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Revising for Genre: Mary Robinson's Poetry from Newspaper Verse to *Lyrical Tales*

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REVISING FOR GENRE:
MARY ROBINSON'S POETRY FROM NEWSPAPER VERSE TO *LYRICAL TALES*

by

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DEDICATION

For my boys.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project, like Robinson's poetry, has benefited from the many versions it has taken. While many friends and colleagues, and my dissertation committee in its current composition, have been kind enough to offer guidance on my work over the years, I would like to acknowledge specifically Paula Feldman's contribution as the former director of the dissertation committee. I am grateful for her time and effort in commenting on earlier versions of several chapters and for discussions regarding the aims of a dissertation in general. Beyond the dissertation, her passion inspired in me a love of Romantic poetry and a respect for editing.

For their careful and enthusiastic readings, I thank Christy Friend, Amy Lehman, and Bill Rivers. To Tony Jarrells I offer my sincere thanks for seeing and believing in the project. Your guidance has taught me so much about the teacher and scholar I aspire to be.

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I would like to thank the staffs of Special Collections and Interlibrary Loan at the Thomas Cooper Library, as well as the Garrick Club, London, for permission to quote from manuscript materials. My thanks to the Women's and Gender Studies department at the University of South Carolina whose funding acquired through the Harriott Hampton Faucette Research Award allowed archival research in Britain.

Finally, I offer love to my most unyielding circle of support: to my parents and brother who have encouraged me through every step and every detour, to Dawson who believed in me enough to read every written word and engage every idea, and to Sebbey and Reed whose curiosity has inspired mine. This project would not be without you.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on Mary Robinson's *Lyrical Tales*, not as the culminating point to which her writing inevitably led, as is frequently imagined in accounts of her life and work, but, instead, as the product of an intricate process of revision that highlights her investment in genre. Versions of many of the poems that Robinson included in *Lyrical Tales* originally were published in newspapers and periodicals. Rather than seeing the changes as a move toward a best or most mature or inspired version, I argue that Robinson revised to meet the requirements of her new genre, the lyrical tale. I make four distinct claims: that Robinson's revisions from newspaper verse to lyrical tale show her revising for genre, rather than privileging one over another; that a revision-based approach makes visible a thematic coherence that licenses me to use the term "genre" for her newspaper verse and lyrical tale; that attending to Robinson's revisions upsets accepted critical views of revision as solely a process of improvement or correction; and that upending traditional developmental narratives of Robinson's work and revision in general challenges critical notions of the nature of Romanticism formed by looking at a too narrow context. Robinson's unique process—her careful revision with an eye to genre—challenges many central ideologies birthed by the Romantics and inherited by Romanticists, particularly hierarchical approaches to the poetic process and the poetic product.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: ROBINSON, REVISION, AND ROMANTICISM

This dissertation argues that reading Mary Robinson's poetry through the lens of a traditional developmental narrative obscures a rich facet of her work: the role played by revision and the extent to which she revised to meet the specific requirements of genre.¹ Developmental narratives inform criticism of both her life and her work. Robinson played many roles in her career. As actress, courtesan, fashion icon, then writer, Robinson's trajectory appears linear, moving through successive stages, from popular persona to popular poet to Romantic genius. *Lyrical Tales* pictures in this developmental narrative as the culmination of her career, the moment at which she enters the field of Romanticism; having shed her early, juvenile (read: tainted) roles, she becomes worthy of a place amongst those whose verse and reputations are seen as transcendent. In spite of the pioneering work of Jerome McGann on Robinson's Della Cruscan period and Judith Pascoe on her pseudonymous selves, *Lyrical Tales* still overshadows Robinson's varied and prolific career.² But this myth of the Romantic genius, long ago debunked by Jack

¹ The project began under the directorship of Paula Feldman. Through several revisions, she sought to streamline the prose of the chapters, encouraged reframing the chapters' structures, and pressed for specificity. Her keen understanding of the conventions of editing provided me with technical terminology. She pointed me towards relevant sources, both those contemporary to Robinson and recent critical works. The thematic structure of several chapters was born of her guidance. I especially appreciate her early championing of Robinson as a figure worthy of focus for a dissertation. Her contributions will be further acknowledged in footnotes to chapters three, four, and five.

² See McGann's *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (1996), chapter nine, and Pascoe's *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship* (1997), chapter six.

Stillinger, implies another falsity: the myth of the solitary text.³ Like the many roles she played, Robinson's poetry, including *Lyrical Tales*, has many lives.

The focus of this dissertation is Robinson's revisions between two genres, newspaper verse and lyrical tales. Robinson's creative process for *Lyrical Tales*, like her career, does not conform to traditional developmental narratives. Her revision is not solely a process aimed at improvement or correction with drafts leading to a finalized text that transcends its earlier versions. Instead, hers is a process of creation and transformation, where verse is reimagined based on the contingencies of genre. I take as my metric not aesthetics, but genre and use this as a standard for discussing Robinson's revisions. My concern is not whether the writing is "good" or "bad" or whether the writing becomes "better" with each successive draft. Questions of aesthetics carry with them the notion that poetry is divorced from the material conditions that produced it and from the materiality of its publication, including the revision process. Instead I ask whether the writing is successful in its negotiation of genre, specifically Robinson's newspaper verse and lyrical tale. As such, my readings are informed by the poems' context. As the following chapters show, to read newspaper verse like "The Storm" devoid of its placement amidst the news stories of a devastating shipwreck is to ignore the poem's trenchant critique of the tools of British empire: slavery, war, and imperialism. To read "The Fugitive" on its own, without connection to its fellow lyrical tales, is to miss its sly resistance to traditional Romantic forms of the lyric. To widen the argument beyond Robinson, to read Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" without its original publication context is to neglect its marrying of the public space of

³ Stillinger's *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (1991) was groundbreaking in its claim that the romantic notion of the solitary genius does not hold when faced with the reality of the collaborative process of composition and publication.

war with the interiorized sphere of the lyric. And to read any of these poems, and the poems that follow in this dissertation, without their context is to miss how the revisions work not necessarily to improve the original but rather to make the material conform to the genres Robinson chose to write within.

It is the intersection of substance and context that recommends the term “genre” instead of something like “form” or “format.” Robinson’s formal ingenuity has long been celebrated. Jerome McGann on her Della Cruscan verse and series of sonnets, *Sappho and Phaon*, Stuart Curran on the “new lyric,” and Daniel Robinson on her fame through form all echo Coleridge’s praise “ay! that Woman has an Ear” (qtd. in Pascoe, *Selected Poems* 58).⁴ However, form and content, medium and audience, are inextricably linked in the larger construct of genre, including the genres she creates. Her newspaper verse and lyrical tales are not bound by a particular structure—a form—nor are they simply tied to the format in which they appear, whether the newspaper or a book collection. Instead they cohere around a set of subjects and stylings taken from their immediate context, the news stories filling the pages, the other lyrical tales filling the collection, or the audience expectations of each.

This dissertation will offer readings of Robinson’s poetry that highlight the features of two genres—newspaper verse and lyrical tale—and that foreground the role that revision played in both moving between genres and in creating them. But attending to Robinson’s process leads to questions about the role developmental narratives play in theories of revision and of Romanticism. Jerome McGann’s concept of the Romantic Ideology has challenged many of the assumptions upon which Romantic critics operate.

⁴ See McGann’s *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (1996), especially chapters nine and ten, Curran’s “Mary Robinson and the New Lyric” (2002), and Daniel Robinson’s *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame* (2011).

McGann's thesis that Romantic literary critics have been imprisoned by the self-representations of Romantic poets, what he calls the Romantic Ideology, has been influential in its critique of those traits that have come to define Romanticism.⁵ Though this work accomplished a significant reevaluation of the period, I add Romantic concepts of revision to what he identifies. The developmental notion of revision as culminating in a "best" text, I suggest, is a romantic notion inherited from the Romantics by Romantic scholars, one that Robinson's revision upsets.

Robinson's process invites us to question hierarchical models of criticism. In this dissertation, I follow her lead. My argument does not privilege one version—newspaper verse or lyrical tale—over another, nor does it privilege one of my claims over another. My concern is how the different key terms—Robinson, revision, and Romanticism—intersect. I make four distinct claims: that Robinson's revisions from newspaper verse to lyrical tale show her revising for genre, rather than privileging one over another; that a revision-based approach makes visible a thematic coherence that licenses me to use the term "genre" for her newspaper verse and lyrical tale; that attending to Robinson's revisions upsets accepted critical views of revision as solely a process of improvement or correction; and that upending traditional developmental narratives of Robinson's work and revision in general challenges critical notions of the nature of Romanticism formed by looking at a too narrow context. But these claims should not be read as hierarchical. In this dissertation, newspaper verse is as important as lyrical tale, and Robinson is as important as Romanticism.

⁵ See *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (1983). The traits McGann defines as illusions include the transcendent nature of verse (13, 134); the unifying purpose, or the "synthesis" and "reconciliation," of poetry (34, 40); the "spontaneous overflow" of poetic production (63); the "epistemological crisis" as poetic subject (71); the possibility of escape from the world through imagination and poetry (91, 131, 137); and the ultimate arrival at Truth through verse (134).

I concede that *Lyrical Tales* is exceptional in Robinson's career, not as the culminating point to which her writing inevitably led, but because its project is unique: to create its own genre. Prior to *Lyrical Tales*, she had published volumes simply titled *Poems* (in 1775, 1791, and 1793), along with several longer poems on specific themes, such as *Captivity, A Poem* (1777), *A Monody to the Memory of the Late Queen of France* (1793), and *Sappho and Phaon. In A Series of Legitimate Sonnets* (1796). *Lyrical Tales*, published one month before her death, is her only major collection of disparate works grouped with a specific thematic and formal focus. This collection also offers the widest selection of substantively revised poems. Thirteen of the twenty-two poems had been previously published in the periodical press, some in several versions and nearly all with substantive revisions prior to their publication in collected form.⁶ *Lyrical Tales* is the only instance of Robinson revising her poetry for a unified purpose to fit a different audience from her periodical publications.

What I will call newspaper verse, as opposed to simply verse published in newspapers, is verse aware of its context, responsive to the news stories that occupy neighboring columns, keen to exploit the conventions of the paper, and sensitive to the material and physical requirements of publishing in a daily or weekly format. These poems are consumable but still complex, intended for a reading public that cuts across classes. Robinson's periodical readership would certainly have included the audience for her collections, but even these readers would be reading the poems in a different manner. The context of the paper would have contributed to the meaning of the poem.

⁶ See Appendix A for the publication history of the thirteen periodical press poems transformed to lyrical tales.

The public reading *Lyrical Tales* for the first time would have met a genre that can be placed within context but was without precedent. Its newness draws on expectations of already existing forms. A lyrical tale's most radical characteristic is its location of the lyric within the tale or the tale within the lyric. Instead of vesting power in the poet-speaker, as is typical of Romantic lyrics, Robinson grants voice to usually derided or dispossessed characters so that they might narrate their own stories. In the world of *Lyrical Tales*, this telling is a form of political power greater than any possible resultant action. As I will argue, in revising to craft her lyrical tales, Robinson made voice essential to the characters within her created genre and to the genre itself, points that become clear when reading the poems as part of a collection.

Both newspaper verse and lyrical tale are underrepresented and even misrepresented in current criticism. Kenneth Curry describes newspaper verse's "function" as "providing momentary delight for the reader by graceful diction and by presenting a theme of no great complexity in a pleasing fashion" (2). Daniel Robinson echoes Curry's sentiment that newspaper verse should be "pleasing": "newspaper poetry of the 1790s served a purpose much like that of the comics section in today's newspapers. These poems were meant to be consumable and literally disposable" (184). "[N]ewspaper poetry," he concludes, "is meant to be playful and fun" (18). But these readings miss that Robinson uses the "consumable" nature of the press and its immediacy to confront injustices and social ills both longstanding and very much of the moment. And characterizations of the verse as primarily intended for "fun" and with themes of "no great complexity" fail to recognize the serious political import of many periodical poems, as evidenced in the landmark anthologies edited by Betty T. Bennett (*British War Poetry*

in the Age of Romanticism, 1793-1815, published 1976) and Michael Scrivener (*Poetry and Reform: Periodical Verse from the English Democratic Press, 1792-1824*, published 1992). Even those poems with comic intentions—especially Mary Robinson’s second set of Tabitha Bramble poems, later revised into lyrical tales (the focus of chapter five)—are not solely meant to be “pleasing” or “fun”: their satire reveals significant political critique dependent upon their setting within the newspaper.

In his discussion of the Tabitha Bramble poems in *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame* (2009), Daniel Robinson recognizes Mary Robinson’s newspaper verse as sometimes possessing “an explicit social message” (159). For Daniel Robinson, Mary Robinson’s political newspaper verse, or any newspaper verse so socially engaged, “ought to eschew literary complexity . . . in favor of easy wit seasoned with sentiment and indignation” and “ought to be consumable” (159). But as Ashley Cross notes, Daniel Stuart, the editor of the *Morning Post* where Robinson worked as chief poetical correspondent in the final year of her life, “needed poets who could produce regularly and who could negotiate the tension between commodity status and aesthetic value, between daily consumption and transcendent worth, which writing for his newspaper demanded” (“Robert Southey and Mary Robinson in Dialogue” 10).

The critical grappling with defining newspaper verse underscores the challenge that Robinson faced in writing for this new medium, with its daily demands and unprecedented broad readership. Newspaper verse’s immediacy—in composition, styling, and subject—does not necessarily negate its complexity. While the casual reader may be drawn in by “wit” and “sentiment,” other readers would recognize in Robinson’s newspaper verse literary, historical, and folkloric allusions. “The Storm,” later revised as

“The Negro Girl,” is a seemingly simple account of lovers parted by the sea. But, as I argue in my second chapter, the poem engages current newspaper stories, is set against the backdrop of slavery, imperialism, and war, and is coupled with allusions to centuries’ old ballad tradition. Robinson’s newspaper verse does not sacrifice complexity; hers is a complexity integrally tied to its context. She writes poetry that is respectful of the medium: direct, political in a way that is accessible, able to arouse emotion, and approachable, but not simple.

Accounts of the amusing and serious in newspaper verse mirror the critical difficulty of reconciling the comic and tragic in *Lyrical Tales*. Critical considerations of *Lyrical Tales* are few, and most ignore the comic, separate the tragic and the comic tales, or selectively interpret from both.⁷ In addition to revaluing Robinson’s newspaper verse, this dissertation seeks to show how these seemingly disparate parts are integrated in *Lyrical Tales*. Close study of Robinson’s intricate and extensive revision allows for a fuller picture of her created genre; her careful emendations, additions, and edits show her revising for a genre she named “lyrical tale,” a genre that foregrounds the relationship between voice and community. Set within the larger context of the project—the nine poems not revised from periodical verse to lyrical tale—these revisions reveal Robinson revising for coherence and developing a unified poetic and political purpose, sustained by and within her genre, the lyrical tale.

One immediate context for Robinson’s new genre, the lyrical tale, is the lyrical ballad. Writing to a prospective publisher on June 17, 1800, Robinson avows her debt to

⁷ Chapter five discusses these claims in depth. There are only two pieces of scholarship that focus solely on the comic tales: Lisa Vargo’s “Tabitha Bramble and the *Lyrical Tales*” (2002) and Daniel Robinson’s article “Mary Robinson and the Trouble with Tabitha Bramble” (2010), later incorporated as chapter four in his book *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame* (2011).

the recently published *Lyrical Ballads* (1798): “The volume will consist of Tales, serious and gay, on a variety of subjects in the manner of Wordsworth[']s Lyrical ballads.”⁸ Anthony Jarrells’ work on the tale posits that the tale does the same work as the ballad—that, though distinct, the terms at the turn of the century had become almost interchangeable.⁹ And as Catherine Kerrigan writes, “The ballad is a tale told in verse” (qtd. in Fielding 2). Both terms point to orality, or to genres that use the medium of print to represent or reproduce the experience of oral communication—a representational telling through oral forms. But I argue that Robinson’s shift from “ballad” to “tale” signifies a different hybrid genre, one that foregrounds a more egalitarian communal experience through its insertion of the emotional utterance of a speaking “I” within the narrative and conversational thrust of the tale. What most differentiates a lyrical tale from a lyrical ballad is voice.

For Wordsworth, the ballad is subordinate to the lyric. *Lyrical Ballads* collapses the many voices of the ballad into the lyric “I.” The poet-speaker of Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* does not experience so much as he interprets other people experiencing. This poet is linked to the community of the ballad, but he is also separate and he is central. Enumerating the qualities of a poet in his 1802 Preface, Wordsworth claims the poet’s superiority through successive comparative adjectives: the poet is “endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness” and “has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul” (603). His continuation further places the poet in a position of power:

⁸ Unpublished manuscript letter to an unidentified publisher, dated June 17, 1800, signed and in Robinson’s hand, in the Library of the Garrick Club, London. Quoted with permission.

⁹ I am indebted to Anthony Jarrells for sharing his thoughts on the tale in personal communications. See his forthcoming book *The Time of the Tale: Romanticism, Enlightenment, and the ‘Intermixing’ of Genre*.

Among the qualities which I have enumerated as principally conducing to form a Poet, is implied nothing differing in kind from other men, but only in degree. The sum of what I have there said is, that the Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner. (607)

The poet, different not in “kind” but “degree,” has “a greater power in expressing” what all feel—he is better able to represent the experience of others than those having the experiences. The ballad bleeds into the lyric, in that the speaker, often synonymous with the poet, holds the position of power, the position as subject, within the poems. The speaking “I” frames the experience not only for the character within the ballad, but also for readers of the ballad. Even in a poem such as “Simon Lee,” in which the speaker claims he has no tale to tell, his dismissal of his “gentle reader” frames the reader’s experience and Simon’s tale gives way to the poet’s reflection on it (69). As William Richey and Daniel Robinson note:

What emerges from the speaker’s encounter is thus not so much a tale as a moment of introspection. Because the poem so deftly juxtaposes the narrative expectations for the ballad with a defiant lyrical resistance that redirects the emphasis to the speaker’s own experience, ‘Simon Lee’ is perhaps the definitive ‘lyrical ballad’ in the collection, a ballad that tells no story but forces the reader to focus on this moment of lyrical insight.

(4)

The continual interruptions and the resistance to tale-telling place the speaker in a position of power over the reader as he can withhold as well as redirect.

Though sharing the ballad's insistence on narrative and action, tales can be spun by anyone. Robinson's tales are told, not by an outside interpreter of experience, but by the characters, themselves. These characters, then, hold the poetic power. This granting of voice to others, I argue, is central to the project of *Lyrical Tales*. In defining a lyrical tale, Stuart Curran reads the lyric as a tool of the author. For Curran, a lyrical ballad "emphasiz[es] as its conception of the lyrical, a psychological perspective arising naturally within what had been in the traditional ballad a field of unselfconscious action" ("Mary Robinson and the New Lyric" 17). Robinson, he claims, "is concerned primarily with lyrical effect, the surface" ("Mary Robinson and the New Lyric" 17). Curran's emphasis invests power in the poet—in the poet's craft to create psychological perspective or lyrical effect. In defining a lyrical tale, I shift emphasis, as does Robinson, from the poet or speaker to the characters. I locate the lyric within the action: the lyric exists within the tale, with an equal emphasis on both reflection and narrative. In *Lyrical Tales*, the number of names in the titles signals this emphasis on individual expression. In her tragic tales, Robinson grants lyric expression to those normally denied voice—a Lascar, a Negro girl, peasants, even animals—literally conferring authority upon those who are powerless. In her comic tales, she stresses a lyric voice that is at once communal and individual. As a genre, the lyrical tale highlights poetry's power to grant voice to others, rather than merely to reflect on how their experience might be imagined.

The lyric began as what G. Gabrielle Starr terms an "unstable genre" (2). But the lyric held a certain fixity in the late eighteenth century, one not shared by the relatively

new genres of newspaper verse and, particularly, tale. A tale's emphasis is on shared experience and narrative action. Pairing a tale with the individual and interiorized lyric seems oxymoronic. But part of Robinson's project is to confront how—and whether—to generalize individual experience. Her poems deliberately reject the didacticism of morals common in tales, either by ignoring them completely or revealing their absurdity. They resist turning a character's life into a moral lesson intended for readers, for when individuals become symbols, they lose their individuality. Robinson's lyrical tales raise questions of authority, autonomy, and ownership, and of who can speak and how loudly. But these questions have no easy answer. Ultimately, it is the power of voice, not the ability to achieve resultant action, that pervades.

While the centrality of Wordsworth and Coleridge to critical notions of Romanticism make *Lyrical Ballads* an obvious and significant context for Robinson's *Lyrical Tales*, there is another important but far less acknowledged context: that of the newspaper, particularly the *Morning Post*.¹⁰ The key term when viewing *Lyrical Tales* in relation to the *Morning Post* is revision. Spurred by the discovery of multiple manuscript and printed versions of Romantic texts, and the ensuing critical engagement with revision these discoveries necessitated, critics are more apt to recognize that Romantic poets' privileging of originality and organicism denies the reality of their careful processes of revision. Phrases such as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and "if Poetry

¹⁰ Robinson's relationships, personal and poetic, with these poets shaped her work and reputation. Early scholarship on Robinson concerns itself primarily with her relationship to Coleridge. See Daniel Robinson, *The Poetry of Mary Robinson* (2009), p.254, footnote 1 for a thorough history of this scholarship. Curran's landmark article "Mary Robinson's *Lyrical Tales* in Context" (1994) widens the circle from Wordsworth and Coleridge and *Lyrical Ballads* to Southey and his "English Eclogues." Cross explores the reciprocal relationship of literary debt between Wordsworth and Robinson in "From *Lyrical Ballads* to *Lyrical Tales*: Mary Robinson's Reputation and the Problem of Literary Debt" (2001). Even the most recent work on Robinson pairs Robinson with Coleridge. Two of the five chapters in the only monograph published on her poetry, Daniel Robinson's *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame* (2011), deal with Robinson's relationship with Coleridge.

comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all” are so firmly rooted in the Romantic Ideology as to no longer need attribution. But as pioneering textual critics such as Jack Stillinger and Jerome McGann make clear, to take as truth Wordsworth’s “spontaneous overflow” is to ignore his immediate qualification—“recollected in tranquility”—and his lifelong preoccupation with revision; and discovering Keats’ manuscripts, riddled with revisions, does not diminish his poems, despite their supposed unnatural growth.¹¹ These critics’ acknowledgement of revision as producing versions of canonical texts worthy of study initiated a new avenue of scholarly inquiry. My dissertation looks beyond the Big Six to Robinson and her revision practices. In doing so, I hope to expand our ways of understanding the revision practices of these traditionally canonical writers.

The most recent monographs on revision challenge in some ways the reality of Romantic poets’ theories of revision and publication but still privilege one version above another or base conclusions on a limited group of writers. Zachary Leader’s *Revision and Romantic Authorship* (1999), the most recent monograph specifically on revision in the Romantic era, takes to task primitivist and pluralist practices of editing, those that privilege the first version or multiple versions of a text, arguing that both diminish what he terms “secondary processes” or “second thoughts” (1). Inherent in his argument, though, is that a choice is necessary, that one version stands above another. Although honoring what she calls the fluidity of versions, the most recent monograph on revision in

¹¹ Jerome McGann’s landmark *The Romantic Ideology* (1983) provided the foundation for reading the Romantics by their practices instead of their theories, while Jack Stillinger’s *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (1991) opened critical debate regarding the social history of texts, with revision as an integral part of this history. McGann’s later theoretical texts *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1991) and *Radiant Textuality: Literature after the World Wide Web* (2004) and Stillinger’s practical work with multiple versions in *Coleridge and Textual Instability: The Multiple Versions of the Major Poems* (1994) and *Romantic Complexity: Keats, Coleridge, and Wordsworth* (2006) extended their original arguments acknowledging revision to newer ones privileging revision as a serious site of critical inquiry.

general, *The Work of Revision* (2013), by Hannah Sullivan, posits that “the association of revision and literary value is the legacy of high modernism and the print culture that nourished it. . . . They used revision, an action that implies retrospection, not for stylistic tidying-up but to *make it new* through large-scale transformations of length, structure, perspective, and genre” (2). This description is as apt for Robinson, who engaged print culture in a similar way a hundred years before, as for the high modernists. Though admitting that Romantic-era writers’ practices of revision may not conform to their espoused beliefs, Sullivan’s work confines its sample to a few traditionally canonical poets, all male. Sullivan locates the Romantic era as a moment of transition in the history of revision—a moment when technology allowed more opportunities for revision. But Robinson’s process challenges Sullivan’s reference to “the possibility of auditing work in periodicals before book form,” a choice of words that implies deference to book form with the periodical press publications as merely intermediary, not complete, states (27).

Another account, by Jeffrey C. Robinson, argues that “revisions ought to be recognized, more fruitfully, as a change or modification of point of view, a change or modification of commitment” (31). For the texts whose versions are firmly rooted in the canon, often these changes to “point of view” or “commitment” are seen in terms of biographical readings or as a response to shifting historical circumstances. A noteworthy example is *The Prelude* whose posthumously added subtitle, “Growth of a Poet’s Mind,” included with its first printing in 1850, attests to the early adoption of these two frameworks for revision. Political preference often guides editorial decision as to which version to privilege: the younger, revolutionary Wordsworth in the 1805 version or the

elder, more conservative Wordsworth in the 1850 version. Mary Robinson's repurposing is different. Hers is in service of genre.

But the implications of studying Robinson's revision and publication history extend beyond challenging traditional views of revision and genre; Robinson's revision process suggests another way to look at how Romantic writers might be edited and taught. Versioning is not a new concept in Romantic scholarship, but presenting multiple texts remains largely a theoretical concept or is confined to monographs and scholarly editions whose expense limits their reach. The choice of a single text persists in editing practices; this dominant ideology even affects parallel text editions, where the presentation of multiple versions nevertheless privileges the view of versions as indicative of progressive improvement or corruption in reference to a "best" text, either through placement on the page or explicit editorial commentary. When offered in accessible teaching editions, versions—typically limited to works by canonical male poets—remain distanced from their original publication venues. An attention to the conditions surrounding the different versions—the demands of the venue and audience—suggests teaching them not as steps towards or away from an ideal text but as versions worthy of attention on their own and in concert with one another.

Theories of editing are endemic to Romantic scholarship. Although the genesis of textual and bibliographic criticism as a serious subset of critical debate is rooted in biblical studies and became codified through investigations of medieval and Shakespearean texts, the most recent spirited debates take up Romantic literature as a contested and contestable site. Given the Romantic period's preoccupation with creative process, it is fitting that scholars of the period would be inspired to espouse a social

theory of the text that subordinates authorial intention to socio-historical and material factors and to challenge the myth of single authorship.¹² These concerns about the context surrounding the production of the work flow naturally into debates about the context of reception and about how best to present Romantic works for modern consumption. The textual and bibliographic wars of the 1980s and 1990s mirror, in many ways, the publishing landscape of the Romantic era. In both Periods, new technology made possible modes of production and consumption heretofore unavailable—the proliferation of printed materials, especially through the periodical press, in the Romantic era and the popularity of facsimile editions and the promise of new digital means of publication in the 1980s and 1990s.¹³

The trajectory of bibliographic and textual scholarship since W.W. Greg, Fredson Bowers, and G. Thomas Tanselle has been towards a best, most authoritative, or complete text, an approach that continues to dominate editorial practice. In the midst of the debate between so-termed primitivists who privilege the earliest version of a text, before publishers' or editors' potential corruption, and those who champion the last version, whether in published or manuscript form, a new side, referred to as “indeterminate” or “pluralist,” emerged. In theory, pluralism challenges the concept of a best text—the necessity of a single copy-text—and several scholarly works by Romanticists in this two-decade period put into practice this theory. Donald Reiman's concept of versioning, of presenting multiple versions of a text with or without a critical

¹² See McGann's *The Textual Condition* and Stillinger's *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*, both published in 1991.

¹³ The history of Garland Publishing mirrors the rise and decline in popularity of facsimile editions. Founded in 1969, the press found success with facsimile editions in the 1970s but turned to scientific texts in 1983. The publisher's name change to Garland Science Publishing after Taylor and Francis acquired the firm in 1997 signals the short-lived relevance of facsimile editions in the internet age. See Michael F. Suarez's entry “Garland Publishing” in *The Oxford Companion to the Book* for a fuller history of the press.

apparatus, is reflected in his early variorum edition of Shelley's "The Triumph of Life" and in his contributions to the Garland series of facsimiles. Stillinger's work with Coleridge and textual instability, later expanded to encompass the concept of Romantic complexity in Keats and Wordsworth, as well, identifies more than one hundred versions of Coleridge's seven major poems. Steven Maxfield Parrish's *Coleridge's Dejection: The Earliest Manuscripts and the Earliest Printings* presents reading and parallel texts, photographs and transcriptions, of the extant versions of three poems penned in 1802.

Although these theories were put into practice, the practicality of their mode of presentation as monographs and facsimiles necessarily limited their reach to scholars. Teaching editions remained—and still remain—firmly rooted in the single text model. The four most widely adopted anthologies of Romantic literature—McGann's *The New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse* (1993), Anne Mellor's and Richard Matlock's *British Literature: 1780-1830* (1996), Susan Wolfson's and Peter Manning's *The Longman Anthology of British Literature* (2006), and Duncan Wu's *Romanticism: An Anthology* (2012)—taken together, make available versions of nine poems from five authors, and, with the exception of one poem by Clare and one poem by Burns, limit their selection to three canonical male poets—Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats.¹⁴ Parallel text versions of few Romantic works exist in teaching editions. The most well-known and accessible parallel texts include the groundbreaking 1979 Norton Critical edition of the 1799, 1805, and 1850 *Prelude*, edited by Meyer Abrams, Stephen Gill, and Jonathan

¹⁴ Wu's anthology is remarkable for its inclusion of four parallel text versions: Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp," "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," "Frost at Midnight," and "The Pains of Sleep." It also incorporates the whole of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, versions in their own right. An affordable anthology titled *Visions & Revisions: The Poet's Process*, edited by Barry Wallenstein and Robert Burr and published by Broadview Press in 2002, begins with Blake as well, but traverses centuries and countries, with Blake as the sole representative Romantic. The anthology's intention to present at least two versions of all included poems is promising, but the execution is lacking. As the texts are not presented on facing pages, readers must thumb from page to page to read the versions and mark the variants.

Wordsworth, updated by Jonathan Wordsworth to include the 1798 short poem “Was It For This” as a fourth version in 1995’s Penguin Classics edition, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*.¹⁵ Broadview Press offers two parallel text teaching editions, Felicia Hemans’ *The Siege of Valencia* (2002), edited by Susan Wolfson and Elizabeth Fay, and my co-edited edition of Helen Maria Williams’ *Peru and “Peruvian Tales,”* forthcoming under the general editorship of Paula R. Feldman. This listing makes clear the difficulty of putting into praxis, using traditional means, the theories Romanticists espouse.

Romanticists have become creative in their pedagogy, however, to meet this deficit. In *Radical Literary Education: A Classroom Experiment with Wordsworth’s “Ode”* (1987), Jeffrey C. Robinson’s recounts how he brings revision to the classroom by focusing on a sole poem in its multiple versions: “Ode: Intimations of Immortality Recollected in Early Childhood.” *The William Blake Archive* and *Romantic Circles* editions point to another solution: digital media.¹⁶ With the advent of the digital humanities, universities are turning their attention to innovative ways to make these resources available, suggesting that versioning may become a regular practice.

Pedagogical shifts are occurring thanks to the work of Romanticists who recognize multiple versions of texts as valid sites of inquiry, but these might, understandably, be

¹⁵ Wordsworth himself would not approve of this practice; he urged the necessity of “following strictly the last Copy of the text of an Author” (qtd. in Leader 20). Ernest de Selincourt inaugurated the now commonplace practice of parallel text format for *The Prelude* with his 1926 facing-page edition, which included both the 1805 and 1850 versions, but this edition was not practical for classroom instruction given its expense. For a concise recounting of the textual debates over Wordsworth’s revision to *The Prelude*, see Susan Wolfson’s chapter “Revision as Form: Wordsworth’s Drowned Man” in *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (1997).

¹⁶ *Romantic Circles* includes the following hypertext editions representing multiple versions of texts: Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818, 1831), Robert Southey’s *Wat Tyler* (1817, 1835, 1850, 1860), Maria Jane Jewsbury’s *The Oceanides* (1832 to 1833), Wordsworth and Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads* (1798, 1800, 1802, 1805), Coleridge’s “Wanderings of Cain” (1828, 1834), and Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *The Devil’s Walk* (Jan. 1812, Aug. 1812).

limited to works for which there is already some debate or works from writers already clearly established. This dissertation provides in part a theoretical approach that might inform ways to use these digital resources to study revision.

Although Mary Robinson's status continues to rise, editions of her work are few and largely conform to traditional modes of editing. Judith Pascoe's editorial choice to include the periodical versions of the poems incorporated into *The Progress of Liberty* in the only available teaching edition of Robinson's poetry, *Selected Poems* (published by Broadview Press in 2000), suggests an awareness of the importance of the periodical press for understanding Robinson and Romanticism. However, the poems appear in isolation, without *The Progress of Liberty*, and thus do not allow for an understanding of Robinson's process of revision and her investment in genre. Daniel Robinson edited the two-volume edition of Mary Robinson's poetry as part of Pickering and Chatto's *The Works of Mary Robinson*. It is described as "the first complete and scholarly edition of Robinson's poetry ever published" and promises to "include periodical verse that did not appear in the posthumous 1806 *Poetical Works*" ("The Works of Mary Robinson"). This choice, like Pascoe's, reinforces the power and position of periodical poetry, not only for Robinson, but also within Romanticism. But there is only one periodical poem published with its later version in this edition, "The Storm" and "The Negro Girl," an editorial decision influenced by my published work on these poems. The Pickering and Chatto edition is "[t]he most complete collection of Robinson's work ever published," but without access to versions, scholars and students risk losing the subtlety of her process and opportunities to

refine the critical conversation surrounding Robinson, revision, and Romanticism (“The Works of Mary Robinson”).

