

**THE REGENCY NOVEL AND THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION:  
AUSTEN, BRUNTON, SHELLEY, AND THE CULTURE OF ROMANTIC DECLINE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

SARAH MARSH: The Regency Novel and the British Constitution:  
Austen, Brunton, Shelley, and the Culture of Romantic Decline  
(Under the direction of Jeanne Moskal)

During the Regency period (1811-1820), Britons were faced at home with daunting political problems: a scandal-plagued royal family; ongoing war with France; a weak postwar economy; a complicated and relatively new union of Scotland with England and Wales; and an enormous new empire abroad that few understood and none knew how to manage. As a hedge against this apparent national decline, Britons made frequent recourse to an ideal of national cohesion they called the British “constitution”: in medicine, the constitution (or health) of British bodies; in domestic matters, the constitution of the British family; in science, the constitution of the British atmosphere and landscape; in politics, the constitution of the British polity out of the English, the Welsh, and the Scottish; in government, the constitutional monarchy comprising the House of Lords, the House of Commons, and the king; in jurisprudence, the body of parliamentary law known as the British Constitution. “Constitution” was for Britons a multivalent and powerful term that emphasized the interrelatedness of political, legal, social, environmental, and medical understandings of lived experience. And yet, as the nineteenth century moved into its second decade, Britons were nevertheless convinced that theirs was a national constitution on the verge of ruin.

This dissertation assesses the interaction of British constitutions—physiological, legal, and national—with genre in the Regency-era novels of Jane Austen, Mary Brunton,

and Mary Shelley. These novels are no exception to the larger trend of Regency-era declinism; what makes these women's fictive appraisals of Britain's ruin so remarkable is how they use gender and genre categories to unsettle the seemingly stable idea of a British constitution. The novel was primed for this political work because it was the principal conduit through which Britons indulged their obsession with constitutional decline: eighteenth-century sentimental and gothic fictions almost universally feature as a plotline the constitutional ruin of heroines. In their Regency-era novels, Austen, Brunton, and Shelley seized upon this older tradition to level its sexual double standard: constitutional decline, they insist, inheres not in women's bodies (as the sentimental and gothic traditions held), but in a social order—and a literary tradition—that maintained women and other disenfranchised groups in positions of precarious constitutional legitimacy. Taken together, the Regency-era novels of Austen, Brunton, and Shelley demonstrate that the British constitution—that old ideal of national cohesion—might be nothing more (and certainly nothing less) than Britain's greatest national fiction.

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sure I had a steady stream of encouragement and English humo(u)r from abroad, and a place to stay in London. Gus called me frequently as I was writing in South Carolina to offer his company in the solitude and his wisdom for the course. Becca made sure the solitude was not constant. Erin injected levity and inspiration at every possible moment. Patrick and Sarah, Erin and Lukas have cared for me more like family than friends, and they are. Patrick I thank for his unbounded goodness. Erin I thank for her years of devoted friendship, more dear to me than I can say.

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## Introduction: The Regency Novel and the British Constitution

And thinks't thou, Britain, still to sit at ease,  
An island Queen amidst thy subject seas,  
While the vext billows, in their distant roar,  
But soothe thy slumbers, and but kiss thy shore?  
To sport in wars, while danger keeps aloof,  
Thy grassy turf unbruised by hostile hoof?  
So sing thy flatterers; but, Britain, know,  
Thou who hast shared the guilt must share the woe.  
Nor distant is the hour; low murmurs spread,  
And whispered fears, creating what they dread;  
Ruin, as with an earthquake shock, is here [...]  
—Anna Laetitia Barbauld<sup>1</sup>

In 1811, the first year of the British Regency, Britons believed themselves in the midst of widespread national decline—the “earthquake shock” of “Ruin,” as Anna Laetitia Barbauld called it in her popular and inflammatory 1812 poem, *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*. The Regency arrangement itself was perhaps the most obvious sign of national ruin that year: in July, the scandal-plagued and unpopular Prince Regent took the place of his mentally deranged father, King George III, whose recurring madness had made him unfit to rule. The medical and political deterioration of Britain’s royal family seemed emblematic of other national fissures: the relatively recent union in 1707 of Scotland to England and Wales had long been creating divisive political struggles in Parliament and abroad, particularly between the English and Scottish, throwing into question what it meant to be British. The eighteenth-century growth of industrialization and agrarian capitalism had produced a

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, A Poem* (London: J. Johnson & Co., 1812), ll. 39-49.

marked decline of titled families' wealth, troubling traditional social arrangements of the British estate and destabilizing home markets. Domestic unrest followed: 1811 alone saw the Luddite rebellions and the rioting of weavers in Glasgow; later in 1819, in what would become known as the Peterloo Massacre, the Prince Regent's cavalry charged a crowd of British citizens gathered in Manchester to demand the reform of parliamentary representation. Beyond the Channel, Napoleonic France's meteoric rise to power in Europe threatened British national security as well as British claims to cultural and military superiority in the old world. By 1811, the American Revolution was more than 30 years old, as was the reality that Great Britain's political influence and commercial opportunities in North America would be limited indeed; the War of 1812, just on the horizon, would certify those limits. Britain's remaining imperial claims in North America, Africa, and Asia did not impart to Britons a comforting sense of global dominion, as is so often assumed, but what Linda Colley has called a worrying "collective agoraphobia": how, wondered MP Edmund Burke, was a "'strong presiding power, that is so useful towards the conservation of a vast, disconnected, infinitely diversified empire' to be reconciled with the preservation of traditional British liberties?"<sup>2</sup> Though many scholars suggest that it began much later in the nineteenth century with the eugenics programs of Max Nordau and Cesare Lombroso, which appeared in Great Britain as the public hygiene campaigns of the Victorians, Britain's culture of declinism had an unmistakable purchase in the last half of the Romantic period, and particularly during the British Regency.

As a hedge against these dire threats to their nation's cohesion—the agoraphobia of empire, internal political fractures, and the prospect of being overrun by the French—Britons

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<sup>2</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 103, 105.

frequently made recourse to an ideal of national holism they called the British “constitution”: in medicine, the constitution (or health) of British bodies; in domestic matters, the constitution of the British family; in science, the constitution of the British atmosphere and landscape; in politics, the constitution of the British polity out of the English, the Welsh, and the Scottish; in government, the constitutional monarchy comprising the House of Lords, the House of Commons, and the king; in jurisprudence, the body of parliamentary law known as the British Constitution. “Constitution” was for Britons a multivalent and powerful term that emphasized the interrelatedness of political, legal, social, environmental, and medical understandings of lived experience—what William Wordsworth called “Unity entire” in his posthumously published poem, *The Recluse* (1888).<sup>3</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary confirms these meanings: for Romantic-era Britons, “constitution” was, at once, the “physical nature or character of the body”; individual disposition or temperament; a civil or ecclesiastical “decree, ordinance, law, [or] regulation”; the “body of fundamental principles according to which a [...] body politic is constituted and governed”; and the way anything was “constituted or made up”—a meaning “constitution” had enjoyed at least since Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* (1623), when Sir Toby jokingly refers to “the excellent constitution of [Sir Andrew Aguecheek’s] legge.”<sup>4</sup> Less than two hundred years later, the Bard himself would be part of the national constitution; as Henry Crawford reports in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814): “Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing

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<sup>3</sup> William Wordsworth, *Home at Grasmere: Part First, Book First, of The Recluse*, ed. Beth Darlington (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), l. 170.

<sup>4</sup> “constitution, n.”. OED Online. September 2012. Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39848?redirectedFrom=constitution&> (accessed October 23, 2012).

how. It is part of an Englishman's constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them every where, one is intimate with him by instinct."<sup>5</sup>

The notion of "constitution" was itself "every where" in British political, medical, and social discourse, as any number of titles from the period demonstrate: an *Essay on the Constitution of England* (1766) and *An Account of the Constitution and Present State of Great Britain* (1779?), both anonymous; Alexander Wight's *A Treatise on the Laws Concerning the Election of the Different Representatives Sent from Scotland to the Parliament of Great Britain, with a Preliminary View of the Constitution of the Parliaments of England and Scotland* (1773); William Pulteney's *An Appeal to Reason and Justice, in Behalf of the British Constitution* (1778), which found American independence a clear "Violation of the Rights of British Subjects"; and John Barker's *Rise and Progress of a Pestilential Constitution* (1795?) are just a few titles of the many.<sup>6</sup> More often than not, conservative treatises like these celebrated the "ancient" nature of the British constitution, beginning with Magna Carta, stressing that constitutional stability, which had its proper material foundation in the land, was the essential unifying feature of British society and government. As political theorist J. G. A. Pocock has written, the Augustan mind conceived of "real property" as

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<sup>5</sup> Austen's fiction is quoted from *The Novels of Jane Austen*, 6 vols., ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923-74), p. 338.

<sup>6</sup> William Pulteney, *An appeal to reason and justice, in behalf of the British constitution, and the subjects of the British empire. In which the present important contest with the revolted colonies is impartially considered, the inconsistency of modern patriotism is demonstrated, the supremacy of Parliament is asserted on Revolution Principles, and American independence is proved to be a manifest violation of the rights of British subjects. To which is added, an appendix, containing remarks on a pamphlet intituled, 'thoughts on the present state of affairs with America.'* (London: W. Nicoll, 1778) Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. Univ Of North Carolina-Chapel Hill Davis. 2 Nov. 2012.

<<http://find.galegroup.com/libproxy.lib.unc.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=uncbrcr&tabID=T001&docId=CW3305396602&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>>.

stable enough to link successive generations in social relationships belonging to [...] the order of nature. Such a government would tend to be a commonwealth (with monarchy) of independent proprietors with a balanced and ancient constitution, fortified by immemorial customs which helped to keep the parts independent and in place; it would be patriotic in defense, but would avoid war and empire.<sup>7</sup>

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, it was of course impossible to believe that Britain's government was avoiding war and empire; furthermore, the ancient "balance" of the British constitution seemed eroded as well, particularly with the apparent constitutional weakness of King George III. Radical political commentators, most notably William Godwin in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), thus reconceptualized British political freedom at the level of individual constitutions: on his anarchic program of human perfectibility, Britons might throw off the corrupted *ancien régime* slowly but inevitably as they exceeded the bodily limitations of their own physiological constitutions, producing a new race of healthy, just, and reasoning people. For others like that arch-declinist Thomas Malthus, however, the die already had been cast: in *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), he refuted Godwin's position by arguing that Britain's linear population increase inevitably would be fraught with disease, famine, and moral vice: the problems of individual Britons' constitutions, brought on by the land's failure to support its inhabitants, would produce an inevitable decline of the British nation.

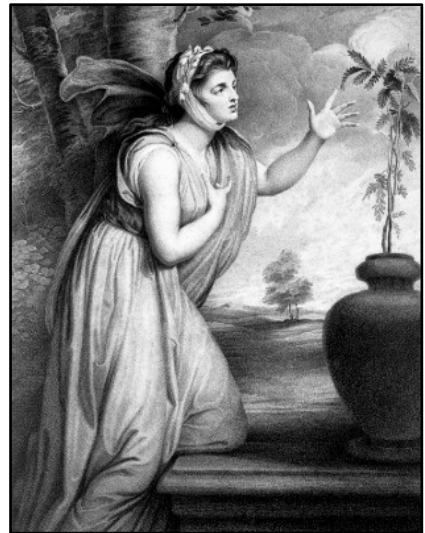
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<sup>7</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 458.

This Romantic-period notion of impending constitutional decline owed much of its cultural prevalence to what J. G. Barker-Benfield (and others) have called the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility. The word “sensibility,” J. G. Barker-Benfield explains,

denoted the receptivity of the senses and referred to the psychoperceptual scheme explained and systematized by Newton and Locke. It connoted the operation of the nervous system, the material basis for consciousness. During the eighteenth century, this psychoperceptual scheme became a paradigm, meaning not only consciousness in general but a particular kind of consciousness, one that could be further sensitized in order to be more acutely responsive to signals from the outside environment and from inside the body. [...] While sensibility rested on essentially materialist assumptions, proponents of the cultivation of sensibility came to invest it with spiritual and moral values.<sup>8</sup>

“This,” Barker-Benfield continues, “was a gendered view of the nerves: not only were women’s nerves interpreted as more delicate and more susceptible than men’s, but women’s ability to operate their nerves by acts of will (part of Newton’s account) was seriously questioned” (xviii). Because of their persistent situation in the home, women were believed to inherit or acquire on a Lockean program “constitutional delicacy” or “delicate



constitutions,” less fit than male constitutions for life in the world, an idea which Mary

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<sup>8</sup> G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. xvii.

Wollstonecraft had decried in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). The connection between sensibility and female constitutions is dramatized in this 1789 stipple engraving by Richard Earlom titled “Sensibility.”<sup>9</sup> The female figure’s apparent identification with the hothouse mimosa on the right suggests the degree to which female sensibility was an aesthetic and emotive mode produced by controlled indoor spaces, most commonly the British home. The pensive expression of the personified Sensibility sets her and the hothouse plant distinctly apart from, and yet threatened by, the uncultivated outdoor space in the middle- and background of the engraving.

For Romantic-era Britons, sensibility emerged as a troubling paradox in which the sensitive, finely tuned, and healthy constitution—normally the constitution of a delicate but beautiful woman—was perpetually at risk of being overwhelmed and ultimately ruined by its ineluctable sympathy with the environment and other human beings. This paradox produced a broader confusion in Britain about sensibility’s relationship to social progress: was sensibility a weakness? Was it effete, too apparently French, the luxurious preserve of Britain’s indulgent upper classes, and thus a symptom (or a cause) of Britain’s decline? Or was sensibility a constitutional strength of Britons who were more attuned to their environment and the suffering of others—and thus better poised to usher Great Britain through a new era of social renewal and the global extension of British liberty?

This study argues that the Regency-era novels of Jane Austen, Mary Brunton, and Mary Shelley engaged this paradox by revising the conventions of the eighteenth-century novel of sensibility, the primary cultural medium through which Britons living before and during the Romantic period played out their national obsession with the sensibility of their

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<sup>9</sup> Image from Richard Earlom after George Romney, “Sensibility,” 1789, The Wellcome Library, London. Accessed 1 November 2012. <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=397289&section=2.2>.



constitutions. Pioneered by Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne, Henry Mackenzie, and Frances Burney, the novel of sensibility emphasized the action of decaying human constitutions in the production of plotlines, most commonly the narrative of “virtue in distress” in which a sensitive woman with a healthy and moral but delicate constitution was ultimately ruined by the sexual advances of a rake like the villain Lovelace in Samuel Richardson’s wildly popular *Clarissa* (1748). Moreover, the novel of sensibility and its macabre twin, the gothic novel, were intended to produce constitutional responses in their readers, normally categorized under the rubric of sympathy, both moral and physiological (Barker-Benfield 15-36). These were genres that not only represented Britons’ declining constitutions, therefore, but affected them intimately, leading Wordsworth famously to lament in his 1800 “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* the “outrageous stimulation” promulgated by “frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.”<sup>10</sup> But as this study argues, Austen, Brunton, and Shelley enacted in their fictions not “outrageous stimulation,” but a new set of relations between the British novel and Britons’ constitutions, which revealed contradictions inhering in the very old, and still very powerful, idea of constitution itself.

The revelation of these contradictions in their fiction was a tremendous imaginative undertaking by these three novelists because the notion of a British constitution had for years insinuated itself not only into the novel’s form but every aspect of Britons’ lives. The key to avoiding bodily constitutional ruin, most Britons had long agreed, was to form a strong constitution in childhood and then fastidiously maintain its strength through programmatic temperance. In his *Discourse on the Temperate Life* (1550), for example, Luigi Cornaro

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<sup>10</sup> William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, eds. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 747.

argued that, under a regimen of limited food and drink, he had repaired a constitution ruined in youth by overindulgence. He urged his readers that they, too, could achieve remarkably advanced age: on his plan, anyone could live to be 100 years old; those with particularly robust constitutions could expect to survive healthfully 20 years more. Though this “paragon of health passed away prematurely in 1565, at the disappointing age of 98,” his work went through more than 50 editions in English translation and was read avidly by health conscious Britons during both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>11</sup> This clear interest in health, amounting often to obsession, was the clearest symptom of widespread anxiety that even the most rigid programs of constitutional maintenance might be insufficient to ensuring the health of Britons and, by extension, the endurance of their body politic.

The coextensive nature of bodily and political constitutions in Romantic-era Britain is perhaps most clearly illustrated by James Gillray’s 1804 colored etching, “BRITANNIA



Between DEATH and the DOCTOR'S,"<sup>12</sup> a satire on William Pitt’s return to political power in Parliament in 1804. The “doctors” surrounding Britannia offer her a variety of antidotes to her constitutional distress. Prime

Minister Pitt holds aloft a “Constitutional restorative,” his own spindly constitution a reminder that austerity was a republican virtue. He treads into the open mouth of the portly

<sup>11</sup> Roy Porter, *Bodies Politic: Disease, Death and Doctors in Britain, 1650-1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 82-84.

<sup>12</sup> Image from Roy Porter, *Bodies Politic: Disease, Death, and Doctors in Britain, 1650-1900*, p. 99.

MP James Charles Fox, an avid abolitionist and radical supporter of the American and French revolutions, signaled by the Phrygian cap in his left hand. Fox offers Britannia a bottle labeled “Republican Balsam” while spilling to the floor a bottle of “Whig pills,” two dice suggesting the political risk of Fox’s outspoken support of the French revolution and political radicals at home, and, more obviously, his significant role in settling the Prince Regent’s enormous gambling debts.<sup>13</sup> On the far left is Henry Addington, Prime Minister from 1801 until 1804, who had held a hard line against Napoleon’s aggression in Europe and was more conservative on domestic issues, particularly Catholic emancipation, than both Fox and Pitt. Addington accidentally drops a “Composing draft” over the balcony as Pitt boots him from Britannia’s sick room, invoking the contentious unseating of Addington’s government in 1804 by Pitt and his supporters when Addington began to lose political ground on the questions of income taxation and the Irish militia, who were unserviceable and threatening domestic unrest.<sup>14</sup> In his left pocket, Pitt holds a copy of *The Art of Restoring Health*, a reference to one of two important Romantic-period medical texts: it may be George Wallis’s *The Art of Preventing Diseases, and Restoring Health* (1796), a popular guide promising to “keep the constitution in, or bring it to, a state of health.”<sup>15</sup> But Pitt’s pocket

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<sup>13</sup> L. G. Mitchell, “Fox, Charles James (1749–1806),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2007 [http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/article/10024, accessed 2 Nov. 2012].

<sup>14</sup> J. E. Cookson, “Addington, Henry, first Viscount Sidmouth (1757–1844),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009 [http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/article/150, accessed 2 Nov. 2012].

<sup>15</sup> George Wallis, *The art of preventing diseases, and restoring health, founded on rational principles, and adapted to persons of every capacity. By George Wallis, M. D. Editor of the last Edition of Motherby’s Medical Dictionary, Sydenham’s Works, with Notes, &c. &c. Second edition. With considerable alterations and additions* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1796) Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. Univ Of North Carolina-Chapel Hill Davis. 31 Oct. 2012. <http://find.galegroup.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=uncbrcr&tabID=T001&docId=CW3308768082&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>, p. 4.

reading may refer more insidiously to a treatise on constitutional maintenance by the French doctor, M. Flamant, *The Art of Preserving and Restoring Health* that had been “faithfully translated” into English in 1697 and widely read by Britons ever since. Thus Gillray suggests not one but two French presences in Britannia’s sick room: one in the hip pocket of the Prime Minister, who had long been criticized for his misplaced optimism about Britain’s war effort and, in 1805, would fail to secure a European coalition against the French, leaving Britain alone “to fight the best Battle We can with our own Strength.”<sup>16</sup> The more obvious French incursion in Britannia’s sick room is Napoleon himself, caricatured as Death behind Britannia’s throne, representing a nearer threat than any of her distracted “doctors” perceive.

Britannia’s failing constitution—political and physiological—is the centerpiece of Gillray’s satire, suggesting how clear it was to Romantic-era Britons that the physiological conditions of the body had real meanings for the body politic. Invoking the common Romantic-period mistrust of physicians, Pitt, Addington, and Fox are portrayed as quacks more interested in peddling their own political “cures” than in improving the condition of their patient, Britannia, whose fainting posture in Napoleon’s presence is a clear parody of novel of sensibility heroines, who succumbed in droves to the sexual advances of untoward men (not only is Napoleon skeletal in Gillray’s etching; he also is naked). One of the ironies of the image—which Gillray actually may have intended, given Pitt’s longtime bad health—is that shortly Pitt himself would find his own constitution in utter ruin under the stress of governance. After taking the waters at Bath for a period, he returned to his rented villa on Putney Heath, where he died on the morning of January 23, 1806 (Ehrman and Smith, par.

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<sup>16</sup> Pitt qtd. in J. P. W. Ehrman and Anthony Smith, “Pitt, William (1759–1806),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/article/22338>, accessed 31 Oct 2012].

66). The macabre caption of Gillray's cartoon, "Death may decide, when doctor's disagree," levels a harsh critique of Parliament's ability effectively to deal with Napoleon by evoking the Romantic-period commonplace that doctors' remedies often were—in reality for Prime Minister Pitt as in fiction for heroines like Clarissa—useless when Britons faced the decline of their own constitutions.

As Roy and Dorothy Porter note, this "analogy" between Britons' physiological constitutions, the political constitution of the British nation, and the body of law known as the British Constitution "rang loud and true."<sup>17</sup> But as this study will demonstrate at length, the relationship in Romantic-era Britain between individual constitutions and the British Constitution amounted to much more than mere analogy: healthy British constitutions were critical to preserving traditional British liberties in the midst of an expansive imperial enterprise and the ongoing struggle with Napoleonic France. Most obviously, the male citizens of the British nation who had been invalided or killed in these two causes had to be replaced if Great Britain was to maintain constitutional security for its citizens at home and cultural ascendancy across the globe. "Rule Britannia, rule the waves / Britons never will be slaves," went James Thomson's popular national song in which Great Britain, embodied as the constitutionally robust figure of Britannia, guaranteed the constitutional freedom of all Britons through sea power—and the traders and military members that sea power persistently mobilized to the empire, where they frequently were killed, injured, or invalided by disease (qtd. in Colley 11). At home, healthy male constitutions were required under primogeniture for the transfer of wealth and political power between generations; healthy female constitutions were required to bear and raise healthy male heirs to legal age. Robust British

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<sup>17</sup> Roy and Dorothy Porter, *In Sickness and in Health: The British Experience 1650-1850* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 28.

constitutions were, therefore, not just analogies or metaphors or any other rhetorical figure: they were a material necessity of Romantic-era life.

Thus, to a degree historians and literary critics have not yet realized, Romantic-era life, thought, and writing were deeply structured in Britain by the individual constitution's relation to the constitution of the state. The work of Michel Foucault, and plenty of subsequent scholarship relying upon it, helpfully explicates the complex relations between the physical body and the body politic. This study contributes to that field of knowledge by clarifying that Romantic-era Britons believed that their bodily constitutions were produced primarily (though not exclusively) by Britain's climate and geography. The constitutions of Britons were nationalized during the period—not yet by the clinic, asylum, and prison (which were slightly later innovations of the Victorians)—but by the eighteenth-century rise of British climate science. In 1776, for example, the vicar Gilbert White published his *Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*, in which he catalogued the weather patterns of his parish in an effort to counteract “superstitious prejudices [...] too gross for this enlightened age.”<sup>18</sup> Similar efforts among country parsons and agricultural writers would follow: William Marshall, in his *Experiments and Observations* (1779) hoped to remove interpretations of the British climate “from the hands of *vulgar Error*” (qtd. in Golinski 64, Marshall's emphasis). At the turn of the century, scientists including Joseph Priestley, David Hartley, and Thomas Beddoes emphasized the reliance of human constitutions upon British aerial environments then being investigated in a number of British laboratories: Thomas Beddoes's Pneumatic Institution in Bristol was and is the best-known of these, but, as critic Larry Stewart has shown, a number of similar endeavors sprang up in London and elsewhere during the

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<sup>18</sup> Qtd. in Jan Golinski, *British Weather and the Climate of the Enlightenment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 64.

eighteenth century, a testament to the crucial role British atmospheric science played in popular understandings of constitutional health at the beginning of the Romantic period.<sup>19</sup> In a letter to Frances Wedgwood, for example, Erasmus Darwin lamented, “I have been lying on the sofa in a state of utter torpor. I mean to go out today to see if I am well or not [...]. If the present beautiful weather continues I shall be compelled to go and be happy in the country but at present I prefer being miserable in London.” (Qtd. in Golinski 137) Darwin’s remark clarifies two critical points about the formation of Britons’ constitutions: Darwin relies on the local British weather (not the state or state-sanctioned institutions) to tell him whether he is “well or not,” and he situates wellness not in the obviously nationalist location of the British capital, but more colloquially “in the country”—a common belief during a period when the noxious airs of London were thought to debilitate human constitutions. Wordsworth would rework this popular medical concern as a Romantic ideal in his relocation of an essential, healthy Britishness from the city to the healthier airs of the countryside: the “correspondent breeze” from *The Prelude* (1850) is not only the Paraclete, therefore, but a biomedical idea central to Britons’ conceptions of their constitutional health and subjective experience.<sup>20</sup>

Individuals thus had some control over the formation of their constitutions—such as in whether they would, as Erasmus Darwin, “go and be happy in the country” or “prefer being miserable in London,” but external conditions were, for many, as yet highly deterministic. Again, the notable exception is Godwin, whose radical program in *Political Justice* held that Britons could use their reason to live beyond the constitutional determinism

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<sup>19</sup> Larry Stewart, *The Rise of Public Science: Rhetoric, Technology, and Natural Philosophy in Newtonian Britain, 1660-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Fourteen-Book Prelude*, ed. W. J. B. Owen (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), l. 43.

of their environment. But most disagreed; as Edmund Burke explained in his influential *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757): the “ill effects of bad weather appear often no otherwise, than in a melancholy dejection of spirits, though without doubt, in this case, the bodily organs suffer first, and the mind through these organs.”<sup>21</sup> For Burke as for Darwin, the environment was the first cause, an idea that encouraged the development of the eudiometer and other instruments supposed to measure the breathability of the air; these were perhaps the clearest attempts of the period to bring Enlightenment science to bear on Britons’ medico-political need to manage their bodily constitutions by regulating interaction with external factors.

Romantic-period discourses on constitution evolved from and often re-inscribed the Renaissance model of “geohumoralism,” a term coined by Mary Floyd-Wilson to describe the system of knowledge under which early modern subjects understood their bodies’ relationship to the world:

[d]erived from the classical texts of Aristotle, Galen, Vitruvius, Pliny, and others, geohumoralism [...] aimed to comprehend (and estrange) the northern and southern climatic extremes that bordered the Mediterranean. The same classical tripartite scheme that constructed ancient Greece and Rome and the civilized middle between the barbaric lands north and south also determined the logic of geohumoralism.<sup>22</sup>

That logic held that the body’s proportions of the four humors described by the physician Galen—black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm—were inflected by local geography and

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<sup>21</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757), p. 281.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 2.



climate. Classical and Renaissance practitioners did not agree, however, on exactly how local factors influenced the humors' proportions: many posited that the body's humoral composition counterbalanced its environment, so that cold, wet locales would give rise to heated constitutions. In fact, Hippocrates's *Airs, Waters, Places* was the only major classical text to suggest that the relationship between environmental factors and humoral constitution was analogous—with the cold, wet English climate producing cold, wet, and thus phlegmatic English subjects (Floyd-Wilson 25). What was agreed upon, however, was that humors' relative proportions in the body produced an individual's health and temperament, or her constitution, and so individual constitutions reflected or refracted their local environments, producing not just major differences among the English, Scottish, and Welsh, but differences within national and ethnic groupings (such as the Lowland and Highland Scots) that depended upon latitude, longitude, and proximity to water, mountains, and urban centers.

Because being white and British during the Renaissance was not, as Floyd-Wilson explains, “a badge of superiority but cast one instead on the margins as uncivil, slow-witted, and more bodily determined than those people living in more temperate zones,” it was “to the English people's advantage to challenge and revise a body of knowledge” that suggested their position on the apparent geohumoral margins of civilization (5). The wild success of these predecessors in revising that body of knowledge, casting themselves as geohumorally central instead of marginal, is why mid-eighteenth-century Britons were convinced that their constitutions, seasoned at home in cold, wet Britain, were a global geopolitical asset—particularly against the allegedly frog-fed, extravagant, and thus weakly constituted French. As early as the late seventeenth century, in fact, the geohumoral theory of *Airs, Waters, Places* had been fully transvalued by Britons: once a producer of marginal, intemperate

constitutions according to Hippocrates, the cold, wet weather of the British Isles was now billed as the best way to season strong, vigorous constitutions. The medical historian Thomas Brown has shown that part of this transformation in British physiology was owing to the work of the Dutch botanist and physician Herman Boerhaave, who emphasized the role of the body's solid components rather than the liquid elements emphasized in humoral theory. Boerhaave's English apostles Stephen Hales and John Stuart advocated attention to the body's "fibres" and their thermodynamic response to external stimulus from the atmosphere; thus could the London practitioner, Bernard Lynch, claim that Britain's cold and wet climate kept the body's fibers in a "continual oscillatory motion," producing "tension of the fibres and the whole nervous system." Hardened northern constitutions like these would be softened and inflamed by hotter atmospheric conditions; as Lynch believed: "when a warm weather suddenly succeeds the cold weather, it relaxes the fibres and the vessels [...] and lymph may admit the blood, which is an inflammatory state."<sup>23</sup> Like their early modern forebears, Romantic-era Britons thus expected their constitutions to be ruined by travel to other latitudes; critically, however, the precise mechanism of this ruination had been substantially revised, with the precepts of Newton's thermodynamics slowly and erratically taking over the explanatory power humoral medicine once had held in the popular imagination.

Thus, healthy constitutions were best maintained by staying at the latitude of one's birth. As John Locke wrote in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1696), the inhabitants of Malta seasoned their children to promising effect by forcing them to go naked in the heat until their tenth year; the English might expect the same good results if they took care to

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<sup>23</sup> Brown and Lynch qtd. in Vladimir Janković, *Confronting the Climate: British Airs and the Making of Environmental Medicine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 24-25.

“accustom [themselves] from [their] Infancy,” to the climate and geography of England. “Give me leave therefore to advise you,” he continued to his readers, “not to fence too carefully against this our Climate.”<sup>24</sup> On Locke’s expansive and widely read view of the subject, English infants required the damp, bracing weather of their homeland in order to become healthy children; over-heated birthing rooms, swaddling, and the administration of warming alcoholic tonics was not just ill-advised but dangerous, tending to produce harmful increases in body temperature and, eventually, a debilitating dependency on medicines. Instead, Locke urged, English children should go barefoot in the cold, sleep in chilly bedrooms without too many blankets, bathe in cold water, and wear shoes that leaked water when it rained. Large differences between indoor and outdoor temperatures would shock the child’s constitution and decrease its strength, so homes should remain cold in the winter and warm in the summer: as close to the English out-of-doors as possible. Just as land ownership formed the material basis of the British government’s constitutional authority, so the British atmosphere was, on Locke’s view, the material foundation of all Britons’ physiological constitutions.

Locke’s late seventeenth-century regimens for constitutional hardening enjoyed an enduring vogue throughout the eighteenth century and beyond: Sir John Hill, under the *nom de plume* of Seymour, cautioned in his *On the Management and Education of Children* (1754) that “Delicacy is the Parent of a thousand Mischiefs,” and, in the early nineteenth century, William Cobbett’s popular conduct manuals advocated that children should grow up “in the fresh air, getting abundant exercise; nurses’ cordials and doctors’ powders” would compromise the constitution indefinitely (Hill and Cobbett qtd. in Porter and Porter 29). In

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<sup>24</sup> John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (London: C. L. Clay and Sons, 1892), p. 2.

*Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Coleridge and Wordsworth famously Romanticized these hardening regimes as part of their growing interest in primitivism: Wordsworth's Old Cumberland Beggar and Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, members of the lower orders who had indeed lived hard, had stronger constitutions than the cosseted ruling classes. According to Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, these rustics were a fitter subject for poetry because they spoke a "real language" and had more "vivid sensation[s]" (741). Wordsworth's subversive implication was that commoners living on and with the land had a higher claim to natural authority than those who legally owned it.

The Romantic-era understanding that British constitutions were produced by local atmospheric conditions gained enormous credence as Britain's imperial project increasingly required Britons to leave home for different climates, particularly tropical ones. Here they died of so-called tropical diseases disproportionately to their homebound compatriots, or they returned home with their constitutions in ruin. With germ theory nearly a century away, the medical and cultural explanation for colonial disease was clear: British constitutions seasoned in northerly climes, and sensitive to their immediate surroundings, could not possibly remain healthy in so foreign a set of topographic and climatic conditions.

The epidemiological reality, of course, was that Europeans of all nations were, in their overseas colonies, coming into contact with pathogens and parasites to which they had no biological immunity, just as they were introducing European illnesses to native peoples of the so-called new world. As Alan Bewell has written,

[c]olonialism may not have created new pathogens, but it did bring people who had previously been isolated into contact with each other and with diseases that were new to them. Precolonial peoples inhabited unique disease

environments, ecologies that had been built up through the interaction of human beings and microbes over vast spans of time. (2)

In what was the actual collision of disease environments, Romantic-era Britons saw the incompatibility of their constitutions with new localities in the tropics—the torrid zone, as they called it—producing what Bewell, in his inspiring study, calls a “*relational* or *differential*” model of disease (19, Bewell’s emphasis). On this model, Britons formed conceptions of their own disease susceptibility in a global context by casting the “pathogenic” tropics in contradistinction to the “healthier” latitudes of the north, where they had seasoned their constitutions in childhood. But as Bewell shows, the realization that Britons died disproportionately in the tropics did little to curtail Britain’s colonial activities there. One of the most catastrophic examples of this occurred during the War of Jenkins’ Ear, when the British, emboldened by recent military success in the West Indies, sailed on Cartagena, Columbia against the Spanish. Arriving in March of 1741, they had taken one of the forts protecting Cartagena by April. The assault was abandoned, however, when fever decimated the British ranks: of the 12,000 soldiers originally enlisted for the expedition, only 3, 569 sailed from Cartagena; less than a third of those who remained were healthy enough for service. In *A History of the British Army* (1899), J. W. Fortescue recounts the horrible scene:

[d]ay after day the sailors rowed ashore to bury their boats’ loads of corpses, for there was always order and discipline in the ships of war; but the raw soldiers simply dragged their dead comrades on deck and dropped them overboard [...]. So after a few hours the bodies that had sunk beneath the water came up to the surface again and floated, hideous and ghastly beyond

description [...] while schools of sharks jostled each other in the scramble to tear them limb from limb. (Qtd. in Bewell 75)

As Bewell notes, colonial disease often was a political scandal for British military and political leaders, which was handled at home with silence; but the enormous losses at Cartagena, which effected the downfall of Robert Walpole's ministry, forced Parliament to reconsider its policy of imperial aggression in environments inhospitable to British constitutions (73).

But Britons who lived their whole lives at home suffered as well. Domestic illness, Romantic-era Britons believed, was largely owing to constitutions compromised from birth by over-indulgent parenting or later in life from *exposure*, an important corollary to the idea of constitution during the Romantic period, which included going out in bad weather, courting the company of immoral society, leading a life of acute hardship, or, oppositely, indulging oneself with the luxuries of French fashion, rich food, and strong drink. Most forms of constitutional exposure could be categorized under the heading of intemperance, which had strong moral overtones for Romantic-era Britons, particularly for Scots as we will see in the case of Mary Brunton, who believed that their Calvinist self control was fundamental in preventing bodily indulgence and thus promoting constitutional balance and wellbeing.

Vigilance was critical, for when one's constitution was eroded or destroyed by exposure, it was widely regarded as beyond repair. In 1795 the *Gentleman's Magazine* provided this versified advice: "'Tis easier to deplete the loaded frame,/Than when exhausted, to recruit the same" (qtd. in Porter and Porter 34). And the morbidly obese Bath physician George Cheyne emphasized, as he well himself knew, that "[i]t is most certain that

‘tis easier to *preserve* Health, than to *recover* it; and to *prevent* Diseases, that to *cure* them”—certainly true in an era when, medical historians tend to agree, medicine was often as likely to make things worse as to make them better.<sup>25</sup> Romantic-era Britons thus lived with the perverse success of geohumoral thought: the white, cold, damp British constitution—resuscitated during the Renaissance and refigured as biomedically superior to other national bodies—had become an impossibly high standard that revealed to Britons their inevitable decline.

In the absence of alternative remedies for this decline, constitutional maintenance persisted in Romantic-period Britain as a grave matter of national importance: there was no end of tonics, pills, balms, and advice on repairing constitutions fallen ineluctably into ruin. Romantic-era Britons consumed diet books and health care manuals as readily as we do in the twenty-first century, and, propelled by the culture of sensibility’s emphasis on managing the body’s delicate sensitivities, they were among the first generations of Britons widely to participate in the commoditization of indoor comfort—an expectation across classes that, contrary to Locke’s recommendations, indoor spaces should be made distinct from the outside, the basis of Caroline Bingley and Louisa Hurst’s outrage in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) that Elizabeth Bennet has arrived at Netherfield with her petticoats “six inches deep in mud” (36). Albeit slowly and unevenly, the weather was becoming a matter of personal convenience that could be controlled within the domestic spaces of an increasingly urbanized Britain; it was no longer a ubiquitous set of conditions that, in the seventeenth century, had more fully circumscribed agricultural practices and the rhythms of daily life.

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<sup>25</sup> George Cheyne, *Essay on Health and Long Life* (London: Strahan and Leake, 1734), p. 2, Cheyne’s emphasis.

Thus, the maintenance of Britons' constitutions—and ultimately the maintenance of the British constitution—was a responsibility that fell primarily to women who worked in what feminist scholars have called the “separate sphere” of the British home. The anxieties attending domestic constitutional maintenance were nowhere more pronounced than in eighteenth-century debates about maternal nursing. Against earlier practices of hand-feeding infants and, for upper-class Britons, employing wet nurses, mid-eighteenth-century medical literatures had begun to extol the universal virtues of maternal nursing, particularly in preventing the fatal condition of “milk fever,” an infection of breast tissue caused by blocked milk ducts.<sup>26</sup> In his widely read *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery* (1752), Dr. William Smellie observed that women “of an healthy constitution, who suckle their own children, have good nipples, and whose milk comes freely, are seldom or never subject to this disorder; which is more incident in those who do not give suck.” (Qtd. in Kipp 39) More consequential was a developing belief that children took on the constitutional characteristics—“mental, physical, emotional, [and] racial”—of the women who breastfed them, making lower-class nurses a threat to aristocratic constitutions. Though these superstitions were largely dispelled by the turn of the nineteenth-century, some commentators (probably encouraged by the fact that urban wet nurses were linked in popular and medical discourses to syphilis transmission) still feared constitutional pollution by “corrupted” nurses. William Roscoe asked, for example, in *The Nurse, A Poem* (1798): “What secret taint, what dread contagion runs / Thro’ Britain’s noble but degenerate sons?” For Roscoe, the answer was evident:

‘Tis from his nurse your offspring draws disgrace,

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<sup>26</sup> Julie Kipp, *Romanticism, Maternity, and the Body Politic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 39.



And thence adulterates his generous race.  
'Till the kind father sees with wondering eyes  
A motley offspring round his table rise;  
Unlike the parent stock from whence they sprung  
And various as the breasts on which they hung. (Qtd. in Kipp 45)

In Roscoe's view, the degeneracy of Britain's nobility was owing to noblewomen's constitutionally irresponsible decision not to nurse their own children.

After a child was weaned, constitutional maintenance in the British home continued: in the preparation of meals; the cleaning, beautification, and organization of indoor space; and the readying of male and female constitutions by toilette and dress before they went out into the world to court marriage partners, which would determine the constitution of the next generation of Britons. To make these matters more complicated, Britain's marriage market had grown increasingly competitive during the period: the supply of eligible young men had been drastically diminished by colonial engagements and the ongoing war with France. (Jane Austen's own sister, Cassandra, faced spinsterhood and relative poverty following the overseas death of her fiancé, Tom Fowle, a chaplain in the British army.) Those titled young men who avoided military service often were faced with incomes eroded during the eighteenth century by the rise of a mercantile class, sheer mismanagement of their estates, and the eventual onset during the Regency of post-war inflation: to marry for money had become a common necessity for women and men alike. As Mrs. Bennet often attests loudly in *Pride and Prejudice*, the Regency-era domestic sphere, with its increasingly insufficient resources, was becoming absurdly unequal to the maintenance of British families through advantageous marriages—especially families from the landed gentry like the Bennets, who were constituted under primogeniture by daughters without birthright. Accordingly, this is how the narrator of *Pride and Prejudice* explains the Bennets' predicament:

When first Mr. Bennet had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless; for, of course, they were to have a son. This son was to join in cutting off the entail, as soon as he should be of age, and the widow and younger children would by that means be provided for. Five daughters successively entered the world; but yet the son was to come; and Mrs. Bennet, for many years after Lydia's birth, had been certain that he would. This event had at last been despaired of, but it was then too late to be saving. (308)

The brother-less Bennets' loss of their financial virtues on the marriage market is Austen's more pragmatic variation on eighteenth-century heroines of sensibility, whose degraded physiological constitutions likewise ruined them for marriage. To real Regency-era women in the precarious but common position of the Bennet sisters, financial decline—resulting from the arbitrary lack of a male sibling—was much more than fiction.

Thus Austen—and, in their different ways, Brunton and Shelley—located in the eighteenth-century novel of sensibility a generic scaffold on which to dramatize the contradictions inhering for women in the traditional notion of a British constitution. The first chapter of this study, “‘Unaffected Prose’: Constitutional Maintenance and Austen's Early Heroines” argues that, while Austen richly parodied in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* the novel of sensibility's treatments of female constitutions, she was also profoundly aware of the social liability posed to women whose constitutions had been ruined by the physical coercions of men either through venereal disease, extra-marital pregnancy, physical violence, or all three. Austen's solution to this problem in her early novels is something she calls “unaffected prose,” or the ability of heroines to steel their ways of speaking—their textual constitutions—against the deleterious discursive effects of social

and physiological exposure. Strong bodily and textual constitutions allow Austen's early heroines (particularly Elizabeth Bennet) to transcend Regency-era declinism through the comedic narrative of companionate marriage.

This study's second chapter, "Scottish Constitutions in Brunton's *Self-Control* and *Discipline*," considers how the Scottish novelist used the victim-rake dyad of the novel of sensibility as a metaphor for the constitutional relationship she observed between a feminized Scotland and masculine England, particularly in their imperial relationship in North America and in the pseudo-colonial conditions that persisted during the Regency in the Scottish Highlands. But for Brunton, like Austen, constitution is more than a metaphor: politicized English incursions into Scottish life persistently produce diseased and debilitated Scottish constitutions among Brunton's characters, suggesting that the alleged constitutional "union" between Scotland and England was much weaker in the early Regency than many English writers of the period were able or willing to acknowledge.

The third chapter of this dissertation, "'That Mixture of Character': Constitutional Instability in Austen's *Sanditon*" considers the profound ambivalence Austen finally brought to bear in 1817 on the comedic plotlines she had lately been perfecting in *Persuasion*. The deflation of feudal incomes by new market pressures and the post-Waterloo economic flatline make socially advantageous, companionate marriages a structural impossibility in Austen's *Sanditon*—a constitutional dead end for Britain's young women signaled by the fragment's utter lack of suitable husbands. The heroines Charlotte Heywood and Clara Brereton instead find themselves among a set of mercenary hypochondriacs who split time between taking the air at Sanditon, a fictional seaside resort, and reading sentimental novels from its lending library. The solipsism of these characters overruns the manuscript, thus

enacting Austen's harshest critique of the cult of sensibility and the literature it produced: too much moral sensitivity to badly written literature, like too much bodily sensitivity to the environment, makes real sympathy impossible and produces hypochondria, that pathetic condition in which narrative becomes completely unhinged from constitutional symptoms. Though *Sanditon* is unfinished, it remains Austen's clear assessment that excessive sensibility was a course of both narrative and national dissolution.

