Romantic Embodiments:

The Wordsworth-Coleridge Circle and the Aesthetics of Disability

by

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Abstract

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Romantic Embodiments seeks to put the body back into conversations about Romantic aesthetics. For as long as there have been healers and doctors, there have been those thought to be under their purview—what we now call "the disabled." During the Romantic period, cultural attitudes about disability were productively diverse, as religious, rationalist, and (proto-) normative views of disability met and clashed in the popular imagination. *Romantic Embodiments* examines texts in a variety of different genres—epic and lyric poetry, essays, medical and scientific tracts, periodicals, letters, notebooks—to demonstrate two critical and interrelated levels on which authors of the Wordsworth-Coleridge circle engage with the aesthetics of disability. The first is that of the non-normative body itself as a participant in aesthetically significant experiences. All of the texts in *Romantic Embodiments* reflect on what it means to encounter the disabled or to encounter the world as a disabled person, and specifically how disability impacts the aesthetic relations between the human body and the various bodies with which it comes into contact. The second level is a formal and conceptual one, as I examine moments at which texts embody such qualities as irrationality, inarticulacy, decay, disfigurement, fragmentation, and distortion at the level of the word, line, sentence, stanza, and genre. The relationship between disabled bodies and the textual qualities I discuss is

not a necessary one, but I discuss characteristics that just as easily may be applied to the human body or work of art, and suggest connections between corporeal and artistic form.

Romantic Embodiments consists of three sections—Scientific Bodies, Bodies in Pain, and Embodied Encounters—and focuses on a specific network of authors and thinkers who were directly engaged with one another from the 1790s onwards: John Thelwall, Thomas Beddoes, Humphry Davy, Tom Wedgwood, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and Charles Lamb. Because I take on a group of authors that collaborated and communicated extensively, I intend *Romantic Embodiments* to fill in a critical gap related to the ways that we understand the aesthetics of specific authors and specific texts. But much more so I intend this project to open up important avenues of inquiry into Romantic literature and culture writ large.

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Introduction

What disgusts each of us is highly variable. So, too, what gives us pleasure and what evokes a sense of sublimity. Most people will readily admit these statements as truisms. But from a sublime landscape to a revolting odor, our aesthetic responses are often so visceral as to feel innate. We recoil, we shrink away from that which disgusts us; overtaken by nausea, we gag; we wrinkle our noses and contort our faces and squeeze shut our eyes. So, too, we may shudder with pleasure at or unconsciously lean towards the beautiful, or feel our heart quicken in the presence of the sublime. Although we implicitly acknowledge the constructedness of aesthetic responses when we acknowledge their variability, we nevertheless experience them as natural and necessary, written not only into the individual body but also into human nature.[1]

So what are the stakes—social, ethical, artistic, political, epistemological—of the moment at which a human body provokes a feeling of disgust or beauty or the sublime? How do our aesthetic responses to what are now called "disabilities" inform our social and ethical orientation, and how do they reflect on and help to construct our individual and collective concepts of "the human"? How do aesthetic qualities associated with disability—disfigurement, for example—create artistic opportunities and productively alter the relationships between author, reader, and text? How might the presence of such aesthetic qualities in literature, music, and the visual arts reflect back on the human bodies around us? Further, what are the stakes of aesthetically-significant experiences that are enabled by non-normative states of embodiment? How can such experiences allow us to reconceptualize the various kinds of bodies—human, animal, technological, plant, mineral, textual, imaginary—that populate our world, and how might they allow us to apprehend disability in new ways?

[1] This is a central problem of aesthetics, one that Kant addresses by foregrounding judgment as the object of inquiry.

These questions, so critical to the current moment, are equally important to consider in relation to authors and thinkers of the Romantic period, a time when religious, rationalist, and (proto-)normative views of disability met and clashed in the popular imagination. *Romantic Embodiments* examines texts in a variety of different genres—epic and lyric poetry, essays, medical and scientific tracts, periodicals, letters, notebooks—to demonstrate that non-normative embodiment was essential to the era's aesthetic debates and modes of aesthetic production. Disability provided limit cases for ideas of humanity and sympathy, while encounters with the disabled provoked questions about the nature of disgust and the sublime. The inarticulability of non-normative embodiment encouraged authors to test the possibilities of language and form, and invited philosophers to rethink the relationships between the mind and the body, the self and the other, and the body and the external world.

In taking up aesthetics I adhere to art historian and disability theorist Tobin Siebers' sense of the field as "track[ing] the sensations that some bodies feel in the presence of other bodies" (1); like Siebers, I take a deliberately expansive view of what kinds of bodies can fall under the purview of aesthetics, from a poem to a human to an ordinary object—that is, anything that can elicit a meaningful bodily reaction. By foregrounding affective response, this project seeks to put the body back into conversations about Romantic aesthetics—a gesture equally appropriate to literary disability studies and Romantic literature, and one demanded by the intersection of the two. In the texts I will examine, experiences of non-normative embodiment and encounters with disability trigger feelings of and reflections on the immaterial, the conceptual, the imaginary. But the texts also foreground the unavoidable material reality of the body. The fact of corporeality becomes a critical aspect of aesthetic experience, and in many cases a precondition for the transcendent. Because disability exists "on the boundary between

the real and the metaphysical" (22), to borrow Ato Quayson's language, it calls attention to broader trends in Romantic aesthetic experience: regardless of theoretical formulations, in action aesthetic experience rarely looked like enacted Kantian idealism or Burkean materialism. Instead it tended to resemble a dialectical interplay between the ideal and material, the mind and the body. This is one of the key ways that attending to disability leads to a productive complication of central aspects of Romantic literature and philosophy.

In taking up the aesthetics of disability, I am interested I more than actual disabled bodies and minds. Following Siebers, I also focusing attention on those words, texts, humans, and other kinds of bodies that conceptually engage with various modes of non-normative embodiment. This project is therefore concerned not only with such figures as actual idiot boys, scrofulic poets, and mad women, but also with those moments at which "bodies" are felt (or may be felt) as idiotic, scrofulic, or mad, regardless of their actual biological realities.[2] In this way I take the relationship between "the aesthetics of disability" and the disabled human body as akin to the relationship between feminine aesthetics and the biologically female body, or queer aesthetics and the homosexual body. This is why the Bristol Circle's nitrous oxide experimentation—which produced temporary states of pain, mutism, erratic behavior, and other forms of non-normative embodiment—is as relevant to the aims of the project as Charles Lamb's blind beggars. This is also why certain formal aspects of texts—fragmentation, for example, or extrasemantic aspects of language (e.g. cries and sounds)—are as important to *Romantic Embodiments* as the actual disabilities with which they are often associated.

In all chapters I aim to demonstrate two critical and interrelated levels on which Romantic authors simultaneously engage with the aesthetics of disability. The first is that of the

[2] I intentionally refer to idiotic and mad bodies (rather than minds) here because it is through the human body, interacting with other bodies, that cognitive differences become palpable.

non-normative body itself as a participant in aesthetically significant experiences. All of the texts in *Romantic Embodiments* reflect on what it means to encounter the disabled or to encounter the world as a disabled person, and specifically how disability impacts the aesthetic relations between the human body and the various bodies with which it comes into contact. Thomas Beddoes, for example, writes at length about the consequences of both smallpox scarring and the complexion of the constitutionally scrofulic—the former of which elicits visible reactions of disgust and profound social exclusion despite its harmlessness, and the latter of which leads to admiration and pronouncements of beauty despite the fact that Beddoes (and many contemporaries) understood it to foretell a chronic and potentially fatal illness.

The second level on which *Romantic Embodiments* engages with the aesthetics of disability is a formal and conceptual one, as I examine moments at which texts embody such qualities as irrationality, inarticulacy, decay, disfigurement, fragmentation, and distortion at the level of the word, line, sentence, stanza, and genre. The relationship between disabled bodies and the textual qualities I discuss is not a necessary one, but I discuss characteristics that just as easily may be applied to the human body or work of art, and suggest connections between corporeal and artistic form. Lamb refers to an amputee, for example, as a "grand fragment, as good as an Elgin marble," thereby taking up the disabled body as an aesthetic object and directly relating it to a paradigmatic group of sculptural fragments—which themselves have been frequently discussed in relation to Romantic literary fragments. When embodied in text, such qualities as fragmentation may actively "summon images of disability" (Siebers 3),[3] especially when the subject matter is somehow related to disability or the human body. This is the case

[3] The specific aesthetic elements Siebers discusses are ones that characterize many works and strains of modern art, and he is particularly interested in "food-stuff, wreckage, refuse, debris, [or] body parts" as a medium or object of depiction (2).

when pronoun disruption, which amounts to formal subjective disruption, is coincident to Humphry Davy's descriptions of nitrous oxide intoxication, for example.

Throughout *Romantic Embodiments*, I maintain an abiding preoccupation with the intersection of aesthetics, intersubjectivity, and ethics. I follow Ato Quayson in believing that "in being represented, it [disability] automatically restores an ethical core to the literary-aesthetic domain" (22)—or, to reframe and extend Quayson's claim, disability reveals the inherent ethical stakes of aesthetics.[4] The aesthetic experiences enabled or provoked by non-normative states of embodiment are often (or may be) used to draw and redraw the boundaries of human communities. Wordsworth's contemporaries believed that as non-rational subjects, the idiotic and mad were not full human subjects, but the poet's mad Martha Ray and Johnny Foy, an "idiot boy," have special access to nature and its aesthetic bounty. Given this, can they rightly be considered anything less than human? Are they not appropriate objects of our fellow-feeling, respect, and perhaps even veneration? Likewise, when the texts I discuss embody qualities that are often associated with disability, they work against normative cultural views. At the very least, by creating fragmentary or irrational texts, Romantic authors, like the modernist artists Siebers describes in *Disability Aesthetics*, do not participate in the valorization of "the healthy body—and its definition of harmony, integrity, and beauty—as the sole determination of the aesthetic" (3). This creates a context in which corresponding qualities of disabled human bodies and minds may be (re)valued and (re)interpreted in light of the ways that they allow us to interrogate and expand the possibilities of textual form, function, and functionality.

By examining several instances in which authors of the Wordsworth-Coleridge circle adopt attitudes, ideas, and methods that run counter to what we would now call ableist stances, I

[4] In a similar vein Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes, "I suggest that representation informs the identity—and often the fate—of real people with extraordinary bodies" (*Extraordinary* 135).

hope to complicate standard accounts of the history of disability. The narratives we have inherited only tell part of the story, and tend to gloss over what is an absolutely critical moment in the history of medicine. The late-eighteenth century to mid-nineteenth century witnessed the professionalization and standardization of medicine. But because of the relative openness of Romantic medicine, these normalizing and regularizing forces did not go unchallenged. Philosophically, ethically, and politically, Romantic ideas about disability—both within and outside of the sciences—were much more complicated and diverse than is typically acknowledged. This is part of a larger trend that Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee, and Peter J. Kitson have described: because "[t]he dominant imperialist ideology of the late Victorian period had not yet emerged," authors of the Romantic era, both "scientific and literary," became "part of a contest in which ideologies and stereotypes were in the process of being formed, often in conflict with each other and in contradiction with themselves" (7).

Throughout *Romantic Embodiments* I rely on a fairly standard definition of "disability" as indicating a dynamic interaction between embodied human variation, medicine, and culture. In describing how "the biological and the social are interactive in creating disability," Susan Wendell proposes that "the social response to and treatment of biological difference constructs disability from biological reality, determining both the nature and the severity of disability" (*Rejected Body* 35, 42).[5] Thus I include in my (necessarily) era-specific, culturally-constituted category of Romantic disability a range of sensory impairments (e.g. blindness, anosmia,

[5] I intentionally use Wendell here for her position part way between constructivism and essentialism, as opposed to a more explicitly and exclusively constructivist theorist like Simi Linton. Linton writes, for example, that "The term *disability*, as it has been used in general parlance, appears to signify something material and concrete, a physical or psychological condition considered to have predominantly medical significance. Yet it is an arbitrary designation, used erratically both by professionals who lay claim to naming such phenomena and by confused citizens" (10). By foregrounding the sociopolitical valences of "disability," Linton, as well as other mainstream disability theorists of the 1980s and 1990s, foreclose the possibility of offering a primarily philosophical, epistemological, or aesthetic reading of "disability"—that is, the very kinds of readings I will offer here. Recent trends in literary disability studies tend to understand "disability" along similar lines to Wendell; Quayson, Siebers, and Garland-Thomson are among those who explicitly espouse such positions.

deafness); medicalized physical differences, both congenital and acquired (e.g. amputated limbs, paralysis); medicalized cognitive differences (e.g. idiocy);[6] mental illnesses (e.g. madness, melancholy); and chronic illnesses (e.g. scrofula, cancer, consumption, hypochondria). It is only this last category that is often excluded by disability theorists, though less and less so in recent years.[7]

In addition to "disability" I often employ the phrase "non-normative embodiment." I intentionally do not draw a clear distinction between the two phrases, although I do intend a difference in inflection: I tend to use the former ("disability") when discussing moments of intersubjectivity, and the latter ("non-normative embodiment") when the primary context is the subject himself or herself. Whereas "disability" is meant to emphasize the socially constituted subject, then, "non-normative embodiment" is meant to call attention to the lived, embodied experience that is associated with various disabilities. The idea of non-normative embodiment therefore invites connections between the subjectivity and epistemology of a blind man or an idiot child to those moments when individuals temporarily inhabit spaces of, or spaces akin to, "disability" without actually becoming a "disabled" person—through experiences of injury, illness, intoxication, delirium, or a number of other corporeal circumstances.

Romantic Embodiments focuses on a specific network of authors and thinkers—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, Davy, Beddoes, Thomas Wedgwood, and John Thelwall—who were directly engaged with one another as scientific or literary collaborators; friends, neighbors, and financial supporters or dependents; and philosophical, political, poetic, or epistolary partners. Around the primary authors I discuss circulate a set of secondary figures—Robert

[6] This broad category would now include such conditions as autism and Down Syndrome.
[7] Susan Wendell has written about the divide in disability studies and disability activism between the healthy and unhealthy disabled, as disability activists seek to "distinguish themselves from those who are ill" ("Unhealthy Disabled" 18). For many reasons—cultural and epistemological reasons as much as political ones—Wendell instead advocates for the consideration of chronic illnesses as "disabilities."

Southey, Dorothy Wordsworth, Mary Lamb, Thomas Poole, William Godwin, Erasmus Darwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Sara Coleridge (Samuel Taylor Coleridge's daughter), to name just a few. Many of these could have been the subjects of chapters of their own, and in the context of disability aesthetics all deserve much more detailed treatment than I am able to give them here.

The primary authors I discuss lived much or all of their lives in various states of non-normative embodiment, from Wedgwood's chronic and eventually fatal undiagnosed illness to Thelwall's childhood speech impediment to Wordsworth's anosmia. That all had first-hand experience with what would in many contexts be understood as "disabilities" may be a coincidence, may be due in part to the era's largely ineffective medical treatments, and may be due in part to the bare fact that most people are disabled in some way at some point in their lives, whether or not they choose to claim disability as an identity. It is worth noting that to varying extents and ends, most of the authors I discuss did claim their disabilities as important identity factors. I like to think that their personal experiences led them to be more open to the possibilities of disability aesthetics at a time when such openness was culturally permitted.

Wordsworth and Coleridge were in active contact with Thelwall, Beddoes, Davy, Wedgwood, and Lamb at various points between the 1780s and 1820s, and especially during the late 1790s, formative years for all of them. I consider two historical moments, the summer to autumn of 1797 and the summer to autumn of 1799, as aesthetic epicenters that brought most of these authors together in body. My phrasing ("in body") is intentional: I think their widely varying embodiments, as well as the nature of their time together during these times, created contexts that brought issues of embodiment to the fore. In this way I understand these two periods as both reflective and generative of the kinds of intellectual circulation and collaboration in which *Romantic Embodiments* is interested. In early 1797 Coleridge settled in Stowey in a

small house whose garden abutted on Tom Poole's orchard. On Coleridge's urging, Wordsworth, whom he had first met in 1795 and had seen a few months before, moved to the nearby Alfoxden with his sister; that summer initiated their intimate friendship and intellectual collaboration and soon gave rise to *Lyrical Ballads*, which was first published by Joseph Cottle in 1798 and which contains a number of rich and provocative depictions of disability.

During the summer of 1797 Coleridge attracted a number of visitors. Lamb, his Christ's Hospital classmate, visited in July, 1797. It was Lamb's first departure from London since his sister, Mary, had murdered their mother the year prior in a fit of madness. A walk Lamb took with the Wordsworths—one in which Coleridge could not participate due to an injury—occasioned Coleridge's remarkable disability poem "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." John Thelwall also visited Coleridge and Wordsworth in July, 1797, a time at which he was (of necessity, due to governmental persecution) seeking a change in career from radical orator, was particularly engaged in literary production, and would soon settle on elocutionary science as his new vocation. At the end of summer 1797 Poole also introduced Coleridge and Wordsworth to the chronically ill Tom Wedgwood, a wealthy scientist-turned-metaphysician who would soon become Coleridge's patron and who would also become one of his dear personal and intellectual friends. In all, it was a season of unusually rich literary, philosophical, and political conversation and production.

The ensuing months brought periods of contact and dispersal between Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the other primary figures I will discuss. Around the same time that Wedgwood and his brother Josiah (Jos) commenced their annuity for Coleridge, in January 1798, Wedgwood also contributed £1,000 to the Pneumatic Institution, a medical venture established by Dr. Beddoes, another friend Wedgwood shared with Coleridge. Around that time Wedgwood also

made Humphry Davy's acquaintance in Penzance, and that autumn Davy took up employment at Beddoes's institute in Bristol. In 1798 Coleridge visited Wedgwood and, with Wordsworth, visited Thelwall at Llyswen; Coleridge and Wordsworth also journeyed to Germany together, following in the footsteps of a trip Wedgwood had taken 16 months earlier.

By the next summer, 1799, Davy, Beddoes, and both Jos and Tom Wedgwood had inhaled nitrous oxide in the Pneumatic Institute's communal trials, as had Coleridge's Pantisocratic collaborator Robert Southey, Maria Edgworth, Joseph Priestley Jr., and others. Joseph Cottle witnessed the trials but did not participate. By the end of October Coleridge had reached Bristol and inhaled the gas, and initiated a friendship with Davy that would last for over two decades. Although the nitrous oxide trials were ostensibly scientific endeavors, they were of no less literary, philosophical, and political consequence than the collaborations that had taken place in the summer of 1797. Considered together, these two summers, and particularly the bodily and intellectual communion that took place during them, demonstrate the rich cross-pollination of the sciences and the arts that enabled the work I discuss in *Romantic Embodiments*—a project that is, after all, concerned with the modes of aesthetic experience and aesthetic production provoked or enabled by bodies which fall under the study and treatment of the medical sciences.

Romantic Embodiments consists of three sections—Scientific Bodies, Bodies in Pain, and Embodied Encounters. A primary goal of the opening section is to illustrate the diversity of Romantic medicine, as well as the conflicting attitudes towards non-normative embodiment that it fostered. Through their various scientific engagements, Thelwall, Beddoes, and Davy helped to provide the Wordsworth-Coleridge circle—and the era as a whole—with a sociomedical framework for understanding disability as much more than merely defect. Especially in this

section, I aim to complicate current accounts of the histories of disability and medicine. In Chapter 1, I seek to particularly draw out the political consequence of Romantic medicine, as well as the correspondences between the goals and methods of radical Romantic science and receptivity to the possibilities of disability. I argue that Thelwall's and Beddoes's egalitarian tendencies helped them to perceive the aesthetic potency of the disabled body and mind, as well as the registers of aesthetic experience opened up by non-normative embodiment. In turn these recognitions shaped their scientific projects and medical texts, which demonstrate an astute awareness of the aesthetics of disability.

In Chapter 2, I discuss how radical medicine became a communal endeavor through Beddoes' Pneumatic Institute, and particularly its nitrous oxide trials. I read Beddoes's, Davy's, and Wedgwood's experimental methods, especially induction and self-experimentation, as conducive to non-normative embodiment. As much as its pleasures, I highlight nitrous oxide's pains, and read the moments of sublimity it provoked as moments of radical embodiment—not disembodied transcendence, as they are often understood. The nitrous oxide texts bear witness to the experiential vistas opened up by non-normative embodiment, as well as the aesthetic experimentation it may provoke. The willingness of medical professionals to sponsor and participate in these modes of aesthetic expansion created a climate in which the literary authors associated with the trials could similarly acknowledge and explore the possibilities of disability.

In taking up Wedgwood's and Coleridge's bodies in pain in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively, I hope to reframe and recuperate our sense of the critical importance of Wedgwood's embodied aesthetics on the one hand, and Coleridge's autobiographical output on the other. Both sets of texts bear the physical traces of the pains and illnesses that shaped and in many cases inspired their composition. Their forms—fragmented, non-linear, epistolary, and

often unpublished—are reflective of the embodied realities of their authors, and help to explain their scholarly undervaluation. In Chapter 3 I argue that the conditions of Wedgwood's illness made his contemporaries more receptive to his intellectual influence, although his status as an ill man also led generations of readers to miss the nature of his importance to the Wordsworth-Coleridge circle. In particular, I suggest that Wedgwood's aesthetics of pleasure and pain likely had a profound influence on such seminal Romantic texts as the *Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads.* Wedgwood's life of chronic illness shaped his aesthetics, which he communicated through his lived example and through letters that served as textual prosthetics capable of transmitting affect on his behalf. Wedgwood was intensely attuned to the pleasures of the immediate, local, and ordinary; was sensitive to the complex associative properties of pain; was an advocate for the mutability of feeling and aesthetic taste; and was a damning skeptic of pity and the relation between the ill subject and his or her loved ones.

In Chapter 4, I argue that Coleridge's embodied autobiographical texts, and particularly his medico-centric letters, might best be considered and appreciated as illness narratives. Understood as such, the period usually considered to mark the drying up of Coleridge's literary output—the late 1790s to early 1800s—may be reevaluated as a richly productive period, one that saw him shift to a literary genre more appropriate to the expression of the ill body. In "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," Coleridge figures injury as an experience that enables revelatory creative production—a dialectical interplay between the pained body and the imagination that, I argue, continues to characterize his acts of textual creation for years to come. Coleridge's 1797 autobiographical letters to Poole, self-diagnostic letters, and letters to, from, and about Wedgwood bear witness to an increasingly antagonistic—but no less rich—struggle between the unruly, ill body on the one hand and the (potentially) transcendent mind and imagination on the

other. Coleridge's epistolary illness narratives disclose his rich textual and linguistic experimentation with the aesthetics of disability as he attempts to articulate his ill body.

In Wordsworth's poetry and Lamb's essays I trace comprehensive aesthetic systems that center disability. In Chapter 5, Wordsworth's retrospective reaction to Wedgwood's ill body provides a theoretical frame for my exploration of the human sublime and Wordsworthian admonishment. By surveying the importance of various encounters with disability to Wordsworth's growth as a poet and to his published poetry, I propose that Wordsworthian aesthetics are fundamentally disability aesthetics. The disabled bodies and minds Wordsworth depicts leave a discernable mark on his poetry, as do the bodily reactions Wordsworth's narrators register when they encounter human difference. By examining contemporary reactions to "The Idiot Boy," I also consider the ways that disability is central to the admonitory power of Wordsworth's verse. For poet and reader alike, disability becomes "a critical resource," to use Siebers' language, "for thinking about what a human being is" (3).

In the Conclusion to *Romantic Embodiments*, I take "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and Mary Lamb's act of matricide as critical background for the urban aesthetics of Lamb's *London Magazine* persona, Elia. Lamb's varied experiences of disability led him to develop a bitingly witty, theatrical approach to the metropolis, one that foregrounds the intersubjective and aesthetic possibilities of disability and bears the formal traces of madness and speech impediment—two forms of non-normative embodiment with which Lamb had personal experience. Elia's is a distinctly cripped aesthetics, reflective of his disabled body and his preference for the performatively uncommon, peculiar, even abnormal in others. But Elia's metropolitanism is eulogistic: writing in the 1820s Lamb registered the very social developments that, as the nineteenth century progressed, made it increasingly difficult to register,

acknowledge—and in many cases even encounter—disability's expansive potential. Lamb's blind beggars, driven from London's streets into institutional confinement, are emblematic of the cultural shifts that Elia both depicts and mourns. In this way Lamb provides an especially compelling link between the possibilities of Romantic disability and the increasingly normative attitudes that Victorian medicine, and with it Victorian culture at large, would come to adopt.

Ato Quayson has written that a focus on disability "helps to foreground hitherto unacknowledged dimensions of [an author's] writing and, in certain cases, this can even lead to a complete revaluation of critical emphasis" (27). In all chapters of *Romantic Embodiments* I aim to initiate just such revaluations. Foregrounding non-normative embodiment allows us to understand and restore Wedgwood to the position of importance he held for his contemporaries, for example, and not only invites a reexamination of Wordsworth's approach to the aesthetics of the human body, but also invites us to reevaluate his treatment of such topics as sympathy, the senses, perception, aesthetic appreciation, and poetic creation. Because I take on a group of authors that collaborated and communicated extensively, and because I seek to highlight the sites of contact between them, the claims I make in *Romantic Embodiments* are somewhat localized in nature. But similar claims can—and in my opinion must—be made of many other authors of the period, and I hope that the broad applicability of both my methodology and my lines of argumentation will be evident. In this way I intend *Romantic Embodiments* to fill in a critical gap related to the ways that we understand the aesthetics of specific authors and specific texts—but much more so I intend this project to open up important avenues of inquiry into Romantic literature and culture writ large.

In the chapters to follow, I wish to initiate conversations about the ways that disability functioned during the Romantic period as a nexus of aesthetic exploration and ethical inquiry.

Scholars of Romanticism have long noted the epistemological crises and the textual and subjective revolutions that define the period, and many of these can be directly linked to provocatively diverse ideas about what "disability" is and what it means to be "disabled." My most fundamental goal in *Romantic Embodiments* is therefore to advance the idea that literary disability studies is absolutely critical to the field of British Romanticism. In order to understand essential aspects of aesthetic experience and aesthetic output during the era—approaches to perception, subjectivity and intersubjectivity, pleasure and pain, and sympathy and pity; debates about humanity and the human community; modes of knowing, feeling, and belief; hallmarks of Romantic genres, poetics, and creative practices—we must begin to view them in light of the aesthetics of disability.

Chapter 1

Citizen Thelwall and Thomas Beddoes, MD: Democracy and the Art of Romantic Medicine

In the early 1790s, as he articulated the political philosophies that inspired his contemporaries and made him a target of the government, John Thelwall could be found attending lectures at St. Thomas's and Guy's hospitals. A member of the Physical Society, Thelwall lent his voice to highly-charged scientific debates including those surrounding the vital principle, which was often cast as a conflict between traditional values and the radical, Jacobin ideals thought to be embodied and promoted by materialist science. Shortly after his publication of *An Essay Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality* (developed from a January 1793 talk at Guy's), Thelwall was brought up on a charge of treason. Were he found guilty, the penalty could be death. Although Thelwall's overtly political speeches and texts were a focus of the government's unfavorable attention, Nicholas Roe has convincingly argued that his materialist animal vitality essay, as well as a materialist essay on sensation, may have also been key contributing factors to the 1794 treason charge ("Atmospheric" 188).

Thelwall was just one of many in the 1790s who suffered dire consequences for a perceived convergence of political radicalism and scientific inquiry. During the Birmingham riots of July 1791, chemist and natural philosopher Joseph Priestley's home was invaded by a mob, his scientific equipment destroyed, and an effigy burned of him as he fled for his life. [1] Much less dramatically, but nevertheless requiring a change of tack in his career, in 1792

[1] Like Thelwall—though not nearly to the same extent—Priestley was active in leftist political discussions, and Mike Jay usefully reads the "single-minded destruction of Priestley's laboratory" as reflective of the contemporary belief in a "symmetry between … chemical researches and … revolutionary politics" (3).

Thomas Beddoes was all but forced to resign his position as a reader in chemistry at the University of Oxford, a position he had held since 1788.[2] By the end of 1792, Beddoes wrote to Davies Giddy, he knew that he had become "eminently and much beyond my importance, odious to Pitt and his gang" (as quoted by Jay 72). Scholars of Romanticism recount these and similar stories to demonstrate the ways that Romantic science was fraught with political, philosophical, and social significance—and the extent to which scientists could be thought of as posing a direct threat to the conservative government.

After Thewall's December 5, 1794 acquittal and the governmental repression that followed, he turned to elocutionary science, "the *New Profession*, to which I have devoted my maturer years" (*Cline* 2), and began to treat stammerers, stutterers, and idiots, among many others. In *A Letter to Henry Cline* Thelwall strives to cultivate a sense of the apolitical character of his new endeavor; as a medical professional he was now, he claimed, far from "the excentric fire of youth" (2). In keeping with this characterization, scholars of British Romanticism have understood Thelwall's therapeutic practice as ideologically neutral in comparison to his earlier involvement in radical politics and materialist science.[3] Thelwall had a great deal at stake, however, in convincing the government and the public that he had abandoned his radicalism, and the democratic and humanistic implications of his elocutionary project are in fact much more significant than he advertised and than scholars have heretofore acknowledged. [4]

[2] He offered his resignation in the summer of 1792 amidst governmental scrutiny of faculty members, although it is unclear "[w]hether politics was the cause, or a pretext, or simply one reason among many" that Beddoes wished to leave the university (Jay 52). For reasons of funding he was asked to remain for another year, but his departure was moved up to Christmas.

[3] Michael Scrivener, Andrew McCann, Nicholas Roe, and J. R. Allard have all argued for some sense of political continuity across Thelwall's diverse career. For Scrivener, however, Thelwall's elocutionary writings "are largely apolitical—or political in an allegorical way" (285); similarly, for McCann, "As an elocutionist … Thelwall had cast off politics" (223).

[4] As Michael Scrivener succinctly reminds us, Thelwall was "[p]rohibited from lecturing and journalism, shadowed by spies, forced to retire to a Welsh farm, discouraged by the course of the revolution in France, [and] devastated by the death of his young daughter" (Scrivener 4). Indeed, not only did Thelwall have to contend with a repressive

The underestimation of Thelwall's social engagement as an elocutionary scientist is characteristic of trends in Romantic scholarship, which has yet to acknowledge the full social and ethical importance of Romantic engagements with disability. This is true even in regard to those medical practitioners like Beddoes, who continued throughout his career to promote projects explicitly aimed at addressing social inequalities. Romantic medicine, it would seem, was of far less political significance than other branches of Romantic science. Yet the histories of medicine and disability have another story to tell. The narrative I will present here is not of an easy ascendance of absolute medical authority and normative views of disability as deficit, but rather an active ideological struggle that in the 1790s and 1800s seemed like it could have resolved in other ways.

Romantic Embodiments primarily engages with disability as an epistemological and aesthetic space that humans can be born into or come to inhabit, and that works of art can engage with both formally and conceptually. But "disability" is also—and is by its strictest definition—a social category of medical origin and organization. To be "disabled," that is, one must have, or be thought to have, a kind of body or mind that is understood to demand medical attention. The constructedness of the category is part of what enables the abstraction of "disability" into aesthetic elements that may exist—or may be consciously deployed—quite apart from the disabled body itself. Understood thus, there has been a concept of "disability" for as long as there have been doctors and healers, and so has there been the possibility of disability aesthetics. But during the Romantic era medicine was remarkably diverse. Partly as a result of this, the era also witnessed a remarkable diversity of social attitudes towards those thought to be under the

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governmental response to his continuing freedom, but also the turning of public opinion against the more radical aspects of his political philosophies. By the commencement of his elocutionary career, early popular enthusiasm about the French Revolution had soured into skepticism and soon gave way to deep and widespread distrust in anything thought to resemble Jacobinism.

purview of medical authority. The sociopolitical stakes of these attitudes, both within and beyond medicine, are why Romantic engagements with disability are—inherently and unavoidably—ethically significant, howsoever conceptual they may be. To understand the stakes of disability aesthetics in Romantic literature and culture, it is therefore necessary to first take up the diversity of Romantic medicine, its overtly political dimensions, and—what I argue helps to enable disability aesthetics in culture at large—its democratic potential.

Against a backdrop of Romantic medicine thus politicized and complicated, John Thelwall and Thomas Beddoes emerge as both exemplary and extraordinary figures, and I use them to frame my discussion for reasons of influence, resonance, and contrast. In the 1790s Thelwall developed a personal and intellectual friendship with Wordsworth and Coleridge, and recent work by Judith Thomson, Michael Scrivener, and others has recuperated our sense of Thelwall's broad ideological influence on his contemporaries. It is therefore likely that Thelwall's political ideals, which led to his distinctive medical approach, would have influenced the authors I will discuss in the following chapters, even if his specific approach to medicine may not have directly influenced any of them. Beddoes was also well-connected, serving as personal physician to many of the era's wealthiest and donating his time to organizing and funding programs aimed at improving the health of the nation's poorest. Beddoes was also close friend to Coleridge and Wedgwood and mentor to Davy; as founder of the Pneumatic Institute, the focus of Chapter 2, his medical practice evolved into a communal self-experimental endeavor in which many of the primary and secondary figures of *Romantic Embodiments* participated. But there is also a critical difference between Thelwall and Beddoes that speaks directly to the open and diverse state of Romantic medicine: despite shared principles, the first was largely self-

trained and sought to provide an alternative to mainstream medicine, and the second had formal medical training and sought to reform medicine from within.

This chapter first seeks to provide a general introduction to the field of Romantic medicine, and to focus especially on the egalitarian possibilities of the era's approaches to disability. Beddoes and Thelwall were unusual for medical practitioners of their age, but theirs were views that did have a place in the remarkably diverse field of Romantic medicine. Beddoes demonstrates an abiding respect for all kinds of patients, especially those who were often exploited and dehumanized by his medical contemporaries, and his democratic ideals are particularly evident in the ways that he addressed issues of class. Thelwall likewise demonstrated a fundamental respect for the disabled, and in taking on mainstream medicine he especially sought to challenge ideas about congenital disabilities. As Susan Wendell has asserted, disability may be rightly understood as "difference" with "intrinsic value" and "sometimes extrinsic advantages" (67). But to accept this proposition one must first see through the idea of disability as deficit and reject the stigma attached to non-normative embodiments. The kinds of inclusive, egalitarian, and humanizing ideals that shaped Beddoes's and Thelwall's medical practices enable the possibility of disability as difference, as well as the aesthetic vistas opened by such an understanding of disability.

Accordingly the second goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that Thelwall's and Beddoes's democratic medical practices allowed them to acknowledge, and at times take advantage of, the aesthetic dimensions of disability. In Beddoes' case this led to the rich symptomological descriptions in his hybrid medico-literary *The History of Isaac Jenkins*, and also his sophisticated theorizing on aesthetic responses to the disabled body, in which he lays bare the aesthetic basis of sociopolitical exclusion. Thelwall viewed his own experience of a

speech impediment, as well as his treatment of "pupils" with speech-related disabilities, as aspects of what he considered to be a larger elocutionary project that was as much an aesthetic undertaking as it was a medical one. In Thelwall's London institution, the appreciation of sound, verse, rhythm, and cadence were formal requirements, and communal poetry recitation became a properly medical act; in this context blindness became a mode of embodiment in which aesthetic experience and aesthetic production could reach a kind of apex.

Beddoes' Democratic Medicine

As Roy Porter and other medical historians have detailed, the practice of medicine became increasingly effective, standardized, regulated, and scientific over the course of the nineteenth century. The 1815 Apothecaries Act, for example, required the certification of all apothecaries and outlined a required course of academic and clinical training. Diagnostic criteria and practices would also become ever more standardized, in large part because of increased anatomical, laboratorial, and clinical expertise, and in large part because of technological innovations including René Laennec's 1816 invention of the stethoscope. During the eighteenth century, however, and extending into the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was little regularity to medicine, and doctors had relatively little to offer in the way of effective treatments. Quack doctors and alternative healers—folk, religious, magical—flourished alongside those striving for institutional authority, regulation, and professionalization. The diversity of Romantic medicine calls to mind Porter's phrase "histories of the medicines," appropriate because "there has never been a single, homogenous body of theory and practice answering to the name 'medicine' " (*Popularization* 1).[5]

[5] For longer accounts of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medicine, see Porter (*Benefit*), Lawrence, and Bynum.

The nineteenth-century increase in institutional authority and medical professionalization was coincident with ever more ideologically consistent approaches to disability as defect. If eighteenth-century medicine largely depended on relative and individualized notions of health and illness, "medical men" of the following century "were developing a language (which we still use) for situating all people in relation to each other, for measuring their deviation from the *normal*, and, increasingly, for managing their deviations from that norm" (Lawrence 45). As Lennard J. Davis has demonstrated, the otherwise meaningless and invisible "normal" depends on its oppositional relationship with visible and measurable deviance, and normative views of biological differences figure them as indelible (and of course definitively negative) identity markers. Paul Youngquist has rightly pointed out that "by the late eighteenth century medical science was consolidating its authority over deviant flesh," and "[t]he last decades of the eighteenth century witness the installation of this turn from contingency to norm" (9, xxv). As Beddoes, Thelwall, and their contemporaries carved out distinct approaches to non-normative bodies and minds in the diverse field of Romantic medicine, doing so often required them to confront the trending forces of normativity. Regardless of their differences, we say of Thelwall what Grinnell says of Thomas Beddoes: both seek to "mode[l] . . . a reorganization of medical practice in Georgian England" (224)—and their forms of reorganization are distinctly humane and ethical, fostering a deep sense of disability as difference.

A "prodigious polymath" (Jay 16), medicine was Beddoes's most consistent professional preoccupation. Having received a medical degree at Oxford and advanced training at Edinburgh, he remained an active physician even during his years as a reader in chemistry at Oxford. But, as Mike Jay describes, Beddoes's "relationship to the medical profession was an abrasive one. He was not its ambassador so much as its scourge and its corrector" (26)—or, in George C.

Grinnell's more measured characterization, "the proper professionalization of medicine in Britain is a fantasy Beddoes in particular nurtures" (225). Beddoes articulated various aspects of his professional ideal throughout his career, which focused especially on preventative medicine and public education. Fittingly, his final publication before dying, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Sir Joseph Banks, Bart. P.R.S. on the Causes and Removal of the Prevailing Discontents, Imperfections, and Abuses in Medicine* (1808), brings together all of his critiques of Romantic medicine and details a comprehensive, systematic program of training and practice that he hoped would come to be implemented and enforced by law.

In his *Letter to Banks*, Beddoes advocates a standardized and extended program of medical education. Instead of the three years required by Edinburgh, or the five years required elsewhere, he outlines a six-year curriculum that emphasizes practical experience, what he thought was most relevant to the quality of patient care.[6] Beddoes also takes up the need for better medical examinations—he proposes one "formal" and one practical exam, both to be judged by impartial faculty members not involved in the student's training (70 – 1), which would help to ensure that only competent medical practitioners could claim medical qualifications. He also emphasized the need for a "compleat medical seminary" in London (79), where there were so many who could be trained and so many who required medical care.

Many of the more passionate passages in his *Letter to Banks* address the ways that medicine at present failed to help the variously sick, injured, or otherwise disabled. Many of the problems Beddoes identified were directly related to the nature of the medical marketplace,

[6] The system Beddoes proposed is modeled partly on the reformed French medical system and anticipates modern medical education. Beddoes indicates that the first three years should be spent primarily in academic study. But emphasizing the need for hands-on training, the fourth year should introduce "clinical lectures," as well as "[o]bservation of medical cases, and practical reading," and the fifth and sixth years should find the student in "attendance on hospitals, with practical reading and lectures" (58). The careers of Beddoes's French contemporaries were shaped by the democratic ideals of the Revolution. British medicine as a whole imported—and many would say benefited from—the medical developments of Revolutionary and Imperial France. For more on French medicine, see Weiner.

which functioned largely on economic interests rather than a common goal of scientific and social progress. The fierce competition of Romantic medicine is a phenomenon recuperated by recent historians of science. Mary E. Fissell describes the "profusion of health-care providers eager for [each patient's] custom" (37), and Roy and Dorothy Porter describe how, "[w]herever money was to be made out of medicine, the opportunity was seized" (Porter and Porter 24). This encouraged medical practitioners to guard rather than share their medical knowledge, a practice Beddoes sought to address through the creation of a "central board" that could collect information from all "hospitals and medical charities in the kingdom" (*Banks* 82). Likewise, Beddoes sought to promote the open exchange of medical knowledge by publishing the outcomes of his various experimental endeavors, even when those results were not favorable. Of his pneumatic experimentation, for example, he wrote that what he sought was "a *trial* of airs in medicine, *without giving the smallest assurance of success*" (*Considerations* 7). No matter his results, the Bristol doctor would disseminate them publicly. Advocating scientific transparency, he insisted that "I have no disposition to secrecy" (*Letter to Darwin* 5).

The medical marketplace also encouraged professionals to see patients as sources of income first and foremost, rather than as human beings who fundamentally deserved assistance. The poor were especially susceptible to exploitation, and this was even (and sometimes especially) the case when they were in the hands of those physicians who did prioritize scientific progress over financial gain. Beddoes was skeptical of the Royal Infirmary, for example, because "it was an arrangement for the benefit of the doctors," who "were clearly looking for subjects on whom they could either experiment or impose their fixed ideas" (Jay 86). As Mike Jay details, "doctors were dependent on cadavers for anatomy practice, and once in the Infirmary they [the poor] were in the care of people to whom they were more interesting and valuable as

corpses" (86). Beddoes's proposition of funded medical research in his *Letter to Banks* speaks directly to these dangers.

So, too does the system he modeled in his Pneumatic Institute, which was run as a non-profit facility funded by donors (Tom Wedgwood among them) that offered free treatment for the poor. Although a primary purpose of the institute was to conduct research in pneumatic medicine, Beddoes did not wish to coerce his patients into any experimental treatments they did not want, and he therefore also offered a standard range of treatments free of charge. Likewise, he conducted extensive animal experimentation and also self-experimentation on his pneumatic therapies rather than immediately administering them to patients. He tested oxygen on animal subjects and also himself, for example, and later supported Humphry Davy's preliminary trials of nitrous oxide before making the gas available to patients. Jay correctly notes that this "relieved Beddoes of the ethical responsibility of experimenting on the sick"—an ethical responsibility many contemporaries failed to acknowledge altogether—"and left him answerable to no one but himself" (73).

For Beddoes, another key to medical reform was the exclusion of quack doctors, untrained practitioners towards whom he maintained unrelenting hostility throughout his career. Beddoes rarely missed an opportunity to critique quacks not only on the basis of their lack of proper training, but also on the grounds that they greedily capitalized on the fears and sickness of the poor without providing any real benefit to them. More than anyone else, quacks exemplified the dire consequences of an open medical market structured around economic gain. In his characteristically enthusiastic tone, Beddoes advocates nothing short of "the extinction of quacks" in his *Letter to Banks*. They are enough of a problem, he insists, that "a scheme for the reform of medicine without the abolition of quack medicines, is about as hopeful as one for

making the rattle-snake harmless, leaving the venom-fang in his jaws" (*A Letter to Banks* 101, 99). "[T]he thunders of the law," Beddoes dramatically concludes, "may be hurled at the quacks without delay" (107 – 8).

Because the moralistic tale *The History of Isaac Jenkins* (1793) is meant to convey Beddoes's principles of preventative medicine to a primarily poor, local readership, it consequently contains a scathing cautionary portrayal of a quack doctor. The story takes place in 1783, when "there came great sickness over all the country, and numbers were swept away by the spotted fever, especially among the poor" (8); Isaac's wife and three of his five children have been "sick of the fever," and one is near death. The quack doctor has preyed on Isaac's family by selling them "some white powder, which did the mother and children no good but harm" (9 – 10). Beddoes is not content to rest on his own medical authority as the physician-author of *Isaac Jenkins*—or the contrast provided by the character of Mr. Langford, a surgeon who generously intervenes and provides the family with a cure and also invaluable advice for the future. Instead Beddoes also appeals to his readership's religious sensibility through the character of the Rector of Wistanstow, who reports that the quack doctor has not only killed some former patients, but also failed to save his own wife's life and is a "[c]onjurer besides." In one of the most moralistic moments of a strikingly moralistic tale, Beddoes tells his reader, "your quack doctors care not a farthing whether they kill or cure; all they want is to fleece those that know no better" (10).

Unsurprisingly, Beddoes was also "deeply suspicious of self-help books" (Mitchell v), a primary medium for the dissemination of medical information in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Popular and influential manuals including John Wesley's *Primitive Physick* and William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine,* used ideologically-charged language in promising to

allow patients to become their own physicians.[7] Wesley's text, for example, "set down cheap, and safe, and easy Medicines; easy to be known, easy to be procured, and easy to be applied by plain, unlettered men"—in contrast to expensive and esoteric medical texts—and provides simple remedies for conditions ranging from breast cancer ("Use the *Cold Bath*") to vertigo ("Take a *Vomit* or two") (xxiv, xiv, 40, 110). Regardless of the author and their medical training (or their lack thereof), Beddoes was fundamentally wary of such texts. Some misled patients and prevented them from accessing legitimate medical treatments and cures. Others detailed proper medical treatments, but Beddoes believed these could be safely implemented only by the trained physician. This is one way in which Beddoes tended to view "the role of the patient as preventing rather than curing complaints" (Grinnell 235).[8]

And yet, wary as he was of the self-help genre and of the patient's role in the therapeutic endeavor, he made various forms of public medical education key to his career. In particular, Beddoes produced manuals on preventative medicine—including *Isaac Jenkins*, which may rightly be read as a literary variation on the genre—and also produced and promoted the practice of open public medical education. In 1798 he held a series of lectures in Bristol that took place three times a week for 24 weeks—and, somewhat remarkably, adapted the material into a second series of ten lectures for women, the "first time women had ever been offered public education in Bristol" (Jay 150). Likewise, Beddoes promoted the need for public lectures in both his *Letter to*

[7] Multiple editions were published of John Wesley's and William Buchan's texts—originally of 1747 and 1769, respectively—and new editions of the latter were available well into the nineteenth century. Ginnie Smith notes that "[f]or a large number of people [medical self-help manuals] could well have been a far more familiar source of information than the personal advice of the trained physician" (250).

[8] See Grinnell on Beddoes's complex relationship with self-help medical texts and his distrust of the practices they encouraged. It also bears mention that although self-help manuals offered apparent control to the patient, they did not always live up to their advertised democratic goals: Roy Porter suggests that while "they might encourage independence of judgment, breeding that 'health protestantism' which fired nineteenth-century alternative medicine," they could also "reinforce the authority of the medical elite" by publicizing their methods (*Benefit* 283). Of course the ambiguous position of self-help manuals also demonstrates the lack of a coherent, centralized medical authority during the era.

Banks and in *Hygëia: Or Essays Moral and Medical, on the Causes Affecting the Personal State of Our Middling and Affluent Classes* (1802), a series of essays that constitute his most comprehensive explication of preventative medicine.

By the time of *Hygëia*'s publication Beddoes has grown disheartened with the possibility of appealing directly to the poor, and so in this instance he writes directly to "the middle and more opulent classes" in the hope that "whatever benefit these essays may be capable of conferring on my indigent countrymen will be best conveyed through the medium of their superiors" (8 – 9). In *Hygëia* he explains that lectures on "select subjects of ANATOMY" would be popular and effective educational tools, to judge by his experiences in Bristol: "parents were struck with the obvious application of what they saw to the prevention of disasters, common in families" (37 – 9). But *Hygëia* also serves as an educational tool, not only laying out ways to remain healthy but also demystifying misconceptions and prejudices about a number of diseases and detailing the incipient signs of illnesses that could alert patients to their need to seek professional medical treatment.

Beddoes sought, in Robert Mitchell's words, "to reform both the public and the medical profession by outlining an almost paradoxical balance between medical authority and public education" (v). And yet his lectures, along with his preventative health texts, demonstrate Beddoes's enduring commitment to a certain kind of transparency in medicine—a commitment also indicated in his *Letter to Banks*, in which he insists that the public must be engaged in conversations about medical reform because of the importance of medicine to their everyday lives. The extent of Beddoes's desire to educate the citizenry on the principles of anatomy and preventive medicine indicates that what he feared most was not full transparency but rather the

consequences of poorly researched medical therapies and treatments left in the hands of those who, without proper training, could not enact them properly.

Beddoes's turn to the middle and upper classes in *Hygëia* demonstrates his distress at the possibilities of social progress, a sense of disillusionment he shared with many friends in the wake of the French Revolution. But his democratic approach to the poor in the 1790s is remarkable, and lays the foundation for an abiding respect and concern for the wellbeing of all patients, highborn and impoverished alike—an inclusivity that is critical in the context of disability politics for its emphasis on the fundamental humanity of the ill. No text better demonstrates the deep respect underpinning Beddoes's medical approach than *Isaac Jenkins*, a story in which unmistakably foregrounds the dignity of its poor and variously ill characters. After the quack doctor has failed to help them and unable to pay for a proper physician, the family is saved by Mr. Langford, a surgeon who is in town to treat a parson. Isaac's wife manages to beg for Langford's prescribed cure, warm ale with ginger, despite her alcoholic husband's drinking debt with the landlady at the *Horse-Shoe*—an instance of communal generosity. The cure proves effective. But the clear central message of *Isaac Jenkins* is conveyed not through the fact of the cure but rather through a conversation-turned-conversion between Isaac and the surgeon that centers on alcoholism and preventive medicine.

When Langford first came upon them, he found Isaac's children malnourished and poorly clothed, with only a "wad of straw" to sleep on (15). Isaac's garden has "more weeds than potatoes" and the family's dwelling is "hardly fit to house a pig": cold and in disrepair, it is damp, dirty, open to the elements, and "ill-smelling withal" (29, 11). In it is little more than "a crazy table, a broken arm chair, a bench and two stools" (15). Although Isaac works, Langford learns that he has spent most of his money on drink since the tragic death of a child two years

earlier. In other words, Isaac developed his habit, importantly, not out of depravity but due to understandable misery, as well as the corrupting influence of two heavy drinkers with silver tongues.

After a caution of the dangers of drinking fails to resound—but believing Isaac to be ignorant rather than malicious—Langford uses Isaac's demonstrated knowledge of "horses and cattle and sheep" to make a series of common-sense points about the maintenance of health and disease prevention. Like calves and lambs, children more easily succumb to illness than adults; likewise those (both animal and human) who are malnourished, filthy, and chronically cold will fall sick or die most easily. Langford comes close to accusing Isaac for the state of his household, but, he tells his reader, he prefers to let Isaac think on the conversation for himself and reach his own conclusions. The family's fate is conveyed in a "letter" sent by Langford to the tale's narrator. Two months after his initial visit Langford again called upon the Jenkins family and was "pleased to see things wearing a better aspect": the house was now clean and smelled "sweet and fresh"; both the house and the children's clothes had been repaired; and the children were now well fed. Since that second visit, Langford happily reports, Isaac managed to pay his bill at the *Horse-Shoe*, and also to pay Langford himself for his services—something Langford allowed because he knew it would be important to Isaac's pride and desire for self-sufficiency.

Part of why *Isaac Jenkins* is such a remarkable text is because it was successfully directed at—and resonated with—a poor audience. Because he "printed [it] in a small chapbook-style format and sold [it] cheaply" Beddoes ensured that *Isaac Jenkins* could be disseminated broadly, but its popularity was due in large part to the fact that "intended readers did not feel patronised" by it even as it "informed" them (Jay 63). It is a moralistic tale, to be sure, but one

that allows for redemption through will and work. Once he is given the necessary knowledge, Isaac acts of his own accord to ensure his family's success. The postscript to the story, that Langford finally secures positions for Isaac's children once they come of age, is a testament to the fact that Isaac as much as Langford is the tale's hero. "Here was a doctor," Mike Jay writes, that "the poor could trust," and it is no surprise that *Isaac Jenkins* remained in print for nearly 50 years (Jay 88, 63).

The types of people depicted in *Isaac Jenkins* and the story's intended audience were the same kinds of people as those Beddoes hoped the middle and upper class readers of *Hygëia* would help, and those he established his Pneumatic Institute to treat. These were patients who were likeliest to be exploited by his medical contemporaries. For Beddoes, however, no class of disability was worthier of medical attention than any other; no man deserved of human dignity more than any other.

Thelwall and the Citizen Patient

Like Beddoes, Thelwall establishes his elocutionary practice in a vexed relation to mainstream medicine, from which he clearly seeks approval yet which he wishes both to exist outside of and in many ways explicitly resist. Determined to establish the legitimacy of "the Science of Curing Impediments" and to appeal to his professional peers (*Results* 74), Thelwall addresses two lengthy elocutionary texts to the medical professor Henry Cline, describes his early exposure to medical education, and admits that he is "desirous of calling the attention of the professional and scientific world" to the "researches and experimental exertions of ten successive years" (Cline 1, 5). Thelwall asserts, however, that the treatment of speech impediments "is not, and, it is obvious, cannot be, the province of the surgeon or the physician"

(Cline 60). He criticizes dental prosthetics and oral surgery for causing greater "difficulties" and "mischiefs" than congenital disabilities do, and for even causing "serious accidents" and "irreparable injury" in some cases (*Results* 4-5, *Cline* 50-51).[9]

Thelwall's critiques may be partly accounted for by the economic realities of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medicine, which would have put acute pressure on Thelwall to actively market his product, just as his competitors did. More likely, Thelwall felt compelled to defend his practice because of his uneasy professional status: not only was he under strict governmental and cultural scrutiny because of his radical political career, but it was not altogether clear that he was substantively different from the quack doctors that Beddoes and many other licensed medical practitioners loathed. Thelwall wished to demonstrate that, despite his relative lack of formal training, he was no less professional or rigorous than an Edinburgh-trained physician. His effective and deeply democratic practice, as well as his consequent professional success, testifies to the "genuine alternatives" presented to patients by the diversity of Romantic medical practitioners (Porter and Porter 24, 26). [10]

By conspicuously withholding details of his therapeutic methods from otherwise comprehensive elocutionary texts—"the key to his system is missing" (Rockey, "Origins" 156)—Thelwall distinguishes his elocutionary texts from self-help manuals. Practical or proprietary concerns could explain his silence, or perhaps like Beddoes, Thelwall feared the misapplication of medical treatments. [11] Although Thelwall's elocutionary texts could never serve as self-help manuals, he, like Beddoes, advocated transparency. Thelwall remarks of *The*

[9] For an account of speech therapy during the era, see Rockey, "Origins."
[10] For a detailed account of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medical market, see Digby.
[11] Denyse Rockey speculates that practical concerns—first a lack of time and later a lack of money—may partly account for the gaps in Thelwall's elocutionary texts ("Origins" 174). They may also be partly explained by proprietary concerns in the competitive medical market. Because of the interactive—and, judging by his case studies, individualized—nature of his elocutionary therapy, moreover, Thelwall's methods may have been impossible to generalize and describe at all, much less effectively.

Vestibule of Eloquence that its price and limited print run may restrict its circulation, but "it is the wish of the professor that every thing relating to the exercises of his pupils should be open to public inspection" (iv).

Because he remains silent as to his specific therapeutic techniques, Thelwall draws attention to the philosophy underlying his practice, which is clearly aligned with his democratic ideals. In striking contrast to doctors who use diagnosis, prognosis, and therapy to "establish, exercise, and perpetuate their power" (Couser 19)—increasingly dominant characteristics of medical professionals—[12] Thelwall demonstrates a devotion to transparency and communication, as well as a resistance to pathologizing his "pupils." He asserts,

> Impress the perceptive faculty, clearly and strongly; demonstrate, step by step, your theory to the understanding; and interest, at the same time, the imagination; leave nothing obscure or unaccounted for, that the capacity of the pupil can comprehend, or that, from the nature and structure of his frame and faculties, is capable of illustration; give him a system on which he can see and feel that he may depend … . (*Cline* 58-59)

Thelwall's commitment to meaningful discourse is similarly evident in his reflection that "the successful practitioner must have looked with scrutinizing eye into the motions of the heart, and of the understanding" (*Results* 74).[13]

Unlike Beddoes, however, Thelwall underscores the importance of and actively seeks to capitalize on the patient's contributions to the therapeutic process even as he stresses the therapist's authority. In this he echoes self-help author William Buchan, who claims, "It is always in the power of the patient, or of those about him, to do as much towards his recovery as can be effected by the physician" (x). In his elocutionary practice, Thelwall made home visits to

[12] Much work has recently been done on the nature of modern medical authority and the antagonistic relationship between modern doctor and modern patient. See Friedson, Couser (*Recovering Bodies*), and Hawkins.
[13] This practice marks Thelwall, and certain of his populist contemporaries, as exceptional. G. Thomas Couser underscores, "discourse between patient and doctor occurs in a way that may be at odds with the root meaning of *communication*, the making common of information"—because of specialized discourse and because of the medical imperative to maintain authority (*Recovering Bodies* 20-21). Also see Freidson on power and authority in medicine.

pupils who could not take up residence in his London institution. In such cases he often trained pupils or their guardians—including severely mentally disabled children and those with structural abnormalities of the mouth—in his techniques so that they could implement them in his absence. The importance of patient involvement is also a point to which Thelwall also devotes a conspicuous amount of textual space and emphasis. Tellingly, Thelwall remarks that "mental and moral causes step in to the explanation" of what he calls his most successful elocutionary case: "I have never met with so devoted an attention, and so entire a confidence" (*Cline* 64). Michael Scrivener reads evidence of Jacobin values in Thelwall's faith in the collaborative therapeutic process: "each successful case" may become an "allegorical illustration of self-improvement and the rational application of knowledge" (197).

Thelwall's early life helps to explain his direction: he was a lisper "from the imperfection and irregular position of [his] teeth," and he benefited from the techniques he promoted as a speech therapist (*Cline* 19). He also experienced voicelessness and marginalization of a different kind as the subject of violent government repression. Having experienced a speech impediment himself, as well as the inability to communicate freely, Thelwall broke with many of his peers by developing an inclusive therapeutic approach that addressed the social and functional consequences of "disability" while humanizing the disabled.

Thelwall's prognosis for nearly all speech impediments is uniform, regardless of context and cause: "a correct and impressive elocution is attainable by all" (*Vestibule* 8). [14] In practice, this insistence on the universal curability of speech impediments imposes an obligation on disabled individuals to seek treatment. This sense is underscored by his frequent references to disabilities themselves as "evils" and, less frequently, "calamities." Although it may be

[14] Rockey indicates that when compared to Victorian elocutionists, whose professional attention seemed to be focused on "stuttering, lisping, and provincialisms" ("Logopaedic" 89), Thelwall's interests were remarkably broad, suggesting his optimism and willingness to include a wide range of patients in his therapeutic project.

professionally and economically understandable, Thelwall's emphasis on treatment is potentially problematical. Disability scholars suggest that the imperative to treat or cure impairments often goes hand in hand with the profound social exclusion of the disabled, and that therapies and cures themselves can be understood as "efforts to control or eradicate" undesirable "human attribute[s]" (Freidson 212). [15]

The framing of Thelwall's elocutionary project, however, establishes his professional services and techniques as ones that do not promote "normative notions of health," which "produce a healthy bourgeois subject primarily by forcefully producing others as infirm" (Grinnell 225). Thelwall's elocutionary principles are not only therapies for the impaired, but techniques for improving the speech of the able-bodied. They may "loose the tongue of the stammerer, and enable the literary student to command, and the critic to comprehend, with certainty, the genuine sources of grace and mellifluence" (*Cline* 4). Here Thelwall not only resists pathologizing his disabled patients, but goes so far as to suggest that their difference from the respected—and presumably able-bodied—student and critic is a matter of degree, not kind. Likewise, by treating politicians and clergymen alongside the congenitally impaired, Thelwall mitigates the stigma that often accompanies medical treatment, creating in his London institution an alternate medico-educational system—a kind of microcosmic democracy—in which the disabled and able-bodied are part of a common project of self-improvement. [16]

It also seems that the "evils" and "calamities" Thelwall seeks to address are not his patients' embodied differences themselves but rather their cultural and political implications.

