be quoting passages from the play in order to contextualize the readings of those passages that eighteenth-century readers present. In those cases (unless explicitly stated otherwise), for consistency's sake, I still refer to the *Riverside* rather than to whatever edition from which the critics I am reading quote.

[42] Thomas Keenan, *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997), 7-11. *Hamlet* is not Keenan's primary topic of study: the opening lines of the play merely model his own vision of an ethics that emerges from an estrangement to the world. Keenan's plea is for a turn to ethics that involves no guarantee of what one is acting for, an ethics that has no foundation: "Abandoned, errant, we happen on ourselves and others, at the frontier, but without basis, foundation, proper place or direction, coming and going, turning around the edge, arriving, waiting, speaking" (11).

century. Even if there is not an easy answer to melancholy's mystery, its presence in both Hamlet and *Hamlet* inspires deep reservoirs of creative critical thought, and thus allegorizes criticism's attempt to respond creatively to literary work. Hamlet's future critics outside the world of the play understand his character where those in his own world cannot, thus making Hamlet's melancholy words and gestures a performance toward futurity, even if only retroactively conceived as such.

Richard Steele is one of the first writers in the eighteenth century to assume the position against which Johnson would later place himself, and Steele's position of a perfectly symbiotic relationship between virtue and melancholy indeed persists in important critical circles across the eighteenth century, as we will see. While Steele is more invested in the melancholy of the play itself than he is in the character of Hamlet, his aligning of melancholy with virtue provides an important critical backdrop for understanding the logic of the play's melancholy for eighteenth-century critics. This logic will inflect the character studies of Hamlet that come to pervade the later portion of the century. In *The Tatler*, no. 111 (1709), Steele argues that virtue itself is inherently melancholy, and he is taught this striking truth by the words of *Hamlet*. In linking virtue with melancholy, Steele uses *Hamlet* to show the inherently moral quality of feeling. But melancholy leads crucially to a moral vision that requires him not to behave morally, but simply to sit and ponder on the state of the modern world. Melancholy inspires imaginative moral thought in him that does not have to be accompanied by action. For Steele, the contemplation of virtue leads to a contemplation of the widespread lack of virtue in the modern world, which then in turn drives him to melancholy and also, as we will see, to *Hamlet*. He writes that, "I was considering, amidst the Stillness of the Night, What was the proper Employment of a thinking Being? What were the Perfections it should propose to it self? And What the End it should aim

at? My Mind is of such a particular Cast that the Falling of a Shower of rain or the Whistling of Wind at such a Time is apt to fill my Thoughts with something awful and solemn."[43] When the night is quiet and solemn, the mind has room to meditate on questions about the nature of virtue. The more that Steele thinks on these questions, as we will see, the more susceptible his mind becomes to melancholy, such that all reflection runs the risk of transforming into distinctly melancholy reflection.

Soon enough, Steele points us to one particular night of meditation and reflection. In Steele's formulation, meditation becomes a way of wishing that what is absent in the world (that is, virtue) might become present. It seems to Steele that the world has been overcome by sin. And as long as virtue will never return to the world, then one's melancholy over the cultural loss of virtue may never leave one's mind either. No one in the modern age, Steele fears, thinks on anything other than immediate pleasure. In Steele's issue of *The Tatler*, the local bellman sings out his homily, which Steele tells us has not changed in the slightest for years: "Oh mortal man, thou that art born in Sin!" (35). Steele hears this, but no one else does.[44] The bellman sings his homily in public, to anyone who will listen, but oddly enough, Steele feels that the bellman is singing solely to him. This may be because Steele has already had these thoughts in his mind for some time, unable to purge himself of their mournful tones. If he already has these thoughts in mind, then he will hear them from the mouth of the bellman all the more readily. The fact that only Steele can hear this homily suggests that the homily is merely a haunting, the residue of a virtue that has been erased from the world already. In prefacing this description by speaking of

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[43] Richard Steele, *The Tatler,* no. 111, 1709, in *Critical Responses to Hamlet, 1600-1790*, ed. David Farley-Hills (New York: AMS Press, 1997), 35-37, 35. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

[44] In this way, we might say that Steele becomes an avatar for Hamlet himself, as Hamlet sees and hears the Ghost and understands him even when his own mother does not.

his own mind—by saying that his "Mind is of such a particular Cast" (35)—Steele points us to melancholy's quality of being persistent. When Steele thinks about virtue, he is reminded of the scarcity of virtue in the world, which in turn leads him to ponder humanity's sin nature. Like Milton's pensive speaker in *Il Penseroso* and like Warton's in *The Pleasures of Melancholy*, he is taken out of the present and into the spiritual world. His meditation on virtue leads him to think of virtue in economic terms—in terms of its scarcity—which in turn leads him to a skepticism regarding the shortcomings of the present.

And beyond the heavenly realm, he is transported to *Hamlet*, because Hamlet speaks perfectly to his already-melancholy state of mind. The bellman's homily puts him in mind of a passage from Act I of *Hamlet*, in which the watchman Marcellus comments on the ghost's disappearance from view:

> It faded on the crowing of the cock.
> Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
> Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
> The bird of dawning singeth all night long,
> And then they say no spirit dare stir abroad,
> The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
> No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
> So hallowed, and so gracious, is that time. (1.1.157-64, qtd. in Steele 35)

Strangely, there appears to be a disjunction between Steele's own melancholy and the mood of the passage that he quotes. While Steele's melancholy leads him to *Hamlet*, the passage from which he quotes is marked not simply by melancholy but by terror. Marcellus is expressing fear at the appearance of the ghost. What Steele takes from *Hamlet*, however, is not its terror but its melancholy, even when the passage from which he quotes does not seem immediately melancholy.

There are three points to draw from this observation. One, the melancholy of the play is so pervasive for Steele that it spills over even into the moments that do not appear immediately

melancholy. Two, it seems here that negative feelings can easily give way to melancholy. While the mood here is terror, terror can easily become melancholy. The terror of the night is in the pall it casts over the world of the play, not unlike the pall that a melancholy sense of the fallen nature of humanity casts over Steele's mind. Finally, Steele finds himself taught by *Hamlet*, but the play teaches him what he already knows. He already knows, as the bellman's homily states, that humanity is irreversibly fallen in its sin nature. *Hamlet* simply reinforces the reality to him by way of its gloomy mood. It mirrors the condition of his own mind; as Johnson would have it, *Hamlet* reflects himself back to him, only in a virtuous way. For Steele, *Hamlet* does not detract from virtue, as Johnson would have it, but it reminds one of universal and religiously inflected moral lessons.

What Steele's inclination toward *Hamlet* reveals is the capacity of literature sometimes to inspire thought and only thought—nothing more and nothing less. In sitting alone at night with his thoughts and nothing else, Steele is brought to *Hamlet* as a means of dealing with his mourning over a cultural loss of virtue. And when he is brought to *Hamlet*, he is given reason to sit, think, and do nothing more. To dwell with loss is virtuous enough its own right, and it requires no action, because any action would be futile anyway. No matter what he does, Steele cannot return virtue to the world. So instead, his virtue manifests itself not in action but in meditation on *Hamlet*. Melancholy allows for the possibility of sitting and thinking without the weight of having to do anything. It is the manifestation of virtue without the accompanying burden of action. In forming a thoughtful connection with the play, Steele is given reason to do nothing—nothing that is, but think both on virtue and its scarcity. Such meditation without action is represented then as itself virtuous.

Steele's emphasis is on the play *Hamlet* more so than on the character of Hamlet. But

other writers across the eighteenth century focus on the gloom of the character Hamlet and not simply the gloom that the play itself inspires. These writers see virtue as a distinctly melancholy phenomenon that forms Hamlet's character and that shapes the world of the play, as the persistence of sadness leads the mind to ruminate both on immediate loss and also on a more widespread lack of morality. Elizabeth Montagu's 1769 *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear*, for instance, views *Hamlet* as communicating sympathy through spectacle and communicating virtue through feeling. Hamlet's isolation from the world rounds out his character and allows audiences to identify with him in the wake of his inability to communicate with the other characters in his play. In the figure of the ghost, Montagu writes, we see melancholy collapsed into terror (as we saw with Steele). The terrifying aspects of the ghost's presence draw the readers and audiences in, and while they are transfixed, Hamlet communicates to them a deep sense of morally weighted melancholy over the wrongful death of Old Hamlet. The loss of Old Hamlet is terrifying, but it is also melancholy.[45] This communication of melancholy, I suggest, is the means by which Montagu sees readers and audiences finding themselves endeared to Hamlet's character.