Finally, this study will consider the end of the British constitution as Mary Shelley envisioned it in *Frankenstein* (1818). With his deeply fragmented body that is composed of parts from inside and outside the human species, Shelley's Creature becomes British literature's first constitution-less being. Accordingly, he has no race, he has no class, he has no nation, and certainly he has no family worthy of the name. "He" may not even have a gender, as some feminist and queer theorists have argued. This constitution-less condition is produced, on Shelley's view, by Victor Frankenstein's highly irregular practice of medicine, which catastrophically leaves moral sympathy out of the doctor-patient relationship, turning the Creature into a monster. This marks a critical distinction between Shelley and Austen on the question of sensibility's social uses: Austen remains suspicious of sympathy's capacity to affect national cohesion and social progress. But Shelley insists that sympathetic discourse—like the kind she gives the Creature in the center-most narrative of *Frankenstein*—is not only necessary but the period's greatest innovation in promoting individual and national well-being, a position she dramatizes negatively when Victor Frankenstein's failed sympathy with the Creature results in domestic tragedy across households and the miscarriage of criminal justice in Britain and Switzerland.

Austen, Brunton, and Shelley are critical to this study because each wrote of a different but crucial aspect of Britain's Regency-era constitution. Austen examines in her novels the complex social and political challenges facing England's gentry; thus (and though it may be an oversimplification to say so) Austen stands in as this study's representative English author. Mary Shelley, also English, offers a more cosmopolitan view of British constitutions in her continental (and ultimately global) novel, *Frankenstein*, which she conceived while she was herself abroad in Europe. In order make claims about a "British" constitution, and not just an English one, the work of Mary Brunton provides a Scottish perspective on Britain, which reveals particular political fissures between Scotland and England that Austen and Shelley engage more peripherally: Austen in staging various elopements at the Scottish border; Shelley in Victor Frankenstein's brief visit to the Orkney Islands, where he plans to construct a female companion for the Creature.

Together, the Regency-era novels of Austen, Brunton, and Shelley comprise an early chapter of Britain's nineteenth-century auto-ethnography, which reassessed in fiction the meanings of the British constitution. Though they came to different conclusions about what ailed Britain, these three authors diverted attention from the popular Regency fear of a declining national constitution and redirected it toward inequities the British constitution, traditionally conceived, held for women (and, on Brunton's sometimes more comprehensive view, other disenfranchised groups like Highland Scots and African slaves). Most important, these women's fictive appraisals of British constitutions—bodily constitutions and the legal constitutions of British subjects under the marital, property, and criminal laws of the British Constitution—showed that, while British literature was not to become the province of "Unity entire" as Wordsworth had once hoped for poetry, the novel was suited by its comparative

unruliness to exploring why constitutional wholeness consistently eluded Britons. For as Austen, Brunton, and particularly Shelley momentarily suggest in their novels, the British constitution—that material necessity of Romantic-period life—might be nothing more (and certainly nothing less) than Britain’s greatest national fiction.

## CHAPTER I

### **“Unaffected Prose”<sup>27</sup>: Constitutional Maintenance and Austen’s Early Heroines**

In late July of 1809, Jane Austen wrote a poem to her brother, Frank, to celebrate the occasion of his oldest son’s birth. It begins:

My dearest Frank, I wish you joy  
Of Mary’s safety with a Boy,  
Whose birth has given little pain,  
Compared with that of Mary Jane.—  
May he a growing Blessing prove,  
And well deserve his Parents’ Love!—  
Endow’d with Art’s & Nature’s Good,  
Thy name possessing with thy Blood,  
In him, in all his ways, may we  
Another Francis William see!—  
Thy infant days may he inherit,  
Thy warmth, nay insolence of spirit;— (*Letters* 264-65)

Austen’s attention in these lines to her nephew’s inheritance of his father’s name, looks, and temperament signals at once her fondness of her brother, nostalgia for their childhood together, and confidence that certain physiological and psychological elements of the Austen family constitution—“Art’s & Nature’s,” “Blood,” “infant days,” “warmth,” and “insolence of spirit”—will be passed from father to son. The maintenance of the Austen family constitution in little Frank’s person is, in Austen’s poem, critical to his parents’ domestic happiness; this is made plain in the poem’s rather ungainly comparison of Frank’s blessed birth to the “pain” caused in 1807 by the arrival of Frank’s older sister, Mary Jane, whose

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<sup>27</sup> Jane Austen, *Jane Austen’s Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others*, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 266.

birth left their mother “so ill as to alarm [the family] extremely.”<sup>28</sup> Because sons who lived to adulthood were critical to the British system of inheritance under primogeniture, the birth of a healthy boy was an especially happy occasion, which would ensure the consolidation of family wealth, land, and power. More broadly, primogeniture was vital to the constitution of the British government as well; in his *Principles of Political Economy*, Thomas Malthus explains: “[t]here is reason to think that the British constitution could not be maintained without an aristocracy; and an effective aristocracy could not be maintained without the right of primogeniture.”<sup>29</sup> As J. A. Downie has written, the “aristocracy” of which Malthus writes included in Austen’s lifetime the landowning nobility—who were responsible for the maintenance of the British Constitution in the House of Lords—as well as the landed gentry.<sup>30</sup> Britain’s non-aristocratic classes also were structured under the same general principle of primogeniture: their fortunes were sometimes smaller, and titles and parliamentary representation were not at stake, but other familial assets—reputation, health, and wealth—always hung in the balance as one generation gave way to the next in the person of each family’s heir. As biographer Claire Tomalin explains: Jane Austen was thus “conventional enough” to acknowledge that her new nephew “mattered more” than his older sister to the maintenance of the Austen family’s constitution (214).

These conventional assumptions about familial constitution underwritten by the sexual politics of primogeniture are enacted in Austen’s poem by the heroic couplets, which rhyme “joy” with “boy” and “pain” with her niece’s (and own) name, “Jane.” In the poem’s

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<sup>28</sup> Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 203.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy* (London: W. Pickering, 1836), p. 582.

<sup>30</sup> J. A. Downie, “Who Says She’s a Bourgeois Writer? Reconsidering the Social and Political Contexts of Jane Austen’s Novels,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40, no. 1 (Fall 2006), pp. 69–84.



final stanza, however, Austen points up these contrivances of the verse form by comparing it to the prose of her sister's letter, now lost, which presumably was mailed with the poem.

Austen writes:

As for ourselves, we're very well;  
As unaffected prose will tell.—  
Cassandra's pen will paint our state,  
The many comforts that await  
Our Chawton home, how much we find  
Already in it, to our mind;  
And how convinced, that when complete  
It will all other Houses beat  
That ever have been made or mended,  
With rooms concise, or rooms distended. (*Letters* 266)

Cassandra's "unaffected prose," unlike Jane's poem, will "paint"—as only prose can, is the suggestion—how the two Austen sisters do in their new home at Chawton. Drawn more quietly here is a comparison between the noisy nursery of Frank and Mary's home and the quieter "comforts" of the Chawton house, where there was little expectation of a new generation of Austens: Cassandra's intended husband, Tom Fowle, had died of fever in St. Domingo twelve years earlier while serving as an army chaplain to a regiment deployed to fight the French in the West Indies; Tom Lefroy, Jane's only serious attachment so far as is known, had by then been married for 10 years to a Wexford heiress, with whom he had fathered seven children (Tomalin 108, 122). The newborn Francis William Austen represented, therefore, not only his parents' hope for the next generation of Austens, but his aunts' as well.

The inaugural crisis of Jane Austen's first two published novels, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, is the absence of a son and heir like the baby Frank in the Dashwood and Bennet families: the Bennet estate at Longbourn will be entailed away from the five Bennet daughters upon their father's death, and the three Dashwood sisters are left

essentially penniless when their father dies and their half-brother, John Dashwood, inherits the family estate at Norland. Each novel is tasked, therefore, with providing a narrative of how familial and class constitutions are maintained among female siblings without brothers. This chapter assesses how the politics of constitutional maintenance interact with genre in Austen's early novels, demonstrating that the resilient constitutions of Austen's heroines—registered textually as “unaffected prose”—resolve the constitutional dilemma of the missing boy.

## §

Though Jane Austen uses the word “constitution” only 24 times in her entire oeuvre, her narrators and characters very frequently make recourse to the idea, which encompassed for Austen an individual's physiological and psychological health as well as a family's financial security, collective moral strength, physical well-being, and social respectability: that is, constitution represented the political efficacy of both the individual and the family, which was transmitted to the next generation by—and thus absolutely dependent upon—the family's legal heir. The imperatives of constitutional maintenance facing the Austens and every other British family of the Romantic period were writ large in the highly publicized story of the Hanoverian monarchy, the British royals whose turbulent family affairs amounted precisely to national politics. While Jane Austen was revising *Sense and Sensibility* and rewriting *Pride and Prejudice* on the eve of the British Regency, the Hanovers were, as Kristin Flieger Samuelian observes, suffering under the convergence of two ongoing constitutional crises: namely, the “sexual and fiscal misconduct of [George IV,] the Prince of Wales,” and King George III's “bouts of dementia, the first of which occurred

without warning in 1788.”<sup>31</sup> Additionally, Caroline of Brunswick—who, in the absence of “a suitable alternative German princess” had been selected as George IV’s wife—had by this time been separated from her husband for more than a decade.<sup>32</sup> The Prince of Wales, who is said to have been in an advanced stage of inebriation at the royal wedding, and for most of the honeymoon, had been married secretly to the widow Maria Fitzherbert since 1795, an illegal union under the Royal Marriage Act, due to the bride’s Catholicism. George married Caroline legitimately—but merely as one of several conditions of his father’s helping him out of dire financial straits. Out of these unfortunate political circumstances, and mutual personal disgust, grew an intensifying rift between the royal husband and wife, and, in a will composed just before the 1796 birth of their only child, Princess Charlotte, George IV declared Mrs. Fitzherbert his only true wife, leaving “to her who is call’d the Princess of Wales” just one shilling (Smith, par. 4). Even at this somewhat early stage of the Hanoverian drama, therefore, Caroline and George IV’s faithless marriage raised serious questions about the stability of the royal family’s constitution and, consequently, their authority to govern.

The couple’s separation was official in 1796, with Caroline removing first to Carlton House, and then to a rented home near Blackheath. This removal, however, did not limit her social valences, and Caroline is reported to have hosted during this period political men including Pitt, Eldon, Charles Grey, Spencer Perceval, Sir Thomas Lawrence and George Canning, allegedly conducting affairs with both Lawrence and Canning. In 1800 she met Admiral Sir Sidney, with whom she is believed to have had a third affair. Through him she

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<sup>31</sup> Kristin Flieger Samuelian, *Royal Romances: Sex, Scandal, and Monarchy in Print, 1780-1821* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> E. A. Smith, “Caroline (1768–1821),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/article/4722> (accessed November 25, 2011), par. 1.

also was acquainted with Sir John and Lady Douglas, who would be her friends until a falling out in 1803, when Lady Douglas is supposed in 1802 to have been circulating rumors that Caroline secretly had borne a child outside of her marriage. Lady Douglas was probably lying, but public suspicion was aroused nevertheless by Caroline's tendency to "adopt stray children" including one William Austin, who "was reputed to be her natural child." (Smith, par. 5) In 1806, these allegations led to an official inquiry by the Crown known as the "delicate investigation," which was an effort to expose the details of Caroline's affairs and reported pregnancies so that George IV reasonably could divorce her before ascending the throne; Caroline's sympathizers responded with equally detailed accounts of the Regent's flagrant sexual misconduct. Lynn Hunt's observation of monarchical power in early modern and enlightenment France—that hereditary monarchies required the mutual reproductive "functioning" of the king's and queen's bodies—is why real or perceived infidelities of George IV and Caroline of Brunswick were so destructive to public faith in the familial constitution of the royals: without the joint fidelity of the future king and queen, Great Britain could not be assured a legitimate heir to its throne.<sup>33</sup>

The Hanovers' apparent constitutional frailties were further complicated in 1810 with King George III's renewed lapse into insanity, a private medical event that became fraught with public confusion. As Samuelian asks:

Was the King mad or simply ill? Was his condition permanent or an episode? Moreover, how was the dementia to be interpreted? Was it, in the language of contemporary medical discourse, the result of an overtaxed system—a stamp of kingship, perhaps, but to that extent treatable? Or was it rather hereditary

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<sup>33</sup> Lynn Hunt, *Eroticism and the Body Politic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 1.

lunacy, a family malady, equally significant of royalty but intractable? In either case, was it to be understood as transformative, occasioning an abrupt change of government during a period of increasing national and international upheaval? Or did it simply indicate a corrupt, vitiated or defunct system—a diseased body politic? (7)

Just as the reproductive bodies of the Regent and his wife directly affected the Hanoverian succession and the political stability of Great Britain, so did the constitutional health of the King become an indicator of national wellbeing. The King's recurred dementia also had weakened Caroline's position at court, as she always had enjoyed her uncle's favor; the queen, conversely, sided with her son. Caroline eventually would be excluded from court entirely, and it was only with great difficulty that she was able to visit her only daughter, Princess Charlotte. Later that year, Caroline left England for the continent, from whence reports of her intrigues were regularly dispatched to London by the Prince Regent's paid spies (Smith, pars. 6, 7). All of this was done with a forward eye to a divorce trial, which commenced in 1820, when, at the death of his father, George IV was crowned king and Caroline returned to London, where she intended to be crowned queen but was barred from entering Westminster Abbey for the coronation.

As this major constitutional upheaval dominated the national stage, Austen was exploring the maintenance of constitutions within a more local scope: "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village," as she wrote famously to her niece, Anna (*Letters* 401). In *Sense and Sensibility*, begun in 1797, we learn that Marianne Dashwood "has not [her sister] Elinor's constitution," according to their stepbrother, John—an observation which underwrites the novel's larger juxtaposition of the sisters' characters: Elinor is sensible, contemplative, and

guarded to the point of repression—and her discourse in the novel exemplifies the “unaffected prose” Austen wrote of to her brother. Marianne, on the other hand, “has not such good health as her sister,” “is very nervous,” maintains clear imaginative commitments to romance, and is consistently more affected than Elinor in her self-expression (237). A strong constitution, at least in John Dashwood’s view, is equivalent to the kind of self-possession that Elinor exercises for much of the novel and that Marianne sees, at least at first, as a deplorable form of insincerity. Fanny Dashwood, John Dashwood’s rapacious wife, also has a “good” constitution—one that permits her quick recovery from shocking news that her brother, Edward Ferrars, is engaged to the moneyless Lucy Steele instead of to “some Lord’s daughter,” who would have improved the Ferrars’s family constitution considerably (265, 258). Elinor’s strong constitution likewise enables her to bear this same news—that Edward, whom she loves, is betrothed to another—in dignified silence for four months. “I would not have you suffer on my account,” Elinor says to her constitutionally weaker sister, Marianne, in explanation of her secrecy: “I assure you,” she continues, “I no longer suffer materially myself.” (263) Elinor’s use of the word “materially” is telling here, for it suggests that both the psychological and somatic elements of her constitution have suffered, and that she did not wish to transfer this suffering to her sister, whose constitution is more susceptible to emotional turmoil and its physiological consequences. Elinor’s capacity to bear her suffering in silence frequently has been interpreted as a “masculine” quality of her character, a reading underwritten by gendered conceptions of the nerves advanced in the eighteenth century by leading exponents of Newton and Locke.

Elinor’s fear that she will transmit her pain to Marianne is grounded more broadly in the culture of sensibility’s intense preoccupation with physiological and psychic pain and the

possibility that human sympathy might transmit pain between bodies. “By the late eighteenth century,” Stephen Bruhm writes, “the physical had become one with the metaphysical in the medical body. What comes to be valorized by late eighteenth-century moralists as ‘sympathy,’ then, is physiologically based.”<sup>34</sup> Janis Caldwell clarifies this point:

[i]n the eighteenth century, as physical science gained authority, mechanical explanations were offered for sympathy, and a crude materialism began to stand in for the previously occult attributes of sympathy. [...] David Hartley in psychology used the rhetoric of “vibrations” and “impressions” to describe the communication of physical units of feeling. Tiny packets of information “impressed” themselves on the senses, and set up vibrations in the “aether,” a supposedly airy substance flowing through the nerves.<sup>35</sup>

Caldwell notes further that many of those who advocated a physiological view of sympathy also supported a belief in social sympathy, or “the literal transmission of sympathy from body to body” (31). For example, in *A Treatise of Human Nature* David Hume suggests that “a transition of passion” constitutes an act of moral sympathy (qtd. in Caldwell 32). And Robert Whytt, the eighteenth-century physician and staunch materialist, believed that moral feelings were as catching as disease:

[t]here is a remarkable sympathy, by means of the nerves, between the various parts of the body; and now it appears that there is a still more wonderful sympathy between the nervous system of different persons whence various

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<sup>34</sup> Steven Bruhm, *Gothic Bodies: the Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Janis Caldwell, *Literature and Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 31.

motions and morbid symptoms are often transferred, without any corporal contact. (Qtd. in Caldwell 32)

Adam Smith argued, however, in refutation of Hume's and Whytt's models of social sympathy, that fellow feeling was "not contagious," that the five senses were the sole source of physiological pain, and that imagination alone permitted humans to understand the pain of others (Caldwell 33). Austen consistently complicates these theories of sympathy in *Sense and Sensibility*: Elinor does not at first reveal the truth of Edward and Lucy's engagement because she knows that Marianne's sensibility has powers of pathologic proportion, which eventually do overthrow her constitutional health. Though Elinor later tells Marianne this information, we learn from Marianne that she never has exercised the sympathy Elinor believes her to possess: "But you," Marianne explains to Elinor, "—you above all [...] had been wronged by me. I, and only I, knew your heart and its sorrows; yet, to what did it influence me—not to any compassion that could benefit you or myself" (346). That is: Marianne's sensibility has no "benefit" to herself or others. This deep ambivalence about the social functions of sympathy is a powerful undercurrent in Austen's fiction, which, as we will see in this study's third chapter, became a foundational motif of her final fragment, *Sanditon*.

As we have previously observed, the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility found its clearest expression in a literature of sentimentality, commonly the novel: "[t]he novel was first in establishing 'sentimental fashion' [...] because 'the disconnection of its form from precedent [...] allowed it to explore most extravagantly the powers of a language of feeling'" (Mullan qtd. in Barker-Benfield xix). In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen adapts the novel's discourse yet again to juxtapose Marianne's sentimental "language of feeling" with Elinor's



“unaffected prose,” and the plot of the novel is constituted largely by the complex interactions of these two narrative modes with Elinor’s anti-sentimentalism (her “sense”) finally, though imperfectly, subsuming Marianne’s sentimentalism (her “sensibility”). As Marilyn Butler has written:

[w]riters of the 1790s [including the apprentice Jane Austen] looked back on their [sentimentalist] predecessors of the earlier generation, and saw subversion in work that in its day was at most mildly reformist. Even progressives in 1790 had their doubts about some of the disturbing implications of mid-century psychology [most famously, Wollstonecraft’s rejection of the eighteenth century’s gendered nervous system]. But by far the most numerous and influential of the attacks on sentiment came from the swelling ranks of political and religious orthodoxy. With some justice, and much exaggeration, the sentimentalists came to be read as moral relativists who threatened to undermine established religion and society. The anti-sentimental writing of Jane Austen has been taken as primarily a burlesque of a *style*; but essentially it was the absorption of the earlier movement.<sup>36</sup>

In *Sense and Sensibility*, for example, Austen absorbs the eighteenth-century sentimental tradition both by burlesquing it in Marianne’s character and acknowledging its power in Regency culture: Marianne’s sensibility, after all, has real consequences for her physiological constitution. In fact, Austen’s uncharacteristically serious treatment of Marianne’s illness is probably the clearest indicator in her early oeuvre that she could not simply parody the implications eighteenth-century psychology still held in Regency-era life.

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<sup>36</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 8, Butler’s emphasis.

While sense and sensibility are, in Austen's view, important regulators of individual constitutions, pride and prejudice maintain the corporate constitutions of family and class, chiefly through the institution of marriage. Acute social, financial, and psychological pressures attend corporate constitutional maintenance, as is demonstrated by the difficulties of Austen's heroines on the marriage market. These difficulties become perhaps most clear in *Pride and Prejudice* when Elizabeth Bennet, a member of the lesser gentry, aspires to marry Fitzwilliam Darcy, the richest man in Austen's oeuvre: "Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted," exclaims Darcy's wealthy aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, at this prospect (357). The obstacle Lady Catherine sees to a marriage between Elizabeth and her nephew is clarified by her belief that Darcy should instead marry her daughter, Anne: "My daughter and my nephew are formed for each other," Lady Catherine insists to Elizabeth, "[t]hey are descended, on the maternal side, from the same noble line; and, on the father's, from respectable, honourable, and ancient—though untitled—families. Their fortune on both sides is splendid." (356) In Lady Catherine's view, Elizabeth is an ineligible match for Darcy not because of her family's relative poverty, but because (especially since Lydia's scandalous elopement) the Bennets do not enjoy the constitutional purity represented by the Darcy and de Bourgh pedigrees, whose ancient Norman surnames, noble blood, and "honour" are augmented by enormous wealth. Lady Catherine's argument to Elizabeth is essentially Edmund Burke's from *Reflections Upon the Revolution in France* (1790). Both Burke and Lady de Bourgh (we should note Austen's echo of Burke's own Norman surname) situate property as the only material reality capable, in Pocock's phrase, of "spanning generations and permitting the living to succeed the dead in a real and natural order," thus preserving the ancient balance of the British constitution in which the de Bourgh and Darcy families enjoy a

mythologized “ancient” ethnicity—and the consolidation of wealth with the constitutional purity such an ethnicity represents (463).

*Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, like all of Austen’s major novels, are set at the end of one generational cycle and at the cusp of the next, when these mythologized ideals of class and familial constitutions are at their most unstable: nubile daughters enter the marriage market to be courted by eligible bachelors, often under the conflicting pressures of both families’ expectations. “For the landed families, the goal was to protect family estates against attrition through debts or taxation,” Mary Poovey explains. “For families of the middle classes, the immediate goal was to acquire land, and [...] establish the family name as ‘one of England’s first’” through the acquisition of a title.<sup>37</sup> As the eighteenth century wore on, the influx of wealthy tradesmen’s daughters into the marriage market drove up the price of husbands and decreased the value of marriageable women (Poovey 12-13). The difficult financial positions of Austen’s early heroines fall in line with this history: as members of the lesser gentry—neither the titled aristocracy nor the newly wealthy mercantile classes—they often are outmatched by men and outdone by other women on the marriage market. And yet, precisely these market pressures allow Austen’s heroines fuller knowledge of themselves. Elizabeth’s famous description of newfound self-understanding—“Till this moment I never knew myself”—is in fact her response to Darcy’s revelation of George Wickham’s past, which exposes Wickham’s “hatefully mercenary” attentions to the wealthy Miss King (208, 207). As J. A. Downie has observed, “much of the frisson of *Emma*,” is produced as well by the aristocratic heroine’s responses “to people like the Westons, the Eltons, the Coles, and

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<sup>37</sup> Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), pp. 11-12.

above all, decayed gentlewomen like Miss Bates and her niece, Jane Fairfax,” whose financial situations are similar to those of the Bennet and the Dashwood sisters (80).

These formative pressures of the marriage market, while advancing the characterological development of Austen’s heroines, also produce the major ruptures in the novels’ social fabric, like Lady Catherine’s high-handed objection to what she supposes is Elizabeth’s engagement to Darcy—ruptures that are figured as conflicts between individual, familial, and class constitutions. This discursive technique is made possible because Austen often signifies class in the novels not only by wealth but by health. Invalids like *Emma*’s Mr. Woodhouse and *Pride and Prejudice*’s “sickly and cross” heiress, Miss Anne de Bourgh, constitute Austen’s clutch of sensitive hypochondriacs, whose self-styled or rumored (but likely not actual) bad health is a product of their free time and rampant consumerism (158). Gerald Newman convincingly has argued that this upper-class malaise—a dubious effect of the culture of sensibility—was, in the late eighteenth century, seen not only as a blight to individual and family constitutions, but as the root cause of Britain’s national constitutional decline and attendant political turmoil.<sup>38</sup> Thus in Austen’s work only the very foolish are likely to provide sympathy for the overwrought sensibilities of hypochondriacs: “She is a most charming young lady, indeed,” Mr. Collins boasts to the Bennets of Anne de Bourgh. He continues:

Lady Catherine herself says that, in point of true beauty, Miss de Bourgh is far superior to the handsomest of her sex; because there is that in her features which marks the young woman of distinguished birth. She is unfortunately of

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<sup>38</sup> Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), pp. 63-122.

a sickly constitution, which has prevented her making that progress in many accomplishments which she could not otherwise have failed of. (67)

Anne's "sickly constitution," in Collins's ingratiating rhetoric, is subordinated to her noble "features," showing that, for him and his patroness, "distinguished birth," marked on the surface, is more important than the substance of health and "accomplishments." Austen of course rejects this view in *Pride and Prejudice* first by giving it to Mr. Collins and finally by awarding Darcy to the constitutionally healthy Elizabeth Bennet, who reads extensively, walks everywhere, and plays well at the pianoforte. Though George C. Grinnell recently has argued persuasively that hypochondria became a powerful Romantic-period rhetoric for understanding institutional pressures on the individual body, Austen tends to relegate this entire discourse to caricature.<sup>39</sup> Austen's letters to Cassandra about their mother's hypochondria parallel the novels' disdain for suspected malingerers: "My mother continues hearty, her appetite & nights are very good, but her Bowels are still not entirely settled, & she sometimes complains of an Asthma, a Dropsy, Water in her Chest & a Liver disorder." (*Letters* 39) In this litany we hear perhaps a subtle parody between sisters of their mother's complaints: as James Thompson observes, in her fiction as in life, "Austen it seems has no compassion for sickness that lacks symptoms."<sup>40</sup>

When Jane Austen glances in the novels "across the gulf," in Virginia Woolf's phrase, to the working classes, it is to note symptoms of their failing constitutions.<sup>41</sup> The very poor often become visible exclusively through their fevers, their coughs, and their

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<sup>39</sup> George C. Grinnell, *The Age of Hypochondria: Interpreting Romantic Health and Illness* (New York: Macmillan Palgrave, 2010), pp. 1-26.

<sup>40</sup> James Thompson, *Between Self and World: The Novels of Jane Austen* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), p. 124.

<sup>41</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, 1925-1928* (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), p. 561.

consumptions: Fanny Price's humbler beginnings in *Mansfield Park* register in the foul air of Portsmouth, where her unhealthy relatives live in squalid conditions; the poor become visible in *Emma* when Emma and Harriet venture outside Highbury to visit "sickness and poverty together" (86). The melodramatic tableau of Eliza Brandon and Eliza Williams in *Sense and Sensibility* equates constitutional decay with social decline. The unwell poor, like wealthy hypochondriacs, have in Austen very little chance of recovery, or of characterological development.

But between the very wealthy and the very poor in Austen's oeuvre there are a set of characters whose constitutional health is more variable, more egalitarian, and more involved in the novels' narrative development. It is from this group that Austen draws her heroines, whose individual constitutions are responsible for their recovery in times of illness as well as their social elevation in marriage. Accordingly, the major illness episodes of the early novels are initiated by social pressures, which attend a marriage market stilted by rank and wealth: Marianne's putrid fever in *Sense and Sensibility* is an effect of Willoughby's abandoning her for Miss Grey's £50,000, and Jane comes down with a bad cold in the opening chapters of *Pride and Prejudice* because her fortune-hunting mother sends her out in the rain to Netherfield, the home of Charles Bingley, in the hope that Jane will marry him, thereby gaining his £5,000 per annum. Even Harriet Smith's sore throat in *Emma* occasions her disappointment over Mr. Elton, though their mismatched social rank has yet to be exposed. That thwarted marriage prospects tend to produce illness highlights a clear relationship in Austen's fiction between constitutional health and social advancement.

As medical historians Vladimir Janković and Roy and Dorothy Porter have argued, late eighteenth-century understandings of health situated *exposure*—to bad air, to dampness,

to excessive warmth, to the weather outside—as the chief threat to individual constitutions. With the eighteenth-century invention of indoor comfort, and its aggressive commercialization, Britons became increasingly able to control their contact with the elements: “[e]ntrepreneurs responded by providing better sash windows, improved heating methods, and newly introduced ventilation. The general public gradually took to using umbrellas and rainproof garments.” (Janković 3) Letters between Jane and Cassandra Austen attest to the very normal, even mundane, practice of managing one’s contact with the out-of-doors: frequently dinner plans are rearranged and social engagements canceled because “the weather [was] too bad”; alternatively, favorable conditions encourage ventures beyond the home: “cloudy and perfectly cool” mornings, for example, make for “very pleasant” driving. (*Letters* 7) The necessity of constantly managing one’s exposure to all these disease-inducing conditions was underlined by the sheer commonness of poor health during the period: “Every body is ill,” Keats explained straightforwardly to his sister Fanny in 1820.<sup>42</sup>

Exposure, then, was the primary means by which one’s constitution could be destroyed. As Roy and Dorothy Porter note, “[a]ltitude, the lie of the land, exposure to winds, the composition and porosity of the soil, landscape features such as rivers, forests, lakes, and mountains, proximity to the sea—all these were believed to impinge on health, and thus critical when choosing a residence or travelling” (*In Sickness and in Health* 156). We can see, therefore, that Marianne is taking a great personal risk when she, in her dejection over Willoughby in the final volume of *Sense and Sensibility*, goes walking in those “most distant parts” of the woods around Cleveland, where “the grass was the longest and wettest.” (305-6) Austen’s contemporaries in fact believed that

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<sup>42</sup> John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821*, ed. Hyder Rollins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 252.

[t]racts of marshy ground were particularly to be avoided: Romney Marsh, the Thames flats, and the Fens were notorious for ague or marsh fever. Elevated land, by contrast, was seen as relatively healthy, away from the miasmas exuded by standing waters, and fanned by refreshing summer breezes. (Porter and Porter 156)

Austen, too, knew the necessity of constitutional maintenance: she reports to her sister Cassandra that the Austens' neighbor, Mrs. Lefroy, traveling in Bath, has called on the Mapletons, and found their son, Christian, "still in a very bad state of health, consumptive, and not likely to recover." (*Letters* 28) This attitude appears in the fiction as well. John Dashwood explains to Elinor that Marianne will never regain her youthful "bloom" after her constitution has been ruined by fever:

[a]t her time of life, any thing of an illness destroys the bloom for ever! Hers has been a very short one! She was as handsome a girl last September, as I ever saw; and as likely to attract the men. There was something in her style of beauty to please them particularly. I remember Fanny used to say that she would marry sooner and better than you did [...]. I question whether Marianne *now*, will marry a man worth more than five or six hundred a-year, at the utmost, and I am very much deceived if *you* do not do better. (227, Austen's emphasis)

Here, Marianne's decline is not merely the failure of her constitution; rather, her destroyed bloom at this critical "time of life"—that is, the intergenerational period while Marianne is seeking a husband—will cause her market value, in pounds, to plummet considerably. As John Mullan has argued, the "precariousness" of this intergenerational period is owing partly



to eighteenth-century medical understandings of menstruation, which in unmarried women signaled a “condition in the bodies of those for whom womanhood [did] not mean the life of the fertile, domesticated, married female,” but rather existence in a “palpitating, sensitized body [...] caught in the difficult area between childhood and marriage.”<sup>43</sup> This “difficult area” was fraught with private physiological dilemmas (mainly the possibility of unsanctioned pregnancy) and public market pressures. “John Dashwood’s direct calculations of Marianne and Elinor’s prospects (their exchange value in marriage)” operate, Thompson notes, according to “a principle of economic competition in a sexual marketplace” (26). The female British body thus enters the political economy, where its levels of physiological exposure—and thus, its constitution—produce its market value.

The concept of exposure also has critical social valences in Austen’s oeuvre. Frequently characters are said to have their feelings or understanding exposed publicly: Elinor Dashwood, for example, refuses to expose herself or Edward Ferrars to the distress of “Marianne’s mistaken warmth” before Marianne knows that Edward is engaged to Lucy Steele, and not to her sister (245). Darcy admits to Elizabeth during their verbal sparring at Netherfield that he has sought to avoid “those weaknesses that often expose a strong understanding [his strong understanding, that is] to ridicule.” (57) At the Netherfield ball, Mr. Collins approaches Darcy in conversation, and Elizabeth is “vexed” to see Collins “expose” himself in such a way that, through their family connection, exposes her as well to Darcy’s “unrestrained wonder.” (98) Who is able to expose whom in these scenes tells us a great deal about the social hierarchies produced by individual, class, and familial constitutions: Elinor is sensible enough to control her levels of exposure; similarly, Darcy is

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<sup>43</sup> John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 226, 228.

aware of his potential for exposure, and he studiously avoids all possibility of it; Elizabeth, bound as she is to Collins as his cousin, has no power to affect her own exposure in this instance, just as she is powerless to limit her family's exposure when Lydia elopes with Wickham. While individuals can exercise some control over their own constitutional exposure, Austen acknowledges that they nevertheless have little power over exposure effected by members of their families.

More often, however, the term "exposure" is used in the novels to connote the potentially compromising display in public of romantic attention; thus, it is a requisite social danger borne primarily but not exclusively by the women in Austen's novels as they enter the marriage market. Yet necessary as it is, exposure is strictly to be avoided: "Austen certainly does not recommend imprudent or premature display of affection," Thompson notes, "Marianne Dashwood's openness with Willoughby being the obvious case in point." (55) Mr. Bennet's famous last words to Elizabeth—before Lydia leaves for Brighton, from whence she scandalously will elope with Wickham—suggest both the peril and necessity of social exposure: "Lydia," explains Mr. Bennet with a note of doom he cannot hear, "will never be easy until she has exposed herself in some public place or other, and we can never expect her to do it with so little expense or inconvenience to her family as under the present circumstances." (230) Austen herself knew well the consequences of exposure. In the earliest of her surviving correspondence, composed in January of 1796, she wrote to Cassandra:

You scold me so much in the nice long letter which I have this moment received from you, that I am almost afraid to tell you how my Irish friend and I behaved. Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together. I *can* expose

myself, however, only *once more*, because he leaves the country soon after next Friday, on which day we *are* to have a dance at Ashe after all. He is very gentlemanlike, good-looking, pleasant young man, I assure you. But as to our having ever met, except at the three last balls, I cannot say much; for he is so excessively laughed at about me at Ashe, that he is ashamed of coming to Steventon, and ran away when we called on Mrs. Lefroy a few days ago.

(*Letters* 1-2, Austen's emphasis)

While it is difficult to gauge the tone of this private correspondence, we can say with some certainty that the giddy hyperbole of the passage's opening lines gives way to an embarrassed reserve at having overexposed herself, and Tom Lefroy, to the company at Manydown House, where she stood up to dance with him not once, the letter intimates, but three times. Of this same letter Claire Tomalin also notes Jane's "provocative" revelation to Cassandra in a subsequent passage that she and Tom Lefroy have discussed *Tom Jones* together, letting her sister know "just how free and even bold their conversation has been" (117). There is an open-ended but palpable kind of disappointment at the conclusion of the above quoted paragraph, however, for Jane and Tom have had only public meetings at the balls at Ashe; something like a threat of further exposure seems to have prompted Tom to flee the more intimate scrutiny of his aunt's drawing room in Steventon, and Austen never reports another significant interaction with him.

Lurking behind this peculiar threat of exposure in the mere sitting down and standing up with a dancing partner is the pariah of the fallen woman, whose lapse in sexual propriety and, normally, extramarital pregnancy represent an absolute social failure, which compromises individual, familial, and class constitutions. Mr. Collins's letter to Mr. Bennet,

for example, castigates Lydia for her disappearance, unmarried, into London with Wickham: “this false step in one daughter,” Collins writes, “will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others; for who, as Lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family?” (297) We have come to expect and discount this moralizing position from Collins, but the constitutional consequences of a misstep like Lydia’s are in fact very real: even with Darcy’s intervention—and his laying by of a considerable amount of money—Lydia is significantly distanced from her family following her elopement, the novel finally suggesting that she never will be fully recuperated to life at Longbourn.

The fallen woman is the antithesis to a figure Poovey famously has called “the Proper Lady.” By the end of the eighteenth century, the Proper Lady was a “comforting and salutary figure” whose “desires bent gracefully to her master’s will” (3). The Proper Lady was not, in Poovey’s view, merely an invention of male desire, but an ideal of female delicacy adopted by men and women alike: the early English feminist, Mary Astell, “proposed her female seminary,” Poovey explains, “in part to shelter heiresses ‘till a convenient Match be offer’d by her Friends [...] Modesty requiring that a Woman should not love before Marriage, but only make choice of one whom she can love hereafter.’” (Qtd. in Poovey 3-4) Here modesty requires not only the suppression of passion but the avoidance of exposure literally, through confinement.

Exposure was a critical social index during the period because, in a time when paternity was impossible to establish absolutely, female chastity was the sole guarantor of a constitutionally pure male line, as in the royal case of George IV and Caroline of Brunswick. Thus, female chastity also was essential—under the old Roman system of coverture and the

new system of capital—for the rightful consolidation of a man’s wealth and power, whether or not he was to be king:

[e]specially for Protestant members of the rising middle classes, property was a visible sign of a man’s inner worth. And, for everyone, property was the source of present income, the measure of social prestige, the basis of political power, and the legacy that carried a man’s name beyond his grave. (Poovey 5)

Malthus argued that these financial imperatives were underwritten by powerful psychic drives: “the desire to realize a fortune as a permanent provision for a family is perhaps the most general motive for the continued exertions of those whose incomes depend upon their own personal skill and efforts.” (471) Under these economic, cultural, and psychological pressures, wives who were unfaithful to their husbands posed a distinct “challenge” to the delicate web of familial, class, and national constitutions (Poovey 5). In *Émile*, Rousseau puts this fine point on the idea:

[c]an any position be more wretched than that of the unhappy father who, when he clasps his child to his breast, is haunted by the suspicion that this is the child of another, the badge of his own dishonour, a thief who is robbing his own children of their inheritance. Under such circumstances the family is little more than a group of secret enemies, armed against each other by a guilty woman.<sup>44</sup>

Johnson would put the matter more directly to Boswell: “[w]e hang a thief for stealing a sheep; but the unchastity of a woman transfers sheep, and farm, and all, from the right

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<sup>44</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (New York: Dutton/Everyman, 1974), pp. 324-25.

owner.”<sup>45</sup> In Malthus’s view, the maintenance of land among the aristocracy—which depended absolutely upon the chastity of women—was tied intimately to national constitutional maintenance: “[i]t is an historical truth which cannot for a moment be disputed,” he writes, vaguely echoing *Pride and Prejudice*’s famous opening sentence, “that the first formation, and subsequent preservation and improvement, of our present constitution, and of the liberties and privileges which have so long distinguished Englishmen, are mainly due to a landed aristocracy.” (437) Thus, female chastity—figured as Poovey’s Proper Lady—becomes critical to national systems of inheritance, and to the British constitution itself; the fallen woman becomes a public threat.

In Austen’s oeuvre, this threat is realized most explicitly in Colonel Brandon’s back story in *Sense and Sensibility* of Eliza Brandon and of her daughter, Eliza Williams, which he relates to Elinor in hope of lessening Marianne’s regret over Willoughby, following his cruel abandonment of her. The first Eliza is Brandon’s young love who, after their interrupted elopement, becomes the unhappy wife of Brandon’s older brother, takes up with another man, and finally divorces her husband, resorting at last, is the implication, to prostitution; as Brandon explains to Elinor: “I could not trace her beyond her first seducer, and there was every reason to fear that she had removed from him only to sink deeper in a life of sin.” (207) After Eliza Brandon dies of “a consumption” with Brandon attending at her bedside, Brandon adopts Eliza’s three-year-old daughter, Eliza Williams, as his ward (207).<sup>46</sup> But she, “the offspring of [her mother’s] first guilty connection,” also is doomed to a life of disgrace: on

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<sup>45</sup> James Boswell, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, ed. Allan Wendt (Boston: Houghton Mifflin/Riverside, 1965), p. 250.

<sup>46</sup> Marie McAllister has argued that this “consumption” is Austen’s euphemism for syphilis. While the medical diagnosis of fictional characters is technically problematic, McAllister’s assessment that constitutional decline springs from sexual impropriety is correct. Marie E. McAllister, ““Only to Sink Deeper”: Venereal Disease in *Sense and Sensibility*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 17.1 (2004), pp. 87-110.

holiday in Bath with a friend, Eliza meets and runs away with Willoughby, who later leaves her “in a situation of utmost distress, with no creditable home, no help, no friends, ignorant of his address!” (208, 209) While constitutional purity is heritable according to characters like Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Brandon’s story suggests that the variety of constitutional decline represented by the fallen woman is multigenerational as well.

These stories of female exposure—Eliza Brandon’s catastrophic marriage and her daughter’s affair with Willoughby and resulting pregnancy—often have been regarded by critics as “melodramatic, digressive, structurally problematic,” and interpreted variously as “an echo of *Clarissa*, as a doubling of the Marianne plot, as a lens through which to view Brandon or Marianne or Willoughby or Elinor or Edward (or Jane Austen herself),” as well as “a metaphor for death by venereal disease.” (McAllister 87-88) These readings can be consolidated by seeing the tableau of the two Elizas as Austen’s purposeful bracketing, or “absorbing,” to use Butler’s term, of the fallen woman narrative in order to replace it with a new form represented at large by *Sense and Sensibility* and, later, by *Pride and Prejudice*, in which constitutionally-sound heroines live beyond the end of the novel in spite of their own exposure—to the emotional pain of unrequited love and the social disgraces of disappointed marriage prospects. This absorption of clichéd eighteenth-century forms is a compositional method Austen had been practicing at least since 1789, when she began her critique of gothic novels in *Northanger Abbey*.

The fallen woman narrative abounded in the literature of sensibility before and during the period of Austen’s life. Most often, as we have noted, the fallen woman was—before her constitutional decline—a figure of “virtue in distress, the virtue a woman’s and the distress caused by a man” (Barker-Benfield xviii). These men were, like Austen’s John Willoughby

and George Wickham, “liars, cheats, frauds, hypocrites, rogues, and sadists”—figures of sexual violence against whom Mary Wollstonecraft had warned in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, where she denounced conceptions of human desire underwritten by women’s identification with the victim in the “victim/rake dyad” (Barker-Benfield 221). Samuel Richardson’s 1748 novel, *Clarissa*, represents the most popular and extensive treatment of this theme, in which the plot’s persistent action is Clarissa’s constitutional decline and ruin at the hands of Lovelace. Some cult of sensibility readers, like Anna Laetitia Barbauld, found Clarissa’s distress enjoyable—even inspiring. Writing in 1773, Barbauld explains:

[a]mid scenes of suffering which rend the heart, in poverty, in a prison, under the most shocking outrages, the grace and delicacy of her character never suffers [...]: [her] charm prevents her from receiving a stain from anything that happens; and Clarissa, abandoned, and undone, is the object not only of complacency, but veneration. (Qtd. in Barker-Benfield 339)

The important paradox of Barbauld’s formulation is that though Clarissa’s psychic and physiological distress—which includes being raped by Lovelace—“rend[s] the heart” of the reader, Clarissa’s “character never suffers.” Barbauld’s elision of Clarissa’s constitutional ruin is one that Austen would qualify in her representation of Marianne Dashwood, who, as we will see, makes only a limited physical and social recovery from her role as a heroine of sensibility.

Other examples of the fallen woman are plentiful: the anonymous 1732 novel, *Love à la Mode: or, the Amours of Florella and Phillis*, follows the spectacular decline of Phillis, who is forced into prostitution following her kidnapping and rape, finally dying of “a



Consumption”—but not before a deathbed speech in which she warns other young women of the perils of prostitution, which can lead only to “Ruine and Death.”<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Helme’s *The Farmer of Inglewood Forest*, originally published in 1796, was another popular novel featuring the degradation of Emma, a farmer’s daughter who, following her seduction by a profligate married man, becomes a prostitute, and later gives birth to the sickly daughter of one of her customers, “an emaciated debauchee”: “I began to find my health uncommonly disordered, as well as that of my child,” Emma relates, “and soon discovered that her pure blood was contaminated as well as my own, in consequence of the acquaintance I had so lately formed.”<sup>48</sup> As with Austen’s Elizas, a damaged constitution is passed from fallen mother to daughter; in Emma’s case, however, it is explicitly a blood-borne affliction, suggesting a materialist conflation of the moral with the physiological, one of the hallmarks of the cult of sensibility. In 1800 Emma’s story was republished with the superadded tale of Kitty Clark, who, according to the work’s lengthy title, “Left her Uncle’s House, and entered into a Licentious Course of gay Living with a Noble Lord: After whose Death she underwent a variety of Scenes; and at length died an object of the utmost Misery, and universal Detestation.”<sup>49</sup> Like the gothic novel, overwrought material like this was, for Austen, an invitation to travesty.

