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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Politics of Pity in Eighteenth-Century Fiction

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While pity had been seen traditionally as an untrustworthy rhetorical effect, beginning in the late seventeenth century, it is celebrated as a powerful and authenticating affect. My dissertation examines the historical rationale for the “rise” of pity in the eighteenth century and the ways in which its new sociopolitical status inspires formal innovation and alternative visions of ethical communion in contemporary literature. Anxious about change but eager to develop a vision of human nature and social coherence antithetical to the Hobbesean version, a growing number of writers made pity both the highest moral value and the central telos of aesthetic experience.

Pity’s defenders came to see in pity a providentially designed reflex built into the human body, a natural law of commonality, like gravity, that could draw otherwise hierarchically differentiated and self-interested individuals into a unified field of intimacy and social consensus. Pity, many felt, could transform suffering into a vehicle of spiritual reformation, social communion, and private moral orientation in a time of rapid change. As the century progressed, an increasing effort to define its parameters suggests that pity had become a dangerously flexible category. Recent critical efforts have typically treated eighteenth-century pity as having one of what I argue are a multitude of competing political and aesthetic functions: as a dubious vehicle of bourgeois ideology, for example,

or as a support or mask for traditional hierarchies, or, alternately, as a positive Enlightenment ideal capable of effecting a new kind of relationship between equality and freedom. At the crossroads of progressive and conservative ideologies, pity provides literary history with an index of alternative visions of social order. My project begins by tracing a history of pity from Aristotle to Hobbes, including a discussion of the conditions that led to its unprecedented moral status in the eighteenth century. I then turn to argue, through a close analysis of works by Samuel Richardson, Henry Mackenzie, and William Wordsworth, that each author creates an aesthetic specific to his own aims, thereby reconstructing the category of pity for diverse political and literary ends.

## DEDICATION

*To Shauna, Sadie, and Sienna for your patience and love.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The eighteenth century displayed an unparalleled enthusiasm for pity. My dissertation traces a history of pity from its “rise” in the late seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century through an examination of a set of period novels and poetry. In an age in which the traditional structures of domination are in decline, many thinkers, beginning in England, sought to make pity the central term in a new universal ethics. Pity, it was felt, could transform suffering, actual or fictional, into a vehicle of spiritual reformation, communal intimacy, and private moral orientation in a time of rapid change and politico-religious factionalism. However, I argue that the eighteenth century’s increasingly comprehensive effort to articulate pity’s proper function suggests contention rather than consensus. No single argument or theoretical approach can sufficiently explain its profusion and the eighteenth century’s enthusiasm. Recent critical efforts have typically treated eighteenth-century pity as having one of what I would suggest are a multitude of competing political and aesthetic functions: as a dubious vehicle of bourgeois ideology, for example, or as a support or mask for traditional hierarchies, or, alternatively, as a positive Enlightenment ideal capable of coordinating a new kind of relationship between “equality” and “freedom.” At the crossroads of progressive and conservative ideologies, pity provides literary history with an index of alternative visions of social order. Through a brief history of pity from the ancient world to the seventeenth century followed by a close analysis of works by Samuel Richardson, Henry Mackenzie, and William Wordsworth, each chapter contextualizes and explores the variable ways eighteenth-century writers defined pity to suit their personal, political, and artistic ends. In this

effort, my work deploys a wide range of interdisciplinary and theoretical methodologies meant to connect the textual with the political, including sociology, cultural studies, critical theory, and theories of gender and sexuality.

My introductory chapter, “A History of Pity: Homer to Hobbes,” provides a brief survey of “pity” as it develops from the ancient world into the seventeenth century. I argue that—with the important exception of early Christianity—before the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century pity is treated at best with a measure of ambivalence and often with contempt. In the Homeric age, pity is an untrustworthy emotion. Homer’s Epics, especially The Iliad, is dominated by the concepts of *aidôs* and *timaô*, translatable respectively as “sense of honor or shame” and “to honor with what is deserved.” Homeric society is hierarchical, and where pity threatens to undermine a proper distribution of honors and rewards to those at the top, the most noble and worthy, pity is rejected. All potential moral values in this period are only acceptable when they serve the end of *aidôs* and *timaô*. In classical Greece and the early Roman Empire, pity is largely treated with contempt, though Aristotle makes it a central concern in both the dramatic and judicial spheres. While “honor” was the controlling ideal in Homer, in the classical period, autarcy (self-sufficiency and independence) and rationality take center stage. The stoics, cynics, and the neoplatonists after them, for the most part treated pity with contempt. Pity, many felt, signaled a loss of control to the one pitied and, as an emotion, it could cloud one’s judgments. In other words, it was seen as antithetical to the ideals of self-sufficiency and rationality. It is with early Christianity that pity attains a uniquely high moral status. As pity’s value rises new categories of people emerged to cultural consciousness—namely the poor, the weak, and the sick. While the classical



period emphasized autarcy and rationality, Christianity emphasized human dependence and faith. While early Christianity saw pity as able to produce a community of equals, the medieval period undergoes a new hierarchization of culture based on the very principle of dependence, and pity's relationship to the ideal of equality is undermined and replaced. As a consequence of its ability to level and equalize, pity needed regulation. In a variety of ways, I argue, pity was made to validate the reigning system of domination and its structured distribution of power. In the seventeenth century, on the other hand, pity undergoes a direct attack by figures like Spinoza and Hobbes. Their arguments are reminiscent of the classical period. It is in response to such attacks that pity again, in a parallel trajectory with early Christianity, rises to a high status. If Christian pity helped bring to cultural consciousness the poor, the sick, the lame, etc., the eighteenth century's endorsement of pity played an important role in facilitating the rise of the "middle class"—another previously unrecognizable category of people.

Taking up the relationship between pity and the historical transition from a status to a class based system of social relations, my second chapter, "Pity, or the Providence of the Body in Richardson's Clarissa," argues that historical shifts in late seventeenth-century religious-political theory parallel and are mutually informed by shifts in aesthetic theory and artistic practice. Richardson is, I claim, the eighteenth-century's most dynamic and influential literary representative of these changes in the value of the affections. In Clarissa, pity is the providence of the body. Richardson seeks to inform the mind, therefore, by making a reader's body obedient to its own inner logic or, in other words, by demobilizing his reader's intellectual biases and informing the mind with the religious precepts available only to a body made passive to the authenticating power of pity.

Clarissa's suffering body thereby provides her intratextual and actual readers with an imaginary zone of contact and moral resuscitation, a common middle ground. Richardson thus aimed to develop a type of writing and reading experience capable of a feeling of immediacy—he sought to grant the present moment and the present needs of the common reader a new value. He spends much of his 'Postscript' to Clarissa, in fact, explaining his style and his affective approach to tragedy in relation to current attitudes about the nature of Providence, authorial responsibility, and the doctrine of poetic justice, which, with its conventional emphasis on plot and happy providential endings, is, he argues, antithetical to the "Christian system." By transferring to the affects the ethical-spiritual authority and the aesthetic function traditionally afforded to the will, reason, and their equivalent literary conventions—poetic justice, Horatian decorum, and the unified plot—in Clarissa Richardson seeks to make pity a dynamic vehicle of social and religious reformation. With her suffering body, through readerly pity, Clarissa opens up an alternative, virtual ethical sphere distinct from actual judicial counterpart. She provides access to a kind of justice accessible to every sympathetic reader. No longer seen as an untrustworthy rhetorical effect, Clarissa embraces pity as a powerful and authenticating moral affect.

Chapter three, "The Backwash of Empire: Self-Pity and Self-Preservation in Henry Mackenzie's The Man of Feeling," examines the rhetorical role Mackenzie assigns to pity as a response to the problem of imperial expansion. Within Mackenzie's lifetime one fifth of the earth's inhabitants had come under the sway of the British Empire. Facing a world in which people were increasingly able to visualize their own existence as conditioned by world-historical forces, Mackenzie was deeply concerned that the English individual's local moorings were being dissolved in the wake of the corresponding influx

of goods, sentiments, and manners that flowed daily from other cultures and spaces both into print and into English ports. Mackenzie's primary intention in *The Man of Feeling*, I argue, is to protect the local self from the moral backwash of empire and expanding pan-European exchange. When his main character, Harley, sees the effects on his neighborhood of the rapid modern growth of luxury and new wealth—what he sees as a complete desacralization of space and time—he is hit personally with an experience of existential fragmentation; a breakdown of individual and national identity. This chapter thus explores pity's tendency to redouble back on the pitier and to validate the pitier's national-selfhood and being-for-self. I thus trace pity into the fissures of a particular aspect of sentimental experience, to those points at which it narrows and sets limits for itself and for the sentimental subject it creates, to those moments, both in Mackenzie's early literary endeavors and his later career as a propagandist for the Pitt-Dundas regime, where it pulls back against the outward flow of its expansive tendency to a more opaque self-protectionism and becomes a cooperative mechanism of imperial expansion: when it morphs into a defensive self-pity, or what Mackenzie called “a *sentiment of Home*.”

While Mackenzie came to see in pity a rhetorical complement to commercial expansion, William Wordsworth saw pity, once subdued by the mediating forces of poetical form, as a springboard into an interiority of private feeling exonerated from the contingencies of history, the shocks of political upheaval, and the deceptions of the self-serving. As Niklas Luhmann, Jürgen Habermas, Reinhart Koselleck, and others have argued, the eighteenth century witnessed a pervasive “temporalization of being” and a marked acceleration of social processes. With the onset of modernity the notion of time as a vehicle of redemption gives way to a new standardized and privatized notion of

temporality—time is handed over to and becomes the burden of, and its sacred qualities must be internalized by, the private individual. Reacting to Descartes' assertion of the independence of the moments of time, many thinkers were struck by both an acute sense of the discontinuity of duration and the revolutionary potential of the indeterminate immediate. Building on the work of Paul de Man and James Averill, in my fourth chapter, "Time and the Turn to Self-Pity in Wordsworth," I examine Wordsworth's representational use of pity, human suffering, and memory as modes of temporal self-care. In response to time's perceived acceleration and the dramatic changes in the way time was being understood and conceived, Wordsworth consistently forefronts pity's temporal qualities: pity slows things down. Wordsworth treats pity, once regulated by poetic form, as a way of engaging in a feeling of "intermediacy," a temporal perspective suspended between body and mind, which is, while fully aware of its own transience and mortality, momentarily exonerated from the contingencies of the historical instant. For Wordsworth, the image of human suffering, an image poised at the cusp between life and death, may become thereby a vehicle of the deepest possible self-reflection. Wordsworth sees pity, or really a poeticized form of self-pity, as a gateway to a recuperative encounter with human time productive of an ostensibly autonomous and authentic self-knowledge. In the process of exonerating himself from the present moment, in other words, pity morphs into self-pity—a rejection of sociability—a move that provides Wordsworth with a perspective distanced enough from the object of pity to exonerate him from the impurities of everyday life. If another's suffering presses too closely, Wordsworth seems to sense, one's autonomy is threatened via the sympathetic exchange pity entails. In Wordsworth, the private *feeling* of pity must therefore replace the suffering object, so that

the poet and his reader may be released from all externality into the landscape of the mind. Through this reversal away from the actual sufferer and his or her actual suffering, pity becomes a means to the end of a sense of aesthetically given ontological recuperation.

In detailing the unique ways pity is deployed by a set of eighteenth-century authors, I argue that, in the search for universal principles compatible with an expanding world, each comes to use pity in a way that is specific to his or her aesthetic and political endeavors. However, some common themes do emerge. Each author is preoccupied with how to handle change and each uses “pity” as a way to re-imagine and reorient his society in the wake of modernization.

## CHAPTER 1

### A HISTORY OF PITY: HOMER TO HOBBS

We have no history of pity, or of cruelty.

—Lucien Fèbvre, “Sensibility and History,” 18.

The progress of the idea of pity would suffice as a gauge of changes in the social state.

—Jean Bourdeau, La Rochefoucauld, 192.

Each sentiment has its history, and this history is curious, because it is, if we may so speak, an abridged history of humanity. Although the feelings of the human heart do not undergo any permanent change, yet they feel the effect of the religious and political revolutions which are going on in the world. They retain their nature, but change their expression; and it is in studying these changes of expression that the literary critic writes, without classifying it, the history of the world.

—Saint-Marc Girardin, Lectures, 21.

#### **Pity in Cultural and Literary History**

“Pity” is an enormously useful term for the cultural historian and literary critic. It provides us with an analytical lens into the unique process by which different cultures and thinkers invest value in the non-rational elements of ethical, social, and political life. In that pity involves a response to human suffering, its history is also bound to tell us something about the way different societies and times have conceived, understood, managed, and distributed power. There is, as Hannah Arendt has shown, a “politics of pity” (see pp. 73-81). Pity has had at best a checkered past. I would argue, in fact, that Western culture has generally held a rather dim view of pity. Yet, in eighteenth-century Western Europe, pity attains an unprecedented prestige and becomes central to the eighteenth century’s self-conception. This present study is devoted to analyzing and exploring the historical conditions and literary repercussions of this dramatic and relatively pervasive shift in pity’s status. From the seventeenth into the nineteenth century, the educated and literary elites of Western Europe paid focused and sustained attention to pity and its value as a social

sentiment and moral guide. By the mid-eighteenth century, Henry Home, Lord Kames, when he calls *pity*—not faith, not reason, not law—“the great cement of human society,” he is simply affirming what was already something of a cliché (Principles 11). Taking after many of his English precursors, Jean-Jacques Rousseau similarly saw pity as the first social principle of humanity, as not only “prior to reason” but as man’s first and original impulse towards society. For Rousseau, pity is a natural vehicle of human equality that civilization has tended to “stifle” in favor of vices like greed, envy, and revenge (Discourse 51, 55). Hannah Arendt notes in turn that, spurred by the thinking of Rousseau, the leaders of the French Revolution sought to raise pity or compassion “to the rank of the supreme political passion and the highest political virtue” (75). What historical conditions and cultural and personal needs could have lead to such high praise for pity?

Friedrich Nietzsche stands out, I think, as the most dynamic and aggressive critic of the eighteenth century’s morality of pity. For all its efforts to see pity as *the* trans-historical virtue par excellence, the eighteenth century’s enthusiasm for pity, Nietzsche points out—I think rightly—is historically exceptional: “this overestimation of and predilection for pity on the part of modern philosophers is something new.” However, Nietzsche understands “the ever spreading morality of pity that [has] seized even on philosophers and made them ill, as the most sinister symptom of a European culture that [has] itself become sinister” (Genealogy 5). We need not share Nietzsche’s values or his contempt for the eighteenth century to entertain something of his vision of the profound changes he sees taking place in European culture as a consequence of the emergence of this “morality of pity.” For Nietzsche, to project pity into the past as the original ground

of all morality, as many eighteenth-century thinkers seem to do, is a crime against history. He laments that in the modern world “[o]ne has [even] ventured to call pity a virtue (—in every *noble* morality it counts as weakness—); one has gone further,” he adds, “one has made of it *the* virtue, the ground and origin of all virtue” (The Anti-Christ 7). All serious and important thinkers before the eighteenth century, he suggests, rightly treated pity with varying degrees of contempt and suspicion. For Nietzsche, pity is the common man’s virtue, a bourgeois emotion, that seduces the powerful into a debilitating relationship with the weak—it opens up a common middle ground between masters and slaves, the noble and the plebs, making it possible to imagine an intermediate “zone” of equality and commonality. Pity, for Nietzsche, thus always threatens, even when it poses on behalf of the masters and rulers, to undermine the will to power and to level all “life-affirming” systems of rank and hierarchy. Whatever we think of Nietzsche’s attitude, pity undoubtedly takes center stage during a period in which the traditional systems of power distribution are in decline and the new system of class orientation is on the rise.

Pity in recent history has come to have nuances of condescension to the sufferer that it generally did not have in the eighteenth century, when, for the most part, “pity” was seen as favorable (for both pitier and pitied), a synonym of “compassion.” Pity, we now feel, highlights unjust inequalities and social distances because it grants to the pitier a self-congratulatory sense of self-worth at the expense of a more vulnerable sufferer. In order to recognize the extent of some eighteenth-century thinkers’ commitment to the universal function of pity, it is important to understand fully its uneven history as a concept whose continued relevance—although we now prefer words like “compassion” and “empathy”—is contested both in academia and the public sphere today. My



dissertation demonstrates how the literary culture of the eighteenth century sought in pity a ground upon which to form, narrate, and organize different models for re-imagining the world. Although Rousseau was perhaps pity's most zealous eighteenth-century advocate, this new enthusiasm for pity has its start, I will argue, in late seventeenth-century England, at least a hundred years before the French Revolution, and it is thus on the English that I will focus the majority of my attention. In order to contextualize my study of the politics of pity in eighteenth-century English literary culture, however, the following chapter, the first of four, will examine, through a brief historical survey, the relationship between pity and power as it develops in Western Europe into the seventeenth century.

### **The Homeric Age: Pity, Honor, and the Rights of Birth**

Homeric society is aristocratic. As M. P. Nilsson notes, kingship in Homer's world is a "hereditary right," built into which is the right to leadership in war (221). Agamemnon, leader of the Greek armies in The Iliad, is a king of kings. More accurately, the elders that serve him are his "companions," but they are also kings in their own right, each of whom has his own set of "companions"—and Homer's sympathies are with this form of aristocracy. Characters that fail to honor the reigning system of dominance are generally ridiculed and even beaten for their perceived insolence (see Ferguson 11-12).

Further, in the Homeric epics "moral concepts are not yet clear-cut. ... There is no clear distinction between what is immoral and what is inexpedient" (Ferguson 12). George Grote, in his influential nineteenth-century study of Greek history, argues that words like *esthlos* and *agathos*, which are generally translated as "good," are, in Homer, related "to power and not to [moral] worth" (II 88 n.). More accurately, I would suggest,

one's social and political status in Homer's world can best be measured in terms of one's power to produce a desired effect. Homer describes Autolycus, Odysseus' grandfather, a known thief and perjurer, as *esthlos*, which seems to suggest that the word denotes not moral worth but efficiency or perhaps even a capacity for success (Odyssey 19:395). What we now think of as morality, therefore, can only be applied to Homer's world somewhat anachronistically. The general ideal of the age is "*agon*" (see, for example, Iliad 6:208; 11:74), but this is more an existential than a moral conception, a fact of life. In addition, R. B. Onians has shown that in the Homeric age there is no definitive distinction between the physical and the psychological, and terms that have been translated conventionally with abstract concepts actually refer to concrete realities. A relevant example is the term *aion*—"the stuff of life"—which is, actually, the liquid that flows from one's eyes in the form of tears. Tears are thus a sign of waning vitality, a literal weakening or signal that one has momentarily lost the energy it takes to participate in life—in *agon*. In Homer, there is very little room for abstract principles or general equivalences, whether political, social, moral, or otherwise.

There are however a few terms that come close to representing moral conceptions in Homer. *Aidôs*, for instance, is conventionally translated "sense of shame," but in a military context it means something more like "sense of honor." In The Iliad, *aidôs Argeioi*, "show some sense of honor, Argives," is a cry to battle (15:502; 16:422). *Aidôs* generally means respect for others, for oneself, or for the gods, but it also involves having a sensitivity to the opinion of others or a fear of what others think or say. *Timaô* (to hold in or treat with due honor, regard, or esteem; to show or pay honor) and *timê* (a recompense, compensation; status or position in a scale of honor or rank; due estimation,

regard, distinction, or respect) are similarly important and related concepts. *Timaô* and *aidôs* emphasize the idea of just deserts, a fitting distribution of rewards and retributions—balance through proper hierarchical distribution. In Homer, I would suggest, all values and passions are suitable when they serve the end of *aidôs*: pity (*eleos* or *oiktos* in Greek) is most fittingly expressed when it operates as a display of honor, when it is felt to be something that is due to or deserved by the one pitied, though it seems to have little value in its own right. When pity is withheld from someone who deserves it, that failure is both shameful to the withholder and a dishonor to the worthy sufferer. When pity does not serve the end of *aidôs*, on the other hand, it is shameful to express it and a dishonor to the sufferer. This sense of honor is, ostensibly, most acutely felt by the most nobly born: it is thought of as an inherent quality of the nobility, and thus *aidôs*, like *esthlos*, must be understood and defined as serving the conventions of the aristocracy.

Euripides was clearly aware of the value of honor in Homeric epic. In the opening scene of *Hecuba*, for example, we see the queen of Troy reduced to misery, her city burning and its men killed, as she waits to be assigned as a slave to a Greek master. While in this state, she is informed that her daughter Polyxena is to be sacrificed to Achilles' ghost as a way to honor the fallen hero—as a way to offer what is due to his courage and status by sending him a bride in Hades. As Odysseus enters to lead the girl away, Hecuba exclaims:

It is not right that those in power should use it out of season, or, when prosperous, suppose they will be always so. For I also was prosperous once, but now my life is lived, and one day robbed me of all my bliss. Friend, by your beard, have some regard [*aidesthêti*, a verbal form of *aidôs*] and pity [*oiktiron*, a verbal form of *oiktos*] for me; go to Achaea's army, and talk them over, saying how hateful a thing it is to slay women whom at first you spared out of pity. ... such a

reputation as yours will persuade them even though its words are weak; for the same argument, when proceeding from those of no account, has not the same force as when it is uttered by men of mark. (Trans. E. P. Coleridge 282-95).

Having appealed to their shared vulnerability to fortune and their similar social standing, Hecuba wisely attaches pity to *aidôs*.

Odysseus—who had made the original promise that Polyxena would go to the chief man of the army after Troy’s fall—nevertheless rejects her plea for pity on the following grounds:

What I said to all, I will not now deny, that after Troy's capture I would give your daughter to the chief man of our army because he asked a victim. For here is a source of weakness to many [city] states, whenever a man of brave and generous soul receives no greater honor [*pleon*, literally “the best of the spoils”] than his inferiors. Now Achilles, lady, deserves honor at our hands [*axios timês*, a “counterbalancing honor”], since on behalf of Hellas the man died most nobly. Is not this a foul reproach [*aischros*, a “great dishonor”] to treat him as a friend in life, but, when he is gone from us, to treat him so no more? Enough! ... Endure these sorrows; for us, if we are wrong in resolving to honor the brave, we shall bring upon ourselves a charge of ignorance; but as for you barbarians, do not regard your friends as such and pay no homage to your gallant dead, so that Hellas may prosper and you may reap the fruits of such policy. (305-30)

When Odysseus pits the honor of Achilles against Hecuba’s plea, honor for his own friend takes precedence. Countering her plea, he calls Achilles a “friend” and Hecuba a “barbarian.” As Achilles is “the chief man of [his] army,” Odysseus is resolved to grant him the greatest honor. To honor Hecuba with his pity would be a dishonor to his own comrade-in-arms. To go back on his word would also be a breach of the reigning code of honor—really a principle of state governance—which contends that the bravest and most generous souls should receive the greatest tribute in victory: that which is properly due to them. It creates weakness in a state, Odysseus argues, “whenever a man of brave and generous soul receives no greater honor than his inferiors”—a problem that dominates The Iliad. Were Hecuba (a barbarian) “not to regard [her] friends as such and pay no

homage to [her] gallant dead,” he suggests, another state would (as his own is now) “reap the fruits of such a policy.” Without the impetus that comes from honoring and memorializing the brave dead, Odysseus suggests, there would be little positive motivation to engage in war on behalf of one’s state interest. The anticipation of political failure and social leveling—namely, Odysseus’ preoccupation with honoring his own—therefore, takes priority over Hecuba’s immediate pain. To pity her would be improper because it would produce imbalance in the Greek ranks. Cultural difference is a key factor here: Odysseus’ pity is reserved for his own and is an expression of rightfully placed respect. The universal principle of honor—the perceived need for balance it serves—trumps pity.

Even though the actual spectacle of the girl’s immolation arouses the pity of a Greek herald and even Achilles’ own son, Neoptolemus (519-20, 566)—and presumably the pity of the spectators as well—we must not assume that Odysseus’ reasoning with regard to Hecuba would have been met with by disapproval from the audience. As Konstan notes, the ancients saw pity as dangerous in part because of their sense that pity tends “to exceed the claims of justice,” and it may inspire one to “judge the suffering of another in a generous and humane spirit, irrespective of what a strict reckoning of worth might be thought to warrant” (94). In his study of the ancient Greek treatment of war captives, W. Kendrick Pritchett avers that “cities were regularly destroyed and the inhabitants killed or sold into slavery. It is only on rare occasions that the victor concerned himself with coming to terms with the vanquished. ... I find little trace of any element of compassion or generosity” for war victims in ancient Greece (312). Indeed, *néleês* (pitiless), a word that Patroclus uses to describe Achilles’, was in fact a formulaic

epithet for the bronze blade of a spear (see Burkert 73-4, 101-2; see also 26 on the meaning of *neleês*). There is no room for pity in war. The lesson is, perhaps, that it is okay (even beneficial) to *express* pity, but one must not be controlled by it and consequently by the sufferer and his or her political or personal agenda. After all, Hecuba is a representative of those who have caused the Greeks their suffering, a member of Odysseus' enemies' city.

Euripides' Odysseus, it seems, has not forgotten how, in The Iliad, Agamemnon's failure to grant Achilles his due honor while alive led to military weakness and the suffering of his comrades-in-arms. In The Iliad itself, when Achilles challenges Agamemnon to return Chryseis' daughter in order to avoid Apollo's wrath, Agamemnon accuses Achilles of challenging his prestige and authority. In response to this perceived dishonor and breaking of ranks, Agamemnon takes Achilles' bride-prize, Briseis. Achilles, who calls Agamemnon "insolent," thereupon refuses to enter the war, having been so roundly dishonored himself (Iliad 1:149). The consequences of Agamemnon's failure to provide due recompense for Achilles' bravery produces some dissention in the ranks—Thersites and his companions, for example, threaten to abandon the war for home on account of Agamemnon's "dishonor [*êtimêsen*]" to Achilles, namely for "grasping for himself" Achilles' "gift of honor [*geras*]." Odysseus, of course, quells the potential rebellion and beats Thersites to a pulp in front of his comrades; but there remains, without Achilles in the front lines, a massive imbalance in the war in favor of the Trojans.

Later, once it becomes clear that the battle cannot be won without him, Odysseus, in an envoy from Agamemnon, is sent to appease Achilles with gifts (though not with Briseis) and to persuade him to return to battle. Odysseus begs Achilles, "though you hate

both [Agamemnon] and his gifts with all your heart, yet pity the rest of the Achaeans who are being harassed in all their host” (9:300-1). Odysseus appeals to the suffering of the Achaeans, but Achilles refuses to relent: “I will be appeased neither by Agamemnon son of Atreus nor by any other of the Danaans, for I see that I have no thanks for all my fighting. He that fights fares no better than he that does not; coward [*kakos*, “the bad”] and hero [*esthlos*, “the good”] are held in equal honor [*timê*], and death deals like measure to him who works and him who is idle” (9:310-12). Achilles’ sense of shame or honor takes precedence over the pains and losses even of his own comrades and he rejects pity. He argues that Agamemnon’s behavior has created a leveling effect—his failure to show proper honor renders the coward and the hero, the idle and the hard working, equals. In Homer, everything militates against equality, and where a proper distribution of honors fails to be paid, there is always the potential for chaos and social rebellion—social stability depends on a strict adherence to status inequality.

Near the end of The Iliad, having watched Hector’s dead body mercilessly and pointlessly dragged about and shamed by the wrathful Achilles, Apollo pities Hector. After chiding the other gods for favoring Achilles, Apollo then seeks to inspire them to pity Hector as well by reminding them of the favors, sacrifices, and honors Hector had shown them when he was alive (24:20, 23). Apollo, in anger, exclaims, “Achilles has utterly destroyed pity [*eleon ... apôlesen*], and has no *aidôs*” (24:44). His argument is that Achilles’ anger has gone beyond due bounds and that his pitilessness shows an inadequate sense of shame, honor, and respect. It is hard to be certain here, however, whether Apollo means respect for Hector, respect for the gods, or proper self-respect. The ambiguity gives it a more generalized significance. Further, and more to the point, pity is

here again directly linked to *aidôs*. The implication is that pity is properly placed when in tune with the ideal of *aidôs*. Achilles' absent pity is taken up by the gods, which manifests itself towards Achilles in the form of returned anger. In addition, Apollo wishes to lessen Achilles' honor by increasing the other gods' pity for Hector: in this case, Apollo, with his pity, aims at a proper distribution of honors, but he fails to take into account Achilles' noble birth. Hera rises up against Apollo in defense of Achilles and suggests that Apollo, in his favor for Hector, aims to equalize their honor, putting them on the same footing—*his* pity, she suggests, is out of tune with *aidôs*. Hera sees this as reprehensible: "Hector is but mortal and was suckled at a woman's breast, but Achilles is the child of a goddess that I mine own self fostered and reared," and, she concludes, they do not thus deserve equal consideration (24:59-60). Achilles is, in part, one of them, a family member. They would thus be honoring Hector at the expense of themselves and their own. Favor is due first to one's equals and Apollo's pity is thus seen as a threat to the cosmic hierarchy and as undermining the distance the gods enjoy.

It is only when Zeus arrives on the scene, however, that the matter is resolved—the highest arbiter is final judge. He reassures Hera not to worry, that Hector and Achilles will never be honored (*timê*) equally, but that the immortal gods also loved Hector and his body must be honored (24:66-68). Everything is put in its right place. Nonetheless, what we may recognize from Apollo's argument is that were Achilles to have shown proper respect to Hector by pitying him, there would be no need for divine intervention. Hera's argument, on the other hand, suggests that Achilles is born above the need to show pity to Hector—his worthiness is an inherent part of his being. In The Iliad, then, pity is suitable when it is subservient to the requirements of *aidôs* and *timê*.



### **Aristotle: Pity and the Rational Principle**

Aristotle has had, perhaps, the greatest influence of all ancient thinkers on Western Europe's understanding of the role, function, and nature of "pity" (*eleos*) as a passion, and it is on his various accounts and definitions, therefore, that we will now turn our attention. Though many, if not most, ancient writers saw displays of pity as signs of weakness and pity itself as a disagreeable or undesirable emotion (a topic we will return to), Aristotle takes the more commonsensical view that people do and will show pity and, therefore, there must be an evaluative place for it in philosophical discourse. However, pity, even for Aristotle, is not a virtue because it is a spontaneous *reaction* and does not arise as a rational choice. He makes a clear distinction between passions or emotions and virtues:

Now neither the virtues nor the vices are passions, because we are not called good or bad on the ground of our passions, but are so called on the ground of our virtues and our vices, and because we are neither praised nor blamed for our passions (for the man who feels fear or anger is not praised, nor is the man who simply feels anger blamed, but the man who feels it in a certain way), but for our virtues and our vices we are praised or blamed. . . . we feel anger and fear without choice, the virtues are modes of choice or involve choice. Further, in respect of the passions we are said to be moved, but in respect of the virtues and vices we are said not to be moved but to be disposed in a particular way. (Nicomachean Ethics 1105b)

The passions, in themselves, lack any particular moral value unless they are felt "in a certain way." The virtues, unlike the passions (which are involuntary—*they move us*), involve choice, and choices are best governed by the rational principle of the soul. The passions, because they are not inspired by deliberation, must be "persuaded by a rational principle" if they are to participate in virtuous choice, action, or judgment. The virtues, Aristotle says, are states of mind that involve right deliberation, choice, and voluntary action. Although Aristotle's account of the passions tends to subvert any radical

distinction between reason and emotion, he “at the same time opens up a space for another contrast between an authentically evaluative emotion and a defective type that omits the necessary element of judgment or assessment” (Konstan 94).

All passions, for Aristotle, are dangerous when “excessive” or “defective” (i.e., deficient); instead, he offers a theory of balance and intermediacy:

fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue. ... Therefore virtue is a kind of mean, since, as we have seen, it aims at what is intermediate. (Nicomachean Ethics 1106b)

For Aristotle, both excess (“too much”) and defect (“too little”) lead to wrong action and judgment. With regard to the passions, one can only reach a favorable intermediate state of feeling and mind when the action and the passion are “determined by a rational principle,” that is, by “practical wisdom” (39). When caught in the grip of one extreme, he suggests, “we must drag ourselves away to the contrary extreme; for we shall get into the intermediate state by drawing well away from error, as people do in straightening sticks that are bent.”

For Aristotle, extremes are contrary to the mean and thus to virtue. In some cases, however, one type of extreme is more contrary to the mean than its polar opposite—that is, one extreme may be more blameworthy than the other. For example, Aristotle sees too little fear in the face of danger as “rashness” and too much fear as “cowardice,” and he calls “courage” the mean; however, he concludes, “it is not rashness ... but cowardice ... that is more opposed to courage.” Given that Aristotle groups pity with fear as the two passions properly purged via tragic drama, we can infer that, as with fear, an excess of

pity is more contrary to pity's conceptual mean than is its deficiency. In this view, drama draws one "away from [the] error" of excessive pity through the spending of that excess on fictional characters, ostensibly as a way to keep pity and fear from dominating civic life and thereby undermining the moral judgments and duties of citizens. "Tragedy," Aristotle famously argues, "is mimesis of an action which is elevated, complete, and of magnitude; in language embellished by distinct forms in its sections; employing the mode of enactment, not narrative; and through pity [*eleou*] and fear [*phobou*] accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions" (Poetics 1449 b 24-28). John Ferguson argues that Aristotle "showed his true philosophy when he said that the function of tragic drama was to purge out of the system pity and fear." For Aristotle, Ferguson suggests, "tragic drama provides us," its viewers, with an "inoculation which will prevent pity and fear [from] assailing us in real life. Pity is classed with fear as an undesirable emotion" (157). Although this was one of drama's functions, catharsis was also and principally an instrumental means of testing how well the plot could be seen as successful.

In his Politics, specifically in his examination of the proper educational function of music and harmonies, Aristotle sheds some light on what he sees as the sociopolitical role of artistic performance and the value of tragic catharsis:

It is clear that we should employ all the harmonies, yet not employ them all in the same way, but use the most ethical ones for education, and the active and passionate kinds for listening to when others are performing (for any experience that occurs violently in some souls is found in all, though with different degrees of intensity—for example pity and fear, and also religious excitement; for some persons are very liable to this form of emotion, and under the influence of sacred music we see these people, when they use tunes that violently arouse the soul, being thrown into a state as if they had received medicinal treatment and taken a purge; the same experience then must come also to the compassionate and the timid and the other emotional people generally in such degree as befalls each individual of these classes, and all must undergo a purgation and a pleasant feeling of relief. (1342 a 4)

Aristotle suggests, thus, that the intensification of pity and fear, like religious enthusiasm, is a way to return the active religious participant or the listening observer of a performance to a state of emotional equilibrium. Latent pity and fear, which register “with different degrees of intensity” in different people, is rendered in this account as a kind of illness that may be purged by the momentary intensification of that illness through musical and dramatic induction. Those most susceptible to these apparently undesirable emotions undergo the most intense “relief,” but “all,” depending on their preconditioned susceptibility, undergo some degree of purgation.

Aristotle’s account of pity in The Art of Rhetoric is the most complete and influential examination from the ancient world. Aristotle begins his discussion of the rhetorical arts with an attack on the improper use of emotions in judicial proceedings: “It is wrong to warp the dicast’s [juror’s] feelings, to arouse him to anger, jealousy, or compassion [*eleon*], which would be like making the rule crooked which one intended to use.” It is the only job of the litigant “to prove that the fact in question is or is not so, that it has happened or not” (1.1.5-6). Aristotle later argues that “emotions are all those affections which cause men to change their opinion in regard to their judgements.” Emotions inspire an alteration of one’s prior assessment or perspective: this tendency makes emotions problematic in that they have the potential to draw one into error. His explorations of the emotions, therefore, although they appear descriptive and analytical, suggest to the reader an appropriate mean (2.1.8). He defines pity in the following way:

Let pity ... be a kind of pain excited by the sight of evil, deadly or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it; an evil which one might expect to come upon himself or one of his friends, and when it seems near. For it is evident that one who is likely to feel pity must be such as to think that he, or one of his friends, is liable to suffer some evil, and such an evil as has been stated in the definition, or

one similar, or nearly similar. ... The persons men pity are those whom they know, provided they are not too closely connected with them; for if they are, they feel the same as if they themselves were likely to suffer. ... The terrible is different from the pitiable, for it drives out pity, and often serves to produce the opposite feeling. Further, the nearness of the terrible makes men pity. Men also pity those who resemble them in age, character, habits, position, or family; for all such relations make a man more likely to think that their misfortune may befall him as well. For, in general, here also we may conclude that all that men fear in regard to themselves excites their pity when others are the victims.

Aristotle thus highlights three interrelated criteria in his examination of pity: the criteria of worth, resemblance, and temporal distance/proximity. Properly speaking, one feels pity, according to Aristotle, only at the sight of those who do not deserve their sufferings—a sufferer must seem *worthy* of pity to inspire it, or, as Aristotle argues, “men feel pity” only if they think that the suffering person is “virtuous.” Here pity requires a deliberative element: “Pity, in classical Greece and Rome, was an emotion that responded to a vivid representation of suffering in others, but was conditioned as well by an evaluation of desert” (Konstan 125).

In addition, for Aristotle, pity arises when one expects that the evil or misfortune inflicted on the sufferer might (could) also strike oneself or one’s friends. In other words, the sufferer, in some way, must seem to *resemble* the pitier or those like him: Aristotle lists “age, character, habits, position, or family” as some of the categories of resemblance. The criteria of resemblance here is an ethical and culturally conditioned principle of similarity: we are more likely to feel pity for those who appear to share a similar ethical, social, or political status or character as ourselves. We’ve seen this already in Hecuba’s appeal to Odysseus. Resemblance, however, is not a pure principle of identification: men pity those they are familiar with or resemble in some way, “provided they are not too closely connected with them.” Resemblance marks a midpoint between sameness and

difference. Identification is, Aristotle suggests, antithetical to resemblance in that it negates the degree of difference pity requires.

Further, as Aristotle's language of expectation suggests, the sufferer's pain must also seem "near" in terms of *temporal proximity*: "sufferings are pitiable when they appear close at hand, while those that are past or future, ten thousand years backwards or forwards, either do not excite pity at all or only in a less degree, because men neither expect the one nor remember the other." Expectation and remembrance are constitutive elements of pity: without them, pity will not be excited, "or only in a less degree." However, with the use of "gestures, voice, dress, and dramatic action," he claims, past or future sufferings may become more pitiable because "they make the evil appear close at hand." When sympathetic pain presses too closely, however, Aristotle claims that pity is extinguished. In other words, the sufferer's undeserved misfortune must not appear to be *too close* at hand, for when it does, pity is replaced in the listener by his own fear for himself; the pain of the pitied becomes his own (cf. Poetics 1448b).

Only those who are "not in great fear" will feel pity, Aristotle notes, "for those who are panic-stricken are incapable of pity, because they are preoccupied with their own emotion." Here "preoccupation" names the temporal experience or mind-set when the expectation of pain gives way to identification and immediacy, which thereby causes a break with the criteria of ethical resemblance and temporal distance/proximity (temporal *intermediacy*). Pity operates thus at a temporal mean or mid-point, at the polar extremes of which, in the direction of either excess or deficiency, the ethical and rhetorical utility of pity dissolves. Aristotle gives a somewhat surprising amount of attention to pity's temporal preconditions. Neither those absorbed in their own pain (those who can

conceive no future relief for their pain), he continues, nor those “who think themselves supremely fortunate are capable of pity.” Only those who see themselves as “likely to suffer”—those who have experienced and survived suffering and have come to see themselves as vulnerable—are capable of pity, because they remember their past sufferings and therefore are able anticipate future suffering to themselves: “a man is moved to pity when he is so affected that he remembers that such evils have happened, or expects that they may happen, either to himself or to one of his friends.” Konstan calls this the “vulnerability principle”—the recognition of the possibility of changes in fortune to oneself, an awareness that is conditioned by the consciousness and constitution of time itself (50).

Aristotle in fact differentiates pity from other passions by distinguishing its unique temporal determinations and characteristics: “those who are ... influenced by any courageous emotion, such as anger or confidence,” for example, do not have the capacity for pity, “for these emotions do not take thought of the future.” The same is true for the “wantonly insolent, ... for they also take no thought of future suffering.” Pity can only arise, then, when one is in a very specific frame of mind, that is, when one is suspended in a particular type of relative temporal-mental intermediacy that hovers somewhere between immediacy (preoccupation or identification) and the distant past or future. Aristotle stresses, “it is those who are between the two extremes that feel pity.” In sum then, pity requires a measure of moral reflection (it discriminates worthiness), temporal and emotional distance/proximity (it depends on memory and anticipation), and social resemblance (non-identification) (for all references, see [Rhetoric 2.8](#)). On account of Aristotle’s lasting influence, his various analyses provide us with a foundational, if

preliminary, look into how western culture has tended to understand pity's structural makeup.

