

Haggling With the Muses: Negotiating Value in 18th Century English Poetry

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Abstract

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“Haggling With the Muses: Negotiating Value in 18th Century English Poetry” argues that English poets writing in the 1730s and 1740s were substantially engaged with the emergent economic system as a result of their professional aspirations. In particular, I present an in-depth examination and reading of Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts*, and show how Young channeled his frustrations at his lack of success into imagining an economic system that would privilege his own efforts. Young’s poetry grapples with the concept of labor value vs. market value, the meaning of capital, and what it means to be an economic individual. His use of religious idiom enhances the complexity of his imagined system. *Night Thoughts* is part of the so-called Graveyard School; and in this dissertation, I investigate whether Young’s engagement with economics was an isolated phenomenon, or a more widespread aspect of poetry from this period. Specifically, I examine the works of Thomas Parnell, James Thomson, and William Shenstone. I

also explore the concepts of otherworldliness and virtue, both of which have been strongly associated with graveyard poetry.

Earlier studies of eighteenth-century verse have often treated poems from the Graveyard School as products of simplistic religious piety, and as a transitional point between the high wit of the early eighteenth century and Romanticism. My research indicates that it is essential to the economic and professional situations of poets in order to understand the concerns that are likely to appear in their verse. I argue that eighteenth-century reading practices encouraged readers to extract short excerpts of verse for epigraphs and commonplace books, and that these activities obscured the economic content of *Night Thoughts*, and were responsible for the reputation of Young and his contemporaries as authors of melancholic Christian verse.

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For Tim Heath

This kind of thing ... is the body and bones of music. Anybody can have the harmony, if they will leave us the counterpoint.

--Dorothy Sayers, *Gaudy Night*

if a thing loves it is infinite

--William Blake, Annotations to Swedenborg

Introduction

This dissertation is a study of verse written and published in England between roughly 1720 and 1760, and often referred to collectively as the graveyard school or graveyard poets. The “graveyard” label originates in the tendency of authors to focus on death, and to include graveyards and other objects and symbols associated with death in their poems. Both of these labels are used by modern critics, as Eric Parisot notes, with hesitancy, because of the way that the field has dramatically expanded and contracted in the past. At its smallest contraction point, the adjective “graveyard” applied to this period refers to four poems: Thomas Parnell’s “A Night-Piece on Death,” Robert Blair’s “The Grave,” Edward Young’s “Night Thoughts,” and Thomas Gray’s “Elegy in a Country-Churchyard. At its largest expansion point, as defined by earlier critical investigations, it covers over one hundred years, stretching from 1721-1830. The term “school” suggests a collegiality that arguably did not exist. While some of the poets associated with the label knew each other, and were even friendly, their imagery was not the result of a concerted project or mission. And yet, even a quick glance at the poetry from this period demonstrates easily that the graveyard style was highly influential, spawning imitations in single lines and entire poems.

Previous studies have attempted to understand this poetry in a variety of ways. Critics have investigated its focus on death as an aspect of religious piety, and its relationship to religious and poetic enthusiasm. Others have sought to explain the imagery and mood which these poems cultivate as heavily influenced by Milton; or alternately, as a rejection of the high wit of Swift and Pope, and thus as a precursor to Romanticism. This study examines it in the context of the media and economic transitions that were taking place in the early eighteenth century. The steep increase in publishing that began after the expiration of the Licensing Act in

1695 provided would-be authors with new potential avenues for success – and also new occasions for competition. The printing boom likewise complicated the relationship between authors and patrons. As Dustin Griffin points out, patrons were seen as having ownership of the works poets produced, and even seen as equally responsible with the poet for works' existence. In return, they provided financial and authoritative support and encouragement. A patron's willingness to claim a poem added to its value (30–31). However, patronage was increasingly scarce, in comparison with the rising numbers of would-be authors. Moreover, it was often necessary to publish in order to find a patron in the first place; and to continue publishing until one was obtained. Nor was patronage regulated in a way that provided authors with any real security. The effect, I argue, was that the stakes of success were amplified as never before. Thus, like Eric Parisot, I read the graveyard school as highly invested in innovation and experimentation (17), and intensely cognizant of the possibilities of success and failure.

The premise of this dissertation is that poets from this era were substantially engaged with the emergent economic system as a result of their professional aspirations. I do not intend for my focus to imply that the graveyard poets were the only writers thinking about value and economics; or that they did so because of their religious background. To say so would be a variation on Max Weber's Protestant work ethic argument, which I discuss below. This project began with Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, in which religious imagery and Christian narrative became the means for Young to think about value. It seemed natural to see whether other poets who used similar themes displayed like concerns. As I read, I began to see the use of the graveyard imagery as less indicative of a particular moral orientation than as a sensitivity to trends in publishing. The solitary yew at close of day and the lonely grave sold well. Thus, it

makes sense that many, if not all¹ of the writers who used the style did so because it seemed to promise success, and because success was important to them. They grappled with economic issues using the imagery that they had, which was already imbued with meaning about authority, power, and reward, in order to articulate what they were experiencing.

The result of these conditions is that authors were exploring economics from a highly individualistic and egoistic perspective. Their efforts resulted in experiential knowledge, which they used as the basis for generalization on a larger scale. They did not always find success; indeed, frustration and failure were the provocations that led to the composition of *Night Thoughts*. In many ways, then, this dissertation is a flavor of what E. P. Thompson called “history from below:” it explores the views of writers who were, for the most part, not as successful as they wanted to be. So, to be precise, my topic is economic knowledge from below, and from within the eighteenth century publishing environment. My choice to focus on this area is in contrast with the more usual practice within economic history of looking towards certain key figures who have been identified as authoritative and influential. As Michael Perelman has pointed out, “modern economists sometimes present classical political economy as a polestar by which we can fix our bearings and ... guide ourselves towards the future.” The consequence is that certain works and authors (Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo, etc.) acquire “a cumulative force—albeit highly symbolic—that calls new generations to confront them once again”(7–8). This symbolic reputation can have a distorting effect on our understanding of what economic knowledge is, and the diversity of forms that it can take.

This dissertation avoids such reductiveness by focusing on what Regenia Gagnier and John Dupré categorize as positive economic thinking. Positive economic thinking is distinct from

¹ I certainly do not intend to suggest that the use of graveyard imagery had a monolithic motivation; without a doubt there were poets who were drawn to the style used it because it connected with their moral and religious beliefs.

normative economic thinking. The former examines “the causal connections between economic phenomena of different kinds;” the latter, how this information should be used, i.e., the best way to acquire profit (Dupre and Gagnier 176). Normative economic thinking is judged according to its successes and failures in any given situation; and its utilitarian nature means that it draws the most attention within the discipline of economics. Positive economic thinking is more exploratory, less bound by the requirement for success. Causal connections in economics include the relationships between inspiration, labour, effort, and reward; all of which will be explored in the chapters that follow. To explore positive economic thinking is, as James English suggests, not to “assume the primacy of the money economy; it is a matter not of reducing culture to economics, artistic motivations to money-lust, but of enlarging the notion of economics to include systems of non-monetary, cultural, and symbolic transaction”(4). It is to focus on individuals, and their perceptions of situations, rather than simply on the end result of how much value has been acquired or lost.

By focusing on individuals, I am arguing for a perspective that has gone largely unnoticed -- a literary engagement with economics that is neither strictly satirical (like Pope’s *Dunciad*, or the numerous financial ballads being written in response to the South Sea Bubble or other economic events) nor novelistic (like Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* or Richardson’s *Pamela*), but instead, highly personal, and oriented towards trying to understand and define types of value, the ways that they circulate, and the rules that determine what is possible with value. The graveyard label is difficult because it groups together poems based on their mordant imagery and/or their didactic expression of Christian piety -- as well as on the poems’ apparent lack of fit with either the categories of Enlightenment wit (characterized by Swift and Pope) or Romanticism (characterized earliest by Wordsworth). My research is driven by the possibility that while

literary style may not be a unifying factor, economic perspective may be a better connective link. In order to see this commonality, I have cast a wide net, choosing to look at poets associated with the graveyard school for aesthetic and religious content, choosing poets who were successful, and who were not, as any of these factors might impact their engagement. In this small sample, there is both unity and variety, and I expect that the variety reflects greater variety on a larger scope.

What do I mean by value? In the last several centuries alone, value has undergone numerous transformations. It has shifted from the visceral, i.e., Shakespeare's pound of flesh in *The Merchant of Venice* to the ephemeral, i.e. the derivatives that are traded on the floors of the major stock exchanges. References to "monetary value" can give the illusion that it is a concrete term with well-defined boundaries, but this is far from true, as scholars like David Graeber have pointed out. In *Debt: the First 5,000 Years*, Graeber surveys the sinuous shifts in monetary value: how money has meant precious metal or moral obligations, and sometimes both at once. He also shows how economic knowledge and authority have metamorphosed from being widely accessible to being the possession of a select few; how economic knowledge and authority have gone from legend and folktale to difficult scientific discipline. The implications of these metamorphoses are that the history of economic thought is more diverse than the discipline of economics and its contemporary gatekeepers might admit. The genealogies of economic knowledge: from Misselden and Mun, to Steuart, to Smith, to Malthus and Ricardo, to Mill, to Marx, etc., are highly incomplete.

This dissertation attempts to shed light on some of the history of economic thinking that has been excluded. Such thinking, I argue, has not been tangential but instead has played a significant role in the various transformations that value has undergone. While much economic

criticism has focused on monetary value, in this research I am deliberately expanding the definition of value to include more than monetary instruments. I will demonstrate how individuals are aware of multiple spheres of value (aesthetic, moral, monetary) as impacting their lives. I will show that they think about these spheres of value in economic terms, meaning that they are attentive to scarcity, abundance, risk, and other factors traditionally associated with monetary economic activity.

My research complements the work that Max Weber began in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. His arguments are an important precursor to this dissertation; that said, Weber's scholarship has a different focus than this project. At the turn of the twentieth century, when the essays that appear in the *Protestant Ethic* were composed, research curiosity was focused on the question of when and how the economic behavior known as capitalism first began. Weber's original question asked how the most economically developed regions were also the ones who "not only tolerated that Puritan tyranny, but defended it" energetically. His goal was to show that Christian religious and capitalistic thinking were not incompatible, and in fact, were closely connected. I extend Weber's argument by enumerating these connections in greater detail, and showing how religious tropes became a flexible foundation for economic thought. If this study challenges Weber, it is in my argument that the *Protestant Ethic* tends to oversimplify the eighteenth century by reducing individual perspectives to a generally homogenous desire for value. Another way of expressing this is to say that Weber is most interested in capitalistic thought, and the sphere of economic thought is much larger than capitalism.

This dissertation has two primary goals: to reveal the extent of Edward Young's economic arguments within *Night Thoughts*, and to illuminate the ways that the imagery and features that have been associated with the graveyard label are expressions of economic thought.

These features have become so recognizable that they are almost clichés, easily extracted and cited as evidence, so it is my particular concern to interpret them within the context of entire poems. While these authors' economic thinking is of particular interest, I do not intend to ignore its reception among contemporary readers. Their reactions are also informative about economic perspectives of the time.

Frustration with lack of professional success was a primary stimulus that prompted authors to consider economic situations and questions of value. In my first chapter, I show how Edward Young's disappointment at finding neither patronage nor preferment resulted in the *Night Thoughts*, a description of a complex imaginary economic system that was part wishful thinking and part strenuous critique of market value. Because *Night Thoughts* is such a strong exemplar of economic thinking in poetry, reading it allows me to establish parameters that can be used to read other graveyard poems, and be more aware of their engagement with value.

My second chapter investigates whether Young's engagement with economics was an isolated phenomenon, or a more widespread aspect of the so-called graveyard poetry. I explore a wider assortment of poetry associated with the graveyard school and two of its key motifs, otherworldliness and virtue, before conducting in-depth explorations of the work of three other poets associated with the graveyard label: Thomas Parnell, James Thomson, and William Shenstone. I demonstrate how each poet displays engagement with value that has gone largely unnoticed -- and use their perspectives in order to enlarge the parameters of what economic engagement looks like in eighteenth-century verse. I conclude by suggesting a new set of questions that will allow us to more accurately read mid-eighteenth century verse for its economic engagement.

It is understandable to ask why a large-scale economic critique like that of *Night Thoughts* went unnoticed, and my third chapter answers that question by showing how the poem's first audiences are the authors of its reputation as a Christian devotional poem. I trace its appearance in a variety of different types of texts from its publication into the nineteenth century. This allows me to argue that the graveyard school, did, in fact, exist -- but that it was a creation of readers, rather than authors.

This dissertation is not intended to be a complete description of poets' engagement with value during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. Such a listing would fill multiple volumes. Exploring how these poets engaged the topic of value is to begin thinking about the relationship between economic authority and thinking. In the conclusion of this dissertation, I will address this relationship, and its implications for literary criticism at greater length.

Chapter 1:

“In Debt to the Great Proprietor of All”: Edward Young’s Poetical Political Economy

Today, Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* is known as a vociferous outpouring of grief in the service of Christian evangelism. The reality is more complex — the poem’s reputation is a joint production created by its author, and its first generations of readers. Over time, the readers’ assessment of the poem has become the dominant interpretation. Young wanted badly for the poem to succeed. He had a living as a cleric, and had been seeking political preferment for over two decades, without success. In the meantime, he had published a popular set of poetic satires, *The Love of Fame: The Universal Passion*, but otherwise failed to achieve steady success as a poet. He had composed occasional verses, featuring effusive dedications to men and women whom he hoped might become patrons — but none of these achieved second printings, or any other marks of success, let alone the longed-for patronage. *Night Thoughts* began as a 20-page folio, published anonymously by Richard Dodsley in late May, 1742. In the apparatus to his critical edition of the poem, Stephen Cornford has noted that the title page gave no indication that the poem was the first of a series. The original title was “The Complaint: or, Night-Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality.” Only the heading, “Night the First,” at the beginning of the verse, signaled that its author might have plans to continue.

That first Night introduces a speaker who mourned his sudden fall from great happiness, caused by the sudden deaths of three beloved friends. This speaker, in between moments of being transfixed by grief, addresses a younger man named Lorenzo in ominous terms. He counsels Lorenzo to beware his apparent good fortune, to “Beware what Earth calls Happiness, beware / All joys, but joys that never can expire” (1.340-41). The narrative, as it was set up,

seemed to promise both dramatic revelations of the three deaths, and further details of Lorenzo's temptation.

As it happened, Young's own fortunes were about to change. *Night Thoughts* sold out completely. Two months from the date of its first printing, the First Night was published in a second edition, with a notice advertising the imminent printing of a Second Night. By the time the Third Night was published in December of 1742, the two previous Nights were in their third edition, and at least one pirated edition was also in circulation. Young, still anonymous, opened the Fourth Night with a Preface, in which he revealed that "the Occasion of this Poem was Real, not Fictitious; so the Method pursued in it, was rather imposed, by what spontaneously arose in the Author's Mind, on that Occasion, than meditated or designed." He needed to explain why he had not provided information regarding his lost friends, or Lorenzo's foreshadowed folly. The "common Mode of Poetry," he said, was "from long narrations to draw short Morals. Here, on the contrary, the Narrative is short and the Morality arising from it makes the Bulk of the Poem." At the heart of that Morality was "one principal and important Theme" -- the knowledge of "the Christian Triumph," the "only Cure for the Fear of Death." When the Sixth Night was published, in 1744, an additional Preface clarified the poem's purpose further: to defend the principle of Man's Immortality, and to offer "plain Arguments derived from Principles which Infidels admit in common with Believers; Arguments, which appear to me altogether Irresistable." Young wanted to signal that his intentions were evangelical, rather than for amusement. His aim was religious ambition — to find common ground between the faithful and irreligious, to produce the ultimate inspiration for conversion. His public had other ideas.

Readers of *Night Thoughts* did recognize the evangelism and tremendous pathos in Young's efforts — but they did so chiefly through the narrative of loss, and the dynamic of

estrangement that they perceived between the speaker of the poem and Lorenzo. By the author's own admission, the narrative of *Night Thoughts* was short — so short that audiences took it upon themselves to flesh it out. After Young was identified as the author of the *Night Thoughts* in the index to the *Gentlemen's Magazine* in 1744, his readers pieced together what they saw as correspondences between his biography and the plot of the poem. They discovered that Young had lost his wife, stepdaughter, and his stepdaughter's husband, with whom he had been close friends. As Stephen Cornford observes, audiences wanted the deaths mentioned throughout the poem to be “absolutely autobiographically true” to Young's own life (21). These readers' fervor extended to Lorenzo, whom they deduced to be a representation of Young's own son. Their sentimental detective work so dominated the poem's reception that as Young fell into poor health at his life's end, some newspapers and magazines breathlessly reported that his son had visited him, and that the quarrels captured in *Night Thoughts* had been resolved. Such stories served as a happy coda to the scolding and melancholic tone that had been so noticeable to the poem's readers.

Young's conception of ambition as a mandate for productive activity

While the public grasped and approved of the evangelical content in Young's magnum opus, they did so only in the broadest sense. Simple sentimentality and family drama were not the “irresistible Argument” for Christianity that Young had been so excited to reveal. The nature and details of that argument are what I shall illuminate here. *Night Thoughts* contains a complex argument about the necessity of human ambition, rooted in a moral calculus, in which value is ascribed to human feelings and actions. In this imagined economy of sentiment, value is gained, lost, and tallied throughout the course of human life. Young's great proposition, crafted for wide appeal, is that he can provide advice on how to succeed within it. The substance of his *Night*

Thoughts is a defense of “true Ambition,” that is to say, Christian Ambition. Young embraces what he recognizes as economic behavior, and reconstructs its significance within the “Oeconomy of Heaven” (5.875) in order to demonstrate that immortal marketplaces are superior to earthly ones, and persuade readers of the necessity of participating. What distinguishes Young’s sales pitch for Christianity is that he exalts it not by appealing to or praising the love of God, but on the basis of its market culture, as he imagines it to exist.

The result is a curious hybrid of evangelical and economic thinking. Young supports his argument by providing a detailed and thorough set of precepts that individuals can use to navigate and succeed profitably within his supposed system. Providing such knowledge allowed Young to draw on his political experience, and his attempts to establish a successful and stable career through preferment or poetry. Writing *Night Thoughts* served two purposes for Young. It allowed him to proselytize, and to process his own frustrations at his unrealized ambitions. Much of his content is didactic — how to succeed in God’s marketplace — but throughout, Young pivots both into wheedling solicitation and righteous anger as his spontaneity of composition forces him to confront problematic aspects of the earthly marketplace. Though his intentions were to illuminate an immortal economy, Young’s poem captures the earthly economy in all its convoluted glory, mapping paths that lead from success to ruin and back again.

What is Young trying to communicate in *Night Thoughts*? The poem is both a critique and highly didactic. Young’s goal is not only to identify what he sees as major problems in the world, but also to show that he has knowledge that will provide solutions. People who possess this knowledge, he thinks, will surely become eager participants in the system. He is concerned with both earth and heaven. This concern leads him to operate on two levels, and to address three contexts throughout the poem. One of these levels is best described as a cosmic Christian

mythos, and it encompasses all the stars and planets, as well as Heaven and Hell (as cosmic locations). The context that Young considers is that of Heaven — Man's relationship to God, and God's relationship to Man. These relationships are significant to Young, because Man's proximity to Heaven or to Hell is a clear indication of human progress or deterioration. Humanity is not stable in *Night Thoughts*; it is always soaring or sinking in response to human activity. Young's choice to include a panoramic cosmic perspective resembles Milton's choice in *Paradise Lost*; but the difference is that Young's justification of the ways of God to Man is set in the present. Other than brief mentions of the Creation and Crucifixion, the Christian mythos in *Night Thoughts* is entirely current, rather than historical. Young is illuminating the significance of human behavior and activity, and its place in the context of God's cosmic creative scheme. Young's other levels are both earthly, involved with the everyday lives of mortal humans and the choices that they make. The two contexts that he considers are individual and societal. Within the individual context, each man's actions either contribute to or detract from his own fate. The societal context encompasses both groups of individuals and the entities of society, e.g. institutions and governments. All three of these contexts are presented as highly interdependent and influential on each other; and at various points, Young shows how individual choices shape, and are shaped by society. Individual activities are supported by humans in their collective mass, and society is dependent on individuals to unite it. The heavenly context, which is inhabited by angelic beings and the Trinity, is the source of life that supports the societal and individual contexts — and its existence is explicitly dependent on their support, through belief and action. Since these contexts are interdependent, all choices and actions have triple significance, and humans are both individual and collective at the same time.

Reason and Ambition

The problem that Young is most concerned with derives from the fallen condition of the world, separated from God, as dictated by biblical scripture. How the Fall occurred is unimportant to Young, and thus left unexplained, very possibly because *Night Thoughts* was intended to carry on naturally from *Paradise Lost*. The consequences of the Fall, however, are profound. Mortal life is characterized as a

dark Dungeon, where confin'd we lie,
Close-grated by the sordid Bars of *Sense*;
All prospect of Eternity shut out;
And, but for Execution, ne'er set Free. (6.405-8)

In portraying the effects of the Fall, rather than focusing on it as a punishment for sin, Young looks at it as akin to a life sentence of imprisonment from which death is the only escape. The nature of this confinement is not physical in the sense that we might picture a barred jail cell. Instead, it is a problem of perception, in which our thought is jailed behind the limits of our senses, causing us to focus only on that which is immediately apparent. This includes our conception of the world, as it exists before our eyes; and also the reactive input of our senses as they meet with pleasurable or painful stimuli. Young, in contrast, encourages the pursuit of “a fairer scene / Than Sense surveys” (6.443-4) — a perspective which is eternal, rather than fallen.

The answer to the fallen condition lies within humanity, in the form of the characteristic of ambition, that is, the desire and will to rise up and return to God. The problem is that Young interprets ambition as directly affected by the Fall, which has deteriorated, resulting in harmful consequences for humanity. It is a

powerful source of Good and Ill!

Thy strength in Man, like length of wing in Birds;
 When disengag'd from Earth, with greater Ease
 And swifter Flight, transports us to the skies:
 By Toys entangl'd or in Guilt bemir'd,
 It turns a Curse, it is our Chain, and Scourge, (6.399-404)

We might say, then, that there are two forms of ambition — one is beneficial, the other harmful. When we are confined in our earthly prison, our ambition is corrupted, because it is wholly oriented towards escaping the torturous confines of our imprisonment, in a wild and directionless fashion, such that we would gladly discard our lives. Young compares its importance to that of a bird's wingspan. Being able to fly is a characteristic that almost defines the concept of a bird; having ambition defines what it means to be human. Fallen ambition becomes both chain and scourge — an instrument of torture that makes genuine escape impossible. By suggesting that ambition can become entangled, or mired in guilt, Young presents it as a characteristic which has fallen, and as an ever-worsening condition.

Rather than presenting ambition as an intellectual trait, in *Night Thoughts*, Young portrays it as heavily influenced by the senses. Their imprisonment is instrumental in changing ambition from wings that soar into a weight that binds us, because when we are bound by the laws of the senses, we focus only on what we can immediately see. Young is forceful in correcting this error. “The *Visible* and *Present!* are for Brutes, / A slender Portion! And a narrow Bound!” (6.246-7) His language criticizes the visible and present as unworthy aspirations. On its own, then, ambition is an extremely powerful trait — but also rather flimsy, and vulnerable to being ensnared by whatever comes along. It is incapable of disengaging from Earth. Fortunately, Young is ready and waiting to explain the answer — namely, that ambition be paired with

Reason, which will allow mortals to escape their imprisonment. “These [the Visible and Present], *Reason*, with an Energy divine, /O’erleaps, and claims the *Future*, and *Unseen*; /The Vast Unseen! the Future fathomless! (6.246-50). Young sees reason as the solution — in fact, the only help — that will allow humans to transcend what is merely apparent. Ambition is incapable of making this flight alone — it is dependent on Reason in order to avoid succumbing to the sensual toys and guilt of earthly imprisonment. Linked together they leap and soar, out of prison and into the vast possibility of the future.

Young’s concept of reason is most clearly understood in the context of his detailed views about human ambition, which I shall illustrate; but it is distinct from Enlightenment reason in that he displays absolute faith in the existence of God. This faith includes a near-unshakeable confidence in God as a loving and devoted creator who is waiting to reclaim humanity whenever they succeed in escaping from their earthly captivity. In the *Pensées*, Blaise Pascal considered the question of whether one ought to believe in God; and concluded that the possible rewards for believing far outweighed the risks of atheism. The type of reasoning that Pascal performs in the *Pensées* is the same mode of thought that Young exalts in *Night Thoughts*. It is highly deductive — focused on extrapolating causes from effects, or predicting likely outcomes from a collection of circumstances, thus assisting us to surmount the visible and present. Like Pascal, Young believes in identifying and comparing all possible outcomes in order to ensure that he makes the correct choice. However, while Pascal treated the existence of God as a hypothesis, Young treats Pascal’s conclusion that it is worthwhile to believe in God as solid proof of God’s existence. His “reason,” then, is a hybrid of strict rationality and what many would classify as religious enthusiasm. Young acknowledges that his reason differs from the form of reason employed by many, which he attributes to the possibility that Reason has been impaired by the senses. This

affects our ability to believe in Heaven, and see the advantages that it promises: “Instinct points out an Int’rest in Hereafter; / But our blind *Reason* sees not where it lies” (7.362-3).

Consequently, a major part of Young’s work is to restore correct perspectives on our use of reason, particularly in its capacity to assist ambition.

The dilemma of being imprisoned and needing Ambition and Reason to work in cooperation in order to be free is at the heart of *Night Thoughts*. It is a poetic epic, with a storyline so simple that it becomes rigid. The condition of imprisonment is so dire, and the union of reason and ambition so vital, that all else — Young’s views on love, faith, and virtue, are subsumed and contained within this plot, rather than separate from it. Though he may seem to digress and pursue a different topic, Young always cycles back to ambition and reason. Even Christianity is made to be a part of this story, rather than the whole that envelops it. The performance of Christian belief is to pursue freedom with the twin engines of ambition and reason. The poem is almost self-contradictory in its presentation of human autonomy - on the one hand, Young means to persuade readers to see their existence through his framework so that they can choose ambition. On the other hand, in his portrayal, humans themselves are largely overshadowed by their confinement, never to truly live until the vast unseen is reached.

In terms of Young’s Christian mythos, the purpose of Ambition is to reunite us with our Creator. But how does this ambition work in the everyday, mortal world? When Young explains ambition, he uses a different tone than when describing the prison of the senses. Ambition is a positive trait, not because it may save humanity, but because it is natural and universal, a sign of human’s connection with the divine. According to Young, the purpose of “true ambition” is “the pursuit / Of glory, nothing less than man can share” (6.235-6). Anyone might pursue this glory — there are no limits requiring that it be political, or artistic, or literary. Glory and ambition are a

means of universal communication, because to speak of ambition is to address all Mankind “all at once, since all humans feel its pull” (8.415-6). Young finds ambition ubiquitous in human and divine forms. When he looks at the world, he sees it through a lens of creative productivity, with mortal and immortal participants. The Earth’s beauty is perhaps the most visible product of immortal ambition — Young sees it whenever he looks at the night sky, and marvels

How is *Night’s* sable Mantle labour’d o’er,
 How richly wrought, with Attributes divine?
 What *Wisdom* shines? what *Love*? This midnight Pomp,
 This gorgeous Arch, with golden Worlds inlay’d;
 Built with divine Ambition! Nought to Thee;
 For Others this Profusion (4.385-90).

He feels the same majesty when he contemplates the possibility of other planets hosting human life, “Built with Divine Ambition! in Disdain / Of Limit built!” (9.782-3). In each of these cases, the result of the ambition is characterized by its beauty — in language that links it to precious metals, as well as extravagance: generous profusion, and disregard for limits. These are the equivalents of God himself o’erleaping the visible and present. The earliest example, however, of divine ambition, takes place at the creation of the world, when God’s “Word from solid *Darkness* struck / That spark, the Sun” (1.38-39). This act is characterized as both generous, and in disdain of limits in that it is the creation of something out of nothing. Humans can achieve proportionally equivalent ambition to God’s — as examples, Young offers Pope, Milton, and Homer (1.449-51), whose poetry he describes as “charm[ing] thro’ distant Ages” (1.444). Their literary immortality grants them status that is as close to divine as humans can get.

The insatiability of human appetites for glory is a central part of Young's "proof" of the validity of Christianity. If we have a desire for glory, he argues, then there must be a cause — namely, that humans were created that way.

MAN'S Heart th' ALMIGHTY to the *Future* sets,

By secret, and inviolable Springs;

And makes his Hope his sublunary Joy.

Man's Heart eats all Things, and is hungry still;

"More, more," the Glutton cries: For something New

So rages Appetite, if man can't Mount,

He *will* Descend. He starves on the *Possest*. (7.119-25)

The emotional intensity that accompanies our appetite for glory is not a source of shame; instead, it is a sign of our eternal nature, and our natural instinct to go beyond the immediate. Gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins; but Young positions it as an intrinsic human characteristic, designed by God, and by design, impossible to suppress.

Glory is a type of value. It may not be as tangible as gold — nevertheless, Young sees it as having genuine and noticeable effects when it is in action. Thus, it can be described as a form of capital, which is used to advance other activities. Much of the time, this glory-produced capital is social: the result of praise and positive reputation. It can also be derived from particular works and productions. All of these species of capital fit under the umbrella of glory, i.e., the fulfillment of "true" ambition. While they are all but impossible to calculate, except through comparison — statements such as "X is better thought of in social circles than Z," — Young treats them as though they may be measured and audited by any observer. Because this capital is not minutely and concretely accounted in any earthly ledger, it is not bound by the same rules that apply to

monetary capital. Despite this, Young regularly applies phrases usually associated with monetary expenditure. Such capital may be spent in generous profusion that is for others, rather than the spender; or spent “in disdain of limits,” as though an authority had predetermined them. By enumerating the vicissitudes of this value, Young encourages readers to actively assess it, at all times, and in all situations. Pursuing ambition, then, is synonymous with the pursuit of glory capital; and participating in the system in order to produce value supersedes all other expressions of faith or creed. The intensity with which Young charges readers to cultivate glory can suggest that he is encouraging greed. Indeed, he does position avarice as beneficent — but he is not doing so because he is a Mandevilleian scoundrel. Instead, he is responding to his attitude that value is so densely ubiquitous that to not interact with it — whether in acquisition or expenditure — is a failure of religious observance. Young observes this as a problem that is particularly evident in terms of religious devotional expression, and issues a sharp rebuke to the “cold-hearted, frozen, Formalists,” advising that “Passion is Reason; Transport Temper *here*” (4.638,640). Any perceived limits are put in place to be exceeded, rather than met. Any barrier that prevents or discourages individuals from this interaction is to be opposed. His economic thinking includes and transcends the sphere of mere money.

The entanglement of Christianity and economic activity

Using his particular interpretation of reason, Young is able to present several assertions about the nature of ambition and its centrality to Christian belief:

1) Ambition is a sign of our immortality. We know this because our souls are “passionately fond of Fame” (7.341), and yet, anxious to conceal that passion, thus “We blush detected in Designs on Praise, / Tho’ for best Deeds, and from the best of Men” (7.343-4). Our immortality is the reason for our embarrassment — it is so exalted that it checks us when we

“stoop to court a Character from Man” while aware that we are in the presence of higher beings, i.e., the Seraphim and God (7.350-2).

2) Ambition is a sign of our eternal nature, in that “we wish our names *eternally* to live,” and cannot be happy with the acclaim we receive during our lifetimes: “One Age is poor Applause” (7.356). Those who achieve power successfully find themselves disgusted, because “Fame is the Shade of Immortality, / And in itself a Shadow” (7.365.6). While “eternal” and “immortal” are essentially synonymous, Young separates them in his arguments about ambition and human nature, and presents them as distinct. He associates immortality with divine substance – the quality of being like God. In contrast, he uses eternity to refer to durability. While this distinction is subtle to the point of being fallacious, what is most important is that Young sees humans as having these qualities – and he wants to amass as much evidence as possible in favor of his arguments.

3) We cannot fulfill earthly ambition without becoming cognizant of the possibility of fulfilling greater ambition in heaven. Even the “first in Fame...will Sigh at *such* Success,” because “far richer Prize” and “far more illustrious Glory calls” (7.371-7). This humility becomes a way of discerning those who are pursuing the “true” Ambition, for, as Young explains, these illustrious possibilities “call in Whispers, yet the Dearest hear” (7.378)

4) It is impossible to quell ambition from human hearts. “Tho’ Disappointments in Ambition *pain*, / And tho’ success *disgusts*” (7.382-3), they do not prompt humans to become unambitious,

Because immortal as their Lord;

And souls immortal must forever heave

At something Great; the Glitter, or the Gold;

The Praise of Mortals, or the Praise of Heav'n. (7.398-401)

Young makes the appetite for glory and praise one of, if not *the* dominant characteristic of humanity. And not only is it dominant, it is vital — the deciding characteristic that determines whether we will successfully cultivate either the beneficial or the harmful sort of ambition. While Young has identified fallen ambition as problematic, he rejects any strict binary opposition that would identify all mortal praise as negative. Instead, his imagery turns poignant in suggesting that the ability to create new ideas and be recognized for them is necessary sustenance for survival. Young is open about this necessity, and in fact, acknowledges that “Nor absolutely vain is Human Praise, / When Human is supported by Divine” (7.402-3). In fact, this appetite for Praise makes the world progress and function on a daily basis:

The Love of Praise is planted to protect,
 And propagate the Glories of the Mind.
 What is it but the Love of Praise inspires,
 Matures, refines, embellishes, exalts,
 Earth's Happiness? From *that*, the Delicate,
 The Grand, the Marvellous, of Civil Life.
Want, and *Convenience*, Under-workers, lay
 The Basis, on which *Love of Glory* builds. (7.408-15)

Even though mortal existence is imprisonment, the appetite for praise as Young constructs it is fundamentally productive and leads to all other improvements. It is more publicly visible than want, or the desire for convenience. Young's statement describing how the love of praise contributes to daily life reads like a thoughtful and non-idealistic revision of Mandeville's argument that private vices lead to public benefits in “The Grumbling Hive.”

Young's update raises a question, though: how do we know the difference between human achievement which is worthy of divine support, and that which is not? According to *Night Thoughts*, reason is our primary tool for determining when a project constitutes true ambition, and determining where the potential for glory exists, or where we can overcome our sense-imposed limits. Human life is the experience of having desires and constantly managing them; channeling our responses to the world in order to make them productive.

"True" ambition, however, is impeded by corrupt, fallen ambition, which is the pursuit of earthly glory, such as fame. From his perspective, pursuing ambition and pursuing fame are distinct activities. They are distinct in that fame is merely conferred by others, and may be conferred whether or not an individual has sought it; ambition, on the other hand, is nothing less than a relationship between the individual and society. Ambition is also distinguished in terms of the individual's motivation which *must* involve a conscious desire to escape the tortured existence of mortal life, and regain eternity. Even though Young acknowledges the irresistible drive to seek mortal praise, he warns against it. Mortal praise is a trap that will do nothing to help release humans from their sensible bondage. At the same time, even though Young is aware of the presence of corrupted ambition, he must maintain his belief that the pure, elevating form of ambition remains in existence.

Young blames the lure of mere mortal praise and fame as largely the fault of earthly institutions. They create confusion about when an achievement is deserving of praise, by presenting a specious assortment of qualifications, which create fame and notoriety, whether or not an individual meets the criteria for genuine, eternal ambition. Even when he is not directly reminding readers that they are in a state of imprisonment, Young thinks in terms of his

overarching goal: to encourage individuals to use ambition to free themselves, rather than to merely become “great:”

Can *Parts*, or *Place* (two bold Pretenders!) make
Lorenzo Great, and pluck him from the Throng?
Genius and *Art*, Ambition’s boasted Wings,
 Our Boast but ill deserve. A feeble Aid!
Dedalian Enginery! If These alone,
 Assist our Flight, *Fame*’s Flight is *Glory*’s Fall. (6.257-62)

Parts, i.e., Fortune, and Place, are qualities over which individuals have no control; rather than genuine achievements. Genius and Art are qualities which are spoken of as though they are artist’s properties — his genius, her art. However, Young does not credit these as actual achievements, but only as insubstantial praise. They may be the source of fame, but they are not evidence of true ambition.

If Young’s good ambition/bad ambition rhetoric sounds contradictory, it’s because in many ways, it is. The first step in raising oneself to the heavens is to raise oneself above other men. The distinction is that for the individual pursuing true ambition, earthly fame is insufficient. Young’s statements in these passages are emphatic, but hollow. He attempts to negate conventional qualifications as evidence of ambition (genius, art, station). In the larger context of the poem, these critiques are clearly meant to be didactic, and positioned to encourage others to take up the pursuit of glory in earnest. At the same time, he is correcting perceptions of how true ambition is defined, and developing his critique of the flaws of mortal societal institutions. However, Young’s sole criteria for true ambition are the desire for eternity, and the use of energy rather than adherence to institutional norms. His advice is didactic, but almost entirely negative

in its form: don't pursue glory through earthly societal paths. While institutions may confer acclaim upon an individual, they interfere with what Young sees as the natural and correct process through which acclaim should be granted.

Earthly standards for ambition need to be challenged because as they exist, they lack (or at least, fail to demonstrate) a commitment to the true ambition. His mission is nothing less than to reform the marketplace by integrating it with his version of Christian mythos, and adjusting earthly standards of value so that they will be determined by and consistent with the context of humans' quest for eternity. He warns against any feature that does not explicitly fit within his agenda.

Talents Angel-bright,

If wanting Worth, are shining Instruments

In false Ambition's Hand, to finish Faults

Illustrious, and give Infamy renown. (6.273-6)

Young's rhetoric encourages paranoia — there is little in his conceived system that is neutral. Every choice either elevates or threatens downfall.

In place of the existing standards for glory and ambition, he proposes the alternative of worth. What constitutes worth is an open category, much like Ambition, with one criterion — that it be reasoned:

Reason perpetuates Joy that Reason gives,

And makes it as Immortal as herself:

To Mortals, nought Immortal, but their Worth.

WORTH, conscious Worth! should *absolutely* reign;

And other Joys ask Leave for their Approach;

Nor unexamin'd, ever Leave obtain. (8.975-80)

The proposition and exaltation of worth clarifies Young's logic. By using reason to calculate the value of their exploits in terms of true ambition, humans are able to make the value lasting.

However, *only* the value itself is durable — not the endeavor itself. The emphasis on “conscious Worth” makes the calculated value the only quality that matters, to the exclusion of all others.

Awareness of one's worth is equivalent to emotional joy — however, only constant vigilance and exclusive devotion to this type of joy will preserve it — otherwise, “a mob of joys / Wage war, and perish in intestine broils” (8.981-82). Thus, every joy has to be minutely scrutinized, to see whether it is “reasonable.” And the more that Young praises reason, the more clearly we can see how precarious happiness and fulfillment are, from his perspective. Everything is vulnerable. He cautions against taking refuge in the idea that talents are by nature good, warning that

Great *Ill* is an Atchievement of great *Pow'rs*,

Plain Sense but rarely leads us far astray.

Reason the Means, *Affections* chuse our End.

Means have no Merit, if our End amiss.

If wrong our Hearts, our Heads are right in vain;

What is a *Pelham's* Head, to *Pelham's* Heart?

Hearts are Proprietors of all Applause. (6.277-82)

Even reason is susceptible to error when not properly balanced with affection, although Young's invocation of affection is largely circular, leading back to the Christian ends that are already grounded in the use of reason. However, Young sees affection as playing a distinct and vital role in his system. The balance between reason and affection is intended to be a balance between the individual and society. In describing this balance, he introduces the term merit, which he treats as

similar to worth. This is evident from the manner in which Young presents merit as a prerequisite for applause and acclaim. He uses both the term “merit,” and a variation, “Heart-merit.”

Humans are supposed to pursue glory and homage, while hearts regulate how the glory is actually released and distributed. In the performance of this duty, hearts are, according to Young, infallible. “Our Hearts ne’er bow but to superior *worth*; / Nor ever fail of their Allegiance there” (6.299-300). Because they are so acutely able to detect worth, the opinions of the masses present a powerful counter to the influence of societal and institutional authority. In fact, the seeming power of institutions is an illusion, only permitted occasionally by the crowd. He writes that station, one of the fallen attributes of fame, often “begs an Alms of Homage from the Throng, / And oft the Throng denies its Charity.” (6.289-90)

Hearts respond when “Each Man makes his own Stature, builds himself” (6.311). Labor, effort, and, “Energy,” (6.248) are key. It is natural, according to Young, that if we build ourselves, we will create the desired “superior Worth,” which, as he explains, is accompanied by multiple benefits:

High Worth is elevated *Place*: ‘tis more;
 It makes the Post stand Candidate for Thee;
 Makes more than Monarchs, makes an Honest man;
 Tho’ no *Exchequer* it commands, ‘tis Wealth;
 And tho’ it wears no *Ribbon*, ‘tis Renown;
 Renown, that would not quit thee tho’ disgrac’d,
 Nor leave thee pendant on a Master’s Smile. (6.334-40).

Young reiterates the importance of calculated value, or high worth and in the process illustrates more about the type of value that he is elevating. It is more genuine than an office of power,

more durable than decorations, and more independent than the regard that accompanies employment under another. He seems to praise the importance of labor value — however, his critique of market value is not that it is invalid, but that it is an inaccurate representation of the larger common audience's views, as opposed to those of institutions.

While Young embeds his advice in his religious epic, the details belie his claim that his fervor is entirely about immortality. He is constantly shifting into discussions of earthly contexts. Certain aspects of his argument — the emphasis on the opinions of the crowd, and the religious framework — appear to be symptoms of religious enthusiasm. However, Young's presentation of both the crowd and his faith is highly idiosyncratic, because they function as economic critique. His Christian evangelism is indirect; instead, he urges adherence to his particular strategy of ambition.

Young's rhetoric is a carrot-and-stick mixture of coaxing and threatening. He pairs it with reasoning that eliminates all other options but his own, as though he can gently herd readers into accepting his assertions. He warns that

Other Ambition Nature interdicts;
 Nature proclaims it most absurd in Man,
 By pointing at his Origin, and End;
 Milk, and a Swathe, *at first*, his whole Demand,
 His whole Domain, *at last*, a Turf, or Stone,
 To whom, *between*, a World may seem too small. (6.341-6)

In this passage, we can clearly see the impact of Young's choice to position reason as the solution to human problems: the span of human life that nature allows dictates limited opportunity for success. The shape of mortal attainment is a curving arc that begins and ends in helplessness.

