Churchyard Poetics

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Landscape, Labour, and the Legacy of Genre

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For Clare

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In memory of Paddy—what a gift you were.

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> We must take notice, that there is a great difference between painting to the imagination, and painting to the heart. The one may be done coolly and at leisure: the other must always be rapid and ardent. In the former, art and labour may be suffered to appear; in the latter, no effect can follow, unless it seem to be the work of nature only.—Hugh Blair, 'Lecture XXXII. Conduct of a Discourse'[1]

> Among these confused relics of humanity, there are, without doubt, persons of *contrary* interests and *contradicting* sentiments. But death, like some able Daysman, has laid his hand on the contending parties, and brought all their differences to an amicable conclusion. . . . Perhaps their crumbling bones *mix*, as they *moulder*: and those who, while they lived, stood aloof in irreconcileable variance, here fall into mutual embraces, and even incorporate with each other in the grave.—James Hervey, *Meditations Among the Tombs*[2]

The ambition of this book is to recover the churchyard as the troubled centre of eighteenth-century poetry. To many readers of this poetry such a proposition might seem redundant: we know the churchyard because we know Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751)—perhaps still the most recognizable eighteenth-century poem, and the highpoint of the so-called 'graveyard school'. Yet *Churchyard Poetics* wagers that Gray's *Elegy*, together with Thomas Parnell's 'A Night-Piece on Death' (1721), Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1743), and Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–6), is so superficially familiar, its churchyard setting so frequently charted in criticism about the period, that we can no longer see the churchyard's waypoints

[1] Hugh Blair, 'Lecture XXXII. Conduct of a Discourse—The Argumentative Part—The Pathetic Part—The Peroration', in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 13th edn, 2 vols (London: Cadell and Davies, et al., 1819), ii. 150.

[2] James Hervey, *Meditations Among the Tombs. In a Letter to a Lady*, 3rd edn. (1746), in *Meditations and Contemplations* (Choteau, MT: Old Paths Gospel Press, 1970), 16.

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clearly nor feel the affective force contained (and just barely) in its harrowed earth. It is, for instance, common practice lightly to sketch the churchyard as the initiating scene for the solitary, melancholy, often religious reflections taken to be the principal 'content' of graveyard poems. Eric Parisot, maintaining the trend, points out that the 'imaginative locale' emphasized in the group label 'graveyard poetry' encourages readers to expect a gloomy setting featuring abundant graves, the dead, a church or charnel house, yew trees, and, 'crucially, a solitary poetic speaker or narrator, highly attuned to the sights and sounds of the dreadful scene', before he dismisses this prospectus as so many superficial 'trappings', ancillary to a fundamentally 'devotional mode of poetry'.[3] According to this critically normative view, the churchyard is not a place but a backdrop—creaking stage machinery that initiates mechanics of fear for the purposes of religious devotion before falling away to secondary, solely scenic importance. Generalized as a graveyard, the churchyard is deprived of its status in the world of the poem and of its historical specificity in the world outside the text.

The women and labouring-class poets of this book's counter-tradition name the churchyard in their work; more important than their nominal exactitude, though, is their retrieval of the churchyard as a landscape of social life—one centrally including, but certainly not limited to, the church—with a particular, often difficult history. While the churchyard has before been demoted to scenery, the poets in *Churchyard Poetics* repeatedly return to the physical landscape, tripping up on the graves in the ground and revealing, in their restless attention, the churchyard as a resting place with no closure. Mary Leapor, Ann Yearsley, Charlotte Smith, and John Clare do not belong to the tradition of 'graveyard poetry', though they have slowly

[3] Eric Parisot, 'Gothic and Graveyard Poetry: Imagining the Dead (of Night)', in David Punter (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Gothic and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 245. Most recently, Parisot has reprised this formulation to claim that the churchyard constitutes 'a proto-Gothic poetic locale', in which 'the interrelation of nature, the church and the buried dead was carefully managed to produce a spectrum of emotions ranging from pensive melancholy to religious awe, existential and eschatological anxiety and deathly horror'. These terms indicate Parisot's predominantly theological focus: as he continues, 'a critical examination of the churchyard as a premodern and proto-Gothic literary locale needs to reinstate the affective import of the church and its consecrated surrounds'—a proposition supported by his priority of the four 'graveyard poems' listed above, which treat the churchyard as 'a hallowed devotional space set aside to reflect with seriousness upon death, salvation and the afterlife' ('The Gothic Churchyard in Graveyard Poetry: Cultural Remains and Literary Beginnings', in Eric Parisot, David McAllister, and Xavier Aldana Reyes (eds), *Graveyard Gothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024), 18, 20, 30). This Introduction sets out the alternative approach taken in *Churchyard Poetics* to the churchyard landscape, the affects it incites, and the poets who articulate them.

overcome their exclusions from other canons in feminist and similar socially conscious critical projects dedicated to reversing such gender- and class-motivated erasures. My own project does not propose to incorporate these writers into the 'graveyard school', but rather uses their position outside its conventional boundaries as an opportunity to redraw them. For Leapor, Yearsley, Smith, and Clare, the churchyard is a different sort of landscape from the one mapped by Parnell, Blair, Young, and Gray; by my account, this difference emerges from their vexed relation to the social world pushed to the borders or buried in the churchyard by its canonical authors, and brought to the surface by those I read in this book. Critical work less committed to maintaining the 'graveyard school' in its bounded state has found a related foothold in the churchyard as what Samantha Matthews and others, reading William Wordsworth in particular, recognize as a literary ideal adopted as the synecdochic image of a national identity elsewhere eroded by widespread change, both economic (in the expansion of agrarian, industrial, and colonial capitalism) and memorial (in the transition to cemeteries).[4] The churchyard is here made to calm by containing surrounding social threats, standing as a bulwark against cultural change by conserving what would otherwise be lost, yet doing so by risking, alongside the assuagement, the burial of history: of history pacified as 'the background, the manure, for landscape'.[5] The churchyard thus becomes an exemplary site for what David Simpson calls Wordsworth's poetry of displacement;[6] what Alan Liu identifies as 'the compound shapes of his denial[,] the deep absences that are his sense of history';[7] what Marjorie Levinson characterizes as his redemptive

[4] Samantha Matthews, *Poetical Remains: Poets' Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See also David McAllister, *Imagining the Dead in British Literature and Culture, 1790–1848* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Esther Schor, *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Nicola J. Watson, *The Literary Tourist* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Paul Westover, *Necromanticism: Travelling to Meet the Dead, 1750–1860* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). For writers in Scotland, too, the kirkyard was a local, metonymic site of national concern with the 'imagined dead', whose location in the culture at large was reformed at the onset of modernity: see Susan Sharp, *Kirkyard Romanticism: Death, Modernity and Scottish Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024).

[5] Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 18.

[6] David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (New York and London: Methuen & Co., 1987). Simpson has further refined his approach to what he has since called Wordsworth's 'stagings of narrative incapacity and detachment in the face of the needs or sufferings of others' (*Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern: The Poetics of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 7).

[7] Liu, *Wordsworth*, 48.

forms and figures for mediating an experience of history that consequently has 'no room to surface';[8] and what Anahid Nersessian has more recently named his 'obscurity': the 'mode of figuration Wordsworth adopts to show the hiatus—the gap, break, lull, stutter—in life as it has hitherto been known, and as it cannot be known again'.[9]

Churchyard Poetics instead investigates the churchyard as a persistent example of what Donna Landry (writing about labouring-class women poets including Leapor and Yearsley) calls 'the scene of writing' as a 'site of resistance' for a 'countertradition of poetic production',[10] according to whose alternative representational tactics the churchyard is a physical and poetic landscape not cordoned off from the pressures of history under capital but placed at their centre. To borrow a phrase from Fredric Jameson, churchyard poetry of the kind I read here 'restor[es] to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality'.[11] Yet the familiar (though still potent) metaphors of burial and exhumation disclose a binary worth complicating, since in any churchyard poem 'history'—a shorthand for the difficult work of feeling attendant on living in time and adjusting to its demands; or, more specifically, the experience of labour under capital[12]—is never buried for long and, it turns out, does not need much exhuming even in the most apparently consolatory fictions the churchyard seems to make possible: of a still point in a troubled world where the legacy of a supposedly better time soothes the anxieties of present crisis.[13] As I discuss below and in the Postscript, if the ideal of the churchyard's communality persists only in its

[8] Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2 and *passim*.

[9] Anahid Nersessian, *The Calamity Form: Poetry and Social Life* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 60.

[10] Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739–1796* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5, 3.

[11] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 4.

[12] To preview here what this Introduction will adumbrate and what my case-study chapters will explain through examples: the churchyard reveals how history, like death, is experienced by everyone but not experienced by everyone in the same ways. Tendentiously to call history the experience of labour under capital is to shunt it to its sharpest edge, and to try to make it possible to hear expressions of the feeling of history at their highest pitch.

[13] In this way, and to anticipate my own claims about genre below, if Liu's Wordsworth could bury history in nature with the help of georgic, he was also able to manipulate the counter-pressure of 'a basic undecideability in georgic making it . . . just as likely to exhume history as bury it', since georgic in particular tested 'the stability of genre as a convention . . . threatening to come apart under the pressure of the times', 'the massive intrusion of specifically historical reality' (*Wordsworth*, 19–20). On the 'negative hermeneutic' by which cultural/historical materialism/new historicism like Liu's cast poems as variously burying history and the critic as exhuming its submerged presence—and whether 'there are ways in which the poetry can

most diminished and fragile state for Gray and Wordsworth—who use the churchyard to articulate what Raymond Williams conceptualized as a 'structure of feeling, at once moved and meditating, appalled and withdrawn' from 'the lost peace and virtue of country life'[14]—this ideal is rarely, and never enduringly, possible for Leapor, Yearsley, Smith, and Clare. And even if it were, displacement and disavowal offer limited grounds for addressing what feels intolerable about the present. Comparisons to the past for these poets, when they occur, glance backwards less for the purposes of melancholy retreat than to spotlight the confounding of the coordinates by which life, experienced in a landscape and expressed in a poem, had once reliably been contained. Put another way, if Theodor Adorno understood lyric as engaging with capital sideways, through 'figures of renunciation and sequestration' amounting to capital's 'rigorous eschewal',[15] the poets I read here turn to other genres such as georgic, pastoral, and elegy to stage a more direct encounter.

This encounter is direct only in its confronting feelings, though—not in its reportage of the historical facts of life under capital. As Nersessian reminds us, poetry is not a form of explanation, and the calamity of capital is a trauma represented indirectly there, traceable in figuration (rather than explicative accounting) that might more powerfully express the 'phenomenological

and does offer a substantial register of "history"': how poems can work as 'agents of disclosure' through mediations requiring different models of critical attention—see Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3 and *passim*.

[14] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Vintage, 2016), 96—the specific instance; see, more generally, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128–35.

[15] Christopher Nealon, *The Matter of Capital: Poetry and Crisis in the American Century* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 19. See Theodor Adorno, 'On Lyric Poetry and Society', trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson, in Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (eds), *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 339–50. Elsewhere, Adorno makes the poignant claim that asociality is 'the wound that art itself bears', since '[w]hoever disappears into the artwork thereby gains dispensation from the impoverishment of a life that is always too little'; yet he occasionally lets slip the negative, reverse mirror art holds up to history in an autonomy amounting to a critique through gestures of refusal, and confesses instead a more imbricated, ambivalent relation. The consolation of rejecting the world as it is, like the hopefulness of positing an alternative, is indivisibly yoked to the social: 'it is precisely as artifacts, as products of social labor, that they [i.e. artworks] also communicate with the empirical experience that they reject and from which they draw their content.' This social aspect of art emerges at the level of form and figure—aesthetic technologies that realize that 'artistic labor is social labor . . . Scarcely anything is done or produced in artworks that does not have its model, however latently, in social production' (*Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 2, 17, 6, 321).

discontinuity' of industrialization, deeply felt but hardly understood.[16] For the poets in this book, working with the material of their violently reordered world is mediated by its pressures on bodies whose lines of life are withdrawn while lines of verse press vitally on—until they do not. Causes are rarely seen, but in the churchyard their effects are everywhere visible. Collectively, then, the poets whose work I examine in *Churchyard Poetics* strain against without resolving the culturally commonplace ideal the churchyard is made to express: that collective life is harmoniously and continuously organized around places of burial and remembrance. They do so by excavating such an ideal's evasions of historical suffering, which they show can be differently contained in the churchyard: not as a site of contrast and safe refuge (containment as consolation), but as a landscape that collects and concentrates what is elsewhere environmental, atmospheric, distributed across a broader topography of laborious life. In other words, they refuse the more orthodox versions of churchyard complaint that compass redemption or consolation, because to redeem would be to forgive the suffering and to console would be to elude the problem. Declining the palliative gesture of turning away to the churchyard from a suffering located elsewhere, these poets refigure the churchyard as a traumatized landscape and unearth from its wounded ground an affective archive of social injury: of bodies compelled into service by new regimes of labour and dispatched to the churchyard when their usefulness runs out.

My citations so far locate *Churchyard Poetics* in a cultural materialist critical tradition concerned with the management of historical experience—of feeling hurt by capital—in aesthetics as a technology of affect management; it is from this tradition that I develop the methodology I will spend the rest

[16] Nersessian, *Calamity*, 3. As Nersessian goes on to say, poetry's figures are 'elements anchored to a world that is adjacent to, at times embedded in, and yet nonidentical to the social world whose violent transformations that poetry would, in theory, like to explain' (*Calamity*, 17). Nersessian's is a recent, historically specific take on a familiar problem—the politics of aesthetics—which this book also engages, in its critical attitudes if not at the level of thoroughgoing polemic. For that, and in addition to the work of Williams and Jameson cited here, see especially: Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1990); Anna Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2019); Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015); George Levine (ed.), *Aesthetics and Ideology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), and *The Question of the Aesthetic* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2022); Marjorie Levinson, *Thinking through Poetry: Field Reports on Romantic Lyric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), especially chs 2 and 6; Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

of this Introduction setting out. In brief for now, and adapting some terms from the sort of politically engaged affective criticism modelled by Lauren Berlant, I read my case-study texts as experiments in how 'the aesthetic or formal rendition of affective experience provides evidence of historical processes', with history understood as 'a densely corporeal, experientially felt thing' whose demands on the body, and on some bodies more than others, might be organized differently by aesthetic adjustments and improvisations as various strategies for survival.[17] The churchyard poetry of *Churchyard Poetics* turns to this landscape as a site, and an especially fraught one, for thinking about the attenuated life of the body under capital and for testing out what sorts of expressive terrain might open up there to say what that feels like, if not what can be done about it.

Refiguring the Churchyard

The conventional critical elision of the churchyard landscape is hardly surprising when the twilight shades of canonical churchyard poems have for so long and so influentially been read as images of retreat from history, into the countryside, night, and death. Gray's *Elegy* in particular seems archetypal of a mid-eighteenth-century evacuation of social life, whose sole representative, the weary ploughman, vacates the scene in its first quatrain 'And leaves the world to darkness and to me'.[18] In John Sitter's famous formulation, Gray's poem offers an extreme example of 'literary loneliness', characterized by a discontinuity with history 'in the mid-century attempt to purify poetry of topicality' (including the explicit social statement and sociable forms of the previous generation under Alexander Pope).[19] This retreat has often been taken to align with the period's preference for a poetry of 'Invention and Imagination', as Gray's contemporary and fellow poet Joseph Warton defined it—a poetry that appeared to prepare the ground for the Romantic flourishing of a pre-Romantic promise, but that also naturalized the churchyard and other social landscapes as purposefully hazy settings

[17] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 16, 64.

[18] Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, in Roger Lonsdale (ed.), *The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1969), l. 4, hereafter cited parenthetically.

[19] John Sitter, *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 12; on Gray's *Elegy*, see 97–103.

for the exercise of the projective imagination.[20] The persistent attraction of this teleology continues to make a temporary stopping place of the mid-century churchyard; as a result, the churchyard as a historical landscape is quickly left behind in the transcendent leap to Romanticism. This character assessment of the mid-eighteenth century continues to feel era-defining.[21] Yet a turn in Sitter's argument suggests how, far from suppressing history's disturbing energies, the poet-as-fugitive is a pervasive trope that powerfully marks the slow violence of social change, written in deep scars on the landscape in this especially tumultuous period: of urbanization, industrialization, parliamentary enclosure of the commons and their engrossment by landlords, and the expansion of capitalist regimes across a globalized commodity culture subtended by the colonial projects of competing European states.[22] The spectre of mid-eighteenth-century poetry is not history's absence but its 'crushing presence'.[23]

Churchyard Poetics locates the churchyard as a poetic landscape embedded in this context, where the crushing presence of history is made palpable in a traumatized terrain composed of bodies pressed to earth as grist to the mill of capital. While standard accounts may find in the churchyard a respite from social change, a site where history is slowed or suspended, the body's persistent presence there denies the poet's bid for flight beyond its limits—whether into the feudal past, future afterlife, or realms of imaginative

[20] Joseph Warton, *Odes on Various Subjects* (London: R. Dodsley, 1746). See David Fairer, 'Creating a National Poetry: The Tradition of Spenser and Milton', in John Sitter (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 177–202; Joan Pittock, *The Ascendancy of Taste: The Achievement of Joseph and Thomas Warton* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1973).

[21] Dustin D. Stewart has recently revised from a different angle this conventional trajectory in literary history, which maps the 'pre-Romantic' low point between the peaks of John Milton and William Wordsworth. Taking a religious emphasis on futural states of disembodiment and re-embodiment (what he calls spiritualist and mortalist positions), Stewart charts instead the contribution of different poets—Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Edward Young, and Mark Akenside—for 'a different genealogy' (*Futures of Enlightenment Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 6–7). Stewart emphasizes the potentially radical imaginative disembodiment of these poets; nevertheless, and as he admits for other mid-century poets of the 'moderate Enlightenment' like Gray, corporeality remains crucial. As I show in *Churchyard Poetics*, an emphasis on the body—especially bodies at work—can also help define an equally pressing, though distinct, alternative to familiar poetic teleologies.

[22] See Carolyn Lesjak on the enclosure of the commons as one among many spatially and temporally distributed activities marking 'the constitutive violence of capitalism' (*The Afterlife of Enclosure: British Realism, Character, and the Commons* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), 7).

[23] Sitter, *Literary Loneliness*, 84. As Sitter says of the *Elegy*, 'the retreat from history occurs in poems most dramatically when historical events and public actors are portrayed as hostile not only to the life of poetry . . . but to the life of the poet himself' (96).

transcendence. Bodies in the ground are the weight that pulls us to earth, our phenomenological tether to the here and now of material life. In the churchyard this contact with history is concentrated in a terminal aggregation of otherwise ambient affective intensities, registering at the sharp end of extremity what it feels like to live and die in time as it gets strung out under capital. The poetry at the centre of *Churchyard Poetics* thus gives the lie to the assumptions articulated by Hugh Blair in the first epigraph to this Introduction: that the imagination is a leisurely force and that writing by the heart, however ardent, is writing according to nature with neither art nor labour in sight. To the contrary, the poets I read in the book collectively expose the painful reality that the most closely felt experiences can make for the most densely worked poetry—worked up, at a fever pitch of feeling (variously expressed as anxiety, grief, anguish, rage, and injured confusion), and worked over: marked by the poet's aesthetic crafting of these exorbitant affective states.

And if the difficult feelings provoked by churchyard encounters are traceable in texts as seemingly orthodox and politically unobtrusive as Gray's *Elegy* (in my reading below) and Blair's *The Grave* (in Chapter 1), then poems more marginal to the period's literary norms can more startlingly disclose this unsettling material. In this book I examine the troubling historical textures of poems typically excluded from canonical 'graveyard poetry' and that fundamentally reshape its familiar topography. In the readings that make up *Churchyard Poetics*, the work of Mary Leapor, Ann Yearsley, Charlotte Smith, and John Clare revises the conventions of the 'graveyard school' but retains the churchyard as a space of social life, and one therefore keenly contested. My proposition is that the churchyard's tensile structures of feeling, running deeper and in a greater ambit than the category of 'graveyard poetry' allows us to see, are most evident to poets whose bodies and works suffer and measure social life. Yet, as I explain in Chapter 2, I do not follow a biographical reading of work by these poets, whose formal, aesthetic, and rhetorical strategies have often been submerged beneath an overdetermined critical focus on the writer's life as the essential context for an engagement with their writing. It is, of course, important that Leapor agonized over the status of her poetry compared to her labour as a domestic servant and died aged 24, never seeing her work published in book form;[24] that Yearsley,

[24] According to her friend and patron Bridget Freemantle, Leapor's 'chief Ambition seem'd to be to have such a Competency as might leave her at Liberty to enjoy the Company of a Friend, and indulge her scribbling Humour (as she call'd it) when she had a mind, without

who worked as a milkwoman, was found close to starving and supported into print by her patron Hannah More;[25] that Smith could be described by William Cowper as '[c]hain'd to her desk like a slave to his oar, with no other means of subsistence for herself and her numerous children';[26] and that Clare laboured in the fields he so attentively describes, including for the purposes of enclosure, which he so feelingly laments.[27] These biographical circumstances account in part for the difference between the relationship to labour and landscape in these poets' works and those of Gray, Blair, and Wordsworth; yet as historically contingent facts they are not nearly sufficient to explain what Leapor, Yearsley, Smith, and Clare did with their historical experience when writing, let alone whether historical experience is sublimated or surmounted by art.

This book takes an alternative track through the churchyard, and the terms of its subtitle—landscape, labour, and the legacy of genre—orient my methods for rereading a poetic topography we think we know through the work of poets who provoke us into knowing it differently. As a social landscape, the churchyard has a messier, more contorted history than its status as the defining British burial site might suggest. And because the churchyard is a social landscape, its history is as vulnerable to sweeping change as other arenas of eighteenth-century cultural life, in which relations between landscape and labour were compelled into new and more

Inconvenience or Interruption. I could not see how much she was straiten'd in point of Time for her Writing, without endeavouring to remove the Difficulty; and therefore propos'd a Subscription . . . I had the Pleasure to see it brought into a promising Way before the Death of the Author; who unfortunately did not live to receive that Benefit by it, which has since accrued to her Father' (*The Works of Mary Leapor*, ed. Richard Greene and Ann Messenger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), xxxvii).

[25] As More described it in her 'Prefatory Letter' to Yearsley's *Poems on Several Occasions* (1785), '[r]epeated losses, and a numerous family . . . reduced them very low, and the rigours of the last severe winter sunk them to the extremity of distress. . . . Her aged mother, her six little infants, and herself (expecting every hour to lie in), were actually on the point of perishing, and had given up every hope of human assistance' (*The Collected Works of Ann Yearsley*, i. *Poetry and Letters*, ed. Kerri Andrews (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 277–8).

[26] William Cowper, *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper*, iv. *Letters, 1792–1799*, ed. James King and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 281.

[27] 'Clare dug lime, dug up what he called "antiquities", dug gardens and perhaps also enclosure ditches', John Goodridge and Simon Kövesi write ('Introduction', in *John Clare: New Approaches* (Helpston: John Clare Society, 2000), xviii). Against this landscape of work, the poet presents himself as 'being totally disoriented in the fields, the sun changing its place in the heavens so that all sense of time and place was lost . . . so that Clare's map of himself and of his countryside became a map without bearings'—an indictment of the history he witnessed as well as a testimony of his own psychological breakdown (Eric Robinson, 'Introduction', in Eric Robinson, David Powell, and Margaret Grainger (eds), *The Later Poems of John Clare 1837–1864*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), i. ix).

pressurized formations than in any earlier period. Violent reorganization of the earth and the lives of its workers also altered poets' engagement with this material in some of eighteenth-century literature's characteristic modes of writing the landscape: georgic, pastoral (often of an elegiac cast), topographical, and Romantic nature poetry. By contrast with these established categories, 'graveyard poetry' has seemed to fall short of the requirements of a genre and has been read as either extending quite loosely to a broad range of poems and novels that define an entire culture of sensibility, or restricted to four works spanning just thirty years.[28] Critics have trialled different models to account for the popularity of the 'graveyard school' phenomenon, pointing out that, however varied the poetry, there is a churchyard at the centre—'at once topography and a *topos*'.[29] Yet the tradition's relationship to genre seems to me more about its incursions into and disruptions of other, established genres than a failure to establish a genre in its own right. The chapters of *Churchyard Poetics* thus take up genres that were especially popular in the eighteenth century, that had particular investments in this century's disarrangement of embodied experience, and that were often crossed and contested by the churchyard. In churchyard poetry's scene of writing, poetic genres could be tested and transformed by the stark social realities the churchyard topos reveals.

Running through the book, but the particular focus of Chapter 1, is georgic poetry: a genre that, according to Kevis Goodman, enacts the physical process of excavation and the interpretative work of disclosure, turning up history 'as *unpleasurable* feeling: as sensory discomfort, as disturbance in affect', so that, 'even when it attempts to narrate or otherwise contain history, something else—an affective residue—will out'.[30] Growing out of Hesiod's *Works and Days* (eighth century BCE) and Virgil's *Georgics* (29 BCE; popularized in John Dryden's 1697 translation), georgic is essentially agricultural: it features practical farming advice on crop- and tree-planting, the tending of livestock, and the keeping of bees. Officially didactic poems, georgics nevertheless tend to deviate from instruction with reflections on political, philosophical, and aesthetic concerns arising from associations with life on the land. This makes georgic a malleable genre for eighteenth-century poets, who enter what Paddy Bullard recognizes as a tradition less linear than it is

[28] Eric Parisot, *Graveyard Poetry: Religion, Aesthetics and the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Poetic Condition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 4–5.

[29] John Baker, '"The Philosophy of *Tears*": Sense(s) and Sensibility in Some Graveyard Poems', *Études Épistémè*, 30 (2016), 4.

[30] Goodman, *Georgic Modernity*, 3–4, 8–9.

'fragmented and discontinuous, each iteration starting in a new direction'.[31] One of georgic's connective threads, though, is a concern with the body made to work the land, and in Chapter 1 I press on the seemingly innocent figures of nature in Robert Blair's *The Grave* to highlight the poem's difficulty with working the irremediably physical churchyard landscape into a vision of the afterlife through the medium of an ambivalent georgic poetics—a variation on the genre that I call churchyard georgic. The body is an unignorable subject in *The Grave*—one that cannot easily be redeemed by Christian models of transcendence or consolation, nor reduced to a prop for didactic imperatives to look to death for moral improvement. In *The Grave* as in this Introduction's second epigraph, from James Hervey's *Meditations Among the Tombs* (1746), death levels social antagonisms as it levels social inequities; yet, in the churchyard's material imaginary, the 'confused relics' laboriously '*mix*, as they *moulder*', making the bodies 'incorporat[ing] with each other in the grave' the image that lingers longest in the mind. A source of some anxiety in a religious text seemingly intent upon the afterlife, this indivisibility of body from earth is a georgic fixation, and the poet must work continually to restore the dead who insist on their status as decaying matter. I examine how the novel association of *The Grave* and the georgic tradition encourages a different approach to the eighteenth-century fascination with places of burial and human remains, as poets make much imaginative work from the lowest of materials: the earth from which we are made and to which we return. Where this orthodoxy has seemed universal in the 'death-the-leveller' didacticism of 'graveyard poetry', its complication by georgic's more proximate and socially determined pressures transfigures the churchyard into a scene of hard work.

The working body of georgic indexes the genre's openness about its 'recreations of the social domain' as it links up country, city, and empire, while admitting that the effects of such economic and cultural imbrications are by no means always positive.[32] Pastoral—the focus of Chapter 2—is another ancient genre, with roots in Theocritus's *Idylls* (third century BCE) and Virgil's *Eclogues* (42–37 BCE), which takes up these social re-creations in more subtle or submerged modalities. The genre's depiction of the idyllic lives of

[31] Paddy Bullard, 'Introduction: A Survey of English Georgic Writing, 1521–2021', in Paddy Bullard (ed.), *A History of English Georgic Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 2.

[32] Karen O'Brien, 'Imperial Georgic, 1660–1780', in Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward (eds), *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 161.

shepherds is occasionally troubled by anxieties about the challenges of work against hard land and inclement weather, the decline of the body in pastoral's persistently elegiac tinge, and the satirical energies pushing utopian nostalgia to its ironic extremes. Each of these elements was emphasized by eighteenth-century poets, who mixed pastoral with georgic as a combined apparatus for 'interpreting, by means of ancient forms of fiction, phenomena which were radically new'; together, these genres were adapted by poets as they contended with 'breaking points in literary history where . . . celebrative efforts fail to hold together against the recalcitrant pressures of actual history'.[33] Nevertheless, critical discussions of pastoral poetry in the period continued to hold fast to the genre's governing spirit of *otium*, or leisure, making pastoral especially inhospitable to labouring-class poets and especially susceptible to their revisionary tactics. In Chapter 2 I examine Mary Leapor's 'Colinetta' (1748), which braids together pastoral, georgic, and elegy to represent the disturbing slide of the beleaguered body of working georgic, labouring against nature's decline, into the dying body of elegiac pastoral—a haunting inversion of reposing shepherds and their lady loves. Leapor dwells in a sombre relation to these genres, using the churchyard to depict the end of a body whose labours—of both georgic work and pastoral song—can no longer be performed.

Chapter 2 also reads into the tradition of topographical poetry, which is typically traced back to John Denham's *Coopers Hill* (1642) and, this chapter shows, pushed to engage with new territories of feeling in Ann Yearsley's 'Clifton Hill' (1785). Topographical or locodescriptive poetry oscillates between fixed prospects seen from an eminence and more dynamic involvements from within the scene, facilitated by a peripatetic structure in which the poet's mobility yields scenic and thematic transitions as the poem tracks across the landscape and along its political and cultural history. Such a free range of motion, with its connotations of confident possession, is unpicked by Yearsley, whose physical movement is halting and whose imaginative and poetic ventures are always under threat. The difficulty she feels in occupying Clifton Hill as a working woman is cathected in the poem's churchyard

[33] Richard Feingold, *Nature and Society: Later Eighteenth-Century Uses of the Pastoral and Georgic* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1978), 9, 12. Tobias Menely similarly shows how the eighteenth century's new industrial and energy regimes could not successfully be 'accommodated within descriptive convention' mandated by 'Virgilian virtues of rural life and labor', resulting in 'modal strain' and representational crisis (*Climate and the Making of Worlds: Toward a Geohistorical Poetics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 127, 129).

scene, where lofty heights collapse in trembling depths and the prospect view is agonized by its vertiginous drop into the grave. In Chapter 2 I discuss Leapor's and Yearsley's strategies for reclaiming the churchyard topos and redirecting its focus to labouring bodies—of those who tilled and otherwise toiled upon the soil and now might rest beneath it, even as their poetry finds ways to linger on. Theirs is an uneasy working out of the life of poetry that relies on, even as it endures beyond, the contracted life of the body.

Charlotte Smith's paired poems 'Sonnet XLIV. Written in the Church-Yard at Middleton in Sussex' and 'Elegy' (both 1789) are less uneasy than they are unstable, collapsing the churchyard into the sea, exhuming the dead, and revealing their status as mere bones. The calamity of this event, related across both poems, organizes another generic reworking as Smith overhauls elegy's internal mechanics, as I discuss in Chapter 3. An elegy is a lament sung on the occasion of a death, with origins in Greek and Latin poetry by Theocritus, Bion, Moschus, Tibullus, and Virgil, and brought to renewed attention in the eighteenth century through John Milton's 'Lycidas' (1637), William Shenstone's elegies in the 1740s, and Gray's *Elegy*. In the masculinist tradition defined by these poets, elegy typically finds consolation in the collaborative mourning of nature and the comforting inheritance of earlier writers. Violently displacing Gray's 'rude forefathers', Smith's gutting of the genre tracks wildly free of these expectations. That it does so in the churchyard—elegy's paradigmatic landscape following the publication of Gray's then-archetypal *Elegy*—tips the genre's compensatory structures of mourning into a condition of marginality, turbulence, and erasure. In this chapter, as in Chapter 2, I emphasize how classical genres such as elegy and pastoral consolidate their patterns of poetic inheritance at the expense of women, who feature in such poems as mute attendants or aggressors whose violence will be still more violently checked. While this narrative, repeated across literary history, leaves a hostile legacy for women poets to work with, Smith, like Leapor and Yearsley, recodes convention by illuminating then displacing its norms. Where Leapor's pastorals subtly modify the genre's expectations, however, Smith's elegies burst through the foundation of masculine consolation on the silence of women as they sweep away the churchyard in their tides of excess feeling.

Chapter 4 takes up another eighteenth-century genre, the long poem, to show how John Clare's 'The Village Minstrel' (1821) combines georgic, pastoral, topographical poetry, and elegy as generic signatures brought into creative tension over the span of a poem charting the life of a rural poet named Lubin. As these genres generate a crosshatched correspondence,

looping back into new formations, the long poem accommodates other interlocking rhythms such as the working day, the seasons, and the lives of rural labourers that find their close in the churchyard. For Clare, however, writing in the industrial intensification of the changes wrought by capital, the churchyard punctuates or rather punctures his poetry's patterns of time and becomes a disruptive centre of difficult feeling as these patterns are warped by agricultural 'improvement'. Through the mix of genres in 'The Village Minstrel', the poem's sequence of uneasy returns to the churchyard pulls pastoral flights of fancy back to the hard earth of georgic, where work is merely interrupted and ends only in death. More starkly, the churchyard in Clare's poem also indexes social changes contorting the arc of this already arduous life of labour, as those buried there are hailed as strangers to their native landscape, rearranged by enclosure. Here, and in a series of shorter lyrics written across his career, Clare turns back to the churchyard as the tormented heart of a community disoriented by the alarmingly accelerated pace of historical change. In the churchyard the waste of social life, rather than its marginal endurance, is what is accumulated and recoverable: a lasting archive of what it feels like to live in time as the times themselves are changing beyond recognition. Clare combines the genres featured across the rest of *Churchyard Poetics* in a mixed mode dedicated to turning over this traumatized earth; in it he finds evidence of the harms allotted to those compelled to work in the grip of a new era of the brutal reorganization of rural life and landscape. Situated in this context, the churchyard is not the familiar place of closure and melancholy calm, but a site perilously porous to the hard life of the landscape surrounding it.

Georgic, pastoral, topographical poetry, elegy, and their combination in the eighteenth-century long poem constitute genres of landscape connected in this book by their collective crossing of the churchyard. They offer ways of working with poetry as a made thing—a process of labour not illegitimately (though certainly uncomfortably) set alongside labour on the land or for its owners, since labouring-class poets such as Leapor, Yearsley, and Clare so often made this connection themselves and fought for recognition of their aesthetic craft. If poetry is work, and poets work with genre, the cross-currents of these acts of making have often been written in the churchyard. Yet the churchyard, and the labour it reveals, disturb the normative functioning of genres such as georgic, pastoral, and elegy, which eighteenth-century critics consistently, even anxiously, positioned as moderating at the level of style and tone the troubling subject of the working and dying body. The combination of these genres with the churchyard makes a bid for elevation

from or softening of history's hard realities that much more challenging; cumulatively, then, my readings defamiliarize literary understanding of the churchyard, which in *Churchyard Poetics* is far from settled territory, as they do the genres by which this instability can be made present and palpable. Using genre as the organizing principle for reading beyond the tradition of 'graveyard poetry' (and, with Blair, more deeply into it), the tensions of the churchyard as a site of social life become startlingly visible beneath the surface of its rucked and clotted ground. In this way, my focus on landscape is less ecocritical than some of my argument's terms might suggest, since environmental images in churchyard poetry work most often as figures for expressing a socially determined historical violence so encompassing that it seems to exceed the social, even as this figural exorbitance proceeds from history's harms to peoples *and* environments.[34] As Carolyn Lesjak writes, 'the constitutive violence of capitalism' is '[s]low rather than spectacular', ambient and atmospheric rather than identifiable as punctual event: 'wending its way through the ubiquity of the everyday, it makes itself known in the least conspicuous of manners: the workaday world, the seemingly natural hedgerow, the constitution of ourselves as individuals, the weather.'[35] The pervasiveness and ongoingness of economic changes wrought on the landscape are nonetheless expressible through the tropes of landscape that establish one of the common grounds of art and especially of eighteenth-century descriptive poetry. The poets of this book use genres of landscape to locate social violences in the social landscape of the churchyard, which in their work cannot be naturalized fully because of the defining presence of people, and therefore of 'culture', there. Buried bodies shape the ground of the churchyard and, in their refusal to stay quietly beneath its disturbed surface, bring attention consistently back to a world that is felt and suffered as a distinctly social environment.

[34] See Nersessian on the late eighteenth century as 'an era rattled by the runaway surrealism of climate change, which is both the progeny and the partner of industrialization', the combination of which frames poets' efforts to stage 'their own works' competence, or rather its lack thereof, to the representation and analysis of the train of consequences set in motion by contemporary economic shifts' (*Calamity*, 2).

[35] Lesjak, *Afterlife*, 7–8. See also Lauren Berlant: '[A] public [is] intimate because they're experiencing together a shift in the atmosphere. . . . We are directed to see not an event but an emergent historical environment that can now be sensed atmospherically' ('Thinking about Feeling Historical', in Janet Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich, and Ann Reynolds (eds), *Political Emotions* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 232); and Christopher Nealon: 'if we can learn to read the weather we will better understand The Matter of Capital' ('Reading on the Left', in *Infinity for Marxists: Essays on Poetry and Capital* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2024), 88).

My replacement of graveyard with churchyard, as I indicated above, is the superficial gesture that makes this kind of deep reading possible. While the former is a general name for a burial site, the latter is historically specific and by far the older term.[36] Beyond this cultural antecedence, the church in the churchyard orients this landscape as a complicated centre of collective life. Yet here accumulated bodies swell in excess of institutional certainties about peaceful burial in the stable ground and the promise of the afterlife; instead, for the poets I read, these bodies expose the grim truth of death's uneven intervention as an end to, and casualty of, the hard lives of those most pressed under capital. In making its argument, however, *Churchyard Poetics* builds from recent historicist work on 'graveyard poetry', which has been most fully articulated by Eric Parisot.[37] Parisot retrieves the status of Parnell's 'Night-Piece', Blair's *The Grave*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, and Gray's *Elegy* as part of 'a historically discrete eighteenth-century mode of poetic experimentation'. He argues that, rather than a 'marginal contributor' to literary history (associated with 'pre-Romanticism' or the 'Age of Sensibility'), the 'graveyard school' models a set of changing ideas about religious belief such as scriptural authority, moral judgement, free will, and Protestant eschatology. Aligning the aesthetic innovations of 'graveyard poetry' with the theological debates by which they were informed, Parisot proposes that 'contemporary religious controversies [were] secularised and poetically translated into re-considerations of poetic authority, agency, death and the afterlife, helping to renegotiate and redefine the shifting parameters of the mid-eighteenth-century poetic condition'.[38] This important re-engagement changes how we read these poems, accounting for their popularity in their own time and their endurance as landmarks in eighteenth-century poetry. It nevertheless remains self-restricting in its focus on Parnell, Blair, Young, and

[36] The *OED* records the earliest use of 'churchyard' in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*c.*1160), while 'graveyard' surfaces as late as 1767, though Parisot traces an earlier mention in 1691 ('The Gothic Churchyard', 19). Significantly, as Parisot points out elsewhere, before the twentieth century critics used 'graveyard poetry' and 'graveyard school' synonymously with other labels including 'Church-yard school' (*Graveyard Poetry*, 1–2).

[37] See also Baker, '"Philosophy"'; Evert Jan Van Leeuwen, 'Funeral Sermons and Graveyard Poetry: The Ecstasy of Death and Bodily Resurrection', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 32/3 (2009), 353–71; Vincent Quinn, 'Graveyard Writing and the Rise of the Gothic', in Angela Wright and Dale Townshend (eds), *Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 37–54; Andrew Smith, *Gothic Death 1740–1914: A Literary History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); Jack G. Voller (ed.), *The Graveyard School: An Anthology* (Richmond, VA: Valancourt Books, 2015).

[38] Parisot, *Graveyard Poetry*, 5, 6, 8.

Gray—after whom 'graveyard poetry' dwindles into parody and imitation.[39] This imposed limit makes sense, since so much earlier work had positioned these poets in subordinate relation to the fuller flowering of their themes in Romantic poetry and the Gothic novel. However, a more extended view now has room to broaden the prospect to see who else occupies the churchyard and what they do differently with it. For this reason, I relinquish 'graveyard poetry' as a term of reference, the parameters of which tend to obscure connections to the poets and priorities that are the concern of this book. Pulling back the curtain of 'graveyard poetry' makes the churchyard newly visible as a social landscape with its own history—one especially significant for the counter-tradition of eighteenth-century poetry featured in *Churchyard Poetics*.

As familiar as the churchyard seems from this period's literature, it is also a commonplace in the British landscape, ubiquitous and intimately known. It is the most recognizable national emblem of the need to bury and remember, to preserve the place of the dead from the wastage of nature. It thus epitomizes what Roger Caillois recognizes as the primal safeguarding of the human form from non-human degradation:

> By digging a grave for his remains, man founds his claim on the future. . . . He also shows that he can remember and prepare. He establishes a continuity. By linking his efforts to those of his contemporaries, he unwittingly unites them with those of a host of vanished or future beings. . . . This is how a civilization appears. Here is its pledge, in the garden dedicated to unfeeling remains, upon this severe shore.

As the first mark of civilization, 'the grove devoted to the dead . . . founds in the solitude of nature the start of a human landscape'.[40] As much for the eighteenth century as Caillois's war-torn twentieth, to bury is to participate in a project of belonging. In his *New Science* (1725, third edn 1744), Giambattista Vico's mythic origin stories are punctuated by death, interment, and the guardianship of the living left behind. Unearthing a vital interplay of landscape and ancestry via acts of burial, he tracks the etymology of the

[39] For a notable exception, see Katarina Stenke, 'Dissenting from Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*: Christian Time and Poetic Metre in Anne Steele's Graveyard Poems', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 41/2 (2018), 273–88.

[40] Roger Caillois, 'Patagonia', in Claudine Frank and Camille Naish (trans.), Claudine Frank (ed.), *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 250, 247.

noun *humanitas*—human civilization—to the verb *humare*—to bury—and locates burial as one of the three founding principles of human institutions (with religion and marriage). Our ancient forebears, Vico writes, 'came to found and divide the first dominions of the earth' through 'protracted settlement and the burial of their ancestors . . . The lords of these domains were called giants, a Greek word which means "sons of the earth", or descendants of the buried dead.'[41] Burial provides a fundamental substructure to human life: instituting ideas of locality and affiliation through repetitions of an original act of space-claiming, it implants the dead in the earth and marks their presence with a stone that defines social identity as living long in a place where the dead are retained.[42]

In eighteenth-century Britain the defining place of the dead was the churchyard. Well into the modern period the churchyard was a place for remembering the known and precisely located dead, visible as a collective that shaped the landscape. The churchyard was a centre of social life, 'a forum, public square, and mall, where all members of the parish could stroll, socialize, and assemble. Here they conducted their spiritual and temporal business, played their games, and carried on their love affairs.' Processions, elections, and acts of public justice were carried out in the churchyard, and fair and market days were held there; living and dead 'coexisted in the same places and behind the same walls'.[43] From the churchyard's ancient origins into the eighteenth century, this site was a territorial extension of the church's temporal custodianship of life as well as afterlife, a physical manifestation of the parish with its ties of collective experience and geographical rootedness. Part of this socio-spatial positioning supported the relations of the living to the dead and to each other: the parish community was embodied by the church it surrounded, given meaning and personal significance through birth, marriage, and burial. Interment was always connected to

[41] Giambattista Vico, *New Science: Principles of the New Science Concerning the Common Nature of Nations*, 3rd edn., trans. David Marsh (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 9.

[42] See Alan Bewell, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 188–95; Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), ix–xi, 18–22. Henri Lefebvre's definition of 'social space' is similarly constituted by 'special places' like the churchyard, which for human communities are 'at once vital and mortal: within it they develop, give expression to themselves, and encounter prohibitions; then they perish, and that same space contains their graves' (*The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 34).

[43] Phillipe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 64, 30.

local rights and belonging to a place meant being able to be buried there.[44] Fundamentally, then, the dead are the foundation of this social world: the dead are 'social beings' who 'structure public spaces' like the churchyard by 'announc[ing] their presence and meaning by occupying space', Thomas Laqueur writes; their bodies 'create a community of memory; visitors to these bodies confirm it; together they make a claim on space and on the attention of the living'.[45]

Yet the churchyard's social history in this period complicates any sense of an ideal and enduring social commons, which its apparent permanence might imply. It may have been the principal place of burial for centuries, but it was organized according to systems of religious exclusion as an Anglican burial ground—one whose spatial model was further stratified according to class hierarchy and the ability to pay for a socially appropriate plot.[46] This is a concern for Gray's *Elegy*, which turns from 'storied urn or animated bust' to 'this neglected spot', 'With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture decked' (ll. 41, 45, 79)—a class-inflected spatiality pithily expressed in Parnell's 'Night-Piece', in which verse paragraphs separate '*Toil* and *Poverty*', 'A *middle Race* of Mortals', and 'the *Rich* [and] . . . the *Great*'.[47] Some of these issues, with others of public health and overcrowding in urban churchyards, anticipated nineteenth-century legislation, which would officially inaugurate the transition from churchyards to cemeteries as clean, new, less hermetically denominational burial sites.[48] The churchyard thus seems less a continuous

[44] See Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); Leonie Kellaher and Ken Worpole, 'Bringing the Dead Back Home: Urban Public Spaces as Sites for New Patterns of Mourning and Memorialisation', in Avril Maddrell and James D. Sidaway (eds), *Deathscapes: Spaces for Death, Dying, Mourning and Remembrance* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 161–80.

[45] Thomas W. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 10, 17, 22.

[46] See Margaret Cox (ed.), *Grave Concerns: Death and Burial in England 1700 to 1850* (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1998); Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (eds), *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Julie Rugg, *Churchyard and Cemetery: Tradition and Modernity in Rural North Yorkshire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

[47] Thomas Parnell, 'A Night-Piece on Death', in Claude Rawson and F. P. Lock (eds), *The Collected Poems of Thomas Parnell* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1989), ll. 32, 37, 44.