After discoursing for several paragraphs on the ghost's terrifying aspects, Montagu turns her attention to the character of Hamlet and his perspective on the sight of the ghost. Incidentally, this is the course that the narrative of the play takes as well. We turn from the ghost to Hamlet, and we initially turn to Hamlet primarily because we are interested in witnessing his reaction to the ghost. Montagu writes, "Young Hamlet's indignation at his mother's hasty and incestuous marriage, his sorrow for his father's death, the character he gives of that prince,

[45] Jacques Derrida was also famously taken with the image of Old Hamlet's ghost, using the ghost as an allegory for the haunting presence of Marxist thought in modernity. See Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 1-13.

prepare the spectator to sympathize with his wrongs and sufferings. The Son, as is natural, with much more vehement emotion than Horatio did, addresses his Father's shade."[46] The first sentence of this passage focuses on Hamlet's feelings, but crucially, the second moves away from Hamlet's feelings and instead focuses on "his Father's shade." Hamlet forms a bond with his deceased father out of his persistent melancholy over his father's death, and out of that bond with the dead, he communicates his sentiments to spectators: "Hamlet's terror, his astonishment, his vehement desire to know the cause of this visitation, are irresistibly communicated to the spectator by the following speech…" (167). Montagu then quotes from Hamlet's initial words to his father, in which he hails his father as father: "I'll call thee Hamlet,/ King, father, royal Dane" (1.4.44-45). Interestingly, Montagu ignores the fact that Hamlet speaks these words to the ghost and not to the audience. She tells us that Hamlet's desire is communicated "to the spectator" and not to the ghost, even though the ghost is the literal addressee. Thus, in one scene, Hamlet forms a relation with two sets of people even while, strictly speaking, it is impossible for him to form a relation with either. He forms a relation with the dead, and yet at the same time his character communicates with the spectators who are not a part of the world of the play. In a manner similar to Gray's fixation with the dead in *An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, Hamlet cannot erase the dead father from his memory. And he transfers this prolonged obsession with the dead to the audience, such that when he speaks, he speaks not only to those in his own world, but he also communicates with any spectators who might be willing to listen.

What we have here is the idea of the spectral return of the lost object as a mediator between melancholy and morality. Montagu's lengthy, drawn-out description of Hamlet's "father's shade" is a testimony of the degree to which the shade is provocative and striking. She,

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[46] Elizabeth Montagu. *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear* (London: 1769), 167. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

like Hamlet, thinks deeply on the shade, mostly because the shade is the manifestation of the degree to which Hamlet cannot stop thinking about loss. The shade carries a magical quality in that it makes present what is absent, and for that reason is difficult if not impossible for a reader or viewer to turn away from. Hamlet's father shadows his soul as an object that is present only as an irreversible absence, his memory never leaving and never letting Hamlet move on from his loss. Just as the ghost is a figure of loss to Hamlet, it is a figure of loss too to the audience. And while the ghost has the audience's attention, Shakespeare takes advantage of the opportunity to teach the audience a moral lesson about allegiance to family.[47] We see in Montagu's description of the Ghost and in her description of Hamlet as communicating to the "spectator" that melancholy becomes a binding feeling. It binds ghost to Hamlet, and the character of Hamlet to the audience of the world beyond the play. Where Hamlet's loss leaves him out in the cold, so to speak, removed from everyone living in the world of the play, it creates an odd transmission of sympathy between fictional character and real-life audience.

Similarly, Elizabeth Griffith, in her 1775 treatment of Shakespeare's works, claims that the ghost is simultaneously a communicator of moral sentiment and melancholy. Writing about Hamlet's confrontation of Gertrude in Act 3, during which the ghost makes his final appearance (appearing only to Hamlet and not to Gertrude), Griffith suggests that the appearance of the ghost puts us in mind both of moral fortitude and death. Placing the idea of death front and

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[47] For a psychoanalytic reading of the Ghost's significance, see Janet Adelman's *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays,* Hamlet *to* The Tempest (New York: Routledge, 1992). Adelman writes that Hamlet's prime obsession is with his mother Gertrude and not with his father; Hamlet has trouble identifying with his father precisely because his father is simply a specter. Instead, his mind becomes fixated on what for him is the perverse image of his mother as a sexual being—with reference to her relationship to Claudius, that is (11-37). Montagu's argument, on the other hand, sees the Ghost not as absent, but as all too present. Hamlet's prime obsession in Montagu's reading (in a mode that is decidedly not psychoanalytic, in contrast to Adelman's) is with the dead and not with the living.

center, Griffith writes, the ghost reminds us of the power of and imperative to forgiveness. In Griffith's reading of *Hamlet* we see that loss and alienation allow for the communication of virtue. For Griffith, what is remarkable about the ghost is his capacity to forgive Gertrude despite what she refers to as Gertrude's "crimes."[48] Griffith writes that this capacity is both "remarkable and pleasing" (507). According to Griffith, the ghost's words about Gertrude in Act 3 are strikingly reminiscent of Dido's encounter with Aeneas after her own death in Virgil's *Aeneid*. These words linger like a weight on the minds of the living:

> Have either the Greek or Latin masters of the Epic afforded us so beautiful an instance of forgiveness, and of love subsisting even beyond the grave? They have both of them presented us with scenes after death; but compare the behaviour of *Dido* upon meeting *Aeneas* in the Elysian fields, with this, as being the most parallel passage I can recollect. He had not been anything near so culpable towards her, as this queen had been to her husband; and yet the utmost temper that the *heathen* Poet could bring his Ghost to, upon that occasion, was merely to be silent, and not upbraid, *in speech*; though he makes her sufficiently mark her resentment, by her *looks and behaviour.* (508)

In other words, the ghost of Old Hamlet teaches us how to forgive—and he accomplishes this pedagogical aim more effectively than Dido does. For where Dido is speechless, the ghost expresses true forgiveness through spoken language. With the presented image of a "love subsisting even beyond the grave," Griffith sees love as that which enables forgiveness but which also signals melancholy. By communicating forgiveness, the ghost achieves another form of life even in death, for forgiveness assumes a degree of agency on the part of the ghost. And, by "subsisting … beyond the grave" as a voice of forgiveness, the Ghost implants himself in the mind of the living, refusing to let those who survive him forget his loss. By forgiving, the Ghost refuses to be relegated to obscurity. He asserts his voice and so too becomes present by speaking. This insistence on presence through the act of speaking forgiveness haunts Hamlet (and for that

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[48] Elizabeth Griffith, *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated.* (London: 1775), 508. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

matter Gertrude as well). He haunts, though, as a beacon of morality, furthering the possibility of loss acting as a carrier for virtue. By his forgiveness, he is the very embodiment of morality.

The Ghost's words are pleasing because they are tender—and they are tender because their sweetness completely defies the circumstance. But these words are also sorrowful. For the Ghost can only forgive after he has been transformed from living king into the very embodiment of loss itself. Forgiveness is best understood as the language of loss, as it converts the loss of life into the language of the beyond, and through this language the lost continue to hang like a weight on the corporeal world and on those who populate it. His father's loss thus makes its claim on Hamlet's inner life, and consumes all of his life in the process, but consumes his life as a symbol of virtue. As the Ghost forgives, he becomes a sign of virtue, and as such, he never leaves Hamlet's consciousness. Old Hamlet is transformed from king into a synecdoche for virtue.

For Griffith, then, feeling and morality work in tandem, and the spectacular appearance of the ghost is the glue that links the two. The appearance of melancholy is riveting, and the ghost seizes the opportunity to teach the moral lesson of forgiveness. The ghost subsumes Hamlet's consciousness as a literal representation of loss, and he then comes to subsume the consciousness of readers and audiences as well, leading readers to expatiate, to move from one melancholy spectacle in Western literary history (Hamlet's ghost) to another (Aeneas and Dido). Loss becomes one of the lines along which Griffith here conceives the progression of literary history.

For other writers, however, melancholy encodes a form of virtue that seems less well-defined and more vague than the virtue of forgiveness that Griffith describes. George Stubbes is one of the more preeminent early eighteenth-century critics to address the issue of the meaning of Hamlet's melancholy, and his inquiry is linked explicitly to Hamlet's character. Stubbes, like

others in the eighteenth century, links melancholy with virtue, but this virtue is not entirely fleshed out and is measured not by the virtuous actions one performs, but by the fact of remaining passive so as to think virtuous thoughts. Shakespeare creates a sympathetic character in Stubbes' account precisely by making him do nothing. Hamlet's melancholy, for Stubbes, simultaneously leads him to cultivate virtue and to remain passive. Both traits are entangled with another, and both traits lead to Stubbes' imaginative critical thought and to the audience's identification with Hamlet. In Stubbes' formulation, Hamlet exists as a character merely to lead the audience to feel powerful (and mostly gloomy) feelings. His constructed status as a creator of feeling for the audience is of more import than any action he might perform within the world of the play.

In 1736, Stubbes writes in a tract titled "Some Remarks on the *Tragedy of Hamlet*" that the play vacillates between instruction and entertainment. In this tract, the melancholy that the audience feels is of more importance than any melancholy that Hamlet the character might feel. The play communicates melancholy to the audience, and through this communication, the audience is instructed in the way of virtue. Scenes such as the gravediggers' scene are signs for Stubbes of the play's obsession with morality and virtue, and this communication of morality is broadcast through the mood of tragedy.[49] Loss is merely the occasion for showcasing Hamlet's moral exemplarity. His melancholy over the loss of his father is the proof that he is simply of a better moral cast than anyone else in the world of the play.