### **The Ideal of Autarcy**

From around the fifth century BC on, the reigning conception of the self was that of a rational mind controlling a body that kept the mind or soul from attaining to the perfect state of which it was inherently capable. The passions, in that they partook of the body, could not be trusted on their own as vehicles of right judgment. In Aristotle's conception, as we have seen, the passions, though neither good nor bad in themselves, need mediation: they must involve, properly speaking, a generous component of evaluation and deliberation to be valued and trusted. In this period, the ideal of rationality is coupled with the ideal of autarcy (self-sufficiency), which together are felt to be productive of happiness. Aristotle accepts four different definitions of what it is that constitutes a happy life: i) well-being and virtue; ii) self-sufficiency or a "self-sufficient life [*autarkeia zoês*]"; iii) a life that combines pleasure and security; iv) wealth in the form of animals and slaves combined with the means to control and manage it all. He goes on to suggest that each definition has the idea of independence at its core and that the man who possessed the best internal powers (of mind and body) and external goods (noble birth, friends, wealth, honor) would be the most self-sufficient person (*autarkéstatos*) (Rhetoric 1.5.3-4).

Although Aristotle sees honor (*timê*) as one of the highest ends of virtue, the "greatness of soul" or "dignity" (*megalopsuchia*) that comes through self-sufficiency is the highest ideal (Rhetoric 1.5.9). Aristotle identifies "supreme self-sufficiency" with the wisdom of the philosopher, which is available in its highest form only through the



contemplative life. Although the philosopher needs the necessities of life, he argues, unlike the temperate, just, or brave man (each of whom needs others to be recognized as such and on whom to practice), the philosopher can contemplate on his own and needs no one else: the better he is able to do so, the wiser he is. He may work efficiently as part of a team of thinkers; even so, “he is the most self-sufficient [*autarkestatos*]” of all men (Nichomachean Ethics 10.27-35). Not all men can be philosophers, however. For Aristotle, thus, the *polis* was “an ideal of self sufficiency ... which compensates for the fact that as individuals humans have needs for the satisfaction of which they must inevitably depend upon others” (Most 128). Ferguson goes as far as to suggest that “the pursuit of autarcy is the general philosophy of the Greek world, and such of the Roman world as was under Greek influence, from the end of the fifth century onwards” (154). Autarcy, as a philosophical ideal, seeks to make the individual independent of life circumstances by making him also independent of other people. That the ideal of *autarkeia* should dominate so thoroughly “a society based upon a slave economy is perhaps the profoundest paradox of Greek culture” (Most 127).

The conception of autarcy as a guiding principle of life has generally been traced to Socrates, whose independent spirit and courage in the face of death were some of the dominant themes of his admirers (see for example Xenophon, Memorabilia 1.2.14; 4.7.1; 4.8.11). His famous dictum, “know thyself,” along with his doctrine of recollection or reminiscence—that all knowledge is ready at hand before birth and simply needs to be remembered—mean, essentially, independence. For Plato, it follows, the good man has in himself as an inalienable part of his being all the resources for a good life: *malista autos hautoi autarkês pros to eû zên*. Plato even intensifies the phrase with the double use of

word for “self” (*autos hautoi*) (Republic 3.387d). Similarly, Diogenes of Sinope, founder of Cynicism, believed that the highest wisdom taught one to confront fortune with courage and suffering with reason and that the result was autarcy (Laërtius 6.38). Even Epicurus, who hated the Cynics, taught autarcy as vigorously as they: “We regard autarcy as a great good, not with a view to always making do with little, but to finding a little sufficient if we have not got a lot, frankly realizing that it is the people who least need luxury who enjoy it most, and that only bagatelles are hard to come by whereas that which is natural is easy to procure.” For Epicurus, to accustom ourselves to a meager regime places us “in a better position when we do occasionally come upon luxuries,” because it “enables us to face fortune fearlessly” (Laërtius 10.130-1). It is, after all, Epicurus who coined the famous idea that the wise man would be happy even on the rack (see Laërtius 10.118). Both the Cynics and the Epicureans taught that the ideal state was one of tranquility in the face of whatever external threats ensue. Epicureans used the term *ataraxia*—“perfect mental peace”—to describe their ideal state.

Although *ataraxia* was also a common term in Stoic jargon, the Stoics preferred the term *apatheia*, or the absence of passion, as their own ideal. The Stoics based their moral ideas on those of the Cynics, and Zeno of Citium is seen as the founder of Stoicism. One of his later admirers praises Zeno for what his admirers saw as his predominate characteristic: “You laid the foundation-stone of self-sufficiency [*autarkeian*]” (Laërtius 7.27). Hecato, another early Stoic, follows Aristotle in his suggestion that “if greatness of soul [*megalopsuchia*] is in itself sufficient [*autarkês*] to raise us high above everything, and is an element of virtue, then virtue is also sufficient in itself [*autarkês*] to attain happiness and is able to despise anything that seems

troublesome” (Laërtius 6.127-28). T. R. Glover, in his important study of religious conflict in the early Roman Empire, argues that “everything with the Stoic turns on the individual,” on things that are “in your own power. ... All is thrown upon the individual will” (65).

Ferguson traces the origin and dynamism of autarcy to the broken optimism born during the decline of the Greek city-states. The city-state represented in a corporate form the positive ideal of independent civic participation and was felt to be a distinct and complete whole in itself. Greek art and architecture reflected this ideal: the Greek temple was a “dynamic unity ... single, whole and complete, and any change of style or later extension” would have spoiled the effect. “Similarly, the Greeks were the first people to make statues which were complete in themselves, designed to be seen from all sides, and not parts of an architectural complex. A Greek tragedy is complete in itself, and Aristotle says so” (Ferguson 133). With the breakdown of the city-states, the fragments were eventually integrated into great empires governed from without. Autarcy develops initially, then, as a positive affirmation of independent civic life and artistic expression. However, as the governmental system no longer seemed to represent in its structure the ideal of autonomy and individual selfhood, the advocates of autoarcy grew pessimistic about the social and civic possibility of independence and they sought to find independence increasingly apart from social and civic interaction.

The Cynics and Epicureans alike thus turned in varying degrees to the value of secluded life. Diogenes, for example, deliberately flouted the conventions of his day. He refused to identify himself with any city, and, unlike Socrates, who saw citizenship as a privilege and responsibility, saw himself as a citizen of the world, by which he meant that

his life was unimpeded by the ties of particular citizenship, law, or the influence of politicians (Laërtius 6.72). As civic independence and responsibility were swept aside by imperial dominance, “people felt themselves in the grip of world powers which they could not control or even affect” (Ferguson 135). One anonymous poet describes Zeno as standing apart, “unspoiled” by public involvement (Laërtius 27). While Plato and Aristotle saw the city-state emerging as a vehicle of self-sufficiency, in the wake of imperial growth, many thinkers sought out sources of power independent of direct public involvement. Plato, for instance, called Diogenes, for his asceticism and rejection of civic involvement, a “Socrates gone mad” (Laërtius 6.54).

As power begins to be located in singular rulers, thinkers seek to discover in the individual an un-corruptible source of empowerment. Epictetus, for instance, elevates the individual to the status of a semi-divinity, allowing the individual to internalize a form of power that, in political terms, was only available to the Emperor: “god is the father of both gods and men ... [and] you are sons of god.” Men are made of two conjoined elements, he avers, “the body, which we have in common with animals, and the mind and reason, which we have in common with the gods” (Dobbin, Discourses 1.3.1-3). As the will is not located in the body, the mind alone is free and sufficient in itself and is only hindered by its own false opinions or beliefs about the power of external circumstances to disturb its peace—it can only be disturbed by itself. Whereas the body is passive to external impressions, the mind and will are not: “the body is not yours, but is clay cunningly compounded.” This part of the self, suggests Epictetus, is not from god. However, god has given us “a part” of himself, “the power” of actively using appearances or external impression. Only the body can be a victim of external circumstances (1.1.9-

12). There is a recognizable contempt for any political or spiritual forms of external coercion in Epictetus' philosophy: "The gods have put in our power only the supreme and most powerful thing, the power of making correct use of impressions" or appearances (1.1.7). Epictetus may thus tell his reader that were Nero to threaten him with chains and punishment, he should say, "You may fetter my leg, but my will not even Zeus himself can overpower" (Discourses 1.1.23). It is only "the body" that is in chains, the will is inherently free and independent, even of god. When discussing how one should behave towards tyrants, he argues:

What is by nature free cannot be disturbed or hindered by anything but itself. It is a man's own opinions that disturb him. For whenever a tyrant says to someone, "I will chain your leg," the man who values the leg says, "No, have mercy [eleêson, have pity]"; while the man who values his moral character says, "if it seems the better course for you, then chain it." "You do not care? [says the tyrant], "I don't care. ... Of my corpse [alone] you are master."

He is not serving the tyrant, he continues, "but myself. And if you [the tyrant] want me to say that I am [serving] you, I will say that I [serve] you [as I do] my pot" (Dobbin, Discourses 1.19.8-10). His philosophy gives to power a countercultural downward mobility in which, paradoxically, the individual attains a complementary spiritual upward mobility or level of intellectual autonomy.

As power is redistributed through the technology of imperial and colonial incorporation to forces outside of the individual self and the city-state, thinkers of the period therefore sought out systems of thought that turned power in the opposite direction, towards increasingly internal, private sources: a type of power that did not need expression in the traditional forms of public engagement. Pity, I would suggest, was perceived as just such a form of social involvement, as a symptom of the self's vulnerability to the forms of external coercion, and, as such, a threat to one's ontological

integrity and wholeness: “pity” must be understood in this sociopolitical context. The need for such internal sources of self-governance that emerged with the city-state thus became increasingly acute with its the decline. It was, after all, a political system that imagined itself as able to produce simultaneously internal and external, private and public, forms of independence and self-sufficiency. With its decline, internal and private forms took precedence.

Of the three—the Cynics, Epicureans, and the Stoics—the Epicureans were the only ones *not* to disown pity, and they even seemed to advocate it (see Laërtius10.18). Epicurus saw the tendency of some Cynics to disavow even friendship as contemptible, though he ended up himself advocating and living a life of austere seclusion. According to Ferguson, Epicureanism, in a nutshell, taught that “The end of life is tranquility, Public life can only destroy tranquility. Live in retirement, in the seclusion of the Garden, in the delights of friendship” (137). Cicero, when it suited his argument, similarly declared that pity was the most admirable of all a virtues, though he often treats it with self-professed stoic suspicion. Still, philosophers of the period generally saw pity as ranking very low on their hierarchy of values, though it was a much-discussed passion. Zeno, for instance, declared that pity is a sickness of the soul that no one but a young fool would display (Cicero, Pro Murena 29.61). *Apatheia*, the stoic ideal, means passionless composure, and pity not only disturbs one’s inner peace, it leaves one at the mercy of things outside of oneself. In other words, pity is for the Stoic an enemy to the individual will. Seneca suggests that we be helpful to others, but that to display pity is a sign of weak character, a symptom of vulnerability that a good man would avoid (Seneca, De Clementia 2.5.1). Epictetus similarly argues that we must feel no anger, rage, envy, or pity. He claims that

pity is caused by too rapid an assent to the sight of another's pain or lamentations: a pitier's assessment of the sufferer's situation is, in his mind, a vicious judgment.

For Epictetus, it is only the sufferer's/pitier's opinion of his circumstances that afflicts him: if a man is unhappy, he argues, his unhappiness is his own fault, for men were made to be happy and free from perturbations of the soul. He suggest that it is okay to *show* pity, even to lament with a sufferer, so long as you take care not to actually feel pity—to lament “internally” (*esôthen*) (see Discourses 3.3.17; 3.24.2; 4.4.33; Manual 16). Pity de-purifies the pristine and divinely implanted mind or soul by involving it in the external world and in inaccurate beliefs about the true self. Participation in another's pain thus had to be limited by a productive disinterest or emotional distance—*apatheia*. Pity therefore weakens one's judgment and disempowers the pitier; pity draws one “down,” as it were, to a level of vulnerability, to a lower state of being (status); it is a threat to the integrity of the self, and as such is seen, like *eros* (especially love for women), to be a kind of sickness that must be avoided. Men were seen as superior to women, and women lacked in the capacity for *autarkeia*.<sup>1</sup> While the relations of man to man tended to be thought of “as being founded upon a high degree of equality and upon mutual recognition of each other's self-sufficiency: vulnerability here would have meant a man's loss of status, his degradation to the rank of a woman or a slave” (Most 129).

Even the Neo-Platonists argue that “it is weakness to be touched by any feeling of pity for misery” (Plotinus, Ennead 1.4.8). Considering these philosophers' attitudes towards pity, Ferguson concludes that it should not seem surprising “that the politicians used the brutal spectacles of triumphal procession and gladiatorial display as instruments of their popularity, nor that the common people rejoiced therein. ... By and large, the

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, A. E. Hanson, “Hippocrates: Diseases of Women,” Signs I (1975): 567-84.

ancient world in general and the Roman world in particular grew inured ... to brutality. This is the outcome of autarcy ...” (157-58). Stoicism did little to change (or even helped promulgate) the brutal tendencies of the Roman political machine. The ancient world did not, however, totally denigrate pity. Sometime after the fourth century, there was in Athens an altar dedicated to Pity. Statius describes it favorably, but, interestingly, calls it *Clementia*, or mercy, not *Misericordia*, the more accurate translation of *Eleos* (Thebais 12 481-505). While pity (*eleos*) in the ancient world was something felt to properly arise between relative equals (cf. Aristotle’s category of resemblance), *clementia* or mercy was typically given by a superior to an inferior and was an action rather than a feeling or passion—it could thus more accurately be called a virtue. Pausanias, in his Description of Greece, argues that the dedication to Pity (*Eleos*) was exceptional and unique (1.17.1), and the Cynic Demonax, when Athens was being considered as a host for the gladiatorial events, suggested that they should first remove the Altar of Pity (Lucian, Life of Demonax 57). The ancient world’s obsession with self-sufficiency is clearly a compensatory response, especially after the collapse of the city-state, to reigning beliefs about the inherent ontological instability of human beings. As Glenn Most rightly recognizes, “the archaic ethos stresses man’s ephemeral character, the fact that his fortune can transform him within the space of a single day from a person of one kind to a completely different one” (129). “The Hellenic Age,” Ferguson avers, “sought autarcy to protect itself against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (145). Security, it seemed, could only be found “within.” As long as the ideal was independence from external forces, from the corrupted attachments of public life, pity would remain low on the hierarchy of virtues and values.



### **Divine Pity and the Rise of Christianity**

Notions of the divine played an important role in shaping pity's historical development as well. Sir Kenneth Dover argues that the Greeks in classical antiquity "did not expect gods to be merciful" (156). In Homer, the outcome of human events is ultimately decided by the gods. After seeing Odysseus weep over the fate of the Argives at Troy, Alcinous explains, "The gods arranged all this, and sent them their misfortunes in order that future generations might have something to sing about" (8.579-80). The gods bring about the ruin of men for aesthetic reasons—to honor men through poetry. Human tragedy is, from a divine perspective, art. Nietzsche—whose attitude reveals something of the essence of the ancient Greek ethos—laments that the modern world has lost its taste for such an elevated perspective on human suffering and he suggests that we not "let ourselves be made gloomy by the lamentation and suffering of other mortals and cover our own sky with clouds." He calls this ability to rise above the limits of humanity "the art of the Olympians," a distanced position from which we may edify "ourselves by the misfortunes of mankind instead of being made unhappy by them." Tragedy, he avers, teaches us to value such distances and heights (Daybreak 144). He thus refers to people and gods who love to pity "overobtrusive." They are, he says, the destroyers of "great destinies," who "full of pity" have lost all "sense of shame, of respect, of sensitivity for distances" (Zarathustra 266; Ecce Homo 4). Tragedy teaches one to look "down from above" so as to attain an Olympian perspective on human suffering: "There are heights of the soul from which even tragedy ceases to look tragic" (Beyond Good and Evil 30). As Konstan notes, although tragedy is the great product of Athenian democracy, "it is just

here that the gods are typically represented as being indifferent to human sorrow and invulnerable to pity” (111).

The Greeks thus tended to see “the gods” as “the source of human instability” (Most 129). In Homer’s world, the gods are as unstable in their desires and favors as humans. Although there are many instances from The Iliad and The Odyssey of divine pity for human suffering, the pity of the gods was neither something one could take for granted, nor, when it was given, could it be entirely trusted. After leaving Calypso’s island, for instance, Odysseus is struck by a tempest, the work of Poseidon, and he turns, not to the gods for help or compassion, but to himself: “He spoke to his own mighty spirit: ‘Ah me, wretched that I am! What is to befall me at the last?’” (5.298-99). “In general,” Konstan argues, “characters in Homer do not ask the gods for pity, and when they do, it is always with the recognition that the result of such a petition is at best doubtful” (110).

At one point in The Iliad, the prophet Helenus tells Hector to return to the city from battle (which, on account of Diomedes strength, is currently going in the favor of the Greeks) in order to ask his mother, Hecuba, to vow to Athena “that she will sacrifice in her temple twelve sleek heifers that have not felt the goad, if [Athena] will have compassion [*eleêsê*] on the city and the Trojan's wives and their little children; in hope she may hold back from sacred Ilios the son of Tydeus, [Diomedes]” (6.94-6). The uncertain “if” turns out to be justified when Athena ends up refusing Hecuba’s petition (6.311). “All human sacrifices, when systematically executed, deceive the god to whom they are made: they subject him to the primacy of human ends, and dissolve his power” (Horkheimer and Adorno 50). Here a sacrifice is sought in exchange for pity, but Hera’s

rejection merely reaffirms the primacy of her own agency and superhuman status. Pity involves a loss of power—it puts the higher in the service of the lower.

In a similar vein, in The Odyssey, Ino, a semi-divine sea nymph, pity's Odysseus as he is blasted by Poseidon after he has fled the safety of Calypso's island. Ino subsequently offers Odysseus an immortal scarf or veil that, she tells him, if he ties it around his waist during the storm his safety will be certain, and though he may need to swim on his own should Poseidon destroy his ship, he should now have nothing to fear, neither pain nor death. After Ino departs, Odysseus, having accepted the scarf,

spoke to his own mighty spirit: 'Woe is me! Let it not be that some one of the immortals is again weaving a snare for me, that she bids me leave my raft. Nay, but verily I will not yet obey, for afar off mine eyes beheld the land, where she said I was to escape. But this will I do, and meseems that this is best: as long as the timbers hold firm in their fastenings, so long will I remain here and endure to suffer affliction; but when the wave shall have shattered the raft to pieces, I will swim, seeing that there is naught better to devise.' (5.326-354)

He tends to see her pity as a “snare” and the gods as troublemakers. He thus ends up trusting his own power to “endure” Poseidon's divine wrath without the help of divine intervention. Also, were some god's pity to intervene, there would be no honor in his successes. The gods honor him more by either not interfering or by providing him with obstacles so that his victories might be his own. Pity seeks to remove obstacles and thus to reduce the need for displays of individual heroism. This is what Nietzsche means when he claims that pity interferes with “great destinies.”

While Aristotle sees resemblance, a relative equivalence in social status, as a precondition of pity, in Homer pity for lesser beings is at least a possibility. Implicitly, Aristotle did not thus extend pity to slaves who were routinely tortured in order to give evidence for juries. In agreement with Nietzsche, Konstan notes that Greek tragedy “is

the great product of the Athenian democracy, yet it is just here that the gods are typically represented as being indifferent to human sorrow and invulnerable to pity, if not always to other passions” (109-11). It is clear that as the city-state is formalized a new conception of the divine begins to replace the older version. Fred Alford argues that “Democratic judgement depends on pity ... because it depends on identification with others” (290). Yet, as we’ve seen, Aristotle’s category of resemblance is anything but identification. Further, in the ancient world, pity does not extend to *all* others: those ancient writers who regarded “pity itself as a positive emotion restrict its application in principle to members of their own class” (Ferwerda 64). While the ancients tended to locate the source of human instability with the gods, with the emergence of the democratic city-state the nature of the divine begins to shift in favor of an even more distant divinity, one even more egalitarian in his apathy to human suffering, who favors no man because he is indifferent to human fortune. Plato and Aristotle relegate the gods, essentially, to a plane of *metaphysical* distance—they are stripped of any Homeric anthropomorphic qualities.

In the Timaeus Plato applies his concept of the ideal forms to the Universe, which is created as a reflection of the divine nature: “it was so designed as to supply its own wastage as food for itself, and to experience by its own agency and within itself all actions and passions, since He that had constructed it deemed that it would be better if it were self-sufficing rather than in need of other things” (33c-d). Plato uses similar language when describing Absolute Beauty, which does not depend on time or circumstance or place, and it sees no decay. It is separate, simple, and eternal (Symposium 211). This image of divinity lacks all desire. Plato seemed to give the ethical

postulate of self-sufficiency thereby a metaphysical ground. Even for Aristotle, god is at the center of his metaphysical system. God is pure form and he sits in eternal self-contemplation, and is himself unmoved, while he moves the spectacle of the universe just as the beloved moves the lover (Metaphysics 12). The gods by definition were thus invulnerable to human misfortune: “Consistency required that gods not suffer from the distress associated with an emotion like pity” (Konstan 112).

Glenn Most argues that “the attributes men give their gods in any culture are an index of the ideal state they wish they themselves could reach” (128). Theodorus, “the atheist,” who was influenced by Zeno, in his zeal for autarcy disavowed belief in the gods, whose interventions into human experience it was outside of the wise man’s power to control (Laërtius 10.8). Epicurus’ own disavowal of the notion of gods who intervene in human affairs was motivated by similar reasoning. Fear and desire are, for Epicurus, the great enemies of tranquility and autarcy, and the principal fears of men are the fear of death and the fear of the gods. For Epicurus, the greatest way to combat fear is through scientific knowledge, which alone can show that death is extinction (there is no afterlife) and the gods are distant and disinterested. “The Epicureans,” claims Konstan, taught that any divine “concern for human beings must necessarily disturb the complete tranquility that they ascribe to the gods; their gods, accordingly took no notice at all of human affairs” (113). In the neo-Platonic view, god, The Absolute, is untouched by material existence, the senses, and the affections therein (see Enneads 8.3). For the Stoic, Seneca, fate was also unmoved by appeals to pity (Natural Questions 2.35.1-2).

With the conquests of Alexander the Great, the political scope of the city-state was seriously reduced. He ushered in an age of great kingdoms, such as the Ptolemies in

Egypt, which were governed by Greek ruling castes until Rome incorporated them into its own Empire. “Democracy of a kind continued to exist in the city-states, or at least some of them, such as Rhodes, but political power now resided largely in the palace rather than the assembly, and kings and queens were honored as gods” (Konstan 114). The ideal thus, in that rulers were divine, was dispassionate governance through a strict application of the law—rule unhindered by the whims of sympathy. As Konstan notes, petitions to the palace sought justice not pity: “Appeals to pity ... apparently do not occur in [petitions] before the second century AD” (114). Mikhail Rostovtzeff avers that before the second century AD, in the Roman governors, “the voice of sympathy is dumb” (154). Similarly, R. L. B. Morris, on the basis of petitions recovered in Oxyrhynchus (in Egypt), argued that in the second century AD, there is a decided deterioration in public confidence and that the populace began to feel themselves increasingly “oppressed by government” (368-9). One striking feature of these petitions, he notes, is their frequent use of “an appeal to pity—an aspect that is totally uncharacteristic of first-century petitions” (369). Morris equates this change to a growing disillusionment with and a lack of trust in government authority.

Further, there is a historical relationship between pity’s emergence in political petitions and its appearance in petitions to the gods. Petitions to the gods, prior to the second century AD, did not tend to include appeals to pity but rather to justice (Konstan 116). Hank Versnel similarly observes that “The person in antiquity who had suffered an injustice and had gone to the authorities in vain,—if indeed he had bothered to go at all—had in fact only one authority at his disposal: he could lodge his complaint with the god(s).” Versnel’s extensive catalogue of “justice” prayers, however, includes none that

invoke pity (68).<sup>2</sup> In all of such prayers for justice, Versnel adds, “the deity is presented as a superior, majestic autocrat to whom human beings in all humility submit their cases” (80). A literary example of such appeals to justice includes Aeneas’ prayer on behalf of Dido—a request to spare her life—in which he beseeches the justice of the gods on account of his piety and their respect for his dutiful service (see Anneid 4.590-5). The same seems to be true of inscriptions from this period: “References ... to divine pity in pagan inscriptions are rare, and, what is more, begin to appear at more or less the same time that appeals to the pity of the emperor and other officials turn up in legal petitions, that is, in the second and third centuries AD” (Konstan 117).

Interestingly, most of these inscriptions that appeal to pity are Christian. One such petition, which comes from the third century AD, is dedicated to “the Highest God” by one Aurelius Asclepiades, in thanks for the relief from suffering God’s pity provided. Thomas Drew-Bear and Christian Naour comment on this inscription: “note the use of the verb [“pitied”], which would rise to so great an importance in Christian terminology, in dedications offered to a divinity with monotheistic character traits” (2039-40). Here pity is seen as a unique character trait of the Hebrew and Christian divinity—of monotheistic versions of the divine in general. In Christianity, the problem becomes how to reconcile typical pagan conceptions of impersonal godhead with the God of the New Testament whose ultimate act, dying on the cross for the sins of the world, is motivated by compassion for humanity. How can God be compassionate and transcendent at once? It is with this question in mind that Isidore of Seville, the sixth-century etymologist, will find it necessary to defend God’s compassion in light of his transcendent nature: “there is

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<sup>2</sup> Versnel tends to translate *hileōs*, a term that does show up in these prayers, as “mercy,” though it would be more suitably rendered by words like “propitious” or “graceful.”

pity in God without there being any misery in his heart” (Origins 10.164). Stoic thought was appealing to Christian theologians, but not its attitude towards pity. For this reason, as Peter Sorabji points out, it is not surprising that one of the two main Christian copies of Epictetus’ handbook leaves out his most famous and critical comments on pity (See Sorabji 390).

In his *Institutiones Civinae*, the Christian thinker Lactantius (early fourth century) confronts head on the deprecatory attitude towards pity grounded on Stoic theory and pervasive throughout most of the pagan intellectual tradition. Lactantius comes at the problem from several angles. He begins by reconsidering the passions in general in human life. Three passions (*adfectus*), he argues, name the primary vices: anger, greed, and lust (56.1). The Stoics, he claims, believe in amputating or extirpating (*amputandos*) these emotions, while Aristotle argues that they need to be controlled (*temperandos*). He concludes that both are in error because the emotions are planted in us by nature and have a rationale or purpose (*rationem*), they cannot be eliminated, nor can they be moderated, since they must be either good or bad. (56.2). In themselves, he concludes, the passions are natural and good; their value depends on how they are used: if for good ends, then they are virtues, if for bad, vices. Like Aristotle, he adds an element of choice to the passions, but here they are deemed good or bad according to the end they produce. Anger is good when it limits sin, as lust is good when it leads to procreation rather than adultery, etc. This initial discussion is just the first stage in his attempt to redeem the worth of pity.

Lactantius’ next move is anthropological in nature and seeks to explain the origin of human society. Human laws were insufficient to regulate human society, he argues, and could only lead to an increase in war and political dissension. The laws could punish



but they could not support conscience (54.8). Once humanity reached this state of chaos, “God took pity on us and revealed himself to us and showed us how we might learn, in him, religion, faith, chastity and pity (55.1). Jesus appeared on earth thus, in part, to teach us to pity and to found our community on these attributes. God has implanted pity in us and sent his Son to teach us pity “so that we might come to hand over the entire protection of our lives to mutual protection” (60.2). Because we are social and weak by nature in comparison to other creatures, we need pity as an instrument of corporate self-preservation.

In contrast to the typical appeal to justice in pagan Greece, there is perhaps no more recognizable formula in Christian tradition than the invocation *kurie, eleêson*, “Lord, have pity!” ( Matthew 15:22), which traditionally is addressed to Jesus and which eventually becomes a formal part of Catholic mass. The New Testament, in other words, emphasizes God’s pity and the obligation to works of charity (*eleêmosune*—literally “acts of pity”—of which “alms” is a transliteration) towards the poor, the sick, and the weak. The Christian emphasis on pity for the lower orders of society was a unique feature of early Christianity. As J. H. W. G. Liegeschuetz has shown, “the idea that the poor, the sick and the old ought to be helped because they were there and [they were] even God’s creatures is not classical” (187). Peter Brown similarly notes, “we are only beginning to appreciate the extent to which a relationship with the poor, as such, existed only on the margins of ancient man’s view of society” (20). P. Veyne suggests that the very concept of the poor is derived from Christianity and Judaism (30-31). Judith Perkins makes the point strikingly clear:

From its earliest periods, Christianity’s growth correlated with the constitution of a category of sufferers, in particular, with the poor and the sick. As heirs and

inhabitants of a Christian thought-world, it is difficult to remember that these in fact are cultural categories, and essentially absent from the classificatory systems of the earlier Greco-Roman world. ... It is perhaps even more important to note that such categories of people were, in essence, not even 'there' in any significant way in the cultural representation of the ancient world and, therefore, in the culture's consciousness. Like [a] new word before it is learned, the poor, the sick and the old hardly existed as subjects of knowledge for the classical world. (8)

In the late Hellenistic period and the early Roman empire, Perkins argues, there is a significant shift in focus from a notion of the body as something to be controlled by the mind or soul, which is seen as impervious to pain and sufficient in itself, to the notion of what she calls "a suffering self," a self "joined to a body liable to pain and suffering" and "in need of outside attention and direction" (3). The Christian God's defining characteristic—his very *modus operandi*—is his compassion for humanity, which he displays by taking on a body and dying for the sins of the world. This God is a master and lord who understands human tragedy not as a distant "Olympian" spectator but as a human participant, and he identifies with the lowest orders of society. He thus seemed to elevate their status, by embracing their suffering and plight as his own. In the Christian world-view, this act was necessary because human beings are fundamentally sinful and dependent. While Greco-Roman morality celebrated individual human agency as the vehicle of "salvation," in Christian soteriology, the individual was entirely dependent on God for his salvation, and God favored and empowered those who suffered: the weak, the sick, the widows, and the old. If the ideal of the "good" and "noble" man in the classical world could be represented by the concept of autarcy— independence and self-sufficiency—the mark of a Christian was his sense of dependence and insufficiency. If we are dependent on God for salvation, it follows, self-sufficiency is not only a sin but an error in belief and understanding. It is "by grace you have been saved through faith,"

writes Paul the Apostle, "... not because of works [deeds or achievements], lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8). Jesus is a gracious and compassionate king, one who elevates the status of the lowest orders of society to that of sainthood *by grace*, i.e. as a gift. The individual is constitutionally incapable of procuring his own salvation. In Homer, the gods' favors are granted according to status, honor, and whim—the highest generally receive the highest honors. The Christian God's pity, on the other hand, is unconditional and produces an unprecedented upward mobility for the lowest orders (the culturally unrecognized orders) of society, explicitly turning the reigning hierarchy on its head—a common theme in early Christian narrative.<sup>3</sup>

In God's kingdom, after all, "the last shall be first, and the first last" (Matthew 20:16), a way of thinking the ancient Greek world could not perhaps conceive and certainly would have rejected before Christianity begins to take center stage. The early Christian church also advocated, at least in theory, a concept of shared property and equality: in the kingdom of God, through baptism "in Christ," Paul writes, "[t]here is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Acts 4:32-5:11; Galatians 3: 27-8; cf. Colossians 3:11). In the "Beatitudes," not only are the meek, the poor and the hungry given precedence, "to those who show pity, pity will be shown" (see Matthew 5). Gregory of Nyssa, writing on the "Beatitudes," explains Christ's words as a call for human beings to mutual affection and sympathy (*sumpathes*), so as to compensate for the unfairness of the unequal distribution of goods in life (On the Beatitudes 44.1252.5-14). It is for such reasons that

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<sup>3</sup> On the theme of hierarchical inversion and the role of suffering as a vehicle of the empowerment of the lowest orders, see Perkins' examination of the Passion of Perpetua, especially pp. 108-110: "a reading of the Passion of Perpetua will demonstrate how in early Christian text, by locating new sources and avenues of power, functioned to subvert the hierarchial structures holding sway in the early Empire" (104).

Nietzsche calls “Christianity ... the religion of *pity*,” and he laments that “It defends life’s disinherited and condemned.” Christianity’s high valuation of pity is repressed eventually, argues Nietzsche, by “the *good etiquette* of the [Roman Catholic] church, that reverential etiquette of the hieratic taste which permits only the more initiated and silent into the holy of holies and closes it to louts “(Anti-Christ 7; Genealogy 3:22).

Pity is, for Nietzsche, the Christian “instinct” *par excellence*; it is the instinct of the weak and oppressed, who seek to subjugate their masters by involving them, through pity, in their suffering: a covert way of drawing their masters “down” to their level: “In Christianity the instincts of the subjugated and oppressed come into the foreground: it is the lowest classes which seek their salvation in it.” He thus sees in Christianity a “[m]ortal hostility against the masters of the earth, against the ‘noble’—and at the same time a covert secret competition.” He therefore sees in Christian pity a base and secret “*ressentiment*,” the *ressentiment* of the lower orders against those who rightfully rule. It is through “the most secret recesses of such base instincts” that “Christianity has waged a war to the death against every feeling of reverence and distance between man and man, against, that is, the precondition of every elevation, every increase in culture—it has forged out of the *ressentiment* of the masses its chief weapon against us, against everything noble. ... Christianity is a revolt of everything that crawls along the ground directed against that which is elevated: the Gospel of the ‘lowly’ makes low.” (Anti-Christ 21).

These radical aspects of early Christian thought cannot be emphasized enough. Ramsay MacMullen has suggested that Christianity failed to make any real impact on the Roman empire because it failed to affect social practices like slavery and judicial

brutality (324). However, the major “difference Christianity made,” argues Perkins, “was itself, its own institutionalization, and the new categories it introduced into cultural consciousness” (9). By the mid third century, the Christian church at Rome already supported around 1,500 people, creating a need for the management of such charitable operations. The pity of the wealthier Christians thus became an institutionalizing machine. Wayne Meeks speculates with Peter Lampe “that it was the need to coordinate charitable efforts that first led to a central organization of the otherwise “fractionated” house-communities of Christians in Rome. ... [T]he practice of giving was [then] one factor that propelled the institutionalization of the church” (108; Lampe 334-45). Peter Brown has similarly shown how assertively fourth century bishops sought power through their role as “lovers of the poor.” The bishop’s authority thus rested on their connection to and formation of a relatively new category of people: “in the name of a religion that claimed to challenge the values of the elite, upper-class Christians gained control of the lower classes of the cities. By the end of the fourth century their authority rested on a newly created constituency.” In this way, the poor were also stabilized and localized: they “could not move to other cities” (Power and Persuasion 78). “Through their offices of caring for sufferers,” writes Perkins, bishops, some from “low-class” origins, “had come to control wealth and influence” (11). For Perkins this institutionalization set the stage for Christianity’s “triumph”; without this organizational apparatus, she suggests, Constantine’s conversion would likely have changed very little.

Although charity seemed to serve only to institutionalize another different hierarchy with bishops at the top and the poor at the bottom, it did bring significant cultural attention to a new category of people (a once culturally invisible class)—

attention they had not had in the classical Greco-Roman world. Christianity's valorization of pity, Nietzsche thus concluded, represented its hatred for all forms of hierarchical power-distribution.<sup>4</sup> As the church begins to organize itself and set up the preconditions for its "triumph," the leaders of the church begin to identify themselves with the suppression which they originally wanted to abolish—a transformational pattern, suggests Horkheimer and Adorno, that is characteristic of all processes of power formation and centralization: "As representatives of power—even if of power for good—they themselves [become] historical forces which [can] be organized, and as such" end up playing a violent "role in the true history of the human race: that of the instruments of organization" (224). The Christian version of God as essentially compassionate along with the conception of humans as dependent must have been appealing at a time of such intense political dissatisfaction, but it too could be assimilated to a hierarchically organized structure of domination.

### **Hierarchy and Pity in Chaucer**

In Medieval Europe, the theme of human dependency developed into a theoretically stable hierarchy. Pity's comparatively dynamic role in early Christianity, along with the fantasy of equality and shared property that coincided with it, was, however, curtailed. As Horkheimer and Adorno show, "social hierarchy," whatever its form, "is ultimately dependent on force" (110). Though it found its original identity in the idea of protecting and providing charity for the weak and poor, Christian ideology was able to transform its defining characteristics into a means of exploitation. Ideally

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<sup>4</sup> "The noble human being must force himself, with the aid of history, to recognize that, since time immemorial, in all somehow dependent social strata the common man *was* only what he was considered; not at all used to posting values himself, he also attached no other value to himself than his masters attached to him (it is the characteristic *right of masters* to create values)" (*Beyond Good and Evil* 261).

conceived, medieval society is an organism made up of different grades, and “human activities form a hierarchy of functions, which differ in kind and in significance, but each of which is of value on its own plane, provided that it is governed, however remotely, by the end which is common to all. Like the celestial order, of which it is the dim reflection, society is stable, because it is straining upwards” (Tawney 21). In such a world view, autarcy meant anarchy. There is no room for individualized human self-sufficiency. To deem oneself self-sufficient would be to place oneself outside the protection of the church, which was the very vehicle of salvation. Salvation was a corporate event available to the faithful. The only legitimate power in such a system was power given as a gift from above. In the words of the Bull of Boniface VIII (*Unam Sanctam*), “The way of religion is to lead the things which are lower to the things which are higher through the things which are intermediate. According to the law of the universe all things are not reduced to order equally and immediately; but the lowest through the intermediate, the intermediate through the higher” (quoted from Tawney 21). Social hierarchy is thus naturalized through the concept of the dependence of the “lower” on the “higher.” These doctrines, notes R. H. Tawney, “are accepted with astonishing docility, and, except on rare occasions, there is no question of reconstruction. What they include is no trifle. It is nothing less than the whole edifice of feudal society—class privilege, class oppression, exploitation, serfdom.” Class status and inequality were rationalized through the metaphor of society as a human body:

Society, like the human body, is an organism composed of different members. Each member has its own function, prayer, or defense, or merchandise, or tilling the soil. Each must receive the means suited to its station, and must claim no more. ... Between classes there must be inequality; for otherwise a class cannot perform its function. ... As a rule of social policy, the doctrine was at once repressive and protective. ... As

a philosophy of society, it attempted to spiritualized the material by incorporating it in a divine universe, which should absorb and transform it. (Tawney 22-3)

Acts of charity were thus really acts of duty and responsibility to the lower orders, who were dependent on the higher orders for their protection and for whom, in return, the lower orders worked and served. *Autarkeia* was typically praised as an ideal for the State and not for the individual person: Thomas Aquinas regarded highly any State that could meet its needs from the produce of its own land, but this was not a principle of individualized spiritual autonomy (see Tawney 33). The idea of an individual, of someone revolving in his own orbit (a concept in its modern sense not even fully formalized at this time), was anathema, yet the radical generalization of Christian pity that produced the fantasy of shared property remained a danger to any hierarchical system of power distribution and needed regulation.

The problem of pity in Medieval England has, not surprisingly, become a topic of renewed interest in recent critical studies on emotion, particularly in Chaucer Studies. One of the main questions revolves around the problem of whether pity is to be thought of as subversive to hierarchy or as ultimately affirming traditional structures. As we've seen already, pity was generally seen in the ancient world as a potential threat to power and to the identity of the pitying self: the general feeling was, before early Christianity, that pity may be shown or displayed but must never lead the pitier into a state of self-abandonment to the sufferer. Pity meant a loss of self-control and was a threat to autarcy, whether the autarcy of the individual, a particular class, or the state. While some studies treat Chaucerian pity as upsetting medieval hierarchies, others see his use of pathos as conventional and as conforming to traditional religious categories. Jill Mann, for



instance, sees Chaucer's pity as a dynamic force that is able to "overturn and obliterate the relationship between conqueror and suppliant" (172). Robert Worth Frank, on the other hand, argues that in the Canterbury Tales, each of the Monk's seventeen mini-narratives is able to evoke pathos because "in a culture so hierarchical, the spectacle of loss of power or fame or riches may have been radically threatening and distressing" (149). Thus from one view pity seems to overturn conventional power relationships, while in the other pity is an emotional response that depends on and validates medieval hierarchies.

