

**Translating the Dead:
Bodies, Burials, and British Romanticism**

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THESIS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AAP</i>	<i>America: A Prophecy</i>
<i>AI</i>	<i>Auto-Icon: Or, Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living</i>
<i>CHP</i>	<i>Childe Harold's Pilgrimage</i>
<i>DJ</i>	<i>Don Juan</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>Essays upon Epitaphs</i>
<i>Eur</i>	<i>Europe: A Prophecy</i>
<i>Exc</i>	<i>The Excursion</i>
<i>F</i>	<i>Frankenstein</i>
<i>G</i>	<i>The Giaour</i>
<i>KJV</i>	<i>The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha</i>
<i>LB</i>	<i>Lyrical Ballads</i>
<i>LM</i>	<i>The Last Man</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>VRW</i>	<i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i>

SUMMARY

The Romantic period gave rise to a conception of the corpse as being not, or not only, the soul's cast-off remains but a potential asset in itself for imagining human possibility and aiding progress. The corpses and graves portrayed in British Romantic literature resonate within debates carried out in the popular press and in Parliament concerning burial reform, anatomy reform, and the politically-charged translation of remains that viewed the corpse as potentially useful to the living. Reading the imaginary literature in this context encourages a reconsideration of the roles of memory and imagination in Romantic writing—especially as they pertain to remembering and memorializing the dead—as being forward-looking and socially and politically engaged.

I argue that Romantic poets, novelists, and essayists locate the utility of dead bodies and burials in their capacity to act as channels for the imaginative retention, re-creation, and translation of the dead from past to future to benefit the individual and better society. Although many writers of the period share the tendency to view the corpse and its postmortem care as potentially useful, they explore various modes by which that use value might be realized. This project examines a number of those modes and the shifting relationships between the corporeal form and the imaginative literary response to it that transforms and translates the knowledge, character, and experiences of the dead to and for the future.

The first chapter establishes the historical and critical context for the project. The second chapter demonstrates how the disappearance of the dead in Wordsworth's poetry enables their imaginative re-creation and memorial dispersal. The third chapter reveals how Byron invests the "dust" of the dead mingling into the soil of a particular place with regenerative potential. The fourth chapter traces Mary Shelley's evolving understanding of how the living learn from the dead: from the detachment of sight to mutual engagement at burial sites. The fifth chapter addresses Hemans's and Bentham's creation of preserved effigial forms to supplement memory.

I. INTRODUCTION: LIVING WITH THE DEAD

“Why lie around on your back [as a corpse] when you can do something interesting and new, something *useful*?” So asks Mary Roach in the introduction to her 2003 *New York Times* bestseller *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* (9, original emphasis). A startling question, perhaps, but not a new concept. During the late eighteenth to mid nineteenth centuries, too many too-visible corpses presented a problem, but any number of creative solutions were proposed to turn that problem into opportunity and make the dead *useful* in spheres as diverse as aesthetics, commerce, agriculture, and urban development. For instance, an “indestructible substance” made from boiled bones could be cast into “busts that would offer the inestimable benefit of being portraits created from the very substance of a father, a mother, or a wife” (qtd. in Ozouf 330).¹ The linen-rag found on mummies which contained “a great portion of the acid used for the preservation of the bodies” might be used in paper-making (qtd. in Stauffer 15).² Bodies could be composted in fields leased as temporary cemeteries for twenty-one years: burials would be conducted for the first fourteen years; the bodies would decompose for an additional seven; then the land would “revert to the landlord, and be cultivated, planted, or laid down in grass” (qtd. in “Cemeteries” 451).³ Alternately, “the ashes resulting from cremation [might be used] as a fertilizer,” or “illuminating gas for general use [could be produced] from the combustion of corpses” (Erichsen 159, 158). Or, corpses might be used “as landfill for the Thames Estuary” in much the way interments had raised the surface of the Holborn Burial-ground fifteen to eighteen feet over the course of three centuries (Arnold 160).⁴ Perhaps not surprisingly, these particular proposals remained in the speculative state or were not widely adopted.

The problem of how to deal with the dead was real, however, and during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Britain, corpses occupied a startlingly prominent place in debates occurring in the popular press, Parliament, poetry, and prose about the place of

the dead among the living. The Romantic period gave rise to a new conception of the corpse as being not, or not only, the soul's cast-off remains but a potential asset in itself for thinking about human possibility and aiding progress toward a better future. The corpses and graves portrayed in British Romantic literature resonate within contemporary discussions about anatomy reform, burial reform, and the politically-charged translation and preservation of remains that viewed the corpse as potentially useful to the living. Reading the literature in this context encourages a reconsideration of the roles of memory and imagination in Romantic writing—especially as they pertain to remembering and memorializing the dead—as not being primarily oriented toward the past or the individual, but as being forward-looking and socially and politically engaged.

Romantic poets, novelists, and essayists locate the utility of dead bodies and burials in their capacity to act as channels for the imaginative retention, re-creation, and translation of the dead from past to future to benefit the individual and better society. Although they share the tendency to view the corpse and its postmortem care as potentially useful, they explore various modes by which that use value might be realized. On the one hand, in the poems of *Lyrical Ballads* William Wordsworth depicts village churchyards as green, domestic spaces that obscure the unpleasantness of death and the dead. Here, as he later writes in the first of his *Essays upon Epitaphs*, the character of the dead may be remembered “through a tender haze or a luminous mist” (*EE* 1.58). Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, on the other hand, shows no such tender vision as he studies the decaying dead in graveyards and fashions a being he later regards as unholy out of “bones from charnel houses” and materials from the “dissecting room and the slaughter-house” (*F* 32). Jeremy Bentham also writes into existence a corporeal form created from dissecting room remainders: his own bones and head. His plans for the public dissection of his body and display of his Auto-Icon—carried out at his death in 1832—were intended to dispel superstitious reverence for corpses and promote Parliament's passage of the Anatomy Act which would make

the bodies of the unclaimed poor available for anatomical dissection, but his multi-media *Auto-Icon* project was also meant to maintain the dead among the living as active participants in all spheres of human activity. These competing visions of the proper and ethical treatment of the dead share a common impetus: disposing of the dead to benefit the living.

With the “Translating” of my title, I seek to emphasize the first definition of the word, the idea of movement from one place to another, and specifically the removal of a body or relics to another burial place (*OED*, “translate, v.” Def. I.1a); however, notions of linguistic translation, though not my focus, are at play here as well. Romantic writers translate bodies and burials into and through literary language in order to explore how the ideas, knowledge, character, and moral worth of the past might be translated to and for the future. Contemporary theories of linguistic translation were preoccupied with similar concerns. For instance, in a treatise read at the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin on 24 June 1813, Friedrich Schleiermacher acknowledges the impossibility of a perfect translation at the same time he argues for the necessity of translation for the preservation, dissemination, and continuation of arts and scholarship: “our nation seems destined, because of its respect for things foreign, and because of its disposition toward mediation, to carry all of the treasures of foreign art and scholarship, together with its own, in its language, to unite them into a great historical whole, as it were, which would be kept safe in the center and heart of Europe” (53-54). Schleiermacher’s stance exemplifies a new attitude toward translation that developed during the mid-eighteenth century which emphasized respect and responsibility toward the foreign aspects of the original language rather than exploitation of the source language for the linguistic and aesthetic benefit of the translator’s own (Schulte and Biguenet 2-3). Rather than thinking of the translator as a “conqueror” who liberates thought imprisoned in the original language as Saint Jerome puts it (the theory that dominated European translation from the Roman Empire through the Renaissance), the late eighteenth century saw a

move toward a more cosmopolitan notion of translation which paralleled increasing toleration of cultural differences (Friedrich 12-13, 14).

The issues and ethical complexities of bodily translation that reformers and writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries debated resemble and overlap concerns about linguistic translation of the same period.⁵ For instance, Lord Byron's poetic rejection of the appropriation and translation of human remains and cultural relics for personal and political gain might be seen as corresponding to a rejection of the older theory of linguistic translation as conquest. His poetry urges readers to move toward the dead and the future potential represented by cultural relics rather than move the dead and cultural artifacts toward themselves and their own imperial ambitions. He chooses for himself the first of what Schleiermacher argues are the only two approaches to translation: "Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader" (42). The crux of the debates about how usefully to dispose of the dead could be seen as revolving around a similar formulation: Either the translator (burial reformer, pantheon creator, antiquities collector, anatomist, embalmer, poet) leaves the dead alone—intact, *in situ*, as she was in life, as he is in death—as much as possible and moves the living toward the dead, or she leaves the living alone as much as possible and moves the dead toward the living. All of the writers in this study explore this tripartite relationship among dead, living, and translator, and they share an impulse to translate bodies and burials so that the dead are retained among the living not simply as static memories bound to the past but as fluid and influential presences now and in the future, but their range of responses reveals the endless nuances that underlie Schleiermacher's deceptively simple formulation. What does it mean to leave the dead or the living alone? How and why might one move either?

A. **Historical Context: Burial Reform, Anatomy Reform, Translation, Preservation**

The extraordinary frequency with which bodies and graves are depicted in British Romantic literature reflects and engages with a larger public conversation about the dead and their disposal. These issues captivated the imagination of people of all classes and walks of life, and not much imagination is needed to understand why: the dead were remarkably visible in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. From the private laying out of bodies in homes to the public hangings outside Newgate Prison and in any number of venues in between, “see[ing] dead people” at the turn of the nineteenth century was not nearly the exotic experience M. Night Shyamalan made it seem at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The burial reform debates that played out in the press often employed heightened rhetoric to emphasize the visual—as well as olfactory—horrors of overcrowded graveyards to incite disgust and to urge change. In 1792 John Ferriar, MD, links poverty with the sickening sights and smells of the graveyards to warn the wealthy of the miasma that rises from the rotting, pestilential bodies of the poor and, “by secret avenues...reaches the most opulent, and severely revenges their neglect, or insensibility to the wretchedness surrounding them” (qtd. in Laqueur “Bodies” 123). In 1793, naturalist and antiquary Thomas Pennant, in *Some Account of London*, described a visit to the churchyard of St. Giles-in-the-Fields thus:

In the church-yard I have observed with horror a great square pit, with many rows of coffins piled one upon the other, all exposed to sight and smell. Some of the piles were incomplete, expecting the mortality of the night. I turned away disgusted at the view, and scandalized at the want of police, which so little regards the health of the living as to permit so many putrid corpses, tacked between some slight boards, dispersing their effluvia over the capital. (qtd. in Richardson *Death* 60)

The language and imagery of the Gothic-tinged burial reform discourse was powerful and ubiquitous enough that it could appear in other, less obvious, settings to emphasize unnatural chaos. For instance, when Edmund Burke, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790),

describes the seizure of the king and queen, the description of the palace echoes those of foul graveyards: The king, queen, and their children were “forced to abandon the sanctuary of the most splendid palace in the world, which they left swimming in blood, polluted by massacre, and strewn with scattered limbs and mutilated carcasses” (164). Polluted, limb- and carcass-covered spaces—the stuff of Gothic nightmare or a description of the neighborhood churchyard?⁶

Other burial reform advocates emphasized the dignity of the dead and the obligations of the living to maintain burial sites properly. For instance, in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1794), a writer laments the “neglect of public cemeteries” in his town “where the venerable remains of the dead, ‘hearsed in earth’ for, perhaps, a thousand years, have ‘burst their cerements,’ and have been exposed to every insult and indignity which the unprotected can experience” (Antiquariolus 1083, 1084). In addition to respect and care for the dead, advocates of burial reform increasingly emphasized respect and care for the health and wellbeing of the living which were endangered by exposure to decaying corpses. “M.N.” uses this type of argument in a letter of 1801 to *The Gentleman's Magazine*: “It is a natural supposition, and which no one can doubt, that air the which exhales from a putrid body must be unwholesome and poisonous to breathe; and that in large towns, where the burying ground is small and confined, it must be prejudicial to the health of the inhabitants and produce fevers of a serious nature” (M.N. 1177).⁷ Many accounts exist of urban churchyards so full of corpses that their surface levels rose above the ground floor of the churches they encircled, almost to the windows of the surrounding dwellings. In other instances such as the notorious Enon Chapel, church vaults were crammed with bodies from floor to ceiling; children attending Sunday School there called the insects that fed on the putrifying corpses “body bugs” (Mellor and Parsons 3-4).⁸ M.N. claims that the health of the living should be of more importance than the moral responsibility of not disturbing the dead; thus, he argues for “the propriety of removing our *burying-grounds* to some airy spot adjoining our towns;

detached from any communication with the houses, properly inclosed, and planted round with the dark and gloomy yew.” He further urges wardens to show more respect for the dead and care appropriately for “human bones that are cast from their graves” so they are “not permitted to be kicked about or beat with a pickaxe from corner to corner” (M.N. 1178). Wordsworth’s poem “To a Sexton” echoes these concerns as the lyric speaker stops the Sexton in the act of removing remains from the graveyard to the charnel house to make room for more burials, a common practice of the period, to ask why he is “piling still / In thy bone-house bone on bone?” (*LB* 2-3).

Although Wordsworth was aware of the material conditions of churchyards, “To a Sexton” is unusual, for his graveyard poetry typically hides the corporeal dead from sight and carefully distances the dead from the living in order to facilitate the imaginative re-creation of their characters and virtues rather than focus on their physical and moral decay. By offering a place for the living to remember and imaginatively respond to the dead, Wordsworth poetic graveyards provide much the same benefits for the living as contemporary burial reform advocates envisioned of commercial garden-like cemeteries.⁹ The concept of the ideal cemetery that began to develop during the Romantic period and came to fruition during the Victorian period involved situating the buried dead at a removed but accessible distance from population centers, hiding corporeal remains within unbreached graves and mausolea, and creating aesthetically pleasing spaces in which the living could remember the dead without recalling the ugliness of death. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, suggestions such as M.N.’s transformed into the more organized efforts of joint-stock companies to develop for-profit private cemeteries. These efforts eventually led to an Act of Parliament in July 1832 that granted the London Cemetery Company the right to open a cemetery at Kensal Green. Others quickly followed, creating a “*cordon sanitaire*” of seven private garden cemeteries around London inspired by the grand Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris (Mellor and Parsons 6).

The plans for garden cemeteries, with their extensive landscaping, elegant walkways, and impressive architecture and sculpture, were intended to distance the living not only from the dead but also from *death* by creating beautiful spaces where the living could remember loved ones without tangible reminders of mortality and decay. John Strang, in *Necropolis Glasguensis; with Osbervations* [sic] *on Ancient and Modern Tombs and Sepulture* (1831), urged the formation of “a Scottish *Père La Chaise*” in Glasgow. Unlike the pestilential, rundown churchyards he and his Scottish contemporaries knew, at Père-Lachaise “all the disagreeable sensations...coupled with a churchyard, are dispelled by the beauty of the garden, the variety of its walks, by the romantic nature of its situation, and, above all, by the commanding view of Paris and its environs.” Here, “the contemplative mind” could be “not only impressed with sentiments of solemn sublimity and religious awe, but with those of the most tender and heart-affecting melancholy” (qtd. in Curl 46). Kensal Green could effect a similar state of mind according to Victorian historian Edward Walford who, in his *Old and New London: A Narrative of its History, its People, and its Places* (c. 1875), describes the cemetery as offering visitors many places to stop and an “almost endless number of subjects for meditation” (qtd. in Curl 60).

Like these burial reform projects, Wordsworth’s memorializing project generally obscures the corporeality of the corpse, but in “The Tables Turned,” with the line “—We murder to dissect” (*LB* 28), he alludes to a distinctly material issue regarding the dead: grave robbing and the more insidious practice of murdering victims to supply freshly-dead cadavers for anatomists. This latter practice was made notorious by William Burke and William Hare in Edinburgh thirty years after Wordsworth’s poem was written in 1798, but they were not the first to “murder to dissect” and they were certainly not the first to procure bodies for anatomists under less than honorable circumstances, for supply of corpses was limited and demand was great.¹⁰ The earliest grave-robbers were surgeon/anatomists and their pupils; later, students accompanied

professional body snatchers as both observers and participants to obtain bodies for their own use or to give their anatomy professors in lieu of tuition fees (Richardson *Death* 54). Mary Shelley, whose work I address in the fourth chapter, was surely thinking of these “Resurrection Men” and the anatomy students they supplied as she wrote *Frankenstein*. As a girl she spent much time at her mother’s grave in St. Pancras churchyard, a well known site for body-snatching due to its convenient location and relative isolation (*Death* xiii). Thomas Laqueur explains the economic impetus behind the upswing in grave robbing activity during the Romantic period: between the 1790s and the 1820s, the “price of a subject” which anatomists would pay increased eightfold, and if the market were tight, by up to approximately fifteen times the rate of the 1790s (“Bodies” 123). Proponents of anatomy reform sought make the dead more useful by making cadavers more reliably available. Despite popular fears that dissection denied the “subject” life in the world to come, anatomy reform advocates such as Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham and his friend (and dissector) Dr. Thomas Southwood Smith lobbied to make the bodies of paupers dying in workhouses and hospitals available for dissection. The Anatomy Act passed in 1832.

As anatomists and their suppliers were moving the dead surreptitiously out of graves and relocating them to dissecting theaters, others were overtly translating human and cultural relics from their original sites of interment to exploit not their material bodies but the intellect and accomplishments those bodies represented. For the Jacobins, the appropriation and relocation of bodies to a monumental mausoleum was intended to consolidate power and legitimate a new, secular government, and the neo-classical Panthéon in Paris provided a crucial illustration for the founding narrative of a new political order.¹¹ This understanding and use of the dead is certainly not new or in itself revolutionary. Robert Pogue Harrison notes that in *The Aeneid*, Virgil gives a “retrospective epic of Rome’s founding” by having Aeneas bury people at places that will be important to Rome’s political and territorial claims (Harrison 26-27). Ann Yearsley’s 523-line

epic poem *Brutus: A Fragment* (1796) provides a Romantic-era example of both cultural and bodily appropriation with its similar retrospective founding tale for Great Britain. The “Troy- and Italy-emigrant Brutus” tames the “hydra Anarchy” when he reaches the British shore, but the establishment of the new order relies equally on the remains and relics that have already become part of the land (Tucker 61; Yearsley 175). Brutus initially encounters the Hermia as she mourns her father whom she has memorialized with “A rustic altar” constructed “Beneath an [English] oak” (Yearsley 368, 367). Her father had sailed from Italy with Brutus but had been lost in a gale; he then preceded Brutus to the British Isles, died, and established a claim on the land through the burial of his body and the “precious relic” of Hermia that he left behind (466). Brutus affirms and extends that claim to the land by uniting with the “Trojan born” Hermia who embodies the heritage of both the “civilized” Italy of her father’s birth and the British soil into which her father’s remains decay so together they can “found another Troy” (429, 469).¹² As I will discuss in the third chapter, Lord Byron also understands the value of burial sites for establishing ancestral, cultural, and political legitimacy, and he too (with more complexity and subtlety, as well as more commercial popularity) poetically invests the places where remains decay with future potential, but rather than create new founding narratives, he reclaims the past and the heritage that has been usurped in the interests of political glory and imperial ambition.¹³

Byron insists on letting the dead decay and mingle into place, in part because this makes the dead non-transferable, permanently part of the place to which they belong and not subject to the vagaries of those who would translate and display corporeal remains for their own interests, but decay was the enemy for many in the Romantic period who sought new and better ways to preserve the corporeal dead. By as early as the late seventeenth century, professional undertakers appeared, and throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth centuries, the care of the corpse shifted inexorably from the domestic realm into the public, commercialized sphere

(Laqueur “Bodies” 113-14; Richardson *Death* 17-22). Embalming methods were developed, improved, and, as a result of the embalming of Princess Charlotte after her death in childbirth in 1817, were widely and publicly discussed (Richardson *Death* 171). The increased interest in anatomy and surgery led to greater numbers of dissections and the preservation of interesting specimens—in whole or in part—for inclusion in anatomy school classrooms and in anatomy collections and museums. The preserved dead human body was an object of aesthetic interest as well as scientific interest. In 1775, the Royal Academy of Arts, under the direction of Professor of Anatomy William Hunter, acquired the body of one of eight men hanged at Tyburn which was posed then flayed to expose the external muscles. A mold was made of the body, and the resulting cast has been used as a model by generations of art students (Richardson *Death* 37).¹⁴ The work of Bentham and poet Felicia Hemans, addressed in the final chapter, reveals how the conflation of corpse and curio, dead body and sculptural form, foreground questions of how the preservation of the body relates to the preservation of the memory and knowledge of dead.

The impulse to preserve the dead extended beyond the corporeal. In 1812, the Parochial Registers Act mandated the recording of burials and specified that for each, the name, residence, date of burial, age of the deceased, and name of the clergyman who performed the burial service be listed. Furthermore, the law provided instructions for the storage and preservation of the burial registers themselves which were to be “safely and securely kept in a dry well-painted Iron Chest” (qtd. in Wiggins 14). Under these provisions, no longer would the dead disappear anonymously in mass graves or under rolling turf; no longer would their preservation—testimony to their once having lived and knowledge of where their remains now decay into the soil—rely on collective memory and oral epitaphs. Their names and those of their final earthly caretakers would, presumably, be neatly archived for eternity, forever accessible to both community members and outsiders. The dead would be preserved in writing.

The focus of the present study is on the preservation of the dead in *literary* writing. Understanding the context in which this work was initially written and read helps to identify in what ways the imaginative literature responds to and engages with the discourses about burial reform, anatomy reform, the translation of relics, and the preservation of bodily remains. This contextualization also helps to clarify what is unique about the literary response; writers of imaginative literature, though also interested in the usefulness of the corpse, understand that usefulness differently than reformers who write for the popular press or speak in Parliament. The poets and authors whose work I study locate the usefulness of the corporeal form in its ability to act as a container of memory and a catalyst for the imaginative reshaping of the future.

B. Literary Context: From Graveyard Poets to the Victorian Celebration of Death

According to cemetery historian Julie Rugg in the introduction to a special issue of the journal *Mortality*, “The subject of the disposal of the dead and of cemeteries in particular has tended to be rather peripheral within the wider death arena both in the UK and abroad” (Introduction 107). A similar case might be made for literary studies of the dead and their disposal (as opposed to death and mourning) in the Romantic period. Perhaps this relative lack of scholarly attention to Romantic-era corpses and graveyards can be attributed, at least in part, to the insistent prevalence of graves in the eras preceding and following it. Sandwiched between the gloomy meditations of the eighteenth-century Graveyard Poets and the literary expressions of the spectacular culture of mourning which James Stevens Curl calls “The Victorian Celebration of Death,” the literature of Romanticism may seem a welcome respite from such oppressive graveyard visions. If there has been a sense that corpses and graves demand less attention from readers and scholars of Romantic literature, this does not stem from their scarcity. If anything, the literature of the period, like the urban graveyards of the time, may be *more* overcrowded with

bodies and graves than the literature that comes before or after. However, literary depictions of dead bodies and burials in this period function differently. Unlike their mid-eighteenth- and mid-nineteenth-century counterparts, Romantic writers tend to employ the corpses and graves in their imaginative work for exploratory instead of explicitly hortatory purposes. Rather than intimidate or berate the living about the condition of their immortal or social souls, Romanticism's speculative engagement with corpses and graves invites readers to participate in envisioning a progressive social, cultural, or political future through and with the dead.

In what are admittedly gross generalizations, I suggest that both Graveyard Poets and Victorian writers often employ dead bodies in the literary landscape to instill in readers a sense of guilt about their own spiritual or social shortcomings, an element that is largely absent from the Romantic literature. Curl, all but eliding the intervening Romantic literature in his survey of the development of the Victorian death culture, argues that the literary works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries inspired and influenced the development of trends which emerged as integral to the Victorian aesthetic responses to death. He addresses the link between Gothic sensibilities—melancholy, gloomy, and sensational—and Victorian deathways, but of primary interest for him is the eighteenth-century phenomenon of valuing the aesthetic, poetic, and emotional aspects of landscapes seen, for instance, in James Thomson's *The Seasons*. Curl argues that the work of the Graveyard Poets specifically—Edward Young, Robert Blair, and Thomas Gray—had the greatest impact on the Victorian celebration of death as churchyards gave way to landscaped suburban cemeteries, the experience of grief, burial, and mourning was aestheticized and commercialized, and a new emphasis was placed on memorializing the dead (1-3). Romantic literary depictions of the dead and their disposal, with their forward- and outward-looking impulses and active involvement of and with the living, simply do not fit into this narrative of introspection and melancholy.

This is not to say that the poets of the eighteenth century are unimportant for the Romantic period. Thomas Gray, for instance, notably provides a foundation and foil for Wordsworth's own graveyard poetry. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, for example, Wordsworth uses Gray's "Sonnet on the Death of Richard West" as an example of prose language that can be adapted to poetry, but Gray offers Wordsworth more than linguistic inspiration. Wallace Jackson and Paul Yoder argue that Gray provides Wordsworth a formal legacy in his exploration of the "progress poem," citing the commonalities between Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" (1751) and the Boy of Winander episode from Book V of *The Prelude* where a speaker stares mute over a "grassy churchyard," and the "Even now" of the present establishes the progress of an earlier experience to the present of the poem (292-93). As I demonstrate in the next chapter, however, the progress of Wordsworth's graveyard poetry does not simply extend to the present and to the speakers who stand above the graves, although this is certainly an important element of his poetry. Wordsworth tries to imagine under what conditions the dead can be transmitted beyond the present moment, beyond intimate acquaintances, in such a way that they "impress and affect" the worldly future of the living (*EE* 1.58).

The Graveyard Poets, following a long tradition, meditate on death at least in part to encourage the anticipation of an otherworldly afterlife. Their death-oriented imagery reveals death to be a leveler, negates the importance of earthly achievements, and encourages speaker and reader to think about what lies beyond this uncertain earthly realm for him- or herself. In Gray's "Elegy," the dead provide the impetus for the musing of the speaker and the ground for the didacticism: the ostensible lesson is that "The paths of glory lead but to the grave" (36). Despite the importance of the dead for Gray, the memories of the dead are suspect. In fact, there are no memories of the churchyard dead in Gray's "Elegy." Anticipating Wordsworth, there are only artistic creations and poetic re-creations, but Gray's re-created dead do not have the sense of

earthly purpose Wordsworth's dead have. Gray warns that memory as epitaph is illusory and inadequate for achieving immortality, but the alternative is the engraved epitaph that waits for visitors to come to it, not an active afterlife that translates the dead into the world. The final stanza of the epitaph itself warns readers not to seek the merits or disclose the frailties of the deceased; they no longer reside here but with God (125-129). Whether one reads that injunction as sincere or ironic, the posthumous options for the dead here are limited: transcendental otherworldliness or oblivion beyond the engraved epitaph.

The shift from eighteenth-century Graveyard Poetry to Romanticism coincided with the shift to Enlightenment thinking which, Rugg argues, tended to diminish the traditional terror of death in a number of ways, but chiefly by naturalizing death due to scientific progress in medicine and by lessening the emphasis on eternal hellfire and damnation. Grave iconography shifted from the *memento mori* of the macabre—skulls and skeletons—popular in some form since the Middle Ages to more gentle images of Christian piety such as those of John Flaxman or examples of rational equanimity both of which looked forward with a more positive outlook either to the otherworldly fate of the dead or the reasoned and reasonable response to the dead by the living (“Reason” 203-04). Even with the Gothic Revival at the end of the Romantic period and beginning of the Victorian period and a return to more Christian and moralistic overtones, medieval representations of the macabre were not revived in architecture and tomb sculpture (“Reason” 226; Etlin 3-12).

Death-oriented literary images in the Victorian period, like those in the mid-eighteenth century, tend to be admonitory, but the focus shifts from the otherworldly toward this world.¹⁵ Corpses, graves, and graveyards in the literature of the Victorian period are often mobilized to advocate for sanitary, medical, and economic reform as they critique injustices and draw attention to inequalities.¹⁶ One might think of the graves in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*

(1868), for example. The poor housemaid Roseanna Spearman, a former thief and current suspect in the theft of the Moonstone, drowns herself and is “buried” in the Shivering Sands, a space described in much the same language as mass graves, the kind of anonymous, chaotic pit dreaded and feared by the urban poor. The quicksand has “hundreds of suffocating people under it—all struggling to get to the surface, and all sinking lower and lower in the dreadful deeps!” (39). Lady Verinder, conversely, receives a secluded, private burial, a privilege of wealth. Her remains are removed from London and are “buried in the little cemetery attached to the church in her own park” (248). Garden cemeteries offered seclusion and tranquility to those who could afford to pay, but the truly elite could create their own eternal memory garden on their estate, unsullied by proximity to the up-and-coming middle class dead.¹⁷ Her burial in her private park is a rhetorically economical indication of how great the economic and social divide is between her and Roseanna Spearman. In Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895) the pathos of poverty and the hardships of social ostracism are embodied in the hanging corpses of Little Father Time and his half-siblings, victims of a murder-suicide but also of social and economic constraints (335). The Resurrection Men in Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and the fetid conditions of the graveyard in *Bleak House* (1853) contribute in fiction to the Victorian discourse condemning the ill-treatment of the poor and dead, while Dickens himself contributed in fact by participating actively in the burial reform movement, supporting the miasma theory of disease, and giving speeches to groups such as the Metropolitan Sanitary Association in favor of the Sanitary Movement (Williams 29). As Mary Elizabeth Hotz puts it, the body gives Victorian novelists “the means by which to examine the nature of social relations in nineteenth-century England” including “ideas about economy and morality, domesticity and religion” (1, 7).

If the focus of the Graveyard poets can be thought of as inclining toward personal considerations of mortality and immortality and that of Victorian writers toward management of

the dead—and by extension, of the living—for the social good, both seem to put the dead into service for those now living to promote pre-determined agendas: better celestial or terrestrial future outcomes. In contrast, Romantic writers tend to incorporate corpses and graves into their imaginative work more speculatively, inviting the dead into conversation to consider how dead and living—past, present, and future—might usefully coexist and mutually benefit one another. They do not abandon the contemplations of personal posterity that interested their predecessors (though their desired posterity often develops into a specifically literary afterlife as Andrew Bennett has shown), but they also become more attuned to the posterity and potentiality of the dead about whom they write. And as their Victorian successors will be after them, Romantic writers are deeply interested in the social significance of dead bodies. However, whereas Victorian writers often use the dying, the dead, and the inadequately buried to interrogate and emblemize disparities among the living—of economics, gender, politics—Romantic writers include the dead among the relations they explore as they consider how not only to remember the dead but also to retain and respond to their knowledge, characters, and cultural achievements.

C. **Critical Context: Fragmenting Poets, Forming Community, Controlling Corpses**

In 1953, M.H. Abrams suggested critics pay more attention to *Essays upon Epitaphs*, “Wordsworth’s longest piece of sustained criticism,” which had “not received adequate attention from students of Wordsworth’s literary theory” (111). Deconstructive critics took up the challenge, focusing on the aspects of language and literary theory espoused in the *Essays* in relation not only to Wordsworth’s poetry but to other Romantic poetry as well. Since the 1960s, deconstructive criticism has been the dominant approach for addressing the corpses, graves, epitaphs, and monuments in British Romantic literature. In examining the underlying fissures in the texts, they have read the poet’s landscape as epitaphic,¹⁸ the poet’s metaphors as disfigured,

and the poet himself as doomed.¹⁹ The emphasis on the ontology of language and on the inconsistencies they inevitably find leads deconstructive critics to find a breakdown of meaning within the text—a kind of textual death—and by extension to the breakdown of meaning for poet and reader—the figuration and recognition of one’s own inevitable mortality.

For many years, the compelling and extensive work of Paul de Man, arguably the deconstructive critic most closely associated with readings of the death-oriented imagery in Romantic literature, served both to inspire similar work and to discourage other approaches. De Man’s persuasive insistence on the allegorical link between the corpses depicted in the poetry and the poets’ own projected deaths makes it seem there can be nothing vital or socially forward-looking in these texts. In discussing the temporality of the figure of allegory, for instance, he writes that “The secularized allegory of the early romantics [in which “the allegorical sign refers to a preceding sign” with which it “can never coincide”] thus *necessarily* contains the negative moment which in Rousseau is that of renunciation, in Wordsworth that of the loss of self in death or in error” (*Blindness* 207, emphasis added). Deconstructive criticism continues to be remarkably resilient among scholars of Romanticism, but in the past few decades, its dominance has receded as scholars have applied other critical perspectives to issues surrounding death in this literature. Many of these have tended to focus on psychological and social reactions to death and to employ psychoanalytic and cultural studies approaches, often exploring mourning and community responses to death.²⁰ This criticism helpfully provides historical and social context that deconstructive work generally lacks, but in its attention to death and mourning, it has neglected the dead and obscured the links between the literary depictions of the dead and the extensive contemporary conversations about the care and use of dead bodies for social progress.

These conversations that newly considered how the dead might be made useful to the living occurred in the context of a more comprehensive change in how both the corpse itself and

the relationship between dead and living were perceived. In *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), Michel Foucault identifies an eighteenth-century shift in the attitude toward corpses within his larger exploration of a change in medical observation and discourse. In his account, at the same time the living patient is transformed “into an object of clinical observation,” the medical understanding of the corpse is transformed as well; both living and dead bodies come to be seen as particularized sites of knowledge whose surfaces must be breached in order for their truths to be revealed (*Birth* 83). The focus turns from the *disease* as part of a classificatory system in which the patient is nearly irrelevant to the *patient* as the multidimensional seat of disease that requires a multi-sensory diagnostic approach—seeing, touching, and hearing—that Foucault terms the clinical gaze (*Birth* 8). Likewise, the corpse reveals its secrets through anatomical dissection as doctors look into the dead and understand the effects of disease on the living. Death is no longer seen as the end of disease, but as the starting point for gaining a better understanding of life (*Birth* 124-25). More importantly, the clinical gaze which “establishes the individual in his irreducible quality” (*Birth* xiv) enables the formation of a linguistic network among clinicians around its object so that what is seen can be said; in other words, it makes possible a common language in which clinicians enunciate what they observe. This new “discursive space of the corpse” had a profound ontological effect by allowing the individual to be “both subject and object of his own knowledge” and to invert “the structure of finitude” (*Birth* 196, 97).

Foucault concludes *The Birth of the Clinic* by reiterating how these revised patterns of what is visible and invisible that developed during the eighteenth century gave death a new centrality in the way “Western man” thinks of himself: “It is when death became the concrete a priori of medical experience that death could detach itself from counter-nature and become embodied in the *living bodies* of individuals” (*Birth* 197, 96, original emphasis). Death both sets a limit on the individual life but also gives it meaning by paradoxically linking that finite life to

the “universality of language” and “lend[ing] to each individual the *power* of being heard forever” (*Birth* 197, emphasis added). It is as if the living are always already dead which gives them a postmortem future, and several of the writers in this study explore this particular dynamic as characters enter into states that are deathlike or spaces that are occupied by the dead, gaining a better understanding of the dead and the past in the process. And all of the Romantic writers in this study consider in some way the converse of this formulation: that the dead are always already living, are still a part of life, and can have an active role among the living in the future. How that happens is less clear, however. These writers seem willing to accept Foucault’s claim that death lends “the *power* of being heard forever.” Less overtly but no less urgently, they also seem to understand Foucault’s argument about the “omnipresence of power” which is “produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another” (*History* 93). Each writer understands that the key to the futurity of the dead lies in poetic imagining, and each explores ways in which the power of death and the dead might be realized and translated to and for the future, but implied is also a consideration of the dynamics of power in the relationships among dead, living, and writer. In this web of translational relations among past, present and future, where does power reside and how is it distributed?

Death and the dead are often conflated in Foucault’s account which muddies discussions about the power of death and the dead, but this distinction seems important to the Romantic writers who depict the corpse and its care, and they seem to invest the corporeal form with the potential to resist objectification and to retain influence. Foucault addresses the moral and political implications for the eighteenth-century multi-sensory gaze which comes to pervade the medical field and makes it a social rather than pathological space: like the space originally envisioned by the leaders of the French Revolution, the clinical space is idealized as one “of free communication in which the relationship of the parts to the whole was always transposable and

reversible” (*Birth* 38). In order for such a space to function as a “force of truth,” however, “every obstacle to the constitution of this new space” must be suppressed; the gaze “is not faithful to truth, nor subject to it, without asserting, at the same time, a supreme mastery: the gaze that sees is a gaze that dominates” (*Birth* 38, 39). Death may lend “to each individual the *power* of being heard forever,” but the dead, objects without voices, seem ripe targets for exploitation and domination. As Foucault describes the clinic, the network which enables free communication among the living about the dead seems to exclude the cadaver (or living patient) as an active participant in the discourse. The objectified corpse is dominated by the living so that the truth it reveals can only be that which the gaze seeks—the secrets of its health and disease. The truth of the life lived by this now dead body is suppressed, and it is this which the writers of imaginative literature during this period attempt to make visible. They seek to include the dead in those conversations that occur in the “discursive space of the corpse” by recognizing the corpse as a repository of many kinds of knowledge and by acknowledging its physicality as a boundary or corrective on the impulses of the living to remake the dead in their own image and imagination.

The account of death’s power which is enabled by clinical medicine is complicated by Foucault’s theorizing of biopower some thirteen years later. In the final lecture of *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, Foucault describes the development of biopower at the end of the eighteenth century and its relegation of death to a place “outside the power relationship” (*Society* 248).²¹ Sovereign power is characterized by the right of life and death—that is, taking life and letting live, but biopower, with its focus on man-as-species rather than man-as-body, is concerned with making live and letting die (*Society* 240, 248). With the advent of biopower, then, death was no longer about the transition of power from worldly to otherworldly sovereign, and so death lost its ritual importance, becoming private, hidden away, taboo: “Power no longer recognizes death. Power literally ignores death” (*Society* 248), or as

Foucault puts it in *The History of Sexuality*, power now “establishes its dominion” over life, and “death is power’s limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most ‘private’” (*History* 138). Death which had been seen as linking the individual with the universal by setting a limit on the individual life now appears simply to limit the regulation of life processes; death seems to have lost its power when power no longer sees death—that is, when notions of death are no longer connected with the corporeal form.

Although the dead body figures prominently in the clinical space as a source of knowledge, as the object of the clinical gaze it has no intrinsic power, and even the power of death recedes under the auspices of biopower. Achille Mbembe, whose work I address briefly at the end of the third chapter, argues that Foucault’s notion of biopower is insufficient for explaining our “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death” so he proposes the notions of necropolitics and necropower to describe ways in which “weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*” (39-40).

Although he does not put it in these terms, his critique seems driven in part by Foucault’s lack of distinction between death and the dead. The fragmented and compounded bodies of the dead and the “pieces, fragments, folds, even immense wounds that are difficult to close” of the “*living dead*” escape the rubrics of biopower and can only be explained under the “conditions of necropower” (35, 40). Although British Romantic writers respond to very different conditions than those concerning Mbembe, they also attempt to account for a kind of necropower. Even as they engage in the new way of thinking about the power of death posited by Foucault, they insist on the primacy of the dead body for enabling and channeling that power. Whether by making the dead disappear in order to be imaginatively re-created, positing the fertile possibilities when the decaying dead mingle with the soil, engaging with the dead in a collaborative recombination of past and present to envision and enable a new future, or creating multi-dimensional effigial

forms that by their presence inspire and insist on continuing attention and care, these writers recognize the potential power of the dead and the role—and complicity—of imaginative literature in transforming and translating the dead for and to the future.

In the next chapter, I juxtapose what I call Wordsworth's "disappearing dead" against the creation of garden-style cemeteries. Like burial reformers, Wordsworth seeks to create distance between dead and living, but his concern is neither sanitation nor, surprisingly, remembrance, but future-oriented imaginative work. With readings of graveyard poems from *Lyrical Ballads* and the churchyard books of *The Excursion*, I argue that for Wordsworth, the corpse limits imagination with its material reality, so it must disappear. Its presence beneath the grassy graveyard is necessary, however, for the living must maintain a calibrated physical and psychological distance from the dead which is regulated by the grave itself in order to see the dead through "a tender haze" (*EE* 1.58). Personal memories that are too idiosyncratic and communal speculation that is too distanced limit the potential of the dead to affect the future, but a detached proximity allows the living to select and abstract the best moral qualities of the dead, imaginatively re-create them, and redistribute the exemplary aspects of their characters for the good of the living, the progress of the nation, and the expansion of the British Empire.

The third chapter focuses on Lord Byron's early Newstead Abbey poems, *The Giaour* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to explore the significance of places where the dead decay and to which the living pilgrimage. Paradoxically, for Byron it is the decomposition of the dead that gives them permanence, moral and political relevance, and a potential future with the living. Byron's attention to location and relocation of remains resonates with debates about the translation of human remains and cultural relics that put the dead and the past in service for national and imperial ambitions. Byron critiques the appropriation of peoples and cultures for personal glory and political gain and invests the "dust" of the dead mingling into the soil of a

particular place with regenerative potential so that the marginalized and conquered dead might not only reclaim their rightful past but also remain present and participatory in the renewal and rebirth of their lineage. Byron's fragmented poetic forms encourage a similar focus not on the gaps between fragments as some readers argue, but on the material that remains. Rather than the melancholic nostalgia with which Byron is typically identified, I suggest his engagement with the decaying dead reveals a surprisingly social and forward-looking logic of survival.

Mary Wollstonecraft's "Extract of the Cave of Fancy" and William Godwin's *Essay on Sepulchres* provide a background against which to read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* in the fourth chapter. Both of these novels by Shelley explore how the dead reveal and convey their knowledge of human life; from one novel to the next, however, the emphasis shifts from the *sight* of the corpse and a critique of the limited knowledge that sciences such as physiognomy, anatomy, and proto-forensic investigation might produce to the *sites* where the boundaries between dead and living blur. This redirection of focus allows Shelley to envision a more productive engagement between dead and living and a privileged position for writers in shaping a future from and with the past. She does not use the dead to reify the past or restrain the future to a pre-defined plan, nor does she settle for regeneration of the past as Byron proposes; she adopts and adapts fragmented remains for a more radical purpose: to imagine and fashion a new human narrative that includes but is not beholden to the dead.

In the final chapter I argue that poet Felicia Hemans and utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham both suggest the mind alone is insufficient for retaining the dead. For them, the effigial form supplements memory as the way in which past lives are kept among the present and translated to and for the future. The preserved human body was an object of both scientific and artistic interest, but preservation suggests both protecting and pickling. Hemans with her poetic re-creations of women and children who would otherwise be forgotten, particularly in *Records of*

Woman, and Bentham with his own textual and corporeal Auto-Icon create ekphrastic, multi-dimensional forms which oscillate between states and forms and which bring the dead into the public sphere, making of them ongoing subjects of conversation and care. These imaginative re-creations allow the writers to “fix” memory by keeping the dead among the living while forestalling a final fixity of form.

¹ This plan of Pierre Giraud draws on the work of German chemist Johann Joachim Becker who believed human remains could be transformed into “beautiful, imperishable, luminous glass” (Etlin 255; Davis 129). Many people today still wish to pay tribute to a loved one by making something aesthetically beautiful from the material remains. In a book exploring alternatives to the professionalized “American way of death” excoriated by Jessica Mitford, Mark Harris notes a few of the more unusual modern uses for the dead including adding ashes to fireworks or having ashes “pressed into diamonds that looked like the real thing” (2).

² This was suggested in May 1825 to British engineer Thomas Galloway by Mohammad Ali Pasha, whom Byron had met in Turkey in 1809. He wanted to build a paper mill on the banks of the Nile (Stauffer 15).

³ Respected horticulturalist, landscape architect, and burial reformer John Claudius Loudon made this proposal. As a writer in the *Quarterly Review* put it, he proposed “to convert paupers into manure!” (“Cemeteries” 451). Creating human compost remains the subject of research and development in the twenty-first century, including a “water reduction” method developed in the United States initially for the disposal of dead livestock and a Swedish researcher’s plan to replace cremation with a kind of organic composting (M. Roach 251-77)

⁴ Sir Francis Seymour Haden of the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons (FRCS) proposed this particular “body-farming scheme.” In 1885 his invention of the “Earth-to-Earth disposable coffin” was compared by *The Queen* magazine to Isabella’s carrying around her dead lover’s head in a pot of basil as immortalized by John Keats’s poem (Arnold 234).

⁵ This overlap of linguistic and bodily translation continues beyond the Romantic period, of course. In “The Translator’s Task,” Walter Benjamin writes of literary translation in death-oriented terms: a translation proceeds from the “afterlife” of the original, for most significant works only “find their chosen translators” after the era in which they are produced, at a point when “they have reached the stage of their continuing life”; translations “owe their existence” to the original work’s fame and are the vehicle by which “the original’s life achieves its constantly renewed, latest, and most comprehensive unfolding” (153). Thought of in this sense, the poetically re-created dead of Romantic literary work would be both the basis of the work itself which in turn enables their afterlife and continued “unfolding.” In different, but also “relevant,” terms Jacques Derrida argues in “What is a ‘Relevant’ Translation?” that when translation comes up against words with the same acoustic or graphic form, it reaches an “insurmountable limit—and the beginning of its end, the figure of its ruin (but perhaps a translation is devoted to ruin, to

that form of memory or commemoration that is called a ruin; ruin is perhaps its vocation and a destiny that it accepts from the very outset)" (181). As this study will show, many Romantic writers seem to recognize the inevitability of "ruin" in translating the dead, but they nevertheless attempt to make the ruined, decayed remains translated into and through their work generative.

⁶ When Burke describes the political system as being like "a permanent body composed of transitory parts" (120), he prefigures Shelley's *Frankenstein* and echoes the experiments of surgeon John Hunter who performed self-transplants on cockerels and recommended "live tooth transplantation" in the 1770s which high-end dentists quickly adopted (Richardson *Death* 410).

⁷ See A. Susan Williams for more about developing theories of disease including miasma theory, burial grounds as a source of pestilence, and the Victorian literary response to the situation (14-29). For a counterargument to the widespread belief that burial reform occurred as a response to public health concerns, see Thomas Laqueur's "The Places of the Dead in Modernity."

⁸ For an eyewitness account and condemnation of the conditions of London and metropolitan graveyards in the early nineteenth century, see George "Graveyard" Walker (147-87).

⁹ For the development of commercial cemeteries before and during the Victorian era, see James Stevens Curl's *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, especially the second and third chapters (37-108). Laqueur offers a specifically economic argument about changing funeral and burial practices during the Romantic and early Victorian periods in a series of articles dating from 1983 to 2002, especially in "Bodies, Death, and Pauper Funerals" (116), "Cemeteries, Religion, and the Culture of Capitalism" (191-200), and "The Places of the Dead in Modernity" (28-32).

¹⁰ For a recent account of the Burke and Hare murders using contemporary unpublished materials to place the sixteen victims in historical and social context, see historian Lisa Rosner's *The Anatomy Murders*; see also Burch (237-38) and Richardson (*Death* 133-47, 193-97).

¹¹ Historian Antoine De Baecque also identifies a change in the conception of the corpse at this very specific historical moment: during the French Revolution, the gory corpse was used as a political symbol, a metaphor for both mastery and brutality, but after the Terror, the corpse disappeared as it was made taboo once again.

¹² For an account of a reading of *Brutus: A Fragment* in light of Yearsley's evolving stances regarding the nation, see Moira Ferguson (45-6, 67-9). Donna Landry reads Yearsley's self-portrayal as "British Liberty" in several of her poems including *Brutus: A Fragment* (170-75).

¹³ William Blake also critiques the sort of founding narrative that usurps a people's liberty with his own oblique allusion to the Brutus legend through references to the "Stone of Night" depicted as the Coronation Stone in *America: A Prophecy* and *Europe: A Prophecy* (AAP 5.1, 7.2; Eur 10.26, 11.1). Edward I of England seized the Stone in 1296 during the Scottish War for Independence; both sides fabricated myths to legitimize their claims to sovereignty. The English claimed to be descended from Brutus's oldest son Lochrine, overlord of Brutus's youngest son Albanact, the ancestor of the Scots, which gave the English the primary claim to power over the Scots and the right to claim the Coronation Stone as their own (Aitchison 11). Blake's interest in

Edward I was surely stimulated when he was sent by his master James Basire to record the opening of the King's tomb by antiquarian Sir Joseph Ayloffe on May 2, 1774 (Bentley 41).

¹⁴ The Royal Academy still has the "cast of this flayed hanged man from Tyburn Tree" (Richardson *Death* 37-38, includes photo).

¹⁵ Certainly, the personal, moral admonitions to live better now in anticipation of the afterlife which can be invoked by images of the dead and related deathways are not lost in the Victorian period. In Victorian-era cemeteries, passers-by are often addressed overtly in the voice of the deceased by gravestone verse. One popular Victorian gravestone verse which has several variations is the following: "Remember, friends, as you pass by / As you are now, so once was I. / As I am now, so you will be. / Prepare for death and follow me."

¹⁶ There is no shortage of examples of death and dying in Victorian literature, and these have given rise to a number of compelling studies. See, for instance, the work of Elisabeth Bronfen, Catherine Gallagher, Mary Elizabeth Hotz, Garrett Stewart, and A. Susan Williams.

¹⁷ See Curl for late eighteenth-century trends in private English mausolea which were influenced by England's overseas territories including Jefferson's and Washington's private burials on plantations in America and the grand tombs built in India where the lack of Christian churchyards made the construction of private tombs necessary (28).

¹⁸ See, for instance, Geoffrey H. Hartman's influential 1965 essay "Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Nature Poetry," reprinted as Chapter 3: "Inscriptions and Romantic Nature Poetry" in *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (*Unremarkable* 31-46).

¹⁹ See Paul de Man's *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, especially the essays "Autobiography as De-Facement" and "Shelly Disfigured" (*Rhetoric* 67-82, 93-124) as well as the earlier essay "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (*Blindness* 187-228). For other examples of deconstructive readings of Nature as epitaphic see J. Douglas Kneale, Paul Fry, Frances Ferguson (*Wordsworth*), D.D. Devlin, and Cynthia Chase. See Lorna Clymer for a convincing argument that much of the work of deconstructive critics regarding Romanticism in general and Wordsworth in particular has incorrectly blurred the classically-based distinctions between the tropes of prosopopoeia and apostrophe; she addresses de Man's "Autobiography as De-Facement" at length (349-55).

²⁰ See, for example, the work of Esther Schor and Stephen C. Behrendt (*Royal*). Examples of work addressing issues of mourning and community in Wordsworth's poems specifically include that of Michele Turner Sharp and Kurt Fosso. In a recent article, Scott Hess builds on both deconstructive and community-oriented readings of Wordsworth's epitaphic poetry but positions the work historically within the changes to the print market and the expansion of the reading public. Also putting Romantic literature in historical context, Mark Canuel addresses death penalty reform and the imaginative work punishment requires in *The Shadow of Death*, but despite his topic, his work, too, contains few corpses.

²¹ See also Part Five, "Right of Death and Power over Life," of *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I, originally published as *La Volonté de savoir* (1976) for the version of this argument about biopower and biopolitics that Foucault revised for publication (*History* 135-59).

II. WORDSWORTH: THE DISAPPEARING DEAD

In a 1794 letter to *The Gentleman's Magazine*, a reader protests that “cemeteries, and their crowded state” are a more urgent matter for reform than the destruction of monuments in Westminster Abbey. He describes a churchyard “not 100 miles East of the Tower” where parishioners attending worship each week see “the mutilated remains of their fellow-parishioners lying above ground; and the foot frequently encounters those bones, exposed on the surface, much...to the disgrace of the living” (Z 892). William Wordsworth, in contrast, praises village churchyards in the first of his *Essays upon Epitaphs* (1810) specifically for their salutary effects on parishioners attending Sabbath-day services who, at the sight of their loved ones’ graves, are “thoughtful yet happy” as they remember the dead and imagine them now “gathered together in that general home” towards which the “spectators themselves are journeying” (EE 1.55-56). Wordsworth returns again and again to the graves of rural churchyards in his lyric poetry, but no “mutilated remains” or exposed bones mar the grassy surfaces of these domestic and community-oriented spaces. Far from being a “disgrace of the living,” the graves of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798, 1800) and *The Excursion* (1814) serve as catalysts for future-oriented imaginative work that positions the dead not in some metaphysical postmortem “general home” but maintains them as active participants among the everyday concerns of the living. In order for them to remain present in the minds of the living, however, the corporeal remains of the dead must disappear.

Much like the burial reformers of his day who advocated moving burials from unsightly urban churchyards to suburban garden cemeteries, Wordsworth seeks to distance the dead *from* the living, *for* the living; however, his concern is neither sanitation nor melancholic meditation on mortality, but the effect of the distance itself on the creative responses that maintain the dead productively among the living.¹ The graves serve as important loci for imaginative engagement with and about the dead by keeping the dead close but contained. For Wordsworth, the corpse,

with its static, tangible reality, limits potential imaginative responses, but being near the buried, invisible dead encourages vivid mental re-creations of them. Just as the “happy spectators” of the *Essay* benefit simply by seeing the graves then imagining their own cohabitation in a spiritual afterlife with those already deceased, the characters in the graveyard poetry similarly create a dynamic earthly afterlife in their minds for and with the dead when they stand within sight of the graves.² Wordsworth’s rural graves serve as a basis for poetic and social imagining by separating the decaying dead from the living and keeping the remembered and re-created dead present within the family circle, the community sphere, and the national conversation.

In Wordsworth’s graveyard poetry, the creative work involved in remembering and memorializing the dead is enabled by a controlled and controlling physical distance from the corpse, but it is shaped by the widely varying psychological distances between living and dead. In *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth focuses on memory: in what ways and to what ends are the dead remembered by individual survivors and the communities that live in daily proximity to their graves, and among whom can the knowledge of the dead be shared? The dead are re-created imaginatively by those who knew them or knew of them, but this mode of retaining the dead is revealed to be inherently fragile. Versions of the dead that adhere too closely or stray too far from the dead as they were in life may produce remarkably vibrant and locally useful imaginative re-creations, but the re-imagined dead cannot be effectively shared beyond the minds of those who create them. In the later graveyard poetry of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth is concerned less with an individual’s or a community’s memories of the dead and more with memorialization: how can the dead be transformed through a process of selection and abstraction in order to be translated geographically and temporally beyond the churchyard walls? In the first of the *Essays upon Epitaphs*, written at about the same time as the churchyard sections of *The Excursion*, he clarifies the distinctions between memory and epitaphic memorialization.³

Counter-intuitively, the memorial representation of an individual should not be “a faithful image” in the sense of an exact, unfiltered likeness: “The character of a deceased friend or beloved kinsman is not seen, no—nor ought to be seen, otherwise than as a tree through a tender haze or a luminous mist, that spiritualises and beautifies it; that takes away, indeed, but only to the end that the parts which are not abstracted may appear more dignified and lovely; may impress and affect the more” (*EE* 1.58). An appropriately distanced relationship between living and dead, one that allows for a degree of abstraction while remaining connected firmly but flexibly to the originary subject, can provide an earthly afterlife for the dead that is both fluid and influential. The memories of the dead are no less fragile in *The Excursion* than in the poems of *Lyrical Ballads*, but here that very fragility promotes the ongoing and widespread participation of the dead among the living. In *The Excursion*, an expansive poem that looks outward with imperial ambition, the dead exist amid—and as—ambassadors for the nation, dispersed among the living interlocutors who in turn are dispersed outward from the village churchyard into the larger world in order to “impress and affect” the future.

As Wordsworth explores memory and memorial—the imaginative re-creation and redistribution of the dead—in his graveyard poems, he simultaneously explores the poetic process—the imaginative re-creation and redistribution of the very “spirit of life” (Preface, *LB* 300).⁴ The descriptions of the process of poetic and epitaphic composition in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and in the *Essays upon Epitaphs* bear striking resemblance to the ways the dead are remembered (from a tempering distance), re-created (by selection and abstraction), and redistributed (as a person speaking to others) in the graveyard poetry of *Lyrical Ballads* and *The Excursion*. I am not suggesting the dead are merely allegories of poetic subjects or that the process of memorialization is a synonym for poetic composition. Rather, the processes and requirements of memorialization parallel those of poetic creation. Exploring one informs

Wordsworth's—and our—understanding of the other. Almost by definition, the dead who have “passed on” from this life would seem to evoke and be consigned to the past, but paradoxically, in Wordsworth's graveyard poetry of *Lyrical Ballads*, when the corporeal dead disappear, the visible presence of the graves promotes memory, provokes conversations about the dead, and enables an imaginative response which makes the dead and poetic imagining itself present and potent among the living. The dead become active participants in the minds and daily lives of those living in the graves' proximity. A decade later, as he writes *Essays upon Epitaphs* and the churchyard books of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth envisions a still more ambitious project for poetry and for the dead that expands beyond the home and community; through the poetic process that is memorialization, the ugliness and corruption of the past can recede and memories of the dead can be distilled into examples of English moral worth that will, in turn, politically and diplomatically memorialize others to effect social progress and support English national interests beyond the churchyard walls and into the future, at home and abroad.