Divorced from the context of their publication histories, versions can too easily appear as merely process; scholars risk ceding an understanding of their independent complexity to the streamlined narrative of progressive development and a “best” text. Robinson’s movement between newspaper verse and lyrical tale intertwines process and product; she transforms unique works into unique works. This realization gives rise to subtler readings of the poems themselves and brings genre into the foreground. While Jerome McGann’s comment that the bibliographic and textual criticism wars are over and that “we all” won may be true, the process of building new ways of approaching texts is ongoing.¹⁷

This dissertation is part of that construction, starting broadly with a consideration of the Romantic periodical press as a site for serious inquiry, before narrowing its focus specifically to Robinson’s revisions from newspaper verse to lyrical tale. It begins with a pair of poems unique among the others for their publishing history, with the newspaper poem published four years prior to *Lyrical Tales*.¹⁸ The study then examines Robinson’s revisions thematically—through the defining motifs of the domestic consequences of war, the Traveler figure, and gossip—before concluding with a poem whose complex

¹⁷ Personal communication following Jerome McGann’s lecture “Philology in a New Key,” delivered at the University of South Carolina’s Center for Digital Humanities Future Knowledge lecture series, October 15, 2012. Following his lecture, I asked Professor McGann to weigh in on the bibliographic and textual criticism wars. Thinking the lack of information I found by Romanticists about copy-text and versioning after the year 2000 was likely due to my limitations as a researcher, I asked for the names of current voices in the debate. Professor McGann’s reply was that the wars were over. I pressed, “Who won?” His response: “We all did.”

¹⁸ The remaining twelve poems were published in their separate versions within months of one another, suggesting the possibility that Robinson may have penned multiple versions simultaneously.

revision and publication history reveals in the most dramatic terms Robinson's commitment to revising to meet the requirements of genre.¹⁹

Set within the context of the publication history of her fellow *Morning Post* poets, Robert Southey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth, chapter one investigates the ways in which modern Romanticists echo the dismissal of the periodical press espoused by these canonical male poets. Examining Robinson's career-long relationship with the periodical press, with particular emphasis on the ways in which her theory and practice uphold the value of the press, provides a significant counterpoint to these contemporary male poetic voices. Recognition and revaluation of her place within the Daniel Stuart circle and her unique process of revision also suggests blind spots in the critical literature on periodical poetry.

Chapter two moves to close readings of Robinson's revision process by pairing the newspaper version of "The Storm" with *Lyrical Tales*' "The Negro Girl," arguing that Robinson's respect for each venue produces two distinct generic forms that paradoxically stand alone and depend upon one another for their meaning. In its transformation from newspaper verse to lyrical tale, Robinson nearly doubled the length of her poem, moving it geographically from England to Africa, and substituting for its white, English characters Nancy and William, the black, African slaves Zelma and Draco. What is equally striking is what has remained unchanged. Amidst these major shifts, Robinson gives the same story of love and loss to both pairs of lovers, the white and the black,

¹⁹ I am grateful to Paula Feldman for seeing in my work that the themes I had identified as bringing coherence to *Lyrical Tales* could provide the structure for the chapters. She also recognized that the substance of what is now chapter two warranted its own chapter.

effectively equalizing her characters, while offering a damning critique of the slave trade's effects on its participants, both willing and enslaved.

Robinson's domestic tales of war, "Edmund's Wedding," "The Deserted Cottage," and "The Widow's Home," the first two originally published in the *Morning Post*, are the focus of chapter three. This trio of poems responds to both Britain's contemporary reality and a larger poetic tradition and documents a particular preoccupation with war—critiquing the culture of war for its devastating effects on the home front. In their movement to lyrical tale, Robinson's poems complicate tropes standard in wartime newspaper verse by illustrating the demands the lyric—with its emphasis on individual expression—places on these commonplace wartime figures. The individual expression given voice in Robinson's *Lyrical Tales* paradoxically enlarges the scope of loss seemingly made universal in her newspaper verse, a loss that can be fully appreciated only by comparing the different versions.

Theorizing revision as addition forms the core of chapter four, whose focus is the Traveler, a shadowy figure who inhabits the world of *Lyrical Tales*, appearing in ten of the twenty-two poems, three of which—"The Hermit of Mont-Blanc," "Poor Marguerite," and "Edmund's Wedding"—first appeared in periodicals. Robinson's Travelers are figures distinct from the dispossessed exiles and émigrés, wanderers and hermits, widows and orphans, slaves and servants, who are the main focus of her poems. Their fallibility makes possible the agency of the dispossessed figures. Unlike "the new wanderers" of eighteenth-century poetry and the contemporary travelers peopling Romantic-era literature, Robinson's *Lyrical Tales* is uninterested in the Traveler's

journey, choosing, instead, to focus on the dispossessed figures traditionally denied a voice.

Voice is central to both the tragic and comic tales, which I explore in chapter five. Although this chapter diverges from the previous ones in its focus on the comic tales, its aim is to show that far from anomalous, the comic tales are integral to the project of *Lyrical Tales*, a point reinforced by their revision. In her newspaper verse, Robinson transforms Tobias Smollett's Tabitha Bramble, the target of his comedic scorn, giving her authority as the tale-teller, the comedienne. In the movement from newspaper verse to lyrical tale, she brings the tale to the lyric, replacing Tabitha with gossip more generally as a dominant narrative technique, thereby creating a lyric voice that is at once individual and collective. No longer a frivolous feminine pastime, gossip creates and reinforces community. The tragic tales grant voice to those who are powerless, while the comic tales reveal the power of voice, regardless of status or intent.

Chapter six looks at the four remaining poems revised from their periodical press versions to lyrical tales—"Poor Marguerite," "The Poor, Singing Dame," "The Haunted Beach," and "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc"—as examples that do not fit neatly with the thematic categories I have previously discussed. The fact that they resist these easy categories and yet remain lyrical tales, I argue, highlights Robinson revising to meet the requirements of her particular genres. From these readings that define a lyrical tale, I turn back to the way that Robinson defines revision to conclude the chapter and the dissertation. Perhaps the best example of Robinson disrupting the developmental narrative of revision is "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc," a poem she transformed into three distinct genres: magazine verse, lyrical tale, and progress poem. Robinson's return to the

periodical press version—not the lyrical tale, the version modern critics privilege—for inclusion in *The Progress of Liberty* foregrounds her investment in the power of genre, while challenging critical notions of the best, most authoritative, or complete text.

In every case, this dissertation does not privilege the last published version of a poem or, indeed, any version over another but, instead, looks at the ways in which these versions are in conversation with one another in order to understand Robinson's poetic and political purposes. It eschews the developmental narratives of Robinson's career and revision in favor of theories of editing that can broaden the ways in which she is read. And it offers readings whose insights and connections are products of the requirements of genre. This study not only challenges the critical conversation surrounding how to approach Romanticism and revision but also offers reasons to draw the scholarship from the realm of ideas into the practical reality of the classroom.

CHAPTER II

THE POWER OF THE PRESS

Appreciation of Robinson's revision begins with recognizing how deftly she works within multiple genres, moving between them, acutely sensitive to their various demands and potentials. Later chapters will discuss the emergence of the lyrical tale and its significance as a genre. But in order to understand Robinson's processes of revision, it is vital to begin with how Robinson wrote to the genre of newspaper verse. Her experiences at the *Morning Post* shaped not only her valuation of this genre, but also the success of the newspaper itself. And both are overlooked aspects of her career.

To make these points, this chapter places Robinson at the center of her circle of peers. Those normally central to Romantic study—William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and to a lesser but still important extent, Robert Southey—all had antagonistic relationships with the popular press. Their derision has shaped readings of Romanticism. But, as this chapter argues, Robinson's relationship to the periodical press challenges these inherited notions.

Robinson's newspaper verse shows an uncommon—certainly within her circle—attention to the requirements of the genre. Much like the lead lines of newspaper articles that entice the reader to engage with serious topics, Robinson's newspaper verse blends popular appeal with serious political import. This genre, for Robinson, is different, not less, than the works collected in bound volumes. It is a necessarily responsive genre, the

poet writing to specific time and space constraints, for a particular audience, and, if sensitive enough, recognizing the poems as framed within a pressing context. This is a context within which Robinson thrived, as her career-long investment in the periodical press makes clear.

II.1 THE DANIEL STUART CIRCLE

Robinson's whole career, not just her *Lyrical Tales*, showed her engaged with the periodical press. Despite 1775's *Poems* and 1777's *Captivity: A Poem; and Celadon, A Tale*, written while imprisoned for debt with her husband, Robinson's literary career began in earnest when she committed herself to life as a writer after the disastrous end to her affair with the Prince of Wales, later King George IV. As part of the immensely popular Della Cruscan Movement of the late 1780s, her first periodical publications took the form of poetic epistles. Publishing under the names "Laura Maria" and "Julia," (and, later, "Laura" and "Oberon"), Robinson appeared in the pages of *The World* and *The Oracle*, writing poetic effusions to Della Crusca himself, Robert Merry, and to other satellite poets.²⁰ Once the passion and intensity that guided these epistles died out, presumably because of a meeting in the flesh between the originators of the poetical correspondence, Robert Merry and Hannah Cowley, Robinson did not abandon the venue that made her popular.²¹ In the last two decades of her career, particularly in the 1790s, Robinson complemented her book publications by publishing several series of essays in the *Morning Post* and the *Monthly Magazine* and hundreds of poems in dozens of

²⁰ In *Romantic Theatricality* (1997), Judith Pascoe, building on the work of Jerome McGann in his *Poetics of Sensibility* (1996), argues for the validity of this tradition, claiming Della Cruscan verse as the "most obvious and immediate precursor to the poetry we know as romantic" (3).

²¹ See Pascoe's *Romantic Theatricality* for an amusing description of this less than passionate meeting (69).

newspapers and magazines.²² Her most prolific and significant contributions to the periodical press came in her final years. As chief poetical correspondent for Daniel Stewart's *Morning Post*, in a little over one year, Robinson published 217 poems, 98 of which were her own, including 12 of the 13 poems that would later be revised for *Lyrical Tales*.²³

Despite the demands of frequent publication, felt most severely during Robinson's intense bouts of illness, the *Morning Post* was well suited for Robinson's virtuosity, as it avowedly prized not solely reportage but also the paper's literary contributions.²⁴ On April 17, 1798, Stuart published an editorial notice for his readers, solidifying his intent for the newly formed poetical department:

To Our Poetical Readers. The Poetry of The Morning Post will in future be critically select. None but first-rate compositions will be admitted to our columns; and we are promised the aid of several of the most distinguished writers of the present day. Thus powerfully supported, we request the attention of the LITERATI to this department of our paper; where the enlightened mind will not fail to receive ample gratification.

Although the *Morning Post*, like many other dailies, printed poetry prior to Stuart's acquisition of the paper, its poetical department was distinctive, which helped him

²² Her essays include "The Sylphid Essays" published in the *Morning Post* (October 1799–February 1800), *Present State of the Manners, Society, Etc. Etc. of the Metropolis of England*, published in the *Monthly Magazine* (August–November 1800), and "Memoirs and Anecdotes of Eminent Persons" published in the *Monthly Magazine* (February–August 1800). See volume 8 of *The Works of Mary Robinson*, edited by William Brewer and Sharon M Setzer, for full texts of these series. The invaluable appendix to Judith Pascoe's *Selected Poems* (Appendix D: Publication Histories of Robinson's Poems), though not exhaustive, showcases the range and breadth of Robinson's periodical publications.

²³ Daniel Robinson provides a detailed explanation of why critics' use of the term "editor" to describe Robinson's role at the *Morning Post* miscasts her role. See 183-89. Also, see Appendix A for detailed publication information for the thirteen poems that form the core of this study.

²⁴ The continuation of Robinson's *Memoirs* includes the following sentiment: "When necessitated by pain and languor to limit her exertions, her unfeeling employers accused her of negligence" (149).

transform the *Morning Post* from a gossip rag with a print run of 350 copies to an independent and serious source of cultural news boasting 4500 daily printings.²⁵ The circle of support that Stuart drew around him was a distinguished one: it included William Wordsworth as an infrequent, unpaid, and sometimes unwitting contributor; Samuel Taylor Coleridge on staff as a regular contributor of verse and reportage; and Robert Southey as chief poetical correspondent before Robinson. The declared intention of publishing original poetry also sets apart the *Morning Post* under Stuart's direction – poetry written expressly as newspaper verse. Though not given much critical attention, their “Original Poetry,” which Stuart touted in a headnote to the publication of “Lewti” three days before his declaration, was one cause of the *Morning Post*'s unprecedented success.

The *Morning Post* was a daily newspaper whose run, from 1772 until 1937, is impressive. With its nascence in a period of rapid growth in the periodical press, the *Morning Post*'s ability to compete, despite the glut in the market, evidences its power and influence at the end of the eighteenth century. However, in 1795, when its circulation had plummeted, due in large part to a libel suit, one of its former owners, James Christie, predicted, “a blank, a ruinous proclamation of decline” for the newspaper (qtd. in Hindle 64). What happened instead of the apocalyptic demise that Christie prophesied was a miraculous increase in circulation with Stuart as owner and editor. Stuart's defense of the paper in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in June 1838 gives the statistics:

I began the management of the Morning Post in the autumn of 1795, when
its sale was only 350 per day. In the spring of 1797 it was 1,000 per day;

²⁵ Most notably, John Wolcot, writing as “Peter Pindar,” and Robert Merry were frequent contributors prior to Stuart's acquisition of the paper, though Robert Southey, later succeeded by Robinson, appears to be the first staffed as chief poetical correspondent.

before Coleridge returned from Germany it was upwards of 2,000 per day . . . its permanent circulation was, in August 1803, 4,500, while no other morning journal sold so much as 3,000. (June, 579)

Stuart sold the paper in 1803, garnering a profit of £24,400, having purchased the paper for £600 (Hindle 84).

The sheer increase in numbers only tells part of the story. What is missing—and what becomes central to a heated public debate between Coleridge and Stuart years after either's last involvement with the *Morning Post*—is who should receive credit for the paper's success. Remarks in Coleridge's 1817 *Biographia Literaria or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* initiated a dispute carried out in print whose implications extend past his own reputation to include the reputation of each poet in the Daniel Stuart circle, Daniel Stuart, himself, and, indeed, the periodical press more broadly. In this work, Coleridge alludes to his time spent as leader writer, Parliamentary reporter, satirical sketch artist, and poetry contributor under Stuart's general editorship:

Soon after my return from Germany I was solicited to undertake the literary and political department in the *Morning Post*; and I acceded to the proposal on the condition that the paper should thenceforwards be conducted on certain fixed and announced principles, and that I should be neither obliged or requested to deviate from them in favor of any party or any event. In consequence, that journal became and for many years continued anti-ministerial indeed, yet with a very qualified approbation of the opposition, and with far greater earnestness and zeal both anti-Jacobin and anti-Gallican. . . . The rapid and unusual increase in the sale of the

Morning Post is a sufficient pledge, that genuine impartiality with a respectable portion of literary talent, will secure the success of a newspaper without the aid of party or ministerial patronage” (*Biographia Literaria* 118; 120).

The success of the *Morning Post* according to Coleridge was because of Coleridge: he was responsible for instituting impartiality as the philosophical doctrine of the paper and for managing both the literary and political departments, thus leading to higher sales.

Coleridge also voices grievances about his tenure at the *Morning Post*:

Yet in these labors I employed, and in the belief of partial friends wasted, the prime and manhood of my intellect. Most assuredly they added nothing to my fortune or my reputation. The industry of the week supplied the necessities of the week. From government or the friends of government I not only never received remuneration, or ever expected it; but I was never honoured with a single acknowledgement or expression of satisfaction. (*Biographia Literaria* 121)

It was his complaints, later picked up by his nephew Henry Coleridge in *Table Talk* (1835) and by James Gillman in *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1838), that prompted Stuart’s response—and defense—four years after Coleridge’s death and 35 years after their last association with the *Morning Post*.

Stuart’s defense was published from May through August 1838 in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*. He blasts Coleridge’s abilities, admitting, rather harshly, that he “regarded him as a man of extraordinary endowments, shipwrecked by habits, a baby in worldly affairs” (July, 27). Stuart found Coleridge, though highly talented, unreliable and

unsuitable to newspaper work.²⁶ Stuart's stated purpose in this defense was to dispel the myth started by Coleridge himself and promoted by Coleridge's later biographers that Stuart was, in any way, not liberal with his patience and his purse. But Stuart also argues that Coleridge was not the person responsible for the newspaper's success. He writes, "there never was the shadow of a pretence for saying he one whole year (or one whole day) managed the literary and political department of the paper, still less for saying (as Henry Coleridge has printed) he in one year raised the *Morning Post* from an inconsiderable number to 7,000 daily" (May, 490). What is less directly stated here is who is responsible for this success, but the nature of the defense suggests that Stuart believes it to be himself.

Stuart and Coleridge both mention the contributions of Southey (the poet who occupied Robinson's position before her), Wordsworth, and Charles Lamb in their assessments of the merits of the paper, but what is absent in their discussions are the contributions of Robinson herself while she was chief poetical correspondent from December 1799 to December 1800.²⁷ Robinson's omission from any published account of the *Morning Post*'s success sheds light on critical blind spots in her career and reputation and that of the paper's. In the only major study of the *Morning Post*, Wilfrid Hindle never mentions Robinson either, going so far as to claim that Southey provided most of the poems between 1798 and 1803 and leaving out the fact that from December

²⁶ Wilfrid Hindle's portrait of their relationship confirms Stuart's view, describing Stuart not only as providing Coleridge's room, board, and wages, but also casting him in the role of nurse and nanny. See pp. 96-98.

²⁷ Although I cannot confirm the exact dates of her post, I posit that she was chief poetical correspondent from December 23, 1799 to her death, with her last publication on December 18, 1800. Southey's last contribution until he returned from Portugal in 1801 was his "Sonnet: Absence" dated December 20, 1799. After Southey's final contribution, the number of Robinson's poems appearing in the *Morning Post* spikes from one in the first 22 days of December 1799 to four in the final eight days of December 1799. Her final contribution to the *Morning Post* occurs on December 18, 1800, a mere eight days before her death.

20, 1799 to September 18, 1801, while Southey was in Portugal, not one of his poems appeared on the *Morning Post*'s pages.

Part of the popularity of the paper was what Hindle calls the paper's "literary pre-eminence," a pre-eminence attributed by Hindle, Coleridge, and Stuart to the male poetic voices published in its pages (72). But it is plausible that Robinson's significant contributions—nearly one hundred in a year's time—were also responsible for that pre-eminence. Although 70 of these poems were signed by other names—Tabitha Bramble, Laura Maria, Oberon, Sappho, and Laura—Robinson's authorship was thinly veiled by her pseudonyms, suggesting that she was not hiding in anonymity, but, instead, using the periodical press to engage multiple poetic stances and selves. Robinson frequently revealed these fictional selves to be her. The dedication to 1791's *Poems* claims those signed as Laura, Laura Maria, and Oberon in *The Oracle* as hers. She confirms her *Morning Post* pseudonyms in a letter to Samuel Jackson Pratt: "I continue my daily labours in the Post; all the Oberons. Tabithas. M R's and indeed most of the Poetry, you see there is mine." Many of the poems Robinson published in the *Morning Post* during her tenure as chief poetical correspondent announce authorship of her pseudonyms' poems, in particular "Oberon to Titania" and "Titania's Answer to Oberon" both signed by M.R. and the many poems that have a note affixed that reads "Written in the Ancient Manner." Robinson draws attention to herself as Sappho—a name she was famously called after her publication of *Sappho and Phaon* in 1796—in her first printing of a poem signed Sappho in the *Morning Post* during her tenure as chief poetical correspondent. On January 11, 1800, Robinson included the following footnote to Sappho's "Anacreontic: To Henry": "If we mistake not, these stanzas are from the pen of the Poetess whom the

tribunal of British literature has honoured with this *title*.” Even her obituary published in the *Morning Post* a few days after her death describes Robinson as “the authoress of several popular novels and poetical pieces, many of them under the signature of Laura Maria.”²⁸ According to Ashley Cross, Stuart “certainly knew the value of [Robinson’s] name and of her writing and capitalized on it. In fact, Stuart hired Robinson to fill Robert Southey’s post in 1800, when Southey left for Portugal, precisely because he knew she would draw a big audience” (“From *Lyrical Ballads* to *Lyrical Tales*” 5). After all, Robinson’s was the well-known name, not the younger poets’. Cross’s article asserts repeatedly that Robinson was a “shaper of reputations.” Perhaps, one of Robinson’s biggest successes was as a shaper of the *Morning Post*’s reputation.

II.2 THE READING PUBLIC

A possible explanation for Robinson’s success as periodical poet is her attitude toward the press, one that is markedly different from her fellow contributors William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose disdain bleeds over into modern critical conceptions of the press. One of the most famous condemnations of the periodical press occurs in the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*:

For 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

²⁸ Critical considerations of Robinson’s pseudonymity include Ashley Cross on Robinson’s use of pseudonyms in general, Paula R. Feldman on women writers and anonymity, McGann on her use of Sappho, Pascoe on her use of theatricality, Sharon M. Setzer on her use of Sylphid, and Lisa Vargo on her use of Tabitha Bramble. Daniel Robinson’s recent monograph treats Robinson’s pseudonyms, what he terms her “avatars,” extensively.

men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. (599)

Wordsworth describes a chain reaction whose conduit is the periodical press and whose result is a stunting of intellectual curiosity and a devaluing of art. The appetite for “extraordinary incident” seeps from news articles into literature, causing an “almost savage torpor” in his countrymen. In even more damaging terms than his attack on Stuart, Coleridge decries a reading public that has been overfed by the periodical press in the first of his *Lay Sermons*, published 1816:

For among other odd burrs and kecksies, the misgrowth of our luxuriant activity, we now have a READING PUBLIC—as strange a phrase, methinks, as ever forced a splenetic smile on the staid countenance of Meditation; and yet no fiction! For our readers have, in good truth, multiplied exceedingly, and have waxed proud. It would require the intrepid accuracy of a Colquhoun to venture at the precise number of that vast company only, whose heads and hearts are dieted at the two public *ordinaries* of Literature, the circulating libraries and the periodical press. But what is the result? Does the inward man thrive on this regimen? Alas! if the average health of the consumers may be judged of by the articles of largest consumption; if the secretions may be conjectured from the ingredients of the dishes that are found best suited to their palates; from all

that I have seen, either of the banquet or the guests, I shall utter my
Profaccia with a desponding sigh. From a popular philosophy and a
philosophic populace, Good Sense deliver us! (*The Statesman's Manual*
19-20)

Coleridge's disdain for what is "popular" is inextricably connected to a distrust of the taste of the "populace." His fear of their size, their inability to be satiated by "Meditation," and their choice of materials for consumption is palpable. Wordsworth's and Coleridge's quotations exhibit a notable fear of a reading public, a fear Robinson does not share.

It would seem fitting that Robinson would share her fellow *Morning Post* writers' misgivings, given her contentious history with the press. From her scandalous love affairs with the Prince of Wales and Banastre Tarleton to what new fashion she paraded in Hyde Park, nearly every aspect of her life was publicly scrutinized. She knew the power of the press, in part because she had felt its wrath. But far from simply using the press to refashion her image, as Sharon Setzer and Judith Pascoe claim, Robinson's prolific publishing in the daily newspapers and journals, as well as her tenure at the *Morning Post*, reveal a dedication to the creative potential of this new, and in her eyes, democratic form. In her series of essays, *Present State of the Manners, Society, etc. etc. of the Metropolis of England*, published in the *Monthly Magazine* just before her death, Robinson discusses this potential at length:

There never were so many monthly and diurnal publications as at the present period; and to the perpetual novelty which issues from the press may in a great measure, be attributed the expansion of mind, which daily

evinces itself among all classes of the people. The monthly miscellanies are read by the middling orders of society, by the *literati*, and sometimes by the loftiest of our nobility. The daily prints fall into the hands of all classes: they display the temper of the times; the intricacies of political manoeuvre; the opinions of the learned, the enlightened, and the patriotic. But for the medium of a diurnal paper, the letters of JUNIUS had been unknown, or perhaps never written. Political controversy and literary discussions are only rendered of utility to mankind by the spirit of emulative contention. The press is the mirror where folly may see its own likeness, and vice contemplate the magnitude of its deformity. It also presents a tablet of manners; a transcript of the temper of mankind; a check on the gigantic strides of innovation; and a bulwark which REASON has raised, and, it is to be hoped, TIME will consecrate, round the altar of immortal LIBERTY! (Nov. 1800, 305)

In contrast to both Wordsworth and Coleridge, Robinson celebrated the reach of the periodical press, its “fall[ing] into the hands of all classes,” and ability to shape public perception. According to Robinson, not only should the press be valued because of its democratic circulation, but it is also because of the press that certain compositions—presumably many of Robinson’s poems, but certainly her Della Cruscan ones—made it into print at all. As early as her Della Cruscan period and even into the final days of her life, Robinson’s prolific periodical publishing evidenced a penchant for molding her poems to fit this new genre, one whose time and space constraints demanded a new type of writing.

II.3 IDEOLOGIES OF THE PRESS

In addition to creating her own distinct genre—the “lyrical tale”—Robinson’s careful revision process supplies an unexpected testament to the *Morning Post*’s poetical department and the value of the periodical press. The writers in the Stuart circle operated under their own ideologies of what the press could achieve. Each author’s work and words about his or her work attest to the power of the press (whether ill or good), but only Robinson evinces respect for the genre. Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey shared suspicions of the literary merit of periodical verse, devaluing its commodity and ephemeral status. Coleridge’s fraught relationship with the periodical press, evidenced by his continual engagement with, despite his denouncement of, periodical culture, suggests a practicality about periodical publication motivated by his dependence. Wordsworth’s ideology rested on his public perception; his carefully crafted and not wholly accurate denial of his involvement with the periodical press reveals that he placed little value in its worth. Of the male poets, Southey is the only one who actively sought new printings of periodical verse, but he, nonetheless, devalued their original venue. His letters reveal that expediency and financial gain, not a belief in the intrinsic worth of the genre, inspired his periodical publishing.

Coleridge’s ties to periodical culture are the most complex, for he not only supplied poetry and prose but also campaigned for staff and editorial positions and founded his own periodicals. Angela Esterhammer’s work on Coleridge in the periodical press untangles this knotty and expansive relationship: a year before accepting a position with the *Morning Post* in 1797, Coleridge sought to become a staff member at the London *Telegraph*, accepted a proposal that never materialized to become co-editor of

the *Morning Chronicle*, and published ten issues of his own periodical *The Watchman*; after Stuart sold the *Post* in 1803, Coleridge joined him at the *Courier*, later becoming deputy editor from 1811-12, while also publishing *The Friend*, a weekly periodical that lasted about a year and was later collected into book form (166-68). Coleridge's poetry publications were even more extensive. As Esterhammer notes, and as evidenced by Stillinger's work on Coleridge and textual instability, "indeed, the poetry volumes of the *Collected Coleridge* reveal that most of his poetry appeared in one or another periodical publication" (166).

Coleridge's publication practices differ from Robinson's strikingly in that his periodical publications never made their way into a thematically and formally cohesive book, but, instead, into his many volumes of collected works. Coleridge differs in his theory of revision, as well. Coleridge's revisions aim to improve or correct, whereas Robinson's process is one of creation and transformation predicated by genre. The poem most critics know as "France: An Ode" had its genesis in the April 16, 1798 edition of the *Morning Post*. Originally titled "The Recantation," this poem was substantively revised for a second periodical publication more than four years later. Appearing on October 14, 1802, now under its familiar title, it was accompanied by the following headnote:

The following ODE was published in the paper (in the beginning of the year 1798) in a less perfect state. The present state of France, and Switzerland, gives it so peculiar an interest at this present time, that we wished to re-publish it, and accordingly have procured from the Author, a corrected copy.

“Less than perfect state,” “corrected copy”—the terms make clear a hierarchical process of revision, privileging the later version over the first.

As both Stuart and Coleridge admit, Coleridge was not well suited for the fast-paced demands of periodical publication; some of his poetic contributions to the *Post* were, in fact, revised versions of poems supplied by Wordsworth.²⁹ But beyond Wordsworth’s helping to fulfill Coleridge’s quota, seven poems (later collected as “Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty”), along with “The Solitude of Binnorie, or the Seven Daughters of Lord Archibald Campbell” (subsequently published as “The Seven Sisters” in the 1807 *Poems in Two Volumes*), and “The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale” (subsequently published in the 1815 *Poems*), appeared first in the *Morning Post*. The last of these poems is the only one which Wordsworth claimed by title to have published in the *Morning Post*. Following Gillman’s biography of Coleridge and the public debate between Coleridge and Stuart, both of which connect Wordsworth in print to periodical publication, Wordsworth felt it necessary to clear his name. His May 17, 1838 letter to Stuart attempts to disentangle himself from those who were staff members regularly paid for their contributions, while downplaying his periodical publishing. After declaring that he, his wife Mary, and sister Dorothy have no memory of his being paid for

²⁹ The exact number of Wordsworth poems revised by Coleridge is a matter of debate. For the most complete catalogue of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s intertwining publications in the *Morning Post*, see David V. Erdman’s “Appendix D: Verse Contributions by Coleridge and Wordsworth” in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (3.3: 285-89). The complications regarding attribution are evident in Erdman’s list. “Lewti,” which Coleridge revised from Wordsworth’s “Beauty and Moonlight,” is the only one of the poems which Wordsworth supplied that Coleridge later republished as his own. The poem had at least seven forms in Coleridge’s lifetime, one of which is particularly relevant given Robinson’s transformation of periodical poems to lyrical tales. After appearing on April 13, 1798 in the *Morning Post*, “Lewti” was included in the first printing of *Lyrical Ballads*. The 1798 Bristol publication of *Lyrical Ballads* was quickly suppressed, and “Lewti” was replaced by “The Nightingale.” A mere five copies of “Lewti” as lyrical ballad were made. J.C.C. Mays, editor of the masterful *Poetical Works* volumes in *The Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, claims the suppression was “to preserve anonymity or because it did not fit the purpose of the joint volume” (574). See G. Louis Joughin for a discussion of the seven forms of “Lewti.”

any contributions to the *Morning Post*, he asserts, “But certain I am that the last thing that could have found its way into my thoughts would have been to enter into an engagement to write for any newspaper, and that I never did so” (Letter 18, *Letters of Lake Poets* 385). The rhetorical moves that follow, particularly the vague and selective cataloging of his contributions not solely to Stuart’s paper but to any periodical, devalue and deemphasize his periodical work. That he must search his memory, and that his memory fails him, suggests, perhaps a bit too conveniently, how little worth he placed in this work.

Of the male poets in the Stuart circle, Southey is the only one whose relationship to periodical poems suggests their worth, although many of his letters denigrate the press itself and his tenure at the *Morning Post*. Unlike Coleridge, Southey felt fairly compensated for what he produced for the *Morning Post*, but the work itself he characterized as “drudge—drudge—drudge” (Letter 754, *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey*).³⁰ According to Kenneth Curry, Southey’s most anthologized poems—“The Battle of Blenheim,” “The Inchcape Rock,” “The Holly-Tree,” and “The Old Man’s Comforts”—found their first printings in the pages of the *Morning Post*, and many found life outside the periodical press with reprintings in the *Annual Anthology*, *Metrical Tales*, *Minor Poems*, and his *Collected Works* (2-3). The movement from periodical press to metrical tale in particular would seem to mirror Robinson’s process of transforming newspaper verse to a thematically and formally cohesive book form; however, Southey’s are reprintings, not revisions, with thirty-one slight emendations in the whole of his collection, none of which affect the meaning of his poems, and many of which are simple

³⁰ He writes of his fair compensation in a letter to Thomas Southey, dated September 8, 1803: “The Morning Post will somewhat interrupt me. Stuart has paid me so well for doing little, that in honesty I must work hard for him” (Letter 837, *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey*).

changes to spelling or pluralization. The most significant changes are in the addition of headnotes to six poems, which give credit to historical source material, and one title change from “The Ring” to “King Charlemain,” but, again, these additions do not affect meaning.³¹ Despite Southey’s “Advertisement,” which abjures his readers to “Let them [the poems] be considered as the desultory productions of a man sedulously employed upon better things,” their inclusion, not only in *Metrical Tales*, but also in the *Annual Anthology*, suggests at least a modicum of worth.

Southey’s *Annual Anthology*, though short-lived, with only two volumes in 1799 and 1800, was envisioned as a home not only for poems “now first published,” but also “many [that] have been printed in the Morning-Post” (“Advertisement,” vol. 1). Indeed, fourteen of Coleridge’s *Morning Post* poems, along with dozens by Robinson, Charles Lamb, and Southey, appeared in the second volume, alone. Writing on December 30, 1798, in response to his friend William Taylor’s suggestion for an annual collection of poetry, Southey declares, “What you said respecting the foreign Almanacks of the Muses has served me as a hint, & I think of speedily editing such a volume. [F]or this I have more motives than one, among others, that there are some half a hundred pieces of my own, too good to perish with the newspapers in which they are printed” (Letter 364, *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey*). Southey’s final clause simultaneously suggests the worth of his poetry and the bane of periodical publishing—that the poetry, though “good” is, ultimately, “too good” for its venue.