That such discerning scholars have come to such different conclusions helps illustrate the complex ways pity was understood in this period. In The Canterbury Tales, the discourse of pity is usually manifest in two different but interrelated contexts: the lover's appeal to his beloved mistress and the appeal of the subject to the ruler. The terms used in each context are similar because they both borrow from the language of the relationship between lord and vassal. In the first scene of pathos in Knight's Tale we see, for example, an appeal from subjects to ruler. Theseus is the tale's representative of kingly authority, who is returning a hero from his victory over the Amazons with his new bride Ypolita. He is subsequently met by a group of Theban women kneeling on the road who are weeping and crying out. The hierarchical relation between the returning hero and his supplicants is highlighted spatially in terms of the distance between the mounted victor and the kneeling wives of the defeated Argives—a classic scene of pity reminiscent of Hecuba's appeal to Odysseus. They, like Hecuba, also appeal to their own high status and their sense of being the victims of Fortune: "for certes, lord, ther is noon of us alle / that she ne hath been a duchesse or a queene. / Now we be caytyves, as it is

well seene” (A 922-24). They beg for even a small expression of his pity: “Som drope of pitee, thurgh thy gentillesse, / Upon us wrecched women lat thou falle” (A 920-21). Theseus climbs off his horse and raises the prostrate women to their feet. Here again pity is imagined as a vehicle of equalization, though ultimately—in tune with the Aristotelian claim that those of noble rank will evoke greater pity than those of the lower ranks—it is their similarity in rank that Theseus finds one of the most appealing features of their complaint: “Hym thoghte that his herte wolde greke, / Whan he saugh hem so pitous and so matt, / That whilom weren of so greet estaat” (A 954-56). Out of pity he swears, “as he was trewe knight” to take vengeance on Creon on their behalf. However, in going to war on behalf of the wronged widows, he ends up adding to the numbers of grieving women rather than effecting any change. His responses validate the reigning system of power he represents, therefore, both in that his pity extends most notably to those of his equal rank, and his reactions to their pain only serves to reestablish in a different guise the same type of social hierarchy the image of his pity initially seemed to overturn. His pity changes nothing—in fact, it seems to validate the traditional structure. Though pity depends on inequality, there must be some measure of similarity to evoke the vulnerability principle necessary for its arising.

In a later scene, Theseus comes across two Theban knights, Palamon and Arcite, who are fighting over their rights to claim Emily as their beloved. Theseus, acting as judge, condemns both parties to death. Emily, the queen, and all the ladies begin to weep out of pity for the condemned knights. The women, who have also suffered defeat at Theseus’ hands, cry out, “Have mercy, Lord, upon us women alle!” (1757). Thus they appeal as mediators who share a common vulnerability with the condemned knights.

Their intercession works and again Theseus is seen as compassionate. Theseus' pity changes nothing in the social order, though it does serve the purpose of making his power seem less brutal. His authority is only enhanced, thus, by his display of pity, because the appearance of equality it evokes helps hide the inequality and brutality necessary for the maintenance of any hierarchical order. "Pity creates an illusion of parity," argues Wendy Harding, yet "[t]he hierarchical relationship between those bestowing pity and those demanding it remains unchanged" (166-67). The scenes seem to give to pity a clearly conservative social utility. Indeed, in his speech on necessity, Theseus ends by advocating the virtue of resignation to this divine order:

Thanne is it wisdom, as it thynketh me,  
 To maken vertue of necessitee,  
 And take it weel that we may nat eschue,  
 And namely that to us alle is due.  
 And whoso gruccheth ought, he dooth folye,  
 And rebel is to hym that al may gye. (A3041-46)

The vertical order of society is represented as designed by Providence. Shortly after this pity is invoked in a different context when Theseus, using the language of courtly love, asks Emily to show "womanly pitee" to Palamon (A 3083). Here the language seems to put Emily in a position of authority in contrast to her suppliant lover. In the end, however, her pity appears as an instrument by which she may tactfully submit to imperial authority. In the Knights Tale, "pity makes patriarchal rule more acceptable in allowing men and women to play at reversing power relationships. Once Emily takes a turn at the role of superior and shows pity to her suitor, she will place herself in the subordinate role of wife" (Harding 166-7). Douglas Gray has observed that pity, as a term operating within the discourse of courtly love, is ostensibly "a natural expression of that noble love which overflows from the 'gentle heart' and which is a 'shadow' of the cosmic love

binding together the universe” (176). Theseus, in fact, represents the cosmos as held together by “that faire cheyne of love” (A 2991). Pity is thus a mechanism by which the vertical social order is held together, and it compensates for the otherwise cold system of vertically ordered power distribution. Pity soothes the appearance of power and makes the social hierarchy seem voluntarily acceptable.

Turning to the Clerk’s Tale, we are faced with a work in which the relationship between human and divine authority does not coincide and is not resolved as easily as in the Knight’s Tale. The story portrays a wife and feudal vassal who is mercilessly tried by her lord and husband, and the Clerk tells the reader that the story must be understood as an allegory of God’s testing of the soul and as an example of the endurance required by all Christians. However, in Chaucer’s version of the story of Walter and Griselda, far from resolving the disjunction between the human and divine order, the pathos of the tale arises from and is enhanced by it. As Elizabeth Salter notes, “The Tale is constantly pulled in two [opposed] directions, and ... the human sympathies so powerfully evoked by the sight of unmerited suffering form, ultimately, a barrier to total acceptance of the work in its original function” (50). On the human or literal level, the relationship between Walter and Griselda makes little sense. Nothing in Giselda’s behavior seems ever to justify Walter’s tests, so the reader has no insight into what his motives might be. Yet there is an interesting parallel that emerges as the story develops between Walter and Griselda and Walter and his vassals that revolves around the problem of power and pity. In the opening scene, the vassals make a request to Walter in the language of the suppliant in order to evoke his pity: “we with pitous herte unto yow pleyne,” and they beg him, “Delivere us out of al this bisy drede” (E 97, 134). However, they seek not to

better their own situation directly, but they rather argue that their security depends on Walter's supplying an heir. They thus seek his pathetic response but invoke their feudal contract. By doing his duty he will serve them. By appealing to pity, they take on the role of suppliant, but in so doing exert a measure of control and Walter is unable to find fault with their request. That Walter must even consider the pain of his vassals, whether through pity or contract, gives to the lower orders a certain relevance, though they voice their concerns in a way that tends to validate the system that oppresses them. However, in exchange, Walter, like Theseus, invokes the image of the providential order and demands that his vassals trust him as he trusts God (see E 159-63). Here again the discourse of pity and the divinely ordered system of duties help make the constraints of the feudal system livable.

This power struggle sets the stage for Walter's testing of Griselda. The marriage contract he formulates gives him absolute power as if to avoid any of the struggles he had with his vassals:

I seye this: be ye redy with good herte  
 To al my lust, and that I fely may,  
 As me best thynketh, do yow laughe or smerte,  
 And nevere ye to grucche it, nyght ne day?  
 And eek whan I sey 'ye,' ne say nat 'nay,'  
 Neither by word ne frownyng contenance?  
 Swere this, and here I swere oure alliance. (E 351-57)

There is no mention of mutual concern or respect. Walter thus extends the distance between ruler and vassal to excessive limits and dispenses with what Harding calls "the illusion of parity" that the discourse of pity in love scenes normally provides:

Walter willfully resists the moral pressure to act mercifully toward his subordinates. He represents the terrifying spectacle of justice deprived of mercy, of absolute and arbitrary power unadorned by pity. However, although Walter chooses not to display the pity appropriate to his status, the narrator assumes this

function, providing an affective response to Griselda's suffering and reminding readers of the mercy needed to make the social hierarchy morally acceptable. (169)

His lack of pity, through the intervention of the reader's pity, renders him vulnerable to the criticism of the reader whose pity for Griselda works against him. To reiterate: pity in the Knights Tale softens the rigor of power and justifies the inequalities of the social order. Griselda's suffering and endurance in the face of tyranny in the Clerk's Tale also seems to uphold social inequalities because her unconditional acceptance and endurance are represented as admirable. Yet, Walter's unjust rule is called into question by the narrator and through the reader's pity for the heroine: "in Chaucer's rendering of the tale, readers are made to feel the difficulties of submitting to an unjust regime and our sympathies are aroused against tyranny" (Harding 170). Here the reader's pity helps draw some perhaps uncomfortable attention to social inequality. Although the thrust of the narrative suggests that pity from above provides power with a way to hide itself from the consciousness of the disempowered, pity's potential to expose that power remains a tangible if only potential vehicle of critique through readerly engagement. Nevertheless, while God's pity in early Christian rhetoric threatened to undo all hierarchical structures, here it serves the end of a vertically ordered soteriological teleology.

In the Parson's Tale, this system finds its greatest support in its multidimensional representation of God as suffering lord. The representation most clearly relevant to a study of Chaucer's pathos is that of "the passioun that oure Lord Jhesu Crist suffred for oure synnes" (I255), which is meant as a source for Contrition. In this paradoxical image, Christ is seen weeping "for pitee of good peple" (I 256), while he simultaneously elicits the reader's/spectator's pity "in remembrance" of his suffering (I 254). Like Griselda,

Christ is an innocent victim of injustice, a passive victim of his father's will and human sin at once. The image seems to confound the cultural hierarchies pity depends on by turning the sinful human, a vassal of God, into the pitier. However, it also imagines Christ's suffering as an act of pity for mankind. Yet, because the reader is represented as the cause of Christ's suffering, he is told ultimately to weep not for Christ but for his own sins that have caused Christ's pain: "Now sith that Jhesu Crist took upon himself the peyne of alle oure wikkednesses, muchel oghte sinful man wepen and biwayle, that for his synnes Goddess one of hevene sholde al this peyne endure" (282). The reader is both pitier and pitied at once, as is God. The contradiction in status such an image might suggest, and certainly would have suggested in ancient Greek and Roman culture, is simultaneously enhanced and denied. It is the human vassal, ultimately, who is to blame for Christ's death. When pity becomes a highly valued passion, those who suffer most theoretically are the most highly valued. Christ is represented in one paradoxical image as passive victim and glorious king. Christ crucified reverses the normal power dynamic as he appropriates the compassion of the spectator, yet he is also a King who relates to humanity as a lord does to his vassals.

Here the spectator's pity is the loophole through which the social hierarchy may attain the corporate endorsement of the subjects of power. Mutual pity seems to bring ruler and ruled into a more intimate relation, an intimacy that paradoxically serves to validate the power that separates and serves to distinguish the two orders of being. I would suggest that this mechanism of power authorization serves to transform pity's subversive potential to the advantage of tradition. That such mechanisms of reversal and counter-reversal are necessary to the viability of a system of hierarchical power

distribution suggests to me at least that the system sees one of its modes of operation—its defining characteristics—namely pity (divine or human) as a potential threat to its continuity. Pity must be looped away from the human sufferer to God and transformed thereby into guilt. In the paradoxical *imago pietatis*, God's compassionate nature remains intact, but the notion of equality that motivated early Christians and helped secure for Christianity a viable institutional ground has been transformed into a vertically ordered distribution of power that is seen as a consequence of human sin and the vehicle of its redemption. Ultimately, the message is that human suffering is the consequence of human sin—everyone deserved the position he is born to. Pity is dangerous to power, however, because it seeks out a cause of suffering, someone to blame. The singular image of Christ as both the crucified and the victorious King serves the function of locating blame squarely on human shoulders. In the early Church the idealization of God as a compassionate being threatened the reigning hierarchy. As Christianity is politicized, however, God's compassionate nature becomes the very tool of hierarchical authorization. The ideology of dependence, however, comes under direct attack from some familiar arguments as we move into the seventeenth century.

### **Against Pity: Spinoza, Hobbes, and the Seventeenth Century**

In the seventeenth century there emerges a neo-stoic revival. With thinkers like Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz, and Spinoza (among others) the perceived gap between the material and the spiritual seemed to grow. Deism and the new mechanistic world-view that come to dominate the philosophical culture of the period begin to see God increasingly as separate and detached, distant and uninvolved, that is, as having left the world to work according to its own internal laws. Mankind is felt to be largely on its own:



“The rise of the ‘mechanistic world-view’ commencing with Galileo and Descartes, and especially, the formulation and refinement of the laws of motion, itself intensified the growing conceptual antithesis in European culture and thought between the ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’. The sharpening of this antithesis ... is a typical and general seventeenth-century phenomenon” (Israel 245). Such a belief helped validate and give a new value to human reason and the seventeenth century saw a revival in the appeal to *autarkeia*.

Though stoic thought had always had an influence on Christian culture and theology, it gained new ground in the atmosphere of secularization that emerges in the seventeenth century. Correspondingly, human nature and pity with it came under particularly acute attack. Spinoza, for instance, saw pity as an evil that must be avoided in order for reason to take precedence: “Pity in a man who lives in accordance with the guidance of reason is in itself evil and unprofitable.” Spinoza’s comments on pity come in a chapter entitled “Of Human Bondage” (Ethics Part 4, proposition 50). Pity is thus, for Spinoza as also for Leibniz, antithetical to human freedom, reason, and morality. It thwarts all deliberation and draws one down into the murky bog of the human body and its mechanism. Because pity is a bodily reflex, the judgment of one constrained by pity is not a judgment that involves choice and is therefore antithetical to morality, which, according to Spinoza, must involve deliberative choice. We must be helpful to our neighbor, he avers, “not from unmanly pity, partiality or superstition, but from the guidance of reason” (1.492). Spinoza routinely lumps the human passions into the same category with superstition and partiality—all of which are “unmanly.” Not only are the passions “womanly,” they dehumanize entirely, stripping man of his very essence. In the penultimate chapter of the Ethics, Spinoza focuses on the consequences of the

inadequacy and weakness, what he calls the “slavery,” that results from man’s inability to restrain and moderate his emotions. It is bondage to be under the sway of the passions because “the man who is subject to affects is under the control not of himself but of fortune in whose power he so entirely is that often, though he sees what is better for himself, still he is forced to follow what is worse” (1.543). For Spinoza, “virtue is power itself,” which is man’s essence. Therefore, any striving after this essence is a way for men to preserve their being and thus their identity against the internal threat of the passions, which are the internal sources of superstition. Pity is devalued on both ontological and epistemological grounds. One must constrain emotions and passions because not to do so is to sacrifice one’s essence, to find one’s identity in the one pitied, and to abandon one’s personal will to the will of another. Pity is detrimental to being, a threat to one’s ontological status—it dehumanizes. Again, as with the Stoics, as God is distanced from human affairs pity undergoes an attack.

In addition, “In the seventeenth century from both religious and secular sources human nature was widely disparaged. ... The dominant theory was pessimistic: men were almost always guided in their behavior by self-interest or self-love” (Fiering 198). Hobbes is often targeted by later critics as the central proponent of this view of human nature. While Spinoza and the neo-stoics emphasize the independence and self-sufficiency of Reason, Hobbes took the ideology of dependence to its logical extreme and thus focused his exploration of human nature on the problem of human untrustworthiness. His interest was not in human ontological preservation, but in the social problem of human untrustworthiness. This problem could not be solved for Hobbes, as it could in theory according to Spinoza, through individual human Reason only in so far as reason leads us

to conclude the necessity of absolutism. To justify absolutism, Hobbes had to see men as entirely dependent on external forces for their social existence and continuity. Hobbes uses the discourse of contract theory to insist on the necessity of external coercion via the power of an absolute sovereign:

The bonds of words are too weak to bridle mens ambition, avarice, anger, and other Passions, without the feare of some coercive Power. ... Therefore before the names of Just, and Unjust can have place, there must be some coercive Power, to compel men equally to the performance of their Covenants, by the terrour of some punishment, greater than the benefit they expect by the breach of their Covenant (Leviathan, chaps. 14, 15, pp. 68, 71-2).

The goal here is not to validate the independence of human reason, but to validate the necessity of absolute power of monarch for state order. Neither reason, conscience, or the human potential to pity could organize a coherent society on its own. Human nature, being dominated by self-love, needed regulation from above and through the coercive action of a sovereign force.

Hobbes likewise disparaged the human passions, according to many, because he saw every passion as working in the service of self-love. Hobbes in fact defined pity itself as a type of self-centered fear motivated by the primary urge for self-preservation:

Pity is imagination or fiction of future calamity to ourselves, proceeding from the sense of another man's present calamity; but when it lighteth on such as we think have not deserved the same, the compassion is the greater, because then there appeareth the more probability that the same may happen to us. For the evil that happeneth to an innocent man, may happen to every man. (53)

For Hobbes, mankind's self-love and desire for pleasure and power make society a site of continual war fare and competition. It is this attitude that made Hobbes the target and obsession of the Cambridge Platonists.<sup>5</sup> John Tulloch argues that although the school

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel I. Mintz argues that "Whether by implication or by direct attack, the Cambridge Platonists treated Hobbes as the opponent *sine qua non*" (80).

arose out of Platonism, “Hobbism was the means of concentrating its thought and giving direction to it” (25-6).

In the face of this atmosphere of pessimism towards worldly existence and human nature, Henry More (one of the most famous of the Cambridge Platonists) defines “Ethicks ... *to be the Art of Living well and happily.*” By “Art,” More means “a methodical Knowledge of such Precepts as are consentaneous” to the “Acquisition” of happiness.<sup>6</sup> Man's greatest desire, according to More, is to live well and be happy. To live well means to live “according to Nature,” and to live according to nature, he claims, is to live “adorned with Virtue.” Our natural passions, because they are natural, More argues, aim at virtue. His argument is reminiscent of Lactantius and the early Christians. For More, virtue is coterminous with a desire for happiness, and as such, is an end motivated naturally by desire and designed and imprinted in us by God. As Fiering notes, “in opposition to the prevailing neo-Stoic opinion,” More asserted “that the passions in general were good in themselves” (199): “Passions ... are not only good but singularly needful to the perfecting of human life” (More 41). Fiering, in fact, suggests that “More seems to have transferred to natural passions the authority of the sanctified heart” (199).<sup>7</sup> Charles Hickman working in line with More’s thought argues in 1700 against the Stoic distrust of the passions:

It is not a sign of Goodness in Man, to have no Passion in him, for such a Man is apparently Good for nothing at all. He does not hate his Brother, ‘tis true. But then he does not love him neither. He does not oppress his Neighbour perhaps; but withal; he neither pities, nor relieves him. ... Nay, without this Goodness, ... Righteousness is nothing else but Interest, and Vertue nothing but design, and Religion itself will dwindle either into forwardness, or formality. (Fourteen Sermons 265, 329)

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<sup>6</sup> More, B and B3.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of this point, see Norman S. Fiering, “Will and Intellect in the New England Mind,” *William and Mary Quarterly*. 3.24 (October 1972), 515-58.

Like More, Hickman sensed in the stoic's contempt for pity and the passions a contempt for religion itself and they saw in neo-stoic philosophy a theory antithetical to the ideology of human dependence.

While attacking stoic apathy, this positive appraisal of human nature sought also to confound Hobbes' theory that "[t]he "Lawes of Nature (as Justice, Equity, Modesty, Mercy, and (in summe) doing to others, as we would be done to,) of themselves, without the terrour of some Power, to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural Passions, that carry us to Partiality, Pride, Revenge, and the like" (chap. 17). Hobbes concludes therefore that "during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man" (Chapter 13). In reaction, religious defenders sought to find evidence of God's providential involvement in human activity via the passions of the body, and they come to see "Goodness" as something that inhered in the human body itself prior to Reason, that is, as something deposited by God for the sake of creating community—aq mechanism built into the human body that could organize communities without the direct need for the impetus of external coercion:

It is the property of Mercy to pity the Infirmities of other Men; ... to cultivate a Tenderness and Humanity of Temper, a quick and ready Feeling of each others Wants and Pains. ... And this is what indeed we are naturally carried to without the Discipline of Reason, or the Precepts of Religion.—There is something in the Human Constitution that naturally melts at Human Misfortunes. (Tomas Herring, Bishop of Bangor 5-6)

It is in response to neo-stoic figures like Spinoza and to defenders of absolutism like Hobbes that the seventeenth and eighteenth century reacted with such force in order to defend God's immanent concern for human well-being—they were renewing the rhetoric

and ideology of dependence. It is in defense of religion, I would argue, that pity is again, as it was in early Christianity, given a heightened value. This time, however, pity rises in value ironically—against the best intentions of its defenders—as a vehicle of secularization. While the early Christian endorsement of pity helped bring to cultural consciousness a new category of people and new constituency, the eighteenth-century defenders of pity participated in defining the characteristics of yet another new category of people we have come to refer to as the middle class.

## CHAPTER 2

### PITY, OR THE PROVIDENCE OF THE BODY IN RICHARDSON'S CLARISSA

Speech and work are outer expressions in which the individual no longer keeps and possesses himself within himself, but lets the inner get completely outside of him, leaving it to the mercy of something other than himself.

—Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 187

#### Introduction: Pity's Positive Revaluation

The eighteenth century witnessed an unprecedented enthusiasm for pity. It may be unexceptional to suggest, then, that Richardson's uniqueness in literary history rests in part on his exceptional ability to make the body rather than the will or reason—through the mediation of pity—a starting point or ground for what he hoped would be a moral reformation of the minds and souls of his readers. As Janet Todd simply puts it, “Richardson accepted the sentimental theory that moral improvement derived from pity” (75), and, according to John Mullan, “it is the body which acts out the powers of sentiment” (201).<sup>8</sup> However, given the apparent ease with which pity's (and the body's) centrality has been assumed, and because it is so readily subsumed as a particular instance, under the more novel and general categories, of “sentiment,” “sensibility,” or “sympathy,”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> On the central role of the body and the mind/body problem in *Clarissa* see also Raymond Stephanson, “Richardson's ‘Nerves’: The Physiology of Sensibility in *Clarissa*,” Journal of the History of Ideas 49 (1988): 267-85; Juliet McMaster, “Reading the Body in *Clarissa*,” Clarissa and her Readers: New Essays for the Clarissa Project, ed. Carol Houlihan Flynn and Edward Copeland (New York: AMS, 1999), 189-212; Scott Paul Gordon, The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 182-211; Julie Park, “‘I Shall Enter Her Heart’: Fetishizing Feeling in *Clarissa*,” Studies in the Novel 37 (2005): 371-93.

<sup>9</sup> There is a large body of work that has examined these crucial concepts and sought out their sources and implications in this period. In particular see R. F. Brissenden, Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade (London: Macmillan Press, 1974); Jean H. Hagstrum, Sex and Sensibility: Ideal and Erotic Love from Milton to Mozart (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and David Marshall, The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Although “sentiment,” “sensibility,” and “sympathy” emerge or take center stage for the first time in the eighteenth century, their novelty is best drawn into

this needs closer analysis. To this end, my argument is comprised of three synchronized or superimposed “layers” that, I think, in an integrated form, will allow us to encounter more productively the highly complex and historically conditioned manner in which Richardson employed “pity” in *Clarissa*. The first layer involves an examination into how Richardson and his predecessors used pity to mediate the relationship—by opening up a “middle,” a figurative zone of common interest—between the body *and* the mind, the material *and* the spiritual. The second layer will trace pity’s evolution in Richardson and the eighteenth century in the context of three different but related categories—the *rhetorical*, the *religious*, and the *literary-formal*—in which pity functions to meet a growing need for principles of social and moral re-orientation, a need *Clarissa* assertively thematizes. These categories also name the stages through which my paper will generally unfold, though I also wish to highlight their points of intersection. Finally, the third layer—the critical category of the *social*—will be a prominent focus throughout the whole. On the conceptual level, then, I will argue that it is through readerly pity that *Clarissa*’s suffering becomes a powerful integrative catalyst that opens up a mediatory if metaphorical middle ground between the conventional binaries that traditionally organize each of these categories. In turn, within *Clarissa*, the figure of pity’s magnetic “middleness” helps foster a vision of an ostensibly all-inclusive, virtual community of readers. This new enthusiasm for pity thereby plays a significant role in shaping and driving the novel form, which not only maximizes readerly accessibility, but also provides its reader with an unparalleled sense of moral autonomy.

I would suggest, in fact, that pity’s “rise” is best made historically intelligible as a vehicle of transition from a status-based to a class-based model of social arrangements. In

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relief, I would argue, when placed against the backdrop of pity’s much broader, more stable, and continuously prescient literary-cultural history.



the eighteenth century, pity becomes a principle of mobility through which ethical authority begins to devolve to an ascendant “middle” class. With the decline of the traditional structures of domination and the corresponding advancement of capitalist ideology, the need emerges for moral principles internal to, and thus capable of uniting, self-interested individuals. Richardson and his contemporaries, I will argue, came to see in pity’s mediatory capacity a potential way to mend the gap opened by the characteristically modern, definitive separation out of “individual” and “society.”<sup>10</sup> Reacting against Hobbes’s notions of the state of nature and social contract, many late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers thus strained to see in pity a natural and embodied principle of sociability.

A surge of positive revaluations of pity in the rhetorical, religious, and literary spheres paralleled and participated in laying the groundwork for such changes in the social sphere. In the more than half-century preceding *Clarissa*’s publication, the conventional critique of pity as an untrustworthy rhetorical effect gives way to a celebration of it as a powerful and authenticating affect.<sup>11</sup> This is especially true in England where Aristotle’s account of pity undergoes a related critical re-reading, whereby writers come to treat pity not simply as an instrumental means of testing how well the structural norm of the unified plot has been achieved, but as the central telos of aesthetic experience. Such changes in the

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<sup>10</sup> For some important critical work that elaborates on the relationship I have in mind regarding the historical transition from “status” to “class” and the formal or definitive separation out of “individual” and “society” see Harold Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), and both of Michael McKeon’s studies, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) and *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> On the history of this development see R. S. Crane, “Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the ‘Man of Feeling’,” *ELH* 1 (1934), 205-30, and Norman S. Fiering’s “Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Sympathy and Humanitarianism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (1976): 195-218. See also Donald Greene: “Latitudinarianism and Sensibility: The Genealogy of the ‘Man of Feeling’ Reconsidered,” *Modern Philology* 75.2 (1977): 159-83.

value and function of pity inspired a demand for new literary forms and techniques compatible with this change in focus from plot to feeling. Pity was also being reconceived within Christian thought. Many writers, in reaction to perceived attacks on religion, sought to find in the impulses of the body—specifically in pity—rather than in the will or intellect, evidence of God’s providential design and care. In effect, this development signaled a shift in the weighting of the two components of *caritas* (namely, the principal component of love for God and its subsidiary, love for one’s neighbor/self) to a heavier stress on self- and neighborly love and the sphere of domestic relationships. Infused by God into the soul, *caritas* was traditionally located in the will rather than in the emotions, regardless of the emotions it evoked. This shift also therefore involved a change in emphasis from the will to the involuntary affections of the body, a development that was matched in the literary sphere by a new focus on the “common” individual and the private or domestic “internal” realm of everyday life.<sup>12</sup> Pity’s newfound status thereby further facilitated an internalization of the spiritual within the material, a historical process that made possible what Michael McKeon has called the gradual “‘replacement’ of religious by literary spirituality” (Politics 36). Through a close and multi-layered examination of *Clarissa*, we may more clearly understand the impulse in Richardson and many of his contemporaries to represent pity as a physiological moral principle capable of transforming human suffering

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<sup>12</sup> On the vexed and variously understood problem and history of the body and affect in eighteenth-century discourse more generally, see George S. Rousseau, “Nerves, Spirits and Fibres: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility,” *Studies in the Eighteenth Century*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 137-57, now reprinted in his *Nervous Acts: Essays on Literature, Culture, and Sensibility* (Palgrave, 2004), 157-84; Karl Figlio, “Theories of Perception and the Physiology of Mind in the Late Eighteenth Century,” *History of Science* 12 (1975): 177-212; Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress*, 39-55; Jean H. Hagstrum, *Sex and Sensibility*, 160-274. Carol Houlihan Flynn, “Running out of Matter: The Body Exercised in Eighteenth-Century Fiction,” *The languages of the Psyche: Mind and Body in Enlightenment Thought*, ed. G. S. Rousseau (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 147-85; Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

into a ground for a broad social empowerment. This essay, then, also seeks to tie together the various interrelated “contexts” in which a more traditional devaluation of pity, in the eighteenth century and in Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa, is positively revalued.

Pity has in recent history come to have nuances of condescension to the sufferer that it generally did not have in the eighteenth century, when, for the most part, “pity” was seen as favorable, a synonym of “compassion.” In addition, as already suggested, the term “sympathy” was also receiving considerable philosophical and literary attention. Before we begin our examination of Clarissa, therefore, it would be useful pause for a moment in order to define our terms. Adam Smith, I would suggest, provides us with a definition of the difference between “pity” and “sympathy” suitable to the period: “Pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever.” Here “sympathy” is separated out and elevated to the status of a sort of general equivalent in the field of emotional exchange. “Pity and compassion” are thus synonyms that signify a subset or particular aspect of “sympathy.” In other words, while pity is a sympathy with the sorrow of others, we also experience sympathy when we feel joy at the sight of another’s joy or when we share a friend’s resentments. “Pity” is, thus, that species of sympathy that is directed specifically towards suffering and sorrow. While Smith redefines “sympathy,” “pity and compassion” ostensibly retain their customary meaning. It is also worthy of notice, here, that “pity and compassion” are relatively undifferentiated as they are in Clarissa and in Richardson’s vocabulary in general. The modern sense of the moral value of “compassion” over “pity” and any

corresponding functional distinction cannot be applied here with any precision and thus only anachronistically. I will therefore treat the terms as *practical* synonyms.<sup>13</sup> In their eighteenth-century form, “pity,” “compassion,” and “sympathy” seemed to fill an acute need for principles of social organization that are internal to individuals and that can be seen to operate without the direct intervention of the more traditional forms of external, state coercion.

### **Trust Through Mutual Refinement**

I would suggest that the eighteenth century’s need for principles of moral reorientation—a need pity was uniquely situated to meet—coheres in *Clarissa* and in the history of its reception around the problem of how to interpret its heroine’s motives. In Sarah Fielding’s Remarks on “Clarissa” (1749), Bellario (a vocal Clarissa convert), in defense of her innocence and sincerity, is “astonished” that instead of pitying Clarissa many of his contemporaries, in a “Manner ... Counterpart” to her cruelest intra-textual readers, have treated Clarissa with suspicion. Some, he says, have even “called” her “perverse,” “artful,” and “cunning” (41).<sup>14</sup> Current critical debates, it seems, have tended to recapitulate such eighteenth-century debates about how to interpret Clarissa’s motives and behavior. According to William Warner, Clarissa’s way of interpreting the world, no less than Lovelace’s, is “irreducibly self-centered,” and they battle on a relatively equal playing field (38).<sup>15</sup> Although Terry Castle sees Lovelace as having the upper hand (on

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<sup>13</sup>Surprisingly few studies focus specifically on pity or compassion in the eighteenth century. Two of the most important articles that do, Norman S. Fiering’s “Irresistible Compassion” and Rita Goldberg’s “Charity Sermons and the Poor: A Rhetoric of Compassion,” The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual 4 (New York: AMS Press, 1991), seem to recognize no distinction between “pity” and “compassion” in their use in eighteenth-century discourse.

<sup>14</sup>Sarah Fielding opens Remarks by directly addressing Richardson, and it purports to be a record of a series of actual dinner conversations and letters in which Clarissa is the subject of conversation and critique.

<sup>15</sup>As Peter Sabor notes, Warner also attacks Sarah Fielding’s Remarks on “Clarissa” as “a representative but misguided interpretation” of the novel: “Warner’s Sara Fielding becomes the precursor of Ian Watt,

account of his various institutional advantages), she agrees that Clarissa exposes the fundamental self-centeredness of all discourse (195). Tom Keymer, likewise, urges his reader to treat epistolary form as “more often rhetorical than simply expressive,” as an “instrument” “put carefully to work.” In this view, Richardson stages the conflict between Lovelace and Clarissa in order to provoke intellectual effort and rational discussion, providing his reader with a mode of discernment in a selfish world (32). In Clarissa, John Richetti contends, Richardson “creates a situation in which the reader is made conscious of the fundamental instrumentality of the text as it is manipulated by the main correspondents” (290). Conversely, Scott Paul Gordon argues, “Richardson relies . . . on a physical solution,”—a “non-rational solution” (namely tears)—“to the problem of proof, [and he] counted on his readers’ sensibilities, not their intellects, to prove his heroine’s sincerity” (“Disinterested Selves” 485; Power 196).<sup>16</sup> Todd similarly suggests that epistolary form was useful to Richardson on account of its “great advantage over the body,” and, because they are modeled on her “body,” Clarissa’s “letters have some sincerity and spontaneity” (86-87). The eighteenth-century cynic and the post-structuralist critic miss the point, Gordon suggests, because they posit “a *judging*, rather than a *feeling*, reader,” and the latter is alone capable of understanding “the reality of non-rhetorical behavior” (Power 197, 208).

Both sides of this ongoing debate, I think rightly, recognize in Clarissa the centrality

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Irving Gopnik, and Mark Kinkad-Weekes, commending the novel’s unity in, according to Warner, the same misguided, nondeconstructionist manner as her recent counterparts.” See Sabor’s introduction to Remarks on “Clarissa.” vi.

<sup>16</sup> In marked opposition to post-structuralist modes of interpretation, Gordon goes so far as to suggest that within the “novel everybody but Clarissa is a rhetorical being” (Power of the Passive Self 190). See also Louis I. Bredvold’s foundational work, The Natural History of Sensibility (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962), in which he argues that “the idea of the judgment as essential to conscience faded away as the [eighteenth] century progressed” (19). It is in this period, he claims, that the notion of the rational, moral “judgment” as the key to ethical action and personal happiness is replaced by the notion of “the impulses of the human organism as the supreme guide to happiness and goodness” (25).

of the problem of trust; however, in their respective overemphasis on either the “non-rhetorical” immediacy of feeling (the “simply expressive”) or the irreducible rhetoricity of the text (the “instrumental”), they each tend to de-emphasize the dialectical process that energized Richardson’s quest to synthesize in one text, through a reconception of pity’s functionality, the needs of both types of reader. As moral authority begins to shift from the rational to the physiological register, the path opens for Richardson to make “sincerity” (disinterestedness) and “rhetoricity” (interestedness)—as embedded correlates in the body-mind dynamic—undergo a mutual refinement whereby each term may find in “pity” a common ground and relief from suspicion. This debate between apparently opposed critical dispositions, as Bellario hints, also mirrors debates within *Clarissa* and the ways in which its characters are separated out into antithetical moral groups based on their responsiveness to its protagonist’s pain.<sup>17</sup>

From the outset, Clarissa sees the capacity to pity as the fundamental sign of another’s trustworthiness. She requires that the man she marries have above all “a tenderness in his nature for the calamities of others,” which would provide her with “a moral assurance” of his future good behavior: “the *heart* is what we women should judge by in the choice we make, as the best security for the party’s good behaviour in every relation of life.” (1:198). Clarissa and her intra-textual “judging” readers thus contend for the space of the heart, the former through pity, and the latter through force and wit. She can trust only a man who is able, like her “compassionating” friend Anna Howe, to “enter ...

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<sup>17</sup> According to Diderot’s famous injunction in his *Eloge de Richardson*, those who do not love Richardson’s novels already stand condemned. He claims that in the world, as in Richardson’s novels, men are divided into two classes—the pleasure seekers and the sufferers—and he thus sees Richardson’s novel’s, or really its readers’ emotional responses, as a test to verify into which class each reader belongs. Denis Diderot, *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, 20 vols. (Paris: Granier frères, 1875-77), 5:211-23. Even Henry Fielding, infamous author of *Shamela*, in a letter to Richardson about *Clarissa* also sees the readerly response to Clarissa’s suffering as a moral test: “God forbid that the Man who reads this with dry Eyes should be alone with my Daughter when she hath no Assistance within Call” (70).

deeply into the distresses of one you love” (1:204).<sup>18</sup> Realizing her penchant for pity, Lovelace seeks to exploit it both by appearing to be compassionate himself and by teaching his accomplices to seem compassionate as well. Clarissa is initially somewhat confused about his potential for reformation by the story of his generosity and kindness to “his Rosebud” (1:284). Anna, with her characteristic skepticism, after inquiring into the case, suspects that “the whole [is] a plot set on foot to wash a blackamoor white.” He seeks at one point to take Clarissa to a play in order to soften her heart towards him, and he takes Polly along to help: “I have directed [Polly] where to weep” as “a weeping eye indicates a gentle heart ... [.] The woes of others, so well represented as those of Belvidera particularly will be, must I hope, unlock and open my charmer’s heart” (2: 342). Despite the world’s mistrust and pity’s exploitability, Clarissa never abandons her interpretive principles.

It is on these same principles that she rejects Solmes, “the man so incapable of pity!” She sees his unwelcome pursuit as perverse: “What a cruel wretch must he be ... who can enjoy the distress he so largely contributes to!” (1:404-05). Further, it is her family’s lack of pity that has united Clarissa to Lovelace as “joint-sufferers in one cause” (1:137). “All your friends by fighting *against* him with impolitic violence fight *for* him,” says Anna (1:45). Lovelace is keenly aware of how valuable their lack of pity is to him: “this stupid family are all combined to do my work for me ... fly she must, or have the man she hates” (1:147-48). Her brother James, she says, is unmoved by “compassion” and has a “marble heart.” He is a tyrant willing to use arbitrary “force”: “the stronger the hold” he thinks Lovelace has on her heart, he exclaims (despite her stated willingness to live single), “the greater must be the force... to tear such a miscreant from it” (1: 263, 390,

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<sup>18</sup> Samuel Richardson, Clarissa or, The History of a Young Lady, 4 vols. (New York: Dent and Son, 1932). References are to this edition.

139). In seeking to secure his mother's allegiance, James argues that Clarissa's behavior is perverse:

There [is] a perverseness... in female minds, a tragedy-pride, that would make a romantic young creature, such a one as [Clarissa], risk anything to obtain pity. I was of an age, and a turn (the insolent said), to be fond of a lover-like distress: and my grief (which she pleaded) would never break my heart; it would sooner break that of the best and most indulgent mothers. (1: 193-4)

By depicting her as self-absorbed, he fictionalizes her suffering. "I have no pity from anybody," Clarissa exclaims (1:348). Her uncle John describes her whole family as "an *embattled phalanx*... we are not to be pierced by your persuasions...[.] We have agreed *all* to be moved, or *none*; and not to comply without one another: so you see your destiny, and have nothing to do but to yield to it" (1: 154). In order to reduce her power over them, her family consistently treats her suffering as a rhetorical device. They make her out to be the aggressor and they see themselves as her victims. Near the end of the novel, when she is dying and their cousin Morden reads to the family one of Clarissa's letters to Anna, Mrs. Norton testifies, "Your sister called you sweet soul ... then grew hard-hearted again; yet said nobody could help being affected by your pathetic grief—but that it was your talent." Her father "could not speak," and her mother "retired to a corner of the room, and sobbed and wept." But her "brother went round to each. ... What was there, he said, in what was read, but the result of the talent [Clarissa] had of moving the passions?" (4:279-80). Clarissa sees James as consistently "intent to show ... [his] wit at the expense of justice and compassion" (1:258). As Christopher Hill argues, when Lovelace switched his proposals from Arabella to Clarissa, the family "design to concentrate the estates and aggrandize the family was seriously endangered. ... The grandfather's will from the start sets personal affection in conflict with family ambition" (104-105). Anna, who often comments on the



Harlowe's inhumanity, tends to see their self-interest as the motivating cause of their accusation that Clarissa is "acting with *deep Art*." Their lack of trust is a great continual source of distress for Clarissa: "I am not always turning the dark side of my prospects, in order to move compassion; a trick imputed to me, too often, by my hard-hearted sister; when, if I know my own heart, it is above all trick or artifice" (2: 4; 4:3).

Lovelace—who himself argues that "[w]hatever our hearts are in, our heads will follow"—likewise accuses Clarissa of having "as great a command over [her] blushes" as she does over her "tears," and he conveniently interprets her actions as merely a "pretense of loving virtue for its own sake" (2:456, 25). "Some one passion predominating in every human breast breaks through principle, and controls us all," he concludes, "Mine is love and revenge taking turns" (3:244). Everywhere he counts on his libertine code, the "maxims by which ... every rake [is] governed," to quell in his heart the voice of pity and conscience, which continually invite him, in the process of involuntarily pitying Clarissa, to abandon his aristocratic hostility and to doubt his libertine principles (3:316). Throughout the novel, pity inspires rather than stifles self-reflection; the mind that will not be informed by pity cannot be reformed. In one of his typical fits of conscience, Lovelace exclaims, "methinks I begin to pity the half-apprehensive beauty! But avaunt, thou unseasonably-intruding pity! Thou hast more than once already well nigh undone me! And, adieu, reflection! Begone, consideration! and commiseration! I dismiss ye all" (3:189). Pity invades a wrongly turned mind by inviting self-reflection, thereby effecting a shift in the location of power, a loss of control at the expense of the pitier.