A. The Domestic Grave

Wordsworth's “We Are Seven,” composed in spring 1798, is set in a churchyard where the corpses of the dead have disappeared under grassy grave mounds that serve as a seat of daily domestic activity for the girl who dwells near them in the “churchyard cottage” (*LB* 23). Framed as a debate between this intimate of the graves and an outsider, the poem asks readers to negotiate between distinct and incompatible positions about how the dead are conceptualized. In the first moment of direct dialogue between the lyric speaker and the girl, he asks: “Sisters and brothers, little maid, / “How many may you be?” (*LB* 13-14). What should be an uncomplicated and incontrovertible answer to an apparently innocuous question turns out to be anything but simple. Do the dead brother and sister buried in this churchyard count as siblings or not? At stake

is how to account for the dead: are they intimately remembered and re-imagined to remain an active, daily presence, or are they abstracted completely from the earthly realm because the gulf between them and the outsider is too great and they are thus unimaginable? Wordsworth suggests the dead can be relevant and even useful to one who imaginatively re-creates them based on vivid personal memories, but their place among the living is tenuous when the very intimacy that creates and sustains them cannot be shared beyond that lived experience. The poem pits two poetic personas against each other, with both the girl and the man demonstrating with their imaginative responses to the dead qualities of good poetry and the successful poet that Wordsworth describes in the Preface. Neither, however, offers a wholly satisfactory model by which the dead can be retained and shared in a meaningful way. The debate remains unresolved at the end of the poem despite the girl's adamant final words, implying the need for a mode of remembrance that allows a broader communal response to the dead.

From the outset, "We Are Seven" foregrounds the differences of age and worldliness between the two primary interlocutors, but although the man as first-person narrator privileges his position, the dialogue of the poem itself does not clearly affirm his claims to superiority. The poem begins with a three-stanza frame in which the narrator describes to his brother the circumstances of the conversation that will follow in the remaining fourteen stanzas. He emphasizes the youth and rusticity of the "little cottage girl" with whom he spoke in implied distinction to his own maturity and sophistication (*LB* 5). By drawing attention to her halo of curly hair, her "rustic, woodland air," her rude garb, and her "fair, and very fair" eyes (*LB* 7-11), he positions her as rural, childish, and female—a youthful member of the "fair" sex—someone who could hardly be expected to offer a reasonable or rational response to his questions. "What," he asks his brother rhetorically, "should [a simple child] know of death?" (*LB* 4). According to Wordsworth's comments in the Preface, this question encapsulates the purpose of the poem: to

show “the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our utter inability to admit that notion” (*LB* 128-30). The dynamic between the man and the girl is crucial to the reading of the poem, and some critics follow the narrator’s and Wordsworth’s lead, viewing the poem as a conversation between a rational adult and a “rustic” or recalcitrant child.⁵ The evidence of the poem, however, indicates that this fair-eyed, curly-haired eight-year-old girl is a more mature and sophisticated thinker than the man recognizes or admits. As Frances Ferguson notes, the girl’s insistence that “we are seven” is not a naive attempt to deny the death of her siblings; rather, “it suggests that she is able to imagine and also to accept the possibility of death far better than her adult interlocutor” (*Wordsworth* 25). Like Ferguson, other recent critics have tended to read the two as being on more equitable forensic footing.⁶ In contrast to readers who evaluate the positions of the man and girl as a question of right versus wrong, “civilized” versus “primitive,” or even one adamant but plausible philosophical position versus another, I contend that the primary distinction between their stances toward the deceased siblings is based on their relative proximity to the dead. As a cohabitant with the graves, the “cottage girl” lives in close, continuous relationship with the dead in contrast to the transience of the man who is just passing through the village and knows nothing of the dead buried here.

The girl’s conception and mental re-creation of the dead is grounded in her psychological nearness to them in terms of both kinship and domestic relations. This debate pitting child against adult more importantly pits a sister against a stranger. Her answer to the man’s query about how many sisters and brothers there may be is determined by familial relationship—not family living arrangements. When he asks where her siblings are, she enumerates them:

“And two of us at Conway dwell,
“And two are gone to sea.

“Two of us in the churchyard lie,
“My sister and my brother;

“And in the churchyard cottage I,
 “Dwell near them with my mother.” (*LB* 19-24)

For her, the current geographical location of the siblings does not affect the fact that they *are* siblings. The parallelism she uses in listing the pairs of siblings and their current whereabouts indicates that she thinks about and remembers her sister and brother in the churchyard in much the way she thinks about her siblings in Conway and at sea.⁷ The notable difference is that the geographically distant siblings are less distinctly drawn. Not only does she specify the kinship relationship of the siblings in the churchyard—sister and brother—she later identifies “Jane” and “John” by name (*LB* 49, 56). In contrast to the unnamed, ungendered living siblings, the dead John and Jane appear to be much more immediate and individualized to her.

The girl’s kinship ties define her family circle as including the dead and help her maintain a relationship with John and Jane that is structurally no different than that of the relationship she shares with her living absent siblings.⁸ Although the girl is adamant that “we are seven,” the man insists the siblings are five. Ferguson identifies this discrepancy as one of counting versus naming, or numbering versus number (*Solitude* 164-67). The man insists on counting only what is seen, what one can point to, and he can point to only five (unburied) children. The girl, however, uses the names of the dead siblings as placeholders, allowing her to personify persons and to count the names even in the face of their lost referents. Ferguson suggests the girl similarly uses the number “seven” as a nominal to name a set of siblings which remains unchanging and unbroken even though it, like the nominals “John” and “Jane,” loses its referent. I agree that the notion of the set is essential to understanding the girl’s answer, and like Ferguson, I see the girl’s method of accounting for her siblings as a more abstract version of counting than the man’s which paradoxically brings her closer to her siblings than the man’s directly demonstrative, but distancing, approach, but it is counting nonetheless. Modifying and

extending Ferguson's account slightly, to focus on the issue of set definition rather than nominalization, helps to address questions that the notion of counting versus naming leaves unanswered: Why, for instance, could the man not point to the visible green graves (as the girl does) and count them? Or why does the girl not need names to act as placeholders for the absent living siblings? Or if countability is the key, why is not the man's answer "one" because there is only one child to whom he can point? Reframing the question, using the language of set theory, from "what is the set called?" ("seven") to "what is the membership of the set?" explains why pointing to the graves would not lead the man to a different answer. The most basic question about a set is one of counting—that is, its cardinality—how many elements does it have? To answer that question, one must know which elements are defined as being part of the set. His definition is "the set of *all living* siblings"; dead children are excluded from set membership, even though their "graves are green, they may be seen" (and counted, presumably) (*LB* 37). The girl's definition, by contrast, is "the set of *all* siblings" which includes those near (in the graves) and far (in Conway and at sea), whether alive or dead; their current geographical location and state of being are irrelevant. Her definition of the set "siblings" is simply more inclusive than the man's and allows all her siblings membership in the set that is her family circle.

More than the blood ties of kinship, the cottage girl's vivid, idiosyncratic memories of her shared experiences with John and Jane endow her imaginative re-creation of them with specificity and vitality and lay the foundation for her ongoing interaction with them. She remembers, for example, the specifics of the last hours of "little Jane" who lay on her bed "moaning" in pain before she died (*LB* 50). She remembers playing around Jane's grave with her brother John. She remembers that John died during the winter, "when the ground was white with snow" and she herself was able to "run and slide" (*LB* 57, 58). These memories of particular moments and ordinary details help her maintain John and Jane as part of her present reality.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of “We Are Seven” is the girl’s physical proximity to her siblings’ graves and the daily intimacy with the dead that engenders. The poem’s grave-mounds separate the living from the materiality of the decaying corpses that would consign lives to the past, but they also keep the dead near, fostering their mental re-creation as vibrant entities in the present. Graves keep the dead enclosed but close—extremely close for the “little cottage girl.” She tells the man that John’s and Jane’s graves are “Twelve steps or more from my mother’s door, / “And they are side by side” (*LB* 39-40). The antecedent for “they” appears to be the graves of brother and sister which are side by side, or perhaps the children themselves. It is also possible, however, to read “they” as the anaphor for “graves” and “door,” making the graves and “mother’s door” side by side. The girl and her mother dwell in the “church-yard cottage,” after all, implying a junction between the two spaces (*LB* 23). This minimal distance between dwelling space and churchyard would conjure dreadful images for burial reformers concerned with contemporary urban graveyards, but here in this rural churchyard, the horrors of the grave give way to a domestic space. In fact, her siblings’ graves are the scene of the girl’s regular household activities and her imaginative interplay with John and Jane:

“My stockings there I often knit,
 “My ’kerchief there I hem;
 “And there upon the ground I sit –
 “I sit and sing to them.

“And often after sunset, Sir,
 “When it is light and fair,
 “I take my little porringer,
 “And eat my supper there. (*LB* 41-48)

The churchyard and its graves function as a parlor, a kitchen, perhaps a three-season porch in today’s vernacular; this is a space for living and for the living, a place of presence, not of absence. Thomas Laqueur notes that rural churches of the period almost always had “some long-standing relationship to [their] built environment”; they were “historically rooted and ... located

in the midst of daily life” (“Places” 29). His concept of the churchyard in the “midst of daily life” may be less personal than the girl’s use of her churchyard space, but the idea of relationship—between past and present and among building, land, and people—rings true to the girl’s experience. Here, where her two siblings “in the church-yard lie, / “Beneath the church-yard tree,” she spends time at the graves in an intimate, domestic way (*LB* 31-32). The physical space with its green grave-mounds that can be seen and sat upon encourages and perhaps enables the girl imaginatively to retain in the present her siblings who have passed on.

In contrast to the girl’s proximity to her dead siblings which allows her to see the graves as evidence of Jane and John’s presence, the man’s distance from the dead and the graves that contain them undergirds his argument for absence. When he challenges her initial answer of seven siblings, she responds by gesturing toward their graves as evidence of the siblings’ existence: “Their graves are green, they may be seen” (*LB* 37).⁹ Despite the girl’s helpful deictic, the man does not acknowledge the graves themselves. He never utters the word “grave” and only uses the word “church-yard” in his repetition of the girl, as if by omitting the terms he might circumvent the earthly presence of the dead they imply.¹⁰ The girl, conversely, is under no illusions about the fact that her siblings are dead. During the course of the poem, she uses the word “church-yard” five times to describe the “church-yard cottage” in which she lives (*LB* 23), the “church-yard tree” under which she sits while completing her chores and eating her meals, and to designate the “church-yard” location of her siblings. To the girl’s way of thinking, both the siblings and she are active subjects in the churchyard space, engaging in routine activities. Even as she indicates that Jane and John are in the churchyard, she imbues them with a kind of agency and presence, repeating: “Two of us in the churchyard lie” (*LB* 21, 31). The intransitive verb makes the children the subject of an active sentence. This use of “lie” is not unique to the girl, of course, and is regularly used to describe the posture of a dead body (lying in state, for

example), but her verb choice contrasts notably with the man's who reformulates her clause into the passive.¹¹ Instead of lying in the churchyard, in his formulation the children "are...laid" there, the passive objects of a transitive verb (*LB* 35). After eliding their agency, he effaces their earthly presence, asking how the "two" could count if they "are in Heaven," and exclaiming in the last stanza: "But they are dead; those two are dead! / "Their spirits are in heaven!" (*LB* 62, 65-66). For him, being dead means being absent from the state and place occupied by the living; the dead are abstracted to a state of intangibility then further to an ethereal sphere. In his outburst, the man's argument has moved from implied physical inactivity of the two children (*LB* 33-36) to the two being "in Heaven" (*LB* 62) to specifically their spirits being "in heaven" (*LB* 66). There is no tangible evidence, for him, of their ever existing. No bodies. No graves. And certainly no ongoing, active presence among the living. The man is as removed from the graves and the dead as the girl is close to them, and for him, the dead disappear in mind as well as body.

If, as I have suggested, "We Are Seven" represents an early exploration of how the dead are remembered and retained, and by extension of the poetic process itself, the girl and the man might be thought of as two versions of a poetic persona. Though not inscribed in stone or on paper, the girl's ongoing mental re-creation of her siblings would seem to be the work of a poet, as Ferguson has suggested (*Wordsworth* 24). In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth famously describes what good poetry is and how it develops. This description implies how the girl's thinking functions poetically to nurture and nourish her feelings for her siblings so they continue to exist for her, but it also suggests in what way she fails in the larger poetic enterprise:

[B]y the repetition and continuance of this act [of contemplation] feelings connected with important subjects will be nourished, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much organic sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced that ... we shall describe objects and utter sentiments of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves ... must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated. (*LB* 109-17)

The “cottage girl” appears to follow the “habits of mind” of a poet, thinking “at length” about her siblings while living with the graves in a daily domestic pattern of “repetition and continuance.” This habit of both her mind and her living body allows her to maintain John and Jane in the present even though, and perhaps because, their bodies have disappeared.

The girl’s mental re-creation of her siblings is neither illusion nor delusion, but an effect of her version of poetic imagining. As Don Bialostosky puts it, “the child, far from clinging irrationally to the idea that her siblings are alive in [the man’s] term, admits their deaths, narrates how they died, and denies that those deaths have deprived her of a significant relation to them” (116-17). The girl’s transformation of her siblings and her relationship with them into a new form that can be retained in the mind gestures to the kind of change that Wordsworth will later describe in the *Essays upon Epitaphs*, written more than a decade after he first drafts “We Are Seven.” In the later piece he writes that when the qualities of a virtuous man’s mind are contemplated at his graveside, they should “be felt as something midway between what he was on earth walking about with his living frailties, and what he may be presumed to be as a Spirit in heaven” (*EE* 1.58). The “cottage girl” is remembering her dead siblings, not memorializing them, so she is not concerned with their qualities of mind or the virtuous effects that thinking about them may have on her. However, she is creating a new expression of her siblings—perhaps something “midway between” the life lived by the body now in the grave and an existence “in Heaven” to which the man points—that is based on her memories and enacted on the site of the graves. Ferguson writes that by naming Jane and John, the girl is able to speak of absent things as being present (*Solitude* 164), but I would suggest that the girl’s interaction with her named siblings does more than this; it enables her to transform and *make* them present.

Yet the girl is too close to the dead to be an effective epitapher or poet; she is unable to convey to the visiting adult the existence of her siblings in such a way that “the understanding of

the being to whom” she addresses herself is “in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated.” Her memories allow her to re-create imaginatively a vivid version of her siblings so they continue to fulfill roles they played in life—companions during chores, meals, and amusement—a version that might be considered what Wordsworth later calls “a faithful image” of the dead (*EE* 1.58). However, her memories are too intimate and unfiltered to be shared with others; they do not allow for memorialization. In the later *Essays upon Epitaphs*, Wordsworth specifically refutes arguments that an epitaph should be “a faithful image” and emphasizes instead the importance of selecting and emphasizing the best qualities of the character of the dead so that “the parts which are not abstracted may appear more dignified and lovely; may impress and affect the more” (*EE* 1.58). The girl’s re-creation of the dead certainly might be thought of as an abstraction in that her imaginative work functions at a remove from their corporeal forms—and paradoxically it is precisely her closeness to the dead that allows for this removal—however, this is not abstraction in the sense Wordsworth will use in the *Essays*. She cannot or does not achieve the kind of regulated distance from the dead that discriminates among character traits in order to retain some while rejecting others or that distances her from the siblings she knows, visits, sings to, and eats with in order to make of them more generic representations that could be translated to and understood by others.

It might be tempting to attribute this failure of communication—the failure of epitaphic or poetic work—exclusively to the girl; however, the man also functions as a poet figure, and he, too, fails to live up to the qualities required of a successful poet. Many readers have identified the man of this poem as a Wordsworthian poet figure,¹² and Wordsworth encourages that identification as well. This is, after all, a *lyrical* ballad and the man, particularly in the first three framing stanzas appears as a lyric “I.” In the 1843 note dictated to Isabella Fenwick, Wordsworth further invites identification between himself and the poem’s speaker by giving the “cottage girl”

a living counterpart of his own acquaintance: “The little girl who is the heroine I met within the area of Goodrich Castle in the year 1793” (*LB* 347). He claims in the Preface that although there is value in the “real language of men,” it is the poet—a Wordsworthian figure, not an eight-year old cottage girl—who is able to fit that language to metrical arrangement in order to impart pleasure through poetry (*LB* 577). Furthermore, the dialogue is, we are reminded, a poetic re-creation. The first three stanzas of the poem provide a frame that emphasizes the temporal distance between the scene of the dialogue proper and its later recounting to the first-person speaker’s “dear brother Jim,” time during which, perhaps, the speaker has reflected tranquilly on the exchange that so exasperates him during the narrative present (*LB* 1).

As poet-like as this adult male character may appear to be, however, in the narrated exchange between him and the child, the man falls short of his poetic potential. His imaginative response to the dead is limited at best, little more than a generic platitude: “they two are in Heaven” (*LB* 62). He fails to re-create the dead in any sort of inspired or artistic way himself, nor does he attempt to understand and re-create the girl’s perspective of them. It is not until the 1802 version of the Preface when Wordsworth adds the section addressing the question “What is a Poet?” (*LB* 295) that he claims explicitly that the wish of the poet is to empathize so fully with those he describes that the poet may “confound and identify his own feelings with theirs” (*LB* 321-22). However, this implication is present even in the 1800 version of the Preface as he describes how the Poet transforms the “elementary feelings,” “passions,” and “language” of rural men (and, presumably, of rural cottage girls) into poetry (*LB* 71, 76, 77). If a Poet has “a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present” (*LB* 302-03) this man who cannot imagine the living presence of these absent children is no Poet; he is too far removed from the girl, the graveyard, and the dead even to acknowledge John and Jane, and his removal makes him too literal to re-create them in a way that will be meaningful to the living.

The man and the girl in “We Are Seven” represent two potential imaginative responses to the dead, but both reveal the inherent fragility of the ongoing place of the dead among the living. The man elides the bodies and graves of the children, and in that process effaces the children themselves. The girl, as the keeper of her siblings’ memories, does not require corporeal remains or inscribed epitaphs to keep their memories in the present through the active work of her mind. But memory is tenuous. What happens when the “little cottage girl” grows up, moves away, dies? The graves of the siblings may be marked with stones, the stones may be inscribed with epitaphs, but there is no textual evidence that this is so. The only evidence we have of their existence is that the graves “are green, they may be seen” (*LB* 37). Without the girl’s explication, they could be the work of moles or tree roots, nothing more than indeterminate grassy hillocks. As long as the girl remains here to debate strangers, they will be part of the present, but when her vigilance slips, then they will slip away as well. Without the work of her mind—and perhaps hers alone given the startling lack of community in the poem: the absence of other villagers, additional graves, even the mother with whom the girl says she dwells—they will cease to exist.

The formal features of the poem itself underscore the tension between the girl’s and the man’s conceptions of the siblings and emphasize the vulnerability of the dead who are retained only in the minds of the living. The ballad meter of the poem accentuates the apparent dominance of “seven,” with the alternating four- and three-beat lines forming consistent seven-beat paired lines. Ferguson draws attention to the poem’s first two lines, “A simple child, dear brother Jem, that lightly draws its breath,” where the words “dear brother Jem” (later changed to “Jim”) add two feet to the first “split-up septanarius” so that the “form adapts name to the purposes of number” (*Solitude* 167). This is true, as long as “dear brother Jem” is there, but Ferguson does not add that, in the only substantive change to the poem, those two feet were omitted beginning in 1815, leaving a five-foot line pair. Are the “purposes of number” served by

the “seven” or the “five”? The final stanza complicates the question further. After the adult speaker loses his composure, the girl apparently gets the last word. The poem ends thus:

“But they are dead; those two are dead!
 “Their spirits are in Heaven!”
 ’Twas throwing words away; for still
 The little Maid would have her will,
 And said, “Nay, we are seven!” (*LB* 65-69)

Reading this last stanza of “We Are Seven,” Maureen N. McLane posits that the child-friendly ballad form and the formal shifts (the exclamations and the extra last line) suggest and enact a “provisional alternative” to the breakdown of understanding in “the sustaining of the encounter” between the outside ethnographer and the rustic (60). Not only does the girl get the last word despite the man’s vehemence, McLane suggests that it is as if her “will” caused the expansion of the poem (60-61). I propose instead that even though the poem ends with her voice and with her exclamatory “seven!” the five-line stanza undercuts her triumph. By beginning with a five-foot line pair and ending with a five-line stanza, the pattern of the ballad meter is subtly destabilized. The “seven” and the dead siblings represented by “seven” are subject to erosion, to slippage, to fading away. The encroaching “five” suggests the inevitable failure of the girl’s poetic perspective as she is unable to share effectively her re-created siblings with others, but the man’s perspective is no more satisfactory in terms of how the dead might be usefully retained among the living. The poem balances the “five” and the “seven” and refuses to choose between a response to the dead that is too distant to recognize and retain them among the living and the detailed and immediate imaginative re-creation that is too close to the dead to be shared.

B. The Marginal Grave

In contrast to the proximity that defines the dead and produces an overly “faithful image” in “We Are Seven,” distance characterizes the imagining of the dead in “The Thorn” and enables

a fantastic—and completely “unfaithful”—poetic re-creation. “The Thorn” is narrated by what Wordsworth calls in the Advertisement to the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* a “loquacious narrator” (*LB* 40) who is further described in subsequent editions as an outsider who has come to this village to retire (*LB* 350). This type of character, according to Wordsworth, is “credulous and talkative from indolence” and is “prone to superstition” (*LB* 351). Unlike other graveyard poems which take place over graves in churchyards and feature at least one person who knew the dead in life engaging in dialogue with another, “The Thorn” is a dramatic monologue spoken in sight of, but not over, what might be a grave-mound near, but not in, a churchyard. Whatever facts and experiences the individual mourner Martha Ray remembers remain unvoiced, left to be transformed through village speculation, filtered through the unreliable narrator, and transmitted to a silent auditor who apparently lacks any connection with the community. “The Thorn” shows how provocative and productive detachment can be for the imaginative communal re-creation of the dead; however, new, irreparable distances from both the individual dead and the individual mourner emerge as a necessary by-product of this mode of re-creation.

The narrator relates the story of the mysterious Martha Ray and the equally mysterious “hill of moss” through a mixture of very specific details and reported conjecture that highlights the physical proximity to the place and the social distance from the person that form the basis of the community’s imaginative response. According to the narrator, Martha Ray was ostensibly jilted on her marriage day even though pregnant. She is rumored to have given birth, and the baby may have died, perhaps as a result of infanticide. The villagers avoid her, but the level of detail in the narrator’s description makes it apparent that they and he watch her carefully from some intermediate distance. They know she sits, clad in a scarlet cloak, and bemoans her misery by a lichen-covered twisted thorn which is near a “little muddy pond” that was measured in her absence and found to be “three feet long, and two feet wide” (*LB* 30, 34). Beside the “aged

thorn” and the pond is a “beauteous heap, a hill of moss, / Just half a foot in height” (*LB* 36-37). At no point in the poem do the villagers converse with Martha Ray, and even when the narrator nearly literally runs into her during a storm, they do not speak. He relates: “I did not speak—I saw her face, / Her face it was enough for me” (*LB* 199-200). The narrator implies he has come at other times to this site but only when Martha Ray is absent, as is the apparent village custom: “I never heard of such as dare / Approach the spot when she is there” (*LB* 98-99). Martha Ray, whether by choice or not, does not share her intimacy with the “hill” with others, leaving the story of its contents to be written by conjecture. The ambiguous hill is not in the churchyard, but is near the “church-yard path” (*LB* 169). It may be a grave, and it may be the grave of an unbaptized infant who would not be allowed in the churchyard. Or it may not. The “hill of moss” is no more forthcoming about its contents than the unmarked graves of rural churchyards. When some villagers would have the hill dug up in a search for “little infant’s bones” and for “justice,” the hill not only hides whatever it might contain; it resists revealing its secrets by stirring and shaking to deter the diggers (*LB* 233-39). Martha Ray’s story is a pastiche of village guesswork and gossip conveyed by a garrulous, unreliable (though sympathetic) narrator, and the hill itself is an unsolvable mystery, yet her story and that of the possible child are replete with details.

Without the limiting and shaping influence of facts that might be revealed by Martha Ray or unearthed from the moss-covered “heap of earth” (*LB* 49), the mystery of the “hill” invites and generates imaginative explanation to fill the interpretive silence, but this unfettered creative production of the dead also contains within itself a caution against such unrestricted re-creation. The villagers rely on, and take advantage of, their detachment from the site and from Martha Ray’s lived experience to abstract the dead they desire: a mysteriously buried dead baby murdered by its mother’s hands. In the process they produce a narrative that may be no better than the “frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant

stories in verse” that Wordsworth scorns in the Preface (*LB* 168-69). Wordsworth carefully distances himself from the narrator in his extra-textual descriptions, but he also distances the narrator from the community whose perspective he presents but does not necessarily represent. The narrator, “superstitious” and “credulous” as he may be, may also be the voice of foolish wisdom who, like Bottom in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, reveals more than he is aware about the nature and power of imagination. The speaker stresses the villager’s lack of factual knowledge and dissociates himself from their narrative, saying in the fifteenth stanza, for instance: “No more I know, I wish I did ... There’s none that ever knew ... There’s no one that could ever tell ... There’s no one knows, as I have said / But some remember well” (*LB* 155, 158, 160, 162-63). Following this spate of negation the suggestion that “some remember well” seems, and is meant to seem, ludicrous, yet the fiction that the villagers’ account is grounded in memory authorizes it to have real-world effects on the earthly afterlife of the possible dead child and on the living woman who mourns beside the “hill of moss.”

The poem’s speaker is clearly conflicted by the community’s production of “extravagant stories” and may, like Wordsworth, regard such proclivities as a “degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation” (Preface, *LB* 170), a tendency that promotes the most damning interpretations and disallows empathic identification. The narrator rejects—more hopefully than emphatically—the community’s suggestion that voices of the dead have been heard “coming from the mountain-head” to condemn Martha Ray: “I cannot think, whate’er they say, / They had to do with Martha Ray” (*LB* 171, 175-76). But he is neither insensible nor indifferent to her suffering; unlike the villagers, when he hears and repeats her cry in the last lines of the poem: “O misery! oh misery! / “O woe is me! oh misery!” (*LB* 252-53), he betrays his humane awareness of her pain, whatever its causes. In the first of the *Essays upon Epitaphs*, Wordsworth will write that the distilled remainder of the dead that exists after the less-than-lovely elements have been

abstracted commemorates the dead properly because “It *is* truth, and of the highest order”; “it is truth hallowed by love – the joint offspring of the worth of the dead and the affections of the living!” (*EE* 1.58). The narrator of “The Thorn” seems to sense that what the villagers have produced through their mode of distanced and ungrounded imaginative creation is not “truth” of any order. He suggests to his unnamed auditor that a closer proximity might reveal something nearer truth: “I wish that you would go [to the thorn, and to the pond]: / Perhaps when you are at the place / You something of her tale may trace” (*LB* 108-10). In the speaker’s recognition that the villagers’ response strays too far from the “incidents of [Martha Ray’s] common life” (Preface, *LB* 65) and in his own empathic response to her, the speaker exemplifies, despite Wordsworth’s disparaging remarks of the Preface, a promising poetic alternative.

The mystery of the “thorn,” the “hill,” and the “pond” and the interpretive possibilities it generates have made the poem a favorite of deconstructive critics because its indeterminacy suggests to them the indeterminacy of language; the thorn can be anything or nothing. Karen Sánchez-Eppler, for instance, argues that the doubleness of the thorn which is both “like a stone” but also a living marker that is never proven to mark a child’s grave leaves its “function as grave ... explicitly linguistic” (426). Scott Hess argues that “The Thorn” represents a failure of epitaphic reading because the “epitaphic site” is “illegible, both literally and figuratively” and “cannot generate any sustained sympathetic or imaginative activity, only a series of unsatisfying, unanswered questions” (71). While I agree that indeterminacy is an essential element of the poem, the point is not one of evacuated meaning or failed imaginative response. The distance from the dead that creates indeterminacy also creates a different kind of meaning and allows Wordsworth to explore a particular mode of detached imaginative and poetic response. This particular re-creation and translation among the community and to future generations relies on the dead being completely dissociated from what may or may not lie under the mound of moss.

In this conjectural, collective storytelling, the dead child lives on—useful in its own way—in the forms of a fable implying a moral for unmarried girls, a gossipy legend that allows adults to indulge feelings of superiority and *schadenfreude*, and a gothic tale that continues to titillate and thrill the entire community with its quaking grave. Both the future of the “child” and its ability to affect the future depend on its indeterminacy, its complete divorce from memory and fact.

This absolute detachment allows and encourages imaginative freedom and creative potential, but if the objective of re-creating the dead is to produce “truth hallowed by love” (*EE* 1.58), and if the object and effect of poetic work is to express “powerful feelings” in such a way that enlightens understanding and ameliorates affections (Preface, *LB* 103, 115-117), then the poem suggests that too great a physical and factual distance from the dead and their mourners makes the creation of such a “truth” and communal empathy with those who remember impossible. The only character in the poem who knows what secrets the hill may hide and who could do the work of a Poet in reproducing the “truth” of the dead “hallowed by love” is Martha Ray herself. But her direct experience is not enough. It must be shared with the community in order to translate the dead beyond her own mind. The community cannot allow that, however, because her knowledge would necessarily limit its range of imagined responses to the grave-like “hill of moss.” The body of the dead child—if it ever existed—disappears within an ambiguous mound of earth; paradoxically, though, the disappearance of the dead creates the conditions for a different kind of earthly immortality, one that relies on speculation and conjecture to create and retain *a* version of a child which can bear no resemblance to *the* child Martha Ray appears to mourn. The imagination and re-creation of the past unencumbered by material evidence allows the child to be projected into what otherwise would have been an impossible future. Abstracted from its grave, its continuing presence is not only shaped by the minds of the living but shapes them as well. The “truth” of the child may have been lost with the lack of proximity to the grave,

to the dead, and to the individual mourner, but the creative and communicable potential that is gained by the distance holds promise for retaining the dead usefully among the living.

C. The Community Grave

In “The Brothers,” written nearly two years after “We Are Seven” and “The Thorn” and about a decade before the graveyard books of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth revisits and revises the poetic positions of the earlier two graveyard poems and anticipates the regulated distances and outward ambitions of the later work. The dialogic exchange of “The Brothers” bears formal resemblance to that of “We Are Seven” as a rational outsider asks questions of a graveyard intimate to determine the status of a sibling, hears in return an explanation that does not conform to his own knowledge or epistemology, and ultimately leaves the community without a resolution between the two perspectives. However, because both interlocutors stand in detached proximity to the dead, the poem presents more nuanced and effective modes of imaginative re-creation that allow and perhaps require the dead to be shared with others. Like “We Are Seven,” “The Brothers” refuses to choose between two modes of poetic response to the dead, but in the later poem, because both modes are shaped by a sympathetic but removed relationship with the dead neither is rejected as incapable of maintaining and dispersing the dead among the living. Both modes of imaginative re-creation of the dead rely on and encourage the selection and adaptation of details that typifies poetic work, and Wordsworth suggests that although the resulting imaginative productions are incompatible, there can be value in both.

“The Brothers” recounts the return of Leonard Ewbank to his home village after a long absence. He visits the village churchyard in an attempt to learn if his brother James still lives. Without revealing his own identity, Leonard asks the Priest of Ennerdale about the graves he knows to be his family’s, and in return he hears his own story and learns the fate of his brother.

Leonard and James had been orphaned as children and had been raised by their loving but debt-ridden grandfather. After the grandfather's death, Leonard left home to make his fortune as a mariner. The villagers heard he had been captured for a slave and had died. His brother James had been taken in by a series of kind villagers, but suffered at the absence of his beloved brother, and began to sleepwalk, apparently seeking Leonard in his sleep. One day, James remained behind at the top of a cliff while his companions went about their errands. His body was found at the bottom of the cliff the next day, and was buried in the churchyard with his mother and father. After hearing this account, Leonard decides he cannot remain in the village and chooses to return to sea. He later writes to the Priest to tell him with whom he had been speaking and to ask forgiveness for maintaining his anonymity. Leonard grows old as a mariner.

The churchyard in "The Brothers," like those of the other graveyard poems, hides the corporeal dead and allows the grave to serve as a catalyst for exploring how the deceased are remembered and retained, but this poem foregrounds the competing epistemological models provided and promoted by the graveyard: empirical and conjectural. Though a child of the village, Leonard has been away for twenty years and returns as an outsider. His initial stop upon returning to the village of Ennerdale is the churchyard because he believes it will reveal whether his brother still lives. He seeks answers in the empirical evidence of the graves themselves and in the inscribed facts he expects of tombstones. In the plot where his family lies, Leonard sees three distinct but indistinguishable graves where he thinks there were only two before. He gazes at the graves for a "full half-hour" until he begins to doubt his own memory, and he "hopes / That he had seen this heap of turf before, / That it was not another grave, but one / He had forgotten" (*LB* 82, 85-88). Rather than clarification, the graves produce confusion. The grassy mounds are inscrutable, hiding the dead and revealing to Leonard nothing about the fate of his brother. Leonard explains to the Priest who approaches him the problem of this unmarked churchyard:

An orphan could not find his Mother's grave.
 Here's neither head nor foot-stone, plate of brass,
 Cross-bones or skull, type of our earthly state
 Or emblem of our hopes: the dead man's home
 Is but a fellow to that pasture field. (*LB* 167-71)

The graves themselves are no more than “heap[s] of turf,” undifferentiated from the pastures that lie next to the churchyard, and no mark or inscription sets individual graves apart. Anyone could be buried here. Or no one. Anticipating the desire for record-keeping that led to passage of the Parochial Registers Act in 1812, Leonard seeks facts: names and dates and the kinds of details that might be found on a headstone, footstone, or “plate of brass.” These inscribed details would identify the dead and would attest for anyone who could read them that the now-dead body once lived. In the absence of such empirical evidence, however, this “orphan [who] could not find his Mother's grave” is effectively orphaned twice, bereft of the mother's body in life and of both her body and memory in death; for outsiders, the dead disappear completely with the lack of empirical evidence as the graves that hide bodies also conceal the fact and facts of lives lived.

The Priest offers an alternative epistemological model by which the living can know the dead through the medium of the churchyard: a narrative that is produced and maintained through speculation and conversation, not in engraved words or symbols. When he first observes Leonard in the churchyard, the Priest boasts that the graveyard will not yield its information to this stranger, for “In our church-yard / Is neither epitaph nor monument, / Tomb-stone nor name, only the turf we tread” (*LB* 12-14). He answers Leonard's charge that, based on the lack of written churchyard record, the village seems “heedless of the past” (*LB* 166) by claiming a more comprehensive community-based record: “We have no need of names and epitaphs, / We talk about the dead by our fire-sides” (*LB* 176-77). According to the Priest, the anonymity of the grave in the village churchyard is counteracted by what Kurt Fosso calls the “oral-interpretive community” that names and maintains the dead through shared conversation (151).

Scholars often read this poem as pitting written and oral modes of communication against each other, and they tend to argue, with reason, that Wordsworth privileges the Priest's oral epitaphic mode over the written epitaphic mode Leonard seeks.¹³ Sally Bushell explains what she sees as the benefits of the oral mode of narration in "The Brothers": not only does it allow for a "positive uncertainty created by the unmarked graves (which helps Leonard to prepare for his loss)," but in the form of the Priest's story, it "offers so much more than the formal utterance of a monument" (190). In recounting James's life as well as death, the narrative makes of James something more than "brother," more than "merely the person Leonard left behind" and instead transforms him into "a part of the community" (190).¹⁴ Bushell is right to note the depth and nuance that the oral, shared narratives can provide in contrast to engraved epitaphs. The fireside mode of communal remembrance and re-creation described by the Priest offers the possibility of a warmer, more humane, and more well-rounded account of the dead than any engraved stone could do, even if that account is, and must be, creatively embellished to approach completeness. Leonard himself recognizes that the oral epitaphic mode offers a kind of earthly immortality as the "dalesmen, then, do in each other's thoughts / Possess a kind of second life" (*LB* 182-83).

This "kind of second life" is both shaped and perpetuated by the community as they re-create James's life and reinterpret his death so that he remains a beloved and bearable presence among them by augmenting facts and eye-witness reports with communal conjecture. Once the Priest confirms the third unmarked Ewbank grave is James's, Leonard asks how he died. He learns that James had been despondent at Leonard's absence, had asked his companions to leave him alone on the cliff, and subsequently fell to his death. Leonard suspects suicide and exclaims: "He could not come to an unhallow'd end!" (*LB* 389). The community has interpreted the situation differently, however, and the Priest shares their reassuring explanation:

we all conjectur'd
 That, as the day was warm, he had lain down
 Upon the grass, and, waiting for his comrades
 He there had fallen asleep, that in his sleep
 He to the margin of the precipice
 Had walked, and from the summit had fallen headlong—
 And so no doubt he perish'd... (LB 392-98)

Time and again in his narration of James's final hours, the Priest underscores the subjectivity of this explanation: "'tis my belief / His absent Brother still was at his heart"; James, tir'd *perhaps*, / Or from *some other cause*, remain'd behind"; "*we all conjectur'd*"; "*We guess*" (LB 343-44, 357-58, 391, 399, emphasis added). We might read these hedging words as a mark of honesty in the Priest's narration that acknowledges the unknowability of another person's thoughts, feelings, and unobserved actions, but this is clearly a narrative that has been adopted, adapted, and shared by the community, just as they adopted and shared James when he was orphaned. If the Priest is to be believed, the community loved and cared for James, and if that is true, then abstracting and distilling the best aspects of his life and character in order to share them while obscuring anything that is unpleasant or unhelpful is part of the caretaking—and poetic—obligation. The fabrication they create is, "no doubt," a kindness to James and inadvertently to Leonard, but it also represents a kindness to the community who must live with their memories of James's life and death. With this narrative, James is perpetuated as an ongoing and integral component of the community, buried in the churchyard at the heart of the community, not at a crossroad without.¹⁵

In the poetic response to the dead represented by the Priest, the community is the seat of the creative, imaginative power that re-creates and retains the dead usefully among the local population. The community memory-making and memory-keeping of James and the Ewbank family are based in facts and in the intimately known lives of the dead. This allows for a detailed, intimate, and caring portrayal of the brothers who loved their grandfather Walter and were "such darlings of each other" (LB 240). Like the cottage girl's re-creation of John and Jane, the

re-creation of James is grounded in personal memories and proximity to the dead, but because those memories are shared among a community, James's afterlife automatically extends beyond the mind of a single individual. However, that dispersal also means conjectural augmentation is necessary to complete the narrative and fill the spaces between memories and beyond eye-witness accounts. This community's re-creation James bears some resemblance to the speculations of the villagers in "The Thorn" about the contents of the "hill of moss," but Wordsworth offers a more sympathetic version of communal re-creation of the dead in "The Brothers." The villagers of Ennerdale maintain James in memory by maintaining a sympathetic distance from him. His body, with its "mangled limbs" (*LB* 378) has disappeared under its "heap of turf" (*LB* 86) which enables the surviving community members to abstract the warm, loving, positive characteristics of his life while leaving behind the potentially more insidious details that suggest his loneliness, rootlessness, and despair. This creative memorialization, based as it is in proximity to the deceased, "hallows" the truth by love, serving and preserving both the earthly afterlife of James and the ongoing self-understanding of the community.

Even though this mode of communal re-creation is more expansive, ensuring James's continuing presence around the firesides of the village, it cannot accommodate within the living community those who do not participate in this particular imaginative process, and so, to account for the absent Leonard, the community has incorporated him into the community's dead. This is made possible by his bodily disappearance. The unmarked graves of the churchyard allow the bodies of the dead to disappear so their lives can be imaginatively re-created, and because the Priest does not recognize Leonard standing before him, the body of the living which disappeared twenty years ago when it left the village also effectively remains hidden. The Priest tells the anonymous Leonard that the community's version of Leonard died as a slave "among the Moors / Upon the Barbary Coast" (*LB* 313-14). Clearly the Priest and the village are wrong, and

Wordsworth implies with this gross misreading of both the historical record and the living form that a degree of skepticism about the story of James's death may be in order as well. However, he also implies that this communal response is worthy of appreciation. The creative impulse that leads to the community's narrative of Leonard seems to be motivated by the desire to remember and memorialize him in a loving way while also upholding the bonds that form the community. Leonard's life, like James's, has been abstracted and augmented to create a story that accounts for his absence in positive terms: his family had been "destitute, / And Leonard, chiefly for his Brother's sake, / Resolv'd to try his fortune on the seas" (*LB* 300-02). The tale told by the Priest also absolves the village of any guilt in Leonard's supposed death. It might be argued that had they done more to support both brothers, Leonard would not have become a mariner and would not have been in a position to die abroad alone, but the Priest makes it seem as if some innate element of Leonard's "spirit" has made his lonely end almost inevitable: "'Twas not a little / That would bring down his spirit, and, no doubt, / Before it ended in his death, the Lad / Was sadly cross'd" (*LB* 314-17).¹⁶ The Priest's interpretation allows him and the community at large to avoid the burden of their potential responsibility for Leonard's absence and death.

The distance that remains between Leonard and this community representative, paradoxically, enables Leonard's ongoing imagined presence in the community that gathers around firesides in his absence, but his brotherly proximity to James and his knowledge of his own life experiences make his bodily presence in the village impossible. Much of the tension in the poem lies in the fact that Leonard keeps his identity from the Priest; a veil of anonymity—not unlike the unmarked turf—exists between them. Leonard, though living, is identified with the anonymous dead when he is present, and when he is absent, he exists as a dead man in the community tales. His dying "among the Moors" is surely recounted in much the way James's dying among the crags is (*LB* 313). The village community retains and re-creates both the dead

and absent through imaginative work, but that same process excludes those who cannot or will not participate, rendering Leonard prematurely dead to the community, living on in an afterlife of fireside conversations. The living Leonard's exclusion from the community seems unavoidable and irrevocable. He is both too close and too distant from the dead—from James and the community-created version of himself—to dwell easily among the living in Ennerdale. However, his distance from the community combined with his close brotherly relationship to James allows him to deduce a truth about James's life and death, and perhaps about his own need to go to sea, that the community cannot or will not bear. In other words, Leonard also maintains a detached proximity to the dead which forms a basis for his own, different poetic imagining.

The ending of "The Brothers" is generally read as a vision of isolation and loss, but these interpretations tend to place too high a value on Leonard's physical presence in the community of Ennerdale and to discount his alternative epistemological mode; thus, they misunderstand the expansive possibilities Wordsworth suggests by ending the poem with Leonard rather than in the insular community.¹⁷ Shortly after parting from the Priest, Leonard retreats to "a *grove* / That overhung the road" almost as if burying himself in a *grave* (*LB* 414-15, emphasis added). Sitting in the grove/grave, Leonard reviews the Priest's tale and his own memories, recalling for himself "his early years" and his recently "cherish'd hopes" for settling in the community with James (*LB* 417, 418). During this process, he comes to realize that this vale is "A place in which he could not bear to live" (*LB* 422), and so he decides not to rejoin the community of Ennerdale and instead to return to his life at sea (*LB* 423). Membership in this community would exact too high a price for Leonard who would have to forego his own memories and interpretations of James in order to align with those of the community; physically staying in the community, in other words, would necessitate his psychologically abandoning James. The end of the poem places Leonard both physically and emotionally outside the community, but his leaving should not be considered

a failure. It is a reasoned choice that enables the ongoing poetic re-creation of himself and James in the minds of the Ennerdale community and affords him the opportunity to create an alternative narrative for his own life and a poetic re-creation of James which will remain with him. Nor is his choice to return to the sea a rejection of family or community. His career as a mariner was initially launched not in isolation among strangers but as an alternate familial occupation when his uncle, “A thriving man” who “traffic’d on the seas,” introduced him to the life of the mariner (*LB* 289). In resuming that life after emerging from the grove/grave, Leonard in effect resurrects himself into a larger, more expansive, but still personally-affiliated community.

In “The Brothers,” Wordsworth presents two competing but successful modes of imaginatively re-creating the dead, both grounded in intimate memories but complicated and enabled by distances of time, geography, and psychological detachment. The community augments its knowledge of the dead with creative speculation that “hallows” the “Truth” by love. This produces a re-creation of the dead and absent that, while not strictly a “faithful image,” is nonetheless cherished and retained within the community. Leonard’s re-creation of James likewise cannot be a “faithful image” because his intimate memories are tempered by the distance of time and must be supplemented by epitaphic facts. His re-creation, too, represents “Truth hallowed by love,” but his “Truth” demands an honesty about the past and about the economic, social, and psychological challenges that exist in Ennerdale that the villagers seem willing to ignore. In this respect, he anticipates the Solitary of *The Excursion* who cannot forget the corruption of the grave and of society even as he participates in the renovation afforded by memorializing the dead. Wordsworth suggests that both modes of remembrance and imaginative re-creation are valid and useful in their ways, but that they are mutually incompatible. The vision of this community and its shared memorial tales as represented by the Priest is one of specific local use and limited reach, available and beneficial to those within the bounds of the community

but excluding those without. The detachment from the community Leonard chooses at the end of the poem aligns him with the detachment of a poet, one who has been in proximity with the feelings, experiences, and “real language” of rural local people but who, with the necessary distance of time and space, can translate those among a larger, more loosely-knit community.

With Leonard’s final act, Wordsworth intimates the vision of a more expansive and dynamic use for the dead that he develops in *The Excursion*. By leaving, Leonard facilitates the ongoing existence of James and himself within the confines of the community narrative, but he also creates the opportunity to forge a future for himself as “a grey-headed Mariner” (LB 431). J.R. Watson compares the “grey-headed mariner” that Leonard becomes to Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner, seeing both as exiles who lose contact with their former communities and must grow older while “condemned to a life of perpetual movement” (48). But the Ancient Mariner is, nonetheless, a poet figure who produces and promotes the imaginative re-creation of the dead. Leonard is not condemned to his life as a Mariner; he chooses it. Thus, he can transform that poetic potential into something positive. In his global travels, Leonard can share the “more dignified and lovely” aspects of James’s character, the bonds of brotherly affection and protection, and the values of the rural English community with the larger world (EE 1.58).

D. The National Grave

At the end of “The Brothers,” Wordsworth only hints at an outward turn when Leonard chooses to leave the isolated community of Ennerdale and resume his life as a mariner, carrying with him his memories of home and family and the values of his pastoral upbringing. By the time Wordsworth writes the *Essays upon Epitaphs* and the churchyard passages of *The Excursion* in 1810, he has refined and developed his ideas about how the dead can be retained and re-created through imaginative work, and his sense of how the dead might be of use to the living has

become more ambitious. In *The Excursion*, the dead—and the living gathered over them in the graveyard—have become a more varied body who represent a broader swath of the nation and whose affiliations extend far beyond the churchyard walls and local village boundaries. The dead in this poem are not simply remembered and maintained by those of the present in the presence of their graves; they are memorialized, given a future and a role in shaping that future by being remembered, imaginatively re-created into publicly accessible forms, then deployed as representatives and advocates of English values. Memorialization involves preserving the memory of a person or commemorating someone or something, certainly, but it also bears the diplomatic and political valence of petition or remonstrance. As negotiating instructions received by an ambassador from those he serves or as facts, claims, or propositions presented by an envoy on behalf of the entity she represents, memorials in this sense imply an outward focus, an expectation of influence, and a commitment to exchange that will encourage or coerce change (*OED*, “memorial, *a.* and *n.*” Def. 6-7). In other words, diplomatic memorialization might be seen as a process of selecting and organizing compelling materials in such a way that they may, as Wordsworth writes of successful epitaphs, “impress and affect the more” (*EE* 1.58).

The Excursion, first published in 1814 and the longest of Wordsworth’s poems published during his lifetime, was admired by its Victorian readers, but has met with mixed and even harsh responses since its publication, beginning with Francis Jeffrey’s often-cited early review for the *Edinburgh Review* in November 1814 which begins “This will never do” and which complains of the poem’s didacticism (Galperin 57n3).¹⁸ Jeffrey set the tone for much of the criticism that followed which complained of the poem’s perceived conservatism, officious instruction, morbidity, and redundancy. In 1964, Geoffrey Hartman excoriated the second half of *The Excursion* and the churchyard books in particular, suggesting the poem is overly long, repetitive, and an unnecessary pastiche of Wordsworth’s previous, lively work, “a repository for homeless

passages from the fertile period of 1797-1800” (*Wordsworth’s* 321).¹⁹ His influential dismissal of the poem set the stage for decades of scholarly neglect, but recent criticism has reassessed the poem and has begun to read it as being more socially and politically engaged than previously recognized and as a development, not a denial, of Wordsworth’s earlier positions.²⁰ In this critical spirit, I turn to the churchyard of *The Excursion* which provides the meditative site in which Wordsworth demonstrates and extends his ongoing preoccupation with how the dead are remembered, imaginatively re-created, and made useful for the living and for the future.

The Excursion recounts in nine books a five-day walking expedition which begins with the Poet and Wanderer who are joined by the despondent Solitary. The tour ends at a village churchyard where the Pastor joins their conversation and participates in their contemplation of the dead and the potential for moral and social restoration and reformation. In the sixth and seventh books, “The Churchyard Among the Mountains” and its continuation, the Pastor recounts, at the Wanderer’s request, the “Authentic epitaphs” of many who are buried here as evidence of hope and to emphasize “the breath we share with human kind” (*Exc* 5.658).

As in Wordsworth’s earlier graveyard poems, this churchyard conceals the corporeality of the dead under its “beautiful and green” surface which is “almost wholly free / From interruption of sepulchral stones” and which makes available for imaginative rendering the “very Soul” of those buried here (*Exc* 6.621, 6.23-24, 5.669), but in its expansiveness, its burial diversity, and its attention to sculpture and landscape architecture, it more closely resembles newly developing garden cemeteries. This churchyard provides a cosmopolitan space where living and dead relate to one another at a certain remove. Wordsworth was aware of the poor material conditions of urban graveyards, referring in the first of his *Essays* to “the unsightly manner in which our monuments are crowded together in the busy, noisy, unclean, and almost grassless church-yard of a large town” (*EE* 1.54). In contrast, the churchyard of *The Excursion*

offers a place where the living visit, stroll, and enjoy the aesthetic pleasures of nature and art, remembering the dead without physical reminders of death.²¹ It is certainly a Christian burial ground, not a secular commercial enterprise, but as with the developing suburban garden cemeteries, the variety of individuals below and above the graveyard surface creates a sense of detachment that would not be present in small, rural churchyards. This space facilitates the kind of thinking that expands beyond the boundaries of the churchyard into the nation and world.

The graves and monuments in the churchyard of *The Excursion* offer much for graveyard tourists to admire, but more importantly, they and the corpses beneath them provide a multiplicity of examples that serve as the basis for poetic and social imagining.²² Much like any graveyard tourists, the Wanderer, the Poet, and the Solitary begin their tour by observing the “various records” which claim their tribute inside the church; then, they proceed outside where they sit on a “moss-grown wall” in dappled sunlight under the branches of a “broad Oak, stretching forth its leafy arms / From an adjoining pasture” (*Exc* 5.169, 5.228, 5.225-26). The stately arboreal national symbol of England—not, incidentally, a yew tree more commonly associated with graveyards—reaches into the churchyard from beyond its boundaries. And indeed, the churchyard boundaries here are porous, ushering in for burial the dead from all times and places across England. The Pastor’s chosen epitaphic subjects represent a far-flung, loosely connected community which includes both natives of this vale and itinerants who have moved in from afar. Even though his selection is broad—over the course of two-and-a-half books he shares sixteen oral epitaphs by Galperin’s count (52)—he does not choose tales indiscriminately. He omits stories of those visitors to the area who “as their stay was brief, / So their departure only left behind / Fancies, and loose conjectures” (*Exc* 6.418-20), but in making that decision, he affirms the transitory nature of at least part of this population. The adult in “We Are Seven” and Leonard in “The Brothers” might have seemed anomalous as they inserted themselves

temporarily into the local community, but in *this* community, those kinds of visitors are regular enough they do not merit remark or retelling. Other outsiders have entered the community and stayed to become part of it. For example, a Priest and his family now buried in five graves had arrived in these hills “from Northumbrian hills” (*Exc* 7.81). The Jacobite and Hanoverian odd couple buried under the sundial they erected as a monument to themselves for “public use” came from Scotland and “Britain’s southern tract” respectively (*Exc* 6.514, 6.443). Scott Hess reads the churchyard’s multiplicity as representing English society from all social classes and helpfully notes that many of the Pastor’s epitaphs focus specifically on nationalism, including that of the Jacobite and the “southern English Whig” who represent “the unity of British society after the uprising of 1745...; and the story of the buried Elizabethan knight ... which connects the village churchyard to the supposed golden age of English nationalism” (72). Importantly, the dead of this community have come from across Britain to mingle here in this churchyard.

The heterogeneity of the dead is replicated in the living members of the community, and Wordsworth emphasizes the healthful engagement between these people and a larger social and political sphere beyond the village boundaries. The Pastor portrays people working outside of the area, participating in commercial and military movements, and thriving in the process. From the old miner who works in a “far-distant Quarry” (*Exc* 5.716), traveling a long distance to work each day and digging out ore that will be sent farther still to the logger who interrupts the Pastor’s narrative as he passes by with his “Team of horses, with a ponderous freight” (*Exc* 7.559), these graveyard neighbors represent a broader national public. As the logger passes, the Pastor temporarily breaks off his recitation of oral epitaphs of humans to pronounce an epitaph on “the giant Oak / Stretched on his bier!” lamenting the loss of these trees to this peasant’s “works of havoc” (*Exc* 7.564-65, 7.610). Though the peasant fells trees of all kinds, significantly it is specifically the oak laid out here. The Pastor suggests this is the death knell for the English

way of life, but his own words belie his implication, for he speaks of “Many a ship / Launched into Morecamb bay” that owe their strong timbers to the peasant’s work in addition to axles and spindles and the “trunk and body” of the “vast engine laboring in the mine” (*Exc* 7.620-21, 7.628, 7.626). The English Oak, as well as the peasant who fells and hauls it, is going forth into the world and promoting progress for the individual and for the Empire, not destroying the English way of life but adapting and spreading it to an ever-larger area. Much as the Pastor might regret the old peasant’s work, it grants health and longevity to the man (and by implication to England) who is “green in age and lusty” (*Exc* 7.648).

In contrast to this long-lived peasant, Oswald, a “glorious ... Youth,” is now buried in the churchyard (*Exc* 7.746). He and nine others from the valley had heeded England’s call to arms against Napoleon, and as a “true patriot” he had fulfilled his duty to his country admirably (*Exc* 7.827). Ironically, it is not his military activity but the pursuits of his country village existence that cut short his life in its prime when, after a day of hunting, he plunges into the cold river to “wash his Father’s flock,” begins to convulse, and dies twelve days later (*Exc* 7.892). Oswald’s tale suggests that vigor and progress are to be found not in the village but in the world beyond the village boundaries. Other examples such as that of the deaf and blind Dalesmen offer images of patience, perseverance, faith, uncomplaining acceptance, and adaptability that are meant to convey the best moral qualities of rural England (*Exc* 7.412-553).

In the immediate context of the poem, the Pastor and Wanderer expect these tales to correct what they perceive as the despondency of the Solitary, but they—and Wordsworth—anticipate a broader audience as well. In order for the tales to achieve their moral purpose and have a broad lasting influence, they must be factually grounded in their originary subjects to achieve “Authenticity,” but sufficiently detached from the intimate, private details that would make their appeal and relevance too narrow. Retaining the dead among the living and translating

their lessons beyond the time and space of the churchyard requires careful selection and editing, the imaginative response requisite for poetic production. Although the Pastor acknowledges that one can learn from “a more forbidding way,” he exerts his poetic prerogative and willingly confines himself to “Authentic epitaphs” that edify, those narratives that accord with “love, esteem, / And admiration” (*Exc* 5.653, 6.675-76, 6.664-65). By basing his epitaphs on “solid facts” and “plain pictures” rather than the “abstractions” and “disputes” that characterized the discussion before he arrived (*Exc* 5.639-40), the Pastor offers his own form of abstraction, the kind Wordsworth advocates in the *Essays* “that takes away, indeed, but only to the end that the parts which are not abstracted may appear more dignified and lovely” (*EE* 1.58). In essence, the Pastor offers a bowdlerized edition of the graveyard, omitting the offensive and indelicate to retain the morally edifying. In other words, he presents the characters of these deceased graveyard inhabitants so that they are seen “as a tree through a tender haze or a luminous mist, that spiritualises and beautifies” them (*EE* 1.58). These distillations of character provide the detachment that makes them communicable and that makes the Pastor’s epitaphic re-creations memorials rather than memories. Wordsworth describes in the first *Essay* the ideal written memorial tribute as being scant of detail because that will best affect and profit the spectator (*EE* 1.58-59). Memorials must focus on humanity’s common nature rather than on the individual human to be widely understood and shared among the living.

For Wordsworth, memorials—translatable imaginative re-creations of the dead—are meant to instruct and challenge as they are distributed beyond the graveyard to present the moral worth of those buried here and the nation they represent. In *The Excursion*, he depicts figures who will go forth from the graveyard to do this poetic work and who, based on their backgrounds and vocations, are particularly equipped for this project. The Pastor’s calling and training equip him for what is essentially a secular evangelism as he communicates the moral character of his

dead parishioners to his living auditors and sends the latter out from the vale to share what they have learned with the larger world.²³ The Pastor is a member of the local community based on his geographical history, but his economic status and educational experience distance him from the majority of his parishioners, allowing him to see them more clearly, to evaluate and select the qualities of their lives that will be of most use to others, and to convey those qualities dispassionately to his auditors. The Wanderer, a Scotsman by birth, has traveled as a pedlar, and his calling as an itinerant salesman has equipped him to identify (with) others' needs while maintaining a professional reserve in his relations. Like the Wanderer, the Solitary is a Scotsman who left his native home and has traveled broadly. He served as chaplain of a military troop, married and settled down with his family, moved to London after their deaths at the height of the French Revolution, and spent time in America in search of a new life until he became disillusioned by that "unknit Republic" (*Exc* 3.923) and returned to England to reside in his secluded vale. Like the other characters, in his loose but undeniable connections to the others, to this local community, and to the larger world, he is positioned to appraise the dead and their tales and to communicate both among and beyond the conversational circle created within the poem, but his experiences of personal loss, political disappointment, and social disillusionment have made him more attuned to human corruption and social ills and allow him to provide a necessary corrective when the distance between the living and the corruption of death becomes too great.

