THE MORAL SELF IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY POETRY

A Study in the Poetics of Gray, Goldsmith, Cowper and Yearsley

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Abstract

This thesis explores one aspect of the 'inward turn' that is a significant feature of English poetry in the later eighteenth century. It claims that a representative group of poets construct an authorial 'self' in which the personal pronoun 'I' becomes an authoritative guarantor of social and moral judgements. It suggests that this move was a response to Lockeian ideas of personal identity and economic individualism which were subsequently refined and developed by theoreticians such as David Hume and Adam Smith such that the 'self' was conceived not merely as the site of the sensorium but also the site of moral judgement.

It identifies Thomas Gray as the initiator of this development, arguing that his earlier poems, and particularly his *Elegy*, were revolutionary in their attempts to accommodate Locke's ideas as a means of combating both the fissiparous nature of the literary market place and the hegemonic practices of the aristocratic class. The reception of the *Elegy* led Gray to believe he had failed, but his construction of the 'swain's' dual identity who both judges and is judged was to resonate in the *persona* of Goldsmith's narrator of *The Deserted Village.* Goldsmith's essentially conservative outlook meant that this poem was fractured and it was not until Cowper's *The Task* that a fully coherent realisation of Gray's poetics was achieved.

The thesis finally considers Ann Yearsley's work, arguing that her construction of a 'self' as narrator and social judge was fraught with difficulty both because of her position as a female labouring-class poet, and because of the repressive response to the French Revolution. The concluding chapter draws together the implications of the preceding chapters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction.

> The whole of this doctrine leads to a conclusion, which is of great importance in the present affair, *viz*. that all the nice and subtle questions concerning personal identity can never possibly be decided, and are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties.
> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739)[1]

Modern linguistic discussions of deixis, and particularly personal deixis, have tended to confirm Hume's conclusion that discussions concerning personal identity are essentially grammatical rather than philosophical. John Lyons, for example, asserts that 'the basic function of deixis is to relate the entities and situations to which reference is made in language to the spatio-temporal zero-point — the here-and-now — of the context of utterance.'[2]

Implicit in this claim for the grammatical rather than philosophical nature of personal identity is the idea that deictic terms typically perform functions rather than possessing semantic reference.[3] In the case of first person singular deixis this is, at first sight, rather puzzling. While the use of 'I' clearly identifies a speaking person, it offers no clues as to the authenticity of what is said or the conception of the self that 'I' encodes. Authenticity is established by comparing our empirical knowledge of the world with the descriptions we are offered in the act of speaking, while the 'self' of the speaker is constructed in the opinions and attitudes we are offered in relation to such descriptions. In face-to-face interactions, we can challenge either of these representations directly and immediately with such expressions as 'that is not the case' or 'you are not really like that'. In written communication, such immediate challenges are no longer possible. Even in the most personal acts of writing (e.g., diaries), we may no

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[1] *David Hume: A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed., *David* 2nd edn rev.by P. H. Niditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 1978), p. 262.

[2] John Lyons, 'Deixis and Subjectivity: *Loquor, ergo sum?*', in *Speech, Place, and Action: Studies in Deixis and Related Topics*, ed. by R. J. Jarvella and W. Klein, ed., (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1982), pp. 101-124, (p. 121).

[3] It would be inappropriate to argue this at length here. As an illustration, however, the deictic properties of time reference in English are typically encoded in the tense system. Thus, whereas the verb itself may possess semantic reference, the tense inflection has the function of assigning that reference to the present or the past and has no intrinsic 'meaning'.

longer recognise our younger selves, or our memory may fail to recall the described events.

In the case of older literature, these problems are magnified in that the opportunities for challenging or questioning the writer no longer exist. We have to take on trust both the world as described and the concept of self established by the author. Of course, this trust can be exploited in various ways as, for example, when authors invent imaginary and fanciful worlds, or when they signal that the narrator is intended to be a fiction. Nevertheless, in the case of non-dramatic poetry, there remains a common tendency to assume that the use of 'I' refers to the speaking subject, the poet. In a brief discussion of Wordsworth's 'I wandered lonely as a cloud', for example, Elena Semino claims that:

> a strong identification between poet and *persona* is encouraged by factors such as the evidence of Dorothy Wordsworth's diaries, the readers' generic expectations about Romantic poetry, and the fact that the poetic *persona* is referred to as *a poet* within the text itself.[4]

Semino's mention of 'the readers' generic expectations about Romantic poetry' is apposite here in that a central theme of this thesis is an exploration of how the poets discussed gradually appropriated the poetic *personae* of lyric and didactic poetry in the later eighteenth century so that they became more obviously associated with the (moral) selves that they wished to project and how these selves were, in turn, increasingly associated with the poets' individual lives.

A hint of this conflation of biography with poetic *persona* can be seen in the opening lines of Pope's 'An Epistle from Mr. Pope, to Dr. Arbuthnot' (1735):

Shut, shut the door, good *John!* fatigu'd I said,
Tye up the knocker, say I'm sick, I'm dead,
The Dog-star rages! nay, 'tis past a doubt,
All *Bedlam,* or *Parnassus*, is let out . . .[5]

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[4] Elena Semino, 'Deixis and the Dynamics of Poetic Voice', in *New Essays in Deixis: Discourse, Narrative, Literature*, ed. by Keith Green (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 145-60, (p. 147}. In a footnote, she observes: 'I have found that many readers (notably, my own students) tend to assume a default identity between *persona* and author, and only revise this assumption if faced with strong evidence to the contrary . . .', p. 158.

[5] *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. by John Butt (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., University Paperbacks, 1965), pp. 597-612.

The direct address to John, with its use of the present tense, suggests that Pope is speaking *in propria persona.* The 'Advertisement' advises its readers that:

> *This Paper is a Sort of Bill of Complaint, begun many years since, and drawn up by snatches, as the several Occasions offer'd. I had no thoughts of publishing it, till it pleas'd some Persons of Rank and Fortune . . . to attack in a very extraordinary manner, not only my Writings (of which being publick the Publick judge) but my* Person, Morals, *and* Family, *whereof to those who know me not, a truer Information may be requisite.*

Readers, then, might have the reasonable expectation that the poem will offer an account of Pope's life and a defence against the attacks on his person mounted by Lord Hervey and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. These expectations are, to a large extent, realised but what is interesting here is how Pope constructs this 'speaking' *persona.* The first section contains a withering attack on the denizens of Grub Street who plague him with their demands for patronage and advice. In many cases, these characters are given the classical names of writers renowned for their foolishness, thereby hinting that Pope can appeal to the higher ideals of classicism from which these poor writers are excluded.[6] Later in the poem, somewhat disingenuously, he gives his reasons for pursuing a life in literature:[7]

I left no Calling for this idle trade,
No duty broke, no Father dis-obeyed.
The Muse but serv'd to ease some Friend, not Wife.
To help me thro' this long Disease, my Life . . .
. . . .
But why then publish? *Granville* the polite,
And knowing *Walsh*; would tell me I could write;
Well-natur'd *Garth* inflam'd with early praise,
And *Congreve* lov'd, and *Swift* endur'd my Lays;
The Courtly *Talbot, Somers, Sheffield* read,
Ev'n mitred *Rochester* would nod the head,
And *St. John's* self (Great *Dryden's* friend before)
With open arms receiv'd one Poet more.   (129-32; 135-42)

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[6] The appeal to classical models is implicit in the quotation from Tully with which Pope prefaces the poem.

[7] I say 'disingenuously' because there is ample evidence that Pope was keenly interested in the commercial success of his writings. But see below, Chapter 4, where Maynard Mack compares Pope's attitudes to commercialization with those of Johnson.

Here, we are offered a portrait of a poet who, unlike the writers he had earlier excoriated, pursued a life of literature not through necessity but as a gentlemanly accomplishment appropriate to a man who mixed with such other gentlemen and statesmen as Talbot, Somers, Sheffield, Rochester and St. John. Further, it was one that could be enjoyed in the privacy of his own retreat at Twickenham — 'Shut, shut the door' — or in the country houses of his grander friends.

Pope's poetic *persona*, then, draws heavily on the kinds of public discourses which were used to sustain a privileged and predominantly masculine élite which prioritized leisured ease in large country estates and which considered the classical virtues of public service as described in, largely Roman, literature paramount to defend such a polity. As such, it is very much a partial representation of Pope the man and much more a portrait of a representative figure of a particular set of values.

Discourse, here, is a slippery term. In linguistics, discourse traditionally referred to texts at the suprasentential level and its object of study was the construction of coherent meanings and arguments above the sentence level. More recently, there has been a developing interest in how groups of texts employ similar linguistic registers and how they combine into text-types and genres.[8] This change of focus, while not ignoring the social conditions under which these texts were produced, had a tendency to reify the texts or groups of texts in such a way as to obscure the interrelationships between them, and between them and competing texts. An alternative way of theorising the relationships between discourse and social action was concurrently being developed by Michel Foucault. For him, when a society speaks to itself, its speakers engage in a set of 'discursive practices' which are essentially anonymous, and which are determined by the positions which they wish to uphold:

> [. . .] what we have called 'discursive practice' can now be defined more
> precisely. It must not be confused with the expressive operation by which
> an individual formulates an idea, a desire, an image; nor with the rational

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[8] See, for example, M. A. K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Language, Context and Text* (Victoria: Deakin University Press, 1985/9).

activity that may operate in a system of inference; nor with the 'competence' of the speaking subject when he constructs grammatical sentences; it is a body of anonymous rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, geographical or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function. . . . [9]

The advantages of this formulation are that it recognises that every utterance is social in origin, and that no utterance can ever be entirely original.[10] The disadvantages are that by insisting on the 'anonymity' of the rules, Foucault fails to take into account either the degrees of originality which different speakers employ to exploit such 'rules', nor does he acknowledge that different speakers can use such 'rules' to greater or lesser effect according to the power they exercise within their (linguistic) community.

Pierre Bourdieu, working within a similar tradition to that of Foucault, develops a theory of how discourses work within society which would appear to be more fruitful for understanding how specific literary discourses operate within given social structures.[11] For Bourdieu, discourses are much more obviously linguistic artefacts and represent the interactions which take place within given social groups. However, given that these groups interact with each other and struggle to gain power over each other within the market-place, these different discourses will be in conflict amongst themselves. He further distinguishes between standard languages and non-standard languages, claiming that the standard language exercises 'symbolic' power. This power is not necessarily exercised overtly because:

the language of authority never governs without the collaboration of those it governs, without the help of the social mechanisms capable of producing this complicity, based on misrecognition, which is the basis of all authority.[12]

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[9] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1972), p. 117.
[10] This is self-evidently true in that no (recognisable) linguistic utterance can occur which does not draw on the pre-existing linguistic potential.
[11] See especially, Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*, ed. by J. B. Thompson., trans. by G. Raymond and M. Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).
[12] Ibid., p. 113.

But although such power may be rejected by some sections of society, it cannot be ignored because '[n]o one can completely ignore the linguistic or cultural law.'[13] The consequences of doing so effectively silence such people so that they are excluded from the market-place. However, this symbolic power is inherently unstable because:

> the linguistic product is only completely realized as a message if it is treated as such, that is to say, if it is decoded, and the associated fact that the schemes of interpretation used by those receiving the message in their creative appropriation of the product may diverge, to a greater or lesser extent, from those which guided its production.[14]

From these theoretical postulates, Bourdieu identifies the 'paradox of communication', which is that although it assumes a common medium (i.e., the standard language) it operates 'by eliciting and reviving singular, and therefore socially-marked, experiences.' And he further identifies poetry as the genre which most obviously exhibits this paradox.[15]

Literary discourse, therefore, is one kind of discourse which is inserted into the myriad of discourses that already exist — of which one will be dominant — and alters them in subtle ways. It is tempting to suggest that it is the narrator who constructs such a discourse. However, given that linguistic meaning is always a social, rather than a personal, construct it follows that no authors can be in complete control of the discourse they are attempting to create. And it is by drawing on the insights of such theorists as Foucault and Bourdieu that I make the claim, above, that Pope's *persona* deployed aspects of a dominant discourse of the early eighteenth century that defended the *status quo* without necessarily subscribing to all of its forms. Further, Pope was able to appeal to this discourse successfully because he possessed symbolic capital through his control of the language, cultural capital through his classical references and his delight in the artistic embellishments of (certain) large landed estates, and, to a lesser extent, market capital through the sale of his works.

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[13] Ibid., p. 97.
[14] Ibid., p. 38.
[15] Ibid., p. 39.

Nevertheless, the material underpinnings of this discourse were being seriously challenged and alternative discourses were being developed, as Pope acknowledges in his portrait of the Grub Street hacks in his 'Epistle' and at far greater length in *The Dunciad* (1729/1743). Such challenges have been variously described by Jurgen Habermas, who argues that there was 'a steadily expanding parliamentary forum' of the bourgeois, Protestant middle-class which effectively changed the nature of the British state after the Glorious Revolution,[16], and by Peter Earle, who tends to avoid the Marxian term 'bourgeois', preferring instead to trace the rise of the merchant middle class in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century London and, by implication, suggests that the rise of the middle class would extend eventually throughout Great Britain.[17] The only significant dissenting voice to these interpretations of the various social and economic changes is that of J. C. D. Clark who insists on the continuity of a polity of church and state based on what he calls the *Ancien Regime*.[18] Nevertheless, the development of radically new discourses, particularly in the commercial literary market-place, suggests that the *Ancien Regime*, such as it existed, was under severe strain.

However, if the organising principles that underlay the aristocratic and largely pre-revolutionary society, and which were represented by Pope's poetic *persona,* were slowly collapsing, it became incumbent on Pope's successors to imagine a future society that embodied a set of moral and ethical principles appropriate to

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[16] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by T. Burger and F. Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), p. 63.

[17] Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class. Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (London: Methuen, 1989).

[18] J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1660-1832. Religion, Ideology and Politics during the Ancien Regime*, 2nd. edn., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Clark's thesis, although supported by a mass of detail, tends to overlook the essential inertia of institutions and bureaucracies which allows them a continued existence even though the ideologies which underpin their justification are themselves changing. Plumb makes the point that: 'Political and social stability . . . came quickly to Britain. . . But once established they acquire immense inertia: tradition, precedent, law, education, religion, all conspire to ensure them.' (J. H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675-1725* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p, 188. Clark is also contradicted by Linda Colley in *Britons: Forging the Nation: 1707-1837* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 31, who points out that church attendance was falling during the eighteenth century, and both by Geoffrey Holmes and Daniel Szechi in *The Age of Oligarchy. Pre-Industrial Britain 1722-1783* (London: Longman, 1993), p. 112, and Roy Porter in *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1982), p. 244, both of whom argue that the church was becoming increasingly less important in the lives of the majority of the people.

its new organisation. I have indicated above that one aim of this thesis is to explore how Gray, Goldsmith, Cowper and Yearsley slowly appropriated voices which readers identified with the poets *in propria personae.* I have referred to this as an 'inward turn' and in Chapter two I demonstrate that such a turn was a common feature of many mid-century poets. As my subsequent discussions will demonstrate, this is not a particularly novel idea in itself. More significantly, though, I shall be hoping to demonstrate how these poets managed to appropriate sufficient symbolic and cultural capital to give their voices authority when they pronounced on matters of social morality — how, in fact, they established the 'moral selves' of my title. In this respect, then, Gray, Goldsmith, Cowper and Yearsley were significantly different from such poets as their near contemporaries, Robert Blair, the Wartons and Mark Akenside. Whereas the latter, in their different ways, insisted on the primacy of the 'self' as the fount and source of their imagination, they largely avoided the social and moral consequences of privileging their individuality in this manner. Gray, Goldsmith, Cowper and Yearsley, on the other hand, constructed poetic 'selves' that were fully engaged in moral and social criticism. They are therefore appropriate subjects both for individual and collective scrutiny.

At one level, their achievements are remarkable. None of them possessed market capital, least of all Ann Yearsley, although Gray, Goldsmith and Cowper could lay some claim to be gentlemen even though they were not members of the landed gentry. None of them really possessed social capital. Gray was a relatively obscure Cambridge don before his writings brought him fame, and all his life he was crippled by shyness. Johnson famously dismissed Goldsmith as a social maladroit, although Reynolds has given us evidence that much of this was a pose.[19] Cowper could not face taking up a position as a clerk in the House of Lords and desperately sought retirement until he collapsed into insanity. Ann

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[19] '. . . Reynolds was convinced . . . "that he was intentionally more absurd, in order to lessen himself in social intercourse, trusting that his character would be sufficiently supported by his works. If it was his intention," he adds, "he was often very successful." . . . "I have heard Sir Joshua say," continues his pupil, "that he has frequently seen the whole company struck with an awful silence at the entrance of Goldsmith; but that the doctor has quickly dispelled the alarm by his boyish and social manners, and he then has soon become the plaything and favourite of the company."' *The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, First President of the Royal Academy*, ed. by H. W. Beechy. 2 vols (London: George Bell and Sons, 1876), vol. 1, p. 200.

Yearsley was even more remarkable being both a humble milkwoman and a woman in a male-dominated world. Nevertheless, they all attained fame in their time and, with the exception of Yearsley, have remained canonical poets.[20]

Throughout my study, I have engaged in occasional grammatical analyses to give empirical justification for my arguments. The grammatical model I use is derived from the functional grammar associated with Michael Halliday.[21] Although this grammar adopts the traditional categories of noun, verb, etc., it has the advantage of recognising that language does not merely describe the world but also expresses the speaker's attitudes to this world with a view of persuading interlocutors, where necessary, to change their (cognitive) behaviour appropriately. Syntactic choice, therefore, reflects all of these three functions. It seems an appropriate model to use in discussing eighteenth-century literature since, although the semantics and pragmatics and, by extension, the discursive effects of English may have changed significantly over the centuries, the grammar of English has remained remarkably stable.

Chapter two contains a brief description of the salient backgrounds which both informed their work and against which their achievements can be appreciated. It contains four sections, the first of which concentrates on Locke's philosophical construct of personal identity. I make the claim that Locke's general philosophical empiricist claims need to be seen in the context of his political philosophy which identified the role of the state as protecting the rights of the propertied individual. The kinds of economic individualism implied by this characterisation encouraged him to establish what it was to be a 'person'. His conclusion that personal identity consists in 'the sameness of a rational being' was subsequently challenged by Hume, whose scepticism as to our ability to attain certain knowledge led him to doubt whether we could ever guarantee that our fleeting sensations and perceptions logically entailed personal identity.[22]

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[20] Yearsley's neglect is deplorable and is doubtless the result of subsequent prejudice against working-class poets in general and women poets in particular. There is evidence that there is a significant revival of interest in her works.

[21] M. A. K., Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 2nd. edn. (London: Edward Arnold, 1994).

[22] Full bibliographical details are given in the relevant chapters.

Nevertheless, we *do* perceive ourselves as individuals who interact with other individuals, and in section two I discuss some of the ways in which the moral responsibilities entailed by such social interaction were theorised in eighteenth-century Britain. A particularly influential thinker, whose ideas were to resonate throughout the century, was Shaftesbury. Taking his own identity as axiomatic, he insisted that the gratification of his own pleasures included exercising such natural affections as contributed to the well-being and happiness of others. The concept of sympathy thus invoked, was developed by Hume. The well-spring of our actions, according to Hume, was the passion to avoid pain and embrace pleasure and, like Shaftesbury, Hume claimed that one such pleasure is the 'natural affection[s]' which cement the family unit. Extrapolating from this local example, Hume developed a social theory which recommended the exercise of sympathy as a template for civil society. The concept of sympathy was developed in greater detail by Adam Smith in his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), and in my discussion of Smith's work, I suggest how his concept of sympathy might have contributed to the cult of sensibility which was a significant feature of the literature of the late eighteenth century and also, perhaps paradoxically, how it underpinned his benevolent portrayal of the cooperative workings of the division of labour in the pin-making industry.

Section three investigates some aspects of the social and economic background from which these debates arose and to which they contributed. I start by considering the impact of the Glorious Revolution and how the divided loyalties between those who supported the Jacobean old order and those who welcomed the new regime were largely unified by a common patriotism in the face of the threats from France both military and cultural. Nevertheless, such unity as was achieved was under strain from structural changes in the economy that had important consequences for how Great Britain was imagined and represented in the literature of the period. These included changes in the pattern of land use, the growing significance of a commercial economy and the inexorable growth of urbanisation. In particular, I observe how the commercialisation of the book trade led to a re-imagining of the relationship between writer and reader such that authors had to establish themselves as individuals writing for a disparate

audience rather than as members of a shared community of taste with common, if sometimes contested, values.

Section four attempts to link these earlier sections directly to the discursive functions of the different genres of poetry, which remained common throughout most of the century but underwent significant changes in their articulation. The most significant of these was the georgic. Earlier, typical representations of the countryside had employed the pastoral mode with its implications of a happy peasantry situated in an unchanging landscape. However, pastoral slowly gave way to the georgic mode at the same time as landowners developed an interest in agricultural innovations and changing patterns of land use. Nevertheless, writers of the georgic chose to deploy the mode in two slightly different ways. John Philips, for example, employs an overtly didactic method in *Cyder* (1708), giving detailed instructions on the cultivation and fermentation of apples. Other writers recover Virgil's use of the georgic to reflect on Augustan Rome as well as offering agricultural advice. So, for example, in *The Fleece* (1757), John Dyer encompasses the whole process of wool manufacture as well as discussing its importance as a significant element in contributing to the prosperity of the nation. One feature of the georgic which is particularly relevant to my argument is the use of an 'impersonal' poetic *persona.* Didactic writing derives its authority from the success of its precepts rather than from the authority of its author, and I explore this feature in greater detail in my discussions of Pope and Thomson.

I also discuss how the oracular nature of *Windsor-Forest* (1713) and *The Seasons* (1730) typically invite the reader to consider their portrayals of a working countryside contributing to the greatness of Britain as representative of particular interests within the kingdom rather than as purely personal beliefs.[23] However, one aspect of Great Britain's growing importance in the world was its growth as a major trading power and the concomitant importance of the commercial interest. This interest was particularly significant in the book trade, which I have

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[23] Of course, this focus on the poetic *persona* as representative rather than personal is a matter of degree. I certainly would not wish to suggest that Pope and Thomson did not believe in what they were arguing.

already mentioned in section three. Here, I develop my argument by suggesting that the increasing isolation of authors from their readers may have contributed to an inward turn which, in conjunction with the philosophical ideas of Hume and Smith, emphasised the importance of the passions. Whereas the dominant poetic mode of the beginning of the century had been that of an author speaking on behalf of the country, by the end of the century poets were more obviously, and more self-consciously, speaking on their own behalf. Elements of pastoral and georgic remain in the poetry of Gray, Goldsmith, Cowper and Yearsley but they have been subtly changed to incorporate these new kinds of discourse.

The following chapters trace these changes by interrogating the major works of these poets. Because my central concern is to show how they managed to construct voices which could convey moral truths and social judgements authoritatively, I have tended to concentrate on their didactic poems rather than treat each poet comprehensively. Where relevant, I have also discussed their political allegiances so as to understand their moral and social judgements in the contexts of their times.

In the case of Gray, I suggest that his deep knowledge of Locke encouraged him to explore the nature of personal identity and the role of memory in establishing such identity. One consequence of this exploration is the introduction of a new 'personal' voice into his poems which reaches its apotheosis in the *Elegy* (1750). However, the uncertain deictics at the close of the poem suggest that Gray was unsure about the propriety of engaging in social criticism *in propria persona.* Insofar as the poem is about the 'state of the nation' and the place of the peasantry within it, the *Elegy* clearly employs some of the tropes associated with both the pastoral and georgic. The 'swain' and the 'listless youth', I argue, can both be read as representations of Gray. The epitaph, however, distances itself from this identification so that the youth becomes the kind of anonymous and 'typical' character that we might expect from pastoral or georgic modes. In spite of this uncertain treatment of a central character within the poem, I suggest that Gray was fully aware that he was attempting something radically new. However, readers' reactions to the *Elegy* indicate that they overlooked this feature concentrating instead on the resigned melancholy and nostalgia that is such a

major element throughout the poem. As a result, I argue that Gray abandoned any further experiments of this nature and turned, instead, to the oracular voice that dominates the *Odes*.

Goldsmith presents a slightly different case. Temperamentally old-fashioned, he wished to emulate the styles of the earlier poets he admired. However, as a jobbing writer, he was fully aware of the uncertainties of the literary market. Lacking patronage, he was forced back on himself and I suggest that the kinds of economic individualism that he was obliged to embrace contributed to a self-consciousness that found its way into his poetry. My analysis of *The Traveller* (1764) shows how Goldsmith employed features both of the topographical poem and the georgic to depict a portrait of Europe within which Great Britain was uniquely endowed with liberty and growing prosperity. However, I also indicate that the asides to his brother and mentions of his family indicate a more personal voice than that typically employed by georgic or the topographical poem. This voice becomes even more dominant in *The Deserted Village* (1770). His magisterial condemnation of the enclosure system includes significant echoes of pastoral, but these are refracted through the narrator's strong identification with 'Auburn'. Further, the displaced and disinherited peasants of the countryside are associated with a decline in the standards of poetry and the loss of the old modes. By implication, the reader is invited to equate the poet-narrator with Goldsmith and his regrets that he could no longer write in the style of Pope and his contemporaries.

The sense that the subject of his poetry was the poet's own 'self' and that this subject could be handled self-confidently was finally achieved by Cowper in *The Task* (1785). In his earlier poems, and particularly the *Moral Satires* (1782), Cowper adopted the anonymous but authoritative voice associated with the morally didactic poetry of the first half of the century. I suggest that this might be partly because he conceived of the *Satires* as akin to sermons. In homiletic discourse, the preacher is not speaking on behalf of himself but as a representative of God's word. His personal views are therefore irrelevant for the ego is in subjection. However, what is striking in the *Satires* is the wide range of

targets for Cowper's disapprobation. The poems detail the moral failings of the nation in remorseless detail, thereby acting as a social as well as a moral critique.

Exactly why Cowper underwent a stylistic shift between these poems and *The Task* is beyond the scope of this study. Clearly, his religious leanings towards an austere form of Calvinism encouraged intense self-scrutiny. Also, interest in the passions had stimulated a number of poems which explored the emotional states of their narrators.[24] However, the immediate trigger for *The Task* was a request by Ann Austen for him to write a poem 'on the sofa where she was sitting at the time'.[25] It is therefore likely that Cowper conceived the poem as a conversation with Lady Austen and that it later developed to become a 'conversation' with subsequent readers. It is this feature that I concentrate on, arguing that the stops and starts, the numerous digressions and the offering of opinions are all characteristic of conversational discourse. Nevertheless, the frequent use of pastoral and georgic elements reminds readers of the serious intent behind the poem and of the kinds of discourses that they had typically represented earlier in the century. Thus Cowper was able to achieve a poem which engaged in moral reflections and social criticism which emanated not from an anonymous narrator but from an individuated 'self'. The authority of the older modes was subsumed into the narrator in such a way that he himself becomes authoritative.

That Cowper managed to conjoin moral and social critiques with emotional states encouraged readers to regard him as engaging in the practice of 'sensibility'. I discuss the cult of sensibility briefly in this chapter before considering it in greater detail in the chapter on Ann Yearsley. Yearsley is a particularly interesting case for my study. I have commented above on how she lacked the various kinds of capitals described by Bourdieu and her struggle to achieve these forms a major theme of her poetry. One part of this struggle involved her breaking free from the patronage and condescension of Hannah More. Her first published work, *Poems on Several Occasions* (1785), was

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[24] These are referred to in Chapter 2, with the *caveat* that they tended to be asocial and more intent on the philosophical, artistic and personal consequences of the emotions rather than to link such feelings to their possible social causes.

[25] *William Cowper: The Task and other Selected Poems*, ed. by James Sambrook (Harlow: Longman Group Ltd., 1994), p. 23.

prefaced with an introduction by More detailing the circumstances of Yearsley's 'discovery' and Yearsley herself is described as 'A Milkwoman of Bristol'. Through these means, More had already constructed a *persona* for the poet that located all her utterances as emanating from a distressed member of the labouring classes. While never disavowing her background and, indeed, often bringing it to the fore in her self-characterisation as 'Lactilla', Yearsley was determined to be respected in her own right. My central claim is that Yearsley accomplished this in part because of her recognition that More's view of sensibility was essentially self-serving. Pity for the poor and acts of charity to relieve their suffering were, for Yearsley, sentimental unless they led to the kinds of social reform which ameliorated structural inequalities. Yearsley's experiences of privation and her aspirations for more education are vividly described in *Clifton Hill*, while her rejection of false sensibility is explored in the first poem of her second collection, *Poems on Various Subjects* (1787). Increasing confidence in her poetic powers allowed Yearsley to expand on the topics she discussed and, in particular, to advocate genuine 'friendship' — a recurring theme — in place of sensibility. A muscular attack on the slave trade indicated her interest in social matters that had wider national significance while her last volume included an unfinished poem, 'Brutus', giving this interest an obvious historical dimension. One of Yearsley's other themes, which was rarely, if ever, discussed in the poetry of Gray or Goldsmith but which is briefly explored by Cowper, is the inequalities between the sexes. Of course, I by no means intend to imply that Yearsley was the last poet to construct a narrator who was both recognisably 'personal' and who used that position to condemn social ills.[26] Nevertheless, I would claim that Yearsley was the last representative of a group of eighteenth-century poets who constructed a *poetic persona* that could be identified with the writing subject, and who used such a voice to engage in social and moral criticism

In the concluding chapter, I draw together the threads of my central argument by revisiting the key terms in the title: 'moral' and 'self'.

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[26] An interesting modern *exemplum* would be Tony Harrison, whose '*v*' consciously imitates Gray's *Elegy*. In Tony Harrison, *Collected Poems* (London: Viking, 2007), 263-79.

CHAPTER 2

Identity and some of its problems in Eighteenth-Century Britain.

'Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of Mankind is Man.'
Alexander Pope: *An Essay on Man* (1734)[27]

Some six years after Pope published the passage cited above, David Hume exhorted his fellow philosophers to 'march up . . . to human nature itself; which being once masters of, we may everywhere else hope for an easy victory.' He further suggested that 'some late philosophers in *England* . . . have begun to put the science of man on a new footing,' listing 'Mr. *Locke,* my Lord *Shaftesbury,* Dr. *Mandeville*, Mr. *Hutchinson* [sic], Dr. *Butler*, &c.'[28] Although these philosophers may have had a shared interest in the 'science of man', the ways in which they pursued this interest and the conclusions they came to were radically different. Similarly, the ways in which this interest was reflected and represented in the poetry of the period were equally diverse.

In this chapter, I intend to explore some of the main themes of these discussions and representations so as to establish the backgrounds against which Gray, Goldsmith, Cowper and Yearsley constructed their own poetry. My initial focus will be on the disputes concerning personal identity since the foregrounding of a problematic 'self' influenced the ways in which these poets constructed their own poetic 'selves'. However, such 'selves' necessarily interact with each other and have moral responsibilities towards each other. The ways in which man can, and should, construct himself as a morally responsible social being will be the focus of my second section.[29] These discussions, though, necessarily took place in a world in which the pressures of a developing economic individualism had material consequences both for society in general and for writers in particular. I shall be considering some of these pressures in my third section before concluding with a more extensive discussion of the dominant poetic genres in

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[27] *An Essay on Man: Epistle II* (1734) in Pope, *Poems,* p. 516.
[28] Hume, *Treatise*, 'Introduction', pp. xvi-xvii.
[29] It is important to recognise that for much of the century these discourses were male-gendered although such gender bias came under increasing attack later in the period.

which these themes were explored. I make no pretence at being comprehensive although I hope that such brief outlines will not have led to significant distortion.

1.

'Mem[orandum]: Carefully to omit defining of Person, or making much mention of it.'
George Berkeley c. 1708[30]

In fact, Berkeley ignored his own advice. In *Three Dialogues Between Hylas And Philonous* (1713), he asserts:

> I do nevertheless know, that I who am a spirit or thinking substance, exist as certainly, as I know my ideas exist. Further, I know what I mean by the terms *I* and *myself*: and I know this immediately, or intuitively, though I do not perceive it as I perceive a triangle, a colour, or a sound.[31]

Berkeley's robust defence of personal identity was designed to counter the sceptical tendencies implicit in the empirical philosophy of Locke and his followers. For Berkeley, it was clear that identity resided not only in consciousness but in an embodied consciousness and that this was given *a priori*.

For Locke, however, such a conclusion was not self-evident and might be seen to be inconsistent with his view that innate ideas do not exist. He argues this at some length in Book 1, Chapter II of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* (Fifth Edition 1706), restating the argument briefly and clearly in Book II, Chapter I: 'Let us suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper void of all characters, without any *ideas*', before explaining how it is that we are able to gain certain knowledge:

> To this I answer, in one word, from *experience*; in that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation, employed either about *external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that*

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[30] Cited in Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. xi.
[31] *George Berkeley:* Principles *of Human Knowledge* and *Three Dialogues*, ed. by H. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p, 174. See, also, p. 176, where he insists '. . . I know or am conscious of my own being, and that I myself am not my ideas, but somewhat else . . .'

which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the *ideas* we have, or can naturally have, do spring.[32]

Although it would be reasonable to infer from this argument that consciousness is somehow stimulated by our (bodily) sensory perceptions, the relationships between body and mind are not spelled out. On the one hand, this relationship could be seen as purely mechanistic in which case our thoughts (and actions) are subject to a deterministic explanation. On the other, consciousness may somehow be embodied thereby leading to the logically contradictory notion of a thinking substance.

It would seem Locke chose to remain agnostic between these two choices by arguing that:

> We have the *ideas* of *matter* and *thinking,* but possibly shall never be able to know whether any mere material being thinks or no: it being impossible for us, by the contemplation of our own *ideas*, without revelation, to discover whether Omnipotence has not given to some systems of matter, fitly disposed, a thinking immaterial substance. . . . For I see no contradiction in it that the first eternal Being should, if he pleased, give to certain systems of created senseless matter, put together as he thinks fit, some degrees of sense, perception, and thought . . .[33]

Nevertheless, as I shall discuss briefly below, this caveat did not satisfy all his critics.[34]

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[32] John Yolton, ed., *John Locke: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.*, 2 vols (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1961), vol.1, Book I, Chap. II, § 1-28, pp. 9-25. The quotation comes from Book II, Chap. I, § 2, p. 77.

[33] Ibid., vol. 2, Book IV, Chap. III, § 6, pp. 146-7.

[34] Modern scholars of Locke continue to find his position on this topic both confusing and inconclusive. Michael Ayers offers an ingenious solution when he argues that '[i]f we can be sure that Locke was a 'pure' mechanist, we must add that his mechanism was a formal commitment, not a material commitment to any existing geometrical mechanics. He might be described, then, as a 'pure ideal' mechanist.' Michael Ayers, *Locke*, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 1991), vol. 2, p. 153. John Yolton, in discussing Locke's discussion with Stillingfleet, suggests that the former rather ducks the question: 'Locke is saying to the Bishop that thought could be, or perhaps even is, a separable accident, attachable by God to either material or to immaterial substance. What are the inseparable accidents of immaterial substance? There seems to be no answer in Locke's remarks.' John Yolton, *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 19. Edwin McCann, however, suggests that Locke was a radical materialist: 'Locke's making God and his action an ineliminable part of the mechanistic world-picture is thus entirely in line with the Gassendi-Boyle program, if something of an extension of it.' Edwin McCann, 'Locke's philosophy of body', p. 75, in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. by Vere Chappell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 56-88.

The appeal to Omnipotence in this passage necessarily depends on evidence of the existence of God. Locke's arguments to prove His existence are relevant here both because they are inextricably linked with his views that individuals are subject to God's judgements and also because they underpin the poetic representations of nature as a manifestation of God's goodness throughout the eighteenth century. In Book I, Chapter 4, he asserts that men derive their idea of God from the 'visible marks of extraordinary wisdom and power [that] appear so plainly in all the works of creation that a rational creature who will reflect on them cannot miss the discovery of a *deity*.'[35] To which he adds, in Book IV, Chapter X, the view that:

> . . . I judge it as certain and clear a truth as can anywhere be delivered, that *the invisible things of GOD, are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood, by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.*[36]

For Locke, then, God's existence is guaranteed both by the argument from design and through divine revelation.[37]

However, if God reveals Himself through his creation, man apprehends God through the application of his reason in the act of perceiving this creation. It follows that this reason must be rooted in an identifiable self that has a continuous existence but, given that Locke has rejected innateness, our knowledge of our 'selves' must derive in some way from our sensible perceptions which are always transient.

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[35] Locke, *Essay*, vol. 1, Book I, Chap. IV, § 1-26, pp. 43 – 60. The quotation comes from §10, p. 48. The argument from design implicit in this characterisation is one that will be deployed extensively by Thomson in *The Seasons* and, with doctrinal modifications, by Cowper in *The Task*.

[36] Locke, *Essay*, vol. 2, § 7, p. 220.

[37] Manfred Kuehn stresses the significance of Locke's arguments when he asserts that '. . . it would be difficult to overestimate the historical importance of Locke's theory of belief for the eighteenth century. While it may go too far to say that Locke was "the intellectual ruler of the eighteenth century," his influence was to a large extent an eighteenth-century phenomenon.' Manfred Kuehn, Manfred, 'Knowledge and Belief', in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Philosophy*, ed. by Knut Haakonssen, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), vol.1, pp. 389-425, p. 391.

Locke suggests that this happens almost imperceptibly. In the initial state (Book 1, Chap., II, §15) '[t]he senses at first let in particular *ideas* and furnish the yet empty cabinet; and the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the memory, and names got to them.'[38] Given that each individual would have slightly different perceptions, the foundation for a theory of personal identity appears to be straightforward. However, there seem to be two reasons why Locke needed to develop this theory in greater detail. I have already indicated that he wished to show how God's judgements were properly allocated. However, he also needed to bring the *Essay* in line with his political philosophy. In *Two Treatises of Government* (1694), he had asserted that '[t]hough the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his.'[39] The grammar of these sentences implies that there is a distinction between a man's body and his ownership of it such that the body is not, of necessity, coterminous with the conscious knowledge of its existence. This interpretation seems borne out by his discussion of identity in the *Essay*.

In an important passage, Locke asserts that identity resides in the consciousness of a thinking man:

> When we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, meditate, or will anything, we know that we do so. Thus it is always as to our present sensations and perceptions, and by this everyone is to himself that which he calls *self*: it not being considered in this case whether the same *self* be continued in the same or divers substances. For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is this that makes everyone to be what he calls *self*, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things: in this alone consists *personal identity*, i.e. the sameness of a rational being.[40]

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[38] Locke, *Essay*, vol. 1, p. 15.
[39] *John Locke: Two Treatises of Government*, Students Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), ed. by Peter Laslett. *The Second Treatise,* § 27, pp. 287-8. I am accepting Laslett's dating here.
[40] Locke, *Essay*, Book II, Chapter XXVII, § 9, vol. 1, pp. 280-1.

He then proceeds to describe a number of rather bizarre scenarios in which he imagines consciousness residing in some specific part of the body[41], to transmigrate between bodies, or to occupy two different bodies with the intention of demonstrating that 'personhood' is independent of its embodiment.[42]

This brief discussion of some of Locke's ideas is pertinent partly because his thinking had a profound influence on eighteenth-century British thought in general, but also because his discussion of identity as something that resides in consciousness had a number of specific effects relevant to my later discussions. In particular, he helped initiate a lively debate about the nature of the 'self' which became a common theme of later philosophical discussions and which was reflected in the work of the poets I shall be investigating. Indeed, in many respects his focus on the responsible self who was answerable to God had the effect of 'psychologising' moral judgements, thereby downgrading the concept of a divine soul.[43] Also, his discussion of the potential transmigration of consciousness between bodies may have foreshadowed later theories of the co-ownership of sympathy and may even have contributed to Gray's uneasy portrayal of the imagined 'swain' as an *alter ego* in his *Elegy*.[44]

Foremost among those philosophers who developed the potential mechanistic strains in Locke's thought include David Hartley and Joseph Priestley. Hartley was, perhaps, particularly significant because he was, according to Roy Porter,

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[41] Ibid., § 17, 'Upon separation of this little finger, should this consciousness go along with this little finger and leave the rest of the body, it is evident the little finger would be the *person*, the *same person*.', pp. 286.

[42] Ibid., § 23, 'Could we suppose two distinct incommunicable consciousnesses acting the same body, the one constantly by day, the other by night; and, on the other side, the same consciousness, acting by intervals, two distinct bodies: I ask, in the first case whether the *day*- and the *night-man* would not be two as distinct persons as *Socrates* and *Plato*? And whether, in the second case, there would not be one person in two distinct bodies, as much as one man is the same in two distinct clothings?', pp. 289.

[43] Jeremy Black argues this in his claim that '[a]ctivity, rather than the passive acceptance of divine will and an unchanging universe, was stressed. Locke's theory of personal identity challenged traditional Christian notions of the soul, although this was not seen as so at the time.' Jeremy Black, *Eighteenth-Century Britain: 1688-1783*, 2nd. edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 159-60 . For a different view and a full discussion of the theological controversies surrounding Locke's concept of the soul see Christopher Fox, *Locke and the Scriblerians: Identity and Consciousness in Early-Eighteenth Century Britain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), Part 2.

[44] For a fuller discussion of Locke's influence on Gray, see my chapter below,

'more influential than Hume in the late Enlightenment.'[45] In *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations: in Two Parts* (London: 1749), Hartley attempts to develop a coherent theory which explains how our experiences are converted into ideas. Following Locke, he rejects any notion of innate ideas, arguing that both the body and the mind are the 'Substance, Agent, Principle *&c.* to which we refer the Sensations, Ideas, Pleasures, Pains, and voluntary Motions.'[46] However, while Locke largely ignored the processes by which sensations became apparent to the consciousness, Hartley appealed to a thoroughgoing form of Newtonian mechanism. So, in Prop.5, he argues that:

> when external Objects are impressed on the sensory Nerves, they excite Vibrations in the Aether residing in the Pores of these Nerves, by means of the mutual Actions interceding between the Objects, Nerves, and Aether.[47]

These vibrations are then transmitted to the brain by means of a fluid: 'The Brain may therefore, in a common Way of speaking, be reckoned the Seat of the sensitive Soul, or Sensorium, in Men'.[48] The construction of complex ideas, whether of matter or emotions, depends on the fading memories being reactivated and combined through association. In the case of matter, this involves its sensible properties; whereas in the case of emotions it involves the degrees of pleasure or pain associated with them.[49]

What is surprising in this formulation is that human agency seems singularly lacking and Hartley seems to have been uncomfortable with his conclusions. In the introduction, he states that he did not set out to formulate a system 'but was carried on by a Train of Thoughts from one thing to another, frequently without any express Design, or even any previous Suspicion of the Consequences that might arise.' That this train of thought led to the 'Doctrine of Necessity' astonished him, 'nor did I admit it at last without the greatest Reluctance.'[50]

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[45] Roy Porter, *ENLIGHTENMENT: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane. The Penguin Press, 2000), p. 183.
[46] David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations: in Two Parts.* (London: 1749), Introduction, pp. i-iv.
[47] Ibid., p. 21.
[48] Ibid., p. 31.
[49] See Prop.10, p. 65 and Chapter 4, p. 416.
[50] Ibid., Preface, p. vi.

However, his adoption of a radical empiricism coupled with Newtonian mechanism led inexorably to such a conclusion.[51]

Priestley's later simplification (1775) of Hartley was even more radical in that he embraced an extreme materialist position which rejected the concept of 'mind' as existing within the body.[52] For him, the mind (and hence consciousness) was no more than the actions of its corpuscles:

> I rather think that the whole man is of some *uniform composition*, and that the properties of *perception*, as well as the other powers that are termed *mental*, is the result (whether necessary or not) of such an organical structure as that of the brain. Consequently, that the whole man becomes extinct at death, and that we have no hope of surviving the grave but what is derived from the scheme of revelation.[53]

Leaving aside the obvious theological consequences implicit in Hartley's and Priestley's positions, it is worth considering what implications such mechanistic characterisations have for 'personhood.' If the self is no more than a bundle of perceptions and sensations, then choices, including moral choices, would seem to depend on the relative amounts of pleasure and pain they engender.[54] On this reading, our moral judgements of behaviour are dependent both on the degree of approbation we accord to others' actions and the extent to which our own actions are likely to be approved by these others. Morality, then, would seem to be both a social and a relational property.[55]

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[51] Kenneth Winkler claims that such a move was necessary to save Lockean empiricism and keep innate or instinctive principles down to a minimum. 'For them [i.e., associationists], Locke's condemnation of association was unduly influenced by his lingering rationalism — his assumption that in the conduct of argument, one idea should follow another not because they are associated but because content or truth demands it.' 'Perception and Ideas, Judgement', in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 234-285; p. 256; see also Aaron Garrett, 'Human Nature', in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Philosophy*, vol.. 1, 160-233; p. 166.

[52] Joseph Priestley, *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind, on the Principle of the Association of Ideas; with Essays Relating to the Subject of it.* (London: 1775).

[53] Ibid., pp. xix-xx.

[54] And it was this conclusion that so horrified Coleridge in his later strictures on Hartley in his *Biographia Literaria.* See *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, ed., 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 119-121.

[55] There are clearly echoes here of Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), although the argumentation is radically different. See further on Smith, below.

I shall be discussing Hume's theories of moral behaviour in greater detail in the following section. Here, however, my focus will be on the ways in which he radically re-theorised Locke's epistemology and, in particular, his discussion of personal identity. Hume may have complained that '[n]ever literary attempt was more unfortunate than my Treatise of Human Nature. It fell *dead-born from the press*, without reaching such distinction, as even to excite a murmur among the zealots'[56] but, following the publication of the simpler *Enquiries* (1748, 1751, 1757), his ideas attracted considerable attention.[57] Following Locke, he insists that '[w]e have no perfect idea of anything but of a perception', and that '[a] substance is entirely different from a perception. We have, therefore, no idea of a substance.'[58] Unlike Locke, however, he rejects the possibility that the mind might be in some way an immaterial substance ordained by God arguing that the disputes concerning the materiality or immateriality of the mind are fundamentally misconceived.[59] Equally, he rejects the mechanistic hypotheses put forward by philosophers such as Hartley on similar grounds by asserting that the impressions (attained through the senses) give rise to perceptions (of pleasure or pain) which are then converted into ideas and remain in the memory and can be recalled so as to give rise to new ideas through reflection '[s]o that the impressions of reflexion are only antecedent to their correspondent ideas; but posterior to those of sensations, and deriv'd from them.'[60]

At first sight, Hume's argument paves the way for a Lockean theory of personal identity. If our initial ideas are the result of sense impressions and our subsequent thoughts, or 'reflexion[s]', are 'deriv'd from them' then it would seem that our thoughts are somehow caused by these initial sense impressions. Our identity would therefore reside in the continuity and connection of these thoughts in our memory. But Hume gives us no such comfort. In *An Enquiry Concerning Human*

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[56] David Hume, *The Life of David Hume, Esq. Written by Himself* in *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. by E. F. Miller, rev. edn. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), p. xxxiv.
[57] *David Hume: Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. by L. A. Selby Bigge, 3rd edn rev. by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).
[58] Hume, *Treatise*, Bk. 1, Part IV, Sect. V, p. 234.
[59] 'What possibility of answering that question, *Whether perceptions inhere in a material or immaterial substance,* when we do not so much as understand the question?' Ibid., p. 234.
[60] *Treatise*, Bk.1, Part I, Sect. II, 8.

Understanding, Hume asserts categorically that we have no knowledge of cause and effect:

> **23** If we would satisfy ourselves, therefore, concerning the nature of that evidence, which assures us of matters of fact, we must enquire how we arrive at the knowledge of cause and effect.
> I shall venture to affirm, as a general proposition, which admits of no exception, that the knowledge of this relation is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings *a priori*; but arises entirely from experience, when we find that any particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other.[61]

It follows from this that we cannot legitimately claim that our 'reflexion[s]' are *caused* by our sense impressions, nor that our thoughts are joined to each other by a causal chain. Rather, the relationship is simply one of constant conjunction or, to use a term which was more widely used in the eighteenth century, association.

Hume develops this idea both in his discussion of the soul and its putative relationship with God and also in his discussion of personal identity.[62] To his own satisfaction, he demonstrates that we cannot prove the existence either of the soul or of God since, if we reject the concept of cause and effect then 'there is no such thing in the universe as a cause or productive principle, not even the deity himself.'[63] If, on the other hand, we accept such a concept, then we are left with the absurd conclusion that:

> as all objects, which are not contrary, are susceptible of a constant conjunction . . . it follows, that for ought we can determine by the mere ideas, any thing may be the cause or effect of any thing; which evidently gives the advantage to the materialists above their antagonists.[64]

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[61] Hume, *Enquiries*, Sect. IV, Part I, p. 27. Of course, he argues this at some length in the *Treatise*, but here he expresses it quite succinctly.

[62] Both Locke and Hume seem to use the terms 'mind' and 'soul' interchangeably although the former tends to be used in relation to our apprehension of the world while the latter is used in relationship to our apprehension of God.

[63] Hume, *Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, Sect. V, p. 248.

[64] Ibid., pp. 249-50. Hume was clearly aware of the potential charge of radical scepticism since he concludes this section by stating: 'If any philosophy, therefore, makes no addition to the arguments for religion, I have at least the satisfaction to think it takes nothing from them, but that everything remains precisely as before.'

Having dealt with the metaphysical consequences of his argument, Hume can now turn to the more mundane problem of personal identity. Perhaps the clearest statement of his ideas on this topic can be found in the *Appendix*.[65]Again, he relies on similar arguments to those that are foundational to his empirical philosophy. All our knowledge derives from our perceptions. Since we cannot perceive any causal relationships, then we cannot claim that one perception is causally related to another, hence our sense of personal identity is a fiction created by the constant conjunction of our fleeting sensations. However, Hume appears to be unhappy with this conclusion for, having failed to reconcile the two views '*that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences* and *that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences*', he ends by stating 'For my part, I must plead the privilege of a sceptic, and confess that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding. I pretend not, however, to pronounce it absolutely.'

There are, I think, good reasons for his discomfiture for, if we have no certain knowledge of our own personal identity, then we can have no knowledge of other peoples' identity. That this appeared to trouble Hume can be suggested by the various figures of speech he employs in his extended discussion in the body of the work.[66] He observes that we attribute a continuing identity to objects which either change their form minimally (e.g., mountains); which continue to perform the same function despite significant changes in form (e.g., ships and churches); and to entities which appear to have 'a *sympathy* of parts to their *common end*' (e.g., vegetables, animals and men).[67] Further he likens the soul to 'a republic or commonwealth, in which the several members are united by the reciprocal ties of government and subordination, and give rise to other persons, who propagate the same republic in the incessant change of its parts.'[68] Thus, it would appear that identity is largely (though by no means exclusively) related to communality. Ships and churches serve the community, and are served by the community; the parts of men are united by sympathy; and the mind is analogous to a republic in which people act cohesively.

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[65] 'Appendix', pp. 633-6.
[66] Hume, *Treatise*, Book I, Section VI, p. 251-263.
[67] Ibid., p. 257.
[68] Ibid., p. 261.

These relationships cannot logically be shown to exist, but they are created by the passions through imagination which unifies them in the memory:[69] 'In this view, therefore, memory does not so much *produce* as *discover* personal identity, by shewing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions.' And he concludes his discussion by asserting that:

> The whole of this doctrine leads to a conclusion, which is of great importance in the present affair, *viz.* that all the nice and subtle questions concerning personal identity can never possibly be decided, and are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties.[70]

This is a startling conclusion. If, as Hume seems to be suggesting, the grammatical 'I' has no obvious referent, it follows that the fictional, or poetic, 'I' has the same ontological status as the self-referring 'I' and can therefore refer both to the authorial 'I' and the narrative 'I'. Further, it invites us to consider the status of other personal pronouns such as 'you', 'we' and 'they' such that the problem of personal identity is not somehow divorced from social identity but is firmly entangled with it.[71]

This conclusion also has some bearing on the final chapter of Book I. At first sight this chapter is distinctly odd since it is neither a philosophical conclusion to Book I, nor a prolegomenon to Book II. Equally, it is stylistically at odds with the preceding discussions and introduces an authorial self in seemingly inappropriate ways. Nevertheless, as a rhetorical shift it reasserts Hume's identity while giving an indirect gloss on his earlier discussions insofar as it acknowledges that the philosophical method that he has adopted may well lead to apparently bizarre conclusions. By personalizing the problems in such a way, Hume seems to be inviting his readers to confront their own (possibly exaggerated) reactions to his conclusions while invoking sympathy for their (and his) perplexity.[72]

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[69] Ibid., p. 262.
[70] Ibid.
[71] I shall be discussing the conflation of the narrative 'I' and the authorial 'I' in greater detail later in this study.
[72] Equally, of course, it can be read as a defence against possible charges of atheism. If, as Hume has shown, his philosophy *per se* is neutral with regard to God, this does not necessarily

The nature of personal identity and the existence of the soul were, as Raymond Martin and John Barresi have shown, intimately connected, and in highly complex ways.[73] To deny the existence of the soul, as Hume did, was to cut man off from direct intercourse with God. This might seem to leave man in a moral quandary in which case he would need to seek moral guidance elsewhere. The most obvious site would be from within.[74] However, Hume has also demonstrated that the notion of personal identity is essentially a fiction. It would seem, then, that we are left in a moral vacuum. Hume, however, plays the rhetorical trick of placing himself in the reader's position and imagining how it can be ameliorated. His solution is to dine, play backgammon, converse and enjoy himself with his friends: 'Here then I find myself absolutely and necessarily determin'd to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life.'[75] The implication, therefore, must be that philosophical reasoning will produce answers only to a limited set of questions; other answers must be sought in the social world and in theories of social morality.[76]

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invalidate the individual's beliefs. For a discussion of Hume's varying reactions to such charges, see Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment. A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780. Vol.2. Shaftesbury to Hume* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Chap. 4.

[73] Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: an Intellectual History of Personal Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[74] As we shall see in the next section, this was the solution largely adopted by Adam Smith.

[75] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 269. It is interesting that Hume uses the word 'necessarily' here. Jonathan Lamb makes a similar point when he observes that '[m]ore sceptical than Locke or Mandeville about personal identity, and plainly incredulous of the various forms of self-esteem cultivated by Descartes, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Hume considers each person necessarily social because a mind so slenderly stored with permanent qualities as the one he has described could not possibly survive in its own company . . .' Jonathan Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: Pickering & Chatto (Publishers) Ltd., 2009), p. 33.

[76] Thomas Reid (1764) has an interesting gloss on Hume's rhetorical shifts in this passage: 'It seems to be a peculiar strain in this author [Hume], to set out in his introduction by promising, with a grave face, no less than a complete system of the sciences, upon a foundation entirely new – to wit, that of human nature – when the intention of the whole work is to shew, that there is neither human nature nor science in the world. It may perhaps be unreasonable to complain of this conduct in an author who neither believes his own existence nor that of his reader; and therefore could not mean to disappoint him, or laugh at his credulity. Yet I cannot imagine that the author of the "Treatise of Human Nature" is so sceptical as to plead this apology. He believed against his principles, that he should be read, and that he should retain his personal identity, till he reached the honour and reputation justly due to his philosophical *acumen*. Indeed, he ingeniously acknowledges, that it was only in solitude and retirement that he could yield any assent to his own philosophy; society, like daylight, dispelled the darkness and fogs of scepticism, and made him yield to the dominion of common sense.' *Thomas Reid: Inquiry and Ethics*, ed. by K. Lehrer, K., and R. E. Beanblossom, eds., (Indianopolis: Bobs-Merrill Company Inc., 1975). P. 8. Carl Henrik Koch has observed that 'British philosophy of the Enlightenment developed from epistemology and metaphysics via moral science into social science. More than

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'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we
expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.'
Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776)[77]

Smith's views as expressed here seem to be directly opposite to those that he
espouses in the opening of his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759):

> How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some
> principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and
> render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it
> except the pleasure of seeing it.[78]

On the one hand, Smith seems to be suggesting that public good arises purely
from self-interest; on the other hand, that self-interest is of less importance than a
natural propinquity to take pleasure and interest in the happiness of others.
However, the contrasting ideas of man as an essentially selfish creature and those
that considered him to be naturally benevolent are a recurring theme in the moral
philosophy of eighteenth-century Britain.

Although Locke failed to develop a fully coherent moral philosophy, there are
hints throughout his writings that he had a clear view of appropriate ethical
behaviour.[79] His rejection of innate ideas meant that he also has to deny the
existence of an innate moral sense. Conscience, therefore, develops as a
consequence of our social interaction.[80] Our perceptions of good or bad

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anything else, it was Hume's philosophical oeuvre that brought about this development' Carl
Henrik Koch, 'Schools and Movements', in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century
Philosophy*, vol.1, 45-68, p. 57.

[77] *Adam Smith: The Wealth of Nations, Books I-III*, Skinner, ed. by A. S. Skinner (London:
Penguin Books, 1999), p. 119.

[78] *Adam Smith: The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. by R. P. Hanley, with an introduction by A.
Sen (London: Penguin Books, 2009), p. 13.

[79] J. B. Schneewind comments that '[h]e published little on this subject [moral philosophy], and
what little he did publish raised more problems for his readers than it solved.' J. B. Schneewind,
'Locke's moral philosophy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, pp. 199-225; p. 199.

[80] '. . . many men may, by the same way that they come to the knowledge of other things, come to
assent to several moral rules and be convinced of their obligation. Others also may come to be of
the same mind, from their education, company, and customs of their country; *which persuasion,
however got, will serve to set conscience on work*, which is nothing else but our own opinion or
judgement of the moral rectitude or pravity of our own actions' Locke, *Essay,* vol. 1, Book 1,
Chap. III, § 8, p. 29

behaviour must, then, be dependent on our views of social justice and Locke develops this idea in a telling passage where he argues:

> *Where there is no property, there is no injustice* is a proposition as certain as any demonstration in *Euclid*: for the *idea of property* being a right to anything, and the idea to which the name *injustice* is given being the invasion or violation of that right, it is evident that, these *ideas* being thus established, and these names annexed to them, I can certainly know this proposition to be true . . . [81]

Clearly, the ideas expressed here are closely related to those he develops in his *Two Treatises,* with the clear implication that those without property cannot suffer injustice.[82] However, as I have suggested above, for Locke 'property' included more than material possessions and his arguments here and in the *Treatises* are developed so as to defend the individual's rights against the arbitrary behaviour of absolute monarchy and are based on an argument that invokes natural law.[83] Nevertheless, Locke's defence of the property-owning individual against the intrusion of the state was developed by other philosophers who expanded Locke's ideas and constructed an economic argument which privileged individualism and self-interest as the ordering principles of eighteenth-century mercantilism.

Foremost among these was Bernard Mandeville. In *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), he attempts to demonstrate that the economic well-being of society depended entirely on the exercise of self-interest and greed:

The Root of evil Avarice,
That damn'd ill-natured baneful Vice,
Was Slave to Prodigality,
That Noble Sin; whilst Luxury
Employ'd a Million of the Poor,

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[81] *Essay*, Vol. 2, Book IV, Chap. III, § 18, p. 155.
[82] Schneewind offers us a word of caution here, stating that '[i]t must be noted that Locke did not claim that the argument of the *Second Treatise* was intended to fill out his moral theory. We may read it as doing so, but as Locke did not acknowledge the work it is doubtful that he meant us to do so.' J. B. Schneewind, 'Locke's moral philosophy', p. 217.
[83] Richard Ashcraft offers the following gloss on Locke's arguments: '[T]the original condition in which God placed mankind – is one in which property is defined in naturalistic and moral terms, where the key concepts are freedom of one's person, labor, use, the right to subsistence, and the Law of Nature or God's will.' Richard Ashcraft, 'Locke's political philosophy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, pp. 226-251, p. 246.

And odious Pride a Million more . . .

Thus Vice nursed Ingenuity,
Which join'd with Time, and Industry
Had carry'd Life's Conveniencies,
Its real Pleasures, Comforts, Ease,
To such a height, the very Poor
Lived better than the Rich before;
And nothing could be added more:[84]

To which, he added the gloss:

> Frugality is like Honesty, a mean starving Virtue, that is only fit for small
> Societies of good peaceable Men, who are contented to be poor so they
> may be easy; but in a large stirring Nation you may have soon enough of it.
> 'Tis an idle dreaming Virtue that employs no Hands, and therefore very
> useless in a trading Country, where there are vast numbers that one way or
> another must be all set to Work.[85]

These apparently shocking sentiments were based on a hard-headed realism that

acknowledged the advantages of the new economic order while deploring the

failure of the church to adapt its teachings to take such advantages into account.[86]

Of course, they were also developed as a direct counterblast to Shaftesbury's

view that we possess an innate moral sense. Indeed, Mandeville stated

unequivocally in his later *A Search into the Nature of Society* (added to the 1723

edition) that '[t]he attentive Reader, who perused the foregoing part of this Book,

will soon perceive that two Systems cannot be more opposite than his Lordship's

and mine.'[87]

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[84] *Bernard Mandeville: The Fable of the Bees*, ed. by P. Harth (London: Penguin Books, 1989), pp. 68, 69.

[85] Ibid., pp. 134-5.

[86] Julian Hoppit claims that Mandeville's 'satire and apparent amorality resonated powerfully through succeeding decades.' Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England 1689-1727* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 198. A discussion of the changing economy of Great Britain occurs in the following section.

[87] Mandeville, *Fable*, p. 329. Jonathan Israel, noting a common intellectual heritage between the two writers, makes the point that 'Shaftesbury accepts the "naturalist" starting-point common to Hobbes, Spinoza, and later Mandeville, that every individual creature seeks its own conservation and 'private good'' but that 'Mandeville rejects Shaftesbury's conception of an innate morality and system of 'virtue', arguing that in polite society, men simply learn their notions of 'virtue' as a superficial veneer from the rules of courtesy and sociability.' Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001),pp. 625-6. Israel also insists that Mandeville was more thoroughly Spinozist in his thinking. There are, indeed, some teasing stylistic similarities between Mandeville and Spinoza. Just as Spinoza sets forth a set of propositions in his *Ethic*, which he then proves through demonstrations (see *Baruch Spinoza: Spinoza Selections*, ed. by J. Wild (New York: Charles

It is unlikely that Shaftesbury would recognise his philosophy as a 'System'. Throughout the *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), he rejects Locke's mode of philosophising, dismissing it with the words: 'In reality, how specious a study, how solemn an amusement is raised from what we call "philosophical speculations", "the formation of ideas, their compositions, comparisons, agreement, and disagreement"!'[88] For Shaftesbury:

> [t]o philosophize, in a just signification, is but to carry good breeding a step higher. For the accompaniment of breeding is to learn whatever is decent in company or beautiful in arts, and the sum of philosophy is to learn what is just in society and beautiful in nature and the order of the world.[89]

As an essential element within eighteenth-century conceptions of 'politeness', then, the exercise of philosophy involves a deference to other people's opinions and a rhetoric that seeks to persuade rather than to convince, and Shaftesbury demonstrates this aspect of his work when he introduces his 'Miscellanies' as a corrective to the more formal properties of his earlier publications.[90] The *Characteristicks* is, therefore, as its title implies, a collection of observations which are clearly interrelated but neither rigorously joined together by a logical inevitability nor dependent on a preordained sequence. In this respect, we are offered free access to the sociable and gentlemanly world envisaged by Shaftesbury in ways that are not dissimilar to those used by Addison and Steele in *The Spectator* and which I shall be discussing in the next section.

Scribner and Sons, 1930)), in *The Grumbling Hive,* Mandeville sets forth a set of propositions which are then 'proved' by his notes.

[88] Klein, L. E., ed., *Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury: Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 'Soliloquy, Or Advice to an Author', p. 134.

[89] *Characteristics*, Miscellany III, p. 407. Such a formulation necessarily excluded those who lacked the leisure to engage in such activity.

[90] 'For these, being of the more regular and formal kind, may easily be oppressive to the airy reader, and may therefore with the same assurance as tragedy claim the necessary relief of the 'little piece' or farce . . .', *Characteristics*, Miscellany I, p. 342. Lawrence Klein elaborates on this point when he argues '[w]hile Steele and Addison operated on a much more concrete level than Shaftesbury, all three were engaged in producing a model that could account for modern discursive conditions. These Whig writers foregrounded the volubility of their society as a problem. Within that polyphony, politeness as a norm and also goal of discourse promised order and direction in a way that inherited cultural institutions might have once sought to do.' Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 12.

Shaftesbury's concept of the self and its relation to his moral philosophy is quite unequivocal. Whatever other philosophers may argue, 'I must so far submit as to declare that, for my own part, I take my being on trust.' Further, having accepted this as axiomatic, he can assert that '[i]f it be certain that *I am*, it is certain and demonstrable *who and what I ought to be,* even on my own account and for the sake of my own private happiness and success.'[91] This claim could potentially lead to the Mandevillian view that whatever satisfies the appetites and leads to success is necessarily good. However, Shaftesbury has a radically different conception of what contributes to 'private happiness'. His view is that:

> It is impossible to suppose a mere sensible creature originally so ill-constituted and unnatural as that, from the moment he comes to be tried by sensible objects, he should have no one good passion towards his kind, no foundation either of pity, love, kindness or social affection.[92]

For Shaftesbury, then, virtue is an innate consequence of these natural affections and, as a corollary, conscience appears to be the act of introspection by which one judges one's own behaviour. So, in 'Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author', he argues that a person who has committed a fault will examine himself such that he:

> becomes two distinct persons. He is pupil and preceptor. He teaches and he learns. And, in good earnest, had I nothing else to plead in behalf of our modern dramatic poets, I should defend them still against their accusers for the sake of this very practice . . .[93]

The split self that is hinted at in Locke's idea of personal identity is here reaffirmed and illustrated with reference to contemporary poetic practice.

Shaftesbury's view that there is a natural propensity towards affectionate intercourse between individuals becomes the basis for his conception of good

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[91] *Characteristics*, Miscellany IV, p. 421.
[92] *Characteristics*, An Enquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit, p. 178.
[93] *Characteristics*, p. 72.

government.[94] Given that such feelings are natural, it follows that they must have existed in the original state of nature. The semi-mythical 'compact' through which men came to form civil societies, therefore, involved more than just property rights and included the maintenance of 'faith, justice, honesty and virtue.'

That Shaftesbury's moral (and political) philosophy was to resonate throughout the century may have been in part because it was linked to an aesthetic which identified the beautiful with the good.[95] In 'Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author', he specifically states:

> And thus the sense of inward numbers, the knowledge and practice of the social virtues, and the familiarity and favour of the moral graces are essential to the character of a deserving artist and just favourite of the Muses. Thus are the arts and the virtues mutually friends and thus the science of virtuosos and that of virtue itself become, in a manner, one and the same.[96]

And he demonstrates his own 'sense of inward numbers' through his rhetorical ploy of developing arguments which rely on their incremental impact, and his use of conversational interchange as a way of dealing with opposing arguments, thus invoking the classical practice of Socratic dialogue while emphasizing the essential sociability of his doctrines. In this respect, therefore, he lacks the intellectual rigour and forensic detail that Hume brought to his particular discussions of moral philosophy.

Having rejected the logical relationship between causes and their effects, Hume had to establish some other way in which sense impressions, ideas and such

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[94] *Characteristics*, Sensus Communis, an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour. Part III, Section I, pp. 48-51.
[95] 'Shaftesbury is a unique and perplexing figure in the history of eighteenth-century moral thought. In his lifetime his position was on the whole an isolated one, but for most of the century his fame and influence were enormous.' Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, p. 86. Shaftesbury's influence on particular poets will be discussed in the relevant sections below.
[96] *Characteristics*, p. 150. Rivers is rather more circumspect. While she acknowledges that Shaftesbury makes the link between the beautiful and the good, she also points out that '[i]n several places, . . . Shaftesbury shows his ambivalence about using the language of aesthetics to discuss ethics. In some places it seems that he is drawing an analogy purely for rhetorical purposes, between art and morals, in others that he really means that the beautiful is the good.' Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, p. 143.

actions as were consequent on these ideas, were connected. As he saw it, his task was 'to prove *first*, that reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will; and *secondly*, that it can never oppose passion in the direction of the will.'[97] In its primitive sense, 'passion' (or 'volition') would appear to be that feeling of pleasure or pain which we receive from our immediate sensations, and reason can hold no sway over such passions.[98] Indeed, '[r]eason is, and ought, only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.'[99]

Having established that the passions are the motivating force behind human activity, Hume needs to explain why civil society is not in a state of Hobbesian anarchy and how it is that individuals possess an awareness of right and wrong, and in Book III of the *Treatise* he develops a comprehensive theory of morals which is clearly intended to be the summation of the book as a whole.[100] Starting from the foundational principle that we identify pleasure as good and pain as bad, he concludes that our moral sense is natural. He then proceeds to consider how these natural feelings translate into the more complex structures of moral behaviour. His answer appears to be that we are driven by purely selfish instincts and that in order to curb the selfish instincts of others (which would harm us) we construct a set of rules which limit the effects of such innate selfishness.[101]

This rather bleak conclusion, however, is somewhat undercut by Hume's contrary claim that we also possess a natural benevolence towards those who are close to us and which derives from our desire to procreate. For Hume, it would appear, the basic (and original) social unit is the family and family ties are maintained through the exercise of 'natural affection'.[102] The apparent tension between these two positions is partially resolved in his discussion of promises. A

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[97] Hume, *Treatise*, Bk. II, Part III. Sect. III, p. 413.
[98] It is unclear whether Hume is using these two terms as synonyms or whether he regards 'volition' as a basic instinct which gives rise to 'passion'. Given that he eschews the kind of mechanistic explanations offered by Hartley, the latter meaning seems unlikely.
[99] *Treatise*, ibid., p. 415.
[100] It is noteworthy that the full title of his work is *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects.*
[101] 'Here then is a proposition, which, I think, may be regarded as certain, *that 'tis only from the selfishness and confin'd generosity of men, along with the scanty provision nature has made for his wants, that justice derives its origin.'* Hume, *Treatise*, Book III, Part II, Sect. II, p. 495.
[102] Ibid., p. 486.

promise is a social contract between two parties, one of whom guarantees to perform some particular action which will bring advantages to both parties. As such, it places both parties under an obligation such that its successful performance is conceived as a public good which helps bind society together. Between families and friends, such promises are redundant since they are bound together by 'the more generous and noble intercourse of friendship and good offices.'[103]

This distinction allows Hume to posit two kinds of morality, the artificial and the natural, where the former operates in the exercise of civil responsibilities and the latter in the exercise of personal relationships. This latter, he refers to as *sympathy* which is a feeling that arises from our common humanity:

> The minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations, nor can any one be actuated by any affection, of which all others are not, in some degree, susceptible. As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature.[104]

Hume develops his discussion of sympathy in some detail in his *Enquiries* (1748).[105] In particular, he argues that:

> If any man from a cold insensibility, or narrow selfishness of temper, is unaffected with the images of human happiness or misery, he must be

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[103] Ibid., p. 521. Alasdair MacIntyre maintains that Hume fails to establish the grounds for our feelings of approbation or disgust. 'Hume . . . argues that when we call an action virtuous or vicious we are saying that it arouses in us a certain feeling, that it pleases us in a certain way. In what way? This question Hume leaves unanswered. He passes on to give an account of why we have the moral rules we do have. Why it is *this* rather than *that* which we judge virtuous. The basic terms of this account are utility and sympathy.' Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1967), p. 174. However, as Adela Pinch has argued, it would seem that for Hume the answer lies in the strength of the passions that are aroused: 'What authorizes feelings, what gives them their authenticity, their ontological status, their moral status, is not their causes but their force or liveliness.' Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 33.

[104] *Treatise*, Book III, Part III, Sect. I, pp. 575-6. Frances Hutcheson, a Shaftesburian follower, takes a slightly more circumspect view of the relationship between sympathy and self interest. 'It is true indeed in fact, that, because *Benevolence* is natural to us, a little Attention to other Natures will raise in us good-will towards them, whenever by any Opinions we are persuaded that there is no real *Opposition of Interest.*' Frances Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections*, 3rd edn., (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1742) § 1, C2, p. 19.

[105] Hume, *Enquiries.* See particularly Sect. V, Part II.

equally indifferent to the images of vice and virtue: As, on the other hand, it is always found, that a warm concern for the interests of our species is attended with a delicate feeling of all moral distinctions; a strong resentment of injury done to men; a lively approbation of their welfare.[106]

Thus, it would seem, that the wandering self, or grammatical 'I', identified by Locke and Hume as the locus of personal identity, was given a motor by the passions and a direction towards others through the exercise of sympathy.

Interestingly, this passage is preceded by a section in which Hume relates these feelings to our appreciation of the representations of joy and suffering in works of art.[107] His claim that 'no passion, when well represented, can be entirely indifferent to us' suggests that he is not merely developing a theory of morality but also, like Shaftesbury, linking it directly to a theory of aesthetics.[108] Hume's theories, then, have a direct relevance to the two central themes of this study. By calling into question the ontological status of 'I', he offered theoretical justifications for the presumption that the narratorial 'I' and the authorial 'I' were of equal importance in lyrical and didactic poetry; and by insisting that we respond directly and sympathetically to the (moral) passions represented in works of art, he implied that such representations possessed a legitimate moral authority.

Hume's privileging of the passions was developed by Edmund Burke into a fully articulated aesthetic in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). In his section on sympathy, which he considers to be one of the social passions, Burke introduces the idea of a bifurcated self 'by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected.'[109] However, it is not at all clear that this 'other self' engages in any moral judgements on the origins of the pleasures or pains which affect the other man.

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[106] Ibid., p. 225.
[107] Ibid.,pp. 221-3.
[108] Indeed, as T. M. Costelloe has argued, '[f]or Hume, then, there is no difference in kind between the beauty of natural and artistic objects, on the one hand, and the beauty of conduct and character, on the other.' T. M. Costelloe, *Aesthetics and Morals in the Philosophy of David Hume* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), p. 27.
[109] David Womersley, ed., *Edmund Burke: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 91.

The affections we feel, it would seem, are purely the effects of sensibility and therefore aesthetic rather than moral.

Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* which was published two years later, adopts a less sentimental position.[110] For him, sympathy is a direct consequence of our being constituted in similar ways:

> Every faculty in one man is the measure by which he judges of the like faculty in another. I judge of your sight by my sight, of your ear by my ear, of your reason by my reason, of your resentment by my resentment, of your love by my love. I neither have, nor can have, any other way of judging about them.[111]

If sympathy, then, is a natural kind, it follows that our feelings for, and judgements of, other people, are not based on the utility of their outcomes.[112] He therefore rejects Hume's view that moral judgements are of two kinds, insisting that 'it is not the view of this utility or hurtfulness which is either the first or principal source of our approbation and disapprobation.'[113]

Equally, it is the presence of this natural sympathy which binds us together in society. Although Smith recognises that man's inclination is to be self-interested, the selfish behaviour which potentially follows from this principle is curbed by a recognition that, to others, 'he is but one of the multitude in no respect better than any others in it', and must therefore accept the more pressing demands of 'fair play', for it 'is thus that man, who can subsist only in society, was fitted by nature for that situation for which he was made. All the members of human society stand in need of each others assistance, and are likewise exposed to mutual injuries.'[114]

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[110] The distinction I am making here is not one that would necessarily be recognised by contemporary writers. As Markman Ellis has argued, '[t]he terms 'sensibility' and 'sentimental' denote a complex field of meanings and connotations in the late eighteenth century, overlapping and coinciding to such an extent as to offer no obvious distinction.' Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: race,gender andcCommerce in the sentimental novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 7. Nevertheless, the differences I have in mind will become clearer in my discussion of Yearsley's rejection of what she saw as More's false sensibility. See Chap. 6.
[111] *TMS*, p. 24-5.
[112] 'The idea of the utility of all qualities of this kind, is plainly an after thought, and not what first recommends them to our approbation.' *TMS*, pp. 26-7.
[113] Ibid., p. 219.
[114] Ibid., pp. 101, 103.

It is this mutual dependence that enables Smith to establish the basis for how we form moral judgements. In Part III, Chapter I, he asserts that our judgements are initially constructed from our sense of how others' behaviour affects our selves.[115] These judgements, however, subsequently give way to an awareness that our own behaviour will have like effects upon others' judgements such that we become 'anxious to know how far we deserve their censure or applause.' In the process, 'we become spectators of our own behaviour.' This leads him to a very peculiar conclusion:

> When I endeavour to examine my own conduct, when I endeavour to pass sentence on it, and either to approve or condemn it, it is evident that, in all such cases, I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; and that I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of. . . . The first is the judge; the second the person judged of. But that the judge should, in every respect, be the same with the person judged of, is as impossible, as that the cause should, in every respect, be the same with the effect.[116]

Later, Smith identifies this judge with 'conscience . . . the great judge and arbiter of our conduct', and underpins its authority as representing the general rules of morality as ordained by God.[117] But the reader is left with the uncomfortable conclusion that he possesses two identities. Although these two identities inhabit the same 'person', they perform reciprocal but different actions. Through sympathy, we can enter into the feelings of others and, through an act of the imagination, recreate these feelings (albeit not as strongly) in ourselves. Equally, by a similar act of imagination, we can estimate how our own actions are likely to be felt by others. In this sense, sympathy is a mechanism by which feelings are transferred between different people and are not, strictly, 'owned' by anybody. As Ildiko Csingei has argued, '[t]he result is an intersubjective identity created through a partial bodily and affective identification, which implies borrowing the feelings that belong to the other person'[118]. However, Smith's formulation makes the identity of the 'judge' ambiguous. On the one hand, he would appear

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[115] Ibid., pp. 133-6.
[116] Ibid., pp. 135-6.
[117] Ibid., pp. 159, 187ff.
[118] Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 52.

to be an inalienable part of the person who is doing the judging, while on the other he would appear to be subject to the same laws of sympathetic identification which govern the feelings. Jonathan Lamb, commenting on this ambiguity, observes that:

> there is almost nothing for his examining person to do but to observe, leaving all responsibility to the examined person, who is of course the victim of passion and not easily able to act.. . By this time it is clear that the examiner, better known as the impartial spectator, is not really an internal function at all, since it would be impossible not to sympathize with oneself in some way; and that really this observer is the personification of the public gaze . . .[119]

On this reading, the 'divided self' is both observer and observed, judge and judged and arguably finds its poetical embodiment in the multiple perspectives of Cowper's narrator in *The Task,* who observes the world, observes himself observing the world, makes moral judgements about the world and judges how that world may judge him.[120]

The problem remains, then, as to how we can reconcile the two quotations from Smith that opened this section. I have suggested above that Locke intended the various strands of his philosophy to be treated as contributing to a coherent whole. I believe the same to be true of Smith. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is not an indication of how men actually behave but an investigation of the psychological bases of our moral judgements. As such, it points the way towards how men should behave and why they should behave in such a way.[121] In this

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[119] Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy*, p. 61. C. L. Griswold makes a similar point when he argues that 'Smith carefully develops an account showing that we are "spectators" of each other, but spectators aware of being actors in the eyes of other spectators. We can talk philosophically about ethics only with people who can imaginatively enter into the particulars of another's situation and who are capable of rendering a judgement that is impartial. . . The use of "we" reflects his views about the nature of moral theorizing, specifically the view that ethics is a social practice that assumes a context of mutual responsiveness, of responsibility to provide reasons that would persuade, of accountability (even if just, ultimately, to an idealized judge).' C. L. Griswold, Jr., *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 50-51.
[120] Something similar seems to be happening with the narrator of *The Deserted Village.* He is both within and outside the village and both judging and being judged by the consequences of depopulation. These ideas will, of course, be discussed at greater length in the relevant chapters.
[121] Johnson, while evidently dissenting from Smith's proposition that men have a natural tendency to sympathy, is reported by Boswell (Wednesday 20 July) to have said, '. . . pity was not a natural passion, for children are always cruel, and savages are always cruel. "Pity is

sense, it is of a piece with his *The Wealth of Nations*. Keith Tribe has argued that this latter work was not conceived as a contribution to economic theory so much as a 'work of *legislation*.'[122] Smith's rejection of mercantilism would necessarily lead to a re-organisation of the socio-economic apparatus of exchange.[123] In his classic description of the division of labour involved in pin making, he offers us a model of the kinds of nascent industries which would benefit from the freeing of trade restrictions and which is in stark contrast to the work processes of the 'country workman' who 'saunters a little in turning his hand from one sort of employment to another', thereby developing habits of 'slothfulness'.[124] Unlike 'the butcher, the brewer or the baker' — or, indeed, the country workman — each of whom works for himself, the pin-maker works in the company of others, and the key social skill he needs to develop is that of cooperation. Smith's moral sentiments helped establish a framework in which such cooperation was seen as both a norm and an injunction.[125]

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acquired and improved by the cultivation of reason. We have no doubt uneasy sensations from seeing a creature in distress, without pity; but it is not pity unless you wish to relieve them.'" *Boswell's London Journal*, ed. by F. A. Pottle (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1950), p. 312. Smith may be said to have supplied the cultivating 'reason'.