In order to avoid being "undone" by the woman he seeks to undo, he commits his mind to the memory of her "flight," which he takes as an unforgivable rebellion and a

threat to the preeminence of his libertine principles. After listing her contrivances, he asks, “Why ... should this enervating pity unsteel my foolish heart!—It shall not. All these things will I remember ... in order to keep up [my] resolution” (3:191). But as his mental fortifications finally falter, his “wit” is exposed as a blind to his own spiritual thick-headedness:

At last, with an heart-breaking sob, I see, I see, Mr Lovelace, in broken sentences she spoke—I see, I see—that at last—at last—I am ruined!—ruined—if your pity—Let me implore your pity!—And down on her bosom, like a half-broken-stalked lily, top-heavy with the overarching dews of the morning, sunk her head with a sigh that went to my heart. All I could think of to reassure her, when a little recovered, I said. Why did I not send for [the] coach, as I had intimated? (3:193)

Without pity, hearts and heads spin, rise, fall and miss each other, never revolving harmoniously: “heart-breaking ... bosom ... head ... heart ... think?” His wits, if for a moment, crumple under the weight of her forward-falling body. However, her repeated and failed attempts to construct a first person account of her sufferings are met, finally, with the dead end of his own first person displacements, whereby he recovers from the temptation to pity: “I must keep my anger alive, lest it sink into compassion. *Love* and *compassion*, be the provocation ever so great, are hard to be separated: while *anger* converts what would be *pity* without it, into *resentment*” (2:514). Conversely, to “sink into compassion” is to undergo a moral refinement and a descent in status. He sees his pity as facilitating an upward infiltration of moral principles that inform his mind from the ground (“bowels”) up. In resisting pity, Lovelace rescues his outdated aristocratic title,<sup>19</sup> but commits a violence against his own nature: “To *be* a libertine, at setting out,” Clarissa comments, “... all humanity, must be overcome” (2:260). The reflexes of pity and conscience thus threaten at

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<sup>19</sup> In Terry Eagleton’s account, Lovelace is a representative of “libertine aristocracy,” a “reactionary throwback, an old-style libertine or Restoration relic who resists ‘embourgeoisement’; the future of the English aristocracy lies not with him but with the impeccably middle-class Sir Charles Grandison. The death of Clarissa is the mechanism of his downfall” (*Rape* 77, 89).

times to inspire a revolution in his body: “Oh thou lurking varletess CONSCIENCE! Is it thou that has thus made me of party against myself” (2:400). “Conscience,” he finds, “though it may be temporarily stifled, cannot die; and when it dare not speak aloud, will whisper. And at this instant, I thought I felt the revived varletess (on but a slight retrograde motion) writhing round my pericardium like a serpent; and, in the action of a dying one (collecting all its force into its head), fix its plaguy fangs into my heart” (3:266).<sup>20</sup> While he often tropes her as a bird, he here experiences Clarissa, whom he also associates with his soul and conscience, as a serpent desperate to plague his heart. In yet another fit, he feels his “back aching as if the vertebrae were disjointed, and falling in pieces” (2: 524).

Frustrated with Clarissa’s ability to draw pity from his accomplices, Lovelace exclaims, “Top your parts, ye villains! ... There will be no passion in *this case* to blind the judgement. ... Let not your faces arraign your hearts” (3:186). Although he recognizes her sincerity, he goes to great lengths to protect himself from a sympathy that would otherwise disempower his libertine ambitions. In other words, Richardson suggests, the libertine system of status Lovelace represents now survives only through a conscious commitment to an inner discord between minds, “faces,” and “hearts.” Lovelace has placed “his pride in a barbarous insensibility,” and, like “that of beasts,” his spiritual posture is “downward bent.” He thus remains “ignorant of the principle glory of ... human nature,” namely, “compassion,” which Clarissa calls (quoting Juvenal) the “celestial sense.” Pity “refine[s]” our “wit” and raises “our thought to things divine,” which “proves our spirit of the gods

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<sup>20</sup> According to John Dussinger, “possibly in reaction to the rationalists’ attack on innate ideas, later seventeenth-century writers altered their concept of conscience to an affective principle, to a function of the sensibility rather than of reason, and they rested their argument on experiential evidence, not on *a priori* reasoning. ... When the doctrine of conscience as an innate, infallible voice of natural reason was abandoned in favor of an affective principle, the more inclusive term ‘heart’ gained wider acceptance” in religious discourse. (“Conscience” 239).

descent.”<sup>21</sup> Clarissa suggests that such principles of virtue have been “implanted” in us “by the first gracious Planter,” principles which “*impel*” people to good behavior (2: 306). Elsewhere she avers that “*a fine person is seldom paired by a fine mind: In other words, that sound principles, and a good heart, are the only bases on which the hopes of a happy future, either with respect to this world or the other, can be built*” (2:398). The head follows the heart’s lead—a body corrupted by selfish desires can corrupt the principles of the mind—and if the two are in discord the consequences can be fatal. Raymond Stephanson, citing Dr. George Cheyne (Richardson’s own physician), recognizes in eighteenth-century medical discourse a similar emphasis on “the reciprocal influence of body and mind” and the double “direction of the mind-body relationship.” His main claim is “that Clarissa dies because of her nervous sensibility, or that intimate relationship of mind and body ... in which one’s mental state can have a direct effect on one’s bodily health (or vice versa) (“Richardson’s ‘Nerves’,” 269, 270, 268). Lovelace acknowledges that Clarissa’s virtue “seems to be *principle*, native, or, if *not* native, so deeply rooted, that its fibres have struck into her heart, and, as she grew up, so blended and twisted themselves with the strings of life that I doubt there is no separating of the one, without cutting the others asunder.” Her principles are woven, mind and body, into the fabric of her heart. Given his strong reaction against the promptings of conscience, the same relationship between the head and the heart, mind and body, can be applied to Lovelace. It is her vulnerable body, her “broken sentences,” not her intellect, that prompts him to pity and to question his own principles: the body has a “celestial” logic or rhetoric of its own. As Ann Jessie Van Sant argues, in Clarissa it appears that “the body itself

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<sup>21</sup> This particular quotation is taken from Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady. ed. Angus Ross (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 699. This version includes a portion of the poem the “Dent” version does not.

speaks—and language is inadequate.” “The body” alone, she suggests, through the representation of “inarticulateness,” is “genuine and unmediated” (116). Recognizing Clarissa’s sexual and moral power over himself and others, Lovelace thus mourns that, whether one is drawn to Clarissa by the force of family interest, erotic desire, or pity, “the girl is the centre of gravity, and we all naturally tend to it” (2:398, 23). As Terry Eagleton puts it, “Clarissa’s body is itself the discourse of the text ... the signifier which distributes others to their positions of power or desire, fixing them in some fraught relation to her own mysteriously inviolable being” (Rape 56). Yet, without the mediation of pity, antithetical interpretive schemata (judging and feeling readers) collide tragically. Richardson seeks through an embodied experience of pity, therefore, to facilitate a reconciliation between the mind and the reflexes of the body by granting the senses an “upward” and the mind a “downward” mobility—a figurative process of mutual refinement and status exchange mediated by the middling (spiritual *and* physical) image of the heart.<sup>22</sup> To the judging reader, Clarissa is “impenetrable” (1:148). In the end, of course, it is to Belford, one of Clarissa’s most compassionate readers, that she entrusts her will. Although she finds ultimate “*assurances*” and “*foretastes*” of “rapture” only in God’s mercy, she leaves behind a *will*, a testimony of her personal desires (3: 346). Her will is thus left in the trust of her most ideal readers: “You cannot imagine how proud I am of this trust,” Belford exclaims (4: 81). She leaves behind a community of trust, thereby shifting moral authority

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<sup>22</sup> For the history of the heart as image and organ from the early modern period to the eighteenth century, see Robert A. Erickson, The Language of the Heart, 1600-1750 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997). In a substantial and thoughtful chapter on Clarissa, he refers to Richardson as the eighteenth century’s “kardiognostes.” For an examination into the role of early empiricism in making possible the “upward mobility” of the senses, the “downward mobility” of the understanding, and the virtual “common” ground in which they meet (namely the imagination), see McKeon, Secret History, 360-3. McKeon explicitly explores the relationship between the mind or understanding and the body in these terms. Using the language of Addison and Steele, he locates this metaphorical process of mutual refinement and exchange between the understanding and the senses (mind and body) not in the image of the heart but in the similarly intermediary faculty of the imagination.

to the hearts of her sympathetic readers.

### **From Legality to Ethics**

John Dussinger argues that “Clarissa seldom writes without a cautious eye on her audience. . . . Clarissa’s sincerity as storyteller . . . is in doubt not only because she may have something to hide but, more significantly, because language inevitably leaves something out.” In the famous “penknife scene,” he suggests, Clarissa wishes to throw herself before the law, “but when she is brought up close to even the most disinterested public, her exposure reveals only the futility of telling the ‘whole story’ to the most sympathetic audience.” As Dussinger notes, when falsely charged, Clarissa reveals her inexperience in failing to understand the legal jargon of the arresting officer: “*Action!* said she. What is that?—I have committed *no bad action!*—Lord bless me! Men, what mean you? That you are our prisoner, Madam. *Prisoner*, Sirs!—What—How—Why—What have I done? . . . *Suit!* Said the charming innocent; I don’t know what you mean.” She interprets “action” in the moral rather than the legal register. “As might be expected in a predatory world,” claims Dussinger, “the reactions from the crowd are mixed and class-oriented, with only one or two educated men speaking up on her behalf” (“Truth” 44). Indeed, as Dussinger shows, the text bears this out: “the people were most of them struck with compassion. A fine young creature!—A thousand pities! cried some. While some few threw out vile and shocking reflections! But a gentleman interposed, and demanded to see the fellows’ authority.” However, once he realizes the suit is legitimate, the gentleman advises Clarissa to cooperate: “He pitied her, and retired” (3:426-29). “No amount of pity,” Dussinger concludes, “can save the heroine” from legal action. Dussinger therefore claims that the fundamental lesson Clarissa learns from her trials is that “role-playing,” “although usually

regarded as the antithesis of sincerity,” “is the requisite condition of being in the world, inescapable not only in talking to others but also in setting pen to paper” (“Truth” 49-50). Richardson’s novels are here seen to function as bourgeois reality tests in which pity’s intra-textual failure inspires a symmetrical extra-textual experience in the reader, by which Richardson, it seems, fully aware of the “contingency of reporting,” means to embolden his reader to face life with more suspicion and prudence and with a willingness to realize the utility of deception and the instrumentality of language. However, if language and law cannot be trusted, the moral feelings of the public majority (“most”), even without deliberative knowledge of her case, seem to provide a more trustworthy, if imaginary, proto-democratic court of appeal. Richardson, in this way, gives to the common reader’s private feelings a certain precedence over and against the apparent blindness created by language and public law. It is where Clarissa’s ability to speak breaks down—stuttering dashes, broken syntax, confused questions—that she has the most power to effect a readerly internalization of moral authority. Through the sympathetic exchange afforded by this breakdown, she is able to relocate her appeals to the more sufficiently just private sphere of the heart.<sup>23</sup>

The scene of her imprisonment is thus designed to make public law in its contemporary form (including the laws of language and reason—*logos*) appear as an unfair limit to the moral prerogatives of private feeling. Richardson thus utilizes pity’s intra-textual failure and Clarissa’s “charming” innocence not simply to expose the instrumentality of language, but also to expand pity’s rhetorical (extra-textual) jurisdiction by shifting the ground of meaning to the hearts of his reading public—and

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<sup>23</sup> Linda Kauffman argues that Clarissa “posits a logic based on the integrity of the body and the supremacy of the heart, which is antithetical to the logic enforced by men” (133).

thus to the private, individual reader. As John Zomchick suggests, “Clarissa’s heart is riven by the same historical forces that are producing the modern conditions of individualism,” and, “in order to keep this ‘heart’ from becoming just another version of private good, Richardson grounds his heroine’s desires in a natural law, derived from generating the affective bonds of social intercourse” (59). Clarissa does learn to mistrust the law and refuses to try her case in the public courts, but not out of a mistrust in pity:

Little advantage in a court (perhaps bandied about, and jested profligately with) would some of those pleas in my favour have been, which out of court, and to a private and serious audience, would have carried the greatest weight. ... The warning that may be given from [the future publication of her story] to all such young creatures as may have known or heard of me, may be more efficacious, as I humbly presume to think, to the end wished for, than my appearance could have been in a court of justice. (4:184, 186)

Clarissa later claims that her persecutors “will have concern enough, when [they] find[] everybody whose displeasure I now labour under acquitting my memory of perverse guilt, and joining in a general pity for me” (4:247-8). According to Carol Kay, “Clarissa uses ... publicity rather than the power of the law in order to symbolize the noncoercive relationships of sympathy and generosity which she prefers to contractual relationships but which have been denied her” (192). In her “private” readers’ “general pity,” then, she recognizes “the end wished for”: her use of the passive voice accentuates the generalization she is after, and she fragments her private interest (herself), making her own wishes stand in as a group wish. In other words, her private interest, through readerly pity, becomes a matter of universal concern.

The continuity of her message depends on her ability to develop an abstract zone of intimacy apart from the law that is capable of being both outside and inside herself, and the exchange pity facilitates allows for the realization of this seeming paradox. Rachel K.



Carnell argues that, “in refusing to present her case in the public court of law, [Clarissa] implies that the public system of justice would not protect her rights as a rational citizen as well as would an expanded public sphere” (284). By framing his critique of the judicial system in the form of published private letters, Richardson insists on the political relevance of private reading experience. He thus seeks to overwhelm the judging reader with feeling in order to redeem the mind through an emotional passivity that allows for the formation of a virtual community of intersubjectivity and an expansion of the frontiers of conscience. If the present systems of juridico-political authority are inadequate to the task of providing accurate judgments, at least there is the moral-aesthetic realm of an imagined community of sensitive interpreters. The heart’s (pity’s) intermediary capacity to foster a mutual refinement of the senses and the understanding, therefore, also involves a movement from the private (“inside”) to the public (“outside”), which provides readers with a fictional but tangible basis for trust. Clarissa’s refusal to take her case to court includes an explicit critique of the profligate state of the juridico-political institution, and she seeks to carve out an alternative space for the judgments of the heart by drawing the mind and senses (the “high” and the “lowly”) into a common matrix, a sort of middle ground, wherein their mutual refinement (redemption) is more easily assured.

As already suggested, Clarissa seeks to overcome the isolation of a society of self-governing individuals by making her ideology seem universal: her story is, in Catherine Gallagher’s terminology, “nobody’s story.” As Gallagher might have it, it is Clarissa’s “overt fictionality,” that she is “nobody *in particular*,” namely, that she has no actual “extra-textual existence,” that makes her accessible to the broadest possible readerly appropriation: “fictional characters were uniquely suitable objects of compassion.

Because they were conjectural, suppositional identities belonging to no one, they could be universally appropriated. A story about nobody was nobody's story and hence could be entered, occupied, identified with by anybody" (173, 174, 168). Clarissa's choice to reject this life for the next, then, works much like her rejection of the courts: her death is meant to bring about a collision of interests in this life in order to exact the compassion from her extra-textual readers missing in her most important intra-textual relationships. She thereby gives to literary experience a soteriological function, which makes the public sphere appear as a virtual form of the heavenly ideal. According to Marx, "each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society ... it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones." In Clarissa's case, this universality takes the form of ethics rather than legality. Clarissa thus makes herself a universalizable victim of social and legal injustice, a representative of "the whole of society" in its confrontation with the structures of "the one ruling class." Marx sees this "illusion of the common interest" in its incipient stage as "true," in that "to start with, its interest really is more connected with the common interest of all other non-ruling classes" (65-66, see also Marx's marginal notes). This initial, paradoxical "moment" of ideological indetermination, in which "illusion" and "truth" intermesh indistinguishably, is the very historical matrix—a temporal isomorph of Clarissa's "heart"—in which "innocence" and "rhetoricity" may coincide. It would seem that only such a collusion of contradictory forces, having been "compelled" into a common time-space by a seemingly historical necessity, could conceive new modes of social exchange and self-recognition. The trope of Clarissa's passivity is thus a necessary

precondition of revolution or, in Richardson's terms, reformation. By packaging her moral-spiritual precepts within her passive and yet persuasive body, that is, by acceding actual and political power to the ruling system of authority without relinquishing her alternative spiritual-ideal principles, Clarissa is most economically able to open a zone for an alternative expression of power that appeals to the interests of the common individual consumer. Through pity, suffering—perhaps the most common human commodity—becomes the vehicle of a broad social empowerment. In *Clarissa*, pity comes to name, in its capacity as a physiological, psychological, and social category, an integrative ethico-political *process* able to draw inside and outside, high and low, and private and public one *within* the other.

In a world in which conventional status boundaries are eroding in favor of class orientation, new modes of social exchange and self-recognition can only be developed by the 'compulsion' of a seemingly historical necessity. In Adam Smith's formulation, pity operates via the imagination to undo the absolute separateness of existence, the experience of which is exacerbated by the development of these changes in the social structure: we cannot extend ourselves "beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of" another's "sensations." We are isolated by our bodies, but via the body (senses) the imagination can mend this gap. He begins his Theory of Moral Sentiments with a discussion of pity's primary role in facilitating this mode of social intimacy and self-regulation:

It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his [the pitied's], which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which ... is not altogether

unlike them. His agonies ... are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them our own.

Pity involves an imaginative identification with and appropriation of another's suffering. For Smith, the imagination operates on and influences "the breast of every attentive spectator" prior to the interventions of reason. Pity, by way of the imagination, evokes a sort of fictional immediacy and Smith discusses the social experience of pity in terms that are drawn from literary experience:

Our joy for the deliverance of those heroes of tragedy or romance who interest us, is as sincere as our grief for their distress, and our fellow-feeling with their misery is not more real than that with their happiness. We enter into their gratitude towards those faithful friends who did not desert them in their difficulties; and we heartily go along with their resentment against those perfidious traitors who injured, abandoned, or deceived them. In every passion of which the mind of man is susceptible, the emotions of the bystander always correspond to what, by bringing the case home to himself, he imagines should be the sentiments of the sufferer. (4-5)

While our fictional experiences are "real," our real ones have a fictional basis that nevertheless remains grounded in sensory experience. Through the imaginative exchange of pity, the "breast" of the reader/spectator becomes a "home" for the suffering other. Via pity, the private sphere of the heart is peopled, civilized, the frontiers of conscience extended through the development of an inner 'impartiality' (a method with which to better ascertain probabilities) that is friendly to sensory experience. Simultaneously, however, the body of the other is 'entered', making it an imaginary home for the spectator. These mutual internalizations allow for a sort of self-doubling in which each particular individual becomes a holding place for (while separated from) society so as to in turn make society a safe holding place for particular individuals. While pity draws the senses and the mind into conformity in the heart, it extends this movement horizontally in the form of a series of

mutual internalizations in which the particular individual (reader) becomes part of a generalized imaginary, “public” body.

We experience our sympathetic feelings towards another person, however, “antecedent to any knowledge” of what excited those feelings in the first place (6). God himself regulates this system of consensus: It is an extension of His own “benevolence and wisdom,” principles with which He has “from all eternity contrived and conducted the immense machine of the universe so as at all times to produce the greatest possible quantity of happiness.” Public virtue can be found most directly in the “resignation” of one’s private will “to the will of the great Director of the universe” (347, 345). Man’s ideal relationship with God provides a model for the individual’s relationship to society: God in man, man in society, society in man, God in society, etc. The lines between individual and society are increasingly blurred, paradoxically, according to the force with which they are separated—while passivity to another’s will is a precondition of individuation, a certain distance between subject and object is the precondition of intimacy. In pitying Clarissa, the reader learns to internalize a new mode of authorization by opening an inner, virtual public space for a simultaneous experience of autonomy and community: reading, thereby, becomes a creative act and society an aesthetic object. In a discussion of pity and compassion, Terry Eagleton argues that the eighteenth century is a period in which, “[a]n erstwhile centralized authority must be parcellized and localized: absolved from continuous political supervision, the bourgeois subject must assume the burden of its own internalized governance.” Thus new modes of consensus are needed to replace the old forms of external coercion: “with the growth of bourgeois society, the ratio between coercion and consent is undergoing a gradual transformation: only a rule weighted towards the latter can effectively regulate

individuals whose economic activity necessitates a high degree of autonomy” (*Ideology* 23). In pity, Clarissa finds a procedure for the appropriation and transformation of an older and corrupted coercive system of “external” force into a consensual “internal” form of authority. Although Richardson’s stated telos is the afterlife, in effect, by making the heart and its imaginary extension (what Habermas calls the literary public sphere)<sup>24</sup> a zone within which the divinely “contrived” and implanted impulses of the body may regulate the immediate actions of individuals, he helps make the politics of this life a legitimate end in itself. What makes Clarissa’s interests “disinterested” is that hers, unlike her family’s or Lovelace’s, are sufficiently farsighted.

At one point, Clarissa tries to inspire Lovelace to look to the next life for assurance in this one. Citing *Job*, she exhorts, ““The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment. He is cast into the net by his own feet—he walketh upon a snare.... His remembrance shall perish from the earth... The heaven shall reveal his iniquity, and the earth shall rise up against him... He shall be no more remembered. This is the fate of him that knoweth not God”” (4: 437). Just as his body through pity rises up to judge him, so will the “earth” on the Day of Judgment in the form of publicity. God’s final judgment is a day of mass publication, the typological fulfillment of the “good news” of the gospels—not a formal judicial proceeding—in which every “iniquity” is revealed and every wicked conqueror is subsequently un-remembered. Richardson thus accommodates the Day of Judgment to us in the albeit imperfect figure of publication. Clarissa need not be afraid of publishing her private thoughts and feelings: her “whole story” has a place in eternity. Lovelace thus misses the point: “She will certainly repent, some time hence, that

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<sup>24</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991 [1962]), see especially 159-60.

she has thus needlessly exposed us both.” For Lovelace, public order depends on female secrecy. Publication of such secrets is dangerous because it inspires pity and because pity inspires pitiers to seek revenge on behalf of those pitied: “There never, surely, was such an odd little soul ... not to keep her own secret, when the revealing of it could answer no possible good end.” Since she is capable of drawing “to herself either pity or friends, or to me enemies, by the proclamation! Why jack, ... what would become of the peace of the world, if all women should take it into their heads to follow her example? ... Sisters would be every day setting their brothers about the cutting of throats” (4:111). “What an army of texts has she drawn up in array against me,” he later exclaims, only to confess that “CONSCIENCE is the conqueror of souls: at least it is the conqueror of mine” (4: 511). Of course, he does not submit to its authority, only to the (even if momentary) fact of its power to destroy him: by “conquer” he does not mean “convert.” His passion for Clarissa—or really his own principles—keeps him from seeing consequences beyond his present interest. Lovelace calls Clarissa’s preference for publication and the world’s pity a method of “Christian revenge.” Clarissa affirms this: “shall not charity complete my triumph?” (4:186). Out of tune with God’s will (i.e. the moral impulses of his body), Lovelace follows his own “providences” or “plots” (3:98), and, as Mary Poovey suggests, “in a universe discontinuous with but set in motion and governed by God, any action or exertion of will constitutes a defiance of providence” (305).

### **Moral Authority and the Internalization of Providence**

In the “Postscript” to Clarissa, Richardson laments that

He has lived to see Scepticism and Infidelity openly avowed, and even endeavored to be propagated from the Press: The great doctrines of the Gospel brought into question ... to the general exclusion of domestic as well as public virtue ... In this general depravity, when even the Pulpit has lost great part of its

weight, and the Clergy are considered as a body of interested men, the Author thought he should be able to answer it to his own heart, be the success what it would, if he threw in his mite towards introducing a Reformation so much wanted: And he imagined, that if in an age given up to diversion and entertainment, he could steal in, as may be said, and investigate the great doctrines of Christianity under the fashionable guise of an amusement; he should be most likely to serve his purpose.

His skeptical and depraved age is more interested in “entertainment” than in hearing from the “Pulpit,” he avers, and his novels are a disinterested attempt to accommodate religion to a distrustful public. He suggests that he is not primarily concerned with “success;” he is responding “to his own heart.” He hopes to gain the public trust while (by) stealing in “in the fashionable guise of an amusement”—in other words, he has found himself having to fight his religious battle using his enemy’s tools. In order to facilitate his spiritual end, he must make his heroine a “*true* object[] of pity.” Pity is his principle didactic vehicle. With reference to Lovelace, Richardson comments that “[r]eformation” cannot “be secured... by a passion that has sense for its object,” by which he means more than simple sexual desire (4: 553). Any passion that has self as its object and does not consider the feelings of others is by definition, he suggests, unable to motivate reform, because it does not recognize the other as an other. In Richardson, pity shifts the center of gravity from desiring subject to suffering object transforming libidinal energy into the production of an ethical separateness that opens up a new level of intimacy. The feeling of pity arises, then, as a response to a perceived disparity in power, yet, through this separation, it alters in the direction of identity. Although it depends on certain distances, it draws to the middle. Its power lies in its ability to assimilate disparate selves without their having to forfeit any sense of individual selfhood, while it simultaneously reveals as unjust the very positional (status) distinctions that called for its initial emergence. According to



Richardson's rhetoric, pity's ascendancy in the heart is meant to lead to a sort of Copernican revolution of the understanding and the soul.

Richardson's transfer of moral authority from the rational to the physiological register is informed by the enquiries of many of the divines of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In response to thinkers like Hobbes, theological writers of the period sought in the body principles that would reattach nature to its divine referent. Isaac Borrow, for instance, preached against what he felt was Hobbes's suggestion that acts of benevolence were contrary to our natural impulses and that, without a common external force, men would be in a state of war:

We are indispensably obliged to these duties, because the best of our natural inclinations prompt us to the performance of them, especially those of pity and benignity, which are manifestly discernible in all ... and which, questionless, by the most wise and good Author of our beings were implanted therein both as monitors to direct, and as spurs to incite us to the performance of our duty. ... Even the stories of calamities, that in ages long since past have happened to persons nowise related to us, yea, the fabulous reports of tragical events, do (even against the bent of our wills, draw tears from our eyes; and thereby evidently signify that general sympathy which naturally intercedes between men, since we can neither see, nor hear of, nor imagine another's grief, without being afflicted ourselves (Works 2. 79).

External political coercion is here replaced with an inner ethical compulsion. Pity is "the best of our natural inclinations," which is "implanted" in us to direct, monitor, and spur us to benevolent action. God's nature can be discerned more readily in the affections of the body than in the distorted "bent of our wills." In addition, the capacity to pity fictional sufferers is his central evidence for the naturalness of pity. The feeling of pity for fictional suffering may thus become proof of one's ethical nature, a foundation for social coherence, and evidence of the providential design of the human frame. Zacheus Isham, at the turn of the eighteenth century, preached that in order to inspire acts of benevolence, "there are

natural Motions wrought within us, and moulded into our very Frame: For when we see a miserable Object, nature it self moves our Bowels to Compassion, and our Hands to give” (A Sermon 4-5). Twenty years later, Richard Fiddes argues that “God has implanted in our very Frame and Make, a compassionate Sense of the Sufferings and Misfortunes of other People, which disposes us to contribute to their Relief... we are naturally, I had almost said, mechanically inclined to be helpful to them” (Fifty-Two Discourses 112-13). Even Laurence Sterne, in a 1760 charity sermon entitled “Vindication of Human Nature,” preaches that God has “founded” compassion in man “as a provisional security to make him social”: “Let interest guard the passage as it will,” when a man, particularly one who has not had his nature ‘rooted out’ of him (someone like Hobbes, he implies), witnesses a scene of suffering, “he will not be able to shut up his bowels of compassion from him.” This natural and irresistible tendency of the heart or conscience to pity others makes every man “an instrument in the hands of GOD to provide for the well-being of others, to serve their interests as well as his own” (193-95).

Samuel Parker, already in 1681—also reacting against Hobbes offers a micro-history of the development of society—argues that pity, an extension of self-love to others, is an original principle that provides the grounds for community. His history begins with the individual (sexual desire), moves to the family (parental love), and finally to pity (an extension of love to those outside the domestic sphere). The instinct of “propagation ... compels [people] to delight in each others Society, with the highest Affections of mutual Love and Kindness. So that they cannot take care of their own support without being obliged to extend their Affections beyond themselves ... thus are we all enforced to neighborly kindnesses from the same principle that endears us to our

nearest and natural Relations.” In addition, the natural “Affection between Parents and Children ... proceeds from the same mechanical necessity with the passion of Self-love”; in that children “are made up of the same material Principles” as their parents, they “are pieces of their Parents,” and as extensions of their parents, “[i]t is impossible for ... a Man to be cruel to his own off-spring without a sad regret and recoil of his own Nature.” This naturally “endears us to something out of our selves, and obliges us to some concernment beyond our own meer self-interest, and is the first beginning of a Society.” In this domestication of Providence, pity becomes the very sign of authority, making coercive force and aggression appear as the symptoms of an inner frailty.

In his third section, entitled “Natural Pity and Compassion,” Parker argues that

The Divine Providence has implanted in the Nature and Constitution of humane bodies a principle of love and Tenderness, and the bowels of Men are soft and apt to receive impressions from the complaints and calamities of their Brethren; and they cannot, without doing violence to themselves and their own natural sense of Humanity, be altogether senseless of the miseries and infelicities of other Men. ... [T]hey cannot but pity and commiserate the afflicted with a kind of fatal and mechanical Sympathy; their groans force tears and sighs from the unafflicted, and ‘tis a pain to them not to be able to relieve their miseries. (50-55)

Parker, like many contemporary divines, is bent on making the human passions trustworthy vehicles of social communion. Even if God is thought to no longer intervene directly in the course of human events, He does so indirectly on behalf of society’s lowly and vulnerable members by leaving behind a trace of His benevolence in the form of a law of reflexive pity built in to the sensory system of the human body and subsequently into the social body as well: the body, through pity, speaks the rhetoric of God. Pity in “man” thus represents an aspect of God in time. Pity is *the providence of the body*: it is “mechanical,” a “force” beyond one’s control, an internalized form of external coercion. “Men” pity, thus, out of an interest not their own: in pity, the body is made to express

God's providential intentions, His interests. The Cambridge Platonist, Henry More, likewise argues that in a proper study of ethics the goal must be "to interpret the Voice of Nature in" the passions, which are "implanted" in us as the "Whisper of Divine Law." Nature's fundamental aim of stifling sexual and aggressive desires before they are enacted manifests itself

in those efficacious sorts of Eloquence, she has bestowed on so many of the Creatures when they are oppressed, for the drawing of Compassion towards them. Such is the querulous and lamenting tone of the Voice, the dejection of the Eyes and Countenance, Groaning, Howling, Sighs, and Tears, and the like. For all these have Power to incline the Mind to Compassion, whether it be to quicken our Help, or to retard the Mischiefs we intended. (54, 79, 59)

A sufferer's physiological "dejection" may thus "incline" the aggressor's "Mind to Compassion" in order to "retard the Mischiefs" he intends. Pity is capable of holding desire in tension and providing for the sufferer a form of "Eloquence," a sort remote control, that operates from within the potential aggressor in advance of his aggression. It was this aspect of pity that made it compatible with what Eagleton described earlier as the capitalist need for a high degree of moral autonomy and conscience. As Thomas Haskell points out, the modern humanitarian "impulse emerged when and where it did because of its kinship with those social and economic changes that we customarily denominate as the 'rise of capitalism'" (547). Norbert Elias suggests that during this period the "social structure" is changing in coordination with shifts in "the structure of affects." As power is centralized, first around a single sovereign and eventually around the individual citizen, "the standards of the drive-economy are very gradually changed" (169-70). With the concomitant civilizing effect and development of (among other things) "books and the theatre," the brutality that was one of the "uncomplicated 'pleasures of life' in the medieval period" became "deeply horrifying (though still

titillating) to more modern sensibilities” (Elias 170; Haskell 548). Such changes in the “structure of affects” usher in a new era of literary and theatrical representation that Eric Rothstein calls “the post-heroic years,” an era in which characterization, psychological detail, and spectatorship begin to predominate over action, plot, or story—an issue we will return to (306). Along with “this transfer of emotions from direct action to spectating,” remarks Elias, “there has been a distinct curve of moderation and ‘humanization’ in the transformation of affects” (171). Although Haskell emphasizes developments in contract law, he does argue that

[h]istorically speaking, capitalism requires conscience and can even be said to be identical with the ascendancy of conscience.... Conscience and promise keeping emerged in human history, of course, long before capitalism.... But it was not until the eighteenth century... that societies first appeared whose economic systems depended on the expectation that most people, most of the time, were sufficiently conscience-ridden... that they could be trusted to keep their promises. (552-53)

The eighteenth century’s unprecedented enthusiasm for pity, I would argue, made it (as a concept) the central vehicle of the interiorization—the “inner” expansion—of the frontiers of conscience. It is in this context that Henry Home, Lord Kames, in his Principles of Morality and Religion (1751), makes the confident claim that pity—and neither (or only implicitly) faith in God nor the external authority of a sovereign—is “the great cement of human society,” and he described “mutual sympathy” as both “natural” and as that which is best able to “promote the security and happiness of mankind.” That humans are capable of feeling pity for others, Kames says, is in all instances a sign of “inward merit” on account of which “the prosperity and preservation of each individual [becomes] the care of many”; and “this,” he concludes, “is wisely ordered by providence” (10-11).

Pity is thus capable of producing naturally a trustworthy system of social as well as economic reciprocity: as an innate, pre-rational, moral principle, pity can be “juxtaposed to the contingencies of history, ignorance, and the machinations of the self-serving” (Steintrager xiii). Pity was thus a providentially designed mechanism of conscience built into the human body itself that made the individual seem trustworthy without recourse to the more traditional forces of external authority. Eagleton suggests that what is at stake in this period “is nothing less than the production of an entirely new kind of human subject—one which ... discovers the law in the depths of its own free identity, rather than in some oppressive external power. The liberated subject is the one who has appropriated the law as the very principle of its own autonomy, broken the forbidding tablets of stone on which that law was originally inscribed in order to rewrite it on the heart of flesh. To consent to the law is thus to consent to one’s own inward being” (Ideology 19). In this way, the compulsion of autocratic power is being replaced in the body by a more gratifying and morally self-sufficient impulse, a “law” written in the flesh, that can be seen as a “natural” element of one’s ontological makeup or “inward being.” This important historical development plays an important role in fostering what Michael McKeon refers to as “the devolution of absolutism,” the dialectical process “whereby the absolute authority of the sovereign is internalized, over time, as a sovereign attribute of the individual citizen” (Secret History 30).

For Hobbes, the truly self-aware individual will conclude that submission to an external authority is the best solution to political and social problems: the head of state rules *over* the common-wealth, which is his fictional body. These later antithetical notions of human nature and the value of the passions make it possible to envision a social body

strengthened from the bottom up based on moral principles internal to, and yet beyond, the individual, a process that is reflected inversely in the downward embodiment of Providence. Pity's rhetorical instrumentality, thus exonerated of all human interest, receives a religious sanction. Obedience to one's own instincts thus becomes obedience to God: theoretically, at least, private interests and public interests may be reconciled through pity. In an attempt to redeem a profligate world from skepticism, as Richardson will in a different form half a decade later, religious thinkers of the late seventeenth century thus infused the human body with an unprecedented moral authority. By no longer associating conscience and duty exclusively with the will and reason, the moral could be made to depend on the physico-emotional vehicle.

### **Pity and the Domestication of Literary Form**

The historical shift we have traced in religio-political theory coincides with similar shifts in aesthetic theory and artistic practice. It is in the late seventeenth century that the ontological assumptions of traditional Christian humanism were thus being replaced by a sort of moral intersubjectivism, and, as Martin C. Battestin notes, “[t]he center of Order was transferred from Nature and Nature's God to the individual consciousness and, as a consequence, a radical reassessment of aesthetic principles was required” (271). Richardson, in fact, spends much of his “Postscript” explaining his affective approach to tragedy in relation to current attitudes about the nature of Providence, authorial responsibility, and the doctrine of poetic justice. “Poetic(al) justice,” a term coined by Thomas Rymer, is, as Eric Rothstein puts it, “the dramatic analogue to Divine Providence.” Richardson rejects this doctrine as an oversimplification of “real” justice. Citing Addison, he claims that poetic justice is a false dispensation of Providence, which commits an author

to a correspondingly false representation of reality—it restricts rather than enhances what Richardson sees as the affective (spiritual) purpose of tragedy. In late seventeenth-century England, “there are two broad explanations of the moral effect of tragedy,” the “fabulist” and the “affective.” “The fabulist explanation is the basis for the medieval and Renaissance apology for poetry,” while the affective explanation emerges as the early modern replacement of the fabulist explanation. While the fabulist approach emphasized the moral value of the fable, story, or plot over the artful “embellishment” (corresponding respectively to Horace’s *utile* and *dulce*), the affective approach exalts “the individual emotional moment.” The former, Rothstein problematically suggests (much in line with Gordon), is a rhetorical, while the latter is “a non-rhetorical[,] theory of tragedy.”<sup>25</sup> The fabulist explanation was associated with Horace, and the affective explanation was associated with Aristotle. According to Rymer, plays which do not reward virtuous and punish vicious characters “falsif[y] the moral structure of Providence and the teaching of prudential morality” (Rothstein 309, 307, 312, 309). Reflecting on the murder of the innocent Desdemona in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, Rymer suggests that such plays “envenome and sour our spirits, to make us repine and grumble at Providence; and the government of the World” (quoted from Williams 545). Rymer believed that “drama ... could perform its supreme ethical function only by the closest possible imitation of a metaphysical reality—the reality of Providence” (Williams 545). Art must come to reflect the cosmic order of providential justice. According to the fabulist explanation, dramatic pleasure resides in the harmony of the ending.

The English relied on René Rapin for their Aristotle. Richardson, in fact, quotes

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<sup>25</sup> Problematically, much like Gordon, Rothstein suggests that the fabulist approach is a rhetorical, while the affective approach is “a non-rhetorical[,] theory of tragedy” (312).



Rapin favorably in his “Postscript” as evidence against those who endorse poetic justice.

According to Aristotle, Rapin suggests,

Tragedy is a publick Lecture, without comparison more instructive than Philosophy; because it teaches the mind by the sense. ... The Philosopher had observ'd two important faults in man to be regulated, pride, and hardness of heart, and he found for both Vices a cure in Tragedy. For it makes man modest, by representing the great masters of the earth humbled; and it makes him tender and merciful. (17:103)<sup>26</sup>

Thus, tragedy can be interpreted in line with Christian morality because the function of catharsis becomes not to purge fear and pity (as in Aristotle) but to increase them so as to cure the audience of “pride” and “hardness of heart.” The “mind” is taught by the “sense.” Richardson, in fact, cites a portion of this quotation in his postscript. Rapin’s attitude to tragedy makes the moral message depend not on the plot but on the emotional vehicle. The plot should appear to move from within according to the nature of the dominant passion rather than as the effect of the magisterial contrivance of the author.

In his “Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*,” Dryden’s account of pity falls in line with Rapin’s (whom Dryden calls a “judicious critic”) but with some important differences:

P]ride and want of commiseration are the two most predominant vices of mankind; therefore, the inventors of tragedy have chose to work upon two other passions, which are fear and pity. We are wrought to fear by their setting before our eyes some terrible example of misfortune, which happened to persons of the highest quality, for such an action demonstrates to us that no condition is privileged from the turns of fortune; this must of necessity cause terror in us, and consequently abate our pride. But when we see that the most virtuous, as well as the greatest, are not exempt from such misfortunes, that consideration moves pity in us, and insensibly works us to be helpful to, and tender over, the distressed; which is the noblest and most god-like of moral virtues. (1:208-9)

Pity “is the noblest and most god-like of moral virtues.” Not only does Dryden treat pity as a moral virtue (a notion, as discussed in Chapter 1, that Aristotle rejected), passing

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<sup>26</sup> Ironically, Rymer was the first to translate Rapin’s *Réflexions sur la poétique d’Aristote et sur les ouvrages des poètes anciens et modernes* into English.

over the quasi-theological form of poetic justice, Dryden also, thereby, makes pity the moral-spiritual end of tragedy. As Rothstein puts it, Dryden alters “the fable from a demonstration of heavenly dispensation to an evocation of ethical feeling” (317).

This change in the location of meaning from God to man has been made possible, I would suggest, because feelings themselves are now able to embody providential directives—albeit in a well-metabolized form. Reason and plot (the instrumental) and the senses/body and feeling (the expressive or ornamental) are paired throughout this period. But after Rymer, the passions of the individual character come to internalize the rhetorical function of the providential plot. Solutions to present public problems may thus be sought for in the sphere of common, private feelings on account of an ennoblement effected by a providentialization of the passions. Pity is noble and “god-like”: the emotional vehicle has thus internalized the quasi-theological utility of the plot and metabolized it as its content. In their very attempt to stifle the secularizing effects of thinkers like Hobbes, many divines of the late seventeenth century thereby give a religious sanction to the glorification of private feeling. “Empathy with characters through the nature and passion of their discourses, a mere rhetorical appurtenance to earlier critics, now assumes equal or greater utilitarian significance than the plot, because equally or more emotionally stirring” (Rothstein 317). Literary characters must increasingly resemble in their inner life, therefore, the private sentiments of the reader. In this way, the emergence of a morality of pity lays the groundwork for the development of the bourgeois domestic novel, with its emphasis on private emotional experience: a development that makes the novel, as Lukács argues, “an indispensable form for crystallizing the really typical” (140). Techniques capable of producing pity thus take on equal or greater utilitarian significance than the fable or plot.