The diversity of the dead and of the living who remember and memorialize them in *The Excursion* contributes to the cosmopolitan impulse of the poem that draws together lives originating in far-flung temporal and geographical distances, connects them in the space of the churchyard, and sends them out again across the nation and the globe in national and imperial service. Hess suggests that the Pastor's audience—the "local Recluse, the itinerant Wanderer, and the socially and geographically unidentified narrator"—will, at the end of the poem,

“disperse to their various locations, but they will internalize and carry with them this common experience of the churchyard and its sense of continuity and stability” (72-73). I suggest instead that when they go their separate ways, rather than—or perhaps in addition to—carrying a sense of continuity and stability which implies a kind of stasis, they will carry and disperse outward from this place the dynamic examples of English moral worth and cosmopolitan progress they have abstracted from this churchyard and its surrounding community.

Although Wordsworth’s cosmopolitanism is not my primary concern, many of the terms I use in this chapter to describe the relationship of living to dead and the dispersal of the dead across geographical and temporal expanses—*distance*, *detachment*, *cosmopolitanism*—coincide with those Amanda Anderson uses in *The Powers of Distance*.²⁴ She argues that Victorian writers were preoccupied by modern practices of detachment and the moral implications of distance for the practitioner of that detachment, asserting that Victorian writers understood cultivated distance to affect more than “impersonal intellectual, aesthetic, or political goals” but to have a “an intimate and profound bearing on moral character” (6). Wordsworth, too, recognizes a moral dimension of abstracting and distributing the characters of the dead, but the ambiguous responses that Anderson identifies Victorian writers experiencing as a result of self-reflexive critique are largely absent here as the Wanderer, the Pastor, and the Poet express no doubt that moral lessons can be gleaned from the churchyard and should be used to correct and instruct others. Wordsworth’s cosmopolitanism is deeply attached to nationalism and the outward expansion of the British Empire. In this he might be closer to what Bruce Robbins identifies as a newer model of cosmopolitanism, one that “is a reality of (re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance” (3) rather than the idealized detachment or disaffiliation from particular local or national interests idealized by older theorizations of cosmopolitanism. Robbins’s notion of multiple attachments, even across distance, and their consequent ethical

implications and burdens offers one way to understand the distanced connections Wordsworth advocates not only across geographical boundaries but across temporal or existential distances between living and dead as well as the Solitary's troubling of his companions' too sanguine and unqualified praise of the English character, even as he does not dismiss it outright.

The Solitary presents the most complex poetic persona of the group; his critique of the others' unexamined (too distant) praise of progress and his insistence on acknowledging the social and moral decay of society stem from his own (too close) identification with the dead, but his regeneration and detached reintegration into society in light of that identification also suggest the potential power of poetic memorial. Like Leonard in "The Brothers, the Solitary is both too close to and too distant from the dead to dwell easily among the living, and he is imagined as a dead man himself, isolated from communal intercourse by his retreat from society and isolated from the living by the Wanderer's account of him. In the Wanderer's interpretation of the Solitary's past, the force of the Solitary's grief at the deaths of his children and wife causes him to enter into intimate association with the place of the dead. Wordsworth emphasizes this connection between living and dead in the revised 1850 edition of the poem; the Solitary is "compelled / To hold communion with the grave" after the death of his family (*Exc* 2.215-16). The Solitary's anguish is replaced by apathy until, the Wanderer explains, the French Revolution stirs him to move to London and preach the "cause of Christ and civil liberty" until the "Plague" of revolutionary fervor infects him with a "mortal taint" (*Exc* 2.236, 2.258, 2.260). The Wanderer's language casts the Solitary's condition as fatal, and he expresses the Solitary's most damning symptom in terms of his relationship to the graves of his family: "he broke faith with those whom he had laid / In earth's dark chambers" (*Exc* 2.262-63). After a period of disillusionment and restless wandering, the Solitary removes himself to dwell alone in the "rugged hills" where, according to the Wanderer, "he will live and die / Forgotten" and where,

despite his attempts to escape society, the Wanderer and Poet now seek him (*Exc* 2.326, 2.330-331). The Wanderer has described the Solitary's past in terms of death and burial, so it is little wonder that he is quick to presume the Solitary dead in the present of the poem. After witnessing a funeral procession that the Wanderer and Poet assume to be the Solitary's, they—and perhaps readers—are surprised to see the Solitary himself shortly thereafter, not only in perfect health but interacting with the living as he comforts a mourning child (*Exc* 2.528-37). Hartman writes that when the Solitary appears, “it is a dead man they see” (*Wordsworth's* 307).²⁵

If the Wanderer's account of the Solitary's past effectively renders him socially dead, the description of his home metaphorically inters him, and a subsequent depiction of the Solitary himself transubstantiates his corporeal form from flesh to funerary stone. The Solitary's vale among the mountains is described as “Urn-like ... in shape, deep as an Urn,” with the repetition of “an urn” providing an aural echo of “inurn” and allusively reducing the Solitary to desiccated fragments (*Exc* 2.353). Near his abode stands a “black yew-tree,” the tree traditionally found in English graveyards (*Exc* 3.26). After being inurned in his own valley, the Solitary appears to lose the last vestiges of his living fleshly form when he visits the church with the Wanderer and the Poet. There within the nave, he is transfigured into an effigial form bedecking an urn, positioned

with curved arm reclined
On the baptismal Font; his pallid face
Upturned, as if his mind were rapt, or lost
In some abstraction;—gracefully he stood,
The semblance bearing of a sculptured Form
That leans upon a monumental Urn (*Exc* 5.209-14)

With his “pallid,” marble-like complexion and his classically posed “Form,” the Solitary could blend seamlessly with the funerary monuments that undoubtedly line the nave, rigid and set apart from human interaction.²⁶ Much like the characters in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* who experience a living-death or death-in-life, the Solitary is temporarily excluded from the world of

the living, but his ambiguous state enables him to identify more closely with the dead and then to act more forcefully on their behalf among the living when he does emerge from this stasis.

Surprisingly, the Solitary's calcification is reversed and he is returned to humanity by a corpse. Unusually for Wordsworth's poetic churchyards, the "Churchyard Among the Mountains" is depicted as an active burial ground with a working Sexton.²⁷ As the Solitary stands immobilized in thought, the Sexton returns from digging a grave to put away "spade and mattock" so they will be ready "for future need" (*Exc* 5.220, 5.221). The Solitary responds in anger to the Sexton's careless humming and apparent unconcern about the import of his task, characterizing the Sexton as a "self-solaced, easy-hearted churl, / Death's hireling, who scoops out his Neighbour's grave, / Or wraps an old Acquaintance up in clay" (*Exc* 5.232-34).²⁸ The Sexton's voice, the Solitary tells his companions, has summoned him "From some affecting images and thoughts, / And from the company of serious words" (*Exc* 5.237-38). Typically, dead bodies disappear beneath the turf of Wordsworth's graveyards in order to provide a foundation for poetic imagining unhindered by the material limitations implied and imposed by the corpse. Here, an unburied corpse does, indeed, arrest thought, but perhaps because it is invisible—implied but not narrated—the corpse also acts as a catalyst for changing the Solitary's silent introspection to shared contemplation. As angry as he is at the interruption, and as heartless as he believes the Sexton to be, the implied but distanced presence of the corpse returns the Solitary "from the company of serious words" to human company and impels him to utter those heretofore silent "affecting images and thoughts." This converse expands and transforms his private interior musings into a shared discussion that is directed outward toward social progress.

The dead of *The Excursion* and the *Essays upon Epitaphs* seem much nearer the surface of the earth and the poem than those of the earlier *Lyrical Ballads*. In the first of the *Essays*, Wordsworth expresses the need for epitaphs, and by extension the contemplation of those

epitaphs, to be near not only the grave but the *contents* of the grave. He writes that an epitaph “is to be accomplished, not in a general manner, but, where it can, in *close connection with the bodily remains of the deceased*” (EE 1.53, original emphasis). Even the process of abstracting the best of a man’s character can and should be accomplished “by the side of the grave where his body is mouldering” (EE 1.58). Wordsworth’s language of “mouldering” keeps these epitaphs grounded with a reminder of the frailties of both “man” and society but also suggests the possibility of something better. In describing the nation as “imagined community,” Benedict Anderson notes the strangeness of “cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers” as emblems of modern nationalism because the “ceremonial reverence” accorded these monuments results “precisely *because* they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them” (9). In contrast, Wordsworth’s vision, though depending on detachment for its communicability, is rooted in its proximity to the dust of the dead. In other words, the community that Wordsworth imagines within the graveyard and the image of the nation that develops around its abstracted examples of moral worth reside wholly within the minds of the interlocutors, or as Anderson put it, “in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6), but that imaginative response is dependent on its rootedness in the materiality of the corpse and proximity to the dead.

Although the Solitary has remained very much alive, Wordsworth invites readers to identify him with the dead for a time, in part because, by the logic of imaginative re-creation and the work of poetic memorial that he has been developing since *Lyrical Ballads*, this provides the conditions by which the Solitary is able not only to rejoin the living but to demand and influence social and political change. Wordsworth draws parallels between the Solitary and the dead which highlight how both are reclaimed and retained among the community of the living. Over the course of the poem, the Solitary experiences the same pattern of disappearance, editorial shaping, and communal sharing that make of the dead dynamic presences in the present and for the future:

He disappears, body and soul, into his urn-like vale; he is reshaped through narrative including the epitaph-like history of him recounted by the Wanderer in Book II, his own retelling and reshaping narrative that augments and corrects the Wanderer's account in Book III, and the Pastor's narratives of the churchyard inhabitants meant to correct his despondency and offer hope in Books V-VII; and he is reintegrated among the living where he will act as a memorial for social and economic justice. The Solitary's close identification with the dead, almost to the point of appearing dead himself, leads him to recognize the corruptibility of humanity in the mouldering of the corpse where the others see only evidence of fertility and growth.

The "mouldering" remains in this garden-like cemetery to which both the Wanderer and Pastor refer (*Exc* 5.652-55, 6.820-21, 6.817), remind readers that the decomposing corpse becomes literally and figuratively the compost from which emerges new life and new possibilities—the human becomes humus—but the dirt of decay is never far removed. Humility and humanity are linked by the humus of the grave, according to the Wanderer, for the purpose of hearing stories of the dead is to value one's commonality with humankind, "To prize the breath we share with human kind; / And look upon the dust of Man with awe" (*Exc* 5.658-59).²⁹ Despite the apparent sincerity of their belief, the Wanderer's exhortation to prize the "dust of man," the Pastor's eager compliance, and the Poet's breathless reportage underscore their platitudinous understanding of this churchyard "mould." The Solitary, conversely, while acceding at the beginning of Book VIII to their suggestion that the carefully selected uplifting tales of the churchyard have been helpful to his renovation, refuses to ignore the "weedy pool or pestilential swamp" that, though unpleasant, might lead to "genuine knowledge" (*Exc* 6.613, 6.610). If graves revealed their contents, he claims, the divergence between the physical decay and understandings of immortality would demand reconsideration of human behavior:

If this mute earth
 Of what it holds could speak, and every grave
 Were as a volume, shut, yet capable
 Of yielding its content to eye and ear,
 We should recoil, stricken with sorrow and shame,
 To see disclosed, by such dread proof, how ill
 That which is done accords with what is known
 To reason, and by conscience is enjoined. (*Exc* 5.246-53)

The mouldering visible or envisioned corpse, with its reminder of corruption, counterbalances the imaginative re-creation and forward-looking hope engendered by the grassy graves. As his reaction to the Sexton indicates, the Solitary appears to have a more finely tuned awareness of the physicality of the corpse than do the Wanderer and the Pastor and a more deeply felt understanding of human corruption based on his time in London and America after the deaths of his family members which allow him to counter the others' too distant response to human decay. However, their ability to extract the renovating characteristics of the dead and to re-create the dead usefully for the present and the future provides a path by which the Solitary might rejoin the living. The interrelations among the living provide the tension and balance that lets each attain detached proximity to the dead.

The very experiences that led to the Solitary's despondency and his awareness of the corruption of death make him an impassioned critic of social ills and an advocate for social justice. After the Pastor finishes his recitation of narratives, the Wanderer responds by exulting in the "gigantic powers" that the thinking mind has compelled to "serve the will of feeble-bodied Man" (*Exc* 8.207-18). The Solitary refuses to let this effusion go unchallenged, and points out that people of the present age in England, particularly those of rural, agricultural areas, are degraded though unimprisoned. He asks on behalf of the "Boy the Fields produce" (*Exc* 8.428):

his Country's name,
 Her equal rights, her churches and her schools,
 What have they done for him? And, let me ask,

For tens of thousands uninformed as he?
In brief, what liberty of mind is here?" (*Exc* 8.432-36)

The Solitary does not question the importance of the moral worth propounded by the other characters; rather, he indicts the hollowness of national grandeur without moral worth. Robert M. Ryan writes that the Solitary's "moral indignation in the face of injustice makes all the other characters seem superficial and complacent by comparison" (107); the Solitary's insistent questions on behalf of the rural poor lead to "one of the more dramatic silences of *The Excursion*" as none of the other characters answers his critique (110). Nor does the Solitary deny the possibility of progress that the Wanderer praises, acknowledging that the Pastor's tales have been worthwhile. Even as he allows for the possibility that moral virtues may be extracted from the abstracted characters of the dead, however, he insists on the simultaneous presence of decay and corruption that attests to the need for change and should direct the course of progress. In terms of his frustrations with the institutions that fail to educate and liberate, the Solitary is more than a religious skeptic or a foil for the religious hope maintained by the Wanderer and Pastor as some critics claim.³⁰ That is, his anger in this regard is not a sign of unbelief but of a clear-eyed assessment of the world as it is, much as Leonard understands the evidence of James's despondency and death, even as he argues for what could be. Identifying the corruption of decay does not deny its generative possibilities.

The modes of poetic imagining presented by the Pastor, the Wanderer, and the Solitary in *The Excursion* co-exist beneficially rather than compete, usefully enabling and tempering one another. The Wanderer praises, perhaps somewhat uncritically, the potential for progress at the end of the Pastor's narratives, claiming that social and economic ranks will ultimately be overthrown while society continues to improve:

The vast Frame
Of social nature changes evermore

Her organs and her members, with decay
 Restless, and restless generation, powers
 And functions dying and produced at need, —
 And by this law the mighty Whole subsists:
 With an ascent and progress in the main (*Exc* 7.1021-27)

Despite his hyperbole, the Wanderer does voice the hopeful expectation for progress and expansion that pervades *The Excursion*, using the language of the grave: decay and generation, dying and production. In the final Book, he reiterates the importance of hope, for without it we would not “breathe the sweet air of futurity” (*Exc* 9.25). “The food of hope,” he adds, “Is meditated action” (*Exc* 9.20-21). The churchyard provides the space for meditation and for gleaning the beneficent characteristics of the rural populace, but it is not the space for action. The Solitary, agitating for justice, reminds his companions and the poem’s readers that action occurs when meditations are interrupted, thoughts move beyond the churchyard’s grassy surface, and the living move beyond its mossy walls. He goes his separate way at the end of the poem, but with a promise to rejoin the group one day and to maintain the loose affiliation that allows for interaction and influence among and beyond the community. His promise of reconnection implies his participation in the hopeful future voiced by the other adults and represented by the children who become part of this diverse group in the poem’s final two Books, but it also suggests he will continue to provide a corrective voice that reminds of the potential for decay and disaffection that lies buried in the humic soil alongside examples of English moral worth.

The Excursion directs the reader outward, away from the churchyard and across the sea. The Wanderer praises the interconnectedness that will sustain and enlarge the British Empire through world-wide trade, affirming what readers have already learned from the Pastor’s narratives about the interconnectedness of this community to the world beyond its churchyard walls. The Wanderer envisions Britain’s global expansion “as an image of “industrious bees” who fly “From the thronged hive, and settle where they list / In fresh abodes” at the

encouragement of the “wide waters” that invite Britain “to cast off / Her swarms, and in succession send them forth” (*Exc* 9.372-80). Wordsworth puts the dead to similar use. They too, having been re-shaped into new, dynamic versions through the imaginative work of story-teller and listener, poet and reader, will move as bees through the air to share the moral worth of England across the country and around the world. The dead in *The Excursion* have been memorialized, their qualities selected, abstracted, and re-ordered so that they are accessible not simply for private remembrance but as publicly available exemplars of English character, and they will memorialize others in turn. The corporeal dead disappear and, in turn, the re-imagined dead are dispersed with and through the living as ambassadors to “impress and affect the more.”

E. The Poetic Grave

The memories of the dead are inherently fragile in Wordsworth’s graveyard poetry, relying as they do on the minds of the living to remember, interpret, and transmit them to others. From the “cottage girl’s” vivid, idiosyncratic memories of her siblings in “We Are Seven” that replicate the dead almost as they were in life but cannot be shared with an outsider, to the speculative community re-creation of a child in “The Thorn” that is so far removed from the suspected grave-mound and first-hand knowledge of what it may contain that it makes a fiction of the dead and an outsider of the individual mourner, to the complex interplay of proximity and distance between sibling-as-outsider and community-as-mourner in “The Brothers,” the continuing presence of the dead of *Lyrical Ballads* is limited to and by the living who knew something of them in life. The memorials of *The Excursion* are no less fragile because no less a product of the mind than the memories of those in the other graveyard poems; however, the dead in this churchyard seem destined for dynamic and far-ranging earthly afterlives. The multiplicity and diversity of lives memorialized, listeners participating, and even the status of the Solitary

ambiguously positioned between living and dead provide the detachment that promotes the imaginative work which will not only retain the past but will translate the dead geographically beyond the churchyard walls and temporally to future generations.

The memorial project and the poetic project are intricately aligned in Wordsworth's way of thinking. As he explores and develops how the dead are retained, imaginatively re-created, and redistributed in his graveyard poetry, he simultaneously develops his notions of the work of the poet and the work of poetry in his prose. In the 1802 Preface, Wordsworth contrasts the isolated but necessary work of the scientist with the expansive work of the poet: "The Man of Science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion" (*LB* 388-90). Wordsworth does not deny the importance of the scientist's solitary work or the detailed, intimate, specialized work of the individual, but he claims that poetic work is necessary to complement and complete the scientist's project, to make it known broadly, now and in the future. In the graveyard poems, Wordsworth contrasts the necessary, intimate, detailed solitary work of memory with the more expansive, abstracted, shaping work of memorial that allows the dead to be re-created—sung—in such a way that those beyond the domestic and communal spaces of the graveyard can participate in knowing and perpetuating the dead. Wordsworth claims for the poet a social and moral purpose in the Preface that extends throughout humanity: the poet is

the rock of defense of human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying every where with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, *the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time.* (*LB* 393-98, emphasis added)

As the Pastor, Wanderer, Poet, Solitary—and Reader—depart from the graveyard and go their separate ways, they will spread the “vast empire of humanity” represented by the moral worth of England’s dead through the work of the imagination across space and time.

Wordsworth’s explorations of how the dead are retained among the living through memory and poetic re-creation range from the detailed specificity and intimacy of the domestic and community graveyards of the *Lyrical Ballads* to the epic-length blank verse poem where a diverse group of graveyard tourists contemplate the dead in a garden-like cosmopolitan burial ground, but these shifting modes of memory and memorial are not unrelated. In the preparatory remarks to *The Excursion*, Wordsworth famously compares his body of work to a gothic church: the “minor Pieces, which have been long before the Public, when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive Reader to have such connection with the main Work as may give them claim to be likened to the little Cells, Oratories, and sepulchral Recesses, ordinarily included in those Edifices” (*Exc* 38). This analogy essentially makes a burial ground of Wordsworth’s work because each “little cell” and “sepulchral Recess” of a cathedral contains interred corpses and their memorials. Far from being a death knell for his corpus, however, his metaphor suggests that these poems will be visited again and again, will be the subject of conversation and speculation, and will be dispersed through the imaginative work of others far and wide for generations to “affect and impress” those who hear and read his poetic work.

¹ Wordsworth was aware of the problems with overcrowded urban cemeteries, comparing in the first of the *Essays upon Epitaphs* (*EE*) “unsightly” crowded church-yards to secluded cemeteries in remote places (*EE* 1.54), but few modern scholars position his work within what was a highly charged burial reform debate conducted in the periodical press. Two exceptions to this are Karen Sánchez-Eppler and Sharon M. Setzer (376-77).

² I use the terms “graveyard poems” and “graveyard poetry” to refer specifically to those poems set in or very near churchyards and that call attention to that setting as integral to the meaning of the poem and the imaginative re-creation of the dead. I intend this designation to distinguish them from the multitude of poems that include actual or implied inscriptions, monuments,

graves, epitaphs, and other death-oriented imagery. Only seven poems in the various editions of *Lyrical Ballads* specifically use the word “churchyard”: “We Are Seven” and “The Thorn” both first appeared in the 1798; “There was a Boy...,” “The Brothers,” “Ellen Irwin, Or the Braes of Kirtle,” “’Tis said, that some have died for love,” and “The Two April Mornings” were added in the 1800 edition. “To a Sexton,” also added in 1800, though not specifically using the term, is clearly set in a churchyard and addresses the Sexton at his work.

³ The first of Wordsworth’s three essays now collected under the title *Essays upon Epitaphs* (EE) was printed in the 22 February 1810 issue of Coleridge’s *The Friend*; the second and third unpublished essays were written by at least 28 February of that same year (Owen and Smyser 45). The epitaphic Books VI and VII of *The Excursion* were probably written between February and May 1810 (Bushell et al. 12). The first essay was reprinted with revisions as a note to Wordsworth’s *The Excursion* published in 1814 (Owen and Smyser 45). See Sally Bushell for an account of Wordsworth’s writing process during this period that approached the topic of epitaphs through multiple forms simultaneously (81-82).

⁴ Quotations from the Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and from the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800, with additions to the 1802 edition inserted) are taken from Appendix III of the Cornell Wordsworth edition of *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800* (LB) and are cited by line number. Quotations from the poems of *Lyrical Ballads* are taken from the Reading Texts of the Cornell Wordsworth edition and are cited by line number. Quotations from Wordsworth’s notes to the poems come from this edition and are cited by page number.

⁵ See, for instance, Geoffrey Hartman who describes the poem as “a dialogue between the rational questioner and the obtuse little girl” (*Wordsworth’s* 144). Arthur K. Moore argues the child’s perspective represents a folk belief in the inseparability of body and soul even after death (261; Richardson *Death* 7).

⁶ For instance, Maureen N. McLane labels the child as one of the “rustics” of *Lyrical Ballads*, but levels the power dynamics by claiming the man is reduced to the level of the girl in his obstinacy (57-58). Sánchez-Eppler elevates the child to the status of a worthy and equally stubborn debate opponent for the man (420-21).

⁷ Ferguson makes a similar point but claims the progression of the sibling list indicates “death simply figures a distance greater than that from her to Conway, or from here to the sea” (*Solitude* 165), whereas I argue that the dead siblings are, in fact, conceived of as being closer.

⁸ The sibling relationship here creates a family circle that by definition is both inclusive and exclusive—including all siblings, but excluding non-siblings. My understanding of the familial relationship differs from that of Alan Liu who argues that Wordsworth’s notion of family focused on three types of relationship: husband and wife, parent and child, and specifically mother and child to the exclusion of competing relationships such as brother and sister (240).

⁹ For a detailed discussion of the man’s changing pedagogical strategies, see McLane who conceives the man as an anthropological instructor unsuccessfully pursuing one technique after another to convince the Maid she is wrong (55-58).

¹⁰ The churchyard setting could imply nothing else. The churchyard, more than being the ground upon which a church stands is “almost universally used as a burial ground for the parish or district, and still so used, esp. in rural districts” (*OED*, “churchyard” Def. 1).

¹¹ The *OED* cites “We Are Seven” as an example of this meaning of *lie* (*OED*, “lie, v.1” Def. B.1d).

¹² See Bialostosky as an example and for additional instances (194n14).

¹³ See, for instance, James K. Chandler who argues that Wordsworth deprecates writing in favor of speech (140) and privileges traditionary material over historical explanation (173). For additional examples of this type of argument about the privileging of speech and community in “The Brothers,” see Fosso (151), Sharp (395), and Bushell (190).

¹⁴ See Galperin for an account of Leonard’s rejection of the identification “brother” in exchange for selfhood accomplished through the act of leaving the community and maintaining his anonymity during his temporary return, a move that makes Leonard an allegory for poetic authority (125-31).

¹⁵ The Burial of Suicide Act (4 George IV.c 52) prohibiting the traditional crossroad burial in a public highway with a stake through the heart was not passed until mid-1823 (Gates 6).

¹⁶ Michael Mason argues that Leonard is presented in the poem “with the suggestion that he has not inherited the ‘family heart’ which kept his grandfather Walter struggling cheerfully against insurmountable difficulties” and in fact “has perhaps more in common with the unnamed man of [line] 194 who ‘died broken-hearted’” (235n314-15).

¹⁷ See, for example, J.R. Watson who comments that the “loss of integration into such a community is profoundly sad” (47). Ferguson reads Leonard’s letter to the priest revealing his identity as evidence that Leonard is effectively severed from his past and is “writing ... his own epitaph” (*Wordsworth* 51). Bushell counters Ferguson’s argument, arguing that the letter will become part of the Priest’s retellings and will reunite Leonard with James through the medium of the oral epitaph (191), but both she and Ferguson suggest, rightly, that Leonard is effectively dead to the village of Ennerdale.

¹⁸ See Stephen Gill’s *Wordsworth and the Victorians* for the centrality of *The Excursion* to Victorian thought about Wordsworth.

¹⁹ Many of Wordsworth’s contemporary readers praised the churchyard books and their oral epitaphs. Charles Lamb writes in his October 1814 review that “Nothing can be conceived finer than the manner of introducing these [Pastor’s] tales with heaven above his head, and the mouldering turf at his feet—standing betwixt life and death” (qtd. in Reiman 830), and an anonymous reviewer in the May 1815 *Belle Assemblée* writes that “the description of the churchyard and the burial places among the mountains, is given in a manner to interest deeply the feelings of the heart, and excite the reflections of the thinking mind” (qtd. in Reiman 50). Thomas Noon Talfourd, writing in the 1 December 1820 edition of *New Monthly Magazine*, calls them “exquisite portraits, touched and softened by a divine imagination” (qtd. in Woof 871).

²⁰ For recent book-length treatments of *The Excursion*, see Kenneth Johnston, Alison Hickey, and Sally Bushell. William H. Galperin argues *The Excursion* is a reinterpretation and clarification of Wordsworth's earlier humanist position (30-31). Robert H. Ryan claims that Wordsworth's earlier metaphysics are reintegrated into the national religious community of *The Excursion* and that it is in and through religious poetry that Wordsworth is most politically and socially engaged (94). Mark Canuel adds that *The Excursion* is more unconventional in the kind of religious establishment it imagines than most readers recognize (*Religion* 163). Nigel Alderman, following Paul Fry, reads *The Excursion* as a social poem in which Wordsworth attempts, though unsuccessfully, to establish a model for the social utility of poetic labor (22).

²¹ The famous Père-Lachaise cemetery, the "prototypical nineteenth-century funerary garden," opened east of Paris in 1804, about six years before Wordsworth wrote the churchyard books of *The Excursion*. Although Wordsworth is unlikely to have modeled his churchyard on a French cemetery, the impetus behind Père-Lachaise to create a space meant for the living as well as the dead would have been well known in England (Curl 25). Père-Lachaise was celebrated for its landscape architecture, its statuary, and its peaceful walkways and benches and served as the prototype for cemeteries throughout Europe and America including the "Magnificent Seven" profit-making cemeteries near London made legal by an act of Parliament in 1832 (Curl 25; Mellor and Parsons 6).

²² Hess suggests Wordsworth's use of the epitaph connects with both the eighteenth-century antiquarian fad in Britain as well as the increasing popularity of domestic tourism, including visits to churchyards and Gothic sites (61). For more about Romantic literary tourism, especially to graves of authors and poets, see Paul Westover's *Necromanticism*; the fifth chapter of Samantha Matthews's *Poetical Remains* addresses Wordsworth's grave specifically (154-88).

²³ Other critics identify the Pastor as being particularly suited for his role as epitapher. See, for instance, Robert M. Ryan (103), Lisa Hirschfield (par. 25), and Bushell who suggests that he is the appropriate teller of epitaphs not only due to his religious role, but also because he is a local person: "he is a part of that society from birth" (203). What she does not note, and what strikes me as critical, is the fact that he has been away from the community and come back.

²⁴ Within the last decade, scholars have turned their attention to the issue of cosmopolitanism in relation to Romanticism in general and to Wordsworth in particular. See, for instance, the 2005 special issue of *European Romantic Review* titled "Romantic Cosmopolitanism" edited by Jill Heydt-Stevenson and Jeffrey N. Cox and the 2008 volume *Secularism, Cosmopolitanism, and Romanticism* edited by Colin Jager for the Romantic Circles Praxis Series.

²⁵ No fan of *The Excursion*, Hartman adds that the Solitary's appearance among the living is "the only dramatic surprise of the poem" (*Wordsworth's* 307).

²⁶ Michele Turner Sharp notes that the Solitary himself "become a funerary marker" (397).

²⁷ The churchyards of Wordsworth's earlier poems are pastoral and peaceful by the very nature of their location in small, isolated, rural communities. The populations there are small, burials rare, graves generally unmarked, and the grass largely undisturbed by spade or sightseer. As

Leonard points out to the Priest in “The Brothers”: “Scarce a funeral / Comes to this churchyard once in eighteen months” (*LB* 126-27).

²⁸ This “easy-hearted churl” resembles the sexton in “To a Sexton” of *Lyrical Ballads* in his apparently matter-of-fact attitude toward his work and in similar imagery of cultivation.

²⁹ As Stephen Cherry notes, the words “humility” and “humus” share the same derivation. Humus is “the product of the long, slow, and apparently negative but vital process of decomposition or decay” (39). Similarly, humility, writes Cherry, is the “*earthiest* of the virtues”; it is “not about being pious; it is about being grounded.”

³⁰ See, for instance, Hirschfield (par. 17) and Canuel (*Religion* 163). I am arguing for the Solitary having a distinct perspective and role in the poem in contrast to some critics who suggest all the characters have a sameness of voice (see, for instance, F. Ferguson *Wordsworth* 198). Alison Hickey notes this tendency toward sameness, but she reads the Solitary as having a distinct voice; the “ventriloquism” among characters does not include him (150). Ryan reads *The Excursion* as having three dominant characters with three very different perspectives “three strong voices in the poem represent three distinct religious opinions that conflict radically” and argues that the Solitary’s position is unique among the three rather than simply oppositional to a single “religious” perspective (102).

III. BYRON: MINGLING WITH THE DEAD

If Wordsworth deliberately distances the living from the dead because of the limitations their corporeality poses on imaginative response, Lord Byron unflinchingly turns toward the corpse and decaying remains for much the same reason. But rather than understand relics of the dead and the past as inhibiting imaginative re-creation as Wordsworth does, Byron suggests instead that their palpable presence provokes and shapes responses, extending their existence and influence into the future and potentially endowing them with what Andrew Bennett might call “posterity.” Bennett argues that Byron questions and ironizes the “Romantic culture of posterity” practiced by other writers of the period by subverting notions of poetic sincerity and subjectivity (7, 193). According to Bennett, Byron suggests that nothing of the writer’s self will survive within the poetry, making the only avenue for poetic posterity a minimal kind of survival based on the future recovery of the “material of writing—letters—inscribed in ink.” This would represent a “*retrieval* from oblivion rather than survival *per se*” which would be “contingent upon the accident of rediscovery and the arbitrary interpretations of historians” (197, original emphasis). Bennett usefully identifies the importance for Byron of material remains—those of the written word or, as this chapter explores, those of humans and their cultures—as links between the past and a potential future. However, by labeling Byron’s approach to Romantic posterity as one that “deconstructs” it (7, 182, 98), he imposes on Byron’s work the sense of failure and finitude inherent in deconstructive thinking. Certainly, Byron explores the futility of some deaths, the ephemerality of individual human lives and endeavors, and the impending effacement of persons and peoples from memory. However, as I will argue, for Byron the decayed remains of people and the soil of a particular place are imbued with generative potential when they blend, a potential realized when the living spend time in that place, in the presence of the dead. In Byron’s poetry, the confluence of “dust” and dirt, past and present, gives the dead a

moral and political relevance and provides the foundation for cultural resurgence. If “survival, *per se*” is impossible, Byron suggests an alternative “logic of survival,” to use Achille Mbembe’s term, which paradoxically can be found mingled—and by mingling—with the dust of the dead.

Byron is not alone in recognizing the potential significance of the places where the living encounter the dead. The relics and ruins of human bodies and human-made edifices and the locations in which those remains decay—burial grounds or battlefields, ancestral vaults or lime pits, mausolea or museums—are critical components affecting whether the dead are remembered and how the natural and national places that accommodate or absorb them are perceived. The dead can wield—or can be made to wield—extraordinary influence over the living, and so, in the interests of personal, political, or cultural advantage, the dead are often translated to sites deemed more propitious for the new or altered narratives in which they are to figure.¹ As I suggested in the previous chapter, Wordsworth comes to envision the influence of the dead extending beyond the boundaries of churchyard, village, and nation to “impress and affect” others as ambassadors of English moral worth, but his movement of the dead occurs wholly in and through the minds of the living while the physical remains of the dead remain *in situ* under the grassy turf. Other corpses and relics of the period were considerably more mobile as they were put into national and imperial service. In France, for instance, Revolutionary leaders appropriated the newly constructed Abbey Sainte-Geneviève, secularized it in 1791, and transformed it into a national Panthéon that became a veritable revolving door for the bodies of scientists, philosophers, and other heroes of the French Revolution whose bodies came and went as their political fortunes and utility rose or fell.² With their commissioning and management of the Panthéon as well as with the desecration of royal bodies and burial sites, Revolutionary leaders indicated their belief in the “founding power of the grave” (Domańska 112)—the idea that interring the dead in a particular place can make both territorial claims of possession and political claims of

legitimacy—and in its correlate, that the absence of a grave or of locatable, identifiable remains troubles such claims (Harrison 24-28). In addition to human relics, cultural relics can do similar work, embodying in their fragmented remains the past glories or worth of a people rather than a single person. Thus, the translation of cultural relics such as the Parthenon Marbles from Athens to London by Lord Elgin was similarly fraught with overtones of appropriation and imperial ambition. To Byron's thinking, Elgin not only robs Greece of her past; in effect, he renders her sterile and robs the land and its people of their future by removing the decayed remnants of a people from the place to which they rightly belong thereby destroying the fertile conjunction of people and place from which a cultural reflowering might arise.

Byron rejects the kind of necrophagous violence that metaphorically feeds on the dead to sate usurping national or imperial ambitions, whether it be the calculated exhumation and relocation of relics or the futile bloodshed perpetrated by those such as "Gaul's Vulture" (*CHP* 1.52).³ Relocating remains to exploit the "founding power of the grave" as the Panthéon's creators or Elgin and Parliament do uses the dead to rewrite the past, claim an alternate foundation for the present, and wrench the historical timeline in a new direction for the future. Byron understands this power of the burial site, but his poetry suggests that the real power of the dead relies on their decomposition into the places to which they are historically or culturally allied. He insists that the dead remain in place to decay into and become a permanent part of that place. This non-transferability makes possible a literally earthly immortality and operates as both a moral corrective of and resistance to the kinds of personal and political ambitions that squander lives and use the dead as pawns. Despite his reputation as a revolutionary, Byron is more interested than might be supposed in a future that develops out of continuity and the restoration of a people's cultural achievements. In this sense his notions of the dead are more Burkean than Wordsworthian.⁴ If, as Robert Pogue Harrison claims, "places are not only founded but also

appropriated by burial of the dead” (24) then leaving the dead in their original locales and contemplating them there recognizes and honors the deceased as well as the past and the places to which they belong. More importantly, allowing remains to decay *in situ* reinvests a particular place and people with energy and potential for renovation. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron famously contemplates the Roman Coliseum in one of his three poetic visitations to the site.⁵ Here, the Coliseum, once the scene of man being “slaughtered by his fellow man” for the sake of “imperial pleasure” and likened to “battle-plain” because both are “theatres where the chief actors rot” (*CHP* 4.139), is itself now a “ruin,” an “enormous skeleton,” that remains after “Walls, palaces, half-cities, have been reared” from its remnants (4.143). Yet, in the midst of this almost total decay that consists of the mingled remains of human and human-made dust lies the prospect of regeneration, not only for new buildings and cities, but for the dead themselves: “in this magic circle raise the dead: / Heroes have trod this spot—’tis on their dust ye tread” (4.144).

This chapter will examine how Byron envisions the conjunction of past, place, and potentiality. Following the example of the narrator of *Don Juan*, it will not “plunge in ‘medias res’” but will “begin with the beginning” of Byron’s poetic career and the Newstead Abbey poems (*DJ* 1.6, 1.7). “On Leaving Newstead Abbey,” dated 1803, is the opening poem of his first public collection *Hours of Idleness* (1807) where it appeared with its companion piece “Elegy on Newstead Abbey,” probably written between 1803 and 1806. Even at this early date, Byron addresses many of the issues about the dead, their remains, and their futurity that he will continue to explore throughout his career. The remainder of the chapter, paying as much fealty to the “regularity of my design” that “Forbids all wandering” as *Don Juan*’s narrator does (*DJ* 1.7), will proceed more thematically than chronologically, taking its cue from the points raised by the Newstead Abbey poems and exploring their development across Byron’s corpus.

Byron's poetic career, much like many of his individual poems including *The Giaour* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, begins and ends with tombs and the dead. In the first stanza of "On Leaving Newstead Abbey," he details the present state of "decay" of his once grand ancestral home (2); then he proceeds to enumerate the ancestors who once lived here, their violent deaths in battle, and the "sad vestiges now that remain" (8). The poem's final stanza promises the "Shades" of the heroic ancestors that they will be remembered, honored, and emulated by their "descendant" (21), and its last line pronounces a benediction on that "descendant" that unites him in death with his ancestors' continuing corporeal presence in this place:

That fame, and that memory, still will he cherish,
 He vows, that he ne'er will disgrace your renown;
 Like you will he live, or like you will he perish;
 When decay'd, may he mingle his dust with your own. (29-32)

Similarly, "Elegy on Newstead Abbey," a poem Stephen Cheeke describes as being "preoccupied with dying in places" (16), offers an extended history of the Abbey from its founding by Henry II, its time as a monastery, its post-Reformation history as seat of the crusading and royalist Byrons, its return to "Culture" with the post-Restoration return of the Lord of the Manor (119), its "slow decay" (138), and its current "damp and mossy tombs" that are preferable to the "gilded domes" of the "vainly great" (151, 149, 150). The final benediction in this poem is bestowed on Newstead Abbey itself and anticipates its restored future: "Hours, splendid as the past, may still be thine, / And bless thy future, as thy former day" (155-56).

In the concluding stanza of one of his final poems, "January 22nd 1824. Messalonghi. On this day I complete my thirty sixth year." published shortly after his death, Byron again contemplates where and with whom he will be buried, encouraging his "spirit" (26) to:

Seek out—less often sought than found,
 A Soldier's Grave—for thee the best,
 Then look around and choose thy ground
 And take thy Rest. (37-40)

Twenty-one years after the publication of *Hours of Idleness*—almost literally a lifetime—Byron ends much as he began, looking steadily at the dead, anticipating death, and seeking the appropriate site for disposition. Across the length and generic breadth of his poetic career, Byron explores the relationships between the living and the dead, corpse and locale, as he returns again and again to particular themes and patterns of imagery in an effort to elucidate for himself a connection he seems to intuit: how the material remains of the dead link past, present, and future. His explorations revolve around key issues about the dead and their disposition which first emerge in his Newstead Abbey poems and which allow him to hypothesize a future emerging from and with the past: the need to be in the physical presence of the dead; the ephemerality of the corpse; the importance of the natural and manmade places that support and absorb the remains of the dead; the generative possibilities of decay; and the fungibility of human remains and human-made relics that paradoxically seems integral to the creative future Byron imagines.

As the Newstead Abbey poems first suggest, dwelling on and with the dead is of foremost importance to Byron for understanding the past and envisioning a future. He dispels the “tender haze” that abstracts characters and conceals corporeality in Wordsworth’s graveyard poetry, but he too abstracts the dead by focusing on their very materiality. Byron’s fraught critical relationship with Wordsworth has been well-documented both in his own prose and poetry as well as in literary criticism. In an unpublished note to “Churchill’s Grave,” a poem Byron claims to have written in “serious imitation of the style of a great poet [Wordsworth],” he comments that “there can exist few greater admirers or deplorers than myself” of “Mr. Wordsworth” (4: 447). As many have noted, Byron seems often to have been attracted to and influenced by Wordsworth’s ideas, even as he felt compelled to reject or right them.⁶ Jerome McGann addresses Byron’s “critical reverence” for Wordsworth via a different set of issues than I am considering, but his discussion of how Byron explores and corrects Wordsworth’s treatment

of memory in the poetic re-creation of the poet's personal past reveals interesting parallels to their poetic treatments of the dead—that is, their re-creation and restoration of a more impersonal or communal past (“Wordsworth” 11). McGann contrasts Wordsworth's evolving approach to his relationship with Annette Vallon over the course of his revisions of *The Prelude* from displacement onto Vaudracour and Julia into effacement of the relationship altogether to Byron's thinly veiled allusions to incest using the character of Astarte in *Manfred*. “In *The Prelude*,” McGann writes, “Wordsworth covers his sins” by deliberately omitting, despite assurances to the contrary, things “of consequence” through “deliberate acts of bad faith, or moments of lapsed awareness” (“Wordsworth” 43, 42). Byron, conversely, opens a taboo to the light in what McGann calls “an act of remembering in public, an act that argues the need to preserve an eternal ‘vigil’ to unedited memory and unconstrained thought” (“Wordsworth” 45).

Wordsworth's and Byron's responses to the dead proceed along similar logic. For Wordsworth, the sight of the dead body and the implications of its inescapable dissolution into mould are unpleasant physical reminders of moral corruption and human failings, so bodily remains must be hidden to facilitate imagining a new and improved version of the dead based on their most edifying qualities. Byron, conversely, almost literally embraces material human remains, demanding that readers look at the corpse and contemplate the decaying remnants of the dead and of the past. The personal moral characters of the dead seem largely irrelevant to Byron in ways Wordsworth and his characters could not imagine, but that which the dead leave behind, the fragments of cultural productions or the decaying fragments of their very bodies, takes on weighted moral significance for peoples and nations. Rather than privilege the sanitized spaces of garden cemeteries that hide the corpse, Byron uncovers and unearths the dead—much as his gardener unearthed a human skull from the grounds of Newstead Abbey—putting them on display as aesthetic objects and cautionary examples—much as he had the skull made into a

decorative drinking cup—and allowing their decaying remains to furnish the medium through which the past is interpreted and the future formed—much as Byron’s poem in response to the skull incident, “Lines inscribed upon a Cup formed from a Skull,” offers jovial advice in the voice of the skull itself to enjoy the wine drunk from it now and to anticipate similarly being “of use” to “another race” in the future (24, 17).⁷ For Byron, the physical presence of the dead in all their materiality, whether newly deceased with bodies still intact or long departed and reduced to “dust” and bone, stimulates creative response and extends their earthly presence among the living while also providing a necessary corrective to unbridled imaginative re-creation by binding the dead with the soil into which they decay and into the history of that place.

Byron’s attention to—or perhaps obsession with—the dead and the past may be one reason he is associated so indelibly with melancholy, nostalgia, and despair, but this chapter, with its examination of Byron examining the dead, encourages a reconsideration of that assessment.⁸ As this study reveals, Byron was not unusual among Romantic writers or reformers in considering the dead and their place among the living in order to identify their utility for the future. Nor is his impulse toward mingling with the dead melancholic or morbid, at least not strictly so. His meditations on the relationships with and among the dead are often surprisingly social and forward looking. The decaying dead offer Byron a medium through which to recount and assess the past, but they also serve as links to the present and supply the material from which might arise the future restoration and reflowering of personal and cultural heritage.

A. The Fresh Corpse

For Byron, the value of being in the presence of the newly dead corpse rests in its ambiguity and ephemerality. The first quality allows, at least briefly, for multiple possibilities to coexist, and the awareness that change is imminent elicits both urgency and anticipation in the

viewer who is thus compelled to look toward the future even while in the presence of the pastness of the dead. Perhaps even today and assuredly at a time when few signs other than “the occurrence of *putrefaction*,” made “*real*” death “distinguishable from *apparent* Death” according to a nineteenth-century physician, the newly deceased seem to occupy a state of being between living and dead (Carpenter 869, original emphasis). Modern forensic taphonomists classify the first stage in the sequence of human decomposition as the “fresh” stage, noting that it does not last beyond the first day and may span only a few hours (Janaway, Percival and Wilson 326).⁹ As I will argue, Byron is fascinated by the generative potential to be found in mingling among and with the fragmented remains of the past—that is, in the mixing or blending of entities so they “become physically united or form a new combination” (*OED*, “mingle v.” Def. 1)—but he also recognizes that being in the presence of a “fresh” corpse provides alternate opportunities to contemplate and evaluate the past and anticipate the future. Thus he insists with his vivid poetic depictions of the dying and newly dead that the living mingle with the deceased in the more interpersonal sense of associating with or moving about among them (*OED* Def. 5).

Byron evokes and prolongs the state of ambiguity associated with the nearly and newly dead in his description of Haidée on her deathbed in canto 4 of *Don Juan* (1821):

Days lay she in that state unchanged, though chill
 With nothing livid, still her lips were red;
 She had no pulse, but death seem'd absent still;
 No hideous sign proclaim'd her surely dead;
 Corruption came not in each mind to kill
 All hope; to look upon her sweet face bred
 New thoughts of life, for it seem'd full of soul,
 She had so much, earth could not claim the whole. (4.60)

This last line seems to allude to Wordsworth’s “A Slumber did my Spirit Seal,” written in 1798 and first published in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, in which “She” is wholly absorbed by the earth, “Rolled round in earth’s diurnal course, / With rocks, and stones, and trees” (*LB* 3, 7-

8). In Wordsworth's poem and in his typical fashion, the dead "She" disappears from view and becomes a disembodied imaginative re-creation of and in service to the living lyric speaker. Byron's Haidée, in contrast, remains fully embodied, refuses to be contained, and retains her own potentiality. While she is not quite living nor yet dead, the narrative indulges in a pregnant pause, allowing the simultaneous senses of possibility and inevitability to coexist for "Twelve days and nights" and into the immediate aftermath of her expiration, for she dies with no noticeable sign to indicate the "instant" of death (4.69). Only with the onset of the "early external signs of decompositional change [in which] the colouration of major veins under the skin ... turn dark green or blue" (Janaway, Percival and Wilson 326)—that is, with "the change that cast / Her sweet face into shadow" (4.69)—is her physical death confirmed and her pregnancy at the time of her death revealed: "She died, but not alone; she held within / A second principle of life" (4.70). The stanza ends with a hyperbolic effusion of poetic pathos: "In vain the dews of Heaven descend above / The bleeding flower and blasted fruit of love." The intentional excess of these lines undercuts the melancholy they are ostensibly meant to evoke and propels the speaker onward, for all does not end with Haidée's death.

Byron acknowledges and exploits the sense of anticipation and possibility for life that Haidée's near-corpses inspires. Might she recover, reunite with Juan, reconcile with her father, resume her "delightful" "days and pleasures" (4.71)? When those possibilities are exhausted at her death, new possibilities emerge for both the dead and the living. The unborn child in Haidée's womb goes "down to the grave" with her, but what appears to be a most hopeless ending—"Blossom and bough lie wither'd with one blight" (4.70)—nevertheless proves to be generative. Their joint death and burial reveals the hitherto unknown existence of the child, giving "birth" and life to it in the context of the poem itself; furnishes the material for the "loving song" of "many a Greek maid" and the "story" that will while away the long nights of "many an

islander” (4.73); and frees Juan for future adventures. The dead body will not, as Wordsworth is aware, allow the living to evade the knowledge of its imminent and inevitable decay, but for Byron, this serves to prompt and channel, rather than prohibit, creative responses. The knowledge that the fresh corpse will soon change invests the present moment with urgency to observe, appreciate, and respond to this fleeting beauty, but it also insists on a futurity, one that will continue to contain the dead and that is linked through the dead to the lived past.

The most overt and striking depiction of a fresh corpse in Byron’s poetry occurs early in *The Giaour*, and the passage, like the corpse itself, bears further scrutiny due to its complex role in the poem.¹⁰ In the opening section which frames the “Turkish Tale,” the speaker describes a hypothetical instance of someone bending over a newly dead body, gazing closely at it, marking the corpse’s lineaments, and questioning the reality of what his eyes tell him:

He who hath bent him o’er the dead,
Ere the first day of death is fled;
The first dark day of nothingness,
The last of danger and distress;
(Before Decay’s effacing fingers
Have swept the lines where beauty lingers)
And mark’d the mild angelic air—
The rapture of repose that’s there—
.....
Some moments—aye—one treacherous hour,
He still might doubt the tyrant’s power,
So fair—so calm—so softly seal’d
The first—last look—by death reveal’d! (68-75, 86-89)

In his note to this passage, Byron clarifies that while few of his readers may have had “an opportunity of witnessing what is here attempted in description,” those who have will identify with the response, remembering “that singular beauty which pervades, with few exceptions the features of the dead, a few hours, and but a few hours after ‘the spirit is not there’” (3: 416).¹¹

Byron’s readers-cum-writers who have quoted this striking passage tend to accept his note’s interpretive guidance and focus on the beauty of the corpse. Two decades after *The*

Giaour was published, for instance, anatomy reform advocate Dr. Thomas Southwood Smith quotes fourteen lines in his *Lecture Delivered over the Remains of Jeremy Bentham, Esq.* (1832) prior to performing a public dissection of the philosopher's body. In his effort to diminish fear of the human cadaver and revulsion toward anatomical dissection, Southwood Smith highlights the beauty of the newly dead face as the "delicacy of the skin" is increased and softened and the features relax into a "calm and placid aspect" ("Lecture" 66-67). He uses Byron's words to make the dead body seem natural, inoffensively familiar in its lifelikeness. Later in the century, Bram Stoker turns to Byron to defamiliarize, to emphasize the unnatural lifelikeness of the undead in *Dracula* (1897). Like Southwood Smith, Stoker draws on the element of aesthetic pleasure in Byron's description, but he also captures the unease and anticipation that underlie the ambiguous and ephemeral moment between life and death. In Stoker's novel, Dr. Seward notes in his diary that the woman employed to perform "the last offices for the dead" remarks that Lucy "makes a very beautiful corpse" (147). In the same entry, he records the visit he and Van Helsing pay to Lucy's corpse the night before her burial: "All Lucy's loveliness had come back to her in death, and the hours that had passed, instead of leaving traces of 'decay's effacing fingers,' had but restored the beauty of life, till positively I could not believe my eyes that I was looking at a corpse" (148-49). As Stoker's readers know, Seward is right to doubt what he sees, for this beautiful façade only temporarily hides that which ferments beneath it, as all fresh corpses do.

The beauty of the newly dead corpse in *The Giaour* figures prominently and importantly, but aesthetic appreciation is not the end in itself; beauty attracts. The poem's hypothetical observer and the reader are drawn nearer the corpse for a more immediate and intimate encounter with the dead. Even though "Decay's effacing fingers" have not yet marred the corpse, they will. In the indeterminate and temporary state before obvious signs of decomposition become apparent, the fresh corpse imposes a sense of urgency on its viewer to appreciate and learn from

the dead in this moment, for the moment is inevitably fleeting. In *The Giaour* the lessons to be learned from observing the corpse are complicated, however, because of the hypothetical nature of the encounter and the fragmented structure of the poem which disrupts chronology and juxtaposes several points of view. Who is the speaker describing the hypothetical corpse and observer? With whom or what are readers to identify the corpse? What connections among living and dead, frame and tale, and among the tale and readers radiate from this unnamed corpse?

The most obvious and explicit “use” of the corpse is as a metaphor for Greece which is usually understood to indicate Greece’s fatal decline under foreign rule. In the lines immediately following the meditation on looking at a fresh corpse, the speaker directs the reader’s eyes upward and outward with the deictic: “Such is the aspect of this shore— / ’Tis Greece—but living Greece no more!” (90-91). Cheeke, examining the role of place in Byron’s work, reads this passage along with Byron’s note to it as equating the “spirit-of-place” and the “spirit-of-life”: death robs the corpse of life and the “tyranny of imperialist power” robs the land of its “spirit of essence” (59-60). He suggests Byron offers meditation on the landscape and its historical connections and the recognition of the “enduring spirit-of-place there” as a kind of antidote that might disrupt contemporary power relations even as Byron admits the instability of such a claim. Cheeke moves quickly and completely from the corpse to the land without looking back, but what might it mean to linger over this fresh corpse, as Byron urges with his extended twenty-two line account, and consider its uncertain state and ephemeral beauty? The element of nostalgia for Greece’s glorious past common to discussions of Romantic philhellenism, including Cheeke’s, is here as Byron points to “living Greece no more,” but Byron’s understanding of Greece and its potential diverges from most accounts of nineteenth-century philhellenism that describe Western interpretations of ancient Greece being imposed from the outside in order to effect modern Greece’s regeneration. Byron’s divergence is embodied in the fresh corpse which

makes Greece both past and present, intact yet subject to the decay which will inseparably bind its cultural body to its historical place and allow for its reflowering from within Greece itself.

To most Europeans both before the Renaissance and after, as Fani-Maria Tsigakou puts it, “Greece possessed an identity entirely in terms of its past. The country itself had, in fact, been forgotten” (11). Wealthy eighteenth-century travelers to Greece were surprised by the ignorance of modern Greeks about classical Greek history and culture and so taught them about the ancient past, filtered through a Western interpretive lens, which modern Greeks then recounted to subsequent tourists who took the narrative to be part of Greek tradition (St. Clair *Greece* 14). Similarly, William St. Clair argues, the idea for a Greek revolution was based on classical tradition and came from outside Greece, imposed by Europeans and Greeks educated in Europe; the influence of the Ancient Greeks had to be returned to Greece (*Greece* 14). Terrance Spencer writes that the nineteenth-century enthusiasm for Greek welfare and “faith in her future” was inspired in part by “the notion that there existed an urgent moral obligation for Europe to restore liberty to Greece as a kind of payment for the civilization which Hellas had once given to the world” (vii). Even with the emergence of the modern Greek state created in 1828 after Greece gained independence from Ottoman rule with the help of European Philhellenes, the country was shaped by Western European understandings of the achievements of classical Hellas (Tsigakou 11). Byron is as fascinated by the ancient Greek past as any Romantic Philhellene and as interested in the future of Greece, but as St. Clair notes, he is far less “Byronic” than the romantic youths who read his poetry and came to fight for the Greek cause as a result. Byron’s engagement with modern Greece and his vision of what St. Clair calls its “regeneration” does not depend on nostalgia for past Greek art and culture and their reimposition onto modern Greece; instead, Byron looks for Greece’s future potential within Greece itself, within its decayed remains that have always already been present in the soil, awaiting engagement with the living.¹²

With the unambiguous connection between the newly dead body and Greece in *The Giaour*, Byron emphasizes the ambiguity of this state of being. Greece, like a fresh corpse, is:

So coldly sweet, so deadly fair,
We start—for soul is wanting there.
Hers is the loveliness in death,
That parts not quite with parting breath;
But beauty with that fearful bloom,
That hue which haunts it to the tomb—
Expression's last receding ray,
A gilded halo hovering round decay,
The farewell beam of Feeling past away! (92-100)

If we bend ourselves “o’er the dead” to look closely, we see that the finality suggested by this passage is not as definitive as it first appears. The “soul” may well be gone if “wanting” means absent or lacking, but it may also mean “needful, requisite, necessary,” a definition that is now obsolete but was still in use in the early nineteenth century (*OED*, “wanting, *pres. pple.*” Defs. 1a, 2). The “parting breath” may not quite have parted; decay has not quite set in as “beauty” continues to hover round this entity that is not yet in the tomb. In this moment of “pregnant pause,” the possibility remains that something of Greece may yet live and may be renewed.

In the next verse paragraph, Greece has, indeed, been transformed. This entity which had been a corpse now becomes both grave and monument for others; the body of Greece absorbing and mingling with the Greek dead as their burial ground:

Clime of the unforgotten brave!—
Whose land from plain to mountain-cave
Was Freedom's home or Glory's grave—
Shrine of the mighty! can it be,
That this is all remains of thee?
.....
Thy heroes—though the general doom
Hath swept the column from their tomb,
A mightier monument command,
The mountains of their native land!
There points thy Muse to stranger's eye,
The graves of those that cannot die! (103-07, 130-135)

As I will discuss in the next section, Byron often conflates dead and decaying human bodies, decayed cultural edifices, ancestral homes and lands, graves and monuments. For the present, it is enough to note that Greece as a graveyard is no more definitive an end than Greece as a corpse. Even as Greece is enshrined by becoming a “Shrine” for her “heroes,” the verb “remains” keeps the “remains” of Greece in sight, embodying both past and potential future to which her “Muse” can point. In a tactic Byron uses elsewhere, the speaker asks what appears to be a rhetorical question with a mutually understood answer, but the very presence of the question allows that more than one answer is possible. When the speaker asks whether this is all that remains, the rhetorical question needs no answer because the expected response is “yes, this is all,” but the question hangs unanswered in the air, providing its own kind of pregnant pause. The answer might be “no, there is more to Greece, more to come in the future.”