[122] Keith Tribe, *Genealogies of Capitalism*, (London: The Macmillan Press, 1980), p. 122.
[123] *WN,* Book IV.
[124] Smith, *WN,* Book l, pp. 109-110, 113-4. That these descriptions were intended to be normative rather than illustrative is suggested by a later passage where Smith asserts that '[n]othing can be more absurd, however, to imagine that men in general should work less when they work for themselves, than when they work for other people.' p. 187.
[125] Donna Landry makes a similar point when she argues that 'Adam Smith's "moral sentiments" were those that best served to constitute the self or subject most appropriate for the capitalist marketplace and commercial society, and were most easily reconcilable with producing the 'wealth of nations'. Donna Landry, 'Picturing Benevolence against the Commercial Cry, 1750-98: Or, Sarah Fielding and the Secret Causes of Romanticism', in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1750-1830* , ed., by J. Labbe (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 150-171; 151.

3.

'Never did the English nation suffer a greater blot. Oh, my country! my country!
Oh, Albian!, Albian. [sic] I doubt thou art tottering on the brink of ruin and
desolation this day!'
The Diary of Thomas Turner of East Hoathly (1754-1756)[126]

With the benefit of hindsight, we may consider Thomas Turner's bleak
prognostications to be unnecessarily gloomy. The outcome of the Seven Years
War was to establish Britain as a major world power. However, Turner was not
to know this and it is likely that his anxieties were shared by many of his
contemporaries.

Throughout much of the eighteenth century, and particularly the first half, Britain
was a project to be achieved rather than a finished product.[127] This is clearly
apparent in James Thomson's masque *Alfred* (1740). A close reading of the
stirring song, 'Rule Britannia', reveals that it is as much projecting a possible
future as it is celebrating Britain's current success in gaining security from
foreign intervention and riches from her commerce.[128] Given the nature of the
masque in which it appears, this is hardly surprising. *Alfred* recounts the tale of
the eponymous hero's eventual defeat of the invading Danish army. In the course
of the action, Alfred is given a prophetic, and selective, vision of Britain's future
history that identifies Edward III, Elizabeth and William III as significant shapers

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[126] F. M. Turner, ed., *The Diary of Thomas Turner of East Hoathly (1754-1765)*, with in
introduction by J. B. Priestley (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited, 1925), July, 18
1756, on hearing of the fall of Minorca, pp, 10-1.

[127] It would not be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that she was searching for a national
identity. In this sense, the discussions of personal and social identity referred to in the previous
sections were not mere epiphenomena but part of wider debate.

[128] James Thomson, *Alfred: A Masque,* (London: 1740)*, in Eighteenth Century Collections
Online* [accessed April 29 2011], pp. 37-8. Suvir Kaul makes the point that 'the repetition of
"shall" or "will", for instance, paradoxically confirms the mood as optative rather than
imperative. Prophecy and the "wished for" are of course not separate, but their combination
certainly qualifies the hortatory tones of this poem.' Suvir Kaul, *Poems of Nation, Anthems of
Empire* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p. 6.

of her destiny culminating in a compliment to the Prince of Wales as the future king.[129]

The historical events referred to are interesting in that they imply that the early victories over the Danes, the French and the Spanish led inexorably to the guarantor of British liberties as embodied in William III:

Immortal WILLIAM! from before his face,
Flies Superstition, flies oppressive Power,
With vile Servility that crouch'd and kiss'd
The whip he trembled at. From this great hour
Shall *Britain* date her rights and laws restor'd:
And one high purpose rule her sovereign's heart;
To scourge the pride of *France*, that foe profess'd
To *England* and to freedom.[130]

Thomson's double prolepsis here is significant in that it links contemporary events with a Saxon past while also indicating that the defeat of France has still not been achieved.[131] A further interesting feature is the uncertain reference to Britain and England. These features, then, suggest some genuine anxieties both about the nature of British nationhood and the security of the Glorious Revolution.

Frank O'Gorman has identified warfare, religion, political culture and unity as the 'four elements which, in their very different ways, contributed to the strengthening of a British national identity . . .'[132] To these elements, I would add a changing economic climate which gave increasing influence to the

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[129] Thomson, *Alfred*, p. 35. Given that the masque was performed before Frederick and the Princess of Wales, I assume that the reference is to him rather than his father, George II.
[130] Ibid., p. 35
[131] Thomson's choice of Alfred for his hero shows a growing concern with tracing the genealogy of British liberty back to pre-Norman roots and contrasts interestingly with the classical ideal of freedom as indicated in Addison's *Cato* written in 1712. Kaul suggests that the word 'rule' in the poem is a deliberate pun: 'For the poem is itself an attempt to impose an impossible mensurational linearity on the ebbs and flows of national fortune – here suggested by the metaphoric disorder of the oceans, of the rise and fall of waves – for the poet's vision of Britain's coming to power, and *staying* in power, is dependent upon such control over the vicissitudes of time and the recalcitrant lessons of history.', *Poems of Nation*, p.8.
[132] Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History 1688-1832* (London: Arnold, 1997). He expands on this by referring to wars against France; protestantism; rallying around the Glorious Revolution; and the establishment of a nationwide political elite (pp. 96-8). In fact, he is referring to the period between 1714 -1757, but to a large extent these factors were already in play post-1688.

merchant and manufacturing interests.[133] Although these 'elements' were, by their nature, intertwined, my purpose in this section is to tease out those threads which had a significant impact on the ways in which Britain was represented in the poetics of the authors I subsequently discuss.

At the turn of the century, perhaps the most potent challenge to the Glorious Revolution was perceived to be France. For many Britons, France was a source of both fascination and fear: fascination because she was the major European power with an enviable record of artistic achievement that was emulated throughout Europe; fear both because she reminded Britons of the autocratic system of a staunchly Catholic government which they had recently renounced and because she was a significant trading rival.[134] Thus, although England had guaranteed the Protestant succession (and constitutional monarchy) with the Act of Settlement (1701), she still needed to protect herself from both her external and internal enemies. Catholic France clearly presented the greatest threat either from direct invasion or through support for the disaffected Jacobites.

The latter were perceived as more likely to receive support from Scotland, not least because Scotland did not benefit from the growing wealth of England.[135] To some extent the Act of Union (1707) was a natural outcome of the shared kingdoms of the Stuarts. However, it also cemented a relationship that was beneficial to some (if not all) of the Scots and which invited Scottish

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[133] Robert Brenner points out that changes to the agrarian class structure 'which had taken place over the period since the later fourteenth century . . . allowed England to increase substantially its agricultural productivity . . . ' As a consequence, 'some 40 per cent of the English population [had moved] out of agricultural employment by the end of the seventeenth century, much of it into industrial pursuits.' Robert Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe', in *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, ed. by T. H. Ashton and C. H. E. Philpin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 10-63, p. 52. Although unqualified to engage in the debate that this article initiated, I surmise that most historians seem to agree that the kinds of changes that occurred happened over a long period. For more on the 'agricultural revolution', see below.

[134] France was, of course, the refuge of James II and subsequent Stuart pretenders to the British crown.

[135] In particular, they were excluded from the overseas trade enjoyed by England because of the Navigation Acts. See Boyd S. Schlenther, 'Religious Faith and Commercial Empire', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Eighteenth Century,* ed. by P.J. Marshall and A. L. Lowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 128-150, p. 139; and Thomas Bartlett, '"This Famous Island Set in a Virginian Sea": Ireland in the British Empire, 1690-1801', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, pp. 253-275, p. 258.

protestantism to join a protective shield against the threat of Catholicism.[136] It would be a mistake, though, to assume that this union was unproblematic.

Attachments to local identities both within England and across Great Britain, remained strong, as can be seen in John Arbuthnot's characterisations of John Bull and his sister, Peg.[137] Written as a series of pamphlets to further the peace movement which ultimately led to the Peace of Utrecht, *The History of John Bull* (1712) includes an account of the relationship between John and Peg prior to, and immediately following, the Act of Union.[138] John is characterized as a bluff, hearty fellow, well-fed and beholden to no man and at constant loggerheads with his sister. Peg, on the other hand, was a half-starved Miss, who possessed 'a hardy Constitution' but 'look'd pale and wan, as if she had the Green-Sickness.' When they are finally reconciled, and Peg is received into John's house, the arguments continue, but 'the Wiser sort bid let her alone, and she might take to it of her own accord.'

What is interesting about these characterisations is that John Bull has passed into folk tradition as the epitome of a British man, while Peg has largely vanished from memory. Although the reasons for this are complex, it has been suggested by Holmes and Szechi that Scotland was largely ruled by loyal Scottish agents who ameliorated the negative effects of London's demands and, in doing this, 'fostered a myth of "Britishness" in which support for the union became a moral act.'[139] The image of the cantankerous Scot was therefore largely erased to be replaced by a concept of Britishness which was 'in many respects a product of English triumphalism and, in part, a vehicle for it.'[140] However, as J. C. D.Clark

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[136] See Colley, *Britons*: 'In these circumstances of regular *and violent* contact with peoples who could so easily be seen as representing the Other, Protestantism was able to become a unifying and distinguishing bond as never before. More than anything else, it was this shared religious allegiance combined with recurrent wars that permitted a sense of British identity to emerge alongside of, and not necessarily in competition with older, more organic attachments to England, Wales or Scotland. Protestantism was the dominant component of British religious life.', p. 18.
[137] Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty*, p. 276. See also Colley, *Britons*, pp, 6, 18; and Black, *Eighteenth-Century Britain*, p. 9.
[138] *John Arbuthnot: The History of John* Bull, ed. by A, W. Bower and R. A. Erickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), *The Third Part*, Chaps .II-V.
[139] Holmes and Szechi, *The Age of Oligarchy*, p. 215.
[140] Black, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, 284. I say 'largely erased' because animosity by the English against the Scots by no means disappeared, although in many cases it was replaced by the kind of condescending raillery practised by Johnson.

argues, the dominance of English culture did not act as a vehicle to crush Scottish identity. Rather, it incorporated it as one part of a 'culturally-defined elite' which had shared tastes and a common educational background.[141] This incorporation of Scottish culture helps to explain why the threat of Jacobitism gradually receded even though the uprising of 1745 appeared to be a very real threat and why, shorn of its Catholicism, it became the nostalgic repository for the kinds of Tory views espoused by Samuel Johnson.[142]

If, in the years following the Act of Union, John Bull had metamorphosed from an Englishman into a Briton, the values he upheld were contrasted with those of our nearest neighbour, most notably in Hogarth's painting 'The Gate of Calais, or O! the Roast Beef of Old England' (1748). Hogarth's observations on France are revealing:

> The first time any one goes from hence to france by way of Calais he cannot avoid being struck with the Extreem different face things appear with at so little distance as from Dover: a farcical pomp of war, parade of religion, and Bustle with very little bussiness in short poverty slavery and Insolence with an affectation of politeness give you even here the first specimen of the whole country nor are the figures less opposed to those of dover than the two shores. Fish wemen have faces of leather and soldiers raged and lean. [sic][143]

Bull is invoked by the pun on the large sirloin joint which in turn is contrasted to the gruel that makes up the meagre repast of the refugee highlander. Central to the picture is the figure of a fat friar contrasting with the poverty of the three old

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[141] Clark, *English Society 1660-1832*, p. 225.
[142] Holmes & Szechi comment on how the anti-Walpole faction of Whigs determinedly 'raised troops and money and volunteered for service against the Jacobites in 1745.' (*The Age of Oligarchy*, p. 269), while Paul Langford refers to the essential loyalty of the anti-government factions after 1745: 'Whatever their private preferences, men of property were not prepared to risk either their property or their lives for the Stuarts. . . . [But] sentimental Jacobitism was commonplace . . . Its prime function was to create a measure of solidarity among those who opposed the government, and who needed some sense of a viable alternative to reinforce their cohesion: Jacobite clubs were mostly of this variety rather than actively subversive.' Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 200-1. Boswell's comment on 31 January 1764, is revealing here, particularly about later Jacobitism: 'You may be a Tory and have most warm loyalty for King George. But beware Jacobitism.' *Boswell in Holland 1763-1764*, ed. by F. A. Pottle (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1952), p. 127.
[143] Quoted in Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: His Life, Art, and Times*, Abridged edn., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 257-8. The eccentric spellings and capitalisations , etc., are Hogarth's own.

women in the left foreground. The background depicts Hogarth on the point of being arrested for spying.

Hogarth's picture and comments reveal an interesting ambivalence towards France that was echoed by many British people of the time. The fact that Hogarth was able, and wanted, to visit France so soon after the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748) indicates a fascination with French culture which is hinted at by the reference to 'an affectation of politeness.' French manners were contrasted with the true 'politeness' of Britain, while the liberties and wealth enjoyed by Britons were manifestly absent in France and the wealth of the church suggests the superstitious awe through which they controlled a cowed populace.

Although Hogarth's portrait is clearly derogatory, this negative picture of French culture was the culmination of a slow but incremental change in British attitudes that had been developing in the first half of the century. Gerald Newman and Linda Colley have been the foremost historians of this shift in attitudes and, although they have been criticised for their narrow focus, their general thesis that the growth of a specific British nationalism was, in part, an antagonistic response to the hegemony of Catholic France both culturally and territorially has not been seriously challenged.[144]

The development of British nationalism is relevant to my following chapters to the extent that it contributed to an artistic shift away from the doctrines of French neo-classicism towards a growing interest in earlier British poetry.[145] It also fostered an interest in the English language with a view to promoting it as a worthy vehicle for proclaiming British ideas. The foremost philosopher of language in Britain was Locke who argued that the vocabulary of a language consisted of two different kinds of words: those that express 'simple' ideas and

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[144] Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (London: Weidensfeld and Nicolson, 1987); Colley, *Britons.* The critical comments come from Black, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, p. 9. France's superiority in these respects was effectively destroyed by the mid-century, giving further justification for British pride. See McFlynn's triumphalist account of the various world-wide conflicts in Frank McFlynn, *1759: The Year Britain Became Master of the World* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004).

[145] This will be discussed in greater detail in the following section and is, of course, relevant to Gray's translations of Norse and Welsh poetry.

those which express 'complex' ideas.[146] Simple ideas derive from our immediate sensations, whereas complex ideas are formed by combining particular simple ideas. From this, it follows that even words that refer to abstract ideas (which are necessarily complex) can be traced back to the various simple ideas that they contain. Thus, for Locke, philosophical confusions arise from the abuse of words, chief among which was 'the using of words without clear and distinct *ideas*, or, which is worse, signs without anything signified.'[147] A robust national language, then, must be furnished with an adequate vocabulary.

Following Locke, Swift had proposed the formation of a society charged with '*Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English tongue*' (1712).[148] His model for such a society was the Académie Francaise, founded in 1637, and its purpose was, in part, to counteract the perceived low esteem of English writing.[149] However, he also wished to make it more 'polite' which is why he recommended that a society should be formed which consisted of:

> such Persons, as are generally allowed to be best qualified for such a Work, without any regard to Quality, Party, or Profession. . . . [These persons would observe] many gross improprieties, which however authorised by Practice, and grown familiar, ought to be discarded. They will find many Words that deserve to be utterly thrown out of our Language, many more to be corrected; and perhaps not a few, long since antiquated, which ought to be restored, on account of their Energy and Sound.[150]

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[146] Locke, *Essay*, *v*ol.2, Book III.

[147] Ibid., Book III, Chapter X, §2, 89. This necessarily brief discussion of Locke cannot hope to capture the complexities of his arguments. More detailed discussions occur in Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (London: The Athlone Press, 1982); Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England 1780-1860* (London: The Athlone Press, 1983) and his chapter 'Philosophy of Language', in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Philosophy*, vol.1, 451-495. See also Roy Harris, who states that 'Locke's influence on 18th-century thought is immeasurable. To linguistic thought he bequeathed not only a more detailed and explicit version of the mentalist conception of language . . . but also serious, explicitly reasoned worries about the capacity of language to serve as an adequate vehicle for the telementational communication of ideas.' Roy Harris and T. J. Taylor, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought 1: the Western Tradition from Socrates to Saussure*, 2nd edn., (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 137.

[148] *Jonathan Swift: A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English tongue*, in *The English Language: Essays by English & American Men of Letters 1490-1839*, ed. by W. F. Bolton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 107-123.

[149] 'The Fame of our Writers is usually confined to these two Islands, and it is hard it should be limited in *Time*, as much as *Place*, by the perpetual Variations of our Speech.' Swift, *Proposal*, p. 117.

[150] Ibid., p. 116.

One consequence of this desire to eradicate the 'perpetual variations of our speech' which so bothered Swift was the construction of an acceptable grammar of English that could serve as a model throughout the kingdom.[151] This task was undertaken by Johnson in the field of lexicography, and by Bishop Lowth, Lindley Murray, and Priestley in the field of syntax.[152]

A side effect of this movement was to homogenize the dialects of the 'gentlemanly' class within Britain and particularly to encourage the Scottish aristocracy to adopt predominantly English modes of speech.[153] Boswell, for example, anxiously seeking the approval of London society, decided to shun Scottish company, while Wilkes stated that 'I will endeavour to write plain English, and to avoid . . .Scotticisms. . . '[154] Later in the century Cowper was to complain that Burns, whom he otherwise admired, wrote 'in a detestable language'.[155] Thus the desire to establish a standard form of English and to demonstrate that it was capable of achieving elegance and propriety was a vehicle for unifying the kingdom, while also serving as one of the weapons in Britain's fight against France's cultural hegemony.[156]

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[151] Alok Yadav, noting the low status of English as a European language in the early part of the century, argues that this impulse to 'fix' the language was in part motivated by a desire to establish its cultural standing so that it could be a worthy voice to match Britain's imperial ambitions. However, the prescriptivism inherent in the various grammars that were published in the mid-century also had the effect of colonising and replacing the local languages of the British Isles among the dominant elites. Alok Yadav, *Before the Empire of English: Literature, Provinciality, and Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 45ff. and 109.

[152] Johnson's own *Grammar* which he prefaced to the *Dictionary* is a curious hybrid in that, unlike the other linguists referred to, he relied heavily on Latin as the paradigm for his syntactic descriptions. For more on these developments, see Richard. J. Watts, 'The Social Construction of Standard English: Grammar Writers as a Discourse Community', in *Standard English: the Widening Debate*, ed. by Tony Bex and Richard J. Watts (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 40-68.

[153] Aarsleff observes that 'In no country was language written about more widely and diversely than in Scotland, by philosophers, lawyers, clergymen, and literary figures. One reason may be that the union with England in 1707 suddenly set a high premium on a good command of correct English.' Aarsleff, 'Philosophy of Language', p. 479.

[154] 'I find that I ought not to keep too much company with Scotch people, because I am kept from acquiring propriety of English speaking . . .' *Boswell's London Journal*, 3 February 1763, p. 177. The passage from Wilkes is cited in Colley, *Britons*, p. 116.

[155] William Cowper, writing to Lady Hesketh on 27 May 1788, in *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper.*, 5 vols, ed by J. King and C. Ryskamp (Oxford: Clandon Press, 1979-86), vol. 3, p. 168.

[156] John Guillory discusses the 'standardisation' process in some detail in John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993). His conclusions will be considered in my chapter on Gray.

Anti-French feeling also found an outlet in civil disorder. Colley, building on Newman's work, refers to the creation of various francophobe societies.[157] Such societies clearly reflected an undercurrent of social unease that was both anti-French and patriotic, but it would probably be a mistake to argue that the creation of these societies represented a shared consensus of aspiration so much as an inchoate social restlessness.[158] For example, in the late 1760s London was filled with mobs baying 'Wilkes and Liberty', 'No Liberty, no King', but it was not entirely clear whose liberty they had in mind or who, or what, might replace the king. Holmes and Szechi[159] consider such disorders to be a symptom of the burgeoning patriotic and nationalistic tendencies referred to by Colley. But they may also represent an increasing frustration among the populace at being excluded from any meaningful dialogue with those in power, and a growing sense of grievance at the tax burden imposed to pay for the various wars.[160] MacFlynn has noted how this burden increased exponentially throughout the century to pay off the interest incurred from government loans.[161] However, there were also structural changes within the economy which contributed to these disorders and which had a significant effect on the poetic representation of the 'state of the nation' of which the three most important were changing patterns of land use, the growth of a commercial class (particularly as it affected writers), and increasing urbanisation.

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[157] Colley, *Britons*, pp. 88-90.

[158] Jenny Uglow has commented on the proliferation of such societies, or clubs, during the eighteenth century. '[I]n the eighteenth century clubs are everywhere: clubs for singing, clubs for drinking, clubs for farting; clubs of poets and pudding-makers and politicians.' Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men: the Friends Who made the Future 1730-1810* (London: Faber and Faber 2002), p. xiii.

[159] 'For the historian it makes good sense to consider both enclosure and turnpike riots not as separate local phenomena but as integral parts of a basic syndrome in much eighteenth-century popular protest, in which the crowd was roused from customary passivity to furious anger by what it took to be the violation of traditional rights or of 'liberties' popularly considered part of an Englishman's birthright.' Holmes and Szechi, *The Age of Oligarchy*, p. 175.

[160] Olivia Smith, for example, mentions the numbers of parliamentary petitions that were rejected because of their 'indecent and disrespectful language.' Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791-1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 30.

[161] 'Incremental expenditure occasioned by the War of Spanish Succession amounted to 74 per cent, by the war of Austrian Succession 79 per cent, and by the Seven Years War close to 100 per cent. . . . The wartime tax burden had to be sustained after the war to cover the interest charges and this led the government in search of new taxes, often with catastrophic results. Ministers began gently with a cider tax – causing an uproar in the west of England – but soon they had unleashed a plethora of new taxes . . .' McFlynn , *1759*, p. 391.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of agriculture to the British economy throughout most of the century. Keith Tribe has argued that '[t]o discuss the agrarian economy of the eighteenth century is to discuss the dominant sector in the national economy.'[162] However, this economy was undergoing significant changes in the landowners' quest for increased profits.[163] In particular, there was a slow but steady increase in the use of mechanisation and the practice of crop rotation, but, more controversially, there was also a growing tendency to consolidate landholdings through engrossment or the application of an Enclosure Act.[164]

The consequences of such consolidation are difficult to assess. Langford, for example, has argued that the negative effects have been overstated, claiming that '[s]uch accounts tend to exaggerate the communal harmony of pre-enclosure days, and underrate the opportunities offered to all ranks by the new regime.'[165] Black, on the other hand, recognises the economic benefits accruing to the landowner, but points out that:

> [Enclosure] appears to have made it easier to control the land. It was often accompanied by a redistribution of agricultural income from the tenant farmer to his landlord as rents rose more than output. . . . More generally, enclosing landlords alarmed much of the rural population and created

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[162] Tribe, *Genealogies*, p. 43. This claim is not necessarily contradicted by Brenner's assertion that 40 per cent of the population had moved out of agriculture by the end of the seventeenth century. See above.

[163] Whether or not there was an 'agricultural revolution' during the eighteenth century has been hotly disputed by agricultural historians. See, for example, Eric Kerridge, *The Agricultural Revolution* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968) and Mark Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the agrarian economy 1500-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). What is important here is that the changes were seen as significant at the time.

[164] Jethro Tull introduced the seed drill in 1701, while Townshend's experiments with winter crops preceded Coke's equally productive experiments with crop rotation by fifty years. Pope clearly saw the value of Townshend's innovation, cf., his reference in *Imitations of Horace: Epistle II .ii* (Pope, *Poems*, p. 657.):
Why, of two Brothers, rich and restless one
Ploughs, burns, manures, and toils from Sun to Sun;
The other slights, for Women, Sports, and Wines,
All *Townshend's* Turnips, and all Grovenor's Mines. . . (270-3)
Indeed, John Goodridge refers to the turnip as 'no less than the silicone chip of the New Farming.' John Goodridge, *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 165.

[165] Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, p. 437.

widespread disruption of traditional rights and expectations, common lands and routes.[166]

Goldsmith clearly saw engrossment and enclosure in entirely negative terms, as will be discussed below[167]. Nor was he alone. Arthur Young, writing towards the end of century, complains that '[b]y nineteen out of twenty Enclosure bills the poor are injured and most grossly … The poor in these parishes may say with truth, "Parliament may be tender of property; all I know is, I had a cow, and an Act of Parliament has taken it from me."'[168] However, it was not only the rural poor who were affected. P. B. Munsche has shown how the consolidation of landholdings had consequences for the application of the game laws, leading to the increasing alienation of landlords from their immediate neighbours.[169] Although this alienation had been happening over a number of years, there seems little doubt that it intensified after the mid-century.[170] Again, Langford makes the point that '[l]andlords increasingly sought privacy from their own communities', an observation that is reinforced, albeit with a slightly different emphasis, by Landry.[171]

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[166] Black, *Eighteenth-Century Britain*, p. 35. This is similar to J. M. Neeson's discussion of the contemporary debates. 'So both sides of the published debate said that enclosure would ensure labourers' complete dependence on a wage, and encourage the proleterianization of small farmers. Enclosure would end 'independence'. On this question the only argument was whether to welcome or disapprove of such a change.' J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 34.

[167] See the chapter on Goldsmith, particularly with regard to *The Deserted Village.*

[168] Quoted in David Miles, *The Tribes of Britain* (London: Phoenix, 2006), p. 355.

[169] 'More damaging to the game laws, however, was the alienation of farmers, small freeholders and tradesmen which followed the enclosure of game. These men constituted the natural constituency of country gentlemen. They followed the latter's lead, and in return expected rewards appropriate to their place in the rural hierarchy.' P. B. Munsche, *Gentlemen and Poacher: the English Game Laws 1671-1831* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 50. Mary Wollstonecraft writes: 'The game laws are almost as oppressive to the peasantry as press-warrants to the mechanics. On this land of liberty, what is to secure the property of the poor farmer when his noble landlord chooses to plant a decoy field near his little property?' *M. Wollstonecraft: A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, ed. by Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.16.

[170] Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty?*, '. . . one of the most important consequences of political and social changes after 1688 was the disengagement of many members of the elite from purely local society, of a reconstitution of the social environments of the rich both at the metropolitan and county levels.', p. 382

[171] See Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People.* He goes on to say 'country houses were remodelled (often with a view to relegating employees to a safe distance), parks extended, footpaths, bridle-ways, and even highways diverted, farmhouses and labourer's cottages demolished. Occasionally, entire settlements were relocated.', p. 440. Landry notes that '[l]arge landowners were now converting tillage into parkland, feeding horses and hounds for elite blood sports — chiefly fox hunting: hence the nostalgia attached to the hunted hare — and implicitly

As we shall see, Goldsmith believed that those forced off the land by enclosures were obliged to emigrate to survive. However, it is equally likely that they sought work in the growing townships associated with nascent industrialisation. Porter observes that 'by the end of the eighteenth century, industrialization was lending its weight to tilting the economy (though it was tilting quite slowly)', leading to 'an unparalleled transformation of social *geography* during the century.'[172] Thus, although Britain had an economy that was still predominantly agrarian at the end of the eighteenth century, it would seem that there was a progressive disengagement both economically and socially from the rural environment in favour of urban environments and the growing importance of the manufacturing sector. In this context, Cowper's shrinking vision of an extensive landscape to a domestic, almost suburban, garden in *The Task* seems remarkably prophetic.

Joan Thirsk has intimated that much of the new money that was transforming the countryside in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was derived from the mercantilist activities encouraged by the 'projectors' of the late seventeenth century.[173] The same money was also filtering into the urban populations leading to a growing number of the 'middling sort' of people. Such people represented a number of different interests, consisting of those Londoners whom Earle refers to as 'middle-class', but also including those in other, provincial urban centres, and such members of the squirearchy (who were gently

starving the populace.' Donna Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside. Hunting, Walking and Ecology in English Literature, 1671-1831.* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 120.

[172] Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 356-7. See, also Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867*, 2nd. edn (London: Longman, 2000). 'The social and economic changes of the last decades of the eighteenth century helped to create not only a new North and a new South but a new rich and a new poor, and, more important still, to change the relationship between them. As industry grew, it brought into existence new men of wealth unaccustomed to a position of command in society, and a new industrial labour force, larger in numbers, more regular in its working habits than either agricultural workers or skilled artisans ever had been before.' p. 48.

[173] 'As the projects of the seventeenth century worked themselves into the economy, they transformed its structure. They effected a redistribution of wealth: geographically — as new industries and new crops in agriculture introduced fresh employment and new commercial attitudes into dark, neglected corners of the kingdom — and socially — as cash flowed in the channels to reach more of the labouring classes at the very bottom of the social scale.' Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 2.

mocked by Addison and Steele through the figure of Sir Roger de Coverley), all of whom tended to look to London as the arbiter of taste and knowledge.[174] What they had in common was a desire to share in the cultural life of the nation, and this desire was to be satisfied by a rapidly growing literary marketplace.

Exactly why this growth occurred is not entirely clear, although Hoppit suggests that it was fuelled by the lapse of the Licensing Act (1695) and the efflorescence of printed matter that followed had a profound influence on changing the nature of authors' relationships with their readers.[175] Whereas the exercise of literary patronage had established a reciprocity of address in that both readers and writers had defined roles, that particular bond had been broken. Equally, the relationship largely determined both topic and treatment since it was clearly not in the interests of an author to write about something that did not interest his potential patron, nor to develop an argument that was antithetical to his patron's interests. Finally, as a professional writer whose living depended on the interests of an indeterminate and largely anonymous audience, an author had to develop a mode of address that was as inclusive as possible.[176] Just as the philosophers were trying to establish the nature of personal identity and the responsibilities incumbent on such identities, so authors were exploring what it meant to be relatively independent (economic) entities and how to establish a relationship with their unknown readers.

This change was negotiated with particular success in *The Spectator* (1711-14). Addison's purpose in bringing 'Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables and in Coffee-Houses', is clearly designed to appeal to an audience that is eager to learn about

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[174] Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*: 'Some sort of middle-class culture had long existed, closely allied to the dominant culture of the gentry and aristocracy but, in our period, this culture was transformed by the ambition and thirst for knowledge of the middle station.', p. 10.

[175] 'The lapse of the Licensing Act [1695] was followed by an explosion of printed matter issuing from the press, be it books, pamphlets, sermons, journals, or newspapers. It is difficult to put accurate numbers to this explosion, but if library holdings are an indication between 1660 and 1688 about 1,100 titles were published per annum, between 1689 and 1727 about 2,000, and between 1728 and 1760 some 2,300 – that is to say increases between the succeeding periods were 82 and 15 per cent, suggesting a particularly dramatic surge in publishing in the generation after the Glorious Revolution.' Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty?*, p. 178. See also Jeremy Black, *The English Press 1621-1861* (Stroud, U.K.: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2001), Chapter 2.

[176] Where appropriate, I shall discuss these factors in greater detail below so far as they affected particular authors.

such otherwise restricted knowledge, and he therefore develops an address that is more familiar than that adopted by writers who are appealing to aristocratic patrons (i.e., the 'closets') or learned scholars (i.e., 'libraries, schools and colleges').[177]

Addison achieves this in a number of ways. The most obvious is his foregrounding of himself by continually referring to 'I'. While it is true that there are such fictional constructs as Mr.Spectator and Sir Roger de Coverly, the impression given is that of one urbane man speaking to others. However, his intended audience also includes 'the Blanks of Society' whose minds, if not furnished with nothing, are too engrossed with business to pay attention to the intellectual currents of the time. And, perhaps more surprisingly given the period, he makes women a specific target: 'But there are none to whom this Paper will be more useful, than to the female World.' To reach this audience, *The Spectator* carries numerous letters. These, whether spurious or not, reinforce the impression that Addison is engaged in a conversation in which other people's opinions matter.

This conversational tone is markedly different from the pamphlets and publications produced by his Tory contemporaries. While it may be possible to conflate the authorial *personae* of *The Spectator* with Addison or Steele, Swift and Arbuthnot operate in a completely different way. In *The Tale of a Tub* (1704) or *John Bull* (1712), the arguments are mediated through masks none of which can be identified with their authors and McCrea, noting this difference, makes the interesting point that Addison and Steele may well have had an effect in

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[177] *The Spectator*, ed. by Donald Bond, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), *Spectator No. 10, v*ol. I, pp. 44, 46. While patronage and the market place clearly co-existed during this period, Porter notes that: '[w]riters were less in the pockets of patrons. Patronage's decline was not due to the drying-up of private largesse. Rather the growth of an audience enabled the resourceful and talented to fare well without it.' Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 263. The mention of 'libraries, schools and colleges is reminiscent of Shaftesbury's complaint (uttered by Philocles) that philosophy 'is no longer active in the world nor can hardly, with any advantage, be brought upon the public stage. We have immured her, poor lady, in colleges and cells and have set her servilely to such works as those in the mines.' 'The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody', *Characteristics*, p. 232. It is tempting to think that Addison is intending to nudge his audience in a Whiggish direction. Klein's observations on the relationships between Addison and Shaftesbury are relevant here. See note above.

promoting a literature in which the authors were more recognisably identifiable with the voices they construct. [178]

Another way in which they ingratiate themselves with their intended audience is by recognising that their readerships are unlikely to have had the benefit of a classical education. Steele observes that:

> Many of my fair Readers, as well as very gay and well-received Persons of the other Sex, are extremely perplexed at the *Latin* Sentences at the Head of my Speculations; I do not know whether I ought not to indulge them with Translations of each of them. . . . [179]

Elsewhere, Addison refers to a fragment of Sappho and offers translations by Catullus, Boileau and Ambrose Philips, thus appealing to the vanity of those who understand Latin or French while including readers who do not have such knowledge.[180]

While the consumers of this print culture were increasingly dominated by the 'middling sort', the entrepreneurs who fed this market saw themselves largely as merchants in the book trade mediating between 'their' authors and the new reading public. An indirect consequence of this mediation was the encouragement of a new authorship largely drawn from writers of the same status.[181] Of course, the existence of 'Grub Street' in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is a well-attested fact, but the 'scribblers' of that generation tended to be writing under the patronage of their political masters,

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[178] B. McCrea, 'The Canon and the Eighteenth Century: A Modest Proposal and a Tale of Two Tubs', *Modern Language Studies,* 18: 1, (1988), 58-73.

[179] *Spectator No. 370*, vol. III, p.393.

[180] *Spectator No. 229*, vol. II, pp. 390-3. See also Earle, who claims that '[m]any people and especially middle-class people were . . . losing faith in the educational value of the classics.' *The Making of the Middle Class*, p. 66

[181] '[W]riting literature was transformed into primarily a paid profession in which most literature was produced for immediate publication without the luxury of leisure. New classes of people, particularly those in the middle ranks of society, began to write and publish, and to do so for money.' Barbara M. Benedict, 'Publishing and Reading Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry,* ed. by John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 63-82, p. 63. For developments later in the century, see Porter, *Enlightenment*, 85-6 and C. Siskin, 'More is Different: Literary Change in the Mid and Late Eighteenth Century', in *Cambridge History of English Literature 1660-1780*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 795-823.

whereas this new and growing authorship consisted of writers who were largely writing in and for their own interest.[182]

For some authors, this independence presented few problems. Samuel Johnson, after he had overcome his initial financial difficulties and in spite of his frequent bouts of self-doubt, projected such a magisterial self-confidence *as an author* that he is among the first writers to have had something of a personality cult constructed around him.[183] For other authors, mediating between the authorial 'I' and the implied audience was far more uncomfortable.

Edward Young, for example, with *Night Thoughts* (1742), offer his readers an avowedly personal poem. In his *Preface*, he states:

> *As the occasion of this Poem was* real*, not* fictitious*; so the Method pursued in it was rather* imposed*, by what spontaneously arose in the Author's Mind on that Occasion, than* mediated *or* designed.[184]

Why readers should choose to engage with Young's meditations is not made clear. Although the two main protagonists, Philander and Lorenzo, are addressed,

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[182] It is worth mentioning here the growing numbers of labourer poets. Landry claims that: '[w]hat the poetry of Stephen Duck, Robert Bloomfield, John Clare, Mary Collier, Ann Yearsley, and others establishes is a new point of view, a new discursive stance, both within the tradition of the English georgic and counterposed to it: it is the perspective of the laborer previously "represented" from outside and at a distance but not (re)produced as such and thus effectively silenced as a discursive possibility.' Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 22-3. While agreeing with Landry that the plebeian (male) poets introduced new discursive possibilities, it is worth pointing out that they did not typically adopt new voices. Indeed, their verse tended to adopt traditional forms of representation and language. F. Stafford notes that '[i]n Spence's eyes, Duck's accent and provincial dialect present a huge obstacle to its literary development; he even goes so far as to observe that "it seems plain to me that he has got *English* just as we get *Latin*". English poetry thus seems a foreign field, to be attained only through study and reading, just as the more educated worked to acquire classical literature.' Pp. 346-7 in F. Stafford, 'Scottish Poetry and Regional Literary Expression', in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780,* pp. 340-362. A more sympathetic view of Duck's literary achievements is offered by Goodridge who takes issue with these kinds of patronising remarks of Spence and of more recent critics who overlook Duck's specific poetic intention in *The Thresher's Labour.* (Goodridge, *Rural Life*, pp. 16-22)**.**
[183] Somewhat later in the century, the same was true for such writers as Elizabeth Carter, Elizabeth Montagu and Hannah More. Anna Seward became famous as the 'Swan of Lichfield', while Catharine Macaulay achieved both fame and notoriety as a historian and supporter of Wilkes, thus demonstrating that such personality cults were not restricted to male authors.
[184] Stephen Cornford, ed., *Edward Young: Night Thoughts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

potential readers are largely ignored or treated as eavesdroppers. On one of the rare occasions where he addresses his audience, he withdraws almost immediately:

> Think'st thou the Theme intoxicates my Song?
> Am I too warm? Too warm I cannot be,
> I lov'd him much; but now I love him more.
> Like Birds, whose Beauties languish, half conceal'd,
> Till mounted on the Wing, their glossy Plumes
> Expanded shine with Azure, Green, and Gold;
> How Blessings brighten as they take their Flight?   (594-9)[185]

The rhetorical questions seem to be addressed as much to himself as to any reader and the ensuing imagery does not invite us so much to view the plumage for itself as to acknowledge the comparison he wishes to draw with the blessings he derives from Philander's decease. Janet Todd, in discussing the poem, claims that:

> It expresses the emotional religious fervour of Methodism, while emphasizing the sentimental qualities of benevolence and pity, and it exalts social sympathy and fellowship in the manner of Shaftesbury and Hume, while yearning for isolation from human contact. Praise is given to society and domestic affections, but the poet himself is alone, withdrawn, sleepless and unconversing.[186]

While agreeing that the poem emphasises 'the sentimental qualities of benevolence and pity', I find it difficult to see how *Night Thoughts* 'exalts social sympathy and fellowship' given that the reader is almost entirely excluded and the principal actor, Lorenzo, is largely exhorted to shun the world in favour of a pious life.

Blair, by contrast, in *The Grave* (1743) addresses his readers directly and invites them to share in his experiences:

> See yonder Hallow'd Fane – the pious Work
> Of Names once famed, now dubious or forgot,

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[185] *Night Thoughts,* 'Night the Second', p. 66.
[186] Janet Todd, *Sensibility: an Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 51-2.

And buried 'midst the Wreck of Things which were,
There lie interr'd the more illustrious Dead.
The wind is up: hark! how it howls! Methinks
Till now I never heard a Sound so dreary.

The injunction to 'see' and the deictic 'yonder' encourage the reader to engage directly with Blair's experiences, and this engagement is reinforced in the last two lines where the howling of the wind is treated as a shared experience. Similarly, the description of the elms later in the poem is sufficiently precise for readers to imagine that they are seeing them as though through Blair's eyes:

Quite round the Pile, a Row of reverend Elms
Coæval near with that, all ragged show,
Long lash'd by the rude Winds: some rift half down
Their branchless Trunks; others so thin a Top,
That scarce two Crows could lodge in the same Tree.[187]   (45-9)

The bleakness of the scene is brought into sharp focus by the exact descriptions of individual items.

This interest in emotional states is not, of course, new.[188] Pope had explored them in *Eloisa and Abelard* (1717). But whereas Pope's analysis was deflected into the voice of Eloisa, Young and Blair are deeply introspective in their use of the authorial 'I' as the narrative voice. Philander and Lorenzo are clearly idealized characters designed to represent virtue and vice, and Young uses the death of his friends as a spur to reflect on how his unhappiness is largely the result of the failure of the Christian message. Blair, clearly influenced by the new aesthetics of the sublime that were to be fully developed by Burke in 1757, also fails to consider possible social causes for his melancholy, preferring instead to locate them in the vanity of human wishes. In this respect, they differ markedly from Goldsmith, Gray, Cowper and Yearsley who, in exploring their isolation, attempt to relate it to social as well as personal experiences.

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[187] Robert Blair, *The Grave. A Poem.* 2nd edn (London: Printed for M Fenner at the *Turk's Head* in *Gracechurch*-street; and Sold by M. Cooper, at the *Globe* in *Pater-Noster-Row.* MDCCXLIII), pp. 5, 6.
[188] Such an interest was almost certainly sparked by Locke's 'psychologism'.

Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows.
Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*[189]

Ulysses's words could well apply to the poetics of the early eighteenth century. Douglas Patey has illustrated how readers and writers believed that:

> [t]he literary work is a structure of signs organized in such a way as to lead the mind to their causes . . . An example of the way signs are organized is through decorums: these are rules of natural signification (i.e., of literary probability) that guide authors in making their works consistent, and guide readers (when circumstances are "probable") in their inference from signs to underlying meaning. [190]

Such rules included a hierarchy of poetic genres, an indication of appropriate modes of address, and a guide to 'fitting' vocabulary. To a large extent, they were drawn from Horace's *Ars Poetica* and were exemplified most brilliantly in Pope's imitation, *An Essay on Criticism* (1711). However, Pope's purpose in this poem was not only to recommend models of correct writing, he was also determined to assert the adequacy of British models over the prevailing fashion for sterile French neo-classicism:

But *Critic Learning* flourish'd most in *France*.
The *Rules*, a Nation born to serve, obeys
And *Boileau* still in Right of *Horace* sways.   (712-14)[191]

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[189] Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, Act 1, Scene 3, 109-10, in *The Complete Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. by Stanley Wells and G. Taylor, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol 2, p. 754.

[190] Douglas Lane Patey, *Probability and literary form: Philosophic theory and literary practice in the Augustan age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 88-9.

[191] Pope, *Poems*, p. 167. He makes a similar complaint in his prologue to Addison's *Cato:*
Our scene precariously subsists too long
On French *translation, and* Italian *song*
Dare to have sense your selves; assert the stage,
Be justly warm'd with your own native rage.
Such plays alone should please a British *ear,*
As Cato's *self had not disdain'd to hear*.   (712-18)
Prologue by Mr. Pope. (1713), in *The Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison. Vol. I. Poems and Plays*, ed. by A. C. Guthkelch (London: G. Bell & Sons Ltd., 1914), p. 349.

By 1737, Pope was able to take a more sanguine view of the potentially civilizing effects of France, acknowledging that under her influence 'Wit grew polite, and Numbers learn'd to flow' (266), later in the poem adding:

Late, very late, correctness grew our care,
When the tir'd nation breath'd from civil war.
Exact Racine, and Corneille's noble fire
Show'd us that France had something to admire. (272-5)[192]

However, the tensions implicit in wishing to develop and promote a purely 'English' voice but to express concepts derived from classical (and particularly Augustan) models, had been a source of critical concern long before Pope wrote these lines.

Dryden, for example, in *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1668), acknowledges the genius of Corneille but insists that Britain should draw its inspiration from English writers. The most obviously classically inspired writer of the preceding generation had been Ben Jonson, and Dryden gives him due praise. But he also has to acknowledge that Shakespeare is fundamentally more adept in the English idiom:

> [Jonson] did a little too much Romanize our Tongue, leaving the words which he translated almost as much *Latine* as he found them: wherein though he learnedly followed their language, he did not enough comply with the Idiom of ours. If I would compare him with *Shakespeare,* I must acknowledge him the more correct Poet, but *Shakespeare* the greater wit. . . . I admire [Jonson], but I love *Shakespeare*.[193]

Nevertheless, Dryden has to admit that Jonson leaves us with 'as many and profitable Rules for perfecting the Stage, as any wherewith the *French* can furnish us.'

Dryden, of course, was primarily concerned with dramatic authors. Other critics appealed to a hierarchy of classical genres and speculated how they may best be

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[192] Pope, *Imitations of Horace, Epistle II, i,* in *Poems*, 645.
[193] *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie and Shorter Works*, in *The Works of John Dryden. Prose 1668-1691*, ed. by S. H. Monk and A. E. Wallace Maurer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), vol. 17, p. 58.

imitated. Buckingham, in *An Essay Upon Poetry* (1682), lists the 'various sorts of Verse' from songs through elegies, odes and satires, until:

By painfull steps we are at last got up
Parnassus hill, upon whose Airy top
The *Epick* Poets so divinely show,
And with just pride behold the rest below.   (309-12)[194]

However, from these exalted heights, he regretfully decides that there are no suitable British models.[195] Similar regrets are expressed by Sir Richard Blackmore in his *Advice to the Poets: A Poem* (1706).[196] Urging his fellow poets to produce an epic in celebration of Marlborough's great victories, he rejects Milton's model out of hand:

No more let *Milton's* Imitator dare
Torture our Language, to torment our Ear
With Numbers harsher than the Din of War.
Let him no more his horrid Muse employ
In uncouth Strains, pure *English* to destroy,
And from its Ruins, yell his hideous Joy.   (193-8)

Of course, Milton was to be reviled as a supporter of the regicide Cromwellian Republic and therefore not a fitting model for a poet aspiring to celebrate the achievements of the Restoration. Equally, his epic had little to do with nation building and was disfigured by its use of tortuous syntax and blank verse rather than being elegantly composed in rhyme.

The one poet who matched some of these requirements was Spenser. Clearly, *The Faerie Queene* was an encomium on one of the great periods of English history and was composed in rhyme. However, as Addison pointed out in *An Account of the Greatest English Poets* (1694), he too was an unsuitable model:

Old *Spenser* next, warmed with poetick rage
In ancient tales amus'd a barb'rous age . . .

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[194] In *Augustan Critical Writing*, ed. by David Womersley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. 97-107.
[195] 'But he must do much more than I can say,
Must above *Cowley*, nay, and *Milton* too prevail,
Succeed where great *Torquato*, and our greater *Spencer* fail.' (pp. 347-50), Ibid.
[196] In *Augustan Critical Writing*, pp. 177-99.

But now the mystick tale, that pleas'd of yore,
Can charm an understanding age no more;
The long-spun allegories fulsome grow,
While the dull moral lyes too plain below.[197]

Spenser, then, was an inappropriate model at least partly because he lacked the rational knowledge that characterised Addison's world, and partly because his use of allegory and a diction that was riddled with archaisms looked back to the medieval world rather than to the classical era.

If the hopes of realising a grand epic which would celebrate British nationalism looked forlorn, there were other genres available which, in their different ways, allowed poets to comment on the state of the nation. Foremost among these were the pastoral and the georgic and they are of significance here because of their influence on the works of Gray, Goldsmith, Cowper and Yearsley.

Pastoral had long been recognised as a potential vehicle for social criticism. George Puttenham, writing in 1589, observed of the Eclogue that he was:

> . . . perswaded that the Poet deuised the *Eglogue* long after the other *dramatick* poems, not of purpose to counterfait, or represent the rusticall manner of loves and communication, but under the vaile of homely persons and in rude speeches to insinuate and glaunce at greater matters, and such as perchance had not bene safe to haue bene disclosed in any other sort . . .[198]

Puttenham was conscious of the Elizabethan practice of criticizing the court under cover of the pastoral but, following the Glorious Revolution (1688) and subsequent Act of Settlement (1701), the court had become more diffuse. Although power remained centralised and largely in the hands of the aristocrats, competing interests were drawn from a wider section of the population including from the growing commercial centres and particularly from London. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the century the majority of the population still

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[197] Joseph Addison, *Miscellaneous Works in Verse and Prose*, 3 vols (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson in the Strand, 1726), pp. 35-6, in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* [accessed 19 March, 2014]

[198] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. by G. Gregory Smith Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1904), vol. 2, p. 40.

had direct experience of the countryside and pastoral representations, however idealised, would have struck an immediate chord.[199]

Keith Thomas refers to Hugh Blair's observation that 'a taste for pastoral depended on the prior growth of towns, for men did not pine for the countryside so long as they lived on terms of daily familiarity with it.'[200] This relationship, though, does not seem to be borne out by the facts. Rather, there was a decline of the strictly pastoral at the same time as Britain became more urbanised. It is not entirely clear exactly why this decline occurred, although it may be that, because of the slow transformations that were taking place in farming practices, readers were becoming more keenly aware of the countryside as an adjunct to the commercial growth of Britain and that they were therefore more interested in the practicalities of farming which were better represented through the georgic.[201]

Traditionally, pastoral had represented an idealised world and Pope acknowledges this idyllic aspiration in his *A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry* (1704):

> . . . pastoral is an image of what they call the Golden age. So that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are . . . We must therefore use some illusion to render a Pastoral delightful; and this consists in exposing the best side only of a shepherd's life; and in concealing its miseries.[202]

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[199] Holmes and Szechi, *The Age of Oligarchy*, 346, estimate that Bristol, England's second largest town, had a population of 55,000 in 1775. It seems likely, then, that the majority of this population would have easy access to the countryside quite apart from travelling through it when they needed to visit other parts of the country. I am not, of course, intending to claim that the pastoral mode was intended to be 'realistic'; more that its references would have some of their counterparts in the observed countryside.

[200] Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 250. Malcolm Andrews makes a similar point when he observes that pastoral 'was a means of escaping imaginatively from the pressures of urban or courtly life into a simpler world, or, one should say, into a world which had been deliberately simplified as a contrast to the complexities of the city.' Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), 5.

[201] I am following Raymond Williams here who, commenting on the functional changes that overtook pastoral as a genre in the eighteenth century, notes that '[the] 'pastoral', with its once precise meaning, was undergoing in the same period an extraordinary transformation. Its most serious element was a renewed intensity of attention to natural beauty, but this is now the nature of observation, of the scientist or the tourist, rather than of the working countryman.' Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 20.

[202] Pope, *Poems,* 120.

However, he does not make it entirely clear why poets should choose to represent this imagined 'Golden age' beyond stating that it is not concerned with the business of agriculture so much as the 'tranquillity of a country life'. Clearly, such a representation may, for those with Christian sensibilities, invoke the pre-lapsarian Eden. Barrell and Bull, however, have suggested that this evocation of a golden age served a more ulterior purpose through legitimizing social and economic inequalities in pre-industrial society.[203]

To some extent this supposition is borne out by the opening lines of Ambrose Philips's *The First Pastoral* (1709):

If we, O *Dorset*, quit the City Throng
To meditate in Shades the Rural Song
By your Commands; be present: And, O, bring
The Muse along! The Muse to you shall sing.   (1-4)[204]

The identification of the Earl of Dorset with a harmonious rural virtue is specifically contrasted with the hurly-burly of the urban 'Throng', implying a relative absence of other people in the 'Shades' of rural England. In *The Third Pastoral*, however, after a eulogy on the blessings of Queen Anne's reign, the shepherds introduced into the scene consist of himself and other 'ignobly born swains' who are visited by a beneficent Dorset:

Mean-time, on oaten pipe a lowly lay,
As my kids browse, obscure in shades I play:
Yet, not obscure, while *Dorset* thinks no scorn
To visit woods, and swains ignobly born.   (13-16)[205]

In these lines, then, Dorset both raises the status of the poet through his patronage and, by implication, betters the lot of his 'swains', thereby mediating the inequalities that exist between them.

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[203] '[T]he pastoral vision is, at base, a false vision, positing a simplistic, unhistorical relationship between the ruling, landowning class — the poet's patrons and often the poet himself — and the workers on the land; as such its function is to mystify and to obscure the harshness of actual social and economic organization.' *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*, ed. by John Barrell and John Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 4.
[204] *The Poems of Ambrose Philips*, ed by M. G. Segar (New York: Russell & Russell, 1937), p. 5.
[205] Ibid., 54.

Earlier pastorals, as represented in Barrell and Bull's anthology, typically either present a conversation between two or more participants (usually bearing 'rustic' names), or adopt a monologic persona of the shepherd/swain. Philips's invocation of Dorset, therefore, is relatively unusual. Pope's *Pastorals*, which were published in the same collection as Ambrose Philips's, also have dedicatees, but the relationships he establishes with them are far more complex.

Spring. The First Pastoral, or Damon opens with the following lines:

First in these Fields I try the Sylvan Strains,
Nor blush to sport on *Windsor*'s blissful Plains:
Fair *Thames* flow gently from thy sacred Spring,
While on thy Banks *Sicilian* Muses sing;
Let Vernal Airs thro' trembling Osiers play,
And *Albion's* Cliffs resound the Rural Lay.   (1-6)[206]

In these lines, Pope foregrounds himself while modestly ('nor blush') suggesting that he is a direct inheritor of the '*Sicilian* muses'. Sir William Trumbull is not introduced until the second stanza where he is portrayed as a world-weary statesman:

You, that too Wise for Pride, too Good for Pow'r,
Enjoy the Glory to be Great no more,
And carrying with you all the World can boast,
To all the World Illustriously are lost!
O let my Muse her slender Reed inspire,
'Till in your Native Shades You tune the Lyre: (7-12)

The suggestion is that Trumbull has not yet attained the ease of his country estate at Easthampstead, and that Pope's aim is to convince him of the pleasures he will gain in his retirement which are subsequently portrayed in a dialogue between Daphnis and Strephon.

By foregrounding himself in this way, it would seem that Pope is using pastoral as a way of finding a voice rather than engaging in strict imitation. And this is born out by the second pastoral, *Summer, or Alexis,* which opens with an

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[206] Pope, *Poems,* pp. 123ff.

anonymous narrator, 'A Shepherd's Boy (he seeks no better Name)/Let forth his Flocks along the silver *Thame. . .*', briefly introduces an implied self with his dedication to Garth, before finally adopting the voice of the shepherd which he maintains throughout the rest of the poem.

The third pastoral, *Autumn, or Hylas and Ægon,* adopts a similar strategy. An imaginary scene is set by the anonymous narrator into which the voices of Hylas and Ægon are inserted singing about '[t]heir artless Passions, and their tender Pains' (12) until the narrative voice returns at the end to round off the poem.

The final pastoral, *Winter, or Daphne*, is altogether more complex. Although Pope adopts the voices of Lycidas and Thyrsis throughout, the threnody for Mrs. Tempest (in the guise of Daphne) seems more personal than the stylized voices of the shepherds of the previous pastorals. Also, the ending suggests that Pope is not only bidding farewell to Daphne, but also to the concept of pastoral verse:

Adieu ye *Vales,* ye *Mountains*, *Streams* and *Groves*,
Adieu, ye Shepherd's rural *Lays* and *Loves,*
Adieu my Flocks, farewell ye *Sylvan* Crew,
Daphne farewell, and all the World adieu!   (90-3)[207]

Pope's abandonment of pastoral was coincident with its more general decline as a means of representing the countryside. Although Shenstone achieved some critical acclaim for his pastorals, it was largely a spent force by the middle of the century at least in its original form.[208] Exactly why the pastoral genre fell into desuetude is not entirely clear, although I have indicated above that this decline

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[207] D. S. Durant suggests that Pope abandoned pastoral because he came to believe that nature was essentially used as a poetic device to depict man and that, therefore, he would concentrate on more direct portrayals of human life. D. S. Durant, 'Man and Nature in Pope's Pastorals', *SEL Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900,* 17, 3, (1977), 477-491.

[208] 'Neither Mr.Pope's, nor Mr. Philip's pastorals do any great honour to the English poetry. . . . Mr. Shenstone's Pastoral Ballad, in four parts, may justly be reckoned, I think, one of the most elegant poems of this kind, which we have in English.' Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed by L. T. Berguer (London: 1827), pp. 476-7. David Fairer, noting the introduction of 'exotic and sensational' elements into the quasi-pastorals of the mid-century, suggests that 'the formal eclogue with its conversing shepherds was having a final fling. By mid-century it is clear that without some such stimuli readers had become jaded . . .' David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), p. 89.

may be related to the renewed interest in agricultural practices which encouraged poets to cast a keener eye on the countryside around them.

More immediately, the decline may have been hastened by the attacks made on Philips by Pope and Swift.[209] These were motivated in part by political differences. Ambrose Philips and Dorset were both ardent supporters of the Whig Junto, and Philips was a protégé of Addison, who was also satirized by Pope.[210] But there were also good artistic justifications for ridiculing the bathos which sometimes emerges in Philips' *Pastorals* in such lines as:

Or, sooth to say, didst thou not hither roam
In hopes of Wealth, thou cou'dst not find at home?
A rolling Stone is ever bare of Moss;
And, to their Cost, green Years old Proverbs cross.   (67-70)[211]

The pastoral had also come under satiric attack by both Swift and Gay. In *A Description of the Morning*, published in 1709, Swift produced an 'urban' pastoral in which Aurora, instead of summoning forth a bunch of joyful swains eager to work in the fields, replaces them with a motley crew of servants and tradesmen engaged, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, in the humdrum activities of city life.[212] And a year later, he published *A Description of a City Shower* in which the fructifying rains of the countryside become a deluge which brings forth:

Sweepings from Butchers Stalls, Dung, Guts, and Blood,   }
Drown'd Puppies, stinking Sprats, all drench'd in Mud,   }
Dead Cats and Turnip-Tops come tumbling down the Flood.   }[213]

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[209] Initially, both Pope and Swift admired Philips's Pastorals. The relationships between these three poets are well documented in Sagar's introduction to his edition of Philips's poetry.
[210] See Olivia Field, *The Kit-Kat Club: Friends Who Imagined A Nation.* (London: HarperPress, 2008), 277. Dorset is listed as a member of the Kit-Kat Club which was founded by Tonson.
[211] *The Poems of Ambrose Philips*, 14. However, it could be argued that Thenot, the speaker of these lines is here adopting the rustic language recommended to writers of pastoral. Eric Rothstein has observed that 'Historically . . . [Ambrose] Philips and [Thomas] Purney are of interest for having revived an English (Spenserian) rather than Latin mode, and for their insistence, however awkward the results, on a somewhat more realistic treatment of Arcadians who were English.' Eric Rothstein, *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Poetry 1660-1780*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 46, but the passage is puzzling in other ways. For example, it is not entirely clear why Thenot, a shepherd, should take up the role of a vagrant.
[212] Jonathan Swift, *Poetical Works*, ed. by Herbert Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 86.
[213] Ibid., 91-3.

Swift, here, seems to be suggesting that the vision of a golden age, elegantly voiced by imaginary swains, was no longer an adequate form for representing the more grotesque realities of urban life.

Gay's *Shepherd's Week* (1714) was a deliberate parody of Ambrose Philips. In the *Proeme*, he comments that:

> *Thou wilt not find my Shepherdesses idly piping on oaten Reeds, but milking the Kine, tying up the Sheaves, or if the Hogs are astray driving them to their Styes, My Shepherd gathereth none other Nosegays but what are the growth of our own Fields, he sleepeth not under Myrtle shades, but under a Hedge, nor doth he vigilantly defend his Flocks from Wolves, because there are none, as Maister* Spencer *well observeth.*[214]

This attention to the details of the shepherds' lives suggests that his poems will have some of the features of the georgic which ultimately replaced pastoral. However, such a suggestion is not borne out in his knowing conclusions to, for example, *Monday*, 'Your Herds for want of Water stand adry,/They're weary of your Songs – and so am I.', or *Friday*, which depicts an almost complicit ravishment:

>   Thus wail'd the Louts, in melancholy Strain,
> 'Till bonny *Susan* sped a-cross the Plain;
> They seiz'd the Lass in Apron clean array'd,
> And to the Ale-house forc'd the willing Maid;
> In Ale and Kisses they forget their Cares,
> And *Susan Blouzelinda*'s Loss repairs.[215]   (159-64)

In the first instance, we hear the voice of the sophisticated metropolitan rather than the country bumpkin implied by the name Cloddipole, whereas in the second Gay deliberately abandons the voices of the rustics in favour of an 'external' narrative voice.

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[214] John Gay, *Poetry and Prose*, ed by Vinton A. Dearing and Charles E. Beckwith, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), vol. I, p. 91. David Nokes comments: '[t]hroughout *The Shepherd's Week* Gay makes his parody of Philips's work explicit.' David Nokes, *John Gay: A Profession of Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 142.
[215] Gay, *Poetry and Prose,* vol. I., pp. 101, 118.

The concern with language implicit in the different 'voicings' adopted by Pope, Swift and Gay was made explicit in Addison's influential essay attached to Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Georgics* (1697).[216] In this, he recommends the *Georgics* over the *Pastorals* on the grounds that 'tho' the Scene of both these Poems lies in the same place; the Speakers in them are of a quite different Character, since the Precepts of Husbandry are not to be deliver'd with the simplicity of a Plow-Man, but with the Address of a Poet.' Further, in contrasting the georgics of Hesiod with those of Virgil, he observes that while Hesiod 'clogs' his poetry with everyday locutions and 'tittle-tattle', Virgil deals with his material expansively, 'like that of a *Roman* Dictator at Plow-Tail. He delivers the meanest of his Precepts with a kind of Grandeur, he breaks the Clods and tosses the Dung about with an air of gracefulness.'

Clearly, Addison was motivated here by a desire to promote the use of a more 'polite' language. However, he was also conscious of the ways in which Virgil, in his *Georgics*, combined both agricultural instruction and reflections on its role within Augustan Rome. If British poets could follow Virgil's practices, then they would have an adequate genre for exploring the nature of contemporary Britain while spurring the nation on to greater productivity and glory.[217] Necessarily, this was a fraught project since it requires a complex representation of the relationships between those who own the land and most obviously benefit from such ownership, and those who work the land without, so obviously, reaping such benefits.[218]

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[216] Joseph Addison, 'An Essay on the Georgics', in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by W. Frost, W. and Vinton A. Dearing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), vol. 5, pp. 145-153.
[217] Landry makes a similar, though more ecological, point when she comments that: 'The pastoral and georgic, poetic forms derived from Greek and Roman precedents, offer differing views of country life. In pastoral verse, shepherds live lives of comparative leisure. In a pastoral idyll, no one labors, and every one is nourished by a natural plenitude. Virgil's *Georgics*, by contrast, offered advice to landowners about husbandry. Georgic verse presupposes a need for labor and cultivation to ensure survival. Resources will be consumed, individual people, plants and animals, will get used up, but good stewardship should ensure the survival of all species. The georgic imagines what would now be called a sustainable relationship between production and consumption.' Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside*, 16. See also, John Barrell, *Poetry, Language and Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 114-8.
[218] R. P. Irvine makes this point explicitly when he argues that '[t]he revival of Virgilian georgic in English poetry at the start of the eighteenth century by John Philips and Alexander Pope must be understood in the context of the relationship between labor, commerce, and the state articulated by John Locke in Chapter 5 of the *Second Treatise of Government*. R. P. Irvine, 'Labor and Commerce in Locke and Early Eighteenth-Century Georgic.', *ELH,* 76,4 (2009), 963-

Nevertheless, the georgic is something of a hybrid form in that some poets (e.g., John Philips and, to a lesser extent, Dyer) deployed it primarily as a vehicle for agricultural education, while others (e.g., Pope and Thomson) use it as an opportunity to explore the place of agriculture within the total economy and the ways in which it (and its workers) can contribute to this economy.

Cyder (1708), for example, opens with the lines:

What Soil the Apple loves, what Care is due
To Orchats, timeliest when to press the Fruits,
Thy Gift, *Pomona*, in *Miltonian* Verse
Adventrous I presume to sing; of Verse
Nor skill'd, nor studious: But my Native Soil
Invites me, and the Theme as yet unsung.   (I, 1-6)[219]

The theme of the poem is introduced immediately with a series of subordinate clauses that foreground the topics that will be covered; the mention of Milton and the Miltonic echoes in lines 4 and 5 establish a literary precedent for the blank verse, while the speaker refers (somewhat tentatively) to himself as narrator in line 4. Finally, the term, 'Native Soil' implies a degree of pride in the nation.

Some 14 lines later, John Philips continues:

    Who-e'er expects his lab'ring Trees shou'd bend
With Fruitage, and a kindly Harvest yield,
Be this his first Concern; to find a Tract
Impervious to the Winds, begirt with Hills . . .   (I, 20-3)

Here, the imperative, 'Be this his first concern', erases the specific identity of the narrator while asserting his authority to command and instruct[220]. And, to a large

988; (p. 963). For a fuller discussion of Locke's *Two Treatises* see the previous sections of this chapter.
[219] John Philips, *Cyder: A Poem in Two Books* (London: printed for Jacob Tonson, within Grays-Inn Gate next Grays-Inn Lane., 1708*), in Eighteenth Century Collections Online* [accessed March 3, 2011].
[220] Cowper's mention of John Philips in *The Task* immediately before his mock-georgic description of cucumber growing suggests that Cowper, too, is offering instruction as much as description. See below, Chap. 5.

extent, Philips maintains this disinterested but authoritative voice throughout the poem.

I do not want to suggest that he never deviates from the instructional tone. Indeed, further on in the poem, he observes that:

> So *Maro*'s Muse,
> Thrice sacred Muse! Commodious Precepts gives
> Instructive to the Swains, not wholly bent
> On what is gainful: Sometimes she diverts
> From solid Counsels . . .   (I, 314-8)[221]

This Virgilian reference serves to give further authority to the narrator by establishing a direct comparison through the use of the adverbial 'So.' It also, of course, establishes the ground for such deviations as the longish section where he praises cider over imported wines:

> Be thou the copious Matter of my Song,
> And Thy choice *Nectar;* on which always waits
> Laughter, and Sport, and care-beguiling Wit,
> And Friendship, chief Delight of Human Life.
> What shou'd we wish for more? or why, in quest
> Of Foreign Vintage, insincere, and mix't,
> Traverse th'extreamest World? Why tempt the Rage
> Of the rough Ocean?   (I, 526-33)[222]

These lines hardly suggest unconditional support for international commerce.[223] However, the ways in which they are voiced recall the opening lines of the poem. This brief foray, then, into a more political arena reads as an aside rather than as an integral element of the poem. Philips, then, largely maintains his role as an instructor rather than as a commentator.[224]

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[221] *Cyder*, 20

[222] Ibid., 33ff.

[223] Irvine reads these lines slightly differently. While acknowledging that Philips is not explicitly lauding British trade, he argues that the passage expresses '[w]orries about economic competition with the continent [which] are subsumed under the poem's less troubling literary relation to its generic antecedent, as a native British production borrowing its literary authority from a classical precursor.' Irvine, 'Labour and Commerce', 977-79. Nevertheless, I find it difficult to find any evidence in the wording of this passage that suggests such worries.

[224] The one obvious occasion when he retreats from this role occurs when he is praising various national heroes, stepping back from his theme to depict a semi-pastoral scene. Here he relates the pleasures imparted by the cider maker to his humble workers, concluding: 'Ease, and Content,

John Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757) is necessarily more extensive in its views, since he takes the whole wool trade as his subject. The topic is broached in the opening lines:

The care of Sheep, the labors of the Loom,
And arts of Trade, I sing. Ye rural nymphs,
Ye swains, and princely merchants, aid the verse,
And ye, high-trusted guardians of our isle,
Whom publick voice approves, or lot of birth
To the great charge assigns: ye good, of all
Degrees, all sects, be present to my song.
So may distress, and wretchedness, and want,
The wide felicities of labor learn: . . .   (I, 1-9)[225]

The almost obligatory Virgilian reference is followed by a parallel construction which clearly distinguishes between the 'labors' of the poor and the 'arts' of the rich.[226] Given that the ensuing prospect of British society is all-inclusive (i.e., 'swains' and the high-born'), my contention that Dyer's georgic is essentially instructional would seem to be undercut.[227]

It is true, he offers frequent panegyrics on the productivity of the British countryside, e.g.:

With grateful heart, ye British swains, enjoy
Your gentle seasons and indulgent clime.
Lo, in the sprinkling clouds, your bleating hills
Rejoice with herbage . . .   (I, 401-4)[228]

He also indulges in pastoral portraits of a happy peasantry:

The little smiling cottage, where at eve
He meets his rosy children at the door,
Prattling their welcomes, and his honest wife,

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and undissembled Love/Shine in each Face, the Thoughts of Labour past/Encrease their Joy.' *Cyder*, 71-2.
[225] John Dyer, *The Fleece: A Poem in Four Books* (London: Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall Mall, 1761), in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* [accessed 19 March, 2014], pp. 3-4.
[226] Cf., the opening of the *Aeneid*: 'Arms and the man I sing.'
[227] Goodridge (*Rural Life*, p. 95) notes the inclusion of the King as 'the people's shepherd' in line 13.
[228] Dyer, *The Fleece*, p. 28.

With good brown cake and bacon slice, intent
To cheer his hunger after labor hard.   (I, 120-5)[229]

Indeed, on one occasion, he is raised to a rapturous state by the contributions to the British economy made by sheep farming, 'What bales, what wealth, what industry, what fleets!/Lo, from the simple fleece how much proceed . .' (III, 631-2), leading John Chalker to claim that the tide of poems praising British trade reaches its apotheosis in *The Fleece.*[230] Nevertheless, these digressions are contained within a structure which is dominated by an impersonal narrative voice which offers both practical advice, 'Shear them the fourth or fifth return of morn,/Lest touch of busy fly-blows wound their skin' (I, 579-80), or moral instruction:

For me, 'tis mine to pray, that men regard
Their occupations with an honest heart,
And chearful diligence . . .
. . .   O be it as my wish!
'Tis mine to teach th'inactive hand to reap
Kind nature's bounties, o'er the globe diffus'd. (II, 496-8, 502-4) [231]

Even the overt introduction of a personal note in these lines is subsumed within the desire to exhort and to instruct rather than to comment or offer opinion.

Cyder and *The Fleece*, then, represent typical examples of the georgic as a mode of agrarian advice and instruction.[232] However, as a genre, the georgic had the

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[229] Ibid., p. 10.
[230] Ibid., p. 116. See John Chalker, *The English Georgic* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 53, a claim repeated in James Sambrook, *The Eighteenth Century: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature* (Harlow: Longman Group Ltd., 1986), p. 75.
[231] Dyer, *The Fleece*, pp. 34, 71-2. Goodridge, in his extensive discussion of *The Fleece*, emphasizes Dyer's detailed knowledge of sheep farming in Part II of *Rural Life*.
[232] The same can be said for Christopher Smart's *The Hop-Garden* (1743-4), although he does include some references to British history, and James Grainger's *The Sugar- Cane* (1764), which, among other things, offers detailed advice on choosing slaves for various different tasks. Grainger also acknowledges his poetic debts in the lines:
 Where pastoral Dyer, where Pomona's Bard,
And Smart and Sommerville in varying strains,
Their sylvan lore convey: O may I join
This choral band, and from their precepts learn
To deck my theme . . . (Bk. 1, 12-15.)
Interestingly, he mentions neither Pope nor Thomson. Christopher Smart, *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart, IV, Miscellaneous Poems English and Latin,* ed. by K. Williamson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); James Grainger, *The Sugar-Cane: A Poem in Four Books*, (London:

capacity to expand beyond these somewhat limiting boundaries. As Fairer argues, 'Georgic . . . was at home with notions of growth, development, variety, digression, and mixture, and had a natural tendency to absorb the old into the new, and find fresh directions.'[233] One particular genre that was largely absorbed into the georgic was the 'prospect poem', elements of which are subsequently found in Gray's *Eton Ode*, Goldsmith's *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*, Cowper's *The Task* and Yearsley's *Clifton Hill.*

The prime exemplar of this type of poem was John Denham's *Cooper's Hill* (1642-8). Praised by Addison in his *Account of the Greatest English Poets*: 'Nor Denham, must we e'er forget they strains,/While Cooper's Hill commands the neighb'ring plains', it also attracted the critical attention of Johnson who claimed that:

> [Denham] seems to have been, at least among us, the author of a species of composition that may be denominated *local poetry*, of which the fundamental subject is some particular landscape to be poetically described, with the addition of such embellishments as may be supplied by historical retrospection or incidental meditation.[234]

Johnson's denomination, '*local poetry*', however, seems to me slightly misleading and is more properly indicative of the later poetry that was influenced by Denham than of *Cooper's Hill* itself. Cooper's Hill is, of course, a real geographical site but, by transmuting it into Parnassus, Denham renders it mythical. He also engages in some rather complex transmutations of himself as narrator:

Nor wonder, if (advantag'd in my Flight,
By taking Wing from thy Auspicious Height)
Through untrac'd Ways, and airy Paths I fly,
More boundless in my Fancy than my Eye:
My Eye, which swift as Thought contracts the Space

Printed for R. and J. Dodsley, in Pall-mall, 1764), *in Eighteenth Century Collections Online* [accessed 10 May, 2013].
[233] Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century*, 80.
[234] Addison, *Miscellaneous Works,* Vol. I, 39. Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on their Works*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale, R., 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), vol. I, p. 238.

That lies between . . . (9-14)[235]

The connections between the flying 'I' which contracts historical time and the 'Eye' which contracts geographical space are reminiscent of the metaphysical wits of the earlier seventeenth century, although they also prefigure Thomson's use of the eye in *Summer*.[236] And it would seem that Denham is deliberately trying to escape from the specificity of his geographical limitations when he continues: 'Here should my wonder dwell, and here my praise/But my fix'd thoughts my wand'ring eye betrays,/Viewing a neighb'ring hill . . .' (111-3)[237]

The hill, then, however real its existence may be, is not merely a physical presence on which Denham stood in order to survey the river and the countryside below. Rather, it is also an imaginative construct from which a disembodied voice can make a variety of moral and political observations. Given the subject matter of the poem, and the circumstances under which it was written, it is not surprising that Denham chose to engage in these kinds of displacements, nor that he should seek the kinds of equilibrium implied by the lines:

Oh could I flow like thee, and make thy stream
My great example, as it is my theme!
Though deep, yet clear, though gentle, yet not dull,
Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full.   (265-6)[238]

The desire to achieve a balanced peace after the turmoil of the Civil War is clearly heartfelt and the disembodied voice of the earlier passages becomes more obviously self-referential here in ways that were to be more thoroughly exploited in the later eighteenth century. However, this self-referential element was not immediately apparent in the georgics of the early part of the century. Pope's *Windsor-Forest* (1713), for example, specifically eulogizes both Denham and

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[235] John Denham, *Coopers-Hill. A Poem,* (London: Printed and Sold by H.Hills, in Black-Fryers, near the Water-Side, 1709)*, in Eighteenth Century Collections Online* [accessed March 24 2011], p. 5.
[236] See below.
[237] Ibid., 9.
[238] Composed between 1642 and 1655, the poem traces a 'royalist' history of Britain viewed through the prism of the civil war.

Cooper's Hill, but his thematic treatment of Windsor Forest and his complex deployment of different voices produce a very different kind of discourse.[239]

Windsor-Forest was initially conceived as two separate poems and composed at a distance of eight years, the two parts were revised and welded together to celebrate the Treaty of Utrecht.[240] The opening section (1-290) is an interesting mix of the prospect poem and the georgic. Although Denham is not specifically referred to until line 264, the influence of *Cooper's Hill* is implicit from the beginning:

Thy Forests, *Windsor*! and thy green Retreats,
At once the Monarch's and the Muse's Seats,
Invite my Lays. Be present, Sylvan Maids!
Unlock your Springs, and open all your Shades.
Granville commands: Your Aid, O Muses bring!
What Muse for *Granville* can refuse to sing?   (1-6)

These lines establish a potentially complex discourse. The immediate focus is on the countryside around Windsor. However, this is not seen for itself, but as the topos of monarchy and poetry. The choice of the verb, then, places the poet in a privileged position in that he is not asking, so much as being asked, to compose the poem.[241] The 'Sylvan Maids', who are subtly eroticized (Unlock your Springs, and open all your Shades) are both under the command of the narrator and of Granville. But the contrasting verbs, 'invite' and 'command', create a deliberate ambiguity as to the status of the narrator.

This ambiguity is compounded by the following lines which refer to a 'vanish'd' Eden that continues to live in Milton's lines. The reader, therefore, is encouraged to think simultaneously of the royalist Denham, the republican Milton, the Arcadian dwelling place of the Sylvan Maids, and the poet as narrator, all conjoined within Windsor Forest which is a site of power. Thus, the potential for

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[239] '(On *Cooper's* Hill eternal Wreaths shall grow,/While lasts the Mountain, or while *Thames* shall flow), Pope, *Poems*, 'Windsor-Forest', 265-6, p. 204.
[240] Pope, *Poems*, pp. 195-210. For a brief description of the events surrounding its composition see Ian Gordon, *A Preface to Pope*, 2nd. edn (Harlow: Longman, 1993), p. 155. My own discussion will be limited to those features of the poem which have relevance to the poetics of Goldsmith, Gray, Cowper and Yearsley.
[241] The various citations in the *OED* all suggest a transitive relation between the act of invitation and the recipient of the invitation. Thus, it can be argued that Pope, as narrator, is consciously casting himself in a privileged role as the invitee.

numerous different voices under the disposition of the author of the verses is clearly foregrounded from the beginning.

This intermixture of themes (and voices) is developed as the poem progresses. The scenery is initially described as though by a connoisseur of painting:

Here Hills and Vales, the Woodland and the Plain,
Here Earth and Water seem to strive again,
Not *Chaos*-like together crush'd and bruis'd,
But as the World, harmoniously confus'd:
Where Order in Variety we see,
And where, tho' all things differ, all agree.   (11-16)

The bringing together of apparently disparate elements (or *discordia concors*) is maintained in the ensuing descriptions where the contrasts are introduced by the alternating locative adverbs, 'here' and 'there' and then viewed essentially in terms of light and shade. The voice here, then, is not one that we would associate with a person actually experiencing the various sensations likely to arise from being in the countryside, but more that of a judicious onlooker seeking to construct an aesthetic from the view. And the purpose of such an aesthetic is revealed in the closing lines of this opening section where the immediate scene is, on the one hand, mythologized and, at the same time, given contemporary significance:

See *Pan* with Flocks, with Fruits *Pomona* crown'd,
Here blushing *Flora* paints th'enamel'd Ground,
Here *Ceres*' Gifts in waving Prospect stand,
And nodding tempt the joyful Reaper's Hand,
And Industry sits smiling on the Plains,
And Peace and Plenty tell, a STUART reigns.   (37-42)

The span of time alluded to here allows Pope to construct a history of Britain that shows how she achieved her good fortune by incorporating references to trade and commerce as major contributors to such fortune.

