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THE ROMANTIC BOWER

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by

David LeBlanc

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The dissertation of David LeBlanc was reviewed and approved by the following:

Claire Colebrook
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of English, Philosophy, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
Dissertation Advisor
Chair of Committee

Daniel Leonhard Purdy
Professor of German Studies

Hester Blum
Professor of English

Shara McCallum
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of English

Janet Lyon
Associate Professor of English and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
Faculty-in-charge, Disability Studies Minor
Director of the Graduate Program in English

ABSTRACT

The Romantic Bower explores the bower as a pastoral configuration adopted by Romantic poets from Spenserian motifs. In the context of the Anthropocene and Post-Humanist debates, the bower demonstrates the limits of the imaginative freedom of the Western subject. The poet's attempt to carve out a new ecological formation as an alternative to the contingent present is ultimately a failure as Anthropocenic relationality intrudes. The bower, then, allows new possibilities for reading Romanticism as a contention with proto-globalist awarenesses of an inescapably tangential world.

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Introduction/Synopsis

In a recent MLA conference panel titled "Can Theory Save The World?,"[1] panel participants were asked to answer the questions: "Is theory up to the task of saving the world? If so, how would theory do it? Is this world really worth saving?"[2] The answer to the third question was a unanimous 'no.' As participants pointed out, theory first needs to ask what kind of world is being saved, and the panel's prompt defined the world in terms of "the age of neoliberal capitalism"; not much worth saving there. A surviving world is only merited by its definition. Anahid Nersessian elaborates on the "Romantic attentiveness to precarity" that is a "necessary precondition to elaborating the possibility of adjustment."[3] For Nersessian, adjustment is "a formal as well as an ethical operation that allows human beings to accommodate themselves to the world by minimizing the demands they place upon it."[4] Following Nersessian's theory, it is possible that Romantic literature can, if not save the world through its theories, provide lessons on how the 'world' is configured towards its own end to illuminate the world as it is in a time of actual world-ending precarity.

This dissertation will explore a specific configuration of Romanticism[5]—the Romantic bower—as a redefinitional act under the pressures of world-ending precarity. The Romantic

[1] "Can Theory Save The World?" (2021 Modern Language Association Annual Convention, held remotely, January 9 2021). Panel participants: Jeffrey R. Di Leo, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Peter James Hitchcock, Calvin Warren, Zahi A. Zalloua, and Claire M. Colebrook.

[2] "Can Theory Save The World?" Description, https://mla.confex.com/mla/2021/meetingapp.cgi/Session/9314.

[3] Nersessian, *Utopia, Limited*, 2.

[4] Nersessian, *Utopia, Limited*, 3.

[5] I will use Romanticism with the capital "R" throughout this thesis, but it is worth noting at the outset that an uncapitalized romanticism is sometimes more appropriate as it suggests not a singular movement, period, aesthetics, etc. but a multiplicity. However, I will eschew this argument in favor of a Romanticism that embraces that multiplicity as a fundamental property that constitutes its constellation. Jacques Khalip and Forest Pyle lay this multiplicity out in their introduction to *Constellations of Contemporary Romanticism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 1-2.

bower is a constructed space of boundedness in an unbound world. Rather than focusing on "minimizing the demands" that the individual places on the world, the Romantic bower accommodates the individual by crafting a means to adjust, instead, the read boundaries of the world. Awareness of the Anthropocene heightens the politics of the individual as the scale of human activity approaches inescapability. In many ways, the Anthropocene's most dire implications are that of scale.[6] This may occur in the form of ecological catastrophe[7] as, put simply by Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, "modern technologies have radically changed the scale of human action."[8] This is taken as a truism now as the repercussions of technological action is felt globally on a daily basis. But the matter of scale is not only one of cause and effect. As ecological catastrophe becomes prevalent in cultural awareness, that awareness must in turn adjust to the scale effect, the very sense of precarity Nersessian centralizes as a feature of Romantic literature. The ecological effects of the actions of one people, or one person, affects all; individual politics mixes with regional politics and global repercussions as agency is pitched against intersecting relationalities that cannot be escaped. Meanwhile, those agencies that transform nature transform it irrevocably by courting extinction. The Romantic bower is a construction that attempts to rein in scale and adjust the terms through which the poet confronts precarity. Bowerism, as will be used in this dissertation, is that act of expanding individual agency by limiting the definition of the world. The bower is an Anthropocenic act: its anthropocentrism is predicated on the individual circumstances of the bower-maker, i.e. the

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[6] Which leads to what Timothy Clark has called a "derangement of linguistic and intellectual proportion." "Derangements of Scale." *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Cli-mate Change*, volume 1 (2012): 150.

[7] I will use the word "catastrophe" throughout this dissertation as it tends to be "less anthropocentric than the word 'disaster' because it does not necessarily judge an event or process by whether its effects on human beings are positive or negative." Higgins, *British Romanticism*, 7.

[8] Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, "Beck Back in the 19th Century: Towards a Genealogy of Risk Society," in *History and Technology*, volume 23, number 4 (December, 2007): 333.

peculiar politics of each poet. This dissertation will demonstrate how Romantic bower poetics already plays out the politics of the fraught Anthropocene[9] by emphasizing inescapable interconnectedness long before the Anthropocene is empirically acknowledged and verified. The Romantic bower is, ultimately, a failed project, as the bower is never a purely separated space. This is not to denigrate the attempt. Rather, the bower demonstrates the limits of poetic imagination in the face of geological truth.

As the editors of *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch* have pointed out, "the Anthropocene concept obliges us to embark on a deep reconceptualisation of political agency and democracy,"[10] a thought echoed by critics such as Morton Manuel Arias-Maldonado.[11] The enactment of a bower—an enclosed place of repose cut off from its surrounding environment, whether that environment is natural or cultural—is an imaginative cul-de-sac, no more secure than a gated community will ever be, hyperbolic in its exaggerated attempt to carve out a bounded ecological space for the poet. On the other hand, the idea of independent action espoused by democratic theories is *also* hyperbolic as it implies the making or unmaking of the world can take place at the level of the individual. Investigations into the Anthropocene expose just how ludicrous this idea is as global effect distorts the scale of actions. The implications of the Anthropocene is that geological action

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[9] The very term "Anthropocene" is fraught as it levels the historical data that gave rise to present circumstances. Though the term describes 'human-led' change on a planetary scale, that change was not initiated by humanity as a whole but by certain peoples engaging in certain technological practices. Alternative terms have been proposed, such as the "Capitalocene" by Andreas Malm, to specify the actors who perpetuated global ecological catastrophe. However, as others (such as Arias-Maldonado in *Environment and Society: Socionatural Relations in the Anthropocene*) have pointed out, there is already strength to the term Anthropocene in the widespread cultural imagination. Moreover, the term does emphasize the harsh reality of ecological catastrophe as a global issue. This is not to say that ecological catastrophe is a *universal* problem. Malm has argued at length that the realities of Anthropocenic change actually reinforce barriers such as wealth disparity in that poorer peoples already are and will continue to be disproportionately affected by ecological change.

[10] *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch*, edited by Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonnueil, and Françoics Gemenne (New York: Routledge, 2015), 9.

[11] In *Environment and Society: Socionatural Relations in the Anthropocene*, chapter 6.

undercuts democratic individualism by implicating human activity in terraforming. Actually, the Romantics already tested the limits of democratically free individuals via the bower's action.[12] How poets engage with these constructed ecological spaces signifies Romantic tendencies to locate and reflect impossible repose in an inescapably contingent world. The promised repose of the bower is itself political, even when it promises a reprieve from the politics of the outside world. This dissertation will demonstrate just how far the action of individualized freedom can be pushed in an imaginative act, and where that individual freedom ultimately breaks against the rocks of relationality. The act of creating the bower reveals the limits of free agency found by each poet.

The World vs. the Planet

It's important to note that the word "world" used above does not mean the planet. Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued in several works for the separation of the "globe" from the "planet."[13] Chakrabarty defines the former as the cultural, economic, industrial, technological, and social environment that has been constructed over the past 500 years or so that we have inherited in its colonialist forms.[14] The globe is a thing constructed by and for humans, a thing that can be reinforced, deconstructed, refashioned, or obliterated, depending on human activity. The planet, on the other hand, is a cosmological ellipsoid billions of years old. The planet's construction is

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[12] This echoes to an extent what Jean-Baptiste Fressoz already asks in "Does political ecology need the approval of geologists?" in IPPR Progressive Review, volume 24, number 3 (Winter, 2017): 170-174. The decision by the International Commission on Stratigraphy is essentially moot. As Caroline Schaumann and Heather I. Sullivan assert in their introduction to *German Ecocriticism in the Anthropocene*, "Regardless of whether geologists will end up accepting or rejecting the term, the Anthropocene has turned humankind at large into the protagonist of a new deep-time narrative." (*German Ecocriticism in the Anthropocene*, edited by Caroline Schaumann and Heather I. Sullivan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1). The Anthropocene is here and has been for some time.
[13] Notably, "The Climate of History: Four Theses." In *Critical Inquiry*, volume 35, number 2 (Winter, 2009): 197-222, as well as *The Crises of Civilization: Exploring Global and Planetary Histories* (2018) and *One Planet, Many Worlds: The Climate Parallax* (2023).
[14] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *One Planet, Many Worlds: The Climate Parallax* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2023)
(New York: Routledge, 2007), 4-5.

utterly outside human activity, its continued existence or eventual destruction dependent on cosmological events rather than humanistic notions of agency. I rein in globalism by the word "world" to emphasize the worldliness of Romantic imaginatives. Romanticism itself participated in the construction of Chakrabarty's globe as it participated in ongoing colonialist practices; Romanticism will never be free of its colonialist past, and while it may critique colonialism, it is also imbricated in its early nineteenth century manifestations. Romanticism can and has, however, intruded itself on how individual worlds are constructed within that global theater by its attempted apprehension of the planet though, for the Romantics, nature is not necessarily solely planetary.

Romantic poetics has always apprehended an ecology without nature. The general tenor of Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature* is that the notion of "'nature'" being subsumed by the "'ecological'" is an emerging phenomenon, or in Morton's terms, an ongoing "unconscious" process the book strives to bring into conscious terms.[15] However, as Morton reveals through his own analyses, and from the very fact that *Ecology Without Nature* draws heavily on Romantic-era writing to unfold its conclusions, an ecology without nature is already emplaced by the Romantic period. The sticking point, then, is a critical one: the need to meet this destruction of nature in a conscious way is paramount in a period of mass ecological (both natural and human) distress: how can we read about the end of nature when nature might actually be ending? It is revealing that the third section of Morton's book focuses on politicizing an ecology without nature, in pulling apart the purpose of environmental literature's compulsion to "provide a compelling and consistent aesthetic basis for the new worldview that is meant to change

[15] Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

society."[16] A more compelling question than Morton's own "What Is Nature For?"[17] is "who is ecology for?," a question that drives much criticism on the Anthropocene as the politics of environmental literature/art is itself subsumed by the politics of ecology. The bower as a poetic motif is the bower as a critical theory, fully conscious of its own negotiations between a pristine nature—"That Thing Over There that surrounds and sustains us," as Morton puts it[18]—and the who and for what of a generated ecology. The bower is already an ecology without nature as it redefines and encloses the world at the level of the individual. Morton's project is more an assignment of and coming to terms with this ecologicality.

The definition of 'nature' is itself up for grabs as critics such as Arias-Maldonado question the subject/object relationality of conventional interpretations of nature. Nature, "That Thing Over There," is redefined by these critics as imbricated with culture to the point where the human/nature dichotomy dissolves. For Morton, this is via a reconsideration of the interrelatedness of ecological relationships, what Heather Sullivan refers to as "the mesh",[19] where human actions, beliefs, and even words are reduced to one node of activity in an ecological framework that crucially does not favor the human over any other node. For Arias-Maldonado, the human/nature divide is first interrupted by Darwin's evolutionary theories that read human beings as just one animal species in a web of evolutionary branches. Human society, then, cannot be ontologically different from what has been conventionally seen as nature: "nature and society are not two separate entities."[20] These lines of inquiry call for a radical reorientation

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[16] Morton, *Ecology*, 5.
[17] Morton, *Ecology*, 21.
[18] Morton, *Ecology*, 1.
[19] Heather Sullivan, "Nature and the 'Dark Pastoral' in Goethe's Werther," in *Goethe Yearbook*, volume 22 (2015): 128.
[20] Manuel Arias-Maldonado, *Environment and Society: Socionatural Relations in the Anthropocene* (New York: Springer, 2015), 1.

of environmental criticism via mixture: “neither material nor cultural explanations suffice in themselves.”[21] This call for redefinition has some merit as the essential ‘otherness’ of nature is pulled apart by the Anthropocene which now reads humans as a “force of nature” on par with environmental forces that too shape the contours of the planet.[22]

However, there has been pushback against this kind of thinking. Stacy Alaimo emphasizes an “elemental sense of the world” that resists the “arrogance” of the named Anthropocene in its lack of acknowledgment of a nature “which cannot be accessed, understood, and fundamentally altered by human practices.”[23] Andreas Malm delivers perhaps the most damning argument for resisting the “rush to jettison the categories as soon as the extent of their entanglement comes into view” by arguing that doing so is simply “the flipside of substance dualism,” a continuation of the Cartesian line of reasoning that so forcefully separated nature and culture during the Enlightenment.[24] Malm goes on to point out that, in a world of global warming, nature “comes roaring back” as that thing that operates well outside of cultural controls.[25] Though culture and nature are indeed enmeshed in the Anthropocene to an extent that one does not exist without acting upon the other, “That Thing Over There” persists in its otherness as an actor outside of human control and even human reckoning.[26] While this is hardly

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[21] Arias-Maldonado, *Environment and Society*, 1.

[22] Several scholars have argued for this paradigm, but here I refer to Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonnueil, and Françoics Gemenne’s introduction to *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch* (New York: Routledge, 2015), in which they dub this reckoning of human activity akin to an “‘impossible’ fact,” (3) emphasizing not only the unprecedented situation we now find ourselves in, but also the remarkable challenge this presents to historical conceptions of nature. If nature has always been something outside of human agency, what happens now that we ourselves can be seen as a “force of nature”? In one way or another, this is at the core of all Anthropocene criticism.

[23] David Higgins, *British Romanticism, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene: Writing Tambora* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 3.

[24] Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (London: Verso, 2018), chapter 2.

[25] Malm, *The Progress*, chapter 2.

[26] Such as the ‘hyper-object’ of Morton’s criticism that sees certain scientific constructs, such as ‘climate change,’ as something that cannot be apprehended as a singular thing but must be constructed through interdisciplinary data-

a new approach for Romantic criticism as one of the tenets of Romanticism is the reaching after a transcendental reality by/through an approach towards nature's otherness, this analysis will demonstrate how the imaginative cutting off of a constructed environment establishes a poetic reckoning of the resistance of the other. The negotiation of nature—its poetic constitution—comes down to a matter of circumstance: Romantic politics playing out at the individual level as bowerism (ultimately a limiting act) attempts to define new worlds, new natures, for the individual, despite the inescapability of the planet.

The Bower and the Pastoral

The pastoral has long stood as a means of understanding this manifold relationality between human activity and natural environments. The pastoral—in its most basic form, the rendering of the rural dramas of shepherds—has long been associated with landscape-like mimesis that highlights the human through its depictions of nature. This is in some ways why the problem of defining the pastoral has plagued critics since as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. Walter Greg, writing in 1905, struggled with pinning down just what the pastoral is, both historically and as an aesthetic concept, boiling the whole down to a "recognition of a contrast, implicit or expressed, between pastoral life and some more complex type of civilization."[27] The problem of defining the pastoral continues through William Empson's *English Pastoral Poetry: Some Versions of the Pastoral* which emphasizes the dichotomy of simplicity and complexity in a Marxist context.[28] More recently, Patrick Cullen's *Spenser, Marvell, and Renaissance Pastoral* broadens the definition of the pastoral as a "a

sciences from many sources. Hyper-objects essentially defy human reasoning as cause-and-effect can only be established through the accumulation of mass data.

[27] Walter W Greg, *Pastoral Poetry & Pastoral Drama* (Oxford: Horace Hart, 1905), 7.

[28] Empson makes this assertion throughout *English Pastoral Poetry: Some Versions of the Pastoral* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1938).

critical exploration and counterbalancing of attitudes, perspectives, and experiences,"[29] while even more recent definitions, such as Ken Hiltner's, marks the Renaissance pastoral as essentially a "form of nature writing."[30] While the definitions among critics narrow[31] and broaden depending on the critical purview, the pastoral generally involves comparison and contrast with nature as context, implicating it in the nature/culture conversation of today.

But conventional treatments of the pastoral lack the globalism of the Anthropocene: instead of agency vs. global effect, the pastoral renders the country vs. the city, as in Raymond Williams's famous division.[32] Yet Williams, writing prior to the postcolonial critical norm, still gestures throughout *The Country and the City* to the implications of this divide in a wider context as he analyzes the urban as a global phenomenon via his own, sometimes anecdotal, view of English urbanism. For Williams there is not simply the country and the city, but multiple countries, multiple cities, that vary depending on location and depending on the observer. Looking back to the days of the Industrial Revolution, Williams emphasizes that "it mattered very much where you were looking from [. . .] In literature it is a complex of different ways of seeing even the same local life."[33] Locality is the crux, as much as it has become in more recent discussions of the local and the global.[34] The pastoral, it would seem, is well positioned as an aesthetic configuration to explore the human/culture debate.

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[29] Patrick Cullen, *Spenser, Marvell, and Renaissance Pastoral* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 1.
[30] Ken Hiltner, *What Else is Pastoral? Renaissance Literature and the Environment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 1.
[31] For example, when Evangelos Karakasis states "the term pastoral/bucolic refers in this study to the poems which are set in the countryside and whose subject is herdsmen and their rural existence." This is not to suggest Karakasis states *all* pastoral must follow these lines of labor, but that the definition is consciously limited as such for "*this* study" (emphasis mine), a matter of critical convenience to limit the corpus. *Song Exchange in Roman Pastoral* (New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 4.
[32] A reference to Williams's *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).
[33] Williams, *The Country and the City*, 108.
[34] Such as for Ursula Heise in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2008).

However, the pastoral crucially lacks the Anthropocene's sense of immediacy. The temporal affect of the pastoral has been fixed between two poles: the Arcadian 'golden-age' at one end, utopia at the other. The 'golden-age' analysis of the pastoral sees it as a mode of looking back to a simpler and better time, a fundamental quality identified in pastoral literature harkening as far back as Greg. The utopian view sees the pastoral as a means of imagining an ideal future that separates from contemporary realities of labor and urban life. Both views treat the pastoral as escapist: "Those are the only two possible escapes, other than a hedonistic glorification of the present moment itself; the looking forward to the future results in the production of utopian or millennial literature, the looking backward to the past in the Arcadian vision."[35] In either rendering, the pastoral is reduced to an imaginative means of escaping one's immediate environment. In the context of the Anthropocene, this carries a certain appeal: lay aside catastrophe for a moment[36] for the dream of the pastoral. But the promise of this momentary reprieve is offset by dire circumstances: we might watch the joyful play of the shepherds, but the world is still burning around us. Can the pastoral really offer a helpful critical perspective if it is merely escapist?

Enter the Romantic bower. A peculiar configuration of the pastoral, the bower acts as a vehicle between the pastoral and the Anthropocene as the bower dramatizes the process of negotiating an enclosed space. Bowerism—as a motif and as an act of poiesis—aggressively carves out a place and makes an ecology—with or without nature—of its own. Crucially, this place does not attempt to utterly escape the present. Though it may be sprung from an Arcadian

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[35] Peter V. Marinelli, *Pastoral* (New York: Methuen & Co, 1971), chapter 1.

[36] The implications of brevity in the pastoral have been acknowledged eloquently as far back as Renato Poggioli's *The Oaten Flute*: "Man may linger in the pastoral dreamworld a short while or a whole lifetime. Pastoral poetry makes more poignant and real the dream it wishes to convey when the retreat is not a lasting but a passing experience, acting as a pause in the process of living, as a breathing spell from the fever and anguish of being." *The Oaten Flute* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 9.

notion of the past or may point to a utopian future, the bower instead forces a reconditioning of the present, a form of alterity it can construct right now. Not about a "return"[37] from an impure present, the bower revolts by transmuting *what is* into *what should be*. Nothing is left behind, only shifted. After all, the pastoral ideal has always been within reach. As Annabel Patterson once pointed out in her exploration of Wordsworth's pastoral, simply shedding off one's urban laurels and joining the shepherds on the hill was always an option.[38] Under the pressures of precarity, however, pastoral escape is not a viable option: the shepherds on the hill are as threatened as Wordsworth in the street. Even if we continue acknowledging the subject as 'something here' and nature as 'something over there,' the activity happening 'over there' ultimately creates and directs what's happening 'here.' The bower fails because its goal is an impossible one as the self tries to seclude, then sever, itself from the other.

Outline

The following chapters will pursue the bower as it is handed down from Spenser to the Romantics. Definitions of the word "bower" range from "a poetical word for 'abode'" to "a vague poetic word for an idealized abode" to a "place closed in or overarched with branches of trees, shrubs, or other plants; a shady recess, leafy covert, arbour."[39] Chapter 1 taxonomizes the word "bower" as it is used to identify a cultural and ecological phenomena in the context of the pastoral. The first section begins with Spenser (and both his precursors and contemporaries), examining how the bower functions in the epic mode as a pastoral antithesis to the epic. The 'Bower of Bliss' episode of *The Faerie Queene* will serve as an ur-text for this study. The second section briefly surveys how the word "bower" is deployed during the Romantic era and uses

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[37] Marinelli, *Pastoral*, chapter 1.
[38] Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 278-9.
[39] "bower" entry in Oxford English Dictionary, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/bower_n1?tab=meaning_and_use#15679856.

instances of these named bowers to taxonomize the ecologies of retreat and repose. This survey witnesses a burgeoning awareness of anthropocenic contingency and its challenge to Enlightenment-era notions of individualism, even as the bower attempts to enact this individualism. The fragility of ecology perpetually haunts—stalks, even—the promised stability of the bower, while the promised stability haunts the poet. Chapter 2 reads four separate Romantic poets's attempts to enact bowers as a political formation. This chapter unpacks iterations of Romantic bowerism in "unnamed" forms, focusing on poems by Mary Robinson, John Clare, Felicia Hemans, and Charlotte Smith, respectively. These readings will show how each poet reaches for a reorientation of the present via bower alterity as cultural and natural ecologies clash in the construction of a new, individualized ecology.

Chapter 1

Taxonomizing the Bower

The Pre-Modern Bower: Spenser's Bower of Bliss

To understand the bower as an aesthetic configuration framing Anthropocenic conflicts, it is necessary to taxonomize it. Poetic bowers are given surprisingly short shrift in critical readings as their own unique place-orientations. Named or unnamed, the bower is often featured in pastoral poetry, either as the specific location of the pastoral tryst and subsequent tragedy (the lovers's bower) or as a concentration of pastoral themes (N/nature's bower). As a utopian structure, the bower appears as a centralized loci of tension between the landscape and the characters within it that vie against 'civilizing' agencies and emphasize supernatural ones by projecting the pastoral actions onto a would-be constructed future. As an Arcadian "golden-age," the bower depicts simplicity by emphasizing rest and repose. Whatever the temporal affect, each manifestation suggests a place set apart from which to critique what surrounds it.

The pastoral as a method of critique is nothing new. Since Theocritus and Virgil the pastoral has provided critical distance from the urban.[40] Depictions of rural laboring life, whether they be simple or complex, allows for reflection on anything non-rural-laboring, i.e. the 'city.' The city taken broadly is perhaps best defined by Greg as anything read as a "more complex type of civilization." Despite the problematic use of the term "civilization," Greg's definition encapsulates many iterations of the bower. Terry Gifford taxonomizes it by identifying several traits of the pastoral, from it being a legitimate means of critiquing the cultural contexts of its contemporary society to the "'pastoral' as pejorative"[41] where the pastoral's simplicity is taken

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[40] A number of critics have discussed this, but I refer here specifically to Charles Segal's explanation in *Poetry and Myth in Ancient Pastoral: Essays on Theocritus and Virgil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 7.
[41] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.

as rudeness of morality and a lack of sophistication, i.e. the pastoral vs. both the urban and the urbane. Variations in the pastoral are largely due to its political situatedness: the poet, a figure historically associated with the urbane (the arts, intelligentsia, court, etc.) is speaking through and for those perceived as non-urbane (the shepherd, or more broadly, the rural laborer). Pastoral criticism has long held this problem at the fore of analysis as its double-view is unavoidable.[42] Much criticism has been leveled at William Wordsworth, for example, as his treatment of rural laborers is both laudatory and patronizing; Wordsworth holds up the laborer as an ideal of simplicity juxtaposed against the urban fascination with the countryside on the side of the urban elite while simultaneously manipulating rural depictions for his own poetic and political ends.[43] The pastoral exists in this often contradictory milieu.

In Edmund Spenser's 'Bower of Bliss,' for example, the bower contains both the lure of overabundance and sexually charged temptation and the promise of repose and protection from the actual world; the pastoral tryst under the protection—and manipulations—of the gods. The 'civilized' man, e.g. the knight of the epic, must intercede to break—quite violently, as will be covered—the tryst. Conversely, in Milton the pastoral tryst breaks down of its own accord and the manipulations of God and angels are ignored by the troublesome and wrongheaded humans. Andrew Mattison's treatment of "responsiveness and autonomy in landscape"[44] in *Paradise Lost* spans the gap between pastoral and utopian readings of Eden in its analysis of Adam and Eve embroiled in an argument over the nature of thingness (in short, Mattison reads Adam's Aristotelian definition of objects against Eve's emphasis on "the individual's relationship with

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[42] Nearly all major critics of the pastoral identify this central characteristic, including Gifford, Richard Chamberlain, and Nigel Leask, to name only three.
[43] Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology*, 269-70.
[44] Andrew Mattison, *Milton's Uncertain Eden: Understanding Place in* Paradise Lost, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 23.

the environment").[45] The Garden of Eden itself becomes a bower read both ways—as a naturalized Arcadian arrangement and as the no-place of renewed utopian genesis—and the argument between Adam and Eve becomes less about "action" and more about anthropocentric misreading of place tempered by often frustrated supernatural intercessions.[46] The humans read the nature of Eden as an expression of their desires with the achievement of those desires in the hands of the gods.

In the critical vein of pastoralism, these readings have led to discussions that imbricate the bower with politics, including postcolonial readings of the pre-modern bower. Denna Iammarino's analysis of Edmund Spenser's *The View* wrestles with Spenser's "pastoral thinking" to explore how the supposed separation of "Spenser the poet and Spenser the political administrator and planter is a false one."[47] Iammarino draws heavily on readings of Spenser's "Bower of Bliss" from Book II of *The Faerie Queene*, asserting pastoral readings as breaching the supposed divide between aesthetics and politics in Spenser. So too does Christopher Burlinson via reading Spenser's use of allegory—in the "Bower of Bliss" and elsewhere in *The Faerie Queene*—as a means of colonial identity-making, specifically through the act of violence.[48] Richard Chamberlain goes as far as declaring that the pastoral informs Spenser's

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[45] Andrew Mattison, *Milton's Uncertain Eden: Understanding Place in* Paradise Lost, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 98.

[46] Mattison makes the case over Raphael's apparent anxiety over what the humans will do, an anxiety that stems from "Raphael, Adam, and God" all having disagreeing conceptions of where the risk of place stems from. Andrew Mattison, *Milton's Uncertain Eden* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 53-4.

[47] Denna Iammarino, "Dressed in Sheep's Clothing: Pastoral and Reform in Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland*," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, no. 47 (2021): 112.

[48] Specifically, the violence occurring in Canto XII of Book II where Guyon utterly destroys the Bower of Bliss (as opposed to, say, rescuing the knights trapped there and avoiding its temptations). More on this violence later. Christopher Burlinson, *Allegory, Space and the Material World in the Writings of Edmund Spenser*, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 126-7.

entire body of work as Spenser embodies the self-critical courtly figure.[49] *The Faeries Queene's* opening states Spenser's purpose in *shunning* the pastoral:

> Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,
> As time her taught, in lowly Shepheards weeds,
> Am now enforst a far unfitter taske,
> For trumpets sterne to chaunge mine Oaten reeds,
> And sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds;[50]

The Faerie Queene performs the necessary opening of the epic and suggests Spenser has moved on to greater tasks than the "lowly Shepheards weeds" of *The Shepheardes Calender*. But as Chamberlain and others have argued, the lowliness of the pastoral and loftiness of the epic is in fact double-cutting, particularly in the shepherd's song of Book VI.[51] The song, a staple of the pastoral genre,[52] seems to undermine the epos of the knightly tale, voicing a critique of the knights while nodding towards the simpler Arcadian ideal.

But when Spenser engages with the bower figure, the pastoral/epic dichotomy is problematized even further. Arguably one of the most famous iterations of the bower in Western poetics, Spenser's "Bower of Bliss," based largely on earlier examples traced as far back as Virgil but as recent as Petrarch and Tasso,[53] typifies the pre-modern bower and its more common, albeit contested, characteristics. The Bower of Bliss is the main nexus of conflict in *The Faerie Queene's* Book II. Guyon, the knight of temperance, seeks out the bower after

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[49] Richard Chamberlain, *Radical Spenser: Pastoral, Politics and the New Aestheticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 1.

[50] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* (London: Routledge, 2013), Book I, Canto I, ll. 1-5.

[51] As David Shore relates, though for Spenser "the prospect of pastoral retirement must ultimately prove illusory," it is not enough to say that Spenser has entirely foregone the appeal of the pastoral in the favor of the action of the epic, although by the time of *The Faerie Queene* it is probable that the pastoral is no longer the end-all for Spenser's poetic project. *Spenser and the Poetics of Pastoral: A Study of the World of Colin Clout* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), 146.

[52] Entire books have been written about the shepherd's song's pervasive presence in the pastoral, but I refer here to the song exchange, a rural contest between shepherds. Karakasis, *Song Exchange*.

[53] The influence of these poets on Spenser and the parallels to their work exhibited by the Bower of Bliss are explored by Andrew Mattison, Dorothy Stephens, and Andrew Wadoski, respectively.

learning that the sorceress Acrasia has been using the seductions of the bower's abundance (and her own sexual coaxing) to lure knights to their beguilement and transformation into wild beasts. The overall arc of Book II, and the confrontation between Guyon and Acrasia, alters the Homeric legend of Circe and the island of Aeaea only slightly. In the *Odyssey*, Circe, like Acrasia, lures travelers—including Odysseus's crew—in with promises of earthly pleasures, only to then transform them into swine. Acrasia, too, via the bower's apparent decadence and comforts, "Where Pleasure dwelles in sensuall delights, / Mongst thousand dangers, and ten thousand magick mights,"[54] lures errant knights away from their quests and, once exhausting them for her own amusement, enchants them into various wild beasts. Guyon, upon meeting a woman intent on killing herself, learns the woman's husband was similarly lured by Acrasia to his eventual death at her hands. The book consists of Guyon's seeking out of Acrasia and the bower to avenge the murdered knight and, on first reading, serves as an allegory for the importance of the virtue of temperance against the sins of lust and gluttony.[55]

Feminist readings of the Bower of Bliss abound.[56] The episode clearly pits Elizabethan notions of masculinity and duty against the purported dangers of the feminine as temptation puts the masculine—in this case, the errant knight—at risk of being superseded by femininity and the trap of pleasure and enjoyment. *The Faerie Queene* as a whole is overtly allegorical, and Spenser himself describe its purpose as "to Fashion a Gentle*man*."[57] On the surface, this "fashion" takes the form of outward misogyny as female characters—among them mermaids, nymph-like

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[54] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 8-9.