The implication that Greece can reverse course and renew her glories can be found in the passages that surround the hypothetical corpse and the corpse-like Greece in *The Giaour*. The speaker claims, following the passage quoted above, that Greece’s current state is a result of its “Self-abasement” which allowed “villain-bonds and despot-sway” (140, 141), but in the opening passage that precedes the description of the newly dead corpse and the nearly/newly dead Greece, the speaker has already identified the “self-abasement” of which Greece is guilty. Man destroyed “Nature” by “mar[ring] it into wilderness, / And traml[ing], brute-like o’er each flower,” and failed to claim “the culture of his hand” (46, 51-52, 54). In other words, Greece has brought her current state upon herself through inappropriate and inadequate concern for nature and culture, and imperial tyrants have merely been the instruments that carry out the sentence. This suggests Greece might also have the capacity for appropriate and adequate self-care that will allow her to repel her usurpers. Her mountains are, after all, the “graves of those that cannot die” and so paradoxically, the graves and Greece itself must yet be living and might live again.

In addition to the overt and intimate connection between the fresh corpse and Greece in the framing section of the poem, the very visible but hypothetical fresh corpse connects allusively to the other dead bodies of the poem: Leila, Hassan, and the eponymous Giaour. This first section of *The Giaour* is generally considered to be narrated from a point of view similar to Byron's own: contemporary and European, if not English as Jerome McGann specifies in his notes to the poem. Marilyn Butler, for instance, describes the first narrator as "an educated Westerner [who] contemplates modern Greeks under Turkish rule, and finds them so enfeebled that he cannot bring himself to tell a story of heroic Greeks in olden times" ("Orientalism" 86). She, like others, distinguishes between an outsider who narrates the beginning of the poem and the voices that narrate within the tale proper. I would propose, however, entertaining the possibility that this first narrator is more intimately associated with one or more of the perspectives within the remaining tale. That is, the frame and the tale may be more fully integrated—or mingled—than is typically understood. Might the speaker be Hassan as he uses the hypothetical description to distance himself from Leila's murder? It is possible, for Hassan does not have a narrative voice elsewhere in the poem, but he is, I think, too closely tied to the land and place itself to achieve the distance of the perspective found in the first section. Much as Byron himself describes his bodily relationship with the decaying Newstead Abbey in "On Leaving Newstead Abbey," Hassan is intimately connected with his ancestral home, so intimately that when he dies, his palace decays into an empty grave complete with pall apparently synchronously with his own murdered body's decomposition (277-351).

More suggestive is the possibility that the first speaker may be aligned with the Giaour himself, perhaps as he contemplates the hypothetical moment of looking at Leila's corpse. Although he describes a vision of her post-mortem appearance in a shroud near the end of the poem, he does not seem to have actually seen her corpse, so the hypothetical stance of the

opening would be appropriate (1271-76). Another possibility arises when we consider that, although readers assume the corpse is that of a woman due to its “beauty,” its “mild angelic air,” the “tender traits that streak... the placid cheek” (73, 74, 76-77) and its immediate juxtaposition with the femininely gendered Greece, the corpse is not specifically gendered. It seems to be a corpse that has died a peaceful death, but it is not necessarily a female corpse. If the Giaour, whose voice dominates the end of the poem, is the opening narrator, he may be referring obliquely to Hassan’s corpse in contrast to this peaceful, hypothetical corpse, or he may be conflating the corpses of two or all three of the participants in the love triangle to come.

The opening frame comes from the point of view of someone who is there and seems to know the land and its history well, which could be, of course, an outsider like Byron who travels through the land much like an embedded journalist,¹³ but it is the Giaour who, in the course of the tale itself, bends over a corpse. The moment is narrated in the third person about midway through the poem after the Giaour has mortally wounded Hassan:

His breast with wounds unnumber’d riven,
His back to earth, his face to heaven,
Fall’n Hassan lies—his unclos’d eye
Yet lowering on his enemy,
.....
And o’er him bends that foe with brow
As dark as his that bled below.— (667-70, 673-74)

In a poem with gaping breaks in its fragmented and disordered narrative, this moment is made all the more remarkable not only by being central but by being narrated twice. The Giaour, in his confession to the priest during his last days at the monastery, claims the murder as an act of revenge and offers a first person account of watching Hassan die after fatally stabbing him:

He died too in the battle broil—
A time that heeds nor pain nor toil—
One cry to Mahomet for aid,
One prayer to Alla—all he made:
He knew and crossed me in the fray—

I gazed upon him where he lay,
And watched his spirit ebb away; (1080-85)

With the authority of an eyewitness, the Giaour disrupts the poem's rhyming couplets with this last tercet as if to match the slow ebb of Hassan's spirit from his body. What he describes is given added credibility when read in conjunction with Byron's note to the earlier corpse-viewing scene. Not only does Byron note the "singular beauty" of the newly dead, he also comments on the faces of those who have been murdered: "It is to be remarked in cases of violent death by gun-shot wounds, the expression is always that of languor, whatever the natural energy of the sufferer's character; but in death from a stab the countenance preserves its traits of feeling or ferocity, and the mind its bias, to the last" (3.416). As the Giaour continues to narrate the immediate aftermath of Hassan's death, he refers to just this phenomenon:

I search'd, but vainly search'd to find,
The workings of a wounded mind;
Each feature of that sullen corse
Betrayed his rage, but no remorse. (1089-92)

Byron prepared readers for this moment with his earlier note which links these instances of corpse-viewing and underscores the fact and means of Hassan's death. Despite this anchor in a shifting text, however, the relationships among the characters and their individual fates remain shrouded in varying degrees of uncertainty, as if the hypothetical, ambiguous corpse of the frame has fragmented and decayed into the tale proper so that meanings and possibilities proliferate.

Reading the opening hypothetical corpse as informing or inflecting the human deaths narrated or alluded to in the poem heightens the sense of ambiguity and ephemerality that surrounds the characters' deaths and postmortem fates. In a scene that prefigures Frankenstein's sinking of the gurgling basket containing the remnants of the female creature, Leila seems to be drowned alive. The Muslim boatman who narrates the murky scene describes the "burthen" plunging sullenly and sinking slowly (360), and as he watches, he thinks he sees movement: "I

watch'd it as it sank, methought / Some motion from the current caught / Bestirr'd it more..."

(376-78). He attributes the movement to a trick of light and affirms—for himself as much as for readers—that “its hidden secrets sleep, / Known but to Genii of the deep” (384-85). Leila’s murder and corpse are pointedly not depicted, as if she need not be quite dead if those elements are not narrated, and indeed at the end of the poem “she liv’d again” (1272) as a shining vision in the Giaour’s dream that “’twas not a dream” (1258). Hassan’s unambiguously dead body which reveals nothing but his rage, becomes as inscrutable in the grave as his freshly dead corpse had been. The place where he died is marked with a monument that may or may not indicate the spot where his remains actually decay and which itself decays synchronously with his palace:

A turban carv’d in coarsest stone,
A pillar with rank weeds o’ergrown,
Whereon can now be scarcely read
The Koran verse that mourns the dead;
Point out the spot where Hassan fell
A victim in that lonely dell. (723-28)

The Giaour, still physically alive at the end of the poem, has been living under a vampiric curse (747-86) and though not in fact “suck[ing] the blood of all [his] race” to feed his ‘livid living corse” (758, 762), he does exist in a kind of undead state in his solitude. His memory is now “the tomb / Of joys long dead” (1000-01). His last narrative act is to issue directions for his burial, and he insists on the same kind of un(re)markable anonymity as that of Leila and Hassan:

Then lay me with the humblest dead,
And save the cross above my head,
Be neither name nor emblem spread
By prying stranger to be read,
Or stay the passing pilgrim’s tread. (1324-28)

The Giaour speaks these words the night before he expects himself to become a corpse, “That lifeless thing the living fear” (1280). Nearly but not yet dead, he ends much as Hassan’s fresh corpse and Leila’s sinking-but-still-animate body, in an ambiguous state between life and death.

The fresh corpse insists readers look closely at the dead while temporarily suspending judgment about what, exactly, they see. Change is imminent in the state between life and death, but for a moment, multiple possibilities coexist. Byron's beautiful corpses are pregnant with potential, literally so in Haidée's case, but that potential might logically seem to end with death. In *The Giaour*, there appears to be more futility than fertility. However, the potential of the fresh corpse of the frame portends the regeneration and reflowering of Greece, and it also refracts into the tale proper, like "a broken mirror, which the glass / In every fragment multiples" (*CHP* 3.33), proliferating the dead and their possible meanings and enacting in the fragmented form of the poem itself both decay and possibility. The *Giaour* implies the generative potential of decay when he claims that his chief regret is that he cannot seek and share with Leila's "narrow bed" in death because she "sleeps beneath the wandering wave" and has no "earthly grave" (1126, 1123, 1124). The sense that the mingling of decaying remains could offer comfort or even a frisson of sexual tension in the grave occurs elsewhere in Byron's work, and as we will see in the next chapter, Mary Shelley understands and exploits his interest in the almost erotic prospects of bodies decaying together with her portrayal of the Byron-like Lord Raymond in *The Last Man*.¹⁴ In *The Giaour*, however, Byron only obliquely posits generation emerging from fragments: the final lines, spoken from a point of view temporally removed from the immediate action of the tale, remind readers of the characters' continuity, even in the inscrutability of death and fragmentation: "This broken tale was all we knew / Of her he lov'd, or him he slew" (1333-34).

B. The Decaying Corpse

If mingling of the dead in and with the soil suggests companionate or even quasi-copulative potential as the *Giaour*'s regret over the postmortem fate of his and Leila's separated remains implies, then the place of interment must be seen as vital in that it enables and

participates in the blending of decaying bodily remains and the particles of place that gives the dead and the past a literally earthly immortality.¹⁵ The decaying corpse visibly affects the soil around it: at the “advanced decay” stage of decomposition the cadaver is reduced to “very little body mass and soil staining of the surrounding soils is still evident” (Adair). In other words, organic material seeps into the soil as person and place mingle, each affecting the other and leaving visual evidence of their interpenetration. For Byron, the ephemerality of the fresh corpse is countered by the permanence of the place into which the corpse decays. He explores several iterations of the conjunction of dust and dirt as human remains and human-made relics decay into sites of personal and cultural significance. Across these variations, the remains of what has gone before are made visible and present even as they merge into the soil in order to effect their continuation and to reinvest the dead and the past with energy and potential for the future.

As Byron understands this conjunction of dust and dirt, the place of burial where the remains of the dead mingle with the soil can give meaning to and ground the dead, inextricably bonding them into the remnants of the past and making of them the foundations for the future. This legitimating function of interment was crucial to Byron’s own sense of self and his notions of ancestral heritage. As his Newstead Abbey poems indicate, Byron saw—and wanted to see—himself as part of the lineage and history represented by the Abbey, and he wanted to have a fixed place in relation to the past which would assure his place for the future. Harrow School, another important place from his childhood, figures into his sense of personal and familial continuity as well. In “Lines Written beneath an Elm in the Churchyard of Harrow” dated 2 September 1807, Byron recalls his schooldays and the time he spent in the churchyard at Harrow. He juxtaposes those memories of the past with a vision of the future and his death. His “fond dream” (23), he writes, is that he might be buried here:

Here might I sleep, where all my hopes arose,
 Scene of my youth, and couch of my repose;
 Forever stretch'd beneath this mantling shade,
 Prest by the turf, where once my childhood play'd;
 Wrapt by the soil, that veils the spot I lov'd,
 Mix'd with the earth, o'er which my footsteps mov'd; (25-30)

Byron's dream, to be "Press'd," "Wrapt," and "Mix'd" into the soil that supported and witnessed his youth in order to become part of the place "For ever," suggests the kind of perpetuity and connectedness he imagines as possible in the blending of the particles of person and place. This was not a passing fancy as his detailed and ongoing stipulations in verse and prose for his own interment and the elaborate arrangements he made for his daughter Allegra's transport and burial reveal. His wills of 14 June 1809 and 12 August 1811 both specify that he be buried beside his Newfoundland dog Boatswain at Newstead Abbey, without ceremony or inscription (Marchand 67, 104), and he continued to think about his burial place his whole life. When he realized he was dying in Missolonghi, he no longer wished to be reunited with his ancestral sod but sought a "Soldier's Grave," telling Dr. Millingen: "One request let me make to you. Let not my body be hacked, or be sent to England. Here let my bones moulder" (qtd. in Marchand 457). Although his sense of where his remains should "moulder" and mingle changed, his need to direct the place and mode of his burial in a personally and historically significant locale remained unaltered.¹⁶

Byron used interment to give his natural daughter Allegra both a history and a future by locating her remains in a place that figured importantly in his own past. At the death of the five-year-old at a convent school in Bagnacavallo, Italy, Byron made arrangements to have her body embalmed and returned to England and interred at Harrow Church, the very churchyard where he had once dreamt of being buried himself.¹⁷ Kathryn Mapes argues that the letters and instructions he wrote announcing Allegra's death and arranging for her body's disposition are epitaphs for both her and himself and that through these he repossesses his place in his native country: "In

writing to Augusta about ‘that spot of earth’ that is Harrow and his plans to secure his daughter in it, Byron is, in effect, reappropriating that ‘spot of earth’ for himself and reclaiming a part of England” (57). I would add that in making these arrangements, he also appropriates for Allegra a legitimate place in England and among the society that deemed this child born of Claire Clairmont illegitimate. In this sense, he is using the notion of the “founding power of the grave” not to usurp power or territory as he criticizes others for doing but to insert Allegra into the history and lineage that should already be hers but from which she has been unfairly excluded.

On the one hand, then, the place of inhumement gives meaning to the dead by positioning them within a longer historical arc that extends to both past and future, but on the other hand, the remains of the dead can give meaning to a place by their very presence. This is precisely why the French Revolutionary leaders translated the worthy dead to the Panthéon: to claim the weight of past glories and achievements of others in order to legitimate their new secular and democratic order. The soldiers on the battlefields of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* function in much the same way, giving meaning to the places in which they died and now lie, but their remains do not legitimate the actions of those who led them there. Despite his early pride and desire to join in his own ancestors’ battlefield feats, his search for a “Soldier’s Grave” in his last years, and his mercurial admiration for figures such as Napoleon, Byron presents recurrent images of the battlefield as burial field with ambivalence. G. Wilson Knight recognizes Byron’s conflicted response to the landscape of Europe which he suggests Byron viewed as “one vast theatre of tombstones”; he writes that Byron “ranges across the centuries accepting and cherishing a past or recent present while he simultaneously repudiates and regrets” the events he chronicles (191). Byron praises the valor of the warriors even as the presence of their dead bodies and decaying remains merging into the battlefields reveal their valor to have been wasted in pursuit of their

leaders' misplaced ambitions. The speaker asks, for instance, if the death of soldiers in Spain is necessary simply for the sake of one person's desire for power:

And must they fall? The young, the proud, the brave,
To swell one bloated Chief's unwholesome reign?
No step between submission and a grave?
The rise of rapine and the fall of Spain?
And doth the Power that man adores ordain
Their doom, nor heed the suppliant's appeal?
Is all that desperate Valour acts in vain? (1.53)

The costs of war have been too high; the political gains illusory and short-lived.

The unnaturalness of the martial pursuit of personal glory and political power pervades *Childe Harold* just as the remains of the dead pervade the battlefields where soldiers have been dehumanized and unsexed. Byron juxtaposes—with the jarring interruption of a song “To Inez” between—the spectacle of brutality and waste at a bull fight in Spain where “One gallant steed is stretch'd a mangled corse; / Another, hideous sight! unseam'd appears, / His gory chest unveils life's panting source” (1.77) with the fate of the “sons of Spain” who “fight for freedom who were never free” (1.86). Not only are soldiers likened to the detritus of a blood sport, they become such detritus on the battlefields as the fragmented remains of human and horse mingle unceremoniously and seep together into the landscape. At Waterloo on the day of the battle, the “The earth is covered thick with other clay, / Which her own clay shall cover, heaped and pent, / Rider and horse,—friend, foe,—in one red burial blent!” (3.28). Here in the blending of creatures, Byron echoes imagery from the early “Elegy on Newstead Abbey” which describes the overrunning of the Abbey by robbers during the English Civil War: “O'er mingling man, and horse commix'd with horse, / Corruption's heap, the savage spoilers trod” (83-84). A first-person account anticipating such a fate is given in *Mazeppa*: “The sun was sinking—still I lay / Chain'd to the chill and stiffening steed, / I thought to mingle there our clay” (18.763-65). The case of the Maid of Saragoza who takes up arms when the men fail reveals the further depredations of war.

“Spain’s maids,” though “no race of Amazons” must be like Spain’s sons (1.57). Byron both admires them for their bravery and abhors the fact that their actions have “unsex’d” them (1.54). Like animals, these men and women have been sacrificed for nothing other than another’s glory.

The battlefields that have become burial fields are the sites of false sacrifice where soldiers have been used and used up for national or imperial gain and a doomed future vision:

Three hosts combine to offer sacrifice;
 Three tongues prefer strange orisons on high;
 Three gaudy standards flout the pale blue skies;
 The shouts are France, Spain, Albion, Victory!
 The foe, the victim, and the fond ally
 That fights for all, but ever fights in vain,
 Are met—as if at home they could not die—
 To feed the crow on Talavera’s plain,
 And to fertilize the field that each pretends to gain. (1.41)

The three warring entities that have joined in this martial worship service are no more distinguishable than the men who die, decay, and mingle their dust with that of horses and battlefield. None stands out as fighting a “righteous” fight or as being the rightful victor. The soldiers have died simply as “tools, / The broken tools, that tyrants cast away,” and “There shall they rot” (1.42). And those who command them gain nothing lasting because the only “span of earth” despots can truthfully call their own is “that wherein at last they crumble bone by bone” (1.42).¹⁸ Waterloo is called an “Empire’s dust” with “An Earthquake’s spoil ... sepulchered below,” but neither “colossal bust” nor triumphal column marks this place (3.17). The “deadly Waterloo” where “Harold stands upon this place of skulls, / The grave of France” (3.18) recalls with irony Golgotha, the site of Jesus’s crucifixion traditionally located within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, for though this new “place of the skull” is also a place of suffering and sacrifice, it seems to hold no promise of victory over the grave.

Yet even as Byron maintains the futility of these battles and deaths, there is utility in the battlefields and their dead. As the casualties of war decay and blend with one another and with

the very land on which they fought, they achieve a kind of earthly immortality. Their bodies cannot be translated from this place in order to rewrite history, for they have become a part of the place; their decayed presence permanently stains the soil as a lasting indictment of the atrocities perpetuated by “bloated Chief[s]” and bears witness to the events that occurred here. Just when readers might be tempted to avert their eyes from the death and decay, to forget or ignore the testimony of stained soil, Byron insists readers look at the dead, leave them *in situ*, and learn:

Flows there a tear of pity for the dead?
 Look o’er the ravage of the reeking plan;
 Look on the hands with female slaughter red;
 Then to the dogs *resign* the unburied slain,
 Then to the vulture *let* each corse remain;
 Albeit unworthy of the prey-bird’s maw,
 Let their bleach’d bones, and blood’s unbleaching stain,
 Long *mark* the battle-field with hideous awe:
 Thus only may *our sons conceive the scenes we saw!* (1.88, emphasis added)

The materiality of the bodies themselves witness to the past and warn future generations of the immorality of national glory or dominion achieved by martial domination and usurpation.

What about the other casualties of wars, invasions, and usurpations? Like the soldiers who have been used as tools to further others’ ambitions then discarded on the battlefields to decay, cultures and peoples have been overrun and left for dead as well. Byron self-consciously and overdeterminedly likens the artifacts, edifices, and the lands themselves to the skeletal remains of human bodies. In *The Giaour*, Greece is depicted as a fresh corpse—beautiful but apparently lifeless, in a state between life and death. In *Childe Harold*, Greece is again likened not just to a dead body but to that of a dead lover, and the survivor who is unmoved by the sight is chastised: “Cold is the heart, fair Greece! that looks on thee, / Nor feels as lovers o’er the dust they lov’d” (2.15). Greece is later described as a “sad relic of departed worth” (2.73). Rome is “The skeleton of her Titanic form, / Wrecks of another world, whose ashes still are warm” (4.46). The Coliseum is a ruin, an “enormous skeleton” (4.143). When Harold is in Athens,

references to the skull of a “vanish’d Hero” and the Parthenon itself ambiguously mingle. Near the “Hero’s lofty mound,” the listener or reader is urged to look closely at remains that have decomposed beyond the point of providing shelter or nutrients for even the lowliest creature:

Remove yon skull from out the scatter’d heaps:
Is that a temple where a God may dwell?
Why ev’n the worm at last disdains her shatter’d cell!

Look on its broken arch, its ruin’d wall,
Its chambers desolate, and portals foul:
Yes, this was once Ambition’s airy hall,
The dome of Thought, the palace of the Soul:
Behold through each lack-lustre, eyeless hole,
The gay recess of Wisdom and Wit
And Passion’s host, that never book’d control: (2.5-6)

Somewhere between these two stanzas, the skull shifts from being that taken from the mound of heroes’ bones to being the Parthenon itself. If eyes are the windows to the soul, then the “eyeless hole” of this skull seems to bespeak a profound absence: the life of a people and a culture lost.

Paul Fry focuses precisely on this sense of absence, arguing that in cantos 3 and 4 of *Childe Harold*, Byron commemorates the absent as dead (168). Since all are absent; all are dead. According to Fry, Byron evacuates the world first of nature in canto 3, turns to culture in canto 4, then buries art as well, leaving only the solitary poet as the “monumental ground” of “Culture” (172). At last, nothing but the poem exists “as the sole place where life is present” (178). In this account, Byron seems as much a usurper of culture and the past as any marauding invader as he becomes the sole possessor and processor of the past which he remakes in his own image within his “domelike brow” (Fry 168). This is the kind of complete abstraction of the dead away from bodily materiality which I have argued Wordsworth pursues, but which Byron adamantly and actively rejects.¹⁹ In focusing on absence, Fry and others neglect to contemplate “yon skull”—that is, the matter Byron places before them and to which he directs readers’ attention. Byron turns cultural relics into human-like remains not to emphasize their pastness or absence but their

presence, and in their decaying presence which merges a people with a place, he posits their potential for future regeneration. His shift from individual to cultural remains—that is, to the relics of a people rather than a person—enables him to invest the blended fragments of a particular people and place with energy and the potential for their continuity and restoration. The logic works much as it did for Allegra or himself but on a larger scale, allowing a people to reclaim the past and heritage that is rightfully theirs but which has been unlawfully or immorally taken from them and to participate in the ongoing presence and future restoration of that heritage.

With the metonymic link between humans and human-made structures and artifacts, Byron treats these objects like bodies and so, like decaying bodies, these objects specific to a people must merge with places of significance to attain permanence. Unlike human remains, however, decaying cultural remnants are often places in themselves and therefore have the potential to become their own gravesites. As such, they are invested with a powerful tendency for continuity. As discussed above, Greece in *The Giaour* is both corpse and monument, its mountains the “graves of those that cannot die!” (135). In *Childe Harold*, Byron employs a similar paradox, describing Greece as “Immortal, though no more!” then asking who will save Greece, who will “call [her] from the tomb” (2.73). The Parthenon, that eyeless skull, is both skeletal remains and the grave that houses them, a “lonely tower” or “tenement.” Of this corpse-cum-tomb the speaker asks in the final two lines of the stanza quoted above: “Can all, saint, sage, or sophist ever writ, / People this lonely tower, this tenement refit?” (2.6). These questions might be taken as rhetorical and expected to elicit an implied negative response, but they could also be legitimately asking and expecting a range of possible answers: can someone inhabit this place again? Who will resurrect Greece? The question itself implies the possibility for future re-habitation and rehabilitation. The language of exodus and resurrection—“Who now shall lead thy scatter’d children forth / And long accustom’d bondage uncreate?... who that gallant spirit

shall resume..., and call thee from the tomb?” (2.73)—does not deny long years of hardship or suffering, but it does offer hope for potential restoration.

That restoration is grounded in the decayed remnants of the past mingled in a place that is a product of both nature and human interaction. J. Andrew Hubbell examines *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* as an expression of Byron's emerging environmental consciousness that uses the “environmental imagination” in the process of nationalization. Although his approach and focus are different than mine, he notices a similar merging of a people and a place: “Just as the ancient Greeks evolved from their environment to construct the greatest civilization of the ancient world, so also modern Greeks devolved back into it. The ancient temples and marbles are described as extensions of the land they are built from and upon” (193). Hubbell argues that the spirit of freedom is retained in the land which remains inspirational even though “the human population and its material culture devolves” (194). I would counter that “devolution” of the human population and culture into the land is precisely what enables the continued existence of the “spirit of freedom” of this people, even though that “spirit” appears dormant for the present.

Just as the decayed remains of soldiers must be absorbed into the battlefield or Byron's future remains must “mingle” with the “dust” of his ancestors in order for place and people to give meaning to one another and achieve a mutual permanence, the future of a people relies on the blending of the dirt of their land and the dust of human-made relics. In canto 2 of *Childe Harold*, the speaker returns to the metaphor of Greece as a lovely corpse. He notes her decayed structures mingling with the earth and sees evidence of continuity:

And yet how lovely in thine age of woe

 Thy fanes, thy temples to thy surface bow,
Commingling slowly with heroic earth,
 Broke by the share of every rustic plough:
 So perish monuments of moral birth,
 So perish all in turn, *save* well-recorded Worth;

Save where some solitary column mourns
 Above its prostrate brethren of the cave;
Save where Tritonia's airy shrine adorns
 Colonna's cliff, and gleams along the wave;
Save o'er some warrior's half-forgotten grave,
 Where the grey stones and unmolested grass
 Ages, but not oblivion, feebly brave,
 While strangers only not regardless pass,
 Linger like me, perchance, to gaze, and sigh 'Alas!' (2.85-86, emphasis added)

The repeated use of "Save" alludes to both the *exceptions* to all perishing and to the *salvation* which will keep all from perishing.

The speaker immediately turns to Nature and the landscape of Greece as the key to continuity: "Yet are thy skies as blue, thy crags as wild... / Art, Glory, Freedom fail, but Nature still is fair" (2.87). But contrary to Hubbell's argument, Nature alone is not the repository of the people's "spirit," nor is it meant as a replacement for "Art, Glory, Freedom." The next stanza suggests Nature retains past art, glory, and freedom and allows for their continuity and potential reflowering because it *contains* the past commingled with it, hallowing the combined whole:

Where'er we tread 'tis haunted, holy ground;
 No earth of thine is lost in vulgar mold,

 Each hill and dale, each deepening glen and wold
 Defies the power which crush'd thy temples gone:
 Age shakes Athena's tower, but spares gray Marathon. (2.88)

When the remains of human-made edifices decay into soil marked by human efforts, body and grave, dust and dirt, of a people become one entity. The law of matter, discovered by Antoine Lavoisier in the late eighteenth century, states that in a closed system mass remains constant over time; matter can be neither created nor destroyed, even though it may be rearranged or transformed in appearance or properties. If "No earth of thine is lost" and the earth contains the matter of the past, then that matter will continue and may emerge in renewed form in the future.

Byron sometimes couches this potential renewal in terms of procreation and rebirth that relies for its fecundity on the dust of the dead. In places, the mingling of dust with dust can take on sexual overtones as a way for lovers to unite fully in the grave as the Giaour would have wished. Elsewhere, that sexual mingling of the dust of the past and the soil of the present is explicitly connected to fertility, or more problematically, the absence of the decayed past within the soil is akin to barrenness. An empty tomb, like an empty womb, will not bring forth a new or renewed people. Paradoxically, there can be no future without the dust of the dead. In canto 4 of *Childe Harold*, Byron makes the connection between tomb and womb, death and rebirth explicit. Rome, the “Lone mother of dead empires,” is childless, barren, withered, and bereft even of “holy dust” (4.78-79). The tomb of the Scipios is plundered and “contains no ashes now; / The very sepulchres lie tenantless / Of their heroic dwellers” (4.79). Rome is the “Niobe of nations” who stands “Childless and crownless,” holding an “empty urn” (4.79). If ashes and dust are required for continuation, being bereft of ashes is akin to barrenness; an “empty urn” no more fecund than an empty womb.

Given the importance of place in conjunction with human and human-made relics for Byron’s thinking about the arc of history, the thread of references to grave desecration and grave robbery that runs throughout his body of work and his well-documented disgust at Lord Elgin’s removal and relocation of the Parthenon Marbles become newly understandable because these acts are not simply dishonoring or devaluing the dead or the past but are a despoliation of the future. In “Elegy on Newstead Abbey,” the “savage spoilers” are after monetary gain (84), but the inhumed dead become collateral damage:

Graves, long with rank and sighing weeds o’erspread,
 Ransack’d, resign, perforce, their mortal mould;
 From ruffian fangs, escape not e’en the dead,
 Rak’d from repose, in search for buried gold. (85-88)

Although the Newstead dead have been disturbed, they have not been removed, and the continuity of the place and its people can resume. After the restoration of Charles II to the throne (109) and the “Master” of Newstead to “his tenure” (115), “happy days” and the proper succession from “Sires” to “Sons” are restored as well (129, 133). Even in the present of Byron’s poem, when the Abbey decays and is deserted, the “vaults, where dead of feudal ages sleep” remain intact to be viewed and cherished in the present and to await and create the promise of a future restoration when “Hours, splendid as the past, may still be thine” (141, 155).

Similarly, at Marathon, the speaker of *Childe Harold* laments the destruction, but the remnants that remain will prove enough to retain the past and draw others to this place. After viewing the scene with “Death in the front, Destruction in the rear!” the speaker asks, “what now remaineth here?” (2.90) then answers his own question:

What sacred trophy marks the hallow’d ground,
Recording Freedom’s smile and Asia’s tear?
The rifled urn, the violated mound,
The dust thy courser’s hoof, rude stranger! spurns around. (2.90)

Despite the desecration of these graves, “pilgrims, pensive, but unwearied” will throng “to the remnants of thy splendor” precisely because those “remnants” are here. In the following section, I will return to the potential in “pilgrimage”—that is, the mingling of the *living* with the dust of the dead—but at this point, I want to highlight the importance for Byron of the fact that something remains of the remains. In his note to this section, he remarks on the recent excavation work at Marathon by the French Consul Fauvel, commenting on both the lack of relics and the lack of respect for the importance of relics: “few or no relics, as vases, &c. were found by the excavator. The plain of Marathon was offered to me for sale at the sum of sixteen thousand piastres, about nine hundred pounds! Alas! ... was the dust of Miltiades worth no more? it could scarcely have fetched less if sold by *weight*” (2: 198). The price cheapens the site—or more

accurately exposes as a pimp he who would sell it—but it does not ruin the site, for its remnants remain ripe to inspire future recollection and reanimation.

Grave *desecrators* plunder goods and artifacts while disturbing the dust of the dead—egregious enough in Byron’s ethical system—but grave *robbers* steal the future, taking from the land and its people the very potential for cultural reflowering which helps to explain Byron’s contempt for Elgin’s actions. In *Childe Harold*, Byron likens Elgin to a grave robber or even a rapist, a “dull spoiler,” who “violate[s] each saddening shrine” (2.11). “Britannia” is not spared either, as Byron labels her a plundering bully and points to the hypocritical rift between her reputation for generosity and the theft of the Marbles that even time and tyrants had spared until this point (2.13). Elgin’s motivations for acquiring the Parthenon Marbles—at great personal expense and frustration—have been questioned since he began the project, with the explanations that have developed including both “enlightened intervention and cultural vandalism,” as John Whale puts it (220).²⁰ Byron admits no such ambiguity; for him, Elgin’s acts and Parliament’s complicity are cultural imperialism akin to the territorial imperialism that plays out on battlefields, and they merit scathing consequences. In “The Curse of Minerva,” he unleashes a cruel attack on Elgin that St. Clair calls “unusually personal” (*Elgin* 199). Byron alludes sneeringly to Elgin’s syphilis and resulting missing nose, his cuckolding and messy public divorce, and his epileptic son and suggests they are a result of the gods’ justice and Minerva’s curse (117-22, 164-168). Minerva’s curse is also leveled on England which will suffer defeats in wars, foreign trade, and domestic economy (209-58). St. Clair comments that satire is often more literary exercise than heart-felt attack, but this does not account for Byron’s vitriol here, nor do explanations based on a personal anger at Elgin’s Scottishness, Toryism, or “apparently typical British contempt for foreigners” (*Elgin* 197, 199). St. Clair concludes that Byron may have been exhibiting “sheer perverseness” in his attempt to present a different approach to the topic and

that he may also still have been responding with bitterness in response to the review of *Hours of Idleness* that had appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* (Elgin 199).

I would argue, however, that in light of the pattern of imagery regarding the remains of the dead and their places of burial that emerges in Byron's work, his attack on Elgin and on the nationalistic impulse that sanctioned Elgin's actions should be read as emerging from the same kind of horror and outrage that met the activities of "Resurrection Men" in the early nineteenth century. As I will discuss more fully in the next chapter, these men exhumed fresh bodies from graveyards and sold them to anatomists to supply subjects for dissection. In lifting the dead from their graves, the Resurrection Men may have put the cadavers to good use according to anatomy reform proponents, but in appropriating their bodies, removing them from their places of interment, and translating them to lie anonymously on display in anatomical theaters, they stripped the dead of their individuality, their personalities, and their connections with families, friends, and the locales to which they belonged. Similarly, Elgin, Parliament, and those who approved of the removal and translation of the Marbles felt these relics of the Greek people were put to better use when claimed in the name of England's imperial project, displayed in the British Museum, and made available for (British) public contemplation.²¹ The Elgin Marbles are not bodies or even funerary sculpture, but Byron treats them and their removal from the place for which they were created as if they were. Elgin's harvesting and relocation of the Marbles is an act of cultural aggression and usurpation that decontextualizes them, making them meaningless in themselves and robbing Greece of their fertile potential for her cultural restoration.²²

C. The Skeletal Corpse

If, as I have been arguing, the remains of the dead and their conjunction with the place in which they decay are vital to Byron's vision of continuation, we along with Byron—who knew

his Bible well (Stevens 352)—might ask as the Lord does of the prophet Ezekiel: “can these bones live?” (*KJV* Ezek. 37.3). Yes. The “dry” or “skeletal” stage of human decomposition, the last measurable phase before bone breakdown begins, is paradoxically the most fertile for the place in which the remains decay. Around the edges of the “cadaver decomposition island” (CDI), plant growth increases after active and advanced decay stages come to an end in response to the nutrients released by the human organic material. This resurgence of vegetation is visible indication that the gravesoil has not yet returned to its normal nutrient level—that is, that the dead continue to affect the place in which they lie, and that effect is one of renewal and growth (Carter and Tibbett 36). Nature’s renewal is evident on the battlefields of *Childe Harold* and occurs not despite but because of the presence of the dead. At Ardennes, Byron imagines the fresh dead now lying on the surface being naturally interred in time: those “unreturning brave” are “trodden like the grass / Which now beneath them, but above shall grow / In its next verdure” (3.27). At “Thrasimene’s lake” where Hannibal defeated Roman legions, the dead have long since been absorbed into the landscape, for now only the “gentle plough” rends the land and “aged trees rise thick as once the slain / Lay where their roots are” (4.65). Not only is Nature restored, but the soldiers who were dehumanized in the course of war are paradoxically restored to a “natural” state as well by their decay into nature. No longer merely “tools,” they have resumed biologic productivity, and though they are no longer visible on the earth’s surface, their presence continues to make itself felt, remembered, and relevant as a cautionary tale through the very renewal of this place. Their lasting presence only reaches full flower, however, when living pilgrims—like *Childe Harold* or Byron or readers—visit this place and mingle here with them.

Like William Godwin in his *Essay on Sepulchres* (1809) who argues that “thus much at least the human race owes to its benefactors, that they should never be passed by without an affectionate remembrance,” Byron “would [seem to] say, with Ezekiel, the Hebrew, in his

Vision, ‘Let these dry bones live!’” (Godwin *Essay* 22). Rather than reverse the process of physical decomposition as Ezekiel’s prophecy does to make dry bones live (*KJV* 37.7-10), Byron gives the dead meaning and enduring relevance by investing the decayed and mingled remains of people and places with generative potential; however, that investment can only be realized by and with the living. As Marilyn Yalom writes, “We like to think that visitors help rescue the dead from oblivion” (xv). In other words, for Byron the living must mingle with the dead who are in turn mingled with the dirt of a particular, significant location in order not only to learn the lessons of the past but to envision a renewed future. Even in his early poetry, Byron suggests how important it is for the living to be in the presence of the dead, but the emphasis on pilgrimage and its companionate implications as a means of mingling with the dead develop over the course of his poetic career. In the early Newstead Abbey poems and “Lines Written beneath an Elm in the Churchyard of Harrow,” being in the presence of graves and decaying remains inspires recollections of the speaker’s own youthful memories and ancestral lore, but it also provokes visions for the future that are both cyclical and forward-looking. In returning to this place again—in memory, in body, in one’s own decay—the place and the people it contains will continue and will encompass the speaker within that future vision.

That vision expands beyond the individual in later poems as notions of ancestry are expanded to include relations that are not of blood or directly shared history but of a people or a culture; these places, too, inspire remembrance of the past and visions of the future for the living visitor who is positioned midway between past and future on the historical arc. As we saw with Byron’s depiction of the field at Marathon in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and in his accompanying note, even though the relics have all but disappeared and those which remain are not adequately valued, enough remains to draw people to this place and to inspire imaginative responses that look both to past and future. Grave-mounds and urns have been violated,

Yet to the remnants of thy splendour past
 Shall pilgrims, pensive, but unwearied, throng;
 Long shall the voyager, with th' Ionian blast,
 Hail the bright clime of battle and of song;
 Long shall thine annals and immortal tongue
 Fill with thy fame the youth of many a shore;
 Boast of the aged! lesson of the young!
 Which sages venerate and bards adore,
 As Pallas and the Muse unveil their awful lore. (2.91)

To facilitate and perpetuate the potential that lies in this ground, the “remnants” must remain undisturbed, so “pilgrims” can continue to mingle here with them. Byron has invested this olio of dust and dirt with generative potential in order to give the dead meaning which can only be redeemed and reinvested by the visitors who spend time here. He gives instructions for how to approach and care for this graveyard, “this consecrated land”: “pass in peace along the magic waste: / But spare its relics—let no busy hand / Deface the scenes, already how defac’d!” (2.93). Instead, “Revere the remnants nations once rever’d” (2.93). With his language of pilgrimage, consecration, and reverence, Byron makes of this place a secular holy site.

In addition to its religious overtones, the notion of pilgrimage bears surprisingly sociable connotations as that most famous of literary pilgrimages, Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, illustrates. The associations formed along the journey are far more important to that group of pilgrims and to readers than the object of their pilgrimage. With *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* as well as his other poetic visits to burial grounds, Byron participates in this literary tradition even though the Childe Harold persona seems notably isolated on *his* pilgrimage. When the character nearly merges with Byron’s own voice in canto 4, he might be considered even more solitary. Haley notes that in this final canto “there are no living people, only memories of dead persons and dead eras embodied in isolated, apparently lifeless, stones, many of them fragments: tombs, prisons, or memorial statues—reminders of the buried, the confined, the once-powerful” (172). For Byron, the dead and the past embodied in these fragments afford both the object and sociable

process of pilgrimage. In contrast to Chaucer's pilgrims, the endpoint of pilgrimages at graves and relics matters for Byron's pilgrims—place is as much a part of the generative potential of the dead as decayed remains—but they matter not as sites of unidirectional observation or devotion but insofar as they become locations that foster a kind of sociability: the dead mingle with the dirt, and the living mingle with and in the presence of the dead.

The remnants of battlefields offer one kind of pilgrimage destination wherein Byron invests the dead and the past with a cautionary meaning that warns against particular actions and attitudes, but martial glory cannot serve as the basis for Byron's vision of future rebirth. For that, he relies on pilgrimages to sites of artistic creation and cultural achievement. Santa Croce, for instance, is "the centre of pilgrimage" according to Byron's note because of its particular tombs (2: 235). The decayed dead of Santa Croce attract the attention and inspire the imagination of the living much as the beauty of the fresh corpse does, and they give meaning to this place. Here "lie / Ashes which make it holier, dust which is / Even in itself an immortality" (4.54). The "Ashes" are not just any ashes; they are "The particle of those sublimities / Which have relaps'd to chaos," the "bones" of Angelo, Alfieri, Galileo, Machiavelli (4.54). The decaying remains of these thinkers and writers and the place in which they are buried act upon one another reciprocally with Santa Croce providing the site for pilgrimage and imaginative response and the dead providing the ashes from which a renewed people might arise phoenix-like: "These are four minds, which, like the elements, / Might furnish forth creation: Italy!"; this rebirth is made possible because the "decay / Is still impregnate with divinity" (4.55). Unlike the empty and barren tomb/womb of Rome, this tomb is ripe with a plenitude of worthy ashes.

Bards trump battles. The speaker of *Childe Harold* recounts, for instance, that Athens's fallen armies and the "thousands" fettered by "the yoke of war" were redeemed by the "Attic Muse" whose voice in the form of their "tragic hymn" is "their only ransom" (4.16). At the

sound, their captor unbinds the captive and “bids him thank the bard for freedom and his strains” (4.16). Bardic triumph is the result of the productive engagement at a particular site between dead and living. If, as Bennett suggests, Byron’s vision for the future is one of “retrieval” rather than the kind of poetic posterity other male Romantic poets aspired to (197), what might that look like? Byron’s notion of decay as futurity offers one answer. For Byron, a productive relationship between the living and the dust or relics of the dead is one of contiguity—physical, temporal, and imaginative—that is effected by what seems stereotypically un-Byronic sociability: mingling in all of its mixing, blending, coupling, and associating connotations. In this fertile combination, the dead and the conquered are given a moral and political relevance to critique and correct the past and to take part in creating a regenerated future. Others have noted Byron’s interest in cycles, but the cyclical impulse of regeneration I am suggesting is not merely a repetition or recurrence, for it is propelled with a forward motion, revisiting and remaining connected to the past, but not repeating it, much like a coiled spring, with the attendant stored energy and potential for energy transfer that a spring implies.²³ In Byron’s formulation, both poet and poetry become part of a timeline that extends to both past and future through the dust of the dead in a process that continues and transforms what has come before for what is yet to come.

D. The Fragmented Corpus

In an entry in his *Ravenna Journal* dated 28 January 1821, Byron defines poetry as combining the qualities of person and place (an emotional response and a temporal location) that both connects and blends past and future: “What is Poetry?—The feeling of a Former world and a Future” (qtd. in Stevens 334). Given his conviction that the fragmented state of the corpse allows it to mingle with the soil, with other dead, and with the living to give the past a future, his experiments with the fragment form in his poetry take on additional meaning.²⁴ Scholars have

suggested the fascination with ruins and fragments and the extensive use of the fragment form during the Romantic period may be a result of an apocalyptic bent, a vision of future destruction, or it may be an invitation to the reader to fill in what appears to be missing. For Byron, the value of fragments and decay is not in absence or what is missing but in presence. The fragment form focuses readers' eyes on that which remains. It is perhaps no coincidence that that most fragmentary of poems, *The Giaour*, presents Byron's most beautiful depiction of an intact human corpse. Both the bodily remains and the fragmented form that surrounds it are attractive, ephemeral, and ambiguous, urging readers to linger over and with the dead and decayed. The presence of fragments invites the living to mingle with them and in that creative—or one might say procreative—process, to regenerate the past and reimagine it for the future.²⁵

That process of regeneration is one of addition and adaptation. What Tom Mole calls Byron's "accretive compositional practice" (62) in writing and publishing *The Giaour* offers a helpful insight into the accretive process Byron imagines for fashioning a future out of the mingling of past and present. Mole refers both to Byron's use of the fragment form and to the frequency of new editions (fourteen editions in two years with the text expanding from 684 lines in the first edition to the received 1334 lines). The expansion is not the result of simply furthering the narrative as a kind of serial drama; as Mole notes, the additions fill in some gaps even as they create others (61). With each addition, then, the fragments of the past remain but more fragments of the present are mingled with them; the original elements continue in their recognizable form, but both old and new are shaped and transformed as they are combined.

Byron's description of visiting St. Peter's Basilica in canto 4 of *Childe Harold* further clarifies the human component in such an accretive mingling as he offers instruction for how to comprehend and enter into the experience of creation through fragmentation:

Thou seest not all; but piecemeal thou must break,
To separate contemplation, the great whole;

.....

and unroll

In mighty graduations, part by part,
The glory which at once upon thee did not dart,

Not by its fault—but thine: Our outward sense
Is but of gradual grasp...

.....

Till, growing with its growth, we thus dilate
Our spirits to the size of that they contemplate. (4.157-58)

St. Peter's is a sepulcher, a site of pilgrimage, and an accretive structure built on the site of successive churches and adorned by the gradual, centuries-long accumulation and integration of artwork and artifacts, and it can only be apprehended, according to Byron, by breaking it down, mingling in the midst of the piecemealed parts, and emerging as—and as part of—a greater whole. Both the place and the person emerge from the experience recognizably the same yet forever changed, enlarged and prepared for future “great conceptions” (4.159).

If Wordsworth's poetic canon is equated with a Gothic cathedral in which every poem becomes a potential grave, then we might think of Byron's fragmentary poetic forms—whether intentionally fragmentary or excerptible set pieces from longer works—as being equated with the decaying dead. This is no more melancholic an outcome for Byron's corpus than Wordsworth's is for his, for in fragmentation, the dead mingle with each other, in their environment, and with the living in a potentially fertile conjunction for the future. Mark Canuel seems surprised to come to a somewhat similar realization about Byron's notion of death and decay as necessary for futurity: “Death, in fact, is more than an unfortunate and disappointing reality; it is *necessary* for the survival of the author's writing” (*Religion* 219). He makes it seem that the potential to be found in ruins for both poetry and poet is based in brokenness; the fracturing of belief systems makes room for poetry that accommodates and subsumes those fragments, but that process also,

paradoxically, makes the poet figure rather more “Byronic”—a marginalized outsider—than my reading of the continuity and sociability of ruins suggests. He concludes that Byron does not merely accept poetry as ruin, but exalts decay in lieu of the survival of his poetic voice. This means that poetry can no longer facilitate sympathetic exchange, but this absence “is felt neither as a tragic loss nor as a poetic defect; it is a poetic gain” because the distance allows poetry to assume a more expansive authority (*Religion* 219). We might think of this reading in terms of what Achille Mbembe calls “the logic of martyrdom” (35). Martyrdom requires the simultaneous death of self and Other; all must be lost in order to secure future gains, whether those be political goals and/or personal eternity. Mbembe writes that the effect of the suicide bomber, the epitome of the logic of martyrdom, is “to reduce the other and oneself to the status of pieces of inert flesh, scattered everywhere, and assembled with difficulty before the burial” (36-37). One way of understanding Byron’s embrace of death and decay might work along these lines wherein the poetic process leads necessarily to fragmentation of the poetic self which might be a version of the “minimal survival” Bennett posits as Byron’s goal. I would argue, however, that Byron’s survival instincts outweigh his propensity to martyrdom.

Mbembe contrasts the “*logic of martyrdom* and the *logic of survival*” (36) in his essay “Necropolitics,” a term meant to account for the “subjugation of life to the power of death” (39-40) in our contemporary world where one mode of governmentality eschews the biopolitical disciplining of bodies in favor of the “maximal economy” of “massacre” (34). I am drawing on Mbembe’s terminology because I think these contrasting logics help to elucidate the distinction I am making about Byron’s forward-looking use of the fragments of the past and because I think it reasonable to suggest that Byron in some ways was also trying to account for the “subjugation of life to the power of death.” In addition to the evidence provided by the war casualties he found decayed into battlefields ancient and recent across Europe that testify to the futility and waste

caused by a leader's quest for personal glory or a nation's quest for usurpation and expansion and the reminders of ancestral and cultural ruination in the abandoned and fragmenting edifices at home and abroad, Byron often expressed his personal sense of loss at what must sometimes have seemed a relentless string of deaths of family members and friends. I am not trying to suggest, however, that Byron is responding to or engaging in necropolitics or necropower as Mbembe uses the terms; Byron's target is too broad, too amorphous for that. Nor do I wish to trivialize the instances of slavery, colonization, and occupation Mbembe addresses. However, Byron does sense power in the dead and their remains, and he attempts to negotiate the relationships between past, present, and future through and with the dust of the dead, so the term *necropolitics* may not be ill-applied.

The "logic of survival" in Mbembe's account can be as brutal as the logic of martyrdom, but unlike the latter, in the former there is, indeed, a survivor just as there consistently is in Byron's negotiations with and through the dead. In canto 3 of *Childe Harold*, Byron offers images of survival-after-loss that reflect both the brokenness of surviving and the continuity inherent in that brokenness. The poem's speaker, aligned very closely with the poet at this point, visits the place where Byron's cousin Major Frederick Howard died at the battlefield of Waterloo. The poet chooses to "select" this one "from that proud throng" of riders, horses, friends, and foes who now are "in one red burial blent" (3.29, 3.28) because of the history (and future) shared by the speaker and the dead man: "*Partly* because they *blend* me with his line, / And *partly* that I did his sire some wrong, / And *partly* that bright names will hallow song" (3.29, emphasis added). Just as the bodies of the dead blend with the ground here at Waterloo, Byron and Howard—living and dead—blend as well through their past ancestral ties and in future poetic "song." Byron's rationale for visiting the site where Howard "didst cease to live" (3.30) is couched in fragmentation; the three *partly*'s in three subsequent lines emphasize the

speaker's own fragmentary thinking, but they also indicate his readiness to mingle here with the decaying dead. Nature lives on in this place, the "wide field reviv[ing] / With fruits and fertile promise" but the speaker turns from this renewal to "those she could not bring" (3.30) and contemplates the "ghastly gap" (3.31) left in the lives of each dead soldier's surviving family and friends. Of those thousands of survivors, Byron writes:

They mourn, but smile at length; and, smiling, mourn:
The tree will wither long before it fall;
The hull drives on, though mast and sail be torn;
The roof-tree sinks, but moulder on the hall
In massy hoariness; the ruined wall
Stands when its wind-worn battlements are gone;
The bars survive the captive they enthrall;
The day drags through though storms keep out the sun;
And thus the heart will break, yet brokenly live on:

Even as a broken mirror, which the glass
In every fragment multiplies; and makes
A thousand images of one that was,
The same, and still the more, the more it breaks. (3.32-33)

The imagery of survival is devastating, yet there is a future here. Even as the fragments of the broken mirror multiply the past, the potential for them to multiply images of survival and continuation are latent as well. Relying on Elias Canetti's work, Mbembe writes that "the survivor is the one who, having stood in the path of death, knowing of many deaths and standing in the midst of the fallen, is still alive" (36), an image much like Byron himself in this passage.

There is reciprocity in survival, although the survivor does not emerge unscathed. In Mbembe's account of our contemporary necropolitics, the survivor is both brutalized and made brutal: "the survivor is the one who has taken on a whole pack of enemies and managed not only to escape alive, but to kill his or her attackers.... Even more radically, in the logic of survival one's horror at the sight of death turns into satisfaction that it is someone else who is dead. It is the death of the other, his or her physical presence as a corpse, that makes the survivor feel

unique” (36). Byron’s survival in the face of the dead is not one of shared killing but of shared decay, and the sight of the corpse or its remnants, while not erasing the uniqueness of the individual, reminds the survivor of shared humanity, a shared past, and the potential for a shared future. In canto 4, after contemplating loss and reminders of loss, Byron demands his soul back “To meditate amongst decay, and stand / A ruin amidst ruins; there to track / Fall’n states and buried greatness” (4.25). This is one of the signal moments in Byron’s corpus that readers identify with his perceived unceasing melancholy and nostalgia because decay triggers memories of the past. What is missed in these readings is that the site is also one of present meditation and future imaginings. The “Fall’n states and buried greatness” are tracked

o’er a land
Which *was* the mightiest in its old command,
And *is* the loveliest, and must ever be
The master-mould of Nature’s heavenly hand,
Wherein were cast the heroic and the free,
The beautiful, the brave—the lords of earth and sea,

The commonwealth of kings, the men of Rome!
And ever since, and now, fair Italy! (4.24-25, original emphasis)

As a “ruin amidst ruin,” the poet mingles with the dead; that is, he blends with the “master-mould” of decay to become the material that will be formed in the “master-mould” for the future of a land that “must ever be.”

The matter of a decaying form, whether human or human-made, remains even though the form is changed, and in the process of this change it combines with its surroundings and attains a kind of permanence that will survive the present. Sophie Thomas observes that fragmentary ruins speak to the past in a number ways, but they interact with the present as well; “ambivalent effects are created by the way ruins float between the past and present . . . , but belong fully to neither” (“Assembling” 181). She further clarifies that the “historicity of the ruin is a function of the present,” meaning that ruins represent “historical relation” rather than history. For Byron, that

relation extends not just to the past; ruins are the mediating factor that “floats between” present and future as well. Thomas notes that in addition to evoking nostalgia, ruins can, as Elizabeth Harries puts it, be a “quarry and resource” for future-building, even functioning as “a symbolic site for radical or revolutionary expression” (“Assembling” 182). Surprisingly, Byron’s future-building through fragments is not particularly radical or revolutionary. Rather than a rupture between old and new, for Byron fragments represent an opportunity for connection and survival.

In Byron’s poetry, the remains of the dead act as reminders of the past—an individual’s, a nation’s, a culture’s—but, in conjunction with the soil that contains and absorbs them and the living who visit and mingle with the dead, they remain morally, politically, and culturally relevant for the present and provide material with which to imagine the future flourishing of a familial lineage or the resurgence of a people’s heritage. Neither dust nor dirt (fragmented persons or places) alone will ensure what Bennett calls “survival *per se*”—that is, survival by itself without reference to anything or anyone else (*OED*, “*per, prep.*” Def. 9 “*per se*”); however, survival that is not by itself, that is with and through the blending of past and present seems possible, even though it is not entirely clear how that might work. As we shall see in the next chapter, Mary Shelley develops some of these ideas and brings the fertility of the grave to term. She theorizes an active, collaborative relationship between living and dead, ultimately offering a more radical vision for imagining and constructing the future that uses the fragments of the past not for accretive change or revival, but for recombination at the hands of the living writer to create something entirely new. If Byron survives his encounters with the dead, Shelley thrives through hers, and she creates the conditions in which new visions for the future can thrive as well. Byron senses from the beginning of his poetic career the generative potential to span history and forge a renewed future that lies in visiting sites of decay and in mingling with the remains of the dead, but that potential will reach fruition only under Mary Shelley’s pen.

¹ Russell Shorto describes one such narrative, the journey of René Descartes's bones through three hundred years and multiple exhumations, translations, and souvenir-keepers' depredations. For reburial as a recuperation of political or cultural reputation, see Michael Kammen.

² Mirabeau and Marat were interred here immediately following their deaths, while others such as Voltaire and Rousseau were translated here for reinterment. Mirabeau's interment on 4 April 1791 was the first for both the Panthéon and Mirabeau. Voltaire's body, thirteen-years-dead, was exhumed and reinterred here on 11 July 1791, the second interment for both person and place. Rousseau's body was translated from Ermenonville to the Panthéon in 1794 (Curl 23). Mirabeau's body was disinterred from the Panthéon on 25 November 1794; Marat's coffin was removed the following February. As Mona Ozouf notes, "after December 1792, every proposal to bring remains of some new great man into the Pantheon was accompanied by a proposal to banish someone else" (340). For an account of Mirabeau's funeral procession and interment, see Simon Schama (*Citizens* 546-48); for Mirabeau's death and the public spectacle of his corpse, see Antoine de Baecque (15-34). For the reinterment of Voltaire as a subversion of royal funeral rites and Catholic ceremonies, see de Baecque (37-59). For an account of the eighteenth-century notion of "great men" that gave rise to the Panthéon, its creation, and its failure to represent a unified French vision, see Ozouf. For an analogous twentieth-century example of the political uses of burial and reburial and the effects of political and social revolutions on death rites and the ritual uses of burial spaces, see Catherine Merridale.

³ Quotations of Byron's poetry are taken from *The Complete Poetical Works*. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (CHP) and *Don Juan* (DJ) are cited by canto and stanza. *The Giaour* (G) and shorter poems are cited by line number. Quotations from prose passages such as Byron's notes are cited by volume and page number.

⁴ Edmund Burke also famously repudiates the desecration of tombs in the interests of political gain, protesting, for instance, against the dragging of the bodies of ancient sovereigns from their tombs (107). He so feared the desecration of his own grave in the service of opposing political interests that he specified that he be buried in an unmarked grave on his estate at Beaconsfield so that his Jacobin enemies who might eventually effect England's fall could not disinter and desecrate his remains (Collings *Monstrous* 92).

⁵ See Robert Dingley for a reading of Byron's poetic renderings of the Coliseum as a form of recycling of memories for both poet and reader.

⁶ For instance, Paul Douglass argues that echoes of Wordsworth can be found throughout the four-canto *Childe Harold*, not just in the "Wordsworthian" response to Nature in canto 3, but each instance is quickly countered and "couched as fantasy" (12-15).