This brief mention of Pope has identified at least four voices: that associated with the addresses to Granville, the voice of the historian, the voice of the visual artist and the voice of the creator of the georgic (or, the poet). These are not

79

particularly distinguishable in terms of diction so much as in their different thematic concerns, but they all share the common characteristic of being public, or oracular, voices. And in this respect they are similar to the voices Pope creates in his other poems.

While Pope remained highly influential throughout the eighteenth century, an even more potent influence, at least on the later development of the georgic, was that of Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730).[242] In this poem, Thomson employs the georgic to construct a discourse of modernity that identifies those virtues necessary to maintain a successful state, and the most important of these is faith in a Lockean God.[243] The closing *Hymn* insists on the role of God as the mover of the seasons, opening with the lines:

    THESE, as they change, ALMIGHTY FATHER, these,
Are but the *varied* GOD. The rolling Year
Is full of Thee.[244]

The religious import of the poem is advertised even more strongly in lines 94-9:

For me, when I forget the darling Theme;
Whether the Blossom blows, the Summer-Ray
Russets the Plain, *inspiring* Autumn gleams,
Or Winter rises in the blackening East;
Be my Tongue mute, may Fancy paint no more,
And, dead to Joy, forget my Heart to beat!

Interestingly, Thomson temporarily abandons the voice of an impersonal narrator to introduce a more personal voice which insists on his own, albeit fragile, piety. It is Thomson who has actively to remember God's presence, and Thomson who

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[242] All references are to James Thomson, *The Seasons*, ed. by James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). References to his other works are to James Thomson, *Liberty, The Castle of Indolence and Other Poems*, ed. by James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). John Sitter has observed that the poetry of the later eighteenth century is 'after Pope creatively as well as chronologically.' John Sitter, 'Political, Satirical, Didactic and Lyric Poetry (II): After Pope', in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, 287; while John Barrell insists on the importance of the georgic in the latter part of the century. 'In the mid-eighteenth century Georgic was the dominant mode of the poetry of rural life; possibly, after the death of Pope in 1744, the dominant mode of poetry.' John Barrell, *English Literature in History. 1730-80: An Equal, Wide Survey*, English Literature in History (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1983), p. 108.
[243] In his commentary on *A Hymn*, Sambrook refers to its deistical tendencies, a religious tendency associated with Lockean philosophy. See p. 395.
[244] *The Seasons*, pp. 254-258.

enjoins himself to be 'mute' should he forget that presence.[245] Nevertheless, the direct reference to the four seasons confirms that this is a God who is active in 'the rolling year', and this religious discourse complicates the poem in interesting ways.

In *Summer, Autumn* and *Winter* we are presented with three different personal tragedies. Each one of these is the direct consequence of the prevailing weather. They are, however, embedded within their contexts in slightly different ways. The Celadon and Amelia episode is a deliberate interpolation.[246] The approaching thunderstorm has been described in some detail and, as it arrives overhead:

>   GUILT hears appall'd, with deeply troubled Thought;
> And yet not always on the guilty Head
> Descends the fated Flash. Young CELADON
> And his AMELIA were a matchless Pair,
> With equal Virtue form'd, and equal Grace,
> The same, distinguish'd by their Sex alone: (1169-74)

The sudden shift away from the immediate description into a narrative mode seems rather forced, which is presumably why Thomson has to state the moral of the story in the opening lines. The conclusion of the story, in which the moral is reiterated, is equally sudden:

>   From his void Embrace,
> (Mysterious Heaven!) that moment, to the Ground,
> A blacken'd Corse, was struck the beauteous Maid.   (1214-6)

The story, then, although not artistically effective, suggests that Thomson felt the need to insist on the arbitrary power of his 'varied' God.[247]

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[245] This brief personal intervention prefigures Cowper in *The Task*, although Cowper's God is intensely personal throughout.

[246] *The Seasons*, *Summer*, pp. 114-6.

[247] The other interpolated story of Musidora and Damon which occurs a few lines later seems equally at odds with its context in the poem as a whole, and has presumably been inserted as a happy contrast to the Celadon and Amelia story. John Barrell makes the interesting point that Thomson protects himself against the charge of prurience in describing Musidora's nakedness by comparing her to the statue of the *Venus de Milo*. However, given the extensive description of the naked, bathing Musidora, there seems to be more than a little prurience evidenced. See John Barrell, *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 228.

The two other narratives emerge more naturally from their descriptive contexts. In *Autumn*, the narrator describes the oncoming night: 'Now black, and deep, the Night begins to fall,/A Shade immense' (1138-9), into which he introduces a 'benighted Wretch/Who then, bewilder'd wanders thro' the Dark.'(1145-6)[248] Bereft of light, he loses his way until he 'sinks absorpt,/Rider and Horse, amid the miry Gulph' (11155-6), while 'his pining Wife,/And plaintive Children his Return await,/In wild Conjecture lost.' (1157-9). Something remarkably similar happens to the shepherd in *Winter*. Lost in the snow, he freezes to death, while:

In vain for him th'officious Wife prepares
The Fire fair-blazing, and the Vestment warm;
In vain his little Children, peeping out
Into the mingling Storm, demand their Sire,
With Tears of artless Innocence. Alas!
Nor Wife, nor Children, more shall he behold,
Nor Friends, nor sacred Home.   (311-7)[249]

In all three cases, we are offered stories which insist on the unpredictability of God's will, but the tragedies which occur apparently only happen to the rural labourers. They have, as it were, been envisaged as inhabiting the state of nature rather than the state of Great Britain.[250]

Of course, this is not to deny that Thomson also portrays the rural poor in happier moments. One of the more significant of these occurs in *Summer*:

  NOW swarms the Village o'er the jovial Mead:
The rustic Youth, brown with meridian Toil,
Healthful and strong; full as the Summer-Rose
Blown by prevailing Suns, the ruddy Maid,
Half naked, swelling on the Sight, and all
Her kindled Graces burning o'er her Cheek.
Even stooping Age is here; and Infant-Hands
Trail the long Rake . . .   (352-9)[251]

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[248] *The Seasons*, p. 192.
[249] Ibid.,p. 218.
[250] Goodridge observes of this incident that '[o]ne expects a predominance of moral over aesthetic considerations because of the patterns Thomson has set up throughout the poem, and we are disturbed to find him, in the build up to the death of the swain, apparently wrapped up in the aesthetics of the situation. . . . Here the image seems to be indulged, as a pleasingly poignant scene. The labourer's role in it is pathetically to die, excluded from the consolation, the aesthetics, the poignancy: here he is expendable.' *Rural Life*, p. 83.
[251] *The Seasons*, pp. 78ff.

This rustic merriment re-introduces pastoral into the georgic. Although 'toil' is referred to, there is little sense that it is arduous, and the whole scene is viewed as though it is a tableau in which the people and the countryside are indistinguishable. It is the 'Mead' that is 'jovial', while the 'ruddy Maid' is subsumed into the 'Summer-Rose' and the 'prevailing Suns'. Also, the sense of distance is confirmed by the generic mention of 'the Sight'. It is not obviously either the sight of the narrator, nor of the participants but has been generalised to include that of any observer (or, in this case, reader).[252]

The pastoral here, however, is an essential part of Thomson's mixed discourse.[253] If the 'varied God' can strike the rural worker down, he can also produce the circumstances by which a provident nature can support health-giving toil and merriment. And it is this bounty (and, by extension, God's bounty) which guarantees the success of the British state:

    A simple Scene! Yet hence BRITANNIA sees
Her solid Grandeur rise: hence she commands
Th'exalted Stores of every brighter Clime,
The Treasures of the Sun without his Rage:
Hence, fervent all, with Culture, Toil, and Arts,
Wide glows her Land: her dreadful Thunder hence
Rides o'er the Waves sublime, and now, even now,
Impending hangs o'er *Gallia's* humbled Coast,
Hence rules the circling Deep, and awes the World.   (*Summer,* 423-31)[254]

The elisions here are skilfully managed. God guarantees the pastoral bounty which allows Britain to develop culture and the arts, and this bounty in turn underlies her success as a trading nation.

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[252] H. Keenlyside points out that the 'eye' in Thomson is peculiarly detached from any human being: 'Thomson's eyes are assigned to neither human nor nonhuman beings, but are oddly detached, body parts that could belong to any creature. Thomson's eyes are assigned to neither human nor nonhuman beings, but are oddly detached, body parts that could belong to any creature.' H. Keenleyside, 'Personification for the People: On James Thomson's the *Seasons*', *ELH,* 76, 2, (2009), 447-472, (p. 455).
[253] Goodridge, commenting on the elisions of georgic and pastoral in Thomson, observes that 'the distinction between pastoral and georgic, and especially between the description of ideal nature in pastoral, and what Addison calls the 'beauties and embellishments' with which farming advice is 'set off' in georgic is not so clear that we can separate the two.' *Rural Life*, p. 60.
[254] *The Seasons*, p. 80.

If, however, the rural worker is typically portrayed as the compost out of which trade, arts and culture grew in such abundance, those who controlled and benefited from this fecundity are afforded far more complex depictions.[255] In an interesting passage from *Spring*, Thomson offers us a portrait of himself as the poet-narrator and his relationship with George Lyttelton, his friend and patron, both of whom are seen as beneficiaries of nature's bounty.[256] His shifting use of pronouns and determiners offers us an insight into the ways he has constructed his narrative voice. The passage opens with an invocation to himself: 'STILL let my Song a nobler Note assume,/And sing th'infusive Force of Spring on Man'. This 'infusive Force' is then catalogued and assumed to have positive effects on 'generous Minds' (878). Meanwhile, the 'sordid Sons of Earth' (875) have been banished, presumably by the narrator.[257] This subtle move from an ostensibly 'personal' voice to a more authoritative impersonal voice is then consolidated in his subsequent personification of the virtues of spring:

Reviving Sickness lifts her languid Head;
Life flows afresh; and young-ey'd Health exalts
The whole Creation round. Contentment walks
The sunny Glade, and feels an inward Bliss
Spring o'er his Mind . . .   (892-6)[258]

These different kinds of 'Contentment' are generalised qualities rather than specifically *felt* ones.

However, in a very peculiar move, these personified qualities are then localized as being specific to Lyttelton:

   THESE are the Sacred Feelings of thy Heart,
Thy Heart inform'd by Reason's purer Ray,
O LYTTELTON, the Friend! thy Passions thus,

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[255] A slightly different portrait of the rural worker occurs in *The Castle of Indolence* in which he is depicted as morally superior because he is free from the temptations of the rich: 'Better the toiling swain, oh happier far!/Perhaps the happiest of the sons of men!' Thomson, *Liberty et al.*, p. 297.

[256] *The Seasons*, pp. 44ff., (867-962).

[257] Thomson's use of the interjections 'Hence' and 'away!' is ambiguous between command and desire. Clearly, Thomson does not actually possess the authority to banish people from Lyttelton's estate.

[258] *Spring*.

And Meditations vary, as at large,
Courting the Muse, thro' HAGLEY-PARK you stray . . .   (904-8)

Further, Lyttelton, as the bearer of all these virtues, does more than merely court the muse (and, by extension, Thomson), he also engages in philosophical reflections on history:

Planning, with warm Benevolence of Mind,
And honest Zeal unwarp'd by Party-Rage,
BRITANNIA's Weal; how from the venal Gulph
To raise her Virtue, and her Arts revive.   (928-31)

It would seem, then, that the benefits accruing to the gentry from the toil of the labourers involve both philosophic and artistic ease coupled with a political engagement both to maintain and further such activity.

The discourse of *The Seasons* is fundamentally to offer a defence of, and justification for, the kinds of Whiggish virtues exemplified by Lyttelton, and Thomson achieves this articulation by adopting a deliberately impersonal narrative voice.[259] In *Summer*, he takes on the role of meditator (192ff); in *Spring*, that of cataloguer (516ff.); and in *Autumn*, that of extolling the virtues — and, by extension, encouraging the development — of mercantilism (118ff). In this fashion, then, Thomson's voices are all public, and therefore apparently non-partisan, voices. There are, of course, internal tensions within the different discourses articulated through these voices, but the voices themselves remain essentially monologic, revealing the workings of Thomson's mind but very little of his personal sensibilities.

The portrait of Lyttelton at ease in his rural retreat introduces another trope, that of the 'Happy Man.' Popularised by John Pomfret in *The Choice* (1700), the 'Happy Man' enjoys a rural retreat supplied with a modest plenty untroubled by

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[259] Todd links this intention directly to Thomson's admiration for Shaftesbury: 'Like the later moral philosophers, whose Scottish, non-metropolitan and middle-class background he shared, Thomson admired Shaftesbury, whom he called 'the friend of man' and whom he described as charming the heart of his readers with 'moral beauty'. Especially impressed by Shaftesbury's ideas of sympathy and aesthetic morality, Thomson saw nature leading to virtue and social harmony.' Todd, *Sensibility*, pp. 55-6.

the turbulence of factional politics.[260] Thomson offers us a portrait of such an ideal life in 'Autumn'.[261] The protagonist inhabits a rural retreat with a few select friends (1235-38), avoiding the luxuries and vanities of the rich and powerful, where he enjoys:

> A solid Life, estrang'd
> To Disappointment, and fallacious Hope:
> Rich in Content, in Nature's Bounty rich,
> In Herbs and Fruits; whatever greens the Spring,
> When Heaven descends in Showers; or bends the Bough,
> When Summer reddens, and when Autumn beams;
> Or in the Wintry Glebe whatever lies
> Conceal'd, and fattens with the richest Sap:
> These are not wanting . .   (1257-65)

A similar portrait occurs In part V of *Liberty* (1735/6), in which Thomson, speaking in the voice of the Goddess of Liberty, offers us the following portrait of the ideal man living in a 'private field':

> Its happy Master there,
> The ONLY FREE-MAN, walks his pleasing Round –
> Sweet-featur'd *Peace* attending; fearless *Truth*;
> Firm *Resolution*; *Goodness*, blessing all
> That can rejoice; *Contentment*, surest Friend;
> And, still fresh Stores from *Nature*'s Book deriv'd,
> *Philosophy*, Companion ever-new.
> These chear his rural, and sustain or fire,
> When into Action call'd, his busy Hours.
> Mean-time *true-judging moderate Desires*,
> *Oeconomy* and *Taste*, combin'd, direct
> His clear Affairs, and from *debauching Fiends*
> Secure his little Kingdom. Nor can Those
> Whom *Fortune* heaps, without *these Virtues*, reach
> That Truce with Pain, that animated Ease,
> That Self-Enjoyment springing from within,
> That INDEPENDANCE, active or retir'd,
> Which make the soundest Bliss of Man below.   (135-52)[262]

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[260] *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 1-4.
[261] *The Seasons*, pp. 144-201.
[262] *Liberty,* pp. 126-147, 130-1. For further discussion of Thomson and Pope's political views in relation to their moral outlooks, see below in the concluding chapter.

The ideal citizen, again, is economically independent, possessed of an estate which he perambulates, rejoicing in the company of peace, truth, resolution and goodness. And from this estate he derives a philosophy which comforts him both in contemplation and action. However, there are curious and telling absences in the portrait. First, and most obvious, is the lack of any other human being. . The only two hints that there is a social world outside occur, first, when 'goodness' blesses 'all that can rejoice' leaving the fate of those who, for one reason or another, cannot rejoice outside his consciousness; and second, when he is called into action, although what such action might consist of and who it may affect is left conveniently obscure. The ensuing economic homily, inveighing against the (Tory) evil of luxury, is offered as equally self-evident since it is the result of 'true-judging moderate desires.'

The existence of such a (Whig) gentleman has been guaranteed by a Britannia excessively praised by Liberty in the opening lines as:

"THOU Guardian of Mankind! whence spring, alone,
"All human Grandeur, Happiness and Fame:
"For Toil, by THEE protected, feels no Pain;
"The poor Man's Lot with Milk and Honey flows;
"And, gilded with thy Rays, even Death looks gay.   (3-7)[263]

To some extent, these lines act as the guarantor of the gentleman because if the poor feel no pain, and death is ultimately 'gay', then he has no need to intervene in their affairs. However, there is still the unresolved ambiguity of what might spur such a man into action in a state that is so perfect.[264] And, given that ambiguity, it is noteworthy how the voice employed by Thomson is so positive in its description of 'The ONLY FREE-MAN'. This is not the voice of an

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[263] Ibid., 127.
[264] Maren-Sofie Røstvig suggests that the very mention of public intervention by the Happy Man as envisaged by Thomson both here and in his description of Lyttelton had revolutionary effects: 'This ideal figure, who so far had always been thoroughly self-centred, for the first time began to burst the bounds of his self-imposed exile. It has now become his duty to reach out towards his fellow men so as to share with them that feeling of joyous benevolence with which nature had inspired him in his solitary moments. And once the principle of social solicitude has been admitted, a public career based on heroic virtues again becomes an acceptable choice. . . . In many ways Thomson's *Seasons* represents the culminating point in the long and tortuous history of the Happy Man. From this time on the truly classical elements in this tradition entered on a period of decline. They were destined to wane with the waxing of interest in man as a terrestrial version of the 'smiling God'.' Maren-Sofie Røstvig, *The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 292.

individual with doubts and uncertainties, but a public voice asserting what it knows to be true.

The trope of the 'Happy Man' recurs in different ways in Gray's *Eton Ode*, where his schoolboys are largely insulated from the outside world, in Goldsmith's imagined 'Auburn', and in Cowper's rural retreats.[265] However, there were also other forces at work in the poetics of the mid-century which were to have far-reaching effects on their poetry. The poets I have been discussing in this section tended to offer the reader images of British landscapes in largely instrumental terms. In the georgics of Dyer, *et al.*, the function of the countryside was to be correctly cultivated. In the more expansive georgics of Pope and Thomson, the countryside becomes a mirror which reflects a largely beneficent God who had seen fit to reward the inhabitants of Britain with unrivalled power on condition that they exploited nature's resources in ways that increased commerce and maintain the social status quo. To that end, the predominant voice deployed was that of a detached, gentlemanly, but impersonal observer and the appeal was to like-minded people who shared a similar intellectual and cultural background. However, as I have suggested in Section 3 above, this cultural consensus was under threat from the growing power of the merchant classes and their thirst for 'polite' knowledge.

I have already commented on *The Spectator*'s expectations as to the degree of classical education among its readership. To some extent, Addison dealt with this assumed lack by drawing attention to earlier works of English literature which displayed the same kinds of virtues that he recognised in the great classics. In his discussion of *Chevy Chase,* for example, he explicitly assimilates the old ballad into the epic tradition by comparing it with the works of Homer, Virgil and Milton and contrasting it to the 'Gothic' works of Martial and Cowley.[266] Addison observes that the latter only appeals to such readers as 'have formed to

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[265] See the chapter below on Cowper, and Kieran O'Brien, '"Still at Home": Cowper's Domestic Empires', in *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth*, ed. by Thomas Woodman (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), pp. 134-147., where she notes the influence of Thomson more generally. 'Cowper . . . has engaged not so much in mock-Miltonics as mock Thomsonics, by investing ordinary plants with portentous moral, national and imperial meaning', pp. 144-45.

[266] *Spectator No. 70,* vol. I, pp. 297-303.

themselves a wrong artificial Taste upon little fanciful Authors and Writers of Epigram.' The great epics and *Chevy Chase*, on the other hand, share 'the same Paintings of Nature', and thus 'please a Reader of plain common Sense' whether he is 'the most ordinary Reader' or 'the most refined'. Addison then continues by citing parallel texts drawn from the *Æneid* and *Chevy Chase* to show how similar sentiments are expressed.[267] He continues by mentioning Spenser's and Jonson's approbation of the ballad, thereby hinting at a national tradition of literary achievement.

The reference to Spenser anticipates his later paper on 'The Fairy Way of Writing.'[268] Here, Addison's primary concerns seem to be to justify the pleasures that arise from contemplating 'the Characters and Actions of such Persons as have many of them no Existence, but what he bestows on them' and to argue that this style of writing is peculiarly British. The chief pleasure is of 'a pleasing kind of Horrour in the Mind of the Reader' derived from 'the Strangeness and Novelty of the Persons who are represented' in such literature. At first sight, this sits oddly with the contemporary philosophical climate which stressed the rationality of nature, but Addison pre-empted any sense of contradiction in an earlier paper where he cites Locke on the association of ideas:

> The Ideas of Goblins and Sprights have really no more to do with Darkness than *Light*; yet let but a foolish Maid inculcate these often on the Mind of a Child, and raise them there together, possibly he shall never be able to separate them again as long as he lives, but Darkness shall ever afterwards bring with it those frightful Ideas, and they shall be so joyned, that he can no more bear the one than the other.[269]

Having observed how rare this style of writing was in the ancients, Addison proceeds to account for, and justify, its prevalence in earlier English writing. As

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[267] Pat Rogers makes the point that '[t]he two papers on the ballad 'Chevy Chase' . . . extend the standard 'rules' to incorporate a popular work from the 'Gothic' age; whilst the attempt to dignify the poem by imputing to it 'the majestic simplicity of the ancients', and by aligning it with classical epic, may not strike us as very convincing, the mere technique of parallel passages (especially where the texts concerned were so far apart in the old hierarchy) provided a tool which critics would find increasingly applicable to their needs.' Pat Rogers, 'Theories of Style', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism Volume 4: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. by H. B. Nisbet and C. Rawson, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 365-380, p. 371. While it is true that the ballad comes from the 'Gothic' age, it is interesting that Addison distinguishes it from 'Gothic' writing as such.
[268] *Spectator No. 419,* vol. III, pp. 570-3.
[269] *Spectator No. 110,* vol. I, p. 454.

to the first, he argues that it was partly the result of 'the Darkness and Superstition' promulgated by the early church 'when pious Frauds were made use of to amuse Mankind, and frighten them into a Sense of their Duty.' However, he adds that it was helped by the national character of the English who 'are naturally Fanciful, and very often disposed, by that Gloominess and Melancholey of temper which is so frequent in our Nation.' Addison, having 'nationalised' such a style, is now in a position where he can both justify and praise those authors who excel in it. These include Shakespeare, Milton and Spenser 'who had an admirable Talent in Representations of this kind.'[270]

Addison, therefore, helped lay the intellectual foundations for a re-examination of the 'Gothic' writers which was to be furthered later in the century while also justifying the readers' enjoyment of Young and the 'graveyard' poets.[271] In championing earlier English writers on the grounds that they offered aesthetic pleasures and possibilities that had previously been overlooked, he created an aesthetic which offered new modes of writing in the mid-century and a consequent restructuring of sensibility associated with such modes. Ironically, it also established a yardstick by which Addison's poetry was to be found wanting.[272]

The contrasts between the poetic styles of the beginning of the eighteenth century and the mid-century can be emblematically represented by Joseph Warton's *The Enthusiast: or the Lover of Nature* (1744-8).[273] The title itself is revealing. Previously, 'enthusiasm' had typically been associated with the kinds of religious

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[270] In listing the various authors mentioned, Addison was also contributing to the formation of a canon of English literature that had been set in motion by Dryden's *Essay on Dramatick Poesie.* In many respects, this move was coterminous with the move to standardise the language (see above). The processes of canon formation have been well described by, among others, Richard Terry, *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past: 1660-1781* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Yadav, *Before the Empire of English Literature*, and J. B. Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700-170* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). I shall not be discussing this formation except insofar as it impinges on particular poets.
[271] See my discussion of Young and Blair in the preceding section of this chapter.
[272] See below.
[273] Joseph Warton and J. Wooll, *Biographical Memoirs of the Late Rev. Joseph Warton, to which are Added, A Selection from His Works; and a Literary Correspondence between Eminent Persons, Reserved by Him for Publication* (London: T.Cadell and W.Davies in the Strand, 1806).

factionalism that had led to the English civil war and was something to be avoided. Warton, however, treats it as a benign passion by means of which one can achieve a rapturous appreciation of nature. The poem opens:

Ye green-robed Dryads, oft at dusky eve
By wondering shepherds seen, to forests brown,
To unfrequented meads, and pathless wilds,
Lead me from gardens decked with art's vain pomps.   (1-4)

The invocation to imaginary Dryads, the 'dusky', 'brown' colours and the 'unfrequented meads' recall Addison's references to the 'Fairy Way of Writing' and Young's solitary musings. 'Art's vain pomps' are subsequently identified as the gardens at Stowe. However, these are later assimilated to overt anti-French sentiments:

Rich in her weeping country's spoils, Versailles
May boast a thousand fountains, that can cast
The tortured waters to the distant heav'ns . . .   (26-8)

Such artifice is to be rejected in favour of the more rugged landscape of 'some pine-topped precipice/Abrupt and shaggy' into which the narrator can insert himself and enthuse over the beauties of nature:

All-beauteous Nature! by thy boundless charms
Oppress'd, O where shall I begin thy praise,
Where turn th'ecstatic eye, how ease my breast
That pants with wild astonishment and love!   (145-8)

The 'I' of this passage is no longer a Thomsonian man-in-general, but an ardent individual. And Warton then appeals directly to Shakespeare as a 'child of nature' to become the model for future literary artefacts: 'What are the lays of artful Addison,/Coldly correct, to Shakespeare's warblings wild?' (168-9). Addison may well be 'artful', but he is 'coldly correct' because he follows the rules. Shakespeare, on the other hand, is a true child of nature, 'warbling' like a songbird and unconstrained by rules.

In this chapter, I have attempted to identify some of the major themes that recur in the following chapters. The philosophical nature of personal identity was of particular concern to Gray, although each of the poets in their different ways

attempted to answer that fundamental question: 'Who am I?' I shall be suggesting further that the poets' authority to make moral judgements in their poetry depended on the provisional answers they offered to this question. Given that personal identity is constructed within a social context, I shall be exploring how these poets reacted to the changing nature of Great Britain, paying particular attention to the imagined histories and social structures they create within their major poems. Such formulations necessarily involve interventions within the prevailing discursive practices of their contemporaries and I shall be demonstrating how these poets adopted the dominant generic poetic forms of georgic and pastoral and subtly altered them to create new discourses which achieved the authority of the older forms.

CHAPTER 3

Gray: The Search for an Authentic Self.

> 'He cannot look upon those registers of existence whether of brass or
> marble but as a kind of satire upon the departed persons who had left no
> other memorial of them than that they were born and that they died.
> Wordsworth, *Essay on Epitaphs*[1]

Critical opinion of Gray's poetry has been mixed almost from the beginning.[2] While his *Elegy* has been universally admired (albeit for a number of different reasons), the rest of his *oeuvre* has led to a great deal of controversy. The reasons for these disagreements are many and various. Some critics, most notably Johnson and Goldsmith, have been puzzled by the heterogeneity of his work. Others, including Johnson, Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold, have criticised him for his use of a distinctive poetic diction.[3] More recently, literary historians have tried to position him as the leading exponent of a new poetics — whether described as the poetry of 'post-Augustanism', 'sensibility' or 'preromanticism'— that was developing in the mid-eighteenth century.[4] However, there has also been an increasing trend to treat him *sui generis*, as neither inconsistent nor representative.[5]

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[1] Wordsworth, quoting Addison, in, *Essays Upon Epitaphs*, in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and J. Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), vol. 2, pp, 49-96, p. 93.

[2] All references to Gray's poems are from *The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray*, ed. by H. W. Starr and J. R. Hendrickson, eds., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966). References to his letters are from *Correspondence of Thomas Gray,* ed. by Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley,, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935). I retain the idiosyncratic punctuation, etc., of the letters.

[3] Johnson, *Lives*; William Wordsworth, 'Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads'* in *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, ed. by Nowell C. Smith, Nowell C. (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1980); 'Gray, a born poet, fell upon an age of prose.' Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism. Second Series* (London: Macmillan, 1888), p. 91.

[4] E.g., Northrop Frye, 'Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility', *ELH*, 23, 2 (1956), 144-52; John Sitter, *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982); Marshall Brown, *Preromanticism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991).

[5] See, for example, book length studies by Robert Gleckner, *Thomas Gray and Masculine Friendship* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Suvir Kaul, *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority: A Study in Ideology and Poetics* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1992); Eugene Macarthy, *Thomas Gray: The Progress of a* Poet (London: Associated University Presses, 1997); Henry Weinfield, *The Poet Without a Name: Gray's Elegy and the Problem of History* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991).

While each one of these critical approaches adds to our knowledge of Gray's work, none of them offers a complete picture. While it would be impertinent to suggest that this chapter fulfils that aim, I hope that it will supply one more piece of the jigsaw that currently confronts us. My central argument is that Gray faced the problems of both personal and national identity that I have outlined in the preceding chapters in radical and disturbing ways. In particular, I shall be arguing that the nature of personal identity is thoroughly explored in *The Eton Ode* and the *Elegy*, with the result that a new and more 'personal' voice is introduced into British poetry that would subsequently be modified, initially and to little purpose, by Goldsmith and then be adopted and fully realised by Cowper in *The Task*. However, it would seem that Gray was ultimately dissatisfied with this potential merging of the poetic 'I' with the personal 'I', abandoning it in favour of other, more impersonal, personifications of the speaking poet in the *Odes*. I shall also suggest that his various re-workings of the genealogy of British liberty (and coincidentally, of British poetry) mark a distinctive break with the genealogies offered by such earlier poets as Pope and Thomson.

Gray's final poem, the *Ode for Music* (1769), was composed for the installation of the Duke of Grafton as Chancellor of the University of Cambridge and as an act of gratitude to Grafton for having recommended him for the professorship of history.[6] Although not obviously an *envoi* to his poetic career, this ode both recapitulates and re-works many of the themes he had explored in his earlier works. The complex rhythms deployed recall the earlier Pindaric odes; the mentions of significant figures from British history, both political and intellectual, hark back to the *Eton Ode* (and to the post-*Elegy* odes). The dedication to Grafton re-affirms the political stance he adopts in both the *Lord Holland* polemic (1769)[7] and the satirical diatribe against Jemmy Twitcher in *The Candidate* (1764)[8]; and there are numerous echoes of his favourite poets and, in particular, of the *Elegy* (1750).

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[6] Gray, *Poems*, pp. 48-51.
[7] Ibid., p. 53.
[8] Ibid., pp. 78-9.

The complexity of the rhythmical patterns can be seen in the opening 'Air', 'Chorus' and 'Recitative'[9]. Although seemingly random, these rhythms are perfectly attuned to their discursive context. The 'Air', after its initial address to the audience, grammatically fronts the different subjects, 'Comus', 'Ignorance', 'Sloth', Sedition' and 'Servitude' and ends with a prepositional phrase referring to the present location before concluding with the pentameter, 'Let painted Flatt'ry hide her serpent-train in flowers.' Similarly, the ending of the 'Recitative' matches form and content exactly:

'Twas *Milton* struck the deep-toned shell,
And, as the choral warblings round him swell,
Meek *Newton's* self bends from his state sublime,
And nods his hoary head, and listens to the rhyme.   (23-6)

The mention of Milton leads naturally to a reminder of his preference for iambic pentameters in *Paradise Lost*, while Newton's 'state sublime' is confirmed by the majesty of the concluding iambic hexameter.

The subsequent reference to Henry VI, by establishing a necessary historical link between the mythical British past of Arthurian times and the accession of the Tudor line (who were the forebears genealogically of Grafton)[10], implies that Henry's reign foreshadowed both the cultural efflorescence of the late seventeenth century (Milton and Newton), and also the prosperity and heroic peace attendant on George III's reign: '"The Star of *Brunswick* smiles serene,/And gilds the horrors of the deep."' (93-4).[11]

Gray also, somewhat archly, introduces a more personal history into the *Ode.* The description of Newton as having a 'hoary head' will have reminded some

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[9] The 'Air' contains seven lines, each containing iambic tetrameters, before concluding with an iambic hexameter. The 'Chorus' is a simple quatrain of iambic tetrameters, while the 'Recitative' opens with two iambic tetrameters followed by an iambic pentameter. These in turn are followed by a single iambic tetrameter and a single iambic hexameter, which give way to three iambic tetrameters, an iambic pentameter, two iambic tetrameters, before concluding with two iambic pentameters and an iambic hexameter. As an aside, the ode must have set Randal, as composer, a number of intractable problems. Gray's comment certainly suggests this: '[The] *Odicle* has been rehearsed again & again, & the boys have got scraps by heart'. *Correspondence*, III, 1065.

[10] See *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, ed by Roger Lonsdale (London: Longmans, 1969), p. 273, n. 70. Henry VI was an important figure for Gray, having particular associations with Eton (see *Eton Ode*, below) and Cambridge.

[11] The *Ode for Music* was composed only six years after the triumphal Treaty of Paris.

listeners of the swain in the *Elegy*. However, the echoes of the *Elegy* that occur in the following passage have an altogether more serious purpose:

"Thy liberal heart, thy judging eye,
"The flower unheeded shall descry,
"And bid it round heaven's altars shed
"The fragrance of it's blushing head:
"Shall raise from earth the latent gem
"To glitter on the diadem.   (71-6)

Here, Gray is both urging Grafton to exercise his considerable powers of patronage and proleptically celebrating such patronage. The unplucked flowers which 'waste [their] sweetness on the desert air' in the *Elegy*, are transformed into virtuous clergy, while, somewhat more ambiguously, the unseen gem becomes a glittering jewel which will adorn the terrestrial kingdom to come.[12] This intertwining of the personal and the public was not something Gray had attempted since the publication of his *Elegy* and was, perhaps, an acknowledgement of his lifelong attachment to Cambridge.

Further ambiguities occur in the frequent intertextual references to Milton. While they obviously celebrate one of Cambridge's more prestigious alumni, they also recall, by indirection, many of Gray's earlier poems through their recycling of similar Miltonic echoes. Robert Gleckner has argued that Gray was unable to escape the shadow of Milton.[13] While this claim is undoubtedly true, it needs to be tempered by a recognition that he could not escape from the poetic selves he had created for himself. And such an impression is strengthened by the curious second 'Air'. This is put into the mouth of Milton but, although a pastiche of Milton's works, it is clearly the work of Gray.[14] It is difficult, here, to assess whether Gray is deliberately arrogating to himself the poetic stature of Milton or

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[12] Linda Zionkowski comments that that '[a]mbivalence towards the waste of talent in a stratified society – a sentiment infused throughout the "Elegy" – find no expression in the "Ode for Music". Explicitly revising the "Elegy's" much noted flower and gem stanza (53-56), Gray predicts that Grafton's bounty will descry "[t]he flower unheeded" and "raise from the earth the latent gem," enabling gifted but obscure scholars and poets to serve the church and the state (71-76).' Linda Zionkowski, 'Gray, the marketplace, and the masculine poet', *Criticism*, 35, 4 (1993), 589-608, (p. 603). To some extent, Gray's reworking of the image may vitiate some of Empson's criticisms of the *Elegy* in William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935). For a fuller discussion, see the section on the *Elegy* below.
[13] Gleckner, *Thomas Gray and Masculine Friendship.*
[14] See Lonsdale's notes, pp. 269-70.

whether, instead, he is engaging in an act of self-irony and asserting indirectly that he can never achieve such heights.[15]

Gleckner prefers the second interpretation arguing that:

> [the Ode for Music] tells us more about the final state of Gray's mind with respect to Milton's vestigial presence there than it does about Grafton and the politics of Cambridge's chancellorship. . . for in it Gray's distaste at the entire enterprise from inception to aftermath arguably underlies an apparent effort to satirize not so much the occasion or Grafton . . . but rather his own hyperbolic, self-consciously inept performance.'[16]

However, it is difficult to see how any audience, during a public performance, would be able to discriminate between the author's self-satire and the more general undermining of the occasion itself, something which seems highly unlikely given that the *Ode for Music* was pre-eminently a public poem crafted to express the ceremonial and political sentiments appropriate to the occasion, many (if not most) of which were shared by Gray.[17] To agree with Gleckner here would mean having to accept that Gray was still pre-occupied with representing a 'personal' self in his poetry, something that, as I shall be arguing below, he abandoned after completing the *Elegy.*

If, however, there is an element of self-irony in the *Ode for Music*, it may derive from a playful impulse not to take himself too seriously rather than an attempt to introduce an authorial self.[18] Indeed, Gray's attitude to his own poetry was highly

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[15] The kind of ventriloquism that occurs here is reminiscent of his experiments with the Pindaric Odes, *The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* (which will be discussed below), where he tentatively casts himself as both the natural successor to Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton and Dryden, and as the heir to the Celtic bardic tradition.

[16] Gleckner, *Thomas Gray and Masculine Friendship*, p. 179.

[17] James Steele makes the point that Gray, by background and inclination, was a natural supporter of Grafton's political position: 'Gray's world vision, then, was consistently that of a whiggish, imperialistic bourgeois, latterly a Pittite. The beauty of the poetry in which he expressed this vision is as tough and uncompromising in substance as it is gracefully intricate in form. Moreover, in the context of those particular forces and feelings — both national and class — in relation to which Gray's work should be dialectically understood, this beauty is progressive in certain respects and of some power.' James Steele, 'Thomas Gray and the Season for Triumph', in *Fearful Joy: Papers from the Thomas Gray Bicentenary Conference at Carleton University*, ed. by J. Downey and B. Jones (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), pp. 198-240, p. 235.

[18] Lonsdale points out that Gray 'was never anything but deprecating about the *Ode*'. *Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, p. 266.Gray's humour, evident throughout his letters, is not frequently remarked upon.

ambivalent. In 1768, for example, while visiting his friend, William Robinson, in Denton Court, Kent, he was said to have left one of his poems in a drawer.[19] Such behaviour could be interpreted as an act of negligence, or a studied nonchalance designed to advertise his relative insouciance to his own poetry.[20] Although this event occurred towards the end of his poetic career, it would seem to be representative of Gray's attitude towards his own poetry throughout his life. Gray's poems, I contend, were written primarily for himself as attempts to solve various discursive and aesthetic problems that had become particularly acute in the poetics of the mid century. Clearly, he was happy to share them with a small and select circle of his trusted friends, but he was, if not indifferent to their public reception, largely contemptuous of the tastes of the wider public. Further, from scattered remarks in his letters, it seems he was doubtful whether the younger generation of poets had fully engaged with the problems he had identified.[21]

It is perfectly clear that Gray had little, or no, proprietary pride in his satires, 'The Candidate' (1764) and 'On L[or]d H[olland']s Seat near M[argate], K[en]t' (1768), nor have they received much critical attention.[22] Given his evident interest in the politics of the time, this is somewhat surprising. As a well-known public figure, it is at least possible that any public intervention he made into the politics of the period would have had some effect.[23] It is, of course, possible to explain his reluctance to have them published as a natural reticence. However, it is more likely that they were private exercises in exploiting the kinds of 'public'

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[19] *Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, p. 259. The poem is 'On L[ord] H[olland']s Seat near M[argate], K[en]t'.

[20] Of course, Gray was painstaking in preparing his poems for publication, but indifference to one's writings in private and anxiety over their public presentation are not necessarily contradictory.

[21] I am thinking here of his comments on Akenside, Collins and Warton in *Correspondence*, I, pp. 115; 129.

[22] Gray, *Poems*, pp. 78, 53. 'Gray saved nothing of the first [among his papers], and the second [Lord Holland], which appeared in the *New Foundling Hospital of Wit* of 1769, was published without his permission. In fact, he is said (by Walpole) "to have condemned all his satirical works" . . . ', Gleckner, *Thomas Gray and Masculine Friendship*, p. 170. A search in the *Thomas Gray Archive* revealed few mentions other than bibliographical ones (*The Thomas Gray Archive,* URL: http://www.thomasgray.org/, [accessed 24, March, 2012].

[23] In a letter to Walpole, Sept. 12, 1763, he writes: 'the present times are so little like anything I remember, that you may excuse my curiosity: besides I really interest myself in these transactions, & cannot persuade myself, that Quæ supra nos, nihil ad nos.' *Correspondence*, II, p. 817.

voice we hear in the satires of Pope and Swift and which had gained a new currency in the writings of Churchill.

 'Lord Holland' opens on a scene of desolation:

Here Seagulls scream and cormorants rejoice,
  And Mariners, tho' shipwreckt, dread to land,
Here reign the blustring north and blighting east,
  No tree is heard to whisper, bird to sing: (7-10)

The natural bleakness of the landscape exactly mirrors the portrait of the 'Old and abandon'd' (1) Holland, who has retired to Margate to 'smuggle some few years and strive to mend/A broken character and constitution.' (3-4) That this is a forlorn hope is underscored by the subsequent reference to the 'shipwreckt mariners' for, if 'they dread to land' even when foundering, they are hardly likely to land in order to smuggle contraband. The poem continues:

  Art he invokes new horrors still to bring;
New mouldring fanes and battlements arise,
  Arches and turrets nodding to their fall,
Unpeopled palaces delude his eyes,
  And mimick desolation covers all.   (12-16)

Lonsdale notes that these lines echo Pope's *To Mr. Addison* and include a brief reference to his *Essay on Man*.[24] However, one can also hear echoes of Pope's *Epistle to Burlington* when the poet chastises the tasteless abuse of wealth on grandiose building.[25]

These opening lines are spoken by an unattributed voice and the distancing that this involves gives them the force of undisputed fact rather than of opinion. It is within this context, then, that we are invited to hear Holland's own words as ventriloquized by Gray. His savage musings on what might have been conclude

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[24] *Poems of Gray Collins and Goldsmith*, p. 62-3.
[25] 'At Timon's Villa let us pass a day,
Where all cry out, 'What sums are thrown away!'
So proud, so grand, of that stupendous air,
Soft and Agreeable come never there', (100-3). Pope, *Poems*, p. 592.

with the chilling words: 'Owls might have hooted in S^t. Peter's Quire,/And foxes stunk and litter'd in S^t. Pauls.' (23-4).

The reference to Pope's *Windsor-Forest* here is particularly powerful.[26] While recalling the dark days of the Norman conquest as envisaged by Pope, it also envisages the future ruination of the kingdom had Holland's machinations been successful. However, as an unrealised prediction it is also problematic. It seems unlikely that Holland would have expressed himself in quite this gloating way. The voice, then, has to be re-imagined as somewhat akin to the voices in *The Dunciad* when they are vying for the supreme accolade of dullness.[27] If such a re-imagining takes place, then the alignment of the bleak landscape, the exercise of poor taste, political ill-judgement,
and overweening arrogance becomes complete and the poem, although brief, evokes the earlier works of Pope and Swift in which different voices (both of narrator and participant) are manipulated to achieve precise satiric aims. What is particularly interesting here, though, is that Gray not only manipulates a narrating voice and a participant voice, but also Pope's voice and all the other voices that are invoked by the intertextual references noted by Lonsdale.

The shocking imagery of the final lines of 'Lord Holland' is matched by the equally shocking obscenity of the conclusion to *The Candidate*. Mason did not include this satire in his collected edition of Gray's works (1775), and for many years the poem was reprinted with the final couplet omitted.[28] The title was almost certainly attached to the lines following Churchill's satire of the same name, and the work, with its jaunty dactylic tetrameters, mimics both Churchill and other satirists of the period. However, there are also echoes of Swift. Although Gray makes no mention of Swift's poetry in his letters, a six volume edition of his works had appeared in 1754-5 which was enlarged in 1762-4 and

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[26] 'The fox obscene to gaping Tombs retires,/And savage Howlings fill the sacred Quires.' (71-2). Ibid., p. 198.
[27] Writing to West in 1742, Gray observes: 'As to the Dunciad, it is greatly admired: the Genii of Operas and Schools, with their attendants, the pleas of the Virtuosos and Florists, and the yawn of dulness in the end, are as fine as anything he has written.' *Correspondence*, I, p. 189.
[28] Lonsdale notes that, although *The Candidate* was circulated in pirated editions soon after its composition, it was not published in its entirety until 1955. *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, p. 246.

1765 and which Walpole refers to in a letter to Gray in 1768.[29] The ostensible subject of *The Candidate* is, of course, the Earl of Sandwich, and Gray's depiction of him is both biting and witty. However, equally significant is his attack on the Cambridge faculties and particularly the faculty of Divinity. Robert L. Mack has observed:

> A surprisingly small number of Gray's critics . . . have commented on the simple fact that, for all Gray's caustic dismissal of Sandwich as an individual, Gray's satire in the poem is aimed far more pointedly at the University faculty itself.[30]

Although it would be wrong to dismiss the immediate inspiration for Gray's satire, it is quite likely that he had in the back of his mind such attacks on the hypocrisy of the church as Swift's 'On the Irish Bishops', 'Judas' and 'Advice to a Parson', the latter of which is a brief polemic on clerical ambition:

Wou'd you rise in the *Church,* be *Stupid* and *Dull*,
Be empty of *Learning,* of *Insolence* full:
Tho' Lewd and Immoral, be Formal and Grave,
In *Flatt'ry* an *Artist*, in *Fawning* a *Slave,*
No Merit, no Science, no Virtue is Wanting
In him, that's accomplish'd in *Cringing* and *Canting*:
Be studious to practice true *Meanness of Spirit*;
For who but *Lord Bolton* was *mitred* for *Merit*?
Wou'd you wish to be wrap't in a *Rochet* – In short,
Be as *Pox'd* and *Profane* as *Fanatical Hort*.[31]

Also, it may be no coincidence that these satires appeared in the same years (1731-5) as 'Cassinus and Peter', which ends with the obscene comment that '*Cælia, Cælia, Cælia* shits'.

Insofar as there are echoes of Swift, then it would give weight to my suggestion that Gray was deliberately playing at imitating other author's voices, and

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[29] See *Swift: Poetical Works,* p. xxvi, and Gray, *Correspondence*, III, 1026.
[30] Robert L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 556.
[31] *Swift: Poetical Works*, p. 535.

particularly those authors who had advocated a self-consciously public role for poetry.[32] As Roger Lonsdale observes:

> English poetry, as Gray knew it, portrayed the self only in the conventional religious or amatory postures and predicaments. The dominant recent influence, Alexander Pope, had dramatized himself in his poetry often enough, but as an idealized, public self, usually fortified and biographically confused by a skilful merger with Horace.[33]

Gray, it seems, felt that such a role was no longer viable and his reconstruction of the poet-narrator as 'Bard' in the Pindaric Odes, and its relative failure to appeal to public taste, had tended to confirm such feelings. His reluctance to publish these satires does not, therefore, arise so much from a disdain for the commercial ethics of the booksellers, although this evidently played a part, as from a sense that they were *jeux d'esprit* that could be shared with his friends but had no place in the public discourse of the time.[34]

In this context, Gray's comments to Gregory on the reception of the *Elegy* are highly suggestive: 'which he told me, with a great deal of acrimony, owed its popularity entirely to the subject, and that the public would have received it as well if it had been written in prose.'[35] Clearly, a prose version would have consisted largely of a number of sententious moralizings and the unique feature of the poem — which I take to be the projection of the poet's self into the texture of the verse in such a way as to indicate his personal engagement with issues of mortality and correct behaviour — would have been lost. The relative failure of the public to recognise this personal element, therefore, obliged Gray to

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[32] And I believe such echoes can be found in his 'A Long Story' which has echoes of Swift's 'An Apology to Lady Carteret'.

[33] Roger Lonsdale, 'The Poetry of Thomas Gray: Versions of the Self', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LIX, (1973), pp. 105-123, p. 113.

[34] A point forcefully made by Zionkowski: 'Gray himself repeatedly renounced the role of public writer, and did so because he opposed the commodification of literature.' Zionkowski, 'Gray, the marketplace, and the masculine poet', p. 594. However, James Mullholland dissents from this view, arguing that Gray continued to publish after the appearance of the Pindaric odes: 'Rather than demonstrating his aversion to the literary marketplace, Gray's poetics of printed voice is a concerted attempt to reformulate the relationship between authors and readers.' James Mullholland, 'Gray's Ambition: Printed Voices and Performing Bards in the Later Poetry' *ELH*, 75, 1, (2008), 109-134, (p. 111).

[35] *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, p. 113.

experiment with other ways of making the speaking poet both narrator and participant.

Such experiments found their fulfilment in *The Progress of Poesy*, *Pindaric Ode* (1754) and *The Bard. A Pindaric Ode* (1757).[36] Initial reaction to the Odes was puzzlement. Few readers seemed aware of what Gray was trying to achieve and Hurd's comment that '. . . everybody would be thought to admire. 'Tis true, I believe, the greater part don't understand them', sums up the general attitude to their publication.[37] Gray affected to be indifferent to their reception and, in refusing to add extra notes to any further edition, writes to Mason (Sept. 1757): 'I would not have put another note to save the souls of all the *Owls* in London. It is extremely well, as it is. Nobody understands me, & I am perfectly satisfied.'[38] Perhaps the most judicious criticism came from Goldsmith in his 'Review of Odes. By Mr. Gray' in the *Monthly Review* (September, 1757) where he writes:

> We cannot, however, without some regret, behold those talents so capable of giving pleasure to all, exerted in efforts that, at best, can amuse only the few; we cannot behold the rising Poet seeking fame among the learned, without hinting to him the same advice that Isocrates used to give to his Scholars, *Study the People*, This study it is that has conducted the great Masters of antiquity up to immortality.[39]

Goldsmith's objections that Gray was ignoring the constituency he had established for himself with the *Elegy* underline the fact that he was attempting something entirely new.

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[36] Gray, *Poems*, pp. 12-17; 18-24. I shall not be considering 'Ode on the Pleasure Arising from Vicissitude' (1755), nor his later translations from the Norse and Welsh languages in any detail. The latter indicate an interest in British poetry partly inspired by his plan to write a history of poetry in the British Isles and partly, perhaps, influenced by the appearance of Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). The former remained unfinished. While it contains a number of references to a visualized nature, it largely consists of personifications of the contrasting moods of pleasure and melancholy. In this respect, the poem's speaking voice contains no self-reference and is therefore 'public' in the ways I have outlined above. The fact that Gray was unable to complete it tends to confirm my view that he was no longer comfortable trying to manipulate the kinds of public voice that had been a feature of poetry in the earlier part of the century.

[37] *Correspondence,* II, p. 517.

[38] Ibid., p. 522.

[39] *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, 5 vols., Friedman, A., ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), Vol. I, 112.

The reasons for this change of direction have been variously explained. Lonsdale sees it as an inevitable consequence of Gray's elevation to the status of popular poet: 'Yet how was he to follow the *Elegy*, which had gained him that new identity as a poet? Perhaps inevitably, the subject of Gray's two remaining serious poems was poetry itself.'[40] While this is persuasive as far as it goes, it tends to overlook the fact that the subject of the two sister odes was a more complex interweaving of poetry and history which picks up, and develops, themes which had been touched on in the *Elegy*. John Sitter, in discussing Johnson's criticism of the odes, argues that 'Johnson's hostility to Gray's *Odes* (1757) is in itself a perverse tribute to the fundamental change in poetic taste they embodied, which many readers were ready to welcome. . .'[41] However, while it is true that the public had accepted the new poetics by the time of Johnson's *Lives* (1779-81), it is also clear from the comments above that it took some time before the odes were properly appreciated. Linda Zionkowski elaborates on Goldsmith's criticism but argues that Gray's withdrawal from his potential audience was a consequence of his increasing alienation from the literary market place. However, she also makes the interesting point that the diversification of readerships as a consequence of market forces meant that there was no longer a stable audience to which Gray could appeal:

> Resisting the commercialization of his work, he seemed determined to deny all but a few chosen readers access to his sister odes, almost as if trying to recreate the small, elite audiences of past ages. . . . As Gray becomes more convinced of his estrangement from his readers, and more sure of their inability to understand him, his odes focus less upon the audience's importance to poetry. While the early poems represent the audience as a responsive force, even as something that offers a threat to the speaker's authority, the later ones deny its significance to and involvement in poetic creation.[42]

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[40] Lonsdale, 'The Poetry of Thomas Gray: Versions of the Self', p. 119. See, also, McCarthy, *Thomas Gray: The Progress of a Poet*: 'Moving from the pastoral domestic "Elegy" to the bardic sublime is the progression of a more serious spokesman, becoming monologic . . . for his nation.', p, 188. In fact, I am not convinced that Gray is entirely monologic in these odes.
[41] Sitter, *Literary Loneliness*, p. 163.
[42] Linda Zionkowski, 'Bridging the Gulf Between: The Poet and the Audience in the Work of Gray', *ELH*, 58, 2 (1991), 331-350, (p. 346).

The suggestion that Gray was seeking 'a fit audience, though few' certainly accords with the ending of 'The Progress of Poesy' where Gray seems to be casting himself in the role of a direct successor to Milton.

As is indicated by its title, 'The Progress of Poesy' is a 'progress' poem which follows the traditional trajectory of associating the flourishing of the arts with political liberty, first in ancient Greece, then in Republican Rome, and finally in Britain. The Pindaric form, however, has the effect of rendering this process intermittent in that each stanza develops its own themes which are only tangentially picked up in the following stanzas. The opening lines are an invocation to the Æolian lyre which is treated as both sound and water. The success of this dual image, which irritated Johnson[43], depends on identifying the flow of water with the transmission of sound and, while initially far-fetched, is actually consistent with the Lockean view of the relationship between primary and secondary qualities in that the primary quality of water gives rise to our perception of the secondary quality of sound.[44] The strophe, thus, has at its heart the pre-human nascence of qualities which will have profound effects on our feelings. The antistrophe and epode describe the variety of effects created by this lyre, at first in calming the warlike passions of the gods and subsequently in the joys of youthful dance.

The implied historical sequence is interesting here since poetry is conceived as existing before the gods, by whom it is then acknowledged and enjoyed. The idea that poetry is an entirely natural phenomenon becomes a dominant theme of the poem which is reworked in various ways. In particular, it explains why poetry should exist in the otherwise inhospitable regions of the poles and the more equable climate of Chile (Stanza 2, antistrophe), how it was passed on to Shakespeare (Stanza 3, strophe) and, more ambiguously, how it was instilled in the narrator of the ode.

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[43] *Lives*, IV, p, 181.
[44] 'Secondly, such qualities which in truth are nothing in the objects themselves but powers to produce various sensations by their *primary* qualities, i.e., by the bulk, figure, texture, and motion of their insensible parts, as colours, sounds, tastes, etc.' Locke, *Essay,* vol., 1, Book II, Chap. VIII, §10, pp. 104-5.

Stanza 2 opens with a distinctly melancholy view of man's existence:

   Man's feeble race what Ills await,
Labour, and Penury, the racks of Pain,
Disease, and Sorrow's weeping train,
And Death, sad refuge from the storms of Fate!
The fond complaint, my Song, disprove,
And justify the laws of Jove.   (41-6)

The first four lines would seem to echo the sentiments expressed in the *Elegy*.[45]
The final couplet is therefore somewhat surprising. It is tempting to assume that
Gray here is repudiating his earlier poem, though exactly why is unclear. 'Fond'
tends to have negative connotations: Johnson's *Dictionary* gives as the first
definition 'foolish; silly; indiscreet; imprudent; injudicious'.[46] The 'fond
complaint' may therefore refer directly to the *Elegy* itself or, by indirection, to
the audience that took it to its heart. If it is the former, the ensuing line would
suggest that Gray had found a new confidence in his poetic powers which, in his
current 'song', would 'justify the laws of Jove'.

The link between poetry and liberty is established in line 65, before Gray
continues with a rather perfunctory description of the desertion of the nine muses
'in Greece's evil hour' for the more welcoming 'Latian plains' (77-8). And,
equally perfunctorily, 'When Latium had her lofty spirit lost,/They sought, oh
Albion! next thy sea-encircled coast.' (81-2). The three British poets who
embody the poetic tradition are imagined in ways that imitate the temporal
sequence established in the first two stanzas. Shakespeare is the child of nature to
whom 'the mighty Mother did unveil/Her aweful face' (86-7). Milton, like the
Greek gods:

                    . . . rode sublime
Upon the seraph-wings of Extasy,
The secrets of th'Abyss to spy.

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[45] Lonsdale also notes echoes from the *Eton Ode* and *Adversity. The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, p. 167.

[46] Samuel Johnson, *A dictionary of the English language: in which the words are deduced from their originals, and illustrated in their different significations by examples from the best writers. To which are prefixed A history of the language, and An English grammar*, 2 vols., (London : printed by W. Strahan, for J. Knapton; C. Hitch and L. Hawes; A. Millar; R. and J. Dodsley; and M. and T. Longman, MDCCLVI).

He pass'd the flaming bounds of Place and Time:
The living Throne, the sapphire-blaze,
Where Angels tremble, while they gaze,
He saw . . .   (95-101)

But, being a mere mortal, he was blinded 'with excess of light.'[47] The 'less presumptuous' Dryden (103) is neither godlike, nor a child of nature. He is therefore much more akin to the mortal Greeks and Romans, and his inspiration, rather than coming directly from nature or heaven, is the result of 'Bright-eyed Fancy' (108).

The slow domestication of poetry that has been described in this ahistorical progress is confirmed in the final epode. Although there is a strong presumption that Gray was describing his own poetic destiny in these lines, the use of the distancing pronoun, 'he', is sufficiently decorous to absolve him from the self-glorification implied in the final line: 'Beneath the Good how far – but far above the Great'. The contemporary poet, then, who inherits the ability to wake the lyre no longer has access to the divine inspirations of the earlier poets but draws on their previous achievements to create his own work:

Yet oft before his infant eyes would run
Such forms, as glitter in the Muse's ray
With orient hues, unborrow'd of the Sun:
Yet shall he mount, and keep his distant way
Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate . . .   (118-122)

Gray, here, seems to be rejecting Pope's injunction to 'follow nature' since the forms which 'glitter' no longer glitter in the sun but receive their light direct from the Muse. Hence his choice of the Pindaric form since it represents an imaginative reworking of a form that had previously been employed for other purposes.[48] In this sense, then, the modern poet will be far beneath the 'Good' who received their inspiration directly from nature (and thence from God), but 'far above the Great' who have succumbed to a 'vulgar fate'.

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[47] Although Gray cites a Homeric source for this mention, the analogy with Homer himself is very persuasive. See Lonsdale's notes, p. 174.

[48] 'Neither antiquarian nor arrogant about capturing the 'soul' of a dead poet, [the odes] recreate Pindar's art in a new way . . . ' Rothstein, *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, p. 95.

However, these lines also seem to acknowledge that the tradition of public poetry which had insisted that great art was an imitation of nature was no longer viable, but that poetry had to withdraw from the 'vulgar' public sphere and keep a 'distant way'. Such a reading, though, could suggest that Gray felt poetry no longer had a social role, a suggestion which seems confirmed by the ahistorical nature of the progress of poetry he describes. However, 'The Progress' needs to be read in conjunction with its sister ode, 'The Bard', for in the latter poetry is both historicized and mythologized. Poetry does have a social role after all, but it turns out to be a prophetic, rather than a didactic, role.

'The Bard' starts in *medias res* with the poet/bard heaping imprecations on Edward 1. Initially, this is a disembodied voice and, to that extent, mirrors the 'natural' voice of the Aeolian lyre in the *Progress*. Indeed, Gray makes the point that the bard's voice is heard as 'sounds' rather than as words, giving it a peculiarly other-worldly quality:

Such were the sounds, that o'er the crested pride
Of the first Edward scatter'd wild dismay,
As down the steep of Snowdon's shaggy side
He wound with toilsome march his long array . . .   (9-12)

When we are finally offered a portrait of the speaker, he is imagined as akin to an Old Testament prophet brooding over the scene below:

  On a rock, whose haughty brow
Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,
Robed in the sable garb of woe,
With haggard eyes the Poet stood;
(Loose his beard and hoary hair
Stream'd, like a meteor, to the troubled air)
And, with a Master's hand and Prophet's fire,
Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.   (15-22)

The bard's function, as prophet, is to foretell a particular version of British history in which the depredations of the Norman conquest and its subsequent tyranny, with occasional brief respites, eventually give way to the glories of the Tudors.

Gray is radically different from such histories as had been used in the recent past to construct a genealogy of the state, and which described the progress of liberty in Britain as largely inexorable. In the first part of *Windsor-Forest* (1704), Pope proudly proclaims 'Rich Industry sits smiling on the Plains,/And Peace and Plenty tell a STUART reigns'(41-2).[49] However, he follows these lines with: 'Not thus the Land appeared in Ages past', and proceeds to sketch an outline history of the years following the Norman conquest in which the barbarities of earlier times finally gave way to the moment when: 'Fair *Liberty, Britannia's* Goddess rears/Her cheerful Head, and leads the golden Years.' (91-2). In the second part (1713), written in part to commend the Peace of Utrecht, Pope recapitulates this history, concentrating on post-Norman history, until 'At length great *ANNA* said − Let Discord cease!/She said, the World obey'd, and all was *Peace.*' (327-8).

Similarly, Thomson has a much longer section in *Liberty*, Part IV, (1736) which Liberty introduces with the words: 'Now turn your View, and mark from *Celtic* Night/To present Grandeur how my BRITAIN rose.' (624-5).[50] The choice of the pronoun 'my' is, of course, significant in indicating that Britain is now the permanent property of Liberty. Although the progress of Liberty is beset by vicissitude, her final triumph is described thus:

    And now behold! exalted as the Cope
That swells immense o'er many-peopled Earth,
And like it free, MY FABRICK stands compleat,
The PALACE OF THE LAWS of the laws . . .   (1177-80)

Of course, the optimism of these two poems was tempered by moral reflections on how such a desirable state should be maintained, but both maintain it was the fundamental right of Britain to possess a political liberty that was supported both by flourishing arts and trade which could then be exported round the world.

The Bard's vision of British history is completely different. Not only is it far more dystopian than these earlier accounts, but it circles back on itself with the

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[49] Pope, *Poems*, p. 196.
[50] Thomson, *Liberty et al.,* p. 107.

bard renewing his curses on Edward. A further anomaly is that the bard's account ends with Elizabethan England, as though the history of Britain since then is entirely provisional. Although these features of the poem are necessarily intertwined, they can be understood in relation both to the political (and colonial) uncertainties of the time and to the new poetics that Gray was attempting to forge.

Gray's antipathy to Newcastle, the leader of the administration in 1756, is well-documented in his letters.[51] Equally, he was depressed by Byng's failure at Minorca, somewhat jocularly suggesting to Mason that they should leave the country together.[52] Although Britain itself was not obviously threatened by its failures in the early years of the war, its colonial trading partners, and therefore its wealth, were in considerable jeopardy. And, rather more remotely, the Jacobite uprising of 1745 had been a shock, albeit temporary, to the kingdom. There were, therefore, grounds for believing that the march of British history could be reversed. If this were to prove the case, then a revised account would have to be created. And Gray achieves this in *The Bard* in a very interesting way.

By focussing on Elizabeth, who represents the end of the Tudor line, the poet's prophecy draws attention to its role of part-mythologizing and part-describing a historical moment which was regarded as particularly glorious:

  'Girt with many a Baron bold
'Sublime their starry fronts they rear;
'And gorgeous Dames, and Statesmen old
'In bearded majesty, appear.
'In the midst a Form divine!
'Her eye proclaims her of the Briton-Line;
'Her lyon-port, her awe-commanding face,
'Attemper'd sweet to virgin-grace.
'What strings symphonious tremble in the air,
'What strains of vocal transport round her play!   (111-20)

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[51] See esp. 'I should have been at Camb:^ge before now, if the D: of New:^le & his foundation-stone would have let me, but I want them to have done before I go.' And accompanying note: *Correspondence*, 1, p. 411.

[52] Ibid., II, p. 465.

These lines place Elizabeth as the apogee of the 'Briton-line', a moment which had been anticipated in line 109: 'No more our long-lost Arthur we bewail'. However, not only is she surrounded by statesmen but also by poets — 'vocal transport' — with clear allusions to Spenser and Shakespeare. The history thus constructed is essentially a poetic history and is rooted in real and mythic historic events. And the interplay between these two features is insisted upon later in lines 125-7, when the bard says: '"The verse adorn again/'Fierce War and faithful Love,/'And Truth severe by fairy Fiction dressed."'

Paul Odney has argued

> His self-conscious interweaving of myth and history contributes an alternative nationalism to eighteenth-century Britain, one that is deliberately distanced from immediate and fixed notions of national identity. . . In creating this alternative nationalism, Gray's odes "denaturalize" many of the eighteenth-century narratives of British national origins and identity . . .[53]

While this 'making strange' of the previous narratives seems to me true, it does not entirely explain why Gray should have chosen such a course. I have suggested that part of the reason may have been because he no longer had confidence in the earlier poetic attempts at representing the genealogy of the nation. Insofar as this is true, it would follow that he not only had to re-imagine such a history, but also create a new way of 'telling'.

Gray achieves this new way of telling in *The Bard* through the use of a very subtle stylistic device. The opening strophe opens with the dramatic words:

  'Ruin seize thee, ruthless King!
'Confusion on thy banners wait,
'Though fann'd by Conquest's crimson wing
'They mock the air with idle state.
'Helm nor Hauberk's twisted mail,
'Nor even thy virtues, Tyrant, shall avail
'To save thy secret soul from nightly fears,

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[53] Paul Odney, 'Thomas Gray's "Daring Spirit": Forging the Poetics of an Alternative Nationalism', *CLIO,* (1999), *in Literature Resource Center; Gale* <http://go.galegroup.com.chain.kent.ac.uk/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA57535146&v=2.1&u=uokent&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w> [accessed 3 Feb, 2012] , non-paginated.

'From Cambria's curse, from Cambria's tears!'   (1-8)

The alliterative use of consonance and assonance and the use of regular trochees in the first five lines establish an incantatory quality which draws the reader into a mythic world in which the identity of the king who is a 'ruthless tyrant' is deliberately obscured. This distancing effect is reinforced by the use of the obsolete terms 'helm' and 'hauberk'. Only in the last line are we offered a precise location, and even this is given the romantic name of Cambria rather than Wales[54]. The voice thus created seems to come from nowhere, and is a singing, rather than a speaking, voice.

The lines which end the strophe, and the first twenty-one lines of the antistrophe, introduce us to the narrator's voice. The function of this voice would appear to be to connect the mythical world with the historical world. To a large extent, it describes rather than passes judgement on the scene. The majority of epithets either imagine the feelings of Edward's army, or depict the landscape. However, there is a subtle shift in the description of the poet. Initially, there are no evaluative adjectives (unless one excepts 'sable garb of woe (17), until immediately before the re-introduction of the poet's voice:

And, with a Master's hand and Prophet's fire,
Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.
'Hark, how each giant-oak, and desert cave,
'Sighs to the torrent's aweful voice beneath!   (21-4)

To the listener (rather than the reader) the move from the narrator's voice to that of the bard would not be at all obvious until the locative 'beneath': the 'torrent's aweful voice', then, could be the torrent of words uttered by the bard.[55] The effect created by such a delay means that the two voices become confused with each other.

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[54] Johnson's criticism that '[i]t is in the power of any man to rush abruptly upon his subject, that has read the ballad of *Johnny Armstrong*' (Johnson, *Lives*, IV, p. 183) is fundamentally misconceived. This ballad opens with a rhetorical question which the listener knows will be answered in the rest of the ballad. *The Bard* opens with a voice that does not indicate clearly the direction the remainder of the poem will take. See *Johnny Armstrong's Last Farewel*, digital.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/15885/transcript/1, [accessed 5 April, 2012].
[55] The device of merging the sound of water with the sound of utterance had already been used in *The Progress of Poesy*.

Gray employs a similar device in the transition between the epode of the first stanza and the strophe of the second stanza (48-9). The bard utters the words, 'And weave with bloody hands the tissue of thy line' which are picked up by the ghostly figures of the bards who had been murdered by Edward: '"Weave the warp and weave the woof"'. These voices then proceed to elaborate on the initial bard's curse by introducing the bleak history of Britain which precedes the arrival of the Tudors.

Although I am not suggesting that the three voices deployed are completely indistinct, I would suggest that they serve slightly different functions in constructing the vision that Gray realises in the poem. The narrator is both present as narrator but also historically remote as auditor of the bard's curses. The bard is speaking at a critical moment in British history when liberty is not only threatened but actually crushed symbolically by the murder of the Welsh bards. And the bards themselves reintroduce, through prophecy, the restoration of liberty and poetry in the reign of Elizabeth. By recognizing the essential unity of these voices, we can make sense of the apparent paradox in the final lines of the poem:

'Be thine Despair, and scept'red Care,
'To triumph, and to die, are mine.'
He spoke, and headlong from the mountain's height
Deep in the roaring tide he plung'd to endless night.   (141-5)

The curse of 'scept'red care' is that which awaits all tyrants. The triumph of the bard is that the voices of liberty represented by the earlier bards can never be extinguished however powerful the repressive forces that attempt such extinction, and the narrator's voice in retelling the story thereby renders himself a true successor to these bardic voices.

Gray's oft-quoted words to Norton Nichols — 'Why I felt myself the bard' — are apposite here.[56] While they can be interpreted as indicating an immersion of self in an imagined persona, they can equally be interpreted as a sense of relief

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[56] *Correspondence*, III, Appendix Z, p. 1290.

that he had at last managed to find a poetic voice that not only avoided the kinds of public rhetoric adopted by Pope and Thomson, and which appealed to specific aristocratic and landowning interests, but one which could be used to challenge these interests without appealing to the mass audiences represented by Grub street.[57]

The similarities in theme between the *Elegy* and 'The Bard' have been remarked on by Robert Mack:

> *The Bard* in some significant respects merely extends the antithesis first outlined in the *Elegy* into the antiquarian past. Where the earlier poem had sought to contrast the pomp and power of the wealthy with the short and simple annals of the poor, the later work likewise contrasted the authority of a brutally established, paternal hierarchy with a generalized, indigenous Welsh bard and his ghostly though still vocal progenitors.[58]

However, these similarities cannot mask the radical differences in treatment and it is these differences which suggest that Gray felt that he had failed in *The Elegy* and needed to move in a new direction.

That he felt he had failed is indicated by his dismissal of the public approbation of the poem already quoted above: 'the public would have received it as well if it had been written in prose.'[59] The irritation in these words suggests that it was the form that had been misunderstood rather than the content which, in turn, indicates that Gray felt he had developed a new mode of address in *The Elegy*. I have already suggested some of the ideological reasons which constrained him

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[57] 'Votaries of Dulness, the booksellers and scribblers of Grub Street appeared so threatening because in deference to the demands of an increasingly popular audience they departed from the norms of elite, classical culture.' L. Zionkowski, 'Gray, the marketplace, and the masculine poet', 593.

[58] R. L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*, p. 479.

[59] A slightly different kind of misunderstanding seems implicit in Smart's lines:
Perhaps our great Augustan GRAY
May grace me with a Doric lay,
With sweet, with manly words of woe,
That nervously pathetic flow.　　(55-8)
Christopher Smart, 'The Brocaded Gown and Linen Rag' (1754), *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart. IV. Miscellaneous Poems English and Latin*, p. 280. Although Smart is not using the term 'Augustan' here in quite the same sense as Goldsmith uses it (see below, Chap. 4), it does place Gray within the direct tradition of such poets as Pope who actively employed Horatian models, as well as emphasizing the pastoral elements of *The Elegy* through the use of the term 'Doric'.

from writing 'state of the nation' poetry. However, there were also aesthetic and personal reasons which drove this desire for innovation, the former of which were being driven by some of Gray's contemporaries.

The new aesthetic was most clearly signalled by Mark Akenside. In *The Pleasures of Imagination. Book 1* (1744), he writes:

MIND, MIND alone, bear witness, earth and heav'n!
The living fountains in itself contains
Of beauteous and sublime: here hand in hand,
Sit paramount the Graces; here inthron'd,
Cœlestial Venus, with divinest airs,
Invites the soul to never-fading joy.   (481-6)[60]

With these lines, Akenside appears to be taking the psychological consequences of Locke's empiricism seriously and arguing that the perception of beauty is the result of the mind's operation on the sense impressions received from nature rather than an inherent quality of nature. This new interest in psychology is also implicit in Joseph Warton's preface to his *Odes* (1746):

> The public has been so much accustomed of late to didactic poetry alone, and essays on moral subjects, that any work, where the imagination is much indulged, will perhaps not be relished or regarded. The author therefore of these pieces is in some pain, lest certain austere critics should think them too fanciful and descriptive. But as he is convinced that the fashion of moralizing in verse has been carried too far, and as he looks upon invention and imagination to be the chief faculties of a poet, so he will be happy if the following Odes may be looked upon as an attempt to bring back poetry into its right channel.[61]

We know Gray had some admiration for Akenside, writing to Wharton in 1744 that *The Pleasures* 'seems to me above the middleing, & now and then (but for a little while) rises even to the best, particularly in Description. it is often obscure, & even unintelligible, & too much infected with the Hutchinson-Jargon.'[62]

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[60] Mark Akenside, *The Poetical Works of Mark Akenside,* ed. by R. Dix (London: Associated University Presses, 1996), p. 105.

[61] Joseph Warton in J. Warton and J. Wooll, *Biographical Memoirs of the Late Rev. Joseph Warton,* p. 14.

[62] *Correspondence,* I, p. 224.

Similarly, of Warton, he writes: '[he] has but little Invention, very poetical choice of Expression, & a good Ear.'[63]

I am not necessarily suggesting that Gray was directly influenced by these works, although both appeared before he had finished writing the *Elegy*, so much as arguing that he was sympathetic to the new directions in poetic expression that Akenside and Warton, among others, were taking. We know, also, that he had a deep interest in Locke. Indeed, S. H. Clark has argued that '[h]is poetry in English can fairly be designated as reactive, a series of rigorous meditations on the Lockean self, the premises of which remain prior to the texts and largely unchallenged.'[64] In particular, Gray seems to have a particular interest in the Lockean concept of memory and its relation to personal identity, having attempted a translation of his philosophy in *De Principiis Cogitandi* (1740) which begins: 'From what origins the mind begins to have knowledge; from what beginnings Memory arises and sets in order the sequence of events and her slender chain; whence Reason spreads its gradual mastery in the savage breast . . .'[65]

Locke's solution to the problem of personal identity was to locate the self in the experiencing mind.[66] However, this solution failed to account for how we perceive ourselves as possessing a unitary history. He tries to deal with this problem in his Chapter, *Of Retention*. Here, he argues that 'the mind has a power in many cases to revive perceptions which it has once had, with this additional perception annexed to them, that it has had them before.'[67] However, as such perceptions become more remote, so they fade in the memory 'leaving no more footsteps or remaining characters of themselves than shadows do flying over fields of corn.' Indeed, for very young children such perceptions may become

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[63] Ibid., p. 261.
[64] S. H. Clark, '"Pendet Homo Incertus": Gray's Response to Locke: Part One: "Dull in A New Way"', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 24, 3 (Spring, 1991), 273-291, (p. 274). Cf., also the portrait of a young Gray flanked by copies of Lock and Temple reproduced in R. L .Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*.
[65] *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, p. 328.
[66] *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, vol. 1, Bk. II, Chap. XXVII, § 9, pp. 280-1. See my discussion of Locke in Chap. 2, Sect.1, above.
[67] Ibid., Chap X, § 4, p. 118.

'quite lost without the least glimpse remaining of them.'[68] And it is the evanescence of memory and its consequences for the sense of self that are a constant preoccupation of Gray's poetry up to and including the *Elegy*.

If Gray was wrestling with the philosophical problems of identity at a personal level, he was also concerned with the textual identity (and authority) of the poet as narrator. Kaul comments on the distinction between the *poet as speaker* and the *poet as discoursal effect* (my italics) and claims that:

> My sense of Gray's poems is that such a double effect is one that is exploited constantly in them, especially as a final compensatory mechanism when the poem's express theme is the marginalised poet or his impoverished authority. Within each poem, there are various rhetorical moves made to distance the thematised figure of impoverishment from the idea of the Poet as creator of the poem . . .[69]

This double effect is apparent in his early poem, *Ode on the Spring* (1742).[70] The opening lines are self-consciously 'poetic' to the extent that they draw attention to a classical tradition of invoking spring in song:

Lo! Where the rosy-bosom'd Hours,
Fair VENUS' train appear,
Disclose the long-expecting flowers,
And wake the purple year!

The authority of the poetic voice is therefore contingent on readers identifying the allusions, and their aesthetic success depends on the aptness with which these allusions have been successfully imitated. However, in lines 11-20 the ode undergoes a subtle change of direction.[71] The imagined geography of the opening lines gives way to a more particularised scene where:

With me the Muse shall sit, and think
(At ease reclin'd in rustic state)
How vain the ardour of the Crowd,

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[68] Ibid., p. 119.
[69] Kaul, *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority*, pp. 60-1.
[70] Gray, *Poems*, pp. 3-4.
[71] It is interesting to note here that the majority of the allusions that Lonsdale lists for lines 1-10 are to classical authors, whereas for lines 11-20 they are predominantly British.

How low, how little are the Proud,
How indigent the Great!   (16-20)

The personal pronoun 'me' potentially introduces a new voice such that the
moralizings introduced in the last three lines can be attributed either to this more
personal voice or to both this voice and that of the 'Muse'.

The ambiguity implicit here is only resolved later:

Methinks I hear in accents low
The sportive kind reply:
Poor moralist! and what art thou?
A solitary fly!   (41-4)

The 'I' of the poem, who was previously in the company of the 'Muse', has
become 'solitary' and his moral reflections are simply those of an isolated
individual. Further, these lines also confirm the impression that the line, 'At ease
reclin'd in rustic state', is intended ironically since the 'poor moralist' described
here has been marginalised in such a way that he can no longer appeal to the
authority of the pastoral tradition.

Gray, here, is deliberately exploring the relationships and tensions between the
vatic voice and the more personal voice not least because of the circumstances of
its composition. In May, 1742, West had sent him an 'Ode' which opens:

Dear Gray, that always in my heart
Possessest far the better part,
What mean these sudden blasts that rise
And drive the Zephyrs from the skies?
O join with mine thy tuneful lay
And invocate the tardy May. [72]

The unabashed personal nature of these lines established a context in which Gray
could reply equally personally. The *Ode on the Spring,* which was his response,
was therefore directed to a specific and sympathetic audience and the self-
deprecating ironies are entirely appropriate to the occasion. However, as is so

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[72] *Correspondence,* I, p. 201.

often the case with Gray, there are subtleties in his modes of address that are not immediately apparent on a first reading.

Johnson claimed that the 'morality is natural, but too stale'.[73] While this is superficially true, it ignores the deep ambivalence that Gray has encoded within the poem. The reflections on the 'vanity of human wishes' that we are offered by the 'solitary fly' are indeed trite, but they are contradicted by the response of the 'sportive kind' who contemptuously point out that: 'Thy sun is set, thy spring is gone –/We frolic, while 'tis May.'(49-50)

 While Kaul's distinction between poet as speaker and poet as discoursal effect would seem to be in operation here, it is complicated by the addition of an extra voice. The poet narrator controls the rhetorical discourse of the ode and is introduced anonymously. The narrator then gives voice to the 'I' of the poem who utters one kind of morality. This voice, however, is contradicted by the voices of the 'sportive kind' — also, of course, under the discursive control of the narrative voice — who offer a different kind of morality. The view, then, that all life is doomed to end in disappointment and the view that life should be enjoyed for its momentary pleasures are held in suspension so that neither seems to predominate. However, given that the poet narrator allows the 'sportive kind' to have the final word, the reader is invited to consider that grasping immediate pleasures is of more significance than 'sitting in rustic state' while viewing the follies of mankind. On this reading, the 'solitary fly' is re-thematised as the subject of the poem but as a subject whose voice is drowned out both by the weight of poetic tradition as displayed by the poet narrator and by the voices of the feckless youth who surround him.