[55] A thinly veiled allegorical angle meant to instruct Spenser's contemporaries on how to be "gentlemen"; more on the fraught use of allegory later.

[56] Notably those by Dorothy Stephens, Joseph Campana, Judith H. Anderson, Katherine Eggert, Lauren Silberman, and Garrett Sullivan.

[57] Emphasis mine. Spenser so describes his purpose in a letter to Walter Raleigh. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 714.

women, and Acrasia herself—are pitted against the knight and his quest for temperance. However, the gendered tensions of the episode are far more subtle as they inhabit the tensions between epic values and gendered modes.[58] Dorothy Stephens identifies this tension as the place wherein Spenser, via the poet's voice, forgoes any "political power" and "[resists] the seductiveness of pastoral retreat," which ultimately cuts Spenser off from the "feminine modes of his own poetic voice."[59] Whatever the political potential of Spenser's work with the pastoral, the marking off of the Bower of Bliss as a place of feminized depravity seems to negate the critical tension of the pastoral process; no longer the idyllic otherness of the courtly poet's fancy, the Bower of Bliss becomes the antithesis to political action.

The masculinized notion of temperance is maximized through its juxtaposition against images of sexual repose. As Guyon and the palmer make their way through the bower, they are confronted by the sight of two young naked women cavorting in a pool:

> As Guyon hapned by the same to wend,
> Two naked Damzelles he therein espyde,
> Which therein bathing, seemed to contend,
> And wrestle wantonly, ne car'd to hyde[60]

The women's challenge to Guyon is this very wantonness that, though directed at one another, personifies the temptations that threaten to distract Guyon from his sense of political expediency, i.e. his quest. Sex, Guyon discovers, interferes with a sense of duty: "Now when they spide the knight to slacke his pace, / Them to behold, and in his sparkling face /The secret signes of kindled lust appeare."[61] The "Damzelles," like the Bower of Bliss, are marked complicit in their temptation as they "encreace" their "wanton meriments" the moment Guyon slows to ogle

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[58] Dorothy Stephens, *The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 225-6.
[59] Stephens, *The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative*, 226.
[60] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 563-566.
[61] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 607-609.

them.[62] In Spenser's rendering, sex is the ultimate thorn in temperance's side, the proverbial "honey trap" that threatens the outcome of the whole adventure. When Acrasia is finally found, she is in the midst of enjoying the company of a knight she has already seduced; the very center of the bower which Acrasia occupies is the play of the trap itself. Sex is, then, the undoing of the political impetus of the knight errant paradigm, a shocking inversion of the pastoral image of the peaceful lover's bower. The Bower of Bliss is rendered anti-pastoral via an adherence to the proposed virtues of masculine—here, anti-sexual and so anti-feminine—control. The knight seduced by Acrasia is rendered non-agential through sex: repose, rest, and recovery become the enemy of valor, manliness, and action.

It is not difficult to trace the anti-repose sentiment throughout *The Faerie Queene* as many moments given over to rest are interrupted, usually by someone or something that poses an immediate threat to the knight, his/her companions, or the quest writ large. In cantos I & II of Book I, Archimago is introduced disguised as a friendly hermit who provides the Redcrosse knight and Una a place to lodge, only to then lure Una away while he plagues the dreams of Redcrosse.[63] Not long after the Redcrosse knight stops with a new companion, Fidessa—who is actually the witch Duessa, also in disguise—by a grove of trees, only to discover that two trees are in fact a man and woman who were once cursed by Duessa.[64] In the following cantos, Una, now separated from Redcrosse, stops to rest under a tree only to be threatened by a wild lion.[65] Una, through her virtue, befriends the lion, but not long after stops to rest at the home of a blind woman and her deaf and dumb daughter. This place and moment of refuge is also interrupted by

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[62] I use "ogle" here without reservation as the scene's extensive description of the "Damzelles" and Guyon's reaction to them suggest a lull in the manly activity leading Guyon to destroy the bower (he is only once again able to move on via the palmer's intercession). Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, l. 610.
[63] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book I, Cantos I-II.
[64] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book I, Canto II.
[65] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book I, Canto III.

a robber in the middle of the night, a robber who is only thwarted by the lion who, no longer a threat, becomes Una's protector.[66] The list of such occurrences continues as Spenser uses any intended moment of rest during the knights's quests to introduce new conflicts and unforeseen dangers.[67] But that is the point. The various knights and characters of *The Faerie Queene* must keep their eyes on the prize, so to speak, or else the veiled threats of the world will catch up with them. If the pastoral of *The Faerie Queene* offers some sense of repose—as it occasionally does—the action seems to actively work against it.[68]

Spenser uses these outside and unexpected threats to introduce moments of action and new conflicts to further the allegorical directive of the whole, but by doing so hinges danger on one thing: deception. Danger in *The Faerie Queene* is nearly always deceptive in nature, whether it be through Archimago's transmutative magic or simply due to the darkness of night. Danger is not only born from deception but compounded by it. Even the "Damzells," whose threat lies in the exposure of their bodies to Guyon—the threat of witness and desire—heighten that danger through what is *not* seen: "Ah see the Virgin Rose, how sweetly shee / Doth first peepe forth with bashfull modestee, / That fairer seemes, the lesse ye see her may."[69] The overt sexuality of the "Damzells" is hidden throughout the episode, whether through "bashfull modestee"[70] or by their bodies being hidden in turn by the water or one another. In this moment there exists a tension between the seen and the unseen, or more acutely, the seeable and the unseeable.

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[66] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book I, Canto IV-V.

[67] There are notable exceptions, such as when Redcrosse, battling the dragon, must heal his wounds night after night in the grove which both restores him and makes him stronger and better equipped to fight. Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book I, Canto XI-XII.

[68] Unsurprising as the opening lines of the work seem to set up this conflict, both internally in the story and externally via Spenser's intent and sideways critique of the pastoral as a "lowly" form of poetry beside the epic.

[69] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 661-663.

[70] One of the women is earmarked as coquettish and is, by that reason, the most enticing of the pair for Guyon.

The unseeable poses the greatest danger to Guyon as he and Palmer traverse the lake to the island of the Bower of Bliss. Paul Zajac illustrates this through his analysis of the "grosse fog" that appears "suddeinly"[71] about Palmer and Guyon's boat.[72] As Zajac points out, the fog in Renaissance discourse regularly signifies a "perversion of perception or an immoderate manipulation of the passions,"[73] a trope Spenser leans heavily on as the fog not only obscures the island but veils the threat of temptation from Guyon. Palmer's role throughout the Bower of Bliss episode is to act as seer *for* Guyon; it is his interventions that maintain Guyon's temperance because he is able to see what Guyon cannot. When the mermaid threatens to steer Guyon off course with her song, Palmer reins him in. It is only when Guyon sees the mermaid with "th'vpper halfe their hew retained still"[74] does he seem ready to continue towards the island upon Palmer's "temperate aduice."[75] When caught in the fog, both Guyon and Palmer are hesitant to continue as they "feard to wander in that wastfull mist, / For tombling into mischiefe vnespide. / Worse is the daunger hidden, then descride."[76] Even Palmer's staff extends this critical role of espying danger as, when arriving at the island, the pair are set upon by "wild beasts" who are only turned away when "Such wondrous powre did in that staffe appeare, / All monsters to subdew to him, that did it beare"[77]; the staff's light turns away danger just as Palmer's own counsel steers Guyon aright.

[71] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, l. 302.
[72] Zajac's emphasis is on Spenser's "causal language of poetic allegory," or the artifice of poetry itself. This will become a key point of the deceptive nature of danger in the poem as the poem itself constitutes a kind of danger to the reader (albeit, a necessary one); more on this later. Paul Joseph Zajac, "Reading through the Fog: Perception, the Passions, and Poetry in Spenser's Bower of Bliss," in *English Literary Renaissance* (Oxford: John Wiley & Son, 2013), 211.
[73] Zajac, "Reading through the Fog," 211-2.
[74] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, l. 276.
[75] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, l. 299.
[76] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 309-311.
[77] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 358-360.

The role of deceptive danger plays along not only sensory lines but sensible ones. One of Guyon's rare moments of unaided temperance on the island of the Bower of Bliss plays out not externally but internally when the poet describes the bower:

> Or Eden selfe, if ought with Eden mote compaire.
>
> Much wondred Guyon at the faire aspect
> Of that sweet place, yet suffred no delight
> To sincke into his sence, nor mind affect.[78]

Here the true threat against temperance is delineated as not the "faire aspect" but that aspect's promise to affect Guyon's mind. The mermaid poses a danger because Guyon "streight his Palmer bad, / To stere the boate towards that dolefull Mayd, / That he might know, and ease her sorrow sad."[79] Unseen, the mermaid's song has the power to "T'allure weake trauellers, whom gotten [she] did kill,"[80] but only because it appeals to the sensibilities of the knight errant operating under a strict Elizabethan sense of duty. Thus, the issue of masculine politics coded as temperance is at stake among the deceptive qualities of the various figures Guyon and Palmer encounter, figures who are nearly exclusively women or, in some instances, not-quite-men.[81]

The threat to the sensibility of the characters likely stems from the danger allegory itself poses and the inability of Spenser to resolve the effectiveness of allegory's pedagogical angle and the deceptive means of allegory's deployment.[82] Throughout the bower, Spenser is quick to note the artifice that backgrounds the natural beauty. Naturalness is at times undermined overtly, such as when Guyon and Palmer encounter "huge Sea monsters" on their way towards the island:

> Most vgly shapes, and horrible aspects,

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[78] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 468-471.
[79] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 243-245.
[80] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, l. 279.
[81] Such as the beasts of the island, once knights who, giving into the seductions of Acrasia, are transformed and thereafter must guard the island.
[82] Zajac explores the tension between Spenser's use and distrust of allegory, likening it to the fog in the Bower of Bliss episode. Zajac, "Reading through the Fog," 212.

> Such as Dame Nature selfe mote feare to see,
> Or shame, that euer should so fowle defects
> From her most cunning hand escaped bee.[83]

Nature is not only lacking in the "horrible aspects" of the sea monsters but outwardly despised. The sounds of the bower, whose danger lies in them being "consorted in one harmonee,"[84] is reversed as dissonance between the creatures and the purported "cunning hand" of nature is emphasized and, through this emphasis, readily reveals the danger to Guyon and Palmer.

The bower itself, however, is far more subtle in its threats. The bower is, at first glance, as ideally placed as an Eden is likely to be: "Whereas the Bowre of Blisse was situate; / A place pickt out by choice of best aliue."[85] This aligns with the typical pastoral idyllic that uses ecological formations to signal simplicity and virtue through otherness. But the mimetic natural facade is undermined by the artfulness of the genre, with all its courtly baggage brought to it by the urbane poet. The bower's seeming naturalness is "sweet, and pleasing vnto liuing sense."[86] Yet the natural pleasures are consistently subverted by the artifice of Acrasia and, by extension, Spenser:

> Or that may dayntiest fantasie aggrate,
> Was poured forth with plentifull dispence,
> And made there to abound with lauish affluence.
>
> Goodly it was enclosed round about,xliii
> Aswell their entred guestes to keepe within,
> As those vnruly beasts to hold without;
> Yet was the fence thereof but weake and thin.[87]

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[83] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 198-201.
[84] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, l. 629.
[85] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 371-372.
[86] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, l. 374.
[87] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 375-381.

Though at first a naturalized space, the poet is quick to turn towards "fantasie aggrate" to describe the abundance now coded as artificial. Though "Goodly [. . .] enclosed," protecting Guyon, Palmer, Acrasia, and the other inhabitants from the men-turned-beasts on its periphery, the natural "fence" works double to pen in Guyon and Palmer. The walls that form the enclosure are themselves "weake and thin," and the status of the pair as "guestes" suspect. It would seem the only thing keeping the walls upright is "wisedomes powre, and temperaunces might."[88] The very beguilement of the bower's bliss is pitted against the sensibility of the visitors and underscored by the unnaturalness of flora, i.e. nature as adornment only: "Wherewith her mother Art, as halfe in scorne / Of niggard Nature, like a pompous bride / Did decke her, and too lauishly adorne."[89] Spenser distrusted allegory as a means of providing lessons for the gentry, even as he deployed it "lauishly."

The forcefulness of the "Acrasian aesthetic"[90] is only undone by the eventual violence of Guyon as Spenser divests the deceptive artifice for a moral one: nature as mirror to signal virtue.[91] In his letter to Raleigh, this paradox is on display as Spenser worries over his "clowdily enwrapped" poetics that purports to govern Elizabethan sensibility.[92] Never wholly trusting artifice, Spenser must unwrite its lavishness in favor of temperance enforced by epic destruction, a necessary move as his own poetic projects turn from the pastoral to the epic.[93] But for Guyon

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[88] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, l. 383.
[89] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 447-449.
[90] A key component of the Bower of Bliss episode that Spenser must reassert through the bower's destruction. Zajac, "Reading through the Fog," 212.
[91] A reference to Abrams's well known reconfiguration of the significance of the Romantic moment as a shift in poetics towards reflection rather than mimesis. M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
[92] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, pp. 714-5.
[93] The topic of Spenser's turn away from the pastoral has a long critical history. Critics like David Shore are opposed by critics such as Arnold Williams who often see the pastoral as a youthful poetic rite Spenser must get through before he can tackle the epic. While Spenser's own words would seem to uphold this theory, Shore and others explain that the case is not so clear-cut.

and Palmer to reach this point of breach, they too must deploy artifice as they "Through many couert groues, and thickets close, / In which they creeping did at last display / That wanton Ladie, with her louer lose."[94] The heroes turn deceptive to undo deception as the poem pigeonholes artifice as a means to an end, thereby providing both the speaker and Spenser an out. Acrasia must be cornered, "Else she will slip away, and all our drift despise,"[95] and only through "surprise" can the trap be sprung and temperance upheld through utterly wanton destruction. The Bower of Bliss, a haven for artifice, is an impediment to courtly duty and manly endeavors. Yet just as those same courts leveraged deceit and deception as viable political action, so too must Spenser deceive the reader—albeit, temporarily—to strike at the allegorical lesson.

Superficially, Spenser's bower, both in *The Faerie Queene* and throughout his corpus, is always closely knit to otherworldly entities. The Bower of Bliss is a place of strange creatures, monsters, witches, magic, and artificial beauty. Elsewhere in Spenser the "bowre" is associated with "ángelick delightes"[96] and deadly sins alike,[97] replete with God and gods, where human characters are thrust against impossible odds. The Bower of Bliss, not just the place of Acrasia and her menagerie, is surrounded by obfuscation, halfway formations, and deceptive distractions, to the point "That all things one, and one as nothing was, / And this great Vniuerse seemd one confused mas."[98] Spenser's "bowre" becomes synonymous with 'ungentlemanly' behavior in Spenser's own time, behavior that can be leveraged, in the case of the Bower of Bliss, to pit quotidian questions of temperance against the fates of otherwise 'right-minded' individuals. The

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[94] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 680-682.

[95] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, l. 483.

[96] Edmund Spenser *Amoretti* in *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser, Volume 5*, edited by Francis James Child (London: Imprinted for William Ponsonbie, 1591). l. 1156

[97] Gluttonie is one of the several figures occupying a bower in Spenser's *Prosopopoia*. Edmund Spenser, "Prosopopoia, or A Mother Hubberds Tale," in *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser, Volume 5*, (London: William Ponsonbie, 1591), l. 1309.

[98] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto XII, ll. 313-315.

"confused mas" is the milieu of repose that threatens to emasculate and render Guyon and other characters in several ways impotent, even as the bower sexually tantalizes. Via Spenser's artifice we are warned of the inherent dangers of artifice that exist in places outside the quotidian realm of industry and anthro-agency; Spenser, now the self-purported epic poet, must undo his pastoral past.

This tension between the epic and the pastoral is in some ways the conflict between epic and romance.[99] Spenser, leveraging the apparatus of medieval romance as a viable aesthetic for allegory, cannot allow Romance to supersede the purpose and purchase of the masculine epic thrust. Epos, however anachronistic by Spenser's time, must remain the proper vein of poetry as Romance threatens to undo the work of politics and replace grounded morality with its flirtations with fantasy. By this time the pastoral appears a burden. By reaching towards an Arcadian past, *The Faerie Queene* allows a subtle critique as it implicates epic "civilization" with danger, violence, and a persistent lack of repose. And yet the epic must win out, as Spenser's own proposed move away from the pastoral is followed-through by casting the bower as the cradle of iniquity. Though the move is decidedly complex, *The Faerie Queene* does seem to fall into the realm of the 'anti-pastoral.'[100] Oddly, the bower still provides a means of escape via a constructed alternative present—Acrasia is "That Thing Over There" to the characters, the otherworldly realm of desire and non-human agency—but the escape hinges on the bower's *un*making. Guyon violently destroys the bower and brings otherness back to the fold so that only the quest remains; the courtly poet now critiques the shepherd's critique of his past and stands

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[99] Scholars of Spenser have argued for this previously, as does Dorothy Stephens and Wendy Beth Hyman.

[100] In Chapter 5 of *Pastoral* Terry Gifford explains the pastoral/anti-pastoral conversation that has often taken place, but this dichotomy has variations. Judith Haber muddies the waters in *Pastoral and the Poetics of Self-Contradiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) as the genre's sometimes contradictory and ambivalent history of usage show pastoral, anti-pastoral, unpastoral, and quasipastoral variations.

once again in full favor of the court. But the rest and repose Spenser's bower suggests evolves as poetic critique of the "civilized" becomes more and more prominent.

The Romantic Bower

To better understand how the bower signals ideas of retreat and repose by the Romantic era, and to distinguish it from the Early Modern usage of Spenser and his contemporaries, a concordance search was conducted throughout a sampling of Romantic-era poets. The results indicate a word and image that has surprising range and defies a neat assignment of bowers to pastoral imagery.[101] However, as the below search and subsequent analysis will show, the bower *does* have strong pastoral tendencies in that it often suggests some form of retreat. By the time of the Romantics, the affectual content of that retreat is far different than what is found in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. While *The Faerie Queene* often portrays retreats, natural or otherwise, as standing in contention with the epic space and impetus, the Romantic bower more usually aligns with the pastoral in its portrayal of a place or time of escape. However, by the time of the Romantics the very notion of escape is increasingly seen as an impossibility. While the poet may strive—even aggressively so—to construct or carve out a space of retreat, the project is always imminently threatened and the limits of success revealed in the attempt. Those limits play out at the level of the individual, the particular challenges each poet faces as they attempt to poetically carve out a new space.

The below data table breaks down a concordance search through a Romantic-era corpus[102] that tallies instances of named bowers as they appear in Romantic poetry:

AUTHOR	REGEX "BOW" HITS
Joanna Baillie	25
Anna Laetitia Barbauld	6

[101] While 'natural' bowers certainly exist, as will be shown, the word and image of the bower are complicated by instances of it referring to abodes, lady's boudoirs, and other non-naturalized spaces. Though a pastoral may feature a bower, a bower does not necessarily need to exist in a pastoral arrangement.
[102] For a full list of texts used, see Appendix A, "Corpus Analytics Bibliography."

William Blake	12
Lord Byron	54
Thomas Chatterton	1
John Clare	23
Samuel Taylor Coleridge	47
William Cowper	24
George Crabbe	18
Erasmus Darwin	37
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe	6
Oliver Goldsmith	8
Heinrich Heine	7
Felicia Hemans	201
Elizabeth Inchbald [Prose/Drama]	0
John Keats	45
Letitia Elizabeth Landon	45
Hannah More	22
Mary Robinson	61
Anna Seward	117
Percy Shelley	63
Charlotte Smith	19
Robert Southey	95
Mary Tighe	81
Helen Maria Williams	24
Dorothy Wordsworth [Prose]	17
William Wordsworth	177

The above corpus concordance search of Romantic-era poetry reveals the extent to which the bower is a recurring figure in British poetics. The data was gathered using the freeware Antconc corpus analytics by Laurence Anthony[103] using regex searches of “bow” to account for variations

[103] Laurence Anthony, “Antconc,” https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/.

in the word bower.[104] The data table above is not meant to be comprehensive but rather representative of the literature of the period, with a special focus on poetry. Inchbald's dramatic writing was included as an example demonstrating that the 'bower' seems to be a uniquely poetic fixture. Corpus analytics of prose from the era tends to show, as it does for Inchbald, that the word bower (or variations of it) was favored by poets but not by, say, novelists or dramatists.[105] At a glance, the table demonstrates how poets favored the word 'bower' and its variations as much as they favored words such as 'fragment,' 'ruin,' and 'autumn,'[106] words/images that are not so rare as to be highly specialized in usage, yet unique enough to designate them as 'uncommon' in English usage. 'Fragment,' 'ruin,' and 'autumn' were chosen as representative Romantic words as they have long held a prominent place in the Romantic canon and Romantic studies as powerfully connotative images for the poetics of the era. The results demonstrate that instances of 'bower' occur with some regularity in Romantic poetics, yet the recurrence of the word/image "bower" is rarely discussed in the field.[107] To better understand what the bower signifies in Romantic poetry, the analysis below will draw on the above concordance hits to

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[104] A regex search looks for simple character strings. Searching for "bow" allows the parser to account for elisions such as "bow'r," "bow'ry," "'mbow'rd," etc. The data table reflects a curation of the raw data, where instances of erroneous data (other words containing the search string "bow," such as "rainbow," "bowed" or "bow'd," or, simply the word "bow") and repetition (such as when the parser picks up two instances of the same use of the word "bower," e.g. when a line of poetry includes the word and a footnote citing that line repeats it) were dropped.

[105] A major exception being both Joanna Baillie and Dorothy Wordsworth, included here. Baillie's drama tends towards poetry as she models her plays after the Elizabethan (her work has often been compared to Shakespeare's). Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals of Grasmere* were included as the prose in her journals tends to be closely linked to specifics of the poetry of the Lake Poets.

[106] To demonstrate, a search of Percy Shelley's poetical works for the regex key 'frag' (to account for variations in the word 'fragment') returns 81 hits, a search for 'ruin,' 168 hits, and a search for 'autu' (a character string found in 'autumn' that rarely appears elsewhere in the English language), 40 hits, placing all three in the company of 63 hits returned for 'bow.' More common words, such as 'night' or 'day,' return many hundreds of hits each (579 for 'night,' 607 for 'day').

[107] Not so for, say, Middle English studies, that regularly deploy the word "bower" as fodder for research, not least of which is Spenser's Bower of Bliss.

explore defining traits of the word/image and contextualize it through critical conversations of the pastoral.

In many ways, Romantic bower usage resembles that of Spenser and other poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in its anachronistic neoclassicalism.[108] Despite Wordsworth's "Prelude" that argues that classical forms of the pastoral are an inherently flawed depiction of rural labor as he knew it,[109] bowers do reveal some pastoral traits retained during the Romantic era. The Romantic Bower, much like its Spenserian predecessor, contains anachronistic associations such as with mystical elements, gentlemanliness, and the specter of duty. However, by the Romantic period the bower had undergone a seismic shift away from the Spenserian associations with epos and, continuing to straddle both the pastoral and utopian ideals, presents the poet with a means of investigating anti-anthro constellations of agency/non-agency that plague Romantic poiesis amidst industrial and scientific developments. By delineating where the bower aligns with Spenser and where it differs, a clearer picture of its evolution can be had.

The Romantic Bower: A Continuation of Spenser

In Anna Laetitia Barbauld's "The Origin of Song-Writing," neoclassical associations with the gods rears its anachronistic head:

> He loiter'd in Arcadian bowers,
> And hid his bow in wreaths of flowers;
> Or pierc'd some fond unguarded heart,
> With now and then a random dart;
> But heroes scorn'd the idle boy,

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[108] From a purely logistical standpoint, a regex 'bow' search for Spenser returns 75 curated hits.

[109] Paul Alpers breaks down Wordsworth's complicated relationship with the pastoral. In one sense, he asserts that Wordsworth's depiction does not, "in Burke's terms, the anecdotes do not provide an adequate descriptive terminology." Yet Alpers explores how Wordsworth's revisions of the "Prelude" do provide some "continuity between past versions of pastoral and present lives." For Alpers, this is yet another instance of the problem of definitions that has pervaded so much pastoral criticism: what is the pastoral? What are its characteristics? Is it a genre, a general mode, an arrangement of similarities? Pastoral's openness is in many ways its weakness. *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 20.

And love was but a shepherd's toy.[110]

Cupid, the protagonist of the poem, deploys the bower as a means to remain both secretive and active in the world of mortals, to embrace a place apart. Opening the poem within this space forces an immediate conflict between the activities of Cupid and the impetus of poiesis as Venus, "vex'd to see her child / Amid the forests thus run wild"[111] must wrest Cupid from the bower for the sake of "Songs of chiefs, and heroes old, / In unsubmitting virtue bold."[112] The notion of poiesis—artifice—is entangled with Spenserian epos as "heroes scorn'd" Cupid's attempts to engage with the virtue the poem purports to uphold. Love, after all, is a mere "shepherd's toy," and Venus must rescue Cupid from futile attempts to influence "nobler game, / Gods, and godlike men."[113] Barbauld's poem reads as a reimagining of Spenser's Bower of Bliss as the virtues of epos underscore the action of the lines. The poem suggests that repose is inherently a problem, just as Spenser would embrace the idea that action is the only possible avenue to virtue.[114] Yet even here in Barbauld the dangers of artifice Spenser was so wary of have been replaced by an acknowledged need, as the poem concludes:

'Tis yours to cull with happy art
Each meaning verse that speaks the heart;
And fair array'd, in order meet,
To lay the wreath at beauty's feet.[115]

Though the bower is still mired in otherworldly beings, these beings appear less hazardous, less

[110] Anna Letitita Barbauld, *Poems* (London: J. Johnson, Saint Paul's Church-yard, 1773), https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/barbauld/1773/1773-poems.html, txt, "The Origin of Song-Writing," ll. 1-6.
[111] Barbauld, *Poems*, "The Origin of Song-Writing," ll. 7-8.
[112] Barbauld, *Poems*, "The Origin of Song-Writing," ll. 17-8.
[113] Barbauld, *Poems*, "The Origin of Song-Writing," ll. 9-10.
[114] David Shore explores this when analyzing Spenser's drift away from the pastoral: "in a fallen world virtue and action cannot be dissociated. For Spenser, as for Sidney, 'the ending end of all earthly learning' is 'virtuous action.'" Yet as Shore also explains (as mentioned earlier), the shift away from the pastoral is not a clean break for Spenser. Shore, *Spenser*, 151-2.
[115] Barbauld, *Poems*, "The Origin of Song-Writing," ll. 87-80.

threatening. They are tangential to anthropocentric agency even as the origins of this agency are of a no-place.[116]

Barbauld's association of gods with spaces set apart occurs regularly when the image of a 'bower' is evoked,[117] as it is through a wide swathe of Romantic poetry. William Blake's "A Dream of Nine Nights" constructs its own spiritual multiplicity within and without bowers;[118] Samuel Taylor Coleridge references Spenser outright when "Sleep enamour'd grew";[119] John Keats's ponderous "Hyperion: A Fragment"[120] contains several bowers, all closely associated with the neoclassicism the poem aims at.[121] As with Spenser, these associations push the bower into a no-place, a blurred nexus of non-human agency where, as in Robert Southey's "Written on Sunday Morning," the purpose of the bower seems to both reveal and conceal otherworldly agency.

Mortals, it would seem, exist only on the periphery, creating a tension among agency,

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[116] This issue of origins, particularly poetic ones, aligns with the neoclassical impulse of Romantic poetics, but in a distinctively new affect. More on this later.

[117] Such as in "Corsica," whose "bowers that breath bliss" are among the places where the "mountain Goddess, loves to range." Barbauld, *Poems*, "Corisca," ll. 77, 71.

[118] "A Dream of Nine Nights" (also called "Vala, or the Four Zoas" and "The Death and Judgment of the Ancient Man, A Dream") is a long, complex poem categorized as one of Blake's 'prophetic books,' poems that mix Christian and other mythologies (largely Zooastrian) as Blake constructs his own theological understanding of the universe. The subject of the 'prophetic books' is far too large to explore here. For the purposes of the bower, it is notable that the mythological characters he fashions often appear in or around bowers, such as the "youth wonders" in the "Visions of Beulah" that "wanderd in the world of Tharmas" and reflect on the "silent secret bowers" where they imagine their parents reside. William Blake, *William Blake: The Complete Poems*, edited by Alicia Ostriker. (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), *Vala, or the Four Zoas*, "Night the Second", ll. 1-4.

[119] In "Lines in the Manner of Spenser" following a stereotypical description of the god Eros piercing the lover with his arrow. The poem is anachronistic in the style of Spenser and the French lays of the 13th and 14th centuries. *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol I (of II)*, edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/29091, l. 36.

[120] The long poem famously (or infamously) was lauded as a fine attempt but was generally regarded, by Keats included, as overwrought.

[121] For example, when Hyperion wanders "Through bowers of fragrant and enwreathed light" even as Saturn follows Thea through a forest to meet with the other titans and discuss their revenge on the Olympian gods for overthrowing them. Bowers dot the landscape of Keats's *Hyperion* to the point of being a somewhat stable fixture of the mythical places. John Keats, *The Poetical Works of John Keats* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1850), https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Poetical_Works_of_John_Keats/l41EAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=john+keats+poetical+works&printsec=frontcover, *Hyperion, a Fragment*, l. 219.

aspiration, and attainability. Southey's "Religion" in "Written on a Sunday Morning" must "seek the shelter of the embowering grove" before "Reflexion in the silent gloom" can be wooed.[122] The poet must plunge all aspirational goals into the bower before the conflict of the poem can be resolved, yet by doing so the speaker[123] must seek it out; the bower and its itinerant rewards are not to be wooed by artifice alone but must be sought out, physically even: "I to the woodlands bend my way / And meet RELIGION there."[124] Much as the pastoral tilts away from industrial activity as the figures that occupy it are better defined through the relationships with nature their labor engenders, the Romantic bower, though Spenserian in its otherness, is not subject to, say, the violence of Guyon's quest. It is always outside of true reach, tantalizing in its nearness yet ultimately a place of aspiration, not agency.

These questions of agency and the bower come down to a matter of placedness. The Romantic fascination with nature points to the prominence of place within their literature as nature becomes a "dynamic, self-generative unity-in-diversity, of which humans were integrally a part" which necessitated a "recognition of the formative role of place, as well as time, in conditioning human existence."[125] This explanation by Kate Rigby is reminiscent of Morton's idea of "the mesh." If the Romantic project was, at least in part, an interrogation of nature, sensibility, and the aestheticization of human agency within naturalized environs, a sense of place underwrites these approaches as agency is, ultimately, *located*. The problem of place in Romanticism stems from what Peter Kitsons describes as the Romantic imaginative project that

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[122] Robert Southey, *The Poetical Works of Robert Southey, Complete in One Volume* (Paris: A. and W. Galignani, 1829), https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Poetical_Works_of_Robert_Southey/3JAiAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0, "Written on Sunday Morning," ll. 33, 36.

[123] In this particular case, simply the "I."

[124] Southey, *Poetical Works*, ll. 27-8.

[125] Kate Rigby, "Ecstatic Dwelling: Perspectives on Place in European Romanticism," in *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 9:2 (2004): 117.