⁷ Byron said of the skull, discovered in November 1808, that it "had probably belonged to some jolly friar or monk of the Abbey about the time it was dismonasteried" (qtd. in Marchand 55). He sent it to a jeweler in Nottingham who returned the skull, according to Byron, "with a very high polish, and of a mottled colour like tortoiseshell." The skull was set in "heavy silver resting on four balls" (55). The skull was, indeed, made to be "of use." Marchand recounts the story of a house party at Newstead Abbey in early 1809, at which Byron and several of his friends enjoyed

dressing up in “*Monks’* dresses from a masquerade warehouse” and sitting “up late in [their] friars’ dresses, drinking burgundy, claret, champagne, and what not, out of the *skull-cup*” (qtd. in Marchand 58, original emphasis).

⁸ Cheeke writes that an “inlayered form of nostalgia-within-nostalgia” becomes “distinctively Byronic” (22), and McGann identifies “despair” as “the Byronic byword” (*Romanticism* 12).

⁹ Although Byron would not have used the modern terms for stages of human decomposition, my use of them in this paper is not, perhaps, as anachronistic as it seems. Eighteenth-century physicians did early scientific research into “putrefaction” in order to treat patients with “putrid diseases,” but as Janaway, Percival, and Wilson point out, it is clear from their work that they recognized and tried to explain changes the human body undergoes, particularly to the soft tissue, during different stages of the decomposition process. Their work was a precursor for “taphonomy” which relates to “decomposition of the body and associated death scene materials” (313). We do not know what, if anything, Byron knew of this research, but his discussions with Percy Shelley and John Polidori about death and reanimation suggest they would have had at least passing familiarity with these pre-taphonomic studies.

¹⁰ Marilyn Butler succinctly summarizes the plot: “The ‘Giaour’ of the title (the word means foreigner or infidel) tries to save his mistress Leila, a slave in Hassan’s harem, from being tied in a sack and thrown into the sea as a ritual, socially-approved punishment for her adultery. When he fails, he joins a band of Albanian brigands in order to ambush Hassan and kill him” (“Orientalism” 86). The structure of the poem is much more complex than this helpful plot summary suggests, consisting of “disjoined fragments,” as Byron writes in the Advertisement, presented in nonlinear fashion from multiple points of view—both Muslim and Christian.

¹¹ Though Byron’s observation may seem remarkable to those of us who, as a result of the professionalization of Western funerary practices, no longer have regular or intimate contact with the dead, it was not unique for the period. In his *Essays on Physiognomy*, Johann Caspar Lavater extols the virtues of observing the newly dead for physiognomic practice: “Of the many dead persons I have seen, I have uniformly observed that sixteen, eighteen, or twenty-four hours after death . . . , they have had a more beautiful form, better defined, more proportionate, harmonized, homogeneous, more noble, more exalted, than they ever had during life” (*Essays* 370). For much more about what Gary Laderman identifies as the shift away from “the intimacy that had connected the physical remains with a community of family and friends” (1) see Philippe Ariès’s magisterial work *The Hour of Our Death*.

¹² St. Clair notes that although Byron’s name was essentially co-opted by the London Greek Committee spearheaded by Sir John Bowring and other Utilitarians as a means of marketing their agenda in England and Byron himself appointed as an agent of the Committee in Greece, Byron’s approach, including his patience to sit back and watch before acting and his careful avoidance of committing himself to one Greek party or another, was quite different from theirs. Byron was yoked with the other agent in Greece appointed by the London Greek Committee, the Honourable Leicester Stanhope, C.B., but they were almost complete opposites in character: “The two men could tolerate one another and occasionally co-operate, but nothing more” (*Greece* 170-71).

¹³ Butler characterizes Byron in his first trip abroad to Spain as being more like a “literary type of war correspondent, an early Hemingway” than a tourist (“Orientalism” 79), and Cheeke argues that Byron’s self-proclaimed authority as a producer of “Orientalist literature” was grounded in the fact of his having been there (60).

¹⁴ The companionate notion of mingling in decay may strike modern readers as odd, but it was not particularly unusual for the period. In his essay “Funeral and Sepulchral Honours” (1811), William Attfieid observes: “The desire of being united in death with the objects of our tenderest love, of being interred by the side of our kindred and ancestors, or even the wish that we should mingle rather with our native dust, and with the ashes of our countrymen, than with those of strangers, are sentiments which will occur to everyone’s recollection” (9).

¹⁵ Other scholars have noted the importance of place in Byron’s work in terms of politics (e.g. Butler), personal and authorial identity (e.g. Cheeke), and more recently in ecocritical work, in terms of “cultural ecology” (Hubbell 184).

¹⁶ Despite Byron’s explicitly stated wishes, his body was “hacked” and “sent to England.” His doctors dissected his body before embalming it; then it was placed in a “tin-lined chest of rough wood” with the heart, brain, and intestines in separate containers (Marchand 463). The jar containing his lungs was left in Missolonghi and deposited in the church of San Spiridione while the coffin and other containers were placed in a “large cask containing 180 gallons of spirits” and transported to England aboard the *Florida* (465). See Marchand for the account of Byron’s body lying in state, its transfer to Hucknall Torkard Church near Newstead, and its burial in the family vault atop the casket of the fifth (“Wicked”) Lord Byron near his mother’s mouldered casket (465-70). See Maurizio Ascari for the fraught history of Byron’s memorialization in Westminster Abbey and elsewhere.

¹⁷ Mary Shelley’s letter of 2 June 1822 to Maria Gisbourne recounts Allegra’s death and the postmortem arrangements (*Letters* 234-38). For more about Allegra’s final illness and death, see Marchand (372-73). Iris Origo provides a detailed account of Allegra’s death, embalming, transport to England, burial, and memorial (77-82). Despite Byron’s instructions, no monument was erected for Allegra at the time of her death. Cedric Hentschel provides an account of the questions surrounding the exact location and details of her interment and the service on 19 April 1980 at which a memorial plaque was erected for her.

¹⁸ Achieving national or imperial glory by appropriating others’ bodies as tools guarantees no more lasting futurity than does enshrinement in the Panthéon. Thomas Moore includes a quotation from Byron’s journal dated “Ravenna, July 5. 1821” in which Byron alludes to the fleeting fame of Pantheonization. He had been approached by a young American poetry enthusiast who told him he had acquired a copy of Thorwaldsen’s bust of Byron in Rome, and Byron comments: “I confess I was more flattered by this young enthusiasm of a solitary trans-Atlantic traveller, than if they had decreed me a statue in the Paris Pantheon (I have seen emperors and demagogues cast down from their pedestals even in my own time....” After all but abandoning the persona of Childe Harold at the beginning of canto 4, Byron makes a similar claim about the futility of such man-made fame in verse: If “dull Oblivion bar / My name from out the temple where the dead / Are honoured by the nations—let it be—” (4.09-10).

¹⁹ Fry sees similarity in Wordsworth's and Byron's approaches to burial and the dead where I see distinct and incompatible difference. He argues that despite their contrasts in what they choose to "bury" or represent in their poetry, Byron and Wordsworth share the "urge to express burial" which is "at bottom always the urge to bury expression" (160).

²⁰ See Timothy Webb for an account of Elgin's acquisition of the Marbles, public reaction, and the role of the museum in defining national taste and conceptions of national identity. Gillen D'Arcy Wood suggests a pathological motivation, arguing that "Elgin's overnight obsession with the 'defaced' statues of Phidias" was inspired some time in 1802 "by the trauma of his disintegrating nose and the sexual revulsion it provoked in his wife" and that Byron recognized this and used it as fodder in his assaults on Elgin in "The Curse of Minerva" and *Childe Harold* (175): "This is archaeology as bad sex, for Byron the most damning of indictments" (174).

²¹ As Angela Esterhammer notes, for instance, Felicia Hemans affirms the value of bringing the Marbles to England in her long poem *Modern Greece*, for modern Greeks and hostile Turks would not have properly appreciated or cared for them, whereas in England they will serve to inspire a new beginning for British art (31).

²² Byron's awareness of the problem of decontextualization in relation to the Elgin Marbles has been addressed from a number of perspectives. See Roger Atwood for an archaeological point of view crediting Byron with prefiguring the idea now held universally by archaeologists "that antiquities lose much of their meaning when they are wrenched out of context by looters" (137). Esterhammer argues that Byron understands monuments that are "forcibly fragmented and sold or collected as souvenirs, lose their historical context and even their aesthetic value, instead becoming commodities" and offers his literary "translation" of antiquities as an alternative (34). From an ecocritical perspective, Hubbell argues that Elgin's acquisition is framed in terms of "resource extraction" that upsets the nature/culture ecosystem (195).

²³ See, for instance, Cheeke, who similarly sees the forward motion in Byron's notion of cycles: "if history is a series of cycles, then those cycles, given the context of the fourth canto, may be liberating rather than merely blindly constraining" (105).

²⁴ See Michael Bradshaw for a helpful overview of modern critical approaches to Romantic fragments (73-80).

²⁵ Scholars who identify the fragment form as issuing an invitation for reader participation to complete the narrative seem to sense the generative potential I identify, but they emphasize the present—the current reader's engagement with the text—rather than the future potential Byron attempts to access and facilitate through remains. See, for instance, David Seed and Tom Mole. Levinson gestures toward the potentiality inherent in the fragment form, arguing that its indeterminacy forever withholds completion—that is, the fragment "cannot be objectified, determined, hence depleted by any one reading" (209)—but for her this is of interest only because the poet cannot therefore be appropriated or seen as a producer of commodities.

IV. MARY SHELLEY: THE SIGHTS AND SITES OF THE DEAD

Although they depict significantly different modes for thinking about the dead as seats of knowledge, both Mary Wollstonecraft in her early unfinished “Extract of the Cave of Fancy. A Tale” (1787) and William Godwin in his *Essay on Sepulchres* (1809) suggest the importance of being in the presence of the dead in order to learn from them and to transmit their characters and knowledge to the living. In Wollstonecraft’s tale, the sage studies the exteriors of newly dead corpses to assess their interior qualities, to judge their moral worth, and to determine what impact, if any, he will allow them to have on him; then he teaches his pupil to do the same with the visible spirit of a dead woman. Godwin, too, advocates spending time with the dead—though after they are buried—to “commune” with them and to benefit from being in the presence of “clod[s]” of earth that are now “fruitful of sentiments and virtues,” so he proposes marking great men’s graves to facilitate that exchange (*Essay* 24, 19). Wollstonecraft suggests that the living best learn from the dead by sight, by observing their forms from an impersonal distance, while Godwin argues the character and knowledge of the dead are best conveyed by being in personal proximity to the decaying matter at burial sites. For both, the perceived stability of the dead renders the morals, character, and experiences of the past accessible and controllable for the living and therefore influential for the future. In this chapter, Wollstonecraft’s “Cave of Fancy” and Godwin’s *Essay* provide a background against which to read Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818, 1831) and *The Last Man* (1826). In these novels, Shelley engages with, extends, and critiques the insights of her parents’ earlier works as she considers what and how the living learn from the bodily forms and the burial places—the sights and the sites—of the dead and how that knowledge might be transformed for and translated to the future.

Shelley takes seriously the rationale behind Godwin’s proposal that accessing the knowledge of the dead by engaging “in a sort of conference” with them can influence the living

and promote future progress (*Essay* 12), and she considers what that “sort of conference” might entail. She suggests in *Frankenstein* and develops more fully in *The Last Man* the potential for the imaginative interaction between dead and living that exists at sites where surfaces break down, fragments integrate into the human landscape, and boundaries between past and present are breached. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley inverts Godwin’s notion that the living should visit the dead in order to “commune” with them and glean something of their knowledge and character (*Essay* 24) by bringing dead bodies to the living—and to life—to facilitate the “making common” or “sharing” through association, communication, and even the breaking of bread that the etymology of *commune* implies (*OED*, “commune, v.”). In this novel, she follows Wollstonecraft by focusing on the sight of the corpse as a source of information, but the very surfaces that make the dead legible also prove to be barriers that limit the kinds of knowledge which can be learned from them and inhibit the reciprocity suggested by Godwin’s notions of conference and communion. At the end of the novel, with the creature’s promise of self-immolation that will destroy the visible surfaces of his body and distribute his ashes across the earth—an action that, I will argue, renews and extends more broadly the invitation to commune with the dead—Shelley turns from the sight of the dead toward the sites of the dead. Her later apocalyptic novel recounting the apparent death of all humans but the eponymous *Last Man* depicts remarkably few corpses; she focuses instead on the places where dead and living encounter one another both figuratively in ambiguous states of near death and living death and literally in the burial sites that will contain and protect the decaying remains of the dead. In both novels, Shelley envisions a privileged position for writers who transform and translate the fragments of the past into a future that honors but is not obligated to the dead.

As I argued in the second chapter, Wordsworth’s dead must disappear from view and remain at a distance to motivate and facilitate their poetic re-creation by and for the living, but

Shelley's dead remain among the living, invite them to spend time in their presence, and ultimately encourage and enable the creation of something new out of the materials they afford. She takes up Byron's suggestion, addressed in the previous chapter, that there is generative potential in the places where dust, dirt, and the living mingle, but rather than the restoration and continuation of a pre-established personal or national past arising out of and on top of decay and dirt, she envisions a new human narrative developed in conjunction with the decayed dead.

Wollstonecraft and Godwin provide examples for Shelley of two modes by which the living might gain knowledge of the dead. I use the terms *sight* and *site* as an abbreviated way to designate those two modes and to indicate two ways of being in the presence of and learning from the deceased. The first participates in what Martin Jay calls the "ocularcentric bias" of the Enlightenment (85) and depends on observing the outward appearances of the dead. It is characterized in *Frankenstein* by the characters' reliance on what I am calling the "surface sciences" of anatomy, physiognomy, and proto-forensic science to create not only the living-dead creature but also the subsequent narratives that account for him and for the novel's other corpses. Shelley considers and rejects this epistemological mode because the knowledge it produces is too limited and the boundaries it erects between dead and living are too impenetrable. Jay argues that the antiocularcentric discourses that arose in critique of Enlightenment visual bias, particularly in French intellectual thought, have not eradicated the visual despite distrusting and adamantly rejecting particular models, but instead have tacitly encouraged the "proliferation of models of visibility" (591). This is true of Shelley's rejection of the "sight" of the dead as an adequate way of knowing, for in her turn to the "site" of the dead she does not eliminate the visual but extends the network of senses and perspectives that characterize the relationships between living and dead. She calls for a shift in perspective similar to that which Michel Foucault describes occurring at the beginning of the nineteenth century in

The Birth of the Clinic, but Shelley's version highlights rather than hides the role of language in meaning-making and includes the dead—whom Foucault considers objects and victims of the clinical gaze—as active contributors to that meaning-making. As I am using it, then, the term *site* refers to the locations where dead and living are in proximity, but it also indicates more interactive and mutually transformative encounters between living and dead than is afforded by visual observations of intact surfaces. Just as Foucault's notion of the clinical space reduces the communicative distance among clinicians, Shelley's sites where dead and living meet narrow and transform the distances between dead and living, past and present. She gestures toward the sites of the dead as a kind of technology that would enable a more reciprocal and mutually creative relationship between living and dead at the end of *Frankenstein*, but she does not explore the notion fully until *The Last Man*. Wollstonecraft and Godwin suggest that the value of the dead as a source of knowledge, whether acquired by sight or by visiting a burial site, rests at least in part in stability—immobile forms in fixed locations—that allows the qualities of the dead to be identified, assessed, and selectively utilized. In contrast, Shelley comes to imagine a more radical relationship between living and dead in which the dead become participants with the living to create a vision for humanity that incorporates but is not constrained by the past.

Both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, particularly with the novels' frames—the thresholds between the characters' and the readers' worlds—ultimately suggest that humanity's future potential relies on a mutually-enabled creative collaboration between dead and living that can only take place at the thresholds where they meet. My reading of Shelley may sound something like Edmund Burke's description of society in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) as a “partnership not only between those who are living, but those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born” (194-95), but her vision is not one of “unchangeable constancy” progressing inexorably through “perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and

progression” (Burke 120). Rather than renovation or even the kind of reconstruction Frankenstein engages in that simply replicates what has already existed, Shelley imagines recombination, a process that draws on the present and past—living writers and fertile dead matter—to produce something entirely new. She does not use the dead to reify the past or to restrain the future to a pre-defined plan; she adopts and adapts their remains to fabricate a new future. Shelley’s mode of burial reform is to re-form the buried.

A. Citing the Dead

Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley cite the dead in their prose in the sense that they arouse or summon the dead as witnesses of the past, calling on them to share their knowledge through the medium of their corporeal forms (*OED*, “cite, v.” Defs. 1, 2). In “Cave of Fancy,” Wollstonecraft draws on the physiognomic theories of Johann Caspar Lavater and provides Shelley with a particularly vivid example of how one might learn from the dead by studying their outward features.¹ Lavater, in his *Essays on Physiognomy*, emphasizes the importance of observing the exterior of a body to understand its interior: “never can his [man’s] properties be wholly known, except by the aid of his external form, his body, his superficies.... This material man must become the subject of observation” (*Essays* 7). Using the dead as a physiognomic training ground in the tale, Wollstonecraft suggests that the living can gain useful knowledge of and from the dead provided they know how to read the surfaces of the material form. With that knowledge come the right and responsibility both to observe others and to make judgments about their moral worth, their social value, and the extent of influence they have on oneself.

Wollstonecraft’s strange, unfinished tale is remarkable for the quantity and variety of dead human forms that populate its three short chapters, all of whom reveal to the trained eye through their external appearances what cannot be seen: the “moral life” and “character” of the

person they were when living (Lavater *Essays* 9, 12). In the first two chapters, the emphasis is on the embodied dead, corpses newly washed ashore after a shipwreck. As the tale begins, the sage emerges from the “Cave of Fancy” where he has spent the night in “the silent vestibule of the grave” among the spirits of the recently dead (“Cave” 192). He rejoices at the sight of reviving life in nature, but soon finds that “death had been at work during his absence,” leaving corpses hanging from “craggy rocks” and strewn across the beach (“Cave” 192-93). Sagestus scans the scene from a distance, trying to “discern any who yet breathed,” but all are dead except one child who clings to her mother’s corpse. When the sage cannot easily “detach her from the body by persuasion,” he temporarily suspends the child’s “powers of life” with a “soporific powder” and carries her away to his hut (“Cave” 193), a tactic Shelley’s Lionel Verney uses when he drugs his sister Perdita in order to separate her from Raymond’s remains in *The Last Man*. While the child sleeps, Sagestus returns to the beach and engages in a careful and systematic study, viewing the dead “with a more scrutinizing eye” as he walks “leisurely among them, narrowly observ[ing] their pallid features” (“Cave” 194). Wollstonecraft underscores his physiognomic acumen by recounting first his minute observations of each corpse followed by his resulting assessment of each living character. With this approach, he exhibits the qualities of both the “scientific physiognomist ... who can arrange, and accurately define, the exterior traits; and the philosophic physiognomist ... who is capable of developing the principles of these exterior traits ... which are the internal causes of external effects” (*Essays* 12). From the commanding thinker to the simpering servant, and from the self-serving humourist to the sailors all “of the same class” who do not merit discrimination though their “characters were all different,” Sagestus observes, analyzes, pronounces judgment with certainty, and moves to the next corpse (“Cave” 194-97).

The sage initially seems interested in the knowledge he gleans only for its own sake; however, when he comes to the body of “the mother of his charge” whom he is “[a]nxious to

observe,” his physiognomic activity becomes less theoretical and his motives more utilitarian (“Cave” 197). He will determine the fate of the girl lying asleep in his hut as well as his own future based on what he learns from the features of the dead woman. Her features reveal that despite her feminine delicacy and a tendency toward goodness, an “improper education” had removed any “vigour from her faculties” and left her shallow, obstinate, and ineffectual (“Cave” 197). She would have inspired “fond affection” in her daughter, but she would not have earned or deserved the child’s respect; thus, the “orphan was not very unfortunate in having lost such a mother” (“Cave” 198). Sagestus’s assessment is a precursor of Wollstonecraft’s later argument in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that “women of sensibility are the most unfit” for the task of managing children (*VRW* 139), so the sage determines to perform the task himself. He adopts the girl, whom he names Sagesta, and begins thinking “of the best method of educating this child” (“Cave” 198). For the sage, the value in a dead body lies in the impersonal legibility of its lineaments that reveal its character and provide the basis for making judgments. Anyone adept at physiognomic reading is able to observe any dead body, abstract its relevant features, and make a detached evaluation of it, free of emotional attachments or power dynamics that color judgments. The lines of the face cannot lie, and the skilled reader of those lines cannot err. Sagestus’s physiognomic proficiency at description and analysis only gains utility, however, when it becomes the basis for informed decision-making and action. The sage reveals—first with his decision to educate the girl based on what he observes of her mother and again with the lesson he teaches her in the final chapter—that the real power of physiognomic judgment lies in the authority it bestows on the practitioner to make judgments about others and for oneself.

The third chapter shifts from the embodied dead to the inspirited dead and provides the only extant “specimen” of the final stage of Sagesta’s education (“Cave” 198).² The spirit of a young woman approaches Sagestus and his pupil and, after a brief exchange among the three

characters, she tells her story. In life, she had to choose between a man she loved but could not marry and a man she esteemed. She married the latter but continued to commune with the former in flights of fancy, even after he died. Only after she met a girl crying in the street, went home with her, and provided relief for the girl's mother did the spirit learn the ostensible lesson: life is enlivened and the "sleep of death" sweetened by performing deeds of "active benevolence" ("Cave" 206). And only after her death and transition to the "Cave of Fancy" through which "every mortal must pass" does she learn that she had in life "neglected many opportunities of being useful" because she allowed ardour to devour her ("Cave" 206).

Wollstonecraft's tale, as many scholars have observed, is about the education of a young girl and, by extension, of young women generally, but what is the subject of that education, and why does Wollstonecraft employ the dead to accomplish it?³ To address the second question first, Lavater recommended the dead as particularly useful subjects for learning physiognomic skills due to their clear, static facial structures: "What life makes fugitive, death arrests; what was indefinable is defined" (*Essays* 149). But why is learning physiognomic skills necessary for a young woman's education? Syndy McMillen Conger positions the sage's physiognomical readings within mid- to late-eighteenth century ideas about sensibility because both physiognomy and sensibility emphasize the importance of the passions in the formation of character (64). The form itself is revelatory of character, she explains, only if the observer possesses the sensibility necessary to understand and interpret what the form reveals. Conger describes the "professed goal" of the sage to be educating the girl through "an extended introduction to sensibility" which leads to an openness of mind (63). Herein lies the power and purpose of educating young women about sensibility: "There are no impassable barriers here between things immortal and mortal, persons male and female, events present and past, nor between observation and introspection, reason and fancy, or sense and sensibility" (67).

As Conger suggests, when the sage tells Sagesta that “in proportion to [her] sensibility, [she] may decide on the character” of those she meets (“Cave” 199), he links the extent of her sensibility to her physiognomic abilities, but the emphasis is not, I would argue, on her acquisition of sensibility, but on her decision-making authority as a physiognomist.⁴ The real lesson he teaches Sagesta through their interaction with the spirit is one of physiognomical judgment. The final chapter of “Cave of Fancy” begins, after all, not with the spirit’s personal morality tale but with her *appearance*: upon her approach, it is the spirit “*form*” that particularly strikes and interests Sagesta (“Cave” 199, emphasis added). Both material and immaterial forms of the dead in the tale, whether inert flesh or interactive spirit, essentially present surfaces to be observed carefully and interpreted skillfully in order to understand their characters. The sage reminds Sagesta that the people she will meet, including the spirit, reveal themselves not only through the words they speak but also through “countenance,” “gestures,” and “voice” (“Cave” 199). Careful observation of others’ appearance will allow her to decide upon their sincerity and whether to give their words credence. Only after the appearance of the spirit is observed and assessed do they agree to listen to her autobiographical morality tale.

If, as I am arguing, the lesson is one of physiognomy and not of sensibility, then we must reconsider Conger’s conclusions about the lack of “impassible barriers” here that allows the sage to teach Sagesta to have openness of mind. Admittedly, the sage does seem to exist in a mutable state that lets him pass between living and dead, and his intimate knowledge of the dead may be one reason he is able to employ so astutely not only scientific but philosophic physiognomy—moving beyond description and definition of surface features to an understanding of the internal characters they reveal (a move Victor Frankenstein is unable to make). Despite Sagesta’s own fluidity of state, however, he demonstrates that physiognomic skill entails an attentiveness to and maintenance of boundaries and hierarchies: the lineaments of the face, the differences of

character and class, and the physiognomist's prerogative to draw a distinction between self and other. Physiognomic skill allows the practitioner to observe with a dispassionate eye and to pronounce judgment. The Grenville translation of *The Whole Works of Lavater on Physiognomy* makes this point quite clear, defining physiognomy as "the art of *forming an accurate judgment* upon the whole, of discovering all these relations with exactness and precision" (*Whole* 12, emphasis added). Not only do the boundaries established by physiognomic observation establish hierarchies now, they extend to the future. Sagestus emphasizes both the immediacy and longevity of first impressions. When he sees Sagesta's reaction to the approaching spirit form, he encourages "her to ever trust to the first impression" which will allow her to determine whether people she meets are "affected" or "selfish," dissembling or vain, and thus how she should respond to their words ("Cave" 199). The initial impression is made quickly, but it can and should remain indefinitely, "ever" trusted, ever defining and delimiting her relationships with those people.⁵ The trained physiognomist is enabled to make immediate value judgments about others with confidence, to act on those judgments with certainty, and to retain those initial judgments indefinitely without self-doubt or second-guessing.

With this lesson, Wollstonecraft suggests that developing physiognomic skills is an empowering educational strategy for young women because physiognomic ability places them in positions from which to assess others and to formulate their own responses and responsibilities toward them. A woman need not be like Sagesta's mother, without "courage to form an opinion of her own" and "adher[ing], with blind partiality, to those [opinions] she adopted, which she received in the lump" ("Cave" 197). Rather, women (and all who have honed their physiognomic skills) can form their own opinions at first sight, certain of their accuracy and self-authorized to act on those judgments, and can avoid falling victim to the ideas and manipulations of unworthy or unscrupulous interlocutors. Although Wollstonecraft does not return to physiognomic theories

in her later work, “Cave of Fancy” does prefigure her interest in women’s education and the importance of the body in relation to the development of the mind, of self-respect, and of autonomous thought.⁶ The body under physiognomic observation provides an impersonal surface to be read before any interpersonal engagement occurs, enabling a woman to achieve the psychological distance necessary for making cool-headed, clear-eyed judgments. “Cave of Fancy” ends with the pious moral from the spirit that urges altruistic love for others on earth in anticipation of the state of heavenly love to come. The physiognomic lesson of the fragment, however, privileges the living over the dead and grants the informed observer of the body’s surface features the power to decide whether to listen to, accept, or act on the dead woman’s tale.

Wollstonecraft’s “Cave of Fancy” and Godwin’s *Essay on Sepulchres* are both concerned with being in the presence of and learning from the dead as a way of future betterment, but Godwin’s *Essay* focuses on the sites where the dead lie out of sight, decaying into and merging with the soil.⁷ He proposes in the *Essay* to mark the graves of the great and good with simple wooden crosses that must be visited and maintained by the living, urging readers to “mark the spot, wherever it can be ascertained; hallowed by the reception of all that was mortal of these glorious beings; let us erect a shrine to their memory; let us visit their tombs; let us indulge all the reality we can now have, of a sort of conference with these men, by repairing to the scene which, as far as they are at all on earth, *they still inhabit!*” (*Essay* 12). Key elements of Godwin’s plan which find expression in Mary Shelley’s explorations of the relationships between dead and living include the physicality of decaying remains that retain and make permanent the qualities and characters of the dead, the influence of the dead on the living enabled by “communion” at the gravesite, and the potential for the knowledge and experiences of the dead to remain among the living and to influence the future through the community that forms around their graves.

Like the corpses of Wordsworth's poems, Godwin's dead also disappear, not simply *under* but *into* the soil to become a lasting part of the landscape; but rather than elide remains as Wordsworth does, Godwin embraces them as relics. For Godwin, a dead person's ring or watch not only reminds survivors of the deceased but also can "inspire [the survivor] with the powers, the feelings and the heart of their preceding master" (*Essay* 8); the physical remains of the dead, fused and infused with the person's life and character, act similarly but even more powerfully on the living.⁸ Godwin is particularly interested in the ubiquity and permanence of the dead which are made possible by decay: "Perhaps every particle of mould which now exists, was once kneaded up into man, and thought and felt and spoke as I do now" (*Essay* 18). The transformation of the dead to "dust" incongruously enables earthen immortality, for "Portraits may be imaginary; the scenes where great events have occurred are the scenes of those events no longer: but the dust that is covered by his tomb is simply and literally *the great man himself*" (*Essay* 20). Unlike Lavater who regarded the portrait (and death) as physiognomically useful and revelatory of internal character because it immobilizes the exterior, Godwin categorizes portraits and landscapes as unstable and changing.⁹ Paradoxically, however, for Godwin—and as I argued in the previous chapter, for Byron writing after him—the mutable remains of the bodily form, even as they decay into the landscape, somehow retain and give permanence to the dead. Godwin, in contrast to Byron, seems largely uninterested in the particularities of ancestry, culture, or nation and instead shares with Wordsworth a desire to retain and transmit personal qualities of dead individuals, but he imagines that happening through contact with the "dust" of the dead which makes them less subject to imaginative erosion and allows their characters and knowledge to remain an integral part of the present and an influence on the future.

According to Godwin, the individual who spends time in "conference" with the dead at the burial site will bring away "good feelings" and "generous sentiments from such a visit," but

visiting the dead will not only make us feel better, it will make us better people now and a better people in the future (*Essay* 12). Communing with the dead will “tend to elevate us above our ordinary sphere, and to *abstract us* from our common and every-day concerns,” Godwin claims, and being in the presence of the dead “will act gently upon our spirits, and fill us with a composed seriousness, favourable to the best and most honourable contemplations” (*Essay* 12, emphasis added). Unlike Wordsworth’s dead whose best moral qualities are abstracted by and for the living, Godwin’s dead act on the living to abstract and distill *our* best qualities, so *we* “may impress and affect the more” (Wordsworth *EE* 1.58). More importantly, being in the presence of the dead allows both dead and living to “impress and affect” the future. Godwin laments that “the world for ever is, and in some degree for ever must be, in its infancy” because of the “calamity of death” that separates the dead and their knowledge from the living who must begin anew with each generation (*Essay* 8). With his proposal to mark and visit graves, he attempts to narrow the physical distance between dead and living in order to narrow and bridge the intellectual gap between past knowledge and that needed for future progress. Being closer to the remains of the dead makes possible the maturation of the world beyond “infancy.” In other words, for Godwin, being too distant from the dead results in perpetual regression, but physical proximity to the dead at their burial sites provides a foundation which propels the living forward.

Godwin’s proposal makes the living caretakers of the dead, to the advantage of both—the dead will be remembered, and knowledge of the dead will be retained—and the individual benefits of spending time with the dead will become social benefits through the communal behaviors that develop around and radiate from the graves. The material requirements of his plan necessarily create community among the living around the dead: the expense and the responsibility for maintaining the wooden monuments will be shared, perhaps by “a committee of men, who should feel, *This is our business*” (*Essay* 26), and the very ephemerality of the

monuments will encourage at least annual visits to the graves (*Essay* 28). Happier, more liberal, more thoughtful, the individual who has been restored through visiting the graves of the great—particularly the great writers—will, in turn, share those better qualities with the larger community through a sort of network of influence: “The poorest peasant in the remotest corner of England, is probably a different man, from what he would have been for the writings of Shakspear [*sic*] and Milton. Every man who is powerfully and deeply impressed by the perusal of their works, communicates a portion of the inspiration all around him. It passes from man to man, till it influences the whole mass” (*Essay* 29). The permanence of Godwin’s memorial system, just as the lasting influence of literary understanding, resides not in the memorials themselves but in the ongoing, cooperative effort by the living and among living and dead to remember and to pass on knowledge to subsequent generations.

Visiting the burial place where the dead “*now dwells*” so that “Some spirit shall escape from his ashes, and whisper to me things unfelt before” (*Essay* 22) is so vital to this future-oriented relationship with the dead that Godwin advocates creating both an atlas and a catalogue by which these sites might be located. The “Atlas of those who Have Lived, for the use of Men Hereafter to be Born” would mark “with incredible minuteness where the monuments of eminent men had been, and where their ashes continue to repose” (*Essay* 29), and the “Catalogue” presents readers “with the last and still remaining abode of all that English honour has yet had to boast” (*Essay* 30). In short, the gravesites of the “Illustrious Departed” are of such importance that not one, but two, modes of written record—plotted by geographic coordinates and enumerated in list format—should act as fail-safes in the unlikely event that living human memory should fail due to “fluctuation and uncertainty of human affairs,” or more ominously, in the face of “times of the greatest calamity and devastation” (*Essay* 29). If but one copy of the Atlas could be preserved, Godwin writes,

Though cities were demolished, and empires overthrown, though the ploughshares were passed over the site of populous streets, and the soil they once occupied were ‘sown with salt,’ the materials would thus be preserved, by means of which, at the greatest distance of time, every thing that was most sacred might be restored, and the calamity which had swallowed up whole generations of men, might be obliterated as if it had never been. (*Essay* 29)

When Shelley turns her attention to the sites of the dead in *The Last Man*, she explores the possibility Godwin envisions here, depicting in the main narrative of the novel the “greatest calamity and devastation” to humanity that could be imagined—its near total eradication by plague—and through the frame, she explores the unfathomable “distance of time” between the future narrative, the Sibylline leaves of the past and the Author’s present. But she also provides in the novel’s frame the means to reconstruct with and from decaying fragments a record that will make of the novel itself a catalog that will “mark the spot” where the dead have been interred and will maintain the dead “for Men Hereafter to be Born.”

B. Sighting the Dead

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley pursues her father’s suggestions from *Essay on Sepulchres* that the living can learn and be transformed in the presence of the dead. According to legend, as a teenager her favorite reading spot had been on her mother’s gravestone in St. Pancras parish churchyard under the two willows Godwin had planted to “mark the spot,” and one of her favorite pieces to read there was Godwin’s *Essay* (Carlson *England’s* 1; Richardson *Death* xiii). There Percy Shelley courted her, read with her, and, according to Godwin, at “the tomb of Mary’s mother, one mile distant from London . . . , it seems, the impious idea first occurred to him of seducing her, playing the traitor to me, & deserting his wife” (*Elopement* 11). Her avid reading of the *Essay* and the transformative moments she experienced while spending time in the presence of the dead likely affirmed for her Godwin’s notion that being at the grave in proximity

to decaying dust can convey something of the knowledge and character of the dead and can transform the living. If this is so, she seems to posit in *Frankenstein*, then being able to see and interact with the dead might be that much more useful for conveying a fuller range of human experience and knowledge. The novel reveals, however, that an Enlightenment empiricism which privileges the visual to the exclusion of other ways of knowing defines life too narrowly, separates dead from living too completely, and fails to produce an adequate account of the dead.

Corpses are laid out and on view throughout *Frankenstein*, much like the first chapters of “Cave of Fancy.” In addition to the most notorious examples of the decomposing bodies Frankenstein studies “in vaults and charnel-houses” and the very body of the being he creates from others’ remains and christens a “demoniacal corpse” (*F* 34, 40), characters kneel above, trip upon, and hang over the corpses of Caroline Beaufort’s father, William Frankenstein, Henry Clerval, Elizabeth Lavenza, and Victor Frankenstein himself. Godwin wants to learn from the dead by “repairing to the scene[s]” of their burial (*Essay* 12), but Shelley repairs to the scenes of the unburied, bringing corpses to the narrative surface so the living have the opportunity literally to be in the presence of the dead and to learn from them. Most dead bodies in the novel are truly defunct—inert remainders of past lives that bear on their surfaces traces of their deaths—but one is a dead body that lives—an interactive representative of past lives and present life that could, if given the opportunity to be heard, contribute to understanding how humans learn, interrelate, and shape the future. Whether distasteful or not, most of the necroscopic examinations in *Frankenstein* depict the kinds of observations of the dead conducted regularly in contemporary public and private arenas: anatomical theaters, courtrooms, and parlors. With Victor’s creature, though, Shelley literalizes the dead with whom one could commune in an extraordinary way: as a still-living, still-learning, still-teaching being who seeks a productive partnership with the living. Many critics have understood Shelley to be literalizing Burke’s metaphor of the French

Revolution as monstrous in this novel,¹⁰ so perhaps her literalizing of the educable and communicating dead as a mode of exploring how and what the living might learn from them should be unsurprising. However, despite the many people who have commented on the creature being “born of dead flesh” (Juengel 356), its role as a representative of the dead and of the knowledge and experiences lost when the dead are marginalized or ignored has been largely overlooked as has its position among the novel’s many other corpses. When read within the context of the novel’s other depictions of the dead, however, the juxtaposition of cadavers and living creature, ordinary and extraordinary, reveals Shelley’s critique of engagements with the dead and the past that attend only to surfaces and produce only a limited knowledge.

Much of the scholarly work on *Frankenstein* has focused on the body in some way, whether it be the absent maternal body or the embodied female author of feminist criticism;¹¹ the decaying mother’s body, the dismantled female creature’s body, or the dead bride’s body of much psychoanalytic criticism;¹² or the monstrous body of revolution, the body politic, or the reassembled, reanimated body that is the product of anatomical study and electrical experimentation contextualized by new historicist and cultural studies criticism.¹³ The body in the novel that has received the most attention is, naturally, that of Frankenstein’s creation. Formed of human and animal materials gathered from the “dissecting room and the slaughter-house” (*F* 37), described vividly by Frankenstein in all its yellow, black, and white hideousness (*F* 39), and endlessly adapted for stage, film, television, and print media to lurch, stitched-up and speechless, before the eyes of terrified and titillated viewers, the creation of this body made of other bodies has captured the imagination of generations (even as the collective imagination has transformed Frankenstein’s creature into an entity very different from Shelley’s original).¹⁴ Although encompassing a relatively small portion of the novel—only six pages in the Oxford edition separate Frankenstein’s confession that his attention was “peculiarly attracted” by “the

structure of the human frame” (*F* 33) and the first hard breaths and “convulsive motion” of the creature’s limbs as it stirs to life (*F* 39)—the vivid descriptions of Frankenstein’s feverish studies in the “church-yard,” “vaults and charnel houses” indelibly mark his living creature as a product of anatomical dissection and a subject of physiognomical scrutiny, and they link Victor to modes of observation and understanding that are concerned specifically with bodily surfaces (*F* 33, 34).

Frankenstein’s work as an anatomist aligns him—for better *and* worse—with the most famous, successful, and progressive anatomists of the period. Both Marilyn Butler and Richard C. Sha argue convincingly that Frankenstein’s science is faulty and outdated in the context of the debates about vitalism and animal electricity they address, and his “focus[ing] on visible surfaces and symptoms” rather than using a more penetrating clinical gaze may position him within eighteenth-century modes of seeing rather than with those of the nineteenth century (Jay 394; Foucault *Birth* 122). However, Victor’s competence as an anatomist is undeniable in that he does successfully assemble and animate a physically and intellectually functional humanoid. His skill serves to focus attention early in his narration on central concerns of the novel: the kinds of knowledge about living humanity that can be produced by the study of the human corpse’s features and where the limitations of such knowledge lie. The description of Victor’s studies of the human mechanism via decay and dismemberment would have resonated with Shelley’s early nineteenth-century readers as being a realistic portrayal of anatomists and their students. His nonfictional near contemporary, the renowned surgeon, anatomist, and lecturer Sir Astley Cooper (1768-1841), exhibited the same obsessive drive and extraordinary ability as Frankenstein.¹⁵ Like Frankenstein, Cooper zealously pursued his studies in comparative anatomy by collecting both animal and human specimens which he procured from any available source including slaughter houses and graveyards and which he dissected in his personal in-home dissecting room. From the dissection of an elephant in his court-yard to the home deliveries of

“Subjects” procured by Resurrection Men from graveyards, Cooper’s anatomical pursuits were no secret, nor was his professional ability which earned him both opprobrium and respect.¹⁶

Frankenstein’s forays into churchyards, vaults, and charnel houses may horrify and frighten, but only insofar as they mimic the practices of anatomists and Resurrection Men that already horrified and frightened the public. Prior to passage of the Anatomy Act in 1832 which made available to anatomists the unclaimed bodies of those dying in hospitals and workhouses, corpses for anatomical dissection were perpetually in short supply, and, as the public well knew, that need was regularly filled by Resurrection Men who procured newly dead bodies from fresh graves. Anatomy students sometimes accompanied professional Resurrectionists as both observers and participants to acquire corpses for their own dissections or to pass along to their instructors as partial payment for their tuition (Richardson *Death* 54). What is unusual about Victor prowling about burial places in search of anatomical and physiological knowledge is not the activity itself but the fact that he went alone, without a lookout, and did not encounter friends and family guarding the newly buried or fellow students trying to procure the same.

By positioning Frankenstein and his fantastical accomplishment so firmly within the known habits and milieus of successful contemporary anatomists, Shelley simultaneously gives credence to her character’s observational skills and anatomic facility and takes advantage of the public’s latent distrust of anatomists and their perceived dehumanization of the dead as nothing more than material, mechanical structures. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault argues that the modern medical profession emerged during the late eighteenth century with a shift in medical perception from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional way of seeing disease that requires a multi-sensory diagnostic approach: seeing, touching, and hearing (*Birth* 10, 8). The body, whether living or dead, is the object of this prolonged, multimodal, anatomizing—and violating—clinical gaze. Foucault thus marks a simultaneous change in the conception of

anatomical dissection: life obscures, but death (and the subsequent dissection of the corpse) reveals. He writes that “Nineteenth-century medicine was haunted by that absolute eye that cadaverizes life and rediscovers in the corpse the frail, broken nervure of life” (*Birth* 166).

Frankenstein enlivens the cadaver, performing what Richard Holmes describes as “*a corpse dissection, in reverse*” (327, original emphasis), but with no less violence. He is unable to see within the living cadaverous creature the “frail ... nervure of life” beyond the fact that it breathes and moves. “It lives! it lives!” the character repeats in Richard Brinsley Peake’s 1823 stage adaptation (1.3). Although Shelley’s Frankenstein does not actually say these words, Peake’s version and subsequent stage and film variations capture Frankenstein’s pride in his technical achievement, even as they suggest his disregard for any but the most mechanistic definitions of life. He had, he tells Walton, “worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body” (*F* 39), but because he understands the “inanimate body” and “life” to be subsequent rather than coexistent, he is unable to recognize the potential for living and dead to exist simultaneously and productively. The creature, existing as both dead human matter and living humanoid at the same time, embodies the potential for communion between dead and living that Godwin imagines at the gravesite, and he repeatedly, though unsuccessfully, invites Victor and others to engage with him in communal exchange. For Shelley, Frankenstein’s inability to know the humanity of his creature through the literal and metaphoric processes of seeing, hearing, and touching is an instance of victimization akin to Foucault’s account of the patient as inhuman object and victim of the clinical gaze.

Frankenstein’s living corpse—the product of graveyards, dissecting theaters, and slaughter houses—should stand as testament to Foucault’s observation that “the presence of the corpse enables us to perceive it living” (*Birth* 149), but even as the creature stirs to life, Frankenstein fails to recognize it as a new infantine being that requires nurture or to envision it

maturing into a partner and participant in human society. Frankenstein's studies operate within a Lavaterian understanding of anatomy. The Grenville translation of Lavater's *Whole Works* reveals clearly that anatomic and physiognomic studies share a dependence on surfaces: The science of anatomy enables us "to *reduce into surfaces* the parts which compose the human frame. Some of the internal parts may be separately observed, *either by their outward extremities, or more nearly and fully seen in the dissection of dead bodies*" (*Whole* 13, emphasis added). Anatomical dissection, to Lavater's way of thinking, opens the body to make external what was once internal, but it nevertheless remains a surface (*Whole* 13). For Frankenstein, the presence of this once-dead body does not enable him "to perceive it living," but instead shifts his mode of observation from one surface science to another, from anatomy to physiognomy.

In "Cave of Fancy," Wollstonecraft suggests that the practice of Lavaterian physiognomy not only allows the practitioner to judge the characters of others based on appearances but also empowers the observer to make a lasting decision about whether to listen to and learn from those others. Victor does just this. As his creature awakens, he instantly observes, assesses, and renders a permanent verdict based on the creature's appearance. The creature is, by Victor's account, beyond "ugly" and therefore morally suspect, in accordance with physiognomical thinking (*F* 40).¹⁷ The relationship between appearance and morality is clear in Ellis Shookman's translation of Lavater's "motto": "The morally better, the more beautiful; the morally worse, the uglier" (17).¹⁸ Not only does Victor make a quick and apparently accurate assessment—other characters react badly to the creature when they see him as well, suggesting Victor's aesthetic judgment is shared—he also "ever trust[s] to the first impression" as the sage taught Sagesta to do ("Cave" 199). After he has deemed his creature "demoniacal" on first sight, the creature remains so in Victor's estimation for the duration of their antagonistic relationship.

Frankenstein offers *an* interpretation of the creature's appearance as if it is *the* interpretation, but Shelley gives readers reason to question Victor's physiognomic judgment: his eyes are overtaxed and he is inattentive to the sights around him, so even if he possesses physiognomic skills, he may be unable to deploy them properly (*F* 36-38). Each time he "delineate[s]" the creature and offers an interpretation, Shelley invites readers to consider a legitimate alternate interpretation (*F* 39). For instance, if we omit Victor's loaded commentary ("catastrophe," "wretch," "horrid"), his initial description of the creature is unflattering but hardly freakish (*F* 39). Mark Canuel's paraphrase emphasizes the sad normalcy of the creature's appearance: "he has yellow skin, stringy hair, watery eyes, and thin lips" (*Justice* 1). Not pretty, perhaps, but surely not "hideous," and, depending on one's taste, perhaps these less salubrious features might even be offset by his "lustrous," "flowing" hair and "pearly" white teeth (*F* 40, 39). In their next encounter, when Victor awakens to see the creature peering at him from behind the bed curtain, the pattern repeats. The creature's eyes, Victor says, were fixed on him: "His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken...; one hand was stretched out..." (*F* 40). A "miserable monster" from whom one must escape as Victor designates him, or a cooing, gurgling, grinning, finger-grasping newly breathing being whom one should gather up and nurture as many critics have suggested?¹⁹ The creature even offers his own competing interpretation of his countenance, arguing that his exterior does not accurately reflect his interior. When they meet in the Alps, he tells Victor of people's response to him: "I have good dispositions; my life has been hitherto harmless, and, in some degree beneficial; but a fatal prejudice clouds their eyes, and where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend they behold only a detestable monster" (*F* 109). Avid physiognomists would dismiss this explanation, but Shelley encourages readers to consider whether detached observation of outward surfaces is adequate to reveal another's knowledge and character. The

reliability of each narrator in this novel is famously fraught with uncertainty, of course, but even though—and perhaps because—it is filtered through both Frankenstein and Walton, the creature’s sympathetic account of himself has a ring of truth. Perhaps more tellingly, its position at the center of the novel—buried, we might say, within those framing narratives—seems to protect and preserve it, inviting readers to visit this place, as Godwin might suggest, to feel it—even in its filtered, fragmented state—“act gently upon our spirits” (*Essay* 12).

The surface that makes the creature legible to Victor and others also acts as a permanent, impenetrable barrier to potential interpersonal communion between dead and living that limits access to any real knowledge of the creature’s character and experiences. In “Cave of Fancy,” Wollstonecraft presents physiognomic hierarchizing from the perspective of the practitioner who gains self-assurance and self-authorization to determine whom she will allow to teach and influence her. Shelley, conversely, considers the position of the judged and what is lost to both parties when surface-based judgments are used to define, delimit, and discount forever the knowledge that can be gained from others, including the dead.²⁰ Many critics, using many approaches, have addressed the creature’s losses—parentage, family, companionship, a place in society, rights within the judicial system—which may all be, at least in part, attributed to his appearance and to others’ judgments of him based on what they see. Less frequently considered, though no less important, is what those others lose when they marginalize the creature: an example of kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, and more importantly, insight into how humans affect the lives of others for good or ill. These losses correlate with those Godwin intends to forestall with his proposal. His list of what is lost when “a great and excellent man dies” includes personal characteristics as well as learned knowledge, both “the thoughts and the virtues” of the dead: “The use and application of his experience, the counsels he could give, the firmness and sagacity with which he could have executed what he might have thus counseled, are

gone” as are the “great stores of learning” he had accumulated, the “taste” he had refined, the “facts” he “had collated,” and the “most curious conclusions” he had drawn (*Essay* 8). Shelley suggests that similar qualities and knowledge are lost to the world when the creature, a living representative of the dead, is “gone,” banished from and by family and society as a result of relying solely on a purely visual mode of knowing.

Godwin seeks to remedy this loss by facilitating visits to burial places, for when he visits the tomb of a great man, he says, “I call his ghost from the tomb to commune with me” (*Essay* 24), but Shelley’s novel reveals that when the engagement between living and dead is premised on sight rather than site, that potential converse is doomed to fail. Frankenstein’s creature answers Godwin’s call, emerging from tombs and seeking to “commune” (*Essay* 12)—that is, to share intellectual and physical nourishment—with Victor, with the De Lacey family, and when human society fails him, with another creature of his own kind, but because of the rigid and irrevocable judgments rendered by those who see him, his “thoughts and virtues” remain unshared and unknown within the novel proper. Godwin writes that by not attending to the dead “we cut ourselves off from the inheritance of our ancestors; we seem to conspire from time to time to ... begin the affairs of the human species afresh” (*Essay* 14). In *Frankenstein*, a new human specimen which could give rise to a new “human species” but shares the inheritance of human ancestors does, in fact, begin “afresh” and is subsequently “cut...off” from society, but as Godwin makes clear, the knife cuts both ways, and “we cut ourselves off” as well.

The interactions among the creature and others in the novel remain distant, and thus his narrative detailing the “great stores of learning” he has accumulated and the “most curious conclusions” he has drawn about the ways humans learn, develop, and interact threatens to be lost, remaining forever in its nascent, unknown state. Only Frankenstein and Walton hear the creature’s narrative and then only after their eyes have been covered or closed (*F* 79, 187). And

Walton alone intentionally diverts his eyes in order to commune with the living dead, listening, learning, assimilating the creature's account with Victor's and his own, and transmitting it from its burial place at the heart of the novel through the epistolary frame to geographically and temporally distant others, to his sister Margaret and to readers unknown. That received narrative which has been fragmented, filtered, and reassembled through Walton's authorial and editorial intervention offers a fuller, multi-perspectival account of the novel's events and the creature's existence than is accessible to any of the characters in the novel proper and is made possible by Walton's "conference" with the dead—both the creature and the now-dead Frankenstein.

Shelley uses the other corpses in the novel and the narratives that develop around them to reiterate the limitations of knowledge that emerges out of detached observations of the dead. Each of the murdered corpses in the novel bears the traces of its killer on its skin, and each is subjected to some kind of proto-forensic observation, but despite the repetition of signature "marks" on the necks of William Frankenstein (*F* 52), Henry Clerval (*F* 146-47), and Elizabeth Lavenza (*F* 166), the knowledge gleaned from the surfaces of the bodies fails to reveal, much less convict, the killer.²¹ Shelley's characters subscribe to the practice of crafting what Alexander Welsh calls "strong representations," narratives that present cohesive and conclusive interpretations of circumstantial evidence that rely on probability rather than "untrustworthy" eyewitness testimony (6), but individual characters in isolated judiciary districts are working without the benefit of knowing of the surface evidence available to others much less of the existence of the creature whom Victor and the De Laceys have condemned as immoral, if not amoral, and excommunicated from society solely by dint of the surface evidence of his countenance. Thus the accounts characters develop to explain the physical marks on the corpses' necks reveal neither the true motive nor the murderer, and Justine is wrongly convicted of William's murder while the murders of Clerval and Elizabeth remain officially unsolved.²²

The reactions of mourners—and potential murderers—as they view the corpses are no more useful in identifying the guilty or meting out justice than studying the corpses themselves. The sight of the victims provokes strong reactions that might imply either grief or guilt and elicits vehement, explicit—and false—confessions. Elizabeth exclaims after examining young William’s neck, “O God! I have murdered my darling infant!” (*F* 53). Justine Moritz is explicitly “shewn the body” after giving unsatisfactory answers about her whereabouts the previous night, but her failure to confess in response to the sight does not save her from conviction (*F* 66).²³ In Ireland, Mr. Kirwin subjects Frankenstein to the corpse-display interrogation tactic as well, causing Victor to gasp, throw himself on Clerval’s body, and exclaim, “Have my murderous machinations deprived you also, my dearest Henry, of life? Two have I already destroyed; other victims await their destiny...” (*F* 148). In *Auto-Icon: Or, Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living*, Jeremy Bentham recommends a version of corpse-viewing to extract murder confessions because, he claims, the guilty would reveal themselves when faced with the Auto-Iconized bodies of their victims (*AI* 5), but Shelley undermines both confession at the sight of the dead and the evidence visible on a cadaver’s surface as reliable means of knowing and understanding the past. Frances Ferguson suggests that the excess of confessions for William’s murder by Elizabeth, Justine, Victor, and the monster result as an extension of Victor’s extreme belief that the individual who lives in society always, and inescapably, shares responsibility for what happens in that society (*Solitude* 110), but the limitations of knowledge imposed by relying on the sight of the dead that I am emphasizing and the isolation and barriers such knowledge produces make society—Godwin’s “conference”—impossible. In Shelley’s hands, both the confessions induced by the sight of a corpse and the narratives formed by other individuals to account for the dead are the products of solipsistic and isolated individuals’ limited and detached

observations of the dead, and without a mediating figure to gather, collate, select and recombine those separate particles of data, no cohesive narrative can emerge.

The final corpse depicted in the novel, Frankenstein's own, provides yet another opportunity for communion with the dead. With the pattern of impassioned—and false—corpse-side confessions that emerges from and is made available through Walton's recounting, Shelley urges readers to reconsider the creature and question the guilt and immorality Victor has imposed on him since his first breaths. When Walton enters the cabin where Frankenstein's body lies, he sees a mourner reacting to the sight of the corpse: "As he hung over the coffin, his face was concealed by long locks of ragged hair; but one vast hand was extended, in colour and apparent texture like that of a mummy" (*F* 186-87). The creature here reprises both the moment of his "birth" when he reached out to Victor and the image of ideal mourning presented with the first corpse of the novel by Victor's mother Caroline Beaufort at the side of her father's dead body (*F* 19). When that initial act of mourning is immortalized on canvas, Caroline is represented "in an agony of despair, kneeling by the coffin of her dead father. Her garb was rustic, and her cheek pale; but there was an air of dignity and beauty, that hardly permitted the sentiment of pity" (*F* 58). While the creature bends over Victor's body—pale, rustic, and exerting his own kind of dignity to which Walton responds with compassion—he oscillates from mourner to murderer: "This is also my victim!...in his murder my crimes are consummated" (*F* 187). Just as Shelley allows for competing interpretations of the creature's physiognomy, however, she seems to allow competing interpretations of his confession. Elizabeth did not murder William; Victor could not have murdered Clerval if his alibi is true; and the creature did not, literally, murder Victor. Are readers meant to entertain the possibility that none of the creature's confessions of murder is any more truthful than Elizabeth's or Victor's? By evoking with the creature's response to Victor's corpse Caroline Beaufort's patient and underserved

suffering, her self-sacrifice first for her father then for Elizabeth, and the dignity and beauty of her grief and mourning, Shelley implies that both physiognomic and forensic judgments may have been wrong and that the creature, too, may be dignified, self-sacrificial, and perhaps not as guilty as Victor's self-interested narrative construction has suggested.

Shelley focuses on sight as the principle mode of learning about and from the dead in *Frankenstein*, but she also alludes to Godwin's ideas about the importance of burial sites for teaching and transforming the living. Although Victor seems aware that being in the presence of the dead and "visit[ing] their tombs" might be beneficial to him (*Essay* 12), his understanding of Godwin's sepulchral theories and his engagement with the dead at their burial sites proves to be as superficial as the knowledge he gained from the sight of corpses. After William's death and again after Elizabeth's death, when Frankenstein most deeply despairs and desperately needs "good feelings" (*Essay* 12), he visits graveyards, not in the guise of a scientist and anatomist, but as a visitor to the burial sites of the great and good, much as Godwin advocates. Frankenstein and Clerval visit the "tomb of the illustrious Hampden" in Oxford where he claims his "soul was elevated ... to contemplate the divine ideas of liberty and self-sacrifice" (*F* 133), and near the end of the novel, he visits the cemetery in Geneva and the "tomb which marked [his family members'] graves," where he appears to acknowledge the importance of this place that mingles dirt and decay, for he "knelt on the grass and kissed the earth" (*F* 171).²⁴ But his elation at Hampden's tomb is momentary because his self-absorption defeats transformation; he applies the "divine ideas of liberty" solely to himself and he imagines neither self-sacrifice nor liberty for others, immediately sinking back "into [his] miserable self" (*F* 133-34).²⁵ At his family's graves, rather than "commune" with the "ghost[s]" of the dead in order to have his "whole soul awakened to honour [their] memory, and [be] chastised into sobriety by the thought of what [they were]" (*Essay* 24), Victor tries to use the dead as pawns for his own betterment, calling on

the “spirits of the dead” and on the “wandering ministers of vengeance” to do his bidding by aiding him in making “the cursed and hellish monster drink deep of agony” (*F* 172). Had he attended to the characters of those buried at this site, they may have “act[ed] gently upon [his] spirit, and fill[ed him] with a composed seriousness,” transforming him by their examples of self-sacrifice and patient understanding, elevating him “above [his] ordinary sphere,” and enabling him to engage in meaningful communion despite the sight and at the site of the dead embodied by his cadaverous creation (*Essay* 12).