Something similar seems to occur in Gray's 'Sonnet. [On the Death of Mr Richard West]' (1742).[74] It is reasonable to suppose that this was written before *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College* even though the latter precedes the

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[73] *Lives*, IV, p. 180.
[74] Gray, *Poems*, p. 92.

former in Gray's commonplace book.[75] The *Sonnet* is an attempt to articulate Gray's grief at the death of his closest friend:

In vain to me the smileing Mornings shine,
And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden Fire:
The Birds in vain their amorous Descant joyn,
Or chearful Fields resume their green Attire:
These Ears, alas! for other Notes repine,
A different Object do these Eyes require.
My lonely Anguish melts no Heart, but mine;
And in my Breast the imperfect Joys expire.

There is a curious mix in these lines between the self-referential and the references to the external world. 'The smiling Mornings', 'the Birds', are both fronted by the generic article 'the', and the 'chearful Fields' by a zero article. They are, therefore, generalized rather than particular. Equally, the sun is personified with the classical term 'Phœbus'. The withdrawal of the poet from the phenomenal world and the lack of experienced sensation paradoxically strengthen the awareness of a Lockean 'self-as-consciousness'. The sextet follows a similar movement. The quatrain re-introduces the external world but again described in general terms, and the final couplet concludes: 'I fruitless mourn to him, that cannot hear,/And weep the more, because I weep in vain.'

Interestingly, Wordsworth considered that only the last three lines of the octave and the final couplet of the sextet were truly poetic: 'the language of the [remainder of] these lines does in no respect differ from that of prose.'[76] While recognising that Wordsworth was pursuing his own poetic agenda here, it is worth considering how Gray actually manipulated his choice of language to achieve particular poetic effects. In his famous comments to West, Gray observed that:

> As to matter of stile, I have this to say: The language of the age is never the
> language of poetry; except among the French, whose verse, where the
> thought or image does not support it, differs in nothing from prose. Our
> poetry, on the contrary, has a language peculiar to itself; to which almost

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[75] See R. L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*, pp. 314ff., and Lonsdale's notes to the two poems.
[76] *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism* (1905), ed by C. Nowell Smith, with a new introduction by H. Mills (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1980), p. 20.

every one, that has written, has added something by enriching it with foreign idioms and derivatives: Nay sometimes words of their own composition or invention. Shakespear and Milton have been great creators this way; and no one more licentious than Pope or Dryden, who perpetually borrow from the former.[77]

Robert Mack has dismissed this passage as 'little more than commonplaces of early Augustan discourse concerning prosody and rhetorical decorum.'[78] In fact, it seems to me that something more interesting is being asserted. Gray's insistence that 'the language of the age is never the language of poetry', coupled with his assertion, by implication, that the language of poetry is *not* the language of prose sits oddly with Wordsworth's claim and suggests that Gray may have been conflating the term 'prose' with that of 'speech'. Thus, while, for Gray, it would be true that the language of poetry is never the language of speech, it would also be true that it is never the language of prose. Wordsworth, then, when he later clarifies his criticism and affirms that, for him, the language of poetry is 'a selection of the language really spoken by men', has to reject Gray's diction as being more akin to prose the further it is from speech.[79]

Johnson's criticism of Gray's diction that he 'thought his language more poetical as it was more remote from common use', although seemingly similar to that of Wordsworth, is directed more at Gray's luxuriance.[80] For Johnson, Gray was not sufficiently prosaic. These two critics, then, both appear to misunderstand how Gray uses his diction to achieve specific effects. C. Siskin offers a more plausible account where he argues that:

> By emphasising and enacting the inherited notion that "the language of the age is never the language of poetry", Gray was taking the practical step of using an available tool to tackle the suddenly more pressing task of lifting certain kinds of writing out of the growing mass of print. [81]

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[77] *Correspondence*, I, p. 192
[78] R. L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*, p. 289.
[79] *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, p. 21.
[80] *Lives,* IV, p. 181.
[81] Siskin, 'More is Different', p. 812. Donald Davie has an interesting view of what Johnson might have meant by 'common use'. He observes that 'the distinction between prosaic and conversational elements in poetic diction is blurred from the start. Moreover, the eighteenth century is the age of great letter-writing, that is, of a form of writing which depends upon blurring the distinction between conversation and written prose. And so, to cut a long story short, it must appear that the 'common use' to which Johnson appeals is to be found in the letters written in his

That there was an ideological reason behind Gray's deliberate uses of archaisms, classicisms and constant allusion seems incontrovertible. However, he may also have been influenced by his reading of Locke on memory. If memory is subject to decay, then it is best shored up through constant recollection. This seems to be happening in the 'Sonnet', where the immediate personal grief of the poet is intermixed with the memories of the literature which he had shared with West.[82] It also seems to be true of his poetry in general. 'The Bard', with its evocation both of Pindar and of the Celtic minstrels, brings a particular past into sensory consciousness and thereby confirms its historical identity and, indirectly, reaffirms the readers' (and writer's) identity insofar as they deem themselves to belong to that history and that literary tradition.

'The Bard' is unusual in Gray's poetry in that it constructs a history in some detail. In his earlier works, there are only occasional mentions of a national history, with the result that the moral reflections made by the poet narrator are particular to him rather than arising out of a view of the past which has moral consequences for the present. This is also evident in *Ode On a Distant Prospect of Eton College* (1742).[83] The title hints at a typical prospect poem in the tradition of Denham's *Cooper's Hill*, with its description of a particular landscape and reflections on how it has been shaped by certain historical events which have present significance. The *Eton Ode's* opening lines appear to fulfil that expectation. The narrator is envisaged both as an eye viewing the spires and towers of Eton set in an unpeopled pastoral scene and as a voice addressing these images. Historical references include a mention of the statue of Henry VI, Windsor's 'heights' and the 'hoary Thames'. However, there is an unresolved hiatus between the first and second stanzas. The address to 'Ye distant spires, ye antique towers' and 'ye that from the stately brow/Of WINDSOR's heights' seems incomplete in that there is no response or elaboration. On the contrary, the

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age.' Donald Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), p,

[82] Lonsdale's notes to the *Sonnet* (pp. 67-8) allusions in all but one line which, tellingly in the light of my argument, is line 7: 'My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine.'

[83] Gray, *Poems*, pp. .

poet sheds his oracular voice in the second stanza in favour of a more personal voice recalling his childhood pleasures within this landscape.

However, the poet has already prepared us for a generic shift by using the term 'distant' to describe the prospect. The epithet is fraught with the possibilities of geographical distance, of temporal distance and, although less obviously, of generic distance from the traditional prospect poem. Gray, then, would appear to be writing a new kind of poem and one that treats the past not as a historical sequence of events but as an exploration of the development of individual lives.

This narrowing of focus can be seen the more clearly if we consider how the poem is organised. It divides broadly into four sections. The first identifies a particular setting and comments on its significance for the poet ending with:

I feel the gales, that from ye, blow,
A momentary bliss bestow,
As waving fresh their gladsome wing,
My weary soul they seem to sooth[e],
And, redolent of joy and youth,
To breathe a second spring.   (15-20)

The 'I' in subject position and the sensory verb 'feel' invite the reader to assume that the poet narrator is being conflated with the poet *tout court*. This would seem to confirm Kaul's distinction between the poet as speaker and the poet as discoursal effect. However, the following lines suggest that Gray was inviting the reader to consider the 'I' here as more than simply 'effect' since they re-enact a particular (and therefore personal) set of memories within a Lockean context. The 'second spring' reminds us of the function of memory as a means of guaranteeing one's sense of identity. However, this 'second spring' is experienced by the contemporary 'weary soul' which appreciates that the bliss which it confers is both 'momentary' and only seemingly soothing. The particular set of memories and emotions, therefore, appears to be more self-referential than Kaul allows, since they are not, and cannot, be shared by anybody else.

Clark claims that '[i]n the "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College", there is only the deterioration of personal memory, the experience of what Johnson called the "cold gradations of decay."'[84] And this seems to be borne out by the general movement of the poem. The second section is an evocation of the various current activities of the schoolchildren. However, this in turn is split into three parts. The first part is a series of questions addressed to Father Thames, the second part addresses the pleasures of intensive study, while the third part reflects on the transience (and innocence) of childhood. Although the rhetorical relationship between these sections appears transparent at first sight, the grammatical relationships are more complicated and reflect the moves from external description to internal judgement.

The initial questions to Father Thames are largely to do with the physical (and light-hearted) activities of swimming, bird snaring, hoop rolling and ball games. Lonsdale observes that Gray here uses a 'self-conscious and ponderous diction . . . which was intended to be gently humorous.'[85] The semi-ironic effect of this serves to distance the speaker from the activities he is describing. The next section is introduced with the lines:

    While some on earnest business bent
Their murm'ring labours ply
'Gainst graver hours, that bring constraint
To sweeten liberty: (31-4)

The punctuation here shows that the temporal clause introduced by 'while' is grammatically distinct from the interrogative clauses that precede it and belongs contrastively with lines 35-50. The earnest schoolboys, conning their books, are only at liberty when they have finished their tasks. However, there are other free spirits who go beyond these constraints:

Some bold adventurers disdain
The limits of their little reign,
And unknown regions dare descry: (35-7)

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[84] Clark, '"Pendet Homo Incertus"', 283.
[85] *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, p. 55.

Given the fullness of description which Gray affords to these 'bold (intellectual) adventurers', it is fair to assume that he is recalling his own delights as a boy. However, poetically, the self-referential element that I have mentioned above is replaced by a more narrative voice which, although full of affective epithets, prepares the reader for the sombre judgements of lines 51–60:

>   Alas, regardless of their doom,
> The little victims play!
> No sense have they of ills to come,
> Nor care beyond today:
> Yet see how all around 'em wait
> The Ministers of human fate,
> And black Misfortune's baleful train!
> Ah! shew them where in ambush stand
> To seize their prey the murtherous band!
> Ah, tell them, they are men!

In the final four lines, Gray employs a neat rhetorical shift which both closes off this section and prepares us for the next section. The final three lines recall the interrogation of 'Father Thames', although now he is being instructed not merely to observe but also to warn, while the preceding line, with its personification of 'Misfortune', anticipates the multiple personifications of lines 61–90.

This third section manifests a clear withdrawal from the more personal elements of the first two sections into a more obviously 'literary' style. Among the many allusions Lonsdale notes, he also observes that this passage owes a major debt to Spenser.[86] The effect is to introduce a third voice into the poem. Whereas we have heard the narrator describing the particular scenes and persons, and the self-referential voice explaining the personal significance of these scenes, we now have the generalizing voice which appeals not to particular misfortunes but to the condition of humanity as represented by poets throughout the centuries. However, the emblematic nature of the adversities of life effectively obscures the immediate causes of suffering; and the retreat into an allusive literary, rather than political, history exonerates the poet from exploring the conditions which have led to such contemporary ills. Thus, the moral reflections which comprise the

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[86] Ibid., p. 61.

fourth and final section, and which summarise the preceding section, are introduced with the generalising lines:

> To each his suff'rings: all are men,
> Condemn'd alike to groan'
> The tender for another's pain;
> Th'unfeeling for his own.   (91-4)

With this rhetorical shift, Gray brings the focus back onto the schoolboys who live in 'paradise', and reminds us of the pleasures the self-referential poet had experienced during his own time at Eton.

I have spent some time on analyzing the *Eton Ode* because I believe it demonstrates both Gray's supreme artistry in poetic construction and also his difficulties in finding and manipulating an appropriate voice to articulate an individual, rather than a representative, response to the changing conditions of mid-eighteenth century Britain. It is telling that the *Ode* has childhood at its thematised center. Children cannot be held responsible for the adult world and their innocence is akin to that of the rustics of the (prehistoric) pastoral age. Their age denies them political involvement. As Sitter observes:

> Gray's lament seems to be wholly apolitical, since the woes which await
> the children are envisaged as human rather than historical evils, due, in
> other words, to the nature of things rather than to the nature of people's
> allotment of things. . . . But what is politically significant from our position
> is simply the fact that childhood and rural innocence are being used as
> norms by which to measure the passionate tragedy of the world adults
> make. The prepassionate, or innocent, state attributed to schoolchildren is a
> kind of internalized Golden Age.[87]

However, in being apolitical, Gray is also claiming an ideological position which denies the importance of politics. The struggles which are played out in the public sphere are of secondary importance to those of the private sphere and, more particularly, to those values which are enshrined in the poetry of the past. It

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[87] Sitter, *Literary Loneliness*, pp. 89-90. See also Clark, '"Pendet Homo Incertus"', who makes the slightly different point: 'These are the sufferings of sentiment rather than intellect, yet the final propositions are couched unequivocally in terms of the onerous futility of "thought," the act of knowing. What's missing is any positive concept of innocence: "bliss" and "paradise" are yoked inseparably to "ignorance"; the prelapsarian *tabula rasa*. So little is claimed for childhood in itself: no power of reverie, not even continuity with the present self.' 286.

is for this reason that the poet as narrator comments on the 'bold adventurers' who go beyond the simple everyday tasks of the schoolchild and manage to descry 'unknown regions' from which they catch a 'fearful joy'. And it is for this reason that the poet as moralist lists the maladies of human life as catalogued by previous poets. But the sense of loss which pervades the poem, and which is given human significance in the line '[t]hought would destroy their paradise' also hints that the role of the poet as moral guide has been irrevocably lost. In Kaul's words:

> In the Eton *Ode*, then, the nostalgia of the thematised poet-figure . . . is far more than a nostalgia for childhood or for a pre-lapsarian innocence. It is also a yearning for an entire tradition of poetic discourse, that successfully claimed for its representations (of 'man', of the 'passions of man') a 'truthfulness' based on their status as exemplars, as figures that were the necessary foundations of ethical and moral didacticism.[88]

The kinds of problems that Gray faced in the *Eton Ode* are partially resolved in 'ELEGY Written in a Country Church Yard' (1750).[89] The architectonics of the poem is similar to that of the *Ode*. Broadly speaking, the *Elegy* is divided into seven sections although the movement between these sections is less abrupt than in the earlier poem.[90] The opening four stanzas place the narrator in an unspecified site; the following three see the peasant's lives through the spectacles of the pastoral tradition; stanzas 8-14 offer moral reflections on these lives; stanzas 15-19 draw these lives into a putative national history; stanzas 20-23 offer further moral reflections on their place, or rather, lack of place within this history; stanzas 24-29 re-introduce the experiencing poet of the opening four stanzas in ways that many critics have found deeply puzzling; and the poem ends (stanzas 30-32) with an epitaph to an enigmatic 'youth', the identity of whom depends on one's interpretation of stanzas 24-9.

My description of these divisions is deliberately over-schematic, but it serves to foreground the changes in mood, subject matter and voice that are characteristic

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[88] Kaul, *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority*, p. 80.
[89] Gray, *Poems*, pp. 37-43.
[90] In preparing copy for publication, Gray wrote to Walpole (Feb. 1751): '[Dodsley] must correct the Press himself, & print it without any Interval between the Stanza's, because the Sense is in some Places continued beyond them . . .' *Correspondence*, I, p. 341. The qualification, 'in some places', suggests that there are other stanzas which are constitutive of their own sense.

of the *Elegy*. The first section can be said to represent the sensory poet experiencing a particular, though non-specific, landscape; the second section constructs a social life for the rustic poor that is largely visualised through the tradition of pastoral poetics; the third section introduces the poet as moralist in which a personified 'Ambition' is contrasted with a personified 'Knowledge'; the fourth section historicizes the pastoral of stanzas 5-7; the fifth section offers us a meditation on the commemoration of passed and passing lives; the sixth section reinserts the experiencing poet and places him within the social life of the village in highly ambiguous ways; and the final section asserts the finality of death but also the continuity (and triumph) of the written word.

The full title, 'Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard', projects the reader into an unknown space. The lack of an article before 'Elegy', and the indefinite article before 'Country Church Yard' suggest that the poem is not about a specific loss within a particular place, but a more general lament for the passing of something as yet indeterminate. Marshall Brown has noticed that the indefinite article in the title is echoed by the indefinite articles in the Epitaph and draws the conclusion that the poem's main theme is that:

> We must learn not to seek knowledge of a particular place, but instead to accept a settled consciousness without a founding gesture or explicit starting "point". Rather than defining a social ideal, the poem turns away from social aspirations in order to evoke the transcendental basis of all experience.[91]

At first sight, the argument that the *Elegy* is about an asocial 'everyman' appears convincing. Certainly, this is an interpretation that has been widely accepted and probably lies behind Johnson's view that '[t]he *Churchyard* abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo.'[92] However, Gray, as a fastidious intellectual steeped both in classical and contemporary literature, was doing more than gesturing towards the plight of humanity at large. The fact that the *Elegy* is set in a country churchyard indicates that, although the poem contains elements of georgic and pastoral, it

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[91] Brown, *Preromanticism*, p. 48.
[92] *Lives,* IV, p. 184.

neither a poem which took as its vantage point the prospect of a happy peasantry working a country estate, nor a retreat into a prelapsarian (or 'transcendental') Golden Age. Clearly, its subject was mortality, but the treatment of this subject was, in important ways, to be radically new.[93]

The opening four stanzas hint at this. The scene described is not an imaginary scene, but one immediately experienced by the poet, and one that impinges on four of the five senses. Although the use of the definite article can be interpreted as generic, we learn that the curfew, the cattle, and the ploughman are in fact particular visual experiences of the poet personified as 'me', and the use of the deictics 'now', 'yonder', and 'those' and 'that' in lines 5, 9 and 13 confirm the 'physical' presence of the poet in the churchyard. It is true that the scene is gradually effaced, but its initial reality is not in doubt, and this reality confirms the reality of the experiencing poet. Of course, the experiences of Gray cannot be directly experienced by the reader and they have, therefore, been necessarily mediated first through language and then through print. For the contemporary critic, this presents a problem. Henry Weinfeld has tried to solve this problem by introducing what he calls the 'lyric-I'.[94] He argues that dramatic monologues and soliloquies imitate speech and that first person reference in such genres may legitimately be taken to refer to the speaker who is, by virtue of the form, an integral actor within the poem. In lyrical forms, however, there is no clear link between the narrator of the poem and the poem itself beyond the fact that the poet is the creator of the poem. The 'I' in such poems is therefore non-referential to anything outside the poem. However, as readers we identify with (and recreate) the poetic 'I' while also searching for a referent. Given that the only referent is internalised within the poem such an 'I' cannot refer to the poet-creator but must be this spectral 'lyric-I'. Thus, the reader 'in the process of rehearsing the poem, actualizes and incorporates *two* experiences

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[93] Fulford's comment is instructive here: 'In this most profound of poems, eighteenth-century conventions of viewing seem to operate, only to collapse. So do the assumptions about the relationship of gentleman to labourer, and of both to nature.' Fulford, '"Nature" Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, pp. 109-13, p. 118.

[94] Weinfeld, *The Poet Without a Name*.

simultaneously: the experience of the "lyric-I". . . and the experience of the poet's activity of shaping the poem.'[95]

I find this argument historically unconvincing. Gray would surely have been aware of Locke's work on language, and would have no doubt assented to his assertion that '[w]hen a man speaks to another, it is that he may be understood; and the end of speech is that those sounds, as marks, may make known his *ideas* to the hearer.'[96] On this basis, it is legitimate to assume that the poet-narrator is referring directly to himself when he uses first person pronouns. Of course, this does not vitiate the claim that Gray is not writing *in propria persona*, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the narrator is describing his own sensations and that, therefore, it is not inconsistent to assume that Gray, as creator of the poem, identifies himself with such sensations. Further, given Gray's preference for circulating his poetry among a small coterie of like-minded people, it is reasonable to assume that they, too, would recognise Gray-the-poet and Gray-the-narrator as one and the same, since the alienating effects of publication, and the distance between the writer and his audience that this involves, would not apply. Nevertheless, what Sitter calls the '[t]he projection of the self into the statement of ideas' was to present Gray with major technical problems towards the end of the poem, when he moves beyond a description of simple sensory experiences to a characterisation of himself as an acting participant within the narration.[97]

Just as the first three stanzas describe a crepuscular, but peopled, landscape which slowly withdraws from sight, stanza four enacts the effacement of the self who is describing it and a shift of interest towards the 'rude Forefathers of the hamlet'. That their lives are described within the tradition of pastoral poetry suggests that they have no real history, but it also denies them any adversity. Their lives were idyllic, free from want, and therefore, for them, change could only be an evil. Richard C. Sha's materialist reading of the *Elegy* argues that these, and other lines, indicate that 'although the poet is sympathetic to the poor,

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[95] Ibid., p. 135.
[96] Locke, *Essay,* vol. 2, Book III, Chap. II, § 2, p. 12 .
[97] Sitter, 'Political, Satirical, Didactic and Lyric Poetry (II): After Pope', p. 303.

Gray's compassion is contingent upon the silent and cheerful penury of the lower classes.' He further asserts that Gray, in representing the peasantry in these terms, was defending the class interests of the property owners. [98] Although the main thrust of Sha's argument is persuasive, it needs to be nuanced by an awareness that Gray himself was not a member of this class (however much he aspired to be), and that elsewhere in the poem he demonstrates a sympathy, however confused, with the rural poor. In fact, it is more likely that he was engaging in a discursive move which would thematise the peasantry in such a way as to emphasize both their virtues and their misfortunes in being unable to escape their lot. Admittedly, it transpires that their inability to improve their lives is characterised by educational, rather than economic, poverty — and to this extent Sha is correct — but, as I shall suggest later, Gray's inability to engage in a political argument is, in part, a function of his inability to conceive of a future which would be untainted by the vulgarities of commercialism. Indeed, one reading of the poem, although somewhat strained, might consider it to be an elegy for the rural poor, and a particular way of life, which was being irrevocably lost precisely because of the encroachment of new commercial interests.[99]

The move from the poetic self to the poet as a narrator is now followed by a move to the poet as moralist:

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.   (29-32)

This section, and the following one, is riven with tensions and contradictions that are hidden beneath the smooth surface of the verse. If the 'rude Forefathers' of the hamlet are denied advancement, then 'Ambition' can hardly mock their obscure destinies since, as we learn in line 65, 'their lot forbad' them such

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[98] Richard C. Sha, 'Gray's Political "Elegy": Poetry as the Burial of History', *Philological Quarterly*, 69, 3, (1990), 337-57, (p. 351).

[99] Cf. Weinfeld, *The Poet Without a Name*, pp. 59-60: 'The Forefathers, after all, now belong to the past – not only as individuals but in a generic sense. In other words, what is now *past* is not only the lives of the Forefathers individually, but — given the social transformation of the eighteenth century — the life of the peasantry as a whole, and hence the idealizing mode stemming from Virgil and the *Beatus Ille* tradition . . .' In this, of course, he anticipates Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, which I discuss in Chapter 4.

ambition. Interestingly, these two lines refer quite specifically to 'their useful toil' while the following lines universalise the observations to 'the poor' in general. They also pick up on a theme that remains unresolved throughout the remainder of the *Elegy*. 'Grandeur' is exhorted to 'hear the short and simple annals of the poor', but these annals are being related through the written word. The relationship between the written and spoken word is a site of deep ambiguity and recurs time and again.

M. T. Sharp has observed that:

> [w]hat is most original, however, is the force with which the "Elegy" writes reading into the space of human life and remembrance. Indeed, the **"**Elegy" finds its end by focusing its attention on a set of questions about reading and reception that condition the adequacy of the written trace to the purposes of commemoration.[100]

While it is certainly true that there is a focus on 'the adequacy of the written trace to the purposes of commemoration', there is an equivalent focus on the conflicts that Gray establishes between the acts of speaking/hearing and writing/reading. In stanzas 10 and 11, for example, he mentions the written memorials over the tombs of the 'Proud', but concludes with the lines: 'Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust/Or Flatt'ry sooth the dull cold ear of Death?' It is as though Gray cannot quite convince himself of the power of (written) poetry to encompass and record the lives either of the rich or the poor, and the contrast which he subsequently establishes between the poor's inability to read — 'But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page/Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll' — and his own position as a learned poet remains highly tentative.

Indeed, Gray withdraws from this analysis in the following lines when he asserts that the failure of the poor to reach their full potential is a direct result of 'chill Penury'. This is the first obviously political statement in the poem, and paves the way for the introduction of a real, but unfulfilled, political history in the lives of the poor. However, this move is interrupted by the quatrain:

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[100] M. T. Sharp, 'Elegy Unto Epitaph: Print Culture and Commemorative Practice in Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"', *Papers on Language & Literature,* 38,1, (2002)*, 3-28, (p. 17).

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.

William Empson comments on these lines that '[b]y comparing the social arrangement to Nature he makes it seem inevitable, which it was not, and gives it a dignity which was undeserved.'[101] If read as a simple metaphor, then the images deserve the irritation which Empson displays. However, it is possible that they conceal a deeper, and more subversive, set of meanings. I have already noted the ways in which Gray reworked these lines in his *Ode for Music* to suggest that Grafton might exercise his patronage to advance people of humble birth. Here, the 'gem' that is lurking in the cave may also be the gem that has not been exploited by the commercial forces that were plundering the world, and the 'flower' may be the flower that has been unsullied by the collectors who were creating the new forms of gardening that were so fashionable.[102] However, such a reading involves acknowledging that the potential social advancement of the peasantry would depend on their exploitation by outside commercial forces. The reason, then, that Gray is so muted in these lines is because he cannot deal with the inherent contradictions implicit in such a political statement.

These contradictions are also apparent in the following lines which introduce a particular version of history into the poem. The choices of Hampden, Milton and Cromwell as representative figures to whom the poor could aspire are selected from a time of deep unrest within British political history. Further, they are also members of the gentry who were instrumental in destroying the hegemony of the aristocratic and royalist classes of the early seventeenth century. As possible emblems of resistance, then, they are deeply subversive. The ever-cautious Gray, however, plays down their significance in interesting and subtle ways. The choice of the subjunctive verb 'may' acts to distance the rebellious potential of the poor. The aspiring Milton becomes 'mute' while all three fail to 'read their hist'ry in a nation's eyes'. Again, we are faced with the peculiar transferral of

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[101]*Some Versions of Pastoral*, p. 4.
[102] Gray's interest in natural history would have made him fully aware of such naturalists as John Ray and Hans Sloane and of the more general and philosophical interest in gardening. See, particularly, Chapter II, 'The Happy Gardener', in Røstvig, *The Happy Man.*

speech and writing which suggests that Gray himself could not resolve the conflicts between the potential eloquence of the individual speaking voice which is irreducibly personal and that of the more public written word which, by means of its production, becomes alienated from the writer as an individual.

These conflicts of voice are played out against, and inform, the conflicts of interest between the rural poor and the commercial and landowning classes and just as Gray could not resolve the poetic problems neither could he identify an ideological or political solution for the latter problems. The reader is placed in the uncomfortable position of having to decide whether the fate of the rural poor is inevitable, or whether it can be alleviated, and Gray offers no obvious clues. On the one hand, we have the effects of 'chill Penury' and illiteracy, on the other, the supposed compensations of being excluded from a world in which 'Luxury and Pride' lead to a host of moral enormities including wading 'through slaughter to a throne'. Indeed, rather than resolving these ambiguities, Gray deliberately avoids giving them contemporary significance:

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

This reintroduction of a pastoral theme is distanced by time. The 'rude Forefathers' who led such 'noiseless' lives — and again we are faced with the problems of who gives 'voice' to their lives — are deceased and can only serve as instruments of moral reflection. The precise relationship of the poet-narrator to the objects of his narration in these lines is hinted at by the negatively evaluative epithet 'ignoble' to describe the political world and the positively evaluative epithet 'sober' to describe the peasant's desires. This has led Sha to argue that:

> [t]he main speaker of the elegy subtly aligns himself with those who would keep the poor ignorant in order to preserve the social hegemony. And insofar as the act of reading becomes literally associated with burial, the elegy itself seems, at least rhetorically, to require the demise of the poor. Even more disturbing, however, is the poem's naturalizing of the political

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reasons for the poor's illiteracy and the reifying of the boundaries between those who can and cannot read.[103]

Had Gray followed his original intentions and ended the poem here, Sha's critique would be fully justified. The *Eton* manuscript (1746?) contains four rejected stanzas which are echoed in these lines, including the stanzas:

And thou, who mindful of the unhonour'd Dead
Dost in these notes thy artless Tale relate
By Night & lonely Contemplation led
To linger in the gloomy Walks of Fate

Hark how the sacred Calm, that broods around
Bids ev'ry fierce tumultuous Passion cease
In still small Accents whisp'ring from the Ground
A gratefull Earnest of eternal Peace.[104]

In this version, the personal voice which introduces the *Elegy,* and which is effaced after line 13, re-appears only tangentially. The discursive moves within the poem are therefore under the control of the narrator/moralist voice which, in Sha's words, is 'the main speaker of the elegy'. The stanzas referred to above are, thus, a direct address to the reader to consider the scene described and to share with the narrator the sense of placid acceptance which the lives of the quiescent poor evoke.

However, the revised version which Gray eventually published is altogether more complicated than this. The 'noiseless tenor' of their defunct lives is interrupted by an interlude which reintroduces the puzzling significance of writing in a radically new context. Whereas the earlier stanzas had insisted on the illiteracy of the rural poor, we are now informed that:

Yet ev'n these bones from insult to protect
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhimes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

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[103] Sha, 'Gray's Political "Elegy"', p. 344.
[104] Gray, *Poems*, p. 40.

Their name, their years, spelt by th'unletter'd muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply:
And many a holy text around she strews,
That teach the rustic moralist to die.   (77-84)

Their lives, in other words, are remembered, and are remembered in semi-literate written forms. Kaul's assertion, then, that '[f]ormal elegies that are *read* are of no memorial or moral use here; the shared sorrows and memories of the community preserve and authenticate lives in ways prior to, and better than, the celebrated forms of public fame and elegiac practice'[105] seems to me to be mistaken unless we assume that these elegies only have iconic and imitative functions rather than expressive purposes. Of course, while it may be true that the majority of the 'rustic moralists' cannot read, there will be some who are sufficiently literate to discern and descry the words on the tombs, thereby re-affirming their significance as *written* texts.[106] The cohesion of the village community, originally imagined in purely pastoral terms, is therefore mediated in rather more complex ways than simple pastoral suggests. And this mediation is confirmed in the lines:

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
Ev'n in our Ashes live their wonted Fires.   (89-92)

The living (and the dying) are sustained by sympathy, but the departed soul still has a voice — and the verb, 'cries', confirms the unstable relationship already established between the speaking voice and the written text that is a marked feature of the poem — so long as it is memorialised in some fashion. Thus, although the poor may have no obvious role in national history, they are not thereby excluded from history since they persist within the memories of the community as smouldering 'ashes'.

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[105] Suvir Kaul, 'Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard*', in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, pp. 277-289, pp. 286-7.
[106] In this context, it is interesting to consider Yearlsey's visits to the local graveyard with her mother as described in *Clifton Hill*: 'I mark'd the verse, the skulls her eyes invite.' For a fuller discussion and references, see Chap. 6.

The inclusive personal pronoun, 'our', in the last line signals an important shift in the rhetorical direction of the poem. Initially, it seems no more than an invitation to the reader to recognise the universal nature of the sentiments expressed. However, the following lines unsettle this assumption since they hint at a more personal involvement in the contemplation of death and remembrance:

For thee, who mindful of th'unhonour'd Dead,
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
If chance, by lonely contemplation led,
Some kindred Spirit shall enquire thy fate,

Haply some hoary-headed Swain may say . . .   (93-7)

Grammatically, 'thee' and 'thy' have a shared referent and the relative pronoun 'who' is anaphoric to 'thee'. The only possible paraphrase of the first four lines has to be: 'If someone asks about the fate of the writer of these lines . . .' However, the syntactic complexity of the clauses suggests that Gray was diffident about drawing attention to himself both as person and as narrator. Nevertheless, the problems are more than just problems of decorum. They also touch on significant philosophical issues concerning the maintenance of identity. In the opening stanzas, Gray had created a poetic self by employing a variety of verbs and epithets which recreated the sensible (and sensuous) apprehension of the landscape: so far, so Lockean. In these lines, however, he has to detach himself from himself so that he can imaginatively view himself from the outside. The Lockean concept of continuous identity-in-consciousness thereby becomes fractured since two identities have to be created, one as subject and the other as object. The only way this splitting can be achieved is by introducing another, spectral, commentator who combines features of the narrative self with those of the commentating self. Gray achieves this spectral doubling with the 'hoary-headed Swain'.[107]

W. B. Hutchings, making a similar point, observes that: '[i]f the elegist is now conceiving of himself as the poem's object rather than its subject, then he must

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[107] The problems that Gray is wrestling with here are not dissimilar to those of Hume in identifying 'I' as a grammatical problem, nor of Smith's doubling of identity in order to create an actor and a judge of such action. See above, Chap. 2, Sections 1 and 2.

hand over the narration to someone else. This is precisely what happens with the entry of the hoary-headed swain, who takes over the poem.'[108] However, the status of the 'Swain' is deeply ambiguous. As the mediating voice between the poet's fate and the kindred spirit, he is in a privileged position and the possible pun in describing him as 'hoary-headed' implies that he is standing in as a proxy for Gray. However, the descriptions he paints of the poet-figure are seen entirely from the outside, and are rendered in a simplistic pastoral form that was already becoming old fashioned. Also, line 115, in which he urges the kindred spirit to 'Approach and read, (for thou can'st read)' the epitaph, suggests that he is deliberately represented as a simple, and quite probably illiterate, member of the village community.[109] If the swain, then, is supposed to represent someone who has an intimate knowledge of the poet, his words demonstrate how impossible it is to know fully the lives of others and indirectly express Gray's sense of alienation from the semiliterate village community which he has attempted to memorialise (for the poet-narrator is now dead), and his alienation from the unknown readers of the burgeoning print culture who will misinterpret the *Elegy* and read it as a simple pastoral.[110]

The Epitaph, which the swain points to, presents another crux within the poem. Again, we are presented with the shift from the speaking voice of the swain to the written text carved on the gravestone. Supposedly written in memory of the 'listless' youth who, by assimilation, represents the Gray-figure, it makes at least one claim that is manifestly false. While it was largely true that at this stage in his life, Gray was 'to fortune and to fame unknown', 'Fair Science' had certainly 'frown'd' on his 'humble birth'. And even if we choose to ignore the previous identification of Gray with the poet-figure represented here, the 'listless' youth

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[108] W. B. Hutchings, 'Syntax of Death: Instability in Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard"', *Studies in Philology*, 81, 4 (1984), 496-514, (p. 508).

[109] Whatever reading we give these lines, it is difficult to imagine quite what Hart has in mind when he observes: '[p]erhaps the meditative poet, now in his thirties and wandering in the churchyard, invents an ideal poet — either himself when a "youth" or another non-existent idealized poet, the stonecutter, whom he imagines to have died.' J. Hart, 'Thomas Gray's Desperate Pastoral', *Modern Age,* 44, 2 (2002), 162-8, (p. 167).

[110] 'But the fact that the hoary-headed Swain does a poor job of describing the poet is not the point of the interlude. Although the situation between the Swain and the youth whom he missed one morn is emblematic of a general condition of alienation, of mutual missing that runs through the poem, the terms with which the Swain misses the poet are important.' Sharp, 'Elegy Unto Epitaph', p. 20.

clearly possessed the 'science' of literacy. In these lines, the poetic self, the narrative self and the moral self, all engage in a withdrawal both from the poem and from life, leaving the written text as their only epitaph. In trying to make sense of this, L. Clymer persuasively argues that:

> The epitaph itself, set off iconically in italics, marks the end of the solitary figure, and of the body of the text. The epitaph is inert, making no requests or promises; the crucial issue of direct address to the wayfarer that produces animation has been shunted onto the poetic encounter itself. The one who is "gained from Heav'n" as a "friend" - the Youth's only wish - could be understood as the reader of the poem and of the epitaph. Ensnared in this mysterious epitaphic arrangement, the reader is written into the very epitaph he now reads as distinctions between personified epitaphic functions are blurred. This is exactly the cumulative effect of the epitaphic displacements: first, alienation between opposites is overcome; next, their boundaries become permeable. Linking subject and object, living and dead, the epitaphic figural logic constitutes entities as subjects without mandatory recourse to apostrophe.[111]

It is as though Gray is asserting that the only way in which he can be both in communion and communication with his readers is through death.

So far, I have indicated three major sites of instability within the *Elegy*: Gray's inability to construct a social history for the villagers; his intermixture of orality and textuality; and his uncertain control of the authorial voice. There are good reasons for thinking that these are interlinked. Gray was writing at a time when the supposed certainties of aristocratic and landowning gentry culture were being severely challenged by an emerging and powerful commercial culture. In the first half of the century, poets had been able to construct a history in which the Glorious Revolution had ushered in a period of liberty in which the gentry would be able to reap the benefits of their properties through the toil of a contented peasantry. This history was typically represented through the genres of pastoral and georgic. However, such a situation no longer applied quite so obviously when Gray was writing. The old gentry were slowly adapting to the new commercial opportunities offered by more intensive farming and were increasingly considered to be unsympathetic to the rights and responsibilities

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[111] Lorna Clymer, 'The Figural Logic of Epitaphs and Elegies in Blair, Gray, Cowper, and Wordsworth', *ELH*, 62, 2 (1995), 347-386, (p. 373).

inherent in the older forms of land ownership. Capturing the new social dynamics required an equally new aesthetics which could represent the ideological conflicts inherent in this situation.[112] Also, to make sense of these changes, it was necessary to construct a social history in which ideological conflict was foregrounded. Gray, as the son of a scrivener with aspirations to become a gentleman, had a personal investment in such conflicts and, although he was anxious not to be identified with the authors who relied on writing to make their money, he also knew that he could never enjoy the benefits of inherited landed wealth. He therefore turned to a period of British history when the conflicts were markedly ideological and the outcome was uncertain.[113]

However, this situation presented him with two further problems which he was unable to resolve. The first was that he had no appropriate poetic genre to represent such conflicts. He could not employ georgic since the rural poor that he was representing had ceased to be engaged in useful economic activity, and even the ploughman was heading home. Full pastoral, however, would have underplayed the extent of the social and ideological conflicts. He therefore chose a mixture of pastoral and lyric forms. At first sight, the choice of pastoral is odd but it serves to portray the life of the peasantry as uninvolved, except tangentially, in political life. Nevertheless, the poem does not deny them aspirations even if they remain unfulfilled. Hence, the pastoral is interrupted by the section where some of them are individualised as a 'village Hampden', a 'mute inglorious Milton' and a 'Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood'. Equally, the lyric form offers the poet a voice in which they, and the author, can speak.

'Speak', here, is the operative word since it highlights the interplay between orality and literacy that recurs throughout the poem. The peasantry are limited by their illiteracy and their lives and histories are therefore mediated through speech. However, speech is lost as soon as spoken and can only live on in

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[112] See my discussions in Chap. 2.
[113] Cf., Kaul, *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority*: 'If "public history" emerges as especially conflicted and violent in the poetry of some high-cultural poets, it is because the public sphere itself was then being reconstituted by the ideologies, cultures, and politics of the bourgeoisie, a reconstitution that effectively challenged and marginalised such poets.' p. 149.

memory where it may be corrupted. For enduring memorials, it is necessary to turn to the written word.

Here, Gray was faced with further problems. The written word depends on an audience of readers and, moreover, an audience that is sympathetic to what the poet is writing. Gray was aware that his potential audience was becoming increasingly attenuated because of the tremendous explosion of the printed word. Whereas the 'Epitaph' was written for a specific audience (the villagers), it failed to capture the life of the unknown poet as related by the 'Swain' and was subject to further scrutiny by passing strangers, hence the plea for a 'kindred spirit' who will interpret it correctly. The *Elegy* had a far greater potential audience but Gray could no longer guarantee that there were a sufficient number of kindred spirits who would understand it. As M. T. Sharp points out: '[n]o longer can the writer pretend, even to himself, that the situation between a writer and reader approximates that between a speaker and auditor. Gray is at the beginning of this change.'[114]

If Gray could not be sure of his audience, it necessarily follows that he could not be sure of how to address them. Having rejected the 'public' voice employed by such poets as Pope and Thomson and which spoke authoritatively from a given ideological position to a like-minded audience, he had to find another mediating voice. Given that Gray was, in part, exploring the relationship between authorship and readership, and the relative isolation of the author from his audience, it was entirely appropriate that he should turn to his own experience as a means of exposition. Thus, while the narrative and, to a large extent, the descriptions were conveyed by an anonymous narrative speaker, and the general morality by an equally anonymous moral speaker, the particular observations were couched in a language that was far more self-referential than had appeared in previous poetry. However, Gray's control of this voice was uncertain and vitiated in part because of his concern for the decorum of speaking *in propria persona,* and in part because of the philosophical problems surrounding the split identity between the author-as-self and the author-as-poet. As Scott Hess makes

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[114] Sharp, 'Elegy Unto Epitaph', p. 23.

clear, Gray's experiment with the authorial 'I' awaited an audience with which it could identify.[115]

The difficulties which Gray faced with the *Elegy* were, as I have indicated above, largely resolved in 'The Bard'. The ideological tensions were displaced to a remote period of history where their present relevance was depicted as prophetic rather than actually occurring and the distinctions between the oral and written traditions were subsumed in the supposed continuity of the oral tradition of bardic poetry with the lyric writing of the Elizabethan period. However, the problem of the authorial 'I' was evaded rather than solved by creating a speaker who, although speaking for himself and with poetic authority, is not only historicised but romanticised. It is, however, significant that the bard lacks a sympathetic audience and, like the elegist, can only achieve fulfilment in death. Gray, it seems, remained acutely aware of the changing relationships between author and audience but failed to find a way to construct an appropriate audience for his more daring experiments.

If, then, the *Elegy* is so problematic, it is puzzling that it should have achieved such instant success and have remained one of the most popular poems of the last two centuries. Guillory goes some way to explaining this enduring popularity. He mentions the educational practice of compiling commonplace books of phrases and works which the pupils subsequently committed to memory, the function of which was to disseminate a standardised form of the vernacular language.[116] Gray's poem is so full of intertextual references, many of which would be found in such commonplace books that it is, in Kaul's words, 'so dense with, and overdetermined by, poetic memory that its every moment might be understood as an informed meditation on the way the idiom of poetry has been crafted from, and has, in turn, enriched, the common language.'[117] Thus, the poem's initial readers were presented with a 'comforting' text which held no linguistic surprises. Guillory goes on to argue that this language was still in the possession of the gentry and that they necessarily interpreted the poem according to their

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[115] Scott Hess, *Authoring the Self: Self-Representation, Authorship, and the Print Market in British Poetry from Pope through Wordsworth* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp, 129ff.
[116] Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 87ff.
[117] Kaul, 'Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard*', p. 279.

own ideological positions as landowners. Such an interpretation would seem perfectly consistent with the introduction of the pastoral elements which ostensibly allow the gentleman aristocrat to enter the world of the peasant without being part of it, thus effectively displacing the peasantry. Their 'real' working lives are thus reduced to an external description which merges them in a landscape devoid of economic disparities. Gray's description of their poverty and lack of mobility is therefore largely abstract in which death is the only possible outcome. 'The peasants, in other words, cannot be both *literary* and real peasants'.[118]

If the mid-eighteenth-century could misread the poem in this way, subsequent readerships had to adapt their readings to account for the bourgeois ideology which eventually overwhelmed the gentry.[119] The true import of the *Elegy* was thus overlooked during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries largely because it was so frequently anthologised, and phrases plundered to serve as the titles of books and films, that it was no longer read with attention. Where it was treated seriously, it was as the harbinger of the Romantic subjective poetic 'I'. Vincent Newey has suggested that the *Eton Ode* 'has some claim to being the earliest notable example of that dominant site of post-Enlightenment subjectivity which M. H. Abrams identified as the greater Romantic lyric . . .'[120] Such a claim can be made with more justice for the *Elegy*. However, I would suggest that the introduction of this poetic 'I' was far more tentative and contingent than occurred later in the century, and it certainly never achieves the conversational assurance of Cowper. Further, that this poetic 'I' was attempting to engage in a far more cogent debate about the social and ideological issues of the time than many earlier critics have recognised. Ultimately, the *Elegy* produces no solutions either aesthetically or ideologically, but this failure was largely because Gray was unable to find a way out of the contradictions which beset him. However, it is a tribute to his supreme skill as a versifier that the surface of the poem can so effectively conceal the tensions it contains.

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[118] Guillory, *Cultural Capital,* p. 113.

[119] And, following Guillory, also because the language it was written in was used as the basis for standardisation later in the century. See Chapter 2, Section 3 above.

[120] Vincent Newey, 'The Selving of Thomas Gray', in *Thomas Gray: Contemporary Essays*, ed by W. B/ Hutchings and W. Ruddick, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), pp. 13-38, p. 25.

Chapter 4

Goldsmith and the reluctant self.

'I know, indeed, that there is something disgusting in the distresses of poverty, at which the imagination revolts, and starts back to exercise itself in the more attractive Arcadia of fiction.'
Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790)[1]

Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* ends with a long coda in which the poet-narrator identifies himself with the dispossessed peasantry and claims that the breakdown in social cohesion incurred by such dispossession has irrevocably damaged the prospect of a socially inclusive poetics.[2] The sense of alienation in this coda is not dissimilar to the sense of alienation evoked in the closing lines of Gray's *Elegy* and, given that the *Elegy* was published in 1751 while *The Deserted Village* appeared in 1770, it would seem reasonable to suppose that Goldsmith had been influenced by Gray. Clearly, Goldsmith admired the *Elegy*, albeit with some reservations, but his strictures on Gray's later poems suggest that he shared Johnson's critical distaste for Gray's luxuriant language.[3] If, then, *The Deserted Village* and the *Elegy* share certain common concerns, the ways in which these concerns were conceived and the poetic discourses which articulate them, derive from different perspectives and lead to different outcomes.

This is hardly surprising given the different ways in which the poets were situated. In the previous chapter, I have suggested that a significant amount of Gray's poetry was composed for a small coterie of friends and was motivated by a desire to find aesthetic solutions to particular intellectual problems. Occupying a relatively secure position as the fellow of a Cambridge college, he was not dependent on the vagaries of the literary marketplace and, if his poems failed to achieve success with the public, he could afford metaphorically to shrug his

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[1] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, 57.
[2] *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. by A. Friedman, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), vol. IV, pp. 287-304.
[3] In *The Beauties of English Poetry* [no date], he comments: '*An Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard*: This is a very fine poem but overloaded with epithet. The heroic measure with alternate rhime [sic] is very properly adapted to the solemnity of the subject, as it is the slowest movement that our language admits of. The latter part of the poem is pathetic and interesting.' *Collected Works*, vol. V, p. 320. For additional comments on Gray, see above Chap. 3.

shoulders. I have suggested that, as a consequence, his poetic struggles to articulate a speaking 'self' that was authoritative without overstepping the bounds of propriety and decorum were motivated in part by an intellectual desire to explore Locke's theories of personal identity. I have also indicated that he achieved a partial success in the *Elegy*, but that his attempts were largely ignored by his critics.

Goldsmith, on the other hand, given the breadth of his output, could be described as a 'jobbing' author and was to a large extent hostage to the fortunes of the booksellers. The development of a literary marketplace coincided with a decline in the exercise of literary patronage with the consequence that poets could no longer speak on behalf of their patrons and their patrons' interests, but had to forge voices which conveyed authority on their own behalf.[4] Goldsmith, then, in order to achieve success was obliged to take this new discursive relationship into account. In this chapter, I shall attempt to show how, with great reluctance, he incorporated a more 'personal' voice into his poetry and how his attempts to do so were both fitful and, like Gray, only partially successful.

Interestingly, Johnson, his near contemporary, made no such attempt, even though he has a legitimate claim to be considered the leading professional writer of his time.[5] As a friend and mentor to Goldsmith, Johnson is very likely to have influenced Goldsmith through his own poetic practice.[6] A brief survey of Johnson's poetry shows that he consciously observed the proprieties of the earlier part of the century. His two greatest poems are, arguably, *London: A Poem* (1738) and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749).[7] Both are imitations of Juvenal, and neither foregrounds Johnson the person even though we may feel the weight of human experience behind them. In *London,* the personal pronouns

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[4] The ways in which these two processes are related are necessarily complex and have been discussed briefly in Chap. 2. 3, above.

[5] Maynard Mack, comparing Pope's and Johnson's attitudes towards publication and its commercial rewards, notes their similarities but insists that Johnson embraced the commercial ethos to a far greater extent than Pope. 'What we have here, plainly, is a clash of worlds, one vanishing, the other emerging . . .' Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 111.

[6] Johnson famously contributed the closing lines both to *The Traveller* and to *The Deserted Village.* See below.

[7] *Samuel Johnson: The Complete English Poems*, ed. by J. D. Fleeman (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 61-8 and 83-92.

'I', 'me' and 'my' are obviously present but they function to identify the otherwise anonymous narrator who is contemplating Thales' departure:

Tho' Grief and Fondness in my Breast rebel,
When injur'd Thales bids the Town farewell,
Yet still my calmer Thoughts his Choice commend,
I praise the Hermit, but regret the Friend . . .   (1-4)

The choice of the classically named Thales effectively distances the reader from any clear identification of the narrator with Johnson himself. Equally, in the opening of *The Vanity of Human Wishes,* it is not Johnson who is observing human nature but a personified 'Observation', the effect of which is to render such observations universally true since they cannot be identified with an individualized speaker:

Let Observation with extensive View,
Survey Mankind from *China* to *Peru*;
Remark each anxious Toil, each eager Strife,
And watch the busy Scenes of crouded Life . . .   (1-4)

Even when Johnson appears to be speaking from personal experience, he is careful to generalize such experience and apply it to a type, 'the young Enthusiast' (136), so that the fate which awaits him, **'**Toil, Envy, Want, the Patron, and the Jail' (160), is not necessarily the fate of any particular writer. And on the rare occasions when Johnson, in his other writings, appears to be referring to himself, the grammatical 'I' tends to be the subject of *ex cathedra* statements. Nokes observes that in one section of Johnson's *Annals*, a work in which he documented his early life, there are 'more examples of the first person singular than anywhere else . . .', although he only numbers four.[8]

Johnson's insistence on generalizing both his moral observations and his personal experience may explain his otherwise perverse judgement on *Lycidas* (1779):

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[8] David Nokes, *Samuel Johnson: A Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 15. Referring to Johnson's 'Preface' to the *Dictionary*, Nokes notes that: '[i]t was with "frigid tranquillity" that he affected to dismiss the *Dictionary* from him; but though this intensely personal statement goes beyond good taste, it makes one thing unmistakeable. The *Dictionary* he produced would be recognised as *his*.' Ibid., p. xvii. I take this to be a further example of the growing economic individualism of authorship in this period.

It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion; for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions. Passion plucks no berries from the myrtle and ivy, nor calls upon Arethuse and Mincius, nor tells of rough *satyrs* and *fauns with cloven heel.* Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief.

In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting: whatever images it can supply, are long ago exhausted; and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind.[9]

Johnson's antipathy to Milton (and to pastoral generally) is well-known, but Johnson's judgement here is informed by his belief that Milton's decision to channel his 'grief' through pastoral and 'remote allusions' results in a lie because the poetic figures do not conform to the decorums appropriate to elegiac verse. Johnson continued to adhere to the view that 'literary works are composed of a hierarchy of levels unified by relations of formal causation, relations which license interpretation as reading from probable signs.'[10] Milton's verse, therefore, was 'disgusting' precisely because the signs he employed were 'improbable'.

This doctrine was, however, being seriously challenged by the middle of the century.[11] The use of decorums necessarily required imitating earlier exemplars leading Pope to assert in 1717:

For to say truth, whatever is very good sense must have been common sense in all times; and what we call Learning, is but the knowledge of the sense of our predecessors. Therefore they who say our thoughts are not our own because they resemble the Ancients, may as well say our faces are not our own, because they are like our fathers.[12]

However, in 1759, Edward Young countered:

Nay, so far are we from complying with a necessity, by which Nature lays us under, that, *Secondly*, by a spirit of *Imitation* we counteract Nature, and

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[9] Johnson, *Lives*, 'Milton', vol. I, pp. 278-9.
[10] Patey, *Probability and Literary Form*, p. 122.
[11] 'Beginning in mid-century, ordinary probability is usually thought to take its objects particularly from the mundane features of everyday social life . . . By mid-century, "nature" had in critical discourse come almost wholly to mean human nature, and especially passionate nature; at the same time, passion became more then ever to be considered the source of all true poetry.' Ibid., p. 144.
[12] Pope, *Poems*, *The Preface of 1717,* p. xxvii.

thwart her design. She brings us into the world all *Originals:* No two faces, no two minds, are just alike; but all bear Nature's evident mark of separation on them. Born *Originals*, how comes it to pass that we die *Copies*?'[13]

If, however, poetic skill depended on the ability to create something previously unattempted, then, according to Joseph Warton (1756/82), the poet needed a 'creative and glowing IMAGINATION, "acer spiritus ac vis", and that alone, that can stamp a writer with this exalted and very uncommon character, which so few possess, and of which so few can properly judge.'[14] This is a particularly interesting statement in that it appears both to isolate the poet from his fellow men and, by extension, to limit his potential audience. The poet has 'an uncommon character' which 'so few can properly judge' and his task is to bring before the public the fruits of his 'uncommon' character through the exercise of his fecund imagination.[15] What we are observing here is an isolationist and 'inward turn' that was to have a far-reaching effect on the poetry and criticism of the later eighteenth century.

Goldsmith's arrival in mainland Britain in 1752, then, coincided with the increasing professionalisation of the literary marketplace and the development of a new aesthetics. His reaction to the former is probably most powerfully expressed in *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759):

> THE poet's poverty is a standing topic of contempt. His writing for bread is an unpardonable offence. Perhaps, of all mankind, an author, in these times, is used most hardly. We keep him poor, and yet revile his poverty. . . . If the author be, therefore, still so necessary among us, let us treat him with proper consideration, as a child of the public, not a rent-charge on the community. . . THE author, when unpatronized by the Great, has naturally recourse to the bookseller. There cannot be, perhaps, imagined a combination more prejudicial to taste than this. It is the interest of the one to allow as little for writing, and of the other to write as much as possible; accordingly, tedious compilations, and periodical magazines, are the result of their joint endeavours. In these circumstances, the author bids adieu to

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[13] Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* (Dublin: P. Wilson in Dame Street, 1759), p. 24.
[14] Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, 4th edn., 2 vols (London: J. Dodsley, 1782), vol. I, pp.. v-vi. It is significant that this work was dedicated to Young.
[15] See my earlier comments on Joseph Warton's *The Enthusiast* in Chap. 2. 4.

fame, writes for bread, and for that only. Imagination is seldom called in;
he sits down to address the venal muse with the most phlegmatic apathy . .
.[16]

Here, he clearly implies that the loss of patronage and the commercialisation of
literature have degraded literary taste. However, there is a certain lack of focus in
his strictures. Authors, it would appear, are reduced to the status of indigents
both by the public in general and by booksellers in particular and their loss of
dignity is compounded by an apparent unwillingness to exert themselves in the
pursuit of fame. The rather bleak scene that he portrays suggests that everybody
is complicit in this state of affairs and that there can be no solution to the
problem.

Earlier, in the same work, Goldsmith suggests that the decline of patronage was a
direct consequence of the Walpole ministry:

> WHEN the link between patronage and learning was entire, then all who
> deserved fame were in a capacity of attaining it. When the great Somers
> was at the helm, patronage was fashionable among our nobility. The
> middle ranks of mankind, who generally imitate the Great, then followed
> their example; and applauded from fashion, if not from feeling. . . BUT this
> link now seems entirely broken. Since the days of a certain prime minister
> of inglorious memory, the learned have been kept pretty much at a
> distance.[17]

Taking these two passages together, it is difficult to avoid the impression that
Goldsmith was engaging in a fit of nostalgia for an imagined golden age similar
to the one he imagines in *The Deserted Village.* Although deeply conscious of
the effects of the decline of patronage, he is far less perceptive in his analysis of
its historical causes.[18]

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[16] Goldsmith, *Collected Works*, vol. I, pp. 314-6.
[17] Ibid., pp. 310-11.
[18] In *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority*, Kaul identifies this failure as endemic among writers
of this period. 'As the representational and discursive form of the aristocratic, high-cultural
reaction, Augustan humanism sought to harness the unbridled energies of market-capitalism, and
thus to retain its own precarious power. Thus, it consistently levelled criticisms of final (moral)
effects, rather than engaging in more fundamental critiques of *process.*', p. 114.

Goldsmith originally left Ireland in order to study medicine in Edinburgh. Ricardo Quintana suggests that, while in Scotland, 'he learned about the new rhetoric then being taught at Edinburgh and Glasgow, which put genuineness of feeling before all traditional techniques of expression; and it is likely also that he was introduced to the available essays of Hume . . .'[19] While there is some evidence both in *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759) and in *The Traveller* (1764) and *The Deserted Village* (1770) that he had absorbed the Humeian concept of sympathy which encourages compassion and serves as the glue which holds society together, he was careful to distinguish the exercise of sympathy from its portrayal in the sentimental novels of the time.[20] In his review of *True Merit true Happiness* (1757), he writes:

> Reader, if thou hast ever known such perfect happiness, as these romance-writers can so liberally dispense, thou hast enjoyed greater pleasure than has ever fallen to our lot. How deceitful are those imaginary pictures of felicity! and, we may add, how mischievous too! – The young and the ignorant lose their taste of present enjoyment, by opposing to it these delusive daubings of consummate bliss they meet with in novels; and, by expecting more happiness than life can give, feel but the more poignancy in all its disappointments.[21]

His rejection of what he perceived to be a false sensibility was balanced by a clear sense of what constituted, for him, true sensibility and the ways in which it should be represented.

Similarly, in his review of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757), Goldsmith explicitly rejects Burke's prioritizing obscurity as productive of the sublime, arguing instead that:

> The term *painting*, in poetry, perhaps, implies more than the mere assemblage of such pictures as affects the sight; sounds, tastes, feeling, all

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[19] Ricardo Quintana, *Oliver Goldsmith: A Georgian Study* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), pp. 7-8.

[20] Quintana makes a similar, if more pointed, observation where, commenting on some of the essays in *The Bee*, he writes: 'What lies in sight here is the war which Goldsmith was to wage against the sentimentalism of his age. He would not accept the moral theory lying behind sentimentalism — the theory that exalted the compassionate emotions, which it was insisted were innate in man; that dwelt upon the exquisite pleasure to be found in every benevolent act; that held that in the presence of noble emotions evil and selfishness cured themselves.' *Oliver Goldsmith: A Georgian Study*, p. 54.

[21] *Monthly Review* (May, 1757), *Collected Works,* vol. I, p. 17.

conspire to complete a poetical picture: hence this art takes the imagination by every inlet, and while it paints the picture, can give it motion and succession too. What wonder then it should strike us so powerfully! Therefore, not from the confusion or obscurity of the description, but from being able to place the object to be described in a greater variety of views, is poetry superior to all other descriptive arts.[22]

The aesthetic principles adumbrated here are both technical insofar as they touch on the principles of poetic composition and social insofar as they relate to the ideal functions of poetry. Goldsmith is arguing that language represents more than visual imagery and that therefore its full potential should be deployed in a successful poem. Only by using language which includes descriptions of 'sounds, tastes, [and] feeling' can poetry perform its social function which is to speak truth by placing 'the object to be described in a greater variety of views.' The prominence which Goldsmith gives to the descriptive powers of language and, by extension, the objectification of the scenes being described, runs directly counter to Burke's privileging of the emotional power of language:

> Now, as there is a moving tone of voice, an impassioned countenance, an agitated gesture, which affect independently of the things about which they are exerted, so there are words, and certain dispositions of words, which being peculiarly devoted to passionate subjects, and always used by those who are under the influence of any passion; they touch and move us more than those which far more clearly and distinctly express the subject matter. We yield to sympathy, what we refuse to description.[23]

Goldsmith's review of Gray's *Odes* explores similar territory. His primary objection is that Gray affected obscurity for its own sake:

> A^S this publication seems designed for those who have formed their taste by the models of antiquity, the generality of Readers cannot be supposed adequate Judges of its merit; nor will the Poet, it is presumed, be greatly disappointed if he finds them backward in commending a performance not entirely suited to their apprehensions. We cannot, however, without some regret behold those talents so capable of giving pleasure to all, exerted in efforts that, at best, can amuse only the few; we cannot behold the rising Poet seeking fame among the learned, without hinting to him the same advice that Isocrates used to give to his Scholars, *Study the People.* This

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[22] *Monthly Review* (May, 1757), *Collected Works,* vol. I, pp. 31-2.
[23] Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 198.

study it is that has conducted the great Masters of antiquity up to immortality.[24]

The deliberate contrast between the popularity of Gray's *Elegy* and the forbidding obscurity of the *Odes* is insisted upon precisely because Goldsmith was adamant that poetry should have a public and social function. But Gray was also at fault for not adhering to the supposed genius of the nation: 'How unsuited then to our national character is that species of poetry which rises upon us with unexpected flights! Where we must hastily catch the thought, or it flies from us; and, in short, where the Reader must largely partake of the Poet's enthusiasm, in order to taste his beauties.'[25]

Alfred Lutz has argued that Goldsmith's reviews of Burke and of Gray are consciously programmatic, and I have indicated that there are compelling reasons for seeing Goldsmith's critiques as indirectly asserting his own statements as to the nature and functions of poetry.[26] In summary, he is arguing that poetry should be clear and perspicuous; that it should appeal to the generality of the public; and that it should express moral truths rather than sentimental fantasies.[27] In these respects, then, Goldsmith's poetics are similar to those of his Augustan predecessors and to his great contemporary, Johnson's. However, not least in his views on patronage, he recognised that social conditions in the 1750s were no longer quite the same as those which had supported such poets as Pope and Thomson and that, therefore, one of his tasks was to construct a poetic voice which affirmed such poetics whilst also offering a vision of the society which he inhabited.[28]

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[24] 'ODES. *By Mr.* Gray', *Monthly Review* (September, 1757), *Collected Works*, vol. I, p. 112.
[25] Ibid., p. 113.
[26] Alfred Lutz, 'Goldsmith on Burke and Gray', *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature,* 34, 3 (1998), 225-249, (p. 246).
[27] He makes this point explicitly in *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759): 'True learning and true morality are closely connected; to improve the head will insensibly influence the heart, a deficiency of taste and a corruption of manners are sometimes found mutually to produce each other.' *Collected Works*, vol. I, p. 259.
[28] For Goldsmith's views on Pope, see his article, 'An Account of the Augustan Age of England,' in *The Bee* (1759). Ibid., vol. I, pp. 498ff. He was more circumspect about Thomson, possibly because of his Whiggish tendencies, writing: 'Mr. Thomson, though, in general, a verbose and affected poet, has told this story [Palemon and Lavinia in *Autumn*] with unusual simplicity; it is rather given here for being much esteemed by the public, than by the editor.' *The Beauties of English Poetry* (n.d.), *Collected Works,* vol. V, p. 325.

In *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759), Goldsmith prefigures some of the arguments which he later explores in *The Traveller.* His principal aim was to assert that the literatures of the various countries he mentions were unique and that their beauties and defects were functions of the particular national characters from which they proceeded:

> IN fact, nothing can be more absurd than rules to direct the taste of one country drawn from the manners of another. There may be some general marks in nature, by which all writers are to proceed; these, however, are obvious and might as well have never been pointed out, but to trace the sources of our passions, to mark the evanescent boundaries between satiety and disgust, and how far elegance differs from finery, requires a thorough knowledge of the people to whom criticism is directed.[29]

This move enabled him to engage in a discussion of British poetry purely on its own terms and to deplore its defects as resulting from an over-zealous application of inappropriate rules. Goldsmith himself saw the irony of his position as a critic decrying the works of other critics:

> *Write what you think, regardless of the critics.* To persuade to this, was the chief design of this essay. To break, or at least to loosen those bonds, first put on by caprice, and afterwards drawn hard by fashion, is my wish. I have assumed the critic only to dissuade from criticism.[30]

In particular, Goldsmith argued against 'a desire in the critic of grafting the spirit of ancient languages upon the English' claiming that this led to 'several disagreeable instances of pedantry. Among the number, I think, we may reckon blank verse.'[31] However, he also turned his fire on the critic as 'connoisseur':

> THERE is scarce an error of which our present writers are guilty, that does not arise from this source. From this proceeds the affected obscurity of our odes, the tuneless flow of our blank verse, the pompous epithet, laboured diction, and every other deviation from common sense, which procures the poet the applause of the connoisseur; he is praised by all, read by a few, and soon forgotten.[32]

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[29] Ibid., Vol. I, 296-7.
[30] Ibid., p. 317.
[31] Ibid., p. 318. His complaint here was not so much against the Miltonic sublime, which he implicitly praises in the ensuing sentence, as against its false introduction into didactic poetry. It is in this context that we should understand his apparent dislike of Thomson.
[32] Ibid., p. 317.

These writings suggest that Goldsmith was advancing a poetic manifesto which self-consciously rejected the poetic experiments attempted by some of his contemporaries and advocated a return to the didacticism of an earlier period which would embody the truths he wished to convey in the medium of rhyme as being more suited to the genius of the English language.[33] However, although he wished poetry to revert to the clarity of an earlier age, he had no appetite for antiquarianism.[34] His strictures on his contemporaries are remarkably similar to those of his fellow Tory, Johnson,[35] although at times he can adopt the mask (and opinions) of Swift, a fellow countryman, from an earlier age.[36] For Goldsmith to realise such a manifesto in practice, he needed a clear view of the moral vision that he wished to communicate. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ascertain either his moral or his political vision from this or, indeed, his other prose writings largely because they are mediated through the voice of Lien Chi Altangi.[37]

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[33] 'If rhymes, therefore, be more difficult, for that very reason, I would have our poets write in rhyme. Such a restriction upon the thought of a good poet, often lifts and encreases the vehemence of every sentiment; for fancy, like a fountain, plays highest by diminishing the aperture.' Ibid., p. 318. The importance of rhyme for Goldsmith has been well described by R. H. Hopkins: 'His centripetal position is based on an idealistic view of art in which the artist is not alienated from society but united with it in his use of rhyme and choice of themes. Rhyme itself is a social and aesthetic convention whereby right feeling is rationally controlled and correctness measured.' R. H. Hopkins, *The True Genius of Oliver Goldsmith* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press., 1969), pp. 38-9.

[34] In *The Beauties of English Poetry*, he praises Shenstone, with the caveat: '[t]hough I dislike the imitations of our old English poets in general, yet, on this minute subject, the antiquity of the style produces a very ludicrous solemnity.' *Collected Works*, vol. V, pp. 320-1.

[35] Cf., Johnson's good-natured, if exasperated, squib on Warton's poetry (1771):
Whereso'er I turn my View,
All is strange, yet nothing new;
Endless Labour all along,
Endless Labour to be wrong;
Phrase that time has flung away,
Uncouth Words in Disarray:
Trickt in Antique Ruff and Bonnet,
Ode and Elegy and Sonnet . . .
Lines on Thomas Warton's Poems, in *Poems,* p. 132.

[36] 'But let folly or dullness join to brand me; I shall take no shame to myself for endeavouring to enforce morals or improve good humour. There is no shame in making truth wear the face of entertainment, or letting ridicule fly only at mental deformity; nor is there any shame in being paid for it. It is not every scholar who pretends to despise this prostitution of talents, whose works have sufficient beauty to allure our employer to propose terms of similar prostitution. It is not every Gentleman who can forego, like me, the common and vendible topicks of government abuse, on which I could descant perhaps with elegance, in order to select general follies; on which topick it is probable I may be generally disregarded.' *Lloyd's Evening Post* (1762), *Collected Works*, vol. III, p. 182.

[37] Of course, in that the supposed author is a fictional character, it would be perfectly legitimate to treat the work as fictional. As we shall see, a similar ambiguity occurs in *The Deserted Village*.

I have already commented on how, in *An Enquiry,* he considers the virtues and vices of the nations he writes about to be mirror images of each other. This work, though, was largely concerned with the exercise of taste and made little reference to the economic conditions which allowed such taste to develop and flourish. In *The Citizen of the World* (1760), Goldsmith explored this theme in more detail. Insofar as we can take the words of his Chinese informant to be representative of Goldsmith's own views, such views remain ambiguous. For example, he writes:

> The greater the luxuries of every country, the more closely, politically speaking, is that country united. Luxury is the child of society alone, the luxurious man stands in need of a thousand different artists to furnish out his happiness; it is more likely, therefore, that he should be a good citizen who is connected by motives of self-interest with so many, than the abstemious man who is united to none.[38]

On one reading, the growth of a commercial empire which is able to furnish luxury for its citizens has specific advantages. It serves to create political cohesion among its citizens since the self-interest of the one is united with the self-interests of the others. Further, it encourages industry by increasing the industry required to satisfy the desires of the 'luxurious man.'[39] Thus, luxury, political cohesion and industry are contrasted with the lot of the 'abstemious man' who is seen as parsimonious and condemned to live in isolation. These views prefigure those advanced by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* when he comments on the self interest of the butcher, the brewer and the baker, but whereas Smith was developing a coherent economic argument in support of the division of labour, Goldsmith's own discussions of the desirable economic bases of society were far more inchoate.[40]

Ten years later, *The Deserted Village* was to assert an exactly opposite point of view, at least with regard to luxury. However, it would probably be a mistake to read the remarks quoted above simply as an exercise in irony since, elsewhere, Goldsmith (or, at least, Altangi) writes:

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[38] Ibid., vol. II, p. 52.

[39] The failure to mention the luxurious woman here is, no doubt, because comparatively few women had personal, disposable incomes.

[40] See, above, Chap. 2. 2 for my discussion of Adam Smith.

No, my friend, in order to make the sciences useful in any country, it must first become populous; the inhabitants must go through the different stages of hunter, shepherd, and husbandman, then when property becomes valuable, and consequently gives cause for injustice; then when laws are appointed to repress injury, and secure possession, when men by the sanction of those laws, become possessed of superfluity, when luxury is thus introduced and demands its continual supply, then it is that the sciences become necessary and useful; the state cannot subsist without them; they must then be introduced, at once to teach men to draw the greatest possible quantity of pleasure from circumscribed possession; and to restrain them within the bounds of moderate enjoyment . . .[41]

Here, the argument is far more nuanced. We are presented with a genealogy of nationhood in which the development of the agricultural arts leads to surplus production and ultimately the concept of property. The concept of property is subsequently enshrined in laws. However, the possession of property encourages the growth of luxury which is seen as a necessary evil because it also encourages the development of the sciences. The function of these sciences is to teach the citizens how to live in an unequal society while curbing the excesses of superfluity. Nevertheless, two things are puzzling about this passage. If we read it as ironic, then it is difficult to see what alternatives Goldsmith might propose since it is unimaginable that he would advocate a society in which property was not protected by law. If, however, we assume that Goldsmith is speaking *in propria persona*, it is not clear whether the social organisation he describes is one which actually obtained in Britain, or whether it is immanent but requiring the assistance of Goldsmith, the poet, to bring it about.

A further puzzling feature is that Goldsmith makes no mention of the poor and dispossessed even though he was well aware that the economic systems which encouraged and protected luxury were instrumental in impoverishing them. In *The Citizen*, Lien Chi Altangi observes: 'The miseries of the poor are however entirely disregarded; tho' some undergo more real hardships in one day than the great in their whole lives.'[42] He then proceeds to narrate the story of an ex-soldier who had suffered unimaginable hardships protecting the liberties and commercial interests of Great Britain around the world. In spite of being maimed

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[41] *Collected Works*, vol. II, p. 338.
[42] Ibid., pp. 458ff.

and in desperate poverty, the soldier is resolutely jolly, happy to have done his duty for his country. The unstable nature of Goldsmith's irony is clearly apparent here. Altangi's opening comment is, I assume, to be taken at face value whereas the soldier's narration is surely intended to be ironic. Goldsmith, then, is playing with his readers' expectations such that we cannot assume that everything the Chinaman says should be treated ironically nor, conversely, that the other voices (and particularly that of the man in black) represent Goldsmith's views.[43]

Perhaps the clearest statement of his own views occurs in Goldsmith's letter, *The Revolution in Low Life* (1762).[44] In this anticipation of *The Deserted Village,* he bewails the enforced removal of the villagers from an estate which had been purchased by 'a Merchant of immense fortune in London.' After describing their misery, he turns to moralizing:

> Let others felicitate their country upon the encrease of foreign commerce and the extension of our foreign conquests; but for my part, this new introduction of wealth gives me but very little satisfaction. Foreign commerce, as it can be managed only by a few, tends proportionably to enrich only a few; neither moderate fortunes nor moderate abilities can carry it on; thus it tends rather to the accumulation of immense wealth in the hands of some, than to a diffusion of it among all; it is calculated rather to make individuals rich, than to make the aggregate happy.[45]

Although this scepticism about the effects of wealth based on global commerce and colonial conquest apparently contradicts the observations of Altangi (above) on the value of luxury, in fact Goldsmith's point is complicated by his reference to the introduction of this wealth as being 'new'. This suggests that Goldsmith can best be described as a 'radical conservative' who saw the benefits of the new commercial society while deploring its effects on the social cohesion which (ostensibly) obtained in an earlier era. If, as seems likely, Goldsmith is referring

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[43] Seamus Deane suggests that there is a deliberate interplay between the exaggerated rationality of Altangi and the equally exaggerated sentimentality of the Man in Black: 'Irony subverts sentimentality, sentimentality softens irony. But the dominant concern here, as in the works of so many satirists in this century, is with the fate of civilization. The thin line which divides polite society from barbarism is one which Goldsmith wished to draw as clearly and distinctly as possible, even though at times the complexity of the evidence he accumulated did not allow for any simple demarcation.' Seamus Deane, 'Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the World*', in *The Art of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. by Andrew Swarbrick (London: Vision Press Limited, 1984), pp. 33-50; p. 48.
[44] *Collected Works*, vol. III, pp. 195ff.
[45] Ibid., p. 197.

to a pre-Walpolian society, then he is suggesting not so much that the accumulation of wealth is bad in itself, but that it has got into the wrong hands and is consequently being misapplied. And it is these tensions in his thinking that he explores in greater detail in his poetry.

Before considering his two greatest poems, *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*, it is instructive to look at some of his lesser verse. The great majority of these are occasional poems composed either as jokes (e.g., 'An Elegy on Mrs.Mary Blaize'), as dramatic songs (e.g., the songs from *She Stoops to Conquer*), or as humorous responses to invitations (e.g., 'Letter in Verse and Prose to Mrs Bunbury').[46] However, there are a small number which stand out as being worthy of discussion here since they help place his work both in relation to his contemporaries and in relation to some of his forbears.

Three of these include a nod to his fellow countryman, Swift. 'The Double Transformation: A Tale' (1760) is a good-natured and rather traditional description of a marriage that deteriorates into constant bickering.[47] The lady succumbs to vanity:

In short, by night 'twas fits or fretting;
By day 'twas gadding or coquetting.
Fond to be seen she kept a bevy
Of powder'd coxcombs at her levy;

while

Jack suck'd his pipe and often broke
A sigh in suffocating smoke;
While all their hours were pass'd between
Insulting repartee or spleen . . .   (51-4; 57-60)

In his introduction to the poem, Lonsdale suggests that Goldsmith was imitating, among other poems, Swift's 'Phillis, or the Progress of Love, 'The Progress of

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[46] I have omitted mention of his two pieces written for music on the grounds that 'The Captivity: an Oratorio' was neither performed nor published in Goldsmith's lifetime and 'Threnodia Augustalis' (1772) was dismissed by him as being '. . . more properly . . . termed a Compilation than a Poem.' *Collected Works*, vol. IV, p. 329.

[47] Ibid., pp. 367-71.

Marriage' and 'Strephon and Chloe'.[48] While there are undoubted echoes of Swift in 'The Double Transformation', Goldsmith's descriptions of the woman are far less harshly satirical. Also, somewhat surprisingly, he turns the tale on its head. Whereas Swift's protagonists lead an increasingly miserable life, Goldsmith has his 'miss' infected with smallpox. Under normal circumstances such a disease would be expected to add even more woes but in this tale her disfigurements cure her of vanity and render her morally beautiful:

No more presuming on her sway,
She learns good-nature every day,
Serenely gay, and strict in duty,
Jack finds his wife a perfect beauty.   (101-4)

The ways in which Goldsmith plays with generic conventions we shall see repeated in a slightly different way in both his major poems, *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village* and they suggest that, however much he may admire such forebears as Pope and Swift and, indeed, his contemporary Johnson, he had developed more personal and flexible ways of deploying such conventions.

Another curiosity is 'The Haunch of Venison. A Poetical Epistle to Lord Clare' (1770).[49] Clare was President of the Board of Trade (1766-68), Vice Treasurer of Ireland (1768-82) and a fellow countryman of Goldsmith who, in this period, spent much time with him. The poem's opening lines hint at Clare's role as a potential patron: 'THANKS, my Lord, for your venison, for finer or fatter/Never rang'd in a forest or smoak'd in a platter . . .' Goldsmith continues by suggesting that the haunch was so fine that:

I had thoughts, in my Chambers, to place it in view,
To be shewn to my Friends as a piece of *Virtu;*
As in some *Irish* houses, where things are so so,
One Gammon of Bacon hangs up for a show:
But for eating a Rasher of what they take pride in,
They'd as soon think of eating the Pan it is fry'd in. (7-12)

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[48] *Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, p. 583. J. A. Downie argues that this is unlikely given that the poem was not printed until 1765. J. A. Downie, 'Goldsmith, Swift and Augustan Satirical Verse', in *The Art of Oliver Goldsmith*, pp. 126-143. However, Herbert Davis notes that Swift's poem was available in *Poems,* 1735. *Swift: Poetical Works*, p. 169.
[49] *Collected Works, v*ol. IV, pp. 311-9.

Although it is possible to read this as a humorous dig at the expense of the Irish peasantry, it also indicates a concern that was to be explored more seriously in *The Deserted Village*.[50]

The poem continues by describing how the narrator is finally cheated out of his meal, and closes with the following lines addressed to Clare:

To be plain, my good Lord, it's but labour misplac'd
To send such good verses to one of your taste;
You've got an odd something – a kind of discerning –
A relish – a taste – sicken'd over by learning;
At least, it's your temper, as very well known,
That you think very slightly of all that's your own:
So, perhaps in your habits of thinking amiss,
You may make a mistake and think slightly of this.   (117-24)

The first two of these lines suggest the kind of dedication that may be made to a potential patron, but the flyting that follows clearly subverts such an intention and, although clearly intended to be comic, asserts the value of the poet and his writing.

Something similar happens in 'Retaliation' (1774).[51] While is some ways comparable to Swift's 'Verses on the Death of Dean Swift', there are some noticeable differences. Swift clearly constructs himself as a public figure and although we may get an inkling of some his feelings with regard to his friends, his *persona* remains unchanged throughout the poem even when ventriloquizing others' voices. Goldsmith, on the other hand, is very much present in his poem, albeit at one remove. The portraits he gives of the other members of the club are conveyed with a wit and sense of irony that indicate that they are not all good-natured raillery. Two, in particular, stand out: his description of Burke and that of Cumberland. The former is anatomised in couplets in which Burke's good and bad qualities are held in suspension:

Here lies our good Edmund, whose genius was such,

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[50] Landry, in discussing *The Deserted Village*, comments that '. . . Goldsmith assumes that rural laborers will look to eat as much meat as they can get, though that won't be much. But now both the laborers and their sport have vanished.' Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside*, p. 120. These lines certainly add support to such a view.