"dissolves the referents of place,"[126] i.e. as place is reimagined by the poet, what it replaces (the actual place) recedes during the imaginative sussing out of poiesis. However, as Kitson goes on to relate, an imagined place is still a place, citing Marilyn Butler in her discussion of "re-imagined places" that would eventually become a source of conflict and contest among Western world powers as they attempted to carve up the East.[127] Implied by Butler's argument is that a re-imagined place is simply a rearrangement of actual place, one that does not necessarily eradicate the real. For Butler, this rearrangement is typically revolutionary, whereas the bower acts out not large-scale revolutions but revolts against circumstance at the individual level.

Understanding how place—as a category and as specific iterations—is negotiated is crucial for understanding how the poet engages with *and* helps shape the world. Jeffrey Malpas argues that "our relation to landscape and environment" must be considered a balance between "our own affectivity as much as our ability to effect."[128] This assertion taps the very roots of environmental humanities as it emphasizes the dual-edged incisiveness of agency. In the case of literary studies, or Romantic studies more particularly, how the poet places themselves in relation to the environment constitutes both the affectation of the poem and the role the poem plays in shaping (indirectly or otherwise) the contours and borders of that same environment. Yet that environment is still held captive by the planet; "the mesh" may be a valid way of thinking of an ecology without nature as "That Thing Over There," but the negotiation of place tends to reinforce the boundary. The bower is a deliberate cutting off with the cutter always at the center.

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[126] Peter J. Kitson, "Romanticism and Colonialism: Races, Places, Peoples, 1785-1800," in *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830*, edited by Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 32.

[127] Marilyn Butler, "The Orientalism of Byron's Giaour," in *Byron: the Limits of Fiction*, edited by Bernard Beatty (Totowa, NJ: 1988), 78.

[128] Jeffrey E Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

During the rare times in Romantic poetry when bowers are within reach, the anachronism of medievalness is overtly marked. Wherein Spenser allegory stands as a portal for the lessons, by the Romantic era this form of allegory is a self-conscious dressing, an ironic allegorization highly critical of its own lessons. Coleridge's "Lines in the Manner of Spenser," for instance, does not equivocate over its own anachronistic adornments: "For straight so fair a Form did upwards start / (No fairer deck'd the bowers of old Romance)."[129] Coleridge's poiesis marks its own artificiality; in the "Lines," artificiality is, indeed, the point, as the poem unfolds in a "Manner" that, too overt to be allegorical, stands as a critique of epos and its forced pedagogy, but one far less distasteful for Coleridge than for Spenser as the play upon anachronism embraces its own divisions. For Spenser, "the pastoral tradition Spenser inherited was [. . .] divided in its vision" as it reflected "the crucial and unresolved conflicts of Renaissance thinking: nature and art, otherworldliness and secularism, Christianity and paganism, reason and emotion."[130] For Coleridge, anachronism can remain wholly anachronistic, signaling the "unresolved" conflicts without being a part of them and ironically pointing to its own sense of play.

The gentlemanliness of Spenser is further evoked overtly by Joanna Baillie in "Sir Maurice: A Ballad." The bower is that of the lady, coded similarly to Spenser's as the place where manly duty can be demonstrated: "Defend your lady's bower, / Lest rude and lawless hands should rend, / That lone and lovely flower."[131] As with Coleridge, Baillie mocks the chivalric mode by unveiling Maurice's intentions:

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[129] Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, "Lines in the Manner of Spenser," ll. 34-5.
[130] Cullen, *Spenser*, 26.
[131] Joanna Baillie, *The Complete Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie, American Edition* (Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1832), https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Complete_Poetical_Works_of_Joanna_Ba/z8t0Y4UyNsYC?hl=en&gbpv=0, txt, "Sir Maurice: A Ballad," ll. 33-5.

> "She was the fairest, is the best,
> Too good for a monarch's bride;
> I would not give her, in nun's coif drest,
> For all her sex beside."[132]

The final line is read both ways as Maurice's sexual desire for his lady but also his mock temperance that disallows sex as the motivation for the quest. The knight of Heinrich Heine's mock epic *Donna Clara* similarly seeks the bower only once he has "Never mind[ed] the Moors and Jews";[133] the gentlemanly mode, though evoked, is by this time limpid to the point of ludicrousness. While Spenser must draw a contiguous line between 'manly' action and virtue and, by so doing, non-ironically condemn poetry,[134] Baillie may point to the "unresolved conflict" as the source of comedy.

Though on the surface the Romantic bower resembles the Spenserian—in its mysticism, its otherworldliness, its gentlemanly mode—the bower of the eighteenth and nineteenth century sports an entirely different mantle. The bower is, in fact, turned on its head and used as a means of criticizing the very anachronistic bent that has helped mold polite British society.

The Romantic Bower: A Revisal of Spenser

Where the Romantic bower diverges from the Spenserian mode is the burgeoning nineteenth century awareness of anthropocenic calamity and entangling relationality. By the Romantic period, the Spenserian epos aspired to in *The Faerie Queene* had already been largely supplanted by the romantic aesthetic.[135] The bower was no longer *solely* the realm of gods,

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[132] Baillie, *Poetical Works*, "Sir Maurice: A Ballad," ll. 241-4.

[133] A mockery of anti-semitism, as most of *Donna Clara* is, as the knight can only quest once he's given up his fixation with Jewish people. Heinrich Heine, *The Poems of Heine; Complete*, translated by Edgar Alfred Bowring (London: George Bell and Sons, 1908), https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/52882, "Donna Clara," l. 57.

[134] So argues Shore in his analysis of Spenser: "the pursuit of the chivalric quest must finally diverge from the pursuit of poetry." Shore, *Spenser*, 146.

[135] This seems an obvious statement but is necessary as the romanticism that defines the period reveals through the bower a seismic shift in its role as an anti-anthro nexus and, by implication, redefines the poetic problem of repose and, by association, exposure.

angels, and demons, just as the pastoral did not stand as antithesis to the work of mere mortals. Rather, the tensions between naturalness and artifice that so troubled Spenser's allegorical mode became the central conflict of the bower as it took on the trappings of natural origination and forms of naivete theorized by Friedrich Schiller[136] which may be seen as a component of pastoral idealism.[137] Artifice is, by the time of the Romantics, a fully embraced and legitimate, often preferred, means of discourse, even while naturalness is exalted.[138] Repose, sexual or otherwise, became representative of the shift away from epos; rather than a bugbear (a la Spenser) the need for repose, recovery, and repair became a consuming drive for Romantic aesthetics. The bower *could* act as a place of refuge and safety among the tidal shifts of industrialization and modernisation, but it leans away from being a foil for Spenser's masculine industry and into precarity. And yet the bower is, ironically, a thing of the Romantic past, an unattainable no-place lost to time.

Though the Romantic bower is still at times associated with the supernaturalness of Spenserian-era archaicism, it is more often than not a place of naturalness for the poetic voice to co-occupy without the need to draw conflict from its self-imposed artifice, much as the pastoral can be a naturalized place that does not necessarily need to critique its own setting. Despite

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[136] In short, Schiller contends that the higher form of poetics is the naive, as opposed to the sentimental. The former embodies a purist reflection of nature and the world, the latter only pretends at this purity. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Friedrich Schiller," "Naive and Sentimental Poetry," https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schiller/#NaveSentPoet.

[137] Though whether or not to align the pastoral with Schiller is a point of contention. As Alpers discusses, "Schiller understands what is at stake in attributing value to certain representations and modes of simplicity. His essay thus provides an anatomy of modern thinking about pastoral and enables us to see connections and implications in a way no later criticism does." It might be that assigning Schiller's theory of poetry to the pastoral overreaches and assigns a newer way of thinking to an older model. However, the association between simplicity and virtue *does* align with Schiller in a way that is difficult to deny, and this association can be traced as far back as Virgil. Schiller's naivete is perhaps best seen as simply applying a new framework of terminology to an older framework of poetics. Alpers, *What is Pastoral?*, 28.

[138] The fraught relationship between artifice and truth is one of the "unresolved conflicts" of the Renaissance discussed by Cullen.

Baillie's nod to the gentlemanliness of the "lady's bower" in poems like "Sir Maurice, A Ballad," much of Baillie's bowers are couched in, or act as the couch for, nonpreternatural flora and fauna. In her "Rhymes for Chanting," the poem "Butterfly" builds an enclosed space for the poet to invite the butterfly spotted above into a place of "rose and the gilliflower."[139] "The Pursuit of Love"[140] focuses on the "rosy bower" of dawn as juxtaposed against the "fall of night" the poet finds themselves in.[141] The "Devotional Song for a Negro Child" speaks of the "bowery brake" filled with hummingbirds and "stingless snakes" where the poet and child "noonday slumber take."[142] Just as with early iterations, the bower of the Romantics is always coupled with a sense of naturalness, yet artifice is embraced rather than contended with. Baillie's butterfly is invited into the constructed space to keep it safe. The rosy bower of dawn is wholly imagined as a means of relief from the oppressive night. The bowery brake is used as a germ, engendering the repetitive question: "Whom should we love to think upon?"[143] Without the imposition of epos, the naturalized bower can exist as a nonhuman space that does not require a supernatural fountainhead; it is, for the Romantics, a bower in the ecological place-based sense, and a nexus for humanistic poiesis.

The naturalness of the Romantic bower aligns with proto-evolutionary notions of origination as seen in Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden*, where civilization and humanism have their roots in the flora of the world.[144] This flora-origin correlation extends throughout

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[139] Joanna Baillie, *Fugitive Verses* (London: Edward Moxon, 1840), https://oac.cdlib.org/view?docId=kt567nb8xt&brand=oac4&doc.view=entire_text, "Rhymes for Chanting," "Butterfly," l. 7.
[140] Also called "Song, Written for a Welch Air."
[141] Baillie, *Fugitive Verses*, "The Pursuit of Love," ll. 13, 16.
[142] Baillie, *Fugitive Verses*, "Devotional Song for a Negro Child," ll. 8-10, 7.
[143] Baillie, *Fugitive Verses*, "Devotional Song for a Negro Child," ll. 6, 12, 18.
[144] As the first part of *The Botanic Garden* explains, human beings can trace their lineage back to primordial vegetative life in a mythical portrayal that resembles the ancient Greek myths of humans sprung from the ground.

much of Romantic poetry, but is perhaps felt most strongly in Blake and Percy Shelley. Blake's "Auguries of Innocence," for instance, sees "Heaven in a Wild Flower";[145] the poem's correlations thread humanistic concerns—theological and otherwise—with naturalized states, given in their most extreme with the opening that traces an imagined omega—Heaven—with a quotidian alpha—the Wild Flower. The power of amorphous faith overrides the "Brain that won't Believe."[146] The violence of the world that the poem rails against is a violence against the natural world and so a violence against God. The bower is then inverted to emphasize this correlation:

> The wanton Boy that kills the Fly
> Shall feel the Spiders enmity
> He who torments the Chafers Sprite
> Weaves a Bower in endless Night.[147]

The bower, here, is a trap. The same naturalness that provides a glimpse into origination becomes an endless night when violence is introduced, a form of original sin that plunges the poem's character into a fall from grace. In Blake's poem, equating naturalness with origination means equating human interference in ecology with hell.[148]

Shelley, on the other hand, takes a more positivist view of natural theology in his quasi-fairy tale *Queen Mab*. In the poem, the fairy queen descends to Ianthe and, through Ianthe's

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Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden. A Poem in Two Parts. Part 1: The Economy of Vegetation* (London: J. Johnson, St. Paul's Church Yard, 1789), https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/9612.

[145] Blake, *Complete Poems*, "Auguries of Innocence," l. 2.

[146] Blake, *Complete Poems*, "Auguries of Innocence," l. 26.

[147] Blake, *Complete Poems*, "Auguries of Innocence," ll. 33-6.

[148] David Wagenknecht, in 1973, goes as far to suggest that "pastoralism is the great unexplored link between Romantic and Renaissance ideas." He arrives at this conclusion via Blake's "traffic[king]" "with both Romantic and Elizabethan ideas." This perhaps oversteps the mark as conversations on Romanticism's similarities *and* great divergences have happened since, but Wagenknecht is not far off when drawing the association. Blake's take on origination is in some ways the pastoral's conflict of mimetic representation of the rural by a non-rural voice. The success or failure of the pastoral poet is the degree and quality of their interference with 'pure' naturalism. David Wagenknecht, *Blake's Night: William Blake and the Idea of Pastoral* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 7.

dreams, carries Ianthe's soul away with her to Mab's own palace. The queen then shows Ianthe the past, present, and future. The temporal arc of past to present is of natural innocence to the ecological disaster of modernity, much as Blake's is. However, in the final cantos of the poem, Shelley proposes his own philosophical evolutionism[149] that will extend the present into a utopia through natural cycles of change:

> Thus do the generations of the earth
> Go to the grave, and issue from the womb,
> Surviving still the imperishable change
> That renovates the world; even as the leaves
> [. . .] fertilize the land they long deformed,
> Till from the breathing lawn a forest springs
> Of youth, integrity, and loveliness.[150]

Like Blake, Shelley's naturalism contains the origins and, so, the revelation of all things, but Shelley extends the temporality to suggest that utopia is an inevitability, a sly take on pastoral utopianism that removes the human actor. Though the poem does emphasize the role of virtue in the creation of this utopia—thus suggesting a necessary anthropic energy—notions of iniquity and virtue are naturalized to the point of the removal of all agency anyway, just as the leaves, though "Loading with loathsome rottenness the land," contain "All germs of promise."[151] Shelley tracks human activity as yet another natural cycle, originating and ending in the cycles of seasons. The queen's visit is, in fact, more a means of relieving the burden of Ianthe's woes rather than attempting to force or change the course of human agency as human agency is rendered moot by revelation.

Despite Shelley's optimism of origination in *Queen Mab*, the Romantic bower is most often associated with loss. Felicia Hemans's body of poetry is rife with instances of the bower—

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[149] The subtitle of the poem is, "A Philosophical Poem,"
[150] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Volume 3*, edited by Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford: University Press, 1914), https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4799, *Queen Mab*, "Part 5," ll.1-4.
[151] Shelley, *Poetical Works*, *Queen Mab*, "Part 5," ll. 8-9.

the image of the bower appears over 200 times throughout her corpus.[152] Hemans's poetry will be discussed at length later, but it is important to note that the bower for Hemans hinges on lost innocence:

> Oh! may I ever pass my happy hours
> In Cambrian valleys and romantic bowers;
> For every spot in sylvan beauty drest,
> And every landscape, charms my youthful breast.[153]

This moment in *Rural Walks's* "Written at the Age of Thirteen" sets up a major conflict that would appear throughout Hemans's poetry as she aged: that of the adult poet attempting to recapture a sense of lost youth.[154] Though not explicitly stated in her poetry, Hemans appears wooed by the image of the naive poet as it appears in Friedrich Schlegel's *Athenaeum Fragments*, the poet whose purist naturalist outlook on the world bridges the gap between artificial superimposition of poiesis and inspired mimesis. For Schlegel, the fountainhead of poetry is this state of naivete, where the poet draws on the natural world and, through a kind of artistic alchemy, transmutes their surroundings without forcing a poetic bent.[155] In the lines "Written at the Age of Thirteen," Hemans states—if without demonstrating—the feeling of inspiration the naive poet aims for as she wanders the landscape, charmed by the pastoral pastiche.

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[152] See concordance data table above.

[153] Felicia Hemans, *The Poems of Felicia Hemans*, edited by William P. Nimmo (London: 15 King William Street, Strand; and Edinburgh, 1875), https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/66785, *Rural Walks*, "Written at the Age of Thirteen," ll. 1-14.

[154] This is the "golden-age" pastoral manifested through the image of youth which has a critical history, particularly in readings of Wordsworth. This will be investigated more thoroughly later in the section on Hemans.

[155] A significant problem for the Romantics who, not least of which Wordsworth, were tortured by the "ravage of self-consciousness," as Geoffrey Hartman puts it. "Romanticism and 'Anti-Self-Consciousness,'" in *The Centennial Review*, volume 6, number 4 (Fall, 1962): 553.

This reeling recurs regularly in Hemans's poetry; it is a source of major conflict in her famous "The Domestic Affections." When the poet asks "Whence are those tranquil joys in mercy given, / To light the wilderness with beams of heaven?"[156] the answer returns several fold:

> . . . in th'enchanted bowers
> Where taste and wealth exert creative powers
> [. . .]
> She dwells unruffled, in her bower of rest
> [. . .]
> With mirth and music in Arcadian bowers.[157]

Again, the bower is a place of enchantment, rest, and joy. Yet the poem goes on to address the seat of this bower:

> Then, while she wanders o'er the sparkling dew,
> Through glens and wood-paths, once endear'd by you,
> And fondly lingers in your favourite bowers,
> And pauses oft, recalling former hours.[158]

The bower is a reconstruction of the charmed past that inspires the warmer feelings of the poem, the pastoral wandering of the "you" that the poet accompanies through recollection. Hemans's bower is seen by looking backwards, ironically, as it resides in a romantic past even as the poem attempts to enact a Romantic forward. The bower verges on being a "golden-age" in its ineffability, yet, according to Hemans, it is a real place that memory attests to.

While Hemans attempts to rejoin with the feelings associated with the bower via memory, John Keats deploys the bower as a vaguely defined space of renewal achieved through Romantic observation. In Keats's *Endymion*, the poem's dedication to Thomas Chatterton as the ideal Romantic poet hinges on the line "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever."[159] Chatterton—held

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[156] Hemans, *Poems*, "The Domestic Affections," ll. 1-2.
[157] Hemans, *Poems*, "The Domestic Affections," ll. 9-10, 37, 158.
[158] Hemans, *Poems*, "The Domestic Affections," ll. 9-10, 37, 387-90.
[159] John Keats, *The Poetical Works of John Keats* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1850), https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Poetical_Works_of_John_Keats/l41EAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=john+keats+poetical+works&printsec=frontcover, *Endymion*, l. 1.

up by many Romantics as the embodiment of Shlegel's naive poet and a martyr to the then-new Romantic turn—died by suicide at the age of 17. His body of work would inspire both the first and second generations of Romantic poets, particularly his seemingly obsessive take on death and its association with ephemerality and beauty. Beauty for Chatterton—but also for Keats and others—stood opposed to the vicissitudinous cycles of life and death. For Keats, the "thing of beauty" constructs by its very existence a bower strongly aligned with repose:

> A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
> Its loveliness increases; it will never
> Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
> A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
> Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.[160]

Beauty resists passing and promises a sleep couched in a protective, "quiet" space. The Spenserian 'threat' of repose has been reversed, and quietude is now the ideal rather than activity. Even breathing, labored under epos, has found a space to relax.

Ultimately, the Romantic bower emphasizes place as an enviro-centric[161] structure where innocence, repose, and safety are espoused yet fundamentally undercut by anthropocenic concerns of exposure, agency, and risk. A reversal of Spenser's formula, the promised repose of the Romantic bower becomes an ideal while epos becomes a threat, yet the promise is undercut by the relationality that interferes. The following chapters will demonstrate how the drama of the bower is actually the drama of living on the global scale: no place is secure in its real or imagined construction, and individual actions are always tangential. Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor propose the Anthropocene as a "literary object," one whose narrative "exceeds narrativization" and forces a recollecting of reading methods in the face of "planetary flows of

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[160] Keats, *Poetical Works*, ll. 1-5.

[161] Enviro-centric as opposed to ecocentric, environment as a spaceness that accounts for non ecological objects, humans included.

energy and matter."[162] Like Chakrabarty, Menely and Taylor read the planet as something wholly non-human, yet they emphasize the potential of imaginative literature in breaching the divide: "If the Anthropocene marks a breach in the wall between human and natural history, then imaginative literature may be understood as the ivy that overspreads that wall, finding its way through the gap, entwining the happenings of history."[163] As the following readings will show, the action of the bower is doomed to fail, yet the failure of the bower is not necessarily a problem—not even for the poets themselves—as even the attempt at constructing a bower reveals how the politics of the Anthropocene play out at the level of the individual; leaves of the ivy that overspreads the wall. If the bower reinforces the limits of individual freedom, it also spells out the specifics of those limits to each individual. In Mary Robinson, the fantasy of historical immortality is underwritten by irony as no place contains the necessary material for rest and recovery, yet the onus of history is forced on the reader. In John Clare, anthropocentrism is pulled apart as ecocentric activity frustrates and mocks the agency of the poet; the human agency of the poet is aligned with the same agency that violates and destroys spaces that once seemed protected. In Dorothy Hemans, domestic spaces belie anxieties about the fragility of nations and the fraught notion of "home." While in Charlotte Smith, the concept of innocence breaks against the rocks of relationality.

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[162] *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, edited by Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), Introduction.
[163] *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, edited by Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), Introduction.

Chapter 2

Readings

Mary Robinson

Mary Robinson's life and career are a masterclass in modern celebrity. Debuting as an actress at Drury Lane Theatre in 1776, she soon achieved international fame, not just for her acting prowess, but far more acutely for her scandalous affair with the Prince of Wales (who would later be crowned George IV). British media at the time would soon label her "Perdita" as, so the story goes, the young prince saw her acting the part of Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* at Drury Lane and fell instantly enamored of her. The gossip writers would label him "Florizel" as a nod to the unique circumstances of their meeting. After some convincing and the offer of a sizeable purse,[164] Robinson would agree to become the prince's mistress and, by so doing, become an instant celebrity as Londoners and the upper echelons of European society looked to her as a trendsetting socialite. This celebrity would, however, soon sour as gossip, rumor, and petty jealousies dogged her every moment in London society, to the point where even her sexual exploits would be grist for the daily news.[165] Robinson's personal correspondence and records of her public appearances[166] show a growing chafing at her celebrity status and, like many female celebrity artists, at the nature of her celebrity as an object of sexual fetishization rather than as a talented and creative virtuoso.[167]

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[164] The young prince offered her some twenty thousand pounds, by most accounts. These and many other details are related by Paula Byrne in *Perdita: The Life of Mary Robinson*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).
[165] There were even lewd pictures of her, the prince, and other lovers circulating among the gentry and gossip columns of the day. Paula Byrne, *Perdita*.
[166] For an overview of Robinson's many correspondences, see Ashley Cross, *Mary Robinson and the Genesis of Romanticism: Literary Dialogues and Debts, 1784-1821* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
[167] Even from this earlier time, Robinson was becoming known for her talents, not just for acting, but poetry and drama as well.

Robinson soon began a decades-long public relations campaign to transform herself from the highly sexualized "Perdita" into a celebrated literary figure in her own right. It is a mark, at least superficially, of her success that her nickname would eventually become "The English Sappho" and that the image of "Perdita" would fade from the public discourse.[168] She would come to be lauded for her brilliant literary successes—not least of which was to continue the revival of the sonnet in English that was started by Charlotte Smith[169]—as a poet, dramatist, and novelist. She would also become embroiled in the protofeminist debates of her day, most acutely through her 1799 political tracts *Impartial Reflections on the Present Situation of the Queen of France* and *A Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*, and was known among and corresponded with the feminist giants of her day, most prominently Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. She was celebrated by her contemporaries—Coleridge famously called her "a woman of undoubted Genius"[170]—and, but for the Victorian process of ousting female poets from the Romantic canon in favor of poets such as Robert Southey, would likely have become a Romantic household name as much as Percy Shelley or Lord Byron.

Critical treatments of Robinson's process of reformation have ranged from the laudatory to the sympathetic. Mary Robinson is seen as an early champion of modern women's rights and her act of reshaping her identity has provided substantial material for critical review, both historical and theoretical. Early treatments following her "rediscovery" in the 1980s and 90s

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[168] Daniel Robinson exhumes evidence of this in the excellent *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5.

[169] Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784) was credited at the time of bringing the sonnet—which, at the time, was largely scoffed at as an overwrought and childish romantic trifle—back to the fold of legitimate English poetic forms.

[170] The quote from Coleridge's correspondence—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Volume 1*, edited by Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 562 —calls into question his own definition of 'genius' and the cultural connotations of the 'myth' of genius that evolved in the Romantic period, centralizing posthumous fame and a miasma of misunderstanding, as Whitney Arnold explores in "Mary Robinson's *Memoirs* and the Terrors of Literary Obscurity," in *Women's Studies*, 43:6, 733-749.

often marked the above process as the struggling female victim attempting to overcome the patriarchal and markedly misogynist culture of her day.[171] This is not an inaccurate rendering as Robinson herself would paint a similar picture in the posthumous publication *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Robinson*, a tour de force illuminating the negotiation of identity and celebrity in the late eighteenth century. However, this image of the struggling Robinson has been problematized as it tends to downplay Robinson's own agency throughout her life as she carefully crafted multiple identities—sometimes flagrantly as she regularly wrote under a number of less-than-secret pseudonyms[172]—and, despite her own illustrated victimhood in works such as the *Memoirs*, ignores the deliberate and nuanced approach she took towards public relations. The critical trend now is to investigate the complexities and subtleties of identity and historical situatedness that contextualize Robinson's life and career.

Irony was deployed by Robinson as a means of identifying the very real concerns and threats she faced as a living public figure and woman literati of late eighteenth century Britain. Through irony Robinson was able to critique the harsh realities of her day, flit among the many identities she had established for herself, and construct a bulwark against contemporary and historical judgment. There are early stirrings of the ironic voice in Robinson's first collection, called simply *Poems by Mrs. Robinson*, and it is hardly surprising that the irony can be felt keenly in the collection's pastoral poems.[173] Irony is to the pastoral what history is to the epic; it

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[171] As often provided in earlier criticism by critics such as Stuart Curran and Anne Mellor; an important stepping stone in Robinson's critical 'rediscovery,' but a narrative that has arguably retained undue strength over a historical figure whose dynamism of identity reaches far past this simpler depiction.

[172] Daniel Robinson explores the associations between Robinson's pseudonyms and the newspaper culture of her day in *The Poetry of Mary Robinson*, highlighting Robinson's deft skill at navigating an environment built on exposure.

[173] In, for instance, the use of parentheticals to indicate the poet's voice. In "A Pastoral Ballad," the poem is interrupted by the line "(Sad story for me to relate)," allowing Robinson the poet to comment on her own narrative even as the speaker comments on theirs.

allows the pastoralist to adopt multiple identities, multiple points of view, without either committing to any or holding any view in particular as "correct," or even as more important, than any other. Critics have made associations between the pastoral and the ironic from as early as Empson, whose model of "double plots" when analyzing pastoral drama allows for the dramatist to hold multiple views of the country even as they themselves adopt multiple personas: the courtly poet writing rural literature.[174] Far more recently, Heather Sullivan, discussing the work of Gifford, notes the "ironic tensions" of pastoralism that allow the pastoralist to explore even "primary opposites" in their work.[175] Sullivan's take on the pastoral implicates it in the artifice of the Anthropocene: "utopian hope for purity (from dualities) is eradicated ironically by the very artifice of the pastoral from which we have not escaped and whose places cannot escape our impact. It is this era of the Anthropocene, after all, beginning in the Age of Goethe, when nature can no longer escape the human."[176] For Sullivan, it is the multiple genres and voices of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* that mark it so aptly as an Anthropocenic text because this 'dark pastoral' "expos[es] the artificiality of the metaviews that would isolate urban and technological humanity from the rest of the biosphere."[177] This layering of "metaviews" is unavoidable in the pastoral tradition as, whether the pastoralist is intentional about it or not, pastoral poetics calls for an insider to write in the voices of outsiders, all the while under the guise of being an outsider themselves. Robinson was faced with just this situation throughout her career. Through irony she was also able to negotiate the hazards of her historical position and, simply, make a living, while simultaneously speaking from both an insider and outsider position.

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[174] Empson, *English Pastoral*, 62.
[175] Sullivan, "Dark Pastoral," 115.
[176] Sullivan, "Dark Pastoral," 129.
[177] Sullivan, "Dark Pastoral," 129.

Through irony we see the framework of Robinson's bower, crafted to protect her position while also commenting on it and on those of her audience.

This ironic incisiveness is perhaps best seen in her seminal *Sappho and Phaon, In a Series of Legitimate Sonnets, with Thoughts on Poetical Subjects, and Anecdotes of the Grecian Poetess*. Published in 1796 only four years before her death, *Sappho and Phaon* is in many ways the crowning achievement of her poetical career, helping solidify her revitalized image as "The English Sappho." It is also one of the last major poetical publications of her life as she spent her remaining years publishing several novels despite poor health.[178] *Sappho and Phaon* is in a sense two works: the "Introduction" to the poems and the poems themselves. Both have been seen as Robinson dramatizing her processes of identity-making as the several guises she spent two decades constructing for herself peek through the introduction's treatment of poesy and fame and through the poems's association of Robinson with the imagined image of Sappho. By investigating what is said, what is not said, and what is implied both honestly and ironically, it is possible to glimpse Robinson's masterful treatment of a life of utter exposure and arduous tangentiality. In many ways the irony of the collection succeeds as its ultimate goal is to align Robinson with poetic fame in perpetuity. However, this success is predicated on the work's accumulation of voices, its dark-pastoralesque sense of relationality that ultimately reverses the process of alterity by opening its agency to history and the agency of others.

Like many, if not all, of the Romantic luminaries of the period,[179] Robinson was concerned with fame and posthumous living. There was at the time a kind of fetishized 'cult of

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[178] Her actual final poetical works—*Lyrical Tales* and *The Mistletoe*—were published in 1800, the year of her death, and, despite their merits as original poetical collections, would not achieve her the same fame as *Sappho and Phaon* and the novels of 1796-1800, most particularly *Walsingham* and *Natural Daughter*.

[179] Not least of which is John Clare, whose own struggles with the notion of fame would take a very different form as "The Rural Muse." This will be explored further in the next section.

literariness' as poets and authors questioned what it meant to be a famous and widely read writer during the collapse of the pre-modern system of artistic patronage.[180] The introduction of *Sappho and Phaon* takes up this social trope forcefully as Robinson narrates and negotiates fame through her exaltation of Sappho:

> The Fame which her genius spread even to the remotest parts of the earth, excited the envy of some writers who endeavoured to throw over her private character, a shade, which shrunk before the brilliancy of her poetical talents. Her soul was replete with harmony, that harmony which neither art nor study can acquire; she felt the intuitive superiority, and to the Muses she paid unbounded adoration.[181]

Here the "genius" of Sappho is enough to spread her name, as though talent alone secured fame and, with it, criticism. We have a reiteration of the 'beautiful mind' trope established in the Early Modern period with the publication of such works as Shakespeare's *First Folio*, where the effluence of the poetic mind seemingly makes success an inevitability. In Robinson's rendering of Sappho, the poet-genius's innate ability to see and sense what others cannot, Sappho's "harmony which neither art nor study can acquire," is the mark of a kind of 'true' poiesis. This poiesis allows a kind of prophetic vision Robinson signifies via her inclusion of William Cowper's "Table Talk" in the introduction, a poem that begins with a slanted invocation of the Muse:

> So when remote futurity is brought
> Before the keen inquiry of her thought,
> A terrible sagacity informs
> The Poet's heart, he looks to distant storms.[182]

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[180] This is a subject that is far too large to dive into here. In short, as older systems of patronage were replaced by the modern publication system (which in turn greatly altered the nature of literary audiences as printed materials became more widely and cheaply available), writers were forced to contend with both the practical (e.g. monetary) and philosophical (e.g. public vs. private accolades) changes that this new system brought with it. For a further explanation of this transitionary period in literary patronage, see Simon Kovesi and Scott McEathron's introduction to *New Essays on John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), particularly the description on page 2.