C. Siting the Dead

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley suggests that knowledge of the dead and of the past gained by a reliance on sight and detached, empirical observation is necessarily incomplete, inaccurate, and impermanent. The anatomist’s knowledge is not that which endures, after all; Frankenstein’s discovery of how to ignite the spark of life dies with him. At novel’s end, however, Walton and the creature live on, and in the sheets of Walton’s epistolary corpus and the ashes of the creature’s corpse, their literary and material remains promise to extend geographically and temporally beyond the boundaries of the novel’s frame, a point to which I will return in the final section of this chapter. With *Frankenstein*, Shelley hints at a more productive and lasting relationship between dead and living based on site rather than on sight. In her later novel *The Last Man*, she all but abandons the sights of the dead and develops instead her exploration of how the places where the boundaries blur between living and dead work to retain, protect, and transform the past. The novel is most often read as presenting a pessimistic perspective—on personal relationships, human nature, or political potential—but I contend that the sites of the dead in the novel are, in fact, the places which enable re-imagination of personal relationships, human natures, and political potentials, and they offer hope for a creative future.²⁶ Within the

main narrative, Shelley interrogates the sites of the dead—the places where dead and living meet and act on one another—in two ways: first, with the figurative “sites” embodied by characters whose mental or physical condition places them ambiguously between living and dead, a state from which they emerge transformed, and second, with literal sites of burial where the living tend to the dead and deposit them to await physical dissolution and potential recombination.

Frankenstein’s creature attests to Shelley’s early interest in the hybrid state of living-dead and the simultaneous impotence and potential power afforded to those who exist and interact in the marginal spaces between living and dead, and she continues to explore those ambiguous states and sites in *The Last Man*. The creature, a being actually made of dead bodies yet living, his skin a mummy-textured surface that forever marks him with the appearance of the dead and effectively acts as a visible and impenetrable boundary between himself and humankind, is nonetheless granted by his removed position a unique vantage from which to learn how humans live and interact.²⁷ Those who are dead-in-life in *The Last Man* are not so spectacularly literal, but their position of being between—or both—living and dead also allows them unique insights into the situations and needs of their fellow humans. Their hybrid states render them simultaneously vulnerable and vigorous, acutely attuned to death and the dead but also equipped to perform extraordinary or even heroic actions.

Long before the deadly pandemic plague strikes, while the focus of the novel remains in the domestic sphere, a plague of a different sort begins to assail narrator Lionel Verney’s circle when one character after another is depicted as being near death or living a dead life. Throughout the novel, as Sophie Thomas points out, many of the main characters have “near death” experiences, when they seem to die as a result of war, fever, grief, or plague but continue to live what she calls “an ambiguous afterlife, before finally dying (again)” (“Ends” 26). Adrian, the former king’s son and Lionel’s benefactor and friend, experiences a physical and mental crisis

early in the novel after which his “spirit of life” lingers, ready to die out like a sacrificial flame on an altar (*LM* 76), and later, as he recovers from a life-threatening wound received in Greece, he “tremble[s] for ever on the verge of annihilation” (*LM* 219). Lionel becomes “haggard and spectre-like” after watching for three days at Adrian’s first supposed deathbed (*LM* 72), but more seriously, he later contracts the plague, apparently dies, and recovers (*LM* 342). At the end of the novel, Thomas notes, he undergoes “effectively, a *second* resurrection” when he survives the shipwreck that claims Adrian and Clara near the end of his narrative (“Ends” 31).²⁸ The aristocratic Lord Raymond is mistakenly reported killed in battle (*LM* 163), and the Turks return him “as a dying man” whom they willingly make over for “the rites of burial” (*LM* 170). The celebration of his return to Athens turns into a somber rehearsal for his funeral cortege in the style of Admiral Nelson’s as the crowd sees the carriage that encloses, hearse-like, his wife Perdita and daughter Clara with Raymond’s (still-living) body. The crowd draws back, music dies, and shouts abruptly cease (*LM* 173).²⁹ Raymond will, of course, renew his career, but as “one, lately snatched from the grave” (*LM* 176).

The women and children of Lionel’s cohort are equally prone to the blurring of life and death: Lionel and Idris’s young son Evelyn suffers a near-fatal fever (*LM* 291-92); Evadne lives near death in poverty in London, and on the battlefield uses her “sepulchral” voice to say she has borne “[m]any living deaths” (*LM* 181); Idris, after Lionel’s encounter with plague, is “wasted and worn into a very type of death” (*LM* 343-44); even the countess of Windsor exists as something more and less than living human, a being “entirely made of mind,” her body a “mere machine,” not belonging “to flesh and blood” who, after viewing her dead daughter, “slowly rose upwards from the vault, a living statue” (*LM* 73, 358).

Being dead-in-life temporarily marginalizes characters from the world of the living and acquaints them intimately with death, but rather than debilitate, this experience seems to equip

them to return to—and to perform extraordinary acts for—society. Raymond returns as a better leader, no longer the “heroic boy or desperate man, who was ready to die” for the Athenians, but a “prudent commander” (*LM* 176). Adrian transforms from his youthful vision of being one of God’s chosen people whose track, with Evadne, “would be like the passage of the Red Sea, which they might traverse with unwet feet, though a wall of destruction were impending on either side” to being a new type of Moses called to lead his people out of England, through a “wall of destruction” toward an unreachable promised land (*LM* 33).³⁰ Evadne crosses gender lines and goes to battle disguised as a soldier (*LM* 180-81). Idris crosses class lines and helps the afflicted poor (*LM* 275). And Lionel, of course, becomes the last man and writes the narrative through which all of the others might have a future. Shelley makes heroism available to many people, not just male soldiers, through the conflation and confusion of living and dead which allows characters to perform beyond their initial capacities or inclinations and to be transformed into new versions of themselves that affect the futures of those beyond their own space and time.

In the midst of these many examples of living death, it is Verney’s sister Perdita who is first and most insistently identified with living a “lost” life. Her name recalls Shakespeare’s heroine Perdita in *The Winter’s Tale* who is left for dead as an infant, and her state recalls Perdita’s mother Hermione who becomes a living statue. Shelley’s Perdita is described as statue-like or, as we will see Felicia Hemans suggest with similar language, effigial, having a face of “living marble” and manners that are “cold and repulsive” (*LM* 15). She responds to emotional threats by reverting to an effigy of herself—an image of her own dead form. After an early snub by Raymond before they are married, she is unmoving, “her eyes fixed on the ground, her cheeks pale, her very lips white, motionless and rigid” (*LM* 54), and after his death in Constantinople, she again becomes “pale as marble,” mimicking the “marble pavement” on which she sits (*LM* 202). She remains “[p]ale as marble” following the recovery of his body, resting her head on

“her white cold hand” as the cortege makes its way to Athens (*LM* 207, 208).³¹ Perdita is peculiarly self-aware of her state of living death, wondering early in the novel, for instance, whether she will be “heart-broken and lost, . . . the ghost of what I am” when she returns from London to Windsor Forest and the Castle (*LM* 93). When Raymond stays with Evadne rather than attend the anniversary celebration in his honor, Perdita fulfills his request to distract the guests even as she acknowledges her blurred state of existence: “I will appear to live—while I am—dead” (*LM* 134). After the guests have left, Perdita meditates on mortality and grief in the context of diurnal and seasonal cycles: “all things proceed, decay, and perish!” (*LM* 135).

Notably, for Perdita decay *precedes* death, as if the wear of being alive is the same as the physical erosion of death, but being in this decayed state between “proceeding” and “perishing” paradoxically equips her to engage in and affect the personal and political spheres around her that are touched by death and the dead. Mary Shelley’s Perdita, after existing as dead in life, is the very opposite of what Karen Swann calls the “pod people” of Percy Shelley’s poetry. Swann argues that these beings suspended between life and death in his work are identified with the aesthetic realm of poet and poetry and are “radically closed to our concerns”; thus, they are unable to act as a “socially-efficacious resource” (par. 3). But Perdita, in contrast, becomes a “socially-efficacious resource” precisely because she has been suspended between states of being. Her familiarity with living as if dead seems to give her crucial awareness of the dead themselves and of their proper care. She is certain—and correct—that reports from Greece of Raymond’s death are false (*LM* 164). She is the first—and correct—to identify the “PLAGUE,” as a greater cause of alarm than warfare (*LM* 170). And she intuits—correctly—when Raymond is, in fact, dead in Constantinople (*LM* 203). Perdita, who perhaps seems the antithesis of heroic in her unwavering devotion to Raymond, re-emerges from her deathlike state to wage fierce battles in support of Raymond. She maintains the fiction of stable governance in his absence, responds

to the initial false story of his death with resolve and courage, demands his return and aids his recovery so he can go back to battle, and when he does die, insists on finding and retrieving his body and providing a fitting burial site at which she constructs a lasting personal and public memorial where living and dead will be able to commune.

Not only does *The Last Man* interrogate the place of the living-dead; with its insistence on burial even in abject circumstances and the variety of burial sites depicted, Shelley explores the sites where the physically dead are disposed to decay and await the future. The novel's frame, which serves as the entry into the novel and will serve as the exit for this chapter, is set in a burial site of sorts and provides the place where living "Author" and decayed fragments of the past encounter one another. Without this interchange, the conceit is that the novel itself would not exist and knowledge of the characters and events would be lost. I will return to a fuller discussion of the implications of the frames of both *The Last Man* and *Frankenstein*, but at this point I simply want to indicate that while the stress I place on the importance of burial sites and their future-oriented utility might not seem fully warranted within the novel itself (because, if the title is to be believed, the narrator is the *Last Man* and there is no foreseeable future), the critical value of the place of burial and decay is made manifest and is justified by and through the frame. For readers, the perceived value of graves within the novel proper is shaped by knowledge of the frame even as the value for characters of those same graves is shaped, at least in part, by their ignorance of their apparent impending future extinction. These competing perspectives allow Shelley both to critique and to commend burial of the dead, acknowledging a certain futility or waste regarding some notions of burial but nevertheless affirming the need to bury the dead and "mark the spot ... *they still inhabit!*" as an act of future investment (Godwin *Essay* 12).

Shelley suggests that the dead must be appropriately sited somewhere to await the future, if they are to have a future, so even in the face of massive death, the novel's characters remain

committed to caring for and suitably interring the dead. As the plague begins to decimate the English population, Lionel notes people continue to attend funerals despite fears of contagion and death (*LM* 249). When the effects of the plague in England are so great the populace decides to abandon the country, he finds Lucy Martin, “the lone survivor of a dead nation,” remaining behind to sew her mother’s shroud and watch “beside the corpse during the weary night,” dutifully determined “to fulfil the usual ceremonies of the dead” (*LM* 364). And on the trek to Switzerland, though they cease to shudder at the sight of other nations’ unburied dead, the English survivors continue to care for their own, never leaving the sick until they die and can be buried (*LM* 400, 409). The novel depicts burials in church-yards [the astronomer Merrival and his family (*LM* 306)]; in vaults both public and private [the chorister at Westminster Abbey in London (*LM* 284) and Lionel’s wife Idris and son Alfred in Windsor (*LM* 355-61)]; and in natural settings [the organist and her father under a walnut tree (*LM* 422) and the last plague victim and the plague itself on an icy bier in a cave in Switzerland (*LM* 425-26)]. The burial site—whatever its actual location—acts as a vault into which the dead are deposited in order to be contained and safeguarded, and in a sense to multiply and compound through decay, as they await recombination with the living in some as yet unforeseeable future.

Like Byron and Godwin, Shelley understands the important role of the grave as a place where the living mingle with the remains of the dead for the continuation of knowledge and the betterment of future peoples, but the future she imagines emerging from this interaction is further-reaching and more expansive than that posited by the other two. She suggests that some of the value the novel’s characters, Byron, and perhaps readers invest in burial is misdirected, focusing too narrowly on the present, feeding egoistic concerns, and allowing an imbalance in the relationship between dead and living. Lucy could potentially be condemned to a solitary life and death in an abandoned England because of her admirable but possibly misguided devotion to

her dead mother, for instance. Among the many interments in *The Last Man*, three sites are depicted particularly vividly: the romantic burial site, the royal burial site, and the battleground burial site. Each alludes to and offers a qualified affirmation of the kinds of burials Byron valorizes in his poetry, but Shelley's portrayals suggest critique as well, making the future Byron envisions emerging from the mingling of living and dead—whether personal companionship, ancestral continuity, or cultural or national rebirth—seem somewhat impoverished.

Raymond and Perdita's grave exemplifies the romantic burial which befits both the Romantic hero and romantic love. When the novel is read as a *roman à clef* of the Byron-Shelley circle, Lord Raymond is identified with Lord Byron, and both the heroic monumentalism and companionate sentimentalism Raymond envisions for his interment support that identification.³² Early in his career, Raymond imagines his own death and posterity, expressing simultaneously his goal of the crown and his desire to build an empire so that "enthusiasts, instead of visiting [Napoleon's] rocky grave ... shall adore my majesty, and magnify my illustrious achievements" (*LM* 57-58).³³ Nor does he abandon his visions of postmortem public glory after his stint as Lord Protector. Moments before entering Constantinople where he will meet his death, he thinks about what will be written on his tomb, envisioning the inscription "Victor of Constantinople" and 2092, the year of his "last winter" (*LM* 194, 195). We might compare Raymond's desired tomb with the social projects he implemented as Lord Protector. Adrian acknowledges the social benefits of these accomplishments (*LM* 152), but as Canuel points out, Adrian also recognizes that these projects stem from Raymond's own ambitions. Canuel argues that the distinctions between humanism and egotism begin to blur, and "egotism now looks more human" ("Acts" 158). In this light, the egotism of the tomb looks "more human" as well. Raymond imagines his continuing humanity after death in terms of the continuity of his living relationships. After his near-death experience, he asks Perdita to "treasure up my ashes till yours may mingle with mine"

so that he will “have a companion in decay” (*LM* 169, 208). He admits the foolishness of this but continues, “even in that dark cell, I may feel that my inanimate dust mingles with yours, and thus have a companion in decay” (*LM* 169). He not only imagines himself as still sentient after death, but he also implies that this mingling is an intimate, companionate, and perhaps erotic process.³⁴

More than simply, personally human, though, Raymond’s grave, ego-driven as it is, serves a humanist function by preserving him for future generations. Perdita’s arrangements for the memorial fulfill the private and public aspects of Raymond’s vision as well as what Lionel calls the “sacred duty of his survivors” to protect not only Raymond’s body but his name, “guarding it from decay, and bequeathing it untainted to posterity” (*LM* 204). Perdita begins construction of a cottage nearby so she can continue communing with the dead Raymond until she joins him in death, but she also makes the location identifiable and accessible for strangers who, she imagines, will visit this site. His remains are placed beneath “a nature-hewn pyramid” which is “reduced to a perfect shape” and over which is “carved in the living stone” his name and “the cause and aera of his death” (*LM* 209), and the path to the monument is widened. Perdita overtly emphasizes this site as a place where the boundaries between living and dead blur. She insists on remaining here and implores Lionel to “Look on me as dead; and truly if death be a mere change of state, I am dead” (*LM* 210).³⁵ At Raymond’s grave, she says, “I hold communion only with the has been, and to come” (*LM* 210). Melodramatic, perhaps, yet Perdita recognizes that her position between past and future, “has been” and “to come,” enables her communion with the dead. Shelley seems to sympathize with the desire for continued union among the dead even as she recognizes the excessive monument and longing for personal postmortem companionship as fundamentally egoistic. Nonetheless, these sorts of projects and memorials are useful to more than those who envision and erect them, and the sites make possible Godwinian communion among living and dead beyond the here and now.³⁶

If Raymond's tomb represents the ultimate burial site for the Byronic hero—isolated, ego-oriented, outside civic space, naturally rugged, lonely yet sexually-charged—Ildris's interment at Windsor offers a sharp contrast—proper, orderly, steeped in tradition, and surrounded by the royal dead. This is, essentially, the ancestral vault into whose dust and lineage Byron imagines himself mingling at Newstead Abbey. Ildris's and Adrian's father may have abdicated the throne in 2073, but the Ex-Queen ensures that his progeny posthumously claims their royal inheritance by interring her aptly named grandson Alfred in the vault in St. George's Chapel (*LM* 20, 355).³⁷ Charlotte Sussman notes that the location of Shelley's idyllic community in Windsor recalls Alexander Pope's patriotic poem "Windsor Forest" (1713) where Windsor's "green retreats" continue to provide a sense of rootedness and to foster government and culture even in the postmonarchical world of *The Last Man* (293). Part of that rootedness, which Sussman does not address, is Pope's litany of kings buried at Windsor including Edward IV and Henry VI, adversaries in the War of the Roses but now united by the grave ("blended lie th'oppressor and th'opprest") and the ill-fated, fragmented Charles I in an unmarked grave (Pope 316, 318).³⁸ Joseph Roach reads Pope's poem as a "circum-Atlantic text," arguing that Pope "reinvents Windsor as a national cemetery, a suburb of the dead," where living and dead monarchs exist together simultaneously, surrogations of one another (139). In bringing "the perishable, unmatchable treasure of dust" that is now Ildris here for burial, Lionel performs a similar surrogation, reinserting her into the monarchical line of England (*LM* 356). Even though he believes he cannot give her a future—neither he nor anyone else within the narrative will visit this vault after the last of the English people leave England—he gives her a past. And by situating her body here, he might give her a future after all, if unimagined visitors come to this site, commune with the fragmented dead, and piece together a narrative of these interments.

Shelley, through Lionel, indicates a certain disdain for the Ex-Queen's motives and the "ruling passion," that caused her to bury Alfred here, but the Countess's reappearance in the vault for Idris's interment suggests the grave can play a more meaningful role than merely being a claim check for history and power. After descending to view her daughter's corpse, the Countess admits the impossibility of reconciliation with the dead, but she and Lionel talk at length after he "pour[s] forth the funeral elegy" (*LM* 360). She apologizes, they close the pavement over the vault, and they leave together (*LM* 360-61). Being in the presence of the dead has transformed them, as Godwin suggests such communion can do, enabling the development of lasting diplomatic—and even loving—ties between Lionel and his mother-in-law. Significantly, in the Countess's vision of Idris that prompted her return to Windsor, Idris paced toward "a tomb-like hollow on the cliff," not toward the royal vaults (*LM* 367). Filled with regret and a desire for reconciliation, the Countess naturalizes Idris's burial site in her mind's eye, making Idris a part of the earth and a part of England, but removing her from the layers of privilege and hierarchy that the vault at Windsor represents, thereby allowing her grave to be a place of reconciliation rather than rule.

The third Byronic burial site in Shelley's novel is that of the battlefield. Like Byron's corpse-strewn battlegrounds, the dead here attest to inhumanity, not insofar as they have been used as tools employed for personal or national ambition for there seems to be no comprehensible, even if reprehensible, reason for their deaths at all, but in their state of unburied abandonment. Shelley seems far less certain than Byron that Nature will absorb their remains and monumentalize them in vegetation for future visitation. At the battle of Rodosto, Lionel emphasizes that no perspective adequately accounts for war. He had been able to imagine troop movements in terms of Greek and Roman history or as chess pieces—that is, as abstractions—but the reality of battle is unintelligible (*LM* 178).³⁹ He is too close to the fighting to understand

the battle itself and too distant to see and understand the death that results; they were, he writes, “too far off to observe the fallen sheaves which death gathered into his storehouse” (*LM* 179).

This clichéd agricultural imagery ironically underscores the lack of productivity, of generative capacity, here. Lionel explains: “The whole of this part of Thrace had been so long a scene of contest, that it had remained uncultivated, and presented a dreary, barren appearance” (*LM* 179).

No nation—plague or not—will emerge from this infertile soil. The Turkish and Greek armies have moved eastward, so “none but the dead remained,” and they remain unburied (*LM* 179).

Lionel “turned to the corpse-strewn earth; and felt ashamed of [his] species” (*LM* 180). This shame stems not only from the uncountable and unaccountable death—the kind of condemnation of wasted life Byron’s battlefield dead level—but also from the lack of care for the dead whose “icy forms” lay exposed to the rushing wind. These dead would seem to have no future among the living. If they cannot be understood or made sense of by the living who see them lying here, they can have no lasting place or effect, and if their remains remain unburied, in Shelley’s logic, they cannot be accessed or retrieved in the future.

In the midst of this mass anonymous death, however, one soldier is buried with a kind of military honor. Lionel finds the dying Evadne dressed as a male soldier and imprecating curses of “fire, war, and plague” on Raymond—and in the logic of battle, on anyone else in range of her weapons (*LM* 181). She has, she claims, sold herself to death in exchange for Raymond following her into that state, but after she dies, Lionel works to redeem her from the oblivion of death she has brought upon herself. Ignoring the unknown and unknowable soldiers, Lionel “veil[s] this monument of human passion and human misery” that is Evadne’s corpse and “heap[s] over her all of flags and heavy accoutrements [he can] find to guard her from birds and beasts of prey, until [he can] bestow on her a fitting grave” (*LM* 182). The next day he buries her, leaving her “warrior shroud” undisturbed (*LM* 183). The attention Lionel pays to Evadne’s

corpse seems a kind of atonement not only for her but for the numberless, nameless dead. It is the antithesis of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a fitting emblem for imagining community in a community that will consist only of the imagined. By siting this nearly inhuman, ambiguously gendered “monument” in this barren field—and recording the burial in his account—Lionel provides a potential future for Evadne and the other nameless dead that surround her.

Shelley suggests that the potential recovery and re-imagining of human natures and personal relationships are made possible in the incubatory space of the burial site, but her vision for future transformation is bolder and bigger than this; the novel suggests that the logic at work with individual burials works on a grander scale and that, paradoxically, the potential for new national or political configurations also must emerge from the decayed matter of the grave. The careful attention to burials in *The Last Man* ensures that the remains of the dead will remain linked, even in decay, in the context of their relationships—couples, family groups, cohorts of compatriots—in protected sites marked by natural monuments, manmade structures, and Lionel Verney’s written account. Here they will remain undisturbed unless and until someone arrives to retrieve and re-imagine them by communing with them at their burial sites. Not only have Lionel and the others attended to the appropriate interments of the human dead to protect their remains, the nation itself is similarly protected as Lionel declares England dead, performs a death-watch for it in the form of a farewell tour of Windsor and its environs, and marks it as a burial site. In her study of emigration and nationhood in the novel, Sussman traces Verney’s competing metaphors which equate England with both a human body and with a tomb or grave (*LM* 288). As the last survivors prepare to leave England, Lionel declares the world is now their country, for “England is in her shroud,—we may not enchain ourselves to a corpse” (*LM* 326). Sussman writes that he “decouples population from nation, and allows the survivors to retain their sense of being a living community by jettisoning their ties to the nation” because “England now becomes

a grave for England's corpse" (289). Her astute observation that England is its own burial site suggests that after the remaining populace leaves, England too will lie undisturbed, resting in peace so to speak, to await its future restoration.

In Byron's poetry, when a place such as Greece is depicted as both corpse and grave the poet is investing the mingled dust and dirt with the potential for future resurrection, but Shelley's vision for the future, though also relying on the continuity afforded by fragmented material remains, is more radical than resurrection or restoration to a previous status; her proposed future is perhaps on the order of reincarnation. On Lionel's last tour through the deserted countryside, he reflects on the simultaneous familiarity and disassociation he feels at the sight of each object and location, writing that "England remained, though England was dead" (*LM* 363). The refrain "The king is dead. Long live the king" echoes in this statement. Rather than Ernst Kantorowicz's notion of the perpetual nature of sovereignty that allows "royal dignity" to live on even as the king's body dies, in Shelley's formulation, the republic "England" is the entity that is endowed with an apparently impossible immortality. Even though the England these exiles have known will die with their leaving, something of "England" will remain fragmented in its grave during the intervening unpopulated years, and the "England" that may emerge from the tomb will both contain the past but will be transformed into a new entity through the recombination of those fragments in the hands and minds of the living. Sussman argues that by leaving the nation—England as body—to die in its own territory—England as burial site—Verney makes it possible to imagine the survival of a different kind of human community in a place beyond the nation. I would add that this also makes it possible to imagine a different kind of nation as England awaits the day when its fragmented remains are taken up, creatively re-imagined, and remade into a new form. Shelley suggests that the dead cannot and should not be used to continue or resurrect the

status quo or to dictate the terms of the future. Instead, their burial and undisturbed decay make possible their incorporation and participation in something new, an as-yet-unimagined future.

Shelley does not intend for this novel to be without hope for a future as so many readers believe, and she admits that potentiality, paradoxically, in the novel's attention to the sites of the dead, both buried and unburied. The buried dead, through their decay and fragmentation, provide the material from which to create and transform the human narrative in the distant and unknowable future, but the unburied dead at novel's end suggest another avenue by which humanity might continue beyond the titular *Last Man*. On the one hand, the bodies of plague victims lying dead along roadsides and the corpses of soldiers strewn in sheaves across battlefields indicate by their very presence an absence—the absence of human community or humane calculations of human life. On the other hand, those who remain unburied because their corpses are absent suggest a potential presence. When the world's known human population is but three—Lionel, Adrian, and Raymond and Perdita's daughter Clara—the dreaded reduction to one occurs when Clara and Adrian are apparently drowned at sea. Lionel believes them dead, and readers—who might otherwise be skeptical of the reliability of a first-person narrator—tend to believe them dead as well.⁴⁰ Shelley has wanted readers to consider as a real possibility the survival and coupling of these two who are not related by blood but would unite the bloodlines of all the main characters, and she has planted that suggestion throughout the novel by depicting their interactions as those of a compatible and growing relationship. The importance of appropriate burial as a repository for safeguarding the dead, particularly the novel's principle characters, heightens the suggestive implications of the fact that the bodies of these two are not buried—or cremated on a pyre on the beach after washing ashore as Shelley might have thought to write given Frankenstein's creature's promised immolation, her awareness of literary and journalistic accounts of plague,⁴¹ and the fact that Percy Shelley's body met just such an end in

accordance with local by-laws designed to prevent the spread of plague.⁴² Even in a novel that all but elides the sight of the dead, the fact that these two bodies are not sighted is significant. As with any drowning, when the body is not recovered, part of the horror and the hope rests in the notion that the missing person may have survived but remains undiscovered. Verney, on surfacing from the shipwreck on the mainland, likens himself to Robinson Crusoe (*LM* 448), but it seems equally possible that, like Crusoe, the other two surface on an island where they remain undiscovered. Shelley intentionally leaves open-ended the possibility of Adrian's and Clara's survival and the continuation of the human race through them, much as she opens the portal to humanity's ongoing and convoluted temporal narrative through the novel's frame.

D. Reciting the Dead

Reciting suggests repetition, calling or citing again, and it also bears the implication of addressees; one only recites—aloud or on paper—if one senses an audience. In the frames of both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, the dead are recited: their fragments are revisited, recalled, recombined, and rewritten to reach audiences that are psychologically or physically unavailable within the narratives proper. The porous boundaries between living and dead exemplified by Victor Frankenstein's creature and Lionel Verney's cohort also exist at the borders of the novels' frames where the figure of the writer turns inward to engage with the decaying dead, transmutes the fragments into a new form, then turns outward to translate the product of that engagement into the world. In *The Last Man*, intimate acquaintance by the living with the state of being dead equips characters to move beyond personal or local concerns and to do the extraordinary in order to affect the future. Shelley suggests in the main narratives of the novels and emphasizes in their frames that writers, too, mediate between states and have extraordinary potential to imagine and

create a changed future. The fragments of the past and of past life interact with the living author so that each forms and transforms the other as living and dead “commune.”

As I suggested, in novels that foreground the bodies and burials of the dead, attending to those who remain unburied can be instructive. The unsighted and unsited bodies of Adrian and Clara offer one possibility for the procreative continuation of humanity, but the continuing living presence of the creature and Walton, Lionel and the “Author”—all writers, authors, and editors of a sort—at the ends and on the edges of *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* suggests a different kind of creative continuation. The creature and Lionel supply the “mould” of corpse or corpus that constitutes the central storylines, authoring themselves in the process of creating those fragments, but in order for their accounts to come to fruition and reach an audience, the figure of the writer/editor—Walton and the Author—must spend time with those fragments and mold them into narratives that are transmitted outward from the frame to present and future readers.

Both the creature and Lionel must ensure that their fragmented remains are sited so that the living will find, commune with, and transform them. The creature’s body *is* the site of the dead; here living and dead have met in the form of his living-dead being, and here, in the form of converse, living and dead might meet again. When Frankenstein neglects to commune at the site of the dead because the sight of the dead and his own ocularcentric bias create an unbridgeable distance between them, Shelley provides a second chance with an odd reversal: the site of the dead comes to him. The creature extends offers of communion and community to Victor again and again: as a newborn, in the Alps, and through the cat-and-mouse trek toward the North Pole during which he provides food and more “marks” as clues to keep Victor alive and on track (*F* 174). When his invitation is spurned for the last time on the ship, the creature promises self-immolation: “I shall collect my funeral pile and consume to ashes this miserable frame, that its remains may afford no light to any curious and unhallowed wretch who would create such

another as I have been” (*F* 190). With this act, he will eliminate his corporeal form and prevent the acquisition of knowledge based on the sight of his dead body, but he also denies himself the kind of burial site that might be marked or recorded in an “Atlas of those who Have Lived, for the use of Men Hereafter to be Born.” The creature says he must perform “this sacrifice” in order to “consummate the series of [his] being” (*F* 190, 191), but as others have observed, this ending may not be as final or as destitute of hope as it appears.⁴³ With this act, the creature authors his own future by claiming for himself the entire world as his site of interment and extending the invitation to “commune” across space and time.

The creature’s self-immolation invokes the myth of Hercules who, according to nineteenth-century cremation proponent Hugo Erichsen, “was unquestionably the first to cremate himself,” an understanding Shelley may have shared (3). According to a late eighteenth-century dictionary of classical mythology, following Hercules’s self-immolation after being poisoned with the tunic of Nessus, Jupiter decided to “raise to the skies the immortal parts of a hero who had cleared the earth from so many monsters and tyrants” as a reward for his labors (Lemprière “Hercules” 382). Among Hercules’s good deeds was his deliverance of Prometheus from his “painful confinement” (Lemprière “Prometheus” 702). Mellor argues that Frankenstein’s creature, “a monstrous male giant,” alludes to the colossal statue of Hercules adopted by the National Convention as a symbolic of the Republic and is intended to be an “encoded representation of the French Revolution and the Terror” (*Mary* 83). I would contend, however, that Shelley’s Herculean allusion, underscored by her subtitle “The Modern Prometheus,” asks readers to consider the creature as a figure of self-sacrifice who in life tries to save his Promethean creator and in death deploys his ashes by “rais[ing them] to the skies” “for the common benefit of mankind.”⁴⁴

With his choice of incineration rather than inhumation the creature ensures his “ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds” and that his corporeal remains will be paradoxically both nowhere and everywhere (*F* 191). Ashes must be disposed of, whether inurned, inhumed, or dispersed. Early cremation proponents preferred the latter method because it left no clutter of body or container: “If cremated remains were scattered sufficiently widely (for example, on the ocean), the dead person was quite literally displaced” (Prothero 145). By his self-immolation, the creature will, indeed “dis-place” himself, eliminating the sight of his body that has caused his unending alienation and denying it a burial site, but he will simultaneously displace it in the sense of moving it from the usual or expected place of interment as he implicitly claims the entire world for his columbarium. Joseph Roach remarks that the burning of effigies—including corpses—is an act of violence, a “performance of waste” that sustains the community by reasserting the fiction of the boundaries between living and dead, but the act of immolation troubles that notion by its very destruction of boundaries (41). Thus, by cremating himself, the creature ostensibly affirms and makes permanent the separation between himself and other living beings, but he also redraws the boundaries of the community and makes himself an inextricable part of it. By dispersing his “dust” on wind and water, he ensures that his remains will be among the living wherever they dwell, breathe, ingest, imbibe, and he thus makes communion between the living and himself inescapable. The creature anticipates Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” which was not begun until October 1819 and not published until it appeared in the *Prometheus Unbound* volume of 1820. In the fifth stanza, the lyric speaker calls on the wind to spread the poet’s message of change. With his self-immolation, Frankenstein’s creature demands a similar service of the wind—not just carrying his poetic message but the ashes of the poet figure himself. If the living will not or cannot come to him, the creature will go to the living, his

ashes dispersed on the winds in a poetic, heroic gesture that demands change in how the past is remembered, the present transformed, and the future shaped.

Despite his attempts at self-authoring, the creature's narrative remains dependent on the interventions of others; his story is filtered through Frankenstein's retelling and again through Walton's epistolary recounting before it can be spread across the sea to Walton's sister Margaret and other readers.⁴⁵ Similarly, even though Lionel Verney in *The Last Man* writes himself into a timeline that both postdates and antedates him in his manuscript detailing his companions' domestic accord, humanity's plague-driven annihilation, and his own new beginning as the "last man," his continuing textual after- (or pre-) life is as dependent on fragmentation and re-formation as the creature's. The only way Lionel's account will reach others is through editorial recombination by the "Author" of the Introduction. When Lionel first "turn[s] author" himself (*LM* 157) he thinks of his authorship, as Samantha Webb notes, in terms of paternity and royalty, "institutions that guarantee individual and social continuity" (125). Lionel, in a burst of enthusiasm that echoes Frankenstein's vision of fathering a new species (*F* 36), exclaims: "Kings have been called the fathers of their people. Suddenly I became as it were the father of all mankind. Posterity became my heirs. My thoughts were gems to enrich the treasure house of man's intellectual possessions; each sentiment was a precious gift I bestowed on them" (*LM* 157). If, as Canuel asserts, Lionel here sees literature as a mode of "social control" ("Acts" 159), I would suggest that Shelley gently corrects Lionel with the frame. His words will only have value in the future if control of them is ceded to or at least shared with the living "Author" who transforms them into something neither could have produced alone.

Just as the creature must take responsibility for making available his own decayed self which *is* his text, Lionel must provide for the safekeeping of his text because he will live and die alone with no one to care for and bury his corporeal or literary remains. Immediately before he

recounts the shipwreck that separates him from Adrian and Clara and makes him the “last man,” he considers who will read his pages and how he should store them: “seek some cave, deep embowered in earth’s dark entrails, where no light will penetrate, save that which struggles, red and flickering, through a single fissure, staining thy page with grimmest livery of death” (*LM* 437). Readers do not know precisely where Lionel leaves his manuscript, but the novel’s frame implies that he found just such a cave when the Author claims to have discovered the fragments of his narrative inside a cave with “an arched dome-like roof” and only a narrow opening at the top to let in “the light of heaven” through a “veil” of natural growth that obscures the daylight and gives “a solemn religious hue to the apartment” (*LM* 5).

The Author’s Introduction to *The Last Man* places the unnamed and ungendered narrator and the narrator’s companion in the cave of the Cumæan Sybil, a cavern many critics have read as womb-like but which, I argue, is also and importantly tomb-like.⁴⁶ These two interpretations need not be mutually exclusive; Shelley imagines the Sibyl’s cave both as a grave, a site of the dead and of decay, and as a place of potential protection and proliferation. The dimly lit, domed cavern with its religious hue prefigures the site of Idris’s interment in the vault at Windsor where “the moon beams, tinged with various colours by the painted glass” fall (*LM* 359). The cavern, formed as a natural monumental exedra, was “spacious, and nearly circular, with a raised seat of stone, about the size of a Grecian couch, at one end” (*LM* 5).⁴⁷ The “only sign that life had been here, was the perfect snow-white skeleton of a goat, which had probably...fallen headlong” through the opening on the hillside that, once raw like a newly dug grave, is now “repaired by the growth of vegetation during many hundred summers” (*LM* 5). The narrator and her companion seat themselves on the “rocky couch” to rest in the presence of the skeleton, like effigies resting on mortuary monuments.⁴⁸ They hear the sounds of life—sheep bells and shepherd shouts—above them, but they are, in a sense, buried alive below while life, oblivious to

their presence, goes on above and without them.⁴⁹ In this burial vault, they discover the sibylline leaves containing details of prophecies and current events “traced on their thin scant pages” (*LM* 5). The Sibyl’s cave suggests prophecy, but these leaves and bark inscribed in extinct and modern languages function also as epitaphs, recording names, dates, and events for posterity.

As tantalizing and suggestive as these fragments are, in themselves they are nothing more than scraps; they require the Author to form them into a narrative, but she requires them as well to form her into an Author. To create what we know as *The Last Man*, the narrator of the Introduction “decipher[s] these sacred remains” and makes order out of chaos: “Scattered and unconnected as they were, I have been obliged to add links, and model the work into a consistent form” (*LM* 6). In the process she both forms and transforms Lionel’s narrative.⁵⁰ The narrator is aware that her work represents a certain necessary violence, acknowledging that “[d]oubtless the leaves of the Cumaean Sibyl have suffered distortion and diminution of interest and excellence in my hands. My only excuse for thus transforming them, is that they were unintelligible in their pristine condition” (*LM* 6-7). The Author’s work involves examining, interpreting, and connecting the objects under scrutiny in order to shape a narrative that accounts for them, but their material presence resists the kind of disappearance that Wordsworth’s dead must undergo; the fragments here may be distorted, but they retain characteristics of their original shape.

Shelley seems to be arguing for a kind of shift in meaning-making similar to that which Foucault describes in *The Birth of the Clinic*, from the ocularcentric, two-dimensional empiricism of the eighteenth century practiced by Frankenstein to a three-dimensional, multi-perspectival model. Foucault describes how medical knowledge, particularly in the context of a “medicine of epidemics,” develops: “The locus in which knowledge is formed is ... a generalized medical consciousness, diffused in space and time, open and mobile, linked to each individual existence, as well as to the collective life of the nation...” (*Birth* 26, 31). In the

process of knowledge-formation, the modern clinicians are formed as well. Foucault aligns this shift with a simultaneous linguistic development: until the clinical organization came into being, doctors did not know how to express in words what they knew to be via the gaze (*Birth* 51), but in the space of the clinic—the site, Shelley might say, where living and dead, past and present meet—“there is only one language” shared by experienced observer and novice alike (*Birth* 68). In Foucault’s account, multiple perspectives are needed to gain and distribute knowledge geographically and temporally, but, as Jay describes Foucault’s argument, although the “epistemic field [is] constructed as much linguistically as visually,” the “constitutive role of language ... was occluded by the assumption that language and vision were one” (393).

The Author in the frame of *The Last Man* has engaged in building the sort of network of connections across space and time that Foucault describes, from—and with—the ancient Sibyl to the future Verney, but Shelley’s vision of this engagement differs from Foucault’s in that language remains foregrounded and the fragmented remains of the dead—the objects of the medical gaze for Foucault—remain active participants in the process of meaning-making. The Author’s “apology” bears hallmarks of the typical distancing and disavowal that often prefaced texts of the period, particularly those by women, but there is pride here as well, for she writes, “obscure and chaotic as they [the Sibylline pages] are, they owe their present form to me, their decipherer” (*LM* 6). It is only through her work that this narrative been shaped—given “form and substance”—and made available to readers of her own time in 1818 and to readers of the future (*LM* 7). But her work alone is not enough, for she cannot create something from nothing. The last words of her introduction refer to her materials, “the frail and attenuated Leaves of the Sibyl,” from which this form has been molded (*LM* 7).

Shelley emphasizes the materiality that necessarily underlies invention. In *The Last Man*, Verney describes writing as weaving material that inspires him into a “new-found web of mind”

then “fashioning ... the material” in a “calmer moment” (*LM* 158). Five years after publication of *The Last Man* Shelley uses similar language to discuss the creative process in her preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*:

Every thing must have a beginning ..., and that beginning must be linked to something that went before.... Invention ... does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself. ... Invention consists in the capacity of seizing on the capabilities of a subject: and in the power of moulding and fashioning ideas suggested to it. (*F* 195)

In *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, the dead and the past provide those materials—the chaos of ashes in the wind and leaves in the cave—and writers who dabble in the margins and transgress boundaries—of visibility, geography, temporality, even of the grave itself—take up those materials to transmute and transmit them.⁵¹ Betty T. Bennett writes that “In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley constructed a being from parts to startle the world from its complacency; in *The Last Man*, she again constructs from parts, this time, the written word. Her purpose, the same” (n.pag.). I would add that not only does Shelley herself construct from (and with) parts, the fragmentation of the creature and of Lionel’s narrative—positioned in the frames, on the boundaries of the novels themselves—invite others to participate in the inventive process as well. If, as Bennett suggests, Shelley attempts to convey and continue the belief in the imagination and in the reformist ideals she shared with Percy Shelley, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft and maintained throughout her life, then providing the materials—fragments of the dead and of the past—from which readers can invent new narratives and new ways of thinking about how society works and humanity interacts provides training in such imaginative thinking. Rather than the intact dead of Wollstonecraft’s physiognomic training ground, Shelley offers the fragmented dead who resist simplistic judgments and enter into creative engagements with the living.

By disposing of his ashes on wind and water, Frankenstein's creature makes his site of interment both nowhere and everywhere at once (apropos for a being without species or nation). He utilizes his position on society's margins to become even more marginal through his scattered ashes, making the site of his dead body almost impossibly diffuse, yet universalizing himself geographically in a way that makes him accessible by all. Verney, on the other hand, concentrates the fragments of his narrative—his textual self—in the Sibyl's cave, paradoxically universalizing himself temporally in a way that makes him accessible to all as well. He, too, is without species and country at the end of *The Last Man*, and his disposition also becomes a kind of “anti-burial” through textual fragmentation, re-incorporation, and emergence from the Sibyl's cave. The strange warping and looping of time among the Sibyl, the Author, and Verney create a kind of Möbius strip which has no beginning, no end, and only one side along which past, present, and future; material, writer, and writing; collide, merge, and emerge.

Mary Shelley is interested in how humans live and learn from one another and what the dead and the past can teach us about those human interactions. From Wollstonecraft she develops the idea of learning from the dead, and even the potential power in shaping narratives, but rather than separate dead from living and champion a uni-directional mode of evaluation, Shelley takes up Godwin's suggestions that the fragments of the past can interact with the living, and that visiting the site of the dead is critical to this enterprise. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley seems to be theorizing what kind of epistemology might enable knowledge and narrative continuity from past to present, critiquing Victor's and others' ocularcentric biases that divide living from dead and gesturing toward a more participatory relationship. In *The Last Man*, she continues to refine her theory and put it into practice as she breaks and blurs boundaries between living and dead and imagines a mutually constitutive and transformative relationship. Near the end of his narrative, Lionel decides to leave Rome and sail whither the wind takes him. He dedicates his

book to those of the past, the “Illustrious Dead,” the very people whom Godwin wishes to memorialize for the future. *The Last Man* comes to function much like Godwin’s “Atlas of the Dead,” allowing readers to identify Verney’s dead, visit them where they “now dwell,” and understand better their moral characters and experiences in order to be elevated “above our ordinary sphere.” No matter how important the sites of the dead are, however, in themselves they are not enough. *The Last Man* needs both Verney and the “Author”—and of course Mary Shelley—to produce a new narrative of humanity. One benefit of learning from the dead for Godwin and Wollstonecraft is that the dead remain static: the way they were in life will be the way they are in death, so those values can be identified, accessed, and employed to shape the future. In contrast, Shelly envisions a collaborative relationship between past and present, dead and living, shapeless substances and shaping writers that will create a new vision of the future with and through—but not dictated by—the dead.

¹ This is Wollstonecraft’s only work to employ extensively Lavater’s theories. She began drafting “Cave” in 1787 at about the same time she undertook the translation and abridgement of his *Physiognomische Fragmente* and would have been at the forefront of a trend to create earnest literary portraits using physiognomic principles. (Graham 567; Tytler 164-65). According to Godwin, she worked from a French translation rather than the German original (*Memoirs* 226). Like “Cave of Fancy,” her translation was neither completed nor published.

² According to Godwin’s editorial note, the final stage of Sagesta’s education was to have been the presentation of “a variety of characters and stories” in the Cave of Fancy (“Cave” 198).

³ Julie A. Carlson discusses the relationship of fancy to storytelling and knowledge acquisition and its potential to give women the “capacity to envision other worlds” (“Fancy’s” 168; see also *England’s* 131-61). See Eileen M. Hunt for the tale as a Christianized version of Rousseau’s *Emile* (94-95). James G. Basker reads “Cave” as Wollstonecraft’s response to Samuel Johnson’s ideas which she believed “essential to the formation of young women’s minds” (48).

⁴ For simplicity, I refer to Sagesta’s physiognomic instruction, but it should be noted that Lavater makes the distinction between physiognomy and pathognomy; the first is “the knowledge of the signs of the powers and inclinations of men” which teaches “knowledge of character at rest”; the second is “knowledge of the signs of the passions” which teaches knowledge of “of character in motion” (*Essays* 12). Sagestus instructs Sagesta in both. Martina Reuter points out that even for Lavater the distinction between the two is not absolute (171).

⁵ The sage's reliance on first impressions again follows Lavater who writes, "Whoever forms a right judgment of the character of man, from those first impressions which are made by his exterior, is naturally a physiognomist" (*Essays* 12).

⁶ Wollstonecraft's focus shifts from the *dead* body in "Cave of Fancy" to woman's *living* body in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as she continues to explore how women develop their a sense of self and self-respect. In the latter, her attention to the body ranges from allowing girls to be physically active in order to become "rational creatures" with "vigour of intellect," to pointing out that women with a "habitual respect" for their person tend to be respected by males of the household, to insisting that the attainment of modesty which accompanies the improvement of reason will allow men and women to converse rationally about the anatomy and proportions of the human body (*VRW* 110, 206, 200). From there, it is a short leap to imagining women as professional caretakers of others' bodies: physicians, nurses, and midwives (*VRW* 229).

⁷ Long ignored and little known, Godwin's *Essay* has recently received more scholarly attention, often in relation to his understanding of history and Enlightenment historiography. See, for example, the work of Mark Phillips (322-41), Rowland Weston, and Paul Westover (48-74).

⁸ Godwin writes that the value of the belongings associated with a dead friend is "not merely fictitious"; "they can purify my sentiments, and make me similar to the man I love...inspir[ing] me with powers, the feelings and the heart of their preceding master" (*Essay* 8). See Westover for the distinction in traditional religious terms between secondary relics—the items left behind by those who have died—and primary relics—the actual corpse and its fragments and Godwin's attachment to the latter (60). See Charles J. Rzepka for a discussion of "relics" versus "remains" as "material clues" which became increasingly valued during the Romantic period as a way to ground and stabilize historical narrative in the face of rapid narrative revisions (par. 7, 9-10).

⁹ Ellis Shookman discusses Lavater's physiognomic theory in relation to the visual arts (19-22).

¹⁰ For examples, see Lee Sterrenburg ("Monster" 152-66), Mellor (*Mary* 82-83), David Collings (*Monstrous* 198), and Fred Botting (436).

¹¹ For issues of maternity, see Ellen Moers on *Frankenstein* as a "birth myth" (79) and Mellor who describes the book as being "about what happens when a man tries to have a baby without a woman" (*Mary* 40). For readings that address issues of the embodied female author, see Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (222-32), Stephen Behrendt ("Mary"), and Michael Eberle-Sinatra. Diane Long Hoeveler provides a helpful overview of critical responses to the novel. In a recent essay, Sara Guyer offers yet another deconstructive account that links the novel's use of lyric figures with the impossibility of "testimony" as Agamben uses the term.

¹² For a series of essays responding to and extending criticism on the dreamed decaying mother, see *Frankenstein's Dream*, edited by Jerrold E. Hogle.

¹³ See Marilyn Butler for an overview of the Shelleys' interest in "radical science" (Introduction xv-xxi, xxix-xl) and the vitalist debate as it inflects *Frankenstein* ("Radical"). See Richard C. Sha for Shelley's novel in relation to the debate about animal magnetism. For the novel as a feminist critique of science, see Mellor (*Mary* Ch. 5, especially 99-101; "Making" 17-19).

Overviews positioning Shelley within multiple scientific discourses include those of Susan E. Lederer, Elizabeth Fee, and Patricia Tuohy (11-21) and Jon Turney (13-25). For Shelley's deployment of physiognomic principles, see Mellor ("Making" 20-21) and Scott A. Juengel. Examples of readings that position *Frankenstein* in relation to anatomic study and the anatomy debates include those of Emma Liggins, Tim Marshall, Clara Tuite (150-53), Anne McWhir ("Unconceiving"), Jonathan Padley, and Paul Youngquist (53-54). For Shelley and attempts at revivification after drowning or strangulation, see Marie Mulvey-Roberts (202-03).

¹⁴ For an account of the visual representation of the creature on film, see James A.W. Heffernan.

¹⁵ Cooper's private dissections and anatomical study would have taken place in the second half of the 1780s, approximately a decade before the action of *Frankenstein* has been estimated to begin (Mellor *Mary* 54-55; Mulvey-Roberts 204), so Frankenstein's own private dissections and anatomical studies would have been approximately contemporaneous with Cooper's. My reading of the accuracy of Shelley's description of Victor's in-home dissecting apartment which was, like Cooper's, "in one of the upper rooms" (Cooper 340) differs significantly from Mellor's who calls the description of Victor's laboratory in a "small attic room" "both vague and naïve" and evidence of Shelley's not being a scientist herself (*Mary* 90). Youngquist also positions Frankenstein in relation to a near-contemporary nonfictional anatomist, Cooper's predecessor John Hunter whom Youngquist positions within the vitalism tradition (53-54, 10).

¹⁶ See Tim Marshall for a discussion of Cooper's elephant dissection and the similarity between Cooper's and Frankenstein's interest and proficiency in the structure of "*any animal* endued with life" (71). For an early biography of Cooper including an account of his dissection and articulation of an elephant from the Tower Menagerie in the court-yard of his home in St. Mary Axe (336-38) and information about the anatomy trade, see *The Life of Sir Astley Cooper* (1843) by his nephew Bransby Blake Cooper. For a modern biography of Cooper written from the perspective of a practicing medical doctor, see Druin Burch.

¹⁷ See Youngquist for a reading of the creature's inability to be part of civil society because of his physical deformity (28, 53-55).

¹⁸ Holcroft's translation offers better parallelism but obscures the "ugliness": "The morally best, the most beautiful. / The morally worst, the most deformed" (Lavater Essays 99).

¹⁹ Juengel writes of this moment, for instance: "There is every reason to believe that the creature's proffered hand, accompanied by a rude grin, is evidence of an embrace suspended, a gesture of detainment only insofar as it would hold Victor to his ethical responsibilities" (361).

²⁰ Juengel rightly identifies Victor's misreading of the creature's face and the determinism inherent in physiognomical practice as being central issues in the novel, but his deconstructive conclusion that leads to an inevitable failure of representation differs considerably from my understanding of Shelley's interests in the kinds of knowledge yielded and occluded by physiognomy and its sister surface sciences (369).

²¹ The term “forensic science” and its corollaries as I am using them here are anachronisms; the first use of “forensic medicine” cited in the *OED* dates to 1845. However, the idea that physical evidence could be analyzed to help determine motive and guilt was certainly familiar.

²² Only a few years before Shelley began drafting *Frankenstein*, the Ratcliffe Highway murders of December 1811 were the talk of the nation. Whether or not she had these specific crimes in mind as she wrote *Frankenstein*, her tale involving, like the Ratcliffe Highway crimes, a series of murders including that of a young child, the failure of evidence to identify accurately the motives or murderer, and the conviction of a killer on the slimmest of circumstantial evidence reflects contemporary concerns about what kinds of visual forensic evidence corpses and crime scenes can provide and how that evidence is used. See Robert Southey’s letter to Neville White, 27 December 1811, for a contemporary reaction to the murders. Thomas de Quincey’s series of essays beginning with “On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts” (*Blackwoods Magazine*, 1827) discusses the alleged murderer John Williams and the crimes. See P.D. James and Thomas A. Critchley for a modern reexamination of the Ratcliffe Highway murders.

²³ Chris Baldick notes that in a novel that repeatedly depicts characters punished for crimes of which they are innocent, Justine’s conviction is particularly unjust and “implicates Victor, the good burghers of Geneva, and the Church in the worst of judicial crimes” (53).

²⁴ Shelley records in her journal a visit to the monument to John Hampden with her father on 21 October 1817 (*Journals* 181-82). Hampden was a favorite of early-nineteenth-century liberal writers including Percy Shelley and Godwin. Michael Kammen notes that during the 1790s, Hampden’s was one of [at least] two seventeenth-century English graves of antimonarchical martyrs opened so that the bodies could be examined before being reinterred (32).

²⁵ My reading of this scene agrees with Iain Crawford’s sense that Shelley here underscores Victor’s lack of self-awareness, but his focus is on Victor’s relation to his father and family.

²⁶ *The Last Man* has been called “a grimly pessimistic novel” (Mellor *Mary* 148), imprinted strongly with a “strain of pessimism” (Snyder 439), that “proposes no solution and offers no escape” (Tarr xi); its “phantasmatic coalescing of personal tragedy with the apocalyptic extinction of humanity...nullifies any illusory hope for humanistic redemption” (An 581). Betty T. Bennett offers an exception, arguing the novel participates in the Romantic valorization of imagination and imagines a different kind of continuity of existence. When read as a *roman à clef* the novel lends itself to biographical and psychoanalytical readings that identify the perceived pessimism of the novel with Mary Shelley’s grief and mourning at the loss of her mother, her three children, and her husband Percy by drowning. Her oft-quoted self-identification with the “last man” in her journal fuels many of those accounts: “The last man! Yes I may well describe that solitary being’s feelings, feelings myself as the last relic of a beloved race, my companions extinct before me” (*Journals* 476-77). Recent work approaches the novel from a variety of perspectives. In addition to work cited elsewhere in this project, representative examples include deconstructive readings that address fragmentation, haunting and decomposing figures, and the failure of meaning (e.g. Barbara Johnson), and the impossibility of human agency (e.g. Audrey A. Fisch); other readings position the novel within contemporary political concerns such as revolution (e.g. Paley “Last Man”), the possibility of

true democracy (e.g. Hilary Strang), and issues of imperialism (e.g. Kari Lokke). Examples of work that focuses on the plague include Allan Bewell's reading of the plague as colonialism turned back on England and Peter Melville's challenge of accounts that locate Lionel's immunity in his encounter with the dying black man.

²⁷ His creator Frankenstein, too, repeatedly describes himself as being mentally and physically near death or like one who is dead. Shelley contrasts Frankenstein's use of his living-dead state to alienate himself from the company of both the living and of the dead with that of his creature who attempts to breach the visual boundary between his living-dead self and others through physical interaction and aural interventions and, when that fails, who transfigures his bodily form through immolation into a state and form that can come to and into the living

²⁸ Thomas writes that Lionel is declared "clinically dead" by the attending physician when, on the third night after being grasped by the dying "negro," "animation was suspended; to the eye and touch of all [he] was dead" ("Ends" 26; *LM* 342). As we saw in the previous chapter, determining definitive death was not a simple matter until visible signs of putrefaction set in.

²⁹ Raymond's procession through Athens echoes the spectacular state funeral procession of 9 January 1806 that carried the body of Admiral Horatio Nelson through London to St. Paul's (Arnold 199). Timothy Jenks notes that one of the aspects of the procession that impressed the ruling classes was the respectful response of the crowd who, as the cortege passed, fell silent, doffed their hats, and generally exhibited affecting and appropriate deportment (441).

³⁰ As the group makes its passage of the Jura, Shelley reminds readers of an analogical biblical context with an allusion to the "Hebrew poet" and a quotation from Ecclesiastes (aptly a poetic book that ponders time, mortality, and the futility of human endeavors) (*LM* 418). Adrian reaches the top of the mountain overlooking Lake Lemman first, and seems "to behold something unexpected and wonderful" as he looks toward the "glorious Alps, clothed in dazzling robes of light by the setting sun" (*LM* 418, 419). His "mountaintop experience" recalls Moses viewing Canaan from the mountain of Nebo, but neither Moses nor Adrian will reach the promised land (*KJV* Deut.34.1-4).

³¹ For a reading of the novel's marble statuary in relation to the story of Pandora and as an art object in the terms of P.B. Shelley's "Defense of Poetry," see McWhir ("Unconceiving" 164-71).

³² For a representative example of a key to the novel's characters, see Morton D. Paley (Introduction xviii), and for challenges to simple one-to-one correspondences, see Maggie Kilgour (569-70) and McWhir (Introduction xx).

³³ Sterrenburg argues, citing this passage, that Shelley indicts the "Romantic cult of the heroic leader" because the plague eliminates not only the Romantic hero, but also the multitudes who would have preserved and glorified his memory" ("Anatomy" 345, 346).

³⁴ The astronomer Merrival expresses a similar desire for his flesh to moulder and mingle with that of his family, a sign of his correctly redirected focus toward his loved ones, but as Kilgour notes, these examples are not without complication: Perdita's death is "a Romantic *liebestod*," but her ideal is ironized because Raymond claimed to be drawn to *his* death by Evadne's curse,

and Evadne died believing she would soon meet Raymond in the grave (571). Ted Underwood notes a tendency in the period to think of bodily sensations continuing during the process of decay and gives the example of Diderot who “fantasized that the particles of his body might retain some power of sensation as they mingled with those of Sophie Volland in the grave” (38).