[51] *Collected Works,* vol. IV, pp. 352-9.

We scarcely can praise it, or blame it too much;
Who, born for the Universe, narrow'd his mind,
And to party gave up, what was meant for mankind . . .   (29-32)

'Praise' and 'blame' have equal weight while 'the universe' and 'mankind' flank
his 'narrowed' mind and addiction to 'party'.

With Cumberland, Goldsmith employs a similar rhetorical ploy, though on a
larger scale. He is initially portrayed as 'The Terence of England, the mender of
hearts' (62), but, as Goldsmith proceeds, it becomes clear that Cumberland
specialises in drawing 'men as they ought to be, not as they are.' (64). This is a
kind of sentimentalism that Goldsmith abhors and which he castigates at the end
of his portrait with the backhanded compliment:

Say, was it that vainly directing his view,
To find out men's virtues and finding them few,
Quite sick of pursuing each troublesome elf,
He grew lazy at last and drew from himself.   (75-8)

Cumberland has not merely grown idle, he has revealed himself to be possessed
of the same kind of sentimentality that he portrays in others. My point, though, is
not just to indicate how delicately subtle Goldsmith can be as a satirist but also to
point to the increasing involvement of self in this late poem. The portraits here
are not constructed as though from an impartial observer but appear to represent
Goldsmith's own assessment of the characters described.[52]

More puzzling is 'Edwin and Angelina' (1761?).[53] Whereas the poems I have
been discussing all hint at features which he was to employ in *The Traveller* and
The Deserted Village, this sentimental ballad belongs to a genre that he never
touched again and which would appear to run counter to all his expressed beliefs.
It does, however, indicate the extent to which Goldsmith had absorbed (perhaps
unwittingly) the new poetics that were evolving in the mid-eighteenth century
and also demonstrate his considerable skill in versification. Angelina, disguised
as a man, is found by a hermit while traversing a wasteland:

For here, deserted, as I tread

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[52] Of course, this was, in part, a function of the circumstances in which the poem was written.
[53] Ibid., pp. 199-206.

With fainting steps and slow,
The wild, immeasurably spread,
Seems lengthening as I go.'   (5-8)

The hermit takes her into his 'cell' where he asks how she came to be in such a plight, suggesting it may be because she is lovelorn. At this moment, she betrays her sex by blushing. She then proceeds to recount how she had been wooed by a number of men but how she had deliberately spurned the one she preferred, Edwin, through her coquettish behaviour. Realising her mistake, she vows to 'seek the solitude he sought, /And stretch me where he lay.' (135-6) At this moment, the hermit reveals himself to be Edwin and they live happily ever after in their rural retreat.

In 1790, Vicesimus Knox declared this poem to be 'one of the most popular pieces in the language; perhaps it stands next in the favour of the people to Gray's delightful Elegy.'[54] The comparison with Gray is instructive here, as is the echo of Young's *Night Thoughts* in lines 31-2: '"Man wants but little here below, /Nor wants that little long."'[55] Given Goldsmith's relative dislike of 'antique' poetry, and his equal dislike of sentimentality, it is unclear what persuaded him to produce such a work.[56] Lonsdale, in his headnote to the poem, observes how Goldsmith admired some of the ancient ballads which were being collected by Percy, and it is possible that 'Edwin and Angelina' was written as an intellectual and poetic exercise.

However, if it was such an exercise, it is remarkable how successfully Goldsmith managed to incorporate all the salient features of the genre into his poem. I have mentioned the 'wild, immeasurably spread' which hint at the Gothicism which was in fashion but it is also noticeable that Edwin's response to Angelina's grief: 'His rising cares the hermit spy'd, /With answering care opprest . . .' (61-2) are motivated by sympathy. And the supposed bliss which the couple arrive at is representative of a species of felicity which he condemns in his review of *True Merit true Happiness*:

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[54] Ibid., p. 598.
[55] See Lonsdale's note, *Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith,* p. 600.
[56] See his reference to Shenstone in n. 34. above.

'Thus let me hold thee to my heart,
  And every care resign,
And shall we never, never part,
  My life, my all that's mine?

'No, never from this hour to part,
  Our love shall still be new . . .   (153-8)

The skill with which he versifies the poem is also remarkable. For example,
consider the following lines:

Then trav'ller turn, thy cares forgo'
  For earth-born cares are wrong;
"Man wants but little here below,
  Nor wants that little long."   (29-32)

The potential double caesura in the first line reinforces the commanding tone of
the hermit, while the end-stopped lines that follow it isolate each particular moral
while linking them through the repetition of 'wants' and 'little'. This stanza can
be contrasted with one that occurs very soon after:

Far in a wilderness obscure
  The lonely mansion lay,
A refuge to th'unshelter'd poor
  And strangers led astray.   (37-40)

Here the enjambments draw the reader forward while the lateral consonant, 'l'
and near-lateral 'n' in 'in', 'wilderness', 'lonely', 'mansion', and 'led' re-enact
the soothing peace of the retreat, while the delaying tactics of the adverbial
phrase prior to the subject and main verb hint at the effort needed to reach the
'lonely mansion.'

So far, then, I have constructed Goldsmith the writer as an unreliable ironist (at
least *qua* Altangi); an experimenter with generic conventions; largely
antagonistic to the emerging poetics of his younger contemporaries; and a
brilliant versifier. I shall be arguing that it is precisely these qualities that make
his two great poems so interesting.

The Traveller, or A Prospect of Society was composed between 1755 and 1764.[57]
A shorter, earlier, version of the poem had apparently been printed bearing the
simpler title, *A Prospect.* This version**,** and the subtitle of the finished poem,
indicates that Goldsmith clearly intended his poem to be read as a 'prospect'
poem. However, it deviates in important ways from the generic archetypes,
Denham's *Cooper's Hill* and Dyer's *Grongar Hill.* I have already commented on
Cooper's Hill, suggesting that the poetic voice largely comments on the
observations of a 'philosophic eye' which roams the countryside and history in
an incorporeal form.[58] Dyer, whose work had been republished in 1761,
constructs a narrator who is far more physically present on Grongar Hill.
However, his philosophical generalisations tend to derive from the contrast
between nature's (and God's) bounty and man's ephemerality, and specific
historical events are never directly invoked. So, for example:

A little rule, a little sway,
A sun beam in a winter's day,
Is all the proud and mighty have
Between the cradle and the grave.[59]

Moral generalisations such as the above are then directly related to the poet's
own person (although no doubt intended as exemplary):

O may I with myself agree,
And never covet what I see:
Content me with an humble shade,
My passions tam'd, my wishes laid;
For while our wishes wildly roll,
We banish quiet from the soul:
'Tis thus the busy beat the air;
And misers gather wealth and care.

Goldsmith conflates these two approaches. Whereas, with Dyer, he describes
himself as physically present on his 'Alpine solitude', like Denham's his eye
travels across vast tracts of Europe, implying that his moral observations were

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[57] *Collected Works*, vol. IV, pp. 243-69. The observations on its composition are taken from
Lonsdale's headnote, *Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, p. 622.
[58] See chapter 2. 4.
[59] Dyer, *Poems*, pp. 13, 15. The second quotation clearly appeals to the 'Happy Man' trope.

the result of *The Traveller*'s personal contact with the societies he has encountered.[60]

Lonsdale notes that the poem also owes something to the 'verse epistle'[61] Such an impression is confirmed by Goldsmith's dedication to his brother. He states that 'a part of this poem was formerly written to you from Switzerland', and that this information will 'throw a light upon many parts of it, when the reader understands that it is addressed to a man, who despising Fame and Fortune, has retired early to Happiness and Obscurity, with an income of forty pounds a year.'[62]

Here, Goldsmith seems to be deliberately subverting the older conventions governing dedications. Rather than praising the estate of the dedicatee and the munificence which flows from such an estate, Goldsmith almost pointedly specifies the meagre income of his brother. However, this move allows him to praise the wisdom of his brother's choice and to reflect on the greater moral worth of abjuring ambition in order to follow such a choice. And it a gives him the further opportunity to discuss the ways in which ambition has invaded the realm of poetry and to deplore the absence of a common poetics not riven by faction.[63]

However, another very interesting thing is happening in this dedication. Goldsmith is much more obviously involving himself personally in the poem than would have been typical of his predecessors. The dedicatee is a member of his close family and is not one of the 'powerful' who currently neglect poetry, and although he retreats into a more detached (and therefore 'public') voice later

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[60] Cf., Quintana: 'For eighteenth-century readers *The Traveller* combined something surprisingly new and something pleasingly familiar, and this fact doubtless explains much of the enthusiasm with which it was greeted. What was new was the voice, the distinctive manner. On the other hand it was a prospect poem, and this kind or type was well established, going back to *Cooper's Hill* in the previous century.' *Oliver Goldsmith*, p. 129.

[61] *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, 'Headnote', p. 627.

[62] *Collected Works,* vol. IV, Dedication, (9-12), ibid., p. 245.

[63] Goldsmith's rejection of 'ambition' as conceived here and later in the poem (335-48), has been discussed in some detail by Lutz and related to Goldsmith's criticism of Burke: '[Poetry] is a profoundly public form, in the Augustan sense of the word, meant to express, perhaps even create, social feelings. The interests of self and society, which the selfish interests of individuals, their ambition, splits up, are not distinct in Goldsmith's poetics. Goldsmith's dissatisfaction with Burke's concept of the sublime, then, is based on his radically different social ideas.' 'Goldsmith on Burke and Gray', 234-5.

in the dedication: 'What reception a Poem may find, which has neither abuse, party nor blank verse to support it, I cannot tell, nor am I solicitous to know', he finishes this section with a personally defiant: 'My aims are right.' (11-3)[64]

The impression that Goldsmith is referring to himself is reinforced in the poem's opening paragraph:

REMOTE, unfriended, melancholy, slow,
Or by the lazy Scheld, or wandering Po;
Or onward, where the rude Carinthian boor
Against the houseless stranger shuts the door;
Or where Campania's plain forsaken lies,
A weary waste expanding to the skies.
Where'er I roam, whatever realms to see,
My heart untravell'd fondly turns to thee;
Still to my brother turns, with ceaseless pain,
And drags at each remove a lengthening chain.

Clearly, the voice is modulated through the rhymes and rhythms of poetry creating a formal distance between the narrator and his audience, but the focus is intensely personal. The main clause, 'My heart turns to thee', is preceded and delayed by a number of unusual grammatical devices. The first line is a list of adjectives with no obvious head noun, although the choice of 'unfriended' and 'melancholy' suggests that the noun will be animate. These are followed by a sequence of adverbials which are grammatically increasingly complex and which have the effect of foregrounding the main clause, the personal element of which has been indicated by the adverb phrase 'Where'er I roam'. Equally, the specific mention of his brother is delayed by a reference to the non-specific 'thee'. The wandering nature of the sentiments is therefore triply emphasised: semantically through the choice of vocabulary; grammatically through the tortuous syntax; and poetically through the subtle mix of end-stopped lines and enjambment.

However, the reasons for the narrator's melancholy exile are unexplained. The ensuing paragraph offers the reader some clues in that the narrator's loneliness is contrasted with the domestic pastoral of his brother's house where the family

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[64] See l. 7 of the dedication: 'Yet, however this art may be neglected by the powerful . . .'
Collected Works, vol. IV, p. 246.

engage in charitable acts and 'learn the luxury of doing good.' (22)[65] It is tempting to speculate that Goldsmith is casting himself in the role of an Odysseus, exiled from his native Ireland and condemned to search for domestic bliss by wandering the world.[66] To some extent, this is suggested by the following lines:

  But me, not destin'd such delights to share,
My prime of life in wand'ring spent and care:
Impell'd, with steps unceasing, to pursue
Some fleeting good, that mocks me with the view;
That, like the circle bounding earth and skies,
Allures from far, yet, as I follow, flies;
My fortune leads to traverse realms alone,
And find no spot of all the world my own.   (23-30)

But the close identification of the narrator with Goldsmith the man makes such an interpretation unlikely. R. H. Hopkins has suggested that Goldsmith is using a conscious rhetorical device to foster sympathy in the reader:

> . . . if the reader at the beginning of the poem is sympathetic to the seemingly detached and impartial traveller, later the reader will become unconsciously more sympathetic to the narrator's argument and more likely to accept his thesis.[67]

While such an appeal to impartiality is persuasive, it is arguable whether the traveller, at least as presented in the lines quoted, really is as 'detached and impartial' as Hopkins suggests.[68] The constant self-reference — in the first thirty lines of the poem, the first person pronoun or possessive occurs ten times — suggest a far more personal involvement with the narration.

Nevertheless, this personal perspective is abandoned as the poem progresses in favour of the more generalising voice associated with the 'prospect' poem:

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[65] The choice of the term 'luxury' here is telling. While clearly antithetical to the normal usage of the word in the eighteenth century, it subtly introduces some of Goldsmith's moral concerns which are developed later in the poem.

[66] There is also, perhaps, an echo of Milton's depiction of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden.

[67] *The True Genius of Oliver Goldsmith*, p. 75.

[68] It is for this reason that I can only give qualified assent to Hopkins's observation: 'If *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village* are no longer read as autobiographical you-can't-go-home-again poems and are recognised as deliberately rhetorical, then the view of Goldsmith as becoming a man of sensibility is untenable' (ibid., p. 234). While it is true that Goldsmith was not becoming a 'man of sensibility', it is still possible to argue that he was introducing a consciously autobiographical element into the two poems which has its own rhetorical effect.

>   Even now, where Alpine solitudes ascend,
> I sit me down a pensive hour to spend;
> And, plac'd on high above the storm's career,
> Look downward where an hundred realms appear;
> Lakes, forests, cities, plains extending wide,
> The pomp of kings, the shepherd's humbler pride.   (31-6)

In viewing this vast prospect with his 'philosophic eye', Goldsmith can position himself as an impartial observer whose moral teachings are no longer purely personal. However, by adopting this stance, Goldsmith renders the integrity of the poem rhetorically flawed because of the disjunction between the lonely traveller and the philosophic observer. The contradictions inherent in Goldsmith's construction of his narrator can be seen most obviously in the lines that follow. The 'pensive traveller' is no longer melancholy, but is restored to psychic health by 'Creation's charms' (37). Indeed, he now feels so much at home in the world that 'Creation's heir, the world, the world is mine' (50).

Having now reconstructed himself, the narrator can begin to answer the question posed in lines 63-4: 'But where to find that happiest spot below, / Who can direct, when all pretend to know?' The immediate answer is in nature's bounty, although this has been complicated by the different social structures that nations have constructed:

> Though patriots flatter, still shall wisdom find
> An equal portion dealt to all mankind,
> As different good, by Art or Nature given,
> To different nations makes their blessings even.
>
>   Nature, a mother kind alike to all,
> Still grants her bliss at Labour's earnest call:
> . .   . .
>   From Art more various are the blessings sent;
> Wealth, commerce, honor, liberty, content:
> Yet these each other's power so strong contest,
> That either seems destructive of the rest.   (77-82, 87-90)

The poem then continues by exploring the ways in which 'wealth, commerce, honour, liberty, content' are enjoyed in different portions by different nations, and how the contests between these values lead to particular, but different, vices.

However, before developing his argument, Goldsmith has a brief interlude in which the traveller re-introduces himself:

But let us try these truths with closer eyes,
And trace them through the prospect as it lies:
Here for a while my proper cares resign'd,
Here let me sit in sorrow for mankind,
Like yon neglected shrub, at random cast,
That shades the steep, and sighs at every blast.   (99-104)

The invitation to the reader through the inclusive 'us' is clearly intended to persuade us that the traveller's 'truths' are not idiosyncratic but shared. However, this assumption *we* are going to 'try these truths with closer eyes' makes the rest of the passage unstable, not least because the narrator immediately detaches himself from this supposed communion, choosing instead to 'sit in sorrow for mankind'. Also, the simile is slightly forced. Although the shrub may 'sigh' as 'in sorrow', and may be 'neglected' as was the narrator at the beginning of the poem, the traveller is not in any obvious way 'shading the steep.' This interruption may have the rhetorical function of establishing the mood of the ensuing reflections, but it also indicates Goldsmith's uncertainty both in blending the personal with the public voice and establishing a clear relationship between the narrator's voice and its addressees.

The traveller's journey round Europe is reminiscent of Johnson's in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, published some fifteen years earlier, but the focus is completely different. Whereas Johnson exemplified his morals with references to particular historical figures, Goldsmith demonstrates his through references to particular national characteristics. The Italians have become enervated by 'sensual bliss' (124) so that: 'Each nobler aim represt by long controul, /Now sinks at last, or feebly mans the soul'. (155-6) The hardier Swiss finds content in the 'meanness of his humble shed' (180), but his meagre life is matched by his meagre ambitions: 'Such are the charms to barren states assign'd; /Their wants but few, their wishes all confin'd'. (209-10). In consequence (233-8):

Some sterner virtues o'er the mountain's breast
May sit, like falcons cow'ring on the nest;
But all the gentler morals, such as play
Through life's more cultur'd walks and charm the way,

These far dispers'd, on timorous pinions fly,
To sport and flutter in a kinder sky.　　(233-8)

Lytton Sells claims that '[t]here is in *The Traveller* . . . no sentiment for nature, no landscape depicted with its local colour, indeed little that appears to have been observed and experienced.'[69] While it is largely true that the descriptions of Italy, Switzerland and Holland are somewhat formulaic, it is manifestly not the case in the traveller's depiction of France. Here, Goldsmith allows the traveller's mask to slip revealing a more personal touch when he describes himself playing his flute to charm the local villagers:

Gay sprightly land of mirth and social ease,
Pleas'd with thyself, whom all the world can please,
How often have I led the sportive choir,
With tuneless pipe, beside the murmuring Loire?　　(241-4)

The sense of involvement here is reinforced in the following lines where the sounds of the pipe are united with the sight of the elms and the sensation of the wind: 'Where shading elms along the margin grew,/And freshen'd from the wave the Zephyr flew;' (245-6). Here, there is genuine pleasure and it is a pleasure that is sympathetically returned by the villagers as they joyfully dance to his tunes. However, the impersonal traveller returns to scold them for being thoughtless in their pleasures, using a splendid oxymoron — 'Thus idly busy rolls their life away' (256) — to describe their wasted lives.

In his diagnosis of French society, the narrator singles out an excessive love of 'honour' as the defining fault, and it is this sense of 'honour' that is the social trade of France: 'Honour, that praise which real merit gains,/Here passes current; paid from hand to hand,/It shifts in splendid traffic round the land . . .' (259-61). The crucial point here is that honour has become a devalued currency which encourages a fawning obsequiousness: 'Hence ostentation here, with tawdry art,/Pants for the vulgar praise which fools impart . . .' (273-4). The vital connections between genuine honour, merit and self worth have been broken.

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[69] A. Lytton Sells, *Oliver Goldsmith: His Life and Works* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1974), p. 295.

For their part, the Dutch are praised for their hard-working diligence and their commercial empire, but:

Industrious habits in each bosom reign,
And industry begets a love of gain.
Hence all the good from opulence that springs,
With all those ills superfluous treasure brings,
Are here display'd . . .   (299-303)

And the particular ill fostered by opulence is greed which encourages 'craft and fraud' (305).

The national portraits that Goldsmith offers us seem peculiarly perfunctory and programmatic. Indeed, at times, they are even contradictory. For example, whereas the hardy Swiss are criticized for their lack of 'gentler morals', the Dutch are likewise criticized for no longer being 'Rough, poor, content, ungovernably bold' (314). It is, of course, possible to see these contradictions as evidence of Goldsmith's recommendation of a golden mean between the various qualities he esteems but, equally, they seem to indicate a relative lack of concern for the peoples themselves. Rather, the depictions of the four nations serve as staging posts on the traveller's journey to Britain. This impression is intensified by the peculiar absence of time in the portraits. Such time as is invoked seems more evolutionary than particular leaving the impression that the social virtues and vices that are described are treated as integral to the people rather than consequences of their histories.

To the extent that the tableaux are oddly timeless, they conform to the subtitle *A Prospect of Society*.[70] In respect of the main title, *The Traveller*, the tableaux are also curiously static. Apart from the brief interlude in France, the narrator does not seem to traverse any of the landscapes that are briefly described. This has led Ingrid Horrocks to argue that:

> [t]he price *The Traveller* pays for destabilizing the safe perspective of the
> prospect, or for admitting and demonstrating that the conceit of extended
> vision from any one place is already a fiction, is that as a result every
> perspective or position becomes uncertain. The mobility and detachment

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[70] Although it may be more appropriate to refer to society in the plural.

from place which the poem posits as the necessary condition of the poet's vision inevitably brings with it a sense of alienation from any place or position: a visionary wanderer is still a 'houseless stranger'.[71]

However, it seems to me that Goldsmith, rather than destabilizing the fiction of extended vision, expands it beyond its previous manifestations. He does, however, significantly destabilise the concept of the traveller both by rendering him static and by giving him an ambiguous voice that is sometimes public and sometimes private. And it is this ambiguity which contributes to the sense of detachment, rather than alienation, 'from any place or position.' This impression is unfortunate for the integrity of the poem because the section on Britain offers us a clear moral and philosophical perspective. Because the strengths and weaknesses of the British character (and constitution) are enumerated more minutely than the formulaic and relativistic portraits offered previously, the reader is at a loss to decide whether these are the generalised observations of the philosophic traveller, or the particular observations of Goldsmith, the melancholic in exile.

The British section is preceded by a line which contrasts the natives of Holland with those of Britain:

How much unlike the sons of Britain now!

  Fir'd at the sound, my genius spreads her wing,
And flies where Britain courts the western spring;
Where lawns extend that scorn Arcadian pride,
And brighter streams than fam'd Hydaspis glide, . . .   (316-20)

A new energy is released with the verbs, 'fired' and 'flies' and, quite suddenly, time and space are introduced in both mythological and more specific historical terms. Classical time is suggested by both 'Arcadia' and the 'famed Hydaspis', but both refer to existing places in Greece and the newly exploited Indian sub-continent. Having observed the moderate climate of the British Isles,[72] the traveller comments: 'Extremes are only in the master's mind' (324). The

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[71] Ingrid Horrocks, '"Circling Eye" and "Houseless Stranger": The New Eighteenth-Century Wanderer (Thomson to Goldsmith)', *ELH*, 77, 3 (2010), 665-687 (p 678).
[72] 'Creation's mildest charms are there combin'd.' (323)

'master', here, seems highly ambiguous since it is not clear whether the traveller is referring to the men who master nature, or whether he is referring to the political master(s) of Britain. This ambiguity is only partly resolved in the following lines:

Stern o'er each bosom reason holds her state.
With daring aims, irregularly great;
Pride in their port, defiance in their eye,
I see the lords of human kind pass by
Intent on high designs, a thoughtful band,
By forms unfashion'd, fresh from Nature's hand;
Fierce in their native hardiness of soul,
True to imagin'd right, above controul,
While even the peasant boasts these rights to scan,
And learns to venerate himself as man.[73]   (325-34)

At first sight, this rodomontade on British liberties is quite as fulsome as anything written by Thomson, but hints of doubt are sown with the epithets, 'irregularly' and 'imagined'. The narrator acknowledges that the British are the 'lords of human kind', while suggesting that this stewardship is not always wisely exercised.

The reasons for this sense of unease become clear in the following lines where the vaunted independence of the 'freeborn Englishman' is prized too highly:

That independence Britons prize too high,
Keeps man from man, and breaks the social tie;
The self dependent lordlings stand alone,

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[73] It is interesting to compare these lines with Bridget Keegan's comments on Woodhouse, a labouring poet whose works were also published in 1764: 'Woodhouse describes his relationship to a landscape that is both the site of class distinctions and a place where these divisions might be equalized. Woodhouse writes in 'An Elegy to William Shenstone':

Tho' no auspicious rent-rolls grace my line,
I boast the same original divine.
Tho' niggard fate with-held her sordid ore,
Yet liberal natures gave better store;
Whose influence early did my mind inspire
To read her works, and seek her mighty Sire.

Woodhouse's rights of access to the land are aesthetic not economic, bestowed on him by 'nature' and ultimately by God, who gives him these gifts presumably to increase his faith.' Bridget Keegan, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry, 1730-1837* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 47.

All claims that bind and sweeten life unknown . . .   (339-42)

Kaul says of these lines that:

> . . . they express a complex idea: a political value – independence, or Freedom – is seen to be the source of the loss of social ties, but there is a particular figure to be condemned — the self-dependent lordling — who is a recognizable socioeconomic type, the commercial magnate who lacks the ties of custom that once defined the life of the land.[74]

While Goldsmith's own political and social ideas may have been complex, the ways in which they are expressed by the narrator here are relatively simple. The rise of the lordling leads to factious ambitions (345-7) which, in turn, encourage combinations based entirely on wealth in place of 'duty, love and honour' (350) with the (probable) outcome that:

Where noble stems transmit the patriot flame,
Where kings have toil'd, and poets wrote for fame,
One sink of level avarice shall lie,
And scholars, soldiers, kings unhonour'd lie.   (357-60)

The general gloom invoked here is reminiscent of the close of *The Dunciad*, where the decay of society is inextricably linked with the decay of poetry. However, the specific linkage of kings and poets is peculiar to Goldsmith.

The poem quickly withdraws from this position when the narrator writes: 'Yet think not, thus when Freedom's ills I state,/I mean to flatter kings, or court the great' (361-2), arguing instead for a balanced constitution:

For just experience tells, in every soil,
That those who think must govern those that toil,
And all that freedom's highest aims can reach
Is but to lay proportion'd loads on each.   (371-4)

Britain, having lost that balance, has become a place governed by lordlings who control the government and the judiciary and who have extended their sway overseas 'where savage nations roam', and where they have 'Pillag'd from slaves to purchase slaves at home' (387-8).

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[74] Kaul, *Poems of Nation*, p. 115.

That this is an impassioned and personal point of view seems confirmed by the narrator's sudden shift from being an impersonal observer to a fraternal correspondent: 'Yes, brother, curse with me that baleful hour /When first ambition struck at regal power' (393-4). Although this could be interpreted as a condemnation of the attempts to limit George III's powers of prerogative, the use of the term 'first' suggests that he is regretting the English revolution, lending support to Donald Davie's assertion that:

> *The Traveller* is a fervent apologia for the monarchical form of government, taking the time-honoured ground that, since the unprivileged need a power to appeal to above the power of local privilege, the only such power conceivable is the power of the Monarch, elevated above all sectional interests. [75]

The poem then concludes with a description of depopulation, which is explored in greater depths in *The Deserted Village,* before retreating into a solitude which indirectly recalls the domestic bliss enjoyed by the narrator's brother. The final lines were written by Johnson and are, as was his wont, typically expressed in more generalizing terms:

How small, of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure.
Still to ourselves in every place consign'd,
Our own felicity we make or find:
With secret course, which no loud storms annoy,
Glides the smooth current of domestic joy.   (429-34)[76]

If *The Traveller* is full of unresolved contradictions, whether these are related to the uncertain choice of narrative voice or the relevant incoherence of Goldsmith's political and moral philosophy, at least some of these contradictions are resolved in *The Deserted Village.* Holmes & Szechi have observed that:

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[75] Donald Davie, 'Notes on Goldsmith's Politics', in *The Art of Oliver Goldsmith*, pp. 79-89; p. 84.

[76] Goldsmith's apparent failure to complete the poem may well indicate how uncertain he was about the appropriate tone of the close.

> [t]here was a strong 'moral economy' in Ireland, rooted in the traditional relationships between paternalistic landlords and deferential peasants even of different religious persuasions. Landlords who protected, aided and were hospitable to their tenants received their public respect and were consulted and obeyed by them.[77]

This was the society in which Goldsmith spent his formative years and there is evidence throughout his works that it served as a model for much of his political thought. However, the view that it was the dominant topos for *The Deserted Village* seems to have been largely an invention of those critics in the nineteenth century who followed Crabbe's refusal to acknowledge that Goldsmith had captured significant truths in his portrayal of the peasants' lives during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.[78] In fact, Goldsmith's manipulation of a dominant 'I' as narrator leads to a far more nuanced articulation of this vision than such criticism implies. However, as I shall be suggesting, it seems that in employing this narrative device, he may well have been working against his natural grain.

The Deserted Village (1770) has attracted more, and more varied, critical attention than *The Traveller.*[79] Johnson commented that 'Take him as a poet, his "Traveller" is a very fine performance; ay, and so is his "Deserted Village", were it not sometimes too much the echo of his "Traveller"', while Cowper observed that '[I] have read Goldsmith's Traveller and his Deserted Village, and am highly pleased with them both, as well for the manner in which they are executed, as for their tendency, and the lessons they inculcate.'[80] His contemporaries, therefore,

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[77] Holmes and Szechi, *The Age of Oligarchy*, p. 229.

[78] For amplification of this development, see Lutz: 'The most powerful, certainly the most influential, critique of Goldsmith's economic ideas, and the one that most lastingly damaged the reputation of "The Deserted Village" as a serious poem, is that of George Crabbe. His dismissive references to "The Deserted Village" are predicated on his acceptance of the fundamental separation of poetry from economics [following Adam Smith]. This acceptance leads Crabbe to attack Goldsmith for not respecting this separation and, at the same time, disables Crabbe's own response to the social injustice he so movingly describes in his work.' Alfred Lutz, 'The Politics of Reception: The Case of Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village"', *Studies in Philology,* 95, 2 (1998), 174-196, (p. 184). I have chosen the slightly contentious term 'peasants' following Neeson, who argues that, in the period preceding the heavy capitalisation of agriculture which transformed rural workers into labourers, there was a genuine peasant class. See Neeson, *Commoners.*

[79] *Collected Works,* vol. IV, pp. 271-304.

[80] *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed, by G. Birkbeck Hill, rev. by L.F.Powell), 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), vol. II, p. 236; W. Cowper, *The Letters and Prose Writings,* vol. II, p. 407.

recognised that both poems explored very similar themes and were broadly similar in the ways that Goldsmith treated these themes. For the modern reader, however, *The Deserted Village* is the more satisfying largely because Goldsmith maintains a relative consistency of tone throughout.[81] However, modern critical opinion seems to be divided on the extent to which Goldsmith played with his readers' expectations through his manipulation of the conventions associated with the georgic and the pastoral genres. Donna Landry makes the interesting point that the narrator argues that it was no longer possible 'for a poet to write a triumphant georgic poem, celebrating England's greatness through her agriculture and the recreational amenities of her countryside.'[82] However, the narrator does not so much assert that the georgic was no longer a viable genre as imply it through indirection. Depopulation inevitably leads to the loss of agricultural labourers so that the countryside is no longer a working countryside with the result that: '[i]t is part of Goldsmith's indictment of his age that at the centre of his poem is an aching void where Georgic might be.'[83] This 'aching void' is, as Fairer points out, partly compensated for by the use of pastoral, and the subsequent anthologizing of the pastoral sections in isolation meant that the poem's political argument could be largely ignored.[84] However, reading such extracts in isolation means ignoring the ways in which these pastorals are 'placed' and how they function as a counterpoint to the moral and political arguments.

The 'Dedication to Sir Joshua Reynolds' provides some signposts for directing us through the poem, particularly where he writes:

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[81] Quintana would dissent from this view. He writes: 'It is not a *cri de coeur* in the way that so many have assumed it to be. In certain passages we have entirely impersonal public speech, and at these points the couplets become pointed, assertive. The dominant tone is, of course, something quite different, for the greater part of the poem is personal in accent and highly emotional. But here the poet's purpose is not to find self-expression but rather, in the manner and according to the principles of rhetoric, to sway his audience. The poet's experience becomes ours; his feelings, his passions are communicated to us; it is we who become personally engaged.' *Oliver Goldsmith*, p. 136.

[82] Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside*, p. 120.

[83] Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 99.

[84] 'Those reviewers who comment on Goldsmith's attack on luxury do so only to question or condemn it. But this, they assert, does nothing to destroy the beauty of the poem, which resides, for them, in its "beauties" — in a series of affecting passages which they quote at length.' Barrell, *Poetry, Language and Politics,* p. 95.

> [B]ut I know you will object . . . that the depopulation it deplores is no where to be seen, and the disorders it laments are only to be found in the poet's own imagination. To this I can scarce make any other answer than that I sincerely believe what I have written. . . . In regretting the depopulation of the country, I inveigh against the increase of our luxuries; and here also I expect the shout of modern politicians against me.   (285; 15-20, 286; 1-3)

The qualification as to the veracity of Goldsmith's observations allows the reader room to treat the accounts of devastation as partly fictional while also underscoring the deep personal convictions of the poet.[85] Equally, the sense that Goldsmith is at odds with the perceived political conformities of his time reinforces the impression that the narrator is engaged in personal prophecy rather than public orthodoxy.[86]

Further evidence that the pastoral moments are intended to be fictional can be seen in the ways in which Goldsmith plays with time. Auburn is initially remembered as containing the 'seats of my youth' (6). This is a gesture towards the narrator's historicity, or 'real time', although it is time remembered through the eyes of childhood. The extended pastoral (113 – 236), which is intended to contrast with the woes of present time, can be read as a partly fictional representation of the narrator's childhood memories and also as a fictionalised past of supposed pastoral harmony:

   A time there was, ere England's griefs began,
When every rood of ground maintained its man;
For him light labour spread her wholesome store,
Just gave what life required, but gave no more.
His best companions, innocence and health;
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.   (57-62)

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[85] See Sebastian Mitchell, who argues that the dedication 'has the effect of conceding the weakness of the poet's case, and indicating that its conclusions are dependent upon emotional conviction and subjective judgement.' Sebastian Mitchell, 'Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*: Past, Present, and Future', *English,* 55 (2006), 123-139, p. 126). Of course, Goldsmith had already discussed the effects of rural depopulation in 'The Revolution in Low Life.'
[86] John Montague points out that the political implications of Goldsmith's portrayal of Auburn are too complex for their limited application: 'Whether the symbol of Auburn can support the tremendous burden of meaning the poem places on it is another matter; if sentimentality is a display of emotion in excess of the given facts, then *The Deserted Village* might justly be called a sentimental prophecy.' John Montague, 'The Sentimental Prophecy: A Study of *The Deserted Village*', in *The Art of Oliver Goldsmith*, pp. 90-106; p, 104.

While it might be tempting to assume that Goldsmith is here referring to a particular historical time, that impression is subtly undercut by the introductory words: 'A time there was . . .' The lack of specificity here suggests that the narrator is using the phrase as a rhetorical ploy of the same nature as the phrase 'once upon a time.' These three realisations of time are further complicated by Goldsmith's invocation of classical time in his reference to Virgil's *Eclogues*.[87] Thus, the poem drifts between mythical time, the classical time of the stern Roman soldier/farmer, childhood time and present time. These temporal references could be destabilizing, but in fact they are mediated through a poetic voice that is, to a large extent, consistent.

The qualification in my last sentence is necessary since I shall be arguing that Goldsmith, although adopting a poetics which brought the personal voice to greater prominence than had been typical earlier in the century, reveals very few intimate details which allow us to identify the narrator directly with Goldsmith the man.[88] Indeed, the poem's opening is a straightforward impersonal description and the narrator is not introduced until line 6:

SWEET AUBURN, loveliest village of the plain,
Where health and plenty cheared the labouring swain,
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,
And parting summer's lingering blooms delayed:
Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please . . .

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[87] R. M. Wardle suggests that ' . . . Goldsmith probably had in mind the classical ideal of cultivated retirement — Horace's Sabine farm .' R. M. Wardle, *Oliver Goldsmith* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1957), p. 203. While this is possible, it seems far more likely that he was imitating Virgil's *Eclogue* 1. The following lines from C. Day Lewis's translation capture the mood of *The Deserted Village* exactly:
But the rest of us must go from here and dispersed –
To Scythia, bone-dry Africa, the chalky spate of the Oxus,
Even to Britain – that place cut off at the very world's end.
Ah, when shall I see my native land again? After long years,
Or never? – see the turf dressed roof of my simple cottage,
And wandering gaze at the ears of corn that were all my kingdom?
To think of some godless soldier owning my well-farmed fallow,
A foreigner reaping these crops! , , ,
No more singing for me. No taking you to browse,
My little goats, on bitter willow and clover flower.
C. Day Lewis, *The Eclogues of Virgil* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963), p. 11.
[88] This, as I shall show in the following chapter, was to be Cowper's great achievement. In this respect, then, I concur with Vincent Newey: 'Significantly of its time and profoundly seminal, *The Deserted Village* was there also to be transcended. Cowper did this on a grand scale.'
Vincent Newey, 'Goldsmith's 'Pensive Plain': Re-viewing *the Deserted Village*', in *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth*, pp. 93-116; p. 114.

The suggestion that Auburn was the first to welcome spring and the last to say farewell to summer already suggests that Goldsmith was romanticising the village, and this impression tends to be confirmed by the precise sequencing of:

The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,
The never failing brook, the busy mill,
The decent church that topt the neighbouring hill,
The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,
For talking age and whispering lovers made.   (10-14)

This is not a visualised scene so much as a catalogue with appropriate epithets of what should appear in an ideal village.[89] However, Goldsmith proceeds to animate this scene in an interesting and unusual way. Rather than peopling it with an industrious peasantry, as would be the case in the georgic, his folk are at play

How often have I blest the coming day,
When toil remitting lent its turn to play,
And all the village train from labour free,
Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree,
While many a pastime circled in the shade,
The young contending as the old surveyed;   (15-20)[90]

The repetition of 'how often' — this is the third time the narrator uses it — recalls the ceaseless rolling of the seasons while also emphasising the juxtaposition of play with work. Lutz suggests that:

> [i]n its description of the Auburn of old, "The Deserted Village" outlines a precapitalistic economy that is based on the politically and economically independent and self-sufficient owner-occupier whose life revolved around the common. [91]

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[89] Commenting on these lines, Raymond William argues that 'the objects seem to dissolve, in what is really a self-regarding poetic exercise.' Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 76.

[90] 'Goldsmith disengaged the labourer from his 'proper' and 'natural' identity as a labourer, as a man born to toil, and suggested he could be as free to dispose of his time as other poets agreed only the rich man or the shepherd was free to do.' John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape. the Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 78

[91] Lutz, 'The Politics of Reception', p. 181.

What is unclear, though, is how far this is an idealised pre-lapsarian vision constructed deliberately to contrast with the evils of emergent agrarian capitalism, and how far it is a genuine representation of a remembered reality. However, the blurring of these distinctions is a rhetorical move that has been foreshadowed in the 'Dedication'. The author may 'sincerely believe' in what he describes, but the reader is at liberty to construe the descriptions as purely literary pastorals. The poem, thus, divides into three sections: the representation of a semi-mythical village containing stock characters from which the narrator has been excluded; the narrator's political explanation of why such a village can no longer exist; and further reflections on the long-term consequences for society of the new politics. The glue that holds these sections together is, necessarily, the narrator's voice and the success of the poem depends on the reader's view of the trustworthiness of this voice.

It is here that the oscillations between the personal and the public voice become crucially significant. In the opening section, as I have said, the village is seen through the eyes of a child, and the repetition of 'How often have I' confirms that this is a personal recollection. This is then followed by a description of the current, desolated village in which:

One only master grasps the whole domain,
And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain;
No more thy glassy brook reflects the day,
But choaked with sedges, works its weedy way.
Along thy glades, a solitary guest,
The hollow sounding bittern guards its nest;
Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies,
And tires their ecchoes with unvaried cries.
Sunk are thy bowers in shapeless ruin all,
And the long grass o'ertops the mouldering wall;
And trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand,
Far, far away, thy children leave the land.   (39-50)

If we take this as part visual (and aural) description and part moral description, then the parallelism between this and the opening scene underwrites the consistency of the narrator-observer. In reverse order, the cot and the farm have become 'mouldering walls', the brook no longer serves the 'busy mill', and the bowers have collapsed. Significantly missing is the 'decent church', and its

absence confirms the loss of social cohesion and moral guidance that are apparent in the opening section.

However, these observations are interrupted by the somewhat *ex-cathedra* statements (51–62) which include the couplet: 'But a bold peasantry, their country's pride, /When once destroyed, can never be supplied.' The particularities of the observer are replaced by the stern moralizings of the public speaker but the shift in tone can only be sustained through the poetic continuity of rhyme and rhythm, in that readers are rhetorically focused on the closures created by the heroic couplet's rhyme scheme and are less likely to notice such shifts between couplets.[92]

From these public pronouncements, the narrator reverts to a further brief description of the desolation surrounding him, before focusing on his feelings:

  In all my wanderings round this world of care,
In all my griefs – and GOD has given my share –
I still had hopes my latest hours to crown,
Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down;   (83-6)

The first two lines are curiously self-indulgent and have the effect of sentimentalizing what follows, and this feeling is maintained throughout the references to his desired deathbed (which is subtly emphasised by the tolling effects of the constant repetitions throughout this passage). We learn that he wanted to show off his book learning to the 'swains'; that he wanted to attract evening groups who would listen to his stories; and that, finally, he wanted to 'die at home at last' (96). This is a poignant image of the deracinated solitary wanderer that is likely to excite sympathy in the reader. However, it gives no indication of the narrator's social status within the 'organic' community. Indeed, the jokey boasting suggests that he wishes himself to become a 'lordling', albeit an intellectual one. This is, perhaps, an unconscious desire but it has echoes later in the poem. If we concede that the narrator wants to take his place as the

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[92] Although I am not suggesting that Goldsmith is being contradictory here, the kinds of shift in tone are not unlike the kinds of shift in argument analysed in John Barrell and Harriet Guest, 'The uses of Contradiction: Pope's "Epistle to Bathurst"', in Barrell, *Poetry, Language and Politics,* pp. 121-143.

(respected) poet of the village, then the loss of that possibility partly helps explain why Goldsmith believes that poetry has fled the land.

However, the narrator's failure to be reincorporated into village life, whether as poet or simply as an 'elder', suggests very real *lacunae* in the poem's political arguments. If the original village is taken to be the model of social and moral cohesion, and representative of other villages in earlier times, then it is difficult to see what role the state might have in unifying such villages into a nation. Further, while the industry within the village may well have supplied the peasants with all that they required, the politer arts of learning are more or less absent. The parson, who reminds one of Goldsmith's brother, lives in a 'modest mansion' and:

A man he was, to all the country dear,
And passing rich with forty pounds a year;
Remote from towns he ran his godly race,
Nor ere had changed, nor wish'd to change his place;
Unpractised he to fawn, or seek for power,
By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour;
Far other aims his heart had learned to prize,
More skilled to raise the wretched than to rise.   (141-8)

Although this is a sympathetic portrait, its chief function is to condemn ecclesiastical ambition. There is, for example, no indication that the Christian virtues and doctrines that the parson practises were almost certainly learned outside the village.[93] Similarly, the village schoolmaster is treated as a figure of affectionate fun:

Yet he was kind, or if severe in aught,
The love he bore to learning was in fault;
The village all declared how much he knew;
'Twas certain he could write and cypher too;
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
And even the story ran that he could gauge.   (205-10)

However much learning such a schoolmaster might be able to impart, it is unlikely that it would be sufficient to educate his charges on matters beyond the bounds of the village. Similarly, the portrait of the alehouse, 'Where grey-beard

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[93] Oliver's brother, Henry, the dedicatee of *The Traveller*, won a scholarship to Trinity College, Dublin.

mirth and smiling toil retired,/Where village statesmen talked,with looks profound,/And news much older than their ale went round' (222-4), reflects both geographical and historical stasis.

Such portraits can, of course, be subsumed into the purely literary pastoral rather than seen as representations of childhood memories, but they are inadequate as ideals for mid-eighteenth-century society. Indeed, they lead to a revisionary reading best offered by Vincent Newey, in which the village is perceived as a very conservative society: '*The Deserted Village* goes fundamentally for stasis. Auburn is a meritocracy where there is no rising through merit.'[94]

The paradox which Newey identifies is fundamental to Goldsmith's pastoral. Both in the pastoral childhood memories, and in the more literary pastoral I have identified, there is plenty of play but very little work and therefore no space for development or change. As such, pastoral becomes an inadequate bulwark against the forces of change which are ostensibly sweeping it, and the village, away. The tensions implicit in the opposing views that pastoral is an appropriate genre with which to represent the past life of the village, but cannot represent the depredations of encroaching capitalism, are displayed through the opposite trajectories Goldsmith adopts in describing the village as it was and the consequences of the new order.

At the beginning of the poem, we are offered a portrait of the village as a socially cohesive unit in which each member has his or her own place. This cohesion, however, has been destroyed by 'One only master' (39). The contrast between individualism and group solidarity is therefore established rhetorically very early on. However, the master is subsequently described as being part of 'trade's unfeeling train' (63), so, although he may be an individual engaging in particular acts of despoliation, he is part of a larger force.[95]

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[94] Newey, 'Goldsmith's "Pensive Plain"',p. 101.
[95] Interestingly, Goldsmith here appears to be giving credence to the popular belief that members of the merchant classes were buying up the estates of the old landed gentry and introducing new and alien values, something that is not borne out by the detailed study of social mobility in Laurence Stone and J. C. F. Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880*, Abridged edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

Interestingly, we then move back to the narrator's frustrated longings for retirement to 'these humble bowers' (86). This gives Goldsmith the opportunity to expand on the imagined delights and social hierarchy of the village pastoral but not before a pathetic portrait of:

. . . yon widowed, solitary thing,
That feebly bends beside the plashy spring;
She, wretched matron, forced, in age, for bread,
To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread,
To pick her wintry faggot from the thorn,
To seek her nightly shed, and weep till morn;
She only left of all the harmless train,
The sad historian of the pensive plain.   (129-36)

The insistence on the loneliness, 'widowed, solitary', 'she only left' introduces a new kind of individualism but one that is forced on the recipient rather than chosen. Even more telling, though, is the introduction of the affective epithets, 'feebly', 'wretched', 'wintry' 'sad' and the verb, 'weep', which makes the contrast between the 'unfeeling train' of trade with that of the 'harmless train' of the villagers particularly poignant.

The portraits of the parson and the schoolmaster are self-consciously literary and no doubt function to illustrate the kinds of stories that the estranged narrator wished to tell his audience. However, they also serve to give a context in which the peasant, the farmer, the barber, the woodman, the smith and the maid (241–9) pursue their activities. I would, however, argue that the repeated use of the generic pronoun here serves less to individualise these characters than to render them as typical members of the village community.

Such an impression tends to be confirmed by the narrator's description of 'the man of wealth and pride' (275). Whereas earlier we were presented with the 'one master', here we are offered a generic type who 'Indignant spurns the cottage from the green' (282). And it is at this stage that the economic argument comes to the fore again:

Around the world each needful product flies,
For all the luxuries the world supplies.
While thus the land adorned for pleasure all

In barren splendour feebly waits the fall.   (283-6)

The choice of the epithet 'needful' suggests that the village is no longer able to supply the country's wants, and that the social organisation integral to village life has become redundant, leading to its breakdown and the loss of Eden (cf., 'fall').[96]

The consequences of depopulation are then described in a series of vignettes. Initially describing the ills of city life (309–36), the narrator presents us with a series of individual ills caused by its social fragmentation, culminating in the ruin of the country maid. However, he continues by describing in some detail the individual woes of those who are forced to emigrate. Sebastian Mitchell claims that:

> the principal target is a particular form of middle-class social and economic deviancy in which the merchant does not observe the rules of conduct for somebody of his station. He has earned too much money through questionable means, has, no doubt, been coarsened by colonial dealings, and now presents himself as though he were an aristocrat without adopting the necessary degree of paternalism towards those further down the social scale.[97]

The focus of these lines, however, is less on the errant landlord than on the effects of emigration, and the rhetorical force with which the narrator relates the anguish of leave-taking and the break-up of the family, and the individuation of the characters (363–84) suggests a more panoramic vision. Certainly, there is rural poverty brought on by the 'one master', but there is also urban factionalism caused by trade's 'unfeeling train' and emigration caused by the love of luxury. And these ills are the direct result of the desire for luxury:

   O luxury! thou curst by heaven's decree,
How ill exchanged are things like these for thee!
How do thy potions with insidious joy,

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[96] Suvir Kaul makes the interesting point that: 'Goldsmith's canvas teems with domestic detail, but its tensions, and its most creative urgencies, derive from his apprehensions about the progress of empire and its domestic discontents. One possible motivation for this alarm might well be Goldsmith's Anglo-Irish origins.' Suvir Kaul, 'On Intersections between Empire, Colony, Nation, and Province in Eighteenth-Century British Poetry', *Eighteenth-Century Novel,* 6-7 (2009), 127-157, (pp. 129-30).
[97] Mitchell, 'Oliver Goldsmith's the Deserted Village: Past, Present, and Future', p. 128.

Diffuse their pleasures only to destroy!
Kingdoms by thee, to sickly greatness grown,
Boast of a florid vigour not their own.   (385-90)

Thus, we have been led in one direction from the integrated social milieu of the village to the breaking of social bonds and the increasing individualism that this enforces on the villager, and in the other from the single landowner in the sway of 'trade's unfeeling train' to the personification of a dominant luxury with which the villager, through economic necessity, is as complicit as the landowner.

A similar counterpoint is evident in the narrator's stance in relation to the various episodes. As observer of both the rural pleasures and devastations of Auburn, he uses a high proportion of first person pronouns and possessives and verbs of perception. In his descriptions of the dispossessed, he relies less on such devices, replacing them with sympathetic epithets. For example, the abandoned maid is a 'poor houseless shivering female' (326), while some of the inhabitants of Auburn:

 . . . To distant climes, a dreary scene,
Where half the convex world intrudes between,
Through torrid tracts with fainting steps they go,
Where wild Altama murmurs to their woe.   (341-4)

In the first instance, the epithets apply directly to the woman, whereas in the second they are largely transferred to the hostile world which they pace 'with fainting steps'. And finally, in his moral and political arguments, he adopts a much more direct and public voice as seen in the passage above (385-88).

These arguments are not offered as opinions, but as self-evident truths and their prophetic nature is confirmed by the use of exclamation marks. The tonal shifts have the initial effect of drawing the readers closer to the narrator at first by implicating them in the pleasures and ills described, then by inviting them to sympathise with the landless peasants. Finally, having gained our trust, we are more likely to concur with his judgements.[98]

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[98] Caryn Chaden has warned against transferring our own reading backwards to the eighteenth century: 'From a modern reader's perspective, Goldsmith's first-hand knowledge of the details he describes and his willingness to insert himself into the poem with his repeated uses of "I" may

The particular political arguments that Goldsmith deploys are largely negative ones in that they do not offer any solution to the decay he perceives as infecting the country. Lutz has suggested that:

> "The Deserted Village" demonstrates that the pastoral and the georgic cannot describe economic or political realities in any meaningful way. It investigates and then subverts the ideological function of both genres. Yet because they are exposed as ideological, as lacking a representational relationship to the present, the poem can refigure them as utopian standards against which the present must be measured. The georgic and especially the pastoral comment on history and do not mask or displace it.[99]

At first sight, this seems a persuasive argument. However, by treating the poem as a purely literary construct, Lutz overlooks the fact that it is clearly also a political poem with a particular argument. The whole point of the village is that it is *deserted*, and this is because the forces of history have rendered the pastoral ideal untenable. A further point is that Goldsmith has disallowed a utopian interpretation by inserting his narrator into the pastoral. Typically in the pastorals of the early eighteenth century, the countryside was seen from without, and even in those pastoral sections of longer poems, the narrator was only fleetingly present. Here, however, the narrator is present both as a child and as an imagined old man. The generic modulation into a pastoral stance, then, may well represent a childhood memory or a fond hope and be therefore semi-fictional, but it is not strictly utopian since it has a tenuous existence. The closure, or rather the failure to end the poem, needs to be read in this light.

In the sections describing the fickleness of the city and the hardships of exile, the narrator is manifestly telling other people's stories. Although he may show due sympathy with their plight, he does not obviously share it directly. However, the final section incorporates a curious twist:

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provide reassuring grounds for the political argument. For eighteenth-century readers, however, such an approach would have appeared quite novel.' Caryn Chaden, 'Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*, and George Crabbe, *The Village*', in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, pp. 303-315, p. 309. The fact that it was relatively novel, however, does not vitiate the argument that contemporary readers may well have been persuaded precisely because of these rhetorical moves.

[99]Alfred Lutz, '"The Deserted Village" and the Politics of Genre', *Modern Language Quarterly: A Journal of Literary History,* 55, 2 (1994), 149-168, (p. 167).

Even now the devastation is begun,
And half the business of destruction done;
Even now, methinks, as pondering here I stand,
I see the rural virtues leave the land.   (395-8)

Thought and observation are combined, but they are attributed to a particular 'I'
who is slightly removed from the scene. This *persona* then proceeds to list the
departing virtues, all of which had been earlier enumerated in the pastoral
sections of the poem:

Contented toil and hospitable care,
And kind connubial tenderness, are there;
And piety with wishes placed above,
And steady loyalty, and faithful love.   (403-6)

The punctuation at the end of these four lines renders the interpretation of the
next two lines increasingly difficult: 'And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest
maid, /Still first to fly where sensual joys invade'. These lines are not obviously
additive, although poetry is evidently intended to be associated with the 'rural
virtues'. The poem then takes another odd turn. Rather than expand on the
relationship that is supposed to exist between poetry and the rural virtues, the
narrator discusses its relationship with him:

Dear charming nymph, neglected and decried,
My shame in crowds, my solitary pride.
Thou source of all my bliss, and all my woe,
That found'st me poor at first, and keep'st me so;   (411-4)

Presumably, the 'shame in crowds' is caused by the narrator's failure to find a
public voice that is widely respected, while the solitariness of his pride is linked
to the growing individualism that he deplores.

Although it is possible to construct an interpretation of these lines by tracing the
ways in which Goldsmith deploys the personal *persona* throughout the poem, or
by relating them to his other pronouncements on the relation between society and
poetry, on their own they are deeply puzzling. At one level, the deracination of
poetry is seen as equivalent to the depopulation of the countryside but they are
treated as parallel rather than consequential. As Williams cogently observes:

> We need not doubt the warmth of Goldsmith's feelings about the men driven from their village: that connection is definite. The structure becomes ambiguous only when this shared feeling is extended to memory and imagination, for what takes over then, in language and idea, is a different pressure: the social history of the writer.[100]

This, then, was the problem for Goldsmith. He wanted to write about the same kinds of grand themes that had occupied Pope, Dyer and Thomson (without necessarily espousing the same viewpoints) but, because society was undergoing a transformation with the advance of a capitalist economy, and because the relationships between the author and his audience had been altered by this transformation, he ended up, almost in spite of himself, largely writing about himself and his feelings.[101] Further, it explains why he was unable to complete his two great poems without Johnson's help. In both cases, his own inspiration peters out on an elegiac but personal note and cannot find the generalising moral which will bind the poems together.[102] *The Deserted Village*'s success, then, depends on the reader ignoring the ambivalences I have identified while admiring the particular portraits and the great skill in versification.

My discussions of Gray and Goldsmith, then, have tended to show that whereas Gray consciously sought to fashion a personal voice with which he could construct a persuasive account of British history that could account for the moral failings and inequalities that he deplored in contemporary society, Goldsmith found himself engaged in a similar task almost in spite of himself. Both poets necessarily drew on the poetic conventions and resources of their period, but both poets, in their different ways, found such conventions inadequate. I have suggested that Gray's failure arose in part because he lacked an audience that fully understood what he was trying to achieve in the *Elegy*. In this chapter, I

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[100] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 78.

[101] 'Goldsmith's work lays bare the conflicts that emerged out of changing social conditions within which and against which poets and poetry had to exist and define themselves. The isolation of the speakers in both of his major poems is a response to these changes. This isolation, though it is one of the most striking features of both '"The Traveller" and '"The Deserted Village", has none of the positive dimensions it acquires in Gray's work and in later Romantic poetry. His inability to offer poetic resolutions to these conflicts and his refusal of resolutions offered by others are a result of both the rejection in his major poems of purely aesthetic solutions for social problems and his own perplexity.' Lutz, 'Goldsmith on Burke and Gray', p. 227.

[102] Sadly, Johnson's quiescent moral — 'Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain; /Teach him that states of native strength possessed, /Though very poor, may still be very blest' — emphasises the failure of Goldsmith to offer any solution to the problems he had identified.

have attempted to show how Goldsmith's relative failure arose from his inability to reconcile the traditional discursive concerns of pastoral and georgic to the changing social world that he wished to describe and criticise. My next chapter will show how Cowper managed to resolve these conflicts so as to construct a poetic *persona* that could selectively draw on the older poetic modes to express moral truths while also being self-referential.

CHAPTER 5

The achieved self in Cowper's *The Task.*

'"To hear those beautiful lines which have frequently almost driven me wild,
pronounced with such impenetrable calmness, such dreadful indifference!" —
"He would certainly have done more justice to simple and elegant prose. I
thought so at the time; but you *would* give him Cowper."
Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811)[1]

The previous two chapters have explored the ways in which Gray and Goldsmith constructed a 'moral self' to act as the principal narrator of, respectively, the *Elegy* and *The Deserted Village*. I have argued that this 'moral self' replaced the more impersonal narrators deployed by such poets as Pope, Thomson and Johnson, and have indicated some of the social, philosophical and aesthetic pressures which contributed to this change. Further, I have suggested that Gray consciously sought ways of constructing and incorporating this new kind of voice in the *Elegy*, whereas Goldsmith adopted it almost reluctantly, and certainly with a nostalgic regret that the older forms (and particularly pastoral) no longer seemed capable of representing what he perceived to be a disintegrating social harmony. I further claim that the transition between these two different kinds of voice was only fitfully achieved by Gray and Goldsmith. In this chapter, I aim to show how such a transition was fully realised in Cowper's later poetry and, most particularly, in *The Task* (1785).[2]

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[1] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. by J. Kinsley and C. Lamont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 14. The opening lines are those of Marianne, who is the epitome of sensibility in the novel. Cowper was clearly sympathetic with the sentiments of sensibility, as will be seen throughout this chapter. However, to call him a poet 'of sensibility' seems to me too reductive.
[2] *The Poems of William Cowper*, ed. by J. D. Baird and C. Ryskamp 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-95), Vol. II., Book 1 ('The Sofa'), pp. 117- 36; Book II ('The Time-Piece'), pp. 139-60; Book III ('The Garden'), pp. 163-84; Book IV ('The Winter Evening'), pp. 187-207; Book V ('The Winter Morning Walk'), pp. 211-34; Book VI ('The Winter Walk at Noon'), pp. 237-63. Vincent Newey notes the similarities between Cowper, Goldsmith and Gray, commenting that: 'What is truly apparent in the later part of the century is a transference of the proper sphere and subject of creative activity from society and human life in general to the individual, often (in poetry at any rate) the author himself. Goldsmith, Gray and Cowper present a much more moral view of the world than Pope, Swift and Prior, but it is, precisely, a view from a distance, of a world all but lost to art. By and large their poetry is an expression, and sometimes a conscious exploration, of their own condition.' Vincent Newey, *Cowper's Poetry: A Critical Study and Reassessment* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982), p. 47. While agreeing in large part with Newey, I would take issue that Pope *et al.* had a less moral view of the world. That Cowper admired both Gray and Goldsmith is apparent from his letters, W. Cowper, *Letters,* see esp., vol. I, pp. 122, 203; vol. 2, p. 407.

In many respects, this trajectory towards a fully confident poetic 'self' was in stark contrast to the reverse journey of his psyche into depression and despair. However, my primary concern here will be with the ways in which Cowper constructed this 'self' as a significant feature of his poetic discourse rather than a consideration of the biographical events and eventual psychoses which undoubtedly contributed to his intense self-obsessions although, where appropriate, I shall take into account his personal circumstances and particularly those that relate to the cult of sensibility that was a marked feature of the literature of the period.[3]

A certain preoccupation with the narrator's relationships to himself and the ostensible subjects of his poetry can be seen can be seen in his earliest poems. In 'The Symptom of Love' (published posthumously), Cowper constructs a persona that has a curiously tentative relationship with his addressee.

Would my Delia know if I love, let her take
My last thought at night, and the first when I wake;
When my prayers and best wishes preferr'd for her sake.

Let her guess what I muse on, when rambling alone
I stride o'er the stubble each day with my gun,
Never ready to shoot till the covey is flown.[4]   (1-6)

The opening conditional clause, by choosing 'would' rather than 'should', has the effect of distancing the speaker from the intended consequences. And this impression is reinforced by the unrealities of the injunctions: Delia (and we) know that she cannot be privy to the writer's last and first thoughts. The second stanza maintains this distance by choosing the verb 'guess'. Cowper, the poet, wishes to affirm his love for Delia, but it is she who has to exert the mental effort to realise his love. The telling image with which Cowper concludes these lines gives added weight to this impression of diffidence (and distance): the hunter

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[3] The phenomenon of 'sensibility' will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.
[4] Cowper, *Poems*, vol. I., p. 36.

(lover), with his (presumably loaded) gun, striding over the fields in pursuit of a prey that he has no intention of capturing (or, in this case, of killing).[5]

The poem concludes with the lines:

And lastly, when summon'd to drink to my flame,
Let her guess why I never once mention her name,
Though herself and the woman I love are *the same*.   (19-21)

Again, there is a peculiar sense of removal and presence by invoking a wider, but unspecified, social world which becomes the spectator and auditor — and it is not clear whether Delia is part of this world, though, if not, it is equally unclear how she can 'guess' — to an act which is never fully realised (i.e., he does not mention her name). The title, of course, indicates that these various activities are all 'symptoms' of the love felt by the narrator but the responsibility for recognising such symptoms is cast entirely on Delia who is an absent partner in the unrealised transaction. The focus, then, is entirely on the narrator.

This poem, however slight, points to a set of contradictions over presence and absence which are evident in his early poems and which are only partially resolved in his later work. A similar contradiction occurs in an untitled poem that begins:

This evening, Delia, you and I
Have managed most delightfully,
   For with a frown we parted;
Having contrived some trifle that
We both may be much troubled at,
   And sadly disconcerted.[6]   (1-5)

Written in the style of Matthew Prior, this poem might reasonably be expected by readers to come to a light-hearted conclusion.[7] The closing stanza opens with the lines:

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[5] Cowper's mention of hunting establishes the narrator as a gentleman (see above Chap. 2.3). However, his reluctance to kill the birds prefigures Cowper's later attitude to animals as noted by Landry: 'In 1785 Cowper made hunting and cruelty to animals synonymous. . . . . And so, for Cowper the proper countryman is not a countryman, born and bred, not even a 'jovial' one, but rather a refugee from urban corruption, like himself, seeking solace in a garden, a greenhouse, country walks and the companionship of tame animals.' *The Invention of the Countryside*, p. 120.
[6] Cowper, *Poems,* vol. I., p. 30.

Happy! when we but seem t'endure
A little pain, then find a cure
  By double joy requited; (19-21)

The image of two lovers semi-deliberately causing an argument so that they can enjoy the pleasures of making-up is delightfully constructed and the choice of 'double joy' hints at a resolution that will be mutually pleasurable. However, the final lines introduce a darker tone:

For friendship, like a sever'd bone,
Improves and gains a stronger tone
  When aptly reunited. (12-4)

Newey argues that:

> [a]lthough we still feel that the poem belongs to a genre concerned with the rituals, refinements, and nuances of behaviour, Cowper shifts the main focus squarely onto the *experience* of love and what it means for the being of the individuals concerned.[8]

However, the shift is less concerned with the experience of 'the individuals concerned' than with the feelings of narrator. The pain from a broken bone can only be felt by the person suffering from it. In this case, then, it is at least arguable that Cowper has internalised the potential suffering in such a way that Delia ceases to be a part of it.

These early poems are best seen as apprentice work and the rhetorical gap between the apparent inclusive address to the narrator's lover and the rather more solipsistic implications derived from their conclusions might seem trivial in the context of his overall *oeuvre*. However, evidence from his more substantial early works suggests that similar rhetorical gaps were recurrent features that troubled Cowper and were not fully resolved until the production of *The Task*.

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[7] '[Cowper's] early songs . . . are experiments in the vein of . . . Matthew Prior.' Ibid., Introduction, p. xii.
[8] Newey, *Cowper's Poetry*, p. 215.

The 'Moral Satires' appeared in 1782.[9] In some respects, the themes he explored in the satires are very similar to those of *The Task*, but the ways in which they are articulated are radically different. The overarching discourse that connects the different poems is a particular form of Christianity. This is clearly apparent in some of the titles he gives to the pieces: 'Truth', 'Hope', 'Charity', but there are other discourses which are equally pressing. In particular, he spends considerable time deploring the state of England and constructing a history that is both social and intellectual and which accounts for Britain's moral turpitude.[10]

These latter themes are particularly evident in 'Table Talk'.[11] Constructed as a conversation between two unnamed interlocutors, *A* functions as a rhetorical device to allow *B* to expand on the distinction between liberty and licence. This is vividly explored in the lines describing the Gordon Riots of 1780:

Liberty blush'd and hung her drooping head,
Beheld their progress with the deepest dread,
Blush'd that effects like these she should produce,
Worse than the deeds of galley-slaves broke loose.
She loses in such storms her very name,
And fierce licentiousness should bear the blame. (324-329)

Something slightly odd seems to be happening here. Personified 'Liberty' seems to accept responsibility for the 'effects like these' that she has produced which are '[w]orse than the deeds of galley-slaves broke loose', although the narrator appears to absolve her from blame on the grounds that the effects are, in fact, the result of 'licentiousness'. The relationship between 'Liberty' and 'licentiousness' is left obscure. On the one hand, they may be two sides of the same coin. On the other, and the absence of capitalisation for 'licentiousness' argues against this, it could be that Cowper intended two different personifications which are only tangentially related.

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[9] They were published under the general title of *Poems by William Cowper, of the Inner Temple, Esq.* Cowper, *Poems*, vol. I, pp. 240-438. There is no clear evidence that Cowper referred to them as 'Moral Epistles', but he clearly regarded them as containing common themes which gave them a unity. See, ibid., 'Introduction', pp. xxiii-v.

[10] And it is predominantly England he refers to, although he does mention the 'three kingdoms' in 'Table Talk', Cowper, *Poems,* vol. I., pp. 240-61, (85). It is, of course, likely that Cowper is using 'England' as a metonym for 'Britain' given that the centres of political power were located in London.

[11] Although the last to be composed, this was intended to 'stand as an introduction to its predecessors', Ibid., Introduction, p. xxiv.

This ambiguity is never fully resolved, and the narrator moves on to discuss the likely causes of such social unrest, chief of which is the absence of true patriots following the death of Chatham (339), and concludes by offering the reader a doomsday scenario:

> Poor England! thou art a devoted deer,
> Beset with ev'ry ill but that of fear.
> The nations hunt; all mark thee for a prey,
> They swarm around thee, and thou standst at bay.
> Undaunted still, though wearied and perplex'd,
> Once Chatham sav'd thee, but who saves thee next? (362-7)

The image of the hunted deer (which recurs more tellingly in *The Task*) is unconvincing for, although it may be true that Britain was under considerable threat during this period, it is difficult to conceive of the country as a benign animal that would otherwise be grazing peacefully.

Indeed, later in the volume, Cowper portrays an England that is positively rapacious:

> Hast thou, though suckl'd at fair freedom's breast,
> Exported slav'ry to the conquer'd East,
> Pull'd down the tyrants India serv'd with dread,
> And rais'd thyself, a greater, in their stead,
> Gone thither arm'd and hungry, returned full,
> Fed from the richest veins of the Mogul,
> A despot big with pow'r obtain'd by wealth,
> And that obtain'd by rapine and by stealth? ('Expostulation, 364-371)[12]

In this passage, he is anticipating his later anti-slavery poems.[13] However, there is a marked shift in the tone of these later poems. While the sincerity of the passage from 'Expostulation' is not in doubt, Cowper's narrator remains impersonal and discusses the evils of slavery in largely abstract terms and *quasi* personifications. England is a 'thou' engaged in 'rapine' and 'stealth' who has become a 'greater tyrant' than the Indian 'Mogul' and the genuine moral outrage is somewhat blunted by these generalisations. In the later poems, Cowper's

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[12] Ibid., pp. 297-316.
[13] These have been collected in Cowper, *Poems,* vol. III.

attack on slavery is far more powerful, not least because he has fully absorbed the tenets of sensibility. In particular, he engages in a sympathetic identification with the slave (and, ironically, with the retiring slave master) in 'The Negro's Complaint', 'Sweet Meat has Sour Sauce: or, The Slave-Trader in the Dumps' and 'The Morning Dream'.[14] He also adopts a 'homely' rhetorical style that is shocking in the ways in which the slave is characterised as a ballad-singing human being comparable to any ballad-singing Briton.

'The Negro's Complaint', for example, is to be sung 'To the tune of "Hosier's Ghost" or "As near Porto Bello lying"'. By using this device, Cowper ensures that the singer adopts the *persona* of the 'I' narrator and this act of identification confirms that the sentiment of lines 15-16: 'Skins may differ, but Affection/Dwells in White and Black the same' is a shared sentiment. Similarly, in 'The Morning Dream, To the tune of "Tweedside"', the singer's identity is merged with the narrator's identity so that the angelic vision in search of 'Liberty' for the slaves is the singer's vision as much as the narrator's vision. The poem's conclusion thus becomes an inclusive vision rather than simply a vision of the abolitionists:

That Britannia, renown'd o'er the waves
  For the hatred she ever has shown
To the black-sceptered rulers of Slaves —
  Resolves to have *none of her own.* (45-8)

In his discussion of evangelicalism, Boyd Hilton comments:

> In their own eyes *they* more than anyone cared about improving society here and now. They were motivated to improve it by their belief that Christ would not return until the world was fit to receive him. However, they conceived of improvement in moral rather than material terms, which explains why the great public cause to which they devoted themselves was anti-slavery.[15]

It is true that Cowper does not strictly engage with the economic consequences of abolitionism in these two poems. However, in 'Sweet Meat Has Sour Sauce:

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[14] Ibid., pp. 13-18. For more information on the development of the concept of sympathy see above, Chap. 2. 2.

[15] Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, & Dangerous People: England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 184.

Or, The Slave-Trader in the Dumps', he introduces a slave-trader's reaction to the possibility that he is going to lose his trade to the abolitionists. The narrator is ostensibly inviting us to feel sympathy with him for his potential loss. However, the jaunty ballad in which he bewails his misfortune completely undercuts his supposed misery.[16] Also, the gruesome catalogue of the instruments of torture that he is trying to sell off is necessarily weighed against the suffering that these instruments cause to the slaves, yet further alienating the reader. Thus, when he complains:

But ah! if in vain I have studied an art
So gainful to me, all boasting apart,
I think it will break my compassionate heart,
                    Which nobody, &c.

For oh! how it enters my soul like an awl!
This pity, which some people self-pity call,
Is sure the most heart-piercing pity of all,
                    Which nobody can, &c. (33- 40)

the reader's potential sympathies have been completely alienated. Robert Mitchell has argued that:

> The poem hints at some sort of calculus by means of which the reader might adjudicate between claims for sympathy . . . but it does not fully illuminate the ground of such a sympathetic schema. It also leaves open the troubling possibility that all pity is simply self-pity, and that one ought to deny any domestication of the other's pain. As a result, while Cowper's poem ensures that readers will not take seriously the slave trader's appeal for his sufferings to enter their souls, it provides no clear-cut rule for when such domestication is desirable, or even if it is possible.[17]

However, this is to misconceive the purpose of Cowper's poem. Cowper may be deploying some of the tropes of sensibility's appeal to sympathetic identification with others' suffering, but he is also showing quite clearly why the slaver's appeal for such sympathy cannot be allowed. While the poem may hint at some

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[16] The editors point out that the intended tune for this ballad was never noted. Cowper, *Poems*, vol. III, p. 285.

[17] Robert E. Mitchell, '"The soul that dreams it shares the power it feels so well": The Politics of Sympathy in the Abolitionist Verse of Williams and Yearsley', *Romanticism on the Net: An Electronic Journal Devoted to Romantic Studies*, 29-30 (2003)**,** http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2003/v/n29-30/007719ar.html?vue=integral. [accessed 7 September, 2012], Para 12.

of the instabilities in the cult of sensibility, its primary function is not to engage in philosophical reflection so much as to insist on the crocodile tears of the anti-abolitionists. In the context of Cowper's vision as a whole, then, these poems are obviously interesting. They illustrate his abhorrence of a particularly brutal institution and they demonstrate his skill in exploiting the contemporary concepts of sympathy while placing these concerns firmly in the realm of popular culture. However, because they are focussed on a single issue and are clearly programmatic in intention, they cannot represent the more complex and sometimes contradictory issues of morality and social justice that he explores in his longer poems, and, most particularly, in *The Task.*

I have suggested, in my brief discussion of 'Table Talk' and 'Expostulation', that Cowper's vision of Britain was potentially contradictory. These contradictions are also present in his representations of British history and the relationships between these representations and the current state of the kingdom. In 'Expostulation', the beneficent effects of the Roman invasion are extolled:

He sow'd the seeds of order where he went,
Improv'd thee far beyond his own intent,
And, while he rul'd thee by the sword alone,
Made thee at last a warrior like his own. (488-91)

In so far as this invokes an ideology, it reminds one of the ancient image of virtue based on arms and agriculture.[18] However, the image of a sturdy, independent warrior nation is at odds with the cooperative virtues he associates with the commercial ideal offered in 'Charity':[19]

  Again – the band of commerce was design'd
T'associate all the branches of mankind,
And if a boundless plenty be the robe,

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[18] See J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), esp., pp. 147-8.

[19] Cowper, *Poems,* vol. I, pp. 337-53. However, this contradiction was, as Pocock (see note above) reminds us, a common feature of eighteenth-century political thought: '[Because this ideal] was never overthrown or abandoned . . . it had to be recognised that the virtue of commercial and cultivated man was never complete, his freedom and independence never devoid of the elements of corruption. No theory of human progress could be constructed which did not carry the negative implication that progress was at the same time decay, that culture entailed some loss of freedom and virtue, that what multiplied human capacities also fractured the unity of human personality.'

Trade is the golden girdle of the globe;. (83-6)

Indeed, one of the happy results of this burgeoning trade is the encouragement it gives to the development of the arts: 'These are the gifts of art, and art thrives most/Where commerce has enrich'd the busy coast;' (112-3)[20] These lines, however, sit oddly with the claim in 'Table Talk' (642-90) that the poetic arts have withered since the death of Pope, even though 'Wit now and then, struck smartly, shows a spark,/Sufficient to redeem the modern race . . .'

I have concentrated on these perceived contradictions because the way Cowper has constructed his voice requires him to declaim rather than contemplate. Whereas Newey, discussing the Moral Satires', states that '[a]s with much of Cowper's best poetry, his moral attitudes emerge naturally during an act of contemplation and response in which the reader is allowed to share', I would suggest that Cowper's choice of method involves the narrator in constructing statements that are moral 'givens' leaving the reader little space for reflection.[21] 'Table Talk', for example, has been ostensibly constructed as a conversation in which the first of the participants is used to introduce the topics which are then analysed by the second participant. This, of course, allows Cowper to move between themes without having to show exactly how they are related, but it also means that there is no obvious contemplation since the answers are driven by the (rhetorical) questions. The opening lines of the other satires are equally revealing, since most of them involve either a simple statement, a question, or, in one case, an invocation.[22] The stage has, as it were, been set for what ensues which, given the constantly recurring Christian sentiments, takes the form of a sermon and, as with most sermons, is addressed to an audience that requires edification and instruction, rather than critical reflection. The contradictions that I have referred to tend, therefore, to be subsumed within the wider discourse and are rendered less noticeable.

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[20] See also, the lines in 'Expostulation' when, after praising the bounty of England's commerce, he comments: 'let the Muse look round/ From East to West, no sorrow can be found,/Or only what in cottages confin'd,,/Sighs unrgarded to the passing wind . . .' (27-30). Cowper, *Poems*, vol. I, pp. 297-8. The force of 'only' here seems strangely dismissive.

[21] Newey, *Cowper's Poetry*, p. 59.

[22] Cowper, *Poems*, vol. I, 'The Progress of Error', pp. 262-279.

It is also possible that Cowper's arguments were constrained by his choice of heroic couplets. Clearly, the 'Moral Satires' owe a huge debt to Pope, and there are some notable occasions when this debt is repaid by similar effects. For example, his portrait of the hypocritical prude in 'Truth' is magnificent in the way it shifts focus from the outward appearance of the woman to her own self-regard.[23] However, the most telling moment occurs when Cowper inserts the figure of the boy:

The shiv'ring urchin, bending as he goes,
With slipshod heels, and dew drop at his nose,
His predecessors coat advanc'd to wear,
Which future pages are yet doom'd to share,
Carries her bible tuck'd beneath his arm,
And hides his hands to keep his fingers warm. (143-9)

What would otherwise have been a relatively simple descriptive statement becomes a dramatised act in which the consequences of the hypocrite's behaviour are made manifest. Similarly, his portrait of the statesman, lounging in his country retreat, snaps shut in an almost Swiftian manner as the statesman 'Flies to the levee, and receiv'd with grace,/Kneels, kisses hands, and shines again in place.' (479-80)[24]

Cowper, however, acknowledges that Pope's influence has not always been a force for good. In 'Table Talk', for example, having praised Pope, Cowper continues:

But he (his musical finesse was such,
So nice his ear, so delicate his touch)
Made poetry a mere mechanic art,
And ev'ry warbler has his tune by heart. (652-55)[25]

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[23] Ibid., pp. 280-96, (131-164).
[24] Ibid., 'Retirement', pp. 378-98, (365-480).
[25] Ibid., p. 258. See, also, his letter to Unwin (1782) on Pope: 'He was certainly a mechanical maker of verses, and in every line he ever wrote we see indubitable marks of the most indefatigable Industry and Labour. . . . With the unwearied application of a plodding Flemish painter who draws a Shrimp with the most minute exactness, he had all the genius of one of the first Masters.' Cowper, *Letters,* vol. 2, p. 3.

Indeed, even Cowper's inspiration could desert him, leading to the kind of 'mechanic art' that occurs in the couplet '*A.* Are we then left — *B.* Not wholly in the dark,/Wit now and then, struck smartly, shows a spark . . .' (662-3) The truncation of the question and the interruption seem to serve two purely instrumental functions here: the first being to move the topic on, and the second to achieve a rhyme. They are hardly examples of 'wit' 'struck smartly'.

That Cowper was not entirely happy with rhyme is suggested by his comments in a letter in which he observes:

> To make verse speak the language of prose, without being prosaic, to marshall the words of it in such an order, as they might naturally take in falling from the lips of an extemporary speaker, yet without meanness; harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rhyme, is one of the most arduous tasks a poet can undertake.[26]

Cowper's concerns here appear to anticipate those of Wordsworth in his 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads.* However, his desire to avoid 'meanness' suggests that he still adheres to the concept of decorum as advocated by Johnson in his criticisms of Milton's *Lycidas*.[27] At this stage in his poetic career, then, while accepting the supremacy of rhyme as a poetic device, he acknowledges that its choice involved 'arduous' selections. Ultimately, he was to reject rhyme in favour of blank verse partly because he found that the heroic couplet, with its tendency to draw attention to itself by anticipating the coming rhyme, while well suited to formal argument and the articulation of antithetical points of view, was less amenable to the more conversational, almost Shaftesburyan, discourse that

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[26] Ibid., Cowper, *Letters,* vol. 2, p. 10. Writing to Thurlow in August 1791, he expresses dissatisfaction with the heroic couplet, although not with the constraints imposed by rhyming: 'Long before I thought of commencing poet myself, I have complain'd and have heard others complain of the wearisomeness of such [grave poems of extreme length]. Not that I suppose that tædium the effect of the rhime [sic] itself, but rather of the perpetual recurrence of the same pause and cadence, unavoidable in the English couplet.' Ibid., vol. 3, p. 562. Rothstein, no doubt with passages such as this in mind, comments: 'Many eighteenth-century critics . . . argued that the couplet paid too much for the exactness with which it could position each word and line. For them, the couplet, with its four-beat line pattern and its repetitive line closure, made the author's control damagingly visible.' Rothstein, *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Poetry 1660-1780*, p. 64.