Southey’s letter brings to the fore another popular criticism of periodical publication—its ephemeral status. Coleridge shares Southey’s valuation of poems

³¹ *Metrical Tales* ends with a piece not published before, “St. Gualberto,” a long poem interesting for its interjection of modernity into a collection, that to this point, has been situated in the past.

published in the press. In his 1800 letter to Thomas Poole, Coleridge divides writing into two camps: “I think there are but 2 good ways of writing—one for immediate, & wide impression, tho’ transitory—the other for permanence—Newspapers the first—the best one can do is the second” (qtd. in Esterhammer 178). Coleridge contrasts newspapers’ “transitory” nature with the “permanence” of book form. Though both are touted as “good ways of writing,” book form is “best.” A later letter to William Sotheby characterizes his newspaper verse as “Experiments” and “peritura charta,” which Esterhammer glosses as “perishable or ephemeral writings” (178). But newspaper verse lived past its original printed pages, not only in collections such as Southey’s *Annual Anthology*, but also in chapbook form, reprinted in newspapers often decades later and countries away, translated into song, copied in letters and commonplace books, even tacked to coffeehouse walls.³² Ephemeral publications often reached larger audiences, not only through larger print runs whose price was palatable for more readers, but also through the culture of coffeehouse and street corner sharing that allowed dailies and weeklies to reach all classes.³³ Coleridge’s and Southey’s own “The Devil’s Thoughts,” published anonymously in the *Morning Post* on September 6, 1799, was so popular as to garner a second print run for that day’s paper. Subsequently, the poem “enjoyed,” to

³² A chapbook, *A Garland of New Songs*, printed by J. Marshall in Newcastle Upon Tyne, includes Robinson’s periodical poem “The Storm.” Its circulation in 1810, nearly fifteen years after the poem’s first publication, suggests the lasting influence that periodical publications had beyond their first appearance. Thomas Jefferson’s scrapbook includes Robinson’s poem “The Old Beggar,” originally appearing in the *Morning Post* on July 25, 1800. Robinson’s “Stanzas, Written Between Dover and Calais,” originally published under the pseudonym Julia in *The Oracle* on August 2, 1792, was particularly popular. My personal collection includes a letter, with the poem transcribed, hand delivered to Mrs. Mary Steele, the wife of the prominent Maryland Congressman, John Nevett Steele, between 1808 and 1818. The poem was also set to music and usually retitled “Bounding Billows” after its first line. This song has become so canonical as to appear in listings of sea shanties attributed, not to Robinson, but as “traditional.” Its original form even appears in a Kentucky newspaper in 1864, accompanied by an impassioned plea for Robinson’s relevance.

³³ The first printings of *Lyrical Ballads* at 500 copies and *Lyrical Tales* at 1250, were substantially less than the 4500 copies the *Morning Post* printed at its zenith.

borrow Morton Paley's phrase, "a subterranean life," shared in manuscript form and group readings, its popularity leading to attributions to several of the poem's most persistent reciters, and culminating in Shelley's famous response "The Devil's Walk" ("The Devil's Walk' and 'The Devil's Thoughts'").

The realities of the extensive lives of these poems confound theories about the necessarily fleeting lifespan of periodical verse, theories that would recommend the newspaper as only fit for lesser work. Robinson's approach represents a belief in the power of verse and of the press—that they are not enemies as Wordsworth and Coleridge argue (and as scholars after them believe). Robinson saw the mutual benefit of verse published in popular forms. Verse was integral to Daniel Stuart's vision of a newspaper of worth. For Robinson, marketing to the literati was not the only concern: verse elevated the paper so that it could elevate all of its readers. What I term newspaper verse, as opposed to verse simply appearing in newspapers, borrowed its subjects and stylings from the contents of the paper and borrowed the space of the newspaper for conversations in verse only made possible by the venue of the popular press. There is a playfulness to Robinson's newspaper verse. She draws readers into the allusive interaction of text and context, of poet responding to poet, of pseudonyms barely masked, of politics woven into verse. Indeed for Robinson, the power of the press lies with its reading public.

This verse does not suffer, in complexity of philosophy or language, for its agreement with venue. Newspaper verse is not a draft, an unfinished or imperfect piece, or a lesser poem submitted without awareness of its place alongside the concerns of the day. It does not transcend popular concerns but realizes popular concerns as complex, beautiful, and vital. Rather than dwelling on questions of legacy and a hierarchical sense

of media, where some spaces are worthy of better verse than others, Robinson focuses on poetry as art for an audience. In the chapters that follow, I focus on Robinson's attentiveness to genre, with as much emphasis on newspaper verse as on lyrical tale. My attentiveness hopefully reveals Robinson as a poetic innovator whose work attests to the power of the press.

CHAPTER III

THE LEVELING STORM

For what was to become her most outspoken abolitionist poem, “The Negro Girl,” published in *Lyrical Tales*, Mary Robinson returned to a poem she had previously published in the periodical press, “The Storm.”³⁴ Though most students and scholars of Romanticism know only the *Lyrical Tales*’ version, this chapter examines Robinson’s complicated revision process as she transforms newspaper verse to lyrical tale. The result of this process, I argue, is versions that paradoxically stand alone and depend on one another for their meaning. In its transformation from newspaper verse to lyrical tale, Robinson nearly doubled the length of her poem, moving it geographically from England to Africa, and substituting for its white, English characters Nancy and William, the black, African slaves Zelma and Draco. The title change underscores this shift in focus, from the natural elements that endanger working-class crew members aboard a slave ship to the precarious position of a female slave in a world that is no longer hers.

But apart from these variants, what is equally striking is what has remained unchanged. Amidst these major shifts, Robinson’s versions retain the same basic plot, structure, and theme. Robinson gives the same story of love and loss to both pairs of lovers, the white and the black, effectively equalizing her characters, while offering a damning critique of the slave trade’s effects on its participants, both willing and enslaved.

³⁴ An earlier version of this chapter appeared in the *CEA Critic*, which benefited from gracious readings by Paula Feldman and Anthony Jarrells prior to submission.

In reading the two poems together—and in conversation with one another—we see that Robinson’s poems enact their own message. Both versions offer an indictment of imperialism based on the disastrous effects of the slave trade. Reading the two versions together underscores the commonality of experience between the colonizer and the colonized: that the slave trade is fatal for Britain as well as Africa.

At the foreground of “The Storm” is a plea for abolition based upon how the slave trade affects Britain’s working classes. Although the *Morning Post* had not yet reached its zenith, when “The Storm” was published, it would have had a wide audience that cut across class boundaries but would have been composed mostly of the middle class.³⁵ As newspaper verse, the poem’s urgent call for change, while aimed at Parliament, is also directed toward its main audience, toward those, who, like William, are complicit in the slave trade out of economic necessity. William, a crewmember aboard a slave ship, perishes in the sea after his ship is wrecked by a storm. Nancy, his lover, watches from the English coast, eventually catching sight of William as he drowns. In her grief, Nancy follows her lover to “A WATRY GRAVE” (60). But before her suicide, Nancy makes an abolitionist plea:

“Oh! Cruel Pow’r! Oh! ruthless fate!
Does HEAV’N’S high will decree,
That some should sleep on beds of State—
Some in the roaring Sea? (19-22)

Although Nancy does turn to “The SABLE *Race*” in the two following stanzas, her argument is predicated, not on race, but on the disparity between Parliament—those who

³⁵ A chapbook called *A Garland of New Songs*, including a version of “The Storm,” ensured that her poem reached the working classes as well.

safely legislate—and the British working class—those who are compelled, often with fatal results, to enforce that legislation (26).

Lamenting that “Humble MERIT pines in Poverty and Woe,” Nancy focuses on the class distinctions that make such dangerous work necessary (24). Robinson’s use of the word “Poverty,” makes obvious the class-based argument. But, more subtlety, the modifier “Humble,” with its suggestion of low-born status and its contrast to the “proud Rulers of the Land” (25), coupled with the term “MERIT,” emphasize the class-based argument against slavery—that the slave trade is fatal for Britain’s working classes. The title of this version indicates the focus on William’s status as an English crewmember aboard a slave ship. What is dangerous for him is not the brutality of the Middle Passage, but the unpredictability of nature, a fact that is emphasized through his last sight being the unreachable “white cliffs” in the final stanza (57). These cliffs are not only one of the most recognizable British landmarks, reinforcing William’s nationality, but their whiteness also underscores William’s race. Even though William “ne’er complain’d,” his final gaze rests accusatorily on the land that could have saved him (57). The poem becomes his complaint, operating by focusing its gaze onto its readership, forcing those like William to recognize their complicity in the slave trade.

In 1787, leading abolitionists had mobilized, founding the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, which led, in a year’s time, to the publication of over 25,000 reports and 50,000 pamphlets aimed at abolishing the slave trade (A. Richardson xii). Poets turned toward abolition as well, focusing accusatorily, as Robinson later would in “The Storm,” on the British appetite for slavery. One of the Society’s earliest literary

publications, William Cowper's popular "Pity for Poor Africans" (1788), sardonically depicts the prevailing British attitude toward slavery:

I pity them greatly, but I must be mum,
For how could we do without sugar and rum?
Especially sugar, so needful we see;
What, give up our desserts, our coffee, and tea! (5-8)

During this early period of abolitionist mobilization, Thomas Clarkson traveled to leading British slave-trading sites, including Bristol and Liverpool, two cities where Robinson had ties, compiling the testimony of those involved in the slave trade—slaves and slavers alike.³⁶ This testimony, presented by William Wilberforce to Parliament, provided evidence of the deplorable—and often fatal—conditions to which British crew members were subjected. According to Graham Ullathorne, Clarkson “documented the brutal treatment of the slave ships’ crews by demonstrating that, on average, twenty per cent of each crew died from disease or ill treatment before the ship returned. His evidence demolished the myth that the slave trade provided useful training for Britain’s seamen, and showed that the trade was bad for sailors as well as Africans.” Despite the extensive efforts of these early reformers and writers, in 1791, the House of Commons defeated Wilberforce’s first abolition bill. The following year, it passed, but rather than immediate abolition, gradual abolition was set to begin January 1796, the month prior to the publication of “The Storm.” This muted victory was repealed in 1793, effectively ending the most intense period of abolitionist campaigning that century would see. The years

³⁶ Robinson’s birthplace was Bristol, while her lover of fifteen years, Banastre Tarleton, was Member of Parliament for Liverpool and a staunch slavery supporter. For a discussion of Bristol and Liverpool as centers of the abolition movement, see A. Richardson, “Introduction,” xi.

leading up to the publication of “The Storm” saw an even more drastic loss of momentum, as international events undermined the abolitionist cause.

Although Robinson’s poem parallels the efforts of early abolitionists through its focus on Britain’s role in the slave trade, “The Storm” appeared nearly ten years after the initial mobilization of abolitionists in the midst of an increasingly conservative environment. Fears of an imported revolution fueled a series of measures—many aimed at the publishing industry—intended to curb the perceived Jacobin influence at home. The first of these measures, the Royal Proclamation against seditious writings, came in May 1792 on the heels of Thomas Paine’s publication of *The Rights of Man*. Six months later, William Pitt and Lord Grenville suggested a set of stringent measures, including “the compulsory registration of all printing presses, the increasing of legal penalties for sedition, the suspension of habeas corpus, . . . [and] the launch of a nationwide seditious libel prosecution campaign” (Mori 96). Although the libel campaign was the only measure pursued in 1792, the 1794 Treason Trials, the suspension of habeas corpus in 1794 and 1798, the Two Acts of 1795, the Newspaper Stamp Duty Act of 1798, and the Corresponding Societies Act of 1799 ensured that the remaining years of the 1790s saw a drastic decrease in civil liberties, particularly those tied to the rights of the press. A week prior to the publication of “The Storm,” the Two Acts occupied nearly two full issues of the *Morning Post*. The “Declaration of the Whig Club,” first published January 25, 1796, denounces the Two Acts, calling them “a system of constraint and terror,” comparing them to “the yoke of slavery,” and declaring that they will bring about “the destruction of the most important securities of Public Liberty.” Even those at the helm of the abolitionist movement retreated from public campaigning. According to Robin

Blackburn, the Abolition Society held “few meetings in 1794 and only two in the following three years,” while Clarkson retired from campaigning in 1794 (150).

This increasing suspicion of English Jacobinism, strengthened by Britain’s three years of war with France, made writing, in general, a more dangerous profession. But, by 1796, writing with an abolitionist stance was particularly risky, given France’s abolition of the slave trade.³⁷ In the French West Indies, abolition was a complicated process, inspired not only by the espoused principles of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* and the successes of the slave revolt in Saint Domingue, but also by the attempts at territorial conquest made by both Spain and England in 1793. Motivated by the opportunity to regain its imperial footing following the loss of the American colonies, England attempted the usurpation of French colonial holdings in the West Indies. Partly as a defensive measure aimed at guaranteeing a larger base of soldiers, during the 1794 National Convention, the French government officially awarded slaves their freedom, as expressed in the original language of the motion, “in all the territory of the Republic, including Saint Domingue” (qtd. in Ott 82).

On January 28, 1796, days before the publication of “The Storm,” a proclamation written by the famed general and governor of Saint Domingue, Etienne Laveaux, appeared in the *Morning Post*. Equal parts vitriolic condemnation of the forces working against France and propagandistic call to arms for those recently freed, the proclamation’s rhetoric underscores the aligning of abolitionists not simply with Jacobin principles but, more roundly, with Jacobin violence. In a characteristic passage, Lavaeux writes:

³⁷ Alongside Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Clarkson, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Paine, William Wilberforce was given honorary citizenship by the French National Convention in 1792, a distinction Robin Furneaux calls both “embarrassing” and “dangerous” (114).

“Citizens of all Colours,

“France calls us to share in her successes; we all are children of the Country which we defend; she has declared that the Colonies were integral parts of it [sic] forces, and that nothing could dissolve her indivisibility. Let us be worthy of this glorious advantage, by co-operating, with all our might and the faculties of our soul, to the re-establishment of that order and harmony which always govern a Free People.

“Citizens in Arms,

“The National Convention have [sic] decreed honourable mention of us, and have decreed, that all the men armed in the Windward Islands, for the defence of the Republic, have deserved well of the Republic, have deserved well of the Country.

The terms are clear. For those in Saint Domingue, freedom requires force.

Lavaeux’s attention turns in the final paragraphs of his proclamation to recruiting those who, until recently, had been the enemy—those from the recently acquired Santo Domingo who fought for their former masters, the Spanish. But the prevailing theme of the proclamation is anti-British sentiment. After the opening paragraph praises France’s newly ratified constitution, the proclamation continues:

“Too long the French Republic has been a prey to the villainy of the insolent British, whose aim was to convert all France into one vast, profound grave, to inter its innumerable victims, to annihilate a Free People, and to find in its destruction, new means of over-swaying the other Nations, whose ruin they had basely purchased.

“The British, like the impetuous torrent which seems to precipitate from the top of a rock; to absorb its limited channel, and spends its impetuosity against a Public, have, at last, in biting the dust at Quiberon, impaired their insolent pride; they are vanquished by French Patriots; they are forsaken by every Power they intended to involve in their downfall; all the Kings have opened their eyes, and are intimate with our principles, and private interest has induced them to solicit Peace with this Free People. Generosity, which is the basis of their Treaties made with Prussia, Holland, and Spain, evinces that the French no less cherish Humanity than Liberty; that in the midst of victories they study to reign over the hearts of their neighbours, and not over corpses.

In the context of Lavaeux’s proclamation, a Jacobin is necessarily anti-British, effectively making the accusation of Jacobinism in England one of treason.³⁸

In February 1796, when “The Storm” was published, in addition to the repressive atmosphere resulting from the fear of English Jacobinism, the British were in the midst of a costly assault on the French West Indies, an assault that, if successful, necessarily would have ensured the expansion of England’s slave trade. According to Michael Duffy, the British government sent “in the 1795-1796 season the biggest expedition yet to sail from British shores, about 32,000 soldiers. The effort saved the British colonies But the cost was appalling. Approximately 14,000 troops died and 7,000 more were incapacitated by disease in the Caribbean in the course of 1796” (85-86). The devastation

³⁸ Reviewers for the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, *The European Magazine*, and *The British Critic*, T.J. Mathias in “The First Dialogue” of *The Pursuits of Literature* (1794), Richard Polwhele in *The Unsex’d Females* (1798), and James Gilray in his political cartoon “New Morality” (1798) denounced Robinson’s works for being too infused with French politics, making connections between her ideas and Jacobinism.

was so appalling, in fact, that it was announced in Parliament that every citizen lost someone he or she knew due to Britain's doomed attempt to expand its empire (Geggus 128). However, not all were lost in the colonies themselves. Some never reached those shores.

In the week preceding the publication of "The Storm," Robinson's readership followed the ongoing saga of a deadly storm off the coast of Plymouth, whose gales caused the loss of Rear Admiral Hugh Cloberry Christian's fleet, a fleet, not carrying its usual "cargo," slaves, but, instead, carrying soldiers destined for an attempt, which ultimately failed, to usurp French colonial power in the West Indies. Daily updates mark the spotty and increasingly grim intelligence regarding the loss. On January 28, 1796, the *Morning Post* printed the first full article on Admiral Christian's fleet:

Yesterday the following very unpleasant intelligence was received, both at the Admiralty and Lloyd's Coffee-house:

On Monday afternoon arrived in Plymouth Sound the Dutton East-Indiaman, of London, Captain Sampson, returned from the West India fleet . . . Since the Dutton parted company, the gales at South and South-West have been the heaviest that have blown during the Winter, especially Saturday last, and Sunday night, when they were severe in the extreme, so that the return of the remainder of the fleet may be hourly looked for, as it will be impossible for them to keep the sea. The Dutton has several hundred troops on board, composed of the grenadier companies of the 2d, 3d, 10th, and 37th regiments, commanded by Major Eyre, of the Queen's regiment.

We are much concerned to state that a malignant fever prevails among these troops, of whom thirty-five died at sea; many others now on board are very ill, and are to be landed as soon as the weather will admit. This ship is damaged in her sails and rigging, and was literally under water the greatest part of Sunday night, until she made the Scilly Lights; she was in extreme danger.

The Paragraphs inserted in the Public Prints, stating that an Easterly wind sprang up the day after the Draxhall parted from the fleet, is an absolute falsehood, as they have not had 24 hours fair wind since they sailed; and on the day the Easterly wind is said to have been, it blew a heavy gale from the S. W.

The saga continued the following day, January 29, 1796, with news dated January 26, 1796, that the Dutton, whose safe return was heralded the previous day, had encountered another forceful gale when trying to dock, causing a shipwreck. Though there were 500 persons aboard—“including soldiers, seamen, women, and children”—due to the heroics of Sir Edward Pellew who, after seeing the wreck from the Plymouth coast, boarded the ship to save its passengers, there were only four or five casualties reported. In an addendum to the story, however, the eye-witness reporter giving seemingly up-to-the-minute updates (this one titled “Five o’clock, P.M.”), increased the death toll to 14. These casualties were infirm, most likely suffering from the fever reported in the previous day’s article. Because the infirm were unable to mount the deck, “these unfortunately perished, and went down in the ship!”

In characteristically dramatic prose matching the events daily unfolding, the newspaper's next report, dated and printed on January 30, 1796, reads:

Yesterday we received intelligence which must create the greatest alarm, not merely for the safety of the West India Armament, but of the lives of the numerous individuals on board of it. The fate of the Dutton, unfortunate as it was, may yet appear happy when compared with what we fear has befallen some other ships belonging to the Expedition. We are no longer agitated with doubts respecting its success; and even its failure must be looked on as a matter of little importance, when we find the strongest reasons to believe, not that the fleet is returned to England—that would be joyful intelligence—but that a great many of the vessels have gone to the bottom, and every soul on board perished!

The following edition, printed February 1, 1796, and dated January 29, 1796, brings the saga to a close:

This morning arrived and came into Spithead, Admiral Christian's fleet, and about forty sail of transports and merchant ships, after having been seven weeks and three days at sea, and encountered a series of the most boisterous weather ever remembered, and which has been truly disastrous to this fleet, which, when it sailed, consisted of nearly 220 sail of ships, but is now reduced by a variety of accidents to less than 50.³⁹

Although the headline proclaims in all capitals "RETURN OF ADMIRAL CHRISTIAN'S FLEET," the statistics given here and the scant list of ships returning that

³⁹ In his memoir *A Mariner of England*, William Richardson, a soldier aboard Admiral Christian's fleet, reports the number of ships that originally set sail as 360 (127).

follows this description suggest the dangers of the British colonial war. Eventually Admiral Christian's fleet, commanded by General Ralph Abercromby, would make it to the West Indies in the "last major British effort in the Caribbean," but at the time Robinson wrote "The Storm," less than one fourth of the fleet, having only made it 150 miles offshore, returned safely to England after encountering the deadly storms (Duffy 86).

The day Admiral Christian's fleet was partially recovered is also the day Robinson penned her verse, according to a note affixed to "The Storm." At the foreground of "The Storm" is a plea for abolition based upon how the slave trade affects Britain's working classes. But when read in its context as newspaper verse, "The Storm" is a much larger statement about the unending devastation caused by British imperialist interests. As a direct response to the events unfolding in the press, "The Storm" stages for its readers the dramatic consequences of British imperialism writ large.

William is already a complicated character, given his status as oppressor and oppressed. But to add to the complexity, he is both a sailor aboard a slave ship and a soldier whose mission would ensure the expansion of Britain's slave trade. Nancy's call to the "proud Rulers of the Land" resonates not only as anti-slavery rhetoric but also as an anti-war appeal (25). But, in its ferocity, the storm drowns out Nancy's call: "She madly call'd, but call'd in vain" (9). In fact, the storm thwarts any productive action from those caught within it. The "Sea-bird," stuck in a circular pattern, can only view the action from above (3). After jumping ship, William "buffeted the storm," but, ultimately, he is overpowered by the sea (54). Even Nancy's suicide is unproductive. Although she

jumps into the sea “with her heart’s true love,” the poem does not stage their reuniting either in life or in death (60).

In the midst of this chaos, however, the poem itself serves as a call to action. The cyclical nature of the imagery—the blowing whirlwinds (2), the bird circling overhead (3), the rolling of the sea (16)—reinforces the position of William and Nancy within the storm, a system they have no control over that is the natural consequence of Britain’s participation in the slave trade. The death and destruction which Britain has wrought circles back on them, just as William’s final gaze at the “white cliffs” serves as an accusation against the British people, and the fleet’s historical circling back to England suggested England’s guilt (57). As William Richardson, a soldier who sailed in Admiral Christian’s fleet, reported, there were many theories as to what caused the storm:

[S]ome said it was a judgment from God, for sending so many brave men to the West Indies to die, as the yellow fever was raging there so horribly at this time; others said it was a judgment against the nation for going to war with France, which we had no right to do; and others blamed Admiral Christian, and said that he was an unlucky man. (127)

The storm in Robinson’s poem is a direct response by Nature sent “To check the barb’rous toil” (38). It is a judgment against the nation for slavery. Although the fates of the characters within “The Storm” are determined, the poem suggests that the readers of “The Storm,” who are—at least for now—outside the storm, need to act. In its response to the immediacy of the news stories, the poem functions as a call to action, arguing against the institution of slavery and the extension of slavery through the ongoing war.

Both versions—newspaper verse and lyrical tale—offer the same basic plot: a slave ship is sinking in a storm; a woman watches from the coast as her lover drowns; overcome with grief, she then commits suicide by jumping into the sea. Both poems also have the same basic structure: both start with a third-person speaker who sets the scene in the first few stanzas; the main narration of the poem occurs in the woman's voice, which takes up several stanzas in each version; the disembodied narrative voice returns in the final stanzas to give the tragic conclusion of the poem. And both poems also offer the same implicit argument: that the slave trade is cruel and should be abolished. But in "The Negro Girl," Robinson moves the action from the shores of England to Africa, transforming William and Nancy, members of the British working class devastated by Britain's expansion of the slave trade, into Zelma and Draco, African slaves whose bondage leads to their tragic deaths. The objects attracting the male characters' final gaze—the "white cliffs" (57) in "The Storm" and "the dark Maid" (123) in "The Negro Girl"—suggest not only the shift in race and nationality through the imagery of "white" and "dark," but also reinforce the position of each character: William, who is oppressed and also complicitous in the oppression of others, sees a quintessential British landmark—and stable ground—while Draco, who has been dispossessed of a home, looks back to his "Maid," a title that suggests Zelma's position as a servant as well as her inability to unite in marriage with her lover. The title change underscores the shift in focus as well. No longer concerned with news stories of "Christian's gales" and its devastation of British crewmembers/soldiers, the second version's focus is the female slave. The critique of the slave trade, then, is not only given through the voice of a female African in bondage but is also centered on her struggle.

In “The Negro Girl,” Robinson more than doubles the length of her poem, and that doubling allows Zelma to recount her tale. The first three consecutive stanzas which Robinson adds (numbered VI-VIII) extend Nancy’s argument that there is a “*Kindred MIND*” among the English and the African (34). But Zelma’s argument is clearly made on racial grounds. Instead of lamenting the “Humble MERIT” (24) and “Poverty and Woe” (24) of the English working class, Zelma laments that “worth” (30), a marker of Draco’s merit as an individual and his monetary value as a slave, “and DRACO pine—in Slavery and woe” (30). In these three added stanzas, Robinson also strengthens the linguistic play with color, including two instances of the descriptor “dark” (33 and 36), the word “ebon” (39), and the phrases “brighter colours” (42) and “dim and glossy hue” (43), emphasizing race as crucial for Zelma and Draco. But it is the seven stanzas Robinson adds later in the poem (numbered XII-XVIII) that provide both the lyric and the tale.

In these stanzas, Robinson gives a lengthy history of Zelma’s life, starting with her being “Torn from my Mother’s aching breast” (67) when she was enslaved, and Robinson also introduces a concrete villain: “The Tyrant WHITE MAN” (73). But this character, like that of William in “The Storm,” is complex: Zelma’s master educates her; he teaches her “in the Soul to find / No tint, as in the face” (75-6). When he finds out that Zelma loves Draco, a fellow slave, the master sells Draco in a “jealous rage” (79). This event causes the tragedy of the ending: Zelma runs away, Draco jumps from the ship to his death, and Zelma follows him, drowning herself in the sea. In Robinson’s poem, despite his teachings of equality, the master’s position of power inevitably leads to exploitation, which inevitably leads to the tragic ending. While “The Storm” serves as a call to all who are complicit in the slave trade, Nancy’s argument is addressed to those

who “sleep on beds of State” (21) and “the proud Rulers of the Land” (25). Her focus is on the undue power Parliament holds over Africans and the English working class, an exploitation that she thinks would change if only “the proud Rulers of the Land / The SABLE *Race* behold” (25-26). But in “The Negro Girl,” Zelma puts Parliament on the same level with slave owners.

In “The Storm,” Robinson conforms to the requirements of the genre of newspaper verse, appealing to her British, white audience’s sympathy by foregrounding the experience of a character whose position in the world is similar to theirs. Once the audience sympathizes with Nancy, then they can heed her call to view “The SABLE *Race*” with sympathy as well (26). But in revising “The Storm” into “The Negro Girl,” Robinson actualizes Nancy’s call by transforming her into an individual figure of that “SABLE *Race*” to elicit sympathy from her audience (26). In keeping the narrative aspects of “The Storm,” Robinson presents this individual as an African Nancy, one who, though different in terms of race and nationality, has the same soul, a point even reinforced by the teachings of her “Tyrant WHITE MAN” (73).

This pivot to undeniable human rights is at odds with the position of privilege inherent in the poetry of many prominent female abolitionists in the late eighteenth century, what Moira Ferguson has termed an “Anglo-Africanism” that subordinates Africans as objects, with white abolitionists in the subject position. Michael Tomko reads these privileged poetic stances as “totalizing visions of worldwide British benevolence,” using as examples Hannah More’s *Slavery: A Poem* and Helen Maria Williams’ *A Poem on the Bill Lately Passed for Regulating the Slave Trade*, both published in 1788, within the foundational years of the abolition movement (28). For Tomko, Williams’ “domestic

image that goes global” of “Britain weaving a ‘finish’d fabric’ of expanding freedom that starts with the ‘strand’ of Africa” convincingly suggests the hierarchical position of Britons over Africans (27-28). Another Anglocentric poem, “The Sorrows of Yamba,” attributed by many modern critics to Hannah More, provides a closer temporal parallel to Robinson’s poems, while offering its own unique revision history. Published in 1795 in Hannah More’s *Cheap Repository Tracts*, the poem’s history of revision, unearthed by Alan Richardson, highlights a white position of privilege; the poem’s revised ending, likely amended by More herself, replaces Eaglesfield Smith’s original slave suicide with Yamba’s chance conversion to Christianity. Yamba’s resultant gratitude for her capture—“Now I’ll bless my cruel capture, / (Hence I’ve known a Saviour’s name)” (125-26)—not only inspires her to “half forget the blame” (128), but also to mitigate the culpability of the slave master by integrating slavery into the general guilt shared by everyone in Christendom, including now the slaves:

O ye slaves whom Massas beat,
 Ye are stained with guilt within;
 As ye hope for mercy sweet,
 So forgive your Massas’ sin. (Richardson, “‘The Sorrows of Yamba’”
 113-16)

In a circuitous way, the poem’s active rationalization makes the slave guilty for the acts of slavery perpetrated against her.

Robinson’s revisions resist this and further infantilizing turns More’s revisions take. Most strikingly, Zelma’s voice is eloquent, rational, and impassioned, not labored with Anglocentric reasoning or dialectical approximations (the revision of “wily” to

“Whity,” noted by Richardson, a particularly egregious example). But it is Robinson’s revisions, as the act of reading her versions together reveals, that contrast most sharply with the Anglo-Africanism of her peers. Reading “The Storm” alongside “The Negro Girl” makes clear that the two speaking “I”s, Nancy and Zelma, both endure the same human tragedy and, indeed, are both human.

The tragedy of loss at sea staged in “The Negro Girl” and “The Storm” are, themselves, revisions of stories of lovers parted by the sea, whose roots in popular balladry date at least from 1690. In their original form, Nancy and William were the “Man” and the “Maid” of “The Seamans Doleful Farewell.” As Dianne Dugaw reports, “The Seamans Doleful Farewell” was turned into “Billy and Nancy’s Kind Parting” by an anonymous balladeer in the eighteenth century (62).⁴⁰ The ballad is written as a dialogue between Billy and Nancy, just before Billy’s departure to sea. Nancy offers to accompany him, dressed “like a sea-boy,” but Billy persuades her to remain home to await his return (13). The ballad does not portray Billy’s parting, and readers are not told the fate of the lovers. In effect, Robinson’s version picks up where “Billy and Nancy’s Kind Parting” left off, giving her characters names that help readers make the association. But conspicuously absent from “Billy and Nancy’s Kind Parting” is any suggestion of Billy’s cargo. Although Billy is headed to the West Indies, there is no mention in this version of slavery.

Robinson’s story of William and Nancy in “The Storm” politicizes the story of lovers parted by the sea by inserting them into an abolitionist narrative. As perpetuated

⁴⁰ The English Broadside Ballad Archive maintained by the University of California, Santa Barbara, has a digital image of “The Seamans Doleful Farewell” available at: http://emc.english.ucsb.edu/ballad_project/ballad_image.asp?id=21848. For the full text of “Billy and Nancy’s Kind Parting,” see Dugaw 105. Dugaw’s appendix lists over 25 versions of this ballad, which continues to be sung today (216).

by popular balladry, the tale of lovers parted by the sea is both mythic and fated.

However, in Robinson's retelling, it is not the abstracted figure of the sea that is to blame.

Instead, the institution of slavery—and all of its participants—bears responsibility.

In "The Storm," Robinson reveals that the seemingly unavoidable consequence of William and Nancy's story is, indeed, unnecessary. In juxtaposing the mythic archetypes of William and Nancy with the current news stories that inspired "The Storm," Robinson presents slavery as an immediate problem that needs to be overcome through present action. Later, by placing Zelma and Draco within a literary lineage that is quintessentially British and that extends back centuries, Robinson daringly draws parallels between the slave and the slaver. Reading the two versions together and within their context as newspaper verse and lyrical tale suggests that these poems together enact their own message—"Whate'er our *Tints* may be, our SOULS are *still the same*" (MP 30).

CHAPTER IV

TALES AND TROPES OF WAR

War haunts *Lyrical Tales*, with widows and a madwoman, exiles and émigrés, a deserter and a hermit, all displaced and dispossessed by war.⁴¹ Nearly a third of the poems foreground the effects of war. “The Fugitive,” “The Hermit of Mont-Blanc,” “Poor Marguerite,” and “The Alien Boy” emphasize the experience of exiles and civilians. “Edmund’s Wedding,” “The Deserted Cottage,” and “The Widow’s Home”—the focus of this chapter—concern British military families and respond to both Britain’s contemporary reality and a larger poetic tradition. In their thematic parallels and shared language, this trio of poems critiques the culture of war for its devastating effects on the home front. Two poems originally appeared as newspaper verse, published eight months before *Lyrical Tales*: “Edmund’s Wedding” was first published under the title of “Agnes” in the *Morning Post* on February 28, 1800; it was followed two weeks later by “The Deserted Cottage,” published on March 13, 1800. Robinson’s newspaper verse takes up familiar tropes standard in wartime poetry, particularly the returning soldier, the decaying cottage, and widows and orphans dispossessed by war. But, in their movement to lyrical tale, Robinson’s poems complicate these tropes; the soldier returns as a deserter, the cottage’s ruin expands beyond the physical decay of its inhabitants and its own walls, and

⁴¹ Under the direction of Paula Feldman, this chapter went through seven revisions, over the course of which the argument saw significant changes. Her acute sense of the need for chapters to have sustained argumentative through lines led me to more extensive research into the period’s preoccupation with war which led me to discover the tropes across the war poems. In its final form, the structure of the chapter highlights the role of newspaper verse in this time of war more clearly.

more than creating widows and orphans, war thwarts even the possibility of family. The revised poems illustrate the demands that the lyric, with its emphasis on individual expression, places on these commonplace wartime tropes.