[15]See Garland-Thomson ("Cultural Logic") and Wendell on the broad social implications of an emphasis on treating and curing disabilities. In discussing "[t]he widespread message that they [the disabled] are not good enough until they are 'cured'," Wendell argues that "the drive to find 'cures' for disabilities can be seen, by those who appreciate disabilities as differences, to be as much an attempt to wipe out difference as an effort to relieve suffering" (83).
[16] Thelwall reveals his sympathy and even allegiance with the impaired when he asserts, in pointedly political terms, that they will rightly understand the value of his techniques even if "senators, barristers, and divines may be content to whine, and croak, and scream, in feeble and exhausting discord" (*Cline* 27).

Foregrounding biological difference only to dismiss it, Thelwall "reject[s], altogether, as far as the organization of the mouth is concerned, all distinction of curable and incurable impediments" (*Cline* 145). Part of why Thelwall believed all cases were treatable—even those "universally" thought to be beyond "remedy" or "relief" (*Results* 2, 28)—is his nuanced understanding of the constructed aspects of disability. Thelwall insists that speech impediments may be accounted for at least partly by social and psychological factors including education, the influence of family members, fear, habit, and trauma—most of which can be traced to restrictive cultural attitudes about disability. For Thelwall, speech impediments are, "Most assuredly … with very few exceptions," "complicated with Moral and Intellectual causes" (*Cline* 61); "Impediments are, in a great degree, contagious" (*Vestibule* 9); and "very many" cases are "purely mental and moral" (*Cline* 61).

The word "apparent" appears frequently throughout his elocutionary texts, similarly suggesting the highly constructed social apparatus that frames and augments our view of non-normative embodiments. By detailing and demystifying "*apparent* deficiencies of mind," "*apparently* defective faculties," and "apparent ineptitude," among others, Thelwall signals both the diagnostic failure of his medical contemporaries and his pupils' unrecognized potential (*Cline* 44, 5, 59, emphasis in original). Thelwall also resists surgery and dental prosthetics, mainstream medical techniques that sought to replicate structural "normalcy" but could hinder or altogether prevent a patient's elocutionary progress. Instead he emphasizes natural compensation, accommodation, and functional improvement—and thus often leaves his patients' physical differences unaffected. Thelwall explains that "more serious and irremediable mischiefs [are] produced … by giving the tongue too much liberty" by medical intervention

"than ever resulted from its too great restriction" by nature (*Cline* 50-51).[17] In these ways Thelwall consistently demonstrates that non-normative embodiments themselves are separate from—and often less disabling than—the social responses to those embodiments (e.g. indulgent parents, inadequate education, personal fears). [18]

Unlike most medical treatments, then, Thelwall's "therapies" and "cures" do not attempt to eliminate embodied human difference, but instead promote his goal of social access. Andrew McCann rightly identifies Thelwall's elocutionary project as "equip[ping] hitherto marginalized and disempowered subjects for active public life" (223), and it is important that Thelwall did so not by forcing his patients to achieve "a norm of embodiment—call it 'the proper body'" (Youngquist xiv). Rather, he sought to help his pupils participate in society by attaining "[g]eneral intelligibility" (*Results* 15). Thelwall's conception of therapeutic success is clear when he notes, with some satisfaction, that despite the limits of a teenaged pupil's progress "he has already done that which, with a little care and attention, will enable him to pass through life with extended means of comfort, utility and social enjoyment" (*Results* 24). By insisting that physical differences need not lead to speechlessness, and that disabilities need not amount to permanent social exclusion, Thelwall revealed the limits of mainstream medicine. He also

[17] Although Thelwall "admit[s] the propriety, and even the necessity, of an occasional appeal to ... operation" he does so only when "the pupil is old enough" and after non-surgical methods have been attempted (53). He tells of the story of two brothers with a common "defective structure" of mouth, one of whom had received surgery that did "irreparable injury" (52). The second brother, however, "had escaped this premature operation," and through natural compensation made progress on his own, added to, "without knife or scissars," by Thelwall's techniques. Thelwall concludes this description by sharing his belief that, unlike his brother, "he may, hereafter, deliver, in the most conspicuous situations, with every requisite accompaniment of grace and energy, the equally vigorous sentiments of his own independent mind" (53).

[18] Like many of his contemporaries, Thelwall was more ambivalent with respect to idiocy, though his project retains its essential character even when he turns to the severest cognitive impairments. For a full description of these tensions and continuities, see Stanback, "Disability and Dissent."

challenged newly emerging normative beliefs, and thereby sought to influence the constitution of the public world.[19]

Beddoes and the Aesthetics of the Disabled Body

Like Thelwall, Beddoes was preoccupied with the social sources and social consequences of disability—and like Thelwall, Beddoes emphasizes functionality over superficial norms of embodiment. But unlike Thelwall, Beddoes directly takes on the aesthetics of the disfigured body in his exploration of the social dimensions of disability. In *Hygëia* he provides what amounts to an aesthetic theory of disfigurement, one that I will put into conversation with his rich descriptive passages about ill bodies—passages that amount to an astute deployment of aesthetic theory to ethical ends.

In Essay VI of *Hygëia* Beddoes asserts that "*beauty* is a thing perfectly arbitrary or conventional" and that, further, "[t]here is no possible cast of features or colour of complexion, to which persons of different age, country, and education will not apply the epithets both *ugly* and *handsome*" (VI 13 – 14). That people often agree on their aesthetic judgments is merely the effect of habituation: "One generation goes on to think and feel, as they have been taught by the preceding" (14). Aesthetic judgment and taste can be shaped not only by cultural indoctrination but also by individual education. So it is for the standard categories of the ugly, handsome, and

[19] The importance of social participation should not be underestimated. As Susan Wendell underscores, there is a fundamental connection between the exclusion of the disabled from the public world and their lack of access to—and a lack of social and governmental recognition of—their civil and human rights (40 - 41). This is one of many insights that leads Wendell to conclude that the devastating social consequences of "disability" may warrant an individual's desire for a cure, even when the immutable realities of an impairment itself may not. It is on all of these grounds that I do not wholly agree with McCann's contention that Thelwall's gentlemen pupils and their professional ambitions suggest that "assimilation into the institutions of bourgeois public life was the goal … indicating an urge to bring students into the ambit of official political and cultural authority, rather than an attempt to subvert its institutions" (225).

beautiful. But, much more remarkably, Beddoes equally asserts the constructedness of our aesthetic responses to what we might call the "deformed" or "grotesque" human body.

In the first essay in *Hygëia* Beddoes uses the topic of scarring to make a number of larger points about the aesthetic potency of the disabled body, as well as affective responses to disability. Beddoes explains that scars often have no disabling potential beyond their social—and therefore emotional—implications. They are, he writes, instances of "consequences left behind by disease" that "do not involve the smallest degree of physical inability" but may lead to "the destruction of internal peace" because of the way others react to them (29 – 30). Beddoes's comments seamlessly align with the way that facial scarring is for contemporary disability theorists a paradigmatic example of a socially-constructed disability.[20] "What impression," Beddoes asks,

> does a sallow, unwholesome complexion, seams from the small-pox, scrophulous scars, the blight of beauty, and those marks which debauchery is apt to stamp upon the face, make upon the spectator? Is he not in general disposed to turn away in disgust from these appearances? or if politeness forbid him to give way to his feelings, do they not rise to a greater height for being dammed up?—And in what manner does the mind of those who perceive themselves to be objects of aversion react?— (30)

These questions constitute a sophisticated examination into the aesthetics of disability, especially because Beddoes inquires not only into the perspective of the "spectator" here, but also that of what may rightly be called the spectacle. Beddoes himself was known for his own highly unusual body, which was the object of scrutiny, gossip, and mockery—he was, famously, "short, rotund, and wheezing" due to a congenital heart condition confirmed only post-mortem (Jay

[20] Susan Wendell writes, for example, "The power of culture alone to construct a disability is revealed when we consider bodily differences—deviations from a society's conception of a 'normal' or acceptable body—that, although they cause little or no functional or physical difficulty for the person who has them, constitute major social disabilities. An important example is facial scarring, which is a disability of appearance only, a disability constructed by stigma and cultural meanings" (44).

15).[21] Given this, coupled with his profession, it makes sense that Beddoes would be equally attuned to the impact of encountering non-normative bodies and also inhabiting a non-normative body.

In pursuing his aesthetic inquiry Beddoes quotes at length from J. George Busch, a recently deceased professor from "Hamburgh" who as a child had had small-pox which "left him badly marked" (31). Busch recalls learning only after recovering from his illness that he had "previously to this disorder … had a comely appearance," and notes the palpable cooling of family friends and his extended family members after his aspect was tarnished. He was subject to "hard words and blows" as "reproaches rained from all quarters"; his parents "alone treated [him] with any degree of sense" (31). Busch underscores the source of his difficulties when he explains, in "my grandfather's favour I stood all the higher, for he was stock-blind; so he could not judge of me by my exterior" (32). Beddoes does not question Busch's ascription of his ill treatment to his scarred appearance alone. Rather, Beddoes concludes that, although Busch grew into an "active, wise and useful" man, "it should seem that … [he] never entirely recovered of the wound inflicted on his tender mind" (32).

For Beddoes, Busch's case is instructive insofar as it reveals the very real damage done by the averse feelings we may register at the sight of disability. If "[u]nhappy feelings" arise from a person's "consciousness of [his] deformity," Beddoes insists, the source is not "envy" at the relative beauty of others, but is rather the effect of the "slight or insult" of others' responses to his appearance (32). It is a damning but realistic take on the social consequences of visible disability. I emphasize "visible" here because Busch's story lays bare the sociocultural forces

[21] Beddoes requested that an autopsy be performed on his body after his death. As Mike Jay describes, "Beddoes' body was dissected by his assistants, John King and John Stock… Their autopsy showed a congenital heart defect and a left lung that had clearly collapsed many years previously, the right lung massively distended in compensation." This autopsy definitively disproved the common "claim that Beddoes had died of his own experiments" (249).

that account for why one would seek to "pass" as non-disabled (if possible), or why one would choose appearance over functionality—the medical choice Thelwall so stridently criticizes his peers for making when performing oral surgery and devising prosthetics that lead to the appearance of normalcy but inhibit patients from speaking and otherwise making the best possible use of their oral capabilities.

Beddoes also uses Busch's case to preface his challenge of the supposition that aesthetic responses to deformity are innate or otherwise natural. Beddoes claims that any disgust we feel at deformity is in fact due to our moral and intellectual shortcomings, explaining that it "is commonly the self-created torment of those who have no evil to plague them, *except* want of employment for their time." Likewise, he proposes that "[f]ew things, in fact, after having attracted rational curiosity, excite disgust" (33). Here Beddoes is especially clear as to the constructedness of aesthetic responses to disability, and here Beddoes implicitly reveals how his proposed public education in anatomy and public education could effect real social change. That is, through lectures and texts, disability may become a source of "rational curiosity" rather than scorn and disgust.[22] What's more, the utopian vision Beddoes goes on to construct in Essay I of *Hygëia* is one defined as much by social progress as medical progress. Advancements in medicine may prevent most cases of deformity from occurring in the first place, but this is matched by advancements in humanity: "the spectator will have been tutored to too high a sense of humanity" to treat the visibly disabled in the way that Busch had ben treated. He would not

[22] The modifier "rational" is key. Susan Wendell writes that seeing disability as an exotic form of difference is not so very far from seeing it as defect. She writes, "It is not uncommon for a difference to be valued for being exotic and interesting, even as the people who embody it or are associated with it are kept on the outskirts of society (Fiedler 1984). People with disabilities are subject to this double-edged form of appreciation, which plays a role in their token cultural representation. Since their difference is what is seen to make them interesting, it is highlighted, and their similarity to people without disabilities is minimized or else commented on as amazing or amusing in order to maintain focus upon the difference" (66). Similarly, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has compellingly demonstrated in *Staring: How We Look* that there is more than one was to look at a disabled body, and more than one way to be beheld as a disabled body.

"degrade [the] countenance" of whatever persons remain with "corporeal blemishes and defects" with a "mirror"—his affective response—"in which they are reproachfully reflected" (33). Beddoes offers here a strikingly embodied image of the aesthetics of disability in which the spectator's visible reaction of disgust becomes a mirror that constructs the disgusting human object it beholds.

Despite—or perhaps because of—his acute sense of the potency and constructedness of aesthetic responses to disability, Beddoes makes pointed use of rich bodily descriptions to serve his moral ends. I will discuss some of his more memorable descriptions of scrofula and gout in Chapter 4, when I take up Samuel Taylor Coleridge's acts of self diagnosis, which I argue are inspired in part by *Hygëia*. *The History of Isaac Jenkins* (1793) makes equally powerful use of the aesthetics of disability, and does so in a more properly literary context.

Beddoes spares no physical detail in describing the initial source of Isaac's woes: the death of his child in an accident. Having been spooked by the sound of a cracker, "horses ran and dragged the wheel over [the child's] body," leaving him "bleeding and mangled, with his face all one wound" (17). The end of this description is as strikingly poetic as it is grizzly, equal parts haunting and viscerally uncomfortable. Beddoes harnesses the affective potency of the image—a child's body crushed and torn, but especially a child's face, the seat of innocence, become nothing but open flesh—to underscore his criticism of "wanton boys" who caused the accident and who "may think it fine sport to make a flash or burst after it is dark." This provides an invitation to participate in preventive medicine of an unlikely form. Beddoes pointedly tells his reader, "considering what shocking mischief [these wanton boys] often do, they ought to be made to leave off these dangerous tricks, if they do not choose to leave them off of their own accord" (17). Beddoes doubtlessly knew the shock and disgust his audience would register on

reading—or on hearing read—the description of the child's bloody body, and this is how he makes his moral imperative more real, more material, more compelling.

Likewise, when describing symptoms the Jenkins child who is most stricken with fever, Beddoes experiments with language, elaborating a symptomological description into a rich portrait:

> His eyes were dull, his face sunk, and round about his lips there was a foul crust of the colour of lead, as it were; you could see when his mouth was a little way open, that his tongue was all brown and rough, like the bark of a tree: his breath was also very bad: and his body broke out all over dark-red spots. (9)

The evocation of colors—a gray crust and brown tongue—is striking. But Beddoes's analogic deployment in this passage especially interests me for the way that it encourages the reader's visceral response, provoking sympathy through radical defamiliarization. Choosing to invoke "lead" rather than any other dark gray object or substance underscores the fever's unnatural corruption of the child's body; the evocation of tree bark, though natural by contrast, is no less unsettling and strange. This is particularly the case as the child's *mouth* is being described here, inviting the reader's embodied participation by creating a situation for him to unwittingly imagine the taste of lead and tree and feel the cool crust of metal and the abrasive coarseness of the bark.

The most unambiguously gruesome description in *Isaac Jenkins* is that of Isaac's employer, Simcox, who unlike Isaac fails to forsake drink by the tale's end. The side-effects of Simcox's frequent imbibing are initially invisible, and then minor, but his alcoholism progresses so that "at last [he] became an hideous spectacle, quite a monster, with his legs enormously swelled, his face bloated, and gasping for breath" (34). This description clarifies the relative aesthetic impotency of general descriptive terms, even of the most dramatic sort (e.g. "monster"), as compared to specific physical details (e.g. "face bloated"). This is a phenomenon Tobin

Siebers takes up in *Disability Aesthetics* in what is one of the book's most important passages. He writes,

> When words gain materiality and appear in the world as visible things, reading comes to a halt, but words acquire an additional power as a result. They stand still, producing a seizure of meaning, interrupting the ordinary transparency of the page, and exposing the materiality of language. They become bodies—Odysseus's scar and James's glass eye are paradigms—and they may act upon other bodies. The word becomes image, which is to say an object visible under the sign of desire… Healthy bodies in art do not have details. They are unmarked… [T]he most compelling images often summon visions of the human body, and of these the ones that picture wounds or markers of physical or mental difference are the most potent for the imagination. For words to rise to the surface of the text and stare back at readers like a glass eye, they must acquire the status of the detail, and where there are details, human difference is not far away (124 – 5).

In *Isaac Jenkins*, Simcox's bloated face and swollen legs—like the child's leaden crust and bark-like tongue—make Beddoes's words profoundly *real*. Through such details of disability Beddoes's text itself becomes a material body that can elicit a palpable response in the reader's body. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, this is a principle on which many of Wordsworth's poems also operate—which explains visceral readerly reactions to such details as Simon Lee's swollen ankles and thin, dry legs and Johnny Foy's "burr, burr, burr."

In his exploitation of the power of detail, Beddoes often crosses from blunt medical realism to the sensational. This is demonstrated by his description of the scene of Isaac's son's death. So is it the case with Simcox's undoing. One day Simcox collapsed, "the swoln unwieldy farmer with his face as black as your hat, snapping for a mouthful of air"—an animalistic image as much as a morbid one. Breath caught, Simcox recited Psalms: "My strength faileth me, because of my iniquity; and my bones are consumed; *My wickednesses are gone over my head; and are like a sore burden, too heavy for me to bear*" (34). Finally "his legs burst, and the holes at which the water oozed out, began to mortify" and he cried out "*there is no whole part in my*

body!" (35). If this moment works, and I believe it does—at least to the end Beddoes intended—it works because the excess of the passage's moralism and emotional tenor is matched by the excess of physical detail. It is a prime example for the purpose to which Beddoes used his astute sense of the affective impact of disability, and a testament to the important aesthetic work done by texts that are rarely read in a literary context.

Thelwall's Art of Elocution and the Beauties of Sound

To judge from his elocutionary texts, Thelwall's practice was much more than a politically-charged medical undertaking. It was also a fundamentally aesthetic project—from the goals of his London institute to the therapeutic techniques it employed, from Thelwall's hybrid elocutionary texts to the aesthetic insights he detailed in them. In this context the most striking of Thelwall's texts are *Letter to Henry Cline* and *The Vestibule of Eloquence: Original Articles, Oratorical and Poetical, Intended As Exercises in Recitation, at the Institution, Bedford Place, Russell Square* (1810). The firmer includes, among other things, a striking description of the aesthetics of blindness. The latter contains lists of pupils admitted at Thelwall's institution (from disabled children to foreigners to clergymen); prices and terms for each category of pupil; an "Introductory Discourse on the Nature and Objects of Elocutionary Science"; and "Odes, Translations, & C. Adapted for Recitation: As Exercises for the Pupils of the Institution" (73), including "The Negro's Prayer" and, compellingly, an ode to Edward Rushton of Liverpool, "*On his Restoration to Sight, after a Blindness of upwards of Thirty Years, by a series of Operations performed by Mr. Gibson, of Manchester*" (81).

In his "Introductory Discourse" Thelwall includes a remarkable series of definitions of the terms on which he founded and runs his elocutionary practice. They clarify the extent to

which Thelwall's ear was attuned to the nuances of speech, an aesthetic medium which he claims can shape—and can determine the impact of—the matter conveyed as much as any textual medium could:

> ELOQUENCE may be defined—*The Art of expressing our thoughts and feelings, with precision, force and elegance; and of heightening the impressions of Reason, by the colourings of the imagination*…
>
> *Oral Eloquence; or the Art of communicating, by the immediate action of the vocal and expressive Organs, to popular, or to select assemblies, the dictates of our Reason, or our Will; and the workings of our Passions, our Feelings and our Imaginations*…
>
> *Elocution is the Art, or the Act, of so delivering our own thoughts and sentiments, or the thoughts and sentiments of others, as not only to convey to those around us (with precision, force and harmony) the full purport and meaning of the words and sentences in which those thoughts are cloathed; but, also, to excite and impress upon their minds—the feelings, the imaginations and the passions, by which those thoughts are dictated; or with which they should naturally be accompanied.*…
>
> Eloquence is the Soul, or animating principle of Discourse. (3 – 5)

It is unsurprising that a man who had a lisp as a child would focus especially on speech as an expressive medium around which he could create a robust aesthetic system. Thelwall writes evocatively of the "musical accents, or inflections of the voice in the harmonic scale," its "sounds and cadences," and its "*percussion, accent* and *quantity*" (8). He writes reverently, "what music [is] so inspiring as the human voice?" (57).

The breadth of Thelwall's elocutionary aesthetics causes him to insist that "[t]he practical application of my principles is extensive—is universal" (Trident 9). Foreign students, for example, may attend the Institution if they are "desirous of attaining the Idiom and Pronunciation of the English Language, and of being made acquainted with the beauties of English Literature, and the principles of English Composition" (18). Clerical pupils are provided with "a copy of the entire Service of the Church of England" which "has been carefully prepared, with an

accurate and intelligible notation of the quantities, pauses, tune, and emphases, best calculated to produce impressions correspondent with the language and sentiments of that sublime composition" (12). And of course he counted among his students adults with various disabilities—"Gentlemen with IMPEDIMENTS or IMPERFECTIONS of UTTERANCE; whether Constitutional, Organic, or Habitual" (18)—as well as children as young as four who have "IMPEDIMENTS of any description, whether Organic, Constitutional, or Imitative" (20). All of these various pupils would be exposed to poetry and trained in recitation; all would learn about language, aurality, cadence, and meter.

Given his emphasis on speech and sound, it makes sense that Thelwall would single out the sensory compensation attendant on blindness. Yet I believe Thelwall's democratic tendencies and his personal experience of speechlessness are what allowed him to develop such an acute appreciation for a non-normative mode of embodiment that is characterized by heightened aurality and orality. For Thelwall, blindness is an unusual perceptual reality and mode of subjectivity—one with definitive benefits—rather than a sensory impairment in need of medical attention. In *A Letter to Henry Cline*, Thelwall describes John Gough, whom he had met years before in Kendal and who was his collaborator on the topic of idiocy. Thelwall focuses on the benefits of blindness to Gough's professional and everyday life:

> Cut off, in his earliest infancy, from all intercourse with the world of knowledge and observation, through the customary inlet, the organ of sight, Mr. Gough has been induced … to cultivate, with extreme diligence, the supplementary faculties of hearing and of touch. The acute perfection to which the latter of these has been improved and expanded, has been sufficiently demonstrated by the extent to which he has carried his practical researches into the minutiae of the science of botany; and the exquisiteness of his perceptions in the other kind—the promptitude with which he discovers the stature of the merest stranger by the first resoundings of his voice (of which I have myself been witness), and the facility with which he recognizes the presence, and discriminates the identity of his acquaintance, by merely listening to their respective breathings, equally illustrate the unprecedented degree of improvement to which he has expanded his hearing

> faculties: so that Mr. Gough is, in reality, one of those *demonstrative instances* of the omnipotency of mental energy … . (*Cline* 32-33)

Here Gough becomes a figure of Jacobin self-improvement, effort, and perseverance. It seems, too, that Gough has succeeded not in spite of his blindness, but in some measure because of it. Gough's blindness has led to a distinct mode of perception in which his senses of sound and space are sharpened and he has developed an "acute perception" of the tactile world. Thelwall treats these compensatory senses as singular—"unprecedented"—but also with a kind of veneration, referring to "the exquisiteness of his perceptions in the other kind." The aesthetic potential of Gough's blindness—and particularly his rich non-visual perceptual reality—remains largely implicit, but what he describes is clearly a mode of embodiment that would productively alter the relationship between the self and the external world.

Thelwall's discussion of John Milton goes further to make the explicit proposition that blindness may be a valuable aesthetic resource. It was not unusual to view blindness ambivalently, or even positively, at Thelwall's time. William R. Paulson argues that "The romantics rediscover, or at least revive, the ancient topos of the blind poet or seer, a visionary whose sight, having lost this world's presence, is directed entirely beyond to the spiritual" (14). Ossian, Homer, and Milton himself are obvious templates for the trope, and Edward Larissy underscores the sense of nostalgia and "inward vision" common to Romantic depictions of blindness (1).[23] For many of Thelwall's contemporaries, then, blindness was rife with symbolic and religious meaning.

For Thelwall, however, John Milton is very much of this world, and Thelwall's praise, unlike others', is based on how he suspects sensory compensation may have impacted the poet's literary technique: "is it not unlikely that [Milton's] blindness… might have given an increased

[23] According to Larissy, "The age … understood that phenomenon as an historical one. Such visions were appropriate to an earlier age" (1).

portion of that strength, that natural and copious melody, and that variety, to the rhythms and numbers of his divine poem" (*Cline* 8). As Lucy Newlyn reminds us, *Paradise Lost* was everywhere in eighteenth-century Britain, and it is therefore of no small consequence to suggest that the epic owes its singular poetics to its author's non-visual relation to the world.[24] Thewall proposes, in other words, that the most widely read, most influential, and most respected literary text of his era could be rightly thought of as a blind text, as a poem fundamentally shaped and characterized by disability aesthetics. The idea underpinning Thelwall's approach to blindness—that biological differences themselves are not inherently negative characteristics and may in fact offer a rich yield—demonstrates the rich diversity of Romantic approaches to disability and in fact very nearly anticipates recent approaches to disability. It also demonstrates the extent to which disability was understood to enable new ways of thinking about and engaging in aesthetic creation.

Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Disability

The sociopolitical implications of Beddoes' and Thelwall's distinct approaches to disability become especially clear in the context of mid- to late nineteenth-century medicine, which brought to fulfillment the normative views of many of their contemporaries. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, individuals and eugenics groups began to advocate publicly for the sterilization of those with congenital disabilities and for the permanent institutional confinement of medicalized individuals, insisting on their social danger. One such advocate, Mary Dendy, declared feeble-mindedness an "evil which will, if unchecked, bring ruin upon our nation, and that before very long" (758). These ideas were discussed in mainstream medical

[24] Aside from the editions of the poem itself—of which there were, by 1800, over a hundred (some illustrated, some not)—the text and its "lessons" could be found in children's literature and anthologies; *Paradise Lost* was also "absorb[ed]…into the arena of public debate" and used by "politicians of different persuasions," as well as "poets and essayists" (*Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader*: 19 – 20.)

journals including *The Lancet* and *The British Medical Journal*, and continued to shape medical and governmental policies, many of them more or less eugenic in nature, well into the twentieth century.[25]

Whether or not they knew it—although I think Thelwall and Beddoes very clearly did—Romantic medical discussions of disability are inherently political. Likewise, whenever Romantic culture at large engaged with the non-normative body and mind, the stakes were innately ethical, and we can trace strong correspondences between inclusive, egalitarian tendencies and the capacity to acknowledge and make use of the modes of aesthetic experience and aesthetic production enabled or provoked by non-normative embodiments. In the chapters that follow I focus on authors who, like Beddoes and Thelwall, understood disability as an aesthetic resource. But the ethical and political remain strong undercurrents throughout *Romantic Embodiments*. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson reminds us, "representation informs the identity—and often the fate—of real people with extraordinary bodies" (*Extraordinary Bodies* 15).

[25] For an examination of disability and eugenics—and speculations as to why it remains a largely unacknowledged topic—see chapter three of Snyder and Mitchell's *Cultural Locations of Disability*. Also see Davis.

Chapter 2

Bristol Circle Self-Experimentation And the Aesthetics of Deviant Embodiment

My friends! from a world, where disorders are rife,
I call you, to taste the liquor of life;
A fluid, to render us nimble and fresh,
And purge from its drossy pollution the flesh;
To cherish, each purified body, the blood in,
The spirit of beef, and the essence of pudding;
In short, to convey us, ere long, to the portal
Of heaven, and transform us to beings immortal…
Perhaps, in my hands, it may shortly preclude
The use or of raiment, of sleep, or of food!
Perhaps, with loud plaudits, the people may own
A discovery to shame the philosopher's stone;
When, as my *rare* luxury to taste I exhort all,
I shew what a ninny man is—to be mortal!

—Richard Polwhele, "Pneumatic Revellers" (1800)

By October 1798, when the young Humphry Davy left Penzance to join Dr. Thomas Beddoes's Pneumatic Institute, Bristol had become a hotbed of scientific experimentation. Within six months Davy would begin spending sleepless days and nights introducing nitrogen and oxygen compounds into his body. In the summer of 1799, experimentation with nitrous oxide would also become a communal undertaking as Robert Southey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Tom Wedgwood, among many others, offered up their bodies as experimental subjects. Beddoes's account of the nitrous oxide trials, *Notice of Observations Made at the Medical Pneumatic Institution* (1799), contains memorable passages that describe his inhalation of nitrous oxide, as well as provocatively distorted testimonials from his experimental collaborators. Davy's significantly extended and contextualized account of the trials, *Researches, Chemical*

and Philosophical Chiefly Concerning Nitrous Oxide (1800), includes meticulous descriptions of his experiments and first-hand experiences with a variety of compounds, some of them dangerous or even deadly, as well as an expanded and diverse—and, it would seem, largely unedited—selection of biographical accounts of nitrous oxide intoxication.

Contemporaries including Richard Polwhele understood—and often lampooned—the pneumatic trials as experiences of intoxication, extreme pleasure, and sublime sensation. This impression has lasted for over two hundred years. Although the trials often were these things, particularly in Beddoes's accounts of them, regarding the Bristol collaborators as primarily "an elitist drug circle" (Lefebure 179) misses crucial components of the cultural work they performed. Such characterizations especially obscure the fact that the nitrous oxide texts contain descriptions of not only exquisite pleasures but also neutral reactions and various forms of pain and discomfort. What's more, the Bristol Circle's varied experiences with nitrous oxide are often described in terms that directly invoke the discourses surrounding Romantic disability.

As I have outlined in Chapter 1, it was a time at which an increasingly professional and standardized "medical science was consolidating its authority over deviant flesh" (Youngquist 9). The project of identifying and maintaining bodily norms was one in which Beddoes and Davy would have been expected to participate. The Pneumatic Institute was, after all, a formal medical endeavor, albeit a somewhat radical one, and was run by trained physicians and scientists. It is important that as the Bristol Circle incited and disseminated pains, un-"healthy" states, and subversive modes of embodiment, they therefore destabilized normative notions of health from within the medical establishment. This fact is important to the ethical work the Bristol Circle performs through their pneumatic experimentation. It is a key point of distinction between the nitrous oxide trials and private self-experimentation with drugs like opium,

subversive acts which lacked the scientific and cultural sanction of formal medical experimentation, and therefore posed a different kind of challenge—and in my estimation a much less dangerous challenge—medical norms.

In examining the Bristol Circle, my purpose is twofold. First, I intend to demonstrate that the nitrous oxide trials created an aesthetics of deviant embodiment largely because of their open, inductive, and self-experimental scientific modes—methodological hallmarks of radical science that were influenced in this case by Tom Wedgwood, one of the Pneumatic Institute's primary funders. To participate in the nitrous oxide trials was to willingly accept the experience of transgressive bodily states and the inarticulability of the body. I hope that our sense of Romantic science in general, and radical science in particular, will be sharpened by my claim that certain experimental modes and scientific textual genres are conducive to—and often productive of—experiences of non-normative embodiment that enable expanded aesthetic experience and new forms of artistic production. Some kinds of scientific acts, in other words, tend to produce disability aesthetics.

The second goal of this chapter concerns the Bristol Circle's particular modes of aesthetic experience and aesthetic output. The nitrous oxide texts foreground deviant embodiments as enabling moments of sublimity, productively altered perception, and provocatively augmented subjectivity. The texts also come to *embody* an aesthetics of disability through formal elements such as disrupted pronouns and verb tenses. Through their pneumatic self-experimentation, the Bristol Circle reveals that non-normative embodiment creates new textual, intersubjective, and epistemological possibilities by unsettling our relationship with language, by calling into question our ideas of self, and by attuning us to different aspects of the world around us.

(Self-)Experimental Backgrounds

Excited by the promise of pneumatic medicine, Dr. Thomas Beddoes had begun by early 1793 to think of opening a medical institute to discover the extent to which "factitious airs" (gasses of various atomic compositions) might be used to treat a wide range of illnesses—many of which, like consumption, were understood at the time to be incurable. Beddoes had recently resigned his post as a reader in chemistry at Oxford at least largely because of his political radicalism. The Pneumatic Institute would allow Beddoes to pursue his democratic goal of developing therapeutic techniques and dispensing medical knowledge that could benefit the poor as much as (if not more than) the wealthy patients who were his primary source of income.[1] As he sought financial backers for his project, Beddoes penned a number of texts that lay important conceptual groundwork for the nitrous oxide trials of 1799, including *A Letter to Erasmus Darwin, M.D. on a New Method of treating Pulmonary Consumption, and Some other Diseases hitherto found Incurable* (1793) and *Considerations on the Medicinal Use of Factitious Airs* (1794). The texts describe Beddoes's initial forays into formal pneumatic research, and include early indications of the ways that the Bristol Circle's experimental methods would necessarily entail a subversion of norms of embodiment.

"I firmly believe," Beddoes wrote, "that the condition of humanity will be improved in consequence of the application of pneumatic chemistry to medicine" (*Considerations* 30). To realize this improvement, however, Beddoes would first need to "ascertain the effects of these powerful agents in various diseases" (*Considerations* 4), and he therefore undertook a series of pneumatic trials on animals, as well as human patients. In assessing the possible value of

[1] In Chapter 1 I detailed some of the democratic policies of the institute: patients at his institute would be offered treatment at no cost, for example, and would have access to more traditional treatments that had no bearing on the institute's pneumatic research. For more on the relationship between the institute and Beddoes's radical tendencies, see Jay and Grinnell.

"factitious airs" for the "business of Pneumatic Medicine"—"the restoration and preservation of health"—Beddoes engaged with a distinctly Brunonian medical discourse (*Letter to Darwin* 59 – 60). Following physician John Brown, Beddoes understood "health" as a state of bodily equilibrium between too much and too little stimulation, the poles toward which different kinds of diseases could be located. In *A Letter to Darwin*, for example, Beddoes speculates as to oxygen's possible benefits for conditions that "arise from the defect … of vital energy" (56), including anafarca, hydrothorax, diabetes, liver injuries, ill-conditioned ulcers, palsy, schirrus, and hydrophobia. Beddoes similarly speculates that "hydrogene" may be applied to "that class of diseases, where a diminution of action is required" (*Considerations* 40).[2]

In *Notice of Observations* (1799), Beddoes would claim that his institute "was, perhaps, the first example, since the origin of civil society, of an extensive scheme of pure scientific medical investigation" (4). Characteristically lofty language aside, Beddoes was correct to assert the relative novelty of his pneumatic undertaking. Romantic medicine was largely ineffectual, a fact Beddoes was quick to admit and bemoan, and he therefore judged it "necessary to strike into a *new* path" and to resist "reptiles that plant themselves on the high road of improvement, and try to hiss back all who would advance" (*Notice* 34, 3 – 4).[3] Despite his stubborn adherence to Brunonian principles, Beddoes framed his endeavor as speculative. As always, he emphasized his belief in scientific transparency, repeatedly assuring his readership that whatever the results of his experimentation, he would make them public.

[2] An especially relevant treatment of Beddoes and Brunonian medicine is Neil Vickers' "Coleridge, Thomas Beddoes, and Brunonian Medicine." In it Vickers not only explores Beddoes's relationship with John Brown's medical principles, but also the radical political valences of Brunonian medicine, and its influence on Coleridge.
[3] See Grinnell for more on the general "importance of experimental activities" to Beddoes's medical philosophy, and the ways in which "the early work of his Pneumatic Institute neatly captures the promise, spirit, and public appreciation of experimental or scientific medicine at the beginning of the nineteenth century" (228 – 9).

Beddoes's inclination to publicly pursue an inductive mode of experimentation stands in stark contrast with the deductive scientific system popularized by A. L. Lavoisier's foundational *Elements of Chemistry* (1789). For Lavoisier, in Peter B. Ford's words, "the 'new,' modern chemist,' "[a]voiding speculation, … works through deductive reasoning like a geometric proof" (248)—or, in Richard Holmes' characterization, Lavoisier's "man of science was humble and observant before nature" (248). Beddoes's willingness to speculatively administer airs to animals, patients, and himself is in some way reflective of what we'd now call a disciplinary distinction between the branches of science that are more or less concerned with the ever-variable living organism, whose seemingly endless vicissitudes might be felt to demand experimental dynamism—and which present stakes (e.g. life or death) that might encourage scientific speculation and even risk taking. If the biological and medical sciences were perhaps more conducive to inductive experimentation, however, the connection is not a necessary one—and as we shall see in the cases of Tom Wedgwood and Humphry Davy, chemistry and physics can also be inductive pursuits.

Beddoes also went much further than many other inductive medical practitioners of the time, and was unafraid even to pursue hypotheses as strange and radical as those that grew from his observation that butchers seemed resistant to consumption. Might the air that came into contact with cows not somehow protect one from consumption? How might cow airs be administered to the sick? Should one live in a butcher's shop in otherwise hopeless cases? For Beddoes, the horror of consumption demanded that all possibilities be explored, and he wrote of consumptive patients living in houses with "three cows in each." "For mere temperature," he wrote to Wedgwood in November 1799, "living with cows is the most delicious thing imaginable; perhaps the fumes would give a salutary stimulus to the surface of the lungs, which

might communicate itself to the whole system. I find this better than living with a butcher" (Litchfield 35 – 6). Regardless of his altruistic motivations, such ideas elicited scorn and mockery from Beddoes's contemporaries. Unsurprisingly, his "cow-house therapy would become prominent in his posthumous mythology, usually in droll and parodic form" (Jay 202). But Beddoes's politicized tolerance for transgression in the pursuit of greater good would remain a hallmark of the Pneumatic Institute, and his disregard for social and scientific norms helped to foster an atmosphere of open and creative experimentation in Bristol.

Beddoes's scientific methods were also distinct by virtue of their emphasis on self-experimentation and first-hand accounts, rather than the pursuit of utter objectivity. As Mike Jay notes, Beddoes "was not unusual in choosing to use his own body as a living laboratory. Many of the great breakthroughs in medicine and anatomy had been made in this way" (72 – 3).[4] In "Aestheticizing the Laboratory: 'Delirium,' the Chemists, and the Boundaries of Language," Peter B. Ford correctly argues that the injection of the scientist into the experiment blurs the bounds between scientific and literary discourse. I wish to qualify Ford's argument only by emphasizing that it is not just the scientist's subjectivity that enters the self-experimental text, but particularly his *embodied* subjectivity—that is, his corpus itself, his flesh and blood and nerves and brains and constituent parts. This has two important consequences.

First, systems like Lavoisier's—and all scientific (and particularly medical) experiments that rely solely or even primarily on external observation—tend to construct the body as a measurable and articulable object of inquiry. This is part of why illness theorists including Arthur Frank are so concerned with the effect of medical authority and medical technologies on the patient's sense of bodily integrity. In the hands of the expert medical professional, tools like

[4] Jay cites the example of Lazzaro Spallanzi, who Beddoes translated. Spallanzi "established the digestive power of gastric juices by swallowing and regurgitating linen bags" (73).

the stethoscope are thought to "accurately" identify and quantify symptoms and illnesses. Along with the physician, whose judgment trumps the patient's sense of his body, such technologies construct the corpus as a stable, bounded object that can be meaningfully abstracted in terms of temperature, heartbeats per minute, etc. This abstract quantification overwrites the patient's own bodily narrative, although it often fails to align with or account for lived experience. By preserving the autobiographical narrative, the self-experimental text undermines such claims to an objectifiable body. In most cases, the self-experimental text also undermines such claims to a stable body.

Second, any form of scientific experimentation on the human body raises the possibility of pain, injury, or even death. Depending on the nature of the experiment, such outcomes may even be a probability. If patients are often coerced, misled, or misinformed by medical professionals into offering up their bodies for experimentation, in acts of self-experimentation, the informed scientist invites bodily deviance upon himself. Accepting pains and injuries—and seeing to their subjective expression—become properly scientific acts. The genre of the self-experimental text is one in which embodied transgression is always on the horizon, as it were, and one that gives way to various autobiographical expressions of non-normative embodiment. In *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, Thomas De Quincey capitalizes on these qualities of scientific self-experimentation in framing his text and culturally legitimizing his laudanum intake. In particular, De Quincey presents his drug use as a medically useful endeavor by noting the precise dosages that yielded his symptoms and carefully cataloging opium's various effects and its differences from alcohol.

The connection between self-experimentation and deviant embodiment plays itself out in Beddoes's early pneumatic research, which found him inhaling oxygen. His *Letter to Darwin* also reveals the formal expansion provoked by the experience:

> I felt, at the time of inspiration, that agreeable glow and lightness of the chest, which has been described by Dr. Priestly, and others. In a very short time I was sensible of a much greater flow of spirits than formerly, and was much more disposed to muscular exertion. By degrees, my complexion, from an uniform brown, became fairer and somewhat florid. I perceived a carnation tint at the ends of the fingers, and on all the covered parts of the body the skin acquired much more of a flesh colour than it had before. I was rather fat, but during this process I fell away rapidly, my waistcoats becoming very much too large for me; I was not sensible however, of any muscular emaciation, but rather then contrary (51).

Beddoes engages here with scientific discourse and his medical community, seeking to confirm previous observations about oxygen and add to the store of knowledge about its effects on the human body.

What Beddoes describes is also clearly a pleasurable experience, and perhaps unwittingly, he textually embodies a subtle form of disability aesthetics as he negotiates the self-experimenter's subject position and the bodily changes produced by oxygen inhalation. In describing the experience, Beddoes oscillates between a subjective *I* and a self that is the object of observation. That is, he "felt" and "was sensible" and "perceived," and describes "my complexion"—but also invokes and seeks to describe the awkwardly depersonalized "the chest," "the fingers," and "the body." Here Beddoes is formally fragmented, and his textual self-presentation thereby undermines the rational, whole sense of self thought to characterize the sane (as opposed to mad) subject.

As is so often the case, here disability aesthetics serves to underscore the productive aspects of non-normative embodiment. Beddoes's experience with oxygen reveals the limits of grammar and syntax to articulate relationality, and especially self-relationality. His experience

also reveals the instability of the relation between the subjective, felt *I* and the body. The subject / body and related mind / body divides are a central problem of Romantic philosophy and literature, as well as Western culture at large. According to disability scholars, they are also problems usefully considered in the context of: the healthy body is invisible, seemingly under the control of the mind; when disabled the body becomes unruly and unavoidable. By gesturing to these issues through its provocatively non-normative grammar, *Letter to Darwin* gives an early and modest glimpse of the kind of disability aesthetics that the nitrous oxide trials would come to inspire in 1799.

On 6 December, 1794, Beddoes wrote personally to Tom Wedgwood to seek a financial contribution for the Pneumatic Institute. He knew his addressee was likely to respond favorably: Wedgwood was not only the philanthropically-disposed son of the wealthy potter Josiah Wedgwood, but was also Beddoes's chronically ill patient—and therefore personally invested in medical progress and any treatments that might have broad applicability. Beddoes's letter to Wedgwood is a neat summary of the medical and experimental philosophy he sought to promote through his institute:

> Medical Pneumatic Institution
>
> From various trials of factitious airs in the Bath & Manchester hospitals as well as in private practice by T Ewant, Bath, & Thronton, Mr. Wather & Mr. Hill surgeons in London, & Dr. Beddoes, Bristol, there is good reason to believe that they will prove efficacious in many disorders hitherto found incurable: particularly in cancer, malignant ulcers, consumption & palsy … In order to discover the best mode of procuring & applying these substances, many eminent philosophers & physicians have approved of the formation of a temporary Institution ...
>
> According to the testimonies above quoted, unexpected success has attended many of the consequent trials, [?] made in this way; & in every case, where the treatment has been employed, has contributed to shew that it is perfectly safe; it is moreover capable of almost endless variation & improvement, nor could it be doubted that, when men of genius perceive that their suggestions will be realized,

> they will exact their inventive powers in behalf of humanity. This Institution, being designed for the universal benefit of mankind, will be carried on with the greatest openness possible, & authentic accounts of its benefits will be regularly published. (WM 35)[5]

As elsewhere, Beddoes's social and medical aspirations are balanced by an emphasis on "authentic accounts" and "the greatest openness possible." Wedgwood's response to the project was equally characteristic of his own experimental philosophy, which was less obviously sanguine but which, like Beddoes', was openly inductive. As Wedgwood commented, "I think I shall contribute as the attempt must be successful in part if it only goes to show that 'airs' are *not* efficacious in medicine" (Litchfield 35).[6] And contribute he did: Wedgwood would eventually donate £1,000 to the project.

Although Wedgwood's intellectual influence on the Pneumatic Institute is not recognized by current scholars of Romantic science, I strongly suspect it was as important as—and in many ways even more important than—his financial generosity. When Beddoes wrote to him in 1794, Wedgwood was a well-regarded young scientist.[7] In 1791 – 2 he had produced two papers on light and heat that were read before the Royal Society. While undertaking this work, which we now know anticipated key elements of the law of incandescence, he had corresponded with two prominent chemists of the day, Joseph Priestley and James Kier (Litchfield 19). Although lifelong ill health forced Wedgwood to curtail his scientific experimentation from 1792 on—that

[5] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England. I personally transcribed the unpublished documents housed at the Wedgwood Museum that are included in this chapter; it should be noted that I did not have the opportunity to double-check my transcriptions, nor were my transcriptions checked by a second reader. Generally speaking, where the text was not clear, I indicate this in my transcription. I also spell out abbreviations where it is clear what they indicate and without which the meaning of the passage would be obscured.

[6] This note was made on another 1794 request from Beddoes, and presumably was not shared with the Bristol doctor. Biographer Richard Litchfield makes the (likely correct) speculation that it was a note made for Tom's brother Josiah (Jos), with whom he often coordinated on his philanthropic activity.

[7] When Wedgwood's scientific output is discussed, it is usually in the context of lamenting his unfulfilled promise—that is, in speculating as to what he might have done had he been healthy. Such notes are often made in conjunction with an acknowledgement of the financial generosity Wedgwood exhibited throughout his life. I wish instead to focus here and also in Chapter 3 on what Wedgwood actually did accomplish in science and metaphysics, often because of and not in spite of his ill health. As I will discuss in the next chapter, Alan Barnes and Gavin Budge have begun to recuperate our sense of Wedgwood's metaphysics, and I hope to extend their project.

is, at the young age of 21—he continued to conduct occasional laboratory experiments. Notably, in 1800 he discovered most of the scientific processes underlying what we now call photography, findings Humphry Davy wrote up for inclusion in the 1802 *Journals of the Royal Institution*. It is not unlikely that, unable to continue his laboratory work, Wedgwood would have taken more care to be involved in the lives of young scientists like Davy, for whom he could serve as a mentor and to whom he could impart his knowledge.[8]

If Wedgwood's experimental modes have been inadequately understood by recent critics, it is in no small part because of the novelty of some of his metaphysical projects which, like Beddoes's cow-house treatment, are all too easy to dismiss without the context provided by his largely unpublished writing. Wedgwood proposed, for example, that children might learn to confront fear and danger if their parents were to "invite the attack of a fierce bull, stand with perfect composure until the animal be within two or three paces of him, then suddenly open an umbrella, hold his hat before his face, or somehow contrive to amuse and terrify the foe" (Litchfield 209)—a plan that Neil Vickers reads as an example of Wedgwood's "naïve commitment to the idea of man as machine" (89). There is also Wedgwood's proposal of a new educational scheme—for which he at one point imagined William Wordsworth acting as a superintendent—that would involve raising a child in an environment so carefully controlled that the walls of its rooms might best be painted gray. Completely isolated and to a high degree living in sensory depravation, the child would be exposed to a methodical sequence of objects

[8] Wedgwood seems to have failed only in that he could not find a way to fix the images created in the photographic process; they would therefore quickly fade on exposure to light. Biographer R.B. Litchfield ventures that had Wedgwood not been ill, his experimental persistence would have surely led him to discover a substance that would be able to fix photographic images. Litchfield also raises the puzzling question of why "Davy did not seriously tackle the problem of fixing the pictures" (198)—and "infer[s] that if Davy had tried seriously to find a 'fixing' process, there was nothing to hinder his soon discovering one" (200).

with which he could develop associations that would assist him in attaining happiness and social utility in adulthood.

Wedgwood was unafraid to propose and pursue such hypotheses, but he did so without the expectation of success that often drove Beddoes's pursuits. After all, Wedgwood contributed £1,000 to the Pneumatic Institute despite—or perhaps even because of—his doubt in its promise: he believed that experimental failure was a valuable way of contributing to scientific progress. Moreover, unlike Beddoes, whose enthusiasm often prevented him from modifying his hypotheses, Wedgwood was open to changing course. As Mary Everest Boole has observed, Wedgwood's intellect was characterized by "a sort of fidelity to truth which ma[de] him … incapable of believing, or fancying he believe[d], anything, without trying to act it out in the minutest detail and at all costs" (26). This "habit of following the truth … 'withersoever it goeth'" (Boole 27) very closely echoes what Wedgwood himself wrote of "[t]he youth of real promise"—that he

> will possess few decisive opinions … and, keeping his mind in that vigilant and sensible state … he will often hearken to the most random and jejune observations in hopes that some spark of light may kindle his fancy and shoot a transient gleam into the obscure regions of human speculation. (*Value* 68)

Like his "youth of promise," Wedgwood demonstrated an intellectual flexibility that allowed him to undertake extended series of experiments based on trial and error, and even as he pursued provisional hypotheses, he remained ever open to correction and revision.

What Wedgwood was inflexible about was rigor and detail, ever demonstrating what his brother Jos called his "tenacity of attention" (*Account* 17). The experiment Wedgwood's health forced him to give up in 1792 is an exemplary instance of his patience and persistence. Having spent six months on a single experimental problem, he gave it up only when he could no longer sustain his exacting approach:

> I spent half a year in endeavouring to suspend a thermometer in vacuo. Olive oil seemed to promise better than mercury. I thought that the thermometer might be raised to a great height by exposing it with a blackened bulb to the rays of the sun, suspended by a very fine wire or hair, as I concluded that a true vacuum would not conduct the heat away from the bulb, all it would lose would be by the wire or hair. I proposed to converge the rays of the moon on it also to try if their heat could be thus appreciated. I proposed likewise to have sails upon a delicate axis to turn round by the impulse of light. But not succeeding in my trials at a vacuum, and finding my health impaired, I resolved to give up experimenting. (Litchfield 21).[9]

One cannot but think here of the meticulous laboratory scientist Davy would soon become—and the laboratory methods that earned Davy fame and which many blamed for shortening the scientist's life.

In discussing his psychological self-experimentation and observation, his primary occupation in the late 1790s, Wedgwood considers the relationship between his exacting scientific approach and his health. In a letter addressed to himself, Wedgwood voices his concern about the possible impact of his metaphysical activities on his already fragile physical and mental state, despairing for some relief from his chronic pains. The letter offers a glimpse into the minute processes by which he continued to undertake his scientific exploration, as well as the way he understood experimentation as a totalizing way of life that itself was productive of non-normative states of the embodied mind:

> Are not you now thoughtful & uneasy in the social circle, always dreading obscurely that something slip your attention? Are not you most miserable when you detect yourself in this mood & compare your anxious imperfect pleasures with the easy light heartedness of those about you? Is it possible you can long bear this manner of existence? (28515 / 112)[10]

[9] Litchfield concludes that Wedgwood's "object … was to keep some record of his ideas which he might pursue at a future time if his health should mend, or which might be useful as suggestions to future experimenters." In the context of Wedgwood's extant notes, and given the care with which the note seems to have been written, I concur.

[10] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England. Not dissimilarly, Molly Lefebure comments of Davy that "His attempts to analyse his feelings of sublimity increasingly exhausted him; at times, he was to confess to Coleridge, he suspected that analysis damaged him" ("Philosophic" 97). Coleridge, too, connected certain modes of thought with physical illness. See my Chapter 4 discussion of Coleridge's self-diagnosis with an anxious condition.

Mike Jay is correct to characterize Wedgwood's metaphysical work as taking place in the "laboratory of his inner mind" (84). Wedgwood had imported his experimental methodology into his new psychological pursuits, and he was by no means unaware of the toll such methods might take on his health.

Because for Wedgwood self-experimentation was a mode of being in the world and in society—a vocation much more than a profession—it is unsurprising that he followed his desperate, self-directed plea with a second one in which he sought to develop a reasoning that could allow him to absolve his experimental methods and continue his metaphysical pursuits:

> Grounds of Hope—that Study is Not essentially & exclusively production of my Nervous Headach.
>
> Have I had more headach after 2 hours thinking & writing for 3 mornings back than I often have from conversations of the same length?
>
> Is it not highly probable that the pain carries on in great measure from being expected. Recollect the case of nervous people who are unable to perform the physical act from always anticipating the circumstances of failures...
>
> The great principle is never to persist in painful speculation… (28515 / 113)[11]

Self-experimentation may be detrimental to Wedgwood's health, but perhaps no more so than other activities. And absent definitive proof of metaphysics' ill effects, one senses that he could not resist continuing his project. This is doubtless in large part because for Wedgwood, as for Beddoes, scientific inquiry was a means of pursuing the betterment of both individuals and mankind; if his scientific methods were detrimental to his health, it was a price worth paying.[12] I suspect that Wedgwood's refusal to abandon his metaphysical self-experimentation is also due to

[11] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England.

[12] As Wedgwood once wrote of education, one of the primary ends of his psychological and philosophical speculation, "How animating is the thought that if by the labour of my life I should add one idea to the stock of those concerning Education, my life has been well spent!" (Tremayne 90). Wedgwood also gave liberally to those whose output might best contribute to the world—that is, scientists and those literary authors he thought could offer particularly valuable philosophical thought to society, including William Godwin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the latter of whom Wedgwood and his brother Jos began to give an annuity of £150 in January 1798.

an awareness of the rich yield of his minute observations and the unusual insight his life of pain afforded him—a primary focus of Chapter 3.

In January 1798 the young Humphry Davy, at the time an apothecary's apprentice, made Wedgwood's acquaintance in Penzance. Davy had already begun to demonstrate a marked enthusiasm for science, and had recently initiated a self-directed course of study and scientific experimentation that had acquainted him with Lavoisier's *Elements of Chemistry* and, more generally, with current methods of scientific experimentation. Wedgwood would have certainly appealed to young Davy: he was held in high esteem by an impressive network of friends and acquaintances, and, more importantly, was well connected in the scientific world. Wedgwood's Royal Society papers, moreover, concerned the very subjects that at the time preoccupied Davy most: light and heat. (Davy's first scientific publication was his "Essay on Heat and Light," which appeared in Beddoes's 1799 edited volume, *Contributions to Physical and Medical Knowledge, principally from the West of England*.) When Davy first arrived at the Pneumatic Institute, Wedgwood was staying nearby with his brother John at Cote House, and Wedgwood and Davy forged a intellectual and personal friendship that would last until Wedgwood's death in 1805.

It is well established that 1798 – 1800 were crucial years in Davy's scientific development, and that *Researches* (1800) marked the moment at which, in his brother John's words, "he had now become, what he always after continued, the experimental and inductive philosopher" (55). Wedgwood offered a scientific approach that was distinct from those of both Lavosier and Beddoes. This is perhaps why Davy would later remark of Wedgwood's corrective influence that "[h]is opinions were to me a secret treasure, and often enabled me to think rightly when otherwise perhaps I should have thought wrongly" (Litchfield 206). Gregory Watt

similarly commented, "I have reason to believe that their [Tom and Jos Wedgwood's] friendship was of substantial benefit to Davy" (Meteyard 81). Wedgwood's experimental philosophy was at once open, rigorous, fastidious, inductive, and totalizing, so much like the approach Davy would come to embody in the laboratory. It is this scientific approach that laid the groundwork for the Bristol Circle's most provocative engagements with the aesthetics of disability: their remarkable accounts of the nitrous oxide trials, and the experiences of intoxication, erratic behavior, illness, pain, sublimity, and injury described therein.

Beddoes's Panacea and the Pleasures of Nitrous

In describing the effects of nitrous oxide, Beddoes, Davy, and their collaborators repeatedly appeal to the language of poetry, the imagination, and the sublime, and by doing so convert scientific inquiry into artistic production. Scholars of Romanticism usually acknowledge this much.[13] Yet thus far we have failed to acknowledge or take seriously the deviant embodiments characteristic of the nitrous oxide experiments, as well as their relationship to the experiments' rich aesthetic yields. Beddoes's enthusiasm and his adherence to Brunonian medicine constrain his account of the pneumatic trials, *Notice of Some Observations Made at the Medical Pneumatic Institute* (1799). The text nevertheless admits of much more bodily transgression than might be readily apparent; in doing so it significantly destabilizes notions of "health" and unwittingly reveals the extent to which medical experimentation is a creative act that is often productive of disability aesthetics.

Like other factitious airs before it, Beddoes frames nitrous oxide as a means of restoring health, particularly for those whose diseases that (understood in a Brunonian framework) involve a deficit of vital energy. Accordingly, in *Notice of Observations* Beddoes details a number of

[13] See Ford, "Aestheticizing the Laboratory," and Lefebure, "Consolations in Opium."

cases in which nitrous oxide has had medical benefits, including that of a 26-year-old half-paralyzed man whose "general health has been most strikingly improved," so much so that he eventually "could grasp things without a tremor of his paralytic arm" (19); a second paralyzed patient who "can now walk a little without crutches" (20); a patient who experiences the amelioration of "ringing in the ears" and then relief of "disagreeable dryness … succeeded by the natural secretion of wax" (40); and a 55-year-old paralytic who testifies that "*the air clears the head*" (42). Just as the gas provides benefits for diseases of deficit, it exacerbates diseases of vital excess. Nitrous oxide, Beddoes indicates, seems to have a deleterious effect on hysterical women. "Miss -----n, was doomed to be the martyr of this course of experiments" and "fell into a succession of hysterical fits of considerable violence" (16). Other cases "of similar temperament" confirm this reaction, and Beddoes is led to conclude that nitrous oxide is an effective means by which "natural or forced decay may be repaired" (31).

Beddoes has more difficulty articulating and accounting for the impact of nitrous oxide on the otherwise "healthy." He claims that the air "renovate[s]" "the faculty of pleasurable sensation" (31). But this is an unusual and distorting—and I think evasive—understatement for the typically enthusiastic doctor: the sensations Beddoes describes are in fact significantly more potent and provocative than this claim suggests. On seeing Humphry Davy inhale the gas, language fails Beddoes, who "find[s] it entirely out of my power to paint the appearances, such as they exhibited themselves to me" (*Notice* 7 – 8). Yet just after this confession of his narrative incapacity, Beddoes attempts to describe the intoxicated Davy, neatly illustrating a compulsion that Arthur Frank describes in *The Wounded Storyteller*: "[t]he ill body is certainly not mute … but it is inarticulate. We must speak for the body, and such speech is quickly frustrated" (2).