In making pity the chief passion, the audience, merely by responding emotionally, becomes the co-partner of the author in the creative process. Rothstein sees this alteration in focus as involving at once a privatization and a domestication whereby “universalized or moralized characters of high degree began, very slowly, to be supplanted by more particularized characters conceived psychologically” (322). Aaron Hill (a friend of Richardson’s) makes explicit in his prologue to *The Fatal Extravagance* (1721) the domestication effected by this revaluation of the passions:

To Ills, remote from our Domestic Fears,  
We lend our Wonder, but with-hold our Tears.  
Not so, when, for such Passions, as our own,  
Some Favorite Folly’s dreadful Fate is shown;  
There the Soul bleeds, for what it feels within;  
And conscious Pity shakes at suffering Sin.<sup>27</sup>

The poem matches Rapin’s and Dryden’s accounts of the new affective explanation, but it reveals the “Domestic” as the terminal point, the end implicit in making the “Passions” and not the plot the key to “the Soul.” Hill’s language moves from the domestic to the religious register—“Domestic” to “sin”— *and* from “Fear” to “Pity,” much like Dryden. The domestic and the heroic (as content and form) merge when pity is made to be the most noble and divine of all passions. The novelty of this historical development cannot be stressed enough and the novel is the genre best suited to fulfill the implicit demand for the particularization of character Hill suggests these developments necessitate.

Although we are now inclined to refer to Richardson’s as domestic novels, he preferred the term “religious novel” (*Correspondences* 4:187). In contradistinction to “*Poetical Justice*,” he argues, in the “the Christian System” death is a fortunate ending.

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<sup>27</sup> Aaron Hill, prologue to *The fatal extravagance. A tragedy. As it is acted at the Theatre, in Lincoln’s-Inn-Fields by Mr. Joseph Mitchell* (London, 1721). The play was actually written by Aaron Hill for Joseph Mitchell.

Citing Addison, he calls the former “a ridiculous doctrine” (Spectator 40; Clarissa 8:280).

But the main problem was that it blunted the emotions:

The English writers of Tragedy ... are possessed with a notion, that when they represent a virtuous or innocent person in distress, they ought not to leave him till they have delivered him out of his troubles, or made him triumph over his enemies.... We find, that good and evil happen alike unto ALL MEN on this side the grave: And as the principle design of Tragedy is to raise commiseration and terror in the minds of the audience, we shall defeat this great end, if we always make Virtue and Innocence happy and successful... and disappointments a good man suffers... will make but a small impression on our minds, when we know, that, in the last Act, he is to arrive at the end of his wishes and desires. When we see him engaged in the depth of his afflictions, we are apt to comfort ourselves, because we are sure he will find his way out of them, and that his grief, how great soever it may be at present, will soon terminate in gladness.

The goal of all tragedians is to “affect their Audience.” Richardson feels that “the instruction and moral are much finer, where a man who is virtuous in the main of his character falls into distresses, and sinks under the blows of fortune, at the end of a Tragedy, than when he is represented as happy and triumphant. Such an example ... softens the mind of the beholder with sentiments of pity and compassion, [and] comforts him under his own private affliction” (Spectator 40, 548; Clarissa 8:283).<sup>28</sup> Fear is not even mentioned in this account. The “instruction and moral” take center stage most effectively when pity is not given an opportunity to “terminate in gladness,” but is instead heightened when the main “character... sinks under the blows of fortune” “in the last Act.” Plot, therefore, must play second fiddle to feeling, the “great end” of tragedy. Even “Horace” (the fabulists exemplar), when attending a tragedy, “wished” above all “to be affected” (4:555). Richardson cites a portion of Pope’s translation of Horace’s Epistle to Augustus in his own defense:

Let me, for once, presume t’ instruct the times

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<sup>28</sup> The previous three citations are from the third edition of Clarissa, as it includes some material the “Dent” addition does not.

To know the *Poet* from the *Man of Rhymes*.  
 'Tis he who gives my breast a thousand pains:  
 Can make me feel each passion that he feigns;  
 With *pity* and with *terror* tear my heart; ... (4:555)

Richardson notes, however, that his readers mainly complained about the story's length: "They were of opinion that the story moved too slowly," but, he argues, "interesting personalities" are the cornerstone of his project (4:563). "They were of opinion that the story moved too slowly, particularly in the first and second volumes," in which Richardson establishes Clarissa's character: in his defense, he argues that they are "the Foundation of the whole." "The letters and conversations, where the story makes the slowest progress, are presumed to be characteristic," and "[t]hey give occasion likewise to suggest many interesting Personalities, in which a good deal of instruction essential to a work of this nature is conveyed" (4: 563-4). Character development slows things down. The "foundation of the whole" is in "interesting personalities": "Epistolary form gives immediate access to the deepest emotions of its characters" (McKeon, "From Prose Fiction" 600). "Letters and Conversations," by their very nature, militate against forward movement and suggest intimacy, privacy, and emphasize psychological interiority over action and plot. Richardson concedes that "there was frequently a necessity to be very circumstantial and minute, in order to preserve and maintain that Air of Probability, which is necessary to be maintained in a Story designed to represent real Life" (8:297). Therefore, he felt that his prolixity, the emphasis on the "circumstantial and minute," on "private" feeling, was justified. It was in this emphasis on private and psychological detail rather than on the unity of action that Clarissa attained an unprecedented readerly

accessibility.<sup>29</sup> Letters, by their very nature, emphasize psychological interiority over action and plot. “The letter form,” as Ian Watt argues, “offered Richardson a short-cut ... to the heart, and encouraged him to express what he found there with the greatest possible precision, even at the cost of shocking the literary traditionalists. As a result, his readers found in his novels the same complete engrossment of their inner feelings” (195).

Richardson’s most ardent fans were thus struck by his ability to make the forces that propel the plot seem to emanate from within the characters themselves. This effect is enhanced by Richardson’s technique of “writing to the moment”—“the Letters being written under the immediate impression of every Circumstance” (*Pamela* 4)—which, as evidence of Richardson’s attention to “nature” and “probability,” inspired in his readers a corresponding sense that the story is happening at the very moment it is being read. As Johannes Stinstra writes in the introduction to his Dutch translations of *Clarissa*, “The descriptions and accounts are here so wonderfully alive that the reader could imagine that he does not read the adventures and discourse of others at second hand but sees them happening with his own eyes, hears the conversations with his own ears, and he is himself present at the very scene” (118). In *Clarissa*, Richardson writes, “[a]ll the Letters are written ... with what may be called *instantaneous* Descriptions and Reflections (proper to be brought home to the breast of the youthful Reader); as also with affecting Conversations; many of them written in the dialogue or dramatic way.”<sup>30</sup> Anna Laetitia Barbauld, editor of Richardson’s *Correspondences* (1804), argues that before Richardson “[t]here was still wanting a mode of writing which should connect the high passion, and the delicacy of sentiment of the old romance, with characters moving in the sphere of life with

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Catherine Gallagher, 173-75. See particularly Gallagher’s discussion on page 174, where she examines the relationship between fictionality, detail, the capacity to produce sympathy, and realism.

<sup>30</sup> Previous two quotations are from *Clarissa*, Third Edition, 8:297, 1:vii.

ourselves, and brought into action by incidents of daily occurrence” (1:xvii). In this break with traditional generic codes, changes in the status of pity helped to shift the center of gravity from the “old romance” to those modes of writing concerned with the more probable “incidents of daily occurrence.” The rise of pity thus participated in a shift in focus to the more common “sphere of [everyday] life.”

According to Francis Jeffrey, editor of the Edinburgh Review (1804), what made Samuel Richardson’s narratives unique “in the whole history of literature” is that we sympathize with his characters as we would “our private friends and acquaintance, with whose whole situation we are familiar.” Richardson invites us to become, in every minute particular, he says, invisible spectators of “the domestic privacy of his characters.” With authors before Richardson, Jeffrey claims, we could only “make a visit by appointment,” because we never see their characters except “in their dress of ceremony” and in “those critical circumstances, and those moments of strong emotion, which are but of rare occurrence in real life.” As a consequence, “we are never deceived into any belief of their reality.” We sympathize with them, therefore, “only as we sympathize with the monarchs and statesmen of history, of whose condition as individuals we have but a very imperfect conception” (1:321).<sup>31</sup> Because Richardson gives us characters of whom we can have a *more perfect*, and thus more deceptive, conception, he, many hoped, had helped to make individual emotional experience and private self-reflection (and thus the act of reading) an engine of sociopolitical critique and spiritual reformation. Jeffrey thus figures Richardson’s style as an expression of public hospitality and his novels become a virtual “home” in which, through a new—because more perfect—sympathy, the ethics of domestic

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Samuel Johnson’s *Rambler* No. 4 for the *locus classicus* of such arguments. See also *Rambler* No. 60 for the equivalent not on fiction but on biography.

relationships and the internal and private trials of common life attain an exceptional public relevance. It is through our pity that we internalize Clarissa's values and in turn become a home for her. Clarissa's suffering body, through pity, seems thus able to open to her readers an alternative "middle" zone of social justice and ethical-political criticism. Richardson, his reading public seemed to sense, made reading novels a more dynamic and morally self-reflexive—and clearly a more comprehensively rhetorical—process than his predecessors. He thereby deepened and extended the significance of private literary experience by locating in the ethics of domestic relationships a vitalizing source for what he hoped could be the spiritual reformation of a failing system of socio-political governance. In the process of elevating the public importance of domestic life, pity's public function and value rose on account of its perceived power to transform individual desires into common social interests.



### CHAPTER 3

#### THE BACKWASH OF EMPIRE: SELF-PITY AND SELF-PRESERVATION IN MACKENZIE'S THE MAN OF FEELING

##### **The Problem of Blame: Pity, Home, and Empire**

Within Henry Mackenzie's lifetime, by 1815, one-fifth of the world's population had come under the sway of the British Empire (Colley 323). The sentimental mode thus emerged, developed, and came to dominate the literary imagination of the times in the climate of vast European, imperial expansion, and increasing global awareness. In addition, the sentimental novel was a *transnational* phenomenon that, beginning with the publication of Samuel Richardson's Pamela, ignited "a pan-European consumer frenzy" (Festa, SB 74). According to Margaret Cohen, "during the century of sentimentality's prestige, ... sentimental novels were the most translated of all literary fiction" (107). A form of writing principally concerned with the individual subject—a subject ultra-sensitive to the suffering of others and ultra-conscious of the interior ebb and flow of its own feelings—it was also a popular mode for writing about slaves, the colonized, the local poor, the insane and the generally displaced and alienated. By imagining a common connection between (and attempting to discover a common cause of suffering that could link) those who suffer at home and those who suffer at the distant fringes of empire, sentimental texts provided their consumers with the experience of a feeling of universal communion. They opened an imaginary zone or channel of contact in a world felt to be increasingly absorbed in private commercial gain, a world suffering from the disorienting effects of imperial expansion. With the guiding compass of its pity, the sentimental self could orient itself in a world of dissolving borders and broken local attachments by

simultaneously *distinguishing the worthy* and *locating*, and thus clearing the self from, *blame*. As it became increasingly difficult to locate a concrete cause—behind each local cause could be found a host of more distant institutions or metaphysical abstractions: “the world,” history, fortune, fate, etc.—the individual subject could often only find stability in reclusiveness and a protective self-pity. The difficulty of locating blame, it would seem, increases in a global system. The conveniently amorphous category of “the world,” one newly consumed by the desires of commercial gain and international trade, took the brunt of the blame. By projecting culpability onto a generalizable, abstract target, the pitier could protect himself from self-accusation and feelings of guilt, and his pity for a suffering other allowed him to also feel bad for himself. He too is a victim of “the world.” The local pitying self may, thus, by pitying distant others, identify himself as a co-victim with the one he pities. The pitier is able thus to participate in the pitied’s victimhood as an equal partner—the same *type* of suffering afflicts both parties. Both the colonized and colonizer have been uprooted and torn from their homes, local identities have been broken by the intrusion of foreign elements—resulting in an internationalized sense of shared suffering and loss. Conveniently, no action can be registered against such a vague and generalized enemy. In other words, although sentimental fiction often concerns itself with the pains of those “others” disenfranchised by imperial power, it is precisely the local individual’s relationship to home—and the experience of this corresponding, apparently modern, kind of suffering and dislocation—that is its priority.

Before we begin to look closely at the various mechanisms by which Mackenzie converts pity into a protective self-pity, it would be helpful to pause briefly to explore the structural relationship between blame and pity. According to David Hume, in fact, the

impulse to find a cause of suffering is a structural component of pity. He claims that pity is always accompanied by a corresponding desire to locate blame. In his A Treatise of Human Nature (1739 and 1740), he defines “pity” as “a sympathy with pain” (433) that is accompanied by a wish to relieve the sufferer or to see him or her in a happy state: “pity is a desire of happiness to another” (430). Pity/compassion and benevolence, for this reason, suggests Hume, share a similar signification to love (417-20). Benevolence and love, like pity, are attended by a desire for another’s happiness. Pity “produces love ... because it interests us in the fortunes of others” (433) and “[b]enevolence or the appetite, which attends love, is a desire of the happiness of the person beloved” (430). However, while love and benevolence tend to be passions that we feel for those we know or feel a kinship to, “*Pity* is a concern for ... the misery of others, without any friendship... to occasion this concern” (417). The distinction here seems to be one of gradations or degrees of relational proximity or intimacy. If pity “produces” or inspires love, it does so “even [for] strangers,” he adds. With regard to our intimate friends and family, pity is merely one expression of love (in that it likewise includes *a desire for another’s happiness*) that manifests itself as a response, in this case, specifically to a *beloved’s* suffering, sorrow, or pain. The feeling of intimacy it produces depends on a certain distance from the one pitied. Pity is, thus, a generalizable form of love, or more accurately, an extra- or even meta-familial manifestation of love that is able to cross local, temporal, and national boundaries, and as such connects a pitier with those to whom he or she would normally be “perfectly indifferent” (417). It extends the reach of love beyond the immediacy of place, time, and the habits of familiarity even to fictional

characters, to the realm of imaginary relations. In other words it is a vehicle of imagined self-extension or expansion. It draws others into the zone of the pitier's self-identity.

However, this wish "for the happiness of another" is complicated in that, for Hume, pity always involves minimally a triangulated relation between pitier, pitied, and cause of suffering. The allegiance that is formed between the pitier and pitied is developed at the expense of the cause of suffering. It produces a kind a family bond, a group feeling born out of a broken allegiance with a perceived common cause of pain. Pity is thus at core a mechanism of self-preservation via the preservation of the group against the foreign intruder. This insight is emphasized in many eighteenth century discussions of pity, but, I would argue, it is in recent discussions a largely ignored component of pity or compassion (or at least is underdeveloped or treated implicitly). Whatever the case, Hume recognizes the triangulated nature of pity in the following comment: "When we observe a person in misfortunes, we are affected with pity and love; but the author of that misfortune becomes the object of our strongest hatred, and is the more detested in proportion to the degree of our compassion" (Treatise 436). There is a sort of zero-sum economy or system of economic equivalence at work in Hume's claim. The more we pity the sufferer, the more we detest the cause of suffering. As one's stock goes up, the other's falls. If the pitier were to entertain the possibility that he was in fact one of the "authors" of the pitied's "misfortunes," i.e., that the triangle might in fact terminate in himself, his pity would terminate in guilt—his pity would coincide with a proportional degree of nullifying self-accusation. To maintain a feeling of pity and shared suffering—the feeling of being part of a big, international family—the local pitier must not see himself as part of "the world," he must find some way of diverting blame. It is

this goal, I will argue, that becomes the focus of sentimental pity, and is, thus, the focus of this chapter. Sentimental pity—pity for distant sufferers—must, in order to remain pity, come to involve more of a quest to find oneself *not* to be at fault than to seek out the happiness of another, lest the happiness of the other come at one's own expense. In light of Hume's insight, we may see more clearly the sociopolitical utility of blaming "the world."

In general, before the eighteenth century the opinion held of human nature was that human flesh was innately corrupt, and one's status and ontological position in the universe was the effect of one's fallenness before and likeness to God. Social inequality and personal suffering were the just consequences of an innate and original sinfulness, a natural effect of sin on all of humanity. According to this world-view, then, theoretically one needed not turn outside of the self to find a cause for one's sufferings, for one's position in the world. However, thinkers like Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Rousseau and the *philosophes*, who saw individuals as naturally benevolent and good, began to locate in a formal way the causes of individual suffering outside of the individual self: in this way society, the law, the government, empire, the world, the aristocracy, the capitalist, the king, or sometimes notions like fate, fortune, (and, in the case of people like Voltaire, even God Himself), etc. could be blamed. The individual subject, in the face of such a barrage of causes, it seemed, could only find refuge from the sources of degeneracy in his own heart, in an inner space withdrawn from the newer forms of circulation. Further, in his capacity to pity others, he could reaffirm his common humanity *and* his difference from the greedy herd. Pity, what Hume seems to see as a feeling of universal benevolence, therefore, had to incorporate into the fabric of its nature the capacity to

monitor the boundaries of the Enlightenment subject. The sentimental mode, I would claim, was one of the eighteenth century's vehicles of this incorporation.

I would suggest further that in this period pity becomes a “holding-term” for a new ideological complex, an increasingly dynamic rhetorical system involving a set of processes and structural principles aimed at affirming local and national identities. To pity Harley, the hero of The Man of Feeling, and to pity the local and distant sufferers he encounters with him is, I will show, to pity oneself. The text invites readers through pity into a feeling of meta-familial affection, but it also protects the reader from having to identify oneself with the causes of suffering—this is its very *modus operandi*. Festa argues that “[i]n an era in which imperial reach increasingly outstripped imaginative grasp, sentimental fiction... enabled readers to reel the world home in their minds” (Festa SFE 2). Both local and distant suffering objects, thus brought home to the mind of the reader, must be made to validate, ventriloquize, and help to elucidate local complaints, concerns, and political problems. In a world in which people were increasingly able to visualize their own existence as conditioned by world-historical forces, the sentimental mode's capacity to enlist compassion for distant suffering allowed its readers to feel for others while maintaining or cultivating a sense of distinctiveness. In the midst of dramatic historical change, Mackenzie's primary intention in The Man of Feeling is to inoculate the local self from the reverse incursions of commercial empire and expanding pan-European exchange. When Harley sees the effects on his neighborhood of the rapid modern growth of luxury and new wealth—what he sees as a complete desacralization of space and time—he is hit personally with an experience of existential fragmentation; a crisis of individual and national identity. The question The Man of Feeling persistently

asks is how does one maintain individual “home” identity in the face of national self-expansion and increasing global awareness? In response to this question, this chapter intends to explore a particular aspect of pity—namely its tendency to redouble back onto the pitier; its tendency to validate the pitier’s being-in-the-world and being-for-self—and the role Mackenzie and the eighteenth century, especially in Scotland, set for pity (or compassion) as a response to the problem of imperial expansion. My goal is to trace pity into the fissures of a particular aspect of sentimental experience, to corner and isolate its often unnoticed undertow, those points at which it narrows and tries to set limits for itself and for the sentimental subject it creates, those instances of retraction or counter-resistance where it pulls back against the outward flow of its expansive tendency to a more opaque and problematic self-protectionism—namely, when it morphs into a sort of self-preservational self-pity, or what Mackenzie will call “a *Sentiment of Home*.” This will involve an exploration of those moments in The Man of Feeling when pity opens for the local self an inner space that is exempt from the necessity of time, or, borrowing the words of Georg Lukács, when it transforms memory into an experience of time which is a “victory over time”—that moment when it seeks to draw the pitier nearer to the “essence of things,” i.e., nearer to himself (124).

### **The Narrator’s Rust and the Lap-Dog**

In the wake of an unprecedented broadening of horizons, the individual’s local moorings were dissolving on account of the corresponding influx of goods, sentiments and manners—by what I will call the backwash or the reverse incursions of empire and transnational exchange—that flowed daily from other cultures and spaces both into print and into English ports. Sentimental fiction, while it had the unique capacity to produce an

imaginary, transnational society of weeping readers, simultaneously sought to provide the local reader with safe domestic harbor by informing it with a sense of historical continuity, existential certainty, and moral grounding in the face of change. What Mackenzie sought to facilitate as a protective reaction to these developments, I would suggest, was a form of self-pity, a defensive benevolence *to self* that grew out of a sympathetic feeling for home.

In the introductory pages of The Man of Feeling, we are given an important description of the narrator of this “bundle of little episodes”: “a grave, oddish kind of man,” whom “[t]he country people called ... The Ghost,” a recluse who “never frequented any of the clubs” and who was known for “the slouch in his gait, and the length of his stride.” “[H]e was as gentle as a lamb” and played “te-totum with the children” in “the church-yard.” The description emphasizes his inwardness and anonymity, his distance from the influences of modern society, and his proximity to a state of innocence—nameless, he is an apparition, a mysterious remnant, someone unattached to common things and modern concerns. It is just such a man as this, seemingly resistant to outside influences and the incursion of commercial culture, whom Mackenzie chooses to represent Harley, the hero of his novel. The first chapter, Chapter XI, begins with a discussion of “bashfulness”:

There is some rust about every man at the beginning; though in some nations (among the French, for instance) the ideas of the inhabitants from climate, or what other cause you will, are so vivacious, so eternally on the wing, that they must, even in small societies, have a frequent collision; the rust therefore will wear off sooner: but in Britain, it often goes with a man to his grave, nay, he dares not even pen a *hic jacet* to speak out for him after his death. (8)

One might suspect that the narrator is describing himself: self-limiting, interested only in the ideas of his immediate “climate,” not inclined to “have a frequent collision” with



others, lacking vivacity, and bearing, paradoxically, a rusty protective coating—he is decidedly un-French and decidedly attached to home.

In his Anecdotes and Egotisms, Mackenzie himself describes The Man of Feeling as “a real picture of my London adventures,” and he suggests that if he had remained in London, as he was urged to do, he would have found “success”—he “missed probably rank and wealth”—because he was “shy and unambitious and fond of my family.” Favoring the virtues of country life, un-enamored of the hustle and bustle of city life, his rust—his bashfulness—did not “wear off” with travel. It is important to note that the first line of the bundle of little episodes involves an international comparison. British men, especially those country gentlemen unaccustomed to the dissipation that prevails in the great metropolitan centers, are also different from the city crowd; encrusted by bashfulness, they are protected from the influences of “the world.” “‘Let them rub it off by travel,’ said the baronet’s brother, who,” the narrator tells us, “was a striking instance of the excellent metal, shamefully rusted.” Yet his lack of travel, his rust or bashfulness, kept “his heart, uncorrupted by its [the world’s] ways, ... ever warm in the cause of virtue and his friends.” To the dangerous idea that travel is a solution to local bashfulness, the narrator comments, “‘Why, it is true, ... that will go far; but then it will often happen, that in the velocity of a modern tour, and amidst the materials through which it is commonly made, the friction is so violent, that not only the rust, but the metal too is lost in the progress.’” Not just the rust but those core elements of one’s national and personal identity may be lost if one collides with too much “velocity” into the foreign “materials” one is bound come into contact with in “a modern tour.” It “‘is not always rust which is acquired by the inactivity of the body,’” Mr. Silton chimes in, “‘it is rather an

encrustation, which nature has given for purposes of the greatest wisdom.” His rust is a natural and thus a unique feature of his national constitution. ““You are right,”” the narrator argues, ““and sometimes, like certain precious fossils, there may be hid under it gems of the purest brilliancy.”” The comment is only a thinly veiled metaphor of Harley himself, who, “in his external appearance,” the narrator tells us, “was modeled” after the type of rusty “gentlemen” he has just described (8-9). Harley, a “precious fossil,” a remnant self, thus represents the hidden metal, the source of the authentic home-virtues, of the narrator—and is meant, ostensibly, to represent a buried part of every sympathetic reader. The rust that covers the surface is the sign of a pure soul—a mode of transparency.

In a chapter simply entitled “The Pupil. A Fragment,” Mountford, a gentleman whose father’s “prodigality had not left him a shilling to support” his “gentility,” provides one example (besides Harley) of someone whose metal does not wear off by travel. Hired as the traveling tutor of Sedley (the son of Mountford’s generous patron), Sedley’s father asks of Mountford, ““You have travelled as became a man; neither France nor Italy have made any thing of Mountford, which Mountford before he left England would have been ashamed of: my son Edward goes abroad, would you take him under your protection?”” Once in Italy, Sedley and Mountford are entertained by the son of a rich count, “count Respino,” who displays a “tenderness of feeling” and a “warmth of honour” (89). Unlike the rusty Mountford, Sedley is taken in by appearances. Respino, Sedley soon accidentally discovers, has unfairly sent a local man to prison and pushed him and his family into poverty simply because “he long had a criminal passion for [the man’s] wife.” Also unknown to Sedley, Mountford has been the secret patron of this

family and has become, out of compassion, their benefactor while they suffer in prison. Once Sedley discovers Respino's treachery he calls him an "Inhuman villain!" and departs disgusted. Mountford's character is largely accounted for by his being "an Englishmen," and his manner is put in contrast to that not only of Respino's but of a monk's who curses Mountford with "some... hard word" that "meant that [he] should not go to heaven." To the family, however, Mountford represents the interposition of "Providence" itself. Mountford takes the opportunity to teach Sedley the following lesson in response to Sedley's indignation at Respino: "'still Respino is *a man of honour*; the world will continue to call him so.'—'It is probable I [Sedley] answered, 'they may; I envy not the appellation. If this is the world's honour, if these men are the guides of its manners'—'Tut!' said Mountford, 'do you eat macaroni?'—'" (87-93). With a sort of eighteenth-century version of the modern cliché "you are what you eat," Mountford reminds Sedley of his origin and tells him essentially to avoid aping (i.e. internalizing or importing into himself) foreign manners. Mountford carries his Englishness with him as he goes; unaltered and unpolluted by the corrupt atmosphere that surrounds him, he maintains the nature-born wisdom mentioned by Mr. Silton. His English crustiness makes him impenetrable to the incursions of foreign manners and he retains his original metal. Those foreigners he cares for thus recognize his actions as uniquely English, and they validate or mirror his authenticity in their humble expressions of gratitude. He brings a good name to English manners, thereby fulfilling, according to Mackenzie, his natural role as an English gentleman. In the world of modern touring, Mountford is a "throwback," the image of a fossilized Englishness. In the face of increased international awareness, this encrustation that covers the arm-chair-Englishman (as it were) is a mode

of self-care, a compassionate concern for national selfhood, for a fast-dissolving original identity.

This metal can be discovered and protected, Mackenzie suggests, only in “that cordial friendship,” in the “felicity” of a “little circle” of kinship, in “that warm attachment which is only to be found in the smaller circles of private life, which is lost in the bustle and extended connection of larger societies” (The Man of the World 8, 11-13). Anxious about the transmissibility of a passing way of life—of a form of sociability and “an older ... disposition of wealth” that John Mullan argues is “no longer feasible” for the eighteenth-century reader—and caught in a struggle against reification or commoditization, these remnant, ghostly selves (the narrator, Mr. Silton, Mountford, and Harley, for example, who are unwilling to modify their desires as they go) can only find a sense of autonomy and rediscover a semblance of the inalienability of their traditional socio-political position by forming a compensatory, if externally impotent or virtual, sphere of interiority and intimacy. Wrapped in a tragic view of the present and of the self—a tactic meant to open a space in which history, as it were, may be brought to a halt—these remnant selves can thus be transformed into publishable, and thus potentially saleable (in that they are in a novel) goods (as fictional representatives of a lost mode of being in the world) thereby providing the public with a measure of its own, and a new inner zone within which the local individual may authenticate himself and validate his sense of *qualitative* self-worth. It is this inner mechanism, this inward turn, I will argue, that, although incompletely, typically closes off pity, keeping the local subject from internalizing foreign elements during the act of self-extension pity implies; it turns back to the pitying self in a gesture of self-preservation. This move reflects a resistance to both

sympathetic and capitalistic forms of exchange. Through this reversal, local selves may feel united to and unique in the world without having to feel responsible for the pain of or to act on behalf of those they pity. That Mackenzie published all his novels anonymously and never made money in their publication reveals his ambivalence about participation in modern forms of exchange. He too enters the public sphere thus as a remnant self, the representative of a paradoxical or contradictory attitude towards the present. Whatever the case, this remnant self can survive self-consciously only in a state of fragmentation as an archaic or residual manifestation of an older form that has anachronistically incorporated into its being for the sake of survival a newer order of feeling. In Mackenzie, I will show, pity, in that it may be closed off and transformed into self-pity, is one of the vehicles of the remnant self's incorporation and continuity.

The object of The Man of Feeling, then, is a sort of archeology, a mining for authentic and native but lost and now exoticized precious metals, or, in the words of Sir Walter Scott—who called Mackenzie “the historian of feeling”—the novel involves a “delineation of the human heart,” the tracing to its origin those feelings that are particular to the British (and especially Scottish) imagination (quoted in Thompson 319). Like the aforementioned rusty, country gentlemen, therefore, in his “antiquity of family,” and in his possession of a “bare 250 l. a year,” Harley is a “representative” type in that, it seems, apparently like his friends, “great part of the property in his neighbourhood [is] in the hands of merchants, who had got rich by their lawful calling abroad, and the sons of stewards, who had got rich by their lawful calling at home: persons... perfectly versed in the ceremonial of thousands, tens of thousands, and hundreds of thousands” (8-9). Harley and his friends seem to be dissolving in the after effects of a vast desacralization of space

and time, the local effect of the “extended connection” made possible by commercial society and imperial expansion. Seclusion appears here as the only means in such a climate to keep hold of one’s sense of authenticity and privacy—how one might remain virtuous in a busy world. As Mullan notes, “[t]he association of virtue and retirement is scarcely unique to Mackenzie’s fiction, but it is suitably fantastic there. From the centre of an urban culture usually taken to be, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, a nexus of progressive intellectual and commercial developments, is produced a type of fiction which finds value in reclusiveness” (126-7).

The narrator’s resentment over the current state of things appears most keenly, however, when he recalls, in the midst of the discussion on bashfulness, a particular moment during the funeral of his friend Ben Silton:

He is now forgotten and gone! The last time I was at Silton hall, I saw his chair stand in its corner by the fire-side; there was an additional cushion on it, and it was occupied by my young lady’s favourite lap-dog. I drew near unperceived, and pinched its ear in the bitterness of my soul; the creature howled, and ran to its mistress. She did not suspect the author of its misfortune, but she bewailed it in the most pathetic terms; and kissing its lips, laid it gently on her lap, and covered it with a cambric handkerchief. I sat in my old friend’s seat; I hear the roar of mirth and gaiety around me: poor Ben Silton! I gave thee a tear then: accept of one cordial drop that falls to thy memory now.

Piqued at finding his friend replaced by a lap-dog, the narrator, on account of a “bitterness of... soul,” seeks revenge with a pinch on the ear. The dog in turn receives the tears and “pathetic” response, the kisses and affections, the narrator feels should be more appropriately spent on his friend. The dog is pitied in place of his friend. The narrator sees Ms. Silton’s pity misplaced and he is hard pressed to know how to correct the problem. It is the narrator alone who remembers and sheds a tear for “poor Ben Silton,” and he symbolically re-appropriates his friend’s seat in a performative act of

transmission. The lapdog thus represents an intrusive element, a challenge to traditional forms of authority, and though he is made to look ridiculous, the narrator's childish response and impotence serves to make more visible his predicament—where shall he locate blame for his own and his friend's apparent losses? As a symbolic image of the backwash of empire, the lapdog here seems to de-center and re-locate power outside of the local benevolent, paternalistic, homespun self. As J. L. Wyett suggests, in the eighteenth century the lapdog was already “a long-standing symbol of aristocratic privilege and excess.” Over time, however, lapdogs were increasingly becoming the “targets” of “anxieties about the effects of increasing trade, capitalism, and imperial expansion upon English manners and values”: “Especially when conflated with their aristocratic, female owners, lapdogs often reified social anxieties surrounding class, gender, sexuality, trade, nation, and empire” (see 277 and 280). Although many were “imported from Holland, Italy, and France, most breeds of lapdog originated in the East,” and they thus became symbols of the indolence, corrupted morals and the exotic and decorative tastes associated with Eastern cultures (Wyett 278). Three years after the publication of The Man of Feeling, Oliver Goldsmith suggests that the contemporary obsession with exotic lapdogs is a problem of national character and purity. He calls lapdogs “perfectly useless” or “foreign useless dogs,” which, on account of hybridization, have “degenerated” “our own native breed” (393). Many saw in the lapdog a depurification of traditional and middle-class values “by expanding imperial commerce in colonial luxury goods” (Wyett 281).

Situated next to that domestic sanctuary of “the fire-side,” seated in the master's chair and then comforted in the lap of its “mistress,” the lapdog signifies to the narrator a

shift in moral attachments and a “foreign,” degenerate, and “useless” intrusion into the domestic and intimate sphere. The narrator may replace the lapdog symbolically as master, but it remains as an obstacle, blocking sexual access to the vehicle of the transmission of that authority. “Inherent in its name,” J. L. Wyett claims, “is the lapdog’s potential to sit in its mistress’s lap and put his tongue to use.” For this reason lapdogs “were feared to be sexual surrogates because of their access to the underskirts, laps, dressing rooms, and bedchambers of women.” On account of their “submissive,” loyal and “imploring” nature, it was feared that lapdogs “could be a highly desirable companion for women, and an attractive alternative to men”—even “a formidable sexual rival.” Therefore, “the lapdog and his mistress can be seen as conspiring to thwart the path of acceptable, heterosexual courtship and marriage” and thus as a threat to those “who feared the destruction of venerated human hierarchies” (Wyett 291). To the narrator, the dog is a symbol of his own impotence, his own replaceability.

A feeling of inevitability haunts Mackenzie’s ironic characterization of the narrator’s impotence. The mistress’s tears, the narrator feels, are misplaced and he pinches the dog’s ear in his resentment, the rest of the company, lost in “gaiety,” sheds no tears, and the narrator’s mourning is inconsequential and isolated. The difficulty of locating blame is a consistent theme throughout the novel. Surrounded by an indifferent crowd, the narrator does not have the authority to affect real change. The lapdog is a symbol of dissolving local affections—a foreigner now sits on the throne and the zone of filial intimacy has been adulterated. When pity is misplaced a historical rift seems to open up making it impossible to assimilate the older content into the newer forms. Mackenzie’s ghostly narrator, who, with his dead friend, has lost his function and social



utility, without being able to garner more pity than a lapdog, has reason to sympathize with the fate of Ben Silton—he too will be replaced, he too will fall into the cracks and become a victim of change, an effect which has been produced by a shift in the direction of sympathetic feeling. With no human figures, no likeminded youths, to replace these rusty old men, the image of the lapdog “signals the passing of a better time. The narrator makes of the empty chair of Ben Silton,” thereby, “both a domestic memorial to the passing of such men and a further illustration of the frivolous practices and fashions of modern commercial society. The novel habitually, even obsessively, tends to characterize all forms of change in terms of loss and the decadence of modern manners” (Harkin 323-4).

April London suggests that in all of his works Mackenzie goes to great pains to elicit “the reader’s sympathy for individuals betrayed by time.” He uses “a number of strategies,” she claims, “... in his effort to represent the corrosive effects of time and to heighten our sympathy for those who are its victims” (45). As local attachments break down, the maladjusted local subject becomes a fragment; able to feel the encroaching shadows of historical inevitability, he must now seek to locate his identity in and surround himself with a sequestered atmosphere or climate of nostalgic significance—one capable of infusing the local subject with a sense of meaning uncorrupted by world-historical forces. Without concrete heirs, he must secure a life for himself by becoming the reluctant but noble sacrificial subject of an otherwise unassimilable memory. Unable to accommodate himself to change, the narrator must be able to produce in his reader a sense of Harley’s value, opening an inner space free from the contaminations of time. The pity that Harley’s suffering invites is intended to produce a longing for home, a call

to the rediscovery of local affiliation—it involves thus an inward turn, a turn to a past as forgotten as he is, that is, to a preservational self-pity. In pitying Harley we are led to pity ourselves. Pity that *does not* fall back on the pitier in this manner remains unregulated and is therefore capable of a dangerous world communion and identity confusion—it may render a pitier vulnerable to foreign ideas and values not to mention foreign goods. By making pity the name of a defensive self-pity, Mackenzie seeks to provide the local subject with a protective layer of rust and a method of political self-conservation in the wake of modernization. Mackenzie was not alone in this endeavor.

**The Scottish Context: “The Mysterious Attachment of the Objects of Compassion”**

The new inflow of wealth and the consequent upward mobility of the nabobs and imperial contractors (and their foreign gold) inspired outrage in many social and political leaders who felt that the traditional structure of power distribution was collapsing as a consequence of imported money and manners: “Without connections, without any natural interest in the soil, the importers of foreign gold have forced their way into Parliament by such a torrent of corruption, as no private hereditary fortune can resist.” And these are the words of the Earl of Chatham (once known as the “Great Commoner”), whose political career was made possible by Thomas Pitt, his grandfather, who, when Governor of Madras, made his fortune in the (certainly less than scrupulous) acquisition and sale of the famous Pitt Diamond (quoted from Edwardes 14). As John Dwyer has shown, anxieties about the threat of luxury (or for Pitt, of “foreign gold” and “corruption”) to cultural identities (or for Pitt, to “connections,” a “natural interest in the soil,” and traditions of heredity) were particularly acute in Scotland. Union with England and the division of the lowlands from the highlands as an intra-national version of the England

Scotland rift—along with concerns about the corresponding erosion to language, culture, and home attachments in general—inspired Edinburgh’s literati to map out a rigorous set of “strategies for avoiding moral corruption and communal disintegration in the wake of the new commercial environment. ... [T]hey were quite literally obsessed with counteracting the dangerous moral effects of a powerful commercial empire and concomitant ‘society of strangers’” (Dwyer 4-5). The danger of shifting cultural and commercial allegiances via the internalization (importation) of, and growing exposure to, foreign gold and manners inspired a surge of efforts to inform Scottish society with a moral program, “blended with a peculiarly Scottish primitivism,” that could monitor the boundaries of self and nation and provide protection from the reverse incursions of imperial expansion (11).

James Macpherson’s attempt to pass off the *Poems of Ossian* (1760-63) as translations of the originals of the ancient Scottish bard Ossian—whose international fame once inspired Madame de Staël to famously dub him ‘l’Homère du Nord’—represents perhaps one of the most obvious symptoms of Scotland’s obsession with securing for itself a distinct identity and an uncorrupted national origin. Although Francis Hutcheson had taught that man is naturally benevolent and inclined to pity his neighbor, the Scottish literati of the latter half of the eighteenth century saw selfishness and greed as modern man’s prevailing passions. According to Harold Thompson, Scottish leaders were thus “delighted to find” in *Ossian* “the record of men in the fourth century or thereabout totally uncorrupted by civilization ... these Ossianic heroes are full of the most chivalrous sentiments and endowed with the most delicate sensibility,” particularly in their displays of deep affection towards land, tribe, and family. “If you took

Macpherson's own word for it," which most Scotsmen were inclined to do, "the Ossianic poems published in 1760-63 were genuine translations of old Celtic fragments and epics, proving that in the fourth century Scotland had been inhabited by Men of Feeling as full of pity and tenderness as Mackenzie's Harley" (Thompson 51, 295).