This chapter examines “Agnes” and “The Deserted Cottage” to illustrate how Robinson’s newspaper verse, though often executed more skillfully than other war poetry in the press, conforms to the conventions of wartime verse accepted and expected by her newspaper audience. The chapter then turns to revisions of these wartime tropes in the lyrical tales, “Edmund’s Wedding” and “The Deserted Cottage.” Rejecting the universality of a trope in favor of the individualized expression of a lyric, the revised poems offer tales of personal tragedy that hinge on an unexpected—and lyric—revision of the familiar trope. No longer solely the Youth who dies from the loss of his lover, Edmund is ultimately executed for treason, a complex ending that generates sympathy for a deserter. The *Lyrical Tales*’ deserted cottage is more than a house; it is imbued with the industry of a people, connection to the divine, and a promise for the future of the nation. The individual expression given voice in Robinson’s *Lyrical Tales* paradoxically enlarges the scope of loss seemingly made universal in her newspaper verse.

The chapter moves to a study of “The Widow’s Home,” a poem that does not have a newspaper counterpart, but whose investigation of valor, mourning, and the home synthesizes the issues raised in the revisions to “Agnes” and “The Deserted Cottage.” The soldier will never return, but the widow does not yet know she is widowed, and the cottage is not deserted but still a home. Hope is the poem’s unexpected lyric expression, a hope not for the soldier’s return but for the family’s potential beyond the soldier’s death. As with “The Storm” and “The Negro Girl,” Robinson’s deviation from convention, her

lyric revision of universal tropes, shows how she is attuned to genre. This attention to genre pairs the poetic with the political, enlarging the traditional sense of the lyric by melding individual and shared experience. Moving outward from Robinson to Coleridge, the chapter ends with a discussion of lyric poetry as a medium for representing the effects of war.

The war “came home,” to borrow Mary Favret’s phrase, through the tangible loss of husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers expressed metaphorically in poetry. Britons had been almost relentlessly besieged by war for nearly a century and a half, extending from the reign of Charles II to the defeat of Napoleon, but, as Betty T. Bennett argues in her landmark anthology of war poetry in the Romantic era, war “was the single most important fact of British life from 1793-1815” (ix). The Invasion Crisis, from 1797 to 1804, saw as many as one in five British men in the military, with casualties proportionally rivaling those of the First World War, and one in four families directly involved in war (Bainbridge 6). For some commentators, war defines the age. Bennett sees war as “perhaps the principal poetic subject” of the period (ix), while Jerome Christensen contests the title “Romantic,” arguing that the works produced during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars “ought to be named wartime poetry” (603). The prevalence of war in daily life led naturally to the emergence of familiar war tropes in literature.⁴²

Robinson’s newspaper war poems represent the immediate experience of their reading public by speaking through a well-known language of loss. Although call-to-arms and commemorative battle verses remained constant during Britain’s war with France, in

⁴² This chapter focuses solely on war tropes about the home front. See Bainbridge, particularly his discussion of “The Field of Battle” poem, for examples of tropes concerning military action.

the latter half of the 1790s, periodical poems shifted toward the effects of war on British families.⁴³ Stephen T. Behrendt argues that Romantic-era women writers displaced their anti-war sentiment by using the family as a stand-in for the nation, their dependence on men requiring “indirection or substitution” instead of explicit criticism (87). By 1800, heightened fears of a French invasion, following two unsuccessful attempts to infiltrate Ireland in 1797 and 1798, and Napoleon’s consolidation of power as First Consul following the 18 Brumaire coup on November 9, 1799, led to a consensus that war was “a necessity, if not a duty” (Bennett 7) fought for “the survival of England” (Behrendt 94).⁴⁴ Instead of evading critique, Robinson’s newspaper verse opposes the culture of war, its values, rituals, and required behavior, with the family as a locus for how to process war, how to cope with the loss which an inevitable war brings.

This focus manifested itself in several recognizable tropes, which I distilled into three categories that Robinson first engages and later complicates.⁴⁵ In general,

⁴³ In Bennett’s sample, there is an interesting, distinct movement from French to English and monarch to military, as the mass of poems featuring Marie Antoinette as widow and her son Louis-Charles as orphan following the imprisonment and subsequent beheadings of the royal family give way to a concern for British loss, with soldiers’ wives and children as widows and orphans.

⁴⁴ Even strident oppositional poems tend toward pacifism, with arguments against any war, not necessarily this war. See especially poems reprinted in Bennett’s anthology that were originally published in the radical paper *The Cambridge Intelligencer* (1793-1800). Of the 22 poems from this periodical that Bennett anthologized, “Effects of War” (1793), “Ode to War” (1794), “Sonnet to W. Wilberforce” (1795), and “Impromptu on the Late Fast” (1794) are of particular interest given their varied appeals to pacifism, ranging from sentimentalism, personification, and panegyric, to satire.

⁴⁵ See Bennett’s *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793-1815*, Bainbridge’s *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*, Behrendt’s *British Women Poets and the Romantic Writing Community* (particularly chapter two), and Favret’s “Coming Home: The Public Spaces of Romantic War” for further discussion and examples of these tropes. Bennett’s foundational work identifies, and provides examples through the anthologized poems, “the favored subjects of the period—the beggar, the orphan, the widow, the sailor and soldier and veteran, the country cottage” as “largely derived from the war experience” (47). Bainbridge categorizes these tropes into several sub-genres of war poetry, including widows, the ruined cottage, the returning soldier, and what he terms “The Field of Battle” poem (with women on the battlefield as both warriors and nurses in addition to male soldiers). Although his study mentions each trope originally identified by Bennett, Behrendt’s work focuses on what he terms “the trope of the nation-family,” where the suffering of those at home mirrors the death and destruction of the battlefield (87). Similarly, Favret narrows her focus to “home and trench, soldier’s body and domestic bodies” (541), paralleling the “the mortal, mangled body of the fighting man” with “the vulnerable, often

Robinson's newspaper verse concerning war on the home front established these tropes, providing the foundation for her later lyric revisions. The first trope, widows and orphans, recurs as a reminder of the devastating effects of battle and disease claiming the lives of husbands and fathers fighting in war. A second trope is the house in ruins, which has two iterations. When coupled with widows and orphans or when the wives and children themselves are dead, usually as a direct consequence of the soldier's parting, the decayed physical structure symbolizes death—the home as body. Decaying cottages abandoned by their still-living inhabitants point not to death, but to poverty induced by war. This second iteration of the ruined cottage trope often reinforced the idea echoed throughout the periodical press—though not necessarily the historical reality—that, without the industry of the male, now soldier, the house and family collapse. A third trope is the returning soldier, sometimes home on leave but, more often, discharged for injury. The disfigured soldier and his wounds become a tangible marker of the permanent impact of war. Even if the soldier comes home intact, the relief of his return is frequently marred by the consequences of his leaving: poverty or his family's loss. He sheds one identity, soldier, hoping to reclaim his former identity. But he often is forced into new roles, beggar or childless widower.

Robinson's newspaper versions of her tales of war employ these tropes and illustrate her attention to genre by presenting the home devastated by war, an all too common story for British audiences in 1800. In "Agnes," Robinson's earlier newspaper version of "Edmund's Wedding," the returning soldier, a character simply called "Youth," comes home to find his lover dead and her cottage decaying. First reporting

injured bodies of those removed from public life on the domestic front—the beggars, widows, orphans and elderly displaced by the effects of war" (544).

Agnes's death as an immediate consequence of the Youth's leaving for war, the speaker then introduces the familiar trope of the ruined cottage, the physical decay of the home symbolic of her physical body's decay:

Her cottage is now on the upland decaying,
For clos'd are the casements, and clos'd is the door;
And the long grass now waves, where the wild KID is playing,
And the neat little garden with weeds is grown o'er! (17-20)

Unlike the violence of the battlefield, destruction of the home front occurs from a simple but poignant closing of windows and a door, the closing off of potential. War thwarts not only Agnes' and the Youth's planned wedding, but also any possibility of children, an irony suggested with homophonic resonance in the image of "the wild KID . . . playing" (19). The death of the family suggests the most serious danger of war: the lost potential for new life.

"Agnes" foregrounds the loss of those who remain at home, those living in and defined by the domestic sphere. After confronting Agnes' ghost in the first stanza, the Youth is no longer an active presence in the poem until its ending, an absence that echoes his recent military departure. The poem foregrounds Agnes' story and the impact of war on her, "Her cottage," and her family (17). Her name serves as the title; in fact, she, not the Youth or the villagers, is the only one given a proper name. The function of the returning soldier is to bear witness to the loss of Agnes: the speaker urges that he trade "thy habit of grey" (25) for "The RAVEN's dark colour, and mourn for thy dear" (26).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The ambiguity of the phrase "habit of grey" is intriguing, especially given that Robinson replaces the phrase with "wedding suit gay" in *Lyrical Tales*. The phrase itself suggests the melancholy mood of the poem. The term "habit" brings to mind a monk, while the grey color evokes specifically a Franciscan friar. Another possibility exists: that the Youth's clothing is his military uniform. But, assuming that the setting

But instead of his mourning, the final stanzas stage the soldier's death, his spiritual reunion with Agnes, and the villagers' scattering roses on their joint grave. The poem's structure does not allow readers to witness the Youth's mourning process, as his death is a further consequence of war. It is the villagers, those left behind, who process war through their memorials to Agnes' and the Youth's love. Though not diminishing the soldier's loss, the poem subordinates his loss to the collective loss.

Robinson teases out the implications of the ruined cottage more fully in the newspaper version of another poem, "The Deserted Cottage," that memorializes the death of Jacob, the cottage's owner gone mad after the death of his son in the war and his daughter from a broken heart after losing her brother.⁴⁷ It presents the cottagers' lives in a picturesque rural scene, a pastoral ideal. The narrative voice answers the question posed

correlates to the publication date, a British soldier would be clothed in red, whereas a French National Guardsman, as of 1791, would be in blue. Prior to 1791, however, the required military dress in France was white or light grey wool. Perhaps Robinson connects the Youth to the *ancien regime*, to a time when military dress, as Daniel Roche argues, "wholly identified the person with the social personage suggested by the costume," as a way of suggesting that soldiers are representatives of an idea, not of an individual (224). For an informative discussion of the cultural significance of French military uniforms—how the move to blue coats was an overtly political rejection of the *ancien regime*—see Daniel Roche, "The Discipline of Appearances: The Prestige of Uniform" in *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Regime*, pp 221-56.

⁴⁷ One of the most recognized treatments of the house in ruins by modern scholars is Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage," which engages the same tropes as Robinson's poems but along divergent paths. "The Ruined Cottage" shares the narrative frame of a wandering observer as tale-teller with "The Deserted Cottage," but diverges from "Agnes" and "Edmund's Wedding" as it tells a protracted story of loss: Margaret's death occurs years after Robert secretly joins the military, instead of Agnes's immediate death in response to Edmund's impressment. The Pedlar's multiple meetings with Margaret told in flashback allow readers to witness the "Five tedious years / She lingered in unquiet widowhood, / A wife and widow," the similar state experienced by the unnamed widow in "The Widow's Home" (446-49). Wordsworth's investigations of hope also resonate with those Robinson explores in "The Widow's Home." Robinson's and Wordsworth's poems share extensive revision histories as well, but while Robinson's known revisions occurred in two forms published within months of one another (newspaper verse and lyrical tale), Wordsworth's revisions occurred in multiple manuscript forms over nearly fifty years, with the only published version during Wordsworth's life as the opening book of *The Excursion* (1814), over a decade after Robinson's published versions. See James Butler "The Ruined Cottage" and "The Pedlar" (1979) and Jonathan Wordsworth *The Music of Humanity: A Critical Study of Wordsworth's "Ruined Cottage," Incorporating Texts from a Manuscript of 1799-1800* (1969) for a detailed exploration of the manuscripts. For a concise history of the issues surrounding editorial copy text, see the opening and endnotes to Cohen "Narrative and Persuasion in 'The Ruined Cottage'" (1978). I am grateful to Paula Feldman for prompting me to look at the connections between this poem and Robinson's.

in the first three stanzas—"Why is the cottage deserted?"—by first presenting an idyllic description of the cottage, its landscape blessed by Nature, and its inhabitants, "One lovely GIRL . . . / fair and blooming" (37-38), whose beauty is the embodiment of nature, and "One sturdy Boy, a peasant bold" (43), whose love keeps his father alive. Switching mid-stanza from past to present ("But now"), the narrative voice then reveals the death of Jacob and the cause of ruin—war (46). In its sudden temporal shift, the poem confronts its reader with the natural beauty of the home front that has been wasted by war abroad.

When war severs familial ties, the result is that war also disrupts humans' place in nature. Before war intrudes, Jacob lives in a symbiotic relationship with Nature. His family's needs were by "Nature's treasure amply stor'd" (27), while both day and night, the breeze "Breath'd sweetly on his dwelling!" (22). When war disrupts Jacob's place as Nature's steward, the "dewy grass" (61) on the path where Jacob's dead body lay becomes "high" (4). The deserted cottage's thatch, fashioned from Nature's materials, is "by tempests shaken" (6), whereas before his death the gentle breezes enlivened the cottage. In effect, the poem argues, war is in opposition to the connection between the human and the natural worlds, a conclusion that Robinson complicates in its *Lyrical Tales*' version; there war is not only in opposition to this natural connection, but also to the human connection to God.

In the first version, the cottage becomes a metaphor for the body, with its decayed state mirroring the fate of its inhabitants. The transition from the eleventh to twelfth stanzas makes this connection explicit:

For, GENTLE STRANGER, lifeless there
Was JACOB'S form extended!

And now behold his little COT,

All dreary and forsaken! (65-68)

The Stranger must first imagine Jacob's lifeless form, but in the abrupt shift from past to present (the "And now," which echoes the previous "But now"), the metaphorical decayed body—the cottage marked by "ruin" (15)—reenters his view. The line's play on the word "extended" signals the extension of his form to the cottage, as well. In this version, decay is a slow and almost natural process, an outgrowth of the war. But decay is also emblematic of war, itself, tying together the physical forms of the body and the cottage with the physical reality of war.

The newspaper version extends the notion of decay further through the Biblical allusion to "JACOB and his race" that ties the poem to an archetypal tradition (70). The third Biblical patriarch, following Abraham and Isaac, Jacob's promise in the Bible is of procreation, imagined metaphorically as fruitfulness: "[God] said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession" (Genesis 48:4). But Robinson subverts the Biblical imagery of fruitful abundance, for, unkempt "high grass" (4) surrounds the cottage, while the "verdant hill" (7) on which the cottage stands mocks the desolation of the cottage in ruin. In Robinson's version, Jacob and his race, beginning with his son, like the cottage, "fall" (70). Whereas the Biblical Jacob regains his son Joseph from slavery, Robinson's Jacob loses his unnamed son to war. The land is no longer an "everlasting possession" of Jacob's seed. Instead, and in parallel to the decaying cottage and the image of the "wild KID . . . playing" in "Agnes" (19), the war

cuts off the promise of procreation as Jacob's only descendants die, leaving the cottage to decay for want of tending. Both the descendants and the land are lost.

"The Deserted Cottage" takes as its focus the father whose son has died in battle, a rarely accounted for victim of the loss of war.⁴⁸ Jacob's loss is extreme, his grief leading not simply to memorializing the past but to being consumed and destroyed by it through madness and death. Robinson's choice of name recalls the Biblical Jacob's promise that he will be the father of the nation, a promise kept as after the Exodus, his sons' sons became the Twelve Tribes of Israel. The broken promise in "The Deserted Cottage" implies more than the loss of an individual family. Linking the father to the Biblical Jacob encourages the reader to imagine an alternate ending to the Biblical story. Robinson's Jacob witnesses the end of his line and the separation of his descendants from the land, while the Biblical Jacob is father to the future generations of Israel. The Biblical Jacob gains what Robinson's Jacob loses: home as defined by connection to family and to the land.

Like "The Storm," whose characters, William and Nancy, allude to a shared, and quintessentially British ancestral history, Robinson's newspaper war poems appeal to their audience's immediate experience of loss. Robinson draws her characters in broad strokes. Most are unnamed, such as the Youth and villagers in "Agnes" and the son and daughter in "The Deserted Cottage," with easily recognizable and transferable stories.

⁴⁸ The father as a variant locus for the loss of war is not unprecedented, but in the few available examples, the father's loss is mitigated by the promise of a reunion with his son in heaven, as in "An Elegy on My Sailor" (Bennett 164), or the belief that his son will die with glory, as in "A Family Dialogue, On a Son's Wishing to Go to Sea" (Bennett 197). The father in Robert Merry's "The Wounded Soldier" does grieve, but the poem reserves the most extreme emotional reactions to his son's disfigured body for the mother and fiancée (Bennett 242):

But when he enter'd in such horrid guise,
His mother shriek'd, and dropp'd upon the floor:
His father look'd to heav'n with streaming eyes,
And LUCY sunk, alas! to rise no more. (97-100)

Even her named characters, the locus for loss as embodied by Agnes and Jacob, present familiar stories of war's devastation. Juxtaposed in the *Morning Post* with the news of the day—tallies disclosed in battle statistics, fleet reports, and casualty lists—Robinson's newspaper verse speaks to the immeasurable sense of loss for the nation as a whole.⁴⁹

"Edmund's Wedding" shares the same story of loss with its newspaper counterpart, "Agnes," but in its lyrical tale form, the poem shifts the focus from Agnes to her fiancé, revising the trope of the returning soldier so that he is individualized. The generalized character of the Youth in "Agnes" is now not only named, but his name replaces Agnes' in the title. Although no longer the titular character, Agnes maintains an important presence in the poem. Instead of having her story told solely by an omniscient narrator, Edmund also supplies and interprets her narrative. Expanding what was five lines in the Youth's voice to 37 in Edmund's, the revised version allows Edmund the lyric expression of his tale. These lines reveal Edmund's new complexity: his identity as not simply a stock returning soldier but a soldier impressed and indoctrinated into a love of valor and then a deserter with divided loyalties to home and war. The title change not

⁴⁹ Of those revised from newspaper verse to lyrical tale, "The Storm" is a unique case of Robinson translating directly news stories into poetry. Robinson does, however, make poetic the statistical, objective reportage in the *Morning Post* of the consequences of war. A further correspondence—not to her newspaper verse but to the revised version of "Agnes," "Edmund's Wedding"—may be found in two scandalous stories that filled the *Morning Post*'s columns near the publication of "Agnes" and "The Deserted Cottage," both tying soldiers at home on leave to crime. A report on February 23, 1800, claims that soldiers may be responsible for a rash of recent robberies. More sensationally, on February 21, 1800, the *Morning Post* printed the riveting report of soldier John Hartley's trial and guilty verdict for the unprovoked murder of his fellow soldier George Scott. The story captured the reading public's imagination enough to warrant not only reportage in the columns of major newspapers, but also its own eight-page chapbook version titled *The Trial of John Hartley*. Hartley's stirring execution scene as described in the *Morning Post* resembles Edmund's: the valor displayed by both soldiers, Hartley showing deference to his fellow soldiers, while Edmund surrenders with a smile to his; the "great numbers" of "comrades"—a term whose ambiguity suggests not only Hartley's regiment, but also his friendly allies—attending Hartley's execution mirrored by the Villagers gathering to scatter roses on Edmund and Agnes's joint grave; and the devastation of the females left behind. Hartley, like Edmund, is a complex case: a soldier and criminal, who, despite his actions, though they destroy community and familial ties, is still worthy of mourning. The proceedings of the trial are available online through the Old Bailey archive, Reference Number: t18000219-10, at <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?path=sessionsPapers%2F18000219.xml>.

only places a stronger focus on Edmund as returning soldier but also alludes to the fundamental question of the poem—to what extent Edmund is wedded to the military or to Agnes—whether he is wedded to nation, to family, or to both.

Like the poem, itself, (which begins with Edmund's return, slowly reveals the events leading to his return, and ends with his execution for treason), Edmund's narrative does not follow chronological time. Edmund's lyric expression starts with his encounter with Agnes' ghost, then later reveals his cause for leaving and his memories of battle. As in its newspaper version, Robinson first stages Agnes' ghost drawing Edmund to what he later understands is her grave, repeating without change the first three lines which the Youth utters in the earlier poem: "AGNES is coming, I know her white vesture! / See! see! how she beckons me on to the willow, / Where, on the cold turf, she has made our rude pillow" (6-8). In the first of four added stanzas in Edmund's voice, Edmund imagines Agnes' ghost indicting him, a revision which complicates the love story that was unquestionable in the first version: "thy bosom no longer the lily discloses — / For thorns, my poor AGNES, are now planted there! . . . / And thou smil'st, as in sadness, thy fond lover, scorning!" (11-16). In Edmund's mind, Agnes's bosom no longer bears the lily—a symbol of purity, innocence, and love that, in its association with dying, also presages her death—but, instead, bears thorns, a dangerous and foreboding barrier around the heart. Edmund is met with a smile, but hers is not a smile of love and reconciliation, but one born of "sadness" that then births a "scorning" of her "lover" (16). Edmund sees in Agnes' guise a disdain not present in the first version. Edmund projects onto Agnes his guilt for leaving, the original desertion that causes her death. His perception, filtered through his experience of war, takes the forefront.

Robinson's revisions of Edmund's ghostly encounter with Agnes show the poem further ensconced in Gothic traditions, traditions she revises.⁵⁰ Anne Williams' analysis of the Gothic castle as "marked, haunted by 'history,'" shows that "ghosts—whether real or imagined—derive from the past passions, past deeds, past crimes of the family identified with this structure" (45). There is no indication in "Edmund's Wedding" of a heritage of war; Robinson's ghost is not a specter of the past but a revelation of the present passions, deeds, and crimes of war and their future consequences. Robinson's ghost, not tied to an ancestral home but to a ruined cottage, reminds readers that Edmund's leaving for war disrupts his and Agnes' union and, eventually, results in the loss of a potential family line. "Edmund's Wedding" shows the nascence of a haunting not rooted in ancient crimes, but, instead, located in the loss of future generations that Agnes and Edmund could have had.⁵¹

Edmund's experiences of war come into sharper focus in the later version, as well, as he pairs opposite scenes of love and war. The stanzas' structures emphasize Edmund's vacillation between the home and battle fronts, juxtaposing Agnes and the war in alternating sections and even alternating lines. The first of these stanzas describes Edmund's return, contrasting "the red scene of slaughter" (17) with Edmund's wedding suit (18), his faithfulness (19), and his impatience to see Agnes (20). The last half of this stanza alternates between Edmund's thoughts of Agnes, marked by the repetition of the phrase "many a time" (21, 23), and the reality of war—the weapons, debris, and his duty

⁵⁰ I am indebted to Paula Feldman's suggestion to look more deeply at this poem's connection to Gothic traditions. A cluster of works in the mid-2000s engages Robinson and the Gothic. See Anne Close's "Mary Robinson and the Gothic," Adrianna Craciun's *Fatal Women of Romanticism*, and Jacqueline M. Labbe's "Romance and Violence in Mary Robinson's *Lyrical Tales* and Other Gothic Poetry." A later study by Sharon M. Setzer, "The Gothic Structure of Mary Robinson's *Memoirs*" (2009) moves outside the realm of Robinson's fiction, tying Gothicism to her autobiography.

⁵¹ Robinson revises the Gothic novel's family plot originating in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by showing the end of a family line instead of its restoration through the male heir.

to valor (22, 24). Edmund's memories of the camp (25-28) precede memories of his impressment (31), resulting separation from Agnes (30), the battle (31), and his desires for Agnes (32). The final stanza in Edmund's voice juxtaposes the idea of death on the battlefield (33, 35-36) with Edmund's thoughts of Agnes (34), culminating with four lines that blend the battlefield with the home front:

For, sever'd from THEE, my SWEET GIRL, the loud thunder,
Which tore the soft fetters of fondness asunder —
Had only one kindness, in mercy to shew me,
To bid me die bravely, that thou, Love, may'st know me! (37-40)

The lines leading to Edmund's concluding words clearly demarcate the border between the battlefield and the home. "From the red scene of slaughter" (17) and "Across the wild Ocean" (29) indicate the war's physical distance from home, while "War" (24) and "the Camp" (25) mark the place of war as separate. The verbs tell of separation, too, both "sever'd" (37) and the repetition of "tore" (30, 38). But these final four lines confuse the two, revealing that there is no easy synthesis of the battlefield and home. A reference to Agnes, "my SWEET GIRL," appears, not separate from, but in the same line as a reference to war, "the loud thunder" (37). The relative clause in the following line, "Which tore the soft fetters of fondness asunder," links the sounds of war, "the loud thunder" (37), to a perversion of traditional wedding vows: "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). The final line conflates Edmund's desires for valor in war with his perception of Agnes' desires. Edmund wishes to "*die bravely*" so that Agnes "may'st *know me*" (40). His wish is not for military fame; instead, his valorous ending would solely serve Agnes' desires,

desires that for Edmund have no connection to a consummation that the word “know” suggests. He translates valor, his love of country and his fellow comrades, and the war collectively, into a highly personal and individuated concern: a desire for a lover to know who he is. But the present of the poem defies this ending and redefines the trope of the returning soldier. Edmund does not die on the battlefield, and he does not return triumphantly or even wounded, as in most conventional treatments of the trope. He is a deserter come home to find his lover dead, a revision which elicits sympathy for a wartime figure not normally celebrated. Agnes’ death compounds this sympathy for Edmund as his desertion leads not to their earthly wedding but his execution for treason.

This revision, though the most striking, is not the only complication Robinson makes to the returning soldier trope in “Edmund’s Wedding.” Recalling his journey to war, Edmund reveals that “Across the wild Ocean, half frantic they bore me; / Unheeding my groans, from Thee, AGNES, they tore me,” suggesting forcible impressment (29-30).⁵² Impressment, itself, was a frequent topos found in war literature, a shorthand way “to highlight social inequality and government oppression” (Ennis 39). Just as frequent are poetic representations of the volunteer soldier seduced by romantic notions of war who becomes disillusioned once those notions are tested.⁵³ Robinson melds these two commonplaces, eschewing the typical pattern of the latter, for Edmund is forced into the

⁵² Robinson’s 1797 novel *Walsingham; Or, the Pupil of Nature* offers another tale of impressment. Griffith Blagden, a wounded soldier returned from war, recounts his love for Peggy, her removal to London to protect herself from the advances of a squire, and Griffith’s meeting with a press gang a short distance from reuniting with Peggy. Griffith loses his leg in war but regains Peggy on his return, though she dies four years after their marriage. See pp. 382-92, 495. Daniel James Ennis includes a paragraph on *Walsingham* in his study of the press gang (*Enter the Press-Gang: Naval Impressment in Eighteenth-Century British Literature*, pp. 70-71), but many of the plot details he includes are incorrect.

⁵³ John Scott’s powerful anti-war poem, “The Drum,” originally published in 1782, found renewed popularity through frequent newspaper reprinting during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars for its critique of the recruitment drum whose “discordant sound” (1) “lures” (4) young men to their deaths. See Bennett, p. 80.

military and is then seduced by the promise of valor. Valor does not impel Edmund to volunteer for the war effort. Instead, warfare teaches Edmund the requirements of being a valorous soldier, as “cannons, loud roaring, taught Valour its duty” (22). On the battlefield, valor’s main requirement is to “die bravely” (40), and Edmund accepts this consequence as he “long’d on the death-bed of Valor to be” (36). The poem does not confirm whether Edmund reframes his desertion to fit the narrative of valor—his sacrifice for something larger being for love instead of war—or whether he abandons valor to be with Agnes. His final characterization casts him as valorous, the narrative voice calling him “EDMUND, of Valour the dauntless defender” when he surrenders instead of attempting to escape his captors (87). The structure of his title hearkens back to Arthurian knights’ appellations, but its context with Edmund as deserter suggests the mock-heroic. The penultimate stanza gives no easy answers as to how Edmund should be regarded, how to deal with a soldier who faced battle but deserts or how to regard a lover whose desertion caused his fiancée’s death. Robinson critiques the culture of war that leads to the poem’s tragic end. Edmund’s impressment, his indoctrination, his desertion, and his execution all merit critique. But the villagers do not moralize. Rather than answer these questions outright, the poem redirects the focus to the ritual of the funeral staged by the villagers in its final stanza.

Robinson closes “Edmund’s Wedding” with the same scene of mourning she staged in “Agnes”:

The breeze, on the mountain’s tall summit now sailing

Fans lightly the dew-drops, that spangle their bed!

The Villagers, thronging around, scatter roses,

The grey wing of Evening the western sky closes,—
And Night's sable pall, o'er the landscape extending,
Is the mourning of Nature! the SOLEMN SCENE ENDING. (91-96)⁵⁴

As a coping mechanism, the villagers choose to ignore the complex reality of Edmund's desertion and focus on what unquestionably should be mourned, Agnes' and Edmund's love. The final lines bring closure for the villagers, a closure echoed by Nature in the image of evening as a wing that "closes" (94), which culminates in "the SOLEMN SCENE ENDING" (96). This closure melds Nature's tears, "the dew-drops, that spangle their bed" (92), with the villagers' scattering of roses, an emblem of love. The villagers emphasize the union thwarted, the wedding that occurs only in death, and the end of lineage this loss implies. Their collective mourning reflects what should be mourned: the loss of a family.

Robinson refuses to stage the horrific ritual reserved for deserters, execution by firing squad. According to Roger Norman Buckley:

The execution site was some lonely area marked by a freshly dug grave. The prisoner, stripped of his colorful regimentals and dressed in white, was marched to the place of execution in ordinary step to the "Dead March" played by his regimental band. The condemned man was made to march behind four men carrying his coffin on their shoulders. Upon arrival at the site, the coffin was placed alongside the yawning pit with the firing party drawn up a few paces on the other side. The condemned man, his arms tightly bound with cords behind his back, was then made to kneel on his coffin, after which his nightcap was drawn over his eyes unless he

⁵⁴ There are three minor revisions from newspaper to lyrical tale form, but none of these alters the scene: "on" (91) replaces "o'er" (43); "lightly" (92) replaces "softly" (44); and "The grey wing of Evening" (94) replaces "'Till the shadow of evening" (46).

requested otherwise. Thus, his last melancholy view in life was the gaping black pit and the firing party positioned just beyond. He was then shot at close range in the presence of his regiment, which had been formed on three sides of a square facing inward. The execution being finished, the regiment filed past the corpse in slow time so that each man got a good look at the mangled form on the ground. (204)⁵⁵

Robinson replaces this spectacle, “an emphatic affirmation of military authority,” with an affirmation of love (Buckley 205). By importing the closing lines, nearly unchanged, from “Agnes,” she evokes the Youth’s and Agnes’ original, uncomplicated love. But Edmund’s death in “Edmund’s Wedding” is different, complicated by his desertion. The loss in “Edmund’s Wedding” hinges on making the universal particular: the culture of military indoctrination, both its ideology and impressment, are collective, but the act of desertion is highly individual. What was a personal tale becomes broadened through the villagers’ mourning, drawing the lyric and the tale together. The villagers collectively recognize the presence of love in this loss. The tragedy of the trope in newspaper form is easily recognizable: the returning soldier in “Agnes” is unquestionably worthy.

“Edmund’s Wedding” enlarges the scope of the tragic to include those who might not be immediately recognized as worthy of mourning.

Whereas Edmund’s return is preceded and followed by tragedy, the tragedy of “The Deserted Cottage” rests on the consequences of a soldier who never returns, with its trope, the ruined cottage, emblematic not solely of the physical body’s decay, as in its newspaper version, but of the loss of life more fully defined: the relationship between

⁵⁵ Over 36% of military crimes in the British Army in 1799 and 1800 were desertion, with courts martial numbering 26 in 1799 and 50 in 1800. See Buckley, pp. 217-219.

humans, nature, and God. The cottage in its lyrical tale form moves beyond the physical, the structure of the house and body; it is the sum of its inhabitants' lives, marked by the poem's expansion of the home to include the surrounding natural world, a world the cottagers actively tend. More than lineage interrupted, the focus of the revised version becomes an active life interrupted. Whereas the cottagers' lives in the newspaper verse are static, presented as a pastoral ideal, the added stanzas in the revised version make their lives more than just beautiful; they become purposeful. Jacob's daughter, though still "fair, and blooming," is also a shepherd. In both versions the daughter is linked directly to the natural landscape and likened to Jesus through her descriptor as the "Morning Star" (39, 51). In the lyrical tale, her connection to Christ becomes more explicit and actively purposeful. Her possession is not only of the land, but also of her Christ-like industry. The line "'Twas hers, the vagrant lamb to lead" (55) evokes the parable of the lost sheep: "How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?" (Matthew 18:12). The son, a "peasant" (43) in the first version, becomes a "yunker" (61) in the second. As Judith Pascoe notes in her gloss, a younker can mean "A young nobleman or gentleman" (*Selected Poems*, 241), giving the line an ironic edge that re-envisions what constitutes nobility, just as does the description of Jacob as the "Cottage Lord" (25). But "yunker" can also mean "one who is employed onboard a ship." This revision, then, is suggestive of the son's occupation. Paradoxically, Robinson envisions the daughter's and son's lives as both more active and more tranquil than the characters' lives in the newspaper version.