Davy's non-normative body simultaneously invites—even demands—articulation, and at the same time disrupts articulation.

In describing Davy on the gas Beddoes demonstrates what will prove to be a hallmark of the nitrous oxide texts: their appeal to analogy as a means of stretching language to accommodate the inarticulate and inarticulable body. Beddoes writes, "I saw and heard shouting, leaping, running, and other gestures, which may be supposed to be exhibited by a person who gives full loose to feelings, excited by a piece of joyful and unlooked for news" (8). This comparison almost works to account for and sanitize Davy's erratic behavior. But Beddoes does not quite contain the fact that Davy's shouting, leaping, and running about might in another context be (mis)taken as an indication of not only anger, but perhaps even madness or idiocy. On first glance, for example, Davy might seem barely distinguishable from Adam Smith's iconic madman, "the poor wretch … who laughs and sings … and is altogether insensible of his own misery" (15). Although it is Davy's pleasure that Beddoes describes, it is therefore pleasure in excess, pleasure that refuses containment not only by language but also within bodily and behavioral norms.

Beddoes goes on to describe a number of other individuals' responses to nitrous oxide in similar terms. By offering these accounts in the form of abstracts written in the third person, Beddoes is able to reshape and reframe others' experiences to conform to a unified narrative of intoxication and Brunonian health. Nitrous oxide, Beddoes suggests, leads to highly pleasurable sensations, involuntary muscular action, and, often, involuntary laughter. All of these effects are accompanied by a "thrilling" in the extremities—a distinctive term often applied throughout the nitrous oxide texts and illustrative of the way that new bodily states invite, and often require, the

augmentation of existing language. A single sequence of abstracts illustrates the experiential pattern Beddoes seeks to construct, and also the extent to which the pattern fails to hold:

> Mr. J.W. Tobin (after the first imperfect trials), when the air was pure, experienced sometimes sublime emotions with tranquil gestures, sometimes violent muscular action, with sensations indescribably exquisite; no subsequent debility—no exhaustion…
>
> Patrick Dwyer has always exhibited a ludicrous struggle between a propensity to laugh, undoubtedly produced by the air, and an eager desire to continue the inhalation.
>
> Rev. Rochemont Barbauld felt exhilarated, and was compelled to laugh, not by any ludicrous idea, but by an impulse unconnected with thought, and similar to that which is felt by children full of health and spirits—lassitude and languor through the day afterwards, which Mr. B. is disposed to attribute to hot oppressive weather, and a preceding sleepless night. (9)

The first and third examples bear the traces of the author's active suppression. In the case of Tobin, Beddoes gestures to an omission parenthetically (a case in which dismissive punctuation calls attention to rather than conceals a narrative gap), and in Rev. Barbauld's case he casually downplays deviations from the gas' expected effects.

Although Beddoes's careful control prevents nitrous oxide's actual range of effects from fully entering *Notice of Observations*, deviations from the pattern are palpably present, ever threatening his neat narrative. Among other things that Beddoes fails to fully explain away are Mrs. Barbauld's "languor" (it was due to an improper dose of the gas) (9); a "disagreeable" sensation (it is often due to not having inhaled enough gas) (10); Mr. Notcutt's second reaction to the gas, feeling "languid," (this may have been due to "exercise in oppressively hot weather" or an improperly "strong" dose of gas) (12); and the Wedgwood brothers' "rather unpleasant feelings" (he attributes these to the poor "quality of the air breathed by both") (13). Appealing to a recognizably Brunonian narrative of health, he explains that initial "unpleasant" feelings in paralytics may even be due to a beneficial "increase of nervous power" (28). Indeed, "many

hundreds of experiments" have allowed him to conclude that the gas's effects are standard enough that individuals "might be classed in various ways," and therefore their dosages may be regulated to provoke the expected response (8).

Like many physicians, Beddoes seems to have been somewhat skeptical of his patients' and collaborators' capacity to accurately describe or scientifically contextualize their experiences. The textual traces of Beddoes's control indicate the extent to which medical inquiry is a creative undertaking, how experience is distorted and reshaped as it enters into medical discourse, and how subjective experience is so often overwritten by the medical professional.[14] But Beddoes's suppression of experimental aberrations also has the effect of conforming others' testimonials to match what we will come to learn is Beddoes's own experience of nitrous oxide. Given the nature of Beddoes's self-experimental descriptions, it makes particular sense that he would have cared to distort others' accounts; in doing so he normalized and justified his own powerful reaction to the airs.

When Beddoes describes his nitrous oxide inhalation, his syntax becomes stilted and his language effusive. In describing oxygen in his *Letter to Darwin*, Beddoes had vacillated between subjective and objective selves ("my complexion" / "the fingers"), but in *Notice of Observations* he opts for the consistent use of the third person. The one contributor who will make a similar grammatical choice in Davy's *Researches* is one "Dr. Blake," who also consistently describes himself in the third person. In these instances, grammar reveals the tension between the medical persona—operating under an imperative to detachment and professionalism—and the self-experimental *I* whose excessive embodied experience frustrates objectification. "He seems to himself," Beddoes writes in *Notice of Observations*, "to be bathed

[14] In the context of illness and disability (rather than voluntary nitrous oxide inhalation) this provocative set of issues have much more pressing ethical implications. See G. Thomas Couser, Arthur Frank, and Ann Hunsaker Hawkins on illness narratives and medical authority.

all over with a bucket full of good humour; and a placid feeling pervades his whole frame" (15). It is an awkward framing, and perhaps also a defensive one—as if the objectivity and professionalism implied by his grammar might mitigate the excessive subjectivity revealed by his descriptions.

Beddoes's defensiveness is similarly evident when he aims to connect his experiences of the gas to his project's purported goal, the maintenance and restoration of health. Nitrous oxide, Beddoes claims, offered many therapeutic benefits in enhancing his relative health. It "removed the sense of distention, and, he supposes, expedited digestion" after "an inconvenient portion of food." Likewise, "going to a play" had formerly caused him a "head-ach" the following morning—that is, "[t]ill he took this air" (15). Try as he might, however, Beddoes's descriptions of nitrous oxide's effects cannot fit easily into a discourse of "health" as again and again he reverts to effusive language in exalting nitrous oxide.

Beddoes claims that the gas even may be considered a kind of divine panacea. It is a "new pleasure" (16), one that gives him cause to speculate that "[m]an may, some time, come to rule over the causes of pain or pleasure, with a dominion as absolute as that which at present he exercises over domestic animals and the other instruments of his convenience" (27). Beddoes similarly speculates that "sleep might possibly be dispensed with," judging by his observation that, after an inhalation, "his morning alertness equals that of a healthy boy" (15). At such times Beddoes seems to propose that the gas induces a kind of excess of health. This is an impossible prospect in a Brunonian system, in which "health" represents balance and excess represents disease—and at such moments Beddoes's text undermines its own constructed notion of "health."

It is yet more difficult to understand nitrous oxide as promoting any conception of "health," Brunonian or otherwise, in light of the frequency with which the gas causes individuals to lose control over their bodies—the recorded instances of involuntary actions and laughter—as well as the frequency of unpleasurable deviations that Beddoes doesn't quite manage to contain or explain away. In the context of *Hygëia*, George C. Grinell has written that Beddoes is "a thinker of the way in which Romantic medicine was itself haunted by a dis-ease that suggested the impossibility of something as basic as health" (223). On the level of the text—and despite Beddoes's efforts to the contrary—*Notice of Observations* similarly registers the unstable process by which the healthy body is "discursively produced" (Grinnell 225).

In 1793 Beddoes had anticipated the unfavorable response his pneumatic research might receive: "It is impossible to engage in a new and arduous undertaking without incurring ridicule and obloquy: Of course I must expect to be decried by some as a silly projector, and by others as a rapacious empiric" (*Letter to Darwin* 4). If no critic seems to have accused him of the latter, many did fix on him as an exemplar of the former. Given Beddoes's radicalism, it is unsurprising that politically conservative critics responded poorly to his text. Richard Polwhele's poem "Pneumatic Revellers," an excerpt from which began this chapter, ridicules Beddoes's most enthusiastic endorsements of nitrous oxide:

> I *float* in a manner——so easy and placid—
> The mild milk of kindness absorbs every acid.
> Or rather, of passion subsides the hot tumour,
> As all over I'm bath'd with a pail of good-humour:
> No languid, no crapular feelings have I——
> But gay s the morn—I'm a boy, I'm a boy!

Throughout the poem, which was first published in the conservative *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, Polwhele continues to scorn Beddoes's embodied zeal for the pleasures of nitrous oxide. Appropriately enough, the conservative poem concludes with an overt political reference.

As the Bristol Circle collaborators dance and sing they "together with gas-born benevolence glow / And prove, that true bliss must arise from equality." At once Polwhele deftly discredits the seriousness and legitimacy of the Pneumatic Institute's scientific undertaking, and also the seriousness and legitimacy of the democratic political sympathies which the collaborators were assumed to harbor.

In a similar vein, *The Anti-Jacobin*'s 1800 review of *Notice of Observations* begins by noting that its reader would be familiar with Beddoes's "zeal" and the undiminished "ardor" with which he pursued "new plans" and "new theories" despite repeated disappointments (424). This is politicized language characteristic of scientific debates of the 1790s, in which materialist scientists were broadly associated with radical politics. [15] Open experimentation need not be pursued for medical progress; instead, *The Anti-Jacobin* asserts, "almost *all* the improvements in science have been made by men who plodded slowly forward in the track begun by others." "Let us hear no more then of *new paths*," the reviewer implores its reader. "[L]et us hear no more reproaches against the plodding pace of philosophers" (427 – 8). Accordingly, the *Anti-Jacobin* saves special ridicule for Beddoes's speculation that man may come to master pain and pleasure, predicting, "We shall be made immortal in the twinkling of an eye, or rather we shall be made over again; for we are to receive new bodies and new minds too; frogs are to be converted into oxen; and oxen, no doubt, into men" (427).

If unchecked human and scientific progress were generally associated with political radicalism, *Notice of Observations* would have proven particularly disconcerting to *The Anti-Jacobin* insofar as what Beddoes describes is explicitly a bodily—rather than an intellectual, moral, or social—pleasure, a pleasure so extreme that the mental faculties no longer control

[15] In addition to the opening of Chapter 1, see Fulford, "Conducting the Vital Fluid," and Roe, "'Atmospheric Air Itself'."

movement and articulation. This helps to explain why *The Anti-Jacobin* is so keen to undermine the scientific value of the nitrous oxide trials. The reviewer dismisses the gas as just another form of "intoxication," noteworthy only for the absence of "the langour and debility which follow that state" (425). By challenging the distinction between pneumatic experimentation and recreational drug use, the reviewer undermines the medical premise of the trials.[16] *The Anti-Jacobin* similarly undermines the validity of Beddoes's findings by venturing that those who reported benefits may have been "assisted by their novelty and the enthusiasm of the discoverers and the patients" (426).

The British Critic extended its review of Beddoes's text beyond the politicized debates of Romantic science. It consequently pinpointed more explicitly the subversive dangers of Beddoes's embodiments. The reviewer admits, "To see persons of sound minds, on inhaling a few mouthfuls of air, bursting into immoderate fits of laughter, cutting capers, and playing all the tricks of a mountebank's merry-andrew, may be allowed, among persons not in the secret at least, to excite surprise" (232). By invoking the condition of "sound mind," the reviewer confirms that the states of embodiment Beddoes describes, both in others and in himself, are not "healthy" but rather are analogous to transgressive, explicitly "unhealthy" states of embodiment. *The British Critic* invites its reader to imagine that the behaviors Beddoes catalogs in *Notice of Observations* make sense in the specific context of madness. The reviewer could have invoked idiocy, speech impediments, or mutism just as easily. Although Beddoes himself did not directly admit these possibilities, they certainly account for the defensive and evasive tone he sometimes

[16] In the 1790s many of the same substances were used for therapeutic ends that were also used for what I would class as "recreational drug use," and there was therefore a less distinct line between the medicinal and non-medicinal than there is at least thought to be in the twenty-first century. But there was nevertheless a distinct sense that one could imbibe too much alcohol or laudanum, or consume these substances too frequently. One could also take opium in such a way as to make it clearly a non-medical endeavor, imbibing or inhaling for pleasure rather than palliation.

assumes in *Notice of Observations*, as when he carefully recontextualizes Davy's shouting, leaping, and running as akin to someone overjoyed at unexpectedly good news.

The British Critic also goes one provocative step further than *The Anti-Jacobin* by stating outright what its fellow conservative periodical only implies—that the nitrous oxide trials may have worked like Mesmerism. *The British Critic* proposes that like Mesmer, whose patients "were thrown into hysterics by his gesticulations" (234), perhaps Beddoes and his enthusiasm partly account for the remarkable pleasures and cures he claims for his patients and collaborators. In this context it is suggestive that Beddoes was not only famous for his ebullient affect, but also for his unusual physique. He was, in Davy's words, "uncommonly short and fat" (as quoted by Jay 161)—and, as I described in Chapter 1, Beddoes was increasingly wheezy towards the end of his life. By sheer force of suggestion, Beddoes's excessive body and excessive zeal, so out of the bounds of propriety, might create similarly uncontrollable, excessive embodiments in the trial participants.

Nor is the reader safe from Beddoes's contagion: *The British Critic* imagines its reader feeling the same "extraordinary sensations" on perusing *Notice of Observations* that Beddoes describes as the hallmarks of nitrous oxide's physiological effects. On reading Beddoes's text he may feel a "glow," an "irresistible" desire to laugh, and "indecorous" behavior (232- 3). The image of *Notice of Observations* intoxicating its reader may be a humorous one, but it is a joke that indicates a very real fear of—and a resulting desire to contain—the deviant body. Even as Beddoes claims to promote health, *The British Critic* warns that he provokes bodily transgression in his patients and readers alike, putting non-normative embodiments into broad cultural circulation.

Davy's *Researches* and the Aesthetics of Deviant Embodiment

Beddoes lacked the inductive flexibility and experimental rigor necessary to acknowledge and present a full account of nitrous oxide's effects. But "the proper professionalization of medicine in Britain [wa]s a fantasy Beddoes in particular nurture[d]" (Grinnell 225)—or, as Humphry Davy would later comment, Beddoes was "fitted to promote enquiry, better than to conduct it" (as quoted by Lefebure "Humphry" 92). Beddoes had written to Davies Giddy in July 1798 that Davy "does not undertake to discover cures for this or that disease; he may acquire just applause by bringing out clear, though negative results … I would gladly place [these] at the head of my first volume" (as quoted by Holmes, *Age* 252). It was a promise Beddoes kept by supporting the composition and publication of *Researches, Chemical and Philosophical Chiefly Concerning Nitrous Oxide* (1800), even though Davy's text undermined Beddoes's assertions about nitrous oxide and also the Brunonian system that had served as a foundation for much of the Bristol doctor's professional output.

Unlike Beddoes, Davy does not suppress the fact that nitrous oxide gives rise to bodily transgression. On the contrary, *Researches* explicitly characterizes the states produced in the pneumatic experiments as deviations from various standards of "health." In some cases, these standards are naturalized and generalized. A goal of his work, Davy claims, is to "ascertain … [nitrous oxide's] general effects on the health" (459 – 60), and he contrasts his experience of nitrous oxide intoxication with his "natural state of mind" (458). Dr. Peter Roget, one of the many self-experimenters who contributed a testimonial to *Researches*, refers to the "unnatural sensation" of nitrous oxide (510). Dr. Kinglake, a fellow Pneumatic Institute employee and textual contributor to the project, frames his experience of nitrous oxide in similar (if more particularly Brunonian) terms. After inhaling, Dr. Kinglake describes, "nor did a minute elapse before the brain rallied, and resumed its wonted faculties, when a sense of glowing warmth

extending over the system, was speedily succeeded by a re-instatement of the equilibrium of health" (505). Repeated inhaler and author of an extended contribution to *Researches* J. W. Tobin tends to refer to the return of his "usual" state after the nitrous oxide has worn off—e.g., "My usual state of mind, however, soon returned" (498). In addition to his use of "unnatural," Dr. Roget refers to the return of the "same state" as before intoxication, and both Dr. Kinglake and Davy sometimes employ "former state" to denote the restoration of sobriety.

Through abstract and generalizable notions of "the health," "natural state" and "equilibrium of health," *Researches* gestures towards the collective medical goal of "situat[ing] all people in relation to each other, for measuring their deviation from the *normal*, and, increasingly, for managing their deviations from the norm" (Lawrence 45). When by contrast they employ such terms as "usual" as a standard, Davy and his collaborators espouse relative notions of health that would become far less prevalent in the decades to come—but which in the 1790s still represented for many the bodily state that was sought through medical management. Although they are individual and subjective, such concepts as "usual" nevertheless function as norms from which deviations can be—and are here—measured, although unlike "health" and "natural" they make no claim to generality. What remains relatively consistent throughout *Researches* is that inhaling nitrous oxide is understood as initiating a departure from some norm of embodiment.

Although scholars of Romantic science and literature tend to discuss nitrous oxide's exquisite pleasures, the un-"healthy," un-"usual" bodily and mental states *Researches* presents are in fact often characterized by their incomplete pleasures, a total lack of pleasure, unpleasant sensations, and pains—the very kinds of experiences Beddoes actively revises, reframes, and otherwise resists in *Notice of Observations*. "Mr. R. Boulton and Mr. G. Watt," Davy reports,

"have been much less affected than any individual" (536). For Robert Southey, the experience is not one of pain, but "neither is it in the slightest degree pleasurable" (509). Dr. Blake and James Thomson both describe having experienced "slight" vertigo, Lovell Edgworth experienced "violent dizziness" (527), Dr. Roget "cannot remember that [he] experienced the least pleasure from any of these sensations" (511), and Thomas Poole experienced a "disagreeable sensation as if breaking out into a profuse perspiration," as well as a "disagreeable feeling abut the face" (520 – 1). [17] William Clayfield "at no period of the experiment experienced agreeable sensations" (502). After Josiah and Tom Wedgwood initially experienced "rather unpleasant feelings," Josiah retried inhalation, which felt "not in the slightest degree pleasant" (536).

Those who have inhaled nitrous oxide on more than one occasion, moreover, almost uniformly admit of—and often emphasize—its broadly variable impact. At the height of his nitrous oxide use Davy inhaled the substance multiple times a day, and indicates that the "effects … were hardly ever exactly similar" (462), and that "[i]t is indeed very different at different times" (490). Southey notes that after a change in his general bodily health, the feelings produced by the gas were "totally different" (508). To judge by *Researches*, one can never be guaranteed a pleasurable experience from nitrous oxide—or, for that matter, any particular effect at all. The gas is not always, not merely, and not predictably ecstatic and sublime. More importantly, the unusual modes of embodiment nitrous oxide produces are at least sometimes or in some way unpleasant in their deviations from embodied norms.[18] This is a point worth underscoring. Although all abnormalities can be said to come under the scrutiny of medical authority, exceptions have long been made for culturally-prized deviations from the norm—intelligence, for example, or whatever physical attributes are valued at a given time and in a

[17] In the text the name appears as "Pople," and "Pople" is repeated in Beddoes's text. Richard Holmes treats this as a typo, however, as do I.
[18] See Lennard Davis on the importance of quartiles in relation to norms.

given place. Albeit problematically, and it seems accidentally, Beddoes's text often presents nitrous oxide as just such a positive deviation. By contrast *Researches* repeatedly describes experiences—pain, discomfort, unpredictability—that are definitively associated with negative deviations from embodied norms.

Researches' most striking bodily transgressions are Davy's often startling and sometimes grisly experiences of inhaling other nitrogen and oxygen compounds and imbibing alcohol. Descriptions of these more dangerous acts of self-experimentation appear alongside descriptions of his enjoyment of nitrous oxide's pleasures, and precede the accounts of the communal pneumatic trials. The effect is to push the text's engagement with bodily deviance close to the brink of death itself, and the nitrous oxide accounts cannot be fully appreciated without also examining the conceptual and textual context these experimental acts provide.

Hydrocarbonate nearly kills Davy, and its after-effects include "nausea, loss of memory, and deficient sensation," as well as "excruciating pain in the forehead and between the eyes, with transient pains in the chest and extremities" (470). Davy decides to experiment with "pure nitrous" "during a fit of enthusiasm produced by the respiration of nitrous oxide" (475)—a provocative framing insofar as Davy admits here that one non-normative bodily state has directly given rise to another. Like hydrocarbonate, pure nitrous proves hazardous:

> In passing through my mouth and fauces, it tasted astringent and highly disagreeable; it occasioned a sense of burning in the throat, and produced a spasm of the epiglottis so painful as to oblige me to desist instantly from attempts to inspire it. After moving my lips from the mouth-piece, when I opened them to inspire common air, aeriform nitrous acid was instantly formed in my mouth, which burnt the tongue and palate, injured the teeth, and produced an inflammation of the mucous membrane which lasted for some hours. (476)

More viscerally than any other moment in *Researches*, this passage demonstrates the stakes of Davy's determination to exhaustively contextualize nitrous oxide by testing test all possible

related chemical compounds. Davy also drinks alcohol to provide a kind of control sample of intoxication against which nitrous oxide's effects may be measured—and although it is far less dangerous, Davy nonetheless describes the experience in stark terms. After imbibing a bottle of wine in less than eight minutes, he has "rather pleasurable" sensations that give way to what becomes a "painful" "fullness in the head," which in turn is succeeded by "excessive" "bodily and mental debility" and "nausea … even after the contents of the stomach had been ejected" (481 – 2).

If Tom Wedgwood believed that he had sacrificed some measure of health to his scientific methods, Davy does him one better in *Researches*, demonstrating the extreme lengths to which he is willing to sacrifice his body. We may in part account for these experiments through references to Davy's professional aspirations and his reckless streak. [19] They are equally reflective of his enthusiastic scientific rigor and his inductive methods, in keeping with Wedgwood's example. For Davy, the scientist participates in self-experimentation, and self-experimentation leads to risk and injury. As Davy notes at the beginning of *Research IV*, the section of the text related to the human respiration of nitrous oxide, "I was aware of the danger

[19] Among the many who understood Davy's experimental methods as reflective of personal recklessness were the Bristol publisher Joseph Cottle, who wrote about Davy that "No personal danger restrained him from determining facts, as the data for his reasoning…He seemed to act as if in case of sacrificing one life, he had two or three others in reserve, on which he could fall back in case of necessity…Occasionally I half despaired of seeing him alive in the next morning" (as quoted by Holmes, *Age* 258). Richard Holmes similarly comments that "It is remarkable that these effects did not frighten or deter him, and these early experiments give a first glimpse of the reckless courage and impetuosity that always drove Davy in the laboratory" (*Age* 258). Molly Lefebure writes, "In true Romantic vein Davy hurled himself at every new experience and sensation which presented itself. When he discovered a gas he unhesitatingly inhaled it…When he produced a new acid, he swallowed it; some odd things happened to him. When he was experimenting with galvanic electricity he gave himself shocks…he visited Vesuvius when it was in eruption and took appalling risks with his life on the edge of the crater experimenting with fresh lava. When he was asked by the government to advise upon improving sanitation in Newgate prison he spent so much time in the prison applying himself firsthand to the problem that he contracted typhus, in the form of so-called gaol fever, and lay at death's door (and, he firmly believed, suffered as a result from ruined health in his later years) … Every drug that came within his reach he sampled; opium, marijuana (in those days known as 'bhang'), hyoscyamine were all tried enthusiastically by him; he exchanged notes upon them with Coleridge." ("Consolations" 180).

of this experiment," but through scientific reasoning had concluded it a worthwhile and sufficiently safe gamble to make.

As Davy presents it in Researches, his modes of self-experimentation, dangerous though they may be, yielded rich experiences. By autumn 1799, Davy seems to have come to appreciate bodily transgression in itself, describing it as an enthusiast—or even an addict—might. Davy recounts solitary inhalations of nitrous oxide that seem to bear no relation to *Researches*' scientific goals. Painting a tableau of gas-induced meditation, for example, Davy admits, "I have often felt very great pleasure when breathing it alone, in darkness and silence, occupied only by ideal existence (491). He also admits that "a desire to breathe the gas is always awakened in me by the sign of a person breathing, or even by that of an air-bag or an air-holder" (493). These impulses of embodied sympathy and embodied desire underscore the ways that, in Davy's text, bodily deviance begets bodily deviance.

One textual moment most clearly reveals Davy's enthusiasm for bodily transgression. Davy confesses of his near-fatal encounter with "pure nitrous" that "I never design again to attempt so rash an experiment" (477). He also describes the month's rest necessary to recover of his "health and vigor," his "health [having been] somewhat injured by the constant labour of experimenting, and the perpetual inhalation of the acid vapours of the laboratory" (478). And yet "[i]mmediately after [his] return" to Bristol, Davy reports that he inhaled nine quarts of nitrous oxide—an act that reveals Davy's compulsive desire for transgression from a newly restored state of health. Davy's careful note of the exact duration of his abstinence—it "having been precisely thirty-three days without breathing any" gas (478)—is in keeping with his standards of scientific accuracy and minute observation. But elsewhere in *Researches*, as in standard medical texts, Davy seeks to track deviations from healthy states and not the converse.

Here, in other words, "health" no longer functions as Davy's embodied norm. Perhaps he has abandoned the ideal—or even the possibility—of a stable, measurable, and "normal" "healthy" state. Or perhaps non-normative embodiment has even become Davy's new norm. It is significant that Davy's month of recuperation coincided with his first trip home to Cornwall since joining Beddoes at the Pneumatic Institute. If visiting his family's home represented a return to health for Davy, arriving back in Bristol to his position as a scientific researcher represented a return to bodily deviance.

Davy goes on to describe effects of his nine-quart inhalation which are characteristic of the highly variable impact nitrous oxide has on him. Davy's senses are disrupted; he reports, "I gradually began to lose the perception of external things" (478 – 9). The relationship between mind and body is similarly upset as he becomes a somewhat passive receptor of mental matter—"a vivid and intense recollection of some former experiments passed through my mind." Likewise, he is not quite in control of his articulations, recalling, "I called out '*what an amazing concatenation of ideas!'* " (479). No longer can the scientist master his body, and this quality, the loss of volition and the resulting destabilization of the mind / body relationship, emerges in *Researches* as the most characteristic—and in this context the most provocative—of nitrous oxide's effects.

Again and again, contributors to *Researches* describe involuntary behaviors like Davy's. In general terms, subjects describe being "almost delirious" (503) and in "the pleasurable trance" (489). Many, including Poole, Thomson, Southey, and Edgworth report "involuntary" laughter; appropriately opting for a passive verb H. Cardwell recounts being "almost convulsed with laughter" (534). As *The British Critic* implied in its review of Beddoes's text, such behavior was seen at the time as iconically representative of madness. An equal number of accounts report

irresistible muscular action that subjects often characterize as "violent," recalling both "mad" behavior and the spastic body. Speech is often impaired as experimenters describe symptoms strongly reminiscent of John Thelwall's elocutionary patients. J.W. Tobin, for example, "stammered exceedingly, and was utterly unable to pronounce some words," and Dr. Roget—of thesaurus fame, suggestively enough—recalls, "I felt myself totally incapable of speaking" (510).

Tobin's behavior is distinctly reminiscent of "mad" and "idiotic" registers: he "struck gently at Mr. Davy and a stranger entering the room … and gave him several blows" before running through the Institute (499 – 500). M. M. Coates was aware of the implications of his "irrational" behavior, but was nevertheless unable to control his body: he "felt an immoderate flow of spirits, and an irresistible propensity to violent laughter and dancing, which, being fully conscious of the violence of my feelings, and of their irrational exhibition, I made great but ineffectual efforts to restrain" (531). The third time Coleridge inhaled nitrous oxide, he recalls experiencing not only a failure of volition, but also the loss of even a *desire* to maintain control over himself: "I could not avoid, nor indeed felt any wish to avoid, beating the ground with my feet; and after the mouth-piece was removed, I remained for a few seconds motionless, in great extacy" (517). Gone at such moments is the rational human subject.

In addition to the involuntarily erratic and inarticulate, *Researches* also contains descriptions of the involuntarily animalistic. Tobin's description of just such behavior is rife with approximation and ambiguity: "my whole frame felt *as if* violently agitated: *I thought* I panted violently: my heart *seemed* to palpitate and every artery to throb with violence" (510, emphases mine). Language has proven insufficient to describe Tobin's experience—but, more tellingly, he also seems to have lost the ability to even track his body, so subsumed is he under

its control. The phrasing "I thought I panted violently" leaves doubt as to whether or not Tobin describes something that actually happened, and it is fitting that the textual moment at which he seems the least in control as a rational subject is the moment at which he describes the most bestial of his reactions, panting. Similarly, Lovell Edgworth admits that, quite animalistically (and madly), "I felt a great propensity to bite through the wooden mouth-piece, or the tube of the bag through which I inspired the air … [I] burst into a violent fit of laughter, and capered about the room without having the power of refraining myself" (527). These descriptions call attention to the porous boundaries between human and animal, rationality and madness—and recall contemporary discourses on "reason," in which the idiot and madman were often figured as more akin to beast than to man.[20]

Mike Jay and others have perceptively characterized the uncontrollable, erratic behaviors of the nitrous oxide trials as moments of social transgression, when manners and conventions are temporarily suspended. But they are also moments at which norms of embodiment are willingly transgressed. Quite simply, *Researches* describes doctors and poets and wives and scientists who act like mutes and madmen, idiots and stammerers. The self has not transcended the body through nitrous oxide, but rather has come completely under the body's control. Or, put another way, these are not moments of radical *dis*embodiment, but are instead moments of radical *em*bodiment.

Moreover, such descriptions do not merely suggest a temporary subsuming of the self to the body; they also offer strong evidence for brain-based models of the mind as a constituent part of the body and therefore subject to its contingencies. Although Davy himself ascribed to just such a model,[21] many of his contemporaries were resistant because of the religious, political, and

[20] See my discussion of "The Idiot Boy" in Chapter 5.
[21] See Holmes, *Age of Wonder*.

philosophical implications of such a materialist psychological stance. Mike Jay has suggested (correctly, I think) that Coleridge's seeming discomfort with nitrous oxide might be due not only to the experiments' general materialist slant, but particularly to the way that inhaling the gas inevitably gave rise to a sense of the embodied mind. Like Beddoes's earlier experimentation with oxygen, nitrous oxide enables an exploration of and insight into the nature of the mind / body relationship. Disability theorist and memoirist Nancy Mairs has written that experiences of disability—or, more broadly, non-normative embodiment—tend to give rise to an embodied sense of self. "The body in trouble, becoming both a warier and a humbler creature," she writes, "is more apt to experience herself all of a piece: a biochemical dynamo cranking out consciousness much as it generates platelets, feces, or reproductive cells…" (42). Many in the Bristol Circle seem to have gained access to these registers of experience and insight through their experimentation with nitrous oxide.

For many participants in the pneumatic trials, the experience of radical embodiment was sometimes characterized by the heightening of the senses, which in turn opened up new and valuable aesthetic prospects. *Researches* presents accounts of the sharpening of specific senses—e.g. "my hearing was certainly more acute" (487), or "I imagined that I had increased sensibility of touch: my fingers were pained by any thing rough, and the tooth edge produced from slighter causes than usual" (464). Some describe experiencing a more general heightened sensibility—e.g. "My senses were more alive to every surrounding impression" (501). In some cases this sensitivity is said to have lingered for hours, and sometimes even for days. M.M. Coates reports, "For six or seven days afterwards, I seemed to feel most exquisitely at every nerve, and was much indisposed to my sedentary pursuits; this acute sensibility has been gradually diminishing; but I still feel somewhat of the effects of this novel agent" (532).

These moments demonstrate the tendency of *Researches* to reveal, in Mike Jay's words, that "an altered sensory and mental frame had the power to generate an entirely different universe" (199). It is especially important to consider these altered perceptive states, and any immediate or retrospective insights they yielded, in the context of the bodily transgressions that gave rise to them. It is essential that unhealthy, unusual, deviant embodiment has productively enhanced the Bristol Circle experimenters' sensory experiences. Such experiences encourage valuing what it means to inhabit a non-normative body. They also invite reflection on other kinds of non-normative perceptive realities that are specifically associated with disabilities—those of deafness and blindness, for example, or what William Wordsworth had, anosmia (no sense of smell)—and how they too may productively reshape the realm of aesthetic experience.

The various ways that the Bristol Circle participants foreground the body provide a crucial context for more accurately assessing the *Researches*' moments of ecstasy, sublimity, and poetic expression. "[M]y visible impressions were dazzling and apparently magnified," Davy reports at the opening of a memorable passage. After his sensations "increased," he writes,

> My emotions were enthusiastic and sublime; and for a minute I walked around the room perfectly regardless of what was said to me. As I recovered my former state of mind, I felt an inclination to communicate the discoveries I had made during the experiment. I endeavoured to recall the ideas, they were feeble and indistinct; one collection of terms, however, presented itself: and with the most intense belief and prophetic manner, I exclaimed to Dr. Kinglake, "*Nothing exists but thoughts!—the universe is composed of impressions, ideas, pleasures and pains!*"
>
> About three minutes and half only, had elapsed during this experiment, though the time as measured by the relative vividness of the recollected ideas, appeared to me much longer. (488-9)

Instead of his more typical term "healthy," which denotes deviance from a norm and implies the devaluation of his intoxicated state, here Davy notes the return of his "former state of mind," using equalizing language to denote only temporal difference. It is no wonder that he would

resist suggesting that this state of intoxicated reverie is in any way inferior to his sobriety.[22] Intense sensory vividness has distorted Davy's sense of duration. Through bodily change Davy has felt not only "the most intense belief" but has become a vessel for religious production through "prophetic" utterance. In all he has experienced a moment of complete and intense unity. [23]

Another sublime passage figures Davy intoxicated "amidst the scenery of the Avon," a provocative sensory distortion in the context of landscape aesthetics. But in many ways *Researches'* most interesting and unusual gesture towards sublimity appears in Davy's description of his hydrocarbonate experiment. Describing a different sort of ecstasy, Davy traces his near death experience in such a way as to suggest its aesthetic and philosophical importance:

> The first inspiration produced a sort of numbness and loss of feeling in the chest and about the pectoral muscles. After the second inspiration, I lost all power of perceiving external things, and had no distinct sensation except a terrible oppression on the chest. During the third expiration, this feeling disappeared, I seemed sinking into annihilation, and had just power enough to drop the mouth-piece from my unclosed lips. A short interval must have passed during which I respired common air, before the objects about me were distinguishable. On recollecting myself, I faintly articulated, "*I do not think I shall die*." Putting my finger on the wrist, I found my pulse thread-like and beating with excessive quickness (468 – 9).

As with nitrous oxide, Davy loses control of his body here, but unlike the more benign gas, hydrocarbonate leads to the total loss of the self, and then the self's "recollection." It is an evocative turn of phrase: the "collect" folded into the word "re-collect" underscores the materiality of Davy's dissolution into the external world. In his conclusion to *Researches* Davy

[22] Davy's other use of "former state of mind" to denote his sobriety supports this reading. In the other instance he inhales nitrous oxide because of "intense physical pain" from a mouth infection. In this case, the pain is diminished by the nitrous oxide until "[a]s the former state of mind returned, the state of organ returned with it" (464 – 5).
[23] The religious tone of the experience is more marked in the account Davy offers in his notebook: "I was now almost completely intoxicated…The sensations were superior to any I ever experienced. Inconceivably pleasurable…Theories passed rapidly thro the mind, believed I may say intensely, at the same time that every thing going on in the room was perceived. I seemed to be a sublime being, newly created and superior to other mortals, I was indignant at what they said of me and stalked majestically out of the laboratory to inform Dr Kinglake privately that nothing existed but thoughts" (Holmes, *Age* 270).

emphasizes the importance of "the passion of fear" to "sublime emotion" (553); in this regard, perhaps no passage in *Researches* can lay claim to a greater relevance to the sublime than when Davy "seemed sinking into annihilation." Few moments in *Researches* speak so directly to aesthetics on its most bare, basic level. This near-death experience fundamentally calls into question the relation between the self and the body, and the body and the external world.

Davy's dark hydrocarbonate passage also provides a representative example of the grammatical experimentation provoked by his experiences of altered bodily states. As elsewhere in the text, Davy oscillates here between a subjective *I* and an externalized, objectified self—much like Beddoes had in his 1793 description of oxygen inhalation. Although in some passages Davy's grammatical oscillations seem random, they just as often seem to communicate something meaningful about the slippage between the scientist and the experimental subject. In this case, and in some other passages in *Researches*, the body parts most directly involved in sensory perception—"my unclosed lips," "my finger" (and elsewhere in the text "my mouth")—are part of Davy's *I*, his felt self, whereas the rest of his body—"the pectoral muscles," "the chest," "the wrist" (and often elsewhere "the throat")—are externalized objects of scientific inquiry. Whether intentional or not, such fissures—between the purposive body and the receptive body—neatly capture the tensions involved in self-experimentation. The act of observation, *feeling* the wrist for a pulse, is the moment at which both the self-experimental subject and the self-experimental object come into being.

Peter B. Ford has vividly described how in *Researches*, through the "interjection of subjectivity and the subject into the experiment," "the objective recordings of a scientist … vanish" (250). Richard Holmes offers an opposing characterization of "Davy's style" in the text as "plain, discursive, and never sensational" as "[h]e presents himself throughout as the objective

narrator of each experiment" (*Age* 271). Both therefore may be said to be half correct, or half incorrect in their reading of Davy. But both equally fail to register that one of *Researches'* most striking formal and conceptual hallmarks is that Davy is at once a profoundly feeling subject and a rigorously objective observer.

Just as Davy's own inhalations opened up new narrative and generic possibilities, so, too, did nitrous oxide incite other Bristol Circle collaborators to formal, linguistic experimentation. James Thomson aptly suggests that to communicate the effects of nitrous oxide it would be necessary to first expand or augment the English language:

> To be able at all to comprehend the effects of nitrous oxide, it is necessary to respire it, and after that, we must either invent new terms to express these new and particular sensations, or attach new ideas to old ones, before we can communicate intelligibly with each other on the operation of this extraordinary gas. (515-6)

In a sense *Researches'* first-hand accounts participate in the very project Thomson suggests, striving to create new language and new modes of expression to account for their experiences of non-normative embodiment. Or, put otherwise, because of nitrous oxide the Bristol Circle collaborators needed to construct new modes of aesthetic expression to account for their new modes of aesthetic experience. Their richly poetic descriptions of inhalation are what many now associate with the pneumatic trials. They often tremble at the point of articulation, demonstrating the strong desire to communicate the body's experience but also the impossibility of doing so.

The Bristol Circle's linguistic expansions tend to take on various analogic forms. In many cases, descriptions invoke synesthesia, and these synethesic descriptions most often involve taste. Suggesting a sensory intermingling, Davy describes, "I often thought that [the gas] produced a feeling somewhat analogous to taste, in its application to my lungs. In one or two

experiments, I perceived a distinct sense of warmth in my chest" (460). [24] This description represents a rare—but I think meaningful—use of "my" in relation to Davy's lungs and chest, which he usually calls "the chest" and "the lungs." Davy's use of "my" here indicates an experience in which his chest and lungs have become organs of sensory perception; tasting the air and feeling the warmth, they explicitly have become parts of Davy's subjective *I*. George Burnet offers a more vague and poetic synesthesic description that is particularly evocative for its shifting verb tense: "I felt a delicious tremor of nerve, which was rapidly propagated over the whole nervous system. As the action of inhaling proceeds, an irresistible *appetite* to repeat it is excited. There is now a general swell of sensations, vivid, strong, and inconceivably pleasurable…" (520). Framed by the past tense, Burnet's sudden shift to the present, complete with a reference to "now," suggests that the act of recounting is also an act of sensory recollection, one so vivid as to overtake the present moment. Burnet's description, and particularly his italicized "*appetite*," calls attention to the way that taste, more than any other sense except perhaps smell, is associated with embodied (as opposed to abstracted and intellectualized) aesthetic experience.

Many of the most unusual and most richly poetic analogic descriptions resist categorization. Both J. Rickman and G. C. Bedford describe a sensation similar to that of an "electric shock" (526, 529). Imagining his body evaporating, Wedgwood "felt as if I were lighter than the atmosphere, and as if I was going to mount to the top of the room" (519); by contrast, Dr. Roget "seemed to lose the sense of my own weight, and I imagined I was sinking into the ground" (509). Coleridge describes a "sensation of warmth over my whole frame,

[24] Many other participants describe the taste of the air; Mr. Hammick, for example, recalls, "I experienced from the air a pleasant taste which I can only call sweetly astringent" (523). It is therefore possible that the air may have actually tasted sweet because of the way it was prepared or administered. But this fact, which may explain certain instances of synesthesia, does not explain Davy's because taste would be discernible on the tongue, not in the lungs.

resembling that which I remember once to have experienced after returning from a walk in the snow into a warm room" (516). On a second trial, Coleridge "fixed my eye on some trees in the distance" that "became dimmer and dimmer, and looked at last as if I had seen them through tears" (517).

Both Beddoes and an unnamed paralytic patient figure their bodies in terms of vibration. Beddoes's description couples music and science in what is a strikingly poetic rendering of Brunonian principles: "In fact, besides a general thrilling, there seemed to be quick and strong alterations in the degree of illumination of all surrounding objects; and I felt as if composed of finely vibrating strings" (544). The paralytic patient makes explicit a connection to music, and radically (and poetically) abstracts his experience, describing that "I felt like the sound of a harp" (496). At some rare moments, no analogous feelings may be found. Davy notes, "I have sometimes experienced from nitrous oxide, sensations similar to no others, and they have consequently been indescribable" (495). Davy ascribes a similar inarticulability to a paralytic patient who depicts feeling "I do not know how, but very queer" (496).

Participants frequently frame nitrous oxide by invoking another aesthetic experience that often defies articulation: the sublime. J. W. Tobin has difficulty describing his sensations, and it is only through a comparison to the effects of drama and literature that he can communicate anything of the experience of inhaling nitrous oxide. He writes, "It is giving but a faint idea of the feelings to say, that they resembled those produced by a representation of an heroic scene on the stage, or by reading a sublime passage in poetry when circumstances contribute to awaken the finest sympathies of the soul" (501). Mr. Wansey links the gas to a source of sublimity that has special resonance for him, music. He recalls feeling "sensations so delightful, that I can compare them to no others, except those which I felt (being a lover of music) about five years

since in Westminster Abbey, in some of the grand chorusses [sic] in the Messiah, from the united powers of 700 instruments of music" (525). Thomas Poole directly equates nitrous oxide's effects with the natural sublime: "Those pleasant feelings were not new, they were felt, but in a less degree, on ascending some high mountains in Glamorganshire" (521). These comparisons demonstrate the high value the Bristol Circle collaborators wished to attribute to their experiences of nitrous oxide, as well as the particular nature of the gas' value—that is, its aesthetic value.

It is remarkable to see such references to the sublime in a text that also contains extended chemical analyses of nitrogen and oxygen, as well as minute records of animal experimentation. In this way *Researches* demonstrates the productive cross-pollination of literary and scientific experience and practice during the period. But it is especially crucial that these—and so many more—moments of aesthetic experience and production are brought on by radical embodiment and bodily transgression. The aesthetically significant experiences described in *Researches*—from sensory distortion to sublimity—are enabled by physical changes that render the will ineffectual and subject the self to the body's control. What participants compare to Handel and mountainous vistas are experiences that have left them involuntarily stuttering, laughing, twitching, shouting, stomping, and racing around a medical institution in Bristol. In this way the nitrous oxide trials remind us that aesthetics is, on its most basic level, the study of embodied feeling. However else we may frame it, to experience the sublime is fundamentally to experience a suspension of or departure from one's typical state of embodiment. Nitrous oxide reminds us that such moments of inspiration and expansion do not come from the soul or the disembodied mind, but rather from a place of flesh and blood.

It is also important to keep the public nature of these experiments ever in mind. Each act of inhalation, each correspondence about such experiences, and Beddoes's and Davy's published texts participate in public attempts to make meaning of embodied experience. They reveal not merely the desire—and sometimes the compulsive need—to account for and articulate one's own non-normative body, but also the desire to account for—and thereby to control—the deviant and unhealthy bodies of others. Like Thelwall's and Beddoes's medical texts, the Bristol Circle self experimenters engage in the project of (re)shaping discursive conventions of embodiment.

Likewise, we may say that critical responses to the nitrous oxide experiments were engaged in the same project of (re)shaping discursive conventions of embodiment. When critics maligned and mocked Davy's 1801 demonstrations of nitrous oxide at the Royal Institution, they particularly focused on the bodily transgressions provoked by the gas.[25] James Gillray's "Scientific Researches!" (Figure 1), published on 23 May, 1802 by Hannah Humphrey, foregrounds the corporeality of both the spectators and the self-experimenter, who has clearly also become a spectacle. The genre of Gillray's print—the caricature, which adheres to an aesthetics of the grotesque—is a particularly apt mode for contextualizing and neutering the Bristol Circle's aesthetics of deviant embodiment. [26]

[25] Davy's account of the demonstration is much more triumphant than Gillray's print would suggest. In June 1801 he wrote to John King, "My labours are finished for the season as to public experimenting and public communication. My last lecture was on Saturday evening. Nearly 500 persons attended…There was Respiration, Nitrous Oxide, and unbounded Applause. Amen!" (as quoted in Holmes, *Age* 287).
[26] Reproduced courtesy of the British Museum.

Figure 1: James Gillray, "Scientific Researches!"

Richard Holmes emphasizes the humor of the image, which he notes "played on the less romantic but equally popular notion of chemistry as 'stinks', and the idea that laughing gas could produce a truly room-shaking fart" (*Age* 292). But this most visceral of embodiments is not so easily contained. Gillray's image captures the provocative duality of gas itself, which unlike opium or alcohol gestures to both the high—the heavens, the atmosphere—and to the low—bodily gas. The gleam in Davy's eye suggests the possible embodiment of mental deviance. The gallery reactions—wide and gawking eyes, hands thrown up, a covered nose, a dropped snuff

box—suggest surprise, but they also suggest that bodily excess and bodily deviance have spread from the stage to the audience. Gillray's print reveals a contemporary discomfort with the kinds of embodiment achieved through the nitrous oxide trials. It also demonstrates the impulse to represent and reproduce such non-normative bodies—to discuss them, but more importantly to find a way to understand them and thereby to contain them.[27]

Nitrous Oxide and the Aesthetic Prospects of Non-Normative Embodiment

> Not in the ideal dreams of wild desire
> Have I beheld a rapture-wakening form:
> My bosom burns with no unhallow'd fire,
> Yet is my cheek with rosy blushes warm;
> Yet are my eyes with sparkling lustre fill'd;
> Yet is my mouth replete with murmuring sound;
> Yet are my limbs with inward transport fill'd;
> And clad with new-born mightiness around.
>
> —Humphry Davy, "On Inhaling Nitrous Oxide"

In *Researches*, Davy suggests that nitrous oxide has lasting effects through a peculiar kind of conversion: "the pleasure produced, is not lost, but that it mingles with the mass of feelings, and becomes intellectual pleasure, or hope" (556). For Davy, the gas stays with the body and the self long after its immediate effects have worn off. Those who inspire it are changed by the experience, and for the better. Given the particular aesthetic potency of the experiences provoked by the nitrous oxide trials, it is unsurprising that the gas lingered in Davy's body and mind in such a way that he would be compelled to memorialize it in verse.

Richard Holmes has observed that "On Inhaling Nitrous Oxide" differs from other poems penned by the scientist. "Davy's verse is normally very clear," Holmes writes, "so the

[27] Not dissimilarly, Davy's 1831 biographer J.A. Paris writes of the self-experimentation, "It will be admitted that there must have been something singularly ludicrous in the whole exhibition. Imagine a party of grave philosophers, with bags of silk tied to their mouths, stamping, roaring and laughing about the apartment" (65).

uncharacteristic confusion of grammar and syntax here, opening with the emphatic but barely coherent 'Not', and tailing off into the repeated 'Yet', is itself interesting empirical evidence of his mental state" (260). I agree that Davy's unusual grammar is reflective of his state of being, but think that it is rather Davy's state of body that is reflected by this instance of disability aesthetics. In the poem Davy rejects the abstracted "bosom" and moralized and symbolic "unhallow'd fire." He instead focuses on his body itself—his cheek, eyes, mouth, limbs—and the physiological changes wrought by nitrous oxide. The gas' impact is nothing short of "inward transport" and a sense of "new-born mightiness." It is an experience that exceeds even his "ideal dreams"—and insistently so, given that the poem poems with a "Not" that negates these dreams. Much like the autobiographical accounts in *Researches,* Davy's poem depicts a moment of intense aesthetic experience realized through radical embodiment.

I conclude this chapter with Davy's poem in order to underscore the ways that the disability aesthetics inspired by the nitrous oxide trials extended far beyond the trials themselves. The experimentation undertaken at the Pneumatic Institute required participants to accept non-normative embodiment, and the Bristol Circle disseminated representations of the intrinsic value of such experiences, embracing the expansion of aesthetic experience and creation caused by the gas. In *A Letter to Henry Cline,* John Thelwall demonstrates the aesthetic benefits of blindness. The Bristol Circle's approach to non-normative embodiment similarly legitimates the kinds of knowledge that would have been enabled by Tom Wedgwood's and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's lives of illness in pain—and the kinds of knowledge accessible to the disabled characters William Wordsworth and Charles Lamb imagine and describe. By revealing the aesthetic prospects opened up by un-"healthy" and deviant bodily states, the Bristol Circle helped to create

a cultural context in which the nuances of embodied deviance, and therefore disability, could be both apprehended and appreciated.

Chapter 3

"an almost painful exquisiteness of Taste": Tom Wedgwood's Pleasure and Pain[1]

Such the fair promise of my early days!
Blossoms of hope just knitting into fruit
No more, alas! your drooping heads shall raise
Sickness has bowed to earth your parent shoot.

Of these fair hopes, these loved pursuits bereft,
How sweet's my comfort that your love is left.

—Tom Wedgwood, fragment (WM1138)[2]

Tom Wedgwood is known to scholars of British Romanticism mostly for his social connections (he was friend to many of the age's greatest scientific, philosophical, and literary minds); his financial generosity (he was patron to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Godwin, and John Leslie, among others); the bare fact of his chronic ill health; his palliative opium use (often noted because of its influence on Coleridge); and his discovery of most of the steps to what we now call the photographic process. There has occasionally been mention of Wedgwood's early scientific accomplishments, and some discussion of the study of associationist metaphysics he took up after his illness made his prior modes of laboratory

[1] My thanks to the Wedgwood Museum Archive for granting me access to many of the materials I discuss in this chapter, and to the archive staff for their assistance. I am also grateful to Al and Lucy Duba, who funded a dissertation year fellowship in the PhD Program in English at the CUNY Graduate Center in honor of their son Frank; without this fellowship I would not have been able to travel to England to undertake the archival research necessary for this chapter.

[2] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England. I personally transcribed the unpublished documents housed at the Wedgwood Museum that are included in this chapter; it should be noted that I did not have the opportunity to double-check my transcriptions, nor were my transcriptions checked by a second reader. Generally speaking, where the text was not clear, I indicate this in my transcription.

experimentation impossible.[3] Before Wedgwood's death in July 1805, James Mackintosh had committed to preparing his philosophical thought for publication; Coleridge had likewise promised to produce a biography of his patron. Neither of these projects, which could have proven invaluable in guiding our sense of Wedgwood and his mind, ever materialized.[4]

Scholars have recently attempted to use Wedgwood's textual remains—notebooks, loose notes, letters—to enrich our sense of the man and thereby better understand the nature and extent of his importance to the era. Neil Vickers has suggested, for example, that Wedgwood deserves greater recognition insofar as he provided Coleridge with a "'template' through which to understand his [Coleridge's] own symptoms during the early stages of the 'dejection' crisis (1800 – 1802)" (90)—a topic I will explore at greater length in Chapter 4.[5] Notably—and marking a departure from Vickers and John Beer, who do not take Wedgwood's philosophical thought altogether seriously[6]—Alan Barnes and Gavin Budge have argued that Wedgwood likely had a much more significant influence on Romanticism in general, and Coleridge's metaphysics in particular, than we have yet acknowledged—in large part through his development of a distinct strain of associationism.[7] Barnes and Budge have described—and, because of the incomplete extant record have somewhat speculated as to—Wedgwood's novel

[3] This was in 1792. That he continued laboratory work whenever possible is demonstrated by the fact that he undertook his work with photography in 1800. For a fuller account of Wedgwood's scientific activities, see Litchfield.

[4] Coleridge wrote of Mackintosh to Wedgwood in February 1803 something that could have equally applied to him, especially in regard to their common friend and benefactor: "As to Mackintosh, I never doubted that he *means* to fulfill his engagements with you; but he is one of those weak-moraled men, with whom the meaning to do a thing means nothing" (*Collected Letters* 931).

[5] Vickers has aptly commented that, "because of the opium, [Coleridge's] symptoms soon came to resemble Wedgwood's to a degree that must have seemed uncanny" ("Coleridge and Tom Wedgwood" 94).

[6] Vickers has written, for example, that a "naïve commitment to the idea of man as machine underpins Wedgwood's metaphysics" ("Coleridge" 89).

[7] In Coleridge's case, they surmise, Wedgwood's theories likely provided a way to address aspects of his dissatisfaction with Hartleyan associationism and, later, with Kantian idealism.

approach to time and space on the one hand, and relatedly, his "biological model" of "mind and its perceptions" on the other (Budge 142).[8]

This recent scholarship has begun to address one of the more puzzling difficulties Tom Wedgwood poses: how to account for the fact that his friends and acquaintances—and by no means just oft-enthusiastic ones like Coleridge—uniformly attest to his singularly potent influence. As Sydney Smith aptly commented, "I know no man who appears to have made such an impression upon his friends" (Meteyard 287). And this is of no small consequence given that Wedgwood was so well connected. Writing of her father, Mary Shelley took it as a commonplace that Wedgwood was known to "all of his [Godwin's] literary contemporaries as the most generous, the most amiable of men" (as quoted in Paul 78). This is what gave the poet Thomas Campbell cause to casually note in a July 1803 letter to Dr. James Currie, the Scottish physician and Robert Burns biographer, "The person I speak of is Thom. Wedgewood [sic]—the son of the Potter, of whom you may have heard, as he is known to literary people" (Campbell 463).

Campbell goes on to describe Wedgwood as "a strange and wonderful being. Full of goodness, benevolence, with a mind stored with ideas—with Metaphysics—the most exquisitely fine I ever heard delivered; a man of wonderful talents, a tact of taste acute beyond description" (463). Tom Poole imagines that had Wedgwood not died, "[w]hatever he did would have been seasoned with a delicacy and simplicity of moral feeling, and with a correctness of taste" (Sandford II 151). These descriptions square with Coleridge's account of Wedgwood in a

[8] Part of why Vickers seems to have concluded that Wedgwood was naïve is on the basis of his posthumously published essay "Origin of our Notion of Distance" (1817), which Vickers apparently takes as directly reflective of Wedgwood's metaphysical ideas. This assumption is unfounded, however. Barnes rightly notes that this essay "is a heavily edited version of papers" that Wedgwood's biographer Richard Buckley Litchfield is probably incorrect in crediting to Mackintosh. "Given the subject matter and relatively poor quality of the writing," Barnes notes, it is "unlikely" that anyone of Mackintosh's skill was the editor (246). He speculates that Tom Wedgwood's sister Sarah (Sally) may have been the one to prepare the essay, and writes that "[i]t is unfortunate that Tom Wedgwood's work has come down to us in this fragmentary and garbled way" (247).

November 1802 letter to his wife as "a delightful and instructive companion" who "possesses the *finest*, the *subtlest* mind & taste, I have ever yet met with"—or, as he wrote in a February 1803 letter to Samuel Purkis, Wedgwood is a "man of Genius (I know not his superior) of exquisite & various Taste" (*Collected Letters* 883, 920). In remembering Wedgwood in *The Friend*, Coleridge extends this characterization, describing his deceased "benefactor" as

> He, who beyond all other men known to me, added a fine and ever-wakeful Sense of Beauty to the most patient Accuracy in experimental Philosophy and the profounder researches of metaphysical Science; he who united all the play and spring of Fancy with the subtlest Discrimination and an inexorable Judgment; and who controlled an almost painful exquisiteness of Taste by a Warmth of Heart, which in all the relations of Life made allowances for faults as quick as the moral taste detected them… (*Collected Works: The Friend* 118)

If we have long acknowledged Wedgwood's generosity and if we have begun, largely because of Barnes and Budge, to understand Wedgwood's metaphysics and his fine mind, we have yet to understand his fine taste, his sense of beauty, his discrimination, his judgment, and the play of his fancy. We have yet to understand, in other words, Tom Wedgwood's aesthetics.

In this chapter I will take a holistic approach, seeking to trace Wedgwood's aesthetic theory and aesthetic practices through his metaphysical writing, his private notebooks, his letters to friends and family, and both contemporaneous and retrospective descriptions of him. Wedgwood's aesthetics is defined by his strikingly nuanced and insightful approach to pleasure and pain, and his metaphysical musings bear witness to the aesthetic experiences and aesthetic insight enabled by his chronic illness. Likewise, his modes of aesthetic production can be best understood in the context of his disability. Although the non-linearity and fragmentation of his notebooking practices constitutes a particularly palpable form of disability aesthetics, I am especially interested in the way he circulated his body and mind—through extended visits with

friends and family members, and embodied in letters that serve as textual prosthetics capable of transmitting affect on his behalf.

I will focus particularly on three interrelated aspects of Wedgwood's embodied aesthetics of pleasure and pain, all of which Coleridge gestures to in his tribute to Wedgwood. First I take up Wedgwood's taste in ordinary pleasures, in which both his "fine and ever-wakeful sense of beauty" and also his keen moral taste are palpable. Next, I examine his preoccupation with the complex associative properties of pleasure and pain, in which the "play and spring of [his] fancy" bears rich poetic fruit. Finally I explore his stark and uncharacteristically rigid ideas about the pleasures and pains of sympathy. Here the exquisiteness of Wedgwood's moral taste becomes painful, and as I trace his ideas about pity through his embodied aesthetics, I also trace a process of negotiation as he develops and augments his theory in conversation with loved ones during the final years of his life.

I choose these three aspects of Wedgwood's aesthetics of pleasure and pain because they likely had a profound impact on his literary friends, an impact that remains unacknowledged but for his friends' general remarks about his importance. In Wedgwood's correspondences, his intimates—most notably his brother Josiah, Tom Poole, and Coleridge—demonstrate a keen familiarity with and capacity to engage with Wedgwood's sensibility and his metaphysics, and I hope to trace the legacy of Wedgwood's aesthetics as it circulated through these relationships and the texts penned by his friends. Just as we have begun to recognize new aspects of Wedgwood's philosophical influence on Coleridge, so must we recognize that Wedgwood's unusual approach to pleasure and pain are critical contexts for understanding Romantic aesthetics.

