ASCETIC CITIZENS: RELIGIOUS AUSTERITY AND POLITICAL CRISIS IN ANGLO-AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1681-1799

By

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Abstract

Ascetic Citizens: Religious Austerity and Political Crisis in Anglo-American Literature, 1681-1799, attends to a number of scenes of voluntary self-restraint in literary, political, and religious writings of the long eighteenth century, scenes that stage, what Alexis de Tocqueville calls, "daily small acts of self-denial" in the service of the nation. Existing studies of asceticism in Anglo-American culture during the period are extremely slim. Ascetic Citizens fills an important gap in the scholarship by reframing religious practices of seclusion and self-denial as a broadly-defined set of civic practices that permeate the political, religious, and gender discourses of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Anglo-American culture.

This thesis focuses on the transatlantic relevance of the ascetic citizen—a figure whose rhetorical utility derives from its capacity, as a marker of political and religious moderation, to deploy individual practices of religious austerity as a means of suturing extreme political binaries during times of political crisis. My conception of asceticism’s role in Anglo-American society is informed by an understanding of ascetic citizenship as a cluster of concepts and cultural practices linking the ascetic’s focus on bodily control to republican theories of political subjectivity. The notion that political membership presupposes a renunciation of personal liberties on the part of the individual citizen represents one of the key assumptions of ascetic citizenship. The future guarantee of
individual political rights is ensured by present renunciations of self-interest. As such, the ascetic citizen functions according to the same economy by which the religious ascetic’s right to future eternal reward is ensured by present acts of pious self-abnegation. That is to say, republican political liberty is enabled by what we might call an *ascetic prerequisite* in which the voluntary self-sacrifice of civic rights guarantees the state’s protection of such rights from the infringements of one’s neighbour.

While the abstemious nature of ascetic practice implies efficiency grounded in economic frugality, bodily self-restraint, and physical isolation, the ascetic citizen functions as the sanctioned perversion of a normative devotional practice that circumvents the division between profane self-interest and sacred disinterestedness. The relevance of ascetic citizenship to political culture is its *political fluidity*, its potential to exceed the ideological functions of the dominant culture while revealing the tension that exists between endorsement of, and dissent from, the civic norm. Counter-intuitively, the ascetic citizen’s practice is marked by a celebration of moderation, of the *via media*. Forging a space at the threshold between endorsement/dissent, the ascetic citizen maps the dialectic movement of cultural extremism, forging a rhetorically useful site of *ascetic deferral* characterized by the subject’s ascetic withdrawal from making critical decisions. *Ascetic Citizens* provides a detailed investigation of how eighteenth-century Anglo-American authors such as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Hannah Webster Foster, and Charles Brockden Brown conceive of individual subjectivity as it exists in the *pause or retired moment* between competing political orders.
Ascetic Citizens: Religious Austerity and Political Crisis in Anglo-American Literature, 1681-1799

Coby J. Dowdell
for bruce dowdell (1945-1984)

a lover of literature and a scholar in his own right, his memory continues to inspire me.
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List of Illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cover</th>
<th>Joseph Wright of Derby, “The Hermit Studying Anatomy” (1769)</th>
<th>iv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Jeremias Drexel, “Let none wonder at my habitation” (1694)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>“Crusoe Burning Cham-Chi Thaungu” (1876)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Francis Quarles, emblem of “Sinner as Caged Bird” (1766)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Frontispiece, Defoe, <em>Robinson Crusoe</em> (1719)</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Frontispiece, <em>Wonderful Discovery of a Hermit</em> (1786)</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Frontispiece, Zimmermann, <em>Solitude</em> (1799)</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

# Table of Contents

Abstract  
ii-iii

Acknowledgements  
vi-vii

List of Illustrations  
viii

**Threshold (I): The English Ascetic and a Politics of Deferral**  
1 - 37

**Chapter One:** Ascetic Prerequisites: Starvation, Civic Virtue, and Self-Interest in Daniel Defoe’s *Crusoe* Narratives  
38 - 79

**Chapter Two:** Ascetic Deferrals: Fasting as Weaning-Time in Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*  
80 - 127

**Threshold (II): The American Hermit: Political Critique and Wilful Reclusion in Early American Culture**  
128 - 165

**Chapter Three:** Public Piety and the Female Ascetic Citizen in Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette*  
166 - 206

**Chapter Four:** Ascetic Sympathy and the Failed Promise of Sentimental Democracy in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* and “Death of Cicero”  
207 - 253

Bibliography  
254 - 290
Threshold (I)
The English Ascetic and a Politics of Deferral

While exalting the powers of man, society is often hard on individuals: of necessity it demands perpetual sacrifice...So that we may fulfill our duties toward society, we must be prepared to violate our instincts at times—to go against the grain of our natural inclinations. Thus, there is an asceticism that is inherent in all social life and destined to survive all mythologies and dogmas.

—Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*

In the same year that the Exclusion Bill was defeated in the House of Lords, an unassuming devotional manual entitled, *The Happy Ascetick, or, The Best Exercise to which is added A Letter to a Person of Quality, concerning the Holy Lives of the Primitive Christians* (1681) was published. Written by Church of England clergyman and Palatine emigrant Anthony Horneck (1641-1697), *The Happy Ascetick* became a modestly popular devotional manual, remaining in print well into the eighteenth-century. Running through six editions between 1681-1724, Horneck’s text was further immortalized by the inclusion of an abridged version in John Wesley’s monumental *A Christian Library; Consisting of extracts from and abridgments of the choicest pieces of practical divinity* (1749-55). More popular devotional manuals such as Lewis Bayly’s *The Practice of Pietie* (1616), Jeremy Taylor’s *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* (1650) and Richard Allestree’s *The Whole Duty of Man* (1658) had firmly established the spiritual virtues of

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2 On the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis, see John P. Kenyon, *The Popish Plot* (London: Heinemann, 1972). Additionally, in 1777, Horneck’s *Letter to a Person of Quality, concerning the Holy Lives of the Primitive Christians* was reprinted on its own. *The Happy Ascetick Or, the Best Exercise, To which is added, A Letter to a Person of Quality, Concerning the Holy Lives of the Primitive Christians* (London, 1681). Hereafter cited within the text.

3 As late as the 1790s, Horneck’s text is cited by in Joseph Sutcliffe’s *The mutual communion of saints exemplified; shewing the necessity and advantages of weekly meetings, for a communication of experience….* (London, 1796), as well as appearing in numerous booksellers’ catalogues between 1770-1800.

rigorous self-examination, temperance, and chastity for a previous generation of readers; it remained for Horneck, however, to label this cluster of practices as ascetic.\(^5\)

The subtitle to Horneck’s *The Happy Ascetick*, “The Best Exercise,” points to the important etymological sources of asceticism. The term *ascetic* is adapted from the two related Greek words: the noun *askitis*, denoting a monk or hermit, and the verb *asko/askisi*, meaning to exercise. The Greek lexeme *askesis* denoted the training of athletes and took on, with the advent of organized Christianity, the notion of a spiritual athlete who, as Saint Timothy suggests, should “Exercise thy self rather unto Godliness”\(^1\) *Tim. 4:7*. From the confluence of these two Greek roots comes the sense of religious training, or spiritual athleticism, central to monastic life.\(^6\) While the term has a long history in Greek dating back to at least the early Christian era, it does not appear in English until the beginning of the seventeenth-century. Prior to this period, the cluster of practices and concepts understood as asceticism was expressed by a variety of synonyms such *contemptu mundi* (contempt of the world), self-mortification and self-denial, or a series of Pauline militarist tropes such as Christian warfare, military discipline, and vigilance. Importantly, however, the earliest references to ascetic practice stress the practice of monks/hermits (*askitis*) over spiritual exercise (*asko/askisi*).\(^7\)

While monastic practice certainly involves spiritual exercise (*asko/askisi*), it is not until the 1640s that ascetic practice is referred to outside of the walls of the monastery. In Jeremy Taylor’s popular treatise, *The Great Exemplar of Sanctity and Holy Life* (1649), the author stresses the ascetic nature of Jesus’ fasting and prayer in the

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\(^7\) This early relegation of the term to monastic practice is corroborated by early dictionary entries. See Edward Philips’ *The New World of English Words: Or, a General Dictionary* (London, 1658), which defines “ascetick” as “belonging to a Monk, or Monastery.” Similarly, Elisha Coles’ *An English Dictionary Explaining the Difficult Terms That Are Used in Divinity, Husbandry, Physick...Etc.* (London, 1677) defines the term as “Monastick, Monkish.”
wilderness when Satan tempts him to relieve his hunger by turning stones into bread. The Devil, he writes,

knows that the ascetic Tables of Mortification, and the stones of the Desert are more healthfull, then the fullnesses of voluptuousnesse, and the corn of the valleys. He cannot endure we should live a life of austerity or self Deniall...by our stone walls our hardiness of Discipline and rudenesses of Mortification, we can with more facilities repell his flatteries and receive fewer incommodities of spirit.\(^8\)

In Taylor, the term *ascetic* joins earlier synonyms of mortification, *contemptu mundi*, Christian warfare, and self-denial. Taylor’s text appears to inaugurate a tradition of valorizing asceticism as a reputable lay practice, a tradition that culminates in the publication of Horneck’s *The Happy Ascetick* (1681). Similarly, as the well-known seventeenth-century theologian, Isaac Barrow, remarks (1693): “Our calling therefore doth require great industry; and the business of it consequently is well represented by those performances, which demand the greatest intention, and laborious activity.” “It is styled *exercise,*” he explains, “agonistick and ascetick exercise”; it is styled as “wrestling,” “running a race,” “watching,” or as “a warfare, a combating...offering violence.”\(^9\) In extending the spiritual exercises of the ascetic to the laity, theologians such as Taylor, Barrow, and Horneck locate asceticism within a broader constellation of technologies of self-management approximating the rigour and abstemiousness of the primitive Christian.\(^10\)

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\(^9\) Isaac Barrow, *Of Industry in Five Discourses...In Our General Calling as Christians* (London, 1693), 105-7. Barrow’s sermon was subsequently reprinted in Wesley’s *Christian Library* alongside Horneck’s *Happy Ascetick*.

\(^10\) By the early 1750s, the term seems to have shed its relation to monastic practice. In John Wesley’s *The Complete English Dictionary, Explaining Most of Those Hard Words, Which Are Found in the Best English Writers* (London, 1753), the term is succinctly defined as “one devoted to prayer and meditation.” Similarly, Samuel Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language: In Which the Words Are Deduced from Their Originals, and Illustrated in Their Different Significations...* (London, 1755), provides two entries. Citing Anglican divine, Robert South, Johnson defines the term as one “employed wholly in exercises of devotion and mortification” and, citing John Norris, as one “that retires to devotion; a hermit.”
Taking the publication of Horneck’s text as an important coalescence of ascetic models of citizenship, the end point is marked by Immanuel Kant’s positive yet fully desacralized re-articulation of asceticism in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1799). In ways that resemble Horneck’s insistence on the contentedness of the ascetic’s practice, Kant remarks that the practice of virtue aims at “a frame of mind that is both valiant and cheerful in fulfilling its duties.”\(^ {11} \) While this is not the place to deal with the full implications and complexities of Kant’s deployment of asceticism, it is worth stressing his interest in a specifically classical mode of ascesis. Describing what he calls “moral ascetics,” Kant contrasts the actions of the Christian ascetic, who “from superstitious fear or hypocritical loathing of oneself goes to work with self-torture and mortification of the flesh” with the actions of the ethical ascetic who marshals self-restraint “only in combating natural impulses sufficiently to be able to master them when a situation comes up in which they threaten morality” (227).

While Kant insists that the Christian ascetic’s motivation “cannot produce the cheerfulness that accompanies virtue, but rather brings with it secret hatred for virtue’s command” (227), his ideal figure shares a great deal with the strain of Christian asceticism favoured by Anglican theologians of the Caroline period. Not unlike the practical piety of radical Protestantism, the training and discipline that Kant’s ethical ascetic practices on himself “can become meritorious and exemplary only through the cheerfulness that accompanies it” (228). It is this contentedness, this cheerful will to self-control, which unifies the self-mastery of Kant’s moral ascetic and the extraordinary exercises of Horneck’s happy ascetic.

Like his predecessors, Horneck outlines the various devotional exercises that make up a regimen of practical piety. Less doctrinal but no less pragmatic than Taylor’s text, Horneck’s manual adds a unique set of “extraordinary exercises” to supplement the conventional devotional content. In this regard, Horneck anticipates William Law’s rigorous defence of practical divinity against the deist threats of the 1720s in *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729).\(^ {12} \) These extraordinary exercises, comprising sections on entering into solemn vows and promises, subduing the body by fasting,

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maintaining watchfulness through abstinence from sleep, and applying one’s self to self-revenge, make up the specifically ascetic content of the book’s title.