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<sup>47</sup> *Love à la Mode: or, the Amours of Florella and Phillis* (London: J. Roberts, 1732), p. 56.

<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Helme, *The Farmer of Inglewood Forest; Or, an Affecting Portrait of Virtue and Vice* (London: G. Virtue, 1825), p. 417.

<sup>49</sup> *The history of Emma [...] To which is added the life of the abandoned Kitty Clark [...]* (London: S. Fisher and T. Hurst, 1800) *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. Univ Of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. 16 Nov. 2011

<<http://find.galegroup.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&contentSet=ECCOArticles&type=multipage&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&docId=CW3311572751&source=gale&userGroupName=uncbrcr&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>>.

In response to this invitation Austen produced a measured narrative mode that burlesqued the cult of sensibility while acknowledging the power of its cultural currency. As Colonel Brandon tells Elinor the overblown story of the two Elizas in *Sense and Sensibility*, he is made noticeably uncomfortable by its clichés and melodrama, as well as the strange role these discursive modes are suddenly playing in his formerly decorous relationship with the Dashwoods: “[y]ou will find me a very awkward narrator,” he confesses to Elinor at the outset. But he also has no other available genre in which to tell the Elizas’s stories: “I hardly know where to begin,” he adds, and so the narrative commences (204). After Brandon narrates a potboiler series of events to Elinor’s uncharacteristically stagy gasps and exclamations, he concludes his tale of woe with nothing less than a duel between himself and Willoughby: “Eliza had confessed to me, though most reluctantly, the name of her lover; and when he returned to town [...] we met by appointment; he to defend, I to punish his conduct. We returned unwounded, and the meeting, therefore, never got abroad.” (211) Austen is just barely taking Brandon seriously here, and even Elinor sighs “over [his] fancied necessity of this.” (211) Placed suggestively at the very end of Brandon’s story, Austen’s ambiguous “this” comes to signify both the duel and the entire sensational tableau. The real necessity of Brandon’s narrative digression, however, is that it allows Austen to, in the remaining pages of *Sense and Sensibility*, draw Marianne as a revision to the fallen woman represented by the two Elizas. That Austen intends Marianne as a programmatic variation on this theme is signaled subtly at the beginning of the novel when “a false step” (41) on wet grass causes Marianne literally to fall down a hill, where she meets Willoughby for the first time. “False step” is the phrase both Mary Bennet and Mr. Collins will use in *Pride and Prejudice* to

describe Lydia's scandalous elopement with Wickham, which initiates her fallen condition (289, 297).

Austen poses Marianne even more overtly as a revision of the Romantic figure of Crazy Jane, the Anglo-Irish stereotype of the jilted woman pining unto death for love that Wordsworth explored with the figure of Martha Ray in "The Thorn" and that Yeats would immortalize a little more than century later in his poetry. For the Romantics, Crazy Jane—sometimes adapted as Crazy Kate or Crazy Ann—was closely related to the figure of "virtue in distress" and, according to Elaine Showalter, the "most popular of the wronged Romantic madwomen."<sup>50</sup> Originally a gothic character developed by Matthew "Monk" Lewis in a 1793 ballad, she is "a poor servant girl who, abandoned by her lover or bereft of him through death, goes mad as a result" (Showalter 11). Around 1800, an anonymous tune called "The Birth of Crazy Jane" and a number of variations on it appeared in London, detailing the springtime birth of a beautiful girl, Jane, who comes of age in grace and beauty until the autumn of her life when new sexual knowledge occasions a "true fondness unrequited" and her "faithful passion slighted," which ultimately drives the "hapless" heroine to "frenzy."<sup>51</sup>

Though Crazy Jane almost never represents the acute sexual impropriety of the fallen woman and its direct threat to the British constitution, her symptoms suggest a "sexual identity" consistent with what Eve Sedgwick famously has called "the masturbating girl," an eighteenth-century female figure who exhibits symptoms of autoeroticism. In 1758, Samuel

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<sup>50</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago Press, 1987), p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> "The Birth of Crazy Jane" (London: J. Davenport, 1800?) *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 17 Nov. 2011.  
<<http://find.galegroup.com/libproxy.lib.unc.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&contentSet=ECCOArticles&type=multipage&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&docId=CB3330636403&source=gale&userGroupName=uncbrcr&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>>.

Tissot describes these symptoms as “the impairment of memory and the senses,” “inability to confine the attention,” and “an air of distraction, embarrassment and stupidity.”<sup>52</sup> Crazy Jane’s sexual “frenzy,” madness, and consequent wandering also situate her distinctly outside of familial, class, and national constitutions—and sometimes even as a woman apart from herself. Doomed to isolation and grief, exposure is her chronic condition, and, like the autoerotic described by Tissot, Crazy Jane becomes, in Eve Sedgwick’s phrase, a figure of “amnesia, repetition or the repetition-compulsion, and ahistorical or history-rupturing rhetorics of sublimity” (820).

The Oxford English Dictionary’s first two senses of onanism are important to clarifying the relationship among Marianne Dashwood, Sedgwick’s “masturbating girl,” and the British constitution: the first definition is masturbation and the second is *coitus interruptus*, both stemming from Onan’s non-reproductive sexual act in the Old Testament, which, in its failure of levirate marriage obligations, disrupts the constitution of the tribes of Judah.<sup>53</sup> Sedgwick’s argument about autoeroticism in *Sense and Sensibility* is important, but onanism’s latter definition also is consistent with Crazy Jane’s (and Marianne Dashwood’s) sexual dilemma, for it denotes the discontinuation of a sexual—or potentially sexual—relationship. Crazy Jane’s sexual interruption, like Onan’s, means total separation from the tribe: Romantic artists Thomas Barker, George Shephard, and Richard Dadd thus painted Crazy Jane alone, exposed to the weather on an inhospitable British landscape with her hair and dress in varying degrees of disarray. Most tellingly, George Shephard’s 1815 painting

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<sup>52</sup> Qtd. in Eve Sedgwick, “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Summer, 1991), p. 827.

<sup>53</sup> “onanism, n.” OED Online. June 2012. Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/131311?redirectedFrom=onanism> (accessed August 14, 2012).

situates a Crazy Jane figure, “Crazy Kate,” overlooking the ocean, sitting precariously at the nation’s edge, gazing longingly out to sea to that which is not Britain.<sup>54</sup>

Signaling the popularity of this myth, spin-off literary works about the death and haunting of Crazy Jane would follow Lewis’s ballad, perhaps most famously in Sarah



Wilkinson’s 1813 chapbook *The Tragical History of Miss Jane Arnold, Commonly Called Crazy Jane, and Mr. Henry Perceval, Giving an Account of Their Birth, Parentage, Courtship, and Melancholy End, Founded on Facts*, in which Jane pines melodramatically, and at length, for her lost love: “[s]he would

sing the most plaintive airs, and converse with those who addressed her about her lover. She would dress her head with willow straw, and wild flowers, disposed in a fanciful style; and this seemed to be the only amusement that soothed her mind.” (Qtd. in Showalter 13) Clearly Austen places Marianne in this role the day after her parting with Willoughby; the details are so exact, they are worth quoting fully:

[Marianne] was awake the whole night, and she wept the greatest part of it. She got up with a headache, was unable to talk, and unwilling to take any nourishment; giving pain every moment to her mother and sisters, and forbidding all attempt at consolation from either. [...] When breakfast was over she walked out by herself, and wandered about the village of Allenham,

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<sup>54</sup> Image from Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 13.

indulging the recollection of past enjoyment, and crying over the present reverse for the chief of the morning. The evening passed off in the equal indulgence of feeling. She played over every favourite song that she had been used to play to Willoughby, every air in which their voices had been oftenest joined [...]. She spent whole hours at the piano-forte, alternatively singing and crying; her voice often totally suspended by her tears. (83)

Marianne, like Crazy Jane, is a direct descendent of Shakespeare's lovesick and deranged Ophelia, who often appeared on the Romantic stage with twigs and straw in her hair, suggesting her exposure to the elements and, therefore, an explicitly public form of melancholy, in which only the out-of-doors—the moors, fields, cliffs, and beaches—are large enough to contain the despondent heroine's grief (Showalter 11). It is perhaps not by accident that the actress Kate Winslet has played both Ophelia and Marianne Dashwood in our own time.<sup>55</sup>

Like the fallen woman and Crazy Jane, Marianne's physiological and social exposure always are yoked: her twisted ankle occasions her introduction to the libertine Willoughby; his final betrayal, which breaks Marianne's heart and momentarily forecloses her prospects of social advancement through marriage, leads to the fever that almost kills her. The clearest instance of Marianne's social exposure, however, comes at a London party, where the Dashwood sisters meet Willoughby after a long period of his silence to Marianne.

Willoughby, recently disinherited of the estate at Combe Magna by his cousin, Mrs. Smith,

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<sup>55</sup> Director Kenneth Branagh's decision to use hydrotherapy on Winslet's Ophelia in his 1996 production of *Hamlet* is consistent with the institutionalized disciplinary measures taken against autoerotics in the nineteenth century. As Sedgwick argues vis-à-vis Michel Foucault and Ed Cohen, these were: "mechanisms of school discipline and surveillance" for boys and the "emergence of gynecology," the "demand for genital surgery," "such identities as that of the hysteric," and "confession-inducing disciplinary discourses as psychoanalysis" for girls (825).

for his liaison with Eliza Williams, and at the party with his wealthy new fiancée, Miss Grey, “evidently struggl[es] for composure” when Marianne finally approaches him. As Willoughby oscillates between poise and alarm, Marianne indulges her characteristic “wildest anxiety,” finally turning “dreadfully white” until she sinks into a chair (177). Marianne’s social exposure, in this case to Willoughby, produces a quick physiological decline. As John Wiltshire notes, Marianne “reacts with the characteristic bodily intensity which abolishes awareness of others, recklessly displaying herself as a woman, rather than conducting herself as a lady.”<sup>56</sup> With an eye to the genres in which Austen is working here, we also should say that Marianne recklessly is displaying herself in this scene as the mythologized figure of Crazy Jane, rather than conducting herself as Poovey’s emotionally reserved, unexposed Proper Lady.

Elinor’s role in this episode is markedly less visible. As critics often have observed, Elinor’s point of view is, throughout the novel, nearly as omniscient as the narrator’s; in this scene, she performs the same action as the narrator, watching Willoughby’s “expression becoming more tranquil” just as the narrator, a paragraph later, will observe how “his complexion changed, and all his embarrassment returned.” (177) Elinor remains calm through the whole of the episode, and though she expects “every moment to see [Marianne] faint,” she endeavors to “screen” Marianne “from the observation of others, while reviving her with lavender water.” (177) Here, limiting Marianne’s exposure to the crowd—especially to Willoughby and his fiancée—is coextensive with her medical revival, and both tasks fall upon the constitutionally sound, narratively authoritative Elinor. When Marianne insists on speaking further with Willoughby in front of the party’s crowd, Elinor answers her without

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<sup>56</sup> John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 35.

flourish: “No my dearest Marianne, you must wait. This is not a place for explanations.”

(177) Here, Austen situates Elinor’s “unaffected prose” as a crucial way to limit Marianne’s social exposure and manage her constitutional health.

This scene also represents the implosion of the Dashwoods’ expectations that Willoughby and Marianne will marry and stabilize the family constitution, significantly disrupted by the death of the girls’ twice-married father, who, in bequeathing his estate to John Dashwood, the son of his first marriage, cannot provide lawfully for the children of his second. John, instead, is tasked by his dying father with providing for his half-sisters’ comfort—but when John moves to do this with a gift of £3,000, his mercenary wife, Fanny, argues that to do so would “impoverish” their little boy “to the most dreadful degree,” particularly considering that the Miss Dashwoods “were related to him only by half blood, which she considered as no relationship at all.” (8) Fanny Dashwood’s math reveals a strictly hereditary understanding of familial constitutions, not unlike Lady Catherine de Bourgh’s, which does not admit “half blood” siblings. Like his father before him, John Dashwood understands that the absence of a male heir is itself a kind of constitutional exposure of the first order—but he hasn’t the moral, or rhetorical, wherewithal to contravene his wife and protect the constitutional interests of his half-sisters. He does, however, spend much of the novel encouraging others, particularly Elinor, to manage her family’s (and by extension, his family’s) reputation and finances—elements critical to their collective constitution.

Elinor’s role as caretaker of the Dashwood family constitution is reified in the episode of Marianne’s dire illness in the novel’s third volume. Having further indulged the role of Crazy Jane in her despondent walks through the grounds of Cleveland, “especially in the most distant parts of them, where there was something more of wildness than in the rest,”



(305-6) Marianne contracts what eventually is pronounced a putrid fever by Mr. Harris, the physician who is called to her bedside. When the doctor breathes word that Marianne's fever may be infectious, the Palmers leave Cleveland immediately with their infant son (a proper protection of their own family's constitution), and Elinor is left, with Mrs. Jennings and Colonel Brandon, as Marianne's constant nurse, and the director of the entire household. As Marianne's illness progresses, Mr. Harris at first predicts her improvement, declaring "his patient materially better. Her pulse was much stronger, and every symptom more favorable than on the preceding visit." (310) While Elinor cheerfully accepts the diagnosis, however, Mrs. Jennings and Colonel Brandon remain convinced that Marianne is living out the mythology of Crazy Jane: the lovesick Brandon, perhaps more melodramatic even than Marianne, cannot "expel from his mind the persuasion that he should see [her] no more." (309-10) Just paragraphs later, the positivist medical narrative is overthrown as Marianne slips precariously toward the genre Mrs. Jennings and Colonel Brandon expect themselves to be populating: "Marianne, suddenly awakened by some accidental noise in the house, started hastily up, and, with feverish wildness, cried out,—'Is mamma coming?'" (310-11) Marianne's delirium finally rouses even Elinor's belief that this is indeed the tragedy of Crazy Jane, and she dispatches Colonel Brandon to Barton to collect Mrs. Dashwood, picturing her mother's grief at the loss of her middle daughter. Strangely, even Austen's narrator seems caught by these scenes in a moment of uncharacteristic earnestness, observing (as Poe would famously) the tragic nature of "the early death of a girl so young, so lovely as Marianne." (313) This is not the constitutionally-sound, "unaffected prose," which we have come to rely upon from Elinor and the narrator.

It is finally Marianne's body, her physiological constitution, that brings the novel out of the melodrama into which characters and narrator alike have fallen: "[a]bout noon, however, [Elinor] began [...] to fancy, to hope she could perceive a slight amendment in her sister's pulse. [...] Half an hour passed away, and the favourable symptoms yet blessed her. Others even arose to confirm it. Her breath, her skin, her lips, all flattered Elinor with signs of amendment." (314) Just as Elizabeth Helme's fallen woman, Emma, sees her sexual impropriety written in the contamination of her own and her daughter's blood, the resiliency of Marianne's constitution is, in Keats's phrase to John Hamilton Reynolds, proven upon her pulse. It is highly unusual for Austen to focus this way on the activity of Marianne's heart, as Charlotte Brontë famously elaborated in a letter to W. S. Williams:

[Austen's] business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands, and feet; what sees deeply, what speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study, but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of Life and the sentient target of death – *this* Miss Austen ignores.<sup>57</sup>

And yet it is the unexpected resiliency of Marianne's material constitution—that "unseen seat of Life and sentient target of death"—that provides the fully embodied circumstance under which Austen rewrites the myth of Crazy Jane mythology and the lurid tale of the fallen woman.

Quite unlike these two stock figures of sentimental literature, Marianne recovers from her illness to marry Colonel Brandon and live in an emotionally stable way past the end of the novel, reconstituted as a daughter to Mrs. Dashwood and a sister to Elinor and Margaret;

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<sup>57</sup> *The Brontës: Their Friendships, Lives and Correspondence*, eds. T. J. Wike and J. A. Symington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 99, Brontë's emphasis.

rather remarkably, Marianne's social reputation, Mary Waldron notes, is not permanently damaged by her connection with Willoughby.<sup>58</sup> Marianne thus will help to compose the larger social circles surrounding Colonel Brandon's estate, taking on the role of Delaford's benevolent mistress. But the Brandons' marriage is, as Waldron explains, not without complication, for in addition to living with the legacy of past romantic connections, the Brandons also will have to take care of Eliza and Willoughby's illegitimate child, a fully embodied reminder of Marianne's and Brandon's heartbreak. As Waldron explains, this is the

harsh outer world of "sense" where romantic love has no legitimacy, where feminine "softness" and vulnerability are exploited, where bastards do not conveniently die, where deathbeds are sordid and ugly, where idle young men take their sanctioned pleasures without responsibility, and where, above all, virtuous and compassionate men like Brandon may make the wrong decisions in their efforts at damage limitation and fail to prevent disasters. (80)

As for Willoughby—the cruel jilter, disappeared lover, and wicked libertine (usually a dead or missing person called Henry in the Crazy Jane myth)—he will pour himself full of porter and reappear in the middle of the night to deliver to Elinor a full explanation of his crimes. This, Austen's reproof of Willoughby, is set in a sentimentalist discourse that has become embarrassingly conscious of itself: during his speech to Elinor, Willoughby regularly acknowledges how pathetic is his own recourse to the clichés of sensibility, noting his idiom's insufficiency even to the standards of Marianne, who has not been known for her reserved verbiage:

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<sup>58</sup> Mary Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 83.

[m]y feelings were very, very painful. Every line [of Marianne's correspondence], every word, was—in the hackneyed metaphor which [Marianne] [...] would forbid—a dagger to my heart. To know that Marianne was in town was, in the same language, a thunderbolt. Thunderbolts and daggers! (325)

Willoughby is made here to account for his shortcomings as a man and a narrator, Austen's clearest rejection of the moral relativism of the language of sensibility. As Sedgwick writes: "the empathetic allo-identifications that were supposed to guarantee the sociable nature of sensibility could not finally be distinguished from an epistemological solipsism, a somatics of trembling self-absorption" (820). And yet, with the complexity that is a hallmark of Austen's fiction, Elinor is unable to denounce Willoughby's egomania completely.

At first, Elinor rejects Willoughby's moral relativism by skillfully dismantling the fallen woman narrative Willoughby seeks to tell of Eliza Williams. When he begins to urge that part of the fault was Eliza's "passions" and lack of "understanding," Elinor reminds him that Eliza's constitution—"any weakness, any natural defect of understanding on her side"—cannot excuse his behavior, suggesting that though Elinor strives always to command her own constitution with sense, she does not hold this as a moral standard for others; rather, Willoughby's selfish advances are, in Elinor's view, solely responsible for Eliza's decline (322). Thus is Willoughby—rake to Eliza's fallen woman and jilter to Marianne's Crazy Jane—restored to the text, where he is exposed as the morally relativist engine of these two stock plots that, before *Sense and Sensibility*, would have assigned Marianne to insanity on the fringes of society or a moralizing descent into the grave. Willoughby's final saccharine assertion—that he had in his misery "seen Marianne's sweet face as white as death," an

apparition like the haunting Crazy Jane—falls so falsely that Elinor does not even gesture toward a response (327).

The significant lack of generic precedent for Willoughby's reappearance in the novel accounts, I believe, for the strange "croud of ideas" Elinor feels following Willoughby's departure: she "dread[s]" the "performance" of his story to Marianne so much that she "wishe[s] Willoughby a widower," free to participate with Marianne in a romantic plot of forgiveness, followed by traditional procreative and dynastic narratives within the comedic structure of marriage (333, 335). Elinor's ongoing musings about a possible reconciliation between her sister and Willoughby—and her strange, eroticized "pang" for him—suggest how difficult it is for Elinor to accept the reality of male exposure, which is the logical outcome of her anti-sentimentalist moral position (339). Though Marianne's recovery and Willoughby's reappearance go a long way toward reworking the mythologies of Crazy Jane and the fallen woman, Elinor's inability fully to embrace *Sense and Sensibility's* generically new outcome suggests how difficult—or perhaps impossible—it was for Austen's early anti-sentimental novel fully to absorb the old sentimentalist forms.

Like Willoughby, Marianne, too, is made to account for the constitutionally precarious role she has played in her own melodrama. Following her recovery, she categorizes her previous behavior as "self-destruction" and Willoughby's conduct as "acting a part." Rhetorically, she asks: "What, in a situation like mine, but a most shamefully unguarded affection could expose me to——," her long pause suggesting the fate of Eliza Williams; her own narrowly-avoided death; and of course her bitter heartbreak. In a process normally categorized under the rubric of discipline, Marianne also revises her stance on romantic affection and its public demonstration, promising herself to a monastic regimen of

exercise and “serious study” as soon as she is further recovered. As for her remembrance of Willoughby, “it shall be regulated,” she vows, “it shall be checked by religion, by reason, by constant employment.” (345-47) Having taken such a risk with Willoughby, Marianne commits herself to the strictest kind of constitutional maintenance.

This regimen, and her marriage to the older, rheumatic Colonel Brandon, has been called a punitive end for Marianne: “it is common,” Thompson notes, “to find muted expressions of disappointment at what happens to Marianne, disappointment that she has to be penalized with Colonel Brandon, chastised under a policy of reduced expectations” (150). Waldron, however, argues that *Sense and Sensibility* nevertheless unites Marianne to “the nearest approach to a romantic figure among the men” of the novel (82). It is largely Austen’s point to leave this matter unsettled: though Marianne’s constitution has enabled her to survive Willoughby’s jilting and her own excessive sensibility, and though she has married a man worth far more than John Dashwood’s low estimation, her character cannot be fully recuperated from its exposure, and she faces a long series of reversals:

Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favourite maxims. She was born to overcome an affection formed so late in life as at seventeen, and with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship, voluntarily to give her hand to another!—and THAT other, a man who had suffered no less than herself under the event of a former attachment, whom, two years before, she had considered too old to be married,—and who still sought the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat! (378)

The ambivalent tone here is important, not to mention somewhat unaccountable, given what we noted earlier as the narrator's genuine concern for Marianne at the most acute moments of her illness. It may be that Marianne's recovery and marriage finally suggested to Austen merely a trifling counterpoint to what was a real and tragic change in the Austen family constitution. As Austen began revising the epistolary novel *Elinor and Marianne* into *Sense and Sensibility* in November of 1797, the Austens still were reeling from the death of Cassandra's intended husband, Tom Fowle, of which they had received news in May of that year. "But," Tomalin postulates, "there was no screaming in agony or refusing to eat; religion, reason and constant employment were Cassandra's resource. 'Jane says that her sister behaves with a degree of resolution & propriety which no common mind could evince in so trying a situation,' wrote [their cousin] Eliza to a friend." (126-27) Though biographical readings are limited, it seems possible that Austen saw in her beloved sister, who suffered grief quietly, a real and appealing alternative to the Crazy Jane mythology.

More broadly, while she acknowledges in *Sense and Sensibility* the real power of the cult of sensibility, Austen's ambivalent final treatment of Marianne defuses that sentimentalism in two critical ways. The first is Austen's subtle erasure of a sexual double standard. Willoughby and Brandon suffer in the novel just as much as Marianne and certainly much more than Elinor—and so Austen implicitly insists, against the eighteenth-century gendering of perception, that women do not necessarily suffer more from the ravages of their nervous constitutions. Some may object to this, citing the fact that only Marianne becomes actually sick; but, in the context Austen provides, Colonel Brandon's rheumatism also is the long-lasting effect of his relationship with Eliza Williams just as Willoughby's drunkenness and derangement are direct outcomes of his real regret over Marianne. Second, and most

important, Austen demonstrates that the psychic and physiological suffering showcased in eighteenth-century literature of sensibility is infinitesimally close to the hard realities of life produced by the constitutionally precarious world of the British Regency. Ultimately, Austen handles the eighteenth-century sentimentalist mode in *Sense and Sensibility* by demonstrating its critical but ultimately very small differences from lived life. Those very small differences inhere primarily in the highly individuated textual constitutions—by which I mean the ultimately un-formulaic characters—of Elinor and Marianne.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, however, Austen largely avoids the hard realities of a constitutionally vulnerable heroine like Marianne Dashwood, producing what Austen herself called in an 1813 letter to Cassandra the “playfulness and epigrammatism” of the novel’s “general style” (*Letters* 300). By further reworking the stock characters of the fallen woman and Crazy Jane, Austen raises the constitutionally sound heroine as an absolute hedge against a familial constitution exposed by the lack of a male heir. The ascendancy of the constitutionally sound individual, realized imperfectly in the Dashwood sisters, is accomplished absolutely in Jane Bennet and her younger sister, Elizabeth, who are not just revisions but Austen’s clearest anti-types to the passive Crazy Jane and the pathologic fallen woman.

Austen invokes the constitutional implications of the Crazy Jane myth comically, or at least unseriously, in the first volume of *Pride and Prejudice* as Jane Bennet falls ill when her fortune-hunting mother sends her out in the rain to Netherfield, the home of Jane’s suitor, Charles Bingley. Mrs. Bennet’s ridiculous hope—very like a bad sentimental plotline—is that a coming rainstorm will prolong Jane’s stay and give her time to secure Bingley’s affections. Jane has been invited to Netherfield, however, not by Bingley, but by his sisters,



Louisa and Caroline, who are determined to convince Jane during her visit that her family's constitution—"such a father and mother, and such low connections"—disqualifies her from marrying their brother (36). As Downie reminds us, the Bingley sisters are apt to forget their own constitutional problem, "that their brother's fortune and their own had been acquired by trade"; the Bennet sisters—as daughters of a gentleman—ought to be relatively unobjectionable by the Bingleys' alleged measure (Downie 72; *Pride and Prejudice* 15). But as we will see, only wealthy aristocrats with family ties to the nobility—Fitzwilliam and Georgiana Darcy—will do for Caroline and Louisa's plan for their family's social elevation.

Jane's simultaneous exposure to bad weather and the Bingley sisters' designs lead overnight to her illness, and in the morning she writes to Elizabeth that she is "very unwell." (31) But, in a reversal of the London ball in *Sense and Sensibility*, the tableau is designed not to underline Jane's overwrought sensibilities and fragile constitution, but to confound the wishes of Mrs. Bennet and the Bingley sisters: Jane's illness requires that she spend six nights at Netherfield—but her headache and sore throat prevent her from seeing Bingley at all; Elizabeth's visit to her sick sister, however, goes a long way toward convincing Bingley and Darcy alike that they have met their matches in the Bennet sisters, with or without the constitutional purity their snobbish relatives seem to require.

In the episode of Jane's illness, the critical elements of the Crazy Jane narrative—exposure, disappointment, illness, and estrangement—are recast as a parody. Jane dispassionately attributes her illness to "getting wet through," and straightforwardly reports to Elizabeth in a short letter that "excepting a sore-throat and headache, there is not much the matter with me." (31) Upon hearing this news, Mr. Bennet provokes his wife with a sarcastic allusion to Crazy Jane, teasing: "if your daughter should have a dangerous fit of illness, if she

should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley, and under your orders.” Ignoring sentimental plotlines that frequently carried away characters on much less, Mrs. Bennet retorts: “people do not die of little trifling colds.” (31) And rather than wandering the moors or surveying the edge of the ocean in unkempt dress and tousled hair, rather than exhibiting the autoerotic tendencies of confusion and stupidity, Jane Bennet convalesces comfortably in the company of her sister in an upstairs bedroom at Netherfield—the estate of which she will one day be mistress. In short: Crazy Jane, in *Pride and Prejudice*, stays home at the manor.

These family homes and the land surrounding them, the most visible form of real property in Austen’s novels, are crucial in *Pride and Prejudice* to her representation of competing constitutional interests—a point of comedy when we are treated to Mr. Collins’s absurdly high-flown assessments of staircases, windows, chimney pieces, and closets. In more serious moments, the Bingley sisters extrapolate Jane’s unsuitability to marry their brother partly from the Cheapside locations of her relatives’ London homes. An even more startling threat to Caroline Bingley’s interests lies in Darcy’s notice of Elizabeth Bennet during her nurse’s errand to Netherfield, as Caroline plans to unite the Bingley and Darcy families—through her own marriage to Darcy, her brother’s marriage to Georgiana, or both. Nothing less than Darcy’s great estate at Pemberley is at stake here:

“Charles,” [Caroline says,] when you build *your* house, I wish it may be half as delightful as Pemberley.”

“I wish it may.”

“But I would really advise you to make your purchase in that neighbourhood, and take Pemberley for a kind of model. There is not a finer county in England than Derbyshire.”

“With all my heart: I will buy Pemberley itself, if Darcy will sell it.”

“I am talking of possibilities, Charles.”

“Upon my word, Caroline, I should think it more possible to get Pemberley by purchase than by imitation.” (38, Austen’s emphasis)

Caroline’s advice about purchasing in Darcy’s “neighbourhood” is a thinly veiled indication of whom she thinks her brother ought to marry, her figure of speech underwritten by the connection women often represented to land during the period and the political authority this land invested in its (male) proprietor. Georgiana Darcy’s dowry of £30,000 easily would provide for the maintenance of a second estate in Derbyshire, close to the estate of her brother, where the Bingleys would be joined to the Darcys geographically and politically as stewards of the Derbyshire countryside and the local body politic. Thus, the “possibilities” Caroline speaks of here are not “purchase” or “imitation,” as her dissembling brother suggests, but a share of the Darcy family’s civic power and influence—a tantalizing political prospect for Caroline to which the Bennet sisters each pose a threat.

Pemberley represents, to Caroline Bingley as to Lady Catherine de Bourgh, the breeding, gentility, and wealth of the Darcy family. More generally, Pemberley is—in the novel, and in contemporary fetishism surrounding *Pride and Prejudice*—the English manor *par excellence*, standing for the undiluted constitution of an ancient English clan. Together, the home and surrounding estate embody the sum total of the Darcy family’s political and dynastic ambition; even its library “has been the work of many generations.” (38) The Darcy

line itself is enshrined in the estate's gallery, where Darcy's portrait hangs among other family likenesses. "Do let the portraits of your uncle and aunt Phillips be placed in the gallery at Pemberley," Caroline Bingley says to Darcy, joking that Elizabeth's working-class relatives, the attorney Phillips and his wife, will one day be Darcy's, too. "Put them next to your great-uncle the judge," she continues, with a sneer: "[t]hey are in the same profession, you know, only in different lines." (52-53) In Caroline Bingley's view, like Lady Catherine's, the specter of class transcendence threatens not just the mythic constitutional purity of the Darcy line, but the distinguished role the Darcy family has played in the highest levels of British jurisprudence and, thus, in the maintenance of the national Constitution.

In opposition to Pemberley Austen sets darkest London, a clear example of what Gerald Newman has identified as the Romantic-period relocation of Englishness from the capital to the surrounding countryside. Although the city fleetingly is represented in *Pride and Prejudice* as a place of learning and high society (it is, after all, the home of Georgiana Darcy as well as the Darcy-Bingley refuge from the country), its commercial districts in Cheapside, where the Gardiners live, are acknowledged—by the Bennets themselves and many of the novel's other families—as one of the darkest marks on the Bennet family's constitution. This is how Elizabeth assesses the likelihood that Bingley will visit Jane at the Gardiners' London home:

*that* is quite impossible; for [Bingley] is now in the custody of his friend, and Mr. Darcy would no more suffer him to call on Jane in such a part of London. [...] Mr. Darcy may perhaps have *heard* of such a place as Gracechurch Street, but he would hardly think a month's ablution enough to cleanse him

from its impurities, were he once to enter it; and depend upon it, Mr. Bingley never stirs without him. (141, Austen's emphasis)

The "impurities" Elizabeth ironizes here are the same as her supposed constitutional "inferiority," which Darcy raises to her during his first disastrous proposal (189). This language of dirt and cleanliness suggests how material (and how like his Aunt de Bourgh's) are Darcy's objections to the Bennet family constitution—and how thoroughly Elizabeth understands, and is offended, by these objections. In spite of her mocking tone, Elizabeth's anger betrays her own internalization of the social hierarchies the Darcys and Bingleys presume, and underlines her understanding of how the spatial and social politics of the city support the maintenance of the aristocracy's constitution, though it is consolidated elsewhere in what Raymond Williams has identified as the "neo-pastoral" of "the country-house, and its estate."<sup>59</sup>

Just as the Crazy Jane narrative is marginalized in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane's relatively unserious illness at Netherfield, the fallen woman narrative is effectively neutralized in the novel by Austen's setting it both in London, and, in the figure of Georgiana Darcy, inside the sacrosanct halls of Pemberley itself—for George Wickham, the facsimile of John Willoughby, has eloped not only with Lydia Bennet, but, in symmetry with the Elizas of *Sense and Sensibility*, with Georgiana Darcy as well. As a daughter of aristocratic privilege, "[r]egard" for Georgiana's "credit and feelings" prevent "any public exposure" of her elopement, and all information concerning it—apart from Darcy's revelation of these circumstances in his letter to Elizabeth—is kept a secret within the family: Darcy, Georgiana, and their cousin, Colonel Fitzwilliam, are among the few characters who know the full

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<sup>59</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 22.

story—and the political leverage represented by the Darcy family keeps Wickham, and his accomplice Mrs. Younge, silent as well (202).

Notably, the Bennet family's less powerful constitution is not as capable of containing the news of Lydia's similar false step. Upon reading a letter from Jane detailing Lydia's elopement, Elizabeth surprisingly reveals all to Darcy, explaining that her sister's actions "cannot be concealed from anyone" (277). As we have observed earlier, Lady Catherine visits Elizabeth on the basis of having heard the news, and a letter from Mr. Collins to Mr. Bennet details his happiness that "Lydia's sad business has been so well hushed up," but admits concern "that their living together before the marriage took place should be so generally known" (363). If the busybody Collins knows, Austen implies, the matter has not been, nor will it ever be, "hushed up," and Austen's narrator finally confirms that "in spite of her youth and her manners, [Lydia] retained all the claims to reputation which her marriage had given her" (387). The reluctance of Mr. Bennet (and Elizabeth and Jane) to receive her and Wickham at Longbourn, as well as Lydia's nearly full removal from the novel to the north in Newcastle, suggest that Lydia and Wickham widely have come to represent the most dubious element of the Bennet family constitution.

However, this doubling of the fallen woman narrative in the Darcy and Bennet families is precisely how Austen situates the individual, represented by the constitutionally sound Elizabeth, above the political imperatives of familial and class constitution inherent in an estate like Pemberley. That his own respectable sister was once nearly seduced by a libertine produces Darcy's quiet but powerful recognition that sentimental plotlines come often very close to realism. In turn, he cannot simply dismiss the Bennets' plight as he might a lowbrow fiction. Instead, he feels real sympathy with Elizabeth when Lydia runs away with

Wickham—even though Elizabeth fully expects that Darcy will see the elopement as “proof of the [Bennet] family weakness”—that is, that Lydia, and the Bennets by extension are as Mr. Collins puts it “naturally bad” (278, 297). Though Darcy’s first unsuccessful proposal cites Elizabeth’s family as the chief obstacle to their union, his second proposal reveals that he no longer considers her as merely an extension of the Bennets. When Elizabeth thanks him on her family’s behalf for the critical role he has played in arranging Lydia’s marriage, he pointedly replies: “your *family* owe me nothing. Much as I respect them, I believe I thought only of *you*” (366). Here, Austen italicizes precisely the terms of familial and individual constitutions, respectively, highlighting Darcy’s subordination of the tribe to Elizabeth in a clear reversal of Lady Catherine’s aristocratic ideology of Pemberley, which would preserve the purity of the clan before all else. The Bennets, consequently, fade for Darcy into a kind of normalized respectability, as is evinced by his second proposal to Elizabeth, his encouragement of Bingley to propose to Jane, and his happy reception of the Cheapside Gardiners at Pemberley: “Darcy,” the narrator affirms in the novel’s final sentence, “really loved them” (388). Thus, Elizabeth emerges out of her family’s corporate identity—as well as from a long lineage of eighteenth-century heroines—as something entirely different. “I must confess I think [Elizabeth] as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, and how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like *her* at least, I do not know,” Austen would write in an 1813 letter to Cassandra, her italics setting Elizabeth apart from all her other heroines to date (*Letters* 76).

## §

Though we have been focusing on the medical and social meanings of constitution in Austen’s early work, it is worthwhile to broaden our view again to the national stage on the

eve of the British Regency, when the mythology of the fallen woman was alive and well in the figure of Caroline of Brunswick, though she was next in line to be Britain's queen. Accordingly, Caroline's every individual interest was absolutely subordinated to the constitutional politics of the royal family: even her efforts to visit their daughter, Charlotte, with whom she is known to have had a close relationship, were characterized by George IV as Caroline's effort to "create discord or confusion in the Family" (Smith, par. 7). After the Regency arrangement had taken effect, competing accounts of the royal marriage were propagated freely in London as politicians jostled for position in the reconstituted Hanoverian monarchy: the Regent's supporters within Tory leadership sought to expose Caroline as an adulterous queen—that most treasonous variety of fallen woman—and the Whigs were at pains to paint the Regent as the sole adulterous party, an unfeeling betrayer of Caroline's innocence, and a cruel suppressor of Princess Charlotte's interests. Charlotte Bury, novelist, diarist, and lady-in-waiting to Caroline, straightforwardly assessed the situation in January of 1813:

[t]here are in the newspapers, daily, long histories written with intention to inflame the public with an idea of [Caroline's] wrongs, and, above all, to make it clear that Princess Charlotte could reign to-morrow, if any circumstance was to unfit her father for so doing. This is the great point with the party out of office, and which men of ambition want to establish, in order to raise themselves.<sup>60</sup>

When George IV finally ascended the throne upon his father's death in 1820, legally making Caroline the Queen Consort, the King demanded his cabinet to introduce in the House of

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<sup>60</sup> Charlotte Bury qtd. in Stephen Behrendt, *Royal Mourning and Regency Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1997), p. 10.



Lords a bill that would strip Caroline of her title and rights, and end their marriage through an act of Parliament (Smith, par. 11).

As Linda Colley notes, Caroline's "trial," as it became known, in the House of Lords was a grave matter: "[u]nder a fourteenth-century law which had never been repealed, adultery on the part of the queen consort was accounted treason; and some arch royalists suggested that Caroline might pay for her transgressions with her life" (271). Though the trial never got that far, Caroline's potential fate nevertheless demonstrated that

[o]nly in the bleakest way possible was a woman's freedom of political action in Great Britain formally acknowledged. [...] A female Briton could be punished for plotting against the state, but – in law – she could never play the part of an active patriot within it. (Colley 243-44)

The legal encumbrances upon women Colley identifies here square very clearly with national mythologies of the marginalized fallen woman and wandering Crazy Jane: as feminist critics and historians long have recognized, women could be daughters, wives, and mothers—the legal property of their fathers and husbands within the British constitution; otherwise they became traitors to the state, traitors to their husbands (which amounted to the same thing), or madwomen.

However, as Colley further notes, "the law [...] is rarely an adequate reflector of social realities," and women certainly found ways to participate, however quietly, in the political valences of their worlds, and this is the Regency life—lived somewhere between absolutes—which Austen sought to represent in her early fiction (244). *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* were poised, therefore, to make new, more complicated claims for a woman's role in the British constitution at a time when even a queen could be exposed as a

fallen woman in the popular imagination. Perhaps especially in the Princess of Wales's highly polarizing case, Austen was intent to see complexities: "I suppose all the World is sitting in Judgement [sic] upon the Princess of Wales's Letter" she wrote to Martha Lloyd in 1813, in reference to a letter ostensibly written by Caroline but probably composed by Caroline's attorney, Henry Brougham, which was intended to make Caroline's case to the Regent and highlight his mistreatment of her (Samuelian 94-94). "Poor woman," Austen continued, "I shall support her as long as I can, because she *is* a Woman, & because I hate her Husband—but I can hardly forgive her for calling herself 'attached & affectionate' to a Man whom she must detest" (*Letters* 504, Austen's emphasis). While Brougham's letter, in Samuelian's view, "sentimentalizes" the Princess's plight, and while pro-Regent media had a stake in labeling Caroline a fallen woman, Austen remains more comfortable standing in "support" of a woman she can, for other reasons, "hardly forgive" (95). Austen's rather caustic "I suppose all the World is sitting in Judgement," suggests her real dissatisfaction with political, legal, and social processes that would aim in a letter to expose the Princess of Wales—and with her the British constitution—to the sentimentalist absolutes of public judgment.

## §

While an index of individual and familial constitutions, exposure functions in Austen's novels as an important structuring principle as well, which is best understood in the terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic theory of the novel. "The novel as a whole," Bakhtin famously writes, "is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in voice," encompassing direct narration; free indirect discourse; quoted epistolary forms; authorial commentary on

philosophy, science, or history; and the quoted speech of the characters.<sup>61</sup> In Bakhtin's view, "the novel as a genre consists precisely in the combination of these subordinated, yet still relatively autonomous, [elements] (even at times comprised of different languages), into the higher unity of the work as a whole: the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles; the language of a novel is the system of its 'languages'" (484). In the current argument, for example, Austen highlights and subordinates by turns the popular forms of Crazy Jane and the fallen woman; thus are the voices of Austen's characters, gossip about their social interactions, their letters to one another, and the free indirect discourse of the narrator highlighted and subordinated serially over the course of the novel. The formal result is that, at every moment, some discourse or other is being exposed at the level of the text, and so the dialogic structure of the novel not only frequently narrates but always enacts the concept of constitutional exposure. Austen is suspicious and often disdainful in her novels of highly public forms of textual exposure—the gossip of Mr. Collins comes to mind—which, like the "Princess of Wales's Letter" open up characters unfairly to the "Judgement" of "all the World." And yet, Austen also frequently accomplishes a more intimate form of exposure in which the interactions between important character dyads expose Austen's chief actors to themselves: Elinor's sense and Marianne's sensibility constitute probably the clearest example of this effect, with the possible exception of Elizabeth's pride and Darcy's prejudice or Anne Elliott's persuasion and Captain Wentworth's—well—persuasion.

The last and most important of this chapter's claims is that textual exposure maintains a critical physiological dimension in Austen's novels, suggesting that, for her, "constitution" was ultimately not a metaphor, but a body living a real life in the world of things. Marianne's

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<sup>61</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1900-2000*, ed. Dorothy Hale (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 484.

self-knowledge of her moral failure to sympathize with Elinor, for example, is intimately tied up in her physiological recovery from fever: “Long before I was enough recovered to talk,” Marianne relates to Elinor, “I was perfectly able to reflect. I considered the past: I saw in my own behaviour, since the beginning of our acquaintance with [Willoughby] last autumn, nothing but a series of imprudence towards myself, and want of kindness to others.” (345) Marianne’s acknowledged imprudent exposure of herself and others, Sedgwick argues, is figured in *Sense and Sensibility* as a lack of will: “the particular muscle on which ‘will’ is modeled in this novel is a sphincter, which, when properly toned, defines an internal space of private identity by holding some kinds of material inside, even while guarding against the admission of others” (831). Though the “will” is more properly understood historically as the activity of a material nervous system rather than that of a muscle, Sedgwick is right to underline the physiological foundations Austen imagines for Marianne’s social and textual exposure.<sup>62</sup>

Elizabeth Bennet’s maintenance of her constitution is an important counterpoint to Marianne’s—so successful, in fact, that it represents in Austen’s oeuvre a kind of ideal form, this example of which is worth quoting fully:

Miss Darcy, on her brother’s entrance, exerted herself much more to talk, and Elizabeth saw that he was anxious for his sister and herself to get acquainted [...]. Miss Bingley saw all this likewise; and, in the imprudence of anger, took the first opportunity of saying, with sneering civility:

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<sup>62</sup> Understanding the will historically is, as Sedgwick explains, largely beside her argument. Disclaiming “a new-historicizing point that you can’t understand *Sense and Sensibility* without entering into the alterity of a bygone masturbation phobia,” Sedgwick focuses instead on “how destructively twentieth-century readings [of Austen] are already shaped by the discourse of masturbation and its sequelae: *more* destructively than the novel is, even though onanism per se, and the phobia against it, are living issues in the novel as they no longer are today.” (836)

“Pray, Miss Eliza, are not the ——shire Militia removed from Meryton? They must be a great loss to *your* family.”