[27] For fuller discussion of these points, see the chapters on Gray and Goldsmith above.

he adopted for *The Task,* where he aimed to persuade his readers by cumulative discussion rather than logical demonstration.[28]

Before leaving the 'Moral Satires', it is worth considering some passages which anticipate this later poem, and in particular, those passages in which he constructs a seemingly more personal narrator. Hints of the personal are suggested by two of the titles: 'Conversation' and 'Retirement'.[29] However, throughout the satires there are moments when Cowper appears to withdraw from the public sphere and enter into more private contemplation. The first of these occurs in 'Table Talk' when the speaker writes:

   B. I know the mind that feels indeed the fire
The muse imparts, and can command the lyre,
Acts with a force, and kindles with a zeal,
Whate'er the theme, that others never feel. (480-3)[30]

The 'I' of these lines is clearly speaker *B*, but the actual referent is unclear. While *B* could, ostensibly, be talking about himself, the use of the definite article in 'the mind' hints that he may be referring to some other person, or to poets in general. Given that no other person is mentioned, the implication is that the referent is the poet. This impression is reinforced by the curious contrast in the use of the verb 'feel'. On the one hand, readers are invited to recognise the inspiration that is 'fire-like' while also being told that they can never have such feelings. Although slight, there is a hint of the themes of withdrawal that were to haunt Cowper's later poetry. Something similar occurs in 'The Progress of Error', 'None but an author knows an author's cares,/Or fancy's fondness for the child she bears.' (516-7) Again, we are led to believe that this is self-referential since, if only authors can know these 'cares' and we, as readers, are clearly not

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[28] Of course, for various reasons that will be discussed in due course, the influence of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Thomson's *The Seasons* was equally important.

[29] 'Table Talk' could be interpreted as private, although there are clear evidences that Cowper was thinking of the kind of talk that occurred in the gentlemen's clubs of the period (cf., 151). Cowper, *Poems*, vol. I, p. 245.

[30] Ibid., p. 254. The construction 'speaker writes' is deliberate and intended to point up another of the ambiguities inherent in this form. We, as readers, know that these words were never spoken even though they are presented to us as a record of a conversation. One minor effect of this is to put the reader at two removes from the words on the page, thereby making them seem even more oracular in form.

authors, then the author here is presumably the author of the poem. And yet, there is also a subtle hint at inclusiveness in the figurative use of 'child' since such feelings are common to most parents.[31]

This evocation of sympathy, and yet withdrawal from it, is also present in 'Hope':[32]

   If ever thou hast felt another's pain,
If ever when he sigh'd, hast sigh'd again,
If ever on thine eye-lid stood the tear
That pity had engender'd, drop one here. (674-7)

And yet the tale that Cowper retails is more ambiguous than these lines appear to announce. Rather than relating the story of a man who has fallen into poverty or disease, the story is about a fun-loving man who realises too late that he has ignored the dictates of 'God's holy word.' (706). Of course, these lines, addressed to 'immortal truth' (663), are inviting sympathy for the trifler's life. However, Cowper's readers might reasonably expect some direct, rather than implied, moral criticism of the man's life. This invitation to elicit sympathy suggests, then, that personal feeling becomes the dominant theme, even though Cowper was consciously offering moral instruction to the world at large.

'Conversation' and 'Retirement' are particularly interesting poems about the tensions between the public and the private. In 'Conversation', Cowper is preoccupied with what makes for polite discourse. As with so much of his poetry, the central themes involve a rejection of social flippancy and a guide to holy living. The former of these is manifested through some excellent character sketches of the 'types' he particularly dislikes. The latter, although often in the form of direct admonishment, also characterises his own behaviour as some kind of social exemplum. For this reason, he is far more obviously present in the poem. The opening is revealing:[33]

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[31] There is also something odd about the change of gender here. Later, he refers to the author as 'he' (522). In some of the other Satires, Cowper bewails that learning is becoming increasingly effeminate, and it may be that he was subconsciously referring to this. See Andrew Elfenbein on the issue of effeminacy: Andrew Elfenbein, 'Cowper's Task and the Anxieties of Femininity', *Eighteenth-Century Life.,* 13, 1 (1989), 1-17, (p 5).
[32] Cowper, *Poems,* vol. I, pp. 317-36.
[33] Ibid., p. 354-77.

Though nature weigh our talents, and dispense
To ev'ry man his modicum of sense,
And Conversation in its better part,
May be esteemed a gift and not an art,
Yet much depends, as in the tiller's toil,
On culture, and the sowing of the soil.
Words learn'd by rote a parrot may rehearse,
But talking is not always to converse. (1-8)

The intermixture of images and the choice of language establish the tone of the ensuing discourse. The claim that 'nature 'weigh' our talents recalls the parable of the prodigal son. However, the reference to nature is extended into the image of the 'tiller' who depends on 'culture', thereby linking art and work. At this stage, however, the words are spoken anonymously. A few lines later, though, Cowper inserts himself directly into the poem:

   Ye pow'rs who rule the tongue, if such there are,
And make colloquial happiness your care,
Preserve me from the thing I dread and hate,
A duel in the form of a debate . . .   (81-4)

The choice of the word 'colloquial' is interesting since it points towards the themes of domestic happiness that will become dominant in *The Task*. However, it is also worth noting that he attributes the feelings directly to himself. Although it may be that there is an element of hyperbole in 'dread and hate', he continues this self-reference a few lines later with the more prosaic (and domestic) lines, 'But sedentary weavers of long tales,/Give me the fidgets and my patience fails.' (207-8) The diction here is truly 'colloquial' and is a significant shift from the diction of the earlier satires.

'Retirement' ends with the lines:

   Me poetry (or rather notes that aim
Feebly and vainly at poetic fame)
Employs, shut out from more important views,
Fast by the banks of the slow-winding Ouse,
Content, if thus sequester'd I may raise
A monitor's, though not a poet's praise,
And while I teach an art too little known,
To close life wisely, may not waste my own. (801-8)[34]

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[34] Ibid., pp. 378-398.

The three themes of the poem are subtly interwoven: Cowper's ambition to be a famous poet; his desire that his poetry should offer moral instruction; and his love of solitude in a rural setting. These themes had been apparent, to differing degrees, in his earlier satires but whereas in 'Hope'[35], for example, he had portrayed nature as a pastoral representing almost Edenic bliss (39-68) that was available to all of mankind, in 'Retirement' he introduces a rather different version of pastoral. Different portraits of stock types are shown withdrawing from the world in pursuit of rural happiness. The poet (187-218), the lover (219-78), the melancholic patient (279-364), the statesman (365-480), the man of business (481-558) and the impecunious youth (559-74), all seek the balm of the countryside for their various reasons, but all they find is a post-lapsarian wilderness. It is not that the beauties of nature are absent, but that the seekers after peace are corrupted by their failure to identify and worship the God that created such beauties. The one possible exception is the patient. Whereas the other characters are rebuked (either explicitly, as with the man of business, or implicitly, as with the statesman), the melancholic is treated as deserving sympathy:

This is a sight for pity to peruse,
'Till she resemble faintly what she views,
'Till sympathy contract a kindred pain,
Pierced with the woes that she laments in vain.
This of all maladies that man infest,
Claims most compassion, and receives the least . . . (297-302)[36]

There is clear evidence that Cowper intended this to be a self-portrait, although it is revealing that he nowhere employs the first person pronoun, and for this reason the portrait sits oddly with the other more public portraits .[37] But it also hints at the development of his later poetry where the personal *persona* is more fully

[35] Ibid., pp. 317-336.
[36] The appeal for sympathy here is interesting in the light of Lamb's observations on Shaftesbury and Hutcheson (among others): 'for they would argue that sympathy is unlikely to succeed if the person suffering is overwhelmed by passions, unseasonably moved and indistinct, or if the person sympathizing is so far invested in the passions on show as to lose the sense of agency.' Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy*, p. 77. It may well be for these reasons that the melancholic, so overwhelmed by his feelings of God's desertion, 'Claims most compassion but receives the least.'
[37] See the reference to Heberden (279).

interwoven into the pastoral and georgic scenes, and the observed public life generally appears as an inevitable concomitant of the working countryside.

In this review of Cowper's earlier poetry, I have indicated three areas which seem to me problematic. At the level of discourse, there are contradictions in his depictions of the growth of commerce. At times, he appears to applaud the ways in which a flourishing economy fostered the growth of the arts; at other times, he deplores the trivia and foppish behaviour which increasing prosperity brought in its train. These contradictions are, perhaps, inevitable given that his primary intention was to encourage a godly way of living since, in his eyes, man was born in sin and therefore any kind of social organisation was subject to the debilitating effects of corrupted humanity. However, these contradictions are brought into a sharper focus because of the verse form which he employed. Heroic couplets are ideal for making public declamations in that they draw attention to themselves, and in so far as Cowper was constructing his 'Moral Satires' as quasi-sermons, they are rhetorically apt.[38] However, it is clear that he was also engaging in something more meditative and for this he needed a less formal kind of versification. And finally, his forays into pastoral are compromised by his delight in portraying the beneficent effects of nature and his regret that, at least for most people, nature was enjoyed as a distraction from the other more pressing concerns of everyday life rather than as a token of God's goodness to man. Pastoral, therefore, could no longer perform one of its traditional functions as representing the state of the nation but, at least for Cowper, became something more personal as a way of signifying his relation to the divine.

Before considering *The Task* (1785) in some detail, a brief consideration of 'The Cast-away' (1799) and 'Yardley Oak' (1792) will help demonstrate some of the ways in which Cowper overcame the problems referred to above, and will also

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[38] That Cowper intended his Satires to serve as moral instruction is evident from his letter to Newton (18 February 1781): 'Now and then I put on the Garb of a philosopher, and take the Opportunity that disguise procures me, to drop a word in favor [sic] of Religion.' Cowper, *Letters,* vol. 1, p, 444. See also, pp. 490, 497, 512, where he asserts the religious intent of 'Truth', 'Charity' ('I have writ Charity, not for popularity, but as well as I could, in hopes to do good') and 'Retirement'.

establish a context in which his major achievement in *The Task* can be measured.[39]

James Sambrook has observed that 'The Cast-away' is written in the same street ballad metre as 'No more shall hapless Celia's ears' which, on the face of it, would seem an odd choice.[40] I have suggested above that Cowper's choice of the ballad metre for his anti-slavery poems has the effect of rendering their sentiments common property rather than the sentiments of a particular partisan group. It is possible that something similar is intended here in that the reader is invited to consider how the narrator's specific sufferings may be the common lot of man insofar as he is alienated from God through sin. A similar iambic metre (albeit in quatrains rather than sestets) is employed in his 'Olney Hymns', another form of communal engagement with God. Thus, it is possible that Cowper was (sub)consciously recalling his earlier work and choosing a metrical form appropriate to a particular Christian discourse and applying it to his narrative of a drowning sailor. If this is the case, then the Christian discourse, which is an essential element of the poem, is firmly established from the opening.

While this may be the controlling discourse, Cowper skilfully combines it with similar personal and political discourses to those he had employed in the 'Moral Satires'. The poem opens:

Obscurest night involved the sky,
  Th'Atlantic billows roar'd,
When such a destin'd wretch as I
  Wash'd headlong from on board
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
His floating home for ever left. (1-6)

The foregrounding of the storm and the delay in introducing the clausal grammatical subject clearly establish the context in which the drama is to be played out. But the sentence construction is contorted in such a way as to make it ambiguous as to the actual subject. 'Such a destin'd wretch as I' suggests, at first

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[39] Cowper, *Poems,* vol. III, pp. 214-6; 77-83.
[40] *William Cowper: The Task*, p. 316.

reading, that 'I' is the grammatical subject and only in the last line is this ambiguity resolved. The effect of this is to give a grammatical warrant to the identification of the narrator with the sailor which is then held in suspense throughout the poem. The closing lines, thus, come as no surprise since the inclusive 'we' has been fully established in the opening lines:

No voice divine the storm ally'd,
  No light propitious shone,
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
  We perish'd, each, alone;
But I, beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd in deeper gulphs than he. (61-6)

What is a surprise, however, are the ways in which Cowper now distinguishes between the two sufferers. The metrical effect of line 64, with its stress on 'each', makes it no longer inclusive but comparative, thereby also re-characterising the storms as of a different kind. One result of this is to leave readers with two tragic stories, with both of which they may sympathise, but which are both individualised. In particular, the suffering of the narrator is highly personalised in such a way that we, as readers, are held slightly at arm's length.[41]

It is in the narrative that Cowper addresses the political concerns to which I have referred, although here in a very muted way. The underlying discourse is that of patriotism, as in the line, 'No braver Chief could Albion boast'. The praise of Anson and the use of the term 'Albion' both recall Cowper's patriotic lines in his

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[41] In this respect, I disagree with Newey who argues that '"The Castaway", then, operates on the same three levels that often, though never so overtly, intersect in Cowper: "phenomenal" – the level of narrative, story, "described event"; authorial psycho-drama – the process of self-contemplation and the contemplation of personal history; "universalization" – the level at which the specific events and subjective drama of mind take on general human significance.' Newey, *Cowper's Poetry*, p. 306. Unlike such poets as Wordsworth and Coleridge, however, Cowper's 'subjective drama of mind' in fact fails to take on 'general human significance' however much we may sympathise with it. Diane Buie adopts a more ambivalent position when she argues that '[a]lthough the subject matter fluctuates between the initial 'I' of the poet, the 'destin'd wretch', and the 'we' of the crew, the poet included, it returns to the familiar egotistical 'I' of Cowper, who suffers more than any of the others because he has been abandoned not only be his friends but also by God. Read in the context of Baxter and Clifford [writers on religious melancholia] the language of the despairing and isolated individual in much of Cowper's poetry becomes increasingly difficult to accept as genuine experience.' Diane Buie, 'William Cowper: A Religious Melancholic?' *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 36, 1 (2013), 104-119 (p. 117). This argument seems to me equally misconceived in that it implies that a writer who draws on previous representations (i.e., 'imitations') of an experience is necessarily being insincere.

earlier poems and in *The Task*.[42] Nevertheless, it is significant that the action and the participants are all located at sea and that the despair which the narrator depicts can no longer be treated as the result of the evil doings of his fellow countrymen as in some of the earlier poems. Indeed, Cowper goes out of his way to enumerate the acts of charity which the crew performed on behalf of their drowning shipmate.

It would seem, then, that in this, the last of his poems, Cowper had effectively withdrawn from the world, and that his poetic observations no longer had an obvious social moral purpose. This tendency is apparent, though to a lesser extent, in 'Yardley Oak'.[43] Again, the overarching discourse is that of Christianity, but the personal and the political also have a role to play. The Christian discourse is most obviously apparent in his description of Adam (167-84). The ending, however, is deeply problematic:

 . . . History, not wanted yet,
Lean'd on her elbow, watching Time, whose course
Eventful should supply her with a theme;

The personifications of history and time, and their activities in these lines, make the poem itself ambiguous. Here, we are observing something that is outside time, but the description is couched in the simple past.[44] The poem, then, is necessarily temporal (and is read in real time). And it is these ambiguities that Cowper plays with throughout the work, at times reflecting on his own sojourn through life and at times on the life of the oak, while all the while he is trying (and failing) to identify with the tree.

One of the more interesting features is the different trajectory Cowper offers to the tree and to the man. As narrator, he starts with a reflection on his acquaintance with the oak. The oak, however, is given a forward trajectory from

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[42] Cf. Book II, (206-9): 'England, with all thy faults, I love thee still/My country! and while yet a nook is left/Where English minds, and manners may be found,/Shall be constrain'd to love thee.' Cowper, *Poems,* vol. II, pp. 111-263.

[43] All quotations are taken from the version in Sambrook, ed., *The Task and Selected Other Poems*, pp. 306-13. This incorporates some lines that do not appear in the first edition, printed by Hayley in 1804, but which Baird and Ryskamp include as a footnote in their edition.

[44] It would be relatively simple to argue that Cowper is contrasting Edenic bliss with post-lapsarian corruption, but the poem is too highly wrought for such an uncomplicated interpretation.

a potential 'bawble (17), to a seedling 'Swelling, with vegetative force instinct' (34), and then, adopting the first use of his personification of 'Time':

    Time made thee what thou wast, King of the woods;
And Time hath made thee what thou art, a cave
For owls to roost in. (50-53)

However, it would seem that Cowper was reluctant to leave this as simple chronology, since a few lines later he reiterates the history but ends it with a meditative reflection:

    While thus through all the stages thou has push'd
Of treeship, first a seedling hid in grass,
Then twig, then sapling, and, as century rolled
Slow after century, a giant bulk
Of girth enormous, with moss-cushion'd root
Upheav'd above the soil, and sides imboss'd
With prominent wens globose, till at last
The rottenness which time is charged to inflict
On other mighty ones, found also Thee.   (60-8)

In the final two lines, then, the narrator re-introduces the symbolic relationship that has been established between humanity (as represented by the 'I' of line 3) and the oak.

Humanity, however, has a reverse trajectory starting with the life of the narrator and regressing first to the Druids, then to the ancient Greeks and finally to Adam. But there is also a more intimate history which is explored through the imagined (but ultimately unsatisfied) relationship between the narrator and the tree. This is established in a variety of ways. In the opening lines, the poem identifies the tree as the narrator's brother who had been present at his birth. The narrator is then defined very precisely as having achieved 'threescore winters' (3) which has the effect of 'personalising' him. The 'I' thus created has all the sentient properties of a real human being, capable of the kinds of sensuous appreciation expressed through the frequent use of vivid visual imagery and the kinds of philosophical reflection employed in:

    So Fancy dreams. Disprove it, if ye can,
Ye Reas'ners broad awake, whose busy searce
Of argument, employ'd too oft amiss,

Sifts half the pleasures of short life away.   (29-32)

However, the narrator's identification with the oak is never fully realised. Rather, the oak is used as a spur to his reflections. Thus, he imagines (forlornly) interrogating the tree:

 . . . I would not curious ask
The Future, best unknown, but at thy mouth
Inquisitive, the less ambiguous Past.   (42-4)

Of these lines, Adam Rounce has commented that:

> Cowper shares with these poems [Gray's *Elegy* and Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*] the central problem of unifying the ambiguities of the past through writing — the aged tree cannot simply be an Edenic metaphor, once the train of meditation has begun. Thus, the 'less ambiguous past' is itself made ambiguous by Cowper, not least because of the conviction with which he defines the qualities of nature as those of necessary decay.[45]

Given that Cowper actively invokes Eden at the end of the poem as standing outside time, it is clear that the oak was never intended to be an Edenic metaphor. However, his reference to the 'less ambiguous past' should be read in the context of his observation to Newton (6 March 1782): 'I find the Politics of times past far more intelligible than those of the present. Time has thrown light upon what was obscure, and decided what was ambiguous . . .'[46] The past is 'less ambiguous' precisely because it casts light on the causes of natural decay whether these are seen as political or inherent in nature. There are, I believe, reasons for this which I shall subsequently explore with relation to *The Task*, but this brief foray into a sub-political discourse indicates that, while Cowper may feel he would be capable of understanding the past were the oak capable of explaining and correcting history, he would not be able to construct a coherent ideology that he could project into the future so as to predict the likely outcomes of present actions. And it is for this reason that he falls back on the Christian discourse of 'necessary decay'.

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[45]Adam Rounce, 'Cowper's Ends.', in *Romanticism and Millenarianism*, ed. by Tim Fulford (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 23-36, p. 29.
[46] Cowper, *Letters,* vol. 2, p. 30.

Indeed, it is this discourse that separates him from the oak and that constructs it as ambivalent both as symbol and as metaphor, something which is clearly established early in the poem when the narrator states:

> . . . Could a mind imbued
> With truth from heav'n created thing adore,
> I might with rev'rence kneel and worship Thee. (6-8)

Here, the Christian discourse very obviously militates against the oak as having a soul or spirit. And this distance is insisted on in the lines where the narrator is most tempted to identify with the tree:

>   But since, although well-qualified by age
> To teach, no spirit dwells in thee, nor voice
> May be expected from thee, seated here
> On thy distorted root, with hearers none
> Or prompter, save the scene, I will perform
> Myself the oracle, and will discourse
> In my own ear such matter as I may. (137-43)

It is here that the personal becomes dominant. The oak having been characterised largely negatively, the narrator is forced back on to his own resources, having to act as both speaker and auditor. The 'matter' that the narrator chooses to 'discourse' involves reflections on the life of Adam and how he was spared:

> the penalties of dull
> Minority. No tutor charg'd his hand
> With the thought-tracing quill, or task'd his mind
> With problems. History, not wanted yet,
> Lean'd on her elbow, watching Time, whose course
> Eventful should supply her with a theme; (179-84)

I have commented above on the grammatical ambiguities of the final lines and I am not persuaded that placing these lines in context fully resolves such ambiguities. If Adam is outside History, then he can hardly serve as a model for mortal man. However, this apparent paradox is partially resolved in the cancelled lines immediately before this conclusion in which Cowper reflects on his own life and compares it to the life of the oak:

Thou, like myself, hast stage by stage attain'd
Life's wintry bourn; thou, after many years,
I after few; but few or many prove
A span in retrospect; for I can touch
With my least finger's end my own decease
And with extended thumb my natal hour,
And hadst thou also skill in measurement
As I, the Past would seem as short to thee. (144-51)

In these lines, 'Time', and by implication, 'History' become the dominant themes. The narrator's own life is sensuously created through the use of vivid tactile imagery and the deliberate pun, 'span', refers both to the length of time allotted to the tree and to the narrator and to the girth of the tree. Further, the supremacy of man is insisted on with the reference to his intellectual powers of reasoning and of mensuration. Both are part of God's creation, but, as the narrator has suggested in the previous lines, man has the advantage because he is aware of a God who stands outside time. So, it would seem that however much Cowper loved the oak as an enduring part of his life, and however closely he was able to describe its physical attributes and imagine its life and even use it as a potential muse (cf., 56-9)[47], ultimately he was separated from it in that he was a sentient being in a fallen world whereas the oak was simply a natural inhabitant of the phenomenal world.[48]

Newey claims that:

> [Yardley Oak] is not primarily about the external world at all, but the poet's momentary and personal experience. It is addressed to no audience; rather it is something to be overheard. It is a new kind of lyric – peculiarly modern in its deliberate subjectivity, which verges at times on cryptic solipsism yet testifies to the sheer creative resilience of the self in isolation.[49]

Certainly, some kind of transition is taking place. While it is clear that Cowper is drawing on the empirical models of perception advocated by Locke and Hume,

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[47] '. . . thou hast outlived/Thy popularity, and art become/ (Unless verse rescues thee awhile) a thing/Forgotten as the foliage of thy youth.'
[48] Sitter argues that 'the Georgic is located in the fallen world of corruption and death, the changing seasons and the necessity of human labour' (p. 276) and that Yardley Oak is an example of a late Georgic.' Sitter, 'Political, Satirical, Didactic and Lyric Poetry (II)', in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, pp. 287-315; p. 285-6. Although this is persuasive, there is no obvious mention of the necessity of human labour.
[49] Newey, *Cowper's Poetry*, p. 44.

there is a new phenomenological focus on the ways in which his perceptions of the oak are organised so that they are treated neither as the sensuous properties of the thing perceived nor, simply, as signs of God's creation, but as spurs to reflection on transitory life. Ultimately, these reflections may lead to a belief in God, but the route taken is other than that used by poets such as Pope and Thomson.[50] However, if the focus is essentially phenomenological, readers are invited to consider whose mind is the subject of such reflections, and there is compelling evidence that the 'I' no longer refers to some disembodied, or impersonal, narrator but to an embodied narrator who can be conflated with the author.

I have so far identified three features which are predominant in Cowper's poetry: a confused and ambiguous political discourse, a dominant Christian discourse, and a markedly personal discourse. In my discussion of his earlier poetry, I have suggested that these three elements were not thoroughly fused, while my discussion of these last poems indicates that the political discourse more or less disappears, or is subsumed into the Christian discourse, whereas the personal discourse is foregrounded through the use of the personal pronoun frequently fronting clauses of perception or reflection. Further, I have suggested that this intense concentration on the perceiving and reflecting self allows, and even encourages, readers to identify the 'I' as referring to the author himself. However, these later poems signal Cowper's desire to withdraw from the world and its immediate controversies whereas in his great 'bridging' poem between these two extremes, *The Task*, he engages with the world (although as an observer rather than an active participant), with himself and with Christian doctrine.

In the 'Advertisement', Cowper describes both the genesis and the development of the poem:

> A lady, fond of blank verse, demanded a poem of that kind from the author, and gave him the SOFA for a subject. He obeyed; and having much leisure,

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[50] That Cowper clearly admired both Pope and Thomson is not in doubt. However, he rejected their deistical tendencies by insisting that Christ's mortality and subsequent resurrection ensured His continuing presence in the world. See, particularly, Book VI, 'The Winter Walk at Noon', (198-261). Cowper, *Poems*, vol. II, pp. 242-3.

connected another subject with it; and pursuing the train of thought to which his situation and turn of mind led him, brought forth at length, instead of the trifle which he at first intended, a serious affair — a Volume.[51]

Implicit in this assertion is the claim that he is appealing to prevalent theories of associationism.[52] Nevertheless, it is clear that Cowper was not randomly addressing such themes as they occurred for, in a letter to Lady Hesketh (28 July 1788) he states unequivocally that:

I am conscious at least myself of having laboured much in the arrangement of my matter, and of having given to the several parts of every book of the Task, as well as to each poem in the first volume, that sort of slight connection which poetry demands; for in poetry (except professedly of the didactic kind) a logical precision would be stiff, pedantic, and ridiculous.[53]

However, in spite of this assertion, the 'slight connection[s]' that he may have identified to himself are not always apparent to his readers. Martin Priestman points out that *The Task* is 'fundamentally . . . not 'about' a topic but structured round a mental process', but by placing the poem in the public domain, Cowper is encouraging the reader to engage in a dialogue with it.'[54] Seen from this perspective, the 'slight connection[s]' resemble the kinds of connections that occur in everyday conversation, whereby the interlocutors will discuss one topic until they feel it is exhausted, only to return to it when prompted by some observation in a later topic that recalls the earlier discussion.[55] My approach, then, will be to identify some of these recurring moments both to establish how they are constructed, and to show how the steady accretion of such recurring moments manages to achieve a satisfactory whole.

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[51] Ibid., p. 113.

[52] It seems to me unlikely that Cowper had any particular philosopher in mind. Locke, for example, developed his theory as a way of explaining how false ideas developed (Locke, *Essay*, vol. 1, Book 11, Chap. XXX111, pp. 335-341.), whereas Hartley's more extensive discussion led inexorably to a form of determinism which was difficult to reconcile with Christianity, although there may be psychological similarities between determinism and predeterminism that appealed subconsciously to Cowper.

[53] Cowper, *Letters*, vol.3, p. 196.

[54] Martin Priestman, *Cowper's Task: Structure and Influence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 14.

[55] Fulford takes a similar view but expands it in ways that will also be discussed below: 'It is not just Cowper's conversational verse that introduces a new note into eighteenth-century poetry. The closeness of observation, from the shifting viewpoint of a walker, renders nature as a fluid experience, in which time as well as space is organized subjectively, from the consciousness of an individual who finds himself changing as the landscape through which he travels changes.', Fulford, '"Nature" Poetry', p. 121.

In Book II, 'The Time-Piece' (285-325), Cowper reflects on his past career as a poet and his delights in composing poetry, before regretting the fact that his verse has probably not achieved its desired effect. He opens with lines that recall 'The Progress of Error':

> There is a pleasure in poetic pains
> Which only poets know. The shifts and turns,
> Th'expedients and inventions multiform
> To which the mind resorts, in chace of terms
> Though apt, yet coy, and difficult to win – (285-9)

As in the previous poem, we are aware that Cowper is speaking in *propria persona*. Although the sentiment has been generalised to all poets, we are aware of the self-reference in part because of the diction which has been carefully chosen to demonstrate his particular rhythmic skills. The move from single syllables ('shifts', 'turns'), which may be deemed demotic, to the multisyllabic repetition and Miltonic inversion of noun and adjective ('inventions multiform'), and the final line with its double caesura, point to a self-awareness that is intended to impress the reader. However, there is also the tacit introduction to a theme which recurs throughout the poem: that of work. Composing poetry may be pleasurable, but it is also hard work. What is slightly odd is that Cowper does not employ the first person pronoun in the lines that follow. The worker is characterised as both general ('the poet's mind' (298)) and as a specific male ('And force them sit 'till he has pencil'd off/A faithful likeness of the forms he views;'(292-3))[56]. To this extent, then, Cowper would seem to be allying himself with all poets so that the criticisms of the lazy readers who are 'Fastidious, or else listless, or perhaps/Aware of nothing arduous in a task/They never undertook' (306-8) refer to a bad habit that is endemic rather than specific to critics of his own poetry. When he does introduce himself directly into the poem, he insists on his serious intent, while noting that his efforts may have been wasted:

> . . . studious of song,
> And yet ambitious not to sing in vain,

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[56] The analogy with drawing here is interesting and, to some extent, coincides with his verbal portraits of the countryside.

I would not trifle merely, though the world
Be loudest in their praise who do no more.
Yet what can satire, whether grave or gay? (311-15)

In these lines, Cowper is signalling a withdrawal from his earlier role as a satirist while constructing a space within which readers can engage with his new poetic address. He is also, of course, re-asserting his primary intention of modelling and encouraging moral behaviour.

This impression is reinforced with the opening of Book III, 'The Garden':

As one who long in thickets and in brakes
Entangled, winds now this way and now that
His devious course uncertain, seeking home;
Or having long in miry ways been foiled
And sore discomfited, from slough to slough
Plunging, and half despairing of escape,
If chance at length he find a green-swerd smooth
And faithful to the foot, his spirits rise,
He chirrups brisk his ear-erecting steed,
And winds his way with pleasure and with ease;
So I, designing other themes, and call'd
T'adorn the Sofa with eulogium due,
To tell its slumbers and to paint its dreams,
Have rambled wide.   (1-14)

The narrator here is clearly a master of poetic form. The illusion of being lost is created by the delaying tactic of introducing eight clauses before we finally reach the actual speaker, and these clauses themselves are full of enjambments which further delay the reader from reaching the finite verb. Also, there is the merest hint of pastoral when the poet 'winds his way with pleasure and with ease' across the 'green-swerd smooth'. But the most telling effect is the way that the 'one' of the opening line is translated into an emphatic 'I' in line 11. This masterstroke of focalisation engages the reader's attention fully so that s/he is forced to consider not only the specific individuality of the narrator, but also how these digressions may have affected the poem as a whole.

The reference to the 'Sofa' in line 12 draws attention to the extent of the narrator's 'ramblings' in Books I and II in his discussions of 'country, city, [and]

seat of academic fame' (14-5).[57] The following lines suggest that in future the narrator intends:

>   to repose
> Where chance may throw me, beneath elm or vine,
> My languid limbs when summer sears the plains,
> Or when rough winter rages, on the soft
> And shelter'd Sofa . . .   (28-32)

While the titles of this and the ensuing three books suggest that the narrator does just that, they, too, are as full of digressions as are Books I and II. Indeed, throughout the work, there are constant comments both on England generally, and particular facets of the structure of contemporary society. However, these are inconsistent, and occasionally contradictory. For example, in Book 1, he constructs a pastoral idyll in which he recounts the pleasure he gains from observing the worked countryside:

> Thence with what pleasure have we just discern'd
> The distant plough slow-moving, and beside
> His lab'ring team that swerv'd not from the track,
> The sturdy swain diminish'd to a boy!   (159-63)

The choice of the word 'swain' romanticises the ploughman and reduces him to an element of the landscape. And it is telling that in the ensuing pastoral which dwells on the delights of the countryside beside the banks of the Ouse, human agency is almost eradicated. There is the 'herdsman's solitary hut' (168), the sound of church bells (174) and the 'smoking villages remote' (176), but they are all viewed from a distance and are reminiscent of the stock images used by Goldsmith in *The Deserted Village*.[58]

However, when Cowper does shift his gaze, and his genre, from pastoral contentment to georgic work, he acknowledges that a farm labourer's work is arduous:

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[57] As Hugh Underhill notes, with a hint of exasperation, 'For a poet who so insists on the solace and virtues of domestic and rural retirement, Cowper writes a great deal on public themes.' Hugh Underhill, '"Domestic Happiness, Thou Only Bliss": Common and Divided Ground in William Cowper and Robert Bloomfield.', in *Robert Bloomfield: Lyric, Class, and the Romantic Canon,* ed. by S. White, and others (Lewisburg, PA.: Bucknell UP, 2006), pp. 269-287, p. 274.

[58] See my discussion in the previous chapter.

We may discern the thresher at his task.
Thump after thump, resounds the constant flail,
That seems to swing uncertain, and yet falls
Full on the destin'd ear. Wide flies the chaff,
The rustling straw sends up a frequent mist
Of atoms sparkling in the noon-day beam.
Come hither, ye that press your beds of down
And sleep not: see him sweating o'er his bread
Before he eats it. — 'Tis the primal curse,
But soften'd into mercy; made the pledge
Of chearful days, and nights without a groan. (356-66)

Interestingly, however, the primary focus remains on the sights and sounds of the threshing rather than on the thresher. The activity itself is recognised as arduous through the sweat of his task, but the thresher is compensated with 'chearful days, and nights without a groan'. This bears no resemblance to the thresher portrayed by Stephen Duck, and his introduction into the poem serves primarily as a hook for Cowper's observations on the Christian necessity of work and the contrast between life in the city ('ye that press your beds of down') and life in the country (or, as he refers to it here with a conscious nod to the conventions of pastoral, 'Flora').[59]

The closing lines of this passage, which suggest that the peasant is happy in his work, are repeated even more fulsomely later in the section:

Ev'n age itself seems privileged in them
With clear exemption from its own defects.
A sparkling eye beneath a wrinkled front
The vet'ran shows, and gracing a grey beard
With youthful smiles, descends toward the grave
Sprightly, and old almost without decay.   (402-8)

These lines are particularly odd in that earlier in the poem, the narrator had been dreaming about changing his habitation so as to live in a peasant's cottage where he would be able to compose his poetry without the interruptions of small town life. However, after contemplating such a move, he recognises that it is girt with inconveniencies, and that the peasant who currently inhabits the dwelling suffers from extreme poverty:

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[59] Cf., 'The spleen is seldom felt where Flora reigns'. (455) Stephen Duck's *The Thresher* is collected in *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse*, pp. 224-5.

So farewel envy of the *peasant's nest*.
If solitude makes scant the means of life,
Society for me! thou seeming sweet,
Be still a pleasing object in my view,
My visit still, but never mine abode.   (247-51)

How Cowper can hold such contradictory views at first sight is a puzzle.
However, before discussing this further, it is worth considering other occasions
in which the poem depicts scenes and characters that have distinct political, but
often contradictory, implications. The occupant of 'the *peasant's nest*' is
evidently divorced from the rural economy which is described as entirely
benevolent in Book 1:

  Blest he, though undistinguish'd from the crowd
By wealth or dignity, who dwells secure
Where man, by nature fierce, has laid aside
His fierceness, having learnt, though slow to learn,
The manners and the arts of civil life.
His wants, indeed, are many; but supply
Is obvious; plac'd within the easy reach
Of temp'rate wishes and industrious hands.
Here virtue thrives as in her proper soil; (592-600)

The crucial words, 'supply is obvious', fail to account for the peasant's
exclusion. Indeed, in his struggle for existence, he is obliged to be extremely
'industrious' and Cowper's refusal to consider the causes of the peasant's
poverty fails to explain why he has been excluded from the supposed benefits of
this small-town economy.[60] Of course, one might suppose that the peasant has,
for some obscure reason, forfeited his rights to such mutual benefits as are
supposed to exist within this community, but Cowper does not spell this out.
More likely, Cowper is thinking of gentlemen like himself who have chosen to
shun the idleness and profligacy of London in favour of a rural but economically
supportive retreat, thereby appealing to the Horation ideal of the Happy Man.[61]

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[60] Cowper, *Poems*, Book. I., p. 123. Underhill makes the perceptive comment that: 'Cowper was
always anxious to acknowledge labor and poetry . . . but he cannot convincingly give us the
sufferers as people, never develops his human pictures much beyond caricature, cannot say where
fault may lie.' Underhill, 'Domestic Happiness, Thou Only Bliss', p. 281.
[61] For more discussion on this ideal, see above, Chap. 2. 4.

The peasant as outcast from the rural economy presents an interesting comparison with the portrait of Omai as an outcast from the mercantile economy, and also reveals a further inconsistency in Cowper's ideas. I have indicated that Cowper favours the moral tendencies of the rural economy over the inherent evils of the London economy that was based on trade. However, we have seen in 'Charity' and 'Expostulation' that he also praises the civilising effects of science, art, and inspiration fostered by such trade.[62] One particular advantage has been the spread of the Christian doctrine throughout the world. Nevertheless, these benefits depended entirely on the commercial viabilities of the countries that were part of Britain's mercantile economy. Where such discoveries as the 'favor'd isles' (620) yield no commercial advantage, their inhabitants were treated as novelties to be exhibited, and then abandoned.[63] Omai was a victim of such treatment and, when he had satisfied the curious scrutiny of London society, he was returned to Tahiti where Cowper imagines him somewhat improbably searching the horizon 'Exploring far and wide the wat'ry waste/For sight of ship from England' (665-6).

It would seem, then, that both types of economy have their social wastage that Cowper reluctantly has to accept. However, in the unlikely event of Omai's return, it would have been to the world of corruption that represents a counterview to the picture painted above of happy industry. Book II offers us a number of stock types of such corruption: the natural philosopher who distances God as the creator and mover of the world (190ff.); the degeneracy of the politicians who were in the process of sacrificing the American colonies (225ff.); false preachers (326ff.); the peculative tailor cheating his customers (597ff.); and the man-about-town (622ff.); and the cause of all this is 'Profusion' (697).[64] As a

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[62] Not least in the history and construction of the sofa that is the inspiration for the whole poem.
[63] Cowper, *Poems*, Book I, p. 134: 'We found no bait/To tempt us in thy country. Doing good,/Disinterested good, is not our trade.' (672-4).
[64] Cf., also, Book IV (580-6):
Increase of pow'r begets increase of wealth,
Wealth luxury, and luxury excess;
Excess, the scrophulous and itchy plague
That seizes first the opulent, descends
To the next rank contagious, and in time
Taints downward all the graduated scale
Of order, from the chariot to the plough.

diagnosis, this is ambiguous, for it would seem that, in this discourse, the same commercial forces that encourage a prosperity that is beneficial to the sciences and the arts are equally responsible for the luxury that enervates the kingdom.

However, the poem also identifies other sources of social disturbance that are altogether more sinister. For example, in Book IV, the poet laments the ways in which the town has impinged on the countryside, causing concerns for the small-town inhabitant (553-75). Interestingly, he is nostalgic for an imagined past where all was secure: 'Time was when in the pastoral retreat/Th'unguarded door was safe',[65] before enumerating the current evils:

. . . Now, 'ere you sleep
See that your polish'd arms be prim'd with care,
And drop the night-bolt. Ruffians are abroad,
And the first larum of the cock's shrill throat
May prove a trumpet, summoning your ear
To horrid sounds of hostile feet within.
Ev'n day-light has its dangers. And the walk
Through pathless wastes and woods, unconscious once
Of other tenants than melodious birds
Or harmless flocks, is hazardous and bold. (566-75)

What is remarkable about these lines is the simplicity of diction (e.g., 'ruffians') and the specificity of particular actions (e.g., 'drop the night-bolt), something that is less obvious in the 'satires' of Book II, and it hints at the personal interest that the narrator (and Cowper) takes in such matters. Although the cause of this disorder is not pursued in this passage, earlier in the work there is a tacit suggestion that it is the result of poverty. This poverty is, at least in part, the result of such absentee landlords who overreach themselves and for whom their 'Estates are landscapes, gaz'd upon a while,/Then advertised, and auctioneer'd away' (756-7) with the consequence that 'The country starves' (758).[66] Nevertheless, Cowper is careful to distinguish between the deserving poor, who deserve the charity that 'denies them nothing' (IV, 428), and the undeserving poor, whose poverty 'is self inflicted woe,/Th'effect of laziness or sottish waste.' (430-1). The former, it would seem, bear their poverty with fortitude and are

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[65] The mention of a 'pastoral retreat' here suggests an implicit nod to Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*.
[66] See Book III, (pp. 746-800).

pious and abstinent, while the latter are either too lazy to attend church or indulge themselves in 'sottish' drunkenness.[67]

The reference to 'Estates' as 'landscapes' reintroduces the discourse on luxury while specifically linking it to rural poverty. It would seem, then, that Cowper held two slightly different, but interconnected, views on luxury. Insofar as it fostered the growth of the arts and sciences it was beneficial although in cities and towns it encouraged a moral poverty. However, when such luxuries were transferred to the country they caused both moral and economic poverty. Further evidence of the moral depravity in treating 'Estates' as 'landscapes' occurs in Cowper's attack on Capability Brown in Book III:

. . . Lo! he comes –
The omnipotent magician, Brown appears.
Down falls the venerable pile, th'abode
Of our forefathers, a grave whisker'd race,
But tasteless. Springs a palace in its stead,
But in a distant spot . . .   (765-70)

Here, the discourse on luxury is complicated by a discussion of art and its relationship to nature that is a frequent theme within the poem as a whole. Cowper is condemning Brown for 'improving' nature by changing it, rather than, as in the 'cucumber georgic', working with nature. 'Omnipotent magician' also hints at the fact that Brown is being impious, and therefore morally culpable, in that he is interfering with God's creation.

This particular section is introduced with the lines:

 . . . were England now
What England was, plain, hospitable, kind,
And undebauch'd. But we have bid farewell
To all the virtues of those better days,
And all their honest pleasures. (742-6)

The kind of nostalgia for a supposed better England that Cowper indulges in here is a common trope within *The Task,* and a very telling instance occurs in Book IV (513-533), when Cowper descants on the days of Virgil and Sydney [sic] as

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[67] It is interesting to note the similarities here between Cowper and Hannah More, whom he admired greatly and who will be discussed in the following chapter. See Cowper, *Letters,* vol. 3, pp. 103-4; 587.

masters of pastoral who ostensibly painted nature as it was. These imagined days were represented as idyllic but, unfortunately, the portrait was false:

Vain wish! those days were never. Airy dreams
Sat for the picture. And the poet's hand
Imparting substance to an empty shade,
Imposed a gay delirium for a truth.
Grant it. I still must envy them an age
That favor'd such a dream . . .   (525-30)

There is a curious ambivalence behind these lines. The narrator's recognition that earlier pastorals depicted a 'gay delirium' in place of 'truth' suggests that he deprecates the inherent falsehoods in such descriptions. However, his 'envy' suggests that he regrets the passing of an age when such 'dreams' were possible. The two possibilities, that Cowper is bewailing the loss of innocence but also admonishing the poets for their false representations, are thus held in suspension in readers' minds.

The problem for the reader, then, is how to reconcile such frequent contradictions. My analysis so far has concentrated on those episodes that have political implications, but the depth of interest Cowper had in contemporary political news is equally elusive and difficult to establish. In 1768, he writes to Mrs Cowper that 'I was never much skilled in Politics', and in 1781 he tells Newton:

> I am not very fond of weaving a political thread into any of my pieces, and that for two reasons. First because I do not think myself qualified in point of Intelligence to form a decided Opinion on any such topics, & secondly, because I think them, though perhaps as popular as any, the most useless of all.[68]

While it is difficult to interpret this passage, it seems likely that Cowper is commenting on his reluctance to form immediate opinions on such 'popular' topics for he later wrote to Hill 'I wish you had more leisure that you might oftener favor me with a page of Politics.'[69] While it is true that his letters are peppered with references to the American colonies, the East India Company and

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[68] Cowper, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 192; 457-8.
[69] Ibid., vol.2, p. 198.

the arguments over the extent of the royal prerogative, it would seem that he was completely indifferent to political philosophy, having observed earlier to Hill, 'Politics are my abhorrence, being almost always Hypothetical, fluctuating, and impracticable.'[70] He further observes that his opinions changed and developed as he grew older and learnt more about the issues at hand.[71] In fact, his attitudes can best be summed up through a letter to Newton in 1783:

> You will suppose me a Politician; but in truth I am nothing less. These are the thoughts that occur to me while I read the News paper, and when I have laid it down, I feel myself more interested in the success of my early Cucumbers, than in any part of this great and important Subject.[72]

And an echo of these words occurs in the opening of Book IV which gives a vivid picture of the narrator eagerly awaiting news from the post boy, and his comment later in the poem that: ''Tis pleasant through the loop-holes of retreat/To peep at such a world. To see the stir/Of the great Babel and not feel the crowd' (88-90). Cowper, it would seem, cherished his 'retreat' but wished to remain abreast of news and events without joining in the 'great Babel'.

It is clear, then, that Cowper adhered to no political ideology and when he does adopt the pastoral mode he uses it primarily as a means of representing the Christian dream of Eden. Inasmuch as such pastoral moments are ideal representations but also subject to mutability, it is because actual nature has been tainted by the inevitable mutability inherent in man's fall. They are, therefore, not, nor intended to be, an ideological representation of the state of the nation. Rather, they represent a place of retreat into which other humans may intrude, sometimes benignly (cf. his underling in the gardening georgic, the 'swain' and maybe the thresher), and sometimes disturbingly (cf. Crazy Kate, the gypsies and Brown). And what holds these contradictions and disjunctions together is that they are viewed from a perspective that varies according to the moods and interests of a particular individual. The inconsistencies are similar to those of the average man who may deplore local and even national events, but who is nevertheless quite prepared both to ignore (or not to analyse deeply) their causes while enjoying the more immediate pleasures of everyday life. Ideological

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[70] Ibid., p. 183
[71] See ibid., pp. 12, 30., and above re: 'Yardley Oak'.
[72] Ibid., p. 105.

consistency, then, has been replaced with psychological consistency.[73] And it is for precisely this reason that I have tended to conflate Cowper with the narrator in my preceding discussions, for Cowper introduces an intensely personal tone into the poem which is unprecedented in the earlier poetry of the century.[74]

The ways in which he does this are manifold. I have already indicated that the narrator's shifts of discursive topics manage to give readers the impression that he is addressing such topics as they occur to him. In spite of Cowper's avowal that there is a plan, this is nowhere obvious. So, for example, in Book VI, there is a constant movement between personal reflections on the narrator's life (12-22), through descriptive scenes (57-84), to moral reflections. In themselves, these moves are unremarkable, but they are constructed in different ways through the subtle use of pronouns and verbs. This section opens with an 'I' considering the difficulties of his past life. Readers are then invited to share in these considerations by the introduction of the inclusive 'we' in line 25 almost as though they are having a conversation.[75] This is subsequently followed by the generalising use of the definite article, 'Here the heart/May give an useful lesson to the head' (85), such that the ensuing moralisations become universalised. Equally, the depicted scenes are experienced rather than merely described. So, in line 12, it is 'Whenever I have heard'. Even when the narrator does engage in apparently detached observation as in 'The night was winter in his roughest mood,/The morning sharp and clear' (57-7), it is not long before the narrator reinserts himself into the scene with an 'I'.

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[73] Fairer makes a similar point when he comments that '[Cowper's] particular achievement in the poem is to create an identity that can hold his miscellany of topics together without being egocentric or expressing mere personality. He manages to achieve a voice that is simultaneously principled yet accommodating, and within it he is able to substantiate . . . the self he is projecting. It gives his words weight and conviction, and as readers we are made to feel that we are not just responding to an individual, but becoming part of an ethical community.' *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 232.

[74] See Newey '*The Task* is a history of the imaginative and psychological life of an identifiable person'. *Cowper's Poetry*, p. 111. See, also, Sitter, 'The most complex created self in English poetry between Pope and Wordsworth is the subject of Cowper's "The Task"'. Sitter, 'Political, Satirical, Didactic and Lyric Poetry (II)', p. 307

[75] See Tim Fulford: 'Cowper makes his diction approximate to gentlemanly conversation, so that the narrator seeks the sympathy of the educated classes in their own terms, rather than declaiming to them in the lofty rhetoric of epic.' Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 43.

For similar reasons, the shifts between apparent pastoral to georgic to anti-pastoral are also carefully managed. In Book I, the passage in which the narrator describes his walk to the top of the hill from whence he observes the Ouse (109-209) has many of the features of a pastoral, but it is one in which the narrator is an active participant. The walk is initially vividly remembered from his childhood. He then moves into the present and introduces his partner whose arm is 'Fast lock'd in mine, with pleasure such as love/Confirm'd by long experience of thy worth/And well-tried virtues could alone inspire.' (146-8). And the landscape is represented in its particularity both visually and aurally as though the narrator is discoursing directly from the scene. Although the diction sometimes adopts consciously pastoral terms, e.g., the 'fleecy tenants' (291), and on one occasion is almost jocularly learned, 'The obsolete prolixity of shade' (265), it is, in general, relatively free of latinisms or consciously 'poetic' terms, thereby enabling readers to 'see through' the language to the described scenes:

. . . rills that slip
Through the cleft rock, and, chiming as they fall
Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length
In matted grass, that with a livelier green
Betrays the secret of their silent course. (192-6)

Equally interesting is the verse movement, whereby the pentametres cross the lines, carrying readers forward until the last line where the stream is both hidden and moving more slowly.

Insofar as this is a pastoral, it has become highly personalised and intimate so that even the privileges that Cowper has been given by the Throckmortons (331-4) are somehow shared with the reader.[76] And because it is intimate, the shift into moral reflections (455ff) gives the impression of being a natural transition since these reflections are controlled by the same speaking voice. Much the same occurs with the introduction of the Crazy Kate episode (534-556). As in everyday conversation, it moves easily from simple description to storytelling, and seems to serve little purpose other than to add extra pathetic human detail to the scenic descriptions. Kate's pathological melancholy (and her poverty) are, in

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[76] It is worth noting that Cowper does not indicate any recognition that he has been granted such privileges because he was a gentleman, unlike the peasants who are represented distantly in the landscape.

the narrative, the result of personal misfortune and Cowper draws no obvious moral from her story.[77] However, coming immediately before the ominous anti-pastoral of the gypsies, he implicitly invites us to compare her involuntary plight with the wilful poverty and anti-social behaviour of the 'vagabond and useless tribe.'[78]

Other ways in which the narrator personalises his discourse can be seen in Book III. Following a long passage in which he condemns hunting, all of which is conducted in an impersonal voice, he moves into a description of his pet hare (334-351). Although this section constantly uses the first person singular pronoun, at times we have the effect of overhearing a conversation he is having with the hare itself:

Yes – thou mayst eat thy bread, and lick the hand
That feeds thee; thou may'st frolic on the floor
At evening, and at night retire secure
To thy straw-couch, and slumber unalarm'd.
For I have gain'd thy confidence, have pledg'd
All that is human in me, to protect
Thine unsuspecting gratitude and love.   (342-8)

While this could become mawkish, the detail of the hare's activities renders it rather charming in a way that reflects back on its owner.[79]

One of the dominant discourses throughout the poem is the Christian one of the need to work and the evils of indolence. Although the narrator expatiates on this at length in general terms, and gives examples of the social ills that are a consequence of sloth, he also struggles with himself, both trying to justify his 'ease' and to argue that he is actually working at the same time. I have already commented on the ways in which he regards writing as an onerous but pleasant

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[77] In this respect, he is quite unlike Yearsley in *Clifton Hill* whose similar tale of Louisa has a clear moral function. See the discussion in the following chapter.

[78] Line 559. For further discussion of the gypsy episode, see below.

[79] David Perkins, interestingly, has suggested that Cowper's experience of being bullied at school established a vision of man as a wilful destroyer of nature. He was thus incapable of distinguishing man-the-destroyer from alternative views of benevolent man, leading to his sympathy with animals. David Perkins, 'Cowper's Hares.', *Eighteenth-Century Life,* 2, 2 (1996), 57-69. Landry, in her general discussion of Cowper's relationship with his hares, is more circumspect arguing that 'the hare is still servant to the man.' *The Inventions of the Countryside*, pp. 121-2. This does not, however, seem to be the case in the passage I have quoted.

employment, but even the title hints at this ensuing discourse. It would seem that the poem was originally to be called 'The Sofa', signalling the comforts of ease. However, it subsequently metamorphosed into *The Task.*

The contradictions between ease and indolence make an appearance in the opening to Book III. Here, Cowper (and the conflation of the man with the narrator is tacitly insisted on in the detail that follows) reviews his earlier work:

What chance that I, to fame so little known,
Nor conversant with men or manners much,
Should speak to purpose, or with better hope
Crack the satyric thong? 'twere wiser far
For me enamour'd of sequester'd scenes,
And charm'd with rural beauty, to repose
Where chance may throw me, beneath elm or vine,
My languid limbs when summer sears the plains,
Or when rough winter rages, on the soft
And shelter'd Sofa . . .   (23-32)

The curious thing about this passage is that it immediately follows the lines that assert, 'I feel myself at large,/Courageous, and refresh'd for future toil,/If toil await me, or if dangers new.' (18-20) It is almost as though he has been working himself up for future tasks but that his resolution is then dissipated thanks to the conditional clause which allows him to retreat into the indolence of resting under the trees or on the sofa.

Later, in the same book, he returns to this theme and treats it at length (352-714). He opens by cleverly inverting the traditional perceptions of work and idleness:

  How various his employments, whom the world
Calls idle, and who justly in return
Esteems that busy world an idler too!

Exactly why the 'busy world' is thought to be an idler is not fully explained, although it may be implicit in the various portraits elsewhere in the poem which condemn the bustle of the city as essentially worthless.[80] More interesting,

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[80] Richard Feingold makes the claim that: 'This is Cowper's manner — to define the nature and virtues of retirement by constantly juxtaposing with it the corresponding activities of the larger world. In its treatment, therefore, of its central theme, retirement, the poem accomplishes a corollary purpose, the criticism of the active world. It is his judgement of the active world, the

perhaps, are the activities that the narrator identifies as his work. He enumerates 'Friends, books, a garden, and, perhaps his pen' (355), and occasional forays into the countryside (358). At first sight, apart perhaps from the pen, it is not clear how such pastimes can be classified as 'work'. And the narrator himself appears to acknowledge this in the way in which they are hedged around with self-doubt:

Can he want occupation who has these?
Will he be idle who has much t'enjoy?
Me therefore, studious of laborious ease,
Not slothful; happy to deceive the time
Not waste it; and aware that human life
Is but a loan to be repaid with use . . . (359-64)

The apparent contradiction between idleness and enjoyment can only be resolved if we assume that the narrator is equating enjoyment with the exercise of the imagination, something that is hinted at in the final line. If human life is loaned to us (by God), then contemplation and enjoyment of God's work becomes a necessary task, albeit an enjoyable one.[81] However, the oxymoron, 'laborious ease' and the odd contrast between wasting and deceiving time, both suggest the narrator is struggling to justify himself.

Cowper's clearest justification for apparent idleness occurs in Book IV ('The Winter Evening). The narrator describes those occasions when he withdraws into himself, and proceeds to explain exactly what is happening and why such withdrawal is both pleasant and (sometimes) useful (277-307). He starts by describing himself as sitting in the parlour at twilight, observing the fire, and with a 'mind contemplative, with some new theme/Pregnant, or indisposed alike to all.' (280-1). He then compares himself with others, asserting 'I am conscious, and confess/Fearless, a soul that does not always think.' (284-5). This is a prolegomenon to an extremely interesting passage in which he speculates on the nature of his musings which he recognises are the creation of 'fancy' (286). The

milieu of society at large, that concerns us here, because in the end, Cowper's concept of retirement is developed in response to his sense of the nature of social experience, and grows into something more like alienation and not the emblematic opportunity for the experience of *otium* – either the Epicurean or Horation kind.' Richard Feingold, *Nature and Society: Later Eighteenth-Century Uses of the Pastoral and Georgic* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1978), p. 138. Although I am inclined to agree with the qualificatory phrase 'something more like alienation', my argument here is that Cowper resists alienation by asserting the positive values implicit in his veneration of, and collaborative work with, nature.

[81] Cf., Book VI, 'Nature is but a name for an effect,/Whose cause is God.' (223-4).

section in which he considers the 'sooty film' as 'prophesying . . . some stranger's near approach' (294-5) is dismissed as being 'still deceiv'd' (295). This exercise of idle imagination is then justified by the lines: ''Tis thus the understanding takes repose/In indolent vacuity of thought' (296-7). And finally, he is brought back to himself by a banging shutter which 'restores me to myself.' (307).

Four things are noteworthy about this section. First, that we are offered a glimpse into the internal working of a (particular) mind, something which is relatively new in the poetry of the period.[82] Second, that these reveries are the product both of indolence and 'fancy'. Third, that they have an important psychological function, and can thereby be justified. And finally, that they are temporary in such a way that they have no obvious significance beyond the immediate moment.[83] The first and third of these are relevant to my argument in that they signal an important shift away from the poet as somehow being an impersonal voice that observes and comments on various aspects of life, and towards the notion of the poet as a realised individual whose observations may perform the same function, but are an expression of personal judgement. The second and fourth, at least in Cowper's terms, acknowledge that the role of 'fancy' may well be a spur to reflection, but that it is of little significance until it has been tested empirically in the phenomenal world.[84] And this latter point seems to be confirmed earlier in the Book, where the narrator compares himself to a painter who depicts scenes that he has visited merely to prove that he has actually been there, but which scenes are 'nothing worth'(238), so he, in a similar fashion:

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[82] Brown says of these lines that: 'Cowper's epochal innovation in these lines does not lie in the recognition that the mind helps to create what it perceives, but rather in the divorce of consciousness from attention. Cowper's grammar is indefinite — in itself an indication of the exploratory character of the lines — but the most natural reading would attribute to them perhaps the earliest absolute use of "consciousness" as an unmodified predicate in the English language. For the first time in English, so far as I can discern, consciousness becomes autonomous, independent of the world in which the conscious being lives.' Brown, *Preromanticism*, 69.

[83] And it is in this respect that Cowper differs from Coleridge who, in 'Frost at Midnight' in which he imitates this section, allows the 'fluttering stranger' to resonate into the future. *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works*, ed. by J. C. C. Mays, vol. I (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 452-6.

[84] Patricia Spacks makes the interesting point that the sailor who plunges into the sea (Book I, (454)) and Crazy Kate are both victims 'of the operations of fancy.' Patricia M. Spacks, *The Poetry of Vision: Five Eighteenth-Century Poets* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 183. In this respect, the operation of unfettered fancy is clearly dangerous.

. . . with brush in hand and pallet spread
With colours mixt for a far diff'rent use,
Paint cards and dolls, and ev'ry idle thing
That fancy finds in her excursive flights. (239-42)

It is difficult to establish which passages Cowper may have had in mind when he composed these lines, although it is possible that was thinking of those earlier quasi-pastorals (especially in Book I) in which the narrator does very little except walk through the countryside and describe its various delights. If the sections from Book IV that I have been discussing represent a retreat into a particular mind, then these earlier scenes represent a similar retreat into an observed and individualised nature but one which has been given only fitful moral agency.

If this is the case, then the introduction of the gypsies in Book 1 is particularly interesting since they serve as a counterpoint to the somewhat idyllic scenes that Cowper has otherwise 'painted'. The narrator describes them with a fascinating mixture of contempt and admiration.[85] At the beginning, they are portrayed as 'A vagabond and useless tribe [who] there eat/Their miserable meal.' (559-60), which the narrator finds distasteful, at least partly because they are on the outside of society (or, like Cowper, in retreat from it), and partly because they are indolent:

Strange! that a creature rational, and cast
In human mould, should brutalize by choice
His nature, and though capable of arts
By which the world might profit and himself,
Self-banish'd from society, prefer
Such squalid sloth to honorable toil. (574-9)

And yet (unlike Cowper), they are an integral part of the 'sylvan world' they inhabit, open to 'gaiety' and art (their music). Indeed, their '. . . breathing wholesome air, and wand'ring much,/Need other physic none to heal th'effects/Of loathsome diet, penury, and cold. (589-92)

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[85] Sarah Houghton-Walker convincingly argues that: 'The gypsies are unknown and unknowable to the poet, and in this unknowability they represent a troubling locus of power. In these ways, as sublime objects which cannot be penetrated, yet which represent some of his principal concerns (idleness, wandering, colony, difference), Cowper's gypsies can be seen as a frightening manifestation of the more general sense of a diabolical fear that permeates his poem.' Sarah Houghton-Walker, 'William Cowper's Gypsies.', *SEL Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900,* 48, 3 (2008), 653-676, (p. 670).

They are, therefore, a conundrum to the narrator since they are not engaged in toil and yet are capable of producing art; they receive all the benefits of nature while giving nothing back; and they seem content with their lot. These contradictions, in other hands, might have led to some moralising conclusions, but because they are refracted through the narrator's mind, they remain irresolvable, troubling, but held in suspension within the created consciousness of the poet.

It is therefore interesting to observe how these themes come together in a particular site within the poem. Tim Fulford has commented on the 'cucumber' georgic:

> In a landscape in which desolation and confusion threaten the writer the growing of cucumbers is a triumph over adversity made more successful and poignant because Cowper, through the mock epic, exposes his awareness of the gap between the small scale of the achievement and its difficulty and seriousness for him. At the same time he shows that he can imitate Milton but will not pretend to match, still less outdo him.[86]

While the cucumber episode can be analysed in its own terms, it is significant that it is part of a much more extended passage on gardening in general (III, 397-674) which includes a justification of the work involved in gardening. It is interesting to note that the section on gardening is deliberately generalised through the use of the third person pronoun. The narrator becomes 'the self-sequester'd man' (386), thereby making himself representative rather than a particular man engaged in a particular activity. This shift enables Cowper to move into a more formal mode, and prepare the reader for the conscious artistry that is a feature of the cucumber episode. It also allows the narrator to set up a social (rather than a personal) barrier between the garden designer and the labourer who needs a watchful eye, 'Oft loit'ring lazily if not o'erseen,/Or

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[86] Fulford, '"Nature Poetry"', pp. 50-1. See, also, Cowper's own comment to Newton in 1784 'Having imitated no man, I may reasonably hope that I shall not incurr [sic] the disadvantage of a comparison with my betters. Milton's manner was peculiar; so is Thomson's. He that should write like either of them, would in my judgement, deserve the name of a Copyist, but not of a Poet.' Cowper, *Letters,* vol. 2, p. 308.

misapplying his unskilful strength.' (401-2)[87] The remainder of this introduction is notable for the sheer detail of the tasks undertaken by the garden designer (and artist), thereby guaranteeing the impression that raising cucumbers is only one part of a task which is not (cumulatively) small scale or trivial even though the specific activity might seem so.

The reference here to the labour involved in raising cucumbers means that the narrator can move quite deliberately into a mock-georgic mode with references to Virgil, the Greeks and John Philips[88]. However, hints of the other discourses that occur in the poem as a whole are evident in the opening lines:

> To raise the prickly and green-coated gourd
> So grateful to the palate, and when rare
> So coveted, else base and disesteem'd –
> Food for the vulgar merely – is an art
> That toiling ages have but just matured,
> And at this moment unassay'd in song. (446-51)

The periphrastic reference to the cucumber in the opening hints at the fact that the ensuing georgic is not to be taken entirely seriously. And the contrast between the occasions when it is rare, and therefore a thing of luxury, and the occasions when it is abundant, making it vulgar food, reminds the reader of those passages which discourse on the effects of 'profusion', allowing the cucumber to occupy the same ambivalent political space that I have referred to earlier in this chapter.[89] Equally, the focus of the section is not on actual agricultural work, but rather on the domestic growing of cucumbers, so to the extent that it is a georgic, it is a domesticated one which, as a mode, and as a way of protecting himself from claims that he was overreaching himself, was best treated with humour. Finally, the last line — 'And at this moment unassay'd in song' — makes a semi-

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[87] Cowper believed that social division was God-given. Writing to Lady Hesketh in the aftermath of the French Revolution, he comments: 'Princes and peers reduced to plain gentlemanship, and gentles reduced to a level with their own lacqueys, are excesses of which they will repent hereafter. Difference of rank and subordination, are, I believe, of God's appointment, and consequently essential to the well being of society. . . .' Cowper, *Letters,* vol. 3, p. 396.

[88] See the discussion of *Cyder* above in Chap. 2. 4.

[89] Johnson famously observed 'that a cucumber should be well sliced, and dressed with pepper and vinegar; and then thrown out, as good for nothing.' J. Boswell, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.,* in *Johnson's Journey to the Western Isles and Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, ed. by R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 354.

ironic claim for the seriousness with which Cowper viewed his poetic endeavours.[90]

This semi-ironic tone is maintained throughout the next section, which deals with the fertilisation of the soil, and is a glorious mixture of the high-flown and the mundane. Horse dung is referred to as 'a stercorarious heap' (463) which ultimately yields 'a gross fog Bœotian' (495).[91] However, we are also given the demotic particularity of such lines as:

. . . First he bids spread
Dry fern or litter'd hay, that may imbibe
Th'ascending damps; then leisurely impose
And lightly, shaking it with agile hand
From the full fork, the saturated straw. (475-9)

A sub-theme here, of art helping nature, is reinforced in lines 505-10 in which the gardener is prompted by experience to judge the appropriate moment to pot out the seedlings, something that is further insisted on later:

. . . Assistant art
Then acts in nature's office, brings to pass
The glad espousals and insures the crop. (541-3)

The combination of art, nature and work that is celebrated throughout this mock georgic would seem to be triumphant. And yet, at the end, Cowper moves back into a self-questioning mode that reminds us that we are dealing with a particular individual trying to justify himself, rather than an actual georgic paean to rural work:

. . . The learn'd and wise
Sarcastic would exclaim, and judge the song
Cold as its theme, and like its theme, the fruit

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[90] Clearly, there are echoes here both of Milton's 'Things unattempted yet in prose or rime' and Philips's 'But my Native Soil/Invites me, and the Theme as yet unsung.' The range of Cowper's borrowings, both in the cucumber section and the ensuing section describing the green house, is outside the scope of this thesis, but it is worth mentioning that O'Brien notes that 'Cowper . . . has engaged not so much in mock-Miltonics as mock Thomsonics, by investing ordinary plants with portentous moral, national and imperial meaning.' '"Still at Home"', pp. 144-5.
[91] Landry observes that 'this word is both a characteristic instance of periphrasis, and an appeal to vegetable lovers and gardeners alike, who can now find their of the less salubrious realities of country life are miniaturized rather preciously for suburban consumption. [sic]' *The Invention of the Countryside*, pp. 59-60.

Of too much labor, worthless when produced. (562-65)

Within the context both of the episode and of the poem as a whole, these lines are deeply ambivalent. By creating a mock, and ironic, georgic, Cowper himself appears to acknowledge that the form, at least in this case, may be 'the fruit of too much labor'. However, the exuberance with which he plays with the genre demonstrates that it is hardly 'worthless when produc'd'. The tensions thus created call into question the current value of the georgic as a still-viable genre, while demonstrating the continuing values of poetic form.[92] That Cowper distances himself from the 'learn'd and wise' implies that he is consciously forging a new poetic form that can play with existing genres while adapting them to the more individual and personal themes that he wishes to foreground. What is significantly new in the 'cucumber georgic', then, is a mode of articulation that is much more obviously personal and which, in this respect, is of a piece with the poem as a whole.

That the 'learn'd and wise' would be 'sarcastic' necessarily suggests that they would lack sympathy and thereby demonstrate their lack of sensibility. For Cowper, sensibility was the '*sine quâ non* of real happiness'.[93] For example, in Book VI, he observes:

   I would not enter on my list of friends
(Though grac'd with polish'd manners and fine sense
Yet wanting sensibility) the man
Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm. (560-3)

The characterisation of sensibility in these lines verges on sentimentality and Cowper's evocations of both sympathy and sensibility are unstable. For example,

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[92] Dustin Griffin observes that '[b]y redefining labor – with help from the Bible and from Milton – as a virtually spiritual activity, and shifting his attention from the public sphere to the private, Cowper re-affirms, though he significantly modifies, the traditional georgic values of steady dedication to a homely and unspectacular task.' This, however, rather misses the point. Although self-consciously appealing to the georgic tradition, Cowper seems to be going deliberately beyond it. Dustin Griffin, 'Redefining Georgic: Cowper's Task.', *ELH,* 57, 4 (1990), 865-79, (p. 876).

[93] In his letter to Mrs.King in 1788, Cowper says: '. . . a very robust athletic habit seems inconsistent with much sensibility. But sensibility is the *sine quâ non* of real happiness. If therefore our lives have not been shorten'd and if our feelings have been render'd more exquisite as our habit of body has become more delicate, on the whole perhaps we have no cause to complain but are rather gainers by our degeneracy.' Cowper, *Letters,* vol. 3, p. 180.

the lines in Book III, in which he describes himself as a 'stricken deer' (108-116), are peculiarly poignant in that they both create an image of the suffering deer (and thus serve as testimony to his own sensibility), but also invite readers to exercise their own sensibility by sympathising with the narrator. However, the narrator does not merely insist on his own unhappy state for in Book IV (333ff.), he refers to the world as 'so thorny, and where none/Find happiness unblighted'. The use of the inclusive term 'none' indicates that the blighted search for happiness is a universal condition. Nevertheless, if we are bound together by mutual suffering, there will be some who suffer more, and it is by contemplating their suffering that 'We may with patience bear our mod'rate ills,/And sympathize with others, suffering more' (339-40)[94].

These reflections occur to the narrator while viewing a snow storm from the comfort of his winter evening's domestic retreat, and put him in mind of the 'trav'ller' and the wagoner who 'stalks /In pond'rous boots beside his reeking team' (341-2). But rather than inviting us to sympathise with the wagoner's plight, we are informed that the wagoner is 'form'd to bear/The pelting brunt of the tempestuous night' (351-2), and is, in fact,

Oh happy! and in my account, denied
That sensibility of pain with which
Refinement is endued, thrice happy thou.
Thy frame robust and hardy, feels indeed
The piercing cold, but feels it unimpair'd. (357-62)

There is a curious failure of sympathy here that is difficult to explain. Although this passage makes the explicit claim that the 'wagoner' is impervious to the kinds of sensibility which are the province of the 'refined', the introductory phrase, 'and in my account', suggests that Cowper is not fully committed to such an obvious class-based distinction, but offering it as a possibility. On this reading, the transition to the next section, where he describes the plight of the

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[94] These lines are curiously reminiscent of More's:
For if, when home-felt joys the mind elate,
It mourns in secret for another's fate;
Yet when its own sad griefs invade the breast,
Abroad, in others blessings blest!
Hannah More, *Sacred Dramas: Chiefly Intended For Young Persons: The Subjects Taken From The Bible. To Which Is Added, Sensibility, A Poem* (London: Printed for T. Cadell in The Strand, 1782), Sensibility, pp. 267-90. See, also, the following chapter.

poor cottagers, becomes more intelligible than it would otherwise be. The cottagers are described as:

  Poor, yet industrious, modest, quiet, neat,
Such claim compassion in a night like this,
And have a friend in ev'ry feeling heart. (374-6)

Although they suffer no particular tragedy, they suffer from the cold precisely because of their poverty, and this is vividly realised by Cowper's description of the cottager who returns home:

Just when the day declined, and the brown loaf
Lodged on the shelf half-eaten without sauce
Of sav'ry cheese, or butter costlier still,
Sleep seems their only refuge. (393-6)

The various moves which I have described whereby the narrator directs sympathy first towards himself, and then to the night-time travellers (which, in one case, he then withdraws), and finally to the poor cottagers, reflect the essential ambiguity within the poem. On the one hand, it is a poem about a created 'self', on the other, it as about the world around this self but refracted through the self's individual consciousness. The narrator is therefore absolved from making the kinds of overall generalisations which the particular scenes might suggest since what generalisations he does make are those which are prompted by immediate reflections of the particular observed scene.

Fulford makes the following comment on the winter scene:

> As he continues the portrait Cowper outdoes Thomson at his own
> sentimental game, idealizing domestic bliss and female innocence but
> ensuring that compassion towards the poor is directed towards the
> encouragement of charitable relief rather than advocacy of large scale
> reform or analysis of its social and political causes.[95]

While it is true that Cowper idealizes domestic bliss and encourages sympathetic and charitable impulses towards the deserving poor, his failure to analyse the fundamental social causes of such poverty is not because the narrator is shying away from either advocacy or analysis. Rather it is because such a programme is

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[95] Fulford, "'Nature Poetry'", 42.

no part of the poem's function. The variable ways in which it invokes both sensibility and sympathy are an inevitable consequence of the serendipitous nature of the poem and the equally serendipitous nature of human consciousness. Sympathy for unfortunate (rather than sinful) individuals is a necessary Christian virtue. The causes of their misfortune do not yield to an ideological explanation (for Cowper), save that of the consequences of having fallen from grace. The moral vision which dominates the poem is essentially transcendental and the social criticisms which derive from this vision are not strictly amenable to human agency.

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate how Cowper manages to develop certain tendencies that were implicit in the poetry of Gray and Goldsmith. In particular, I have argued that he creates a fully realised narrator who is absorbed by his own observations and reflections and who uses these observations and reflections as a basis for making moral and social judgements. Unlike Gray or Goldsmith, Cowper has managed to construct a narrator who can be treated as a sentient self and who can be assimilated with Cowper's own self. Sambrook has commented that Cowper is frequently regarded as a 'transitional' poet. However, he also makes the point that '[t]hough the degree of self-reference in Cowper's [*The Task*] effects a crucial generic shift, the orthodox eighteenth-century loco-descriptive poem does serve . . . as his general structural model.'[96] My aim has been to show how this 'generic shift' was achieved and to investigate some of its consequences. It is notable that many of the discourses of the earlier poems, and particularly the over-arching Christian discourse, are re-visited in *The Task*. However, I have also pointed to the essential contradictions which occur in the 'Moral Satires', arguing that these arose because Cowper was largely uninterested in the ideological causes of the disjunctions that he observed in the society around him. Although I have tended to ignore those aspects of his life which gave rise to his self-absorption and general retreat from society, I have shown that he retained an interest in political events, but on an *ad hoc* basis.

By engaging in some close reading of the earlier poems, I suggested that the verse forms which Cowper adopted were inappropriate for the explorations of the

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[96]*The Task and Selected Other Poems*, pp. 48, 29.

self that he subsequently undertook. What is most noticeable in *The Task*, then, is that the poetic voice is no longer of the type which tends to 'declaim' universal truths, but is recreated as the voice of an individual who is variously involved in observing and making judgements about the life around him. Although he adopts many of the features of pastoral, Cowper portrays nature less as a symbolic representation of the nation, and more as a series of scenes which are both delightful and, sometimes, frightening. When he ventures into georgic, he does it almost coyly, half mocking his pretensions while at the same time demonstrating and drawing attention to his skills as an artist. One consequence of this playful use of generic forms is that his moral reflections are also personalised and dependent on the immediate scenes he portrays rather than dependent on the generic expectations associated with such forms.[97] Thus, for example, he can portray the delights of the view over the Ouse, while interrupting the portrayal with an equivocal description of the gypsies. Although I have not explored such shifts and juxtapositions in detail, the temporal (and sequential) nature of the poem contributes to the lack of an overall 'position'. What the narrator sees as 'work' in the morning, can be regarded as a kind of idleness in the evening. The reveries that he indulges in front of the grate, although delightful and possibly instructive, can be rejected later as the product of 'mere fancy'.

This personalisation is achieved partly through the shifting uses of an 'I' who sees, hears, walks, works and reflects on what is he doing and thinking. It is also helped by the diction he employs. Domestic issues and employment are described in detail, but also with a minimum of latinate vocabulary in such a way that the common reader can identify with the activities.[98] And it is partly through such language that Cowper manages to develop his conversational style. However, a further effect of his style is that it creates the impression that we are overhearing the narrator, rather than being directly addressed by him.[99] And it is

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[97] See my discussion in Chap. 2. 4.

[98] See the description of needlework in Book IV which ends almost bathetically with the evening meal: 'a radish and an egg' (173).

[99] See Deborah Heller: 'The reader has the illusion of witnessing the person's life unfold, so to speak, from the inside . . . he has the illusion of watching the persona proceed through the minutiae of everyday life, working and wandering and resting – and constantly commentating on and appraising his activities.' Deborah Heller, 'Cowper's Task and the Writing of a Poet's Salvation', *SEL Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900,* 35, 3 (1995), 575-98, (p.581).

this separateness that encourages us to recognise the contingent nature of Cowper's moral observations.

In Book VI, Cowper assesses the value of his poem:

Perhaps the self-approving haughty world
That as she sweeps him with her whistling silks
Scarce deigns to notice him, or if she see
Deems him a cypher in the works of God,
Receives advantage from his noiseless hours
Of which she little dreams. Perhaps she owes
Her sunshine and her rain, her blooming spring
And plenteous harvest, to the pray'r he makes,
When Isaac like, the solitary saint
Walks forth to meditate at even-tide,
And think on her, who thinks not for herself. (940-50)

Elfenbein observes of these lines that:

> Cowper ventures briefly to imagine himself in a position of power and his poetic triumph is that we want to believe him. . . . Even in this moment of egotistical sublimity, his "perhaps" signals a reluctance to commit himself fully.[100]

Cowper's 'perhaps', however, is crucial. Unlike Wordsworth, Cowper is not engaging in a moment of 'egotistical sublimity'. He is making the more modest claim that this is how he sees the world, and this is how he judges it, but that his views, however much underpinned by his faith, are largely subjective. In this way, he establishes a new poetic voice that later poets could exploit in their various ways, but which was consistently rooted in the personal.

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[100] Elfenbein, 'Cowper's Task and the Anxieties of Femininity.', P. 15.

CHAPTER 6

Self and Sensibility: Yearsley's construction of 'Lactilla' as an authoritative voice.

Johnson said pity was not a natural passion, for children are always cruel, and
savages are always cruel. "Pity is acquired and improved by the cultivation of
reason. We have no doubt uneasy sensations from seeing a creature in distress,
without pity; for it is not pity unless you wish to relieve them."
James Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal* (1763)[1]

In the previous chapter, I commented on what I called a phenomenological element in *The Task.* In this chapter, I intend to show how Hannah More developed this inward turn to recommend a form of sentimental sensibility which concentrated on the emotions and the display of feeling at the expense of social action. Further, I shall be arguing that this 'cult' of sensibility was fiercely challenged in the poetry of Ann Yearsley and that Yearsley, while acknowledging the attractions of sensibility, insisted that it was worthless unless it was socially, rather than individually, situated.

Hannah More's poem, *Sensibility*, was published in 1782.[2] Conceived originally as a private epistle to Lady Boscawen, it was subsequently 'enlarged, and several passages [were] added, or altered, as circumstances required.'[3] The finished poem is largely a philosophical reflection on, and description of, sensibility. Among other qualities, More asserts that sensibility:

. . . is th'etherial flame which lights and warms,
In song transports us, and in action charms.
'Tis THIS that makes the pensive strains of GRAY*
Win to the open heart their easy way.