The value of Horneck’s uniquely self-conscious presentation of practical piety as ascetic practice does not rest in its devotional material alone. Unlike his predecessors, Horneck’s call for a Protestant asceticism is a calculated political intervention in the complex political circumstances besetting the Anglican Church and the English nation between the Exclusion Crisis and the Glorious Revolution. *The Happy Ascetic* provides a useful example of how ascetic practice came to represent a politically charged call for both religious and political moderation. Characteristic of the *via media* favoured by Anglican clergy during the Caroline period, Horneck’s attention to ascetic practice as a regimen of moderation (as a *golden mean*) marks the primary perceived difference between Roman Catholic and Protestant asceticism. The reclaiming of ascetic practice from its perjured Catholic association served, not only to inaugurate a distinctly Protestant form of asceticism, but also to associate this inauguration with the political exigencies of the period.

Taking Horneck’s unique articulation of a Protestant asceticism as inherently political in scope, *Ascetic Citizens: Religious Austerity and Political Crisis in Anglo-American Literature, 1681-1799* attends to a number of scenes of voluntary self-restraint in literary, political, and religious writings of the long eighteenth century, to argue that ascetic citizenship arises at precisely the moment in which various forces of secularization threatened to discard religion as incompatible with democratic political ideals such as personal freedom, autonomy, and natural rights. *Ascetic Citizens*, in this regard, reconsiders the narrative of western individualism from the perspective of the ascetic civic subject, a narrative that reads the history of republican political identity as “a letter written in the language of the sacred.”¹³ While, generally speaking, citizenship refers to a system of rights and obligations that permits the citizen to participate in the political life of the community, the focus of my study will be on the relationship between modes of civic activity and amorphous concepts such as civic virtue, civic duty, and civic

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¹³ I am indebted to Bryce Traister for this suggestive phrase. See “Mary Rowlandson and the Invention of the Secular,” *Early American Literature*, 42.2 (2007): 326.
To this end, I conceive of ascetic citizenship as a set of practices that link the civic self-restraint required of the republican subject with the religious austerity of post-Reformation Protestantism, joining narratives of national imagining with narratives of sacral revelation.

Existing studies of asceticism in Anglo-American culture during the period are extremely slim. This dissertation fills an important gap in the scholarship by reframing isolation and self-denial as a broadly defined set of religiously-inflected civic practices that permeate the political, religious, racial, and gender discourses of eighteenth-century Anglo-American culture. Ascetic citizenship is not presented as a widespread phenomenon or unifying logic to explain the milieu of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. Instead, Ascetic Citizens investigates a particular group of writers and thinkers who address the combined notions of deferred judgment, an eschewal of extremism, and a desire for consensus or equilibrium with recourse to a tropology of ascetic behaviours. Ascetic figures and practices are employed as limit cases or metaphors to confront the impossible in a particular cultural moment. The eighteenth century is a unique period in which a strictly religious conception of asceticism was generalized into practices such as economic frugality, temperance, or sentimental moralism. It is precisely asceticism’s distance from actual religious practice

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14 I employ the conventional terms citizen and citizenship as they are historically specific to the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Yet the focus of this study is less on the juridical issues of civic membership or eligibility than with the duties and responsibilities required of the citizen. More properly, I am concerned with what Thomas L. Dynneson refers to as civism, the didactic means by which individuals acquired the necessary skills to privately and publicly present the behaviours necessary to promote appropriate images of citizenship (Civism: Cultivating Citizenship in European History [New York: Peter Lang, 2001], 9).

15 Eric Slauter’s recent article on the politics of the American hermit represents an important exception here. While Slauter’s article will be dealt with in more depth below, his insight into how narratives of hermitic withdrawal provide “counterpoints for the social contract’s narrative of individuals voluntarily leaving the state of nature for the protections of civil governments” is highly suggestive (“Being Alone in the Age of the Social Contract,” The William and Mary Quarterly, 1 (2005), http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/wm/62.1/slauter.html, par. 5). While I find Slauter’s overall discussion to be extremely astute, his suggestion that hermits represent “postsocial individuals” highlights (as I discuss below) only half of the ascetic citizen’s political relevance.

16 Broadly speaking, my methodological approach to the intersection of religious and political cultures is informed by Russ Castronovo’s exemplary study of American citizenship conceptualized through discourses of death (Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States [Durham: Duke University Press, 2001]).
that permits its larger figural use as a set of rhetorical figures to negotiate questions of civic duty.

Rather than suggesting that the persistent reappearance of ascetic figures or ascetic analogies represents a call for actual citizens to partake of rigorous fasting or self-flagellation, this study argues that it is the ascetic citizen’s rhetorical interaction with political culture that provides the ascetic ideal. The rhetorical utility of ascetic citizenship derives from its capacity, as a figure of political and religious moderation, to deploy individual practices of religious austerity as a means of confronting the impossible reconciliation of extreme political binaries during times of rapidly increasing individual freedom. Peter Brown’s observations about the fifth-century holy man seem especially germane to the rise of the ascetic citizen. He remarks: “We have found the holy man central to the way in which different milieus coped with increased freedom and its consequent dangers…for innumerable individuals, \[he represented\] an oasis of certainty in the conflicting aims and traditions of the world.”

Ascetic Citizens addresses the extent to which ascetic figures and analogies struggle with the dangers attending increased civic freedoms. Neither politically conservative nor politically liberal, ascetic citizenship’s relevance lies in its capacity to serve all perspectives by confronting the limitations of existing ideologies. In this sense, ascetic citizenship is not an ideology but a rhetorical approach to ideology, replete with its own internal grammar or logic.

Philip Fisher explains that the study of rhetorics provides a viable alternative to the study of ideology. Rhetorics signal what is provisional, temporary, or strategic in culture. Announcing both the “power of invention and obsolescence within culture,” a study of rhetorics investigates “the nuances of provisional justification and defense, the opening up of newness within culture without escaping the grip of master problems and resources of the culture.” For this reason, the ascetic citizen cannot be separated from the wider culture of which it is a part. As William Deal remarks: “asceticism is a rhetoric of thought and action that is situated within the parameters of culturally


specific religious discourses.” In what is certainly the premier discussion of asceticism, Geoffrey Harpham similarly notes that asceticism does not simply endorse or condemn culture; rather, being “sub-ideological,” it “raises the issue of culture by structuring an opposition between culture and its opposite.” While the abstemious nature of ascetic practice implies efficiency grounded in economic frugality and bodily self-restraint, the ascetic citizen functions as the sanctioned perversion of a normative devotional practice. The specific nature of this perversion lies in its refusal to categorically decide between profane self-interest and sacred disinterestedness. The relevance of ascetic citizenship to political culture is its political fluidity, its potential to exceed the ideological functions of the dominant culture while revealing the tension that exists between endorsement of, and dissent from, the civic norm. Forging a space at the threshold between the sacred and the profane (endorsement and dissent), the ascetic citizen maps the dialectic movement of cultural extremism, forging a rhetorically useful site of deferred judgment. The ascetic citizen, in this sense, provides a unique lens through which eighteenth-century Anglo-American authors conceived of individual political subjectivity as existing in the pause or retired moment between cultural binaries. It is the ascetic citizen’s rhetorical stance both within and without, and, we may say, along and at the border between the city and nature, the polis and the domus, the public and the private, duties and responsibilities, obedience and rebellion, and English and American that marks his/her political utility.

While the specific American context for ascetic citizenship will be mapped out in “The American Hermit: Political Critique and Willful Reclusion in Early American Culture,” it is worth commenting on the specific transatlantic perspective of this study. In his recent book, The Importance of Feeling English, Leonard Tennenhouse insists that “what we mean by American is most likely a reproduction of cultural practices the originate elsewhere.” Taking Tennenhouse’s assumption as a starting point, Ascetic

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Citizens studies the unique emergence and reproduction of an ascetic politics that is neither (properly speaking) British nor American. This is a particularly crucial point, for the ascetic citizen’s resistance to weighing in on the most controversial cultural polemics of the time is no less true when it comes to national affiliation. During the early years of the American republic, the ascetic citizen’s resistance to choosing American over British identity is signally relevant. Focusing on the transatlantic transmission of ascetic rhetorical practices, this study argues that postrevolutionary American thinkers appropriate British representations of the ascetic citizen as a way to confront the aporetic condition of an early American civic identity situated precariously at the boundary between British-ness and American-ness. From a literary point of view, Ascetic Citizens follows in the footsteps of such pioneers of transatlantic literary studies as Leslie Fiedler, Jay Fliegelman, Nancy Armstrong, Leonard Tennenhouse, Paul Gilroy, and Paul Giles in discussing the relevance of British literary precedents such as the castaway and sentimental seduction narratives for the development of the early American novel.

St. Antony and St. Paul: Two Models of Ascetic Practice

Among scholars working on period-specific studies of ascetic practice (often situated in antiquity or early Christianity) and those employing asceticism in a dehistoricised context as a theoretical rubric for the investigation of various critical issues, the question of defining asceticism is a hotly debated issue. The standard is the centripetal force that draws disparate diasporic people, not back to their geographical origin (i.e. England) but “toward an imagined cultural source that as in fact displaced that origin”.22


23 Clearly, we must be able to distinguish not only between ascetic and non-ascetic practices but also between Christian (and then between Roman Catholic and Protestant forms) and classical strains of
definition of asceticism is derived from Walter Kaelber’s oft-cited entry in The Encyclopedia of Religion (1987). While Kaelber’s definition is open to contestation, it provides a useful starting point. According to Kaelber, asceticism has three distinct purposes: i) the purging of impurities; ii) the acting out of a penance; and iii) the search for personal unity with God (441-2). Practically speaking, asceticism generally involves fasting, sexual continence, voluntary poverty, wilful reclusion from society, self-mortification, and renunciation of the world (contemptu mundi)(442-3). On a more soteriological level, ascetic practice is

a voluntary, sustained, and at least partially systematic program of self-discipline and self-denial in which immediate, sensual, or profane gratifications are renounced in order to attain a higher spiritual state or a more thorough absorption in the sacred.24

There are two points that bear emphasis in Kaelber’s definition. Firstly, asceticism must be a voluntary practice. As Horneck explains in Happy Ascetick, the extra-ordinary ascetic practices must be “free-will Offerings over and above what is commanded” to be worthy of God’s approval (444). Secondly, asceticism implies a relationship between present acts of self-control and future states. Present pleasures are renounced, and present mortifications are justified, in terms of the future deferred reward of eternal salvation (see Fig. 1). As we will see, asceticism’s strict adherence to both an economy of volition and an economy of deferred reward helps explain its relevance as an analogy for democratic political subjectivity.

Ascetic Citizens focuses on the tradition of Protestant Christian asceticism as distinct from both its classical and Catholic variants. The tradition of Christian asceticism undoubtedly begins with the desert saints, St. Antony and Paul of Thebes, and follows through such canonical figures as St. Pachomius, St. Benedict, St. Augustine, St. Francis, and St. Thomas, to more recent examples such as Julian of Norwich, Richard Rolle and Margery Kempe.25 From the beginning of its historical development, western asceticism struggled to achieve an equilibrium between absolute exclusion from society and absolute inclusion within society. As Owen Chadwick explains, during the third and fourth centuries AD, the concept of individual sanctity underwent a dramatic transformation towards a more corporate and collective model of sacred life. As the Church became a more established and pervasive presence in peoples’ lives, those following an ascetic life began to drift farther and farther from the margins of community.26 The increased isolation attending the ascetic life brought with it many


26 Chadwick, introduction to Western Asceticism, 21-23.
new challenges. The loneliness of the solitary ascetic “increased the chance of abnormality, eccentricity, even madness” (Chadwick, 24). From the beginning, western asceticism needed institutional checks to moderate the excesses of self-mortification. By 375 AD, monks in the Nile valley began living in holy communities; by 386 AD, a small group of acolytes under St. Jerome were proclaiming a new form of corporate asceticism (coenobitism) near Palestine; by the time St. Augustine of Hippo died (430 AD), the ideals of corporate or monastic asceticism were sweeping across western Europe as the
dominant form of rigorous piety. During the sixth century, St. Benedict of Nursia composed his famous *Regula* to be used as a standard rule of law for ascetic practice; by 817 AD, Benedict’s Rule was compulsory in every monastery in the Frankish empire.\(^{27}\)

Immortalized by Athanasius of Alexandria and St. Jerome respectively, the lives of St. Antony and St. Paul capture the central tensions of ascetic practice.\(^{28}\) As their *vitae* illustrate, ascetic withdrawal can be positive or negative, world-affirming or world-denying. Kallistos Ware points out that while St. Paul retreats to the desert into a life of total seclusion, St. Antony makes himself publicly available, taking disciples under his care and offering his services to those in need.\(^{5}\) Where St. Paul’s life is characterized by silence and seclusion, for St. Antony “silence gives place to speech, [and] seclusion leads him to involvement”\(^{5}\). Importantly, however, St. Paul’s wilful reclusion is not without its benefits to society. His *anchoresis* is, itself, simply a different mode of serving the community. The reason for his withdrawal is to forge a union with God. As Ware suggests, St. Paul’s withdrawal into “prayerful union supports and strengthens his fellow humans, even though he knows nothing about them”\(^{6-7}\). The mode of asceticism represented by St. Paul’s life is akin to the spiritual sentry who keeps watch over the city of God, devoting himself to the creator so that others can go about their daily business.