Young's application of reason to his existence refuses any other possibility than an ever-ascending line, which leads him to reach towards the possibility of Heaven, rather than the nihilism of an atheist perspective.

Young's concept of ambition is based upon thought that is fundamentally economic. All value is circulating, and the held quantities effect their possessors' power and autonomy. Value is best described as partially finite. It is not self-generating, and does not occur naturally, like gold, iron, or petroleum. The only way to produce it is through the use of energy. Young's sense of energy is like the Greek term, *energeia*, meaning activity, so it is more appropriate to say, through the act of energy -- he sees it as something that humans and gods do, rather than as a resource that they use. His version of energy is similar in certain ways to the idea of energy as it is conceived scientifically, as the force that propels the world. Arguably, Young sees energy as a force flowing between individuals and groups. However, the scientific concept of energy is inclusive of inhuman forces, e.g. kinetic energy produced by gravity, and involuntary forces, such as human reflex movements. Neither of these, nor any other unintentional or automatic motion, would qualify as energy according to Young's rules. They would only be examples of mortal fallen energy, and would only produce fallen value. According to these laws, it is conceivable that humans could live in such a way that no new true energy was performed-- only perpetual fallen motion. Whatever true and immortal value existed, produced by humans or by divine ambition, might run out. Or humans might entirely cease to produce value, and only witness the products of divine ambition. There is always potential to produce more value, thus breaking any apparent finite limits on its quantity-- but the energy must be willed, and deliberate, and felt, in accordance with the interpretation of human existence as a prison to be escaped.

Time, wisdom, and virtue: the key components of economic activity in Young's eyes

Night Thoughts is meant to be a handbook to the comprehensive economic system.

Young's intention is to demonstrate its intelligibility to would-be human participants, whom he conceives as playing vital roles as producers of value, and evaluators of value who ascribe praise when truly merited. As he portrays it, participation in this economy is necessarily social. Praise is an object given by others. The concept of self-validation is almost entirely absent from Young's schema, because it would be an engagement in an economy of one, and thus incapable of satisfying the natural human appetite for praise. In the larger economy, there is only calculation of one's likely worth in another's eyes. Self-calculation leads to action which will increase that worth. Young wants his poem to galvanize individuals so that they will prioritize the active pursuit of increased value. Too often, though, they lack awareness of the economic system, or they misunderstand how to use the available resources. In keeping with his critiques of parts, place, and station — resources available to only a limited few -- Young's recommendations are oriented towards resources that are more democratically available: time, wisdom, and virtue. These are familiar terms — no one would claim to be unaware of them — but in *Night Thoughts*, they are amplified and clarified through Young's interpretation. Each acquires epic potential for either exalting or debasing individuals who use them well, or poorly.

Time as resource

Time's value surpasses even that of gold (2.28); it is the only resource which is "truly man's" — the rest belongs to Fortune (2.193-4). It is portrayed as being accessible similar to the way that John Locke characterized potential property as being abundant in the *Second Treatise of Government*. Locke explained that nature has provided enough that "no man's labor could subdue, or appropriate all, nor could his enjoyment consume more than a small part, so that it

was impossible for any man ... to entrench upon the right of another” (Locke 22). From Young’s perspective, time is, in one sense, widely available, and immensely powerful. “Time is Eternity; / Pregnant with all Eternity can give” (2.107-108). As described in *Night Thoughts*, Time is not earned; it is simply available, and imbued with the idea of an immeasurable gift to humanity. This “gift” is comparable to the “gift” of the crucifixion, and Young makes the link between the two explicit by portraying time as “Heaven’s stranger” — a sort of prodigal son who has been cast out “from Eternity’s mysterious orb,” and is literally flying, on wings of “hours, days, and months and years” to “join anew Eternity his sire” (2.194-218). This mini-narrative is meant to encourage and compel humans to make better use of time because of its Christian significance. “The man who consecrates his hours / By vigorous effort, and honest aim / At once he draws the sting of Life and Death” (2.185-7). Productivity is a panacea that cures all ills, whether frustration at lack of recognition, or fear of dying.

However, this apparent optimism is only one side of Young’s vision. He warns that “*Youth* is not rich in *Time*; it may be, poor” (2.48). Time is an ample resource, until Death intervenes. Like Locke, Young believes that humans must be productive in order to claim property and reap its value. Otherwise, time, however abundant, is all too easily a lost resource. While a little wasted time is no great problem from a mortal perspective, from an eternal perspective where each moment can be counted, it adds up to a substantial amount. According to *Night Thoughts*, we are subject to lifelong monitoring, at the hands of our own Conscience, even if we fail to realize that we are being watched:

...with Indulgence most severe, She treats
 Us spendthrifts of inestimable time;
 Unnoted, notes each moment misapplied;

In leaves more durable than leaves of brass,
 Writes our whole history; which Death shall read
 In every pale delinquent's private ear;
 And Judgment publish; publish to more worlds
 Than this; and endless age in groans resound. (2.272-79)

Calling attention to the significance of wasted time emphasizes that even what seem like choices may have great significance. Here, the limitlessness of Time “pregnant with all Eternity can give” backfires. The later passage transforms the vast quantity into a concrete, quantifiable resource. Individuals are taken to task for failing to make use of such and the apparent “gift” of Time is revoked, and replaced with a loan with dire consequences. “What *Moment* granted Man without account? / What *Years* are squander'd, Wisdom's debt unpaid? / Our Wealth in Days all due to *that* discharge.” (2.29-31)

Nearly every statement that Young makes about time is also a statement about human agency. “Time wasted is existence, used is life,” he says. He asserts that the worth of mortal existence depends on how we use time. Statements like this one, that chide Young's audience, are repeated throughout the poem. They imply gross human ignorance regarding time as a resource or value. Mortals are so ignorant that they cannot differentiate between time and eternity. Young's language sets firm restrictions — “there's no prerogative in human hours” — as though he were outlining the terms of a legal contract dictating human freedoms. His imagery reinforces humanity's minimal power. When he portrays individuals being publicly indicted for misusing time, or when he recommends that “'tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours, / And ask them, what report they bore to heaven; / And how they might have borne more welcome news” (2.376-8). In both cases, humans are in bondage that demands constant productivity. However, this

servitude is not portrayed as between humans and God, but instead, within each individual himself. It is our own Conscience and past hours that condemn us. And while Young is prone to warning of the consequences of disregarding his system, the language that he uses to admonish against wasting time is easily the most forceful in the poem: “Time destroy’d / Is suicide, where more than blood is spilt” (3.290). Because mortal existence is fallen and temporary, by wasting time, humans are committing a form of eternal suicide, from which there can be no redemption.

Virtue as resource

Whereas time can be a negative pressure, there is a correlative positive impulse called virtue. If Time is a slippery resource, Virtue is the safeguard that ensures its value. Virtue is equated with Purpose; and “If nothing more than Purpose in thy power, Thy purpose firm, is equal to the Deed” (2.89-90). Young knows that individual endeavors may go unrecognized, and that humans are desperate for praise. If fervent recognition of any endeavor were the requirement for time to be used, rather than wasted, the situation would be untenable. Virtue allows individuals to consider their time productive whether they succeed or fail: “Heaven sells all pleasure; Effort is the Price” (8.787).

Virtue is effusively praised throughout the entire poem, in superlatives that obscure the fact that Young’s entire concept of morality centers around the notion of productivity, which is to say, the proper cultivation of ambition and reason. Virtue is intention, focused will, oriented towards escaping the fallen world through diligent pursuit of praise. This is why Young can make the comparison:

For what is vice? self-love in a mistake:
 A poor blind merchant buying joys too dear.
 And virtue, what? ‘tis self-love in her wits,

Quite skilful in the market of delight. (8.886-9)

Vice is the pursuit of endeavors to which one is unsuited, while virtue is self-knowledge that allows any individual to know what schemes to attempt.

Wisdom as resource

Wisdom is defined as the knowledge and ideas that individuals encounter during their lives. It is a personal and private aspect of any person, rather than as part of a common stock of knowledge. Like praise, wisdom is a form of private capital, meant to be used. Young focuses on communicating that it is not merely a static possession. Clumsiness at dealing with wisdom is in part an effect of our myopic view of time: “The present Moment terminates our sight; / Clouds thick as those on Doomsday, drown the *next*; / We penetrate, we prophesy in vain” (1.363-5).

When we hesitate to act on an idea because we are uncertain about the future, then wisdom becomes its opposite, folly, almost instantaneously. The result is men who are perpetually “about to live, / Forever on the Brink of being born” (1.399-400). Young is coldly scornful of those who fall into this trap:

All pay themselves the compliment to think
 They, one day, shall not drivel; and their Pride
 On this Reversion takes up ready Praise;
 At least, their own; their future selves applauds;
 How excellent that Life they *ne'er* will lead? (1.401-5)

Not only are these men living foolishly and unindustriously, their combination of indolence and self-praise implicitly means that their acclaim is not reaching those who actually merit it. The central issue that causes this behavior is the tendency to treat wisdom as a lasting property. This mistake stems from the error of treating earthly existence as though it were immortality (1.421-2)

instead of a limited opportunity to soar upwards. Individuals may be praised as being wise, or having wisdom -- but this achievement is no better than being praised for genius or art. As Young frames it, wisdom might take the form of a particular project or desire to do something -- but if not acted upon, it changes from a form of capital into a debt owed to Wisdom (2.31), which mounts up over time. The only way to repay the debt is to act upon the wisdom in question. This debt is a metaphor for unused ideas, but Young wants it to be seen as real. In his Christian mythos, death is supposed to set humans free from their earthly prison, but those who borrow from Wisdom without making good on the loan face a different fate. Should they die, with nothing to show for their grand ambitions, then “no Composition sets the Prisoner free, / *Eternity's* inexorable chain / Fast binds; and Vengeance claims the full Arrear” (2.35-7).

In keeping with the essentially private nature of wisdom, Young suggests that its source is internally directed contemplation, and he urges “Man! Know thyself; all Wisdom centers there” (4.483), rather than in external institutional judgments that might dampen one’s energy.

Counseling rejection of institutional vices is a defensive statement, and an attempt to shield individual ideas from thoughtless criticism, as much as it is a constructive proclamation of self-knowledge. “The World’s a School / Of *Wrong*” (5.164-5) when it comes to wisdom, just as it is often wrong regarding merit. Young’s concept of wisdom is not antisocial, however; or averse to criticism. Wisdom may be found in friendship, like that between the narrator of the poem and Philander (2.496), because a true friend would know oneself — including one’s faults — better than some outside authority. Accuracy of wisdom is important. Night can serve as an alternative to a true friend’s counsel because solitude promotes accuracy as well: “Few are the Faults we flatter when alone, / *Vice* sinks in her Allurements, is ungilt, / And looks, like other Objects, black by Night” (5.173-5). As elsewhere, though, reason and energy are still the chief means of

cultivating wisdom. We accomplish this cultivation by scrutinizing our actions, and meditating on our inevitable but unpredictable end (5.495), in order to remind ourselves that the amount of time we have to produce value before we die is entirely unpredictable. Through such reflection, we gain Experience, “If Wisdom’s Friend, her best; if not, worst Foe” (2.379-80). Experience of failure may be unpleasant, but it is the source of the only general wisdom that Young acknowledges: that mortal life is temporary: “There’s nothing here, but what as nothing weighs, / The more our Joy, the more we know it vain, / And by Success are tutor’d to Despair” (2.383-5). If experience reminds us not to become ensnared in earthly triumphs, then it is “kind Experience” (2.381), rather than an enemy.

How time, virtue, and wisdom combine to fuel economic activity

Time, virtue, and wisdom are all components of energy, presented to coax readers into a highly systematic view of the world, in which the totality of human life is contained within the narrative of imprisonment and escape. While Young’s assertions look like black and white absolutes, when combined, they soften each other, as virtue softens the requirement of productivity. Moreover, the content of the advice attempts to provide a framework for each part of the process of development and ideation, from the inception of the barest wisp of an idea, to its eventual success or failure. His “rules” act to provide a way of calculating and ascribing value and praise even in those situations when the throng, for whatever reason, fails to provide acclaim. Though asserting the value of experience in the context of failure may seem so harsh as to be masochistic, treating it as kind or helpful is less grim than the alternative in which failure merely happens, and brings no intelligible benefit whatsoever. Instead, to Young, everything must result in progress. Not just human action, but existence itself must be an environment that gives rise to and permits advancement. Otherwise, the arduous efforts -- the virtue-- required for

any sort of enterprise, would be “a crime to reason, if it costs us pain unpaid.” Young’s chief criterion for determining whether the world makes sense is whether it can be seen as a space that encourages human activity.

Humans’ primary goal: the production of value

He advises on the potential for acquiring value in nearly every aspect of human life, including conversation:

Thought in the mine, may come forth gold, or dross;

When coin’d in words, we know its real worth.

If sterling, store it for thy future use;

‘Twill buy thee benefit; perhaps, renown.

Thought, too, deliver’d, is the more possess’d;

Teaching, we learn; and, giving, we retain

The births of intellect; when dumb, forgot. (2.470-76)

Young is most interested in the activity in which value is involved -- in this case, thought.

Passive readers are unaware that their ideas might be objects for investment. They are also ignorant of the “real worth” of their thoughts, as opposed to their false worth, which we can extrapolate as an idea, prior to verbal expression. Ideas are a capital which may be powerful in the future; a capital with special property characteristics. When shared, they become more our property; when hoarded, we risk being unable to retain ownership. As though he expects resistance to these assertions, Young elaborates on the importance of circulating ideas, rather than simply storing them:

Speech ventilates our intellectual fire;

Speech burnishes our mental magazine;

Brightens, for ornament; and whets, for use.
 What numbers, sheathed in erudition, lie,
 Plunged to the hilts in venerable tomes,
 And rusted in; who might have borne an edge,
 And play'd a sprightly beam, if born to speech;
 If born bless'd heirs of half their mother's tongue!
 'Tis thought's exchange, which, like th' alternate push
 Of waves conflicting, breaks the learned scum,
 And defecates the students standing pool. (2.477-87)

Speech becomes more than an end in itself -- it is a vital part of the process of producing and refining thought into value. He wants us to think of this in quantitative terms, and to consider the vast amounts of thought which have been "sheathed in Erudition". The image he chooses, of swords "plung'd to the hilts in venerable Tomes, and rusted in", epitomizes poor production, because the finished objects are non-functional. The original value of both the swords and the books has been destroyed because their owners were not willing to submit them to be refined. Speech as production is active refinement, in contrast with value which is merely inherited (2.483-84). Young wants readers to understand the importance of active refinement -- in this case "Thought's exchange" with others -- for generating value. He sees the importance of this process as superior to the strategy of refining through contemplation. The chief difference between them is the use of labor:

In contemplation is his proud resource?
 'Tis poor, as proud, by converse unsustain'd.
 Rude thought runs wild in contemplation's field;

Converse, the menage, breaks it to the bit

Of due restraint; and emulation's spur

Gives graceful energy, by rivals awed.

'Tis converse qualifies for solitude;

As exercise, for salutary rest.

By that untutor'd, contemplation raves;

And Nature's fool, by wisdom is undone. (2.488-97)

Converse redeems Rude Thought by forcing it into labor, as a skilled rider transforms a horse's wild energy from disorder to grace. Rest and leisure are not forbidden, but they can only be enjoyed when they proceed from hard work. The only reason for avoiding labor is pride; and Young links labor with wisdom to warn that in the end, contemplation alone will inevitably be outdone. The framing in these examples illuminates a larger systemic context for life, reminding audiences (or revealing to them for the first time) that their experiences are not isolated, but are components in a larger schema, an economy. Happiness is "borrow'd bliss" (1.227). We are constantly producing value (or failing to produce it), and our choices in production have lasting ramifications. The type of value which is produced in thought can be classified as intellectual value, and it is distinct from emotional value in that Young explicitly suggests it can be exchanged to acquire praise and renown.

As well as producing value, Young sees us as expending it. While describing the coquettish lures of false friendship, Young asks

Ye fortune's cofferers! ye powers of wealth!

Can gold gain friendship? Impudence of hope!

As well mere man an angel might beget.

Love, and love only, is the loan for love.

Lorenzo! pride repress; nor hope to find

A friend, but what has found a friend in thee.

All like the purchase; few the price will pay;

And this makes friends such miracles below. (2.550-557)

In this case, Young's focus is partly on knowing the appropriate type of value (love) for a particular transaction (friendship). He is also emphasizing the importance of seeing the risks and motivations clearly. He warns Lorenzo against assuming a successful transaction; and cautions him that response to the advertisement is separate from closing the deal. Overcoming the risk successfully is what makes the transaction valuable in the first place. However, this type of value is presented differently from the emotional value which Young associates with his deceased friends. Though love is a factor, this type of value is unequivocally transactional — the love is loaned, rather than given; and it is loaned with the expectation of receiving love in return. We can call this type of value interpersonal, because it is passed between individuals. Young does not associate it with the “permanent delight” which he referenced in the First Night. Instead, his comment that “this makes friends such miracles below” indicates that this type of value is more like intellectual value, and may be used for personal advancement.

Young exudes confidence in the system that he describes to be successful as a means of ascent for individuals who participate in it using the precepts that he has set out. “Souls truly great dart forward on the wing / Of just ambition” (6.347-8). Despite the fallen nature of the world, in terms of the prison of the senses, he perceives it as a system which *can* lead to the revelation of genuine value. We can say, then, that his worldview is especially based upon two precepts. The first of these precepts is that humans are imprisoned, and can only break free by

pressing beyond the visible and present through the use of their ambition. The second is that human ambition can produce genuine and lasting value.

These two precepts can be condensed into a single assertion: that humans break free of their earthly prison by producing value. The mortal world, then, is both prison and factory. Young highlights the negative, prison-like aspects of earth when he is persuading readers that they must use their ambition and reason; but his presentation of the world as the ultimate factory of value is essentially positive. He is a constant cheerleader for innovation. Though he criticizes the environment (in terms of the usurpation of the applause economy) by institutions, he presents the process which individuals must follow as fairly straightforward: Step #1: Use your reason to guide your ambition in order to break the bounds of the visible and present. Step #2: Collect your praise. Step #3: Be gloriously reunited with God in Eternity.

Reason, as Young presents it, is essentially rational economic choice. Using reason involves careful consideration of all possibilities for action, and choosing the one that is most likely to result in the highest return of personal value. The activity of economic choice includes careful calculation of all of one's actions, speech, and implicitly, one's characteristics, as potential sources of value that could be refined and compounded. In short, Young's use of reason is profoundly economic.

The system *should* work in this way. Young wants readers to be persuaded that it can work this way; that it is possible. However, there are certain obstacles that must be dealt with. One of these obstacles is that the corrupted, earthly ambition makes men "Burst law's enclosure, leap the mounds of right / Pursuing, and pursued, each other's prey; / As wolves, for rapine; as the fox, for wiles" (4.93-95). This type of behavior is the cause of Young's emphasis on the importance of eternal ambition — not because the earthly sort of ambition is without value, but

because it is harmful. Ambition and Avarice, in their corrupted forms, are demons that “burn mankind” (6.225).

Young has an additional concern, which is that people are failing to pursue “true ambition” at all. Their hesitation is partly the result of their fears overtaking them — particularly those fears in response to the sudden deaths of friends,

which make us stoop from our aerial Heights,

And damp't with Omen of our own Decease,

On drooping pinions of Ambition lower'd,

Just skim Earth's Surface, ere we break it up (3.290)

While ambition is robust in its ability to carry us to the skies, it is also entirely vulnerable to our emotions, particularly our fear of ending the cycle of creative production, and, moreover, of earthly praise. Earthly ambition, like a pestilence, makes us crave endless gains (5.155-6); and yet, Young warns, of “Ambition's ill-judg'd Effort to be rich. / Alas! Ambition makes my Little, less; / Imbittering the Possess'd: Why wish for more?” (4.68-70). What he describes is consistent with the effects of failing to use Reason in order to make good choices about our investments. Instead, we become bewitched by earthly institutions encroaching into the flow of praise, which motivate us to follow the directive of “Art, brainless Art! our furious charioteer” (2.120), and seek approval rather than ambition. Instead of learning to pursue vision, we learn to wish — which “of all Employments is the worst” (4.71), in that it is the reverse of creative energy. People who learn to wish merely learn not to act on their desires. Ever determined to persuade, Young tries to suggest that he is promoting the pursuit of ambition and avarice - not the sort that make men prey upon each other, but the avarice and ambition for breaking the bounds of what is

conventionally accepted as knowledge, thus “giving Sense / A wider pasture, and a richer range” (7.1160-4).

Young’s economic agitprop: a didactic plot to spur productive activity

As a result, Young sees his mission as reawakening his readers to the economic contexts in which they participate throughout their lives, from birth to death. They must learn to see the world in a new way, and to correct their flawed perceptions about value. *Night Thoughts*’ didactic plot allows Young, as the speaker and protagonist of the poem, to jumpstart his Ambition, and publicly rehearse the proper use of his Reason in order to appropriately participate in the economy that he has described.

In order to accomplish this, in the First Night of the poem, he forces the issue of value production by assigning himself a debt that must be paid to wisdom — the result of his previous inaction (1.38-53). Appealing to God as the ultimate creator of value from nothingness, he uses the passage to establish a parallel between himself and the deity. The setup, with its divine/human comparison, elevates Young’s situation. He is not merely facing an indiscretion of spending that must be recompensed, but an epic challenge of creativity that must be fulfilled. The narrative presentation of the debt in *Night Thoughts* is distinct from that of other contemporary economic narratives in that it begins with the debt, and the question of how to escape it, rather than beginning with the missteps that lead to the debt. To do so would provide readers with a cautionary tale about the misuse of credit. Instead, our focus is on the activity of producing value, and the constraints involved.

Young asks for God’s help in fulfilling his obligations in a manner that expresses both a desire to leave grief behind, and to make it useful. The scope of activities (conduct and song) suggest that Young’s pursuit will be creative labor; however, in emphasizing rectitude and

resolve, Young hints that paying the debt will involve coming around to the “right” way of thinking. The mood of the poem changes with his newfound understanding of his situation. Previously, Young has described himself as drifting, his “wreck’d, desponding Thought / From wave to wave of *fancy’d* Misery, / At random drove, her helm of Reason lost” (1.10-12), but suddenly, hearing the clock strike, he realizes how much time he has lost in grieving.

How Much is to be done? my Hopes and Fears

Start up alarm’d, and o’er life’s narrow Verge

Look down - on what? a fathomless Abyss;

A dread Eternity! how surely *mine!*

And can Eternity belong to me,

Poor Pensioner on the bounties of an Hour?

How poor? how rich? how abject? how august?

How complicat? how wonderful is Man?

How passing wonder He, who made him such? (1.61-69)

Contemplating the fathomless abyss stimulates a peculiar blend of terror and admiration.

The abyss is a reminder of the void that preceded the world’s creation, and thus, an image of potential wealth of futurity, if Young can fulfill the challenge of his ambition to overcome the visible and present. However, it is likewise a threatening reminder of Hell as the ultimate debtor’s prison, should Young fail to make good on his obligation. The lines of verse allude to Man made in God’s likeness, and situate that mirror image within a question: how big of a scrape can God (and therefore Man) escape? Determining economic capability is at once a personal and a theological question, as it is phrased here; and tied into the precise nature of humanity’s creation. Young sees himself in peril, but his vision grants him tremendous clarity — it is as

though for the first time, he understands that to be human is to be able to produce value, even under constraints, and vice-versa. The activity of producing value has a religious foundation. This establishes the broad territory of *Night Thoughts* as understanding value — both its creation and its whole context. From this perspective, Young's task to fulfill his debt to wisdom is to properly see, and if necessary, correct his sense of the value that surrounds him. This train of thought will lead him to remember that though human life seems perilously fragile, "even silent Night proclaims [his] soul immortal" (1.102). Thinking of his friends, he corrects his perception of them as lost (1.106) — instead, their value has merely been transferred.

If this were the extent of Young's vision of value, then *Night Thoughts* would be merely an evangelical poem. However, his scope includes both eternal and earthly perspectives on worth, and this leads to various complications. Young knows the value of his friends, even to the point of being able to quantify it. Describing his grief for Philander, he exclaims "O my full Heart! But should I give it vent, / The longest Night, tho' longer far, would fail, / And the *Lark* listen to my *midnight* Song." (1.434-6). Unfortunately, as Young evaluates his own production, he sees it as deficient: he strives to "call the Stars to listen," but all are "deaf" to his efforts, which fall short of the song of the lark (1.439-42).

Young has offered pure feeling, an elegy lasting through night and into morning, as currency for his debt. However, his payment fails, because different values compete, and Young's creation fails to compare with that of the lark. Moreover, the lark is the least of the competitors who exceed Young's contribution. There are others — Milton, Homer, and Pope — whose songs "excell, / And charm thro' distant Ages" (1.443-4). Young sees his own efforts as akin to theirs: "How often I repeat their Rage divine, / To lull my Grievs, and steal my heart from Woe? / I rowl their Raptures, but not catch their Fire" (1.446-48).

Earlier, the poem's mood changed from aimless gloom to sudden activity; here it shifts again, from recognizing value to having one's own creative value recognized. Young's plea, "nor less inspire my conduct than my song" takes on greater significance. Comparing his own work to Pope's, Young quibbles "Man too he sung: Immortal Man I sing ... O had he mounted on his wing of Fire / Soar'd where I sink, and sung Immortal man! / How had it blest mankind? And rescued me?" (1.452, 57-9). This is the complaint from which the poem draws its original title and its subject matter. It asserts that Young's own labors had not been sufficiently recognized — but that they would have been, if Pope's "Essay on Man" had "sung Immortal man," and thus brought attention to bear on Young's subject matter, "rescuing" him from the C-list of 18th century poets. With this added complexity, *Night Thoughts* becomes a poem about immortality, and the world that precedes it. Young is working with more than one concept of Eternity — that which is associated with the divine, and the eternity produced by human acclaim. "Fain would I pay thee with Eternity, but ill my Genius answers my Desire" (2.41-2), Young apologizes. His debt will be eliminated if audience's evaluations of his work were to rise to match their estimations of Pope, Milton, and Homer. In order to have the "true value" of his work recognized, then, Young must teach his readers to see the value of his labor — the striving and rowling that characterizes his efforts. Though this may sound purely self-aggrandizing, it plays directly into Young's evangelism. His assumption is that if readers only understood his labor, their estimation of his work would rise. This same principle underlies Young's brand of Christianity: who could admire and appreciate the magnitude of God's effort without worshipping him?

Young's treatment of emotions as value

While we think of happiness as an experience, Young considers it as a value — one that we possess when we experience it, and lose when it is gone. In *Night Thoughts*, he emphasizes our experience of it as a commodity, comparing the joy he felt with his family to rich household furnishings that are suddenly liquidated.

How richly were my noon-tide Trances hung
 With gorgeous Tapestries of pictur'd joys?
 Joy behind joy, in endless Perspective!
 Till at Death's Toll, whose restless Iron tongue
 Calls daily for his Millions at a meal,
 Starting I woke, and found myself undone?
 Where now my Frenzy's pompous Furniture?
 The *cobweb'd* Cottage with its ragged wall
 Of mould'ring mud, is *Royalty* to me! (1.168-76)

Perspectives shift, and the balance of value changes. The first change is that the former objects of Young's happiness have been removed. The second change is that the ruins of his former joys have become "Royalty" to him — a new standard of value that has replaced the previous standard of gorgeous tapestries and joy behind joy. This demonstrates that humans lack stable perception in assessing happiness — our views change based on whatever we happen to possess at any given moment. The misfortune of his friends' deaths is also a reminder of the fragility of earthly happiness, and more seriously, the human tendency to forget this frailty. We fail to recognize that only "a Perpetuity of Bliss, is Bliss," or that we should strive for "permanent Delight" — implicitly, that which is promised in heaven.

With these passages, Young walks a fine line between complexity and contradiction. On the one hand, he mourns the transience of happiness — on the other, his contrast between earth and heaven treats happiness as though it is a tangible, quantifiable possession that can be permanently acquired. The status of happiness as a value is a subject with which Young is deeply and didactically engaged. In the poem, he portrays the realization that happiness is fragile not as a commonplace, but as a devastating epiphany. He marvels at how he had become confused: “wrapt round and round / In silken thought, which reptile Fancy spun, / Till darken’d Reason lay quite clouded o’er / With soft conceit, of endless Comfort here, / Nor yet put forth her Wings to reach the skies” (1.157-61). Because he mistook his life as a more permanent happiness, he failed to attempt pursuit of the more genuine happiness.

In addition to the happiness which Young possessed while in the company of his friends, a lower form of happiness exists. There are joys which are merely amusements, and which are characterized as repetitive and merely sensual (3.373-5). This passage separates not only higher from lower joys, but also people who are prone to experiencing one sort or another. This underscores Young’s urgings that the way individuals pursue value is important — it separates them into different classes. In either case, happiness, while pleasant to experience, is presented as a risky value to possess, because it might slow or deaden our ambition. Young repeatedly identifies happiness as a form of debt which is incurred during life. He sees humans as having a tendency to seek out pleasure repeatedly, and without ceasing (2.131-2). Implicitly, because we are so myopic about value, when we run into this sort of debt, we do so willingly and eagerly.

The debt that Young describes individuals accruing through their experience of happiness is essentially imaginary - however, he encourages readers to treat it as a matter of great importance. It is much worse than the problem of simply being poor by earthly standards. “Poor

is the man in Debt; the man of Gold / In debt to Fortune, trembles at her Pow'r" (6.532-3). The nature of happiness as a type of credit that incurs debt is its most salient feature — the point that Young is most determined to communicate through the poem. By emphasizing it as debt, rather than credit, Young skips over a key step in other writing about credit — the choice that individuals make to spend it. In Young's description of happiness, individuals either have it, or pursue it, incurring the debt whether or not they are successful in achieving the high happiness that Young associates with Philander and Narcissa, or the low happiness of the senses that must be continually refreshed.

In keeping with his presentation of happiness as a form of debt, Young presents unhappiness as a type of value as well. It is defined chiefly via its contrast with happiness — it is far less ephemeral. No one craves it, so it is not presented as a cause of indebtedness. Unhappiness is plentiful — Young imagines two of its common manifestations, Want and Incurable Disease, roaming widely and encountering hopeless multitudes to prey upon (1.253-4). While happiness is distinguished by its apparent endlessness, the joy behind joy in endless perspective, unhappiness represents itself in terms of its power and appetite to consume happiness value. It is voracious — “able to drink up all your Joy, / And quite unparadise the Realms of Light” (1.184-5). The strongest manifestation of unhappiness is Death, to whom Young attributes the power “to tread out Empire, and to quench the Stars; / The Sun himself by thy permission shines, / And one day, thou shalt pluck him from his sphere” (1.204-7). This portrayal emphasizes unhappiness as highly visible — its power to bereave is both immense and highly public. Considered as a commodity, unhappiness is far easier than happiness to obtain — and when you possess any at all, you are always certain that you have plenty.

The plenitude of unhappiness available is what gives it positive, as well as negative value. Young treats it both as the enforcer of debt incurred through happiness, and the solution. As enforcer, unhappiness is anthropomorphized, in order to be shown as intently alert to debtor's activities:

Misfortune, like a Creditor severe,
 But rises in demand for her Delay;
 She makes a scourge of past Prosperity,
 To stay thee more, and double thy Distress (1.317-20)

The repayment of debt is treated as particularly vindictive, but also as a source of value — a form of capital that provides opportunities to earn. These opportunities may lead to profits that will repay or cancel the debt accrued through happiness. Young makes this claim because he sees happiness as causing individuals to become confused and unable to correctly discern value; and sees adversity as sharpening their ability to be aware of worth. We make different choices when we are in the midst of pain, rather than pleasure. Pain is more truthful, and it

Dispells the Mists our sultry Passions raise
 From Objects low, terrestrial and obscene,
 And shows the Real Estimate of Things,
 Which no Man, unafflicted, ever saw (5.330-5)

Humanity, as Young illustrates it, has a complicated relationship with earthly objects that it encounters. The intercourse between our passions and the objects they encounter produces false information regarding their value. Only when in trouble can we see clearly. Being able to distinguish real from false worth is important to Young not only because he sees it as a generally useful skill, but also because of its implications for human endeavours. Because the majority of

the world is in a fog of passions, they will be unlikely to realize that potential opportunities are standing right before their eyes. Thus, Young counsels readers that “Affliction is the Good Man’s shining Scene; / Prosperity conceals his brightest Ray; / As Night to Stars, Woe Lustre gives to Man” (9.406-8). Individuals in a state of comfort and prosperity are less likely to feel want. And when they do not feel want, they are less likely to act at all, let alone to act in an ambitious fashion.

When Young says this, he is actually referring to other, more familiar types of value — but he groups them within the category of value acquired through the experience of unhappiness. Both because he sees it as having highly varied potential, and because this grouping simplifies his didactic theme: happiness is debt, unhappiness is presented as a form of capital, like praise. The fact that value can be acquired through the more specific activities is secondary to Young’s goal of changing readers’ minds from seeing unhappiness as bad, to seeing it as productive. Considering his bereft state, he vows

I’ll raise a Tax on my Calamity,
 And reap rich Compensation from my Pain.
 I’ll range the plenteous, Intellectual Field;
 And gather ev’ry Thought of sovereign Power,
 To chase the Moral maladies of Men;
 Thoughts, which may bear transplanting to the Skies,
 Tho’ Natives of this coarse penurious Soil,
 Nor wholly wither *there*, where *Seraphs* sing;
 Refin’d, exalted, not annull’d in Heaven (5.280-8).

These lines illustrate the intense degree to which Young's definitions of value are constructed through economic thinking, that is, thinking concerned with how the plenitude or scarcity of different objects changes their value. Here, the plan he proposes builds on his earlier definition of intellectual value. It is a means of accessing "sovereign Thoughts" which are plenteous, implicitly, because few others are willing to harvest them at the cost of personal misfortune. And Young is gathering them because he is confident that they will only mature and be refined, and therefore will be more valuable in Heaven. Young's reasoning is not entirely explicit on why the thoughts would have more value. However, his thinking is characterized by the identification of polar opposites — thus, because earthly happiness is flim-flam that crumbles in death, earthly sorrows must have more lasting value. This high-contrast logic dominates Young's thinking so much that it becomes the basis for his evaluation of knowledge value and literary value, such that they all become subsets of misery capital.

Young's economic retrofit of the crucifixion

The account of the crucifixion occurs in the Fourth Night; not quite halfway through the poem. It is actually presented three times in quick succession, each version emphasizing a different economic concept. The first emphasizes its expense, describing it as a ransom paid by heaven on behalf of mortals. The idea of a ransom being paid is not original to Young, but he takes pains to emphasize the accounting through which a "Sum of Good" is transferred to Man, and "Man's Mortality / Was, then, transfer'd to Death" (4.289-96):

The Ransom was paid down; the Fund of Heaven,
Heaven's inexhaustible, exhausted Fund,
Amazing, and amaz'd, pour'd forth the Price,
All Price beyond: Tho' curious to compute,

Archangels fail'd to cast the mighty Sum;
 It's Value vast ungraspt by Minds Create,
 For ever hides, and glows, in the Supreme. (4.236-241)

The first line provides the simplest description of what took place: the ransom was paid. Young's poetic artistry elaborates in terms of its size – enough to paradoxically “exhaust” the infinite reserves of Heaven, and its incalculability. The dramatic nature of the sacrifice is increased by the importance that Young has already placed on being able to understand value in numerical terms. When we are told that the computation is beyond the skill of even the archangels, the immensity of the sacrifice takes on new meaning. Even if mortals were to improve their mathematical skills, as Young directs, it would be beyond them to understand.

The second description of the crucifixion glorifies it in terms of labor: “*Redemption!* ‘twas Creation more Sublime; / *Redemption!* ‘twas the Labour of the Skies; / Far more than Labour – It was Death in Heaven. (4.455-57).” Death, as the Great Proprietor of All, has already been associated with ownership and appetite; here, however, Young asks who is responsible for the redemption taking place, and surprisingly, awards Death a large share of the credit, with the intriguing implication that Death's actions are “far more than Labour.” When we examine these two representations of Christ's sacrifice and its benefit for mortals, it may appear at first that little has changed, until we realize that all of the tension that Young has added pertains to money, or to work. The event's significance derives from the different incomes (and therefore, different purchasing power), of the parties involved.

The financial circumstances only become more clear as Young moves toward the third depiction of the crucifixion. Where the first description of the crucifixion was meant to humble humanity, in the third depiction it is reason for admiration: “O how is Man enlarg'd / Seen thro'

this Medium?” (4.462-3) asks Young. As a result of their actions, mortals are the recipient of “a Bounty, not indulg’d on high “ (4.439); in fact, the expenditure provokes the attention of the angels above, and the envy of some of them (4.443-4). The final theme is production; and the bounty paid in return for humanity’s part in the crucifixion and creation of “Heaven’s double Property,” Christ, “The double Son; the Made, and the Re-made” (4.471-72). Young recasts the crucifixion as a manufacturing innovation, which anticipates Adam Smith’s delight in the division of labor made possible by production assembly lines.

However, where a traditional Puritan sermon would climax with the crucifixion and resurrection as the solution to the problem of human sin, *Night Thoughts* introduces a new source of jeopardy. “And shall Heaven’s double Property be lost? / Man’s double Madness only can destroy” (4.471-72). The resurrection itself is insufficient, if Heaven is unable to take advantage of it in the marketplace. By “double Madness,” Young refers to the mortal tendency to ignore “Our interest in the Master of the Storm” (4.481), and the potential wealth possible if humans work in cooperation with God. Considering this possibility, the tension that has infused the poem thus far begins to dissolve. At the poem’s start, man’s relationship with the world was fraught – Young blamed his debt-ridden situation on having his “heart incrust’d by the world;” or on his heart being “buried in the rubbish of the world.” All this changes when he contemplates the new possibilities granted by the bounty and the opportunity to become “A glorious Partner with the Deity”(4.496):

I gaze, and as I gaze, my mounting Soul
 Catches strange Fire, Eternity! At thee,
And drops the World – or rather, more enjoys: [italics mine]
 How chang’d the Face of Nature? how improv’d?

What seem'd a Chaos, shines a glorious World,
Or, what a World, an *Eden*; heighten'd all! (4.499-504)

With the prospect of partnership, the speaker's reaction is not increased asceticism, but rather, to rejoice in his ability to see the resources of his surroundings newly reinvigorated. Appetite for the mortal world suddenly becomes possible.

Young's accounts of the crucifixion emphasize increasing economic sophistication, evolving from the payment of a debt, to the efficacy of labor, to the development of a marketable commodity in the form of Christ himself. The tone throughout this passage is most accurately characterized as explanatory, clarifying how the means being described result in their specific ends. Lucidity is significant. The crucifixion itself is surely not unfamiliar, but for the first time, in the course of his night visions, the speaker claims to be able to see "the Price" (4.269) paid by Christ and Heaven. Seeing "the wond'rous Cure" from a heavenly perspective is to view the salvation of humanity taking place "Thro' Means, that speak its Value infinite!" (4.318, 321). If a typical definition for religious enthusiasm described it as believing in a unique insight into divine perspective, then in this instance, the result of the religious enthusiasm is a glimpse of accounting transparency.

The accounts are also noticeable for their optimism. Within the whole structure of *Night Thoughts*, the offer of partnership with the deity represents the most plausible and potentially enjoyable possibility offered thus far in the poem for the protagonist to find a way of paying his debt. It is the precursor to the later offer in Night VIII to "make two Worlds your own." But accompanying this optimism is a note of urgency in the suggestion that the double property could be lost to both heaven and earth. Young, like many good economists, is oriented towards actions, and their results. This uncertainty is emblematic of one of the features distinguishing

Night Thoughts from other contemporary essays and pamphlets on the subject of trade. The poem attempts to deal with the challenges and benefits faced by multiple participants involved; in this case, mortals, Heaven, and strangely, Death, who in the second account of the crucifixion was presented as a key participant, contributing a form of labor that transcends mortal efforts. *Night Thoughts* has elements throughout its sections that are obviously harsh criticisms, both of humanity, and as we shall see, divinity. But other passages, especially those that display tempered optimism, can easily be seen as idealized visions of a commercial sphere, where all participants have clear stakes, risks, and where all make some form of contribution to the enterprise in progress.

Like the crucifixion, the account of the Last Judgment is given an economic retrofit: it is about how Young chooses to unite his own energy and labor with that of God. This can happen because over the course of the poem, Young learns to think of potentially everything as capital to be invested: Time, Joy, Misery, and Virtue, in addition to that most tangible of capitals: his own writing. Though he begins as a fierce advocate for greater recognition of labor value, and remains so through the poem's end, his choice to join forces with the Almighty reflects his acquired understanding of the importance of labor capital combined with concrete capital; as well as his knowledge that labor compensated by an employer's wages has a stability that independent labor, subject to market demand, lacks.

Learning to think like a capitalist involves a more creative interpretation of value, as well as of capital. At first, the boundary separating profit from debt is black and white, and a source of fear. But by the final Night, the "mighty debt" is discharged, paid in the form of the poem itself (9.540-41). By the time *Night IX* was published, the previous nights were already being reprinted, and it must have been satisfying to Young to know that though he had established a

Heaven willing to accept pure effort regardless of its attainment, that the labor would be a genuine success. Equally important to understanding the evolution of the concept of debt are the poem's final scene, in which readers learn the fate of any who failed to take advantage of the vociferous advice that Young has been offering for the previous ten thousand lines. Christ, the "Patron-God,"

Against the *Cross*, *Death's* Iron Sceptre breaks!

From famish'd *Ruin* plucks her human Prey!

Throws wide the Gates Celestial to his *Foes!*

Their *Gratitude*, for such a boundless Debt,

Deputes their *Suffering Brothers* to receive!