[181] Mary Robinson, *Mary Robinson* (East Sussex: Delphi Classics, 2019), "Account of Sappho" in *Sappho and Phaon*.

[182] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Preface" to *Sappho and Phaon*.

Cowper, Robinson's contemporary and frequent correspondent,[183] not identified by name, is instead labeled "an admired and classical writer,"[184] layering in an ironic accolade for Cowper while simultaneously doubling down on the layers of literary fame that inform the work (the only other poem included in the introduction is Milton's "O Nightingale"). Robinson places her own work among those of purported literary genius that history has eventually favored despite the "envy of some writers" of their day.

Robinson's treatment of fame and poetic ability are both a sly nod to her own accolades and an establishment of her authority, just as her critiques of sonnet usage in English in the introduction both counter possible critiques and establish her own *better* usage:

> Sophisticated sonnets are so common, for every rhapsody of rhyme, from six lines to sixty comes under that denomination, that the eye frequently turns from this species of poem with disgust. Every school-boy, every romantic scribbler, thinks a sonnet a task of little difficulty. From this ignorance in some, and vanity in others, we see the monthly and diurnal publications abounding with ballads, odes, elegies, epitaphs, and allegories, the non-descript ephemera from the heated brains of self-important poetasters, all ushered into notice under the appellation of Sonnet![185]

By bashing the "self-important poetasters" and their rudimentary knowledge and composition of "sonnets," Robinson firmly avers her own position as something *greater* than a "poetaster," implying that she, like Sappho, Milton, and the "classical writer" Cowper, are cut from a different cloth, one that attains "harmony" to see beyond the immediacy of the moment to "remote futurity." Robinson has extended the temporal limits of her own fame and elbowed her way into the English canon, a tactic that has, despite the Victorians, worked.

However, both *Sappho and Phaon's* introduction and the historical data of Robinson's own life emphasize that *posthumous* literary fame and success is simply not enough. Robinson

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[183] As described by Ashley Cross in *Genesis*.
[184] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Preface" to *Sappho and Phaon*.
[185] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Preface" to *Sappho and Phaon*.

was, after all, a living woman writing under extraordinarily difficult circumstances—economic, social, and political. Amy Garnai, in her treatment of Robinson's engagement with the Revolutionary politics of her day, notes that "Robinson can yet salvage the ideal of a community of literary meritocracy from the ruins of the failed Revolutionary promise, providing at least the possibility of representation amidst the struggle for survival."[186] The "struggle for survival" was both dire and imminent for Robinson. Her later life was plagued by poor health and rising debts, despite her earlier financial successes as one of the most widely read poets of the era.[187] Posthumous celebrity could do little to sustain her day-by-day, and one of the repercussions of the refashioning of her "Perdita" identity was the growing need for financial solvency independent of her husband and lovers that followed her separation from her husband. Robinson was *living* as an exposed and at times vulnerable woman whose very life was attached to the elaborate public relations strategies she began in the 1770s. *Sappho and Phaon's* introduction, through its illustrations of Sappho as both a literary icon and historical figure, hardly shies away from this hard truth:

> The merit of her compositions must have been indisputable, to have left all cotemporary female writers in obscurity; for it is known, that poetry was, at the period in which she lived, held in the most sacred veneration; and that those who were gifted with that divine inspiration, were ranked as the first class of human beings. Among the many Grecian writers, Sappho was the unrivalled poetess of her time: the envy she excited, the public honours she received, and the fatal passion which terminated her existence, will, I trust, create that sympathy in the mind of the susceptible reader, which may render the following poetical trifles not wholly uninteresting.[188]

The 'survival of the fittest' paradigm Robinson establishes here that leaves all other female writers in the dust plays several roles. It continues the praise of Sappho as both a literary genius

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[186] Amy Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 94.

[187] The end-of-life realities for Robinson are well known to students of the period. For a detailed—and often heartbreaking—account, see the final chapters of Byrne's *Perdita*.

[188] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Preface" to *Sappho and Phaon*.

and a historical legend. It extends this same level of genius to Robinson's own "poetical trifles," thus securing her a place alongside Sappho in the meritocratic sense. It suggests, ironically, that Robinson should also receive such "public honours" not just posthumously but at the moment of *Sappho and Phaon's* publication. And it exposes the precarity of Robinson's own life as she faces a tragic 'termination' on several fronts: financially, acceptability, authority, and as a living and, by this point, long suffering body.[189] In her tirade against Britain's apparent "defecit [sic]"[190] in its appreciation of literary genius, the introduction pointedly makes a plea for immediate success for Robinson's work: "Many individuals, whose works are held in the highest estimation, now that their ashes sleep in the sepulchre, were, when living, suffered to languish, and even to perish, in obscure poverty."[191] The contestations with fame the introduction present ask the questions: what good is meritocratic fame if the artist never lives to experience it? Why should Robinson experience poverty when Sappho's own fame led the Mytilenians to "[coin] money with the impression of her head"?[192] Will the reader look past any potential criticisms as the "envy of some writers" Robinson has made it out to be? And will Robinson's own work endure, like Sappho's, "through many dark ages, and for the space of more than two thousand years"?[193]

These unasked questions are the outgrowth of Robinson's living with the exposure of international celebrity, both as a writer and as a woman. Anti-Jacobin sentiments in the Revolutionary period were growing to a fervor as the British public, first enamored with the

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[189] Which is not to suggest a reinforcement of the lamentable woman-figure that so often pervades studies of Robinson. Rather, I take Kate Singer's line that emphasizes how Robinson faced her death with a fortitude and calm quite unlike the woe-begotten Robinson image. Kate Singer, "Mary Robinson and the Idiot's Guide to Sensibility and Oblivion," in *Literature Compass*, 12/12 (2015): 667-674.
[190] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Preface" to *Sappho and Phaon*.
[191] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Preface" to *Sappho and Phaon*.
[192] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Account of Sappho" in *Sappho and Phaon*.
[193] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Preface" to *Sappho and Phaon*.

ideals espoused by the French during the earlier parts of the Revolution, began to turn away in horror from the violent realities of the bloody swathe the Revolution cut through French society. Writers like Robinson who praised the French in the early days of the Revolution were quickly being shunned by polite society for what was coming to be seen as political extremism. In the case of Robinson and other woman writers, Anti-Jacobin sentiment took a distinctly misogynist tone as the education of women—and the notion of women reading books, by proxy—became a point of contention for conservatives and was marked as a potential threat that would lead to British unrest and a French-like violence against authority. One of the Anti-Jacobin sentiments leveled against, particularly, women authors was sentimentality itself, particularly the emotional tales found in the new trending novels of the period. Sentimentality, in a nutshell, was seen as a path towards irrationality and hysteria, particularly for women.[194] Robinson slyly confronts Anti-Jacobin critiques of her work in the introduction:

> The story of the Lesbian Muse, though not new to the classical reader, presented to my imagination such a lively example of the human mind, enlightened by the most exquisite talents, yet yielding to the destructive controul of ungovernable passions, that I felt an irresistible impulse to attempt the delineation of their progress; mingling with the glowing picture of her soul, such moral reflections, as may serve to exite that pity, which, while it proves the susceptibility of the heart, arms it against the danger of indulging too luxuriant fancy.[195]

This passage constitutes an edged apology. In one sense, the story of Sappho *must* be told by a fellow poetic genius as it constitutes a "lively example," thus an educational apparatus for a Britain that has come to neglect its own literary and cultural history and that ignores the genius that presently exists within its borders (i.e. Mary Robinson). However, Robinson also nods to the

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[194] Again, the permutations of this subject are far too large to cover here. In short, the "Sentimental Movement" (a misnomer) was identified with Romantic narratives that often featured a suffering woman. This movement was part of the protofeminist negotiations with patriarchal values the circumvented misogyny by positing women in many guises—as motherly caretakers of Britain, as educators of youths, as the victims of imperious father figures, etc.

[195] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Preface" to *Sappho and Phaon*.

fear of the "destructive controul of ungovernable passions" that threatens not only the individual but the very welfare of Britain. "That pity" that stands against "luxuriant fancy" is the very poetical angle of *Sappho and Phaon*; the emotionality contains its "moral reflections" while the "luxuriant fancy" constitutes its imaginative treatment of Sappho's fragmentary history. Robinson knows she doesn't write in a vacuum and so ironically curates the exposure that will inevitably follow the publication of her work.

Moreover, Robinson's introduction must contend with her placement within what is, by her time, a forcibly patriarchal literary tradition. The inclusion of Milton's poem in the early part of the introduction is not accidental. Milton is, by this time, the "father" of English poetry (and Chaucer arguably its "grandfather"). By including Milton's poem Robinson acknowledges the masculinity of the tradition she is a part of. However, Milton is being leveraged to engage with one of the most famous female poets of Western literature, Sappho! If Milton is the "father" of English poetry, Sappho his female ascendant many times removed. The poem of Cowper, too, exposes the origins of poiesis as markedly feminine in its invocation of a female muse (a move Milton himself deploys regularly in a neoclassical fashion). Rather than simply positioning herself *against* a masculine tradition, Robinson subverts the issue by confusing the gender of poetic inspiration; she positions herself in the introduction in both a masculine and feminine tradition. Like Coleridge, Robinson uses androgyny to remove herself from the calcified binarism of the Western philosophical tradition, a tradition that tends to explore questions of morality and ethics in terms of good vs. evil, public vs. private, feminine vs. masculine. Through ironic association, Robinson can hold up both the feminine and masculine traditions as legitimate sources of poiesis without forcing an espousal of either (though through its subject matter and accolades, *Sappho and Phaon* certainly leans feminine).

Ultimately, through an association with Sappho and the suggestion of Robinson's own poetic genius, the introduction exhibits a vital awareness of its own precarity. Referring to the writings of Sappho, she asserts:

> They possessed none of the artificial decorations of a feigned passion; they were the genuine effusions of a supremely enlightened soul, laboring to subdue a fatal enchantment; and vainly opposing the conscious pride of illustrious fame, against the warm susceptibility of a generous bosom.[196]

If Robinson, like Sappho, wants both living and posthumous fame, she must engage in "genuine effusions" of the "soul," the expressions of a 'true' and inner self that do not succumb to the "artificial decorations" of a lesser poetics. Robinson goes on to write that the "few stanzas" of Sappho, though scant and passed down in fragmentary ways, nevertheless "prove beyond dispute the taste, feeling, and inspiration of the mind which produced them."[197] This is at once a laudatory move and an indication of the perils of such writing. Robinson, whose life and career were shaped by the crafting and manipulation of public identities, may well expose her own mind if she is to write like Sappho and reveal the real identity of the poet behind the many masks. "Feigned passion," then, is the antithesis to reverent poetic genius, and the result of engaging with it is nothing less than the exposure to the ravages of both criticism, Anti-Jacobin or otherwise, and time:

> In examining the curiosities of antiquity, we look to the perfections, and not the magnitude of those relics, which have been preserved amidst the wrecks of time [. . .] so the precious fragments of the immortal Sappho, will be admired, when the voluminous productions of inferior poets are mouldered into dust.[198]

The "perfections" of poetic genius are all well and good, the alternative being essentially utter oblivion, but the introduction implies these "perfections" have to be true in some sense. For a

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[196] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Account of Sappho" in *Sappho and Phaon*.
[197] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Account of Sappho" in *Sappho and Phaon*.
[198] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Account of Sappho" in *Sappho and Phaon*.

poet and figure like Robinson, whose fame is intimately linked with the ‘feigning’ of self, passionate or otherwise, this provides a problem. As the introduction goes on to state, Sappho’s “superior effulgence” is a result of her knowing “she was writing for future ages” and that she would never “tarnish her reputation, or lessen that celebrity which it was the labour of her life to consecrate.”[199] It’s a bold statement of the nature of Sappho’s intentionality as it relates to her ultimate success, and an ever bolder move to emulate. Robinson has written herself into a corner: do and die, and all of history will judge. Her own labor must be a perfection to avoid the “[mouldering] into dust” that threatens nonperfection. However, Robinson, ever the brilliant public relations persona, leaves herself an out.

The coup de grace of the introduction comes in the form of reversing the very exposure that threatens Robinson by ironically pointing how *the readers themselves* will be exposed by their reading. First, Robinson sets up the stakes by her continued criticism of Britain in its negligence of literary merit:

> That poetry ought to be cherished as a national ornament, cannot be more strongly exemplified than in the simple fact, that, in those centuries when the poets’ laurels have been most generously fostered in Britain, the minds and manners of the natives have been most polished and enlightened. Even the language of a country refines into purity by the elegance of numbers: the strains of Waller have done more to effect that, then all the labours of monkish pedantry, since the days of druidical mystery and superstition.[200]

The stakes couldn’t be higher. A Britain that embraces its poets is “polished and enlightened,” while a Britain that does not must succumb to “monkish pedantry” and so coarseness and ignorance. What’s more, this is a matter of “national ornament.” In the days of full-blown British imperialism, this statement would resound with readers: Britain’s success as a poetic nation is tied to its success in internationality: “How much would Britain have been defecit in a

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[199] Robinson, *Robinson*, “Account of Sappho” in *Sappho and Phaon*.
[200] Robinson, *Robinson*, “Preface” to *Sappho and Phaon*.

comparison with other countries on the scale of intellectual grace, had these poets never existed!"[201] Just as there is an edge to competition among the poets themselves—some achieving glory for thousands of years, some resigned to "the wrecks of time" and dust—British poesy exists among and competes with its European peers.[202] Robinson turns this competition back on the reader: "It is at once a melancholy truth, and a national disgrace, that this Island, so profusely favored by nature, should be marked, of all enlightened countries, as the most neglectful of literary merit!"[203] Literary merit exists in Britain (in a 'natural' form), but it is the British people who do not acknowledge it. The poet's life, on the other hand, is "one perpetual scene of warfare" whose work is under constant threat from "concealed assassins."[204] In the context of British imperialism, Robinson shifts the blame: the poet is already fighting battles, so why are they not applauded or acknowledged for it?

The problem could simply be one of situatedness that the ignorant masses cannot look past. The Greeks are modeled as an educated people who could look past the details of historicity (in this case, the fact that Robinson is a woman) to appreciate the poetry: "when they paid adoration to Sappho, they idolized the Muse, and not the Woman."[205] Not only does Robinson head off Anti-Jacobin sentiments against her project, she excuses herself from the situation entirely: her role is simply to channel the Muse. This raw source of poetics is "too glowing for the fastidious refinement of modern times."[206] Drawing on the well-established fascination with

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[201] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Preface" to *Sappho and Phaon*.
[202] I say European here as though other traditions did not exist and that British culture did not compete openly with them. A global colonizer as Britain was is, by definition, an agent in global affairs far beyond Europe. However, though the exchange of influences and competitiveness of British culture with others abroad was raging at the time, the influences that appear most acutely in Robinson's work are usually Continental.
[203] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Preface" to *Sappho and Phaon*.
[204] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Preface" to *Sappho and Phaon*.
[205] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Account of Sappho" in *Sappho and Phaon*.
[206] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Account of Sappho" in *Sappho and Phaon*.

the neoclassical, Robinson positions her work as an alternative to a "fastidious refinement" that is, by proxy, plunging Britain into a new dark age. Whatever her own circumstances (and whatever her constructed identity purports to be), the poetry of 'genius' exists as a kind of intellectual truism. This poetry also exists on the global scene as much as Britain's colonialist policies do. To neglect one is to threaten the other.

Furthermore, Robinson suggests that a lack of appreciation for poetry is in fact a demerit against individual sensibility: "Though different minds are variously affected by the infinite diversity of harmonious effusions, there are, I believe, very few that are wholly insensible to the powers of poetic compositions."[207] The norm is one of affect when poetry is encountered, and to be outside this norm indicates a problem of the individual: "Cold must that bosom be, which can resist the magical versification of Eloisa to Abelard; and torpid to all the more exalted sensations of the soul is that being, whose ear is not delighted by the grand and sublime effusions of the divine Milton!"[208] The "defecit" of Britain is a deficit on the individual level, and the reader that engages with *Sappho and Phaon* is asked to reflect on this even after they've purchased the work.

As the above reading of *Sappho and Phaon's* introduction demonstrates, Mary Robinson regularly deploys irony to speak in multiple voices simultaneously. The literary tradition is masculine but the source is also feminine. Posthumous fame is deserved but immediate accolades required. Poetry is the effluence of the individual soul, but the soul of the nation is the effluence of individual poets. The success of the poet is down to her embrace of inspired genius, but the ignorance of that genius is the fault of the reader. By reflecting the political, economic, and even

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[207] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Preface" to *Sappho and Phaon*.
[208] Robinson, *Robinson*, "Preface" to *Sappho and Phaon*.

moral responsibilities and implications of poetry back onto the reader, Robinson has constructed a defense against her own. The poems of the collection, then, are free to dramatize the precarity, defense, and fate of “The English Sappho” through their imaginative narrative of another Sappho.

Robinson draws on the legend of Sappho and her lover Phaon as well as some fragments that were available to spin an imaginative narrative that, superficially, parallels her own. Robinson’s rendition of the story describes how Sappho, caught off guard by the sudden overwhelming love she finds for a ferryman, Phaon, must endure the tragedy of her unrequited feelings, musing on the vicissitudes of love and life throughout. As the sonnet collection reveals, Phaon ultimately betrays her by seeking the love of another and Sappho, mired in the misery of her unwanted feelings, hurls herself off the Leucadian cliffs in a final act of seeming despair. The parallels between the Sappho story and Robinson’s own complicated romantic history with a debtor husband and an earlier raft of suitors and lovers, including the young George IV, are legion. The very fact that Phaon constitutes a masculinized threat of circumstance to the female poet genius are enough to justify biographical readings, and a number of critics have explored these parallels ad nauseam. Though the historical and associated literary connections are fascinating, that will not be the focus here. Instead, I will investigate a number of the poems as they dramatize the topics covered in my analysis of the introduction above. In the end, Robinson’s irony persists: though her poems remain true to the plot of the legend of Sappho and Phaon, her unique rendering of that legend allows her to comment both explicitly and implicitly on the issues of precarity and defense the introduction explores.

One of the major conflicts of the sonnet sequence begins with a question. In sonnet “VIII. Her Passion Increases,” the poet/Sappho asks:

> Why, through each aching vein, with lazy pace
>
> Thus steals the languid fountain of my heart,
>
> While, from its source, each wild convulsive start
>
> Tears the scorch'd roses from my burning face?[209]

This follows on from the initial question asked in "IV. Sappho Discovers Her Passion": "Why, when I gaze on Phaon's beauteous eyes, / Why does each thought in wild disorder stray?"[210] A quick reading of these mounting questions would paint Sappho as a victim to the same "ungovernable passion" the introduction drives at. Sappho, on meeting Phaon, is overcome with a "wild disorder" that, though prompted by the person of Phaon, seems to exist both within and for Phaon and yet outside his influence. It is a passion which sonnet "VIII" explains has not only replaced Sappho's passion for artistry but has rendered those passions "vain": "Vain is the poet's theme, the sculptor's art; / No more the Lyre its magic can impart, / Though wak'd to sound, with more than mortal grace!"[211] Indeed, the poem cries that "no joys are sweet, but joys of love."[212]

And yet the poiesis of Robinson pervades the scene in its artful and intricately metered rendering. Robinson's own investment in the mechanics of poetics is well documented; she, like most of the poets of the era, was engaged with formalism at a level that possibly rivaled the subject matter itself.[213] The Romantic era was an era of sometimes extreme experimentation, and the search for a truly 'British' form was the object of many poets, not least of which was William

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[209] Robinson, *Robinson*, "VIII. Her Passion Increases," ll. 1-4.
[210] Robinson, *Robinson*, "IV. Sappho Discovers Her Passion," ll. 1-2.
[211] Robinson, *Robinson*, "VIII. Her Passion Increases," ll. 6-8.
[212] Robinson, *Robinson*, "VIII. Her Passion Increases," l. 11.
[213] Daniel Robinson identifies one of the overriding traits of Robinson's poetry, its "technical rigor," as setting her apart from many poets of her day and bringing her a measure of praise from her contemporaries. She was, in fact, an exuberant participant in the larger Romantic project of formal experimentation. Daniel Robinson, *Poetry of Mary Robinson*, 8.

Wordsworth.[214] Robinson's own formalism is exacting and, often, brilliant. The cries of passionate dismissal of poetry by Sappho are delivered in a flexible, melodic iambic: "Vain is the poet's theme" interrupts the flow of iambic by reversing the first foot into a trochee, pinpointing the moment as one of departure from the "poet's [metrical] theme" while reinforcing those same mechanics by the act of departure,[215] at the very moment when Sappho has lost all interest in poetry. Robinson lays her own 'poetic genius' over the scene and, by doing so, juxtaposes genius against genius-lost. The telling of the loss of poetic passion happens when (hopefully) the reader is enrapt with poetic passion, an ironic formalist nod to the themes of the introduction.

Meanwhile the peril of the passions and the stratagem for Sappho's escape is tied to location. In sonnet "XIV. To the Aeolian Harp," Sappho issues a warning: "Let not the wise their little world deride, / The smallest sting can wound the breast of Love."[216] The "little world" the poem praises edgewise is a fairly typical bower scene, replete with shade, murmurs of doves, and other lulling sounds. These are a reflection of the "aeolian harp" of the poem's subject, an instrument that, in the Romantic trope, is associated with noumenal notions of sublime sense that transcend gross bodies, a kind of ethereal utopian device that promises a path away from such Romantic assailants as death, hunger, and oblivion. The peril, then, is the "smallest sting" that tears the poet away from the noumenal, and, in this narrative anyway, poiesis, and the defense against is the "little world" of the bower that must not be neglected. Sonnet "XIV" suggests that the problem of the tragedy is a problem of loci, and this problem becomes more prominent as the

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[214] Wordsworth would posit blank verse—unrhymed iambic pentameter—as the true English epic form, modeled after Milton's *Paradise Lost* (what would become a truism of the day), but the search for the English epic was laden with nationalist connotations. For a thorough investigation of this phenomenon, see Chapter 7 of Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[215] A temporary breaking of the 'metrical contract' established with the reader which draws attention to its own formal aberration.

[216] Robinson, *Robinson*, "XIV. To the Aeolian Harp," ll. 13-4.

sequence unfolds. The problem is, in the end, unavoidable, as sonnet "XVII. The Tyranny of Love" suggests, as even "Summer breezes"[217] can bring in the "little sting" of the preceding sonnet, but Sappho still seeks a way out.

Robinson provides Sappho the opportunity to gaze, tantalizingly, at other noumenal spaces. In two sonnets, "XXIV. Her Address to the Moon" and "XXVII. Sappho's Address to the Stars," Robinson has Sappho look literally to the heavens for an answer. In sonnet "XXIV," Sappho, seeing the moon reflected on the smooth surface of a lake, is mocked by the appearance of tranquility the image presents. "What can thy cool and placid eye avail?" asks Sappho, only to answer herself: "vain is ev'ry charm! and vain the hour, / That brings to madd'ning love, no soothing dream!"[218] The tranquility of the moon is literally and figuratively out of reach, and the very fact of its reflection is doubly mocking as Robinson does not even have Sappho look up to the real object of escape.

Sonnet "XXVII," meanwhile, depicts the stars further mockery to Sappho's plight, while tossing in a snide aside directed at the Britains of the introduction who, unappreciative of poetry, "Cold must [their] bosom be." Like the moon, the stars are unable to provide succor for Sappho as they only yield to the coming of the morning sun and not, to her despair, to her "flames" she asserts are more fierce than the sun's.[219] The stars, unswervingly apathetic to her suffering, only cause Sappho to double inward:

> Since, then, capricious nature but bestows
> The fine affections of the soul, to prove
> A keener sense of desolating woes,
> Far, far from me the empty boast remove;
> If bliss from coldness, pain from passion flows,

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[217] Robinson, *Robinson*, "XVII. The Tyranny of Love," l. 2.
[218] Robinson, *Robinson*, "XXIV. Her Address to the Moon," ll. 5, 13-4.
[219] Robinson, *Robinson*, "XXVII. Sappho's Address to the Stars," l. 5.

> Ah! who would wish to feel, or learn to love?[220]

The bliss of the stars reflects the coldness of their situatedness, both of which are unreachable for Sappho. The question that concludes the sonnet can be read as a cry of despair, as though Sappho wishes to recant her feelings for the bliss of the stars. Yet read against the introduction, the question is posed to the reader: who out there is ready to be stirred by poetry just as Sappho is stirred by Phaon? The moment is a brilliant juxtaposition against the internal narrative of Sappho's feelings. While Sappho loses the passion for poetry because of Phaon's love, the reader may lose the "fine affections of the soul" by ignoring a passion for poetry. The question marks a moment where the true tragedy and suffering is called into question, that of the reader unable to read or appreciate poetry for its 'trueness.' In Sappho's direction to look elsewhere, so too must the Britain, who doesn't appreciate the passion that exists in their "Island, so profusely favored by nature" and must look elsewhere for poetic sustenance.

Simply changing location cannot either the reader from willful ignorance or Sappho from her passion. Towards the end of the sequence, Robinson has Sappho literally change physical location as she sails from Lesbos to Sicily in pursuit of Phaon. The image of Lesbos seems to contain all of Sappho's pain:

> While from their green beds rise the Syren band
> With tongues aerial to repeat my pain!
> The vessel rocks beside the pebbly shore,
> The foamy curls its gaudy trappings lave;
> Oh! Bark propitious! bear me gently o'er,
> Breathe soft, ye winds; rise slow, O! swelling wave!
> Lesbos; these eyes shall meet thy sands no more:
> I fly, to seek my Lover, or my Grave![221]

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[220] Robinson, *Robinson*, "XXVII. Sappho's Address to the Stars," ll. 9-14.
[221] Robinson, Robinson, "XXX. Bids Farewell to Lesbos," ll. 7-14.

The pain of tragic love is painted on the scenery of Lesbos as Sappho leaves, implying she hopes to leave that pain by leaving the island. The sonnet does, of course, reverse course at the end as Sappho's real strategy—to seek Phaon or to seek death—is revealed. But Sappho attempts to escape inward anguish by outward means, shifting herself physically. During the trip over the seas Sappho dreams of an imagined rival for her affections in a fairly typical Romantic trope. However, upon reaching Sicily, Robinson has the significance of the dream heightened by the acknowledgment that it is just simply a dream.

> I Wake! delusive phantoms hence, away!
> Tempt not the weakness of a lover's breast;
> The softest breeze can shake the halcyon's nest,
> And lightest clouds o'ercast the dawning ray![222]

Sicily brings with it an awakening from delusions, at first the delusion of the imagined rival, but soon after the delusion that Phaon might return her love. The same breeze that brought the pain of Phaon's love cannot now "shake the halcyon's nest" of that love; the only thing to shake it is Phaon's eventual rejection of Sappho, which Robinson has set up through the juxtaposition of dreaming with wakening.[223]

The sequence concludes with two sonnets: "XLIII. Her Reflections on the Leucadian Rock before she perishes" and "XLIV. Sonnect Conclusive," in which Sappho pauses for a moment to reflect both on the tragedy that has brought her to the Leucadian rock and the rock itself. Both ground the sequence in location before Sappho escapes through suicide. The rock,

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[222] Robinson, Robinson, "XXXIII. Reaches Sicily," ll. 1-4.

[223] The issue of dreaming and waking traces back to Descartes who postulated the inability of the knowing mind to grasp the true difference between dreams and realities. This presented an acute problem for Romantic poets who grappled with the uncertainty of parsing their waking lives from their dreaming ones. In the poems, Sappho too seems caught between dreaming and waking as her mind wanders forth during her voyage to Sicily to apprehend imagined lovers of Phaon. Sicily the place, then, is a means for her to affirm that she is now indeed awake, though this hardly solves her problem of unrequited love and, so, destabilizes place as a way out of the Cartesian problem. See Phillip Barron's "'Who Has not Wak'd': Mary Robinson and Cartesian Poetry," in *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 41, number 2 (October 2017): 392-399 for a more thorough analysis of how Mary Robinson grappled with a Cartesian sense of dreaming through her poetry.

solid against the vicissitudes of the poet's feelings, offers no reprieve and instead, mocks much like the moon and stars: "While from the dizzy precipice I gaze, / The world receding from my pensive eyes, / High o'er my head the tyrant eagle flies."[224] Sappho, transfixed to the rock, can only watch as the eagle flies away "o'er the purpling plains of light she hies, / Till the last stream of living lustre dies."[225] The stratagem of location ultimately fails to provide an escape for Sappho as the final poem has her throw herself into the sea.

But Sappho's voice is noticeably absent from "XLIV. Sonnect Conclusive" as the speaker's voice intrudes to occupy the center of the narrative:

> Here droops the muse! while from her glowing mind,
> Celestial Sympathy, with humid eye,
> Bids the light Sylph capricious Fancy fly,
> Time's restless wings with transient flowr's to bind![226]

Sappho's poiesis has been cut off by Robinson's as the poet wrests control back to the speaker in the final moment of Sappho's life. Robinson, as it were, will have the last say. The sonnet sequence returns to the subject of the preface as the poem ends: "Yet shalt thou more than mortal raptures claim, / The brightest planet of th' Eternal Sphere!"[227] The speaker affirms Sappho's prediction that "Then shall my Lyre disdain love's dread control, / And loftier passions, prompt the loftier theme!" but with a tinge of irony. True, Sappho has predicted that her poetry will outweigh the love that intruded upon her and stole her poetry away. True also that the "loftier passions [and] theme" will displace the narrative as the final sonnet affirms the "Celestial Sympathy" that will seemingly back her actions.

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[224] Robinson, Robinson, "XLIII. Her Reflections on the Leucadian Rock before she perishes," ll. 1-3.
[225] Robinson, Robinson, "XLIII. Her Reflections on the Leucadian Rock before she perishes," ll. 6-7.
[226] Robinson, Robinson, "XLIV. Sonnet Conclusive," ll. 1-4.
[227] Robinson, Robinson, "XLIV. Sonnet Conclusive," ll. 13-14.
Robinson, Robinson, "XLIII. Her Reflections on the Leucadian Rock before she perishes," ll. 13-14.

But there is a loftier purpose still to Sappho's suicide: Robinson's own fame. The story of Sappho serves to further Robinson's own ambitions and place her in Sappho's company. The final lines do indeed exalt Sappho as she ascends to the "Eternal Sphere," but this ascent is predicated on the acceptance that to affirm Sappho's ascent one must prompt Robinson's. The preface sets the trap for the reader by placing the burden of honoring English literary merit on them, and the poiesis of the death of Sappho springs it. Robinson has effectively leveraged irony to excuse herself from the process that will (and by her reckoning, *should*) propel her towards the Romantic ideal and image of genius relies entirely on a posthumous reckoning, i.e. the genius that cannot write itself alone but relies on audience and history to affirm it. Robinson's bower of irony is a bower of nonagential agency: the same prying eyes of the public that shaped her identity and career are now forced to weave a bower of posthumous historicity *for her*. Irony has, in a sense, turned global dramas that threaten constant exposure in its favor by embracing that exposure as a legitimate means of securing posthumous celebrity. Robinson, ever the deft actress, has set the stage and needs only wait for the applauding audience to troop in. The collection is and was brilliantly successful in this light, yet it is hardly a secured place. It must open itself to, not only a (mostly) adoring public, but the vicissitudes of literary tradition. Robinson writes, but history has the final say. It's telling that Robinson, like so many women poets of the era, was confined for centuries to footnotes and the margins of the Romantic canon. The fate of the work resides in the milieu, and Robinson's own agency can only go so far.