[48] Cemeteries were still managed for a profit and contained at least a portion of consecrated ground, however, and the apparent progression from churchyard to cemetery was neither swift nor consistent, especially in rural areas, where new churchyards were created and old ones extended at the same time that cemeteries were being constructed—see Rugg, *Churchyard and Cemetery*.

presence in the social landscape whose existence can be taken for granted than it does a site of memory under siege; increasingly it came to represent a culture whose decline might fittingly be memorialized there.[49] As Paul Westover observes, the churchyard features in such eighteenth-century literary genres as the prose pastoral as a landscape where 'an idyllic past still within living memory or just beyond it' might yet be recovered. Its cultural form is as a shadowy existence in the temporal disjuncture of pastoral longing: 'Churchyard-centred prose pastorals flourished because of the churchyard's potent associations with ways of life and death that were vanishing—and because churchyards themselves appeared to be threatened.'[50] The churchyard, consecrated as much by its literary commemoration as by its sacred repository of the dead, is a site of connection and continuity whose legacy is menaced by the pervasive dislocations of the long eighteenth century.

The poems that are the focus of this book inhabit this unsettled territory. Yet, uncomfortable with the generic prescriptions of pastoral and its unwelcome superintendence or erasure of the labouring body, poets such as Leapor, Yearsley, and Clare turn to different genres such as georgic, elegy, and topographical poetry to deal with a cultural loss felt more keenly and with little of nostalgia's softening gloss. In Smith's turbulent elegies, too, fate is hard, and the body suffers its blows with grim endurance and vociferous complaint. Even in Blair's *The Grave*, the orthodoxy of the disembodied afterlife or the yearning retrospective of an unfallen (and therefore labour-free) Golden Age is complicated by the laborious figures of body and earth with which the georgic poet must contend. The threat to the churchyard as a site of memory exposes a vulnerability in the rhythm of rural life it seems to preserve; this is a life some of these poets lived, and its changes are felt the nearer for the disarticulation of the social world before their eyes. In their work the churchyard is less a site of retrieval of an otherwise vanishing world than it is that world's grave.

[49] On sites of memory see Pierre Nora, 'General Introduction: Between Memory and History', in Arthur Goldhammer (trans.), Lawrence D. Kritzman (ed.), *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, i. *Conflicts and Divisions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1–21.

[50] Paul Westover, 'At Home in the Churchyard: Graves, Localism, and Literary Heritage in the Prose Pastoral', in Evan Gottlieb and Juliet Shields (eds), *Representing Place in British Literature and Culture, 1660–1830: From Local to Global* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 65–6.

'Rude forefathers': Breaking with Gray's *Elegy*

I can clarify the distinction I am making between the work featured in *Churchyard Poetics* and more familiar representations of the churchyard in eighteenth-century poetry through a comparison with such landscape- and era-defining texts as Gray's *Elegy*. Again, though, this is a difference of degree rather than kind, since here too there are palpable discomforts disclosed in the churchyard, which merely require some disinterring. For John Sitter and others reading for history's thumbprint on the text, the politics of Gray's poem are only obscured in its controlling aesthetic and discernible in their studied suppression.[51] In the *Elegy* the pressure points of history—personified by 'Ambition' and 'Chill Penury' (ll. 29, 51)—are chastised for their sophisticated judgements of the 'rude forefathers of the hamlet', contained in the churchyard's 'narrow cell[s]' and commemorated by its 'frail memorial[s]' (ll. 16, 15, 78). Yet the poem's complicated politics seem orchestrated by an active sympathy that nevertheless declines much complaint, let alone any plea for or hope of social change. As such, Gray's 'language of melancholy and seeming resignation . . . figures the inaccessibility rather than the comprehensibility of historical forces'.[52] Denied knowledge or anything like participation beyond their confined community, the villagers are also protected from the world's corrupting influence: 'Their lot forbade: nor circumscribed alone | Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined' (ll. 65–6).

The alternative society the *Elegy* imagines, 'Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife' (l. 73), is one of collective work and communal memory. As the poem's affectionate backward glance records:

[51] See especially John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 157–8; William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Penguin, 1995), 11–12; John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85–133; Suvir Kaul, *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority: A Study in Ideology and Poetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 111–66; Richard C. Sha, 'Gray's Political Elegy: Poetry as the Burial of History', *Philological Quarterly*, 69/3 (1990), 337–57; Henry Weinfield, *The Poet Without a Name: Gray's Elegy and the Problem of History* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991).

[52] Jonathan C. Williams, 'Thomas Gray's *Elegy* and the Politics of Memorialization', *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 58/3 (2018), 653–4. Levinson makes a similar point about Wordsworth's poem 'Michael' (1800), in which 'elements of a stringent critique . . . are arranged in such a way as to valorize a wise passiveness in the face of circumstantial—which is to say, ideologically perspicuous—misfortune' (*Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, 59). See the Postscript for my discussion of Wordsworth's churchyard poems.

> Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
> Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
> How jocund did they drive their team afield!
> How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke! (ll. 25–8)

And in its final lines the poet is at least notionally integrated in the village's memorial community, remembered by the fond (if baffled) 'hoary-headed swain' and sought out by a 'kindred spirit' when buried in the local churchyard (ll. 97, 96). The closure of this sympathetic economy and its corollary aesthetic structure, with its hushed utterance and softening chiaroscuro, veil both the supervening historical circumstances and the poem's unease with them—smoothed into the landscape as its agricultural work ethic is ameliorated by the cooperation of yielding harvests and bowing woods. Yet even here pastoral's characteristic rose-tinted representational mode is ruffled: the hard verbs 'broke' and 'drive', the stubbornness of the landscape and the strokes deployed to master it, disrupt the *Elegy*'s superficial ease by subtly accommodating the troubling matter of labour. While workers in the landscape are seen but not heard in Gray's poem, it matters that the potential for an affective recalibration from melancholy sufferance to a more actively, if mutedly, discontented alienation turns on images of work; the suspension of work in death is not, in the end, mercifully welcomed but anxiously awaited as the hard edge and terminal point of life—particularly of life conditioned as one long round of work. The time lag between the first stanza's present-tense observation of the homeward-plodding ploughman at evening curfew and the retrospection of these more energetic, sunlit lines of harvest—a reverse chronology in which working bodies are first weary then sturdy—is traversed by the repeated 'oft' signalling labour's repetition, its wearing down of 'jocund' work (that is, pleasant work cheerfully performed) over generations of 'useful toil' (l. 29).

This submerged social consciousness, excavated in the critical afterlife of Gray's *Elegy*, is deeply written into its churchyard setting. This is inescapably a place of bodies that bear the weight of history: those buried beneath the ground but also the poet's, whose distracted wandering sets the coordinates for the poem's progress—less stately than its elegiac measure suggests when the obstacle course of the ground heaped with graves is called continually to mind. Mapped with an attentiveness to movement and pause typically associated with topographical poetry, the churchyard is the

constant referent of most of the poem's deictic markers and indexical pronouns: 'Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade, | Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap' (ll. 13–14); 'these bones' (l. 77).[53] The experiential realism of the opening four stanzas, in which a reduced ocular acuity in the darkening environment is compensated by a heightened receptiveness to sound, demonstrates the poet's presence in a landscape rich with sensuous detail finely discriminated.[54] And the predominating spatial architectonics—deprivation gently figured as 'the cool sequester'd vale of life' (l. 75); the poet's literalizing of the trope 'The paths of glory lead but to the grave' as his funeral processes 'through the church-way path' (ll. 36, 114)—determine the poem's recursive inclination to earth in this most grounding of places.[55] These aspects of the poem are contoured to the churchyard landscape and reveal how Gray's *Elegy* takes its bearings by the body—of the roaming poet and of the palpable presence of the dead in the heaving earth. Placing this poem with others of its time and temperament, Nersessian observes:

> These are poems about places and times and their imagination is topographical, even when the lay of the land concerns the shape of a feeling. They promise an experience of *presence*, as though by reading Gray or Goldsmith we are brought close to a gravestone or empty house, pulled toward ruins and twilit fields.[56]

In the churchyard, though, the 'experience of presence' is always liable to be waylaid by intimations of decay, disturbing the poet's 'shape of a feeling' by pulling it into close contact with material that cannot so easily be covered over or redeemed. Beset by such encounters, poetic feelings are less often resigned, let alone contented, but more strained and ill-at-ease.

Nevertheless, in Gray's *Elegy* the serried graves of generations have seemed to exemplify the organic continuity of the life of a place and a community, recoverable by an idealizing poet who joins its ranks. This is what Mikhail Bakhtin means by his idyllic variation of the chronotope, in which a

[53] See Helen Deutsch, 'Elegies in Country Churchyards: The Prospect Poem in and around the Eighteenth Century', in Karen Weisman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 187–205.

[54] See Erik Gray, "Save Where . . .": The Trope of Exceptionality', *ELH*, 77/3 (2010), 645–63; Anne Williams, *Prophetic Strain: The Greater Lyric in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 96–100.

[55] See Marshall Brown, *Preromanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 42–8.

[56] Nersessian, *Calamity*, 38.

'sequence of generations' is visible in a 'concrete, spatial corner of the world where the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one's children and their children will live'.[57] This book takes up the work of other poets, ones less often read in relation to Gray and his mid-century moment of imagination's upswing, who occupy the churchyard still more ambivalently and whose attention to the body is even less sure of its capacity affirmatively to sponsor the compensatory work of the imagination. In my readings of their poems, Blair, Leapor, Yearsley, Smith, and Clare find in the churchyard an archive of history's wasting effects, and their encounters with this difficult material chart the body's breakdown and the poem's blockage of connection or continuity. What Gray's poetic control seeks to contain and in some limited sense console, these poets expose as uncontainable and inconsolable.

Even in their work, though, having a body and using it as the ground of poetry is not an unleavened distress—there is much pleasure to be drawn from a sensuous appreciation of the world, as their poems so often demonstrate. Recent work on eighteenth-century landscape poetry has emphasized the generative correspondence between attentive mind and sensed location, mediated by an active body that conditions perceptual relations to the external phenomena that become the stuff of poetry.[58] But this process is not always easy or entirely celebratory, and the churchyard poets of this book are clear about the challenges, costs, and constraints of the social life of the body. At the same time, 'the body' is not a totalized entity or a natural given, but the historically specific object of social demarcation and discipline—as far as my poets are concerned, the bodies of women and workers: '*the first machine[s] developed by capitalism*'.[59] These particular bodies are also

[57] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics', in Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (trans.), Michael Holquist (ed.), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 225.

[58] See Margaret Koehler, *Poetry of Attention in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Jonathan Kramnick, *Paper Minds: Literature and the Ecology of Consciousness* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Elizabeth Oldfather, '"Snatched" into *The Seasons*: The Cognitive Roots of Loco-Descriptive Form', *Eighteenth Century*, 56/4 (2015), 445–65. This energetic corporeality is, however, strained by social pressures such as war and industrialization: see Mary A. Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010); Lily Gurton-Wachter, *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of Attention* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Nersessian, *Calamity*.

[59] Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (London: Penguin, 2021), 160, emphasis in original. As Federici defines it, primitive accumulation is a process requiring 'the transformation of the body into a work-machine, and the subjugation of women to the reproduction of the work-force' (*Caliban*, 62). See also Amy De'Ath, 'Hidden Abodes and Inner Bonds: Literary Study and Marxist-Feminism', in Colleen

the subjects of representation (by others and by themselves) that can support or subvert their social inscription.[60] The various figures of the body in eighteenth-century churchyard poetry thus endure and express what Raymond Williams calls the 'structures of feeling' consequent on living in history—'the experienced tensions, shifts and uncertainties, the intricate forms of unevenness and confusion' that characterize the 'immediate and actual significance of being';[61] what Kevis Goodman terms 'the noise of living' in the presentness of history 'as a seething mix of unsettled elements';[62] and what Lauren Berlant refers to as the affective adjustments attendant on dwelling in the uncertain sensorium of 'shared *historical* time'.[63] If 'history is what hurts',[64] its painful pressures are legible in the ground of the churchyard and writ large in its poetics.

Written on the Body: The Hard Work of Feeling

Turned towards the world, partaking of its rhythms and subject to them, Blair, Leapor, Yearsley, Smith, and Clare confront the fact of their poetic-making with difficult materials constellated about the body: its energies directed in work, figured in poetry, and wasted in death, all of which are situated in the churchyard in the poems discussed in the chapters to follow. These poets reveal that the churchyard is an exemplary embodied location,

Lye and Christopher Nealon (eds), *After Marx: Literature, Theory, and Value in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 225–39; Marina Vishmidt and Zoë Sutherland, 'Social Reproduction: New Questions for the Gender, Affect, and Substance of Value', in Jennifer Cooke (ed.), *The New Feminist Literary Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 143–54.

[60] See especially Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

[61] Williams, *Marxism*, 129–30. On the influence of Williams's concept, see Jon Klancher and Jonathan Sachs, 'Introduction: Raymond Williams and Romanticism', *Romantic Circles* (2020), n.p.

[62] Goodman, *Georgic Modernity*, 4, 3.

[63] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 15.

[64] Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 88. To forestall cliché by marking instead the persistence of this damaged feeling, some further formulations: repeatedly, Adorno writes that '[t]he socially critical zones of artworks are those where it hurts'; '[i]n expression they reveal themselves as the wounds of society'; 'what would art be, as the writing of history, if it shook off the memory of accumulated suffering' (*Aesthetic Theory*, 323, 352). Nealon considers contemporary poetry in which '[t]he possibility that capital takes charge of matter is being thought of in terms of human *pain*' ('The Price of Value', in *Infinity*, 152). And, aligning John Keats with Karl Marx, Nersessian focalizes how the former's 'senses always strain, are always under stress. . . . This is desire as duress, embodiment as ordeal', in a poetry that 'concentrates on the effortful, even agonizing work of shaping the body's response to the world' (*Keats's Odes: A Lover's Discourse* (London: Verso, 2022), 6, 7).

and that the poetics it stimulates is equally emphatic in its corporeal grounding. In Leapor's 'Colinetta', for example, the crossing of body and landscape in shared states of decline is concentrated in the churchyard, where Colinetta imagines the grave she will inhabit after the poem ends with her death. The working landscape of this shepherdess is suffering its own 'sick Season', and the 'baneful Dew' of the churchyard's metonymic yew tree cathects an affective atmosphere of mourning distributed across a denuded pastoral landscape, where 'the dry Stubble drank the falling Dew'.[65] Colinetta's death likewise metonymically instantiates the prospect of social decay, and both individual and communal forms of deterioration are expressed in the churchyard as a site of endings where natural patterns of flourishing and degeneration are pressurized by the social tensions obscured by such pastoral figurations. Smith's churchyard, too, is a landscape of grief, though her poems resist closure and reverse burial as a storm-tossed sea 'Tears from their grassy tombs the village dead, | And breaks the silent sabbath of the grave!'[66] The violent exposure of Smith's 'Sonnet XLIV' unearths the abject matter of the corpse in a startlingly corporeal encounter, which leaves the poem's 'I' overlooking the devastation from a distance nonetheless vulnerable to its affective reverberations, internalized as 'life's long storm' (l. 13). In the churchyard, the work of the poet is thrown back upon the body and takes its substance as a point of origin. This is a demanding though not necessarily undesirable challenge to poets, for whom a body in a place as starkly material as the churchyard is less a regrettable restriction than it is a conditioning structure for the making of a poem, however hard the work. Where other poets in other settings might feel free to roam among sensory details mediated by sensuous description, bodies in these poems are strained because they are unable, or perhaps more positively unwilling, to turn away from the historical conditions shaping the lives of particular bodies as useful objects.

It is true that poetry's amplified attention to the phenomenological often helps us see the body and its attachments to the world with startling clarity. In Susan Stewart's formulation, *poiēsis*—from the root *poiein*, 'to make'—yokes together two seemingly antithetical 'kinds of creation: the inspired creation that resembles a godlike power and the difficult material struggle . . . of making forms out of the resources available. Poetry's work of

[65] Mary Leapor, 'Colinetta', in *The Works of Mary Leapor*, ll. 13, 84, 12. All references to Leapor's poems are to this edition, hereafter cited parenthetically.

[66] Charlotte Smith, 'Sonnet XLIV. Written in the Church-Yard at Middleton in Sussex', in Stuart Curran (ed.), *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), ll. 7–8. All references to Smith's poems are to this edition, hereafter cited parenthetically.

creating . . . proceeds by means of imagination and a material engagement with the resources of language.' By these lights, the apparent polarities of inspiration and craft, or *technē*—'the laborious considered making that proceeds from the interaction of mind and hand'—are in fact complementary, combining sensuous immediacy and 'imaginative reach' in a form-making dialectic.[67] For Stewart, this is the poet's work: *poiēsis* is a relational process between the material and the maker as both perceiver and receiver of the world. Yet, far from an entirely optimistic collaboration with the material world, poetry's relationship to work remains messy and troubled. Abstract claims for the (intellectual) work of making can never totally occlude the presence of (physical) labour, which holds the poem's finality of form in tension with its creation through effort in time, its equivocal interaction with external phenomena, and its uncertain fate as material artefact.[68] All the way back to Genesis, the body is made from clay and forced to work and suffer the pain of childbirth, retaining in its physical shape and capacity for labour the story of a fallen state ambiguously balanced against poetry's claims for Godlike (and thus disembodied) speech acts.[69] As Christopher Nealon puts it, poetry's value status as a made and, what's more, useful form opens the question of its implication in—including its potential escape from or critique of—social scenes of production: 'the significance of poetry is not captured by the language of making or purpose' because 'it is a type of activity that puts pressure on the social meanings of both'.[70]

[67] Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 12, 198. Stathis Gourgouris concludes that the 'tension between idealist creating and materialist making permeates the entire hist[ory] of signification of the term *poiēsis*' ('Poiēsis', in Roland Greene (ed.), *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th edn (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1071).

[68] Susan Stewart, *The Poet's Freedom: A Notebook on Making* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 111–12. On the metaphor of poetic work as labour see Kurt Heinzelman, *The Economics of the Imagination* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2010); Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain 1700–1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

[69] Stewart, *Poet's Freedom*, 19, 21. Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Stewart reads maternity into gendered definitions of creative acts that distinguish between masculine work, 'which has some manifested consequence', and feminine labour, 'which becomes erased back into time and nature', to point out that the differences between work and labour are 'set out starkly in gendered terms that make the labor of childbirth the paradigm for gratuitous suffering' (*Poet's Freedom*, 192, 193).

[70] Christopher Nealon, 'The Poetic Case', in *Infinity*, 39.

This general state of affairs is further complicated by the historical contexts shaping churchyard poetry and the aesthetic strategies adopted by its poets to stage this encounter between poetry, the body, and the world through the mechanics of labour, especially its corporeal and affective intensities. Locating these coordinates for interpretation is helped in part by recent work in historical poetics, or the New Lyric Studies, to which this book adopts a methodological relation. To summarize its project briefly: to rebalance the enduring emphasis on lyric as the paradigmatic and transhistorically available poetic mode tersely expressing the passionate feelings of an individual speaker, Virginia Jackson, Yopie Prins, and others retrieve the diverse forms, genres, and ways of understanding poetry in different historical periods and on particular social occasions as features often overwritten by this capacious category (a process Jackson calls 'lyricization'). They do so by recovering more local scenes of composition and reception—for instance, reading poems alongside contemporaneous instruction manuals on prosody, or discovering how poems were circulated in historical print cultures.[71] In the eighteenth century, before 'lyricization' was properly underway, lyric operates less restrictively as a genre whose capacity for social reference is evident in its allusive and tropological patterns, occasional impetus, interrelation with other genres, and what Jennifer Keith calls its 'social passions'—affects that turn outwards to others in socially contingent realms and not only inwards towards the private self.[72] Nevertheless,

[71] See Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 'Historical Poetics and the Dream of Interpretation: A Response to Paul Fry', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 81/3 (2020), 289–318, and 'Lyric', in Greene (ed.), *Princeton Encyclopedia*, 826–34; Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, 'General Introduction', in Jackson and Prins (eds), *Lyric Theory Reader*, 1–8; Yopie Prins, 'Historical Poetics, Dysprosody, and *The Science of English Verse*', *PMLA*, 123/1 (2008), 229–34, and 'What Is Historical Poetics?', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 77/1 (2016), 13–40. Most recently, Jackson has claimed that lyricization describes the erasure of the historical, racialized, gendered persons by the lyric fiction of 'the speaker'—a universalized abstraction at the heart of lyric, 'characterized by a definite article rather than by a race or a gender or a pronoun or a proper name. A missing person.' Jackson continues: 'Black poets and women poets saw early and often that lyric's abstract communal subjective tendencies came at their expense. They pushed back by demonstrating the alienation of that abstraction from historical persons, and it is this response that has shaped modern ideas of lyric as what [Theodor] Adorno would call "the expression of a social antagonism"' (*Before Modernism: Inventing American Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 7, 20).

[72] Jennifer Keith, 'Lyric', in Jack Lynch (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 579–95. See also Chris Chan, 'Anne Finch's "Contemn'd Retreat" and the Politics of Lyric', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 53/3 (2020), 463–80; Margaret Anne Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 57–62; Sarah M. Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

churchyard poetry is often compressed as a recognizably modern kind of lyric in some versions like Gray's, which prepare the ground for the full lyric tilt of Romanticism, while the less obviously personal though no less passionate didacticism of the likes of Blair and Young sits awkwardly alongside this retrospectively convenient lineage. If 'graveyard poetry' can be co-opted as one strand of pre-Romantic lyric, its solitary, melancholy figures occupying the churchyard as a space of private feeling, how much less comfortably can churchyard poems by Leapor, Yearsley, Smith, or Clare be 'lyricized'? By my account, the counter-tradition of churchyard poetry mapped by these poets adapts other poetic genres such as georgic, pastoral, and elegy to complicate the smoothing out of literary history into successive 'lyric generations' and to refuse this narrative's smoothing over of the churchyard earth.[73] These genres work instead to reveal and resist the violences by which such smoothing takes place: they are social genres, and the churchyard is their social space—a topos tracked by a less even, more troubled and restless poetics riven by the ways in which class and gender shape physical matter in, and the embodied experience of, the churchyard as a historical landscape.[74]

Churchyard Poetics finds in the churchyard a sensorium in which these fundamentally physical poetic dynamics are exercised in the eighteenth century—a site where imaginative reach beyond the mortal body remains complicatedly attached to earth. It does so through sustained attention to the material conditions of the poems under discussion in each chapter, in terms of their generic affiliations and renovations, but more fundamentally in terms of the bodies by which they are animated and whose forms of life are structured by the genres, tropes, and other mechanisms that poets exploit in their shaping of an alternative tradition of churchyard poetry. My readings therefore also contribute to work on the eighteenth-century history of the senses, which finds in the body a locus of meaning articulated in texts

[73] See G. Gabrielle Starr, *Lyric Generations: Poetry and the Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

[74] The body is also essential to the New Lyric Studies, as diagnosed by Dustin Stewart, who writes that, if a persistent model of lyric is a disembodied voice seeking re-embodiment in new readers, the New Lyric Studies re-embodies poems in their own time, so that 'the conscientious critic ought to restore individual lyrics, like so many detached souls, to their individual bodies, namely to the[ir] complex and highly specific material conditions' (*Futures*, 34). See also Stephanie Burt: 'Historically oriented readers push back against, or try to render visible, the frames implied by the category "lyric", in order to speak about bodies, reception, institutions, and *mentalité*, in ways that "lyric" tends to foreclose' ('What Is This Thing Called Lyric?', *Modern Philology*, 113/3 (2016), 423).

attentive to the sensory inputs underpinning experience and expression.[75] Studies of eighteenth-century affect build on this history by emphasizing the vibrant and vulnerable bodies at the centre of an array of distributed, extravagant, and even unfelt feelings.[76] These affective intensities reveal a generally corporeal exposure to feelings beyond personal, individuated emotions—a collective implication in social experiences felt keenly by the particular bodies that endure them. As Carmen Faye Mathes recognizes, such unsettled feelings operate at the limits of sympathy in complex social relations that look more like shared vulnerability. They also disarrange aesthetic relations of genre and form through strategies of disruption, which waylay readers' expectations of a text and provoke an acknowledgement of their 'susceptibility to outside impressions as a kind of dissonance or refusal to resolve' into familiar structures of feeling, reoriented to something more demanding and disturbing.[77] These are at once textual and material entanglements, with the shared ground of the impressible body serving as the condition of the precarious relationality of life and poetry. Throughout this book I demonstrate how the coimplication of corporeal experience and poetic representation (signalled in the locative formulation 'written in the churchyard' in Gray's *Elegy* and elsewhere[78]) is essential in the churchyard, where bodies

[75] See Andrew Bennett, 'Language and the Body', in David Hillman and Ulrika Maude (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 73–86; Rowan Rose Boyson, 'The Senses in Literature: Pleasures of Imagining in Poetry and Prose', in Anne C. Vila (ed.), *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Enlightenment* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 155–78; Helen Deutsch and Mary Terrall (eds), *Vital Matters: Eighteenth-Century Views of Conception, Life, and Death* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Noel Jackson, *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Alan Richardson, 'Romanticism and the Body', *Literature Compass*, 1 (2004), 1–14.

[76] See James Chandler, *An Archaeology of Sympathy: The Sentimental Mode in Literature and Cinema* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); James Noggle, *Unfelt: The Language of Affect in the British Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020); Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790–1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Kate Singer, *Romantic Vacancy: The Poetics of Gender, Affect, and Radical Speculation* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2019).

[77] Carmen Faye Mathes, *Poetic Form and Romantic Provocation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022), 9.

[78] e.g. Susanna Blamire, 'Written in a Churchyard, on Seeing a Number of Cattle Grazing in It' (1766); William Mason, 'Elegy II: Written in a Churchyard in South Wales, 1787' (1797); Charlotte Smith, 'Sonnet XLIV. Written in the Church-Yard at Middleton in Sussex' (1789); Henry Kirke White, 'Lines Written in Wilford Churchyard' (1806); George Townsend, 'Elegy, Supposed to be Written in Barnet Church-Yard' (1810).

define space and where long patterns of inhabitation—of walking and burying, of mourning and remembering—animate this site's structures of feeling. In the period and for the poets at the centre of this book, such feelings are sharpened when these patterns go astray—in fractures of inherited social patterns felt all the more strongly at society's fractious margins. The bodies of the dead contour the earth, their monuments are materials to be navigated by the living bodies walking the ground, and these objects and their negotiation generate energies of thought and feeling given form by, and giving force to, poems that take their impetus from the churchyard in a time of flux. These energies often emerge in my readings as pressures, anxieties, dissonances, and other vectors of ambivalence that do not curtail the work of poetic-making but give it an expressive shape sensitive to its difficult social formation.

In Robert Blair's *The Grave*, for example, the tenacious subject of the body derails the poem's trajectory towards the disembodied afterlife through a set of georgic tropes conditioned by the labouring body at work on/in the earth and collapsing into its wreckage of 'Death's Spoils, the Spoils of Animals | Savage and Tame, and full of Dead Mens Bones'.[79] These images of decay have typically been interpreted as devices in service of the poem's pedagogical impetus, prodding readers towards a consideration of death to encourage them to look beyond it to the life hereafter. However, in my reading, this exhumation of the churchyard's relics works more like the agricultural excavations of Virgil's *Georgics*, which disinter the painful past as much as they plant for the future, finding within the soil 'rusty Piles', 'empty Helmets', and 'mighty Relicks of Gygantick Bones'.[80] This scene constitutes 'a representative anecdote for the pervasive georgic influence in eighteenth-century poetry';[81] but it is also a fundamentally disquieting scene of labour, and the excavation, even the consequence and perpetuation, of historical violence is likewise mediated in this period by the churchyard as a site of shared wounding. For Ann Yearsley in 'Clifton Hill', bodily life is primary and fragile: the working woman at the centre of the poem is exposed to seasonal fluctuations and menaced by sexual and economic threats, which

[79] Robert Blair, *The Grave. A Poem. (1743)*, Augustan Reprint Society, vol. 161 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1973), ll. 485–6, hereafter cited parenthetically.

[80] John Dryden, *Virgil's Georgics*, in William Frost and Vinton A. Dearing (eds), *The Works of John Dryden*, v. *Poems; The Works of Virgil in English 1697* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1987), bk 1, ll. 664, 665, 667, hereafter cited parenthetically.

[81] Goodman, *Georgic Modernity*, 1.

seem as ambiently present as winter's frosty atmosphere. In the churchyard this general state of susceptibility is put under yet more severe pressure as the poet calls on her mother buried there to shield her from the hard cares of a life eked out in death's shadow: 'My shrieking soul deserted, sullen views | The depths below, and Hope's fond strains refuse.'[82] However high up the hill she climbs, Yearsley is always liable to stumble down its surrounding steeps; her bodily vulnerability often threatens the course of her poetry—in which 'Hope's fond strains' might figure a happier song denied to, as much as refused by, the poet of 'Clifton Hill'—and the churchyard exacerbates these unsettling affects in a confrontation with the depths (of earth, of grief) in which all songs are silenced.

Yearsley's example powerfully demonstrates that the forming of poetry as shaped by a body at work is especially important for labouring-class poets, and labouring-class women poets in particular, as I explain in Chapters 2 and 4. For Blair and Smith, bodies in the churchyard are subject to work according to the differently disposed frameworks of georgic and elegiac poetry, and in Chapters 1 and 3 I show how bodies earthed up in agricultural metaphors or by personified storms are differently 'worked': worked up by a poetics exercised by the body's persistence, and worked upon by poets through the figurative, formal, and generic resources at their disposal. Acknowledging the hard work of poetic-making challenges the eighteenth-century model of 'natural genius', which conceals the self-taught relationship to poetic tradition, technical abilities, and aesthetic claims of poets such as Leapor, Yearsley, and Clare. But it also abandons the universalizing tendency of canonical 'graveyard poetry' to present all alike as vulnerable to the tug towards mortality. For these poets in this time, the churchyard as a site for the organization of collective life is complicated by its sharply differentiated remembrance of the anonymous and the vulnerable. This location thus comprehends the position of labouring-class poets as workers in the physical and literary landscape—a status whose expectations they disrupt in their reworking of the churchyard through revisionary takes on georgic, pastoral, elegy, and topographical poetry.

Crossing the axes of class and gender, such (re)workings are especially evident in poetry by Leapor, Yearsley, and Smith, I argue in Chapters 2 and 3, since their relationship to traditional genres of poetry is peculiarly vexed.

[82] Ann Yearsley, 'Clifton Hill. Written in January 1785', in *The Collected Works*, ll. 89–90, hereafter cited parenthetically.

Rendered mute when not erased entirely, women in masculinist generic traditions such as pastoral and elegy, for instance, are reduced to silent bodies 'whose unresponsiveness stands as the mark of their aesthetic value', Barbara Johnson writes. The origin myths of classical poetry—Apollo and Daphne, Orpheus and Eurydice, Actaeon and Diana, Tereus and Philomela—provide 'primal scenes of Western literature' in which the silence of women on the cusp or in the aftermath of sexual violence becomes the basis of the aesthetic in the Western tradition.[83] The disarticulation of women in tropes like the blazon of Petrarch's genre-defining love sonnets to Laura (in which, according to Nancy Vickers, 'her image is that of a collection of exquisitely beautiful disassociated objects') is discursive *and* embodied: a scattering of body parts—a figure as violent as it is voyeuristic—is also a shattering of voice.[84] Yet women poets have recomposed their voices, taking up poetry's dominant forms, genres, techniques, and images for new ends. More complicated than outright rejection, this project of resistance-through-revision has been read by many feminist critics as supporting a rehabilitation of the bodies to which women are told they are limited, as opposed to the male basis of the universal transcendent self—what Judith Butler (paraphrasing Simone de Beauvoir) calls 'a fundamental critique of the very disembodiment of the abstract masculine epistemological subject'.[85] In eighteenth-century poetry, the narrow corporeal range of women (often located in the domestic world

[83] Barbara Johnson, 'Muteness Envy', in Melissa Feuerstein et al. (eds), *The Barbara Johnson Reader: The Surprise of Otherness* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 202, 204. The arc of sexual violence in the stories of Orpheus and Actaeon is less direct but nonetheless structures their versions of the origin of poetry. Orpheus' double loss of Eurydice presents a woman's death, the compensation of poetry for the mourning man, and the spectacle of sexual violence subtending poetry's elegiac origins, since Orpheus ends the myth torn apart by jealous maenads (see Melissa F. Zeiger, *Beyond Consolation: Death, Sexuality, and the Changing Shapes of Elegy* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1997)); and while Actaeon's forbidden sight of Diana's naked body precipitates his own bodily disintegration, this narrative is reversed in subsequent versions like Petrarch's, which dismember (in anxious anticipation) the woman, neutralized to preserve male coherence (see Nancy J. Vickers, 'Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme', in Jackson and Prins (eds), *Lyric Theory Reader*, 511–21).

[84] Vickers, 'Diana', 512.

[85] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 16. Butler continues: 'That subject is abstract to the extent that it disavows its socially marked embodiment and, further, projects that disavowed and disparaged embodiment on to the feminine sphere, effectively renaming the body as female. . . . Beauvoir proposes that the female body ought to be the situation and instrumentality of women's freedom, not a defining and limiting essence.' Butler is nevertheless critical of Beauvoir's mind/body distinction and argues instead that gendered bodies are as much a product of masculinist discursive signification as the self-claimed status of men as 'the incorporeal instrument of an ostensibly radical freedom', which might then also be the site of those bodies' resignification (*Gender Trouble*, 16).

of objects and the animal realm of fleshly feeling) can be transformed as the ground for a revaluation of senses and feelings, experienced by gendered bodies expansive in their capacity for response and meaning.[86] The work of making this embodied world available in poetry, not redeemed from material life but fully participating in it, underpins my discussion of poems by Leapor, Yearsley, and Smith; in their churchyard poems, the social life of the body is hard and cruel yet fundamental to the making of poetry all the same.

Genre is one of the principal structures by which these poets render the corporeal impressions of the social: managing embodied experience and its affective intensities, they each rework eighteenth-century poetry's generic touchstones by bringing them into closer complicity with a world whose social (de)formations (dis)order their lives and works. The following chapters set out how I understand the genres used by each poet, but I want here to offer some critical waypoints to orient my sense of how genre animates poetry in the period. Genres such as georgic, pastoral, and elegy have ancient origins, while others like topographical poetry were a more recent innovation; yet each of these poetic kinds was given a new life in the eighteenth century, when the landscapes that formed their representational stock in trade were changing almost beyond recognition. While I interpret genres as connective frameworks linking specific texts to their traditions, my use of the term in *Churchyard Poetics* is historically contingent, fashioned by specific examples and relative to their particular contexts. Georgic means something different for labouring-class poets such as Mary Leapor or John Clare from what it does for writers whose relationship to its scenes of work are more abstracted, such as James Thomson or Robert Blair; and it means something different again for Leapor and for Clare, each of whom

[86] See especially Isobel Armstrong, 'The Gush of the Feminine: How Can We Read Women's Poetry of the Romantic Period?', in Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelly (eds), *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices* (Hanover, NH, and London: University Press of New England, 1995), 13–32; Ros Ballaster, 'Passing Judgement: The Place of the Aesthetic in Feminist Literary History', in Jennie Batchelor and Gillian Dow (eds), *Women's Writing, 1660–1830: Feminisms and Futures* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 21–42; Stuart Curran, 'Romantic Poetry: The I Altered', in Anne K. Mellor (ed.), *Romanticism and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 185–207; Margaret Anne Doody, 'Sensuousness in the Poetry of Eighteenth-Century Women Poets', in Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (eds), *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon, 1730–1820* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), 3–32; Kathryn R. King, 'The Constructions of Femininity', in Christine Gerrard (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 431–43; Landry, *Muses*; Karina Williams, 'The Tenth Muse: Women Writers and the Poetry of Common Life', in Thomas Woodman (ed.), *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), 185–99.

had a vocationally specific and gendered relationship to the world of work that georgic was used to describe. Likewise, elegy for Charlotte Smith is not the same as elegy for Thomas Gray, which proves not the invalid application of the genre to the work of either poet but rather their distinctive use of its formal and thematic expectations—including, in Smith's case, drastic departures from them.[87]

The formulations of genre I adopt are thus less invested in tracing individual contributions to universal structures than they are in historically formed, socially sensitive, and formally experimental poetic energies.[88] My more local appreciation of genre develops from the insights of Ralph Cohen's (eighteenth-century-inflected) definition of generic groupings as historical processes rather than prevailing categories, produced through intrarelations of different texts that alter the character of a group, and through the interrelations of different generic groups that determine their relative configurations.[89] I also take my bearings from the social shapes of genre, which are important for Cohen as they are for Lauren Berlant.[90] If the present itself is 'a temporal genre', then aesthetic kinds express the tensile, flexuous emergence of the now as 'genre[s] of social time and practice in which a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changing but the rules of habitation and the genres of storytelling about it are unstable, in chaos'. Locating an event's genre puts a frame around a story that is not finished, but whose affective coordinates require some arrangement among the impasses

[87] On the adaptation of generic traditions by eighteenth-century women and labouring-class poets, see especially Paula R. Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); William J. Christmas, 'Genre Matters: Attending to Form and Convention in Eighteenth-Century Labouring-Class Poetry', *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism*, 8 (2010), 38–45; Steve Van-Hagen, 'Literary Technique, the Aestheticization of Laboring Experience, and Generic Experimentation in Stephen Duck's "The Thresher's Labour"', *Criticism*, 47/4 (2005), 421–50.

[88] On these counterposed conceptualizations of genre, see Jonathan Culler, 'Lyric, History, and Genre', in Jackson and Prins (eds), *Lyric Theory Reader*, 63–77; Jackson and Prins (eds), 'Genre Theory', in *Lyric Theory Reader*, 11–16.

[89] Ralph Cohen, 'History and Genre', in John L. Rowlett (ed.), *Genre Theory and Historical Change: Theoretical Essays of Ralph Cohen* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 85–104. For recent discussions of genre, see Wai Chee Dimock and Bruce Robbins (eds), 'Special Topic: Remapping Genre', *PMLA*, 122/5 (2007), 1377–570; Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry and its Others: News, Prayer, Song, and the Dialogue of Genres* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Robyn Warhol (ed.), *The Work of Genre: Selected Essays from the English Institute* (Cambridge, MA: English Institute, 2011).

[90] For Cohen, '[g]eneric transformation can be a social act. Generic transformation reveals the social changes in audiences and the interpenetration of popular and polite literature' ('History and Genre', 99). See also Carolyn Miller, 'Genre as Social Action', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70/2 (1984), 151–67.

of present crisis—a process Berlant refers to as the rehabituation of our sensorium, using genres as metrics 'that mediate social forces and become exemplary of a scene of sociality'.[91]

This theoretical work has helped me understand how genre operates as a means of managing historical experience and its affective pressures: not quashing or controlling them but putting some shape on them so as to express their effects. In *Churchyard Poetics*, each of the genres on which I focus reflects a social formation: of work (georgic), of song (pastoral), of movement (topographical poetry), and of mourning (elegy). For Raymond Williams, the popularity and renovation of these particular genres in the eighteenth century arose from a felt need for new ways of organizing the otherwise alarmingly uncontained forces of the transition to capitalism wrought upon the landscape and the ways of life and modes of work taken up there.[92] The vertiginous exposure to social derangement in the eighteenth century reconditioned the 'material force of feelings' as felt by sensuous bodies, whose responses were torqued in unexpected and often undesired directions. Nevertheless, the negative intensities of affective experience were open to various aesthetic, and especially poetic, experiments, which collectively represent a common vulnerability to—but also a coalitional striving against—the tensions of living in the welter of the social life of the body.[93] The regimes of labour reconfiguring such experience made demands on bodies adapted to their purposes as the malleable matter of production. This is a history well documented in many of the sources cited above and throughout the book, including studies of its effects on literary efforts to come to terms with capital's demands.

Churchyard Poetics charts instead a tale of aftermath, finding in the churchyard the refuse of capital; yet, far from being silent relics, these are bodies that decline to stay quietly buried. Like the spoils of history turned

[91] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4, 6, 12. Critics of eighteenth-century literary kinds have also found genres to be what Tilottama Rajan calls 'sites of negotiation', stretched into innovative shapes by allusive links to the poetry of the past and by new voices ('Theories of Genre', in Marshall Brown (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, v. *Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 226). See David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Sandro Jung (ed.), *Experiments in Genre in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2011); Tilottama Rajan, 'The Epigenesis of Genre: New Forms from Old', in James Chandler (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 507–26.

[92] See Williams, *The Country*. Elsewhere Williams writes: 'Genre . . . is neither an ideal type nor a traditional order nor a set of technical rules. It is in the practical and variable combination and even fusion of what are, in abstraction, different levels of the social material process that what we have known as genre becomes a new kind of constitutive evidence' (*Marxism*, 185).

[93] Mathes, *Poetic Form*, 15.

up by labourers in Virgil's *Georgics*, bodies in the churchyard have suffered the experience of living in time and thus provide a disturbing index of its effects. In each of the chapters that follow this Introduction—on Blair's churchyard georgic; on Leapor, Yearsley, and the working body's decline in pastoral and topographical poetry; on Smith's storm-tossed elegies; and on Clare's long, mixed-genre churchyard poem into the nineteenth century—the poems under discussion reveal what it means to confront the difficult matter of the body, foregrounding the churchyard as a site not of quiet burial but of unquiet structures of feeling animated by the body's refusal to disappear into the earth. A common place across the varied genres and literary careers spanning the century of poetry covered in this book, the churchyard topos figures as a persistent trace, at once ghostly shade and earthly strata (to take up recent formulations on genre, allusion, and other substructures of poetry's verbal surface by Susan Wolfson and Tobias Menely). As one of the 'spectral pressures on shapes of composition . . . work[ing] by "under-presence"' (a Wordsworthian coinage),[94] as a site both retaining and disclosing poetry's 'multiple strata, [its] layering of time',[95] the churchyard is a shadowy presence permeating eighteenth-century poetics and a material layer sustaining it. Unearthing the churchyard's layers and reviving its ghosts form the project of this book.

[94] Susan J. Wolfson, *Romantic Shades and Shadows* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 4.
[95] Menely, *Climate*, 16.

1
'Earthing up'
Robert Blair's Churchyard Georgic

> But this kind of Poetry I am now speaking of, addresses it self wholly to the Imagination: It is altogether Conversant among the Fields and Woods, and has the most delightful part of Nature for its Province. It raises in our Minds a pleasing variety of Scenes and Landskips, whilst it teaches us: and makes the dryest of its Precepts look like a Description. *A* Georgic *therefore is some part of the Science of Husbandry put into a pleasing Dress, and set off with all the Beauties and Embellishments of Poetry*.—Joseph Addison, 'An Essay on the Georgics'[1]

If, as I have claimed in the Introduction, it is the work of the churchyard poet to unearth the dead and make them speak, this difficult, even traumatic process of exposure is given generic shape by the eighteenth-century English georgic. As David Fairer writes, 'the traumatised earth that is the context for Virgil's great poem of husbandry and cultivation' has particular resonances in both the eighteenth century's industrial and colonial extractive regimes and today's climate crisis, 'in which a mutual respect between man and nature needs to be recovered'.[2] The interface of human and nature in georgic is labour, and in this book I trace georgic's resurfacings in a cluster of churchyard poems, including Mary Leapor's 'Colinetta' (1748), John Clare's

[1] Joseph Addison, 'An Essay on the Georgics', in *The Works of John Dryden*, v. 146.

[2] David Fairer, '"Where Fuming Trees Refresh the Thirsty Air": The World of Eco-Georgic', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 40 (2011), 202. See also Clare Bucknell, 'The Mid-Eighteenth-Century Georgic and Agricultural Improvement', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36/3 (2013), 335–52; Erin Drew, *The Usufructuary Ethos: Power, Politics, and Environment in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2021); Michael Genovese, 'An Organic Commerce: Sociable Selfhood in Eighteenth-Century Georgic', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 46/2 (2013), 197–221; Juan Christian Pellicer, 'The Georgic at Mid-Eighteenth Century and the Case of Dodsley's "Agriculture"', *Review of English Studies*, 54/213 (2003), 67–93; Melissa Schoenberger, *Cultivating Peace: The Virgilian Georgic in English, 1650–1750* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2019); Courtney Weiss Smith, *Empiricist Devotions: Science, Religion, and Poetry in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2016).

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'The Village Minstrel' (1821), and perhaps most surprisingly, the poem at the centre of this chapter, Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1743)—surprising because this poem's concerns with the soul and its attainment of the afterlife have up to now seemed remote from Virgil's pragmatic engagement with the soil and its more manual tending. The generic category of English georgic has typically been limited to eighteenth-century formal adaptations of the *Georgics*, including John Philips's *Cyder* (1708), Christopher Smart's *The Hop-Garden* (1752), John Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757), and James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* (1764). These poems develop Virgil's practical farming advice, and its political context placing the life of the husbandman in contrast to ruptures in the Roman state before the reign of Augustus, in new historical and agricultural situations including enclosure, industry, and plantation slavery. As such they are the clearest continuation of the traditional georgic in the eighteenth century.[3] Fairer and others have, however, traced georgic influences and assimilations in labouring-class, topographical, meditative, and Romantic-period poetry, including Stephen Duck's 'The Thresher's Labour' (1730), James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1726–46), John Armstrong's *The Art of Preserving Health* (1744), Richard Jago's *Edge-Hill* (1767), William Cowper's *The Task* (1785), William Wordsworth's *The Excursion* (1814), and John Clare's 'The Mores' (1820).[4] These poems maintain georgic preoccupations but rework them through a range of new interests and frameworks, some of which track quite far from the original agricultural focus.[5]

In this chapter I read *The Grave* in this eighteenth-century tradition of georgic reworking to propose a churchyard variation on the georgic mode, in which the body working the earth is not so far from the soul soaring

[3] This is not a straightforward mapping of Virgilian precepts onto eighteenth-century practices, however: Tobias Menely identifies 'modal strain' in the application of classical models onto radically new industrial and colonial scenarios that fall far outside traditional georgic labour (*Climate*, 127–64).