And, if deep Human Guilt in Payment fails,

As deeper Guilt, prohibits our *Despair!*

Injoins it, as our Duty, to *Rejoice!*

And (to close All), omnipotently kind,

**Takes His Delights among the Sons of Men.*² (9.2355-64)

Young does not go quite so far as to explicitly state that Heaven will include different classes, based on income – but the implication is clear: those who suffered, and balanced their accounts, stand to benefit from this transaction. Heaven, too, balances its accounts, rewarding those already in commerce with it. The final line, a scriptural reference, is particularly intriguing when considered in a transactional context. The specific verse quoted is Proverbs 8, and describes Christ's place in the creation of the earth: "Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth;

² The asterisk, part of the original text, identified the last line as referencing Proverbs, chapter 8.

and my delights were with the sons of men.”³ Originally, these two verses portrayed Christ’s presence before the Incarnation, and showed the constancy of his love of humankind. Young, when he describes Christ *taking* his delights among the sons of men as part of a process of resolving a question of payment, changes the tone of the verse significantly. Christ’s actions can be interpreted as merciful, but also seem ominous, for they perpetuate the cycle of debt and misery that was introduced at the beginning of the poem. But from the perspective of the poem’s speaker, these lines clarify that debt may be one person’s trial, but it’s also another person’s investment.

Young uses Christianity to provide a representation of the developing contemporary economy, but also of the thought process of the individual who seeks to rise from wage-laborer to capitalist. This is a central implication of the promises of prosperity that are offered, and the adjurations for man to aspire to be a God – God, we learn, is a capitalist; the head of an organization powered by a social division of labor. When it is advantageous, as in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, Heaven can collaborate, rather than compete, with Death – but when Death’s appetite becomes inconveniently powerful, enough economic power has been developed (especially through the creation of the double property) that Death can be demoted in the economic cycle. Though allusions to the Great Chain of Being are made, as critics have noted, the sphere in which labor takes place is more inclusive than the original conceptions of the chain. Traditionally, though earth and nature (encompassing rocks and plants) are part of the chain, they have neither motion nor appetite. Young, praising Nature’s productivity in comparison to man’s,⁴ and describing Nature throughout as “frugal” and “low-tax’d,” transforms it into an individual with economic stakes that are similar to those faced by mortals. Death is similarly personified,

³ Proverbs 8:30-31, KJV.

⁴ “No blank, no trifle, Nature made, or meant.” (Night II.80)

and serves a specific purpose – to help Young valorize ambitious economic behavior, and what might even be described as business ruthlessness. Choosing to include Death and Nature, as well as figures like Hope and Misfortune is Young's method of including uncertainty and uncontrollable circumstances in his arguments about economic activity. As any capitalist would recognize, it is fatal to ignore them.

Were the arguments in *Night Thoughts* actually sympathetic to individual laborers?

The conception, in *Night Thoughts*, of what constitutes economics, is highly risk-oriented, which is to say that risk and uncertainty are the foundation upon which Young builds all of his principles. He makes risk much more central than the majority of those participating in economic activity and discourse. We can see this in his choice to represent business relationships between mortal humans and abstract personifications; but also in his conceptions of what moves economic activity forward: change. Profit and development occur over the long term, as mortals invest in heaven, heaven invests in the earth, and perhaps negotiates a sweet deal on the side with Death to bring in extra funds. When returns on human guilt are lower than expected, the best tactic is to seek newer sources of revenue, and perhaps – in terms of the imagery in *Night Thoughts*, expand the mortal workforce. The transitions from joy to misery, and back again, also constitute change, and thus, as Young makes clear, they also qualify as capital. This is both advantageous and disadvantageous for individual laborers. Free and unlimited access to potential capital might appear to be a beneficent imaginative gesture, interpreted as supporting individual laborers. However, the presence of capital everywhere also creates a justification for near constant effort.

While Young can seem sympathetic to the plight of the individual laborer in some parts of *Night Thoughts*, he also exhibits the views prevalent among authors engaging in traditional

(prose) analyses of England's prospects for wealth. These authors, with few exceptions, advocated for the importance of engaging individuals in productive wage labor – that, not coincidentally, provided a profit for employers (Perelman 18). To the eighteenth century entrepreneur, the logic of wage labor profits was straightforward: the profits from exports of finished products were higher than the profits from the same quantity of raw materials. It did not occur to them, as it would to a contemporary businessman, to consider the costs of the labor required for production of the finished goods (Furniss 13). When the resources themselves were seen as valuable, labor was concentrated on the land itself, and the retrieval of the raw materials. But as various nations participated more actively in commerce, English businessmen rethought their ideas about what made a nation competitive in the international marketplace. Daniel Defoe succinctly states the new view in *A General History of Trade*: “A native produce in any country will by consequence bring a trade to that country. But it is the labor and industry of the people that alone brings wealth and makes that trade profitable to the nation” (qtd. in Furniss 16).

Writings from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century exhibit a change in the way that individuals thought about time, emphasizing its scarcity rather than its abundance. Sir Henry Pollexfen's *Discourse of Trade*, published in 1700, presents the following argument: “For if but 2 million of working people at 6d. a day comes to £500,000 which upon due inquiry whence our riches must arise, will appear to be so much lost to the nation by every holiday that is kept(qtd. in Perelman 17). More familiar to contemporary readers is Benjamin Franklin's *Advice to a Young Tradesman* (published in 1748), which Weber seized upon as evidence for his interpretation of the spirit of capitalism: “Remember that Time is Money” (Franklin and Ketcham 51–54). Perelman and Joyce Oldham Appleby both cite multiple instances of authors suggesting ways for individuals to occupy their early morning and late evening hours with tasks

such as weaving, carding, spinning, or constructing fishnets. These suggestions persisted throughout the eighteenth century, and were directed at the footmen of the gentry, as well as “disbanded soldiers, poor prisoners, widows and orphans, all poor tradesmen, artificers, and labourers, their wives, children, and servants” (Puckle 26). Supposedly, this was to the benefit of the laboring individuals. James Puckle, describing the increased vulnerability of the poor to “many loathsome Diseases,” also cited their susceptibility to another chronic ailment: “Idle Habits contracted in their Youths” (Preface). Poverty was seen as a potential epidemic threatening the entire population, as Puckle demonstrates when he cites Sir Matthew Hale’s 1683 *Discourse touching provision for the Poor*, to warn that “Where there are many very Poor, the Rich cannot long or safely continue such” (Preface).

Encouragement to enter the field of wage labour came from religious authorities as well. Robert Clayton, the Bishop of Cork, and later Clogher, the second richest bishopric in Ireland,⁵ launched an attack on the Methodists in a sermon given in 1739. “Under Pretence of Devotion to God, [they] would, instead of the Spade and the Plow, leave nothing in the Hands of Children, but Manuals of Piety” (Clayton 7). Clayton likewise advocated for limiting the number of individuals allowed to “give up their Time to the preaching of the Gospel and propagating Religion” (24) which benefited his own earnings. He too subscribed to the view that to make people industrious in their old age, it was vital to be sure that they learned the habit at a young age (5). Young, it must be noted, is equally ready to criticize mortals as lazy and unproductive; but the personal nature of his poetic narrative alleviates a great deal of the harshness. He shows, we might say, both the perspective of the employer, and that of the wage laborer – and he portrays the problem of sloth as a difference in the way that time is perceived in the eye of the beholder. “*Time’s wondrous price*” (2.16) is identified as one of the themes of the second Night,

⁵ (Leighton) *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

and throughout, Young's narrator illustrates it as the only possession that man has, whose use is ordained to please God (2.183-87), anticipating the aphorism voiced above by Franklin. But where Young sees time as inherently valuable if well-used, Lorenzo "pleads Time's *numerous* Blanks" (2.87). He sees Time as similar to a lottery, where the majority of the tickets bring no returns.

The answer to the question of whether Young was sympathetic to other laborers is that he was only semi-sympathetic. As a straw man, Lorenzo indicates Young's contempt for the majority of other individuals as dim, and largely unaware of the context of value that surrounded them. The fact that Young emphasizes virtue, time, and wisdom as the key tools for participating in the economy can look sympathetic, because such resources are freely available – but since Young wants individuals to work and work and work, he cannot truly be said to be an advocate on anyone's behalf but his own.

Understanding Young's arguments in a larger economic context

Night Thoughts has been taken for granted as an enthusiastic poem, proclaiming salvation via revealed religion. The sheer bulk of the poem has dissuaded critics from perceiving the complexity of the relations between God, Death, Christ, and humanity within it, which make it clear that Young's goals go far beyond mere melancholy proselytizing. But it is equally important that Young makes the debate surrounding reason and enthusiasm a central issue in economic thought and strategy. Too often, studies of enthusiasm have positioned it as grounded in and influencing one of two areas: imaginative writing and religious thought. In *Night Thoughts*, we can see enthusiasm playing a broader role, as Young uses it to meet the need for strategy and guidance due to the fact that rationality cannot fully explain the shifts in value in the eighteenth-century economic environment.

Night Thoughts, then, represents not only an insightful vision of questions that remain relevant to the discipline of economics to this day, and an early text in the genre of political economy, but also an important work for studies of economics and literature that make inquiries into when the two disciplines were united as one, and the circumstances under which they separated, and became antagonistic towards each other. It provides new material with which to explore perspectives on the binary between fact and fiction in money in the Enlightenment, and the rise of Romanticism.

The word “economy” has undergone a subtle but dramatic transformation, just in the last hundred years. From the middle of the fifteenth century, and through the nineteenth, the term “economy” denoted the choices made by an individual managing a household or business. In the late sixteenth century, mentions of “divine economy,” begin to occur, referring to the choices made by God in governing the world, specifically with regards to mankind, and primarily referring to the reconciling powers of the sacraments (OED, def. economy). The decisions that “economy” refers to in this early sense may not be easy decisions, especially if they involve choosing between food and lodging – but the word in itself refers only to the decisions, and to the individual’s skill at allotting resources. Today, the dominant understanding of “economy” is as *the* economy – which encompasses multiple parties with diverse and often combative interests interacting with each other and providing the basis for continued support for cities’ states’ and nations’ livelihoods.

When we use the term economy in the twenty-first century, we are acknowledging that to a large degree, our supposed economic individualism is bound up in the viability of an aggregation. The woes of investment banks can be explained with references to what NPR

International Business and Economics correspondent Adam Davidson described as the “global pool of money:”

Most people don't think about it but there's this huge pool of money out there, which is basically all the money the world is saving now. Insurance companies saving for a catastrophe, pension funds saving money for retirement, the central bank of England saving for whatever central banks save for. All the world's savings.... And, by the way, before you finance enthusiasts start writing any letters, we do know that 70 trillion technically refers to that subset of global savings called fixed-income securities. Everyone else can just ignore what I just said. Let's put 70 trillion dollars in perspective. Do this. Think about all the money that people spend everywhere in the world. Everything you bought in the last year, all of it. Then add everything Bill Gates bought. And all the rice sold in China and that fleet of planes Boeing just sold to South Korea. All the money spent and earned in every country on earth in a year: that is LESS than 70 trillion, less than this global pool of money.(Glass)

Though not everyone invests in the fixed-income securities market, anyone with a mortgage is connected to it, since one of the main options for increasing the global pool of money is to invest it in bundled mortgage securities. At some point, debt became a fundamental part of how capital works. As John Lanchester notes, in the corporate world, debt is even seen as beneficial, much of the time.⁶ Debt functions to allow individuals to increase capital and thereby proportionately increase net profit from production. Leverage, or “using other people's money to make your own money work harder,” means that our definition of economic individualism is only becoming more complex. In addition, discussions of capitalistic individualism and the leveraged economy must nearly always take a synchronic approach, considering both the immediate and the future effects of choices made and debt borrowed.

There is no shortage of pundits offering to interpret the changing shape of the aggregate economy and present strategies for navigating it successfully. This is what makes *Night*

⁶ (Lanchester 45) In Lucy Prebble's 2009 play *Enron*, Andy Fastow and Jeff Skilling have the following exchange:

Skilling They're consuming our debt.

Fastow Yes! And debt's just money. All money is debt.

Skilling In ... what ... sense?

Fastow If the bank gives you money, you owe *them*. You put money in the bank, they owe *you*. All money is debt. It's just how you present it.

Thoughts so interesting as economic writing – it is one of the earliest and most complex visions of a comprehensively networked economic system. Young framed Earth and Heaven as interdependent economies. Though the two produce competing values, which humans must choose between, Young carefully adjusts the traditional Puritan opposition of mortal and eternal worth to show how each world invests in and is supported by the other. The great debt carried by the poem's primary speaker and protagonist has the potential to result in his downfall if unpaid, or to allow him to achieve new heights of commercial collaboration and prosperity. Young's system is easily distinguished from the spiritual commerce metaphors common in the sermons and essays of Richard Baxter (1615-1691) and Matthew Henry (1662-1714), whom Weber and Sombart identified as exemplary advocates for spiritual commerce. Baxter and Henry's imagery descends from biblical exegesis, and stops short of anything beyond a proclamation of the subjective wealth of each individual's own soul. "We reckon that is most worth that is most worth to us," writes Henry, proving to his own satisfaction that the value of the soul far outweighs that of the world (309-310).

The soul itself is currency, product, and capital in the Puritan oeuvre; the only debt or detractor of value is sin (see *Pilgrim's Progress*, the Ninth Stage). In *Night Thoughts*, while the soul is simply the individual self, and virtue is a quality that aids humans. But from Young's perspective, neither the soul nor virtue substitutes for the importance of producing value. Mortal humans participate in the economy alongside Death, the "Great Proprietor of All," and Christ, "the Patron-God," where Wisdom, Nature, and Misfortune are also identified as creditors and/or other investors in the pursuit of profit. By constructing an economic playing field where certain participants (mortal humans) are distinct individuals maneuvering among powerful abstract supernatural figures, Young creates a world that highlights the obstacles created by inequalities

of economic power, and their effects on individual earners. Our economic conceptual thought today is charged with the same tensions between individuals and aggregates that inform the dramatic structure of *Night Thoughts*. The poem provides insight into economic development in the eighteenth century, but perhaps more importantly, Young's unusual strategy of mixing the real and the supernatural raises questions about the role that we have ascribed to the imagination in economic discourse.

Night Thoughts in previous literary criticism

This dissertation is not the first piece of writing to address Young's interest in value. Two canonical authors have commented on it previously. The first is William Blake, whose poem *Vala; or, The Four Zoas*, was composed on proof sheets of illustrations that he had been commissioned to design by Richard Edwards for a deluxe edition of Young's poem, published in 1797. Blake created 537 illustrations for Young's poem, approximately one image for every 20 lines – an indication that he knew the work quite well by the end. His critique of Young within *The Four Zoas* is extensive and complex – too much so to comment at length at this point in time. But one of the clearest instances of his critique is in a passage of five lines, often quoted as representative of Blake at his peak eloquence:

What is the price of Experience? do men buy it for a song

Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No it is bought with the price

Of all that a man hath, his house his wife his children.

Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy

And in the witherd field where the farmer plows for bread in vain (TFZ, Night II, Plate

35, ll. 11-15)

These lines are a rejoinder to Young's counsel that men should "talk" with their past hours, and "ask them . . . how they might have borne more welcome news", explaining that their answers are the voice of "kind Experience" (2.376-81). Kind Experience, says Young, warns against success because it can lead to complacency, rather than energetic work. Blake's passage is a sharp rebuke to Young's framing of experience and wisdom as "kind" and as freely available. His rejoinder is written from the perspective of struggling to achieve any opportunities to display his work at all, let alone to find the large audience that Young had. However, *The Four Zoas* is as difficult a poem to read as *Night Thoughts*, and the connection between the two in terms of content has never been fully or correctly articulated. The other author to comment on Young's economic perspective is George Eliot, whose strenuous critique was most likely responsible for relegating Young to the dustier corner of canonical literature, and which I discuss in Chapter 3. But neither Blake's nor Eliot's commentary was enough to call attention to the content that this chapter has discussed. What then have critics been focusing on when they have written about *Night Thoughts*?

The chief answer is mood. Raymond Dexter Havens' *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry* was published in 1922, and followed soon after by Amy Louise Reed's *The Background of Gray's Elegy*. Both wrote about melancholic verse in the eighteenth century, and kicked off a series of critical works commenting on Young's particular style of gloom. In actuality, Havens' discussion of *Night Thoughts* is more of a denunciation calling attention to the poem's lack of merit in comparison with works by Cowper and Thomson, while Reed focused more on the effect of seventeenth-century influences on Young given free rein by Shaftesbury's sanctioning of the "free out-pouring of emotion" (192). While Thomson's *Seasons* had been notably long and reflective, Young, Reed explains, outdoes Thomson in terms of both length and discursiveness

(193). I cite read both because of her influence and to make a point about how later criticism of *Night Thoughts* was shaped by these early twentieth-century critics. The vast majority of criticism of *Night Thoughts* runs in a direct line back to Reed or Havens, or to John M. Draper and/or Edith M. Sickels, whose *The Funeral Elegy and the Rise of Romanticism* and *The Gloomy Egoist*, respectively, shored up Reed and Havens. If the authors do not cite one of the four directly, they cite someone who relied upon them. Thus, criticism of Young's poem is heavily focused on melancholy, but not so much on the quality or particular nuances of the melancholy as on its general presence. It is notable because it is so unrestrained in comparison to the poetry that came before. This has created a situation where critical commentary has tended to engage Young in terms of his intensity – to argue, as Cecil Wicker did, that “Young's melancholy is far more subjective and personal” than any other poet of the Graveyard School, or to say that his degree of melancholy is “too deep for mere noonday retirement among sylvan shadows,” as Reed does (194). And Reed took matters even further when she argued that “Young's subjectivity extends to his nature description and amounts to pathetic fallacy” (194). This assertion turned the entire poem – all its encyclopedic detail of the surrounding world – into a figurative representation of Young's selfhood. That interpretation has largely persisted, and has been tremendously influential, even after the category of the Graveyard School has been largely discarded.

Interpreting Young's poem as the portrayal of an epic-sized selfhood has also contributed to writers discussing the phenomena of religious and poetic enthusiasm, both of which involve an overabundance of confidence and focus on oneself. Both types of enthusiasm are so focused on the self – whether self as poet, or self experiencing the divine, that they tend to exclude other subjects. Enthusiasm sought or achieved, tends to fill entire poems, and to become their chief

critical subject, rather than something auxiliary. This has put critics into the difficult situation of needing to find something new to say about Young's egoism and subjectivity while staying consistent with the standard interpretations of the poem as devotional, and as an example of religious and/or poetic enthusiasm. The result is that we get statements that are all variations on the same theme: Young has a tremendous sense of his own self. At worst, this leads to statements like Shaun Irlam's in his study of religious and poetic enthusiasm:

So, to summarize: the entire movement of *Night-Thoughts* takes place under the sign of a self-estrangement operating in the service of a transcendental self-identity against a perpetual, narcissistically tenacious self-alienation that perversely insists on admiring itself *as* self-identity and mistakenly congratulating itself on a bogus immortality (203).

Without anything but the self to focus on, any interpretation of the poem is like a cat chasing its tail. Melancholy interpreted as being so closely tied to the selfhood (as opposed to career failure) is an endlessly slippery subject – once entered into, it is nearly impossible to end the discussion. One can attempt to find new ground by emphasizing Young as visionary, which mitigates the egotistical aspects of his inwardness somewhat – but not entirely. Other criticism has addressed *Night Thoughts* as participating in and helping to establish the Romantic aesthetic of the sublime, arguing that Young finds the sublime infinite via his intense self-reflection (Bloom 77). I do not intend to wholly negate these critical works with my argument about the poem's content; undeniably, the sublime was an emerging subject of interest to poets, and it seems unlikely that Young, given his hunger for success, would ignore it. At the same time, without awareness of his yearning and frustration regarding his career, the sublime of *Night Thoughts* looks like intensity for intensity's own sake, rather than as a part of thinking about the exchange of labor for reward, and to miss this thread of Young's thought is to fundamentally misconceive the poem.

If previous criticism is one obstacle to understanding the poem, then the other major stumbling block is the necessity of reading it completely. Admittedly, it is a highly challenging text to read and digest – what is unfortunate is that the difficulty it presents has become an occasion for discussing it through quick and casual comments that indicate that there is nothing left to discuss – that the poem’s difficulty is all due to its length, or to the phenomenon of eighteenth century contradiction and paradox (as argued by Barrell and Guest), rather than because of any yet-to-be-understood content.

This means that the clearest commentary comes from those who have read more of the poem than others, and who have dodged prior criticism almost entirely. In *Preromanticism*, Marshall Brown argues for the existence of an urbane sublime aesthetic, characterized by disciplined coolness and a commitment to detachment. He is perhaps the only twentieth-century critic to pick up on the fact that “the aim of *Night Thoughts* is to examine our feelings and to make us conscious of the variability and relativity of values,” (36) though he is quite wrong in suggesting that the aimless meandering of the poem resolves into “everything turn[ing] out to be gentle,” or that the “poem’s theodicy is based not on rational persuasion, but rather on making the reader conscious of the eternal variability of life,”(34–35) for choosing rationally is one of Young’s primary points.

Daniel Odell, in one of the most thorough readings of the poem published, presented it as a rebuttal to Pope’s *Essay on Man* that exhibited Young’s confidence in an anthropocentric Christian cosmos, wherein man could be capable of “endless material, intellectual, and spiritual progress.”(Odell) Eliot was appalled at Young associating God with any sort of monetary transaction at all; Odell’s defense reminded readers that Young’s emphasis on reward was part of an already existent eighteenth century debate regarding human progress (Lovejoy 244–49, see

also Odell, op. cit., 491-92). John Barrell and Harriet Guest take a similar tactic to Odell's and suggest that Young was promoting the market of "spiritual acquisitions," or more accurately, the spiritual futures market. The point, they say, is not that virtue has to be *paid* for – it's just a much better investment in the long run.⁷ It's true that this is an aspect of Young's message. But Barrell and Guest construct their interpretation using exclusively passages from Night VIII, describing Young's "God-like Man" (8.1249) without regard to the steps that Young has taken to arrive at this portrayal, and thus, Young's economic thinking appears to be similar to that of Alexander Pope in the *Epistle to Bathurst*.

Interest in patronage has led to more study of Young in the last few years, not so much for his poetry as for his role as a historical figure; and that has brought us closer to understanding his perspective. This criticism focuses not on *Night Thoughts*, but instead on *Conjectures on Original Composition*, the essay that Young wrote while riding high on *Night Thoughts*' success. Both Dustin Griffin and Adam Rounce have begun the work of unpacking Young's economic perspective with the *Conjectures* as a starting point.⁸ I do not intend to minimize the importance of the *Conjectures* to understanding Young's economic perspective -- on the contrary, the similarities and differences in how Young's economic thinking is presented in these two genres are worthy of a more expansive discussion than this dissertation permitted. Their investigations are changing the way that critics read *Night Thoughts*, and graveyard poets in general – and the results are visible in Eric Parisot's brand new volume *Graveyard Poetry*, which begins to look more closely at the poets' professional situations and their effects on their verse. However, the build-up of previous criticism establishing Young as devotional, and the difficulty of

⁷ (Barrell and Guest 138) Barrell and Guest, who are the only recent critics to touch on the economic dimension of the poem, argue that Young's choice to include a market-oriented subtext was part of a deliberate choice by 18th century poets to incorporate a variety of discourses into their poetry, including that of economics.

⁸ See Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800*, pp 155-188; and Rounce, "Young, Goldsmith, Johnson, and the Idea of the Author in 1759," pp. 95-112.

understanding the non-linear narrative of *Night Thoughts* prevails, resulting in Parisot reading it as a poem of Christian, rather than economic conversion.

***Night Thoughts* in the context of economic criticism**

Why has it been so easy to miss Young's engagement with economics in *Night Thoughts*, a poem whose lines are liberally adorned with economic language? The length of the poem and its author's reputation for sententious scolding have not helped its reputation; but in addition, Young's style of presenting his arguments regarding value, productivity, and profit in *Night Thoughts* goes counter to our conventional conception of what form political economic thought can take. Most striking is his choice to portray an economic sphere that cannot be empirically verified. Young's contemporaries Swift and Pope both used imaginative elements to comment on aspects of economic development, but did so in order to satirize certain elements, i.e., Gulliver's changing size as an ironic reflection of the fluctuating currency value. Commercial satires helped to set a precedent that imaginative depictions of finance would be seen by later critics as mocking and sharply criticizing economic structure, instead of being considered as theorizing about the structure itself.

The function of imagination in the evolution of economic and financial thought is subject to ongoing debate. "The economy" as we refer to it in everyday conversation is a construct that has become more prevalent than capitalism itself, but it does not provoke particular scrutiny. Its shift in meaning from individual resource allocation to a vast competitive aggregate at first appears to be a development of the last hundred years: the concept of "the economy" became familiar in the wake of Keynesian economics and their role in assuaging the Great Depression. Even before its "start" on Black Tuesday, October 29, 1929, Keynes had promoted the idea of an economic macrocosm, arguing that the government needed to invest in smaller businesses,

injecting capital and thus creating more power to spend. His views contrasted with the longstanding laissez-faire principles associated with Adam Smith's idea of the invisible hand, which in itself was an aspect of the Whig narrative of progress. Keynes believed that we cannot wait for things to work out in the long run, because "in the long run, we are all dead" (Vol. IV, 65). Instead, immediate and deliberate action must be taken. The laissez-faire and Keynesian perspectives are not just opinions about the best strategies for economic wellbeing: they are contrasting conceptions of human autonomy. The implication of Keynes' view is that collective action can have a verifiable effect on a specific goal; while the implication of the laissez-faire theories is that it cannot – there is too much push and pull from the parties that oppose each other. Both views underscore the importance of imagination in developing ongoing strategies for financial survival. However, any acknowledgement of the utility or necessity of an imaginative construct in economic activity must be carefully distinguished from irrational choices that have been associated with market crashes and devolution. To choose imagination over rationality goes against the established narratives describing the development of modern capitalism.

Examining the definitions of capitalism that have emerged shows that its affinity with rationality is impossible to sum up in a simple statement. Marx never undertook the task of articulating a succinct description of capitalism, and successive scholars have casually framed it in a variety of ways. None of these are entirely synonymous; they present capitalism from several different perspectives. In a recent work, Joyce Oldham Appleby describes the "cultural heart of capitalism" as "the individual's capacity to control resources and initiate projects." (A (275–82). While correct, this definition is clearly incomplete, describing primarily the prosperous ventricle of the "heart" of capitalism. We can see this easily by looking at the language of Appleby's definition set beside that of Max Weber's in *The Protestant Ethic and the*

Spirit of Capitalism. Weber described capitalism as “identical with the pursuit of profit, and forever *renewed* profit, by means of a continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise.” While Weber describes a desire, Appleby describes a skill, foregrounding the fact that not all individuals have this capacity. The ambiguity is thick enough that it’s almost understandable that Weber offers a tautology, writing that capitalism is “capitalistic.” Neither definition captures the range of economic activities that have taken place within society in the last hundred years. Attempts to be more particular careen into thorny territories of ideology and class conflict. To look at the varied ways that critics have described capitalism: a yearning, an energy that may be utilized, an oppressive force – in these terms, it is as mysterious as romantic love; and poets, as well as scholars of literature and economics, might pursue investigations of capitalism with equal creativity and disciplinary freedom as their colleagues have pondered *eros*.

Scholarly interest in the origins of capitalism has elevated the importance of rationality because it allowed historians to assess capitalistic development on a comparative spectrum. One need only glance at the disputes surrounding the origin of capitalism to understand why creating an external measure of progress seemed necessary, for the arguments are fraught with semantic tension. Must capitalism be consciously generalized and referred to as a specific set of strategies and perspectives in order to exist? If so, then it would be necessary to date its emergence in the last half of the nineteenth century. Weber’s approach located capitalism as arising chiefly in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, drawing heavily on printed texts that recorded an increasingly active discourse surrounding labor and commerce. His rival Werner Sombart argued for a capitalist spirit that sprang earlier, from the fifteenth century (63-103), promulgated by Moorish and Florentine merchants, and supported as much by Catholicism and Judaism as by Protestantism. But Sombart’s case is built on information gathered about the activity of

merchants throughout Europe, and distinguishes between imaginary standards of early and perfected capitalism. H. M. Robertson, taking issue with the idea of capitalism as perfectible, points out that though the scale of medieval commerce does not compare with that of later centuries (38), the fundamental importance of capital (in the form of money invested and materials purchased in bulk to be crafted into saleable goods) to medieval merchants was equivalent with the role it played during the Reformation and Enlightenment. He notes, too, that Sombart admitted that if pressed to cite

a definitive birth-date for modern capitalism, he would choose A.D. 1202 – the year in which Leonardo Pisano’s *Liber Abbaci* (the arithmetical treatise which first rendered exact calculation possible) appeared, and in which Venice began the attack on Constantinople which marked the beginning of the exploitation of the East by Western Europeans – especially by the Italian communes – and through which the large-scale accumulation of money began. (Robertson 44)

Here, the focus is on the sudden appearance of a tool for rational calculation. And rationality is central to each of these market theorists. For Sombart, “absolute rationalism” had become the first rule of economic activity in the early twentieth century, and he presented rationality as the primary characteristic that evolved from medieval capitalism to modern (182). Only the intensity of this rationality had changed, causing humanity to become more adaptive, and more likely to change behaviors if they saw the change as benefiting them. This description contrasts in interesting ways with Weber’s, because while Sombart’s narrative of rationalism suggests humans becoming more independent, and able to diverge from tradition, Weber’s presents the mirror opposite: “no country and no age has ever experienced, in the same sense as the modern Occident, the absolute and complete dependence of its whole existence, of the political,

technical, and economic conditions of its life, on a specially trained *organization* of officials” (16). Robertson, too, agrees on the importance of rationalism to capitalism, though he cites Aristotle’s discussion of the desire for gain, as fulfilled by either speculation, labor, or usury (qtd. in Robinson 36) as evidence that capitalistic thought was present in the classical era.

I am not rehearsing these perspectives as a precursor for proposing a new originary point for capitalism, but instead to demonstrate how rationality became both a key characteristic *and* a rare bit of common ground for historians and critics. In the early 21st century, and in the wake of a global recession, discussions about investor irrationality are center stage. Alan Greenspan’s description (in 1996) of the stock market’s “irrational exuberance” prompted a frenzy of discussion marveling at the precarious logic wielded by investors, and the consequences when this logic failed them. Irrationality (in this case, imagining that a highly unlikely situation would *never* occur) became a scapegoat for economic collapse. But a little thought brings the realization that pure rationality would serve no better than its opposite. The market depends on the “state of long term expectation” (Keynes, *General Theory*, 133), which, as John Maynard Keynes explained “does not solely depend... on the most probable forecast we can make. It also depends on the confidence with which we make this forecast” and in the end, there is always a black swan on the horizon.

The emerging field of behavioral finance, which has been defined as “the study of human fallibility in competitive markets,”(Shleifer 23) emphasizes the role that emotions and emotional responses play in financial decision making. Behavioral finance has arisen as a sharp contrast to the efficient markets hypothesis (EMH) that dominated contemporary economics for the latter part of the twentieth century. In efficient markets, security prices “always ‘fully reflect’ all available information” (Fama 383). The phenomenon of arbitrage, which is a descendant of

Adam Smith's invisible hand, posits "the simultaneous purchase and sale of the same, or essentially similar, securit[ies] in two different markets at advantageously different prices" (Sharpe and Alexander, qtd. in Shleifer 3), and this reduces the prices of securities to their fundamental, and accurate, values. The EMH is also a descendant of Say's Law, which states that production and consumption will naturally move towards a state of equilibrium: the best way to facilitate robust consumption of products is to make sure that production is equally energetic. Behavioral finance represents a sharp digression from the economic thought of the late eighties and nineties, which cast investors as expert cultivators of profit, able to reliably seed a small investment that would ripen into huge profits. We could also trace the ancestry of behavioral finance back to Addison's beautiful virgin named Public Credit, who is herself a descendant of the medieval goddess of Fortune, that fickle bitch who always abandons countless businessmen at the worst moment. All three are coping mechanisms for dealing with certain troublesome aspects of market activity. But while citations for Smith, Fama, and Say would be unsurprising in an economic treatise, referencing Addison would be almost unheard of. By calling something a law, or a natural phenomenon, we protect it from the taint of irrationality. A goddess would be out of place in the 21st century. A new science fits right in.

Economists struggle with the task of communicating their knowledge to others, especially regarding what can and cannot be controlled in the market. Mary Poovey has presented investigations into factual and fictive strategies for conveying information that, if not exhaustive, are two of the most detailed and wide-ranging studies on the subject. Poovey's body of work, as it currently concludes in *Genres of the Credit Economy*, makes a statement that will strike some literary economic critics as untenable: she denies the efficacy of the novel as a subject of study for economic criticism. Controversial for its directness, her view can also be seen as an explicit

confrontation of a challenge for both the disciplines of economics and literary criticism. John Dupré and Regenia Gagnier have noted the problem of the ambiguity surrounding the ends of economics, specifically, regarding how we treat economic discourse differently depending on whether we see it as positive or normative. The former “tells us of the causal connections between economic phenomena of different kinds;” the latter, how this information should be used (Dupre and Gagnier 176). Poovey rejects the value of historical positive economics. Perhaps she is correct in doing so, but the result is that only a fraction of the economic thought taking place in individual minds will ever be used.

Edward Young set out to illustrate his perceptions of economic development on an epic scale, encompassing the situations of individual laborers and powerful capitalists, and capturing *both* of their efforts to succeed, even when these efforts rendered them antagonistic towards each other. Young’s situation in the eighteenth century mirrors ours in reverse, as he and others were contemplating an economy that was moving away from the aggregate-based systems of mercantilism. In the first half of the eighteenth century, as manufacturing opportunities began to arise, agricultural production decreased, releasing a large number of migrant workers from landlord-tenant-based employment on the land. Guilds, which regulated all aspects of production of goods, and determined whether an individual craftsman could begin residing and producing within a town, were beginning to be perceived as too controlling, with the consequence of deterring “any person of an enterprising genius in regard of manufacture” from contributing to the town’s prosperity (Daunton 155). From the end of the seventeenth century, writers had identified the benefits to individuals that were possible in conjunction with the creation of banks, including the registration of land titles (increasing the speed and security of land-based loans),

and the ease with which the banks made it possible to secure funds for private necessities, as well as public ones (Dickson 5–16).

There was no literary precedent for endeavoring to portray the vicissitudes of individual wealth and fortune accompanied with lengthy didactic commentary on the construction of value, and the efficacy of labor. It was more common to find one or the other, in satires and georgics, respectively – but not both at the same time. The genre of political economy was still inchoate and diverse. William Letwin suggests that the community of writers discoursing in the seventeenth century on coinage and interest issues saw themselves as united by the controversy of their subjects and perspectives – but this in itself did not qualify economics as a science, a structure of knowledge in which every component had been tested and verified, and which called for large-scale descriptive articulations. But nor were there clearly demarcated boundaries for economics as a discipline. Intertextuality played an important role, for authors continually defined and redefined what activities constituted the economic sphere; and as William Letwin argues, any new definition had to acknowledge and include all the other books that were judged as deserving of a place in the subject.(210-214). Seventeenth-century writers (Gerald de Malynes, Edward Misselden, Thomas Mun) primarily referred to trade and commerce in their titles, and though their work contributed to the abstract idea of the economy, there is no indication that they were trying to create a systemic image of economic activity that linked buying and selling with workmanlike occupations or professions.⁹ Their focus was nearly always on the exchange of goods.

By the end of the century, the labor that produced the goods was drawing more attention. William Petty, whose *Verbum Sapienti* was published three years after his death in 1687, included a chapter entitled “How to Employ the People, and the End Thereof,” emphasizing the

⁹ See Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact* 66; see also Letwin, *op. cit.*, 214-15.

importance of transferring individual labor out of agriculture, and into industries that would be more productive for trade, and for England (Perelman 128). The term “economy,” was first used in regard to discussions of commerce in France. One of the earliest treatises is Antoine de Montchrétien’s 1615 *Traicté de L’Économie Politique*, but the shift from discussing *commerce* to discussing *oeconomie* took hold in the mid-eighteenth century, when Quesnay published the *Tableau Oeconomique* in 1759, and when his followers began to identify themselves as *économistes*. (Letwin 217) Eight years later, Sir James Steuart published *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Oeconomy: being an essay on the science of domestic policy in free nations*, bringing the term into the English vocabulary, and pressing towards identifying an accumulation of specific principles that together, formed a discipline.

Young’s economic engagement prior to *Night Thoughts*

Night Thoughts precedes any writings by Quesnay, the earliest of the authors who would be identified as the Physiocratic school, by fourteen years. Young’s interest in framing systems of commerce began at least a dozen years even earlier, as exhibited in his *Imperium Pelagi*, which consisted of one ode, titled “The Merchant.” It was only published twice in 1730, in London and in Dublin, though it was included in later anthologies of Young’s poetry published before and after his death. It is not an outstanding work by the aesthetic standards of the eighteenth century or any period since; as the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Young states, “No critic has thought these works successful enough to resolve the degrees to which Young’s persistence in writing six-line stanzas on naval policy arose from patriotic fervor, governmental encouragement, or the aspiration to gain preferment or to domesticate Pindar.”¹⁰ The poem’s composition was occasioned by the Treaty of Seville, which ended the Spanish siege of Gibraltar, and restored Britain’s commercial concessions in the territory (and provided official

¹⁰ James E. May, (Matthew and Harrison)

British support of Spain's claims in pre-Risorgimento Italian states). Searching the work for examples of Young's poetic craft bears little fruit; the fascination is in the claims that its author makes about its goals. Young begins by identifying trade as "a very *noble* subject in itself; more *proper* than any for an Englishman" (*Imperium Pelagi*: Preface). The body of the poem, and the summary arguments that precede each strain exhibit the familiar flavor of the Whig narrative: "Trade natural to Britain. (Strain I) ... *Arts* from commerce (Strain II) ... Britain's obligation to pursue *trade* (Strain III). "Virtues should rise, as fortunes swell (Strain III, l. 7)," he writes; and waxes poetic on the source of compassion: "Trade's the big *heart*; bright empire, but their *eye*" (Strain V, v. 19, l. 5). In the poem's final verses, Young trumpets his treatment's success:

Thee Trade! *I* first, *who* boast no *Store*,
Who owe *Thee* Nought, thus snatch from *Shore*,
The Shore of *Prose*, where *Thou* hast slumber'd long.¹¹

One of the enduring questions in economic criticism pertains to the separation between the disciplines of literary production and economics. Young's triumphant pronouncement sets the separation perhaps even earlier than the start of the golden age of political economy, and more surprising still, shows him trying to mend the divide. His attempt does so in part by rebuking any who see sloth as beneficial indulgence, or who associate an abundance of wealth with a moral deficit (I, st.16-18). More important, however, is poetry's ability to capture aspects of commercial activity that were outside the scope of economic writing being produced during that era. Young emphasizes the importance of virtue in commercial activity throughout the poem.¹²

When he does so, he echoes the earlier logic of Gerard de Malynes and Edward Misselden, who also emphasized morality over exchange theory, articulating their logic for commerce through

¹¹ Edward Young, "the Merchant," *The Close*, stanza I. London, 1730.

¹² See especially Strain II, stanzas 6-13 for an account of the rise of Tyre's commercial prowess, and consequent fall as a result of venality.

liberal paraphrases of classical historians. Andrea Finkelstein notes that in the second edition of *Free Trade. Or, the Meanes to Make Trade Flourish*, Misselden felt the need to defend the erudition and breadth of source material that he had drawn on in the first edition. Both Misselden and Malynes were voracious autodidacts; but as more interest in commerce developed, the public was losing its ability to recognize and translate the citations given to them, or to appreciate their full import. (Finkelstein 12) Young's accounts of Tyre's rise and fall, and of the rich resources of Africa (Strain IV, st. 21; Strain V, st. 20) promote the not uncommon vision of a British empire as a means of ensuring prosperity and peace,¹³ but they also approach the subject of trade from a more abstract perspective than the political arithmetic that rose to popularity through the writings of Sir William Petty and through Misselden's Balance of Trade theory, which was the latter's most enduring contribution to economic thought.

"The Merchant" waxes poetic, badly, in its construction of naval commerce as a more profitable alternative to agriculture. (This also echoes Petty, specifically a chapter from *Verbum Sapienti* (1691) entitled "How to Employ the People, and the End Thereof" Perelman 128). It is more unusual in its perspective on risk. The *Imperium Pelagi* was composed during a major period of development for insurance facilities. Most of the largest firms were devoted to protection against fire risk, though a few covered life and marine insurance, but the majority were small firms, usually called "friendly" or "amicable" societies, designed to protect against what A. H. John describes as "contingencies which can loosely be designated risks of life" (John 137). These societies were providers of investment instruments, most commonly life annuities, and their popularity depended on a growing awareness of risk. We are familiar with eighteenth-century nervousness about unexpected liabilities: it has seemed sensible to critics to transmit narratives supporting prudence and caution. The South Sea Bubble left a deep impression, as did

¹³ Pope's "Windsor-Forest," ll. 327-422 presents a similar vision, albeit much more eloquently than Young.

the “Vision of Public Credit.” Hogarth, like Addison, was concerned that his contemporaries were becoming addicted to the pleasure of speculative desire as they participated in the securities market and weathered investment bubbles (Henderson 39, 44–62). In light of the rise of insurance and risk-averseness, Young’s perspective in the “Merchant” is striking:

Thou golden chain ‘twixt God and men,
 Bless’d Reason! guide my life and pen:
 All ills, like ghosts, fly trembling at thy light.
 Who thee obeys, reigns over all;
 Smiles, though the stars around him fall:
 A God is nought but Reason Infinite.

The man of Reason is a god
 Who scorns to stoop to Fortune’s nod;
 Sole agent he beneath the shining sphere.
 Others are passive, are impell’d,
 Are frighten’d, flatter’d, sunk, or swell’d,
 As Accident is pleased to domineer.

(Strain the First, stanzas 29-30)

The golden chain mentioned here recurs in *Night Thoughts* where it is again associated with Reason, and divine benevolence towards humanity. It has a larger significance than alluding to the Great Chain of Being, comprising as well a restraint against voracious appetite, the architectural structure of the cosmos, and, as in these lines, a reason to avoid being tyrannized through the fear of risk. Young does not promise readers that Christian faith will protect them from disaster; he merely proclaims the uselessness of being controlled by it. Probably the inferior prosody is to blame; or perhaps Young’s lack of reputation as an expert scholar of risk. “The Merchant” does not advise readers to take shelter in Christianity as a contingency plan. Despite its suggestion that “who [God] obeys, reigns over all,” it warns of the presence of risk in the form of more predictable problems – specifically, the possibility that China’s naval fleet is large enough to compete with Britain’s, and China’s production output great enough to overflow all of Europe (Strain V, stanza 22).