Wedgwood in/and "Pleasure" & "Pain"

Sentience = Series of Perceptions

pleasure pain	}	mechanically and necessarily succeeding to each other, as the expansion of petals to the light and warmth of the sun—All action resolvable into those perceptions called
Sensations & Ideas	}	The <u>value</u> of any of them is the quantity of pleasure they are calculated to give me—I observe that pleasure which first anteceded & accompanied particular actions, now does not—I wish it were otherwise—A great part of my sensations are now accompanied with the idea of pleasure in other sentiences—Pain from observing them enjoy what once was mine—[9] (WM 111S)

Pleasure and pain. Before, beyond, and above all else these were the concepts by which Wedgwood structured his thought and measured his experiences. For Wedgwood man may be somewhat mechanistic, but he is also profoundly *feeling*—and that feeling is what finally matters.[10] Pleasure and pain underlie Wedgwood's approach to his world: he sought to experience whatever pleasures he could, even at the height of his illness, and to elicit pleasure and alleviate pain in those around him. Wedgwood also structured his ethical philosophy around his associationist ideas about pleasure and pain: he imagined a society, constructed through education, habit, and volition, in which pleasure might be associated with moral action, and pain might be minimized as much as possible—in part by preventing, repressing, and replacing negative associations. Pleasure and pain also structure the modes of expression and circulation of Wedgwood's metaphysical output, and especially how he embodied his philosophy and transmitted it in letters. Underlying, guiding, and profoundly shaping Wedgwood's life, thoughts,

[9] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England. Wedgwood developed his own system of notation and abbreviation in his notebooks and other private writing. Throughout this chapter I will fill out these abbreviations. Thus "p & p" becomes "pleasure and pain," for example, and "ass.d" becomes "associated."
[10] Like many of his predecessors and contemporaries, Wedgwood understood pleasure and pain as belonging to the realm of human feeling, registered on the level of the body but also potentially intellectual in source.

and textual output is his unusual—or, his friends claimed, singular—sensibility and his exquisite sensitivity to the world's pleasures and the nature of its pains.

It is no wonder that for Wedgwood every perception, idea, experience, and object was reducible to the pleasure or pain it elicited. By the age of seven and a half Wedgwood's health was poor enough that he had to be schooled at home "on account of the head-ache" (WM1138), and his health only deteriorated as he grew older. Wedgwood spent much of his adolescence and adulthood seeking remedies for his undiagnosed ailments, but his discomfort was rarely eased. The passing of time brought ever more acute and unremitting physical agony—and, often, mental anguish. Because of this, and perhaps also because of a presentiment of his early death, Wedgwood did not follow through on a series of plans to establish his own household. Instead he often took up residence with friends and family for weeks or months at a time. He consulted many of the most notable physicians of the day—among them Thomas Beddoes and Erasmus Darwin, the latter of whom was also his tutor as a child—and tried therapies including a warm room scheme, which had him confined in a room heated by a stove, and a housework scheme, which had him cleaning and cooking and otherwise running a household in London. But the medical treatment he undertook most repeatedly was travel, and his periods of absence sometimes found him far afield in locations including Paris, Switzerland, Germany, and even the West Indies. Through travel he sought the alteration of climate, company, or scenery—and, increasingly, to shield his loved ones from the agony of witnessing his painful deterioration.

If Wedgwood's preoccupation with pleasure and pain makes sense given his embodied reality, it is also a way in which he was very much of his time. In the late eighteenth century, the two concepts were in broad cultural circulation. As Rowan Boyson has noted, in the eighteenth century, "pleasure appeared in almost all areas of British, French and German thought, from

theology to the luxury debates, epistemology, science and aesthetics, to education and the new political economy" (1). Among other things, "pleasure" helped to define the discourses of metaphysics and ethics, particularly of the associationist strain inaugurated by David Hartley and the utilitarian strain that at the time was most closely associated with Jeremy Bentham. Although I wish to particularly focus on the more aesthetically-oriented aspects of Wedgwood's metaphysics he explicitly engages with associationist and utilitarian thinking as he lays out his approach to pleasure and pain. Moreover, it is in large part because of his more novel divergences from associationism and utilitarianism that he arrives at many of his most provocative—and aesthetically relevant—propositions about the nature of human feeling.

Pleasure and pain are certainly not Hartley's primary preoccupations in *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (1749), an important text for Wedgwood—as it was for Coleridge, but more enduringly so. Yet in it Hartley emphasizes the fundamental nature of pleasure and pain, explaining that "all our internal Feelings seem to be attended with some degree either of *Pleasure or Pain*" (ii). Hartley also emphasizes the crucial importance of pleasure to man's final goal, "living happily, of attaining our *summum bonum*, or greatest possible happiness" (204). Hartley cautions that "[t]he Pleasures of Sensation ought not to be made the primary Pursuit," and "indulgence in sensual gratification will not afford us our *summum bonum*" (454 – 5). Although they may be compelling and intense, sensual pleasures are in fact "inferior" because they are limited and transitory, whereas intellectual pleasures—which nevertheless originate in the body's sense perceptions (as all things do for Hartley)—may affect "all the sensible parts" of the body and also may offer the opportunity for "reflection" (456). It is in fact only "more exalted and pure pleasures" that are "consistent with our *summum bonum*" for Hartley (265).

Befitting their importance, Hartley devotes a great deal of textual attention to classifying the various sources and types of pleasure and pain. In addition to the "inferior" sensual pleasures and the markedly more impactful sensual pains (that is, the pleasures and pains of the body and its organs, as well as individual senses), Hartley describes pleasures and pains of the imagination (which include those deriving from nature, the arts, and human beauty and deformity); ambition (others' actual or expected opinions of us); self-interest (ranging from selfishness to the rational fear of death); sympathy (various modes of feeling for and with others); theopathy (various modes of feeling towards God); and moral sense (from charity to cruelty towards others).

Utilitarian thinkers, of which I use Jeremy Bentham as an exemplar here, explicitly figure pleasure and pain at the epicenter of their philosophical systems. Building on associationist psychology but in some ways significantly departing from it, utilitarian systems focused on pleasure and pain not only as they related to the individual's *summum bonum* but also—and more importantly—society's. Because man is "under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure," Bentham explains in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, "[t]he *principle of utility* recognises this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and law" (11). Like Hartleyan associationists, utilitarian philosophers tend to value intellectual over sensual pleasures, but Bentham also specifically outlines a system by which a pleasure or pain may be evaluated based on intensity, duration, certainty or uncertainty, and propinquity or remoteness—and, in the context of society, by fecundity ("the chance it has of *not* being followed by sensations of the *same* kind"), purity ("the chance it has of *not* being followed by sensations of the opposite kind"), and extent (how many are "affected by it") (38).

Although Bentham classified similar types and sources of pleasure and pain to Hartley, he also classified 32 "circumstances influencing sensibility" that would make individuals susceptible to different quantities of pleasure or pain from the same source (52). Among these factors are health, strength, hardiness, bodily imperfection, moral biases, sympathetic sensibility, and religious sensibility. Crucially, Bentham definitively equates "pleasure" with "what comes to the same thing, immunity from pain" (34). The strain of thinking exemplified here by Bentham, figuring pain and pleasure as directly oppositional forces, is a relatively common eighteenth-century view that Edmund Burke takes on in *A Philosophical Enquiry*. Burke vehemently insists that pain and pleasure are "by no means necessarily dependent on each other"—pleasure is not a lack of pain, and pain is not a lack of pleasure—and seeks to outline a state of "indifference" which is characterized by an absence of either positive feeling.[11]

For Wedgwood, Bentham and Hartley's approaches to pleasure and pain would have likely seemed not only reductive but also in various ways incorrect and, where they tended to moralizing, perhaps even somewhat dangerous. Always in physical discomfort, and in increasingly agonizing pain, Wedgwood (much more so than Burke) had a stake in emphasizing that pleasure and pain were not oppositionally related. In fact one could easily experience both feelings simultaneously and in various proportions. Or, as Wordsworth writes in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802)—a text I will argue bears the traces of Wedgwood's influence—"man and the objects that surround him [act and re-act] upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure" (402).

[11] I quote Burke here because he is the relevant context for considering Wedgwood's aesthetics. Though he would have likely come into contact with Kant's ideas once an intimate of Coleridge's, the writings I discuss here were primarily written before his acquaintance with Coleridge. Additionally, Kant's approach to pleasure in relation to the beautiful (the pleasure comes from the fact of our judgment of the beautiful, and not from the object itself), along with his aesthetic theory as a whole, is remarkably more disembodied than Wedgwood's ever was.

Equally importantly, Wedgwood would have been at an express disadvantage in the first four of Bentham's "circumstances influencing sensibility"—health, strength, hardiness, and bodily imperfection. At times he also would have been constitutionally disadvantaged as to his firmness of mind, steadiness of mind, and, at some particularly difficult moments, may have even edged uncomfortably close to a seventh of Bentham's circumstances influencing sensibility, "insanity." But it is not so simple as to say that these circumstances made him more susceptible to pain and left him dulled to pleasure. Wedgwood's experience of chronic pain in fact seems to have contributed to his unusual appreciation and advocacy of pleasure, and especially his heightened sensitivity to the possibilities of pleasure that were always around him. His illness also led him to explore the extent to which one might modify one's feelings and one's taste in pleasures—an approach to volition with equally important aesthetic and ethical implications.

Aside from Vickers there has been a critical tendency to either overlook the possibly positive products of Wedgwood's illness, or to understand his ailing body and mind as solely limiting factors—as the reasons Wedgwood never fulfilled his scientific promise, never married, never established his own household, and never published a comprehensive account of his metaphysical thought. As is evident in the verse fragment with which I began this chapter, this is the attitude Wedgwood himself, melancholic by nature, tends to adopt. A notable exception to this line of thinking is Mary Everest Boole, author of the introduction to the 1912 collection *The Value of a Maimed Life: Extracts from the Manuscript Notes of Thomas Wedgwood*. Writing of the "exceptional kind of intuition conferred on [him] by [his] suffering," Boole notes that "no healthy man could be what Thomas Wedgwood was to all around him, could think his thoughts, or give off the same gently luminous influence on the thoughts of others" (26). Boole's comment dovetails with recent approaches to disability as not only a social and medical

category, but also a rich and unique experiential reality. Susan Wendell writes, "people with disabilities have experiences, by virtue of their disabilities, which non-disabled people do not have, and which are sources of knowledge that is not directly accessible to non-disabled people" (69).

The proposition that Wedgwood's non-normative embodiment could have led to his keen sensibility—as well as his unusual approach to human feeling—is akin to what Wedgwood's Bristol Circle collaborators glimpsed through their use of nitrous oxide. At the very least the nitrous oxide experiments, like John Thelwall's approach to blindness, demonstrate the capacity of Wedgwood's contemporaries to recognize the nuanced insights afforded by non-normative states of body and mind. Put otherwise, intimates including Coleridge, Godwin, Wordsworth, Beddoes, Mackintosh, Poole, Jos Wedgwood, and Humphry Davy almost certainly would have been more open and receptive than late-nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century audiences to the kinds of knowledge Wedgwood's illness could afford him.

Wedgwood's Embodied Aesthetics of Pleasure and Pain

> Surprise, doubt, fear &c obtained from experience, unknown to infants. Above Question suggested itself whilst Leslie lived with me, his first year 1790 & contains in it the germ of all which has since been done by me. (as quoted in WM1138)[12]

In the above note, dated 29 August, 1797, Tom Wedgwood articulates the insight underlying his metaphysical project, an endeavor through which he sought to discover how to prevent and alleviate human suffering and how to promote its converse, "the great standard of human conduct, the production of happiness," (*Value* 74). Ever preoccupied with the broad social implications of feeling, Wedgwood shared an underlying interest and end goal with

[12] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England.

utilitarianism, and what Wedgwood called the "[m]ost unobjectionable principle of action, viz.—of greatest sum of happiness on the surface of the globe" (*Value* 76) very closely mirrors Bentham's "*greatest happiness* or *greatest felicity* principle" (11), which in turn echoes Beccaria, Hutcheson, Leibniz, and one of Wedgwood's scientific correspondents, Joseph Priestley (Rosen li). It was in the service of this end—reflective of an ethical stance profoundly shaped by the experience of pain—that Wedgwood articulated his associationist approach to feeling.

Wedgwood wrote to Godwin in January 1797 that he had over the past four days devoured Volume 1 of Hartley for the first time. It was, he reported, an experience of "instruction" and "pleasure" but also of "no little mortification." This is because of a "coincidence": "I have been anticipated in many of my conceived original observations & most favourite conclusions" (WM 36). It is important to note at the outset that Wedgwood had been engaging in metaphysical inquiry for years before he came upon Hartley. This helps to explain how and why he was able to develop such an independent strain of associationist metaphysics, one that maintained its distinct character even after he began reading more broadly and conversing with Godwin, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Mackintosh, and other luminaries of the age.

Like other associationists Wedgwood sought to trace the various ways that the external world provoked feelings of pleasure and pain, how pleasure and pain factored into complex ideas, and how pleasurable and painful associations played themselves out in an individual's life. But Wedgwood's specific conceptions of pleasure and pain, those feelings by which a man's—and society's—happiness could equally be measured, diverge significantly from both standard utilitarian and standard associationist views. If Wedgwood's assocationism was somewhat mechanistic—though I think not nearly as mechanistic as Vickers, Beer, and even Budge or Barnes might claim—Wedgwood's sensibility tended to the poetic. The particular ways he takes

up pleasure and pain—two concepts with inherent aesthetic traction insofar as we judge aesthetic objects largely by the pain or pleasure they invoke—[13] would have made Wedgwood's theoretical approach of special interest to his literary friends. Indeed, his metaphysics is pervaded by an abiding preoccupation with aspects of human feeling and human experience that also figured prominently in debates about aesthetic reception and literary production.

I. *A Taste for the Ordinary*

I use the idea of "taste" to frame my discussion of Wedgwood's pleasures for the concept's fitting multiplicity. That is, as a noun "taste" signifies an often (but not necessarily) abstracted and rarefied characteristic usually related to aesthetic judgment. But as a verb it describes an action of viscerally embodied sensual experience. Perhaps more than any other concept, taste therefore bridges the abstracted I and the body, the thing and activity, the immaterial and material. As Coleridge used it in relation to his patron, "taste" can also slip between, and reveal the relationship of, the aesthetic and the moral. These multiplicities of "taste" are appropriate to Wedgwood, a man who in his metaphysics, social critique, and life tends towards the same end: local, immediate, everyday pleasures. Wedgwood's taste in pleasure amounts to a distinct ethical system as much as an aesthetic one, and it is one that he both develops and puts to the test through his life in pain. The pleasures Wedgwood values most, advocates, and seeks most ardently reveal the unique sensibility of a man shaped by his experiences of radical embodiment.

At one point in a notebook explicitly devoted to his metaphysical observations and speculations, Wedgwood suggests that pain and pleasure "may perhaps be best considered as two

[13] Pleasure factors into discussions of the beautiful and the sublime, and various forms of pain (e.g. fear, aversion) factor into discussions of the sublime, the ugly, the grotesque, and the disgusting.

distinct and additional senses—capable of synchronous affection—like sight or touch" (WM 111S).[14] Wedgwood tells himself to "[p]ursue the analogy," and so he did: although he does not seem to have explicitly written at greater length about pleasure and pain as additional senses, many of his ideas about human feeling bear the analogy out to a high degree. By proposing that pain and pleasure may be akin to sight or touch, Wedgwood indicates his strong desire to figure them at the most fundamental level of human experience—at a somewhat more fundamental (though no more universal) level than even Hartley had figured them. It also indicates Wedgwood's abiding desire to foreclose the possibility of a system in which pleasure and pain might be understood as incompatible with or even in direct conflict with one another.

Although Wedgwood leaves room for a standard range of possible sources and types of pleasures and pains, he creates a system in which pleasure and pain may be evaluated according to their intensity or richness, in keeping with how he might evaluate complex ideas within his associationist system. By doing so he sidesteps more standard measures of feeling, for example whether a pleasure would be followed by pain (which for Wedgwood it nearly always would) or, for those that even allowed the possibility, whether pleasure was experienced simultaneously with pain (which for Wedgwood it always was). As Boole notes, "[i]n weighing relative degrees of enjoyment, he estimates quality more highly than mere quantity," and accordingly, "[h]is estimate of the difference in enjoying power of persons in different moral states and at different stages of development is very high" (*Value* 21 – 2).

Wedgwood speculates that "[d]ifferent animals, and different men, have different views of nature in proportion to the number of ideas associated. I see ten times the number of features in a landscape that a ploughman does; having ten times more ideas to associate and blend

[14] This is not wholly unlike Burke's conception of pleasure and pain as positive feelings, and his conception of a state of indifference when neither of the feelings was stimulated.

themselves with impressions." (*Value* 61). Whatever pleasure Wedgwood derives from a landscape is therefore to be valued accordingly over the ploughman's, an inequality Wedgwood would likely say was due to both his unusual innate sensibility and the unjust inequalities of human society that he sought to address through his philanthropy.[15] Likewise, but for reasons of inherent species superiority, the more complex pleasure of man is to be valued over the pleasure of animals, just as "[t]he pleasure of a dog … is more intense than that of an oyster, a toad, or even a bird. If it were possible to estimate degrees of animal pleasure," he speculates, "I should expect to find that an hour of a dog's enjoyment was equal to a month of an oyster's, three weeks that of a toad, a week that of a bird, etc" (*Value* 75). It is on this basis that Wedgwood justifies the sport of hunting, which provides pleasures for man that outweigh whatever pains it causes to the hunted animal.

Even as Wedgwood emphasizes the richness and complexity of feeling, he refuses to value intellectual pleasure over the sensual, or the rarefied over the ordinary. Although he defines grander concepts in terms of pleasure—as when he somewhat strikingly calls love "that state produced by whatever gives us pleasure yet is not mere pleasure" (28515 / 79-40)—Wedgwood, in Boole's words, "lays comparatively little stress on the superiority of one *source* of pleasure over another," and "keep[s] the power of deriving pleasure from commonplace objects at its highest possible level" (*Value* 22). Wedgwood insists that "Every object in Nature may become a source of pleasure" (*Value* 63); "[i]n short, roused attention is pleasurable in all

[15] For example, in explaining why mere "gaiety, mirth, frolick, etc." are not the only correct end of education, he reveals his approach to class and society. He writes, "Look around you, fix your eyes on our great cities and manufacturing towns, on our jails, hospitals, and on those still more revolting abodes of misery, our Bridewalls and Poor Houses. Contemplate well this scene; and then decide whether our object should be to form by education a Merry-Andrew or jack-pudding whose diverting tricks shall draw off the eyes of those classes of society to whose avarice, indifference, or supineness this misery owes its existence; or a man who shall hunt out and expose that misery in its gloomiest recesses and combat those fatal prejudices which have chiefly occasioned it by splitting society into subordinate classes" (*Value* 69 – 70).

cases" (*Value* 39 – 40); and even just the "[e]xercise of sense produces pleasurable state" in infants (28515 / 47-40).

If pleasure may come in many forms and from many sources, those enjoyments to which Wedgwood is drawn tend to be ordinary ones, those which are both simple and easily accessible. Wedgwood counts among his pleasures those of the imagination and sympathy—that is, music, drama, romance, and "visiting those friends which interest your feelings" (*Value* 64). He also vividly describes pleasure at commonplace social and sensory pleasures, as when he records his "Initial feeling [at] Cote house": "Sympathy with Richard's playing on Bess—found my neck still as if playing myself—breast a little affected" (WM 111S). He enthuses, "[h]ow wonderful it appears, how different to any effect in the inanimate world, that the slightest vibration of air, for what else is a joyful piece of intelligence conveyed in a whisper, should instantly quicken the pulse, bring a glow upon the skin & set the tongue in motion" (28515 / 50 – 40). Unsurprisingly, given his eager justification of hunting, it too was a favorite enjoyment of his. It provided him with enough pleasure that in November 1802, a month before Wordsworth would register Wedgwood's "painful" physical deterioration, Coleridge reported to his wife that Wedgwood had "gone out cock-shooting, in high glee and sprits" (*Collected Letters* 883).[16]

To judge from Wedgwood's life and writing, part of what makes such pleasures so valuable is their immediacy. For this reason the capacity to "[g]ive [one]self to the present moment" becomes for Wedgwood, despairing at a moment of physical and mental agony, the "grand, inestimable secret of human happiness!!!" (28515 / 14-40). But in no way does this amount to hedonism. Instead it amounts to a wakeful receptivity to the beauties always already

[16] Although Coleridge's effusion sometimes produced distorted descriptions, Wedgwood's own writing on the sport of hunting corroborates Coleridge's description. Wedgwood explains that for man, the "pleasures" of the "chase" are "derive[d] … from many sources. He is eager to grasp the object of pursuit; he rejoices in the vigour he is acquiring by the exercise; his mind is delighted and refreshed by the change of ideas; he contemplates with rapture the varied face of nature, etc." (*Value* 75 – 6).

surrounding him. Actively seeking to preserve a sensory inlet of pleasure, he writes a note to himself in October 1797. "Spare your eyes for old age," he instructs himself, and expands in synesthetic and evocative terms, "Think of the delicious moments you now owe to your sight." But in defining these "delicious moments" he does not go on to write of typically valued sight-based pleasures of the imagination or intellect—viewing the Swiss Alps or a great work of art, for example, or reading philosophy or even conducting laboratory experiments. Instead he calls a single pleasure to mind: "Remember the promenade towards Mrs Jacksons" (28515 / 112). This alone, this everyday visual enjoyment, is sufficient to remind Wedgwood of the importance of sight and its capacity to bring him pleasure.

This taste for the local and ordinary is one that Wedgwood shared with Wordsworth—an inclination that led the poet to challenge the aesthetic value of novelty in his fragment "[The Beautiful and the Sublime]." Just as Wedgwood implicitly foregrounds sensibility, habit, and education by citing the number of ideas he (as opposed to the ploughman) may associate with the landscape, so too does Wordsworth emphasize the importance of the spectator in relation to the everyday aesthetic object. "[I]t is certain," Wordsworth writes, that a person's "conceptions of the sublime, far from being dulled or narrowed by commonness or frequency, will be rendered more lively & comprehensive by more accurate observation and by encreasing knowledge." This is yet more true, Wordsworth writes, in respect to "the influences of beauty" (349), the aesthetic category most universally and unambiguously associated with pleasure.

For both men, moreover, a taste in the everyday amounts to much more than merely a personal aesthetic preference. Wedgwood frequently recasts his taste in strikingly, sometimes stiflingly, moral terms. It is partly on the basis of the simple pleasures of physical exercise, for example, that Wedgwood levels a scathing critique of gender norms, especially amongst the

upper classes. He rails, "[l]adies continue long sedentary & inactive; as soon as they are no longer girls, they resign those daily constant occupations & sports which formerly pursued with interest, kept them in a state of motion and of pleasure which assisted all the vital functions" (*Value* 68). They become cold because of poor circulation, "languor" follows, then "ennui," and finally

> the languor becomes chronical, and the constitution so weakened as to be peculiarly susceptible to disorder. It is also violently affected by slight attacks; a cold and a cough, which to a farmer's girl is rather a troublesome than a serious affection, will often confine a young lady to her room, induce severe sore throat, and not unfrequently, terminate in Consumption. (*Value* 68 – 9)

What Wedgwood describes here is a total deterioration of body, mind, and situation—the senseless wasting away of a whole class of society. Although he focuses first on physical enjoyments, the lifestyle he finally imagines is one in which women are prevented from enjoying not just the pleasures of the body, but also pleasures of nature and society and health itself.

There are three reasons I am interested in this passage. First, in it Wedgwood does not just credit the prohibition of physical exercise with illness and deterioration. He specifically credits the cessation of the *pleasure* that accompanies exercise with a definitive contribution to ill health. Indeed, it is "a state of motion and of pleasure" that had once "assisted all the vital functions" (*Value* 68). The effect is to foreground, albeit somewhat dramatically, the simple enjoyments of muscle and movement. In *The Rejected Body*, Susan Wendell describes how, "[b]ecause of their cultural disqualification, disabled people are in a particular position to "notice and criticize cultural myths about the body and mind, as well as such matters of self-worth, intimacy, sexuality, dependency, and independence" (69). In losing the ability to easily derive pleasure from his body, Wedgwood would be in a better position to understand what it actually means to be able to derive pleasures from the body. Because of his personal experience and the

insight it afforded, he would tend to revere simple sensual pleasures rather than to caution against their dangers—and would be able to recognize the specious or flawed logic on which many of his contemporaries based their critiques of sensual pleasure.

Second, Wedgwood's sensitivity to issues of gender, evident here and elsewhere in his notebooks and letters, is clearly founded not just on abstract egalitarian principles, which he (like Beddoes, Darwin, Godwin, and many other of his intimates) certainly cultivated. It is also founded on a kind of fundamentally embodied sympathy, as he imagines the upper class woman necessarily (but needlessly) ending up in a position of chronic pain, weakness, and physical limitation akin to his own. Akin to other feminist disability scholars, Susan Wendell traces correspondences between the social, but also the epistemological positions of women and the ill and disabled; although Wendell addresses contemporary Western culture, her points hold true for British society of the 1790s. With a dramatic flourish, Wedgwood reveals the deterministic role of upper class women—a status which confines and produces different intersubjective possibilities; the kinds of spaces one is expected and allowed to inhabit; the activities in which one may, must, or mustn't participate; and other factors that fundamentally structure experience and profoundly shape one's relation to the external world. Wedgwood would have been in a position to better intuit aspects of women's realities because many of these were realities he shared.

Third, this notebook passage definitively demonstrates the extent to which Wedgwood's taste in immediate and simple pleasures is as much ethical as it is aesthetic, and at times amounts to a moral and social imperative. Indeed, for Wedgwood a key aspect of "*moral* excellence"—as opposed to just happiness—is "to extract the agreeable from every situation and pay little attention to its opposite" (*Value* 73 – 4 emphasis mine). Accordingly, just as Wedgwood

criticizes society for denying wealthy women the pleasures of exercise, he criticizes culture for generally deemphasizing and discrediting the simple, local, and ordinary enjoyments from which he has derived such precious moments of pleasure, even at times of suffering and confinement. By doing so, culture not only works against human happiness, but also against human nature and to the explicit detriment of humankind.

Instead of a direct relation to the world and its sources of pleasure, modern man may only experience them mimetically, filtered and dulled through the medium of art. Wedgwood writes,

> In civilised society man is lost for want of excitement. Hence a passion for romance and scenic exhibition. These remind us of our lost dignity and pleasures, and transport us for a moment out of that dull, incessant routine in which we are doomed to circulate… How miserable is the construction of Society! How pitiable the destiny of its helpless victims! (*Value* 46 – 7).

But art itself is not the problem for Wedgwood so much as the function art comes to serve in the "dull, incessant routine" of modern society. It is partly through the association of pain that man's natural capacities are actively corrupted. "Man's mind," he claims, "is moulded by the existent practices of systems of the world." "[T]he simple impulses of his nature" are "pervert[ed]" both by "false statements of the relations of events" but also by "tacking to ideas at first wholly indifferent, painful feelings as shame, disgust, horror &c." (WM 111S).[17] In Wedgwood's estimation, not only does man lose contact with his natural sources of pleasure, and not only does he come to view these as inferior sources of pleasure—but they therefore become things that will conjure in him various species of pain.

This description smacks of Rousseau and the dignity of his savage man. Even more so, however, this passage calls to mind Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. It is in this context that we may best understand the extent to which, by virtue of his taste in everyday

[17] This notebook entry was made in the time after Wedgwood visited with Wordsworth in 1797, suggesting that this was a topic of discussion during their visit.

pleasures, Wedgwood actively participates in one of the most important aesthetic debates and poetic projects of his day. In the context of Wedgwood's metaphysics, moreover, we can better apprehend the associationist underpinnings of Wordsworth's project and the extent to which Wordsworth's thought, like Wedgwood's, depends on an aesthetics of pleasure and pain.

In the Preface Wordsworth explains that his necessary task as a poet, "producing immediate pleasure," may be understood as "an acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe" and "a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives and moves" (401). Like Wedgwood, Wordsworth insists that "the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants" (395). The poet describes how

> a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the encreasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies… The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse. When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble effort with which I have endeavoured to counteract it; and, reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with no dishonorable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it which are equally inherent and indestructible.[18] (395 – 6)

This is clearly a more well-developed and nuanced critique than Wedgwood's, which was but an entry in a private notebook. But both depend on a shared convergence of taste and conviction.

[18] Wordsworth's use of taste, craving, and thirst here illustrates the unique characteristics of "taste" that I underscored earlier. All three are used in conjunction with acts of gustatory consumption, but "craving" and "thirst" are incompatible with acts of restraint and judgment. Or, put otherwise, "craving" and "thirst" suggest a body that overwhelms the mind, whereas "taste" bridges the body and mind.

Like Wedgwood, Wordsworth emphasizes sensibility over the source of pleasure, and simple and ordinary pleasures over the extraordinary and novel. Like Wedgwood, moreover, Wordsworth asserts the potential of art to work against the aesthetic system he advocates and, importantly, both men naturalize their taste, insisting on its inherent correspondence with the human body and mind.

Some of the linguistic and conceptual correspondences between Wedgwood and Wordsworth may be accidental, but coincidence seems less likely given the timing and nature of Wedgwood's developing friendship with Wordsworth and Coleridge. On September 15, 1797 Wedgwood recalls his first visit with the poet: "Went down to Wordsworth's with ——n. Spent 5 days there. Remarked to ——n on the 5th day at Alfoxden that the time had gone like lightning—he agreed with me" (WM 111S). The notebook in which Wedgwood kept many of the metaphysical observations on pleasure and pain that I have quoted from here, and in which he levels a critique of society for degrading man by degrading his simple pleasures, was kept from September 1797 to October 1798. That is, he began it just days before he visited with Wordsworth, although he had developed many of his associationist ideas about pleasure and pain, and also his taste for ordinary pleasures long before this.

In this context it is also significant that Coleridge's intellectual intimacy with—and in light of Barnes' and Budge's work we may now also say intellectual collaboration with—Wedgwood was approaching its peak from 1798 – 1802, when Coleridge was also most influential on Wordsworth's aesthetic and metaphysical theories, and specifically to the composition and revision of the Preface. Indeed, for critics including Kenneth Johnston and Seamus Perry, "the Preface makes little sense if not seen in the context of the Wordsworth-Coleridge collaboration" (Hatherell 223). Rowan Boyson has traced the extent to which

"Wordsworth increasingly focused his discussions of poetry around [pleasure]" (109). In the 1798 Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* the word "pleasure" appears once. In the 1800 Preface it appears 25 times, and in the 1802 Preface it appears 43 times. By this last version, the word "follows only narrowly in frequency behind the words that tend to be thought of as the text's main subjects… Thus, pleasure begins as an occasional topic of his poems at the beginning of the 'great decade' and gradually swells to become a central feature of his poetics" (110). Although this, too, may be a coincidence, it is at least highly suggestive that the years that saw Wordsworth focus increasingly on "pleasure" are also the years that saw him (as well as Coleridge) become friends with Wedgwood.

It is of course impossible to tell in what directions the influence ran on specific points, but there is ample cause to conclude that Wedgwood was at least an active participant in some of the conversations about human feeling that were critical to Wordsworth's development of his own ideas on the topic, and that Wedgwood's was also a voice that, circulating through Coleridge, Poole, and other mutual intimates, continued to influence the poetic project outlined in the Preface. But I also wish to emphasize another, potentially more compelling mode of influence apart from Wedgwood's metaphysical theory itself. Given the extent to which Wedgwood's taste in pleasure guided his lifestyle, I suspect he may have served for Wordsworth as an emblematic embodiment of their shared aesthetic principles, that his lived example may have demonstrated to the poet that his taste did indeed run in accordance with human nature and the dignity of man. In a sense Wedgwood implicitly tests both his principles and also the durability of various kinds of pleasure, especially at those times when he is in particular pain and mental anguish.

Tellingly, once his illness has progressed into a life of pain, travel produces little positive pleasure for Wedgwood—although it provides a reliable way to ease the guilt he invariably feels at exposing his loved ones to his pains. When in April, 1800 he writes to his family from Martinique, he begins by expressing the "beauty of the trees and shrubs," which "astonished and delighted us beyond our highest expectations." He is, he claims, "at a loss how to convey an idea of the exquisite beauty of the scenery." Soon, however, he confesses the pains of novelty: "[t]he sight aches and the spirit sinks from unceasing excitement. The mind, too full, keeps longing for a moment's respite" (Litchfield 89). Although he continues to pursue travel as a therapy—as I will discuss later, his desire to shield his loved ones borders on pathological—he seems increasingly disenchanted by it. When traveling in 1803 in Switzerland he records only "glimpses of pleasure," but unmitigated pain and "disgust for all the circumstances of travelling" (WM 21).

When more exotic pleasures prove insufficient, the simple pleasures to which his taste increasingly tends, those of a promenade or the mere exercise of the senses, endure. Thus his health schemes increasingly tend to the domestic: for example the warm room plan and the housekeeping plan, the latter of which allows him to socialize with friends in London. In August 1802 he tells Tom Poole that he is "eternally racking [his] brains for some pleasurable scheme of action & subject every day to fits of the greatest despondency." "At this moment," he explains, "I propose taking a farm in hand which you may remember shooting at" (WM 67). Pastoral pleasures, domesticity, and the promise of sport are perhaps more likely than the novelties of travel to provide consolations for Wedgwood's pains. Such pleasures may not seem profound in themselves, but Wedgwood's experience demonstrates that they are reliable and accessible, and the man who can find enjoyment in them might be likeliest to successfully cultivate a life of

happiness, and to find comfort even when intense pain—and perhaps even when death—is unavoidable.

None of Wedgwood's loved ones demonstrates as acute a sensitivity to his taste in pleasure as the famously expansive Poole, and their correspondence demonstrates both the circulation of Wedgwood's taste and its durability. Knowing that health was all that was wanting for a man with Wedgwood's "dispositions, powers and means" Poole allows himself to imagine, "my God, how happy would you be" given a respite from the pains of illness (WM 54). In a November 1803 letter Poole appeals directly to his friend's taste:

> I never did nor ever shall reproach you for want of functionality in answering a letter. I know your ill health and consequent feelings. God grant I could see you in a state when you should deserve to be scolded. For you there is but one line of action, to follow up [even?] every impulse of pleasure which the moment gives. You must go beyond the carpe diem. You must catch the moment. This your duty is a sufficient apology on your part for every neglect of answering, for every change of plan. (to say nothing of the necessity in case of attention in health.) Whoever is not satisfied with this does not know you, or does not deserve to be your friend. (WM 54)[19]

This description compellingly indicates how Wedgwood's taste may be still be successfully pursued and fulfilled, even at the extremities of life. Novel enjoyments and pleasures deferred may hold appeal, but the immediate, the local is what may be counted on. This is why, in two letters sent about a year before Wedgwood's death, Poole writes with elegant simplicity—but in utter earnestness—that he hopes the fair weather may have a salutary effect for his friend.

What's more, imagining Wedgwood's enjoyment of the springtime weather clearly brings Poole a sympathetic pleasure. So, too, did witnessing his friend's enjoyment on a recent visit to Stowey: he writes that "while you amused yourself you contributed very much indeed to the comfort and pleasure of those around you" (WM 54). Herein Poole's letters demonstrate how, in part because of Wedgwood's sociable tendencies and in part because of his ailing

[19] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England.

health—which very clearly increased others' desires to see him experience pleasure—Wedgwood's taste and pursuit of simple enjoyments evolved into a participatory, communal endeavor. Wedgwood's sensibility circulated through his conversations, letters, and life, but also sympathetically through the bodies and imaginations of his friends. In speaking and writing of him, too, his intimates would have kept his taste in circulation as any news of Wedgwood was also, quite necessarily, news about his pains and about the simple pleasures he sought with increasing desperation.

Wordsworth's particular susceptibility to the influence of Wedgwood's mere presence is demonstrated by a letter I will discuss at length in Chapter 5 in which Wordsworth describes his last meeting with Wedgwood. Years later the poet wrote to Jos Wedgwood that on Christmas Eve, 1802, Wedgwood was the "most sublime" of all humans Wordsworth had seen—in part because of the "calm and dignified manner" with which he bore his physical suffering (*Letters* v.8, 7). Their time together in 1797 may have left a similarly strong impression on the poet. It certainly left enough of an impression on Dorothy that in summer 1851, the mention of the surname "Wedgwood" sent her "into a eulogy of Tom Wedgwood as if his death had occurred yesterday instead of nearly half a century before" (Barbara Wedgwood 254).[20]

It is difficult to imagine that whatever ideas Wordsworth had about simple pleasures would not have been influenced by his impression of how they functioned in the life of a man with chronic pain—a kind of analog to other figures of marginalization and suffering that so clearly left an impression on the poet. Considering Wedgwood as a possible lived example for Wordsworth gives body to what the poet writes about modern man's "degrading thirst" after

[20] Not dissimilarly, there was a meeting between Dorothy and Tom Wedgwood's grand-niece Julia Wedgwood in the summer of 1849. Writing of Dorothy's "wild eyes," which she says "kept all their life and light, though the mind had grown dim," Julia recalls, "There was no dimness in her interest when she heard my name. 'From whom are you sprung?'," she asked. Julia confesses that Dorothy's "allusion to [Tom Wedgwood] clothes him with a halo perhaps more vivid for my eyes because the vision is so absolutely untransferable" (332).

"extraordinary incident," and his "blunted mind and almost savage torpor." Modern man has become a passive receptor—and no longer an active agent, stimulants must be evermore extreme to reach him. By contrast Wedgwood's sensibility was ever seeking and responsive to the humblest pleasures, even when he was in utter agony.

II. *The Complex Associative Properties of Pleasure and Pain, or, The Play of Fancy*

We register pleasures and pains at the level of the body. They have a material presence as much they have as an emotional one. They feel necessary, inevitable, like stubborn, immutable facts. And yet *feeling* often seems incommensurate to circumstance, and feelings evolve in ways that seem inexplicable. Wedgwood was drawn to moments which expose the inconsistencies, complexities, and mutability of feeling. Associative problems were, to someone with Wedgwood's scientific mind and ethical goals, an invitation. Thus he set out to track his own moments of mental pain, and noted instances of strange numbness. He recorded his efforts to capitalize on the mutability of pleasure and pain, as well as the variability of his taste. By working through these complex associative properties of feeling, Wedgwood exposed aspects of the deep literary potential of association and his own poetic sensibility, and provides new contexts in which we can read Romantic poetry.

Wedgwood was prone to moments and periods of mental anguish, often in response to—or at least in correlation with—his physical pains, but also, he seemed to believe, partly because of his nature. Like his chronic physical pains, his tendency to mental suffering helped to shape his metaphysical project, which is especially preoccupied with the associative properties and circumstances that lead to dejection, anxiety, fear, and all of the other species of mental pain that can inhibit the pursuit of both individual and collective happiness. Wedgwood kept meticulous

accounts of personal experiences and observations related to his psychological pains, seeking to tease out their associational origins. A sustained exploration of the dejection associated with the "Chiming of Bells *in the day-time*" demonstrates Wedgwood's nuanced associative approach (*Value* 51).

There are at least three instances of the bells in his extant writings, dated October 23 and 30, and November 6, 1796.[21] In this last case the "oppressive influence of this sound was immediately felt" (*Value* 51), and Wedgwood carefully tracks its impact, which is largely emotional. Wedgwood comes to realize the conditions for his pain. First, he must hear bells. Second, he "must be conscious of its being day" as opposed to night, when he is "exhilarated" by the sound of bells. Third, his mind must be at "leisure" (52 – 3). He also traces the probable associative origin of the pain to the conditions and experiences of his life and also to his temperament. It is traceable to

> an early date, and is derived from a natural timidity which was alarmed more or less every Sunday by my being forced into crowded streets and highways, the bells chiming at the same time. It is an association of Contiguity. I have often lain in bed on a Sunday morning, loathing the occupation of the day, and listening to the numerous bells of the neighbouring Churches. (52).

It is difficult to take the emotions elicited by the bells as the mere accidental effect of life's impressions, and it is impossible to take them as incidental. This is one of the reasons I think it is misleading to simply call Wedgwood's strain of associationism "mechanistic." What Wedgwood explores in the church bells is the way that a seeming accident can conspire to produce one of life's most powerful pains, dejection. Such pains often come unbidden, and the effect is a feeling that seems wholly inappropriate to the circumstances that have elicited it. The same may be said of other potent feelings—various forms of pain, pleasure, and mixtures of the

[21] Two are published in *The Value of a Maimed Life*; the third was on a scrap of paper I found in the Wedgwood Archive. There may well be more.

two—that are triggered by what abstractly may seem to be a meaningless, or at least not a meaningful, set of circumstances.

Wedgwood also records a cluster of dreams of the dead which provide a kind of converse case to his exploration of daytime church bells, insofar as what he records in the dreams are circumstances that should definitively provoke some form of pain but do not. He generally comments of the "peculiar nature of the brilliancy of the ideas in sleep / Imperfect but partially distinct" (WM 111S). A dream of May 28, 1796, recorded the following day in Frankfort, demonstrates the extent and nature of the peculiarity to which he refers. His description is almost eerily sober, given the scene he describes: "Dreamt last night of being lay together in company with C Smith, dead more than a year ago——How happens it that the idea of his death was never associated? Dreamt too of his looking ill & of thinking him moribund" (28515 / 5-40). On Oct 23 he records a second related dream, and his delivery is equally numb: "The same of him & his father—only he not ill" (28515 / 5-40). Repeating his earlier question elsewhere Wedgwood notes matter of factly that it is "Curious that in my dreams I never am aware that my friends & relatives of 3-4 years ago are dead" (28515 / 50-40). The circumstances of a dream that he titles "Dream of a dead body" are yet more obviously disturbing. He recalls, "I let H's head fall hard on a pavement—hear a loud noise from the body—see his eyes close—& his whole face still, from ceased repetition—I survey him as perfectly dead" (28515/ 9-40).

Wedgwood's tone in these descriptions not only reflects the objectivity of a scientist. Feelings were the very thing Wedgwood sought to trace when he recorded metaphysical observations such as these. One can assume that the ever-meticulous experimenter would have been careful to note if he had felt any form of pain—or any form of feeling at all—in these dreams. By noting the "curious" fact that death isn't associated in his dreams Wedgwood

accounts for one potential source of pains—fear at seeing a person known to be dead, or sorrow at having been reminded of the loss of a loved one. But by 1796 Wedgwood was already harboring active (and ultimately realistic) fears of dying young, fears to which he admits in his notebooks. Because illness and death themselves were concepts with rich affective associations for Wedgwood, being in communion with H's corpse should have been unsettling (if not downright terrifying) to his dream self, and C Smith "looking ill" and "moribund," too should have provoked an emotional response of some sort.

Strangest of all, Wedgwood does not—or perhaps cannot—account for his dream self's lack of emotional response to his interaction with H's body, which was accidental violence at best and at worst was homicide. Interestingly, Wedgwood crossed this note out but did not throw it away, despite the fact that it was written on a loose sheet of paper—nor did he cross it out so completely as to obscure the writing. I take this as an indication that the dream was too strange, and perhaps too disturbing to adequately interpret, but that it was also too interesting to destroy. It certainly would be difficult to interpret the fact that in his dream, "I survey[ed H] as perfectly dead." This comment has the coolness of a casual judgment that suggests a kind of connoisseurship of death, but the judgment itself is a kind of poetic paradox. There are not truly degrees of death, let alone a "perfect" one. In Wedgwood's dream world, facts which should definitively cause various kinds of pain—even facts as strange as this perfectly dead corpse—seem to not be accompanied by any emotion at all.

Much literature depends for its potency on moments like Wedgwood's church bells and dreams of the dead. There is a peculiar power to such stubbornly strange convergences—moments at which sounds, images, or words are peculiarly, undeniably overburdened with feeling or, conversely, are inexplicably lacking in emotional weight. In this way Wedgwood's

notebooks are filled with literary fodder, instances of the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" that the poet can weave into verse (Preface 407). In their purpose, Wedgwood's explorations of church bells are akin to Wordsworth's spots of time: both attempt to trace the curious processes by which feeling is attached to events and memories. Both also attempt to understand—to the greatest extent possible—how such overdetermined sounds, scenes, and memories shape one's subjectivity and relation to the external world.

The entry in which Wedgwood records his 1797 visit with Wordsworth describes a perceptual breakdown that is analogous to the incommensurate feelings of the church bells and dreams of the dead:

> Entering the garden at L—, it struck me as being very long since I had entered it before though I knew it was only 5 days. Might not this be owing to having never intermediately thought of this garden? Its recollection was faint & suggested remoteness of time as faint object does at distance in sight. (WM 111S)[22]

This note makes explicit that Wedgwood was actively preoccupied with associative complexities during his five days with Wordsworth, and it is tantalizing to imagine what aspects of the association of feeling Wedgwood and Wordsworth may have discussed.

It is equally tantalizing to imagine Wedgwood and Coleridge's conversations about the associative properties of pain—conversations which, given the content of extant records, seem certain to have occurred. Before traveling to Germany in 1798, Coleridge visited the Wedgwoods, and wrote to Poole on 16 June that "I have been metaphysicizing so long & so closely with T. Wedgwood, that I am a caput mortuum, mere lees & residuum" (*Collected Letters* 413). The dissolution of self and mind Coleridge describes suggests that the two did not just discuss philosophy but rather engaged in a kind of intimate, embodied, collaborative process, a co-mingling of brain matter. This helps to explain why what are now sometimes called

[22] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England.

Coleridge's Wedgwood Letters—a set of four from 1801 that scholars take as critical records of Coleridge's evolving philosophy, and especially his rejection of Lockean associationism—were explicitly meant for Tom Wedgwood, although they were addressed to Jos.[23] There are also the many letters in which Wedgwood and Coleridge mention (and in the case of the latter expound on in minute detail) their physical and mental pains. Among the pains discussed were dejection, and in one letter Coleridge quotes from "Dejection: An Ode," making reference to an earlier conversation about the poem.

At some point Coleridge and Wedgwood must have spoken at length about how sounds and sights and memories are overburdened with feeling. It is not altogether unlikely that they even spoke explicitly of Wedgwood's church bells, given the prominence Wedgwood himself gives the sound. That the two could have easily discussed the church bells in 1797, just months before Coleridge would begin "Frost at Midnight," invites a new reading of the poem's church bells:

> …and as oft
> With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt
> Of my sweet birth-place, and the old church-tower,
> Whose bells, the poor man's only music, rang
> From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,
> So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me
> With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear
> Most like articulate sounds of things to come! (26 – 33)

Coleridge's bells are invested with a far different but no less potent associative meaning than Wedgwood's bells. In "Frost at Midnight" the sound of the church bells is the only one of the poem's many sounds that is burdened with history. And part of that history which Coleridge

[23] Although there is no critical consensus as to when Coleridge fully threw off associationism in favor of Kantian idealism, both Budge and Barnes read his 1801 letters to the Wedgwoods as less indicative of a full shift to idealism as an attempt to carve out a middle ground—or as evidence that Coleridge perhaps had not yet even begun to actually move towards Kant. As Barnes notes, "[t]he only contemporary notebook entry" relevant to Kant, "merely states 'the opinion of Kant' on space as a presupposition of perception, a philosophical claim that is also relevant to Wedgwood's thinking" (252). It is likely that Coleridge addressed the letters to Jos in part because he saw his relationship with Jos as a more professional one than he ever had with Tom Wedgwood.

recalls is the immediate emotional response the sound triggers—a stirring, a haunting, and a "wild pleasure." Had they spoken of the bells in 1797, Wedgwood's contribution may have been to clarify for Coleridge the unusual potency of church bells, which partly derives from the shared cultural history of those that hear them, partly derives from personal history, and partly derives from individual temperament. And if through metaphysical exploration Wedgwood manages to somewhat neutralize and contain the dejection the sound provokes in him, Coleridge reinvests the sound with complex associative feeling as he incorporates it into his poem.

Befitting his appreciation of their complex associative properties, Wedgwood also emphasizes the fundamental, intense, and often inherently inchoate nature of pleasure and pain themselves.[24] He writes, for example, of instances in which pleasure and pain may be confused for each other, or may be impossible to distinguish from one another. A prime example of this is when Wedgwood tracks his perception of a pleasurable burning sensation—felt as pleasurable rather than painful because of its association with the alcohol that causes it:

> Often imagine the same sensation—pleasure + pain. —As the sting of strong wine in the mouth. If proceeding from fine port, I relish it much. Attending to it abstractedly, I find it to be what is usually called pain. burning, the same as what I should deem so if it proceeded from mezereon, euphorbia, etc. (WM 111S).[25]

This is a characteristic Wedgwoodian move. As Mary Everest Boole has noted, his "remarks often seem to touch on the idea that … a fact which under one set of conditions causes pain, may, under other conditions, be productive of actual pleasure" (*Value* 11). And as with so many of his metaphysical observations, Wedgwood fixes here on an associational problem that opens

[24] Likewise Wedgwood's thinking on what I will call here the "standard senses" (e.g. hearing, taste), often turns to perceptions that are most difficult to trace to their origins: time, proportion, and distance, for example. The aesthetic yield is rich, as when he writes, "Time, then, never was or will be but always is—& all its variations are analagous to those of a continued Sound which is sometimes swelling sometimes becoming fainter, & sometimes continues unvarying.—or of a continued odour which is at one time more, at another less intense & sometimes uniform" (28492-40). Barnes and Budge have contributed to our sense of Wedgwood's metphysics of perception, and additional aspects of this theories warrant further exploration.

[25] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England.

up an ethical possibility. That is, the ability to confuse pleasure and pain, and the possibility that in some cases association may completely determine how a feeling is registered, suggest that perhaps pain may be actively converted into pleasure, and vice versa.

In one sense Wedgwood's view of associative conversions is a simple extension of a Hartleyan approach to the standard senses, akin to what Wedgwood says elsewhere about the "voluntary exert[ion of] sensual organs" (28515/42-40), which he says mirrors the voluntary exertion of the muscular system. In pursuing a similar argument in relation to pleasure and pain, however, Wedgwood notes that the stakes are much greater. "How far possible," he muses, "to bring the feelings under the same control as Ideas—of infinitely more importance" (WM 111S). Through the voluntary exertion of feeling, Wedgwood might diminish his own pains and perhaps convert some into pleasures. The voluntary exertion of feeling could also bring mankind closer to the goal he shared with utilitarianism: the greatest happiness possible for the greatest number.

Wedgwood was aware that the proposition of controlling one's feelings would strike many as futile. Many would even insist that what pleases and what pains us is immutable, written into an individual's nature—or even into human nature itself. But Wedgwood aims to quickly dispatch with the "common and rooted prejudice that we cannot change the nature of our pleasures so as to reconcile us to resign any one of our present ones in exchange for new ones." It is, he claims, a prejudice that easily reveals itself as ludicrous. Any man need look no further than the necessary "succession and change of pleasures" over the course of his lifetime to find evidence that pleasures are by no means permanent or unalterable (*Value* 71). [26] Wedgwood's belief in the mutability of feeling and taste also helps to explain how he decries society's ability

[26] Similarly, in the *Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads,* Wordsworth writes, "all men feel an habitual gratitude, and something of an honorable bigotry for the objects which have long continued to please them: we not only wish to be pleased, but to be pleased in that particular way in which we have been accustomed to be pleased" (411).

to corrupt man's pleasures and taste even as he also has a clear vision of what pleasures man tends to enjoy in his most natural and dignified state.

Insisting that "dry eyes & tranquil bosom are the first state of man" (28515/37-40), Wedgwood pursues the question, "May not all painful feeling be repressed while the opposite is cultivated?" (*Value* 59). His repeated answer is affirmative, if sometimes qualified—and accordingly, he records his attempts to capitalize on the associative properties of pleasure and pain and thereby modify his feelings. Some of his speculations and self-experimental trials focus on the body, as when he takes on his taste in tastes, asking if he might alter his preference for specific fruits and types of meat. Perhaps because it was a special object of his metaphysical inquiry, the places in his notebooks where he specifically explores perception in relation to volition are particularly rich. For example, in what I will call the Creaking Door Case, he tracks a humble example of the associative conversion of feeling after registering his "impatien[ce]" at a door that needed oiling. His attempt to confront and augment his feelings abstractly, to view his annoyance as a "good lesson of patience," fails outright: "Creaking continues. Impatience." But through associative logic he is able to transform the act of hearing into a neutral experience. He recalls the similar sound of a "sail on the mast." Now "[d]oor creaks; I do not mind it, thinking of the ship" (*Value* 62).

Elsewhere he outlines an instance in which he converts an otherwise neutral sensory experience into a pleasurable one. He begins by describing a peculiar instance of sensory confusion but eventually—I would almost say necessarily—circles back to the pursuit of imaginative enjoyment. His initial description is of "a distant white object in the field" witnessed at "dusk":

> My dog is barking out of doors; this object assumes resemblance of a dog. The dog comes into the house the object is still in view, and a cow lows.

> It now looks as like a cow as it before did like a dog. Walking towards it, I find it to be a white stone, whose impression has thus been twice modified by a concomitant idea into an appearance very different from its own. Resuming my first station in the house, I cannot now add the idea of dog or cow to this impression, which obstinately looks like a stone. (*Value* 62).

When Wedgwood later returns to the experience, he converts his observations on the associative interplay of visual and auditory data into an invitation to exercise the imagination (or Coleridge would say the fancy) in the pursuit of enjoyment: "Dog & Cow Case—By Abstraction, may acquire power of superadding the necessary ideas to make the stone re appear a cow or a dog at pleasure" (28515 / 83).

To be sure, the capacity to imagine a stone as a cow or a dog would be a humble enjoyment in itself, but it is humble, local pleasures that Wedgwood tends to pursue. So it is the case for Wedgwood that no pain is too small to understand and, if possible, augment—and through such efforts one might move ever closer to happiness. In this way Wedgwood's approach to the mutability of feeling is an apt example of what Susan Wendell writes about the insight born of suffering. She explains that the knowledge many disabled people have about "how to live with a suffering body, would be of enormous practical help to most people." It is a way that disability can "enrich and expand our culture" and "change our thinking and our ways of life profoundly" (69). As with his pursuit of everyday pleasures, the ways that Wedgwood remolds his feelings may be born of his life of illness, but they provide insights with broad applicability—something I suspect his friends would have intuited.

It is equally notable that Wedgwood's augmentation of feeling in both the Creaking Door and Dog & Cow cases are imaginative acts with rich creative potential—the kind of moments in Wedgwood's metaphysics that help to explain Coleridge's reference to Wedgwood's sensitivity to "all the play and spring of fancy." In his description of the creaking door, Wedgwood reveals

the voluntary play of ideas and impressions that underlies poetic creation and appreciation—what Wordsworth called the perception of "similitude in dissimilitude" which is both the source of pleasure in poetry and also a source of pleasure in life. Both the Creaking Door and Dog & Cow demonstrate the ways that associative thinking tends to produce analogy, and reveals resemblances that may be obscured by standard linear thinking. Through Wedgwood's repeated initial misperceptions, the latter case in particular demonstrates what Wordsworth calls one of "primary laws of our nature" to which the poet must attend: "the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement" (Preface 406).

Both the Creaking Door and the Dog & Cow also reveal the constitutive nature of human perception. By describing the ease with which his powers of aural perception and volition can convert his bedroom into a ship's deck, Wedgwood unsettles the notions of place and space, and reaffirms the power of the imagination. Likewise, by describing the ease with which his powers of visual perception and volition can convert a stone into a dog or a cow, and back into a stone again, Wedgwood destabilizes the hard line between categories of thing and animal. This is even, and perhaps especially the case in his first instance of repeated misperception. Gavin Budge has also noted that Wedgwood understands perception as necessarily a creative process—a reason Budge believes Wedgwood's metaphysics would have appealed to Coleridge.[27] Wordsworth's poetry is also concerned with similar slippages and perceptive failures, and is preoccupied with their ethical implications; I will discuss this at length in Chapter 5, but for now one need think no further than the slippage between the Leech Gatherer's human body, a "sea-beast," and a "huge stone" to have a sense of the trend to which I refer here.

[27] Budge claims that "Wedgwood's account of perception would have 'extricated' Coleridge's thought from associationism, as Coleridge puts it in his 1801 letter to Thomas Poole by emphasizing the mind's capacity to elaborate its own reality without being dependent on a material world conceived as 'external' to the mind, thus making possible a more consistent form of philosophical immaterialism than that presented by Berkeley in the *Essay towards a New Theory of Vision*" (166).

If we have long accepted the idea that there is an aesthetic yield to the associative play of ideas, Wedgwood specifically attunes us to the aesthetic yield of the associative play of feeling. Given the range of friends with whom Wedgwood regularly conversed, it is likely that many of the era's most important authors came into contact with Wedgwood's metaphysical ideas. I hope that by recuperating Wedgwood's aesthetics of pleasure and pain, and by putting it back into active circulation, as it were, we may open new avenues of inquiry into not only specific poems and poetic projects that he likely influenced, but into Romantic poetry, considered broadly.

III. *The Pleasures and Pains of Sympathy*

Wedgwood's ideas about the pleasures and pains of sympathy are significantly shaped by his damning sense of the affective impact of the disabled body. For Wedgwood, sympathy with pain is an act of unambiguous selfishness on both sides, and is wholly incommensurate with its relational opposite, love. If Wedgwood's taste sometimes tends to the moralistic, it is only with regard to pity that it is not balanced by conceptual subtlety. Yet Wedgwood's rigid views of pity break down as the reality of his ill body and his loved ones' reactions to it conspire to create a new set of intersubjective possibilities both in the flesh and in text. In tracing sympathetic pleasure and pain through Wedgwood's textual remains, I pay special attention to his belief in the power of the written word to transmit *feeling*, a belief that led him to approach letters as prosthetics that could keep his body in circulation when he could not bear to subject his loved ones to his physical presence. Wedgwood's is a distinct mode of aesthetic creation and aesthetic exchange enabled by the material circumstances of his illness. By tracing the negotiation of Wedgwood's theory of sympathy and what I think of as a collaborative project to keep his body and voice in circulation, we can understand the extent to which Wedgwood's intimates not only

came to care deeply for him, but also came to participate in—and quite literally embody—his aesthetics of pleasure and pain.