[4] See Tim Burke, 'The Romantic Georgic and the Work of Writing', in Charles Mahoney (ed.), *A Companion to Romantic Poetry* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 140–58; Ralph Cohen, 'Innovation and Variation: Literary Change and Georgic Poetry', in *Genre Theory*, 189–220; David Fairer, 'The Pastoral–Georgic Tradition', in Andrew Bennett (ed.), *William Wordsworth in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 111–18; Goodman, *Georgic Modernity*; Bridget Keegan, 'Georgic Transformations and Stephen Duck's "The Thresher's Labour"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 41/3 (2001), 545–62; Anne D. Wallace, 'Farming on Foot: Tracking Georgic in Clare and Wordsworth', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 34/4 (1992), 509–40.

[5] On georgic reworking, see Bullard (ed.), *History of English Georgic Writing*; Sue Edney and Tess Somervell (eds), *Georgic Literature and the Environment: Working Land, Reworking Genre* (London: Routledge, 2022).

to spiritual freedom as Blair might want to suppose. *The Grave* is typically located in the 'graveyard school' of poetry, as a Christian didactic poem that uses visceral depictions of death and decay to compel readers before directing their thoughts to the afterlife. In an influential reading, James Means placed *The Grave* in the context of the eighteenth-century evangelical revival and claimed that the churchyard setting and its macabre details were subordinate to the central theme of avoiding damnation by confronting death; the robust physicality of the poem is merely the appropriate apparatus for its 'exercise in evangelism', Means concluded.[6] However, John Baker, Eric Parisot, and others have more recently shown that the corporeal emphasis of Blair's poem is not straightforwardly resolved in a theological prioritizing of the non-material afterlife.[7] Reading *The Grave* as a poetic anticipation of Gothic literature's psychological fixation on death, Andrew Smith notes that Blair frequently resists orthodox consolation and 'refuses to resolve a body and soul dualism via a discourse of reason, as he asserts death as a source of rational, because understandable, fear'.[8] And Lorna Clymer identifies Blair's text as an exemplary epitaphic poem for its emphasis on 'the vicinity of the deceased body [as] the formative circumstance'.[9]

The body is, then, an unignorable subject in *The Grave*—one that cannot easily be redeemed by Christian models of transcendence or consolation, nor reduced to a prop for didactic imperatives to look to death for moral improvement. I position Blair's poem as a 'churchyard georgic' to show how the buried body is mixed up in an earthly accumulation of other matter. Earthed up—unearthed, but also inextricable from the surrounding, consuming earth—the corpse undergoes a transformation into dust, ashes, and

[6] James A. Means, 'Introduction', in Robert Blair, *The Grave. A Poem. (1743)*, Augustan Reprint Society, vol. 161 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1973), i, iii. See also Means, 'A Reading of *The Grave*', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 12/4 (1975), 270–81, and 'The Composition of *The Grave*', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 10/1 (1972), 3–9.

[7] Baker, '"Philosophy"', 25–30; Parisot, *Graveyard Poetry*, 58–74, and 'Graveyard Poetry and the Aesthetics of Horror', in Clive Bloom (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Gothic Origins* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 245–62.

[8] Smith, *Gothic Death*, 23. See also Serena Trowbridge, 'Past, Present, and Future in the Gothic Graveyard', in Carol Margaret Davison (ed.), *The Gothic and Death* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 21–33.

[9] Lorna Clymer, 'Graved in Tropes: The Figural Logic of Epitaphs and Elegies in Blair, Gray, Cowper, and Wordsworth', *ELH*, 62/2 (1995), 367. For Robert N. Essick and Morton D. Paley, the 'material, physical, sensualist' emphasis of *The Grave*, and its 'progressive' movement through the churchyard, confirm an attachment to the 'concrete details' of a particular location ('Introduction', in Robert N. Essick and Morton D. Paley (eds), *Robert Blair's The Grave, Illustrated by William Blake. A Study with Facsimile* (London: Scolar Press, 1982), 4).

dirt in Blair's poem. A source of some anxiety in a religious text seemingly intent upon the afterlife, this indivisibility of body from earth is a georgic preoccupation, and the poet writing churchyard georgic must work continually to restore the dead, who insist on their status as decaying matter. Emphasizing their shared concern with earthly materiality, I examine how the novel association of *The Grave* and the georgic tradition encourages an original approach to the eighteenth-century fascination with places of burial and human remains, as poets make much imaginative work from the lowest of materials: the earth from which we are made and to which we return. What is most challenging about the body in its georgic context, though, is its compelled labour as an instrument of productivity—coerced into work by regimes of (here agricultural) capital that the georgic naturalizes as the necessary mediation of an earth bent on decline and decay, but that churchyard poetics more uneasily exhibits as an arduous life exhausted to the point of death. In later chapters I will discuss Leapor's and Clare's uses of the georgic's emphasis on the striving and strife of labour to examine how, in the churchyard's grim repository, it is the working body that is most material and, perhaps, least redeemable according to Blair's more obviously spiritual logic. Yet my reading here will show that, even at its most orthodox, as in *The Grave*, churchyard poetry's fixation with bodies—living, dying, and dead on the same grisly ground—refuses easy resolution in available consolatory models, Presbyterian or poetic. Nor can Blair's poem leave labour behind, since it is in scenes of labour that Christian and georgic poets find their most suggestive metaphors for hard work, of faith as of farming. In reading eighteenth-century discussions of the georgic as coarse, common, humble, or otherwise 'low' in its handling of earth and labour alongside Blair's adaptation of these subjects as theological analogies in *The Grave*, I reveal how, even in a poem so apparently alienated from scenes of work, it is both the material body and its compulsive labour that prove the most difficult and discomforting matter for churchyard poetics. *The Grave*'s articulation of Christian concerns through georgic tropes is animated and made anxious by a metapoetic dynamic of imagination and craft, structured by bodily rhythms geared towards labour and figured in the churchyard as a dialectic between intimations of the afterlife and an earth crowded with the buried dead. For Blair, these intransigent objects constitute the difficult work of poetry, entangled with a body that refuses to be quiet or still, and whose laborious liveliness troubles his ambitions for a loftier ambit.

Eighteenth-Century Georgic and the Hard Work of the Body

The Grave, like other reworkings, shares with more traditional Virgilian georgics a thematic concern with (and vexed relation to) the physical labour of the earth, worrying over how the (art)work of the poet can be considered in the same or at least related terms to that of the agriculturalist. Variously called the 'poetry of work' or the 'poetry of earth', eighteenth-century georgic locates meaning in structures of work *and* poetry—and of poetry as a type of work—both of which find their energies directed downwards, into the agriculturally and imaginatively productive soil.[10] Kevis Goodman observes that the earthly emphasis of Virgil's *Georgics* makes them

> as much about the tending of words as they are about agriculture and other forms of terraculture: they are concerned not only with words (*verba*) as bearers of things (*res*) but also with words *as* things, exerting friction within representation and requiring labor and care. With their deliberately 'soaring words' amplifying the rural *res* of their subject matter, the *Georgics* displayed . . . a gorgeous verbal *tekhnē*.[11]

In the matrix of this poetic work, 'things and words, the materials of the husbandman's and the poet's labors respectively, exist at once in a collaborative and a competitive relation to each other'.[12] For Fairer, too, in georgic poetry the language itself works as the farmer does, according to principles of adaptation and experimentation, coming to terms with materials that can only partially, and never for long, be brought into a controlling system. As a mixed mode of didactic instruction and lyric reflection, georgic poetry was 'at home with notions of growth, development, variety, digression and mixture, and had a natural tendency to absorb the old into the new, and find fresh directions'.[13]

[10] See Rachel Crawford, *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape, 1700–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 89–165; David Fairer, '"The Year Runs Round": The Poetry of Work in Eighteenth-Century England', in Lorna Clymer (ed.), *Ritual, Routine, and Regime: Repetition in Early Modern British and European Cultures* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 153–71.

[11] Goodman, *Georgic Modernity*, 11.

[12] Goodman, *Georgic Modernity*, 27.

[13] David Fairer, 'Persistence, Adaptations and Transformations in Pastoral and Georgic Poetry', in John Richetti (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 261.

Reading eighteenth-century English georgics as experimental interventions in Virgil's themes, these critics identify the georgic as an enabling genre for a range of poetic forms and subjects in this period. For instance, Fairer claims georgic's capaciousness as a defining characteristic of a mode open to 'freer reworkings and extension to different topics. . . . Georgic flourished by seeking new subjects for attention.'[14] Goodman reads the georgic 'as a mode exerting a rhizomatic underpresence across a variety of affiliated descriptive and didactic verse genres' in the long eighteenth century, including poems variously 'written under the sign of the georgic mode' up to and including Romantic-period texts.[15] And Katie Kadue's recent project relies on the georgic's accommodation of variety. The early modern writers in her study domesticate and revise the 'georgic ethos', describing a labour that 'resembles the mundane maintenance work of housewives and domestic laborers rather than the trailblazing feats of modern and modernizing heroes'.[16] These modifications to, even departures from, Virgil's *Georgics* are georgic nonetheless, as they retain the spirit of experiment and innovation in their focus on, and earthly analogies for, the work of the poet. Blair's *The Grave* is a churchyard poem particularly receptive to this kind of georgic reading—one that takes georgic principles of natural mixture and change as a rationale for tracing its poetic underpresence in a range of fresh directions. The churchyard gives Blair an appropriate testing ground for the didactic forcefulness of his verse; the georgic gives him a method for turning the earth, disinterring its dead and making them speak again. Yet the churchyard georgic is far from a cooperative instrument, since its irresolvable corporeality and labour-intensive operation pull Blair's poem to the working earth it is always struggling to leave behind. Labour and death together signal the fallen world, against which Blair's churchyard georgic strives yet from which it cannot extricate itself; the churchyard centres on the body, and the georgic discloses the labour that makes the body such an awkward object for a Christian poetics intent on its own hard work of redeeming such difficult matter.

[14] Fairer, 'Persistence', 275.

[15] Goodman, *Georgic Modernity*, 1, 8. See also Tim Burke, who coined 'georgicism' to express not the historical and political mechanisms of georgic labour in eighteenth-century formal georgics, but a persistent undercurrent—evident in Virgil and his successors—of processes of 'self-generation and the generation of the materials for the making of both the self and the work of art' ('Romantic Georgic', 143).

[16] Katie Kadue, *Domestic Georgic: Labors of Preservation from Rabelais to Milton* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 5.

In the eighteenth-century English Christianized georgic that provides the generic context for *The Grave*, the stimulus behind earthly labour is death: the world of the georgic is fallen from an Edenic, pastoral Golden Age of natural plenty to a world of sin—an Age of Iron into which mortality has entered, and human labour is required to stem the tide of its wasting effects.[17] Poets of this period, perhaps Thomson foremost among them, find in Virgil's equation of moral and practical order, located in ancient theodicy, a model for discerning godly design in the Book of Nature.[18] Anthony Low, Louis L. Martz, and Kevis Goodman trace this georgic adaptation to a biblical context back to John Milton—another enabling model for eighteenth-century poets, and one who retains a 'georgic spirit' through specific allusions to Virgil's *Georgics* and more extended treatment of its themes and structures.[19] Explaining how for English writers in the early modern period Virgil's text is 'more than a simple didactic poem or an instruction manual for farmers', Low writes that Milton's work 'embodied the Virgilian virtues of long labor, heroism involving painstaking daily care instead of decisive military battle, and unflagging dedication to one's people and civilization'.[20] The labours in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are not agricultural but spiritual; yet Milton's metaphors in these texts are frequently earthly in tenor and georgic in style. In *Paradise Regained*, for example, Jesus, as the second Adam and 'by means of strenuous effort[,] has raised an Eden in the waste wilderness and refounded paradise', demonstrating how

> Virgil's georgic theodicy, with its double vision of labor as both a curse and a blessing and its assumption that a historical devolution took place from

[17] Fairer begins his essay on eco-georgic with James Thomson's depiction of 'these iron Times' (*Spring*, l. 274)—an image of what Fairer calls 'an earth that is dis-tempered', 'a system working against itself' ('"Fuming Trees"', 201–2). He argues elsewhere that, as English pastorals Christianize Arcadia as the Garden of Eden, the eighteenth-century georgic is 'located in the fallen world of corruption and death, the changing seasons and the necessity of human labour' ('Persistence', 276).

[18] See Smith, *Empiricist Devotions*, 183, 238. On Thomson's georgic adaptations see chapters by Tess Somervell, John D. Morillo, and Alfred Sjödin in Sandro Jung and Kwinten Van De Walle (eds), *The Genres of Thomson's The Seasons* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2018), 137–99.

[19] As Dustin Stewart points out, eighteenth-century poets combined Virgilian themes and Miltonic blank verse in their georgics, blending two major poetic influences and 'building on an identification between latter-day land workers and their first parents in Eden' (*Futures*, 123).

[20] Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 8, 296. Low extends Louis L. Martz's argument in *Poet of Exile: A Study of Milton's Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980); Martz revisits this topic in 'Paradise Regained: Georgic Form, Georgic Style', *Milton Studies*, 42 (2003), 7–25.

> a primal Golden Age of pastoral ease and abundance at the same time that an evolution took place in human thought, art, and invention, is readily and variously accommodated to a Christian world view.[21]

The poet's art, too, is placed in this context of declining nature and necessary work: according to Goodman, Milton like Virgil represents and enacts labour in poems that show how labour means 'the force spent and burden sustained in any pursuit or *ars* (skill)', 'rowing against an adverse current'.[22] This thematic and tropological engrafting of Virgilian georgic onto seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Christian poetics establishes the malleability as well as the legacy of the genre. In Blair's *The Grave*, as in poems by Milton and Thomson, all those who labour against death and for earthly things do so in a fallen world of sin, where human physical energy runs parallel to poetic mourning for the lost heavenly state and the shared striving to attain it after death. The poet's work is morally didactic in its relentless pursuit of this theme: as Blair writes,

> Absurd! to think to over-reach the *Grave*,
> And from the Wreck of Names to rescue ours!
> The best concerted Schemes Men lay for Fame
> Die fast away: Only themselves die faster. (ll. 183–6)

Yet the images of ruin and decay on which earlier critics have focused as evidence of Blair's preacherly instruction are balanced by a conceit of organic regeneration and an abiding sense of the labour required to realize the hoped-for return to a nature restored to paradisal harmony. The poet works hard to sustain this vision, and the instruments of his labour are agricultural metaphors that his Christian poetics shares with contemporary georgic, as both labour to grow enduring moral truths from the soil of a resistant earth.

According to Denise Levertov, '[t]he poet is a *farmer*, one who tends the land of language and imagination and its creatures, who makes things grow, poem-things, story-things, not out of nowhere but out of the ground on

[21] Low, *Georgic Revolution*, 331, 11.

[22] Kevis Goodman, '"Wasted Labor"? Milton's Eve, the Poet's Work, and the Challenge of Sympathy', *ELH*, 64/2 (1997), 421. Goodman makes this reading central to her definition of georgic in *Georgic Modernity*. On Milton's equation of poetry's intellectual work with rural labour, and his influence on eighteenth-century poets concerned with georgic and pastoral modes, see Andrea Brady, 'From Grief to Leisure: "Lycidas" in the Eighteenth Century', *MLQ*, 77/1 (2016), 41–63.

which he walks'. By placing the poet's labour as land-work in this context of energy versus entropy, Levertov positions the poet as

> an *antagonist*—but to what? To the hostility of the environment, which, however, contains the elements that will nourish his crops. And in what sense? In the sense of the struggle to compose—not to *im*pose order but to *com*pose the passive elements into a harvest, to grow not tares but wheat.[23]

The lively paradox of the recalcitrant yet generative earth that yields for farmer and poet alike, but only from due care and attention (Levertov's emphasis on the prefix com-, 'with', makes this work a collaboration with the earth), is a georgic concern; Virgil's insistence on the values of care or *cura* affords both spiritual challenge and thoughtful labour. The persistence of these poetic efforts to balance imagination and sensuous experience, ideas and things, inspiration and *technē*, helps me position eighteenth-century georgic alongside churchyard poetry as correspondent traditions deeply embedded in the productive soil—a shared poetics in which imaginative flights are consistently brought to the earth that is their point of origin and closure, both springboard and landing place.

Blair's poem begins with a self-reflexive acknowledgement and site-specific situating of the poet's labour:

> the Task be mine
> To paint the gloomy Horrors of the *Tomb*;
> Th' appointed Place of Rendezvous, where all
> . . . meet. (ll. 4–7)

So defined, the poet's work is located in the grave as the site of moral work in this churchyard georgic. *The Grave* is metapoetic in this sense and operates, like other georgics, as a commentary on poetic labour in its combination of divine inspiration and embodied making. Blair's appears to be a georgic with a difference, however, more often departing from than merely modifying the original. Unlike Virgil, who derives moral lessons from scenes of practical farming, Blair's Christian precepts are primary; they are, though, delivered using exempla that rely on and arise from earthly tropes grown from the ground of the churchyard. The formal organization of *The Grave*'s progression from burial to resurrection may also seem structurally distinct from the mixed mode of the georgic. Yet the repeated discursive movement

[23] Denise Levertov, 'The Ideas in the Things', in *New & Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions Books, 1992), 46, 47.

from spiritual directive to earthly, physical figure and back again achieves a cyclical structure that mixes high and low registers (characteristic of Virgil's 'middle style' in the *Georgics*[24]), the poem blending as it shifts between heavenly vision and churchyard reality. Like the georgic, too, *The Grave* struggles against the labour it both depends upon and attempts to conceal or at least moderate, making its own compositional work the more visibly arduous as it contends with a subject it would rather avoid. The awkward arrangement of tone and image in Blair's poem, for example, forms what the eighteenth-century critic Robert Anderson called 'a succession of unconnected descriptions, and of reflections that seem independent of one another, interwoven with striking allusions, and digressive sallies of imagination'. This 'series of pathetic representations, without unity of design . . . exhibit[s] a wide display of original poetry' yet also reveals an 'imagination, excursive and vigorous, [which] sometimes exceeds the bounds that criticism prescribes' by passing 'too suddenly from grave and serious description, to irony and satire. Instances of this improper association too frequently occur, and the grave and ludicrous destroy one another.'[25]

What Anderson interprets as Blair's faulty management of the didactic poem's incorporation of varying shades of subject and style is underpinned by an anxiety about what James Means, tracing the poet's revisions for the final published text, calls the 'homely color and rude immediacy' of Blair's diction, which he feared would detract from his religious intention. For Means, the modifications 'represent a suppression of Blair's characteristic vein of strong, sensuous language in favor of a studied gentility of phrase, at two removes from raw experience'.[26] What Blair attempts unsuccessfully to subdue is his poem's emphatic corporeality, but also the necessarily practical terms with which the body as a subject compels a poem to work. A similar concern for how coarse subject matter might be ameliorated by the protocols of tone exercises the critics of eighteenth-century georgic. Joseph Addison's essay accompanying John Dryden's 1697 translation of the *Georgics* is concerned to point out that Virgil's subject is at once 'the meanest and the least improving, but the most pleasing and delightful'. The *Georgics*

[24] See Low, *Georgic Revolution*, 117–18; Martz, 'Paradise'.

[25] Robert Anderson, 'The Life of Blair', in *The Poetical Works of Robert Blair. Containing The Grave; and A Poem to the Memory of Mr Law* (London: John and Arthur Arch; Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute, and J. Mundell and Co., 1794), 12–13.

[26] Means, 'Composition', 5. As Clymer comments, Blair's poem diverges from conventional spiritual meditations in 'its invocation of almost every entity, abstract or otherwise, associated with the grave and for its singular lack of descriptive decorum. . . . Blair not only notices the physical circumstances of death, but goes out of his way to highlight them' ('Graved', 363).

achieves its elevation through a style of polite periphrasis, with which it treats its humble theme and by which it varies its didacticism, so that, in Addison's famous phrase, Virgil 'delivers the meanest of his Precepts with a kind of Grandeur, he breaks the Clods and tosses the Dung about with an air of gracefulness'. As Addison summarizes: '*A* Georgic *therefore is some part of the Science of Husbandry put into a pleasing Dress, and set off with all the Beauties and Embellishments of Poetry*.' By these means the poet has been able, through careful selection, disposition, and ornamentation of agricultural instruction into an aesthetic unity, to avoid 'letting his Subject debase his Stile, and betray him into a meanness of Expression, but every where to keep up his Verse in all the Pomp of Numbers, and Dignity of words'.[27] Georgic poetry may rise from the ground but it must also rise above it—a class-inflected anxiety that will be further unfolded by Leapor, Clare, and other labouring-class poets working under the shadow of the georgic's aesthetic work and aestheticized labour.

Joseph Warton, prefacing his own 1753 translation of the *Georgics*, is likewise anxious to offset any perceived lowness in his handling of Virgil's earthy focus:

> the meanness of the terms of husbandry is concealed and lost in a dead language, and they convey no low or despicable image to the mind; but the coarse and common words I was necessitated to use in the following translation, viz. *plough and sow*, *wheat*, *dung, ashes*, *horse and cow*, &c. will, I fear, unconquerably disgust many a delicate reader, if he doth not make proper allowances for a modern compared with an ancient language[.][28]

Subjects proper to agriculture are improper for poetry, at least in the eighteenth century. Yet Warton's concern for the modern reader's nervous system is as much about the georgic's hectoring tone as its 'coarse and common' subject matter, its stylistic construction as an art/work as well

[27] Addison, 'An Essay', 146, 151, 146, 149. See also Joseph Trapp, who says of the *Georgics* that 'it is to be particularly observ'd, that, because the Matter of a Poem is low, it by no means follows the Thoughts and Diction must be so too, and that there's no necessary Connexion between a common Subject and a vulgar Style. To prescribe Rules for Sowing, Harvest, and other Matters of Husbandry, is a slight subject, but not therefore to be treated with the Unpoliteness of a Clown. Tho' the Poem be preceptive in its Nature, it may be elegant in its Manner; it may be employ'd upon Things of small Moment, yet they may be cloath'd with Ornament, and heighten'd by Description' ('Lecture VII. *An Enumeration of different Sorts of Style*', in *Lectures on Poetry, Read in the Schools of Natural Philosophy at Oxford* (London: C. Hitch and C. Davis, 1742), 89).

[28] Joseph Warton, 'Dedication', in Warton (ed.), *The Works of Virgil, in Latin and English . . .*, 4 vols (London: R. Dodsley, 1753), i. vii.

as its compositional elements, since, 'altho' the poet delivers his precepts in the most artful manner imaginable, and renders them as palatable as possible, yet the reader will soon be disgusted with a continued series of instruction, if his mind be not relieved at proper intervals'. Didacticism, like homely diction, must be leavened to 'lift a language above the vulgar and current expressions'; ''Tis after this manner Virgil judiciously conceals the nakedness and barrenness of his subject, by the lustre of his language.'[29]

I have spent some time with the eighteenth-century reception of the *Georgics* to show how this poem, like *The Grave*, worries away at its approach to the matter of—as well as the laborious process by—which it is made. My reading of Blair's poem over the rest of this chapter demonstrates that this unease is as much about the (perhaps irredeemably) earthly body as it is about the rural labour to which it was yoked. While Virgil's soaring words, in Addison's and Warton's estimation, strive to 'keep up his Verse' and 'lift [his] language' from contact with the lowly earth it treats from the magisterial elevation of the poet, he must nevertheless descend to touch the ground, conscious of its status as the source of life and its final home in death—a vital source of poetic as well as agricultural energy, however mean and vulgar.[30] And, if the *Georgics* ultimately masters the difficult arrangement of its disturbing subject, Virgil's eighteenth-century commentators are aware of how precariously this task is conducted and how challenging it is to follow. For them, as for Hugh Blair in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), didactic poets must work all the harder to conceal the signs of their labour, which not only tires readers with remorseless instruction but more

[29] Warton, 'Reflections on Didactic Poetry', in Warton (ed.), *The Works of Virgil*, i. 397, 404, 406. Trapp expands his notes on style likewise to advise that, in didactic poetry, precepts 'must not be obtruded with Moroseness, but insinuated with Mildness', since 'Instructions are the better receiv'd, and sink the deeper upon the Mind, in proportion to the Address with which they are convey'd' ('Lecture XV. Of Didactic or Preceptive Poetry', in *Lectures*, 187). Hugh Blair concludes similarly that '[b]y the charm of Versification and Numbers, [didactic poetry] renders instruction more agreeable' and often does so 'by indirect methods', so that '[t]he Poet must instruct; but he must study, at the same time, to enliven his instructions, by the introduction of such figures, and such circumstances, as may amuse the imagination, may conceal the dryness of his subject, and embellish it with poetical painting. Virgil, in his Georgics, presents us here with a perfect model' ('Lecture XL. Didactic Poetry—Descriptive Poetry', in *Lectures*, ii. 313–14). See Lorna Clymer, 'The Poet as Teacher', in Lynch (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660–1800*, 179–94.

[30] As Kadue documents, so much of georgic's operating tension emerges from anxiety about the tempering of continuous crisis and the difficulty the labourers performing that work presented to elite poets faced with the task of either exalting or erasing such 'lowly' subject matter (*Domestic Georgic*, especially chs 1 & 2).

fundamentally confronts them with the difficult work of making art, not least its awkward conjunction with the more manual labour that populates georgic's scenes. Lauding the simplicity of Homer among the ancient poets, Blair writes: 'There are no marks of art in his expression; it seems the very language of nature; you see in the Style, not the writer and his labour, but the man in his own natural character.'[31] The tense interplay of art (as discernible craft) and nature animates georgic as it does other forms of didactic poetry—the digressive 'ranginess' of which is, according to John Barrell and Harriet Guest, 'hospitable to a diversity of topics which could be used . . . to represent the diversity of modern experience' in the eighteenth century.[32] Addison's, Warton's, and Anderson's unease about the unsettling potential for intransigence in such long, various, morally instructive poems as the *Georgics* and *The Grave* confirms the trial the didactic poet faces with the physical matter of 'modern experience'—matter so exuberant as to escape control and become disarranged, setting a tricky challenge for the poet's art/work, which is potently figured in the agriculturalist's daily negotiation with nature's contrary forces. *The Grave* labours to leave the mortal world behind but rarely achieves its daring leap beyond the bounds of the raw, rude, material body living and dying in time, which it takes as its master theme. This dynamic state of irresolution finds a powerful but underexplored axis in passages of the poem that articulate Christian concerns through georgic tropes, and especially its unsettled figures of work: of an earth turned in the labour of plough and harvest as well as the succession of the seasons and the passing from day to night.

These thematics can be traced back to Virgil's *Georgics*, book 1 of which ends with a catastrophic vision of the buried bodies of historic battles which 'fatten twice those Fields with *Roman* Blood', and whose remains are later disclosed by bewildered ploughmen:

> Then, after length of Time, the lab'ring Swains,
> Who turn the Turfs of those unhappy Plains,
> Shall rusty Piles from the plough'd Furrows take,
> And over empty Helmets pass the Rake:

[31] Blair, 'Lecture XIX. General Characters of Style—Simple, Affected, Vehement—Directions for forming a proper Style', in *Lectures*, i. 376. See also 'Lecture XL', in *Lectures*, ii. 312–35.

[32] John Barrell and Harriet Guest, 'On the Use of Contradiction: Economics and Morality in the Eighteenth-Century Long Poem', in Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (eds), *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 133.

> Amaz'd at Antick Titles on the Stones,
> And mighty Relicks of Gygantick Bones. (bk 1, ll. 661, 662–7)

Dryden's translation, from which these lines are taken, is punctuated with such images of death, burial, and absorption into the earth. In book 3, for instance, the diseases of livestock are treated at length and extrapolated as a general maxim:

> In Youth alone, unhappy Mortals live;
> But, ah! the mighty Bliss is fugitive;
> Discolour'd Sickness, anxious Labours come,
> And Age, and Death's inexorable Doom. (bk 3, ll. 108–11)

Dryden's Christian translation of Virgil's more immediate political concerns transitions from Roman battles to a metaphysics in which death, and the consequent labour it requires 'to prevent th' entire decay' (bk 3, l. 115), characterizes an entropic system: 'all below, whether by Nature's Curse, | Or Fates Decree, degen'rate still to worse', for

> The Sire of Gods and Men, with hard Decrees,
> Forbids our Plenty to be bought with Ease:
> And wills that Mortal Men, inur'd to toil,
> Shou'd exercise, with pains, the grudging Soil . . . (bk 1, ll. 288–9, 183–6)

The poet's labour is bound to these same cycles, and Dryden's Virgil pleads with the 'sacred Muses' to grant him knowledge of the celestial and earthly movements that lie behind the revolutions of destruction and regeneration:

> Give me the Ways of wandring Stars to know:
> The Depths of Heav'n above, and Earth below.
> Teach me the various Labours of the Moon,
> And whence proceed th' Eclipses of the Sun:
> Why flowing Tides prevail upon the Main,
> And in what dark Recess they shrink again:
> What shakes the solid Earth, what Cause delays
> The Summer Nights, and shortens Winter Days.
> But if my heavy Blood restrain the Flight

> Of my free Soul, aspiring to the Height
> Of Nature, and unclouded Fields of Light:
> My next Desire is, void of Care and Strife,
> To lead a soft, secure, inglorious Life. (bk 2, ll. 673, 677–89)

The transition from lofty ambition to humble retirement turns on the body's limitations: 'my heavy Blood restrain[s] the Flight | Of my free Soul'. Even in its reflections on poetics, georgic's narratives of growth are remorselessly counterpoised by intimations of decay, and human energy works against the 'entropic principle' of nature's diurnal and seasonal decline.[33] The heavy body is weighed down to the earth it tends and in which it will finally be buried. As Armstrong's *The Art of Preserving Health* most transparently demonstrates, the human body is profoundly implicated in the georgic's rhythms of work, not only as the instrument of culture and cultivation required to keep civilization from ruin, but as an organic form insistent on its own decline—one that will not revive in a natural cycle of degeneration and restoration, but that becomes lost in the grave and mixed with the humic, non-human compost.[34] In georgic poetry there is a fixation on waste: soil, dirt, dust, and ashes are the base elements that compose an earth in flux—lively in its decay, and among the potent metaphors for human life, work, and death in this tradition. Virgil's advice for raising the productivity of the soil is to spread it with ashes as well as dung (bk 1, ll. 116–21); and in his fourth and final book bees are born from the carcass of a decaying calf, yoking composition to decomposition (bk 4, ll. 421–42, 800–7). As Kadue comments, the georgic mode is as concerned with issues of preservation as it is with propagation, 'with the repetitive, uneventful labors necessary to preserve life, and with how those labors inform the metabolic processes of thinking and writing'.[35]

In this context the poet's didacticism is tinged with elegy, their labour wrapped up in *lapsus* (waste), in a pattern established by Virgil's inclusion of the Orpheus epyllion in *Georgics* book 4. Goodman claims that this alternation or interlocking of work and waste in the georgic cycle offers a self-reflexive account of the poet's work of mourning, defining labour 'as fundamentally reparative or restitutive, precarious, and subject to lapse', and linking bereavement to agriculture as merely another type

[33] See Fairer, '"The Year"', 155, 160, 164.
[34] See Fairer, '"Fuming Trees"', 213–15.
[35] Kadue, *Domestic Georgic*, 5.

of energy expended against loss—'the attempt to counteract the entropic forces of physical or human nature'.[36] As in Orpheus' thwarted restoration of Eurydice from the underworld, the work of mourning sits 'within a spectrum of labors joining cultivation to exhumation'—a project continued in Wordsworth's *Excursion*,[37] which Annabel Patterson describes as a 'georgic of the grave'.[38] In this poem the figure of the Sexton embodies a 'deep country sense of man's metaphysical closeness to the soil, so that even grave-digging becomes a form of agriculture', and the Pastor imaginatively disinters the dead, bringing them back into the human realm from '[t]he mine of real life'.[39] While Patterson claims that Wordsworth established this 'new sub-genre, the georgic of the grave', her observation that 'a country churchyard is itself a genre' connects Wordsworth's poem to an eighteenth-century churchyard poetics that, this book argues, is animated by a similar georgic impulse of cultivation and exhumation in the fallen world of time, change, and earthly materiality.[40] *The Grave*'s concentration of the georgic themes and processes of loss, mourning, and recovery mediated by the earth and managed by the constant care of labour (and care in its double sense of careful attention and careworn negotiations with ceaseless demands) uses a poetic tropology that works hard to revive the lost Eden in an anticipated but distant heaven. Dirt, dust, and ashes are the irritants that provoke this poetic and spiritual contemplation; but they are also irredeemably material and, as in Dryden's *Georgics*, their physical and metaphorical heaviness provides a constant (and anxiety-inducing) corporeal counterweight to the soul's heavenward flight.

Dirty Work: 'this ado in Earthing up a Carcase'

There is a productive relationship between soil, dirt, dust, and ashes—what William A. Cohen calls 'filth'—and civilization: 'Filth represents a cultural location at which the human body, social hierarchy, psychological subjec-

[36] Goodman, *Georgic Modernity*, 113, 114.
[37] Goodman, *Georgic Modernity*, 114, 115.
[38] Annabel Patterson, 'Wordsworth's Georgic: Genre and Structure in *The Excursion*', *Wordsworth Circle*, 9/2 (1978), 150.
[39] Patterson, 'Wordsworth's Georgic', 151; William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye, with the assistance of David García (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), bk V, l. 631, hereafter cited parenthetically.
[40] Patterson, 'Wordsworth's Georgic', 150, 151. See the Postscript for my discussion of Wordsworth's churchyard poems.

tivity, and material objects converge.'[41] If corpses are the filthiest objects, as in Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject, repudiated as waste and thereby becoming 'conceivably *productive*, the discarded sources in which riches may lie',[42] they have also consistently been located in theological and physical relation to other forms of dirty matter.[43] In funeral sermons and in churchyard poetry, the future is imagined not only in terms of winged souls and heavenly gates but also worms and dust in an emphatically corporeal process of dissolution. For Christopher Hamlin, the dynamics of the decaying body are powerful stimulants to literary imagination, in which the grave 'is both a place of peace where nothing happens but a form of "sleep" and a place of incessant chemical and biological activity', as the human corpse makes postmortem alliances with 'the worms, the fungi, the plants, the dirt' that share the soil in an energetic combination of destruction and construction.[44] Dirt, dust, and ashes—fundamental components of matter and symbolically resonant in religious and poetic worlds of imagination—are unignorable and persistent. They disrupt our ontological certainties in revealing the essence of what we are and what we will become—processes of living and dying that pivot on the point of burial.

In material and discursive ways, dirt and dust are generative in the spirit of the georgic poem, with its balance of human energy and natural entropy, imaginative reach and earthly recrudescence, since they are the gross elements that must be worked with and upon to be fit subjects for poetry.[45] According to Michael Marder, dust and ashes teeter between matter and spirit so that, while the funeral convention 'earth to earth' 'spurs the Aristotelian movement of restitution according to nature, such that an earthly human body returns to its native element', 'dust to dust' 'interrupts the elemental cycle. . . . [D]ust allegorizes the spiritualization of matter. Because of its restlessness and deconstruction of the boundaries between life and death, it reflects the hope of resurrection.' Combining eschatology with agriculture

[41] William A. Cohen, 'Introduction: Locating Filth', in William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson (eds), *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), viii. See also Sophie Gee, *Making Waste: Leftovers and the Eighteenth-Century Imagination* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[42] Cohen, 'Introduction', x.

[43] In Mary Douglas's influential study, dirt is 'matter out of place': 'It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order' (*Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, in *Collected Works* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), ii. 36).

[44] Christopher Hamlin, 'Good and Intimate Filth', in Cohen and Johnson (eds), *Filth*, 13.

[45] In Smith's reading, georgic poets such as Dryden and Philips 'were interested in the culture of the soil primarily as a metaphor for the culture of the human being', revealing how earthly matter is both pragmatically agricultural and potently metaphorical, with a host of theological valences (*Empiricist Devotions*, 175, 199).

in a georgic turn, Marder points out that '[t]he growth of plants out of the ashes that fertilize the soil augurs a similar hopeful prospect'.[46] This interstitial state of becoming, at once material and spiritual, makes dust an alarming yet enticing element to thinkers and writers—particularly those concerned with the relationship between orthodox Christianity and empirical philosophy. This was an especially potent combination in the eighteenth century. As Dustin Stewart argues, body and soul were not entirely separable even in this period's conformist theology, as the Protestant afterlife promised both the soul's disembodiment at the point of death and its re-embodiment at the Resurrection. These 'spiritualist' and 'mortalist' states coexisted in 'an open-ended and adjustable rhythm', which had important implications for eighteenth-century poetics as '[d]isagreement about what the afterlife is like spilled over into disagreement about what poetry is like, what it is and what it can do', particularly the types of futures it can imagine.[47]

Blair's *The Grave* turns on an equivocal movement between the purely spiritual and the basely mortal, the delicate navigation of which constitutes the poet's difficult work. An undeniable affinity between earthly remains and the immortal soul, and the task of poetry to chart the 'gloomy Path' of death that lies between (l. 688), marks an uneasy confluence of last things and new life, the decaying body buried in the churchyard and the heaven to which the soul—and the poetic imagination—aspires. The body is at the centre of these movements, but so too is the earth it tends and in which it is buried. Stewart writes that Edward Young's spiritualist impulse in *Night Thoughts* and his early odes seeks to counter a georgic imperative, according to which 'the laborer's body must join the soil upon dying, planted now to be harvested later, and Young suspects that this perspective is mortalist at bottom, entombing the laborer's soul in the ground as well'.[48] Georgic affinities in *The Grave* show how this poem, less confident than Young's in its efforts to extract the soul from the body in the ground, is constantly thrown back upon an earthly mortalism it cannot escape and with which it must continue to work.[49] As intellectually and spiritually productive as they are organically and agriculturally vital, dirt and dust are a poetic provocation in

[46] Michael Marder, *Dust* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 86–7. See also Joseph A. Amato, *Dust: A History of the Small and the Invisible* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000).

[47] Stewart, *Futures*, 4, 5.

[48] Stewart, *Futures*, 123.

[49] As Parisot puts it, '[t]he poem's insistence upon corporeal horror . . . can be read as a radical aesthetic expression of our inability to escape the mundane existence in which we are mired' ('Graveyard Poetry and the Aesthetics of Horror', 255–6).

Blair's text—one that yields as much anxiety as energy, as the poet seeks to learn 'what 'tis *to Die*' (l. 440).

In *The Grave*, then, the churchyard is a place not of finality but of process—where 'Nature appall'd | Shakes off her wonted Firmness' in a lively dissolution (ll. 10–11). Pulled into death's 'long-extended Realms, and rueful Wastes', nature's constancy is disrupted and reverts to '*Chaos*, 'ere the Infant Sun | Was roll'd together, or had try'd his Beams | Athwart the Gloom profound!' (ll. 12, 14–16). Cast as a waste and a sunless void, the grave seems nothing but an accumulation of dead matter: 'Sculls and Coffins, Epitaphs and Worms' (l. 23); the church itself is 'buried 'midst the Wreck of Things which were' (l. 30). Yet, as subsequent lines make clear, the churchyard is an animated environment in which the poet and the dead themselves are forcefully embodied and susceptible to atmospheric influences of sights and sounds that affect their perceiving bodies:

> The Wind is up: Hark! how it howls! Methinks
> Till now, I never heard a Sound so dreary:
> Doors creak, and Windows clap, and Night's foul Bird
> Rook'd in the Spire screams loud: The gloomy Isles
> Black-plaster'd, and hung round with Shreds of 'Scutcheons
> And tatter'd Coats of Arms, send back the Sound
> Laden with heavier Airs, from the low Vaults
> The Mansions of the Dead. Rous'd from their Slumbers
> In grim Array the grizly Spectres rise,
> Grin horrible, and obstinately sullen
> Pass and repass, hush'd as the Foot of Night.
> Again! the Screech-Owl shrieks: Ungracious Sound!
> I'll hear no more, it makes one's Blood run chill. (ll. 32–44)

In a georgic convergence of surface and depth, the subterranean life of the churchyard is disclosed; the dead rise from their graves and walk again.

Far from a place of closure and conventional mourning, the churchyard in Blair's poem is punctuated by 'new-open'd *Grave*[*s*]' (l. 70). In an apostrophe to undertakers, Blair puns on 'Waste' as economic ostentation at funerals and the decaying matter of the corpse:

> Why this Waste?
> Why this ado in Earthing up a Carcase

> That's fall'n into Disgrace, and in the Nostril
> Smells horrible? (ll. 168–71)

In an etymological pun on the body's fall from grace, the 'Disgrace' of the carcass is its forsaken integrity (no longer whole and indivisible, from *integritas*, from *integer*, 'intact') as it dissolves into minute, invisible particles that invade the olfactory sense of the poet. Blair continues this theme in his description of the gravedigger, who unearths fragments of the buried dead as he makes space for new interments in the crowded churchyard earth:

> See! yonder Maker of the Dead Man's Bed,
> The *Sexton!* hoary-headed Chronicle,
> . . .
> with Mattock in his Hand
> Digs through whole Rows of Kindred and Acquaintance,
> By far his Juniors! Scarce a Scull's cast up,
> But well he knew its Owner, and can tell
> Some Passage of his Life.
> . . .
> Poor Wretch! he minds not,
> That soon some trusty Brother of the Trade
> Shall do for him what he has done for Thousands. (ll. 452–3, 455–9, 464–6)

In these lines there is a georgic system at work: the poet, channelling the gravedigger's labour or 'Trade', works the soil and discloses emblems of mortality, like the appalled swains at the end of book I of Virgil's *Georgics*. Representatives of the georgic's cyclical turnings of earth and of time, the dead are disinterred in a proleptic preview of the fate of the living, pushed to an ironic extreme in the figure of the sexton whose familiarity with the dead will not protect him from this universal end. As a 'Maker', a worker of the soil to make beds or rows for the dead (rather than crops or flowers), the gravedigger tills the field for his own burial. Naturalizing a labour that is here specific, embodied, and tilted towards the grave in more ways than one, the waste of thousands of individuals swells to become the wreck of empires as the Egyptian pyramids are made into 'A hideous and misshapen Length of Ruins' in a temporal collapse that allows 'all-subduing Time' to 'wasteth them', and 'The Labour of whole Ages lumbers down' (ll. 199, 201, 202, 198). Expanding beyond the churchyard, the poem makes it clear that

this landscape is synecdochic of the entire earth, which emerges as a tilth of 'Spoils':

> What is *this World?*
> What? but a spacious *Burial-field* unwall'd,
> Strew'd with Death's Spoils, the Spoils of Animals
> Savage and Tame, and full of Dead Mens Bones?
> The very Turf on which we tread, once liv'd:
> And we that live must lend our Carcases
> To cover our own Offspring: In their Turns
> They too must cover theirs. (ll. 483–90)

There is a recycling impulse in *The Grave*, as the cyclical pattern of animation followed by burial, life followed by death progressing infinitely down the generations, propagates further life. The once-living earth still lives—its yield is the poem's message that we ignore death at our peril, for we are but 'Creatures of a Day' (l. 475). The energies of growth and labour mandated by the georgic are given new symbolic impetus in Blair's theological framework, which nonetheless maintains georgic's ambivalent attachment to daily rhythms of rural work. The poem begins with a comparison between diurnal and nocturnal populations: 'some affect the Sun, and some the Shade' (l. 1); ghosts set loose to roam at 'Witching Time of Night' vanish 'at Crowing of the Cock' (ll. 55, 71); the sunless realms of the dead are imagined by analogy with the chaos before the world's formation (ll. 14–16, quoted above); and its *memento mori* precepts of looking to the end before it is too late are symbolized in the passing of day to night:

> Oh! slipp'ry State of Things! What sudden Turns?
> What strange Vicissitudes, in the first Leaf
> Of Man's sad History? To-day most Happy,
> And 'ere To-morrow's Sun has set, most Abject! (ll. 560–3)

The pun on leaf, as a page and a fragile marker of growth and decay—as Blair writes, 'Men see their Friends | Drop off, like Leaves in Autumn' (ll. 467–8)—brings the metaphorical sun into the world of the organic and the agricultural. This in turn forms the context for a system of analogies that structures *The Grave*, demonstrating the natural and imaginative growth that balances, indeed stems from, the wreckage of the churchyard earth. As the earth turns and seasons change, the mortal world that labours in and against this demanding context is levelled to the soil into which it

is absorbed, the basis of new growth. So too, the churchyard poet's lines turn from precept to exemplum, didactic moral to earthly figure, oscillating about the churchyard as the central point in which life and death (and life from death) are contained then released in new cycles of energetic exchange.

Describing personified Beauty through conventional images of flowers, whose desiccation yields a lesson on vanity—'Thy Roses faded, and thy Lillies soil'd, | What hast thou more to boast of?' (ll. 241–2)—for instance, Blair's georgic management of this trope also brings body and flower physically together as differently formed types of decaying matter that alike provide food for the 'high-fed *Worm*', 'surfeited upon thy Damask Cheek' (ll. 246, 245). Grimly reversing Beauty's 'painful Labours at thy Glass' in its own laborious feeding, the worm relishes the 'Coarse Fare' of the dead whose flowers do further rhetorical duty, moving from metaphorical to physical ('Damask Cheek' bears the colour and texture of the rose on the body) to metaphorical again, as Beauty's tears are figured as 'Dew-drops on the Bells of Flow'rs' (ll. 248, 251, 254). Metonymically extending from this representative case to the world as a whole, and transitioning to a related set of organic images, from flowers to fruit and grain, *The Grave* progresses to describe sin as '[t]he fruitful Parent | Of Woes of all Dimensions', 'Blasting the foodful Grain, the loaded Branches, | And marking all along its Way with Ruin' (ll. 601–2, 619–20). Blair compares sin to volcanoes and floods—examples of the natural disasters with which georgic poets and their farming subjects must contend (like Virgil's storm and Grainger's hurricane); yet while these 'Sorts of Evils | Are kindly circumscrib'd, and have their Bounds', '*Sin* has laid waste | Not here and there a Country, but *a World*' (ll. 604–5, 614–15). Nevertheless, sin is the 'Pregnant Womb of Ills' including natural ones, since 'Sicknesses | of ev'ry Size and Symptom . . . | . . . are thine! See! how the Fiend | Profusely scatters the Contagion round', 'defacing | A whole Creation's Beauty with rude Hands'—an exuberant amplification of the earlier isolated case of Beauty's defaced 'Damask Cheek' (ll. 623, 626–9, 617–18). And, even when imagining the future state, Blair maintains his pattern of georgic images. At the Resurrection a global exhumation will take place as the grave 'must *render up thy Dead*', 'only in thy Keeping for a Season', until the restitution of 'the long, long Sleepers into Life, | Day-Light, and Liberty' (ll. 654, 656, 660–1). At this moment of unearthing the churchyard graves are represented as 'Mines, that lay long forming under Ground, | In their dark Cells immur'd; but now full ripe' (ll. 663–4) in a subterranean entanglement of vegetal and mineral life. After death's seasonal reign, in

which the dead have ripened underground, heaven is a place of 'purer Air, and softer Skies, | And a ne'er Setting Sun', 'where Sweets unwith'ring bloom' (ll. 694–5, 696).