Rescuing Trade from the Shore of Prose, in this instance, is not to reduce it to a question of devoutness (as critics often easily assume when presented with confluences of trade and religion), but to reinvigorate earlier strategies for economic theory, and to voice questions not in vogue with the contemporary treatises being produced. The approach allows for the speaker to widen the field of data considered relevant to the emerging subject of economics, but despite the free-ranging style, the choice allows Young to present what today we might call pragmatic advice: do not allow yourself to be hobbled by your fears; and remember to consider the long-term, as well as the immediate situation. “The Merchant” is trade as grand epic narrative; and, unquestionably angling for a preferment, Young ends on a positive note, presenting commerce as antidote to war, and path to fairness. His poem does not take any account of the circumstances of the individual in proportion to the collective Britain. It was produced five years after his success with a sequence of satires titled *The Love of Fame: the Universal Passion*, and displays all the bluster and optimism of someone who expected to succeed easily. By the time he began composing *Night Thoughts*, his lack of success had shifted his focus to individuals as laborers, and the contrasts between labor value and market value.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that *Night Thoughts* displays an intense engagement with economics on several levels, including individual, employer, and systemic. This engagement was not an isolated phenomenon, but rather a part of Young’s literary goals from the start of his career. He was fascinated with the portrayal and articulation of ideas involving economics and commerce. While it is possible, and even likely that he was influenced by his assumptions of subjects that would enhance his career prospects, *Night Thoughts* demonstrates his

transformation from a writer who saw commerce as a good career subject to a writer with an immense and sophisticated vision to communicate to readers.

My research demonstrates that Young's ideas, and his adjuration to labor in order to produce value were in many ways consistent with those of men in power who benefitted from the labor of individuals below them. While his emphasis on the value of labor and effort sounds sympathetic to working individuals, the one who benefits most is Young himself. The one who struggles most is also Young himself: while he is at times emphatic and forceful, his confidence is founded upon the accumulation of hundreds of questions that he encounters and partially answers throughout the poem. While he is able to bring the speaker's dilemma to a sort of resolution, the ending of the poem does not answer all his doubts, or resolve the sometimes contradictory explanations of what constitutes value, and how individuals are to use it. The poem is a conundrum precisely because of its strange mixture of certainty and doubt, which does not fit conventional understandings of what economic writing looks like.

Because we can't see Young as thinking about value – because we don't fully know how to describe someone as thinking about value, we can't see his poetry as anything but eccentric.¹⁴ The result is that we have a very hard time looking at it as individual, as opposed to in terms of whether it does or doesn't conform to one particular trend or another. In this chapter, I have shown that while *Night Thoughts* is undoubtedly eccentric, it is hardly imprecise; nor is it eccentric for the reasons that we have thought.

Uncovering the economic content allows us to see how the ideas in *Night Thoughts* were precocious for their time, anticipating key aspects of our contemporary economic issues; and raising the possibility that Young's poem, given its popularity, might well have influenced other

¹⁴ Plenty of critics have commented on the eccentricities of the poem in passing, but the best lengthy discussion is that of Cheryl In(Wanko)

economic writers. More immediately, however, the economics of *Night Thoughts* raise questions about whether Young's contemporaries, especially those of the Graveyard School, were concerned with value in a similar fashion. These questions I shall address in the second chapter.

Chapter 2:

Re-evaluating graveyard poetry in the wake of *Night Thoughts*

To see *Night Thoughts* as a drama of value is to recognize it as a highly unusual poem, demonstrating the intensity of Young's engagement with emerging socioeconomic structures. The content that I have illuminated has gone unnoticed for the past 170 years because we have not understood the entanglement of the poem's religious idiom with the real-life structures that it critiqued. Nor have we understood the imaginative nature of that critique, which alternated between direct denunciations and complex visions of eternal systems succeeding and failing. One primary reason that we have missed seeing the details of Young's arguments is that it has been easy to identify his imagery of God, Eternity, and Christ as religious thinking, oriented towards evangelical conversion. However, Young's invocations of Christian symbols are the building blocks that he uses to think about value. *Night Thoughts* is a tangled web of questions, principles, and stories about value – it is Young articulating what he values, and trying to coerce his readers to adopt similar views.

In the wake of rereading *Night Thoughts*, it is necessary to ask how much of an outlier Young was. Did other poets from this time period pursue similar arguments and use religious and graveyard imagery in a manner similar to Young, which is to say, did they use it to articulate their thoughts on a wide range of issues including but not limited to economics? Previous studies of poetry within the graveyard school have passed quickly by the topics of value and economics because it is easy to assume that the poetry will exhibit a fairly simple perspective on value, namely, that earthly value is inferior and ephemeral compared to heavenly value. That has been the message of many sermons from this period, and is highly familiar as the perspective described in Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Moreover, on the

surface, poetry from this period seems to trumpet this perspective. When Robert Blair catalogues the finery associated with death: “Arabia’s gums and odoriferous drugs,” the “well-plum’d Hearse,” in order to ask “why this Waste?” his lines seem confirmation of a straightforward critique and lack of interest in earthly economics. I argue that *Night Thoughts* indicates the importance of questioning such quick judgments – not necessarily to dismiss them outright, but in order to consider whether they may be only one angle among others.

Thus, this chapter is motivated by the questions “what did graveyard poets value? How did their poetry reflect what they valued?” Examining earlier criticism of poets grouped within the graveyard school label reveals interesting possible answers to this question. Poets from this period have been weighted down somewhat by critical inertia of the last century. There are many works of criticism like that of Peter Thorpe’s *18th Century English Poetry*, which lays out seven particular objectives constituting “the chief ingredients of the graveyard poem” (56), including the memento mori, the argument of the vain and transitory nature of life, the funereal tone, etc. The poetry is characterized by “stock imagery or diction...dim, melancholy, solemn, crumbled, shades, shrouds, bones, parting, silent” (55). Even if we acknowledge, as Robert L. Mack does in the Graveyard School entry in the recent *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era*, that the poets involved were only “*said* to have composed quietly reflective and meditative verses” (emphasis mine), and that the category is meant to “bestow some sense of unity and development on the otherwise often wildly idiosyncratic poets and poetic subjects,” there is little that tempts a reinvestigation. The prevalence of stock imagery seems to preclude any real quality material worthy of study.

Part of the problem can be ascribed to what Clifford Siskin identifies as “the literary historical principle of ‘convenience’” (801), namely, the convenience of identifying the seeds of

Romanticism in the decades that precede it. Graveyard poetry is highly functional – not only as a midpoint between Augustan wit and Romanticism, but for more modern readers. John Sitter identifies it as the source of the modern idea that “pure poetry” should be about a lonely poet surrounded by “nature” (9). Even if the poetry is not so good (as many critics have observed), it has acquired such important status in the origin story of poetry that it is hard to tamper with it. It is part of too many narratives.

However, if we examine these narratives, and the discussions of the poets that they present, what emerges is the realization that earlier readers have noticed the engagement with value. Havens casually but firmly comments that Young’s commercial frustrations contributed to *Night Thoughts*’ gloomy mode (149) – it was so obvious to him that there was no need to prove it. Likewise, David Hill Radcliffe, discussing country house poems, acknowledges the interplay between virtue and commerce in the 18th century, as articulated by J. G. A. Pocock. To say that they were “bound up together” (447) is all that he feels needs to be said. Radcliffe comments on poetry by Shenstone and by John Dalton that explores various levels of luxury, and people of different classes encountering each other. His conclusion, however, is that “Shenstone regards taste as prior to and independent of ownership” (457). I single out this comment for the phrase “prior to and independent of,” which decisively separates taste from any of the messiness of economic instruments. In the same paragraph, Radcliffe explains that “aesthetic detachment does not imply ownership of rural property, but superior feelings for Nature.” The issue is that Radcliffe assumes clear separations between aesthetics and taste on the one hand, and issues of value, property, and economics on the other. There is a long tradition of assuming that poets and economic issues are on opposite ends of any spectrum, but such definitive separations fundamentally misconceive value, and possibly taste and aesthetics, too.

A different sort of oversimplification and evasion appears in Christine Gerrard's "Parnell, Pope, and Pastoral." Examining Parnell's devotional juvenilia in comparison with his adult output, Gerrard observes that "he seems to have been totally indifferent to *any* kind of literary fame: 'I seek no praise & keep me safe from shame / Not known to many & unknown to fame.' Satyr 5: Verse, Apparently devoid of ambition, he was particularly susceptible to manipulation by stronger forces, notably Pope" (224). It is asking a lot of the single couplet quoted to explain Parnell's stance, as the modifier "apparently" acknowledges. According to Gerrard, Parnell's twentieth century editors, Claude Rawson and F. P. Lock, likewise viewed Parnell as unambitious. She quotes their interpretation of Parnell as "presumably" wanting to achieve classical permanency, which they surmise that he picked up by osmosis from Pope (229). It is much easier to position any engagement with value as external to Parnell, even though Gerrard describes some early versions of his "Health: An Eclogue" as sounding more like Stephen Duck, and questioning the status of his literary fantasies, i.e., his prospects of success (235-37). This is a careful explaining away of Parnell as anything but a shy and retiring poetic figure who fits with the mythology of the Graveyard School. It is a simplification because of the conclusion that keeping "safe from shame" and "unknown to fame" is to be totally indifferent to success. In any earlier article by Thomas Woodman, we are told that Parnell is a remarkable innovator because of the way that his "Night-Piece on Death" so neatly fuses together such a variety of traditions into an harmonious whole" (216). Here, Parnell is praised specifically because of his ability to recombine earlier traditions, and to make them new. If the product being made were anything tangible, then it would almost certainly be discussed as a commercial innovation – but poetry is peculiarly isolated from such discussions.

Arguably, early twentieth century criticism was written before the rise of economic criticism as pioneered by Marc Shell and Kurt Heinzelman. My point, however, is that despite the development of economics as a discipline, and the vocabulary of terminology that accompanies it, supposedly allowing discussion of complex details, we have an extraordinarily limited conception of what thinking about value, and being engaged with economic situations, actually looks like. Perhaps it is *because* of the disciplinary structure that we are confused. Having a vocabulary makes it harder to see economic engagement that is not articulated through that same vocabulary – it takes a very conscious effort to look for such engagement without the presence of familiar terms and contexts. But such familiar terms and contexts are precisely what mid-eighteenth-century poets lack, and are trying to find ways of articulating. When Samuel Johnson asks “Is not a Patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help?,” it is easier for us to recognize that he is discussing economic support – but not all the voices from the mid-eighteenth century speak in so familiar an idiom. Without a wider perspective on what thinking about value might involve, it is difficult to read poets from this period thoroughly – so this chapter’s purpose is to illuminate what that thinking looks like.

In Edward Young’s case, the answer to these question of what he valued was highly personal and individualistic. *Night Thoughts* has been classified as a work of religious enthusiasm because of Young’s fervor, but it is more accurate to say that Young uses the imagery of heaven, faith, and the deity the way that a child uses finger paints to create a picture of the monster under the bed. For him, the familiar is a tool to articulate the unfamiliar. If the case of *Night Thoughts* is at all indicative of other poetry from this period, then it may be that there is more heterogeneity than there is common ground; however, a survey will begin to shed

light on what has gone unseen. To conduct this survey, I will begin by reviewing critical perspectives on two concepts – otherworldliness and virtue. Both concepts touch on distinct aspects of graveyard poetry: otherworldliness describes context or environment; and virtue is a moral quality, and more likely to be referenced directly within poems than variations on “moral” or “pious.” Together, they allow me to approach this collection of verse from something approaching a holistic perspective inclusive of context and morality.

From the reviews of otherworldliness and virtue, I will move to three extensive readings of the work of Thomas Parnell, James Thomson, and William Shenstone. In choosing them, I have attempted to investigate the question of Young’s outlier status on several different fronts. Each poet was most active at a slightly different point during the period when graveyard poetry was emergent: Parnell between 1702 and 1718; Thomson between 1725 and 1746, and Shenstone between 1737 and 1756. I have chosen Shenstone and Parnell because they share with Young a yearning for success that never materialized during their lifetimes, and it is worth seeing if their career frustrations manifest in their poetry as Young’s did. In contrast, Thomson saw far more success during his lifetime than most poets associated with the graveyard school; if his poetry is free from economic thinking, then that will lend credence to the suggestion that graveyard angst is strongly correlated with professional success, or lack thereof. Thomson and Young share a preference for the common form of the long blank-verse poem, and Thomson’s *The Seasons*, which meanders freely from digression to digression, was almost certainly influential on Young’s choice of the form for *Night Thoughts*. Parnell and Shenstone, on the other hand, both favored shorter forms. Looking at both longer and shorter graveyard poetry should provide some indication of whether economic thinking using graveyard and religious

imagery is dependent on having a certain amount of length in order to set up discussions of economics and value.

Finally, with this trio of poets, I have two, in Thomson and Shenstone, who could have been influenced by Young, and by the popularity of *Night Thoughts*. All three poets have been associated with the graveyard label: Parnell for the influential imagery of the *Night-Piece on Death*, Thomson for the solitary reflective retirement which *The Seasons* advocates, and Shenstone for his use of the elegiac form, and his ability to portray melancholic atmospheres in poems like the *Pastoral Ballad*. By examining these three poets I hope to begin developing new angles and questions with which to investigate otherworldliness and virtue, as well as other traits associated with poetry that has been assigned the graveyard label.

The question of what each of these poets valued has implications for the way that we think about poetry from this period being responsive to and affected by the changes taking place within the publishing system. Much of the scholarship devoted to melancholy poetry was published in the first few decades of the twentieth century, prior to advances in book history that have illuminated our understanding of the competitive commercial market that mid-18th century poets were navigating for the first time. I argue that based on the example of *Night Thoughts*, that we have underestimated the engagement of poets from this period with economic issues and the constraints of the publishing environment. Young's particular vision is highly individualized, so it is unreasonable to expect other poets to duplicate it. Instead, my goal in this chapter is to investigate what other poets from this period valued, as those values are reflected in their poetry, in order to begin reassessing the critical tools and backdrop that we use in order to read their work.

Otherworldliness

Otherworldliness is the encounter or yearning for something other than the present and immediate world. The “other” world which is experienced may be a cosmic or heavenly vision, like that portrayed in *Night Thoughts*; but many other poets crafted otherworldliness in an earthly format, imagining a return to a golden age from the distant past. Poetry from this period shows a similar split between whether the otherworldliness is the product of a dream or vision; or whether it is a literal retirement of the sort proposed by Thomson in *The Seasons*, and by numerous other poets writing georgic eclogues to health, praising the clarity of perspective achieved in rural settings. To start, then, otherworldliness may be said to be pulled in opposite directions. On the one hand, it seems as accessible as lying down in bed; on the other, it is only accessible if you are able to escape to the country. Cosmic visions are inevitably focused on a moment in the future in contrast with the nostalgia of imagining an earlier era. These differences can be resolved into unity if we say that each of these uses of otherworldliness becomes the basis for critique: each is a means of stepping outside one’s daily existence. As Shaun Irlam has noted, the otherworldly existence, whether cosmic or retrospective, is characterized by its ideal and transcendent state (126-30), meaning that the otherworldly functions as a measuring stick for what might be achieved.

This view of the otherworldly as critique has become prominent through awareness of the repentant mood and direct rebukes that are present in several examples, including both *Night Thoughts* and Blair’s “The Grave.” However, rebuke and repentance suggest a simple critique, and the use of the otherworldly is more complex. John Barrell observes that “whoever reads *The Seasons* must observe that it appears to be committed to two quite opposite views of history” (54), because Thomson sings rhapsodically of the benefits of “Wealth and Commerce” as he

decries their corruptive power. Similar dissonance may be found in Thomas Warton's "Ode written at Vale-Royal Abbey in Cheshire," which looks to a lost past to reflect on "Learning, guarded from a barbarous age" (l. 65). Warton's mournful musing recounts how an idyllic existence was destroyed by ambition, by "Charity's misguided zeal" which built the abbey's towers, and by the visionary gleams of Superstition. The poem culminates, however, with precisely the sort of scene that the speaker has seemed to warn against:

From these deserted domes, new glories rise;
More useful institutes, adorning man,
Manners enlarg'd, and new civilities,
On fresh foundations build the social plan. (85-88)

Warton's poem is a particularly interesting example of otherworldliness, because he seems to skewer the ideal vision of the past, associating it with error, and yet return to it. This should be a major issue, and yet Warton seems no more concerned than Thomson. Critical opinion on poems like these is split on how to handle contradictions like these. Ralph Cohen argues that in *The Seasons*, Thomson is creating unity through diversity; but Barrell argues that this creates a paradox wherein "the qualities of the universal man [are] divided in their unity" (65). David Fairer and Christine Gerrard note the irony of Warton's ending, but make no attempt to explain it; while John Vance argues that in "Vale-Royal" and elsewhere, Warton repeatedly portrays the idea of escape in order to underscore that it cannot be permanent (38).

Examples like Warton and Thomson suggest that use of the otherworldly may be too divergent to be considered as a unified trope at all – or that alternatively, that it is meant to critique the world and to draw it together at the same time. This would entail the assumption that poets who made use of otherworldliness valued inclusivity, and incorporated it into their work.

Though this may seem a departure from previous interpretations of graveyard poetry, it is merely an instance where we acknowledge that Young and Blair's scolding has been more visible because we are conditioned to be more aware of negativity than its opposite.

One commonality that nearly all the early instances of otherworldliness share is that they are experienced by a single individual. Thomson's "Seasons" are the exception to this rule, since the poem has no single protagonist, only an omniscient narrator; but not until Blake's *Milton* and *Jerusalem* do we see otherworldliness experienced by society, rather than by individuals. The tendency of otherworldliness to be an individual experience may be explained by its function, which is of a purely private nature. Edith Sickels suggests that for many of the graveyard poets, both happiness and virtue are dependent on belief in immortality (29). Experiencing otherworldliness in poetry seems to confirm the reality of immortality. It functions whether the immortality is glimpsed through cosmic vision or merely through an enlarged sight of a prior civilization. The measuring stick of critique allows one to measure progress, and assures that progress is worth striving for. Both happiness and virtue are, in the end, only individually obtainable. They are also incredibly elusive.

If poets saw them as conditional upon a belief in immortality, then that may explain why they went to occasionally elaborate lengths in order to achieve otherworldliness. Sometimes these lengths are so fanciful that their elaborateness has gone unremarked, as in Akenside's *The Pleasures of Imagination*, in which a vast and sumptuous pageant is put on in order to remind the speaker to "Remember, what the will of heav'n ordains / Is ever good for all; and if for all, / Then good for thee." There are numerous other instances of extravagant scenarios crafted to remind narrators of homiletic platitudes presented much more plainly in sermons. But the otherworldly can be subtly elaborate too, as John Draper suggests when he catalogues the

instances where otherworldliness is achieved by attributing human emotions to the natural landscape (255-6). The result is that emotion and its force becomes possible to explore from a safe distance. When defamiliarized, it is easier to look at feeling in order to judge and strategize. That such elaborateness felt necessary underscores the anxiety and uncertainty that may have contributed to authors' endeavors.

We can see this anxiety from a different angle when we look at poems where otherworldliness takes the form of the close presence of death, as is the case in Elizabeth Carter's "Thoughts at Midnight." In the poem, each night makes "life's deceitful colors fade away," leaving the speaker able to confront any missteps from her path of virtue in the previous day. The comparative darkness comes from the willfulness of the speaker, who repeatedly and determinedly stumbles, explaining that "Oft' when thy gracious Spirit's guardian care / Warn'd my fond soul to shun the tempting snare, / My stubborn will his gentle aid repress" (ll. 21-23). The otherworldly appeal of night is not simply that it is different from or quieter from day, but the speaker's thought that if necessary, the gracious Spirit would "secure [her soul's] safety by a sudden doom." In this case, the thought of otherworldly immortality does indeed safeguard virtue and happiness, but it does so at metaphorical gunpoint, for the speaker's propensity to sin makes up most of the poem.

Otherworldliness is often brief, and a source of reflection, but there are instances where its power is highly evident, and presented as a real or near-real force. Carter's poem is one of these instances; another is Thomas Gray's "The Bard," in which the titular figure, after proclaiming a prophetic and otherworldly vision, hurls himself from a mountain cliff, proclaiming that "To triumph, and to die, are mine." The intensity that Gray portrays is perhaps the pinnacle of otherworldliness, but it is not tragic; rather, it is a "redefinition of death as

triumph” (Sitter 97). Seen from this perspective, it is easier to recognize that this perspective is also not isolated; the same invocation of destruction and regeneration is present in the final segment of *Night Thoughts*, in Thomson’s “Winter,” as well as other poems from this period (Irlam 131).

The survey of otherworldliness that I have offered has established as much variety and contrast as it has common ground. What can we learn from a characteristic that has been so flexibly used? I do not intend to suggest that there is an easy unity that can be discerned. What even this brief survey shows is the entanglement between the individual self and the larger world. The idea of an ideal and transcendent world is used to create standards for the self; the individual may inspire or demand change from the world. Put this way, the varieties of otherworldliness can sound like yin and yang, easily complementing each other – and this is the sort of oversimplification that has guided too much of earlier graveyard criticism. Poems like Thomson’s *Seasons*, Warton’s “Vale-Royal Abbey,” and in particular, *Night Thoughts*, illustrate the complexity that is inherent. For Young, the achievement of an ideal world was inextricably bound up with his own personal achievements. Thomson’s idyllic vision in *The Seasons*, which I will explore in greater detail, could not exclude invocations of wealthy and powerful patrons without negating the circumstances that had made Thomson’s own success possible. The otherworldly is pervaded by tension between worlds, and only when we begin to investigate this tension will we be able to understand the poems that use it.

Virtue

What is virtue? Specifically, what is it in regards to poetry of the early eighteenth century? We might begin by noting a contrast in the way that it is portrayed. In several poems, we see virtue triumphant and powerful. Virtue conquers Time and Death, it “alone can give the

lasting joy” that mortals mistakenly seek in earthly riches. (*The London Magazine, Or, Gentleman’s Monthly Intelligencer* 518) In Amyas Bushe’s *Socrates: a dramatic poem*, virtue’s power is the spectacle for readers, who are invited to “See rancour, fraud, by Socrates subdu’d, / His virtue conquers all, all rage defies, / His virtue triumphs, triumphs as he dies”. (Bushe vi) On the other hand, it is also typical to see virtue presented in a dependent role, supported by some other figure or object. Edith Sickels notes that the formula for poems on solitude includes invoking “Solitude as ‘friend of Virtue,’” (Sickels 82) and that to say that someone is a friend to/of virtue is common praise in elegies of the period. (Bowden 176) In Addison’s play *Cato, a tragedy*, when asked “What is a Roman, that is Cesar’s foe?,” Cato replies “Greater than Cesar; he’s a friend to Virtue”. (Addison 37) Virtue needs help, but it triumphs; it is both independent and reliant. Sometimes it is both at the same time, as in the example from *Socrates*, and in a collection of Christian devotions, where we learn that “suffering virtue ever conquers with greater triumph.” (*The Devout Christian’s Hourly Companion. Consisting of Holy Prayers, and Divine Meditations. Done into English from That Great Spiritualist, Drexelius.* 4) Statements like these, especially those referencing virtue with a capital “V,” can suggest that virtue is a stable category, whose meaning is assured and understood by readers. This perception is encouraged by other aspects of graveyard poetry, which have been commented on extensively by earlier critics. Like Sickels, Draper offers a poetic formula, and his language emphasizes the predictability in the funeral elegiac form: after reaching a tomb, church, or graveyard, “then, if not before, description and narrative give place to pensive moralizing ... the latter part ... is almost sure to be taken up with a panegyric of the dead and a declaration of his heavenly reward”. (Draper 8) Moralizing is so much a part of the graveyard genre that its treatment of virtue has become a cliché. I argue, however, that this assumption overlooks the instability of the

idea of virtue during the early eighteenth century, and the engagement of poets with uncertainty about the precise substance of virtue, and what having and pursuing it entailed.

The changing definition of virtue in eighteenth century prose

The very definition of virtue was in flux during the eighteenth century, though in a subtle way. The instability developed more from how and when people invoked virtue more than from direct and focused arguments. Its dominant meaning refers to moral qualities: the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and courage; the three primary Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity, identified in 1st Corinthians, and oft-mentioned in devotionals, catechisms, and poetry; and a host of other qualities that become associated over time, i.e., modesty, chastity, honesty, kindness, mercy. Less common is virtue's definition as industry or diligence, associated with physical labor and industry, as in Allan Ramsay's poem "The Gentle Shepherd," in which he advises "That Lads should a' for Wives that's vertuous pray: / For the maist thrifty Man cou'd never get / A well stor'd Room unless his Wife wad let." The two meanings could blend together, through the assumption that to work is morally correct. This association probably originated from the maxim set forth in Proverbs 12:24: "The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor." Diligence becomes superiority, and superiority is assumed to be inclusive of moral superiority, rather than just productivity. The association of virtue and labor is a central aspect of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in which Benjamin Franklin's 1748 sermon beginning "Time is money," is highlighted as a classic example of utilitarian and capitalistic virtue.¹ Franklin's sermon, argues Weber, defines virtue as an action that "brings credit." This is a good example of one particular perspective on virtue (and shared by Young); however, Franklin's assertions are so confident as to suggest certainty about virtue's meaning. The interpretation of virtue, then, becomes general

¹ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Unwin Counterpoint Paperbacks), 9–13.

morality, with an emphasis on morality's profitable nature. This particular flavor of virtue becomes even more prominent via the canonicity of Adam Smith's moral philosophy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. As such, both the sermon, and Weber's theory of the protestant work ethic can overshadow the larger panoply of poets grappling with virtue during this time period.

The instability of virtue is partly an effect of poetry criticism at the turn of the eighteenth century. We can see an example of this criticism in Richard Blackmore's preface to *Prince Arthur, an Heroick Poem*, in which Blackmore argues that

[Poetry's] true and genuine End is by universal Confession, the Instruction of our Minds, and Regulation of our Manners; for which 'tis furnish'd with so many excellent Advantages. The Delicacy of its Strains, the Sweetness and Harmony of its Numbers, the lively and admirable manner of its Painting or Representation, and the wonderful Force of its Eloquence, cannot but open the Passages to our Breasts, triumph over our Passions, and leave behind them very deep Impressions. 'Tis in the power of Poetry to insinuate into the inmost Recesses of the Mind, to touch any Spring that moves the Heart, to agitate the Soul with any sort of Affection, and transform it into any Shape or Posture it thinks fit. (A2)

This passage is full of poetic descriptions and figurative language, and as Shaun Irlam notes, he is attributing to poetry "extraordinary power and agency" (Irlam 57). While increasing poetry's power, though, Blackmore is also fencing it in. The instructive and regulatory purposes that he cites in his opening paragraph are strictly reinforced throughout the rest of the essay. While he acknowledges that poetry may give pleasure and delight, Blackmore firmly categorizes this as a subordinate purpose, warning that "Tis below the Dignity of a true Poet to take his Aim at any

inferiour End. They are Men of little Genius, of mean and poor Design, that imploy their Wit for no higher Purpose, than to please the Imagination of vain and wanton People.” While poetry has considerable agency, Blackmore’s poet’s talent is directly linked with his intentions, and heavily regulated. We learn that those poets whose Wit is “altogether unuseful are justly reproach’d; but ... those others are highly to be condemned, who use all their Wit in Opposition to Religion, and to the Destruction of Virtue and good Manners in the World.” In enforcing proper didacticism, Blackmore associates virtue with an assortment of aesthetic standards: with the highest ends rather than inferior ones, of great genius and grand design, and pleasing more than merely vain and wanton people. His language implies a certain familiarity, suggesting that his knowledge of true poetry is grounded in having encountered plenty of the false sort. Here, we see why virtue might be positioned as needing friends in order to support its ongoing presence.

Blackmore’s arguments about poetry’s purpose and power were echoed and elevated by the critic John Dennis when he wrote in 1704 that “Poetry has been thought not only by Heathens, but by the Writers of the Old Testament, and consequently by God himself who inspir’d them, to be the fittest Method for the enforcing Religion upon the Minds of Men” (I, 373, qtd. in Irlam). Here we see poetry at what might be considered the peak of its ascent, traveling from approbation by classical poets to divine approbation. Poetry’s elevation made it a remarkable object, in that the commentary from Blackmore and Dennis made pleasure and instruction seem synonymous. However, its power was becoming wholly based on the ability to instill virtue; and virtue more inextricably entangled with poetic qualities. This is evident from Dennis’ discussion of how to restore poetry from a debauched state to its former innocence and virtue in *The Grounds of Criticism*. Accomplishing this will be easy, he explains, because “a Poet will contemn everything but the acquiring the Reputation of a good Poet,” and the only

remonstrance is to “convince him that he is an ill Poet ... for an ill Poet is ten times more ridiculous than a Blockhead of any other Profession ... so that there is nothing he will refuse to do to avoid the Infamy of that Reputation” (22-23). In this passage, virtue and bad poetry are mutually exclusive. Dennis’s statements here are more extreme than Blackmore’s. To please the imagination of vain and wanton people may not be the highest achievement, but it still implies an audience. An ill poet, though, “is found out by every body,” and is a laughingstock as a result.

There is a tension between the exclusivity of virtue in Blackmore and Dennis’s interpretations, because Dennis’s suggestion that every body recognizes a bad poet makes virtue universal rather than exclusive. The idea of virtue’s exclusivity had been discussed at the end of the seventeenth century by Spinoza, who extended an earlier argument by Calvin that God’s revelation was accommodated to individual capacities; so that people of “extraordinary Vertue” came to understand God “by the help of imagination; that is by the means of words or signs, and these either real or imaginary” (qtd. in Parisot 41). As Eric Parisot observes, this way of thinking was set up to “shift [biblical scripture] from being a literal and authoritative depository of God’s law and will, to a figurative and emblematic literary product designed to inculcate human morality and virtue.” The effect on virtue, however, was to contribute to the idea that it was learned and taught, rather than absolute. Dennis, in praising poetry, went farther and farther in suggesting virtue’s dependency on it. He argued “that Poetry [is] requisite to Religion in order to its making more forcible Impressions upon the Minds of Men,” and moreover, that “there are Duties in this Religion, which cannot be worthily perform’d without the assistance of Poetry.” These duties included the work of “declaring the will of God to the People.” We might argue that poetry’s importance was growing through Dennis’s efforts, and that virtue’s importance was

growing with it – but at the same time, the high stakes that Dennis and Blackmore declared suggested virtue's fragility as well.

Thus, while belief and admiration for poetry's influence continued to grow in the early decades of the 18th century, its praises were accompanied by anxiety, as reflected by Addison's statement in the *Spectator* in 1711. "If Writings are thus durable, and may pass from Age to Age throughout the whole Course of Time, how careful should an Author be of committing any thing to Print that may corrupt Posterity, and poison the Minds of Men with Vice and Error?" (196). Addison's worry reflects Blackmore's ascription of poetry's limitless power. If poetry was capable of such change, might it corrupt, rather than improve? Addison acknowledges the uncertainty that poets might poison readers' morality because they themselves had failed to distinguish virtue from vice.

Virtue's instability was almost certainly a response to views like those expressed by Bernard de Mandeville in *The Grumbling Hive* (1705), and *The Fable of the Bees* (1714). His satirical allegory of a community which became more prosperous overall when individuals gave free rein to greed concluded with the moral that "private vices lead to publick benefits," that is, that indulgence in vice was a form of virtue. His satire undermined the idea of virtuous social cooperation. The *Fable* suggested that not only was virtue vice, and vice-versa, but that individual judgment was incapable of distinguishing which was which. This was a fundamental blow to human agency regarding virtue – for it suggested uncertainty about what virtue was for, and how individuals could know that it was functioning correctly. As a result, we see discussions like that of Edmund Gibson in *Religion, the best security to church and state*, a sermon from 1714/15. Religious and good men, says Gibson, may still suffer poverty and afflictions, because "both are capable of *future* Rewards and Punishments, and for that End are accountable to God

in the next World” (10-11). This is simple enough. The difficulty comes in determining the case of nations, rather than individuals, for

Nations as such, which are united and incorporated for the Ends and Purposes of this World only, are to have no *Being* in the next; and since they are incapable of *future* Rewards, it follows, That National Virtue must either be rewarded with National Blessings now, or not be rewarded at all; and if the Supposition of no Reward is inconsistent with the Divine Justice, the Consequence will be, That a general Practice of Virtue and Goodness, intitles a Nation to such *Temporal Blessings*, as may most conduce to the Strength, Prosperity and Establishment of the whole (Gibson 11).

The idea that virtue must be rewarded is a theme of the entire sermon, but it is most starkly clear when Gibson explains the system for nations, as opposed to individuals. One result of his statement is that virtue and belief become ever more inseparable, because to not believe in a reward for virtue is implied to be a lack of faith in divine justice. To believe in God is to believe in being rewarded, though not, perhaps, individually.

Such ideas were contributing to uncertainty about virtue’s purpose, and effectively splintering virtue into different categories. Gibson’s sermon is one of the earliest references to “national virtue,” but in the wake of the *Fable*, references to public and private virtue, and statements defining what they were, and were not, began to spring up. An aphorism from 1722 nicely illustrates the moral complexity that was developing from this split. “Forgiving enemies is only a private Virtue; not the Rule of publick Government” (*Collection of Select Aphorisms and Maxims* 19). While forgiveness is usually central to Christianity, here, it becomes a strictly personal virtue. While Gibson’s mention of national virtue suggests a national religion, the anonymous author of the aphorism dismisses any suggestion of a public faith.

The uneasiness regarding virtue was not simply the effect of the *Fable of the Bees*. People were also dealing with a significant blow to their understanding of their individual relationships with God. This blow was an outcome of the rise of Lockean empirical philosophy, which had become prominent over the course of the seventeenth century. One of Locke's core assertions was that the mind was a blank slate, and that knowledge could only be obtained through the experience of the senses. As John Draper notes, this principle equalized men, and supported both individuality and democracy; but had a "dissipating and chilling" effect on religion, for "how can we know God if all our knowledge comes through the senses?" (182-3). One solution was to focus on acts as evidence of virtue, and to make a vital link between virtue and religion, so that virtuous actions would be a clear path through which one came to know God. We can see Dennis asserting this link in letters to Blackmore, written in 1720 and published in 1721. He was decrying the efforts of an ongoing conspiracy "to overthrow the Religion of their native Countrey, and by that means to let in Corruption upon us like a Deluge" (462).² In his letter, Dennis set out the stakes of the conspiracy, and why it must not be allowed to succeed: "national Religion is . . . the only Fountain both of general publick and private Virtue, and of general public Siprit[sic]; and that being abolish'd, or very much weaken'd, even natural Religion must lose its Force, and consequently there can be no general Morality" (463). In this statement, Dennis has not said explicitly that virtue leads directly to God, but by making religion the only source of virtue, he has accomplished the same effect. If worshipping God is the only source of virtue, then displaying virtue becomes the demonstrable sign of knowing God. Texts from this era display a tendency towards extreme conditions and language, as is the case of with

² Dennis cast a wide net in describing this conspiracy, saying that it took place "among a great number of People, some by conversing and by writing, and some by encouraging these Conversations and Writings." Almost certainly, Mandeville, whom Dennis would attack at length in *Vice and Luxury Publick Mischiefs: Or, Remarks on a book intituled, The fable of the bees; or, Private vices publick benefits* (1724), was one of those whom he perceived to be responsible.

Samuel Acton's 1722 sermon titled "A caveat to ministers, and mans' [sic] high way to honour. A sermon proving, that our honouring of God, by doing his will, is our only sure way to honour, both in this world, and that to come." The sermon elevated virtue in two ways: by making it the "only sure way" to God, and by attacking several "wicked Ministers," who, "tho' they attend at God's Alter, whatever their Gifts and Parts may be, they are taxed as being ignorant of God, and disowned by him for his Ministers" (5–6).

Virtue's instability, then, comes in part from its being at the center of a web of different conflicts across the spectrum of texts. It was achieved through pleasure; it was vital for the Christian faith; it was for everyone, and also limited to a select few; it was a path to honor; and in danger of being lost. There is great variety in the way that it is treated, reflecting the diverse communities and contexts in which it was a highly charged issue, so that it seems impetuous to make any claims that this short survey attempts to handle it completely. It does, I hope, demonstrate a rationale for revisiting virtue as a rich subject for interpretation instead of a period cliché.

What does this mean for poetry from this period?

Virtue is a type of value. This is why we see it compared directly to gold, either to establish that it is equal or superior to that metal, then the dominant standard for money. Making these comparisons allowed individuals to claim authority and knowledge regarding value, and the very act of asserting the recognition of value was powerful. By looking at how poets wrote about virtue, we can see them learning and struggling to participate in an economy that was more open to them than the official governmental structure. Virtue, moreover, is a type of value being used in a time of economic turmoil and transition, with a highly stratified society whose stratification had been dealt significant blows (in the form of Locke's principle of the *tabula*

rasa, which theoretically equalized the rich and poor; and the opportunities presented by the rise of printing after the expiration of the Licensing Act). To understand virtue, then, we need to keep that class struggle in mind; thinking both about immediate individual situations, and seeing them as contributing to the larger context. No individual transaction exists in a vacuum; it is always a potential part of the larger infrastructure. The uses of virtue are tactical in the sense that Michel de Certeau uses the term – defensive and opportunistic actions that counter the strategies of a more powerful regulatory entity (33–35). However, the tactics used arguably have ambitions of becoming strategies. Thus, we need to understand assertions of virtue’s superiority as complex gestures made by disadvantaged people trying to find equilibrium. Statements about virtue in the graveyard poems and other mid-eighteenth century verse are often the most direct statements about what their authors valued. And to say that these poets valued virtue is to miss the rich assortment of things that “virtue” signified to them.

In spite of these direct comparisons, virtue is not quite like gold. As an object of value, it works and is transmitted through different mechanisms. It is not measurable, except in the abstract sense of more or less; and it could not be authenticated in the same simple way that a coin or note might be.³ These differences are not insignificant, because they both provide more freedom and autonomy to individuals who were disadvantaged within the monetary system. Virtue is an interpreted value – making it similar to credit in the ways that it could be presented. Credit could be granted easily with a note promising payment; virtue could be established through an action, which, once witnessed and admired, served the same purpose. Writers had to deal with a slight challenge: they needed to create the virtuous act in a written form in order for it to circulate – and so it is not uncommon to see writers acknowledging that acts are the highest

³ This is not to say that virtue could not be authenticated at all. But a coin or note can be authenticated according to specific features (weight, engraving, content) – and the process for confirming virtue is nowhere near as formulaic.

virtue – that actions speak louder than words – even though words are all they have to give. This is the equivalent of stamping coins with the phrase “In God we trust.” God isn’t present, but acknowledging him is a shibboleth demonstrating a particular understanding of how the economy works, and ensuring that the person you are trading with has the same understanding, making them safe to trade with. “In action we trust” serves the same purpose.

Virtue had an advantage over “real” money in that it was potentially unlimited – and circulating virtue was not a debt that had to be paid as it would with money – so participating was, in some ways, less of a risk. This is not to say that it was risk-free, for certainly an accusation of vice could put one’s stock of virtue at risk. In some ways, the stakes were higher than the monetary economy, for a serious accusation of vice, or a proven one, might destroy all one’s credibility as virtuous in one fell swoop. But being interpretive was a cushion – there were, potentially, multiple ways of repairing virtue if an opportunity arose. We see this play out in novels where virtue is lost, then regained, or where an apparently evil character is able to redeem himself through one or more altruistic (often sacrificial) acts.

Because virtue is roughly rather than precisely quantitative, its acquisition does not work in quite the same way that the acquisition of money does. Narratives about money tend to involve discussions about how it was acquired; how a small amount became a larger one. With virtue, it is better to start from a strong position, which is part of why we see references to “every virtue,” which suggest perfection and imperviousness to vice.

There would be no reason to start from a weaker position with only one or two specific virtues. In fact, there was good reason not to start tentatively. One of the ways that virtue differs from money is that virtue is a collective of qualities. Each part of the collection supported the others, and scripture had linked them closely – so someone who appeared to lack one might

conceivably lack others. Mandeville's *Fable* was disturbing precisely because it challenged this collectivity. The idea of private vices and public benefits suggests that one might be greedy while at the same time manifesting feelings of benevolence toward one's community.⁴

Money creates autonomy by allowing people to purchase goods that they need; and in any given economy, it is possible to tell a lot about the people by examining what they are buying. The same is true for an economy of virtue. People do not trade it away so much as trading on it – that is, they make statements about what virtue allows as a condition for other things. Thus, we see statements like “from virtue alone” and “virtue only.” This formulation is advantageously ambiguous – it could mean that virtue was the only currency that could obtain the desired object, or that virtue was the only currency necessary; so even if one had only virtue and not a farthing else, one might still make a valid claim of sufficient currency to be powerful.

The economy of virtue within these poems is mostly content to intersect with the monetary economy. It does not try to replace it – instead, the two coexist, with the economy of virtue providing alternate sources of autonomy when necessary. Occasionally, more aggressive language was used, suggesting that monetary currency could not purchase the object (Carter, “neither Wealth nor Titles can bestow”). One of the primary things that we see people “purchasing” with virtue is security via self-confidence.