Wedgwood's speculations on human development begin at the moment of birth with the feelings that may be experienced—"Sensation of Cold on leaving the womb—a peculiar pain" (28515/ 42-40). He also speculates on the "Affection of Infant to its mother or Origin of Love." Although it is undeniably somewhat mechanistic, Wedgwood's scene is also one of primal pleasure and affection:

> Having <u>often</u> received pleasure whilst the mothers image was present to his observation, by assoc. mother's Image afterwards associates a recollection of Pleasure—More accurately—Mother's image impressed on organ of vision proceeds almost immediately to pleasure & a constant approach to the breast after this impression—Mother's image then suggests Pleasure to be quietly obtained by approaching it—i.e. Desire—& Desire relating to any living object constitute Love—The [strength?] of this first passion is in direct proportion to the appetite & the quality & qty of the milk, the sensibility of the infant to the warmth & softness of the mother's breast. (28515/ 47-40)[28]

We may say of this passage what Alan Richardson says of Herder's scene of infancy and the Blest Babe passage of *The Prelude*, that it is a "naturalistic accoun[t] of infant development that balance[s] the empiricist stress on sensation with the infant's active participation in shaping the objects of that sensation." Like Herder and Wordsworth, Wedgwood may be said to "depic[t] a process of cognitive unfolding that confounds distinctions between reason and emotion that places the infant in a world of passionate social interaction from the moment of birth" (Richardson 67). This is, after all, the origin of love, that which Wedgwood defines as a kind of supersaturation of feeling, as "that state produced by whatever gives us <u>pleasure</u> yet is not mere <u>pleasure.</u>"[29]

[28] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England.

[29] Because Wedgwood imagined Wordsworth as a possible superintendent for his gray room educational scheme, it stands to reason that during their five-day visit in 1797, talk would have led to Wedgwood's ideas of infancy and childhood. In this sense we can read the Blest Babe passage of *The Prelude* in conversation with Wedgwood's

If the origin of love is in the pleasures of the senses and human relationality, he traces the origin of pity to quite the opposite. Pity is, he argues, a feeling born of selfishness that can lay claim to no inherent ethical, or even social value. He speculates that the "Origin of Pity" in fact lies in our desire to avoid or ease our own painful associations:

> Child having often cried from bodily pain & depression of spirit the noise of crying, Pain, & Depression becomes associated. Hearing his play fellow cry, he suffers, a certain quantity of pain, a faint [?association?] of prior pains called Reflection—perhaps of the last or most violent pain he has suffered—depression——& cries. It is in [?] to add Desire of Relief—as that feeling is included in all Pain. Taught by observation that those irksome sensations arise from the ones of another, & that they may be stopped by performing acts of kindness, a selfish beneficence practised. (29498-40).[30]

Wedgwood is not unusual in his skepticism of those who offer pity. His language is starker than most, however, and his reasoning is unusual. Strikingly, for Wedgwood the origin of pity lies in the remembrance of past pains of body (illness, injury) and mind (depression, anxiety), and our desire to relieve these associations.

Wedgwood's view of the individual who seeks pity from others is yet more scathing than his critique of those who offer it. Wedgwood asks, "What is it we wish in exciting the sympathy of others with our sufferings?" His answer is definitive: "That others should be almost as unhappy as ourselves. Of the same nature is the pleasure we have in our calamity being shared by others" (*Value* 40). In the late 1790s Wedgwood offers a definition of sympathy: "Sympathy with pain is an Sensation unmixed with Love— / To not pity = Sympathy + Love" (WM 111S).[31] Likewise, Wedgwood vividly describes the "Bed of sickness": "Friend is distressed, while

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images of infancy. Wordsworth's Blest Babe passage similarly emphasizes the "organ of vision" to the origin of love as the infant "[d]oth gather passion from his mother's eye." Although this study of Wedgwood does not warrant an extended reading of Wedgwood's views of childhood in relation to Wordsworth's, and to the Romantic child in general, such a study is needed. Wedgwood's views of child development have been woefully skewed by misleading and incomplete readings.

[30] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England.

[31] This definition's placement in a notebook suggests that it was written soon after Wedgwood visited Wordsworth, indicating that sympathy was probably a topic the two discussed—a provocative possibility given their shared scrutiny of sympathy.

patient is comforted. But patient is vitiated by Education, or he would derive his comfort from a purer source" (*Value* 60). Like his condemning definition of sympathy, this is a place where Wedgwood problematically theorizes the states in which he lives—pained body, pained mind, and yet desirous of human contact—as purely negative. These are heartbreaking (if implicit) self-reflections, especially for someone who is as unflaggingly generous to others as Wedgwood is. And of course Wedgwood's inflexibility obscures the nuanced ways that his pains actually influenced him and those around him: they sometimes caused unmitigated suffering on both sides, but they were also productive of many of his most unusual insights, and also were crucial to the formation of the intimate personal and intellectual bonds he forged with his loved ones.

In excusing himself for not wanting to see Godwin, who at one point had felt close enough to Wedgwood that he wanted to establish a joint household with him, Wedgwood writes that he is "Perhaps … incapable of friendship." In explaining his incapacity Wedgwood misquotes Samuel Johnson as having said that "[s]ickness … makes scoundrels of us all," and takes Johnson to mean that sickness "impairs and destroys sympathy" (Litchfield 311). What Johnson actually said, or what version of the quote at least appeared in Boswell's *Life*, is the following: "'It is so very difficult,' said he always, 'for a sick man not to be a scoundrel'" (49). Not only does Wedgwood misread (or misrepresent) Johnson as to the extent of the challenge posed by sickness—Johnson is nowhere near as definitive as Wedgwood claims—but Wedgwood also misreads (or misrepresents) Johnson's meaning. As Boswell reminds us in the context of the story, "*scoundrel* seems to have been a favourite word of his," at least to judge the fact that in his dictionary, Johnson defined all of the following as "scoundrels": *knave*, *loon*, *lout*, *poltroon*, *sneakup*, and *rascal*—"and *scoundrel* itself he defines a *mean rascal*; a *low petty villain*" (49). These are all dubious characters, to be sure, but it is hard to find any meaningful

connection to "sympathy" in Johnson's sense of *scoundrel*. To my eyes, this misreading or faulty recollection reveals the extent of Wedgwood's guilt and his damning estimation of the impact of his sickness on his relationships.

In seeking a solution to the "harassing and useless emotions of sympathy with the irretrievably unfortunate" (*Value* 74), Wedgwood turns to education:

> It has been said that if you do not shew sympathy with a child's sufferings, it will become hardened and will not learn to sympathize with others. Perhaps it is desirable that they should learn to sympathize only with the agreeable feelings of others, and it will not be denied that other principles of action may be given more powerful than pity. We see persons who have the most pity and the least capable of acting. The highest degree of pity destroys the active powers & humans under its influence faint away. The most active benevolence is that of a surgeon, and it is allowed that they lose the feeling of pity. (WM 1116). [32]

It is interesting that he uses the surgeon here as a model for asympathetic ethical behavior—perhaps because of his abiding hope that medicine may still prove useful to him. It is also interesting that Wedgwood fixes on constructing a system of asympathetic ethical behavior, given that this is precisely the kind of system that in Chapter 6 I argue Charles Lamb seeks to promote in response to his and his family's experiences of disability. Lamb, too, seeks to reject pity from Coleridge in the form of "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison." Yet in rejecting pity and constructing an asympathetic ethical system, Charles Lamb fixes on humor and theatricality. Because of this, Lamb's approach to disability is profoundly redemptive, and makes sense in the context of other aspects of his urban approach. Conversely, Wedgwood's rigid and unforgiving view of pity not only strips him of dignity, but also marks a somewhat startling departure from his otherwise extraordinarily nuanced approach to human feeling.

[32] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England. Wedgwood never articulates the exact means by which man might achieve the "most active benevolence" in the absence of pity—or if he does, he outlines it on a scrap of paper that no longer exists or has not yet been examined.

The full social implications to Wedgwood's approach of volition and feeling become clear when he takes on the possibility of ethical self-sacrifice in the form of what is perhaps the most extreme, albeit theoretical, educational propositions he makes.[33] Although he does not introduce self-sacrifice in the direct context of his suffering, it provides an unmistakable solution to the problem of desiring or provoking pity to the detriment of others. Wedgwood insists, "[m]an may be taught to act for the benefit of others—either with pain or pleasure to himself" (WM 111S). Wedgwood brings this line of thinking to its apex through a thought experiment in which he imagines an individual "educated by a Philosopher who incessantly inculcated the idea of his being born for the good of mankind and that he must never hesitate to offer his life for that object, whether at the head of an army or by his own hand" (*Value* 53). Having weighed the circumstances, this imagined subject "plunges into the stream" (*Value* 54). But Wedgwood is not certain of the feelings attendant on such an act. He asks,

> What sensation ensues? Is it possible that a human being could be so educated as that he should feel pleasure in procuring happiness to others, let his own personal sacrifice be what it may? If so, then all the degrees between great horror of death and joy are possible on such an occasion. In the instance before us, we wish to consider the effects of resolution without the aid of much feeling. We will suppose then that he has been so educated as neither to feel pleasure nor horror from the discovery of the necessity of his death. (*Value* 54).

[33] In a similar vein, it is worth noting that Wedgwood's more extreme educational proposals are more rare than current scholarship on Wedgwood might suggest, and most of what he writes about in relation to childhood development and education is mundane. Even his much maligned bull and umbrella experiment is much less remarkable in context. He suggested that an adult wielding an umbrella could confront—and startle—a raging bull in order to teach a child not to indulge in fear. But this proposition is just one of many in his plan to "[a]ccustom children to everything which … might disconcert from its novelty and alarming appearance" and to teach children how to "elude danger and inconvenience by address" (*Value* 85). In addition to novel and frightening animals like bulls, Wedgwood suggested that children should also be accustomed to such commonplace but potentially frightening novelties as "[h]ospitals, prisons, and madhouses" (85). Among the many other everyday topics Wedgwood covers are the proper parental responses to minor injury (children should be left alone so that they might "[a]cquire an invaluable habit of independent exertion in times of suffering") (8), as well as the best ways to address more significant injuries (parents should try to stress fortitude and, if possible, "diver[t] their minds") (86 – 7).

Although he is uncertain as to whether such an education is possible, it is an ideal he maintains. It is also an ideal he seems personally invested in maintaining because self-sacrifice is the best, or perhaps the only, solution he will be able to imagine in his letters for his pains of sympathy.

Wedgwood writes that the act of reading is founded on the experience of pleasure and pain, and the "end" of reading is "accomplished" when those sensations "become associated with words as well as meaning so as with the things they represent" (WM 111S). This embodied conception of reading, coupled with Wedgwood's embodied views of sympathy, frame his epistolary presentation. When Wedgwood tries to enact his rigid views of pity, their limits are laid bare. His letters reveal an increasingly fraught process of self-blame and pain, but also unforeseen pains and pleasures. These in turn lead to a brokered approach to sympathy, a negotiation with his loved ones that acknowledges the pains of sympathy but also reveals its correspondent pleasures. As much as this negotiation took place in the flesh, Wedgwood's almost masochistic desire to shield his loved ones from the sight of his suffering body frequently forced this negotiation into text. This is how and why Wedgwood's textual production becomes such a remarkable multi-layered act of disability aesthetics: it is at once a mode of aesthetic creation shaped by the material reality of disability, reflects an aesthetic approach to disability, and transmits and circulates that aesthetic system in a way that is also determined by a life of illness.

Wedgwood's personal letters are typically framed by references to his illness, and are often occasioned by a change in his physical state or his state of mind. They offer correspondents valuable news of Wedgwood's evolving condition—chronic but rarely remitting, in which a descent to death was always a possibility and the converse—for Wedgwood, at least—was only slight and temporary amelioration. Thus we have Wedgwood reporting from

Martinique that “I gain strength very rapidly” and “If I had no indigestion and headache I should be in heaven” (Litchfield 89). Conversely, he writes to Jos’ wife, Elizabeth (Bess), “I feel the greatest want of a little relief + the Wine + Opium I now live upon has given me courage to leave home” (WM 93).

These epistolary circumstances encouraged close emotional engagement, and accordingly, his letters often negotiate the transmission of feeling and affect through the medium of text, and suggest the extent to which a letter can serve as a surrogate for the body itself. Bad news both anticipates and occasions sympathetic, profoundly embodied distress; likewise good news both imagines and provokes palpable joy and hope. These are pains and pleasures that are registered on the level of the word and often on the letters themselves as material objects. In September 1803, for example, Tom Poole writes to Wedgwood, “I was made absolutely happy last night by the receipt of your letter. I am certain by <u>your writing</u> that you are much better. I have never seen you write with so strong and so steady a hand before” (WM 54). Conversely, Jos writes to his brother in February 1801 that, “Your letter has excited the most painful feelings in my heart, and I know not what to write, for I have no other topic of consolation than the truest affection and the warmest sympathy, and in your state of health and feeling that is nothing” (Litchfield 96). When Wedgwood is neither author or recipient but rather the subject of the letters of others, his body remains viscerally in circulation. Even filtered through three steps of mediation, Wedgwood’s body provokes an affective response. Coleridge writes to Jos in June 1800 that “Your letter to me, that is, the account in your letter [of Wedgwood’s health], made the tears roll down Poole’s face” (*Collected Letters* 591). These affective responses make explicit that the letter serves as a medium to quite literally connect Tom’s body to those of his correspondents.

The material embodiment in the letters Wedgwood penned is no less palpable—a connection rendered yet more material by the fact that, as Poole notes above, Wedgwood's handwriting changes dramatically depending on his physical and mental state. Wedgwood writes, "I had resolved never to write any thing home which should give pain—much as I always long to communicate whatever happens to affect me in any way, I never could fully justify to myself the increasing the evil of my own suffering by exciting a painful sympathy in others" (WM 21). The most unbearable aspect of Wedgwood's suffering is his knowledge of the sympathetic pain it inspires in his loved ones. In spring 1803 Wedgwood writes his brother Jos from Geneva, offering a confession of his guilt, some variation of which appears in many of his letters: "The repugnance I feel at again distressing you with my almost hopeless case, *believe me*, is most extreme" (Litchfield 141). Wedgwood's longing and repugnance—and elsewhere myriad variations of mental pains—take on a visceral presence in his letters. Yet despite his pains at his desire for sympathy, Wedgwood finds it impossible to avoid contact with his loved ones for extended periods—what would be necessary if he were to truly enact his rigid stance on pity in his life.

As early as 1800 Wedgwood begins to write fractured letters that are exquisite for the acuity of feeling they express and agonizing for their radical vacillations between the pleasures and pains of sympathy. A May 1800 letter addressed to Jos contains (among other things) the following sentiments:

> I cannot tell you the pleasure your letter gave me.
>
> Your most welcome assurance brought with it everything which was wanting to complete the charm of that intimate connection which has so long and so happily subsisted between us.
>
> To the moment of our separation your tenderness and affection were continually on the increase; I was only apprehensive that even your forbearance and pity

> might at length be fatigued by the importunate and dismal intercourse of a sick man. I have read your letter a dozen times over. It has inspired me with an increased craving after health. I long so ardently to contribute towards your happiness.
>
> I cannot endure the idea of being a thorn in your side.
>
> You may judge how welcome your letter was to me when I tell you that I read the receipt to dress a pig three times, merely for the association of your hand-writing.
>
> You are my great repository, magazine, reservoir of agreeable associations and lively feelings. You are for ever present to my memory, and the chief consolation of absence and a most tedious illness.
>
> Oh God! that I had force to display my own character—to act, in any degree, as I feel. I should not then be making professions. But I am so blasted by my cruel Fates, so crippled and cramped in every energy of mind and body, that with all those qualities for which you give me credit, I am absolutely inferior to the veriest imbecile that eats, drinks, and sleeps away life. (Litchfield 91 – 2).

Wedgwood's pleasure is made especially material through the image he conjures of himself rereading Jos' handwriting to re-experience the pleasure he associates with the sight of it. And yet for all of sympathy's pleasures, Wedgwood circles back again and again to its pains—his feelings of failure, anxiety, and particularly his agonizing inability to (he believes) contribute to his brother's happiness.

This letter also painfully demonstrates Wedgwood's stiflingly, impossibly high ethical standards to which Wedgwood holds himself. It is because of this, what Coleridge would call his almost painful moral taste, that Wedgwood repeatedly raises the possibility of self-sacrifice.[34] In his letters, Wedgwood reveals the stakes of his abstracted thought experiment about a self-sacrificial man, a man who could willingly—and perhaps even with pleasure—give his life for the good of humankind. On Christmas Day 1802, the day after his final meeting with

[34] This is another of Wedgwood's characteristics that I will argue in Chapter 4 intimidates Coleridge, who does not exhibit a similar desire to shield loved ones from his physical and mental suffering but rather seeks to exploit the social bonds forged through sympathy with pain and illness.

Wordsworth, Wedgwood writes a letter to Jos that on the outside is marked "Private" and "Read by yourself." It reads in part:

> If that [his current health scheme] fail I will neither distress myself nor my friends by continuing a vain struggle with Nature, but in complete resignation yield to her an existence which she will not allow to be anything but a burden to myself, and a perpetual source of anxiety to all around me. I feel a comfort from this resolution which sustains me in my most gloomy moments—I see a termination of my sufferings…I have for more than ten years made every possible effort to recover my health and spirits. In that time I have suffered more than I have ever told and more than can easily be conceived…I do not become inured to suffering, and I am determined, after one or two more efforts, to relieve myself from all further effort, and to minister such stimuli as shall diminish the tediousness and misery of my life to a bearable degree, and take my chance for the consequences. If for a moment you could enter into my feelings, you would not be inclined to controvert my resolve. Would to God I could devote my life to your happiness, instead of thus for ever disturbing it!" (Litchfield 128).

Here and elsewhere Wedgwood appears to welcome death periodically, always as much for the benefit of others as for himself. At some times he frames it as a passive act of resignation, as above, and as in a letter of January 1804 in which he writes that "I am now endeavouring to habituate myself to my near exit without dismay" (Litchfield 161). At other times he subtly implies that he might be a somewhat more active agent in his own death. Just six days after writing the above letter, for example, he writes of the possibility of "instantly resort[ing] to that final scheme which would bring immediate ease into my mind, by calmly yielding to that power" (of death)—something he rejects because of the pain it would cause his loved ones, an acknowledgement that he feels a painful selfishness even in his desires for self-sacrifice (Litchfield 128).

Wedgwood is also forced to confront the fact that if his expressions of pain cause corresponding pain in his loved ones, receiving no word at all is often yet more painful. Indeed, the absence of letters is granted a palpable, embodied presence akin to the palpable absence of his flesh. After a stretch of silence Poole writes to Wedgwood in August 1802 that "I have been

anxiously expecting a letter from you for some time, and I am indeed apprehensive that your health is very bad, and that this alone has prevented your writing" (WM 54). Two years later he expands on the emotional impact of his dear friend's silence:

> My dear sir,
> Why have I not heard from you? I am fond of believing that 'no news is good news,' and yet I have apprehensions that you are not so well even as you were. Do let me hear from you, or if you cannot write yourself, desire Leslie to give me a line. If he has left you, and you have no one else make Willimoff do it. I must have failed indeed to manifest my feelings if you can doubt my anxiety about you. Without having heard from you, or of you I hardly know how to write, for to write cheerfully when you are overwhelmed with gloom, or to write otherwise than cheerfully when you can relish cheerfulness, would be equally unbearable. (WM 54).[35]

Poole compellingly demonstrates that no news is indeed worse than bad news. It causes anxiety about Wedgwood's condition, and elicits anxiety at the very act of writing—at least for those like Poole with whom Wedgwood shared a deep mutual affection.[36]

Jos is particularly eloquent as to the notion that there is a pleasure to relationality itself, even in the presence of pain—and that there is even a corresponding pleasure to the fact itself of sympathetic pain, howsoever vehemently Wedgwood wishes to deny this. Jos refers to the act of writing to his recently departed brother as "unburden[ing] my heart" and explains that although "Very few of the letters I write afford me any pleasure," "I foresee a great pleasure in writing to you all that comes, and just as it comes." This is because, Jos explains, "There is a pleasure in tender regret for the absence and misfortunes of a person one loves, and corresponding with that person is the complete fruition of it. I feel like Aeneas clasping the shade of Creusa. I call up

[35] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England.
[36] Coleridge wrote to Poole in December 1801 to describe how Wedgwood "spoke of you [Poole] to me with an enthusiasm of Friendship that surprized me & brought such a gush of Tears into my eyes that I had well nigh made a fool of myself in the Street" (*Collected Letters* 776 – 7). On his part, when writing Coleridge Poole somewhat remarkably (and uncharacteristically) compared his disappointment at not having Wedgwood become his neighbor—a plan nearly executed at one point—to the death of Coleridge's child, news of which he was writing to offer. Poole in fact estimated that his pain in this case was more acute than Coleridge's would be at hearing of the death.

your image, but it is not substantial" (Litchfield 86 – 8). A year before his brother's death Jos also describes another source of pleasure that accompanies his pains of sympathy: that of feeling useful. He writes,

> I have just received your second letter. I shall not enter more into the subject of it than to assure you that I always receive every warmth of your affection with a correspondent feeling, and that, since I can be of no other use to you, I shall be very sorry if you refrain from the expression of any of your feelings, as you occasionally alleviate them in some degree by communicating them. I consider it as a privilege that even in this way my love for you is not entirely in vain. (WM 28).[37]

Here he repeats a sentiment he has expressed on more than one occasion before, and one that friends including Coleridge also express. There is a pleasure in taking on Wedgwood's pains.

In the last two years of his life, against his only somewhat softening moral inclinations, Wedgwood seems to resign himself to the comforts of sympathy. In January 1803 he writes to Josiah, "I propose returning with you to Gunville." Although he still feels "extreme repugnance" at the idea of subjecting his family to himself and "all my attendant gloom," he is now able to ask for—and accept—what he needs and what his loved ones are happy to offer. He writes,

> What other alternative is left me?
>
> Though I cannot sit up, nor longer bear to be present a lifeless unparticipating thing in living scenes—yet I know from several trials, that my sufferings in the seasoning to this self-entombment, are to be very acute. There may be times, and frequently, when I may require your company and patient attendance. God only knows the horrors which low spirits sometimes produce. At those times solitude is insupportable.
>
> I feel that my plan has nothing definite—if it had, I could not bring myself to state it. It is an act of resignation to a consuming disorder against which I have kept up a fight of twelve years. I shall no longer think of health, but administer every present comfort. (Litchfield 161 – 2)

Wedgwood concludes the letter with a reminder of the way that the letter materially reflects and conveys his state of mind and body: "I stop because my powers and paper are exhausted—or I

[37] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England.

could converse with you for a month without a stop" (Litchfield 162). That November, he similarly writes that Jos and their sister Sally "always move me most to think of a love more than mortal, which cannot flourish in this chilling world and must survive it. Your deep affection, and Sally's angelic kindness, give a certain value to life in its most trying moments" (Litchfield 163). This pleasure is more intense and more exquisite for the pain with which it is mingled. Wedgwood has come to register the depths of the consolations, pleasures, and beauty of love.

Legacies: In Death as in Life

> I now often think of all I remember him to have said, but particularly I am impressed by a conversation I had with him when last at Gunville. It seemed as if he felt it would be the last time he should see me. He said he thought we must tread back our steps, and that the more we deviated from a simple mode of life the less happy we were, and the more difficult it was to be made happy. The refined man, said he, does not meet with one in a hundred whose society gives him pleasure, the peasant does not meet with one in a hundred from whom he cannot extract pleasure. These remarks he illustrated with a force and vivacity which proved how clearly he saw through and seemed to leave behind him the vanities of human nature. Much must be allowed for the melancholy state in which he was, but yet if we retain that love of a simple life, so natural, I believe, to every virtuous mind—that capability of being easily pleased and easily satisfied, which most of us feel at the beginning of life, and at the same time not sink into inactivity or any of the defects of simple life, we shall possess the frame of mind which does give the largest share of happiness on earth… .
>
> —Tom Poole, letter to Jos, 3 August 1805 (Sandford 150 – 1)

Tom Wedgwood died on 10 July, 1805, at the age of 34. According to Jos' wife, Bess, Wedgwood died quietly—so quietly that both a servant and Jos mistook the first of his final hours for sleeping. "What a day for poor Jos," Bess writes, "watching him dying for 12 hours" (Litchfield 178). In the weeks and months following, a number of his friends registered their reactions to Wedgwood's death. Telling patterns of characterization emerge that indicate the peculiar intellectual and emotional effect Wedgwood had on those around him. Bess wrote to her sister Emma, "The more I think of him the more his character rises in my opinion; he really

was too good for this world" (Litchfield 180). Wordsworth's neighbor, Charles Luff, with whom Wedgwood stayed for some time when residing in the Lakes, counted the death as "one of the greatest afflictions of my life" and told Jos, "Your dear brother was to me a savior! And I loved him as such, my loss is irreparable, and never can be supplied to me in this world; for strange to tell you? I felt for him an affection, that I never before knew, ever…" (WM 99). Luff's singular affection is beyond linguistic expression, as is his sense of loss. Wedgwood's status as a "savior" speaks to his suffering, selflessness, and generosity, but also his peculiarity: for Luff as for Bess, Wedgwood—and the loss of him—are not of this world.

Luff was not alone in the awkward self-consciousness with which he expressed the depth of his grief. Dr. Thomas Brown sent Jos a commemorative poem,[38] "On the death of Thomas Wedgwood Esq.," along with a note:

> The friendship I have expressed in the poem now sent to you may perhaps appear extravagant, after so short an acquaintance. But I beg you not to consider it as poetic friendship only. You who know your Brother's…qualities and the very interesting circumstances in which I was led to view him, will believe me when I assure you that it was written from my heart. (WM 100).[39]

As much as Brown wishes to console Jos, he also seeks acknowledgement of the legitimacy of his feelings, so incommensurate to the brevity of his friendship with Wedgwood. The underlined note that the poem was "written from my heart" is defensive, but also characteristic of the way that so many of Wedgwood's acquaintances express their emotional connection to him in visceral terms. Brown's letter, like so many of Wedgwood's, is meant to *embody* its author.

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[38] Brown's poem includes the lines:
The toil is over,—the glorious wreath is won.—
Smile, holy Virtue! smile, and own thy son!...
O early fallen!—When to mutual age
Thy friendship might have sooth'd each weary stage,
Why wert thou given me at too dear a cost?
Why did I know thee but to mourn thee lost? (WM 100)
It is certainly overwrought, but bespeaks genuine loss.

[39] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England.

To judge from what Thomas Campbell wrote to Jos, he had cultivated a kind of denial of the facts of Wedgwood's illness, unable to face the awful reality of his friend's impending death:

> ...I confess the intelligence shocked me more than was consistent with the accounts I received of his rapid decline in constitution—I had still (I know now why) hopes of his recovery—I was not prepared for the news by anticipation—and it was not till I had recovered from the first sensation produced by the sudden intelligence that I reflected how much reason I had to expect it—
> It is satisfactory to think that some essentially alleviating circumstance—the presence of friends and freedom from pain attended to the last moments of this—most pure—and worthy character.
> That the finest of human minds and the noblest heart that ever warm'd a human breast are now delivered from pain & sickness is also in one way of viewing this event a partial thought of consolation but who can speak of the virtues who can think of him without sorrow & who can slightly regret his loss to a world which contains so few that are like him—
> Feeling with a great deal of gratitude the friendly manner in which you have communicated this event and sincerely anxious that <u>as far as I may be in failure known to you</u> I may not appear unworthy of the sentiments you have expressed... (WM 101).[40]

Given the immediate impact of Wedgwood's death, it is unsurprising that when Coleridge writes to Poole in February 1809 on the occasion of Beddoes' death, he reflects that "never a week, seldom two days have passed in which the recollection [of Wedgwood's death] has not made me sad or thoughtful" (Collected Letters 174).

One line of Wedgwood's influence can be traced through the legacy of his family. Reflecting on his brother, Jos credits Tom with "rais[ing] my mind above the cares anxieties & exclusive love of money that are apt to lay hold of men who have entered early into commercial concerns…[and] occasion[ing] me (in whatever degree I may have succeeded) to correct some of the faults of my character, & to be aware of others & keep a watch over them" (WM1138). As it happens, the brother who was so influenced by Tom's example was also the "greatly revered" uncle of Charles Darwin. Jos intervened when Darwin's father forbade his Beagle voyage,

[40] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England.

thereby enabling Darwin's scientific career—an act that demonstrates the very kind of active care and societal concern to which he attributes his brother's influence.

A second line of influence can be traced through his literary friends. Towards the end of his life Wedgwood took stock of his early potential, writing to his brother, "I feel very certain that at the age of fifteen I held out more promise, and united a greater variety of talent, a more ardent longing after all that is beautiful and good, in morals, things, and art, than any young man I have ever met with." Wedgwood worried that all of his formidable talent "should all perish and come to nothing" (Litchfield 161). It is true that Wedgwood did not—and indeed could not—produce in standard ways (by publishing his metaphysics, by enacting concrete social change, through publicized scientific discoveries), his talent did amount to something very profound, and Wedgwood did indeed exert a profound influence on his generation.[41] It is all the more difficult to trace Wedgwood's influence for its mode of expression, but that unusual mode of expression is also what accounts for his peculiar power.

The final, painful stretch of Wedgwood's life found him nearly unable to enjoy the world's pleasures. He wrote, "I can not even in the midst of all my friends here get either spirits or strength to draw me out of the house this charming weather—I have not a particular relish for all the charms of spring" and "...the cruel situation I am placed in, does not allow me to taste of the sweetest & most innocent pleasures" (WM 21). Likewise Wedgwood reported of his 1803 trip to France and Switzerland that what had once given him "the greatest pleasure" now gave him pain, and in Jos's words, "he had frequently shut his eyes to avoid seeing scenery more beautiful than common" (WM1138). But facing inevitable death, he never ceased to pursue "the great end of existence: <u>individual happiness</u>" (Value 65). At this time Jos describes Wedgwood

[41] Mary Everest Boole writes, "Nothing that Thomas Wedgwood left behind, in the way of published papers or actual records of discoveries, accounts for or seems to correspond with the high esteem in which he was held by his contemporaries as an important factor in the intellectual life of the world" (*Value* 10).

finding a pleasure in nature that might "appea[r] childish." Wordsworth might say that if so, it was an aspect of the child's original relation to the world that the adult only suffered by losing. This final expression of Wedgwood's exquisite and enduring taste, his embodied aesthetics of pleasure and pain, accounts for the ways that Wedgwood loved and was loved—and is the basis of my conviction that his aesthetics of pleasure and pain could not have died with him. Jos writes,

> My mother's house was situated in a wood & an extensive shrubbery which were inhabited by singing birds in great numbers & variety. He [Tom] delighted to seize the gleams of sunshine & to walk out in the secluded paths of this retreat & listen to the birds. He became intimately acquainted with their different songs, & the last days of his life owed these few moments of pleasure that were sprinkled over them to this simple taste, & another congenial one, a love that in some characters might have appeared childish, for the beauty & smell of flowers. (WM1138).[42]

[42] By courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire, England.

Chapter 4

The Author "Disabled"
Or
Between the Body in Pain and the Coleridgean Imagination

In her introduction to the 1847 edition of *Biographia Literaria*, Sara Coleridge describes her father, the author. Part apology, part illumination, she explains that "he wanted that agility of mind which can turn the understanding from its wonted mode of movement" to what lacked interest to him even when it was "necessary" to the intellectual "task" at hand (11). What comes through strongly in Sara's description is a suggestive sense of her father's embodiment, a subjectivity fundamentally shaped by experiences of illness and both physical and mental pains. Coleridge's

> nerveless languor, which, after early youth, became almost the habit of his body and *bodily mind* … rendered all exercises difficult to him except of thought and imagination flowing onward freely and in self-made channels; for these brought with them their own warm atmosphere to thaw the chains of frost that bound his spirit. (12)

I am interested in the causal relationship Sara constructs between her father's body and bodily mind on the one hand and his thought and imagination on the other—and especially her indication that their relationship was at once oppositional and mutually constitutive.[1]

Sara asserts, moreover, that her father's way of thinking is somehow inaccessible to those who have not lived in sickness: his intellectual peculiarities "appea[r] nothing" "to the healthful and vigorous, simply because they *are* healthful and vigorous" (11 – 12). She wrote this from

[1] Alan Vardy reads this passage as indicating that, for Sara, the acts of "thinking and composition" were "palliative" for her father (107). I wish to take one step back to focus on Sara's indication that her father's bodily states (and states of his bodily mind) created the circumstances in which his thinking and writing would take the shape they took. One effect of this was that thinking and writing became palliative acts, but the consequences of his body for his modes of thought and textual production are also, I will demonstrate, aesthetic and social.

experience. Like her father, Sara suffered in body and mind, and also suffered because of her opium use, and therefore would have understood the kinds of experiences and perspectives enabled—and at times required—by a life of illness.[2] In this way she is one of the readers best able to continue the autobiographical and rhetorical project her father began, capable of enacting what her introduction explicitly calls for: a reading of Coleridge that centers disability epistemology. Her most unusual and provocative insight comes when she connects the materiality of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* to the materiality of his body, claiming for it what may rightly be understood as disability aesthetics. In defending *Biographia Literaria* against its critics, she explains that it was "composed at that period of his life when his health was most deranged, and his mind most subjected to this influence of bodily disorder. It bears marks of this throughout, for it is even less methodical in its arrangement than any of his other works" (13). It is a striking image: *Biographia Literaria* as not just a literary but also a literal embodiment, giving textual form to Coleridge's fleshly maladies.

In his excellent chapter "Indigestion and Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought" Gavin Budge rightly calls attention to what he calls one of Coleridge's "enigmatic" notebook entries: "body & soul, an utterly absolute Mawwallop" (141). Taking this to be a likely reference to the digestive process, Budge uses it to frame his discussion of the mind / body problem in Coleridge's philosophy. He argues for Coleridge's "general insistence on the productivity of the human condition of 'embodiedness' for all thought, including … 'visionary' kinds of discourse" (164 – 5).[3] For Budge, Coleridgean thought is a process of digestion in which perceptions are "assimilat[ed] … into the living whole which is the mind"—and the

[2] See Vardy on Sara's embodied sympathy for her father.
[3] He argues for Coleridge the "materialist" insofar as "the focus of his attention is the materially embodied situation in which human thought takes place" (155).

imagination is the faculty that allows this to happen (174).[4] So much for the body. But what of the *ill* body? The body in pain? The body that cannot be—indeed *refuses* to be—ignored or forgotten in its immediacy?

Sara Coleridge's description of her father takes us a bit further than Budge's, attuning us to the ways that the *ill* body is in fact a precondition for the ways that the imagination and free thought function for Coleridge. Sara's description of her father also paints a relationship between the body in pain and the imagination that is distinctly oppositional—a relationship between two distinct forces that represent open freedom and warmth versus bound confinement and frost. Taking her account of *Biographia Literaria*'s form into account, the process she describes is not akin to digestion as much as it is akin to the dialectical: the body and embodied mind a kind of thesis, the imagination and free thought a kind of antithesis, and the resulting product (*Biographia Literaria* in particular and Coleridge's output in general) as a kind of synthesis—one that, fittingly, bears the traces of the body as much as the imagination.

This chapter demonstrates what Sara Coleridge so insightfully suggests, that the problem of disabled embodiment was a generative force behind much of Coleridge's work, and that it leaves its traces on his textual output. I will specifically explore the aesthetics of Coleridge's autobiographical embodiments, which I organize into four "cases" in acknowledgement of Coleridge's masterful use of medical rhetoric. By attending to Coleridge's embodied selves and by paying special attention to the functions of injury, illness, and pain in his life and texts, I hope to significantly enrich our understanding of the man and his works. I hope to open up the possibility of understanding Coleridge's opium addiction, for example, as in part a kind of guarantee of the painful embodiments on which he understood his particular (and peculiar) creative processes to depend. My reading of Coleridge also has broader implications: like

[4] This is why Budge thinks Tom Wedgwood was such a critical influence on Coleridge. + Quote.

Wedgwood, Coleridge's example demonstrates something important about the rich epistemological and aesthetic possibilities even of intense bodily and mental suffering. By focusing on the author's body "disabled," we may understand the kinds of aesthetic creation that disability can provoke.

Throughout, I strive to create a sense of a continually renewing dialectical relationship between Coleridge's body and imagination that centers the act of narrating his corpus and his attempts to make meaning of his pains. These negotiations are sometimes bitter, sometimes agonizing, and sometimes redemptive. Coleridge exploits the rhetorical and formal possibilities of his unwell body as text becomes a means of mediating between the author's body and the others bodies with which it comes into contact.[5] His autobiographical embodiments reveal the extent to which his is always necessarily an embodied subjectivity—and especially the ways that his body contributes dynamically to his modes of linguistic expression and aesthetic creation, and also to his insight into the fraught relationships between mind and body, flesh and the imagination, and pain and pleasure. Without a body in pain there would be no Coleridgean imagination and no "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." Without a body in pain, there would be no Coleridge.

Case 1: The Child's Body in Pain

"My dear Poole," Coleridge wrote in February 1797, "I could inform the dullest author how he might write an interesting book. Let him relate the events of his own life with honesty, not disguising the feelings that accompanied them" (4). What follows in that and four subsequent letters—which I will refer to as the Poole Letters—is Coleridge's attempt to

[5] What I trace in Coleridge's work is not unlike what Wedgwood does in his letters, but if Wedgwood's textual negotiations are driven largely by his moral disgust at the idea of causing his loved ones sympathetic pain, Coleridge's motives were more varied and ambiguous.

reconstruct his earliest years, 1772 – 82—the beginning of a life with "all the charms of variety,—high life and low life, vices and virtues, great folly and some wisdom." It will be a "useful" endeavor for Coleridge as he understands that "what I am depends on what I have been" and "[i]t will renew and deepen my reflections on the past." And not only will it prove interesting for Poole insofar as all autobiography is interesting, but Poole in fact has a "right to the narration" because, as Coleridge explains, "you [are] *my best Friend!*" (4). Importantly, Coleridge explains that his autobiographical offering may "perhaps make you [Poole] behold with no unforgiving or impatient eye those weaknesses and defects in my character, which so many untoward circumstances have concurred to plant there" (4). The letters, in other words, are meant to clarify Coleridge's sense of his past and current selves but also to contextualize and thereby excuse his present flaws. Because what he offers Poole is a portrait penned partly out of a guilty sense of the man he had become, the details and memories that he highlights gain emotional importance—and unsurprisingly, these details and memories are by and large those of fraught bodily and medical negotiations.

After the first letter, which is devoted to Coleridge's lineage, the second takes up his immediate family—listing his nine older siblings' professions, spouses and issue, cause of death (where applicable), and general character. The first memory Coleridge registers in the Poole Letters appears in the second, of March 1797. It is the sole memory detailed to represent the period of October 20, 1773 to a year later, from age one to two—an episode that Richard Holmes characterizes as a "Promethean incident" that demonstrates Coleridge's "waywardness and inquisitive mischief" (*Early* 2). Coleridge recalls, "I was carelessly left by my nurse, ran by the fire, and pulled out a live coal—burnt myself dreadfully." This is also the scene of Coleridge's

(apparent) first words.[6] If the author comes into subjective existence, as it were, in a dramatic moment of bodily pain and distress, Coleridge the prodigious talker comes into being in an adversarial relation to a medical professional.[7] He writes, "While my hand was being dressed by a Mr. Young, I spoke for the first time (so my mother informs me) and said, 'nasty Doctor Young!'" (9).[8] To judge by the narrative Coleridge constructs here, his sense of distress with a doctor is the first sentiment important enough to find a means to articulate.

Coleridge asks Poole, "The snatching at fire, and the circumstances of my first words expressing hatred to professional men—are they at all *ominous*?" Excepting the fact that Coleridge obscures the particular profession of the man towards whom his first words were expressed, no question seems to less require an answer. And yet the almost perfunctory ease with which most scholars identify the importance of Coleridge's illnesses, addiction, and medical relations has, I think, led to a generally reductive approach to them.[9] It would be easy to read Coleridge's first memory and words as a paradigmatic use of his bodily trauma to excuse moral shortcomings—the ur-moment, as it were, which all subsequent bodily traumas, and all subsequent bodily excuses, followed. But it is not so simple, especially in Coleridge's framing of it. If this moment is ominous for how it prefigures Coleridge's adult pains and the moral failings he excuses through reference to them, it is also ominous for how it prefigures the importance of the body in provoking Coleridge's modes and methods of linguistic creation. It is reductive to read his descriptions of early pains (or later pains) as no more than indications of his

[6] I include the parenthetical "apparent" here to acknowledge an assumption underlying this chapter: all autobiography is constructed. This can happen more or less self-consciously—a fraught topic that it would not be worth speculating about in relation to Coleridge, at least not in passing.
[7] Mary Wedd recounts, for example, a story reported by Charles Lamb: Coleridge cornered Lamb to speak to him about something; Lamb cut off the button of his coat, which Coleridge had taken in his hand. Lamb then left the garden, only to return five hours later to find Coleridge still talking with his eyes closed and button in hand and no sense that his friend had been absent. ("Charles Lamb, the Friend" 23.)
[8] Coleridge's parenthetical note here usefully reminds us of the ways in which biography—and even autobiography—is also communally constructed. This is a point fleshed out by Vardy's *Constructing Coleridge*.
[9] Neil Vickers and Martin Wallen are important exceptions to this trend.

suffering or his guilty justification—in no small part because it ignores the particular kind of importance Coleridge himself ascribes to them, albeit often reluctantly.

After making general reference to the commencement of his schooling and his first schoolmaster Coleridge takes up the period of October 20, 1774 – 5, a year in which he acquired a vital mental and spiritual skill: by the end of it he "could read a chapter in the Bible." It is a second year represented by only one distinct memory. Again it is a memory of bodily pain and antagonistically confronting medical authority, although in this case Coleridge manages to exert a measure of mastery over circumstance. That year, Coleridge recalls, he was inoculated. Unwilling to be blindfolded, he "manifested so much obstinate indignation that at last they removed the bandage, and unaffrighted I looked at the lancet, and suffered the scratch" (10). Here the child Coleridge demonstrates an interest in medicine and the body that seems almost innate and, as the framing of the story makes clear, wholly unexpected.

In a typical instance of Coleridgean misdirection, he concludes his account of 1772 – 5 by insisting that these years had "nothing in them that seems to relate to" "form[ing] *my particular mind*" (10). Of course it be impossible to discount the contents or framing of these first three years of his life. If anything this note calls greater attention to them, underscoring the deep ambivalence with which Coleridge regards his body and his relationship to medicine, an ambivalence that equally characterizes his account of what he insists are the more important years of 1775 – 82. The letters in which he describes these years (the third, fourth, and fifth of the Poole Letters), contain some explicit mention of Coleridge's ailing body and medicine—but, importantly, they also begin to explore the social and sympathetic implications of material embodiment and bodily illness, and also the increasingly fraught relationship between Coleridge's body, mind, and imagination.

In 1779, during his first year at the King's school, Coleridge contracted "a dangerous putrid fever" (12). This stretch of sickness marks two additional firsts for the child. One is "my [Coleridge's] first piece of wit," a pointed joke told to his mother in response to his distress that a particular neighbor was unwilling to come and visit him because of a fear of contagion: "Ah, Mamma! the four Angels round my bed an't afraid of catching it!" It is a moment of aesthetic creation (if I can be permitted the latitude to call it that) that is provoked by sickness. According to the account Coleridge gave his physician James Gillman, this is around the same time in his past as another first, Coleridge's "first attempt at making a verse" (18), written on the occasion of getting ringworm:

> O Lord, have mercy on me!
> For I am very sad!
> For why, good Lord? I've got the itch,
> And eke I've got the *tad*

Richard Holmes describes a second verse from this era of Coleridge's life, one written about "morning cramps, a rhyming spell to be chanted aloud while making magic cross-marks of spittle on the seized calf muscles" (28). Bodily illness and injury thus account for Coleridge's first memory, first words, first wit, and first verse. Whatever ambivalence he registers at his body—and in the Poole letters he registers quite a bit of ambivalence—its vicissitudes are, by his own account, responsible for the birth of his creative capacities.[10]

As Coleridge details in the 1775 – 82 section of his epistolary autobiography, the very things that provoke aesthetic creation (the body and bodily mind) are also most antithetical to his developing imagination. Knowing that Coleridge was quite literally acting out scenes from his books and becoming emotionally overwhelmed by them—he recalls, "I was haunted by spectres,

[10] Coleridge's father's death in 1781 leads to what is at least a very early act of medical diagnosis, and may well be the first time that he observed symptoms in such a way as to be able to make a retrospective diagnosis. Coleridge writes quite casually, with the objective, easy authority of a physician, "Some said it was the gout in the heart;—probably it was a fit of apoplexy" (18).

whenever I was in the dark (12)—Coleridge's father burned his books. It is an act of material destruction that matches the materiality of Coleridge's embodied reenactment of the texts. After this, Coleridge writes, "I became a *dreamer*, and acquired an indisposition to all bodily activity" (12). He likewise insists that because of his early reading, "my mind had been habituated *to the Vast*, and I never regarded *my senses* in any way as the criteria of my belief" (16). But even if his senses did not inspire his belief, and even if he was disinclined to make use of his slothful body, his corpus continued to determine his life and, especially at this point, his social relations.

While Coleridge was sick with the fever that provoked his first joke, so too was his brother George, who "lay ill of the same fever in the next room" (12). Disobeying orders, their brother Francis (Frank) snuck into Coleridge's room to read to him. This was, Coleridge is careful to note, against Frank's general nature: not only was he the sort of boy who enjoyed physical activity (an apt temperamental counterpoint to his younger brother) but Frank also "had a violent love of beating [Coleridge]" (13). [11] When circumstance called for it, however, Frank could also be loving, as he was to Coleridge on his sick bed. It is fitting that the first image of sympathy in the Poole Letters is one of shared brotherly suffering (between Coleridge and George) and nursing (between Frank and Coleridge), demonstrating not just the ways that Coleridge's social relationships were forged around experiences of illness but also the ways that illness may strengthen the bonds of human affection.[12]

[11] Coleridge recalls that Frank "hated books, and loved climbing, fighting, playing and robbing orchards, to distraction" (13).

[12] Scenes of nursing recur frequently in Coleridge's life and writing. As Holmes writes, "For Coleridge, the act of nursing or being nursed, and the intimacy of the sickroom, eventually became an emblem of true love and understanding. Sickroom incidents are frequent in his life, and gradually begin to pass into his poetry as a major theme" (15). Unlike Holmes, I do not read this as necessarily indicative of Coleridge's " 'dependent' personality" (12), but rather an acknowledgement of a fundamental way that the experience of disability can create new—and in many ways rich and positive—intersubjective possibilities. This was an idea that Coleridge was always much more attuned to than Wedgwood, who never fully warmed to the possibilities of being cared for.

Frank's tenderness at Coleridge's sick bed is part of why the scene he describes in the fourth letter, written a week after the third, is burdened with a sense of betrayal. His memory of the infamous "*crumbly* cheese" incident begins with food, which emerges in the Poole Letters as a means of developing and negotiating familial and social ties through the materiality of the body. Coleridge's father gave him a penny, for instance, as a reward for his love of an "economic food," beans. Tellingly, Frank hated his younger brother partly because their mother "gave [Coleridge] now and then a bit of cake, when [Frank] had none"—an unjust condemnation, Coleridge writes, because Frank's nurse Molly was fond of giving Frank (but not Coleridge) "pieces of bread and butter with sugar on them" (11).[13] The crumbly cheese incident brings to a fever pitch the negotiation of social relations through the medium of food.

Coleridge describes the memory in the kind of rich detail that indicates pain and trauma. Their mother gave Coleridge some cheese, and while he was in the garden, "Frank *minced* my cheese 'to disappoint the favorite'" (14). The emotional crux of the story is the moment after Coleridge hit him. Frank "pretended to have been seriously hurt by my [Coleridge's] blow" and "flung himself on the ground, and there lay with outstretched limbs." Coleridge "hung over him moaning, and in a great fright"—an image of powerfully embodied sympathy at a perceived injury. But the younger brother soon learned that his sympathy had been misplaced as Frank "leaped up, and with a horse-laugh gave me a severe blow in the face" (14). This provoked Coleridge to grab a knife, chase Frank, and after their mother's intervention, flee the house.[14] He

[13] Food is also how he judges his early institutional experiences. Of his first school, Hertford, he says "I was very happy, on the whole, for I had plenty to eat and drink, and pudding and vegetables almost every day" (19). He measures state of mind, in other words, by his state of body. At Christ's Hospital, by contrast, "Our diet was very scanty" (20), and in detailing his dissatisfaction with the school he goes so far as to detail the weekly menu. "[E]xcepting on Wednesdays," Coleridge notes, "I never had a belly full. Our appetites were *damped*, never satisfied; and we had no vegetables" (21).

[14] This scene resembles the scene of Mary Lamb's murder of her mother to enough of an extent that I have long wondered if Coleridge's reaction to the event was shaped by his own knife-wielding memory, which one imagines could have easily led to an actual injury to Frank's body were it not for luck and the intervention of their mother.

remained outside all night, and by his own account almost died. Coleridge lost control over his body; he recalls, "I was broad awake, and attempted to get up and walk; but I could not move. I … cried, but so faintly that it was impossible to hear me thirty yards off." At that moment Coleridge was made aware of his subjection to the whims of a body he could not, and never would control. The impact on his health lingered; "for many years after," Coleridge claims "I was weakly and subject to the ague" (15).

If, as Peter Melville has written, the night following his confrontation with Frank "may very well have been his first taste of (psychological) homelessness" (104), I believe that his sense of homelessness is not because of his experience of lonely exposure, which rather follows from the real trauma, the specific nature of the rupture between him and Frank. It is not just the fact of a feigned injury and the misplaced sympathy, but most of all what they represent: the possibilities of lying about the body and also being misled by one's immediate bodily reactions and bodily sympathies. In other words, I read this scene as staging what is perhaps Coleridge's most important first of all. This is the moment at which young Coleridge realized two contradictory truths about bodily experience: the extent to which one can exploit and misrepresent the body and also the extent to which one can be completely subject to the body. A nuanced understanding of the body's narrative plasticity and physical necessity would enable some of Coleridge's best work. As much a history of the body as anything else, the Poole Letters depict a child Coleridge whose already unruly, cursed, suffering body is generative of his creative process—even as his mind, imagination, and soul have already gained a place of ascendant importance. In the crumbly cheese incident, Coleridge come into maturity.

Case 2: Injured to Epiphany

Conversely, Mary Lamb's murder could have reflected back on the crumbly cheese incident, giving it symbolic resonances that it otherwise lacked.

In July, 1797, Charles Lamb accepted Coleridge's invitation to visit him at Nether Stowey. As I detailed in the Introduction, it was a season during which Coleridge was eager for visitors (at the time Dorothy and William Wordsworth were also present), but Lamb's visit had an agenda: Coleridge wished to console Lamb in person about the violent death of his mother. It was the first time Lamb had left London since the murder, which had taken place a year prior, and Coleridge imagined that the consolation he could offer his friend would come in part through an exposure to the healing properties of nature from which his urban life has cut him off. That month Coleridge sent a letter to Robert Southey in which he described the visit and in which he included a draft of the poem that would become "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." In its published form of 1800 it is a remarkable and challenging text, and is yet richer for the diverse and evolving bodies that circulate through and around it. There is the temporarily immobilized Coleridge, who had already had experience with other physical and psychological pains and illnesses and whose opium use would soon pass the threshold of dependency; Mary Lamb, whose life was punctuated by periods of lunacy, both before and after the 1796 murder of her mother; and the sometimes mad, eventually alcohol-dependent, and always stuttering and limping Charles Lamb.

The poem's strikingly modern approach to disability as a social space, an aesthetic space, and an epistemological space, is accomplished through a particularly Coleridgean composition process, distinctive for its exploitation of the narrative plasticity of the body. It is a compositional process I will return to later in reference to Coleridge's self-diagnostic epistolary embodiments. In "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," the effect of this creative process is to create a poetic space for re-envisioning the enriching, even revelatory potential of non-normative

embodiment, understood broadly. It is a revelation—and an act of textual creation—born of the struggle between the body and the spirit and imagination.

The letter to Southey in which Coleridge describes Lamb's visit is generically interesting. It contains two distinct accounts of the same embodied experience, one in prose and one in verse, allowing us to glean Coleridge's sense of the different possibilities of each genre to represent the human body. He writes to Southey, "The second day after Wordsworth came to me," Coleridge recalls, "dear Sara accidentally emptied a skillet of boiling milk on my foot, which confined me during the whole time of C. Lambs stay and still prevents me from all *walks* longer than a furlong" (224). While Dorothy and William Wordsworth were away one evening with Lamb, Coleridge was left sitting in Tom Poole's garden. He memorializes his injury and the scene of his confinement in verse. It begins,

> Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,
> Lam'd by the scathe of fire, lonely and faint,
> This lime-tree bower my prison! They, meantime
> My Friends, whom I may never meet again,
> On springy heath, along the hilltop edge
> Wander delighted… (225).

The first significant narrative choice Coleridge has made in his verse is to eliminate most details of his injury and to adopt a dramatic tone that contrasts starkly with the pragmatic tone of his prose description. Social context and bodily detail are stripped from the verse, which seems to require a more symbolic treatment of the body. The one circumstance of the injury that remains in the poem draft—the injury's source—is somewhat misleadingly framed as "the scathe of fire." Scalding milk would have been extremely painful, but Coleridge could have been confident that it would heal. In the verse his injury is taken out of time, as it were. The suggestion that he is "faint" and "may never meet [his friends] again" implies a long-term or permanently disabled

speaker dwindling away much more so than it conjures an image of a speaker in intense immediate (but temporary) pain.

When Coleridge published "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison" in 1800, continued to withhold the particulars of his injury that he mentions in his prose description to Southey, and also removes the "scathe of fire" included in the verse draft. The "Advertisement" appended to the published poem only vaguely mentions that the poet "met with an accident" that rendered him "disabled." Details related to the bodies of the poem's addressee, Charles Lamb, and his sister are similarly ambiguous; madness, matricide, and institutionalization become "evil and pain / And strange calamity!" (31 – 2). It is important that in the published version of the poem we do not know the nature, severity, or expected duration of the poet's injury, or the circumstances that brought it about; it is similarly important that we are not told anything about the evils that have left "gentle-hearted Charles" in need of the palliative care of nature.

By removing—or suppressing, or repressing—the details of Charles and Mary Lamb's impairments and his own injured body, Coleridge prevents their particularities from overtaking the narrative. The poem's non-specific references to the Lambs' troubles may be partly explained by the distracting interest that references to madness and institutionalization might inspire, and much more so by the demonstrated public interest in Mary Lamb's murder of her mother. The incident and its aftermath were reported in London periodicals; the September 26 edition of the *Morning Chronicle*, for example, described the matricide in lurid detail:

> the young lady seized a case knife laying on the table, and in a menacing manner pursued a little girl, her apprentice, round the room… [T]he dreadful scene presented to [the landlord of the house] the mother lifeless, pierced to the heart, on a chair, her daughter yet wildly standing over her with the fatal knife. (As quoted in Lucas *Life* 130).

This widely publicized scene, Mary's violent act of matricide, could easily distract the reader. So, too, could the evocative circumstances of Coleridge's injury. As Rachel Crawford argues, the historical event behind the poet's vague "accident" is suggestive. "[S]pilt milk is doubly transgressive, a fluid which crosses not merely somatic boundaries, but social boundaries also," in large part because in this case the milk has been spilled by the poet's wife; the accident is complicated by the fact that a "man's wounded foot" may recall "mythological associations…with figures like Achilles, Oedipus, and Jesus" (190).

Coleridge deftly manages the bodies in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," and in doing so demonstrates his awareness of the multiplicity of meaning that tends to inflect our understanding of non-normative embodiments. This is especially the case given that in his self-diagnostic letters he often includes an excess of symptomological descriptions, demonstrating a desire to capitalize on—and also a masterful skill at managing—both the affective potency of bodily details and also their social and symbolic registers. Articulating a view common to contemporary disability scholars, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues that "disability" is "a representational system more than a medical problem" (*Extraordinary Bodies* 321). This is a view of "disability" also suggested by the textual history of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and by Coleridge's general approach to textual embodiment, which highlights the ways that the non-normative body may be interpreted and reinterpreted, valued and reevaluated according to shared social, political, literary, and religious codes. By transforming specific disabled bodies into "disability," broadly construed, Coleridge unfetters "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" from potentially complicating cultural contexts.

By effacing the Lambs' impairments and his own from the text, Coleridge also productively changes the scope of the poem's commentary on "disability." Because the text

foregrounds Coleridge's and Charles Lamb's bodies—the one "disabled" and in "confinement," the other participating in what is depicted as much-needed restorative physical activity—it announces its central concern with issues of embodiment. Yet because important details of the men's bodies are withheld from the poem, "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" functions as a more general and conceptual exploration of the states of "health" and disability than it could have otherwise.

Enacting a modern understanding of "disability," the opening lines of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" foreground the social, epistemological, and aesthetic consequences of disability instead of the poet's injury itself, which could be temporary or permanent, severe or minor, generalized or localized. Coleridge's ambiguity suggests that, at least in this case and context, the precise physical nature of his "disabled" state does not matter. As a broad range of disabilities would, the poet's unnamed injury leads to his confinement in a liminally domestic space—he "must … remain" in "This lime-tree bower my prison" (1 – 2)—and precludes him from full social participation (a walk with "some long-expected friends").[15] Because of this confinement he is denied commune with nature, and thus the aesthetic, sympathetic, and spiritual experiences that otherwise would have been his to both relish and cherish. Elsewhere in Coleridge's poetry nature is constructed as a force of physical, mental, and spiritual health. Thus nature is invoked in "The Dungeon" as that which may "Healest thy wandering and distempered child" (21), and thus in "Frost at Midnight" nature will cultivate Hartley's mind and spirit. A central problem posed by the opening of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" is therefore what consolation may come to the injured poet who cannot move through the landscape—whether or

[15] Disability scholars emphasize social exclusion and confinement to the private, domestic realm as foundational elements of the experience of the "disabled." See Susan Wendell for a representative explanation of this view.

not, in other words, the "disabled" man can be, or can become, spiritually and psychically "healthy."

If the poet mourns what he cannot have, his reflection on his state of embodiment almost immediately sparks a generative process characterized by vivid and immediate imagery. It is a creative movement similar to the string of "first"s detailed in the Poole letters. The poem's ambiguous grammar, and especially its verb tenses, become important:

> And there my friends,
> *Behold* the dark-green file of long lank weeds,
> That all at once (a most fantastic sight!)
> Still nod and drip beneath the dripping edge
> Of the dim clay-stone.
> Now my friends *emerge*
> Beneath the wide wide Heaven, and view again
> The many-steepled track magnificent
> Of hilly fields and meadows, and the sea… (16 – 23, italics mine)

Read in the present tense, the above italicized verbs ("Behold" and "emerge") may be understood as descriptions of what the poet somewhat passively imagines his friends may be doing. But the verbs may just as easily be read as imperatives, as the instructions of a guide commanding his friends (or the reader) to first behold, and now emerge. It is an important ambiguity of inflection. In this second case, the poet's active agency comes to the fore as he creates and directs the paths of his absent friends.