As these examples demonstrate, Blair's theological discourse describing the cycles of life, death, and resurrection operates around metaphors of seasonal growth and industrial extraction, which his churchyard poem shares with a contemporary georgic tradition. Revealed by the combination of churchyard georgic, though, is the otherwise sublimated human labour intervening in these images of an earth made productive for specific purposes—an anxiety for churchyard poetics as for the georgic genre to which it so often turns as a technology or method capable of turning the soil for the production of morally didactic, as well as agricultural, ends. For instance, attaining paradise, in which georgic decline and work reverts to pastoral plenitude and ease, the exemplary life and death of the 'Good Man' are represented in agricultural terms of organic growth sustained by working bodies. Edenic plenty in the next life is achieved through the good works of the present to maintain the field of virtue—not a feat of nature, but a 'Harvest' planted with care:

> Behold him! in the Evening-Tide of Life,
> A Life well-spent, whose early Care it was
> His riper Years should not upbraid his Green:
> By unperceiv'd Degrees he wears away;
> Yet like the Sun seems larger at his Setting!
>
> . . .
>
> Whilst the glad Gates of Sight are wide-expanded
> To let new Glories in, the first fair Fruits
> Of the fast-coming Harvest. (ll. 716–20, 724–6)

Three sections of Blair's poem bring this georgic cycle of degeneration and renewal into stark relief. Each offers a vision of a pre-georgic pastoral, fallen into the mortal world that is also, and consequently, the world of labour—for Christian poet as for georgic farmer. The former must work to recover the lost Golden Age in heaven; to do so, Blair uses a cluster of organic and agricultural analogies that connect his work to that of Virgil's husbandman and bring the mourned-for paradise, present world of death and labour, and future heaven into uneasy but creative tension. In the first episode, the personification of Death, metonymically figured as the 'Invidious *Grave*' (l. 85), severs the bonds of friendship—'A Tie more stubborn far than Nature's

Band!' (l. 87), which mortality also breaks even as death forms a crucial link in the chain of regeneration. The poet describes lingering with a friend in a hidden wood reminiscent of Milton's primal earth, where the waters 'underground, or circuit wide | With serpent error wandering, found their way':[50]

> Oh! when my Friend and I
> In some thick Wood have wander'd heedless on,
> Hid from the vulgar Eye; and sat us down
> Upon the sloping Cowslip-cover'd Bank,
> Where the pure limpid Stream has slid along
> In grateful Errors thro' the Under-wood
> Sweet-murmuring . . . (ll. 94–100)

As in Milton's paradise, however, error is already present: even this pastoral friendship requires 'the Labours of thy [i.e. Friendship's] Love' (l. 92); as the sun sets 'the longest Summer's Day | Seem'd too too much in Haste' (ll. 106–7), and the verse paragraph ends elegiacally, mourning 'Joys departed | Not to return' (ll. 109–10). The next paragraph confirms their location: the 'Dull *Grave!*' (l. 111).

After several sections enumerating the shared fate of the various personified qualities and professions of the dead (Beauty and Strength, Sage and Miser), accumulated in the churchyard where each alike 'Shakes Hands with Dust, and calls the Worm his Kinsman' (l. 228)—'Grossly familiar, [they] Side by Side consume' (l. 231)—Blair's poem recovers a vision of humanity's idyllic

> *first State!*
> When yet but warm from thy great Maker's Hand,
> He stamp'd thee with his Image, and well-pleas'd
> Smil'd on his last fair Work. Then all was Well.
> Sound was the *Body*, and the *Soul* serene;
> Like Two sweet Instruments, ne'er out of Tune,
> That play their several Parts. Nor Head, nor Heart,
> Offer'd to ache: Nor was there Cause they should;
> For all was pure within: No fell Remorse,

[50] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (eds), *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), bk VII, ll. 301–2. All references to Milton's poems are to this edition, hereafter cited parenthetically.

> Nor anxious Castings up of what might be,
> Alarm'd his peaceful Bosom: Summer Seas
> Shew not more smooth when kiss'd by Southern Winds
> Just ready to expire. Scarce importun'd
> The generous Soil with a luxuriant Hand
> Offer'd the various Produce of the Year,
> And every Thing most perfect in its Kind. (ll. 541–56)

As in the previous episode, this state of things is envisioned only to be mourned as 'fugitive . . . and quickly gone' (l. 559), yielding a lesson on planning for the end that may come at any moment:

> Thus far'd it with *our Sire:* Not long he enjoy'd
> His Paradise! Scarce had the happy Tenant
> Of the fair Spot due Time to prove its Sweets,
> Or summ them up; when strait he must be gone
> Ne'er to return again.
>
> . . .
>
> At once he lost
> His Glory, and his GOD. If Mortal now,
> And sorely maim'd, No Wonder! *Man has Sinn'd.*
>
> . . .
>
> An Error fatal not to him alone,
> But to his future Sons, his Fortune's Heirs.
> Inglorious Bondage! Human Nature groans
> Beneath a Vassalage so vile and cruel,
> And its vast Body bleeds through ev'ry Vein. (ll. 565–9, 579–81, 595–9)

There is an uneasy intermingling of pastoral and georgic frames of reference in this envisioned Eden—or perhaps a play with georgic's capacity for self-difference or counter-pressure. As in *Georgics* book 2, when nature smiles and seems to collaborate with human effort, its entropic principle—so evident in book 1—temporarily suspended, in these lines from *The Grave*, work and ease, agricultural labour and natural growth, oscillate in unresolved relation. Serene, pure, and perfect, human life resides in a harmonious nature that freely gives up its luxuriant crop. The 'Produce of the Year', however, emerges from a soil that, however lightly, is worked to some degree: the participle 'importun'd' sits oddly with the adverb 'scarce', their attributes

of persistence and negligence setting up a curious contradiction of natural plenty annually replenished and human labour set against the seasonal cycle—from *importūnus*, inopportune, unseasonable, and, at a further etymological level, difficult and urgent.[51] Stranger still, it is the soil's own 'Hand' that offers the fruits, collapsing human labour into the vital humus. Through the extended analogy between body and environment, the human form also rises, plant-like, from the soil (in a conventional metaphor given new purpose in a georgic system, Blair elsewhere refers to the body as the 'Clay Tenement' of the soul (l. 355)), the 'fair Work' of the 'Maker's Hand'. As Tess Somervell writes, in the flux of the georgic present, the 'labourer must fore*cast* but not fore*know* the results of his labour'.[52] In this passage of *The Grave*, prolepsis doubly animates the line 'anxious Castings up of what might be', which anticipates (fore*casting*) the fall from Eden into labour and death—'a Vassalage' that wears down the labouring mortal body—even as the repetition of 'Error' looks back to paradise and the fateful closing of its gates.

This anticipatory register of turning earth and turning time also prefigures the unearthing of the dead, who embody the consequences of the fall down the generations, at the Resurrection, when the fall is reversed: casting is the action of throwing or throwing up,[53] and as 'The Time draws on | When not a single Spot of Burial-Earth, | . . . | But must give back its long-committed Dust' (ll. 734–7), the crop is a body perfected once more:

> Each *Soul* shall have a *Body* ready furnish'd;
> And each shall have his own. Hence ye Prophane!
> Ask not, how this can be? Sure the same Pow'r
> That rear'd the Piece at first, and took it down,
> Can re-assemble the loose scatter'd Parts,
> And put them as they were.
>
> . . .
>
> When the dread Trumpet sounds, the slumb'ring Dust,
> Not unattentive to the Call, shall wake:
> And ev'ry Joint possess its proper Place,

[51] See *OED adj.* and *n.* A. *adj.* 2. 'Troublesome, vexatious, irksome'; 3. 'Inopportune, untimely, unseasonable; inappropriate or unsuitable for the time or place'; and 4. 'Pressing, urgent; busy' https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/92577#eid877694 (accessed 14 June 2022).

[52] Tess Somervell, *Reading Time in the Long Poem: Milton, Thomson and Wordsworth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 101.

[53] *OED n.* 1. a. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/28578?isAdvanced=false&result=3&rskey=Xp1wuO& (accessed 14 June 2022).

> With a new Elegance of Form, unknown
> To its first State. (ll. 741–6, 750–4)

This episode renders the Resurrection as a laborious georgic assembly, a material working-up or agricultural 'rearing' from the base and decaying elements (dust and scattered parts) of nature brought to a restored form, unearthed or grown from the soil.[54] The cyclical revisions imposed by this georgic system, however, raise the spectre of impermanence even for the resurrected body called to the final judgement; returned to earth in burial and reared from it at the Resurrection, the body's earthly cycles must be monitored and constantly managed in the care-full work demanded by churchyard georgic. As Blair's focus on scattered parts and perfected form suggests, the poem is here concerned with issues of articulation: how to express the linkage between mortal body, churchyard earth, and the afterlife when the first is everywhere in evidence—'What is *this World* . . . | . . . but a spacious *Burial-field* unwall'd' (ll. 483–4)—and the next and last are impossible to discern. As he writes of the '*Tongue-Warrior*' laid low (l. 297):

> Where is . . .
> . . . the Force of Words,
> The well-turn'd Period, and the well-tun'd Voice,
> With all the lesser Ornaments of Phrase?
> Ah! fled for ever, as they ne'er had been! (ll. 307–11)

Language falters on the precipice of the grave—'on the Edge of Days', we 'frolick on Eternity's dread Brink' (ll. 203, 476)—and the depths below remain obscure. What this amounts to is the hard work facing the poet of this churchyard georgic, uneasily coming to terms with the troubling and troublesome matter of the grave.

As Parisot observes, Blair's poem ends with a circumscribed vision of heaven, attained in only the most veiled symbolic terms, which keep consolation and revelation offstage, as the soul is figured as a 'weary Bird' that 'Leaves the wide Air, and in some lonely Brake | Cow'rs down, and dozes till the Dawn of Day, | Then claps his well-fledg'd Wings, and bears away' (ll. 764–7).[55] Represented thus, the soul—already dependent on the body

[54] See Christopher F. Loar, 'Georgic Assemblies: James Grainger, John Dyer, and Bruno Latour', *Philological Quarterly*, 97/2 (2018), 242.

[55] Parisot, *Graveyard Poetry*, 65–6.

in its first state and now, in its last, in haste to rejoin 'its Partner' (l. 755)—inhabits the same familiar pattern of day and night, work and rest. What is unfamiliar is the unknown location to which it 'bears away', and the poem's conclusion strikes the same discordant note that echoes throughout *The Grave*, in which the voices of the dead are heard but the secret of their state remains mysterious, 'Dumb, as the green Turf that covers them' (l. 122):

> Tell us! ye Dead! Will none of you in Pity
> To those you left behind disclose the Secret?
> Oh! that some courteous Ghost would blab it out!
> What 'tis You are, and We must shortly be.
>
> . . .
>
> Why might you not
> Tell us what 'tis *to Die?* Do the strict Laws
> Of your Society forbid your speaking
> Upon a Point so nice? I'll ask no more;
> Sullen, like Lamps in Sepulchres, your Shine
> Enlightens but yourselves: Well,—'tis no Matter,
> A very little Time will clear up all,
> And make us learn'd as you are, and as close. (ll. 431–4, 439–46)

This being so, an anxiety that death is simply what is seen and felt on the decaying earth in which all things decline—'Returning to the barren Womb of Nothing | Whence first they sprung' (ll. 384–5)—haunts even as it animates the labour of the georgic poet of the grave. If it is 'no Matter' for the poet's learning to be delayed until he too passes into death, this is because his understanding of 'what 'tis *to Die*' is also no *matter*—an immaterial and therefore intangible, inarticulable knowledge disconsonant with the material world of the body in and of the earth, from which his poetic visions offer only fleeting release.

In this sense *The Grave* manifests another form of human energy, a laborious striving against natural entropy that is uneasily and only temporarily elevated by the poem's Christian ethos. To reach heaven requires good works, a spiritualized georgic *cura*, in the material present. These works—as challenging as they are necessary—are figured agriculturally and organically through a metaphorical pattern that also structures the poem's sections on the non-material afterlife, yoking the soul to the body and rooting the poetic

imagination in the churchyard earth. As the structural coherence of Blair's didactic poem, like other kinds of georgic, requires a constant push and pull between imperative and image, so too the depictions of soul and life after death require their tensile correspondence with the mortal, material world. I have argued that Blair's *The Grave* can usefully be considered a type of georgic: the modal affinity between an archetypal churchyard poem and a georgic tradition more typically characterized by agricultural advice is realized not only through a shared didactic impetus and figural congruities of labour and the earth (as dirt, dust, and ashes as well as agriculturally productive soil), but also through the underlying mortal impulse of these poetic tropes. The death that overshadows the eighteenth-century English georgic takes centre stage in churchyard poetry, and the work of the poet to confront and overcome physical decline—of the body as an exemplification of all organic matter—makes an important point of connection as a form of work that owes its energies to the labourers whose presence is submerged by the poem as their bodies are buried in the churchyard. The georgic method of *The Grave*, however, reveals in its initiating landscape both the human remains and the regimes of work on which the poet relies. In the churchyard georgic of *The Grave*, immortal soul and poetic imagination attempt ambitious leaps beyond material and mortal constraints—a bid for transcendence that can only temporarily be achieved as the poem falls back to earth, generating new growth from the churchyard.

2

The Working Body's Decline

Mary Leapor's Pastoral and Ann Yearsley's Topographical Poetry

> If we would copy Nature, it may be useful to take this Idea along with us, that pastoral is an image of what they call the Golden age. So that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceiv'd then to have been; when the best of men follow'd the employment. . . . We must therefore use some illusion to render a Pastoral delightful; and this consists in exposing the best side only of a shepherd's life, and in concealing its miseries.—Alexander Pope, 'A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry'.[1]

In the previous chapter, I examined how the georgic in Blair's *The Grave* formed a haunting underpresence, challenging the poem's Christian orthodoxy with the difficult matter of the working body. This matter resurfaces in the two poems of this chapter—Mary Leapor's 'Colinetta' (1748) and Ann Yearsley's 'Clifton Hill' (1785)—but as a more intimate sort of problem. If bodies for Blair were a nagging vexation the poet would rather forget (however impossible that might be), for these poets embodied experience is a nearer concern, and one with still less chance of being transfigured or otherwise mastered. To restate my position from the Introduction, the body in poetry by labouring-class women such as Leapor and Yearsley is not only a location of adversity: as Margaret Anne Doody, Stuart Curran, and others have observed, 'the impulses and receptions that make for sense-experience' are central in the sensuous world to which women are told they are limited, yet within the compass of which they might recreate 'the fascinating and insistent world of particulars' in an exhilaratingly

[1] Alexander Pope, 'A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry', in John Butt (ed.), *The Poems of Alexander Pope* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 120. All references to Pope's poems are to this edition, hereafter cited parenthetically.

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experiential poetics.[2] The other side of this proposition is, however, a discomforting concealment of the hard life of the body and its challenging representation in work by labouring-class women poets. In their own time, their poetry was defined as the product of 'natural genius'—a demarcation that fixed the rural labourer as an organic feature of the landscape, naturalizing their labour and marketing their aesthetic work as a neutralized, non-threatening product of the organic society they seemed still to enjoy. Closer to nature in their rural employment and with little to no formal education or much access to books, poets such as Leapor and Yearsley were wilfully misconceived as writing by grace of a talent grown from the proximate soil rather than produced through an intellectual labour supposed beyond the reach of the manual labourer's abilities.[3] As Tim Burke points out, the double bind of labour for women workers, erased from processes of cultural reproduction, which nonetheless depend on their conscripted bodies, upsets further the misprision of 'natural genius' as these poets 'dramatize the difficulty of vocalizing and materializing imaginative labour in public'.[4]

This chapter looks to the churchyard as a site in which this difficulty can be accommodated but not contained. In 'Colinetta' and 'Clifton Hill', Leapor and Yearsley use the churchyard to recentre the work of the labouring body and to point up the end of labour in premature death. Collapsing under the strain of hard work and vulnerable to hostile environments throughout the working year, the shepherdess Colinetta and the milkwoman Lactilla (Yearsley's poetic persona) fall fast to earth and end in the churchyard as the most grounding of places. Yet they also reclaim the churchyard for a poetics that works out from the body and finds a vitality even as the body itself is worn away. The ambivalence of this negotiation—between rural labour and poetic work, the death of the body and the life of the verse—is managed through adaptations of poetic genres concerned with rural work, such as pastoral, georgic, and topographical poetry. Pushing at the outward limits of literary

[2] Doody, 'Sensuousness', 4, 5. See also Curran, 'Romantic Poetry'.

[3] See especially John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan, 'John Clare and the Tradition of Labouring-Class Verse', in Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 280–95; Bridget Keegan, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry, 1730–1837* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2–5.

[4] Tim Burke, 'Ann Yearsley and the Distribution of Genius in Early Romantic Culture', in Woodman (ed.), *Early Romantics*, 223. On the figure of maternity as domesticated embodiment in eighteenth-century women's poetry see Jane Spencer, 'Imagining the Woman Poet: Creative Female Bodies', in Sarah Prescott and David E. Shuttleton (eds), *Women and Poetry 1660–1750* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 99–120.

tradition, poets such as Leapor, Yearsley, and (in Chapter 4) John Clare rewrite discourses on labour, landscape, and the social life of working bodies by depicting experience from within their oppressive structures. I read the churchyard in work by these poets as a topos that transects multiple genres, recuring in labouring-class poetics as a place where the troubling textures of this experience can be reckoned with, if never ultimately resolved. The poet's song might fly free in a hilltop's liberating atmosphere or be engraved in the living bark of a tree, but labouring-class poets show how this release into nature is often short-lived as they are called back to their bodies and pressed into work.

I make this argument with an eye towards the formal work with which Leapor and Yearsley mediate their concerns. Successive critics have argued, and with a growing resolve in the twenty-first century, that aesthetic concerns ought to find a more central place in readings of eighteenth-century labouring-class poetry, which has been constrained by a necessary but perhaps unnecessarily exclusive interest in socio-historical contexts. Kerri Andrews, for instance, observes that 'criticism of laboring-class women's writing still tends towards the biographical or the emblematic . . . [and] has been subjected to relatively little serious aesthetic or theoretical criticism'.[5] Poets such as Leapor and Yearsley have a particular 'capacity for critical resistance', which may run counter to more familiar ideological or biographical perspectives—readings that place them insistently as labouring-class before acknowledging their status as poets.[6] Andrews's claim builds on earlier critical work on the aesthetics of labouring-class poetry—and calls for more of the same—which strives to recognize the work of these poets, their artistry and craft, in addition to and as an essential framework for the physical work they describe.[7] Like Clare after them, Leapor and Yearsley

[5] Kerri Andrews, 'New Directions on Mary Leapor and Ann Yearsley', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 34/1 (2015), 12. Similar claims have been made in Clare studies: see Mina Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 6–7; Sara Guyer, *Reading with John Clare: Biopoetics, Sovereignty, Romanticism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 6–8; Hugh Haughton, 'Progress and Rhyme: "The Nightingale's Nest" and Romantic Poetry', in Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips, and Geoffrey Summerfield (eds), *John Clare in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 51–86.

[6] David Fairer, '"Flying atoms in the sightless air": Issues of Coherence and Scale in Leapor and Yearsley', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 34/1 (2015), 142.

[7] See especially Donna Landry and William J. Christmas, 'Introduction', *Criticism*, 47/4 (2005), 414. See also Corey E. Andrews, '"Work" Poems: Assessing the Georgic Mode of Eighteenth-Century Working Class Poetry', in Jung (ed.), *Experiments in Genre*, 105–33; John Goodridge, 'General Editor's Introduction', in John Goodridge et al. (eds), *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, 1700–1800*, 2 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), i. xiii–xvi; Van-Hagen, 'Literary Technique'.

write about labour *and as* labour, figuring writing as work—'a new form of productive labor that depends upon the depiction of, or the cultural capital of, the earlier occupation'[8]—and constituting 'the scene of writing' as a 'site of resistance' for a 'countertradition of poetic production' that both emulates and subverts the structures of the dominant literary culture.[9]

This 'scene of writing' comprehends the layered sense of place occupied by labouring-class poets: their rootedness in particular known, felt landscapes; their social 'place' (whether affirmed, resisted, or situated within a complex mixture of political positions in their work); and their place in literary markets and print cultures, including their relationship to the canon, negotiated through allusion, imitation, and revision. Leapor's and Yearsley's churchyard poems reveal how the churchyard concentrates these concerns, despite its absence in critical accounts of the relation of these poets to canonical 'scenes of writing'.[10] This landscape can be a place of release for the body and for poetry—release as bodily activity suspended; release as poetry's freedom to roam and work unconstrained, however briefly—yet with the possibility of further difficult work always pressing in from the margins. Attending closely to Leapor's and Yearsley's poetics in an effort to answer the call for an aesthetically nuanced—as well as an appropriately socially and politically historicized—appreciation of eighteenth-century labouring-class writing, this chapter sustains my broader preoccupation with the body and the work of writing developed across *Churchyard Poetics*. It does so with a sharpened awareness of the emphasis placed on these issues by labouring-class writers, especially women, whose work—as labourers, as poets, and in the interstices between these seemingly polarized vocational identities—serves as a particularly sensitive register of the implications of body, labour, writing, and place. In Leapor's 'Colinetta' and Yearsley's 'Clifton Hill', the churchyard emerges as a highly worked 'scene of writing'.

[8] William J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730–1830* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 23.

[9] Landry, *Muses*, 5, 3. See also Christmas, *Lab'ring Muses*, 24, 50.

[10] Various studies acknowledge the relationship of Leapor, Yearsley, and Clare to writers including Gray and Young, but none read the churchyard into this connection. On Leapor see Richard Greene, *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Women's Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 186–93. On Yearsley see Kerri Andrews, 'Neither Mute nor Inglorious: Ann Yearsley and Elegy', in John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan (eds), *A History of British Working Class Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 85–100. On Clare see R. J. Ellis, 'Plodding Plowmen: Issues of Labour and Literacy in Gray's "Elegy"', in John Goodridge (ed.), *The Independent Spirit: John Clare and the Self-Taught Tradition* (Helpston: John Clare Society and Margaret Grainger Memorial Trust, 1994), 27–43; John Goodridge, *John Clare and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 47–58; Gorji, *John Clare*, 32–56.

'fertile Lays my early Labours knew': Mary Leapor's 'Colinetta'

Leapor's two collections, both titled *Poems Upon Several Occasions* (1748 and 1751), comprise a diversity of formal and generic innovations. Bill Overton identifies poems in genres and on subjects including the epistle, pastoral, satire, ode, epitaph, fable, tale, dialogue, prayer, dream vision, testament, and country house, with still more crossing traditional genres; William Christmas reads Leapor's soliloquy poems and Mary Chandler her dramatic monologues, adding further varieties to the list.[11] In her poems Leapor works with, against, and through established conventions, mingling and modulating them to exploit the capacity of different genres to enable different ways of thinking—about poetry, about the natural world, about society, and about the kinds of labour that cross these shaping contexts.

One of the principal ways in which poetic genre and form structure Leapor's work is by depicting the forms the body takes to adapt to the exigencies of labour and to perform in the generic frameworks of poetic tradition, where women's bodies in particular are subject to contorted misshapings. Doody proposes that Leapor, like Yearsley, is a woman poet less bound to hierarchies of sense experience and who instead describes a totally bodily, tactile responsive to environment. In this 'clearly sensuous world' the 'mind cannot divorce itself from the senses'; and while this immersion is not always celebratory, Doody finds in women's poetry of the eighteenth century, especially poetry by labouring-class women, a receptiveness to 'explor[ing] the activities of sensing and the sensed world as much more immediate', permitting 'investigations and statements counter to a dangerously prevalent reduction of everything to the life of Mind'.[12] The association of woman with body is a tensile relation in Leapor's work, as she deconstructs classical frames of beauty, grace, and ease in a hyper-embodied discourse rooted in physical experience and a diversity of poetic forms beyond the (patriarchally defined) conventional. Women live in a discursive world of male modes of reference and control, yet they have their own ways of existing and of describing their existence. As Laura Mandell argues, Leapor's twisting of generic expectations through more immediate, empiricist observations of

[11] Bill Overton, 'Mary Leapor's Verse and Genre'; William J. Christmas, 'Lyric Modes: The Soliloquy Poems of Mary Leapor and Ann Yearsley'; Mary Chandler, 'Monarchy, Meritocracy, and Tragic Realism in the Work of Mary Leapor', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 34/1 (2015), 19–32; 33–50; 65–87.

[12] Doody, 'Sensuousness', 4, 13. See also Williams, 'The Tenth Muse', 185–6.

bodily experience provokes a looking again and otherwise at (and through) established forms of inscribing the body; Leapor's poetry works 'to discover the reality hidden by traditional literary forms for the sake of overcoming their oppressive mystifications'.[13]

Combining genre with concerns of gender and class, pastoral is one source of oppressive mystification, and what Joseph Warton called its 'Representations of Innocence and Tranquillity' characterizing the lives of shepherds have often been contrasted with georgic frankness about the repetition and rigours of rural work.[14] Such a dichotomy can simplify the potent contrast pastoral makes to city or courtly corruption through its rhythms of retreat, as well as its own anxieties about bodily decline (as the genre's representative image, Nicolas Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego*, famously documents).[15] For Raymond Williams, 'this sense of a simple community, living on narrow margins and experiencing the delights of summer and fertility the more intensely because they also know winter and barrenness and accident, is intensely present' in pastoral. The idyllic is not pastoral's only tone, though it may become the dominant one, and there is a tradition from Theocritus through Virgil on that 'maintains its contact with the working year and with the real social conditions of country life'.[16] In the eighteenth century, Knightly Chetwood, commending Virgil's *Eclogues* in his preface to John Dryden's translation, went so far as to say that '[t]he *Poet* is better skilled in *Husbandry* than those that get their Bread by *it*. He describes the Nature, the Diseases, the Remedies, the proper places, and Seasons, of Feeding, of

[13] Laura Mandell, 'Demystifying (with) the Repugnant Female Body: Mary Leapor and Feminist Literary History', *Criticism*, 38/4 (1996), 553. See also King, 'Constructions', 441; Kate Lilley, 'Homosocial Women: Martha Sansom, Constantia Grierson, Mary Leapor and the Georgic Verse Epistle', in Armstrong and Blain (eds), *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment*, 167–8; Michael Nicholson, 'More than Eve: Women and Superior Secondariness in English Poetry, 1751–1810', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 46/1 (2022), 83–5.

[14] Joseph Warton, 'A Dissertation upon Pastoral Poetry', in Warton (ed.), *The Works of Virgil*, i. 35.

[15] See Margaret Fields Denton, 'Death in French Arcady: Nicolas Poussin's "The Arcadian Shepherds" and Burial Reform in France *c*.1800', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36/2 (2003), 195–216. On burial, eighteenth-century garden aesthetics, and churchyard poetics, see James Metcalf, '"Death's Refreshing Shade": Elizabeth Carter, "Church-yard Poetry", and Contemplative Retirement in the Gardens of the Dead', in Markman Ellis and Jack Orchard (eds), *Bluestockings and Landscape in Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Prospect of Improvement* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, forthcoming).

[16] Williams, *The Country*, 21, 22. See also Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 85–127; Terry Gifford, 'Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, and Post-Pastoral', in Louise Westling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 17–30; Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).

Watering their Flocks; the Furniture, Diet; the Lodging and pastimes of his Shepherds.'[17] However much pastoral idealizes the life of the shepherd, for Alexander Pope as for many others the genre's poetic primacy was linked to ancient patterns of labour, since, 'as the keep of flocks seems to have been the first employment of mankind, the most ancient sort of poetry was probably pastoral.'[18]

For eighteenth-century poets testing their mettle—and exhibiting the genre's topos of the singing competition, as in the infamous public contest between Pope and Ambrose Philips—pastoral also offered a malleable mode for experimental energies by whose force its formulas would be 'beaten into new shapes'.[19] Various pressures were tested against pastoral's classical limits, including an ambivalent accommodation of georgic's contrary impulses, the traditional yet potentially troubling elegiac overtones of complaint, and the strains of rural life in the less congenial British (rather than the more typical and clement Italian) climate, all of which pushed the genre to its ironic or tragic extremes in anti- and counter-pastorals such as John Gay's, Jonathan Swift's, Oliver Goldsmith's, George Crabbe's, and John Clare's.[20] Nonetheless, pastorals traditionally privilege what Chetwood called the 'Ancient Innocence, and unpractis'd Plainness' of the shepherd's work, 'with his Flock around him, resting securely under a spreading Beech, which furnish'd the first Food to our Ancestors'.[21] Joseph Trapp echoes this nostalgic celebration of the 'plain harmless Lives' and 'primitive Honour' of 'happy Times abound[ing] with Leisure and Recreation: To feed the Flock, and cultivate the Land, was the only Employ of its peaceable Inhabitants', who appear in pastorals 'in their Holyday Garments', 'neatly rural, and above the Habit of the Vulgar'.[22]

[17] Knightly Chetwood, 'Preface to the Pastorals', in *The Works of John Dryden*, v. 49–50. This is echoed in a comment by Joseph Trapp on the *Georgics*, in which he says Virgil 'appears more a Poet than a Husbandman, and yet of Husbandmen the greatest' ('Lecture XV. Of Didactic or Preceptive Poetry', in *Lectures*, 192).

[18] Pope, 'A Discourse', in *Poems*, 119. Samuel Johnson disputes the originary status of pastoral as 'the most ancient poetry'; nevertheless, he similarly claims: 'For the same reason that pastoral poetry was the first employment of the human imagination, it is generally the first literary amusement of our minds' ('*The Rambler*, No. 36', in Donald Greene (ed.), *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 190).

[19] Fairer, 'Persistence', 260. See also Fairer, 'Pastoral-Georgic Tradition'; David Hill Radcliffe, 'Pastoral', in Lynch (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660–1800*, 441–56.

[20] See 'Number 30, April 15 [1713]', supposed to be by Joseph Addison, in John Calhoun Stephens (ed.), *The Guardian* (Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 128–30; Barrell and John Bull (eds), *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse* (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 375–424.

[21] Chetwood, 'Preface to the Pastorals', 47.

[22] Trapp, 'Lecture XIV. Of *Pastorals*', in *Lectures*, 172, 173, 172, 178. See also Joseph Addison, 'Number 22', in *The Guardian*, 105–7; Hugh Blair, 'Lecture XXXIX. Pastoral Poetry—Lyric

Cumulatively, this insistence on the contented simplicity of rural life and labour viewed from the long-range perspective of an idealizing city (and formerly court) culture has earned pastoral the reputation of what Anne-Lise François calls 'the justifiably maligned genre in which you point to poor people *and* say how good they have it'.[23] Striving to soften the stark presence of poverty and its necessary work at the level of tone, Chetwood, Pope, Trapp, and Warton also extend pastoral's topical simplicity to its style, which, though 'humble, it is not sordidly mean, nor slovenly careless . . . But is sweet, pleasant, and easy; elegant with Plainness, and but poetically low.'[24] While the material may be ruggedly natural, 'the Manners, Thoughts, and Expressions, are full of the greatest Simplicity in Nature. The complete Character of this Poem consists in Simplicity, Brevity, and Delicacy: the two first of which render an Eclogue natural, and the last delightful.'[25] Yet, as Hugh Blair observes, the capacity to conduct a pastoral as natural and dignified turns on the poet's choice to depict rural life

> such as it now actually is; when the state of shepherds is reduced to a mean, servile, and laborious state; when their employments are become disagreeable, and their ideas gross and low: or such as we may suppose it once to have been, in the more early and simple ages, when it was a life of ease and abundance; . . . or, lastly, such as it never was, and never can in reality be, when, to the ease, innocence, and simplicity of the early ages, we attempt to add the polished taste and cultivated manners of modern times . . .[26]

Only the second, retrospectively rose-tinted option constitutes pastoral, Blair concludes (echoing Pope, quoted in the epigraph above), since 'the first is too gross and mean, and the last too refined and unnatural'. The consequent aesthetic tempering of the genre's depiction of rural work—what Blair calls its 'pleasing illusion', by which the poet 'must display to us all

Poetry', in *Lectures*, ii. 288–9; Johnson, '*The Rambler*, No. 36', in *The Major Works*, 190–1; Pope, 'A Discourse', in *Poems*, 119. For Williams, this excision of the tensions of classical pastoral characterizes the early modern remodelling of the genre 'until there is nothing countervailing, and selected images stand as themselves: not in a living but in an enamelled world' obscuring the transition to agrarian capitalism (*The Country*, 26). Responding to Williams, Feingold sees in late eighteenth-century pastoral adaptations not mystification but 'a direct effort to see, judge, and feel [the effects of capital], the result of which is to disturb imaginative integrity' (*Nature and Society*, 13).

[23] Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), xxii.

[24] Trapp, 'Of *Pastorals*', in *Lectures*, 179.

[25] Warton, 'A Dissertation', in Warton (ed.), *The Works of Virgil*, i. 37.

[26] Blair, 'Pastoral Poetry', in *Lectures*, ii. 289–90.

that is agreeable in that state, but hide whatever is displeasing'[27]—made it especially inhospitable to labouring-class poets. Georgic has seemed to offer sufficient answer to this exclusion, with its articulation of the costs of a life of labour serving for many critics to write labouring-class poets into a counter-tradition of 'proletarian anti-pastoral' or specifically 'plebeian georgic'—a tradition that alters the parent genre to reveal not merely the heroic necessity but the back-breaking strain of rural work, described from within its strictures.[28] The growing popularity of georgic into the mid-eighteenth century, however, is more tightly braided with pastoral than a straightforward opposition supposes.[29] The beleaguered bodies of working georgic, labouring against nature's decay, can quickly shade into the dying bodies of elegiac pastoral—a haunting inversion of the indolent (meaning pain-free) bodies of reposing shepherds and their lady loves.[30]

The churchyard brings the bodies labouring against the difficult matter of history back into a genre from which their presence has been excluded or obscured. This landscape, then, helps labouring-class poets complicate and contest the social determinants of pain and death—naturalized as the divinely orchestrated order of things in pastoral—since bodies that suffer are individuated only as long as they are remembered (before they disappear into the soil subtending the pastoral landscape). For Leapor, this means that the labouring bodies of women are rendered visible to pastoral only at the point of death; the churchyard is the site at once of their appearance and their vanishing from the social scene.

Leapor thus demonstrates the particular difficulty the porous generic boundary between pastoral and georgic presents to working women, pressed into lowly service by predominantly male georgic (as, for instance, Mary Collier's *The Woman's Labour* (1739) so incisively shows) or

[27] Blair, 'Pastoral Poetry', in *Lectures*, ii. 290.

[28] See, respectively, John Goodridge, *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6, and Donna Landry, 'Georgic Ecology', in Simon White, John Goodridge, and Bridget Keegan (eds), *Robert Bloomfield: Lyric, Class, and the Romantic Canon* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2006), 253–68. The labouring-class affinity with georgic over pastoral is a point often made, with reference to the poets Robert Duck and Mary Collier, in John Barrell's work; see also Andrews, '"Work" Poems'; Keegan, 'Georgic Transformations'; E. P. Thompson and Marian Sugden (eds), The Thresher's Labour *by Stephen Duck and* The Woman's Labour *by Mary Collier: Two Eighteenth-Century Poems* (London: Merlin Press, 1989); Van-Hagen, 'Literary Technique'.

[29] See Terry Gifford, 'What Is Georgic's Relation to Pastoral?', in Edney and Somervell (eds), *Georgic Literature and the Environment*, 13–25.

[30] The proximity of reposing and dying bodies is present in the pastoral-tinted passages of Gray's *Elegy*, in which the poet's exemption from rural toil is recalled in the lines 'His listless length at noontide would he stretch, | And pore upon the brook that babbles by' (ll. 103–4).

conditioned by the pastoral gaze as objects for the amusement of others—and either way reduced to 'pleasurable or useful *bodies*'.[31] Pope's 'Spring' (1709), for example, fixes Sylvia and Delia as the silent objects of discursive exchange in the singing competition between Strephon and Daphnis—'Blest Swains, whose Nymphs in ev'ry Grace excell; | Blest Nymphs, whose Swains those Graces sing so well'—as each heaps on yet more extravagant praise (ll. 95–6). And though Gay's *The Shepherd's Week* (1714) features no 'Shepherdesses idly piping on oaten Reeds, but milking the Kine, tying up the Sheaves, or if the Hogs are astray driving them to their Styes', these women and their work, however realistically treated, are a rustic punchline to the mock-pastoral poet and his 'Gentle Reader'.[32] Contrastingly, in 'Corydon. Phillario. Or, Mira's Picture. A Pastoral' (1751), Leapor differently defies pastoral conventions of graceful maidens disporting by amorous shepherds to show a woman's body in ironized excess of male expectation and brought into dehumanizing proximity to the nature in which she works: 'yon lean Rook can shew a fairer Skin'; 'her Brows, | So like a dry Furze-faggot; and, beside, | Not quite so even as a Mouse's Hide' (ll. 44, 52–4).

While Pope's allegorical nature declines with heartache and is restored with a maiden's smile, and while 'Lab'rers faint with Pain' is merely the poet's metaphor for unsatisfied desire ('Autumn', l. 44),[33] 'Colinetta' dwells in a more sombre, empirical relation to georgic-pastoral structures, inhabiting the churchyard and depicting the decline of a body whose labours can no longer be performed. As the poem's opening lines reveal, the labour of the harvest is over but what is left is devastation rather than plenty: 'the Fields had shed their golden Grain, | And burning Suns had sear'd the russet Plain' (ll. 1–2). As the poem progresses, this wasted landscape finds its metonymic correlate in Colinetta's wasted body, laid out not like an idle shepherd's maid but 'like the Swan expiring' (l. 22). While the cause of Colinetta's death is unknown, the compressive tension between body and landscape in the poem suggests a degeneration owing to rural labour, offstage by the first lines but leaving its brutal mark. Value is extracted in the lines' colour transitions,

[31] Michael Meyer, 'Mary Leapor: The Female Body and the Body of her Texts', *1650–1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, 10 (2004), 65. See also Landry, *Muses*, 56–77; Ann Messenger, *Pastoral Tradition and the Female Talent: Studies in Augustan Poetry* (New York: AMS Press, 2001), 173–93.

[32] John Gay, *The Shepherd's Week: In Six Pastorals*, in *John Gay: Poetry and Prose*, ed. Vinton A. Dearing with the assistance of Charles E. Beckwith, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), i. 91, 92. See Doody, *Daring Muse*, 105–6.

[33] See also Pope, 'Spring', ll. 69–76; 'Autumn', ll. 23–38.

with 'golden Grain' stripped away and replaced by a 'russet Plain'; like the 'tufted Green' turned 'an irksom Brown' as flowers are displaced by weeds in autumn (ll. 4, 6), the violence of this human despoliation is naturalized and its labourers expunged from the scene in the opening line's passive construction, 'the Fields had shed'. Nevertheless, as the instrument of labour, 'pale' Colinetta's body betrays a similar tonal deterioration: her 'sallow Cheeks had lost their rosy Dye' (ll. 14, 15). 'In this sick Season, at the close of Day' (l. 13), abundance turns too quickly to decay, and pastoral ease is transformed into a far from easeful—indeed, 'unwilling' (l. 44)—death. At the end of the poem, Colinetta's 'pale Lips' are closed, her 'rosy Breath' stopped forever (l. 92).

Bodies in poetry by Leapor and Yearsley, then, exist in dynamic relation to other objects of the everyday, including poetic forms, which can be subjected to startling subversions of established codes or expectations. These poets habitually refuse the metaphysical—as a technique, rather than a failing—in a far-from-modest 'attention to uncomfortable particulars' as the true source of insight into the nature of things.[34] Reading Leapor's 'The Enquiry' (1748) with Yearsley's 'A Fragment' (1785) and 'To Mr ****, an Unlettered Poet, on Genius Improved' (1787), for instance, David Fairer identifies acts of meaning-making bound to the material life of objects and the senses as these poets investigate how we know and how sense is made. Both poets 'have a fascination with the dynamics of the mind' and model its busy movement in querying tones and teasing forms dependent upon the active life of the body; they raise questions 'fundamental to the basis of empiricism with its interest in subjective experience, the mechanisms of sense perception, and how external reality is mediated'.[35] Thinking beyond the circumscribed conventions of form, but retaining a mode of enquiry that thinks through form (as poetic shape, object, body), the work of Leapor's

[34] Patricia Meyer Spacks identifies these as crucial elements in Leapor's work, which formally and tonally manipulates discomfort, estrangement, and 'refusal to write in a merely conventional mode', all of which demonstrates her technical expertise and capacity to undermine the expected from within traditional structures (*Reading Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 167, 172). See also Valerie Rumbold, 'Mary Leapor (1722–46): Menial Labour and Poetic Aspiration', in Prescott and Shuttleton (eds), *Women and Poetry*, 88–95. The soul, too, is embodied even at the point of death in Leapor's corporeal poetics—see Helen Deutsch, 'Dismantl'd Souls: The Verse Epistle, Embodied Subjectivity, and Poetic Animation', in Deutsch and Terrall (eds), *Vital Matters*, 43–4.

[35] Fairer, '"Flying Atoms"', 158, 149. See also Greene, who suggests that Leapor manifests a physiognomic sense 'that the body reflects mental and moral worth. . . . Well-being is defined in terms which are at once physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual' (*Mary Leapor*, 196).

and Yearsley's poetry makes itself known and felt as a movement of mind that remains exuberantly physical.

As such it frequently declares itself as work, and often in relation to other forms of labour. It is here, as in their churchyard poems, that difficulty enters Leapor's and Yearsley's poetry: the decline of the body under duress is patiently and poignantly examined by these poets as the persistent condition of a life of unrelenting labour. In poems such as 'The Inspir'd Quill', 'The Ten-Penny Nail' (both 1748), 'The Epistle of Deborah Dough', and 'Minutius. Artemisia. A Dialogue' (both 1751), Leapor draws out the vulnerable materiality of writing—its paper-thin weight; her penmanship, criticized as illegible; the airy ephemerality of her rhymes—within a complicated defence of its worthiness and personal significance in a world of other forms of work that suppress her capacity to make and speak on her own terms.[36] Leapor's awareness of the fragility of the poem as a made object, the value of which is determined by a socially stratified and restrictive system, frequently places her text alongside the bodies it describes, as a piece of work perilously close to death, teetering into burial in the textual graveyard of neglected writers crushed to earth. The hostile environments in which Leapor's work is tested and found wanting are allegorized in the inhospitable landscapes of poems such as 'An Essay on Hope' and 'On Winter' (both 1748)—difficult places that Richard Greene reads as characteristic of Leapor's tactile, ground-level perspective, in which 'lives are subject to the environment' and there is 'no retreat from suffering', even as the poet 'assert[s] the dignity of people who have to bear' the harshness of the seasons in and against which they labour.[37] In the pastoral waste of 'Colinetta', 'friendly Groves' are agreeable only in the most fugitive sense, run to by those who must 'beg a Shelter from the burning Sun', and quickly stripped of this fragile protection, becoming the 'tarnish'd Groves' of autumn after the harvest (ll. 25, 26, 7). Here the dignity of work on the land is relegated to a remembered past; what Leapor's technique of repeated contrasts reveals in the poem's present is the aftermath of a life of labour, when the working woman's body collapses to earth and is buried in the churchyard when it can work no more.

[36] See Christmas, *Lab'ring Muses*, 161–83; Jessica Cook, 'Mary Leapor and the Poem as Meeting Place', *Eighteenth Century*, 57/3 (2016), 371–4; James Metcalf, 'Curious Objects: Form and Feeling in Mary Leapor's Thing Poems', *ABO: Interactive Journal of Women in the Arts, 1640–1840*, 15 (forthcoming).

[37] Greene, *Mary Leapor*, 128–30.

The environmental and moral evil in 'Colinetta' connects economic and social changes in the use of land to the 'sick Season' and Colinetta's individual death (l. 13). Typifying another strain in Leapor's work—her persistent awareness of death—this poem records a reduced and elegized sensuous capacity as it contemplates the mystery ahead.[38] According to Donna Landry, Colinetta, like other women represented by Leapor, possesses a body at once lively and decaying, an object 'preyed upon by time and cruelly devalued by social custom as time passes', but neither satirized nor chastised in this 'alternative green world of female affection', which offers other consolations, such as friendship and retreat. The churchyard might provide some of the relief Landry identifies in the 'female pastoral idyll' elsewhere evident in Leapor's verse—that place 'of release from social constraints and relief from social oppression', a wild place, unworked and requiring no labour.[39] Its cathected status at the end of this poem, its investment with a hectic mental energy as a site that registers time's wasting effects on Colinetta's body, pulls it in a less comfortable direction, however; in the churchyard the mind moves uneasily, working in a state of restlessness, as the body declines to its final rest.