Hugh Blair, a well-known Moderate clergyman and acquaintance of Mackenzie's (who apparently thought highly of The Man of Feeling),<sup>32</sup> in his *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian*, represents the ancient Scottish bard, in his capacity to memorialize and to inspire "moderation, humanity, and clemency," as playing the most important role in the state (99; see also Dwyer 11). The heroes of *Ossian*, Blair argues, show a "refinement of sentiment" and Ossian's "poetry, more perhaps than that of any other writer, deserves to be styled, *The poetry of the heart*. It is a heart penetrated with noble sentiments and with sublime and tender passion." Fingal, Ossian's exemplary hero, "is truly the father of his people" and "the universal protector of the distressed." Blair's entire dissertation compares Ossian with Homer and Virgil, two of the most famous bardic representatives of ancient civilization and imperial strength: "in grandeur of sentiment, in native majesty of passion," he claims, Ossian "...is fully their equal" (104, 107, 120, 179). While "Homer is... more cheerful and sprightly... than Ossian" and his heroes display a "vivacity" natural to the ancient Greek temperament, "Ossian maintains the gravity and solemnity of a Celtic hero": "his writings are remarkably favorable to virtue. They awake the tenderest sympathies, and inspire the most generous emotions. No reader can rise from him without being warmed with the sentiments of humanity, virtue, and honor." Because of their melancholy and paternal concern for the distressed, Ossian's heroes display "true heroism." In Ossian, "[w]e find [that] tenderness, and even delicacy

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<sup>32</sup> See Mackenzie, Anecdotes and Egotisms (AE), 189.

of sentiment, greatly predominant over fierceness and barbarity” and our “hearts are melted by the softest feelings” (109-110, 179, 120, 96). Homer’s heroes, although they have many “great and amiable” qualities, are “tinctured ... with a degree of ... savage ferocity,” cruelty, and martial arrogance, but when we approach Ossian’s more melancholy heroes, “[w]e become attached” to their “interest[s], and are deeply touched with [their] distress[es]” (120, 119). Blair is thus particularly struck by Ossian’s “native” ability to inspire not just *admiration* (Homer’s native talent) but *compassion* (a particularly Scottish talent) for his native heroes and their subjects:

[T]he sublimity of moral sentiments, if they wanted the softening of the tender, would be in hazard of giving a hard and stiff air to poetry. It is not enough to admire. Admiration is a cold feeling, in comparison of that deep interest which the heart takes in tender and pathetic scenes; where, by a mysterious attachment of the objects of compassion, we are pleased and delighted, even whilst we mourn. ... The general character of his poetry is the heroic mixed with the elegiac strain; admiration tempered with pity. (174)

Pity and compassion form “mysterious attachments,” tempering and adding depth (“that deep interest”) to an otherwise “hard” and “cold” poetic surface of heroic exploit. Noting “the total absence of religious ideas from this work”—its having been written ostensibly during an intermediate period when “druidical superstition was ... on the point of its final extinction” and the “Christian faith was not yet established”—Blair suggests that pity and compassion take up the uniquely Scottish task of sacralizing communities, uniting chief and tribe, reader and character, across space and time. In this way, the modern reader finds in *Ossian* a homespun link, i.e. through the “mysterious attachment” made available by “the objects of compassion,” to an inner historical-mythological depth that predates Christianity but is uninfluenced by druidical superstition. This was a time in which Scottishness could be authenticated because it was uninfluenced by the modern world-

commercial backwash of foreign elements and desires and primitive and false religious sentiments. Uncorrupted by local superstitions, “Ossian’s mythology is ... the mythology of human nature.” “Ossian,” Blair argues, therefore “almost never expresses himself in the abstract. His ideas extended little further than to the objects he saw around him. A public, a community, the universe, were conceptions beyond his sphere,” instead, everything is “particularized” (127, 105).

Macpherson himself describes the ancient period of Ossian’s poems as one in which the chief and his tribe lived in a state of natural complementarity with each other and with the land. This harmony is possible, he implies, because the people’s desires, regulated by necessity, did not exceed their needs, which, in conjunction with the inaccessibility of their region, both allowed them to experience their world as a protective matrix (they are “surrounded,” “covered,” and “secured”) and provided a sense of comfortable self-sufficiency:

The seats of the Highland chiefs were neither disagreeable nor inconvenient. Surrounded with mountains and hanging woods, they were covered from the inclemency of the weather. Near them ... ran a pretty large river, which ... swarmed with variety of fish. The woods were stocked with wildfowl; and the heaths and mountains behind them were the natural seat of the red-deer and roe. ... the valleys were not unfertile; affording ... the necessaries of life. Here the chief lived the supreme judge and lawgiver of his own people; but his sway was neither severe nor unjust. As the populace regarded him as the chief of their blood, so he, in return, considered them as members of his family. His commands, therefore, though absolute and decisive, partook more the authority of a father than of the rigor of a judge. Though the whole territory of the tribe was considered as the property of the chief, yet his vassals made him no other consideration for their lands than services, neither burdensome nor frequent. As he seldom went from home, he was at no expense. His table was supplied by his own herds and what his numerous attendants killed in hunting.

In this rural kind of magnificence the Highland chiefs lived for many ages. At a distance from the seat of government, and secured by the inaccessibility of their country, they were free and independent. As they had little communication with strangers, the customs of their ancestors remained among them, and their language retained its original purity. ... The ideas of an unpolished period are so

contrary to the present advanced state of society, that more than a common mediocrity of taste is required to relish them as they deserve. (71-3)

In the non-coercive and paternal atmosphere of a proto-feudal kinship, chief and tribe, “[a]t a distance from the seat of government, and secured by the inaccessibility of their country,” could enjoy an unsullied freedom and independence. This distance and inaccessibility meant that ancestral “custom” and “language” could retain “its original purity.” Luxury, wealth, and exchange are a threat to this original purity. As Lynn Festa argues, “[a]t stake in giving and getting is personal and social identity. Commerce threatens to dissolve the borders between discrete individuals that sentimental value<sup>33</sup> attempts to uphold” (SFE 76). As the highland borders are breached via commercial exchange, local identity is also threatened. In an age of commercialism, Macpherson and his Scottish contemporaries were obsessed with problems of origin and the disorienting effects of modern “intermixture,” the threat of the “business” of a “commercial age,” and the influence of “foreigners” on local “manners”—with how to insulate oneself in a world of dissolving borders.

Desperate to solidify a Scottish identity in the face of the demands of modern existence, Macpherson claims that

[N]o kingdom in Europe is now possessed by its original inhabitants. Societies were formed, and kingdoms erected, from a mixture of nations, who in process of time, lost all knowledge of their own origin. If tradition could be depended upon, it is only among a people, from all time, free from intermixture with foreigners. ... Such are the inhabitants of the mountains of Scotland. ... Their language is pure and original, and their manners are those of an ancient and unmixed race of men. ... As they lived in a country only fit for pasture, they were free from that toil and business which engross the attention of a commercial people. (58-9)

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<sup>33</sup> Festa defines “sentimental value” as “the attribution of personal significance to an object that transcends its economic price or material worth” (11).

Macpherson's constant tense shifts reveal anxieties about the relationship between past and present, between the Scottish Highlands and the rest of Scotland as it internalizes modern forms of being. He hints that in Scotland antiquity has been preserved into the present, but he seems uncertain about how to locate the modern Scottish self caught in the middle of two worlds, how to preserve the past within the present as a refuge from the "toil and business ... of a commercial people." In contrast to the modern age, the chiefs "seldom went from home," and they thus had no moral or economic debts and were never enticed into speculations, prospects, or "transactions" beyond their immediate surroundings—nor did they thus form any dependencies. In *Ossian*, Blair argues, "[t]he circle of ideas and transactions is no wider than suits such an age" (103). One might argue that individual identity emerges only as the local self can explicitly compare, recognize, and measure its difference from others through exchange. In other words, only someone disembedded from local culture, only someone like Blair, whose distanced perspective affords him the insight, is able to reflectively articulate the particularity of the local self. Without exchange, the local self is unable to attain an alternative perspective from which to identify its uniqueness. For Blair, however, any exchanges with outsiders—whether sympathetic, economic, or otherwise—that would condition such a disembedding of self from the particularity of location actually threaten to undermine local identity and he thus sees exchange is the harbinger of a lost innocence. Without particularity of location, Blair suggests, there is no authentic singularity of self. The very mechanism that produces personal identity, it would seem, also poses the greatest threat to its continuity. In other words, as it expands his "circle of ideas and transactions," exchange begins to corrupt the independence and purity of the authentic Scotsman. Now



attached to “the seat of government” and in constant “communication with strangers,” modern, “advanced” Scottish society, Blair claims, especially its leaders, has become insensitive to and estranged from its own past and, unattached to the unique social arrangements and identities that are the natural moral productions of its climate and soil, it has lost a “taste” for what is singular to itself. Therefore, its “beauties” are, Blair argues, only “open” to the “reader who is capable of sensibility,” to those able to engage in the “particularized,” “mysterious attachment” of “compassion” (108).

For Blair, it seems, it is through a readerly compassion for a lost and idealized image of the self that one is drawn back momentarily into the historical bubble of a pure and authentic Scotland. Compassion for an older form of the self thus becomes important here because it makes possible a feeling of continuity between past and present. Blair’s “compassion” is the name of a process, then, through which a reader may be drawn into a fictive zone of pastoral innocence free from foreign incursions. It opens up an imagined world in which the otherness of a lost and older, authentic self is momentarily negated—a process in which pity (sympathetic exchange) morphs into self-pity. Just as the mountains once closed off Scotland from outsiders and tacitly shaped the local inhabitant’s moral being, so compassion for the heroes of this older form of life provides the reader with the feeling of a regained insularity. In other words, Blair’s compassion aims to limit the effects of the very otherness that preconditions both sympathetic and commercial exchange. In a world in which physical boundaries no longer tacitly define the local subject and protect the self from intruders, it seems, new measures must be taken, new boundaries *within* the self must emerge, if there is to be a *sense* of continuity. The “mysterious attachments” of compassion are thus the life rafts of a lost naivety. As the

perceived relationship between geography and human identity is threatened by commercialization and increasing global awareness, history-making thus becomes an increasingly important vehicle of national self-preservation.

John Logan, another well-known Scottish Moderate clergyman and historian (a classmate and close friend of Mackenzie's), suggests, in fact, that in the modern period, a new kind of historiography is now possible and necessary: "A field now opens for cultivating a part of Philosophy little known to the ancients, the Theory of man as a political being, and the History of Civil Society." Not surprisingly, Logan metaphorically ties his new history to the land: "fields" and "cultivation." Logan's approach is comparative and seeks to identify a link between geography and morality, between the shape and climate of a given place and the moral nature of its inhabitants. He is interested primarily in explaining the natural causes of national character and he wants to answer what it is that makes the manners and politics of each nation differ. In tune with Blair, he argues that the "PHYSICAL and MORAL concur in forming the character of nations [and] *Physical Causes* are those qualities of the climate and soil which work insensibly on the temper: *Moral Causes*, all those circumstances which serve as motives to the mind." The physical and moral are synthesized through a kind of "sympathy and imitation," through which the moral qualities inherent in local landscapes spreads to the community as a whole. Through the link of sympathy—as society progresses and these physical qualities are internalized by local inhabitants—"instincts turn into arts, and original principles are converted into actual establishments." The climate and shape of the land inform the character and morals of the local subject. "Physical and Moral Causes are so connected and combined in their operation, that in tracing the same effect, one

person will ascribe it to *Physical*, and another to a *Moral* cause.” “[T]he natural character of a people, their animal temperament, their sensibility, and imagination, depend on” the physical causes (PH 12-15). The “people” of Asia, he suggests, therefore, are “prepared by nature for servitude” and “submit quietly to the yoke,” because “[t]he physical form of Asia prepares it for despotism.” (Dissertation 11, 21; see also PH 27). Whereas Asia is distinguished by “[v]ast and extended plains,”

Europe is divided by natural barriers into nations of moderate extent; a bond of union is easily formed; the principle of political life can pervade the whole society, and the nation communicates its spirit to all its members. But among the inhabitants of an extensive region, a bond of political association becomes almost impossible. Scattered and disjointed multitudes can never avail themselves of their own strength. The mountains of Europe are the barriers of liberty; the plains of Asia form the seat of despotism. (Dissertation 20)

Communicative proximity marked by definitive physical boundaries characterizes Europe and explains its capacity to foster corporate and civil power at the expense of despotic systems of governance. In addition, mirroring Blair’s and Macpherson’s attitudes about the role of local landscapes in developing appropriate, homespun moral beliefs and poetic genius, he argues that “the extreme fertility of [the Asian] continent” is equally “favourable to despotic government”: “As in the extent of the territory so in the serenity of its air, the fertility of its soil, and the abundance of its fruits, Asia far exceeds the other quarters of the world.” In this way, in Asia

[t]he care of nature has anticipated and prevented the industry of man. ... The most powerful motives of labour are withdrawn. ... The most fortunate countries are not the most favourable to the human genius. The active nature of man requires difficulties to surmount, and obstacles to overcome. Necessity, by rousing industry, is the parent of invention and arts. The luxuriance of the climate checks exertion; and the great facility of subsistence invites to indolence and sloth. The same sun also, which produces the fruits of the earth in vast abundance, enervates the people. (21)

As a consequence, the land produces “not only the necessaries but also the delicacies of life” and “every species of luxury.” In this manner, the people are furnished with “every sensual gratification,” which

contributes still farther to debilitate the human frame. Locked up in indolence or emasculated by pleasure, the mind forgets its functions, and loses its spring; the body and the soul become equally relaxed and void of vigour ... curiosity never awakes them to the love of arts that are ingenious and liberal; sentiment never determines them to pursuits that are honourable and manly; liberty never fires them to enterprises which shine abroad to nations and ages... not one free spirit has ever arisen in the regions of Asia; no punishment is so severe as energy of mind; slavery is more supportable to a slave, than the vigour of soul which is requisite to break the yoke of tyrants, and vindicate freedom. ... Every period of their existence resembles the decline of nations, which establishes despotism. (21-22)

The implication is that, were the inhabitants of Britain to attain through importation the luxuries of Asia, they too would become unmanly, enervated, emasculated, indolent and prepared for slavery—all symptoms of decline. The objects, ideas, and people born in such a region carry in themselves the moral qualities inspired by the soil and climate from which they have come. Luxury is thus associated with despotism and oppression and is the product of the local climate.<sup>34</sup> Further, this is both a critique and an albeit ambivalent justification of Empire; it includes a warning against the local repercussions of imperial backwash. The modern European “energy of mind” is a more “severe” “punishment” than Asian “indolence” and is an effect of the local climate and soil. This mental energy is a greater punishment to the British than slavery is to those born into a state of “natural” servitude, in whose hands the fruits of the land fall without toil or labor. In other words, the burden of liberty is much greater than the burden of slavery. The British people are the real sufferers, and this position in the world must not be lost

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<sup>34</sup> Such a critique of luxury is, of course, a commonplace at this time. See, for example, John Sekora’s *Luxury: the Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Johns Hopkins UP: 1977), and Christopher J. Berry’s *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge UP: 1994).

through an unfavorable internalization of the very vices, the very physical causes, that may come attached to the foreign luxuries that make Asia destined for “the yoke.”

Still, Edinburgh’s Moderate churchmen, lawyers, literati and statesmen “realized that Scotland needed to accommodate itself to a new and commercial world if it was to survive as a meaningful national community,” but this accommodation needed to be monitored, especially from the incursions of foreign manners and luxury imported from the East (Dwyer 18; see also 23). Land and a feeling for home rather than commercial enterprise were felt to be the moral foundation of Scottish society (see Dwyer 25). The Mirror and The Lounger, Mackenzie’s periodicals, were highly concerned with “the transmission of manners, attitudes, and ideas”: including above all the threat of foreign and metropolitan fashions and luxury to homespun manners (Michasiw 154). In them, Mackenzie, like Blair and Logan, emphasizes the sympathetic relationship between moral character and location. In Mirror 61, Mackenzie describes his “friend Mr. Umphrville,” who is a character in many of his essays and a representation of an authentic native Scotsman and patriot, in the following way: “Some of my friend’s peculiarities may not only be discovered in his manner and his discourse, but may be traced in his house and furniture, his garden and grounds.” Unlike “his fashionable neighbors,” who adorn their homes with “India-paper,” with their “*Bows* and *Venetians*, their open lawns, ... and the *zig-zag* twist of their walks,” Mr. Umphrville holds in “contempt” such “modern refinements.” He prefers instead “his dusky Gothic windows,” the “gloom of his avenues, ... and the long, dull line of his hedged terraces.” “From the warmth of his heart, and the sensibility of his feelings,” Mackenzie says, he “has a strong attachment to all the ancient occupiers of his house and grounds, whether they be of the human or the brute, the

animate or inanimate creation. His tenants are, mostly, coeval with himself; his servants have been either in his family, or on his estate, from their infancy.” He also mentions Mr. Umphraville’s “old pointer” and an “old house-dog,” his “flea-bitten horse,” “his leathern elbow-chair, patched and tattered,” and a “withered stump,” which, although it blocks the entryway to his house, “he would not suffer to be cut down, because it had the names of himself and some of his school-companions cyphered on its bark.” The loss of any of these “would, I am persuaded,” says Mackenzie, “be one of the most serious calamities that could befall him.” Here decline paradoxically signifies longevity and continuity. In this setting, no foreign elements have replaced or intruded upon the authentic, homespun, natural sensibility of one attached to the fragments of the past—the house, its furniture, the servants and tenants, the pets, the grounds and the soil itself bear the signs of a past made sacred through the “mysterious attachments of the objects of compassion.” Umphraville is as compassionate to others as he is to his old horse, “to whom he has devoted the grass of his orchard, and a manger of good hay during the severity of winter.” His compassion keeps him attached. “Above all others,” he says, “those objects which recal the years of our childhood” have the most “tender effect upon the heart.” Along with these attachments is a feeling Mackenzie calls a “*sentiment of Home*”:

This feeling will be easily understood by those in whom the business or the pleasure of the world has not distinguished it. That sort of relation which we own to every object we have long been acquainted with, is one of those natural propensities the mind will always experience, if it has not lost this connection by the variety of its engagements, or the bustle of its pursuits. There is a silent chronicle of past hours in the inanimate things amidst which they have been spent, that gives us back the affections, the regrets, the sentiments, of our former days.

Here we see Mackenzie directly engaging his reader, whom he asks to participate in a shared feeling. “We” are meant to identify with Umphraville and to see him as

representing ourselves. To the modern subject who has been “estranged from” this home-feeling, and who has lost all ties to the past on account of the “bustle” of the world, this ability to see oneself and to recognize the totality of local life in these “objects of compassion” has a restorative effect. It is a means of reorientation in an expanding world that relates success to the capacity for commercial self-extension. Mackenzie comments that he too has this same feeling for home. He too sits down near his fire and hearth “with the feeling of a friend for every chair and table in the room.” The objects that surround him act as the containers for local personality; they *hold* him and fill out his life. They reflect back the appearance of decline in an aesthetically pleasing form, making possible an experience that “gives us back ... the regrets” and life’s “griefs without poignancy.” Sitting and reflecting on the objects and grounds of one’s estate is like observing a “landscape by moon-shine; the distinctness of objects is lost, but a mellow kind of dimness softens and unites the whole.” The dimness of recollection softens the pains of life and the objects of the domesticated landscape thus express to and in their owner the compassion that is lacking in the outside world—unlike the lady and the lapdog, they pity him and provide him with a sense of his own continuity. Adam Smith suggests that we naturally acquire over time “a sort of gratitude for those inanimate objects which have been the causes of great or frequent pleasure to us,” and through the process of emotional investment they acquire the status of benefactors: “The house which we have long lived in, the tree whose verdure and shade we have long enjoyed, are both looked upon with a sort or respect that seems due to such benefactors. The decay of the one, or the ruin of the other, affects us with a kind of melancholy” (TMS 136-7).<sup>35</sup> Over time objects acquire

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<sup>35</sup> Smith associates this sympathy that develops between people and local objects with superstition: “The dryads and the lares of the ancients, a sort of genii of trees and houses, were probably first suggested by

the personality of their owners, just as the owners come to acquire the moral and social characteristics of their home-objects and the features of the countryside that in turn bear the marks of their existence—owner and landscape come to exist in a state of mutual emotional reciprocity.

Like Umphraville, Mackenzie's own compassion for the decaying objects around him is thus a form of self-pity, or a pity to self, in which objects become the benefactors of a compensatory, historically grounded ontological continuity. Here the otherness that preconditions pity is negated by the solipsism of self-pity. Self-pity protects one from both historical and geographical experiences of discontinuity precisely because it disallows otherness. While Hume sees pity as, at least potentially and in theory, radically inclusive, self-pity replaces pity for the very purpose of exclusion; it is a way to preserve and to limit the self from foreign influence. In a discussion of Mackenzie, Festa argues that "[b]y establishing a personal communion between subject and object, owner and possession, the sentimental creates a value separate from the economic. ... It renders certain things exempt from exchange, as if they were extensions of a self provisionally free from market relations" (74). The objects, as Mackenzie's true friends, sympathize with him, returning his pains in a softened, pleasurable form, and they are thus as loyal to him as he is to them. Unlike *new* things, fashions, and manners, *local* things, animate or inanimate, are marked and tattered by local people, they carry local signatures and thereby contain local history within them as their essential features, and like Umphraville's stump, the names of one's friends are carved on their surface; they have a private monumentality and are internally bound by ties to the local personalities that

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this sort of affection which the authors of those superstitions felt for such objects, and which seemed unreasonable, if there was nothing animated about them" (TMS 137).



inhabit them. Newer fashionables, on the other hand, “India-paper,” “Venetians,” etc., disrupt the continuity of local feeling, opening a rift in time; they resist sentimentalization. Unable to act as a container for local identity, new, foreign objects sever local ties. “There is, perhaps, a degree of melancholy in all this,” Mackenzie continues,

the *French*, who are a lively people, have, I think, no vocable that answers to our substantive *Home*; but it is not the melancholy of a sour unsocial being; on the contrary, I believe, there will always be found an tone of benevolence in it, both to ourselves and others; I say ourselves, because I hold the sensation of peace and friendship with our own minds to be one of the best preparatives, as well as one of the best rewards of virtue.

Nor has Nature given us this propensity in vain. From this the principle of patriotism has its earliest source, and some of those ties are formed, which link the inhabitants of less favoured regions to the heaths and mountains of their native land. In cultivated society, this *Sentiment of Home* cherishes the useful virtues of domestic life; it opposes, to the tumultuous pleasures of dissipation and intemperance, the quiet enjoyments of sobriety, oeconomy and family affection. (19-22)

Describing the French in the same suggestive way Blair describes the Greeks (i.e. they “are a lively people”), he claims that this form of self-benevolence or “benevolence... to ourselves,” “*this Sentiment of Home*,” is an especially “useful” and uniquely Scottish feeling. It prepares one for the world and is virtue’s best reward. In that it is a “substantive,” the word “Home” has weight, cultural as well as existential independence and ontological significance; it bears within itself the essential elements of local identity and provides a point of comparative orientation. Mackenzie’s use of the term “vocable” also has a special relevance in this regard. The term had apparently fallen out of use in the early seventeenth century, but was revived in the late eighteenth. In 1779, James

Beattie refers to the term as a Scoticism.<sup>36</sup> Mackenzie's words themselves, like Umphrville's tattered old chair and his Gothic windows, are monuments to local life. They refer to an older time and sacred space, an interior purity and authenticity, unsullied by ambition. Only in this state of mind, he feels, only when attached to home and drawn into this process of protective self-pity or benevolence to self, can one truly promote "the welfare of the community" and remain morally untainted by the backwash of empire (23).

Like Addison's "pleasures of the imagination," Mackenzie's "*Sentiment of Home*" or "benevolence to self" is meant as an oppositional but (and therefore) *complementary* sphere distinct from (but complementary to) the sphere of "business" activity. Addison laments modern men's tendency to abuse leisure time: "every diversion they take is at the expense of some one virtue or another, and their very first step out of business is into vice or folly. A man should endeavour, therefore, to make the sphere of his innocent pleasures as wide as possible, that he may retire into them with safety, and find in them such a satisfaction as a wise man would not blush to take." Leisure time may thus become an ethically sound complement to "busy" time. Such pleasures "awaken" such men from "sloth and idleness, without putting them upon any labour or difficulty." The best "preparatives" of virtue for Addison are "[d]elightful scenes," which "serve to clear and brighten the imagination, but are able to disperse grief." However, where Mackenzie seeks to sequester the imagination and familiarize it with local colors and objects, Addison's vision is expansive. He speaks of the "amazement in the soul at the apprehension" of "unbounded views," and "[t]he mind of man," with its imperial

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36 Reference in OED. It is mentioned in his *Scoticisms, Arranged in Alphabetical Order, Designed to Correct Improperities of Speech and Writing* (1779). Mackenzie's (and Beattie's) use of the word predates the earliest eighteenth century usage mentioned in the OED by seven years.

imagination, he says, “hates everything that looks like a restraint upon it, and is apt to fancy itself under a sort of confinement, when the sight is pent up in a narrow compass, and shortened on every side by the neighbourhood of walls or mountains” (Spectator #411; 397-8). While Addison seems to emphasize the role of the imagination and its ability to form a virtual reality, Mackenzie emphasizes the function and appeal of the feelings and sentiments that arise in proximity to actual locations. As a consequence, where Addison is abstract and universalizing, Mackenzie (like Ossian/Macpherson) is particular and local—he prefers his neighborhood “walls” and “mountains.” I do not wish to suggest that Addison did not value local landscapes in this respect, only that, to a much greater degree, Mackenzie seeks to “narrow the compass” and surround the local subject with local “mountains,” to inform the local subject with values that emanate out from a home-center as the physical causes of local temperament. This difference between Addison and Mackenzie (whom Scott famously dubbed “the Scottish Addison”) may perhaps be accounted for by the economic, imperial, and social developments that had taken place in the more than half-century that separated them as well as by the cultural differences and contrasting interests of Edinburgh and London (among other things). Whatever the case, one of their implicit intentions is to ensure that leisure time has a moral, social, and economic function, so that imagination, sentiment, and what Addison calls “business” (above) might go hand in hand as separate but ethically complementary spheres.<sup>37</sup>

The spiritual improvements required by the reciprocal practice of self-benevolence—or what we might call Mackenzie’s *pleasures of the domesticating*

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<sup>37</sup> See G. J. Barker-Benfield’s discussion of this aspect of Mackenzie’s work in The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain, 92, 219.

*imagination*—a process that requires a “comparison of objects,” subtle discernments, and a “distinction of causes,” could “guide the speculations of the merchant, and... prompt the arguments of the lawyer” (Lounger 172). However, Mackenzie was particularly interested in providing protective measures for the values and status of the middle and upper gentry against the backwash of commercial expansion, including the luxuries of aristocracy and the new wealth of the mushroom gentry and the lower-order merchandizers and imperial contractors. His tendency to particularize and localize the imagination is meant to protect the local, gentrified subject from the foreign fashions and manners that infiltrate local culture “from above” (aristocracy) and the wealth that corrupts “from below” (the middling types).<sup>38</sup> In doing so, whatever his intentions, he gives to ambition a sphere of retirement and recuperation in an attempted resistance to reification.

“It may in fact be the defining characteristic of the modern novel (as of bourgeois society),” argues Peter Brooks,

that it takes aspiration, getting ahead, seriously, rather than simply as the object of satire (which was the case in much earlier, more aristocratically determined literature), and thus it makes ambition the vehicle and emblem of Eros, that which totalizes the world as possession and progress.... The ambitious hero thus stands as a figure of the reader’s efforts to construct meanings in ever-larger wholes, to totalize his experience of human existence in time, to grasp past, present, and future in a significant shape. (39)

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<sup>38</sup> Mackenzie suggests that for the lower orders of society, desire of financial gain is beneficial, but if the upper classes are drawn in by such ambitions, national corruption is bound to ensue: “In the lower ranks, the desire of gain, as it is the source of industry, may be held equally conducive to private happiness and publick prosperity: but those who, by birth or education, are destined for nobler pursuits, should be actuated by more generous passions. If from luxury, and the love of vain expense, they also shall give way to this desire of wealth; if it shall extinguish the sentiments of public virtue, and the passion for true glory, natural to that order of the state; the spring of private and national honour must have lost its force, and there will remain nothing to withstand the general corruption of manners, and the publick disorder and debility which are its inseparable attendants. If our country has not already reached this point of degeneracy, she seems, at least, as far as a spectator of her manners can judge, to be too fast approaching it” (Mirror 28).

In Mackenzie's novels, however, the ambitious or imperialistic subject is usually a villain, because, in his attempt to totalize "the world as possession," every thing he acquires is cleansed of its immanent and personal meaning, everywhere he goes he leaves behind a barren landscape.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, those characters who come to recognize imperial ambition as morally barren generally come to find themselves—like Savillon, the sentimental hero of Mackenzie's third novel, Julia de Roubigné—"torn from... every connection my heart had formed; cast, like a shipwrecked thing, on the other side of the Atlantic, amidst a desert, of all others, the most dreadful, the desert of society, with which no social tie unites me" (2:14). Unable to locate a center, he has nothing left with which to anchor himself; adrift, "like a shipwrecked thing," he can find nothing to hang on to and nothing capable of holding the content of his identity in return. In a strange conflation, the image of society (a relation of proximity) is fused with that of the frontiers of empire (a relation of distance)—civil and savage spaces merge at the point of their mutual capacity to disorient and alienate, at the point where foreign goods are internalized and spread to the countryside via local ports. The world has become at once too big and too compressed for a singular consciousness to organize and master; an unbridgeable gap seems to open between his current and his former self. According to Lukács, a subjectivity "denied the possibility of fulfilling itself in action turns inwards, yet cannot finally renounce what it has lost forever" (118). Savillon, like all of Mackenzie's heroes, seeks refuge in a kind of inwardness in response to his sense that a part of himself has been lost forever; he returns, thus, if not in reality in memory, to those older spaces and relationships which had once held his identity. Longing to become the

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<sup>39</sup> Perhaps this is one of the underlying reasons why Mackenzie is reluctant to call it a novel. See his letter to Rose... and quote it here.

son-in-law of his childhood patron, Mr. Roubigné—who, in Savillon’s absence, has lost his family estate to the same forces to which Savillon has lost his soul—he calls out in hopeful recollection, “Where now are Roubigné’s little copses, where his winding walks, his nameless rivulets? Where the ivy’d gate of his venerable dwelling, the Gothic windows of his echoing hall?” (2:14). So far from his native soil and unaware of the changes that have taken place there, he yearns for the smaller (but now lost) universe of home in which life can be narrowed to its idyllic originality.

### **Contempt as the Negation of Self-Pity**

The universalizing tendency of Harley’s exhortation, “let us never forget that we are all relations”—so typical of the sentimental mode and in tune with Hume’s notion of pity—must be seen in the context of the curses that precede it (75). In a scene reminiscent of Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* (1769), Harley, on his journey home from his fruitless trip to London (that seat of luxury and extravagance), discovers “the mouldering walls of a ruined” school-house. “[T]is but a twelvemonth since I saw it standing, and its benches filled with cherubs: this was “the scene of my infant joys, my earliest friendships,” he exclaims. The “green” on which he and his childhood friends “sported,” he laments to Edwards, his old acquaintance and now travel companion, is “now ploughed up! I would have given fifty times its value to have saved it from the sacrilege of that plough.” His reaction to the effects of commercial enterprise is much like Savillon’s. Harley’s hyperbolic wish to reconstruct a seamless continuity between past and present (self and landscape) reveals a deep anxiety over (and a stubborn naivety regarding) the relative speed with which his mode of existence and notion of value and social production have become anachronistic. He would be willing to spend his money

(were he to have enough) at a loss in order to resist change. He is, however, incapable of removing the things and spaces around him from commercial circulation into a zone free from commercial adulteration.

What ensues is a grocery list of de-sacralized objects and actions in which he can no longer see himself reflected:

I shall never see the sward covered with its daisies, nor pressed by the dance of their dear innocents: I shall never see that stump decked with the garlands which their little hands had gathered. These two long stones which now lie at the foot of it, were once the supports of a hut I myself assisted to rear: I have sat on the sods within it, when we had spread our banquet of apples before us, and been more blest—Oh! Edwards! infinitely more blest than ever I shall be again. (71-2).

Harley's "inner life is as fragmentary as the outside world" (Lukács 124-5). Alienated from the soil and his own memories, unable to accommodate himself to the altered landscape, presence inexplicably gives way to new absences; with each "I" or "I shall" Harley announces his inability to either catch up with the present or project himself into the future and thereby reconstitute his dissolving identity in the wake of each "never" and "nor." The outer world no longer provides Harley with an ontological holding place, with the attachments constituted by the domesticating imagination; the signifying spaces that once served his memory no longer submit to his powers of repetition or symbolization having, in their usual capacity as mirrors of self-authorization, become unable to affirm him or provide him with the stabilizing reciprocity that it had been their customary role to provide. The continuity of the past—and the continuity between his personal history and these new outward forms—has already been negated, though he reconstructs his past and his identity in his imagination, the only place left for them. His desperation quickly gives way to trance-like fits of tempero-spatial disorientation or moments of dissociative amnesia, and in such moments he disappears into himself as if to recuperate in the face of

dissolution only to resurface with sudden bursts of indignation (a pattern which repeats itself):

Just then a woman passed them on the road, and discovered some signs of wonder at the attitude of Harley, who stood, with his hands folded together, looking with a moistened eye on the fallen pillars of the hut. He was too much entranced in thought to observe her at all; but Edwards civilly accosting her, desired to know ... how [the school-house] came into the condition in which they now saw it? 'Alack a-day!' said she. ... 'the squire has pulled it down, because it stood in the way of his prospects—What! how! prospects! pulled down!' cried Harley.—'Yes, to be sure, Sir, and the green, where the children used to play, he has ploughed up, because, he said, they hurt his fence on the other side of it.'—'Curses on his narrow heart,' cried Harley—, 'that could violate a right so sacred! Heaven blast the wretch!

'And from his derogate body never spring  
A babe to honour him!—'

But I need not, Edwards, I need not,' (recovering himself a little) 'he is cursed enough already: to him the noblest source of happiness is denied; and the cares of his sordid soul shall gnaw it, while thou sittest over a brown crust, smiling on those mangled limbs that have saved thy son and his children!' 'If you want anything with the school-mistress, Sir,' said the woman, 'I can show you the way to her house.' He followed her without knowing whither he went.

Harley's curses, of course, ultimately fall back on himself: he has already proven himself an economic failure, he dies without "a babe to honour him," and the image he creates to recover himself is as much a phantom as his curses: in reality Edwards' son is dead and his grandchildren are now displaced orphans. Unable or unwilling to assimilate himself to this new mode of existence, Harley's curses resemble the last nervous twitches of a dying body. Yet, by identifying a cause on which to project his own pain, Harley is able to *momentarily* locate himself and attain a concrete, if vitiated, presence amidst the wreckage. This sudden orientation is found, however, not in relation to an inalienable landscape that had once provided an enduring spatial form for the content of his memories but in the impotent curses he reflexively sends out to that absent representative



of change—the squire. It is only when he identifies a specific and concrete cause of suffering that he escapes the safe bubble of his self-pity.

The squire has created an empty space (an emotional vacuum) where Harley was once able to engage in a “Sentiment of Home”—Harley’s self-certainty resides, then, in the reciprocity he has become accustomed to between himself as subject and the local world as nurturing object, a method of self-understanding that coincides with his outdated physiognomic method of interpretation—namely, his belief that there is an identity between one’s physical appearance and one’s moral and intellectual character. Harley’s suffering can thus also be seen as the product of a dangerous, because epistemologically outmoded, assumption: that the world in which he lives can be understood via the notion that a similarity of appearances will guarantee an equivalence of essences. Thus some of the blame and all of the effects of his curses drift from the squire back to Harley and he puts great effort into “recovering himself” (here recovery, ironically, means resignation) and thereby forfeiting his only means to survival. All of Harley’s benevolent acts are tainted in some way as they refract through the object of pity out into the world. On his journey, he has no ethical or epistemological frame of reference that could help him accommodate himself to a world in which action, even generous action motivated by sincere feelings, is everywhere being altered by the structures of modern exchange into a social effect that is unable to withstand close moral scrutiny. He finds himself adrift in a world in which all actions tend to support the machine generous acts are meant to participate in reforming. Harley is in fact consistently willing to take responsibility for the problems that beset him, but he dies unable to personally effect change. There is no point of contact, no anchoring point, left in the world except in textualization. His story

remains as the vehicle through which his (and thus Mackenzie's) values, ironically, remain in circulation. Nevertheless, the fragmentary form of the narrative resembles a crumbling tombstone and, near the end of his career, Mackenzie only ambivalently endorses such a means to social reformation. The novel ends with the following epitaph by the narrator: "I sometimes visit his grave; I sit in the hollow of the tree. It is worth a thousand homilies! every nobler feeling rises within me! Every beat of my heart awakens a virtue!—but it will make you hate the world—No: there is such an air of gentleness around, that I can hate nothing; but, as to the world—I pity the men of it." Unable to locate a specific target of scorn outside of himself—tempted to blame "the world" and thereby rise above it—the narrator, like Harley, discovers a feeling of self-elevation by claiming a position of emotional superiority and spiritual self-distancing. His pity is a symptom of his decline and defeat by, and a sign that he has given up on, the world.

Pity here becomes the means to a sort of metaphysical reconstitution of self but in a zone free from the exigencies of temporal and spatial commitment. Instead of seeking direct political change, his indignation morphs into a protective internalization of spiritual authority in the form of self-pity. Looking something like Hegel's "beautiful soul," the narrator (and Harley with him) has lost "the power to externalize" his self "and to endure [mere] being. It [the beautiful soul] lives in dread of besmirching the splendour of its inner being by action and an existence; and, in order to preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from contact to renounce its self which is reduced to the extreme of ultimate abstraction.... Its activity is a yearning which merely loses itself" (399-400). In addition, it is this movement "upwards" into a feeling of generalized pity for those who dominate *in* the world that Nietzsche will come to see as the dark underbelly of all expressions of

pity—it is in these moments that he sees in pity a kind of moral revenge, a dangerous self-protective resentment and hatred for life as it is (see, for example, HAH 50; Antichrist 128; Genealogy 19-20, 36-7). In his death scene, Harley places himself above the world, above worldliness: “I was not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the dissipation of the gay. . . . The world is in general selfish, interested, and unthinking.” His tender feelings in contrast may be thought of as ““weaknesses here;—but there may be some modification of them in heaven,”” he suggests, “which may deserve the name of virtues.”” Seeking a space in which action and feeling in their execution remain untinged by the world, Harley sighs, ““My mind expands at the thought I shall enter into the society of the blessed, wise as angels, with the simplicity of children”” (94-5). Here the future is a mirror image of his idealized past—his self-pity, which is produced in part when he abandons his contempt for the squire, provides him with a way to avoid the burdens of his present. In the wake of the dissolutions of identity effected in ever-increasing proximity to his own home (and self) by the reverse incursion of empire, he seeks a kind of transcendental feeling of autonomy-in-communion that, he feels, awaits at the other side of (or really that masks) his contempt.

However, it seems that, in The Man of Feeling, there is little hope of surviving intact as an ethical and involved person in the wake of modern existence without the differentiating authority of impassioned resentment. In seeking to purge himself of the “lyrical power of scorn or pathos” that might have otherwise set his “interiority” (his idealism) against “the pettiness of reality,” his life fades in stages: first on account of an inability or stubborn refusal to adapt himself to changing life, and finally in an “unconditional surrender in the face of reality” (Lukács 125, 135). It is as if he is

reversing the dangerous moral ripple effects of action itself; but one may also understand this displacement as the seeking-out of an inner space free from a deeper self-loathing: pity for the world as a kind of compassionate act to himself. With no “attachments” left to hold him intact and to keep him grounded, he becomes, through the memorializing power of publication, the benefactor of and virtual holding place for the lost and fragmentary selves of the reader who may thus join him with no ethical qualms in his self-pity (96).

### **Colony, Slavery, and National Self-Preservation**

It is hard to tell to what extent Harley’s sentiments on the subject of the colonization and exploitation of India reflect Mackenzie’s own. After meeting Edwards on his return from London, Harley is struck by the relation of Edwards’ experiences in India. It was one of the most popular episodes in the novel. After his son is convicted of a petty crime and is condemned to join a press-gang, the seemingly tender-hearted serjeant of the troop tells Edwards that his son has the “choice of sea or land service.” Offering the serjeant some money, Edwards, out of love for his son and grandchildren, substitutes himself for his son and heads off to India in his place. Witnessing the tearful departure of Edwards from his family,

the very press-gang could scarce keep from tears; but the serjeant, who had seemed the softest before, was now the least moved of them all. . . . I had not been long with [this press-gang], when we were ordered to the East Indies, where I was soon made serjeant, and might have picked up some money if my heart had been as hard as some others were; but my nature was never of that kind, that could think of getting rich at the expence of my conscience.

Amongst our prisoners was an old Indian, whom some of our officers supposed to have a treasure hidden somewhere; which is no uncommon practice in that country. They pressed him to discover it. He declared he had none; but that would not satisfy them: so they ordered him to be tied to a stake, and suffer fifty lashes every morning, till he should learn to speak out, as they said. Oh! Mr. Harley, had you seen him, as I did, with his hands bound behind him, suffering in silence,

while the big drops trickled down his shriveled cheeks, and wet his grey beard, which some of the inhuman soldiers plucked in scorn! I could not bear it, I could not for my soul; and one morning, when the rest of the guard were out of the way, I found means to let him escape. I was tried by a court-martial for negligence of post. (69-70)

For his disservice, Edwards is given “300 lashes,” but “in compassion of [his] age,” the number is reduced to 200. Here the interestedness of individuals and the legal system conspire to make such a scene of suffering possible. The irony in the narrator’s earlier comments about the “lawful” callings of the “merchants” and “stewards” reaches new levels. The employees of the East India Company “were expected to make their money through trade, and this inevitably led to wide-scale corruption” (Editorial note 118). In the end the Indian finds Edwards, gives him the treasure he had hidden—why steal it when with generosity natives will hand it over out of gratitude?—embraces Edwards and kisses his wounds and he insists, despite Edwards’ resistance, that he accept his gift. The Indian (he is not given a name) embraces him again as they part and he says, “You are an Englishman, ... but the Great Spirit has given you an Indian heart; may he bear up the weight of your old age, and blunt the arrow that brings it rest!” Having heard the story Harley exclaims in raptures, ““Edwards, ... let me hold thee to my bosom; let me imprint the virtue of thy sufferings on my soul. Come, my honoured veteran! Let me endeavour to soften the last days of a life, worn out in the service of humanity: call me also thy son, and let me cherish thee as a father.”” And Edwards returns Harley’s compassion with the same kind of gratitude as the Indian had bestowed upon him. Edwards has given to the name of Englishness a worthy title. His heart is noble and savage, English and Indian, civil and sensitive. The Indian thus ventriloquizes Edwards’ values, but the family bond the three of them end up forming is, for the most part, impotent, unable to reproduce

itself except in literary space as a zone of affiliation and self-affirmation that recognizes in itself a feeling of the inevitability of history and its inability to externalize its complaints in the form of direct action. There is here a world-system dysfunction that is too vast—its center is un-locatable—to be altered by individual acts of generosity, but the individual act may, through publication, provide an imaginary space of self- and national-Self affection in which distant and local sufferers may enter into a fictional communion that, even in its material inconsequentiality, seeks to open a zone resistant to the pressures of reification, which, in a self-enclosing turn, nevertheless remains as a ballast-life raft for the modern imperial individual (nation) within the zone of commercial exchange.