Stubbes writes that one of Shakespeare's strength as a dramatist is his ability to represent a certain "Sublimity of Sentiments" (66). But to what sentiments is Stubbes referring? One of

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[49] George Stubbes, *Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet*, 1736, rpt. in *Critical Responses to Hamlet, 1600*-1790, ed. David Farley-Hills (New York: AMS Press, 1997), 98-131, 108. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

Shakespeare's prominent sublime sentiments, indeed, is melancholy. Earlier in the tract, Stubbes writes that the logic of the melancholy mood brings about the pleasure of tragedy. Stubbes writes that the reason that the audience comes to the theater to view tragedy is to cultivate a "pleasing Melancholy of mind" (50). Audiences enjoy the theater because of the way that it makes them feel. When the audience views *Hamlet*, they feel melancholy on behalf of Hamlet, and in doing so they feel a sense of union with the virtue of the play. Critics such as James Chandler, Hina Nazar, and Janet Todd have written of the importance of sentiment to the formation of eighteenth- and post-eighteenth-century culture, but by and large melancholy has little role to play in these narratives.[50] How can a negative feeling produce anything? In Stubbes' view, though, the typically negative feeling of melancholy is culturally and critically generative, and not only is it pleasing; it is also virtuous. In fact, its virtue may be part of its pleasure. If one of the ends of tragedy is to bring about a "pleasing Melancholy of mind" in its spectators, then this end, Stubbes writes, also has virtue in view. Referencing Hamlet's initial encounter with Ghost, Stubbes writes that:

> The Prince's Resolution to speak to the Phantom, let what will be the Consequence, is entirely suitable to his Heroical Disposition; and his Reflection upon his Father's Spirit appearing in Arms, is such as one would naturally expect from him; and the Moral Sentence he ends his short Speech with, suits his virtuous Temper, and at the same Time that it has a good Effect upon the Audience, and answers the end of Tragedy. (108)

The entrance of the ghost upon the scene signals the convergence of the spiritual with the material. Hamlet is virtuous here insofar as he concentrates on priorities beyond the vanity characterized by Gertrude and Claudius. The loss of his father leads Hamlet to turn his focus

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[50] See James Chandler, *An Archaeology of Sympathy: The Sentimental Mode in Literature and Cinema* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2013), 1-36 and throughout; Hina Nazar, *Enlightened Sentiments: Judgment and Autonomy in the Age of Enlightenment* (New York: Fordham UP, 2012), 1-10 and throughout; and Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen & Co., 1986).

away from the world and toward the world beyond, where his father now dwells. What is curious about this passage is that the fixation on loss within this scene is described as having a "good Effect upon the Audience" (108). What could a "good effect" of a melancholy fixation mean? It could easily mean one of two things (or both): it might be a good in that it instructs the audience in the ways of virtue, and it might also be a good in that it is simply pleasing to view.

It seems that the "good effect" of melancholy that Stubbes describes is both. It is instructive in virtue and it also pleasing. As proof of this, we might turn to an earlier moment in the tract, where Stubbes writes that the arts should both please and instruct. As a disclaimer to his criticism of the play, Stubbes tells us that:

> I think every one should contribute to the Improvement of some Branch or other of Literature in this Country of ours, and thus furnish out his Share toward the Bettering of the Minds of his Countrymen, by affording some honest Amusements, which can entertain a Man, and help to refine his Taste, and improve his Understanding, and no ways at the Expence of his Honesty and Virtue. (99)

Good literature entertains without sacrificing virtue, such that the descriptor "good" refers both to moral goodness and to goodness as an aesthetic value judgment. Here, Stubbes is speaking directly of his own critical task being double-edged: as a critic, his role is to expose the entertaining aspects of *Hamlet* while also simultaneously exposing its virtuous valences. But Stubbes' dual critical task is a replication of Shakespeare's artistic accomplishment. Shakespeare forwarded both virtue and amusement in equal doses. Neither was lost in his artistic vision. The "good effect" of the play, which includes the representation of the play's melancholy, is an effect that is produced by the chemistry between entertainment and virtue. Shakespeare does not, as Johnson would put it, "sacrifice virtue to convenience" (20); rather, entertainment is the means by which he communicates virtue.

Crucially, though, the virtue value of melancholy and the entertainment value of

melancholy only coexist perfectly, in Stubbes' mind, when Hamlet delays acting. In response to the ages-old question of why Hamlet waits so long to take action against his murderous uncle, Stubbes writes that: "Had *Hamlet* gone naturally to work, as we could suppose such a Prince to do in parallel Circumstances, there would have been an End of our Play" (55). Stubbes's reasoning here is almost comically obtuse. In this reading Hamlet's delay has nothing to do with him; it has everything to do with the play itself as a piece of artifice.[51] Gefen Bar-On Santor has written that many eighteenth-century critics "could find no productive explanation for [Hamlet's] deferral of revenge, nor for the atmosphere of madness and chaos that this delay generates,"[52] but for Stubbes the reason is perfectly clear. The delay allows the play to continue, and it allows for Hamlet to cultivate further a tragic mode that the audience would enjoy.[53] In not acting, Hamlet thus prolongs and renders more powerful the "pleasing Melancholy of mind" for his audience.

But the melancholy that Hamlet produces in audiences and readers would conceivably correspond to his virtue as well: his sorrow over his father's death is a sign of his moral uprightness. But in not acting so as not to end his play so soon, Hamlet shows us that sometimes virtue—when depicted in art—requires that one do nothing, at least for a time. It requires that one sit and think. Virtue is a state of mind and not necessarily based in action. One can be virtuous simply by thinking virtuous thoughts, as Hamlet does; virtue does not always have to be

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[51] William Empson provides a similar reasoning for Hamlet's inaction. Once Hamlet gets his revenge, there is no longer a play, so the revenge has to wait until the very end (William Empson, *Essays on Shakespeare*, ed. David B. Pirie [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986], 82). De Grazia explicitly refers to Empson's reading as a(n) (perhaps unwitting) inheritor of Stubbes' reading (172-74).

[52] Gefen Bar-On Santor, "Shakespeare in the Georgian Theatre," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832*, ed. Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 213-28, 221.

[53] For a critically important reading of the reasons for Hamlet's inaction, see de Grazia, 158-204. For de Grazia, Hamlet's refusal to act is not a sign of a disorder, but is rather Shakespeare absorbing a number of "stock figures of privation" (5), such as "the Clown, madman, Vice, and devil" (5).

operative to deserve the name. Hamlet's endless rumination on his father's death is a form of virtue, for it involves an act of moral judgment on his father's wrongful death. More particularly, virtue requires letting the play run its course, such that its "pleasing Melancholy of mind" have its time to work on the consciousnesses of spectators. If melancholy is paralysis, then for much of the play virtue is represented as inaction, for virtue also corresponds to thought and not necessarily to immediate action.

Moreover, this virtue, being communicated to the spectators as a "pleasing Melancholy of mind," has little place to go in Stubbes' account after Shakespeare places it in the minds of the spectators using Hamlet as his mouthpiece. When the audiences have the melancholy of the play placed into their own consciousnesses, along with its correspondent virtue, they are bestowed no burden of action to go with that virtue, other than the imperative to feel pleasure at the presence of such virtue implanted into their hearts. This is a virtue with no action, only the pondering of morality, just as melancholy requires no action, only ponderousness. The audiences feel a virtuous sympathy for Hamlet in the wake of his loss, and this is the only burden placed upon them. More than that, it is the only burden they can even bear. We learn thus from Stubbes that the presence of virtue in the mind comes at a cost, the cost being that it does not correspond to action. It corresponds only to a state of the heart, and from that point on is inoperative.

The uncertainty regarding melancholy's meaning to *Hamlet* becomes even more pronounced in the second half of the eighteenth century, as the discipline of what Deidre Lynch has referred to as "character appreciation" takes shape. According to Lynch, character appreciation is "the critical exercise that teases out the complex meanings composing a character's interiority and that thereby reanimates a being who never really was, of course, alive

at all."[54] Character appreciation becomes one of the most important tools for the literary critic in the late eighteenth century, as it delves into a character's psychological depths using a character's language, gestures, and demeanor as cues to what might lie beneath. The outside of a character is a hermeneutical guide by which one might read what is on the inside.[55] For Shakespearean critics later in the century devoted to the activity of character study, I suggest, the logic of Hamlet's melancholy reveals that sometimes character study is a sign of just how isolated Hamlet is from the world of his own play. Later in the century, in his *Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters* (1774)—which Eric Gidal refers to as the first real Shakespearean character study[56]—William Richardson offers the most straightforward but also the most enigmatic account of the relationship between melancholy and pleasure in *Hamlet*. Hamlet's melancholy occasions literary criticism, precisely because it is unclear to anyone else in the world of the play what his melancholy means, simply furthering Hamlet's isolation from the world. Where the characters of the play fail, then, criticism steps in to cast light upon the darkness and to reconcile Hamlet's isolation to the audience. Robert Weimann writes that the character of Hamlet "assumes the image of a more poetically unified individuality."[57] But at what cost? And what does such a "poetically unified individuality" reveal? By looking to Richardson's account, we might see that literary individuality reveals not only Hamlet's psyche, but that it also reveals the dysfunction of his society and (paradoxically) by extension the harmony of the culture in which the play is read and performed. By looking to

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[54] Lynch, 133.
[55] Lynch takes the idea of character appreciation a step further, saying that character appreciation does not merely read the depths of a character: rather, it creates those depths (Lynch, 135).
[56] Eric Gidal, "'A gross and barbarous composition': Melancholy, National Character, and the Critical Reception of *Hamlet* in the Eighteenth Century." *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 39 (2010): 235-61, 248.
[57] Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of the Dramatic Form and Function* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978), 126.

Richardson (and also to Henry Mackenzie, who I discuss at the end of this section), we see that Hamlet's individuality emerges painfully. Hamlet's loneliness leads, strangely, to a feeling of love. Not only does the audience sympathize with Hamlet, Richardson suggests; they also, as we will see, come to love Hamlet, such that Hamlet's painful individuality is didactic. It teaches what love is and it teaches how to love.