The two modes of ascetic practice presented here function as complimentary poles within the concept of Christian asceticism. One functions as a religious exemplar for society while the other functions as an intermediary between God and man, lobbying for human interests while satisfying God’s demand for absolute obedience. As Peter Brown remarks, the holy man “carried the burden of making such a distant God relevant to the particularity of human needs.”\(^{29}\)

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\(^{27}\) For a useful summary of the historical development of monastic ideals, see ibid., 23-30.


\(^{29}\) Brown, “Rise and Function of the Holy Man,” 93. Brown’s discussion of the holy man is especially germane to the roles assumed by the ascetic citizen in the eighteenth century. He argues that the holy man was ultimately a man of power (87). Functioning as an objective mediator in human disputes, the holy man was held up by Byzantine culture as an individual who embodied the universal ideals of the period (91). The holy man’s capacity to meditate objectively derived from his position as an absolute
negation, the ascetic embodies a contradictory position in relation to society, one that, as this study argues, is situated at the threshold between social participation and social withdrawal.

Harpham carefully articulates the distinctions between St. Antony and St. Paul as a difference between eremitic and coenobitic asceticism. His attention to this distinction is crucial for understanding the “conceptual richness” of ascetic practice as a model for civic identity (21). Of the two strands, the “heroic fanaticism” of the eremite, while rarely endorsed, is most widely acknowledged as the archetype for ascetic practice; engaging in self-torture and combat with demons, the eremite enacts “an improvisational, unregulated, and ecstatic warfare” alone in the desert (Harpham, 20). Rejecting familial and social connections entirely, the eremite exists at the limits of human capacity. Representing an ostensibly self-involved battle against the forces of evil, the eremite epitomizes a strident individualism by placing himself “under a virtual obligation to reinvent himself… the eremite was a self-made man” (Harpham, 24). Seemingly bent on securing his own fame, the eremite’s chief aim involves the “transformation of the self into narrative so that it may be preserved and remembered” (Harpham, 27). Unlike the self-assertion of the eremite, the coenobite revels in “silence, and particularly obedience, the total subordination of the will to that of the Master” (Harpham, 28). In contrast to the eremite’s radical dissociation from culture, the coenobite endorses a “certain worldliness such as hierarchy, written laws, conformity and routine, and tries to perfect them”; coenobitism embodies a “more corporate and stable form” of ascetic practice, one which promotes the internalization of strict discipline and regulation of monastic rules (Harpham, 21). As Harpham’s study usefully reminds us, both strands of ascetic practice function simultaneously as “the corrective shadow of the other” (21). While the eremite reminds us that the divine essence is ultimately indwelling in each individual, the coenobite checks this presumption with a reminder of “the dead weight of sin” that separates humans from God (Harpham, 28). The contrast established between the self-effacement of the coenobite and the arrogance of the eremite is necessary for explaining, not only the stranger to society. The ascetic rituals of dissociation through which the holy man forged his identity provided him with a subjectivity that could “stand outside the ties of family, and of economic interest (92).
totality of ascetic practice, but the manner in which the excessive nature of ascetic citizenship achieves a golden mean at the threshold between these two poles.

The Via Media: The Ascetic Citizen’s Political Intervention

To understand the emergence of asceticism as a crucial category for both religious and political subjectivity at the close of the seventeenth century, one must understand Horneck’s text as part of a larger religio-political response to the perceived threat of Roman Catholicism. Scott Thomas Kisker’s recent study of Horneck’s life clearly illustrates the connection between Horneck’s particular brand of Anglican pietism and political reactions to the succession of a Catholic king. While Horneck is not especially well known for his devotional writing, he was well respected during his time for his part in establishing Anglican religious societies for the cultivation of individual piety. While conventicles had long been a recognized element of the English religious landscape, the collegia pietatis Anglicana established by Horneck sometime around 1678 had the distinction of being the first such societies established within the folds of the national church.\(^{30}\)

When Charles II died of a stroke in March 1685, his Roman Catholic brother, James Stuart succeeded to the throne, bringing with him a host of anxieties about the security of the Protestant religion under a Catholic monarchy. Even Anglicans loyal to the new king suspected him of trying to reconvert the nation. Horneck was no exception in this regard, publishing a series of anti-papal diatribes and sermons during the 1670s-80s.\(^{31}\) During this period, Horneck’s religious societies became increasingly radicalized, more openly advocating Protestantism in the face of perceived threats of Catholic resurgence. As Kisker rightly notes, The Happy Ascetick was “in many ways an extension of the mission of the Religious Societies,” partly explaining Wesley’s reprinting of Horneck’s text in his Christian Library.\(^{32}\) The collegia pietatis Anglicana


\(^{31}\) Kisker lists Horneck’s publication of *A Letter from a Protestant Gentleman to a Lady Revolted to the Church of Rome* (1678), *The Crucified Jesus or, A full account of the nature, end, design & benefits of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper* with necessary directions, prayers, praises and meditations, to be used by persons who come to the Holy Communion (1686), and *Questions and Answears Concerning the Two Religions* (1688). On Horneck’s larger efforts against Catholicism, see Kisker, *Foundation for Revival*, 97.

\(^{32}\) Kisker, *Foundation for Revival*, 85.
developed in reaction to what contemporaries identified as a spiritual crisis in both the nation and the church. Attempting to strike a balance between the interests of the monarchy, the parliament, and the people, as well as neutralizing contemporary criticisms of the Church’s morality, societies such as Horneck’s collegia attempted a moral balance. As Horneck’s biographer, Richard Kidder (bap. 1634–1703), Bishop of Bath and Wells, notes, the societies were premised on the opinion “that the young men were not to be discouraged, and that it was best to take care of them and secure that zeal which they expressed, in the right channel; he was well contended to leave them to the care and management of a minister of the Church of England.”

To achieve this moral balance and ensure membership in the Anglican Church, Horneck worked hard to distance the rigorous austerities of the primitive Christians from the Roman Catholic tradition of a fanatical monastic asceticism.

From the outset, Horneck insists that the aim of his project is not “to reduce men to Popery…the Papists have not forg’d a new Doctrine, but have only turned an old Doctrine into Superstition, and run it into excess, and extravagant” (466–7). Kidder redoubles this point noting that “Far was he from the Innovations of the Roman Church on the one hand, and from Enthusiasm [of the dissenters] on the other” (Kidder, 37). The distinction made by both Horneck and Kidder is crucial. Advocating a catholic doctrine derived from primitive Christianity, Horneck contrasts a moderate Protestant asceticism against the excesses of both the Roman Catholic and dissenting models. According to Horneck, with the eclipse of primitive Christianity in fourth century AD, asceticism became spoiled; yet by retaining “some of these [ascetic] severities to this day,” the Roman Catholic Church has “forbid Christians the moderate use of them” (440).

The key distinction that Horneck makes between Catholic and Protestant asceticism is this question of moderation. Unsurprisingly, the central criterion of Protestant asceticism is its capacity to foster the via media, or middle way. Protestant asceticism is, thus, grounded in a seemingly paradoxical regimen of moderated excess. Introducing the “extraordinary exercises” of his manual, Horneck explains that “to make these Exercises daily, and constant, were the way to ruin the body, and to

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obstruct the Soul in her flights to heaven” (316). The excessive practice of rigorous piety marks the threat embodied by Catholic asceticism, a threat that exposes the penitent to “the Devils Tyranny... by going farther than God design’d, or requir’d” (317). While Horneck adheres to the orthodox body/soul duality in which the spiritual self ascends in proportion to the denigration of the physical self, he warns that “here the Golden mean must be used, and to avoid extremes, is without doubt, the safest way we can walk in” (317). Still, readers are left with the strange paradox in which a moderated ascetic practice is achieved through excessive measures. Arguing for the kind of spiritual athleticism inherent in the Greek root, Horneck indicates that a practice like fasting “makes the Soul more agile, and lively, and consequently quickens her understanding, and prepares her for those communications of the Deity” (378). “The more the Body is cherish’d,” he argues, “the more sleepy will the Soul be, and the less it is cocker’d, and pleased, the more active will the Spirit be” (379). Horneck’s ascetic exercises serve to jump-start one’s spiritual awareness. This approach works in two scenarios: “when either some great corruption is to be subdued, or our Devotion wants quickning” (316). As both scenarios suggest, the goal is moderation between extremes. When either an excessive corruption requires curtailing or an excessively inactive devotion requires enlivenment, ascetic practices are recommended. Asceticism delivers a shock to the system, shaking off apathy and corruption while resuscitating a balanced active piety.

In advocating such a model, Horneck expresses a firmly established Anglican approach to practical divinity. In English Spirituality: An Outline of Ascetical Theology According to the English Pastoral Tradition, Martin Thornton explains the affinity between Anglican devotional practice and the ascetic balance. Ascetic theology, he writes, “is concerned with maintaining a proper balance” between the affective and speculative extremes of Christianity.34 The emotional extreme of Protestantism, exemplified by St. Francis of Assisi’s affective stress on the Passion and carried forward through Anglicanism to the evangelical revivals of the eighteenth century, must be checked by doctrinal regularity. Contrarily, theological study should encourage a personal affective connection to God through prayer (Thornton, 24). This speculative-

34 Thornton, English Spirituality, 24.
affective synthesis (to borrow Thornton’s term) is central to the via media of the Anglican faith (48). As Thornton remarks:

the deepest meaning of the Anglican via media... is the insistence that prayer, worship, and life itself, are grounded upon dogmatic fact, that in everyday religious experience head and heart are wedded. English Christianity has constantly rejected the ecstatic, spectacular, and baroque, not because they are ‘Roman,’ or because of ‘superstition,’ and ‘enthusiasm,’ or even because ‘one should not go too far’—they are but passing manifestations—but because of this deep-rooted ascetical principle, of which our saints and teachers will never let go. (49)

With the death of William Law in 1761, Anglicanism veered dangerously away from this synthesis. The eighteenth century, in this regard, represents a period of crisis for the ascetic style of life. “The post-Caroline period,” Thornton writes, “is one of disintegration; of ascetical emphases and omissions which overthrew system, synthesis, and balance”(282). Law’s Serious Call hints at the impending disintegration, attacking rationalism with an extreme affectiveness. As Thornton explains, during the eighteenth century ascetical theology waged a dismal rearguard defence against the twin threats of rationalism and enthusiasm. Representing the extreme in speculative and affective religion respectively, these two catchwords epitomize the threat facing the via media of ascetic life during the eighteenth century.35 Seemingly counterintuitive, ascetic practice from its very beginnings functions according to an economy of moderation through excess. Ascetic Citizens addresses this middle path or liminal space that exists, just before the threat of excess, at the irresolvable contradiction between the sacred and profane.

In Émile Durkheim’s influential study, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912), he outlines the relationship between the sacred and the profane. Sacred beings, he writes are, “by definition, separate beings. They are characterized by a discontinuity between them and profane beings.”36 Exemplary among sacred beings is “the pure

35 Ibid., 283.
36 Durkheim, Elementary Forms, 221.
ascetic,” a being who separates himself by “rais[ing] himself above men and acquires a particular holiness through fasting, vigils, retreat, and silence”(232). Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) takes Durkheim’s assessment of the relationship between sacrality and profanity as the starting point for his fascinating treatise on sacred life and political power. Differentiating between *bios*, “the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group,” and *zoë*, “the simple fact of living common to all living beings,” that which is originally excluded from the polis in the household (*oikos*), Agamben argues that the exclusion of bare life (*zoë*) from the polis is what effectively founds the city.\(^{37}\) Rather than presenting a binary between friend/enemy, Agamben argues that the fundamental opposition of Western political life is between bare life (*zoë*) and political existence (*bios*), between exclusion and inclusion (8). Bare life is embodied by the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man), the life of the individual “who may be killed and yet not sacrificed”(8). Taking on the conflicts of the political order, the sacred life of the ascetic citizen is that life which exceeds both religious and juridical systems of law. Occupying what Agamben calls a “double exception,” excepted from both “the *ius humanum* and from the *ius divinum*, both from the sphere of the profane and from that of the religious”(82), the cultural authority of the ascetic citizen is analogous to the sovereign’s authority. Forged from the suspension of religious and divine law, sacred life functions through a “double exclusion, as an excrescence of the profane in the religious and of the religious in the profane”(Agamben, 83). From an originary separation between bare life and politics, there emerges an aporetic “zone of irreducible indistinction,” the space of *homo sacer* (Agamben, 9). If, as Agamben argues, classical politics is constituted on the separation of the home (*domus*) and the city (*polis*), then sacred life as the life that can be killed but not sacrificed is “the hinge on which each sphere is articulated and the threshold at which the two spheres are joined in becoming indeterminate”(90).

*Homo sacer*’s excrescence, its abnormal or excess growth, is central to its situation along or at the threshold between the sacred/profane, *zoë/ bios*, and inclusion/exclusion. The figure of the ascetic citizens exists in this same tenuous relationship with society, one founded on a strange “inclusive exclusion” (Agamben, 85).