³⁵ Perdita commits suicide in order to ensure her return to Raymond’s grave after Lionel forcibly removes her. Contrary to Paley who sees her suicide as emblemizing failure of the imagination (Introduction xi), I would suggest it be read more in line with Frankenstein’s creature’s final act of self-immolation, a heroic effort to recombine living and dead. Shelley does not promote suicide as a solution, but neither does she condemn Perdita.

³⁶ Godwin notes in his *Essay* that memorials need not be ostentatious to be effective, but neither would he recommend demolishing “the ample and sumptuous monuments, particularly which belong to persons of genuine merit, that now exist” (*Essay* 24).

³⁷ The name “Alfred” evokes Alfred the Great, resourceful military leader, consolidator of Anglo-Saxon territory by means of both military action and peace treaties, able administrator, and proponent of education. Even without the Ex-Queen’s assistance, by naming their son after the man often considered the first “King of the English” and the only English monarch to bear the epithet “the Great,” Idris and Lionel lay claim to a royal lineage that extends back to the Medieval Era, but the name also suggests the precedent of a new kingdom formed, at least in part, by means of writing and the translation and distribution of texts.

³⁸ In 1813, little more than a decade before Shelley began writing *The Last Man*, the assumed burial vault of Charles I was opened in the presence of the Prince Regent (the future George IV) to inspect the body for evidence of decapitation in order to identify it positively. Shelley would also likely have had more recent royal interments in mind. George III commissioned the construction of the Royal Vault at St. George’s Chapel, and between the time of its completion in 1810 and publication of *The Last Man* in 1826, ten members of the royal family were buried there including Princess Charlotte who died in childbirth in 1817 and King George III himself in 1820 (“St. George’s”). Lisa Hopkins suggests Verney’s interment of Idris at Windsor Castle would have evoked memories Princess Charlotte (par. 12). See Stephen Behrendt for responses to the death of Princess Charlotte (*Royal*). Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote one such response: “An Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte” (623-30).

³⁹ Julia M. Wright argues that *The Last Man* reveals insecurity about the ability of the nation to control its empire and cites this passage as a moment when Lionel is unable to control large spaces and distances imaginatively, so he concedes defeat (139).

⁴⁰ Mellor notes in passing that this pair is the only one that could have become a non-incestual couple had Adrian not “carelessly sacrifice[d] both his own life and that of the young girl” by agreeing to visit her parents’ grave (*Mary* 150), and Kilgour writes that “the future represented finally in the possible union of Adrian and Clara” washes away with their deaths (577). McWhir states baldly that “Adrian perishes at sea, as Percy did in 1822” (Introduction xx-xxi). Sophie Thomas is the only scholar I have come across who leaves open the possibility of this couple’s

survival, writing “their deaths are a matter of inference; their bodies are not found washed up on the shore” (“Ends” 31), but she does not pursue the implications of this death-by-inference.

⁴¹ See Paley for some of the plague predecessors from which Shelley would have drawn (Introduction xii-xiii).

⁴² Shelley writes about the death and disposal of the bodies of Edward Williams and Percy Shelley in a letter of 15 August 1822 to Maria Gisborne: “they [Hunt, Lord Byron, and Trelawny] are gone to the desolate sea coast to perform the last offices to their earthly remains.... The quarantine laws would not permit us to remove them sooner—& now only on condition that we burn them to ashes” (*Letters* 249). According to Catherine Arnold, Percy Shelley “was cremated in accordance with local by-laws designed to prevent the spread of plague, which ruled that anything washed up by the sea must be burned on the shore” (228). See Samantha Matthews for a discussion of how Italy’s quarantine laws inspired the recuperative efforts of survivors intent on protecting first the corpses then the poetic reputations and corpuses of Keats and Shelly (115-51).

⁴³ See, for instance, Mellor (Mellor *Mary* 68) and Andrew Griffin (70). Fred Botting writes that the monster’s suicide is the “only act of self-possession available to him” (444), a notion which Mary Beth Rose reminds us stems from Locke’s idea that the “perfect condition of slavery” is the “ability to commit suicide when captivity becomes intolerable” (103). If, as Rose argues, Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* manifests a “heroics of endurance” by resisting suicide and self-definition as a slave (103-04), we might think of Frankenstein’s creature as acknowledging his captivity to his hideous shape with his proposed self-destruction, but I would argue that in his self-immolation he manifests a different kind of self-sacrificial heroics and enables a different kind of endurance that will transmit his lived experience to and through the living to the future.

⁴⁴ The creature evokes another classical figure and reference to self-sacrifice, that of the colossus. In *Homo Sacer*, Giorgio Agamben draws on Livy’s tale of the *devotus* who consecrates his life to the gods in order to save the city and who, if he does not die, must participate in a ritual in which a seven-foot-tall effigy of himself is buried and a victim immolated in expiation (97). Agamben makes the analogy between the *devotus* and the figure of the *homo sacer* because once the *devotus* has consecrated himself to death, he no longer belongs to the world of the living. While it seems unlikely Mary Shelley would have theorized the *devotus* quite as Agamben does, it bears remarking that she and Percy Shelley read Livy together and were, in fact, reading the very sections of Livy referenced by Agamben which relate the story of the colossus while she was working on the *Frankenstein* manuscript. Her journal entry of 20 December 1818 notes both: “Finish 8th book of Livy” and “Correct Frankenstein” (*Journals* 245). Agamben likens the *devotus*—and the sovereign who also has an effigy—to the *homo sacer*, a figure that “can be killed but not sacrificed” (94), but Shelley envisions her creature’s marginalized position as having of a certain kind of power based in his ability to choose his fate. Agamben dwells on the position of the *devotus* vis-à-vis his exclusion from society, but Shelley is interested in the choice made by the *devotus* and by her creature to sacrifice themselves for the betterment of society.

⁴⁵ Walton's epistolary form seems particularly apt as letters are intended explicitly to cross boundaries: to travel among persons, across distances, through time, and among genres.

⁴⁶ For an exemplary reading of the Sibyl's cave as a womb, see Gilbert and Gubar (95-104). The main narrative of *The Last Man* also makes explicit the connection between womb and grave: on returning to Windsor after Adrian takes over the protectorship, Lionel thinks about "shadows of future" hours which rise up "from the womb of time, their cradle and their bier" (*LM* 258).

⁴⁷ The exedra is a common cemetery monument modeled on ancient Greek *exedrae* which began as the seating around public shelters but came to be built specifically for burial grounds. Exedrae are typically shaped like a curved bench. (Keister 36-38).

⁴⁸ The narrator and the narrator's companion are pointedly not gendered in the text, but for the sake of simplicity, I use feminine pronouns to refer to the Author.

⁴⁹ The fear of being buried alive became particularly acute during the nineteenth century, especially in continental Europe and America, and stories—both fictional and purportedly true—described what it was like to be buried alive, including hearing the sounds of life and the living above (Bondeson 274). John Snart's *Thesaurus of Horror; or the Charnel-House Explored!!...* is an example of a hair-raising reformist book on premature burial. For a Romantic-era short story on the topic, see John Galt's "The Buried Alive" (1821), and for a classic mid-nineteenth-century short story on the topic, see Edgar Allan Poe's "The Premature Burial" (1844).

⁵⁰ See Kilgour for a different reading of the role of the writer as one who transforms; she argues Mary Shelley used *The Last Man* to transform Percy Shelley into her own ideal of him.

⁵¹ Thomas views the Sibylline leaves themselves as a means by which boundaries are blurred because the fragments are identified "with the work of translation, adaptation, and ordering that must be carried out" to blur "ancient fragments and their modern recuperation" ("Ends" 34).

V. HEMANS AND BENTHAM: PRESERVING THE CORPOREAL DEAD

For Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley, the permanence of the intact dead body is unnecessary or even detrimental to their future-oriented projects. Wollstonecraft's sage and his pupil glean knowledge from the physiognomy of the dead; then they move on, leaving the dead behind. To absorb past knowledge or recombine it in order to create new ways of thinking and acting in the future, Godwin and Shelley propose interacting with the remnants of the decaying dead. For others, though, the ephemerality of the corpse—its inevitable dissolution and disappearance—forewarns that the memory and influence of the person it embodied may be equally short-lived; for them, the long-term presence of the dead among the living and their potential influence on the future relies on bodily preservation. This chapter brings together the unlikely pair of Felicia Hemans, "the poetess of the affections" (Chorley 2.110), and utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham who, surprisingly, share a similar approach to retaining the dead. Both distrust the immaterial workings of the mind alone to sustain the defunct in memory and to extend imaginatively the knowledge and experiences of the dead into the future, and so both rely, paradoxically, on an empirical attachment to the dead human form to enable the future potentiality of the dead. They write into being effigial bodies which, by their multi-dimensional presence, demand the attention and care of the living; then they preserve the place of the dead in memory and imagination by re-creating and preserving their corporeal forms.

Even though some Romantic-era writers and reformers sought to let the dead decompose out of sight in grassy graveyards or at significant historic or cultural sites, others recognized that the visible, preserved human form could be an aid to memory and a storehouse of knowledge. For instance, casting life and death masks became popular in the early nineteenth century, with the "fashion for casting" peaking in the 1820s and 1830s (Forbes and McGrath). Friends and family valued these masks as mementos of loved ones, and phrenologists valued them as tangible

and permanent demonstrations of their theories. In 1802, Madame Tussaud began touring Britain with her collection of wax heads—many of which she had cast from decapitated victims of the French Revolution—and by 1835 she moved into her permanent premises on Baker Street in London where her exhibition of wax figures became a “major cultural industry that combined commemoration and entertainment” (Pickering and Westcott 3). In addition to masks and models, the preserved human corpse itself was more widely visible due to improved funeral and anatomical embalming methods developed during the eighteenth century that arrested or delayed decomposition. Better funeral embalming practices involving evisceration and desiccation of the body, such as that performed on Byron’s daughter Allegra and on Byron himself, enabled transportation of corpses over greater distances and more elaborate rituals for public and private pre-burial displays of remains. Loyal subjects, devoted admirers, family, and friends could have one long, last look at the unsullied body of the deceased from which to create and preserve an image in memory. At the same time, innovative arterial and cavity embalming techniques made possible the prolonged preservation and study of medical specimens and museum curiosities (Trompette and Lemonnier 11). Anatomist William Hunter praised the advanced anatomical embalming processes he helped to pioneer for “saving the time and labour of the Anatomist” and making the resulting prepared body parts and the information contained therein immediately and ever accessible: “whatever he [the Anatomist] has prepared with care, he can preserve; and the object is ready to be seen at any time” (qtd. in Youngquist 139).

Hemans and Bentham participate in a literary version of preserving the body that can “be seen at any time,” but they recognize the limitations imposed by the preservation processes which make static forms of once-dynamic entities. As Paul Youngquist notes regarding the illustrations in Hunter’s greatest work, *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus* (1774), “what is lost to preservation is what escapes representation: the movements of animal flesh” (139).

Hunter's anatomical atlas came about when, as he notes in the Preface, at the "first favourable opportunity" of examining a woman who had "died suddenly, when very near the end of her pregnancy," he was able to inject the blood vessels successfully with colored wax and locate "a very able painter," thereby preserving the body both in flesh and on paper. The series of plates depicting the step-by-step dissection, Youngquist writes, "turns the generative body into a cadaver" (138). Similarly, Anne McWhir draws a parallel between the progressively more medicalized views in the plates and the ever greater distance from the once-living woman and her humanity: "Reproduction, halted by death and penetrated by analysis, is systematically reduced to a series of beautifully represented but increasingly useless parts" ("Unconceiving" 167). Hemans and Bentham capitalize on the promise of corporeal preservation to protect the dead, but they also sense and seek to counter through literary techniques the simultaneous threat of preservation that pickles the dead into the kind of static, "useless" two-dimensionality of Hunter's engravings.¹ Their ideas about who can and should manage the memory of the dead differ, but they share an impulse to preserve and maintain the dead by transubstantiating bodies into visible and publicly accessible, multi-dimensional effigial forms. Whether by Hemans's intentions or, perhaps, in spite of Bentham's, the care of the dead becomes a corporate responsibility, but the corporeal form that anchors the dead among the living also underscores the inherent instability of memorialization which requires mediation by the living.

A. Fixing Forms

Felicia Hemans's poetry insistently meditates on the oscillations of bodies between states and forms—living and dead, flesh and stone—at the intersection between private memory and public memorial. For Hemans, the disappearance of the dead is not a precursor to imaginative re-creation as in Wordsworth's poetry, nor does decomposition offer creative potential for

reconstituting the past or composing a newly imagined future as it does for Byron or Shelley. Decay, for Hemans, would be just another type of disappearance. She suggests that when lives, particularly those of women and children, are left strictly to memory they will disappear, so she attempts to “fix” memory—that is, to avoid or repair the breaches made when knowledge of past lives are lost—by exploring and exploiting the potential for poetically re-created intact human forms to render the dead present, visible, and compelling objects of ongoing public concern and care. However, she is equally wary of preservation models that flatten lives into single-perspective, “fixed” representations. Therefore, through creative use of formal poetic features, she attempts to forestall a final fixity of the dead form. Hemans paradoxically insists on the materiality of the dead precisely by preserving it in poetic form, and that very materiality, the preserved effigial figure, remarkably makes possible a dynamic, earthly future for the dead. Through her poetic re-creations, Hemans carries on the traditional women’s work of “streaking” the dead, laying them out and preparing them for viewing (Richardson *Death* 17-18), but she modernizes and expands the practice, moving the dead from private parlors to public fora. As important as the material bodily forms presented in and created by her poetry are for inspiring care and community, only the public attention and conversation that forms around them will retain and transmit the lives and experiences of the dead they represent.

Death-oriented imagery, including dying bodies, dead bodies, and funerary sculpture, is a mainstay of Hemans’s entire poetic corpus, but in this chapter I focus specifically on poems from her most popular collection, *Records of Woman, with Other Poems* (1828). Paula Feldman astutely notes in the introduction to her complete modern edition of the collection: “nearly every poem in the series describes a corpse or the anticipation of one” (xxii). The poems in *Records of Woman* lend themselves particularly well to a consideration of how Hemans imagines the preservation of women’s lives in conjunction with poetic preservation of their corporeal forms

because here she foregrounds women's places in history and their potential posterity. In what Susan Wolfson calls Hemans's "signal achievement," Hemans develops the "Records of Woman" genre which features "women as historical figures, as repositories of cultural values (heroines of 'domestic affection'), as interpreters (herself included) of history and social structure, and (not the least) as perpetual victims of men's rivalries, political contentions, and wars" (Introduction xvii). The "*Other Poems*" in the collection often perform similar work of remembering and memorializing the deceased—children and men as well as women—and draw attention to women's care for and protection of the bodies and memories of the dead. Wolfson's enumeration of the many roles for women Hemans explores is correct as far as it goes, but, perhaps because of the prevalence of dying and dead bodies that Feldman notes, Wolfson's list is positioned within Hemans's present and oriented toward the past: women of the past, women's understanding of the past, and women's submission to and maintenance of the status quo.² I contend, however, that Hemans's use of dead bodies, much like that of the other writers in this study, attends to the past while being decidedly future-oriented, and that the dying bodies, corpses, and effigial forms of *Records of Woman* are precisely what allow Hemans to posit and perpetuate a future for the named and unnamed women she records here.

Hemans's writerly fortunes have risen, fallen, and resurged in large part due to two dominant themes in her poetry to which I have already alluded: domesticity and death. The attention to "domestic affections" and the mournful sensibilities upon which her reputation and popularity were built during the early and mid-nineteenth century proved to be their undoing by its last decades, and her work languished in the archives until rediscovered by critics in the late 1980s, a decade after the first wave of feminist criticism began rehabilitating other Romantic women's writing.³ Since then, Hemans's work has been the subject of renewed scholarly interest, much of it concerned with reconciling the jarring conjunction of domesticity and death in her

poetry. Some read Hemans's paeans to domesticity as being sincere but undermined by her portrayals of death.⁴ Others position her depictions of domesticity disrupted by death in the context of her personal losses of her father and later her husband to separation and abandonment, her mother to death, and her sister to marriage, or more broadly in the context of the mass separation and death associated with the French Revolution and ongoing foreign wars.⁵ More recently, critics have suggested that Hemans was intentionally more subversive and critical of the domestic feminine ideal than it might initially appear and that she uses depictions of the dead and dying as a mode of social critique.⁶ My reading aligns with this latter group in that I see Hemans implicitly critiquing the historical and ongoing effacement and underestimation of unsung lives, but more importantly, with her ekphrastic poems focusing on effigial forms she does more than critique; she suggests and enacts through the relationship between domesticity and death in her poetry a means to correct this oversight. Hemans uses the corporeal form as a link between the private sphere of domesticity and death and the public domain of memorial, and in the process, makes visible and memorable the lives of women, children, and the poor who would otherwise be consigned to postmortem oblivion. In her poetry, recently dead bodies become effigies to be viewed and appreciated while funerary sculptures become sleeping forms which require attention and care. The oscillations between body and funerary sculpture invite readers to imagine the dead—even those who would typically disappear from the collective, social memory—occupying a public space where their care and preservation become a corporate responsibility.

With disorienting shifts of state and form between living and dead, flesh body and stone sculpture, Hemans locates the human forms she presents between stable binaries, encouraging readers to reconsider received wisdom and question whether effigial forms might yet live, whether human bodies might be public memorials, and whether the unacknowledged and unnamed might and should be remembered.⁷ If, as the authors of the influential book *Women's*

Ways of Knowing argue, “received knowledge” tends to perceive ideas as “concrete and dualistic.... right or wrong, true or false, good or bad, black or white” without admitting the possibility of paradox (Belenky et al. 37), Hemans seeks to disrupt this particular “way of knowing” by blurring the very boundaries that keep paradoxes at bay. She insists readers explore the spaces between: between poetic lines, between flesh and stone, and between living and dead. She suggests that reading a poem or a literary corpus as a nuanced and multifaceted object requires and exercises the same ability one needs to see and see beyond a multidimensional corporeal form and to imagine the nuances of the life and experiences that body might have had.

To illustrate how Hemans makes the self-contradictory seem plausible, the paradox possible, the dead yet present among the living if only temporarily, I turn first to her poem “The Child’s Last Sleep,” in part because its focus on funerary sculpture—the inanimate form of a dead child—is so overdetermined that her effective efforts to suggest animation are particularly startling.⁸ One of the “other poems” in *Records of Woman, with Other Poems*, “The Child’s Last Sleep” insists—repeatedly—that the eponymous child is dead, but nevertheless asks readers to entertain the possibility that it lives. Before the reader begins, she knows she will be reading a poem about not just a dead child, but about the stone statue of a dead child: the title announces this is its “Last Sleep”; the subtitle “Suggested by a monument of Chantrey’s” foregrounds the mortuary sculpture that is the poem’s ekphrastic subject; the poem’s original placement in *Friendship’s Offering* (1826) positions it on the page next to a depiction of said monument of an infant girl; and the poem’s original epigraph by John Wilson begins unequivocally with the line “The lovely child is dead!” (*Records* 206).⁹ Yet, the poem’s speaker begins by apostrophizing the child as if it lives:

Thou sleepest—but when wilt thou wake, fair child?
When the fawn awakes in the forest wild?
When the lark’s wing mounts with the breeze of morn?

When the first rich breath of the rose is born?—
 Lovely thou sleepest, yet something lies
 Too deep and still on thy soft-seal'd eyes,
 Mournful, tho' sweet, is thy rest to see—
 When will the hour of thy rising be? (1-8)

The first four lines of the poem end in question marks, a pattern which serves at least two functions. First, everything the reader knew about this poem from the title, the subtitle, and the illustration is called into question: Is it possible the child is merely sleeping? Second, the four consistently end-stopped lines condition the reader to expect the line to be the syntactic unit. The fifth line, then, which continues to address the child, seems to read “Lovely thou sleepest, yet something lies.” Despite the lack of punctuation, the reader expects syntactic completion. The hopes that were raised, the possibilities that were so briefly entertained are dashed because “something lies.” The line is enjambed, though, and “lies” is revealed to be something of a lie. This is not about the telling of a falsehood but about a mysterious, unknowable “something” that “lies / Too deep and still” on the child’s “soft-seal’d eyes” (5-6). The child’s rest, though “mournful,” is still identified as “rest,” not death, and the stanza ends with yet another question about when, not if, the child might rise.

The metaphor of death as a temporary sleep until the expected resurrection of the body is so familiar in Western thought that we may overlook it as a trite convention, but while I agree that Hemans would uphold the importance and assurance of a heavenly eternal life to which she often alludes in her poetry, she also insists with her focus on the corporeal form that readers think about the earthly afterlife of individuals, including the child of this poem. A hope for the spiritual world to come does not preclude her pursuing a terrestrial postmortem presence among the living for herself and others. Paul Westover reminds readers that faith in a spiritual hereafter and a desire for secular posterity need not be mutually exclusive; in her last tribute lyrics to other poets, Hemans also finalized her own secular self-canonization, and she wished to be

remembered as a Christian poet (87).¹⁰ Even as a successful, widely published, self-supporting author, Hemans is aware of the tenuousness of her own posthumous afterlife, and she understands equally that others—particularly women and children who so often have no public record of their lives—are in greater danger of being effaced from memory and history when they slip out of sight. Thus, she focuses attention on corporeal forms to insist that readers see and care for these individuals. The figural presence of the child in “The Child’s Last Sleep” and its ambiguous state—mortuary monument, dead body, or sleeping infant—means the reader must attend to what she sees even if, or perhaps because, she can never be quite certain what to believe or how to think of this child’s form.¹¹

The poem’s lineation, rhyme scheme, and meter undergird the sense of instability between life and death, knowing and not knowing. For instance, Hemans’s use of enjambment disrupts expectations and encourages a suspension of judgment about the child’s state and form. Grant F. Scott writes that a distinctive feature of Hemans’s ekphrastic poem “Properzia Rossi,” first published in 1828 in *Records of Woman*, is “a restless enjambment that never allows the reader’s eye to fixate on a specific image” (43). He argues that Hemans’s “process of art” becomes more important than the artistic product in a poem that “represents a shifting tapestry of motion” (43). In “The Child’s Last Sleep” first published two years earlier than “Properzia Rossi,” Hemans experiments with the same technique of “restless enjambment” and the “shifting tapestry of motion” it produces to prevent the reader from “fixating” too long on the child’s stone effigy or from “fixing” the child in a state of death or a medium of marble. In spite of the enjambment, though, the rhyming couplets of “The Child’s Last Sleep” lend a sense of order, and the lines are consistently in tetrameter. The meter refuses to march to a steady beat, however. Hemans denies readers the regularity of a heartbeat even as metrical liveliness takes its place. In the first line of the poem, the syllables “sleep,” “when,” “wake,” and “child”—all words that

might be associated with life—are stressed. Despite the infusion of doubt mid-way through the eight-line stanza with the “yet” at the caesura in line five, the possibility of life returns with the initial stressed syllable of the final line of the stanza: “When will the hour of thy rising be?” (8).

The second stanza begins with its own answering stressed syllable—“Not”—and the remainder of the poem reinforces that denial: the child will not rise (9-16); the child is “gone” (17, 19); only “Beautiful dust” remains to be “look[ed] on” (24); yet the child remains the object of address and attention. This figure—the stone child—has been cared for, touched, and dampened by tears as if it were flesh, perhaps still living. The speaker tells the child-form that

Grief with vain passionate tears hath wet
Thy hair, shedding gleams from thy pale brow yet;
Love with sad kisses, unfelt, hath press’d
Thy meek-dropt eyelids and quiet breast; (11-14)

The speaker continues to apostrophize the monument in the third and final stanza, insisting “Thou’rt gone from us,” “Thou’rt gone” (17, 19) and suggesting that the child-form itself is no more certain about its state of being than readers were in the first stanza. The tears and kisses lavished on this form are without doubt the natural enactment of a parent’s grief, but the pattern of care for corporeal forms throughout Hemans’s corpus asks readers to imagine other possibilities as well. Have these tears and kisses touched flesh or stone? “Something” might lie “Too deep and still” on the monument’s carved eyes; the child’s body might lie “Too deep and still” in the grave beneath it; but the poem itself, with its disconcerting questions and its lively meter, will not lie “Too deep and still,” nor will it let the memory of this child lie “Too deep and still.” The child, impossibly, lives on, and paradoxically this effigy—the stone form of the child—seems to be the catalyst for that, allowing and encouraging public contemplation, conversation, and caregiving both within the poem and between poem and readers.¹² Personal grief seems to be the initial impetus for ascribing being to this particular child’s form, but that

grief becomes communal as the poem's readers, too, experience the hope of doubt and the disappointment of assurance. If, through the shared experience of Hemans's poetry, readers mourn the dead who are likely to be forgotten, they also enter into community with and around the effigial forms the poetry produces to care for and perpetuate the dead among the living.

Hemans's effigial forms need not hover in an ambiguous state between life and death to provoke the attention and care of the living; as the unambiguously titled "The Effigies" demonstrates, sculptural human forms, by their very presence, encourage conversation and contemplation which acts to recuperate lives that would otherwise be lost. The poem begins with the speaker gazing on the sepulchral stone renderings of a husband and wife lying side by side, addressing first one—"Warrior!"—then the other—"Woman!" (1, 25). The "image" on the warrior's tomb "With shield and crested head, / Sleeps proudly in the purple gloom" (1, 2-3). Although "The records of [his] name and race / Have faded from the stone," the lyric speaker is able to identify him as a warrior and to understand the heroic life he led—that is, to "trace / What thou hast been and done" (5-8). The Warrior has achieved earthly immortality; his name has been the proud subject of "herald, harp, and bard"; and thus he has had his "reward" (22, 24). In contrast, the "Woman," who cannot be named or defined by her vocation, is identified only by her gender. She cannot even command an active verb as the Warrior does. His "image" "Sleeps"; her "sculptur'd form" "is laid" "at rest / By the armed knight" (26, 25-26), lying there either beside him or because of him. This female effigy has "meek hands" and wears "matron robes" (27, 28); she spent her life alone and largely abandoned, embroidering and weeping, praying for her absent, adventuring spouse (33-46). The allusion to Penelope suggests both the apparent faithfulness and the futility that have marked her life and actions. The poem's speaker asks her "What bard hath sung of *thee*?" (32), "when did *Fame* take heed / Of griefs obscure as these?" (39-40), and points out about her "tasks unguerdon'd" that "*These* fill no minstrel strains" (50,

48). In the final stanza, the speaker contrasts the Woman's celestial afterlife with the Warrior's, telling the female effigy that her love, vigils, prayers, and alms-giving will be rewarded spiritually, for she is "happy, happier than [her] lord, / In that lone path to heaven!" (55-56). On the one hand, the promise of otherworldly consolation is probably offered sincerely by the speaker and by Hemans herself; on the other, however, the litany of the Woman's worldly woes, contrasted so sharply with the Warrior's adventuring, makes heaven seem a poor consolation prize, the equivalent of a lifetime supply of Rice-a-Roni[®] awarded to the runner-up whose feats and fate will go unrecorded and unsung.

Can a woman have it all? Both earthly and heavenly afterlife? If, as I think Hemans believes, the potential for a heavenly afterlife is assured, she is free to focus on creating the conditions for an earthly afterlife for women, a lasting presence in the minds and lives of the living. She suggests that a bodily form as a placeholder is required so that the dead will not disappear from sight and consequently from memory, but the mere presence of the form itself, though necessary, is inadequate for understanding, sharing, and retaining the lives and experiences of those now-dead bodies. The effigial forms must be the objects of conversations and care. Hemans's speakers' apostrophic addresses to the dead and their mortuary statues belie Paul de Man's claims that addressing "death" is a suicidal enterprise. He argues that the "latent threat" of the trope of prosopopeia is its reciprocity; making the dead speak silences the living in death (*Rhetoric* 78). Rather than join the dead in deathly silence, however, Hemans's speakers implicitly invite the dead to rejoin the world of the living through the conversations which form in and around the poems themselves. The speaker of "The Effigies," for example, engages the "Woman" in dialogue by addressing her, imagining and interpreting her experiences, and proclaiming for her a history and a heroism of sorts. And by becoming the "bard" who sings of her, the speaker gives her a kind of "*Fame*" as long as the poem has readers.

Empathetic attentiveness to the now-voiceless human form is necessary for the posterity Hemans posits. The speaker of “The Effigies” begins the final stanza with the words “A still, sad life was thine!” echoing Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” and acknowledging loss, but also alluding to the potential for continuity founded in shared, though temporally distant, experiences. In Wordsworth’s poem, learning in maturity to hear “The still, sad music of humanity” (*LB* 92) when looking on nature is “Abundant recompence” (89) for losing the “aching joys” (85) and “dizzy raptures” (86) of his youthful interaction with nature. His lyric speaker can, it seems, have it all, for even as he gains “a sense sublime” (96), he is “still / A lover of the meadows and the woods, / And mountains; and of all that we behold / From this green earth” (103-06), attaining a transcendent state yet retaining a vital attachment to the earthly. Moreover, his future “decay” (114), will be combated by the presence of his “dearest Friend” (116) whose “wild eyes” (120) will see the “pleasures” (119) the speaker once experienced and whose “voice” (117) will employ “The language of [his] former heart” (118). Wordsworth wants to outlast his own bodily decay. Imagining the language that his “Friend” will take up from the remains of his “former heart” and will translate into empathetic expressions of shared experience allows him to reflect on his own future decay as a source of his continuation. Some critics argue that this “Friend,” Wordsworth’s sister Dorothy, is silenced by the poet so she can do nothing more than reflect his experiences in his own language, but Hemans identifies bardic power in the “Friend’s” position. In “The Effigies,” the present speaker fulfills Dorothy’s future role. Through the caring work of “eyes” and “voice”—seeing the effigy, addressing it, and retelling the life of the Woman in the form of the poem—the speaker reclaims and reconfigures the Woman’s “genial spirits” (Wordsworth *LB* 114), keeping them and her among the earthly and saving them from “decay” and oblivion much as Wordsworth hopes Dorothy will do for him.

The name of the Woman in “The Effigies” remains unknown and knowledge of her and her experiences is necessarily incomplete, but her potential earthly presence among the living is aided, though not ensured, by her position within a family and social class that affords interment in an excellent location—within a chapel near “the stain’d window” (4)—under an impressive effigy. Her form will remain visible indefinitely, ready to attract and receive a visitor’s attention and to provoke an imaginative response in the future. Wealth and the mortuary sculpture it can buy will not assure the posthumous earthly life of the dead, however. Without the poem’s speaker and her empathic engagement, the stone form remains silent, forgotten, and “dead.”¹³ In contrast, neither wealth nor stone effigy is necessary to be remembered in Hemans’s poetic worldview as long as some material remains remain to provoke compassionate response.

“The Peasant Girl of the Rhone” vibrates with contrasts—flesh and stone, male and female, rich and poor, forgotten and remembered—as it upends expected notions of who will be remembered and how. It reveals that neither wealth nor gender in itself or in combination will ensure remembrance but also that the most ephemeral of forms can elicit care and perpetuate the dead. One of the nineteen poems in the *Records of Woman* section of the collection, “The Peasant Girl of the Rhone” begins by recounting the funeral procession and burial of a young warrior who died in battle. The first description of the dead young man occurs as the cortege moves along “With youth’s fair form upon the bier laid low” (17). Hemans often uses the word *form* for describing bodies of both flesh and stone; here it works to distance the warrior’s body from its humanity by emphasizing its aesthetic quality. His “form,” laid out with care and prepared for burial, was “Fair even when found, amidst the bloody slain / Stretch’d by *its* broken lance” (18-19, emphasis added). This corpse is beautiful and worthy of aesthetic admiration much as a statue would be. It is a thing, though, not a person, and the possessive pronoun used to describe this as-yet-unnamed body is the neuter “its.” The corpse is laid in the family tomb, and

a sculptor is commissioned to create an effigy. Only when the effigy is carved to “deck that lordly grave” does the form turn into “the pale image of a youth” which is laid “In slumber on *his* shield” (32, 35, emphasis added). Just as the body was statue-like, the statue is body-like, more human than the original. Hemans uses a metaphor rather than a simile to describe the recumbent warrior so that his mortuary statue does not *appear* to be sleeping, but *is* “laid / In slumber,” and unlike the actual body that was neutralized by the neuter gender, the statue commands the masculine possessive pronoun “*his*.”

The lifelike memorial sculpture meant to serve as a focal point for commemoration is no guarantee of earthly immortality, however; it requires the attention and care of the living. The dead warrior’s friends and father are soon stirred by “Manhood’s high passions” to resume their own activities (40), and he fades from their minds. He will not be remembered for his military exploits nor will he remain part of their social fabric (43-45). The poem’s speaker pronounces his apparent fate: “He lay forgotten in his early shroud” (50) but then reveals that he is, in fact, not completely forgotten. One anonymous person “[f]or years,” brings with “gentle nurture” a garland of flowers to his tomb each day (77, 73). The “gorgeous coronals” that “might speak of love—a secret love and lowly” (77, 68) bring life to the tomb and “brightly clasp[]” (78) the effigy even in mid-winter, keeping the now-named Aymer’s memory alive. When first published in the *Literary Souvenir* for 1826, the poem appeared as “Aymer’s Tomb,” but Hemans changed the title for its inclusion in *Records of Woman* (Records 177). By withholding the young warrior’s name until after the titular but unnamed “Peasant Girl” begins caring for his effigy, Hemans celebrates the often unnoticed and unsung but indispensable role of those who care for and carry forward the dead. Through her actions, the “Peasant Girl” retains the warrior’s memory and restores him to personhood.¹⁴

More interesting than the wealthy warrior's predictable mortuary monument and the care it receives from his socially inferior female admirer is its juxtaposition with the effigy created for the "Peasant Girl" herself which ultimately makes the warrior's earthly immortality subject to her own. The poem ends with an image of the dead body of this "dark-hair'd peasant maid" grasping the "tomb's last garland" (87, 99). In a parody of those recumbent effigies of spouses who lie sedately side-by-side for eternity—the kind described in "The Effigies"—the body of the "peasant maid" lies alone and untended next to Aymer's monument, "within that tomb's proud shadow" (85). Like his had been, her corpse is described in overtly sculptural terms:

That still face
Had once been fair; for on the clear arch'd brow,
And the curv'd lip, there lingered yet such grace
As sculpture gives its dreams. (88-91)

Yet where his body was fair even in death, hers bears only the traces of fairness: her cheek sunken, her dark hair faded, and her "slight form all wasted, as by care" (95). The only way for the peasant maid to be enshrined in this chapel is literally to die and lie here, a flesh substitute for marble sculpture.¹⁵ Where his statue is lifelike, her lifeless body becomes statue-like because no other effigy will be commissioned. The poem's speaker notes, with italics no less, that "*Her* kindred's place / Was not amidst the high De Couci race" (97), yet her care has earned her a memorial of sorts, for as the speaker concludes, "Yet there her shrine had been!" (98). By retaining the "Peasant Girl" among the living, the poem retains her lover as well. Aymer, though beautifully monumentalized, would be forgotten if not the recipient of the poem's memorialized ministrations of "The Peasant Girl of the Rhone."

The apparently ephemeral effigy of the "Peasant Girl" is formed and perpetuated within and by means of a poem that becomes her monument and which begins to generate around itself conversations that will keep her memory among the living. The description of her emaciated and

worn body and her lonely death might imply that the care she provided was a waste just as she was “wasted, as by care,” but Hemans suggests that as a question without supplying answers. When she re-titled the poem for inclusion in *Records of Woman*, she also added two epigraphs—one from Coleridge’s translation of Friedrich von Schiller’s *The Death of Wallenstein* and one from Byron’s *Childe Harold*—that suggest conflicting valuation of postmortem devotion such as the peasant girl’s. Should the “single spot” where one’s lover lies buried be “the whole earth” to a woman as Thekla declares in the first epigraph, or do these “young affections run to waste” as Byron’s speaker declares (*Records* 54)? The answers seem less important than the fact that questions have been raised, generating conversation between the epigraphs’ authors and among readers which serves to retain the “Peasant Girl” and, through her actions, “Aymer” in the consciousness of the living. Hemans’s inclusion of epigraphs fits her typical practice of including ancillary texts with her poems: headnotes and epigraphs written by herself and others as well as explanatory footnotes.¹⁶ Westover reads her dense intertextuality in terms of self-canonization (83), but he also points to the expansive, democratizing effects of her efforts. He likens her anthologies to collections of corporeal remains such as Milton’s hair or Percy Shelley’s heart: “Hemans’s reliquaries, full of quotations, offer fragments of literary tradition, extending readers symbolic access to the entire canon” (84). We might usefully make Westover’s metaphor slightly more literal, for Hemans’s poetic “reliquaries” gather and display dead bodies and effigial forms, paradoxically emphasizing the materiality and multidimensionality of the dead with the epigraphs and intertextual allusions that surround them. Her collections of corporeal remains have the further democratizing effect of expanding the boundaries that define who is worthy of memorializing and being memorialized. She invites readers to join a larger, ongoing, multi-perspectival conversation that has at its center the women, children, and men—wealthy and poor, known and unknown—whose effigial forms supply her ekphrastic objects.

B. Fictile Forms

In Hemans's poetry, effigial forms "fix" memory by acting as visual reminders and prompting the imaginative care and conversation that recuperate and maintain the dead among the living, but even in the absence of a solid effigial figure, poet and poetry can create fictile forms from whatever material remains. Those processes of molding and sculpting, though, intensify the risks in a project of transforming private memory to public memorial, remembering to recording, which is already fraught with the threat of fixity. Hemans was mindful of both the necessity and the cost of turning inherently fragile private remembrances—or as we will see in the case of "The Image in Lava," no remembrance at all—into more permanent public records. Bryan P. Elliott claims that the ekphrastic object in Hemans's poetry becomes "a flattened symbol excluding any other contextual possibilities" (30), but I contend that she actively sought to counteract both the disappearance of unrecorded lives from history and the confining of those lives into a single, limited perspective precisely by offering multiple "contextual possibilities." As I have argued, the oscillations of state and material of the effigial forms in her poems provide one way in which she disrupts expectations and suggests other possibilities to inspire renewed consideration of the dead. "The Image in Lava," in which no solid effigial form exists to transmute from flesh to stone and back, presents a special challenge. Nevertheless, the merest "trace" of this woman and child are enough from which to create a fictile form that suggests and encourages their ongoing presence.

"The Image in Lava" consists of an apostrophic address to and meditation on what is at best a "thing" and may more accurately be called an empty space (1), the "impression of a woman's form, with an infant clasped to the bosom, found at the uncovering of Herculaneum," according to Hemans's note to the poem (*Records* 209). In *Living Forms: Romantics and the*

Monumental Figure, Bruce Haley points out the ambiguity of the word *form* with its dozens of *OED* definitions and subheadings. He is interested in the relationship between the uses of *form* in literary studies to designate something like an unseen structuring principle and the visual forms of human figures depicted in the arts (7). Following Haley—and Hemans—I have been using *form* mainly to designate depictions of the human figure in Hemans’s poetry. However, the fluidity of the concept leads naturally to the notion of form as empty space, a container, a mold to be filled in order to create a solid form. Hemans’s “The Image in Lava” offers a particularly apt case study for the notion of effigy as a space to be filled because its ekphrastic subject, rather than being a solid figure, is a hollow form.¹⁷ Hemans contrasts the still-surviving hollow form of a woman and child who have no known or knowable names, genealogies, or histories and who have only the barest suggestion of an effigy to the man-made “Temple and tower [which] have moulder’d” (5). The “woman’s heart,” where the infant is clasped to her breast, has left only a “trace,” but their image nonetheless “outlast[s] the “proud memorials rear’d / By conquerors of mankind” (7, 11-12). In an apostrophe to the “Babe!” embedded in the central five stanzas of the eleven-stanza poem, the speaker imagines the loving, nurturing moments immediately before “the fiery tomb / Shut round” them (15-16) and the mother’s love and hopes for this child that might have been her “only treasure” (23).¹⁸ The poem ends with the speaker treasuring the sight of “this rude monument, / Cast in affection’s mould” above “all relics / Left by the pomps of old,” for love’s “print upon the dust” remains even after cities have fallen (35-36, 33-34, 38).

Paradoxically, the very ambiguity surrounding the dust and ashes of this “image” bodies forth the woman and her child and makes them part of a larger community. In the final stanza the speaker says “these ashes” have been made holy (43), but it is unclear to what exactly the speaker refers with “these ashes.” Is this the “dust” upon which the impression is made or the remains of the mother and child that have now decayed to dust? In other words, is it the place or

the people who have been “given...holiness”? Kathleen Lundeen implies that person and place are inseparable, referring to the lava impression of the woman and child as “a full-body death mask” which does not replicate their bodies but *is* their bodies in a way (par. 13).¹⁹ Hemans blurs the boundaries between impression and impressers with ashes that could be place, person, or, most likely, a blending that intermingles human and humus which, like Byron’s mingling of and with the dead discussed in chapter 3, preserves both. Hemans has somehow taken a hollow mold and given it the solidity of a tangible form that will, like the very soil, endure, yet the hollow form remains, waiting to be viewed and perpetually refilled. In addition to the ambiguity of the “ashes” themselves, Hemans’s speaker includes a range of possibilities for apostrophic addressees in the last stanza and, by extension, for the creators and preservers of immortality. This technique expands indefinitely the community of those who remember and retain the child and mother. The speaker endows “Thou”—the one “whose earthly glow / Hath given these ashes holiness”—with the quality of immortality (42-43), but the syntax and uncertain pronoun referent for “Thou” make it unclear whether the apostrophic object is “Love, human love” addressed in the penultimate stanza (37), the “Babe” addressed in the central five stanzas, the mother and child combination, their effigial impression, God, or perhaps even those who “gaze” (35) on the impression *in situ* or in the poem. Hemans positions the poetically re-created materiality of “these ashes” in a social space of addressees to provide preservative potential.

I am suggesting that by surrounding the effigial forms in her poetry with a multiplicity of voices Hemans gives them composite voices of their own, but others read her project less charitably, as one of appropriation and effacement of their bodies and lives into which she projects her own self and emotions. With a hollow ekphrastic object at its center, “The Image in Lava” tends to act as a lightning rod for this kind of criticism. Because no factual information exists about the woman and child other than their implied loving bond, some scholars dismiss the

poem and consign its subjects to ashen oblivion. Or to put it another way, they see only the void.²⁰ Elliott, for instance, protests that Hemans has “no more access to the lost inner lives of these women than any other historically distant person: she must create these lives, and the remains again become the mold into which her thoughts flow and solidify into verse, recasting the original women into a new form” (29). While it is true (and would arguably be true of anyone trying to access the inner life of another) that Hemans cannot access this woman’s inner life or lived reality, Elliott misrepresents her response. He claims she “silenc[es] the object/monument’s ability to speak for the dead, inserting her own voice instead” (29). About “The Image in Lava” in particular, Elliot charges that the “speaker converts [the woman] into an iconic figure of motherhood, and it is this icon that endures, not the woman herself” (36). I contend that Hemans understands the women about whom she writes to have always already been silenced, erased by and from history. She would, I think, agree with Elliott that “the problem lies in the fact that no trace of the historical woman’s identity remains” (36), so she attempts to correct for that by making something of the slightest “trace” that does remain. That something is bodied forth not simply by Hemans’s own thoughts filling the form but by the voices that enter into conversation around it. Hemans’s ekphrastic forms—both solid and hollow—capture what they can of an individual who has been nearly effaced by history and position it within a larger social and cultural system to tether it to the living and to life. In other words, identifying the woman whose image is impressed in lava as a “figure of motherhood” is not a failure on Hemans’s part; it positions the woman within a larger schema of relationships and roles that may make her more memorable and understandable without denying both her individuality and its inscrutability.

Hemans knows that “recasting” these figures will, of necessity, involve a certain creative type-casting, using imagination and invention along with whatever clues and evidence—“traces”—remain of the remains to construct effigial forms, but far from the “flattening” of

which Elliott accuses her, she wields ekphrasis, formal devices, and extra-textual material to create multidimensional work suitable even for “precasting” herself as both sculptor and sculptural form.²¹ Based on letters describing her visits to view monuments and sculpture, Hemans seems to have been particularly drawn to sculptural forms because of the latent potential for movement she sensed in them and the affinities she identified between the products and processes of sculptural and poetic creation (Chorley 2.159, 2.72). Her personal experience of the flexibility allowed by the sculpting process likely influenced her as well. She describes sitting for sculptor Angus Fletcher: “the sculptor allows much greater liberty of action [than when sitting for a picture], as every part of the head and form is necessary to *his* work. My *effigy* is now nearly completed...” (Chorley 2.66, original emphasis). Later, she returns to the sculptor’s studio: “Imagine my dismay on visiting Mr. Fletcher’s sculpture-room, on beholding at least *six Mrs. Hemans*, placed as if to greet me in every direction. There is something absolutely frightening in this multiplication of one’s self to *infinity*” (2.150, original emphasis). Despite her feigned horror, she seems pleased and intrigued at the potential for such multiplicities, and she pursues something similar in her poetry to preserve and perpetuate the memories of women “to *infinity*.”

In what Peter Simonsen calls “her most important ekphrastic,” she aligns her poetic process with that of the sculptor “Properzia Rossi” and implicitly carves with words her own multidimensional and lasting sculptural form, a poetic auto-icon of herself (330, 331).²² Properzia Rossi was a sixteenth-century female sculptor, poet, and musician from Bologna. According to Hemans’s headnote, she based her poem on a painting of the sculptor showing her last work, a basso-relievo of Ariadne, to a Roman Knight whom she loves but who regards her work—and, by extension, her—with indifference. The epigraph, spoken in the voice of Rossi, reveals the shape of the poem: she seems to reject her talents and the fame they have brought

because they have not attracted her would-be lover to her, but she dreams of her name outliving her and having a lasting persuasive power that she has not had in life. Although there are no mortuary effigies in this poem as there are in the other poems I have discussed, the sculpture within the poem functions as an effigy for Rossi who in turn functions as an effigy for Hemans.²³

In the second of five sections, the dynamic, oscillating effects that characterize many of Hemans effigial poems are replicated when Rossi is inspired to create, imbues her sculpture with her own history and shape, and asks her creation to speak for her to her lover:

It comes,—the power
Within me born, flows back; my fruitless dower
That could not win me love. Yet once again
I greet it proudly, with its rushing train
Of glorious images:—they throng—they press—
A sudden joy lights up my loneliness,—
I shall not perish all!

The bright work grows
Beneath my hand, unfolding, as a rose,
Leaf by leaf, to beauty; line by line,
I fix my thought, heart, soul, to burn, to shine,
Thro' the pale marble's veins. It grows—and now
I give my own life's history to thy brow,
Forsaken Ariadne! thou shalt wear
My form, my lineaments....

.....
Thou art the mould
Wherein I pour the fervent thoughts, th' untold,
The self-consuming! Speak to him of me,
Thou, the deserted by the lonely sea,
With the soft sadness of thine earnest eye,
Speak to him, lorn one! deeply mournfully,
Of all my love and grief!... (26-40, 45-51)

As the sculptor entreats her creation to represent her, artist and art, flesh body and stone effigy, are conflated, as are sculpture and poem. Rossi's powers are enacted through the vitality of enjambed lines and quick, broken phrases marked by dashes. Simonsen writes of this passage:

Hemans aligns poem and sculpture as she puns on the word 'line' to denote the lines of sculpture, but certainly also to connote the lines of verse inscribed on the white page, where they may be imagined to look like the dark veins that animate

the white sculpture.... Indeed, we may see the dark lines or veins literally in the congestion of dashes in the lines that evoke the spontaneous overflow of images at the moment of inspiration.... Thus, in a minimal but decisive way poetic lines of typographic inscription reproduce the carved lines of relief sculpture. (332)

There is a danger in this; the lines that *delineate* the form also *delimit* the form. The process of sculpting is one of selection and subtraction, and the final form is a product of omission as much as commission. That which remains can never fully represent the living form it represents.

One way both the character and her creator destabilize this potential stasis and move through and beyond the necessary boundaries is with the play of senses against one another. The emphasis on sound in this section of the poem in which the effigy is created and at the end of the poem when the artist leaves her “name— / As a deep thrill may linger on the lyre / When its full chords are hush’d...” offers yet more conflation and confusion, this time of senses and sister arts (125-27). Scott notes that unlike other Romantic ekphrastic poems that present art from a distance—untouchable and visual—this poem focuses on the tactile and aural, ending with a privileging of voice over visual image as Rossi leaves her name “on my country’s air to dwell” (49; Hemans 131). The poem bids readers immerse themselves in a multi-sensory experience and not only contemplate but engage with the speaking, multi-dimensional form(s) before them.

Rossi and her creator Hemans envision the fame that will allow their names and their memories to live on, and they each create a fictile surrogate, an effigy of stone or poem which comes to life under its creator’s shaping influence and in turn cares for its creator by speaking for her and attracting the attention and care of others. Once one is buried in a tomb or in the literary archives and disappears from sight, she disappears from memory as well. A material form—a body or a body of work—has the potential to make the dead visible and present among the living, but corpses or corpuses—remains, literary or otherwise—are not enough; the effigial form must inspire and participate in questions, conversations, and reconsiderations. Within Hemans’s

poems, the settings in which the dead are located—whether in human or stone form—are often isolated, and their continuing presence within the memories and imaginations of the living might seem endangered precisely by that isolation. The “communities” depicted around them tend to be small: a lover, a child, a parent, sometimes only the speaker/observer who may or may not have known the person in life, but with each act of questioning, caring, and remembering, the community expands to include both dead and living, and in the re-creation of the dead and the care shown them in poetic form, the community expands yet again. The effigies come to inhabit a public space, no matter how isolated their depicted or implied physical location, so they remain part of the social fabric and become part of the collective memory. Scott notes that “In redirecting the focus of ekphrasis and in giving objects like sepulchres and tombs special status, Hemans effectively moves the *objet d’art* out of the aesthetic domain of the art museum and into a less elite, more social space” (36). Here in this “more social space,” the dead and their effigies are not the objects of silent contemplation or whispered asides as they would be in the art museum; they are positioned in a lively arena as the objects of corporate interest and care.

In his essay “Funeral and Sepulchral Honours” (1811), William Attfield writes that even people who give up “hope of posthumous regard” wish to be remembered after death because “To be totally forgotten ... without a record or a place, is ... intolerable” (8). Hemans provides for herself and the women, children, and men whose effigial forms populate *Records of Woman* and her other poetry just such a “record or a place.” The paradoxes of her poetry—that material remains are somehow coextensive with poetic rendering and that the visible presence of those mortal and mortuary remains advance earthly immortality—recuperate and retain the dead among the living now and perpetually translate them to future.

C. Statuary Forms

Like Hemans, Jeremy Bentham is dubious about preservation through memory alone, so he too writes statuary forms into being, advocating and creating multidimensional, multimedia effigial figures whose materiality and visibility induce imaginative responses among the living and keep the dead physically present and of use now and in the future. Unlike Hemans, however, the written work with which Bentham bodies forth the dead dictates the use of both anatomical and funeral forms of embalming to ensure not only the preservation of their posthumous places in society but their bodily preservation as well. Bentham's plan makes possible what Godwin only dreams of in his *Essay on Sepulchres* when writing of a hypothetical dead "friend": "This form is all that is now left of him.... I would give all that I possess, to purchase the art of preserving the wholesome character and rosy hue of this form, that it might be my companion still" (*Essay* 9). Bentham seeks to ensure that the dead generally and his own dead self in particular retain their "rosy hue" and remain vibrant participants among the living, but he also attempts to minimize re-interpretation, an impulse that aligns with his theories of language and law. His Auto-Icon project, wherein the human body after anatomical dissection and preservation of the viscera was to be exsiccated, stuffed, and displayed as its own statue, has confounded readers from the beginning with the apparent absurdity of the proposal juxtaposed against his apparent seriousness reiterated in multiple documents over the span of decades. For readers who understand Bentham to be averse to the literary and disinterested in Romantic concerns of the individual and the imagination, the Auto-Icon project with its confluence of highly individual, seemingly fantastical elements is all but incomprehensible in relation to his rational, methodical Utilitarianism. I suggest, however, that repositioning the multimedia Auto-Icon project within the context of Romantic literature that explores how the corpse might be used to retain memories

and knowledge of the past and translate them usefully to the future provides a better understanding of the concerns motivating and shaping Bentham's project.

It may be difficult to imagine a less likely pairing than Felicia Hemans and Jeremy Bentham, but as recent scholarship has shown, Hemans was more clear-eyed about the compromised positions of women in society and more calculatingly practical in her negotiation of the literary marketplace than was previously acknowledged, and as Mark Canuel has convincingly argued, Bentham's positions contrast much less sharply with those of Romantic writers of imaginative literature than has generally been recognized.²⁴ In fact, the domestic "poetess" and the utilitarian philosopher have more in common than a potential philosophical convergence; their social circles overlapped as well. In his *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans*, Henry F. Chorley counts Bentham's friend and future literary executor "Dr. Bowring" among "those passing literary friends in whose society Hemans found such genuine enjoyment" and whom she "gathered round her hearth" on many evenings when she lived at Wavertree near Liverpool (1.215). Hemans apparently enjoyed Bowring's company and was conversant with Utilitarian thought. She wrote of "our Utilitarian friend" that "I think his pretensions to that title are... dubious"; "I do not know when I have been more amused by his grotesque flights of conversation" (2.83-84). Readers may find Bentham's juxtaposition of utility and fancy disconcerting, but Hemans seems to have recognized the potential for them to coexist early on. In an essay that draws attention to Hemans's poetic participation in contemporary reform debates between her early patron William Roscoe and Jeremy Bentham and between Sir Walter Scott and his Conservative friend Sir Francis Palgrave, Nanora Sweet pinpoints Bowring as "a trickster figure... who opens an unsuspected dialogue between poetry and reform in the 1820s" (159). In short, Sweet writes, "Utilitarians may be less 'serious' and ... popular writers more earnest than

we had imagined” (159-60). As the remainder of this chapter reveals, reading Bentham’s effigial preservation project in light of Hemans’s and vice versa illuminates both.

Bentham’s “Auto-Icon project,” as I am referring to it, consists of two elements: written texts and corporeal form. The first includes the combination of documents that describe Bentham’s theory and practice of Auto-Iconization. From its beginnings, the project which comes to be articulated as universally applicable was also intensely personal—one might say almost lyric—as Bentham considered how his body could be of postmortem use to the living. The project originates in his first will of 24 August 1769, written when he was only twenty-one years old. As long as funeral expenses did not “in any wise exceed forty shillings,” he did not care how or where his body was buried, but he did request that if his Executor judged he had died “of any such disease” that would advance “the art of Surgery or science of Physic ... by observations to be made on the opening of [his] body,” it should be delivered to Dr. George Fordyce for dissection (“Will” 4). Twenty-three years later, in the codicil to his will of 15 July 1792, he expanded and developed his postmortem plans for himself, forbidding the burial of the body and bequeathing it to “Doctor Armstrong ... to be by him caused to be anatomized in the most public manner” (“Will” 6). He further stipulated that subsequent to dissection, his head should be preserved “after the New Zealand manner” and placed atop his clothed, stuffed skeleton and that his “effigy” be “seated in an appropriate chair... at one end of the table” in the manner of a chairman whenever his commemoration club would meet (“Will” 6). His postmortem plans reached their final state in his last will of 30 May 1832, completed about one week before his death. In it he bequeathed his body to his friend and fellow anatomy reform advocate Dr. Thomas Southwood Smith who, after ascertaining that Bentham was indeed dead, was to “take the requisite and appropriate measures to the disposal and preservation of the several parts of my bodily frame in the manner expressed” in a paper annexed to the will and

marked “B: Auto Icon” (“Will” 7, 8). This appendix directs and describes the use of his body for illustrating public anatomy lectures presented before “scientific and literary men,” the preservation of his organs such as the heart and kidney as anatomical specimens, the creation of his Auto-Icon, and its display (“Will” 16).²⁵

Another key component to the written element of Bentham’s Auto-Icon project is his *Auto-Icon: Or Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living*, which one pair of authors has called a “manifesto for the age of monuments” (Pickering and Westcott 3). The treatise offers not only an explication of the fate to which he willed his own corpse; it also urges the widespread adoption of Auto-Iconization for the good of society.²⁶ Bentham’s title alludes to a pro-anatomy reform pamphlet written by Southwood Smith titled “Use of the Dead to the Living” (1828), but his *Auto-Icon* extends the “Use of the Dead to the Living” far beyond the operating theatre.²⁷ He proposes that “the mass matter which death has created, be disposed of with a view to the felicity of mankind—in a word, to the best advantage, —the comparatively incorruptible part converted into an Auto-Icon, —the soft and corruptible parts employed for the purpose of anatomical instruction” (*AI* 2). These forms would be created by exsiccating the head for “Auto-Icons of the head alone,” and where economically feasible, attaching the prepared head to the skeleton which would be cleaned, articulated, wrapped with stuffing material, and clothed to create “whole-length Auto-Icons” (*AI* 3).²⁸ With the application of “paint” to correct for the considerable color change brought about by the drying process and with the use of readily available, completely natural-looking glass eyes, the “properly preserved” head “is better than a statue” (*AI* 2). Like his other reform-minded initiatives, Bentham’s *Auto-Icon* is ostensibly motivated by utilitarian concerns. In addition to furthering medical knowledge by making cadavers more readily available for dissection, adoption of his preservation plan would alleviate overcrowding in cemeteries and the attendant health risks associated with the presence of decaying bodies among

the living (*AI* 3), reduce funeral costs thereby releasing individuals from ongoing and often financially crippling payments to burial clubs (*AI* 9), and most importantly, provide a means of identification and memorialization based on the very “real entity” of the individual him- or herself—that is, on the “perceptible ... corporeal substances,” of “bodies” (“Ontology” 120-22).