* This is meant of the *Elegy in a Country Church-yard*, of which exquisite Poem,
Sensibility is, perhaps, the characteristic beauty.[4]

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[1] Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal*, p. 312.
[2] More, *Sacred Dramas*, pp. 267-90.
[3] It was presumably started in 1775, given that it refers to Lady Boscawen's 'only remaining son
[who] was then in America, and at the battle of Lexington.' Ibid., p. 289. The further comment
occurs on page 268.
[4] Ibid., p. 288.

Subsequently, More was to observe of Cowper that 'I have found what I have been looking for all my life, a poet whom I can read on Sunday,' leading Anne Stott to comment that 'More found in Cowper a poet both of sensibility and religion and, further, a man of exemplary piety.'[5] However, both Stott's comment and More's description of Gray beg the question of what is meant by sensibility.

In the preceding chapters, I have shown how, in their different ways, Gray, Goldsmith and Cowper expressed a sympathetic identification with the working poor.[6] In particular, they implied that such poverty represented a moral failure in the nation. Although none of them were particularly astute in analysing the causes of such poverty, they were clearly driven by the same kinds of ethical considerations as adumbrated by Shaftesbury, Hume and Smith. In this chapter, I shall be arguing that Hannah More's representation of sensibility lacked this particular ethical dimension and that much of Ann Yearsley's poetry was written as a direct challenge to what she considered as More's 'false' sensibility.[7]

The last chapter had, as a headnote, a quotation from Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. The title indicates that these are two distinct qualities while the movement of the novel implies that, while not necessarily antitheses, each quality needs to be ameliorated by the other so that they are in equal balance. It would seem, however, that for Hannah More, the possession of sensibility was of paramount importance both in life and in art. Her poem opens with a panegyric on the various literary characters who had been familiar to Lady Boscawen. It then proceeds to list those contemporaries who continue to bear the flame kindled by such poets (and artists) as Young and Lyttelton. These include the Wartons, Beattie, Lowth, Reynolds and, perhaps surprisingly, Johnson. However, in an interesting shift, More then follows by adding her (and Boscawen's) intimates from the Bluestockings, the suggestion being that the custodianship of

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[5] See Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 273. Cowper's admiration for More has been referred to in the previous chapter.
[6] The qualification is important, particularly for Cowper, who held the 'idle poor' in contempt.
[7] I am not, of course, suggesting that her outlook lacked a moral dimension. On the contrary, it was deeply rooted in a pietistic Christian tradition that tended to concentrate on the moral failings of individuals rather than on the social conditions which encouraged such moral laxity.

intellect and taste had passed from a largely male oriented society to a female one.

Rather more subtly, this passage allows her to introduce herself both as a major protagonist within the poem and as the bearer of a particularly exquisite sensibility:

   Yet, what is wit, and what the Poet's art?
Can Genius shield the vulnerable heart?
Ah, no! where bright imagination reigns,
The fine-wrought spirit feels acuter pains:
Where glow exalted sense, and taste refin'd
There keener anguish rankles in the mind:
. . .   .

   Say, can the boasted pow'rs of wit and song,
Of life one pang remove, one hour prolong?
Presumptuous hope! which daily truths deride;
For you, alas! have wept – and GARRICK dy'd!
Ne'er shall my heart his lov'd remembrance lose,
Guide, critic, guardian, glory of my muse!
. . .   .

GARRICK! those pow'rs which form a friend were thine;
And let me add, with pride, that friend was mine:
With pride! at once the vain emotion's fled;
Far other thoughts are sacred to the dead.[8]

These passages are particularly interesting because of the ways in which More constructs her argument.[9] The initial questions pave the way for her later discussion of the differences between genuine and false sensibility. Implicit in the first two is a rejection of an earlier poetics (exemplified most obviously by Pope and Swift) which prized wit as an essential element of the poet's art in favour of 'bright imagination' which feels 'acuter pain'. As if to reinforce her argument, she continues by pointing out that 'wit and song' have no power to ameliorate the 'pangs' of life as evidenced by the tears of Boscawen for the death of Garrick. And then, by an interesting elision, she appropriates Boscawen's grief for herself, thrusting herself into the forefront of the poem 'with pride'.

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[8] *Sensibility*, pp. 273-74.
[9] The sections I have omitted do not materially affect my discussion.

This foregrounding of herself allows More to expatiate on Garrick's genius and his many kindnesses as her quasi-patron and, by indirection, assert her own worth because of her association with him. It is only sometime later that she draws back from this apparent self-aggrandizement and apologises:

> Forgive BOSCAWEN, if my sorrowing heart,
> Intent on grief, forget the rules of art;
> Forgive, if wounded recollection melt –
> You best can pardon who have oft'nest felt.[10]

More's appeal here to a sympathy of feeling has the effect of dissolving the particular and individual emotional experience into a more general transference of feelings between those people who possess 'exalted sense, and taste refin'd'.[11] However, these lines also beg a number of questions that More only partially addresses, but which will be resolved by Yearsley in radically different ways.

The first of these concerns the social function of the 'feeling heart'. More's own response to this is hinted at in the following lines:

> For tho' in souls where taste and sense abound,
> Pain thro' a thousand avenues can wound;
> Yet the same avenues are open still,
> To casual blessings as to casual ill.
> Nor is the trembling temper more awake
> To every wound which misery can make,
> Than is the finely-fashion'd nerve alive
> To every transport pleasure has to give.
> For if, when home-felt joys the mind elate,
> It mourns in secret for another's fate;
> Yet when its own sad griefs invade the breast,
> Abroad, in others blessings, see it blest![12]

In this characterisation, it seems apparent that More is not recommending the alleviation of others' distress. Indeed, the mourning 'for another's fate' is done in secret, the recompense being that one's own distresses are equally mourned (and 'blest') by other, presumably secret, mourners. Sensibility, on this reading, is not

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[10] Ibid., p. 276.
[11] Cf. Pinch: '[There was a] tendency to characterize feelings as transpersonal, as autonomous entities that do not always belong to individuals, but rather wander extravagantly from one to another.' Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion,* p. 3.
[12] *Sensibility*, pp. 276-7.

a spur to social action or intelligent reflection, so much as a shared, but hidden, sympathy.

In a later passage, More lists the attributes of sensibility, concluding with an apostrophe to Frances Greville:

No, Greville! no! – Thy song tho' steep'd in tears,
Tho' all thy soul in all thy strain appears;
Yet wou'dst thou all thy well-sung anguish chuse,
And all th'inglorious peace thou begg'st, refuse.[13]

In her note on these lines, More refers to the 'Beautiful Ode to Indifference'. This is an interesting slip because she is, in fact, referring to Greville's *A Prayer for Indifference*, described by Lonsdale as 'the most celebrated poem by a woman in the period'.[14] The difference in prepositions is crucial here. Whereas More's misremembered title indicates that Greville is praising indifference, Greville's title suggests that she is asking for it in vain. So, although More may have misremembered the exact title, it is clear that she remembered the purport of the poem, as is indicated by the last two lines above. As Jerome McGann observes:

> More understands that Greville's prayer for indifference expresses exactly the opposite of what it appears to call for. It prays for indifference the way Jesus prays to his father on the cross, and for the same reasons. Both are (literally) prayers of passion. They reveal that the demands of an absolute love commitment are extreme, and that they are felt in the blood, and felt along the heart.[15]

Significantly, when More returns to her theme of trying to define sensibility, she has to give up the effort:

               Art can never seize,
Nor affectation catch thy pow'r to please:
Thy subtile essence still eludes the chains

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[13] *Sensibility*, p. 2 80.

[14] *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 190. *A Prayer for Indifference* is printed on 192.

[15] Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press., 1996), p. 52.

Of Definition, and defeats her pains.[16]

While it may be true that 'art'[17] and 'affectation' are incapable of representing sensibility, the reader is left wondering what exactly More is referring to. To some extent, the poem solves this problem by describing the outward signs and inward effects of sensibility:

    As words are but th'external marks, to tell
The fair ideas in the mind that dwell;
And only are of things the outward sign,
And not the things themselves, they but define;
So exclamations, tender tones, fond tears,
And all the graceful drapery Pity wears;
These are not Pity's self, they but express
Her inward sufferings by their pictur'd dress;
And these fair marks, reluctant I relate,
These lovely symbols may be counterfeit.[18]

The distinction More is making here between true sensibility and its false counterpart places her in an invidious position which is hardly resolved by the ensuing lines which attempt to illustrate false sensibility. In describing the kind of poetry that focuses on the distress of wounded animals, she observes that, while their 'well-sung sorrows every breast inflame', such poets 'break all hearts but his from whom they came.' Indeed, she goes further than this by claiming that at least some of these poets are heartless in their everyday conduct thereby implying that if they lack personal sensibility their works are disqualified from displaying genuine sensibility.

In the light of my previous chapters, this is a fascinating claim since it suggests that, for More, poetic *personae* represent the poets' personal identities.

Interestingly, More continues with the lines: 'Not so the tender moralist of Tweed;/His *Man of Feeling,* is a man indeed.'[19] Again, the implication is that because Mackenzie is himself possessed of 'tender' feelings, he is able to represent such feelings in his portrayal of Harley, the fictional hero of *The Man*

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[16] *Sensibility*, p. 282.
[17] Here, presumably 'artifice'.
[18] *Sensibility*, pp. 283-4.
[19] Ibid., p. 285.

of Feeling. However, the work is far more complex than More's one dimensional reading suggests. Published in April 1771, *The Man of Feeling* was such a success that a second edition appeared in August. Purporting to be the fragmentary memoirs of one Harley, the work is filtered through an initial editor, the publisher, and a curate who has been using the missing leaves to act as wadding for his fowling piece.[20] The main body of the text consists of a collection of largely unrelated events, each of which is distinguished by a sequence of pathetic scenes in which Harley is reduced to a state of deep emotion frequently involving the tears both of him and the other participants. As the editor states:

> Some instruction, and some example, I make no doubt they contained; but it is likely that many of those, whom chance has led to a perusal of what I have already presented, may have read it with little pleasure, and will feel no disappointment from the want of those parts which I have been unable to procure: to such as may have expected the intricacies of a novel, a few incidents in a life undistinguished, except by some feature of the heart, cannot afford much entertainment.[21]

The self-deprecating tone here is clearly intended to mask the writer's real intention, which is to instruct readers how to approach the work. What is on offer is *not* a novel, but a series of vignettes designed to illustrate the workings of a feeling heart. And there is some evidence that other readers, as well as More, took him at his word. Lady Louisa Stuart, in 1826, recording how her tastes had changed, observed that the episode when Harley walked down to breakfast with his shoe-buckles in his hand reduced her and the assembled company to tears of laughter whereas 'I remember so well its first publication, my mother and sisters crying over it, dwelling on it with rapture.'[22] Nevertheless, its initial popularity suggests that it can be considered as an index of how sensibility was conceived of in the last quarter of the century.

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[20] It is reasonable to assume that the voice that proffers us the printed manuscript also functions in the role of publisher.

[21] *Henry Mackenzie: The Man of Feeling*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 93.

[22] Ibid., S. Bending and S. Bygrave, *Inroduction*, p. xv.

Harley, the main protagonist, is presented as a peculiarly passive character. Events tend to happen to, and around him, and he rarely initiates any activity. Typical episodes involve his meeting people in distress, listening to their stories, and alleviating their situation with a gift of money. Very occasionally, he is the subject of deceits which leave him distressed but, as he reflects on one such occasion: '"Powers of mercy that surround me!", cried he, "do ye not smile upon deeds like these? to calculate the chances of deception is too tedious business for the life of man."'[23] The prime focus, then, is on the emotional responses he has to distress and their physical manifestations which frequently involve tears as well as small acts of charity.

This brief description of the novel clearly fails to do it justice but it brings into focus a particular absence in the exercise of sensibility: a lack of social engagement. In his visit to Bedlam, Harley is genuinely affected by the story of the madwoman and he responds with tears, feelings of pity and the offer of a couple of guineas.[24] His longer encounter with the prostitute and her father also culminates in acts of benevolence to the daughter and shared tears with the father. Similarly, in the extended episode with Edwards and his grandchildren, Harley and his fellow protagonists engage in copious floods of tears amongst which are those expressed when Harley grants Edwards a small farm on which to live out his days. However, Harley never considers that the inequities and hardships suffered by his co–protagonists can be alleviated by any other social action than that of offering monetary charity. The impression he gives is that inequality is endemic to society and that it can be ameliorated by generous feelings and acts, but cannot be fundamentally altered.

Unlike More, however, Mackenzie refracts our perceptions of Harley through the double filter of an 'editor' and an 'author' such that the reader is presented with a portrait of Harley from the outside. To that extent, the representation of the man of feeling is a description. However, the 'author' would appear to be cognisant of Harley's feelings throughout so that the reader is presented with an enactment of sensibility. Further, the fragmentary nature of the 'history' mimics the ebb and

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[23] *The Man of Feeling*, p. 41.
[24] Ibid., p. 27.

flow of the feelings depicted, thereby reinforcing the sense of enactment. We are therefore presented with a double mimesis: that of description and that of enactment. Hannah More's philosophical poem allows us no such flexibility and she is reduced to the rather weak claim that true sensibility is beyond the reach of definition.[25] However, because sensibility largely consists of pity for, and sympathy with, others' sufferings, its outward manifestations would be through acts of charity and appropriate displays of feeling. Nevertheless, More is acutely aware that displays of emotion could be simulated. Therefore, the expression of sensible emotions is not, in itself, sufficient evidence of 'true' sensibility. The logic of this position leads inexorably to a downgrading of emotional representations of sensibility in favour of representations of public acts of charity and 'proper' living such as we find in her later works. As Todd has argued:

> In Hannah More's division of proper and improper sensibility, the collapse of sensibility as a poetic mode is foreshadowed. Once the physical response, the aesthetics of suffering and the sensational aspects of emotion . . . are publicly divorced from, for example, pity, patience and tolerance, which are yet asserted, a straightforward Christian ethic appears and it becomes unnecessary and inappropriate to extol sensibility.[26]

I have spent some time in discussing *The Man of Feeling* and *Sensibility, A Poem* because, in their different ways, they expose the fundamental flaw at the heart of this kind of sensibility.[27] While recognising the inequities and inequalities of their contemporary society, neither Mackenzie nor More suggests any method of amelioration beyond copious displays of emotional sympathy and the casual granting of charity. Indeed, the exercise of sensibility, almost by definition, requires victims for it to be effective.[28] One such victim was Ann Yearsley, and I

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[25] See above, 'Art can never seize,/Nor affectation catch thy pow'r to please:/Thy subtile essence still eludes the chains/Of Definition, and defeats her pains.'

[26] Todd, *Sensibility*, p. 64. See also Stott, *Hannah More:* '. . . the downside of sensibility was a facile emotionalism that placed feelings above duty. In itself neutral, it made the good better and the bad worse, and was therefore a fatal gift for those who lacked a firm grounding in moral principles', p. 84.

[27] This criticism does not apply to all manifestations of the cult of sensibility. See, above, in my chapter on Cowper.

[28] Cf. Paula Backscheider, quoting Ellison: 'The literature of sensibility is inconceivable without victims and its victims are typically foreign, low, or otherwise alien and estranged.' Paula Backscheider, 'Literary Culture as Immediate Reality', in *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel and Culture*', ed. by Paula Backsheider and Christine Ingrassia (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 504-538; 521.

shall be suggesting that Yearsley's struggle to find her poetic voice derives from her attempts to reject the facile emotionalism of More's type of sensibility and replace it with a more socially informed poetics that, while not advocating social equality *tout court*, recommends forms of social cohesion based on fellowship and, one of her favourite words, friendship. Further, I believe that her rejection of sensibility as an adequate poetic response to the social problems of her times was exacerbated and made more bitter by the treatment she received at the hands of Hannah More.

Monica Smith Hart has indicated that:

> . . . modern assessments of Yearsley's writing tend to concentrate on three areas: first, her relationship with More, particularly their disastrous quarrel and subsequent estrangement; second, her self-conscious literary identifications; and third, the questions regarding her working-class origins and/or class status.[29]

She could, perhaps, have added to this list the interest in Yearsley as a specifically *female* poet. All these are legitimate areas of interest, and I shall touch on them when they seem relevant to my study. My primary concern, however, is to investigate how Yearsley managed to develop a powerful poetic voice and the ways she deployed this voice to explore particular, and largely social, concerns.

The known facts of Yearsley's life are by now well-documented, and more recent research has uncovered new documents which cast light on her career as a poet and her relationship with the eighteenth-century system of patronage.[30] Put

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[29] Monica Smith Hart, 'Protest and Performance: Ann Yearsley's *Poems on Several Occasions*', p. 50. In Krishnamurthy, A., ed., *The Working-Class Intellectual in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by A. Krishnamurthy (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), pp. 49-66.

[30] See, particularly, the headnote to Yearsley's entry in Lonsdale, *Eighteenth Century Women Poets,* p. 392; Mary Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton: The Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley, 1753 – 1806* (London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996). For more recent work, see Moira Ferguson's edition of Yearsley's unpublished poetry in Moira Ferguson and Ann Yearsley, 'Poems: Additions by the Same Hand,' *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 12, 1, (1993), 30-46; Frank Felsenstein, 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage: The Thorp Arch Archive: Part I', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 21, 2 (2002), 347-392, and 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage: The Thorp Arch Archive: Part II: Letters to and from & Papers concerning Mrs Yearsley the Bristol Milkwoman', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 22, 1 (2003), 12-56; Kerri Andrews, 'Patronal Care and Maternal Feeling: New Correspondence

briefly, Yearsley was born into a labouring family in 1752 where she received little education although she learned to read and had access to some books.[31] She subsequently married a labourer, John, but, for reasons that are not clear, neither his wages, nor hers as a milkseller in Clifton, were sufficient to support their family of six children and Ann's mother.[32] Rescued from extreme poverty by a Mr. Vaughan, she came to the attention of Hannah More whose cook had received copies of some poetry she had written. More was struck by the quality of these poems and busied herself in raising a subscription which would lead to the publication of Yearsley's first volume, *Poems on Several Occasions* (1785).

The monies which More (and her associate, Elizabeth Montagu) raised were placed in a trust under the sole control of More and Montagu. Yearsley (not unreasonably) resented this deeply and challenged More's high-handed behaviour. The outcome was a bitter feud between Yearsley and More that became something of a *cause célèbre* within literary society. In 1786, Yearsley produced her fourth edition of *Poems on Several Occasions* under the auspices of her new patron, Frederick, Earl of Bristol. In this new edition, she added a preface which offered her own account of the feud, something which she repeated (in more detail) in her second publication, *Poems on Various Subjects* (1787). These two publications received sufficient critical approbation to encourage her to continue writing, and she published three further volumes of poetry, *Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* (1788), *Stanzas of Woe, addressed from the heart on a bed of illness to L. Eames, Esq., etc.* (1790), and

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between Ann Yearsley and Hannah More', *Romanticism: The Journal of Romantic Culture and Criticism,* 16, 1 (2010), 43 – 59; and *Anne Yearsley and Hannah More, Patronage and Poetry: The Story of a Literary Relationship* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), which unfortunately appeared after the completion of this thesis, as did her edition of *The Collected Works of Ann Yearsley*, 3 vols (Pickering and Chatto, 2014).

[31] Landry claims, 'In Yearsley's peasant household, people read – not tracts, or homiletic verse, but "Hist'ry"; and not history as in the glorious chronicles of royal dynasticism, but the history of English insurgency'; *The Muses of Resistance,* p. 179. Claire Knowles expands on this: 'Yearsley may have come from a labouring background, but she was, like many farm workers at this time, relatively well read. In fact, her tastes in literature appear to have run to the classics, with Virgil's Georgics being a particular favourite'; 'Ann Yearsley, Biography and the "Pow'rs of Sensibility Untaught!"', *Women's Writing*, 17, 1 (2010), 166-184, (p. 169).

[32] Waldron offers some suggestions as to why the Yearsley family may have fallen into poverty in M. Waldron, 'Ann Yearsley and the Clifton Records', *The Age of Johnson*, 3 (1990), 301-329, (p. 308).

The Rural Lyre, a volume of Poems, etc. (1796).[33] During this period, she opened a subscription library in Bristol Hot Wells but published no further works, retiring to Melksham on account of ill health, where she died in 1806.

As Hart has observed, these bare bones of Yearsley's life conceal a number of contentious problems which have exercised scholars over the recent years and are relevant to my argument.[34] The first of these involves Yearsley's social sympathies. Born, as she was, in Clifton Hill, she was neither strictly a member of the rural poor, nor, although her mother sold milk door-to-door, a member of the urban poor, but occupied a hinterland between the two. That she was relatively poor is certain; however, given that her mother owned at least one cow and was a milkseller clearly suggests a degree of independence, and it is likely that, although the family slipped into abject poverty, Yearsley resented being placed in a dependent status by Hannah More. Further, her relative lack of education meant that her undoubted intellectual abilities lacked, to some extent, the range of cultural associations which would otherwise be nurtured within a higher status family.[35] Equally, under the patronage of More, such prestige as she might come to enjoy was deflected to More as her 'discoverer'. As Tim Burke puts it:

> Yearsley's creativity is seen as a form of 'idleness' [in More's introduction to *Poems on Several Occasions*], an inferior species of the true labour of motherhood. Yet, thanks to More's triumph of marketing, the poet is herself created, an object of creativity. Once she was Ann Yearsley, now she is 'Lactilla', a saleable and perfectly packaged commodity, not *a* but *the* 'Poetical Milkwoman'. Yearsley becomes, in a sense, Hannah More's 'monster', a starving, homeless, broken fragment until she is 'mended' – More's own phrase – by 'one' who claims to be 'not motivated by idle vanity'. Yearsley's poetic identity is therefore doubly displaced, first by the cultural saturation of ideas about genius, motherhood and charitable sensibility, and then by the impossible injunctions placed upon her at a local level by More.[36]

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[33] She also wrote a play, *Earl Godwin* (1791), and a novel, *The Royal Captive* (1795), neither of which I shall be considering in any detail.

[34] See above.

[35] The kinds of cultural references to which I am referring were not typically available to women during this period. They would, however, be available to women of higher status from governesses and other members of their families.

[36] Tim Burke, 'Anne Yearsley and the Distribution of Genius in Early Romantic Culture', in *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth*, pp. 215-230; p. 227. See also Hess: 'Most working class poets . . . such as Duck, Leapor, Yearsley and Clare, were

Thus, Yearsley lacked, in Bourdieu's terms, material, cultural and symbolic capital and much of her career can be seen in the light of her trying to achieve these kinds of capital.[37]

However, to the extent that Yearsley saw this as a personal struggle, it becomes meaningless to try to recruit her as some sort of advocate for an emerging working-class. Equally, it is not at all clear that she was particularly anxious to raise herself socially into the middle-class.[38] Yearsley knew who she was and where she came from and, although occasionally afflicted with self-doubt, her poetry continually asserts her right to speak authoritatively for herself. As Landry observes:

> Yearsley rarely fails to locate herself firmly within the social space of the labouring woman writer – poor, plebeian, and deficient in education and culture. . . . But working within and against the grain of this location within social space is another sort of authorial consciousness: the striving for a literary freedom from social and sexual constraints through the establishment of a sovereign subject, a self constituting and imperial "I" who takes a rarefied but emancipatory pleasure in the imagination and in aesthetic production.[39]

In the preceding chapters, I have indicated that Gray, Goldsmith (although to a lesser extent) and Cowper were similarly attempting to establish a 'sovereign subject'. Further, I have suggested that, in their different ways, they used this

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hampered from strong self-assertion by the pressures of patrons and readers, who often wanted to define these poets' identities for them within the expectations of class, rather than allowing such poets to construct their own identities and authority.' Hess, *Authoring the Self,* p. 28.

[37] See Chap. 1.

[38] Waldron's take on this seems to me fundamentally mistaken: 'Those who wish to see Yearsley as a representative of an emerging proletariat must be puzzled to find absolutely no use made of existing folk poetry and ballad. The foregoing analysis must lead us to the certainty that she would have found such traditional models coarse and unworthy of her attention. It is impossible to escape the conclusion that, far from identifying with the community into which she had been born, Yearsley only felt at home with the cultured and educated. Since she also saw much to criticize among the wealthy, her position, both socially and culturally must be recognized as that of an isolate.' Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton*, p. 116. A disinclination to employ folk poetry or ballads can hardly be seen as an index of one's class alliances; nor is it at all obvious that feeling 'at home with the cultured and educated' disqualifies Yearsley from having deep sympathy with 'the community into which she had been born.' The final sentence may be partly true, but what is of interest is the nature of her isolation. See, also, my discussion of *Addressed to Ignorance*, below.

[39] Landry**,** *The Muses of Resistance,* p. 24.

authoritative subject position as a platform from which to engage in social criticism. However, unlike Yearsley, they had the advantage of being born into comfortable circumstances and receiving the kind of education that was only available to the gentry. Yearsley was encumbered by radically different circumstances, being both poor and under-privileged with regard to education.[40] Further, she was a woman. The struggles she faced, therefore, to achieve an authorial self that was both 'self-constituting and imperial' were immense and had to be fought for, first from her inferior position in relation to More, and secondly from her inferior position in relation to the social and cultural hegemonies of the period. Yearsley never forgets these struggles and the ambivalent positions she occupies in relation to them. Her poetry regularly acknowledges the gratitude she feels to More for aiding her escape from the deplorable conditions in which Vaughan found her, while at the same time deeply resenting the high-handed treatment she received from More subsequently. Further, much of her poetry exposes and criticises the social inequities under which she suffered, both as a woman and a member of the labouring classes.[41] That she achieved 'emancipatory pleasure in the imagination and in aesthetic production' is undeniable, but it would be mistaken to assume from this that her poetry turns in on itself in such a way as to celebrate this pleasure at the expense of questioning why she, and others similarly situated, should need such emancipation in the first place.

The tensions implicit in Yearsley's position are evident from the fourth edition of *Poems, On Several Occasions*.[42] The poems are prefaced both by More's original letter of recommendation and by Yearsley's response. More's initial letter, addressed to Elizabeth Montagu, is, of course, constrained by the generic

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[40] In this context, it is unimportant whether she came from a self-employed family or from a family that worked for an employer.

[41] It is significant that her final collection of poetry had, as a frontispiece, a picture of Yearsley entitled 'Ann Yearsley. The Bristol Milk Woman & Poetess'. The discourse established through the image and its caption makes clear that Yearsley (or her printer) was signifying that she was provincial, that she came from lowly circumstances, that she was a woman, but that she had achieved the right to present her image to the world as a poetess almost in spite of these disadvantages. Ann Yearsley, *The Rural Lyre; A Volume Of Poems: Dedicated To The Right Honourable The Earl Of Bristol, Lord Bishop Of Derry* (Paternoster-row, London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1796).

[42] Ann Yearsley, *Poems, On Several Occasions By Ann Yearsley, A Milkwoman Of Bristol.* 4th edn (Pater-noster Row, London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1786).

formulae of the period, but its discursive moves are extremely interesting. She opens by flattering Montagu for her high reputation and liberal spirit. She then proceeds to relate how she became aware both of Yearsley and of her distress. Somewhat contradictorily, More describes Yearsley as 'a poor illiterate woman' who, nevertheless, had written some verses which 'though incorrect, they breathed the genuine spirit of Poetry, and were rendered still more interesting, by a certain natural and strong expression of misery.'[43] More relates the circumstances from which Vaughan had rescued her before continuing:

> I was curious to know what poetry she had read. With the Night Thoughts, and Paradise Lost, I found her well acquainted; but she was astonished to learn that Young and Milton had written any thing else. Of Pope, she had only seen the Eloisa; and Dryden, Spenser, Thomson, and Prior, were quite unknown to her, even by name. She has read a few of Shakespeare's Plays, and speaks of a translation of the Georgics, which she has somewhere seen, with the warmest poetic rapture.

> But though it has been denied to her to drink at the *pure well-head* of Pagan Poesy, yet, from the true fountain of divine Inspiration, her mind seems to have been wonderfully nourished and enriched.[44]

Yearsley is thus established as poor, illiterate to the extent that her reading had been limited, but whose verses demonstrated many of the features of sensibility that appealed to More. Further, she was worthy of patronage because she was well-acquainted with the Bible.[45]

More's discussion of her poetic style is also revealing:

> If her epithets are now and then bold and vehement, they are striking and original; and I should be sorry to see the wild vigour of her rustic muse polished into elegance, or laboured into correctness. Her ear is perfect; there is sometimes great felicity in the structure of her blank verse, and she often varies the pause with a happiness which looks like skill . . .[46]

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[43] Ibid., p. vi.
[44] Ibid., p. ix.
[45] Landry hints that there may have been a deliberate strategy in Yearsley's mention of both the Bible and the Georgics: 'As late as 1784, when discussing her favorite authors, Ann Yearsley, the "milkmaid of Bristol," would cannily claim that "Among the Heathens," she had met with no such Composition as Virgil's Georgics," thus simultaneously demonstrating her piety and her professional good sense'; Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside*; p. 57.
[46] *Poems, On Several Occasions*, pp. x-xi.

Yearsley, for More, is highly competent but her competence is, and should remain, in 'the wild vigour of her rustic muse.' Although More's reluctance to encourage Yearsley to develop her poetry beyond the generic constraints of the 'rustic muse' may appear to be arrogant, there are complicated reasons behind it, as becomes clear later in the letter. On the one hand, the earlier eighteenth-century desire to discriminate between different 'kinds' of poetry, although fading, was still present. But, more importantly, it allowed More to appeal to the widely-held belief that *poeta nascitur, non fit*:

> Though I have a high reverence for art, study, and institution, and for all the mighty names and master spirits who have given laws to Taste, yet I am not sorry, now and then, to convince the supercilious Critic, whose mass of knowledge is not warmed by a single particle of native fire, that genius is antecedent to rules, and independent on criticism; for who, but his own divine and incomprehensible genius, pointed out to Shakespeare, while he was holding horses at the play-house door, every varied position of the human mind, every shade of discrimination in the human character?[47]

Further, More is determined that Yearsley should not be placed in 'a state of independence as might seduce her to devote her time to the idleness of Poetry' for 'as a wife and a mother, she has duties to fill, the smallest of which is of more value than the finest verses she can write.'[48]

Again, we are offered a complex set of interlocking ideas which deserve some scrutiny. More was self-evidently aware, because of her own publishing history, that the book trade was capable of supporting individual writers. But Yearsley was in the position of being 'a wife and a mother', so the risk that she might succumb to the 'idleness of Poetry' was not so much because the writing of poetry was the prerogative of the leisured, male classes, but because she had

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[47] Ibid., p. xii.

[48] Ibid., p. xv. Linda Zionkowski comments that: '[b]y sentimentalizing Yearsley as a struggling Shakespeare or as Gray's unlettered muse, and by assuring subscribers of the poet's docility as one of the deserving poor, More tries to evoke readers' sympathy and deflect their criticism. But the character she constructs in the preface also undermines whatever subjectivity that Yearsley might express.' Linda Zionkowski, 'Strategies of Containment: Stephen Duck, Ann Yearsley, and the Problem of Polite Culture', *Eighteenth Century Life*, 13, 3 (1989), 91-108, (p. 100). While this is true up to a point, it downplays the importance of the evangelical Christianity that was becoming increasingly attractive to More. While this inevitably had political consequences, as is clear from More's later writings, it seems to me that, in this instance, More was displaying a gender bias rather more than a class bias and that Yearsley's subjectivity was not being seriously undermined. Indeed, some aspects of her subjectivity — those relating to sensibility — were the subject of More's approval.

other, female, responsibilities that far transcended those which might be incumbent on a literary life.[49] For More, literature was the domain of the leisured middle class, both male and female. Yearsley was unlikely to achieve that degree of independence.

More finishes her letter with a characteristic show of false modesty when she writes:

> For my own part, I do not feel myself actuated by the idle vanity of a *discoverer*; for I confess, that the ambition of bringing to light a genius buried in obscurity, operates much less powerfully on my mind, than the wish to rescue a meritorious woman from misery, for it is not fame, but bread, which I am anxious to secure to her.[50]

More's letter, then, exhibits a complex set of presumptions and tropes but there is no evidence that she was acting in ways that were anything less than generous.[51] However, Yearsley's response to this prefatory letter indicates very clearly that she was disgusted by the nature of More's subsequent patronage. Her primary charge was that More had set up a trust fund for Yearsley and her children over which they had no rights. Yearsley suggests that she signed the document under duress: 'I had no time to peruse it, nor take a copy,' and that she had agreed to terms under which 'I felt as a mother deemed unworthy the tuition or care of her family.'[52] In asserting this, Yearsley constructs a discourse that explicitly challenges More's previous anxiety that her patronage may divert Yearsley from her duties as a wife and mother.[53] Yearsley, then, is demanding that the readers

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[49] Although the fate of Stephen Duck, who committed suicide in 1756, was an awful warning to those poets who attempted to escape the limitations of their class origins through the deployment of their literary talents.

[50] *Poems, On Several Occasions,* p. xvi.

[51] Commenting on the different positions of More and Yearsley more generally, Paul Demers observes: 'In sifting through the skewed and distorting rhetoric of the champions of both sides, it is as important to recognize Yearsley's expressions of gratitude as it is to note her corrosive anger; similarly, More's zeal and tirelessness in Yearsley's cause must be remembered as well as her miscalculations and intransigence.' Paul Demers, '"For Mine's a Stubborn and a Savage Will": "Lactilla" (Ann Yearsley) and "Stella" (Hannah More) Reconsidered', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 56, 2 (Spring, 1993), 135-150, (p. 136).

[52] *Poems, On Several Occasions,* p. xix.

[53] A good account of the dispute between More and Yearsley occurs in Andrews, 'Patronal Care and Maternal Feeling'. Among other things, Andrews argues that: 'Using the conventions of patronage, More has been able to determine exactly how she represents herself and Yearsley to Montagu, and to the world at large. Yearsley had no socially acceptable way to respond in order to correct this deliberate misrepresentation of her character and conduct. Instead, Yearsley chose a socially *un*acceptable way, the publication in 1786 of "Mrs. Yearsley's Narrative". A double

of this fourth edition should read her poetry as the expression of a subjectively independent voice whose objective person has been distorted by More's portrayal of her in the prefatory letter. As if to reinforce this point (and to take another sideswipe at More's characterisation of her), Yearsley finishes her narrative with the words:

> It having been represented that my last work received great ornament and addition from a learned and superior genius, and my manuscripts *not existing* to contradict it, I have ventured, without a guide, on a second volume of poems, and will complete them with as much expedition as the more important duties of my family will permit.[54]

This dispute is of obvious interest in the ways in which it displays the changing nature of the patronage system in the later eighteenth century. Waldron believes that it also has a wider significance. Commenting on the publicity that the dispute generated at the time, she observes:

> These samples from the flurry of correspondence and comment that took place show the Yearsley story to have been a nationwide event and demonstrate the widespread interest at this time in writers from humble backgrounds. The contention surrounding such writers also underlines the conflict between the genuine tide of cultural and educational democracy that had originated among those members of the middle ranks dissatisfied with the arrogance of court and aristocracy, and the undertow of conservatism that produced great fear of social destabilization.[55]

At the more personal level, it also offers us an insight into the ways in which Yearsley altered and developed her poetical practices as a consequence of her bitter disagreements with More.

Poems, On Several Occasions was regarded as a striking achievement. More's tireless advocacy meant that there was an impressive list of subscribers, including most of her friends from the Bluestockings and Frances and Dr

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breach of social convention, Yearsley rejected with its publication the rules of public communication supposedly governing her both as a mother and as a protégée', p. 58.

[54] *Poems, On Several Occasions*, p. xxx.

[55] Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton,* p. 77. An interesting discussion of the dispute occurs in Landry, *The Muses of Resistance*, wherein she makes the related point that '[w]e are up against the limits of class ideology in this period, the limits of what social subjects like More and Yearsley would have been likely to expect from one another, and not some villainous failure of understanding for which More can be held accountable.', 19.

Burney, and a significant number of the poems were addressed to one or other of the subscribers.[56] However, because it is not clear which poems were 'improved' by More, I shall touch only briefly on those poems that raise themes which Yearsley develops in greater detail in her later work, and those in which the poetic voice is clearly original.

Yearsley's tentative contacts with the 'polite' world of More and her associates are explored most fully in *Night. To Stella,*[57] *To Stella on a Visit to Mrs. Montagu*[58] and *On Mrs. Montagu*.[59] The first of these opens with a formulaic description of night, followed by an invocation to Fancy to watch over Stella:

At this lone hour, when Nature silent lies,
And CYNTHIA, solemn, aids the rising scene,
Whilst Hydra-headed Care one moment sleeps,
And, listless, drops his galling chain to earth;
O! let swift Fancy plume her ruffled wing,
And seek the spot where sacred raptures rise; . . .

The classical references are both an acknowledgement of Stella's superior learning (since she would understand them) and an indication that they were accessible to the lowly born Yearsley. In this sense, they ally the poet and her patron and establish a context for her further request to Melpomene in which she asks:

O lend thy aid, while thy soft votary sleeps,
And bid *me* boldly swell the artless line,
Lend me *her* pen, and guide my rustic hand,
To draw soft pity from the Tragic Tale,
Where goading misery drives her ploughshare deep . . .   (20-24)

There is a fascinating reciprocity here, in that the tale (Yearsley's own), originally told to Stella and presumably stored in Stella's memory, is now being

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[56] It is reasonable to assume that these were written after she had met More and that they were therefore written, to some extent, under More's tutelage. The William Cowper who is listed is not, as might be supposed, the poet but another gentleman whose will is recorded in the National Archives: Will of William Cowper of Mount Street near Grosvenor Square, Middlesex. Date: 23 February 1799 http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/PROB+11/1319/19 [accessed 28 September, 2012.]
[57] *Poems, On Several Occasions,* pp. 1-2. Stella was Yearsley's name for More.
[58] Ibid., pp. 52-5.
[59] Ibid., pp. 79-84.

reclaimed so that it can be retold with all the moral embellishments it would have received from a woman of superior education and vocabulary. Yearsley, however, claims to be unworthy of the task precisely because she lacks Stella's learning: 'Hard, hard command! and yet I will obey;/Unaided, unassisted, will deplore/That learning, Heaven's best gift, is lost to me.' (77-9) The gap Yearsley establishes here between herself and More leads her both to despair and to reflect on her early life:

The journey clos'd, I shoot the gulf unknown,
To find a home, perhaps – a long-lost mother.
How does fond thought hang on her much-lov'd name,
And tear each fibre of my bursting heart!
Ah! dear supporter of my infant mind,
Whose nobler precept bade my soul aspire
To more than tinsel joy; the filial tear
Shall drop for thee when pleasure loudest calls.   (82-9)

The contrasts established here are revealing. Stella, the potential mother-figure, soars beyond the reach of the narrator-poet who is left in her circumscribed world where 'Cheerless and pensive o'er the wilds of life,/Like the poor beetle creep my hours away' (80-1) until she remembers her own mother whose instruction, though rudimentary, inspired her to 'more than tinsel joy.' A very real tension is thus established between the world of More which Yearsley initially aspired to enter, and the world in which she was reared and which is, in fact, the true source of her inspiration. While there is no overt criticism of More's world, there is tacit acceptance that Yearsley's true genius lay elsewhere.[60]

And yet, Yearsley cannot stop yearning for the kind of education that More was able to offer her. As the poem progresses, she continues to invoke Stella's help to 'aid my pen' (146) and the tensions I have described above are made explicit in the lines:

  Thus desperately I reason'd, madly talk'd –
Thus horrid as I was, of rugged growth,
More savage than the nightly-prowling wolf;

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[60] The apparent contradiction between my earlier claim that Yearsley arrogates to herself a knowledge of classical imagery can be explained by the fact that this is clearly an early poem and that the poet has not yet got all her themes under control. At a deeper level, it represents a very real anxiety about her status in the learned and polite world.

She feels what Nature taught; I, wilder far,
Oppos'd her dictates – but my panting soul
Now shivers in the agony of change,
As insects tremble in the doubtful hour
Of transmigration; loth to lose the form
Of various tints, its fondly cherish'd pride.   (189-96)

This is a fascinating self-description, not least in the assertion that although she was 'more savage than the nightly-prowling wolf', she was not simply a child of nature. Her trembling on the brink of transformation thus depends on the very real benefits she hopes to gain from More's patronage, which are finally acknowledged in the lines: 'In thy mild rhetoric dwells a social love/Beyond my wild conceptions, optics false!/Thro' which I falsely judg'd of polish'd life.' (202-5)

Whether More's 'mild rhetoric' was entirely beneficial to Yearsley's growth as a poet is, at best, debatable. Those passages in which she details her former life have a sinewy strength and vigour which become enervated when Yearsley is describing the pleasures of More's instruction. For example, when she is listing her various deficiencies, she employs very precise epithets:

  Excuse me, STELLA! lo, I guideless stray,
No friendly hand assists my wilder'd thought;
Uncouth, unciviliz'd, and rudely rough,
Unpolish'd, as the form thrown bye by Heaven,
Not worth completion, or the Artist's hand,
To add a something more.   (134-8)

'Uncouth, unciviliz'd and rudely rough/Unpolish'd' refer both to her lack of polite manners, her lack of education and her class origins. The alliteration emphasises the 'roughness' of her background, while the rhythms which pull together these individual qualities have a jarring and abrupt quality which both mimics and enacts the states described. The phrases which follow seem somehow incomplete as though they have been cobbled together. A full stop after 'Heaven' would have made the point, but Yearsley continues with two further phrases which rhythmically beg the unanswered question 'why?', thereby adding to the sense of incompleteness. Equally, the lines quoted above (194-6) employ a very precise observation of insects passing from the grub stage to that of fully formed insect of a kind which tends to be absent from the lines which

264

employ the more polite language drawn from Young and Milton. There is, for example, something unbelievable in the metaphors she employs to describe Stella's verse:

Her song, least part, her soaring spirit shares
An early Heaven, anticipates her bliss,
And quaffs nectareous draughts of joy sublime;
Beyond yon starry firmament she roves,
And basks in suns that never warm'd the earth;
Newtonian systems lag her rapid flight,
She pierces thro' his planetary worlds,
And, eager, grasps creations yet to be. (37-44)

The sheer excess of this renders it poetically implausible.

Such criticisms are somewhat vitiated if we consider Yearsley at this point as an apprentice poet. Certainly, in *To Stella on a Visit to Mrs. Montagu* and *On Mrs. Montagu*, she has the rhetoric of praise more under control, although she continues to insist on her own baseness in relation to these two luminaries.[61] *To Stella* opens with the lines:

Unequal, lost to the aspiring claim,
I neither ask, nor own th'immortal name
Of Friend; ah, no! its ardors are too great,
My soul too narrow, and too low my state;
STELLA! soar on, to nobler objects true,
 Pour out your soul with your lov'd MONTAGU;

Throughout these two poems, there is a sense that Yearsley's true object of admiration is Montagu, and that More is primarily regarded as an intermediary who will convey Montagu's thoughts 'in polish'd diction drest' (25). However, there is also a developing interest in the theme of friendship which was to recur in many of her later poems. So, later in the poem, she comments:

What bliss the friendship of the wise to share,
Of soul superior, and of virtues rare!
Where Genius in familiar converse sits,
Crowns real worth, and blasts pretending Wits; . . .   (19-22)

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[61] *To Stella* is composed in rhyming couplets and it may be that the discipline of the form encouraged a tighter control of the rhetorical flights of fancy.

At this stage of her career, it is not clear whether Yearsley considered the class divide to be a barrier to friendship, or whether, as seems more likely, a disparity in intellect and learning made true friendship impossible. It is interesting to see in *On Mrs. Montagu* the theme of friendship raised again, but in a radically different way: 'The theme unfolds/Its ample maze, for MONTAGU befriends/The puzzled thought' (11-3). If thoughts can be befriended, then it is not unreasonable to assume that people who have 'befriended' the same thought can themselves be friends. Social distance, therefore, can be overcome through education leading to an equality of minds, though not necessarily to an equality of economic opportunity.

The intellectual consequences of Yearsley's relative lack of education are touched on in *Night. To Stella* and *To Stella*, but they are portrayed in some detail in *On Mrs. Montagu.* In a longish passage (51-66), she describes how she observed the Clifton landscape with rapture:

> Yon starry orbs,
> Majestic ocean, flowery vales, gay groves,
> Eye wasting lawns, and Heaven-attempting hills,
> Which bound th'horizon, and which curb the view;
> All those, with beauteous imagery awak'd
> My ravish'd soul to extacy untaught,
> To all the transport the rapt sense can bear.   (56-62)

There is a telling lack of detail in these descriptions. Indeed, they read rather like a catalogue of types of landscapes, but this is deliberate for Yearsley wants to insist on her lack of vocabulary at that time to describe them in detail: 'But all expir'd, for want of powers to speak;/All perish'd in the mind as soon as born . . .' (63-4).[62]

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[62] Knowles has a slightly different view of these lines: 'Freed from immediate want by the patronage of these women, and buoyed by her access to their learned company, Yearsley turns in earnest to the cultivation of the very middle-class discourse of sensibility. Somewhat paradoxically, while Yearsley presents sensibility as an innate phenomenon, inspired by the beauties of the natural world and nurtured by a life of deprivation and sorrow, it becomes clear in this poem that sensibility is meaningless if it exists in isolation from (middle-class) society.' Knowles, 'Ann Yearsley', p. 176. This is, I think, to misread these lines. Although the language may draw on the language of sensibility, the idea that landscapes were a source of wonder and inspiration was almost a commonplace among eighteenth-century writers. Further, Yearsley is not lamenting the fact that she is not a member of middle-class society, so much as complaining that she lacked the language to express her feelings precisely. Julie Cairnie is more convincing when she argues that: 'Even in this early poem [On Mrs.Montagu], supposedly an exemplar of

So far, then, Lactilla has constructed herself in these poems as an unfortunate soul, lacking knowledge, money and social cultivation who, thanks to the almost miraculous intervention of Hannah More, has gained a glimpse of these benefits and a desire to avail herself of them. What is noticeably lacking is any serious questioning of the social structure that allows her, and others like her, to exist in such a deprived state. There is a clear condemnation of masculine arrogance in the opening lines of *On Mrs. Montagu*:

Why boast, O arrogant, imperious man,
Perfection so exclusive? are thy powers
Nearer approaching Deity? can'st thou solve
Questions which high Infinity propounds,
Soar nobler flights, or dare immortal deeds,
Unknown to woman, if she greatly dares
To use the powers assign'd her? Active strength,
The boast of animals, is clearly thine;
By this upheld, thou think'st the lesson rare
That female virtues teach; and poor the height
Which female wit obtains.   (1-11)

However, rather than confronting such arrogance directly, Lactilla deliberately deflects it to become Montagu's problem. Again, she has constructed herself as an unlettered person who, at this stage of her career, leaves such problems to her betters.

There was, of course, a strategic advantage in adopting such a position. It guaranteed the continued support of More and her coterie and it allowed her to develop her technical skills to a point where she was able to stand forth in her own right and make use of her experiences to construct a very different kind of poetry and the seeds of this transformation are already hinted at in her poems *To the SAME; on her accusing the Author of Flattery*, *To the Honourable H---E W---E on Reading the Castle of Otranto* and, pre-eminently, in *Clifton Hill.*

natural genius and submission, we find compelling evidence in its silences of Yearsley's authorial ambition and resistance. A most striking absence in this poem is work, or physical labor; in this rural landscape there is no labor, no activity beyond the seemingly aimless wandering of the poet'; Julie Cairnie, 'The Ambivalence of Ann Yearsley: Laboring and Writing, Submission and Resistance', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 27, 4 (2005), 353-364, (p. 357). The absence of physical work is something of a puzzle but it may not be intended as an implicit criticism of More and her circle for simply ignoring physical labour in such poems as *Sensibility*. More likely, Yearsley's reveries in her country walks were a means of blotting out the harsh realities of her working life.

However, before considering these poems, two others are worthy of remark. *Address to Friendship* seems to have been abandoned, possibly because the ideas that Yearsley explores in the poem were as yet too inchoate to formulate clearly.[63] Largely an attempt to distinguish friendship from sexual love, it closes with some fascinating lines that explore Yearsley's relationship with More and hint at the coming feud:

> My abject fate
> Excites the willing hand of Charity,
> The momentary sigh, the pitying tear,
> Ans instantaeous act of bounty bland,
> To Misery so kind; yet not to you,
> Bounty, or Charity, or Mercy mild,
> The pensive thought applies fair Friendship's name;
> That name which never yet cou'd dare exist
> But in equality * * * * *
> * * * * * * * * * * * * * (78-86)

Waldron argues that:

> [i]t is important to remember that in context the word "equality" has no connection with ideas about the brotherhood of man; Yearsley is simply lamenting the fact that, as things were, friendship between persons of different social status was impossible, since it would always be tainted by pity. Probably More saw her interpretation as acceptance rather than rebellion.[64]

This is a persuasive interpretation, but it overlooks the incipient hostility that Yearsley was developing towards More's self-interested acts of charity. Equally, Yearsley is actively exploring the concept of friendship and while, at this stage, deploring the fact that it may not be possible for it to exist between people of different social status, is laying the foundations for her later manipulations of the same theme whereby she seems to claim that friendship between people of like minds is possible regardless of social disparities.[65]

In *To Mr. R------------ on his Benevolent Scheme for rescuing Poor Children from Vice and Misery, by promoting Sunday Schools*, Yearsley explores another

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[63] Ibid., pp. 61-66.
[64] Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton,* p. 108.
[65] But cf. above my discussion of the theme of friendship in *To Stella* and *On Mrs. Montagu*.

theme which is dear to her heart.[66] To a modern reader, the idea of Sunday schools smacks of the evangelicalism dear to Hannah More and, indeed, there are aspects of this in the poem. However, it is important to remember that the labouring classes had very limited access to any kind of education and that for Yearsley, equally deprived, any kind of education was for the public good. As Hart has argued: 'What modern criticism at times misrepresents as Yearsley's acquiescence to middle-class literary mores can be read instead as sophisticated manipulation of those same mores for her own purposes – one of which was to promote the cause of working-class education.'[67]

Yearsley's depiction of the life of the poor, untouched by education, is particularly vivid:

>   The poor illiterate, chill'd by freezing want,
> Within whose walls pale Penury still sits,
> With icy hand impressing every meal,
> Cannot divide his slender hard-earn'd mite
> Betwixt his bodily and mental wants;
> The soul must go – for hunger loudly pleads,
> And Nature will be answer'd; thus his race,
> Envelop'd, groping, sink in vulgar toils;
> To eat and sleep includes the soul's best wish;
> And mean deceit, and treacherous, low-phras'd guile,
> Fill the vast space for better purpose given.   (125-35)

Interestingly, Yearsley's use of the word 'Nature' here is contrasted with the condition of the educated person indicating clearly that she has no belief in the Rousseauian view of the innate goodness of man 'in a state of nature.' On the contrary, education allows people fully to become themselves:

>   the accent soft,
> The humble sigh, the infant's early tear,
> The husband's stifled, sympathetic groan,
> The mother's feelings, more then ever felt,
> Tho' borne in silence and in pensive mood.
> These are all shades in which the Godhead's seen. . .   (166-71)

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[66] *Poems, On Several Occasions,* pp. 38-48.
[67] Hart, 'Protest and Performance: Ann Yearsley's *Poems on Several Occasions*', p. 63.

From these lines, it seems clear that Yearsley is not advocating a social revolution, although she is certainly demanding social change in which the 'Godhead' can be realised among the poor as well as the rich.

To the Honourable H---E W---E on Reading the Castle of Otranto revisits the theme of patriarchal arrogance mentioned in *On Mrs. Montagu*.[68] Horace Walpole was one of the original subscribers to this collection and Yearsley's taking him to task was a courageous act.[69] The poem opens with the lines:

> To praise thee, WALPOLE, asks a pen divine,
>   And common sense to me is hardly given;
> BIANCA's Pen now owns the daring line,
>   And who expects *her* muse should drop from Heaven?   (1-4)

The first two lines cunningly suggest that because she, Yearsley, lacks the skill (and education) to engage in the appropriate flattery both for Walpole himself and for his novel, she therefore adopts the *persona* of Bianca, a minor female servant in the novel. This act of ventriloquizing enables Yearsley to criticise Walpole for his portrayal both of women and, particularly, serving women**,** by contrasting it with his portrayal of the male characters:

> HYPOLITA! fond, passive to excess,
>   Her low submission suits not souls like mine;
> BIANCA might have lov'd her MANFRED less,
>   Not offer'd less at great Religion's shrine,
>
> Implicit Faith, all hail! Imperial man
>   Exacts submission; reason we resign;
> Against our senses we adopt the plan
>   Which Reverence, Fear, and Folly think divine.   (48-56)

In these lines, Bianca contrasts herself with the passive Hypolita while asserting her essential honesty as a god-fearing woman. This enables her to excoriate the submission of woman to man which is founded on 'Reverence, Fear, and Folly.'

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[68] Ibid., pp. 67-74.

[69] Walpole admired Yearsley's first collection but, in a characteristic display of class arrogance, wrote to More that she 'must remember that she is a Lactilla, not a Pastora, and is to tend real Cows, not Arcadian sheep.' Horace Walpole, *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. by W. S. Lewis, vol. 31 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 219.

Having used Bianca's voice to articulate some of the ideological biases in the novel, Yearsley reverts to her own voice to warn Stella against the seductive power of Walpole's imagination:

Oh! with this noble Sorcerer ne'er converse;
  Fly, STELLA, quickly from the magic storm,
Or, soon he'll close thee in some high-plum'd hearse,
  Then raise another Angel in thy form.   (85-8)

However, in a characteristic act of submission (and foresight), she later comments:

Yet whisper not I've call'd him names, I fear
  His ARIEL would my hapless sprite torment,
He'd cramp my bones, and all my sinews tear,
  Should STELLA blab the secret I'd prevent.   (97-100)

In this poem, then, Yearsley not only displays her technical competence but, by adopting the voice of the lowly Bianca, manages to elicit many of the hidden discourses that other readers may take for granted.[70] Nevertheless, as her final address to Stella suggests, she is still not yet confident enough to speak in her own voice.[71]

A similar failure of confidence occurs in *To the SAME; on her accusing the Author of Flattery*.[72] This relatively brief poem wavers between an apparently servile acquiescence to More's complaint and an aggressive determination to assert her independent right to speak as she sees fit. The opening of the poem makes this abundantly clear:

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[70] Her control of the quatrains can be illustrated by the following lines:
But while the Hermit does my soul affright,
  Love dies – Lo! in yon corner down he kneels,
I shudder, see the taper sinks in night,
  He rises, and his fleshless form reveals.   (73-6)
While each line contains exactly ten syllables, the placing of the *caesurae* after the verbs in lines two, three and four interrupt the movement of the verse with involuntary starts. Similarly, the shifts of focus suggested by the subject choices (Love, he, I, he) imitates the sense of terror portrayed by the visually vivid scenes.
[71] An excellent account of this poem occurs in Madeleine Kahn, '"A by-stander often sees more of the game than those that play": Ann Yearsley reads The Castle of Otranto', *Bucknell Review: A Scholarly Journal of Letters, Arts and Sciences*, 42, 1 (1998): 59-78. http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:abell:R01250608:0 [accessed 10 September, 2012].
[72] *Poems, on Several Occasions*, pp. 56-7.

Excuse me, STELLA, sunk in humble state,
With more than needful awe I view the great;
No glossy diction e'er can aid the thought,
First stamp'd in ignorance, with error fraught.
My friends I've prais'd – they stood in heavenly guise
When first I saw them, and my mental eyes
Shall in the heavenly rapture view them still,
For mine's a stubborn and a savage will;
No customs, manners, or soft arts I boast,
On my rough soul your nicest rules are lost;
Yet shall unpolish'd gratitude be mine,
While STELLA deigns to nurse the spark divine.   (1-12)

Yearsley does not so much excuse herself as explain to More that, coming from a humble background lacking in 'customs, manners, or soft arts', she was bound to view those who possessed such attributes 'with more than needful awe', and that her gratitude to More and her friends was also bound to be 'unpolish'd' since 'they stood in heavenly guise/When first I saw them'. However, the epithet 'glossy' to describe the 'diction' which More evidently admires suggests that Yearsley is already beginning to distrust the rhetorical styles adopted by More and that they may conceal a more tawdry undercoat. In this context, the challenge implicit in 'For mine's a stubborn and a savage will' foregrounds the poet as an independent voice who will pursue her own career in her own way.

That voice is realised most completely in this collection in *Clifton Hill.*[73] Composed in January, 1785, it may well have been the last poem written before publication. Landry insists on the 'literariness' of the work, arguing that:

> from Lactilla's vantage point.., the georgic binding together through
> stewardship and reciprocity of humans and animals, and indeed of humans
> and humans, is constantly under threat of human violation. Yearsley
> exposes how the georgic ethos was always precariously balanced between
> necessity and thoughtless violence, between sustainable needs and greed.[74]

I have earlier claimed that much of Yearsley's work in this volume could be considered as apprentice work. *Clifton Hill* represents the successful completion

[73] Ibid., pp. 85-193.
[74] Landry, 'Georgic Ecology', in *Robert Bloomfield: Lyric, Class, and the Romantic Canon*, pp. 253-268, p. 265.

of this apprenticeship. However, I would suggest the Landry's comments require some nuancing.

In this poem, Yearsley is trying to draw together a bundle of different experiences suggested by her walks around Clifton, her observations of the countryside, her reactions to the significance of Bristol as a major centre of commerce, grief for the loss of her mother and the symbolic significance of Louisa. There was no obvious generic model which could accommodate all these elements and it is not surprising that she turned to the georgic as a template on which she could project her vision. However, her ultimate rejection of the form depends as much on her recognition that the georgic was no longer an adequate means of harmoniously representing the multifarious sensations, experiences and ideas that she was trying to incorporate as on the inherent contradictions of the form itself. Also, by ultimately rejecting georgic, she was breaking free from the poetic restrictions which absorbed her voice into a (largely middle-class) set of discursive practices which she did not, and could not, support.

The first section (1-65) is a damaged pastoral. The 'angry storms' and 'hoary Winter' lay waste to the countryside such that 'FLORA'S beauties' are withered and the 'feather'd warblers quit the leafless shade' to seek 'the savage haunt of man.' The diction, with its personification of 'Winter' and 'Flora' and the generic term 'feather'd warbler', is clearly drawn from the pastoral tradition.[75] However, all the potentially pleasing features of a pastoral depiction of nature are contradicted by rooting the scene in a 'savage' environment which is subsequently domesticated and made particular:

The Swain neglects his Nymph, yet knows not why;
The Nymph, indifferent, mourns the freezing sky;
Alike insensible to soft desire,
She asks no warmth – but from the kitchen fire;
Love seeks a milder zone; half sunk in snow,
LACTILLA, shivering, tends her fav'rite cow; . . .   (15-20)

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[75] This is confirmed by her use of the terms 'Swain' and 'Nymph' and the use of capitalisation.

The mention of the 'kitchen fire' might seem bathetic were it not for the introduction of Lactilla as an individual, named character who is actually 'shivering.'

These chilling winter scenes give way to the arrival of spring (35-65), realised by a detailed, country-person's catalogue of flowers; and the illusion of pastoral is maintained by a description of the amorous games played by the 'swain' and the 'screaming milk-maids'. However, these games are not innocent since the participants are blighted by a lack of that education which would allow them to distinguish between right and wrong:

No conquest of the passions e'er was taught,
No meed e'er given them for the vanquish'd thought,
To sacrifice, to govern, to restrain,
Or to extinguish, or to hug the pain,
Was never theirs; instead, the fear of shame
Proves a strong bulwark, and secures their fame . . .   (57-62)

These moral and social judgements are offered by a narrator who is apparently observing from a distance. However, a significant shift of narrative voice in the next section (67-145) establishes that it is an 'I' who is assuming such authority.

This section opens with a scene which contrasts the rude pleasures of the peasants with the more consoling instructions of religion as symbolised by the dome of Clifton church. At first sight, these lines can be taken as a typical example of Christian moralizing, but they serve an important function in the ways in which they make a transition from the largely impersonal first section to the more personal second section. The moral lessons that the 'I' as poet narrator has learned are legitimated because they come from her mother and were largely dispensed on visits to the graveyard where she was subsequently buried. Further, they are given more force because of the emotional circumstances in which they were imparted:

        'twas here we frequently stray'd,
And these sad records mournfully survey'd.
I mark'd the verse, the skulls her eye invite,
Whilst my young bosom shudder'd with affright!
My heart recoil'd and shun'd the loathsome view;   (77-81)

In a few lines, then, Yearsley manages to explain where she developed her love of verse, its power to impress the mind and the possibility of moral instruction from within the community she has been describing.[76] The poet has the authority to speak *in propria persona* because she has experienced the life that she describes and because she has received an appropriate, albeit rudimentary, education to interpret such experiences. And, as if to underline the point, she proudly contrasts her situation with those who are socially and economically more advantaged:

The proud Crœsean crew, light, cruel, vain,
Whose deeds have never swell'd the Muse's strain,
Whose bosoms others sorrows ne'er assail,   }
Who hear, unheeding, Misery's bitter tale,   }
Here call for satire, would the verse avail.   }   (93-7)

The following section (98-181) reverts to the semi-pastoral style, although it describes a landscape that is peculiarly devoid of human agency. Indeed, at one point, in describing Leigh Wood (156-7), she mentions 'How thickly cloth'd, yon rock of scanty soil,/Its lovely verdure scorns the hand of Toil'. This can, I think, be explained because the immensely detailed and loving descriptions she offers of the flora and fauna are offered to us by Lactilla. As 'I', the poet is a member of the community, but as Lactilla the (educated) poet, she is set apart from its ruder pleasures.

This impression is reinforced when she invokes the georgic genre most directly in her celebration of Bristol's commercial success:

 Hail, useful channel! Commerce spreads her wings,
From either pole her various treasure brings;
Wafted by thee, the mariner long stray'd,
Clasps the fond parent, and the sighing maid;
Joy tunes the cry; the rocks rebound the roar;
The deep vibration quivers 'long the shore;
The merchant hears, and hails the peeping mast,
The wave-drench'd sailor scorns all peril past;
Now love and joy the noisy crew invite,
And clumsy music crowns the rough delight.

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[76] There are interesting echoes of Gray's *Elegy* here. See Chap. 3 above.

Yours be the vulgar dissonance . . .   (182-192)

There is a genuine celebration here and, albeit briefly, the different pleasures of the homecoming are vividly described. However, Lactilla, the poet, cannot fully enjoy it. As Landry observes:

> Yearsley's position in relation to the plebeian culture of the sailors seems ambiguous. The sailor's music is "clumsy" and their delight "rough" in its vernacularity, its difference from the sensibility of the literate laborer whose powers of literary articulation set her apart from much of the class for whom she speaks and out of whose situation she writes.[77]

Some critics have hinted that these lines call into question Yearsley's class loyalties.[78] However, as Landry makes abundantly clear, it is possible to remain sympathetic to the conditions under which the dispossessed live without necessarily wishing to partake in all their different activities. Lactilla's shared joy in the sailors' homecoming and her pleasure in the 'love and joy' displayed by their 'clumsy music' and 'rough delight' is not vitiated by her desire to be separated from it.

This section ends with a mention of the cattle sheltering from the rage of winter beside a 'hoarded hay-stack', affording her a transitional opportunity to relate the story of Louisa (206-293). Something very subtle is happening here. We have already been offered a vision of Lactilla tending her favourite cow in the bitter cold. By referring to the cattle again, Yearsley reminds us of her intrinsic sympathies with the objects of her care (and income) and subtly transfers those

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[77] Landry, *The Muses of Resistance*, p. 131.

[78] E.g., Waldron, on *Clifton Hill*, writes that: '[a]s usual, and very wisely, Yearsley confines her observations to those parts of human life on earth of which she had personal experience. For this reason the poem may at first look rather like a plea for the poor and oppressed, but it is not really so.' *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton,* p. 108. Keegan interprets the poem in a radically different way: 'Thus, Yearsley's more "realistic" depiction of woods, coupled with the subsequent passage on the madwoman Louisa, creates a text that subverts any simple statement of unqualified support for commerce and imperialism. Yearsley identifies with the lowly woodland snail and the socially marginalized Louisa. Their more careful depiction, as opposed to the predictable and conventional lines praising trade, indicates where Yearsley's real sympathies tend.' Keegan, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry,* pp. 184 –5. It will be apparent that my sympathies lie more with Keegan's interpretation.

sympathies to Louisa who, like the cattle, shelters from the storms of life under the same haystack.[79]

Invoking this intrinsic sympathy with Louisa's plight allows Yearsley to bring the poem to a satisfactory conclusion. Initially, Louisa' condition is largely described from without. She is a 'fair Maniac' who is observed wandering 'o'er the wilds' until she manages to find refuge in the haystack from where 'the slow-pac'd maid' is seen to 'Tread the dark grove, and unfrequented green'. Eventually, she is rescued by Lactilla's 'kind friend! whom here I dare not name'.[80] The sequence of events allows Lactilla the opportunity to reinforce the sense of identification she feels with Louisa and therefore enables her to recount Louisa's story partly from within, almost as if it were also Lactilla's own story. And in recounting Louisa's tale of thwarted love, we are given explicit insight into her emotions as though they were shared between Lactilla and Louisa:

>   Now heaves the sigh,
> Now unavailing sorrows fill the eye:
> Fancy once more brings back the long-lost youth
> To the fond soul, in all the charms of Truth;
> Pourtrays the past, with guiltless pleasures fraught;
> 'Tis momentary bliss, 'tis rapture high,
> The heart o'erflows, and all is extacy.
> MEMORY! I charge thee yet preserve the shade,
> Ah! let not yet the glittering colours fade!   (240-9)

There is a deep ambiguity about the speaker in the last two lines. On the one hand, it could be Louisa begging her memory to keep the image of her lover alive; on the other hand, it could be Lactilla speaking on behalf of both of them. And this ambiguity is retained, and largely unresolved, in the final lines of the poem:

> Ill-starr'd LOUISA! Memory, 'tis a strain,
> Which fills my soul with sympathetic pain.

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[79] 'The same' because Yearsley specifically identifies it as 'this stack' (206). It is tempting to suggest that the resonances established between the cows, Lactilla and Louisa indicates that, with her loss of reason, Louisa has become little more than an animal, shunned by society, and therefore a fitting subject both for Yearsley's sympathy and her fellow-feeling. The full story of Louisa is recounted in J. Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bath: Kingsmead Reprints, 1970), pp. 425-26.

[80] This is clearly Hannah More, who was instrumental in transferring Louisa to St. Luke's Hospital for the Insane, London. See Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian*, p. 57.

Remembrance, hence, give thy vain struggles o'er,
Nor swell the line with forms that live no more.   (293-6)

If we take the final two lines as a valediction rather than as a rejection of memory, then the memory '[w]hich fills my soul with sympathetic pain' is the memory which Lactilla has explored most thoroughly in her descriptions of her walks around Clifton Hill and in her earlier invocation to her deceased mother. Keegan has claimed that:

> Yearsley's landscape around Clifton is the most dramatically innovative, inverting several of the genre's conventions. She resists imposing harmony and unity upon disorder through her focus on the emotional and psychological distress of her avatar, Louisa.[81]

While it is true that the generic conventions of georgic are inverted in *Clifton Hill*, the poem is, in fact, given a 'harmony and unity' by the subtle interplay between the different memories that are explored and exploited throughout the poem and it is this control which indicates that Yearsley has finally reached maturity as a poet.

In 1787, Yearsley published her second volume of poetry, *Poems on Various Subjects*.[82] In this work, she deployed her increasing self-confidence and grasp of technical detail to explore many of the themes that were nascent in *Poems, on Several Occasions*. In particular, she distanced herself even further from More while developing an alternative to More's sentimental construction of sensibility. The justification for her estrangement from More is insisted upon in her preface, *Mrs. Yearsley's Narrative*, in which she elaborates on the story she had recounted in the earlier volume.[83] The bitterness she expresses is ostensibly centred on the potential economic consequences of More's highhanded refusal to allow Yearsley or her children access to the funds invested in the trust. There is, however, a subtext in which Yearsley appears to question whether More's

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[81] Keegan, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry*, p. 80.
[82] Ann Yearsley, *Poems on Various Subjects, by Ann Yearsley, A Milkwoman of Clifton, near Bristol; Being Her Second Work* (Paternoster Row, London: G. G. J.Robinson and J. Robinson, 1787).
[83] Ibid., pp. xv-xxx.

patronage is a true exercise of sympathetic sensibility, and it is against this background that her initial poem, *Addressed to Sensibility*, needs to be read.[84]

This is a puzzling poem. It is narrated by an anonymous author, characterised as 'I', and contains two named characters, Julius and Lysander, whose involvement in the action are not fully explained.[85] There are distinct echoes of the story of Louisa, in that the narrator appears to re-enact the anguish of a woman visiting her estranged lover in Bedlam and subsequently uses such anguish as a talisman against which she can explore her own feelings when confronted with a similar situation. The circumstances of the two stories, however, have been so elided that it is difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins.

The poem contains three sections and opens with a futile attempt to reject the effects of sensibility: 'They rend my panting breast,/But I will tear them thence: ah! effort vain!', with the consequence that they '[s]trike at poor Memory' and 'wounded she deplores/Her ravish'd joys, and murmurs o'er the past.'[86] There is a curious distinction here between 'memory' and 'sensibility' which is not fully worked out but, as will be suggested in the conclusion of the poem, it would seem that 'memory' refers to the rational recall of past events while 'sensibility' refers to the clouded emotions related to such events consequent upon their subsequent history.[87] Equally, there is an indeterminacy as to the identity of the speaker which, too, is held in suspension until the final section.

This interplay of recall and reflection forms the argument of the next two sections. The second section begins:

   Why shrinks my soul within these prison walls,
Where wretches shake their chains? Ill-fated youth,
Why does thine eye run wildly o'er my form,
Pointed with fond enquiry? 'Tis not *Me*,

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[84] Ibid., pp. 1-6. In a private communication, Kerri Andrews has pointed out that: 'Another thing that strikes me as interesting is Yearsley's decision to open her second volume -- of course her first publication since her break with More -- with the Address to Sensibility. I wonder if there is some sort of statement of intent there.'

[85] A further 'I' appears in the poem but, I will argue, as a dramatised actor within the poem.

[86] Ibid., p. 1-2. Unlike in her earlier volume, Yearsley does not number her lines here.

[87] There are echoes here of Yearsley's recalling of her mother and her subsequent grief at her death in *Clifton Hill*.

Thy restless thought would find; the silent tear
Steals gently down his cheek: ah! could my arms
Afford thee refuge, I would bear thee hence
To a more peaceful dwelling.[88]

Initially, the reader is encouraged to believe that the narrator of the first section is visiting Bedlam in order to bring succour to her mad lover, although the italicised '*Me'* complicates such an interpretation. The section continues with the narrator bewailing the consequences of the estrangement — 'Pensive I rove,/ More wounded than the hart, whose side yet holds/The deadly arrow' — before quitting 'the scene/Where haughty Insult cut the sacred ties/Which long had held us: Cruel Julius! take/My last adieu.' The nature of the insult is not spelled out but there are clear echoes of Yearsley's own feelings with regard to More.

This section, then, appears to enact the exercise of sympathy and sensibility, only to have it rejected by the mad lover, making the '*Me'* doubly alienated both from her lover and from the supposed relieving affects of sensibility. And this impression is confirmed in the lines which link section two to the final section:

   Officious Sensibility! 'tis thine
To give the finest anguish, to dissolve
The dross of spirit, till all essence, she
Refines on real woe; from thence extracts
Sad unexisting phantoms, never seen.

Reading back from these lines, it would appear that the Bedlam scene is a dream sequence, or false memory, brought on by sensibility's ability to deflect its real concern onto 'Sad unexisting phantoms' and can be regarded as an implicit rejection of More's characterisation of Sensibility which 'mourns in secret for another's fate'.[89]

In a peculiar *volte face*, the third section opens with the lines:

   Yet, dear ideal mourner, be thou near
When on Lysander's tears I silent gaze;
Then, with thy viewless pencil, form his sigh,
His deepest groan, his sorrow-tinged thought,

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[88] *Various Subjects*, pp. 2-3.
[89] See my discussion of More's poem above.

280

Wish immature, impatience, cold despair,
With all the tort'ring images that play,
In sable hue, within his wasted mind.[90]

The narrator here is inviting the imagined scene to act as a spur to stimulate her own sensibility and sympathy which are then described in some detail in the ensuing lines. At first sight, this would seem a paradox, but it is resolved when the narrator herself distinguishes false sensibility from the 'Bright cherub' who is invited to:

safely rove
Thro' all the deep recesses of the soul!
Float on her raptures, deeper tinge her woes,
Strengthen emotion, higher waft her sigh,
Sit in the tearful orb, and ardent gaze
On joy or sorrow. But thy empire ends
Within the line of SPIRIT.

Yearsley here, then, acknowledges the power of sensibility while, at the same time, warning us against its limitations. It may justly encourage genuine feelings of sympathy but does not, of itself, lead to action since it remains in 'the line of SPIRIT.'

For this reason, those who make a cult of sensibility, who 'can fix/A rule for sentiment, if rules there are' become no more than 'self-confounding sophists' who 'Pronounce *that* joy which never touch'd the heart.' True sensibility derives from 'Nature' which 'feels/Most poignant, undefended; hails with me/The Pow'rs of Sensibility untaught.'

With these lines, Yearsley is asserting her own independence to write in her own person, to express her own feelings as a 'rough soul', and to reject the false (and presumably 'taught') sensibility of More. The *'Me'*, which I have claimed is doubly alienated in the beginning of the poem, becomes reinstated as the controlling voice of a highly complex argument. As Knowles justly asserts: '[w]hen Yearsley highlights her isolation and suffering in this poem, she is, in effect, rejecting the society that she avows in ''On Mrs. Montagu'''.[91] The status

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[90] *Various Subjects*, p. 4-6.
[91] Knowles, 'Ann Yearsley, Biography and the "Pow'rs of Sensibility Untaught!"', p. 179. Curiously, Knowles seems to contradict herself here since earlier in the article she claims that:

of the two stories — that of the visitor to Bedlam and that of the estrangement with Lysander — remains obscure but it can be partially resolved if we acknowledge that the highly-wrought and marginally Gothic first tale, although 'false' can still act as a spur to engender the 'true' sensibility of the second tale. Nevertheless, the artistic representation of sensibility only has genuine 'truth' insofar as it recounts the kind of actual lived experience as depicted in *Clifton Hill.*

I have spent some time on this poem because it represents a major development in Yearsley's career as a poet. Not only does it foreground the '*I*' in ways which leave the reader in little doubt that she is speaking for herself, but it deploys a sophisticated rhetorical logic which incorporates philosophical argument, Gothic horror and self-reflection which are ultimately blended into a whole.

Yearsley's exploration of the discourse of sensibility is a recurring theme of her poetry. *To Indifference,* as the title suggests, recalls both Frances Greville's poem and More's criticisms of it.[92] It is tempting to consider that Yearsley is engaging in some kind of poetic exercise in which she plays with the ideas both of Greville and More. However, there is a real personal engagement with the topic which leads, finally, to a deeply ambiguous conclusion. Her claim that: 'To SENSIBILITY, what is not bliss/Is woe. No placid medium's ever held/Beneath her torrid line,' leads her to reject sensibility in favour of indifference:

I'd rather lose myself with *thee*, and share
Thine happy indolence, for one short hour,
Than live of Sensibility the tool
For endless ages. Oh! her points have pierc'd
My soul, till, like a sponge, it drinks up woe.
. . . .
                 here down I'll sink
With thee upon my couch of homely rush,
Which fading forms of Friendship, Love, or Hope,
Must ne'er approach . . .

'Somewhat paradoxically, while Yearsley presents sensibility as an innate phenomenon, inspired by the beauties of the natural world and nurtured by a life of deprivation and sorrow, it becomes clear in this poem that sensibility is meaningless if it exists in isolation from (middle-class) society.' Ibid., p. 176.
[92] *Various Subjects*, pp. 49-51.

Like More, Yearsley acknowledges that she has been prey to the effects of sensibility but, unlike More, she domesticates and contextualizes her situation by referring to her 'couch of homely rush.' Thus, having abjured sensibility to 'be gone,/Thou chequer'd angel! Seek the soul refin'd' she comes close to arguing that sensibility is a term which is essentially class-based and has no certain reference to her own more homely woes. The problem for Yearsley, then, was to find some other term which would account for the complex relationships which hold between the emotions and the exercise of sympathetic identification, but which was not tainted by the devalued and middle-class associations of 'sensibility'.

A hint of a solution is supplied by the title of the third poem, *To a Sensible but Passionate Friend*.[93] This unspecified friend suffers from all the effects of a heightened sensibility: 'Quick *sensations, Rule* despising,/Give thee strongest, keenest taste.' Yearsley does indeed offer the friend sympathy but primarily through re-enacting the transports he (?) is suffering in her verse. More tellingly, she concludes with the lines:

* * * * * * such souls as *thine* must languish,
Like majestic *ruin* lie;
None but equals share thine anguish,
Fools deride thy deepest sigh.

The reference to 'equals' here might seem to refer to social equals but, from the evidence of many of the poems in the collection, it seems more likely to refer to equality in feelings and thought.

This becomes clear in *To those who accuse the AUTHOR of INGRATITUDE*, where she excoriates the supporters of More for having:

   A wish to share the false, tho' public din,
In which the popular, not virtuous, live;
A fear of being singular, which claims
A fortitude of mind you ne'er could boast . . .[94]

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[93] *Various Subjects*, pp. 11-13.
[94] Ibid., pp. 57-60.

These lines are more than a simple assertion of Yearsley's fierce independence. They also condemn More's supporters for simply following fashion rather than basing their condemnation on true feelings of friendship with More. And for these reasons, they are contemptible and incapable of seizing 'the bright sublimity of Truth', or of scanning 'the feelings of Lactilla's soul.'

As Lactilla, then, Yearsley displays a confidence in her poetic powers and asserts her right to speak on her own behalf as a thinking woman regardless of her background. It is this independence which complicates any discussion of Yearsley's class allegiances and which brings into relief her discussions of friendship. Her poem *On Being Presented with a Silver Pen* brings this to the fore. The opening lines celebrate the values of friendship:

Fair proof of Friendship! be thy numbers strong,
Paint high her raptures in thine artless Song;
Her beauties ask, Idea all divine,
While passion daunted, drops beneath the line.

The contrast insisted on here between friendship and passion is a delicate one and has been hinted at before in *Clifton Hill* when she describes the sexual games played by the 'swain' and the 'screaming milk-maids.' For Yearsley, 'passion' was an untutored emotion and was therefore not equivalent to the more refined pleasures of friendship. However, such refinement is not consequent on a rejection of the unrefined past so much as an incorporation and intellectual understanding of that past. Therefore, in describing the pen, she writes:

  But can thy lovely form, pointed by Art
More deeply strike the feelings of the heart
Than this poor quill? Which now neglected lies,
Tho' oft it bade the willing transport rise?

No; avaricious souls *alone* can know
Superior ardours, *if* from *thee* they flow.
Yet, Friendship consecrates thee at her shine,
And while her blaze ascends, the off'ring's mine.

The pen has become a symbol of friendship whose value as an object is no greater than that of the quill that the poet had used previously. And this is insisted upon in the closing lines of the poem:

Ah, valued Pen! why thus the task decline;
Will not thy beauties swell the glowing line?
Lo, Rapture dies! – hast thou the magic pow'r,
To raise my spirit in her drooping hour?
No; rest – while *thought* to rural toil descends,
Resigning ev'ry Image – but my Friend's.