John Clare

At first it may seem odd to follow Mary Robinson with John Clare. In a certain sense, they could not have been more different. Robinson's life and career are entangled with and largely defined by upper London society; in the end, her fame was in the hands of this same society. Though she struggled with the "Perdita" image, Robinson was a highly successful writer for much of her career, her poetry accepted and read by the landed gentry of Britain. She was patronized by George IV and traveled among the wealthy circles of her day. She was an accepted poet, despite the political and cultural conflicts she participated in, and her sometimes-status as an outsider only served to heighten the allure of her work.

Clare, on the other hand, was a rural poet—perhaps *the* rural poet—of the era, rivaled only by Burns. Largely self-taught, he received a formal education only until the age of twelve, which, as it were, put him ahead of the majority of his rural peers. Born to a poor laboring family, his early life was more starkly defined by agricultural labor than literature, and his life was a constant balancing act between marginal literary success and the need to feed his family. He is often called "The Rural Muse" with good reason, and this nickname was already in use among his contemporaries. His work is often categorized through its interest in rural locality, customs, and even language; one of the distinctive marks of his poetry is its reenactment of the rural speech he himself used. These traits would often work against him as he was sidelined by the upper echelons of London society as a bumpkin as classism in its most rudimentary form largely prevented his poetry from being wholly embraced by the reading public well into the late twentieth century.[228] These traits are largely a reiteration of the connotations of pastoral poetry as

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[228] The problem of classism against Clare is present throughout, not just readerly receptions, but the historical criticism of his work as well. It was not until the 1970s and 80s that his poetry began to take on the mien of serious material for criticism, particularly by the work of Johanne Clare who firmly established John Clare as a significant poet of the era in *John Clare and the Bounds of Circumstance*.

a people's art, coded as *lesser* art (the 'pastoral as pejorative').[229] The country for Clare was the same country for Virgil, tinged with otherness that could provide a valuable outsider's perspective on the workings of the city—politics, economics, foreign relations, proper conduct. Yet the pastoral by Clare's time was seen as foundational to western art, its classical known and valued by the intelligentsia (notwithstanding Wordsworth's misgivings). Clare was dubbed "The Rural Muse"; to name him "The Pastoral Muse" would grate against the implied criticism of his contemporaries as an outsider to the sociable community of intelligentsia so important to the Romantics. "The Rural Muse" undercuts Clare's value as an outsider; in the pastoral tradition, he is both lauded and denigrated for an implied simplicity. If the cherished critique the pastoral contains cannot be unwritten, Clare's participation in it must be. It's little surprise that Raymond Williams devotes so much of *The Country and the City* to Clare's work as it exposes the complexities of the pastoral, and not always in a positive light.

However, Robinson and Clare have much in common. They both struggled with the notion of fame and what it meant to exist as a literary figure ad infinitum. They both struggled with simply making a living: Robinson largely due to her husband's ongoing debt and her precarious situation of being a woman poet,[230] Clare due to the macroeconomics of the British countryside and the sometimes half-hearted acceptance of his work.[231] They also both struggled

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[229] Even Empson struggles to avoid the classism that attends the pastoral as he opens *English Pastoral Poetry* with the self-deprecating yet damning lines: "It is hard for an Englishman to talk definitely about proletarian art" (3). Empson goes on to argue that the idea of the proletarian in English culture is an unsettled one, but the quick-to-act defense rings of the critical mien of the 'city.' If the city is the seat of criticism, the country can only critique from a subordinate position. *English Pastoral Poetry: Some Versions of the Pastoral*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1938.

[230] And the imperative circumstances that attend that historical position: a husband constantly living above his means, a stay in debtor's prison, a lascivious public eye, etc.

[231] Issues of enclosure, taxation, and the practice of textual publication free of patronage would dog Clare throughout his life. Enclosure, or the government-led privatization of land that had once been commonly held and worked by locals, is a complex issue and shapes our understanding of rural England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Clare's own enclosure-driven concerns appear regularly in his poetry, as will be explored here, but for a broader treatment of the subject, see J. M. Neeson's seminal *Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change*

continuously with identity. For Mary Robinson, the trajectory of her career ran from "Perdita" to "The English Sappho" with numerous stops along the way as she used identity to engage with readers in guises both formalistic and socio-cultural. For Clare, the issue of identity was one that often plagued his life at a deeply emotional level, particularly during the several years he spent in a mental asylum. Like Robinson, identity was not a fixed state of being for Clare but an ongoing constructivism as he challenged his "Rural Muse" identity even while his work often reinforced it. This would unfortunately culminate in a seeming dissociative state where he claimed, among other things and at different times, to be Byron and Shakespeare.[232]

Much of this disassociation likely comes from what John Goodridge examines in *John Clare and Community*. The cliche of Clare depicts him as a loner poet, excised or, at least, kept at bay by the writing and intellectual community of his day. However, as Goodridge explores, John Clare was deeply invested in multiple senses of community. Clare struggled to maintain a well-read life in his somewhat sequestered rural area (he lived his entire life within miles of his boyhood home, and rarely had the opportunity or means to travel outside of Northamptonshire); his journals and other autobiographia are littered with both instances of his struggling to acquire such-and-such book or with a mixture of anguish at not having access to written material or effusive gratitude for those who managed to provide him books. Critically, he is thought of as more or less self-taught, which is often associated with a classist definition of Clare as existing outside the major influences of his day as he is derided for taking much of his inspiration from earlier eighteenth century poets.[233] However, he corresponded regularly with individuals close to

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in England, 1700-1820 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), a work that is still considered a standard authority on the subject.

[232] Many critics have remarked on the subject; for a biographical overview, see Johann Clare's *John Clare and the Bounds of Circumstance*, chapters 1 & 3.

[233] Not least of whom is Jonathan Bate, who, in his 2003 *John Clare: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux) praises Clare as a brilliant poet in his own right yet maintains the assumptions of Clare's nonparticipation in

such luminaries as Keats; they in fact shared the same publisher. He was also, like many Romantics, fascinated with more recent Romantic icons such as Thomas Chatterton.[234] Though undoubtedly a challenge at times, Clare managed to maintain connections with the intellectual community of his day, though certainly not to the extent that many other major Romantic figures participated in the newfound and highly prized practices of literary sociability.

Clare was, of course, also enmeshed in his rural community as it existed on the periphery of London's concerns. Clare, like the Wordsworths and the Lake Poets in general, depicted members of the working class throughout his corpus. However, unlike the Lake Poets, whose interest in rural laboring society was constructed from the position of outsiders and who often take up the mantle of rescuing the working class from literary oblivion,[235] Clare was a member of that society. His daily concerns were the concerns of a laborer. His friends, family, and neighbors were agricultural workers. He faced enclosure, that pervasive threat of land being suddenly transferred to the ownership of wealthier landed gentry, as a person whose very livelihood was under attack. When a rural laborer appears in his poetry, it is often someone he knows personally. The cliche of Clare as a solitary figure simply does not stand up to scrutiny.

And yet that cliche persists for good reason. The image of "The Rural Muse" is underwritten by the narrative of 'poor Clare.'[236] He did live in a kind of isolation. Those same neighbors he worked alongside and wrote about were more often than not illiterate. He had few

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active writing circles and criticizes Clare for his reliance on earlier poets until he came into his own voice. However, this narrative trajectory of Clare as a poet ignores the complex history of influence and communal participation uncovered by John Goodridge in *John Clare and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[234] Goodridge investigates the convoluted and, at times, fraught relationship Clare had with the tragic image of Chatterton, a relationship of influence, conflict, and occasional rejection. Goodridge, *John Clare and Community*, chapter 1.

[235] Hence the many readings of Wordsworth that cannot avoid his often patronizing attitude towards the laborers he purports to glorify.

[236] John Goodridge, "Poor Clare," in *The Guardian*, 3 (July 2000): review section. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/jul/22/poetry.books. Accessed February 5th, 2024.

immediate connections to intellectual circles and relied largely on correspondence and occasional visitations to fuel his desire for a well-read community. The classism that exiled him to the margins of British poetry challenged him to find ways to invent identities to circumvent it, including an episode where he wrote as a fabricated group of writers from the seventeenth century, even to the point where he forged manuscripts to appear as 'found' poems. And hovering over his life was the threat of illness, both physical and mental. For many years he suffered terrible bouts of depression and disassociation. When he committed himself to the asylum at High Beach, he wrote in his journals of a kind of imprisoned life of never-ending convalescence. Clare's life *was* tragic and deserving of the pity of the 'poor Clare' narrative (though without the classism that often accompanies it).

In the end, Clare's life is one of exposure to circumstances far outside his control. Though the acts of Parliament may have felt distant and autonomous in the rural countryside, those acts still affected his ability to survive. Though the Napoleonic Wars, for instance, were in many ways occurring in a separate world from his, the effects spiraled outwards, to the point where Clare describes the jarring experience of meeting French POWs who are forced to live in prison camps in the British country.[237] And the ecological concerns of an agricultural laborer were, for Clare, a gateway into the global systems of thought, action, and violence that could not be escaped, even isolated as he was.

To call Clare an ecological poet seems almost a redundancy due to his appellation as "The Rural Muse." However, rural does *not* equate with ecological, a distinction that is unfortunately elided in much criticism. Though linked, Clare's ecologicalism and ruralism are

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[237] The experiences Clare relates bring to mind the 'slow violence' Rob Nixon describes as the violence from violent acts spiral outwards from the original event to draw in large swathes of people and experiences. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

distinct facets of his poetic output and worth parsing out. In one sense, Clare's loco-centricism (his rural situatedness) leads neatly to the loco-descriptive qualities of his poetry, and loco-descriptiveness is what is conventionally associated with ecological poetry. In this way, Clare is the consummate ecological poet. His verse is rife with description of flora and fauna, from herbs[238] to insects[239] to birds and birdsong,[240] so rife in fact that his taxonomic bent is often derided as interfering with his poetics. The setting for virtually all of his poetry is pastoral, emphasizing the fragility of natural objects and the relationships between human activity and beings and the nonhuman.[241] Through this taxonomic approach of subject/object interaction, the subject actually recedes as Clare's poetry can be read as a powerhouse of affect-laden effect, less concerned with emotionality as with the objects and events that prompt it.[242] Likely a result of the eighteenth century poets that influenced him, Clare's interest in objects often belies an interest in the natural patterns those objects manifest,[243] and his tracing of those patterns has the

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[238] A subject in its own right as critics have noted, particularly Erin Lafford in her argument for Clare's inescapable associations between flora and elegy. Lafford, "John Clare, Herbalism, and Elegy," in *Romanticism*, 26.2 (2020): 202-213.

[239] Yet another subject in its own right. Clare's tendency towards a naturalist's outlook borders on the entomological as insects, their behaviors, and their interactions with humans occupy key moments of Clare's poems as part of his networked ecology of rurality. See, for example, Michael Nicholson, "Unheard Swarms: John Clare and Romantic Entomology," in *The Wordsworth Circle*, (Summer 2020): 338-359.

[240] Clare on birds is a large subject as birds are a driving aesthetic configuration for Clare that both prompts poetic musings and defies the poet's reflections and expectations (as will be explored below). Birdsong in particular held a certain sway over Romantic poets as developments in the field of ornithology, particularly those that drew connections between how birds learn to sing and how humans learn to speak, provided material for poets's thinking on poetry, expression, and being.

[241] But notedly not just the *living* nonhuman, as explained by Seth Reno. Clare's interest and, to put it inanely though no less accurately, *love* of thingness moves beyond biophilia, the love of living things, to what Reno calls 'ecophilia,' broadly, 'nature-love.' Seth Reno, "John Clare and Ecological Love," in *John Clare Society Journal*, 35 (2016): 59-76.

[242] An important distinction as conventional affect theory places the emotions at the center of the networked relationships that influence them. Jonas Cope, on the other hand, argues that Clare's poetry constantly resists this anthropocentrism as the emotions are used as springboards to close the distance between subject and object. Jonas Cope, "Autumnal Affect in the Poetry of John Clare," in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, volume 58, number 4 (Autumn 2018): 855-875.

[243] As Goodridge explains in chapter 2 of *John Clare and Community* as he contests that the influence of eighteenth century poetry on Clare's own is more than just a youthful period of experimentation, as critics like Bate assert, as its interest in patterns can be found in Clare's mature poetry as well.

effect of defamiliarizing the natural for the reader.[244] Though perhaps not a full-blown 'enmeshment' of the human with nature, as Morton would have, Clare's poetry does tend to mix the human with the other in ways that much ecological writing does not. But ultimately Clare's poetry has been read as an ecological poetry of place,[245] where placedness encompasses questions of relationality.

To read Clare's ecologies as solely an outgrowth of place does an injustice to the agency that emerges as a nexus of conflict in his work. Clare's ecological poetics is one of activity; he is rarely the descriptive bystander we would like good ecological poets to be. Instead, he participates in the ecologies he describes, to the point that Robert Heyes, in a recent conference called "Clare in Space," describes him as a "one-man ecological disaster."[246] This is hardly the starling image of the nature poet existing as an appreciative witness to the naturalness Londoners (and by proxy, us) are so removed from. True, Clare appears to love nature—he is an ecophiliac, as one critic described him.[247] And yet his participation in ecology exposes its fragility and is, at times, dangerously close to being ecocidal. By being an 'active' ecological poet, Clare threatens that same fragility he takes such pains to describe. From a biographical standpoint, this makes sense. Clare was, after all, wholly familiar with agricultural labor which is, more often than not, highly destructive to local ecologies (or, at the very least, highly threatening of destruction). Within this bifurcated ecology that is also *anti*-ecological, we see a Clare that is both ecological and rural, both pastoral and georgic.

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[244] Defamiliarization via ecological description queers Clare's poetry as it uses the conventions of ecological writing to emphasize the speaker's relationality with the alien world of other. See Daniel Hannah, "Invitations and Withdrawals: Queer Romantic Ecologies in William Blake's *The Book of Thel* and John Clare's 'The Nightingale's Nest,'" in *Essays in Romanticism*, volume 20, number 1 (2013): 1-18.

[245] Which is, in a way, the accepted paradigm of all ecological poetry..

[246] Robert Heyes, "John Clare's Natural History," presented at "John Clare in Space: Poetry, Nature and Contemporary Culture," Oxford Brookes University, May 2014.

[247] Reno, "John Clare and Ecological Love."

The rural John Clare is a poet of the people, in the classist as well as practical sense, and his interests range from the purely ecological (e.g. the taxonomizing of flowers ad nauseam) to the purely quotidian (e.g. his complaints about the rough clothing laborers wear and how it rubs and itches, as in *The Shepherd's Calendar*). Setting aside the classism that 'rural' often implies, the rural Clare is a political force that speaks from the sharp edge of the Parliamentary knife. His poetry (and autobiographical prose, for that matter) is as concerned with the taxation of incomes among the new rural employee class[248] as it is with the floral makeup of the moors. The ruralism Clare espouses as he fastidiously describes the activities of laborers, often dismissed as country naivete, is in fact a complex depiction of husbandry and other forms of agricultural labor and its interconnectedness with its ecological surroundings—hardly ecological, even if it *is* concerned with plants and dirt.

In his straddling of the ecological and the rural, John Clare problematizes the fabrications that bowerism attempts. Just as global concerns and activities spiral outward to interrupt Clare's enclosed rural space, so too do Clare's own actions spiral outward with imagined effect. Though obviously concerned with the fragility of nature and the insecurity portended by such practices as enclosure, he is also entangled by the tangentiality of his own sometimes interruptive actions and poiesis and the precarity it introduces to otherwise "safe" natural spaces. Clare is at the center of what a Londoner might see as a bower, announcing that there is, in fact, no bower at all. To best investigate this fabricated paradox, it is necessary to explore both some of his iconic 'ecological' poetry—his famous constellation of bird's nest—as well as his iconic 'rural' poetry—his frequent depictions of a laboring class. Emerging from these two discourses—often at odds with each other—is a Clare fueled by bitterness, loss, and a barely concealed desire for revenge. His

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[248] R. S. Attack valorizes Clare as a working class poet and argues for a reading of Clare that privileges class, even over the ecological. *John Clare: Voice of Freedom* (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 2010).

two poems, "Swordy Well" and "The Lament of Swordy Well" show Clare at his finest as he navigates the complexities of a small world rent asunder by a larger one.

John Clare's "nest poems" have garnered a great deal of attention since the revival of interest in his verse as an ecological poet extraordinaire. Originally intended as a distinct volume of work with the appropriate title "Birds Nesting"[249]—a project that was never fulfilled—Clare's nest poems are comprised of thirteen separate poems dealing with a variety of bird species, their nesting habits, and human encounters with their usually enclosed locations. The collection is, unsurprisingly, ornithologically-minded as the particular habits—nesting and otherwise—of each bird are described. As such, the nest poems epitomize the loco-descriptive qualities of Clare's writing while forefronting the human-nonhuman interactions that have engendered so much interest in Clare as an ecological poet. However, read as iterations of bowerism, the nest poems emphasize that Clare is less a place-based poet and is far more concerned with queries of homeness, belonging, and fragility.

One of the few nest poems not directly focused on a particular species—simply called "Birds' Nests"—is a highly taxonomic undertaking providing an overview of nesting that relies heavily on sensory data to paint a vivid picture:

> Nests newly made or finished all and lined
>
> With hair and thistledown and in the bough
> Of little awthorn huddled up in green
> The leaves still thickening as the spring gets age
> The pink's quite round and snug and closely laid
> And linnet's of materials loose and rough.[250]

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[249] Goodridge, *Community*, 135.
[250] John Clare, *John Clare: Selected Poems*, "Birds and Beasts," "Birds' Nests," ll. 3-8.

This moment of the poem has much of what would conventionally be looked for in ‘nature poetry’: identification of seasonality (“as the spring gets age”), a stereotypical green space (literally “huddle up in green”), and ecological listing (“awthorn,” “thistledown,” “leaves,” etc.) Clare takes pains to identify the “materials loose and rough” the nests (presumably of the “hedge-sparrow,”[251] as the poem later names them) are constructed of, providing a brief glimpse into the materiality of the nesting spaces that dot the countryside in “The lanes and hedges where their homes abide.”[252]

Yet even this apparently peaceful ecological pastiche is interrupted by human intervention. The poem begins “How fresh the air, the birds how busy now / In every walk if I but peep I find . . .”[253] In one sense, these first two lines fulfill the ecological standard: the beauty of nature is witnessed by the poet in an air of implied serenity (“How fresh the air”) as though nature is itself a balm; ecopoetics, eat your heart out. And yet Clare is quick to undercut this prototypical nature walk with a jarring, even perverse human activity: “if I but peep.” The act of ‘peeping’—with all its connotations of spying, sexual curiosity, and interference—cuts hard against the serenity the remainder of the poem attempts to enact. Even as the quaint materiality holds up the contract of ecological niceties, the interlocutor interrupts with his own agential lewdness. The final moments of this brief glimpse into the birds’ nests reinforce the juxtaposition:

> Dead grass and mosses green, an hermitage
> For secresy and shelter rightly made
> And beautiful it is to walk beside
> The lanes and hedges where their homes abide.[254]

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[251] Clare, *Selected Poems*, “Birds and Beasts,” “Birds’ Nests,” l. 9.
[252] Clare, *Selected Poems*, “Birds and Beasts,” “Birds’ Nests,” l. 14.
[253] Clare, *Selected Poems*, “Birds and Beasts,” “Birds’ Nests,” ll. 1-2.
[254] Clare, *Selected Poems*, “Birds and Beasts,” “Birds’ Nests,” ll. 11-4.

Though these nests among the "lanes and hedges" may indeed be beautiful "to walk beside," the agency of ecological absorption—the poet as nature's sponge—is pitted against the agency of survival on the birds's part, an agency that requires "secresy and shelter." Though in this poem the poet does not *directly* interfere with the birds and their nesting, the mere threat of this interference still pervades it and so too threatens the ecological contract. Unfortunately for the ecologically-minded, more direct interference *also* pervades many of the nest poems.

"The Pettichaps Nest"[255] continues the nesting trope with its itinerant Clare and his attendant taxonomic bent. However, the more purist ecological scene is rent from the start:

> Well, in my many walks I rarely found
> A place less likely for a bird to form
> Its nest close by the rut-gulled waggon road
> And on the almost bare foot-trodden ground
> With scarce a clump of grass to keep it warm
> And not a thistle spreads its spears abroad
> Or prickly bush to shield it from harm's way
> And yet so snugly made that none may spy
> It out, save accident—[256]

True though that in the "Birds' Nests" the ecological placeness is defined by the "lanes and hedges" of the rural countryside, the poem still maintains a certain level of ecological separation from human activity. Not so in "The Pettichaps Nest." The nest itself is imminent for the poet, "close by the rut-gulled waggon road," who continues his disturbing act of 'peeping,' or, in this case, 'spying.' It is also scarcely protected, with little of the "secresy" of the preceding poem; "not a thistle spreads its spears abroad / Or prickly bush to shield it from harm's way." The nest of the pettichap exists in a state of constant exposure. And yet, the poem does attempt to redeem this exposure by noting: "Had not the old bird heard us trampling by / And fluttered out - we had

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[255] Pettychap is a colloquial blanket term applied to a number of European small nesting songbirds, including the willow warbler, a bird Clare would have likely encountered in Northamptonshire.
[256] Clare, *Selected Poems*, "Birds and Beasts," "The Pettichap's Nest," ll. 1-9.

not seen it lie / Brown as the roadway side—."[257] It is human movement—the violence of "trampling"—that fully opens the nest to investigation. Moreover, the "we" of the poem is introduced as "you and I."[258] Not only is the poet disturbing the nest that, though hardly protected by "secresy" still manages to escape notice save violence, the reader is as well, forced into joining the delinquent 'spying' of the poet by the very act of reading. The poem then continues its trope of interference when the poet, taxonomizing the makeup of the nest, writes "Hard to discover - that snug entrance wins / Scarcely admitting e'en two fingers in."[259] The description of the size of the nest's entrance appears both literal and figurative: though the poem does not explicitly state that Clare has actually measured the nest with his own body, the knowledge of its size seems wholly intimate and, frankly, a violation, defying the purely loco-descriptive to highlight the poet's agency, in this case pitted directly against that of the pettichap.

We see similar configurations in poems such as "The Robin's Nest" and "The Yellow Hammer's Nest," where the poet highlights the fragility of nests and an awareness of his interference and the violations that attend it. Nevertheless, there still appears a genuine appreciation for the nonhuman throughout Clare's work. It is between these two combative impetuses that the true John Clare exists: the desire for and activity of witness contends with survival through secrecy. It is easy to see why Clare is defined as a place-based poet as the conflicts presented in his semi-ecological verse is the narrative of the loci of rural Britain. And yet 'place' is so heavily laden with ecological overtones that it is a problematic term when applied to Clare. Critics have proposed emphasizing Clare's 'environmentalism' as the ecological alternative of 'environmental' helps expand the definition of place to encompass

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[257] Clare, *Selected Poems*, "Birds and Beasts," "The Pettichap's Nest," ll. 12-4.
[258] Clare, *Selected Poems*, "Birds and Beasts," "The Pettichap's Nest," l. 9.
[259] Clare, *Selected Poems*, "Birds and Beasts," "The Pettichap's Nest," ll. 20-1.

human activity, not as the centralized hub for poiesis, but as one node of interconnectedness.[260] However, to call Clare an environmental poet would also run the risk of eliding his rural bent, with all its issues of class, labor, and socio-cultural minutiae that separate Clare so starkly from the environmental poetry of his contemporaries, such as the "rustic retreat" of Wordsworth.[261] The politics of Clare are more pressing than mere human-nature interaction, and the laborers more intimately known than in Wordsworth.

A more helpful (and fraught) term is presented by Shalon Noble in the term 'home,' or more specifically, the Greek oikos.[262] Oikos has been used in place of home as home tends to carry with it heavily patriarchal notions of domesticity and male-female binarism which might tend to overcast the complexities of a poet like Felicia Hemans. However, Noble takes issue with critics's use of oikos as it tends to valorize homeness as a "stable site of unity and identity."[263] Applying this definition of oikos to Clare immediately fractures as his well-known *in*stability of identity defines much of his work and the critical history surrounding it. Noble, instead, seeks to turn home on its head by defining oikos as "a home of uncommon ground,"[264] emphasizing not only Clare's sense of rural unity but also its imminent discontinuity; Clare was in fact, for a

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[260] An interconnectedness that can often turn 'dark,' as Timothy Morton argues, by emphasizing the ugliness, hesitation, and terror that accompany the realization of this networked existence in *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 16-7. This view is counterbalanced by critics who argue for a 'lighter' interconnectedness that assert the 'darkness' of Morton's arrangement problematically still relies on the human as the definitive center of its ecological network as the notion of interconnectedness denotes a severance in the first place. A dehumanized interconnectedness, such as Markus Poetzsch advocates, emphasizes not only interconnectedness but interdependence. Poetzsch, "The Brighter Side of 'Dark Ecology': John Clare and Henry David Thoreau," in *John Clare Society Journal*, 34 (2015): 63-74.

[261] As Robert Pack and Jay Parini mockingly call the nature of Wordsworth, as opposed to the nature of the late twentieth century that is "now a pressing political question." *Poems for a Small Planet: Contemporary American Nature Poetry* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1993), xv.

[262] Noble makes the case for this reversion to the Greek, prompted by an analysis of Clare's personal struggle against homelessness—a struggle made common by enclosure—in "'Homeless at Home': John Clare's Uncommon Ecology," in *Romanticism*, 21.2 (2015): 171-181.

[263] Noble, "'Homeless at Home,'" 172.

[264] Noble, "'Homeless at Home,'" 172.

while, homeless, as were many of his fellow agricultural laborers pushed out of their relationship with the land by the practice of enclosure.

Building off Noble's redefinition of oikos as an alternative to ecological, environmental, and the gender-laden home, the rural poetry of Clare is characterized by human characters who both violate the land they exist within and alongside while being violated by the politics of their day, all the while with a pervasive appreciation for nature that is perhaps best termed as 'non-London.'[265] In the poem "The Woodman," for example, the woodman himself appreciates nature even as he taxidermizes it:

> The woodman rustles in his leathern guise
> Hiding in dyke, ylined with brustling sedge,
> His bill and mattock from theft's meddling eyes
> And in his wallets storing many a pledge
> Of flowers and boughs from early-sprouting trees
> And painted pootys from the ivied hedge
> About its mossy roots, his boys to please,
> Who wait with merry joy his coming home
> Anticipating presents such as these.[266]

The woodman and "his boys" certainly seem to appreciate nature, albeit in a way that violates nature's pristine existence as separate from the human. These "presents" the woodman gathers are taken from places "Where flowers but rarely from their stalks are torn / And birds scarce loose[267] a nest the season through."[268] The interference of this rural laborer is delivered in a quotidian fashion: a father who spends all his laboring time outside who wants to please his children with small gifts. In so doing the poem blends ecophilia with ecocide.

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[265] Several biographies have argued that London haunts Clare throughout his life—as evidenced by his poetry and more personal writings—and that the images and objects of London are antithetical to Clare's rural poetics. This is really just a return to the pastoral and its conflicts, the country vs. the city.
[266] Clare, *Selected Poems*, "Landscapes with Figures," "The Woodman," ll. 2-10.
[267] A word with double meaning that is commonly found in Clare as it can mean both "loose" and "lose," and often both simultaneously. Simon Kövesi, *John Clare: Nature, Criticism and History* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 2017), 109.
[268] Clare, *Selected Poems*, "Landscapes with Figures," "The Woodman," ll. 13-4.

Yet the father—and his children by proxy—are threatened just as nature is by "theft's meddling eyes." So too in "The Shepherd's Hut" where a bygone era of pastoral equanimity is only accessed through stories told in the hut whose "sweetness haunts [the poet] still."[269] This poem was written at a time when the Acts of Enclosure and the physical enclosing of lands by hedgerows had all but decimated the practice of rural shepherding over common pasture land. Despite the poet's romantic feelings of wistfulness when hearing the shepherd's tales, the poem ends acknowledging that:

> The shepherds vanished all, and disregard
> Left their old music like a vagrant bee
> For summer's breeze to murmur o'er and die
> And in these ancient spots mind ear and eye.[270]

The hut itself is a home within a home within a home: the shepherd's personal hovel couched in Clare's rural countryside is one of many rural spaces in greater Britain.[271] All three interact at the level of a discontinuous oikos, a give and take between places, spaces, and abstract notions of identity, coalescing in a story dependent on the notion of interactions with nature. It is difficult to categorize this network of being as a form of interconnectedness as 'interconnected' implies some form of equality, whereas the shepherd's hut is hardly on the same footing as the forces that nonchalantly threaten it (e.g. enclosure) and provide the possibility of succor (e.g. the pasture). Rather, the layers of oikos are mutually parasitic, a kind of proto-Darwinism that folds in notions of class and labor alongside the very real struggle of physical survival.

But Clare is more than a witness. If taken solely on the nest poems, "The Woodman," and "The Shepherd's Hut," Clare would appear a poet whose actions, though tangential (the

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[269] Clare, *Selected Poems*, "Landscapes with Figures," "The Shepherd's Hut," l. 17.
[270] Clare, *Selected Poems*, "Landscapes with Figures," "The Woodman," ll. 21-4.
[271] Nation as home is a larger subject which will be explored further in the next chapter on Felicia Hemans.

violations), are less agential. Rather than a pure documentarian, Clare is known as a powerful voice of protest. To understand one of his most famous protest poems, “The Lament of Swordy Well” and how it relates to oikos, it is necessary to first look at his earlier poem simply titled “Swordy Well,” given here in its entirety:

> I’ve loved thee Swordy Well and love thee still
> Long was I with thee tending sheep and cow
> In boyhood ramping up each steepy hill
> To play at ‘roly poly’ down - and now
> A man I trifle o’er thee cares to kill
> Haunting thy mossy steeps to botanize
> And hunt the orchis tribes where nature’s skill
> Doth like my thoughts run into phantasys
> Spider and Bee all mimicking at will
> Displaying powers that fools the proudly wise
> Showing the wonders of great nature’s plan
> In trifles insignificant and small
> Puzzling the power of that great trifle man
> Who finds no reason to be proud at all.[272]

Swordy Well, now an official nature reserve known as Swaddywell—the very concept of which would have likely pleased Clare while confirming his ecological terror—was well known to him as a boy and whose landscape features in several poems of his youth. In this poem, Swordy Well is both the seat of boyhood joy and naivete and the object for Clare’s violatory impulse. The grown Clare, like the woodman, taxidermizes the plants of the area and, by doing so, begs pause to reflect on his own insignificance. “Swordy Well” is by most standards an exemplary ecological poem: nature is lauded, the interfering human activity derided, and a lesson on humility derived. But it is “The Lament of Swordy Well,” written years later, that recasts this ecological relationship and forces a reckoning with oikos, where Clare must play both the insider and outsider, the celebrant of nature and its destroyer. The artifice of the pastoralist is not enough

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[272] Clare, *Selected Poems*, “Landscapes with Figures,” “Swordy Well.”

to sustain Clare's remembrance of more youthful times where Swordy Well is hailed as a true bower.