In Darcy’s presence she dared not mention Wickham’s name; but Elizabeth instantly comprehended that he was uppermost in her thoughts; and the various recollections connected with him gave her a moment’s distress; but exerting herself vigorously to repel the ill-natured attack, she presently answered the question in a tolerably detached tone. While she spoke, an involuntary glance showed her Darcy, with a heightened complexion, earnestly looking at her, and his sister overcome with confusion, and unable to lift up her eyes. (269, Austen’s emphasis)

Caroline Bingley’s veiled reference to George Wickham here exposes Elizabeth to Darcy’s notice, but hardly in the way she anticipates. Caroline’s “*your* family” is intended to emphasize Elizabeth’s membership in the Bennet clan, as well as their collective low connections in Meryton and elsewhere, which make her an ineligible match for Darcy. But because Caroline also accidentally touches the nerve of Georgiana’s past with Wickham (a past of which Caroline is ignorant<sup>63</sup>), she is doing more here to impugn the constitution of the Darcys than to sully that of the Bennets, an effect registered physiologically in Darcy’s altered complexion and Georgiana’s downcast eyes. Public exposure, Austen suggests in Caroline’s miscalculation, always carries with it a certain amount of unpredictable discursive slippage into other constitutions. Elizabeth’s response to this—no quoted speech, merely a nondescript “collected behavior” and “tolerably detached tone”—fixes Darcy’s thoughts on

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<sup>63</sup> “Not a syllable had ever reached her of Miss Darcy’s meditated elopement.” (269-70)

her “more and more cheerfully.” (270) Elizabeth’s ultimate appeal here—to Darcy and to us readers—is her capacity to be entirely unexposed at just the right moments—so thoroughly constituted within herself by “unaffected prose” that not even the narrator intervenes.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> In this scene, Elizabeth becomes a figure for what D. A. Miller has called Austen’s “Style.” “Austen’s work,” Miller explains, “most fundamentally consists in *dematerializing* the voice that speaks it.” D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen: Or, the Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 6-7.

## CHAPTER II

### Scottish Constitutions in Brunton's *Self-Control* and *Discipline*

When Queen Charlotte, the wife of King George III, died in 1818, she left to her children an extensive library, which included Jane Austen's posthumous publications, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* (both published in December of 1817 under an 1818 imprint); the latter named Austen as its author and included a correct list of her completed novels. The Queen's librarian and the Christie's cataloguer (and possibly the Queen herself) also had wrongly attributed to Austen two other novels: the formidably titled *Self-Control* (1811) and *Discipline* (1814), which were the first two publications of the Scottish novelist, Mary Brunton. As H. J. Jackson has written, this "is an intriguing error. It must signal the presence of qualities [in Brunton's work] that contemporaries associated with Austen."<sup>65</sup> But similarities were not Austen's concern; she was more worried about being surpassed by a superior literary talent. While she was in London in April of 1811, overseeing the publication of *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen wrote to Cassandra uneasily of Brunton's first novel: "We have tried to get Self-controul, but in vain.—I should like to know what her Estimate is—but am always half afraid of finding a clever novel *too clever*—& of finding my own story and my own people all forestalled" (*Letters* 278, Austen's emphasis). Although Austen would revise her concern about Brunton's cleverness after reading *Self-Control*, this early letter to Cassandra reveals Austen in a bind over Brunton's rise to fame on Britain's literary scene:

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<sup>65</sup> H. J. Jackson, "Raising the Unread," *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 5375 (July 4, 2006), p. 14.

anxious that a comparison to Brunton will show the deficiencies of her own plots and characters, she nevertheless wishes to measure her work against the accomplishment of one of her most popular Scottish contemporaries.

Austen was not the only English author of the period to compare herself to her northern compatriots. Writing in 1815 to R. P. Gillies, William Wordsworth lamented the “insupportable slovenliness and neglect of syntax and grammar, by which James Hogg’s writings are disfigured.” While such offenses are “excusable in [Hogg] from his education,” Wordsworth continues, “Walter Scott knows, and ought to do, better.” Finally, Wordsworth determines that “[t]hey neither of them write a language which has any pretention to be called English.”<sup>66</sup> Wordsworth’s assessment, Ian Duncan argues, “cuts across distinct if overlapping conceptions of [...] British Romantic literature: as a *market*, in which Scottish writing enjoys a notable success, and as a *canon*, from which it must be purged – on the grounds of a national deficiency, a linguistic unfitness ‘to be called English.’”<sup>67</sup> This “national deficiency” and “linguistic unfitness” appear because Hogg and Scott are set against a standard of Englishness—not a more expansive Britishness established by the 1706 and 1707 Acts of Union, which had constituted the Kingdom of England and the Kingdom of Scotland as Great Britain: a single state with a single Parliament under a single monarch.

The tendency for “British” to be synonymous with “English” and for Scotland and Wales to be elided from Great Britain’s national constitution is not exclusive to Wordsworth: “the English and the foreign,” Colley notes, “are still inclined today to refer to the island of Great Britain as ‘England,’” and to think of Scotland, when they think of it, as something

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<sup>66</sup> *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 8 vols., III, *The Middle Years, Part 2: 1812-1820*, eds. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 196-7.

<sup>67</sup> Ian Duncan, “Introduction,” *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, eds. Ian Duncan, Leith Davis, and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 1.



altogether different, something altogether elsewhere (131). This peculiarity of Britain's national constitution—an imperfect synecdoche in which an unrepresentative part stands in for the whole—has had considerable endurance in the British and American academies as well: “British Romanticism is English,” Duncan observes, “from Blake and *Lyrical Ballads* in the 1790s to Keats, Shelley, and Byron”; and “Scotland, neither English nor foreign, stands for an inauthentic Romanticism, defined by a mystified – purely ideological – commitment to history and folklore” (1). A case of Duncan's point is Wordsworth's well-known poem, “The Solitary Reaper” (1803), in which an English speaker fancifully construes the song of a lone Highland woman whose Gaelic he does not understand. Traveling to Oxford from London in 1815, however, Brunton made this comparison: “[h]arvest does not seem the same cheerful season here as with us [in Scotland]! No bands of reapers! [...] In a fine field of wheat, *one* man was cutting at one corner, and *one* woman at another!”<sup>68</sup> Brunton's reference to the solitary English reapers is not strange; her journals are filled with similar observations of the English landscape and its inhabitants—but, especially given the points of her emphasis, one wonders if she had in mind Wordsworth's poem and sought to demystify the Romantic English record of Scotland's harvest.

This view of Scotland as a Romantic theme park of tartans and misty glens—the kitschy vacation spot of the Wordsworths, J. M. W. Turner, and Queen Victoria and lately the setting of Walt Disney's 2012 animated film, *Brave*—is not simply the product of imperial eyes. Many modern Scottish commentators agree that Scotland became “self-divided” in the aftermath of the 1707 Union. Described in 1919 as “the Caledonian antisgyzy” by G. Gregory Smith, Scottish self-division was in this early assessment

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<sup>68</sup> Mary Brunton, *Emmeline: With Some Other Pieces*, ed. Alexander Brunton (Edinburgh: Manners and Miller, 1819), p. 141, Brunton's emphasis.

characterized as a generic split between realism and fantasy in Scottish literary and historical traditions. In more recent interpretations of postcolonial scholars, Scottish self-division is geo-culturally contingent: the Lowland intelligentsia of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and St. Andrews are alienated by their progress from a more conservative and oftentimes backward Highland fringe, whose lives—characterized by economic hardship, political repression, and disease—were similar to those of British colonial subjects (Duncan 2). As in the Irish postcolonial struggle against the English, scholars often have interpreted English programs of “economic improvement” in Scotland as a form of political and cultural imperialism.<sup>69</sup>

Many of Scotland’s internal divisions—which owed to the nation’s problematic constitution within Britain—were embodied in Mary Brunton’s family life. Her maternal and paternal grandfathers fought on opposite sides in the Hanoverian army’s repression of the Jacobites in the 1740s: while her mother’s father, Francis Ligonier, died shortly after Falkirk, probably of pleurisy contracted earlier in The ‘Forty-Five, William Balfour lived to know his grandchild, Mary, who was seven years old when he died.<sup>70</sup> Brunton’s religious life in the Church of Scotland, particularly her marriage to Church of Scotland minister Alexander Brunton, raises another important ambiguity of Scotland’s constitution within Great Britain. Though recognized by the British state as the true Scottish church in the 1707 Act of Union, the Church of Scotland did not recognize the supremacy of the British monarchy or enjoy Parliamentary representation; rather, the Church created itself independently of the British

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<sup>69</sup> Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. xi.

<sup>70</sup> Mary McKerrow, *Mary Brunton: The Forgotten Scottish Novelist* (Orkney: The Arcadian Limited, 2001), pp. 14-15.

state in matters of doctrine, worship rites, and government, so its members constantly juggled allegiances to King and Kirk.<sup>71</sup>

The complex national mythos of the self-divided Scot met with special political resistance in eighteenth-century England. A breed of English chauvinism promulgated by the Middlesex MP John Wilkes consolidated this divided Scottish identity and set a strident English nationalism against the whole, situating poor Highlanders, sophisticated Lowlanders, and every Scot between as part of the same inferior group (Colley 109, 115). In spite of persistent Wilkite assertions of English supremacy within the Union, some justifiable English anxiety remained about the widespread (and now well-documented) integration of talented Scottish men into Great Britain's imperial administration. As critic Christopher Smout has explained, the long-alienated Scottish margin was beginning through military service and promotion in imperial institutions like the East India Company to have "a pull on the core, the tail ever so slightly beginning to wag the dog."<sup>72</sup> Here, the empire was critical, for while the island of Great Britain was (and is) considered "English," the empire had always been "emphatically British," and therefore a place where Scots could be coequals with the English in both prestige and profit (Colley 131). Mary Brunton's father, Thomas Balfour, was part of this trend: after his matriculation at Aberdeen University and then Edinburgh University, where he studied medicine, Balfour became a British officer in the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot, America. Like many Scots his age, Balfour's enlistment was in response to the American

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<sup>71</sup> Stewart J. Brown, "Church of Scotland," *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World*, ed. Peter N. Stearns. Oxford University Press 2008. Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World: (e-reference edition). Oxford University Press. University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill Libraries. 27 July 2012 <http://www.oxford-modernworld.com/entry?entry=t254.e303>.

<sup>72</sup> Christopher Smout, "Scotland in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries – a satellite economy?" eds. Ståle Dyrik, Knut Mykland and Jan Oldervoll, *The Satellite State in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Bergen, Norway, 1979), p. 18.

Revolution's challenge to British (not Scottish) imperial claims in North America (McKerrow 21-2).

But, as Leith Davis insists, the Britishness of the empire never turned the Scottish and the English into a homogeneous nation of Britons.<sup>73</sup> Instead, the rise of Scottish men into the administration of the empire produced a real sense of competition between the English and the Scottish on Great Britain's national and imperial stages (Colley 122). The market in novels was no exception, as Austen, again looking north to Scotland, noted in an 1814 letter: "Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones.—It is not fair.—He has Fame and Profit enough as a Poet, and should not be taking the bread out of other people's mouths" (*Letters* 404). Austen's complaint about Scott helps to contextualize her earlier interest in taking Brunton's "Estimate": Austen wished to know the competition her work would meet in a more comprehensive British marketplace. Writing to Cassandra in the fall of 1813, having by this time read *Self-Control* several times, Austen acknowledged her initial concern about Brunton to have been unfounded:

I am looking over *Self Control* again, & my opinion is confirmed of its being an excellently-meant, elegantly written Work, without anything of Nature or Probability in it. I declare I do not know whether Laura's passage down the American River, is not the most natural, possible, everyday thing she ever does.—" (*Letters* 344)

Here Austen is writing of Laura Montreville, *Self-Control*'s Scottish heroine, who indeed takes an improbable canoe trip in the novel's third volume. The episode was a lightning rod for harsh criticisms, not least of all Austen's: her words of almost sincere praise

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<sup>73</sup> Leith Davis, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 1-18.

(“excellently-meant, elegantly written”) are swiftly undercut by an assertion of absolute failure and then slightly tempered by humor. But there is something else in Austen’s tone—the “I declare,” is where it is most audible—that suggests her relief that Brunton’s novel is unequal to her own. Austen must have needed her perverse comfort in “Laura’s passage down the American River,” because in 1814 she joked of it again to her niece, Anna Lefroy: to “redeem [her] credit” with an unnamed critic of the recently published *Mansfield Park*, Austen quips, she will write “a close imitation of ‘Self-control.’” “I will improve upon it;—” she continues, “my Heroine shall not merely be wafted down an American river in a boat by herself, she shall cross the Atlantic in the same way, & never stop till she reaches Gravesent [sic]” (*Letters* 423). This is faint praise, to be sure; but Austen’s tendency to return to *Self-Control* suggests that Brunton remained for her a lingering specter on the national literary stage.

Brunton, however, had beaten Austen to the punch at *Self-Control*, particularly Laura’s much-ridiculed American adventure. In April of 1811, when Austen was in London still searching out a copy of the novel, Brunton wrote to her friend, Mrs. Izett, of *Self-Control*’s strengths as well as of the episode that later would catch the barb of Austen’s wit: “We have all heard of a ‘peacock with a fiery tail,’” Brunton explained, “but my American jaunt is this same monstrous appendage tacked to a poor little grey linnet” (xlvi). This lopsided bird is an apt figure for *Self-Control*’s picaresque form, as Brunton noted:

I think the story of Self-Control is defective—it is disjointed—it wants unity.

The incidents, particularly in the second volume, have little mutual connection. This appears to me the capital defect of the book. It is patch-work—the shreds are pretty, and sometimes rich; but the joining is clumsily

visible. [...] The American expedition, too,—though, in the author’s opinion, the best written part of the book,—is more conspicuously a *patch*, than any thing else which it contains. (xlvihi, Brunton’s emphasis)

The patchiness Brunton underlines here, while a straightforward reflection on *Self-Control*’s literary achievement, is also an incisive identification of the British constitutional dilemma that *Self-Control* persistently articulates: the novel is “disjointed,” to be sure—but its narrative discontinuities coincide with Laura’s crossings of national borders on *Self-Control*’s international stage. The novel’s jarring fault lines between Scottish episodes, English episodes, and one North American episode suggest that Brunton at least intuits that a Scotswoman’s constitution—her legal status and her health—was highly contingent upon her place on Great Britain’s map: the political and juridical “patch-work” of Scotland, England, and North America.

Brunton’s first two novels are thus important artifacts of Scots’—and particularly Scottish women’s—struggle legitimately to be constituted as part of Britain in the age of empire. The novels grapple specifically with the popular idea that Anglo-Scottish intermarriage, a figurative act of national unification, might increase Anglo-Scottish cohesion within the postcolonial Union, much as the Irish author Sydney Owenson had envisioned in the Anglo-Irish context with her 1806 novel, *The Wild Irish Girl*. In *Self-Control*, Brunton imagines a Scottish heroine whose constitutional status as a free-born British woman is compromised by an English colonel’s threats to marry her against her will and rape her, but Laura’s Scottish self control ensures her escape from sexual violence and finally her happy marriage in Britain to a virtuous, self-controlled Englishman, Montague De Courcy. Brunton, however, significantly revises this positive view of Anglo-Scottish intermarriage in her

second novel, *Discipline*. Ellen Percy, a wealthy English heroine, is married to a Scottish Highland clansman, a plot that reveals Scottish constitutions physiologically and morally compromised by the ugly offshore activity of British imperialism, specifically the Atlantic slave trade. Intermarriage remained an irresistible plotline for Brunton and a suggestive metaphor for British national cohesion—but, as she saw it, Anglo-Scottish marriage ultimately failed to produce a stable political union between Scotland and England: the inequities of the empire's political constitution had become too acute. This chapter argues, that, as Brunton saw it, the limited and inconsistent constitutional rights of women and the nonexistent rights of African slaves across the British empire made impossible any meaningful political cohesion of the British state.

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Here, a (somewhat lengthy) synopsis will be useful for those unfamiliar with Brunton's first novel; those acquainted with *Self-Control* can rejoin the argument on page 98. The story begins in Glenalbert, Scotland, where Laura—born in Scotland of English parents and raised as a Gaelic-speaking Scot in the Church of Scotland—is indelicately propositioned and then, a day later, properly proposed to by English rake-on-the-make, Colonel Villiers Hargrave. Laura's father, Captain Montreville, ignorant of Hargrave's untoward advance, encourages Laura to accept his suit, and Laura, after prayer and contemplation, establishes a compromise between her father's and Hargrave's wishes in which she promises to marry Hargrave if he can manage to behave well for two full years: this is a tall order for the pathologically licentious Hargrave, but Laura nevertheless considers herself engaged to him. It is important to note here the trouble Brunton takes throughout *Self-Control* to show Laura still very much in love with Hargrave, though she remains deeply disappointed in the failure

of his character. Anxious to be free from Hargrave's company, but hopeful that he will reform himself, Laura discreetly departs for London with her father, who has business to transact there with a Mr. Baynard and a Mr. Warren concerning the annuity Laura will inherit on her father's death. Laura's mother, Harriet, is deceased, having died just three days before the beginning of the novel.

Together, Laura and her father travel first to Edinburgh and then on to London, where their financial situation begins to deteriorate under the strain of city living. Laura thus decides that she will support her father by selling her paintings, and, while she is making enquiries and negotiating prices at local galleries, she meets Montague De Courcy, the novel's quiet hero, who instantly falls in love with Laura. He also secretly begins buying Laura's paintings in which all of the male figures resemble Hargrave, the man whose life De Courcy saved while they were serving together in the British army. We also learn that De Courcy's father and Captain Montreville were longtime friends, and De Courcy begins regularly to visit the Montrevilles as a continuance of his deceased father's friendship with the Captain but also to establish a relationship with Laura.

Captain Montreville's business in London has reached an impasse by this stage, and, in spite of De Courcy's and Laura's efforts to care for him, he begins to succumb to debilitating hypochondria and then eventually to two burst blood vessels, which ultimately kill him, leaving Laura to fend for herself in London with no ready money and a limited annuity. De Courcy is absent at this stage, suspicious of Laura's ongoing commitment to Hargrave, whose character he knows to be seriously compromised: Hargrave, it is later revealed, has assaulted, raped, and finally abandoned a woman named Jessy Wilson, the young daughter of two of the De Courcy family's servants. Montague De Courcy is raising as



his protégé Hargrave and Jessy's illegitimate son, Henry, as Jessy died just a few days after giving birth. Because of its clear generic similarities to the story of the two Elizas from Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, the story of Jessy Wilson will become important later in this analysis.

Impoverished, starving, and alone in London in the wake of her father's death, Laura appeals to Lady Pelham, her mother's sister, who lives in a fashionable part of the city. Because she has disowned her own daughter over a marriage she disapproved, Lady Pelham is able to focus all of her social and financial machinations on reconnecting Laura with Colonel Hargrave, who is one of Lady Pelham's friends and confidants in a glittering London circle of intrigue and betrayal. In that vein, Hargrave has spent his absence from the end of the novel's first volume seducing and impregnating a peer's wife, Lady Bellamer, information that comes to light as Hargrave's attempts to trap Laura become more devious and violent. Under the strain of his advances, Laura periodically takes refuge with the De Courcy family—Montague, his sister Harriet, and their mother—but Lady Pelham objects to these visits and contrives ways of derailing them so that Laura can be put into Hargrave's company. Again, it is critical to note that Laura is still struggling in these pages with her feelings for Hargrave and her earlier promise to marry him; she also is beginning to recognize De Courcy's virtue and intuit his love for her, but she regards him yet as a friend and brother.

In the meantime, Hargrave's grip on Laura tightens as he tries to ensnare her in gambling debts and has her falsely arrested. Each time, Laura escapes to the De Courcy home at Norwood. During one of these visits, Hargrave arrives and challenges his old friend, Montague De Courcy, to a duel under the assertion that De Courcy is trespassing upon his

“right” to Laura. De Courcy, refusing to fight, is nevertheless shot by Hargrave, though not mortally. Following this episode, Laura considers her engagement to Hargrave dissolved, and De Courcy, at length, proposes. Laura agrees that they will marry when she returns from a visit to Scotland to see her old friend, Mrs. Douglas. Fortuitously, Lady Pelham dies, bequeathing a significant portion of her fortune to Laura, but only on the condition that she marry Hargrave and become Lady Lincourt upon the death of Hargrave’s uncle, Lord Lincourt, whose title and fortune Hargrave is to inherit. Laura also will receive some portion of this inheritance from Lady Pelham if she marries some other peer of the realm, but she will be disinherited if she marries outside of the English aristocracy.

In spite of the revelation of Lady Pelham’s will, Laura maintains her engagement to De Courcy as well as her plans to travel to Scotland, but before she can depart for her homeland Hargrave orders a brutal kidnapping that takes Laura across the Atlantic to Quebec and beyond to the wilderness of North America, where it becomes ominously clear that, though Hargrave is absent from these pages entirely, he intends to marry Laura against her will and rape her, probably, but not certainly, in that order. Starving, injured, disoriented, and in abject despair about the impending loss of her virtue, Laura manages to escape by canoe and, with the help of a Quebec family, boards a ship back to Britain to prepare for a life of confinement, as she imagines her engagement to De Courcy dissolved by the mere appearance of Hargrave’s sexual violation. Yet: a letter from Hargrave surfaces, notifying Laura that he has committed suicide and confirming that Laura remains a virgin. De Courcy—healed from his gunshot wound and as devoted to Laura as ever—arrives in Glenalbert and renews his proposals of marriage under the assurances of Hargrave’s letter. Finally, Laura and De Courcy marry.

### ***Self-Control* and the Constitutional Laws of Scotland, England, and North America**

Laura's two major dilemmas, rape and marriage, were complicated constitutional matters after the Anglo-Scottish Union, especially for women. Both pivoted on women's consent—either to sexual activity or a marital relationship—but the legal force of that consent varied as a British woman moved across national and imperial borders. Scottish, English, and imperial legislation play a critical role in Brunton's conception of Laura's character, particularly because Laura's deteriorating legal status under the varying constitutional laws of Britain and its empire produces the steady decline of her bodily constitution. In this sense, Brunton is working in *Self-Control* to add realist elements of social criticism to the novel of sensibility and suggest that British constitutions might be produced not just by the climate, but also by the law. Her revisions of the eighteenth-century novel are not as programmatic as Austen's, but the two contemporaries shared an impulse to demonstrate the often small differences between sentimental plotlines of decline and ruin and the lived lives of Regency-era women.

Most eighteenth-century Scottish rape cases in the available record appeared in Scotland's ecclesiastical courts: after the Union with England, the Church of Scotland maintained a strong hierarchy of church courts in every parish while the secular justice system of the British Crown was, in Scotland, more diffuse. During the period, Scottish law did not address the crime of rape unless the victim was propertied and had been abducted (like Laura) in the course of the crime's commission; marital rape would not be criminalized in Scotland until 1982. For an indictment in a case of rape, an eighteenth-century Scottish victim was required to report her rape within 24 hours and to prove in court that she had cried

out for help while the crime was in progress. Without proof of these two elements, the Kirk considered a victim as guilty as her attacker because strict Calvinist interpretations of individual discipline suggested that a Scottish woman, through her self control, was responsible for preventing any sexual violence that might be committed against her person. In 1745, for example, the St. Cuthbert's session disciplined Marion Mitchell for her "sin" with James Borthwick in spite of her insistence that she had been "compelled by him to this sin being alone in her house." In January of 1747, Jane Menzies fled similar punishment in Aberdeen, though her rapist, a man named Polwarth, had "forced and ravished her, stopping her mouth with his Napkin." If a woman could not properly discipline her body to prevent rape, the Kirk stepped in after the crime to perform that discipline for her, usually in the form of social disgrace such as appearing publicly in sackcloth.<sup>74</sup> As in any case of rape, victims always faced the prospect of unwanted pregnancy and childbirth outside of wedlock, obvious further grounds for alienation and shame.

Consistent with these stringent requirements of Scottish ecclesiastical law, Laura Montreville's self control (or discipline; Brunton uses the words interchangeably) is her most reliable defense against the sexual advances of Colonel Hargrave. "In the character of Laura Montreville," Brunton explained in *Self-Control*'s 1811 dedication to Joanna Baillie, "the [Calvinist] religious principle is exhibited as rejecting the bribes of ambition; bestowing fortitude in want and sorrow; as restraining just displeasure; overcoming constitutional timidity; conquering misplaced affection; and triumphing over the fear of death and of disgrace."<sup>75</sup> Brunton thus intends Laura as an exemplar of Calvinist virtue, particularly the

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<sup>74</sup> Qtd. in Rosalind Mitchison and Leah Leneman, *Sexuality and Social Control: Scotland 1660-1780* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 195-96.

<sup>75</sup> Mary Brunton, "Dedication," *Self-Control* (London, Pandora Press: 1986), p. v.

ideal “that a true church imposes proper discipline” on its individual members.<sup>76</sup> According to Calvin, this kind of discipline ensured the church’s constitutional cohesion. As he writes in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536):

[i]f no society, nay no house with even a moderate family, can be kept in a right state without discipline, much more necessary is it in the Church, whose state ought to be the best ordered possible. Hence as the saving doctrine of Christ is the life of the Church, so discipline is, as it were its sinews; for to it it is owing that the members of the body adhere together, each in its own place. Wherefore, all who either wish that discipline were abolished, or who impede the restoration of it, whether they do this of design or through thoughtlessness, certainly aim at the complete devastation of the Church.<sup>77</sup>

Calvin’s recourse to physiology—the “sinews” of discipline and the corporate “body” of the Church—is a common Christian metaphor for ecclesiastical constitution. But for real victims like Marion Mitchell and Jane Menzie and fictive ones like Laura Montreville, discipline had real physiological implications: the Scottish Church expected a woman to defend herself against rape by resisting her attacker and crying out against him, actions which required the physiological activity of her body. Modern readers tend to think of self control as an individual’s control over her emotions, as in Elinor’s persistent self-command in *Sense and Sensibility*. This definition is relevant, but for Romantic-era Calvinist Scots, self control had more explicitly to do with an individual’s ability to control her physiological constitution. In the case of rape, self control meant that a woman should use her physical body to protect her

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<sup>76</sup> Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 49.

<sup>77</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), p. 453.

sexual and reproductive body from violation and ruin. The constitutional law of the Kirk thus effected another form of Scottish self-division, in which Scottish women's physiological constitutions could be strangely divided in themselves.

Like Brunton and Laura herself, Colonel Hargrave sees Laura's Calvinist self control as the chief obstacle to his designs on her, rendered here in the overwrought language of sensibility: "Good heavens, Laura," he implores, "will you sacrifice to a punctilio—to a fit of Calvinist enthusiasm, the peace of my life, the peace of your own?"<sup>78</sup> With its extended focus on a secular English assault on Scottish religious virtue, *Self-Control* is very like Sir Walter Scott's *The Antiquary* (1816), which critic David Punter calls an exploration of "the history of Scottish Protestantism and [...] attempts of the [English] authorities to suppress it."<sup>79</sup> Brunton's innovation in *Self-Control* is to assign gender to this Anglo-Scottish dichotomy in the figures of Hargrave and Laura, Brunton's variation on what Barker-Benfield calls the "rake/victim dyad" of the novel of sensibility. But rape is not just Brunton's metaphor for the relationship between a feminized Scottish Church and masculinist English authorities or, more generally, for a feminine Scotland and a masculine England. Because Hargrave attacks Scottish and English women (Laura and Jessie Wilson), rape also is properly understood in Brunton's novel as the way British women's physiological constitutions are sickened and ruined by the unwanted sexual advances of men. By subordinating a Scottish nationalist position to a broader feminist one, Brunton suggests, like Mary Wollstonecraft in *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), that British women—Scottish and English alike—may not have a country.

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<sup>78</sup> Mary Brunton, *Self-Control* (Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1832), p. 18.

<sup>79</sup> David Punter, "Scottish and Irish Gothic," *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 109.

The steady deterioration of Laura's physiological and legal constitution in spite of her Calvinist self control is the result of her increasing geopolitical exposure at the hands of Colonel Hargrave: while Laura is in London with her Aunt Pelham, for example, Hargrave pays a group of men to apprehend Laura, accuse her of an unpaid debt, and threaten her with imprisonment until she can produce the necessary sum. Hargrave's sentimentalist plan is to intervene on Laura's behalf, win her love through this rescue, and marry her. The ruse is effected by a false warrant for Laura's arrest, as Brunton's narrator explains:

[t]he warrant was stamped and imposingly written upon parchment. With the tautology which Laura had been taught to expect in a law-paper, it rang changes upon the permission to seize and confine the person of Laura Montreville, as heiress of William Montreville, debtor to John Dykes of Pimlico. It was signed as by a magistrate, and marked with the large seals of office. (402)

This is *Self-Control*'s most explicit example of English constitutional dominance over Laura's Scottish person. The "imposing" features of a putative state document—the forged mark of the magistrate, and the official-seeming seals—conspire here to convince Laura of a debt she does not owe to a nonexistent Englishman, John Dykes. Though Laura begins this episode sure that her guilt is "impossible," the forged warrant is enough to convince her otherwise, and Laura's physiological constitution thus begins to fail: she becomes "pale" and "faint," "almost sinking with horror" to the ground (401, 402). The power Laura imagines the English constabulary to exercise over her person overthrows bodily constitutional soundness, presaging the more acute constitutional decline she will undergo in North America, when her ability to control her self is removed entirely. *Self-Control* thus enters into what D. A. Miller

has called the novel's "long tradition of portraying the police as incompetent or powerless"; with *Self-Control*'s (actually fake) police officers, Brunton underlines the fictivity of English law, which, instead of protecting Laura from Hargrave's attacks, tends rather to aid and abet them.<sup>80</sup>

Also underpinning this episode is Laura's persistent inability to, as a Scot, understand the real meanings of English discourse—from Hargrave's proposals to the machinations of her Aunt Pelham to the specious arrest warrant. Laura's tendency toward misunderstanding, the novel repeatedly asserts, is the result of her sheltered upbringing in rural Scotland by an eccentric English father, where her first language is not English but Gaelic. Brunton also takes special care to show Laura being instructed by Captain Montreville (apparently in his own mood of national self-alienation) in a healthy set of prejudices against the English, specifically Londoners. When Laura asks what kind of man is her father's London solicitor, Mr. Warren, for example, Montreville replies "contemptuously": "Man! [...] Why child, he is a creature entirely new to you. He talks like a parrot, looks like a woman, dresses like a monkey, and smells like a civet-cat. You might have lived in Glenalbert for half a century, without seeing such a creature" (67). Here is Brunton's first substantive articulation of the idea that Britain's unprincipled English element, found primarily in London, was responsible for the reflux of empire: on Montreville's view, Mr. Warren becomes a kind of postcolonial chimera; instead of lion, goat, and serpent, however, Montreville's monster comprises animals native to the tropics. Important in this passage is Montreville's belief that colonial reflux has yet to reach rural areas of Scotland like Laura's native Glenalbert. In her second novel, *Discipline*, this idea—that Scotland was a haven at risk for constitutional decline

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<sup>80</sup> D. A. Miller, "The Novel and the Police," *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1900-2000*, ed. Dorothy Hale (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 545.



because of its imperial relationship with London—would become a more central idea for Brunton, as we will discuss in the final section of this chapter.

Laura's nationalized naïveté and her prejudices against the English begin to fall away as she becomes more familiar with London life and develops a meaningful friendship with the Englishman Montague De Courcy, who is her equal in self control and religious devotion. As Laura navigates an international London art market in the sale of her own paintings, Brunton also approximates in Laura a fledgling cosmopolitanism in which Laura acknowledges both her English parentage and her Scottish upbringing, imagining herself a British subject:

[t]he capital, with all its wonders, of which she had hitherto seen little, the endless diversity of character which she expected its inhabitants to exhibit, the conversation of the literary and the elegant, of wits, senators, and statesmen, promised an inexhaustible fund of instruction and delight. Nay, the patriotic heart of Laura beat high with the hope of meeting some of those heroes, who, undaunted by disaster, where all but honour is lost, maintain the honour of Britain, or who, with happier fortune, guide the triumphant navies of our native land. (381-82)

The situation of the word “patriotic” is telling; with it, the narrator asserts not Laura's Scottishness but her Britishness—her belief that she, together with the narrator and all Britons, shares ownership of Britain's “triumphant” imperial navies and a British “native land.” Hargrave, too—who, with a Wilkite degree of English chauvinism tends to dismiss the Scottish as backward—nevertheless sees Laura's developing British subjectivity as a significant legal obstacle to his designs on her. “To marry a free-born British woman against

her consent,” says Brunton’s narrator, explaining Hargrave’s calculations, “is, in these enlightened times, an affair of some difficulty” (432).

And it was. As Rebecca Probert and Laura Leneman have shown, it was nearly impossible for a man to marry an English, Welsh, or Scottish woman against her consent in Great Britain. Almost all eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English marriages were solemnized with the consent of both parties in the Church of England—both before and after the watershed Marriage Act of 1753.<sup>81</sup> And yet, elopement and irregular marriage remained a national constitutional concern in Romantic-era Britain, arising primarily from the fact that north of the River Tweed a more permissive set of marriage laws and practices existed within the Church of Scotland, which, as we have seen, operated outside the strictures of the British state and, thus, the Anglican Communion. In addition to “regular marriage,” which in both Scotland and England required the posting of banns at the parish church and solemnization by a clergy member, there were three “‘irregular’ yet equally valid ways” for a couple to be wed in Scotland. These were, first, *per verba de praesenti*, in which an of-age couple beyond prohibited degrees of kinship could solemnly declare themselves husband and wife—without parental consent or the presence of witnesses—in order to constitute a legally binding union. The second irregular form was *per verba de futuro subsequente copula*, which was “a promise to marry in the future, followed by sexual intercourse.”<sup>82</sup> One wonders if Hargrave’s first indecent proposition to Laura—that she “reward [his] lingering pains, and let this happy hour begin a life of love and rapture”—coupled to his initial, secret resolve never actually to marry her is perhaps Brunton’s subtle commentary on this practice (*Self-Control* 9). The third

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<sup>81</sup> Rebecca Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-2.

<sup>82</sup> Leah Leneman, *Promises, Promises: Marriage Litigation in Scotland, 1698-1830* (Edinburgh: NMS Enterprises Limited, 2003), p. x.

irregular form of Scottish marriage, similar to twenty-first-century common law marriage, occurred when a couple cohabitated long enough to “produce a general belief” that they were husband and wife.<sup>83</sup>

Though they each required individual consent, none of these irregular Scottish marriage forms could be validly enacted in England or Wales, and so couples in need of a speedy or secret marriage often would elope to Scottish border towns to be wed. Gretna Green, the site of Lydia and Wickham’s illicit marriage in *Pride and Prejudice*, is probably the most famous of these constitutionally permissive locations, but other marrying points could be found almost anywhere a main road crossed the English-Scottish border. That Lady Catherine de Bourgh is scandalized by Lydia and Wickham’s “infamous elopement” to Scotland is historically accurate as well (*Pride and Prejudice* 253). Mary Brunton’s mother, Frances Balfour, and with her several of Brunton’s aunts, were shocked to learn of Mary’s own elopement with Alexander Brunton in December of 1798, especially because Frances had been planning to send Mary to London for the upcoming season under the care of her sister-in-law, Mary’s godmother, the well-connected Viscountess Wentworth. Made increasingly uneasy by her daughter’s developing friendship with Brunton (who was employed in the Balfour home as a tutor to Mary’s brothers, William and John), Frances arranged for Mary to visit her affluent Craigie relatives on the small island of Gairsay until her aunt could remove her to more acceptable society in the south. But it was too late: Alexander already had proposed, and Mary had accepted him; they eloped from Gairsay in the middle of the night by rowboat, and the couple were secretly married in Edinburgh under the regular form of the Church of Scotland, which required the consent of the betrothed,

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<sup>83</sup> James Fergusson, *Treatise on the Present State of Constitutional Law in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1829), p. 116.

but—luckily for Mary and Alexander—not that of their objecting parents. Not long after the wedding, Alexander became minister of the parish church at Bolton in East Lothian, where he publicly—though (perhaps in view of his own elopement) very reluctantly—denounced two of his congregants, William Bennet and Janet Guthrie, for their irregular marriage as part of his parochial obligation to congregational discipline (McKerrow 58, 63). In a similar if more ambitious vein, a Mr. W. Ness, grieved at “The Irregularities and Excesses” imputed to these irregular Scottish marriages, thus offered his services to the public:

Mr W. Ness

*at the*

Blue Bell Inn, High Street, Berwick-upon-Tweed, begs to offer himself to the notice of the Public. He will, for the future, celebrate Marriages at the various Stations and on the Borders, from Lamberton Toll on the East to Gretna Green on the West, in a manner which must give general satisfaction. The strictest attention will be paid to decorum and the ceremony performed with as much solemnity as circumstances will admit. A correct Register will be kept and carefully preserved and the most honourable secrecy, when required, will be maintained. By this means Mr W. Ness hopes to restore to its pristine purity this ancient heirloom of our ancestors, and to render this primitive romantic Institution as reputable as it is popular, and as honourable as it is binding and Legitimate.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Qtd. in “Claverhouse,” *Irregular Border Marriages* (Edinburgh: The Moray Press, 1934), pp. 21-22. Clearly Mr. W. Ness believed that his advertisement would be far-reaching: “In the case of parties at a distance,” he added thoughtfully, “it would save trouble and prevent disappointment if a previous notice were sent, and in the event of a conveyance being required, a small remittance should be forwarded.” (22)

Scotland becomes here not just the kitschy vacation spot of the Wordsworths, but—through the entrepreneurial aplomb of Mr. W. Ness—a place of magical paradoxes where marriage is at once secret and registered, romantic and binding, primitive and popular.

If Scotland's border with England was a zone of deregulated marriage practices, Britain's colonies abroad were a veritable free-for-all. As Dorothy A. Mays has shown, the colonial governments of New England and the mid-Atlantic initially inherited their marriage practices from English ecclesiastical law, but—comprising religious dissidents who had little if any regard for the Church of England—tended to revise these practices considerably according to local social and religious needs. Influenced by Calvinist and Lutheran ideals, many congregations of the New England colonies treated marriage as contractual rather than sacramental, making divorces generally easier to obtain, and thus more common.<sup>85</sup> Conflicting interpretations of marriage (and of a woman's role in it) coexisted among colonial New England sects and even individual congregations of the same sect.<sup>86</sup> In southern colonies settled predominantly by Anglicans, on the other hand, Church of England authority persisted and regularized church marriages were the norm. Divorce, accordingly, was rare in the south until after the American Revolution, granted as it was only in cases of extreme physical abuse or flagrant adultery. Following American independence, some southern states maintained their prohibition on absolute divorce, the only form of separation in which the parties were permitted to remarry; South Carolina, for example, would not lift its ban on this form of separation until 1868 (Mays 111). As Peter Hoffer writes, this general prohibition on divorce owed in small part to southern colonies' (and later states') persistence in the

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<sup>85</sup> Dorothy A. Mays, *Women in Early America: Struggle, Survival, and Freedom in a New World* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2004), p. 111.

<sup>86</sup> Larry Eldridge, *Women and Freedom in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 241.

Anglican Communion, but it also was intended to protect the wealth of large plantation owners against dissipation in divorce settlements.<sup>87</sup> On the other side of the Atlantic, Scottish and English laws were silent on the regulation of colonial marriage. The Marriage Act of 1753, for example, emphasized that “nothing in this Act shall extend to that Part of Great Britain called Scotland [...] nor to any Marriages solemnized beyond the Seas” (qtd. in Probert 235). Thus, when Laura is kidnapped to the wilderness of North America, she is removed beyond the jurisdiction of all these constitutional protections.

### **Patchy Constitutions and Brunton’s Colonial Picaresque**

In the maintenance of laws that differed among Scotland, England, and its overseas colonies, the British state created its female subjects in a condition of, to borrow Brunton’s word, “patchy” constitutional legitimacy. While there is little evidence in the available record that this constitutional patchiness was a practical problem for most female Britons, who tended to move infrequently over national borders, it is nevertheless the precise constitutional dilemma that Brunton imagines Laura to face: while Laura protects herself from Hargrave in Scotland and England by refusing her consent to sexual activity and marriage, this protection ends when he kidnaps her to the North American wilderness, an extra-legal space that becomes a site of Laura’s psychic and physiological extremity.

The episodes of *Self-Control*’s picaresque form are produced by the patchy constitutional legitimacy of its heroine. As Katie Trumpener has written,

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<sup>87</sup> Peter Charles Hoffer, *Law and People in Colonial America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 109.

[Romantic-period picaresque] fiction begins to codify the different British peripheries and colonies into distinctive “chronotopes.” Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the literary chronotope theorizes the spatial-temporal parameters that determine the worldview of a fictional genre and the rules of operation that establish the direction, the pace, and the meaning of the stories unfolding within it. (xii)

Brunton offers an important reworking of one overseas chronotope in the North American episode of *Self-Control*, which explicitly situates the precarious constitutional legitimacy of Laura Montreville as the product of English chauvinism. In the extralegal space of North America, Hargrave takes Laura to the brink of constitutional ruin, signaled by the dissolution (Laura imagines) of her engagement to Montague De Courcy and the increasing likelihood that she will be unable to refuse marriage and sexual intercourse with Hargrave. Brunton’s narrator is emphatic in these pages about Laura’s advanced condition of deterioration: Laura’s form is “wasted” and her mind delusional, signaling that a collapse of Laura’s physiology and psychology inheres in the absence in North America of her constitutional right to consent—that most literal form of her Calvinist self control (262).

The highly overwrought prose of *Self-Control*’s American chronotope caught the attention of many readers other than Jane Austen. In her journal, a lady described Lord Byron’s response to the novel at a party, where *Self-Control* was being read aloud by some of the guests; coming in and out of the room, the journal recalls, Byron couldn’t help “smiling at ‘the cant of it,’ as he termed all the serious parts” (Jackson 14). *Self-Control*’s melodrama, while apparently amusing to Austen’s and Byron’s more ironical sensibilities, is Brunton’s serious effort to demonstrate her heroine close in North America not only to utter social ruin,

but to death, just as in Colonel Brandon's melodramatic story of Eliza Brandon in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. The important difference between Austen and Brunton is that, while Austen confines melodrama to Colonel Brandon's character, Brunton allows it full run of the novel's discourse, where it spills through the thoughts of *Self-Control*'s narrator and characters alike, a formal failure of containment which contributes to Laura's agoraphobic sexual panic in the North America. Here Hargrave is everywhere at once:

Laura looked round to observe whether any trace of Hargrave's presence was visible. None appeared. She examined every recess and corner of her new abode, as one who fears the lurking assassin. She ascertained that Hargrave was not its inmate; and thanked Heaven for the prospect of one night of peace. It was in vain, however, that she tried to discover how long this reprieve might last. The servants either could not or would not give her any information.

(474)

Laura's inability in North America to track Hargrave's rape threat is a form of that "collective agoraphobia" exerted upon Romantic-era Britons by what Colley calls "the vast empire abroad [...] which few of them properly understood" (105). Just as it is difficult for Laura to manage her personal constitution in the so-called new world, it was difficult for many Britons even to fathom the existence of a coherent British constitution across the enormous empire they had acquired in the Atlantic world on the eve of the British Regency. In spite of this national agoraphobia, Brunton remained certain that a Scottish, or British, global identity was possible: "I do not see," she confided in Mrs. Izett of Laura's journey to North America, "the outrageous improbability with which it has been charged" (xlviii). She was later pleased to learn that her fellow Scotswoman, Joanna Baillie, also approved the



novel's overseas episode: "I am no less gratified," Brunton wrote to Baillie in March of 1811, "that you praise the American expedition, which is in equal favour with me" (McKerrow 93). Brunton's object in *Self-Control*, which her countrywomen Baillie seems to have recognized, was to highlight the acute political and legal problems of British women's global identity and show that these problems differed in degree, but certainly not in kind, from the difficulties British women already faced at home.