The pen, therefore, serves to recall the image of her friend but Yearsley still has
to 'descend' to 'rural toil'. Yearsley, then, does not reject her background but
incorporates it into her present experience. However, given that this experience is
significantly different from others of her class she, as a strong-minded and
independent poet, can sympathetically allude to their shared sufferings without
necessarily offering herself as a representative of such sufferings.[95]

This sympathy is clearly at work in *Elegy, Written on the Banks of the Avon,
where the Author took a last Farewel of her Brother.*[96] This is a deeply-felt
personal poem that weaves together four different stories narrated by an 'I' who
is both controlling the narrative and, at the same time, a powerless onlooker.
Yearsley introduces herself into the poem directly with her mention of 'a lov'd
brother'. Her anguish at the loss is vividly represented in the description of their
leave-taking:

            Oh God, what tremors shook
The strongest pow'rs of my reluctant soul,
When, from his eyes, I took their farewel gaze;
So pensive, yea, so full of promis'd death,
That my sad bosom slow responses beat,
And all my mother shudder'd in my breast;
For *her* fond hopes I felt; for *her* my soul
Forgot its resolutions: sure, the pang
Of pity, pointed with another's woe,
Is then most strong.

Yearsley, as narrator, is both a part of the emotional action while also reliving the
imagined feeling of her mother, thus rendering her own response doubly

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[95] An interesting example of the role of memory in uniting the past and the present occurs in
Familiar Epistle to a Friend (Ibid., pp. 23-28). Admittedly this poem addresses a personal loss
and is not overtly concerned with the privations of labouring class life, but its insistence on
memory bringing the past to the present and acting as a 'balm' informs much of Yearsley's
poetry in ways that are often hinted at rather than stated. In this way, her early experiences are an
integral part of her poetic *persona.*
[96] Ibid., p. 37-43.

powerful. However, the potential morbidity of this scene is deflected by her narration of other equally unfortunate souls who had perished in the Avon. The result is an effective contextualisation of her personal tragedy in ways which indicate that Cromartie's fate was not an isolated incident but one shared by the Smith family (with even more disastrous consequences). Thus, although Yearsley is necessarily recounting her own grief, she is also insisting on the fact that her experiences are not merely personal. And it is this element in her work which absolves her from being in any sense self-obsessed with her own situation.

An apparent contradiction occurs in the two poems *To Mr. * * * *, An unlettered Poet, on Genius Unimproved* and *Addressed to Ignorance, occasion'd by a Gentleman's desiring the Author never to assume a Knowledge of the Ancients.* [97] Of the former, Waldron comments:

> Here we have the emergence of a poetics, a philosophy, that had to wait another ten years for its full expression in *Lyrical Ballads* but that was part of the spirit of these times. It finds a single, potent voice here, and it is this above all that makes this book, in my opinion, more remarkable than *Poems, on Several Occasions.*' [98]

The opening lines seem to bear this out:

FLORUS, canst thou define that innate spark
Which blazes but for glory? Canst thou paint
The trembling rapture in its infant dawn,
Ere young Ideas spring; to local Thought
Arrange the busy phantoms of the mind,
And drag the distant timid shadows forth,
Which, still retiring, glide unform'd away,
Nor rush into expression? No; the pen,
Tho' dipp'd in awful Wisdom's deepest tint,
Can *never* paint the wild extatic mood.

However, Yearsley's apparent championing of untutored genius needs to be placed in context. Her encouragement of Mr. * * * * is not insincere but it is inspired by her desire to re-assert her own humble beginnings as a poet:

              Like thee, estrang'd
From Science, and old Wisdom's classic lore,

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[97] Ibid., pp. 77-82; 93-9.
[98] Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton*, p. 152.

I've patient trod the wild entangled path
Of unimprov'd Idea. Dauntless Thought
I eager seiz'd, no formal Rule e'er aw'd;
No Precedent controul'd; no Custom fix'd
My independent spirit . . .

The 'I' here has the authority of one who has achieved poetic fame in the face of adversity.[99] Although it is possible to argue that Yearsley is privileging native art over educated reflection, I would suggest that such a reading is undermined by the deeply ironic *Addressed to Ignorance.*

Written in jaunty quatrains, her control of the alternating anapaests and amphibrachs is an indication of her skill in versification.[100] The poem begins with an apparent rejection of Science's 'strong ray' which lives 'In the orb of bright Learning' in favour of Ignorance's 'dark Veil', and the second quatrain concludes: 'Lactilla and thou must be friends.' However, the fourth quatrain introduces a discordant note:

When Ign'rance forbids me in ambush to move,
  Or to feed on the scraps of the Sage,
I am blind to the Ancients – yet Fancy would prove,
  That Pythagoras lives thro' each age.

The wisdom of the ancients is therefore denied to Lactilla simply because she is unlearned in the classics. However, the remainder of the poem argues that, although the spirit of these ancient sages lives on in the souls of the various contemporary lower echelons of society, their uneducated condition forbids them to realise their full potential:

Stout Ajax, the form of a butcher now takes,
  But the last he past thro' was a calf;
Yet no revolution his spirit awakes,
  For no Troy is remember'd by Ralph.

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[99] See, again, Waldron, when she states: 'If we are looking for an authentic poetic voice, *Poems on Various Subjects* is perhaps the high point of Yearsley's achievement. *The Rural Lyre* leans far more heavily on the classical. This may have been because it was a more consciously commercial venture . . .'; Ibid., p. 321.

[100] The fact that it was written in a metre appropriate for an ale-house song that might have been sung by Tony Lumpkin underlines the ironic intent of the poem by suggesting that unlettered poets are incapable of employing more sophisticated verse forms but not necessarily incapable *by nature* of acquiring such sophistication. It also adds a gloss to Waldron's observation that she can find 'absolutely no use made of existing folk poetry and ballad.' (See above, n. 38).

Although something of a squib, the poem has a serious point which is to assert that the spark which might light the imagination depends, at least in part, on education and that, further, Lactilla knows this because, in her early life, she lacked such education.[101] Both these poems, then, draw on Lactilla's experience as an untutored but successful poet as a way of showing that the poetic impulse is latent among the labouring classes and that it needs encouragement rather than scorn even though it may lack the refinements of a more educated poetry.[102]

Yearsley demonstrates her own ambiguous position in *Written on a Visit*.[103] Although acknowledging Pope's genius, and describing him as 'her fav'rite Bard', she nevertheless recognises that she cannot aspire to reach his heights of poetic achievement: 'Ah! no, I droop!' The curious pastoral scene in which she invokes 'Emma's spotless lamb' is difficult to interpret.[104] My own reading of this passage suggests a subtle identification between Lactilla, Pope and the 'spotless lamb' which is only extant while she is visiting the groves and lawns of 'Twick'nham'. The lamb, however, must eventually die, bringing a tear to 'Maro's manly eye' and a pang to 'Lactilla's bosom'. The death of innocence is compensated for by the pleasures of 'Friendship', in this case an imagined friendship with Pope as a kindred spirit, although such friendship does not preclude certain disagreements because, in an implicit rejection of Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, Lactilla proclaims:

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[101] The unfulfilled potential of the characters is reminiscent of Gray's *Elegy*, although realised in a more humorous manner.

[102] Cf. the line on Chatterton: 'Where hapless Genius lies by Pride opprest' from *Elegy on Mr.Chatterton*, in *Various Subjects*, pp. 145-149. Weinfield has observed that: 'Chatterton's story suggests that there were forces operating during the period that were opening up new possibilities for expression for members of the working classes while at the same time, of course, repressing those possibilities.' Weinfield, *The Poet Without a Name*, p. 78. The tensions between these two forces explain, in part, Yearsley's apparent contradictions in the two poems I have been discussing.

[103] *Various Subjects*, pp. 139-143.

[104] It is tempting to think that Yearsley was already thinking of her drama, *Earl Goodwin*, published in 1791 in which she praises Queen Emma as a paragon of virtue: 'I cannot find any other woman recorded for this miraculous proof of virtue; and allow the event to be as unlikely, vague, and indefinite, as if I had passed the burning ploughshares myself. But as our *good men* were as easily convinced in that age as they are in this, I thought myself privileged in representing the incident to the immortal glory of Emma'; from the 'Exordium' to *Earl Goodwin, An Historical Play.* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1791)*, in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* [accessed October 19, 2012], no page number. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to support this surmise.

Wild Ardour shall ungovern'd stray ;
  Nor dare the mimic pedant clip my wing.

Rule! what art *thou?* Thy limits I disown!
  Can thy weak law the swelling thought confine?
Snatch glowing Transport from her kindred zone,
  And fix her melting on thy frozen line?

These lines would appear to reject the poetics advocated by Pope, and yet they

are tempered by her recognition:

Yet, Precept! shall thy richest store be mine,
  When soft'ning pleasure would invade my breast;
To thee my struggling spirit shall resign;
  On thy cold bosom will I sink to rest.

Farewel, ye groves! and when the friendly moon
  Tempts each fair sister o'er the vernal green,
Oh, may each lovely maid reflect how soon
  Lactilla saw, and sighing left the scene.

Keegan argues that these lines show that:

> Yearsley recognizes that she, as Lactilla, the milkwoman poet, cannot
> remain in this landscape, and in the poem's final stanza she reveals that she
> is quickly forced to leave the pastoral scene, much as Woodhouse was
> banished from Shenstone's Leasowes. Unlike Woodhouse, however,
> Yearsley's poetry cannot help her to gain readmission.[105]

A more nuanced reading, however, suggests that, although Keegan is essentially

correct, Yearsley's exclusion from Pope's pastoral scene is not merely the

consequence of her being a 'milkwoman poet' but also a recognition that the

kinds of poetry that Pope wrote were no longer accessible to her generation and

that she was the spearhead of a new kind of poetics that acknowledged the

tutored elegance of Pope's writings while also employing the new poetics

associated with members of her own untutored background. The 'I' who disowns

the limits of '*Rule'* is thus both the poet, Lactilla, who 'sighing left the scene',

and the Yearsley who stood up to the social 'rules' of More and her coterie.

'Lactilla', then, becomes a badge of pride which both asserts Yearsley's poetic

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[105] Bridget Keegan, 'Lambs to the Slaughter: Leisure and Laboring-Class Poetry', *Romanticism on the Net: An Electronic Journal Devoted to Romantic Studies*, 27 (2002)**,** http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2002/v/n27/006562ar.html?vue=integral. [accessed 7 September, 2012], Para. 26.

credentials while also acknowledging her background as a milkwoman. The authority of Yearsley is thus subsumed into the authority of the now-respected poet, Lactilla.

Three other poems from this collection deserve some brief comment. *Lucy, A Tale for the Ladies*, *On Jephtha's Vow, Taken in a Literal Sense* and *Effusion to the Right Honourable the Earl of Bristol, &c*.[106] The first two experiment with story-telling as a way of critiquing the paternalism of contemporary society. *Lucy*, among other things, laments the absence of friendship in marriages that have been contracted purely for the financial gain of the bride's father:

> The joyless hours now slowly roll;
> Confin'd Idea swells her soul:
> She pants for converse, soft, yet strong,
> In vain!

It also deplores the petty interests of the uneducated gossips who willingly submit to this form of paternalism with flashes of wit that recall Pope's *Rape of the Lock*:

> Good Wives, whose wishes ne'er were try'd,
> And therefore on the surest side;
> Who ne'er could dare e'en Friendship's ray,
> Lest weak Resolve should melt away;
> Now meet, and whilst the dish goes round,
> Their darling topic loudly sound:
> Religion, Politics, they hate;
> Their early faults they throw on Fate:
> But *Scandal!* dear delightful strain,
> Sounds thro' the roof – nor sounds in vain.

The mistaken belief that this form of social organisation is the result of 'Fate' rather than deliberate choices is explored in a slightly different way in *Jephtha's Vow*. Here, Yearsley takes issue with the belief that paternalism is in some way ordained by God. Jephtha's daughter is the model of a dutiful child whose sacrifice is ordained by her father as a result of a vow he had made to God. Whereas Lucy had been sacrificed by her father for purely economic reasons, Jeptha's sacrifice had the full authority of divine law. However, the parallels

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[106] *Various Subjects*, pp. 107-130, 131-138, 166-168.

290

between the two sacrificial victims underscore the ways in which religion could serve as a buttress to support social inequities. In her condemnation of this practice, Yearsley adopts a heterodoxy that overtly challenges the received tenets of Anglicanism: 'Hence, dupes! nor make a Moloch of your God./Tear not your Infants from the tender breast,/Nor throw your Virgins to consuming fires./He asks it not . . .'

The vexed question of social relationships is explored in a more personal way in Yearsley's *Effusion*. The Earl of Bristol had been her patron ever since her split from More. It was, therefore, appropriate that Yearsley should acknowledge this in a laudatory poem. In *Effusion*, she rehearses the griefs she had suffered and how they had acted as a spur, but also an encumbrance, to her earlier career:

Ah, who shall sit on Meditation's height,
With stoic firmness, when the piercing shriek
Of Agony is heard? In vain we boast
A fortitude of soul, in vain we turn
From sad obtruding Mem'ry.

She also contrasts her suffering with Bristol's fortitude which derives from his education and learning while regretting that she lacks such qualities:

Thine are the stores of ev'ry classic sage,
Thine ev'ry virtue which the mind can own,
When strong Resolve would fix – but all is weak,
Oppos'd to latent Woe . . .

However, the crucial words which link these two passages — 'Oh, my friend!' — confirm her belief that social distance can be overcome through shared friendship. Although the remainder of the poem insists on the superiority of Bristol, she acknowledges his role in bearing 'My spirit from the scene, placing it high/On Hope's unmeasur'd height', and affirms that in the final dissolution of the world 'I *then* may hail thee; but till *then* accept/The language faint of an untutor'd mind,/Whose pow'rs have found their best support in thee.'

Clearly, Yearsley has not entirely worked out the relationships between social distance and intellectual friendship in these lines, but they call into question Waldron's claim that '[t]hough freed from outside pressure to avoid controversial

matters, Yearsley does not, in this book, present herself in any way as a champion of the laboring poor. In fact, she aligns herself with the paternalists.'[107] While it may be true that she does not present herself 'as a champion of the laboring poor', the poems I have discussed either contextualise Yearsley's own sufferings in ways that indicate that they are symptomatic of wider social injustices, criticise the form of paternalism which gives comfort to such injustices, or propose friendship as one possible way of ameliorating such injustices.

The new-found confidence that Yearsley displays in this second volume is both a cause and an effect of her arguments with More. These had been carried out largely at the personal and the philosophical level. However, with *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave-Trade* (1788), she challenges More for the position of laureate of Bristol.[108] That it was seen in this light by their contemporaries is evidenced by a poem of Elizabeth Dawson, published in *The Bristol Gazette* in May, 1788:

Two Sapphos in one city bred and born,
Sufficient a whole kingdom to adorn.
Tis hard to say, which we must most admire,
More's polish'd muse, or Yearsley's muse of fire.
Yearsley self-taught, uncramp'd by art or rhyme,
Is forcible, pathetic, and sublime –
But More's trim muse subdues the critic's heart,
And leads it captive, by the rules of art[109]

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[107] Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton*, p. 136.

[108] Ann Yearsley, *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave-Trade. Humbly inscribed to the Right Honourable and Right Reverend Frederick, Earl of Bristol, Bishop of Derry, &c. &c* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, Paternoster-Row, 1788), in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* [accessed October 24, 2012]. Kerri Andrews comments that 'For Yearsley, the very act of contributing to the abolitionist argument demonstrated her right to be part of a wider literary culture and, as such, continued her textual rivalry with More. . . That More and Yearsley were prepared to endanger their personal finances and their voices in order to see who is entitled to speak for Bristol, is indicative of the fierceness of their competition.' Kerri Andrews, '"More's polish'd muse, or Yearsley's muse of fire": bitter enemies write the Abolition Movement', *European Romantic Review*, 20, 1 (2009), 21-36, (pp. 27-8). In an interesting article on Jane Cave Winscom (who will be mentioned below), Norbert Schürer explores 'a different model of female provincial authorship . . . that was entirely separate from London.' This article appeared too late for detailed discussion in my chapter, but there is clear evidence from the subject matter of many of Yearsley's poems that she considered herself a specifically *Bristol* poet. See Norbert Schürer, 'Jane Cave Winscom: Provincial Poetry and the Metropolitan Connection', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36, 3 (2013), 415-31, (pp. 415-6).

[109] Cited by Andrews, '"More's polish'd muse"', p. 22.

Yearsley was aware that she had little likelihood of joining the metropolitan elite, nor is there any evidence that she would have wanted to, seeing herself as the natural heir to the 'neglected' Chatterton.[110] However, she did feel that she could speak directly to Bristol:

BRISTOL, thine heart hath throbb'd to glory. –Slaves,
E'en Christian slaves, have shook their chains, and gaz'd
With wonder and amazement on thee. Hence
Ye grov'ling souls, who think the term I give,
Of Christian slave, a paradox! to *you*
I do not turn, but leave you to conception
Narrow . . .[111]

Yearsley's appeal establishes a specific audience and, by default, a specific addressee. Nevertheless, as if aware of her presumption, she both identifies and justifies herself in the later lines:

  Yet, Bristol, list! nor deem Lactilla's soul
Lessen'd by distance; snatch her rustic thought,
Her crude ideas, from their panting state,
And let them fly in wide expansion; lend
Thine energy, so little understood
By the rude million, and I'll dare the strain
Of Heav'n-born Liberty till Nature moves
Obedient to her voice.

These opening lines can be contrasted with the opening lines of More's *Slavery, A Poem*:

If Heaven has into being deign'd to call
Thy light, O LIBERTY! to shine on all;
Bright intellectual Sun! why does thy ray
To earth distribute only partial day?[112]

Superficially, they are similar. Both appeal to notions of 'Liberty', the mention of 'Heaven' in More's poem refers, albeit indirectly, to Christianity, but there the

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[110] See her final lines in *Elegy on Mr. Chatterton*: 'Yet shalt thou live! nor shall my song be vain/That dares not thine, but dares to imitate.' *Various Subjects*, p. 149.
[111] *The Inhumanity of the Slave-Trade*, non-paginated.
[112] Hannah More, *Slavery, A Poem by Hannah More* (London: Printed for T. Cadell in the Strand, 1788).

similarities cease. Whereas Yearsley has a specific audience in mind but acknowledges that, as 'Lactilla', the milkwoman, she has to approach her audience somewhat circumspectly, More introduces herself as an anonymous narrator with the authority to speak on behalf of both 'Liberty' and intellect.

The differences established in these opening lines are maintained throughout the poems. More's condemnation rests largely on intellectual conceptions of liberty, on Christian values, and the exercise of feeling sensibility. The former leads her into some difficulties. Liberty needs to be distinguished from licence: 'Whose magic cries the frantic vulgar draw/To spurn at Order, and to outrage Law' and one way of dealing with this distinction was to treat the slave as essentially 'other':

Does matter govern spirit? or is mind
Degraded by the form to which 'tis join'd?
  No: they have heads to think, and hearts to feel,
And souls to act, with firm, tho'erring zeal . . .   (65-8)

The choice of verb, 'degraded', acknowledges implicitly that the black slaves are perhaps not, after all, created in God's image, although More swiftly withdraws from this position by granting them 'souls' however errantly they deploy them. Also, the choice of pronoun, 'they', distances them from 'us' transforming them almost into objects.[113]

More's Christian (and evangelical) values are affirmed with her reference to Penn and the Quakers, whose emancipation of their slaves demonstrates that:

Still thy meek spirit in thy flock survives,
Consistent still, *their* doctrines rule their lives;
Thy followers only have effac'd the shame
Inscrib'd by SLAVERY on the Christian name.   (247-50)

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[113] Kaul's comments on this poem are instructive here: 'The description of "mad liberty" in More's poem is thus key to its ideological concerns, less a digression than a necessary response to a recent socially traumatic series of events [including the Gordon Riots] and the universalizing, leveling possibility of antislavery rhetoric. In seeking to inoculate the term *liberty* against any populist infection, the poem makes clear that Britain is not the proper political or social space for those who would claim to act against oppression . . .' Kaul, *Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire*, p. 255.

Finally, sensibility is invoked by domesticating the effects of slavery and inviting the slaver to consider his own feelings:

By felon hands, by one relentless stroke,
See the fond links of feeling Nature broke!
The fibres twisting round a parent's heart,
Torn from their grasp, and bleeding as they part.
  Hold, murderers, hold! nor aggravate distress;
Respect the passions you yourselves possess;
Ev'n you, of ruffian heart, and ruthless hand,
Love your own offspring, love your native land.   (107-14)

Although More does acknowledge the very real sufferings of the slaves elsewhere in the poem, it is noteworthy that she chooses the verb 'aggravate' with its suggestion that the sufferings might somehow be alleviated were the family unit allowed to remain intact.[114]

Yearsley engages with a similar set of discourses, but because her address is so different the effects are equally different. By circumscribing both the intended audience (Bristol) and the putative speaker (Lactilla, the milkwoman of Clifton, near Bristol) the poem invokes a shared discursive space which is inhabited by both those who benefit from slavery and those who abhor it. The process of particularization is then enhanced by telling the tale not of slaves in general but of a specific slave, Luco. The sense of immediacy is heightened by narrating Luco's story in the present tense and the scenes of his suffering are described as though they were occurring *in situ*:

  But come, ye souls who feel for human woe,
Tho' drest in savage guise! Approach, thou son,

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[114] Anne Mellor argues that More is appealing to a specifically feminine concept of sensibility in this poem: 'By invoking sensibility as the source of morality, More lays claim to a virtue that had historically been identified with the female gender. She further identifies that same sensibility with a specifically female poetry, with what she calls the 'feeling line' . . . The responsibility of the female poet, then, is to 'define' the pains, the evils, that savage white men cause, and by raising their consciousness of their wrongdoings, inspire her countrymen to repent their sins and end their crimes.' Anne K. Mellor, 'The Female Poet and the Poetess: Two Traditions of British Women's Poetry, 1780 – 1830', in *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), pp. 81 – 98, p. 88. But see also Hilton, who suggests that the discourse of sensibility, at least here, was imbued with the values of evangelicalism: 'However, [the evangelicals] conceived of improvement in moral rather than material terms, which explains why the great public cause to which they devoted themselves was anti-slavery.' Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, & Dangerous People: England 1783-1846*, p. 184.

Whose heart would shudder at a father's chains,
And melt o'er thy lov'd brother as he lies
Gasping in torment undeserv'd. Oh, sight
Horrid and insupportable! far worse
Than an immediate, an heroic death;
Yet to this sight I summon thee. Approach,
Thou slave of avarice, that canst see the maid
Weep o'er her inky sire!

The epithet, 'savage', to describe Luco has clear echoes both of More's description of Yearsley and of her own self-description, thereby encouraging the reader to acknowledge Yearsley's sincerity when she enacts sympathetic identification with Luco.

Andrews, comparing these lines with More's more detached description of the miseries of slavery, comments:

> The spectacle of suffering is a means to an end, and the poet can therefore remain detached. This kind of poetic detachment has no place in Yearsley's work, where it is essential that she introduces herself, and therefore her version of sensibility, in order to relate it directly to the individual, so far unfeeling, reader.[115]

While it is certainly true that Yearsley 'introduces herself' within the poem, I would argue that this introduction has already taken place with the use of 'Lactilla' earlier in the poem. Nevertheless, the sense of interaction with a specific audience is clearly emphasised by the inclusive invitation either to 'come, ye souls who feel for human woe', or to 'approach, thou slave of avarice'. Yearsley's rhetorical ploy here means that her comparison of the 'crafty' merchant's feelings towards his family with Luco's feelings towards his family is made far more immediate than More's similar comparison. Indeed, the merchant becomes transformed into a particular member of the audience with the lines: 'Why that start?/Why gaze as thou wouldst fright me from my challenge/With look of anguish?'

And it is because we are imaginatively invited to see him as a fellow member of the audience listening to Yearsley's tale, that her advice to sell his own family seems even more shocking:

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[115] Andrews, '"More's polish'd muse"', p. 30.

<div style="text-align: center">Bring on</div>

Thy daughter to this market! bring thy wife!
Thine aged mother, though of little worth,
With all thy ruddy boys! Sell them, thou wretch,
And swell the price of Luco!

At first sight, this passage might give the impression that Yearsley is engaging with the discourse of Christianity (and sensibility) as it applies to the sanctity of the family unit.[116] Indeed, Cairnie characterizes it in this way:

> A typical emotive device in abolitionist texts of this period is the depiction of slavery as (among other things) a disruption of the family unit. This device, which is a central feature of both More's and Yearsley's poems, is disturbing in that it reduces a system of economic, social, and cultural exploitation to a domestic problem.[117]

A more nuanced reading of these lines, however, suggests that Yearsley is confronting the problem of capitalism as a potentially disruptive force overall.[118] The fact that this has been realised in the poem as a local consequence of capitalism does not diminish its impact. Indeed, it can be argued that by presenting the argument initially as both local and as involving the disruption of kinship ties, Yearsley's condemnation of slavery is couched in a rhetorically appropriate form for the poet's intended audience.

However, the more general link between capital and slavery is insisted on in the passage beginning with the lines:

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[116] My claim here is, of course, that the sanctity of the family and the emotions which are ostensibly shared between members of this unit are inextricably interlinked such that the discourses of religion and of sensibility share a common ground.

[117] Cairnie, 'The Ambivalence of Ann Yearsley ', p. 360.

[118] Cf. Robert Mitchell: 'By forcing her readers to imagine the figure of the "crafty merchant" who sells his family, Yearsley implies that that the breakup of families occurring in Africa and in the Northern hemisphere is simply a remote expression of an inner tendency of commerce, a tendency that would achieve its logical expression in the crafty merchant's sale of his own family. Capital, suggests Yearsley, is based on greed (avarice) but also on the exchangeability of objects, and there is no reason intrinsic to capital to draw the line at one's own family in the pursuit of profit (especially if the sale of one's family, by flooding the market with relatively inefficient slave labor, would "swell the price" of Luco.' Robert E. Mitchell, '"The soul that dreams it shares the power it feels so well": The Politics of Sympathy in the Abolitionist Verse of Williams and Yearsley', *Romanticism on the Net: An Electronic Journal Devoted to Romantic Studies*, 29-30 (2003**),** http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2003/v/n29-30/007719ar.html?vue=integral. [accessed 7 September, 2012], Para 29.

Advance, ye Christians, and oppose my strain:
Who dares condemn it? Prove from laws divine,
From deep philosophy, or social love,
That ye derive your privilege. I scorn
The cry of Av'rice, or the trade that drains
A fellow-creature's blood . . .

But then, Yearsley engages in a sleight of hand which is difficult to interpret:

                            Curses fall
On the destructive system that shall need
Such base supports! Doth England need them? No;
Her laws, with prudence, hang the meagre thief
That from his neighbour steals a slender sum,
Tho' famine drove him on. O'er *him* the priest,
Beneath the fatal tree, laments the crime,
Approves the law, and bids him calmly die.
Say, doth his law, that dooms the thief, protect
The wretch who makes another's life his prey,
By hellish force to take it at his will?

While it would be legitimate to read these lines as a comment on the hypocrisies
of a set of laws which discriminate between those crimes that are committed by
the rich merchants and those crimes committed by the poor, it is equally
legitimate to read them as an ironic comment on the law in general which
condemns one kind of acquisitiveness that is undertaken through need and
another kind that is pursued in the name of commerce. Andrews favours the
ironic reading, arguing that, for Yearsley: 'abolition is the only thing which can
save a country [she] portrays as corrupted, polluted and debased beyond almost
all hope of redemption. Her descriptions of Britain as "great" are ironic, and the
Christian faith is represented as a sham.'[119]
The power of the arguments against unbridled capitalism are such that I am
inclined to accept that these lines are intended ironically with the proviso that
they are both ambiguous and muted because Yearsley could not afford to be
considered as someone who was openly seditious, having already challenged the
social order with her complaints against More.

My intention thus far has been to demonstrate that, from uncertain beginnings,
Yearsley had managed to develop a distinct and personal voice which allowed

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[119] Andrews, '"More's polish'd muse"', p. 33.

298

her to comment on social affairs authoritatively. Initially, as 'Lactilla', this voice was cloaked in the humility appropriate to a 'rustic' and 'savage' poet who had been discovered by her betters, although occasional statements of independent feeling indicated that Lactilla was not a mere cypher. In the second volume, her increasing confidence allowed her to use this poetic *persona* in rather different ways. She was now much more obviously 'Lactilla, a milkwoman of Clifton near *Bristol*', and her increasing fame as Ann Yearsley meant that the names Lactilla and Yearsley were interchangeable such that her social comments could be identified as more obviously personal rather than deflected on to a semi-imaginary *persona*. However, she remained conscious that her status to some extent constrained her ability to attack social and political injustices as endemic to Great Britain. Thus, rather than writing a 'state of the nation' poem she chose to compose a 'state of Bristol' poem. To the extent that readers chose to extrapolate from the fact that the commercial activities of Bristol merchants which gave comfort to slavery might apply to the country as a whole, so much the better.

This apparent provincialism is present in *Stanzas of Woe*.[120] This poem describes two acts of gross injustice perpetrated on the Yearsley family by servants of the late Mayor of Bristol that subsequently led to Yearsley miscarrying. Her attempts to seek restitution from the mayor to compensate for the severe beating her children had received at the hands of his servants were thwarted by her attorney who 'justly supposing her purse not to be *quite* so heavy as Mr. Eames's, advised her to drop the prosecution.' The fact that the poem recounts a purely personal story indicates that Yearsley no longer felt the need to hide the personal behind the fictional mask of Lactilla. While the sheer provincialism of the subject matter would seem to limit its application to the wider world, Yearsley subtly moves from the particular to the universal. Eames, the 'insolent tyrant' is invited to consider that: 'humble as we are,/
Our minds are rich with honest truth as thine;/Bring on thy sons, their value we'll compare,/Then – lay thy infant in the grave with mine.'

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[120] Ann Yearsley, *Stanzas Of Woe, Addressed From The Heart On A Bed Of Illness, To Levi Eames, Esq. Late Mayor Of The City Of Bristol, By AnnYearsley, A Milk-Woman Of Clifton, Near Bristol* (Paternoster-row, London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1790).

The interplay between the personal pronoun, 'mine', and the inclusive pronoun, 'our' invites us to read Yearsley as speaking on behalf of all those who are economically disadvantaged while, later in the poem, Eames's high-handed conduct is given a historical context which links the local event to Britain's history:

> What Dæmon plac'd *Thee* in the council chair?
>   Go back, thou novice to that glorious hour!
> When the bold Barons planted freedom here,
>   And tore the vitals of tyrannic pow'r

> Hast thou read o'er the statutes of the land?
>   In Magna-Charta hast thou ever found,
> A *Mayor* trudging with his whip in hand,
>   To give the school-boy many a *lawful* wound?

The use of the local to comment on national affairs is also deployed in her final volume, *The Rural Lyre.* In *Bristol Elegy*, Yearsley recounts the story of a murderous event that took place in 1793 when the local militia indiscriminately fired on a group of citizens who had taken it into their own hands to resist the imposition of a toll.[121] Yearsley's account of the event is vividly realised through sketches of the individuals who were killed in the fracas and the consequences of their deaths. Although I have made few comments on Yearsley's poetic skills, a brief comparison between her dramatic depictions of three of the victims as they approached and met their deaths and the anaemic lines by Jane Cave Winscom describing the same event amply demonstrate Yearsley's superior abilities.[122] For example, describing the death of a young, pregnant woman, Yearsley writes:

>   What fearful scream
>   Troubles the air? – Must gentle woman die?
> Ah! plunge her not beneath the restless stream:
>   Behold, assassins! her imploring eye!

> Gaze full on its mild beams, and ye shall feel
>   Softer emotions than the sword inspires;
> Compassion, love, and sympathy would heal

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[121] Ann Yearsley, *The Rural Lyre; A Volume Of Poems: Dedicated To The Right Honourable The Earl Of Bristol, Lord Bishop Of Derry* (Paternoster-Row, London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1796), pp. 101-109. The full story can be found in J. Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol,* pp. 500-504.
[122] See my mention of Winscom as a 'provincial' poet, above.

   Your spirits raging with destructive fire.

Hear her! Her unborn offspring shall return –
   The mercy its sad mother feebly craves;
Know, though the Sons of War for conquest burn,
   He boasts a nobler joy who beauty saves.

She's gone!

The first line plunges the reader into the action, while the movement from caesura to caesura followed by the brief question re-enacts the arbitrary confusion of the scene. The second stanza, with its enjambments, has a calming effect appropriate to the mention of 'compassion, love and sympathy', while the third stanza's moral injunctions are brutally cut short by the ensuing line: 'She's gone!'

Winscom, on the other hand, offers little more than a catalogue of victims graced with unexceptionable and conventional epithets:

The honest tradesman homeward bound,
Would not have met the fatal wound;
Nor inoffensive stander-by
Drop by his neighbour's side, and die;
No amputated legs and arms,
(As tho' amid dire war's alarms)
The hapless woman, boy, or man,
Had mourn'd through life's protracted span:
Nor widow wept her husband gone,
While orphan's tears the groan prolong![123]

The cumulative effect of these lines certainly contributes to the sense of outrage at the enormity of the massacre, but the lack of individuation within Winscom's depiction of the victims suggests an equivalent lack of emotional involvement that is clearly present in Yearsley's lines. However, what is puzzling about Yearsley's response to the event is her apparent quiescence. Rather than urging the victims to seek vengeance, she invites them to:

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[123] Jane Cave Winscom, 'Thoughts occasioned by the Proceedings on Bristol-Bridge, and the Melancholy Consequences, on the Awful Night of Monday, the 30th of September, 1793', anthologised in *British Women Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Paula R. Backscheider and Christine E. Ingrassia (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), pp. 489-493. The choice of tetrameters, rather than pentameters, also has the effect of trivialising the incident with its jog-trot effect.

Ah! think how num'rous are the ills of life!
    Through ev'ry moment millions die! – Not here
Lives the sole tragedy of mortal strife;
    From pole to pole Contention shakes the sphere.
. . .   .

Then nurse not dark revenge.

Yearsley, here, seems to be withdrawing from the specificity of the massacre so that it becomes absorbed into the general 'contention' that 'shakes the sphere'. The final line thus reads, puzzlingly, as an injunction to accept such massacres as the lot of humankind. However, if this poem is read in conjunction with *The Genius of England* some kind of pattern begins to emerge.[124] The subtitle of *The Genius of England* recommends 'Order, Commerce and Union to the Britons.' The sequence here is interesting. 'Order' is contrasted with the 'Assassins' who are glutting themselves on 'the feast where Murder smiles/Triumphant o'er her bleeding victims.' 'Commerce', which was obviously highly significant for the local, Bristol economy is praised not merely for the benefits it brought to Britain, but also for the invaluable gifts of 'Liberty, Religion, and the Name/We love and fear' to those around the whole world who had previously lacked such benefits.[125] 'Union' is necessary to counteract 'the pow'r my rival's hate would lure/From you and me', which hate is fomented by the:

                    Pale assassins [who] dare
Attempt to calumny, malice. Envious men
Inquisitive, to draw the guiltless heart
Within their snares, would, like gaunt wolves, deface
The charms of Order.

Clearly, this is a poem written as a direct reaction both to the French Revolution and the ensuing war. Yearsley could not afford to be seen as a Jacobin sympathiser, not least because her lowly background would necessarily compromise her.[126] Equally, however, there are good reasons to believe that it

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[124] *The Rural Lyre*, pp. 94-99.

[125] It is noteworthy that there is no mention of slavery in this encomium.

[126] Cf. Hilton: 'Whether there was a serious threat of subversion in the early to mid-1790s is uncertain. What is certain is that the government responded as though there was.' *A Mad, Bad, & Dangerous People*, p. 65.

was inspired by a genuine patriotic response to the war in which her third son may have died.[127]

It is possible, of course, to accuse Yearsley of equivocation. Her *Elegy, Sacred to the Memory of Lord William Russel*[128], for example, has been criticized by Waldron because it fails to link the potential political consequences of Russell's execution to the equally potential radicalism of a disaffected peasantry:

> . . . the poem falls apart because, unusually for Yearsley, it has no single aim. It begins politically and ends philosophically; the two sets of ideas are only tenuously linked by the two lines beginning "No clamour of the state" and, therefore, as a poem it does not really work.[129]

The stanza that Waldron cites claims that:

No clamour of the state, no party broil,
Inflames the pensive wand'rer of the vale:
He with his ox by day pursues his toil,
At night sits list'ning to the tragic tale.

If we read the stanza in context, it seems clear that Waldron is mistaken since these lines, with their echoes of Gray, are preceded by the stanza:

Believe me, Russel, when thy tale is told
Beside the peasant's hearth, his children weep:
His fire neglected dies; their blood runs cold;
To their low pallets they in silence creep.

Further, they are followed by a stanza which hints at a more disturbing future:

"I had a son," the hoary shepherd cries:
"He lives no more! – my labour's nearly done! –"
By Hist'ry taught, he wipes his tearful eyes;
There Bedford's shade is heard – "I had a son!"

It is possible, therefore, to read the poem as a coded warning that the peasantry of Gray's time, who had 'kept the noiseless tenor of their way', may no longer

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[127] See entry under Ann Yearsley in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, http://www.oxforddnb.* [accessed 31 October, 2012].
[128] *The Rural Lyre*, pp. 36-42.
[129] Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton*, p. 259.

remain acquiescent in the face of constitutional injustice.[130] On this reading, then, Yearsley's earlier injunction to 'nurse not dark revenge' may presage a genuine fear that Britain might be plunged into the kind of anarchy that corrupted the ideals of the French Revolution.[131]

Yearsley's vision of Britain is explored in some detail in *Brutus: A Fragment.*[132] This is similar in construction to the 'state of the nation' poems written earlier in the century. However, Yearsley has her own perspective on the various relationships that subsist between Britain and the wider world as well as those that should bind the different economic groupings of Britain together. The central figure, Brutus, is under the aegis of Venus who is a slightly ambiguous figure. When she demands that Jove should seal his promise with an oath, Jove replies:

> "Goddess, how long
> Will mean suspicion to thy sex belong?
> Know, child, till confidence in woman shine,
> She'll own no truth, nor credit oaths of mine."

Such a reply, and Venus's subsequent submission to his will, suggests that the poem is upholding the hegemonic patriarchal structures of society. However, the key word here is 'confidence'. Although the overall balance of power rests with Jove, there is a suggested mutuality in that Venus should abide by his will only until such time as he abuses that power, and this sense of mutuality and shared responsibility is one of the thematic features of the poem. So, Brutus wins over the original inhabitants of Britain not by brutal conquest but by recognising that 'liberty' is indivisible:

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[130] Yearsley's poem in M. Ferguson and Ann Yearsley, 'Poems: Additions by the Same Hand,' *To The King: On His Majesty's arrival at Cheltenham 1788* (p. 37), certainly appears to contradict this claim. However, I would argue that it appeals to post-1688 notions of constitutional monarchy which distinguish between the king and the king-in-parliament. Further, it was an address intended (unsuccessfully) to solicit the king's patronage and, as it remained unpublished, it was clearly not regarded by Yearsley as central to her *oeuvre.*

[131] The tensions between the ideals of the revolution and their misappropriation by the mob are vividly described in Mary Wollstonecraft's reply to Burke in her *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, pp. 287-371.

[132] *The Rural Lyre*, pp. 1-27. The themes in Yearsley's *Brutus* are remarkably similar to those of Pope's abandoned epic as described by Maynard Mack: 'Brutus's ruling principle is benevolence . . . Compelling only where he has to, persuading by example where he can, allowing no one in his company to prey either upon the land or its people, he eventually brings about the good . . . that an epic hero should.' Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope*, p. 772.

When LIBERTY, to Brutus only known,
Whisper'd, "To yield is to deserve a throne.
Let fall thy spear: my Britons are not slaves:
There lives no conqueror but the man who saves.
Untaught, unpolish'd is the savage mind,
Yet firm in friendship, to affliction kind:
Deserve their love, their error will decay . . .

It is in this way that liberty can be distinguished from:

The hydra Anarchy [who] I live to tame: -
She with Licentiousness usurps my name;
Her restless offspring shall misguided roam,
The foe of order ne'er shall find a home.

And such mutuality can even be traced historically to the time when:

No diadem usurp'd, or finely wrought
To press with pain and care, the seat of thought;
But the first cap the sons of order wear,
When kings are fathers, and their subjects dear.

The contrasts between 'Liberty' and 'Anarchy', and the need for a balanced
constitution in which 'kings are fathers, and their subjects dear' would seem to
support my earlier reading of the Russel *Elegy*. However, there is a subtext to the
poem which gives added cogency to the immediate political message. Brutus is
led to the goddess Liberty by Venus who, in turn, is under the control of the
narrator. Although the narrator is clearly anonymous, the self-referential mention
of 'the savage mind' and the adoption of similar attitudes to slavery in the
passage I have quoted invite the reader to equate this anonymous narrator with
Yearsley herself. Thus, by a potentially ironic twist, the controlling voice is not,
in fact, Jove, but Yearsley, and the social values espoused are those which
dominate much of her work:

To Love alone society must owe
The deep foundations of all bliss below:
Friendship, that cheers as summer suns decline,
Forgiveness, mercy, charity divine;
All deeds refin'd, benevolent and free
Are but the branches – Love's the parent tree. . .[133]

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[133] Cf. also D. P. Watkins: '[In 'Brutus'], Yearsley's portrayal of Venus uses the political
vocabulary of imperialism in a way that clearly transforms it; Venus's imperialistic reach is
entirely free of proclivities toward violence (in contrast to Mars), or domination, and is defined
instead as a sweeping power that is marked by the embrace of shared desire — for sympathy,

The emphasis on 'friendship' is not obviously a political value, but it has the potential to create a society which is 'benevolent and free.' Yearsley, therefore, offers us a clear moral vision of a society which is based on ties of mutuality, and she articulates this either directly through the voice of 'Lactilla' or, as in *Brutus*, more subtly by controlling the act of narration so that we hear the voice of the narrator as though it were the voice of Yearsley herself. Nevertheless, the adoption of narrative form does represent a new departure for Yearsley and it may, as I have suggested above, represent a reluctance to stand out in this case too prominently against the waves of counter-revolutionary feeling that were sweeping the nation.

If we read the 'Roman' poems from this perspective, they become much more than simple exercises in style.[134] The three poems are an exploration and condemnation of the voluptuousness displayed by Plautus who cast away his virtuous sister although she had 'with two hundred talents weighed in gold,/Made good thy fortune.' However, a central focus is on the relationships between the (Roman) aristocracy and the peasantry. In *The Consul C. Fannius to Fannius Didius*, C. Fannius stumbles across Fulvia, 'Who bore so patiently our boyish feats,/Oft meant to anger her.' Fulvia, though aged, is depicted as a hard-working peasant preparing her pullets for sale 'While mightier spirits, who bewitch'd the crowd/By boasting their own virtues, sleep!'

In the course of their bargaining, Fannius rejects the yellow-footed pullet on the grounds that it is tough, although Fulvia had earlier sold 'twenty worse to one/Who gave the price, nor murmur'd.' It turns out that the customer had been Tellus, Fannius's rival for Nisa's affections.

Later, Fulvia recalls how she visits Nisa's cottage:

> where Orchius erst was wont
> To shun the noise of Rome, peruse the writs,

friendship, love, security, and order — which is the necessary precondition for liberty'; D. P. Watkins, 'History and Vision in Ann Yearsley's *Rural Lyre*' *The Age of Johnson*, 20 (2010), 223-295, (p. 234).

[134] *The Consul C. Fannius to Fannius Didius, Familiar Poem from Nisa to Fulvia of the Vale, Familiar Poem from Caius Fannius to Plautus, The Rural Lyre,* pp. 47-66.

And weigh the tribune's bold remonstrance, when
The people clamour'd for th'Agrarian law.

And she subsequently contrasts his attitude with that of Fannius:

You, prudent Consul, like a greedy churl
Higgling for pennyworths, this pullet scorn
For that (though plump) her feet are yellow. Ha!
Yellow suits some complexions.

Such a domestic scene could be treated as a semi-comic interlude to the main narrative, but the detail, the mention of the 'Agrarian law' and the depiction of the arrogant Fannius all suggest that the narrator is inviting us to consider the interactions that take place between the different social strata. Nevertheless, Yearsley has concealed this intention by narrating the story from Fannius's point of view and it is for this reason that the symbolism of the colour yellow assumes a significance that is not immediately apparent. Whereas for Fulvia, it represents the possibility of a meagre living through her sale of aged pullets (which Fannius rejects), for Fannius it comes to represent a gaudy and inappropriate gift to Nisa that is rejected both by her and her labouring-class partner, Tellus. Subtly, and indirectly, the narrator has informed us that the interests of the gentry are not the same as those of the peasantry.

Although I have suggested that her choice of other voices when she wished to engage in social criticism – the anonymous narrator of *Brutus* and the dominant voice of Fannius in the 'Roman' poems – may have been caused by a fear of 'Pitt's Terror',[135] other critics have argued that Yearsley was deliberately ambivalent as a way of protecting her own interests and aspirations. Cairnie, for example, states that:

> Yearsley's radicalism is clearly impeded by her appropriation of middle-class ideology and form, and by the compromises she had to make to maintain her position in literary culture. We must acknowledge that Yearsley formulated some highly sophisticated criticisms of systemic discrimination, but we must also regret that her ambivalence hindered her elaboration of the connections between gender, class, and race discrimination.[136]

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[135] See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), esp. chapter 5, 'Planting the Liberty Tree'.
[136] Cairnie, 'The Ambivalence of Ann Yearsley', p. 362.

Cairnie, here, seems to me to fall into the error of assuming that Yearsley was constructing political pamphlets rather than poems which had political consequences. Her more socially-aware poetry was grounded in her own experience as a poor, labouring-class woman. As such, it displays a sympathetic acknowledgement of those who shared similar experiences without necessarily identifying them as a class who had identical opinions or aspirations.[137] Indeed, as I have also suggested, there is no clear evidence that she had a developed set of specifically political ideas, although she clearly offers her readers a strong vision of the powers of 'love', 'friendship', 'forgiveness', 'mercy' and 'charity divine.'

Such beliefs do not make her naive, and they help to explain the apparently anomalous dedication to the Earl of Bristol whereby she appears to extol the social gulf that separates him from her.[138] These beliefs also help to explain her criticism of the spiteful maid in *To Mira, on the Care of her Infant*.[139] Landry asks, 'What has become of Yearsley's militantly pacifist female "warmth" in the person of the nursemaid?' and makes the valid point that the nursemaid's behaviour is the result of 'inadequate education, thwarted affections, strategic hypocrisy, and hostility towards the privileged.'[140] Again, it does not seem to me that Yearsley is under any obligation, in a poem of this nature, to explore the causes of the maid's behaviour, although she is surely right to condemn it. No doubt her own experiences as a labouring-class woman give her ample warrant

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[137] Cf. Watkins, 'History and Vision in Ann Yearsley's *Rural Lyre*': 'If we accept as a starting point the reality the Yearsley was an ill-educated laboring-class outsider poet of considerable intellectual ability, it becomes easier to imagine the particular complexity and even knottiness of her visionary poetic impulses. Rather than putting forward a body of work that stumblingly describes in verse subjects of interest to the middle class, which would make her little more than a literary curiosity, she achieves a hard-won independent voice (described explicitly in the final poem of *The Rural Lyre*) that is uniquely hers, and she uses this voice to capture and intervene in the troubling cross-currents of her personal and historical situation', p. 225. In this respect, Watkins compares her to Blake.

[138] Apparently, even some of her contemporaries found this disturbing. Waldron quotes a reviewer from *Critical Review* who commented: 'The inequalities of nature.. . . are good and useful; the inequalities of society are evil in themselves, and to be justified only as being necessary evils . . . Mrs. Yearsley might have acknowledged, not without sighs, the necessity of such a state of society; but surely *she* should not have *exulted* in it. Dedications to great people are dangerous things. Woman, beloved by genius, "Know thine own worth, and reverence the lyre"'; in Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton*, p. 241.

[139] *The Rural Lyre*, pp. 113-124.

[140] Landry, *The Muses of Resistance*, p. 266.

for identifying the effects of poverty and inequality without necessarily having to condone spiteful behaviour.

Although Yearsley never abandons the moral vision implicit in the beliefs I have listed, it would seem that she was moving towards a more introspective, and even metaphysical, perspective towards the end of her poetic career. Her *Remonstrance in the Platonic Shade, Flourishing on an Height* is an autobiographical poem that both recounts the struggles Yearsley had undergone to reach such a height and also serves as a manifesto for her poetic stance:[141]

> In this sacred shade,
> Whilst cruel duty fetter'd every sense,
> I saw my morning sun ascend with tears,
> And sink at eve with heaviness; the night
> Came burthen'd with despair; yet unsubdued,
> I frown'd indignant on my chains, and tun'd
> My rural lay to universal love.

These few lines capture the central themes that are subsequently developed later in the poem. The suffering she endured under the 'cruel duty' of having to earn a living to maintain her family is offset by the beauty offered within 'this sacred shade'. Therefore, rather than remaining entangled in these 'chains', Yearsley breaks free to proclaim poetically the values of 'universal love'. These values are then itemised, although they are essentially indivisible:

> Love, friendship, virtue, to my thought, seem'd one
> Trinomial pow'r, and blended to refine
> Most highly wrought existence.

One of the more interesting features of the poem is the interplay between the social and the personal. Yearsley is constantly reminding us that she pursued her ambitions unaided, driven on by her invincible will:

> Good heaven! have I not climb'd an height
> So frightful, e'en from comfort so remote,
> That had my judgement reel'd, my foot forgot
> Its strenuous print, my inexperienced eye
> The wondrous point in view; or my firm soul,
> Made early stubborn, her exalted pride,

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[141] *The Rural Lyre*, pp. 67-73.

Though of external poor; the stagnant lake
Of vice beneath, than Cocytus more foul,
Had oped its wave to swallow me, and hide
My frame for ever.

However, this pursuit is not merely for personal gain so much as to achieve a fuller understanding of herself in the world.

<div align="center">Know,</div>

'Tis not to pass the line for ever plac'd
'Mid the Platonic system, to revere
Myself, adore in solitude, perform
More social duties, whilst I tune my reed
To Friendship, Virtue, Love, and Heav'n, and Thee.

These lines, perhaps more than any elsewhere in her work, capture the essence of Yearsley's poetry. Her struggles have to be described in personal terms because they are, at least compared to other poets of her generation, unique and therefore authoritative. However, her frequent recall of her early life as a labouring-class rural woman, while undoubtedly designed to invoke the reader's sympathy, has a deeper purpose, which is to proclaim the virtues of friendship over the more narrow intimacies of shared class interests. Paradoxically, perhaps, Yearsley's turn to introspection, while privileging the authorial 'I', has the effect of inviting the reader to share the wider social sympathies that this 'I' so vehemently proclaims. In this respect, Yearsley's introspection remains firmly rooted in her contemporary society with all its faults and manages, Janus-like, to be both inward looking and outward looking at the same time.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

'Ah tell where I must seek this compound I'
Anna Letitia Barbauld, 'Life' (1825)[1]

In this concluding chapter, I shall re-visit the key terms of my title: 'moral' and 'self' in order to clarify how I have been using them and how they have contributed to my general and specific arguments. Inevitably, this will lead to a number of generalisations and short cuts, although these are, I believe, supported by the detail of the earlier chapters.

Interestingly, Johnson's *Dictionary* has no entry for 'moral', although he defines *Ethick* as 'Moral; delivering the precepts of morality', and *Ethicks* as 'The doctrine of morality; a system of morality'. The implication is that, for Johnson, 'ethics' and 'morality' were synonyms and that the concept of morality was self-evident. For Pope, also, the two terms appear synonymous. The title-page of his *Essay on Man* describes the work as 'The First Book of Ethic Epistles'. However, in 'The Design', he complains that '*disputes*' over 'the conformations and uses' of the 'finer nerves and vessels . . . have diminished the practice, more than advanced the theory, of Morality.'[2] Indeed, according to the *OED*, 'ethics' as a distinct term first appears in 1765, and is listed under '(b) With reference to a wider sphere that includes law and politics as well as personal conduct and religion', and its first mention is a citation from Blackstone: '1765 W. Blackstone *Comm. Laws Eng.* Introd. 27 "Jurisprudence is the principal and most perfect branch of ethics"', whereas 'morality' is defined as: 'Moral virtue; behaviour conforming to moral law or accepted moral standards, esp. in relation to sexual matters; personal qualities judged to be good.' Morality, therefore, for much of the eighteenth century, encompassed both notions of public, and of personal, behaviour such that unjust laws were not merely unethical but also immoral.

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[1] 'Life', *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Ormskirk, Lancs: Broadview Press Ltd., 2002), p. 174 (12).
[2] Pope, *Poems*, pp. 501, 2.

For Johnson, of course, the source of the moral law was obvious: it derived from God and was enshrined in the practice of Christianity. Broadly speaking, Johnson's view was also shared by a large majority of the British population throughout the century. As Sambrook observes: 'There was a general feeling that the religious life was to be lived in the ordinary world, and that the prime duty of man was to lead a life of good works in accordance with the precepts of St. James.'[3] Nevertheless, the interpretation of such precepts required a philosophical and theological explanation of how God manifests himself in the world and how he reveals his moral law in such a way that all can abide by it.

To a large extent, this was supplied by Locke. His rejection of innate ideas *tout court* necessarily meant that we can have no innate idea of God. Our knowledge, therefore, develops from our experience of the wonders of the universe:

> . . . I judge it as certain and clear a truth as can anywhere be delivered, that *the invisible things of GOD, are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood, by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.*[4]

Using similar arguments, Locke claims that our knowledge of morality also develops from our experiences of social interactions:

> . . . many men may, by the same way that they come to the knowledge of other things, come to assent to several moral rules and be convinced of their obligation. Others also may come to be of the same mind, from their education, company, and customs of their country; *which persuasion, however got, will serve to set conscience on work*, which is nothing else but our own opinion or judgement of the moral rectitude or pravity of our own actions[5]

Although this passage does not make it entirely clear exactly how we reach such judgements, elsewhere in his works he suggests that the worst 'moral pravity' is that which interferes with a person's right to their own property, however

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[3] See Sambrook, *The Eighteenth Century*, Chap. 2. The quotation comes from p. 36.
[4] Locke, *Essay*, vol. 2, § 7, p. 220. As I have pointed out in Chap. 2, Locke also believed in divine revelation.
[5] Ibid., vol. 1, § 8, p. 29.

conceived. Indeed, the defence of property was intimately connected to the defence of British liberties which had been wrested from the crown during the Glorious Revolution.

Locke's ideas were developed (and challenged) by Mandeville and Shaftesbury. Mandeville, defending the mercantile interest, argued that the pursuit of one's private interests led to an increase in public prosperity, thereby implying that selfishness was, paradoxically, a greater good than such meaner virtues as 'Frugality' and 'Honesty'.[6] Shaftesbury, however, insisted that the natural affections encouraged a sympathetic identification with others' fortunes and misfortunes that could contribute to a social intercourse of like-minded individuals which, in turn, should serve as the basis for social governance.

The concept of sympathy was further developed by David Hume and Adam Smith. Hume's radical empiricism took as a given that our conceptions of good and evil were posited on our perceptions of pleasure and pain. Moral considerations, therefore, were driven by passion rather than by reason. Nevertheless, to explain the fact that we did not live in a state of moral anarchy, Hume offered two slightly different solutions. The first may be considered the contractual obligation to honour agreements made between strangers since to do otherwise would lead to civic dissolution.[7] The second derived from the natural affections which supposedly exist within families and which further the propagation of the species. This latter he called 'sympathy' and it was to be the cornerstone of Adam Smith's investigations into the concept of morality as implied by the title of his work: *The Theory of Moral Sentiments.*

Two things emerge from this brief discussion of philosophical ideas concerning morality. The first is that, however much they locate the origins of moral feelings within the individual, the exercise of morality can only be observed in the social interactions of such individuals. The second, and this is something of a subtext even though it follows on from the first, is that moral behaviour is inextricably linked to the correct organisation of the state.

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[6] Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, p. 135.
[7] Although Hume does not mention it specifically, he may well have had in mind the various acts of Parliament following the civil war which both guaranteed the British Constitution and the Protestant succession.

Both of these ideas were explored and developed in the poetry of the eighteenth century in different ways. Pope, who may be considered the most influential poet of the century, makes his moral concerns explicit in the *Moral Epistles* while also constructing a genealogy of British history and liberty in *Windsor Forest* which will allow appropriate moral behaviour to flourish.[8] His attitude to empirical philosophy is encapsulated in the epigrammatic *Epitaph. Intended for Sir Isaac Newton, In Westminster-Abbey* (1730):

Nature, and Nature's Laws lay hid in Night.
God said, *Let Newton be!* And All was *Light.*[9]

Newton, the great natural philosopher, had revealed the wonders of God's creation in much the same way as Locke had revealed the workings of the human mind, and the results of these revelations were celebrated in Pope's physico-theological poem, *An Essay on Man.*[10] Conceived as four 'Ethic Epistles to H. St. John L. Bolingbroke', they offer a panoramic view of man's place in the universe and a general analysis of his behaviour. More detailed investigations of moral behaviour are considered in the *Moral Essays*, also written as 'Epistles'.

Perhaps the most revealing of these is *Epistle III. To Allen Lord Bathurst* (1733).[11] In it, Pope explores the moral effects of wealth and its distribution. Interestingly, he has very little to say about the causes of inequality although he insists that the possession of wealth brings with it a moral obligation to act charitably to relieve the sufferings of the poor. This is made clear in the three portraits he offers us of Cotta, his son, and the Man of Ross.

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[8] Abigail Williams argues convincingly that the Whig poetry of the early part of the century has been largely obscured by the attacks on it from, particularly, Pope and the Scriblerians. See Abigail Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1681-1714* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). While acknowledging that Whig poetry has been unjustly ignored, I am inclined to agree with Sitter that the poetry of the later eighteenth century is 'after Pope creatively as well as chronologically.' Sitter, 'Political, Satirical, Didactic and Lyric Poetry (II): After Pope', p.287.
[9] Pope, *Poems*, p. 808.
[10] Ibid., pp. 501-47.
[11] Ibid., pp. 570-86.

Cotta represents an extreme of frugality which is indistinguishable from meanness. Although he denies himself, he also denies his tenants:

To cram the Rich was prodigal expence,
And who would take the Poor from Providence?

. . .   .

No rafter'd roofs with dance and tabor sound,
No noontide-bell invites the country round;
Tenants with sighs the smoakless tow'rs survey,
And turn th'unwilling steeds another way: (187-8; 191-4)[12]

Clearly, for Pope, Cotta has failed to recognise that the possession of wealth imposes certain moral obligations towards one's neighbours in order to encourage and cultivate social cohesion.

Cotta's son adopts a contrary path by squandering his estate in what he imagines to be the service of his country, only to be cold-shouldered by the court when he seeks some recompense. Interestingly, however, although the son's prodigality extends to 'the capacious Squire, and deep Divine', there is no hint that he cares about his tenants. The son's misuse of riches, therefore, would appear to proceed from self-love.

The contrast with the Man of Ross could not be more extreme. Having a relatively modest income — 'five hundred pounds a year' — he spends it on improving the environment, relieving the poor and dispensing justice. It would seem, then, that for Pope true morality involved ameliorating the evils of society without upsetting the social order, and this view was consistent both with the largely deist theology he expounds in the *Essay on Man* and his deep distrust of the kinds of 'enthusiasm' that he excoriates in *The Dunciad.* However, for some critics, such a position was akin to secularism. Richardson, for example, in a letter to Young, compares *Night Thoughts* with Pope's poetry in the following terms:

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[12] It is interesting to see similar images appearing in Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*, albeit for different reasons.

> Pope's . . . was not the genius to *lift our souls to Heaven*, had it soared ever
> so freely, since it soared not in the Christian beam; but there is an eagle,
> whose eyes pierce through the shades of midnight, that does indeed
> *transport* us, and the apotheosis is your's.[13]

A corollary of this apparent secularism was that views of morality were deeply rooted in contemporary political discourse. The interconnections between moral philosophy and aesthetics that have been explored in Chapter 2 therefore extend outwards to include political philosophy. As Williams succinctly puts it: '[i]n Tory satire aesthetic evaluation was predicated on political considerations, and political evaluation was also determined by aesthetic judgements.'[14]

However, although various political discourses invaded all poetic genres, in Whig 'Patriot' poetry it was transmuted through particular visions of the growth of liberty that were rooted in a mythic British history.[15] In Book IV of Thomson'se *Liberty*, the goddess traces the growth of liberty in Britain through a highly selective history which culminates in its triumph in his own times. Book V opens with the narrator interrupting:

HERE interposing, as the GODDESS paus'd, —
"Oh blest BRITANNIA! In THY Presence blest
"THOU Guardian of Mankind! Whence spring, alone,
"All human Grandeur, Happiness and Fame:
"For Toil, by THEE protected, feels no Pain;
"The poor Man's Lot with Milk and Honey flows;
"And, gilded with thy Rays, even Death looks Gay.   (1-7)[16]

This is a curiously optimistic portrait of the 'poor Man's Lot' and clearly avoids any mention of the very real hardships that such a poor man may suffer. However, it is consistent with the virtues that Liberty proclaims are essential to the preservation of such a free society:

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[13] Cited in Cornford's 'Introduction' to Young's *Night Thoughts*, p. 2.

[14] Abigail Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture*, p. 27.

[15] Christine Gerrard observes that, after *Windsor-Forest*, Pope's poetry concentrates on contemporary events whereas Patriot poetry 'rarely identifies in detail contemporary names, places, or events', but explores 'a more positive and expansive sense of the relationship between historical past, present, and future.' Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry and National Myth 1725-1742* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 100.

[16] Thomson, *Liberty*, 127.

By those THREE VIRTUES be the Frame sustain'd,
Of BRITISH FREEDOM: INDEPENDENT LIFE;
INTEGRITY IN OFFICE; and, o'er all
Supreme, A PASSION FOR THE COMMON-WEAL.   (120-3)[17]

While 'a passion for the common-weal' clearly implies that acts of charity consistent with maintaining the status quo are legitimate, such acts must not impinge on the freedom to live an 'independent life'. Of course, Thomson here is promulgating a particular political view of liberty and it is one that is closely associated with his friend and patron, George Lyttelton. In this respect, his poem is similar to Pope's *Windsor-Forest*, which was dedicated to George Lansdown, who gave encouragement to Pope.[18]

Both poets, then, were voicing political points of view and their views of morality were intricately bound up with their political beliefs. Of course, I am not claiming that their poetry was simply a form of political propaganda, but their readers would have identified the networks of political affiliations which informed their poetry, and would have responded sympathetically, or otherwise, depending on their own interests and affiliations.

The decline of (political) patronage and the growing commercialisation of the literary market meant that poets who chose to work within the traditions established by Pope and Thomson could no longer rely on an assumed audience in quite the same ways. Gray, for example, had no political hinterland to which he could appeal, nevertheless the kinds of morality he espouses in the *Elegy* emerge from a particular vision of British history that has political consequences. That it was a social morality is evident from the epitaph inscribed on the tombstone of the swain:

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,

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[17] Ibid., p. 130.
[18] Lyttelton was also a friend of Pope and was an ally in the anti-Walpole faction. Although Pope was sympathetic to the Tory cause and Thomson to that of the Whigs, as Christine Gerrard demonstrates in *The Patriot Opposition*, the opposition to Walpole produced considerable blurring across these political boundaries.

Heav'n did a recompence 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.   (121-4)[19]

The God depicted here is a 'friend' rather than a Messiah offering moral injunctions to His people, and reflects the distrust of the 'enthusiasm' of the previous century which tended to privilege the Holy Spirit over the other members of the Trinity.[20]

Goldsmith's poetry works in a similar vein. In *The Traveller*, he comments on the felicity of his brother who, having retired to a country parsonage and living on forty pounds a year, lives in domestic harmony performing acts of charity and learning 'the luxury of doing good.' (22)[21] Again, however, the kind of morality espoused here is essentially social rather than transcendental. When projected on to the larger social sphere, as it is in *The Deserted Village*, this particular kind of morality is concerned with the correct distribution and exercise of power, and particularly economic power.

Cowper's poetry rather complicates this particular analysis. I am not implying that Gray or Goldsmith were lacking in piety, but they manifestly did not believe in the kind of transcendent God that is both praised and feared by Cowper. In hymns such as 'God moves in a mysterious way', or poems such as *The Castaway* and *Yardley Oak*, God is immediately present rather than reflected from his works, and the kind of morality that emerges from these works is primarily concerned with living an individual life in accordance with God's precepts. This is less obviously the case in his major poem, *The Task*. Here, Cowper largely celebrates the God-given social comforts of a retired domesticity. The emphasis is on gentlemanly, but modest, pursuits carried out in the company of a small group of like-minded people.[22] However, the particular virtues of such retirement are constantly contrasted with moral criticism of the vices of the larger, external, society.

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[19] Gray, *Poems*, p. 43.
[20] It also, of course, reflects a distrust of the 'superstitions' of the Roman Catholics.
[21] Goldsmith, *Collected Works*, vol. IV, pp. 243-69.
[22] And it is worth noting that the majority of such people tend to be women.

If Cowper's perspectives have shrunk from the historical sweep of Gray's *Elegy*, or the geographical vistas of Goldsmith's *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*[23] to the garden of *The Task*, Yearsley's poetry represents a further reduction in perspective in that she tends to concentrate on the social relationships she encounters with her 'betters'. However, this is not to suggest that there is any diminution in the skill or power of her work; rather, that she works with what she knows and projects her experiences of social injustice, particularly at the hands of Hannah More, as symptoms of the inequalities in the wider social structures of Britain. The two poems which might seem to defy this analysis, *Brutus* and *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave-Trade*, are revealing in this respect. The former, which sets out to offer a historical account of the growth of liberty in Britain, was abandoned, while the latter, although it clearly had a potential audience throughout the kingdom, is addressed quite specifically to the citizens of Bristol.

Throughout my analyses, then, I have been using the term 'moral' to describe a specific form of moral criticism which is steeped in politics, and which confronts social inequalities and injustices in their various forms.

The term 'self' presents different kinds of problems: on the one hand, there is the philosophical problem of identity, and, on the other, the linguistic problem of how personal pronouns work. For Hume, this distinction was nugatory. His conclusion was that questions of personal identity are best regarded as grammatical rather philosophical difficulties. However, as Thomas Reid pointed out:

> [Hume] believed against his principles, that he should be read, and that he should retain his personal identity, till he reached the honour and reputation justly due to his philosophical *acumen.* Indeed, he ingeniously acknowledges, that it was only in solitude and retirement that he could yield any assent to his own philosophy; society, like daylight, dispelled the darkness and fogs of scepticism, and made him yield to the dominion of common sense.[24]

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[23] It should be remembered that the evicted and homeless tenants are forced to emigrate.
[24] Reid, *Inquiry and Ethics,* p. 8.

Hume's discomfiture reveals a very real philosophical dilemma, and Reid's 'common sense' dismissal of the problem is no more a refutation of Hume's arguments than was Johnson's kicking a stone an adequate refutation of Berkeley'idealism.

The classical linguistic definition of personal deixis is that the use of 'I' refers to the originator of the utterance. Further, anthropological linguists have found no languages which lack a means of encoding this reference. Thus, although the use of 'I' makes very limited claims as to the identity of the speaker (or, in our case, the writer), it triggers in the hearer/reader the concept of an *origo*. Having conceptualised this *origo*, readers can then use it to construct the context of the utterance from the various other deictic markers that indicate time and place.[25] In this way, the conceptual identity of the author is established. Whether or not this conceptual identity can be verified philosophically becomes an irrelevance since readers are, to a greater or lesser extent, invited to imagine a 'real' writer with all the virtues and instabilities of a 'real' person.

In the light of recent critical theory emanating from structuralist and post-structuralist writers, such a position might seem perversely naive. Barthes' seminal essay, *The Death of the Author* asserts:

> We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning . . . but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.[26]

However, Barthes' analysis ignores certain fundamental weaknesses in Saussurean structural linguistics, and weaknesses that continue to undermine both Chomsky's and Pinker's developments of structuralism.

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[25] For further discussion, see Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), esp. Chap. 4.

[26] Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author* in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed., by David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), pp.166-72, (p. 170).

Saussure's concentration on *langue* rather than *parole* tended to reify language and detach it from its human contexts, thereby ignoring the fact that language is not merely a set of signs organised in regular patterns, but also used to perform certain (human) functions. Further, his prioritising of synchronic linguistics over diachronic linguistics means that language change can be ignored. Barthes appears to be adopting a similar stance. His claim that a text is a 'space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash' is obviated by the fact that, at some stage in the past, there must have been an *ur*-text which would, by its very nature, have been original. Once that has been admitted, then the likelihood of a multitude of original texts becomes possible.

A further problem with Barthes' analysis is that he seems to be arguing that meaning, however construed, is a property of the text rather than of the text's writers and readers, thereby reifying the text in the same ways as Saussure reified language.[27] Such a view is clearly challenged by the development of more recent theories such as Speech Act Theory and Relevance Theory.[28] The former asserts that in making an utterance, writers clearly intend to convey both semantic meaning and social purpose, while the latter argues that readers engage in a search for that range of meanings that will have optimal relevance for them either contextually or co-textually, and will then cease their cognitive processing.

Of course, my arguments do not preclude the possibility of multiple interpretations of texts, nor do they deny that, in the process of learning language, humans absorb the discourses of a variety of 'centres of culture'. They do, however, insist that authors are responsible for choosing how they select from these discourses in their writings, and how they shape their texts to offer intended meanings and functions to their potential audiences. Equally, they suggest that a responsible audience has a duty to make as much effort as appropriate to understand such meanings and functions.

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[27] Although it would be tedious to argue this at length, it is self-evident that without humans there would be neither languages nor texts.
[28] The seminal text for Speech Act Theory is J. L Austin, *How to do things with words* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962); Relevance Theory is formulated most comprehensively in Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition,* 2nd. edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

If texts, then, are not autonomous artefacts, they must have their origin in some kind of 'self'. However, as I have indicated above, this 'self' is necessarily a textual construct and cannot necessarily be identified with the actual writer. Such 'selves' are revealed as the poetic discourse unfolds, and are signalled by specific linguistic choices. Although texts are rarely univocal, they can be distinguished from each other by the use of a dominant 'self' who can be said to 'speak' the poem. In the preceding chapters, I have identified three broad types of speaker referred to as either narrators, *personae*, or by using the proper name of the poet. Narrators are typically anonymous speakers whose function is to impart information. *Personae* tend to be speakers who invite the reader to imagine a particular type of speaker whose agenda is intimately bound up with the subject matter. They may, in other words, be said to be representative both of an ideology or set of beliefs and the kinds of people who hold to that ideology. The use of proper names indicates that the speakers are speaking on their own behalf.[29]

A typical example of a narrator occurs in John Dyer's *The Fleece*. The opening lines state: 'The care of Sheep, the labors of the Loom,/And arts of Trade, I sing.'[30] In Speech Act Theory, this is an unequivocal assertion that establishes a tacit contract with the reader about the contents of the poem, and Dyer fulfils this contract. Throughout, the narrator reveals himself in the role of instructor or advisor and, to a large extent, other elements of his personality are excluded. Of course, this is not the full story since the grammatical inversion of an adverb phrase preceding the subject and verb, and the choice of the verb 'sing' indicate a direct reference to the initial line of Virgil's *Aeneid*: 'Arma virumque cano' and, by extension, to Dryden's translation. Mention of Virgil brings to mind his *Georgics*, thereby establishing the genre within which Dyer's poem occurs and the freight with which this genre is loaded. Nevertheless, the voice of an

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[29] It is important to insist that these are methodological distinctions. In any particular text, there are likely to be rhetorical shifts of presentation involving a movement from one kind of speaker to another.

[30] John Dyer, *The Fleece*, p. 3.

impersonal narrator is maintained throughout the poem with very few exceptions.[31]

Personae are deliberate authorial constructions which may be fictional characters such as Martinus Scriblerus, or which may represent a set of ideas and attitudes which are ascribed to the implied author of the work. David Fairer has indicated how the public world of politics intersected with the private world of individuals and this is clearly apparent in Pope's *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*.[32] The *Epistle* is constructed in the form of a private communication. It was, however, offered to the public in 1735.[33] In it, Pope constructs himself as a speaker who adheres to the Horation ethos while also coruscating such Whig adherents as Hervey and Addison. Thus the personal ideals of the speaker are projected into the public world of politics. Something similar happens in Thomson's *The Seasons*. Although the speaker has the impersonality associated with a dispassionate narrator, the frequent references to Lyttelton and his estate at Hagley Park indicate that Thomson, too, is engaging in a political discourse and adopting an appropriate 'Whiggish' *persona.*

The poets who form the focus of this study clearly draw on the rhetorical resources of their predecessors, but no longer have the same kinds of access to the centres of political power. Their moral judgements are therefore less obviously tinged with the kinds of personal connections that were apparent in Pope and Thomson. In this sense, they were speaking for 'themselves'. A clear example of this more private verse can be seen in Gray's *Sonnet [on the Death of Mr Richard West]*. The closing lines contain such self-reference as 'In vain to me', 'my lonely anguish' and 'my breast'. Such references are entirely appropriate to a poem of private mourning. However, the *Elegy* is an altogether different kind of poem, being a meditation on history, on writing and on the peasantry. Nevertheless, rather than adopt the impersonal voice of a narrator, Gray intrudes himself into the poem right from the beginning as a sensory being

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[31] John Goodridge points out that: '[t]he poem is driven forward by an urgent, self-confident didacticism.' 'Introduction' to John Dyer, *The Fleece. A Poem in Four Books*, ed., by John Goodridge and Juan Christian Pellicer (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2007), p. 4.
[32] *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 15.
[33] Pope, *Poems*, pp. 597-612.

who is actually experiencing the sights and sounds he is describing. This was a bold step poetically, and one that he found difficult to resolve rhetorically, hence the uncertain uses of personal deixis at the end where he attempts to identify himself both with, and as, the 'swain'.

Goldsmith, like Gray, was not a member of the gentry. Unlike Gray, however, he was a professional writer, and well aware of the vagaries of the book trade. Whereas Gray could, and did, treat his potential audiences with a degree of indifference, Goldsmith needed their approbation. His friendship with, and admiration of, Johnson was that of one professional for another that was also augmented by his respect for Johnson's views, and it is possible that the dedication of *The Traveller* was influenced by Johnson's repudiation of patronage in his letter to Chesterfield composed in 1755. By choosing his brother as the dedicatee, Goldsmith clearly indicated that he had no aristocratic connections. It also subtly implied that he was of a similar social class as his intended readers. However, in the context of this study, the dedication is particularly interesting in that it brought into focus Goldsmith's personal investment in the project. Unlike earlier surveys of the British character, Goldsmith largely ignores the historical genealogy of the growth of liberty, concentrating instead on contrasting portraits of the different virtues and vices of various European nations. As a result, the social evils that he descries are less the consequence of a historical process and more the result of an imbalance between the desire for independence and the need for social cohesion.[34]

To a large extent, this social analysis is repeated in *The Deserted Village.* However, the two things that are striking in this poem are the emotional energy with which Goldsmith attacks the enclosure system and his deep personal involvement in its consequences. The former is conveyed through the contrast between the desolate scenes of depopulation and the imaginary bounty of the Auburn of his childhood, while the latter is signalled by his frequent use of personal deictics to convey his deep sense of loss at the apparent collapse of social inclusion leading to a corresponding loss of his poetic inspiration.

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[34] Cf. 'That independence Britons prize too high,/Keeps man from man, and breaks the social tie' *The Traveller* (339-40).

As with Gray, there are various disjunctions in the ways Goldsmith rhetorically organises the shifts of voice between the impersonal narrator and the involved author that were finally resolved by Cowper. Cowper's *Moral Satires* clearly appealed to earlier models of morally didactic poetry in that they used an impersonal narrator. However, with *The Task*, he manages to blend the personal with the public seamlessly. As with Gray and Goldsmith, Cowper's scenes are replete with personal deictics, but they also contain a fuller set of proximal, distal and temporal deictics which render them more richly experienced by the presumed author. Also, the creation of the supposed reader is handled in a different manner. Gray's *Elegy* is spoken into the void, with no particular dedicatee. Although Goldsmith claims to be writing *The Traveller* to his brother, it is clearly not a private epistle, while *The Deserted Village* is fronted by a dedication in the form of an *apologia* to Sir Joshua Reynolds, although it is obviously a public document. *The Task*, on the other hand, has no obvious addressee, although it is prefaced by a 'history'. As the poem progresses, it becomes apparent that the primary addressee is Cowper's friend, Mrs. Unwin, and that the mode of address is similar to a conversation. However, Unwin is not always present as the action unfolds, and the overwhelming impression for readers is that they are taking part in a tri-partite conversation, part of which they overhear and part of which is directed at them. The sense of intimacy that this creates compounds the effect that Cowper, the person, is representing his own ideas.

Yearsley's poetry has the same sense of immediacy. *Clifton Hill* contains a conversation with her mother, numerous closely-observed natural phenomena, and plentiful uses of first person deixis. Also, the first two volumes are prefaced with letters between herself and Hannah More. The reader is thus invited to approach her poetry as the production of a specific person who is situated both as grateful recipient of More's patronage and deeply resentful of her subsequent treatment. This is particularly apparent in her poem to 'Stella', *To the Same on*

her Accusing the Author of Flattery.[35] The contrast between the urbane world of
'Stella' and the deprived world of Yearsley is neatly captured in the lines:

My friends I've praised — they stood in heavenly guise
When first I saw them, and my mental eyes
Shall in that heavenly rapture view them still,
For mine's a stubborn and a savage will;
No customs, manners, or soft arts I boast,
On my rough soul your nicest rules are lost,
Yet shall unpolish'd gratitude be mine,
While STELLA deigns to nurse the spark divine.   (6-12)

Both the 'I' and the'Stella' of these lines are clearly meant to have personal
reference.

Nevertheless, the choice of the classical name, 'Stella', for More constructs her
as a *persona* in the same way as the choice of 'Lactilla' construct the author as a
persona in a number of Yearsley's other poems. The reason for this can be found
in Yearsley's background. *Poems on Several Occasions* and *Stanzas of Woe* each
proclaim on the title page that Anne Yearsley is 'A Milk-Woman of Clifton',
while her final volume, *The Rural Lyre* has the same legend together with a
portrait of Yearsley. This identification can be seen initially as an advertisement
by More of Yearsley's humble origins. In the final volume, however, it becomes
a badge of pride. Similarly, the alternation between the self-identification as an
'I' and as 'Lactilla' proclaims a shared pride in her educational attainments and
in her own poetic achievements as a lowly milk-woman. Compared to Gray,
Goldsmith and Cowper, Yearsley comes from a considerably disadvantaged
background, and to demonstrate that she has attained the same authority to speak
out against the social evils of slavery, inequality of education and social injustice,
Yearsley has to demonstrate her own worth.

The 'moral self', then, described in the previous chapters refers to the poetic
construction of a speaker who may be said to be speaking on his, or her, own

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[35] Yearsley, *Poems on Several Occasions*, pp. 56-7.

behalf while engaging in a set of discourses which focus moral criticisms of his, or her, contemporary society. In this respect, then, the four poets are innovatory.

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