By the time of Clare's more mature writing, Swordy Well had been enclosed by the parish of Helpston and all pasture activity on it deemed unlawful. The "Lament" personifies Swordy Well as a polemic[273] delivered in a rollicking ballad form, an seeming odd choice for a lament. The poem takes on the modes of Clare's other poems, but in a far darker mood. When Swordy Well taxonomizes the fauna:

> The bees flye round in feeble rings
> And find no blossom bye
> Then thrum their almost weary wings
> Upon the moss and die
> Rabbits that find my hills turned o'er
> Forsake my poor abode
> They dread a workhouse like the poor
> And nibble on the road,[274]

the taxonomy is more akin to Dante's descriptions of *Inferno* than to the ecological poetics of Clare's other verse, simultaneously lamenting the creatures that can no longer physically survive on the heath that's been ravaged by the parish's developments while comparing them with the poor who too can no longer depend on the heath for economic—or even nutritional—sustenance and who "dread a workhouse." The poem sustains this mixture of ecological and rural deprivation against an apocalyptic background:

> My only tree they've left a stump
> And nought remains my own
>
> My mossy hills gain's greedy hand
> And more then greedy mind

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[273] John Burnside, in his chapter "John Clare and the new varieties of enclosure: a polemic" in *New Essays on John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 79-96, asks what sort of writer Clare would be if he were alive today. Burnside concludes—justifiably—that Clare would be a diehard writer of polemics, as the "sensitivity to the enclosures of his own time" (94) suggest an outlook attuned to the constant tug of privatization so pervasive today.

[274] Clare, *Selected Poems*, "Changes and Contradictions," "The Lament of Swordy Well," ll. 81-8.

> Levels into a russet land
> Nor leaves a bent behind.[275]

The implications of the content are somewhat obvious: Swordy Well, now enclosed, has been cut off from the people, creatures, and flora that moved about it in earlier days, and the culprit is macroeconomics: "And should the price of grain get high - / Lord help and keep it low - / I shan't possess a single flye."[276] But it is the form of the poem that delivers the master stroke. The jaunty meter harshly conflicts with the emotional undertones of the imagery and the argumentative strides of the polemic. Swordy Well, as a character, appears deranged, as though amused by its—and the rural countryside more widely—imminent destruction:

> Of all the fields I am the last
> That my own face can tell
> Yet what with stone pits' delving holes
> And strife to buy and sell
> My name will quickly be the whole
> That's left of Swordy Well.[277]

So ends the poem on a deeply negative note of both ecological and rural eradication, yet finishing off with perfect iambic ballad meter, as though the poetic form could take the edge off the harshness of Swordy Well's fate. But too aware of its own mechanics, the ballad form comes off as forced, a square bandage drooped over a round wound. The jaunty overtone belies a dark emotional disturbance, one that seeks any means, however ridiculous, for relief. The placeness here is a nexus of loss and the anger that accompanies it.

The poem is about a place—narrated by a place, even—yet local description alone hardly encapsulates the highly complex circumstances that have led to that place's undoing. Instead, Clare's approach is that of an insider, a resident and witness to the 'outside' that has invaded.

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[275] Clare, *Selected Poems*, "Changes and Contradictions," "The Lament of Swordy Well," ll. 127-32.
[276] Clare, *Selected Poems*, "Changes and Contradictions," "The Lament of Swordy Well," ll. 145-7.
[277] Clare, *Selected Poems*, "Changes and Contradictions," "The Lament of Swordy Well," ll. 203-8.

Taken in conjunction with the earlier poem, the Swordy Well of the "Lament" *does* provide a sense of stable identity; Clare identifies, intimately, with the goings on of the parishioners, of the laborers who once worked the heath, of the creatures whose survival depends on the biodiversity of the heath, and of the very flora he once violated as a boy. Yet this identity is also highly unstable as its destruction threatens Clare with a physical, emotional, and noumenal homelessness. What would appear a bower to a Londoner, even in its enclosed space, is, again, no bower at all. This bower is even more unbower-like in that Clare is also a participant in Swordy Well's instability. Whatever his affinity with the place, he too intrudes on it, altering it irrevocably. Clare would have us see his interferences as non-destructive, and though they largely may be, they still interfere, changing the pastoral landscape even as Clare celebrates its 'purity.' By the standards of Swordy Well itself, Clare too is an outsider, participating in the Anthropocene-like alteration of the place. Though Swordy Well may offer the appearance of a bower, its fate only exposes Clare's own fabrications; he may try to force Swordy Well to fit the purposes of refuge and retreat, but his own poiesis exposes the limits of the process. In many ways Clare's life is a stark example of the reality of Chakrabarty's sense of globalism: though he lived his entire life in a relatively small, enclosed area, larger global forces mercilessly assailed him and the rural laborers around him. Clare's attempts to unmake that globe at the personal level are ineffectual. His ecological poems reinforce the activities that threaten ecology. His depictions of place emphasize place's ephemerality. Even his sense of identity is constantly at odds with his subject matter: Clare the proto-conservationist and Clare the interloper. His poetic efforts can only secure him so far before the outside world has its say.

Felicia Hemans

Including Felicia Hemans in the company of Robinson and Clare may at first seem jarring. Both Robinson and Clare were, to an extent, defined as outsiders. Robinson's career was shaped by her struggle against her earliest public identities and Clare's was shaped by his class and the rural milieu of Northamptonshire. Hemans, on the other hand, was the consummate cultural insider as she would become widely accepted as the icon for a new archetype of the Victorian woman: motherly, quiet, dutiful, and best relegated to the domestic sphere. This archetype evolved partly from the anti-Jacobin sentiments that arose during the revolutionary period that held that the education of women and the advocation for their rights was as dangerous as the education and empowerment of the laboring classes, a threat to the very social fiber of Britain. Despite the pushback from proto-feminist authors and thinkers, these conservative sentiments took root as the British public, helped along by the ruling class, began to fear the sort of violent uprisings that took hold of France as early revolutionaries such as Robespierre became embroiled in the Reign of Terror that shook European notions of genteel security to its core. Though many intellectual circles—headed by figures such as Wollstonecraft—would laud the vocal and progressive women in their midst, the threat of censure or worse would begin to shape how women writers comported themselves in public through their writing and their association with so-called 'radicals.' By the time of Hemans's first publication in 1808 when she was just fourteen, a difficult situation had taken hold: established Romantic authors such as Percy Shelley took interest in her writings as upholding the Wordsworthian[278] Romantic project of "Nature-,

[278] A contentious appellation as 'Wordsworthian' Romanticism, though often taken as the default form of Romantic poetics, does not wholly encapsulate the spectrum of Romanticism that evolved from the late 18th and and early 19th century periods. In fact, there is reason to speculate on whether 'Wordsworthian' is even an appropriate label, as will be explained in the following section on Charlotte Smith.

memory-, and self-based form,"[279] and yet the very identity of 'woman writer' was under attack to the extent that women's poetry was often scrutinized to an alarming degree.[280] When published, Hemans's writing would be instantly caught in this push and pull between Jacobin and anti-Jacobin politics.

To further complicate the inclusion of Hemans, she bridges both the Romantic and Victorian eras and literary movements, to the extent that she has been called "the last Romantic and the first Victorian."[281] While the majority of Romantic woman authors would tend to fall more in the Jacobin realm of progressive philosophies and politics, Hemans would become, in no small way, a conservative ideal other women were measured against both in public and in private. Her prose and poetry often pushed images of women as compassionate, domestic, motherly figures that withstood the shifting tastes of the contentious British public. She herself seemed to embody this ideal; she was, "by the late 1820s, an item on the cultural tourism map,"[282] a cultural oddity of the dutifully reserved yet widely read woman author. Though she would die before the start of Victoria's reign, and despite her earlier wooing of Romantic luminaries, the image she constructed for herself throughout her career would live on as an idea of just how far a woman author and thinker should and shouldn't go.

However, this image was largely a construct of Victorianism and does not fully reflect Hemans's often deft maneuvering of her public persona. In many ways, Hemans's life and writing is at odds with mainstream Victorianism. Her poems and novels contain scenes of

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[279] As defined by Jacqueline Labbe in *Writing Romanticism: Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth, 1784-1807* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5-6.
[280] As it defined Mary Robinson's career; writing from known women authors was immediately wrapped up in the political arguments of the day, against Jacobinism, Continentalism, 'best' colonialist practices, etc.
[281] Nanora Sweet and Julie Melnyk, editors. *Felicia Hemans: Reimagining Poetry in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 4.
[282] Norma Clarke: *Ambitious Heights: Writing, Friendship, Love - The Jewsbury Sisters, Felicia Hemans, and Jane Welsh Carlyle* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 75.

violence—against men, women, and even children.[283] Her women are not always quiet. They also often meet tragic ends at the behest of overbearing, self-serving patriarchal figures whose impossible demands leave little choice other than either self- or other-inflicted martyrdoms.[284] Hermans herself was far from the quiet Victorian woman she was later held up to be. In visits with the Lake Poets, for example, younger women would belittle her as too opinionated, saying she should speak less,[285] and Wordsworth would complain to Southey and others in private of her verbosity, even while he praised her publicly for her motherly and wifely mien.[286] Her interactions with younger female writers, too, reflect this conflicted double-act: while cautioning them to uphold humility, she encouraged their writings and challenged them to think dynamically of their female characters.[287]

Ultimately, Hemans's career was defined by the proto-Victorian sentiment that to be a successful writer means to be a failure as a woman.[288] The specter of actual failure—financially, politically, personally—was never far off as public praise and condemnation could shift with the political mood of the hour or the offhand accusation or denunciation in a tabloid-esque public

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[283] The poems do not shy away from violence, as when, for example, the city is sacked at the end of "The Indian City" and is literally awash in blood:

> And the streams glow'd red, as from warrior-veins,
> And the sword of the Moslem, let loose to slay,
> Like the panther leapt on its flying prey,
> Till a city of ruin begirt the shade,
> Where the boy and his mother at rest were laid.

Hemans, Felicia, *Records of Woman, with Other Poems* (Lexington: The University of Press of Kentucky, 1999), "Records of Woman," "The Indian City," ll. 218-222.

[284] *Records of Woman* as a whole is called a "bloody affair" by Norma Clarke as marriage is almost always followed by death. *Ambitious Heights*, 79.

[285] As when a young woman, Sara Hutchinson, visiting the Wordsworths while Hemans was staying there, complained that Hemans was "spoilt by the adulation of 'the world,'" that her "affection is perfectly unendurable." Kathleen Coburn, editor, *The Letters of Sara Hutchinson, 1800-1835* (London: Routledge), 370.

[286] Clarke, *Ambitious Heights*, 65.

[287] As she did for Mary Jane Jewsbury. The two women struck up a friendship, Hemans encouraging Jewsbury and Jewsbury acting as Hemans's constant companion. This encouragement was however, as far as the records show, done entirely in private; public encouragement between women authors was, by the late 1820s, becoming more and more unthinkable. Clarke, *Ambitious Heights*, 74-6.

[288] Clarke, *Ambitious Heights*, 45.

pamphlet. Hemans was especially vulnerable to public censure as after six years of marriage, her husband Alfred Hemans left her with their five children,[289] a fact that she worked hard for years to keep secret and that her friends covered up after her death.[290] Had this been known it would have only confirmed the idea that Hemans's failure as a wife was due to her wide success as a author, in spite of the fact that her husband was a well-known profligate and their marriage an unhappy affair from the start.

In a way, the bower of domesticity Hemans constructed of and for herself was a brilliant success. To maintain her house and the wellbeing of her children, Hemans sold books, and to sell books she crafted an image of a woman the public would accept and pay for. Her personal writings and correspondence (those that were saved from the fire on her death)[291] reveal an excellent judge of public taste and a personal sense of ambition and creativity that hardly squared with the idealized image of humility she helped promote, yet her ability to succeed as a writer depended on this jarring coalescence of work and persona. Her earlier writings in particular fashion a security of home that hinges upon the loyalty of the wife and ministrations of the mother.[292] The Hemans oikos was a pocket of domestic repose in a world that, despite its often charged and politically violent bent, could not violate the sacred[293] bounds of home and hearth, an image of home that appealed across class boundaries. The only true threat to the home came

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[289] The fifth not yet born at the time of his leaving.

[290] Not to mention a possible late-life love affair with the famed painter of Romantic figures—including Hemans and Byron—William Edward West, as uncovered by Noah Comet and Nanora Sweet. This and other 'sordid' details that suggest Hemans fit into the 'successful author, failed woman' stereotype were covered up by friends and family following her death. "'You have my life, with my name, in your hands,'" *Keats-Shelley Journal*, volume 67 (2018): 29-48.

[291] See Comet and Sweet, "'You have my life.'"

[292] As exemplified by such poems as "To My Mother" in *The Domestic Affections and Other Poems* (1812). Verse in this vein written by a young Hemans would help secure her image as the ultimate poet of the domestic sphere. Felicia Hemans, *The Poems of Felicia Hemans*, edited by William P. Nimmo (London: 15 King William Street, Strand; and Edinburgh, 1875).

[293] I use this adjective pointedly here as throughout Hemans writing but particularly towards the end Christian sacredness played a vital role in her constructions of domesticity.

from the inside: a wife's failure of duty, a mother's neglect of her children, a husband's violation of trust, etc.

And yet, towards the end of her life, Hemans's writing reveals a critical reflection on the proto-Victorian images of womanhood and domesticity she had long publicly espoused. *Records of Woman with Other Poems* has been seen, critically at least, as a significant turn in Hemans's work. Published seven years before her death and one of her final collections of poetry, the women of *Records of Woman* are placed center stage as roughly the first half of the collection retells the stories of historical or imagined women, often from their perspective and often to the exclusion of men. These 'records' complicate the idealistic woman figure Hemans's career helped shape and often reflect the proto-feminist ideas Hemans likely held to in private.[294] This is in keeping with her writing in general. Hemans deploys the layered critical power of the pastoral as a means to critique her "audience of refined wealthy people"[295] even in her early work. *Records of Woman*, on the other hand, combats the directives of womanliness Hemans helped champion, creating a pastoral within the city by pitting the sensibilities of one refined audience—the more conservative proto-Victorian one—against the rebellious progressivism of another—the proto-feminism of a revolutionary intellectualism that espoused these new "nature" poets. Though hardly an outward didactician on feminist rights such as Wollstonecraft, her creative works throughout her career do hint at a pro-feminist Jacobinism cleverly masked in the

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[294] It is difficult to say how deeply proto-feminist ideas affected Hemans at a personal level as much of her personal correspondence was destroyed following her death. However, several critics have, by exploring the extant writings and correspondence with her friends, families, and associates, reconstructed an image of Hemans that suggest she was far more radical in her political and philosophical beliefs than she allowed her public image to profess. For an example, see Emma Mason and Jonathan Roberts, "Felicia Hemans's Sonnets on Female Characters of Scripture," in *The Yearbook of English Studies*, volume 39, number 1/2 (2009): 72-83.

[295] As Empson defines it in his explanation of the pastoral's tendency to mock its own audience: "it describes the lives of 'simple' low people to an audience of refined wealthy people, so as to make them think first 'this is true about everyone' and then 'this is specially true about us.'" Empson, *English Pastoral*, 195-6.

trappings of proto-Victorianism.[296] The first half of the *Records* is, if anything, simply a more outwardly vocal treatment of proto-feminism that, though not explicit in its statement of a progressive agenda, does lead the reader towards progressivism.[297] Implicitly throughout, Hemans tears down her own bower of domesticity.

The "Other Poems" section of the *Records* is even more revealing. These poems contain subject matter in line with the colonialist aesthetics so often associated with Victorianism, emphasizing London urbanism mixed with an exotic cosmopolitanism that would tantalize the reading public of Hemans's day and would come to define—or at least pervade[298]—the Victorian era. And yet through these aesthetics the poems often critique those same colonialist practices that buoy up the British economy.[299] The poems use this critical stance to play on proto-Victorian tropes and to further ground the poems in Britain. "The Palm-Tree" reverses the exoticist air from the start: "It wav'd not thro' an Eastern sky, / Beside a fount of Araby."[300] Less concerned with documentary realism of foreign lands, the poem draws on imagery associated with India but, more especially, with anything distinctly non-British, only to state that this palm tree is *not* there: "Midst foliage of no kindred hue; / Thro' the laburnum's dropping gold / Rose

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[296] Such as a marked turning of the image of the 'charmed cup' (literally, alcohol) by authors like Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon whose poetry suggests the "intoxication of authorial power" is open to women as well as men. Young-Ok An, "The Poetics of the 'Charmed Cup' in Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon," in *Studies in Romanticism*, volume 53, number 2 (Summer 2014): 218.

[297] The whole point of the volume is to record women's voices that have been otherwise lost, such as in the case of Arabella Stuart's imprisonment. The introduction to "Arabella Stuart cites D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature*: "What passed in that dreadful imprisonment, cannot perhaps be recovered for authentic history." Hemans's poem, then, attempts to recover through *in*authentic history, namely, the poem, and by so doing privileges the story of the woman over that of the men that have relegated her to a mere unknown, a footnote in a larger (coded more important) history. Hemans, *Records of Woman*, p. 7.

[298] Not least of which through the materiality of otherness that was, during the period, everywhere, as colonialist practices filled the homes of England with the objects of abroad. Several studies explore this topic, but for an excellent overview, see the collection of essays edited by Margot Finn and Kate Smith, *The East India Company at Home: 1757-1857* (London: UCL Press, 2018).

[299] Such as the laments of the voyager in "A Voyager's Dream of Land" that exhort the reader to "Hold me not, brethren! I go, I go," a plea for the unnamed powers to cease whatever has caused the voyager to be so far from home. Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," l. 51.

[300] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Palm-Tree," ll. 1-2.

the light shaft of orient mould."[301] "The Palm-Tree" establishes a crucial juxtaposition through loco-description that is leveraged to illustrate both the local and *non*local. The palm-tree itself is out of place, and the drama of the poem hinges on this displacement.

And yet the poem is astoundingly home-oriented in a way easily recognizable for readers. The original locale of the palm-tree is "some green isle of Indian seas."[302] Referring to the British isles as "green isles" was in common parlance, appearing regularly in all manner of writing, most especially the poetry, of the time.[303] The tree, then, is both from a foreign green isle yet now resides in a known green isle. "The Palm-Tree" then introduces a boy "lone . . . midst the throng" of onlookers who recognizes the palm tree as a native of his land. The reader is displaced yet further when a "shot a rapture through his frame" at the sight of the tree, prompting an immediate imagined relocation as the boy remembers his native land, "His mother's cabin home," and begins to weep. Yet Hemans then doubles down on the Britishness by asking the other members of the crowd (and so, the reader) to "scorn him not" as the emotions of the boy are related to those of any "freeman battling on his hills" or "patriot [who] girds himself to die,"[304] forcing an equivalence between the boy's affect, however physically displaced from its original source, and the affect of any audience member who might weep as they "clasp'd his country's Tree."[305] The poem finishes by declaring that the ideas of patriotism that prompt the emotional response of the boy and the better-known patriotic deaths of British soldiers spring

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[301] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Palm-Tree," ll. 8-10.

[302] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Palm-Tree," l. 4.

[303] Examples of this are as varied as they are numerous as the "green isle" became a kind of cultural motif. Every Romantic era poet mentioned in this thesis refers to England as a "green isle"—or uses a similar appellation of 'greenness' and 'isleness' to refer to the lands of Britain—at some point.

[304] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Palm-Tree," ll. 49-52.

[305] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Palm-Tree," l. 48.

from the same source. The poem is, then, as much about British feelings of nation and homeness as it is about the actions and responses of the boy who is utterly displaced from home.

Hemans, the well-known poet of domesticity, places the home on the global scale. Through “The Palm-Tree” and poems such as “A Voyager’s Dream of Land” and “The Birds of Passage,” *Records of Woman* uses the tension between here and elsewhere to highlight the fragility of familiarity, where well-known British landscapes, people, and objects are juxtaposed against distinctly non-British ones. The conventional image of home, in this context, is challenged, as the three ‘homes’ poems of the *Records*—“Homes of England,” “The Spells of Home,” and “The Graves of a Household”—play out the drama of seeking places of repose, refuge, and renewal, and the attendant complications of thinking in such terms in the milieu of a globalized position. “The Adopted Child,” finally, exposes this home-as-bower as less about place and more about memory and filial connections. In the end, the bower of Hemans can *not* consist only of the home, yet “The Adopted Child” leaves off with the promise of a bower that remains ineffable.

The “Homes of England” contains all that’s expected of Hemans the domestic poet. The homes are described in idealistic terms in the first stanza:

> How beautiful they stand!
> Amidst their tall ancestral trees,
> O'er all the pleasant land.
> The deer across their greensward bound
> Thro' shade and sunny gleam,
> And the swan glides past them with the sound
> Of some rejoicing stream.[306]

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[306] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, “Miscellaneous Pieces,” “The Homes of England,” ll. 2-8.

At this point in Hemans's career this style of description of domestic spaces is expected as it reflects the stylings of many of her earlier poems on English homes.[307] The homes are picturesque, the countryside a blend of pastoral naturalness and georgic ruggedness. The next stanza then opens the homes themselves to describe their "hearths by night," the "woman's voice" that "flows forth in song," and the "childhood's tale" told from "Some glorious page of old."[308] Again, this is conventional Hemans as it describes a domestic scene reminiscent of those that would become so popular among the American "Fireside Poets"[309] in the following decades, a scene that focuses on the quotidian, wholly idealized life of the rural or suburban English countryside. The scene is also quite secure: there appears to be no real strife as the pleasures of a simple domestic life are described without trace of direct conflict. The two stanzas that follow are much in this vein as the descriptions of the domestic life are extended to the "thousands" of "Cottage Homes of England"[310] wherein "fearless there the lowly sleep, / As the bird beneath their eaves."[311]

Despite the expected portrayals of homes at peace in the first four stanzas that are so typical of Hemans, a sense of threat pervades the poem. "The Homes of England" opens with a quotation from Sir Walter Scott's *Marmion*: "Where's the coward that would not dare / To fight for such a land?"[312] These pictures of peaceful living must, ultimately, be fought for, as the quotation suggests, and yet who will do the fighting and who is to be fought is called into question. *Marmion* focuses on the sixteenth-century conflict between the Scottish and English

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[307] See earlier note on *Domestic Affections and Other Poems*. The descriptions of women in her earlier works extend to what would become stereotypical depictions of cottage homes, replete with fireside conversations, kitchen labor, and the flitting about of children.
[308] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Homes of England," ll. 10-6.
[309] Such as Longfellow and Bryant.
[310] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Homes of England," ll. 25-6.
[311] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Homes of England," ll. 31-2.
[312] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Homes of England."

that ends with the Battle of Flodden Field, a major victory for England that would help bring Scotland under English rule for centuries to come. Yet *Marmion* is hardly a rallying cry for English conquest as it focuses on the internal political intrigues of Scottish nobility in the time of Henry VIII's exertion of greater control over Scottish territories. *Marmion* is ultimately a poem about Scotland and its residents, England playing an outsider role of backing one noble over another to further its own interests. To begin a poem titled "The Homes of England" with Sir Walter Scott's romantic depictions of the complexities of Scottish noble life and the notion of the defense of one's homeland from England disrupts the serenity that accompanies the English homelife and, just as "The Palm-Tree" does, throws into relief the notion of home as a subjective negotiation of both place and one's loyalty to it.

The final stanza of the poem, taken at surface value, appears to be a nationalist rallying cry to defend the idealistic security of English homes as given in the first four stanzas from whatever forces threaten them:

> The free, fair Homes of England!
> Long, long, in hut and hall,
> May hearts of native proof be rear'd
> To guard each hallow'd wall![313]

And yet the opening quotation from Scott has already drawn this depiction into questions of allegiance, nationhood, and the interference of England in foreign affairs. The home of a mature Hemans is thrown against English colonialist practices and so deconstructed as a less-than-secure domestic space that cannot stand as a representation of England as a nation. A tinge of irony follows in the closing lines:

> And green for ever be the groves,
> And bright the flowery sod,
> Where first the child's glad spirit loves

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[313] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Homes of England," ll. 33-6.

Its country and its God! [314]

In the conventional Hemans domestic dynamic, the mother figure is closely aligned with the education of the young. This would garner her much praise in her life as the woman-teacher became a well-known image associated with domestic stability and the continued success of English projects—both at home and abroad—a kind of solid base on which English nationhood can be built. Yet the children in the final stanza are being reared as defenders of peace, a paradoxical view of soldiery that had already been deeply questioned by the Romantic period as poor working class individuals were forced into the military to fight both domestic and foreign wars orchestrated by members of a cash-based martial and political elite that excluded those same working class soldiers from rank and privilege.[315] The makeup of the English fighting force was fraught with perils for the same people who could occupy Hemans's idealistic homes. The woman-teacher figure, then, is made complicit by the poem as they are the ones who will teach the children to 'love their country and their God,' those same children who will eventually die horrifically to protect it. The pastoral beauty of "The Homes of England" hinges on the death and violence of its residents, hardly the image of simplicity and content the opening stanzas of the poem depict; the domestic bower of the mature Hemans must be actively guarded against outside forces, rendering it wholly un-bower-like.

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[314] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Homes of England," ll. 37-40.

[315] At the time, commissions in the British army past the rank of sergeant (only one rank above that of private) had to be literally 'purchased,' paid for in cash or promised assets, thus excluding all working class soldiers from promotion (the commissions usually cost in the thousands of pounds, or several hundred times what a working class British laborer would make in a year). On occasion a soldier could be commissioned based on merit and the purchase waived, but these occasions were exceedingly rare. The leadership of the British Army, from the highest to the lowliest ranks, was a gentrified one. The list of books that detail the intricacies of the British armed forces during and after the Napoleonic Campaigns is seemingly endless, but for a solid scholarly account, read any of the several treatments on the subject by Philip Haythornthwaite and other guest authors, such as *Napoleonic Weapons and Warfare: Napoleonic Infantry* (London: Cassel & Co, 2001), or, for a broader reference, *The Encyclopedia of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: A Political, Social, and Military History, in Three Volumes*, edited by Gregory Fremont-Barnes (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006).

The second 'home' poem of the *Records of Woman*, "The Spells of Home," *begins* with the act of guarding the idealistic image as the first stanza ends with the home "Holy and precious-oh! guard it well!"[316] And yet the fragility and the need to protect the home-space is maximized by depictions of it as the seat of not only domestic but divine bliss. A quotation from Bernard Barton introduces the poem:

> There blend the ties that strengthen
> Our hearts in hours of grief,
> The silver links that lengthen
> Joy's visits when most brief.[317]

Barton's poem—titled simply "Home"—provides a moralized treatment of home as the fountainhead of love and domestic caring one should return to continuously as a reminder of "the ties that strengthen" despite the "hours of grief" that assail the individual outside the home. Moreover, Barton's poem describes the home as a shrine, urging readers to even forgo worship "Beneath Religion's dome" to reserve true worship at "Home! dear Home!"[318] To begin a poem titled "The Spells of Home" this way is a bold move from Hemans. Her religiosity and its influence on her poetry is well documented and much of her career was reduced to a set of religious teachings for children following her death. Barton's poem suggests an allegiance to domesticity that might even replace religious duty, a sense of 'home is where the holy is.' "The Spells of Home" repeats this enshrinement of home, the guarding at the end of the first stanza a protection of not only home, but a holy land, heightening the importance of its security.

The "Spells" also extends Barton's depiction of the home as a domestic place of renewal that must be returned to, but Hemans's depiction emphasizes the role of memory in this process.

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[316] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Spells of Home," l. 8.
[317] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Spells of Home."
[318] Bernard Berton, *Poetic Vigils* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1824), "Home," ll. 46-8.

The 'spell' of the home is woven by the experiences of youth: "By the sleepy ripple of the stream, / Which hath lull'd thee into many a dream; / By the shiver of the ivy-leaves [. . .]"[319] and so on. These details construct a naturalized bower as "every sound of thy native shade" makes the spell "Stronger and dearer"[320] as the home becomes a mixture of ongoing activity and repetition through memory creating a "gift" that "hath gentle might / A guardian power and a guiding light."[321] In this poem, home extends beyond the actual domestic to erect a protective charm against the same "hours of grief" Barton names, where home is both the actual *and* religious experience of birth and youth. This domestic experience is cast as a solution to life's ills:

> Yes! when thy heart in its pride would stray
> From the pure first loves of its youth away;
> When the sullying breath of the world would come
> O'er the flowers it brought from its childhood's home;
> Think thou again of the woody glade,
> And the sound by the rustling ivy made,
> Think of the tree at thy father's door,
> And the kindly spell shall have power once more![322]

If the "sullying breath of the world" is an inescapable anathema—and the *Records* would certainly argue it is, as no space or idea, even that of nation, is free from the global interferences that both influence and threaten it—the bower of the home can act as, at the very least, a temporary balm. The "kindly spell" it casts through the weaving of youthful loving experience is akin to the religious promise of paradise as a refuge from the sufferings of life.

But there is a finality to the home of the *Records* that seems to loom over the whole. "The Graves of a Household" has received a good deal of recent postcolonial critical attention as its

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[319] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Spells of Home," ll. 9-11.
[320] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Spells of Home," ll. 15-6.
[321] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Spells of Home," ll. 25-6.
[322] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Spells of Home," ll. 33-40.

mixing of globalism, domesticity, and large expanses, including the oceans, critiques the nation-building England was involved with at the time.[323] Cast against the image of the bower, the "Graves" would seem to bend the bower almost to the point of breaking. Recasting the "ties that strengthen" at the outset, the "Graves" sets up the central conflict of the poem with a repetition of youthful experience: "They grew in beauty, side by side, / They fill'd one home with glee."[324] The unnamed individuals of the poem have, as in the "Spells," this home-built bond that would, presumably, be a reachable bower that could be returned to for renewal. However, the poem immediately counteracts this image by depicting those same home-bound individuals as already dead: "Their graves are sever'd, far and wide, / By mount, and stream, and sea."[325]

The reality of the "sever'd" graves would be well known at the time of the *Records* publication. The challenges of returning bodies of soldiers in foreign wars was part of the public discourse of the time as the resources necessary for transporting bodies back to be buried in English soil presented both a practical and ideological problem for military leaders. Even the recovery of bodies from a battlefield would become a gruesome but necessary part of wartime logistics as opposing armies would set apart time—even in the middle of days long battle—to meet on the field and separate the corpses of friend and foe before the wildlife or nearby residents could defile and strip the bodies of anything of value, including flesh.[326] On top of this, there was the issue of unrecoverable bodies—those lost at sea or those who could not be transported back for logistical reasons (most often the bodies of the poor), and the bodies of people who died in the daily course of occupying colonial territories. The religious dignity of

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[323] For an excellent example: Tricia Lootens, "Hemans and Home: Victorianism, Feminine 'Internal Enemies,' and the Domestication of National Identity," in *PMLA*, volume 109, number 2 (March, 1994): 238-253.
[324] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Graves of a Household," ll. 1-2.
[325] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Graves of a Household," ll. 3-4.
[326] See Tony Pollard, "*These spots of excavation tell*: Using Early Visitor Accounts to Map the Missing Graves of Waterloo," in *Journal of Conflict Archeology*, 16:2: 75-113.

death, then, and the associated repose of home the *Records* establishes, is rent by the opening of the "Graves."