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Represented topographically by his/her withdrawal to the margins of the polis, the ascetic citizen forges a subjectivity that, like Agamben’s *homo sacer*, the *wargus* (wolfman), or bandit, represents that “monstrous hybrid of human and animal, [which] divided the forest and the city” (Agamben, 105). Importantly, the ascetic citizen as *homo sacer* is not exoteric to either the city or law, but rather like an element of a Hobbesian state of nature dwelling within the city (Agamben, 105-6). While the ascetic citizen’s inclusion within the city as the banned-It figures him/her as representative, the ascetic citizen’s otherworldliness figures him/her as separate and exemplary. As Agamben suggests: “It is as if male citizens had to pay for their participation in political life with an unconditional subjection to a power of death” (90). While the ascetic citizen’s subjection stops short (in most cases) of death, the economy of ascetic practice functions according to this same rubric of sacred life. Giving oneself over unconditionally to “a power of death” or self-abnegation, the ascetic citizen achieves something of an otherworldly status, exceeding established cultural categories of sacred and profane. The sacred life of the ascetic citizen imbues him/her with what Agamben calls a “bare life that has been separated from its context and that, so to speak surviving its death, is for this reason incompatibility with the human world” (100).

The ascetic citizen’s rhetorical strength derives from the monstrous hybridity of his/her incompatibility with society. The inclusion/exclusion of the ascetic citizen functions ontologically, providing a rhetorical clarity. In his recent book, *The Ascetic Self* (2004), Gavin Flood argues for an “ambiguity of the self” that stems from the ascetic’s “eradication of the will through an act of will.”38 Karmen MacKendrick similarly insists that ascetic practice is structured on the tension between humility and arrogance. It requires “great strength of will” for the ascetic “to make the will into nothing, to deny one’s own strength in its very use.”39 The ostensibly paradoxical ontology of the ascetic identified by Flood and MacKendrick is, of course, easily recognized as the tension that exists between the eremitic and coenobitic strains of ascetic practice. More importantly, however, is the fact that for Carolinian theologians like Horneck, this seemingly paradoxical ontology was not so much a contradiction as an instantiation of orthodox

38 Flood, *Ascetic Self*, 212.

notions of Christian Liberty. As Horneck explains, ascetic practice achieves the desired golden mean by employing excessive and extraordinary practices to “pinch Flesh and Blood, and confine it to boundaries, and limits” (342). An exercise like fasting, vowing, or self-revenge “drives the Soul into a narrow path, and restrains her freedom, tyes her up to a Law, and by that Law she must go, and dares not swerve, or deviate from it; and yet it is a pleasing Bondage, and the Soul voluntarily yields to the yoak, to avoid being dissolute” (342). Importantly, the ascetic practices advocated by Horneck attempt to moderate the penitent’s actions by a submission to an external divine law. Submission to Law is “a pleasing Bondage” in which the Soul “voluntarily yields to the yoak” of the regulations. Central to ascetic practice, however, is the internalization of such external laws; the adoption of such rules are, therefore, so many “deliberate, voluntary, solemn Promise[s] made to Almighty God of things Lawful” (319).

Scott Paul Gordon’s recent work on what he calls the “passivity trope” helps to shed light on the ascetic citizen’s internalization of God’s law. Discussing a counter-tradition developing as a reaction to the valorization of self-interest put forth by Hobbes and Mandeville, Gordon argues that a new subjectivity developed during the long eighteenth century, one that located agency outside the individual. In an effort to envision behaviour as unmotivated, writers such as Joseph Addison, David Garrick, and Samuel Richardson imagined external authority acting on the individual prior to volition. Developing in part from Protestant attempts to understand the loss of self in God’s “preventing grace” (as that which supersedes human will) as more appealing than self-assertion, the passivity trope depicts “the agent as more passively prompted than actively choosing, more ‘acted by another’ than acting freely.” While Gordon’s study is especially revealing, the tenacity with which Restoration and eighteenth-century writers held on to the concept of a wilful Christian liberty as the crucial prerequisite to divine approval suggests a much more orthodox mode of religious subjectivity, one that locates individual action in the purposeful renunciation of self-assertion.

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Martin Luther speaks of a spiritual power that “means nothing else than that strength that ‘power is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Cor. 12:9).” True Christian liberty consists in a spiritual liberty that makes “our hearts free from all sins, laws, and commands” (Luther, 371). According to Luther, the key to preserving this freedom comes from the Christian’s capacity to “discipline his body by fastings, watchings, labors, and other reasonable discipline and to subject it to the Spirit so that it will obey and conform to the inner man and faith” (358). As such, Christian Liberty represents an emancipation from sin enabled first by the subjection of individual will to divine authority and secondly by the subsequent internalization of such authority. Preaching on the anniversary of Charles I’s execution, royalist minister Robert South characteristically employs the notion of Christian Liberty to recommend a passive political obedience: “Subjection unto Governours is part of our Christian Profession, as being a plain Command of God.” Christian Liberty, South argues, does not free one from “Submission to your Superiours; your Christian Liberty, is a Liberty from Sin, not a Liberty to do what you please” (10). In this sense, religious liberty is not antinomianism but a freedom achieved through submission. As John Tillotson explains, Christian Liberty does not imply freedom “from the Laws of God, and the obligation of our Duty” but a freedom “to live according to…the Laws of God.” Much like his contemporaries, Horneck’s manual consistently endorses the ideal of Christian Liberty through submission. He argues that the subjection of personal will to God’s will does not “make us Slaves, but perfect Freeman” (A5). The distinction made here between enslavement and liberty reminds us that the subjection of individual will under God’s will does not entail a reduction into passivity; it is not the dejection of enslavement, but contrarily, the liberty of the freeman. “We are never so much at liberty,” he contends, “than when we cheerfully go on from one Virtue to another. The Truth certainly makes us Free, and the Soul doth but lie shackled and a Prisoner till its Wings serve her to mount up by Contemplation to the Regions of Glory” (A5v).


42 Robert South, A Sermon Preach’d on the Anniversary-Fast for the Martyrdom of King Charles I. In the Last Century.... (London, 1710), 9.

During the last decades of the seventeenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth century, a distinction was made between active and passive obedience. In his immensely popular devotional manual, *The Whole Duty of Man* (1659), Richard Allestree makes a distinction between active and passive obedience, between *willing* and *accepting/enduring*. The distinction made between these two types of obedience is not, in this case, a question of volition. In both Christ’s active decision to submit to God’s command to die for the sins of humankind and his passive decision to endure the suffering this choice involved, his volition (his *willing*) is subsumed into God’s will. The subsumption of individual will into divine will does not indicate a move from activity to passivity; it does not indicate a relocation of individual agency outside of the self in God’s will. Rather, it involves a will to non-willing, a desire to actively endure a state of deferred action. As we shall see, the will to defer action or judgment is crucial to the ascetic citizen’s rhetorical stance.

For men such as South, Tillotson, Allestree, and Horneck, the concept of a liberty achieved through voluntary subjection was extremely relevant for negotiating contemporary political notions of passive obedience and non-resistance. Celebrating the coronation of William and Mary, Horneck’s friend, Gilbert Burnet, preached a sermon that yoked political and religious moderation together in the way implied by Horneck’s project. Contrasting “a State of Liberty, without any restraint” and a “State of Restraint, that shuts out all Liberty,” Burnet advocates a “Mean between these two Extremes.” Burnet defines just government as that which “conducts those who are under it, by constant and fixed Rules, that limits Mens Rights, and restrains their Passions” (7–8). Without this balance between restraint and liberty, “Man-kind would grow into so much disorder, that the World would become a Desert” not unlike that of the original Desert Fathers (8).

Burnet’s views are representative of late seventeenth-century divines who had lived through the civil war and the Glorious Revolution. In Burnet’s eyes, the Revolution was preferable because it embodied Anglicanism’s cherished *via media*: it had


not led to the excesses that characterized the civil war. Precisely because they recognized the necessity of regarding the Law and the necessity of a Prince to uphold it, many Anglican theologians (nonjurors notwithstanding) gave the controversial issue of passive obedience/non-resistance qualified endorsement. Yet, as Gerald Straka points out, both juring and nonjuring clergy during the early days of William III’s reign were forced to admit that if the Church was found to be complicit with the Revolution then its critics might justifiably argue that it had preached doctrines it no longer intended to practice.\textsuperscript{46} The difficulty surrounding the clergy’s tempered support of passive obedience is reconciled to some extent by the appearance of Horneck’s happy ascetic. Restaging absolute obedience to authority, not as passive acceptance, but as wilful and conscientious endorsement, Horneck’s happy ascetic attempts to reconcile notions of religious austerity with notions of political liberty and obedience in a way that addressed the specific paradoxes confronting both the Anglican clergy and the political leaders of the 1680s-90s.\textsuperscript{47} Poised between the excesses of Roman Catholic superstition and the excesses of immoral libertinism on the one hand, and the extremes of passive obedience and the right of rebellion on the other, the ascetic citizen confronts the specific political and religious dilemmas of Horneck’s time resulting from the transfer of power between Stuart autocracy and Williamite mixed monarchy.

**Strenuous Citizenship: Classical Republicanism and the Ascetic Citizen**

Informing the genealogy of the ascetic citizen is the continued relevance during the eighteenth century of classical republicanism. As many historians have painstakingly argued, the classical republican tradition derived from Aristotle, Livy, Sallust, and Cicero and transmitted via Machiavelli and Florentine humanism to the


neo-classical republicans or commonwealth men of the eighteenth-century, was crucial to both oppositional politics in England and revolutionary politics in America. In England, men such as James Harrington, John Milton, Algernon Sidney, Walter Moyle, John Trenchard, and Thomas Gordon, and, in America, men such as Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Rush, worked hard to put the ideals of classical republicanism into practice.48

The specific relevance of ascetic practice to classical republican notions of civic duty is identified in Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). Explaining the connection between civic subjectivity and religious austerity, he writes: “Political virtue is a renunciation of oneself, which is always a painful thing.”49 After visiting America in 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville identifies the ascetic dimension of civic subjectivity even more explicitly. Outlining the “principle of interest rightly understood,” he underscores the necessity of “daily small acts of self-denial” as a guarantee of civic security in an age when the vestigial “self-sacrifice and instinctive virtues” of the nation’s theocratic heritage threatened to be eclipsed by commercialism and secularism. On its own, he claims, the principle of interest rightly understood “cannot suffice to make a man virtuous, but it disciplines a number of citizens in habits of regularity, temperance, moderation, foresight, self-command.” While it may not “lead men straight to virtue by the will,” it may succeed in leading them there “by their habits.” The utility of this


principle, while "perhaps prevent[ing] some men from rising far about the level of mankind," will also ensure that "a great number of other men, who were falling far below, are caught and restrained by it."\(^{50}\)

What Tocqueville and Montesquieu identify here as fundamental to civic virtue is nothing short of the central political paradox of republican thought: that is, the aporetic relationship between individual liberties guaranteed by the state and the requisite renunciation of such liberties. The notion that political harmony presupposes such a renunciation on the part of the individual citizen represents one of the key assumptions of ascetic citizenship. As a prerequisite to civic membership (and access to the rights and freedoms ostensibly guaranteed by such membership), the individual citizen must internalize a regimen of self-discipline that balances self-interest with the common good. The future guarantee of individual political rights is ensured by present renunciations of self-interest. As such, it functions according to the same economy in which the religious ascetic’s right to future eternal reward is ensured by present acts of pious self-abnegation. That is to say, republican political liberty is enabled by what we might call an *ascetic prerequisite* in which the voluntary self-sacrifice of civic rights guarantees the state's protection of such rights from the infringements of one's neighbour.

The tension inherent in republican thought derives from the development of two competing understandings of civic liberty. On the one hand, the tradition of liberal republicanism derived from Locke advocates a theory of negative liberty in which liberty is marked by the absence of coercion or restraint. By contrast, classical republicanism advocates a theory of positive liberty premised on the Aristotelian notion of humans as both inherently moral and inherently social. In the latter tradition, an individual is only in the full possession of his liberty when he is contributing to the general welfare of the community.\(^{51}\) For the classical republican, the question of civic participation is inextricably bound to the question of individual civic liberty.

The notion of civic participation as a prerequisite for political membership resulted in a confrontation during the Renaissance between an emergent humanist


\[^{51}\text{For a succinct overview of these distinctions, see Skinner, "Republican Ideal," 294-97.}\]
endorsement of the active life (*vita activa*) and the existing medieval valorization of the contemplative life (*vita contemplativa*). As Pocock explains in his monumental study, *The Machiavellian Moment*, Florentine humanists supplanted the *vita contemplativa* by privileging the *vita activa*, thereby giving way to “a *vivere civile* [civic life]—a way of life given over to civic concerns and the (ultimately political) activity of citizenship.” By embracing this new civic ideal, the Florentine humanist “staked his fortune as a moral person on the political health of his city…for once the justice which was part of Christian virtue was identified with the distributive justice of the polis, salvation became in some degree social, in some degree dependent upon others” (Pocock, 75). In terms nearly identical to those that Harpham uses to characterize eremitic and coenobitic asceticism, Pocock explains how political life was transformed from the “heroic manhood of a ruling individual” to the “partnership of citizens in a polis” (78). This politicization of virtue (as Pocock describes it) placed a heavy burden upon the individual citizen. Persistently asked to curtail his own personal needs and interests in the service of the collective good, the republican citizen confronts the specific requirements for political membership as ascetic in nature.