Harley describes his attitude towards the colonization of India and slavery in the following way:

‘Edwards,’ said he, ‘I have a proper regard for the prosperity of my country: every native of it appropriates to himself some share of the power, or the fame, which, as a nation, it acquires; but I cannot throw off the man so much, as to rejoice at our conquests in India. You tell me of immense territories subject to the English: I cannot think of their possessions, without being led to enquire, by what right they possess them. They came there as traders, bartering the commodities they brought for others which their purchasers could spare; and however great their profits were, they were then equitable. But what title have the subjects of another kingdom to establish an empire in India? to give laws to a country where the inhabitants received them on the terms of friendly commerce? You say they are happier under our regulations than the tyranny of their own petty princes. I must doubt it, for the conduct of those by whom these regulations have been made. They have drained the treasuries of Nabobs, who must fill them by oppressing the industry of their subjects. Nor is this to be wondered at, when we consider the motive upon which those gentlemen do not deny their going to India. The fame of conquest, barbarous as the motive is, is but a secondary consideration: there are certain stations in wealth to which the warriors of the East aspire. ... When shall I see a commander return from India in the pride of honourable poverty?—You describe the victories they have gained; they are sullied by the cause in which they fought: you enumerate the spoils of those victories; they are covered with the blood of the vanquished!

Could you tell me of some conqueror giving peace and happiness to the conquered?... did he endear the British name by examples of generosity, which the most barbarous or most depraved are rarely able to resist? did he return with

the consciousness of duty discharged to his country, and humanity to his fellow-creatures? did he return with no lace on his coat, no slaves in his retinue, no chariot at this door, and no Burgundy at his table?... however the current of opinion may point, the feelings are not yet lost that applaud benevolence, and censure inhumanity. Let us endeavour to strengthen them in ourselves; and we, who live sequestered from the noise of the multitude, have better opportunities of listening undisturbed to their voice.’ (76-8)

His questions particularly stress pity for the other and the immorality of his country’s oppression, yet he seeks in the end to make of himself a sort of monument of feelings “not yet lost.” Here sensibility is its own reward. His “feelings [of benevolence and moral indignation] are not yet lost,” but the same cannot be said of his capacity and will for action. “It is up to the “sequestered” to hold on to values antithetical to the modern ones of imperial ambition and greed for wealth, luxury, and power. In other words, by the end of his discourse he finds himself flat up against the rhetorical dead end of retirement and reclusiveness: “The best Harley can do in the world is to dispense private charity, an act without political force” (Michasiw 163).

In Mirror 28, Mr. Umphrville explains how a reformation might take place with regard to England’s dealing in India—dealings which he abhors—only to sigh inwardly: “But, alas! ... such reformations are more easily effected by me in my elbow-chair, than by those who conduct the great and complicated machine of government.” He calls himself a “retired old man” who suspects that “the period of such reformations is nearly past” and he “wishes” that England would “be actuated by more generous passions” than by the “luxury, and the love of vain expense” that dominates and overcomes “the sentiments of public virtue, and the passion for the true glory, natural to that order of the state.” The intra-textual editor of The Man of Feeling calls the chapter in which Harley discusses his views on England’s exploitation of India “The Man of Feeling Talks of

What He Does Not Understand.” In a similar way, Mackenzie partially takes back Umphraville’s opinions:

Living retired in the country, conversing with few, and ignorant of the opinions of the many; attached to ideas of *family*, and not very fond of the mercantile interests, disposed to give praise to former times, and not to think highly of the present; in his apprehension of facts he is often mistaken, and the conclusions he draws from these facts are often erroneous. In the present instance, the view which I have presented of his opinions, may throw further light upon his character; it gives a striking picture both of the candour of his mind, and of the generosity of his sentiments. His opinions, though erroneous, may be useful; they may remind [those] . . . in danger of being seduced by circumstances and situation, that our own interest or ambition is never to be pursued but in consistency with the sacred obligations of justice, humanity, and benevolence; and they may afford a very pleasing source of reflection to others, who, in trying situations, have maintained their virtue and their character untainted. (Mirror 28)

If retirement—rustiness—is a precondition of good moral character, one wonders here how those with the correct opinion could maintain their generosity of feeling in the face of the “facts.” Umphraville’s utility is limited to his being represented textually—to his fictionality: he is a “reminder” and a remnant. He cannot affect the world politically except by ethical example, i.e. as a corrective mirror. He must be internalized as a sacred object of memory, a representative of a dying but memorializable part of self, an anchoring symbol, a point of material orientation in a world of shifting attachments and moving targets, that is, in a world-system that incorporates good intentions into the mechanics of its authority production, thereby providing a hiding place for both the local self and for an apparently necessary corporate or national hypocrisy in the ethics of individual responsibility. The image of Umphraville helps the reader differentiate what must be done from who one is, action from being and from character, in order to validate the individual’s non-participation in the world-system, while simultaneously rendering that notion of self politically ineffective.



Speaking out with indignation against the actions of his friend Colonel Plum, who has recently returned from India with a fortune, Umphraville argues,

Since his return to this country, Colonel *Plum* has acted the part of an affectionate and generous relation, of an attentive and useful friend; he has been an indulgent landlord, a patron of the industrious, and a support to the indigent. In a word, he has proved a worthy and useful member of society, on whom fortune seems not to have misplaced her favours.

Yet, with all the excellent dispositions of which these are proofs, placed as a soldier of fortune in India; inflamed with the ambition of amassing wealth; corrupted by the contagious example of others governed by the same passion, and engaged in the same pursuit, Col. *Plum* appears to have been little under the influence of justice or humanity; he seems to have viewed the unhappy people of that country merely as the instruments, which, in one way or other, were to furnish himself and his countrymen with that wealth they had gone so far in quest of.

If these circumstances could operate so strongly on such a man as Colonel *Plum*, we have little reason to wonder that they should have carried others of our countrymen to still more lamentable excesses... such examples as that of the Colonel should perhaps dispose us, in place of violently declaiming against the conduct of individuals, to investigate the causes by which it is produced. (Mirror 28)

Although Mackenzie is often seen as aiming to make individuals responsible for their actions, here he seems to recognize the problem more broadly. Plum, to some degree, is exonerated. He is a good citizen after all. Again, the move to find other causes is both the effect and consequence of world-historical consciousness itself; it is a particular method of self-care, of freeing the local citizen from the burden of political responsibility via, ironically, an “ethics of home.” External forces seem uncontrollable and if one is alive and wishes to continue living one is obliged to participate in exploitation and to seek global profit, but one’s sense of being a part of a feeling of common humanity is unimpaired here and Umphraville is hard pressed to explain the problem. He therefore, I would suggest, unwittingly remains a “useful” part of the system through the very act of

criticism. Mackenzie/Umphraville ends up, if only in part, blaming commerce, mercantilism, and the climate of India:

The conquests of a commercial people have always, I believe, proved uncommonly destructive; and this might naturally have been expected of those made by our countrymen in India, under the direction of a mercantile society, conducted by its members in a distant country, in a climate fatal to European constitutions, which they visit only for the purpose of suddenly amassing riches, and from which they are anxious to return as soon as that purpose is accomplished. (Mirror 28)

He does not say explicitly what kind of society should direct the conduct of foreign trade. In addition, returning speculatively to Logan's studies, the "climate" of India may not simply be fatal physically but morally as well. Whatever the case, these things, says Umphraville, should fill "us with shame and indignation."

Harold Thompson suggests that, considering the "blunt terms" in which Harley's discusses British Imperialism with Edwards, the recollection of these "terms" in later years "must have given [Harley's] creator a twinge when Mackenzie became an important member of the imperialistic party of Pitt and Dundas," the latter of whom had been a childhood friend of Mackenzie's (119). Although I doubt this gave Mackenzie too much of a "twinge"<sup>40</sup>—through Dundas, in 1769 Mackenzie was named "as an attorney in the Court of Exchequer" and he remained so until 1820—Mackenzie's early sentiments must be seen as a part of, or at least not in simple contradiction with, his later political activity (Thompson 81). Unlike Mackenzie, who knows the "facts," Harley and Umphraville speak about things they don't understand—they only get half the story; Mackenzie's political career fulfills or at the most complicates rather than undermines

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<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, Mackenzie has Savillon, the hero of Julia de Roubigne claim, "I sometimes sit down alone, and transporting myself into the little circle at Roubigne's, grow sick of the world, and hate the part which I am obliged to perform in it" (1:45). Mackenzie thus sees himself in some sense as obliged to perform as he does. Actions inevitably enter the world and become tainted in their expression.

(despite his later declamations of the opinions in his novels) his sentimental representations as at their bases both positions are supported by the same mechanism of self-pity: the “*Sentiment of Home*.”

In addition to speaking out against England’s conquest of India, Mackenzie has his characters speak out against the slave trade. This is especially evident in his third novel, Julia de Roubigné, in which the hero of the novel, Savillon, reforms his uncle’s plantation by befriending the slaves, where he offers them the choice of their freedom or of working with him as autonomous employees. He succeeds because he enlists the support of the former prince of these slaves, Yambu. When Yambu realizes Savillon’s intentions to abolish slavery in his plantation, he says, in the accent of a child, “ Yambu no leave you ... Master, (said his former subject), where we go? leave good white man, and go to bad; for much bad white men in this country. ...’ Yambu stood silent, and I [Savillon] saw a tear on his cheek.” Savillon’s generosity spawns a system of trade and exchange; however, the relationship depends on the fact that other nations and men have not done the same as Savillon. Yambu and his men have no better option. As problematic as the circumstances are, Mackenzie did not end up favoring abolition.

After becoming a propagandist for the Pitt administration, Mackenzie refers to his former doctrines as “the momentary ebullition of romantic humanity” (cited in Thompson 21). Realizing what is at stake for his countrymen were the slave trade abolished (an argument that works just as well with regard to all forms of imperial and domestic domination), Mackenzie finds rhetorical recourse in nation-self pity and in the need to engage in international commercial competition so as to avoid forfeiting power to other

less generous and revolutionary governments and nations. Speaking out against abolition and its supporters, Mackenzie says,

Justice, they argued, is antecedent to compassion, and the rights of property are as sacred as those of humanity ... Does our humanity never think of the consequences of the wished-for abolition to the thousands of our own countrymen, whom it will reduce to distress and poverty? ... But even to the natives of Africa our mistaken compassion will not be humanity. We can only abolish this trade for ourselves. ... In France, wilder than the wildest of us in abstract notions, fond as she is of revolution, and in the very honey-moon of liberty, the proposal of abolishing the slave trade was decidedly rejected by the national assembly. ... We shall not only lose the trade ourselves, but throw it, with a double advantage, into the hands of rival powers. (Cited in Thompson 261-2)

Would Harley disagree? To abolish slavery here is to “reduce” “our own countrymen” “to distress and poverty.” In this way Mackenzie renders abolition an inhumane act. The “justice” of the abolitionists is unpatriotic. They consider others over Self at too great an expense to Self. They will end as Mountford, Harley, Edwards and the narrator do: without heirs and thus without a means of material continuity. Mackenzie’s “Sentiment of Home,” therefore, manifests itself in the political sphere (a sphere he renders distinct from and tertiary to the imaginary sphere of literary, sentimental exchange) as an act of compassion to Self/self that appears to come at the expense of its own moral basis but is itself a basis for the rhetoric of moral self-preservation *and* commercial ambition.

In the end, his argument goes, the slave trade would flourish even if the English abolished it, and it would only end up in the hands of their revolutionary and “liberal” competitors who would get rich at their expense. These are the facts that Harley and Umphraville are missing. Like Colonel Plum, they too are attached to home, but without the facts they fail to be good stewards of national power. Mackenzie thus manages to favor both Umphraville’s (and Harley’s) and Plum’s attitude towards imperial expansion.

In a rhetorical reversal, Mackenzie thus morphs pity into a mode of double self-conservation, which makes the inner critical attitude of the homespun subject a means to projecting blame outside of the self and onto other imperial identities. Therefore, the sentimental source of national feeling (the “Sentiment of Home,” a “benevolence to self” or the ‘mysterious attachments of compassion’) turns in a double-twist from sentimental identification with the colonial and enslaved other simultaneously *back to* Self/self and *out to* empire. With its eyes facing inward it monitors the local self for the moral detritus of global, commercial communion, while with its legs pointing in the direction of empire it marches outward to expand its dominion. This sentimental self-pity thus opens to the local individual a zone for the development of local attachments, a feeling of sentimental communion with the world as his “family,” and a protective levee for the “ebullations of romantic humanity.” The self-criticism implicit in Harley’s sympathy for distant others is thereby given a commercial foundation—imperial politics thus monitors and protects, ironically *on behalf of* its local sentimental critics, a safe inner zone of imaginary self-difference and memorialization, a space in which to foster simultaneously a feeling of non-participation in the atrocities of empire and a sense of moral distinction from the politics of commercial ambition. In other words, by thus forming a “contradictory distinction” between the political “necessity” of imperial self-expansion and this sentimental “benevolence to self,” this doubling or double-duty of pity protects the local self by blinding it to, or by threatening it with the necessity of, its own participation. This double-direction of pity, thus unconscious of itself, comes at the expense of those at the fringes of imperial expansion on account of a sort of zero sum economy whereby local security comes to depend on the capacity for imperial growth. The moral protectionism of

sentimental self-pity is thus *protected by* the drive for financial security, and the threat to self of imperial backwash comes in second place, or really comes second in a reciprocal sequence, to the advantages of commercial gain. In this way, Mackenzie's propagandist position paradoxically complements the self-pity (the "*Sentiment of Home*") he endorses in the Mirror and the abolitionist and anti-imperialist sentiments he expresses in Julia de Roubigne and through Harley in The Man of Feeling. Without commercial imperial prospects and the slave trade, Mackenzie, and England (and thus Scotland) with him, he argues, has an insecure future. In this politico-rhetorical reversal "the turning outward of empire" carves out a space for "the turning inward of the sentimental mode," the latter of which is meant to protect the local self from the dangerous moral flotsam and jetsam of empire, while the former is meant to guarantee for the local self the luxury of sentimental pity (Festa SFE 2). In that they are modes of exchange, therefore, *commerce is pity*—a concern for the well-being of the local self; abolition equals a "mistaken compassion" (compassion in the wrong direction), and moral self-protectionism thereby comes to play the role of self-affirming complement to capital and imperial development. According to Mackenzie, even the enslaved will not see abolition as an act of "humanity." From behind the sentimental object of pity emerges the shadow of the pitying subject.

## CHAPTER 4

### TIME AND THE TURN TO SELF-PITY IN WORDSWORTH

#### **Introduction to Pity and Time: Aristotle, Richardson, Mackenzie**

Though Wordsworth grants pity a historically unique temporal significance, pity's temporal qualities were a concern at least since Aristotle. In order to better contextualize my examination of time and pity in Wordsworth, therefore, and before we begin to examine his own contribution to the history of their relationship, I would like to take a brief look back at the conceptual connection between time and pity as we've seen it develop thus far in previous chapters. In every preceding chapter, I've noted with varying degrees of emphasis, that pity is capable of producing a certain temporal experience and cannot arise except when a pitier is in a certain temporally conditioned state of mind. As I point out in my first chapter (see pp. 18-20), Aristotle seeks to differentiate pity from other passions (he highlights courage and fear) by contrasting their respective temporal characteristics. He argues that those who feel courage, anger, and confidence, for example, unlike those who feel pity, are unconcerned with both the past and future. The courageous man does not anticipate evil to himself—he takes no heed of the future. On the other hand, pity, it seems, requires memory and a capacity for anticipation or expectation. Only those who have come to recognize their vulnerability through personal experience are able to anticipate misfortune to themselves: and pity can only arise in those who are able to anticipate future suffering to themselves. For suffering to incite pity, in other words, it must seem close at hand, but not too close, lest it morph into a fear for oneself. Likewise, if the sufferer's misfortunes appear too far in either the past or the future, he notes, they will not incite pity, or only to a lesser degree. Those in a state of

fear, on the other hand, are incapable of pity, Aristotle claims, “because they are preoccupied with their own emotion.” Temporally speaking, according to Aristotle, pity hovers between the extremes of both the distant past or future and the immediate present. Pity may arise only in someone who is in a state of temporal intermediacy—a pitier must feel neither too close nor too far from the pitied’s suffering. With these descriptions of pity as a temporal entity, Aristotle is interested primarily in exploring pity’s rhetorical instrumentality. Wordsworth, on the other hand, picking up and expanding on the themes of intermediacy, memory, and expectation, gives to pity a dynamic intra-subjective instrumentality and a historically conditioned ontological and aesthetic function.

Though my second chapter does not focus on temporality, in Clarissa Richardson does implicitly contrast fear and pity based on the antithetical temporal experiences they inspire. It is fear, for instance, that strips Clarissa of thought and the ability for moral self-reflection when she is tricked by Lovelace into fleeing her home. In her one moment of moral and intellectual unsteadiness, she agrees to meet with Lovelace outside the boundaries of her home. As she turns back from their discussion to sneak back inside, she hears what she thinks are her pursuers on the other side of the garden door: “Now behind me, now before me, now on this side, now on that, I turned my affrighted face in the same moment ... I ran as fast as he, yet knew not that I ran; my fears at the same time that they took all power of thinking from me adding wings to my feet; my voice, however, contradicting my action; crying, No, no, no, all the while.” She hears only sounds behind the door, but imagines “my brother, my father and their servants” (380). Richardson clearly highlights fear’s temporal elements. The scene is dominated by the feeling of immediate presence. Her “fears” strip her of “all power of thinking.” In fear, she loses



control of both her senses and her mind. Time seems to accelerate and there is no opportunity for reflection. Fear is not a morally, politically, or psychologically trustworthy emotion because it splits the self and shrinks the time she has for moral self-concern. In contrast, pity consistently inspires self-reflection. As we've seen (see pp. 71-2), in response to an uprising of conscience Lovelace exclaims as if to his own heart or mind, "Methinks I begin to pity the half-apprehensive beauty!--But avaunt, thou unseasonably-intruding pity! Thou hast more than once already well nigh undone me!-- And, adieu, reflection! Begone, consideration! and commiseration!" Pity, Lovelace laments, seems to stabilize the moment, to slow things down enough for self-reflection. Richardson implies, thus, that it is this temporal quality in pity that makes it, unlike fear, a trustworthy moral virtue. In Clarissa, pity, though it is itself a bodily reflex, has the special ability to slow down and interrupt the progress of other more hurried and aggressive impulses and to thereby inspire moral self-reflection—it has an important semi-cognitive potentiality, and an implied temporal quality.

The relationship between time and pity becomes a more central focus in Chapter 3. For Mackenzie and many of his contemporaries, I have suggested, sentimental pity is capable of reorienting local subjects negatively affected by the disorienting forces of globalization and a capitalist economy. In conjunction, they also come to see pity or compassion (really a form of self-pity) as having a highly valued capacity to resolve the uniquely modern experience of historical discontinuity: pity bridges the gap that opens up with and comes to characterize "modernity" between the present and a lost, and subsequently idealized, past. In other words, pity works not only in the spatial but also in the temporal register. Pity alters one's relationship with time. At the end of The Man of

Feeling, in his pity for “the world” the narrator attains an alternative, transcendent, temporal perspective in which he is freed from the burdens of immediacy. He seeks in pity thereby a way to avoid the anxiety of the moment. His pity provides him with the feeling of being outside of time: through pity, he comes to see the world from the vantage point of an imagined and idealized future beyond the corrupting influences of change.

Underneath Mackenzie’s apparent endorsement of the social utility of pity and compassion, I would suggest, we may recognize in his turn to self-pity—an attempt really to close off sympathetic exchange all together—an ambivalence about pity’s viability as a vehicle of social communion and political consensus. This ambivalence is not unique to Mackenzie. In fact, as the eighteenth century progresses this tendency grows and becomes particularly acute after the fall-out of the French Revolution. William Wordsworth’s contribution to this history is of vital importance; his is a contribution that, I will argue, revolves around this very problem of the relationship between pity and time. His own ambivalence to contemporary mechanistic approaches to sociability, which by Mackenzie’s time had already been conventionalized, registers most notably in his emphatic turn in the direction of subjectivity and to the private experience of individual consciousness—namely, to an even more extreme and internalized version of self-pity. What has gone largely unnoticed, however—and herein lies my own contribution—is his heightened emphasis on pity’s temporal qualities and the complex conceptual transformations pity undergoes therein as his art matures. Wordsworth’s iteration of pity seeks to grant pity’s temporal character a new social and subjective functionality: no longer a descriptive element of pity’s rhetorical potential, its temporal “intermediacy” becomes a subjective end in itself.

### **The Modern Acceleration and Internalization of Time**

In Wordsworth, pity names and is itself a type of temporal experience: pity slows things down and sets up the conditions for the kind of self-reflection, security, and self-knowledge he is after. This uniquely Wordsworthian version of pity, I will argue, is born in response to transformations in the way time itself is coming to be conceived and understood. As the *concept* of time begins to change in this period—as time’s redemptive function gives way to a more standardized, secular notion of time—Wordsworth discovers in pity a private encounter with, and a way to recoup in individual consciousness, those sacred elements of time that seem to have been lost in the wake of modernization. Wordsworth discovers in pity a resource within himself with which to manage and attain some measure of distance from his own—and his period’s—unique temporal anxieties. Broadly speaking, then, what I will examine in this chapter is Wordsworth’s poetic response to the new relationship that emerges in the eighteenth century between the changing structures of feeling (on the one hand) and the changing structures of time (on the other). In reaction to these changing structures and the experience of temporality, Wordsworth’s poetry, I will suggest, involves an experimentation with the ways particular feelings may be used to construct a compensatory, inner experience of, and a private orientation towards, time. With regard to its temporal aspect, Wordsworth makes pity play an important role with other emotions as a vehicle of ontological stability. I will argue, through an analysis of a selection of his poetry and prose, that in Wordsworth emotions themselves (focusing also on fear, which as Aristotle notes, has a contrasting temporal character to pity) take on specialized temporal qualities and come to name different, but not, in the end, necessarily

incompatible, experiences of time. At the most basic level, through a variety of methods, Wordsworth—most vividly and explicitly in his earliest poetry—connects pity with the production of a particular mood, which he names variously “serenity,” “calm,” “tranquility” and others. For Wordsworth, pity stabilizes and orients the self as long as it remains at the level of a mood-reflection. Wordsworth’s approach to pity thus represents, in some ways, a radically individualized version of Mackenzian self-pity in that it becomes an almost entirely internal experience that needs no object outside of the self to condition its subjective utility. This development, I think, needs some brief historical contextualization so that we can better grasp the evolution of this relationship between time and feeling and Wordsworth’s particular way of exploring the problem.

Niklas Luhmann argues that with “the structural change from traditional to bourgeois society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” the older “temporal structure” dissolved. This historical transformation was facilitated, Luhmann suggests, by a pervasive “temporalization of being” (130-31). The earlier notion of sacred time was cyclical and repetitive and as a cycle it interrupted the forward movement of secular time adding a spiritual depth to an otherwise discontinuous flux of phenomena. Mikhail Bakhtin argues thus that “[t]he mark of cyclicity, and consequently of cyclical repetitiveness, is imprinted on all events occurring in this [pre-modern] type of time. Time’s forward impulse is limited by the cycle. For this reason even growth does not achieve an authentic ‘becoming’.” Cyclicity, it seems, was meant to militate against the corruptive force of independent mobility by inserting into time a soteriological (i.e. Christian) teleology. The older form of time took for granted time’s immanent unity. George Poulet similarly argues that “[e]ven in his body the Christian of the Middle Ages

felt a continuous orientation toward a spiritual perfection. Time had a direction. Time finally carried the Christian toward God. ... All *becoming* in the natural order, as in the spiritual order, required a determination direct from God” (5). In this model, sacred time cuts into secular time providing it with a vertically organized redemptive end. Secular time, without the interventions of the form-giving power of eternal time, was entropic and led to non-being and chaos.

As this older form of time gives way, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Reinhart Koselleck argues that there arises “the peculiar form of acceleration which characterizes modernity” (5). With the break from tradition made by Cartesian philosophy, the notion of time as a series of independent moments emerges as one of the period’s most frequent and poignant anxieties. Finding itself always in the present moment, “this disengaged consciousness ... appears as irresolutely floating on the surface of the [discontinuous] flux of phenomena” (Poulet 17). It is in the wake of this acceleration, Habermas will suggest, that “[t]ime becomes experienced as a scarce resource for the mastery of problems that arise” on account of “the pressure of time” itself (6). The “present” is thus “consumed,” he suggests, “in the consciousness of a speeding up and in the expectation of the differentness of the future” (6). With the Reformation, he argues, “the world of the divine was” gradually “changed in the solitude of subjectivity into something posited by ourselves” (17). The burden of time is thereby handed over to the interiority of the individual subject at a moment in history in which “the problem of self-grounding becomes acute” (8). No longer able to depend on the older, pre-given, “external” forms of time, the modern subject “had to stabilize itself” without the benefit of “models” through new methods of “self-reassurance” (16). The

modern subject is thus faced with the task of obtaining from subjectivity the power of “stabilizing a historical formation that has been set loose from all historical obligations” (20). In other words, with the demystification of religion was born the “necessity of creating all that is normative out of [oneself],” and “Romantic” Habermas suggests, names the period in which this demystification is self-consciously and centrally thematized (20, 18).

Poulet, in fact, connects these changes in the temporal structure explicitly to changes in the value and functions of human feelings and emotions. Parodying Descartes, he suggests that the eighteenth century is dominated by the sense that “if I feel, I am. . . . My feeling creates me. [And t]he lived sensation is the consciousness of being” (19). Elsewhere, Poulet argues that “when the poets of the middle Ages and the baroque age write about eternity, “it is the eternity *of* God” (i.e. its not a property of individual consciousness). The Romantics, he suggests, coveted this “objective” [external] vision of eternity and sought to make it their own: theirs was, in Poulet’s words, “a personal and subjective eternity: an eternity for their own private use. There was within the romantic poet, he argues, *the need*, brought on by the uniquely modern and particularly acute experience of the transience of human time, to make the eternity of Heaven descend to their own habitation, that is, to relocate eternity to this world as a feature of their own [thoughts and feelings]” (my translations 25). That Wordsworth grew up and developed his unique character as a poet within the context of this modern acceleration and privatization or division of time and the corresponding demand for existential self-assurance I take as a starting point for this examination.

### **Pity and Fear in “The Vale of Esthwaite”**

Wordsworth's concern with the relationship between time and feeling can be traced in his earliest poetry when many of the issues and the most salient tropes and modes of representation that will engage him throughout his career retain a youthful rawness and transparency that makes access to the origins and nature of these concerns easier to grasp because less mediated by the relative opacity maturity and sophistication often afford. Early on, pity seems to provide Wordsworth, in what he sees as "these times of fear" and hurried life, with access to the human version of the seemingly lost experience of sacred time. His world, he feels, lacks temporal depth and he is hard pressed to find stability in the face of time's modern acceleration. Written at the age of seventeen, just prior to his departure for Cambridge, "The Vale of Esthwaite" was Wordsworth's first "sustained original poem," a poem that "expresses a precarious interplay of opposing moods" (Hartman 76). The tension in the poem hovers between the anxieties of personal loss and the haunting anticipation of an unknown future: He "is about to leave for Cambridge," and "[h]aving lost father and mother, and deprived of sister and everything that used to be home, he is in danger of being detached from," what he calls, "the 'social chain'. . . . This gentlest of valleys, his home for the last eight years, begins to haunt him (Hartman 88, 77). The figure of "Pity" emerges in the poem, thus, as a response to the "situation" of personal, temporal crisis, which is the result of what Geoffrey Hartman calls "homelessness" (77). Pity becomes for Wordsworth a mechanism by which he is able to develop out of his own emotional experience an *intrasubjective* "home," a virtual internal community of feelings and imagined relationships through which he may no longer depend on things and people outside of himself for his sense of ontological stability. James Averill argues that it is only with some of his later poetry that Wordsworth begins

“to emphasize a connection between sympathetic emotion and moral improvement. Earlier, though doubtless conversant with the platitudes of sentimental morality,” he is “largely indifferent,” Averill claims, to this element of aesthetic experience. Instead, “Wordsworth’s juvenilia are concerned not with justifying the power of sentimental emotion but with appropriating it. His first poems reveal a poet in search of an effective way to provoke tragic emotions” (38). I would argue, however, that the goal of power-appropriation via the evocation of tragic feeling remains throughout his career, albeit with the help of more varied and subtle poetic modes of expression, a principal focus. It is one of poetry’s most important functions in “The Vale of Esthwaite,” as in his later poetry, to “beguile” pain through the evocation of strong emotion (450:347).<sup>41</sup>

The poem comes down to us as a series of fragments. Some definite emotional and temporal patterns, however, can be traced in what remains. It generally moves from hurried scenes of fear to more tranquil images of local scenery tintured by the more mellow moods of pity and melancholy. In “Esthwaite,” Pity is a personified mood, a force of the imagination which is either projected into nature or represented by spiritual or mythical forms and figures, who bring him comfort. The emotional raptures of fear and madness dominate, however, and provide a discontinuous temporal and emotional backdrop for the fleeting moments of tranquil reflection afforded by the many comforting images of Pity, figured as Memory and Melancholy as well as by characters such as Philomela, elves, and Angels. For the sake of contrast, we will begin by looking at an example of the temporal quality he gives to fear:

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<sup>41</sup> As I will be citing from many of “Esthwaite’s” extracts and fragments, I will be citing often from Landis and Curtis’ *Wordsworth: Early Poems and Fragments, 1785-1797*. My in-text citations will refer, thus, first to the page numbers and second (except for the “extracts”) to the line numbers for the sake of readers to whom the Landis and Curtis edition is unavailable.



But now a thicker blacker veil  
 Is thrown o'er all the wavering dale ...  
 [W]hile hills o'er hills in gradual pride  
 That swell'd along the upland side  
 From the blunt baffled Vision pass  
 And melt into one gloomy mass ...  
 But Lo the night ...  
 The owl screams her song  
 And mark the train of fear be[hind]  
 Wave her black banner to the w[ind] ...  
 [Ter]rific swept the mighty Lyre  
 [Of] Nature. With Hell-rousing sound  
 [W]hile shriek'd the trembling strings around  
 Or the deep tones struck my ear  
 My Soul would melt away with Fear  
 Or swell'd to madness bad me le[ap]  
 Down Headlong down the hideous steep. (430-36:101-02,111-14, 133-36, 170-76)

While he tries to grasp at something tangible, “the train of fear” possesses him, pushing him into a state of “madness” and a kind of suicidal vertigo: fear is entropic, and the immediate impressions that inspire it possess him. Like the wind that “sweeps” the “mighty Lyre / [Of] Nature,” time moves quickly, its movements feel discontinuous, sudden, and they threaten to dissolve his “Soul.” Each line, image, and sound is laced with temporal qualities. The poet seems unable to produce in himself perceptual limits and impose meaning on a chaos of mental and sensory data except in moments of pity. In the last quoted lines above, perhaps unsure what to do with Pity’s “forms,” it flees his “mind,” his world goes “dark,” and he is blinded and enveloped by a “thicker blacker veil,” the form of fear itself, in which the ego is almost lost. Unable to control and delimit his temporal and spatial horizons as they extend “hill o’er hill,” he is hard-pressed to discover a position in the world or within himself safe and secure from the haunted immediacy that everywhere threatens to overtake him and urges him, “swell’d to madness,” to leap “Down headlong the hideous steep.” He recognizes in fear an albeit

aesthetically exhilarating threat to his identity and mental stability.

We may contrast this with one of his depiction of pity, which interrupts only to give way again to such moments of fear:

Now too while o'er the heart we feel  
 A Tender Twilight softly steal  
 Sweet Pity gives her forms array'd  
 In tenderer tints and softer shade....  
 Yet ah! my soul was never blind  
 To Pleasures of a softer kind.  
 Her tints so shadowy soft and pale  
 O'er lovely Gasmere's heavenly vale  
 While muttering low the wayward song  
 I sat the wild field flow'rs among  
 Through what sweet scenes did fancy rove  
 While thus her faery dream she wove  
 Compared with fancy what is truth?  
 And Reason what art thou to youth?  
 Soft sleeps the breeze upon the deep  
 Sweet flow'rs while all in peace you sleep  
 Dream of the Tempest which may blow  
 Tomorrow, and may lay you low.  
 While lighted by the star of eve...  
 Getting ... shelter from the storm  
 The moon retired air blacken'd round  
 And loud the tempest lash'd the ground  
 While Pity's visions fled my mind  
 I tried the wide Vault dark and blind  
 While yelling loud ... (lines 101-136, 170-199)

Before fear—in the figure of blackness and the tempest—chases it away, pity interrupts the series of discontinuous fearful moments with an experience of tranquility. It is a “twilight” emotion of the heart and a vision in the mind. While during the day, he says, his vision stretches without limits “hill o'er hill” and at night he is terrified, in the twilight of Pity's forms he is stilled and is able to reflect on himself, even if momentarily. While in fear he is dominated by the pressing *immediacy* of time, in Pity he is able to participate in an experience of time that I will refer to, as I have already in my

exploration of pity in Aristotle, as *inter-mediacy*. Pity makes this experience possible because it leans in the direction of the reflective mind away from the flux of sensory phenomena. That Fear, associated with darkness, night, and storms, inspires a temporal haste is not all that surprising, and neither is pity's association with softness and sweetness; however, the association of pity with twilight, at least to my sensibility, stands out and seems somewhat forced, a signal that something important is happening. That pity may produce tranquility is implicit in earlier poets who influenced Wordsworth. In Collins' "Ode to Pity," for example, Collins calls for Pity to "charm his frantic Woe" (2). Wordsworth, however, takes the analogy to a new level, by making the temporal quality of the word "frantic" play a more explicit and dynamic, though somewhat more awkward and overwrought, part in the poem. In "Esthwaite," Pity is, as Averill suggests, "displaced from man to nature," yet it is also a self-consciously "felt" engagement or encounter with time. Pity is, here, a felt experience of time in which day and night, darkness and light, death and life, motion and stillness, and their respective ontological and aesthetic significations, seem to *interfuse*. While fear is possessed by immediacy, pity is productive of an experience of *intermediacy* and visionary composure.

In "Esthwaite," argues Averill, "Pity ... is most often a feeling in search of an object. There are no human beings for the poet to vent his sympathy upon in the solipsistic valley of his imagination and compassion finds no 'appropriate human centre' there. Without another person upon whom to lavish attention, Pity either floats freely or exhausts itself in self-contemplation. ... Ungrounded by any definite human object, Pity becomes a self-defining, ... mode of autonomous feeling" (46-7). Unattached and disembodied—a comforting intermediary Spirit of Nature floating somewhere between

the “heart” and the “mind—unlike “Fear,” Pity seems to open out for the speaker a broader temporal “zone” productive of some measure of self-reflection. It mediates between body and mind and is able to partake of both. In Pity, the temporal horizons of the pitying/pitied self (of Pity itself) seem both more extended and more controlled than those produced by Fear, though it includes light, it has some comforting limits to vision. In Fear, thought seems to collapse in the wake of the insatiable moment. In the state of pity, the mind has “room,” enough time, a certain capacity for self-distance, to think about itself, even if to question the value to itself of its traditional *modus operandi*, “truth” and “Reason”: “Compared with fancy what is truth?” he asks, “And Reason what art thou to youth?” Such moments of self-pondering are impossible while gripped by fear. In the more fearful scenes, he has no time for questions. Pity makes deliberation possible. It moves the poet from the fanaticism of fear in the direction of the interfusion of reason and sense. Throughout the poem fear has a demonic bodily aspect, while pity is a proto- or semi- cognitive phenomena. Pity introduces a mood of calm and tranquility. In this state, pity is able to mediate between the flux of sensory phenomena and temporal needs of a mind otherwise dominated by sensory impressions. Paul de Man claims that “[t]he key to an understanding of Wordsworth lies in the relationship between imagination and time, not [as has most often been claimed] in the relationship between imagination and nature. . . . For Wordsworth, relationships towards time have a priority over relationships towards nature; one finds, in his work, a persistent deepening of self-insight represented as a movement that begins in contact with nature, then grows beyond nature to become a contact with time” (16-17). Pity, I will argue, provides one avenue “beyond nature” to “a contact with time.” For Wordsworth, de Man suggests, it is only in making “a contact

with time” that “self-discovery” and “self-knowledge” and the “truth about the self” become possible: in Wordsworth, he claims, truth is best described “not in terms of accuracy, but in terms of authenticity”: “true knowledge of self is knowledge that understands the self as it really is” (17). According to Wordsworth, in contrast to the knowledge of the “Man of Science,” who “seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor,” the “knowledge of the [Poet] cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance” through the power of “sympathy.” The poet, to borrow Adam Smith’s metaphor, brings the reader “home” to himself, and returns to him his “unalienable inheritance,” that “necessary part of our existence,” which seems to have been lost in the wake of a uniquely modern existential crisis. The poet fills a deep need, the Scientist a “personal and individual” desire (“Preface to the Lyrical Ballads 1802,” 606).

### **Pity’s Temporal Intermediacy**

While the preceding “twilight” episodes figured pity through the image of the waning day, in the following abstract (one of many similar ones) it is the waning *year* that serves to convey the quality of pity:

I trust the Bard can never part  
 With Pity Autumn of the Heart!  
 For then the mind serene  
 Is one sweet tender faded scene (476)

In the lines that follow these, the “blown” leaves “die,” and, as if falling from the “brighter sky” of his serene mind, their “richer colors” cover like clothing (they have colorfully “drest”), “The varying landscape of the breast.” Pity is here an aspect of his “heart” and “mind.” The projection on to nature (personification) has been, to some small degree, withdrawn. Still, it is not entirely *his* pity, *his* mind, *his* serenity. Again pity

represents an intermediate experience of time, a point of temporal interfusion between mind and body, represented in the middling image of the heart. Here the interfusion is not between day and night, but between the high clarity and exuberance of summer and the dark, frozen, bareness of winter. Again it turns in the direction of the “mind” and it is “serene.” In pity, the speaker seems to, however briefly, step outside of the immediate moment to a position of relative distance from which he is able to experience time as an aesthetic object, as something upon which he is able to reflect and with which he is thus able to engage without losing control of his faculties. Within “Esthwaite,” Pity begins to look something like the human emotional, literary, and moral equivalent of eternal or sacred time in that it adds, through the temporal distance it opens up within the pitier, a temporal depth and calm to an otherwise demonic surface of undifferentiated moments.

In another attempt to characterize pity, he refers to that “melancholy joy / Which pensive pity does impart / [Pity the sweet] Autumn of the heart!” (479). In yet another, he writes, “I wish not for excess of sorrow— But how sweet [is that] Emotion of pity, ... / the autumn of the heart when joy and / Sorrow unite” (478). While the foregoing “twilight” episodes were based on images of the waning day, here it is the waning year that serves to convey the quality of pity. Again pity represents an intermediate experience of time, a point of temporal interfusion between the exuberance of youth and the decline of old age: that is, between the high clarity and exuberance of summer and the dark, frozen, bareness of winter. In terms of pity’s relationship with time and in the image of pity as autumn, again possession is replaced by encounter, just as a dominant immediacy gives way to a felt experience of intermediacy: as the feeling-tone shifts from fear to pity, time is deepened and made capable of holding together contradictory or fragmentary

elements of a more complete self. Pity moves the poet in a meditative direction, adding a hierarchical depth where there was a surface of dislocated, descending moments. In pity the ego is held together in or by time, and the poet is able to perceive his own continued existence. It opens out a temporal zone in which “joy” may be fused to “Sorrow.” Pity softens pain by adding a certain measure of temporal breadth to the otherwise collapsing instant that draws the poet into a panic. As a mood, Pity mediates a relationship and a movement between time and affect. According to Northrop Frye, “Where there is a sense of literature as process,” as an exchange between text and reader in time, “pity and fear become states of mind without objects, moods” shared by “the work of art and the reader” (Frye 149). Frye has further commented that “[p]ity without an object has never to my knowledge been given a name.” However, I think we may justly refer to “pity without an object” as “self-pity,” i.e., a pity in this instance that turns back to the self from a personified “form” of nature: pity as a means to the privatization or internalization of temporal experience. He calls fear without an object “anxiety” (149).