For Richardson, melancholy is simultaneously paralyzing and inspirational; it is both static and dynamic, and this tension adds rigor and enthusiasm to the critical enterprise. Of Hamlet's melancholy, Richardson writes that:

> …the grief of Hamlet is for the death of a father: he entertains aversion against an incestuous uncle, and indignation at the ingratitude and guilt of an mother. Grief is passive: if its object be irretrievably lost, it is attended with no desires, and rouses no active principle. After the first emotions, it disposes us to silence, solitude, and inaction. If it is blended with other passions, its operations will pass unnoticed, lost in the violence of other emotions, though even these it may have originally excited, and may secretly stimulate. Accordingly, though sorrow be manifest in the features and demeanour of Hamlet, aversion and indignation are the feelings he expresses.[58]

Here we see a stunning description of the logic of melancholy as unending sadness. Leon Harold Craig has written that it is easy for critics to forget the "full awfulness of what [Hamlet] has been subjected to."[59] Richardson gives a sufficient account of such awfulness. For Richardson, melancholy does nothing, but it also does everything. Seeing that the loss of his father is irreversible, Hamlet becomes passive (which, as we have seen in our discussion of Stubbes, leads to the prolonging of the play itself and also to the correspondent prolonging of its effect on the audience). But as his melancholy leads him to be passive in one sense, it is purely generative in another. It gives rise to every one of his other emotions, including indignation and aversion. At

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[58] William Richardson, *A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters* (London: 1774), 70. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

[59] Leon Harold Craig, *Philosophy and the Puzzles of* Hamlet*: A Study of Shakespeare's Method* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 183.

the root of Hamlet's performance of aversion and indignation is a deep melancholy that prevents him from doing anything else—other than generating other emotions, that is. This is the perfect manifestation of Deidre Lynch's description of character study: Richardson reads the depth of emotion by looking to the surface. Melancholy is "manifest in the features and demeanour of Hamlet" (70); and these features help one to see what is beneath.

As such, Hamlet's melancholy is more generative than it appears at first glance. In addition to producing other emotions, it also produces criticism itself. As he opens his piece on *Hamlet*, Richardson writes that the task of criticism is to make a judgment about the propriety of Hamlet's feelings: "To judge, therefore, of [his feelings'] propriety, we must examine their motives, and the temper or state of mind that produces them" (69-70). Feelings are mysteries and call out for examination, such that the function of criticism is to inquire into what lies beneath. Toward the end of his piece, Richardson writes, in a passage I examine in more detail later, that "…by reflecting on the following brief observations, the difficulty [of understanding Hamlet's feelings] will disappear" (76). Criticism illuminates what seems difficult, hidden, dark. And as melancholy is the emotion that runs beneath and produces the others, for Richardson, its presence in the play is the most critically generative.

Hamlet's melancholy for Richardson is thus a balance of darkness and wonder. Initially, it manifests itself as an obsession with death. Richardson writes that, "the mind of Hamlet, violently agitated, and filled with displeasing and painful images, loses all sense of felicity; and he even wishes for a change of being" (75). Hamlet's melancholy is so pervasive that he sees no way out of his condition except through death. Richardson sees Hamlet's mind at war with itself. His emotions clash with his sense of "felicity." In his study on philosophical receptions of *Hamlet* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Andrew Cutrofello writes that, for thinkers

such as Nietzsche and Hegel, melancholy is the condition of wishing to die. Ventriloquizing Nietzsche, Cutrofello writes that, for Hamlet, "To gaze into the true essence of things is to discover that it is better not to be than to be."[60] It appears on initial glance that Richardson too sees Hamlet as the very embodiment of darkness. But then, he complicates his reading by remarking that, "The appearance is wonderful, and leads us to inquire into the affections and opinions that could render him so despondent" (75). By the descriptor "wonderful," Richardson likely means that Hamlet's melancholy produces wonder and not necessarily that it is wonderful in the modern sense (i.e., "good").[61] What is darkness is also something to be marveled at. It is awe-inspiring, and demands attention from readers and spectators. The more that Hamlet's mind descends into darkness, the more that the critical enterprise rises toward a state of enthusiasm.

What does it mean for the appearance of Hamlet's melancholy to be "wonderful"? The answer lies in melancholy's mysteriousness. It is wonderful because, in Richardson's words, it "leads us to inquire into the affections and opinions that could render him so despondent" (234), even if there is no definitive answer to the question. We cannot turn away from the character of Hamlet, precisely because his melancholy raises a mystery. What does it mean? Why is it significant? What lies beneath its appearance?[62] Melancholy epitomizes question-begging.

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[60] Andrew Cutrofello, *All for Nothing: Hamlet's Negativity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 15. See also, of course, Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* 1872, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Spiers (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999). Nietzsche famously writes that Hamlet and the Dionysian man have both "gazed into the true essence of things, they have *acquired knowledge*, and they find action repulsive, for their actions can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things" (40).

[61] For a discussion of the critical implications of wonder in the eighteenth century, see Sarah Tindal Kareem, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014). Kareem's discussion centers around the novel in the eighteenth century, and suggests that the concept of wonder was key to the development of fiction during the period.

[62] Richardson's reading is thus a sort of proleptic echo to T.S. Eliot's. For Eliot, it is difficult to trace a cause of Hamlet's melancholy (58-59). But while this difficulty is a sign of the play's deficiency for Eliot, it seems on the contrary to be a source of aesthetic pleasure to Richardson.

Hamlet's melancholy is magnetic because it poses a challenge to our own critical skills, a challenge that we cannot help but take up. Melancholy generates criticism, but here it generates a criticism of wonder—a mode of criticism in which one stands in awe of the text.

As Richardson's inquiry into the meaning of Hamlet's melancholy continues, we see, as with other critics in the eighteenth century, that his melancholy is a sign of higher moral virtue. Richardson writes that, "…to vehement and vain ambition [Hamlet] appears superior. He is moved by finer principles, by an exquisite sense of virtue, of moral beauty and turpitude" (235). Only someone of fine upstanding moral character could be moved to such a degree of melancholy, because his melancholy is a sign of his disgust with the immorality of the world. And it is powerfully moving to see Hamlet's melancholy at work, as his melancholy reminds readers and viewers that Hamlet is, in many ways, the only moral one left in his world.

As Richardson continues his analysis, it becomes clear that Hamlet's moral uprightness, as evidenced by his melancholy, throws into question the nature of moral judgment. Richardson writes that moral uprightness is exceedingly painful and lonely:

> [T]here is in human nature a supreme, and, in many cases, a powerful principle, that pronounces sentence on the conduct of mankind, and, in well-regulated tempers, is a source of anguish or delight. In minds uncommonly excellent, it is more frequently a fountain of bitter suffering, than of immediate pleasure. This may seem a paradox; but by reflecting on the following brief observations, the difficulty will disappear. […] The man whose sense of moral excellence is uncommonly exquisite, will find it a source of pleasure and pain in his commerce with mankind. Susceptible of every moral impression, the display of virtuous actions will yield him delight, and the contrary excite uneasiness. He will not receive that genuine and supreme felicity in associating with the wealthy and the magnificent, the gay and loquacious, if they have nothing in their hearts to recommend them, that he will enjoy in the society of gentle, benevolent, and enlightened spirits, though they are not the favourites of fortune, and have not that glitter and false brilliancy of intellectual endowments, that dazzle without being useful, yet often recommend men of slender abilities, and less virtue, to the attention of mankind. (76-78)

Richardson is not so much concerned with finding the answer to the question so much as he is in finding himself in wonder at the question. He does not, after all, definitively answer it. His question-asking simply leads to further wonder.

The virtuous man has nothing to recommend him to society, because often the vain are the ones who are "wealthy and magnificent" (78). They are the ones who make the social wheels turn. Moreover, the virtuous man is possessed of a sobriety of mind that leads him to see himself as superior to others. By virtue, he "pronounces sentence on the conduct of mankind" (76). This is perhaps the most melancholy of existences for a person of Hamlet's cast, because not only must he reconcile himself to the loss of his father: everyone else in the world is lost to him as well. His father's death is a symbol for the loss of virtue across the rest of the world.

But what good is virtue, really? If virtue is accompanied by melancholy, then it is also accompanied by a sense of paralysis, since "Grief is passive: if its object be irretrievably lost, it is attended with no desires, and rouses no active principle" (70). To put this question another way, Richardson's convergence of virtue and melancholy leads us to ask whether virtue, when accompanied by melancholy, is really operative. Can virtuous melancholy do anything of use if melancholy is also, as Richardson has indicated, total passivity? The answer would seem, for Richardson at least, to be no. For as he continues, he seems to indicate that the pain of virtue outweighs any of its pleasures, and the lesson of the play seems to be that persons of a virtuous yet melancholy cast such as Hamlet would be better off not interacting with anyone. He writes at the end of his remarks that Hamlet's virtue and melancholy allow him to identify with the audience, but not with anyone else:

> We love, we almost revere the character of Hamlet; and grieve for his sufferings. But we must at the same time confess, that his weaknesses, amiable weaknesses! are the cause of his disappointments and early death. The instruction to be gathered from this delineation is, that persons formed like Hamlet, should retire, or keep aloof, from situations of difficulty and contention: or endeavour, if they are forced to contend, to brace their minds, and acquire such vigour and determination of spirit as shall arm them against malignity. (120)

A person with so much virtue and melancholy as Hamlet has no place in the world, Richardson

suggests. He is simply of too sensitive a spirit to be able to survive in his own world. This, Richardson tells us, is the lesson of the play. The melancholic must remain isolated from others at all costs, because the world is simply too much for them. There is no cure; there is only withdrawal. When we pursue the wonder of Hamlet's melancholy, we are taken to a truly dark lesson, a lesson that seems to offer no hope for humanity.