Virtue was a source of security and stability in uncertain situations. Elizabeth Carter opens her imitation of Horace's Ode 22, “Integer vitae, scelerisque purus,” with a fairly close translation of the first two lines: “A virtuous Man, whose Acts and Thoughts are pure, / Without the help of weapons is secure.” Then she elaborates, adding her own description to make the nature of this security explicit: “His stedfast Soul forgets the Sense of Fear.” Emotional turmoil,

⁴ Mandeville's greedy figures do not actively love their compatriots, but they are passively willing to let them benefit. The challenge which Mandeville mounted to virtue also functioned as a challenge to the idea of vice.

rather than hostile combatants, is the primary threat. Virtue is the protagonist's "passport." With it, he "safe in his own intrinsick Worth remains; / And arm'd with that each Obstacle disdains." Carter's focus is on virtue's function: it is defensive and offensive, providing "settled calm" in difficult situations, and doing so whether "in splendid Courts, or on a barren Plain." Carter's virtue is knowledge and confidence as a shield against anxiety, or other very human threats. Horace's original speaks of traveling through the burning Syrtes desert and the inhospitable Caucasus; the imitation augments these threatening landscapes with emotions, associating them with Fury, and a complete absence of cheerfulness -- human encounters represented figuratively. In the heat of the moment, Carter's antidote of "conscious Virtue" does not need to provide protection from sin -- instead, she tells us, it beguiles "every Care." If we take this statement at face value, it is a description of unusual power, with the same thoroughness that Blackmore attributed to poetry's didactic capabilities. The only advertisement for morality is in the first couplet, and the indication that morality is the means through which tranquility is obtained.

A similar perspective appears in a blank verse poem "In Praise of Virtue," published a year before Carter's. From the author, a pseudonymous "Gentleman of Oxford," we learn that "Virtue makes his Mind invincible, / And places him above Dame Fortune's reach." While being out of fortune's reach suggests security from bad luck, the poem immediately clarifies that the protection is emotional: "No Infelicity can him dismay, / Nor can Misfortunes make him quit his Ground." The phrasing of the lines puts the protagonist in the position of object being acted upon by outside forces. Even beneficent virtue imposes itself on his mind in order to make it impervious. The result is that it makes him "truly great," and does so "without the Help of Heraldry." This has both temporal and eternal benefits: "Peace and Comfort in this Life," and preparation for "eternal Joys hereafter." Both the gentleman of Oxford and Carter present their

praise of virtue almost as a formula, but quicker allusions to it appear as well. Sometimes authors contort themselves to make them: in Addison's *Cato*, where we hear that "Sweet are the slumbers of the virtuous Man" (73). Freedom from anxiety is important enough to acknowledge directly, as William Bond explains in an Epistle to Lord Cobham: "*Conscience* of doing well, if lost, were hard; *That* alone Virtue makes its own Reward" (*The Altar of Love* 19). In each of these cases, there is no discussion or debate regarding what the particular details of what virtue, or the virtuous choice entails. The emphasis is on creating a causal link between virtue and calm. Bond's epistle alone acknowledges the possibility that confidence, conscience, or knowledge of intrinsic self worth, might be lost. When he writes that such a loss would be hard, he implies that the causal link is not as stable as one might desire. But the absoluteness of the next lines cuts away sympathy: like Carter, he suggests that only virtue can provide this solace, and does not provide any other means of obtaining it. Instead, he focuses on what it can do: It "remains with us, nor with Bodies dies, / Blessing and blest, it seeks, with Souls, the Skies." Conscience is so valuable that it is portrayed as being separate from the soul, rather than as part of it.

Buying virtuous confidence is a shortcut for other means of obtaining it – through schooling, place, or other options that might have been available to the wealthy or high-ranked. However, few of these options would have been accessible to anyone who did not already have considerable autonomy. Virtue cannot participate in the monetary economy by purchasing an education. Instead, by purchasing confidence, it provided a comparable feeling of autonomy. This was beneficial to the individuals who participated in such transactions, although the overall effect was to complicate the meaning of virtue even further.

In Joseph Warton's "Ode to Despair," the confidence is a metaphorical shield, carried previously by Ulysses, Alcides, Regulus, and Raleigh. The speaker is assured that his

...heart no tenfold woes shall feel,
 'Twas VIRTUE temper'd the rough steel,
 And, by her heavenly fingers wrought,
 To me the precious present brought.

Warton's poem is a variation on the theme of purchasing using virtue as currency, because rather than buying the shield with his own, Patience comes to him in female form and rescues him. The poem works, however, because of its theatricality. It is essentially a didactic skit to advertise virtue's power to bring a man on the brink of suicide back to life. Similarly, in William Collins' "Ode to Fear," Aeschylus is portrayed at the battle of Marathon, reaching "from Virtue's Hand the Patriot's Steel" (*Odes*, 7). in defiance of fear. Whether or a sword or a shield, both Collins and Warton emphasize virtue's ability to provide dramatic autonomy – enough to avoid suicide or survive on a battlefield.

These sorts of anecdotes are akin to the narratives of value that Mary Poovey suggests were instrumental in creating a stable and complex monetary economy during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (*Genres of the Credit Economy* 125–145). They dramatize minute and chaotic mental processes, giving them physical form with anything available: landscapes, familiar narratives and figures; and weave a thick palimpsest, similar enough to hold together, but varied enough that it cannot be negated in a single gesture. Virtue was a safer value to strive for than money or any official form of power. Francis Hutcheson's 1725 *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* explained that "The Author of Nature ... has given us a Moral Sense, to direct our Actions, and to give us still nobler Pleasures; so that while we are only intending the Good of others, we undesignedly promote our own greatest private Good" (100). The poets illustrate that specific moral sense of pleasures, and elaborate what

“undesignedly” means when they show virtue acting as an external force that pulls individuals forward and up.

What is virtue? It is a democratic and equalizing power. The portrayals above are subtle in comparison with the statements made by John Auther, a Baptist minister who published both sermons and poetry. In his 1725 poem titled “The weakness of our Faculties, or the uncertainty and deficiency of Human Knowledge,” he addressed virtue’s equalizing capabilities directly. The poem addresses an unidentified individual or group, with whom the poet sees himself in competition. Auther laments, at length, “how small a Portion can we gain / Of what so strongly we desire t’attain,” musing over a host of questions related to gravity, astronomy, and geology, as well as why misfortunes befall virtuous people, while vice goes unpunished (50). He does not reach any real answer to any of these questions, particularly those about vice and virtue. The lack of answers, however, does not dissuade him from vowing, in the end:

I’ll strive however to be good,
 And guide my Life by Virtue’s sacred Law;
 This by the meanest may be understood
 To Souls of lowest Frame this Pow’r is giv’n
 Hereby I’ll hope to climb, at last, to Heav’n;
 And then without fatiguing Study, I shall grow
 As wise, as knowing, as the best of you.
 There the emancipated Soul
 (By no contracting Pow’rs controul’d,
 Which now obstruct its tow’ring Flight)
 Truth in its native Lustre shall behold;

To understand will then as nat'ral be,
 As now 'tis for the opening Eye to see. (53-54)

While Heaven normally connotes Christian morality, in these lines, it plays a different role. Heaven is a destination that represents capabilities that the speaker lacks on earth. When he ponders scientific mysteries in the first part of the poem, he appears deeply interested in them for their own sake. In the poem's climax, that curiosity is transmuted into competitiveness. Auther displays the leveling that critics associate with the graveyard school, but that leveling is usually portrayed as the rich and powerful being laid low in the grave. In contrast, Auther's climax equalizes by elevating the individual "of lowest Frame." The effect is that the poem becomes less about the answers to scientific questions than it is about the people who can and cannot answer them; the perception of social stratification that is insurmountable in mortal contexts; and what will happen when it becomes less of a barrier. The nature of the "contracting Pow'rs" is not explicitly explained. However, they are presented as hindering the speaker's understanding. In Heaven, he says, he will be able to be "as wise, as knowing, as the best of you," This indicates that instead of being a universal constraint, like gravity, the contracting powers are an aspect of the rivalry with the collective "you" whom the poem addresses.

Auther uses virtue in order to boldly state his ambitions. Others, like Bond and Mark Akenside, use it to explain them. The justification is based on the idea that fame is pursued on behalf of gaining honor for virtue, rather than any individual desire. For Akenside in *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, it is the cause of ambition: a voice that "calls [Man] to his high reward, / Th' applauding smile of heav'n" (1.165-168). The force of virtue explains the burning "unquenched hope / That breathes from day to day sublimer things." It is a way of making strong emotions safe without designating them as passions.

The self-confidence that virtue can buy becomes a means of participating in earthly systems, including the temporal monetary economy. Virtue also becomes the reason for doing so, and under certain conditions, it made ambition acceptable and even desirable. One of these conditions was that virtue itself was being glorified. Because our consciousness of virtue remains with us after death and ascends to heaven, writes Bond in the “Epistle to Cobham” “Thus, ‘tis noble to desire true Fame, / Odours celestial scenting Virtue’s Name” (19). Fame is noble and acceptable because it has the effect of adorning virtue with celestial scents – so in this instance, ambition serves the purpose of economic maintenance by reinforcing virtue as valuable. The other acceptable condition was if virtue itself was the source of the ambition – essentially grandfathering ambition in with the other virtues. This sort of interpretation is only possible because of the established conception of collectivity: virtues referenced collectively could exert a centripetal force drawing things in. While such an interpretation contributes to confusion regarding virtue’s meaning, the force (and the resulting inclusion of ambition) plays a significant role in permitting individual autonomy. There were limits, however, in how far individual autonomy was permissible. While the poems referenced above embrace ambition, others take the standpoint voiced by Robert Blair in “The Grave.” Blair decries ambition as antithetical to virtue, and writes of “all the mighty troublers of the earth, / Who swam to sov’ reign rule through seas of blood” (ll. 208-209); as well as petty tyrants: those in power who tormented the poor (ll. 210-231). In other words, virtue and ambition were compatible so long as the ambition in question was seen as not directly harmful to individuals or groups.

The link in Proverbs between virtue and diligence was one that many in power took advantage of, resulting in numerous variations on the theme of labor as a positive activity that resulted in benefits such as virtue, as in Dodsley’s maxim “Idleness is the parent of want and of

pain; but the labour of virtue bringeth forth pleasure.” These sorts of assertions came from both secular and devotional texts. That is to say, they were presented as general wisdom, and in the context of religious faith and activity. In Robert Bowes’ *Practical Reflections for every day throughout the year*, readers were told to “*Labour* to repair what you have lost by Sin; *labour* to avoid Sin for the future; *labour* to obtain an Increase in Virtue; / *be doing something, that the Devil may always find you busy*” (104). In Dodsley, labor buys pleasure, in Bowes, it brings virtue; in both, labor and value are straightforwardly given a causal connection: labor has a positive result. This is treated as an established fact.⁵

The meaning of virtue is thus subject to ongoing confusion/diffusion. Pleasure and virtue were linked so easily as to be almost synonymous. One effect of *this* was that work itself could be elevated, so we see couplets like that of William Whitehead’s explaining that “Virtue’s glorious deeds, / Employ [man’s] toilsome day” (90). Here the invocation of virtue isn’t fighting fear; it’s elevating otherwise menial work. What *this* is is part of an inflation of virtue. It is hard to identify a specific point in time at which *this* inflation begins – most likely, perceptions of it varied depending on individual exposure – but the result is that we see writers responding to what they must have perceived as complications. Swithin Adee complains that

For Authors who write of themselves, may with Ease

Be as good--and as highly abus’d, as they please;

Pick out ev’ry Virtue, and give to themselves,

Out of Volumes they read--from *Octavos* to *Twelves*.

Their Deserts and good Qualities ranging in Rows,

⁵ While both labor and misfortune appear in poems from this period, they are kept separate from each other, i.e., misfortune may befall someone, but it does not befall his labor. This set up an expectation that labor would always have a positive result. However, Young, Shenstone, and Parnell’s poems display frustration precisely at their own labors being unsuccessful.

Most prudently leaving the *Bad* to their Foes. (23)

Adee is irked that virtue has become too accessible, and the habit of presenting one's virtue(s) directly is familiar enough that it can be used by others. Adee's complaint with its references to virtues "ranging in rows" suggests stanzas like shelves, stacked with various qualities. It also implies a sense of scarcity more like the monetary economy, suggesting that individuals take from each other, rather than simply creating their own virtue.

Thomas Warton, meanwhile, professes his desire "to leave the Muse for Virtue." It sounds humble and pious, until we learn his motivations: namely, not to "deck the Head with fading Crown / Of useless Bays; but chief my Soul to steel / With adamant Honour, to withstand Corruption's Tides" (*Poems on Several Occasions*, 221). He is simply trading in one investment for a better one. The point to notice in Warton's poem is that virtue alone is not enough to invoke; instead, it gets augmented with additional trappings. Joseph Warton illustrates the slipperiness differently in the "Ode to Liberty," but the effect is similar. He writes to voice a wish for Britain's future:

May ne'er thy oak-crown'd hills, rich meads & downs,

(Fame, virtue, courage, property, forgot)

Thy peaceful villages, and busy towns,

Be doom'd some death-dispensing tyrant's lot (*Odes on Various Subjects*, 15)

There is no mention of virtue alone, or virtue as the highest value here. Instead, Fame, courage, virtue, and property are simply all items that are valuable – commodified to some degree or another, and which it was painful to think of relinquishing.

Of course, because virtue is not a value in the same way that money was, and could not be verified on demand, it does not display the same characteristics. Thomas Warton cannot put

his hands on adamantine Honour, whatever it might look like in a physical form. Does this matter? The answer is no and yes. No, in the sense that the economy of virtue is an imaginary economy, existing both in collective and individual imaginations. Though such an economy would never work in the same realistic way that the monetary economy works, the virtue economy's fragility does not matter so long as there is enough common ground for value to be transmitted; and it is clear that there was. We know this because it was easy for individuals to praise or criticize each other's virtues or lack thereof. The intertextual dialogues about virtue sustain it as a value which people were interested in obtaining and displaying.

Many poems include mention of virtue's reward. It is associated with confidence; that is, a mention of reward preceded by a description confirming that the subjects were "To Joys, or Evils, Ever Low resign'd, / They give their Cares and Follies to the Wind: / In all his Ways to meet their God prepar'd" (Achates to Varus, 12). It is through this confidence that individuals are "Secure that Virtue finds its great Reward." In this instance, the reward is linked also with belief in God. It is no less about value for being so. Participating in an economy has multiple purposes: it is a way of belonging to and identifying with a society as well as a way of obtaining necessary resources.

A variation on this presentation of virtue's reward is to invoke God as surety that the reward does indeed exist, as William Bewick does, assuring readers that "If no Reward, *says he*, for Virtue here, / God, always just, gives it some other where" (125). His statement has two functions – besides confirming the reward's existence, it uses the existence as a basis for praising God. In other cases, asserting the link between virtue and reward is accompanied by a rejection of falsehood. One of the heroines of John Blanch's tragicomedy *Hoops into spinning-wheels* rejects a get-rich-quick scheme, dismissing it with the explanation that "From Virtue flows a rich

Reward; / No flattering Tongue will I regard” (12). Needless to say, the man making the offer does not have her best interests at heart, so by rejecting it, the heroine is able to demonstrate not only her commitment to virtue, but also her knowledge of true value.

Still another variation involving true value involves seeing it in other people, and praising them for it, as in Elizabeth Carter’s occasional poem “On the Death of Her Sacred Majesty Queen Caroline”:

Attending Angels, bear your sacred Prize
 Amidst the radiant Glories of the Skies
 Where God-like Princes, who below pursu’d
 That noblest End of Rule, the publick Good,
 Now sit secure, their gen’rous Labour past,
 With all the just Rewards of Virtue grac’d.
 In that bright Train distinguish’d let her move,
 Who built her Empire on a People’s Love. (21)

In this passage, we can see the trappings of Carter’s presentation of virtue in her imitation of Horace – the princes sit secure, exuding the calmness that characterizes virtue-based confidence.

All of the above mentions of virtue’s reward contrast sharply with the tone of Richard Blackmore’s reference to it in his poem “The Vanity of Human Life.” Blackmore, writing from a more privileged position of a knighthood, informs us that:

All real Pleasure that we here enjoy,
 Is on our pious Actions to reflect,
 Our Lives in Virtue constant to employ,
 And the Reward of Virtue to expect. (412)

Instead of confidence, Blackmore's adjuration to constant virtue suggests the need to treat virtue more like money, and acquire as much of it as possible.

In many instances, including all of the above, asserting virtue's reward takes place at the end of a poem. This is because the reward is a final stop that confirms that participation in the system of virtue is worthwhile. This is different from saying that people only participate in a system because they expect a reward. Instead, it is a validation that the system is fair and just. However, we do see discussion of what, specifically, virtue's reward is. Happiness, usually referred to as "bliss," is the most common object. Sometimes, this is presented in the sense that "Virtue makes the Bliss, where'er we dwell" (Collins, *Persian Eclogues* 5). Collins specifies later in the same poem that the particular bliss being sought is that of romantic love, and enumerates other specific virtues that contribute to it: modesty, chastity, meekness, and pity. In plenty of cases, the link between virtue and bliss is more general. Thomas Warton's "Ode" ends with the speaker asking Wisdom's aid to find "True Delight," and is told in reply, that "Virtue alone is Bliss Compleat" (Warton 135). The associations between bliss and virtue tend to emphasize bliss's accessibility to all: that it is there if one follows the rules. But saying this can serve multiple purposes. In "A religious ode, occasioned by the present rebellion," the poet, an anonymous clergyman, tells readers that "Thy law is holy, just and good, / To Bliss by Virtue points the Way," – and with these lines, professes Christian devotion, and devotion to "George, the Guardian of this Faith" (12).

We see a more repressive perspective from Lady Mary Chudleigh in her poem "On the Death of my Dear Daughter Eliza Maria Chudleigh: A Dialogue Between Lucinda and Marissa," which advises that

Honour is ever the Reward of Pain,

A lazy Virtue no Applause will gain:
All such as to uncommon Heights would rise,
And on the Wings of Fame ascend the Skies,
Must learn the Gifts of Fortune to despise.
They to themselves their Bliss must still confine,
Must be unmov'd, and never once repine. (108)

The meaning of virtue splinters, becoming diffuse, even euphemistic. This creates a situation where poems that interpret and clarify virtue are desirable; and ironically, virtue, perhaps once intended as a set of rules, becomes a flexible trope that can be used to discuss individual autonomy. Writing about virtue could make people into heroes – not just because they were virtuous, but because virtue created an imaginative context which could be grafted onto everyday life, and in which subjects wielded significantly more autonomy and agency than they would have otherwise. It allowed individuals to make statements that would otherwise have been highly controversial, or else, seemed ridiculous. Blackmore and Dennis conferred extraordinary agency on virtue; many poets began the work of transferring that agency to themselves.

What I have suggested in the previous several pages is in some ways consistent with the statements on virtue and commerce made by J. G. A. Pocock in *Virtue, Commerce, and History* – which is to say that both Pocock and I agree that virtue and commerce are complexly linked. In other ways, however, we differ – though it is perhaps more accurate to say that I take issue with the way that Pocock has been used by literary critics. As a historian, Pocock has focused on political thought (encompassing economic activity) as it is visible through the writings of various authorities. He brings clarity to a chaotic period in the history of ideas by establishing clean categories, i.e, those of civic humanism and classical republicanism; and he shows how the two

run through various texts, and conflict with each other (39). In his own words, he is writing “the history of political thought in law-centered terms” (46). This is a very narrow, and top-down perspective on political economy, and it preemptively excludes the ways that individuals navigate the situations that they find themselves in, as the variety of perspectives on virtue as a value indicates. Because Pocock’s achievements are so extensive, literary critics have handily dropped in references to either *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, or *The Machiavellian Moment*, in order to explain away situations where Pocock is only partially correct, and in some ways, a fundamental mismatch. This is not because of any particular errors in his thinking, but only because he has not examined the economic thinking of non-economic authorities such as the three poets whom I discuss below.

Thomas Parnell

Thomas Parnell was trained to enter the priesthood in the Church of Ireland, and ordained as a deacon in 1700. It took four more years for him to be ordained as a priest, due to his own uncertainties regarding his vocation. But upon being ordained, he was installed as minor canon of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin; and two years later rose to become the archdeacon of Clogher. The church became his livelihood — but it also introduced him to the tantalizing possibilities of a literary career, for it was through the priesthood that Parnell became friends with Jonathan Swift. His clerical career provided occasions to visit London, where he met Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Alexander Pope, and eventually became a member of the Scriblerus Club. Parnell published a handful of pieces credited to him in the *Spectator*, the *Guardian*, and Steele’s *Poetic Miscellany* — and is thought to have jointly authored at least a few Scriblerus pieces, though his exact contribution is unknown. That he hoped for greater success is evident from his refusal to accept an offer to become prebend of Dunlavin, a parish of St. Patrick’s, where Swift

had ascended to Dean in 1713. The prebendary would almost certainly have been a less laborious position than the archdeaconship, which involved supporting the archbishop — but it also would have taken Parnell away from London and literary society. Unfortunately, his commitment to London life bore no fruit, and when the Scriblerus Club disbanded in 1714, Parnell returned to Ireland, eventually accepting the vicarage of Finglas in 1716. He died two years later, falling ill while returning from one last trip to London.

Pope edited Parnell's *Poems for Several Occasions* in 1722 — the first book length collection in which Parnell had star billing. The collection was popular, whether through Pope's reputation, or through audience responses to Parnell's poetry directly. His fame increased when in 1742, Robert Blair quoted a couplet from Parnell's "Night-Piece on Death" within "The Grave:" "Death's but a path that must be trod, / If man would ever pass to God." These lines, and Blair's use of them, were substantially responsible for the categorization of Parnell as a member of the Graveyard School. That assessment was further supported by the 1758 publication of *The Posthumous Works of Dr. Thomas Parnell*, which presented a quantity of Parnell's juvenilia, given by him to Benjamin Everard. The majority of this latter volume is devotional in its content. It includes six secular poems, helpfully shuffled to the back of the collection.

The "Night-Piece on Death" is responsible for most of the critical attention that Parnell has received in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He is credited as the inspiration and origin for the increased interest in funereal poetry from the point in 1721 when his first volume of poetry was published. Few contemporary critics have focused on interpreting the poem; Marshall Brown's "Deconstruction and Enlightenment" is a rare exception. Instead opting to explain its influence — to assert, as Woodman does, that Parnell influenced Robert Blair, Thomas Gray, James Beattie, and through Beattie, directly influenced Wordsworth. (Woodman

209) Critics have also traced Parnell's relationship with more canonical writers. Both Woodman and Christine Gerrard do this – Gerrard focusing more on Pope, (Gerrard) Woodman identifying how Parnell conforms to or breaks with Addisonian style and sentiment. Likewise, there have been investigations into Gray's opinion of Parnell, (Starr) and Addison's relationship with Parnell and his brother Matthew. (Rawson) Over time, then, interest in Parnell has come to be primarily about the insight that his life and career can provide into early eighteenth century publishing culture – and this comes not from any aspect of his poetry, but from his interactions with other poets.

The emphasis on Parnell's Christian poetry, and his relationship with Pope, has had the effect of making much of his writing fade into the background, and has distorted critics' senses of what he valued, and the questions that his poetry engages. Most significantly, this has led them to overlook Parnell's literary aspirations, and his uncertainties about his clerical vocation; and this is a mistake, for his ambitions had a powerful influence on his religious and secular poetry.

Perhaps because Parnell had entered the clergy, he looked through the lens of his clerical role as he sought satisfaction as an artist — and thus his religious interpretations and his poetic goals became merged. We can see this in his portrayal of the relationship between man and God in his religious poetry. In the famous couplet from the "Night-Piece," Parnell explains death away, into a mere journey. At the same time, he communicates his perception of human and divine as fundamentally separate, until that path is traveled. In the "Night-Piece," this separation is temporary, because implicitly, death is a path to be trodden by all. No one is left behind. A road is a powerful metaphor — and Parnell uses it again, in "Piety, or, The Vision," in which he recounts a visit from an angelic figure who encourages him to pursue a spiritual muse. However,

in “Piety,” devotion leads the faithful “thro’ *paths untrod*” (225-27, emphasis mine), suggesting a hierarchy of participation and knowledge unlike the more democratic presentation in the “Night-Piece.” The substance of religious vision is privileged and highly classified information, a notion that is reinforced when the angel finds that “My raptures smother what I long to tell!” (228). Even in his own vision, Parnell feels himself on the outside looking in! This suggests that kinship between man and God is not entirely instinctive. Death may be the ultimate uniting force, but in life, divine kinship is a complex performance to be learned from figures like “Piety’s” angel, who comes “to teach thee praises mix’d with humble pray’rs / And tune thy soul to sing seraphic airs” (226).

“Piety” suggests that Parnell sees the angel’s tutelage as a rather difficult curriculum for poets, who must learn to produce the right mixture of “prayer, and praise, and pleasure.” Poets are charged both to ascend to new heights, *and* to craft poetry that may well be efficacious in correcting the wrongs of earthly idolatry. Only when they achieve this balance, and recreate the story of the “great unseen descent of God,” does the distant divine become rapturously present. It is striking that when pursuing this course, Parnell is thinking less about morality, and more about the pursuit of uniqueness. What he must achieve is the right balance of content; or in other words, he is concerned with the aesthetics of faith, and the efficacy of poetry in achieving religious ends. He thinks this through via consideration of the most appropriate subjects, and the proper poetic ornamentation: “floods of liquid light” to accompany God’s presence. When the angel adjures him to select “a theme divine;” he pledges to “mount the roving wind’s expanding wing,” and journey widely. “I’ll make my lays, / Obedient to thy summons, sound with praise” (229). The poem is at once a record of the ambitions of a would-be poet and a priest.

Both Parnell’s anxieties and his yearnings are on display, as readers learn about his sense

of the challenges involved in piety. We learn that piety is experiential, in the sense that it involves vision and response to vision. Pleasure has a role to play, but a befuddling one. While the angelic visitor identifies pleasure as a component of piety, at the conclusion, the speaker worries that he has “take[n] for truth the flatteries of a dream.” The vision that he has experienced is more pleasure than he knows how to handle. He worries that he might “barely wish the wond’rous gift I boast, / And faintly practice what deserves it most” (229) doubting that his yearning is intense enough to measure up; or that his skill goes beyond mediocrity. It’s telling that the angel mentions the fusing of pleasure, prayer, and praise, while Parnell reflexively doubts his own feeling of pleasure as valid — a subtle indication of his lack of self-confidence as a poet. How will he distinguish between enough pleasure and too much? With the angelic visitor departed, there is no certain answer from heaven. But this concern does not prevent Parnell from praying that the angelic visitation be “no dream of bliss, / Or be, to bless my nights, my dreams like this” (229). If such joy is wrong, who wants to be right?

Throughout his poetry, we see Parnell getting glimpses of a vocation that is all his own, in which both his religious belief and his poetry contribute. “Hymn to Contentment” provides a different angle from that of “Piety.” It’s an odd poem, in which trembling religious zeal is grafted onto a fairly cynical meditation on success in life. This pairing is visible even in the opening lines. “Lovely, lasting peace of mind! / Sweet delight of human kind! Heav’nly born, and bred on high” (93) suggests a meditation on the comfort of faith and security in the knowledge of divine love. Any such expectations are dashed in the next three lines, which abruptly shift into a competitive context. The contentment described above is intended “To crown the favorites of the sky, / With more of happiness below, / Than victors in a triumph know!” As Parnell amplifies its value, he also circumscribes it — not just limiting those with

faith, but those who are the most favored. The poem grapples with the consequences of this situation, specifically with the speaker trying to find contentment for himself. The search for happiness is a not uncommon narrative trope in writing from this period, and so we might expect the poem to seek it in ambition, avarice, and adventure, before discovering solace in faith. What is interesting about Parnell's iteration is that he doesn't exclude either ambition or avarice from achieving contentment. Only the "bold advent'rer," the figure most like Parnell himself — i.e., the bold pilgrim who will follow the roving wind to display his zeal, discovers that "No real happiness is found / In trailing purple o'er the ground" (94).

Fortunately, the poem doesn't prolong the speaker's melancholy. A feminine presence, described merely as "the Grace," appears, and offers counsel: know God, and discover the joys of religion. This advice, like the trope of seeking happiness, is familiar. Less common is what follows. The Grace is aware of his earlier longing, for she promises that "then every Grace shall prove [the heart's] guest, / And I'll be there to crown the rest" (95). But graces in the plural are qualities which are appealing and attractive to others — so implicitly the promised contentment *is* that of the victor. What is at stake is not merely Parnell's discovering the joys of religion — it's his ability to become one of the favorites of heaven. Parnell's personal vision of contentment is to employ his soul and poetic gifts "pleasing all men." And while his desire to be "Pleas'd and bless'd with God alone" is unquestionably devout, it is also a wish for an engrossing subject for one's writing.

The effect of the spiritual visitation is electrifying. It reinvigorates the speaker's perception of the landscape that had previously been bereft of satisfaction. While cataloging the beauty of his surroundings, he declares "All of these, and all I see, / Should be sung, and sung by me" (95). This is a vision of happiness that comes not so much from pure devotion as from

feeling needed; and having a clear role in the world.

When Parnell tells others to “go search among your idle dreams, / Your busy or your vain extremes; / And find a life of equal bliss,” (96) he’s inviting them to embark on the same sort of self-searching which he has just undertaken. His phrasing is non-restrictive — while poetry is his own “idle dream,” it may not be everyone’s. If the poem ended with “bliss,” it would be a strong endorsement of individuality, anticipating the motivations that drive Wordsworth and other Romantic voices.

But the bubble of optimism bursts: the final couplet reads “And find a life of equal bliss, / Or own the next begun in this.” Parnell cannot forget his original understanding of contentment as highly exclusive. To own the next life begun is a callback to this exclusivity. It suggests that there is no separation between the current world, and an eternity beginning with the last judgment — instead, there is no separation, and God’s judgment has been issued already.

What is it that hinders Parnell from finding his bliss, and puts him in the position of rehearsing inspirational epiphanies? He feels perpetually on the cusp of mastery, but always short of achieving it. This anguish is often surprisingly visible. When he celebrates Pope in verse, his envy is so palpable that he wonders who he can speak truthfully, “yet still preserve the province of a friend.” Parnell aches for Pope’s skill; aches enough to haggle with the muses:

O might thy Genius in my bosom shine!

Thou should’st not fail of numbers worthy thine;

The brightest Ancients might at once agree,

To sing within my lays, and sing of thee. (62)

Bargaining to glorify your friend and rival in order to get a taste of his poetic flare is a terrible compromise to have to make. When Parnell alludes to the brightest ancients, how much

of the image is drawing on neoclassical convention; and how much is the pain of feeling permanently excluded from the circles of the right people? His misery is dynamic: from one angle, it's a lack of talent, from another, a problem of social exclusion, from still another, a shortage of happiness.

Despite the claim of its title, "To Mr. Pope" is much more about Parnell himself. It records his attempts to overcome and triumph, and reveals the true difficulty, as he understands it: "For fortune plac'd me in unfertile ground, / Far from the joys that with my soul agree, / From wit, from learning—very far from thee" (65). While he may lack Pope's genius, Parnell is no tasteless cretin; instead, he's sensitive enough to recognize the objects he craves, and his distance from them. He elevates Pope by portraying himself as dependent, as serf to the magnanimous master. Underneath Parnell's squirming to find his place as a poet is a genuine question that he fidgets around, uncertain of how to confront it. Is poetic success a limited and exhaustible resource? The answer to this question has ramifications for his relationship with Pope. If success is limited (Parnell imagines it as a gold mine, once plentiful and now lost), then friends in the same industry must be competitors, rather than collaborators. Putting the blame on fortune is easier than squaring off against Pope, as Parnell searches for his professional footing.

The search for inspiration, for a voice, is repeated over and over again throughout Parnell's work, in varied forms, with the moment of transformation always highlighted. In "Health: An Eclogue", the theme is not poetry at all. The speaker is "Damon, a youth from city cares withdrawn;" a stock character who follows what should be becoming recognizable as a standard arc. At first, "Damon" is submissive, imploring Health, the "country-Goddess" to "let my breath through quivering trees inhale / The rosy blessings" of the outdoors (69). Parnell prefers to start from deferential positions -- all the better to declare the value of what he pursues.

And Health is valuable -- but not, ultimately, his goal. Instead, the object is Health's "mountain-sister, Exercise," a rowdy diva with an entourage of dogs, hawks, and horses trailing in her wake. Summoning this lady successfully electrifies Damon out of reverence. He "mount[s] the courser, call[s] the deep-mouth'd hounds," masters the hawks, and "loads the gun with fate" (70). Thus does he achieve his goal -- by taking charge of the weapon which he feels has been wielded against him. The accomplishment proves so fulfilling that Parnell drops "Damon's" mask, and ends the verses, focused on being inspired by Daphnis and Virgil, and ministered to by feminine Content, as "fancy, void of sorrow, turns to song" (71). His talent would be more productive, he pleads, if only he could feel less worried.

What Parnell dramatizes is never the result of the inspiration, but instead, the choices that allow inspiration to occur. Equally important are the stumbling blocks that Parnell, or his stand-ins, must overcome in order to gain their visions. The choices and obstacles are the story that he tells, and what he esteems is most accurately described as human agency. Exercise is a fitting goddess, for Parnell values the ability to accomplish his goals, and the conviction that his actions will be significant. Agency encompasses several sometimes disparate qualities brought together by a single commonality: they allow the poet to get things done. Moral endowments such as honesty and humility are occasionally important; but sin is not a grave concern. Courage and clear-headedness are more emphasized as aspects of virtue. And virtue matters not so much because God approve of it, but because it "can advance...can gain the Odds of Fate, / And from it self shake off the Weight / Upon th'unworthy Mind" (28). Its importance is that it holds the promise of thriving, whether in poetry, or in romance; and Parnell is far more interested in thriving than in some arid moral high ground.

Agency is important; however, to fully understand Parnell's perspective on it, we need to

examine his views on competition as well. Competition is the resistance against which agency is exerted. The way in which Parnell enshrines this competition in his verse varies. Rivalry with other poets is always close at hand, and it is the worst sort of competition, by which I mean that it is the hardest for Parnell to resolve in a satisfactory manner. In other poems, though, he is able to present competition in a more positive light. "The Horse and the Olive," sung "to make the moderns wise" (Parnell, *The Horse and the Olive*, 1) argues that competition is the mechanism of progress. It offers the tale of Neptune and Minerva, grappling in order to become patron of Athens. The two present contrasting strategies of human good: warlike pomp, and peaceful agricultural plenty, respectively. Their contest is judged by Jove, aided by "impartial scales," which award Minerva's plenitude as most beneficial: a seeming open-and-shut case. But the poem is deceptively simple, and requires closer examination to see it clearly. Parnell elevates competition by setting it among immortals -- and this has the effect of oversimplifying it, rendering the competition neatly won in a single heroic quatrain. The results are almost magical: "Athens hence in arts and honours grew" (2) and they all lived happily ever after.

Parnell knows that he is telling tales -- he says so directly. "From Fables thus disclos'd, a monarch's mind / May form just rules to chuse the truly great," This pronouncement is plain and simple, while simultaneously pointing directly at the contrast between the fable and the reality. While Jove has impartial scales, modern monarchs must devise rules that will be similarly effective. But how to accomplish this task? The argument grows more rickety as Parnell elaborates the details of how the competition should work. It will:

... Subjects weary'd with Distresses find
Whose kind Endeavours most befriend the State.
Ev'n Britain here may learn to place her Love,

If Cities won her Kingdoms Wealth have cost,
If Anna's Thoughts the patriot-souls approve
Whose Cares restore that Wealth the Wars had lost. (2)

These lines are nowhere near as simple as their clean iambic pentameter suggests; rather, they are competitions stacked on competitions. The distressed subjects have already lost one or more bouts, leading to their current sorry state. Likewise, the mention of wars lost implies that Britain has not always placed her love well! In other words, Parnell is proposing competitions in order to reform competitions. As proof, he offers a paradox. In determining the best patron of Europe, "Great Anna's title no exception knows" -- not even Neptune and Minerva will face her in opposition. The ramshackle morals of the poem are precisely what make it illuminating. Parnell is radically, foolishly committed to competition as method. He lauds it as the optimum means of redressing past ills, including those dealt out by fortune and fate. Competition, he suggests, is a particularly important tool for monarchs and others in power, who are prone to miss the far reaching-consequences of their actions.

While Parnell extols competition, he does not present it as easy to overcome — in "A Fairy Tale," the only poem where one disadvantaged man triumphs over a privileged rival, he does so through the aid of magic. However, in spite of his palpable longing for success, Parnell's poems demonstrate that winning isn't everything to him. In "An Elegy To An Old Beauty," he examines competition from an alternate angle: between an aging mother and her daughter, on the cusp of adulthood. The speaker in the poem chides the mother nicely, if not gently, that "really fifty-five is something old," and that it would be better to step out of the spotlight before the "withering seasons" take their toll (75-76). Part of his message is that the mother cannot win in this contest — the only question is how badly she will lose. But he offers her a strategy of retreat

by suggesting Socrates as a role model. Parnell presents him crossing “a glittering fair, / Unmov’d by ...tape, toys, tinsel, gimp, perfume and lace,” and rejecting the world entirely to be “wrapt in wisdom,” while his antagonists are merely “whirl’d by whim” (77). Unfortunately, this image truly highlights its author’s flaws as a poet. Socrates rejecting tinsel and lace falls flat as an image; and his ultimate end makes him a dubious exemplar for emulation. The decision to use him underscores Parnell’s emphasis on competition, and more importantly, helps us understand how agency matters to him. Socrates chooses of his own volition not to involve himself, as the aging mother might choose to stop competing. Agency, Parnell would argue, gives us a wider range of options than simply winning or losing. And competition, which is ubiquitous in private and public spheres, is what makes our choices matter at all.

Examining Parnell’s thoughts on agency across an assortment of poems illuminates where his concern is focused: squarely on the individual in an earthly context. His encounters with the divine include only one messenger, in “Piety,” whose declaration can be characterized as otherworldly, urging the poet to reject earth in favor of better things in heaven. This advice is almost entirely lost on Parnell as speaker, who focuses instead on his ambitions to craft a glorious song. This burning ambition, rather than piety, is the driving force throughout his work. And Parnell struggles — not just to fulfill his ambitions of success as a poet, but also to reconcile his own agency with divine management. This struggle is most evident in his long poem, “The Hermit,” in which he lays bare the uncertainty that is a subtle undertone in other poems.

The titular hermit, though he connotes piety, is not a simple archetype of otherworldliness. As the poem begins, he has decided to leave his cave, out of fear that “vice should triumph, Virtue vice obey” (96). His fear causes him to doubt a “certain prospect,” and that “all the tenor of his soul” will be lost — in other words, he’s no longer sure of his security

through Christianity. The implication is that his “career” choice is at least partially utilitarian, an implication that is reinforced by the suggestion that prayer is “all his bus’ness” — in other words, a trade. In this, his situation resembles Parnell’s. The hermit’s character is established with care to indicate that whatever his career motivations, he is genuinely kind and devout, inclined to generosity and humility in ample measure. If Parnell wanted to reinforce unworldly virtue, then we might expect the hermit to encounter situations that demonstrate worldly greed, but which also reassure him that virtue is still master of vice.

Such didacticism is not quite the story that Parnell provides. The hermit quickly acquires a traveling companion, a youth who appears entirely simpatico with his ideals. Lulled into trust, the hermit is disturbed at his companion’s actions, which begin with theft, and quickly escalate to the double murders of an infant and an apparently good man. He is even more thunderstruck to find that his companion is no devil, but a “beauteous angel” who reveals “the truth of government divine,” namely that “Its sacred majesty thro’ all depends / On using second means to work [God’s] ends” (103). These second means are human actions, or angelic ones, when no humans are at hand. Perhaps sensing the hermit’s dismay, the angel attempts to console him by stating that God uses human actions, but does not control human will — and he salutes the hermit’s choice of occupation, leaving him little choice but to acquiesce with “thy will be done,” and retreat back to his solitude.

No matter how much Parnell struggles with his desire for success as a poet, in “The Hermit,” he faces an even larger problem. Agency is something that he knows how to present and rehearse; he can imagine stories about where it’s important. The situation in “The Hermit” is one where he is out of his depth. In every situation that the hermit and his companion encounter, the hermit’s assessment turns out to be entirely inaccurate; and, had he acted, his actions would

have resulted in more harm than good. In such unintelligible contexts, human agency is at best worthless, and at worse, confirms the hermit's fears that virtue aids vice. The resolution to the poem, though it assuages the hermit, would be a blow to the majority of speakers in Parnell's other poems, where action matters, and where the realization of knowing what to do is the peak of the dramatic arc.

Does Parnell find a way of reconciling his belief and his doubts about human agency? One way of answering this question is to examine his best-known poem, the "Night-Piece on Death," to see how it fits within the images and tropes that are typical of his larger body of work. A Night-Piece on Death's speaker resembles other protagonists from "Piety," "Contentment," "To Mr. Pope," and even "Health," which is to say, he is hungry for wisdom, inspiration, and happiness. But there is a marked difference in the speaker's stance in this poem. This alteration can be summed up by describing the "Night-Piece" as the reverse mirror-image of "Piety" -- and it is worth looking into the details of the reversal further. Parnell writes frequently about his pursuit of artistry; but the "Night-Piece begins by giving up that chase: "No more I waste the wakeful night, / Intent with endless view to pore / The schoolmen and the sages o'er." These lines have often been interpreted as rejecting earthly rationality in favor of otherworldly enthusiasm; but it is more plausible to look to Parnell's other verse to understand this particular cold shoulder. It puts aside the schoolmen and sages whom Parnell looked to for mentoring: Swift, Pope, and the Scriblerus Club, as well as older sources: Virgil, Horace. He critiques them for straying from wisdom, or pointing, "at best the longest way." The "longest way" is a fair description of Swift's counsel, which involved adding compliments in essays to the Viscount Bolingbroke, and then pursuing a friendship with the Earl of Oxford (Coleborne). Parnell seems to have attempted to follow Swift's advice, but for whatever reason, it was a road that led

nowhere. No surprise, then, that he seeks a “readier path...where wisdom’s surely taught below.” Rather than pursuing the high political machinery that served Pope and Swift well, he turns to the landscape.

Surveying the nocturnal prospects prompts no declaration that this view “should be sung, and sung by me,” as in “Piety”. Parnell is quiet, almost passive; his perception is marked by hesitancy. The nether crescent “seems” to glide; his sight is “doubtful,” and must be guided by the steeple. What he sees is also marked by familiarity, as “once again” the spangled show descends. All the images he uses are characterized by repetition: water lapping; a vista that aspires and retires, over and over again. This is poetic *deja vu*, or more accurately, the same dull round: Parnell has been here before.