Questioning why monks love their order, Montesquieu answers:

Their love comes from the same thing that makes their order intolerable to them. Their rule deprives them of everything upon which ordinary passions rest; what remains, therefore, is the passion for the very rule that afflicts them. The more austere it is, that is, the more it curtails their inclinations, the more force it gives to those that remain.

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52 See J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 41-2. See also, Arthur Ferguson’s suggestion that the rise of the articulate citizen during the English Renaissance was characterized by a crucial conflation of the dialectic of contemplation and action, producing a citizen in which the contemplative propensities of the mind were directed towards the service of the commonwealth (*The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1965], 162).


In the ideal scenario where the Law was fully internalized, the ascetic prerequisite takes hold; self-interest and public good become synonymous and the res publica functions as a coenobium. Yet as this chapter’s epigram by Durkheim suggests, society “is often hard on individuals: of necessity it demands perpetual sacrifice.” How might the res publica maintain the freedom of the citizen and at the same time guarantee the subordination of private interest to public good?

Given the constant threat of corruption, the citizen of the self-governing republic was constantly responsible for his own moral vigilance, constantly responsible for renouncing his own interests in the service of the community. What classical republican thinkers from Machiavelli onward recognized was that a self-governing republic could only escape the corruption of its members by ensuring that each citizen cultivated civic virtue or public-spiritedness. The capacity for civic virtue to guarantee the security of the republic was directly related to the capacity of the citizen to internalize the laws of the polis. Both Hobbes and Locke clearly explain how the law preserves the liberty of the citizenry by coercing other people into checking their self-interest. Yet for the classical republican, the law served another important purpose. Rather than simply coercing others, the law encouraged an internalization of civic duty, an internalization that forced the citizen out of his “habitual patterns of self-interested behaviour” (Skinner, 305). Hence, the republican citizen was paradoxically both ruler (according to his own liberty) and ruled (according to Law) (Pocock, 68).

Well before Pierre Hadot or Michel Foucault, Max Weber identified the internalization of external law as the primary outcome of inner-worldly asceticism. Weber’s influential study of the Protestant work ethic as a secularized and rationalized form of ascetic practice attempted to account for the increasing obsolescence of an ascetic life separate from the world and its replacement by an ascetic life practiced “in the world and amidst its mundane affairs.” The well-known economic implications of


57 On the importance of law to the self-governing republic, see Skinner, “Republican Ideal,” 305-6.

Weber’s theory—the equation between puritan views on idleness and frugality and the accumulation of material wealth—represent only the secondary effect of Weber’s discussion of the internalization of ascetic regulations. “This ascetic style of life,” Weber insists, implied “the complete orientation of this being towards God’s will” (101).

The subjection of the individual will to God’s will involves a process of internalizing external laws and regulations, rendering ostensibly objective rules subjective. In this regard, as Flood points out, the ascetic self presents a ritualized self in which will is not so much renounced as made serviceable to tradition. Perhaps more than any other thinker on the subject, Michel Foucault insists on the larger political relevance on ascetic practice. During the Greco-Roman period, he argues, the notion of civic liberty was inextricably linked to self-care and self-knowledge. While a rigorous attention to self would centuries later be denounced as self-interested egotism, for classical thinkers care of the self implied the internalization of a “knowledge of a certain number of rules of conduct or of principles” that informed not only one’s relation to the self but to the community. The process of ascetic internalization during the classical period was subsequently transformed into the self-mortification, isolation, and self-monitoring of Christian asceticism. Representing what Foucault calls “technologies of the self,” the goal of Christian asceticism, unlike its classical predecessor, was not a final autonomous state, but a “sacrifice of the self, of the subject’s own will...through obedience.” The care of the self “constituted, not an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice.”

To speak of asceticism in the context of civic practice, therefore, and total focus on individual religious needs) to a coenobitic model (one characterized by a corporate model of religious piety) of asceticism. Indeed, his comments regarding the obsolescence of “monastic communities” bear this point. In reality, however, Weber’s theory charts a different movement: one in which the external controls and rules imposed upon the ascetic within the institutional framework of the monastery (coenobium) are replaced by an internalized set of regulations for reconciling self-interest with God’s will within society. Harpham clarifies Weber’s contention that the coenobite left the monastery to enter the world by arguing that the extension of the coenobitic tradition did not suddenly coincide with the rise of capitalism. Rather, asceticism had always been associated with labour and “methods of becoming self-made men, beings that owe nothing to genealogy or community...early asceticism is capitalism without money” (Ascetic Imperative, 30). With the rise of capitalism, both types re-emerge, cast in the role of the producer and the consumer, capitalist and the worker “in a sudden and dramatic expansion of the inventory of ascetic gestures” (ibid., 30).


60 Foucault, Technologies of the Self, 45.

61 Foucault, Care of the Self, 51.
makes a great deal of sense. The ascetic citizen’s “eradication of the will through an act of will” discussed by Flood is achieved through the ascetic’s successful submission to, and internalization of, the externalized telos of cultural tradition (241, 212).

Yet there is a darkness to this scenario, one in which the ascetic prerequisite, falling short of full internalization, remains an external law in open defiance of self-interest. Years ago, Michael Waltzer controversially asserted the shared “sense of civic virtue, of discipline, and duty” of the saint and the citizen that developed out of the puritan revolutions of the mid-seventeenth century.62 I want to suggest a slightly more complex interconnection between the saint and the citizen, one that belies the facile conflation of self-interest and public good imagined by a community of rule-abiding and God-fearing coenobites. This vision, in the end, was never more than an ideal struggling to transcend the realities of human corruption. The reality demanded, to borrow a term from Skinner, a much more “strenuous view of citizenship”(304). In the last analysis, the heroic fanaticism of the eremitic individualist stands in opposition to the monkish virtue of the coenobitic citizen.

The ascetic citizen can never rid him/herself completely of the eremite’s thirst for originality. As Nietzsche explains, ascetic life “is an expression of the basic fact of the human will…man would much rather will nothingness than not will.”63 Yet the “unsatiated instinct and power-will” of Nietzsche’s ascetic “to become lord not over something living but rather over life itself” is balanced by his/her need to heal the isolation of originality (84). The putative goal of religious asceticism—that of perfection or original presence—is ultimately the ascetic’s undoing. Yet as Nietzsche suggests, the ascetic will never fully reconcile his/herself to the coenobite’s wilful subjection as an imitation of Law. Between these two extreme possibilities, the ascetic life is, as Nietzsche puts it, “a kind of provisional expression, an interpretation, formal, arrangement, a psychological misunderstanding of something whose actual nature could not be understood for a long time, could not be designated in itself—a mere word, jammed into an old gap in human knowledge”(85-6). During the eighteenth century, the

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ascetic citizen fought a war of attrition against liberal republicanism’s valorization of civic rights over civic duties, consistently challenging the eighteenth-century British and American citizen’s will to self-abnegation. The deployment of ascetic citizenship served to confront the particular contradictions developing from the polarization of classical and liberal republicanism. Encouraged on the one hand to pursue his particular interests, the republican citizen was constantly reminded that only his vigilant attention to the needs of the general good could sustain the republic. Confronting the fissures cleaved into the political landscape by these two extreme imperatives is the endurance of the ascetic citizen, hoping to paper over, if only provisionally, the indisputable fact that “the pursuit of particular goods would [ultimately] prove incompatible with the maintenance of civic virtue” (Pocock, 80).

**Endurance & Ascetic Deferral**

Chadwick explains the *raison d’être* of the ascetic as an imperative to “pray, endure, wait for the end.” Aside from the obvious religious implications of enduring affliction in this world in the hope of eternal reward in the next, the ascetic’s endurance informs his/her epistemology. As Paul Ricoeur suggests, consent represents an enduring patience “which reaffirms an existence which is not chosen.” It is a consent that defers saying no. If “Will is the capacity for saying no, since it is itself born in withdrawing…[then] the initial act of freedom for the classical thinker is suspicion: it is a doubt, and that doubt is an act of withdrawal” (445-6). The so-called freedom of No is not so much the act of refusing an idea or person but the refusal of saying yes: a withdrawal from consent that, to use Ricoeur’s terms, transforms “freedom denied” into a “denying freedom” (464). Similar to that which Agamben calls the irreparable, or that which exists at the boundary between necessity and contingency, between universality and individuality, the ascetic citizen is akin to Agamben’s “whatever” being, a

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64 Chadwick, introduction to *Western Asceticism*, 22.

subjectivity that inheres in its capability “of not not-being” (39). Its power is that which exists in the gap between power and impotency.  

Clearly indebted to Lutheran notions of Christian liberty, the “denying freedom” or power-in-impotence of the ascetic citizen is a freedom to defer deciding, a freedom to postpone the utterance of consent or dissent. For Freud, the key aspect of deferral’s economy (verleugnung) is its resistance to deciding between the wish and the counter-wish. While “we see that the perception has persisted, and that a very energetic action had been undertaken to maintain the disavowal,” Freud finds that the individual “has retained that belief, but he has also given it up.”  

Freudian deferral achieves a more complex treatment in Derrida’s well-known explanation of différance. Representing “an economical calculation, a detour, a delay, a relay, a reserve, a representation,” différance embodies a deconstructive via media, remaining “undecided between the active and the passive...announcing or rather recalling something like the middle voice.”  

Interestingly, while the specific economy of différance is elliptical, functioning as a perverse middle way “in the suspense of the interval,” it does so through an economy of excess that exceeds the division between the economic and noneconomic, announcing “the same and the entirely other...[that] cannot be thought together.”  

The economy of ascetic citizenship is similarly aporetic in nature. As Derrida suggests, the aporia represents “impermeability,” “the impasse,” the “nonpassage,” “the impossible,” “the antimony,” or “the contradiction.” It is the experience of the nonpassage that paralyzes us in the indecision of the undecidable. Faced with the aporia, Derrida postulates an experience (more than a movement) that does not move with or


against the aporia in the sense of the Hegelian dialectic, but “according to another thinking of the aporia, one perhaps more enduring” (Aporia, 13). Derrida’s reference to endurance is crucial to his thinking according to the aporia. The endurance of the aporia is “a sort of nonpassive endurance” that is the very “condition of decision and responsibility” (Derrida, Aporia, 16). The rhetoric of ascetic citizenship partakes of this endurance of the aporia, this nonpassage that is not so much solved or resolved as reconciled to the aporia by a commitment or faith in excess.

As Robyn Horner remarks, “excessiveness inevitably prompts no less a risk of faith than aporia, and in spite of the many differences between their positions.”71 The “risk of faith” inherent in both excessiveness and aporia is what, strictly speaking, is at stake for the ascetic citizen. The ascetic citizen is above all else a figure of unshakable faith: faith both in God’s plan and the republican dream of individual freedom guaranteed through the res publica. Unlike the aporetic and elliptical nature of différance, the rhetoric of ascetic citizenship purports a philosophy of transcendence. There is, in this sense, a face (or, at least, the hopeful illusion of a face) behind the mask. The belief in a transcendental Truth or Law—be it Providence, natural law, moral sense, rationality, or human nature—unifies the soteriological episteme of the ascetic citizen. Harpham suggests that asceticism combines “the traditional religious concern with self-negation, self-overcoming, self-alienation, self-transcendence as ways of achieving…an openness of being.”72 The ascetic citizen is, however, unable to access this Truth/Law in any sufficient way in the present moment. He/she is distanced from such “openness of being,” obscured or obfuscated by the inherent insufficiency of human judgment. The life of the ascetic citizen is apophatic in orientation, guided by a recognition of the inadequacy of human reason to explain God, Truth, or the Law. Distinct from Derrida’s understanding of aporia as perpetually undecidable, the ascetic citizen’s faithful endurance of aporia has an end. His/her inability to decide is provisional in the sense that Nietzsche suggests, balanced by a hope that the third voice of God will absorb and replace individual will with revelation, thus drawing the ascetic and the community out of a simple binary relationship.


72 Harpham, “Asceticism and the Compensations of Art,” 358.
Hadot explains the Stoic origins of the ascetic’s movement towards transcendence. The ascetic’s “attention to the present moment allows us to accede to cosmic consciousness, by making us attentive to the infinite value of each instant, and causing us to accept each moment of existence from the viewpoint of the universal law of the cosmos.”\(^73\) In Hadot’s response to Foucault’s work, he corrects the latter’s emphasis on the subjectivization inherent in technologies of the self. Defining ethics and ascetics as “the progressive consideration of self, or master over oneself,” Foucault argues that this mastery is “obtained not through renunciation of reality but through the acquisition and assimilation of truth.”\(^74\) Hadot argues that, at least in classical sources, the “movement of interiorization” in which the ascetic internalizes external laws or truths is linked to another movement “whereby one rises to a higher psychic level, at which one encounters another kind of exteriorization, another relationship with ‘the exterior’”\(^211\). Hadot’s point is that Foucault’s emphasis on the ascetic care of the self betrays the more crucial movement away from the self, a movement from particularity to universality that finds the ascetic striving for transcendence.\(^75\) What the ascetic strives for “is a new way of being-in-the-world, which consists in becoming aware of oneself as a part of nature, and a portion of universal reason…Interiorization is a going beyond oneself; it is universalization”\(^{211}\).