Or, that is, it offers no hope save for the opening sentence in the previous passage, which unsettles the meaning of the rest of the paragraph: "We love, we almost revere the character of Hamlet; and grieve for his sufferings" (120). While critical inquiry produces a cynicism about the place of virtue in the world, it also produces something that one might not expect out of criticism: it produces love. Thus, virtuous melancholy, while being passive, is also active, but in a way that cannot be quantified. The virtuous melancholy Hamlet cannot contribute to his own world in an objective way, but he can contribute to the world beyond the play in a way that cannot be objectively measured, for he produces in readers and spectators a feeling of love. He may not teach how to make virtue applicable in real-world situations. Instead, he teaches readers and viewers how to love those who are possessed both of melancholy and of virtue, and to love those who are virtuous is both to resist the vanity of the world and also to recognize that virtue might simply have no place in a world full of vice and selfishness.

Through this message of love and virtue, Richardson's criticism of *Hamlet* represents melancholy as that which reveals readers and spectators to be of a better cast than anyone around Hamlet in the world of his own play. Readers and audiences, as ordinary persons, can do that which no one in *Hamlet* itself can do: they can understand Hamlet. That which is not evident to those in the world of the play is perfectly clear to *Hamlet*'s (and Hamlet's) readers and spectators, via the project of criticism. In writing about Hamlet's interaction with other

characters, Richardson says that:

> Hamlet in his retirement expresses his agony without reserve, and by giving it utterance he receives relief. In public he restrains it […] Influenced by an exquisite sense of propriety, he would do nothing unbecoming: he therefore suppresses every emotion which others cannot easily enter into […] Yet in his demeanour we discover a certain air of pensiveness and solemnity arising naturally from his inward uneasiness. (85-86)

Hamlet does not express his melancholy in the company of others, because no one else would understand it.[63] And yet, "by giving it utterance he receives relief" (85). We might ask: to whom does he give it utterance? The answer lies in Richardson's pronoun usage: "*we* discover a certain air of pensiveness" (86; italics mine). The ones who hear Hamlet's words are not those around him. Rather, they are his readers and spectators. He is simultaneously better than one world and perfectly suited for another: better than his own but suited for ours. In one sense his melancholy makes him too good for his own world. But in another sense he is an ordinary person in that anyone who reads or views his play can understand, empathize with, and even love him. Drew Daniel, writing about the relationship between utterance and melancholy in *Hamlet*, has pointed to the impossibility of knowing whether some of Hamlet's most melancholy words—particularly Hamlet's first line, "A little more than kin, and less than kind" (1.2.65)—should be read as a private aside or as spoken to others.[64] For Daniel, the debate over whether or not lines such as this are asides speak to the uneasy ways in which melancholy forms bonds between persons

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[63] From the language of the play itself, one might easily object to Richardson's reading. One could argue that Hamlet's words to others in public are practically saturated by melancholy. When Hamlet broods in I.2 in the company of Claudius and Gertrude, for instance, or when he confronts his mother about her marriage to Claudius in III.4, his melancholy and sorrow seem to be on full display. The interest of the present chapter, however, is not so much in how the play actually represents melancholy as much as it is in how eighteenth-century writers such as Richardson understand his melancholy. In other words, the question for me is what the eighteenth century's response to *Hamlet* can teach us about the eighteenth century's understanding of melancholy.

[64] Drew Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* (New York: Fordham UP, 2013), 136-37. For his part, Daniel claims that the line is an aside (137).

(136-37). It shows that the human body is both private and shaped by public experiences.[65] It implies that those who read and view *Hamlet* are more virtuous than the other characters in the play, and thus also that the other characters in the play are merely meant to be faceless foils for Hamlet's rare virtue.

It is through criticism, then, that Hamlet's utterances in fact "receive relief" (85). For keep in mind that Richardson told his readers that the task of criticism is to make plain that which seems obscure: "…by reflecting on the following brief observations, the difficulty [of understanding Hamlet's feelings] will disappear" (76). Criticism does more than simply explicate a play. It also renders readers and viewers superior to the fictional characters in the world of the play who cannot understand what lies beneath the surface of Hamlet's character. By explicating melancholy virtue, criticism calls into being the perfect reader, and the reader's perfection is measured by one's superiority to the characters of the play. And by extension, then, Hamlet himself calls into being this form of criticism by his melancholy utterances. Even though his agony might be pure passivity, it creates critical possibilities in its wake.

In 1780, Henry Mackenzie, like Richardson, sees melancholy as a means by which Hamlet forms a relationship with his audience, but Mackenzie goes even further than Richardson, saying that we not only love Hamlet for his melancholy virtue, but that we also absorb Hamlet's feelings into our own. As for Richardson, the aim of Mackenzie's literary

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[65] Daniel writes that, "…the multiplicity of arguments in favor of both positions about Hamlet's first line should be taken as a symptomatic expression of an underlying problem about the dramatic experience of melancholy. If the inconclusive state of *Hamlet*'s multiple texts prepares the way for critical conflict, the mysterious trajectory of the melancholic address, its capacity to be both for an implied other and yet somehow marked as stifled and private, works in tandem with that larger textual mystery to generate this local impasse. […] I wish to argue that this speech is in fact an aside, in that it is a speech marked as 'private,' but that it is specifically a *melancholic* aside, and that as such it must be necessarily public, overheard, and shareable, precisely because melancholy as such abides in an interstitial diagnostic and discursive space between the private self and the social body" (136-37).

criticism is to shed light on the effects of Hamlet's melancholy. And as for Richardson, Hamlet's melancholy in Mackenzie's account teaches virtue. Criticism for Mackenzie takes Hamlet's melancholy—which appears to be weakness and paralysis—and transforms it into an empowering feeling, even if Mackenzie leaves it undecided just what the nature of its power is. Criticism teaches that melancholy has power, but Mackenzie must leave it to readers to inquire for themselves into what that power actually looks like.

Shakespeare's greatness, Mackenzie argues, comes not from his creativity in dreaming up stories or from his skill at structuring narrative. Mackenzie goes so far as to use the word "careless"[66] when describing Shakespeare's formal technique, but this descriptor is a compliment and not a critique. His greatness lies in that he does not have to try to be great, but is so merely by nature. Rather, Shakespeare is one of the greats because of the intensity and authenticity with which he is able to communicate human feeling to his audience. "[T]he persons of his drama," Mackenzie writes, "speak in the language of the heart, and in the style of their characters" (221). In other words, Shakespeare's characters' words are a perfect and complete reflection of the states of their hearts. They feel the feelings that their words codify.

Mackenzie admits, though, that Hamlet is the most perplexing of Shakespeare's characters, and the perplexity of his character poses a particular challenge to the critical enterprise. "Of all the characters of Shakespeare," Mackenzie writes, "that of Hamlet has been generally thought to be the most difficult to be reduced to any fixed or settled principle" (221-22). This difficulty, though, is the perfect occasion for criticism since, as we have seen in Richardson, criticism illuminates what is otherwise darkness to the understanding. The reason that Hamlet is such a difficult character to comprehend, Mackenzie writes, is that he

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[66] Henry Mackenzie, *The Mirror*, no. 99, 1780, in *The Mirror, in Two Volumes, Vol. II* (London: 1794*),* 220-26, 221. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

communicates not one feeling to the audience but several. All of his emotions seem to exist simultaneously: "With the strongest purposes of revenge, he is irresolute and inactive; amidst the gloom of the deepest melancholy, he is gay and jocular; and, while he is described as a passionate lover, he seems indifferent about the object of his affections" (221-22). How can one character be so divided within himself? How can he be simultaneously melancholy and gay? Vengeful yet passive? For Mackenzie, this odd chemical reaction between emotions is a result of a violent collision between Hamlet's natural disposition and the situation into which he is thrown. Hamlet is naturally gifted with a delicate sensibility (222-23). He possesses a sensitive soul by nature, and when this sensitivity is confronted by the cruelty and callousness of the intruding outside world, the result is a seismic eruption of divergent passions. Hamlet's behavior is entirely realistic. His conflicted passions are a sign of his universal appeal.