The poem isn’t gloom devoid of thought, however — Parnell finds, as he wanders, that he does have points to make. He wants to talk about that “middle race of mortals...men half ambitious, all unknown.” He wants people to know that this group exists, and when he asserts this, it’s not hard to recognize that he’s talking about himself, and his own situation. He was a man who was half ambitious, and from his own sense of things, who failed to find success in the profession he aspired to. Years later, Thomas Gray will riff on the image of the “half ambitious, all unknown,” and turn it into the “mute inglorious Milton” buried in the country churchyard, the idea of the genius whom we have lost, whose art we don’t know. Gray’s lines have had more staying power, but they were preceded by Parnell’s image, and the two are distinct from each other. Parnell’s line isn’t about the artistic treasure that we lost; it’s about the men whose ambition never quite gelled. Were they geniuses? Maybe. But Gray is writing about the flowers “born to blush unseen,” while Parnell is writing about the flowers that did not figure out how to bloom at all. Even in his own poem, though, Parnell doesn’t feel like he knows how to flower.

His tone is self-deprecating: “Ha! while I gaze, pale Cynthia fades, / The bursting earth unveils the shades” (91). He looks for the moonlight, and the moonlight palls. There is nothing to see here, except for shades warning that this is a competition that he can’t win.

In “Piety,” the angelic visitor encouraged Parnell to pursue a heavenly muse “through paths untrod” in order to fulfill “Love Divine” who “asks it all and more,” who demands nothing less than everything from would-be devotees. Parnell’s body of work is the record of his attempts to give that all; and the “Night-Piece” is his letter of resignation and defeat. “Death’s but a path that must be trod, / If man would ever pass to God” (91). It’s the path that everyone takes, rather than the great men; but Parnell sees it as the only path left; and as a calmer and easier journey than the striving that he has previously pursued. When he questions the need for “flowing sable stoles, / Deep pendent cypress, mourning poles,” and other funereal pomp, the question is double-edged: it asks why we engage in sorrow over death when the end is a relief. However, it also questions the poetic *modus operandi* that Pope used in *The Rape of the Lock*, of extravagantly detailing objects, and their motion. Parnell isn’t just relinquishing his hold on life: he’s letting go of poetry, too. In the final couplet, he finds his freedom in mingling “with the blaze of day.” There are no thoughts of eloquent versification, or concerns about knowing whether heaven’s favor has been granted. He is content to “tow’r away,” and disappear (92).

In the end, then, Parnell does partake of the melancholy with which the Graveyard School is associated; and he has one poem that rejects ambition in favor of the afterlife. We miss a great deal, however, if we mistake him for someone who disavows ambition on principle — especially on pious and religious principle, because the body of his work demonstrates that the opposite is true, and that Parnell’s ambition and agency were intense expressions of his faith. He hoped to make peace between his religious career and a poetic profession — not just writing religious

poetry, but composing satire, classical forms, witty vignettes, and retellings of myth. His melancholy comes from the fact that he was never successful in crafting a reconciliation between his two masters.

James Thomson

James Thomson (1700-1748) was one of the more successful mid-18th century poets in terms of securing patronage, and a reputation as a professional poet — when he dedicated poems to officials, they tended to reciprocate with financial gifts. This distinguishes him from poets like Shenstone and Young, whose similar efforts were unsuccessful. Born in Scotland, Thomson had been encouraged to seek a literary career by David Mallet (originally David Malloch), and he did so through both poetry and drama. But he also traveled, first from Scotland to England; throughout England when visiting friends, and then through France and Italy. Even after returning to England, he continued to be a vigorous walker, settling in Richmond, but traveling to London on foot to meet friends in pubs. This peripatetic lifestyle played a key role in his interpretation of the rest of the world - and provided much of the material that appears in his verse. This is evident in *The Seasons*, Thomson's best surviving poem, written in four parts between 1725 and 1730, and published both separately and as a collection, before being revised in 1744 and 1746.

“Winter,” which was published first in 1725, helped to establish readers' interpretation and expectations of the entire poem. Thomson identified his theme as Winter's rule over the earth, and the “vapours, clouds, and storms” that “exalt the soul to solemn thought / And heavenly musing” (ll. 3-5). The speaker proclaimed that this mournful mood replaced a previous “unceasing Joy” in Nature, during what he described as the “cheerful Morn of Life” (l. 7). This

gesture seemed a momentous setting aside of Nature and natural beauty as childish things, and an elevation of grave moral contemplations as a more serious and proper subject for poetry. The reception of “Winter” was bolstered by Thomson’s established reputation. Other poets who hoped for similar success followed in his footsteps in producing poetry that called for somber sobriety, and contributed to the phenomenon of what later critics called the Graveyard School. Its reputation, however, has overshadowed Thomson’s full range of subject matter in “The Seasons.”

Valuing social feeling as tied to emotions

Throughout all four parts of the poem (one for each season), Thomson is highly concerned with sociability and social feeling, which he sees as intrinsically tied to emotions and sensibility in general. *The Seasons* is unusual for its time in that it appears to have no human protagonists as its subjects. Men and women appear briefly, and discover happiness or meet their ends in thirty lines or less, before fading out of view. Other humans merely wander through in a line or two, in the midst of more detailed and complex portrayals of natural phenomena. Rather than portray a human, or a handful of humans, Thomson’s epic attempts to represent all of humanity en masse, and avoids any sustained focus on individuals. Each season details aspects of human emotion in conjunction with the vicissitudes of seasonal life. By portraying human passions and nature side by side, “The Seasons” raises subtle questions about emotional progression and development.

His concern is evident both from the way that he portrays Nature, and humans, within the poem. Nature is characterized as active, responsive, and varied. His language amplifies natural processes like sunlight and spring growth by giving them words which accentuate pervasive change. The sun penetrates the dark retreat of vegetation, and this act sets the “steaming power”

of growth at large to wander over the vernant earth (Spring, ll. 82-83). Not all of the imagery has such strong overtones of impregnation, though much of it is masculine and sexual. The emphasis is on what happens to the earth: it is shaken, rolled, and swollen. Natural processes which happen on too small, or too large a scale to be seen by the the human eye are given vivid presence in the poem.

It is important that these actions are not simply seen as examples of dominance, or of Nature being conquered in any way. Instead, they are portraits of interactivity. At each action, the Earth responds in the form of counteractions that meet shaking and swelling with rejoinders of oozing sap, and lively fermentation (Spring, ll. 564-68). The responsiveness that Thomson describes is robust and almost bacchanalian in the couplings which it portrays. Sea water is courted by the sand into joyfully relinquishing its salt, and led deep into inland mazes far from shore before suddenly abandoning what had “charm’d its Course so long” (Autumn, ll. 765-773). “Why should the Waters love / To take so far a Journey to the Hills?” Thomson asks — but he has no answer. The point is not to reveal the precise reasons why natural processes happen — instead, it is to highlight the energy and vigour of their cooperation. Even the “broad monsters of the foaming deep,” “flounce and tumble in unwieldy joy” in response to seasonal change.

Nature’s unity, meaning its ability to persist through time, repeating the cycle of the seasons, is all the more wondrous within the poem because of the disparate aspects that are joined together. Streams and rivers are a congruence of placid waters and “impetuous torrent[s],” both effecting the countryside through which they flow (Summer, ll. 587-90). The array of substance throughout Nature is highlighted and praised throughout the poem — to Thomson, diversity “in ever-changing composition mixed” is what holds the world together. The significance of diversity is made explicit in the “Hymn on the Seasons,” which accompanied

publications of all four parts, and proclaimed that “These [Seasons] as they change, Almighty Father! these / Are but the varied God” (Hymn, ll. 1-2). They are an omnipresent form of divinity, visible to any who would look for it.

Thomson’s portrayal is inclusive to the point of chaos, except that the result of all this activity is not disorder, but rather concord and consonance. The mixture results in peace — a peace that does not so much subdue as much as it contains its wilder parts. What is the result of this concord? By bringing together plant and animal life, it connects higher and lower beings. Thomson interprets this connection as more than the mere commonality of being present on earth. In his eyes, it is a process of giving and receiving; of energy transmitted between organisms, and resulting in a harmony that is all the more astonishing for its diffusiveness. It is miraculous because it is not coincidental, but explicitly social — an ongoing “social commerce” that provides “firm support [for] / The full-adjusted harmony of things” (Autumn, ll. 843-44). Concord, in other words, is stability, a form of infrastructure that sustains other ongoing activities. The sociability referenced implies some degree of empathy between the participants, suggesting that the raging torrent cares for the earth, even as it shakes it. The stability and permanence that Thomson perceives are collective; and the bond encompassing Earth and Saturn as “indissoluble” (Summer, l. 97). His imagery conveys a powerful sense of security and care which is all the more remarkable for its existence within the endless busyness of life. This is the “great eternal scheme, / Involving all” that motivates Thomson to write. The scheme’s existence is both an impossible question, and the question’s answer writ large. Only God, “who, boundless spirit all / And unremitting energy, pervades, / Adjusts, sustains, and agitates the whole” (Spring, ll. 850-52) is capable of such an achievement. The emphasis in these lines is not on proclaiming divine existence by negating objections. Instead, it is focused on divine activity, and its effects

throughout the world. In praising God, Thomson limits the nature and scope of his praise, so that apostrophes to the divine are a tiny fraction of the poem, compared with the descriptions of the earth itself. God is praised as the intricate mechanism that makes Nature work, and yet, instead of saying “praise the mechanism,” he urges his audience to marvel at its output. God is a hazy presence in the background, and Thomson restricts himself to saying that God “ceaseless works alone, and yet alone / Seems not to work” (Spring, ll. 853-55). It is the contrast between the effortlessness and the result that is the miracle.

While nature teems with interactivity and sociability, Thomson sees the equivalent human concord as lacking. Its absence is evident through human cruelty and a general lack of awareness among humans. The “gay licentious proud”, who are surrounded by “pleasure, power, and affluence,” are happily unaware of the “sad variety of pain” (Winter, ll. 323-29) experienced by those who are less fortunate. Humans whose vision has a wider scope, and who are willing to act on their empathy, are in short supply. One small group, a committee who investigated and shed light on the cruel conditions of British jails in 1729, is singled out by Thomson for praise, and as a model for others — but Thomson warns that “Much [oppression] still untouched remains” (Winter, l. 383). This cruelty is, as Ralph Cohen and others have noted, a probable reference to the biblical fall of man; however, the allusion is subtle. Thomson’s portrayal suggests that the problem with humans’ lack of sociability is emotional -- or rather, that the problem is that their emotional sensibilities have lost a social dimension which they once had. No mention is made of sin, or serpents; instead, we hear of “a golden age,” of poetry and music, when “emergent from the gloomy wood, / The glaring lion saw, his horrid heart / Was meekened, and he joined his sullen joy” (Spring, ll. 265-66) with that of humans. This framing casts the fall of man as a failure of sociability, though the precise cause of the failure is unclear.

What matters is that the golden age “is found no more,” and the passions have “burst their bounds,” and social feeling has become extinct (Spring, ll. 305-306).

For Thomson, emotion is hugely important as a force which creates and promotes activity — as in the greening of the world in the spring. It is akin to energy in its role within the world. But this energy is dangerous and destructive without the vital component of sociability. Thus, Thomson makes the problem of emotion evident in a reversal between humans and Nature. He personifies aspects of nature as intensely loving, inventive, and resilient. Natural emotionality is most evident within moments when the seasons are progressing; for example, when ardent Summer appears, and “the turning Spring / Averts her blushful face, and earth and skies / All-smiling to his hot dominion leaves” (Summer, ll. 6-8) The heat of emotion and heat of summer are synonymous, and beneficent in their effects. Though inhuman, these natural features are characterized as though they *were* human, and all their actions and changes the result of productive sensibility.

In contrast with the portrayal of nature as humane, throughout the poem, Thomson links humanity with qualities more usually associated with nature, and specifically, with the inhospitable wilderness. “Convulsive anger *storms* at large,” and “Base Envy *withers* at another’s Joy” (emphasis mine). These verbs, and others like them (sinks, gusts, swells) portray human feeling and thinking as a condition that wounds both the self and others. The natural landscape becomes the antidote that can “soothe every Gust of Passion into Peace” (Spring, l. 462); and its social interactivity, Thomson suggests, can rekindle human empathy.

Without social feeling, energy; even energy associated with the vibrant liveliness of the earth, becomes harmful. This change has significant impact on human lives, changing the relationship between humanity and the earth:

The Seasons since have, with severer sway,
Oppressed a broken world: the Winter keen
Shook forth his waste of snows; and Summer shot
His pestilential heats. Great Spring before
Greened all the year; and fruits and blossoms blushed
In social sweetness on the self-same bough. (Spring, ll. 317-322)

These lines provide a macroscopic view of the world as affected by the seasons. The microscopic perspective — what happens to individuals — is presented in vignettes that occur throughout the larger four poems. Men and women, at work, and at leisure, act within the confines of the environment. Sometimes, Thomson shows them acting, and proceeding with their lives. At other times, the actions prove fatal, as in the case of the young lovers who are fatally struck by lightning in “Summer.” Thomson’s articulation of the stakes of sociability affects the significance of these human vignettes. His premise that since the decay of social feeling, the effects of the seasons have become harsher towards humans, suggests that humans’ physical environments are shaped by emotions. This is a radically different perspective than the scolding morality that warns individuals that they must meticulously calculate the moral consequences of their actions. In *The Seasons*, people die because they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Without Thomson’s argument regarding the importance of social feeling, what happens in the poem could seem to portray the cruelty of chance misfortune. Instead, the implication is that each human action affects not only oneself, but many others. Instead of emphasizing the importance of the individual, the vignettes portray interdependence on a grand scale; and survival dependent on sociability.

What can we learn from *The Seasons* about what Thomson values?

Thomson values the experience of happiness. He wants all humanity, and all of Nature, to be able to experience this contentment; but from his perspective, the decay of social feeling prevents it. I think it's also accurate to say that he values managing emotions, and is highly critical of overly melancholy emotion. Melancholy plays a role in human life, and Thomson portrays the experience of it in winter. However, this melancholy is temporary, bracketed by the fecundity of autumn and the rejuvenation of spring. And even Thomson's solemn winter contemplation is presented as social, involving both "high converse with the dead," and the company of "a few chosen friends, who sometimes deign / To bless my humble roof" (Winter, ll. 549-550).

Thomson also values the idea of design. Maybe it's more accurate to say that he values complexity -- but design is the word that he uses throughout the poem to praise the variety that he observes in Nature. I think it's accurate to say that his concept of design includes his interpretation of Nature as being multi-leveled, as having "finer Springs that move the World" (a version of the watchmaker intelligent design argument, sort of). He sees Nature as incredibly diffuse, full of small and large, gentle and strenuous forces, all somehow working in concord. This concord, needless to say, is lacking from the great majority of humanity.

Finally, Thomson values showing over telling, which is why he's written a very long poem with no specific human protagonists, instead opting to attempt to portray humanity en masse. (He values inclusivity as well, for that matter, and doesn't want to leave anyone out if he can help it.) He has little faith in human rationality, scolding, or human imagination as a way of improving the problems of the fallen world, and asks "If Fancy then / Unequal fails beneath the pleasing Task; / Oh what shall Language do?" (Spring, ll. 471-473) Instead, he sees a more

effective method in learning the “moral song” of Nature, and showing it to humans, with the assumption that many will choose it, if they are aware of it.

Thomson’s direct treatment of labor and value in the *Castle of Indolence*

In *The Seasons*, Thomson provides a detailed view of the world as macrocosm. He shows how happiness is dependent on macroscopic social activity from both humans and from natural objects and forces. The decay of social feeling as a threat to happiness is one of his major concerns; and throughout the poem, he illustrates the different phenomena that either promote or detract from social feeling. The poem is rife with activity, but spends little time directly commenting on work, other than the section praising industry in “Summer” (ll. 1-200). However, Thomson’s last poem, *Castle of Indolence*, provides a view of the macrocosm from a more humancentric angle, and as the title suggests, spends more time directly focused on work, or the lack thereof. *Castle* is an homage to Spenser, written in two cantos of Spenserian stanzas, and recounting the story of an enchantment laid by the Sorcerer Indolence, and the Knight of Arts and Industry who must defeat him.

Aside from the Spenserian narrative, the poem is about correcting the problematic way that people see labor; and it provides insight into the way that Thomson understands what labor is. When the enchanter snares the population, he does so with a complaint “of cruel Fate, / And Labour harsh” (Canto 1, Stanza 7). This is enough to draw in hosts of pilgrims, whose vision the sorcerer poisons, so that they “see all but Man with unearn’d Pleasure gay” (Stanza 9). The pilgrims are not presented as instinctively indolent; instead, it is their understanding of labor that is vulnerable. They are persuaded both that all other creatures have an easier lot, and that the sorcerer can offer them an escape to a life of leisure (Stanza 13). Specifically, he promises that through Indolence, the heart “is sooth’d and sweeten’d by the social Sense; / For Interest, Envy,

Pride, and Strife are banish'd hence" (Stanza 15). The promises that he offers suggest an audience of people who like Thomson in their yearning for sociability, and who are ensnared out of frustration with unfairness and competition (Stanza 17). Unfortunately, though the enchanter's castle has the vestiges of sociability, in that it is home to many individuals, its true nature is one of isolation. The people have their freedom, but its "One great Rule for All" is that "each should work his own Desire" (Stanza 35), and pass their time eating, drinking, studying, or sleeping, as they like. The rule renders them all alone, and all alike, reduced to basic human functions.

The enchanter appeals to their rational side, painting a portrait of men who "run bustling to and fro with foolish Haste," but who find no pleasure in it. Indolence asks: "when nothing is enjoy'd, can there be greater Waste?," He suggests that work is an inefficient way of obtaining joy compared to idleness, and goes so far as to label those who *do* work as "Muckworm[s] of the Town." He accuses them of vanity for working, and suggests that they are as useful as corpses hanging in gallow-trees. (Stanzas 49-50). The framing that Thomson develops for his villain is diabolical, in that it strips labor of all its social value: the man of the town is neither helping others, nor even helping himself. In keeping with the emphasis on energetic activity in *The Seasons*, the result of the enchantment is that those who fall prey to it succumb to immobility until they lie stricken with disease (Stanzas 75-76).

While the first canto portrays the onset of the problem; the second portrays its solution through the endeavors of the Knight of Arts and Industry, and his accompanying Bard, who lay siege to the castle. In order to correct the inhabitants' erroneous view of labor, the Bard holds forth with a passage reprising lines from Thomson's "Spring:"

Ye hapless Race,
Dire-labouring here to smother Reason's Ray,

That lights our Maker's Image in our Face,
 And gives us wide o'er Earth unquestion'd Sway;
 What is TH' ADOR'd SUPREME PERFECTION, say?
 What, but eternal never-resting Soul,
 Almighty Power, and all-directing Day;
 By whom each Atom stirs, the Planets roll;
 Who fills, surrounds, informs, and agitates the Whole? (Canto 2, Stanza 47)⁶

The contrast is stark: indolence measured against an “eternal never-resting” deity who is responsible for motion on a cosmic level. The rebuttal to Indolence draws on human resemblance to God, and also slyly suggests that holding the perspective urged by the sorcerer is a form of labor in itself. He appeals to their desire for fame, to their virtue, and then directly argues in contradiction to the wizard's assertion that labor is pain. Instead, the Knight argues, the key to pleasure is to “Toil, and be glad! Let Industry inspire / Into your quicken'd Limbs her buoyant Breath! / Who does not act is dead” (Stanza 54). As the climax to his argument, with a single gesture, the Knight reveals that the supposed happiness experienced by those in the sorcerer's power was, in reality, the destruction of the entire surrounding landscape (Stanzas 62-63). It is no surprise, given Thomson's predilection for Nature, that the consequences of indolence have their most dreadful effects on the earth itself.

Happiness as functional value

We can say, then, that *Castle of Indolence* has concerns that are similar to those of *The Seasons*. In both poems, happiness is a vital and desirable quality. Where *The Seasons* illustrated it against a predominantly natural background, *Castle* provides a view of happiness from the

⁶ Cf. “Spring,” ll. 849-52: “What, but God ? / Inspiring God ! who boundless Spirit all, / And unremitting Energy, pervades, / Adjusts, sustains, and agitates the whole.”

human side. Moreover, because the poem is focused on humans, it becomes about human choice. The portrayal of how humans perceive work, indolence, and happiness means that the basis on which humans choose either work or indolence is a significant subject within the poem. Thomson makes it a focal point. Even with the Knight of Arts and Industry showing what the right choice is, and why, it's still about how the people choose; the logic behind their decision. That comes through both in the beginning, when the enchanter casts his spell; and in the end, when most choose correctly, but some don't.

The idea of the macrocosm, and the perspective from the macroscopic angle, are important. In both poems, humanity is portrayed en masse, with select individuals briefly sketched, only to disappear again into the fray. Thomson's interest, we might say, lies in the sorts of arguments that sway the majority of humanity. He sees humans as acting in groups, implicitly influencing each other, and he portrays them as having more or less equal opportunities. When the wizard casts his spell, it is inclusive of all humanity; and at the end of the poem, most of humanity has chosen one path, while a few have chosen another. This suggests that ... however many individual choices humans may make (and the poem does suggest that individuals do make choices, rather than being homogenous), they also make epic choices that impact human life on a large scale; and those are the choices that Thomson is most interested in. There is no detailed explanation of how or why this is; it is simply the way that he perceives humanity.

The two poems, then, are consistent in many ways. Even though *Castle of Indolence* has a narrative plot, and a distinct villain and hero, neither Indolence nor the Knight are human, and Thomson takes care to communicate this fact. The Knight, in particular, is the child of constant hunting and poverty, and "in every Science and in every Art ... Was never Knight on Ground

mote be with him compar'd” (Canto 2, Stanza 9). As Spenser did in the *Faerie Queene*, Thomson presents qualities as heroes – and their large-scale effect on humanity is really no different than the wintery cold and summer heat that flow over the earth in *The Seasons*. The *Castle* focuses on the humans, and in doing so, it presents the equivalent of the “varied God” whom Thomson praised earlier. The two poems are two sides of the same coin.

I have said that Thomson values social happiness. Another way of expressing this is to say that he values happiness that is the product of varied and complex activity. One might even say that he sees happiness as only possible through varied and complex activity. This is because solitude—true isolation, with no other humans, flora, or fauna present—is anathema to his religious worldview. It’s not that solitude is unpleasant, or forbidden, but Thomson is highly aware of the constant activity that shapes the world; thus, even moments of human solitude are social. To be truly alone would be an impossible existence in a void of nothingness.

Working is how one knows for certain that one is alive and in the world, rather than out of it. Labor is a connection to God, who also works. But Thomson’s perspective on work as it relates to value is eccentric. This is because in both *The Seasons*, and *Castle of Indolence*, it is most accurate to say that work *is* value, rather than that work is exchanged for value. By this, I mean that work is positioned as equivalent to happiness.

Internally-validated value

For Thomson, value is internally validated, rather than externally. Each individual is responsible for affirming the worth of his or her own actions. In *Castle of Indolence*, the individuals who have been ensorcelled are contrasted directly with another guest, “Who felt each Worth, for every Worth he had” (Canto 1, Stanza 65). The guest is quickly identified as someone who will not remain in the castle – but while he is present, the indolent inhabitants send him

flattering messages, assuring him that “when at last [his] Toils, but ill apaid, / Shall dead thy Fire, and damp its Heavenly Spark,” they will reward him themselves with a lodge. They are only capable of seeing worth as externally validated, and from their perspective, the young man cannot possibly be receiving sufficient reward.

I say that individuals are responsible for knowing their own worth because being aware of Thomson’s logic of internal validation clarifies the reasons for the critique of melancholy in *The Seasons*: melancholy impedes a positive assessment of value. And the assumption is that such an assessment will be positive by default – there is almost no competition in this setting. Even Thomson, however, whose default mode is broad statements, makes exceptions:

To every Labour its Reward accrues,
 And they are sure of Bread who swink and moil;
 But a fell Tribe th’ Aonian Hive despoil,
 As ruthless Wasps oft rob the painful Bee:
 Thus while the Laws not guard that noblest Toil,
 Ne for the Muses other Meed decree,
 They praised are alone, and starve right merrily. (Canto 2, Stanza 2)

All who swink and moil are repaid; and that “all” includes everyone except the muses. They are exalted because they starve, i.e., are paid *only* in happiness, and nothing else. Put simply, besides indolence, there are no problems with work in these poems. Unspecified laws “guard” all other toil from predation. Scarcity does exist in Thomson’s poetry: it shows up in the story of Lavinia, based on the biblical story of Ruth and Naomi – but even then, though food is scarce, it is obtainable, and the finale of the story is that Lavinia is rewarded for her efforts.

Thomson's system is characterized by sufficiency, rather than scarcity – so it is a very different type of economic system from that which shows up elsewhere in the graveyard school.

The primary difference is that in Thomson, value is not quantifiable. It circulates in what is best described as aggregate and cyclical motion. This motion is portrayed far more clearly in *The Seasons* than in *Castle of Indolence*: spring's steaming power spreads to the land; humans spread value by working the land, and collect said value in the bounty of autumn, and consume it in winter, before the cycle starts again. It is possible to identify precise instances where one individual or force acts upon another; however, there is never any bargaining to find a good exchange, let alone any suggestion that transactions might be called off. As well as being non-quantifiable, Thomson's value is non-competitive. It is, to use a phrase from *The Seasons*, "full-adjusted," and therefore effective.

To say that there is "firm support [for] / The full-adjusted harmony of things" (Autumn 843-44) suggests remarkable stability – the same sort of stability that would be needed to guarantee bread for "all who swink and moil," and to maintain the ongoing cycle of the seasons. The language conveys security to put anxieties to rest while still remaining opaque. After all, this is the productivity of God who "ceaseless works and yet alone seems not to work." The effect of Thomson's divine miracle is to mystify the system, even while proclaiming the simple rule that labour is happiness; and the mysteriousness is surety that existence is in fact, part of a scheme that "only God" can understand. As a consequence of this theology, however, Thomson has to avoid putting humans in positions of authority or competition. This does not bar him from showing individuals who are exceptional: the inhabitants of the wizard's castle encounter "a joyous Youth... Of social Glee, and Wit humane though keen," who briefly turns the castle into an uproar, ending the sleep of indolence. The adjectives "social" and "humane" mark the youth

as a positive figure – but his purpose is to disrupt and rouse the others, instead of being a fully-realized hero. Seen in cameo, he can be blurrily ambitious, and then fade away before his initiative crystallizes into problematic aspirations. The same is true for the man who knows his own worth; and for fame itself. Fame appears in the poem to identify the good qualities that are missing in the inhabitants of Indolence: they are not “wise, generous, bold, and stout.” Fame is also mentioned as a motivating factor that is associated with labor: “Had unambitious Mortals minded Nought, ...None e’er had soar’d to Fame, None honour’d been, None prais’d” (Canto 2, Stanza 51). Fame is important to Thomson as a motivation, but if it were placed centerstage, then it would destabilize his system of internal validation, since fame, by default, requires others’ acclaim.

However, the mystified economy has serious implications for individual agency. The humans in the poem are expected to value the social as much as Thomson himself does, which is to say, far more than they value their own condition. Perhaps the most extreme example of this is when the sorcerer entices would-be authors to lay aside their efforts, saying:

Why, Authors, all this Scrawl and Scribbling sore?
 To lose the present, gain the future Age,
 Praised to be when you can hear no more,
 And much enrich’d with Fame when useless worldly Store. (Canto I, 52).

This presentation of fame as a useless worldly value looks like pious Puritanism, but in this case, it’s being presented as the bad example that readers are supposed to reject. The answer to the question is that “ Had unambitious Mortals minded Nought, / But in loose Joy their Time to wear away; /.../ No Arts had made us opulent and gay” (Canto 2, Stanza 51). Fame is desirable not because of its benefits to any one individual, but to the entire community. But this

perspective requires individuals to work without expectation of anything beyond internal validation. It demands that they surrender much of their individual agency in order to be led, literally, by the Knight of Arts and Industry:

Some he will lead to Courts, and Some to Camps;
 To Senates Some, and public sage Debates,
 Where, by the solemn Gleam of Midnight-Lamps,
 The World is pois'd, and manag'd mighty States;
 To high Discovery Some, that new-creates
 The Face of Earth; Some to the thriving Mart;
 Some to the Rural Reign, and softer Fates;
 To the sweet Muses Some, who raise the Heart:
 All Glory shall be yours, all Nature, and all Art! (Canto 2, Stanza 60)

There are a range of different pursuits described here, but the implicit promise is that all who agree to be led, i.e., pursue industry, will find success. Elsewhere in the poem, Thomson acknowledges the risk of bad fortune (Canto 2, Stanza 3) – but he does so only to dismiss Fortune as impotent, because it cannot rob him of Fancy, Reason, and Virtue. Because he himself has learned to internally validate his efforts, he can still claim some degree of agency – but his claim is essentially an empty show of bravado, since no obstacles are encountered.

Just as emotions were important in *The Seasons*, they are key to understanding Thomson's perspective on work in the *Castle of Indolence*, and the latter poem clarifies an important aspect of their role. Work results in happiness; and happiness determines one's social participation. Individuals who are competitive will display acquisitive, rather than altruistic behavior, and will find their lives poisoned by avarice and vanity. The "toiling Swain" is happier

far, because “rich in Nature’s Wealth, he thinks not of Increase” (Canto 2, Stanza 55). The way that emotions work is an important contrast between Thomson and Young. In *Castle of Indolence*, work and indolence create happiness and melancholy, respectively; while in *Night Thoughts*, the equation is reversed: emotions lead either to energetic work or to idleness. The difference is that for Thomson, work is a means of regulating passions; thus, it serves an entirely different purpose than it does for Young, whose goal is to create value. For Thomson, humans (and Nature) participate as the conduits through which the divinely-created value flows. In most respects, Thomson cannot be described as capitalistic: he is wholly uninterested in the acquisition of exchangeable value. However, emotions are the capital on which Thomson’s treasured social feeling is based.

William Shenstone

William Shenstone was born to a relatively wealthy family, with multiple properties, and sufficient funds to send him to Pembroke College, Oxford, between 1732 and 1736, at commoner rates. Though his name was listed in the college records of BAs, Shenstone apparently never claimed to have earned any degree. In 1737, he published his first collection of *Poems Upon Various Occasions Written for the Entertainment of the Author, And Printed for the Amusement Of a few Friends, Prejudic’d in his Favour*. The volume was dedicated to an unnamed patroness, possibly Lady Luxborough, the sister of Shenstone’s friend the Viscount of Bolingbroke. Shenstone’s volume displayed the cautious experimentation of a poet who is unsure of which form will best suit his talents. It contained a few pastoral poems, a pair of biblical monologues from the perspectives of Judith and Eve, seriocomic encounters between humans and Greek gods, a slightly vulgar parody of a panegyric, a smattering of other classical imitations, and the first version of Shenstone’s “The School-Mistress,” written in a Spenserian

style. Shenstone's desire to succeed and his nervousness about pleasing his patroness are visible throughout the dedication, in which he draws parallels between his own first efforts, and those of others, and heaps praises upon the unnamed benefactress.

Unfortunately for Shenstone, his first volume led to little concrete success. Having left Oxford, he took up residence at the Leasowes, and made periodic trips to London and Bath, where he became friends with a number of other poets and writers, including Richard Jago, Richard Graves, and James Thomson. In 1741, he published a poetic retelling of the judgment of Hercules, and a revision of *The School-Mistress* in 1742. Neither of these endeavors were any more successful than his first volume, and in 1744, frustrated with his attempts, Shenstone partially abandoned his aspirations of poetic glory, and moved to the Leasowes, the family estate where he had been born. He turned his efforts to landscape gardening, cultivating his property according to the rising interest in landscape aesthetics. This proved to be a more successful endeavor, and the Leasowes became something of a destination for cultural tourists. Shenstone was happy to act as host, showing visitors around the grounds, and engaging in rivalry with his closest neighbor, whose estate was similarly maintained. His reputation as a landscape gardener, helped his poetic reputation slightly, and several of his poems were included in Dodsley's *Collection of Poems By Several Hands* anthologies.

When Shenstone died in 1763, Dodsley published a sizable two-volume edition of his writing (Shenstone, *Works in Verse and Prose*). The first volume was primarily poetry, and besides reprinting the majority of Shenstone's early poems, included a set of 26 elegies, and a sizable collection of shorter poems. Even though his prospects of publication had been slim, Shenstone had continued writing. The second volume contained over 300 pages of prose essays, none of which had been published. The edition sold well enough to be reprinted multiple times,

and published in Edinburgh and Dublin, possibly because of Shenstone's reputation as a landscape gardener. Apart from a short essay titled "Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening," however, Shenstone's subject matter varied widely. The collection included an imitation of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and a handful of short humorous sketches. The bulk of the collection was made up of Shenstone's observations on social and moral issues. These ranged in length from several paragraphs to 1-2 sentence aphorisms, but they have not been seen as relevant, and thus have gone unmentioned on.

The majority of recent Shenstone criticism has focused either on his perspectives on landscape architecture, or on determining the details and extent of his poetic output. Over 1,000 pages of Shenstone's writing survives, but it survives in several pieces – in poems and letters sent to Dodsley, or passed along to other friends. As these pieces have been discovered in various archives, they provide opportunities for fact-checking publication data.⁷ In this way, Shenstone, like Parnell before him, serves primarily to add to our understanding of interaction between mid-eighteenth century poets. Shenstone has proven to be an unusually interesting phenomenon because of the fascination that sprung up around his persona after his death. His retreat to the Leasowes estate, and turn from poetry to gardening, led to a public perception of him as both shy and retiring *and* incredibly heroic and generous, giving rise to anecdotes like the one published in the *Westminster Magazine* in 1776 (Pitcher). This anecdote describes an encounter between Shenstone and his beloved, and a poor man who "burst[s] out of a thicket" to rob them at gunpoint, only to be disarmed by Shenstone's complete generosity. The thief runs away, not having stolen anything, and Shenstone pursues him, discovers that he is a poor laborer driven to poverty, and takes it upon himself to improve the man's life. Betty Schellenberger has catalogued this, and similar stories waxing rapturous about Shenstone, in order to demonstrate

⁷ See, for example Sambrook; Price; Tierney; Jung, "Some Additions to the Shenstone Canon"; Smith; Burns)

how they contributed to the commercial fascination with landscape gardening and celebrity poets.(Schellenberger)

The critic who has spent the most time reading Shenstone at any length recently is Sandro Jung. Jung acknowledges Shenstone's efforts to secure patronage, and his evident ambition ("Mentorship and 'Patronage'" 193) in spite of protestations to the contrary; nevertheless, these dimensions of Shenstone's life are kept entirely separate from the contents of his poetic writing. Jung's argument is that "Shenstone's coterie of friends and fellow-poets helped him to create a literary scene in the Birmingham area that... could draw on the facilities of the London publishing market while...still operating on terms of patronage" (188). Elsewhere, Jung comments that "Shenstone largely designs a poetics that supports his centralized construction as owner of the Leasowes" ("Shenstone, Woodhouse, and Mid-Eighteenth-Century Poetics" 132) – a potential occasion for examining the nature of that construction – but Jung's focus is on Shenstone's use of the pastoral genre in his "Ode on Rural Elegance," and his patronage of the laboring-class poet James Woodhouse. The overall effect of current Shenstone criticism is that the most relevant aspects of his life and writing are those that fit into the already-established critical category of landscape aesthetics.

Shenstone's high merit

We can see one of the clearest articulations of Shenstone's ambition in the short poem "Love and Musick,"⁸ in which Shenstone contemplates the capabilities of poetry and love when wielded by masters. He is most interested in the highest magnitudes and intensities: instruments of power that can "make the World obey," and may claim a "universal Right to Fame / An undisputed Sway" (8). Specifically, he wonders whether poetry, i.e., the music of bards, might be

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all poems are taken from Shenstone, *Poems upon Various Occasions Written for the Entertainment of the Author, and Printed for the Amusement of a Few Friends, Prejudic'd in His Favour. By William Shenstone, Gent.* 1737.

equally powerful as love. The examples he cites, many of which feature Orpheus, suggest that there is no question: the best poetry can end wars, obstruct tyrants, and hold sway over beasts, men, and gods. To illustrate Love's "equal Pow'r," Shenstone alludes to Cymon, who appears in the myth of Iphigenia. Though Cymon is rustic and ignorant, when he sees Iphigenia, his instant attraction to her transforms his ignorance into education, and coarseness into elegant sophistication. How will Shenstone end the poem? He could argue that poetry is superior; or vow that he will succeed in Orpheus's place. The final stanza reveals the ultimate point of his recitation. After emphasizing the supreme powers of love and music, Shenstone explodes his earlier standard by imagining the effect of love and music "when their various Pow'rs are join'd." This union appears in the form of the beautiful Selinda, whose very presence causes Shenstone to be overcome. But this is no love poem for a maiden. We know nothing about Selinda's features, other than that she is the vehicle in which love and music unite. The poet's true infatuation is with merit as sheer unbridled power.

Superlative perfection is also the focus of "To Selinda: An Apology for Celebrating Others" (51). The poem is a personal narrative, in which the speaker recounts his experience following "Wise Plato's rules . . . to scale by Steps to perfect Beauty." Not surprisingly, the rules are only the occasion for the poem. Its actual subject is Shenstone's efforts to create "some perfect form" in his imagination. Love is not his motivation; the goal is "My Prowess in her Cause to shew" — an eighteenth century Pygmalion. The development of the poem is that Shenstone is astonished to discover that in Selinda, he has found the impossible: a "real Nymph" whose perfection matches his imagination. His assumption that she couldn't exist outside of his imagination is the faux pas that requires the apology of the title. Shenstone is quite happy to offer it, explaining that before, "the Poet made the Lover, [and] now, the Lover makes the Poet." The

underlying subject matter is the quest for merit, via Plato's rules, and the happy ending is that the merit is assured. "To Selinda" teaches us about the importance of perfection to Shenstone: "perfect Beauty" is his sole imperative, and treated as an ideal that will "make" and sustain him. However, the poem displays tension that undermines its pat solution. While Shenstone devotes himself to Selinda, his loyalty clashes with a colony of bees who serve as role models in his search for perfect merit:

From every *fragrant Beauty* known
 The Bees thus furnish out their Hive;
 To None confin'd; intent alone
 On the *rich compound* they contrive. (52)

The bees work on the exact opposite of Shenstone's strategy, refusing to confine themselves to anything less than "every fragrant beauty." Other than mentioning them, Shenstone does not explore the contrast — the bees simply appear as a tacit illustration that Shenstone's pursuit and exclusive devotion to Selinda are not the only strategies.

What looks like a love poem on one level is on another level about the imperative to achieve perfection, and the question of how best to do so: by strict devotion, or by ranging wide? The question of making or being made is relevant to Shenstone's meditations on power and magnitude — it's akin to the transformation described in "Love and Musick," but in that instance, the poet's words were acting upon the people, and in this instance, Selinda's perfection is acting upon the poet.

As an aspiring poet, navigating this type of power was a particular concern for Shenstone; and his caution is evident from what he writes in his dedication to an unidentified female patroness that precedes his 1737 collection. If the two shorter poems reveal Shenstone's

interest in merit as poetic power, the Dedication illuminates how he perceives his own individual relation to merit. His statement indicates the lingering importance of patronage — direct monetary support and advocacy. Shenstone begins by acknowledging that Dedications “ought in Policy to be address to the most powerful, and in Justice to the most deserving.” By separating the two, he creates the possibility of conflict but solves it immediately, because his addressee has “gain’d the former of these Advantages by means of the latter” (iii). He explains, too, why the combination is so important: “Accomplishments like Yours give the most absolute Authority of any. I mean that over the Judgments, as well as Hearts of Mankind.” His assertion corresponds precisely with the two poems and their portrayals of power. Like “Love and Music,” the Dedication is a story about the greatest powers being combined and exponentially increased. The difference is that while the poems suggest Shenstone as exerting that power, the Dedication shows him having to cultivate it through another, belying the capabilities that he had attributed to poetry.

Gaining this power requires tricky maneuvering that goes beyond flattery. Shenstone describes the conditions, the complex give and take he has to go through in order to get it. Poetry may make the world obey, but only, it seems, when it has the authority of merit behind it.

As Shenstone pursues his patroness’ favor, his attention is partly focused on the absolute splendor of what he is pursuing, and on the motions that he has to make in order to get it. We learn about the ins and outs — how lack of merit is forgivable due to lack of experience, or even due to laziness (indolence). Implicitly, what is not forgivable is effort that produces something judged to be of poor merit, or failing to recognize good merit when it is seen — failing to participate is the end. It is not acceptable to make excuses.

So this is a tightrope, and Shenstone thinks of it quantitatively — economically, this is about participation. And just as there was a scale to perfect beauty, there's a scale for merit. In Shenstone's pursuit of merit, his attention is most influenced by the splendor of it. What are the implications of pursuing absolute authority? Shenstone makes it clear: there are things that you must and must not do. He reveals his strategy, illustrating with brief anecdotes to explain his choices. This is what emerges: that in a quest for merit, lack of experience is the only forgivable offense. Shenstone excuses himself as "a young Genius little exercised in Versification" (v). Implicitly, what is not acceptable is any labor or effort that results in a product without merit. We learn that people try to dodge this, as in the case of "a Lady, who, having thrum'd over a Spinnet for a considerable Space, without the least shed of Harmony, took much pains to prove she had never play'd before." No one is fooled. Inexperience is the only excuse that might be justifiable. In any other flaw, while one "may excuse his Ill-Success," and even have good reasons for doing so, "in vain may he attempt his justification to the world" (vi).

The second requirement to gain merit is that one must demonstrate a firm grasp of what merit is. Shenstone has accomplished this already by choosing the appropriate person to address; even so, he notes the possibility of trying to portray the lady in more detail, as he had thought to show his prowess by portraying Selinda. But he concludes that his subject matter is so overwhelming as to make such portraiture pointless — to love her is to know her, and to know her is to love her. His commentary is hyperbolic, in that it points to the contradictory nature of high merit — it is elusive enough that not everyone can find it, but so obvious and communicative that there is no benefit in trying to portray it.