The following two quatrains of the poem, like "The Palm-Tree," juxtapose non-English people with the people of foreign lands as the "mother" who once "bent at night / O'er each fair sleeping brow"[327] no longer has physical access to the children she reared even in death. Meanwhile, the "Indian knows [their] place of rest, / Far in the cedar shade."[328] The poem continues to describe the several children of the mother figure who have died in various places around the globe, all of whom "none [. . .] may weep" over.[329] Whatever contract of return and renewal the "Spells" has established cannot withstand the colonialist practices that have strewn the home's residents to far off places, never to return again. The poem laments this reality by further juxtaposition: one of the children "sleeps where southern vines are drest [. . .] On a blood-red field of Spain,"[330] the same child a later quatrain says "play'd / Beneath the same green tree."[331] Another, whose "voices mingled as they pray'd / Around one parent knee,"[332] now lies "midst Italian flowers" where the "myrtle showers / Its leaves."[333]

> The problem is clear as the final quatrain relates:
> They that with smiles lit up the hall,
> And cheer'd with song the hearth,-
> Alas! for love, if thou wert all,
> And nought beyond, oh, earth![334]

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[327] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Graves of a Household," ll. 5-6.
[328] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Graves of a Household," ll. 11-2.
[329] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Graves of a Household," l. 16.
[330] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Graves of a Household," ll. 17-20.
[331] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Graves of a Household," ll. 25-6.
[332] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Graves of a Household," ll. 26-7.
[333] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Graves of a Household," ll. 21-3.
[334] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Graves of a Household," ll. 29-32.

As participants in the building of the domestic bower, the children brought life and song to the place that helped fill the "home with glee" of the opening lines. But whatever "Spells" might have them return to home have been violated by something other than "love, if [it] were all, / And nought beyond." The "Graves" does not fully negate the home-as-bower as it still emphasizes this relationship between youth, memory, and renewal. Yet the home-as-bower can still fail in its promise of renewal if whatever "beyond" the home forces a severance—in this case, to the point of death—and the "ties that strengthen" are lost.

The drama of this severance is played out most keenly in "The Adopted Child" and through this drama the mother-domestic figure's capacity as both instructor and carer is thrown into disarray. The poem consists of a dialog between an adopted child and adoptive mother, each character given a sextet's worth of dialog with the mother opening the poem and the child closing it. The mother's opening establishes the conventional domestic bower image against the child's desire to return to its original home:

> "Why wouldst thou leave me, oh! gentle child?
> Thy home on the mountain is bleak and wild,
> A straw-roof'd cabin with lowly wall
> Mine is a fair and a pillar'd hall,
> Where many an image of marble gleams,
> And the sunshine of picture for ever streams."[335]

As the mother emphasizes, the child's new home is an idealized place of peace, beauty, and refuge replete with images of "marble gleams" and "sunshine." The original home of the child is portrayed as rural to the point of wild, without the comforts of the presumably semi-rural or suburban home he now lives in. In this opening stanza, the mother's desire to keep the adopted

[335] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Adopted Child," ll. 1-6.

child with her would seem a loving gesture of charity as she keeps a better home, thus fulfilling the dynamic of home-mother-child established in other poems.

The child's response is to be expected as he wishes to see "the turf where my brothers play,"[336] beseeching the mother: "Lady, kind lady! oh! let me go."[337] The next responses of both mother and child extend this discourse with the mother taking a more imperious tone, yet still presumably for the good of the child: "Content thee, boy! in my bower to dwell."[338] The child responds with talk of his own mother, "Oh! my mother sings, at the twilight's fall [. . .] I dreamt last night of that music low,"[339] identifying the crux of the poem as the adoptive mother attempts to replace the original. As the poem soon reveals, the mother "is gone from her cares to rest,"[340] the brothers "wanderers now, / They sport no more on the mountain's brow,"[341] and the original "cabin-home" of the child is now "a lonely spot."[342] The child, in a heartbreaking moment, is unable to understand the death of his own mother—"Is my mother gone from her home away?"[343]—yet by the final stanza seems to concede that his original home is now empty: "Are they gone, all gone from the sunny hill?"[344] By the final stanza, the new mother has fulfilled her domestic role as both carer and teacher, urging the child to stay under her protection—however imperious it may be—and instructing him in the death and exodus of his own family.

But the final stanza leaves the rift between the adoptive mother's new domestic bower and the original open:

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[336] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Adopted Child," l. 7.
[337] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Adopted Child," l. 12.
[338] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Adopted Child," l. 13.
[339] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Adopted Child," ll. 19-20.
[340] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Adopted Child," l. 25.
[341] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Adopted Child," ll. 37-8.
[342] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Adopted Child," l. 42.
[343] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Adopted Child," l. 31.
[344] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Adopted Child," l. 43.

> "Are they gone, all gone from the sunny hilI?-
> But the bird and the blue-fly rove o'er it still;
> And the red-deer bound in their gladness free,
> And the heath is bent by the singing bee,
> And the waters leap, and the fresh winds blow,-
> Lady, kind lady! oh! let me go."[345]

Acquiescing that whatever "ties that strengthen" in the original home have been lost, the child nevertheless hopes to return to it. The ecological milieu of the place still holds sway over him and holds the promise of fulfilling something the new mother's domestic space cannot. What the "cabin-home" constitutes the poem never explains, but the boy cannot be content to dwell in the new bower despite the new mother's order to do so. The poem dramatizes the after-effects of the pastoral "golden-age" of childhood, an association established by Peter Marinelli's *Pastoral*. In Marinelli's model, childhood reflects the 'simplicity' of the "golden-age" via innocence.[346] Wordsworth's poetry spends much time reflecting a younger self, and the critical conversations on Wordsworth's treatment of childhood are legion. The most readily apparent reasoning follows the line of Schiller's naive poet; as the naive child matures into the adult poet, the adult must look back in a sentimental way. But in Schiller's dichotomy, the naive is always a 'truer' or 'purer' form of reflection than the sentimental as he explores the question of "the pleasure humans take in nature."[347] For Schiller, "natural objects display a harmony and unity that we feel we once enjoyed and, as rational creatures, have lost."[348] The question of naive and sentimental is one of looking outwards to the other.

In Hemans, the adopted child is bent on retrieving this "lost" pleasure. Despite the associations between home and bower established by the other poems of the *Records*, "The

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[345] Hemans, *Records of Woman*, "Miscellaneous Pieces," "The Adopted Child," ll. 43-8.
[346] Marinelli, *Pastoral*, chapter 5.
[347] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Friedrich Schiller," "Naive and Sentimental Poetry."
[348] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Friedrich Schiller," "Naive and Sentimental Poetry."

Adopted Child" supplants the actual place of home, now readily available, with the *memory* of what a home is (and by the child's terms, should be). Hemans's bower, then, is less about the living "ties that strengthen" and more about the experiential promise of place that cannot be fulfilled elsewhere. Thus the poem ends with the child still pleading "Lady, kind lady! oh! let me go" while the new mother is incapable of enacting the experiential promise through an act of simple replacement. Another home will not do, just as the Indian boy's affect in "The Palm-Tree" is a response to a reminder of his own remembered bower and the impossibility of his new home—Britain writ large, as the poem establishes—to provide the same opportunity for rest and renewal. Through these poems Hemans reflects on the promises the images of women and home she helped create, critiquing them as fruitless constructions. In this light, the poems are remarkably honest and seem to contain at least a kernel of Hemans's acknowledgment of the limitations of her own project to carve out a bower.

Charlotte Smith

With Charlotte Smith we return to a Robinson-esque figure. Her meteoric rise to fame began with her *Elegiac Sonnets*, first written and published in 1784 from a debtor's prison. Her husband, Benjamin Smith, was a degenerate spendthrift who spent a large portion of his father's estate, despite it being willed to their children, for which he was imprisoned. Smith joined him in prison and wrote the sonnets as a means of securing enough money for her husband's release. The sonnets were a resounding success and were credited at the time as reviving the sonnet form in the English language.[349] She was one of the most widely read poets of her day and was able to make a living solely through her writing, despite her husband's profligacy and her own poor health that continuously plagued her until her death.[350] Like Robinson, Smith hinged her livelihood on her acknowledged literary merit and was, under these dire circumstances, successful at keeping her children from the poorhouses. Also like Robinson, Smith leveraged her newfound celebrity to her advantage, creating a public identity that would help define the very image of the Romantic poet and would, in the end, sell books.

Smith's problem with her husband, and the sundry other problems that accompanied it, became part of her public persona. The introductions of the various *Elegiac Sonnets* editions weave a narrative about her as a victimized woman who must seek out the help of the public to aid in her private woes. This is hardly an exaggeration. Despite her obvious portrayals of Benjamin's acts against her via male characters in her novels—analogies that even in her day

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[349] As Donelle R. Ruwe explains in "Benevolent Brothers and Supervising Mother: Ideology in the Children's Verses of Mary and Charles Lamb and Charlotte Smith," in *Children's Literature*, volume 25 (1997): 109.

[350] Her children would not actually receive the proceeds from her father-in-law's estate until seven years after her death, as Benjamin Smith would tie the funds up in litigation. This is largely due to the primogeniture laws that were still active in England which allowed Benjamin to continue to access the funds even though they were not willed to him. For these and other biographical details, see Sarah M. Zimmerman, "Smith [née Turner], Charlotte (1749-1806). Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/25790.

were easily perceived—the actual behavior of her husband was probably far worse than she let on.[351] However, these very public lamentations would at times draw criticism, including from Mary Robinson, and the image of the woe-begotten woman would become a comical figure in many circles. Despite this, Smith was able to, like Hemans, craft a public image of womanhood that largely aided in her success, despite whatever her personal feelings were.[352]

Smith's impact on Romanticism—and British literature more generally—cannot be understated. Despite being relegated to esoterica by the Victorian critics and historians as they established the Bix Six male Romantic poets—a fate Wordsworth predicted when, acknowledging the influence Smith had on his own writing, wrote in a letter that "English verse is under greater obligations [to her] than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered"[353]—Smith's crucial role in shaping our understanding of Romanticism, particularly 'Wordsworthian' Romanticism, has been explored by a number of critics in the last few decades. In a sly bit of creative criticism, Jacqueline Labbe even turns the conventional bases for Romanticism on their head:

> It is my contention that if we read Smith alongside her important, if understudied contemporary, then something truly novel happens: we begin to understand more, not just about the Romantic writing each undertook, but about how each undertook to write the Romantic. In other words, despite the legible shorthand that mandates a common reading of the Smithian, it is time to see what happens if we unpick this to find how much of the "Wordsworthian," to coin a term, cohabits the construct.[354]

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[351] A "much more thoroughgoing scoundrel than Smith ever created," as Judith Phillips Stanton puts it. *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, edited by Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), xxii.

[352] Based on extant personal papers and correspondence, Smith actually seemed to abhor the idea of being thought of strictly as a 'woman poet' or, worse, as a 'poetess.' However, she was able to use chivalric notions of the protection of women to her advantage as she simultaneously asked for pity and demanded acknowledgement on the basis of her literary merit, as Jacqueline Labbe argues in *Writing Romanticism*, 9.

[353] William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, Vol. VII*, edited by William Angus Knight, 351.

[354] Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, 2.

A Wordsworthian Romanticism is indeed as much Smith's as it is Wordsworth's as her poetry explores personal memory, selfhood, nature, and the political questions of her day through largely experimental means.

It is perhaps experimentation that best defines the evolution of Smith's work and her lofty place among the Romantics. Each edition of the *Elegiac Sonnets* included rafts of new poetry that toyed with sonnet form in varied and surprising ways, even as it firmly set her poems among the illustrious names of the literary past, much as Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon* did.[355] She fully embraced the sentimental novel form and created hugely popular works that helped define the genre for decades to come, even as they explored the rising mode of Gothicism.[356] But it is one of her final poems, *Beachy Head*, that embodies her use of experimentation and sets her apart.

Beachy Head—one of the last poems she wrote, published posthumously in 1807 in *Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems*—is a Romantic tour de force whose literary merit is still only just being realized by critics. Consisting of 731 lines of blank verse,[357] it has been called by one critic a "poet's poem"[358] because of the ambitiousness and scope of its project, the beauty of its imagery, and the deftness of its traversal of layers of meaning. The poem details the poet's dwelling-in-place on Beachy Head, the southernmost point of the British Isle. The actual place itself is a large, white chalk headland that overlooks the English Channel. By the time of *Beachy Head's* writing, the headland was notable among naturalists as the chalk helped preserve numerous fossils from as far back as the late Cretaceous period and captured the passage of

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[355] By, for instance, naming Petrarch in the titles to several of the sonnets.

[356] Smith is also credited with being one of the major innovators of the Gothic novel, alongside writers such as Ann Radcliffe and Horace Walpole.

[357] Unrhymed iambic pentameter. See earlier note on Wordsworth and the search for the English epic form.

[358] Donelle Ruwe, "Charlotte Smith's Beachy Head and the Lyric Mode," in *Pedagogy*, volume 16, issue 2 (April, 2016): 300.

geological time in its rocky coastal formations.[359] It had also developed a measure of Romantic mystique as a place of mystery, passage, and even suicide. *Beachy Head* captures the naturalist and historicist bent of Smith and the Romantic era as a whole as it enthusiastically—even belligerently—uses notation styled after scientific discourses to expand the context of the poem to engage with the rising sciences of geology and evolutionary biology to take the long historical view of early nineteenth century Britain. Though its opening advertisement states that, due to the "increasing debility of its author" the poem was not in fact ever finished, the publishers hoped readers would still attest to "the most unquestionable evidence of the same undiminished genius, spirit, and imagination, which so imminently distinguished [Smith's] former productions."[360] Complete or not, *Beachy Head* was sold as the capstone of Smith's poetic career and proved quite popular after its publication.[361]

The poem begins with the poet looking out from the crest of Beachy Head, but then pondering the ecology of the place, the laborers and people that reside there, the poet's own memories, and her philosophical attempts to cope with looming death which, at the time of its writing, was a very real care for Smith. As a bower poem, *Beachy Head* ruthlessly deconstructs the promises of protected spaces and any attempt at poetic repose as its spatial and temporal shifts extend the poet's reach to global arenas and deep time. But, as with Hemans, Smith offers the possibility of escape by the end of the poem, albeit in a much darker mien than Hemans's.

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[359] It's fitting that *Beachy Head* appears at the end of this discussion as its significance to geologists is well known. The geologists who now wrangle over the term "Anthropocene" are of the same ilk in Smith's day that began reading stratification as the narrative of the planet. Dana Luciano has explored how "geology, for many nineteenth-century subjects, promised abundance" as planetary time opened up the possibilities of history to an almost frightening degree. It's no small wonder that this area of abundance would suggest imaginative possibilities for Smith. Dana Luciano, "Out of Time," in *Victorian Studies*, volume 64, number 3 (Spring, 2022), p. 434.

[360] Charlotte Smith, *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, edited by Stuart Curran (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Advertisement," p. 215.

[361] As the advertisement relates. Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Advertisement," p. 215.

Though the poem begins on Beachy Head, the sense of bound place is immediately overthrown:

> On thy stupendous summit, rock sublime!
> That o'er the channel rear'd, halfway at sea
> The mariner at early morning hails,
> I would recline; while Fancy should go forth,
> And represent the strange and awful hour
> Of vast concussion; when the Omnipotent
> Stretch'd forth his arm, and rent the solid hills,
> Bidding the impetuous main flood rush between
> The rifted shores, and from the continent
> Eternally divided this green isle.[362]

Though the "I" of the poem is introduced within the first four lines, the "vast concussion"—to the understanding of geologists of the time, an unknown force that broke off the British Isle from continental Europe—immediately interrupts the immediacy of place in the poem and establishes the overall push-and-pull of the poem as a whole as it constantly shifts spatially and temporally.[363] This early juxtaposition is key as, in the end, *Beachy Head* cannot simply be called a 'place poem' as, in high Romantic fashion, the poet's subjective witnessing of place is never entirely subsumed by the place itself. Beachy Head also pervades the poem while giving way to the many subjects that cross it, standing as both the "rock sublime" while also a continuously read record, a nexus of activity that precedes and will succeed even as the poem ends. This mixture of abstract and concrete, the self and the place it resides, and the self and the other touches on the overall character of the poem.

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[362] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 1-10.

[363] Dana Luciano, discussing the work of Wai Chee Dimock, notes that it "highlights the developing geological imaginary and other currents of deep time in an attempt to undo the constraints of the habitual reproduction of nationhood." This moment speaks to Luciano and Dimock as it renders the separation of England and France as geological activity—nonhuman—even as human activity would keep the nations distinct. "Geological Fantasies, Haunting Anachronies: Eros, Time, and History in Harriet Prescott Spofford's 'The Amber Gods,'" in *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, volume 55, number 3-4 (2009), p. 276.

Despite the immediate transcendence of Beachy Head by the look back into the deep geological time of its formation, Smith introduces loco-description to ground *Beachy Head* and the "I": "I would mark / Far in the east the shades of night disperse,"[364] and with that dispersal comes a catalogic description of the immediate moment wherein the poem takes place. The "Melting and thinned" colors of the night contain the "rippling tide of flood," "the sands," and the "inmates of the chalky clefts," the "terns, and gulls, and tarrocks"[365] who have already begun hunting in the dawn light. Locodescription maintains the pace of placeness as when, later in the poem after a long meditative passage, the poem pointedly turns back to the immediate surroundings: "How gladly the reflecting mind returns / To simple scenes of peace and industry."[366]

By grounding the poem in the ecological milieu of Beachy Head, the lines emphasize boundness and containment, even as it careens off into reflection. More distinctively, the milieu also provides closeness. Kristin M. Girten has argued that one of the key components of Smithian poetics is its closing of the distance between self and other; if the modern self is partly characterized by the drive for a buffering distance between the subject and object, Smith closes this distance by, among other things, a fascinating use of tactile descriptors on top of visual and auditory ones.[367] When describing the work of slaves to pry pearls from the sea bed, tactility closes the distance between the slave labor and the object of the labor:

> the round pearl
> Enchased in rugged covering; which the slave,
> With perilous and breathless toil, tears off

[364] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 12-3.
[365] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 14, 19, 20, 23.
[366] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 168-9.
[367] Kristin M. Girten, "Charlotte Smith's Tactile Poetics," in *The Eighteenth Century*, volume 54, number 2 (Summer, 2013): 215-230.

From the rough sea-rock, deep beneath the waves.[368]

As Girten has argued, this tactility reduces the layers of abstraction between subject and object, in this case graphically realizing the relationship between the enslaved and the labor quite literally close at hand.[369] By so doing, Smith is able to demonstrate through a performative action how the politics and economics of early nineteenth-century England shape Beachy Head in a different yet no less significant way as the "vast concussion" once did.

The politics of Smith are never far off[370]—through much of her poetry and novels but especially in *Beachy Head*—as the poem critiques the labor practices that interrupt the being-in-place of the poem as much as it interrupts the being-in-place of living there. Following a description of the cove and its myriad avian residents that Beachy Head overlooks, a "ship of commerce richly freighted" is spied on its way to "the orient climates."[371] As with Hemans, colonialist practices stretch the purview of the poem past any attempts at fixing it to a home-like place and, by so doing, reflects itself back on those practices that leads to the enslaving of others in an effort to secure pearls that, though "Glancing resplendent on the regal crown, / Or trembling in the high born beauty's ear," are nevertheless "poor and paltry, to the lovely light / Of the fair star."[372] Just as in Clare's "Lament of Swordy Well," loco-description provides a means for both retaining a centralized locale for the poem but also launching into blistering

[368] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 51-4.
[369] This moment could also be seen as an enactment of the kind of dialog with ecology that Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley describe that could help counter the "decoupling of nature and history [that] has helped to mystify colonialism's histories of forced migration, suffering, and human violence." In this moment, Smith forcefully *re*couples nature and history to uncover the slave elided by colonialist history. *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, edited by Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.
[370] Nor are they for Mary Robinson and other female authors of the age, as is the basis for Amy Garnai's *Revolutionary Imaginings*.
[371] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 42-4.
[372] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 71-2.

critiques of the activities that threaten the objects of loco-description. For Clare, the threat to his boyhood heath is immediate as the parish's enclosure of it causes extensive damage to its fragile ecological system. For Smith's Beachy Head, economic practices threaten the ecological sublimity the poem opens with as the "Reason" of industry that drives slavery overrides "the toys of Nature" as "her sport" is "Of little estimate in Reason's eye."[373] Industry, as it were, stands as anathema to Beachy Head's naturalness and, through the distortions of time in space in describing the slave and "ship of commerce," to the naturalness of the globe, a prescient estimation in the time when the ecological disastrousness of the Industrial Revolution was just starting to be witnessed. As a part of the threat to Beachy Head's ecology, even the pastoral work of a shepherd who "Drive[s] to thy turfy crest his bleating flock"[374] as the shepherd acts as a lookout for the contraband smugglers who use Beachy Head as their berth. Human activities that stand more in balance with the ecologies of the place[375] are also at risk as the relentless activity of colonial and industrial activity breaks apart both the poem and the place of Beachy Head.

These same illegal labors will also interrupt Hemans's proposed domestic bowerism as the "one, who sometimes watches on the heights," his "crook abandoning," also abandons his children who "share / The rugged shed" of his home.[376] The pastoral home cannot withstand the dual roles the shepherd/smuggler plays who would be better off as "the hind, / Who, with his own hands rears on some black moor [. . .] his independent hut."[377] The "sacred freedom" that has been stolen from the slave also appears stolen from the shepherd whose home itself is violated by the larger economic practices of the era that cannot sustain an "independent hut."

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[373] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," l. 56.
[374] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," l. 28.
[375] Despite Clare's own witness to the sometimes wanton destruction accompanying rural labor.
[376] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 198-9.
[377] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 193-5.

More alarming still, the violence of this process extends outwards to the wild creatures as well. When the residents of the shepherd's hut take to the moors in the spring to "live / Joint tenants of the waste throughout the day";[378] "They scare the plover, that with plaintive cries / Flutters, as sorely wounded, down the wind."[379] As in Clare's roadside nest, the daily survival of the birds is interrupted by the nearby activities of rural laborers, and another home severed from its security by unintended yet destructive activity. The poem then doubles back on its claim of the shepherd's loss of freedom by emphasizing a *lack* of moral affect on the part of the shepherd: "But he is free; / The dread that follows on illegal acts / He never feels."[380] But this seems largely due to his wife—named in a naturalist fashion as "his industrious mate"[381]—who "Shares in his labour" and "wades; gathering the long green rush / That well prepar'd hereafter lends its light / To her poor cottage."[382] Her labor provides a bridge from the colonialist activities of smuggling to the quotidian work of rural life that, though technically idyllic and pastoral, contains "Scenes all unlike the poet's fabling dreams / Describing Arcady."[383] Smith turns poiesis against itself by openly signifying the non poetic nature Beachy Head labors, bending genre even as she complicates the freedom of the so-named "savage life"[384] of the Beachy Head shepherd. While Beachy Head may be retained through more conventional ecological loco-description as a pastoral landscape, the agency of the people in it—poet included—complicates the pastoral pastiche and renders it distinctly non-pastoral as the burgeoning economic practices of modern life cross it.

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[378] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 201-2.
[379] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 205-6.
[380] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 210-2.
[381] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," l. 212.
[382] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 216-8.
[383] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 209-10.
[384] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," l. 207.

The genre-bending of *Beachy Head* is most prominent—and most famous—in its use of notes. Several reasons for the extensive note-taking have been proposed. During Charlotte Smith's lifetime, scientific discourse began to resemble the conventional academic forms of today as intellectuals used notation to engage in conversational-style writing through citation, reference, and cross-reference. Unsurprisingly, this written dialogic mode was dominated by men as it grew out of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century intellectual circles that were often critical—or at least reticent—of women's participation.[385] The notation of *Beachy Head* is an effective way for Smith to bridge poetry with naturalist modes; a genre that is open to women with a genre that is largely not. Smith was known for openly contending in male-dominated fields, especially publishing, where she demanded minimally equal footing with men. Extant correspondence portrays Smith as wholly confident in her writing and so forthright in her monetary and publishing requirements that to our knowledge publishers—rightly so, due to her popularity—would inevitably pay her whatever she asked for new poems and novels.[386] So too did she participate in legal discourses as she fought for decades with her husband's lawyers to secure the funds from her father-in-law's will that were due, despite primogeniture, to her children. On a more personal level, there is rife evidence that Smith considered even the appellation of 'woman author' or, far worse, 'poetess,' as utterly distasteful,[387] although she, like Robinson and Hemans, would leverage her position as a woman—specifically, a victim of primogeniture and her husband's depraved behavior—to sell books and critique the gendering of

[385] Such as Donna Landry explains in "Green Languages? Women Poets as Naturalists in 1653 and 1807." In *Huntington Library Quarterly*, volume 63, number 4, "Forging Connections: Women's Poetry from the Renaissance to Romanticism (2000): 467-489.
[386] Smith's correspondence with publishers—and the result that "most of [them agreed] to give her advances, and indeed, most kept running accounts for her" is explained by Stanton in the introduction to the *Collected Letters*, xvi.
[387] Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, 9.

status of her day. Taking the long view of history, she hoped to be remembered alongside canonical male poets as, simply, a poet.[388]

And yet these gender-based explanations, though most certainly true, do not fully account for the surprising use of notation in *Beachy Head*, which, for instance, contains a single note on the history of Scandinavian expeditions in Britain and Normandy some 610 words long: an appended essay, really. The notations as a whole range from the taxonomical—for example, the noting of the Latin names of the flora and fauna depicted in the poem[389]—to the imagaic—for example, in her description of the Isle of Wight: "Every cottage in this country has its orchard; and I imagine that not even those of Herefordshire, or Worcestershire, exhibit a more beautiful prospect, when the trees are in bloom, and the 'Primavera Candida e vermiglia,' is every where so enchanting."[390] In a sense, both the taxonomical and imagaic references—and the many notes that span both—extend the loco-description of the poem by layering in details. The poem grounds and regrounds itself in Beachy Head through these means; the taxonomical notes play the vital role of keeping the place in the cold confines of science, the imagaic ones read as prose extensions to the poiesis. Dana Luciano has explained how geology, a relatively new science in Smith's day, suggested a sense of the limitlessness of planetary time.[391] Smith's own layers of notes resemble a geological stratification: a single line can have a 610 word note that greatly deepens the purview of the image and place. In other words, in *Beachy Head* there is always something beneath the surface, waiting to be dug up. The notes do just this.

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[388] Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, 9-10.
[389] "Key to the poets' use of category," per Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, 148.
[390] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," footnote on p. 230. Curran notes that this is quote from Petrarch's Sonnet 310.
[391] Luciano, "Out of Time," p. 434.

They contain references to fictional works, such as Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*, and nonfictional references, such as Robert Percival's *View of Ceylon*,[392] that create layers of referential meaning that both place the poem in established poetic traditions and displace it into academic realms such as history. Moreover, the more referential notes, particularly those on historical and geological moments of the poem, are often far from purely referential, as, at the outset of the poem, the "vast concussion" contains the footnote:

> Alluding to an idea that this Island was once joined to the continent of Europe, and torn from it by some convulsion of Nature. I confess I never could trace the resemblance between the two countries. Yet the cliffs about Dieppe, resemble the chalk cliffs on the Southern coast. But Normandy has no likeness whatever to the part of England opposite to it.[393]

It is worth noting that this moment was marked in the original publication with an unexpected Latin cross symbol (†) as a means to offset it from other notations on the first page. The notes are, therefore, active, a means for Smith to engage with material that perhaps did not square with the blank verse of the poem and yet still alters its reading, sometimes quite significantly, as when above she both casts doubt on the 'vast concussion' theory that separated England from continental Europe while also further describing the actual look of Beachy Head and the other cliffs of southern England. By so doing, references help create an audience—as one critic has described, a "virtual community"[394]—as, like academic discourse, it signals to readers a referential network and its participants. Though *Beachy Head* may be a 'poet's poem,' it reaches past an audience of poem-readers and pulls in multiple interests and disciplines, expanding the

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[392] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," footnotes on pp. 225 and 219, respectively. Curran notes the accepted name for Percival's work, *An Account of the Island of Ceylon* (1803).
[393] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," footnote on p. 217.
[394] Mary Anne Myers, "Unsexing Petrarch: Charlotte Smith's Lessons in the Sonnet as a Social Medium," in *Studies in Romanticism*, volume 53, number 2 (Summer, 2014): 239.

purview of the poem's boundaries while directing its readers elsewhere, deep into literary history.

One certainty is that *Beachy Head* extends Smith's experimental verse projects to the extreme. *Beachy Head* contains no less than four separate genres throughout its lines—the elegiac (and the lyric more generally), the epic, the pastoral, and the georgic—and likely far more. These shifting generic moments, though all delivered in blank verse, are marked by references to other works[395] and the signaling of generic conventions.[396] *Beachy Head* has incredible range as genre and form are played with, and the notationary style of the poem helps support these experiments by creating its own virtual network of convention and historical literacy; the poem expects its readers to either know or be willing to pursue its many references and, by so doing, explore the works and genres that gird the whole. Never static, *Beachy Head* makes the reader complicit in its own meaning-making.

Finally, the notations play a similarly interruptive role as the temporal, spatial, and philosophical shifts. Stuart Curran's modern edition of *Beachy Head* uses footnotes to better integrate the notes into the verse itself. The original publication of *Beachy Head* relegated the notations to the end of the poem, though it is worth mentioning that Smith had less to do with the publication in its final form as it was published some six months after her death. In either case, reading the poem suggests that paratext pervades the verse,[397] that the lines are not all there is

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[395] Such as the reference to Petrarch in the description of the country cottages of Beachy Head: see quote and note above on the footnote on p. 230.

[396] Kari Lokke focuses on the elegiac mode as it inhabits the sentimental one in the final portions of Beachy Head, drawing on conventions of each to signal to readers the experimental layering of genres the poem constructs. "The Figure of the Hermit in Charlotte Smith's 'Beachy Head,'" in *The Wordsworth Circle*, volume 39, number 1/2 (Winter/Spring, 2008): 38-43. John M. Anderson goes further by defining the poem as a "mosaic" in that it pieces together genre and form throughout its lines. "*Beachy Head*: The Romantic Fragment Poem as Mosaic," in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, volume 63, number 4, "Forging Connections: Women's Poetry from the Renaissance to Romanticism" (2000): 547-574.

[397] Amy Garnai attributes this to "the anxiety that invariably accompanies the presentation of a reformist narrative in a time of political impression." *Revolutionary Imaginings*, 44.

and that the full experience of the poem requires further digging; in essence, the poem is stratified. For instance, when describing the surrounding landscape, the poem references "the holy pile" of Battle Abbey.[398] Reading just the lines provides a loco-description that delves into the Norman conquests that helped shape Beachy Head and its surrounding vistas, but to read the note is to be transported both through history and through cultural practice into a more nuanced and richer understanding of the significance of the "holy pile" in the place of Beachy Head: "Battle Abbey was raised by the Conqueror, and endowed with an ample revenue, that masses might be said night and day for the souls of those who perished in battle."[399] Not only are we provided a foray into recent centuries of history, the note signals auditory details otherwise missing from the landscape, piecing together an imagined collage that mixes the present with the past, constructed shapes with the fields, and the natural details of the scene—readily apparent to the poet-recorder—with depictions of violence, rite, and ceremony.

This shifting perspective and scope is indicative of the frenetic energy of *Beachy Head* as a whole. Place is never bound as the point of view expands and contracts, at times prompted by the objects of the place, at times prompted from the poet's own musings. When "gladly the reflecting mind returns / To simple scenes of peace and industry," this return does not last long as the shepherd-smuggler interrupts the "simple scenes" some eight lines later. As the description of the shepherd-smuggler continues, it too is interrupted by the historical accounts of battle provided earlier in the poem as the winter fires of the family are associated with the "hostile war-fires flashing to the sky"[400] which the associated note explains are "The Beacons formerly lighted on the hills to give notice of the approach of an enemy" in lieu of the semaphore early

[398] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," l. 138.
[399] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," footnote on p. 223.
[400] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," l. 228.

warning systems being rendered useless by weather.[401] The poem, never content to stay in one time or place, waffles among multiple modes. The impression is that this place, however real and fixed, is rendered mutable by description, activity, reference, and the interruption of whatever mode currently dominates. Beachy Head is rendered less a place, more a confluence of movements both real and imagined. It contains the comings-and-goings of its people and expands the edges of the containment through association. The agencies that help shape the place's activity—economical, historical, etc.—are opposed to the non-agential forces, such as the "vast concussion," that shape the place's physical makeup, but neither is in control of the other as both blend to make the imagined reality of Beachy Head, a poetic demonstration of Morton's "mesh" that nevertheless maintains the planet as a 'something else.'