Hadot’s insight into stoic asceticism is clearly relevant to the history of Christian asceticism we have been attempting to outline. If we replace stoic cosmology with a cosmology that places the Christian God as the originary source of meaning, Hadot’s suggestion that asceticism attempts “to liberate ourselves from a partial, passionate point of view”—one that is linked to the particular, to the body, to the material world—and open ourselves up “to the universal, normative viewpoint of thought” sounds strikingly Christian\(^{94}\). Similar to British theologians such as William Sherlock (1639/40–1707) and William Law (1686–1761), Hadot suggests that to practice *askesis* is to train oneself to “die to one’s individuality and passions, in order to look at things from the perspective of universality and objectivity”\(^95\).

\(^73\) Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 85.


\(^75\) See also Flood, *Ascetic Self*, 6.
The ascetic citizen’s philosophy of transcendence functions as an index of the impossible, of the aporia or the excess in culture. If the ascetic’s goal of transcendence is, as Harpham suggests, “a goal that is always unreachable, a goal whose realization is blocked by the very methods of achieving it” (18), a goal that persistently resists closure, it is also a goal that nonetheless aims at clarity, definition, and finality. Averil Cameron insists that, historically speaking, “the notion of a closing in of possibilities, a contraction of horizons, [is] somehow to be connected with the predominance of asceticism.” The ascetic citizen, I would argue, occupies this threshold between closure and lack of closure, between determinacy and indeterminacy, by its very capacity to exceed “the ideological limitations of that culture” (Harpham, xi). The excess of the ascetic citizen is a form of transcendence similar to what Jean-Luc Marion calls saturated phenomena. As Robyn Horner explains, Marion’s notion of saturated phenomenon is excessive precisely because their “intuitive content cannot be contained in a single concept, or even a combination of concepts, but demands an endless hermeneutics.”

The excessiveness of the saturated phenomena that the ascetic citizen confronts, however, does not unravel into a Derridean “expenditure without reserve.” Instead, the ascetic citizen seeks meaning in a radical insubordination of loss. The meaning of the ascetic citizen’s life begins from “the moment when the ordered and reserved forces liberate themselves for ends that cannot be subordinated to anything one can account for.” The epistemological perspective of the ascetic citizen is such that Truth is locatable only as something in excess of rational categories. The power of the ascetic citizen inheres in his/her willingness to lose him/herself in the irreconcilable differences of the cultural dialogue.

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76 Cameron, “Ascetic Closure,” 147.


Faced with a radical undecidability, the ascetic citizen endures that which exceeds the conceptual categories of culture. But the transcendental solution, as it were, the Law that might make sense of the irreconcilable contradictions which the ascetic citizen confronts, is beyond the capacity of humans to conceive. The ascetic citizen confronts irreconcilability with a wilful refusal to decide. Premised on an economy of deferral, the ascetic citizen embodies something of a retreat from conventional models of civic duty into the space between the vita activa and the vita contemplativa. Between the eremite’s fanatical originality and the coenobite’s serial redundancy, the ascetic citizen confronts a choice between the particular and the universal. Held in mutual opposition, the dialectic of eremitism/coenobitism denies reconciliation; the choice of the ascetic citizen is, we might say, a choice that is no choice, an aporia or perpetually deferred decision.

Ascetic Citizens tells the story of a civic duty expressed through gestures of critical withdrawal. This retreat is a rhetorical retreat figured topographically by the hermit’s physical withdrawal from society. A particular character’s wilful reclusion figures a rhetorical stance against decision—an aporetic gesture of deferral that is both hopeless and hopeful without being either. The ascetic citizen suspends this dialectic, perpetually deferring and, in this sense, sustaining the dream of republican political hope. The political dream of wholesale individual freedoms promised in, for example, the British Bill of Rights (1689) or the American Declaration of Independence (1776), is preserved by the ascetic citizen’s willingness to endure the paradoxes underwriting political freedom. In this regard, the ascetic citizen functions as a preserver of tradition. Living in isolated spaces, deferring judgment, the ascetic citizen provides the community with continued hope in the sustainability of the self-governing republic. By refusing to test the bounds of freedom, by deferring the choice between the pursuit of individual interest and the necessary sacrifice of self-interest to the general good, the ascetic citizen announces the ultimately aporetic condition of republican civic subjectivity. Ascetic Citizens is a narrative of the proverbial fence sitter. Yet this fence sitting is neither passivity nor quietism; it is a radical political gesture of active non-
action that ensures the continued viability of the republican dream of political freedom. Never a moral majority, the men and women endorsing an ascetic citizenship were lovers of humankind who chose to express this love through misanthropy.
Chapter One
Ascetic Prerequisites: Starvation, Civic Virtue, and Self-Interest in Daniel Defoe’s Crusoe Narratives

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

—1 Corinthians 9:27

Since Ian Watt’s landmark study, The Rise of the Novel (1957), an understanding of Robinson Crusoe as the quintessential capitalist individual has been indelibly etched in our minds.¹ In his persuasive reading, personal relationships and emotional ties are construed in terms of commodity value. Presenting what Watt calls “a monitory image of the ultimate consequences of absolute individualism” (92), Crusoe’s filial disobedience and later moral failings signal the “dynamic tendency of capitalism itself” (65). Following Watt’s lead, innumerable scholars have sought to explain the popularity of Defoe’s text during the eighteenth century as a product of its endorsement of a nascent capitalism underwritten by a Lockean brand of liberal republicanism.² Drawing on Max Weber’s well-known articulation of the Protestant work ethic, one that blends spiritual and secular values to understand the pursuit of economic self-interest as the natural outcome of Calvinist theories of divine election, Watt insists that Defoe “clearly belongs to the tradition of Ascetic Protestantism” (73). Yet while Defoe’s depiction of Crusoe as homo economicus certainly prevails—one need only consider that both The Life and Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner (1719) and The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe; being the Second and Last Part of his Life (1719) end with the protagonist’s gleeful enumeration of the economic profits of his adventures—what Watt’s appeal to Weber glosses over is Defoe’s insistent exposure of the incompatibility between capitalist individualism and republican models of civil governance. Defoe’s


protagonist is not simply ascetic because he deploys Protestant notions of a religious calling to justify an accumulation of economic wealth; it is Defoe’s recognition of the incompatibility between economic self-interest and public disinterestedness that marks his ascetic stance. Remarking on the specific colonial incompatibilities of the text, Peter Hulme argues that Defoe’s representation of Crusoe, as a self-divided British castaway, “is a technique for negotiating the unspeakable—and eventually uncloseable—gap between the violence of slavery and the notion of a moral economy.” Crusoe’s efforts to forge a viable means of transcending such unspeakable gaps explain the specifically ascetic nature of Robinson Crusoe’s actions.

Prior to leaving the island for a second and final time in Farther Adventures, Crusoe explains the specific political principles by which the islanders, “being now settled in a Kind of Common-wealth among themselves,” are to be governed. Ostensibly distinct from his earlier absolutist authority, Crusoe readily admits that he had “no Authority or Power, to Act or Command one way or other, farther than voluntary Consent mov’d them to comply” (217, emphasis added). The inhabitants corroborate this evaluation, reporting that “they voluntarily engag’d…not to leave the Place without [Crusoe’s] Consent” (135). Crusoe’s recognition of the people’s capacity for self-governance in turn limits the extent of his authority. His “influence over them,” he suggests, was now restricted to a benevolent despotism, that of a “Father and Benefactor” rather than that of a monarch (217). Crusoe’s insistence on the people’s consent is clearly indebted to a Lockean rights-based contractualism, as is his equally Lockean explanation that the political stability of the community is ensured by the property rights of each citizen: “Setting out the Bounds and Situation of every Man’s Plantation, and testifying that I gave them thereby severally a Right to the whole Possession and Inheritance of the respective Plantations or Farms, with their

3 Hulme, Colonial Encounters, 222.


5 Hulme uses this term to describe Crusoe’s authority during the latter half of Robinson Crusoe (Colonial Encounters, 188). Assuming an identity as monarch, sovereign, and patriarch, Crusoe’s “relationships with his subjects are properly contractual, entered into on their part through an appropriately Hobbesian fear, but guaranteed in the absence of ‘the sword’ by their gratitude for such almost magical deliverance from danger” (ibid., 217).
Improvements”(192). On the surface, it appears that Crusoe’s attention to personal liberty derived from property ownership serves to identify the island community of *Farther Adventures* with Lockean ideals of liberal republicanism.

Yet if, as Watt suggests, Crusoe “acts like a good Lockean,” he is also a good republican, a republican in the tradition of seventeenth-century radical Whig theorists such as James Harrington, Henry Neville, and Algernon Sidney (64). Certainly the dramatic transformation of the island community from a society of subjects under an absolute monarchy to a colony of citizens under a contractual commonwealth begs the question as to the specific means by which this shift occurs.⁶ Crusoe’s suggestion that the inhabitants were motivated by “voluntary Consent…to comply” hints at part of the reason for this shift. Defoe’s attention to the inhabitants’ voluntary submission raises an important question as to the revocability of their consent. How are we to understand Defoe’s apparent willingness to permit obedience on such flexible terms? The answer, I would argue, has much to do with Crusoe’s belief in the necessity of self-government to secure social order. As Crusoe remarks: “As to the Government and Laws among them, I told them I was not capable of giving them better Rules, than they were able to give themselves”(192). Taken together, Defoe insists that the ability of the inhabitants to consent to a particular form of government works in tandem with their capacity to provide themselves with appropriate rules of social and political conduct.

Recent studies of the colonial aspects of Defoe’s text have drawn the connection between Crusoe’s self-mastery and his mastering of colonial others such as Friday, the Spanish castaways and the English mutineers.⁷ Attention to Crusoe’s authority of

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⁶ Sara Soncini provides one of the few discussions of this question (“The Island as Social Experiment: A Reappraisal of Daniel Defoe’s Political Discourse(s) in *Robinson Crusoe* and the *Farther Adventures*,” in *Wrestling with Defoe: Approaches from a Workshop on Defoe’s Prose*, ed. Marialuisa Bignami [Via Ferraresesce, Bologna, Spain: Cisalpino Instituto Editoriale Universitario, 1997], 11-43). Considering Defoe’s political theories in the context of both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Farther Adventures*, she cites the advent of property rights as the key development responsible for the advent of a Lockean contractual community. If the acquisition of property rights removes self-interest as a threat to political community and, by doing so, renders the autocratic authority of Crusoe unnecessary, why does Defoe expend such energy between 1717-1720 criticizing a society corrupted by self-interest, a society in which (for a significant cohort) property rights were secured? In stressing the acquisition of property rights, Soncini’s article neglects to address the *means* by which this transition is realized.

⁷ Brent C. McInelly has recently argued that, for Crusoe, the colonial experience has a paradoxical effect on his self-identity: “the vastness of the globe can bring a corresponding enlargement, rather than shrinking, of the venturing self and can produce close self-reflection of a kind not easy to achieve in ‘civilized’ society” (“Expanding Empires, Expanding Selves: Colonialism, the Novel, and *Robinson Crusoe*,” *Studies in the Novel* 35.1 [2003]: 1).
Friday makes obvious sense as an analogy for colonial governmentality. As Christopher Loar astutely remarks, “Friday is a symptom of the tension in the text between the ideology of English liberty and the brutalities of sovereignty,” a tension that the novel seeks to resolve through the figure of Crusoe. More important, however, is Loar’s insistence that this resolution is neither complete nor comfortable (20). If we focus our attention away from Friday and towards the relationship between Crusoe and the European inhabitants of his island, we gain an important insight into the unsolvable problems of British colonial subjectivity. In this sense, while I recognize the colonial context as vital to any appreciation of Defoe’s text, my reading of the Crusoe narratives has less to do with the British colonial experience per se, and more to do with the formation of British civic subjectivity played out in the isolating circumstances of colonial life. What might it mean to live as a European among Europeans in a colonial setting? What additional forms of civic disciplining might be required for the security of a community so far removed from the seat of British monarchical authority?

In Farther Adventures, the voluntary submission to civil law of such politically recalcitrant islanders as Will Atkins and the English mutineers announces an important internalization of political authority, one that Defoe hopes will provide the necessary check on self-interest, thereby rendering an external political authority redundant. This chapter investigates the narrative of this process of internalization or self-mastery, a narrative that unifies Defoe’s Crusoe narratives, not by pointing to the individualistic pursuits of Crusoe’s first years on the island, but by emphasizing Defoe’s qualification of this ethic of self-interest with voluntary civic self-sacrifice. The island community’s shift towards a rights-based Lockean commonwealth occurs only after the mutineers voluntarily pledge to reconcile their individual interests with those of the community. With the ability to restrain self-interested actions, the people of the island recognize the

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duties and responsibilities of citizenship as vital to the maintenance of their civil rights, forging a political community without “any Interest separate from one another”(134). Importantly, however, Defoe’s rehearsal of a classical republican conception of positive liberty premised on the fulfilment of civic duties and responsibilities represents something of an ideological phantasm, one that is ultimately insufficient to mask the violence and warfare Loar identifies as lurking “at the foundational moment of sovereignty…[and] the ideology of liberty that makes sovereignty’s violence possible”(1). In this regard, my attention to Defoe’s articulation of an ascetic citizenship partakes of those fantasies of “voluntary association and friendship” that underwrite a peaceful British colonial administration (Loar, 4). The specific elements of this phantasm derive from Defoe’s qualified endorsement of the inhabitants’ capacity for self-governance, a self-governance that does not function as the natural outcome of a politically consensual society but rather as the necessary ascetic prerequisite and continuing guarantor of a political community grounded in the protection of individual rights and freedoms. Embodying what we might call the ascetic prerequisite demanded of the republican citizen, the Crusoe narratives deploy images of physical isolation and bodily self-mortification as culturally resonant analogies for the internalization of civic-divine law.