What does all this mean for Shenstone the young aspiring poet? His commentary suggests flashes of occasional nervousness, but on the whole, conveys his calm acceptance of the

situation. Like “the scale of perfect beauty,” high merit also consists of different levels through which one ascends. We learn a little more about the mysterious process by which merit is developed when Shenstone voices his security that “as one almost insensibly conforms to a taste one very much admires, I can’t but think these Trifles won’t prove absolutely disagreeable to Your’s” (vi). The absolute authority can be transmitted through recognition. Thus Shenstone can explain that “Next to the happiness of being possess’d of Merit, is to shew one’s Approbation of those who are; And this is really no small addition to a Man’s Character” (vii). On the contrary, it is a key step in the process of achieving the high merit that is conditional for success as a poet. These characteristics, taken together, describe a busy but closed economy, where merit circulates among a limited population of participants. Shenstone gestures towards thinking about merit in quantitative terms, saying, for example, that he knows his patroness will understand his praising others occasionally because “A Lady of Your Merit may give all others infinitely more than their due, without the least Shadow of Danger” (vi) — but these are soft calculations, suggesting that the rise and fall of merit is important, rather than there are hard limits. Shenstone is thinking in terms of high merit because his goal is to be a participant in it. That goal is a driving force behind his poetic efforts. Happiness is being possessed of merit, and in the head of Shenstone’s youthful ambition, that is the only happiness.

Merit, in these three texts, is characterized chiefly by its power, rarity, and desirability: everyone, from athletes to poets to spinet-players, wants to possess it. It is an absolute category: poetry that makes people sort of want to obey won’t cut it. However, all three texts gesture towards the ambiguities that surround this type of merit: is it created internally, or bestowed by external forces? Is it a limited resource subject to scarcity, or an infinite one to be freely given?

Shenstone answers each of these questions in the affirmative, identifying merit as both limited and abundant, made and given, suggesting that he himself is still figuring out its nature.

Shenstone's low merit

In contrast to the risky and restrictive high merit, however, Shenstone describes sharply contrasting pursuits in several of his other poems. "Stanzas to the Memory of W.G." (31) provides an example. The poem is a monologue written in the voice of the deceased honoree, addressed to any who encounter his grave stone. Its subject matter follows the form of a memento mori. However, rather than scolding and dismissing mortal achievements, the poem celebrates the clerk's: both his acceptance of death's inevitability and his evangelism in his parish.

Merit is the backdrop for the poem in several ways: first, in that the poem is about how WG led folk to Heaven, and it compares him favorably to others for the number of people whom he led. Secondly, that his method for doing so was singing, and doing so wholeheartedly, even though he was also comically bad at it. The whole point of these lines is that even though his singing was bad according to mortal standards, it pleased the saints.

In some ways, Stanzas is in complete contrast to the high merit that Shenstone praises elsewhere, but it corresponds in other ways. Recognizing merit is important: throughout, WG aligns himself with Sternhold and Hopkins, the authors of the Psalter. He identifies as their servant, continuing their work. Also, the idea of music as the ultimate power is referenced (even if only to acknowledge that it cannot, in fact, stop death) – so ultimate power, normally a characteristic of high merit, is referenced.

We learn more about this contrasting type of merit in one of Shenstone's anacreontic verses, titled "Io, Bacche" (35). The poem's speaker is a young man contemplating his eventual

death. It is not the story of his achievements, or even the achievements that he needs to make, but the merit he hopes to gain after his death that matter to him. He wishes to become a tree whose branches will shelter lovers, whose wood will be used to form a bowl for drinking, and whose foliage will be used to fertilize grapes that will produce wine to fill the bowl, all so that he may “be lov’d again” by his friends. This is a far less dominant conception of merit than, say, wanting to make the world obey, or to transform it. The youth’s desire is not to overwhelm, but to inspire thirst; he longs for recognition, but not fame or the restrictive devotion that is associated with high merit.

Even so, Shenstone’s attraction to the ultimate creeps in. When he wishes to be a bowl, he elaborates, wanting it to be “so capacious . . . that it seems to hold a Sea!” While his wish does not mention perfection, he longs to be loved and appreciated by all who encounter him. Though this affection would be impersonal, his longings are hardly free from ego.

While Shenstone does not use the word “merit” in either of these latter poems, his attention is again focused on accomplishments, just as it is elsewhere. The merit described in these two poems is associated less with power than with function and purpose. Judgment is comparatively far less important than in “To Selinda” or the Dedication; “Stanzas to the Memory of WG” refers to judgment but suggests that it will be based on his Christian intentions, and not on the aesthetic quality of his voice. (In terms of aesthetics, both poems strongly anticipate Gilpin’s category of the picturesque in contrast with the beautiful or sublime). There is no suggestion of this type of merit as scarce, nor any pressure on the speakers to be judges of merit — though WG’s praise of Sternhold implies that he would be perfectly capable of such assessment if necessary. The effect, however, suggests that there is no circulating or closed economy that individuals must qualify to participate in. Despite the informal and unrestricted

nature of this merit, it is portrayed as significant, playing a key role in religious salvation, and in social and environmental happiness. While cut foliage cannot make the world obey, the role of fertilizer is vital to plant growth, so we might say that this merit celebrates subtler but still important types of power.

What we have, then, are two separate types of merit. What do they look like in comparison? The first may be described as high merit, and Shenstone sees it as a necessary achievement for would-be poets. Indeed, his emphasis on power and complex, rule-based perfection suggests that his ideal of poetry is fundamentally incompatible with the characteristics of merit described in “Stanzas” and “Io, Bacche.” Poetry cannot be purely functional, or at least, Shenstone’s dedication suggests that he feels pressured to strive for something far more powerful, even while yearns simply to be loved. The merit in “Stanzas” and “Io, Bacche,” can be identified as rural merit, based on its association with with rustic and pastoral settings and figures.

The most significant differences between the two are with regard to quality and exclusivity. Both are highly social, depending on others’ presence to have an effect, but while high merit’s demand for perfection makes it socially competitive, rural merit is socially cohesive. In both cases, Shenstone displays a certain hesitation to claim either sort as his. He is acted upon by high merit, and hopes to be judged as having it, but even in “Io, Bacche,” he is hoping to be made as an object of rural merit, rather than asserting simply that he does have it.

High merit and low merit in conversation and conflict

Shenstone’s presentations of these two types of merit suggest a class-based separation, which my labels of “high” and “rural” merit reflect. This distinction, and its significance, becomes more evident in his pair of poems titled “Sloth” and “Virtue” (1). The two poems show

Shenstone thinking about actually achieving merit as a poet, and what it will take to achieve success. This reflection is presented as a youth confronted with two personifications who each appeal to him. Ostensibly, his choice is between laziness and hard work, as the title suggests, and sloth and virtue are traditional binaries during this time.

Sloth features a goddess who encourages her audience to resign himself to pleasure, suggesting that “In brilliant Mines, be other Hands employ’d, / So the gay Product be by thine enjoy’d.” This is an important framing of the choice between work and leisure, because by suggesting that someone else will do the work of producing beautiful things that the youth can enjoy, the goddess is suggesting a change of station — that the youth can become someone who has high merit, and judges that of others — an adjudicator, essentially. The signs that the goddess offers are described in terms that strongly suggest high merit — “a fairer Rose . . . a brighter Lilly” — always oriented towards more. As Shenstone performs it in the Dedication, those who have high merit are also those for whom new merit is presented for judgment, and that too is echoed in these lines. The goddess performs for the individual:

To please my Ear she breaths celestial Strains:

To please my Eye, with Lillies strews the Plains:

To form my Couch in mossy Beds she grows:

To gratify my Smell she blooms a Rose. (2)

The lines suggest great effort, all to please and glorify the individual who is witnessing them. “For thee with softest Art the Dome shall rise, / And spiring Turrets glitter thro’ the skies.” These wondrous feats simply occur, as if by magic, without the least stumble or imperfection. The vision simply expands to include greater tributes, until “each Nation” the world over is offering homage (just as Shenstone offered tribute to his patroness in the Dedication). What the

speaker is describing is not sloth; it is high merit. It is perfection that simply appears, and acts on the individual, transforming; offering fame.

When Virtue is allowed to speak, it offers less immediately desirable objects — things that are prickly, shapeless — all less than. Virtue's promise is that "each unsightly Object can supply / More lasting Pleasure, more substantial Joy." Nothing happens, argues Virtue, "without fair Industry." This argument is genuine, however, it is not quite a rebuttal to Sloth, who has implied that indeed, industry is important, but that someone else may just as effectively do the work. Here we see a peculiarity and potential contradiction between the two sets of merit.

What is the relationship between industry and high and rural merit? In rural merit, work and effort are visible, but in high merit, the situation is more ambiguous. The speaker in "To Selinda" is apparently at work following the scale of steps to perfect beauty, but he immediately abandons them on encountering Selinda's perfection. Why? The answer is found in the Dedication, and its anecdotes of failure. The effort of industry may be virtuous, but it's far more risky than simply being powerful or talented enough that industry isn't necessary. And this is precisely what Sloth promises. It's not simply lying around. If the subject longs for "more specious ease," or encounters "faint Desire of Fame," then

Some trivial Science shall thy Thoughts amuse;
 And Learning's Name a solemn Sound diffuse.
 To Thee all Nature's shelly Store I'll bring,
 To thee the Sparklings on the Insect's Wing.
 Pleasure in infant Forms shalt thou descry;
 View, in an Ant, or hear her in a Fly. (3)

The pursuits that Sloth is offering are reminiscent of books published containing early observations on aesthetics and natural philosophy that were becoming popular. In other words, Sloth is tempting the youth with labor that was most likely to be successful. Shenstone may be sneering at the latest fad, but he's not denying its popularity.

Virtue counsels that though the path to Fame is steep, "yet equal to the Labour is the Prize." This is an assertion, but one that is dependent on valuing labour and industry, and their potential to improve rugged and shapeless things. (Sloth's offer suggests rather the opposite — that the prize is based on the perfection of the finished object, rather than the effort that went into the transformation). Shenstone's articulations of low merit validate effort — but in poems portraying high merit, industry is barely mentioned, let alone celebrated. Even Shenstone's patroness, who is hailed as both powerful and deserving, has an ambiguous relationship with industry — we don't learn whether she's deserving because of her efforts, or for some other reason.

This pair of poems is one of the first instances where Shenstone puts the two types of merit in conversation with each other. Virtue is placed in the stronger position with the rebuttal to Sloth. However, the class associations of high and rural merit indicate that this is not as simple a choice as working or not working. Arguably, the choice offered is not really a choice that one can make — one is born into a social class, rather than choosing it. And yet, the ending of the Virtue poem suggests that the choice is of central importance, and promises fame provided that the subject chooses wisely. The difficulty is that Shenstone wants both: the magnitude of power, and the sweet devotion of affection and satisfaction in hard work. Nowhere is this more clear than in his pastoral love poems "Nancy of the Vale," and the two versions of the "Pastoral Ballad."

Shenstone's treatment of merit in his pastoral romantic poetry

We have already seen that the love poems to Selinda are poems about power. In "Nancy of the Vale," published in Dodsley's *Collection of Poems by Several Hands*, we see the same concern with power, but from a different angle. The poem is a pastoral romance that takes place between Nancy and Strephon, and it begins with Strephon's love song, effusively praising Nancy. His declaration of her merit constitutes two-thirds of the poem. His praise displays some of the hyperbole of high merit: "The little halcyon's azure plume / Was never half so blue" as Nancy's eyes; and she is "soft as the wild-duck's tender young," and "Bright as the water-lily, sprung." These praises make for an odd combination, but they follow a clear formula: soft as the softest thing, bright as the brightest thing, etc. The only surprise is that he doesn't make Nancy "softer" and "brighter," as opposed to "soft as." Perhaps it wouldn't scan. No matter, though, since Shenstone finds another way to compete: "Let fops with fickle falsehoods range / The paths of wanton love, / While weeping maids lament their change." Compared to him, all other lovers are disingenuous. He describes his discovery of Nancy: "a peerless bud," hidden because "shadowy rocks, and woods conspir'd / To fence her beauties round." By falling in love, Strephon has discovered a rare aesthetic object, previously hidden, and brought it to public view.

His assessment of Nancy's perfection is confirmed by the reaction of others once she is discovered. "Gay lordlings" appear to court and pursue her, but she rejects them without hesitation, answering "Prove to your equals true, she cry'd, / As I will prove to mine." Her dismissal doubles neatly as a profession of love and an elevation of Strephon from ordinary swain to equal paragon of perfection. Fidelity for Shenstone means recognizing each other's merits, and Nancy of the Vale closes with Strephon pledging that if he should ever forego Nancy's charms, then the river Avon will cease to flow, i.e., the world will have ended.

“Nancy of the Vale” is more of a love poem than “To Selinda”, but it is a romance founded upon merit, praise, and competition. It has aspects of fantasy — a sort of “have your cake and eat it, too” dream for Shenstone, in that it is high merit disguised as rural merit. The intensity, successful competition, and exclusive loyalty are combined with declarations of love and the security of escaping from any further competitions of merit. Nancy vows “To [Strephon] I gave my plighted vow / With him I’ll climb the hill,” suggesting a return to the shadowy rocks that had isolated her before.

Underneath the intensity of this high merit preference, however, is a corollary more appropriate to rural merit: relationships succeed or fail based on each partner’s appreciation of the other, and their ability to communicate their praise. By putting merit centerstage, Shenstone also illuminates the facets of life that are most affected by it, and partnership is central, perhaps because it is the rural merit analogue to the devotional commitment that Shenstone aspires to with his patroness or Selinda. His tendency to explore the nature of merit and its effects suggests a yearning to understand what merit is for. His poetry, however, usually takes the form of cautious experiments from many different angles. They may include climactic assertions like “Prove to your equals true...,” but they almost never offer commentary on the situation — Shenstone simply restarts the experiment to gather data from a different angle. This indicates both the complexity of Shenstone’s subject, and his lack of confidence in what he portrays as a highly competitive and risky environment.

If “Nancy of the Vale” is an idealized portrayal of the best of both worlds of merit, then the two versions of the “Pastoral Ballad” are a recognition that such a perfect resolution may not be possible. The first version of the ballad, apparently written in 1743, was published anonymously in the London Magazine in 1751. It is written from the perspective of a lover

considering his relationship, and begins on a note of uncertainty — he thinks his beloved was sorry to see him leave, but he is not sure. To resolve his doubts, he reflects on what he has to offer — his own merits. In these poem, his merits are based on his land and livestock. The description he offers is confident, but not hyperbolic: his land is pleasant, his flock is plentiful, and his pastures are healthy enough that he has suffered few losses. He turns to musing over his preparations for the object of his affections. These consist of a grove that he has created especially for the beloved: “For whatever I heard her admire / I hastened and planted it there.” The end product is, by his own evaluation, a success, where he “could have pleasantly stray’d / If ought in her absence could please.” These statements suggest a shift towards high merit, because the speaker is acting according to the precise specifications of the beloved, and taking care to rank all pleasures second to her (and making this ranking the subject of the stanza.)

In the fourth stanza, high and low merit come into conflict explicitly. Strephon has found a wood-pigeon’s nest, and is considering it as a gift for Phyllida. But while the gift might be beautiful, the risk is that his beloved would find it barbarous and unkind to steal from the birds. Her sentiments are based in low merit. In this instance, her tenderness only increases his affection.

We see high merit creeping back in when the lover, having reasoned that he is in a good position, sets out to advance the relationship. He does so by inciting others to praise Phyllida; and he demonstrates the intensity of his commitment by vowing that he “could lay down my life for the swain, / That will speak in my Phyllida’s praise.” His goal is to prove himself by attracting as much public attention to her good qualities as possible. However, his strategy has a potential flaw, in regards to the swain. While the speaker wants Phyllida to accept the swain’s praise, he “cannot allow her to smile,” and risk transferring her affections to someone else. The

swain is a potential rival because he is young. In the next stanza, the speaker imagines a scenario with which he has no problems: he imagines a hermit “peep[ing] out of his cell,” seeing Phyllida, and remembering his youth. The hermit is no threat, so “On him, she may smile, if she please, / It will warm the cool bosom of age.” He cautions, though, against Phyllida smiling too much, and corrupting the hermit’s wisdom.

The poem ends with the speaker again assessing his situation. He sings “in a rustical way,” suggesting low merit. But “Phyllida’s pleas’d with the lay,” and her satisfaction is enough for him to end by saying “Go, poets, and envy my song.” Low merit may be rustic and simple, but if it’s enough to get the girl, then the speaker wins.

In the revision, the poem has a less happy resolution, as Phyllis’s (née Phyllida) affections are captured by the swain whom Corydon coerces into singing her praises. The swain’s song is a wicked parody of praise along the lines of the “bright as the brightest object” formula that we saw in “Nancy of the Vale”:

... her face is as bright as the snow,
 And her bosom, be sure, is as cold?
 How the nightingales labour the strain,
 With the notes of his charmer to vie;
 How they vary their accents in vain,
 Repine at her triumphs, and die.

The beloved is literally lethally perfect; the swain’s praise an illustration of high merit at its most extreme, which gestures to how empty the category is. Unfortunately, in a world founded on high merit as Shenstone portrays it, endless competition is inevitable. This is what Shenstone portrays in the revision of the “Pastoral Ballad.” Subjects are in constant competition to sustain their

capital, and they must do so through social encounters. And nothing is stable — the swain who steals Phyllis is described as being like Paridel, Spenser’s coquettish and unfaithful knight — but Corydon envies his song, because it sways Phyllis’s heart. There’s no stable value standard — it’s only measured by what happens. Shenstone seeks merit because it is the only form of capital that matters in his world. The ending of the Pastoral Ballad shows him concluding that it was only to be expected “That a nymph so complete would be sought by a swain more engaging than me” There is no thought of feelings — all that matters is the merit that the other displayed. In this situation, there is little or nothing that can be done, except for avoiding encounters with unequal merit. “Beware how ye loiter in vain / Amid nymphs of an higher degree” he warns. With the failure of his romance comes bittersweet solace in the possibility that he might, “in time,” find comfort for himself in the grove he had planted for Phyllis.

Shenstone’s poems are chiefly flavored with saccharine and melodrama, but underneath, they display more careful thinking about value, as in the penultimate stanza:

High transports are shewn to the sight
 But we are not to find them our own
 Fate never bestow’d such a delight
 As I with my Phyllis had known.

There are two meanings here. One is that the most beautiful things cannot be possessed; because fate would never allow it — and to assume ownership is to set oneself up for disappointment. The other interpretation is that we cannot understand the full intensity of merit, in any form, when we are alone. Only in the company of others, and with the inevitable risks of competition and loss, can merit reach its peak pleasures.

The evolution of Shenstone’s ideas of merit

Looking from Shenstone's earliest poems in the 1737 collection to the second version of the Pastoral Ballad demonstrates the way that his portrayals of merit have evolved in complexity and scope. Early on, he portrays, almost exclusively, interactions between two people, like Selinda and her lover. While others appear collectively, they do so largely as set pieces to illustrate the effects of merit. Only in later poems do they appear as competitors or bystanders with apparent agency, who notice things like Corydon's sudden lack of attention to his flock after Phyllis appears, or who play a role in his courtship, whether by participating in admiration, or as rivals. Having merit in these more complex contexts is more thrilling, and leads to more concrete imagery than poems like "Love and Musick." The types of questions evolve, too, from musing on merit's power to the role merit plays in finding and courting a lover. Shenstone becomes more willing to confront difficult questions, like the unintended effects of others' praise, or what the value of an object is when it's created for someone else. He deals with issues of everyday value as mediated through subjectivity — the fact that whether or not an object or action is identified as money, or assigned a specific quantitative amount, many, if not all aspects of life are value-laden. And as he attempts to make sense of his value-laden experiences, he repeatedly grapples with contrasting ideals of perfect high merit and comforting rural merit to determine how and whether they can be combined.

In most cases, Shenstone gravitates towards the experience of the individual subject pursuing merit, or trying to wield it successfully — we know very little, for example, about the perspectives of Phyllida/Phyllis, Selinda, or the woman addressed in the Dedication. As a result we rarely ever see from any angle other than that which looks up at merit in awe. "The School-Mistress," Shenstone's best known poem, is one of few exceptions to this pattern; and because he revised it twice in 1742 and 1748, the versions present one of the most direct progressions of

his thoughts. “The School-Mistress” is written in Spenserian stanzas, and often cited as evidence of Shenstone’s admiration of Spenser — but it is illuminated by an understanding of his ongoing struggles with the idea of merit.

The poem reflects on the experiences of the pupils at a rural school, and their teacher. Shenstone portrays the School-Mistress as a keen authority, who knows “right well” how “to thwart the proud, and the submiss to raise: / Some with vile copper Prize exalt on high, / And some entice with Pittance small of Praise.” Thus, as we see the schoolboys learning, and the schoolmistress rewarding or correcting them, we get a bird’s-eye view of how merit develops, aided in later versions by brief glimpses into the future, which reveal the effects of the method of training. Shenstone gives the school-mistress what amounts to foresight of any mischief and dramatizes the gravity of her instructions. He also emphasizes the fear of the schoolboy who has shirked and faces imminent punishment. What readers see is the emotional intensity and contrasts of the scene: the boy’s “plenteous Show’rs” of tears as he begs for a reprieve, the steely dispassion of his punisher, who “levels well her aim,” and the awed response of the other students who “from their Fellow’s furrow’d Bum beware.” This is a poem about how we learn.

In the first version, contrasts and rustic humor seem to be the whole point of the poem as our perspective shifts to the end of the school day. Any fear of authority quickly dissipates in the sun, and the boys “cack in open Street,” and “p-ss boldly, in the face of all” without shame. The lines emphasize their rudeness only to show how later they “usher forth all debonair and gay,” and proceed to a huxter’s cottage to buy sweets. Schoolboys, Shenstone seems to say, can change in an instant, from good to bad and back again. In the School-Mistress herself, we see one of the forces that influences their choices — the other is the desire for the huxter’s wares, which “draw with pamper’d Look our Eyes aside: / [And] must be bought, tho’ Penury betide,” The allure of

treats is the only thing that commands the same attention. However, Shenstone merely documents this, and does not comment on it, or on any other aspect of the portrait.

In 1742, he published a revision “The School-Mistress” as a stand-alone poem, with an additional sixteen stanzas. The revision stands out among Shenstone’s poetry because he begins it with a rare direct statement explaining his goals:

Ah me! full sorely is my Heart forlorn,
To think that Merit thus neglected lies!
While partial Fame doth with her Blasts adorn
Such Deeds alone, as Pride and Pomp disguise;
Deeds of ill Sort, and mischievous Emprise!
Lend me the Trumpet, Goddess! let me try
To sound the Praise of Merit e’er it dies;
Such as I oft have chanced to espy,
Lost in the dreary Shades of dull Obscurity. (A3)

The poem is intended to illuminate the true meaning of merit, and to distinguish it from false forms. Shenstone’s rhetoric suggests that the situation is dire.

As before, the poem centers on the school-mistress and her pupils; the school-boy’s transgression, punishment, and resentment, and the appeal of the treats that can be bought. Our focus is still on the interplay of the school-mistress’ authority and the school-boys’ feelings, but Shenstone provides more information throughout to clarify how these scenes elevate neglected merit. The additional stanzas explore the nature of the authority of schoolmistresses over their charges, and are decidedly mixed. On the one hand, the speaker compares teacherly authority to a lifeless scarecrow, bereaving “little birds of Peace...Of Sport, of Song, of Pleasure, and

Repast,” and hopes that future pupils will never have to experience such “sad Servitude! such comfortless Annoy.” On the other hand, he compares the school-boys to Aeolus’ winds, and wonders how earth would fare if they were uncontrolled; or if the school-mistress did not quell rebellious minds or maintain the discipline ensuring that “lovely Peace of Mind, and decent Order dwell.” What makes merit?, Shenstone is asking: is it freedom from restriction, or exposure to it?

These are difficult questions, but he works to communicate information that will help readers find answers. We learn that the school-mistress is industrious, “clad In Texture of her own, all strong and tough,” and proud of it. She is thrifty, too, having made a pet of an “Antient Hen,” and her accompanying flock, because the school-mistress knows “The Chicken-feeding Pow’r of ev’ry Crumb she found.” These qualities categorize her clearly as an example of rural merit. However, her presence is commanding enough to inspire “pious Awe” from her pupils, who “think, no doubt, she been the greatest Wight on Ground.” This sort of charisma is almost always an embodiment of high merit. Of her judgment, Shenstone tells us that “ne Flatt’ry did corrupt het Truth, / Ne pompous Title did debauch her Ear” — she is as close to incorruptible as possible. This is especially important in light of the struggles that Shenstone has dramatized elsewhere: in a world of unending competition and shifting values, the schoolmistress is a reliable arbiter of value.

The early Shenstone articulated merely by identifying an object of person as the most powerful, and then venerating them energetically. To simply proclaim the school-mistress as high judge of merit would be no different than his earlier praise of the unidentified woman in the 1737 Dedication. But the revision of “The School-Mistress” avoids this sort of facile gesture by acknowledging that even with good arbiters, there are uncertain effects of authoritative judgment

and chastisement. When the school-boy is punished, the speaker warns “Beware, ye Dames, with nice Discernment see / Ye quench not too the Sparks of noble Fires!” Punishment may work, but may have unintended consequences. Still, Shenstone also marvels that “sprung from Birch, what dazzling Fruits appear!”: bishops, chancellors, bards sublime as Milton and Shakespeare. Unlike the Shenstone who cautioned against trying to justify failure, and who planned to scale the steps to perfect beauty by following rules, this Shenstone dares to imagine mistakes as inevitable and even productive of future greatness. By suggesting such things, Shenstone makes “The School-Mistress,” into a reconciliation of the incompatibility between the two types of merit, suggesting that authority can be both humble and exacting; and that the careless joy and playfulness of the schoolboys does not exclude them from great feats later on.

Nor is it merely authority in the form of school-teachers and patrons that pose dangers: some boys, Shenstone says, will in “Wisdom’s Mazes lose their way,” while others meet with accidents. Still others, he warns in the third version, may become harsh critics in the mode of John Dennis. Such critics are capable of destroying young poets’ confidence, which is as flimsy as a house of cards. The poem has become about productivity, and we see this even with the stanzas describing the huxter’s cottage of sweets. Here, happiness is not defined by knowing that one has merit, but in having the ability to purchase desired treats. Poetry and politics may command praise, but Shenstone reminds readers that even pastries may garner fame, and that the Shrewsbury cakes have rendered “thro’ Britain’s Isle Salopia’s Praises known.” While the school-mistress gets the honor of the poem’s title, the final lines award the highest praises to her “Whose Art did first these dulcet Cates display; / A Motive fair to Learning’s Imps he gave.” Merit is sweet, but never underestimate the satisfaction of a well-made cake.

Conclusion

My investigations into the topics of otherworldliness and virtue, and the question of what Parnell, Thomson, and Shenstone valued, have demonstrated that Young's engagement with value and economic thinking is not an isolated phenomenon – though Young's engagement is unusual, each of these poets demonstrate an individualistic economic engagement. While the value that Thomson, Shenstone, and Parnell were engaged with was entangled with monetary value, and the activity of participating in a monetary economy, each of them see it from different angles – and display their own concerns. These concerns take the form of economic thinking, i.e., in terms of quantity, competition, exchange, superiority; and they have a definite influence on the poetry of this period. What has been conventionally understood as poetic enthusiasm and lush imagery heralding the rise of Romanticism reflects authors' perspectives on success and failure: how to ensure the former and avoid the latter.

That said, compared with Young's immense and interdependent economic system in *Night Thoughts*, other poets' views are far simpler. Thomson's praise of Nature in *The Seasons* displays an awareness of value and of value's circulation; but his encouragement to individuals to participate – in both *The Seasons* and *The Castle of Indolence* does not take into account scarcity or risk. Nor it is oriented towards acquisition and enhancement of value. In short, it is not capitalistic. What Thomson values is happiness for both humans and the earth, and he writes about labor in *Castle of Indolence* because he sees labor as conducive of happiness, not because he sees an imperative to create value.

Parnell's longing for agency reflects his understanding of what it meant to be a professional poet. He saw poetry as working with the highest types of value, which he generally perceived as being always just beyond his own reach. The separation of those on the inside and

the outside is a major dimension of his poetry. His writing is less oriented towards quantitative economics precisely because he sees himself as excluded from participating. However, his poetry is interesting in the way that it engages with aspects of capitalism, such as competition. He deals with the question of whether competition will result in the best solution, and whether those who give their all are guaranteed to be successful.

Shenstone is most like Young in his concerns with achieving high merit. The anguish that he feels at not being successful in achieving it is palpable in his work. I have not discussed Shenstone's later prose writings in this chapter; however, they display an even more intense focus on merit, and more direct discussions of the professional constraints that poets face as they try to achieve that merit. Shenstone references Young directly in these writings⁹, and just as *Night Thoughts* is Young's attempt to try to make sense of the whole economy, Shenstone too writes of trying to grasp and control the whole system. The strangest instance of this is a short essay in which Shenstone imagines having enough money to create a village where his friends could live, and be paid a monthly income based on their productivity. He imagines that if their productivity dropped, he would jumpstart it by forcing them to take on an (implicitly unpleasant) housemate until their productivity increased again. Shenstone's idea is far more down-to-earth than Young's debt narrative, but the principles are the same.

Overall, poetry from this period is concerned with a variety of issues related to participation in the traditional monetary economy. Many of these issues (access to value, agency, competition) are crucial aspects of economic activity that loom largest for the disadvantaged and unlucky. It is probable, then, that the engagement with value has gone unrecognized partly

⁹ See "Of Books and Writers" in *The Works in Verse and Prose, of William Shenstone, Esq; Most of Which Were Never before Printed. In Two Volumes, with Decorations. ...* (1765)

because the authors do not meet the standards for being economic authorities as established by the discipline of economics.

Having demonstrated that poets from this period are more complex than previous criticism has given them credit for, I can suggest parameters that will more effectively reveal their individual perspectives. Too often, criticism has interpreted poetic passages about industry as insertions merely to please patrons. This assumption has shifted attention away from the possibility that poets themselves might have their own opinions about economic situations. Investigations into poets' engagement with the marketplace, like Philip Connell's *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'*, have shown this assumption to be patently false. The poetry of this period has much to offer that is yet to be fully revealed. Explorations into the structure of publishing and book trade will only assist such investigations.

Because the conventional interpretation of the graveyard poets is that their economic perspective is entirely otherworldly, the first parameter that I would suggest is that we consider their entanglement with the world. While there are genuinely otherworldly poems, focused purely on heaven and encouraging readers to reject the world (Blair's "The Grave" is a good example of this view), many poets are straddling an uncomfortable fence between this world and the next. Christopher Hill's *The World Turned Upside Down* considers the political thought behind seventeenth century poets of religious enthusiasm; the same sort study conducted on mid-eighteenth century poets would be usefully illuminating. Jon Mee's *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics And the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* considers otherworldliness through the lens of enthusiasm, but does so while examining how disadvantaged voices were reigned in to the point of becoming acceptable. Thus, while an

excellent study, it unintentionally reinforces the idea of the graveyard school as frenzied or lost in disengaged raptures.

A second parameter that should be considered is what each poet values. My studies of Parnell, Thomson, and Shenstone demonstrate that each poet values different things. While Shenstone and Parnell both desire success and are frustrated by its being out of reach, Parnell's focus on agency is quite different from Shenstone's focus on merit. Using this parameter may entail reading poets from this period in a more sustained fashion, rather than by plucking single poems out of their bodies of work. It is not really surprising that plucking single poems has not been revealing – it tends to lead to horizontal reading of the period, connected by particular images and tropes, and to demonstrate poets' acute sensitivity to images that were eye-catching, and their willingness to use them. This lends itself to the assumption that they valued the same things. To say that we should consider what each of these poets value is, in another sense, to say that some of the existing hallmarks of graveyard poetry are far too abstract. It is too easy to label a poem as melancholy without investigating the precise cause of the melancholy. This is partly because melancholy is, in some ways, too old a concept – it carries baggage from the seventeenth century, which only contributes to obscuring eighteenth century verse under old categories. A more apt descriptor, if a substitute for melancholy were wanted, might be frustration. Frustration would be a useful new term because it could be specifically used for examining eighteenth century poetry, and because it is less otherworldly than melancholy.

The description of graveyard poets as egoistic and inwardly focused likewise tends to homogenize them, and is similarly problematic. I strongly suspect that the categories of religious and poetic enthusiasm have also contributed to the difficulties of reading poets from this era.

While these enthusiasms may indeed be part of the literary history of this period, they have tended to oversimplify our interpretations.

Finally, what I have shown about Shenstone, Thomson, and Parnell, as well as the other poets from this period (approximately 1720-1760) indicates that it is essential to understand their economic and professional situations in order to understand the concerns that are likely to emerge in their poetry. This is more complicated than simply understanding whether or not they were rich or poor; it involves looking at their particular access to publishers and patronage, and the relationships that each poet had with their respective publishers and patrons. Put simply, because we think of economics today as a specialized area of knowledge, the default assumption is that people will not be concerned with economics, or with thinking about value, and its role in various aspects of their lives. In fact, however, concerns with value are never far away; and I hope to explore in future criticism how monetary value and professional success and failure intersect with more often studied ideas such as taste and genius. However, my next chapter addresses more immediate questions regarding economic thinking in poetry – specifically, how eighteenth century readers reacted to Young's ideas.

Chapter 3:

The Crowdsourced Authorship of *Night Thoughts*

If *Night Thoughts* was so engaged with issues of value and economics, why has this content gone unnoticed? Asking how much of the content of Young's *Night Thoughts* 18th century readers understood requires consideration of the evolution of reading practices preceding and during the years when the poem was published. These readers' habits were shaped by the availability of reading material, and by customs that had been handed down from the seventeenth century and earlier. In the case of *Night Thoughts*, however, investigating the habits of its readers is vital. Such an investigation explains how Young's economic arguments and his critique of patronage were buried in favor of an alternative version of *Night Thoughts* authored by those who read it, excerpted it, and enthusiastically recreated it as a work of sober Christian piety, and as the epitome of "graveyard" verse.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson could distinguish between 'mere reading' vs. 'study.' Mere reading involved examining multiple texts, to be read a single time, while study limited one's consumption to a select few, to be read and reread. While Johnson urged people to engage in the latter, he preferred the former for his own enjoyment. Johnson's categories imply that one must read a *whole* text from start to finish, in order to reap any benefit from it; and that reading more texts is an indication of a lack of seriousness. These categories have been applied retroactively to earlier decades in the century, and have helped to suggest that the broad shift taking place during it was from intensive to extensive reading — from the focused study of a small number of texts to a less-focused engagement with greater numbers of volumes, in keeping with the explosive rise in publishing.

This paradigm suggests that *Night Thoughts*, especially as a wildly popular text, should have been subject to scrupulous attention, making Young's economic enthusiasm impossible to miss — but this was not the case. More recent studies by Stephen Colclough and David Allan have suggested that a simple shift from intensive to extensive reading is inaccurate, and fails to recognize the variety of reading practices during the first part of the long eighteenth century. Both Allan's and Colclough's studies challenge the notion that extensive reading was a feature only of the late eighteenth century, and help to explain how readers might be intently engaged with Young's poem, and yet not fully aware of the economic arguments involved.

It is true that early eighteenth century readers seem to have been more inwardly focused, reading texts for the purpose of self-improvement and edification. However, the process by which this autodidacticism took place was central, and highly individual. Each reader accomplished it by discovering, gathering, and retaining the relevant passages and ideas in what they read. Addison hoped for a society in which "Knowledge, instead of being bound up in Books, and kept in Libraries and retirement, is thus obtruded upon the Publick" (Allan, 16). Of necessity, the act of unbinding knowledge from books, or even newspapers, required new units of information which individuals could circulate amongst themselves.

Personal diaries and more formal commonplace books facilitated this process, supporting Enlightenment self-construction. The use of blank books as journals and personal devotional archives had become standard during the seventeenth century. A more formal system of commonplacing dictated by John Locke in *A New Method of a Common-Place Book*, was published in 1706. While earlier commonplacing techniques had divided the commonplace books into sections of generic labels, i.e., Memoria, Eloquentia, Anima, and Methodus (Allan, 51), Locke's system, which utilized an alphabetical grid, allowed users to establish whatever

headings/sections they found appropriate, and thus encouraged greater autonomy and diversity in content. As Allan observed, this was in keeping with Locke's denial of the existence of innate categories.

Both Addison and Shaftesbury encouraged the cultivation of discernment and careful self-scrutiny in recording one's activities and findings. Swift criticized those who collected too little from ancient sources, and too much from modern ones. But even Swift made it clear that he saw collecting as an admirable characteristic of reading. In *The Battle of the Books*, he contrasted the act of collecting with that of producing knowledge using the image of a bee and spider, and asking

Whether is the nobler Being of the two, That which by a lazy Contemplation of four Inches round; by an over-weening Pride, which feeding and engendering on it self, turns all into Excrement and Venom; producing nothing at last, but Fly-bane and a Cobweb: Or That, which, by an universal Range, with long Search, much Study, true Judgment, and Distinction of Things, brings home Honey and Wax. (*The Battle of the Books*, 12)

To Swift, efforts at collecting and disseminating knowledge were not meant to be judged by the ideas, so much as the texture of their assembly. Their value depended on the collector being well-read, with the assumption that any author who read widely would have developed a discerning eye for wisdom. Locke stipulated that keepers of commonplace books were to record only "Those Things alone...which we cannot so readily call to mind, or for which we should want proper Words and Expressions." He advised further, that readers were not to collect selections while reading, but only on reflection, in retrospect. These restraints would serve to cultivate readers' memories and rational faculties. They dictated that users would seek out passages that struck them as both unique and highly applicable — reusable in other contexts. This meant that what readers were looking for, then, were the immediately relevant and extractable units of Young's poetry, rather than for any larger narrative of the poem — indeed,

the Preface attached to *Night Thoughts*, which emphasized the spontaneity of the content, seemed to discount the possibility that a larger narrative existed. *Night Thoughts*' stated subject matter of life, death, and immortality, were sufficiently universally applicable without any need to look for concealed meanings beyond Lorenzo's identity and the autobiographical connections with Young's own life.²⁴

Though Shaftesbury emphasized the privacy of commonplacing, and was scornful of those who published collections of their occasional reflections, meditations or solitary thoughts, it is clear that commonplace books were social instruments, shared between friends and passed down through families. They were seen as proof of the owner's ability to choose appropriate and valuable passages. Both Locke's manual and comments from Shaftesbury and Swift encouraged individuals to record others' ideas, treating what they found as worth more than their own reflections. "Your own original thought[s]," wrote Swift, "a hundred to one, are few and insignificant." To enter a passage into a commonplace book, though, was to invoke possession, "for take this as a rule, when an author is in your books, you have the same demand upon him for his wit, as a merchant has for your money, when you are in his." Swift's comparison between quotes and debt ledger entries highlights the importance of exactitude — copying, rather than responding. Ownership was not dependent on restating in one's own words, and the value of the property was highly intrinsic, located in the phrase itself, rather than the context from which it had been taken.

The idea of commonplaces as currency also emphasizes the importance of recognizability, another factor encouraging recording, rather than rephrasing — like money, the passages needed to be recognizably valid, though as we shall see, the threshold for

²⁴ Moreover, since Young was not identified as the author of *Night Thoughts* until 1744, the poem's themes of death and redemption had been largely established before any questions of the autobiographical connections even arose.

recognizability was low. While readers sought passages that would be unique, they also were seeking excerpts that would fit within the social norms of what counted as literary. Addison advised his “readers to be in a particular manner careful how they meddle with romances, Chocolates, novels, and like enflamers” (Spectator No. 365, April 29, 1712). English readers had voracious appetites, which in turn supported an over-vigorous stream of criticism. As James Engell explains, “people want to read literature, but they also want to read about reading literature” (Engell, 3). They wanted their efforts to meet the standards that were being set, even if these standards were so plentiful that Pope could suggest that they were the product of mud and dung rather than ideas (Engell).

***Night Thoughts* quoted and commonplacéd**

Young’s knack for producing lapidary and aphoristic verse, honed through his earlier satires, made him a perfect candidate for extraction, and reinforced readers’ instincts to seize on small parts of his poem. Not only was *Night Thoughts* popular in private commonplace books; it also was frequently quoted as an epigraph or source in other publications. Specific instances of this popularity demonstrate the flexible standards for exact quote, and the wide range of contexts in which it was seen as useful. A pamphlet titled “A Letter from Mr. Alexander Webster To the Reverend Mr. Ralph Erskine; Containing a Vindication of Mr. Webster’s Post-script to his second Edition of *Divine Influence*...” uses lines from *Night Thoughts* to express indignation. The title page prints a quote from Erskine, the target of the pamphlet; and directly below it, a fragment from Young: “--How Reason Reels! / O what a Miracle is Man to Man!” There is no connection between Erskine’s quote and Young’s – rather, either Alexander Webster or his publisher seem to have found the phrasing and alliteration of *Night Thoughts* a suitably catchy retort.

The words are accurate, but the punctuation has been changed. The original lines ask “How Reason reels? Oh what a miracle to man is man, Triumphantly distressed?” (Night I, ll. 83-84) as Young’s narrator quivers at his powerlessness compared with that of other forces in the cosmos, specifically through the experience of being “triumphantly distressed,” abused with misfortune through divine intent. As printed, it becomes an expression of outraged indignation at the incorrectness of Erskine’s statement. Though Young consistently kept the phrases as questions throughout the different editions of the poem, it was regularly reprinted in snippet form as an exclamation. Though a small change, this alteration and others like it helped to cement Young’s reputation as a poet of pronouncements and aghast exclamations, rather than of complex exploration. This is the origin of the numerous descriptions of *Night Thoughts* as a poem about an overly pious older man ranting and chiding a younger one – and that synopsis still survives today.

Exclamations were valuable, and Young’s particular style of alternating shorter statements or questions (no more than two lines) with longer, more syntactically complex descriptive or argumentative passages only increased the likelihood of his words being repurposed. Rarely are these questions or statements as simple as they seem when quoted in excerpt. Young often followed simple phrases with rapid-fire fragments that complicated them, but these complexities were easily avoided by leaving off the fragments, and adjusting the punctuation. Moreover, the system that *Night Thoughts* portrayed was, in many ways, Young’s own interpretation of the power dynamics in the widely familiar structures of Christianity. He developed his own portrayal of the economy by beginning with a compelling portrayal of what people already knew. Thus it should be no surprise to find *Night Thoughts*, and specifically the “what a miracle is man to man” passage being included as footnotes the way that William Dodd

did, noting that “Dr. Young, in his *Night Thoughts*, expresses himself in nearly the same manner” (Dodd, 273). There is no discussion -- Dodd simply used a reference to *Night Thoughts* without further discussion to confirm the rightness of his own opinion, and to establish a link between his writing and Young’s poetry.