Colonial chronotopes, particularly the colonial gothic, often articulate "a growing fear in British society around 1800 of the consequences of the nation's exposure to colonial societies, nonwhite races, non-Christian belief systems, and the moral evils of slavery."<sup>88</sup> The colonial roots of British constitutional decline seemed clear to many, as this excerpt from Edward Long's *Candid Reflections [...] Upon the Negroe-Cause* (1772) demonstrates explicitly:

[t]he lower classes of women in England are remarkably fond of the blacks; for reasons too brutal to mention they would connect themselves with horses and asses if the law permitted them. By these ladies they generally have a numerous brood. Thus, in the course of a few generations more the English blood will become [...] contaminated with this mixture [...] this alloy may spread so extensively as even to reach the middle, and then the higher orders of the people, till the whole nation resembles the *Portuguese* and the *Moriscos* in complexion of skin and baseness of mind. This is a venomous and

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<sup>88</sup> Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, "Colonial and Postcolonial Gothic: The Caribbean," *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 229.

dangerous ulcer, that threatens to spread its malignancy far and wide, until every family catches infection from it.<sup>89</sup>

For Long, the constitutional threat to “every family” in England, and thus the English constitution itself, inheres in the imagined contamination of “English blood” with a “mixture” of English and “black” blood from the colonies, a physiological change that eventually will produce “baseness of mind” in all English people. But Brunton’s picaresque refuses this popular understanding of the imperial British constitution. While Laura sees North America as a landscape “of exile, of degradation, – of death,” the “three Indians” who assist Hargrave in his plan to marry and rape Laura are not themselves figures of sexual threat. Rather, they are represented flatly as Hargrave’s minions, and Laura remains essentially ambivalent toward them, with occasional flights of partiality. One of these men speaks to Laura in a comforting “broken French,” assuring her “that he [will] not hurt her,” and he assists Laura through the wilderness, saving her at one point from a rattlesnake. Eventually, Laura tires and allows him to carry her through the wilderness, though her British sensibilities are at first repulsed by “such a mode of conveyance” (472). While Mary Brunton never traveled to North America, and probably did not have contact with native North Americans, she had at least one encounter with two so-called “colonial others” in her home in Bolton parish. Alexander Brunton, who would one day become a Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Languages at the University of Edinburgh, took special interest in students visiting Britain from the Indian subcontinent, and he invited two “East Indians” to stay with him and Mary at their home in the parish manse. Mary Brunton spent many hours with these young

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<sup>89</sup> Edward Long, *Candid Reflections Upon the Judgment Lately Awarded by the Court of King’s Bench, in Westminster-Hall, On what is Commonly Called the Negroe-Cause* (London: T. Lowden, 1772), p. 82.

people, “caring for their material needs,” and assisting her husband in their religious education. As Alexander Brunton recorded:

[f]or this important work she had greater facilities now than she had enjoyed at any former period: and she applied herself to it with all her characteristic ardour. [...] The Shorter Catechism of our church was the form on which she grounded her instruction to her young pupils; and while, with anxious and successful assiduity, she accompanied its language to their capacity, she never failed to speak in warm admiration of the vigour and condensation of thought by which it is very peculiarly distinguished. (McKerrow 66-67)

Through the lens of postcolonial cultural criticism, it is easy to see in the Bruntons’ efforts with their “young pupils” Britain’s imperial effort to Christianize its empire. And yet, these lines from Alexander Brunton also bespeak a kind of progressive postcolonial domesticity, in which four multilingual scholars were, at least by Alexander’s account, thriving together in a Calvinist classroom. It is particularly telling that Brunton was educating her pupils in “The Shorter Catechism,” which was widely believed to be the more complicated version of the Church of Scotland’s statement of faith.

While Brunton uses *Self-Control*’s episodic form to portray the limits on women’s constitutions imposed by Britain’s patchy constitutional protections, her more compelling insight is to situate the origin of those limits not in the desolate “rank,” “desolate,” “dreary,” and “forlorn” landscape of North America, nor in Laura’s Indian captors, but in the machinations of two of the novel’s English characters: Colonel Hargrave—Laura’s “elegant,” “accomplished” lover, whose English “person [is, to Laura] symmetry itself”—and Laura’s Aunt Pelham (7). As Hargrave divulges to Laura in this final, most sinister letter:

you must pardon me if I am explicit with you. I have known the disposition of Lady Pelham's fortune from the hour when it was made. You know that with all my faults I am not sordid; but circumstances have rendered money necessary to me. Except in the event of Lord Lincourt's death, I cannot return to England otherwise than as your husband. (478)

Unlike so much of the colonial and postcolonial fiction of her time, Brunton's work is not underpinned by the threat of contact with non-Christian religions, nonwhite races, and interracial sexuality, but by the unprincipled ambitions of an English dowager and a handsome English army officer in line for the peerage, who are exposed as the real cause of British constitutional decline.

Like the "foreign Gothic," Brunton's colonial picaresque also is characterized by its use of a "third location" in which "the traumas and defeats of the past" are "reenacted under a different banner, reterritorialized into a phantom or simulacrum and thus recoded within the supposed logic of a foreign body" (qtd. in Punter 106-7). Brunton selects as a "third space" the extralegal territory beyond Britain's North American empire, probably in present-day Canada. Taking pains to remove Laura from Quebec and Montreal, through "woods impervious to the light," to a place where there is "no trace" of "human footstep," Brunton has in mind not Britain's settled North American colonies, but an unknown frontier beyond imperial borders, where, like Christ in the wilderness, Laura's self control can be tested absolutely (471, 472). Laura's American adventure appended to an otherwise British story thus becomes, as Brunton herself noted, precisely as conspicuous as a linnet with a peacock's tail: a small, unassuming bird native to the British Isles encumbered on one end by exotic plumage known only to Britons from the very ends of their empire.

The traumatic national past reenacted in *Self-Control*'s "third space" is the story of Jessy Wilson, the oldest daughter of the De Courcy's servants, John and Margaret, who is brutally raped by Hargrave and dies after giving birth to his illegitimate son, Henry. After Laura hears Jessy's story from Margaret on a visit to the De Courcy home, it periodically haunts her memory, finally returning to terrorize her during her kidnapping to North America:

[s]he suddenly remembered Jessy Wilson. Starting, with an exclamation of horror and affright, she sought some weapon which might dispense to her a death less terrible; and instinctively grasping her penknife, hid it in her bosom. The next moment she shrank from her purpose, and doubted the lawfulness of such defence. (466)

Brunton's doubling of Jessy and Laura's stories demonstrates the fictivity of British law, which is exactly as effective in Britain at preventing Jessy's rape and Laura's false arrest and kidnapping as it is "beyond the Seas," where it explicitly has no force; for Jessy and Laura after her, Brunton insists, the guarantees of the British Constitution ultimately make no difference. In the world of Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, English heroines are by and large protected against the sexual coercion of men by strong familial constitutions and their own health in the legally unambiguous, constitutionally stable English countryside. Though Marianne Dashwood and Lydia Bennet each come perilously close to constitutional ruin, the real fallen women of Austen's early fiction remain offstage and highly coded under the generic signs of melodrama. In *Self-Control*, on the other hand, Brunton imagines a larger, more frightening global reality in which Laura and Jessy are afforded few

social and no legal protections from the advances of an English colonel, a figure of both military and sexual aggression.

While *Self-Control* explores these serious fissures in British constitutional law, Brunton had by no means lost faith in the idea of Britain. By removing Laura to a “third space” of absolute constitutional distress, Brunton also establishes Britain as the homeland to which Laura safely can escape. Laura—whose first language is Gaelic; whose father strongly encouraged her in national prejudices against the English; and who has been assaulted for most of the novel by an Englishman—returns neither to Scotland nor to England, but to “Britain,” where she marries the Englishman, De Courcy, in a figurative act of national union. As we have observed in the previous chapter, Austen’s Marianne Dashwood and Lydia Bennet make limited returns to constitutional wholeness; Eliza Brandon does not return at all. Laura, on the other hand—her constitution much more compromised than Marianne’s or Lydia’s—experiences a full return to health and meaningful social life in Britain. Austen’s is a fiction of limited recoveries; Brunton’s is a fiction of absolute ones. This is why Austen—applying Aristotle’s requirement from the *Poetics* that tragedy, comedy, and epic should represent a series of probable events—found in 1813 nothing of “Probability” in *Self-Control*.<sup>90</sup> As Austen saw it, and as her own novels bear out, a British woman’s ability to survive the events of *Self-Control* with her constitution fully intact was highly improbable and, as her joke to Cassandra suggests, ultimately not to be taken seriously as literature. As we have noted, however, Brunton did not see the “outrageous improbability” with which *Self-Control*’s American episode had been charged—and this is because Brunton believed absolutely, as Austen of course did not, in the real-world effects of a Calvinist ethic,

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<sup>90</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, eds. Dimitri Gutas and Leonardo Tarán (Boston: Brill, 2012), p. 294.

which are borne out quite explicitly in the structure and allusions of *Self Control*'s American episode.

Having spent her first day in North America in transit and her second day confined in terror to Hargrave's cabin, Laura awakes on her third day in the wilderness momentarily refreshed. After her attendant, Mary, brings her a small breakfast and notifies her that Hargrave is due to arrive in the evening, the two women go walking through the woods, where Laura's

eye rested as it fell, upon a track as of recent footsteps. They had brushed away the dew, and the rank grass had not yet risen from their pressure. The unwonted trace of man's presence arrested her attention; and her mind, exhausted by suffering, and sharing the weakness of its frail abode, admitted the *superstitious* thought that these marks afforded a *providential* indication for her guidance. (483, my emphasis)

As important echoes of Calvin's teachings, the terms "superstitious" and "providential" deserve special attention here. Calvin held that "while some [religious people] lose themselves in superstitious observances, and others, of set purpose, wickedly revolt from God, the result is that [...] all are so degenerate, that in no part of the world can genuine godliness be found" (*Institutes* 46). In calling Laura's thoughts "superstitious" (the most common codeword for Roman Catholicism during the period), Brunton's narrator disciplines them for what Calvin would call their inherent "ungodliness." And yet, in spite of the superstition that flashes across Laura's weakened mind, Brunton maintains her heroine as one of God's elect: the "providential" crushing of the grass shows that Laura, like Christ, is not destined to die alone in the wilderness.

In what remains of the novel's North American episode, Brunton rearranges the terrorizing elements of the American wilderness into a Calvinist fulfillment of Laura's foreordained salvation. The "providential" "recent footsteps" that mark the path through the grass, for example, belong to her Indian captors, whose foreign "method of conveyance" once repulsed Laura so thoroughly. Following the footsteps, Laura comes upon a moored Indian canoe—the same one used to transport her in terror to Hargrave's cabin—which she again boards on her journey homeward. Laura's final passage over a waterfall (during which the canoe dangerously capsizes) secures her safety from Hargrave with the sacramental ablution of a baptism. Laura is not only Christ here, but Jonah: after three harrowing days of seclusion—not in Hell or the belly of the whale, but in the constitutional desert of North America—she is miraculously reconstituted as a British subject. That *Self-Control* becomes a Romantic-period allegory to both Old and New Testaments is highly consistent with Brunton's professed purpose to provide Biblical guidance to young British women living in age of "lax morality" in the more palatable form of the novel: "[w]hen the vitiated appetite refuses its proper food," she wrote in *Self-Control*'s preface to Joanna Baillie,

the alternative may be administered in a sweetmeat. It may be imprudent to confess the presence of the medicine, lest the sickly palate, thus warned, turn from it in loathing. But I rely in this instance on the [...] philosopher, who avers that "young ladies never read prefaces." (vi)

The novel's retelling of the Bible—with a female Christ figure living under a Calvinist framework of self discipline—becomes on Brunton's view a "medicine" to heal the ailing moral constitutions of Great Britain's young ladies.



Many of Brunton's contemporary readers were surprised to find such violent and sexually explicit themes in a novel claiming to elaborate the "religious principle" of its virgin heroine. As Jackson notes, "[o]ne of the hostile reviews asked rhetorically whether responsible parents would want their daughters 'to take up a *religious* novel and read of *rapes*'" (14, anonymous reviewer's emphasis). But the proximity of religion and sexual violence is largely Brunton's point. Her solution to British women's constitutional dilemmas is Calvinist discipline, through which women can control not only their own constitutions but the constitutions of men like Hargrave—without the legal protections of the British state. With what Jackson calls a "faith-based moral seriousness," Brunton insists that women's self control is necessary to a strong British constitution, particularly because of brutal global realities that many novelists of the period were content to either treat at a distance or leave entirely untouched (14).

Thus, in spite of the nationalist divisions between Laura and Hargrave and the harrowing threats of Britain's vast empire to Laura's person, Laura finally marries safely and happily into one of England's oldest families, who traces its lineage to William the Conqueror (93). Montague De Courcy, Laura's English but Edinburgh-educated husband, shares her acquired sense of Britishness (98). Following their wedding, the couple divide their time between Glenalbert, Scotland and the De Courcy family home in England in a gesture of British self-identification. While perhaps less attractive to twenty-first century audiences than the companionate English marriages imagined by Austen, the "chastened affection, tempered desires, useful employment, and devout meditation" Laura and De Courcy share in marriage are Brunton's vision of an explicitly British domestic fulfillment: by reinstating Laura to the constitutional protections of her homeland and adding the

constitutional protections of marriage, Brunton removes the constitutional threats presented to Laura by Hargrave in particular and the British empire in general (500).

**“A comparison of the two extremities of the island”<sup>91</sup>**

And yet in *Discipline*, her second and last completed novel, Brunton substantially revises *Self-Control*'s ideals of self control and Anglo-Scottish intermarriage in favor of a more clearly articulated—but finally deeply ambivalent—form of Scottish nationalism. Increasingly critical of the role played by wealthy English people in Britain's national constitution, and increasingly sympathetic to the plight of the men and women of Scotland's downtrodden Celtic fringe, Brunton proposes in her second novel a Calvinist program of self discipline for the reformation of an unprincipled leisure class she saw among the English in general, and in London in particular. This marked change in Brunton's disposition toward the English seems to have grown out of a long holiday she and her husband took to England in 1812, just before she began the manuscript of *Discipline*. In her journal from that year, Brunton explains the real differences she observed between Scotland and England in what she called “[a] comparison of the two extremities of the island”: “[y]ou no sooner cross the boundary,” Brunton observed, “than you are sensibly in another kingdom. Near neighbourhood and constant intercourse have effected little intercommunity of language, manners, or appearance. Before you advance ten miles on English ground, the women are prettier, the accent is perceptibly English, and hats and shoes are universal” (McKerrow 103). The comparative wealth Brunton saw among the English was accompanied by a lack of

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<sup>91</sup> Mary Brunton qtd. in McKerrow 122.

religious discipline; she was surprised to find in Greatham, for example, that the English waiter at the town's local inn did not know the name of his own parish minister: "Intimate and affectionate relation between pastor and flock!" she exclaimed in ironical disbelief (*Emmeline* 105). This lack of proper religious discipline among the English was crystallized for Brunton later in the trip at a Covent Garden oratorio, where her religious sensibilities were offended by the irreverence of the London crowd during a performance that ended with Handel's "Halleluiahs Chorus" from *The Messiah*. Brunton remembers:

All went on peaceably enough, till it pleased [the London tenor, John] Braham, the most delightful singer that ever sung, to sing a nonsensical song about Lord Nelson. Although the words and tune were equally despicable, the song was encored; Braham was engaged elsewhere, and went off without complying. The next performer, Mrs Ashe, a sweet, modest looking creature, whose figure declared her to be in no fit situation to bear fright or ill-usage, tried to begin her song, but was stopped by a tremendous outcry. She tried it again and again, but not a note could be heard, and she desisted. The Halleluiahs chorus was begun; but the people bawled, and whistled and hissed, and thumped, and shrieked and groaned, and hooted, and made a thousand indescribable noises besides, till they fairly drowned the organ, the French horns, the kettle-drums, and—the Halleluiahs chorus! (McKerrow 117)

The failure of self discipline in London is signaled by the crowd's encore of a tune with "despicable" lyrics, Mrs. Ashe's appearance in public while pregnant, and—most offensive to Brunton of all—the derision by a mob of Handel's famous proclamation of God's eternal supremacy. Finding herself in a kind of modern Babel, Brunton felt confirmed in many of the

suspensions of London culture she had begun to voice in *Self-Control* with the unprincipled English characters of Hargrave and Lady Pelham—suspensions that became severe and certain critiques in *Discipline*.

Once again, a synopsis is helpful; the argument resumes on page 125. The novel, which is the spiritual *Bildungsroman* of its English-born narrator, Ellen Percy, begins at Ellen's father's villa at Richmond and in the lavish ball and drawing rooms of other parts of London. Like Laura Montreville, Ellen loses her mother at the novel's outset but, quite differently from Laura, embarks on a path of materialism and thoughtless flirtation, supported by the enormous fortune her indulgent English father has acquired as a merchant with the East India Company—and in spite of the spiritual guidance offered her by her mother's childhood friend, Miss Mortimer, who is a Scottish Presbyterian. One of her father's associates, Mr. Maitland, a virtuous Scottish MP and also a Presbyterian, meets and falls in love with Ellen in Richmond—but Ellen already has become entangled in an English plot on her fortune. Lady St. Edmund and Lord Frederick de Burgh (*Discipline's* version of Lady Pelham and Hargrave, respectively) have conspired to remove Ellen to Scotland, where an irregular border marriage will consolidate Ellen's wealth to Lord Frederick's titled but impoverished family. Ellen—pressured by her shallow friend, Juliet Arnold, and threatened by Lord Frederick's sister, Maria—consents to the elopement, which is cut short when Lord Frederick learns that Ellen's father has been ruined and that none of the Percy fortune remains. By this time, Maitland has removed himself from his acquaintance with Ellen because, though he remains convinced of Ellen's basic goodness, the company she keeps among the English disgusts him. After the loss of her fortune, Lord Frederick, Lady St. Edmund, and Juliet Arnold also abandon Ellen, who, following her father's suicide, is flung

to the streets where she becomes ill and delusional. Fortuitously, Miss Mortimer reappears on the scene to supply Ellen a modest shelter and assist in her physiological and spiritual recovery, though she dies from an unnamed illness before Ellen's reformation is complete. In the wake of her death, Miss Mortimer's will recommends Ellen to the care of friends in Edinburgh, the Murray family. Due to a series of missed meetings with the Murrays, Ellen lives in poverty in Edinburgh until finding a situation as governess to the Boswell family; wrongly imagining a budding romance between her husband and Ellen, however, the unstable Mrs. Boswell has Ellen removed to an Edinburgh lunatic asylum, where she suffers from a fever contracted from the Boswells' daughter, Jessie.<sup>92</sup> After her release from the asylum, Ellen meets a variety of old and new friends, including the newly impoverished Juliet Arnold, who has consented to an irregular Scottish marriage to Lord Glendower, which he fails to honor in favor of a more regularized marriage to the English Maria De Burgh. Grieving over his betrayal, Juliet sinks into illness and, in spite of Ellen's faithful nursing, dies. Following Juliet's death, Ellen meets the Highlander Charlotte Graham and travels with Charlotte to her Highland home in Glen Eredine, where Ellen eventually is married to Charlotte's brother, Henry, who is next in line to be laird. The novel's most significant plot twist is to reveal in its final pages that Henry Graham is the real identity of the Scottish MP Maitland, who originally fell in love with Ellen in London and has been trying ever since his disappearance from the novel's first volume to rescue her from the tribulations that followed her father's death and the loss of her fortune.

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<sup>92</sup> Clearly the Boswells are a reference to Dr. Johnson's famous Scottish friend; they are such a fleeting and odd presence in Brunton's novel, however, that it remains difficult to discern if she intended the family as a comment upon that Anglo-Scotch relationship.

Although Ellen remains on the British Isles for the whole of *Discipline*, the scope of the novel's concern is as broad as *Self-Control*'s. Instead of exploring the problem of English coercion and Scottish vulnerability abroad, however, *Discipline* highlights the reflux of these colonial problems first to London and Greenwich and then to the Scottish Lowlands and Highlands. Using this geopolitical schematic as a rough scaffolding, Brunton's novel remaps Great Britain according to a concept Alan Bewell has identified as "colonial return" (13). As Bewell explains, "figures of colonial return" were those Britons who had traveled and lived in Britain's tropical colonies only to return home with permanent constitutional damage inflicted by the ravages of equatorial disease environments that contained pathogens to which British constitutions lacked immunity. Normally, figures of colonial return were service members in Britain's army and navy—but overseas merchants, colonial administrators, and their families often succumbed as well to this widely acknowledged constitutional threat. "Colonial return" became especially visible as diseases known only in the empire abroad began appearing in London and other major British cities as afflicted British colonists returned home, making it seem particularly certain to some that individual and thus national constitutional decline was immanent in the British imperial project. Looking back in 1852 to the beginnings of Britain's empire, Robert Dundas, for example, appended to his *Sketches of Brazil* the sinister subtitle *Remarks on a Premature Decay of the System Incident to Europeans on Their Return from Hot Climates* (Bewell 13). Brunton's particular innovation in *Discipline* is to encode the internal divisions among the Scottish Highlands, the Scottish Lowlands, and England by their levels of susceptibility to colonial return: in Brunton's London the likelihood of colonial return is absolute; to the north in

Scotland, the inherent Calvinist discipline of Scottish culture tends to keep at bay constitutional threats from abroad. As Bewell has written:

[i]t is striking how far discipline shaped the lives of British, and especially Scottish, colonists. Read within the context of colonial epidemiology, the British emphasis on discipline may be less the expression of an intrinsic national moral outlook than a reflection of epidemiological anxiety—a fear perhaps that self-control was the only thing that might keep one alive. (26)

For Brunton, discipline probably remained first and foremost “the expression of an intrinsic [Scottish Calvinist] moral outlook” before it was a “reflection of epidemiological anxiety”—but she remains clear in *Discipline* that the Anglo-Scottish relationship, and with it the British constitution, was significantly troubled by an unprincipled English element that required a Scottish—and particularly a Calvinist—variety of moral discipline for both individual and national health.

And yet, there is a marked uncertainty in *Discipline* about Scotland’s ability to resist the national constitutional decay of colonial reflux brought on by the English. As Ellen recovers from the shock of her father’s death and the loss of her fortune, she, like Harriet in Austen’s *Emma*, joins Miss Mortimer in a visit to the three members of a poor Highland family, the Campbells, who are living in a “low dark apartment in the meanest part of Greenwich” where the “vapour” is so “stagnant” Ellen can “scarcely breathe.” The Campbells, we learn, have come to London from the Highlands looking for employment; Mr. Campbell is a gardener, but is unable to find work in the south until applying to his countryman, Maitland, who finds a position for him at the villa of one Mr. Percy of

Richmond, who is of course Ellen's father. This is how Ellen remembers the Campbells' story:

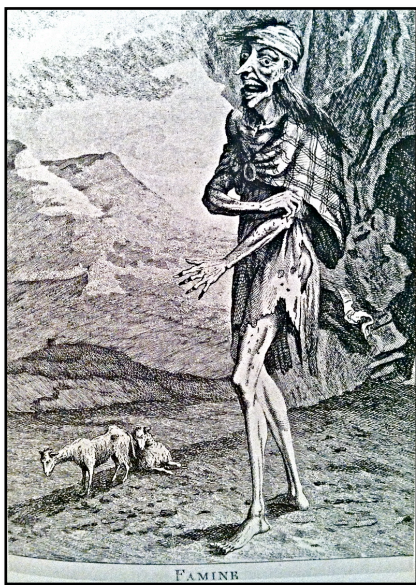
I was become cautious; and, without betraying myself, asked whether they had ever seen Miss Percy. The woman answered that they had not; having entered on their service the same day that their master's family removed to town. The evil influence of Miss Percy, however, had blasted all their hopes and comforts. She had given peremptory orders that some delicate exotics should be forced into flower to adorn an entertainment. Poor Campbell, deputed to take care of them, watched them all night in the hot-house; then walked two miles to his lodging through a thick drift of snow; breathed ever afterwards with pain; struggled against disease; wrought hard in the sharp mornings and chilly evenings of spring; and, when my father could no longer repay his services, was dismissed to die. (186-87)

The pathogenic humid atmosphere and the exotic flora of Britain's tropical colonies appear in this passage at the Percy's Richmond hot-house in support of Ellen's personal, imperial luxury. Mr. Campbell, whose Scottish constitution has been seasoned in the more northerly climes of the Highlands, falls ill when he is exposed to tropical temperatures and then suddenly to the cold winter weather of the British Isles. Unable to bear this imperial range of meteorological conditions, Mr. Campbell unwittingly becomes what Alan Bewell has called a "tropical invalid," or that "new kind of patient [...] with 'a constitution [...] wasted and debilitated'" by pathogenic colonial environments (Curtis qtd. in Bewell 13). As we learn later in the story, Mr. Campbell finally succumbs to his consumption, his death invoking the tragically common Romantic-period reality that a British servant class—normally military



service members, but in this case an impoverished Scottish gardener—succumbed in disproportionate numbers when British constitutions of all classes were increasingly exposed to the tropics (Bewell 82).

In the same Greenwich apartment, the Campbells' infant son suffers from smallpox—another colonial disease, which was the European scourge of populations native to the Americas during the age of imperialism. “William Bradford,” for example, “after observing that, in contact with smallpox, the natives of the Connecticut River ‘dye like rotten



sheep,’ notes with some satisfaction that ‘by the marvelous goodness and providens of God not one of the English was so much as sicke, or in the least measure tainted with this disease” (Bewell 5). But as medical historian Deborah Brunton has shown, the Scottish Highlands and the Hebrides also were the site of several smallpox outbreaks, a major one in the late 1790s, about a decade before Mary Brunton began

*Discipline*, when inoculation efforts of the British state failed in these distantly removed Scottish populations.<sup>93</sup> That illness generally, and smallpox in particular, characterized life in the Scottish Highlands is borne out by the above rather cruel example of 1763 English Wilkite propaganda titled “Famine,” in which a starving clansman freezes in his insufficient tartan while scratching at a worsening skin condition, consistent with the lesions of

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<sup>93</sup> Deborah Brunton, “Smallpox Inoculation and Demographic Trends in Eighteenth-Century Scotland,” *Medical History* 36, no. 4 (October 1992): 403–29.  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1036632/>. So far as my research shows, Deborah is not directly related to Mary and Alexander.

smallpox.<sup>94</sup> These conditions of poverty and disease made the lives of Scottish Highlanders strikingly similar to those of British colonial subjects. In *Discipline*'s Greenwich scene, therefore, not only have the colonial diseases of consumption and smallpox arrived just east of London at the seat of Britain's naval power; they have been carried there by postcolonial Highland bodies, whose human identities are obscured by their illnesses to the eyes of an Englishwoman: as Ellen recalls, the Campbells' son "scarcely retained a trace of human likeness," though certainly he retains his humanity in the eyes of his Scottish parents (186).

Just as Laura Montreville's constitutional extremity in *Self-Control* is the product of prolonged English sexual coercion, so in *Discipline* is Scottish constitutional decline caused by English greed and immorality. "On my entrance," Ellen recalls, Mrs. Campbell "started up to offer me the only seat which her apartment contained; and the poor Scotchman, with national courtesy to a superior, would have risen to receive me, – but was unable to move without help." When Ellen sees the Campbells struggling under the burdens of their colonial illnesses and their nationalized inferiority, Ellen suddenly, emphatically realizes: "it was *my* work" (187, Brunton's emphasis). Scottish Highland illness and inferiority are produced in this scene by Ellen's English claims to national superiority and disproportionate English ascendancy within the British empire, which are embodied in Ellen's greed, materialism, beauty, and good health.

If Brunton saw English imperial greed at the heart of Highland suffering, her solution in *Discipline* was to use the English Ellen Percy to ventriloquize these concerns, and then to commit Ellen to a particularly Scottish variety of personal reformation: namely, the moral discipline of the Presbyterian Church and the more explicitly Foucauldian bodily

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<sup>94</sup> Image from Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1807*, p. 115.

discipline of grating poverty following the failure of her father's colonial ambitions and her subsequent confinement in an Edinburgh asylum. The novel enacts these Scottish forms of discipline by using English characters to destabilize Ellen's own English constitution as well as that of her English friend, Juliet, who, we noted earlier, is tricked into an irregular Scottish marriage by an unprincipled Englishman. Ultimately, Brunton makes both Ellen and Juliet dependent upon the care of the Highlander Mrs. Campbell when they occasion to meet her again in Edinburgh; now living in a "clean though humble" home and recovered from her family's tragedies in Greenwich, the widowed Mrs. Campbell offers to care for Juliet and Ellen, who remarks wistfully on the reversal of their positions affected by "the changes of this restless world" (314). Later, when the Boswells employ her, Ellen imagines herself "degraded into slavery" (290). The English colonizers—through their undisciplined living—have become, as Ellen sees it, as wretched as the colonized.

And yet, Brunton's apparently clear-cut nationalist position—that Scotland, and especially the Scottish Highlands, were immunized by Calvinist discipline to the pathologic reflux of the British empire—is nevertheless marked by a deep undercurrent of ambivalence: perhaps, Brunton suggests in *Discipline*, Scotland already was unalterably complicit in the moral transgressions of the British empire. This ambivalence is best articulated in the Scottish MP and East India merchant Maitland who, among other contradictions, is an abolitionist who owns slaves. As Ellen explains:

[a]wake, as he ever was, to the claims of justice and humanity, it was not personal interest that could shield the slave trade from the reprobation of Maitland. He conquered his retiring nature that, in the senate of his country, he might lend his testimony against this foulest of her crimes; and when that

senate stilled the general cry with a poor promise of distant reform, he blushed for England and for human kind. Somewhat of the same honest shame he felt at the recollection that he was himself the proprietor of many hundreds of his fellow-creatures. (130)

This is a truly curious passage. Ellen is inclined to associate the shame of the Atlantic slave trade with the English: the abolitionist Maitland, on her view, blushes primarily “for England.” But this association is undercut by Maitland’s “recollection” that he, a Scot, is also a slave owner. Brunton’s unsettling implication is that Maitland, with an insidious variety of Scottish self-division, regularly forgets his own “shame[ful]” role in the empire. Ellen—fresh from her realization that Scottish constitutional problems are owing to English ascendancy in the Union—struggles, too, to acknowledge Scotland’s complicity in the Triangle Trade, that “foulest of [...] crimes.” Ellen and Maitland thus dramatize an acute constitutional problem of the Anglo-Scottish union: the obstacles to abolition presented by “the senate of [Maitland’s] country”—Parliament, that is—are represented by Ellen as English, not Scottish or British. In *Discipline*, therefore, the tendency for Great Britain to be construed as England becomes not a figure for the elision of Scottish and Welsh politics and culture, but Maitland’s, Ellen’s—and perhaps also Brunton’s—reluctance to acknowledge Scotland’s implication in the most immoral offshore activities of the British empire.

Brunton’s initial effort in *Discipline* to situate Scottish discipline as an antidote to English constitutional dissipation therefore comes to an impasse. The clearest formal result of this impasse is Ellen’s revelation very late in the novel that the Scottish MP and colonial merchant Maitland is actually the Highland clansman, Henry Graham, who uses his pseudonym when transacting business in Europe and London on behalf of Britain’s empire.

He is called by his given Scottish name only when he returns to the Highlands, in an effort to distance himself, his family, and the Highland community at Glen Eredine from the ill effects of his ambitions. For Ellen, however, the name Maitland itself remains fraught with the complications of imperial reflux—the “self-reproach” and “regret” of her luxurious life in London—and so she resolves never again to call Henry by his British name (371).

Consequently, the integration of Ellen’s newly disciplined English constitution into Highland life is extensive, but incomplete: she is “united” to the Highland community through her marriage to Henry Graham, she retains her old English superiority as “the mother of their future chieftan”; and though Ellen’s moral life is largely reformed by the novel’s end, she yet maintains “a little of the coquettish sauciness of Ellen Percy” (375). Most ominously of all, Henry, Ellen, and Henry’s sister, Charlotte, represent the appearance in the Highlands of the Atlantic slave trade, for it is from her new home in Glen Eredine that Ellen maintains her own stake in the “large plantation which [she, Henry, and Charlotte] all superintend together” (371). Previously confined to London, the reflux of Britain’s empire reaches the Highlands as a result of Henry and Ellen’s international marriage. Thus—in spite of the tenuous British domesticity she establishes in *Self-Control* between Laura and De Courcy—Brunton finally could not maintain Anglo-Scottish intermarriage as an arrangement immune to the constitutional problems posed by the political unification of England and Scotland and their mutually dependent role on Britain’s imperial stage.

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Marking a new chapter in the long tradition of the self-divided Scot, Brunton positioned her own intellectual life squarely at the nexus of Scottish nationalism on one hand and a united, imperial, English-speaking Great Britain on the other. Writing in 1813 to

Joanna Baillie, who was living abroad in England that year, Brunton confided a lasting nationalist disposition: “I hope,” Brunton ventured, “you will be so national as to let me say, that a pretty English knoll is not half so exhilarating as the top of a Scotch hill” (*Emmeline* lx). And yet, on August 15, 1814, the day she finished the manuscript for *Discipline*, Brunton wrote to Mrs. Izett:

I began the Gaelic Grammar y’day. The pronunciation is terribly unintelligible. “There is no sound like this in English” is a very spirit-braking index. I fear I shall never make out the true croaking and spluttering. If I persevere, however, I may astonish you when we meet – shocking your ears with your dear native tongue spoken in the barbarous accents of a southron.  
(McKerrow 133)

The English instructions of Brunton’s *Gaelic Grammar*—that “[t]here is no sound like this in English”—equally frustrate Brunton’s mind, which thinks in English, and her Scottish nationalist disposition to learn Gaelic; together these opposing constitutional forces turn her into a person of “barbarous accents”—not really a “colonial other,” but a peculiar variety of Scottish nationalist made alien exactly by her sense of nationalism.

In the same letter, Brunton characterizes the novel as a genre particularly suited to addressing the kind of constitutional dilemma she was facing in her program to learn Gaelic:

[Scot’s *Waverly*] delights my very soul. [...] I think a fiction containing a just representation of human beings and of their actions – a connected, interesting and probable story, conducing to a useful and impressive moral lesson – might be one of the greatest efforts of human genius. Let the admirable construction of fable in *Tom Jones* be employed to unfold characters like Miss Edgworth’s

[sic] – let it be told with the eloquence of Rousseau, and with the simplicity of Goldsmith – let it be all this, and Milton need not have been ashamed of the work! (McKerrow 133)

Imagining a novel constituted by Scottish, English, Irish, and Swiss formal elements, and celebrating the work of her countryman, Sir Walter Scott, she nevertheless sets the English poet Milton as their judge, suggesting that Brunton, more like Wordsworth than some might care to acknowledge, still saw the English as the chief arbiters of literary taste in Britain. But with the “patch-work” of characters and settings she imagined in *Self-Control* and *Discipline*, the novel already had become for Brunton something more than a Scottish advance into an English literary market: it was rather a multi-national genre capable of addressing the English—and Scottish—problems inhering in a British constitution.

### CHAPTER III

#### **“That Mixture of Character”<sup>95</sup>: Constitutional Instability in Austen’s *Sanditon***

The death of Princess Charlotte Augusta on November 6, 1817, within hours of her first son’s stillbirth, marked one of the most acute constitutional crises of the British Regency. Most evident in this national tragedy was that Britain had lost its future queen and king—as well as the constitutional stability they embodied—for neither Princess Charlotte nor her estranged parents had any other children. Reflecting on this loss thirty years later, during the opening years of Queen Victoria’s reign, writer and translator Harriet Martineau called Charlotte’s death “the great historical event of 1817”—“never,” she continued, “was a whole nation plunged in such deep and universal grief. From the highest to the lowest, this death was felt as a calamity that demanded the intense sorrow of domestic misfortune.” (Qtd. in Behrendt 1) As Stephen Behrendt notes, Martineau’s conflation of Charlotte’s “personal and public life, domestic and national interest,” and her position as “citizen and sovereign” is why her loss could be felt so universally: Charlotte was a figure who embodied many different meanings of the British constitution (1).

Other circumstances had increased Charlotte’s appeal to her presumptive subjects. Since her 1816 marriage to Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, Charlotte been celebrated increasingly by the British public as an “attractive and acceptable alternative” to her mother, Caroline of Brunswick, who, as we saw in this study’s first chapter, had long been gaining

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<sup>95</sup> Jane Austen, *Sanditon*, p. 378.



renown as Britain's most visible fallen woman (Behrendt 2). Caroline's real or imagined transgressions against her husband, the Prince Regent, were matched by his own, which—with irresponsible spending habits costing British taxpayers in excess of 3 million pounds since his twenty-first birthday—had begun considerably to erode his own popularity. In December of 1815, two years before Princess Charlotte died, diarist and novelist Charlotte Bury recorded in her journal that:

[o]n late occasion, when His Royal Highness went to church (to receive the sacrament) he was hissed and groaned at, both going and coming. He was afraid of going in state through the streets as he should have done, but went in his private carriage through the park. But the mob found him out, and clung to the wheels, hissing [...] and the church (the chapel royal) was surrounded by soldiers, who would not let in a peer's son.<sup>96</sup>

Bury's portrait is of a national constitution destabilized by the unpopularity of the Regent: concealing himself in a private coach instead of going to church publicly "as he should have done," he interacts with his subjects in the amalgamated form of a clinging and hissing mob, a more reptilian version of Edmund Burke's "swinish multitude" from *Reflections Upon the Revolution in France*. In Martineau's explanation, the Regent's fear transforms free-born Britons into something at least akin to the French rioters who, in Burke's account, had entered Marie Antoinette's bedchamber in 1789.<sup>97</sup> Britain's military, which had lately acquitted itself victoriously at Waterloo, is now required in London to protect the monarch from his people while he is at prayer. In addition to providing a respectable alternative to her

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<sup>96</sup> Charlotte Bury, *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth*, 4 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1838-9), IV, pp. 278-9.

<sup>97</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections Upon the Revolution in France*, ed. J.C.D. Clark (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 242, 232.

mother, therefore, Princess Charlotte was widely expected to relieve the British people from her father's blatantly ineffectual leadership upon her ascension to the throne.

Britain's constitutional stability also was being rocked during this period by usual postwar problems: with a common French enemy soundly defeated at Waterloo, Britons of all stations were faced at home with unemployment, rising food costs, and a social system inadequate to the support of soldiers and sailors returning from Europe and the British colonies, many of whom had been invalided by their service. While local relief was sometimes available, these social problems were largely under the administration of George IV's facile leadership, bureaucratic deficiencies of Great Britain's government, and partisan wrangling in London. Thus, perceived threats to the British constitution were no longer coming from the French abroad, but from the capital, a popular sentiment that was confirmed by the 1819 "Peterloo Massacre" of protestors by government troops in the city of Manchester.

In view of her parents' perceived moral inadequacies, the well-publicized madness of her grandfather, King George III, and the difficulties of a postwar domestic economy, it is not surprising that the young Charlotte became for Britons a critical public figure, standing for the possibility that the Hanoverian line, and Britain with it, might recover one day soon from the constitutional weaknesses signified by the older members of the royal family. Other circumstances made it easy for the British public to see Charlotte as a princess apart from her family: it was reputed that Charlotte was badly mistreated by her father, who forbade her attendance at his social functions at Carlton House, prevented her from having a circle of female friends, and made it difficult for her to have only the most basic contact with her mother. "The British people," Behrendt notes,

came to see in Charlotte's plight – as a victim of the Regent and by extension of the government and of the status quo generally – a measure of their own. And because she was attractive both physically and socially (in contrast to both her parents), the people found it easy to invest her with [...] nationalistic views of 'Englishness': liveliness, extroversion, independence of mind and spirit, and an easy commerce with the public generally. Charlotte seemed to break the royal mould of the aloof, elitist ruler, crossing the traditional barriers [...] separating the nobility from the rest of society. (20)

Thus, Princess Charlotte came to personify the increasingly complicated constitution of postwar Britain alongside the figures of John Bull and Britannia, with whom she often was portrayed.

So important was it for Britons to separate Charlotte from the rest of her family that, as Behrendt observes, something of a public campaign to this purpose became visible in literary and print media dating from 1812 to 1815, the years when Charlotte was in the process of selecting a husband. Lord Byron, in the 1812 poem "Lines to a Lady Weeping," characterized Charlotte's treatment at her father's hands as "a Sire's disgrace, a realm's decay," drawing in these two possessive clauses the ready analogy between the "disgrace" of George IV and the "decay" of Great Britain while setting Charlotte apart from these deficiencies. After Charlotte's death, Byron would emphasize Charlotte's singularity in Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, calling her "The fair-hair'd Daughter of the Isles" and "The love of millions!"—appositives which hail the princess and elide her family: "the Isles" of Britain stand clearly in the place of her parents (Byron qtd. in Behrendt 24-25).

Accordingly, Charlotte's wedding—to Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, whom she chose over the Hereditary Prince William of Orange, whom her father had selected—inspired hopeful acclimation of a renewed national wholeness at a time otherwise marked by widespread social unrest; the *Augustan Review*, for example, proclaimed in June of 1816: “[Our rejoicings on the occasion] spring out of an event auspicious to the royal family, because it is so to the nation at large.”<sup>98</sup> Charlotte's refusal of William in favor of Leopold, which marked a royal young woman's ability seriously to contravene at least one of her parents, had acquired nationalistic resonance as well. The public reason Charlotte provided for ending her relationship with William was her nationalist aversion to spending any part of the year outside of Great Britain. This was grist to the mill of the anti-Regent Whig press, who characterized Charlotte's prospective marriage to William as the tyranny of a father who was trying to get her out of his political way, and, worse, “an assault on British liberty” (Behrendt 18). Particularly poignant for many Britons was the idea that Charlotte, strongly identified as the queen under whom the British nation would cast off despotic power while retaining its monarchy, would be forced by that same despotic power to leave her people and her beloved homeland.

Just how important Charlotte had become to Britons became most apparent, however, in the wake of her unexpected death. As royal daughter, heir apparent, and mother of the future king, Charlotte was mourned as both a woman and a princess; as the art collector and novelist William Beckford attested in a letter: “I consider her loss pretty great, a sad and dire accident calculated to fill with tears the eyes of almost all the people, a fatal event pregnant with confusion, and, in time, with civil war.” (Qtd. in Behrendt 2) Charlotte's death, in

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<sup>98</sup> *Augustan Review*, 2.14 (June 1816), p. 658.

Beckford's view, brought the medical and national meanings of the British constitution into crisis: the common dangers of Romantic-era childbirth, which Beckford invokes in the word "pregnant," were raised in Charlotte's case to the loss of a monarch and the end of a royal line, affecting "almost all the people" of Britain. Charlotte's death, therefore, made clear the connection between the constitution of the individual body and the constitution of the British body politic: in time, Beckford predicts, Charlotte's death may result in civil war, national constitutional crisis in its absolute form.

Jane Austen was not alive to witness Britain in the wake of Charlotte's death. She had died on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, 1817—a little more than three months before the woman who was to be her queen. When she died, however, Austen left behind a strange, unfinished manuscript known as the *Sanditon* fragment, which follows a young woman named Charlotte from her country home at Willingden to the fictional seaside resort of Sanditon, where she, very like Princess Charlotte on the national stage, plays a healthful alternative to the constitutional decay embodied by the characters around her. It seems unlikely that Austen's naming of Charlotte Heywood is purely coincidental, given the popularity of the princess (another Charlotte H.) during the period when Austen was composing the *Sanditon* fragment, but it also seems unlikely that Austen intended Charlotte Heywood as an absolute allegory for the princess: though Princess Charlotte inspired a great many nationalist allegories, poems, and essays, there is not much evidence beyond Charlotte Heywood's name that Austen intended *Sanditon* to be among them.

Critical in the current argument, however, is that Regency-era Britons were eager in the constitutionally precarious postwar years to raise their healthy young princess as a national heroine poised to usher in an era of political and social renewal. They did this

precisely by seeing Charlotte as an individual apart from her vulgar family—quite reminiscent, in fact, of how Austen had separated Elizabeth from the Bennets in order to save them. And yet, just as the constitutionally sound, lone heroine was coming to the fore at the highest level of Britain’s national stage, Austen was writing a manuscript that is altogether less certain about the efficacy of individual characters against a complex social force this chapter terms “constitutional instability.” Constitutional instability—“that mixture of Character” is Austen’s phrase for it—connotes the dramatically changing social landscape of postwar Britain, wherein traditional markers of class and family constitutions—title, wealth, and land—were being eroded by postwar inflation, the persistent reflux of Britain’s expanding empire to the metropole, and the continuing rise of the middling classes under capital, a system in which everything—including the British constitution—was marked for sale. As the *Sanditon* fragment implies in its striking lack of suitable husbands, these enormous social changes made the advantageous marriages of Austen’s early novels a narrative impossibility. Instead of positioning her *Sanditon* heroines for social elevation in marriage, therefore, Austen would seem instead to set a fledgling friendship between Charlotte Heywood and another female character, Clara Brereton, distinctly apart from the disorienting social and narrative effects of constitutional instability.