As the poem progresses, the verbs become more insistent. Now they are more obviously imperatives, clarifying the creative role the poet has in relation to the landscape and his distant friends. This raises the possibility that the poet may have been engaged in imaginative creation before he even knew he was doing so. The poet directs the natural scene with a string of emphatic and evocative directives: "slowly sink…thou glorious Sun" (32), "Shine…Ye purple heath flowers" (34), "richlier burn, ye clouds" (35), "Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves"

(36), “kindle, thou blue ocean” (37). This description is more appropriate to a painter at the canvas, a conductor standing before an orchestra, or even a God, than it is to an immobilized man sitting alone in a bower. The dynamism of the scene is imaginative and artistic, but is contingent on the poet’s physical confinement. That is, the particular kind of agency the poet demonstrates would be constrained, if not precluded outright, by the possibility or realities of physically moving through the landscape. Likewise literal absence confirms rather than weakens the poet’s sense of kinship with Lamb: the poem concludes as nature, now in the form of “the last Rook,” mediates—geographically, physically, spiritually—the men’s sympathetic bond.

Thus far my reading of “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison” largely resonates with standard readings of the poem, but with one key exception: scholars tend to conclude that the poem finally represents the triumph of nature, God, the Imagination, the soul, and/or the human will—despite, regardless of, or by overcoming the body and its limitations. Lucy Newlyn has written that it “celebrate[s] a moment of great confidence in Nature’s regenerative power” (408), for example; William A. Ulmer characterizes the poem as depicting “a triumph of the human spirit over suffering” (20). All such readings square with normative understandings of disability as defect, but are not reflective of the rich possibilities that Coleridge and his contemporaries found in non-normative embodiment. Standard readings of the poem also overlook the bare fact that in the poem itself, the poet’s impaired body and his marginal status create the conditions for epiphanic experience. I therefore advocate a slight but necessary shift in our perception: Coleridge’s poem does not depict an inherently deficient physical state that has been overcome. It rather depicts a mode of non-normative embodiment that can—and should—be understood as a necessary precondition for the poem’s revelatory movement.

The poem's final stanza underscores this reading. Confinement has been a productive state, and the poet acknowledges the joy he has found in his immobility: "A delight / Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad / As I myself were there!" (44 – 6). In this case equivalent gladness does not amount to a similar experience, however, and what follows meaningfully underscores this distinction. The poet has already engaged in a creative, imaginative process provoked by his confinement, and what he describes next are the features of nature that surround him in the bower:

> I watch'd
> Some broad and sunny leaf, and lov'd to see
> The shadow of the leaf and stem above
> Dappling its sunshine! (49 – 52)

This exclamation of love speaks to a heightened appreciation of the immediate, the familiar, and the everyday, a Wordsworthian reverence for local particularity. The narrator has enthusiastically directed the scenes from which his injury barred his body, and he demonstrates no less enthusiasm—in tone or punctuation—when he describes "That Wallnut tree" that "Was richly ting'd" (52 – 3), and exclaims,

> …and tho' now the Bat
> Wheels silent by, and not a Swallow twitters,
> Yet still the solitary humble Bee,
> Sings in the bean-flower!" (57 – 60).

If he had already had the capacity to appreciate the more striking and imposing features of nature, the ocean and sun and valleys, the poet is now able to appreciate its minutest details.[16]

In a different context, Christopher Miller has underscored the importance of the revised lines, "Nor in this bower, / This little lime-tree bower have I not mark'd / Much that has soothed me" (46 – 8). The 1797 version of the poem had employed the simple present tense—"Nor in this bower / Want I sweet sounds…" (226 – 7). Because of the shift in verb tense, the poem

[16] Dell scene also has detail.

describes not what has only *just* come to be, but rather what "has been going on around him all the while" (Miller 534). That is, the consolations in such "scene[s] so narrow" (62) were always already around the poet, but he had not before had cause, or perhaps even the capacity, to recognize their existence and potential.[17] "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison" implies that the poet's confinement is a transformational moment, an experience that has provoked him to develop a new mode of perception and a new relation to the natural world. If "[t]he changed status of the bower depends entirely upon Coleridge's perceptions" (James 109), it is the poet's change in embodiment that facilitates—and perhaps in some sense even requires—his change in perception.

Contemporary disability scholars emphasize the rich epistemological, aesthetic, and intersubjective yield of non-normative states of embodiment. "This Lime-Tree Bower" intuitively affirms such a perspective on "disability," especially because it is the state of being "disabled" and not a particular injury that the poem describes. Coleridge depicts a negotiation of body and mind and the resulting acquisition of a different—and rich—relationship with Nature, mind, and spiritual self. If quite early in the poem Coleridge seems healthy and well—at least mentally, spiritually, and imaginatively—by the poem's end we could say that he is even better than merely "healthy," although he remains "disabled" throughout. This poem about an author "disabled" is one of the first, if not the very first, explicit literary enactment of what it is to be "disabled" in the modern sense of the phrase, and the text itself is the product of the tense negotiation between the body in pain and the Coleridgean imagination.[18]

[17] This is not unlike the way that the "strange / And extreme silentness" of the cottage in "Frost at Midnight" provokes Coleridge's exploration of present sounds (the "owlet's cry," and Hartley's "gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm"), as well as sounds of memory (the church bells, which I took up in Chapter 3).

[18] If "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" successfully and positively synthesizes the poet's experience of being "disabled" and his act of imaginative creation, the poem's revelation is made easier by the fact that the poet could be sure that his ankle injury would soon heal.

Case 3: Gouty Subjectivities, Scrofulic Subjectivities

During and after the years of his composition and publication of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," Coleridge experienced frequent illnesses and pains and developed a dependency on opium that brought its own distinct kinds of physical and mental suffering. Like "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison," Coleridge's epistolary embodiments from the late 1790s and early 1800s demonstrate his skillful manipulation of various modes of textual embodiment. If a great many authors have participated in the narration of their unwell bodies, few have constructed themselves as an "ill" subject so provocatively, so variously, and so agonizingly as Coleridge did. His letters from this era bear the traces of an increasingly antagonistic relationship with his ill body and demonstrate a strong, sometimes desperate desire to understand and articulate its vicissitudes. Along with a sense that Coleridge's life of pain was making certain modes of thinking and creating impossible, the letters also demonstrate how his body continued to generate possibilities for new ways of thinking and creating.

As Coleridge grappled to (re)define himself and his body, he attempted to subsume his corpus under a succession of organizing systems and established narratives, medical ones primary among them. Coleridge did not seek to identify an appropriate diagnosis merely for purposes of treatment, which might have been accomplished most easily were he to subject himself completely to medical authority—to that of his close friend Beddoes, for example. Nor do I agree with Martin Wallen that the primary appeal of medical discourse for Coleridge was to facilitate misdirection and keep his opium addiction a secret from friends and the public alike. On this matter I agree with Neil Vickers, who asserts that "opium was an important but subsidiary element in Coleridge's attempts to manage his condition and that he was more

preoccupied by the diseases for which he was taking that substance in the first place" (*Coleridge* 10).[19] As he actively molded and manipulated medical discourse and practiced self-diagnosis, Coleridge engaged in creative acts that aimed at meaning-making. I read his epistolary embodiments as illness narratives created through a tense collaboration between the body and the imagination—as narratives pervaded throughout, in both form and preoccupation, with disability aesthetics.

Coleridge complained in letters to various friends of symptoms including "violent pain, inflammation, and swelling" (45), "sickness even to vomiting" (767), a "Bowel-attack" (780), sore throats, "6 Boils behind my ear" (650), "spasms in my stomach" (875), "sudden & violent Diarrhoea" (888), a swollen face, a "left knee … most uncouthly swoln & discolored" (731), swollen fingers, a swollen testicle, and numerous other distressing symptoms. In 1801, he wrote to Southey, "I am often literally *sick* with pain" (748). Coleridge may have intuited that opium somehow contributed to some of his symptoms. At the time relatively little was known about the long-term impact of habitual opium use, but Neil Vickers "believe[s] that Coleridge was not unaware of [its] dangers" (*Coleridge* 11). At the same time, and I think much more importantly, many of Coleridge's complaints aligned more or less directly with descriptions of various illnesses detailed in contemporaneous self-help manuals and medical treatises.

A November 5, 1796 letter Coleridge sent to Tom Poole demonstrates how far back his self-diagnostic impulses can be traced, as well as the ways he took his body in pain as an invitation to imaginative diagnostic creation, and also the role of medical authority in his creative

[19] In Wallen's reading, Coleridge's opium addiction, as well as his desire to keep it private, account for his appeal to medical discourse. It was a time in Coleridge's life, Wallen explains, when he "struggled … to create an acceptable public character whose parts made up a constitutional whole" (558). All of this may be true, but if hiding his addiction was one of Coleridge's motivations in seeking out scrofula, it was by no means his only motivation—nor do I think it was his primary motivation.

process. I quote at length from the letter because I am most interested in its unusual narrative structure, and especially the way Coleridge moves quickly from matter-of-fact symptomological descriptions to his emotional and behavioral reactions to his attempt at self-treatment (by "division") to a dizzying succession of subjective analogic descriptions to, finally, a quick subsuming of the "medical attendant" before what is the narrative climax: his acts of self-diagnosis and self-medication, and the identification of the etiology of his apparent nervous disorder. He writes,

> I wanted such a letter as yours, for I am very unwell. On Wednesday night I was seized with an intolerable pain from my right temple to the tip of my right shoulder, including my right eye, cheek, jaw, and the right side of the throat. I was nearly frantic, and ran about the house naked, endeavouring by every means to excite sensations in different parts of my body, and so to weaken the enemy by creating division. It continued from one in the morning till half past five, and left me pale and fainting. It came on fitfully, but not so violently, several times on Thursday, and began severer threats towards night; but I took between sixty and seventy drops of laudanum, and *sopped* the Cerberus, just as his mouth began to open. On Friday it only *niggled*, as if the chief had departed from a conquered place, and merely left a small garrison behind, or as if he had evacuated the Corsica, and a few straggling pains only remained. But *this morning* he returned in full force, and his name is Legion. Giant-fiend of a hundred hands, with a shower of arrowy death-pangs he transpierced me, and then he became a wolf, and lay a-gnawing at my bones! I am now mad, most noble Festus, but in sober sadness I have suffered this day more bodily pain than I had before a conception of. My right cheek has certainly been placed with admirable exactness under the focus of some invisible burning-glass, which concentrated all the rays of a Tartarean sun. My medical attendant decides it to be altogether nervous, and that it originates either in severe application, or excessive anxiety. My beloved Poole! in excessive anxiety, I believe it might originate. I have a blister under my right ear, and I take twenty-five drops of laudanum every five hours, the ease and *spirits* gained by which have enabled me to write you this flighty but not exaggerated account. With a gloomy wantonness of imagination I had been coquetting with the hideous *possibles* of disappointment. I drank fears like wormwood, yea, made myself drunken with bitterness; for my ever-shaping and distrustful mind still mingled gall-drops, till out of the cup of hope I almost *poisoned* myself with despair.

Laudanum may seem to spur the analogic train that follows its mention, and by Coleridge's account the narcotic "enabled [him] to write." But opium is not his motivation or inspiration to write. Rather, it is his pain that provides the spark for his creative outburst, its content, and also the shape it has taken. Intense pain on "this day," the day of composition, immediately gives rise to a passage that is remarkable for its discursive and aesthetic richness.

The unfolding of Coleridge's letter—rapidly changing tack, taking up a range of discursive conventions—resembles the subjective fragmentation and sudden physiological changes it describes. The letter's form, that is, reflects its content, and that content is bodily and psychological distress. Like the nitrous oxide descriptions, this passage exemplifies the need to appeal to analogic language in attempting the impossible task of articulating the non-normative body—and like Wordsworth's disability poetry will, Coleridge demonstrates that the non-normative body often provokes narrative excess. And what spectacular excess Coleridge's pained body elicits here. In illustrating his pains Coleridge makes references to a three-headed hellhound that guards the gates of the underworld; a battle tableau with a chief, a conquered land, and a garrison; biblical demons who, when Jesus asked their name, answered, "My name is Legion: for we are many" (242)—demons who were then exorcised by Jesus and sent into swine that then ran off a cliff to their death;[20] a Hecatonchire, one of three giants in Greek mythology with 100 hands also had 50 heads; a hungry wolf; and a lens that concentrates the rays of the sun of Tartarus, the realm in the underworld set apart specifically for defeated gods and/or the punishment of sinners, as well as the realm of exile for the Hecatonchires, sent there because of

[20] In the Gospel of Mark, 5, Jesus meets a "man with an uncleane spirit, / Who had his dwelling among the tombs" in Gadarenes (242). This is an unusually potent image of simultaneous moral taint and moral absolution—not only through Jesus' exorcism, but also because the man is possessed, a passive form of corruption.

their ferocity.[21] It is a spectacular array of references that spans cultures and languages and species, the religious and secular, light and dark, the heavens and hell, the human and monstrous, the moral and diabolical.

In later years Coleridge will fix more often on medically-significant details than symbolically- and religiously-significant ones, but the narrative profusion that characterizes his 1796 letter to Poole continues to characterize his epistolary embodiments, as does what might be called an aesthetics of pain. In his 1796 letter to Poole the closest Coleridge comes to conferring stable meaning onto his body—to fixing his body, as it were—is through his diagnostic utterance "in excessive anxiety, I believe it might originate." But even this act of naming only inspires further inquiry into his condition's etiological origin. The "*possibilities* of disappointment," he believes, caused his excessive anxiety; his imagination and "ever-shaping" mind "almost *poisoned*" him. It is a linear, causal narrative, but not a wholly convincing one. At least in this telling, the disease's origin is completely incommensurate to its effects. The letter demonstrates Coleridge's desire to subject the body to the power of the imagination and mind, but also reveals the limits of this narrative. More clearly it demonstrates the necessary connection between Coleridge's mind, body, and the creative production of text.

Beddoes' emphasis on preventive medicine is an important context for understanding Coleridge's self-diagnostic impulse. Especially though Neil Vickers' work, we have more fully come to understand the extent of Beddoes's influence on Coleridge from the mid-1790s on: in 1997 Vickers claimed "Coleridge's friendship with [Beddoes] is arguably the least examined of all the momentous friendships of his life," a scholarly gap he has since filled, and of the Bristol

[21] In Greek mythology Tartarus houses those who had sinned against the gods; in the bible it appears once, in the Gospel of Peter, as a realm to house sinning angels.

physician's lines of influence, it was "in relation to medicine that Beddoes made his most lasting influence on Coleridge" ("Coleridge" 47, 58). And as I detailed in Chapter 1, Beddoes was known for his lifelong, strident advocacy of preventive medicine. I would never credit Beddoes with singlehandedly inspiring Coleridge to self-diagnose, but he provided compelling enough rationales for prevention and early detection that Coleridge would have felt encouraged to survey and surveil his ill body with greater urgency than he may have otherwise.[22]

Coleridge may have tracked his symptoms out of a genuine sense of medical concern or genuine fear, or (consciously or unconsciously) may have taken Beddoes' emphasis on early detection as an invitation to imagine the course of his pains and illnesses—whether for creative, narrative, psychological, philosophical, or social ends.[23] But if the practice of tracking one's own symptoms and acts of self-diagnosis were by no means unusual at the time, Coleridge took self-diagnosis much further than most would—and, at least discursively, took his self-diagnostic acts further than almost anyone else ever *could*.

In addition to nervous disorders, Neil Vickers suggests that in 1803, Coleridge's epistolary descriptions began to reflect the influence of the psychological case study, a genre that would have had a particular draw for Coleridge because it allowed him to conceive of his body as "lying entirely under the sway of his mental experience" (277).[24] I agree, although as his 1796 letter to Southey demonstrates, Coleridge was preoccupied through much of his life—and

[22] I use "surveil" in reference to Grinnell, who has written about *Hygëia* that "Rather than committing the care of the people to the people, Beddoes imagines for a moment a much more disciplinary environment of maximal surveillance, even and especially of the authority of the physician is not present" (238).

[23] Of course Beddoes would have been vehemently opposed to any acts of self-diagnosis. What he would have advocated for is Coleridge's increased understanding of and attention to his own body, which would allow him to appeal to professional medicine at the moment at which anything suggesting scrofula presented itself.

[24] Although Coleridge's impulse to self-diagnosis was not wholly unusual for a time at which alternative medical practices—including self-help manuals—flourished, it is nonetheless provocative in light of Paul Youngquist's I believe correct assertion that "by the late eighteenth century medical science was consolidating its authority over deviant flesh" (9). By asserting his diagnostic authority, Coleridge refuses to cede his autonomy over his body's narrative. (See Porter, Lawrence, and Bynum on the state of medicine during Coleridge's lifetime.)

much earlier than 1803—with the possibility that the mind could wield control over the body. It is a possibility that repeatedly failed to materialize in his reality, and I am interested in the acts of creation spurred by his body's refusal to be subject to his mind. Coleridge's intrusive body, coupled with his self-diagnostic impulse, brought him to the imaginatively fertile diagnosis of epilepsy (see Vickers's *Coleridge and the Doctors* for a discussion of "The Pains of Sleep" in this context), rheumatic fever, hydrocele, cholera morbus, and bilious colic, among other things. At times he is interested in more general medical frameworks of embodiment. In a revealing letter of 2 December 1800, for example, Coleridge writes to Humphry Davy to request more information on surgeon Anthony Carlisle's ideas on pain, indicating that "It is a subject which *exceedingly interests* me. I want to read something by somebody expressly on *pain*, if only to give an *arrangement* to my own thoughts, though if it were well treated I have little doubt it would revolutionize them" (341).[25]

During the late 1790s and early 1800s the two disorders Coleridge returns to most frequently—and often in conjunction with one another—are gout and scrofula.[26] Both chronic illnesses were characterized by a complex set of aesthetic, discursive, and cultural associations, and Beddoes indicated in *Hygëia* that both were especially important to understand and monitor insofar as both were broadly misunderstood.[27] In *Hygëia* Beddoes writes that in general, chronic

[25] This may just be another attempt on Coleridge's part to find a medical framework to help him interpret and recreate his body. But I think that his interest in pain must have been heightened by his developing friendship with Tom Wedgwood, whose metaphysics are organized around his embodied ideas of pleasure and pain, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 3.

[26] Gout was roughly the same thing during the Romantic era as it is now, except that it was thought that while the big toe was the most common site of disease, it could attack a much wider range of body parts—hence Coleridge's retrospective diagnosis of his father's cause of death as gout in the heart. Scrofula is a condition defined by swelling of the lymph nodes, especially of the neck, but also sometimes of the armpits and groin. It is usually caused by tuberculosis. As with gout, scrofula in the Romantic era was less site-specific than it is now, and also was associated with a much broader symptomology.

[27] *Hygëia* was published in 1802, and we know Coleridge to have read it soon after publication. Given their relationship, Coleridge would have been very familiar with Beddoes's take on scrofula and gout much earlier, given that Beddoes was a physician he could be sure to consult should he think himself chronically ill.

illnesses "are often suffered to run on to a dangerous or an irremediable length" (4). Gout posed a problem insofar as "[t]he public has unlearned an infinity of false opinions with regard to other disorders, but the prejudices of the darkest ages cling as fast as ever to the idea of gout" (138). In the instance of scrofula, misunderstanding also abounded, and the consequences of late treatment could be dire. Although scrofula was highly treatable if caught early enough—in fact "[t]here are few diseases in which the triumph of art has been rendered more compleat" (7)—Beddoes indicates that to receive treatment, "[t]he patient must not be just at the point of death" and the disease "must not have proceeded beyond a given degree" (7). What's more, the only causes for scrofula treatment sought too late are "extreme penury, gross neglect, or prejudice on the one hand, or unpardonable deficiency of skill on the other" (7). In other words, it was up to the patient (and his family), as well as his physician, to monitor for a predisposition to and also incipient signs of the disease.

In demystifying scrofula and gout Beddoes had to contend with the rich cultural history of both diseases. Coleridge himself took up the disease from this perspective in his 1816 "An Essay on Scrofula," which he began in collaboration with James Gillman while living at the physician's house. The work remained unfinished and unpublished—suggestively, the essay's composition was interrupted when Coleridge felt that in order to finish it he needed to first compose *Hints toward the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life*. It is just one of innumerable instances in which Coleridge's medical engagements initiated unforeseen acts of creation, and just one of innumerable instances in which the creative products related to Coleridge's illnesses exist only in a fragmentary state—or, from another perspective, in a state of disability aesthetics.

The two sections of the 1816 essay he did compose take up the long history of scrofula, also known as the King's Evil (or *Morbus Regius*, a name which Coleridge traces to the Bible), or Struma, or Choiras. Coleridge mentions the etymology of "scrofula," which derives from *scrofa*, the Latin for sow—perhaps, Coleridge speculates, because of the "likeness to a sow with a litter of pigs or from a certain black rock just emerging from the surface of the sea exactly in the shape of a sow with a litter of pigs" ("Essay" 459). This explanation is not an unusual one, and indicates one way that scrofula may be understood as an aesthetic category as much as a medical one. Although scrofula existed in classical antiquity, Coleridge notes that the "establishment of independent kingdoms, in the ungenial and capricious climates of the half cultivated and over wooded North" is what must have caused an increase in the disease, which is sensitive to temperature and humidity and has as its origin in "depressive causes" (460). [28] Going back to at least Edward the Confessor and until 1714, superstition—and ceremony—had it that the King's Touch (or more generally the Royal Touch) could effect a miraculous cure of the disease either through direct physical contact or mediated by a gold coin blessed by the monarch.[29]

Martin Wallen does not identify the allure of scrofula in its cultural history, but rather in the "elastic rhetoric" it provides, particularly through its association with certain temperaments

[28] Martin Wallen rightly notes the ways that the medical association of scrofula with cold, damp weather (like England's) bears poetic fruit for Coleridge, and traces the correspondence of bad weather in Coleridge's poetry with dejection and other scrofulic symptoms.

[29] Coleridge challenges this superstition as illogical. Why would God "establish a standing miracle" when there was already a "natural means" of curing it in existence? Further, if the heavenly cure (via a gold coin) were so effective, why would anyone go to a medical professional for treatment? Coleridge notes that the cure may have originally been a gift from the Pope, and explains the cessation of this practice in wry terms: "The times appointed for the touch became insufficient for the vast numbers who had equal claims to the communications of the precious gift. In proportion to the multitude touched must have been the frequency of Cases touched in vain and the number of these manifest failures compared with that of the apparent cures must have become too great to be overlooked, even by the dim and blinking eye of Superstition itself, and the Sovereign would at length have been inevitably degraded into the most unsuccessful Quack in the dominions" ("Essay" 461 – 2). Queen Anne presided over the final such ceremony, which took place in April 1714.

and types of intellect (556). Beddoes somewhat remarkably describes the scrofulic constitution in *Hygëia*:

> The intellectual superiority of children of the scrophulous temperament has long been noticed, and it is certainly found to exist in a large proportion of cases. That sensibility or openness to impression, which is one of the principal constituents of genius, has often been observed to accompany different diseases of debility. The compleat distinction of circumstances, and ascertainment of causes is one of the remotest benefits, to be expected from the knowledge of the human mind... (23)

Coleridge's enduring interest in the scrofulic's disposition is indicated by his note in "An Essay on Scrofula" that "it is fact, that in this Country and generally throughout the North of Europe the Males, that are, or are most likely under exciting causes to become, the Subjects of Scrofula, are distinguished by … a certain feminine character of quick feeling, ready sympathy, lively fancy, and other marks of venous predominance" (480). But Beddoes warns that if the onset of scrofula could thus confirm innate sensibility and a tendency to genius, the disease could come to destroy those very things: in some cases, when scrofula "has made considerable progress, the effect is entirely the opposite … [and] the intellectual and other functions are equally impaired" (24).

During the period gout, too, was an ambivalent condition, culturally and morally. Associated in the imagination and in fact with "a life of indulgence and intemperance" (138), Beddoes is careful to note that the "condition is not absolute." Some "descendants of gouty ancestors" may do very little to aggravate a predisposition and—importantly in the context of the ever-guilty Coleridge—there are yet others whose lifestyle does not account for their illness at all (138). And yet the association of gout with excess leads to its cultural exaltation. Given the painful, debilitating, depressing, and sometimes fatal course of the illness, Beddoes asks, "can it

really deserve to be regarded in the favourable light it usually is? Is it reasonable to desire, and wise to cherish such a complaint?" (142). Together scrofula and gout signified tense oppositions and moral ambiguity.

Wallen notes that "[b]y bemoaning his diseased constitution which keeps him from doing his duty, he can keep his correspondents focused on his potential accomplishments, what he would do and be were he not victimized by illness" (563 – 4). Wallen's remarks correctly identify what is indeed one potential (and perhaps intended) set of effects wrought by Coleridge's use of scrofula—and also, I would add, gout. Such moral motivations help to explain Coleridge's self-diagnosis with scrofula in a November 1802 letter to his brother James. He writes,

> At present, my main plan must be to recover my health. My stomach is weak—& disposed to flatulence with all it's [sic] pains & heaviness—& I have no [doubt that] there is a taint of Scrofula in my constitution. [By Scroful]a I mean no more than an inirritable State [of] the muscles, with deficient venous action, & a languor of the absorbents—accompanied with an undue sensibility of the nervous system, or whatever unknown parts of our body are more immediate Instruments of Feeling & Idea. Where you find a man indolent in body & indisposed to definite action, but with lively Feelings, vivid ideal Images, & a power & habit of continuous Thinking, you may always, I believe, suspect a somewhat of Scrofula—With me it is something more than a suspicion—I had several glandular Swellings at School—& within the last four years a Lump has formed on my left cheek, just on the edge of my whisker—. The swellings in my knees were from the same cause. (897)

Here Coleridge uses scrofula to justify his plan for the coming months, the pursuit of health and what is "of absolute necessity" to his health, "warmth, warm cloathing, & tranquillity of mind" (897). The constitutional portrait he paints of the scrofulic also neatly aligns with his long-time self-definition as indolent in body and quick of mind. With the detail "just on the edge of my

whisker" Coleridge includes slightly more symptomological detail than necessary to corroborate his diagnosis. I call attention to this in part because it is not unlike something he calls attention to in Wordsworth's poetry when, as I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 5, he criticizes the awkward specificity of some moments in "The Thorn." In both instances I believe hyper-specificity is born of the desire to somehow contain the uncontainable body; small details—symptoms, body parts, sensations—are grasped after because the larger picture is impossible to adequately paint.

Although Martin Wallen has rightly drawn attention to the appeal for Coleridge of the way Beddoes describes the scrofulic disposition, I think the most interesting aspect of *Hygëia* in a Coleridgean context has heretofore gone unnoticed. In Beddoes's descriptions of both scrofula and gout, as well as the scrofulic's constitution, the two diseases properly become aesthetic categories. Beddoes's visual descriptions are remarkable, as are his uses of analogy and humor—all aesthetic strands Coleridge picks up in his letters. In Beddoes' scrofula and gout Coleridge finds a flexible and deep system, one which he adopts and expands to confer meaning onto his otherwise inassimilable bodily experiences; this system, in Coleridge as in Beddoes, centers and aestheticizes the body at least as much as, and often much more than, the intellect. By attending to the aesthetics of embodiment, the letters in which Coleridge seems to excuse his lack of productivity become rich textual products themselves, and bear witness to the author's continuing artistic creation. Yes, Coleridge failed to produce in expected ways—or, put in terms of disability, his textual output was distinctly non-normative—but that does not mean that he did not produce a great deal, and perhaps much more than he might have produced were he "healthy."

In *Hygëia*, Beddoes traced scrofula's loose and suggestive progress and symptomology, and constructed highly aestheticized portraits of those constitutionally predisposed to the disease. Part of the allure of Beddoes' account of the scrofulic predisposition is his description of the scrofulic's physical appearance—something Coleridge will also note in his 1816 essay. "The quality of the skin, and particularly that of the complexion," Beddoes explains, "is one of the leading indications. The skin is fine and sleek; the complexion bright and ruddy. It is often such as, from first appearances, a mother would most desire for a daughter; and an unwary spectator consider as a mark of the most perfect health" (13).[30] This description is feminine and refined, and when Beddoes describes the scrofulic's eyes and fine features, he fills out his portrait of what most would (mis)perceive as the scrofulic's natural beauty. In his essay on scrofula, Coleridge echoes and intensifies Beddoes's description, writing that scrofulics "are distinguished by a certain *speciousness* of color, an apparent laxity of fibre, large or full eyes" (480). Especially through his use of "speciousness," Coleridge captures and conveys the dangers of what it takes Beddoes pages to demonstrate: that the scrofulic's "beauty" misleads us into thinking that he is "healthy" when it is actually a sign of his constitutional weakness.

Coleridge must have also found it suggestive that one of the "more constant" of all "indications" of a scrofulic tendency for Beddoes is "the enlargement of the upper lip, which often reaches to the partition between the nostrils, and to the *wings* of the nose" (17). As Coleridge wrote in an autobiographical sketch for John Thelwall in November 1796, "I cannot breathe through my nose, so my mouth, with sensual thick lips, is always open" (*Collected*

[30] This leads Beddoes to speculate "how much the sum of human happiness and virtue would be enlarged, *if the standard of health were rendered the standard of beauty also?*" (14). This is a place where Beddoes's nuanced understanding of the social construction of "disability" is especially clear—although the aesthetic restructuring Beddoes advocates here is problematic insofar as it anticipates the troubling healthy disabled / unhealthy disabled divide that is so problematic for contemporary disability advocacy and disability studies. Susan Wendell has written extensively on this fissure in the field as disability activists seek to "distinguish themselves from those who are ill" (Unhealthy Disabled: 18).

Letters X). Beddoes notes that those who have a lifelong large lip (like Coleridge did) should not be understood as necessarily scrofulic—indeed, it is those whose lip enlarges over the course of time who should be concerned. Yet, at the very least, Coleridge's preoccupation with his own lips must have made Beddoes's physical description of the scrofulic seem ominous.

Beddoes explicitly foregrounds and frames scrofula's aesthetics when he imagines an "artist" painting the glandular scrofulic. One may "admire exceedingly" the subject's "feature and complexion," he describes, but if one were to look below the neck one would see "various tumors, some suppurating, some discharging matter, and others having left indelible scars, and for the present surrounded by an extensive area of a disagreeable dark red" (15 – 6).[31] Between the face and the neck, scrofula offers a stark aesthetic contrast. But this portrait also underscores an important aspect of the beauty of the scrofulic's skin and face: what Beddoes imagines here is a narrative of aesthetic redemption as much as it is a narrative of aesthetic corruption—a potent image in which the grotesque is contrasted with, but also coexists with beauty. I use "redemption" here because I think that one of the effects of this portrait is emotional and ethical, offering not just a way, but also an invitation to behold the deformed. That said, it is also simply more *interesting* to be able to positively acknowledge the beauty that may be coexistent with suppurating tumors. It amounts to a kind of aesthetic negative capability with as much intellectual as moral appeal.

Beddoes also provided a particular aesthetic resource through his descriptions of gout in *Hygëia*. Making reference to the vegetable kingdom, Beddoes describes how "concretions of a chalky consistence are generated, and sometimes in such abundance, and of such size, that it

[31] Provocatively, Beddoes writes, "If, on the first impression it feel cruel to call up such images before the public eye, I hope, on second thoughts, that it will be allowed at least cruel kindness"—because of its educational value (16).

seems as if the skin had been stuffed with plumbstones" (141). It is a lurid image, startling for its discontinuity, and somewhat ludicrous if imagined. The grotesque humor of the image is also palpable in Beddoes's description of gout's progression:

> After several repetitions the fits [of gout] occur more frequently, and the affection shall fly from foot to foot; from a foot to one of the knees; from the knee to the wrist. It shall at times transfer itself to the chest, the neck, or to one of the senses. Thus gouty pain in a joint shall cease, and instant deafness come on, which again new pain shall sometimes remove, though it sometimes becomes permanent. Lastly, the stomach shall be seized with dangerous violence. (140)

Beddoes's gout is a disease with intentionality. At the very least it is an implicit personification, resonant with contemporaneous images of the disease including James Gillray's 1799 etching, which depicts gout as a demonic little fire-breathing creature gnawing and clawing at the toe. (See Figure 2.) Beddoes's description exemplifies how aesthetic and linguistic play need not be excluded from what is on the whole a very serious portrait of a painful disease. Rather, Beddoes reveals the dark humor inherent to a condition like gout, which can cause crippling agony and debility by affecting such a seemingly insignificant and not altogether dignified body part.

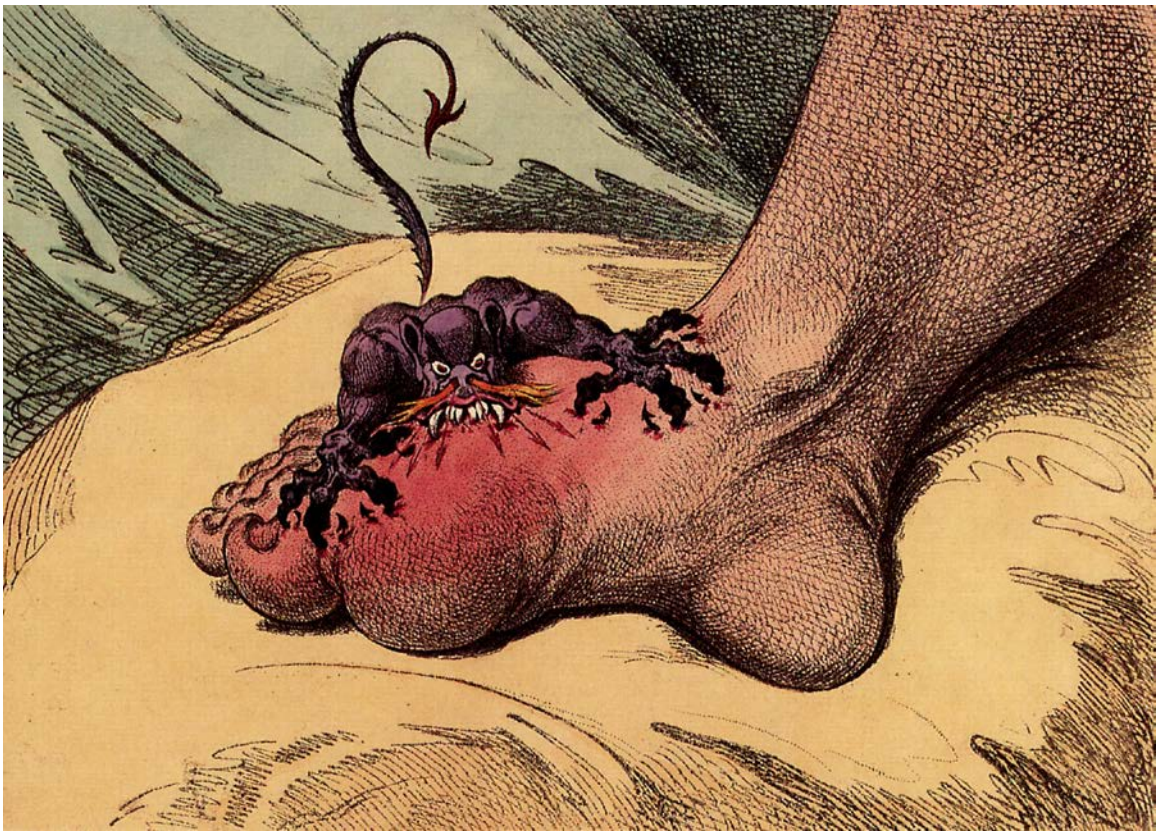

Figure 2. “The Gout” (1799), James Gillray[32]

Dark wit is in fact one of Coleridge’s most frequent modes in his self-diagnostic letters, and he often adopted a jocular tone not unlike that of Beddoes’s description of gout—befitting the fact that in the Poole Letters he identified his first “wit” as a response to illness. In 1804, for example, Coleridge wrote a discursively playful letter to his wife, Sara: “I am more and more convinced that it is not Gout—or at all events, that if my case be flying windy Gout, that flying windy Gout is not the same disease with regular Gout, but a something cutaneous—a something

[32] Reproduced courtesy of the British Museum.

neither scrofulous nor scorbutic absolutely, & yet partaking of both" (1038 – 9).[33] Not dissimilarly, he wrote to Samuel Perkis in February 1803 about the impact of the climate, widely understood to be medically significant in cases of scrofula and a variety of other conditions: "Cold & Wet are my He and She Devil" (919). In November 1800 Coleridge wrote to Jos Wedgwood, "My eyes are in such a state of inflammation that I might as well write blindfold—they are so blood-red, that I should make a very good Personification of Murder" (647).

In what is an especially rich example of Coleridge's illness humor, he wrote in May, 1801 to Poole with what started as a symptomology but gave way to doggerel—what seems to be Coleridge's preferred verse form for representing bodily particulars. He writes, in what I will call his typical illness doggerel,

> my knee is still swoln, & my left [ancle?] in flames of fire, & last night these pretty companions kept me sleepless the whole night—hour after hour,
>
> > I utter'd and suppress'd full many a groan,
> > The Cur, Arthritis, gnawing my knee-bone—
> > … Hope is itself no mean Medicine (732)

This is a kind of verse analog to Gillray's caricature—humorous and partaking in the grotesque, but also suggestive of a reality that is profoundly painful. These and other instances of play and wit indicate that whatever their intended function, Coleridge's self-diagnostic acts became about much more than simply moral justification—if this is what they ever were meant to be in the first place. Pain has inspired creation, and in turn creation has afforded an outlet for making some kind of sense of and deriving some kind of satisfaction from pain.

The most imaginative possibilities of Beddoes's scrofula are evident in his description of the disease's course. Lymphatic glands "most nearly resemble the acorn, when out of its cup or

[33] A less humorous but nonetheless witty and playful version of this appears in February 1803 letter to Southey. He writes, "My Disease is probably anomalous. If it can be called any thing, by a lucky Guess, it may be called irregular scrophulous Gout" (930).

calyx" (9). But after they "become affected by schrophula," they "take the name of *growing kernels*" and can eventually swell to a range of sizes:

> Their bulk varies from the size of a pea to that of a kidney-bean and hazle nut. They enlarge to the magnitude of a pigeon's egg, rarely to that of a pullet's. For though glandular lymphatic swellings often attain the size of a goose's egg, particularly under the arm-pit or in the groin, this happens from the enlargement of a whole cluster, and seldom of a single gland. (10)

Beddoes's motivation may have been to accurately communicate to as broad an audience as possible, although throughout his writing Beddoes demonstrates a sometimes irresistible tendency to play with language and images whenever possible. Regardless of Beddoes's intention, this passage is aesthetically provocative. It is a peculiar, almost startling instance of similitude in dissimilitude—between human body parts beans, nuts, and eggs. The disabled body is a site for questioning ideas about humanity, and also a site at which we may perceive correspondences and ruptures that are obscured in the healthy body. Here the scrofulic body invites us to sense the similarities between the matter and structure of our human bodies and both vegetable bodies and animal bodies—comparisons that are especially suggestive given that all of the objects Beddoes references are also food products. Because all of the objects (beans, nuts, eggs) are central to the process of regeneration—whereas tubercular tumors are indicative of degeneration—this passage also calls attention to the unstable line between fecundity and spoilage.

Coleridge's self-diagnoses take on a similarly literary tone. In a Christmas 1802 letter Coleridge explains his theory of scrofula to Southey. In doing so he invokes strikingly poetic language and picks up the resonances of scrofula and vegetable matter that Beddoes had traced in *Hygëia* earlier that year:

> It is a theory of mine that virtue and genius are diseases of the hypochondriacal and scrofulous genera, and exist in a peculiar state of the nerves and diseased

> digestion, analogous to the beautiful diseases that colour and variegate certain trees. However, I add, by way of comfort, that it is my faith that the virtue and genius produce the disease, not the disease the virtue, etc., though when present it fosters them. (902)

Having established his theory of the illness, he goes on to confess to Southey that "a deeply ingrained though mild scrofula is diffused through me" (903).

Coleridge is trying here to enact a moral recuperation by subjecting his body to his mind and soul. It is a proposition that fails to hold up in the course of the letter as he minutely details the diet he is trying to keep to address his "indifferent" health—unavoidable evidence that he is, daily, subject to his body's whims. And yet he has been able to successfully enact an aesthetic recuperation here. On the matter of vegetable analogs Coleridge does Beddoes one better by evoking the diseases that affect trees. It is a striking image that allows him to associate a definitive aesthetic judgment—"beautiful"—with the disease that he believes is ravaging his body. This is not an embodied representation sought for purely moral ends. This is a creative act inspired—or even required—by the body in pain. It is a potent image in itself, but is all the more important because of what it achieves in recuperating the diseased body. Coleridge offers a way to appreciate and engage with what would usually inspire disgust and avoidance—and does so not by effacing the diseased body, but by centering it.

Case 4: The Author and/as Tom Wedgwood

Although Coleridge communicated the state of his body to a range of friends and family, Tom Wedgwood is by far the most important presence in his self-diagnostic letters insofar as Coleridge increasingly came to see his benefactor as a kind of double, a model for what he and his body may become once illness—an illness he often seemed to think they shared—had progressed further. Coleridge had made Wedgwood's acquaintance through Poole in the

summer of 1797, and in January 1798 accepted the £150 annuity from Tom and his brother Josiah (Jos). By the time of their first meeting, Wedgwood was known as a chronically ill man, and was regularly taking opium for its palliative benefits.

Prior and contemporaneous to his self-diagnostic letters, Coleridge also sent letters that reveal that he sought in Wedgwood an embodied example of how to live a life of illness and pain. At times Wedgwood seems to have influenced Coleridge's self-diagnoses themselves or their modes of expression; the types of treatment he sought; his systems of thought; and his methods of aesthetic production. Coleridge's communications with Wedgwood, as well as his communications with others while in Wedgwood's presence, indicate that he felt a singular affinity for his benefactor's body and mind. At no time could he be an ill man as freely as when he was in Wedgwood's presence, and with no one else did he seem to believe he could attain as perfect of a sympathy. That Wedgwood's presence inspired his discursive experimentation is demonstrated by the fact that many of his richest scrofula and gout letters were sent while or shortly after Coleridge was spending what was his most extended period of time with him, from November 1802 to early 1803.

In a letter of October 20, 1802 that Coleridge sent to Wedgwood before the commencement of this period of travel, he took up the topic of their embodied sympathy. This is perhaps only fitting, given what he knew of their shared pains and, because of common opium use, their increasingly shared bodily symptoms. Knowing Wedgwood's painful and rigid objections to sympathy as a source of pain, Coleridge assured him,

> If Leslie could not go abroad with you and I could in any way mould my manners and habits to suit you, I should of all things like to be your companion. Good nature, an affectionate disposition, and so thorough a sympathy with the nature of your complaint that I should feel no pain, not the most momentary, at being told

> by you what your feelings required at the time in which they required it—this I should bring with me. (*Collected Letters* 877 – 8)[34]

As companions, the two could be assured of similar constitutions. Their shared illness could make Coleridge an exception to Wedgwood's prohibition against freely airing his physical complaints—and could lead to the kind of perfect sympathy that Coleridge could not find elsewhere.

Having received Wedgwood's request for his company "two hours since," Coleridge promises in his next letter, of November 3, that he will leave to join Wedgwood "tomorrow." Despite his eagerness to post the letter, he cannot resist expanding on his earlier comments on sympathy. He would not wish to join Wedgwood, he enthuses,

> if I did not appear to myself to *understand* the nature of your sufferings, & within the last year in some slight degree to have *felt*, myself, something of the same. Forgive me, my dear Sir! if I have said too much—it is better to *write* it than to *say* it—& I am anxious in the event of our travelling together that you should feel yourself at ease with me, even as you would with a younger Brother, to whom from his childhood you had been in the Habit of saying, Do this, Col.—or—don't do that—.—. (878 – 9)

What I am interested in here is not so much what Coleridge hoped he could be to Wedgwood, but rather what he clearly hopes Wedgwood could be to him. What he imagines is a brother who could be what Frank could never have been, active and physical as he was—and what George could only be for that brief time that they laid in their nearby sickbeds as children. Wedgwood, in other words, could be Coleridge's true brother.

Once in Wedgwood's company Coleridge wrote to his wife Sara and tried to convey why she could not adequately sympathize with him. "My bodily Feelings," he wrote, "are linked in so peculiar a way with my Ideas, that you cannot *enter into* a state of Health so utterly different

[34] In this letter, written on his 30th birthday (as he announces at the outset), Coleridge prefaces his offer of companionship and sympathy with details of his domestic strife, which recently has been resolved because of a bout of illness during which both Coleridge and his wife thought he might die. This is the letter in which Coleridge also quotes from "Dejection: An Ode." This background helps to explain his eagerness to join Wedgwood.

from your own natural Constitution—you can only see & know, that so it is" (887). The not so subtle implication of the letter is that he now had a model of sympathy that made Sara's imperfect sympathies—and indeed the impossibility of her sympathy—more stark than ever. This point is driven home by the fact that he reports he has had such a pleasant time at Cresselly, the home of Wedgwood's sister, that "the best Blessing … is a *placid Sleep*—no *difficulties* in my Dreams, no pains, [no Desires]—" (890).[35] He requests that, if the child Sara then carried were to be born a boy, it should be named Cresselly in commemoration of his time with the Wedgwood family. It was a request he repeated.

It is no wonder that Coleridge would think he had finally found someone with whom he could share a perfect sympathy. They had felt a kinship for one another from the start. Both had long exhibited intellectual tendencies, temperaments, and aesthetic predispositions that were shaped by their bodies in pain, and there had already been many ways the two men's lives had suggestively shadowed, embodied, and crossed one another prior to this period. Some are easy enough to trace. The path Coleridge took on his German tour, funded by the Wedgwood brothers, followed the path Wedgwood had taken on his trip to Germany 16 months prior. In July 1802 Coleridge described his abandonment of his poetic vocation: "sickness and some other worse afflictions … forced me into downright metaphysics" (378); almost a decade earlier, Wedgwood had given up laboratory science for metaphysics on account of his ailing body. And then of course there is the fact that, especially in pursuit of their metaphysical inquiries, the two men had developed strikingly similar notebooking practices. These material textual items—fragmentary, rife with illustrations and notes, winding and skipping between subjects—are perhaps more directly evocative of disability aesthetics than anything else the two men produced. It is no wonder that Coleridge thought he had found in Wedgwood a kind of perfect sympathy.

[35] "no Desires" is crossed out, according to Griggs.

Coleridge freely, even enthusiastically, writes about his opium intake to Sara while visiting Wedgwood. After noting his beverage consumption, he notes that

> I take half a grain of purified opium, equal to 12 drops of Laudanum—which is not more than [an] 8th part of what I took at Keswick, exclusively of B[eer], Brandy, & Tea, which last is undoubtedly a pernicious S[timulant]—all which I have left off—& will give this Regimen a *fair, compleat* Trial of one month—with no other deviation, than that I shall sometimes lessen the opiate, & sometimes miss a day. But I am fully convinced, & so is T. Wedgwood, that to a person, with such a Stomach & Bowels as mine, if any stimulus is needful, Opium in the small quantities, I now take it, is incomparably better in every respect than Beer, Wine, Spirits, or any *fermented* Liquor—nay, far less pernicious than even Tea. (*Collected Letters* 884)

Likewise, he reports that on November 22, diarrhea caused by the receipt of Sara's most recent letter required "20 drops of Laudanum" which had more of an effect than "80 or 100 drops" before his recent regimen of 1/3 gram of opium each day. There is no hint of guilt in these mentions of laudanum.

Nor is there anything but palpable enthusiasm when he writes to Wedgwood in February 1803—soon after the two have parted, but with plans to meet again shortly—to let his friend know that he has successfully procured Bhang (or Bang, or Indian Hemp). He promises that "We will have a fair Trial of *Bang*" but this is not all. He asks, "Do bring down some of the Hyoscyamine Pills—& I will give a fair Trial of opium, Hensbane, & Nepenthe. By the bye, I always considered Homer's account of the *Nepenthe* as a *Banging* lie.—" (934). With Wedgwood, Coleridge could be an ill man, a man in pain, a man experimenting with medicine and his body; these are roles that, with Wedgwood, Coleridge could relish.

When absent, Wedgwood remains a palpable presence in Coleridge's life, mediated through letters. As I detailed in Chapter 3, this was a common occurrence for Wedgwood, but none of his correspondents took epistolary embodiment nearly as far as Coleridge did. In a January 1803 letter to Wedgwood, for example, Coleridge writes,

> The exceeding kindness which it [your letter] breathed was literally medicinal to me, and I firmly believe, cured me of a nervous rheumatism in my head and teeth... I had a wretched Night…But almost immediately after the receipt and perusal of your letter the pains left me, and I have bettered to this hour… (*Collected Letters* 915)

Here Coleridge amplifies the affective, embodied potency Wedgwood assigns to textual correspondence. Wedgwood's letter is given a physical presence as it "breathe[s]" onto Coleridge. What's more, he capitalizes on medical rhetoric to undermine medical treatment: this sympathy alone, Wedgwood's breath conveyed through the medium of text, is enough to have effected Coleridge's bodily cure. The following year Coleridge repeats the image of Wedgwood's epistolary body entering his own physical body. After telling his correspondent that he had been sleeping with the letter under his pillow "day after day," he confesses, "I never received a delight that lasted longer upon me, 'brooded on my mind and made it pregnant,' than the last six sentences of your Letter" (1040). The peculiar intimacy Coleridge describes in these letters is as profoundly embodied as it is intellectual, and accomplishes a kind of perfect union between mind and body.

Wedgwood's importance to Coleridge during these years is perhaps nowhere exemplified better than in a letter he wrote in September, 1803. A postscript to the letter contains an epitaph, which Coleridge says he "composed in my Sleep for myself, while dreaming that I was dying. To the best of my recollection I have not altered a word." It is a compositional process that suggestively mirrors the process by which he wrote "Kubla Khan."[36] For this most embodied of verses Coleridge adopts his illness doggerel:

[36] In his note to "Kubla Khan" Coleridge writes that "On awaking" from what we know was an opium-fueled dream "he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved" (*Coleridge's Poetry and Prose* 181). This correspondence invites us to reconsider Coleridge's opium use as a paradigm through which we can read Coleridge's textual output, especially given the common reading of drug use as a disembodied condition rather than an embodied one—a supposition I disagree with and have taken on in Chapter 2 in the specific context of nitrous oxide. I would suggest as a much more fruitful category that of non-normative embodiment—for the connections it suggests between

> Here sleeps at length poor Col, & without Screaming,
> Who died, as he had always liv'd, a dreaming:
> Shot dead, while sleeping, by the Gout within,
> Alone, and all unknown, at E'nbro' in an Inn

This verse deftly uses humor to allow for the expression of what would otherwise be unutterable: a fear of dying suddenly, a fear of death itself, a fear of being alone—and, perhaps worst of all, a fear of dying unknown. That Coleridge sent this epitaph to Wedgwood speaks directly to this fear. Through Wedgwood he could be seen, felt, known. The letter itself and the verse it contains enact a negation of the fear it expresses.

Coleridge's fraught investment in Wedgwood and his body becomes painfully clear in the year and a half leading to Wedgwood's 1805 death. The letter Coleridge sent Wedgwood in January, 1804, in which his mind is pregnant from Tom's letter, was quickly followed by a letter on 28 January 1804, just after he has gotten word that Tom has resigned himself to death. After raising the possibility of "large doses of opium in a hot climate, with a diet of grapes, and the fruits of the climate"—a not altogether unorthodox treatment of pharmaceuticals, diet, and climate—Coleridge somewhat remarkably asks whether or not it might be possible for Wedgwood to give himself gout by "drinking freely." Were this possible, "a violent Pain and Inflammations in the extremities might produce new trains of motion and feeling in your stomach, and the organs connected with the stomach, known and unknown?" (*Collected Letters* 1043). In his desperation Coleridge makes recourse to what Beddoes calls "the inveterate prejudice that *gout performs the good office of carrying something hurtful out of the body*"—a prejudice Beddoes thoroughly undermines in Essay VIII of *Hygëia* (157). It is not Coleridge's wont to appeal so directly to superstition regarding illness.

Coleridge's illnesses, pains, and drug use, but also because it appropriately blurs the lines between these embodied experiences.

Coleridge also registered the trauma of receiving Wedgwood's letter to a number of correspondents. What he describes is an incredibly visceral—and also poetically rendered—bodily reaction to the idea of Wedgwood's death. Like Wedgwood's previous letters, we learn that this one "*got into me*" and provoked a change in his state of body of equal violence to the change of mind it provoked. I include six descriptions below in table form because it demonstrates Wedgwood's impact, and because it is evidence of a creative process wrought through the negotiation of body and mind—but most of all because it is evidence of a complex compositional process that is not so different from how a poem or a more standard work of "literature" might be composed. The descriptions in these letters are not obviously literary, but understood in the framework of illness narratives we might begin to perceive them as such:

Richard Sharp Sunday Noon, January 29 1804	"Yesterday I received an almost heart-breaking Letter from our Friend *T.W.* a tremendous Cloud of Gloom & Despondency—but I trust in God, that from the very restlessness of the misery, that induces it, it will soon be blown off, or dissolve / " (1044)
Grosvenor Bedford Sunday Noon, January 29, 1804	"I was unwell all yestermorning, as I inevitably am, during wet & windy weather / about ½ past 2 I received a letter of tremendous gloom & darkest despondency from a very dear friend, a truly great & valuable man, but to whom ill health does not allow a day's Quiet throughout the year, following him, & driving him here & there & every where, as the Furies drove Orestes / . This Letter had *got into* me, more than I myself was conscious of—I walked…into the Strand to dine at 4 o clock with a Friend / I had not eaten half a dozen mouthfuls, when there burst out from all parts of my body a Sweat, like a tropical Rain / it literally *frightened* Stuart (with whom I was dining). I was obliged to leave the table very abruptly—suffered all the extremes of Joint Vomiting & Diarrhoea—& in short, could not stir—or scarcely think where I was, till the watchman was crying past 10 o clock / when I got myself conveyed home" (1044 – 5).
Thomas Poole Monday Morning January 30, 1804	"I dined with Stuart on Saturday—the first morsel I put into my mouth, I burst all over me into a Sweat, that resembled a tropical Rain / it literally *frightened* Stuart / I hurried down to the Necessary—vomited a little, & was finally relieved by a violent Diarrhoea—& recovered, tho' I remain somewhat feeble … But

	for a slight irregular Fluttering at the Heart, & a speck of *Coldness* felt there, I should not have known, that T.W.'s letter had *got into me* / & even so it has been over & over & over again… It should seem, as if certain Trains of Feeling acted, *on me*, underneath my own *Consciousness*… so that all Feelings which particularly affect *myself, as* myself, connect & combine with my bodily sensations, especially the trains of motion in the digestive Organs, & therefore tho' I feel them *en masse*, I do not & cannot make them the objects of a distinct attention" (1045 – 6).
William Godwin Monday Morning January 30, 1804	"I was sadly diseased by the rain & storm of Saturday—received a Letter of tremendous Gloom from T. W., which *got into me* unknown, *in the degree at least*, to my own consciousness—dined with Stuart, & had not swallowed half a dozen Morsel, when a Sweat, like a tropical Rain, burst out from all my Limbs, Head, Forehead, & c & c, so as to *frighten* Stuart—& this was instantly followed by a violent Diarrhoea not without vomiting—I soon recovered; but am still feeble" (1047).
Sir George Beaumont January 30, 1804	"About one o/ clock I received a Letter of tremendous Gloom from T. Wedgwood / as usual, I read it without much conscious emotion—& some body coming in, I talked on general Subjects with ease, & had no suspicion that the Letter had *gotten* into me. I went out dinner / and had not eat 3 morsels, before a Perspiration broke out upon me, like a Tropical Rain / followed by a bowel-seizure, & c & c—and in about an hour I was quite well" (1048 – 9).
Robert Southey Wednesday February 1, 1804	"I am tolerably well—only on Saturday in consequence of the bad weather & a Letter of tremendous Gloom of Despair from T. W. my Stomach was diseased, & on swallowing half a dozen morsels of my Dinner (at Stuart's) I burst out into a Sweat, like a tropical Rain / that literally *frightened Stuart*—after this one of the 4 or 5 most violent Bowel-seizures I have ever had—but in the evening I grew well again" (1051).

Coleridge and/as Postmodern Illness Narrative

On 3 February, 1809 Coleridge wrote to Poole on the occasion of Beddoes' death. "O dear Poole!," he wrote,

> Beddoes' departure has taken more hope out of my life than any former event except perhaps T. Wedgwood's. That did indeed pull very hard at me; never a week, seldom two days have passed in which the recollection has not made me

> sad or thoughtful. Beddoes' seems to pull yet harder, because it combines with the former, because it is the *second*, and because I have not been in the habit of connecting such a weight of despondency with my attachment to him as with my love of my revered and dear benefactor. (544)

Some of Coleridge's pain at losing Beddoes and Wedgwood is surely the pain of losing two intimate friends. But Coleridge's connection of the two is provocative because, in a very real way, Beddoes and Wedgwood were the two men who offered Coleridge ways to think through and imaginatively create around his ill body—the first through his medical work (and *Hygëia* in particular), and the latter through his example and through their shared sympathies.

Coleridge concludes his 1809 letter to Poole with a description of his "health," which he reports "is more *regular* than formerly … yet my sufferings are often great, and I am rarely indeed wholly without pain or sensations more oppressive than definite pain. But my mind, and what is far better, my *will* is active" (544). His reference to the will is notable given the letter's references to Wedgwood, for whom volition was the key to diminishing pain and cultivating a life of increased pleasures. Coleridge's active will, and his active mind, would ensure that even in the absence of Beddoes and Wedgwood, Coleridge might continue to produce, as always, *through* and *because of* his ill body. As Coleridge's body evolved from early illnesses to years of opium addiction to years in treatment under the care of Dr. Gillman, his various textual embodiments equally evolved. But to the end, Coleridge's texts continued to demonstrate an unremitting desire to express—and also the vexing difficulty of articulating—the embodied experience, and his texts bear the marks of his body in pain.