Even to cite a single line or short passage from *Night Thoughts* was to engage in criticism by simple approbation (Engell, 10), and to elevate one’s own ideas by their commonality or kinship with the quotation, and bolster one’s authority with Young’s. The variety of imagery in *Night Thoughts* was such that it could be used to shore up and lend a certain exoticness to a huge range of topics. The couplet “Pygmies are Pygmies still, tho’ placed in Alps; / And Pyramids are Pyramids in Vales” was quoted to elaborate on the existence of wretchedness in the midst of grandeur (John Mason, *Self-Knowledge*, 250), to illustrate the contrast between ancients and moderns in an edition of commentaries of Proclus on Euclid (*Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries*, 13), and to augment a description of the cliffs of Dover in a 1772 travelogue (*Tour Through Holland*, 109). It could be equally applicable whether it was being used to illustrate proportion, the specific arrogance of a particular group of people, or the impossibility of fundamentally changing one’s nature (Priestly, *Tracts*, 193). *Night Thoughts* was highly remixable. Alexander Thomson used the pygmies and pyramids couplet as the basis for a similar image in his poem “The Paradise of Taste,” crediting Young as his source.

Later, Hazlitt argued that this type of activity detracted from the progress of art, because “The diffusion of taste is not the same thing as the improvement of taste, but it is only the former...that is promoted by public institutions and other artificial means” (*Why the Arts are not Progressive*, 1814) — but previously, even while some authors lamented the huge volume of critics, this type of diffusion was valued. Johnson, in his critical comment on Young, advised

that “Particular lines [of *Night Thoughts*] are not to be regarded; the power is in the whole; and in the whole there is a magnificence like that ascribed to Chinese plantation, the magnificence of vast extent and endless diversity.” This is an unusual comment, in that diversity generally is based on the effect of individual lines. It is an apt description, however, given the way that the poem was being used by its many readers. When people read *Night Thoughts*, whether they had access to their own private copies or to library volumes, they were almost certainly also reading it in a distributed and fragmentary fashion through the works in which it was being referenced and quoted.

The small excerpts that readers identified as important then reflected back on the meaning of the poem as a whole. In one sense, *Night Thoughts* was published by Dodsley in nine parts between 1742 and 1746, and in approximately 100 reprint editions by 1800; in another sense, it was published at least twice that in highly excerpted formats. Though readers knew that the excerpts were not the whole poem, for the purposes of reading influenced by commonplacing each fragment counted as a distinctive whole in a way that is alien to the 21st century reader. This reflection took place not only in terms of content, but also in terms of tone. Later comments and articles, brief biographies and obituaries referred to *Night Thoughts* as chiding, rebuking, and correcting, because it was often used to do so. The Webster-Erskine transformation of a question into an aghast exclamation is only one of many examples.

While *Night Thoughts* was used in a variety of different genres, it was unquestionably more popular in some genres than in others. Epigraphs and excerpts were regularly included in pamphlets debating appropriate theology, and accusing others of inappropriate conduct, belief, or observance. Young’s corrective tone towards Lorenzo was amplified and reverberated through church debates. It was also found congenial by the authors and compilers of books on etiquette

and good conduct. Swift had advised that gathering an author's words could "make them your own" — but the reverse of this applied too, so that the sense attributed by remixers of Young became, by extension, the meaning of his poem. The tendency to simply use *Night Thoughts* as a like-minded example or confirmation of the author's point, rather than discussing and interpreting Young's lines, only added to this transference of meaning.

The partial reading and remixing encouraged by commonplace culture meant that alluding to *Night Thoughts* and demonstrating familiarity with it was considered more significant in literary circles than critically commenting on its content. Quoting or alluding to *Night Thoughts* demonstrated knowledge of a popular work; and at the height of the poem's popularity, such knowledge had more social capital than showing critical acumen towards it. As a result Young's poem was not at first the recipient of analytical commentary. The earliest and most extensive response to it was published in James Hervey's 2-volume *Meditations and Contemplations* in 1748. Hervey included multiple lines from *Night Thoughts* as prominent epigraphs, and footnotes, and wrote two paragraphs of approximately 300 words, in which he waxed rhapsodic about Young's "Energy of Language, Sublimity of Sentiment, and the most exquisite Beauties of Poetry." Hervey's generosity with superlatives crowned *Night Thoughts* with the achievement of providing "the highest entertainment, to the Fancy, and impart[ing] the noblest Improvement to the Mind: They not only refine our Taste, but prepare us for Death, and Glory" (Vol. 1, 87). Hervey's extracts from *Night Thoughts* juxtaposed some of Young's most aesthetic and atmospheric descriptions with the *Contemplations*' own aesthetic unity along with a select few lines on the inevitability of death, and the mercy of Christ. His piety was, if anything, more vociferous than Young's —he wished fervently that his own "little Sketches . . . might be honored with the most inferior Degree, of the same Success [as Young's]; and receive a

Testimony, not from the Voice of Fame, but from the dying lips of some edified Christian” (Vol. 2, 204). This piety was profitable — more than one hundred editions of the *Meditations and Contemplations* had been published by 1800, making it more popular even than *Night Thoughts*. It also means that Hervey’s informal two-paragraph review has the distinction of being by far the most reprinted commentary on the poem and its meaning, ever. For a large portion of eighteenth century readers, his statements cemented the kernel of meaning of Young’s poem.

Night Thoughts was steadily reprinted, and certain passages clearly popular. As its celebrity continued, even as the number of books available grew, critics and publishers saw an opening for advice, not just on how to read, but how to read Young’s poem specifically. This direction was presented to the public in three primary ways: abridgments, indexing, and critical focused commentary. No homogenous conception of the poem emerged from these productions; if anything, they served to splinter *Night Thoughts* into a few quite different poems — that each contained or gestured to is an indication of shifts in reading practice that were occurring — among them, a more focused reading in line with Samuel Johnson’s reading for study.

The first abridgment of the *Night Thoughts* was published quite early in 1744, before the full nine nights had even been printed, or Young’s name had been attached, by John Wesley, in *A Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems from the Most Celebrated English Authors*. In reprinting an anonymous poem, Wesley made no comment on why *Night Thoughts* was being included — the anthology’s title made that self-evident. Nor did Wesley acknowledge alterations in the text apart from the omission of the Third Night. What he did, in fact, was strip out the references to contemporary authors (i.e. Milton and Pope) and to authorship as a profession and remove the darkest unresolved passages on doubt from Nights VI and VII as well as many of the references to fortune; thus eliminating the more personal and complex narrative of indebtedness, failure,

and success that was being developed. Whether through luck or careful planning, Wesley published his collection at a fortuitous moment — his collection was the first printing to include all seven of the then-published nights in one binding. At the time, readers were not expecting Young to publish two more sections of the poem, so Wesley's edition appeared to be the complete poem.. Dodsley, who held the copyright, had published an edition of the first four nights together, and separate octavo editions of Nights V, VI, and VII. Wesley's edition undercut Dodsley's pricing: single nights were selling at a price between one shilling each (for the earliest, shorter nights), and one shilling-sixpence for the longer nights (IV-VII). Those who were buying one night at a time would have been most likely committed to remaining with Dodsley. However, Wesley's 3-volume edition, totaling just over 1,000 pages, and containing far more than just the *Night Thoughts*, was priced at 7 shillings-sixpence unbound. It was printed in Bristol and distributed and sold in London, Bath, Exeter, and Newcastle. For those buyers who had been excited by the buzz around the poem but had not yet purchased their own copy, Wesley's editions were a bargain, especially as most readers imagined that his edition contained the entire poem. Dodsley confronted Wesley on the matter and succeeded in wresting £50 for reprint rights for the Collection. Dodsley also secured Wesley's promise, later broken, that he would "never again print the same, in that or any other matter" (Dodsley Correspondence, 83). Wesley's edition meant that *Night Thoughts* had been made available in a form that was consistent with the interpretation of it as a pious and contemplative poem, along the lines of Hervey's encomium.

Further transformations of *Night Thoughts* through abridgments and glossaries

Twenty-five years later, the first generation of writers and publishers involved with *Night Thoughts* was nearly extinct: Young (1765), Dodsley (1764), Richardson (1761), who had

printed Nights VII-IX, and Andrew Millar (1768), who bought the rights for Nights VII to IX from Young for 60 guineas (Cornford, 28). In fact, Wesley was the only one still living. Though the poem was not, strictly speaking in the public domain, there were fewer people around who were motivated to protect it. Because the poem was so large, there was an opening for advice not just on how to read, but on how to read *Night Thoughts* specifically. This was facilitated by abridgments, indexing, and specific instructions.

The first abridgment of *Night Thoughts* after Young's death was titled "The Beauties of Dr. Young's Night Thoughts," and was published in 1769, with the epigraph "*suave est ex magno tollere acervo*," from Horace, which translates as "it is pleasant to take what you want from a heap" (4). Though "beauties" volumes were common productions for long texts, or large bodies of text (Shakespeare, the English stage), they were less common for single works like the *Night Thoughts*, so it is not surprising that the epigraph is slightly acerbic, as the Horatian context makes even clearer. This edition has no editorial comment, but despite the jab at the length of the poem, it appears to have been produced with complimentary intent, rather than as parody. That intent was to transform Young's poem into an aesthetic work; one which clearly embodied the principles of the sublime as articulated by Edmund Burke in his *Philosophical Enquiry* of 1757.

The editor of the Beauties edition was ruthless in pruning — approximately 60% of the original poem was removed — the figure of Lorenzo is reduced to three mentions, and all references to Christianity are entirely absent. The effect is that the poem becomes a series of atmospheric short fragments, usually between 2-8 lines, and rarely more than 14. These encapsulate the themes of darkness, vastness, and the thought of death, as well as minuteness, and beauty, into passages that would have been easily copied into private commonplace books,

journals, or correspondence — each one rendered complete, rather than as part of a larger monologue. Young's frilly dependent clauses are often pared down to render the lines stark and spare: his lines "For what, my small philosopher, is Hell? / 'Tis nothing but full knowledge of the Truth" are presented as "For what is Hell? Full knowledge of the Truth" — two lines of iambic pentameter become one, and the condescending tone of the original is omitted.

This edition featured the first index of the poem, making even quicker references possible. The index, like the abridgment itself, casts the poem as aesthetic — the only listing mentioning God is an entry for "Footsteps of the Almighty in the Deep." More prominent are listings for "death," "night," "day," and "the starry firmament." There are also listings for affective and emotive detail, such as "Glance, a simple, may create envy, etc." and "Grief, indiscrete." These entries are consistent with Burke's juxtaposition of aesthetics and social passions in the Enquiry. The creation of this edition suggests that *Night Thoughts*' reputation was quite durable — in fact, it is remarkable that it could be adapted and transformed to meet the changing tastes while still being recognizably Young's poem. That it *was* recognizable suggests the likelihood that *Night Thoughts* was already being partially read, and thus readers did not need to use the whole poem in order to think of it as *Night Thoughts*. Young's name as author was important to include in the title in order to distinguish the volume from others' Night Thoughts (both because the title was a generic phrase for describing nocturnal contemplations, and because imitations of Young had since entered the marketplace). But otherwise, there was no concern with addressing Young's intentions in crafting the poem.

However, in the wake of Johnson, formal criticism on the quality of other people's writing was becoming more common, and perhaps this and the possibility of a resurgence of *Night Thoughts*' popularity were the factors motivating John Wesley to produce a new edition,

titled *An Extract from Dr. Young's Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality*. It seems likely that Wesley saw a market for a version of *Night Thoughts* aimed at readers who were interested in an edition presented as equally (or more) useful as the original in less time. That expediency was a common concern is indicated by the final sentences of Wesley's introduction: "I have made a little attempt, such as I could consistently with abundance of other employment. Let one that has more leisure and more abilities supply what is here wanting." In short, there were better things to do than deal with the likes of Young. The tetchiness of Wesley's statement suggests that he may have come to regret his inclusion of *Night Thoughts* in the 1744 Collection, for his opinion of it is decidedly mixed.

Whatever his motivations for the new edition, Wesley took pains to update his earlier abridgment for an audience more acutely concerned with taste, than with the sacredness of Young's verse. His opening paragraph explains that "It is the observation of a late ingenious writer, [that] 'What is usually called a correct taste is very much offended with Dr. Young's *Night Thoughts*. It is obvious, that the poetry sometimes sinks into *childish conceits*, or *prosaic flatness*; but oftner rises into the *turgid*, or *false sublime*: and that it is often *perplex* and *obscure*'" (7). Presumably the unnamed critic is an imaginary stand-in for Wesley himself, but he did not attach his name to the edition. As is to be expected, given the interest in *Night Thoughts* as an aesthetic text, Wesley's critique is centered upon the presence of both "true and admirable," and "false" sublime within the poem. No direct discussion is made of the theology, except to the extent that Wesley describes some of Young's ideas as "extremely odd and peculiarly childish." He included a series of notes at the end of each section, primarily, he explained, to make it possible for readers to understand, implying that the poem was incomprehensible otherwise.

The implication of incomprehensibility is not just snark on Wesley's part — it is a singularly odd comment to make about a poem that had been comprehensible enough to support steady reprints and pirated editions outside of London. It strongly suggests that Wesley had been reading *Night Thoughts* in a more modern, linear fashion, from start to finish — and 'studying' it in a Johnsonian fashion. The question is whether he found it impossible to understand, or whether he understood Young's scheme, and found it contemptible. The notes suggest the latter. Rather than correct Young's odd definitions, Wesley advised that he would define them in the way that Young intended them to mean. Several of the words that he needed to clarify were those relating to income, earnings, debt, and reward, suggesting that at least, he grasped that the poem's content involved these topics. This could simply mean that when *Night Thoughts* was revealed as Young's, Wesley loosely overlaid Young's search for preferment as a key to understanding the overall meaning of the poem. Doing so would have allowed him to have a general sense of its meaning, without necessarily understanding the complexity of the system that Young was structuring. One indication that Wesley may have done just this was in his choice to define for readers the term "oeconomy," as in the line, "the oeconomy of heaven," as "government." A more usual meaning for economy would have been that it signified the management of domestic resources, or, of divine oversight. Neither of these was a particularly unusual meaning. Wesley's definition suggests an awareness of the political subtext.

What does Wesley's second edition of *Night Thoughts* suggest about how reading practices contributed to its meaning in the latter part of the eighteenth century? First, some sort of general meaning was seen as existing for popular texts, and that it could be managed — in fact, *needed* to be managed for "common" readers. This management was accomplished through the production of abridgments and explanatory notes — and it was most effective when subtly

done, through the encouragement of others' activity, rather than through strict didactic pronouncements. Wesley does not explain why certain aspects of Young's ideas/imagery are full of childish conceits and the false sublime, thereby circumventing arguments that he had misinterpreted a particular passage and was vilifying Young without cause. Second, meaning could be managed fairly independently, that is, without attempting to compete for dominance among editions. There is no dismissal of the 1769 aesthetic-oriented edition, or any attempt to interact with Hervey's effusive praise. Finally, Wesley calmly accepted that readers *will* shape the meaning of a text, depending on how they judge it as being correct or incorrect in the grand scheme of existence. Wesley makes no mention of art or artistic merit — of taste, yes, but his description of the poem's strengths and flaws, implicitly, the things that affect whether it will be offensive to Taste, are based on Young's ability to accurately reflect genuine human feelings. Because Wesley evaluates *Night Thoughts* in terms of verisimilitude, rather than art, it is implicit that the poem will not last — does not have a stable meaning, but is, rather, a vehicle “to indulge and flatter the present passion” of the reader, “and at the same time present those motives of consolation which alone can render certain griefs supportable” (8). According to this logic, the poem works because reading is customizable.

People had plenty to argue about regarding *Night Thoughts* without getting into the depths of Young's argument. However it started, by the time the first five nights had come out, *Night Thoughts* had something for everyone — whether they were looking for wit, pathos, or spirituality. The many meanings that partial reading had created were in force and associated with the poem enough that they had, in some ways, become it. Over time, extensive reading shifted to more intensive reading — but that did not necessarily mean discovering what Young had “really” written — people were just as likely to work to make it more possible/easier to read

the poem that they already knew existed. Young had previously styled himself as a classically-influenced writer, adept at satires and Pindaric odes, but the personal and reflective tone of *Night Thoughts* was more modern than ancient, stylewise. The tone was not so colloquial in itself — but the practice of extracting made it seem so. The existence of the Burkean aesthetics-influenced *Beauties of Dr. Young's Night Thoughts* abridgment indicates the highly plastic and hybrid nature of the poem. But it is difficult, if not impossible, to say whether its longevity is due more to Young's method of writing it, or his audiences' methods of reading it. This is not carelessness — or not simply carelessness, but rather, it is indicative of a particular confidence and fidelity to the construction of meaning through the activity of partial reading.

The popularity of *Night Thoughts* created a mild interest in Young's backlist — at least, in those titles with religious content. Both Young's "Paraphrase on the Book of Job" and "Poem on the Last Day," which had languished when originally published, were included in new *Night Thoughts* editions. In addition to the authorized versions published by Dodsley's heir, various unauthorized editions were released. It is evident that the poem was being marketed to poorer customers. Most editions of the poem were either 2 volumes of 300+ pages each, printed in a large and highly readable type, or a lower budget edition of one volume, again, with approximately 300 pages, in a medium typeface. 1777 saw the first ultra-compact edition, which shrunk the typeface down to an approximately 8-point font, and fit the entire poem into 86 pages. Though the title page of this edition bears no price, it seems likely that the goal was to create an even more affordable *Night Thoughts*. In the same year there were also two editions with substantial paratextual apparatuses. The first of these was in an edition printed for Dodsley's son. According to the prefatory Advertisement, the newly created Glossary and Index were intended to make *Night Thoughts* "more generally useful and better understood, especially by those

Readers who having not enjoyed the advantages of a classical Education, are unacquainted with the sublime Language . . . and those various Stories referred to in the Heathen Mythology or Fables of the Ancients.” True to the description, the glossary is full of clarifications pertaining to Greek and Roman history and mythology. However, the result suggests that the Editor and the compiler of the glossary, G. Wright, were working at cross purposes. Wright’s definitions provide classical information — but not necessarily information targeted at Young’s poem. As an example, consider Wright’s entry for “Corduba” (Cordoba). Corduba is in the glossary because of the following lines from Night IX:

The Stagirite; and Plato; He who drank
The poison’d Bowl; and He of Tusculum;
With Him of Corduba (immortal Names!) [IX.976-78]

Here Young is praising orators and rhetoricians: Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, and Seneca the Younger, respectively. But Wright’s entry reads “Corduba, a city of Beotic Spain, noted for its fertility, the country of Lucan and the two Senecas.” While this is certainly a classically-oriented definition, it makes no attempt to clarify the meaning of the lines in the poem. While Wright’s glossary more clearly identifies Tusculum as the birthplace of Cicero, his definition for the Stagirite is simply “an astronomer or stargazer.” Because of Aristotle’s origins in Stagira in Macedonia, and his fame as an astronomer, “stagirite” had become slang for anyone who stargazed. However, the implication from this error, and others that consistently occur throughout the glossary, is that Wright created it from a list of terms provided by a separate person who had collected them from the poem. It seems unlikely that Wright was examining the actual occurrences of the classical terms that he defined.

The result of grafting the glossary onto the poem is that *Night Thoughts* seems to become a repository of classical knowledge. In a similar fashion, the index that follows the glossary transforms the poem into a repository of Christian knowledge. It encourages non-linear reading by presenting the information contained in the fashion of an encyclopedia. Thus, the index entry on God does not direct speakers to the perspective of either Young or the speaker of the poem, but instead presents a sequence of lines defining God: how he is “proved to be a spirit,” “omnipresent,” where his throne is located, and why, “his first command to man,” and how he is viewed differently by infidels and believers (333-34). Similar entries exist for other religious topics (Christ, Death, Immortality), and for other abstract emotional terms, such as hope and happiness. Despite the heavy presence of classical terms in the glossary, there are very few referenced in the index. Each entry delineates a broad topic into specific subcategories. In the middle of the index, at the end of the “S” entries, is a separate alphabetical index of similes. While it contains short entries for Narcissa and Philander, the vast majority of its terms are for ideas that would not be unique to *Night Thoughts*: vice, station, thoughts, and creator, are all included.

The other major indexed edition of *Night Thoughts* was published in the same year, indexed by a W. Waring, “late of Magdalen-College, Oxford.” Waring’s apparatus is more religious in its focus than Wright’s. His index has scant references to classical culture; replacing them instead with more detailed specifics of Christian topics, i.e., different types of virtue and sin. Waring’s index is also unlike Wright’s in that it includes a much longer entry for “Author,” in which he provides a more thorough list of more than twenty specific details from the poem. This allows readers to see a list of the speaker’s progression through emotional highs and lows.

It is no surprise, then, that the majority of readers weren't fully grasping the economic content of Young's poem, because *Night Thoughts* could and *was* being customized to hold a diverse range of meanings. Moreover, there was little interest in establishing a single, agreed-upon interpretation of the poem's meaning. Instead, publishers and printers were trying to connect it to as many contexts as possible, in order to reap the maximum commercial benefits from a diverse readership.

Only one critic, Samuel Jackson Pratt, produced a book-length argument discussing *Night Thoughts* (*Observations on the Night Thoughts of Dr. Young*, credited as Courtney Melmoth, published in 1776), in which he criticized Young, writing that poetry is not the province of argument. From Pratt's perspective, to the degree that the two were compatible, they could be combined because "circumscribed" argument helped to counter "airy and animated effusions." In contrast, "a large proportion of the *Night Thoughts*, is employed in such a train of argument as renders poetry almost incompatible: for which reason, perhaps, such contemplations should for the most part be contented with prose." Pratt's discussion and critique suggest that he was reading *Night Thoughts* from start to finish, as his project would have required, and it suggests may have understood the economic content more than most readers. But he showed no interest in clarifying and explaining the details of Young's train of argument. Instead, he anticipated that they would be more able to grasp and work with a concise description of Young's literary sin.

Poetic Parodies of *Night Thoughts*

While Pratt was the only writer to issue a lengthy critical commentary on *Night Thoughts*, there were at least three poetic responses parodying and critiquing it published after the poem's completion. Each parody clarified how Young's ideas were received, or how they failed to

communicate. Two of the three parodies were popular enough to be reprinted multiple times, and to contribute to the conventional understanding of *Night Thoughts*' meaning.

“New Night Thoughts,” probably written by Young’s contemporary William Whitehead, was the earliest, and shortest, published first in *The foundling hospital, for wit* in 1746 (and reprinted in the same volume in 1748, 1749, and 1764); and then picked up by the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1747. A very brief footnote indicates that the poem is responding chiefly to the first Night of Young’s poem. In that first Night, Young had staged a dramatic epiphany, in which the speaker realized that he had failed to pursue the right type of value, that is, capitalistic value. Young illustrates this sudden clarity with lines like “The cobwebb’d cottage, with its ragged wall / Of mouldering mud, is royalty to me!” (NT 1.77). The line is meant to show the sudden awareness of shifting value. However, to Whitehead, this line and others in the same vein appeared to be absurdly contradictory statements. He mocks them throughout the poem, portraying the speaker gasping that that “Silence sounds Alarms / To me, and Darkness dazzles my weak Mind!” Because Whitehead doesn’t understand Young’s larger arguments about value and capital, the contrasts simply read as complaints. Thus, he illustrates Young as kvetching that “Vain Life to me / Is but a tatter’d Garment, --a patch’d Rag, / That ill defends me from the Cold of Age.” This seems to have been Whitehead’s impression of Young’s entire poem: a man ranting that black was white, and bright was dark. *Night Thoughts*' elevation of labor was recognized, but interpreted as more of the same, so it is mimicked with lines that proclaim “A Life of Labour is a Life of Ease; / Pain gives true Joy, and Want is Luxury.”

“The Vindication,” published in 1754, and written by an anonymous author, is the only parody written by an author who took time to read the entire poem a linear fashion (as evidenced by the fact that his response poem proceeds through the entire work, from the first night, to the

ninth, citing specific lines in the margin to help readers connect. In the introduction to the “Vindication,” the author explains that he had read the first night at the time of its original publication, and had been distressed, and only years later finished the entire poem. He expresses approval of the final redemption of the poem, but explains that his rebuke to the first eight nights still stands. Reading the “Vindication”, it is evident that the author would have benefited from understanding Young’s arguments about ambition and glory (contained in the sixth and seventh nights). Without them, what the author sees is that is that Young is suggesting that life itself is worthless. The author of “The Vindication” sees life itself as inherently valuable, and does not understand or even grasp Young’s attempt to spur capitalistic activity.

***Night Thoughts* and George Eliot: changing opinions about authors’ involvement in business**

Perhaps the most famous criticism of Young’s poem was written by the novelist George Eliot, in her 1857 evisceration of both *Night Thoughts* and its author. “Worldliness and Otherworldliness: the Poet Young” devoted sixty pages to demonstrating that Young showed a “deficient human sympathy” in contrast to the more “genuine love” of poets like William Cowper. Besides being underwhelmed by Young’s imagery, and contemptuous of his statement that “Virtue is a Crime; A Crime to *Reason*, if it costs us Pain *Unpaid*” (VII.710-712), Eliot is quite obviously appalled, from the start, at a divine who shows an interest in money as well as in spirituality, at “a poet whose imagination is alternately fired by the Last Day and by a creation of peers, who fluctuates between rhapsodic applause of King George and rhapsodic applause of Jehovah.”²⁵ To her, combining these interests is an overt sign of corruption.

²⁵ (Published originally in the Westminster Review, January 1857. Eliot) 335.

However, examining Eliot's distaste is to look critically at how literary history and economic history are sometimes poorly joined. The evolution of literary discourse is a beloved subject generally, as is the evolution of literary discourse in reaction to the Industrial Revolution and the development of literary publishing. What has been forgotten in the case of Eliot and Young is that the evolution of economic discourse is also germane. Eliot composed her review when the genre of political economy was well established, nearly ten years after J.S. Mill had published the final volumes of *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), and only about a decade before the rise of neoclassical economics in the 1870s. The concept of the expert authority on political economy had taken a firm hold during her lifetime, and it did not mesh with the identity of the romantic poet.²⁶

In addition, the novelist and the poet developed their careers approximately a century apart, and the changing perspectives on the profession of literary authorship cannot be discounted. In 1847, Eliot's future husband, G. H. Lewes had declared in *Fraser's Magazine* that

Literature should be a profession, not a trade. It should be a profession, just lucrative enough to furnish a decent subsistence to its members, but in no way lucrative enough to tempt speculators. As soon as its rewards are high enough and secure enough to tempt men to enter the lists for the sake of the reward, and parents think of it as an opening for their sons, from that moment it becomes vitiated. Then will the ranks, already so numerous, be swelled by an innumerable host of hungry pretenders[:]...barristers with scarce briefs, physicians with few patients, clergymen on small livings, idle women, rich men, and a large crop of aspiring noodles... (qtd. in Woodmansee and Osteen 6)

²⁶ Thomas Pinney, *op. cit.*, 336, notes in his introduction to Eliot's essay that she found the essay difficult to write, citing her mature judgment of Young as "entirely opposed to our youthful predilections and enthusiasm."

Lewes went on in the same article to hail Samuel Johnson as the “first professional author... free from the slavery of a bookseller’s hack, and free from the still worse slavery of attendance on the great.”(Woodmansee and Osteen 6) It is tempting to wonder what Lewes would have made of the commercial shenanigans that took place between Pope and bookseller Edmund Curll.(See Ingrassia) That Lewes’ opinion, with its suspicions of clergymen on small livings aspiring to be authors, was still prevalent ten years later is evident from the approach taken by John Doran, who produced a memoir of Young’s life which Eliot consulted while she wrote her review.(Young and Doran) Though Doran proceeds systematically through Young’s chronology of productions, he is at his most expressive on the subject of the poet’s attempts to secure patronage. Young’s first verses, he recounts, were published in “the hugest of forms, and in the most stupendous of types. It is as modest and unflattering a strain as poets could then use when writing to their patrons” (xx). The next poetic publication of any note is Young’s “The Last Day,” accompanied by a dedication to Queen Anne, of which the style, we are told, “is that of flattery gone mad; a Chinese sovereign would almost blush at hearing himself so bepraised. Lin Sin, who forbade his ministers to trouble him with any of the affairs of his empire, was never insulted in more awkwardly stupendous bombast” (xxiv). Doran’s biography might well be titled “Life of the Poet, and his Income,” as the descriptions of literary productions are bracketed by the descriptions of livings, bonds, annuities, and other payments received, including the warrant for a £200 annual pension, received by Young in 1726; and an account of Young’s attempt to secure funding from Lady Mary Wortley Montague for the staging of his tragedy, “The Brothers.”

So much attention to money is present in the biography that it would be hard to imagine its not making a striking impression upon Eliot. Doran, it must be said, engages in a bit of

detective work. He notes that a few years after receiving his royal pension, some time between 1730 and 1732, Young was ordained and provided with a living at Welwyn, in Hertfordshire, and a £300 per annum pension. Doran then presents a letter, undated, but written, he calculates, shortly after Young succeeded to the Welwyn post. In it, he addresses the king's mistress, claiming that he has "no manner of preferment," and has "lost £300 per annum, by being in His Majesty's service" for the past seven years (lv). Doran suggests that Young may have been wholly untruthful in claiming no means of preferment; though this claim cannot be fully resolved one way or the other. More plausible is the idea that the poet's logic was based on his calculations of what he would have earned had he been ordained seven years earlier. The sum is dubious in that it assumes no change whatsoever in the amount of the Welwyn pension – but it displays Young's proclivity to assess his situation in terms of long-term financial arithmetic.

Herbert Croft's *Life of Young*, produced for Samuel Johnson in 1780, shows a similar though less intense attentiveness to money matters; but also telltale indications of flawed research. Croft suggests that in the South Sea Company collapse, Young lost a considerable amount of his £3,000 earnings from the publication of *The Love of Fame – The Universal Passion*, a series of seven satires. As the South Sea Bubble occurred in 1721-22, and as Young's satires were published between 1725 and 1728, this cannot be the case, though it also does not rule out the possibility that Young lost money in the crash. The evidence for this, according to the *Life*, is that Young's allusion to the South Sea debacle (4.75) is a sure indication of his having suffered as a result of it. Croft's assumption is that Young could have no reason to reference the South Sea Company other than poetic vengeance; and if typical, it is indicative that it was considered unusual, by the late eighteenth century, for a literary author to show any interest in the market for other than critique.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown precisely how *Night Thoughts* developed a reputation as a deeply Christian poem focused on conversion, redemption and piety. Its readers' interpretations, and their activities, have played a far larger role in shaping our understanding of the poem than what Young actually wrote. In all probability, the format of the poem and its publication did not aid Young's cause: readers' interpretations were set by the time he had published the first few nights, and the last parts of the poem were too long for anyone to piece together what the various arguments added up to. The original audiences' interpretations were passed onto Victorian critics, and then taken up by early twentieth century literary critics, who used them to make *Night Thoughts* into the cornerstone of the graveyard school, where it was left to grow critical moss, and to be occasionally trotted out as a relic of the decades between Augustan and Romantic poetry.

My research in this chapter has implications for the "graveyard school" label. As I have shown, there was not a conscious effort on poets' part to form a "school," or to produce, as a group, poetry that used images of graveyards, melancholy evenings, etc., in order to proselytize or encourage religious devotion. However, if *Night Thoughts* is any indication, many of the original readers of these poems had a particular appetite for just such devotional poetry, and the ability and opportunity to promote devotional interpretations through the practices of commonplacing and quoting. In other words, there *is* a graveyard school – but it is the creation of eighteenth century readers, rather than eighteenth century authors.

Conclusion

This dissertation can be said to be framed around two questions: how did Edward Young think about value and economics, and why did his economic thinking go unnoticed for so long? I have demonstrated that the answers to these questions are anything but simple. Looking at how poets negotiate systems of value, and how critics have largely remained unaware of this dimension of their poetry, opens up the middle decades of the eighteenth century which for decades have been thought of as more gloomy than good. In the previous three chapters, I have introduced previously unnoticed economic dimensions of four poets from the mid-eighteenth century. There is Edward Young, who imagined an economic system wherein his own labor was valuable because of the effort he had put into it; and where everyone else around him participated in the same system. There is Thomas Parnell, who wrote about pursuing the aesthetic value that would make him a worthy and successful poet. In his most famous poem, the “Night Piece on Death,” the solemn nocturnal and melancholy imagery that he used was representative of his disappointment at failed ambitions, and that the aesthetic value he pursued never came to fruition. William Shenstone’s early poems shift rapidly between two distinct types of merit: one that can “make the world obey,” and another that consists simply of being loved. In his poetry, Shenstone struggles to figure out where merit comes from – whether it is the product of perfect unfailing goodness, or from being bad, and being punished, and learning a lesson. And then there is James Thomson, who is the most successful of the four, writing about industry as part of the harmony of life on earth, and the abundant value that God produces.

Of these four, Thomson’s engagement with value is the simplest, exhibiting the belief that if you work, good things will happen, and never questioning it. In all likelihood, this reflects his professional success, which came easily, compared to the other three poets. He was not put

into a position where he needed to question why success did not come, or to try to figure out whether he had offered insufficient value, or the wrong kind of value, in exchange.

The conventional view of the graveyard school is as a group of poets united by common religious convictions. I have shown, using Young, and *Night Thoughts*' afterlife in quotations, excerpts, and reprints, that it is more likely that the association of the graveyard school with Christianity is more likely the result of readers' activities than of authors. If there is a unifying characteristic common to these four poets, it is an interest in success, and an equal concern about failure. Even virtue is itself a type of value that poets handled in an economic fashion; and otherworldliness was rarely a thorough rejection of the world, but rather, an entanglement with it. Virtue and otherworldliness were ideas that allowed the individuals who wrote about them to grapple with how to participate in the world. Seeing value, figuring out what that value allows, and exploring how one participates in a system, and the rules and contingencies that govern it – these are all key aspects of economic activity. They are not economic knowledge or expertise as defined by the discipline of economics, which prizes information leading directly to profit – but to acknowledge that is only to acknowledge that most people do not self-identify as economists. Perhaps more people should; or rather, perhaps there needs to be a sphere of economic knowledge and thinking that exists in relation to that of the authorities, but is still judged as relevant to economic studies.

Having demonstrated that there is economic content in these four poets, am I suggesting that all the graveyard poetry is in fact, economic? That it is really not about devotion and piety, but about value? That God is and has always been, the ultimate banker? No. In Edward Young's case, something like that might be true, but to extend Young's vision broadly would blur and mute the individual complexity of other voices from this period. Young was almost certainly

consciously making arguments about an economic system that involved and transcended the “official” or “real” institutions of eighteenth-century England, i.e., publishing and patronage, in which he saw himself as participating. Parnell was far less bold – he was aware of the success of other poets, like Pope, and aware that certain activities, like retreating to rural pursuits, were meant to encourage success – but not aware enough to critique them. Shenstone, on the other hand, starts out with stars in his eyes and visions of perfection, which he then has to modify to match reality. His concern becomes one of whether value is pure unblemished perfection, or something rougher that bears the clear evidence of labor and effort. Thomson, meanwhile, is concerned about making sense that work is steady, and shared, compassionately, by all, lest the absence of work, or of humane work, threaten Nature and humanity. There are varied perceptions of value in these four poets, and multiple interpretations of how systems (some simple, some complex) govern aspects of human life.

At the same time they are negotiating value, all four poets are negotiating with their patrons, publishers, and audiences, writing what they hope will bring them success. As a result of his commercial goals, Young buries the clearest articulation of his argument part way through *Night Thoughts*, choosing to start with a more sentimental opening. In other words, their thinking about value, and about different economic systems, is influenced and shaped by the conventions of the genres and forms that are available, and by the characteristics of the media environment. I have suggested in my readings that thinking about value is highly personal and highly emotional – that poets engage with value not only by thinking about money directly, but by imagining how different types of value change the self, as Parnell does in “A Fairy Story,” or by imagining romances that hinge upon complex transactions and the values of both partners, as Shenstone does in the two versions of his “Pastoral Ballad.” The eighteenth century is the first major

commercial publishing era – and with its onset, we see a rise in poems on similar topics, such as sloth and industry, idleness and virtue, and health and sickness. The similarity of their titles, and sometimes, the apparent aphoristic confidence of their assertions (“Virtue is all in all!” “Procrastination is the Thief of Time!”) can suggest that their content is simplistic: an endless parade of didactic morals. It is true that some critics – like Blackmore and Dennis – do offer such bald statements, and appear to mean them – and true that some poems offer them as well! But what my readings of Parnell, Thomson, Shenstone, and Young, as well as other poets from this era, indicate, is that poets often challenge the simplicity of such statements. They struggle with the real complexity that is hidden by the pat moral clichés. Often, they grapple with the pat morals even while simultaneously seeming to elevate them! The particular literary and stylistic features that are prevalent during any one period will shape the type of thinking about labor, value, money, and exchange, that emerge – thus, in eighteenth century poetry, which can be highly aphoristic, we see people dealing with pat pronouncements about work. In the same measure, since another common feature in eighteenth century is lengthy, meandering free verse, we see drawn-out discussions that wander through the minute details of issues about value, slowly accruing into massive arguments. Even the commonplacing and remixing activities that I have surveyed in the third chapter are part of this phenomenon.

Based on what I have shown in the prior three chapters, I want to assert that our definitions of economic knowledge and thinking need to be adjusted. Economic thinking is negotiation – the product of individuals seizing and struggling with numerous constraints and opportunities. Economic thinking is responsive to both explicitly visible and tacit institutional structures, and to prevailing ideologies of any particular environment. Such economic engagement may be characterized by a mixture of tentativeness and assertiveness; or by spouting

truisms as though they are obvious, and then questioning them. It is highly heterogeneous and individualistic, and affected by individual access to resources. Finally, in the eighteenth century especially, it is not separate from but entwined with religious thought. In short, I am saying that this sort of economic thought is, in a word, messy.

However, for all its messiness, it is no less important to thinking about the monetary economy. To explain, I need to turn to a more contemporary colloquialism: the phrase “pull yourself up by your bootstraps,” sometimes referred to as bootstrapping. To pull yourself up by your bootstraps is to do what it takes in order to achieve success. Implicitly, this success is economic, related to serving as a productive member of society. Also implicit is the idea that such success is possible purely through individual efforts. The metaphor of bootstrapping may originate in the eighteenth century German tall tales of Baron von Munchausen, who at one point, pulls himself and his horse out of the mud by his own pigtail – but its greatest usage has been in twentieth century economic contexts. James Joyce, in *Ulysses*, writes of those “who had forced their way to the top from the lowest rung by the aid of their bootstraps.”²⁷ To literally pull oneself up by one’s own bootstraps is impossible – it is a euphemism for a whole host of choices and actions that individuals must take. The idea of bootstrapping, and its invocation, has been fraught with tension because it connotes ease and simplicity, portraying economic success as a direct and accessible result of a single action.

Much of the economic content – the negotiations with value that I have uncovered in mid-eighteenth century – is related to bootstrapping -- to figuring out one’s position, and what is possible from that position, in order to pull oneself up. It is self-made economic knowledge, though influenced by external factors. It involves participation in any number of non-monetary types of value, i.e., virtue, merit, acclaim – but from the perspectives of the individuals involved,

²⁷ (“Boot-Strap | Bootstrap, N.”) *Oxford English Dictionary*. Accessed May 6th, 2014.

these economies (which sometimes intersect, and other times run parallel to the monetary economy), are just as important. Perhaps they might even be more important than the monetary economy, especially if they are more accessible. While their knowledge is not authoritative by the disciplinary standards of economics, such knowledge is an exceedingly important part of the texture of any general or specifically economic history. Moreover, understanding that this dimension of economic thinking exists, and is a strong current in poetry from this period, has the potential to significantly impact how such poetry is treated in criticism, and how literary critics categorize economic thought as it appears in literature.

These assertions made, I feel that I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the incompleteness of my studies as represented by this dissertation. I chose to read the poetry of the middle decades of the eighteenth century in depth, rather than contrasting the type of economic thinking that may be found in eighteenth century novels. This is partly because novels, as very different genres from poems, provide a different surface for negotiating with value. To explain this difference in a highly abbreviated fashion, I can say that poetry promotes exploratory, conceptual thinking about economic systems, more free-form than the novelistic form allows. Novels tend to explore and critique existing specific economic systems from a position of verisimilitude, and poetry is not bound by verisimilitude in the same way. I look forward to investigating some of the key differences of economic thought in the two genres at greater length in my future research.

Similarly, this dissertation in its current form, deals only briefly with women writers. Their near exclusion reflects that fewer women were writing poetry than men during these decades, as well as differences in women's autonomy and the structures through which they published their work. This is not to minimize women's grasp of economics in any way, or to

suggest that they did not face complex situations. An early draft of the second chapter included a discussion and profile of Ann Yearsley, whose relationship with Hannah More is certainly worth study; that discussion was excluded by my decision to limit the main area of analysis from 1720-1760. Any expansion of this dissertation will certainly deal with Yearsley and other women writers in greater detail than these three chapters.

Finally, the primary problem with the category of the graveyard school is that it is based on too-slender readings of *Night Thoughts*, and of mid-eighteenth century poets generally. I have rectified this somewhat by presenting much more in-depth readings of Young's poem, and of Thomson, Shenstone, and Parnell's bodies of work. The result has demonstrated that there is much in their poems that is worth further critical commentary and study. However, I could fill two dissertations with readings of poets from this period, and still be guilty of covering only a mere sliver of the output that exists. The volume of work published presents a problem that is ripe for digital humanities intervention. Computing techniques will be able to handle the volume of poetry published during this period, and identify phrases that are repeated throughout different poems, providing information about the density in which they appear. Being able to see concentrations of particular words and phrases will provide vital traction in a sea of verse. It will allow me to target poems and poets with a wider net than canonicity allows. With these tools and techniques, it will be possible, perhaps for the first time, to see graveyard poetry in its full scope, and understand it as the product of multiple influences: stylistic, religious, political, philosophical, and commercial.

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