The Crusoe narratives underscore the importance of self-governance as the necessary prerequisite to political membership through Defoe’s repeated attention to narratives of near-starvation. The choice to focus on near-starvation narratives as the primary expression of the text’s interest in technologies of self-restraint is a deliberate one. Robinson Crusoe contains numerous examples of the protagonist’s efforts to self-regulate his actions. Most prominently, Crusoe repeatedly draws attention to the husbanding of his resources. For example, there are several points at which he comments to the effect that he has “reduc’d [himself] to one Bisket-cake a day”(71). Elsewhere he discusses how his “Food was regulated”(88). Perhaps most interesting is Crusoe’s strange decision to maintain his dwelling on “the worst Side of the Island,” rather than in the lush valley of the interior (94). The decision to choose the more austere of the two locations, while justified by the perceived inability to adequately defend the valley against intruders, speaks to Defoe’s overarching concern with practices of self-regulation and voluntary restraint. I have opted to focus on instances of
near-starvation for two important reasons. Firstly, unlike Crusoe’s husbanding of resources or dietary restrictions, near-starvation extends to *Farther Adventures*, informing the larger architecture of Defoe’s thematic exploration of abstention. Secondly, the near-starvation narratives are consistently given both religious and political significance in ways that the other examples of ascetic behaviour are not.

Crusoe’s sickness and subsequent subjection to Providence in volume I is informed by the same logic that informs the political subjection of Will Atkins and the Reprobates in volume II. Just as Crusoe domesticates his goats by withholding their food, the preparation of Crusoe and Atkins for political leadership is premised on a political model of obedience through starvation. Crusoe’s re-staging of the involuntary physical suffering of his sickness as an annual voluntary fast provides the central example of how near-starvation figures the process by which the political disciplining demanded of the individual citizen is conceived, by analogy, as a religious practice of self-sacrifice. Will Atkins and the Reprobates’ transformation from political dissidents to productive citizens in *Farther Adventures* replicates this process, premising Atkins’ appointment as *de facto* civic leader on his transformation into a “modest, sober, grave, managing Fellow, perfectly reform’d, exceeding Pious and Religious, and…a true sincere Penitent”(191). The subjection of Atkins’ crew by near-starvation can be seen as the primary reason for the Reprobates’ decision to consider the “Good of the Plantation” over their own interests. This decision to place public welfare over self-interest (or, in the very least, to conceive of self-interest as enabled through public welfare) identifies the ascetic citizen’s specific compromise of the Lockean model of political community grounded in consent.

The voluntary subjection inhering in instances of near-starvation brings the classical republican ideal of civic virtue to bear on a society corrupted by the rampant pursuit of individual rights and freedoms. Qualifying Locke’s rights-based paradigm, the obedience by starvation trope illustrates how a submission by absolute necessity (in this case, extreme hunger) is transformed into an active internalization of civic-divine law through a voluntary decision to submit to a clearly stated rule of Law. According to Defoe, a political community based on the consent of its members is secured by the prior voluntary subjection to, and internalization of, the external authority of God.
This chapter seeks to provide a context for the dramatic shift in the political constitution of Crusoe’s island that occurs between the publication of *The Life and Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* in April 1719 and the publication of *Farther Adventures* in August of the same year. In the months between the publication of Defoe’s two volumes, Sir Richard Steele, John Trenchard, and Joseph Addison (among others) engaged in a vigorous debate over a prospective peerage bill. A desperate move on the part of the Earls of Sunderland and Stanhope to ensure the supremacy of his ministry against the increasingly powerful opposition led by Robert Walpole and the Prince of Wales, the Peerage Bill of 1719 aimed at removing the Crown’s power to create new peers for political purposes. This bill would have effectively reduced the prerogative of the monarch while freeing the power of the aristocracy, an action that George I voluntarily endorses to protect the people from the abuses of previous reigns.

While most historians would characterize the peerage bill as a minor and relatively insignificant event in Britain’s further consolidation of constitutional monarchy, the fact that it produced such an intense polemic in 1719 should give us pause. Contemporary concern with the peerage bill is, in part, explained by its symbolic importance as the culmination of contemporary fears of the threat that self-interest poses to the security of the nation. Self-interest did not, of course, represent a new threat in 1719. Rather, the debates surrounding the peerage bill took on a symbolic importance exceeding the particular consequences deriving from the success or failure of the bill. Specifically speaking, the symbolic importance of the peerage bill

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demonstrates contemporary scepticisms of the Hanoverian subject’s capacity to reconcile self-interest with public service. Alongside repeated calls for individual self-restraint, the virtue of individual moderation re-entered political parlance during the late 1710s as a vital character trait.\(^{13}\)

Considering Defoe’s shifting views of self-interest between 1706-1719 alongside the various near-starvation narratives of the *Crusoe* narratives allows us to appreciate Defoe’s ultimate recommendation of a Whig rights-based political community (as presented at the close of Crusoe’s second sojourn on the island) that is moderated by classical republican notions of civic virtue. Contextualizing Defoe’s novel with contemporary debates on self-interest does not, of course, provide a bird’s eye view of his thoughts on political community, nor does it explain away the many contradictions that exist both within and between the two *Crusoe* narratives. Instead, what we gain by such contextualization is a fuller picture of the complexity of Defoe’s political thinking, one that finds the author struggling (but ultimately unable) to transcend the specific political aporias of his time. By insisting on voluntary self-restraint as the necessary precursor to both political leadership and civic responsibility, Defoe struggles to qualify the existing Lockean paradigm of citizen as bearer of rights favoured by the Whig ministries of Stanhope and Sunderland (1714–1721).\(^{14}\) In the very least, Defoe’s changing views on self-interest (and particularly his waning optimism concerning the capacity of competing self-interests to ensure social harmony) from the publication of *Jure Divino: A Satyr* (1706) to the publication of the *Crusoe* narratives (1719), find Defoe struggling to achieve what David Womersley calls a “politics of consensus.”\(^{15}\) Consistent with contemporary anxieties of excessive self-interest, Defoe admits to being a “follower of moderate Principles, \[and\] a vigorous Opposer of hot Measures in all

\(^{13}\) Naylor, *British Aristocracy*, 3.

\(^{14}\) On the importance of Locke’s theories for Whig politics during the Hanoverian years, see Williams, *Whig Supremacy*, 3–9.

Defoe’s depiction of Robinson Crusoe as an ascetic citizen privileges moderation as “the only Vertue”; transcending both Whig infighting and Whig-Tory partisanship, the *Crusoe* narratives struggle to consolidate what Defoe calls a “safe *Medium* which may please us all.” In contrast to Lockean liberalism, Defoe identifies the civic duties necessary to render the whiggish ideal of a consensual political community possible. Defoe balances liberal republicanism’s view of the government as protector of rights (specifically property rights in this case) by insisting that the responsibility for inculcating the kind of civic virtue encouraged by classical republican thinkers from Machiavelli onwards does not rest solely on the state but devolves on the individual citizen. By 1719, Defoe seeks to redefine the voluntary renunciation of self-interest, not as a decline into the sort of passive obedience privileged by Jacobites, Tories, and divine-right ideologues, but rather as a necessary civic duty, as a voluntary self-divestment informed by the classical republican theories of the period, theories exemplified for Defoe by Algernon Sidney’s *Discourses Concerning Government* (1698).

Yet, as the final section of this chapter argues, this “safe *Medium*” is revealed to be nothing more than a chimerical plan. As Robert Markley astutely notes, the islanders’ inability to fully internalize “discourses of self-control” suggests that the island “as an experiment in or as a model of colonialism…is a failure.” If the island experiment is indeed a failure, then it is a failure that announces itself in the ultimate insufficiency of the *ascetic prerequisite* to guarantee the security of the commonwealth against threats of self-interest. As Crusoe’s visit with the Banished Prince of Tobolski, the Madagascar Massacre, and the razing of the Tartar village attest to, despite the self-discipline Crusoe has apparently gleaned from his life on the island, he cannot transcend the political paradoxes that haunt Defoe’s text: the irreconcilable contradiction between Crusoe’s identification as an exiled dissenter and his identification as an absolute monarch. Ultimately, Defoe’s allegiance to an economic entrepreneurialism underwritten by Lockean liberalism forces him to recognize the irreconcilability

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17 Ibid.

18 Markley, “I Have Now Done with My Island,” 31-2.
between self-interest and disinterest that Crusoe’s sojourn on the island attempts to transcend.

“Int’rest is Nature’s Law”: Algernon Sidney’s Influence on Defoe’s Jure Divino

Scholars have traced the influence of various philosophers on Defoe’s political thinking, among them John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Baruch de Spinoza, Samuel Pufendorf, Hugo Grotius, James Tyrell, Algernon Sidney, and Richard Cumberland. Most commonly, however, scholars have underscored the parallels between Defoe’s politics and either Locke’s social contract theory or Thomas Hobbes’ state of nature. The theories of Hobbes and Locke are simply inadequate, however, to explain either the inhabitants’ development into self-governing citizens or Crusoe’s vacillation between autocrat and just magistrate. Paying serious attention to the influence of classical republicanism on Defoe’s thinking clarifies the process by which the islanders move from a Hobbesian state of nature to a Lockean civic community. The influence of classical republicanism on Defoe’s thinking is nowhere more evident than in his adulation for Algernon Sidney. Contextualizing the Crusoe narratives in terms of the classical republican tradition fills a crucial gap in the existing scholarship by understanding the political model recommended by Defoe, not solely in terms of his most obviously political writings, writings such as The Original Power of the Collective Body of the People of England Examined and Asserted (1702) or Jure Divino, but in terms of Defoe’s repeated concern with the corruption of society by self-interest expressed in pamphlets written in and around the composition of the Crusoe narratives.

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20 Manuel Schonhorn’s otherwise well-researched study of Defoe’s politics suffers from this attempt to understand Robinson Crusoe almost exclusively in terms of political pamphlets composed over ten years before the publication of his novel. For his reading of Robinson Crusoe, see Defoe’s Politics: Parliament, Power, Kingship and Robinson Crusoe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 141–161. See also Manuel Schonhorn, “Defoe: The Literature of Politics and the Politics of Literature,” in English Literature in the Age of Disguise, ed. Maximillian E. Novak (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 30–35; P.
To understand how Defoe’s views on political corruption and self-interest shift by 1719, we need to return to the author’s earlier verse satire, *Jure Divino: A Satyr* (1706), with an eye to the manner in which religious and political discourses of self-restraint coalesce around the classical republicanism of Sidney’s *Discourses on Government*. Seventy years ago, James Sutherland described *Jure Divino* as “largely derived from Locke and Algernon Sidney.” Since that time, however, there has been little attention to Defoe’s interest in Sidney’s writings. Even Furbank’s introduction to the Pickering & Chatto edition of *Jure Divino*, while drawing attention to Defoe’s footnotes on Sidney, quickly moves to a discussion of the more well-known of the two political theorists in a section aptly entitled, “Defoe and Locke.” This neglect is surprising given Defoe’s repeated references to Sidney’s work. Responding to Charles Leslie’s virulent endorsement of *jure divino*, Defoe famously explains that

I know, what Mr. Lock, Sidney and others have said on this Head, and I must confess, I never thought their Systems fully answer’d—But I am arguing by my own Light, not other Mens; and therefore my Opinions may be new.

While Defoe certainly overstates the originality of his own thought, his attention to “Mr. Lock [and] Sidney” demands a reconsideration of the influence of both theorists.