In contrast to the cottagers portrayed as seemingly frozen in time and space in the newspaper version, in *Lyrical Tales*, Jacob's family achieves this paradoxical state through a purposeful distancing from society. In the first version, there is a clear contrast between the rich, connected to "pride" (24), and the poor, connected to "Freedom" (23). Robinson extends her critique of social class from two lines in the first version to two added stanzas in the second, creating what will prove to be an ironic portrayal of Jacob's chosen home in Nature as beyond the reach of the State. In these stanzas, society is not only connected to pride (21), but also to "Ambition's gilded toy" (23) and "Folly's sick'ning riot" (24). The cottagers have not only "left the proud" (21) and moved "far" (19) from the corrupting influence of society, but they are also literally and metaphorically placed "*above* the busy croud" (19, emphasis added). "There" (19), ambiguously referring to Nature and the cottage, one can find "repose" and "quiet" (20); one can "smile" (21) in knowing "the ever tranquil mind" (25). For it is there, the poem claims, that the inhabitants can "find / The DEITY" (27-28). The cottage in Nature is imbued with the Deity, itself, a place of refuge where an active daily life is worship, where cultivating the land and tending the home is communing with God. But even though the final line of these added stanzas claims that there is "No mortal foe molesting," war intrudes, proving deadly for all (30).

As in the newspaper version, war devastates the natural order of things. In *Lyrical Tales*, war is not a gradual process of decay but, instead, an active, aggressive, decisive "foe" that interrupts and corrupts (30). If the Deity imbues the cottage, this foe not only destroys the domestic unit and the cottage in Nature, but the site of interaction with God: war is not only in opposition to humans' relationship to Nature, but also to God.

The poem begins and ends with the Stranger's attention drawn to the cottage. The cottage, its desolation and ruin, spurs the retelling of Jacob's tale, a lyric expression that Jacob, himself, tells before madness and death consume him: "But one remain'd their fate to tell" (69). After the tale, the speaker tells the Stranger:

And now behold yon little Cot

All dreary and forsaken!

And know, that soon 'twill be thy lot,

To fall, like JACOB and his race. (91-94)

The tale's retellings by Jacob and the speaker, as well as the direct parallels the speaker draws between the cottage, Jacob, Jacob's descendants, and the Stranger, widen the reach of war's implications. The cottage is not solely a symbol of the family's absence and decay but evidence that the loss of war reverberates beyond the individual family to the country as a whole, what Behrendt terms the trope of the "nation-family" (87). "[Y]on little Cot" is an emblem of the Stranger's fate, not solely Jacob's. The tragedy of war is not only individual, but shared, drawing together the individualized lyric and the communal tale.

By giving lyric expression to those left behind, "Edmund's Wedding" and the second version of "The Deserted Cottage" reveal the consequences of war at home, not solely on the battlefield. "The Widow's Home," not known to have been published in any other version prior to *Lyrical Tales*, provides a poignant alternative to the complex investigations of valor and mourning explored in "Edmund's Wedding" and "The Deserted Cottage." Whereas "Edmund's Wedding" and "The Deserted Cottage" retell the fiancée's, sister's, and father's grief, "The Widow's Home" stages the precursor to grief

for a family with a loved one at war: hope. For the home's inhabitants, mourning will come, but it is not staged; the unnamed widow and her son await the return of their soldier, not knowing, as the narrative voice reveals in the third stanza, that he is dead. Read together, this trio of poems illustrates the enlarged sense of loss that occurs in revising familiar war tropes. In "The Widow's Home," Robinson offers a soldier who will never return, a widow who does not yet know she is a widow, and a cottage not deserted but a home. The majority of the poem's narrative stages the mother's and son's hope that their soldier will return, but theirs is a hope undermined by the poem's dramatic irony and its place alongside tragic tales of the loss of war. In its final lines, the poem turns from the tragedy of the present to hope for the future, from the mother and son's immediate experience to the speaker's projections of their future. The speaker praises, "The WIDOW'S LOWLY HOME: The Soldier's HEIR; / The proud inheritor of Heav'n's best gifts — / The mind unshackled — and the guiltless Soul!" (108-09). Although the mother is widowed and the son is fatherless, the final lines describe their home as the site of promise for the reconstituted family, an alternative ending to the tragic loss of the family line as staged in "Edmund's Wedding" and "The Deserted Cottage." The family will mourn when the news of their soldier's death arrives, but the narrator, in a strikingly direct voice, declares that the home will endure.⁵⁶

"The Widow's Home" teems with vibrant, natural imagery that reinforces domestic bonds. Instead of Agnes's or Jacob's deserted, decaying cottage, the poem presents a home, so called for what is "yet within / The sweets of joy domestic," as well as for the connections to nature that abound without (6-7). The natural reinforces the domestic through images of tangible connection: the branches of nearby trees weave together to

⁵⁶ I appreciate Paula Feldman's suggestion to draw the pathos of the tale's dramatic irony to the fore.

create an “ozier canopy” over the family’s sitting place (4); the birdsong greeting travelers wafts, not from individual voices, but from a “plummy choir” (101); and ivy and vine “Bind” the thatch of the birds’ nest to the cottagers’ roof (21). The widow decorates her home with flowers, and she is one with nature: “the queen-flow’r of the garland! The sweet Rose / Of wood-wild beauty” (31-32). The son is connected to both of his parents through natural elements, as well. Like his mother, the boy metaphorically is a flower, as he has the delicateness and pliability of a “low vale-born lily” (44). His favorite places for watching and awaiting his father’s return connect him to nature and reveal his connection to his absent father. The boy’s “lone watch tow’r” (58) is an oak tree that, like his father, is blasted by “warfare” (61). The seashore—the liminal space that binds land to water—is another spot where the son roams. Even his pastime, singing and playing his “oaten pipe” (65), connects him to nature’s birdsong that bookends the poem and to his father, as the song that comes from within the boy, taught only from listening as an infant, is his father’s.

Although they are separated, not only by war but also by death, the poem suggests that these connections, true in life, will remain. The soldier in “The Widow’s Home” eschews “pomp and praise,” (90) “Pride” (91), and “Ambition” (92); “no trophied tomb / Tells of his bold exploits” (88-89); his “very name / Is now forgotten!” and, indeed, is never revealed in the poem (87-88). He will not be remembered in the annals of history, but the soldier will live through his son and through the love he created with his wife. The poem melds familial and patriotic duty. The soldier’s work on the battlefield and his work at home create “peace domestic,” and the home tempers valor: “the circling arm / Of valour, [is] temper’d by the milder joys / Of rural merriment” (85-87). The soldier’s

valor, which his son inherits, is linked not only to bravery but also to the quality of his love: “his brave father’s warm intrepid heart / Throbs in his infant bosom” (41-42). Mirrored in the entwining of the natural and domestic realms, the soldier’s connections to his military world and his domestic life—his melding of a heart that is both brave and warm—create his legacy. Though the soldier will never return, he still lives, his presence tangible in his cottage, his widow, and his son.

The narrative voice interjects a personal, lyric expression in the final stanza, ending the poem by drawing together “the poor Soldier’s grave” (98), “The Widow’s lone and unregarded Cot” (99), and “the Soldier’s HEIR” (108) as that which should be prized over wealth, ambition, and military exploits. The poem’s concluding lines juxtapose “The WIDOW’S LOWLY HOME” with “The Soldier’s HEIR,” pairing the trope of the widow with another, more hopeful figure, that of the mother. The poem does not celebrate the sacrifice the widow has made for war, but, instead, shifts the focus to what will live on after—and despite—the war. When read in its context as a lyrical tale, “The Widow’s Home” ends on an uncharacteristically hopeful note. Instead of the end of the family line as staged in “Edmund’s Wedding” and “The Deserted Cottage,” the poem presents hope for the family through an heir. The final lines no longer focus on the foredoomed hope of the soldier’s return or focus solely on the widow, whose title marks the consequences of war. Instead, the speaker shifts to the home as emblemized by the son, emphasizing the hope the product of love, not war, offers. What prevails is the son, the “living rose” (105) over which the mother weeps. The home is not solely the place for mourning, but also a place for life.

While the genre of lyrical tale with its blending of individual and shared experience

seems particularly well-suited to recognizing both the personal and communal loss associated with war, Betty T. Bennett's groundbreaking anthology and Mary Favret's recent work in *War at a Distance* makes clear that newspapers both inspired and housed poetic remediations of the war, as well. Bennett claims newspapers as the province of ballads, where newspaper poets recounted unassuming stories using common tropes. Even those with a personal, subjective voice Bennett classifies as balladic, not lyric. But there is a lyric strain to war poetry within the *Morning Post*, most exemplified by Coleridge's "The Recantation," now known popularly by its later title "France, An Ode." Originally published April 16, 1798, and signed by Coleridge, the poem's palpable sense of loss and betrayal is emphasized by the speaker's reticent but, ultimately, necessary turn from France following its invasion of Switzerland. Its lyric operates in the familiar territory of an interior struggle, staged literally as an inner dialogue in the third stanza. But this inward stance pulses with the poem's very public subject, opening outward to the field of politics.

Coleridge's poem was republished later that year alongside two other lyrics that combine the personal and political in a quarto volume titled *Fears in Solitude, Written in 1798, During the Alarm of an Invasion, to which are added France, An Ode; and Frost at Midnight*.⁵⁷ The speaker in the opening poem "Fears in Solitude" sustains an appeal to the first-person plural—the repeated "we" sharing guilt for Britain's wrongs—that only in the final stanzas morphs to a singular prophetic voice. But this voice, whether "we" or "I," retains its passion, both its anger and sadness, throughout. As in "The Recantation,"

⁵⁷ Minor variations in capitalization occur frequently in the movement from "The Recantation" to its quarto form as "France: An Ode," along with two substantive revisions to words: "My" replaces "By" in line 12 and "patriot" replaces "patient" in line 79. The most intriguing emendation to the quarto volume is the deletion of the *Morning Post*'s editorial note vaguely explaining the removal of stanza V, and the rewriting of the final stanza's opening five lines.

the poem oscillates between the public spaces of war and the private consequences of that war. The poem's damning critique of newspapers illustrates the point:

. . . Boys and girls,
And women that would groan to see a child
Pull off an insect's leg, all read of war,
The best amusement for our morning meal! (101-04)

Here, unlike in Robinson, there is separation of the battle and home fronts. The constant barrage of numbers daily read numbs those at home to the actuality of what those numbers represent, the reality of war for those in battle. Coleridge condemns not only those "technical in victories and defeats" (109), but even the language of war:

And all our dainty terms for fratricide,
Terms which we trundle smoothly o'er our tongues
Like mere abstractions, empty sounds to which
We join no feeling and attach no form,
As if the soldier died without a wound;
As if the fibres of this godlike frame
Were gor'd without a pang: as if the wretch,
Who fell in battle doing bloody deeds,
Pass'd off to Heaven, *translated* and not killed. (110-18)

Although the widow appears in the following line—"As tho' he had no wife to pine for him" (119)—the poem primarily locates the domestic consequences of war in an ideational space. Coleridge's poem is a call to replace abstractions and translations of experience but does not enact the humanization he seeks. It is an argument for the type of

verse Robinson writes. Though necessarily mediated by their fictionality, Robinson's characters suffer directly, personally, and viscerally the consequences of war.

The sharp turn to Nether Stowey in the final lines of "Fears in Solitude" draws the collective domestic experience of an imagined Britain (the "we" of the poem) into the speaker's immediate experience (his "I"), a move much like the final poem in the collection, "Frost at Midnight." A quintessential Coleridgean lyric, this poem's cloistered domestic scene seems far removed from the public space of war. Nearly two decades after its original publication, Coleridge, himself, disavows the poem's associations with war. In a comment on proofs for 1817's *Sibylline Leaves* that placed the poem in the section "Poems Occasioned by Political Events or Feelings Connected with Them," Coleridge questions: "How comes this Poem here? What has it to do with Political Events?" (qtd. in Stillinger 55). But as Paul Magnuson's work, followed by Favret's eloquent arguments, have shown, the poem's original context marks the poem as political. In its original quarto form, "Frost at Midnight" is dated February 1798, situated alongside two poems overtly connected not only to war but to tangible events in a particular war, and produced by radical publisher Joseph Johnson. The occasion of the poem, in Favret's words, is that "On a winter's night a man looks into the fireplace and guides his thoughts away from war" (*War at Distance* 2).

The poem is also occasioned by William Cowper's "Brown Study," the section of *The Task*'s Book IV, which, as Kevis Goodman has suggested, often appears lyrical when excised in modern anthologies. But Goodman argues that Book IV taken whole is georgic, not lyric, and that it is Coleridge, alluding to one part without its previous context, who crafts a lyric. No longer connected to Cowper's opening scenes, which

Goodman reads as “turning the contents of the daily news into poetry,” “Frost at Midnight” retreats to the interiority of the lyric (71):

It is Coleridge who would make lyric out of *The Task*, fifteen years later in “Frost at Midnight,” and now we can see that he does so precisely by excising the “indolent vacuity of thought” sequence from its narrative surroundings, moving what “Frost at Midnight” renders as “the interspersed vacancies / And momentary pauses of the thought” (46-47) far, far from the newspaper’s “map of busy life.” (100)

But this is to read “Frost at Midnight” out of its context, without its fellow poem’s critique of newspaper culture hauntingly similar to Cowper’s lines preceding the “Brown Study”: “The sound of war / Has lost its terrors ere it reaches me; / Grieves, but alarms me not” (100-2). It is also to read the lyric bereft of politics, to see the lyric as the province solely of the private.

It is context that creates a lyric at once public and private for both Coleridge and Robinson, just as it is context that defines the genres in which Robinson writes. Robinson’s revised tales of war find their poignancy in individual expressions of individual lives. No longer commonplace figures that point to recurrent and reductive arguments about war, Robinson’s tales’ revised tropes complicate the vision of war, its consequences and complexities for those at home. Mourning is their mode of lyric expression, voiced by the characters, honored by the speakers, and embodied by the poems themselves. This mourning moves from celebrating the typical, but empty, abstractions that abound during war to recognizing worthwhile ideals not necessarily connected to war. Unconcerned with celebrating valor, honor, patriotism, or sacrifice for

country, the poems uphold civilian ideals as worthy of mourning: the villagers mourn the loss of love in “Edmund’s Wedding,” the speaker lauds “Truth and feeling” (97) in “The Deserted Cottage,” and the narrative voice praises “Heav’n’s best gifts — / The mind unshackled — and the guiltless soul” (109-10) in “The Widow’s Home.” A deserter and a madman, those not typically seen as worthy of mourning, become emblems of the community’s veneration. Through the process of mourning appropriately, those at home can maintain the promise of humanity, to live on through memorializing and memory, as in “Edmund’s Wedding” and “The Deserted Cottage,” or through the hope of a successive generation in “The Widow’s Home.” By speaking through individual expressions of shared experience, the poems—themselves memorials to the loss of war—enhance the tragedy of what, for Robinson’s readers, were common tales.

CHAPTER V

ROBINSON'S SHADOWY TRAVELER AND THE DISPOSSESSED

Robinson's revision did not rest solely on her intricate process of altering individual newspaper poems.⁵⁸ She also revised for coherence, defining *Lyrical Tales*, her only collection with a specific thematic and formal focus, as much by what she added as by what she reworked. The most telling addition is the motif of the Traveler, a shadowy figure who inhabits the world of *Lyrical Tales*—sometimes a mere mention, sometimes an interloper, sometimes the lead character or speaker. The Traveler—a type of character distinct from the dispossessed exiles and émigrés, wanderers and hermits, widows and orphans, slaves and servants, who are the main focus of her poems and of the previous chapters—is not only without a home but also without a past or probable future. The Traveler's story is of the present. Like the individual narratives given voice by the solitary, dispossessed figures, who people the *Lyrical Tales*, the multiple Traveler characters do not offer a unified, singular vision of connection or of social cohesion. Instead, the many Travelers moving through *Lyrical Tales* provide a unifying thread among the poems and moments for connection within the fragmented society the poems represent.

⁵⁸ Like "Tropes and Tales of War," this chapter began under the direction of Paula Feldman, whose careful readings of three versions led me to investigate further how the traveler figures in literature of the time. At her prompting, I also turned more attention to criticism concerning traveler figures. I am especially grateful for her suggestion of Jeanne Moskal as a source.

Robinson's process of revision often involves substantive changes of words, phrases, or lines, coupled with large-scale alterations to entire stanzas. But this chapter focuses on what Robinson left unchanged from her newspaper verse and what she added to *Lyrical Tales* in order to bring greater formal and thematic cohesion. As Paul Magnuson tells us, "A lyric's location influences its significance, and to change a poem's location is to change its significance, sometimes radically, both for our understanding of its original historical period and for our own construction of Romanticism" (*Reading Public Romanticism* 67). To shift location alters significance. To shift genres is, necessarily, to revise. In moving newspaper verse to lyrical tale, Robinson redefines the genre of her poems. Now lyrical tale, these poems turn their focus to the power of voice—the voice of the dispossessed. Upsetting the traditional role of the Romantic Traveler as poet-speaker—therefore, subject—Robinson's Traveler is not the source of revelation or insight. The Traveler's journey does not appear in the poem; the Traveler exists only in moments of confrontation with the dispossessed, moments that elevate the dispossessed to subject position.

The motif of the Traveler has its origins in Robinson's newspaper verse but coheres in *Lyrical Tales*, where nearly half of the poems, ten out of twenty-two, include a Traveler. Three of these Traveler figure poems—"The Hermit of Mont-Blanc," "Poor Marguerite," and "Edmund's Wedding"—first appeared in periodicals.⁵⁹ Despite extensive substantive revisions to each of these poems for their *Lyrical Tales* publication, Robinson leaves the lines mentioning the Traveler figure untouched. In both the periodical verse and lyrical tale versions, the Hermit has "a tinkling bell [that] / Oft

⁵⁹ Published in the *Monthly Magazine* on February 1, 1800, the *Morning Post* on April 8, 1800, and as "Agnes" in the *Morning Post* on February 28, 1800, respectively.

told the weary Trav'ler to approach / Fearless of danger" (*LT* 56-58, *MP* 50-52); for Marguerite, "The watchful Cur assail'd her not, / Though at the beggar he would fly, / And fright the Trav'ler passing by" (*LT* 50-52, *MP* 34-36); and Agnes' deserted cottage is where

The Owl builds its nest in the thatch, and there, shrieking,
(A place all deserted and lonely bespeaking)
Salutes the night traveller, wandering near it,
And makes his faint heart, sicken sadly to hear it. (*LT* 53-56, *MP* 21-24)

When read individually and at separate times as periodical verse, mentions of the Traveler seem inconsequential. Yet when read together and with the addition of seven new poems that contain the Traveler figure, what were vague and scattered references become a defining motif in *Lyrical Tales*.⁶⁰

This chapter examines the function of Robinson's Traveler figure, looking first briefly at poems that merely mention the Traveler, those originally published in the periodical press along with four poems original to *Lyrical Tales*: "The Trumpeter," "The Widow's Home," "The Shepherd's Dog," and "Golfre: A Gothic Swiss Tale in Five Parts," before moving to an extended discussion of three poems in which the Traveler is a fully-formed, if shadowy, character—"All Alone," "The Lascar," and "The Fugitive."⁶¹ These added poems that flesh out the Traveler offer a complex character, whose confrontations with the solitary figures at the heart of the poems provide a challenge to

⁶⁰ These references occur in ten lines in three poems among hundreds Robinson penned for the periodical press in her final year. As chief poetry correspondent for the *Morning Post* from December 1799 until her death in December 1800, Robinson published at least 98 of her own poems, while continuing frequent publications in other popular periodicals.

⁶¹ "All Alone" was published in the *Morning Post*, but its publication on December 18, 1800, after *Lyrical Tales* appeared, was intended to advertise Robinson's final volume, as the appended note attests. In excising stanzas XX–XXV, it stands, then, as an excerpt of an already published poem instead of a substantially revised poem appearing in both genres, newspaper verse and lyrical tale.

traditional forms of authority and afford moments in which the dispossessed can have a voice.

Robinson's Travelers are in a position to provide aid or solace to the lonely, outcast figures, but the focus of these poems, and of *Lyrical Tales* itself, is these solitary, dispossessed figures, a cast of characters kept distinct from the Traveler. Even though many of the dispossessed figures who haunt *Lyrical Tales* are technically travelers, Robinson reserves the title "Traveler" for particular figures.⁶² From African slaves denied their humanity to Revolutionary exiles and the poverty-stricken denied a home, all of *Lyrical Tales'* dispossessed characters are stripped of agency by the society in which they live. But Robinson's hybrid genre, the lyrical tale, grants these dispossessed characters agency by including their voices in the narrative, locating the lyric in the tale. She gives the singular, lyric expression of a solitary speaking "I," not to the Traveler, but to the dispossessed characters; or, in the case of "The Fugitive," she challenges the Traveler's lyrical expression of the Fugitive's tale. What is most fascinating about Robinson's fully-formed Traveler figures, and what forms the core of the following analysis, is the extent of their fallibility, which makes possible the agency of the dispossessed figures. Although these Travelers can be sympathetic characters, they frequently misread and further threaten to dispossess the solitary characters they encounter. That is to say, their efforts to connect often, ironically, lead to disconnection as they attempt to claim authority over the dispossessed characters.

Alongside the concrete mentions of fully-formed Traveler figures are poems with Travelers as metaphors or even hypotheticals. The poems that originally appeared in

⁶² One exception is "The Fugitive," in which the speaker calls the Fugitive "Poor Traveller!" (34). However, this naming represents the speaker's attempts to equate the Fugitive's experience with his or her own.

periodicals, as well as four poems created solely for *Lyrical Tales*—"The Trumpeter," "The Widow's Home," "The Shepherd's Dog," and "Golfre,"—offer a mere mention of the Traveler. In these poems, this figure does not take part in the action of the poem; he or she is one who is expected to come or one who represents an aspect of the dispossessed characters. The final lines of "The Trumpeter," the only comic tale to reference directly a Traveler figure, metaphorically cast any repentant person as a Traveler, one seeking to move beyond a narrow path of egotism: "by Temperance, Virtue and liberal deeds, / By nursing the flowrets, and crushing the weeds, / The loftiest Traveller always succeeds — / For his journey will lead him to HEAV'N" (111-12).⁶³ Beyond the potential for anyone to become a Traveler, the lines emphasize the Traveler figure's familiarity for Robinson's audience, where travel serves as a metaphor for expansion of perception.⁶⁴ In the remaining Traveler poems original to *Lyrical Tales*, there is an expectation that the Traveler may come; the Traveler is familiar enough within the landscape to be planned for or guarded against. In "The Widow's Home," outside the family home is "a rude seat . . . [that] / Invites the weary traveller to rest" (4-5); in "The Shepherd's Dog," Old Trim guards his master's home "though no stranger company, / Or lonely traveller rested there" (19-20); and in "Golfre," "A strong portcullis entrance . . . And stagnate . . . green moat was found, / Whene'er the Trav'ller wander'd round" (11-14), while Zorietto's "little hovel open stood . . . To travellers — benighted" (53-55).

⁶³ Although "The Trumpeter" is the sole comic tale to name the Traveler figure, Robinson's comic tales often invoke the solitary, dispossessed main characters found in the tragic tales. Mimicking the language of the tragic tales, the comic tales term inconstant lovers "wanderers" and children born out of wedlock "alien," with unmarried older women and Gypsies as solitary figures and exiles. See especially "Deborah's Parrot: A Village Tale," "The Fortune-Teller: A Gypsy Tale," and "The Granny Grey: A Love Tale."

⁶⁴ The Traveler was a familiar motif for Robinson's readers. The Romantic period saw an unprecedented number of foreign travelers, often forced, on British shores, and British travelers and tourists across class and gender divides journeying to territories both foreign and domestic. For valuable information on the boom in travel and tourism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Carl Thompson *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (2007).

Here, as in the Traveler poems revised from periodical verse, the Travelers' function is to reveal aspects of the dispossessed figures' character. Whereas Golfre's castle is armed against the Traveler, Zorietto's hovel is welcoming. "The Widow's Home" and "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc" welcome the Traveler, the former with a place to rest, the latter with a bell to chime for assistance, while the Traveler in "Edmund's Wedding" no longer finds Agnes's cottage open, foreshadowing her death. The Travelers in "The Shepherd's Dog" and "Poor Marguerite" are guarded against, signaling the inhabitants' fear. These Travelers weave their way through *Lyrical Tales*, but the emphasis remains on the dispossessed and their tales.

The most complex treatments of the Traveler figure occur in "All Alone," "The Lascar," and "The Fugitive," but even in these poems Robinson gives little detail about her Travelers, an omission that maintains the poems' focus on the dispossessed. Despite being more fully developed, the Traveler remains shadowy, appearing only in the moment of confrontation with the dispossessed characters. Readers see only the Traveler's conversation with a grief stricken, impoverished boy in "All Alone," his tragic encounter with an outcast Indian sailor in "The Lascar," and his or her immediate observations of the exile in "The Fugitive." Upending readerly expectations, Robinson's Travelers have no clear path or journey, no named place from which they have traveled and no destination ahead. They also lack nostalgia, one of the defining traits of what Ingrid Horrocks calls "the new eighteenth-century wanderer." Unlike their immediate literary predecessors, the "new wanderers" in the Graveyard Poetry of James Thomson and Oliver Goldsmith, Robinson's Travelers are not nostalgic, and their past is left unknown. "All Alone" gives only the details of the Traveler's previous interactions with

the boy. The speaker in “The Fugitive” appears solely in vague comparison to the Fugitive: “I, like thee, am but a Fugitive / An alien from delight, in this dark scene!” (35-36). Readers come upon the Traveler in “The Lascar” at the moment the Lascar does, watch their confrontation, and leave the Traveler to follow the Lascar to his death. Although appearing in a scant 13 lines in a two-part, 312 line poem, the Traveler in “The Lascar,” ironically, is the only one drawn with identifiable and unambiguous characteristics, fear and greed: “The traveller was a fearful man, — / And next his life he prized his gold! —” (231-32). “The Lascar” is the only poem that genders its Traveler. In Robinson’s poems, it is unclear whether the Traveler is on a journey when encountering the dispossessed or whether the name suggests one who has traveled in the past. What is clear is that Robinson’s Traveler strays by domestic scenes, attempting to connect to a home that is not his or her own: at the mother’s gravesite in “All Alone,” in the village that shuns the Lascar, and near the Fugitive’s haunts. The Traveler feels attachment to the places of importance for the dispossessed.

“All Alone,” one of the three poems with more fully drawn Traveler figures, not only opens *Lyrical Tales*, but also introduces the Traveler as a deeply flawed character central to the project of the collection. The poem presents moments for connection between the Traveler and the outcast characters, but, though possible, these moments are not realized, largely because the Traveler attempts to usurp the boy’s agency. The poem recounts the tale of a boy’s loss of his mother, his father, and his home. Both the Traveler and the boy speak, each giving competing narratives centered on whether the boy is, indeed, all alone. The Traveler’s repeated assurances that his presence should provide solace for the boy are genuine attempts to connect, but they threaten to dispossess the boy

further. The Traveler rewrites the boy's narrative and discredits his perception, attempting to take away the power of his voice. But the poem stages the boy's defiant response—his claim to power over his own story and his challenge to the Traveler's authority.

From its first lines, the poem reveals the Traveler's presumption. The poem opens with the Traveler asking two questions, seeming invitations for dialogue that are undercut by the Traveler answering his own questions. He asks, "Ah! wherefore by the Church-yard side, / Poor little LORN ONE, dost thou stray?" (1-2) but answers in the second stanza, "thy mother's cheek is pale / And withers under yon grave stone" (10-11). The Traveler knows of the boy's recent loss and the reason for his presence at the graveyard. In response to his second question, "And wherefore dost thou sigh, and moan, / And weep, that thou are left alone?" (5-6), the Traveler presumes an answer, framed as a foregone conclusion: "Thou art not left alone, poor boy" (7). The boy's narrative, as he "sighs[s], and moan[s], / And weeps[s]," is that he is, indeed, "left alone" (5-6). The Traveler contradicts the boy's narrative, presuming better insight into his situation than the boy himself.

The stanza endings offer a subtle critique of the Traveler's presumption, further challenging this alternative narrative of the boy's state. Stanza two ends with an admonition that "Thou art not, Urchin, left alone," but the successive stanzas culminating in the boy voicing his loneliness admit that the boy is, indeed, alone: the Traveler knew the boy before "Fate had left thee — all alone!" (18); hears the boy "groan / That thou, poor boy, art left alone" (23-4); observes that, at his mother's gravestone, the boy "lov'st to grieve — alone!" (30); hears the boy "In darkness weep — and weep alone!" (36). The

grave stone, itself, “Proclaims, that thou art left alone!” (42). The Traveler’s language confirms what the Traveler’s first question implies and foreshadows what the boy will confirm: that he is alone.

Either oblivious to or ignoring the severity of the child’s loss, the Traveler asks a final question, inquiring why he is a “truant from the throng — alone”—that is to say, why he refuses to join the surrounding scenes of happiness (48). The boy directly responds, offering his history as proof of the severity of his loss, beginning with the most immediate cause for his suffering, his mother’s death, then moving chronologically through the successive tragedies he has endured: his father’s death overseas; the kid’s death and dog’s madness; and the loss of their home. Mirroring the Traveler’s narrative, of the eleven stanzas spoken in the boy’s voice, eight end in the word “alone.”⁶⁵ Five of these stanzas (9 - 13) stress the mother’s loneliness in her grave; one stanza each for the father (14), the kid (16), and the dog (17) underscores the loneliness at their moments of death, while the boy, who “STILL LIVE[S],” lives only to “weep alone” (90). The repetition stresses not only the Traveler’s mistake in claiming to be the boy’s companion, but also that all who were once connected to the boy are alone—parents and animals—not simply the boy.

The Traveler and the boy offer competing definitions of the word “alone.” The boy challenges the Traveler:

Then wonder not I shed the tear
She would have DIED, to follow me!
And yet she sleeps beneath yon stone
And I STILL LIVE — to weep alone. (87-90)

⁶⁵ In a ninth stanza, the second to last line ends in “alone.”

Underlying the boy's retort is his belief in the possibility of union were they both dead; the ultimate loneliness is his separation from his mother. The boy is alone, not because his mother died, but because he is not united with his mother in her grave. Moreover, the husband died overseas, disconnected from the family, and presumably is buried separately from his wife, a further disconnection. The animals, who are important in a child's world, speak to this aloneness, too: the kid died at the bottom of a cliff, outside the reach of the family, while the dog's madness likely alienated him from his owners. In contrast, the Traveler cites solely his own presence or the throng's presence as evidence of the boy not being alone. For the Traveler, the presence of other people dispels aloneness, while for the boy, all those who are without meaningful connections to the home are alone, including the Traveler.

The boy's words do not deter the Traveler, however, who continues to insist on his own definition. The verbs are telling: the Traveler has "seen" (115), "heard" (119, 129), "mark'd" (123), and "follow'd" (127) the boy. The Traveler is connected merely by observation. The Traveler has watched the boy since before his mother's death: "Oft have I seen thee, little boy, / Upon thy lovely mother's knee" (37-38), and the Traveler has observed the boy through at least two seasons, as indicated by the "winter winds" (27) that harass the boy at the gravesite and Spring's "green hill" (49) and "gaudy flowers" (55), which the boy rejects. The poem does not offer a clear timeline, the boy's age, or when the deaths occurred, but it suggests that the Traveler has lingered, observing, longer than would seem customary for a traveler. The Traveler, like the boy, stays, and, paradoxically, they are both wanderers: the boy claims, "O! yes, I was! and still shall be / A wand'rer, mourning and forlorn" (133-34). Their similar positions on the fringe of

society should warrant genuine connection, but the great tragedy of the poem is that even those who might connect cannot. Regardless of the Traveler's observation or straying, as a Traveler, his presence is transitory. Although the Traveler has observed the boy, the Traveler's claim that he "knows thee well" is true only in its most surface sense. The Traveler has watched the boy's movements, but not shared in his life. The boy rebuts the Traveler's response—and has the final word. To be alone is to be without a "friend" (140), to be without family, with "no kindred left, to mourn" (147). The Traveler, as a transient observer, is not a friend, cannot replace his mother, and, in fact, has not offered any tangible assistance. The Traveler will move on. The finality of the last line leaves little doubt: "Then surely, I AM LEFT ALONE" (150). The boy has lost his connection to home, while the Traveler seeks domestic scenes but does not invest in connecting to home.

In an attempt to connect, to give the boy solace by claiming that he is not alone, the Traveler insensitively claims authority over the child, assuming, perhaps because of age or experience, that his or her narrative will supersede the child's. But the boy maintains his voice and his perspective on his own condition. As the opening poem, "All Alone" introduces the themes, tropes, and recurrent language of *Lyrical Tales*. Images of thorns, ozier, and primroses suggest suffering and grief; a literal storm represents a metaphoric one; a grave supplants a home; individuals reject and are rejected by the "noisy crowd" (58); political and social inequity dissolve the family unit; even the sheep dog and the kid recur within the fictional landscape the poems create. "All Alone" introduces a dispossessed character allowed a voice in the world of the poem, if not in his

larger social context, and a Traveler character whose fundamental misunderstanding, even if well-meaning, reflects the disconnection and fragmentation of society at large.