Because Austen was writing *Sanditon* as she was dying, criticism has tended to see the fragment’s asyndetic form as evidence of both Austen’s innovating literary mind and her dissociative mental tendencies as a gravely unwell person. Kathryn Sutherland, for example, notes that critics of *Sanditon* risk “mistaking composition for the more painful but no less

revelatory labour of decomposition.”<sup>99</sup> The decline in Austen’s health should enter into our consideration of the *Sanditon* fragment as much as any other biographical detail, and I leave the bulk of this work to biographers and critics who already have used the available record to describe both probable and improbable relationships between Austen’s illness and her energetic spoof of hypochondriacs in the last months of her life. It will, however, remain worthwhile to make some recourse to Austen’s final letters from 1817 as well as the correspondence she wrote to Cassandra from the health resort at Bath in 1800. In spite of how well this earlier Bath correspondence illuminates Austen’s disdainful attitudes toward coastal health resorts and hypochondria, the *Sanditon* fragment has not yet been read against it. Together with these early and late letters, the *Sanditon* manuscript tends to show not Austen’s mental decomposition in the throes of illness, but a highly stylized conception of a destabilized British constitution that deliberately confounds the clearer narrative meanings “constitution” held in her earlier work.

Rather than preparing her stage for another set of heroines to find social and financial security in companionate marriages, Austen seems to have been working out in *Sanditon* the problem heroines face when narratives of social ascendancy and companionate marriage are foreclosed by national economic downturn and the bleak social realities it produces. Though Austen did not live long enough to resolve this narrative problem (which is to assume—perhaps wrongly—that Austen saw a resolution), the fact of her having posed the problem in 1817 is important for several reasons. First, *Sanditon*’s apparent foreclosure of marriage plots suggests that the historical realities of the postwar Regency were making comedic narratives seem impossible to Austen, if not highly improbable, to borrow a word from her Aristotelian

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<sup>99</sup> Kathryn Sutherland, *Jane Austen’s Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 197.

critique of Mary Brunton's novels. Further, the developing relationship *Sanditon* describes between Charlotte and Clara suggests that Austen may have been posing homosocial bonds as a constitutionally viable alternative to marriage, a social and narrative structure she had raised in *Sense and Sensibility* under the more traditional form of a double marriage. While Elinor and Marianne are eventually secured in their social and financial conditions through respective unions with the ineffectual Edward Ferrars and the rheumatic Colonel Brandon, it remains clear in the novel's final paragraph that this friendship between sisters outruns whatever domestic felicity their nuptials produce:

[b]etween Barton and Delaford there was that constant communication which strong family affection would naturally dictate; and among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that, though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands. (380)

This lack of "coolness between [...] husbands"—as strange as two sisters living "without disagreement"—suggests that Edward and Brandon do not even mind that their wives go elsewhere to find the kind of close companionship Thompson has called "intimacy" (159-80). Though the reading that follows here must remain speculative in view of *Sanditon*'s fragmentary nature, it seems possible that Austen was pulling taut in *Sanditon* the thread she had only briefly touched in the female friendships of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma*. Unlike Elinor, Marianne, Elizabeth, and Jane, whose sisterhood is the foundation of their friendship—and unlike Emma and Harriet, whose friendship is circumscribed by Emma's belief in their shared social position—Charlotte Heywood and



Clara Brereton's relationship transcends these constitutional categories. *Sanditon*, as critics frequently observe, remains deeply pessimistic, even fatalistic, about the condition of the British constitution; Charlotte and Clara are heroines apart from this national decline because they make minimal recourse to the old order's decaying categories.

§

As in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen uses in *Sanditon* a false step to signify her story's rising action. On his way to Willingden to contract a surgeon to live at Sanditon, the fragment's eponymous (and fictional) seaside resort, Mr. Thomas Parker overturns his carriage, spilling himself and his wife, Mary, into the road, thereby injuring his ankle. According to the trend we have observed in the early novels with Marianne Dashwood and Jane Bennet, Mr. Parker's physical injury also occasions an episode of his social exposure to a Mr. Heywood, the father of Charlotte, who comes to the Parkers' aid. Mr. Parker is exposed in *Sanditon*'s opening scene not by a romantic attachment exactly, but by his obsession with the commoditization of constitutional health; as Wiltshire notes, "Mr. Parker has privatised the sea air"—and is quite eager that as many Britons as possible might enjoy, as he does, this developing market on their coast (205). While Austen suggests the materialist flavor of Mr. Parker's patriotism in his home at Trafalgar House, where Britain's costly naval victory is remade as Mr. Parker's personal luxury, she also is keen to play up Mr. Parker's belief that his personal interest in the health-promoting qualities of Britain's coast is a matter of his nationally-minded beneficence. For example, this is how Mr. Parker assesses the effect of Sanditon's high society on the local poor: Sanditon is "the sure resort of the very best Company, those regular, steady, private Families of thorough Gentility & Character, who are a blessing everywhere, excite the industry of the Poor and diffuse comfort

& improvement among them of every sort.” (368) Sanditon, on Mr. Parker’s view, advances a kind of proto-trickle-down economics, whereby constitutionally sound “private Families of thorough Gentility & Character” improve Britain’s national constitution at large. Mr. Parker’s opinion—that the health-promoting qualities of Britain’s coast were a boon to British constitutions—was common historically as well. The January 1816 *Gentleman’s Magazine* eagerly explained, for example, that

[i]t is now universally advised to have recourse to that Ocean, at once the safeguard and the glory of the Nation, whose healing properties cannot be too much extolled [...]. The numerous places on the coast that now, at each returning summer, vie with each other in tempting the invalid of the interior to try the efficacy of Sea-Air and Sea-Bathing, are solid and convincing proofs of the importance of the offered remedy. (Qtd. in Wiltshire 206)

Very like this passage’s circuitous rhetoric—in which the asserted “healing properties” of a nationalist Atlantic become proof of “the importance of” its “remedy”—Mr. Parker’s self-interest and his nationalism amount finally to the same thing.

Mr. Parker’s Sanditon thus represents a strange implosion of national, class, familial, and individual constitutions: “Sanditon was second Wife & 4 Children to him—hardly less Dear,” Austen’s narrator discloses, “[Sanditon] had indeed the highest claims;—not only those of Birthplace, Property, and Home,—it was his Mine, his Lottery, his Speculation & his Hobby Horse; his Occupation his Hope & his Futurity.” (372) That the commas fall altogether out of this litany suggests the breathless ardor of Mr. Parker’s enthusiasm for Sanditon, a new coastal home that becomes Austen’s late counterpoint to Pemberley. While Darcy’s estate symbolizes and undertakes the maintenance of a multigenerational family

structure within the larger genealogical constitution of the British aristocracy, Sanditon represents Mr. Parker's financial speculation on the success of the surrounding resort, which paradoxically will require the widespread constitutional decline of Britons everywhere.

"[E]verybody has heard of Sanditon," he boasts to Mr. Heywood, through the pain of his seriously sprained his ankle: "for a young & rising Bathing-place, [Sanditon is] certainly the favourite spot of all that are to be found along the coast of Sussex" (368). Into the mouth of Mr. Heywood, however, Austen places this critique, enlisting her usual suspicion of hypochondria:

Yes—I have heard of Sanditon. [...] Every five years, one hears of some new place or other starting up by the Sea [...].—How they can half of them be filled, is the wonder! *Where* People can be found with Money or Time to go to them!—Bad things for a Country;—sure to raise the price of Provisions & make the Poor good for nothing." (368)

Austen's italicized "*Where*" is important, for while it suggests Mr. Heywood's popular political view that excess luxury was depleting the national economy and destabilizing its class constitution, this "*Where*" also implies that nowhere in Britain's postwar economy are there people who responsibly can afford such luxuries; still less is there anyone who needs them. This is a fitting pretext for the strange group of people Austen assembles at Sanditon: they are, at least in Mr. Heywood's view, characters from nowhere.

While Mr. Parker's injured ankle reveals his peculiar obsession with his home, it also allows Austen, several chapters later, to pursue an important comparison of Mr. Parker to Coleridge and Wordsworth. Critic William Deresiewicz finds no direct proof that Austen read Coleridge and only her fleeting references to Wordsworth; nevertheless, he argues

persuasively, the two poets significantly influenced Austen's later works.<sup>100</sup> Austen's clear reference to Coleridge in *Sanditon* is exciting because it corroborates Deresiewicz's claim and demonstrates that she must have read "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" (1797). The poem was written on a July afternoon when the poet was left alone at the Nether Stowey home of Thomas Poole. Poole and Coleridge had been neighbors since the end of 1796, when Coleridge took a cottage close to Poole's property. On this particular afternoon, Coleridge's friends, Charles Lamb, Dorothy and William Wordsworth, and probably also his wife, Sara Fricker, embarked from Poole's home on a walking tour across the Quantocks. Suffering from a scalded foot after Sara spilled boiling milk on it, Coleridge stayed behind to convalesce in Poole's arbor: the location of the poem's title lime tree.<sup>101</sup> Famously, the poem becomes an appeal that the idealized British landscape will instill in Lamb a "gladness," (l. 21) bringing him into full communion with the poem's speaker (presumably Coleridge), his other "friends" (l. 19), the surrounding scene, and God:

Ah! slowly sink  
Behind the western ridge, thou glorious Sun!  
Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,  
Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn, ye clouds!  
Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves!  
And kindle, thou blue Ocean! So my Friend  
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,  
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round  
On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem  
Less gross than bodily: and of such hues  
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes  
Spirits perceive his presence. (ll. 33-44)

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<sup>100</sup> William Deresiewicz, *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 1-17.

<sup>101</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Poetical Works, Part I*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 349-54.

The phrase “till all doth seem / Less gross than bodily”—much remarked by eco-critical Romanticists as Coleridge’s elision of the boundary between the human mind and the natural world—is most important to the current discussion, for Mr. Parker, lamed like Coleridge by an injury to his foot and ankle, is arrested by a similar sentiment when viewing the landscape at Sanditon: “He longed,” Austen’s narrator tells us, “to be on the Sands, the Cliffs, at his own House, & everywhere out of his House *at once*” (384, my emphasis). If Austen is alluding to Coleridge here, and it seems likely that she is, two interpretations are plausible: in her usual stance toward hypochondria, Austen may be using Mr. Parker to poke fun at Coleridge’s poetic dramatization of his own injury. But Mr. Parker is also a rather degraded version of Coleridge in that he does not call upon the surrounding landscape to promote his friend’s constitutional health, as Coleridge did on Lamb’s behalf—but for the increase of his own health and surplus: Mr. Parker’s “Spirits rose with the very sight of the Sea & he c<sup>d</sup> almost feel his Ankle getting stronger”; in this moment of spiritual exultation, Mr. Parker—never too far from his mercenary attitudes—also hopes “to see scarcely any empty houses” at the Sanditon resort (384). Exemplary of the way Austen undercuts characters whose motives she does not approve, Mr. Parker’s remarks are designed to reveal his purely financial interest in the landscape’s health-imparting, spirit-raising qualities. Because Austen also includes in this paragraph a clear reference to Wordsworth’s “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,” it seems likely that she is drawing Mr. Parker as a kind of anti-type to both Romantic poets, and Sanditon as a Romantic landscape in an advanced condition of ruin: Wordsworth’s famous “steep woods and lofty cliffs”<sup>102</sup> surrounding Tintern Abbey

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<sup>102</sup> William Wordsworth, “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour,” *Lyrical Ballads* and Other Poems, eds. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), l. 158.

become, in Austen's hands, a clear but broken echo: Sanditon's cliffs are "steep, but not very lofty," the subordinate clause pointing up a deficiency not with the angle of the cliffs, but in the eye that perceives them—which belongs to Mr. Parker. More important is that the landscape at Sanditon does not lead on to Wordsworth's salubrious "hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows" (l. 16), "sportive wood run wild" (l. 17), or "pastoral farms / Green to the very door" (ll. 17-18)—but to a "Hotel & Billiard Room," "the best Milliner's shop," and, at the water's edge with a subtle air of the bizarre, the "Bathing Machines," designed expressly to mediate human interaction with the natural world, which Coleridge had sought in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" to figure as seamless. In short, Wordsworth and Coleridge's health-imparting landscapes have become in Austen's scene "the Mall." (384)

Austen's reworking of the landscapes of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and "Tintern Abbey" do not necessarily satirize Coleridge and Wordsworth's high Romantic formulations of what constituted Britons, though this is one possible reading of Austen's allusions. Given *Sanditon*'s wider interest in lampooning bad readers of literature, however, it seems far more likely that Austen is satirizing not Coleridge and Wordsworth but readers like Mr. Parker, who absorbed the most memorable phrases of popular poems but misunderstood their meanings. Instead of using the British landscape to, in M. H. Abram's reading of the Greater Romantic Lyric, arrive at an "insight," understand "a tragic loss," make "a moral decision," or work out "an emotional problem," Mr. Parker uses his Romantic imagination to indulge a frivolous consumerist idyll fueled by the ugly offshore activity of imperialism while actually believing himself engaged to the higher purpose of national

health.<sup>103</sup> Thus not only is Mr. Parker a degraded version of Coleridge, but of Wordsworth, who was an important figure of national health during the Romantic period identified primarily by his proclivity for walking. Mr. Parker is a great walker, too—even in spite of his injury—but as Austen shows in *Sanditon*, his pedestrianism does not give way to Wordsworthian insights about the nature of human consciousness. Rather, everywhere Mr. Parker walks he sees potential profits on an aggressively marketed British coastline.

And yet, Austen's critique of Mr. Parker, and the commercialization of the British constitution he represents, remains unlike the work of materialist literary criticism of the 1980s, particularly Marjorie Levinson's "Insight and Oversight: Rereading 'Tintern Abbey,'" (1986) and, more broadly, Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (1983). Though "Blue Shoes," "nankin Boots," (383) and "Venetian window[s]" (384) etch marks of empire at Sanditon, and though Charlotte Heywood is invited to Sanditon by the Parkers "to buy new Parasols, new Gloves, & new Brooches"—Austen does not see at Sanditon merely what Romantic ideologies obscure (374). Sanditon is, for all its ugliness, also beautiful—even to the practical eye of Charlotte Heywood: "having received possession of her apartment, [Charlotte] found amusement enough in standing at her ample Venetian window, and looking over the miscellaneous foreground of unfinished Buildings, waving Linen, & tops of Houses, to the Sea, dancing & sparkling in Sunshine & Freshness" (384). Most striking about Charlotte's prospect is its aesthetic of miscellany, which imperialism produces locally: the Venetian window, presumably more "ample" than British windows, allows Charlotte to see both the disembodied work of urban development and domesticity ("unfinished buildings" and "waving linen")—as well as a more traditional,

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<sup>103</sup> M. H. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), pp. 78-108.

and more beautiful, “dancing and sparkling” view of that conduit of British trade, the English Channel. This framed view of the water, an effect of picturesque tourism, is what Mr. Parker wishes to sell to his guests—but it comes with a “miscellaneous foreground,” a British landscape variegated by the very changes that make possible Charlotte’s window and the scenery it showcases. Typical of Austen’s genius is a tendency to see both sides of the matter.

This mixed landscape on the coast paints in *Sanditon* a contrast to a more homogenous inland; signs of change, however, appear subtly in the country as well. On their way to the seaside resort, the Parkers and Charlotte pass a “moderate-sized house” about two miles inland that reminds Charlotte of her family’s home at Willingden (379). This, we learn, is the Parkers’ original home where Mr. Parker, his siblings, and his three eldest children were born—giving the lie to an earlier impression we have received in the narrator’s free indirect discourse that the resort at Sanditon was Mr. Parker’s “Birthplace.” Here, the narrator mocks Mr. Parker’s ongoing sales pitch of Sanditon to the Heywoods while he is laid up at their Willingden home with his ankle: in his enthusiasm for the resort, and the financial gain it promises, Mr. Parker conveniently has forgotten where he was born. Perhaps more telling is that his rage for the new and improved Sanditon has compelled him to give up his ancestral home to Mr. Hillier, “who occupies the cheif [sic] of [Mr. Parker’s] land,” an action which places a tenant of no relation in the position traditionally reserved for Mr. Parker’s son and heir, disrupting traditional hereditary mechanisms of constitutional maintenance (380).

At length, the Parkers and Charlotte arrive in Sanditon—“modern Sanditon,” the text now specifies—where we see the Parkers’ new home at Trafalgar House, which Mr. Parker



“wishes [he] had not named Trafalgar—for Waterloo is more the thing now.” Thus, on the developing coast, we see inscribed the most recent activity of British military might, standing in contradistinction to the Parker’s old home, which, in Mr. Parker’s opinion, was “built in a hole” “without Air or View” by “pent down” ancestors who knew no better—this a hypochondriac’s formulation of the common Romantic-era belief that the practices of the past were becoming insufficient to the progress of the present. And yet, Mr. Parker’s certitude of his “better” situation on the coast is troubled by Mrs. Parker’s information that the Hilliers “did not seem to feel the Storms last Winter at all.—I remember seeing M<sup>rs</sup> Hillier after one of those dreadful Nights, when *we* had been literally rocked in our bed, and she did not seem at all aware of the Wind being anything more than common” (381). While the Parkers have had the aesthetic enjoyment of “the Grandeur of the Storm” at the new and poorly-built Trafalgar House, the Hilliers are protected from the weather in a home built to last by an older generation of Britons; the architectural stability of the “honest old Place” serves ironically to underline the new constitutional precariousness of its original family (381, 380, my emphasis).

Between the Parkers’ original home and the resort at Sanditon’s coast is the Sanditon parish church and—Austen’s narrator is clear—“the real village of Sanditon” with its working-class cottages, “Woods & enclosures,” “Baker’s shop,” and “a small cluster of Fisherman’s Houses” at the mouth of a small stream (382-3). But even “real Sanditon” is home to a new leisured class, much to Mr. Parker’s shallow satisfaction: two or three of the best cottages have taken up their own tourist enterprise, with “Lodgings to let” advertised in their windows; “two Females in elegant white” read in the green court of a farm house; through an upper casement comes the sound of someone improving herself at harp lessons

(383). Yet Mr. Parker's joy in "the increasing fashion of the place altogether" is belied by his utter lack of "personal concern in the success of the village itself." There is also the imposing geographic reality of a hill, which hides "modern Sanditon" from the baker, the fishermen, and the elegantly attired farmers' daughters, who can only approximate the leisure of wealthier coastal tourists (383). Charlotte Heywood's journey from Willingden to the coastal Sanditon thus traverses a geography of sprawling commercialism, which shows that Britain's constitution is in remarkable flux: traditional barriers of class and location are eroding—but by no means fully eroded—under the constant pressures of the market.

The variety of Sanditon's landscape (the old and the new; the sturdy and the decaying; the real and the ersatz; the systematized and the arbitrary) together with a honed textual confusion about Sanditon's location (is it at the Parkers' old home, in the village of Sanditon, or on the developing coast?) suggest the constitutional instability of Sanditon's populace. In addition to the Hilliers, tenants who have moved into the manor house by invitation, Austen gives us a variety of characters whose class and familial constitutions are increasingly, and openly, mixed. The most memorable of these characters is Lady Denham, Sanditon's resident dowager and Mr. Parker's "Colleague in Speculation," whose significant fortune of more than £30,000 is even more significantly encumbered by relations and legal heirs she has incurred through her multiple marriages—the first to a wealthy Mr. Hollis and the second to an impoverished Sir Harry Denham, whom she widely is rumored to have married for his title (375). Lady Denham's mercenary interests in Sanditon, however, are tempered by her generous attentions to Miss Clara Brereton, a poor young relation from an unfashionable part of London whom she has invited to stay with her: Mr. Parker "gave [to Charlotte] the particulars which had led to Clara's admission at Sanditon, as no bad

exemplification of that *mixture of Character*, that union of Littleness with Kindness with Good Sense [sic] with even Liberality which he saw in Lady D.” Lady Denham’s is a constitutional instability at the level of the individual: here is the “Kindness” and “Liberality” of noblesse oblige typical of Darcy and Knightley alongside the “Littleness” and greed of a rising capitalist (378, my emphasis).

At the level of Sanditon’s society constitution is no less mixed—and this poses a dire challenge to Mr. Parker and Lady Denham’s joint venture to make Sanditon among the most fashionable of Britain’s bathing places: after all, Mr. Parker already has turned the resort’s social constitution into a marketable commodity in his promise to Mr. Heywood that Sanditon’s is a constitutionally homogenous society of “private Families of thorough Gentility & Character.” But Mr. Parker has not let the facts get in the way of his sales pitch to Mr. Heywood, as evidenced by this very disappointing “List of Subscribers,” who are in Sanditon for the upcoming season:

The Lady Denham, Miss Brereton, M<sup>r</sup> and M<sup>rs</sup> P—— Sir Edw: Denham & Miss Denham, whose names might be said to lead off the Season, were followed by nothing better than—M<sup>rs</sup> Mathews—Miss Mathews, Miss E. Mathews, Miss H. Mathews.—D<sup>r</sup> & M<sup>rs</sup> Brown—M<sup>r</sup> Richard Pratt.—Lieut: Smith, R.N. Capt: Little,—Limehouse.—M<sup>rs</sup> Jane Fisher. Miss Fisher. Miss Scroggs.—Rev: M<sup>r</sup> Hanking. M<sup>r</sup> Beard—Solicitor, Grays Inn.—M<sup>rs</sup> Davis. & Miss Merryweather. (389)

Behind Austen’s primary cast of characters, “whose names might be said to lead off the Season,” is a disheartening litany of miscellaneous military officers on peacetime half pay, a solicitor, a physician, a man of the cloth, and finally married and unmarried women with

unpromising last names—Miss Scroggs registering to the ear particularly as a kind of proto-Dickensian marker of constitutional mediocrity. Accordingly, Lady Denham assesses Sanditon’s situation: “if we could but get a young Heiress to S[anditon]! But Heiresses are monstrous scarce! I do not think we have had an Heiress here or even a Co—[heiress] since Sanditon has been a public place. Families come after Families, but as far as I can learn, it is not one in an hundred of them that have any real Property” (401). Again, the constitution of Sanditon society is far less distinguished than its chief speculators would wish for—and “real Property,” the material basis of British constitutional authority, is somewhere beyond the reach of the coastal resort (401).

Underpinning Lady Denham’s exclamations about an heiress is that postwar inflation has, at Sanditon and across Britain, outrun the conservation of wealth once guaranteed by strict settlement, “a legal provision developed in the middle of the seventeenth century to ensure that the family estate would descend intact to the eldest son,” perpetuating the maintenance of the family’s financial status and thus its strength of constitution into the next generation. “Under strict settlement,” Poovey explains further, “each man was the only life-tenant of the family estates. Generally, the essential articles governing property were settled on the eldest son’s marriage: the amount of his maintenance, his wife’s jointure [...] and the form and amount of portion that the younger children of the marriage would receive” (12). Lady Denham is familiar with this process because it has governed the inheritance of the dwindling Denham estate since the death of her most recent husband: after Sir Harry’s decease prior to the beginning of *Sanditon*, Lady Denham returned with her £30,000 per annum to Sanditon House, the home she enjoyed as Mrs. Hollis, leaving behind an impoverished Denham Park for her nephew and his sister, Miss Esther Denham, as Sir and

Lady Denham have had no children of their own. Heiresses, therefore—or co-heiresses, as Lady Denham allows—are necessary to raising the fortunes of penurious heirs like her nephew, the baronet Sir Edward, whose estate has presumably long exceeded its income in spite of Sir Harry's efforts to improve its situation: in a mutually convenient effort to re-establish the Denham family constitution, Sir Harry is supposed to have married Lady Denham for her fortune just as she is believed to have married him for his title.

Though the Denham estate has passed from Sir Harry to Sir Edward undivided, its yearly income is unequal to the Denhams' new style of life at Sanditon and Denham Park; as Mr. Parker discloses, Sir Edward Denham is "a poor Man for his rank in Society" and has not enough money to be a patron of the resort (377). Lady Denham and her nephew therefore find themselves in an unorthodox arrangement in which Lady Denham, herself an heiress not having had the inclination to enrich the "ancient" Denham family with her new money, supports Sir Edward in his baronetcy in payments according to her whim. She explains to Charlotte: "for though I am only the *Dowager* my Dear, & he is the *Heir*, things do not stand between us in the way they commonly do between those two parties.—Not a shilling do I receive from the Denham estate. Sir Edw: has no Payments to make *me*. He don't stand uppermost, beleive [sic] *me*.—It is *I* that help *him*." Not putting too fine a point on the matter, Lady Denham adds: "Sir Edw<sup>d</sup> *must* marry for Money," a comment intended to warn Charlotte that he is, in every possible way, no Mr. Darcy (400). Thus, we begin to see that Sanditon's society is the strange shadow cast by deflating feudal incomes, rising capitalist markets, postwar inflation—and, in the foreground, not a missing male heir as in the Dashwood and Bennet families, but an heir absurdly without a fortune to inherit.

The heiress who arrives in Sanditon, at length, is the West Indian Miss Lambe: “here was the very young Lady, sickly & rich, whom [Lady Denham] had been asking for; & she made the acquaintance for Sir Edward’s sake, & the sake of her Milch asses,” whose milk Lady Denham hopes to offer, or perhaps sell to, Miss Lambe for her constitutional improvement. Described as “about 17, half Mulatto, chilly & tender,” Miss Lambe has been, in spite of her brief appearance in the fragment, a magnet for the attention of literary critics (421). D. A. Miller attributes Miss Lambe’s racial characteristics to Austen’s projected anxiety about the dermatologic symptoms of her own illness, which she characterizes as “black and white and every wrong colour” in a late letter to her niece, Fanny Knight.<sup>104</sup> Clara Tuite has argued more persuasively that “Miss Lambe is for Lady Denham what Maria Edgeworth’s Lady Delacour in *Belinda* refers to as ‘the heiress lozenge’—the consolation of a rich wife for a ruined aristocrat,” noting that “*Belinda* (1801) also has a West Indian intertext, and was revised in 1810 to occlude interracial marriage.” On Tuite’s view, Miss Lambe (according to her Pentecostal name) becomes in Lady Denham’s imagination an offering to her penniless nephew: the wealthy offspring of empire will be sacrificed on the crumbling altar of the English aristocracy. Fortunately for Miss Lambe, Lady Denham’s plan is checked by Miss Lambe’s aunt, Mrs. Griffiths, who “would not allow Miss L. to have the smallest symptom of a Decline, or any complaint which Asses’ milk c<sup>d</sup> possibly relieve [sic]” (422). This interaction forecloses Lady Denham’s marriage plot, but it seems unlikely that Austen would have introduced Miss Lambe into Sanditon’s heiress-starved social scene without a narrative purpose. Because of *Sanditon*’s status as a fragment, however, and Miss Lambe’s relatively brief appearance in it, any conjecture about the outcome of Lady

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<sup>104</sup> D. A. Miller, “The Late Jane Austen,” *Raritan*, 10, 1990, pp. 55-6.

Denham's speculation on the marriage of Miss Lambe to Sir Edward, such as Tuite's assertion that Miss Lambe is designed as "the sacrifice and scapegoat" of *Sanditon*, must remain largely unfounded.<sup>105</sup>

Tuite's reading nevertheless brings to light yet another critical discourse on constitutional instability within *Sanditon*, in which wealthy West Indians, are "for the locals," Tuite explains, "a monstrous inbred parvenu class, persecuted for eliminating difference" through their immense wealth. "[B]ecause they have full purses," Lady Denham observes, "West-injines" "fancy themselves equal, may be, to your old Country Families"; "they who scatter their Money so freely, never think of whether they may not be doing mischief of raising the price of Things." (Tuite 179; *Sanditon* 392). Here, Lady Denham reduces what Tuite identifies as a "persecution text around the West Indians" to the market's absolute measure: "the price of Things." And, while Lady Denham broadcasts many unflattering prejudices against the West Indians in *Sanditon*, she notably has no compunction that Miss Lambe should become the next Lady Denham, suggesting that wealth now trumps absolutely Lady Catherine de Bourgh's myth of a heritable (even pseudo-racial) aristocratic purity—not surprising, considering that Lady Denham herself married Sir Harry from (probably quite far) outside the British aristocracy. Finally, Mr. Parker is able to convince Lady Denham by this same logic that West Indians ought not to be persecuted, but welcome in Sanditon: "[m]y dear Madam, they can only raise the price of consumable Articles, by such an extraordinary Demand for them & such a diffusion of money among us, as must do us more Good than harm," an observation which largely quells Lady Denham's classist and racist concerns (392). Thus, contrary to Tuite's assessment that "*Sanditon* occupies the

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<sup>105</sup> Clara Tuite, *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 178-9.

dangerous shoreline that keeps the reflux of empire barely in check,” the British and West Indian populations that constitute Sanditon society along the human fault lines of empire are really not so volatile—as long as the market remains stable. In Austen’s formulation of colonial relationships in *Sanditon*, the bottom line tends to, as Tuite says, “eliminate difference,” thereby emptying constitutional categories (of family, of class, of race) of their tenuous and complex meanings.

*Sanditon*’s most programmatic discursive technique, enacted one way or another in all of the above examples, is to demonstrate not that Britons’ constitutions are in decline *per se* (though many of them are), but that constitutions no longer maintain a clear relationship with narrative. While Austen’s early novels reward constitutional health with social ascendancy and conversely punish constitutional decline with social ruin, there seems to be no such correlation in *Sanditon*—though we must remember that the novel is not so much unfinished as it is just begun, and not yet at that stage where Austen’s novels normally meet out punishments and rewards. Even in its fragmentary condition, however, *Sanditon*’s representation of destabilized constitutions erodes the reader’s ability make judgments or predictions about the story’s narrative progress. “Austen,” Sutherland notes, “seems to have little energy for characters who require some probable development.” Further, in her analysis of the *Sanditon* holograph, Sutherland sees evidence that Austen was working in her compositional process to achieve precisely this effect: “[t]ime and again, revision clears the text of information and works to counter the temptation of first thoughts to over-direct the reader’s response and anticipate evaluation” (178, 180). Perhaps this compositional technique explains why critics have come to trouble in their attempts to identify *Sanditon*’s heroine



between Charlotte Heywood and Clara Brereton, a point to which this argument will finally return.

Austen's subtle detachment of constitution from narrative is why hypochondria—the condition whose narrative is always unhinged from constitutional symptoms—is *Sanditon*'s central figure for the condition of the British constitution. Hypochondria, George C. Grinnel explains, was produced during the Romantic period by an “unprecedented fascination with well-being combined with greater investments in the construction of the body as an object of knowledge” (14). For Austen, hypochondria is the surest indicator of constitutional instability, and in the *Sanditon* fragment Austen envisions the very world to which the uncontrollable physiological, social, and discursive symptoms of hypochondria go after they have been cordoned off from more stable elements of the British body politic. This act of separation has important textual effects in the *Sanditon* manuscript; as Tony Tanner has observed: “[*Sanditon*] is not mere burlesque. [Austen] is writing herself out of the world she is writing about,”<sup>106</sup> where very little authorial control can be exercised over the constitutions of bodies, societies, or narratives.

The removal of hypochondria to the coast of Britain—both historically and in Austen's novel—represents an important phase in the cultural meanings of this condition. Originally identified by ancient practitioners as a somatic disorder of the hypochondrium, hypochondria enjoyed a long and well-documented cultural history in England, which

begins with forms of melancholia or what became known as the English Malady. The Renaissance deemed melancholia to be a rapidly spreading disorder imported from Europe. The melancholic was a figure of foreignness

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<sup>106</sup> Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 284.

and disordered well-being who became a stock malcontent in the literary and medical texts of the Elizabethan era. For Shakespeare, the melancholic was also an anguished figure whose ennui was expressive of a troubled and tormented psyche. Hamlet is the example *par excellence* of the foreign melancholic, a sufferer whose spectacular grief and bodily disorders only further affirm his depression. (Grinnel 16)

We should note here the important nationalist meanings hypochondria held in the early modern period: the melancholic was not yet a figure of Englishness, but a foreign presence whose disordered health set him apart from a healthy English populace. Hamlet, of continental Denmark, becomes in England the standard of the male melancholic just as Ophelia was gaining traction as the original Crazy Jane—their co-devolution suggesting the prevalence in England of gendered characterizations of psychic decline and of course the enduring power for the English of Shakespeare's tragedy.<sup>107</sup>

“The melancholic – like the hypochondriac of the eighteenth-century,” Grinnel notes, “was often associated with a scholarly life and refinement and sensitivity. Francis Bacon, Sir Phillip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and John Donne all numbered themselves among the morbidly depressed.” But one commentator, Robert Burton, considered his period of intense ennui productive, in that it inspired him to write his 1638 *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, probably the first English text expressly devoted to describing the disorder. It was not until nearly a century later, in 1733, that George Cheyne would offer a dramatic revision of the splenetic sufferer in his *The English Malady: A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds, as*

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<sup>107</sup> For a full-length study of nineteenth-century gendering of mental illness, see Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (1985) and Elizabeth A. Dolan's *Seeing Suffering in Women's Literature of the Romantic Era* (2008).

*Spleen, Vapours, Lowness of Spirits, Hyochondriacal and Hysterical Distempers* (Grinnel 16-17). In his widely influential study the physician from Bath observed, in opposition to Renaissance formulations, that hypochondria was not a foreign disorder at all, but a definitive characteristic of the English constitution produced by English geography, climate, and ways of life:

the moisture of our air, the variableness of our weather, (from our situation amidst the ocean) the rankness and fertility of our soil, the richness and heaviness of our food, the wealth and abundance of the inhabitants (from their universal trade), the inactivity and sedentary occupations of the better sort (among whom this evil mostly rages), and the humour of living in great, populous and consequently unhealthy towns, have brought forth a class and set of distempers with atrocious and frightful symptoms, scarce known to our ancestors, and never rising to such fatal heights, nor afflicting such numbers in any other nation. These nervous disorders being computed to make almost one third of the complaints of the [...] condition in England.<sup>108</sup>

What is so striking about Cheyne's explanation of hypochondria is that, while he sees it first and foremost as the English malady his title asserts, he also acknowledges that this disorder was "scarce known to our ancestors," suggesting that hypochondria, though a constitutional problem, has no hereditary component. Rather, hypochondria represents the coincidence of "universal trade," "sedentary occupations of the better sort," and overcrowding with English climes and social habits—a set of characterizations which suggest that, even in the eighteenth century, hypochondria was understood to be historically and culturally produced.

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<sup>108</sup> George Cheyne, *The English Malady*, ed. Roy Porter (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. i-ii.

In *Sanditon*, Austen offers her own extended interpretation and critique of hypochondria. The English malady—once a constitutional problem affecting nearly one third of all English people in Cheyne’s estimation—is now moved to the coast of Britain, back in the direction of the continent from whence it is alleged to have come during the sixteenth century. Making possible this relocation is Mr. Parker’s loud and vigorous contradiction of what Cheyne had earlier called England’s unhealthy “situation amidst the ocean.” In Mr. Parker’s view, nothing in Britain is healthier than Sanditon’s geographic situation, which boasts “[t]he finest, purest Sea Breeze on the Coast—[...]—Excellent Bathing—fine hard Sand—Deep Water 10 yards from the Shore—no Mud—no Weeds—no slimey rocks—Never was there a place more palpably designed by Nature for the resort of the Invalid” (369). Such aggressive commercialization of the coast’s salubrity was common historically, too, with many new resorts springing up during Austen’s lifetime and attracting an increasing number of patrons from the growing middle classes. As Wiltshire observes, it was common for British proprietors of one resort or another to slander neighboring resorts, as Mr. Parker does in running down Brighton, Worthing, and Eastbourne. This example from Dr. Anthony Relhand’s *Short History of Brighthelmston* (1761), sets Brighton apart from competitors at Baiae and the ancient city of Bath:

Brighthelmston, thus free from the insalutary vapour of stagnant water, distant from [...] noxious steams [...] and every other cause aiding to produce a [...] putrid atmosphere, seldom sees its inhabitants labouring under those disorders which arise from a relaxed fibre and a languid circulation. Yet, from the vicinity of the sea, and the abundant, but salutary vapour it affords, it is as certain that the complaints that arise from a too rigid and tense fibre are

equally unknown. Hence neither dropsical, nor Chlorotic complaints; Pleurises, nor Quincies, nor any other inflammatory ones prevail here. (Qtd. in Wiltshire 206)

Similarly, Mr. Parker is convinced that Sanditon's salubrious atmosphere and landscape along with its "Buildings," "Nursery Grounds," and growing markets ("the demand for every thing" is Mr. Parker's phrase) set it apart from every other resort on Britain's coast (368). What Cheyne had lately identified as the poison—of the British weather, overcrowding, and materialism—is here being offered to Britons in the bottle of the cure, a paradox that could hardly have been lost on Austen's acute sense of irony.

Herself a resident of Bath for several years during her mid-twenties (Charlotte Heywood is twenty-two), Austen had ample occasion to observe the social constitution of a coastal resort. Strangely, critics never mention Austen's residence in Bath in their readings of *Sanditon*, tending instead to set the fragment in the context of Austen's final illness and death. We must remember, however, that this is a context that Austen very likely did not have, especially because she left off writing *Sanditon* several months before the onset of her final decline. Even Austen's last letters from May of 1817, which we will consider at the end of this chapter, suggest her belief that she might be getting better. In December of 1800, when Austen had just turned 25, her parents announced their plan to remove to Bath from their longtime home at Steventon, where Austen had spent almost all of her life. The choice seems to have been as unexpected to Austen as it was unwelcome. As Tomalin notes, "Cassandra destroyed several letters Jane wrote to her immediately after hearing her parents' decision, which suggests they made her uncomfortable, too full of raw feeling and even anger." It seems likely that Austen's scathing characterization of the Parkers' heartless

abandonment of their old home in favor of new Sanditon is a reworking in fiction of the feelings she experienced when her parents moved to Bath: “[a]ll the Austen children were affected by it,” Tomalin explains, “every one of them who was absent and could possibly return to Steventon—Edward, Henry, Frank and Charles—made a point of doing so before their parents left—‘while Steventon is ours,’ as Jane put it.” The sudden disruption of her family’s steady constitution in her beloved childhood home is one that Austen learned to deflect with parody. As Tomalin explains, letters from this period show Austen using her “established comic tone for Mrs. Austen,” who, as Jane Austen saw it, was leading the move to Bath for the sake of her own health and comfort: “[m]y Mother looks forward with as much certainty as you can do to our keeping two Maids—my father is the only one not in the secret,” she noted suspiciously in a letter to Cassandra (Tomalin 171-73). Long before Austen ever set to work on *Sanditon*, therefore, she seems to have been poised by her mother’s indulgences to see connections between hypochondria, consumerism, and the erosion of traditional familial constitutions.

Austen found Bath not much different from what she was expecting it to be. A place of “vapour, shadow, smoke & confusion,” Bath is, in Austen’s letters, aesthetically similar to the disorienting place Sanditon would become in fiction. The society at Bath was as intolerable as its weather: she writes to Cassandra of “stupid” parties, confessing finally that she “cannot anyhow continue to find people agreeable [sic].” Other characterizations from the letters bespeak Austen’s intense boredom with (and outright disdain of) the women in her society: a Miss Langley, “like any other short girl with a broad nose & wide mouth, fashionable dress, & exposed bosom,” and a Mrs. Chamberlayne, who prompted this bitter line to Cassandra: “[a]s to Agreeableness [sic] she is much like other people”—a particularly

striking rebuke when we understand that Cassandra had recommended Mrs. Chamberlayne to Austen as a “suitable friend.” The meanness of Austen’s characterizations are, again, perhaps the original, suggestive kernel of the stunning caricatures she would accomplish much later in *Sanditon* (Tomalin 171-73).

Tomalin suspects that Austen’s intense dissatisfaction with Bath society was underwritten by her “stinging sense of humiliation at any idea of being paraded” by her parents in the Bath marriage market. Her parents had met and married in Bath, as had her Aunt Jane: it was not difficult for Austen to see the plan her parents had in mind. Austen rebelled against this arrangement, Tomalin suggests, by driving “up and down Kingsdown Hill in a phaeton and four with a man she could not be suspected of setting her cap at, Mr. Evelyn, who was both married and thought more of horses than anything else,” not unlike Captain Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*. Because the letters from Bath stop in May of 1801, just before Cassandra joined her family on the coast, we have little else with which to characterize Austen’s life in Bath, apart from the fact that she seems to have stopped writing altogether while she lived there. Tomalin concludes that while Austen never wrote of being depressed in the way of Johnson or Boswell, her treatment of Fanny Price’s “permanent low spirits after a childhood trauma” in *Mansfield Park*—so different from her earlier clichéd figuration of Marianne Dashwood suffering as Crazy Jane—suggests how well Austen had come to understand depression during her residence at Bath (Tomalin 174-76).

It was not Austen’s experience of depression, however, but her energetic irony that, once practiced on her mother in Bath, would finally direct her characterizations of hypochondria in *Sanditon*. As John Wiltshire has noted, “the hypochondriacs who dominate the uncompleted novel *Sanditon* are presented with an amazing inventiveness, brio and zest.

There is not just one ‘sad invalid’ here, but at least three, a trio of health-obsessed people,” who are given much more attention than the hypochondriacs of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*, with the possible exception of Mrs. Bennet, whose nervous complaints are mocked with considerable endurance (198). Sutherland notes that, in this vein, *Sanditon* “seems to recall the spirit of the early, finished fragments of juvenile burlesque” rather than any of the finished works (176). Mr. Parker’s sister Diana, who is introduced through her long and bizarre letter read aloud by Mr. Parker to Charlotte, is the fragment’s most extended indulgence of this characterological form. In Diana’s letter we learn the extreme measures by which she and her siblings, Arthur and Susan, maintain their “wretched Constitutions” against all manner of ailments: “Spasmodic Bile,” “[deranged] Nerves,” “Headache” (for which Susan has had three teeth drawn), “cough,” and so on (386-7). This, Wiltshire explains, highlights “the way all three Parkers suffer in concert, reflect and amplify, act and react upon each others’ symptoms,” suggesting that hypochondria is, for Austen, a problem of social, not individual, constitutions. Like her oeuvre’s other suspected malingerers, none of the Parkers are observably sick; Diana, the avid inventor and narrator of the Parkers’ ills, is especially busy upon her arrival in Sanditon and seemingly quite well. Instead, hypochondria presents in *Sanditon* as a disordered family constitution, Austen’s version of what would one day be called *folie à famille*, and an allegory for the broader social conditions at the Sanditon resort.<sup>109</sup> “Nothing,” Wiltshire concludes, “is too amazing to be true [in Sanditon] about a person’s relation to their body: the body is an infinitely labile and plastic medium for the living through and projection of desires and symptoms and ideas, an expandable arena for the imagination and culture to collaborate in the creation of subjective

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<sup>109</sup> *Folie à famille* is a form of group psychosis (less known than the more famous *folie à deux*) in which family members, like the Parkers, share a set of psychotic tendencies.



phenomena” (214-15). Because constitutions like the Parkers’ can be illimitably destabilized in narrative through the imaginative and cultural actions of hypochondria, individuals in *Sanditon* begin to have a pathologic effect on the collective constitutions of family, class, and nation.

The text of the fragment enacts this pathologic consequence in a series of asyndetic monologues by Mr. Parker, Lady Denham, Diana Parker, and Sir Edward Denham; in fact, only Charlotte Heywood and her father, from “so healthy a family,” seem consistently to speak in response to others, suggesting that their family’s constitutional health may bear some relationship to their discursive patterns. As Sutherland notes, “[t]he unusual range of strongly drawn characters” who “occupy the foreground, serially and in so short a space—Mr. Parker, Diana Parker, Sir Edward Denham, Lady Denham, Arthur Parker—each one adrift in their own language-loop, deny by their robust self-absorption an underlying principle of consensus. There is none.” (194) Said another way, the asyndetic discourse of the unfinished novel is that of a society whose constitution is rendered extremely (if not entirely) diffuse by its members’ acute self-interest.

In *Sanditon*, excessive care of the self is figured as a kind of isolating horror, an effect accomplished most explicitly in “those 3 Teeth” Susan Parker has had drawn in an appalling attempt to relieve a headache (388). More disconcerting still is the narrator’s apparent departure from the voice and consciousness of Charlotte, the fragment’s central female character; as Sutherland notes, Austen’s minimal use of free indirect discourse is divided in *Sanditon* almost equally between Charlotte and Mr. Parker, one of *Sanditon*’s “leading eccentrics,” and is usually quite hesitant to declare sympathy with any of the characters (Sutherland 175). This brings to light an important distinction between the discursive patterns

of *Sanditon* and the early novels. As we have observed in this study's first chapter, social, physiological, and textual overexposure tend to produce illness in Marianne Dashwood and Jane Bennet while the composure of Elinor and Elizabeth, in combination with the narrators' clear sympathy with them, works narratively to fortify their constitutions. Something like the converse is true in *Sanditon*, where the narrator is flatly disinterested in the constitutions of characters who are chronically overexposed by their own discourse—but not sick at all.