But what is the place of Beachy Head to the poet? The poetic impulse of the poem builds as the halfway point of the poem approaches. A central concern of the poet arrives in a question:

> Ah! who *is* happy? Happiness! a word
> That like false fire, from marsh effluvia born,
> Misleads the wanderer, destin'd to contend
> In the world's wilderness, with want or woe—[402]

The moment is reminiscent of the introductory material of the *Elegiac Sonnets* that emphasizes the ongoing suffering of the poet, here mixed with the loco-descriptive ecology of the moors that surround Beachy Head. It is the first question the poem proposes and arrives in a brief moment of uninterrupted meditative inquiry as the poet moves from descriptions of the shepherd-smuggler's family to broader musings on the naive states of both the children and the shepherd-smuggler, named a "sturdy hind, who stands / Gazing, with looks where envy and contempt / Are

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[401] The semaphore warning system was a technological innovation of the era as inflated bladders, usually made of animal skins, were raised and lowered to form coded messages, a preceder of the modern telegraph system.
[402] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 255-8.

often strangely mingled"[403] on his own children who play in the fields. The poet is prompted by these images to suss out the apparent conflict of the happiness of children and the sullenness of the parent that seems diametrically opposed to the whimsy of the bower:

> *He* knows not
> How frequently the child of Luxury
> Enjoying nothing, flies from place to place
> In chase of pleasure that eludes his grasp;
> And that content is e'en less found by him,
> Than by the labourer.[404]

The "sturdy hind" presents a quandary. His pastoral labor, mixed with larger global economics, does not suffice to provide a protected space of rural existence, as it does in Clare, nor does the domesticity of his "independent hut" protect him from the nexus of activities that open his home to the world. Nor can imagined or real elsewheres provide succor, as they do for Robinson's Sappho, as the shepherd-smuggler's state of *not* knowing precludes any opportunity of looking beyond his immediate surroundings. It could be argued that the "ship of commerce" allows him space to reach past Beachy Head, but the ship and the colonialist practices it represents are so mixed with his pastoral labor that the pastoral is rendered tainted and the opportunity for transport from the tinge of his residence. Beachy Head is, for the shepherd-smuggler, inescapable—less a bower, more a prison—and so the poet must investigate the character of the figure as he wallows in unhappiness even while witnessing the joy of his own children. To emphasize the juxtaposition, the poem continues:

> Yet *they* are happy, who have never ask'd
> What good or evil means. The boy
> That on the river's margin gaily plays,
> Has heard that Death is there—He knows not Death,

[403] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 239-41.
[404] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 244-9.

And therefore fears it not.[405]

The poet at first plays with the idea of knowledge and naivete as the seats of unhappiness and happiness, respectively, proposing that the boy can "gaily play" because he has no reckoning of the threats that pervade the place. So, too, the "village girl is happy, who sets forth / To distant fair, gay in her Sunday suit,"[406] until, as the poem soon proposes, the seat of future unhappiness is sprung on the girl. She is pursued in her wanderings by a "rural lovers' oaths / Of constant faith, and still increasing love,"[407] until:

Ah! yet a while, and half those oaths believ'd,
Her happiness is vanish'd; and the boy
While yet a stripling, finds the sound he lov'd
Has led him on, till he has given up
His freedom, and his happiness together.[408]

The moment is autobiographical, as a reader would readily interpret, as issues of a boy/man's unfaithfulness "drowns"[409] the girl in future misery, playing on the narrative of the *Sonnets* Smith crafted and suggesting the suffering that plagues the later life of the poet. Yet *Beachy Head* turns the narrative against itself. Though the poem goes on to reiterate the *Sonnets's* tale, "childhood scarcely passed, I was condemned, / A guiltless exile,"[410] it also offers an alternative narrative as it focuses on the seat of happiness: "*I* once was happy, when while yet a child, / I learn'd to love these upland solitudes."[411] The material of happiness that was taken from the poet is tied to place and solitude, to the materiality of Beachy Head that can only be accessed via

[405] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 259-63.
[406] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 270-1.
[407] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 275-6.
[408] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 277-81.
[409] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," l. 275.
[410] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 287-8.
[411] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 282-3.

"Memory, [which] with faithful pencil, drew / The contrast."[412] The moment has, at this point, become a convention of Wordsworthian/Smithian Romanticism: the memory of childhood is the crux of mature notions of beauty and bliss as the subject turns to objects to only turn back inward. But placeness is fixed still as the "contrast" is emphasized when the poet regards "the polluted smoky atmosphere / And dark and stifling streets" of urban England.[413] Place, mixed with memory, simultaneously offers a place of reprieve even as it emphasizes the current unhappiness of the poet:

> —Haunts of my youth!
> Scenes of fond day dreams, I behold ye yet!
> Where 'twas so pleasant by thy northern slopes
> To climb the winding sheep-path.[414]

The place provides succor but haunts the poet; the "scenes of fond day dreams" are beheld even as the poem reiterates that the poet only "once was happy." The place alone cannot by sustained as a bower as its permeated borders allow in everything from global slaveries to the haunting memories that highlight current miseries through contrast. What follows is the firmest establishment of place in the poem yet as the point-of-view "Advancing higher"[415] towards Beachy Head's crest takes in both the rural developments of the area—the "village church," the "lowly roofs of thatch," and the "orchards"—mixed with the natural features—the "rude arms of trees," "partial copses," and "little nameless stream."[416] The section precedes the crux of the poem, a moment where the poet attempts to reconcile the place of Beachy Head with the remembered happiness of youth:

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[412] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 289-90.
[413] Presumably London, though it is not named in the poem, as Smith spent much of her unhappy marriage in Cheapside near the Turner family seat, a locale she would come to despise. Zimmerman, *ODB* entry for Charlotte Smith.
[414] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 297-300.
[415] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," l. 309.
[416] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 310, 313, 317, 314, 321, 323.

> An early worshipper at Nature's shrine,
> I loved her rudest scenes—warrens, and heaths,
> And yellow commons, and birch-shaded hollows,
> And hedge rows, bordering unfrequented lanes
> Bowered with wild roses, and the clasping woodbine
> Where purple tassels of the tangling vetch*
> With bittersweet, and bryony inweave,†
> And the dew fills the silver bindweed's○ cups—
> I loved to trace the brooks whose humid banks
> Nourish the harebell, and the freckled pagil;‡
> And stroll among o'ershadowing woods of beech
> [. . .]
> Ah! hills so early loved! in fancy still
> I breathe your pure keen air; and still behold
> Those widely spreading views, mocking alike
> The Poet and the Painter's utmost art.[417]

This moment is strongly pastoral in its evocation of a "golden-age," one that not only emphasizes the ecological formations of the present but the imaginative associations of lost youth.[418] The notations—reproduced here similarly to how they appeared in the original publication—continue to mix the recollections with explanations of each object and their taxonomical designations (for instance, the notation "○ bindweed. *Convolvulus sepium.*"),[419] while the speculation turns to a Hemanesque description of the bower as a religious "shrine," here found in the naturalized ecology of Beachy Head rather than the domestic space of the home. The "shrine" is Spenserian in its description of the trappings of bliss that shape the poet's impression of place. But, like in Hemans, there is a problem of ineffability as the "spreading views" mock "The Poet and the Painter's utmost art." The moment, spanning roughly the middle of *Beachy Head's* 731 lines, turns the poem on itself as it suggests that poetry alone cannot capture the bowerism that can

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[417] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 346-60.

[418] The sentiment is reminiscent of Jonathan Bate's claim that poetry contains "the capacity of the writer to restore us to the earth which is our home," a noble pursuit, to be sure, but one that is undercut by Smith's own mature voice whose "happiness is vanish'd."

[419] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," footnote on p. 231.

only 'haunt' the poet through the intangibility of memory. This moment appears to be a failure—of poetry, of the poet, of the bower of youth—to truly recapture the renewal the bower promises. Yet, only the poem's halfway point, the lines still leave some hope: "I breathe your pure keen air; and still behold."[420] Though the views that spread—physically in their expansiveness, temporally in the connection with memory, the tapping of history, etc.—are mocking, the poet *can* still behold them and, by implication, return to the bower, though the mere beholding is not enough.

It would seem the poem has hit a wall. Place, attendant memory, and even philosophical inquiry cannot fulfill the bower's promise. Instead, the poet's view turns to place for further evidence of a solution. The evidence it finds is unexpected as the second half of the poem is preoccupied with the lives of two hermits who live in the Beachy Head area. Each hermit episode lays out a model of existence that, while not wholly fulfilling the bower's promise, hints at a form of active repose that distances the reader from the broken boundness of place in the first half of the poem. The first, a wandering hermit known by the locals by his sudden appearances, disappearances, and songs that fill the wild areas, is cast as a pseudo-Romantic figure whose obsession with lost love is balanced by the same ecological fixtures that teasingly promise succor for the poet but who, ultimately, is more a figment of the poet's wished-for existence than a tangible resident of bowerism. The first hermit fulfills the pastoral promise of a shepherding song. The second hermit—the hermit of the rocks—a less Romantic, more tempestuous figure, offers a possible solution for the poet that is never delivered but that, at the very least, suggests an end to the expansions and contractions that buffet her.

The wandering hermit is introduced in the stanza beginning with line 506:

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[420] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," l. 369.

> In such a castellated mansion once
> A stranger chose his home; and where hard by
> In rude disorder fallen, and hid with brushwood
> Lay fragments gray of towers and buttresses,
> Among the ruins, often he would muse—[421]

The stories of the hermit are introduced as local lore, the "once . . ." distancing the tale from the poet's own wanderings across Beachy Head. The image of wandering through ruins was a popular one for Romantic poets. Whether it is Byron's Childe Harold who remarks on the ruins of continental Europe during his travels, allowing the waste to shape his musings: "Oh Time! the beautifier of the dead / Adorner of the ruin, comforter / And only healer when the heart hath bled,"[422] or "The Ruined Cottage" of Wordsworth's Lakes era, ruins held the potential for being both a counterpoint for meditations on mortality and an opportunity to access a Neoclassical, 'immortal' past. Smith's wandering hermit is of this ilk, wandering and pondering among ruins, and yet stands apart as we are not provided insight into his musings: "the tir'd hind / Pass'd him at nightfall, wondering he should sit / On the hill top so late."[423] The locals that witness his passing speculate on what preoccupies him so and drove him to seek the wandering hermit life: "village maidens thought / His senses injur'd; and with pity say / That he, poor youth! must have been cross'd in love."[424] Their conclusions are not unfounded as the poem splits 103 lines[425] between two songs he sings that tell a vague tale of an "Amanda" who did not return the wanderer's love.[426]

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[421] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 506-10.
[422] Byron, George Gordon, Lord. *Child Harolde's Pilgrimage* in *The Works of Lord Byron, Volume 2*. Edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899. https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/25340, "Canto the Fourth," stanza "CXXX."
[423] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 515-7.
[424] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 519-21.
[425] Lines 531-555 and 577-654 are devoted to the hermit's songs, delivered in rhymed ballad form (the only rhyming section of *Beachy Head*).
[426] The neoclassical reenactment of pastoral song is peculiar here as it both performs a new song and imitates the textuality of, say, Virgil. In a sense, any pastoral song does this, as Brian Breed explains: "the representation of

Were these songs our only evidence of the wandering hermit's existence, he would remain an anachronistic figure more at home in a fifteenth-century French lay than wandering the cliffs of Beachy Head, the roving lover in Arcadia. However, the wanderer's life does not appear to be solely a forlorn lament:

> Yet otherwhile it seem'd as if young Hope
> Her flattering pencil gave to Fancy's hand,
> And in his wanderings, rear'd to sooth his soul
> Ideal bowers of pleasure—Then, of Solitude
> And of his hermit life, still more enamour'd,
> His home was in the forest.[427]

This teasing description of a kind of discovered equanimity immediately follows the first song of the wanderer. The "Ideal bowers of pleasure" are, for the wanderer, real, provided by "Fancy's hand" in a Spenserian style arrangement of myth and bliss among his forest home. The lonely life both allows him to be "more enamour'd"—more invested in his forlorn wanderings and songs—and yet also "more enamour'd" with the solitary life itself as the description turns on the ambiguity of "of," eliding a verb that might directly determined what enamors the wanderer.

Yet the whole of the description of a kind of peace hinges on the word "seem'd"; we are not told if this is indeed the wanderer's existence as, like the locals, we are forced to speculate on the true nature of his life. He is portrayed as a specter that flits about the scenery, spied by "Barkmen," "Wedgecutters,"[428] and the "shaggy dog following the truffle hunter,"[429] while other "Belated villagers" "just [see] him pass"[430] in his wanderings. His second song is never even heard as "love-songs and scatter'd rhymes, / Unfinish'd sentences, or half erased, / And

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speech and the imitation of previous texts are two sides of the same coin; both can be classed as imitatio or mimêsis." *Pastoral Inscriptions: Reading and Writing Virgil's Eclogues* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 13.

[427] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 556-61.

[428] Both professions Smith explains in footnotes. Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," p. 241.

[429] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," l. 566.

[430] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 568-70.

rhapsodies like [the second song], were sometimes found" beneath an "ancient tree"[431] he was known to frequent. The poem equivocates about his happiness as the closest assertion to a declaration is delivered in a double-negative: "The visionary, nursing dreams like these, / Is not indeed unhappy."[432] The speculations on the "future blessings he may yet enjoy"[433] are the poet's own as she imagines him wandering the forests of Beachy Head as "Summer woods / Wave over him."[434] The poet aphoristically pleads "Oh! let him cherish his ideal bliss,"[435] but it is immediately apparent that this wish is really for the poet's own plight: "sad and gloomy are his days, who lives / Of Hope abandon'd!"[436] Hope, then, would seem to hold some solution for the poet's current troubles, hope as a place of renewal and escape from the troubles that Beachy Head alone, though tinged with happier memories, cannot offer. The "seem'd" destabilizes both the Arcadian past and the hoped for utopia by rendering both suspect. Delivered in postulation, imaginings, and the speculations of locals, poet, and readers, and hinging on the lived state that "seem'd" a certain way, hope alone as succor is called into question, less a solution, more a possibility, a 'hoped-for-hope' that feeds its own pursuit. The wandering hermit, as he appears in *Beachy Head*, is in the end only a fanciful creation, too Romantic even for his own existence. His fate is never mentioned, and so he remains a series of imagined activities and "scatter'd" songs.

The hermit of the rocks presents a far different, perhaps more tangible, reality of an enclosed life that, nevertheless, is exposed and, through its exposure, will eventually lead to his

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[431] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 573-76.
[432] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 655-6.
[433] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," l. 658.
[434] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 656-7.
[435] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," l. 667.
[436] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 670-1.

death. He is introduced immediately following the “Hope abandon’d!” of the wandering hermit episode:

> Just beneath the rock
> Where Beachy overpeers the channel wave,
> Within a cavern mined by wintry tides
> Dwelt one, who long disgusted with the world
> And all its ways, appear'd to suffer life
> Rather than live; the soul-reviving gale,
> Fanning the bean-field, or the thymy heath,
> Had not for many summers breathed on him;
> And nothing mark'd to him the season's change,
> Save that more gently rose the placid sea,
> And that the birds which winter on the coast
> Gave place to other migrants.[437]

Not lovelorn but seemingly embittered by “the world / And all its ways,” the hermit of the rocks seeks solitude to a more extreme degree than the wandering hermit, to the point where he does not even witness the shifting of the seasons but for a few nearby details: the changing of the tides and the replacement of one bird migration with another. Smith seems to be drawing on anchoritic images of early Christian monastic hermitages, such as from *The Life of Antony*, that contain similar figures who, disillusioned with the sufferings of ‘civilized’ life (i.e. the life of urban and agricultural developed Egypt and Palestine of the first several A.D. centuries), seek refuges of utter solitude in the desert caves and mountains.[438] The hermit of the rocks, like the original anchorites, lives a life of self-imposed suffering. Yet again, the description of the hermit who “appear'd to suffer life / Rather than live” cannot be wholly trusted as “appear’d” denotes the poet’s own interpretation of his continual existence. Does he suffer life, or has he found a bower all his own? The final three stanzas of *Beachy Head* provide hints, but, whether the poem is

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[437] Smith, *Poems*, “Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems,” “Beachy Head,” ll. 671-82.

[438] See William Harmless’s *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) for a more thorough investigation of the lives and writings of these individuals.

deliberately left open-ended or is simply that way because Smith never finished it, is difficult to discern.

What is certain is that Smith continues playing with the anchorite image by depicting the hermit of the rock's life as a paradoxical split between extreme solitude, a la Antony, and a life of communal service, as is depicted by stories of the other legendary anchorite of the desert, Pachomius, whose biographies mark him as the originator of cenobitic monasticism, or the communal monastic life, and emphasize him as a figure of charitable service and selfless acts.[439] The hermit of the rocks acts as the anchoritic prophet when he

> Wandering on the beach,
> [. . .] learn'd to augur from the clouds of heaven,
> And from the changing colours of the sea,
> And sullen murmurs of the hollow cliffs,
> Or the dark porpoises, that near the shore
> Gambol'd and sported on the level brine
> When tempests were approaching.[440]

He is elevated to mystical heights, and, key to this elevation, the description is given in the indicative mood; there is no equivocation as to this hermit's heightened, almost preternatural powers of reading the ecology of the cliffs and predicting coming storms.[441] By so predicting the weather, the hermit of the rocks is able to save any local mariner who, caught in the storms, "in conflict dread / Was buffeting for life the roaring surge,"[442] for though the mariner has retired to a form of extreme solitude, "he still acutely felt / For human misery."[443] The hermit is both

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[439] Not unlike what David Shore sees in Spenser: "The need for virtuous action means that the heroic image cannot adequately be developed with reference to the individual alone. Virtue pertains not only to man's private relationship to God and to his relation as a rational being to his own passionate nature; it also pertains to his relations with other men." Spenser's fall from the pastoral is reflected in this double life of the hermit whose heroism cannot exist for himself alone. Shore, *Spenser*, p. 152.

[440] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 691-7.

[441] This pastoral, too, has its supernatural creature, if only a transmuted hermit who seems to converse with God.

[442] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 703-4.

[443] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 691-2.

Antony and Pachomius, committed to living alone yet stepping outside of this boundary to save a life at risk of his own. Paradoxically, his own life that he 'hazards' is marked by the poem as "too valueless"[444] even as the local populace is filled with "some unhappy [men] / Who liv'd to bless the hermit of the rocks"[445] as he saved them from the storms. Unlike the wandering hermit, the hermit of the rocks is ironically presented as a hero. Though living a life "too valueless," he commits acts of compassion and communal service to the point that, upon finding his body "By the waves wafted,"[446] the mountain shepherds who would visit him chisel a short elegy that stood as "Memorials of his sufferings."[447] The mountain shepherds:

> did not grieve,
> That dying in the cause of charity
> His spirit, from its earthly bondage freed,
> Had to some better region fled for ever.[448]

It is unclear if the final lines of *Beachy Head* are the actual elegy left by the shepherds or simply representative of the spirit of the final tribute to the hermit who saved so many despite his strange life of solitude.

The hermit of the rocks represents a unique form of bowerism that aligns with Smith's own waning life in surprising ways. The happiness of the hermit of the rocks is left to interpretation, just as that of the wandering hermit, but for this hermit the question of happiness is rendered moot by his actions. He has deliberately erected an ecological boundary, a bower of the cave wherein he lives. The boundaries of this bower, like others, is also permeated by external influences, whether it's the birds of cliffs or the "dark porpoises" that signal coming

[444] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," l. 701.
[445] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 708-9.
[446] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 725.
[447].Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 728.
[448] Smith, *Poems*, "Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems," "Beachy Head," ll. 728-31

storms. The bower is, in the end, exposed with the death of the hermit and the intrusions of the mariners who carve his eulogy, literally writing their agency into the earth. However, unlike the case of so many other bowers, while yet alive its dweller *willingly* leaves its enclosure to help others when he sees fit.

The final years of Charlotte Smith's life were ones of regular solitude. Her increasing ailments[449] forced her into a reclusive life in Tilford where she would, on occasion, write to friends, saying that her daily pains relegated her to a "vegetating" state.[450] Knowing death was approaching, she spent her final days attempting to wrest the funds of her father-in-law's inheritance away from the legal battles that embroiled it so she could secure it for her children before she died. Perhaps the wandering hermit appears less an ideal in the poem as she, in her final days, could no longer laud the Romantic wanderer as the eventual source of bowered security it promised to be. Though her own waning life was a forced solitude, the hermit of the rocks suggests an alternative bower of *deliberate* hermitage, where the resident of the bower will only leave its bounds by choice, and that of the choice to live for others. It's difficult to state unequivocally what *Beachy Head's* concluding hermit images represent as Smith's untimely death left the poem in an 'unfinished' state, one which she would not live to explain and/or defend. Whatever the case might be, the hermit's bowery cave is attenuated by a constant otherness that interrupts and exposes. It is perhaps as close to a bower as these poets can get, fittingly delivered by the Romantic poet who did at least as much as Wordsworth to push the experimental project of the era. The hermit represents a form of extreme alterity to the standards of Chakrabarty's globe, imbricated in say, colonialism, only in so far as he saves lives.

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[449] "Gout," as she calls it, but what was likely rheumatoid arthritis. Zimmerman, *ODB* entry for Charlotte Smith.
[450] Charlotte Smith to Sarah Rose, March 5th, 1804. Smith, *Collected Letters*, 609.

Questions and Conclusions

If the modern Western individualized subject did indeed arise amid the ongoing crisis of colonialism, bowerism is pursued by these poets as a potential avenue for that subject to maintain a self independent of the spatial and temporal exposure that threatens the self's security and independence. Perhaps more importantly, bowerism *highlights the limitations of the subject and defines the processes that keep it exposed*.[451] The epic bower of Spenser constitutes a threat to the masculinized fabric of industrious society and so, as it was in *The Faerie Queene*, must be eradicated. The Romantic bower constitutes a space separate from that industry,[452] not just a means of escape but an alternative option to the globally networked subject that must participate in the very Anthropocenic systems that threaten its existence. The bower is potentially a poetic counternarrative to the raw interconnectedness that defines the epoch, although the bower cannot keep its promise of escaping that interconnectedness. It can, however, stand in opposition to the world that, dashing towards its own extinction, still fixates on "establishing a secure haven for keeping alive the thought of the world."[453]

Post-humanist criticism has already explored the limits of agential freedom via the nature/culture debate. Jane Bennett dubs this dichotomy as "thin": "Theories of democracy that assume a world of active subjects and passive objects begin to appear as thin descriptions at a time when the interactions between human, viral, animal, and technological bodies are becoming more and more intense."[454] An Anthropocenic rendering of the planet must straddle both the globe and the planet. To do so, the activity of the nonhuman must be acknowledged as planetary,

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[451] The romantic bower then, rather than providing a means of escape, reflects on its own inability to provide.
[452] Related in part to the "has-beenness" of romanticism "that a bureaucratized culture cannot accommodate." The bower simply does not square with neoliberalism's tally of value via "cost-benefit analyses." Jacques Khalip, *Last Things: Disastrous Form from Kant to Hujar* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 12.
[453] Khalip, *Last Things*, 16.
[454] Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 108.

activity that does indeed conflict with the supremacy of the Western subject's independent action and those of its 'world.'

Though the Romantics themselves had no notion of the Anthropocene, they still demonstrated an awareness of the interconnectedness between global forces and the limits of themselves as subjects. The pressures of precarity, and Romanticism's "attentiveness" to it,[455] play out among poets attempting to construct bower spaces. Personal imaginative worlds fail as a means of escaping or defending against global precarities, yet the process of that failure redefines the limits of the individual. Robinson, constructing a protective participation in traditions of Western poetics, must rely on irony to circumvent the problem as her Sappho, despite all efforts of relocation and pursuit, takes her own life to escape the influence of Phaon's unreturned love. Robinson's self-imposed alignment with Sappho relies on the agencies of others to seal her historical fate, dramatizing the efforts of imagination against the inevitability of oblivion. Clare can only double back on the processes that have resulted in a near total eradication of the ecologies of "Swordy Well" and the memories of his youthful "golden-age" he associates with them. Clare's own interferences in nature are reminiscent of the global forces that intrude, while his ruralness is peeled away by his own artifice as pastoral meets industry. Hemans must critique the domestic space she helped create and only point to a new composition of 'home' that, though it appears to hold some sway over the adopted child, cannot be fully explained by the new mother who attempts to create a new bower to protect the child whose family has been 'lost.' Hemans must simply call her own constructed domestic bower a myth, a temporary cultural arrangement that won't escape global influences. Smith alludes to a way out of the inescapable world via a form of hermitage that may provide solace and solitude while

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[455] Nersessian, *Utopia, Limited*, 2.

allowing a willing traversal of the bower by its enclosed inhabitant, but even Smith's hermit is intruded upon. In the end, *Beachy Head* is only a poem, its bower mythologizing a figure that cannot be human. Via these imaginative efforts, Robinson, Clare, Hemans, and Smith expose their own exposures to global forces.

In the form of the bower, the "Romantic attentiveness to precarity" is an aggressive one. If the Anthropocene severely limits the agencies of Western subjects, the bower is a means of exploring the response of those subjects as they map out imaginative—albeit failed—attempts to escape through alterity. The alterities they construct can help answer the question posed by the MLA panelists mentioned at the start of this project: in this moment of global crises, what kind of world are we trying to save, whose world is it, and is it a world worth saving? By responding to the first two questions with a world of its own, the bower-making poet, like the MLA panelists, answers the last with a simple 'no.'

This project began as a look into a literary oddity: the bower. As pervasively present as mountains or rivers, the bower has little critical treatment outside of Spenser's "Bower of Bliss" episode. Yet the motif of the bower has intriguing critical mass. Unlike a mountain or a river—objects that have received no shortage of critical inquiry, particularly in Romantic studies—the bower exists in literature somewhere between a natural and constructed object. Additionally, its strong associations with notions of home, repose, and security complicate its definition as a motif and pitch it into multiple lines of established critical inquiry. The conversations that dominate this project point to two important bower ambiguities: its ontological straddling of both natural- and nonnatural-place and its associated conflict between boundness and exposure. Being both natural and nonnatural—the extent of which depends on its iteration—the bower critiques the Romantic notion of nature as a political construction that nevertheless is intruded upon by "That

Thing Over There"; if nature is a political construction with limits, the bower helps define whose nature is constructed and, by virtue of the subject, what limits are imposed. By treading the line between boundness and exposure, the bower critiques the supremacy of the Romantic imagination just as it critiques the supremacy of the Western subject; individual agency is, indeed, "thin," and even imagination can only go so far.

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Appendix B: Corpus Analytics Regex Hits & Corresponding Database Codes

AUTHOR	REGEX "BOW" HITS	ASSOCIATED DATABASE CODES
Joanna Baillie	25	The_Complete_Poetical_Works_of_Joanna_B a.txt
Anna Laetitia Barbauld	6	pg14100.txt barbauld poems.txt Barbauld, Anna Laetitia - The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, with a Memoir by Lucy Aikin.txt
William Blake	12	Blake_-William-The-Complete-Poems.txt
Lord Byron	54	pg8861.txt 25340-0.txt 21811-0.txt 20158-0.txt 23475-0.txt 18762-0.txt 27577-0.txt
Thomas Chatterton	1	Chatterton, Thomas - Poetical Works.txt
John Clare	23	52601-0.txt pg8672.txt
Samuel Taylor Coleridge	47	29091-0.txt 29092-0.txt
William Cowper	24	47790-0.txt
George Crabbe	18	pg46858.txt 51003-0.txt 59204-0.txt
Erasmus Darwin	37	pg9612.txt pg10671.txt pg26861.txt
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe	6	pg63203.txt pg33670.txt pg1287.txt
Oliver Goldsmith	8	pg3545.txt
Heinrich Heine	7	52882-0.txt
Felicia Hemans	201	pg66785.txt
Elizabeth Inchbald [Prose/Drama]	0	Elizabeth Inchbald - Complete Works of Elizabeth Inchbald (2021, Delphi Classics).txt

John Keats	45	The_Poetical_Works_of_John_Keats.txt
Letitia Elizabeth Landon	45	The_Poetical_Works_of_Letitia_Elizabeth 1.txt POETICAL_WORKS_OF_LETITIA_ELIZABETH_LAND 2.txt
Hannah More	22	The_Poetical_Works_of_Hannah_More.txt
Percy Shelley	63	pg4797.txt pg4798.txt pg4799.txt
Mary Robinson	61	Delphi-Poets_-Mary-Robinson-Delphi-Collected-Poetical-Works-of-Mary-Robinson-_Illustrated_.txt
Anna Seward	117	The_Poetical_Works_of_Anna_Seward_with_E 1.txt The_Poetical_Works_of_Anna_Seward 2.txt The_Poetical_Works_of_Anna_Seward 3.txt
Charlotte Smith	19	96.txt smith elegaic sonnets.txt emigrants.txt
Robert Southey	95	The_Poetical_Works_of_Robert_Southey.txt
Edmund Spenser[456]	75	spenser faerie queene.txt spenser poetical works.txt
Mary Tighe	81	Paula-R.-Feldman-The-Collected-Poetry-of-Mary-Tighe.txt
Helen Maria Williams	24	pg11054.txt
Dorothy Wordsworth [Prose]	17	pg42856.txt pg42857.txt
William Wordsworth	177	pg10219.txt pg12145.txt pg12383.txt pg32459.txt 56361-0.txt 47651-0.txt pg47143-0.txt 52836-0.txt

[456] Spenser was included in this data table by way of comparison.

VITA

430 Burrowes Building, University Park, PA 16802

EDUCATION

PhD: English
Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania
Projected Graduation Date: August 2024

Master of Arts: English
Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania
Graduated: May 2018

Master of Fine Arts: Creative Writing (Poetry)
University of Southern Maine, Portland, Maine
Graduated: January 2015

Bachelor of Arts: English (Minor: Writing)
Keene State College, Keene, New Hampshire
Graduated Magna Cum Laude: May 2008

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor of Record. Pennsylvania State University Department of English.

ENGL 201 – What is Literature? — 1 section, 2022
Intermediate course exploring the history, culture, politics, and aesthetics of the notion of the “literary.”

ENGL 136 - The Graphic Novel — 1 section, 2021
Introductory literature course on the graphic novel as an iconographic form.

ENGL 50 - Introduction to Creative Writing — 1 section, 2021
Introductory writing course covering fiction, non-fiction, and poetry.

ENGL 202C - Technical Writing — 3 sections, 2019, 2022
Advanced writing course on social science composition principles, discourse, research methods, and theories.

ENGL 202A - Writing in the Social Sciences — 2 sections, 2018-2019
Advanced writing course on technical writing communication principles, discourse, research methods, and ethics.

ENGL 15 - Rhetoric and Composition — 13 sections, 2016-2024
Introductory course on argumentation, research methods, rhetorical theory and practice, and compositional praxis.