The feeling that stands out the most in Mackenzie's account, however, is melancholy. Melancholy has an air of what Mackenzie calls "majesty" (226), and it is born out of chaos:

> Shakespeare, wishing to elevate the hero of his tragedy, and at the same time to interest the audience in his behalf, throws around him, from the beginning, the majesty of melancholy, along with that sort of weakness and irresolution which frequently attends it. The incident of the ghost, which is entirely the poet's own, […] not only produces the happiest stage effect, but is also of the greatest advantage in unfolding that character which is stamped on the young prince at the opening of the play. In the communications of such a visionary being, there is an uncertain kind of belief, and a dark unlimited horror, which are aptly suited to display the wavering purpose and varied emotions of a mind endowed with a delicacy of feeling, that often shakes its fortitude, with sensibility that overpowers its strength. (226)

Through the figure of the ghost, Shakespeare uses melancholy to command his audience to attention. The ghost infiltrates Hamlet's memory fully. In the same way, the ghost imprints his image—as the image of loss—onto the hearts of his audience, as a permanent image of unrestorable loss. Here we have a number of seemingly opposed descriptors attached to the name melancholy: majesty, weakness, irresolution. What, then, might Mackenzie mean by the phrase

"majesty of melancholy"? It would seem that the majesty lies in the aesthetic pleasure attending the mystery of what melancholy means for Hamlet's character. Is it weakness? Is it virtue? Is it irresolution? Can virtue and irresolution coexist? It seems that the answer to all of these questions is yes, which places melancholy in the position of being both an empowering and stunting feeling. Melancholy is majestic because one cannot turn away from its mysteries. It is this convergence of seemingly opposed qualities that renders Hamlet magnetic and prevents his readers and spectators from being able to take their minds off of him.

But there is more to the majesty of Hamlet's melancholy too. Melancholy is majestic in part because it is movable between persons. Hamlet's feelings become the audience's. In a particularly striking moment, Mackenzie writes that, "As it is, we feel not only the virtues, but the weaknesses of Hamlet, as our own" (223). Hamlet does more than speak to the audience. He actually, through the controlling power of Shakespeare, places himself within the hearts of the audience members, such that the audience members believe that they too feel what Hamlet feels. As we know from reading Samuel Johnson's account of Shakespearean feeling, Shakespeare presents feelings that are powerful precisely because they are normal: they are the kinds of feelings that anyone might feel. Anyone can empathize with Hamlet's melancholy, because melancholy is one of the most common of human feelings. Hamlet then is more than a character in a drama. He is just like his own audience, and reflects his audience's own refined feelings back to them as if in a mirror. Human emotions are naturally conflicted and unstable. Hamlet is no different. Hamlet is decidedly not a perfect character. His flaws make him more accessible and relatable. When audiences view Hamlet, they do not view a divinity from on high who is beyond identification. They view weakness, and they see how weakness and strength (i.e., virtue) might actually coincide with one another. In this sense, Mackenzie's version of Hamlet

epitomizes Johnson's notion of the prototypical Shakespearean character: not an individual but a species. For Johnson, as for Mackenzie, Shakespeare's characters are not unique, but they are general manifestations of a universal humanity. For Mackenzie, this universality is accomplished by the feeling of melancholy. Melancholy is a universal feeling because it is a humanizing feeling (as Hamlet is decidedly not perfect but marked by weakness. De Grazia argues that Mackenzie's reading of *Hamlet* is revolutionary in that it considers Hamlet as an actual character and not simply an instrument propelling the action forward.[67] We see here that Mackenzie believes Shakespeare also creates more than simply a character. He creates an avatar for his readers and spectators.

Importantly for Mackenzie, since the character of Hamlet is marked by a collision of feeling, his virtues and weaknesses are inseparable from one another. His near-obsessive sense of virtue makes him appear weak to those around him, as virtue comes across as sensitivity, and one possessed of a sensitive soul has almost no place in a vicious world such as that of Elsinore. When "we feel not only the virtues, but the weaknesses of Hamlet, as our own" (223), we see that passion is easily communicable between persons. To this end, the lesson of unflagging virtue is transported between Hamlet and audience via the vehicle of feeling. Virtue is attached to feeling, and virtue sticks better with the audience when it is communicated in emotional registers.

In linking virtue with weakness via the "majesty of melancholy," Mackenzie, like Richardson and Stubbes before him, represents a form of virtue detached from use value. Despite its virtuousness, melancholy is still marked by a sense of "irresolution" (226). Does virtue need to correspond to resolution to act? Not in the case of Mackenzie's Hamlet. As with Stubbes and

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[67] De Grazia, 12.

(to some extent) Richardson, virtue for Mackenzie's Hamlet involves the thinking of virtuous thought. This thought might not contribute directly to action, but this does not mean it is any less virtuous. In this way, it is unclear what exactly Hamlet's melancholy accomplishes for Mackenzie, other than a sense of magical transportation of identity, in which we feel a kinship with the character of Hamlet because of a similarity of feeling. In other words, Hamlet's melancholy virtue accomplishes more when it becomes constitutive not of his own identity but of his relation as a fictional character to readers and audiences outside of the world of the play. As Richardson told us, no one in the play can "enter into" (85) Hamlet's emotions because they are too caught up in the whirlwind of worldly gaiety to have time for more sober feelings such as melancholy. Those who can enter into Hamlet's melancholy, however, are those who view it from a distance beyond the world of the play (i.e., readers and audiences), such that the critical reception of his melancholy constitutes a community beyond the world of the play, even if it accomplishes nothing of objective use value within the world of the play.

Griffith, Montagu, Stubbes, Richardson, and Mackenzie each treat *Hamlet* as a literary text, in much the same way that the institution of literary criticism in its current professional form does. But *Hamlet* was more than just a literary text in the eighteenth century; it was also a living and breathing performance, and the reviews of particular performances of the play struggle with the question of what Hamlet's melancholy means in the same way that the textual criticism does. In closing, I turn briefly now to the figure of David Garrick to show that melancholy staged reveals melancholy to be made legible through performance and that it also reveals melancholy to be itself a performance.

III. Playing the Part: Melancholy Staged

In the introduction to "Melancholy's Wake," I described melancholy not merely as

embodied but as abstracted. In the conclusion to this chapter, I show the ways in which the theater provides a means for embodying the abstracted figure of melancholy. Theater attempts to make performative the abstractions of the psyche. *Hamlet* was of course not just read as a literary text in the eighteenth century. It also had a rich stage life, and it is with the stage legacy of *Hamlet* that I conclude this chapter. On stage, *Hamlet* becomes, on the most obvious level, the performance of melancholy and virtue, such that the display of melancholy becomes inseparable from technical expertise in acting. As theatergoers recount their experiences viewing actors portraying Hamlet, their language describes Hamlet depicting a feeling that they themselves recognize and identify with (in a vein of identification that the writers in the previous section such as Richardson and Mackenzie speak of). If the focus of the bulk of this chapter has been the eighteenth-century fascination with Hamlet the character, then the visibility of Hamlet's melancholy, as explored in this section, adds another dimension to the act of critical interpretation. Hamlet the character becomes intertwined with the real-life actor(s) playing Hamlet, and Hamlet's melancholy provides a means for audiences to become drawn simultaneously to Hamlet the character and to the actor(s) playing the part. If the performance of Hamlet's melancholy in the theater links melancholy to the ways in which it is performed, it can also reveal melancholy itself to be a performance. Theater attempts to make visible the otherwise-invisible and abstracted workings of the human mind.

Harold Bloom famously claims that Hamlet's tortured psyche extends from the fact that he himself is a man of the theater: he is always invested in performing.[68] For Bloom, Hamlet is constantly anxious over whether he is playing his part well or whether he is playing the right part at all. We might say, then, that in performing the role of Hamlet, eighteenth-century actors

[68] Bloom, 11.

inhabit alternate versions of themselves, as they perform the role of a character who is himself a performer. No reading of *Hamlet*'s eighteenth-century legacy is complete without an account of David Garrick's performance. Undoubtedly the most famous actor of the eighteenth century, and quite possibly the first modern "celebrity," Garrick's portrayal of Hamlet was quite possibly his most well-known accomplishment. Garrick's performance was emotional, sensational, and kept his audience on the edge of their seats. Speaking of Garrick's Hamlet, Lisa Freeman points out that Garrick had a way of holding poses for so long that those around him on the stage would wonder whether Garrick had been struck into a stupor.[69] Garrick was also unafraid of taking liberties with the actual text of *Hamlet* itself. He famously deleted the gravediggers scene and also erased the accounts of Hamlet's trip across to England, Ophelia's funeral, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths. Garrick's intention was to keep the action moving forward at a brisk and healthy pace, such that the audience remained captivated with the play at every point.

In short, Garrick's concern at every point seems to be to render the play a sight to behold. But theater is also, for Garrick, meant to communicate virtue through feeling. Like Steele, Montagu, and Richardson, among others, Garrick takes up the position that virtue and feeling are partners to one another. In his 1744 *Essay on Acting*, he writes that acting is "an Entertainment of the Stage, which by calling in the Aid and Assistance of Articulation, Corporeal Motion, and Occular Expression, imitates, assumes, or puts on the various mental and bodily Emotions arising from various Humours, Virtues and Vices, incident to human Nature."[70] Lisa Freeman

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[69] Lisa Freeman, *Character's Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2002), 32. For another description of the magnetic qualities of Garrick's theatrical self, see Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1985), esp. 58-59.

[70] David Garrick, *An Essay on Acting in which will be considered the Mimical Behavior of a certain Fashionable Faulty Actor* (London: 1744), 5. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

has used Garrick's definition to point out that feeling is a surface level performance;[71] it cannot be divorced from its performative aspects.[72] As Garrick puts it, the external performance of feeling as entertainment is the pathway toward the depiction of various "Virtues and Vices" (5). Reading this, one cannot help but think of Garrick's own well-documented performances as Hamlet. Freeman tells us that, "audience members did not attend Garrick's performances to see Hamlet, but rather to see Garrick as Hamlet."[73] Garrick was himself the main event. If he was not larger than life, he was at least larger than Hamlet. And, as we shall see, one of the reasons that he was such an attraction was the affected style with which he performed Hamlet's feelings. He drew audiences in, even if, as he indicates in his definition of acting, his status as a source of entertainment was merely intended as a means toward representing virtue through the representation of emotions. Audiences would view Garrick and identify with him, even if the Hamlet that he was playing was unable to identify with anyone else in the world of his own play.