“The Lascar” stages *Lyrical Tales*’ most extreme case of disconnection, not only through the dire situation of the dispossessed title character, but also because the Traveler figure is his murderer. The Traveler in “The Lascar,” like his counterpart in “All Alone,” thwarts connection with the dispossessed character, despite their seeming similarities—their ungrounded and solitary nature. Bound by his limited perceptions and presumptions, this Traveler’s self-interest precludes sympathy. The Lascar finds himself on hostile British shores, disconnected from the family he left behind, his “Dear Indian home,” and any aid (12). He appeals to but is rejected by authorities rooted in place—a place of worship and a place of wealth—authorities the Traveler, himself, may apply to for aid. The Lascar’s murder at the hands of the character that should act as a bridge between the fixtures of British society and the displaced amplifies the poignancy of the ending.

Despite his extreme dispossession, the poem grants the Lascar agency through allowing him the lyric expression of his tale. Robinson describes him as an “alien” (113), a “wand’rer” (109, 115, 142, 153, 193), and a “slave” (54). This last term critiques the treatment of Indian sailors under the Asiatic Articles, contracts designed to limit Lascars’ wages, length of contract, and ability to settle in Britain. Legally bound to the ship by Asiatic Articles, Robinson’s Lascar, having broken contract, is “alien,” not only because of his race, but also because he is denied citizenship. Unable to belong, he, like many Lascars living illegally in Britain, is forced to be a “wand’rer,” a beggar.⁶⁶ The bulk of

⁶⁶ For a fascinating comparison of Atlantic and Indian Ocean sailors and slaves, see Janet J. Ewald “Crossers of the Sea: Slaves, Freedmen, and other Migrants in the Northwestern Indian Ocean, c. 1750-1914” (2000). See Rozina Visram *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (2002) for a historical overview of Lascars in Britain.

the narrative is told in the Lascar's voice. His words reveal the tension between himself and British society, that he is paradoxically alone amidst the crowd. He laments that he is "doom'd . . . / To perish in the peopled street" (29-30) and "Alone, amid the race of man" (112). He cannot find one sympathetic person in the crowd, even those whose Christian beliefs should compel them to help. The Lascar lacks agency to change his situation, but he gives voice to his own tale of dispossession.

The Lascar turns for aid to two authorities, both of whom have the power to help but refuse: the wealthy aristocracy and the church. His turning to these factions of society further displays his disconnection as the poem marks the Lascar's difference from the British not only in terms of his race, but also his social class and religion. The most visible marker of the Lascar's difference is his race. Alone, where "No cheek so dark as mine, I see," (74), the Lascar draws a distinction between his color, later described as "sable" (156) and "Black as the sky" (236), and those with "softer dyes" (75) who are "Europe's favour'd progeny" (76). The third stanza, which introduces both the class and religious distinctions, begins by contrasting the Lascar with the rich:

What is, to me, the City gay?
And what, the board profusely spread?
I have no home, no rich array,
No spicy feast, no downy bed. (25-28)

The phrase "to me," interrupting the sentence by its position and punctuation, suggests the Lascar's difference, and the repetitive "no's" underscore his dispossession: he is without a home, without food, and without shelter. The fifth stanza amplifies the social class distinction. Though on the sea he "Preserv'd your treasures by his toil" (55), the

Lascar must “beg [and] . . . die” (57) once he reaches the land “Where plenty smiles” (58). Possessive pronouns underscore that the Lascar is defined by “his toil,” which preserves “treasures” belonging to the British.

Never explicitly stating the Lascar’s religion, the poem makes its religious distinction by labeling the British Christian. The third stanza ends with the poem’s first mention of religion; the Lascar says, “if I curse my fate severe, / Some Christian Savage mocks my tear!” (35-36). Just six lines earlier, the Lascar notes that he finds his food “with the dogs,” suggesting that the Lascar has been reduced to a subhuman position (29). Turning the language of the oppressor against itself, the Lascar asserts that it is the Christian who is the inhuman “Savage” (36). Despite its being singular, the modifier “Some” in “Some Christian Savage mocks my tear!” suggests that the Lascar frequently meets this type of inhumane response from those whose religious principles dictate that they should act with sympathy (36). Those with traditional claims to authority offer no help to the Lascar, but his voice asserts a measure of agency for himself.

The Lascar’s desperate and unsuccessful pleas, both to the aristocracy and to the church, emphasize the relative moral positions of these traditional forms of authority and the dispossessed character. The Lord’s Porter, whose blood-thirsty mastiff mirrors his owner’s cruelty, a comparison that echoes the inhumanity of the “Christian Savage,” refuses the Lascar’s plea. Interpreting “the church-bell’s merry peal” (145) as a sign of potential welcome, the Lascar then turns from the aristocracy to religion for aid:

Yet the poor Indian wand’rer found
E’en where Religion smil’d around —
That tears had little pow’r to speak

When trembling, on a sable cheek! (153-56)

The lines emphasize the Lascar's difference in terms of race and religion and imply that the house's inhabitants may have helped the Lascar had his tear fallen on a lighter colored cheek. The Lascar's final words further underscore this tension between religion and his outcast state:

"What have I done?" the LASCAR cried—

"That Heaven to Me the pow'r denied

To touch the soul of man, and share

A brother's love, a brother care?" (245-48)

Echoing Christianity's message of brotherly love—and, thereby, revealing the Christian Savages' hypocrisy—the Lascar blames both "Heaven" (246) and "the soul of man" (247) for lack of empathy. His words are powerful not only for what they say, but for what is unsaid. The final words in the Lascar's voice, his final question, though unanswered for him, is answered by the poem as a whole: he is blameless. Though having no agency to change his fate, the Lascar authors his own story, giving lyric expression to his tale.

But while the Porter, the mastiff, and the "Christian Savage" all commit acts of indifference and rejection, the Traveler is the most culpable in the Lascar's ultimate demise. In more extreme and bleak form than in "All Alone," Robinson stages the absence of sympathy in all of its destructive power and the price society pays for ignoring another's humanity. The Traveler takes the Lascar's life, because, like his counterpart in "All Alone," he is confined to his own limited, self-centered perceptions. Fear, self-interest, and greed motivate the Traveler's actions: "The Trav'ler was a fearful man — /

And next his life he priz'd his gold! —" (231-32). The Traveler's fear that the Lascar might take his life or his possessions is intensified because he can only hear, not see, the Lascar. The Traveler

heard the wand'rer madly cry;
He heard his footsteps following nigh;
He nothing saw, while onward prest,
Black as the sky, the Indian's breast. (234-37)

The Lascar's marker of racial difference, his "accents bold," rouses the Traveler's fear (230). Whether the Lascar actually cried "madly" or whether the Traveler, motivated by his own fear or the Lascar's foreign accent, interpreted his cry as mad is left ambiguous (234). The Lascar, "Black as the sky," blends into the natural landscape; his color prevents him from physically and metaphorically being seen (235). While the Traveler hears the Lascar's cry and his footsteps, "He nothing saw," a line whose irony underscores the Lascar's color, his dispossession, and his disconnection (235). The word "nothing" refers at once to the Traveler's blindness and the Lascar's position in his world. The Lascar is literally and metaphorically invisible. The moment the Lascar makes physical contact, the Traveler gives "A deep wound to the LASCAR Slave" (240). The Lascar's attempt at connection triggers the Traveler's act of murder.

The end of the poem further stages the Lascar's invisibility, while suggesting his superior moral position. In his own attempt to see—to find a cottage with someone willing to help—the Lascar climbs an elm tree, positioning himself above the village. The tall, stately, and ornamental English elm contrasts with the Lascar's earlier memory of

the Indian Banyan tree under which his mother would nurse him.⁶⁷ The height of the English elm removes the Lascar from the villagers who “Far off . . . mark the wretch” (307). This distance between the villagers and the Lascar implies that they do not see the Lascar fully; their having to “cross the river wide” to reach the elm suggests that the villagers might not have seen his darker skin (309). But their seeing is too late and too limited, for what they find is his corpse as he falls from the tree. The poem’s ending, though bleak, offers a sliver of hope, for Britons are finally willing to come to his aid.

The dispossessed character in “The Fugitive,” like the Lascar, is seen from a distance—one that emphasizes both the speaker’s attempts to sympathize with the character and to usurp his agency. Of the three fully-formed Traveler poems, “The Fugitive” is the most complex. Forgoing the typical pattern of a lyrical tale, the poem does not grant a voice to the dispossessed; it is solely in the unnamed first-person speaker’s voice.⁶⁸ Though voiced solely by the speaker, on its surface, the poem’s concern appears to be the Fugitive’s story, with a mere two lines of the speaker’s monologue directly about the speaker: “For I, like thee, am but a Fugitive / An alien from

⁶⁷ The connection between the mother and infant parallels the Banyan’s unique structure, where the infant shoots reroot into the ground, creating a wide network of support for its parent and sibling branches. A contemporary source, an article in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1795, describes the banyan tree as “an emblem of the Deity, on account of its duration, its out-stretching arms, and its shadowy beneficence,” adding

The chief trunks of this single tree amount to three hundred and fifty, all superior in size to the generality of our English oaks and elms; the smaller stems, forming into stronger supporters, are more than three thousand; and each of these new branches and hanging roots are proceeding, which in time will form trunks, and become parents to a future progeny. (480)

Sacred in India as a symbol of connection, the Banyan is also useful for its shade, providing the Lascar and his mother—as well as other Indian travelers—shelter from the sun’s heat and rays.

⁶⁸ Most dispossessed characters in *Lyrical Tales* are given a voice, except in “The Widow’s Home,” “The Haunted Beach,” “The Deserted Cottage,” and “The Alien Boy,” where an omniscient third-person narrator sympathetically and reliably tells the dispossessed characters’ tales. Even the cat in “Mistress Gurton’s Cat: A Domestic Tale” tells her tale. Mistress Gurton’s neighbor remembers:

How would she [the cat] chant her lovelorn tale,
Soft as the wild Eolian lyre!
Till every brute, on hill, in dale,
Listen’d with wonder mute! (76-79)

delight, in this dark scene” (35-36). However, the poem challenges the reliability of the speaker’s lyric expression of the Fugitive’s tale, subtly staging the consequences of not allowing the dispossessed characters their own voice.

The speaker’s unreliability rests upon repeated attempts to define the Fugitive. Arrested by the presence of the Fugitive, the speaker recalls many times having seen the Fugitive, pacing along the meadow, reading at the foot of a tree, loitering by the brook, and pondering the night sky, before posing the question on which the poem hinges: “What is He?” (20). The speaker layers the answers to this question, conjecturing first that the Fugitive is like the speaker, “a Fugitive / An alien from delight” (35-36), second, that he is an exiled Priest, “a Stranger, from thy kindred torn — / Thy kindred massacred!” (43-44), and, third, that he is no different from anyone who has ever suffered “his portion of calamity” (64). Each answer is solely supposition, for there is no evidence that the speaker knows the Fugitive’s history. The only evidence is an observation of the Fugitive’s physical appearance—“And, now I mark thy features, I behold / The cause of thy complaining”—with no indication about what in the Fugitive’s features led to the speaker’s conclusions (37-38). With no substantive evidence, even the Fugitive’s status as a fugitive and as a “Poor Traveler” is mere speculation (34).

The Fugitive, even when observed, does not speak. “[M]ute” (10) except for “a struggling sigh” (11), “Silent yet eloquent” (15), “Unapt⁶⁹ in supplication” (18), with “not a sound . . . escap[ing] his trembling lip” (15), his tale is imagined by the speaker.

Readers know the Fugitive solely through the speaker’s words, words that, like the

⁶⁹ In her gloss to this line, Judith Pascoe notes, “Though ‘rapt’ seems the more likely word here, it is ‘unapt’ in every version of the poem” (*Selected Poems*, 216). “Unapt” aligns with the poem’s motif of silence, however, for the Fugitive would not have a tendency to, is not likely to, or may even be unskilled in supplication.

Traveler's in "All Alone," threaten to dispossess the Fugitive further by supplanting the dispossessed's voice with the speaker's own supposition. Read on its own, Robinson's poem finds congruity with what traditional authorities on the Traveler figure in Romantic literature—Bernard Blackstone, Meyer Abrams, Harold Bloom, and Geoffrey Hartman—note in traditionally canonical Romantic poetry: in "The Fugitive," the speaker's outward gaze turns inward, revealing more about the speaker's own psychology than his subject's plight.

Blackstone's *The Lost Travellers* (1962) inaugurated a cluster of works in the 1960s and 1970s that established the Traveler figure as a particularly Romantic—and particularly male—trope, a reading that, problematically, remains standard in modern scholarship. Declaring in its first sentence that Romanticism is "a literature of movement," *The Lost Travellers* offers a way to orient the traveler in the poetry of the traditionally canonical male poets (ix). Blackstone, like those whose studies stem from his foundational work, collapses the speaker and poet, offering an interiorized theory of the journey that subsumes all externals into the self-educative process of the poet's journey. For Blackstone, the interchangeability of the speakers and poets is a matter of course: "They are of course identifiable, in the first place, with the poets who created them" (6). This collapse emphasizes the Romantic traveler's journey as solely an act of self-exploration.

Though published over a decade after Blackstone's theories of travel, Abrams' theme of the circuitous journey, found in *Natural Supernaturalism* (1973), parallels the deeper implications of Blackstone's work. Whereas Blackstone is more interested in mapping, almost literally, travel in Romantic poetry—categorizing when, where, and how

the poet-speakers travel—Abrams maps the philosophical underpinnings of his heroes' journeys. The theme of the circuitous journey had its antecedent in Abrams' theory of the lyric, formulated in 1965's "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric." Abrams' influential distilling of the lyric as an outward journey that returns unto itself, drawing the speaker back to himself, but a changed man, mimics the spiraling or circuitous journey he finds in Hegel and Schelling and, thus, in Romantic poetry. In the circuitous journey, the fractured self, fallen from its original state of unity, must quest for completeness, ultimately finding a higher state of integration upon its return to the beginning. The journey—like Abrams' lyric and Blackstone's travel—is solely about the poet-speaker; his struggle, though mirrored by the craggy nature, is ultimately forged in an internal landscape.

The quest is central to Bloom's 1969 treatise on the traveler, "The Internalization of the Quest Romance." Bloom locates the travelers' parallels in the romance genre, but, in its Romantic iteration, the quest is internalized, with the resultant struggle leading to heightened imaginative faculties, what Bloom will later call the visionary imagination. All outward expression of the journey becomes metaphor for the internal growth of the poet-speaker. Robinson's speaker in "The Fugitive," like the travelers Blackstone, Abrams, and Bloom identify, turns outward only to journey within. What Geoffrey Hartman notes of Wordsworth's Solitary Reaper applies equally to Robinson's speaker in "The Fugitive": "his response rather than the image causing it is his subject" (3).

Hartman's theories are especially appropriate when looking at "The Fugitive" in isolation from its fellow lyrical tales. Robinson's poem is what Hartman terms a "lyric of surmise" (11), where the speaker, arrested by an unexpected sight, muses on its mystery,

until the mind itself becomes the object. As Hartman says of Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper": "surprise turns into something pensive, even elegiac. There is an inward sinking, as if the mind, having been moved by the Highland girl is now moved by itself. The mystery lies in that sudden deepening, or doubled shock" (6-7). The speaker's initial description turns from tangible observations of the Fugitive's daily activities to a series of surmises punctuated by rhetorical questions. The formulation of the first rhetorical question, "What is He?" with the interrogative pronoun "what" instead of "who," objectifies its referent, turning the Fugitive into an object of wonder (20). The second, "Is it so?, / Poor Traveller! Oh tell me, tell me all —," suggests that the speaker does not impose a narrative onto the Fugitive, as does the Traveler in "All Alone" (33-34). But because the Fugitive does not speak, what follows is necessarily surmise, the imagining of the speaker.

But the speaker and the Fugitive become conflated. According to the speaker, both are travelers, both fugitives: "For I, like thee, am but a Fugitive / An alien from delight, in this dark scene!" (35-36). Premised only on the speaker's observations—the speaker "mark[s]" (37) and "behold[s]" (37) the Fugitive—the speaker recounts a familiar narrative of the Fugitive's history: a priest, now exiled, his "kindred massacred" (44), is alone on foreign shores. This imagined history could describe any number of French émigré priests, 10,000 of whom made their asylum in Britain during the Terror.⁷⁰ The vague description of the Fugitive's home as "some village," coupled with the speaker's previous surmises, suggests that the speaker's narrative, though crafted out of

⁷⁰ The number of Revolutionary exiles in Britain is difficult to calculate. Although Donald Greer estimates some 20,000 to 30,000 additional unregistered exiles from France, Revolutionary émigrés officially numbered 129,099 (20), with England as their "principle refuge" (93). A more accurate registry reveals 10,000 exiled priests fled France for Britain in this period (94).

sympathetic concern, tells more about the speaker than the Fugitive (45). Also vague is the speaker's own history. What the speaker is a fugitive from is unclear. But the distance between being an "alien from delight" (36) and an exile fleeing the horrors of the Terror is great, signaling the dangers of conflating or denying individual experiences.

After detailing the Fugitive's imagined and horrific past, the speaker abruptly exclaims, "What of that!" (50). Eschewing the previous pattern of questioning, in favor of an exclamation, the speaker dismisses the Fugitive's suffering. The speaker's following exclamations echo the language that Robinson has already called into question in "All Alone":

thou art not alone!

For there, on each, on all, The DEITY

Is thy companion still! Then, exiled MAN!

Be chearful as the Lark that o'er yon hill

In Nature's language, wild, yet musical,

Hails the Creator! (53-8)

Like the Traveler in "All Alone," the speaker insists that the object of observation cast aside his suffering and find happiness in knowing that he is not alone. But instead of finding sympathy solely through the connection between the observer and observed, the speaker introduces an intermediary, "The DEITY," who connects "each" and "all" (54). These indefinite pronouns signal a tension in *Lyrical Tales* between finding connection ("all"), while honoring the individual ("each"). *Lyrical Tales* is a collection of individual voices, a study in giving the dispossessed a voice. "The Fugitive," like "All Alone," subtly stages the consequences of one voice dominating or silencing another. The danger

in conflating the two, *Lyrical Tales* suggests, is that one individual presumes power over another.

The poem concludes by collapsing all of humanity into a simplified statement: “Who, that lives, / Hath not his portion of calamity?” (62-3). The poem does not reveal the “calamity” the speaker has faced, but there is a distancing, a disconnection, and a danger in equating all forms of despair. What connects all, in fact, is only death, as the final stanza reveals. The tyrant and the slave, the rose and the thistle, the bird and the fly all share not in happiness or in experience, but in mortality. Echoing the previous stanza’s bird imagery, the speaker claims, “The bold Bird, / Whose strong eye braves the ever burning Orb, / Falls like the Summer Fly” (71-73). What had earlier been the speaker’s idealized symbol of faith in God, the “cheerful . . . Lark that . . . / In Nature’s language, wild, yet musical, / Hails the Creator!” (56), becomes the “bold Bird” (71) who “Falls like the Summer Fly” (73). Conflating the Fugitive, the speaker, and all of humanity, the poem ends, “Be cheerful! Thou art not a fugitive! / All are thy kindred — all thy brothers, here — / The hoping — trembling Creatures — of one God!” (75-77). These final lines contradict the preceding, repeated surmises that the Fugitive is, indeed, a fugitive, underscored by the title of the poem itself, as well as the suffering that the speaker has apparently witnessed. The repetition of “trembling,” used twice in the first stanza to describe both the Fugitive’s “lip” (17) and “wasting form” (25), draws the reader back to the speaker’s opening observations, which reflect a solitary man without kindred. The term “hoping” undercuts the seeming finality of the poem’s last line, while the dashes, used previously to mark only line endings, suggest a stuttered and unsure response that both belies the seeming confidence of the line and suggests typographically the

disconnection between the “all” (76) and the “one” (77). His admonition to “Be chearful!” invokes both the lark’s faith and the bold Bird’s frailty. Read in context as a lyrical tale, the poem’s parallels to “The Lascar” undercut the speaker’s refuge in religion. The Lascar has the internal revelation the speaker urges the Fugitive to have, but the Lascar’s revelation that all are brothers does nothing to affect his society, change his state, or stay his death. It is the Lascar’s voice that gives him agency, an agency the Fugitive is denied.

The speaker in “The Fugitive” reflects Hartman’s theory of the “halted traveler” as well, but, read in context as a lyrical tale, “The Fugitive” critiques the solipsism inherent in his theory:

The traveler—man, the secular pilgrim—is halted by an affecting image. And something peculiar in the image, or the suspension itself of habitual motion, or an ensuing, meditative consciousness, brings him into the shadow of death. That shadow is lightened or subsumed as the poem proceeds, and the unusual image pointing like an epitaph to the passerby is transformed into a more internal inscription testifying of continuance rather than death. (12)

The speaker, halted by the Fugitive’s suffering, turns inward and toward death, finding solace in religion at the poem’s end. But this solace is tenuous, “trembling” and “hopeful,” at best (77). Taken on its own and on its surface, “The Fugitive” reflects the trajectory of what Hartman and his contemporary critics, Bernard Blackstone, Meyer Abrams, and Harold Bloom, find in the male Romantic poets: a poem about the poet. Read in context as a lyrical tale, which privileges the voice of the dispossessed, “The

Fugitive” offers a warning about the inward journey of the poet. Without context, without individual voices, without both the Traveler figure and the dispossessed character, an imaginative journey can become solipsistic.

Robinson’s revision of the Traveler figure extends beyond imported references from the periodical press coupled with expanded and original lyrical tales of the Traveler. She also defines her figure within and against a larger literary tradition. Robinson’s predecessors and contemporaries were fascinated by the Traveler. This literature was inundated by exiles, émigrés, and outcasts molded on the myths of Cain and the Wandering Jew; ship-wrecked mariners, adventurous seamen, and naval professionals and conscripts inspired by Voyage and Travels tales; vagrants, gypsies, and wanderers borrowed from the literature of Sensibility; and tourists, travelers, and pilgrims influenced by real-life experiences set down in travelogues and travel guides. But, unlike “the new wanderers” of a previous generation and the contemporary travelers peopling Romantic-era literature, Robinson’s *Lyrical Tales* is uninterested in the Traveler’s journey, choosing, instead, to focus on those traditionally denied a voice.

Echoing traditional scholarship from a generation ago, the most recent monograph on the Traveler figure, Carl Thompson’s *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination*, reads the Traveler as self-consciously fashioning an image that is quintessentially Romantic: always gendered masculine in Thompson’s work (as he was for Blackstone, Abrams, Bloom, and Hartman), he is spontaneous and improvisational (22); independent, authoritative, original, courageous, and self-possessed (28). Thompson provides skillful historical background but rehearses dated readings of a limited pool of writers, avowedly ignoring not only any writer who is not in the traditional Big Six, but

also the voices of those whom Robinson highlights—the unwilling and forced travelers, the dispossessed characters at the heart of her collection.⁷¹

Celeste Langan's *Romantic Vagrancy* shifts the focus solely from the poet as traveler to the vagrants that people Romantic literature, what I categorize as those displaced and dispossessed. But her focus on Wordsworth necessitates the same forms of assimilation theorized by the original commentators on the Romantic traveler. The vagrants' lives serve to mirror, however unrealistically, the freedoms sought by the poet-speakers. According to Langan, the idealization inherent in the poet-speaker's vision of vagrants as analogous to themselves—their reading of vagrants as possessing “freedom of movement” and “freedom of speech”—ignores the actualities of their dispossession (17). Langan does critique Wordsworth's representation of vagrancy, which she claims “pathologically misunderstands and misrepresents” what she terms “the domain of freedom,” but she collapses all of Romanticism into her critique: it is “the Romantic text” at fault, not solely the Wordsworthian texts she reads (20). Robinson's dispossessed characters' speech acts certainly escape what Langan calls “the specific purpose of the vagrant's speech: entreaty, or begging” (17). Robinson's focus—the power through lyricism she grants the dispossessed—also resists an identification with or assimilation into the Traveler.

⁷¹ Thompson's first three chapters provide enlightening historical data on real travelers, and his final two chapters, the only to offer literary analyses, offer fascinating accounts of Wordsworth and Byron's reading habits. But, problematically, Thompson justifies limiting his study to male writers by appealing to decades-old scholarly definitions that term Romanticism as “very much a masculine agenda” (6). Thompson's study also focuses narrowly on willing travelers, those whose status, both gender and class, allowed recreational, leisurely travel, in contrast to those who were “refugees displaced by war or famine, or . . . compelled through exigency to travel” (8). Even his descriptors for the unwilling exclude certain forced travelers—slaves, and, to a lesser degree, Lascars restricted by Asiatic Articles—who form the core of Robinson's *Lyrical Tales*.

Scholarship aiming to place women within the canon of travel literature, though valuable, retains a focus on the historical figures, the true travels of women recorded in travelogues or how gender defines travel in literary works.⁷² Even the recent article by Melissa Sodeman on Charlotte Smith's exiles that claims to focus on the literary nature of the Traveler figure imprisons the literary character within biographical readings of the author.⁷³ What these scholars overlook is Robinson's complex literary creation—a recurrent Traveler whose journey is insignificant in relation to the untold stories of the dispossessed.

Robinson forces readers to remain in a state of ambiguity, not knowing who the Traveler is. She denies her readers the solace of a formative history from which to draw conclusions about motivation. Robinson's Traveler figure embodies the tension between willing and unwilling, free and constrained, freedom and force, sympathy and self-interest. Her Traveler wanders among the dispossessed but, unlike the traditional literary traveler, does not find a stable sense of community through shared nostalgia. Her Traveler offers sympathy, but fails to connect with dispossessed characters.

If the journey of the traveler is, in many ways, the poet's journey, as the scholarship concerning the traditional literary Traveler suggests, Robinson's journey through *Lyrical Tales* reflects the uncertainty of poetic representation, the irony of giving voice to those without a voice by writing and circulating their words, the irony of telling tales as histories and as fictions. However tenuous, it is through writing—and the promise

⁷² See especially Jeanne Moskal "Gender, Nationality, and Textual Authority in Lady Morgan's Travel Books" (1995), Elizabeth A. Bohls *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818* (1995), and Karen R. Lawrence *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition* (1994).

⁷³ Sodeman, writing on exile in Charlotte Smith's poetry in the article "Charlotte Smith's Literary Exile" (2009), bases her analysis on biographical readings, giving little attention to the exiled characters Smith creates, arguing, instead, that Smith's speakers are poorly veiled projections of Smith's own disappointments and longings.

of being read—that Robinson seeks to create a sympathetic community that can distinguish and value individual autonomy.

CHAPTER VI

THE POWER OF GOSSIP FROM TABITHA BRAMBLE TO THE COMIC TALES

The preceding chapters have focused on Mary Robinson's tragic tales.⁷⁴ This chapter draws to the fore her often overlooked comic tales. An awareness of a potential thematic divide between the tragic and the comic in *Lyrical Tales* begins with Robinson herself. In describing *Lyrical Tales* to an unknown publisher, Robinson writes: "The volume will consist of Tales, both serious and gay, in the manner of Wordsworth[']s Lyrical ballads."⁷⁵ The majority of scholarship on *Lyrical Tales* considers Robinson's second descriptor, the relationship between *Lyrical Tales* and *Lyrical Ballads*, or between Robinson and Wordsworth and Coleridge more generally.⁷⁶ Scholarship whose sole focus is *Lyrical Tales* tends to concern itself with the tragic tales. Despite accounting for nearly a third of *Lyrical Tales* and Robinson's own accounting of their equal place amidst the "serious," critical considerations of Robinson's comic tales are few; most characterize these tales as separate and distinct from the tragic tales whose province is the political, and confuse the comic tales' earlier publications with their later ones, not taking into account the complex revision process Robinson engages, where she revises to genre. Though they are different in tone, this chapter argues that Robinson's comic tales have a

⁷⁴ Or what Stuart Curran terms the pathetic in his article "Mary Robison's *Lyrical Tales* in Context" (2002).

⁷⁵ Unpublished manuscript letter to an unidentified publisher, dated June 17, 1800, signed and in Robinson's hand, in the Library of the Garrick Club, London. Quoted with permission. See Introduction, pp. 8-12, for discussion of the relationship between *Lyrical Tales* and *Lyrical Ballads*.

⁷⁶ Scholarship initially linked Robinson with Coleridge, later broadening to include Wordsworth and Southey. See Introduction, p. 12, footnote 10.

purpose similar to her tragic ones and, far from anomalous, are integral to the project of *Lyrical Tales*, a point reinforced by their revision. Robinson's comic tales enlarge what a lyrical tale can do by bringing the tale to the lyric. Her revisions from newspaper verse to lyrical tale make visible the comic tales' investment in the power of voice, which accords with the tragic tales' politics. By generalizing the voice of a gossipy Tabitha Bramble in her newspaper verse to gossip in general in *Lyrical Tales*, she invests the power of voice within a community.

In the tragic tales, Robinson grants authority to dispossessed characters through their individual acts of speaking. Those dispossessed can and do tell their own tales, counternarratives to those imposed on them by British society. The words of an African slave or the tales of war told by those on the home front, for example, not only are heard but heard more loudly than the tales spun by the supporters of the slave trade or the military. Shifting focus to the comic tales highlights the broader concern of the *Lyrical Tales* project, not solely to give voice to the powerless but to show the power of voice. The tragic tales confront large-scale systems of oppression—war, slavery, poverty—systems outside the individual characters' control; individuals find empowerment through telling their tales, even if their lyric expression does not change the system challenged. Likewise, the comic tales uphold the power of voice, particularly its ability to create and reinforce communities through the collective force of gossip regardless of its intent or outcome. These communities serve as an alternative to the systems present in the comic tales—cultural mores, stigmas, and stereotypes that oppress the comic characters. The tragic tales primarily concern the dire consequences of not recognizing or denying those

who are powerless their voice, whereas the comic tales dramatize the power of voice, regardless of good or ill, and regardless of the speaker's status.

The comic tales—eight in number in *Lyrical Tales*—generally root their humor in juxtaposing the unexpected with the mundane.⁷⁷ They are set in everyday domestic scenes—typically homes or places of worship—but the poems upend the expected peace of these places. Whether the murder of a pet, the beating of a wife, the swindling of a grandson, or the multiple instances of infidelity, violence and deceit intrude to shocking extents. This shock, often felt most acutely when recognizing the immorality of the concluding morals, provides the humor and the critique. This critique, noticeable when read in context as lyrical tales, aligns the comic poems with the political purposes of the tragic tales. But the comic sharpens the critique.

Robinson initiates her subtle criticisms with the pseudonymous byline used for the poems' newspaper publications. Six of *Lyrical Tales*' eight comic tales were originally published in the *Morning Post* under the name Tabitha Bramble, an allusion to Tobias Smollett's character in *The Expeditions of Humphry Clinker* (1771). Published nearly a month apart between January and June 1800, the six poems' titles, like their later *Lyrical Tales*' versions, all include the word "tale": "Mistress Gurton's Cat: A Domestic Tale" (January 8), "Old Barnard: A Monkish Tale" (January 28), "The Tell Tale: Or, Deborah's Parrot" (March 4), "The Confessor: A Tale" (March 20), "The Fortune-Teller: A Tale" (April 12), and "The Granny Grey: A Tale" (June 10). These Tabitha Bramble poems fit into a tradition of pseudonymous newspaper writing, a tradition in which

⁷⁷ The eight comic lyrical tales are: "The Mistletoe, a Christmas Tale," "Mistress Gurton's Cat, a Domestic Tale," "Old Barnard, a Monkish Tale," "Deborah's Parrot, a Village Tale," "The Trumpeter, an Old English Tale," "The Fortune-Teller, a Gypsy Tale," "The Confessor: a Sanctified Tale," and "The Granny Grey, a Love Tale."

Robinson was well-versed, having authored poems signed by at least nine fictional selves.⁷⁸ Robinson carries on the impulse begun in her early Della Cruscan verse in this later evocation of Tabitha Bramble. Though radically differing in style, the Tabitha Bramble poems, like her Della Cruscan verse, participate in a conversation, a public dialog that alludes to a context outside the individual text. *Lyrical Tales*, on the other hand, is not allusive in a traditional sense; it draws its context from within. Eschewing what is expedient and what may have been expected, Robinson adopted the voice of a well-known character only to reimagine it as her own in newspaper verse and to revise it out completely in *Lyrical Tales*. The collected poems explore the lyric potential of the tale by revising who tells the tale, therefore foregrounding the issue of voice.

By taking up Tabitha Bramble as a pseudonym in her newspaper verse, Robinson reimaged Smollett's caricature, the grotesque "old maid," conferring her authority and an empowered voice devoid from physical description. Instead of the butt of the joke, Robinson's revised Tabitha is the tale-teller, the comedienne. In the movement from newspaper verse to lyrical tale, Robinson removes the Tabitha Bramble moniker, replacing it with a typically derided feminine mode of engagement, gossip. Not only is gossip the subject of the tales, but it also becomes a dominant narrative technique. No longer a frivolous feminine pastime, gossip becomes a fundamental act of creating community, at once an individual and collective voice. The revising of the voice telling the tale coupled with the *Lyrical Tales*' collective focus on the power of voice show Robinson revising to genre.

⁷⁸ Robinson published in periodicals as "Laura," "Laura Maria," "Oberon," "Sappho," "Julia," "Lesbia," "Portia," "Bridget," and "Tabitha Bramble." She also published her proto-feminist tract *Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799) pseudonymously as Anne Frances Randall. See Chapter II, p. 33, footnote 28.