Thus, the *Sanditon* fragment is Austen's exploration of what a character like Charlotte Heywood—very similar to Elizabeth Bennet in her constitutional vigor, ready prejudice, and early interest in a man whose “great object in life was to be seductive”—will do in a world where the constitutions of society, and of narrative itself, are increasingly destabilized by pathologic forms of individualism (405). As Alistair M. Duckworth notes: “[t]his is a world, it would seem, so far removed from traditional grounds of moral action that its retrieval through former fictional means is no longer possible, a world in which the heroine, though she remains a fundamentally moral figure, can no longer be an agent of social renewal”—perhaps especially because no other character bothers to hear Charlotte above her or his own monologue.<sup>110</sup> The most notable example of this is Charlotte Heywood's conversation with Sir Edward Denham about the work of Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns, James Montgomery, Thomas Campbell, and William Wordsworth. Reminiscent of Colonel Brandon's telling of the fallen woman narrative to Elinor Dashwood; Henry Tilney and Catherine Moreland's discussions of gothic novels in *Northanger Abbey*; and Anne Eliot and Captain Harville's debate about history in *Persuasion*, Charlotte and Sir Edward's conversation is meant to critique the commonplaces of a popular Romantic-period

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<sup>110</sup> Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 221.

genre. Instead of using tableau or quoted speech, however, as she does in these earlier novels, Austen accomplishes *Sanditon*'s absorption of clichéd forms almost entirely through Sir Edward's character, a careful parody of the Romantic man of sensibility whose over-studied elocution, luxury, and general self-indulgence place him close to the hypochondriac on Austen's sliding scale of pathologic individualism.

Sir Edward appears in the fragment as a dilettante's idiolect. This is how he begins "to stagger [Charlotte] with the number of his Quotations, & the bewilderment of some of his sentences"; because this lengthy passage demonstrates Sir Edward's views on literature, which in turn illuminate Austen's, it is necessary to quote fully:

"Do you remember," said he, "Scotts' [sic] beautiful Lines on the Sea?—Oh! what a description they convey!—They are never out of my Thoughts when I walk here.—That Man who can read them unmoved must have the nerves of an Assassin!—Heaven defend me from meeting such a Man unarmed.—"What description do you mean?—said Charlotte. I remember none at this moment, of the Sea, in either of Scotts' Poems."—"Do you not indeed?—Nor can I exactly recall the beginning at this moment—But—you cannot have forgotten his description of Woman.—

'Oh! Woman in our Hours of Ease—'

"Delicious! Delicious!—Had he written nothing more, he w<sup>d</sup> have been Immortal. And then again, that unequalled, unrivalled address to Parental affection—

'Some feelings are to Mortals given  
'With less of Earth in them than Heaven' &c.

“But while we are on the subject of Poetry, what think you Miss H. of Burns [sic] Lines to his Mary?—Oh! there is Pathos to madden one!—If ever there was a Man who *felt*, it was Burns.—Montgomery has all the Fire of Poetry, Wordsworth has the true soul of it—Campbell in his Pleasures of Hope has touched the extreme of our sensations—“Like Angel’s visits, few & far between.” Can you conceive of anything more subduing, more melting, more fraught with the deep Sublime than that line?—But Burns—I confess my sense of his Pre-eminence Miss H.—If Scott *has* a fault, it is the want of Passion.—Tender, Elegant, Descriptive—but *Tame*.—The Man who cannot do justice to the attributes of Woman is my contempt.—Sometimes indeed a flash of feeling seems to irradiate him—as in the lines we were speaking of—‘Oh! Woman in our hours of Ease’—. But Burns is always on fire.—His Soul was the Altar in which lovely Woman sat enshrined, his Spirit truly breathed the immortal Incense which is her Due.— (396-97, Austen’s emphasis)

He continues in this manner for several additional paragraphs, but Austen has achieved the point she raised earlier in the fragment in her comparison of Mr. Parker to Coleridge and Wordsworth. That is: there is a problem with the self-reflexive way Romantic-era discursive modes, namely the picturesque and some forms of poetry, represent the British constitution. Sir Edward’s character displays in *Sanditon* a highly ironized form of this problem: “[h]e began,” Austen’s narrator mockingly explains, “in a tone of great Taste & Feeling, to talk of the Sea & the Sea shore—& ran with Energy through all the usual Phrases employed in praise of their Sublimity, & descriptive of the *undescribable* [sic] Emotions they excite in the Mind of Sensibility.” (396) Here, Sir Edward invokes William Gilpin’s popular tautology

that the picturesque was that which was sufficient to form a picture as well as Burke's discussion of the sublime in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*—simultaneously foreclosing the possibility that he will actually communicate with Charlotte, his fellow Briton. More disconcerting is that Sir Edward, the heir of Sanditon House and thus the proper steward of the estate, is instead utterly overcome by the landscape itself because of his “Mind of Sensibility,” his highly sensitized constitution. In this way, Sir Edward Denham represents another “mixture of Character”: the ridiculous frivolity of a Reverend Collins with the social station (and attendant civic responsibilities) of a Mr. Darcy. The relation between Britons and the British landscape embodied in Sir Edward is thus not only ridiculous in Austen's estimation, but corrosive to the political order represented by the country estate—not to mention a major dilemma for Austen's heroines, who in *Sanditon* have no reasonable person with whom to fall in love.

Coming under particular scrutiny in *Sanditon* is what Keats would, the following year in an October letter to Richard Woodhouse, call the “wordsworthian or egotistical sublime,” or the tendency of Wordsworth's poetry to stand “alone” in excessive self-reflexivity (387). As we have observed, Austen sets *Sanditon*'s constitutionally variegated landscapes in contradistinction to the fully-integrated scenes of Coleridge's lime tree bower and Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey, where the landscape of Britain is precisely the landscape of the self, where dwells “A motion and a spirit” that “rolls through all things” (“Tintern Abbey,” ll. 101, 103). The coextensive nature of human constitutions in Wordsworth and Coleridge's poems admits the possibility of human communion, like the kind Coleridge writes of between himself and Charles Lamb. Austen is clear, however, that no such common spirit runs through the characters gathered at Sanditon, who are a community in name only.

Absorbed by their own constitutions, or deflected as Charlotte is by the self-interest of her company, Austen's characters each find themselves quite alone in the landscapes of their own imagining: "[a] little of our own Bracing Sea Air will soon set me on my feet again.—Depend upon it my Dear, it is exactly a case for the Sea. Saline air & immersion will be the very thing.—My sensations tell me so already," pronounces Mr. Parker after injuring his ankle (367). Though he is comforted by the certainty he attributes to his own "sensations," he hears no reply from his wife, Mary, whom Austen places in a position similar to that of the silent auditor of "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy, or the Mary of Robert Burns's poems, who all but disappears amidst the speaker's commentary on himself.

This is not to imply that Austen disliked the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Burns, Montgomery, Scott, and Campbell—or that she saw an absolute moral problem at the heart of the poetry contemporary to her novels; as Deresiewicz shows at length, Austen's interactions with the Romantic poets was much more nuanced. What is borne out by the text of *Sanditon*, however, is that bad readers of literature—good, bad, or otherwise—endanger British constitutions, both physiological and social. At the commercial lending library on Sanditon's Mall, for example, novels are regularly subjected to "that vast, unknown mass of buyers or renters and readers," who, like Sir Edward, constitute "the most treacherous and unpredictable audience." (Thompson 10) In *Sanditon*, genre itself is under the hard sway of expanding British markets, as in Sir Edward's highly stylized, imperial designs on Clara Brereton:

[i]f she could not be won by affection, he must carry her off. He knew his Business.—Already had he had many Musings on the Subject. If he *were* constrained so to act, he must naturally wish to strike out something new, to

exceed those who had gone before him—and he felt a strong curiosity to ascertain whether the Neighborhood of Timbuctoo might not afford some solitary House adapted for Clara’s reception;—but the Expense alas! of Measures in that masterly style was ill-suited to his Purse, & Prudence obliged him to prefer the quietest sort of ruin & disgrace for the object of his Affections, to the more renowned. (405-6)

Sir Edward’s appearance in his own imagination as a rake in the style of Richardson’s Lovelace is encouraged by the empire’s expansive narrative possibilities; fortunately for Clara, Sir Edward’s deteriorating personal finances will prevent his taking action on any of them.

What becomes so striking, then, about the *Sanditon* fragment is that it seems a preliminary formulation of Austen’s idea that, particularly in the hands of bad readers, literature is insufficient to promoting human sympathy and the social cohesion such sympathy implies. This is how Austen frames Sir Edward’s belief (which is now enjoying a great resurgence in twenty-first-century literary studies) that novel-reading promotes human sympathy: “[t]he Novels which I approve,” Sir Edward begins,

hold forth the most splendid Portraits of high Conceptions, Unbounded Views, illimitable Ardour, indomptible [sic] Decision—and even when the Event is mainly anti-prosperous to the high-toned Machinations of the prime Character, the potent, pervading Hero of the Story, it leaves us full of Generous Emotions for him;—our Hearts are paralyzed—. [...] These are the Novels which enlarge the primitive Capabilities of the Heart, & which cannot

impugn the Sense or be any Dereliction of character, of the most anti-peurile [sic] Man, to be conversant with. (403-4).

Ironically, Sir Edward's over-articulated opinions about sympathy prevent Charlotte from sympathizing with his position: "[i]f I understand you aright [...] our taste in Novels is not at all the same," she replies to him flatly (404). Austen suggests through Sir Edward's monologues to the mostly silent Charlotte that highly self-reflexive methods of reading, produced in this case out of the idle, impoverished lifestyle of a Regency aristocrat, make sympathy not only impossible but unfavorable—and the prospect of marriage to such a person more impossible and unfavorable still. Like hypochondria, self-reflexive reading is another of Sanditon's modern plagues, and Sir Edward is not its only victim. Mrs. Whitby, the proprietor of Sanditon's lending library, appears at the beginning of the fragment's sixth chapter "in her inner room, reading one of her own Novels, for want of Employment." (389) At the center of Sanditon's busiest social venue—and its repository of literature—sits a solitary, idle female novelist: a writer and a reader collapsed in a lonely dystopia of boredom.

After beginning such a brutal critique of hypochondria in *Sanditon*, Austen remained highly aware of her own illness's tendency to isolate her from her friends, or to make her ridiculous; she was quite determined in her final months, it would seem, to stay out of Mrs. Whitby's inner room. In a letter written from Chawton on May 22, 1817 to Anne Sharp, Austen wittily admits to being "really a very genteel, portable sort of an Invalid" in an account of her travel to the hospital at Winchester to receive ministrations during the worst bout of her illness to date. The incongruent pairing of the languid adjective "genteel" with the staccato, practical notes of the word "portable" suggest aurally that Austen cheerfully was able to direct her irony at herself as eagerly as she had applied it to Mr. Parker and his



hypochondriac siblings. Later in this letter is another rather striking personal reference to the kind of monologue she had been developing among the *Sanditon* hypochondriacs: “Beleive [sic] me,” Austen assures Sharp, “I was interested in all you wrote, though with all the Egotism of an Invalid I write only of myself.” After serially lampooning the *Sanditon* characters who speak only of themselves, she admonishes this tendency in herself—but, in another note of humor, not until after she has permitted herself the indulgence. In Austen’s last letters, there are more difficult moments as well—particularly Austen’s constant worry that she is burdening Cassandra, and the rest of her family, with her care (494-95, 497). Thus we can see that while Austen was sometimes carried away in the wry narration of her own illness, she was careful to check this tendency not only with self-mockery but an almost constant recourse to thoughts of her relatives, particularly her dear sister. In Austen’s own experience of illness, therefore, a collective family constitution was a critical and comforting protection against the “Egotism of an Invalid,” a hedge that she had all but written out of *Sanditon*.

In *Sanditon*, in fact, there only seem to be the relatively undeveloped Charlotte and, less developed still, Clara standing against the solipsism of the other characters, who exhibit what R. W. Chapman called “a certain roughness and harshness of satire [...] due in part to lack of revision.” As Sutherland observes, “Chapman [...] felt sure (following a hint from Anna Lefroy) that Austen would have toned down the caricatures of Mr. Parker, his sister Diana, Lady Denham, and Sir Edward: ‘she would have smoothed these coarse strokes, so strikingly different from the mellow pencilings of *Persuasion*.’” (Chapman qtd. in Sutherland 175) In a more decorous approach, critic Francis Warre Cornish discouraged altogether critical interpretation of *Sanditon* because of these rougher sections: while the fragment

“contains some promising sketches,” on his view, “it would be useless, if not impertinent, to pass an opinion on a work so obviously incomplete.”<sup>111</sup> These more conservative approaches to the manuscript—and the caution they urge to critics who would take advantage of the suggestive power of fragments—are important to bear in mind when interpreting Charlotte and Clara: we must acknowledge that a fragment cannot support notions of authorial intention in the ways a published novel can.

But many of these readers frequently append to their apologies and warnings suggestions that Austen was not drastically off her mark in the manuscript she left at her death: “a degree of savagery would, I think, have persisted,” Chapman added, in his explanation of *Sanditon*’s satirized characters.<sup>112</sup> As Brian Southam has argued, “the modifications to the characters, especially to the four eccentrics, are not in the direction of toning down, of de-caricaturising, but tend to enforce and heighten their traits and eccentricities.”<sup>113</sup> Sutherland notes more generally of the *Sanditon* holograph that “every page is filled, implying that no large-scale revision of the draft in this form was contemplated” (172). The textual features we have assessed in this chapter—*Sanditon*’s highly programmatic representations of British constitutional instability, Austen’s complex development of hypochondria as a figure for Regency life, her invocations and parodies of Romantic poetry, and the formalization of her characters’ solipsism into a series of asyndetic monologues—tend to corroborate these views of a more “finished” *Sanditon* manuscript.

If Austen indeed intended the harsh caricatures of the Parkers and the Denhams, then we can see Charlotte and Clara as a kind of textual relief from the exhausting self-

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<sup>111</sup> Francis Warre Cornish, *Jane Austen*, “English Men of Letters” series (London: Macmillan, 1913), p. 231.

<sup>112</sup> R. W. Chapman, *Jane Austen, Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 208.

<sup>113</sup> B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen’s Literary Manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 130.

involvement of the others. That *Sanditon* was calculated to explore what a heroine might do under the relatively serious narrative pressure of being unable to speak (like Dorothy Wordsworth at Tintern Abbey, or Mary in Robert Burns's poem) is made particularly manifest in the dynamic Austen achieves briefly between Charlotte and Clara toward the fragment's end. Short as it is, it remains *Sanditon*'s most psychologically developed relationship, putting one in mind of the most innovative moments of *Emma*. As Charlotte is making the approach to Lady Denham's home at Sanditon House, this is what she sees: the

Entrance Gates were so much in a corner of the Grounds or Paddock, so near one of its Boundaries, that an outside fence was at first almost pressing on the road—til an angle *here*, & a curve *there* threw them to a better distance. The Fence was a proper park Paling in excellent condition; with clusters of fine Elms, or rows of old Thorns following its line almost everywhere.—*Almost* must be stipulated—for there were vacant spaces—& through one of these, Charlotte as soon as they entered the Enclosure, caught a glimpse over the pales of something White & Womanish on the other side;—it was something which immediately brought Miss B. into her head—& stepping to the pales, she saw indeed—and very decidedly, in spite of the Mist; Miss B— seated, not far before her, at the foot of the bank which sloped down from the outside of the Paling & which a narrow Path seemed to skirt along;—Miss Brereton seated, apparently very composedly—& Sir E. D. by her side. (426)

Like the approach to Sotherton in *Mansfield Park*, which illuminates Fanny Price's place in the web of attractions suspended between the members of the party in transit, the approach to Sanditon House elaborates Charlotte's position in Sanditon, which is marked by her desire

for clarity in an uncertain landscape. While the odd composition of this scene might tend at first to suggest a lack of clarity and redundancy of detail that would have been removed from the passage in revision, Sutherland has shown that the reverse is true: as in other revisions to the fragment, Austen's manuscript shows her heightening, rather than reducing, the passage's "roughness of finish, perceptual opacity, and the leveling of relevant and non-relevant information" (184). Through these disorienting discursive techniques as well as a morning mist that threatens further to obscure her perceptions, Charlotte receives a series of vague impressions that make her think of Clara Brereton, who is finally confirmed to be seated next to Sir Edward, as if in a sketch or painting "very composedly." "Like Alice in Wonderland," Sutherland notes, "[Charlotte] experiences the loss of peripheral vision that inhabiting a strange world entails" (190). It is notable, therefore, that she achieves a pronounced perceptual clarity when she encounters Clara—even in spite of the "Mist," which surely would have overthrown the perceptive faculties of *Sanditon*'s other characters; Mrs. Parker, in fact, who is traveling to Sanditon House with Charlotte, sees "nothing" of the scene.

Earlier in the fragment, Clara has similar effects on Charlotte's consciousness. On their way from Willingden to Sanditon, when Charlotte is by turns overwhelmed and confused by Mr. Parker's effusions on the resort and its inhabitants, he also speaks

warmly of Clara Brereton, & the interest of his story increased very much with the introduction of such a Character. Charlotte listened with more than amusement now;—it was solicitude & Enjoyment, as she heard her described to be lovely, amiable, gentle, unassuming, conducting herself uniformly with great good sense, & evidently gaining by her innate worth, on the affections of her Patroness.—Beauty, Sweetness, Poverty & Dependence, do not want the

imagination of a Man to operate upon. With due exceptions—Woman feels for Woman very promptly & compassionately. (377-78)

Clara is literally the only person in *Sanditon* for whom Charlotte exhibits any kind of fellow feeling. In fact, for characters like Lady Denham, Charlotte finds it “impossible even to affect sympathy” (401). Early in the fragment, Charlotte’s sympathy for Clara is figured as an intense attraction that may be owing to genre: “Charlotte could see in [Clara] only the most perfect representation of whatever Heroine might be most beautiful & bewitching [...]—Perhaps it might be partly owing to her having just issued from a Circulating Library” (391). Like Catherine Moreland’s tendency to expect the gothic everywhere in *Northanger Abbey*, Charlotte is eagerly prepared to find heroines in *Sanditon*.

Charlotte’s rather superficial, and probably naïve, fascination with Clara becomes much more complicated, however, when she discovers Clara in a compromising situation alone with the ridiculous Sir Edward. At first, the view “could not but strike [Charlotte] rather unfavourably with regard to Clara,” but this assessment dissipates when Charlotte concludes that Clara’s poverty is “a situation which must not be judged with severity.” Then a striking thing happens: Charlotte, suspending even her extreme disdain for Sir Edward, cannot “but think of the extreme difficulty which secret Lovers must have in finding a proper spot for their stolen Interviews” (426-27). In addition to feeling this sympathy for Clara, Charlotte also is eager that Clara’s reputation should not be damaged by wider discovery of the meeting, suggesting that she is not mocking Clara with her idea of “stolen Interviews” between “Lovers.” In fact, Charlotte is “glad to perceive that nothing had been discerned by M<sup>rs</sup> Parker; if Charlotte had not been considerably the tallest of the two, Miss B.’s white ribbons might not have fallen within the ken of *her* more observant eyes” (426). Charlotte,

normally ruled by her first impressions like Elizabeth Bennet, is willing to make a long series of exceptions for Clara, whom she barely knows.

One possible reading of these scenes is that Charlotte Heywood, like Sir Edward, is just another voracious and bad reader of literature, all too eager to see opening in front of her the seduction of a Clarissa by a Lovelace, or far too enamored of Clara's role as heroine to judge her honestly. But this does not seem to square with what we know of Charlotte's prudent, rather judgmental character: "She is thoroughly mean," Charlotte rapidly concludes of Lady Denham, "[Mr. Parker] is too kind hearted to see clearly.—I must judge for myself." (402) Nor does this reading work with a detail from Clara's own consciousness, that she "had not the least intention of being seduced" by Sir Edward, for it would require *Sanditon's* narrator, in this rare example of free indirect discourse, to be wrong (405). It seems more likely that these interactions between Charlotte and Clara are the fragment's tentative attempt to represent real sympathy between Charlotte and Clara, which Austen had once longed for herself in Bath's tedious society: "[t]he distance between Charlotte and the world she encounters and attempts to analyse is rarely bridged," Sutherland notes, but these rare occasions of understanding are almost always marked by Clara's presence (190). This is compelling evidence that Austen was beginning to establish bonds between these two young women as a viable alternative to the constitutional instability—both national and narrative—represented at large in *Sanditon*.

Tentative though it must remain, this reading sets the *Sanditon* manuscript as a site of competing notions of social constitution: real sympathy, and the constitutional cohesion it implies, is set in contradistinction to those who would erode collective constitutions through excessive attention to the self. Charlotte's attempt to sympathize with Clara in the final pages

of the fragment suggests that Austen may have been working out a narrative mechanism, similar to Wollstonecraft's in *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, through which two women might constitute a community apart from the pathologic individualism of the British Regency. Critically, the sympathy Charlotte shows for Clara at the end of the *Sanditon* fragment marks a connection categorically different from friendships between related sisters in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, and the extra-familial friendship in *Emma* between Emma Woodhouse and Harriet Smith—which, founded on Emma's belief that Harriet is the daughter of an aristocrat, must end when the difference between their social constitutions is at last revealed. Instead, Charlotte's real sympathy for Clara would seem to transcend constitutional barriers of family and class: in fact, these characters have no more in common than their unfortunate situation in a constitutionally destabilized nation and narrative, where marriage seems at least highly undesirable, if not utterly impossible. What begins in *Sanditon* to constitute a heroine, therefore, is not Elizabeth Bennet's (or Princess Charlotte's) moral capacity to break from her family in self-actualizing preparation for companionate marriage; rather, Austen envisions in Charlotte Heywood a heroine whose primary psychological inclination is to see in another the possibility of a heroine.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Frankenstein, Romantic Medicine, and the End of the British Constitution*

A State without religion is like a human body without a soul, or rather like a human body of the species of the Frankenstein Monster, without a pure and vivifying principle.

—*Fraser's Magazine*, 1830<sup>114</sup>

In *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), Mary Shelley gave Western literature its first mad scientist. But by giving Victor Frankenstein influential medical training at the University of Ingolstadt, she also created a doctor. Victor Frankenstein's white-coated successors on the silver screen often have highlighted the medical character of his education and experiment: Dr. Henry Frankenstein (Colin Clive) in James Whale's 1931 film *Frankenstein* is a medical student turned rogue experimenter; in *Young Frankenstein*, Mel Brooks's 1974 parody, Gene Wilder plays the medical school lecturer, Dr. Frederick Frankenstein. In these films, Frankenstein's Creature appears as a patient on a hospital gurney swathed in bandages or under a tented white sheet, underlining the clear similarities between Shelley's animation scene and modern surgery. But *Frankenstein's* medicine is not merely a product of twentieth-century cinema; as this chapter argues, Shelley, too, saw Frankenstein as a physician, the Creature as his patient, and their tragic relationship as a critique not only of science, as so many scholars have found, but of medicine. Some may

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<sup>114</sup> Qtd. in Marilyn Butler, "Introduction," *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 1.



argue that the difference between “science” and “medicine” was unremarkable during the Romantic period when disciplinary boundaries were much more pliable than they eventually would become. But this chapter will show that even in the period of Shelley’s life there were clear cultural distinctions, which Shelley certainly knew of, between medicine and the new science of the Enlightenment to which medicine had not yet fully adapted. When Shelley began *Frankenstein* in 1816, Romantic medicine, by and large, was still treating a holistic body, a fully integrated constitution, which the new science was in many ways threatening to dissolve. These differences between science and medicine, which Shelley takes up at length in *Frankenstein*, were posing important questions about the nature, in fact the very existence, of the British constitution.

Marilyn Butler’s groundbreaking reading of the radical science in Shelley’s 1818 *Frankenstein* is foundational to understanding the novel’s interaction with Romantic medicine. As Butler argues, Shelley revised the original text of *Frankenstein* for an 1831 popular edition to minimize the 1818 text’s thoroughgoing engagement with the controversy over the nature and origin of life between John Abernethy and his protégé, William Lawrence, at London’s Royal College of Surgeons between 1814 and 1819, what scholars now interchangeably call the Lawrence-Abernethy debates, the vitalist debates, or the Life question. Butler compellingly explains how the science of the London debates underwrote Shelley’s first novel—but Mary Shelley’s engagement with the Lawrence-Abernethy debates in *Frankenstein* is tied perhaps even more explicitly to Romantic-era medical practice, not just to the radical science that was beginning to reform and complicate it. The reason William Lawrence could argue so brilliantly about human physiology at the Royal College of Surgeons is that he had dissected cadavers during his medical training with his teacher, the

Edinburgh-trained physician John Abernethy. Both men had overseen hundreds of surgeries on human patients. In an 1815 example particularly resonant with *Frankenstein*, Lawrence cared in his own home for a boy born without a portion of his brain, a condition Lawrence later described in Ree's *Clycopaedia* as an "aberration" of the body's "form and structure" that had produced a "monster" (qtd. in Butler xli-xlii). Much later in his career, Lawrence treated perhaps his most famous patient, the young Queen Victoria. Abernethy and Lawrence's position as practicing physicians is a vitally important but as yet unremarked aspect of *Frankenstein*'s historical context indicating that—just as Shelley knew and championed the radical science underlying the Lawrence-Abernethy debates—she also understood that this science came with potentially dangerous implications for physicians and their patients in Romantic-era Britain.

"Everything must have a beginning," Shelley declared in her 1831 preface to *Frankenstein*, and this argument begins in 1814, when John Abernethy, then the President of the Royal College of Surgeons, used the work of John Hunter to argue—somewhat unclearly—that life was owing to a "subtile, mobile, invisible substance," which was "superadded" to the human frame and not part of the body itself.<sup>115</sup> This, the vitalist position as it became known, was attractive to faithful scientists like Abernethy, who, holding fast to the Newtonian ideal that a mechanized universe was the Creator's work, sought further to reconcile scientific and religious understandings of human life. Crucially for Abernethy and those in agreement with him in the Royal College of Surgeons, vitalism held that this superadded "vital principle" was coextensive with the soul; perhaps the vital principle was

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<sup>115</sup> Owsei Temkin, "Basic Science, Medicine and the Romantic Era," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 37, no. 2 (March-April 1963), pp. 98-99. See also Nora Crook and Derek Guiton's *Shelley's Venomed Melody* (1986) and Sharon Ruston's *Shelley and Vitality* (2005).

electricity itself or at least analogous to that subtle fluid Benjamin Franklin (whose surname Frankenstein's echoes) had recently drawn from the heavens in his own famous experiment.

In 1816, the year Shelley began *Frankenstein*, Abernethy's pupil, William Lawrence, first publicly challenged the vitalist position of his teacher. Using the work of the French zoologist Georges Cuvier, the tissue theory of Cuvier's young countryman, Marie François Xavier Bichât, and the ethnography of the German naturalist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Lawrence argued for a materialist understanding of life, in which the functions of living beings depended absolutely upon their bodily structures. Structure, Lawrence argued to the Royal College of Surgeons, was "the peculiar composition, which distinguished living bodies," and functions were "the purposes, which any organ or system of organs executes in the animal frame."<sup>116</sup> Ultimately, as Bichât had written, life represented the sum total of organic functions "by which death is resisted" (qtd. in Temkin 106). Generally believed to be more charismatic and articulate than his teacher, Lawrence thus inaugurated a long and contentious debate in the College of Surgeons and beyond in the public that complicated science's cultural ascendancy in Britain during the Regency. As the debate was popularized in Britain, it involved political figures as diverse as the radical materialists Sir Thomas Charles Morgan, his wife, Lady Sydney Morgan, and, on the other side of the aisle, the conservative Christian Advocate in the University of Cambridge, Reverend Thomas Rennell, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who staunchly defended the vitalist position in his Philosophical Lectures of the 1818-1819 winter (Temkin 106-108).

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<sup>116</sup> William Lawrence, *Lectures on Comparative Anatomy, Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man; Delivered at the Royal College of Surgeons in the Years 1816, 1817, and 1818* (London: Carlile, 1823), p. 52.

Predictably, in view of the post-war political climate of the Regency, the vitalist debates became nationalized, a fact especially important in understanding Mary Shelley's treatment of national constitutions in *Frankenstein*, which this chapter will discuss in its final section. Reverend Rennell, for example, remembered with satisfaction the work of the anatomist Charles Bell, who, according to Bell's own account, was "engaged in maintaining the principles of the English school of Physiology, and in exposing the futility of the opinions of those French philosophers and physiologists, who represented life as the mere physical result of certain combinations and actions of parts" (Temkin 107). More scathing than Rennell's characterization was the complaint of an anonymous "Oxonian Resident in London," who situated Lawrence among a "radical triumvirate" of thinkers including Lord Byron and the "infidel" Thomas Paine. In the view of this anonymous commentator, Lawrence, Byron, and Paine were "Colleagu[ing] with the Patriotic Radicals to Emancipate Mankind from All Laws Human and Divine," and in so doing were "undermining belief in the Bible and the immortality of the soul, were destroying hope or dread of future reward or punishment"—and thus they were sabotaging Britain's constitution under civil, religious, and divine authorities (Temkin 108). Though he at first refrained from these nationalized arguments, Abernethy eventually would impute sedition to Lawrence's continental understanding of human physiology. According to their nationalist suspicions of the godless, politically radical French, Abernethy and his coreligionists in the College of Surgeons were especially offended by Lawrence's claim that science could offer no account of the everlasting soul: "the theological doctrine of the soul and its separate existence," Lawrence argued in 1817, depended upon "a species of proof altogether different. These sublime dogmas could never have been brought to light by the labours of the anatomist and

physiologist. An immaterial and spiritual being could not have been discovered amid the blood and filth of the dissecting-room.” (*Lectures* 8) But too late: the conservative establishment in London already had brought English nationalism and Christian belief together under the banner of a vitalist physiology promulgated by English science, which is why the anonymous conservative contributor to *Fraser’s Magazine* quoted at the beginning of this chapter could in 1830 so readily liken a “State without religion” to a being “without a pure and vivifying principle.”

Lawrence’s gothicized rhetoric about “the blood and filth of the dissecting room” should sound familiar to those who have read *Frankenstein* because, as Butler momentously has shown, there was a healthy traffic in ideas between the Shelleys and Lawrence during the vitalist debates in London, particularly from 1815-1816, when Lawrence was physician to the hypochondriac Percy Shelley (who, at this time, believed himself to be dying of syphilis); by 1816, Mary Shelley was working up her famous ghost story into the novel manuscript of *Frankenstein*. As Butler explains, it was because of this traffic in ideas that Lawrence came to adopt Shelley’s gothicized language and her social satire, and that Shelley (like Lawrence) was believed, in *Frankenstein*, to be attacking Britain’s state-sponsored Christianity. Because of its intense preoccupations with materialist science, the 1818 *Frankenstein* had definitively aligned Shelley with Lawrence in the hostile London debates (Butler xx).

Lawrence and Shelley’s radical materialism also challenged implicitly the notion of constitution, an idea that was, as we have seen in the previous chapters, at least as entrenched in Britain as Christianity. Georgian-era Britons made constant recourse to the idea of their bodily constitutions: “My constitution will no longer allow me to toil as formerly,” Tobias Smollet wrote to his doctor in 1762; and Lady Palmerston, recording her father’s descent into

ill health, explained: “Papa is a little better for the change of air, but not much. He is certainly weak and ill and in very low spirits. He is broken within the last few months, [...] yet he had so strong a constitution ones hopes he may pick up again.” As Roy and Dorothy Porter have shown, and as the remarks of Smollet and Palmerston bear out, constitution was a holistic conception of the body and its health: “the inner stock of vitality and strength, the vigour that flowed when all one’s organs worked effectively together, without the artificial crutches of medicines.” (Porter and Porter 26-28; Smollet and Palmerston qtd. in Porter)

Owing largely to the absorption of Galenic humoralism into understandings of bodily constitution during the eighteenth century, disease still meant total constitutional disorder to most Britons during the Romantic period; it was not yet a sign, as in later nineteenth- and twentieth-century medicine, of a particular affliction to a unique site in the body: the lesion, as it eventually would be called by the materialist Foucault. Physiological events—boils, swelling, rashes, and fevers—were regarded by Romantic-period sufferers and their caretakers only as the outward manifestations of full-scale constitutional problems—favorable signs, in fact, that disease was working itself out of the body. This is why in *Sense and Sensibility*, for example, Dr. Harris initially sees Marianne Dashwood’s fever as a welcome sign of her recovery.

When the Lawrence-Abernethy debates and *Frankenstein* appeared on Britain’s national scene, therefore, constitution—as we have seen in the works of Austen and Brunton—was the essentially unchallenged rubric under which Britons understood their bodies and what ailed them. Materialism’s insistence on discreet bodily structures with unique, structure-dependent functions dangerously implied that holistic human constitutions might not exist and—more outrageous still—that all human beings might be fundamentally

the same in their body's structures regardless of familial, racial, or national identities.

Without bodily constitutions, where were those material human differences to be located?

Materialism was thus deeply troubling to political conservatives not only because it questioned the existence of God and an everlasting soul, but because it undermined the widely-held belief that constitutional differences between people produced and justified the existing social order in which the rich were superior to the poor, the English were superior to the Scottish, and—particularly important in the context of *Frankenstein*—men were superior to women. On the other hand, this is why materialism was so exciting to radicals lately disenchanted by the failed French Revolution. Materialism supported democratic conceptions of human perfectibility explicated by Shelley's father, William Godwin, in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*: if everyone had the same material body with the same structures and the same functions, then each person, regardless of the circumstances of birth, might improve toward perfection on a similar program. Thus would the *ancien régime's* hierarchies be leveled through education, that Romantic mechanism of individual improvement which Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had argued for so famously in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. More compelling still to British radicals was that materialists in Britain and on the continent, perhaps most notably Lawrence, were laying the groundwork for evolutionary theory: the idea that not just individuals, but entire species, could improve based on sexual selection. As Butler notes, science thus offered a wonderfully tantalizing alternative to the failed political revolution in France: [i]f revolution were to be put in a new, much grander frame, and redefined as evolution, it could be represented as natural, even inevitable" (xxxii)—certainly a comforting thought to those British radicals who had seen the momentous political upheaval in France quashed by the Terror and

Madame Guillotine. By invoking Lawrence's materialist science in Frankenstein's radical experiment, Shelley irreparably altered—in a way the French Revolution could not—Romantic-era constitutional identities with the birth of the Creature: a nation-less, race-less, and, as some feminist and queer theorists have argued, genderless being who has no family. According to the Godwinian promises of Lawrence's democratizing materialist science, Shelley's Creature is unencumbered by membership in the corporate constitutions implied by each of these categories.

And yet: instead of staging the triumph of scientific discovery or, as in *Pride and Prejudice*, the rise of the individual over the unfair systems of the past, *Frankenstein* is most famously a story of domestic tragedy that, as her biographers frequently note, resonates deeply with Shelley's own losses. The first and perhaps most famous of these was Mary Wollstonecraft's death from puerperal fever very shortly after her daughter's birth, a common Romantic-period fate of new mothers who had been delivered of their babies by doctors and midwives who, before the advent of germ theory much later in the century, saw no reason to maintain sterile birthing rooms. Mary Shelley, née Godwin, was born at home, and a midwife attended until Mary Wollstonecraft had difficulty delivering the placenta following Mary's birth; finally the physician Dr. Poignard was called who, allegedly coming to Wollstonecraft's bedside from a post-mortem without washing his hands, introduced the infection that killed her little more than a week later.<sup>117</sup> Mary Shelley lost three of her own children as well: a prematurely-born daughter, Clara, died in February of 1815, just before Shelley conceived the ghost story that would become *Frankenstein*; William and a second daughter, also Clara, died in childhood. As an adolescent, Shelley was ineffectively treated

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<sup>117</sup> Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 1.



for a case of eczema, which erupted on her hand and spread along one of her arms. The thirteen-year-old was often sent away from her father's home to the Kent coast at Ramsgate because sea-bathing had been prescribed as part of her treatment. The prescriptions of her doctor, which never cured her eczema, often removed her from familiar domestic life in her father's home.<sup>118</sup>

When she began *Frankenstein* in 1816, therefore, the nineteen-year-old Shelley was grappling with competing conceptions of human life: the wonderful freedom from individual and corporate constitutions championed by her parents and all but promised by Lawrence's materialist science, on one hand, and, on the other, Britons (including herself and beloved members of her own family) who lived and died with what still looked to most doctors—and felt to most patients—like integrated bodily constitutions, consistent with the vitalism championed by Abernethy. Shelley embodied this conundrum in the Creature. His birth is the result of Victor's materialist science but also of Victor's older preoccupations with medieval and Renaissance occult forms of inquiry, which are notionally if not explicitly vitalist. Stuart Peterfreund, Martin Tropp, and Irving Buchen, who explore Victor's longstanding interest in Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus, convincingly have explained the vitalist nature of Victor's childhood interests. Peterfreund acknowledges the novel's particular use of Paracelsus's work, noting the “similarity [...] between the ‘transparent’ homunculus of Paracelsus [...] as well as the forty-day and forty-week gestation of the homunculus and the ‘nearly two years’ that Victor works ‘for the sole purpose of infusing

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<sup>118</sup> Martin Garrett, *The British Library Writers' Lives: Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 14.

life into an inanimate body.”<sup>119</sup> Tropp notes in *Frankenstein* the influence of Godwin’s *St. Leon* (1799), explaining that in her father’s novel Shelley “read of an alchemist [...] who discovers both the philosopher’s stone and the elixir of life,”<sup>120</sup> and modeled Victor Frankenstein after this character. Medieval and early modern necromancers also sought to animate lifeless matter, and Buchen describes the role of this occultist pursuit in *Frankenstein*, underlining Victor’s aim to “wed the visions of alchemy to the methodology of science.”<sup>121</sup> These elements of Victor’s early interests, particularly the elixir of life, are deeply consistent with the vitalist idea that a superadded principle, perhaps even fluid like an elixir, was necessary to make a being live.

Shelley’s alignment of Victor’s early (and unsuccessful) interests with the vitalist position would have seemed fairly explicit to her contemporary readers attuned to the Lawrence-Abernethy controversy. Against his father’s recommendation, for example, Victor ineffectively repeats Agrippa’s old methods of incantation, which, like Victor’s animation of the Creature at Ingolstadt, seek to bring insentient bodies to life by exciting a vital principle.<sup>122</sup> This is another important parallel between Shelley’s 1818 *Frankenstein* and the work of William Lawrence. In his *Lectures on Comparative Anatomy*, Lawrence mockingly compared the vitalist position to the very myths that fascinate Shelley’s young Frankenstein (and that newer colonial figure, the “untutor’d” “Indian”): “Thus we find,” Lawrence argued,

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<sup>119</sup> Stuart Peterfreund, “Composing What May not Be ‘Sad Trash’: A Reconsideration of Mary Shelley’s Use of Paracelsus in *Frankenstein*,” *Studies in Romanticism* (Spring 2004), 43(1), p. 84.

<sup>120</sup> Martin Tropp, *Mary Shelley’s Monster* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), p. 55.

<sup>121</sup> Irving H. Buchen, “*Frankenstein* and the Alchemy of Creation and Evolution,” *The Wordsworth Circle* (Spring 1977), 8.2, p. 104.

<sup>122</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, eds. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Toronto: Broadview Literary Texts, 1999), p. 68.

“that the philosopher with his archeus, his anima, or his subtle and mobile fluid is about on a level, in respect to the mental processes, by which he has arrived at it with the

‘Poor Indian, whose untutor’d mind,  
Sees God in clouds, and hears him in the wind.’” (77)

Victor’s early interests in older methods are tellingly coupled with his backward resistance to Enlightenment science, particularly to the minutia of chemistry. When Victor “attend[s] a course of lectures upon natural philosophy” at his father’s behest, he is confused and alienated by the professor’s lecture on “potassium and boron, of sulphates and oxyds, terms to which [he] could affix no idea,” ultimately becoming “disgusted with the science of natural philosophy” (70-71). With Victor’s aversion to these elements of Enlightenment science—and his enthusiasm for the holism of ancient and medieval traditions—Shelley clearly situates him as a primitive vitalist of the Abernethy school.

As he begins his courses at Ingolstadt, however, Victor’s attitude toward the new science changes dramatically, largely under the influence of his teacher, M. Krempe. Following this shift, Victor censures his anachronistic fascinations and apologizes for his ignorance:

[i]t may appear very strange, that a disciple of Albertus Magnus should arise in the eighteenth century; but our family was not scientific, and I had not attended any of the lectures given at the schools of Geneva. My dreams were therefore undisturbed by reality. (68-69)

Victor’s retrospective assessment of himself echoes Krempe’s critique of Victor upon his arrival at the University: “I little expected in this enlightened and scientific age to find a disciple of Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus. My dear Sir [he says to Victor], you must begin your studies entirely anew” (75). Shelley uses Victor and M. Krempe not only to critique

vitalism, but to articulate a linear narrative of scientific progress, common to the rhetoric of Romantic-era materialists. Lawrence, for example, rejoiced that, because Europe was becoming “one great state prison,” many French scientists were emigrating to the newly formed United States. Unencumbered by the oppressive systems of the Old World, in which he included Abernethy’s religious vitalism, Lawrence predicted that American people “may reach in our lives as gigantic a superiority over the worn-out despotisms of the old world, as the physical features of America, her colossal mountains, her mighty rivers, her forests and her lakes, exhibit in comparison with those of Europe” (qtd. in Temkin 102). The constitution of the young republic becomes for Lawrence a Godwinian utopia, a classically liberal experiment in human perfectibility; on Lawrence’s view, America is Frankenstein’s endeavor to construct a perfect, “beautiful” Creature writ large (85).

And yet: Victor’s transition from older methodologies to the new science of the Enlightenment is imperfect and, according to Shelley, incomplete. Though Victor reportedly abandons his childhood fascination with alchemy at Ingolstadt, he retains a “supernatural enthusiasm” for his physiology courses (79). In her 1831 preface to *Frankenstein*, Shelley continues to characterize Victor as “the pale student of the unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together” (qtd. in Macdonald and Scherf 357). Victor’s work on the Creature therefore represents the collision of new materialist science with a lately discredited but as yet not fully abandoned vitalism that supported Britons’ notion of constitutional holism. This is why we must see Victor Frankenstein not only as Shelley’s vitalist philosopher turned materialist experimenter but as her physician: that lone figure Romantic-era Britons had—perhaps unfairly—positioned in the yawning chasm between the promises

of Enlightenment science and the darker realities of embodied life at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Largely unaware of the latest scientific and medical discoveries being made in the great urban centers of Great Britain and the continent, most Romantic-era Britons continued to rely on older methods of constitutional maintenance: common sense remedies of nursing and midwifery in combination with prayers, charms, strict and well-recorded dietary and exercise regimens, and homespun treatments based on supposed healing properties of plants and minerals that, like Victor's early intellectual interests, dated back to the Renaissance, or earlier.<sup>123</sup> Especially before the broad standardization of medical education and practice required by The Apothecaries Act in 1815, there was no guarantee that British medical practitioners—physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries—could offer their patients anything much different from these holistic domestic remedies. In favor of folk nostrums and rightly suspicious of new methods that frequently were painful and ineffective, many mid- to late eighteenth-century Britons advocated avoiding medicine altogether, as diarist Joseph Farington reports of his watchmaker, Johnson:

I asked him how he preserved his health being so constantly employed in a sedentary business. He said by abstemiousness. That He never eats so much as He could, and when He finds himself a little indisposed He reduces the quantity of his usual allowance. He never takes Physick. He eats water gruel for breakfast – drinks half a pint at night. He scarcely knows what it is now to feel very hungry. Sometimes He is low and faint with a sinking of the stomach: but rest from business for a day restores him. He drinks a glass of

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<sup>123</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic, Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), p. 178.

cold water every morning when He gets up. Dr. Fothergill of Bath told him that would carry off accumulating bile. (Qtd. in Porter and Porter 31)

Johnson's apparently complicated relationship with professionalized medicine is underlined in this passage by his consultation with the Bath physician, Dr. Fothergill, in spite of other allegations to Farington that he "never takes Physick."