I wish to end with an excerpt of a letter Coleridge wrote in 1803. It is as much a prose poem as anything else, and if presented to an audience as a twentieth-century illness narrative, I suspect it would be unquestioningly read as such. Tobin Siebers has argued that modernist aesthetics is fundamentally disability aesthetics insofar as modernist art subverts genre and

embraces distortion, disfigurement, and fragmentation. I would add in this particularly literary context that modernist aesthetics is disability aesthetics insofar as it encourages non-normative modes of articulation. Coleridge did not know that his daughter Sara would advocate reading *Biographia Literaria* from the standpoint of disability and as a text that embodies a kind of disability aesthetics. But in Tom Wedgwood Coleridge knew he had an audience who might do this naturally through their embodied sympathies. This is the Coleridge I would like to recuperate and introduce to a twenty-first century audience—a Coleridge who might rightly be understood not just as the author of the first poetic treatment of modern "disability," but who also might be understood as offering the first postmodern illness narratives:

> For 5 months past my mind has been strangely shut up. I have taken the paper with the intention to write to you many times; but it has been all one blank Feeling, one blank idealess Feeling. I had nothing to say,—I could say nothing. How dearly I love you, my very Dreams make known to me.—I will not trouble you with the gloomy Tale of my Health. While I am awake, by patience, employment, effort of mind, & walking I can keep the fiend at Arm's length; but the Night is my Hell, Sleep my tormenting Angel. Three nights out of four I fall asleep, struggling to lie awake--& my frequent Night-screams have almost made me a nuisance in my own house. Dreams with me are no Shadows, but the very Substances & foot-thick Calaties of my Life. Beddoes, who has been to me ever a very kind man, suspects that my Stomach 'brews Vinegar'—it may be so—but I have no other symptom but that of Flatulence / shewing itself by an asthmatic Puffing, & transient paralytic Affections / this Flatulence has never any acid Taste in my mouth / I have now no bowel-rumblings. I am too careful of my Diet—the supercarbonated Kali does me no service, nor magnesia—neither have I any headach. But I am grown hysterical.—Meantime my Looks & Strength have improved. I myself fully believe it to be either atonic, hypochondriacal Gout, or a scrophulous affection of the mesenteric Glands. In the hope of driving the Gout, if Gout it should be, into the feet, I walked, previously to my getting into the Coach at Perth, 264 miles in eight Days, with no unpleasant fatigur: & if I could do you any service by coming to town, & there were no Coaches, I would undertake to be with you, on foot, in 7 days.—I must have strength somewhere / My head is indefatigably strong, my limbs too are strong—but acid or not acid, Gout or Scrofula, Something there is [in] my stomach or Guts that transubstantiates my Bread & Wine into the Body & Blood of the Devil—Meat & Drink I should say—for I eat but little bread, & take nothing, in any form, spirituous or narcotic, stronger than Table Beer.—I am about to try the new Gout

Medicine / & if it cures me, I will turn Preacher, form a new Sect in honor of the Discoverer, & make a greater clamour *in his Favour*, as the Anti-podagra, 'that was to come & is already in the world', than ever the Puritans did *against* the poor Pope, as Anti-christ.—" (991 – 2).

Chapter 5

Sublime Encounters:
Wordsworthian Admonishment and the Aesthetics of Human Difference

Wordsworth frequently depicts scenes of admonishment. Among these are the encounters with the Leech Gatherer, the Blind Beggar, Simon Lee, the peasant of Point Rash-Judgment, Martha Ray, the Discharged Soldier, and Johnny Foy—all exemplary instances of what Seamus Heaney calls "poetic recognition scenes" that lead to "the growth or reorientation of the poet's mind," and announce or remind the poet of his "Vocation" (19, 22). Wordsworth's admonished speakers, who are poet-narrators or figures of the author himself, often apprehend these figures as otherworldly forms and shapes before recognizing them as humans. Yet Wordsworth's admonitory figures are very much of this world: the poet describes their bodies in minute and often visceral detail, from Johnny Foy's burr to Simon Lee's swollen ankles and thin, dry legs. All are characterized by their non-normative embodiments,[1] and Wordsworth's speakers tend to identify the disabled body itself (the Leech Gatherer's form or the Blind Beggar's eyes) as the specific source of their aesthetic and ethical crises.

Wordsworth's comments on Tom Wedgwood are a useful starting point for addressing the relationship between Wordsworthian admonishment and the disabled body. Wedgwood's health dramatically deteriorated in the years after he first met the poet at Alfoxden in 1797. At the time of their last meeting, Wedgwood was nearing the end of his short life and was in near-constant, excruciating pain. Wordsworth described the encounter in a September 1806 letter to Wedgwood's brother Josiah (Jos):

[1] In Wordsworth's poetry, madness and idiocy are very much embodied human differences. This is partly in keeping with contemporary scientific and medical trends of locating the mind—and therefore "disorders" of the mind—in the brain. (See Richardson.) But this reflects Wordsworth's understanding of the ways that it is through the medium of the body that mental differences become evident.

> When your brother entered the room where I am now writing, about four years ago, I was quite heart-stricken; he was deplorably changed, which was painful to see; but his calm and dignified manner, united with his tall person and beautiful face, produced in me an impression of sublimity beyond what I have ever experienced from the appearance of any other human being. (7)

Wordsworth uses the same terminology to describe Wedgwood's sublimity that he uses elsewhere to describe the natural sublime. In the textual fragment "[The Beautiful and the Sublime]" the poet defines sublimity as "exist[ing] in the extinction of the comparing power of the mind, & in intense unity" (356). Like Wedgwood's peculiarly "united" face, body, and affect (one "beautiful," one "deplorably changed," and the last "calm and dignified"), a rock and a waterfall "will be found to have exalted the mind to the highest state of sublimity when they are thought of in that state of opposition & yet reconcilement" (357). But unlike the natural sublime, which for Wordsworth depends on the spectator—following Kant (via Coleridge), he writes that it is "absurd" to "talk of an object as being sublime … in itself" (357)—Wedgwood seems to be partly responsible for the response his "appearance" has elicited.

In his letter to Jos Wedgwood Wordsworth articulates two important characteristics of the crises that the disabled body can catalyze—characteristics shared by the most potent admonitory encounters that appear in his poetry. First, Wordsworth indicates the capacity of the disabled body to provoke a sense of sublimity and thereby initiate reflection on critical aesthetic and ethical issues. His final encounter with Wedgwood raises questions about the human sublime and the extent to which it may be produced through an intersubjective process; other Wordsworthian encounters with disability raise questions about perception, for example, or sympathy, narrative process, or the epistemology of various forms of non-normative embodiment. Second, Wordsworth demonstrates how the disabled body can become a kind of limit case for humanity. He experiences Wedgwood as the most sublime of all humans he has

encountered, and elsewhere figures disability at the boundary of man and animal or human and thing—or at the edge of articulation or margins of society. If we do not consider Wordsworth a disability poet, it is perhaps due to our own perspective. [2] Once one is attentive to embodied human difference, it becomes clear how important disability was to Wordsworth's poetics and philosophy.

In this chapter I argue for the centrality of disability in Wordsworthian aesthetics, first as it shapes the poet's development, as represented in *The Prelude* (1805), and then as it informs his published poetry and the critical responses it provoked. To do this I focus specifically on the development of the Discharged Soldier passage—with a brief digression to "Poems on the Naming of Places"—and then the Blind Beggar passage as it appears in *The Prelude* (1805), "The Thorn," and "The Idiot Boy." The range of disabilities I take on is intentionally broad. What I hope to demonstrate is the extent to which Wordsworth stages sublime scenes of admonishment around the disabled body, providing narrator and reader alike with an invitation to ethical inquiry and sympathetic expansion.

Not without self-blame

In the years of his acquaintance with and subsequent reflection on Wedgwood, Wordsworth wrote a series of poetic passages about bodies that bear a striking resemblance to Wedgwood's sublime form and demonstrate the poet's evolving ideas about the aesthetics of disability. We now refer to the first as "[The Discharged Soldier]" (1798). I will discuss its 1805 revision at greater length, but the earlier passage warrants immediate attention for its

[2] As David Mitchell has aptly noted, "Once readers begin to actively seek out representations of disability in our literatures, it is difficult for them to avoid being struck by disability's tendency to proliferate in texts with which they believed themselves to be utterly familiar" (19). Paul Longmore has similarly revealed the ubiquity of disability in film, and Tobin Siebers argues of the visual arts that "disability is rarely recognized as such, even though it often serves as the very factor that establishes works as superior examples of aesthetic beauty" (4).

unfulfilled admonishments and unrealized sublimity, which lay the conceptual groundwork for the admonishments in *The Prelude*. In the 1798 passage Wordsworth's narrator comes upon a man whose body—tall, lean, and sickly, much like Wedgwood's—arrests his movement. The narrator's concealed observation of the soldier indicates an absorption with physical form that is characteristic of Wordsworthian encounters with disabled figures, and is akin to the cognitive suspension of sublime experience. The narrator knows his voyeurism is unsustainable, however; he indicates, "Not without reproach / Had I prolonged my watch" (83 – 4). This recognition is a gesture towards admonishment, though not a fully realized one.

In the 1798 passage the narrator offers a more detailed description of the soldier's body than in its 1805 version. Likewise, only the 1798 passage offers the soldier's voice as he indicates what will be implicit in *The Prelude*, that he was "loth to move" because of his "weakness" (129). More importantly, in 1798 the soldier responds to the dog's howl in a way that suggests the psychological effects of war. He admits, "that village mastiff fretted me, / And every second moment rang a peal / Felt at my heart" (131 – 3). This extended portrait harnesses the aesthetic potency of disability for a largely implicit but nonetheless powerful commentary on war, imperialism, and class. It also provides a convincing basis for the narrator's assertion that the soldier's "strange half-absence" and "tone of … indifference" are extreme enough to have limited his aesthetic impact; otherwise he "might have seemed" "solemn and sublime" (141 – 4). Like Wedgwood, the soldier is partly responsible for the aesthetic response he has provoked.

Having led the soldier to a cottage for shelter, the narrator delivers a "reproof," asking him to seek help sooner in the future, to which the soldier replies, "My trust is in the God of Heaven, / And in the eye of him that passes me" (164 – 5). The passage's earliest surviving draft frames the soldier's words evocatively: they appear on the final page of one of Dorothy

Wordsworth's notebooks, woven between 16 ½ scattered "amen"s written in Dorothy's hand.[3] A textual coincidence, these "amen"s nonetheless resonate with the poem's earliest drafts, which largely succeed in containing the potential "disturbance" of the encounter, to use Susan Wolfson's term—and particularly the closing exchange of reproofs, so pregnant with disruptive potential. The extended version of the 1798 manuscript draft ends as the narrator responds to the soldier's thanks, "I returned / The blessing of the poor unhappy man, / And so we parted - - - - - - - - - - - -." The dashes Dorothy uses here, unfortunately not often reproduced in print, draw attention to the passage's conspicuously resolved conclusion, which prevents the final exchange from achieving the full effects of poetic admonishment. Although the episode never passes the threshold of aesthetic crisis, it demonstrates the sublime and admonitory tendencies of encounters with the disabled body, which Wordsworth will soon begin to more fully exploit.

In 1800 Wordsworth excerpted two lines from the 1798 Discharged Soldier passage for inclusion in Part IV of "Poems on the Naming of Places," "A narrow girdle of rough stones and crags." In the poem the narrator and "two beloved friends" (Coleridge and Dorothy) apprehend the "figure of a Man," a wording that calls the stranger's personhood into question through the medium of his form; the three "with one and the same voice / We all cried out, that he must be indeed / An idle man" for fishing when work was available and wages high (55 – 7). When they approach the peasant they are able to see him for what he actually is:

> He stood alone; whereat he turned his head
> To greet us—and we saw a man worn down
> By sickness, gaunt and lean, with sunken cheeks
> And wasted limbs, his legs so long and lean
> That for my single self *I looked at them,*
> *Forgetful of the body they sustained*.— (63 – 8, italics mine)

[3] My thanks to the Wordsworth Trust and the staff at the Jerwood Centre for the opportunity of consulting the various manuscript drafts of the Discharged Soldier passage.

The lines lifted from the 1798 Discharged Soldier passage (italicized above) demonstrate a kind of sublime cognitive suspension, and in the "single self" there is a conceptual echo of the sublime's "unity."

In July 1800, Coleridge writes of an encounter that at least partly inspired "Poems on the Naming of Places": "Poor fellow at a distance [—] idle? in this hay time when wages are so high? Come near—thin, pale, can scarce speak—or throw out his fishing rod" (Perry, *Notebooks* 18). The editors of the Cornell Wordsworth read this as an indication that it was Coleridge who was initially intended to write a poem about the encounter for *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).[4] But what I am interested in here is the fact that two of the three physical details Coleridge notes about the man are not at all represented in Wordsworth's poetic account. Instead Wordsworth chooses to use details that he has already used in the Discharged Soldier passage and descriptors he will also use in reference to Tom Wedgwood, intensifying the relationship between the three bodies.

Wordsworth's narrator never fleshes out the peasant's character and affect, but his sickly body alone, misrecognized and then revealed, suffices to deliver an unambiguous "admonishment," "What need there is to be reserved in speech, / And temper all our thoughts with charity" (82, 78 – 9). For the three friends, the landscape and poem itself will serve as reminders of the "serious musing" and "self-reproach" provoked by their perceptive failure and by the peasant's embodied reality (76). The poem's admonishment, coupled with its suggestions of sublimity, indicate a correlation between aesthetic crisis and moral reorientation. Like the 1798 Discharged Soldier, the sickly peasant literally and symbolically embodies the margins of human society. The encounter thereby offers a lesson that is at once ethical and political, although the poem does not engage with the subtler and more fundamental kinds of aesthetic and

[4] Given Coleridge's ambivalence about his own ill body, I am not surprised that Coleridge did not convert his experience of the encounter into verse.

intersubjective questions that Wordsworth will take up in *The Prelude* and in his 1806 letter to Jos Wedgwood.

As Wordsworth reworked the 1798 Discharged Soldier passage for inclusion in *The Prelude*, he may well have had in his mind both the peasant of Point Rash-Judgment and Tom Wedgwood as he appeared to Wordsworth in 1802—sharpening his sense of their aesthetic possibilities and admonitory power. When the soldier emerges in Book IV of *The Prelude* (1805), Wordsworth has been engaged in "a favorite pleasure" (4.364), a solitary evening walk. Aurally evocative, the passage describes what is at once a moment of singular calmness and also sensory stimulation, both "heard and felt" (4.391), as the poet enjoys "animal delight, / A self-possession felt in every pause / And every gentle movement of my frame" (4.397 – 9). His body and the surrounding environment in harmony, the young man experiences "restoration like the calm of sleep, / But sweeter far" (4.387 – 8).

The action and text shift when "a sudden turning of the road / Presented to [his] view an uncouth shape" (4.401 – 2), the Discharged Soldier, whose unmoving form inhibits the poet's forward progress. Wordsworth's initial reaction to the soldier, to "sli[p]" into concealment and watch him, "[m]yself unseen" (4.403, 405), betrays both shock and fascination.[5] In Richard J. Onorato's words, he does not "kno[w] what to make of the figure—how to 'take' him" (251). The man is too tall, too pale, too weak. He is somewhat human, but not fully so, a borderer in every sense of the word:

> He was of stature tall,
> A foot above man's common measure tall,
> Stiff in his form, and upright, lank and lean—
> A man more meager, as it seemed to me,

[5] Here Wordsworth describes a phenomenon more recently taken up by disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson: on encountering the disabled, "the nondisabled person may feel fear, pity, fascination, repulsion, or merely surprise, none of which is expressible according to social protocol" (*Extraordinary Bodies* 12)—or, I would add, in the language available to us.

> Was never seen abroad by night or day.
> His arms were long, and bare his hands; his mouth
> Shewed ghastly in the moonlight; from behind,
> A milestone propped him, and his figure seemed
> Half sitting, and half standing… (4.405 – 413)

A greater contrast to young Wordsworth's easy, vital physicality could hardly be imagined, yet the poet's "mingled … fear and sorrow" points to more than just difference (4.20 – 1). The soldier's tall, thin "form" resembles what we know Wordsworth's to have looked like (4.407). The poet has therefore encountered what is at once a radically alien figure and also an intimate double, a projection of how his own body might appear if wasted by disease or poverty or old age. Twice-conditional grammar indicates the extent of Wordsworth's interpretive incapacity—a suspension of his comparing powers—as he notes, "From his lips meanwhile / There issued murmuring sounds, *as if* of pain / *Or* of uneasy thought" (4.421 – 3, italics mine). Through revision, the moment at which the poet condemns his voyeuristic observation becomes an instance of disability aesthetics, as knotty and difficult to parse as the soldier's non-normative body itself. In the 1805 passage the moment also comes to syntactically embody the unsettling feeling of admonishment: "Without self-blame / I had not thus prolonged my watch" (4.432 – 3).

These early intimations of sublimity and admonishment are complicated by the poet's interaction with the soldier, whose apparent disaffectedness proves problematic. By removing the soldier's voice from *The Prelude*, the poet at once foregrounds his own fraught response and effaces the very thing—"all [the soldier] said"—that he claims has troubled it:

> Solemn and sublime
> He might have seemed, but that in all he said
> There was a strange half-absence, and a tone
> Of weakness and indifference, as of one
> Remembering the importance of his theme
> But feeling it no longer. (4.473 – 8)

Wordsworth communicates his ambivalence through enjambment and inverted grammar, explicitly invoking the soldier's sublimity before only imperfectly disqualifying it in the following line. Here and elsewhere I read such non-normative poetics—variously distorted articulative forms—as resonant with the disabled bodies and embodied encounters Wordsworth describes. In this passage the poet's anticipation, too, is palpable—the soldier could have, perhaps *should* have, seemed otherwise—and like the Simplon Pass episode, the Discharged Soldier passage depicts the aftermath of aesthetic expectation. The lingering experience of sublimity is evident in the poet's continued fixation with the soldier's body, the "ill-suppressed astonishment" with which he has regarded the "tall / And ghastly figure moving at [his] side" (4.467 – 8).

The soldier has told his story—"He told in simple words a soldier's tale" (4.445)—but it proves insufficient, as soon enough Wordsworth cannot "forbear / To question him of what he had endured / From hardship, battle, or the pestilence" (4.469 – 71). The almost compulsive desire to account for and narrate the non-normative body is common in Wordsworth's poetry. Martha Ray, Simon Lee, and Johnny Foy are among other disabled figures that also demand—and repeatedly frustrate—the narrator's interpretation and articulation. In *Aesthetic Nervousness*, Ato Quayson explains such responses by linking disability to the sublime: both "elicit[t] language and narrativity even while resisting or frustrating complete comprehension and representation" (22).

Wordsworth's reaction to the soldier is most uneasy at the 1805 passage's conclusion. He greets the cottager by awkwardly, even defensively announcing the soldier's humanity before displacing it through enjambment and syntactical inversion, just as he had earlier displaced the

sublime: "My friend, here is a man / By sickness overcome" (4.484 – 5).[6] The unsettlingly self-serving "reproof" Wordsworth offers the soldier before their parting—asking him not to "henceforth / … linger in the public ways" but rather to immediately seek assistance (4.489 – 90)—suggests the poet's desire to henceforth avoid such difficult encounters. In its focus on the poet's anxious aesthetic response, *The Prelude* has significantly revised the 1798 Discharged Soldier passage. In this new context, the soldier's reply—his sole utterance in 1805—does more to implicate the young poet's perceptive (in)capacity, as the man's "trust" rests both in God and "in the *eye* of him that passes me" (4.493 – 5, emphasis mine). Likewise, this new context lends increased ambivalence to the poet's description of the soldier's thanks, delivered "in a voice that seemed / To speak with a reviving interest, / Till then unfelt" (4.498 – 500). "[R]eviving interest" could as easily refer to the soldier's altered affect or to the renewal of the poet's interest by a satisfying, because relatively superficial, gesture of social recognition. Throughout the 1805 passage, and particularly towards its close, it is difficult to tell the extent to which Wordsworth's fears, expectations, and interpretive shortcomings may have complicated the encounter.

Wordsworth immediately registers the fallout of the episode through his inability to move freely, as "Back I cast a look, / And lingered near the door" (4.502 – 3). Unlike the earlier silence of his solitary walk, the "quiet heart" with which Wordsworth leaves the soldier suggests an unease (4.504). Because Book IV of *The Prelude* (1805) ends in this way, the passage's inhibition and suspension are yet more palpable. As Susan Wolfson has noted, "the episode remains all the more haunting for not being analyzed" (*The Questioning Presence* 141).[7] Both

[6] In the 1798 version of the poem the narrator's introduction ends with the note that "The service if need be I will requite"—opening up a more explicit set of economic and class concerns. Similarly, the 1798 version, through extended references to the tropics, also raises more explicitly a set of imperial—and again class—concerns. See Alan Bewell's *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*.

[7] The textual placement of this encounter makes its irresolution more pronounced than other of Wordsworth's strongly ambivalent memories that are nevertheless more fully assimilated into the fabric of the poem, including the woodcock snaring incident, after which Wordsworth recalls, "low breathings coming after me, and sounds / Of

through the introduction of this sustained ambivalence and because of its incorporation into Wordsworth's autobiographical poem, the Discharged Soldier passage becomes a paradigmatic poetic admonishment.

The Discharged Soldier's body invites reflection and reorientation on issues of sympathy, aging, and community.[8] He raises vital questions about the lived experience of time, space, and movement—topics of equal importance to recent disability theorists and to Wordsworth—and also about the aesthetics of the human body. In the converse cases of Tom Wedgwood and the 1798 Discharged Soldier, Wordsworth figures the human sublime as a mutually constitutive act between the viewer and the disabled individual. The ambivalence of the 1805 Discharged Soldier passage complicates the role of intersubjectivity in relation to the aesthetics of disability. The episode raises but does not resolve the problem of perception—the poet's eye itself—and the extent to which it may be responsible for failures of intersubjective and aesthetic response in human encounters.

As if admonished from another world

The Discharged Soldier's admonishment plays itself out in the unfolding of *The Prelude*—and particularly in the Blind Beggar episode, which I read as its companion encounter because of the way the episodes work together to establish the importance of disability aesthetics to the growth of the poet's mind and his social philosophy. Just as Wordsworth encounters the

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undistinguishable motion" (1. 330 – 1)—and the skiff stealing scene, during which Wordsworth feels that "the huge cliff" "still / With measured motion, like a living thing / Strode after me" (1.409 – 412). Wolfson rightly notes of the 1850 version that it "seems intended to mitigate this effect and contain its disturbance" (*The Questioning Presence* 141).

[8] The soldier's body is likewise key to the passage's continuing appeal to readers, in both its 1798 and later versions, as well as the critical responses it has elicited. Embodied difference is at the fore, for example, in Jonathan Wordsworth's reading of the Discharged Soldier as a borderer in *The Borders of Vision*. Nancy Yousef implicitly recognizes that only such a body as the soldier's could function as it does—as an interruption, a "refut[ation]," and an object of projection that problematizes Wordsworth's "bold epistemological claim" from earlier in Book IV that "The face of every neighbor whom I met / Was as a volume to me" (Yousef 210; Wordsworth: 4:58 – 9).

sick and unmoving Discharged Soldier at a moment of heightened physicality, Book VII of *The Prelude* depicts an encounter between, in Richard J. Onorato's words, "The man who cannot see and the poet who has been observing everything" (257). In "Residence in London," Wordsworth registers an almost encyclopedic array of urban spectacles; quick, superficial descriptions, delivered in Wordsworth's "poet-impresario" voice (Hertz 54), replace the rich and often uncannily particular details of his rural descriptions. Rather than observing, acting, and reacting, Wordsworth is acted upon: as William B. Thesing has argued, "The great poet in the city is indeed a passive consumer… [with] no control over the 'spectacles' that 'present themselves'" (19).

The critical prelude to Wordsworth's encounter with the Blind Beggar depicts the poet grappling with his urban spectatorship and his questionable subjectivity in the cityscape. When Wordsworth says to himself that "The face of every one / That passes by me is a mystery" (7.597 – 8), he confirms that not only is the crowd an inaccessible visual object but so, too, is "every one" in the crowd. What leaves Wordsworth "oppressed" are "thoughts of what, and whither, when and how"—and it seems that, if fulfilled, these questions might allow the "shapes before [his] eyes" to become fully human subjects (7.599 – 601). Wordsworth's subjectivity, too, is at risk when "all the ballast of familiar life… / Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known" (7.604, 607).

It is at this moment that he encounters the Blind Beggar, who poses a revelatory challenge to both the young Wordsworth in London and the Wordsworth writing *The Prelude*:

> And once, far travelled in such mood, beyond
> The reach of common indications, lost
> Amid the moving pageant, 'twas my chance
> Abruptly to be smitten with the view
> Of a blind beggar, who, with upright face,
> Stood propped against a wall, upon his chest

> Wearing a written paper, to explain
> The story of the man, and who he was.
> My mind did at this spectacle turn round
> As with the might of waters, and it seemed
> To me that in this label was a type
> Or emblem of the utmost that we know
> Both of ourselves and of the universe,
> And on the shape of this unmoving man,
> His fixèd face and sightless eyes, I looked,
> As if admonished from another world. (7:608 – 23)

Wordsworth's choice of "smitten" to describe the man's immediate impact is arresting. By recalling both smite ("to strike or hit") and smit ("to infect"), "smitten" evokes the visceral impact—even affective violence—of encounters with embodied difference, as well as the uncontainable after-effects of such moments (oed.com).[9] Wordsworth explicitly figures this confrontation with disability in sublime terms—as a moment of suspension and intense unity—and it completes the poet's admonitory reorientation, as his "mind did … turn round / As with the might of waters" (7:616 – 7).

Wordsworth attributes the beggar's singular impact to his blindness: his "fixèd face and sightless eyes" leave the poet "admonished" (7:622 – 3). The reasons for the immediate and lingering impact of his non-normative embodiment are various, and prime among them is his public narrative, which raises pressing questions of textual representation and autobiography. Because he "Wear[s] a written paper, to explain / The story of the man, and who he was" (613 – 5), the beggar's identity is externalized and fixed in text he cannot read and, presumably, in text he could not have written himself. Because the beggar at most dictated his story, his sign calls into question the possibility of authorial agency and intentionality; so clearly alienated from his (auto)biography, he raises the troubling possibility that a questionable text can displace the very

[9] This second sense of smitten (from "smit") is akin to the common association of disability with contagion. Although this was a latent association at Wordsworth's time, it would become more culturally prominent over the course of the nineteenth century, and would figure centrally in many public health and eugenic campaigns.

human the text is meant to represent. Further, because in the "label" Wordsworth reads "a type / Or emblem of the utmost that we know / Both of ourselves and of the universe" (619 – 21), the encounter goes so far as to implicate the limits of self-knowledge and philosophical understanding.[10]

Critics are correct to connect the anxieties of this encounter to the anxieties surrounding Wordsworth's composition of *The Prelude,* reading it in relation to problems of origin and authorship. Geraldine Friedman has argued, for example, that by "presenting a double not only for Wordsworth but for *The Prelude* as well, it [the passage] questions the legitimacy of autobiography as self-representation" (125). Wordsworth's encounter with the Blind Beggar certainly offers insight into the non-publication of *The Prelude,* embodying Wordsworth's fear at the dangers of sending one's story into the public realm. As Wordsworth wrote in an 1804 letter to Thomas De Quincey, "This poem [*The Prelude*] will not be published these many years, and never during my lifetime, till I have finished a larger and more important work to which it is tributary"—that is, *The Recluse* (531). The grammar of the statement is troubled, as is its conception of time. It is clear enough, however, that Wordsworth felt compelled to retain discretionary power over his poem—and in this context it is no wonder why. "What if," Jonathan Wordsworth writes, "[Wordsworth's] own life and work—*The Prelude* is after all 'The story of the man, and who he was'—could be seen by some remote and dispassionate wisdom as 'but a label on a blind man's chest'?" (306). And what if the process that brought Wordsworth's own autobiography into public view were as little under his intentional control as the process that likely created the blind beggar's label?

[10] The earliest extant version of these lines, in MS X makes this crisis yet clearer: "and I thought / That even the very most of what we know / Both of ourselves and of the universe, / The whole of what is written to our view, / Is but a label on a blind man's chest."

The shadowy presence of blind bards past amplify the beggar's ambivalent connection to Wordsworth and his poetic project. Edward Larissy has read echoes of Ossian in the encounter,[11] although the blind bard most immediately present in the context of *The Prelude* is John Milton. Nicholas Roe aptly reminds us of Wordsworth's early sense of "republican fellowship" with Milton, before the development of the intense and often antagonistic "creative competition" that largely drives the "Prospectus" to the project *The Prelude* was to precede ("Milton" 118). Roe's formulation—a complication of Harold Bloom's view of the literary relationship—is useful in allowing us to see how the beggar might function as a double for the young poet writing and thinking in concord with John Milton, and also as a double for the mature poet writing against John Milton. As such the beggar more multiply embodies the tensions—political, poetic, subjective—between Wordsworth's past and present selves.[12]

If there is ample cause to emphasize the beggar's text and the symbolic significance of his blindness, there is also good cause to emphasize the realities and realism of the Blind Beggar's embodied subjectivity and their likely importance to Wordsworth. *The Prelude* cues us to such a reading by framing the beggar in such a way that he is for the most part free of the kinds of emblematic features common to Romantic depictions of blindness. He emerges in Wordsworth's visual field without the objects or stances that during the era would have much

[11] Edward Larissy pays particular attention to the "second-sight procession, such as glides / Over still mountains, or appears in dreams" (602 – 3)—the image that directly precedes the appearance of the beggar. In the "mountains" and "dreams" Larissy finds a particular reference to "Ossian and other Celtic seers," a connection that he claims "would have been automatic for a contemporary reader (if *The Prelude* had possessed one)." It is also appropriate to also note here the more general tradition of the blind visionary, which dates back to classical antiquity. The blind seer Tiresias is perhaps the most obvious example of this tradition, though Moshe Barasch suggests that traces of visionary power are found in representations of blindness from the age of Tiresias through the Renaissance.

[12] For more on Wordsworth's relationship with John Milton, see Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, and Robin Jarvis' *Wordsworth, Milton, and the Theory of Poetic Relations*. For a different take on this doubleness, see Neil Hertz's chapter "The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime." Here Hertz argues that the beggar becomes a double for Wordsworth, and necessarily so within the structure of sublime blockage that he explicates: "the self cannot simply think but must read the confirmation of its own integrity, which is only legible in a specular structure, a structure in which the self can perform that 'supererogatory identification with the blocking agent'" (*The End of the Line* 54 – 5.)

more fully conjured the image of the blind visionary and its culturally inscribed meanings. That is, Wordsworth's beggar does not look towards the gods or stumble on the arm of a helping boy, but with "upright face" is beheld by passersby. Of course the blind beggar, too, was a stock character of the era, as was the sighted beggar who feigned blindness—a topic I will take up in Chapter 6 when I discuss the beggars described by Charles Lamb, who served as an urban guide to the poet and, for example, brought him and Dorothy to Bartholomew Fair in summer, 1802 (Newyln, "City" 428). Because of Wordsworth's realistic and unsentimental description of the man's fixed face and sightless eyes, the passage resists these associations. Stripped to a body and text, the beggar disrupts the troubling pattern of features common to pre-Romantic and Romantic representations of blindness. He embodies but does not perform his impairment, and we ought therefore to particularly attend to the realities rather than the symbolism of his blindness.[13]

The beggar's alternative mode of subjectivity is critical in a poem so concerned with social exchange, visual perception, and the relationship between the senses. Like the Blind Beggar, Wordsworth had a sensory impairment that would have necessarily impacted his perception of the external world and the development of his aesthetic sensibility. But the specific nature of the poet's impairment, anosmia, would have made his sensory reality dramatically different from the beggar's—in actuality, but also conceptually. Most Western aesthetic theory

[13] According to art historian Moshe Barasch, an artistic tradition, one in use for over a millennium, depicted the blind explicitly looking upwards: the pose "is found in almost all renderings of blind figures in antiquity, and it can be seen in many works of painting and sculpture done in later ages"; after a lull in popularity, the pose again became, by the fifteenth century, "a hallmark of the image of the blind" (42, 119). Such figures can be found in works including Ribera's seventeenth century *The Blind Beggar and His Boy* and Raphael's *Parnassus*, to name two—and although implications vary by context, the gaze typically evokes religious and/or spiritual associations. Wordsworth's beggar also lacks other traditional gestures of the blind, including the "outstretched hand" that Barasch notes was, by the Renaissance, "a shorthand emblem for blindness," and the characteristic—and sometimes cruelly comic—"hesitant step" and stumbling that so many artists and authors have used to signify the weakness and need of visually impaired figures (113, 102). (On the point of stumbling, one need look no further than Brueghel's iconic *The Blind Leading the Blind* (also known as *The Parable of the Blind*) to understand the end to which artists used the image of the stumbling blind.) Further, Wordsworth's Blind Beggar lacks the highly symbolic accoutrements of the blind—e.g. a guiding boy, a guiding dog, or a walking stick.

(including Kant's) has understood vision to be among the higher senses. By contrast, smell, which the poet lacked, is usually thought to be base—in large part because it is experienced as more immediately and necessarily embodied, and less easily abstracted. The common notion that visual data can intellectually and aesthetically transcend corporeal experience takes on a dark urgency in the hands of the anosmic poet, who lacked one of the more "bodily" senses. In Book XI of *The Prelude* (1805), Wordsworth calls vision "[t]he most despotic of our senses," describing a time when "the eye was the master of the heart" (11.173, 171). This "tyranny" of the eye is combatted by Nature, which "summons all the senses each / To counteract the other and themselves, / And makes them all… / … subservient in their turn" (11.179 – 182). The Blind Beggar is likewise key to the evolving realignment of the poet's senses and his perceptive capacity in human encounters.

In Book VII of *The Prelude* (1805), the poet catalogs the realities of a rapidly growing metropolis and a dramatically evolving cityscape. But without one of the non-visual senses—and especially without the visceral data communicated by urban smells—he would have been in a position to more easily become overwhelmed by London as an unreal (rather than, say, disgusting) city, little more than a profusion of meaningless spectacles. As Megan Becker-Leckrone has written, "Wordsworth's London is a kind of hell of the imagination, where an intense and often horrific overload of sensory input challenges the poet's powers of understanding and meaning-making" (999). The city's spectacles include the human form, which in Book VII is little more than a visual index, as when Wordsworth finds in the crowd "all specimens of man" (7.236): the Italian, Jew, Turk, Swede, Russian, Frenchman, Spaniard, Indian, Moor, Malay, Lascar, Tartar, Chinese, Negro.

Part of what is so troubling about Wordsworth's urban spectatorship is that the potential for human interaction disappears as the individual body, like the crowd, becomes a spectacle that is apprehended only superficially. Prime among Wordsworth's unsettling urban encounters is that with the prostitute—an encounter that doesn't fit temporally with his residence in London but whose appearance in Book VII is crucial to establishing Wordsworth's crises of urban vision. Deborah Epstein Nord aptly notes that "'Woman,' so facelessly, so generically evoked" (354) is remarkable from a poet known for depicting the particularities of bodies and the awkward intimacies of human interactions. All we are given from Wordsworth's encounter with the prostitute is a description of his absolute shock: "… a barrier seemed at once / Thrown in, that from humanity divorced / The human form …" (424 – 6). In the words of Epstein Nord, "difference overwhelms him" (354), effectively preempting any meaningful interchange—and it is telling that he frames his trauma in terms of the superficial being cleaved from the substantial. Retrospectively, Wordsworth feels "a milder sadness of such spectacles" (430), but "spectacles" such women remain.

Even the rosy babe who Wordsworth sees outside of the theater is relegated to the spectacular. A perversion of the blest babe and his visual intersubjectivity, the rosy babe and his beauty are exaggerated into hackneyed singularity and consumed by the spectator: he is "as beautiful" as any who "ever sate upon a mother's knee" (371), with "beauty in such excess" and "lusty vigour, more than infantine" (406, 379); he is "a cottage child, but ne'er / Saw I by cottage or elsewhere a babe / By Nature's gifts so honored" (381). In this urban context his beauty brings to Wordsworth's mind its inevitable decay, "the years / That bear us forward to distress and guilt, / Pain and abasement" (404 – 6). The poet also describes its immediate implications, the babe's commodification as he is "environed with a ring / Of chance spectators" who devour

his countenance (386 – 7). One wonders if the child could ever be more than a visual object, surrounded by "dissolute men / And shameless women" (387 – 8). For Wordsworth, at least, he remains eerily preserved in the mind's eye, "as if embalmed / By Nature" (400 – 1).

At the very moment when Wordsworth's line of vision has threatened to annihilate his subjectivity and the subjectivity of all passersby, the poet encounters a man whose sensory experience and urban subjectivity are as non-visual as Wordsworth's are non-olfactory. The Blind Beggar is a "spectacle" incapable of reciprocating Wordsworth's act of visual objectification (7.616). His vision necessarily extends beneath the visible surface of things: he is certainly not free of London's consumerism and bustle, but can only access the city through sound, smell, touch, and taste.[14] If Wordsworth has had—and has suffered because of—an overwhelmingly visual and abstracted metropolitan experience, the beggar's very existence serves as an admonitory confirmation that it need not be so.

Absent any interaction with the beggar, the poet's sublime admonishment is a self-generated aesthetic response, circumscribed within his mind and his verse—an example of "such structures as the mind / Builds for itself," "Though reared upon the base of outward things" (7.625 – 6, 624).[15] The episode therefore confirms the constitutive power of the poet's eye—a likelihood the 1805 Discharged Soldier passage had introduced. At the same time the beggar raises the possibility of a kind of intersubjectivity that extends beyond the visible. When Wordsworth returns to the "public road" in Book XII, he demonstrates the reorienting influence of both the soldier's and the beggar's admonishments, realizing a model of social exchange that

[14] This is assuming, of course, that unlike Wordsworth, the man has use of all of the non-visual senses.

[15] Some critics have suggested a kind of reciprocity to Wordsworth's encounter with the beggar; Megan Becker-Leckrone, for example, contends that the blind beggar "speaks, as it were, through the written text upon his chest" (996). Yet the assumption that the beggar's inner world might be accessible—or even might *seem* accessible—through his sign is specious; at the very least he quite clearly cannot verify it, and it is not unlikely that he does not even know what exactly it contains. Moreover, Wordsworth has not engaged with the man, who gives no indication that he is aware of Wordsworth's presence. Wordsworth's admonishment is therefore necessarily self-produced and self-directed. What the blind man reflects back to the young poet is his own sense of himself.

puts process and reciprocity at the fore. "[W]atch[ing] and question[ing]" now lead to "[f]amiliar talk" and a kind of seeing that penetrates deep beneath the surface (12.162 – 3). Reading the Discharged Soldier and the Blind Beggar in conversation clarifies the critical role of disability in shaping the poet's development.

Her face it was enough for me

Just as encounters with disability are formative moments in Wordsworth's account of his poetic development, he repeatedly stages encounters with variously disabled figures in his published poetry. These encounters provide admonishments to his narrators, and they often provide explicit correctives to the reader. I take up two poems from Lyrical Ballads (1798) here, both of which focus on figures of mental difference, one a "mad" woman and the other an "idiot boy." I do this in part to demonstrate the breadth of Wordsworth's engagement with disability, and in part because both poems offer especially rich commentary on issues of aesthetic appreciation and narrative production. In an important sense "The Thorn" and "The Idiot Boy" also continue the work begun by the Discharged Soldier and Blind Beggar episodes, which are so central to the development of Wordsworth's sense of intersubjectivity. Because the poems take up characters marked by mental difference—disabilities thought by many in the era to render one more akin to beast than to man—these two poems are critical to understanding Wordsworth's developing sense of the human community.

Susan Wendell argues that "the social response to and treatment of biological difference … determin[es] both the nature and the severity of disability" (42). In a sense, this idea is at the heart of "The Thorn," a poem that provocatively explores the ways we identify, interpret, and narrate madness. Long before we are introduced to Martha Ray the poem's narrator describes a

landscape rich with allusions to sordid tales about the madwoman and the baby she may have borne, killed, and buried near the thorn of the poem's title. Although these tales depict her according to normative standards of "disability"—that is, in "an absolute state of otherness," her difference "an alien condition" (Snyder, Brueggemann, Garland-Thomson 2)—the poem comes to reveal the limits of these narratives. Martha's voice and face, which are the sources of repetitive, insistent narrative, constitute the poem's admonitory cruxes.

When Martha first emerges in the sixth stanza of the poem, she is engaged in a communicative gesture without a human audience as "to herself she cries" (64). She is isolated beyond the margins of society, a common trope of madness at Wordsworth's time,[16] but Martha's access to and immersion in the landscape does not function only as a confirmation of her social otherness. Considered within Wordsworth's oeuvre it is also an important sign of capacity. The poem describes a rich register of aesthetic experience specific to Martha's social and epistemological realities as a madwoman: she participates in an intimate, reciprocal relationship with a living nature, as "she is known to every star, / And every wind that blows" (69 – 70, emphasis mine). In the contexts of Lyrical Ballads and The Prelude, it is difficult to pass over the positive implications of such relationships with the natural world.

The early focus of the narrator's preoccupation is the cause of Martha's perceived sorrow: why she acts so peculiarly, so madly, mourning alone on the mountaintop; he is clearly "possessed by [this] scene and wants his listener to be possessed by it too" (Bialostosky 98). It is a preoccupation echoed by the poem's second narrative voice, which in one stanza asks no fewer than six questions, among them "And wherefore does she cry?— / Oh wherefore? wherefore?

[16] Because of the scenic framing, Martha cannot but recall such characters as Charlotte Smith's lunatic, a "solitary wretch who hies / To the tall cliff … / And, measuring, views with wild and hollow eyes / Its distance from the waves that chide below" (1-4)—or Cowper's crazy Kate, who after the loss of her lover "roams / The dreary waste; there spends the livelong day" and, usually, "[t]he livelong night" (546-7, 549). Martha even recalls Wordsworth's own "mad mother" here, who with "wild" eyes "talked and sung the woods among" (1, 9).

tell me why…" (86-7). These repetitive, even excessive inquiries anticipate Martha's repetitive refrain, "O woe is me! oh misery! Oh woe is me!" In both instances, non-normative articulation unsettles both linguistic convention and narrative progress. Functionally, the insistent inquiries of the second narrative voice demand answers, but they also indicate a fear that answers may not exist. Martha Ray's disability is equally a source of intense interest and intense anxiety. In answering wherefore and why, the narrator immediately confesses, "I cannot tell; I wish I could; / For the true reason no one knows" (89-90), intimating the inarticulability and inaccessibility of Martha's story. Yet this confession introduces rather than halts the narrator's attempt to reconstruct Martha's story.

The narrator only seems confident in asserting that Martha was abandoned by Stephen Hill on what was to be their wedding day. The narrator calls her betrothed "Unthinking Stephen" (127). It is not a suggestive wording because it absolves Stephen in any way: in a moment of rare certainty and profound sympathy the narrator's reference to Martha's "exceeding pain" leads him to cry out, "Oh me! ten thousand times I'd rather / That he had died, that cruel father!" (141 – 3). I pointedly call this an instance of sympathy rather than pity partly because the exclamatory form of narrator's vocal ejaculation indicates pain. More compellingly, it is a sympathetic act because the narrator, in echolalic fashion, picks up a fragment of Martha's cry—"Oh me!"—and thereby quite literally embodies and expresses her pain. The fact that Stephen is "[u]nthinking" interests me because it Stephen's own failure of mind that ignites the "cruel, cruel fire" that "they say … almost turn'd her brain to tinder" (129, 132, emphasis mine). Wordsworth's wording here connects Martha's condition to the science and medicine of the time, which often located the mind—and thus disorders of the mind—in the brain.[17] This bit of anatomical discourse marks Martha as a medical "other," and pathology turns poetic with the

[17] See Richardson.

image of fire, an image that would be far less potent were it her "mind" and not the explicitly material "brain" that were aflame.

Of course "they say" much more about Martha, borrowing heavily from contemporary conventions of madness. She may have given birth to a child; the baby may have been born alive, or possibly stillborn; she may have killed it, perhaps by drowning it in the pond or hanging it on a nearby tree. [18] Structurally, these narratives embody an aesthetics of madness insofar as their qualitative characteristics—instability, fragmentation, non-"rationality," non-linearity—are also all associated with non-normative mental states. The narrator sounds somewhat more confident when he ventures, "to any eye was plain / She was with child, and she was mad" (138-9). By describing the casual diagnosis of Martha's mental status—as obvious to the layman as her pregnancy—the poem intuitively anticipates an idea now written into most definitions of "disability": to be "disabled" one must have, or be perceived to have, an body that demands medical intervention. Indeed, there is no need for professional corroboration of Martha's mental difference; it is enough that she seems and is said to be "mad" for her to effectively function as a "madwoman."

At moments, the narrator reveals the extent of his anxiety at the insufficiency of his account of Martha. Surprisingly specific details emerge: a reference to "Last Christmas," for example, when he spoke to "Old Farmer Simpson" (148-9), and a couplet about the pond's dimensions—"I've measured it from side to side: / 'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide" (32-3)—that drew Coleridge's sharp criticism as an instance of the "sudden and unpleasant sinkings" that could be felt now and again in Wordsworth's poetry (501). Such details are disruptive

[18] According to Jacobus, "The commonest of all literary associations for a thorn tree were illegitimate birth and child murder" (*Tradition* 241).

because of the unease with which they work to fix knowledge amidst the otherwise irreducible otherness of Martha's story.

By drawing attention to the thorn, which the narrator transforms into an overdetermined emblem, the poem's title itself calls attention to the cognitive and narrative processes of those who talk about Martha. Likewise, Wordsworth's 1800 note to the poem identifies its purpose as "shew[ing] the manner in which such men [as the narrator] cleave to the same ideas; and to follow the turns of passion … by which their conversation is swayed" (388). The poem demonstrates how disability and the desire to understand non-normative states of embodiment may trigger aesthetic production in the form of storytelling. There are many other moments of similar narrative excess in Wordsworth's disability poetry, demonstrating the cultural compulsion to speak of—and particularly to speculate about—disabled bodies and minds. This phenomenon is evident in the long history of Simon Lee's body, which fills more than half of the poem in which he appears, and, as I will soon discuss, also characterizes "The Idiot Boy."[19] A fascination with embodied difference is repeated at the level of Lyrical Ballads, which contains two mad women ("The Mad Mother" and "The Thorn"); an idiot ("The Idiot Boy"); two cripples ("Simon Lee," "Poems on the Naming of Places"), the former of whom is one-eyed; and the old man travelling, whose body is described in less extreme terms of physical difference but nonetheless gestures towards the disabilities of old age.

The narrator recalls meeting Martha, with "brain so wild" (147). It is a potent scene of admonishment:

> 'Twas mist and rain, and storm and rain,
> No screen, no fence could I discover,
> And then the wind! in faith, it was

[19] Although in "Simon Lee" it is purportedly the title character's history that we are given, a disproportionate focus is on his body, both in terms of its former, near-mythical prowess (" He all the country could outrun") through its stark decline in old age (he is now "[t]he weakest in the village") (41, 40).

A wind full ten times over.
I looked around, I thought I saw
A jutting crag, and off I ran,
Head-foremost, through the driving rain,
The shelter of the crag to gain,
And, as I am a man,
Instead of jutting crag, I found
A woman seated on the ground.

I did not speak—I saw her face,
Her face it was enough for me;
I turned about and heard her cry,
"O misery! O misery!" (188-202)

This encounter is unsettling, elemental, and sublime, and it powerfully evokes the affective potency of disability. The narrator's awkward assertions of his reliability ("in faith" and "as I am a man") are important, and invite multiple readings. For one they indicate the inarticulability of such sublime encounters. These assertions also suggest that the encounter operates on more fundamental registers than what has preceded it—it is not mere gossip, but the stuff of faith and fundamental humanity. The assertions also imply that the narrator may harbor fear that his own experience may be misunderstood or misappropriated, caught up in the uncontrollable storytelling that surrounds Martha.[20]

Alan Richardson usefully reminds us of the centrality of "the extrasemantic aspects of language"—e.g. moans and sounds—in Wordsworth's poetry (80), highlighting the validity and potency of such alternate modes of communication. This issue is particularly important for those who do not—or cannot—articulate verbally, or those whose sounds and gestures (like Martha's cries and the look on her face) mark them as impaired or otherwise abnormal. In this sense the narrator's encounter with Martha may be understood a particular corrective to the narrative compulsion she has inspired. At this moment it becomes clear that Martha alone—and not the

[20] Both Wolfson and Parrish suggest that the narrator might have imagined this encounter, but its mystery and emotion can be accounted for by the difficulty of articulating encounters with madness, as well as the sublime character of such encounters.

narrator, not Farmer Simpson, not the reader, not Stephen Hill—controls her own story, fragmented and non-linguistic as is. Martha's face seems to have communicated something of her experience and emotional landscape to the narrator—something perhaps beyond articulation in the language available to her, to the narrator, and to Wordsworth himself. Her face, coupled with her repeated cry, demonstrate the strangeness and the potency of a narrative thus characterized by disability aesthetics. And because the narrator fails to articulate the story told by Martha's face, she maintains agency: her story cannot be transmitted without her presence.

The irreducibility and incommunicability of Martha's narrative help to explain the narrator's insistent directions to "you." He urges,

> But to the thorn, and to the pond …
> I wish that you would go:
> Perhaps when you are at the place
> You something of her tale may trace. (106, 108-10)

Though spoken to the second narrative voice, the repeated suggestions to "view the spot, / The spot to which she goes" also address "you" the reader. This is a central lesson offered by the poem—and by the figure of Martha herself. Her body elicits interest and provokes narrative production, but in order to understand her, in order to know anything meaningful of her at all, we must encounter her ourselves. It is a lesson directed at the reader that runs counter to the social exclusion Martha has faced, an exclusion that was at Wordsworth's time a standard response to madness.

Only at the poem's end does it become clear that Martha's insistent and repeated cry is granted a narrative primacy, constituting the skeleton around which rumor has converged. Martha's narrative may be more difficult to apprehend, but is no less meaningful for it, and is all the more powerful for it. Because "The Thorn" ends with her voice—"Oh misery! oh misery! / Oh woe is me! oh misery!" (252 – 3)—she displaces all of the tales told about her. Taken as a

story, hers is a lament that viscerally foregrounds, that insists upon, her human subjectivity. As much as the poem admonishes the narrator, then, it equally admonishes the reader. The poem offers provocative insight into the workings of the mind as it seeks the object of its fascination, and asks us to reflect on our own participation in such processes. The poem grants us an opportunity to feel for—or indeed with—Martha in her abandonment, as the object of speculation and the subject of loss. It tells us to go to her. It forces us to listen to her. All of these are deeply recuperative gestures, and work towards an expanded sense of the human community, one that allows a place for the madwoman.

And the sun did shine so cold

Although in form and feeling "The Thorn" and "The Idiot Boy" are quite different, the latter follows the former in presenting a tale-telling narrator (a poet in this case) who proves incapable of adequately narrating the story of a mentally disabled character. "The Idiot Boy," like "The Thorn," frames an initial tension between fundamentally incompatible views of mental difference—but in the case of Johnny Foy, Wordsworth's idiot boy, this tension is much more explicit. In the poem's opening lines it is evident that Johnny is a respected member of his family and immediate human community, and it is equally evident that this fact baffles the poem's narrator. While Betty Foy hopes in her son's ability to summon the doctor for their ailing neighbor Susan Gale, the narrator doubts, exclaiming that "not a mother, no not one" would fail to be "fright[ened]" by the scene (24, 26).

Similarly, where Betty senses meaning in her idiot son's communicative gestures, the narrator senses nonsense:

> To this did Johnny answer make,
> Both with his head and with his hand,
> And proudly shook the bridle too,

> And then! his words were not a few,
> Which Betty well could understand (72-6, emphasis mine).

The poem importantly suggests the intensity of the maternal connection here, but it also establishes the narrator's sense of Johnny's utter cognitive difference. He is, by the narrator's estimation, incapable of communication and meaningful action. The fact of Johnny's and the poem's shared title, too, helps to establish this sense of difference: Johnny is, it seems, no more or less than an "idiot boy" to the narrator—a yet more notable fact as we come to learn that Betty is "almost threescore," making it a near certainty that the "boy" known by the diminutive form of the name "John" is actually a grown man.[21]

The formal aspects of "The Idiot Boy" reinforce the narrator's early implication that Johnny is very much an idiot boy, incapable of intentionality and rationality—and this is one important way in which the poem bears the aesthetic traces of disability. There is its childlike rhythm, with its unusually regular iambic tetrameter and rhyme scheme, immediately apprehensible in the poem's opening stanzas:

> But Betty's bent on her intent;
> For her good neighbour, Susan Gale,
> Old Susan, she who dwells alone,
> Is sick, and makes a piteous moan
> As if her very life would fail (27 – 31).

There is the poem's lively, multi-sensory appeal, created in large part by the poem's onomatopoeic punctuations (the halloos and burrs, hoots and currs) and playful phrases ("stirrup fiddle-faddle," "hurly-burly") (14, 60). Notable, too, are occasional hudibraistic rhymes and meter breaks ("This piteous news so much it shock'd her, / She quite forgot to send the Doctor") (284–5). Critics tend to dwell on one or another of these formal elements when making a case

[21] An immediate apprehension of—if not bewilderment at—otherness is characteristic of Wordsworthian encounters with disability, and such characters as the Leech Gatherer, the Discharged Soldier, and Martha Ray enter his poetry first as borderers. Only later do they become fully human subjects, and often only in retrospect or in the reader's mind.

for the poem's humor,[22] and although some measure of humor (or at least jocularity) is certainly palpable from the first, what is most important in this context is that the poetic elements that signal humor are many of the same poetic elements that might be said to construct an aesthetics of idiocy.

The burr Johnny makes frequently throughout "The Idiot Boy"—e.g. "Burr, burr—now Johnny's lips they burr" (107)—is the poem's most potent aesthetic signal of idiocy. It viscerally communicates Johnny's cognitive difference, an exemplary instance of what Tobin Siebers describes as a "marke[r] of physical or mental difference" that causes the "disabled body [to rise] to the surface of the page and mov[e] into the emotional consciousness of the reader" (Siebers 125). Similarly realistic, particular, and powerful markers of physical and mental difference are everywhere in Wordsworth's poetry. Perhaps no Wordsworthian details of disability are more well-recognized than what John F. Danby has called the "scandalous particularity of [Simon Lee's] swollen ankles": "he is lean and he is sick, / His little body's half awry / His ancles they are swoln and thick; / His legs are thin and dry" (33-6).[23] Such descriptions are visceral, elemental, discomfiting; such bodies cannot easily be forgotten. Wordsworth makes great use of the burr and its potency. The poem's early stanzas include a particularly confrontational framing of Johnny's burr:

> Burr, burr—now Johnny's lips they burr,
> As loud as any mill, or near it;
> Meek as a lamb the Pony moves,
> And Johnny makes the noise he loves,
> And Betty listens, glad to hear it (107 – 11).

[22] See Mary Jacobus ("The Idiot Boy") or Jonathan Wordsworth ("Wordsworthian Comedy") for readings of the poem's comedic features.
[23] Similarly, Wordsworth describes the Leech-Gatherer's form, "bent double, feet and head / Coming together in their pilgrimage" (73 – 4).

The narrator goes beyond just conveying the burr's peculiarity here. Here Johnny's voice places him in multiply liminal territory. The narrator's invocation of a mill conjures a sound loud enough to be intrusive and alien enough to warrant comparison to machinery.

If the burr is a marker of Johnny's difference—indeed his otherness—in the above passage it is elsewhere framed so as to also demonstrate his immersive relationship with nature, which is richly suggestive in this literary context. Importantly, the burr is aurally and poetically subsumed in the sounds of the owls: "The owlets hoot, the owlets curr, / And Johnny's lips they burr, burr, burr" (114 – 5). Like Martha Ray's immersive relationship with nature, Johnny's cannot be dismissed summarily. By connecting him to the natural world so intimately, the burr functions not only as a confirmation of his idiocy but, considered within Wordsworthian aesthetics, it can also be understood as an important facility. Or, considered from a slightly different angle, Wordsworth creates a context in which a marker of idiocy might be reassessed and idiocy may be reinterpreted in less reductive terms. An apt counterpoint to such figures is the Boy of Winander, whose attempts to join in the owls' song are framed as troubling mimicry.[24]

Usefully considering Johnny's burr in another context, Alan Richardson reads it as an "expressive" gesture that "connects" him to his human community (81, 164), as "his lips with joy they burr at you" (19). In the case of "you," Betty Foy, the burr serves as a mode of meaningful, affectively-charged communication: as "Johnny makes the noise he loves," his mother, Betty "listens, glad to hear it" (110 – 1). But "you" also implicates the reader, an invitation not lost on readers of the poem, as I will discuss later.

[24] Using his "skill" (*The Prelude* 5:405), the boy "Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,/ That they might answer him.—And they would shout / Across the watery vale, and shout again,/Responsive to his call,—with quivering peals,/ And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud /Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild / Of jocund din!" (5:398 – 404).

If the character of Johnny Foy produces the potent and ambiguous aesthetic element that is his "burr, burr, burr," he also inspires aesthetic production in the characters surrounding him. When Johnny fails to return home at the expected hour, Betty and Susan begin to spin a dizzying array of speculative tales as they try to figure out where he might be. The narrator initially resists joining in, claiming his own inadequacy and Johnny's inaccessibility:

> Oh reader! now that I might tell
> What Johnny and his horse are doing!
> What they've been doing all this time,
> Oh could I put it into rhyme,
> A most delightful tale pursuing! (322-6).

If he could tell this tale it would be a good one, and yet just after suggesting that it is a tale he cannot tell the narrator undertakes precisely this task—and goes on to contribute many of the more fantastical possibilities for Johnny's location. One senses a touch of compulsion here, as if the narrator cannot resist speculating about the idiot boy.

Taken together, Susan, Betty, and the narrator invoke images of unintentional suicide, gypsies, ghosts, goblins, star catching, and hunting sheep, among other things; Betty imagines where Johnny actually is (by the waterfall), but it is just one in a long list of possibilities. This narrative excess reinforces Johnny's inaccessibility, and therefore his otherness, and these tales introduce many common and conflicting ideas about "the idiot" that were then in circulation. Namely, Johnny is connected to the child, the devil, nature, animals, and the wild child;[25] the

[25] Johnny is aligned with the devil, both by the doctor, who exclaims, "The devil take his wisdom!" (268), and by the narrator, who imagines that Johnny "with head and heels on fire, / and like the very soul of evil, / [Is] galloping away away / …The bane of all that dread the devil" (342 – 4, 346). He is linked to the natural world, as "The moon that shines above his head / Is not more still and mute than he" (90 – 1); he is linked and with animals when his burr is subsumed in the sound of the owls and when his state of mind is compared to the pony's ('His steed and he right well agree') (114 – 5, 117). Finally, Johnny is associated with the wild child, who was often figured as having been discovered in the forest by 'wandering gypsey-folk' and adopted into their communities (236). Alan Bewell makes much of these allusions to 'wild children', who were 'discovered' after having spent much time alone in nature and having reverted to a savage state. In fact, partly because of this reference, Bewell downplays Johnny's 'idiocy'. Though there are certainly ample textual suggestions that Johnny is, in fact, quite an 'idiot', Bewell's reading of

tales also evoke more unusual references to the Romance and the Gothic. [26] David Mitchell has argued that the disabled body is burdened with an "overdetermined symbolic surface" (28-9); "The Idiot Boy" similarly reveals—and, with the jocular tone of these stanzas, jokes about—the profusion and confusion of cultural associations with "the idiot" at Wordsworth's time.[27] As Duncan Wu has suggested, "[t]his array of narrative possibilities treads a fine line between tragedy and absurdity" ("Looking," 174).

At the end of this deluge of tales, the narrator indicates that his failure to tell Johnny's story amounts to a vocational failure:

> I to the muses have been bound,
> These fourteen years, by strong indentures;
> Oh gentle muses! let me tell
> But half of what to him befel,
> For sure he met with strange adventures.
>
> Oh gentle muses! is this kind?
> Why will ye thus my suit repel?
> Why of your further aid bereave me?
> And an you thus unfriended leave me?
> Ye muses! whom I love so well. (347 – 356)

As Richey and Robinson have noted, through his invocation of a fourteen-year apprenticeship, "Wordsworth implies that the speaker of this poem is by no means a quick study." But this is also what lays the groundwork for the poem's scene of admonishment.