The imbrication of bodily and environmental degradation is established from the beginning of 'Colinetta'. The first couplet's autumnal sense of an ending, the harvest over and the earth scarified, is formally sustained by the poem's initial past perfect tense and elegiac refrain, beginning with 'No more the Rose nor Hyacinth were seen' and extended to a whole personified landscape in mourning: 'In mournful Plight the tarnish'd Groves appear, | And Nature weeps for the declining Year' (ll. 3, 7–8). These lines stretch the downturn of the 'closing Day' (ll. 36, 52) and the 'sick Season, at the close of Day' (l. 13) to a general deterioration: day, season, and year are at an end. This conventionally melancholic language of pastoral regression is subtly altered in Leapor's poem, though, as the body in the place shares its decay but not its renewal at the turning of the year: 'The Spring shall all those wonted Charms restore, | Which *Colinetta* must behold no more' (ll. 31–2). Unlike pastoral's largely allegorical transitions, these mournful groves are part of a familiar landscape occupied over time, and their progression from former plenty to current neglect—'the rude Thistle rear'd its hoary Crown, | And the

[38] This process is more often marked in 'An Epistle to a Lady' (see Lilley, 'Homosocial Women', 180–1) but applies as justly to 'Colinetta'. On the pathologized mind–body relation in labouring-class poetry, see Erin Lafford, '"Mild health I seek thee": Clare and Bloomfield at the Limits of Pastoral', *European Romantic Review*, 31/5 (2020), 527–40.

[39] Landry, *Muses*, 92, 82, 118.

ripe Nettle shew'd an irksome Brown' (ll. 5–6)—is noted in terms of a processual movement that implicates (without representing) the labour behind and haunting these altered states of nature. The active verbs in the prevailing past perfect, 'shed', 'sear'd', 'rear'd', 'shew'd', shifting eventually to the present-tense 'weeps', combine to represent a landscape undergoing change before the eye—the 'ev'ning Eye' of the too-quickly setting sun, whose murky shape hidden by 'rising Vapours' marks another temporal declension (l. 10), and the eyes of the watching inhabitants. The line 'No more the Rose nor Hyacinth were seen' describes vanished flowers in the fields converted to 'dry Stubble' (l. 12); yet it also suggests a contingent perceptual relationship to the landscape, as Colinetta's body too is falling to an autumnal state, its eyes blurring like the hazy sun.

This deathly analogy between body and earth is underscored in the second verse paragraph:

> In this sick Season, at the close of Day,
> On *Lydia*'s Lap pale *Colinetta* lay;
> Whose sallow Cheeks had lost their rosy Dye,
> The Sparkles languish'd in her closing Eye.
> Parch'd were those Lips whence Musick us'd to flow,
> Nor more the Flute her weary Fingers know,
> Yet thrice to raise her feeble Voice she try'd,
> Thrice on her Tongue the fainting Numbers dy'd;
> At last reviv'd, on *Lydia*'s Neck she hung,
> And like the Swan expiring thus she sung. (ll. 13–22)

In this passage, Leapor uses the same mobile language of transformation to compare present with past states, repeating the elegiac 'No(r) more' to emphasize a lost former vitality—in Colinetta's body as in the embodied landscape. The anti-blazon common in Leapor's poetry here anatomizes not only a surprising (and anti-pastoral) 'repugnant body', in Mandell's terms, but a sickness unto death: cheeks, eye, lips, fingers, and tongue collectively register the body's expiration. Crucially, it is not only Colinetta's body's appearance but its function as a sonic instrument that is lamented here, as Leapor connects song, environment, and death in a rewriting of pastoral elegy with a metapoetic reflection on the hard work of poetry. While Leapor maintains the trope common to pastoral elegy of a personified landscape in mourning, in this poem the dead shepherds are not distantly apostrophized but still present, dying and singing their own elegy in and to place. As a

result, the relation of 'Colinetta' to pastoral is strained. In the genre's conventional framework, shepherding is a culture of song rather than (or in the easeful wake of) rural labour—as in Pope's 'Spring', where Strephon urges Daphnis, 'Sing then, and *Damon* shall attend the Strain, | While yon slow Oxen turn the furrow'd Plain' (ll. 29–30), eliding human labour and declining or distantly ironizing the pun in 'strain'. Leapor's 'Colinetta' overturns this opposition of work and song in an uneasy alignment of the two. Following the poem's opening allusions to a harvest completed or adjourned, Colinetta's song—measured by 'Numbers' and attempted 'thrice'—is a type of work performed by her body in dynamic yet ambivalent relation to an animate environment that mirrors embodied states of degradation ironically caused by labouring on the land, and where labour is only suspended at the point of death.

This coercive crossing of body and landscape is potently expressed in the poem's vexed affinities with pastoral elegies such as Pope's 'Autumn' and 'Winter', as Colinetta sings a lament directed at a known and densely experienced place: 'Farewel, ye Forests and delightful Hills, | Ye flow'ry Meadows and ye crystal Rills, | Ye friendly Groves to whom we us'd to run' (ll. 23–5). The refrain of 'Farewel' is repeated in the third verse paragraph, anaphorically affirming the poem's status as song, but as a song of mourning—music with a definitive terminal point, so that the refrain becomes a haunting. As such, it anticipates another repetition—the deathly progression of the epistrophic outbursts signalling what Colinetta will no longer see or hear, and her own vanished presence: 'Which *Colinetta* must behold no more' (l. 32); 'But, *Colinetta*, you must hear no more' (l. 46); 'When *Colinetta* shall be seen no more' (l. 70); 'Like *Colinetta*, shall be seen no more' (l. 90). These circling complaints echo Pope's pastoral laments: 'No more ye Hills, no more resound my Strains!' ('Autumn', l. 96); but where his shepherds Aegon and Thyrsis mourn an absent or lost love, Colinetta anticipates her own death, and with it the end of her poetry.

In Leapor's mingling of self and space, the mourning runs both ways (by Colinetta to the landscape; of Colinetta by a landscape '[i]n mournful Plight' (l. 7)), and Colinetta's ephemeral music finds an absent echo in the deferred birdsong:

> Those blasted Shades all mournful now I see,
> Who droop their Heads as tho' they wept for me.
> The pensive Linnet has forgot to sing,
> The Lark is silent till returning Spring. (ll. 27–30)

The analogy is not complete, however, and the body escapes full absorption into nature as Colinetta shifts the metaphor from the natural music of the birds to a human, and humanly crafted, song, introducing memories of other voices—Lydia's 'mournful Tale', the 'wayward Tongues' of local gossips, and her own past performances to 'jolly Swain[s]' and 'rosy Virgins' (ll. 37, 47, 41, 42). In a pun on 'Lay', as an area of land and as a ballad or song (and often a funeral song or complaint), Leapor merges a labour at once agricultural and poetic in her 'native Fields', 'Whose fertile Lays my early Labours knew' (ll. 33, 34); 'I sung a chearful Lay' (l. 39); 'That mine [i.e. flock] might graze upon the vacant Lay' (l. 56). In the first reference, the 'fertile Lays' cut across both meanings, later separately parsed, as song and as field. So placed, environmentally and syntactically in the poetic line, Colinetta's labours 'knew' the 'fertile Lays' of the surrounding grasslands, which in turn 'knew' her 'fertile Lays'—another form of labour, enlivened (made fertile) by her local environment. Most moving, though, about this human culture of pastoral song is its ephemerality: if the 'sing'/'Spring' rhyme in the lines above anticipates the return of birdsong as the seasons renew, this is a music Colinetta will neither hear nor mimic in her own fragile song.

Conjuring memories of her pastoral existence in a community of work (here the genre-defining work of shepherding) and song, Colinetta's fading music sustains both occupations yet ultimately demonstrates their noncoincidence. Her music cannot continue since her song-producing body has been ground down by the work that forms her aesthetic subject, making the repeated crossing of song and self, landscape and labour, an ambivalent pressure pulling the working body to earth. In the final part of the poem, Colinetta's song enacts her incipient death by cataloguing her bequests—the instruments of labour she leaves to her friends and fellow workers: 'My studded Sheep-hook'; 'my Hay-fork and my Hazel Rake'; 'My hoarded Apples and my winter Pears'; 'These Nuts that late were pluck'd from yonder Tree, | And this Straw-basket', weaved by 'these dying Fingers' (ll. 73–79). Last of Colinetta's legacies is another instrument of labour, 'My boxen Flute' (l. 80), which will posthumously sustain her music though not her dying song. This valedictory abandonment of the flute and its proximity to 'dying Fingers' recalls its earlier mention: 'Nor more the Flute her weary Fingers know' (l. 18). Unable either to participate or to hear, Colinetta leaves her music behind as she leaves it to her pastoral community as a complicated inheritance, laden with loss: 'Still may soft Musick bless your happy Shore, | But, *Colinetta*, you must hear no more' (ll. 45–6). 'Colinetta' shares the image of a flute abandoned on death with Pope's 'Summer', in which a flute

is left to Alexis by Colin, the archetypal shepherd whose name alludes to Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar* (1579) and is feminized in Colinetta. But where Pope's Alexis inherits the flute 'which *Colin*'s tuneful Breath | Inspir'd when living, and bequeath'd in Death' only to give it up out of thwarted love for the addressed Rosalind—'But now the Reeds shall hang on yonder Tree, | For ever silent, since despis'd by thee' (ll. 39–40, 43–4)—Colinetta's song ends with her death. So while passages of 'Colinetta' recalling past vitality appear to celebrate rural labour and draw a congenial equivalence between work and poetry as both arise from a tactile relation to landscape, frequent reminders that this song is Colinetta's last as her body declines while nature remorselessly revives dissolve the happy affinity and mark the end of the working body in death.

The end of the poem turns to the churchyard, where Colinetta's remains—what she leaves behind—are more directly embodied as she arranges her own burial:

> In our Churchyard there grows a spreading Yew,
> Whose dark green Leaves distil a baneful Dew:
> Be those sad Branches o'er my Grave reclin'd,
> And let these Words be graven on the Rind:
> 'Mark, gentle Reader,—Underneath this Tree,
> There sleeps a Maid, old *Simon*'s Daughter she;
> Thou too, perhaps, ere many Weeks be o'er,
> Like *Colinetta*, shall be seen no more.'
>
> Here ends the Maid—for now the Seal of Death
> Clos'd her pale Lips, and stop'd her rosy Breath.
> Her sinking Eye-balls took their long Adieu,
> And with a Sigh her harmless Spirit flew. (ll. 83–94)

Here, at the close of her song and in her final breaths, Colinetta's body is integrated into the churchyard as the centre of the familiar landscape—the centre because, while labour may be suspended there, the churchyard gathers the bodies no longer fit to be the instruments of labour, the machines of capital. In 'our Churchyard' the dew from the yew tree recalls 'the falling Dew' drunk by the 'dry Stubble' in the grain field (l. 12), and the 'sad Branches' the line 'Autumnal Threads [i.e. gossamer] around the Branches

flew' (l. 11), yoking together the churchyard and the surrounding fields of labour as it does the beginning and the end of the poem. This recursive connectivity confirms the pastoral cycle, the restoration of the seasonal round, from which Colinetta's working/dying body is excluded. Even the archetypal yew tree is metonymically pulled into this complicity of land, labour, and death, the line 'Be those sad Branches o'er my grave reclin'd' imperatively tugging this icon of the churchyard into relation with the worn-out body buried beneath it. Colinetta's voice, too, is retained in the living tree, engraved in the bark; yet, as her elegiac song becomes an epitaph, fond remembrance hardens as the lingering voice of poetry issues a warning, enjoining those she leaves behind to remember their own fated, indeed startlingly proximate ('ere many Weeks'), disappearance from the encompassing world of work.

The poem's status as a piece of work, and the references to labour that structure its rhythms in relation to lively patterns of toil and rest, negate any straightforward sense of closure or resignation in the churchyard. The final couplets of the poem, after Colinetta's song is ended, also return to the beginning, where lips and eyes were in the process of closing forever. Her body's downward trajectory, told over the course of the poem and analogous to surrounding autumnal degeneration, is sensuously measured, as its former functions, indeed its manifest presence, are lost and lamented: Colinetta shall see and be seen no more. Her spirit is 'harmless', as testified by her litany of small kindnesses to animals and other people (ll. 47–70), but her body has been remorselessly subject to harm. The poem itself, though, appears to participate in the renewal enjoyed by the landscape in which Colinetta's sustained music and inscribed words linger in the air and in the fabric of the living land. The cycle of her song—its refrains and repeated images—enacts a seasonal succession, casting into relief Colinetta's inability to renew herself; she is not an organic product but a producer, her body a mechanism labouring to make a song attempted 'thrice', paced out in 'fainting Numbers', and accompanied by a flute played first by 'weary' then by 'dying Fingers' (ll. 18, 79)—at once working and expiring. Operating between pastoral, elegiac, and georgic frameworks as both a naturally occurring and a more explicitly crafted song, 'Colinetta' achieves a complex retelling of the work of the labouring poet. The churchyard is a place of final and deserved rest for Colinetta's dying body, no longer capable of physical work; it is also a place of regeneration and longevity for her song, embodied in the yew tree's

growth from the churchyard earth. As the closing lines reveal, the churchyard is, finally, a place of unsettling reminder, as the working bodies left behind are instructed to prepare for their own approaching decline.

'tumbles to the deep': Ann Yearsley's 'Clifton Hill'

Like Leapor, though in a more impassioned mode, Yearsley occupies a poetic landscape in which bodily life is primary, constituting a form of shared existence between human, animal, and mythical beings that registers their collective experience of environmental contingency.[40] The adjustments of bodies to space and over time also shape poetic activity. Whether walking through and observing a landscape in 'Clifton Hill' or measuring the pulse against the motions of a watch and the cycles of the moon in 'Soliloquy' (1796), the work of attention in Yearsley's poetry operates along a continuum of sensory inputs—their disturbance, suspension, and resumption—in places and with objects experienced at intersecting levels of physical labour and wandering contemplation.[41] Like Leapor, too, Yearsley locates this sharply attentive poetry in a worked and working landscape, including in 'Clifton Hill', which begins with the difficulty of organizing perceptions and images in the mind, and which uses the churchyard as a site of poetic initiation—a scene of writing that presses on the poet's consciousness as a cathected node, around which radiates her intensely physical experience of landscape and the material work of poetic-making.[42] As in 'Colinetta', the churchyard in 'Clifton Hill' appears near the end of the poem yet forms a thematic and affective centre of gravity in its concentration of ambient concerns with hard labour in a hostile landscape that is, however inhospitable,

[40] See Doody, 'Sensuousness', 9–11; Landry, 'Georgic Ecology', 260–5.

[41] See Kerri Andrews, '"No more than as an atom 'mid the vast profound": Conceptions of Time in the Poetry of William Cowper, William Wordsworth, and Ann Yearsley', in Kirstie Blair and Mina Gorji (eds), *Class and the Canon: Constructing Labouring-Class Poetry and Poetics, 1750–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 98–100; Christmas, 'Lyric Modes', 42–6; Koehler, *Poetry*, 177–8.

[42] Catherine Keohane observes that issues of reading in the churchyard scene of 'Clifton Hill' raise issues of reading the poem, which moves through time and resists a singular preceptive conclusion as it performs the 'human thoughts' activated by this churchyard encounter ('Ann Yearsley's "Clifton Hill" and its Lessons in Reading', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 41 (2012), 244–5). See also Moira Ferguson, 'Resistance and Power in the Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley', *Eighteenth Century*, 27/3 (1986), 247–68; Mary Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton: The Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley, 1753–1806* (Athens, GA, and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 7, 85–8.

the only home these working women know. The labouring life of Yearsley's Lactilla, stretched across space by the topographical poem's excursive structure, cannot claim as her own the world of her work; in the churchyard this social tragedy is heightened since, even beside her mother's grave, Lactilla has no home, either present or perpetual, to go to. One stopping place in a shifting scene, therefore, the churchyard is nonetheless crucial to the poem's dynamics of rootlessness and the daily agonies of a social world characterized by suffering.

Where Leapor's 'Colinetta' writes back to pastoral, elegy, and georgic, Yearsley's 'Clifton Hill' pushes against the eighteenth-century topographical tradition. From its origins in John Denham's *Coopers Hill* (1642) to its eighteenth-century development by Alexander Pope, John Gay, James Thomson, and John Dyer, topographical or locodescriptive poetry combines descriptive and meditative modes in its gleaning of ethical lessons relative to the poet's position in the material landscape. As Samuel Johnson defined it, this species of 'local poetry' takes the subject of 'some particular landschape, to be poetically described, with the addition of such embellishments as may be supplied by historical retrospection, or incidental meditation.'[43] For John Barrell, the genre's confident arrangement of (physical and moral) prospects is related to property ownership and the often violent rearrangement of the land to fix a landscape in which workers appear as aesthetic objects or are stripped from the scene.[44] This local distribution of power, concealed as natural harmony as the model for existing social relations, is expansive in its implications for national and, in the eighteenth century's imperial spread, colonial management. More recently, critical work has emphasized topographical poetry's placement of the poet as an active participant within the scene rather than above it. Itinerant and discursively various, topographical poetry wanders through a space intimately known through experience: the view from an eminence is attained only through the ramble up the hillside, and the poet is at such

[43] Samuel Johnson, 'Life of Denham', in Roger Lonsdale (ed.), *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets. With Critical Observations on Their Works*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), i. 238.

[44] John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730–1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), and 'The Public Prospect and the Private View: The Politics of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (eds), *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 81–102. See also Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

moments concerned less with ownership than with tactile interaction with the landscape.[45]

Both versions of the genre—prospect and peripatetic—nonetheless require an authority that stakes a claim to place rarely available to women or labourers. As one of what Ingrid Horrocks calls 'women wanderers'—defining writers such as Charlotte Smith and Mary Wollstonecraft by their unwilled drifting in search of better prospects and kinder homes[46]—Ann Yearsley's relation to the views from Clifton Hill and the associations they provoke are hedged about by difficulty, never at ease in the landscape and vulnerable to its harms. Denied the distance afforded by a lofty height and clear sky, 'Clifton Hill' begins mournfully responsive to winter storms and tightly bound by the obscured prospect and constrictive force of the opening line's deictic now: 'In this lone hour, when angry storms descend' (l. 1). As a textual gesture of pointing to places and times marked out for attention, deixis conventionally establishes a relationship 'between an external world and the mind of an observer' that 'both creates and marks interactions . . . it *performs* hereness through a process of leaning and reaching', Heather Dubrow writes.[47] The figure's 'relational coordinates' show how, according to Amanda Jo Goldstein, its 'preponderance of meaning seems to stem from the sign's participation in the continuum of the physical world' through sensory inputs by which the human body inclines towards certain others in a shared field of existence.[48] In a topographical poem like Yearsley's, however, such corporeal locations and postures are less evenly collective because, she shows, they can be so starkly gendered: in the poem's allegorical framework, 'hoary Winter' is a 'grisly tyrant' and Flora a beleaguered goddess who 'beauties at his feet are cast' (ll. 5, 7, 6). Experience of landscape is alarmingly equivocal and topographical poetry can spotlight the vulnerability of particular bodies, the bodies of labouring-class women, exposed to the dangers of outdoors.

[45] See especially Kramnick, *Paper Minds*, 57–97; Ingrid Horrocks, *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784–1814* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 39–78; Donna Landry, 'Poems on Place', in Lynch (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660–1800*, 335–55; Oldfather, '"Snatched"'; Adam Potkay, 'Ear and Eye: Counteracting Senses in Loco-Descriptive Poetry', in Mahoney (ed.), *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, 176–94.

[46] Horrocks, *Women Wanderers*.

[47] Heather Dubrow, 'Neither Here nor There: Deixis and the Sixteenth-Century Sonnet', in Marion Thain (ed.), *The Lyric Poem: Formations and Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 30, 36. See also Stewart, *Poetry*, 150–60.

[48] Amanda Jo Goldstein, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 113, 115.

Yearsley's poetic topography, though alternately descriptive and meditative as tradition dictates, is thus more consistently physical and draws on the poet's experience of tending animals and selling milk to the community around Clifton Hill. Supervening winter affects both alike, and Yearsley's persona Lactilla, 'half sunk in snow' and 'shivering' (ll. 19, 20), feelingly depicts the bodily implications for those—animals and working women—forced to withstand seasonal severity.[49] Leapor's autumnal decline here becomes a more brutal cessation of natural growth and song, as the energizing force of love is quelled by the cold. Yearsley is as powerfully alive to the suspension of song as Leapor and finds similarly metapoetic implications:

> How mourns each tenant of the silent grove!
> No soft sensation tunes the heart to love;
> No fluttering pulse awakes to Rapture's call;
> No strain responsive aids the water's fall.
> The Swain neglects his Nymph, yet knows not why;
> The Nymph, indifferent, mourns the freezing sky;
> Alike insensible to soft desire . . . (ll. 11–17)

This mourning of nature's yearly turn is curiously silent, as Yearsley emphasizes the interdependence of song and body: 'Rapture's call' requires (even as it animates) a 'fluttering pulse'—a fluttering that uneasily teeters between hectic liveliness and a deathly arrhythmia—and the water, suspended in the snap of winter ('chrystal streams in frozen fetters stand' (l. 22)), makes no sound and provokes none in turn: its 'call' 'fall[s]' to earth and on deaf ears. The landscape, and the bodies inhabiting it, are pushed to an insensibility perilously close to death; and the birdsong that so often stands for poetic utterance is sustained by a lone robin, 'tender in her frame' (l. 23), whose complaint is silenced by the murderer's gun.

As in the shifting landscape of 'Colinetta', though, in 'Clifton Hill' there is a processual sense of time's movement: winter is a temporary suspension and, 'Tho' slow and pensive now the moments roll, | Successive months shall from our torpid soul | Hurry these scenes again' (ll. 35–7). Time's transitions are measured organically, by the arrival of snowdrops, crocuses, violets, primroses, and hyacinths, as 'All Nature's sweets in joyous circle move, | And wake the frozen soul again to love' (ll. 43–4); they are also measured sonically, as

[49] See Doody, 'Sensuousness', 8–9.

human music returns with the swain's whistle when 'The landscape rushes on his untaught mind' and he 'snuffs fresh ardour from the flying gale' (ll. 47, 46). Here too, however, Yearsley's topographical poem turns revisionist, so that the swain's whistle (surely an innocent pastoral tune?) sounds a sinister note when it is answered by the sharper pitch of 'screaming milkmaids' (l. 50). The season of 'mighty Love' (l. 53) is as hostile to women working in the landscape as winter was, if not more so, as this pastoral scene of rural dalliance among spring flowers becomes watchful—'They dread his eye, retire and gaze again' (l. 52)—reversing idealization with the realities of sexual threat and social disgrace:

> . . . Ye blooming maids, beware,
> Nor the lone thicket with a lover dare.
> No high romantic rules of honour bind
> The timid virgin of the rural kind;
> No conquest of the passions e'er was taught,
> No meed e'er given them for the vanquish'd thought.
> To sacrifice, to govern, to restrain,
> Or to extinguish, or to hug the pain,
> Was never theirs; instead, the fear of shame
> Proves a strong bulwark, and secures their fame . . .
> (ll. 53–62)

Here and throughout 'Clifton Hill', the bodies of women in the landscape mark a relationship of apprehensive contingency where joys are rarely felt, and only by those capable of withstanding their associated dangers. The tensions described above may be resolved in marriage, but the bride—with only partial control of her fate through repressive acts of refusal: 'they flout, reject, deny' (l. 63)—is nonetheless a 'trembling' one (l. 66). The poem's 'progress' radically reverses the harmony through discord more typical of topographical poetry since Denham, revealing instead a slide into bitter misfortune as 'blooming maids' become 'fair Maniac[s]' like the character Louisa, crossed in love, confined to a convent, and finally become a fugitive cast upon the landscape and eking out three despairing years beneath a haystack as a 'death-devoted maid' (ll. 207, 266).[50]

The human–environment connections on which Yearsley dwells are simultaneously, and of necessity, relations between the body and the work of

[50] On the topos of *concordia discors* in topographical poetry see Earl R. Wasserman, *The Subtler Language: Critical Readings of Neoclassic and Romantic Poems* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959).

poetry. As bodies awake with new vigour in spring, their internal responsiveness is likewise stimulated and 'Strong raptures rise'—'raptures undefin'd' for the swain stalking the milkmaids (l. 48), though not, the line implies, for Lactilla, who enters the text as a speaking 'I' at the end of the verse paragraph:

> As o'er the upland hills I take my way,
> My eyes in transport boundless scenes survey:
> Here the neat dome where sacred raptures rise,
> From whence the contrite groan shall pierce the skies;
> Where sin-struck souls bend low in humble prayer,
> And waft that sigh which ne'er is lost in air. (ll. 67–72)

In this short section preceding the churchyard scene, Yearsley attains the topographical poem's boundless survey but obstructs its progressive oscillation between description and meditation, emphasizing the pressure on the success of imaginative freedom when perceptual experience is under duress. She begins with an active sense of movement, the verb 'take' combining with the adverb 'o'er' to establish a progression through place. This forward momentum is confirmed in the following line, in which it is the eyes—and not the independent mind—that are transported (a term that can mean embodied motility as well as emotional response carrying us away from our senses): the topographical prospect or 'survey' depends upon the poet making her 'way' through the landscape.[51] Among the scenes discerned by the transported sight is a church, from which prayers are figured as physically made—'souls bend low'—and physically manifested, rising as groans and sighs that do not dissipate but rather 'pierce the skies'. Abridging the distance imputed by the initial visual framing of the prospect, this sacred auditory transport connects animate bodies in sympathy across a shared environment. It nevertheless describes a scene of suffering, of contrition and humility bent low and releasing a moan that hauntingly lingers.

Clifton Hill's mediating and precarious spatiality extends vertically, as well as horizontally, in the churchyard scene, which pulls Lactilla from the hilltop above the churchyard to the 'sacred turf' below:

> Ah! sacred turf! here a fond Parent lies,
> How my soul melts while dreadful scenes arise!
> The past! Ah! shield me, Mercy! from that thought,
> My aching brain now whirls, with horror fraught.

[51] See Oldfather, '"Snatched"', 447–8.

> Dead! can it be? 'twas here we frequent stray'd,
> And these sad records mournfully survey'd.
> I mark'd the verse, the skulls her eye invite,
> Whilst my young bosom shudder'd with affright!
> My heart recoil'd, and shun'd the loathsome view;
> 'Start not, my child, each human thought subdue',
> She calmy said; 'this fate shall once be thine,
> My woes pronounce that it shall first be mine'.
> Abash'd, I caught the awful truths she sung,
> And on her firm resolves one moment hung;
> Vain boast—my bulwark tumbles to the deep,
> Amaz'd—alone I climb the craggy steep;
> My shrieking soul deserted, sullen views
> The depths below, and Hope's fond strains refuse;
> I listen'd not—She louder struck the lyre,
> And love divine, and moral truths conspire. (ll. 73–92)

In this verse paragraph, Lactilla's eyes are fixed on the ground rather than the surrounding view. Collapsing the earlier (male) tradition of 'confidence and spatial command' in which the 'poet was at liberty to select points of focus and to digress and moralise at will', Yearsley's persona is brought to earth by the force of the past—'private memory that works as a counter-movement' to spatial progress, 'pulling her downwards'.[52] Beginning with an apostrophe to the churchyard's consecrated ground, whose enclosure is further constricted by the deictic 'here' isolating the mother's grave, temporal registers braid together in an alarming torque of past and present; the parent once living and now dead is summoned by a mind in fraught relation to a place steeped in personal history. The second 'here' twists deictic relation by placing the poem elsewhere, or in a palimpsest, a landscape of the past: ''*twas* here'; and in line 79 the contorted reversal of expected verb tenses appears to invert living and dead by placing Lactilla in the past and her mother in the present: 'I mark'd the verse, the skulls her eye invite.' In this confusion 'Dreadful scenes arise' as though from the churchyard ground, and they compel the poet's melting soul and aching mind, physicalized in these visceral verbs. Inhabited in the present of the poem and the past of memory, the churchyard brings to Yearsley's mind layers of experience also

[52] David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700–1789* (London: Longman, 2003), 207.

commemorated textually in the 'sad records' frequently surveyed and provoking a similarly corporeal response: shuddering bosom, recoiling heart, a view shunned.

Yearsley's 'confrontational shifting of perspectives' in 'Clifton Hill', according to Landry, marks her retention of a labouring-class sense of place and work in the simultaneously 'high literary landscape' of topographical poetry. While the wildness and elevation of Clifton Hill might at times have an 'emancipatory effect upon the memory and the imagination', the churchyard passage reveals the fierce material struggle of Yearsley's particular prospects as her migratory consciousness stalls and staggers, 'her toilsome journeys giv[ing] rise to poetry'—and poetry of a different sort from that which topographical convention demands.[53] The churchyard encounter with the body and memory of the poet's buried mother, mediated by epitaphic verse and the mother's words transformed to song (drawing equivalence to the poem's own mournful remembrance), presents a particularly strenuous instance of this toil. From this perspective, it is significant that Yearsley refers to the offerings of music and poetry as 'strains'—a term of hard work and difficult feeling as well as sonic expression that she regularly exploits. Lactilla snatches at the interpolated speech of her mother, which seems momentarily to hang in the air, more ephemeral and precious than the living prayers rising from the nearby church. In doing so, she shifts again from past to present (marked in the verbs, from 'hung' to 'tumbles') and from height to depth (from 'craggy steep' to 'depths below') as she seeks to recall—to re-hear, re-member, and rearticulate—the churchyard song in the service of future poetic work. This passage's syntax and punctuation, first heightened with exclamation then fragmented with dashes, erratic caesural commas, and enjambment, pull against coherence as verbs are disaggregated from clear subjects and thoughts swirl in disarray: 'My aching brain now whirls'. Nevertheless, in 'Clifton Hill' the churchyard's epitaphic 'sad records' and the metapoetic reflections to which they give rise as Yearsley's mother's advice, cast as a song in tune with 'Hope's fond strains' on the lyre, stimulate and support the poet as she continues her work. While the syntax breaks down, then, the metre sustains an orderly pulse, which runs against disrupted intellection (and evidences Yearsley's expertly crafted blank verse). Yet, like the potential for a redemptive upswing of poetic imagination activated by the topographical poem's bracing walk in the upland air—'The tardy pulse, whose throbs were almost o'er, | Here beats a livelier

[53] Landry, *Muses*, 130, 131, 134.

tune'; 'Keen exercise shall brace the fainting soul, | And bid her slacken'd powers more vigorous roll' (ll. 129–30, 144–5)—this forward-running metrical pulse is also under strain, skirting precarity in its reminder of the earlier 'fluttering pulse', at once excited and at risk for the poet's 'tardy pulse' and 'fainting soul'.[54] In Yearsley's hands, topographical poetry's lofty prospects are always liable to tip into a downward spiral, rushing headlong down the hill just climbed into the depths below. If bodily decline in 'Colinetta' took the form of a slow sickness, in 'Clifton Hill' it is a more precipitous descent. Both poems end in the churchyard as the scene of suffering: for Leapor it is mercifully ended though not forgotten; for Yearsley there is not even the prospect of this grim consolation—at least not yet.

My sense of the work of metre in 'Clifton Hill' highlights how Yearsley's making of poetry against the grain of generic convention is a labour at once physical and intellectual, combining the vocational identities of the labouring-class poet. Crucially, 'love divine' is among the promised virtues of poetry's call to the poet in the churchyard, recalling the earlier corporeal reawakening in the transition from winter to spring on Clifton Hill, as Lactilla's body and poem both warm to love—but of a kinder, familial type—and resist the pull of death and melancholy. This pull is inexorable and requires constant guarding against in Yearsley's reworking of the topographical poem, which exchanges self-possession and confident control for a marked degradation. The hill in this poem is less a lofty eminence than it is a refuge from surrounding threat—as much for Lactilla as for its non-human inhabitants: the 'nibbling flocks' feeding on 'the low niggard bush' and menaced by 'the human form, their only foe'; young birds protected from schoolboy violence by the 'terror-striking frown' of its 'silent, solemn, strong, stupendous heights'; trees at a safe remove from 'the stroke | Of axe relentless'; and innocent reptiles, insects, and 'pests' eluding for the time being the 'doom' posed by the violence of people (ll. 100, 102, 105, 119, 118, 163–4, 177). The hill's reviving airs are necessary as Lactilla ever anticipates a downturn in her fortunes and those of other vulnerable lives, of animals and women, by which she is surrounded in the world of rural work. Poetry, too, is pushed to its limits as 'Fancy dies', 'Thought sinks in real woe', and Yearsley ends the poem with Louisa's tormented existence and a

[54] See Isobel Armstrong: 'The adjacent meanings of *strain*—filtering out, passing a liquid through a medium, tension, and binding fast—. . . sugges[t] sounds bound together, at tension, mediated, and filtered, through meter' ('Meter and Meaning', in Jason David Hall (ed.), *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011), 43).

stark reminder of the final end to toil including the work of poetry: 'Remembrance, hence, give thy vain struggles o'er, | Nor swell the line with forms that live no more' (ll. 254, 256, 295–6). Where the topographical poet attains a hill's high prospects, Louisa's 'drown'd faculties like pebbles roll, | Unloos'd, uptorn, by whirlwinds of despair' (ll. 284–5), anticipating the potential deterioration of Lactilla's (cognitive and poetic) faculties as she stares from the hilltop into the abyss. Far from a place of ease in death, the churchyard is located at the centre of this scene of ongoing labour in the grip of remorseless decline—a site in which the poet's work is enlivened and exhilarated even as it is strained close to breaking point as Yearsley, like Leapor, resists its conventional closure.

3
Churchyard Collapse
Charlotte Smith and Elegy

> To return, therefore, to Elegy, according to the common Acceptation of the Word; its chief Property is to be easy and soft; to flow in one even Current, and captivate the Ear with Melody. It must be free from all Asperity, from every Thing that is harsh, or unpleasant.—Joseph Trapp, 'Lecture XIII. Of *Elegy*'[1]

In the eighth edition of her *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797—thirteen years after the collection's initial appearance in 1784) Charlotte Smith published a poem with the expansive title of 'The Dead Beggar. An Elegy Addressed to a LADY, who was affected at seeing the Funeral of a nameless Pauper, buried at the Expence of the Parish, in the Church-Yard at Brighthelmstone, in November 1792'. The poem itself runs rather short at six elegiac stanzas—following the model of Gray's *Elegy*, with its quatrains of alternate rhymes in iambic pentameter—but it packs a punch in its confrontational apostrophe to the 'LADY' of the title, who makes all, perhaps only, the outward show of mourning: 'Swells then thy feeling heart, and streams thine eye | O'er the deserted being . . . ?' (ll. 1–2). Death and churchyard burial, Smith writes, mark the end of the beggar's 'evil days still threatening woes to come' (l. 6); this being so, his mourners should

> Rather rejoice that *here* his sorrows cease,
> Whom sickness, age, and poverty oppress'd;
> Where Death, the Leveller, restores to peace
> The wretch who living knew not where to rest. (ll. 13–16)

'The Dead Beggar' appears to be a conventional, theologically orthodox elegy reminding readers (the second-hand mourners at the funeral) that

[1] Joseph Trapp, 'Lecture XIII. Of *Elegy*', in *Lectures*, 166–7.

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life's 'rugged path', however 'sown with thorns', ends in death for all alike, 'In earth's cold bosom, equall'd with the great' (ll. 18, 22, 19). Yet the line 'Death vindicates the insulted rights of Man' (l. 20) draws the poem into the messier realm of politics, using the revolutionary language of Smith's contemporaries Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft.[2] Putting pressure on Death's compensations for the living who suffer on—'evil days *still* threatening'—Smith implies that the social levelling of the grave, '(where unfeeling Fortune cannot come)' (l. 23), might be small comfort when in life it seems such a distant possibility, and one so bitterly fought for. In this poem, burial is the occasion for, rather than the effacement of, social tensions that persist beyond death.

In 'The Dead Beggar' and, this chapter shows, the churchyard poems 'Sonnet XLIV. Written in the Church-Yard at Middleton in Sussex' and 'Elegy' (1789), Smith turns the churchyard into a site of confrontation between the living and the dead. I have argued in the previous chapters that the churchyard is a social landscape in which the living approach, remember, and address the dead before joining them below ground. Always ambivalently managed, in Smith's paired churchyard poems this encounter is further contorted by the poet's agonizing insistence on the living body's proximity to the grave in the most visceral sense, placed in alarming confrontation with the figure of the corpse, which seems fated to foreclose other imaginative possibilities: 'Sonnet XLIV' and 'Elegy' collapse the churchyard into the sea, exhume the dead, and reveal their status as 'bones [that] whiten in the frequent wave' ('Sonnet XLIV', l. 10). In these poems, landscape becomes seascape and the churchyard is rewritten in a poetics of volatile, energetic exchange across external and internal boundaries as Smith evacuates the consoling fictions that subtend churchyard poems by the likes of Robert Blair and Thomas Gray, for whom the dead can be imaginatively recovered as religious teachers or treasured forefathers—a status that covers over their disintegration in the grave. If, as Ingrid Horrocks suggests, corpses

[2] Smith's note to the poem is ambivalently poised on this charged vocabulary: 'I have been told that I have incurred blame for having used in this short composition, terms that have become obnoxious to certain persons. Such remarks are hardly worth notice; and it is very little my ambition to obtain the suffrage of those who suffer party prejudice to influence their taste; or of those who desire that because they have themselves done it, every one else should be willing to sell their best birth-rights, the liberty of thought, and of expressing thought, for the *promise* of a mess of pottage. It is surely not too much to say, that in a country like ours, where such immense sums are annually raised for the poor, there ought to be some regulation which should prevent any miserable deserted being from perishing through want, as too often happens to such objects as that on whose interment these stanzas were written' (Smith, *Poems*, 96).

underlie Smith's work, lurking 'beneath the surface from the very beginning',[3] the dead are figures for radical departures of feeling in her churchyard poems. What was already a site of anxiety for Blair and Gray, and what the previous chapter examined as the more fraught feelings of grief and anguish for Leapor and Yearsley, is amped up again in Smith's churchyard poems, which disturb this landscape's seemingly stable material and generic ground in a heightening of its affective intensities equally intent on destabilizing its pervasive fictions, but here in a form of agonized feeling closer to rage than the resignation expected of elegy.

As in 'The Dead Beggar', Smith's churchyard poems organize troubling encounters with the dead through their relationship to the sibling genre of elegy, which share a common ground in Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.[4] While Gray does not lament the death of a particular individual, his poem aligns with Joseph Trapp's more atmospheric, tonal definition of elegy's rhythms and feelings, which 'flow in one even Current, and captivate the Ear with Melody. It must be free from all Asperity, from every Thing that is harsh, or unpleasant.' For Trapp, repeating received wisdom from Horace's *Ars Poetica* on the inherent softness of the genre (personified as feminine), '[e]legy aims not to be witty or facetious, acrimonious or severe, majestic or sublime; nor yet is she abject in her Humility, but becoming, elegant, and attractive'.[5] William Shenstone echoed Trapp's typological evenness, claiming that elegy 'throws its melancholy stole over pretty different subjects, which, like the dresses at a funeral procession, gives them all a kind of solemn and uniform appearance'. The genre's uniformity serves to 'elevate the more tranquil virtues of humility, disinterestedness, simplicity, and innocence', exemplifying elegy's particular 'degree of elegance and refinement', 'simple and diffuse, and flowing as a mourner's veil'.[6] Elegy, like georgic and pastoral, must be purged of its dissonant or disruptive subjects and affects at the level of a mellifluous style nonetheless, and as a consequence, under rigorous control.

As the later eighteenth century's model of elegy's 'one even Current', Gray's *Elegy* draws into its easeful sway two characteristic movements of the genre: the allusive and the natural. Roger Lonsdale's magnificent footnotes

[3] Horrocks, *Women Wanderers*, 108.

[4] See Jerrold E. Hogle, 'Elegy and the Gothic: The Common Grounds', in Weisman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, 565–84.

[5] Trapp, 'Of *Elegy*', 167, 169. See James D. Garrison, 'Elegy', in Lynch (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660–1800*, 535–6.

[6] William Shenstone, 'A Prefatory Essay on Elegy', in *The Works in Verse and Prose of William Shenstone*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Alexander Donaldson, 1765), i. 4, 6.

demonstrate the poem's dense intertextual layering of earlier writers such as Virgil, Dante, Petrarch, Shakespeare, and Milton alongside Gray's contemporaries, including James Thomson, William Collins, and Thomas Warton. These literary lines of life sustain the *Elegy*—as they sustain elegy in general, which Peter Sacks defines as 'weaving a consolation' of loss through language, controlling and distancing death, and establishing living communities of writers in a reassuring poetic lineage.[7] Formally, this lineage is enacted through allusions multiplied so as to constellate a chorus of voices harmonizing with the poet's present speech. Elegies, Diana Fuss writes, are invested in 'reparation, resuscitation, and reclamation', attempting 'to buoy the living by holding on to the dead'; and this effort is facilitated by the echoes of literary forefathers, whose words demonstrate the enduring life of language (what Sacks calls the 'saving power of voice') in which present poets can place their faith.[8] This voice, underpinning the allusive structure of the *Elegy*, also permeates its surface with images of nature called to mourn with the poet: the 'parting day', the air's 'solemn stillness', and the 'moping owl' complaining to the moon introduce a shared frequency of feeling running from woeful poet to his corresponsive surroundings (ll. 1, 6, 10).

To take another influential example, and an important one for Gray, Milton's 'Lycidas' (1637) makes similar claims for an ecology of grief in which all nature mourns the poet's loss:

> But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
> Now thou art gone, and never must return!
> Thee shepherd, thee the woods, and desert caves,
> With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,
> And all their echoes mourn. (ll. 37–41)

Towards the end of the poem Milton calls forth flowers to adorn an imagined hearse, where they might 'hang the[ir] pensive head[s], | And every flower that sad embroidery wear' (ll. 147–8). Milton here uses apostrophe—a figure of speech, synonymous with lyric poetry, 'through which the speaker throws

[7] Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 19.

[8] Diana Fuss, *Dying Modern: A Meditation on Elegy* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 7; Sacks, *English Elegy*, 135. See also Lorna Clymer, 'The Funeral Elegy in Early Modern Britain: A Brief History', in Weisman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, 170–87. There is a tradition of anti-elegy, however, which 'strive[s] to honor the integrity of the dead by melancholically refusing the violence of interiorization' (Fuss, *Dying Modern*, 108): see Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness'[9]—to call upon supporting figures to share his lament. This co-opting of nature, like the comforting chorus of past poets, distributes a grief too potent to be borne alone, enabling the elegist to progress from loss to consolation through the mechanics of pathetic fallacy as another form of corresponsive feeling. Alexander Pope's pastoral elegy 'Winter' (1709), in which one of the shepherds is named Lycidas, articulates this corporate grief again for the early eighteenth century, as nature and the muses follow the poet's command:

> Ye gentle *Muses* leave your Crystal Spring,
> Let *Nymphs* and *Sylvans* Cypress Garlands bring;
> Ye weeping *Loves*, the Stream with Myrtles hide,
> And break your Bows, as when *Adonis* dy'd;
> And with your Golden Darts, now useless grown,
> Inscribe a Verse on this relenting Stone:
> 'Let Nature change, let Heav'n and Earth deplore,
> Fair *Daphne*'s dead, and Love is now no more!'
> 'Tis done, and Nature's various Charms decay;
> See gloomy Clouds obscure the cheerful Day!
> Now hung with Pearls the dropping Trees appear,
> Their faded Honours scatter'd on her Bier.
> See, where on Earth the flow'ry Glories lye,
> With her they flourish'd, and with her they dye.
> Ah what avail the Beauties Nature wore?
> Fair *Daphne*'s dead, and Beauty is no more! (ll. 21–36)

The depletive power of winter is here not merely analogized as being like mourning or somehow in harmony with it; rather, the epitaphic imperative 'Let nature change' works a sort of poetic magic, permitted in the suspended space of pastoral elegy, so that the words written are enacted—not by natural process but poetic fiat. The poet grieves, demands reciprocal feeling in the world, and finds it done, so that the beasts of the field refuse to eat, flowers release no scent, birds are silent, and 'The silver Flood, so lately calm, appears | Swell'd with new Passion, and o'erflows with Tears' (ll. 65–6). Yet this progression is rarely as smooth as Trapp and Shenstone suggest. In 'Lycidas' Milton recognizes the fiction of his floral tribute to a body in fact

[9] Barbara Johnson, 'Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion', in *The Barbara Johnson Reader*, 218.

lost to the waves, breaking the spell to reflect on his need 'to interpose a little ease' and 'Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise' (ll. 152, 153). Likewise, the gentle murmurings of complaint get louder and more insistent as Gray's *Elegy* builds towards its epitaphic climax, as I suggested in my reading in the Introduction; fond remembrance of nature's cooperation turns out to be less straightforward than it appears, as the bodies of the dead refuse to lie still beneath the ground.[10] Even in Pope's 'Winter', in which 'all things listen while thy Muse complains', nature makes a rogue turn so that the commands of pastoral poets are also swept up in its deathly tide: 'Sharp *Boreas* blows, and Nature feels Decay, | Time conquers All, and We must Time obey' (ll. 77, 87–8).

Relief nevertheless remains at least an imaginative possibility in these elegies, while for Charlotte Smith such chance comforts never occur. Smith's 'Sonnet XLIV' and 'Elegy', straddling elegy and churchyard poem, track wildly free of the 'one even Current' of these overlapping traditions in their depiction of chaotic storm and churchyard collapse. They do so by twisting elegy's dynamics of allusion, apostrophe, and pathetic fallacy, tormented to a pitch of excess feeling that fractures their regulated functioning and propels 'tenderness to its dizzying limits'.[11] Rhetorically, the smoothness of lament, its musicality of grief, shifts closer to a species of affect more like rage in the acuteness and inefficacy of its discontent, since this is a feeling whose release neither diminishes nor develops into more ameliorative discourse. Elegy thus becomes complaint—an expression of social dissatisfaction peculiarly vexed for Smith as a woman poet, since, as Lauren Berlant writes, '[s]ituated precisely in the space between a sexual politics that threatens structures of patriarchal authority and a sentimentality that confirms the inevitability of the speaker's powerlessness, the female complaint registers the speaker's frustration, rage, abjection, and heroic self-sacrifice in an oppositional utterance that declares its limits in its very saying'. '[T]he complaint is a performative plea that implicitly holds no hope for change in the conditions of the author's misery' because it has no legitimacy in the patriarchal realm of rhetoric. In this public but delimited mode—what Berlant calls a 'genre of self-containment'—political rage and affective excess

[10] As Sacks points out, Gray's search for 'a saving power of voice' is halting and uncertain, butting up against images of muteness (including the 'mute inglorious Milton' (l. 59)) as the poet becomes uneasily reconciled to a reliance on written words such as the closing epitaph and the *Elegy* itself: 'the poem has been about the dying of a voice' (*English Elegy*, 136).