But the more captivating that Garrick's performance becomes to viewers, the more it also figures a slippage (or rather a convergence) between a conception of melancholy as a state of mind on the one hand and as a performance on the other. Cheryl Wanko points out, after all, that Garrick's entire life—both public and private versions—seemed to be a performance, such that all Garrick's behavior was in essence performative behavior.[74] Extending this to the stage, we might say that melancholy itself is a performance. In a famous written account, Georg

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[71] Freeman, 35.
[72] Freeman argues that the theater and not simply the novel in the eighteenth century helped to shaped notion of subjectivity. The theater reveals the performativity of identity and subjectivity (1 and throughout). Freeman's implication is that drama was one of the most culturally important forms of art in the eighteenth century, in a way that previous scholarly studies have not really taken into account.
[73] Freeman, 35-36.
[74] Cheryl Wanko, *Roles of Authority: Thespian Biography and Celebrity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Lubbock: Texas Tech UP, 2003), 196.

Lichtenberg, a German scientist, visits England and attends one of Garrick's performances of *Hamlet*. For Lichtenberg, seeing Hamlet is inseparable from seeing Garrick. He begins his review with a reference to Hamlet's famous "inky cloak" (*Hamlet* 1.2.77),[75] telling his reader that "Hamlet appears in a black dress, the only one in the whole court, alas! still worn for his poor father, who has been dead scarce a couple of months."[76] Hamlet's melancholy, in the person of Garrick, is on full display from the very beginning. He is in mourning for his father, and he cannot stop mourning for his father, no matter how insistent Gertrude and Claudius are that he should move past this grief. His melancholy presents itself from the very first, and is instantly recognizable. Interestingly, the scene to which Lichtenberg refers primarily is not Act 1, Scene 2 (in which the inky cloak is actually referenced by Gertrude), but Act 1, Scene 4, where Hamlet encounters the Ghost for the first time. Garrick makes the artistic choice to have Hamlet continue to wear his mourning garb even after the scene in which it is referenced, telling us that Hamlet's mourning is not simply mourning but also melancholy: it is a grief he cannot get over. For Garrick, thus, melancholy is fully visual and fully semiotic. Its recognizability relies on its being funneled through visual cues (or rather signs) that point to something deep inside the psyche.

Soon enough for Lichtenberg, Garrick claims a form of ownership to Hamlet's melancholy. Upon seeing the Ghost, Hamlet's melancholy mingles with paralyzing fear, and for

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[75] Hamlet tells his mother, in response to his mother's chastising him for his excessive grief over Old Hamlet's death:

> 'Seems,' madam? Nay, it is. I know not 'seems.'
> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> […]
> That can denote me truly. (1.2.76-83)

[76] Georg Lichtenberg, *Lichtenberg's Visits to England as Described in His Letters and Diaries*, 1776, rpt. in *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook, 1700-1820*, ed. E.J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 107-9, 107. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

Lichtenberg the sight is incredible (William Richardson might call it "wonderful"). As Lichtenberg recounts the experience of watching Garrick's exit from the stage, he finds himself compelled to give an account for Garrick's genius (and so too for Shakespeare's genius):

> You can well imagine what applause accompanies this exit. It begins as soon as the ghost goes off the stage and lasts until Hamlet also disappears. What an amazing triumph it is. One might think that such applause in one of the first playhouses in the world, and from an audience of the greatest sensibility, would fan into flame every spark of dramatic genius in a spectator. But then one perceives that to act like Garrick and to write like Shakespeare are the effects of very deep-seated causes. They are certainly imitated; not they, but rather their phantom self, created by the imitator according to the measure of his own powers. He often attains to and even surpasses this phantom, and nevertheless falls far short of the true original. The house-painter thinks his work as perfect as, or even more so than that of the artist. Not every player who can always command the applause of a couple of hundred people or so is on that account a Garrick; and not every writer who has learnt the trick of blabbing a few of the so-called secrets of human nature in archaic prose, outraging language and propriety in his bombast, is on that account Shakespeare. (108)

The tone here is one of awe and wonder. The exchange between the ghost and Garrick's Hamlet, clad in inky cloak, is nothing less than an "amazing triumph" (108). As Lichtenberg writes, though, the focus shifts from the character of Hamlet to the figure of Garrick, as it becomes clear that the audience is not simply watching Hamlet, but they are watching someone performing Hamlet. The fiction and artifice of the moment become all the more clear by the virtuosity of Garrick's performance. By seeing Garrick's performance, Lichtenberg is taken not only to an admiration of Hamlet the character, but also to an appreciation of performative skill.

The passage is striking most of all for its near stream-of-consciousness mode of writing. Lichtenberg's logic is associative, expansive, and wide-ranging. He jumps from the immediate scene, to the audience's reaction, to a discussion of imitation and representation, to a discussion of Garrick's genius, to a discussion of Shakespeare's genius, all within the span of one paragraph. All of these movements are inspired by nothing more than the sight of Garrick's/Hamlet's "inky cloak" leaving the stage (i.e., by the sight of Hamlet's melancholy).

Thought is inspired by the slightest of movements from Garrick. If Hamlet is known as being one of the most loquacious characters in Western literary history, his willingness to discourse endlessly bleeds over from the bounds of the play to Lichtenberg himself. Hamlet's discursiveness becomes Lichtenberg's discursiveness. Melancholy makes Hamlet a magnetic character: Lichtenberg cannot help but stare at Hamlet's inky cloak, the signifier of his melancholy. But melancholy becomes the inspiration not simply for Lichtenberg to speak more on the nature of melancholy, but also to speak on the genius of the way that Shakespeare and Garrick both represent Hamlet's melancholy. It is as if melancholy is not just a sign of grief, virtue, or any other of the melancholic's internal attributes. It is also a sign of the talent of the one representing melancholy. If one can represent melancholy well, then one must be possessed of a supreme talent.

There are many factors that contribute to Hamlet's character for Garrick, but one of them, as Lichtenberg makes clear, is Hamlet's melancholy. His inky cloak seems to be a central aspect to his character. His mourning shapes his interaction with the ghost of his dead father. In other words, melancholy is part of Hamlet's self-presentation, but it is also part of Garrick's performance as Hamlet. Melancholy becomes inseparable from performance. It is not simply a state of mind. It is also striking visual and wrapped up in discourses of self-presentation.

In putting the written text of *Hamlet* in conversation with its performance in eighteenth century culture, we see that character is developed in many ways at the intersection of the linguistic and the bodily. And, as Hamlet's character for many of these critics is constituted primarily by his melancholy, we see too that melancholy is represented as simultaneously linguistic and bodily. It is both a condition of the psyche that is codified by language and a performance that is performed through the body, and it is out of this complex calculus between

all of its different factors that melancholy works to link Hamlet the character with the eighteenth-century audience that receives him. And in sitting in a state of awe and wonder as they watch or read *Hamlet*, the critics and audiences that we have encountered in this chapter find themselves impersonating Hamlet—whether intentionally or not. For as the Hamlet of the eighteenth century is, as we have seen, put into a space of thought and contemplation when faced with the death of his father, so too are critics and audiences put in the same place by viewing Hamlet. Hamlet teaches readers and audiences to sit, think, and behold the wonders of loss—and perhaps, whether for better or for worse, to do nothing more.

It is in the eighteenth century's receiving of both Hamlet the character and *Hamlet* the play that melancholy, in addition to being a mechanism for resisting the present (as we have seen in the previous chapters of "Melancholy's Wake" in the figures of Thomas Warton, Thomas Gray, and Sarah Fielding, among others), might also help to form eighteenth-century critical institutions. Present-day critics such as Jonathan Kramnick and Lee Morrissey, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, have written of the development of criticism in the eighteenth century as the institutionalization of reading, and by looking at *Hamlet*'s first critical inheritors, we see the crucial role that melancholy played in the formation of such institutionalization. Melancholy is thus not simply a response to the erosion and destruction of all that is good; it also works to reconstruct new modes of thought and history out of the ruins.

Coda: Melancholy's Wager

From Thomas Warton's retirement out of society and into a place of spiritual ponderousness, to the graveyard poets' imaginations of the lower-rank dead, to the sentimental novelists' imagination of a utopic afterlife, the melancholy of "Melancholy's Wake" has been characterized by a double gaze. It allows one to look back to loss and forward to a better future in which losses are either restored or do not matter any longer. This is why the term "imagination" has been so crucial to the work of "Melancholy's Wake." To imagine is by definition to think up an alternative to the present, one that does not exist now but might (emphasis on the auxiliary "might") in the future.