Instead of answering his plea for narrative inspiration, the narrator finds Johnny himself—much as the narrator of "The Thorn" found Martha himself, which provided the only certain narrative in that poem. In "The Idiot Boy," compulsive narrative excess is followed by a moment of metrical stammering. Having consciously halted the poem's deluge of aesthetic

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Johnny as not-quite-idiotic speaks to the poem's openness in allowing us to make so many different things of Johnny. ('Wordsworth's Primal Scene: Retrospective Tales of Idiots, Wild Children, and Savages.')

[26] See Angus Easson and Christopher Simons on the topic of "The Idiot Boy" and the Romance.

[27] For a detailed historical examination of definitions and views of idiocy, refer to Rushton or Neugebauer.

production when Johnny himself reemerges by the waterfall—by telling Betty "It is no goblin,'tis no ghost, / 'Tis he whom you so long have lost, / He whom you love, your idiot boy" (379-81)—the narrator returns to Johnny's burr, burr, burr and now deems it unreadable. An uncomfortable break in the poem's iambic tetrameter halts our reading: "And Johnny burrs and laughs aloud, / Whether in cunning or in joy, / I cannot tell…" (387-9, emphasis mine). Ato Quayson has suggested how disability can be experienced as a hermeneutical impasse, and "The Idiot Boy" formally registers just such an impasse as this metrical rupture coincides with the narrator's major, and revisionary, shift in relation to the poem's title character. It may not seem a standard admonishment, but so it functions in the poem.

If the "idiot" was thought to be many things at Wordsworth's time he was thought to be nothing close to "cunning," and at the poem's opening the narrator seems to think that Johnny is true to type, wholly unreasoning and incapable of intentional, rational action. Yet the possibility of a cunning idiot boy is what the poem's broken meter has us stumble at—and indeed, the poem concludes as the narrator fosters this possibility:

> The owls have hardly sung their last,
> While our four travellers homeward wend;
> The owls have hooted all night long,
> And with the owls began my song,
> And with the owls must end.
>
> For while they all were travelling home,
> Cried Betty, "Tell us, Johnny, do,
> Where all this long night you have been,
> What you have heard, what you have seen:
> And, Johnny, mind you tell us true."
>
> Now Johnny all night long had heard
> The owls in tuneful concert strive;
> No doubt too he the moon had seen;
> For in the moonlight he had been
> From eight o'clock till five.

> And thus, to Betty's question, he
> Made answer, like a traveller bold,
> (His very words I give to you,)
> "The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo,
> And the sun did shine so cold!"
> —Thus answered Johnny in his glory,
> And that was all his travel's story (442 – 463).

In response to his mother's questions about his night, Johnny "[m]ade answer"; Betty's plea, "Johnny, mind you tell us true" suggests that he may be capable of fabrication. The narrator indicates the literal meaning of Johnny's couplet (the "cocks" are actually "owls" and the "sun" the "moon"), yet the import of Johnny's inversion is unclear. Perhaps Johnny has given voice to an idiotic misunderstanding, or perhaps he has chosen as best he could from a limited vocabulary. Perhaps, however, a "cunning" Johnny has told a "story" in "his glory," as the narrator suggests (463, 462). If this is indeed the case, it seems that Johnny was always capable of meaningful communication; it was the narrator who did not know how to listen.

In an 1802 letter to John Wilson, Wordsworth elides two lines from "The Idiot Boy" to emphasize Johnny's capacity: "Whether in cunning or in joy, / And then his words were not a few, &c." The first line confirms Wordsworth's desire that Wilson—and, by extension, the poem's broader readership—seriously consider the possibility of a cunning Johnny. The second line is one from early in the poem, and I have already suggested that in part it demonstrates the narrator's initial belief that only Betty could understand her idiot son. Wordsworth's indication that this line also demonstrates Johnny's capacity suggests that it was a capacity that the narrator did not—and perhaps could not—recognize at the outset. It would certainly not be the first time nor the last that Wordsworth constructed a narrator with an inability to listen well or to listen at all to a disabled character. I have already discussed not dissimilar failures on the part of the young Wordsworth of *The Prelude*, distracted by the perception of difference in beholding the

Discharged Soldier and, later, incapable of engaging with the Blind Beggar. Similarly, the Leech Gatherer must repeat his story because the narrator's mind has wandered.

In fact, most critics who have recently addressed "The Idiot Boy" suggest Johnny's poetic resonances. Johnny has been called "the ultimate Wordsworthian visionary" who "makes us see afresh what is familiar" (Wu *Wordsworth* 107; Jacobus "Tradition" 261). Johnny is like a poet "if only in that he calls out imagination in others" (Easson 11); because of his "susceptibility to the principle of pleasure"; and because of his ability to "bind more closely the affections of other men and women" (Bromwich 103). Yet all of the scholars I've just quoted trace Johnny Foy's poeticism with caution; as Susan Wolfson suggests, "the mysterious 'glory' of his answer remains radically private" (*The Questioning Presence* 33).

Of course Johnny does remain a mystery insofar as we can't definitively know what to make of him or his couplet—and this may be partly in keeping with Wordsworth's belief, expressed in his letter to John Wilson, that as an idiot Johnny's way would be hidden with god.[28] But it is certainly also in keeping with one of the more striking and unusual characteristics of Wordsworth's poetry: his emphasis on the difficulty—impossibility, even—of understanding or accessing another's inner world.[29] Mystery or no, however, Johnny certainly seems to at least perhaps function as a poet, and it is productive to press further in this reading than critics have yet been willing to press—to learn from Wordsworth's own failed encounters with embodied difference and to allow ourselves to approach Johnny without the "false delicacy" that Wordsworth sensed and criticized in John Wilson's response to the poem.[30] In his Fenwick

[28] In the letter quoted in the preface to this project, Wordsworth relates to John Wilson his belief in "that sublime expression of Scripture that '*their* [idiots'] *life is hidden with God*'" (212).
[29] See Nancy Yousef on the limits of sympathy in Wordsworthian encounters with disability.
[30] In Wordsworth's defense of the poem, quoted in the preface to this project, he comments that "the loathing and disgust which many people have at the sight of an idiot … ow[es] in a great measure to a false delicacy, and, if I may say it without rudeness, a certain want of comprehensiveness of thinking and feeling" (212).

note to “The Idiot Boy” Wordsworth called Johnny’s couplet the “foundation of the whole” of the poem (55), and we would do well to more fully consider it as such.

To borrow language from the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, we may say that, like the “poet,” Johnny has thrown over the night “a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way” (Wordsworth, “Preface” 392). In his fragment about the beautiful and sublime, Wordsworth uses a waterfall as the exemplary—and, one therefore senses, somewhat obvious—example of a natural feature that can be experienced as sublime. Johnny is found by a waterfall, and yet it is the moon—one of the most ordinary features of nature—to which his poetic lines refer. According to Wordsworth, it is possible to experience the familiar as sublime through a cultivated and habitual aesthetic appreciation of the everyday features of one’s surroundings—Wordsworth’s own poetic goal—and also, perhaps, through “some accidents of nature” (“[Sublime]” 351). Herein Johnny’s couplet demonstrates that he may in fact fulfill Wordsworth’s aesthetic ideal. For what it’s worth, there is also the fact that the moon reflects the sun’s light, and it is therefore a poetic rendering of scientific knowledge to say of the moon that in it, “the sun d[oes] shine so cold.” And despite the efforts of Susan, Betty, and the narrator, only Johnny is able to tell a tale of his night, however we may value it. It is a narrative that appears at the poem’s end, moreover, thereby displacing the profusion of narratives that preceded it.

At least one of the poem’s first readers, Dorothy Wordsworth, seems to have read something of the Wordsworthian poet in “The Idiot Boy,” to judge from her note that on the same day in 1802 that she was “full of thoughts about my darling”—her brother William who had just left on a short trip—it was “The Idiot Boy” among all the poems in Lyrical Ballads with which she was “enchanted” (74). This is perhaps a coincidence, but the suggestion is certainly

there that a poem about an initially misunderstood poet-visionary in nature could somehow bring Dorothy closer to her absent brother, a poet of a not dissimilar description.

Of course Johnny may or may not be a poet, and his poeticism may be accidental. Like so much in Wordsworth, the matter is left frustratingly unsettled at the poem's end. (As Frances Ferguson has noted, "in Wordsworth's poetry beginnings are never settled, even by endings" (129).) By questioning the common ascription of intelligence as a "measure of aesthetic quality," Tobin Siebers's aesthetic theory invites us to consider Johnny's poetic output and poetic functions regardless of our final estimation of Johnny's mind. Siebers asks, "If intention has uncertain value for interpretation," an idea that certainly caused Wordsworth anxiety, "why should it be used to determine whether an action or object is a work of art?" (19)—and we might do well to ask these questions in relation to Johnny Foy and his couplet.[31]

Readerly Admonishments

When the enthusiastic young John Wilson wrote to William Wordsworth in 1802, he offered mostly praise for Lyrical Ballads, in which he recognized the "body of morality of the purest kind" (111). Yet "in several cases," Wilson noted, "[y]ou have described feelings with which I cannot sympathize" (112). Wilson reserved his harshest and most impassioned criticism for "The Idiot Boy," deeming its poetic subject inappropriate and vividly describing his "disgus[t]" at Betty Foy's love for her idiot son: "it appears almost unnatural that a person in a

[31] Writing of cognitively impaired fiber artist Judith Scott and the critical anxiety surrounding her art, Tobin Siebers observes that "The problem, of course, is that Scott did not possess the intelligence associated with true artists by the tradition of art history." He asks, further, "What kind of changes in the conception of art would be necessary to include her in this history?" (Siebers 19). A similar critical anxiety may be at play in our assessment of Johnny's couplet as poetic and visionary. Siebers also asks us to interrogate our assumptions about aesthetic appreciation, writing that "The appreciation of the work of art is a topic well rehearsed in the history of aesthetics, but rarely is it considered from the vantage point of the disabled mind—no doubt because the spectacle of the mentally disabled person, rising with emotion before the shining work of art, disrupts the long-standing belief that pronouncements of taste depend on a form of human intelligence as autonomous and imaginative as the art object itself" (15). It is not unlikely that our assessment of Johnny's couplet is in large part based on our problematic assumptions about whether or not an idiot could appreciate nature in ways that "we" could respect.

State of complete ideotism, should excite the warmest feelings of attachment in the breast even of his Mother" (113). Wordsworth defended "The Idiot Boy" in his reply to Wilson, instructing his young admirer that "the loathing and disgust which many people have at the sight of an idiot … ow[es] in a great measure to a false delicacy, and, if I may say it without rudeness, a certain want of comprehensiveness of thinking and feeling" (212). "The Idiot Boy" might serve as a corrective measure for such tendencies and manners: the goal of "a great Poet," according to Wordsworth, is to "rectify men's feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more sane, pure, and permanent" (211).

In defending "The Idiot Boy" Wordsworth criticizes the increasingly mainstream medical practice of "board[ing] out" idiots to "public or private receptacle[s] for such unfortunate beings" (212). Wordsworth instead promotes a model of communal care still predominant, he claims, in the lower classes, and writes reverently of the morality idiots may bring out in those around them: "I have, indeed, often looked upon the conduct of fathers and mothers of the lower classes of society towards idiots as the great triumph of the human heart. It is there that we see the strength, disinterestedness, and grandeur of love."[32] Wordsworth likewise implies the inherent value in cognitive difference when he relates to Wilson his belief in "that sublime expression of Scripture that 'their [idiots'] life is hidden with God'" (212). By invoking aesthetic terminology and concepts—e.g. "disgust," "false delicacy," "disinterestedness," "sublime"—Wordsworth foregrounds the deep intertwining of ethics and aesthetics in social responses to idiocy.

Tensions between our ideas of art and cognitive impairment seem to be at the heart of the revulsion—even the aesthetic and epistemological trauma—registered by so many readers of "The Idiot Boy." One "Mr. S." wrote to Wordsworth that he was "Almost thrown by it into a fit

[32] This wording would likely strike disability scholars as problematic. To some extent it surely is, yet Wordsworth's consistent focus on human community makes this an emphatic rather than a condescending compliment.

of disgust! cannot read it!" (Wordsworth as quoted in Mead 187). When Wilson expanded on his notion that some subjects are not fit for poetry, he remarked, "I have seen a most excellent painting of an Ideot—but it created in me inexpressible disgust. I was struck with the excellence of the picture—I admired the talents of the artist—but I had no other source of pleasure" (114). In his anonymous review of Lyrical Ballads (1798), Robert Southey used similar language, claiming that: "No tale less deserved the labour that appears to have been bestowed upon this"; like a Flemish picture, the "design" of "The Idiot Boy" was worthless, although its "execution" was excellent (66).

Johnny's burr in particular didn't sit well with many of Wordsworth's contemporaries, who registered what they clearly believed was a more appropriate reaction to the sound than Betty Foy, who was "glad to hear it." The burr certainly alienated Coleridge, at least after the fact, and he complained of it in Biographia Literaria as a "disgusting imag[e] of ordinary morbid idiocy" (500). Importantly, Coleridge noted that its impact could have been mitigated by a "description of the boy's beauty" (500), directly confirming the problem of the burr as an aesthetic one, and importantly drawing our attention to the poem's delicate aesthetic balance. Herein we may glean a possible benefit of the poem's playful and comedic aesthetics, so unusual for Wordsworth: they may be understood—and I believe should be understood—as a counterbalance for the poem's realistic (and, because realistic, unsettling) portrayal of idiocy.[33]

Southey was apparently so displeased with Wordsworth's poem that he anonymously published "The Idiot," a poem about a "poor wretch" (57), a "thing of idiot mind" (2), which

[33] Humor's use to diffuse the discomfort of disability also factors centrally into my Chapter 6 discussion of Charles Lamb's work.

definitively settles the aesthetic and affective confusion prompted by "The Idiot Boy."[34] Ned, the poem's idiot loses his mother "Sarah," his "only friend" (58)— and the townsfolk so pity this loss that the local schoolboys temporarily stop taunting him. But Ned, now completely alone, fails to understand the concept of death, digs up his mother's corpse, and seats her by the fireplace. Like Johnny Foy, Ned utters only one couplet, but if Johnny's can be read as an imaginative rendering of the natural sublime, Ned's is a straighforwardly alienating, gruesome mistake: while holding its hand, Ned asks the corpse, "Why, mother, do you look so pale, / and why are you so cold?" (55 – 6). Articulate idiots, it would seem, were appropriate to stories of death and the perversion of burial places, but not to stories about human community, nature, sympathy, and narrative.

Unsurprisingly, visceral responses to "The Idiot Boy" persisted into the 20th century. Perhaps no example is more telling than a deeply unfortunate (mis)reading by Jonathan Wordsworth: "Johnny is a mongol (Down's Syndrome is the euphemism we now prefer). Not since Henryson's Testament of Cresseid (where the heroine is a prostitute) had any writer taken on the task of establishing sympathy for a more incongruous hero" (203). Jonathan Wordsworth's assumption of Johnny's unsympathetic character is more reflective of mid- to late-20th century views of idiocy than of the diverse perspectives recorded by the Romantics. Compellingly, moreover, there is nothing in the poem—or anything Wordsworth wrote about the poem—to suggest that Johnny has Down's, and this reference is particularly puzzling given one of the more richly troubling comments Wordsworth made about Johnny Foy in his letter to Wilson. Namely, Wordsworth defensively insisted that as he imagined him, Johnny was

[34] Though published shortly before *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Jacobus has convincingly argued that Southey had the means and motive to write "The Idiot" as part of his "deliberate attempt to put right what he had criticized in his review [of *Lyrical Ballads*]" ("Southey's Debt" 24).

handsome, as opposed to other classes of idiots who we can assume would bear more fully the physical mark of their idiocy.

Admonitory Prospects

For Wordsworth, idiocy provided a generative opportunity to explore issues of aesthetic production and aesthetic reception—and the role of the poet, both in nature and in his human community. In this way "The Idiot Boy" gives its readership an opportunity to reconsider idiocy in new contexts that might allow for an altered sense of the possibilities of cognitive difference. Other Wordsworthian encounters with disability provoke the narrator's reflection and reorientation on similarly significant aspects of the poet's aesthetics and social philosophy. Considered together, Wordsworth's admonishments bear witness to the various ways that, as Tobin Siebers has written, disability "acquires aesthetic value because it represents … a critical resource for thinking about what a human being is" (3).

It is worth remembering, too, that Wordsworth's disabled are realistically depicted and often based on actual individuals: Simon Lee and the Leech Gatherer had historical models, for example, and Wordsworth noted of Johnny Foy's couplet that "[t]he words were reported to me by my dear friend, Thomas Poole" as spoken by an actual idiot (*Fenwick* 55). Perhaps most importantly, all of Wordsworth's disabled characters are, at the end of his poems, still very much the disabled individuals they were at the poem's beginning: the Discharged Soldier remains sick throughout and throughout the Blind Beggar remains without the capacity to see; the Leech Gatherer is always crippled, as is Simon Lee, and Johnny Foy is always very much an "idiot." What changes is the narrator's perspective—or, in some cases, the poem's perspective—in

relation to disability.[35] And herein Wordsworth provides for us a model of ethical growth, expanded perspective, and enlarged sympathies that might enable us to become more open to the human diversity that is always already around us.

Wordsworth warned in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads that his readers would experience feelings of strangeness and awkwardness while reading his poetry. All those who registered disgust—and other forms of discomfort—at his disability poetry bear witness to this phenomenon. Yet in his 1802 letter to John Wilson, Wordsworth explains that such feelings of distress are not all for naught. As Wilson had implied in his 1802 letter to Wordsworth, "The Idiot Boy" violates Adam Smith's theory of sympathy, which excludes the unreasoning individual as an object of our fellow-feeling. But for Wordsworth, aesthetic distress may be a sign of ethical action and sympathetic growth:

> It is not enough for me as a Poet, to delineate merely such feelings as all men do sympathise with; but it is also highly desirable to add to these others, such as all men may sympathise with, and such as there is reason to believe they would be better and more moral beings if they did sympathise with. (*Prose Works II* 213)

Or, put differently, just as the young poet was reoriented by figures like the Discharged Soldier and Tom Wedgwood, "The Idiot Boy"—and so many of Wordsworth's other admonitory poems—might morally and aesthetically reorient his readers.

[35] I make this qualification almost entirely on the basis of "The Thorn," which presents a narrator who does not change his position in relation to Martha Ray as much as he reveals the insufficiency of his perspective to the reader, who is thereby encouraged to question his own perspective.

Conclusion

"queer points" and *"answering needles"*: Lamb's Cripped Metropolitanism and Modern Disability

In a May 27, 1796 letter to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Lamb writes of money, Robert Southey, and Coleridge's poetry before mentioning their Christ's Hospital friend Charles Le Grice, who "is gone to make puns in Cornwall." Mid-paragraph Lamb changes tack, recalling his recent stay in an asylum:

> My life has been somewhat diversified of late. The six weeks that finished last year and began this, your very humble servant spent very agreeably in a mad-house, at Hoxton. I am got somewhat rational now, and don't bite any one. But mad I was; and many a vagary my imagination played with me, enough to make a volume, if all were told (2).

This framing and narrative turn are characteristic of Lamb, who is ever able to exploit humor and timing to render dire circumstances palatable. It is the same serious-non-seriousness, to borrow Seamus Perry's term, that will characterize Lamb's *London Magazine* persona, Elia. Lamb's highly developed and skillfully deployed wit allow him to maintain an audience, both private and public, for what might otherwise be startling and confrontational commentary on such matters as madness, poverty, class, murder, death, and gender relations. In Mary Wedd's words, "The therapeutic uses of humour were something he knew well" (25). Lamb's quick comic turns, ever impeccably timed, resonate with what we know of Lamb's self-presentation as a stutterer: he learned to use his halting and stammering for comic effect.

If Lamb's wit makes utterable and articulable what might not otherwise be so it also addresses his experience of the stigma of disability, and is key to his intersubjective ethics. The September after Lamb spent six weeks at the madhouse, his sister murdered their mother in a fit of madness. Rather than commit her to a life of institutional care, Lamb lived with Mary and saw to her psychiatric commitment when periods of lunacy came on. By 1800 Lamb had thus been the object of the medicalizing gaze, a patient's devoted family member, and his sister's diagnostician, self-trained to recognize signs of her incipient madness. Put otherwise, early in adulthood Lamb had come to intimately understand a single mode of non-normative embodiment, madness, from different and competing vantage points. As Elia he developed a distinct brand of metropolitanism that offers a similarly diverse and contradictory array of perspectives towards disability.

But even when Lamb does not explicitly take up disability, his tastes and modes of intersubjectivity still bear the traces of his experiences of non-normative embodiment. In his life and essays he appreciated, even reveled in the unique quirks—and what others would surely call the difficulties—of those around him. In an 1822 letter to William Wordsworth, Lamb describes the effect of a friend or family member's death. "Every departure destroys a class of sympathies," he laments. What follows this remark is a passage often quoted to demonstrate Lamb's expansiveness. I read it as an expression of Lamb's aesthetic sensibility: "Common natures do not suffice me. Good people, as they are called, won't serve. I want individuals. I am made up of queer points, and I want so many answering needles" (608). Lamb's rejection of the "common" and "good" in favor of "individuals" with "queer points" and "needles" resonates with Tobin Siebers' descriptions of disability aesthetics. "Healthy bodies in art do not have details," Siebers claims. "They are unmarked." But "where there are details, human difference

is not far away." Disability aesthetics is an effective artistic principle because, Siebers writes, "the most compelling images often summon visions of the human body, and of these the ones that picture wounds or markers of physical or mental difference are the most potent for the imagination" (125). It is perhaps no coincidence that Lamb asserts his taste for the particular in a letter to Wordsworth, who shared a reverence for details—of flowers and landscapes, but also human bodies. But Lamb's taste is especially appropriate to Siebers' description of disability aesthetics insofar as the meeting of "queer points" and "needles" evokes an image of bodily wounding, one much less violent than Mary's use of a kitchen knife to stab their mother, but still resonant with it.

But I wish to put more pressure on Lamb's lexical choices here, for they reveal an aesthetic orientation that has a modern charge, what may best be understood as a decidedly cripped aesthetics. Following Robert McRuer, the term "crip" is typically used to denote the intersection of the queer and the disabled, bodies which are similarly marked as deviant "in a contemporary history and political economy of visibility" (2)—an important point insofar as Lamb writes about his sense of visible stigma, and under the guise of Elia demonstrates a preoccupation with theatricality and performativity. Although I do not wish to make any definitive claims about Lamb's sexuality, "crip" is an appropriate term for an author who in his personal life rejected a heteronormative familial structure by living with his sister and remaining a bachelor—and as Elia leveled a humorous but nonetheless deeply subversive critique of heteronormative culture and gender politics in "Modern Gallantry" and "A Bachelor's Complaint on the Behaviour of Married People." Lamb's image of "queer points" and "needles" offers a vision of intersubjectivity involving bodies that are less non-normative than they are positively abnormal. Latent in Lamb's claim of his own "queer"ness is a sense of self-aware deviance,

particularly as he describes it giving rise to a "want," an appetite for "answering needles." Lamb's language here is not explicitly sexual, but neither is it quite nonsexual; his use of "queer" at least resonates with the modern, sexualized usage of the term. Lamb's awareness of his strangeness and his desire for the strange in others is what makes his a distinctly modern perspective, writing as he did at a time when the idea of the norm was becoming ever more palpable.

In the pages to follow, I will trace the genesis of Lamb's cripped metropolitanism to his experiences of the late 1790s. His own period of madness was formative, as was his experience of Mary's madness. But so, too, were the reactions of others to his family's circumstances. I focus on Coleridge's "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" because the historical events that inspired it, Coleridge's compositional process, and Lamb's reaction to the poem, bring together many aspects of his personal experience with disability, and especially the connections between stigma, the city, and Lamb's intersubjective ethics. By way of concluding *Romantic Embodiments*, I then move to Elia to demonstrate the ways that Lamb's urban approach not only addresses the marking and erasure enacted by Coleridge's poem, but also mourns a London in which disability can no longer occupy the place and spaces it once had. Critically, writing years after all of the other texts I have discussed in the earlier chapters of *Romantic Embodiments*, Lamb's urban approach is distinctly nostalgic. He recalls to page and mind the non-normative bodies that by the 1820s could be—but, Lamb's essays suggest, do not need to be—recognized as "disabled" in the modern sense of the word. As Elia, Lamb adopts scientific and medical language only to subvert the aims and relevance of science and medicine, those sources of authority that marked bodies like his and Mary's as deviant. Lamb's essays do not pathologize but instead celebrate the peculiar, and mourn the expulsion of disabled beggars from the city

streets. The sociocultural changes that Lamb registers and resists as Elia foretell the position of disability in the mid-19th century and underscore the qualities that made the 1790s and 1800s such a singular moment in the history of disability.

Two Siblings Marked

In the May 27, 1796 letter to Coleridge in which he describes his institutionalization, Lamb included a sonnet addressed to Mary, "my sister and my friend." It is a poem he notes was composed "in my prison-house in one of my lucid intervals." Lamb's prison is both a literal, physical one—his body is confined within the walls of the madhouse at Hoxton—and also a symbolic one—his subjective self is imprisoned within a temporarily disordered brain. The sonnet immediately sets out to apologize for "the error of a sickly mind / And troubled thoughts, clouding the purer well / And waters clear of Reason." "[T]his my verse" may "poor atonement be," but as atonement it is meant to serve (2). Like the poem, the letter itself has a recuperative function. It allows Lamb to articulate his imprisonment, assert his restored "health" (understood in the relative rather than universal sense of the term), and enact that health by reconnecting with his intimate boyhood friend.

As I discussed in Chapter 4, Coleridge sent a letter to Southey just over a year later in which he introduced his own depiction of the movement from confinement and "disability" to consolation and restoration—the poem that would become "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." If, as I have argued, Coleridge's poem provocatively suggests the possibilities of "disability," its philosophical and artistic vision comes at a personal and ethical cost. Writing of Beddoes, George C. Grinnell reminds us that "health" is constituted "primarily by forcefully producing

others as infirm" (225). A similar movement takes place in the composition of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." Part of why the poet can experience his injury as revelatory is because of his sense that the body of "gentle-hearted Charles," and not his own, most acutely needs the restorative power of nature; other sources of comfort follow from this initial consolation. Because Lamb's woes were due to his own and his sister's madness, Coleridge's estimation is a standard one, at least insofar as madness was understood at the time to pose a threat to human subjectivity and wellbeing that no physical injury, howsoever severe, could pose. (Madness was, according to Adam Smith, "that last stage of human wretchedness" and "by far the most dreadful" of "all the calamities to which the condition of mortality exposes mankind" (15).) What interests me most in this context, however, are the ways that "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" is representative of what Felicity James has described as Coleridge's "persistent tendency to overwrite the experiences of others" (85). In advancing the poet's experience of being "disabled"—or at least what he wishes the reader to believe was his experience—Coleridge distorts and represses Charles and Mary Lamb's experiences of disability.

The poem's most obvious erasure is that of Mary Lamb herself, the cause of the "evil and pain / And strange calamity" that (along with London) account for "gentle-hearted" Lamb's need for nature's salutary effects.[1] In Chapter 4 I indicated that the sensational nature of the matricide helps to account for its effacement from "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." But its effacement also points to the interpretive and intersubjective difficulties the violent act posed for the Lamb family and for those who were close to them. Adriana Craciun suggests that it was difficult for

[1] Mary had appeared in Coleridge's earlier "Effusion XXII," dedicated "To a Friend" (the unnamed Charles), as one with "soul affectionate yet wise, / Her polish'd wit as mild as lambent glories" (23 – 4). Here Mary's identity is only thinly disguised by the pun "lambent," and she is described in her sick bed with Lamb as her healer, "Soothing each pang with fond solicitude, / And tenderest tones medicinal of love" (10 – 11). The scene reminds Coleridge of own sister, Anne, who had died years before, and the poet implies that a sick sister is far better than a dead one. "Effusion XXII" concludes with a prayer for the "healing ray" (30), a prayer that evidently remained unanswered as Coleridge composed "This Lime-Tree Bower."

Lamb to "reconcile Mary's gender with her behavior" (26), leading him and his sister to seek explanations for her deeds in what Jane Aaron has characterized as "a dominant masculine madness, satanic or divine, which had taken possession of [Mary]" (126). Likewise, Mark Mossman has convincingly argued that Mary Lamb remains an "uncomfortable" figure even today—"too aggressive, too violent, too insane"—which helps to explain why her work has not been recuperated at a pace equal to that of her female contemporaries. In "This Lime-Tree Bower" the mad Mary Lamb functions as the unutterable, the inarticulable, haunting the margins of the poem. For any who knew the circumstances the poem alludes to, Mary would be palpable in her absence.[2]

Coleridge's poem also overwrites the image of dual imprisonment that Lamb had shared with him in May, 1796. Understood thus in conversation with Lamb, the image of Coleridge's bower-prison is conceptually productive in that it enacts a sense of the shared social position of "the disabled"—isolated, confined, at the margins. But whether it is conscious or not, Coleridge's revision of the prison image is discomfiting, appearing as it does in a poem about and dedicated to someone whose own "prison-house" had been so much more material—to say nothing of Mary's literal prison-houses, or the ways that her madness foreclosed as many possibilities as it created.

Similarly, Coleridge uses the poem to articulate the advantages of rural surroundings by transforming London into a space of confinement. "My gentle-hearted Charles!," the poem exclaims, "thou hadn'st pin'd / And hunger'd after nature many a year / In the great city pent"

[2] Coleridge performs a not dissimilar effacement of his wife, Sara, who is the cause of the injury that creates the poem's circumstances.

(28 – 30).[3] Much more radically than Coleridge's displacement of the Hoxton madhouse with a lime-tree bower, this depiction of London runs directly counter to Lamb's metropolitan aesthetics and also to what Lamb insisted was the significance of urban experience to the fact of he and Mary being disabled. The notoriety of Mary's act of matricide had left the siblings in a precarious social position. Detailed newspaper accounts of the events of 22 September, 1796, as well as Mary's murder trial, did not fail to also mention Lamb. A note included in the *Morning Chronicle* four days after the murder, for example, reports that "It has been stated in some of the Morning Papers, that she [Mary] has an insane brother also in confinement—this is without foundation" (Lucas *Life* 130). Gerald Monsman rightly reads ambiguity in the note: "this" could refer to Lamb's insanity, his confinement at Hoxton, or both, and the note therefore puts—and leaves—Lamb's mental health publicly in question (54). In a May 1800 letter to Coleridge, Lamb addresses the social and emotional impact of this notoriety, remarking, "nor is it the least of our evils that her case and all our story is so well known around us. We are in a manner *marked*" (166). Lamb's use of "marked" suggests stigma in its most literal sense, the way that the non-normative mind may leave, or at least may be felt to have left, its visible trace on the body. It is an image of disability in its modern sense, cast against the backdrop of an increasingly normative society.

In the context of disability and stigma, the urban streets and crowds did not confine the Lambs, but rather allowed them a very real kind of freedom. As Lamb indicates in a letter to Thomas Manning, his sense of being "marked" could be alleviated by the city itself: "It is a great

[3] Coleridge's relationship with Wordsworth is significant as to this point. As Lucy Newlyn has written, "For Wordsworth and Coleridge, in the years of 1797 to 1801, the opposition between city and country was not a literary cliché. It was a way of alluding to differences that were felt to lie very deep: differences on a personal level between their own childhood experiences, and on a purely symbolic level between states of mind" ("In City Pent" 408).

object to me to live in town, where we shall be much more *private*… We can be nowhere private except in the midst of London" (167). This invokes the city's size and complexity, as well as the size of its population—the anonymity of traveling the streets amidst a throng. But the particular constitution of London's crowds also must have helped to alleviate Lamb's sense of being marked. By the turn of the century London's public spaces contained a dazzling array of bodies—bodies of different races, speaking different languages, attired in the clothing of different cultures; bodies for sale; disabled bodies; diseased bodies; rich bodies; poor bodies; freakish bodies; animal bodies of various and sometimes freakish forms. Indeed, on the urban street, the Lambs' mad bodies would hardly be noteworthy, let alone singular. London also offered the siblings a distinct geographical advantage, allowing them to live in close proximity to the asylums Mary would continue to enter and exit whenever she was "from home," as they came to say. [4]

Given the extent to which Coleridge rewrote Lamb's experience, it is unsurprising that Lamb took issue with "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and wrote in protest to his friend. Although he uses his characteristic wit in addressing Coleridge's poetic treatment of him, Lamb's distress is evident, not least in the fact that he wrote not one but two letters of complaint, in quick succession, on the 6th and 14th of August, 1800. In the first letter, Lamb's objection focuses on the thrice repeated phrase "gentle-hearted," which he claimed rendered him "ridiculous" because the term "gentle" is "equivocal at best, and almost always means poor-

[4] In 1803, Coleridge wrote to his wife, Sara, of taking Mary to the asylum himself: "the next day she *smiled* in an ominous way—on Sunday she told her Brother that she was getting bad, with great agony—on Tuesday morning she layed hold of me with violent agitation, & talked wildly about George Dyer / I told Charles, there was no a moment to lose / and I did not lose a moment—but went for a Hackney Coach, & took her to the private Madhouse at Hogsden / She was quite calm, & said—it was the best to do—but she wept bitterly two or three times, yet all in a calm way. Charles it cut to the Heart" (941). Interestingly, London's advantages for the "patient" were ones that Coleridge would benefit from when he took up residence with Dr. Gillman many years later.

spirited" (172). The gentle Lamb of "This Lime-Tree Bower" is the victim of cruel fate; sad and sensitive, he dwells too far from nature's healing hand. This characterization is painfully inappropriate to the self that Lamb revealed to his friends in the wake of his mother's death. In the letters Lamb wrote to Coleridge after the "day of horrors," there is little trace of the wit that usually characterizes his prose. It was a rare situation that he did not—or could not—approach with his typical humor. What he seeks from Coleridge is not merely friendship. Gurion Taussig has described how Lamb's "desire for a religious friendship became heightened in the aftermath of his mother's death … In coping with his loss, Lamb sought the twin supports of friendship and religion, both of which he found embodied in Coleridge" (79). Lamb writes on October 3, 1796, for example, "I must be serious, circumspect, and deeply religious through life; and by such means may *both* of us [he and Mary] escape madness in future, if it so please the Almighty" (47). Similarly, on December 2 of the same year he writes, "O my friend, I am in danger of forgetting the awful lessons then presented to me! Remind me of them; remind me of my duty!" (61).

In his letters to Coleridge, Lamb also reveals the devastating complexity of his feelings for his sister. Such is the case when he first tells his friend of his mother's death. In that letter, dated September 27, 1796, Lamb uses an evocative phrase that he will twice repeat to Coleridge less than a week later, calling Mary "My *poor dear, dearest* sister" (41, italics mine). The phrase simultaneously invokes his deep and abiding love for her and what she has cost him, and repeated three times the sentiment would be difficult to forget. In the September 27 letter Lamb also refers to "terrible calamities that have fallen on our family" (41), obscuring Mary's agency in the tragedy—or perhaps absolving her—and using a word, "calamity," that Coleridge repeats in his immediate reply to Lamb and that he will incorporate into "This Lime-Tree Bower." Even years after his mother's death, in a May 12, 1800 letter to Coleridge, Lamb writes, "Mary will

get better again; but her constantly being liable to such relapses is dreadful... Excuse my troubling you, but I have nobody by me to speak to me… I am completely shipwrecked. My head is quite bad. I almost wish that Mary were dead" (166). It is a painful letter to read and bespeaks the agonizing complexity of Lamb's love for his sister. This is the violently despairing brother who in Coleridge's poem becomes "gentle-hearted Charles," just as Lamb's "terrible calamities" become "strange calamities" in Coleridge's verse. Being called "gentle-hearted" may have only served to remind Lamb of just how rough his feelings actually were.

Lamb's second letter of complaint to Coleridge seems to have been occasioned by his further reflection on the published "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," which Lucy Newlyn has speculated Lamb may have "[u]ntil then … regarded … as an intensely private poem" ("City" 423). It is often noted that in this letter Lamb offers Coleridge humorous alternatives for the phrase "gentle-hearted," but it is worth noting that his humor here is uncharacteristically tense. He writes, "please to blot out gentle-hearted, and substitute 'drunken dog, ragged head, seld-shaven, odd-eyed, stuttering,' or any other epithet which truly and properly belongs to the gentleman in question" (177). There is also a new focus of Lamb's critique: Coleridge's use of his proper name, a fact that tends to fall by the wayside in discussions of the letter. Lamb implores his friend, "for Charles read Tom, or Bob, or Richard for mere delicacy" (177). Lamb fixes on a related point in describing what convinced him of Coleridge's "studied malice" in composing the poem: "Hang you, I was beginning to forgive you, and believe in earnest that the lugging in of my proper name was purely unintentional on your part, when looking back for further conviction, stares me in the face, 'Charles Lamb of the *India House*'" (177). Charmed by Lamb's humor and generosity of spirit, we often forget about his capacity for deep emotion and disturbance. This is a case in which Lamb asks to be taken seriously. He had described himself

to Coleridge as a marked man who felt that everyone knew—and could *see*—his body's narrative. In effect, Coleridge's poem repeats this process of stigmatization, especially as its dedication goes as far to specify Lamb's place of employment. By locating Lamb in "the *India House*," Coleridge provides what may have felt uncomfortably like directions for the reader who wished to view for himself the spectacle of Lamb's marked body.

Elia's Cripped Wit

Mary Wedd has written of Lamb that he saw his friends "without illusions but with no less love" (21)—and if anything, "almost delighted in them the more because of their failings and peculiarities" (19). Writing as Elia in *The London Magazine*, Lamb takes up Coleridge, whom he had long ago forgiven for "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and for the various other difficulties that his friend posed. In "The Two Races of Men" Elia divides the "human species" into "two distinct races," "according to the best theory I can form of it": "*the men who borrow*, and *the men who lend*" (26). Elia is of the latter race; Coleridge, whom Elia calls by his military pseudonym ("Comberbache") and his initials ("S.T.C."), is of the former. Although Coleridge may, "like the sea," "sweep away" one of Elia's books, he will often, "sea-like," bring him an "orphan" from someone else's shelves (30). When (or at least if) texts are returned, they are "enriched with annotations, tripling their value" (31). Elia concludes by counseling his reader, "shut not thy heart, nor thy library, against S.T.C." (30). The essay, and especially its conclusion, is a genuine celebration of Lamb's unreliable, book-stealing friend. It is an exemplary instance of Lamb's tendency to highlight what would often be considered the flaws of his loved ones and through framing, timing, wit, and wordplay treat these as qualities worthy of

delight. Elia celebrates passersby and mere acquaintances according to the same principles. If in 1800 Lamb appreciated his ability to be "private" amidst London's crowd, by the 1820s he is able to envision a kind of metropolitan theater in which apparent deviance is made visible—not as a mark of stigma but rather as detail of aesthetic significance. As Elia he provides a frame for beholding peculiarity, participating in and deriving pleasure from its strange ways.

Lamb's prose is as queer as his own body and the bodies he commemorates, formally enacting a crip aesthetics. The essays are deliciously contradictory, unfolding in ways that make a kind of intuitive sense in their irrationality, but they are no less irrational for their intuitive sense. As Gerald Monsman has commented, "If the essays at times seem to be patterned almost mathematically around a central scene, most undercut their form ironically or trail off, ambiguously unresolved" (15). Likewise, Lamb's prose reflects his body and its vicissitudes. His essays gain speed only to halt, stutter, pivot, accelerate again. Monsman notes this resemblance, too, but with some hesitation:

> One wonders if the motif of lameness in Lamb's essays might not reflect his own idiosyncratic stride in which his foot slapped to the ground. Certainly his stammering speech, a sort of verbal paralysis, is akin to a halting gait: 'a natural nervous impediment [L impedire, fr. In- without + ped-, pes foot] in my speech' (1:134), as his persona says. (22)

Whether or not it is a coincidence, Lamb's aesthetic system mirrors its author's body, as well as the deviant bodies and minds Elia places in the center of his urban community.

Before moving to medicalized bodies themselves, I wish to briefly discuss "Imperfect Sympathies" because in it Lamb importantly undermines the scientific classification of humans—something he gestures at in "The Two Races of Men" when he divides the species into

borrowers and lenders. Since the late-18th century, but especially since the mid-19th century, taxonomic practices have been a cornerstone of the various social systems (medical, governmental, economic) through which the norm is established and the abnormal are identified so that they may be institutionally dealt with.[5] "Imperfect Sympathies" ostensibly aims to comment on Elia's feelings for the "species" of "mankind" (119). Though he claims "I am a lover of my species," Elia is nevertheless also a "bundle of prejudices—made up of likings and dislikings" (120). These likings and dislikings give rise to a taxonomy ordered not by a single, coherent principle, but instead by what Elia happens to find significant—race in some cases, religion in others, and regional culture in yet others. At first, Elia's tone is decidedly jocular, befitting the idea of a taxonomy based on whim and individual prejudice. The Scotchman, Elia contends, "has no faltering of self-suspicion … he has no doubts … he always keeps his path … his affirmations have the sanctity of an oath" (123). As Felicity James notes, however, "as the prejudices become steadily darker and the jokes more savage and hapless the reader is left scrabbling for an escape clause" (209). Such is the case as we read Elia's summary of the relationship between the Jew and the Christian, which is one of violence and abiding antipathy: "Centuries of injury, contempt, and hate, on the one side—of cloaked revenge, dissimulation, and hate, on the other" (126).

Yet especially when his remarks turn serious, humor is never so far afield, reintroduced just in time to deflect the gravity of his commentary. Thus Lamb moves from the violent historical conflict between Christians and Jews to remark of a "moderate Jew" that he "is a more confounding piece of anomaly than a wet Quaker" (127). In an instance of sub-classification, he notes that "[s]ome admire the Jewish female physiognomy. I admire it—but with trembling"

[5] See Davis.

(128). The essay thus flickers between the dark and the witty. If this flickering is intentional—and I believe it is—Elia's pseudo-scientific system is nonetheless not so far in tone from contemporaneous human taxonomies. One need think no further here than Beddoes' description of the constitutionally scrofulic in *Hygëia*, excerpts of which I included in Chapter 4. Beddoes' lengthy nosological narrative includes such details as the scrofulic's disposition and physical characteristics, demonstrating the kind of information unselfconsciously offered in human taxonomies—that is, the seemingly trivial (e.g. complexion, lip size) is reported at length and in a deadly earnest tone beside the unavoidably critical (e.g. tumor progression, prognosis). This is true of nosological taxonomies like Beddoes's and anthropological ones like Lamb's. Unlike the time at which Beddoes wrote, however, by the 1820s the careful observer—a distinction Lamb certainly deserves—could intuit the ends to which taxonomies were beginning to be used, as in the case of the 1822 Vagrancy Act, which I will discuss later.

What makes "Imperfect Sympathies" an important example of Lamb's serious non-seriousness is that its flickering between insistent gravity and insistent wit provokes the question of whether or not any system of classification can be said to have a more rational or objective basis than the one Lamb offers here. Tim Milnes has written that Lamb "counter[s] philosophy's indifference to human life with an ironic indifference to philosophy's objectives" (329)—and I would apply the same to Lamb's relationship with science here, and extend it a bit further. That is, Lamb counters science's indifference to human lives with contempt for science's objectives. It is not so much of a stretch to say that the essay ultimately suggests that classifying humans is so meaningless as to be dangerous if it is taken seriously.

The ethical stakes of this subversive pseudo-scientific approach are evident when Elia turns from cultural types to explicitly medicalized ones. Lamb commences "The Praise of

Chimney-Sweepers" by delighting in the inscrutable contradictions of their bodies. Elia asks the reader to join him in not just beholding, but in being held by the small forms before him. In this process the essay resonates with Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's conception of "staring." Garland-Thomson writes that the visual encounter between the spectator and the extraordinary body (which "demand[s] attention") is a "dynamic struggle" that "creates a circuit of communication and meaning-making" (*Staring* 3). So it comes to pass that what Lamb describes at the opening of "The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers" is a complex, evolving process of seeing. "I like to meet a sweep," Elia comments, but only one who is still of a young age—

> one of those tender novices, blooming through their first nigritude, the maternal washings not quite effaced from the cheek—such as come forth with the dawn, or somewhat earlier, with their little professional notes sounding like the *peep peep* of a young sparrow; or liker to the matin lark should I pronounce them, in their aerial ascents not seldom anticipating the sun-rise?
>
> I have a kindly yearning towards these dim specks—poor blots—innocent blackness—
>
> I reverence these young Africans of our own growth—these almost clergy imps, who sport their cloth without assumption; and from their little pulpits (the tops of chimneys), in the nipping air of a December morning, preach a lesson of patience to mankind. (124).

This unfolding makes a kind of aesthetic sense, but not an immediately rational one. As they enter their professional lives, the children's bodies morph into the avian, their cry of "sweep sweep" becoming birdsong and their climbing akin to that of a lark. Elia's metaphors darken as the children become formless things (specks, blots, blackness), and then, their skin blackened, they take on a new dark race before becoming wise preachers capable of broadly imparting knowledge. All of these competing images trigger Elia's sympathy, his "kindly yearning"; as

such Elia uses the boys' bodies to tease and prod at the unstable, porous boundaries of "the human." But the point of his sympathetic prodding is not immediately clear.

Soon enough, however, the sense behind the essay's opening becomes evident: Elia understands the young laborers of the essay's title not only as a distinct professional class, but also as a distinct medical class, bound by their shared corporeal deviance. The bodies of the sweeps become objects of medical curiosity as Elia speaks of their appreciation of saloop, a sassafras tea, which he depicts as a palliative treatment for their oral ailments—and he goes so far as to use a casual parenthetical aside to conjure an image of the boys' small corpses as anatomical specimens. "The oily particles" of the tea, Elia speculates, may "attenuate and soften the fuliginous concretions, which are sometimes found (in dissections) to adhere to the roof of the mouth in these unfledged practitioners" (226). Similarly, he reveals a fixation with the teeth of the young sweeps, which he describes as an anatomist might, as "white and shining ossifications" (229). Of a sweep who once taunted him after a nasty fall, Elia notes not only the appearance of "his poor red eyes," but also the probable etiology of this symptom: they are "red from many a previous weeping, and soot-inflamed" (228).

Unavoidably humorous at points, this scientific wordplay is a way of reminding the reader that these children's bodies are medically abnormal. Boys were frequently maimed in the chimneys of the wealthy, and it was well known that deaths were a common occurrence; those who survived to outgrow their usefulness in the chimneys were very likely to develop cancer, often of the mouth or scrotum, and often in their adolescence or early adulthood. Such medical facts—that is, the progressive disablement of the chimney sweeps' bodies—formed a basis for public objections, which in turn led to legislation aimed at reforming the practice, though such laws were sorely under-enforced if they were enforced at all. This fact was especially shocking

to many of Lamb's contemporaries as, from 1803 on, mechanical devices were available that made the use of small bodies all but unnecessary.[6]

Given that Elia views theirs as bodies in the process of becoming disabled, it is fitting that the boys initially slipped so easily from their vital human youth to become animal, thing, and racial other—three longstanding associations with the disabled—[7]and then to reemerge in the context of Christian charity, long the haven for the cast-out deformed and diseased. But the bodies of the sweeps are appealing to Elia throughout, and not just because of the intellectual pleasure of the associative and imagistic play they provoke. As Elia is careful to note, his interest in *young* sweepers is partly on aesthetic grounds, because "old chimney-sweepers are by no means attractive" (124). What the essay accomplishes is in one way not so different from what Beddoes attempts in describing the constitutionally scrofulic. The young sweep and constitutionally scrofulic may be attractive according to cultural standards—the one a vigorous youth, the other of fine feature and complexion. But both are classes of bodies awaiting the onset of illness. Unlike Beddoes, Lamb does not desire to exclude whatever "beauty" mistakenly conceals ill health or to reconstitute "beauty" along the lines of health. Rather, the sweeps are "attractive" to Lamb precisely because they are uncommon children and, like him, have queer points.

One thing is certain: it is because of the boys' deviant bodies that they move him emotionally. Claire Lamont has remarked that the essay is "curiously egotistical" (117), drawing attention to the ways that Elia's intimate feelings about and embodied encounters with chimney sweeps—rather than an abstract discourse on what was at the time a popular social topic—help

[6] For more information on the history of chimney sweepers, see Fulford, Lee, and Kitson's book; also see George L Phillips' "The Abolition of Climbing Boys."
[7] Wordsworth's Johnny Foy, for example, is also associated not just with animals, but with birds; he is associated with things (the moon, a mill); and also with a racial other (Gypsies).

to organize and propel the essay. In foregrounding his affective response to the sweeps, Elia models a distinct intersubjective and aesthetic stance, one that bears the traces of what Lamont calls a "curiously Wordsworthian … inability … to retain any ascendancy over the child" (117). But unlike Lamont I do not think that Elia demonstrates any desire for ascendancy. What interests him is sympathy.

Elia foregrounds the embodied basis of his affinity for the sweeps in the scene in which a sweep mocks him after he falls. It should be a scene that triggers anger, regret, or a variety of other negative emotions, both at the time and in recollection. Instead it becomes a scene of intense sympathy and mutual recuperation that is both social and aesthetic. Elia prefaces the encounter by noting that what would usually cause pain leads in this aberrant case to something quite different: "I am by nature extremely susceptible to street affronts … yet can I endure the jocularity of a young sweep with something more than forgiveness" (130). The phrase "more than forgiveness" is tantalizingly vague. In its obscurity it suggests that the emotional content of the encounter may be inarticulable, excessive, impermissible. Elia details the "treacherous slide" that

> brought me upon my back in an instant. I scrambled up with pain and shame enough—yet outwardly trying to face it down, as if nothing had happened—when the roguish grin of one of the young wits encountered me. There he stood pointing me out with his dusky finger to the mob, and to a poor woman (I suppose his mother) in particular, till the tears for the exquisiteness of the fun (so he thought it) worked themselves out at the corners of his poor red eyes. (126).

This should be a memory of painful degradation. Elia's bodily integrity has been compromised, and although he has explicitly made efforts to hide this fact, the sweep has made it not only visible, but—by pointing, laughing, and drawing the eyes of the "mob"—has made Elia's body a

spectacle. Elia is now public property, no longer in control of his self-presentation. But in this instance, a striking counterpoint to Lamb's descriptions of feeling marked two decades earlier, Elia confesses, "I could have been content, if the honour of a gentleman might endure it, to have remained his butt and his mockery till midnight" (127). He knows he shouldn't, but Elia enjoys this degradation. If at the time his pride did not allow him to remain degraded for longer than he has, the act of writing allows him to relive the encounter and its feeling. "Hogarth has got him [the boy] already," and the moment appears before his mind's eye as if a work of art: "there he stood, as he stands in the picture, irremoveable, as if the jest was to last forever" (126).

Intellectual and ethical joy cannot account for this kind of relish. The scene is about more than Elia providing a glimpse of happiness to a child whose life will hold such misery. Elia's "more than forgiveness" is a positive pleasure, albeit a prohibited one. And his sympathetic joy is in fact enabled by his own visible degradation. For Elia, at least, this is less a moment of mockery than a moment of acknowledgement; the boy's "dusky finger" connects the one queer body to the other. Spotted thus by a peer, Elia can, or at least chooses to, enjoy the performance. This is not to say that I think Lamb in any way would advocate the continued use of chimney sweeps. The effect of his persistent humanizing would tend to encourage quite the opposite, as would his dark implication that some sweeps may in fact be high-born children, orphaned or lost but of noble blood. But in this image of 1820s London, Elia acknowledges the possibilities and pleasures of mutual deviance. Depending on the audience, it seems, performing one's aberration can be a joy.

Elia's Complaint and the Modern Disabled Body

Elia's aesthetic and intersubjective approach takes on a distinctly eulogistic tone in "A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis" as he describes two of the kinds of disabled bodies that Wordsworth took up in *The Prelude* (1805). In Wordsworth's poem an amputee beggar appears in passing, "A travelling cripple, by the trunk cut short, / And stumping on his arms" (7: 219 – 20). So, too, does a blind beggar, which in Chapter 5 I argued was a critical encounter in Wordsworth's poetic and aesthetic development. As Lamb was a guide to Wordsworth in London, there is cause to assume that the men drew from an overlapping store of encounters and images in constructing their texts. But Wordsworth wrote *The Prelude* nearly two decades before Lamb wrote as Elia, and the occasion of Lamb's essay is a lament of the disappearance of these disabled bodies from the streets.

Lamb wrote his essay soon after the passage of the 1822 Vagrancy Act, one in a series of laws that strove to remove beggars from the streets. Elia describes the vital social functions that beggars had once performed: "No corner of a street is complete without them" and they are "as indispensable as the Ballad singer" (133). They are missed as "standing morals, emblems, mementos, dialmottos, the spital sermons, the books for children, the salutary checks and pauses to the high and rushing tide of greasy citizenry" (133). The beggars had long been a part of London's culture, figured prominently in their urban tales, and appeared frequently in literature.

In particular, Elia remarks that now "These dim eyes have in vain explored for some months past a well-known figure, or part of the figure, of a man, who used to glide his comely upper half over the pavements of London." This beggar "was a spectacle to natives, to foreigners, and to children" and the spectacle was well worth the cost: "The contributors had enjoyed their *sight* for their pennies" (136) His history, too, is well known, and ties him to the history of the city itself: "the accident, which brought him low, took place during the riots of

1780." Elia exalts the beggar's body by comparing him to classical heroes, noting that the "*os sublime* was not wanting; and he threw out yet a jolly countenance upon the heavens" (135). Elia also reveals a way that disability aesthetics lie at the heart of Romantic aesthetics by saying of the amputee that "[h]e was a grand fragment; as good as an Elgin marble" (135). Those who appreciated the famous (if culturally ambiguous) sculptures had a framework for appreciating the beauty of the amputee's form, whether or not they chose to acknowledge it.

In questioning why this "daily spectacle…[was] to be deemed a nuisance, which called for legal interference to remove," Elia humorously names the man "*Lusus* (not *Naturae,* indeed, but) *Accidentum,*" adopting the style of binomial nomenclature made standard by Linnaeus (135). By referring to two species of stumpers—*Naturae* and *Accidentum*—Elia points to a distinction that would become of increasing importance in later decades, the difference between congenital and acquired impairments. If both constituted a burden to present society, only the former would come to be seen as a threat to the wellbeing of future generations. As he gestures to Linnean taxonomy and important distinctions of medical etiology, however, Elia (predictably) undermines his act of classification by his choice of genus name. A "lusus" is a game or a jest. The genus name thus indicates the social role of the stumper—he is, indeed, an urban spectacle, a means of entertainment. This is one of Elia's acts of pseudo-scientific classification that undermines scientific goals. The etiology of the beggar's impairment is here made subservient to his social role, deemphasizing the medical in favor of the social and making a performative jest of it all.

The jest is, of course, pointed, as is the humor that surfaces as Elia wonders about the current whereabouts of "those old blind Tobits that used to line the wall of Lincoln's Inn Garden, before modern fastidiousness had expelled them" (133). Elia imagines the blind beggars

"casting their ruined orbs to catch a ray of pity, and (if possible) of light, with their faithful Dog guide at their feet" (133). Such public fictions as feigned blindness were typical to London beggars, and Elia concludes his essay by making the radical—and subversively humorous—proposition that such dishonestly makes no real difference. Echoing his appeal on book-stealing S.T.C.'s behalf, Elia directs his reader,

> Shut not thy purse-strings always against painted distress. Act a charity sometimes. When a poor creature (outwardly and visibly such) comes before thee… [r]ake not into the bowels of unwelcome truth, to save a halfpenny. It is good to believe him. If he be not all that he pretendeth, *give,* and under a personate father of a family, think (if thou pleases) that thou hast relieved an indigent bachelor. When they come with their counterfeit looks, and mumping tones, think them players. You pay your money to see a comedian feign these things, which, concerning these poor people, thou canst not certainly tell whether they are feigned or not. (137).

By recasting the streets as a theater and again emphasizing the social role of the "blind" beggars, Elia advances a system of performative abnormality that centers the queer and uncommon.

Compellingly, however, Elia also evokes for the reader an image of Victorian reality when he imagines his blind beggars in an institutional setting. The blind beggars of whom he writes are "immersed between four walls," their shared confinement directly connected to their now-uniform—and no longer performative—visual reality: he wonders, "in what withering poor-house do they endure the penalty of double darkness, where the chink of the dropt half-penny no more consoles their forlorn bereavement, far from the sound of the cheerful and hope-stirring tread of the passenger?" (133).

Elia's description is darkly prescient. A variety of factors—the regulation of medical education, the professionalization of medicine, an emphasis on medical specialization, the

development of a sense of "medical objectivity," an increase in institutional authority, and increased governmental involvement in public health measures—were beginning to lead to ever more ideologically consistent approaches to medicalized classes. By the end of the 1880s, Francis Galton, Charles Darwin's cousin, had begun to publish material on his theory of eugenics, which formed the basis for movements that identified and tracked individuals' medical status as a preliminary step to institutionalization, sterilization, radical experimentation, and state-sanctioned murder. 1913, for example, saw the passing in Britain of the Mental Deficiency Act, which sought to identify and institutionalize the mentally disabled because of the genetic threat posed by their potential reproduction. In America, Dr. Henry H. Goddard used intelligence tests to determine the severity of his patients' idiocy, hoping to prevent the unfit from reproducing. In the 1930s, Nazi eugenics extended their program of extermination to whole medical classes.

Lost was the openness of the 1790s and 1800s, a time when non-normative embodiment could mean so many different things, and held so much potential for aesthetic experience and aesthetic creation. Lost, too, was the possibility of the consciously deviant theatricality of Lamb's metropolitan aesthetics—at least in the open, on the streets. But if, as Lamb laments, modern medicine forced disability indoors—into the parlors and attics and asylums of Victorian England—disability activists and disability theorists have since the 1980s provided an invitation to revisit the kinds of art that non-normative embodiment can enable. As we do so, we would do well to also look back to authors of the Romantic era. Like ours, theirs was a time when the disabled body could do and mean many different things, and could be apprehended for the ways that it expanded the vistas of the worlds in which it circulated. Like ours, theirs was a time when

authors and artists could find in their own experiences of non-normative embodiment the insights and inspiration to make their art.

At the close of her seminal *Extraordinary Bodies*, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson powerfully underscores the stakes of literary depictions of disability. She writes that "representation informs the identity—and often the fate—of real people with extraordinary bodies" (15). Insofar as poem, novel, or play does not merely reflect the culture of its production but can shape the attitudes and realities of its readership, the texts I have discussed are important artifacts in reconstructing the lived history of disability. But I hope they may also cause us to revisit, and perhaps even revise, the Romantic canon with an eye to what authors of the period may teach us about the possibilities of non-normative embodiment.

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