While owing partly to Shelley's own experience with the failures of Romantic-era medicine in the deaths of her mother and children, the domestic tragedy that results, in *Frankenstein*, from Victor's medical practice on the Creature also reveals a more general cultural anxiety, in which the watchmaker Johnson takes part, about the changing nature of medical training, medical practitioners, and medicine itself in the wake of the Enlightenment. During the Romantic period, medicine was still evolving from Galenic medicine's humoralism, which relied on a physician's capacity to interpret patients' constitutional symptoms in a fashion more literary than scientific.<sup>124</sup> Progressive Romantic-period medical practitioners sought to marry these interpretive techniques to disease pathology, using both patient narratives and empirical knowledge from scientific experiments to diagnose illness. Science and medicine were of course not separate and highly specialized fields: even university-trained, practicing physicians like Lawrence could have their hands deep in experimental science and philosophy. The field Lawrence and Abernethy worked in was thus a broad and varying venture, which Shelley recreates in the sheer miscellany of Victor Frankenstein's training at Ingolstadt, enumerated here by Anne Mellor:

Victor Frankenstein chooses to work within the newly established field of chemical physiology. He must thus become familiar with recent experiments

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<sup>124</sup> Lilian R. Furst, *Medical Progress and Social Reality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 3.

in the disparate fields of biology, chemistry, mechanics, physics, and medicine. (90)

And though Enlightenment science was playing an increasingly larger role in more progressive Romantic-era medical practices, British medical men would not be legally required to know anything of this new science until Parliament passed The Apothecaries Act in 1815. Before this, medical practitioners were divided haphazardly into the (often indistinguishable) categories of apothecary, surgeon, and physician not by standardized university or hospital training, but by personal decisions and local business practices. In 1772, the famous Edinburgh-trained physician and medical ethicist John Gregory (whose traditional views on raising girls Wollstonecraft had decried in *A Vindication*<sup>125</sup>) explained that

[i]f a surgeon or apothecary had had the education, and acquired the knowledge of a physician, he is a physician to all intents and purposes, whether he has a degree or not, and ought to be treated and respected accordingly. In Great Britain surgery is a liberal profession. In many parts of it, surgeons or apothecaries are the physicians in ordinary to most families, for which trust they are often well qualified by their education and knowledge; a physician is only called in where a case is difficult, or attended with danger.<sup>126</sup>

These blurred distinctions between apothecaries, physicians, and surgeons were made increasingly unreliable by the range of practitioners in each category. Before 1815, some

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<sup>125</sup> Gregory's "paternal solitudes" were rejected vehemently by Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (Dublin: J. Stockdale, 1793), p. 122. Though Gregory was a household villain in this sense, his ideas about medical practice—particularly his theory of medical sympathy, which we will shortly discuss—seem to have been palatable to the Wollstonecraft-Godwin-Shelley circle.

<sup>126</sup> Qtd. in Irvine Loudon, *Medical Care and the General Practitioner: 1750-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 25.

practitioners held degrees, university certificates, or membership in the Company of Surgeons; large numbers had served full apprenticeships to others in their practice. Other medical practitioners, however, had started as grocers and began selling medicines on the side to increase business; some physicians had purchased or inherited their degrees instead of earning them through academic training. Even among practitioners trained in hospitals and universities was the occasional itinerant quack; the most infamous of these, John Taylor (1703-1772), had even undertaken formal training at St. Thomas's Hospital in London (Loudon 13).

The Apothecaries Act thus represented in medicine the general spirit of reform that had animated British politics in the wake of the Napoleonic wars and, in 1819, inspired an anonymous author earnestly to insist that “[a] spirit of Reform, Revolution, Renovation and Alteration, are passing through every rank, spreading far and wide and like the resistless billows of the ocean, carrying all things before it with an irresistible and impetuous sway.”<sup>127</sup> The Act and the changes it encouraged—the professionalization of each of the three areas of medicine and, eventually, their establishment as academic disciplines—are suggested in Victor's study of only post-Enlightenment subjects at Ingolstadt, a detail Mary Shelley surely gleaned from her acquaintance with several university-trained physicians: William Lawrence, for one, as well as John William Polidori, who was Byron's physician in 1816 and consequently present at the ghost story contest during which Shelley first came to her idea

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<sup>127</sup> This anonymous statement was made as a defense of the University of Edinburgh, where the reforms of the early nineteenth century found both support and practical application in the University's medical training programs. W. H. McHenemey, “Education and the Medical Reform Movement,” *The Evolution of Medical Education in Britain* (Baltimore: The Williams and Wilkins Company, 1966), p. 135.



for *Frankenstein*.<sup>128</sup> While this chapter will soon argue that the amateur chemist and partially trained surgeon Percy Shelley was Mary Shelley's primary model for Victor Frankenstein, it seems equally plausible that Polidori, like Lawrence, also served as an inspiration for Shelley's title character. Like Victor Frankenstein, Polidori was dissatisfied with his professors and academic work at Edinburgh and often wished to leave medical school. More compelling still is that, at the time of Polidori's matriculation, enrollment at Edinburgh had increased from 158 students in 1750 to 650 students in 1800, a dramatic change in lecture sizes that led to cadaver shortages in Edinburgh's anatomy courses. While it is not known whether or not Polidori ever participated, his classmates at Edinburgh took it upon themselves to make up for this shortage through an extensive grave-robbing campaign, which, as Polidori's biographer D. L. Macdonald speculates, likely encouraged Polidori's, and perhaps Mary Shelley's, gothic imagination.<sup>129</sup>

Alongside social and legal developments in medicine represented by The Apothecaries Act of 1815 was a burgeoning medical interest in the nature of human sensation, particularly pain; experiments on sensory perception—like those in galvanism Shelley references in her 1831 Preface to *Frankenstein*—were steadily beginning to inform medical practice in Great Britain and elsewhere on the continent. As Steven Bruhm explains,

[t]he complex slipperiness of pain began to manifest itself profusely in the mid-eighteenth century as physicians attempted to reorganize the landscape of the human body and its responses to stimulation (10)

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<sup>128</sup> While it is important to note that Victor, a Swiss citizen attending a German medical school, would not literally have fallen under the governance of The Apothecaries Act, this reading of *Frankenstein* assumes that Mary Shelley's imaginative foundations for the medicine in the novel rest primarily in British medical culture.

<sup>129</sup> D. L. Macdonald, *Poor Polidori: A Critical Biography of the Author of The Vampyre* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 2.

—an enterprise at the heart of the Lawrence-Abernethy debates and, of course, Frankenstein’s work at Ingolstadt. As in Elinor Dashwood’s fear in *Sense and Sensibility* that Marianne might sympathize with others’ feelings too readily and thus ruin her own constitution, many who advocated a physiological understanding of sympathy extended this theory to include social sympathy, or the literal transmission of corporal feeling from constitution to constitution.

The mechanisms of social sympathy cohered nicely with vitalist explanations of human life: eighteenth-century physiology held that organs themselves existed in mutual awareness, or sympathy, with one another because of the vital principal (or something like it), thus producing a fully integrated constitution. Newton’s argument in *Opticks* (1704) that sensory impressions were produced by vibrations in the ether—that invisible substance flowing both between bodies and through the nerves—explained how sympathetic transmissions occurred not only within, but between, individual constitutions. This model of sympathy was not new. Ether was merely the empiricist’s explanation of what heretofore had been sympathy’s supposed occult properties, which prompted the early modern English, for example, to treat wounds “by anointing the offending weapon,” or by using “plants fancifully resembling a lung [...] as specifics against phthisis.” These sympathetic “wound salves” and the “doctrine of signatures” practiced by the Renaissance physician Paracelsus were regularly derided during the Romantic period by university-trained doctors, but it is critical to remember that, like Shelley’s Frankenstein, many Romantic-era Britons were involved in the ongoing practice and even the revival of Paracelsian methods.<sup>130</sup> Victor’s fascination with Renaissance systems is therefore probably not what Butler calls a “poorly explained

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<sup>130</sup> Nora Crook and Derek Guiton, *Shelley’s Venomed Melody* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 28.

preoccupation,” but Shelley’s keen understanding of just how variable medical practice was during the period of her own life, particularly before The Apothecaries Act (xxviii).

Although it took place before Mary knew him, Percy Shelley’s brief attempt to become a surgeon illustrates the chaotic and unregulated nature of medical training in Britain prior to The Apothecaries Act and suggests that Mary Shelley—positioned by the fall of that year to compare her husband’s meager medical training to that of the already quite accomplished William Lawrence—knew British medicine’s lack of standards when she imagined Victor Frankenstein. Before he was expelled from Oxford, Percy Shelley used his rooms there to house, according to Thomas Jefferson Hogg, “an electrical machine, and air-pump, the galvanic trough, a solar microscope, and large glass jars and receivers,” which he was using to prepare medical salves on his own program of innovation and discovery.<sup>131</sup>

Shelley’s biographers tend to agree that he pursued medicine primarily because of a persistent and debilitating hypochondria, which, in combination with the necessity of supporting himself after expulsion from Oxford, eventually led him to the study of surgery in London (Crook and Guiton ix).

Percy Shelley’s intention to practice medicine professionally can be traced through his letters of 1811, when he was visiting London after the expulsion. Charles Grove recalls that Shelley

then came to London, his father at that time refusing to receive [him] at Field Place. He came, therefore, to my brother’s house in Lincoln-inn Fields. I was then in town, attending Mr. Abernethy’s anatomical lectures. The thought of

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<sup>131</sup> Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 74.

anatomy [...] became quite delightful to Bysshe, and he attended a course with me, and sometimes went also to St. Bartholomew's Hospital.<sup>132</sup>

In July of that year, and in spite of his increasingly dire financial straits, Shelley reported to E. F. Graham his ongoing determination to become a surgeon: "I still remain firm in my resolve to study surgery – you will see that I shall." Shelley was then regularly accompanying Charles on their summer course of study at St. Bartholomew's during which they followed practicing surgeons through the hospital, observing as the surgeons diagnosed patients, performed operations, and conducted post-mortems. Four months later, however, Shelley composed a far less certain letter to his friend, Elizabeth Hitchener, suggesting that his interest in surgery was by then well on the wane (Ruston 77).

Shelley's elopement with Harriet Westbrook drew him away from his surgery training permanently after that summer, but as Ruston writes, Shelley

clearly felt that he had gained sufficient knowledge from his time at Bart's to advise others on their health. Leigh Hunt's son, Thornton, recalled that Shelley, in Marlow in the summer of 1817, "played the Lord Bountiful among his humbler neighbours, not only helping them with money or money's-worth, but also advising them in sickness; for he had made some study of medicine, in part, I suspect, to be the more useful." (79)

While it was infrequent and relatively inconsequential, Shelley's ability to dispense medical advice among his "humbler neighbours" without proper qualification was symptomatic of a larger social problem that The Apothecaries Act of 1815 was meant to correct. Irregular medical practitioners—like Percy Shelley and his fictive incarnation, Victor Frankenstein—

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<sup>132</sup> Qtd. in Thomas Jefferson Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1906), p. 575.

stood at the heart of the British public's distrust of the medical profession during the Romantic period (Loudon 132-33).<sup>133</sup>

Before leaving his surgery training in London, however, Percy Shelley encountered—and for a time, it seems, embraced—a vitalist theory of constitutional maintenance being promulgated during the 1811 summer by his anatomy lecturer, John Abernethy, whose ideas Shelley would come to reject for Lawrence's materialism. During Shelley's attendance at these lectures, Abernethy explicated the theory of physiological sympathy already laid out broadly in his *Surgical Observations on the Constitutional Origin and Treatment of Local Diseases; and on Aneurisms*, a book Abernethy had been promoting wildly among his patients and professional circles since its publication in 1809. Abernethy's lectures at St. Bartholomew's in the summer of 1811 were organized according to individual parts of the body, but the overarching theme of his lectures, as the title of his book suggests, was that local physiological problems were merely the symptom of global constitutional disorder (Ruston 84-85). For example, in a lecture on joints and their musculature, Abernethy explained that “many joints become diseased by the general health being disordered, in these cases local applications will be of little use, our chief care then should be to amend the constitution, and having done this we cure the disease” (qtd. in Ruston 85). Shelley references Abernethy's lectures extensively in his 1815 “Essay on the Vegetable System of Diet,” noting, in one instance, that the “remotest parts of the body sympathise [with] the stomach; groundless terrors, vertigo and delirium are frequently consequent upon a disease of

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<sup>133</sup> Like Percy Shelley's abbreviated attendance at St. Bartholomew's, Frankenstein leaves the University of Ingolstadt before obtaining any formal qualification. Percy left his medical training to marry Harriet Westbrook, who had committed suicide in the Serpentine by the time Mary published *Frankenstein*; Frankenstein, similarly, leaves Ingolstadt to work on his Creature, a grim effort resulting in two more dead brides: Elizabeth Frankenstein and the Creature's female companion, whom Victor destroys before bringing her to life.

the digestive organs” (qtd. in Ruston 84). As Crook and Guiton have shown, Percy Shelley would soon become a vegetarian in an effort to manage his stomach’s sympathy with the rest of his constitution on Abernethy’s program (69-84).

Sympathy had yet another critical role to play as aspiring medical professionals like Percy Shelley learned to treat Britons’ ailing constitutions during the Romantic era. John Gregory’s seminal *Lectures on the Duties and Qualifications of a Physician* (1772), which Percy Shelley must have encountered at St. Bartholomew’s, stressed that a physician’s capacity to reason scientifically and sympathize with his patient must be independent of one another while simultaneously present in his practice: the “happy union of genius and understanding, which we so rarely see,” Gregory claims, “constitutes a [physician] of the first rate and dignity.” (Qtd. in Caldwell 34) According to Gregory, it was possible for a physician to have both too small and too great a measure of fellow feeling:

a physician [...] has many opportunities of displaying patience, good-nature, generosity, compassion, and all the gentler virtues that do honour to human nature. The faculty has often been reproached with hardness of heart, occasioned, as is supposed, by [physicians’] being so much conversant with human misery. [...] But [...] when this insensibility is real, it is an [sic] misfortune to a physician, as it deprives him of one of the most natural and powerful incitements to exert himself for the relief of his patient. On the other hand, a physician of too much sensibility may be rendered incapable of doing his duty from anxiety, and excess of sympathy, which cloud his understanding, depress his spirit, and prevent him from acting with that

steadiness and vigour, upon which perhaps the life of his patient in a great measure depends.<sup>134</sup>

By the time Percy Shelley matriculated at St. Bartholomew's, Gregory's medical ethics were required reading at major hospitals, and influential elsewhere in the medical profession, as Hermione de Almeida explains in her study of Keats's medical training at Guy's Hospital, which he began in 1815:

conduct treatises by famous researchers like Brodie and regimental surgeons like James Wallace, and handbooks by renowned general practitioners like Anthony Carlisle and Abraham Banks, as well as the pamphlets on staff manners and perspective in the clinics drawn up by the individual teaching hospitals, were all testament to the Romantic age's growing preoccupation with defining who knew most of life and pain and so deserved best the accolade of physician.<sup>135</sup>

While ministering to the constitutions of others, therefore, Romantic-period physicians were also tasked with managing their own sympathies, and thus their own constitutions, in order to provide proper care at the patient's bedside.

In Victor Frankenstein's profound—sometimes comically hyperbolic—lack of sympathy for the Creature, Shelley invokes these contemporary medical debates about the physiology of human sympathy and its relationship to the medical practitioner, which she no doubt collected from her husband, William Lawrence, and John William Polidori. The full scope of Shelley's engagement with medical sympathy in the novel comes more completely

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<sup>134</sup> John Gregory, *Lectures on the Duties and Qualifications of a Physician* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1772), pp. 7-9.

<sup>135</sup> Hermione de Almeida, *Romantic Medicine and John Keats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 36.

into view when we remember that Victor Frankenstein's famous experiment is actually two: the discovery of the principle of life and then, later, the construction of the Creature's body, which Victor animates by means of his first discovery. Film's popular adaptations of the animation scene in *Frankenstein*—bolts to conduct electric current, for example, inserted into the Creature's neck—reinforce a materialist perception that the completion of the Creature's physical body and its animation are simultaneous events: after all structure, in Lawrence's view, should itself produce life's functions. Mary Shelley's text, however, gives a different chronology of the experiment, suggesting that while Shelley was indeed fascinated with Lawrence's materialism in 1816, she still was unable or unwilling to write an animation scene without invoking Abernethy's vitalism. Long before the Creature's body is completed, Victor discovers the method, the principle of life, by which he will animate his Creature:

[s]ome miracle might have produced it, yet the stages of the discovery were distinct and probable. After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter. (80)

The theoretical work of discovering the principle of life, a more glorified and prestigious practice than Victor's admittedly filthy work on the Creature's body, underpins contemporary class distinctions among apothecaries, surgeons, and physicians reinforced by The Apothecaries Act in 1815. Physicians, for example, especially eighteenth-century practitioners who often delivered their prescriptions by correspondence, enjoyed a much higher social position than apothecaries and surgeons who dirtied their hands by coming into contact with patients (Loudon 19).



A more recent form of this same aversion to the human body, especially a body that is dead or sick, has caused *Frankenstein's* critics to wonder how Victor stood the smell of the second half of his experiment. Those who write on *Frankenstein's* science have often perpetuated this cultural aversion to the body, tending to ignore the second half of Victor's experiment to focus on his discovery of "the cause of generation and life" and link it to scientific theories that held wide currency in academic institutions and intellectual circles during the Romantic era. But reading Victor as a university-trained physician offers a compelling new view of the second, dirtier half of Victor's project because it allows us to see this work as an anatomical dissection in reverse: "I possessed the capacity of bestowing animation," he explains, "yet to prepare a frame for the reception of it, with all its intricacies of fibres, muscles, and veins, still remained a work of inconceivable difficulty and labour" (83). The work of assembling the Creature's body is separate from Victor's discovery of the method of animation, and this second part of the experiment thoroughly drains Victor of his own vitality—perhaps a comment on the strenuous nature of a medical education, recognized as well by Shelley's generation as it is now (McHenemey 138). Victor remembers:

[w]inter, spring, and summer, passed away during my labours; but I did not watch the blossom or the expanding leaves – sights which before always yielded me supreme delight, so deeply was I engrossed in my occupation. [...]  
I appeared rather like one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines, or any other unwholesome trade, than an artist occupied by his favorite employment. (84)

This exhausting, dirty, and "unwholesome" work contrasts Victor's prior discovery of the principle of life, which sends him into a state of "delight and rapture" (80). This distance Shelley portrays between theoretical science and medical practice is one of her most

important pieces of social satire in *Frankenstein*: for while a university-trained man like Lawrence could be both a practicing physician and an experimental scientist, there were, as yet, only a very few ways to transform the knowledge produced by experiments into better patient care. This is why medical sympathy was so important to practicing physicians like John Gregory: even if his medicines failed—as they so frequently did—the physician’s sympathy could yet provide a moral balm to his patient that, at least according to the many Britons who believed in physiological sympathy, might actually aid an ailing constitution.

Although we might expect Victor to sympathize with the Creature’s body after its animation by the glorious “spark of life,” the result is precisely, and catastrophically, the reverse. Victor becomes disgusted with his remarkable discovery in this famous passage because the Creature is hideous:

[h]ow can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom which such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion, and straight black lips. (85)

Victor’s failure to make the human body “beautiful,” though, is not a deficiency of his science or even of his training in anatomy and physiology. Indeed, all of these aspects of Victor’s work are successful: he discovers the “spark of life” and creates a human frame that

can and does bear the process of animation. Shelley is clear that Victor's real failure is his lack of what Gregory called the "happy union of genius and understanding"—Victor is a genius to be sure, but he does not possess the understanding, the moral sympathy, which distinguishes a gifted scientist from a skilled physician. In her husband, an aspiring medical man, Shelley might have seen a similar tendency. This is how Percy Shelley remembers his time walking the wards at St. Bartholomew's Hospital:

[h]ospitals are filled with a thousand screaming victims; the palaces of luxury and the hovels of indigence resound alike with the bitter wailings of disease, idiotism and madness grin and rave amongst us. (Qtd. in Ruston 81)

Like Victor's view of the Creature, Percy Shelley abstracts the symptoms of sufferers in St. Bartholomew's Hospital, personifying physical and mental illness instead of seeing the patients themselves.

For all of Shelley's well-documented investment in Lawrence's materialist science, she nevertheless insists that Victor's materialist way of seeing the Creature gets in the way of his medical sympathy. Victor's account of the animation focuses on different, discrete parts of Creature (eyes, hair, teeth), fragmenting the Creature's body, and turning him into the subhuman fiend, wretch, and daemon Victor calls him serially throughout the novel.

Oppositely, the Creature's sense of himself suggests an integrated holism:

it is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original aera of my being: all events of that period appear confused and indistinct. A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt at the same time. (128)

At this crucial moment of Victor's absolute scientific success, he fails, as a physician, to know what his patient is feeling: a problem of moral sympathy and of diagnosis. Because Victor is unable to know what the Creature is feeling, he also is unable accurately to understand the Creature's condition and provide proper care, a crisis that was, as Mary Shelley knew, at the heart of medical practice during the Romantic period—though certainly the problem was less acute in most cases than the satirical extreme Frankenstein represents. Mellor addresses this aspect of Victor's relationship with the Creature when she reads Victor as a parent whose absolute lack of sympathy prevents him from caring for his child:

Frankenstein's inability to sympathize with his child, to care for or even to comprehend its basic needs, soon take the extreme form of putative infanticide. After his next glimpse of his child, he confesses, "I gnashed my teeth, my eyes became inflamed, and I ardently wished to extinguish that life which I had so thoughtlessly bestowed." (42)

Through her portrayal of Victor as a parent and physician, Shelley implies that Victor's sympathy is faulty in both domestic and clinical senses.

Victor's lack of sympathy for the Creature is much more than a passing topical reference to Romantic medical practice; Shelley uses it as a major structuring principle of the novel. The Creature's narrative, the innermost story in *Frankenstein*, catalogs the intricacies of his physiological suffering as well as his diet and sleeping habits during the first weeks of his life, a very common practice of Romantic-period sufferers attempting better to understand and correct their constitutional disorders at home. After some time, the Creature learns how to live in his strange environment, and there are strong suggestions in the 1818 text that the Creature is seasoning his body to local environmental factors—food sources, daily rhythms

of lightness and dark, and the weather—increasing his personal sense of holism in a body whose pieces have been gathered variously within and without the human species. In this sense, Victor’s failed medical sympathy positions the Creature as the Romantic patient *par excellence*: not the hypochondriac whose ailments are of the imagination, but a real sufferer, whose constitution is so fundamentally disordered that it cannot be said to exist.

The Creature’s first real understanding of his constitution-less condition comes from his acquaintance with the De Lacey family as he learns their language, observes their social interactions, and reads the family’s books on political economy, where he begins to understand the exclusive nature of corporate human constitutions: “I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty; of rank, decent and noble blood”; the Creature learns that without wealth or descent a man is considered “a vagabond and a slave, doomed to waste his powers for the profit of the chosen few” (145). The Creature also begins to understand that his physical form—both its strange origin and its appearance—will prevent his constitution within the human family. The ugliness of his body is why he has “no friends”: “[w]as I then a monster [...] from which all men fled?” he wonders rhetorically. In a body without kin or connection, the Creature also is without clan and class, the consummate subaltern with claim to “no money” and “no kind of property.” Later, when Victor destroys the Creature’s companion, it becomes clear that the Creature will remain a race unto himself, his suicide in the Arctic amounting to genocide. Outside all imaginable human constitutions, the Creature famously, poignantly asks: “What was I?”—a sentiment that is of course reinforced when the Creature is violently driven by Felix from the idealized De Lacey home (145).

In Shelley's thematization of medical sympathy in *Frankenstein*, the counter-text to the Creature's patient narrative is Victor's journal, which the Creature discovers in the pocket of his garments taken from Victor's laboratory. In it, the Creature reads Victor's original, damaging observations and diagnosis:

[y]ou, doubtless, recollect these papers. Here they are. Every thing is related in them which bears reference to my accursed origin; the whole detail of that series of disgusting circumstances which produced it is set in view; the minutest description of my odious and loathsome person is given. (155)

Though they contradict his sense of having a fully integrated constitution, the Creature—like a patient—trusts Victor's observations of his body, which suggest a fragmented and subhuman condition. When the Creature adopts Victor's diagnosis, it alienates him from the De Lacey household and the rest of humankind: “[i]ncrease of knowledge,” the Creature explains, “only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was.” Victor's laboratory notes on the Creature thus become a rather prescient critique of how nineteenth-century “medicine” would participate in the institutionalization of racism. The Creature still feels the human emotion of hope, but it “vanishe[s]” each time he is reminded of Victor's devastating but authoritative opinion by seeing his reflection in water (156). While the split nature of Victor's experiment suggests the huge divide yet to be closed during the Romantic era between theoretical science and medical practice, the difference between Victor's opinion of the Creature and the Creature's account of himself insists that moral sympathy be applied in medical practice as a necessary corollary to Enlightenment science. The alternative Shelley warns of is a materialist medicine that fragments the body to diagnose its ailments without an understanding of the whole patient, turning that patient into a monster and outcast.

William Wordsworth's famous caution about nature in "The Tables Turned" (1798), that "[w]e murder to dissect" (l. 28) it, therefore has radical resonance in the medical context Mary Shelley establishes in *Frankenstein*: Victor fragments the human body through a reverse dissection seeking to create life, but when it is performed without sympathy to the whole patient, it is more deadly than life-giving. What is most striking, though, about Shelley's structural pairing of the Creature's narrative to Victor's journal is that the Creature clearly emerges from the comparison as the more sympathetic figure. Insofar as the Creature is constituted in *Frankenstein* by his own narrative (and not by Victor's materialist view of him), we readers are far more inclined to sympathize with him—to feel, as some have argued, that he is a human being. Though readers do not agree about the Creature's human status (which is largely Shelley's point), he certainly seems more human to us than the egomaniacal Frankenstein revealed in the laboratory journal. This comparison of the Creature's narrative to Victor's, in fact, has led many critics and readers to name Frankenstein as the real monster of the two, a point that frequently reemerges when *Frankenstein* is adapted to film. By calling our attention to the disparate narratives of the Creature's life that constitute *Frankenstein*, and by persuading us to identify with the Creature, Shelley situates the Romantic novel—not anatomical dissections, not electrical experiments, not even doctoring—as the period's great innovation in moral sympathy.<sup>136</sup>

Victor's denial of the Creature's constitutional wholeness—through both his materialist science and his lack of medical sympathy—causes most immediately the tragedy of the Creature's life. But Shelley sees larger constitutional problems on the horizon of Victor's unregulated and unorthodox medical practice. Because Frankenstein does not

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<sup>136</sup> This as an absolute contrast to Austen's deep ambivalence about the ability of novels to promote moral sympathy, most lucidly distilled a year before *Frankenstein* in her *Sanditon* caricature of Sir Edward Denham.

acknowledge the Creature even in the most basic ways—will not, in fact, report his existence to authorities after he knows the Creature to be capable of killing—Justine is wrongly accused of William’s murder, tried, and executed in what would have been in Shelley’s Britain a gross miscarriage of constitutional law, a fact Shelley of course acknowledges in the sardonic play of Justine’s given name. Similarly, the inquest following Henry Clerval’s murder in an Irish fishing village is short-circuited because the Creature remains in an extra-legal condition perpetuated by Frankenstein’s unwillingness to acknowledge him. Finally, Frankenstein himself is wrongly tried for Clerval’s murder in an Irish assize and acquitted, without revealing that the Creature is responsible (205). Later, when Victor finally does report the Creature to a criminal judge at home in Switzerland, the judge believes Frankenstein himself constitutionally deranged, considering his tale “the effects of delirium.” Realizing himself in the presence of, apparently, a madman, the judge humors Frankenstein’s wishes: “I will exert myself [to find him],” he promises Victor, “[b]ut I fear, from what you have yourself described to be his properties, that this will prove impracticable, and that, while every proper measure is pursued, you should endeavor to make up your mind to disappointment” (222). The rule of law is thus severely compromised in *Frankenstein*, made meaningless, in fact, by the presence of not one being but two forced outside the bounds of traditional human constitutions: the Creature by Frankenstein’s unwillingness to acknowledge him, and Frankenstein himself by his periodic madness.

The deterioration of constitutional law is itself more programmatic in *Frankenstein* than topical. Before the Creature commits any crime, and before Justine Moritz loses her constitutional rights in an unfair murder trial, Shelley prefigures the deterioration of the law’s meaning when the sighted children of old De Lacey—a figure of Blind Justice and the only



character in the novel to acknowledge the Creature as human—drive the Creature away from their father and back into the wilderness, where he lives for the rest of the novel beyond the rule of law. Together, *Frankenstein*'s engagements with criminal law are Shelley's taut allegory for The Criminal Lunatics Act 1800, which was passed by the House of Commons in response to James Hadfield's alleged attempt on King George III's life at the Drury Lane Theater. Deemed by a judge and jury to have a mental constitution too deranged to be convicted on charges of treason, Hadfield was simply released from Britain's legal system; The Criminal Lunatics Act was then passed through the House of Commons hastily to ensure that Hadfield could be incarcerated legally and indefinitely at the behest of the Regent.<sup>137</sup>

In her 1826 novel, *The Last Man*, Shelley would further elucidate the political and legal problems created within a constitutional monarchy by pathologic individualism, particularly egomania of the kind she had presented in Victor Frankenstein. Adrian, Shelley's progressive heir to the British leadership, is made unfit to rule by his idealism and "self-destructive love" for the Greek princess Evadne, thus paving the way for the Byronic Lord Raymond to become Lord Protector. Raymond hopes that his rule will return England, an island republic in Shelley's novel, to a constitutional monarchy: "my first act when I become King of England," Raymond pledges, "will be to unite with the Greeks, take Constantinople, and subdue all Asia."<sup>138</sup> Raymond's imperial ambitions and adulterous affair with Evadne disrupt the happiness of Shelley's small cast of ruling families, the succession of power in England, and ultimately the population of the world. As Kari E. Lokke has observed, Lord Raymond's brutal attack on Constantinople "disseminates the plague and initiates a narrative

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<sup>137</sup> Richard Moran, "The Origin of Insanity as a Special Verdict: The Trial for Treason of James Hadfield (1800)," *Law & Society Review* 19, no. 3 (1985), pp. 487–519.

<sup>138</sup> Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, ed. Hugh J. Luke, Jr. (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 40.

of death that will not end until the entire human race, save [Shelley's] narrator, Lionel [Verney], is gone."<sup>139</sup> The problems of Shelley's fictive constitutional monarchy under the egomaniacal Lord Raymond—while often read as a *roman-à-clef*, “an act of mourning for Percy Bysshe Shelley, [...] for Byron, and for the collective life they had led”—are also a clear critique of Regency-era Hanover family politics, which seriously compromised the political efficacy and the personal happiness of the royal family's least powerful members (Lokke 117). Caroline of Brunswick and her daughter, Princess Charlotte, are allegorized in *The Last Man* as Shelley's Perdita and Clara, Lord Raymond's wife and daughter, whom he cruelly abandons following his affair with Evadne. Perdita, too, in her dejection over Raymond's betrayal, neglects “even her child” and steels “her heart against all tenderness” (111). By the time Shelley published *The Last Man*, of course, both Caroline and Princess Charlotte were dead, the unwitting victims, many Britons believed, of an unfeeling, unprincipled Regent. In the meanwhile, George IV ruled as Britain's king with the dissolution and self-interest that his subjects had long come to expect from him. Shelley's notice of egomania's effects on Britain's constitutional monarchy—which she first articulated in *Frankenstein* in the erosion of Justine's constitutional rights by Victor's lack of sympathy—would become a programmatic feature of her third novel and a pointed attack on contemporary royal politics.

Familial constitutions, too, are deeply troubled in *Frankenstein* by Victor's failed sympathy for the Creature: most obviously, the Creature, embittered by his loneliness and dejection, murders Elizabeth Frankenstein on her wedding night, strongly implying that the

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<sup>139</sup> Kari E. Lokke, “The Last Man,” *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. Esther Shor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 119.

Frankenstein family line will end with Victor, though his younger brother, Ernest (his name implying that he may be more sympathetic than his older brother), somewhat miraculously survives the novel. The Creature's understanding of human family's constitutions, what he calls the "sanguinary laws of man," marks the child William out for death when he asserts the name of his father and with it his membership in the Frankenstein bloodline: "My papa is a Syndic – he is M. Frankenstein," William announces defiantly to the Creature upon meeting him. "Frankenstein!" the Creature exclaims, "You belong then to my enemy – to him towards whom I have sworn eternal revenge; you shall be my first victim" (168, 167). But there is a deeper, more sinister problem with the Frankenstein family constitution: the threat of incest between Victor and Elizabeth, his cousin, who has been raised in the Frankenstein home as a sibling. As Butler argues, Shelley revised the original *Frankenstein* in 1831 to remove the stigma of incest (by making Elizabeth a stranger adopted by the Frankensteins, not Victor's cousin), but in the 1818 version of the novel the theme of a degenerative upper class family is clear, a constitutional problem made worse by the ambitions of a son whose professional failures are revisited upon the Frankenstein family in the murders of the family's most vulnerable members, Elizabeth and William. Victor's professional failure is substantially underlined by the coincidence of illness and death in the Frankenstein household with the beginning of his medical education at Ingolstadt. With these details, Shelley suggests that Victor's interest in medicine may be strongly focused by his desire to prevent the kind of domestic tragedy that precedes his departure from home:

Elizabeth had caught the scarlet fever; but her illness was not severe, and she quickly recovered. During her confinement many arguments had been urged to persuade my mother to refrain from attending upon her. She had, at first,

yielded to our entreaties; but when she heard that her favourite was recovering, she could no longer debar herself from her society, and entered her chamber long before the danger of infection was past. The consequences of this imprudence were fatal. (72)

This sense of possibility is disappointed, however, by Victor's failure to see his studies as a way of righting his family's misfortunes; rather, he selfishly thinks of Ingolstadt as a place merely to escape a boring life in his parents' home:

as I proceeded, my spirits and hopes rose, I ardently desired the acquisition of knowledge. I have often, when at home, thought it hard to remain during my youth cooped up in one place, and had longed to enter the world, and take my station among other human beings. Now my desires were complied with, and it would, indeed, have been folly to repent. (74)

Victor's blithe inattention even to the suffering of his own family—especially when compared to the utter selflessness of his mother's care for Elizabeth—indicates that his lack of sympathy is not just a professional failure, but his own constitutional problem, a real aberration from the rest of his family. Victor acknowledges this problem in his conversation with the Creature, when they are discussing the possibility of Victor's making a female companion. The Creature pleads with Victor to let him see that he "excite[s] the sympathy of some existing thing." But Victor cannot: "I compassionated him," Victor admits, "and sometimes felt a wish to console him; but when I talked, my heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred. [...] I could not sympathize with him" (171). But the Creature has already intuited, through his own superior capacity for sympathy, that human feelings like Victor's will always prevent him and his companion from being

constituted among the human family: “the human senses,” the Creature explains calmly to Victor, “are insurmountable barriers to our union” (169). Still, though, Shelley continues to suggest that Victor’s physical constitution is in some way particularly resistant to sympathy, not just for the Creature, but for everyone—even his closest friend. After Clerval’s death, Victor invokes Lawrence’s science to wonder: “Of what materials was I made, that I could thus resist so many shocks, which, like the turning of the wheel, continually renewed the torture?” “Why,” he clarifies, “did I not die?” (201) In a last effort for familial constitutional cohesion among the Frankenstein’s, Elizabeth urges Victor to “transfer” his love for the lost to “those who yet live,” a macabre bond to be forged in Elizabeth’s view “by the ties of affection and mutual misfortune”—but even this fails when Elizabeth, too, is murdered because of Victor’s neglect.

The action of the Frankenstein family’s extinction is mirrored in Frankenstein’s destruction of the Creature’s female companion on the Orkney Islands, Victor’s effort to prevent the emergence of a family and eventually a race constituted entirely by monsters. Victor’s abortion of the Creature’s female companion in Scotland suggests an end to all familial constitutions touched by Frankenstein’s unsympathetic practice of medicine—a dissolution of the family unit Shelley knew well from a life lived without her mother. Following Wollstonecraft’s death, Godwin remarried his neighbor, Mary Jane Clairmont, in 1801, and between 1810 and 1812, Mary Godwin herself went twice to Scotland, probably, her biographers agree, because of a tenuous relationship with her stepmother, who saw her as a rival for Godwin’s attention (Butler ix-x). On a broader scale, the discomposure of Europe’s most elite families, William Lawrence pointed out in his lectures at the Royal College of Surgeons, also was owing to the instability of physiological constitutions

produced by generations of inbreeding. The threat of incest between Victor and Elizabeth in an upper-class Swiss family dramatizes this concern in Shelley's fiction; the constitutional weakness of ruling-class families like the Frankensteins was a clear reminder to Britons of their own King George III, whose recurrent episodes of mental derangement betrayed a weakness in both the Hanover family line and the British national constitution.

The Creature's constitution-less body and Victor's unsympathetic treatment of it have still wider implications in Shelley's novel—greater than the Frankensteins' familial concerns, and greater even than the short-circuiting of Ireland and Switzerland's criminal laws. As we have observed in our earlier discussion of the Lawrence-Abernethy debates, British conservatives perceived materialist science as a threat to the national constitution because it suggested that Britain's social order and national supremacy could no longer be justified by constitutional differences among individuals. The Creature is Shelley's embodiment of that threat. A figure explicitly apart from human corporate constitutions, the Creature is profoundly lonely—but he is also in many respects free, the reason why, near the end of the novel, he begins to refer to himself as “master” and to Victor as his “slave” (192). Shelley signals the Creature's freedom physiologically in his ability to survive over an enormous climatologic range, travel great distances on foot, learn human languages quickly, and live on only a meager supply of food: “acorns and berries,” he notes to Victor, “afford me sufficient nourishment” (170). The Creature is not “beautiful,” as Victor had hoped, but his ability to survive (or, to use an idea that materialist science inaugurated, his evolutionary fitness) exceeds that of humans, who, during Shelley's lifetime, were believed to season their constitutions in one climate and become enfeebled or diseased in others. This is why Frankenstein and Walton are so unwell in the Arctic—“daily declin[ing] in health” as Walton

reports—while the Creature maintains his usual strength of mind and body (235). In fact, it is only in applying simultaneously the global extremes of heat and cold—his imagined self-immolation at the North Pole’s zero degrees north latitude—that the Creature will be able to end his life (243).

Ultimately, Shelley insists that a being without a constitution—who can live anywhere on the globe without legal identity or family ties—dissolves the idea of national constitution as well, a point she achieves primarily through a comparison of Victor, Walton, and the Creature. Victor’s physiological constitution responds regularly to his belief in national constitutions: during his visit to the tomb of the English “patriot” John Hampden, the cousin and supporter of Oliver Cromwell, Victor reports that his soul is “elevated from its debasing and miserable fears to contemplate the divine ideas of liberty and self-sacrifice,” suggesting a strong analogy in Victor’s mind between his own Swiss nationalism and the English patriotism he so readily embraces (185). Following his incarceration in Ireland, but before he has arrived at home in Geneva, Victor reports a “*maladie du pays*”—literally “homesickness” in his native French—that is “devouring” his constitution (206). Similarly, Walton’s physical constitution is dependent upon his belief in a national one. When it appears that his ship, moored in the Arctic ice, will be crushed, he imagines his death and the deaths of his crew in familiar national terms: the idea of never seeing “dear England” again (234). Life is similarly conceived: when the ship breaks free of the ice, Walton’s crew celebrate on deck, and Walton reports to Frankenstein that “[t]hey shout [...] because they will soon return to England” (238).

The Creature, on the other hand, has no such national feelings, no such understanding of his life and death. As he explains to Victor on the sea of ice: “At length I wandered toward

these mountains, and have ranged through their immense recesses,” with no thought of compromising his constitution (168). The un-nationalized woods surrounding Ingolstadt, “the ice caves of the glaciers,” the “ridges of inaccessible precipices,” the “sea of ice,” the “desserts of the new world,” and the “dens” of the wilderness are equally habitable to the Creature, strongly suggesting that the infinite aesthetics of the sublime can be embodied in him, as Mellor has argued, precisely because he has no constitution (*Frankenstein* 172; Mellor 131-32). Unlike Laura Montreville, whose Scottish constitution is severely compromised by her transatlantic kidnapping, and unlike Crazy Jane, who lives on the fringe of Britain but cannot leave, the Creature willingly offers to leave the nation, in fact, the continent of his birth with his female companion: to “quit Europe” and live peacefully in the wilds of “South America,” probably the best opposite Shelley could imagine to Europe’s latitude and longitude. In his effort to draw Victor on in their final chase, the Creature sets out “across the sea in a direction that led to no land,” Shelley’s invocation of Thomas Moore’s utopia, literally, “no place,” turned bleakly in *Frankenstein* into the site of Victor and the Creature’s deaths, not to mention the obvious fate of the innocent sled dogs, which the Creature commandeers from the villagers of an Arctic outpost (228).

Equally demonstrative of the Creature’s nation-less condition is that Victor Frankenstein must incorporate a variety of national settings in his endeavor to build the Creature and his female companion. First are Victor’s occult fascinations during his childhood in Switzerland and then the medicine he learns in Germany. When the Creature tasks him with building a companion, Victor travels to England, having “heard of some discoveries [...] made by an English philosopher [in London], the knowledge of which was material to my success” (175). This is probably William Lawrence’s most topical appearance



in *Frankenstein*, the word “material” clueing us in to Shelley’s reference. After visiting London, Frankenstein removes to Scotland with his materials and chemical instruments, a detail strongly suggesting that Victor has gathered his materials for a female Creature in London. Shelley was very familiar with at least one London graveyard: St. Pancras Churchyard was where she frequently retired to read on her mother’s grave (Butler xi). Victor decides finally to construct the female Creature on “the remotest” of Scotland’s Orkney Islands, “an obscure nook in the northern highlands,” where he can work in solitude (188, 184). Frankenstein’s journey into Scotland—in which he consciously avoids that place of advanced medical reform and regulation, Edinburgh—may have prompted Sir Walter Scott to publish three dream visions in the *Edinburgh Weekly Journal* in the 1819 autumn: in the middle vision, the dreamer encounters in a “barely recognizable Scotland of the future” a “democratic ‘ogre’ with ‘a physiognomy which was brutal rather than human’” (Scott qtd. in Butler xlv). Frankenstein’s Creature follows him throughout his journey, enduring “incalculable fatigue, and cold, and hunger,” a set of details that begin to demonstrate the Creature’s super-, not sub-, human condition across many latitudes and climes. When Victor begins his pursuit of the Creature after Elizabeth’s death, he travels northward through Europe to the “wilds of Tartary and Russia,” still maintaining a nationalized view of the world; the Creature, on the other hand, feels no such distinctions, and has no sense of being far from a national home he does not possess (225). This is why the Creature’s strength grows while Victor’s constitution begins to succumb.

Shelley’s critique of Frankenstein’s unsympathetic, transnational, and ultimately catastrophic medical practice is not only the stuff of fiction. In 1800 the British physician, John Reid, leveled his own harsh critique at George Washington’s American doctors for what

he thought to be their excessive bloodletting of the President during his final illness. He added with nervous levity that a “British physician may be deemed not competent to ascertain the propriety of trans-Atlantic practice; the current of blood, in the inhabitants of the new world, may bear some proportion to the current of its rivers.”<sup>140</sup> Just as American rivers have currents deeper and stronger than those of British waterways, Reid half-joked, so had President Washington more blood than British men, perhaps making necessary the copious bloodlettings (upwards of 80 ounces in twelve hours!) of Washington’s American treatment. Beneath Reid’s sarcasm, however, there is a real question about whether or not Washington’s American constitution was too different for British doctors to understand and treat: perhaps not even medical sympathy could make up for the constitutional differences between Americans and Britons, who, when Washington died in 1799, had only just been created as different national groups by the United States Constitution in 1789.

In figuring Victor Frankenstein as a Romantic physician, Shelley imagines the most extreme form of Reid’s point: Victor’s practice of medicine is so unsympathetic that it produces not just a being with a profoundly different physical and national constitution, like Washington, but a being with no constitution at all, who undermines the human social order at all of its known levels. In the absence of medical sympathy, there is finally no living remedy for the Creature or his doctor: death is their only alternative. In its complex critique of a Romantic medicine that would apply materialist science without moral sympathy, Shelley’s *Frankenstein* becomes the period’s clearest and most enduring articulation of the lived relationship between bodily constitutions and the corporate constitutions of family, class, race, and nation. With her Creature—who comes to life in spite of his constitution-less

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<sup>140</sup> J. Craik and E. C. Dick, “On the Death of General George Washington,” *The Philadelphia Museum*, 4(1808), pp. 154-156.

condition—Shelley momentarily suggests that human constitutions, both physiological and political, are perhaps only a fiction. But as the tragedy of *Frankenstein* confirms, this powerful fiction of human “constitutions” remained a necessary one for Regency-era Britons.

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