[11] Patrick H. Vincent, *The Romantic Poetess: European Culture, Politics, and Gender 1820–1840* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2004), 35.

are complicatedly entangled and produce no resolution beyond the howl of complaint, vulnerable to a 'hystericization' 'immanent in the very genre of [its] expression'.[12] In their tropological working-through of these complexities, Smith's churchyard poems displace the comforting earth in which the dead might be smoothed away or kept safe as the undergirding structure of patriarchal civilization and its poetics of elegiac succession, with devastating winds and the watery tumult they stir up. These elemental forces travel far from the correspondent breeze of Romantic poetics, in which wind is a figure for inspiring breath and nature's music;[13] as an apostrophic figure, called by and carrying the poet's voice, the wind that might amplify or respond can also drown out and take the breath away. Smith's apostrophic airs do not lift off from the poet's body but press it violently to earth.

Apostrophe, the archetypal gesture of poetry's passionate expression, breathily and sonically codifies what Thomas Ford calls an 'aesthetic . . . of aerial communication' and what Daniel Tiffany identifies as the 'pneumatic substance' of lyric poetry.[14] Smith's churchyard poems, however, demonstrate the uneasy entanglements of subjects, objects, affects, and agency

[12] Lauren Berlant, 'The Female Complaint', *Social Text*, 19/20 (1988), 243–4, 245, 242. See also Anne K. Mellor, '"Anguish no Cessation Knows": Elegy and the British Woman Poet, 1660–1834', in Weisman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, 442–62. Smith's poetics of complaint has long been read, alongside her autobiographical prefaces, in relation to her own struggles with the heterosexual economy after her separation from her husband and difficulty accessing bequests made from her husband's father to her children: see Stuart Curran, 'Charlotte Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the Romance of Real Life', in Jacqueline M. Labbe (ed.), *The History of British Women's Writing, v. 1750–1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 194–206; Jacqueline M. Labbe, *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, Poetry and the Culture of Gender* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), and 'Selling One's Sorrows: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, and the Marketing of Poetry', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 25/2 (1994), 68–71.

[13] See M. H. Abrams, who claimed that canonical Romantic poetry is 'so thoroughly ventilated' as to be characterized as 'air-in-motion, whether it occurs as breeze or breath, wind or respiration' ('The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor', in *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 26, 25). More recently, Carmen Faye Mathes has read political poems by William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley for their figuring of 'the desire for social and political change as atmospheric forces', undercut by their striation by race and ethnicity in the unequal distribution of vulnerability to both natural and historical violence (*Poetic Form*, 148). See also Rowan Boyson, 'Air and Atmosphere Studies: Enlightenment, Phenomenology and Ecocriticism', *Literature Compass*, 19/1–2 (2022), n.p., and 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the Right to Air', *Romanticism*, 27/2 (2021), 173–86.

[14] Thomas H. Ford, *Wordsworth and the Poetics of Air* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 4; Daniel Tiffany, *Toy Medium: Materialism and Modern Lyric* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000), 15. See also Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2017), 186–243; Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 6–10.

compelled by the calling voice. Barbara Johnson famously undercut the redemptive force of apostrophe as a conferral of life and animation, asking: '[i]s there any *inherent* connection between figurative language and questions of life and death, of who will wield and who will receive violence in a given human society?' What appears to be life-giving can function as life-taking, Johnson contends, on lines frequently divided according to gender, as women poets more often depict 'the self as eternally addressed and possessed by the lost, anthropomorphized other' than they do the confident donation of voice.[15] As Mary Jacobus, Anahid Nersessian, and Virginia Jackson have subsequently argued, there is a perilous alignment skirted by apostrophe and represented by the commonplace rhyme of breath with death, which pulls lyric close to elegy and epitaph to make poetry a ghostly activity—a communing with the dead and a becoming-dead with them.[16] In this sense apostrophe as an address to an absent, inanimate, imagined, or dead entity can emphasize not the fantasy of intersubjective correspondence but the detachment or unreachability of the mute addressee for the powerless poet-speaker, 'making the phenomenology of attenuated life credible and conspicuous' but doing little to redress its vulnerability.[17]

This variation of apostrophe, as a claiming of sympathy that might be misdirected or refused, features prominently in eighteenth-century antislavery writing, where the fiction of the speaking dead denies the fiction of redemptive mourning by focalizing the massive inflation of social violence in enslavement. As Andrea Haslanger writes, there is a bitter paradox to the 'separation between rhetorical existence and biological life', encoded in the uncertain provenance of apostrophe and prosopopoeia and magnified in antislavery poetry's interrogation of 'rhetorical representations that are not recuperative or attached to ideas of the human or the politico-legal person'.[18] The transatlantic trade in enslaved African peoples is not part of

[15] Johnson, 'Apostrophe', 218, 222.

[16] Mary Jacobus, *Romantic Things: A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 6, 114–16. See also Angela Leighton, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2018), 5–8. Lorna Clymer focuses on apostrophe as part of what she calls 'the figural logic of epitaphs and elegies' including Blair's *The Grave* and Gray's *Elegy*, in which it overlaps with prosopopoeia 'when the relation of death to language is pursued under the common denominator of absence'. At this confluence, poetry's master tropes of vocalization fail to become articulate in a 'simultaneous bestowal and erasure of animicity' in which the dead speak and are spoken to, yet this cross-current never coheres in full dialogic reciprocity. This uncertain centre of agency, Clymer concludes, powers the didacticism of eighteenth-century epitaphic poetry ('Graved', 347).

[17] Nersessian, *Calamity*, 132. See also Jackson, *Before Modernism*, 64–101.

[18] Andrea Haslanger, 'The Speaking and the Dead: Antislavery Poetry's Fictions of the Person', *The Eighteenth Century*, 60/4 (2019), 420.

Smith's explicit content in her churchyard poems; yet these poems participate in a related disarticulation of voice's figuring as a reliable source of fellow-feeling by uncovering the histories of suffering located in one of the British Empire's defining images of an ancestry and a homeland: the churchyard as the location of fore*fathers*. And they do so through an atmospheric violence that has often, including in antislavery poetry, rendered in nature a social violence that has felt as sublimely inexorable as a storm on the sea.[19] Smith's 'Elegy' and her elegiac 'Sonnet XLIV' apostrophize a storm that tears the churchyard into the sea; in its indiscriminate exercise of power, this force of weather and of poetry tugs the poet and (in 'Elegy') her speaker close to the death evident all about her in the churchyard. Yet the storm's indifference is also available as the vengeful instrument of a poet who wills destruction on the churchyard as a site of social exclusion. Animated by the equivocal energies of wind and sea, the suffering bodies of Smith's churchyard poems are expressive but incoherent, their speech disarticulated like the corpses in the waves—the dead to whom they call but who cannot hear and who will never respond. The energetic voice of the wind powering these texts is thus less analogous to the sighing and singing voice figured by apostrophe and essential to Trapp's sense of elegy's 'one even Current', which 'captivate[s] the Ear with Melody'; instead, Smith's elegiac complaint is (to borrow Gaston Bachelard's terms) 'a phenomenology of the cry', at risk of collapsing back into 'a phenomenology of the storm' as animal life dissolves in 'the drama of violent air'.[20]

Smith's pressure on elegy's generic expectations in her paired churchyard poems locates her in another, counter-tradition of elegiac writing by women, which often begins with the recognition that the construction of poetic tradition performed by elegy is also an act of prohibition configured by the gendered stakes of voice.[21] Such an exclusion is practised less in the clear-cut removal of women from the field of elegy than it is in their silencing in poems by men, where women feature as mute objects like the nymphs chastised

[19] See Annette Hurlbert, who writes that Phillis Wheatley Peters and Olaudah Equiano both use 'storm apostrophe' to punish the perpetrators of the slave trade yet find that 'the effect of calling on a storm provides variable and unpredictable results, showing how justice and the environment are complexly interrelated in ways that fail to bring clarity' ('Storm Apostrophe', in Jeremy Chow (ed.), *Eighteenth-Century Environmental Humanities* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2022), 39).

[20] Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*, trans. Edith R. Farrell and C. Frederick Farrell (Dallas: Dallas Institute Publications, 1983), 228, 227.

[21] See Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, 268–315; Mellor, '"Anguish no Cessation Knows"'; Celeste M. Schenck, 'Feminism and Deconstruction: Re-Constructing the Elegy', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 5/1 (1986), 13–27.

for their abandonment of Lycidas in Milton's poem, and the 'Sicilian muse' later instructed by the poet to 'call the vales, and bid them hither cast | Their bells, and flowrets of a thousand hues' (ll. 133, 134–5). In this way, elegy is a paradigmatic example of poetry's foundation on the displacement of women's voices, as in the mythic origin stories I discussed in the Introduction. According to Sacks, for example, Apollo is the archetypal mourner and effectively establishes poetry as elegy in the wake of Daphne's transformation into a laurel tree, since what 'the poet pursues turns into a sign not only of his lost love but also of his very pursuit—a consoling sign that carries in itself the reminder of the loss on which it has been founded'.[22] As Johnson observes, what Sacks's account of this foundational moment leaves out is the violence on which it is based: Apollo's 'loss' is also Daphne's escape from the god's intended rape, and his consolation of the laurel wreath of poetry is cropped from the tree she has become, so that 'the aesthetic is inextricably tied to a silence in the place of rape'.[23] The silence into which Daphne is cast—'saved from one kind of sacrifice only by another that puts her beyond all response'—occludes sexual violence against women but also prevents their speech at all, codifying poetry as the erasure both of women's bodies and of their voices, which might protest or strive to tell a different story.[24] To return one last time to Milton's 'Lycidas', the violence perpetrated against the laurel and myrtle trees in the opening lines is all the more disturbing when we recognize its metonymic representation of a naturalized poetic archive of sexual violence: 'I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude, | And with forced fingers rude, | Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year' (ll. 3–5).

In the wake of these founding texts, elegies by women poets like Smith strike out an alternative path. Like Gray's *Elegy*, Smith's elegiac poems are typically laments for unspecified loss; they also work through the allusive patterns of poetic form and feeling conditioned by the genre of elegy. But where Gray at least gestures to the resolution of difficult feelings about death through these accumulated poetic compensations, Smith resists progressive development and instead releases the full force of grief upon the blasted

[22] Sacks, *English Elegy*, 5.

[23] Johnson, 'Muteness Envy', 204. See also Zeiger, *Beyond Consolation*, 4–6.

[24] Anne-Lise François, '"The feel of not to feel it," or the Pleasures of Enduring Form', in Mahoney (ed.), *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, 446. Quoting Johnson, François argues that aesthetic form as such manifests 'the opposition of masculine reason or form to a feminine energy in need of domination and control', according to which 'the appearance of "poetry" or "art" coincides with and is inseparable from its containment and feminization: it only ever appears bound, shorn of destructive power, neutralized of its full potential' ('"The feel"', 446).

landscape of the churchyard. Smith's hybrid texts thus push provocatively against what Carmen Faye Mathes defines as the 'deeply held expectations of and attachments to particular literary experiences', like those movements from loss to solace characterizing elegy as a genre; refusing 'to elicit or reflect back to readers what Raymond Williams called dominant "structures of feeling", including and especially sympathy', Smith uses strategies of disruption and negation to make a series of tactical turns to other, less comfortable feelings.[25] Credited with the late eighteenth-century sonnet revival and celebrated for her innovations with the form's English history, Smith features prominently in this Romantic experimentation against the limits of generic expectations. As Bethan Roberts notes, the *Elegiac Sonnets* are steeped in literary history and have a densely allusive texture, yet their attitude to earlier writers strikes most often a posture of supplementation or contrast.[26] Smith repeatedly claims attention, in her poems and their autobiographical paratexts, as an outcast from homosocial cultures of sympathy and security (poetic, emotional, domestic, financial).[27] The project of her *Elegiac Sonnets* details the affective experience of this exclusion as a form of unabating rage; but it also, and more positively, redirects difficult feeling to new expressive territory.

In the sections that follow I read Smith's churchyard poems to continue to build on this book's revisions to the normative bounds of genres like elegy. Like, for instance, Eleanor Perry's recent work, I am interested in Smith as a writer of 'elegies that articulate ways in which grief and loss may be experienced *because of* society's privileging of whiteness, masculinity and heteronormative binaries of gender'. These are radical elegies that break with tradition, advocate for change, and 'write about erasures and marginalizations, from a position of erasure and marginalization'.[28] Smith's 'Sonnet XLIV' and 'Elegy' likewise present radical reworkings of earlier churchyard poetry along the contours of elegy as counter-tradition. Like other women elegists in the long eighteenth century and beyond, Smith resists the genre's consolatory gestures because she is debarred from its community of male writers who solace grief through homosocial bonds

[25] Mathes, *Poetic Form*, 1. See also Stuart Curran, 'Romantic Elegiac Hybridity', in Weisman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, 238–50; Daniel Froid, 'Charlotte Smith's Ugly Feelings', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 59/3 (2019), 605–24.

[26] Bethan Roberts, *Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet: Form, Place and Tradition in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 1–4.

[27] See especially Claire Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition, 1780–1860: The Legacy of Charlotte Smith* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Labbe, *Charlotte Smith*.

[28] Eleanor Perry, *Radical Elegies: White Violence, Patriarchy, and Necropoetics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 11, 25.

built upon the silencing of women. If '[m]asculine, canonical elegy is dominated by the drive towards succession and self-placing', women's elegy, according to Kate Lilley, 'seems to partake of a logic of renunciation and cancellation, expressly refusing the reification of the elegized' and extending this absence or lack to other material forms like the elegy itself, troped as immaterial—a spectral genre.[29] Developing this critical focus on the lineage of elegy as a material act of placing, revised by women elegists writing from a perspective of marginality and erasure, in 'Sonnet XLIV' and 'Elegy' the material place of the churchyard forms the centre of Smith's generic reworking. Where churchyard poems by Gray (in my Introduction) and Wordsworth (in my Postscript) feature agents at liberty to move, feel, and think in this landscape of human loss tempered by the relief of poetic composition and community, Smith's churchyard poems complicate any sense of easy imaginative lift from the body as a source of suffering, death, and persistent grief; the poet and, in 'Elegy', her speaker seem instead rooted to the churchyard earth as they are compelled to witness its devastation by the sea. Smith's poems thus unearth the churchyard, disturbing the cultural imaginary and literary tradition implanted there, to disclose the difficult material contained and more typically controlled in masculine elegy's composed aesthetic. There is no complacent call on nature to share the poet's mourning; instead, in 'Sonnet XLIV' the poet stands aloof from the churchyard in ambivalent isolation, while in 'Elegy' the speaker apostrophizes the animate elements of air and water to enact her revenge on the stable earth in which her oppressor is buried, only to find herself subjected to their indiscriminate violence. Retaining the churchyard but drastically redefining its conventional representation, Smith's churchyard poems draw their emotional force from the environmental energy of this landscape as a place in flux. As the agonized site of bodies to which Smith pays agonizing attention, the churchyard's defining affective stakes are fundamentally unsettled and uprooted.

'bones whiten in the frequent wave': 'Sonnet XLIV'

It is a critical commonplace that landscape is a crucial point of origin for Smith's poetry: her *Elegiac Sonnets* recurrently explore 'how poetry and the creative, poetic imagination might be placed within or drawn from locale'

[29] Kate Lilley, 'True State Within: Women's Elegy 1640–1700', in Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (eds), *Women, Writing, History 1640–1740* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1992), 87.

in 'a poetics of spatial and compositional geographies';[30] and throughout Smith's work 'the literary associations of places and aspects of the natural world facilitate intertextual relations', 'invoking a male literary tradition and a model for it through the settings and subjects of [her] sonnets'.[31] Smith scholarship has often placed her poems in specific locations, guided by locodescriptive titles such as 'Written in Farm Wood, South Downs, in May 1784' and 'Written at Penshurst, in Autumn 1788';[32] and Smith described her own late poem 'Beachy Head' (1807) as a 'local Poem', leading her biographer Carrol Fry to label Smith a 'regional poet'.[33] However, as Jacqueline Labbe observes, the idea of Smith's poetry as comfortably dependent on place is frequently complicated by scenes of decomposition, so that '[e]very place that is written, and that sees the poet writing, serves only to signal its own impossibility as a location available to the poet; either imagination, or hope, or joy, or life is stymied'.[34] When the place of writing is the churchyard, and when the living poet's contact with the earth is juxtaposed with that same earth's disclosure of the buried corpse, this already vexed relationship to the material world and its aesthetic representation is brought alarmingly into tension.

Smith is a writer who shrewdly engaged with literary trends, and her recurrent use of the churchyard has been read as part of a strategic positioning that drew on the popularity of this setting after Gray's *Elegy*. While Smith repeatedly demonstrates her familiarity with the tropes of earlier churchyard poetry, she also challenges its male coterie, in the process redefining the homosocial community of the churchyard codified by Gray's 'rude forefathers'. 'Sonnet XLIV' has been interpreted in these literary terms: as a stormy sea disrupts the boundaries of the churchyard 'And breaks the silent sabbath of the grave' (l. 8), Smith's poem disturbs the literary categories founded upon ancestral figures.[35] Smith's

[30] Jacqueline M. Labbe, *Writing Romanticism: Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth, 1784–1807* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 79, 80.

[31] Roberts, *Charlotte Smith*, 5.

[32] See Elizabeth A. Dolan and Jacqueline M. Labbe (eds), *Placing Charlotte Smith* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2021).

[33] Charlotte Smith, *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, ed. Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 696, 705, 717, 740; Carrol L. Fry, *Charlotte Smith* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 19, 31.

[34] Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, 87.

[35] See Horrocks, *Women Wanderers*, 92–6; Pinch, *Strange Fits*, 59; Roberts, *Charlotte Smith*, 83, 99; Schor, *Bearing*, 65–6. On Smith's 'Saint Monica' (1807) as 'a Romantic re-writing of eighteenth-century graveyard poetry' see Kari Lokke, 'Charlotte Smith and Literary History: "Dark Forgetfulness" and the "Intercession of Saint Monica"', *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 27/3 (1998), 263.

rewriting of the churchyard in 'Sonnet XLIV', from a centre of rural settlement to a precariously balanced coastal site, goes beyond literary revision, however. Acknowledging the material place and cultural history of the churchyard, Smith destabilizes the status of this landscape as the ground of a poetics defined by a firm footing on an earth marked by, indeed made of, the buried dead, who could therefore be imaginatively recovered.

Formerly the dead were disclosed as the sleeping moral stewards of their community, maintaining their membership of the living society they upheld before being respectfully covered over once more; or they provided the means of religious enlightenment as vessels for speculation on the afterlife. In Gray's *Elegy* there is a reassuring relationship between the ploughman working the soil, the poet walking the lawn, and the dead beneath the feet of both, even if these stratified social relations remain unresolved. In earlier, more emphatically religious churchyard poetry, the dead do not appear as the supportive basis for poetics and community but instead frequently emerge as grotesque cadavers that disturb and disgust, as Chapter 1 revealed. Nevertheless, the ambition of poems like Blair's *The Grave* is ultimately to reverse exhumation as the dead are covered over with the literal turf of the churchyard and the consolation of Christian immortality. With a sentimental instead of an evangelical emphasis, Gray's *Elegy* similarly exhumes the buried dead but defers their decomposition by reimagining their lives in idealized terms. As the poet prophesies his own death, he hopes for a 'kindred spirit' likewise to preserve his memory and his dignity by remembering without enquiring too closely: 'No farther seek his merits to disclose, | Or draw his frailties from their dread abode' (ll. 125–6). Smith's churchyard poems remorselessly draw out both frailty and dread; the juxtaposition of abject and animate bodies remains exposed, transforming the churchyard into a site of unease in which the formerly comforting earth is dramatically unearthed—dispossessed of its dead and deprived of its physical and symbolic stability for the living poet. While Smith's revisions have been located in a movement from mid-century melancholy to Gothic extremity,[36] I shift the focus back to the churchyard, where the collision of bodies both living

[36] Stella Brooks, 'The Sonnets of Charlotte Smith', *Critical Survey*, 4/1 (1992), 14. On this distinction see Carol Margaret Davison, 'Introduction—The Corpse in the Closet: The Gothic, Death, and Modernity', in Davison (ed.), *The Gothic and Death*, 1–21; Hogle, 'Elegy and the Gothic'; Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); Yael Shapira, *Inventing the Gothic Corpse: The Thrill of Human Remains in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

and dead instantiates a disturbing disarrangement of churchyard poetry's idea of the body in, and startlingly out of, place.

> Press'd by the Moon, mute arbitress of tides,
> While the loud equinox its power combines,
> The sea no more its swelling surge confines,
> But o'er the shrinking land sublimely rides.
> The wild blast, rising from the Western cave,
> Drives the huge billows from their heaving bed;
> Tears from their grassy tombs the village dead,*
> And breaks the silent sabbath of the grave!
> With shells and sea-weed mingled, on the shore
> Lo! their bones whiten in the frequent wave;
> But vain to them the winds and waters rave;
> *They* hear the warring elements no more:
> While I am doom'd—by life's long storm opprest,
> To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest.

*Middleton is a village on the margin of the sea, in Sussex, containing only two or three houses. There were formerly several acres of ground between its small church and the sea, which now, by its continual encroachments, approaches within a few feet of this half-ruined and humble edifice. The wall, which once surrounded the church-yard, is entirely swept away, many of the graves broken up, and the remains of bodies interred washed into the sea; whence human bones are found among the sand and shingles on the shore. (Smith, *Poems*, 42).

'Sonnet XLIV' begins with a passive verb—the object of the Moon's pressure, not revealed until the third line, is the sea—which suggests a distribution of activity in the landscape. 'Press'd' into action by the 'mute arbitress', the sea is also personified and quickly reverses implied passivity by breaking the confinement of its 'swelling surge' and imposing upon 'the shrinking land', over which it 'sublimely rides'. The poem's first quatrain layers violent active verbs with a parallel adjectival push–pull ('swelling', 'shrinking') to suggest urgent, destructive movement. While the feminized personification of the Moon may be mute, then, she is the force behind the 'loud equinox' that devastates the churchyard. Coupling the Moon's rousing force with the 'swelling surge', the sonnet presents wind and water—'the great forces of wearing

away and wearing down', yet simultaneously inspiring[37]—as the animating energies of a dynamic environment: wind and sea, which 'drive', 'tear', and 'break', are external energies capable of impressing the land, the dead, and the abstract 'silent sabbath of the grave'. Their relationship with the dead is not purely violent, since the sea breaks both its own and the dead's state of confinement, and the 'heaving bed' of the 'huge billows' implies a metaphor of restless sleep often applied to the dead—as for Gray's 'rude forefathers', who 'sleep' beneath heaving turf; like the sea driven from its bed, the dead are un-coffined and unconfined. Yet this unsettling event at the centre of the poem (formally, as lines 7 and 8, but also symbolically) reveals the extent of the storm's destruction and the churchyard landscape's slide into seascape. The dead are 'the village dead', belonging to a place from which they have been brutally torn; the religious protection afforded by burial is also rendered ineffectual, as 'the silent sabbath of the grave' is broken. Consequently, the dead are locally and spiritually divested, disconnected from the living whose recuperative processes are revealed as empty consolations.

This is all the more shocking as Smith's note, affixed to the dead at the end of line 7, confirms the reality of her description and places an apparently fictive event within the poet's biographical landscape. It therefore presents the sonnet as an occasional poem, complementing the locodescriptive title, which reproduces the trope of poetic composition in the churchyard ('Written in . . .') and places the poet on the ground. In the poem's churchyard context, the footnote is a buried object brought to the surface as the poem's dead are disinterred by the sea.[38] Enjambed from the previous line's 'on the shore', the exclamatory 'Lo!' of line 10 signals a deictic positioning, homophonically echoing 'below', which places the dead in spatial relation to the poet. In Gérard Genette's terms, the footnote contributes 'textual depth', earthing the discourse to provide a chthonic grounding to a poem characterized by instability.[39] Yet, as Labbe comments, while the note anchors the poem, the 'decomposition exemplified by the uncovered bones in the sonnet enacts the undermining of the poem's desire to place itself . . . The location,

[37] Stewart, *Poetry*, 211. See also Barbara Johnson: 'the wind, which is to give animation, is also the giver of death' ('Apostrophe', 221).

[38] Crystal B. Lake writes that footnotes in 'Beachy Head' 'crowd the pages like buried objects' ('History Writing and Antiquarianism', in Devoney Looser (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Women's Writing in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 95).

[39] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 328.

in other words, is there and not-there, just as the poem is fixed—"written"—and in flux.'[40] Earthly attrition has claimed more than soil and stone, as the village itself—embodied in the remains of its ancestors and spiritually represented by the now 'half-ruined and humble' church—is 'swept away'.[41] As the poem progresses, the sea's supremacy over the earth is confirmed and bones mix with oceanic detritus, 'With shells and sea-weed mingled'. Deprived of their humic and human status, the remains return to a natural or animal state, joining the non-human aggregation 'among the sand and shingles on the shore'.

It is significant that Smith's churchyard excavations take place at the coast—an environment defined by John R. Gillis as the originary human landscape. Occupied for millennia and helping to shape the species, the inhabited coastline's human history is one 'of coevolution, of cocreation'. The sea is also, however, a place for the projection of apocalyptic anxieties: 'It is at the edge of the sea that we imagine both the birth of new worlds and the death of old ones.'[42] Roger Caillois draws on this vision of waning vitality (or energetic decline) when he opposes the Patagonian beach where animals have gathered 'to expire in a first and fatal intimacy', 'gently crushed by the ocean's useless energy', to the graveyard where human bodies are protected from the coast's exemplification of nature's 'law of universal and terrible destruction'.[43] While the sea in Smith's poetry can be an energizing and emancipatory natural force,[44] in 'Sonnet XLIV' the disintegrating churchyard littoral emphasizes the sea's exposure of the dead and the resulting breakdown of community, to the exclusion of its life-giving properties. Collapsing this human landscape onto the separate, non-human burial on the shore, Smith unearths the fragile foundations of civilization. And, as the poet enters the poem, she draws a distinction between the insensible '*They*' and the all too sensible 'I' who is separated by the sonnet's volta, formally confined to the closed terminal couplet as she is spatially confined to the

[40] Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, 90.

[41] Despite protective measures being taken in 1779, by 1838 the church had fallen into the sea and had disappeared completely by 1847; it was replaced on an inland site in 1849—see Roberts, *Charlotte Smith*, 122–5.

[42] John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 6, 158.

[43] Caillois, 'Patagonia', 245. On the persistence of the sea's image in literature 'as a mortuary zone, a wasteland haunted by the specter of shipwreck and decay', see Hannah Freed-Thall, *Modernism at the Beach: Queer Ecologies and the Coastal Commons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 12.

[44] See Teddi Lynn Chichester, 'Charlotte Smith's "The Sea View": Reimagining Burke's Sublime and Beautiful', *ANQ*, 33/1 (2019), 48–52; Roberts, *Charlotte Smith*, 71.

headland overlooking the sea.[45] Resemblances remain as both living and dead are 'Press'd'/'oppress' by the storm, the poet internalizing the atmospheric upheaval. Nonetheless, these connections are observed only to be disturbed: the churchyard is an external context to which the poet is ambivalently related—the landscape's deterioration symbolizes a fractured self as the 'I' is equally dispossessed of a stable position. In the sonnet's play with silence, sound, and the capacity for speech, too, there is an uneasy toggling between parallels and oppositions. The moon as 'mute arbitress of tides' is causally connected to the 'loud equinox' she stimulates, making 'the winds and waters rave' yet abiding in a feminized silence containing only indirect agency. Similarly, the dead 'hear the warring elements no more', despite their disinterment from 'the silent sabbath of the grave', which nonetheless fails to disrupt 'their gloomy rest', while the 'I' who enters in the closing lines hears and feels everything as a 'doom', throwing into ironic relief the sonnet's final words in which the dead remain mute objects incapable of feeling. Smith's poem tracks far from elegy's cooperative mourning around the grave, then, not only in displacing the churchyard's earthly solidity but also by observing affective analogies—the storm that releases the dead and that which oppresses the poet—only to spotlight their disarticulation: the dead cannot feel, and the speaker is wrapped up in an intensity of feeling so high pitched it cannot be expressed otherwise than as the fractured metaphor of 'life's long storm'.

The poet's emotional momentum, characteristically liable to pitch headlong into agonized apprehension across Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*, is in 'Sonnet XLIV' also attuned to hectic planetary energies, which recent criticism has tracked to Smith's interest in geology. In 'Beachy Head', for instance, the shocks felt by the wanderer on the hilltop are distended to take in historical and deep time, whose lines of pressure surge on the poem's present moment. This uncanny convergence is concentrated in moments of sublime excavation, including of the much-cited fossil shells and the elephant bones once taken to be those of giants.[46] These materials bring to the poet's mind unwitnessed but still palpable events of Roman invasion and, deep in the rock record,

[45] On Smith's use of the sonnet volta to disrupt expected lines of thought and feeling see Mathes, *Poetic Form*, 33.

[46] See Kevis Goodman, 'Conjectures on Beachy Head: Charlotte Smith's Geological Poetics and the Ground of the Present', *ELH*, 81/3 (2014), 983–1006; Menely, *Climate*, 196–207; Alexandra Paterson, 'Tracing the Earth: Narratives of Personal and Geological History in Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head*', *Romanticism*, 25/1 (2019), 22–31; Anne D. Wallace, 'Interfusing Living and Nonliving in Charlotte Smith's "Beachy Head"', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 50/1 (2019), 1–19, and 'Picturesque Fossils, Sublime Geology? The Crisis of Authority in Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head*', *European Romantic Review*, 13/1 (2002), 77–93.

> What time these fossil shells,
> Buoy'd on their native element, were thrown
> Among the imbedding calx: when the huge hill
> Its giant bulk heaved, and in strange ferment
> Grew up a guardian barrier, 'twixt the sea
> And the green level of the sylvan weald. (ll. 384–9)

Registered as percussive jolts, these temporal junctures are nonetheless displaced as fantastical phenomena, unknown and only dimly guessed: as Smith writes in the opening lines, it is 'Fancy' that 'should go forth, | And represent the strange and awful hour | Of vast concussion' separating Britain from continental Europe in unrecorded memory (ll. 4–6). The expanding and contracting views of 'Beachy Head', in the style of topographical poetry but unspooling to include geology's more capacious archive, make felt the pangs of time; but this is living in history in its most ambient sense, and the noisy feelings elsewhere so urgent in Smith's work are in this long, unfinished poem more evenly distributed. In Smith's churchyard poems there is little hope of losing sorrow in deep time's baggy compass. Instead, 'Sonnet XLIV' and 'Elegy' bring up short a sublime environmental energy with the bones of the dead and find in the churchyard a much more intimate, and intimately disconcerting, record of time's wasting effects. Here the natural analogies for social violence populating churchyard poetry are brought hard to an earth densely populated by those who suffer—for Smith, those around the grave as much as those within it.

At the end of 'Beachy Head', nature's destructive forces are brought close in the figure of the ocean, which causes shipwrecks and drowns the hermit buried in the cliff, for whom the poem is a kind of epitaph. For Isobel Armstrong, in its total and proximate violence this is a catastrophe in excess of the masculine sublime, which manufactures ways to recuperate destruction from the safety and authority of distant observation. Smith's churchyard poems, hardly models of aesthetic detachment, might similarly align with Armstrong's genre of 'oceanic monody' in their orientation 'through dissolving or unstable markers in a psychological or literal landscape whose context is the ocean', their language of '*flow*, as unmediated secretion of feeling naturalized as effusion', enacting 'the precipitation of emotion and expressive experience of the body'.[47] Unlike the tradition Armstrong identifies, though, these poems resist the sort of redemptive continuity that might resolve all this watery weather chaos in a symbolic register. Instead, 'Sonnet XLIV' uses

[47] Isobel Armstrong, 'Msrepresentation: Codes of Affect and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetry', in Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (eds), *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830–1900* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), 22, 15–17.

sea and air at their most primal dramatically to revise established protocols of representing the churchyard and its dead. Smith works against the poetic compensations of elegy—its archive of past poets and its apostrophic command of nature's cooperative powers—through a process of exhumation and revelation that is purely physical: the poem refuses to grant the dead a voice and rejects their significance as memorial objects; it also turns its violence loose, so that the poet, too, is swept up in its destructive sway. Confronted by dead matter, the poet becomes implicated in churchyard tumult rather than isolated on the distant headland. 'Sonnet XLIV' therefore 'moves from life-in-death (waves tear bones from their graves) to death-in-life (the speaker is dead to peace)'; but while Labbe interprets this movement as 'a transition from the "right here" to the imaginative sublime',[48] in the context of the exposure of the churchyard dead the poet is too close and too involved in the startling processes of collapse to make the imaginative jump to sublimity, remaining fixed to earth even as it crumbles beneath her compelled gaze.

Smith's inability to relinquish or refigure the corpse according to elegy's teleology of suffering followed by solace is more characteristic of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection. According to Kristeva, the corpse is the ultimate figure for the revolt of being 'against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated.' The abject is 'opposed to *I*'; it 'fascinates desire', which remains apprehensive and, 'sickened, it rejects' yet simultaneously persists in 'a vortex of summons and repulsion [that] places the one haunted by it literally beside himself'. Embodying this phenomenon, the corpse

> upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance . . . corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. . . . [T]he corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled. . . . I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders . . . It is death infecting life.[49]

In 'Sonnet XLIV', the introjection of an inner storm becomes urgent when the foundational role the dead typically play for the living is washed away; their unearthed bones expose that which ought not to be seen—a challenge to the living self that is both disruptive and compelling. Contrasted with

[48] Labbe, *Writing Romanticism*, 81.

[49] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1, 3–4.

the energetic but de-identified corpse, Smith's 'I' has an animating inner life sustained by an agitation of spirits but is without animation; her static body on the shore assumes the inactivity usually ascribed to the restful corpse, becoming a living-dead figure. Stood at a mortal threshold, she is appropriately present in the churchyard as a site of (poetic) composition and change. Like the marginal headland, the poet is precariously balanced: faced with its human foundations, she transforms these once-reliable roots of civilization into a source of self-questioning anxiety that generates the poem's affective force and connects it to the destructive yet exhilarating environmental dynamics through an analogy (outside to inside to outside again, in the progression from storm to feeling to poetic expression), which nonetheless signals its own thwarted correspondence.

The process by which this is achieved is potently unearthing. In Robert Pogue Harrison's neo-Vichian framework, the inscribable earth constitutes a 'foothold for human worldhood' while the sea is the apocalyptic 'imaginary agent of ultimate obliteration' in its antagonism to 'imprinted memory'; inhuman in 'its passion for erasure' and set against the earth's solidity on which the prospect of resurrection depends, the sea 'closes over rather than keeps the place of its dead, while its unbounded grave remains humanly unmarked': 'There are no gravestones on the sea.'[50] As Smith uses the sea to unearth the defining humus, the collective identity of the dead marked in the soil is drowned out. The line 'But vain to them the winds and waters rave' also uses these destabilizing elements in literary terms, amending a line of Gray's 'Sonnet on the Death of Richard West': 'In vain to me the smiling mornings shine.'[51] Smith draws on Gray's influence but transfers her allegiance away from the 'rude forefathers' of his *Elegy* by unearthing their real (rather than idealized) identity as deracinated bones on the shore.[52] At a deeper allusive level, the bones in Smith's coastal churchyard suffer the same watery fate as Milton's Lycidas.[53] As Rebecca Mills observes, the elegiac tradition from 'Lycidas' on frequently locates the dead by or in the sea, drawing on its associations with 'destruction and death, and the shore as a liminal and often uncanny zone' where the anxieties of mortality are expressed in 'the slippery and shifting ground'.[54] This is also true of 'Sonnet XLIV'; nevertheless, even as Smith claims this tradition,

[50] Harrison, *Dominion*, 4, 12. See also W. H. Auden, *The Enchafèd Flood, or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea* (London: Faber, 1985), 16–17.

[51] Thomas Gray, 'Sonnet on the Death of Richard West', in *Poems*, l. 1.

[52] See Daniel Robinson, '*Elegiac Sonnets*: Charlotte Smith's Formal Paradoxy', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 39/2 (2003), 194; Schor, *Bearing*, 66.

[53] See Schor, *Bearing*, 65.

[54] Rebecca Mills, 'The Elegiac Tradition and the Imagined Geography of the Sea and the Shore', *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 17/4 (2015), 494.

she disrupts its continuity. Milton organized 'the chaotic sea [to] become a site of responsive winds, order, and hierarchy', transferring the powers of the destructive environment to an elegiac landscape that mourns the deceased. In this transformed 'Arcadian imagined geography', Lycidas is recovered, ending the poem with hope of resurrection.[55] By contrast, Smith's dead are washed away by an indifferent sea; their bones become Kristeva's 'jettisoned object[s]', which draw 'me toward the place where meaning collapses'.[56]

Smith's churchyard poem thus runs against elegiac expectations and blocks sympathetic connection (to the dead and to poetic forerunners) but maintains a lively relationship to the churchyard: exposed as vulnerable, this landscape is also the centre of animation in Smith's hectic reworking. Within the parameters of Mathes's affective reading of the *Elegiac Sonnets*, the environmental excess of Smith's churchyard poems might figure exorbitant emotions with no alternative channel when sympathetic communication is not available. In 'Sonnet XLIV' we witness at once a collapse of the dead's cultural location and its imaginative reconstruction as a site of precarious, exhilarating, ultimately short-lived and self-destructive energy. This composition around a moment of erasure disperses affective force into the churchyard itself, demonstrating how, as Mathes writes, Smith's poetics of strenuous feeling finds a source in 'her enmeshment in a world of powerful external forces'.[57] Yet, locating Smith's revisionary aesthetic in her rewriting of churchyard poetry, stirring up the conventional waters of earlier examples and their affinities with masculinist elegy, this enmeshment looks more like radical non-coincidence: the poet is at odds with the world's figures of feeling and cannot turn them to even the most guarded form of consolation, since the storm, which had seemed to represent her own experience, merely confirms her isolation amid extreme emotions that cannot be shared in a nature already co-opted to other purposes. Like the abject dead, the churchyard—in the process of collapse but not yet effaced completely—constitutes a location of potential connection ultimately frustrated. Smith declines the deeply worn tracks of elegiac feeling and ends the poem in the fray of a storm, mute among the unhearing and with no possibility of resolution, as the poet is held perilously in balance between violent sea and unstable earth, living and dead.

[55] Mills, 'Elegiac Tradition', 499, 500.
[56] Kristeva, *Powers*, 2.
[57] Mathes, *Poetic Form*, 28. See also Karen A. Weisman, 'Form and Loss in Charlotte Smith's "Elegiac Sonnets"', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 33/1 (2002), 24–5.

'The embodied waters come': 'Elegy'

The excess feeling of 'Sonnet XLIV' is extended yet undiminished in its partner poem, 'Elegy'. Here Smith's refusal of the dead's repossession by, and foundation of, living society seems to be reversed, as the dead are given a biography in relation to a speaker's autobiography. The poem's note reads:

> This elegy is written on the supposition that an indigent young woman had been addressed by the son of a wealthy yeoman, who resenting his attachment, had driven him from home, and compelled him to have recourse for subsistence to the occupation of a pilot, in which, in attempting to save a vessel in distress, he perished.
>
> The father dying, a tomb is supposed to be erected to his memory in the church-yard mentioned in Sonnet the 44th. And while a tempest is gathering, the unfortunate young woman comes thither; and courting the same death as had robbed her of her lover, she awaits its violence, and is at length overwhelmed by the waves.[58]

Where the sonnet emphasizes discontinuity, the elegy's opening note (attached to the title) is all coherent narrative and connective threads—including to 'Sonnet XLIV', with which it shares the churchyard landscape. 'Elegy' also features a character who speaks her feelings with declamatory force, rather than an 'I' who feels much yet says very little. Through the prefatory work of the note and in her own speech the living speaker relates closely to the dead (her lover and his father), before becoming absorbed into their mortal community in a collective destruction that elaborates 'at length' the storm's erasure of the churchyard in 'Sonnet XLIV'. In formal terms, the longer poem offers a narrative pathway for affective intensities compressed in the sonnet's ambiguous gesture to unidentified sources of suffering. Yet however reparative these connections might appear, Smith's 'Elegy' does not fulfil the idealized community of Gray's *Elegy*, in which the poet joins the dead in the local churchyard in an attempt to become mutually reconciled. Despite its genre-claiming title, this poem sits restlessly in a tradition defined by Sacks as an 'accommodation between the mourning self on the one hand and the very words of grief and fictions of consolation on the other'.[59] Smith's speaker is instead motivated by despair and revenge, and her relation to

[58] Smith, *Poems*, 80.
[59] Sacks, *English Elegy*, 2.

the dead, though personal, is emotionally alienated: in Smith's 'Elegy' the churchyard is 'the spot accurst | Where ruthless Avarice finds a quiet grave', and the speaker's response to that grave is to invoke 'vengeance on the dust below' (ll. 11–12, 20).

Smith's poem may therefore incline towards later traditions of 'anti-elegy', which refuse accommodation between the living and the dead. But, unlike 'Sonnet XLIV', 'Elegy' does not preserve 'the dead in all their radical alterity' as ghastly bones but brings them even closer to the living, making them all the more destabilizing.[60] As both speaker and churchyard are swept away, Smith's 'Elegy' expands and intensifies the sonnet's dramatic effacement of the stable earth in which enduring connections to the dead might be grounded. These sweeping revisions of elegy's material placing reveal how, without the churchyard's foundation, there is nowhere to locate restorative feelings or compensatory beliefs, which are as remorselessly washed away. Nonetheless, as in 'Sonnet XLIV', relations in the churchyard are thrillingly animated and the landscape—in the process of falling into the sea but not yet vanished—epitomizes Smith's restive rewriting of the churchyard poem. Difficult feelings are released to find no answer, yet Smith's 'Elegy' draws reserves of energy from the churchyard as a site of poetic matter powering her revisionary treatment.

Vitalizing powers stimulate 'Elegy' from its opening lines, which begin with an indirect apostrophe from the speaker to the personified environment:

> 'Dark gathering clouds involve the threatening skies,
> The sea heaves conscious of the impending gloom,
> Deep, hollow murmurs from the cliffs arise;
> They come—the Spirits of the Tempest come![']' (ll. 1–4)

These lines present an encompassing atmosphere, including sky, sea, and earth, cumulatively active with a broadly distributed agency: clouds involve, skies threaten, the sea is conscious, and the cliffs murmur, alike animated to verbal action by 'the Spirits of the Tempest'. The source of animation is also dispersed, as the quatrain's final line seems both to describe and to demand the coming of the tempest through its repeated 'come'; the speaker registers the action of the storm, yet she also precipitates it in a series of injunctions flowing from this initiating imperative. The uncertainty of this apostrophe,

[60] Fuss, *Dying Modern*, 108.

however, displaces the primacy of sound and associated agency from the speaker's voice to the storm it stirs up and in which it becomes lost over the course of the poem. To recall the critical stances on poetic apostrophe from the introduction to this chapter, the voice of a speaker self-defined as a 'widow'd wanderer driven' (l. 29) exemplifies this trope's uneasy turns of speech around vulnerable life, which is as likely to pitch into a downward spiral as it is to assume a commanding position over cooperative forces of nature—a differentiation of rhetorical efficacy riven by the authority of one gender and its reliance on another's compelled submission. In Smith's 'Elegy', the speaker's 'shrieks of horror' and 'trembling speech' participate in but are also absorbed by the 'warring elements' that 'rave' (ll. 14, 10). Calling on the storm as a collaborative agent of retributive justice, Smith's speaker in 'Elegy' is nevertheless subject to the harms meted out by its encompassing violence—not least in her shattered voice, reduced from articulate complaint to elemental noise as legitimate speech becomes lost in a whirl of exclamations.[61]

In the poem's opening stanza, 'the Spirits of the Tempest' seem both atmospheric and ghostly in their swirling motion around the churchyard. The line 'Deep, hollow murmurs from the cliffs arise', combined with the speaker's frenzied invocation, extends the aerial analogy to include potent speech and the possibility of response—an anticipated correspondence that continues in stanzas three and four:

> ['']Loud and more loud, ye foaming billows! burst;
> Ye warring elements! more fiercely rave,
> Till the wide waves o'erwhelm the spot accurst
> Where ruthless Avarice finds a quiet grave!'
>
> Thus with clasp'd hands, wild looks, and streaming hair,
> While shrieks of horror broke her trembling speech,
> A wretched maid—the victim of Despair,
> Survey'd the threatening storm and desart beech . . .
> (ll. 9–16)

[61] Exclamation marks occur in every stanza of 'Elegy' and the poem is littered with interjections of 'Oh!' and a sonic pulse of 'o' sounds, as in the lines 'Loud and more loud, ye foaming billows! burst', 'Then to the tomb where now the father slept', and 'Forth to the world, a widow'd wanderer driven', forming a 'hollow murmur' of their own (ll. 9, 17, 29, 3). As Johnson writes: 'o' is 'pure vocative' and vibrates against the apostrophic interjection 'oh' as pure subjective, the social relationality of which it seems to derail as expressive but inarticulate sound ('Apostrophe', 220).

But this economy of breath is far from dialogic since there is a fundamental inequality between speaker and storm, lone voice and overwhelming atmosphere: while the wind appears to answer the speaker's call it also threatens to subsume her breath, converting her poetic utterance into ghost speech wavering on the margins of the audible and intelligible. This is a calamitous take on the silencing of women in elegy's poetic ecology; while Smith's speaker has a voice and uses it in robust complaint, the excess energies of her speech (giving the lie to that collected verb 'survey'd') communicate with the winds only to be whipped away by their background violence. Her 'sorrows flow' (l. 18), like the sea but without its sympathy; her potent injunction becomes a powerless and desperate plea, a 'female complaint'; and her description by the poet fulfils the trope in which a woman's passion is pathologized as hysteria: 'Frantic she turn'd—and beat her breast and wept, | Invoking vengeance on the dust below' (ll. 19–20).