While anxiety takes the speaker in the direction of nonbeing, self-pity seems to make possible a mediation between the tranquility of mind and the vast energy of the senses, between what does not move and what does. The poem soon shifts to a new landscape in which the speaker envisions “Philomela,” whose voice Coleridge will call “pity-pleasing” (“Ode to a Nightingale”), and “Her Elfins” coming over the “hills with dewy feet” and warbling voices, which are “softly sweet.” The scene then becomes one of mourning, the energy of the poem is again subdued, and suffering is softened and sweetened. He mentions “Eden” and “our first father[.]” who is “sooth’d” from “his anxious pain” by the “soft warbl’d” voices of the Elfins. The speaker then hears the

consoling voice

Of angels hovering round the bed  
Where the dying rest their head  
That they may tempt without a fear  
The night of Death so dark and drear.

Here, together with the angels, elves, and Philomela (a set of fellow sufferers and pitiers), who perhaps name some of the “Forms,” “scenes,” or “visions” of Pity, Wordsworth is again provided with a moment of tranquility, with an interfusion of a human form of “Edenic” time, that interrupts the otherwise haunted surface of the poem. Wordsworth’s own pain and loss, through the interventions of Pity and its “forms,” seem to provide Wordsworth with access to a felt position *in* time that reaches outside of time so as to provide him with a more tranquil and mediated engagement with time. The temporal distance pity provides allows him to reflect on and find a degree of temporary balance within his own mind.

In this mood of pity or attitude of self-pity, suffering and loss are felt, accepted, and internalized, if momentarily, from a distanced temporal perspective and access is given thereby to an experience of “stillness,” the word or concept which Augustine says describes the quintessential characteristic of eternal time: Eternity is, he says, “forever still [*semper stans*]” as opposed to those things which are “never still.” At another point, he describes some of his detractors (who suggest that God attains a new will at the moment of creation) as lacking a steadiness of mind: “their thoughts ... twist and turn.” He then adds, “But if only their minds could be seized and held steady [*ut paululum stet*], they would be still for awhile and, for that short moment, they would glimpse the splendor of eternity which is forever still [*semper stantis*]. They would contrast it with time, which is never still ... If only men’s minds could be seized and held still” (11:13).



At another point, he asks beseechingly (at least twice), “Who will hold still ... ?” (30:40). Augustine did in fact teach that in contemplation eternal time could be approximated and could inspire one to strive not for the pleasures of this world but for the next; however, even in contemplation eternity remained the property and gift of God alone. It is *His* eternity. If, as Poulet suggests, the Romantic poet sought to hand over eternity to individual human consciousness, then, in Wordsworth, we may perhaps see pity is one of the vehicles of eternity’s human internalization. Pity is, for Wordsworth, as long as it does not terminate in another human being, an internal resource able to produce relative mental stillness.

Pity’s contemplative quality, therefore, makes it capable of mediating not between the eternity and secularity of traditional temporality per se, but more accurately between their human intellectual and sensory equivalents. Wordsworth calls these moments man’s “godlike hours” (Prelude III: 192, 186-89). In “Esthwaite,” then, Pity and its forms internalize some of the features of the divine, and the poet may begin to feel this semi-divine authority as an element of his own being. He need not look to God or the Church for a feeling of eternity when it resides within as one of the resources of his own self-creative, self-mythologized being. The spiritual is thus internalized by the material, the holy is substituted by the aesthetic, and the heavenly is appropriated as an authentic, albeit imperfect, aspect of human experience. Pity is one of the vehicles of this internalization.

In the discourse of “Esthwaite,” the curious experience of Pity’s calm or poise always involves the blending or co-presence of motion and stillness. It is also curious that in general no particular human sufferers, nor any painful details of their stories, are

highlighted: the death-bed scene, with its host of fanciful and mythical figures (in which angels are given equal credence as folkloric and mythical figures), is a type of all death-bed scenes where all “*the dying* rest their head.” In other words, in imitation of the imagery and style of Gray’s “Elegy,” the insinuation is that everyone is “dying,” and the scene thus becomes an opportunity for self-pity, a mourning over one’s own death as if in advance. In self-pity, the speaker comes to see himself in his own death-bed as if from a position of eternal time. Pity thereby begins to name a process whereby the poet projects himself beyond time, which makes his present moment more perceptible within time to himself. In this process, we can see pity morph into memory, or more specifically, into the memorialization of the present.

Within Esthwaite, the emphasis on dramatic emotional alternations between life and death, presence and absence, and motion and stillness suggests, paradoxically, both a longing to accept life as it is and the need to find anchorage in something outside of the self so as to be released from the burden of anxiety and of time: “The boy needs something truly external,” suggests Hartman, “some belief in the reality of a larger body of which he is a part; his soul must be linked to or rooted inalienably in something, and his eight-year association with Esthwaite ... becomes for him... that place which [must not] be taken from him so charged is it is with personal and imaginative history. ... Rising and setting in its confines, the imagination can never be homeless.” Yet, “the demonic aspect of nature is ... [reveal the] danger the soul runs in seeking a natural home. For its intense effort not to know its own separateness results in so forceful an attribution of its own energy to parts of nature that these appear endowed with independent life and vex the very power that has given them this life.” H thus tends to externalize his anxiety

by projecting it into the objects and things that surround him in the landscape as if to escape from, and find a more stable home outside, himself. Hartman suggests that “the poem’s maturest verses are those in which Wordsworth vows to keep the valley always in his heart. ... That Wordsworth’s first original poem reverts so often to a gothic and visionary gloom reveals the strength of the conflict in him between the homeless and the naturalized imagination” (88-89).

At the “heart” of the poem, then, is the problem of what we’ve seen Habermas call “self-grounding,” of the feeling of profound homelessness, and fear and pity represent its systole and diastole. At each turn of the poem, the poet’s contingency is brought home to himself, and the poem thereby embodies the tireless human impulse to find anchorage and to surmount ourselves in things, which, in their apparent stability, permeate the contingencies of time with the form and appearance of a powerful and felt fixity. Yet, in the end, we might argue, Wordsworth seeks anchorage not in things, but in moods, which he personifies or projects into nature as if they were forces internal to it. In other words, he does not fully “own” these feelings, and the temporal qualities they represent and produce, therefore, remain at the level of projection. In an encounter with “Fear,” time is fled rather than felt, it is a symptom of the haunting dominance of the unpredictable immediate and thus of death. For Wordsworth, Esthwaite is both the scene of poetic birth and an “apocalyptic wounding” (Hartman 87). The poem is also thus an experiment in which he seeks an experience of time that might render his mind capable of both accepting the inevitability of his own death and surviving the death of loved ones. In Wordsworth, I would suggest, the personification of nature precisely serves the purpose of transforming pain into pleasure via self-pity. By giving to nature the

compassionate features of his dead or absent family members, he seeks to discover in natural and mythic forms the timeless feeling of his childhood, the innocence before time-and-death-consciousness, and he seeks to discover and incorporate the power to do so within and to himself. We may thus see this image of Pity, a prosopopoeia projected onto nature, as a reaction to the acute experience that is generated by the need of a self-conscious and in acute confrontation with the fact of death and transience.

### **Pity and Memory**

Too young to fully appropriate the distantiating power of memory and the feeling of continuity it provides, he everywhere seeks shelter from what de Man calls “the anxiety of the moment” (“Time” 8). Pity’s pensive tranquility, it seems, is as fleeting as Fear’s manic possession: it only provides a temporary respite in a process that otherwise seems to be one of steady descent and dissolution. His comments on his youthful days in The Prelude bear this out:

... even in that tempestuous time  
                   Those hallowed and pure motions of the sense  
 Which seem, in their simplicity, to own  
 An intellectual charm, that calm delight  
 Which, if I care not, surely must be long  
 To those first-born affinities that fit  
 Our new existence to existing things,  
 And, in our dawn of being, constitute  
 The bond of union betwixt life and joy  
 ... even then,  
 A Child, I held unconscious intercourse  
 With the eternal Beauty. (I: 577-590)

In pity’s inadequacy he here recognizes the origin and ground of his “being” and “existence,” which, however caught up in and based on external “things,” have “An intellectual charm,” and in which he is able to hold “unconscious intercourse” with “eternal” forms. However fleeting, Pity helped set the stage for his later memories of this

time when he hopes, after being severed from this past, to “fetch / Invigorating thoughts from former years” by which, he says, I “Might fix the wavering balance of my mind” (Prelude I: 649-50). It is at these moments, when the mind returns into “its former self” that he attains for himself, he says, “The strength and consolation which were mine” (Prelude III: 96-7 and 107-8).

It is later in the poem, however, in the figure of “Memory,” that he makes “Pity” more continuously available as a conscious vehicle of consolation to the present. Having anticipated the value and potential of memory, he seeks to add it, as if in advance of having a sufficient past to reflect on, by projecting for himself a future from which to view the present from a more comfortable distance. Unable to “pry / Through time’s dark veil” so as to know “The hour when these sad orbs shall close,” he beseeches himself to “Cease” the fruitless attempt, and instead he chooses to envision himself and his current moment through “the eyes of age.” “Then” (in that future) he envisions himself as an old man reading “the book of Nature,” fixing his “feeble gaze” on the “year” of “childhood.” There, from the vantage point of the future, retracing “each scene” with the help of memory, he opens up for the present an alternative position from which to attain the self-control and security of a spectator:

Perhaps my pains might be beguil’d  
 By some sweet vacant gazing child  
 He the long wondrous tale would hear ...  
 For while I wandered round the veil  
 From every rock would ‘hang a tale’  
 While he with questions dear and dear  
 Called tale from tale and tear from tear” (Extract V: p. 494).

As if longing prophetically for the powers of memory, which he will forefront in The Prelude, without a significant past to turn too, he creates one for himself out of his

present by projecting for himself a future position of reflection from which he may see his current self as merely a residual self-image. There are three intratextual, temporal positions here: the suffering speaker, the old story-teller, and the pitying child, all of whom, I would suggest, represent types of the poet himself and types of temporal positions. His own "Memory" transforms the present into a past as if to escape the claustrophobia of the immediate instant that presses so close, so as to attain for the present a new feeling of duration refined and purified of youthful excess, a duration in which he gains the time to compose himself, to moderate his energies, and to perceive rather than be controlled by present isolation and discomfort.

The space that opens in time via the imagination and poetic form allows for self-exchange, i.e. for personal re-creation and the transformation of the present into a fullness of times: past, present, and future. The "vacant gazing child" also stands in for the speaker of the poem; the child could be seen as either a "pre-lapsarian" (pre-death-consciousness) or at least a younger version of the young poet, or the young poet himself shedding tears (pity's most conventional physiological effect) for himself, thereby beguiling his own pain through the retelling to an earlier version of himself in an imagined future the tale of his present woes. Through this memorialization of the present, pity may intercede in an otherwise ungraspable moment, interfusing that moment with a consciousness of time able to contemplate at once the durability and the unfailing mutability of the human condition. Memory here is another one of Pity's "forms," a mechanism of temporal distantiation, which gives to the present a measure of self-distance, a distance necessary for the pain-beguiling power sympathetic exchange. The "tale" of his woes becomes the vehicle whereby he carves out in and for himself a home

independent of immediate contact with either real human beings or the natural “spots” from which Pity and Fear seem to emerge of their own accord. This is an experience of consciousness, in de Man’s words, which “does not relate itself any longer to nature but to a temporal entity.” Here, “the bond between men is not one of common enterprise, or of a common belonging to nature: it is much rather the recognition of a common temporal predicament” in the image of his own personal destiny in time (“Time” 15).

By making himself child and man at once, he thereby establishes in time a reciprocity between past/present and future so as to expand the experience of the present moment and create within it a condition of not just metaphorical but narrative, or sequentially ordered, intermediacy, in which growth and dissolution, birth and death, participate in filling out a compressed present. Temporal distance—memory—makes pity a resource *of the self to the self*. He is his own father. From Fear to Pity to Memory, there is a movement towards increasing levels of distance from the epicenter of trauma (whether of birth or death), thereby providing the self a temporal circumference or horizon—a radius defined by the limits of birth and death—from which to look back into the self and attain a position in which the flux of time becomes, if momentarily, a perceptible and thus humanized experience. The main problem Wordsworth is reacting to, then, is not so much that there are no human objects on whom he might “vent his sympathy,” as Averill has suggested (above), but that there are no subjects, no actual family members, available *to pity him*, that there is no one there to sympathize with *his* current situation. He thus makes his own pity a form of nature able to console him in his losses. In other words, his “compassion” is not “[u]ngrounded by any definite human object”: he is the “definite human object” and, considering his circumstances, the

“appropriate human centre” of his own pity. Via memory, pity terminates in the pitier.

In Esthwaite, Wordsworth describes his experience at his father’s funeral in the following way:

Long Long upon yon steepy rock  
 Alone I bore the bitter shock  
 Long Long my swimming eyes did roam  
 For little Horse to bear me home  
 To bear me what avails my tear  
 To sorrow o’er a Father’s bier.— ...  
 Nor did my little heart foresee  
 —She lost a home in losing thee. (446, 448)

The repeated use of “Long” suggests not only the temporal intensity of the experience but a *longing* for “home”: it might read “*I Long, I Long... / For.... Home.*” Having become homeless, “little more than Heav’n was left” (448). Unable to find more than a fleeting consolation in the notion of meeting his father again in heaven, his mind turns at the ring of a “solemn knell” and

A still voice whispered to my breast  
 I soon shall be with them that rest  
 Then, may one kind and pious friend  
 Assiduous over my body bend.  
 Once might I see him turn aside  
 The kind unwilling tear to hide  
 In peace beneath a green grass heap  
 In church-yard such a death of day  
 As heard the pensive sighs of Gray  
 And if the Children loitering round  
 Should e’er disturb the holy ground  
 ... come with pensive pace  
 The violated sod replace  
 And what would ev’n in death be dear  
 Ah pour upon the spot a tear.

Again he turns to an image of himself in the future, to a moment beyond his own lifetime, and this time a friend sheds a tear for him. He compensates for the loss of father via fantasy by seeking pitiers, whether through personification or memory, so as to console himself in



his anguish. Here the “other,” or what Smith calls the “person principally concerned” is himself. His visions of sympathy lack a true other, they lack authentic intersubjectivity. Instead, his inward turn of pity, its many “forms,” are an intrapsychic intersubjectivity. He is not merely pitying himself, the movement is more radical and complex than that.

Finding himself unattached from society, he moves from fear to the memorialization of the present to self-pity, or some version of this sequence, in order to find anchorage within himself. But all of this is mediated by the consciousness of mortality. What de Man says in his study of time in “The Winander Boy” can thus be equally applied here:

The structure of the poem, although it seems retrospective, is in fact proleptic. . . . Wordsworth is reflecting on his own death which lies, of course, in the future, and can only be anticipated. . . . Wordsworth is thus anticipating a future event as if it existed in the past. Seeming to be remembering, to be moving to a past, he is in fact anticipating a future. The objectification of the past self as that of a consciousness that unwittingly experiences an anticipation of its own death, allows him to reflect on an event that is, in fact, unimaginable. For this is the real terror of death, that it lies truly beyond the reach of reflection. Yet the poem names the moment of death in a reflective mood, and it is this reflective mood that makes it possible to transform what would otherwise be an experience of terror into . . . relative appeasement. (9)

In Esthwaite, “Pity” is a “reflective mood” and is the existential force which makes available this characteristically Wordsworthian “temporal perspective,” which leads to an encounter with what de Man calls “meditative time” (9). In one sense, as Smith’s model might have it, through his “friend’s” tears, he survives his own death by finding his “home” in the breast of an other, yet in another sense he is his own friend and is able, through what might be called an act of pre-retrospection or pre-retrospective self-pity, to internalize the power of survival in a mood of acquiescence, as a way to accept his own and his loved ones’ mortality. By accepting his failure to overcome the power of time in

advance of his own death, he seems able to feel himself as a participant in time rather than as one of its outcasts and victims.

Self-pity here means self-transcendence, the formal precondition of “authentic” self-knowledge. He must be able to imagine himself operating outside of or from the other side of time in order to orient and perceive himself and to participate in time, and, in that memory is the vehicle of this “moment” of self-pity, time may thus be recognized as “the power that maintains the imagination” (de Man, “Time” 16). In self-pity, acquiescence (registered poetically by the concepts of stillness and tranquility) thereby appears, paradoxically, as an inward self-affirmation, the mastery of a trauma, a sort of premonition of power in the midst of a self-conscious recognition of transience and dissolution. Wordsworthian self-pity thus becomes the ground for an encounter with time, in which time may be recognized as the ground for an authentic understanding and a deepening of self. However, Wordsworth will come to see his early form of self-memorialization as a weak and immature, albeit structurally foundational, form or version of memory. Memory is, here, that technology of the self whereby time is measured and its limits marked off in a search for a way to impose meaning on an otherwise randomly associated mess of formless things.

### **The Turn to Self-Sufficiency**

In The Prelude, reflecting back on his youthful days, however, he recognizes that his exuberance fell short of true “imaginative Power”:

Even then it slept  
When, wrought upon by tragic sufferings,  
The heart was full; amid my sobs and tears  
It slept, even in the season of my youth:  
For though I was most passionately moved  
And yielded to the changes of the scene

With most obsequious feeling, yet all this  
 Passed not beyond the suburbs of the mind. (Prelude VII: 500-507)

Here we begin to see Wordsworth seeking a more thorough transition to the mind. Here we can see the young Wordsworth struggling to make the transition from the simple dependencies of childhood, in which his identity resides in others and in natural things, to the independence of an adult already familiar with and practiced in the contingencies of time. He is learning how to hold *himself* together, so that he might one day admonish his reader to live “with Thyself, / And for Thyself,” in that state of being in which “each man” recognizes that he “is a memory to himself” (Prelude II: 482-3 and III:189). What Wordsworth learns in this tenuous period of life is “A quiet independence of the heart... / The self-sufficing power of solitude” (Prelude II: 73 and 78). Wordsworth himself describes this as a period of transition, as a sort of bridge, initiation, or point of entry that will provide the inner support for his “transit from the smooth delights / ... of simple youth” to the complex and busy world of men and the society of men. It was in the valley of Esthwaite that he first established within himself “something that resembled an *approach* / Towards mortal business” (my italics), a sort of stable, intermediate vantage point or passage and set of emotional and intellectual (ontological) resources that will become available in later years through a more sophisticated language and form of memory, and with which he will hold himself together in the spiritually deadening world of “business.” He calls this “approach” to an unknown future “... a privileged world / Within a world, a midway residence / With all its intervenient imagery.” It was better to have experienced this “moment” of transition, he feels, than to have been

Thrust out abruptly into Fortunes way  
 Among the conflicts of substantial life;  
 By a more just gradation did lead on

To higher things, more naturally matured,  
For permanent possession. (Prelude III: 550-562)

Pity is as an “intervenient” image, a preludic figure, that not only helps open up a broader temporal horizon within “Esthwaite” and within the poet, but also names the inner “spirit,” the inwardly structuring force and engine, of his personal and historically conditioned need for self-sufficiency and time-consciousness, which organizes his desires in his later life and drives him to attain a more “permanent” access “To higher things.”

The inward turn of pity names one part in a process whereby time becomes a tool of stabilization for the young poet. Esthwaite becomes the space in which he is able to experiment with this future in advance and his present as if it were a past. Esthwaite is not just a place: like pity, it is a span of time, a period of transition, a threshold, between potentially antithetical experiences of time and forms of life. In this period he begins to store up the resources to help him withstand “This heavy time of change for all mankind” (Prelude X: 985). His search is for some form of temporal permanence, some stability in the midst of flux. Nearly severed from the “social chain,” he stands in a “midway residence,” hovering between the past and future and madness and serenity of mind; suspended in this middle zone of interfusion, he discovers within himself the rudimentary resources, access to “higher things,” with which to survive an encounter with the modern forms of time and “heavy ... change.” In “Eswaith,” he is beginning to transform the “apocalyptic wound” attained via the death of father and mother into a vehicle of self-sufficiency, by transforming victimhood through repetition (i.e. the repeated intervention of moments of fear and pity) into a form of, albeit imperfect, temporal mastery—the essential structural system is established during this period of life as he moves towards Cambridge and London.

In his “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface (1815),” Wordsworth suggests that for the youthful reader poetry is more a “fashionable pleasure” and a “species of luxurious amusement” than a vehicle of serious, spiritual self-discovery and awakening. However, “[i]n middle and declining age, a scattered number of serious persons resort to poetry, as to religion, for a protection against the pressure of trivial appointments, and as a consolation for the afflictions of life” (640). Poetry, in middle age, thus compensates for a world that has become dominated by the pressures of “Sense,” a world in which there seems to be no time for the restorative powers of contemplation and the mind. The modern world seems to work against the mind, which needs rescuing.

In his “Preface to the Lyrical Ballads (1802),” Wordsworth claims that “a multitude of causes, unknown to the former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor” (599). He puts poetry at the center of a mental and spiritual revival. And, as in his youth, tranquility is initially the key to the security and balance of mind: “Poetry,” he writes, “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquility disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind” (611). As he matures as a poet, “tranquility” becomes a bridge (rather than a sort of end in itself) to a deeper level of emotional experience, one that moves beyond the “suburbs of the mind.” The reader is called to elevate his or her emotion to the level of a mental state through contemplation. By focusing mental attention on the emotion—rather than on the imagery, language, meter, or the characters in the poem itself—the emotion is sublimated

and becomes itself an object of thought. The suffering object of the poem becomes a bridge to an alternative *intra* subjective encounter. Although the poetry itself is meant to produce the initial emotional experience, it is through a turn away from the poem, and away from the reader's own physiological reaction to the internal experience of the poem, that the original feeling itself is elevated via "tranquility" and "contemplation" to the status of mental existence. Beginning with the "language of sense" and the pathos of "animal sensation" ("Tintern Abbey" 109, 75), poetry is meant to transform, what he calls in his "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface (of 1815)," this "*human... pathos*" and "ordinary [or everyday, common] sorrow" into what he calls "*meditative... pathos*" ("Essay, Supplementary ... (1815)," 660). This revolution of "the soul into herself," he says, produces an inner "accord," which he calls "sublimated humanity," which is "at once" able to take in in one view "a history of the remote past and the remotest future" (660-661).

This sublimation marks a terminal point from pity as a vehicle of sociability to pity as a vehicle of subjectivity. Pity formally, though it perhaps always had been, morphs, in Wordsworth, into a form of self-pity, a focus on the feeling of the pitier not the pitied. This amounts to nothing less than the rejection of pity itself. This is a crucial move. The danger for Wordsworth is that when we pity someone we are in danger of being disempowered by them, pity involves a potential loss of control to the one pitied. Pity has a revolutionary potential and, through it, one may be compelled to internalize and act on the victim's own political values. He thus criticizes Clarissa in his "Preface" because Clarissa's sufferings press too closely and stay at the level of bodily impulse. For Wordsworth, there must be a greater distance between spectator and sufferer, otherwise,

psychic and social discord will ensue.

In his poem, “Lines Written Near Richmond, Upon the Thames, At Evening,” the speaker, at twilight, sees the waters of the Thames flow “backward,” an image that allures the “youthful bard” into a fantasy of immortality: “heedless of the flowing gloom, / He deems their colours shall endure.” The image of the river has the power of “beguiling” the painful fact of mortality. It’s at the moment when the past and future, backwards and forwards, interfuse, when the poet’s heart is “in” the river, as if to re-appropriate its ontological stability there:

Who would not cherish dreams so sweet,  
 Though grief and pain may come to-morrow?  
 Glide gently, thus forever glide,  
 O Thames! that other bards may see,  
 As lovely visions by thy side  
 As now, fair river! come to me.  
 Oh glide, fair stream! for ever so;  
 Thy quiet soul on all bestowing,  
 'Till all our minds for ever flow,  
 As thy deep waters now are flowing.  
 ... yet be as now thou art,  
 That in thy waters may be seen  
 The image of a poet's heart,  
 How bright, how solemn, how serene!  
 Such heart did once the poet bless,  
 Who, pouring here a later ditty,  
 Could find no refuge from distress,  
 But in the milder grief of pity.  
 Remembrance! as we glide along,  
 For him suspend the dashing oar,  
 And pray that never child of Song  
 May know his freezing sorrows more.  
 How calm! how still! the only sound,  
 The dripping of the oar suspended!

The wished-for moment will happen after “all our minds” flow like the river is “now,” “that other bards may see” visions like his own. Here again, stasis and motion interfuse in the image. There is a repetition of poetic moments here. In this dedication to Gray (the

“him” in the poem), the poet finds “refuge from distress” in “pity,” in a catharsis that gives way to “Remembrance” and what we might call poetic time. Time’s irrevocable flowing, its moment of tidal back-turn, interrupts its more consistent “gloom.” The river represents immortality and mortality at once. The poet’s heart is in the river, and it is at twilight that pity emerges. The poet is at once participant in and spectator of time.

The backward motion of the river, and of time, much as in Duddon, is a moment of “refuge,” the privileged moment of the faculty of the mind—i.e. imagination. From a scene that moves from human effort to suspension, the imagination turns back time and suspends the will in an act of more “conscious will” that results, via self-pity, in a tranquil acceptance. He creates a point of view beyond earthly time (the “dashing oar” is suspended) in a world that still does not escape from mutability. He “asserts” this point of view, says de Man, “within” the knowledge of its own transience” (“Time” 13). Here “remembrance” emerges within a truly temporal perspective. This temporal perspective is the vehicle that makes recollection possible. Here duration is embraced and the infinite moves. Time is the ground of the imaginative act, its precondition. Poetry is revealed here as the “dwelling-place” of memory, as “the retrospective recording of man’s failure to overcome the power of time” (de Man, “Time” 15). This is a world in which Eternity, the divine, have been lost, and yet the poet is determined to celebrate, through his poetry, his power of self-assertion. In this sense, the poet rejects “life ever after.” Here, in the river, to repeat Wordsworth’s words, the “knowledge of the [Poet] cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance” through the power of “sympathy.” Here we witness in the river Gray’s inheritance that we may draw into ourselves from the river. The image of the suspended oars, as a salute to Gray, is an



image of continuity, i.e. an “inheritance,” which available in those objects poetic language has sanctified in previous generations. It gives to the landscape a meaning accessible only to those attuned to the poetic imagination—like the child in Eswaithe who reads and weeps over the stories hung from different objects in the landscape by the old poet.

It’s as if the natural object, without poetry, has lost any power to signify something beyond itself. The poet must, therefore, infuse the object with meanings borrowed from the resource of his own imagination as an inheritance to the next generation. The river, that place of “substantial” action (oars rowing) and commodity trafficking, without poetic intervention will become *just* a thing void of spiritual use and relevance. Art and its aestheticization of the object become the vehicle of an ontological infusion of meaning into the object the art depicts. De Man argues that the Romantic image “is inspired by a nostalgia for the natural object.” The poet’s heart is in the river as if it were his natural home, and in pity he seems capable of drawing its felt participation in the river’s stillness (really his own stillness) back to himself—to the home of his own breast. But, de Man suggests, “[s]uch a nostalgia can only exist when the transcendental presence is forgotten. ... The existence of the poetic image is itself a sign of divine absence, and the conscious use of poetic imagery an admission of this absence.” Yet language has this advantage, that it can never” achieve “the absolute identity with itself that exists in the natural object. ... The word is a free presence to the mind, the means by which the permanence of natural entities can be put into question” (Rhetoric of Romanticism 6-7). Eternity may be one of poetry’s central objects, but it also recognizes eternal form as a threat to its unique ontologically indeterminate status.

### Poetry and Pity's Inward Turn

Poetry is thus a consolation to the self from the self—a human circle—that depends on the “forever about to be” of human time, and its own failure to attain the ontological status, the relatively timeless quality, of the object it seems to be seeking, for its existence. Language does not make sense as a medium of exchange without time and impermanence. In this way, the river’s “gloom” dooms the imagination in advance of its assertions of immortality, thereby guaranteeing the imagination’s continuity in time. As we’ve seen elsewhere, here too pity gives way to “Remembrance,” an act of pity that returns to the poet himself. And the reciprocity within the poet that pity makes possible, the celebration of his self-produced tranquility, is guaranteed by “the grief and pain” that “*may* come to-morrow.” The image is here one of self-assertion that is guaranteed by the ongoingness of self-loss. Human suffering, the most tangibly felt effect of time, becomes the precondition of poetic existence. The poem sees an end to human suffering as its own end. Human suffering (time, which guarantees its continuity) here becomes a portal to the theatre of consciousness itself, to the source of one’s own powers to be. Self-pity, or what we might call “meditative pity” (pity elevated to the status of ideational object) thus makes it possible, makes it acceptable to the self, to “forget” God—“the transcendental presence”—and to celebrate in oneself the power to endure.

It is in his experience of London, as represented in Prelude VII, that we see some of Wordsworth’s most dynamic visions of meditative pathos. In Prelude VII, as elsewhere, images of human suffering become not, strictly speaking, opportunities for pity, but rather for its “meditative” form. What is felt in the body as a fleeting and reflexive response to tragic suffering may become in the human mind and imagination a

more permanent form and thus a more stable experience of intermediacy. In meditative pathos, pity and fear are sublimated, held together in the tension of a stillness and calm haunted by a subdued sense of anticipation, “a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused” (“Tintern Abbey” 96-7). Tragic feelings become the features of a privatized encounter with time and the scaffolding of a new capacity for self-orientation in the human world, in history, and thus in the face of dramatic historical change. Self-pity transforms existential fears into a celebration of the felt duration of the present made accessible to perception by the various forms and technologies of self-pity. Pity, as it appears in Esthwaite, is the form and blueprint of meditative pity. But this is not a disembodied encounter with time. It is in “the language of the sense” that he finds “The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being.” The body must be stilled, “the motion of our human blood / Almost suspended,” before the “animal movements” of the body and the language of the sense are transfigured to meditative and intellectual feelings.

There is a relationship of dependency here between the mind and body, in which the body sustains and makes possible the feeling of autonomous duration. Fears, through the mechanisms of self-pity that transform sense into intellectual form, are sublimated into premonitions of an eternal future that yet, thankfully, can never come. It is in the midst of this intermediate temporal “zone” that the authentic self (the self-authenticating self-image), in de Man’s terminology, emerges. It is the passage or threshold itself, between profane to sacred times (both of which are discoverable in human consciousness), that is the subject of Wordsworth’s best poetry. It is at this threshold that permanence is a premonition, a premonition of a completeness that the poet does not

actually want, for life happens at this threshold. Wordsworth says that our “home[] / is with infinitude, and only there; / With hope it is, hope that can never die, / Effort, and expectation, and desire, / And something evermore about to be” (Prelude VI: 538-42). Infinitude is a home that is “evermore” in a state of incompleteness, and it is this incompleteness that is being celebrated here. He encounters what is true about himself not in nature but in an encounter with the temporal entity of infinitude. His “infinitude” is neither an escape from human suffering and the contingencies of the body nor a refuge from time in eternal time. He does not wish to do away with human longing. He wishes to remain in that tension in which time is “ever more about to be.” In other words, his imagination depends on and is sustained by time, without which hope, expectation, desire, and effort might dissolve. Fear of death emerges here as a less conscious fear of disembodied eternal time: “Wordsworth always found it difficult and frightening to imagine any state of disembodiment, even that of heavenly beatitude” (Miller 86). It is here where pleasure and pain, joy and human suffering intermingle. To embrace anything else is to reject life as it is. Outside of time, all tensions melt away; while possessed by time, the self breaks apart, and life with it. In *Pity*, as we’ve seen, time is humanized; it is felt rather than fled. In the register of morality, de Man argues, “The retrospective recording of man’s failure to overcome the power of time”—one of the procedures of self-pity—“is indeed a sentiment directed towards other men rather than nature.” There is in this embrace of time “the recognition of a common temporal predicament,” and it is in this “recognition” that self-pity begins to morph into *Self-pity*, a shared human experience with time (15).

Before moving our attention to London, we will briefly pause in our movement

towards “the City” to “the scattered villages” of England. In “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” we witness an “old Beggar” taking “his rounds” “Among the Farms the solitary huts / Hamlets and thinly-scattered villages” (90, 88-9). From “childhood,” the local inhabitants “have ... received,” “from this solitary being,” “That first mild touch of sympathy and thought, / In which they found their kindred with a world / Where want and sorrow were” (102, 103, 105-7). In the same way that the personified figure of Pity “gives” to the young poet of Esthwaite, here the beggar provides the local subject with an opportunity for “sympathy and thought”—they “receive” this from him, he gives them this. Paradoxically, his suffering and isolation represents a form of beneficence to the less vulnerable. His presence turns the mind of the onlooker within himself.

As an image of wandering vulnerability, the beggar becomes the vehicle of the “first mild touch” of moral self-reflection. His presence provides moments of self-insight and “self-congratulation” to the spectator. “[A]ll Behold in him / A silent monitor, which on their minds / Must needs impress a transitory thought / Of self-congratulation, to the heart / Of each recalling his peculiar boons,” and though the beggar is unable to actually help locals “preserve” their “present blessings, “he, at least / And ‘tis no vulgar service, makes them felt.” The effect of the beggar is to draw attention away from his isolation and suffering to the spectator’s response, to his sympathy, to the “felt” experience of his own pity. Here the actual beggar, the “everdayness” of his actuality as beggar, disappears or is distanced and he becomes a screen for an experience of time that is sacred. This is how the beggar “gives.” The spectator “receives” from the presence of the beggar nothing less than his moral and spiritual being. The beggar is the standard-bearer of personal and communal moral history. He is, in effect, a personification of their own pity. As Averill

points out, he is also “a borderer ‘dwelling betwixt life and death,’ tottering in a limbo between motion and not-motion” (120). Just as Pity in “Esthwaite” hovered between day and night, summer and winter, the Cumberland beggar hovers between life and death: he too is an image of intermediacy, one of Pity’s “forms.” As Jonathan Wordsworth has argued, he is just one of Wordsworth’s many “borderers.” He too is “A Borderer dwelling betwixt life and death, / A Living Statue or a statued life” (from the “book-five” Prelude p. 624).

In the image of the Leech-Gatherer in “Resolution and Independence,” the “Old Man” is bent into the image of a circle, that is, into the form of an eternal “pilgrimage”: “His body was bent double, feet and head / Coming together in their pilgrimage. ... Motionless as a Cloud the Old Man stood” (73-4, 82). Here, as in traditional forms of time, images of motion and motionlessness unite in the symbol of circularity. The word “stood” evokes vertical stasis, but his body is turning in the process of a pilgrimage. His body itself becomes a remnant image of a more primordial and historically distant form of time in which stability and mobility are complimentary rather than contradictory elements of time. As the old man speaks, “his voice,” says Wordsworth, “was like a stream / ... nor word from word could I divide.” His words embody temporal continuity, types of the unity and fullness of time. He suddenly, then, seems to the poet as a figure in a “dream,” “Or like a Man from some far region sent; / To give me human strength” (115-119). Again, the sufferer gives just as Pity in Esthwaite gave. He provides the poet with “strength.” Like the discharged soldier, whose “cheeks [are] sunken; and his mouth / Shewed ghastly in the moonlight,” he is a man “Forlorn and desolate ... cut off / From all his kind, and more than half detached / From his own nature.” His face bends down to

earth to meet his feet, as if gravity (the grave) itself could draw the human frame into the shape of a circle. Yet, “his form” was one of “steadiness. His shadow / Lay at his feet and moved not” (“The Discharged Soldier,” 48-72).

The Cumberland beggar too carries around him a divine aura and is someone pushed into the solitude of his own being by the “tide” of modernization and the “restless” sweeping aside of “Statesmen”:

... in that vast solitude to which  
 The tide of things has led him, he appears  
 To breathe and live but for self alone,  
 Unblamed uninjured, let him bear about  
 The good which the benignant law of heaven  
 Has hung around him, and, while life is his,  
 Still let him prompt the unlettered Villagers  
 To tender offices and pensive thoughts (67-9, 156-164).

In meditative pathos, pity is sublimated, as it is already in Esthwaite, at least in part, into reverence. Here the beggars, as “borderers” between death and life, as “twilight” figures, are like the forms of Philomela and the angels and elves of Esthwaite; they comfort and provide strength to the poet. Here, however, Pity has been given a human form, though they still seem to be forms of the poet's own mind. When he encounters such sufferers he also encounters time.

When Wordsworth encounter London, he longs for “nature’s intermediate hours of rest, / When the great tide of human life stands still.” London evokes in him an experience of temporal disorientation:

... one feeling was there which belonged  
 To this great City, by exclusive right;  
 How often in the overflowing Streets,  
 Have I gone forward with the Crowd, and said  
 Unto myself, the face of every one  
 That passes by me is a mystery,  
 Thus have I looked, nor cease to look, oppressed

By thought of what, and wither, when and how,  
 Until the shapes before me became  
 A second-sight procession ...  
 And all the ballast of familiar life,  
 The present, and the past ... all stays,  
 All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man  
 Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known.

His personal means of self-orientation is narrativization, a need to know the “what, and wither, when and how” of each mysterious “face.” Story would add a depth to the otherwise hurried and blended surface of dehumanized faces. They are impenetrable to the imagination, which demands some measure of tranquility for its operation. Like souls in Dante’s Inferno, no center emerges, time is homogeneous, no hierarchy or heterogeneous structuring principles stand out, just random mobs of people, a quantitative field of desires without the intervention of a moral or qualitative vertical line—no points of sacred contact. He is thus, as he was in Esthwaite when in a state of fear, hurried out of himself.

But, in the midst of this “moving pageant,” he glimpses a different type of face, one that stands out from the crowd and provides a point of orientation—perhaps a type of his future self. Again the image of a river (or waterfall) as an emblem of temporal equanimity emerges, and again the image of suffering provides access to tranquility. He is suddenly, he says,

... smitten with the view  
 Of a blind Beggar, who, with upright face,  
 Stood propped against a Wall, upon his Chest  
 Wearing a written paper, to explain  
 The story of the Man, and who he was.  
 My mind did at this spectacle turn round  
 As with the might of waters, and it seemed  
 To me that in this Label was a type,  
 Or emblem, of the utmost that we know,  
 Both of ourselves and of the universe:



And, on the shape of the unmoving man,  
 His fixed face and sightless eyes, I looked  
 As if admonished from another world (Prelude VII:612-23)

Here the image of a beggar, who cannot return Wordsworth's gaze, provides him with access to "another world." He is a sacred vision, an image of stillness in the hurried and homogenous crowd of blank faces. In contrast to the swarm of faces, in the image of the beggar a depth is encountered, a structuring element in the self of the poet emerges. Here, the beggar has a story; narrative sacrilizes objects, making them a portal to a "world" of self-authentication. This is another of Wordsworth's attempt to sanctify human suffering. He criticizes Coleridge in fact for not having the capacity to do so, that is, for not being able to elevate human suffering and pity to the status of a meditation: "Not being able to dwell on or sanctify natural woes, he took to the supernatural, and hence his *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*" (from Little, 100-101). The beggar, at least, unlike the other faces in the crowd, has not only a story but also a metaphysical aura. Through the distantiated image of the beggar, the speaker thus finds refuge from the everydayness and the temporal acceleration of modern life that threatens to engulf him in the defensive reaction of self-pity precisely by exonerating himself from the more common and reflexive experience of sympathetic sociability—this scene represents nothing less than a rejection of pity. In self-pity, it is really the speaker's suffering that is sublimated and sacrilized. In that it ultimately turns him to himself, self-pity guarantees the speaker's sense of independence, a feeling of creative self-sufficiency. This is one example among many in Wordsworth's poetry of what William Galperin has referred to as "*unshared* compassion," a withdrawal of sympathetic engagement "that allows the speaker to appear larger than life" (143). This "unsharing" is also thus a rejection of the everydayness of the

present moment in favor of an alternative temporality. Everyday suffering is thus an obstacle to the kind of metaphysical autonomy the speaker is after. What Galperin has argued about the Leach-gatherer may thus be applied equally to the blind beggar: namely, that he provides a passageway to “a temporality that situates the speaker elsewhere.” The speaker thus attains a position in time commensurate with a feeling of “autonomy rather than a bond of sympathy” (150, 148). This implication is that, in the wake of time’s modern acceleration, without this inward turn of pity, men become “the slaves ... of low pursuits, / Living amid the same perpetual flow / Of trivial objects, melted and reduced / To one identity, by differences / That have no law, no meaning and no end” (Prelude VII:701-05).

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