The dismissive and often derisive view of Robinson's comic poetry that persists in scholarship today originated in reviews by her contemporaries. The "Friend" who authored the continuation of Robinson's *Memoirs*, likely either Robinson's daughter Maria Elizabeth or her friend Samuel Jackson Pratt, characterizes Robinson's comic poetry as "lighter compositions, considered by the author as unworthy of a place with her collected poems" (146).⁷⁹ Judith Pascoe calls into question this dismissive view, citing the fact that Robinson included six of these "lighter compositions" in *Lyrical Tales*. But Pascoe's statement that these six tales "can be read as bits of comic business meant primarily, if not solely, to amuse" is a dismissal that ignores the political underpinnings of Robinson's humor (181). Pascoe also misreads the Friend's assessment. When taken in its full context, the Friend is not referring to the six tales Robinson revises from *Morning Post* to *Lyrical Tales*, but, instead, to the many "Satirical Odes, on local and temporary subjects, to which was affixed the signature of 'Tabitha Bramble'" (146).⁸⁰ Though signed by the same pseudonym, these odes are a separate category of composition from the six poems incorporated into *Lyrical Tales*, all titled in their *Morning Post* versions "tales."⁸¹ These tales—albeit in their revised form—had a prominent place, not only in the last published collection in Robinson's lifetime, but also in *Lyrical Tales*' entire reprinting as part of the 1806 *Poetical Works*.

The confusion as to which poems the Friend refers is only part of the problem with critical appraisals of Robinson's comic poems. Daniel Robinson calls Tabitha

⁷⁹ Hester Davenport argues for Pratt's authorship. See *The Works of Mary Robinson*, 7: xxi.

⁸⁰ From 1797-1800, Robinson penned 39 verses published in the *Morning Post* and signed by "Tabitha Bramble." See Daniel Robinson's "Mary Robinson and the Trouble with Tabitha Bramble" (2010)—incorporated as chapter four in *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame* (2011)—for a consideration of Robinson's earlier Tabitha Bramble poems, the odes he states the "Friend" and Robinson never claimed.

⁸¹ See the list of poems on p. 123. "The Mistletoe: A Christmas Tale," originally published in the *Morning Post* on December 31, 1799 under the name Laura Maria, is also republished in *Lyrical Tales* but with little substantive revision. See p. 141, footnote 86.

Bramble Robinson's "most vexing" pseudonym (142). For him, the trouble lies with the pseudonym's lack of cohesiveness across the 39 Tabitha Bramble poems and the incongruity between Robinson's pseudonym and its literary namesake in Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*. Another significant issue is the misidentification of the *Lyrical Tales*' versions as Tabitha Bramble poems. Daniel Robinson continues the line of thinking stemming from Lisa Vargo's "Tabitha Bramble and the *Lyrical Tales*," the first piece of modern scholarship to focus solely on Robinson's comic tales. Both Vargo and Daniel Robinson treat the comic poems in *Lyrical Tales* as Tabitha Bramble poems, despite the fact that Robinson removed the Tabitha Bramble signature when revising from newspaper verse to lyrical tale. The final paragraphs in each critic's articles are telling. Daniel Robinson twice conflates the newspaper verse with lyrical tale by making claims about "the Tabitha Bramble of the *Lyrical Tales*" and "The *Lyrical Tales* Tabitha" (146). Vargo makes overtures to the poems' new context as lyrical tales in her conclusion, acknowledging that "In the volume, they belong, like the other poems, to 'Mrs. Mary Robinson,'" whose name appeared as author of *Lyrical Tales* (48-49). But Vargo's argument to this point has made no distinction between Tabitha Bramble and Mrs. Mary Robinson, assuming, instead, that the narrator of the two lyrical tales she discusses, "Mistress Gurton's Cat" and "Deborah's Parrot," is Tabitha Bramble. Stuart Curran also conflates the newspaper and lyrical tale voices. He reads the narrative voice of the comic tales through its "original position" as Tabitha Bramble to circumvent what he sees as the antifeminist content of the comic tales, the "targeting [of] sex-starved old maids and subjecting them to male discipline" ("Mary Robinson's *Lyrical Tales* in Context" 27). What is most problematic is that this conflation of the Tabitha Bramble

poems with the comic tales ignores Robinson's extensive revision, a process that transformed the newspaper verse to lyrical tales.

For her newspaper verse, Robinson borrowed her nom de plume from Tobias Smollett's widely popular 1771 novel *The Expeditions of Humphry Clinker*. The novel tracks the journey of Matthew Bramble and his family through England and Scotland in a series of letters whose gossip satirizes eighteenth-century high society. Tabitha, or Tabby, Bramble is Matthew's unmarried sister, described repeatedly by modern critics as "sex-starved."⁸² Drawing on a well-defined stereotype begun on the Restoration stage, if not earlier, Smollett exaggerates Tabby as the stereotypical old maid to the point of caricature, creating what Robert D. Spector calls a "grotesque" figure (144). The first physical description of Tabby comes in a letter written by her biggest detractor, her nephew Jerry:

. . . Mrs. Tabitha Bramble is a maiden of forty-five. In her person, she is tall, raw-boned, aukward, flat-chested, and stooping; her complexion is sallow and freckled; her eyes are not grey, but greenish, like those of a cat, and generally inflamed; her hair is of a sandy, or rather dusty hue; her forehead low; her nose long, sharp, and, towards the extremity, always red in cool weather; her lips skinny, her mouth extensive, her teeth straggling and loose, of various colours and conformation; and her long neck shrivelled into a thousand wrinkles. (60)

Her physical extremes, many contradictory, create this grotesque picture. Tabby is both tall and stooping, her height compromised by her bent stature. Her yellowed and freckled skin contrasts with the red glow of her nose. Her hair, at first deemed "sandy," is more

⁸² The phrase "sex-starved" occurs in Spector (144), Vargo (37), and Curran (27).

accurately “dusty,” grey and soiled. The protruding nose matches her “raw-boned, aukward, [and] flat-chested” body. Her large mouth is offset by thin lips and crooked, discolored teeth. The wrinkled skin fails to camouflage the length of her neck, highlighting, instead, her age. Metaphorically, Tabby as a husband hunter is “straggling” and “loose,” her worth “shrivelled” like her body.

Jery’s description continues, moving from her physicality to her (in his eyes) equally deformed character:

In her temper, she is proud, stiff, vain, imperious, prying, malicious, greedy, and uncharitable. In all likelihood, her natural austerity has been soured by disappointment in love; for her long celibacy is by no means owing to her dislike of matrimony: on the contrary, she has left no stone unturned to avoid the reproachful epithet of old maid. (60)

Jery writes this description of his Aunt Tabby at the request of his friend, who has found such “entertainment” in his previous tellings of Tabby’s pursuit of Sir Ulic Mackilligut, that the friend “desire[s]” more (60). Jery’s intention is to amuse, with Tabby as his comic target. Jery’s perception is conjecture, as he suggests through the phrase “In all likelihood.” Except for an unintentionally innuendo-filled statement uttered on the heels of her marriage to Captain Lismahago, Tabby, herself, never speaks of her sexual exploits or her unmarried state. “[T]he reproachful epithet of old maid” is applied solely by others. In fact, readers know Tabby through others’ words. In a three-volume novel, Tabby authors a mere six letters. She is barely allowed a voice, but her actions preoccupy the novel.

Tabby's greediness, both for material possessions and matrimonial bond, is her most unflattering characteristic. Smollett enlarges her greed not only through strategic plot points, such as her frequent attempts to ensnare a husband and her conversion to Methodism, but also through his epistolary technique. Tabby's pronunciation and malapropisms, often sexual in nature, are the most recognizable characteristics of her prose, tropes Smollett uses to great comedic effect. Linguist Louise Hanes argues that Tabitha's speech patterns are based not on geography, social position, or sex, but on education: "Smollett elected to mark Tabitha's speech as that of a person lacking in education" (16). Although she tries—and fails—to emulate her well-traveled brother, trusted doctor, and University-trained nephew, her pronunciation more closely resembles her servants', while her malapropisms reveal her feeble-minded attempts to transcend her educational limits. The result is that, consistently and continually, Tabitha is the butt of the joke.

By taking up "Tabitha Bramble" as a pseudonym, Robinson quite literally confers authority upon her. Instead of the target of comedic scorn, Robinson's Tabitha is the comedienne, the teller of jokes. She is markedly divorced from physical description. Robinson replaces Tabitha's grotesque physicality, dangerously suggesting heightened female sexuality in Smollett, with a female voice, disembodied but strong. Part of this new characterization is a lack of the ignorant speech patterns integral to Smollett's humor, a point Daniel Robinson finds "irritat[ing]":

. . . I think anyone familiar with Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* is likely going to be disappointed with—if not exasperated by—Robinson's performances as Tabitha Bramble. The most puzzling thing about the

Tabitha poems is how incongruous they seem in relation to Smollett's original character, whom was popular and visually represented in new engravings for reprints of the book Honestly, it irritates me to imagine Robinson adopting such a recognizable character and then performing her so lamely—especially since the epistolary nature of Smollett's book provides such specific depictions of the character and her manner of expression. . . . Despite the critical emphasis on the theatrical nature of her pseudonymous writing, Robinson never convincingly performs Smollett's character and one might even begin to wonder—as I do of some modern adaptations—if she even read the book. (143-44)

Those coming to Mary Robinson looking for Smollett understandably will be disappointed, for her point is not to parrot derivatively, but to find new voice in a familiar figure. In doing so, Tabitha—ignored, slighted, and ridiculed in Smollett—becomes empowered as the teller of the tale. This new Tabitha barbers in the same sorts of things for which her namesake was held as being in ignorance. No longer confined by malapropisms she does not understand which are indicative of her scorned and subservient position, Robinson's Tabitha crafts innuendo, puns, and plays on words. And she is in control of the tale.

One marker of Tabitha's authority is sexual innuendo, which ranges in its subtlety in the newspaper verse. The aptly (and not-so-subtly) named monk in "The Confessor," Father Peter, is "hoary" (11) and "lusty" (25). As Tabitha's narrative makes clear, "whore" is implied by the term "hoary," which fits Father Peter's characterization better than the perceived meaning of being venerable. The ambiguous term "lusty," meaning

both vigorous and full of sexual desire, is particularly fitting for Father Peter, as is the description “buxom” (14) for Mistress Twyford, who is healthy and suggestively busty. “Old Barnard” picks up the language of “The Confessor”; the title character’s opening description is “a lusty hind” (1). Here, as in “The Confessor,” “lusty” foreshadows what will be made explicit later, but Old Barnard’s weakness is not sex; it is greed. He is “lusty,” full of vigor and also desirous, as he is a “hind,” both a rustic and an ass.

The substance of “Old Barnard” signals a further shift from Smollett. Robinson parodies desire of all sorts, not simply the perceived desperate longings of an unmarried woman. Male sexual desire forms the basis of her comedy as much as female desire. Father Peter and the male neighbor in “The Confessor” are as much the target of her joke as is Mistress Twyford. Ridicule is not solely reserved for Kate in “The Fortune-Teller.” Stephen, the comedically titled “rustic libertine,” shares in the ridicule (16). The violence of Edwin’s response to Dame Dowson’s protection of her granddaughter in “The Granny Grey” suggests the dangerous ends of male lust. Although Deborah receives punishment in “The Tell Tale; Or, Deborah’s Parrot” for deeds she did not commit, Tabitha makes clear the Parson is the lustful one. Desire takes other forms as well. “Old Barnard” is not only devoid of female characters but also of sexual exploits. The desire taken to task is greed for material possessions. Likewise, “Mistress Gurton’s Cat” parodies the fraught relationships between and among women. Robinson’s widening scope suggests that if Smollett’s Tabitha Bramble is ridiculous, then all those whose desire rules them—farmers, wives, even monks—are as well.

“Mistress Gurton’s Cat” is a striking instance of Robinson’s reimagining of the Tabitha Bramble moniker, as the cat is allusively named Tabby. Spector writes, “the

name 'Tabby' was to become not only the appellation for an old maid, but in turn that of the striped cat and ultimately the female cat, a kind of tribute to the characteristics identifiable with Miss Bramble in [Smollett's] novel" (145). In Robinson's tale, the cat, as an "old maid," mirrors Mistress Gurton, herself. Tabby's murder represents the killing of the self-important, ostentatious, and unruly side that affronts Mistress Gurton's orderly world. But Mistress Gurton mischaracterizes Tabby; the food or milk taken due to "neglect, or hunger keen" (10), instead of reflecting poorly on Mistress Gurton's caretaking, becomes reason for her to curse Tabby as "Of squalling, crabbed, thieving things, the worst" (20) and to threaten Tabby with hanging. Mistress Gurton's perception does not match the reality of Tabby's character, and, like Smollett's Tabitha Bramble, this Tabby is also the victim of hyperbolic extremes. Robinson's comparison highlights the ridiculousness of Smollett's scorn. Smollett's Tabitha wants what other characters desire, to be loved and to feel secure, but her character is assassinated. Tabby wants what other cats desire, loving attention and her basic needs met, and she is literally murdered.

Of the six tales revised from newspaper verse to lyrical tale, this one may be the most playful with its juxtaposition of Tabby and Tabitha, but, in each tale, Robinson's Tabitha, unlike her predecessor, controls the narrative. The poems emphasize her ability to see through guises. As her playfulness with language makes clear, Tabitha is able to recognize hypocrisy when others cannot. From the first line of "Old Barnard," for instance, she explains Barnard's true character as a "lusty hind." In "The Confessor," she exhorts:

Yet some did scoff; and some believ'd
That sinners were themselves deceiv'd:

And taking MONKS for more than MEN,
They prov'd themselves, nine out of ten,
Mere dupes of these old fathers, hoary—

But—read—and mark the story. (7-12)

This Tabitha, no longer “deceiv’d” or a “mere dupe,” is educated, sophisticated, authoritative. The story is hers to tell.

In her movement of the Tabitha Bramble newspaper verse to collected form in *Lyrical Tales*, Robinson removes the fictional byline, revising out this reimagined voice. As lyrical tales, these six poems are no longer signed “Tabitha Bramble.” Instead, the title page bares Robinson’s name, “Mrs. Mary Robinson.” Robinson’s highlighting of voice continues, as she replaces the singular and empowered voice of Tabitha Bramble with what is at once a singular and collective empowered voice, the generalized voice of gossip. In doing so, Robinson reimagines the lyric as not solely the province of an impassioned, singular speaker but also as a collective voice that through telling its tale creates and upholds community. Whereas Robinson’s newspaper verse reclaims a scorned female voice, Robinson’s lyrical tales recognize a typically derided female mode of engagement. Robinson challenges the idea that gossip is stereotypically female, and therefore lesser, while revealing that gossip, due to rigid constraints on women, is more disastrous for them. The poems engage gossip on two levels: as the subject of the narrative and as a narrative technique. Pitting what is left unsaid in each poem against the didacticism of the direct moral that ends each poem, Robinson parodies the very concept of a moral lesson. The morals seemingly uphold society’s rules and restrictions, particularly in relation to female sexual desire, but when read with an eye to the poems’

antagonism to oppressive systems, the morals collapse. In *Lyrical Tales*, gossip is no longer a frivolous feminine pastime, but a powerful way to construct community.

In her landmark feminist study of gossip, Patricia Meyer Spacks marks the Middle Ages as the point at which gossip became a derided female form. Although originally applying to both sexes and etymologically from the root “God,” having the meaning of God parent, the term traded its positive connotations for negative ones as it changed from a term for designating these familiar and familial relationships to one that included the often ill-intentioned act of talking about those relationships. In the space of 200 years, from the late fourteenth to the late sixteenth centuries, the term developed a new sense, one specifically tied to the female sex: “A person, mostly a woman, of light and trifling character, esp. one who delights in idle talk; a newsmonger, a tattler” (“Gossip, n.” def. 3).⁸³ Drawing on Spacks’ work, Blakey Vermeule sums up the traditional view of gossip thusly: “Gossip is derided, decried, condemned, and maligned. It is womanish, low, slavish, servantish, silly, pert, loose, wanton, jiggetty, mean. . . . If it [is] ever innocent, it is only because it is meaningless” (102). But what Spacks and those critics influenced by her add to the conversation is a point about gossip’s power of cohesion, its ability to define social groups by giving voice to those normally disallowed participation.⁸⁴ Robinson’s narrative technique embodies this social power, giving voice to the community, and, ultimately, allowing their voice, and not societal dictates and norms, to create community.

⁸³ The *OED* lists the first use of this sense of “gossip” in 1580 and its last use in 1884.

⁸⁴ Nicola Parsons’ recent monograph on gossip, *Reading Gossip in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (2009), is indebted to and positions itself against Spacks’ work. In contrast to Spacks, who privileges acts of private oral gossip, Parsons reads primarily printed gossip, arguing that “in this period, gossip was a political instrument that had crucial public effects” (8).

As with the Traveler tales Robinson revised from newspaper verse to lyrical tales, the six Tabitha Bramble poems she revises all include references to gossip in their original newspaper form. However, it is not until these poems are collected together in close proximity and thematically linked in *Lyrical Tales* that the motif becomes clear. Rather than suggesting a progression toward a superior version, this generalization of gossip indicates *Lyrical Tales*' interest in voice. Each of the comic tales includes an aspect or permutation of gossip, whether the characters within the narrative engage in gossip or the language of the tale-teller is likened to gossip. Gossip occurs within the narratives, but Robinson revises the traditionally accepted view of gossip as gendered and derided as a female practice. It is not solely older female characters, like Deborah in "Deborah's Parrot" and Dame Dowson in "Granny Grey," who gossip; male characters, such as the monk and grandfather in "Old Barnard," Lubin in "The Fortune-Teller," and the male child in "The Confessor," participate in gossip. Gossiping is extended even to animals in "Mistress Gurton's Cat" and "Deborah's Parrot." The most harmful forms of gossip, in fact, are perpetrated by the male characters in the poems where older female characters also gossip: a gossipy conversation over dinner plants the seeds of Jenkins's domestic violence against his wife Deborah in "Deborah's Parrot" and the entire town in "Granny Grey" verges on mob violence, incited by the young male lover's gossip.

But gossip does not always lead to such violent extremes. Indeed, gossip is offered as a solution for the protagonist's problems in "The Fortune-Teller," even as Robinson maintains a subtle critique of Lubin's character. In *Lyrical Tales*, Robinson revises the subtitle to include a telling descriptor: what was simply "A TALE" becomes "A GYPSY TALE." Lubin's interaction with the gypsies, expanded significantly from its

Morning Post form in a series of added stanzas (57-82) and delineated particularly in the added “roguish Girl” (71), parallels Kate’s indiscretion with Stephen. The gypsies’ “wand’ring” suggests the inconstancy of both Kate and Stephen, but, more suggestive is Lubin’s lust for the Gypsy who tells his fortune (55). After admitting his wish to trade Kate for his new companion, the narrative voice of the poem moralizes:

For when the FANCY is on wing,
VARIETY’S a dangerous thing:
And PASSIONS, when they learn to stray
Will seldom keep the beaten way. (77-80)

Though Lubin does not act on his lust, this description is equally as apt for Kate as for Lubin.

In this poem, gossip takes the form of fortune telling. Not only does Lubin believe the gossip foretold by the gypsy, but he also takes on the role of gossip by pretending to be a gypsy, revising the conventional narrative of the gossip as female. With gossip as his tool, Lubin tricks Kate into admitting her infidelity and recovers his lost dowry through bribery. Like “Old Barnard” where the title character and the Monk conspire to trick the Grandson into giving over half his fortune, the male trickster character in “The Fortune-Teller” comes out on top. The narrative ends with Lubin’s triumph as he is “cur’d of jealous pain, — / And got his TEN POUNDS back again!” (157-58), a result attributed in the moral to “Fortune pay[ing] the Lover bold” (159). However, the subtext of Lubin’s usurping the role of gossip and mirroring Kate’s lust call into question the simplicity of the moral portraying “simple KATE” (162) as solely at fault.

Although there are clear repercussions for Kate as a sexualized female character in “The Fortune-Teller,” the consequences for older gossip females turn dire in “Deborah’s Parrot” and “The Granny Grey.” The revisions in “Deborah’s Parrot” display the tension between the dominant societal narrative and gossip’s counternarrative of how an unmarried woman of a certain age should behave, both of which lead to the poem’s violent ending. The opening lines uphold the tenuous nature of Deborah’s sexual and social identities: “Her name was MISS, or MISTRESS, Brown, / Or DEBORAH, or DEBBY” (3-4). Her naming vacillates between married and unmarried, old and young. Until she marries, the narrative voice styles her “Miss DEBBY,” the name that most clearly denotes her unmarried state but also suggests youthfulness instead of spinsterhood.⁸⁵ The change of title, from “The Tell Tale: Or, Deborah’s Parrot” in its *Morning Post* form to “Deborah’s Parrot: A Village Tale” in *Lyrical Tales*, signals the redoubled emphasis on the power of community, a community forged by gossip.

In its movement to lyrical tale, Robinson adds 70 lines, nearly all of which bring gossip into sharper focus. Two added stanzas, placed just after the opening lines, reveal what proper society deems Deborah should be: chaste and pure. Her descriptors include being “so wond’rous pure, / So stiff, so solemn — so demure” (11-12) and “of mien demure” (23) who “blush’d, like any maid” (24). But “The tattler, Fame” (15) and “Scandal, ever busy” (33) offer an alternative vision of Deborah. Her blushing and

⁸⁵ Naming recurs in “The Granny Grey,” with a pointed comment specifically and self-consciously referencing Deborah. After extolling the beauty of the name Annetta as “pretty, soft, [and] romantic” (22), the narrative voice jokingly declares:

For had the maid been christen’d JOAN,
Or DEBORAH, or HESTER, —
The little God had coldly prest her,
Or, let her quite alone!
For magic is the silver sound —
Which, often, in a NAME is found! (25-30)

staring at “saucy” men is not the result of chasteness but of lust (25). According to gossip’s counternarrative, Deborah has “other eyes” (30) and “rarely practic’d — what she taught” (34). Gossip sees her as a sexual being, as the very thing she is meant to have rejected.

Deborah breaches society’s narrative of her as an “old maid,” but it is her mate’s proclivity to believe this gossip that proves her undoing. Her husband’s gossipy dinner conversation introduces the idea of Deborah’s sexual indiscretion. Jenkins chooses at first not to believe gossip’s report because “His partner was not young, nor frail” (116), conveniently ignoring “That young, or old, or rich or poor / None could defy / The magic of his roving eye!” (110-12). It is the parrot’s report, “Who with the Parson toy’d? O fie!,” and Deborah’s subsequent behavior that convince Jenkins of his wife’s supposed unfaithfulness (120). Jenkins believes the parrot, the ultimate symbol of gossip: a bird whose communication is only possible through repetition. Robinson’s revisions in the final set of added lines portray Deborah’s guilt, but her “trembling” (125), “blush[ing]” (130), and “pale[ness]” (132) are the result of her shame for teaching the parrot to gossip, not proof of an indiscretion that never happened. In the end, the poem circles back to its original framework set up in the first added stanzas, where gossip guides the narrative. The domestic violence perpetrated against Deborah is merely gossip: “Some say he seiz’ed his fearful bride, / And came to blows!” (149-50). Even the moral concluding the poem ironically rests its weight on gossip:

Thus, SLANDER turns against its maker;
And if this little Story reaches
A SPINSTER, who her PARROT teaches,

Let her a better task pursue,
And here, the certain VENGEANCE view
Which surely will, in TIME O'ERTAKE HER.

The tale-teller is gossip. The power of the tale is lost without its repeating; thus, its power lies in gossip.

Gossip takes a more sinister form in “The Granny Grey.” As in “Deborah’s Parrot,” both the female and male characters participate in gossip, but male gossip leads to violent repercussions for the title character. Although never confirmed, it is assumed in “Deborah’s Parrot” that the gossip Deborah perpetuates is true. However, in revisions to “The Granny Grey,” Robinson confirms that Dame Dowson’s “talking of the men” is, indeed, true (4). The two added lines—“And credit was to GRANNY due, / The truth, she, by EXPERIENCE, knew!” (45-46)—though not excusing her gossip, certainly justify it. Dame Dowson’s forbidding Annetta romantic love results from her own love for her granddaughter but precipitates the poem’s violence.

After William discovers Dame Dowson’s plot to spoil his and Annetta’s secret meeting, he incites mob violence against Granny. Although the male lover enlists the villagers to taunt Dame Dowson in its *Morning Post* form, in twenty-one added lines in *Lyrical Tales*, William provokes their wrathful response by invoking stereotypical representations of the spinster figure. William refers to Dame Dowson, not by her title and last name as the narrative voice does, but as “Granny.” Even more significant, however, is his referring to Granny as an “OLD GREY OWL . . . / A fierce, ill-omen’d, crabbed Bird —” (74-75), a “monster” (80) who “many a timid trembling Maid / She brought to shame / For negligence, that was her own” (81-83). His tale evokes the

supernatural connotation of owls as familiars of witches, even conflating the two as he describes seeing Dame Dowson “on a broomstick, witchlike, riding” (90). Robinson also adds lines in the villagers’ voice that explicitly address Dame Dowson as a witch and evoke gossip through the repetition of the echo: “‘A witch, a witch!’ the people cry, / ‘A witch,’ the echoing hills reply” (119-20). Further resting the power of his argument on Dame Dowson’s supposed hypocrisy, William’s accusations play up the narrative of the lustful unmarried woman, wanting that which she has been denied and denying those who could have it. However, the moral implicates everyone involved, the “LOVERS CROSS’D” and “GRANNIES GREY” who may hear the tale (130). With its reference to “The wisest heads,” the final line of the moral and of the poem references not only Dame Dowson’s grey hair, often a symbol of veneration, but also evokes the typical symbology of an owl as wise (132). The subtext of the narrative, given Dame Dowson’s justified suspicion, the horrifically violent repercussions of William’s gossip, and the alternative symbolic meaning of an owl as wise, undercuts the seemingly happy resolution of the two lovers united.

In poems where gossip is the overarching narrative technique and not simply part of the narrative, the voice, paradoxically, is both singular and collective, a revision of the traditional lyric form used in Robinson’s tragic tales that, nonetheless, supports the project of *Lyrical Tales*: empowerment through telling one’s own tale, regardless of the dominant narrative. Robinson’s revisions extend beyond having gossip as the subject of the tales to making gossip the voice of the tale-teller. In reclaiming this mode of engagement, *Lyrical Tales* empowers the act of gossip, even if it does not condone its consequences, which are often disastrous for its female characters.

Appearing after the opening poem, “All Alone,” the first comic tale in the collection, “The Mistletoe: A Christmas Tale,” introduces gossip as a dominant narrative technique.⁸⁶ Robinson constructs the first mention of the collective nature of gossip in passive voice. The voice interjects the phrase “as the tale is told” in the second stanza when discussing the Farmer’s disposition, revealing a shared knowledge of the “tale,” without assigning ownership of the narrative (11). The following stanza explicitly names both gossip and fame—“or gossip Fame’s a liar” (24)—as responsible for the narrative, while the fourth stanza uses the first-person plural in “we’re told” (40) to designate the voice as collective and distribute ownership of the tale. Likewise, “Mistress Gurton’s Cat” includes the phrasings “‘tis said” (14) and “Some say” (98) along with a mention of “report, for ever busy” (41), all of which suggest collective ownership of the tale. “Deborah’s Parrot” repeats the phrasing “Some say” (129), replaces report with “Scandal, ever busy” (33), and repeatedly refers to “Fame” (15, 20, and 46). “[W]e” (11) recurs in “The Fortune-Teller,” where the opening lines explicitly name gossip as the tale-teller: “LUBIN and KATE, as gossips tell, / Were Lovers many a day” (1-2). As these examples suggest, the narrative technique takes two forms: first, the use of an explicitly collective phrasing to describe the voice and, second, the naming of the voice with a singular noun that is also collective. As embodied by the passive construction in “The Mistletoe,” “‘tis said,” “Some say,” and the first-person plural pronoun “we,” there are multiple speakers, multiple instances of telling, but all are codified as a singular utterance, whereas

⁸⁶ The fact that Robinson includes “The Mistletoe,” a poem originally signed Laura Maria, is further evidence of the misguided presumption that the comic poems in *Lyrical Tales* should be read in the voice of Tabitha Bramble. This poem, which first appeared in *Morning Post* on December 31, 1799, contains little substantive revision. Lines 15 and 16 were not present in its newspaper form, and the word “led” was replaced by “tempted” (51) and “displayed” by “betray’d” (53).

“Gossip,” “Fame,” “Report,” and “Scandal” are singular terms for collective voice.⁸⁷

Gossip, as Patricia Meyer Spacks, acknowledges, “demands a process of relatedness among its participants; its *I*’s inevitably turn into a *we*” (261). But Robinson’s gossip retains both the individual and the collective. In creating this paradox, Robinson re-envisions the lyric as simultaneously collective and individual. What was a singular utterance of a speaking “I,” the traditional sense of a lyric employed by the dispossessed characters in the tragic tales, becomes the collective voice of the community, empowered to tell its own tale.

The few critics who deal directly with the comic tales are wont to declare that the comic tales, especially their morals, are vexing—that they seem to have little connection with the larger political project of *Lyrical Tales* so readily identifiable in the tragic tales. Part of the reason the morals are slippery is precisely because the morality of the tale is not what matters: what matters in *Lyrical Tales* is voice. The disconnect between the concluding moral and the actual thrust of the narrative represents the disconnect between the surface-level standard for social interaction espoused by the moralizing system (the systems that Robinson’s poems challenge) and the lived lives of the individuals who comprise the community within the poems. The morals teach ways to avoid conflict—ways to maintain polite society—instead of truly acknowledging society’s underlying problems. In fact, the morals do not admonish the most morally corrupt acts. They preach to acknowledge loved ones before they are gone, instead of against murdering one’s cat

⁸⁷ Parsons distinguishes tattle, scandal, and gossip. Drawing upon readings of the eighteenth-century periodicals the *Tatler* and the *Female Tatler*, Parsons defines tattle as uncoded gossip: “Rather than suggesting a secret that lies at the heart of the text that its readers must uncover, tattle presumes that everyone shares the right to know” (10). Scandal she sees as “an event” that “occurs when the values or standards that are held in common by community are breached” (36). Whereas gossip is “amorphous and wide-ranging, seeming to circulate without any specific aim,” scandal “has a definite purpose . . . to discredit its subjects” (36). Although these separate meanings were in circulation in Robinson’s time, Robinson uses these terms interchangeably.

in a fit of anger. They teach not to use a parrot to jokingly spread gossip, instead of against having extramarital affairs with the parson or physically abusing one's wife. The comic tales dramatize how an effective use of voice can achieve whatever end it wants to—how there is political power inherent in having a voice—regardless of what the morally or ethically “right” action is. The morals, like the totalizing and oppressive systems in the tragic tales, attempt to deny individual characters' empowerment. The morals, then, are at odds with the purpose of the poems, which is to illustrate the power of voice.

But what is left unsaid is as important as what is said. Through the comic tales, Robinson sets up a poetics of gossip, whereby gossip, like poetry, works through juxtaposition, obfuscation, and absence. None in the community attempt overt definition, either of themselves or those outside. Instead, the characters within the poems are empowered to tell their stories without overt didactic statements that self-define. The direct moral capping each comic tale seems to provide the didacticism the narratives lack. However, there is a fair amount of dissonance, not only because the morals are pat and refuse a connection with the narratives in their fullest sense, but also because they do not fit the model of a lyrical tale. On their surface, the morals fit the systems the poems are antagonistic toward; they seem to reinforce the restraint of female sexuality or desire in any form. But the poems' relationship to gossip undercuts the seeming finality of the morals because ultimately gossip is the province of the poet, the tale-teller.

In her revisions for *Lyrical Tales*, Robinson generalizes the voice of gossip, bringing the tale to the lyric, creating a communal voice. In the newspaper poem, one must look outside the text to the fictional byline to find the voice of the gossip. This

singular voice of the gossip is dependent on context and the interplay between readers' recognition of Smollet and Robinson in Tabitha Bramble's voice. The newspaper verse subverts readerly expectations of allusion, while the lyrical tales, within the narrative, subvert the illusion that gossip is a frivolous, yet toothless pursuit. *Lyrical Tales*, both the tragic and the comic, is uninterested in positive or affirming outcomes, as the number of dead bodies in the tragic and the dire consequences of gossip in the comic attest. Instead, *Lyrical Tales*' power lies in empowerment, giving voice to those normally dispossessed, as in the tragic tales, or reclaiming that which has been dismissed or derided, as in the comic tales. Empowerment comes from authoring one's own tale, regardless of whether it changes the system of oppression. A negative consequence is incidental to the main aim of having one's voice heard.

CHAPTER VII

THE PROGRESS OF *THE PROGRESS OF LIBERTY*

The power of voice, I have argued, defines a lyrical tale. Robinson's hybrid genre combines the narrative thrust of a tale with the individual power of voice, revising the traditional sense of the lyric by giving those who are powerless lyrical expression within the tale or stressing the power of a voice that is at once individual and communal, thus bringing the tale to the lyric. Empowerment in a lyrical tale comes from the ability to voice, not necessarily from the ability to affect change. The characters within *Lyrical Tales* cannot escape the systems of oppression that confine them, but they find power in authoring their own tales.