The hazard of this aerial transfer is sharpened in the biographical terms of these stanzas, which reprise in scattered form the speaker's story from the introductory note: she is 'A wretched maid—the victim of Despair', and her focus is the 'quiet grave' of 'ruthless Avarice': her lover's father. The incorporation of this specifically gendered narrative, within the more immediate concern of the storm in the churchyard by the sea, invests the landscape with an emotional significance and a personal particularity: the churchyard is 'the spot accurst' and the storm is an instrument of revenge willed by the speaker, whose exclamatory instruction gathers urgency yet remains ineffective. Her complaining speech, she realizes, is not a motivating force but a small sound lost amid forces beyond her control:

> ['] Forth to the world, a widow'd wanderer driven,
> I pour to winds and waves the unheeded tear,
> Try with vain effort to submit to Heaven,
> And fruitless call on him—"who cannot hear".[']
> (ll. 29–32)

This stanza's repetition of speech effectively rendered mute in the absence of response severs the allusive and natural lines of correspondence that characterize elegy's mourning community. The speaker is 'unheeded' by the elements and the dead—including earlier elegiac poets, since the final line echoes Gray's 'Richard West' sonnet—as she is cast out of the patriarchal churchyard in another repetition of the sonnet's They/I dichotomy: 'Yon cipher'd stones *his* name and wealth relate, | . . . | While I, his living victim,

curse my fate' (ll. 22–24). Her lover's father may be dead, but the churchyard ensures that he is at least remembered; she lives on and suffers alone, haunting the same landscape.

This stanza comes on the heels of a further apostrophic turn—a change in the direction of address inherent to the trope, which has its roots in legal rhetoric: 'A digression in discourse. Esp. a turning away from an audience [like a judge] to address an absent or imaginary person.'[62] As the speaker redirects her complaint from the storm to the dead as yet another entity who cannot respond, the poem casts doubt on the value of her speech as anything more than respiration, necessary for life but ineffective as communication, as she slides towards death as the ultimate silence. In these lines the speaker develops the inward turn of the final couplet of 'Sonnet XLIV' by drawing a distinction between herself and the (now specified and personalized) dead:

> ['] Oh! my lost love! no tomb is placed for thee,
> That may to strangers' eyes thy worth impart;
> Thou hast no grave but in the stormy sea!
> And no memorial but this breaking heart!['] (ll. 25–8)

Confirming her body's place in the churchyard ('there', 'Yon'), the speaker also internalizes its function, providing her lover's absent body with a memorial in her 'breaking heart'. As she relates, her lover when alive sought 'One sigh of speechless tenderness' (l. 48), expressing an emotional relationship through the charged bodily exhalation prized by Smith's contemporary culture of sensibility yet reminding readers of the ephemerality of such an exchange. Now her lover is dead, their fleeting communication evolves into the far from redemptive figuring of the mourning body and graveside lament, in which the emotional and physical entanglement of living and dead collapses the speaker into the subject of her address and bears her body to the ground as her speech is torn away by the wind.

The poet's descriptions of the speaker (dispersed across three stanzas not spoken by the speaker: stanzas 4, 5, and 17) disarticulate her body, fragmented into 'clasp'd hands' and 'streaming hair' (l. 13); her complaint is similarly splintered from its purpose, unable to make the dead witness and thereby legitimize, even potentially alleviate, her suffering. There is, however, a point in 'Elegy' when the turns of the poem seem also to turn the tide: pouring her tears into the sea, though lamenting her 'vain effort', the

[62] Johnson, *Persons*, 6.

speaker nonetheless continues her environmental apostrophe and finds it temporarily answered:

> ['Part, raging waters! part, and shew beneath,
> In your dread caves, his pale and mangled form;
> . . .
> Lo! by the lightning's momentary blaze,
> I see him rise the whitening waves above['] (ll. 37–8, 41–2)

Yet this is a fragile moment of recovery, and an unhappy one: the lost lover is retrieved yet bears a horrifying difference: 'No longer such as when in happier days | He gave the enchanted hours—to me and love', 'But dead, disfigured', a 'pale and mangled form' (ll. 43–4, 49, 38). He also makes his own terrible utterance (through apostrophe's answering trope of prosopopoeia: the responsive voice from the addressed object), fleetly coursing on the back of the storm with 'accents [that] pierce mine ear', which solicits the speaker's death in a terminal reunion beneath the waves: 'Ah, wretch! delay no more, | But come, unhappy mourner—meet me here' (ll. 50, 51–2). As the speaker's utterance wavers on the edge of noise in the chaos of the storm, the corpse rising from or falling into the sea is a figure only dimly discernible, on the cusp of vanishing into a primordial state. The speaker, however bewildered with grief for the dead and anguish at her own suffering, quickly recognizes that her lover's form is a fancied 'phantom', 'already past': 'Along the waves his shadow glides away, | I lose his voice amid the deafening blast!' (ll. 53, 54, 55–6). In her final words her lament is directed at her own illusion, addressed as a personification, which initiates a final sequence of apostrophes:

> ['Ah! wild Illusion, born of frantic Pain!
> He hears not, comes not from his watery bed!
> My tears, my anguish, my despair are vain,
> The insatiate ocean gives not up its dead.
> 'Tis not his voice! Hark! the deep thunders roll!
> Upheaves the ground; the rocky barriers fail!
> Approach, ye horrors that delight my soul!
> Despair, and Death, and Desolation, hail!' (ll. 57–64)

Neither hearing nor speaking, the dead are replaced with inanimate figures of abstracted feeling: Illusion, Pain, Despair, and Desolation. As personifications of negative affects, these are far from the empty rhetorical figures they might seem today; rather, they are outsized forces of feeling, too big to be contained in a single speaker and unleashed on the churchyard landscape.[63] Finally, and fatally, the speaker's declamation ends with an ironic turning-back to its demands—at first unanswered and eventually abandoned—in the poem's last stanza, when they find their deadly response:

> The Ocean hears—The embodied waters come—
> Rise o'er the land, and with resistless sweep
> Tear from its base the proud aggressor's tomb,
> And bear the injured to eternal sleep! (ll. 65–8)

Smith's speaker began 'Elegy' immersed in the churchyard, not distantly surveilling but positioned by the grave with which she shares a history and a fate. This proximity is developed over the course of the poem, so that her body becomes the churchyard ('no memorial but this breaking heart') and eventually collapses with it in the consuming sea. 'Elegy' closes with a final image in which the speaker's body joins the absent corpse of her lover and the tomb of his father: 'The embodied waters come' when they disclose then absorb the lover's corpse, taking on his corporeal form and becoming 'embodied' at the end of a poem that they began as 'Spirits'. Like the churchyard at Middleton, perilously poised on an eroded coast, the body of Smith's speaker is fragile and marginal, swept up by feeling and swept away by the storm: in a pun on her emotionally expressive (but 'unheeded') 'tear' and the verb 'tear', which pulls the churchyard into the waves (another repetition from the sonnet), Smith emphasizes that this movement is as affective as it is material. The co-implication of the speaker's body and her feelings in close association with the churchyard landscape does not amount to a reconciliation, though, and Smith's 'Elegy' is wildly alienated from the genre it appears to claim, since the corresponsive force of apostrophe works explosively to

[63] Eighteenth-century personifications are, according to Margaret Anne Doody, 'embodiments of energies' capable of transforming 'imagined sculpting of inanimate object[s] to soft flesh and fearful powers' (*Daring Muse*, 164, 166). Recovering the trope's importance for eighteenth-century readers, John Sitter argues that personification offers poetry 'a way to bring an art dependent on sensuous particularity into a more harmonious relationship with a discourse of universals' (*The Cambridge Introduction to Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 169). On personification's necessary work in the churchyard landscape see Metcalf, '"Death's Refreshing Shade"'.

shatter subjects from objects of address, representing the speaker's fractured feelings. Forceful, rage-filled injunctions to the place and buried persons of the churchyard, consistently derailed by an anxious susceptibility to an ultimately overpowering drive to erasure, undermine complaint's political efficacy and apostrophe's distribution of agency by revealing the devastating effects that redound on the vulnerable speaker. Unlike the poet of 'Sonnet XLIV', the speaker in 'Elegy' is closely, feelingly involved but finds no closure in the churchyard that does not lead to her (and its) destruction. This stark finality, then, hardly confirms reintegration: while their bodies share a common fate, the speaker's relationship to the buried dead remains radically unresolved.

Together, 'Sonnet XLIV' and 'Elegy' oppose the churchyard's physical covering-up of the corpse in the earth and its imaginative construction of community, including the literary community assembled by elegiac convention, which for the eighteenth century finds in the churchyard its representative landscape. In the sonnet in particular, the visceral, abject animation of the dead shockingly reverses the closure of burial—a ritual that marks an end to life, which is here persistent and disturbing. Rising from their beds and tossed among the waves, the dead are given a ghastly semblance of liveliness, even as they are acknowledged to be lifeless objects. As they are forced from their locality, the dead are also disconnected from the community of which the churchyard forms the centre. It is this disconnection that destabilizes the basis of the poet's identity: faced with mere bones, she draws close to death, which infects life. The extension and personalization of this compressive story in the passionate speech of 'Elegy' nevertheless strings out a similar tale of frustrated emotion. Ambivalently addressing a storm and an ocean that drown out her voice as they promise to drown her body, the speaker's complaint is reduced to the silence of a material body bound for death. As the churchyard collapses into the sea, corpses are exposed or created, and the living look on or find themselves carried away, 'Sonnet XLIV' and 'Elegy' revise without resolving the tradition of churchyard poetry. The difficult feelings experienced by the poet and the speaker have no culmination or release, and the churchyard in Smith's poetry remains perpetually unsettled, teetering at the tipping point of total dissolution.

4

'All ploughd & buried now'

John Clare's Mixed Genres and the Long Churchyard Poem

> To contrive a story which shall please and interest all Readers, by being at once entertaining, important, and instructive; to fill it with suitable incidents; to enliven it with a variety of characters, and of descriptions; and, throughout a long work, to maintain that propriety of sentiment, and that elevation of Style, which the Epic Character requires, is unquestionably the highest effort of Poetical Genius.—Hugh Blair, 'Lecture XLII. Epic Poetry'[1]

In his poem 'Thoughts in a Churchyard' (in *The Midsummer Cushion*, composed 1831–4; published 1978), John Clare deploys the funeral conventions of death as sleep and as a levelling force. Gesturing to successive graves of rich and poor with a deictic 'there', his poem affirms the universal rest achieved in the churchyard, 'Where crowds of buried memorys sleep'.[2] Clare, though, presses on this trope with firmer force:

> There rest the weary from their toil
> There lye the troubled free from care
> Who through the strife of lifes turmoil
> Sought rest & only found it there (ll. 9–12)

The churchyard, as a site of final release from the endurance of labour in which toil always means turmoil, life always bound and broken by strife, becomes a negative reminder of the physical burdens of lifelong work—exactions that no longer menace the buried dead. They do, though, trouble

[1] Hugh Blair, 'Lecture XLII. Epic Poetry', in *Lectures*, ii. 357.

[2] John Clare, 'Thoughts in a Churchyard', in Eric Robinson, David Powell, and P. M. S. Dawson (eds), *Poems of the Middle Period 1822–1837*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), iii. ll. 12, 2, hereafter cited parenthetically.

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the poet, whose thoughts remain busy about the quiet graves: 'How quiet nature oer them dreams | Tis but our troubled thoughts that weep' (ll. 3–4). The labouring bodies are discharged from the world of toil, but the poet, brought into affective relation to the dead through the repetition of 'troubled', has work still to do in constructing those thoughts—principally into an epitaphic order, as Clare is anxious that the 'buried memorys' will fade without leaving a mark:

> Lifes book shuts here its page is lost
> With them & all its busy claims
> The poor are from its memory crost
> The rich have nothing but their names
>
> . . .
>
> Theyre blotted from the list of life
> And absent from its teazing cares
> Grief joy hope fear & all their crew
> That haunt the memorys living mind
> Ceased where they could no more pursue
> & left a painless blank behind (ll. 5–8, 27–32)

Removed beyond the reach of life's cares, the dead nonetheless 'haunt the memorys living mind' (to twist Clare's line), absently signifying a ghostly erasure in the blank record they leave as a chastening memorial. Where once their names filled lists—'The bills made out the reckoning paid | The book is crossed the business done' (ll. 36–7)—the now 'painless blank' seems nevertheless to pain the poet, whose poem generates another record. Names cannot be recovered, but there are identities, collective and individual, inscribed in the lines: 'the weary', 'the troubled', 'the master & the slave', 'the honoured & the brave', 'the miser & the heir', 'The fair one' (ll. 9, 10, 14, 16, 17, 21). Reminiscent of the catalogue of generalized characters in Robert Blair's *The Grave*, where they served as emblems of a shared mortality, these human types work differently in Clare's poem. Here they seem to be retrieved from memory—both haunted and sleeping, living and dead—in an effort of mind intent on restoring consciousness to the buried: those whose bodies were all that were valued in the pages of business and are all that remain in the churchyard earth. The churchyard, then, is a place—the 'there' of line 12—in which the cares of the dead are closed while those of the labouring poet painfully linger.

'Thoughts in a Churchyard' is one of several churchyard poems by Clare. They recur throughout his career, from *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820) and *The Village Minstrel* (1821) to the poems he wrote in the Northampton Asylum (1842–64). As my reading of 'Thoughts in a Churchyard' suggests, in these poems Clare draws on and participates in the counter-tradition of churchyard poetry at the centre of this book, redirecting thoughts in the churchyard to a more explicit focus on the labouring body—of those who tilled or otherwise toiled upon the soil and now find rest beneath it. As Simon Kövesi notes, facing 'the blunt realities of a labouring life' for Clare meant facing 'a future that intrudes suddenly . . . and throws the speaker back to a leaden mortality'.[3] In the pressure he places on tropes of respite in the churchyard earth, positioned against a relentless life of labour mercifully ended, but also the continued demands on the work of the poet in this landscape, Clare contributes to another eighteenth-century tradition. Like Clare, Mary Leapor and Ann Yearsley use churchyards in their poems 'Colinetta' and 'Clifton Hill', which I discussed in Chapter 2, to foreground the layered work of the labouring-class poet: the working body buried or paused in the churchyard after long labour; the mind busy in the making of a poem that cannot leave the working body behind.

Returning to the crossing points between churchyard and labouring-class poetics in this chapter, I recover Clare's persistent concern with the churchyard across his career in the long poem 'The Village Minstrel' and a cluster of shorter, later lyrics. Revisiting the churchyard, Clare combines the genres featured in the rest of the book—georgic, pastoral, elegy, and topographical poetry—in a mixed mode dedicated to turning over the traumatized earth whose brutal deformations he so often catalogues. In particular, Clare extends and deepens the concern with time, and the poetic strategies for dealing with its simultaneous tightening and unravelling by capital, that I emphasized in my reading of work by Leapor and Yearsley. These poets implicate the days, seasons, and years orchestrating old regimes of labour in a spiralling downturn most punishing to the exposed bodies of working women. For Clare, writing in the industrial intensification of the changes wrought upon landscape and labour by capital, time unspools more capaciously and disorientingly, as a place deeply known through the rhythms of working life alters beyond recognition in the distended violence of enclosure. Against this broad spatial distribution of instability and

[3] Simon Kövesi, 'John Clare's Deaths: Poverty, Education and Poetry', in Simon Kövesi and Scott McEathron (eds), *New Essays on John Clare: Poetry, Culture and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 152.

confusion, the churchyard punctuates or rather punctures Clare's poetic patterns of time and becomes a disruptive centre of difficult feeling as these patterns are warped by agricultural 'improvement'.

The uneasy returns of Clare's churchyard poems, then, seem drawn back to this landscape as to a site of trauma, and the turning of genres exemplified in 'The Village Minstrel'—from pastoral ease to georgic work to elegiac complaint[4]—works and reworks the churchyard ground as a site of aftermath. The bodies buried there belong to ancestors who would no longer recognize the terrain of times themselves changed beyond recognition. These dead are the workers who have escaped the remorseless progress of agricultural 'improvement'; yet they also constitute the starkest evidence that this 'progress' leaves many casualties in its wake. Clare's churchyard haunting—his recursive inclination to this landscape over one long poem and throughout his writing life—is coordinated loosely around genres whose oblique, sometimes contradictory relations articulate the twisting of time in the churchyard. Here the buried dead can no longer represent the surety of intergenerational succession, since the conventional contours of working life that had long been passed down and taken up afresh are now distorted or lost. Reading in this vein, Anne-Lise François describes enclosure as the aggregate 'slow accretions and intensifying redundancies [that] yield a different mode of temporal relation fundamental to the tenuous, asymmetrical, and nonreciprocal links that precariously bind humans to the nonhuman world whose protection and nurture they seek'. Where before there were common practices—temporally ordered acts of work around 'the earth's diurnal rotation, the round of the seasons, the multiyear succession of cultivated on fallow fields'—there is now an 'expulsion from known orbits or circuits of relations and exposure to control', by which old certainties are erased along with the marginal existence of the commons that held some fragile space for their continuance.[5] The churchyard, for Clare, is the site

[4] See Tess Somervell, 'Georgic, Romanticism and Complaint: John Clare and his Contemporaries', in Bullard (ed.), *A History of English Georgic Writing*, 177–8. Where Clare's *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827) 'recreates georgic's distinctive temporal perspective of an ongoing present, shaped by the past and shaping the future, which is both reassuringly repetitive and pleasingly variable', Somervell writes, the collection, like 'The Village Minstrel', also 'punctuate[s] this sense of ongoing cyclical time with a complaint interlude, which raises the unsettling possibility that everything the poem describes belongs not to the present but to a lost past' ('Georgic', 189).

[5] Anne-Lise François, 'Passing Impasse', *Comparative Literature*, 72/2 (2020), 250, 246, 247. See also Carolyn Lesjak, who writes that 'enclosure defies our commonsense understandings of a historical event as discrete, locatable, and temporally bounded' because we lack a clear point of origin or termination, as well as a clear narrative sense of enclosure's social effects, making it an especially challenging story to tell (*Afterlife*, 7 and *passim*).

in which this fractured inheritance comes home to roost. In his churchyard poems this landscape is agonized in a specific sense, imbricated in his new reality: maintaining their hold on the lives of those left behind, these poems nonetheless confront the hard fact that historical change has suspended once-reliable continuities. The time signature of these poems is therefore increasingly unmoored as they strive to come to terms with a terminal landscape that refuses endings, making the churchyard a resting place without closure. Dealing with the feelings such a state of things provokes, Clare's churchyard poems express an equally charged affect to Blair's anxiety, Leapor's grief, Yearsley's anguish, and Smith's rage, but one again differently disposed to its difficult material in a feeling of injured confusion.

The bewilderment of Clare's 'Village Minstrel' is a torn affect, pulled between a past that cannot be recovered and a future that cannot be imagined; the present moment is experienced as a tearing of the fabric of life before the rupture, and it generates in its poetics what Anahid Nersessian identifies as the hard work of negation:

> A negation—an annulment of the possibility of forgiving anything about the reality we are forced to endure—is meant to linger and deepen. There is no solution to it: it is not a conundrum but the signature of a crisis. Its job is to make crisis available, if only partially, to sensation and thought.[6]

Positioning John Keats's 'To Autumn' against its immediate political context in the wake of the Peterloo Massacre in 1819, Nersessian identifies the poem's temporal holding pattern as a 'downtime of insurrection . . . nonetheless replete with effort, much of it painful', as disclosed in the 'massive and relentless' mechanics of its images of agricultural labour in which Autumn is personified 'on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep', 'Or by a cyder-press, with patient look, | Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours'.[7] Where Keats's negations keep history's tragic determinants off-stage (though lurking in the wings), Clare brings them front of house under glaring lights; nevertheless, the totality of history's deranging force, though palpable in its affective impressions, is ultimately inconceivable. The unresolved perplexity of Clare's churchyard poems wrestles with a social violence so overmastering as to be earth-shifting (appropriately enough, with all the earth improvement had to shift), as the poet turns to face the problem of living on when

[6] Nersessian, *Keats's Odes*, 120.

[7] Nersessian, *Keats's Odes*, 124; John Keats, 'To Autumn', in Elizabeth Cook (ed.), *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ll. 16, 21–2.

the world has tipped and his sense of it has fallen off the edge. Clare's negations amount, then, not to a refusal to include or engage with historical tragedy, but an inability to countenance it. It is hard to define more clearly this peculiar sense of history, since of its nature it resists a clear accounting of events and their consequences.[8] What I mean is that Clare's expression of the pressures of historical experience is never resigned but nor can it be revolutionary, since the changes wrought by enclosure's unfolding—a ceaseless unravelling rather than a discrete event, making protest that much harder to initiate—are not fixed quantities but accumulated harms; Clare cannot countenance history, cannot accept or endure it, because its impressions are so painful and so bewilderingly manifold. What he knows, and what his churchyard poems describe, is that things are forever changed, that familiar continuities from past to present are attenuated if not annihilated, and that the future is a startling blank in the wake of the destruction of a way of life no longer possible. If this sounds like the problem Wordsworth faces (as I previewed in my Introduction and will discuss in my Postscript), it is: both poets lived through and responded to industrial capital and were especially sensitive to its disorienting effects on the landscapes they loved. Yet, as Clare's experience of such landscapes was felt the nearer because of the pressure points of his labour there, so too his poetic methods for managing the hurt of history are less oriented around the distancing tactics that can look, in other poets, like displacement, denial, or obscurity. In Clare's churchyard poems, the wound is surface level.

Documenting this injured sense of time 'The Village Minstrel' abides in the lull of enclosure's aftermath, which is also an anxious anticipation of 'what next', braced for further damage down the line. But, for Clare, 'the interim between riot and revolution' occupied by Keats cannot quite slide into the responsive, revolutionary phase, since the only response available seems to be a baffled mourning—unless by revolution we mean another turning of the earth, another seasonal round, of work and rest and time for poetry, as Clare's avatar in the poem, the rural poet Lubin, edges closer to the grave.[9] These turns might be quietly revolutionary, juxtaposing the

[8] Clare's traumatized perception of history is thus related to what Nersessian elsewhere calls the '*nescience*, or unknowing' generated by the transition to capitalism, when 'what is felt, what is known, and what is actually true [is] gone irretrievably to pieces' (*Calamity*, 3). On my reading, though, Clare's articulation of his experience of the industrial era is more local in the double sense of written with particularity into a personal landscape and felt in relation to a life of labour there; Clare's churchyard poems register the impacts of history in a delimited site in which its harms are horrifyingly accrued and intimately suffered.

[9] Nersessian, *Keats's Odes*, 124.

'rhythmically predictable and newly imagined turns in the wheel of the year' common to georgic poetry and the 'labours' of Christian iconography, both meeting the challenge of the hard life of work and finding new ways to turn it into something else.[10] Poetry may neither alter nor redeem a present felt as sustained suffering, but it can transmute the experience of harm into a kind of testimony. Clare's readers know from his enclosure poems that he does more than many of his contemporaries to connect effect (suffering) to cause (capital), poetry to protest, in a committed documentary engagement with historical experience. Yet Clare's churchyard poems reveal how often a poetics of hard witnessing is fragile in its composition (as well as its potential efficacy), pressured into moments when work is adjourned in carefully poised interludes that are generically coded, as georgic's repetitive round of labour is leavened by pastoral's pause for breath. These moments of chance amid rhythms of change are fugitive, making their revolutions a form of turning to the future not as a new opportunity but as a break with all that had come before—a splintering of temporal experience that Clare renders as elegy. It is not only that the future is dreaded from the insecure vantage of a traumatized present that remembers (or perhaps manufactures) a kinder past. Like the other churchyard poets in this book, Clare teeters on the edge of history as a duration of damage; he uses the churchyard to expose history's deeply gouged 'signature of crisis', made 'available to sensation and thought' in his churchyard poems yet disarranging history's temporal coordinates so that what might come next, once crisis has quietened down or bedded in, is a dimly perceived and disturbing unknown.[11] The churchyard is among the most appropriate landscapes for these edgy speculations, as 'The Village Minstrel' demonstrates, because its seemingly fixed position at the haven-like hub of a turning wheel opposes the surrounding world of time and change with a past that can no longer be recovered. Clare reveals, perhaps more directly than any other churchyard poet, that the prospect of peace the churchyard appears to offer is both elusive and illusory—far away and, his poems grimly suppose, maybe never to be had.

Recent work on time in eighteenth-century poetry locates the interlocking temporal-poetic movement of Clare's churchyard poems, combining past and future in the present work, as a preoccupation for writers of the period. Concerned with the acceleration of natural time in clocks and calendars

[10] Alexandra Harris, 'Turning, Flying: The Rural Year', in Bullard (ed.), *A History of English Georgic Writing*, 58.

[11] Nersessian, *Keats's Odes*, 120.

prescribing working hours and weeks in emerging industrial systems, and finding a slower release or expanded chronological frame in the deferred activity of evening, in buried artefacts, and in ruins reclaimed by a patient nature, poets chart dialectical scales of time in their verse—of progress and decline, rise and fall, where the relative value of each shift or turn is open to debate.[12] As Jonathan Sachs observes, '[d]ecline too can be productive of new future possibilities' and 'new sources of value' if understood as 'generative and not disabling'. Variously taking up this view, Romantic poets play with the parameters of time through a variation on its progress that Sachs calls 'slow time': 'a way of experiencing time that while not necessarily stable at least offers a more secure basis of thought and new possibilities for how to live within accelerated time', partly through the mechanisms of poetry itself. Against pressurized commercial time, the writing and reading of poetry presents an alternative pace, keyed less to event than to 'a particular mode of attentiveness'. 'Representations of slow time in poetry, in other words, create new forms of literary experience by deploying a particular temporal framework to generate modes of attentiveness and habits of reading' adjusted to 'a form of elemental life that preceded the letter' and that is enacted in poetry's rhythmic effects.[13]

In 'The Village Minstrel' Clare disrupts any straightforward opposition between coercive forms of industrial time and the 'elemental' or natural time of poetry. Time *for* poetry, for the likes of Lubin, is stolen in the shadow of working time, making its aesthetic labour a precious and pressurized activity, picked up in all too narrow margins of rest. While the poet's childhood memories might seem to stretch out across the text in a fairly indolent posture, they are savoured fleetingly among the fractured repercussions of the poem's current moment, the puncturing intensity of which continues to ripple out in a cascade of restive adjustments. In making this argument that capitalist time's painful rendering of working life is crucial to Clare's

[12] See Michael Carter, Peter N. Lindfield, and Dale Townshend (eds), *Writing Britain's Ruins* (London: British Library, 2017); Rosemary Hill, *Time's Witness: History in the Age of Romanticism* (London: Allen Lane, 2021); Crystal B. Lake, *Artifacts: How We Think and Write about Found Objects* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020); Christopher R. Miller, *The Invention of Evening: Perception and Time in Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[13] Jonathan Sachs, *The Poetics of Decline in British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 5–9. See also Christina Lupton, *Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018); Jesse Molesworth (ed.), 'The Temporal Turn in Eighteenth-Century Studies', *The Eighteenth Century*, 60/2 (2019), 129–221; David Sigler, *Fracture Feminism: The Politics of Impossible Time in British Romanticism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2021).

churchyard poems I am also staking a claim about space: these are landscape poems of a certain stamp, and their imagining of time—unfolding in its cyclical round as the seasons renew and work begins again each day, only to be knocked out of joint by new regimes of labour—are felt in the precincts of a defined location. The churchyard is one of the era's chronotopes in this sense, since the time of work, poetry, and life itself end here; yet, as I have suggested, the churchyard for Clare is never a site of complete closure. Instead, this landscape's condensation of former times, in buried ancestors and recoverable memories, unwinds with the disruptive force of present change. If formerly the churchyard dead had seemed to mark a continuity of experience, comprising a reliable archive of rural life, Clare shows us how lines of connectivity from past to present can buckle and break, making churchyard poetry a mode in which historical rupture can be confronted though not consoled. The dead remain present and familiar but irremediably dislocated from a world in which everything else has changed. If the churchyard can be imagined as a still point in a turning world, its stability merely illuminates with ironizing clarity the flux of present crisis.

The churchyard takes on these particular proportions as it is visited in two, bookend episodes of 'The Village Minstrel', encompassing the past of childhood remembrance with the present of shattered memory. 'The Village Minstrel' can contain these uneasily juxtaposed units of time in part because it takes a form known today as the long poem, and which seemed in the long eighteenth century specially engineered to deal with concerns of time and change. Tess Somervell defines the form in its traditional sense as a poem covering the span of a book, 'with lines running to the thousands, rather than the hundreds', as for instance in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1726–46), Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–6), William Cowper's *The Task* (1785), and William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805; 1850) and *The Excursion* (1814).[14] This longitudinal sense of the long poem clearly would not include Clare's 'Village Minstrel', which runs to 1,326 lines and gives its title to a book containing other poems. However, Somervell's understanding of the long poem as 'a medium in which to shape and reshape time' often rendered spatial through figures of landscape, and her emphasis on the long poem's capacity to combine genres such as georgic, prospect, and philosophical poetry, help me draw attention to Clare's management of time, change, and the representational task of genre in his work.[15] In the baggy compass of the long poem Clare can situate

[14] Somervell, *Reading Time*, 2.
[15] Somervell, *Reading Time*, 2.

georgic repetition, pastoral pause, and elegiac aftermath as frequencies of time's affective tones given some generic arrangement as they collide in the twisting history of landscape documented in his poetry. While it may be a long poem compressed into a little over a thousand lines, as its geography is confined to a particular place, 'The Village Minstrel' deals with the materials of history (rural, industrial, and literary) through this form's porosity—its capaciousness and its vulnerability to fragmentation and instability.[16]

Earlier studies of the long poem have recognized contradiction and coherence as central problems with the form-as-amalgam—as what Richard Terry calls the long poem's 'orchestrations of fragments',[17] and what John Barrell and Harriet Guest identify as its joined-up but not consistent topics:

> A criticism that legitimates the employment of a variety of discourses within a poem is one that legitimates a new notion of what makes a work coherent. It does not demand that a poem of mixed genre should be, as a whole, *consistent*; it demands that each topic, as it is elaborated, should exhibit a discursive unity, and that the separate topics should *cohere*, should be glued together in such a way that we can see the join, but are not offended by its abruptness.[18]

For these critics, the long poem's extent and multiplicity of disparate parts pulled into relation are not an accidental fault but a formal tactic. As the world changed into its recognizably modern shape poems also changed, responsive to 'a pervasive sense that some of the older genres, epic and pastoral in particular, were incapable of representing the nature of the modern world, the diversity . . . of modern European society',[19] which required a form like the eighteenth-century long poem to function flexibly, as a precarious structure 'constantly involved in puzzling over its amphibian status as both a congeries of parts and a constructed integrity'.[20] While long poems yoke together aesthetic parts, perceptual experiences, geographical locations, and global populations in their abundant range, 'their very extensiveness and mobility make them vulnerable', so that the long poem becomes 'a perilous

[16] See Somervell, *Reading Time*, 154. The long poem thus exemplifies what Wordsworth called poetry's 'composite order' in texts that, Stuart Curran writes, 'seemed to escape normal generic classification' yet retained 'generic signals' to point readers towards conventional threads in their braided mixture (*Poetic Form*, 181).

[17] Richard Terry, 'Transitions and Digressions in the Eighteenth-Century Long Poem', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 32/3 (1992), 496.

[18] Barrell and Guest, 'Contradiction', 136.

[19] Barrell and Guest, 'Contradiction', 132.

[20] Terry, 'Transitions', 498.

landscape through which both writer and reader wander, seeking moments of vision and sympathy, but in constant danger of becoming lost'.[21] These challenges of the long poem align with what Hugh Blair, in the epigraph above, identifies as the hard work of maintaining the 'propriety' of an epic poem across its long hike. This is not to say, of course, that 'The Village Minstrel' is in any traditional sense an epic—the genre Blair defines as 'the recital of some illustrious enterprise in a Poetical Form'; Clare's poem does, though, appropriate the durational qualities of epic for a humble subject that can, like Blair's epic but with a pointed inflection, be called 'the highest strain of Poetry'.[22] In this sense duration is not the only connection between classical epic (which Blair nonetheless tracks in *Paradise Lost* and the Ossian poems of the 1760s) and the long poem, since 'The Village Minstrel' is quietly heroic in its wrangling with hard work made unheroically quotidian—everyday and humiliated—by capital.[23]

In its own way, then, Clare's 'Village Minstrel' confronts danger and difficulty, connecting it to historical change carved into the landscape during the eighteenth century's press towards improvement through enclosure. Ambiently palpable, these pressures emerge at their most affectively freighted in the poem's churchyard scenes, where those already lost become doubly so: the dead, were they to wake again, would 'little think as such your natal scene', 'All ploughd & buried now as tho there nought had been'.[24] The slippage from the 'natal' then to the 'buried now' tracks from birth to death but

[21] Horrocks, *Women Wanderers*, 49, 65.

[22] Blair, 'Epic Poetry', 360. For instance, Blair insists on the aesthetic and affective management of the epic (or long) poem, since 'the chief circumstance which renders an Epic Poem interesting . . . is the skilful conduct of the Author in the management of his subject. He must so contrive his plan, as that it shall comprehend many affecting incidents. . . . He may sometimes be awful and august; he must often be tender and pathetic; he must give us gentle and pleasing scenes of love, friendship, and affection. The more an Epic Poem abounds with situations which awaken the feelings of humanity, the more interesting it is; and these form, always, the favourite passages of the work.' Part of this management involves leavening 'unity' with episodic variety and character speech, by which the poet gains 'the greater liberty of spreading out such parts of the subject as he is inclined to dwell upon in person, and of comprehending the rest within a short recital'. Which is to say, these are among the methods by which the epic poet can interrupt the long poem's temporal unspooling: 'With regard to the time or duration of the Epic Action, no precise boundaries can be ascertained. A considerable extent is always allowed to it, as it does not necessarily depend on those violent passions which can be supposed to have only a short continuance' ('Epic Poetry', 369–70, 377, 371).

[23] By contrast, Clare's long poem cannot be, or declines to be, 'calm' in the sense of Blair's epic because it is not distant from history, either in its everydayness or in its experience of history as pain 'prolonged' ('Epic Poetry', 363).

[24] John Clare, 'The Village Minstrel', in Eric Robinson, David Powell, and Margaret Grainger (eds), *The Early Poems of John Clare 1804–1822*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), ii. ll. 1242, 1245, hereafter cited parenthetically.

also marks a rift between the familiarity of a particular history of a place and a present in which familiarity has all but disappeared. The churchyard thus connects two halves of a poem that seem affectively dichotomous—happy in the past and anguished in the present—so that the early retrospect anticipates, becomes continuous with, and is compelled hopelessly into compensating for a later tragedy that arrives less as a punctual event than as the high, breaking point of long decline.

In the churchyard's compression or collapse of time the life that was remains available, but not to recovery; rather, the labourer-poet Lubin haunts the churchyard as a site where loss is physically manifested in the remains of the local dead, displaced by the disorienting force of history as it disarranges their 'natal scene'. While it occurs only twice in 'The Village Minstrel', then, the churchyard is a cathected landscape that troubles the poem's rhythms of time with repeated acts of memory, as the poem's capacity to recall the past is made both more urgent and more difficult. If, in the first scene, the poet fondly remembers, in the second neither narrative retrospect nor the shared past it takes up is available. Clare's rendering of fissured time disorients his long poem's coherence, as Lubin is cast adrift in a landscape stripped of its orienting marks and made a field of negation. The mixed genres of 'The Village Minstrel', like the bookends of its churchyard scenes, strive to put some shape on this bewildering change; yet these technologies of representation also refuse to braid together, as the oscillation of georgic graft and pastoral play is turned upside down by elegy's agonized complaint that time for work and time for poetry have become irresolvably confused, since the familiar movement of time itself has gone off the rails. Other writers of long poems could make a virtue of incoherence through patterns of consistency, according to Barrell and Guest. Clare's episodic development not only refuses to line up because the trajectories they describe are alarmingly set loose; when pasts dissolve into unreachability and futures trail away as hopeless prospects, the present emerges as a terrible tangle.

Before I get to the poem itself, I want briefly to suggest how this chapter also thinks about time in a poetic sense, since Clare's are the latest churchyard poems of the book and cap off the counter-tradition it has been charting. Clare in a sense, then, inherits the churchyard topos—a physical place and a poetic legacy, of time marked in landscape and carried in poetry—from the likes of Blair, Gray, and Wordsworth but also Leapor, Yearsley, and Smith. In this way, too, the churchyard is a site in which Clare's concerns with time take on additional burdens of meaning, connecting his poetry to a place about which poetry had long been written

in ways that his own writing both continues and contests. Such a layered poetics of place has been a consistent thread in Clare studies since John Barrell's field-defining work on Clare's occupation of a strained landscape, physically altered beyond recognition in his lifetime and described according to eighteenth-century conventions—ideas of landscape based in an abstracted ideology of ownership and control, as in the prospect tradition—that his sensuous particularity works to overturn. According to Barrell, Clare departs from the poetic postures of his predecessors, describing his local landscape 'as a manifold of particular impressions, in a language which is his own and Helpston's'; in doing so, he reconfigures old ideas of containment and control through an 'open-field' sense of place, which also, and more urgently, challenges the ongoing segmentation of the land through enclosure.[25]

More recently, other readers have complicated Clare's relationship with an eighteenth-century poetics of place: learning from, even as it pushes against, James Thomson, Oliver Goldsmith, James Beattie, and Thomas Gray, Clare's poetic labour is metapoetic in its self-awareness about the allusive stratigraphy of place in his poems.[26] The residual signature of Gray's *Elegy*, resurfacing across Clare's work, locates these negotiations with tradition in the churchyard. Reading the *Elegy* as a poem about enclosure, labour, and literacy, with its weary ploughman and unlettered epitaphs, R. J. Ellis, for instance, sees in Clare the possible fulfilment of Gray's turn to the unidentified 'thee' in the poem: a labouring-class poet who combines in one person the *Elegy*'s divided interests: its pastoral abstractions and its intrusions of real life.[27] John Goodridge reads Clare's use of 'the *Elegy* as a site for poetic speculation about what was for him a vital question: what is the fate of the working-class poet, the "peasant" poet?'[28] And Mina Gorji observes Clare 'calling up and revising his own image as an obscure and artless peasant poet' in a career whose intertextual tapestry amounts to a self-reflexive positioning as both the potential subject and the writer of a work like the *Elegy*.[29]

[25] Barrell, *Idea*, 161, 96.

[26] See John Goodridge and Kelsey Thornton, 'John Clare: The Trespasser', and James McKusick, 'Beyond the Visionary Company: John Clare's Resistance to Romanticism', in Haughton, Phillips, and Summerfield (eds), *John Clare in Context*, 87–129; 221–37; Adam Rounce, 'John Clare, William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century', in Kövesi and McEathron (eds), *New Essays on John Clare*, 38–56.

[27] Ellis, 'Plodding Plowmen', 27–43.

[28] Goodridge, *John Clare*, 48–9.

[29] Gorji, *John Clare*, 32. See also Zimmerman, *Romanticism*, 154–5.

The churchyard, in its poetic as well as its social legacy, is thus a landscape in which Clare takes up 'the labour involved in breaking up earth or making up poetry'—both activities that bring up bones, fragments, and poetic voices from the buried past.[30] 'Perhaps these mangled bones | When they was blest with life tho long ago | Hath trac'd sweet musick thro her highest tones', Clare writes in a starkly corporealized reimagining of Gray's elegiac vision of the lives of the 'rude forefathers' buried in the churchyard.[31] In these lines, and across his churchyard poems, Clare's sense of the quickening force of the churchyard earth is disinterred through a labour at once intensely physical—unlike Gray, Clare shows us the bones 'mangled' beneath the surface—and poetic: like Gray, Clare discerns the possibility and mourns the loss of a poetic talent (the 'mute inglorious Milton' of Gray's *Elegy*, l. 59) buried in obscurity and now lost in death. In the reading that follows, I focus on 'The Village Minstrel' as the most extended treatment of these themes in Clare's churchyard poetry. Across the arc of this long poem, charting the historical development of a poet and a place, the churchyard recurs as a pressure point punctuating both the onward rush and the seasonal round of time. Labour ends in the grave but it also thickens there, as difficult structures of feeling remain potent for those, like Lubin, living on and labouring still against a time whose demands on the labouring body press all the harder.

'neath the churchyard grass': 'The Village Minstrel'

'The Village Minstrel' begins self-conscious of the stakes for class and labour in poetry as a type of work uneasily and unequally performed alongside other, more demanding exactions of effort. Its opening lines contrast an elevated poetry of 'learned genius', liberated to snatch sun beams 'to light the muses fires', and the 'lowly dreams' hummed by the 'humble rustic' 'Far in the swail where poverty retires' (ll. 1–4). The adjectives 'lowly' and 'humble' (abbreviated in the rustic's 'hum') place the poet's music close to the soil; yet this placed poetics—associated with craft (humming as made music, performed by the body) as opposed to inspiration's airy flights—'sings what nature & what truth inspires | The charms that rise from rural scenery'

[30] Paul Chirico, '"Like Clover through Lime": Rural Ruins and the Language of the Past', in Goodridge and Kövesi (eds), *John Clare: New Approaches*, 93.

[31] John Clare, 'Lines Written While Viewing Some Remains of an Human Body in Lolham Lane', in *The Early Poems*, i. ll. 6–8. See Goodridge, *John Clare*, 57.

(ll. 5–6). These lines spotlight the poem's early optimism about the possible combination of work on the land and its poetry, since Clare prizes the modest music of a particular place, set at variance with and at a distance 'from what the learneds toils requite' (l. 10). However seemingly 'artless' or 'unambitious' this verse (ll. 9, 11)—like the things of nature it celebrates—it is nonetheless a finely wrought poem, deliberately worked and elaborately ornamented in the intricate rhyme scheme and metre of its Spenserian stanzas (which also shape Beattie's *The Minstrel* (1771)—an affinity with which Clare signals in his poem's title). Carried in its form, the work of the poet is also the poem's theme: if it wanders far from 'the learneds toils', it carries out a different kind of labour as it describes and enacts Lubin's work as a labourer-poet-in-place, 'Where toil & slavery bears each fancy down | That feign woud soar & sing' (ll. 16–17). As these lines indicate, though, Lubin's vocational identities are more conflicted than continuous, since however hopeful he might be about their coexistence, his poetic work is set against (as backdrop and as protest) a scene of labour inimical to poetry: 'Where toil & slavery bears each fancy down'. The rest of the poem charts this antagonism across Lubin's life, describing in its early part a youthful enthusiasm that comes to seem more an apprehensive compromise once it reaches crisis point with the onset of enclosure, when constrained but familiar patterns of work and rest, labour and poetry, are disarticulated and the place in which they once took shape is violently disarranged.

Labour is always a constant, and then an exponential, demand on Lubin. He is 'a peasant from his birth | His sire a hind born to the frail & plough' (ll. 28–9); like his ancestors he follows 'The coarsest chance which natures laws alow | To earn his living by a sweating brow' (ll. 31–2), and his own

> early days did rugged roll
> & mixt in timley toil—but een as now
> Ambitions prospects fird his little soul
> & fancy soard & sung bove povertys controul (ll. 33–6)

From 'early days' to 'Ambitions prospects', crossing the enjambed line at 'now', the poem charts a development over time as a movement across a place never left behind. In this poetic prehistory, Clare combines the artistic registers earlier distinguished: for Lubin as labourer-poet, inspiration and *technē* coalesce in the earthly cycles of the georgic landscape in which both physical work and poetic pleasure are located. Described in this mixed mode, his labour does not produce a straightforward telos from poverty to

success, nor does it function in a metaphorical trajectory from lowly earth to soaring flight. Lubin's fancy, fired by 'native scenes', 'So sweet to view so temptingly to sing', 'limps her lowly flight | Groups thro obscuritys dark vale & struggles for the light' (ll. 22, 23, 26–7). This is a hesitant and inhibited elevation in a middle range of air, one generatively bound to a place known and loved in which evanescent compensations—'little hopes break his oblivions night' (l. 12)—can be found, but one also beleaguered by earthly attachments restraining a loftier ambit. Fluctuating between these terms of hard craft and airy imagination, 'The Village Minstrel' narrates Lubin's poetic apprenticeship as a form of work tied to his agricultural community, to which his own labour contributes yet from which he can detach in moments of grace—a fleeting ease made uneasy by its constant regulation.

The poem charts Lubin's halting and compromised vocational progression, like Leapor's 'Colinetta' and Yearsley's 'Clifton Hill', by attending to the passing seasons as a measure of artistic growth over time and in a particular place:

> Twas thus his fond enquirey usd to trace
> Thro natures secrets wi unwear[i]ed eye
> & watch the shifting seasons changing grace
> Springs first wild flower & summers painted sky
> The inscet creeping & the birds that flye
> The autumns dying breeze the winter wind
> That bellowd round his hut most mournfully
> & as his years increasd his taste refind
> & fancy wi new charms enlightnd up his mind (ll. 645–53)

Rooted here and participating in its annual round, Lubin's song forms a dominant note within a chorus of other sounds, including both natural and human music, which run through the poem as interleaved registers of and figures for a poetics of the local. For instance, Lubin learns through mimicking birdsong: 'while the thrush sung her long silencd strain | He thought it sweet & mockt it oer again' (ll. 158–9). Like Leapor's Colinetta, he also positions his poetry alongside the 'haunted tales which village legends fill', local gossip, and fireside songs which cheer winter's 'long dark night' and in which 'rural manners will survive' (ll. 82, 76, 120; see especially ll. 385–429). Each species of music alike resounds in the landscape, 'As nature seemly sung his mutterings usd repeat', and 'the rural muse' 'warmd his artless soul wi' feelings strong | To teach his reed to warble forth a song' (ll. 172, 236,

239–40). Yet the harmony of these lines, warm and free as they seem, is less celebratory than it appears, principally because those past participles accumulate a shadowy scene where what was loved is gone—a song 'long silencd'—and what 'will survive' is more a fragile hope than the certainty of long and still-uninterrupted inheritance.