As shocking as the process for creating the Auto-Icons might initially seem, it is the uses to which the figures might be put and the fact that Bentham actually became such a figure himself that strain readers’ credulity, making *Auto-Icon* seem, in the words of some of his recent commentators, “absurd” (Collings *Monstrous* 129), “bizarre,” (Crimmins xi; Kayman 227), “whimsical” (Engelmann 2), and “provocative” (Engelmann 2; Kayman 227).²⁹ When considered from a utilitarian point of view, Auto-Iconization would be no more a desecration of the body than the process of anatomical dissection itself, and the justifications Bentham gives for his proposal address very real environmental, hygienic, and economic concerns. However, his proposed deployment of Auto-Icons for such uses as lining the drives of country houses—with “Copal varnish” protecting the faces from rain and “caoutchouc the habiliments” (*AI* 3)—or performing as animated puppets in “Theatrical or Dramatic” exhibitions suggests why scholars have struggled to explain the relationship between the competing utilitarian and fantastic aspects of *Auto-Icon* (*AI* 3, 12).³⁰ The temptation to dismiss the *Auto-Icon* as a joke or Swiftian satire in the vein of “A Modest Proposal” is thwarted, though, by the second element of Bentham’s project: the very real Auto-Icon of Bentham himself, currently sitting placidly in a case in University College London, the walking stick he called “Dapple” at hand (Marmoy). The result of 63-years’ planning, the Auto-Icon project was no joke to Bentham, or not merely a joke.

Reading the Auto-Icon project as a conjoined text that participates in the literary explorations of how the corpse and its artistic renderings might usefully retain and transmit memories and knowledge of the dead to inform and shape the future cannot reconcile all of the

contradictions or alleviate the strangeness of the Auto-Icon, but it does offer additional context for understanding Bentham's motivation and techniques. Besides the fact that one actual Auto-Icon was produced and remains in existence, the chief difference between Bentham's written explorations of how the dead can be of use in the future and those of other Romantic writers is his intentionality. A grave can be stood upon, decay and dust can be mingled with and recombined, and effigial forms can be posthumously re-produced poetically at any time (though the greater the temporal distance from the dead, the more imaginative input is required to access and re-create the past before it can be translated for future use). Rather than retroactively locating and re-creating the dead from whatever forms and fragments happen to remain, however, Bentham proactively seeks to provide the forms that will affect the future. In the very first paragraph of *Auto-Icon*, Bentham catalogues a number of bodies—both human and animal—that serendipitously “have been preserved for ages” including human bodies “discovered in the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii” (*AI* 1). He writes that “Every fact of this sort furnishes valuable materials for thought: but all these facts are the result of accident—not of intention” (*AI* 2). Hemans's “The Image in Lava” manages to preserve poetically two such bodies “discovered in the ruins of Herculaneum,” but even though she retains some version of this pair, her version is necessarily, at best, “similitude” not “identity” as Bentham prefers. If Hemans makes the most out of “accident”—the ashen remains of the Mount Vesuvius eruption, for instance—to retrieve the past and create a future for those she preserves in poetic forms, Bentham is determined to act by “intention” to preserve the dead literally as well as literarily. His planned extension of his and others' posthumous utility into future generations by means of their own corpses relies on and accentuates the paradoxes of Hemans's poetry; here, too, empirical attachment to the dead body, though taken to a more extreme and literal form, emphasizes a future potentiality for the dead.

For both Bentham and Hemans, the effigial figure acts as the linchpin that connects past and future, and participates in the larger tradition of commemoration through statuary. Mona Ozouf, describing the context out of which the Panthéon in Paris arose, explains that visual forms, especially statues, were one of the favored means for commemorating “great men” in the eighteenth century because they were associated with the greatness of classical antiquity and because they focused on a single expressive gesture or moment which contributed to the statue’s pedagogical effectiveness. More importantly, however, sculpture “was solid: it bore the stamp of eternity and hence a promise of immortality” (333). Bentham, like Hemans, seeks to exploit these benefits of statuary. As I will discuss further below, both writers extend “greatness” beyond the definitions of “great men” typically employed in ancient Greece or early nineteenth-century England, and the wide availability of the effigial forms their writing produces is integral to their democratizing efforts. They also make use of the dead human form to instruct. Most importantly, though, the visual materiality of statuary promotes immortality. Bentham emphasizes the connection between “the Auto-Icon art” and the tradition of plastic arts, declaring “now *every man* be *his own statue*” (*AI* 2, original emphasis). Although “monuments of stone or marble” will no longer be needed because each man is his “own monument,” Bentham is not dismissing monuments, merely converting them to petrified flesh in the form of Auto-Icons which will continue to exist as he anticipates a moment of retrospective appreciation for himself and others (*AI* 4, 3). And in an inspired combination of “Honorific” and “Economic” uses, the Auto-Icons could be more than statuary in their own right by “furnish[ing] moulds for the creation of perfect and economical busts” in the rare cases in which “men obtain such a celebrity as makes their resemblances a subject matter of commerce” (*AI* 3, 6).³¹

As important as the sculptural form is for the Auto-Icon project, Bentham also emphasizes its literary aspects; aesthetic forms interact with one another in this multimodal

enterprise. Bentham links the effigial form and writing when he proclaims that not only can each person be his (or her) own statue, “*Every man is his best biographer*” (AI 2). Body is conflated with statue which is conflated with the written account of a life. In other words, material remains are simultaneously literary remains. As a kind of ur-art, Auto-Icons can inspire and enable further creation of literary arts as well as the plastic arts. In much the way Auto-Icon statuary could be used as a basis to produce simulacra of itself, Auto-Icons could drive literary production in the realm of fiction. He alludes to the Auto-Icon playing a role similar to the wax figure behind the veil in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* when he suggests that Auto-Icons might be used by novelists “of the terrific school” such as “a Mrs Radcliffe, or a member of the German ghost-seeing illuminati” (AI 16). Making the connection between the Auto-Icon and the literary more explicit still, Bentham considers the difficulties in accounting for the status of an Auto-Icon as property and analogizes it to literary property and the doctrine of copyright settled in the House of Lords in 1774, concluding that the Auto-Icon is a “new subject-matter of property...brought for the first time into existence” (AI 10). Bentham’s analogy, according to Martin A. Kayman, is entirely appropriate because literary property was “a new form of immaterial property created by writing” just as the Auto-Icon is a body produced by writing—that is, by Bentham’s will and treatise (226). Far from rejecting the literary, Bentham embraces this aspect of his project and suggests authors will be among the worthies venerated in Auto-Iconic form (AI 6).³²

If we consider Bentham to be working within a literary context, some of the affinities between his project and other Romantic-era imaginative writing become clearer, including his perhaps surprising engagement with the imagination.³³ Bentham values the Auto-Icons themselves because their inherent individuality requires no imaginative link between person and effigy, but this has the benefits of making the Auto-Icons widely available and, paradoxically, of enabling the more imaginative uses to which they are put. Bentham asks, quite reasonably,

“What resemblance, what painting, what statue of a human being can be so like him, as, in the character of an Auto-Icon, he or she will be to himself or herself?” (*AI* 3). A statue may *resemble* its sitter, but the Auto-Icon *is* its sitter because the sitter is always already an icon. The most important factor, though, is the head. He notes early in the piece, “As regards anatomical purposes, one body serves for instruction nearly as well as another; but the head of each individual is peculiar to him, and, when properly preserved, is better than a statue” (*AI* 2). Or as Regina Janes describes the power of decapitated heads during the French Revolution: “The head tells all. It identifies itself” (250). Bentham prefers the “perceptible real entity” (“Ontology” 118) or the “identity” of the Auto-Icon and its perfect “equality” with the dead human form over the “similitude” of statuary, for, he explains, “In Geometry, identity is the source and standard of equality” (*AI* 2). In other words, the Auto-Icon equals the person who has been Auto-Iconized, even though each (head-length) Auto-Icon is unique. That uniqueness is its own form of equality.

The Auto-Icon plan makes it possible for each individual to have an ideal posthumous monument and makes available to society a monument of each individual. Although he highlights the Auto-Icons of the well-heeled which could, for instance, be “ranged like so many statues” in the mansions of “opulent families” to testify to their pedigree (*AI* 5) and those of great philosophers (*AI* 13-15), politicians (*AI* 5), and authors (*AI* 6), Bentham’s notion of who is worthy of Auto-Iconization is overwhelmingly inclusive.³⁴ As Paul A. Pickering and Robyn Westcott point out, Bentham recognized the “spirit of the age” (3) and imagined Auto-Icons being made of both poor and rich, even if, as he writes in *Auto-Icon* this must be done at “the common expense,” so “they would be placed on the same level” (*AI* 3). Likewise, both men and women will be Auto-Iconized; any “embarrassing questions” about how to appropriately dispose of the Auto-Icons posed by, for instance, multiple successive or simultaneous spouses could easily be solved by displaying Auto-Icons not by familial but by gendered grouping (*AI* 4). In

other words, much like Hemans's expansive notions of who should be remembered and retained through effigial forms, Bentham suggests neither wealth nor gender should exclude an individual from Auto-Iconization, and he is even unwilling to define exclusions based on the "age at which a human being should be admitted to the honours of Auto-Iconism," writing that this is a matter "to be debated and determined" (*AI* 4). His plan makes ideal posthumous statuary available to everyone: ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, children of all ages.

Although Bentham is not typically thought of as celebrating the individual or the imagination, *Auto-Icon* does both. The Auto-Icon—which requires no imagination to identify it with its living person—acts to inspire imaginative responses in its requisite audience. It almost seems as if the imagination is freed to become more boldly useful at the sight of the Auto-Icon because the mechanical aspect of the Auto-Icon, the material figure, does not itself siphon off and absorb portions of viewers' imaginations as looking at statuary likenesses might. Viewers' imaginations are released from the drudgery of matching games and can focus on re-creating the life and experiences of the person before them and envisioning how that person's ideas might continue to affect the future. Pickering and Westcott describe the Auto-Icon's audience-oriented nature and necessity in this way: Bentham based his assertion that the Auto-Icons would "set curiosity in motion,—virtuous curiosity" (*AI* 7) "on the idea that Auto-Icons would initiate and ultimately be accessed through a process of constructive engagement with their audience" (5-6). When imagining his own Auto-Iconized state and the pilgrims who will make their way to his "quasi sacred Auto-Icon," Bentham rapturously addresses his audience: "Reader, whoever thou art, put on for a moment the wings of imagination, transport thyself to future ages" (*AI* 15).

The surprising sense that one is joining Bentham on a flight of fancy is evident throughout the piece, but his harnessing of imaginative potential for future improvement is not a new technique for him. His earliest published work, *A Fragment on Government* (1776), contains

a passage in which he makes a case for conducting debates on the basis of utility as opposed to “womanish scolding and childish altercation” precisely because with utility as the foundation, debaters can proceed to the kind of creative problem-solving we might now call brainstorming. He writes, the “question is now manifestly a question of conjecture concerning so many future contingent matters of fact: to solve it, both parties then are naturally directed to support their respective persuasions by the only evidence the nature of the case admits of;—the evidence of such *past* matters of fact as appear to be analogous to those contingent *future* ones” (*Government* 104, 105, original emphasis). In effect, making a conjecture about the future, based on knowledge of the past, creates the future. In Bentham’s last written work, the *Auto-Icon*, the same formula holds with the knowledge of the past being presented and literally embodied by Auto-Icons of the dead to spark the imagination of “contingent *future*” possibilities. Throughout *Auto-Icon*, the imagination connects past to future through the figure of the effigial Auto-Icon, whether it is positioned at the head of Commemoration Clubs (*AI* 5), participating in Dialogues of the Dead (*AI* 13), or is an object of pilgrimages whom people visit “to gather from the study of individuals, benefits for mankind” (*AI* 17).

Bentham’s Auto-Iconized forms and Hemans’s poetic effigial forms work similarly by keeping the dead present and participatory among the living precisely due to their visibility, with Bentham’s extreme empiricism—his fully committed attachment to the materiality of the corpse itself—paradoxically heightening his imaginative rendering of the utility of the dead. Bentham’s Auto-Icons must be seen and integrated among the living to be of use. After his initial explanation of what Auto-Icons are in *Auto-Icon*, he begins by enumerating the categories of uses they might fill, but even as he ostensibly turns first to the moral uses to which they can be put, he in fact turns to *where* they might be put. Churches are an ideal location for tapping into the moral potential of Auto-Icons, but the discussion is really about storage and presentation.

Churches, he writes, are “ready-provided receptacles ... for all classes,—for rich and poor” (*AI* 3). Walls could be “composed of head-length Auto-Icons” or the heads could be “stowed one above another in four-sided pyramids” like “cannon-balls or bomb-shells” are stored in arsenals (*AI* 3). The problem with this latter method, obviously, is that “the pyramid presents only a small number of Auto-Icons to view,—the multitude would remain like the mummies enclosed in Egyptian Pyramids, in a state of everlasting concealment” (*AI* 3). Auto-Icons must be seen to be “heard”: as the objects of pilgrimages, the “Auto-Icons of the virtuous in their silence would be eloquent preachers. ‘Go thou and do likewise,’ would be the lessons they would teach” (*AI* 7).

As Auto-Icons, the dead become instruments for producing imaginative effects on the living, and thus they may retain some influence in the world “*they still inhabit!*” as Godwin might put it (*Essay* 12). For instance, Bentham imagines positioning “Auto-Icons of criminals” in a “temple of dishonour” which acts as a sort of Purgatory. Here they would remain unless public opinion changed, which it is wont to do as it “is enlightened by experience, by knowledge, by philosophy” (*AI* 6). If public opinion were to judge that the “reputation of an Auto-Icon” had been wrongly injured, it “might redress the wrong” by transferring the “sufferer” to the “temple of honour.” Likewise if the “interests and prejudices of our age” were to incorrectly position an Auto-Icon in the temple of honour, it might, when those interests and prejudices had “passed away, be placed prominently in the temple of dishonor” (*AI* 6). Practical and flexible, this plan would alleviate the problem Westminster Abbey experienced during the last decade of the eighteenth century when it became overcrowded with monuments, would allow for more diversity than St. Paul’s Cathedral which, from 1791, became “a ‘Temple of British Fame’ for Britain’s military and naval heroes” (Hoath 44), and would solve the problem of “hasty apotheoses” experienced at the Panthéon where the drama of “election and exclusion [was] exemplified by the shocking spectacle of Mirabeau’s de-Pantheonization: his remains were

spirited out a side door at the very moment when Marat's entered by the main entrance" (Ozouf 342, 340).³⁵ In Bentham's plan, the "vibrations of Auto-Icons between the two temples" would be instructive for all (*AI* 6). Although the temples defining the poles between which Bentham's Auto-Icons vibrate are significantly different than the states and forms between which Hemans's effigial forms oscillate, the sense of dynamic movement similarly inspires imaginative response to the dead and suggests that the dead need not be permanently fixed in stasis when they remain objects of public contemplation and care.

The preserved corporeal form allows both Hemans and Bentham to imagine the dead not merely as pawns of the living, but as participants in life. Bentham's dead *do* things, remaining consequential among the living, even if their movements must be executed by others. Auto-Icons could, for instance, correct and prevent inheritance fraud, for while "Names may be invented—can be forged; and the existence of persons bearing them can be asserted" in heraldic colors, no less, "Auto-Icons cannot be invented, cannot be forged" (*AI* 5). Going one better than the keepers of justice in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in a post-Auto-Iconic world, "Were a murder committed, and the body taken in hand by the Auto-Icon-making practitioner before the features had been subject to change by the putrefaction process," the suspect could be confronted with the Auto-Icon of his or her alleged victim at any later date to observe whether the suspect "experience[d] such emotions as would lead to conclusive evidence of guilt" (*AI* 5). That is, a murder victim could continue to confront suspects as long as necessary until the true murderer could be discovered, thereby playing an active role in the conviction and punishment of his or her own killer. More mundanely, the afterlife could be a sort of posthumous busman's holiday with Auto-Icons remaining in the places and stations they occupied when living: the "Lords Spiritual and Temporal, in their *Auto-Icon* state, should be disposed of in their own most Honourable House... with their robes on their back—their coronets on their head" (*AI* 4).³⁶ A selection of Auto-Icons

may be used to create a “Temple of Fame” (*AI* 4), and “the Auto-Icon of a venerated preacher” might be placed “in the chapel where he had taught” so that “Though dead, yet he speaketh!” (*AI* 6). Although Bentham does not specifically say so, he implies that this active role in the lives and thoughts of the living would not be possible for the dead if they were not physically present.

Auto-Icons maintain an active afterlife, and Bentham envisions—and dictates—no less for himself. Others chaired the Pitt Club and the Fox Club because the “Auto-Icon system” did not yet exist during *their* last days (*AI* 6). Not so for Bentham’s Club: “when Bentham has ceased to live, (in memory will he never cease to live!) whom shall the Bentham Club have for its chairman? Whom but Bentham himself? On him will all eyes be turned, —to him will all speeches be addressed” (*AI* 5). If the situation described in *Auto-Icon* might be dismissed as merely fanciful or hypothetical, his final will dictates the reality of his posthumous presence should such a meeting occur. He specifies that in the event his “previous friends and other Disciples” should meet “for the purpose of commemorating the Founder of the greatest happiness system of morals and legislation [his] executor will from time to time cause to be conveyed to the room in which they meet the said Box or case with the contents [Bentham’s Auto-Icon] there to be stationed in such part of the room as to the assembled company shall seem meet” (“Will” 8). Bentham’s corpse in its preserved state will participate in the world of the living, and as such, it will retain a sort of undead status, but it can only do so as a result of careful antemortem planning and postmortem care.

Bentham recognizes the dynamic potential of sculptural and written forms, particularly when they play off one another, to heighten an audience’s imaginative response and to create a form of immortality. He uses the Auto-Icon and the writing that surrounds it in much the same way other Romantic writers exploit the interaction between media. We might think, for instance, of Blake’s illuminated manuscripts that juxtapose text and image with meaning resonating in the

interstices between the two. Not only does Bentham blur the boundaries between visual and literary artistic creations, but he also blurs distinctions between static written or visual objects and performance. His Auto-Icon will not only preside over his Commemoration Club, but it will also play the starring role in Dialogues of the Dead during which his artificially animated and voiced effigy will engage in debate with luminaries such as Aristotle, Bacon, D'Alembert, and Locke (*AI* 13). The performance aspect of the Auto-Icon is not limited to the figure's activities; it extends to the confusion of practice and theory that characterizes *Auto-Icon*. His *Auto-Icon* is ostensibly a proposal for general use, but the boundaries between the "Farther Uses of the Dead" and the "farther uses" of his own postmortem self become indistinct with the appearance of his Auto-Icon in *Auto-Icon*. The repetition and variation between his *Auto-Icon* proposal written for public consumption and his personal wills, their codicils, and appendices further complicates the distinctions between fancy and fact. The "vibrations" become more complex still with enactment of the stipulations in his will for a public lecture over his dead body, the subsequent public dissection of his body, and of course, the creation and display of his Auto-Icon. Writing, performance art, and statuary converge to form a multimedia project that will remain the subject of public consideration and will keep Bentham active and utile after death.

Bentham's multi-part Auto-Icon project works in much the way I have argued Hemans's oscillations between states and forms do to disrupt simplistic acceptance of first impressions (e.g. that a dead Bentham is no longer useful), but like Hemans, he also seizes on the dynamic oscillations between artist and art. His antemortem written production of his own Auto-Icon projects his postmortem self and work into the future where his fictile form will continue to speak for him much as Hemans's Rossi and Rossi's Ariadne do. Hemans's fascination with ekphrasis logically extends to Bentham. Haley suggests that Romantic writers attempt "to restore damaged, faded, or unfamiliar figures to the status of living forms" (5) by means of formal

reproduction—not in the sense of copying but of producing anew (9)—and that ekphrasis offers one means by which to produce not only a different form, but a different *mode* of form and thus a kind of perpetuity (10). Given this, we might think of Bentham’s project as one of producing his own ekphrastic object and ekphrasis on that object. From a slightly different perspective, Miran Božovič suggests “Bentham was interested in the dead body in the same way that De Quincey was interested in murder—as an *objet d’art*” (229). When we pursue that logic we see that if, in De Quincey’s scheme, murder is of “one of the fine arts,” then the murderer is an artist. Who, then, is the artist in Bentham’s project? Although Thomas Southwood Smith actually performs the labor needed for Bentham’s Auto-Iconization and curates the project initially, his role is more like that of an artist assistant or sous chef who assists with and carries out Bentham’s artistic vision. Bentham as his own Auto-Icon is both artist and artwork, creator and creation.

In addition to his interest in the creative potential of the imagination and his sense that the ekphrastic, sculptural form provokes and promotes that potential, Bentham shares with other Romantic writers a tendency toward the fragmentary. The notorious fragmentary aspect of Bentham’s writing, beginning with his first published work, *A Fragment on Government*, works in some ways like the fragmentation in Byron’s poetry that posits the generative potential of graveyard dust and fragmented ruins. Bentham cannot possibly intend for the fragmentariness of his work to evoke images of decay; his almost obsessive interest in preserving the human body precludes that. However, the sense of incompleteness and fragmentation that characterizes his corpus does suggest potential: work still to be done, new ideas to be anticipated. In fact, in *Auto-Icon*, Bentham celebrates this unfinished nature of his work. He imagines “votaries of the greatest-happiness principle” coming to visit his Auto-Icon which will be “preserved in some safe repository” accompanied by “his unedited and unfinished manuscripts, lodged in an appropriate case of shelves” (*AI* 15). Collings notes of this passage that pilgrims who come to

venerate Bentham will see “the philosopher in the act of writing; not...one whose life has reached completion, whose body has achieved repose, but who even in death continues to produce more manuscripts for those groaning shelves” (*Monstrous* 125). The unfinished work suggests future possibilities, but there is a danger to being unfinished as well.

Bentham attempts to control meticulously the creation, deployment, and interpretation of his posthumous self, but the very multiplicity and indeterminacy around the Auto-Icon and *Auto-Icon* that lend the project its vitality also underscore the potential fragility of his preservation and the futility of his “preneed” planning. Even as he arranges for his active, influential posthumous work, Bentham indicates he is fully aware that relying on others to remember oneself—which is all one can do after death no matter how carefully one plans—is an uncertain business. He specifies in his final will that his preserved components should be carefully and permanently labeled: after Southwood Smith has the Auto-Icon readied, he should

cause to be prepared an appropriate box or case and will cause to be engraved in conspicuous characters on a plate to be affixed hereon and also on the labels on the glass cases in which the preparations of the soft parts of my body shall be contained as for example as in the manner used in the case of wine decanters my name at length with the letters ob: followed by the day of my decease. (“Will” 8)

Writing has bodied forth the form, but writing is also necessary to define and delimit the embodied form. In themselves, the component parts could belong to anyone, and even Bentham’s head which is “peculiar to him” may not be recognized without its accompanying text after a lapse of time. Marmoy, writing in 1957, notes that Bentham’s original case was enclosed at some later time in a “more elaborate but dignified one” which does, indeed, bear his name in “conspicuous characters” but which does not include “ob. June 6, 1832” as Bentham directed. His Auto-Icon’s label, a simple expedient for ensuring he is remembered, thus remains unfinished. His textual *Auto-Icon* was unfinished at his death as well and required the assistance of his anonymous editor to bring it to its present state. And his physical Auto-Icon was

unfinished until Southwood Smith commissioned a wax head to replace the misshapen and discolored real head that did not suffer the preservation process well. Bentham's Auto-Icon has been the subject of periodic cleaning, re-stuffing, re-clothing, and relocation; its preserved head stored within the chest cavity, displayed, stolen, ransomed, allegedly used as a football, and again tucked away in storage for safekeeping.³⁷ Its fragmented state invites the participation of others, but his statuary form escapes the careful control Bentham tried to exert over it.

D. Statutory Forms

Rather than extending postmortem management of his memory to an ever-widening circle of caretakers as Hemans does, Bentham attempts to wield that management himself. Through a series of increasingly detailed wills, their codicils and appendices, and his treatise *Auto-Icon: Or, Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living*, he directs the creation and potential uses of the effigial form that will keep him among the living even after death and, he believes, will afford him a measure of control over his own memory and memorialization. His Auto-Icon, a statutory statue, was created and regulated through a series of written directives, but his attempt to superintend the unwritten element of his Auto-Icon project through the written elements necessarily reaches limits with his death, even as his Auto-icon "lives" on. Most, if not all, of Bentham's commentators conclude that his Auto-Icon project ultimately fails because, in spite of his best laid plans, he and his Auto-Icon cannot escape the mediation and re-interpretation of the living. I contend, though, that positioning Bentham's work among poetic writing as well as his theories of legal writing suggests that he employs alternate forms of memory management that work with and beyond his statutory management of the Auto-Icon statue to ensure a dynamic future for his dead self.

Kayman helpfully reads Bentham's Auto-Icon project through the lens of "law-and-literature," considering the roles of memory, fiction, and writing in traditional English Common Law and in the two projects that occupied Bentham's final years, the *Constitutional Code for the Use of All Nations and All Governments Professing Liberal Opinions* (1830) and *Auto-Icon* (209, 208). According to Kayman, for Bentham the problem with unwritten English law which has "no discernible creative author" is that because it is a fiction, as he argued in *A Fragment on Government*, it lacks transparency and is vulnerable "to corrupt manipulation"; the text "needed constantly to be interpreted, and this, necessarily, after the event" (214). He adds that for Bentham, the "fundamental instability of English law was intensified by the fact that the need for interpretation necessarily entailed the possibility of re-interpretation" (214). Bentham's critique of unwritten law is grounded on the "crucial recognition of the ontological power of language" (216). Statute law is the proper alternative to unwritten law because as "writing that originates and constrains law, the *corpus* of laws has the same status of 'real entity' as a *body* – in contrast to the unwritten law whose texts always allude to a spirit, a fiction that can only exist because such law does not have the materiality of a body" (217). The legitimacy of Common Law rests in its temporal continuity and has its source in the national spirit of justice, not in its rational coherence as Bentham prefers (211-13), but that same temporal continuity also allows the Common Law to be thought of as monumental. In *The History of the Common Law of England* [1713, 1739], for instance, Matthew Hale refers to the unwritten English Laws as "Monuments in Writing, whereby they are transferred from one Age to another" (qtd. in Kayman 212n12).

Kayman sees the Auto-Icon as attempting to resist the shift to fiction just as Bentham's arguments about law and lawful language do but in "an extreme and literal form here whereby the one who is to be remembered uses his own 'real' body to anchor his memory to himself" (225). In the other project that occupied his final years, his *Constitutional Code*, Bentham's

desire to eliminate ambiguity and re-interpretation leads to the same stylistic features of his other writing: “legalistic repetition, cross-reference, and redundancy are present, in exaggerated form, in Bentham’s achingly laborious process of definition and explication” (221). Bentham’s Auto-Icon project, with its multiplicities and redundancies not only within the *Auto-Icon* text but across the related texts, operates similarly. However, Bentham’s attempts to fix his body and his writing into texts that resist re-interpretation “leave us in fact with a textual body that demands to be interpreted” and so, Kayman writes, “This monument to self-referentiality and the control of meaning, the auto-icon, turns out to be...pre-eminently a *literary* piece of writing” (228).

As I have been suggesting throughout my discussion of the Auto-Icon project, I think Kayman is quite right to situate the Auto-Icon within literary writing, but in his formulation, the literariness of the Auto-Icon project is where it fails to meet Bentham’s own standards whereas I would argue this is precisely the point of its success. Bentham is aware he cannot eliminate re-interpretation of his Auto-Icon after his death, and he may not want to because once his Auto-Icon and the knowledge and principles it represents are no longer the subject of contemplation, his immortality ceases. Returning to the affinities between Hemans’s work and Bentham’s helps to explain his approach. Hemans recuperates and extends into the future the memories of people who would otherwise be forgotten by poetically creating and preserving their effigial forms, but she counteracts the potential ossification of those same forms with oscillations and interplay between life and death, flesh and marble, poem and extra-textual material. I suggest that Bentham endeavors to achieve a similar mode of preservation for his memory through his effigial Auto-Icon and its accompanying texts by exploiting the tensions between his desired stability of meaning and the truly deadly stasis of death.

Although Bentham objects to the indiscriminate re-interpretation he believes unwritten law allows, he nevertheless seeks the kind of temporal continuity and monumentality that Hale

attributes to unwritten law which transfers it “from one Age to another.” Bentham wants to assure a continuing place in the future for his work, his thought, and himself, and he does this not by throwing out the “unwritten” element of his Auto-Icon project—the Auto-Icon itself—but by featuring it while also attempting to direct and focus the inevitable re-interpretation as much as possible. In other words, he juxtaposes the written texts against the plastic and performed aspects of the Auto-Icon to produce a project that looks surprisingly like Hemans’s poetic work. The insistent materiality of their effigial forms created with and through the accompanying texts demands that the living see the dead and invites readers and viewers to think of the dead as occupying a public space. Here their continuation and care becomes a corporate responsibility that in turn enables their continuing contributions to the body corporate.

If viewing Bentham’s preservation project through the literary lens of Hemans’s work helps to reveal how he imagines futurity emerging through a combination of unwritten material bodied forth and shaped by written materials, then thinking briefly about Hemans’s preservation project through the lens of Bentham’s perspective on law and language may also be instructive. Unlike Bentham’s Auto-Icon project that begins in text, Hemans’s effigial forms must necessarily begin from a point of “unwritten” records because her subjects have been traditionally unnoticed, unremarked, and unrecorded. If the unwritten Common Law can be monumental, she seems to suggest that the unwritten records of women can be monumental as well, but only if they are maintained among the living. Bentham argues that unwritten law was repressive because it was too easily manipulated; therefore, according to Kayman, he “pursues a language for law” that does not require “judicial interpretation, [which] serves an oppressive regime wherein the lawyers are the agents of the ruling class”; his new mode of language “will be capable of constructing a solid democratic body in a rational code of written law” (218). Similarly, Hemans recognizes the need to reform the kind of memorialization that restricts

selection and interpretation to a hegemonic group. Rather than upend or limit interpretation, however, she reforms from within by broadening the pool of participants, both those who interpret and those who are interpreted. She and Bentham both engage in a democratizing agenda. She constructs a democratic body of the remembered dead and their caretakers by expanding the notion of who should be remembered and memorialized and who is capable of and qualified to do the work of remembering and memorializing from the “oppressive regime” of lawyers or men or the wealthy to women, children, the poor, the traditionally unsung of all kinds.

At the conclusion of *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*, Mary Roach comments that “It makes little sense to try to control what happens to your remains when you are no longer around to reap the joys or benefits of that control. People who make elaborate requests concerning disposition of their bodies are probably people who have trouble with the concept of not existing” (290). Indeed, Bentham’s requests—and bequests—concerning the disposition of his body could hardly be more elaborate, and despite the bravado of his claim that “in memory will he never cease to live!” the obsessive and redundant planning of every postmortem detail, down to the labeling of his Auto-Icon’s storage box and the jars containing his preserved viscera, suggests he recognizes the fragility of memory and the ease with which he could slip into “not existing.” Hemans, too, recognizes how easy it is for people—particularly women and children, herself included—to “not exist” after death, and her poetry implicitly makes requests about their postmortem care on their behalf. Both Hemans and Bentham are aware that when the dead disappear from view and from active thought, access to their knowledge and experiences disappears with them. Like other Romantic-era writers and reformers, they “have trouble with the concept of [the dead] not existing,” so they participate in the Romantic exploration of how to retain the dead in memory and translate them to the future so they will remain fluid and influential presences.

For Hemans and Bentham, the effigial form functions as an integral component of memory retention; to remain a presence now and for the future, a person's bodily form must be visible in order to command attention and become the object of conversation and care. They address the threat latent in Wordsworth's mode of memorialization which exists exclusively in the minds of the living. Like unwritten Common Law, Wordsworth's memorialized dead are endlessly and unconstrainedly interpretable; without a body to make the dead visible and tether memories to a specific entity, the dead may be forgotten entirely or imaginatively reshaped into unrecognizable new forms. In contrast, Hemans and Bentham insist on the paradox that the materiality of the dead body is integral to the future of the dead among the living. They recognize, however, that whatever is gained by preservation, something is lost; a dynamic, multifaceted life can easily become fixed in a memorial rigor mortis. In *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, Kenneth Gross explores humans' fantasies of and fascinations with statues that come to life and the converse notion that a statue may be a living thing metamorphosed into stone. The statue "both preserves and destroys something," he writes. "The statue can be a ghostly, harrowing thing. Yet in the face of other fates, other forms of preservation or destruction, it may become something to desire, to be seduced by" (19). For Hemans and Bentham, the lure of the statuary form as a container and corrective for memory outweighs the dangers of fixity it might impose because the visible, publicly accessible effigial form insists on its own presence unlike Wordsworth's disappearing dead or the fragmented dust of Byron's and Shelley's dead. Hemans and Bentham use the effigial form to supplement memory in retaining the dead, for it gives impetus and shape to the imaginative work that maintains the dead. With oscillations of states, forms, and perspectives, they create a vibrant, imaginative, and forward-looking relationship among the dead and the communities of the living that develop and gather around them.

¹ It should be noted that although the parts depicted in the plates become “increasingly useless” in McWhir’s words and the depictions are “useless” in the sense of conveying who this woman was and what her life was like as interests Hemans, Hunter’s work was of central importance for a field of anatomy which had been “largely ignored up to that time,” according to Peter M. Dunn (F76). In the dedication to King George III, Hunter comments that the work “illustrates one part of science hitherto imperfectly understood” and that “it contains the foundation of another part of science, on which the lives and happiness of millions must depend.”

² Donald H. Reiman, in the introduction to his reprint edition of *Records of Woman*, similarly concludes Hemans is unread and unremembered because “she spoke only from the past to her age and not, as well, from her age to the next” (xi; qtd. in Haley 184).

³ During the nineteenth century, Hemans was the most widely read woman poet in the English-speaking world, vying with and besting many of her contemporary, now-canonical male writers in terms of popularity and productivity (Kelly 15). She sold more books than all of her contemporaries who remain well-known today except Lord Byron and Walter Scott (Feldman xi). Andrew Franta offers a reading of how Hemans’s used the conflict between private and public to offer social critique and reflect on her poetry’s reception by this mass public (165-85). Modern scholarly interest in Hemans was initiated by Stuart Curran’s essay, “The I Altered” and a chapter in Marlon Ross’s *The Contours of Masculine Desire* (267-316). For a more detailed account of Hemans’s fame and critical reception, see Wolfson (Introduction xiii-xvii).

⁴ Feldman notes Hemans simultaneously reinforces and undercuts traditional views of women’s roles (xx). For other examples, see Anne Mellor (*Romanticism* 130, 24) and Anthony John Harding (139).

⁵ See Feldman for one overview of Hemans’s personal situation (xxii-xxiii). See Gary Kelly for Hemans’s participation in “a Romantic feminist turn” to make mass death meaningful (28).

⁶ For instance, Myra Cottingham argues that Hemans critiques warfare and its effects on women through images of dead and dying warriors. Julie Kipp argues that death is the only way for mothers in many of Hemans’s poems to maintain the bond with their children and to avoid suffering at the separation of mother and child (92). Other recent readings argue Hemans reworks and subverts the masculine tradition of elegy in feminine terms. See, for instance, Michael T. Williamson, Brandy Ryan, and Brian P. Elliott. Readings that consider Hemans’s self-image as a woman poet and her concern for her posterity include those of Andrew Bennett (75-80), Bruce Haley (183-91), Samantha Matthews (77-112), and Paul Westover (75-91).

⁷ Anthropologist Arnold van Gennep formulates death as a rite of passage: the binaries of life and death create a threefold process: living, dying, and being dead. The central stage—that of dying or “passing”—is less stable, acts as an opening or passageway, and generates the most intense ritual experiences and activities (J. R. Roach 37; Gennep 147). By dwelling in and on the paradoxes and oscillations of her poetry, Hemans’s readers participate in the kinds of intense experiences and activities Gennep describes to preserve and perpetuate the dead.

⁸ Other poems from *Records of Woman, with Other Poems* that conflate living and dead or dead body and funerary sculpture include “The Spanish Chapel,” “Juana,” “Edith, A Tale of the Woods,” and “Costanza.” All quotations from poems in this collection are taken from Paula Feldman’s edition; poetry is cited by line number, prose by page number.

⁹ According to Feldman, Hemans was probably asked to poetically “illustrate” the engraving by W.T. Fry of a drawing by H. Corbould of Sir Francis Chantrey’s monument “Sleeping Child” which depicts the infant daughter of Sir Thomas Ackland (*Records* 141, 207). This multi-layered, multi-genre effort offers its own version of community and continuity around the dead.

¹⁰ Bennett’s work on “the Romantic culture of posterity” has usefully turned critical attention toward the ways in which Romantic poets began writing to embrace the notion of deferred or posthumous reception, but he aligns this desire with “a masculine poetics” (5), arguing that women poets including Hemans were skeptical of literary posterity and focused on the quotidian, ephemeral, and impermanent to exclude themselves intentionally from the canon (69). More recent work like Westover’s has provided a necessary corrective to Bennett’s argument and has convincingly shown Hemans and other Romantic-era women poets to be more interested in their fame and literary posterity than Bennett recognizes. See, for instance, Matthews and B. Ryan.

¹¹ Feldman writes that Hemans “disturbingly blur[s] the distinction” between “the image of a peacefully sleeping child” and “that of an infant corpse” (xxvi).

¹² William Hazlitt, too, contemplates the forms of dead children in “On the Fear of Death” (1822). For him, the statue remains distinct from the corpse, but he shares with Hemans the sense that the space between binaries is the place where questions are asked and alternatives are imagined. When looking at an ivory or marble image of an infant, we do not “grieve and fret” that it is not alive because it never was alive; the change of state causes us pain: “it is the difficulty of making the transition from life to death, the struggle between the two in our imagination, that confounds their properties painfully together, and makes us conceive that the infant that is but just dead, still wants to breathe, to enjoy, and look about it, and is prevented by the icy hand of death, locking up its faculties and benumbing its senses; so that, if it could, it would complain of its own hard state” (166-67).

¹³ Just as wealth is no guarantee of posthumous continuation, neither is fame. Even well-known women need postmortem care to remain among the living. See, for instance, “The Grave of the Poetess” written about poet Mary Tighe whose grave must be visited, contemplated, and recreated in poetry by Hemans and “The Queen of Prussia’s Tomb” in which the queen’s children’s love-offerings at her effigy occupy the central, pivotal point in the poem and apparently enable the triumphant reclamation of her name and power among her people.

¹⁴ Most of the effigial forms on which I focus are those of women, but as Cottingham notes, while men are absent from the home in *Records*, “there is a startling proliferation of male bodies” (283). She argues that their sculptural quality alludes to classicism and by extension heroism, but, dying or dead, they have not been the victors. I would also point out that the male bodies always require the care of women, whether social peers or inferiors. Peasant women, such as the “Peasant Girl of the Rhone” and the “peasant girl” (21) who cares for the dying Emperor

“Albert of Hapsburgh” in “A Monarch’s Death-Bed” care for noble and even royal men as they die and after death, and in the process are empowered as the keepers and bestowers of immortality.

¹⁵ In “Imelda,” another of Hemans’s *Records of Woman*, both male and female bodies become their own memorials, mimicking the position of “The Effigies” and the substitution of human body for sculpture of “The Peasant Girl.”

¹⁶ Every one of the nineteen poems in the *Records of Woman* collection includes at least one epigraph and nine poems are also preceded by an explanatory headnote; many of the “*Other Poems*” are accompanied by epigraphs and Hemans’s endnotes as well. Fourteen of the nineteen *Records of Woman* have one epigraph; five have two epigraphs.

¹⁷ Created when the dust and ash of Mount Vesuvius overtook them, this form is indeed a mold, an empty space, because the poem was written “before archaeologists had learned to make solid forms from Pompeian remains by filling their ‘moulds’ with plaster” (Armstrong 214)

¹⁸ See Armstrong for a reading of the five-stanza “lullaby” as formally creating “a mould embedded in, or hollowed out of the text” (226).

¹⁹ Although Lundeen does not think about the issue of “fixing” in the same way I do, she observes that “in an act of cosmic irony, the eruption of a volcano ensured the immortality of a mother and child even as it killed them,” with the “Ashen lava” acting as “both residue and embalmer” (par. 3, 4). In other words, their memory is “fixed” as it is “fixed.”

²⁰ Armstrong offers a generous version of the argument, positioning the poem within what she calls Hemans’s “aesthetics of the void,” a “figuring of sculpture as mould or *container*” which must be filled from the inside out with the “author’s own vitality” but which runs the risk of appropriating form “as a kind of conduit for the ego’s projections” (224, 222). For less positive examples of the argument see, for instance, Harding who writes that “this woman warrants memorializing ... just because she was a nursing mother” (143); Bennett who calls the poem “little more than a repeated declaration of the survival of this ‘trace’ of love” (79); Haley who finds the poem an “ideogram for the poet’s own self” (10); and Elliott who argues that Hemans creates icons of her ekphrastic objects by emptying them of their historical content to create poetic molds which she then fills with her own affective, emotional responses (38).

²¹ According to Grant F. Scott, Hemans wrote thirty-eight ekphrastic poems, more than the major Romantic poets combined (36). He notes that, typically, Romantic ekphrasis focuses on classical artwork, but Hemans incorporated more quotidian genres, including “portraits, sketches, and watercolors, and ... a variety of funerary monuments” (36). This might remind us of Stuart Curran’s argument that a key feature of women’s writing in the Romantic period was an emphasis on seeing and describing the quotidian (189-90).

²² Simonsen and Hemans counter critics who claim that Romantic poets aspired to imitate the ontological conditions of music while devaluing painting and other visual arts. He argues that Hemans was interested in many genres and sought to reinforce the connections between the sister arts (326), or as Scott puts it, “Hemans consciously downplays the distinctions between poet,

sculptor, and artwork" (42). Even in her early poem on "The Statue of the Dying Gladiator," she foregrounds the making of the statue rather than the object itself and addresses directly the power of creativity so that art becomes a combination of sculpture and poetry (Simonsen 327-29).

²³ Reading "Porperzia Rossi" as an analog for Hemans herself and the issues that concerned her such as the conflict between domestic and artistic callings and a desire for posthumous fame is a fairly common approach in recent criticism of the poem. See, for instance, Wolfson ("Gendering" 63-65), Haley (185), Simonsen (330-32), Scott (41-49) who sees Hemans invoking the "the obstetrical function of ekphrasis" (46), and Deborah Kennedy who notes in particular the sexual energy and procreative potential in Hemans's description of Rossi's creative process and its "breathless, orgasmic quality, erotic in a way scarcely equaled by her contemporaries" (279). "Properzia Rossi" is neither the only poem through which Hemans aligns herself with another female artist and explores her own posthumous monumentalization nor is it the most explicit in this regard. That honor surely would go to "The Grave of a Poetess" (1827) which is ostensibly about the grave of poet Mary Tighe but is inevitably and rightly read as Hemans's meditation on her own posterity. See, for instance, Ryan's "'Echo and Reply'"; Matthews offers a careful reading of "The Grave of a Poetess" along with Hemans's second memorial poem to Tighe, "Written After Visiting a Tomb, Near Woodstock, in the County of Kilkenny" (1831; 1834) (77-112).

²⁴ See Canuel's *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing, 1790-1830* for more about how Bentham's writings contribute to and support the impetus toward toleration found in Romantic writing (*Religion* 6-7, and chapter 1) and his essay "Bentham, Utility, and the Romantic Imagination" for an examination of the "intertwined political and aesthetic affinities" between Bentham and his radical literary contemporaries ("Bentham" 502).

²⁵ Claire Gittings, in a survey of twenty-six unusual burials and commemorations that were pre-planned by the deceased and carried out in England between 1689 and 1823, notes that although the heart was often seen as the embodiment of identity, many of the deceased seemed to have understood their identity after death to remain principally in their bones (333-34). This may suggest one reason Bentham was unconcerned about keeping his preserved organs with his Auto-Icon, but did want his skeleton articulated to form the support structure of the effigy.

²⁶ Bentham worked on *Auto-Icon: Or, Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living* during the last years of his life, adding passages until just a few weeks before he died (*AI* 1). The term "Auto-Icon," a neologism created by Bentham, is self-explanatory, he writes, and would come to be understood as "a man who is his own image" (*AI* 2). *Auto-Icon* is designated by *AI* in citations.

²⁷ Bentham fully supported Southwood Smith's call to repeal the law imposing dissection as a punishment for hanged criminals and to pass a law which would make unclaimed bodies of those dying in hospitals and work-houses available to anatomists for dissection. As Ruth Richardson has demonstrated, the drafting and passage of the Anatomy Act of 1832 which did exactly what Southwood Smith had advocated was heavily influenced by Bentham himself and a Benthamite agenda. See Richardson's "Bentham and 'Bodies for Dissection'" ("Bentham") and her revised version in *Death, Dissection, and the Destitute* (*Death* 107-30).

²⁸ Bentham notes that the human head can easily be preserved by employing techniques used by New Zealanders and further developed through experiments he claims had been underway in England (*AI* 2). See Marmoy who cites a conversation in which Bentham told Bowring that he had consulted Dr. Armstrong about the New Zealanders' preservation process and that Armstrong was to acquire "a human head from Grainger, the anatomist, which is to be slowly dried in a stove at Bentham's house." It is unclear whether these experiments were conducted.

²⁹ This reaction is not a modern phenomenon. From the beginning, this document was regarded by Bentham's followers as not only embarrassing but also potentially detrimental to the philosopher's reputation. Its publication was repressed, and its authenticity challenged. See James E. Crimmins' introduction to the 2002 facsimile edition of *Auto-Icon* for a publication and reception history.

³⁰ For instance, Martin A. Kayman calls *Auto-Icon* "a pastiche of [Bentham's] usual style, a posthumous mocking of his own logic" (227), and David Collings makes sense of the contradiction by concluding: "The tone of his absurd proposals . . . fuses playful inversion and serious skepticism into a seriously intended joke" (*Monstrous* 109). Stephen G. Engelmann writes that Bentham's directions for the preservation and display of his body were "about having fun with making good use of otherwise useless and unenjoyable corpses" (2).

³¹ Bentham's attraction to the corporeal form makes sense in light of his preference for "perceptible real entities." In "A Fragment on Ontology," he states that a "perceptible real entity is, in one word, a body" ("Ontology" 118). He uses the term *body* expansively, of course, to refer to any thing that can be perceived by the senses ("Ontology" 119), but the resonance of the term in the context of the "Auto-Icon" seems to endow these effigial entities with special significance.

³² The "literary fund" might collect and arrange "Auto-Icons of authors" where, in "a circular, or quasi-circular apartment, they might surround the living, divided into the different walks in which they were distinguished. They might be arranged in the order of time of their existence or decease, or in the order of merit, to be decided by ballot" (*AI* 6).

³³ Southwood Smith alludes to the affinities between Bentham and other Romantic writers in his lecture "Delivered Over the Remains" of Bentham, quoting from Byron's *The Giaour* and drawing at length from Godwin's "beautiful little Essay on Sepulchres" to stress how "we manage badly every thing relating to the dead" ("Lecture" 66-67, 70). He quotes and paraphrases Godwin's *Essay on Sepulchres* without citing it in his pamphlet "Use of the Dead to the Living" ("Use" 29-30).

³⁴ This inclusivity is in keeping with Bentham's other writing. See his essay "Sex," for instance, for Bentham's rejection of prejudice associated with homosexuality. Bentham's so-called aversion to poetry might even be reframed as a matter of inclusivity. Bruce Hinderer argues that Bentham was not opposed to poetry but was more interested in leveling the arts so that puns, word games, and more common diversions could be seen as having the same utility as high-brow arts as a means for keeping people from more harmful pursuits such as drink and gambling.

³⁵ See Matthew Craske for the eighteenth-century development of Westminster Abbey as a pantheon “built upon private interest” and its transition from commemorating court loyalties to representing a broad patriotic public. See Holger Hooch for the “invention” and creation of a military pantheon and cult of personal fame in St. Paul’s Cathedral from 1790-1820. In France, in Prairial, year IV, Pierre-Louis Roederer proposed a plan that, like Bentham’s, would highlight the moral dichotomies of the dead but which offered much less chance of rehabilitation; he advocated paired cemeteries: one a beautifully landscaped “Elysium” for the moral; the other featuring “sepulchral caverns cut into ‘terrifying, arid rocks’ over which vultures (‘symbols of remorse’) would hover” for executed criminals (Etlin 255).

³⁶ Collings finds it “rather ruinous to imagine corpses throughout England, in the Houses of Parliament, along the entryways to great houses: the perpetual haunting of the present not simply with the ideas and legacies of the dead, but with their actual corpses” (“Re: Bentham”). He finds Bentham’s notion “subversive (and challenging)” because it disrupts our notion of history as being in the past, buried with the dead, but as I have argued throughout this project, as strange as it may seem to us, Bentham is not alone in imagining the future through the remains of the dead.

³⁷ See Marmoy for an account of how Bentham’s Auto-Icon came to be at University College London, and its subsequent storage and care, including cleaning, debugging, and restuffing in 1939 under the direction of Museum Curator Violette Lafleur. The most recent inspection and cleaning of Bentham’s Auto Icon were conducted on 8 November 2012 by University College London staff (Booth); my thanks go to Anna Kornbluh for bringing this to my attention. See the “Auto-Icon” page of the *UCL Bentham Project* for more about the abuses suffered by Bentham’s real head at the hands of students (Baker).

CODA: STILL LIVING WITH THE DEAD

Following the recent discovery of the remains of King Richard III under a car park in Leicester, England, and their positive identification by means of forensic analysis, historian Simon Schama writes that the discovery of Richard's skeleton "has fleshed out his story. It has brought him back to life ... more materially and physically than anything mere words or portraits could accomplish" ("Return" n.pag.). For most of us, however, awareness of this discovery and its subsequent incitement of the collective imagination have been produced by means of words and images—those news reports, historical reassessments, and speculative reconstructions of the king's facial features and voice that have been disseminated across the globe—and for many of us, our incited imaginations are drawn almost inexorably to the words of the great English dramatist William Shakespeare and images of his *Richard III* produced on stage and screen. Schama himself, although he insists that artistic recreation of the past "is lame beside the raw truth of those bleached bones," relies on a poet to make understandable our craving in this era of fleeting ephemerality for "companionship with our ancestry" or, as he notes W.H. Auden puts it: "to break bread with the dead." Distinguishing between the effects produced on the living by the presence of the material remains of the dead and those produced by the words and images that make present the dead in the mind's eye is not as simple as Schama suggests.

Romantic-era writers understood both the value of material remains for retaining the dead among the living and the potential for literary words and images to re-create and disseminate those remains in such a way that the dead and the past they represent remain present and relevant now and for the future. However, they were also aware of the hold the dead could have over the living. It is against this notion in Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* that Thomas Paine in *Rights of Man* argues so strenuously, writing: "I am contending for the rights of the *living*, and against their being willed away, and controlled and contracted for, by the

manuscript assumed authority of the dead; Mr Burke is contending for the authority of the dead over the rights and freedom of the living” (42, original emphasis). As Hilary Strang notes, however, Paine’s impassioned rhetoric against Burke’s “fantastic” but “tyrannical” dead suggests the power of Burke’s ideas—and the dead—to resist easy dismissal (412).

The writers whose work I have discussed in this study seek by various means to negotiate between these extremes so that dead and living might coexist and interact in fruitful partnership. Should the corporeal forms of the dead disappear to enable their imaginative re-creation and translation in the minds of the living as Wordsworth suggests, or should the material forms of the dead be imaginatively re-created precisely so that the dead do *not* disappear from the minds of the living as Hemans and Bentham contend? Will mingling with the dust of the dead and the dirt of significant locales invest the dead, the conquered, and the all-but-forgotten past with the potential for regeneration and a renewed moral and political relevance as Byron posits? Or is such a resurrection of the past too limiting and limited a vision for the future which would be better served by entering the sites of the dead, taking up the “dark, shapeless substances” which the dead afford, and “moulding and fashioning” them through the process of invention—and intervention—into a new narrative for human potential as Mary Shelley models (*F* 193)? These writers attempt to facilitate and manage how the dead are remembered and translated to the future, but they also allow the dead a powerful role in informing and shaping that future.

Some two centuries later, we continue to negotiate between the needs of the dead and the living to discover how best to remember and honor the past without limiting humanity’s future and irreparably damaging our own humanity. Are the costs—financial and environmental—of our current burial and cremation practices too high (Mitford; Harris)? Is “virtual mourning” on a Facebook page “real” mourning (Miller)? Whose responsibility is it to acquire and maintain abandoned cemeteries or should cemeteries *be* abandoned to return to their natural environmental

state (Reitz; Ambrose)? Are graves a permanent claim on the land or are they lent to the dead until more pressing needs such as airport runways or government buildings or new burial sites in crowded urban spaces arise (Hilkevitch; Harrington; “UK’s”)? Is it appropriate to use the remains of strangers as the material for aesthetic creation as do Czech artist Romany Tyc, creator of portraits made from the surplus ashes of Prague crematoriums, and German anatomist Gunther von Hagens, creator of the “Plastination” process and the *Body World* exhibits (Strochli; Padley)? Should graves and the humans they contain(ed) be research subjects and museum exhibits or should their burial sites remain unstudied and undisturbed as if sacred spaces (Abel; Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou; Nakamatsu; “Roman”; Guillory; Mullen)? These questions are inflected by our own technologies and issues, but their underlying import reflects the concerns of the Romantic period as the living attempted, in the face of increasing population and pluralism, to accommodate and incorporate the dead in the present and to facilitate and channel their contributions for the future.

This project has been informed by and is indebted to the excellent work of literary critics, historians, and cultural theorists who have written about specific aspects of the Romantic-era conversations concerning corpses, relics, and resting places. By contextualizing the literature as I do within these other discourses, I offer a new way to understand the literary bodies and graves as participating in progressive, beneficial, future-oriented imaginative work. I hope that the rich, multi-faceted dialogue about the dead and their disposal that I identify in the period and have begun to explore in terms of its literature might inspire new research, both in literary criticism and other fields, that extends and synthesizes these discourses as has not yet been fully done. As we continue to grapple with how best to remember the dead while serving the needs of the living, we, too, can benefit from the temporal translation of ideas and knowledge of the past through words and images that inspire the imaginative re-creation of the dead and visions for the future.

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OTHER

PUBLICATIONS: "University of Illinois at Chicago: Chancellor Paula Allen-Meares." *Continuance* 25.3-4 (Spring/Summer 2011): 34. Print.

"Involving Parents in Career Planning." *National Consortium for State Guidance Leadership Newsletter*, Summer 2006. Print.

Editor, contributing writer, and designer of internal layout and cover for career-planning textbook:

Harris-Bowlsbey, JoAnn. *Take Hold of Your Future*, 5th ed. Adel, IA: National Career Assessment Services, Inc., 2004. Print.

"Thelma Grace Pahlmann Stewart: A Life Story." *Ashland Sentinel*, Ashland, Illinois; *Murrayville Gazette*, Murrayville, Illinois; *Franklin Times*, Franklin, Illinois, March 2003. Print.

PRESENTATIONS: "'The hand accustomed to command': Physiognomic Authority in Wollstonecraft's 'Cave of Fancy.'" British Women Writers Conference. University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico. April 2013

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"Eliminating the Intermediary: Bentham's Auto-Icon as Romantic Artist and Art." North American Society for the Study of Romanticism Conference. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. August 2010

"'Too deep and still': Fixing Memory in Hemans's *Records of Woman*" (Featured Graduate Student Speaker). British Women Writers Conference. Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. April 2010

“The Disappearing Dead: The Graves of Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*.” International Conference on Romanticism. The City College and The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, New York. November 2009

“Glanville Learns to Read: Interpretation and Understanding in *The Female Quixote*.” British Women Writers Conference. University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa. April 2009

“The Work of Revision: Maria Edgeworth’s *The Modern Griselda*.” International Conference on Romanticism. Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan. October 2008

“Maria Edgeworth’s *The Modern Griselda*: Reimagining Relationships.” Illinois Philological Association. Millikin University, Decatur, Illinois. April 2008

“From Chalkboard to Blackboard: Blackboard Basics for Your Composition Classroom” (Invited Presentation). Mile 8: First-Year Writing Program Professional Development Workshop. University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. March 2008

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“Better Business Writing.” Invited Full-Day Workshop Presentation sponsored by National Career Assessment Services, Inc. Des Moines Area Community College – West Campus, West Des Moines, Iowa. August 2006

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Packingtown Review scholarly journal, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2007-2010 (Production Editor, 2009-2010; Associate Editor: Scholarship, Art, 2007-2010; Production Committee Member, 2007-2009)

Peer Team Facilitator, First Year Writing Program (FYWP) Portfolio Assessment, University of Illinois at Chicago, Fall 2007, Fall 2009

Mentor, English 555 New Instructor course, First-Year Writing Program, University of Illinois at Chicago, Spring 2007

Reader, Des Moines Area Community College Composition I Portfolio Assessment Pilot Program, 2005-2006

Speaker, Orientation Program for Incoming English Graduate Teaching/Research Assistants, Truman State University, Fall 2004

Editor, Designer, *Daughters of Albion*, Graduate English Organization (GEO) newsletter, Truman State University, 2003-2004

Co-organizer, Panel Moderator, Graduate English Organization (GEO) Conference, Truman State University, Spring 2004