The previous chapters examined voice as it relates to specific thematic concerns, the domestic consequences of war, the Traveler figure, and gossip. This chapter looks at the four remaining poems revised from their periodical press versions to lyrical tales—"Poor Marguerite," "The Poor, Singing Dame," "The Haunted Beach," and "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc"—as examples that do not fit the themes around which her other revised poems cohere. "Poor Marguerite" displaces the consequences of war onto French families instead of British, and her journey is akin to the typical Romantic wanderer, not the Traveler figure *Lyrical Tales* creates. Marguerite and the protagonist in "The Haunted Beach" are also unlike *Lyrical Tales*' typical tragic characters: Marguerite is the only protagonist in the collection to seek retributive violence, and the Fisherman in "The

Haunted Beach” is its only anti-hero. Like “Poor Marguerite,” Robinson displaces events in “The Poor, Singing Dame.” Its action occurs outside the contemporary setting of war and is attached to place, with its characters literally or figuratively imprisoned. This displacement occurs through gothic elements as well, which gives the poem an indistinct, timeless and formless mood. The Gothic recurs in “The Hermit of Mont-Blanc,” which concludes this chapter. Unlike “The Haunted Beach” and “The Poor, Singing Dame,” which combined had revisions to less than 25 lines, “The Hermit of Mont-Blanc” is Robinson’s most revised poem for *Lyrical Tales*. War intrudes, but not into the domestic space of family. The Hermit is attached to place like the poor, singing Dame, but he removes himself to solitude amongst the Alps, foregoing the chance to reunite with his estranged lover even before her death. These poems vary in their concerns, not fitting neatly with the thematic categories I have previously discussed. But the fact that they resist these easy categories and yet remain lyrical tales highlights Robinson revising to meet the requirements of her particular genres.

The poems this chapter discusses are all tragic tales, but “Poor Marguerite” fits the schema of the tragic tales most closely. Often, Robinson brings voice to the fore by allowing her tragic characters to express their tales in their own words. Zelma in “The Negro Girl,” Edmund in “Edmund’s Wedding,” even the speaker in “The Widow’s Home” all author their own tales. The revisions to “Poor Marguerite,” published April 4, 1800, in the *Morning Post* and with no substantive changes in the September 1800 edition of *The Lady’s Monthly Museum*, show this engagement with voice at its most extreme. The newspaper poem is a sentimentalized, almost mythic, portrait of a woman’s loss, her ensuing madness, and eventual suicide. Although the *Lyrical Tales* version

retains the same basic plot, the nearly tripling of the poem's length gives space for a fuller, and darker, portrait of Marguerite. The lengthiest addition to the *Lyrical Tales* version is Marguerite's song—the lyric expression of her tale—a 40-line section in which Marguerite reveals her past and imagines her future. The first Marguerite closely resembles Robinson's other newspaper verse characters, the ones embroiled in war: like Nancy in "The Storm," Agnes in "Agnes," and the unnamed sister in "The Deserted Cottage," she is the woman left behind, unable to navigate her world without her lost love. Similar to these female characters, in the newspaper version, Marguerite's characterization is indistinct, her form blurred by what she represents, a madwoman whose tragedy is solely the result of personal loss. Marguerite in the periodical poem—a character without a voice—is the stereotypical madwoman, defined by her madness and resultant suicide instead of by the political conditions that led her there.

The revisions to Marguerite's haunting tale show her no longer aimlessly wandering as madwoman, but, instead, attached to place—the cliff where she meets her lover in death. In its new form, this place also has historical resonance; Robinson inserts the political turmoil of the French Revolution as the cause of Marguerite's personal tragedy. As told in her own voice, Marguerite's past and her imagined future reflect not solely personal, individual concerns, but also the concerns of communities and nations. In the poem's movement from newspaper verse to lyrical tale, the state intrudes and causes the eventual destruction of Marguerite and her lover Henry, but here, unlike the poems discussed in previous chapters, it is the reconstituted and redefined governmental forces in France that bear responsibility, not the British State. Having usurped power from the *ancien regime*, the revolutionaries, what Robinson calls the "rabble crew" (131), occupy

the space of the state and exile their own subject, Henry, leading to Marguerite's eventual madness and suicide. Although the events leading to the action of the poem are displaced to France, regardless of the nation, "Poor Marguerite" stages the same suspicions present in the other tragic tales of the power of the state to encroach upon the common people. The poem invests power in Marguerite not through tangible action against her oppressors, but through her voice. Though it does not eliminate her oppression, telling her tale is an act of resistance.

Disconnected from her home, Marguerite transfers her inability to affect change in France onto the natural setting that is the scene of her and her lover's deaths. Her retributive violence—the only retributive violence in *Lyrical Tales* perpetrated by a protagonist—will bind her to this place even beyond death. In the most shocking image in all of *Lyrical Tales*, Marguerite vows to "watch for the Eagle's unfledg'd brood," and threatens, "I'll scatter their nest, and I'll drink their blood" (117-18). Marguerite transfers her psychological and social pain onto the natural landscape, itself a substitute for her home. Henry is torn from his parents and Marguerite is torn from Henry, just as Marguerite will tear the unfledged from their mother, effectively cutting off a generation in the way war has, as well. The other characters within the tragic tales respond to systems of oppression with sadness; Marguerite's horrific imagined act is one borne of anger. The eagle does not seem to be connected to anything destructive—anything responsible for severing "nature's bands" (132), including the lovers' separation or Henry's death.⁸⁸ In fact, it and its brood are the only symbol within the poem of a natural,

⁸⁸ Although the eagle is a common symbol of the State and military victory, the poem does not make clear a connection to either. Concurrent historical circumstance does not suggest a connection either. Napoleon did adopt the eagle as a symbol of France but not until crowned emperor on December 2, 1804, well after the publication of "Poor Marguerite." However, if Marguerite's imagined murdering of the eagle's brood is

familial connection. Marguerite adopts vengeance, vowing to break nature's bonds as they have been broken for her. In her imaginings, she, like the rabble crew, causes the destruction of the natural. She projects her violence onto something other than its cause because she cannot affect that cause.

But Marguerite's lyric expression does not materialize in action; her imaginings are not rooted in reality. Her song represents, albeit *in extremis*, *Lyrical Tales*' investment in the power of voice as psychological release, even if there is no resultant consequence for the system of oppression. As in the other tragic tales, Marguerite has an empowered voice, and, like the comic tales, the poem is uninterested in lessons about the morality of her imagined violence or possible madness. It is the power of having voice that matters.

Robinson plays with her reader's expectations of a lyrical tale by bringing voice into prominence through its absence in "The Poor, Singing Dame" and "The Haunted Beach." These poems are singular amongst the tragic tales, not only for being Robinson's least revised poems in *Lyrical Tales*, but also because they deny their protagonists voice. "The Poor, Singing Dame," originally published in the January 25, 1800, edition of the *Morning Post*, is the least revised of Robinson's poems, with fewer than ten words altered.⁸⁹ When read in context as a lyrical tale, though, the presence of the lyrical tension that Robinson added to other poems becomes clear, for the poem dramatizes the consequences of denying voice to the powerless. The heroine, named in the final lines

suggestive of an overthrow of government, it is interesting to note that the babies are unfledged. They are not yet fully feathered and out of the nest, meaning, in a political sense, that they have not yet been indoctrinated into society: they have not yet become fully-fledged members of society. Marguerite's brutality, then, could prevent future political brutality.

⁸⁹ Several words are capitalized in its newspaper form that are not in its lyrical tale form, changes that likely have more to do with house style than meaning. Other revisions include replacing "There" with "For" (16); deleting the word "Now" from the beginning of line 17; replacing "did sting" with "possess'd" (33); and changing line 36 from "While care shou'd inhabit the breast of a king!" to "While care could the fav'rites of Fortune molest."

Mary, is imprisoned by the “Lord of the Castle” for the supposed transgression of singing (17). Poverty, her captor reasons, precludes an active use of voice. Her silence is totalizing, as death follows quickly from her imprisonment, but nature’s song replaces and revises hers, resulting in the Lord’s repentance. The poem manifests the Dame’s oppression in literal form, with the four walls of the prison the physical equivalent of her suffering. The Lord succeeds in denying her voice through this imprisonment and her ensuing death. These dire consequences suggest the political power of voice, as does the Lord’s fitting punishment: his haunting, repentance, and death.

In contrast to a poem such as “Poor Marguerite,” readers never hear the Dame’s song, even before it is denied her by the Lord of the Castle and even though its “sweet music” (18), attuned to the song of the “sweet Birds” (11), permeates the poem. But its absence signals its singular importance. Voice dominates the action of the poem; its suppression is the reason for the Dame’s both literal and figurative imprisonment and eventual death and the Lord’s being haunted by the “Screech-owls” (51), whose piercing call is a perversion of nature’s birdsong which the Dame’s song embodied, and his physical decay and death. In a self-reflexive turn in the penultimate stanza, the narrative voice names the Dame the “poor Singing Mary” (50), suggesting that the song is the poem, itself—that the poor, singing Dame’s plight is the plight of the poet, where the power of the poet rests on her ability to express herself.

“The Haunted Beach” shares with “The Poor, Singing Dame” a concern for suffering from a lack of voice, but its protagonist is barred from expressive acts as punishment for an actual, not a perceived, crime. This poem, unique among the tragic tales, centers its tale on an anti-hero, the Fisherman whose murder and resultant guilt bind

him eternally to the place of his crime. Robinson's revisions amplify the Fisherman's guilt, for the second version provides a possible motive. The one added stanza in lyrical tale form suggests greed as his impetus for murdering the Mariner: the "Shipwreck'd Mariner" (46) escapes his ship with "A packet rich of Spanish gold" (54).⁹⁰ Unlike Coleridge's Mariner, forced to wander, telling his tale as penance, Robinson's Fisherman suffers in silence, supernaturally imprisoned to the shore. The Fisherman's inability to act, particularly his silencing, emphasizes by its absence the power inherent in voice.

Sound and silence pervade "The Haunted Beach." The poem begins with an auditory image echoed throughout: "And, all around, the deafening roar, / Re-echo'd on the chalky shore, / By the green billows made" (7-9). The billows reappear at the end of each stanza except the last, their sound overpowering the Spectre's "dismal howlings" (33) and the "Curlews screaming" (38). The billows recur, a constant reminder of the force of nature and of the Fisherman's act against nature. Moreover, the billows enforce the Fisherman's punishment: bound by the sea, the Fisherman "has not pow'r to stray" (78). The poem denies the Fisherman not only the traditional penance of wandering, emblematic in persistent allusions in Romantic poetry to Cain or the Wandering Jew, but also the opportunity for atonement through voice. Instead, he "wastes—in Solitude and Pain— / A loathsome life away" (80-81).

From these readings that define a lyrical tale, I turn back to the way that Robinson defines revision to conclude the chapter and the dissertation. In a lyrical tale, Robinson disrupts the ways in which voices are traditionally heard; those typically silenced by

⁹⁰ Robinson revised two words, changing "grown" to "been" (73) and "feed" to "dwell" (76), and, most significantly, added lines 46-54, which call the "MURDER'D MAN" (42) a "Mariner" (46) and suggest a motive for his murder, the "packet rich of Spanish gold" in his possession (52).

oppressive systems resist through voice. And these voices speak loudest when looked at through the revision process. Robinson grants more lines on the page, inserts empowered voices where they had been absent, and even silences to bring voice to prominence in *Lyrical Tales*. The way a lyrical tale interrupts traditional narratives of political power resembles the way Robinson's work resists typical notions of revision. This is particularly clear when one studies the publication history of "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc," perhaps the best example of Robinson disrupting the developmental narrative of revision. Of the poems initially published in the periodical press and later revised for *Lyrical Tales*, "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc" is the only one to find a further poetic context, one that involves an entirely new genre. The poem was originally published in the *Monthly Magazine* on February 1, 1800, revised substantively for publication in *Lyrical Tales* nine months later, and finally folded into *The Progress of Liberty*, the epic poem Robinson penned in the months before her death. Robinson's keen awareness of writing to and revising for genre is here displayed in three distinct genres—magazine verse, lyrical tale, and progress poem.⁹¹ What makes this generic repurposing so illustrative of Robinson's resistance to traditional views of revision as correction or improvement leading to a perfect state is her return to the magazine version of "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc" for inclusion in *The Progress of Liberty*. She eschews the later, lyrical tales form, the one most modern critics contend reflects her Romantic genius, for one often derided by her contemporaries and ours as pedestrian. Her reason for doing so, I argue, is tied to genre.

⁹¹ The lyrical tales version was republished as "The Murdered Maid" in her *Poetical Works* published posthumously in 1806.

Regardless of the version, the basic plot, setting, and structure of “The Hermit of Mont-Blanc” remain the same. The poem begins with a description of the Hermit’s lone dwelling, his solitude in nature, and the lost love that compelled his wandering and eventual isolation. The danger and sublimity of this backdrop and the mysterious circumstances of the Hermit’s separation from his lover prepare readers for the perilous events of the ending and their Gothic resonances. From a general description of the Hermit, who spends his days in prayer for his lover, seldom meeting anyone except a traveler needing help, the poem shifts to the present moment of danger. A sense of foreboding paralyzes the Hermit until he receives confirmation that his fear was warranted, a groan that rouses him to action. He is unable to navigate the treacherous terrain and is once again paralyzed, this time by the natural setting, rather than his fear. At dawn, he finds his lover—not some hapless traveler—dead. Warring factions intrude into the scene of his despair. The Hermit marks his lover’s murderer amongst the band of soldiers; he retreats to his cell and dies.

The poem’s first version trades in the immediacy expected by readers of periodical verse, delivering quick action blended with mystery and suspense. This mystery gives way to uncertainty and obscurity in the second version, where the Hermit, not solely his actions, is given prominence. The added lines allow for a study of a character trapped by forces outside his control, one who is individualized and yet inextricable from community—themes central to *Lyrical Tales*. The return to the magazine version for its final placement in *The Progress of Liberty* signals a retreat from this individuated and sympathetic portrait of a man broken by broken systems. *The Progress of Liberty*’s Hermit becomes a case study instead of an individual case. He is

suspended within a larger narrative that critiques types, not individuals, all of whom stunt liberty's progress. These characters are titled (the monk, the vestal, the homicide), not named. In this context, they lose their specificity. In *The Progress of Liberty*, he is a hermit, not the Hermit, thus subject to critique.

Of those poems transformed from periodical verse to lyrical tale, "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc" is the most extensively revised, with over 25 substantive changes to single words, phrases, or lines, four revisions of sections between three and eight lines long, and over forty lines added. But the poem retains many of its details from genre to genre. There is a facet of Robinson's revision, discussed extensively in chapter four, whereby what she maintains is as important as what she changes. Revision is a process of selection; Robinson edits by omission, addition, alteration, and preservation.

In each version of "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc," setting and plot reveal the poem's entanglement with gothic themes. Displaced to Mont Blanc, that great Romantic symbol of sublimity, the poem captures the awesome and terrifying power of nature.⁹² But its first version relies on indistinctness not obscurity for effect. "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc," printed in the *Monthly Magazine*, is the only poem revised from periodical verse to *Lyrical Tales* that was not originally published in the *Morning Post*. But Robinson's magazine verse shows economy similar to her newspaper verse. Length constraints being less, magazines allowed poets the space for meditation, often upon subjects not suited to newspapers but reflective of the essayistic pieces that surrounded the poetry in the

⁹² Although displaced from England, the poem resists Gothic texts' traditional displacement in time. Robinson finds reason for terror not in the 15th-century horrors of the Inquisition, but in her present, war-torn reality. This unconventional move is also seen in Robinson's Gothic fiction. In her article "Notorious: Mary Robinson and the Gothic" (2004), Anne Close discusses Robinson's unusual contemporary setting in her Gothic novel *Hubert de Sevrac*, claiming that Robinson's "transformation of the Gothic narrative from the remote past to the present Revolutionary landscape makes a bold connection between Gothic and aristocratic values" (187, footnote 19).

magazines. Whereas newspapers traded in the events of the day, magazines filled their pages with reflections on the accumulated effects of these political and social events. Robinson's metropolis essays, appearing in the *Monthly Magazine* concurrently with the poems I discuss in this dissertation, offer an apt example. Their title, *Present State of the Manners, Society, Etc. Etc. of the Metropolis of England*, points to the essays' timeliness—that they are of the present moment. But the feeling of immediacy within the poems resulting from the timeliness of their production and consumption is tempered by their interest in the state of things, a broader conception of the condition of the nation instead of a daily accounting of that nation's events. The repeated et ceteras open the possibility for further exploration, hinting at the common practice of serialization that Daniel Stuart relied upon in his defense of the *Morning Post* that stretched over months in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Magazine writers could expect magazine readers to follow from month to month, a theory proven by the common practice of readers collecting that year's magazines into bound volumes. Though timeliness was a factor, it was a timeliness of months rather than days.

One subject Robinson took up in her magazine verse that, though generally important to her poetry as a whole, was seldom, if ever, included in newspaper verse is the Gothic. Although the Gothic relies upon suspense, which requires a measure of meditation from its readers not necessarily present in newspaper poetry, in its magazine version, "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc" drives the reader through successive perils at a rate quicker than its *Lyrical Tales* counterpart. With a quarter fewer lines, the first version moves rapidly from event to event, reflecting the immediacy expected for its genre. But the poem also suspends readers within successive mysteries—Why was the Hermit's love

thwarted? What are the “monastic horrors” his lover endures (19)? Why is his lover now at Mont Blanc? Whose soldiers are responsible for her murder? There is an indistinctness to this version, as well. After the title, Mont Blanc is never mentioned by name. The original opening line in the *Monthly Magazine* locates the Hermit “Mid the dread altitudes of dazzling snow” instead of “High, on the Solitude of Alpine Hills” in *Lyrical Tales*. Lush descriptions of the surrounding landscape added to the *Lyrical Tales* version in lines 32-40 further define the Hermit’s scene in nature. The setting, almost mythical in the first version, gains geographic and political specificity in its second version.

In *Lyrical Tales*, the Hermit’s confinement is literalized through place. The Hermit’s attempts to retreat to an impregnable solitude are in vain, as war intrudes. Mont Blanc is located at the apex of three national borders: Switzerland, France, and Italy. It was the site of a tumultuous land dispute during the Napoleonic Wars. In 1798, two years before the first publication of “The Hermit of Mont-Blanc,” Napoleon conquered the area of Switzerland including Mont Blanc, renaming it the Département of Léman.⁹³ Robinson’s use of the term “Léman,” instead of its English equivalent, Lake Geneva, signals the political conflict related to this area. The place he has removed himself to—the Léman—was a site of longstanding historic conflict over ownership of land during the Napoleonic Wars. But the term also means a lover or, in Christian terms, Christ or the Virgin Mary depicted as lover, suggesting the connection between both characters—as blighted lovers, as religious renunciates, as political victims—and the idea of contested space. The geographic location, whose historic and metaphoric allusions are strengthened in the lyrical tale version, is not only a cloistered, but also a contested space.

⁹³ The Département of Léman was not dismantled until after the defeat of Napoleon in 1815.

The poem grants a measure of autonomy to the Hermit, despite his confinement, through voice, a central concern in its new *Lyrical Tales* version. The Hermit's voice, here imagined as prayer, is unheard, but permeates the poem. The poem includes no dialogue and no transcription of characters' thoughts; the Hermit's prayers serve as his lyric expression. His prayers, already unusual within the world of *Lyrical Tales*, also take a curious form: "His Orisons he pour'd, for her," his lost love (21). These prayers, meant to strengthen his connection to God and to further remove him into his self-imposed role as "Anchoret," are a daily repetition of the same prayers, for the same person. The Hermit's desire to make his life purely of the lyric, simply a solitary voice in a solitary place, cannot overcome the pervasive power of community. The tale he tells, embedded in these prayers, is of his love. Coupling the lyric with the tale, he binds his lover and God to the site of his renunciation: "For, still, Love / A dark, though unpolluted altar, rear'd / On the white waste of wonders!" (24-26). Within the lyrical tale, the Hermit is hemmed in by both political and personal turmoil reflected in place and prayer, a fact emphasized by the poem's tragic ending where war destroys the natural and sublime.

Although I am unconcerned with the aesthetic judgment motivating Ann Radcliffe's famous categorization of the Gothic, her distinction between horror and terror offers a framework for understanding Robinson's revision of "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc" from its original magazine form to a lyrical tale:

Terror and Horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend, that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked

to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one; and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil? (149-50)

In its movement from magazine verse to lyrical tale, “The Hermit of Mont-Blanc” engages more directly with the connection between setting and character, the personal and the political, reshaping the poem’s gothic nature as terror instead of horror. A hallmark of periodical verse—either newspaper or magazine—is its immediacy, and Robinson’s use of horror—that which “contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates” the senses—propels the reader of her magazine verse from start to finish with barely a line without danger. The temporality of horror connects plot with the reading experience. Supplying incident after incident shapes the rapid way in which readers encounter the poem, which shapes their response.⁹⁴ The recurrent mortal peril in its magazine form does not traffic in “uncertainty and obscurity.” Readers are not given the time or the substance for lengthy or expansive meditation. Even when the magazine poem promises a reprieve, it immediately delivers peril. The Hermit feels Summer’s “fragrant gales” (73), only to portend “the swift storm advancing” (76). His memory of “happier days” precipitates an avalanche (81).

Added passages to the *Lyrical Tales* version evoke the uncertainty and obscurity of the sublime by considering scenes of nature and how the Hermit is reflected in those scenes. In its *Lyrical Tales* form, Mont Blanc is now terrifying in its sublimity. The

⁹⁴ Radcliffe’s judgment of readerly responses to Gothic literature closely resembles Wordsworth’s condemnation of the periodical press in his 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth declaims “a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies” (599). Radcliffe finds that the rapidity of extraordinary incidents endemic to horror leads to contraction and deadening of the mind, instead of expanding of the mind, as does terror.

mountain embodies Burkean traits of the sublime—it astonishes the senses, overwhelming them with the power of its obscurity, resulting in both pain and fear for the viewer. Mont Blanc’s obscurity reflects the political and personal resonances of its status as contested space: “the blue mist of waters rose / Veiling the ridgy outline, faintly grey, / Blended with clouds” (37-39) and

’Twas darkness, all!
All, solitary gloom!—The concave vast
Of Heav’n frown’d chaos; for all varied things
Of air, and earth, and waters, blended, lost
Their forms, in blank oblivion! (138-42)

The blurred landscape, its “oblivion” and its forms “blended” and “lost,” mirror the “uncertainty and obscurity” of Radcliffe’s terror, the potential danger inherent in Burke’s sublime, and the historical conflict suggested by the setting. These natural descriptions parallel the characters’ place in the world, as well, for they are alien, alone, and lost, both figuratively and literally through death.

The sublimity of the setting in the *Lyrical Tales* version evokes divinity, as well: the terror felt in beholding a landscape leaves the observer awe-struck, reeling from a physical manifestation of the presence of God. Robinson’s sublimity connects nature to God, and, through his connection to nature, the Hermit to God:

So liv’d the HERMIT, like an hardy Tree
Plac’d on a mountain’s solitary brow,
And destin’d, thro’ the Seasons, to endure
Their wond’rous changes. To behold the face

Of ever-varying Nature, and to mark

In each grand lineament, the work of God! (90-95)

Tasked with finding God in nature, the Hermit lives in communion with both nature and God. But the Ruffian and his fellow soldiers violently intrude into this natural communion, suggesting, as in other tragic tales, the destructive and inescapable power of war.

The ending underscores the extent to which the Hermit's psychological and social struggle manifests itself in the physicality of this contested space. Although described as "the mountain's solitary brow," the space's solitude is tenuous (91). Though the Hermit seeks—but does not find—a space removed from others, "solitary," here, means not solely alone, but also singular. The ambiguity of the term suggests both the contested space and the Hermit's conflicted state. Ironically, this singular space represents the convergence of multiple interests: warring factions claiming possession of the land who collide with the Hermit's lover. But, reminiscent of the blurring of geographic and natural borders symbolized by Mont Blanc and the obscurity of night, Robinson conceals the nationality of the murderer. All responsible for war could be culpable, the ending suggests, as both the political and personal converge, leading only to death and destruction.

Death and destruction recur in the final iteration of "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc," but its new context within *The Progress of Liberty* necessitates new readings. *The Progress of Liberty*, appearing first in the fourth volume of Robinson's posthumously published *Memoirs* in 1802 and again in 1806's *Poetical Works*, integrates ten poems previously published in periodical form, but "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc" is the only one

also published as a lyrical tale.⁹⁵ The poem's transformation encompasses three genres: magazine verse, lyrical tale, and the popular mid-eighteenth century progress poem. Using Mark Akenside's poem *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744) as the keystone of her theory, Abigail Williams claims that this genre, "commonplace" by the 1750s, was typified by a "belief in the transition of liberty and letters from classical Greece and Rome through to modern Britain" (451). *The Progress of Liberty* as a whole defines Liberty as the law of nature, personified as the resultant child of the union between Time and Genius. Although at the turn of the century the term "genius" is shifting its meaning from the natural attendant god of a place to an individual, natural intellectual power, Robinson clearly defines Liberty's mother as a Genius loci, what she calls "the Genius of the scene" (19). In the poem's terms, Liberty is the union of time and space, which is how humans define their experience of the world. Born on "a mountain's solitary brow" (16), Liberty descends to be among humankind. Liberty is not aspirational; it is an uncorrupted state of existence open to all humans. The poem argues, then, that humans' natural existence should be this liberated existence, one defined by a connection to nature and to each other.

Instead of running the course of a typical progress poem, progressing ever westerly, improving along its way until settling on Britain, Robinson's "Liberty" resists a linear or hierarchical temporal and geographical movement—much as Robinson resists traditional developmental narratives of revision. Robinson does not delineate ancient European civilizations' contributions to a liberated state. Instead, she focuses on cultures like the Native Americans, Zemblans, Africans, and Peruvians, whose natural state—

⁹⁵ See Appendix B for the publication history of periodical poems incorporated into *The Progress of Liberty*.

before European enslavement—was liberated. Even direct historical references defy temporal categorization; she mentions institutions—the de Medici family, the Bastille, and the Inquisition—founded during medieval times but still in existence at the poem’s present. Liberty in Robinson’s poem is an observer, a traveler who watches humans’—particularly Europeans’—movement away from the natural order and thus away from liberty.

The Progress of Liberty’s construction is unique as well. The poem presents a series of vignettes, each originally printed in the *Morning Post* or *Monthly Magazine*, that also defy temporal or geographic specificity. Six in a series titled “Poetical Pictures” and numbered using Roman numerals, appeared from April to May 1798 in the *Morning Post*: “The Birth-Day of Liberty” (April 7), “The Progress of Liberty” (April 14), “The Horrors of Anarchy” (April 24), “The Vestal” (May 5), “The Monk” (May 12), and “The Dungeon” (May 18). Three poems followed in three successive years, all in the *Morning Post* as well: “The African” (August 2, 1798), “The Cell of the Atheist” (August 19, 1799), and “Harvest Home” (August 30, 1800). “The Hermit of Mont-Blanc” (February 1, 1800) and “The Italian Peasantry” (April 1, 1800) appeared in the *Monthly Magazine*. By 1799, Robinson’s epic poem was already in progress, as evidenced by the note accompanying the publication of “The Cell of the Atheist”—“from a poem in two books, not yet published”—suggesting that she may have written multiple forms simultaneously.

As Judith Pascoe notes, “the individual poems that she [Robinson] swept into the grand vision of *The Progress of Liberty* are distinctive separate entities” (*Selected Poems*, 298). But reading the periodical poems collected in their epic form as progress poem suggests new ways of reading, based on genre. Robinson’s poem does not follow the

typical Eurocentric movement of a progress poem, offering, instead, a broad and surprising critique of those—typically tied to European institutions—who resist liberty. In *The Progress of Liberty*, readers watch as a vestal and a monk willfully absent themselves from society, pursuing what the poem terms “Superstition,” which is antithetical to natural Reason. Both have abandoned their natural state of liberty. Readers then move to a murderer and an atheist, both of whom in equal measure as the nun and the monk have upset the natural order of things. The Hermit of Mont-Blanc occupies the next vignette, but his story is suspended amidst a discussion of anarchy. Read within this context, the Hermit is no longer “happier . . . in total solitude,” as he was in the *Lyrical Tales* version (96). He does not absent himself from society as a means to find communion with nature and God (which is possible in the *Lyrical Tales* version), for as the first stanza of *The Progress of Liberty* makes clear, Liberty has left the “mountain’s solitary brow” (16). Instead, he has removed himself from any narrative of progress and become frozen in time and space. He, like every other character in *The Progress of Liberty*, murderers and nuns alike, is locked in a cell, pining for a moment that is past or never to come. Though there are no substantive changes to the poems incorporated into *The Progress of Liberty* from the periodical press, the juxtaposition of these scenes coupled with the framing narrative of the birth of Liberty and Liberty’s progress through time and space recasts what previously engendered sympathy. Without the theory of liberty espoused by the narrative voice but denied by the characters in the progress poem, the vignettes in isolation—in their periodical form—suggest pathos. But in *The Progress of Liberty*, these characters are responsible for the stunting of Liberty. The Hermit is not in communion with nature or with others. He is on par not only with the other religious

renunciates, but also with the homicide, the atheist, and presumably the Ruffian who murdered his lover.

Robinson's most complex revision process as evidenced in "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc" serves as a testament to the inherent potential of each genre. The revisions from its original magazine verse form to lyrical tale illustrate Robinson attuned to the demands of each genre, her recognition that a vignette published as a "Poetical Picture" is not a lyrical tale. But, most strikingly, Robinson returned to the original magazine version for inclusion in her epic poem *The Progress of Liberty*. Like "Poor Marguerite" in its newspaper form, the *Monthly Magazine's* "The Hermit of Mont-Blanc" roots its protagonist's choices in personal terms; in *Lyrical Tales*, the personal enlarges to the political, with an emphasis on how individuals work as a collective. Moving back to the magazine version for *The Progress of Liberty* strips away communal culpability for the Hermit's actions. Robinson's epic poem illustrates the ways that individual actions and choices impede liberty and progress.

I began this dissertation by proposing that traditional views of Mary Robinson's life and career limit our readings of her works. Likewise, sweeping concepts of Romantic authors, such as the Romantic genius, impede our recognition of the nuances of an individual author's revision processes and understandings of poetic subjects and genres. Robinson's process is one of continual disruption. For example, the progress of *The Progress of Liberty*, like the vision of progress she espouses within the poem, defies any predictable, linear narratives of achievement. Even in writing an epic, an aspirational genre for Romantic writers, Robinson confounds expectations: disruption is embodied most clearly by the incorporation of what would be deemed a "lesser" work into a genre

considered the highest achievement. This process, then, suggests that the work of magazine verse should be on par with the work of the epic poem. Robinson's revisions, like her poems, suggest intersection and commonality instead of division and hierarchy. Studying these revisions encourages us to pause before too readily accepting developmental narratives of revision and Romanticism. The subtle, varied poetic work of Mary Robinson provides an alternative narrative, not one of aesthetic judgment, of claiming prominence, but of Romantic work as a refined engagement with context.

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APPENDIX A – PERIODICAL VERSE TO LYRICAL TALE PUBLICATION INFORMATION

Original Title	Periodical	Periodical Date	<i>Lyrical Tales</i> ' Title (if revised)
"The Storm"	<i>Morning Post</i>	February 3, 1796	"The Negro Girl"
	<i>Lady's Magazine</i>	April 1796	
"Mistress Gurton's Cat. A Domestic Tale"	<i>Morning Post</i>	January 8, 1800	
"The Poor, Singing Dame"	<i>Morning Post</i>	January 25, 1800	
"Old Barnard—A Monkish Tale"	<i>Morning Post</i>	January 28, 1800	
"The Hermit of Mont-Blanc"	<i>Monthly Magazine</i>	February 1, 1800	
"The Haunted Beach"	<i>Morning Post</i>	February 26, 1800	
"Agnes"	<i>Morning Post</i>	February 28, 1800	"Edmund's Wedding"
	<i>The Whitehall Evening-Post</i>	March 4, 1800	
"The Tell Tale; Or, Deborah's Parrot"	<i>Morning Post</i>	March 4, 1800	"Deborah's Parrot, a Village Tale"
"The Deserted Cottage"	<i>Morning Post</i>	March 13, 1800	
"The Confessor— <i>A Tale</i> "	<i>Morning Post</i>	March 20, 1800	"The Confessor, a Sanctified Tale"
"Poor Marguerite!"	<i>Morning Post</i>	April 8, 1800	
	<i>The Lady's Monthly Museum</i>	September 1800	
"The Fortune-Teller— <i>A Tale</i> "	<i>Morning Post</i>	April 12, 1800	"The Fortune-Teller, a Gypsy Tale"
"The Granny Grey:— <i>A Tale</i> "	<i>Morning Post</i>	June 10, 1800	"The Granny Grey, a Love Tale"

"The Mistletoe" (published December 31, 1799 in the *Morning Post*) was not substantively revised before inclusion in *Lyrical Tales*.

"All Alone" (published December 18, 1800 in the *Morning Post*) was extracted from her already published *Lyrical Tales* and is thus not a substantially revised poem appearing in both mediums.

APPENDIX B – PERIODICAL VERSE INCORPORATED INTO *THE PROGRESS OF LIBERTY*

Original Title	Periodical	Periodical Date
"The Birth-Day of Liberty" Poetical Pictures No. I	<i>Morning Post</i>	April 7, 1798
"The Progress of Liberty" Poetical Pictures No. II	<i>Morning Post</i>	April 14, 1798
"The Horrors of Anarchy" Poetical Pictures No. III	<i>Morning Post</i>	April 24, 1798
"The Vestal" Poetical Pictures No. IV	<i>Morning Post</i>	May 5, 1798
"The Monk" Poetical Pictures No. V	<i>Morning Post</i>	May 12, 1798
"The Dungeon" Poetical Pictures No. VI	<i>Morning Post</i>	May 18, 1798
"The African"	<i>Morning Post</i>	August 2, 1798
"The Cell of the Atheist"	<i>Morning Post</i>	August 19, 1799
"Harvest Home"	<i>Morning Post</i>	August 30, 1800
"The Hermit of Mont-Blanc"	<i>Monthly Magazine</i>	February 1, 1800
"The Italian Peasantry"	<i>Monthly Magazine</i>	April 1, 1800