Customs and beliefs, sonically expressed and culturally circulated, might inhere in the rural landscape that enfolds the working life from which such pastimes provide some temporary relief. But these are 'haunted tales' in more ways than one, since old legends become the etiolated substance of forms of living available only in spectral memory.[32] At this early point in the poem's ghost-ridden retrospect, the churchyard occupies a 'wild retreat' in which local legends take frightening form:

> He had his dreads & fears & scarce coud pass
> A church yards dreary mounds at silent night
> But footsteps trampld thro the rustling grass
> & ghosts hind grave stones 'peard in sheets of white
> Dread monsters fancy moulded on his sight
> Soft woud he step lest they his tread shoud hear
> & crept & crept till past his wild afright
> Then on winds wings woud rally as it where
> So swift the wild retreat of childhoods fancyd fear
> (ll. 127–35)

Strongly reminiscent of the schoolboy episode in Blair's *The Grave*, this stanza layers superstition and sensuous detail as footsteps in grass combine with ghostly visions half-seen behind the churchyard monuments. In the line 'Dread monsters fancy moulded on his sight' Clare combines perceptual and imaginative response; and he further implicates the body in Lubin's varying pace, measured line by line, from a soft step to a creep to a rallying run, as the stanza weaves through the churchyard. Densely occupied at the level of the receptive body, this place also braids times from childhood fear to future death and burial, traversing the now of the poem, which is stretched across discrete instances by the repeated, temporally promiscuous verb 'wou[l]d' to intimate a habitual crossing of this familiar ground. The

[32] They are also tales of instruction amounting to a form of surveillance, since the elves and sprites 'rewarded industry' and made 'ancient dames' sweat with domestic work: 'they but every night the hearthstone cleard | & gen their visits all things neat prepard | As fays nought more then cleanliness regard' (ll. 107, 109, 111–13).

churchyard is one source of Lubin's own tellings, contributing to the cultural chorus of songs and tales—'From gossips wisdom much he gleand & knew | Who told him haunts for ghosts as well as fays' (ll. 480–1)—since 'when fear left him on his corner seat | Much woud he chatter oer each dreadful tale' (ll. 136–7). As much as Lubin is a poet of nature in the broadest sense, as often as he wends his way to unfrequented places, his earthly song returns to ground in sites like the churchyard, with their stores and stories of history. Anticipating the poem's later return to this particular landscape, it is here that the playfully haunting tones of earlier times will take on a new, eerie, and anguished quality, when all that can be retrieved of ages past are the battered fragments left to a present broken from links to past or future.

Here and throughout 'The Village Minstrel' it is Lubin's poetically alert consciousness, as well as his working body, that dwells in a place whose changes he feels early and deep:

> With contemplations stores his mind to fill
> O doubly happy woud he roam as then
> As the blue eve crept deeper round the hill
> While the coy rabbit venturd from his den
> & weary labour sought its rest agen
> Lone wanderings led him haply by the stream
> Where unperceivd he joyd his hours at will
> Musing the cricket twittering oer its dream
> Or watching oer the brook the moon lights da[n]cing beam
> (ll. 227–35)

Roaming and thinking with a sympathetic animal (and animate) nature, Lubin contemplates—an embodied-cognitive act comprising both watching and wondering. This layered attentiveness to landscape, though, much as it has stood for the Romantic poet's consolatory turn from industrial capital in cities and across seas, also marks a double vulnerability to the spatial renderings of capital's social injuries. Sharply conscious of the movements of time—hours available to joy in 'the blue eve'—this passage occupies a repeated past tense, as work and rest alternate and activities recur into the present: 'would', 'As', and 'while' push the 'then' of 'crept', 'venturd', 'sought', and 'joyd' into the now of 'Musing . . . | Or watching'. Yet the apparently smooth succession of temporal attitudes in sequential verb tenses is already beginning to fray. Crucially, as this stanza narrates, Lubin performs his careful acts of attention on release from labour, but watchfully, vulnerable as the

'coy rabbit', as his wanderings are 'unperceivd' for 'hours' only, when 'weary labour sought its rest agen'. Closely guarded, this is a form of active rest, one that works through and produces the poem, and one that indexes both necessary relief from labour's demands and their inevitable resurgence at any moment.[33]

To situate these delicate rhythms generically, the burdens of georgic repetition within cycles of nature and work put pressure on pastoral's suspended time, in which Lubin is attuned to natural phenomena in all their alternative life—rather than, or anxiously alongside, their status as the stuff of work and profit. As a child he is taken from school and put to work, yet 'When struggling efforts warmd him up the while | To keep the little toil coud not destroy | & oft wi books spare hours he woud beguile' (ll. 381–3). Lubin's stolen time for reading, as for wandering and watching the natural world, is a fate widespread, since he recalls

> when old women overpowrd by heat
> Tuckt up their tails & sickend at the toil
> Seeking beneath the thorn the mole hill seat
> To tell their tales & catch their breath awhile
> Their gabbling talk did lubins cares beguile (ll. 519–23)

The necessity of stories to fill the downtime between rounds of work too quickly taken up again depletes their status as leisurely, beguiling practices of memory, since their distinction from labour is hard to sustain when labour's demands bleed into every activity. Hardly an unalloyed pleasure, storytelling—a crucial source for Lubin's poetry—is pressurized as a fugitive (taken up just while the women 'catch their breath') and overdetermined mediation of toil that sickens and overpowers. As in earlier lines, he remembers

> As how in rural charms he did delight
> To mark the shepherds folds & swains at plough
> & pasture speckt wi sheep & horse & cow
> & many a beauty that does intervene
> The steeple peeping oer the woods dark brow
> While many a young hope popt its smile between
> & wishd mans days to spend in some such peaceful scene
> (ll. 66–72)

[33] See Bridget Keegan, 'The Poet as Laborer', in Lynch (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry 1660–1800*, 163–4.

While 'the beauty that does intervene' refers to picturesque interruptions in the visual topography, it also draws attention to beauty's necessary and all too brief intervention in supervening work. In the stanza's closing lines, this transient distance from work is retrospective, looking back on childhood scenes, but also provisional—a reprieve from labour in which Lubin is temporarily freed to watch the ongoing work of others. The future-looking wish that peace might be sustained, then, intervenes in a double sense: a hope stretched 'between' present and future but also squeezed by the labour repeatedly recessed and renewed. The poem's governing past tense here differently shades former delight and future hope, turning from fond memories to dim recollections of what might have been. The past offers not just an archive of familiar history but, as in the first churchyard scene, a time lost, including (by the end of the poem and the second churchyard visit) to any redemptive efforts.

The reason for this fracturing from an available past is the violently disordered affective relationship to a landscape dominated by painful scenes of difficult work. Attentive as he is, trained in songs that record a shared history, Lubin's poetics is 'oft bitterd wi the ways of woe' and forged 'From pain & toil & poverty that flow | So copiously in lifes low humble sphere' (ll. 287, 290–1); far from a song of false sympathy, 'Staining his ryhmes wi tears he never shed', Lubin's is formed from bitter experience, '& as his tears & sighs did erst complain | His numbers took it up & wept it oer again' (ll. 352, 356–7). Made of the materials of a life lived under cruel regimes of work ever more exigent, 'The Village Minstrel' measures in its momentum the rise and fall described in its first lines, when poetic flights were made the more necessary and manically exultant by the dragging at their heels to 'Where toil & slavery bears each fancy down'. The poem, confined to its 'low humble sphere', seems tilted in a perpetual downturn and lands hard to an earth whose redemptive qualities are about to be torn away. At this point in the poem it becomes clear that Lubin's past is always a 'before'—before enclosure, before calamity—and his memorialization is consequently a deeply unsettled history. In its recurrence at the poles of the poem, the churchyard amplifies the feelings associated with this fall into history, which is not the conventional collapse into shared mortality but a grinding-down in 'pain & toil & poverty'.

Formally rendering this decline, two of the interpolated poems in 'The Village Minstrel'—'Lubins Song 28' (ll. 245–85) and 'Lubins sigh For the pauper' (ll. 295–339)—show Lubin honing his craft in skilled experiments (varying the Spenserian stanza with alternate measures) organized as

expressions of and about work. Set in a chiming environment of tolling bells, lowing cows, bleating sheep, and singing milkmaids, Lubin's 'ryhmes' mark 'How musical betimes | From mowers wetting sycthe in meadow ground | Came murmring oer the ear a sharp shill tinkling sound' (ll. 261, 262–4). Disclosing the dark side of the music of this working landscape—if he joys in 'the scene neath its dew drop[p]ing eye' he is able to do so on temporary release, since 'the cock labours slumbers unseald | & hastnd her tenants to toil in the field' (ll. 249, 251–2)—'Lubins sigh' follows the reported speech of a pauper who tells a story of the poverty attendant on the life of the labouring poor. In the lines remembering 'When I coud boast of strength to mow & reap' and lamenting 'but what is past is past | Twas mine of woe instead of joy to reap', the pauper's pun on 'reap' bridges the hard fate of a life of labour paced out in repeated acts that wear away his working body, his 'tottering limbs by age & toil brought down' (ll. 314, 318–19, 336). This is also Lubin's world of work, his past and his future, and it envelops his poetry: 'When he a thresher wi his seive has been | When he a ploughboy in the fields did maul | & drudgd wi toil thro a'most every scene' (ll. 359–61). Collapsing the distance between poetic and agricultural labour, Lubin's song combines daily work—'Ploughmen & threshers whose discourses led | To nothing more then labours rude employs' (ll. 390–1)—and the requisite distractions afforded by fairy tales, children's stories, and local lore. Both discourses are marked by time ('years rolld round him' (l. 576)), operating on a calendar whose diurnal and seasonal progress is charted through oral tradition: 'goodys strain' is 'told from morn till night' and 'at days return resumd again', '& so the story runs its round both morning noon & night' (ll. 547, 548, 550, 402). Likewise, at harvest time, 'The swains & maids wi fork & rake attend | & how the childern on the load delight | Wi shouts of harvest home their throats to rend' (ll. 568–70), and

> As rests warm rapture rousd the rustics lay
> The thread bare ballad from each quavering tongue
> As 'peggy bond' or the 'sweet month of may'
> As how he joyd to hear each 'good old song'
> That on nights pausing ear did echo loud & strong (ll. 559–63)

As work songs, though, these repeated refrains carried on the 'quavering tongue' and 'rend[ing]' the throat yoke together work and poetry in a far from peaceful coexistence, transfiguring what seemed like the enthusiasm of

collective participation into the inexorable regularity of physical hardship—'from morn till night'—by which bodies and songs, including poetry, become 'thread bare'. Clare thus fully works the pun on 'strain' and makes the most of the juxtaposition between these scenes of labour—marking over 'the long day how labour wore away' (l. 265)—and where they end up in 'Lubins sigh For the pauper': 'by age & toil brought down'.

It is important, then, to recognize that while Lubin's attentiveness—'Joying to listen' (l. 558)—facilitates his lifelong poetic apprenticeship in a landscape animated by this mixed cultural music, where 'toil comes every day & feasts but once a year' (l. 896), the recurrence of toil wears away a poetry that only ever provided a short-lived and flimsy consolation. More painful even than this bitter degradation is Clare's deep signature of temporal crisis, which shows how these cycles of repeated acts of work and song, of georgic toil and pastoral tune, fall radically out of sync with the arrival of history through the rupture of enclosure. Old rhythms end in the churchyard, but not only because of the universal reach of death. The upcoming, second churchyard scene of 'The Village Minstrel' provides a moment for recognizing the disruptive grip of historical change, which breaks the seasonal round read into the landscape and performed in its associated music. If early in the poem and in Lubin's remembered childhood 'Each opening season & each opening scene | On his wild view still teemd wi fresh delight' (ll. 73–4), the duration of that 'still' is put under severe, ironizing pressure in the poem's temporal march towards a scene of devastation; in the present (or this past's future), the prospect of delight will be as elusive as the prospect itself, vanished from the landscape. Here conflicting temporal registers, past to present, natural and industrial, are twisted round the churchyard as a cathected site of memory shunted off its axis, in which former times can be exhumed only as splintered shards of experience, and future times are anticipated with confusion as familiar prospects turn to dim horizons. The poem's first churchyard visit perhaps redeemed the hard lesson of this deathly site by transmuting fear into legend as an adolescent participation in communal mythography; the sympathetic fear expressed in his second visit, though, is dispersed across Lubin's society, and his poetic response is to mourn and remember—other forms of potentially redemptive action, which are undermined by his distress that what is lost will never come again. The local music, to which Lubin listens and learns to add his voice, thus becomes less a tune in harmony with the turning of the world than an overburdened cultural curative for a set of harms it has little hope of healing. The pauper's haggard face and hard words reveal a bitter social

reality: that the past, far from continuing unscathed into the present nor able to rescue it, becomes a haunting—'It once were his hard fate some kinder days to know' (l. 303); Lubin, too, later learns how 'painfull mem'ry banishd thoughts renew | Reminding when't was young what happy days he knew' (ll. 1190–1).

In this context, Lubin's poetic training is brought to a solemn fruition as the georgic tone of cheerful (though not idealized) labour punctuated by pastoral moments of attunement to nature's gentler motions shifts to elegy, when the landscape and the sensibility of 'The Village Minstrel'—what Barrell calls Clare's 'open-field' sense of place[34]—is pushed to breaking point by enclosure: 'curst improvment gan his fields inclose | O greens & fields & trees farwell farwell' (ll. 1052–3). This universal lament, encompassing greens and fields and trees alike, is curiously negated as the poet's song, local tales, and ancestral myths are equally insufficient to the task of relating, let alone reversing, the trauma of the present: 'No words can utter & no tongue can tell | When ploughs destroyd the green when groves of willows fell' (ll. 1055–6). Nonetheless, the poet's elegiac refrain, patterned with cries of 'There once was' and 'no more', tells 'the mournful tale' that the place itself cannot speak but by negation. Its organic forms have been erased or reordered, except in the few remaining spots 'Existing still in spite of spade & plough' and able to 'Tel[l] where was once the green—brown fallows now | Where lubin often turns a saddnd brow | Marks the stopt brook & mourns oppresions power' (ll. 1067, 1069–71). As the land remembers and relates, so too does the working community:

> There once was days the wood man knows it well
> When shades een echod wi the singing thrush
> There once was hours the ploughmens tale can tell
> When mornings beauty wore its earliest blush
> How woodlarks carrold from each stumpy bush
> Lubin himself has markd em soar & sing
> The thorns are gone the woodlarks song is hush
> Spring more resembles winter now then spring
> The shades are banishd all—the birds betook to wing
> (ll. 1075–83)

Inscribed in the collective memory and reaching Lubin's own lifetime, these former times, regulated by working day and seasonal change, are turned

[34] Barrell, *Idea*, 96. See also Lesjak, *Afterlife*, 39–40.

upside down—'Spring more resembles winter now'. Here the poem's past tense is ramped up to the full tilt of complaint and set adjacent to a radically discontinuous present. The turning point is between lines 1080 and 1081, when the lost past becomes the present in which loss is felt, and pastoral attention to what is becomes an elegiac apprehension of what can no longer be found. Stripped and scoured, the landscape is featureless and its occupants disoriented but for the (now severely) limited compensations of memory. Lubin, as the local poet particularly sensitive to reversals in a landscape closely marked (noticed and noted down), is grimly affected, 'Mourning to scenes that made him no reply' (l. 1225).

It is here, near the end of the poem and appropriate to its dying cadences, that Lubin revisits the churchyard—now a troubled centre of the landscape where memory itself is out of kilter, refracted by currents of change by which all times, past and future, are dislocated:

> 'Ah' woud he sigh 'ye neath the churchyard grass
> 'Ye sleeping shepherds coud ye rise again
> '& see what since your time has come to pass
> 'See neer a bush nor willow now remain
> 'Looking & listning for the brook in vain
> 'Yed little think as such your natal scene
> 'Yed little now distinguish field from plain
> 'Or where to look for each departed green
> 'All ploughd & buried now as tho there nought had been[']
> (ll. 1237–45)

Apostrophizing the local dead in the churchyard, Lubin's song turns, physically and discursively, in a thwarted deictic effort to recover a time lost and buried, strained between the poles of 'your time' and 'now'. The shepherds' memories are stored in the churchyard with their bodies underground; but these forms of life, subject to decay and invisible, are a faint reminder when the more tangible natural forms with which they were aligned have been deleted from the surface. The repeated rhyme of 'grass' and 'pass' from the first churchyard scene here marks not a habitual crossing of this familiar landscape but a break in which familiarity, repetition, and habituation to a place and its customs fall fast through the cracks. In this sense, what gets 'buried' in the churchyard is, of course, the bodies of fellow workers over generations, but also the possibility of life's continuation in stable patterns that these bodies carried with them and that they now mark, not as a memory recuperable in the present, but a past lost and gone. The stutter of 'see'

and 'now' across the stanza marks the distractedly alert expectation of further effacement. In this sense, the 'Looking and listning' that have comprised Lubin's attentional attachment to his landscape become haunted acts of noticing what is now absent—not just reduced to 'little' but 'departed', 'as tho there nought had been'. The physical markers of trees, brooks, and fields are vacant surface signifiers of a deeper-running reality whose most cruel, most human depletions are uncovered in the churchyard. At the centre of a landscape homogenized into an indecipherable blank, with few waypoints left to guide the senses or prompt the memory, the churchyard's position at the human heart of the physical and imaginative geography mapped in Lubin's verse marks a low point of disturbance; it stands for a whole world physically turned over ('ploughd and buried') and inciting an affective dissonance with ominous implications for this poetics of a place sundered.

At the end of 'The Village Minstrel' Lubin's vocation again becomes one of recollection, but now in the aftermath of enclosure and telling a nakedly restorative tale through acts of memorialization compelled into a role of consolation: '& oft wi shepherds he woud sit to sigh | On past delights of many a by gone day | & look on scenes now naked to the eye' (ll. 1120–2). 'Sweet muttering oer his joys' (l. 1281), his wandering verse reads like that of the distracted poet described by the swain at the end of Gray's *Elegy*, 'Muttering his wayward fancies' (*Elegy*, l. 106). Unlike Gray's indolent and death-bound poet, however, Lubin is preoccupied with his future life—figured as an unknowable time whose 'steady movements' cannot be discerned—and how he might pragmatically 'his time employ' 'As manhoods painful prime approaches near' ('The Village Minstrel', ll. 1311, 1317, 1321). His poetry, which has measured time across the text, is implicated in time's demands on labour, so that retrospection becomes a transient luxury Lubin can ill afford, and which anyway softens surrounding suffering only for the space of a moment. In the line 'if no worth anticipates the lay', both time and labour estimate the value of poetry in a landscape newly (though in truth always, as Lubin's life and song reveal) commodified (l. 1315). The poem closes with a hope for the time 'When fortune finds him out in some far welcome day' (l. 1326). Until then, poetry occupies the margins of his life, 'now & then' accompanying hope and 'the low muse' to cheer sleepless nights, and otherwise dedicated, Clare implies, to a life of 'troubles' and toil (ll. 1323, 1324, 1322). Trouble, toil, and poetry alike end in the churchyard, yet resolution in the peace of death is not Clare's destination. The churchyard in his long poem is the centre of a painful knot of difficult feeling, twisted about

by remembrance of an irrecoverable past and anticipation of an unsettled future. Agonized and bewildered, 'The Village Minstrel' ends with uncertainty, and its churchyard vision upheaves an earth remorselessly turning to an unknown point.

'resting places': Clare's Churchyard Lyric

The turns of life, from childhood fear to adult care, are gathered in the churchyard stanzas of 'The Village Minstrel' and in condensed form in another poem in the same volume. 'In Helpstone Church Yard' looks back to a time when 'To walk a church [yard]' and read epitaphs 'Of well known friends & next door neighbours gone' was to 'dread' death;[35] in the present of the poem—'What makes me love thee now thou dreary scene' (l. 1)—it is life that is dreaded and the poet has learned to 'see in each swelld heap a peacful bed' (l. 2). The difference is intervening suffering—'But then I knew no cloudy cares of life' (l. 7)—and the poet's remaining hope is to find future rest in the churchyard. In this sonnet the compressive force of time, contracted yet maximally expressive in its foreshortened state, finds its spatial correlate in the churchyard, whose strata render visible and palpable the pressures of history, its coercive pull to the earth. Here time is compactly accommodated rather than contained, though, since the poet in the present looks backwards and forwards across the gulf of experience figured as endured hardship:

> I then was blest & had not eyes to see
> Lifes future change & fates severe tomorrow
> When all those ill[s] & pains shoud compass me
> & no hope left but what I meet in thee (ll. 11–14)

Now, in the churchyard, there is no ease but a future hope of death to come; the present is the past's disappointment, and all times cross the churchyard as the spatial axis of then, now, and yet to be. In concentrated form this churchyard lyric, like the episodes of 'The Village Minstrel', finds in this landscape a resting place with no closure, where pain and difficulty are up in the air of the poet's glance across time's arc yet always poised to return to ground and wreak further damage before the anticipated moment of death arrives.

[35] John Clare, 'In Helpstone Church Yard', in *The Early Poems*, ii. ll. 4 and 6, hereafter cited parenthetically.

In two late poems both titled 'The Churchyard', too, there is a tight torque of time from happy childhood to strife and toil to endless sleep, with the dead absorbed into nature's more generous rhythms, 'From every care and strife removed':

> These resting places of the dead,
> How beautiful they lie;
> The green grass turf above them spread,
> Beneath a summer sky.[36]

Peaceful as the images of pliant nature make it seem, this ballad's ten stanzas pull an alarming number of fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and lovers into the churchyard earth. In the second poem's nine-line span, processes and effects of time take on larger proportions, their human implications elided as more expansive movements loom into view:

> Look on this dust the living and the dead
> Are in its atoms—present life and past
> Are all its future—'tis the bed
> Of nations, and of empires that but last
> Some years—and then seem nothing when they're past
> Crowns, scepters, stars and garters—all the lust
> Of greatness in these fields and hillocks lie
> 'Tis what life was at first—at last all must
> Enrich those weeds o'er animated dust.[37]

The opening imperative locates the poem in the churchyard with its deictic 'this', but the ringing round of time and place in faithful correspondence is exploded from the first line's second clause, since the dust contains the living *and* the dead, present, past, and future. This lyric's density of experience, encompassing universals, ends as it began: in the churchyard, with 'those weeds o'er animated dust', which tells the story of the collective fall to earth.

These short lyric poems show how the churchyard is, perhaps, a marginal concern in Clare's work—a small space incomparable (though not incompatible) with his open-field sensibility. Nonetheless, in its smallness great

[36] John Clare, 'The Churchyard' ('The graves of those we loved'), in *The Later Poems*, i. ll. 3, 37–40.

[37] John Clare, 'The Churchyard' ('Look on this dust'), in *The Later Poems*, i. ll. 1–9.

matters are contained: the source of life in its buried but still-animated dust and the shifts of time that brought life low, 'at first—at last' chiastically enfolding all of human experience. Tim Fulford, Karen Swann, and Mina Gorji have shown how Clare's is a poetics of the marginal and the marginalized: of birds, insects, and places often unnoticed yet threatened by individual and legislative violence;[38] of tight poetic forms like the sonnet, which isolate and direct thought to these small things, revealing how Clare uses this 'technology of patterning, in order to open the form and its cadences to the perceptual habits and sounding vernaculars of rural experience'.[39] And as Carolyn Lesjak observes, Clare's famously 'precise attention to detail and language' serves often to pinpoint 'the most particular and far-reaching incursions into a landscape and life' of capital as he 'both minutely and expansively names the changes that too smoothly fall under the heading of the move from a commons to a commodity culture'.[40] In 'The Village Minstrel', contemplation is repeatedly identified as the form of close, thoughtful attention that Lubin, 'in contemplation deep', 'traces', 'tracks', and 'marks'—a watchful, textual documentation—as for instance when he notices a 'stagnant pond', 'some channel on its journey wild', 'the ploughboys at their sunday bath', 'a namless flye | O[f] scarlet plumage puntual to its time | Percht on a flower', a 'plain drest butter flye of russet dye | . . . wakend by the scythes shill sound' (ll. 438, 430, 434, 441, 449–51, 452–3):

> No inscet scapt him from the gaudy plumes
> Of dazzling butterflyes so fine to view
> To the small midgen that at evening comes
> Like dust spots dancing oer the waters blue (ll. 457–60)

These moments of attention to nature's minor key, otherwise ignored in the rush of human concerns, are—as the Sunday ploughboys (able to bathe

[38] Tim Fulford, 'Ecopoetics and Boyopoetics: Bloomfield, Clare and the Nature of Lyric', *European Romantic Review*, 31/5 (2020), 550–1. See also Richard M. Ness, 'Songs of Experience: John Clare's Empirical Taste', *John Clare Society Journal*, 38 (2019), 13–31.

[39] Karen Swann, 'John Clare: The Sonnet "Ill at Rest"', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 52/2 (2021), 206. See also Mina Gorji, 'John Clare and the Triumph of Little Things', in Blair and Gorji (eds), *Class and the Canon*, 77–94.

[40] Lesjak, *Afterlife*, 39. See also Sarah Zimmerman: 'Clare's habitual response to a pervasive sense of dissolution was to describe in vivid detail that which is subject to change. He regularly employs lyric strategies to grant the vulnerable places, animals, and persons in his poems a heightened visibility' in works that, however, 'dramatize not a singleness of theme or tone but rather a multiplicity of loss'—'a wounded aesthetic sense of landscapes disfigured' (*Romanticism*, 150, 153, 165).

because of the sabbath) and the butterfly startled by the threshers show—often cut short by the surrounding world of work, which makes the work of noticing them all the more difficult.

Marginal life of this kind, including Lubin's poetics of delicate noticing, is short-lived—'Unnamd unoticd but by lubins eye | That like low genius sprang to bloom their day & dye' (ll. 198–9). At the very beginning of the poem, Lubin turns from stanza 2's 'toil & slavery', which 'forc[e] him submit to fates controuling will' (ll. 16, 18), to stanza 3, where

> Still like the broad leafd dock its horned burrs
> That to the passing labourers garments cling
> On retrospections sight the past adhers
> His native scenes & childhoods early spring
> So sweet to view so temptingly to sing (ll. 19–23)

Raptly attentive to marginal forms of life before they vanish, Lubin's watchfulness is a kind of affection under duress; when georgic cycles are thrown off course the affordances of pastoral to pause and notice slide into elegy, as what can, and only in retrospect, be noticed is what has already been lost. Across the poem, Lubin's dreamy wandering is a form of defrayed (aesthetic) labour that gently withdraws from expected scenes of work—viewing them from a distance and making art of them—in something like a refusal to participate in the changes that encompass him.[41] In this way he seems to exemplify Theodor Adorno's sense that '[w]hoever disappears into the artwork thereby gains dispensation from the impoverishment of a life that is always too little'.[42] Yet this qualified species of resistance is fragile in its provisionality, existing under the shadow of future work to come and abiding, however patiently, in a state of extreme curtailment. The churchyard in 'The Village Minstrel' is a place of suspension in exactly this sense—not a rejection of history's wound but a location from which it can be situated and measured in time, where the relentlessness of now is set alongside then and

[41] Clare's 'The Village Minstrel' therefore sits alongside the 'literature of uncounted experience' François reads, in which to turn away from the coercive pull of capitalist productivity and instead towards grace or indolence might constitute a radical refusal of Enlightenment logics of instrumentality (*Open Secrets*). The minimally expressive lyrics of William Wordsworth, Thomas Hardy, and Emily Dickinson are, however, tonally and descriptively distinct from the outspokenness of Clare's confrontation with the forces compelling such withdrawals; unable ever fully to set aside the labour exacted by encompassing regimes of work, Lubin's moments of retreat are less recessive than they are constrained to bitter abbreviation.

[42] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 17.

soon, perhaps made more bearable but also irremediably more sad. Lubin's (and the poem's) preference for looking back over times that were comes not at the expense of the present but as a result of it, and the lives of shepherds long dead and buried exist in appalled and tragic tension with the changed landscape of Lubin's own time.

Across his churchyard poems Clare reveals with alarming clarity the knocks and jolts faced by such an affectively fraught attachment to local ways of living, working, and dying. In this fugitive poetics, the churchyard, while it occupies a corner of Clare's corpus and a marginal place in the history of enclosure more typically associated with his work, is likewise implicated in the patterns of a life of labour, as it is for the work of Mary Leapor and Ann Yearsley discussed in Chapter 2. These rhythms are often contrasted with the much larger temporal movements (intergenerational, historical, natural) that the churchyard affords to the poet's mind. They are also embedded in the churchyard earth, cast as a place of final rest and release from toil but never only that, because when the end of work comes at the expense of life, death constitutes a double loss: of persons who could not make a better life and of the hope that 'better' might ever come to pass. For these labouring-class poets the churchyard remains a place of poetic work, where the busy mind thoughtfully attends to the sharp shifts of time brought to bear on the surrounding world and distilled in this particular place. In the churchyard, bodies paused to watch and listen are as energetically involved in the movements of poetry committed to the strenuous work of unearthing the difficult matter of history, buried out of sight but contouring the churchyard as a place in which the waste of social life is accumulated, a lasting archive of what it feels like to live and die in time.

Clare's churchyard poems measure time that moves in recognizable shapes, but that also weighs heavily and turns sharply in untoward directions. In 'The Village Minstrel' and his shorter lyrics, churchyard poetry remains grounded in the days, nights, seasons, and years in whose cycles of degeneration and regeneration the objects and bodies of the churchyard live and die; yet it can track widely in expansive trajectories of past and future, of remembrance both fond and bitter and a hope sometimes so desperate it feels more like despair. Revived over the century of writing covered by this book, the churchyard is remarkable for its capacity to contain and unfold time in the regenerative force of the living language of poetry. The churchyard's basic lesson is that we die; churchyard poetry says that others come after us and lines of connection and continuity run on. Yet these lines are always liable to unwind and fray, and for Clare as for the other

poets in *Churchyard Poetics*, their connections are as likely to be missed or broken as they are to take root and flourish. Clare's cluster of churchyard poems returns again and again to the churchyard as a site of unsettled feeling conscious of the tangle of time yet not knowing what to do about it. In the churchyard the experiential fact of a time so out of joint as to be disorienting is distressingly felt, since the lost time it seemed to hold open finds no echo in the present, and the future rest it seemed to promise is now a distant hope.

Postscript

> Amid the quiet of a Church-yard thus decorated as it seemed by the hand of Memory . . . I have been affected by sensations akin to those which have risen in my mind while I have been standing by the side of a smooth Sea, on a Summer's day. . . . [M]y fancy has penetrated into the depths of that Sea—with accompanying thoughts of Shipwreck, of the destruction of the Mariner's hopes, the bones of drowned Men heaped together, monsters of the deep, and all the hideous and confused sights which Clarence saw in his Dream!—William Wordsworth, 'Essays upon Epitaphs'[1]

At the beginning of the nineteenth century it was still possible for William Wordsworth to write that 'a parish-church, in the stillness of the country, is a visible centre of a community of the living and the dead'. Unlike in 'a town of crowded population', where 'our monuments are crowded together in the busy, noisy, unclean, and almost grassless church-yard', the 'village church-yard, lying as it does in the lap of nature', remains a sacred site where inherited customs and ancestral relations might be shored up and protected.[2] For Wordsworth in the 'Essays upon Epitaphs' (1810), burial and the writing of epitaphs are constitutional acts of civil society with a still-tangible trace in the country churchyard, where relationships between the living and the dead remain intact and, through an epitaphic form of writing—on gravestones and in poetry—reach out to new communities of readers, connecting past to present and preparing for the future in a landscape that will last.[3]

[1] William Wordsworth, '[Essay upon Epitaphs II]', in W. J. B. Owens and Jane Worthington Smyser (eds), *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), ii. 63–4.

[2] Wordsworth, 'Essays upon Epitaphs I', in *The Prose Works*, ii. 54–6.

[3] David McAllister emphasizes this connection to argue that the social spirit of the rural community centred in a particular location joins up the 'humble' subjects of Wordsworth's poetry and the 'humic' basis of their community. Wordsworth's poetics is therefore grounded in 'a mode of life shaped by a connection with the soil and rooted in an understanding that the *humus* is both the mythic origin of life and its ultimate destination' (*Imagining*, 45). There is

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The churchyard recurs in Wordsworth's writings as an enclave of sustained traditions that elsewhere appeared to be disappearing as the poet charts the breakdown of the memorial community at one time—and, he suggests, still in certain sacred spots—reliably contained in the churchyard. Yet, as the epigraph above demonstrates, while the 'Essays' seem ultimately to celebrate the churchyard's sustained though diminished cultural life, Wordsworth is as aware of memory's faulty or partial operation as he is its redemptive potential—its capacity for idealization and its tendency to obscure the 'afflictions which Peasants and rural Artizans have to struggle with' in 'a labour of privacy', as well as its fundamental instability.[4] The image of the unquiet sea, where 'the bones of drowned Men heaped together' accumulate with other 'hideous and confused sights', is the paradigmatic agent of churchyard collapse, as I discussed in Chapter 3 on Charlotte Smith's turbulent poems of the churchyard littoral. In his own churchyard poems, Wordsworth reveals that this elemental degradation is as much about the sea as the medium of mobility to other places, at a distance from the community constellated around the churchyard, as it is the primordial opposition of earth and eroding water. The local attachments to the land that make the churchyard available to memory are severed by dispersive systems of capital whose disarticulations are written into churchyard poems such as 'We Are Seven' (1798), 'The Brothers' (1800), and *The Excursion* (1814).[5]

an extensive bibliography of work on Wordsworth's preoccupation with death and burial: see especially Bewell, *Wordsworth*, 187–234; Katherine E. Blake, 'Urban Burial Reform in William Wordsworth's "Village Churchyard"', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 74/3 (2019), 279–304; Clymer, 'Graved'; Kurt Fosso, *Buried Communities: Wordsworth and the Bonds of Mourning* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004); Scott Hess, 'Wordsworth's Epitaphic Poetics and the Print Market', *Studies in Romanticism*, 50/1 (2011), 55–78; Samantha Matthews, 'Epitaphs and Inscriptions', in Bennett (ed.), *William Wordsworth in Context*, 152–60, and *Poetical Remains*, 154–88; Karen Sánchez-Eppler, 'Decomposing: Wordsworth's Poetry of Epitaph and English Burial Reform', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 42/4 (1988), 415–31; Schor, *Bearing*, 151–95; Joshua Scodel, *The English Poetic Epitaph: Commemoration and Conflict from Jonson to Wordsworth* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 384–403; Michele Turner Sharp, 'The Churchyard among the Wordsworthian Mountains: Mapping the Common Ground of Death and the Reconfiguration of Romantic Community', *ELH*, 62/2 (1995), 387–407.

[4] Wordsworth, '[Essay upon Epitaphs II]', in *The Prose Works*, 64–5.

[5] See also the less familiar poem 'The Tuft of Primroses' (composed 1808; published 1949), in which environmental and human erasures that devastate the rural community arrayed around Grasmere Churchyard are connected to political disasters like the destruction of the Grande Chartreuse monastery during the French Revolution. For a compelling reading, see Jessica Fay, *Wordsworth's Monastic Inheritance: Poetry, Place, and the Sense of Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 112–15.

According to Geoffrey Hartman, who attaches Wordsworth's inscription poems like 'Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree' (1798) to 'graveyard poetry' via Gray's *Elegy*, the graveyard is 'a major locus for the expression of nature sentiment, but Nature is herself a larger graveyard inscribed deeply with evidences of past life'. These evidences are not always easy to find, however, and Wordsworth's churchyard poems are cast adrift by moments in which the poet struggles to wrest fragments from an earth that is recalcitrant or ineffable: his archaeological poetics is challenged by the faint traces of 'a life (in nature) so hidden, retired, or anonymous that it is perceived only with difficulty'.[6] The churchyard poem becomes in Wordsworth's hands a beleaguered form of containment: a site of enduring communal bonds including the dead and lauded by the poet, but also a site hemmed in and menaced by surrounding change. In 'We Are Seven' the cottage girl maintains her relationship with her dead siblings in the nearby churchyard in the face of hostile questioning from the poem's speaker—a nameless figure standing for the world beyond the child's rural retreat and unsympathetic to its intergenerational community, which has also been hollowed out by other deprivations: of siblings sent to work in the town of Conway or 'gone to sea'.[7] In 'The Brothers', too, connections to life on the land, including to its buried dead, are frayed by economic necessity. Leonard Ewbank, a former shepherd who left Ennerdale's mountain precincts and his family's failing sheep farm to make his fortune through 'traffic in the Indian Isles', returns home to see if his brother James is still alive.[8] After twelve years' absence he finds the landscape no longer legible and the churchyard, in which graves are unmarked, 'but a fellow to that pasture field' (l. 171). To identify his brother's grave he requires the interpretative remediation of the Priest, whose affiliation with the land and the dead remains intact but exclusive to those who have stayed within the vale's narrow compass. Leonard, unremembered and cast out from the closed circuit of its sympathetic economy, ends the poem by returning to the sea.

[6] Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (London: Methuen & Co., 1987), 33–4. See also Charles J. Rzepka, 'Wordsworth and Lyrical Archaeology: The Poetics of Pre-Historical Imagination in "The Brothers"', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 34/2 (2003), 81–5, and 'Sacrificial Sites, Place-Keeping, and "Pre-History" in Wordsworth's "Michael"', *European Romantic Review*, 15/2 (2004), 205–13.

[7] William Wordsworth, 'We Are Seven', in James Butler and Karen Green (eds), *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797–1800* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), ll. 19–20.

[8] William Wordsworth, 'The Brothers', in *Lyrical Ballads*, l. 64, hereafter cited parenthetically.

The Excursion offers a more extended treatment of what the poem's figure of the Wanderer calls 'precious rites | And customs of our rural ancestry | . . . gone, or stealing from us' (bk II, ll. 577–9). Nestled in the poem's 'Urn-like' valley, 'deep as an Urn; | With rocks encompassed' (bk II, ll. 353-4), the Churchyard among the Mountains of books VI and VII forms a protective but sepulchral landscape—an 'appropriated spot' for 'the sheltered few', 'the fixed centre of a troubled World' (bk V, ll. 951, 949, 16). The figure of the Pastor is again able to recite lengthy records of the buried dead, but to strangers the churchyard appears 'A dreary plain of unillumined snow' (bk V, l. 538). In book VIII the discourse shifts from a remembrance of a cluster of individual deaths to anticipation of a sweeping social death to come in the ambivalent anticipation of the new 'inventive Age', in which roads swallow ancient avenues, peaceful labours are corrupted by industrial technologies, and 'the Sail | Of traffic glides with ceaseless interchange' on water as on land (bk VIII, ll. 89, 114–15).[9] Framed by cultural contagion, the churchyard is 'preserved from taint' by a combination of the Pastor's faithful watching and 'heaven's good providence' (bk VIII, l. 151). Nonetheless, the Wanderer foresees the end of the community protectively contained in the Churchyard among the Mountains, whose sacred trust and ancient morals are

> Fled utterly! or only to be traced
> In a few fortunate Retreats like this;
> Which I behold with trembling, when I think
> What lamentable change, a year—a month—
> May bring . . . (bk VIII, ll. 255–9)

Glancing back over the vale before he leaves it, the Wanderer observes a community 'seemingly preserved | From the intrusion of a restless world | By rocks impassable and mountains huge' (bk IX, ll. 577–9). That 'seemingly' is doing some difficult work in qualifying the defensive embrace of forms of nature perhaps no longer up to the task.

Churchyard and churchyard poem eke out a circumscribed existence as Wordsworth dramatizes a movement from horrified grief at a social change whose totality is barely comprehensible to the limited consolations of containment and conservation still (just) possible in the country churchyard.[10]

[9] See Jeremy Davies, 'Introduction: Romantic Studies and the "Shorter Industrial Revolution"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 61/2 (2022), 187–202.

[10] See Katey Castellano, *The Ecology of British Romantic Conservatism, 1790–1837* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 37–62; McAllister, *Imagining*, 35–71. My reading here

Yet Wordsworth's churchyard poems are remarkably light on the bodies made to carry the social and symbolic, textual weight of this altered world, more concerned as they are with memories that can fade or remain articulable than with graves and the things inside them—those markers of former life always subject to doubt as they blend with the greensward. Reductively, but as a useful provocation, we might say that this is the hard work that Wordsworth attempts to siphon off in his churchyard poems, while the poets of this book can afford few such displacements. I make this claim self-consciously and with the important qualification that, for Wordsworth, the churchyard's borders are never smugly secure, making his effortful containment precisely that: an effort, and a strained one.[11] The distinction I am making is not between a complacent and an activist poetics, but between a poetics that can countenance the gesture of turning away and one that cannot. For Robert Blair, Mary Leapor, Ann Yearsley, Charlotte Smith, and John Clare, the churchyard is less easily preserved from surrounding social change; yet they are no more able than Wordsworth or Gray to do anything to tackle, let alone solve, the difficulties given shape by their poems. The churchyard's truncated participation in the world beyond its borders is its lifeline and its fatal flaw: implicated as a site of aftermath, this landscape

builds from Marjorie Levinson's influential sense of Wordsworth's redemptive figures of 'unworkable, unspeakable loss' in a formal resolution or displacement of the lived difficulty of history, partly through his use of sacred spaces like the churchyard to neutralize what was elsewhere abundant: 'a land stripped of its sacred spots offers the individual no escape from the social body and the historical moment' (*Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, 4, 33). For an interesting counterpoint—where difficulty is not contained but dispersed across a flattened horizon in a poetry that 'sets loose more than it manages to hold'—see Nersessian, *Calamity*, 5, 57–91.

[11] For this reason Wordsworth's churchyard poems are not necessarily reflexively conservative, but might instead be defensive strongholds of (for instance) E. P. Thompson's common customs, or what Marilyn Butler recognizes as an eighteenth-century politics of retreat, capable of critique from the distance of rural precincts and through the cultural mechanisms of revivalism—e.g. of the ancient past as the basis of an alternative to modern capitalism: see Marilyn Butler, *Mapping Mythologies: Countercurrents in Eighteenth-Century British Poetry and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin Books, 1993); and, for variations of this more sympathetic reading of Wordsworth, see François, *Open Secrets*, 129–217, and 'To Hold in Common and Know by Heart: The Prevalence of Gentle Forces in Humean Empiricism and Romantic Experience', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 7/1 (1994), 139–62; Simpson, *Wordsworth, Commodification*. On Wordsworth's own sense of his poetic-making as local work with material things see Burke, 'Romantic Georgic'; Jason N. Goldsmith, 'Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800', in Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 204–20; John Rieder, 'Wordsworth's "Indolence": Providential Economy and Poetic Vocation', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 23/1–2 (1988), 67–76; Fiona Stafford, *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 13–29, and 'Wordsworth's Poetry of Place', in Gravil and Robinson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, 309–24.

bears its burdens as the repository of the bodies dispatched from that world's front lines; it also remains vitally attached to the life of the body in all its suffering and splendour.

In *Churchyard Poetics* I have argued that recovering the churchyard as the unsettled ground of eighteenth-century poetry reveals the difficulty with which poets, especially women and labouring-class poets, contended with history's disturbing energies, set loose in this period and mapped onto a social topography in earlier ages organized around the cultural centrepiece of the church and its churchyard. Where for Wordsworth this remains a sacred spot preserved, if flimsily, from surrounding change, for the poets whose work features more prominently in this book the churchyard is not cut off from but fully involved in the fluctuations of the wider world under capital; as a result, this landscape appears in their work less as a site of release in death than as a stark reminder of the fatal consequences of new systems of labour on the bodies used to power them. The dead have been buried in churchyards since they were first consecrated, and poetry has always been spoken then written around the grave. What was different about the eighteenth century was both the heightened, anxious frequency with which its poets returned to the churchyard in their work, and the new aesthetic and political purposes to which it was put. No longer simply a location of mourning, still less of protection or endurance, the churchyard in this period's poetry—familiar but therefore taken for granted and, I have suggested, misinterpreted as an innocuous backdrop—was a site of suffering on a massive social scale. In churchyard poetry, formerly habitual lines of continuity across generations gathered in space by this landscape's symbolic centre of gravity are inexorably and traumatically dispersed.

Genre is one way of managing aesthetically the affective exorbitances that characterize life under the eighteenth century's regimes of capital, and I have examined how poets exploited the technologies of georgic, pastoral, topographical poetry, and elegy to disclose the hard histories buried in the churchyard earth. While we are conversant with the churchyard from its long cultural legacy in which so-called 'graveyard poetry' has played a major part, the uncomfortable energies poets such as Blair, Leapor, Yearsley, Smith, and Clare draw from it are articulated anew by fresh takes on old patterns of thought, feeling, and aesthetic form. In conventional 'graveyard poetry' as in traditions of georgic, pastoral, topographical poetry, and elegy, these deep-laid narratives of suffering in time are often submerged, rising in agitated jolts or ripples in the poetic surface; the churchyard poets of this book expose these painful stories and work through what it feels like to live

within them, before dying by them and joining the churchyard earth—not as bodies finally laid to rest but as the tenacious archive of history's wasting effects. Such disclosures can be grimly visceral, most obviously in Blair's *The Grave* and Smith's 'Sonnet XLIV'; emotionally tormented, as in Yearsley's 'Clifton Hill' and Smith's 'Elegy'; or historically fraught, as in Leapor's 'Colinetta' and the churchyard passages of Clare's 'The Village Minstrel'. In startling concentrations, these poets expose stratigraphic layerings of these affective frequencies, their poems featuring bodies buried and returning to the surface, feelings worked to extremes, and political contexts brought to light in varying degrees of explicitness.

On the cusp of time and at the edge of the world, the grave in the churchyard is a site of confrontation. While bodies collapse into this pit of earth, churchyard poetics presses on to make an interrogation of this contested terrain, navigated in genre, form, and figure as the tactics best equipped to represent the experience of ways of life falling apart. Churchyard poetics is, therefore, against closure, without resolution, since the arrangements of thought and feeling variously expressed by this book's churchyard poets remain anxious, anguished, and powerfully vocal. For the poets in *Churchyard Poetics*, the churchyard is a landscape of unceasing labour; their poems bring up and work through the legacies contained in this unsettled terrain, leaving us the textual remains of an alternative tradition of churchyard poetry.

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