As I close this study, then, I want to take a brief turn away from the eighteenth century and into the twentieth—specifically to the more politically inflected version of high theory that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century—to show that high theory is invested in an unquantifiable futurity that bears a structural resemblance to the form of melancholy that we have followed over the course of the four chapters of "Melancholy's Wake." In much the same way as melancholy's imaginative revolutionary thought operates, the high theory of the late twentieth century (peopled by critics such as Gayatri Spivak and Jacques Derrida) is invested in the possibility (however unrepresentable it may be) of a future world that is always on the horizon, never fully arriving. For these critics, such an orientation toward the future keeps the discipline of criticism alive in much the same way that melancholy keeps alive a vision of a future world in which losses might be reversed.

Twentieth-century literary theory describes the act of reading in terms of a futurity that finds a proleptic (and unlikely) corollary in the eighteenth century's deployment of melancholy as a rhetorical trope. In the advent of high theory in the second half of the twentieth century, the

act of reading became clouded in mystery and uncertainty, described as a play of grammatical tropes and wandering signifiers.[1] We were presented with the death of the author and left with the idea of a text that confounded the act of reading.[2] Each of these strains of criticism has been rehearsed innumerable times over the years, but they also each speak to the ultimate resistance of meaning to dogmatic interpretations. Perhaps most interestingly and most generatively, we were given a sense of an ethical demand that is subject to the radical unknowability of history, articulated famously, as we shall see, by Jacques Derrida in *The Politics of Friendship* (and then later taken up by critics such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *Death of a Discipline*). This spirit of uncertainty seems at first to have little truck with the eighteenth-century tropes of loss, gloom, and imagination. But upon closer look, we see that the two models converge under the heading of futurity.

For Derrida, the term "teleopoiesis" describes a future-oriented vision of history that echoes the relationship between melancholy and imagination I have traced in this dissertation. Calling teleopoiesis a "messianic structure,"[3] Derrida writes that, "We are not yet among these philosophers of the future, we who are calling them and calling them the philosophers of the future, but we are in advance their friends" (37). For Derrida, the act of reading involves trying to seek answers that resist foreclosure in the present and may for that matter always resist closure, but the terms of questioning that criticism provides also allows a goal toward which to

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[1] See, for instance, the work of Paul de Man, most notably *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983); and *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979). See also the work of Jacques Derrida, most foundationally *Writing and Difference*, 1967, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978); and *Of Grammatology*. 1967, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997).

[2] See Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" in *Image-Music-Text.* Trans Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-48.

[3] Derrida, 37. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

strive, even if such a goal is unreachable.[4] Philosophy, reading, and criticism continue as disciplines because they offer a promise of meaning, even if it is unclear when—if ever—that meaning will be fulfilled.[5] Nine years later, Spivak appropriates Derrida's term to overt political ends, putting teleopoiesis in conversation with Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* to envision academic and creative work as both collective and feminist, even as such a dream of collectivity is never fully realized. Spivak contends that, in *A Room of One's Own*, the notion of teleopoiesis finds its prime example. Woolf creates the figure Mary Beton, who sets out to write a lecture that would exemplify Woolf's dream of female creative freedom. But just as Beton sits down to write her lecture, her story ends, signaling that the dream, to borrow from Langston Hughes, is deferred. But even if the dream is deferred, the possibility that it exists at all offers a reason to hope.[6]

What Spivak, Woolf, and Derrida each have in common is a hope for definitive meaning that must always remain an illusion—but this illusion is what keeps the task of criticism alive, as

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[4] In essence, this is a point about deferral. See Morrissey's *The Constitution of Literature* for a discussion of the relationship between the deferral at the heart of deconstruction (Derridean deconstruction in particular) and the Enlightenment. For Morrissey, the emergence of literary criticism in the eighteenth century involves a clash about what exactly good reading should look like, whether it should (for instance) be beholden to the passions or not (182-85). The eighteenth century's debate over how to read reveals what Morrissey, taking a cue from deconstructive critics such as Derrida and de Man, calls the "indeterminability" (187) of reading.

[5] It is hard not to hear echoes here of Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," specifically of Benjamin's idea of a "weak messianic power" ("Theses on the Philosophy of History, 1940, rpt. In *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt [New York: Schocken, 1968], pp. 253-64, 254). Benjamin writes that, "The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim" (254). Where Derrida's perspective is from the present looking forward to an unknowable future, Benjamin's is from the present looking back to a future-oriented past.

[6] A similar notion animates Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2007). Laclau argues that organic unions between subjects around core concepts such as "freedom" or "liberty" offer the promise for revolution even if it is unclear what such revolution might look like in the real world (17-18 and throughout).

it sets a goal towards which criticism might reach. It enables the structure of criticism even if it leaves the goal always at arm's length. Structurally, this future promise of a definitive meaning that never reaches fruition as it characterizes much twentieth-century criticism bears a resemblance to the eighteenth century's deployment of literary melancholy. For when Derrida speaks of befriending those "philosophers of the future" (37), he brings to our mind the vision of David Simple on his deathbed looking into the future—or Thomas Warton in the solitude of nature looking up the heavens and away from worldly vanity for literary inspiration. For these figures—and for others in "Melancholy's Wake" as well—melancholy is a dwelling with loss, but it is also a wager on the imaginative possibility of a revolutionary and utopian politics. Mary Beton, for instance, is Woolf's imaginative dream of creative freedom, even if she exists as merely a dream, and even if this dream is haunted by the very real possibility that the figure of the dream of freedom is also a figure for the loss of freedom. In the same way, we might say, for instance, that Thomas Gray's vision of a possible world in which the lower-rank deceased might in fact be as culturally important as Milton or Cromwell opens up a dream of egalitarianism, even if such a dream is conditioned by the reality of the loss of such egalitarianism to the discourses of bourgeois ideology.

What is the end of all of this, though? The messianic theory of teleopoiesis offers up a dream for the future that resists instrumentalization, precisely because it is a dream, existing solely in the realm of representation and not in empirical reality. Similarly, the imaginative thought of melancholy is (to invoke a term that I have deployed at various points across this dissertation) inoperative. Melancholy dwells in the realm of imagination, because it dreams up the absent and (perhaps irretrievably) lost object, but it does so to politically revolutionary ends. But the revolution that melancholy dreams up is not televised—precisely because it is a dream.

What melancholy and teleopoiesis share with one another is a commitment to the revolutionary and invigorating potential of thought itself *qua* thought. In the wake of loss, the characters of this dissertation feel disempowered and paralyzed. But such disempowerment also opens up the possibility for imaginative thought. In the same way, teleopoiesis devotes itself to a thought of the future as itself revolutionary. Melancholy and teleopoiesis each teach us that sometimes thinking itself can be the most revolutionary of acts. Thought cannot be readily assimilated into any dominant cultural or ideological narrative. If dwelling with loss enacts the possibility of dwelling too with a fantasy, then it prevents such utopic fantasies from being co-opted by the cultural discourses that they critique—precisely because they are instrumental, and the cultural narratives that melancholy imagination resists are deeply invested in instrumentalizing the subject.

Perhaps melancholy teaches us, more than anything, that thought itself is inherently politically subversive. The melancholy protagonists of "Melancholy's Wake" subvert their worlds by thinking—or by thinking specifically on loss. In a 2015 GOP Presidential debate, Florida senator and presidential candidate Marco Rubio remarked—in a moment that earned him instant notoriety—that the American educational system should be training more welders and fewer philosophers.[7] On its face, Sen. Rubio's comment would seem to draw a (probably false) distinction between working and thinking. We need more workers, this line of thought would go, because labor produces things whereas thought produces nothing tangible. Or, put even more bluntly, the false dichotomy of this logic would suggest that work is useful but thinking is

[7] "[We need to] make higher education faster and easier to access, especially vocational training," Rubio said in a debate aired on the Fox Business Network. "For the life of me, I don't know why we have stigmatized vocational education. Welders make more money than philosophers. We need more welders and less philosophers" (*Fox Business Network GOP Debate*, Fox Business Channel: 10 November 2015).

useless. On another level, though, it might be that Sen. Rubio's remark betrays a deep and unspoken fear of the thinking subject. To think is always potentially to resist the dominant cultural ideologies, because the realm of thought is where revolutionary ideas have their beginnings. There is perhaps no greater figure for radical and disruptive subjectivity than the figure that is without quantifiable use value to the vision of the dominant political ideology, and the thinking subject always resides potentially outside the bounds of quantifiable use value. This possibility is what melancholy affords, it is what figures such as teleopoiesis articulate, and it may be what modern conservative and neoliberal politicians fear. Thought cannot be easily corralled in the service of dominant ideological narratives, as the melancholy protagonists of "Melancholy's Wake" have shown us; this is why, as ideologies such as Rubio's would contend, we need fewer thinkers.

The title of my coda is "Melancholy's Wager." If melancholy's wake is imaginative thought, then what is its wager? As Mackenzie's Harley, Fielding's Simple, Gray's elegist, and Warton's pensive solitary have shown us, melancholy dwells with loss so as to imagine another reality. This imagination places a wager on the future, that the future might be better than the present—or that utopic and imaginary visions of equality might be realized in the future when they seem to have no place in the present. The wager, though, is a weak one, because it requires little effort other than imagination. There is nothing much to lose on this wager, because what there is to lose has already been lost. Melancholy offers itself as a wager, but what one has to wager is one's imagination rather than anything tangible. Another way to put this would be to say that melancholy offers a promise (promises, after all, are by definition a nod to the future): where nothing else is possible, melancholy simulates the promise of freedom—a freedom that

may or may not one day be realized in empirical reality—by allowing, in its constant calling of loss to mind, the freedom to do nothing but think.

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