Composed between 1681–83 and first published posthumously in 1689, Sidney’s *Discourses Concerning Government* is the product of the same historical period in which Locke penned his famous *Two Treatises on Government*, a period following the collapse of Whig parliamentary power after the Exclusion Crisis when Whig theorists branched off...
into more radical political theory.24 Indeed, no two works did more to establish the vocabulary of political theory during the eighteenth century than Locke and Sidney. Yet as Jonathan Scott reminds us, during the first half of the eighteenth century, Sidney’s *Discourses* remained the more influential of the two theorists, routinely endorsed by Whig politicians and celebrated by various ‘Sidney Societies.’25 In close proximity to the publication of *Jure Divino* (1706), Defoe references Sidney and his writings on no less than five occasions.26 While scholars agree that Defoe was certainly as familiar with Sidney’s *Discourses* as he was with Locke’s *Two Treatises on Government*, the lumping together of two similar, yet distinct, Whig theorists, obscures not only the importance of the former to Defoe’s theory but the important distinction Defoe seeks to maintain between the liberal republicanism of Locke’s rights-based contractualism and the classical republicanism of Sidney’s emphasis on civic virtue.27


26 Defoe’s most significant reference to Sidney appears as an extensive footnote in Book IV of *Jure Divino*, both commending the author’s formidable political system and eulogizing his regrettable demise. Significantly, despite the repeated insistence of contemporary scholars on the affinity between the political philosophy of Defoe and Locke, Defoe does not cite the latter in his satire on divine-right ideology. His attention to Sidney’s work in 1705-6 most certainly derives from the publication in 1704 of a second corrected edition of Sidney’s *Discourses*. Yet while several of these references stem from Defoe’s concern with the political martyrdom of the author, several other references reveal a close affinity between the political thought of Defoe and Sidney. See as well, *Review*, No. 84 (15 Sept 1705), in *Defoe’s Review*, ed. McVeagh, 2 [pt. 2]: 590; *Review*, No. 92 (1 Aug 1706), in *Defoe’s Review*, ed. McVeagh, 3 [pt. 2]: 471; *Review* No. 123 (5 Jan 1712), in Daniel Defoe, *Defoe’s Review: Reproduced from the Original Editions* [New York: AMS Press, 1965], 493; and Defoe’s 1705 publication, Daniel Defoe, *The Consolidator; or, Memoirs of Sundry Transactions from the World in the Moon* (New York: Garland, 1972), 14. In the same period, Locke is referenced only once in Defoe’s *Review*, alongside another reference to Sidney.

27 On the relevance of natural law theory to the political theory expounded in *Jure Divino*, see Novák, *Defoe and the Nature of Man*, 1-2. For a general overview of the differences and similarities between the two thinkers, see Furbank, introduction to *Jure Divino*, 22-4; and Thomas G. West, foreword to *Discourses Concerning Government by Algernon Sidney*, ed. Thomas G. West (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1990), xv-xxxviii.
In the following paragraphs, it is not my intention to provide a comprehensive comparison of the political systems of Sidney and Defoe. Rather, by touching on key passages from *Jure Divino*, I want to highlight the affinities between Defoe’s political project and the classical republicanism of the late seventeenth century. We can start by considering Defoe’s celebration of Sidney’s “true System of Original Power, and the stated Bounds of Government and Subjection by the Laws of God, Nature, and Reason.” Defoe’s evaluation carefully outlines the distinction between Locke and Sidney. Unlike Locke, Sidney qualifies standard Whig calls to restrict absolute monarchy within “the stated Bounds of Government” with a classical republican emphasis on the individual citizen’s “Subjection by the Laws of God, Nature, and Reason.” The attention placed by Sidney and Defoe on the specific nature of civic law, the role played by law in society, and the capacity of laws to foster an internalization of its proscriptions on the part of the citizen, is based on four fundamental concepts: (i) humanity is inherently self-interested; (ii) civil liberty and virtue are inextricably bound; (iii) divine law and civic law are synonymous; and (iv) both governor and governed must be, as Sidney suggests, “a living law to himself and others.”

Sounding distinctly Hobbesian, both authors evaluate human nature as inherently self-interested. Commenting on the “perpetual anxiety” (II.i.83–4) attendant on a society governed by self-interest, Sidney explains how “the liberty of one is thwarted by that of another; and whilst they are all equal, none will yield to any, otherwise than by a general consent” (I.x.30). Defoe similarly remarks that Nature predisposes “That all Men would be Tyrants if they cou’d: / If they forbear their Neighbours to devour, / Tis not for want of Will, but want of Power” (Introduction, 2–4). Elsewhere he notes that “Self-Love’s the Ground of all the things we do, / Which they that talk on’t least do most pursue” (IV: 173–4). This predisposition is counterbalanced by the wording of Book III, where the speaker explains how “Nature Commands, and ‘tis Prescrib’d to Sense” that humans “adhere to Self-defence” (III: 241–1). “Self-Preservation,” he argues, “is the only Law, / That does Involuntary Duty Draw; / It

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serves for Reason and Authority, / And they'll defend themselves, that know not
why” (III: 243-6). From the Hobbesian assumption that humanity is steeped in vice and
driven solely by self-interest, Defoe provides the important caveat that such self-interest
is ultimately self-regulating:

The only Safety of Society,
Is, that my Neighbour’s just as proud as I;
Has the same Will and Wish, the same Design,
And his Abortive Envy ruines mine
The Epidemick Frenzy has possesed
By Nature one, by Nature all the rest. (Introduction, 15-20)

Defoe’s belief that “th’Absurdities” an individual “seeks [to] enjoy” are cancelled out
when “one Extreme another will destroy” is central to his conception of Nature’s Laws
(Introduction, 54-5). Sounding strikingly similar to Locke’s conception of civil harmony,
the self-regulating balance of self-interest is upset when individuals allow the voice of
Reason to be overruled by the force of their passions. When this occurs, some
individuals choose to redirect their energies from self-preservation to vice while other
individuals take this opportunity to assume authority over their neighbours.

Interestingly, despite Defoe’s repeated suggestion that tyranny is the product of
individuals’ failure to follow Nature’s imperative to self-preservation, Jure Divino
staunchly defends the possibility that a self-regulating self-interest guided by Reason
may provide a sound basis for political society. While “Men, may sometimes by Subtilty
and Slight” contrive to “Oppose themselves, and Sacrifice their Right [i.e. their self-
interest],” ultimately, “Int’rest Instructs” and restores self-interest (IV: 169-73). That is
to say, while individuals may at times trick themselves (or be tricked by those in
authority) into sacrificing their right to self-preservation, “Int’rest is Nature’s Law, and
will not lye” (IV: 166). “Self-Interest,” Defoe argues, “is such a prevailing Bond, especially
where Reason concurs, that is never fails to open Mens Eyes to their Advantages.”

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In his discussion of a mutually limiting economy of self-interest, Defoe clearly footnotes the work of Locke. Yet Defoe’s overriding optimism in Nature’s ability to correct the ills of society is ultimately compromised by the time he composes *Robinson Crusoe.* Between 1717–19, Defoe’s writings focus largely on the damaging impact of self-interest on society, something *Jure Divino*’s representation of self-interest gives little sense of. In 1706, Defoe’s focus is on justifying a particular model of political authority (monarchical vs. republican), in understanding the relationship between the individual and the state. In contrast, the pamphlets written between 1717 and the publication of the *Crusoe* narratives concern themselves with what we might call the social governance of the civic body, how the ethical self-management of individual citizens, and their interaction with neighbours, ensures or threatens the security of society. The sense that self-interest functions as a natural balance to self-preservation, checking one man’s overreaching interests by the instinctual self-preservation of his peers, is an optimistic view that Defoe appears to abandon (or at least temper) by 1719, opting instead to augment self-preservation with self-governance according to a clearly-stated external rule of law. Whether Defoe is speaking of power-hungry Whigs, avaricious stock-jobbers, Crusoe’s ruthless economizing of his environment or the recalcitrance of Will Atkins and Reprobates, attention is consistently focussed on the extent to which self-interest threatens the common interests of society.

In *The Old Whig and Modern Whig Revived, in the Present Divisions at Court; Or, The Difference betwixt Acting upon Principle and Interest exemplified by some of our present Patriots* (1717), Defoe makes a distinction between “Acting upon Principle and [acting on] Interest.” Defoe’s main concern in this pamphlet is the self-interested infighting of the Whig party. He argues that the “Private Interest, and the Engrossing of Profits and Power from one another” has resulted in the “whole Overthrow of the Whig Interest” (185, 192). Due to the “Self-interested Management” of some members, “a

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31 Novak explains that while Defoe keenly supported self-interest as the motivator of human endeavour, admiring the writings of both Hobbes and Lord Rochester, by 1718–19 his evaluation of the ubiquity of self-interest in society had taken a significantly pessimistic turn (Maximillian E. Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions, His Life and Ideas* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 515).

Flood of *High Flyers* and *Jacobites* were allowed to seize power (192). The distinction made here between acting upon principle and acting out of interest is dramatized in *Robinson Crusoe* by the protagonist’s struggle with “Inclination” and “Duty”(34). In opposition to the spectre of self-interest, Defoe presents the possibility of a disinterested principle. Throughout the pamphlet this is Defoe’s ideal guiding principle. “Are not these Heroes?,” he asks, “Are not these disinterested Men? Can any Thing act these Men but Love to their Country, [and] a true Affection to the Interest of Liberty”?(193). Yet Defoe clearly doubts that patriotism or the love of liberty will provide an adequate check on self-interest, reminding his readers that the “OUSTED PARTY” (i.e. the Tory party) is no less self-interested than the reigning Whig party.

Similarly, in *An Argument Proving that the Design of Employing and En[obl]obling Foreigners, is a Treasonable Conspiracy* (1717), Defoe responds to recommendations to ennable the King’s German counsellors by bemoaning “a Sett of selfish and designing Men, who, to engross Power, amass Wealth, and gratifie the unbounded Avarice and Ambition of a few, care not what Dishonour they bring upon their Country, what Bondage they entail upon their Posterity, or to what Reproaches they expose the King and Royal Family.” In opposition to this set of selfish men (presumably the Earls of Sunderland and Stanhope), Defoe calls upon the “FEW faithful and disinterested Men” among the King’s ministers (presumably Walpole and Townshend), to save the “Honour of the *British* Peerage [from being] sacrificed to those Party-making Views” which threaten the “Ruine of [the Nobility’s] Posterity.” As previously mentioned, the central tension explored in Defoe’s pamphlets between private interest and public welfare coalesces around the public debates of the Peerage Bill of 1719. Much as Defoe condemns self-interest in *The Old Whig*, the prevailing sentiment of *An Argument* is the

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33 On Defoe’s sense that forms of self-interest might be successfully directed through careful attention to God’s Providence, see Carol Kay, *Political Constructions: Defoe, Richardson, and Sterne in Relation to Hobbes, Hume, and Burke* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 73–4. While in theory Defoe appears to subscribe to this possibility, during the period in which the *Crusoe* narratives are composed, there is a certain pessimism regarding the capacity for any individual to restrain him/herself.

34 Daniel Defoe, *An Argument Proving That the Design of Employing and Enobling Foreigners, Is a Treasonable Conspiracy against the Constitution, Dangerous to the Kingdom, an Affront to the Nobility in Scotland in Particular, and Dishonourable to the Peerage of Britain in General* (London, 1717), 5–6.

danger posed by the prostitution of the nation’s common interests. In *The Anatomy of Exchange-Alley; Or, A System of Stock-Jobbing* (1719), Defoe equates stock-jobbing with “High-Treason in its very Nature, and in its Consequences,” as “Traytours to King George, and to his Government, Family and Interest.” Typical of Defoe’s increasingly pessimistic assessments of self-interest during this period, the threat posed by the stock-jobbers escalates until they “job for the Nation, and without any Scruple, make a Transfer of King George and his Crown for a half per cent. upon the Value to whoever bids the Money” (55).

A survey of the pamphlets written by Defoe between the Whig Schism of 1717 and the Peerage Bill of 1719 vividly illustrate how far Defoe’s attitude on self-interest had come since the publication of *Original Power* (1702), where he remarks with optimism that “As there is but One Interest in the Nation, I wish there were but One Party, and that Party would adhere to Unbass’d Justice, and pursue the Honour and Interest of the Protestant Religion, and the English Liberty.” By 1719, Defoe’s pessimistic identification of self-interest as the ruling principle of Hanoverian society leads him to question Locke’s faith in the sufficiency of a self-regulating self-interest to guarantee political stability. His involvement in contemporary debates concerning the threat of self-interested action helps explain the persistent appearance, in the *Crusoe* narratives, of the spectre of self-interest. By augmenting *Jure Divino*’s conception of human nature with the necessity of a supplementary moral code under which the individual voluntarily subjects himself, Defoe’s vision of political society calls upon the classical republican emphasis of civic virtue that Sidney repeatedly advocates.

“*The Glorious Liberty of the Sons of God*”: Conscientious Obedience and Liberty through Subjection

The supplementary moral code underwriting the political theories of both Sidney and Defoe depends upon the conflation of civil law with divine law. Typically

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whiggish in his concern with law, Defoe echoes Sidney’s insistence on the capacity of the individual subject to internalize the civic laws of the community. Mirroring the voluntary subjection of the individual Christian to divine authority, internalization of civic law provides the necessary check on self-interested action. Only when individuals learn to govern themselves according to a civic virtue that places equal emphasis on both self-interest and public welfare does the autocratic authority of figures such as Crusoe become redundant. Mapped out in *Jure Divino*, and carried forth to the *Crusoe* narratives, the process of internalizing divine law is simultaneously a process of internalizing civil law. The ideal just magistrate of Defoe’s thinking both rules and is ruled by a conflated standard of divine Justice and human Reason. Man owes obedience to the just magistrate only insofar as he conveys God’s law to earth. Borrowing the concept from Sidney, Defoe advocates a *conscientious obedience*. Contrasting the passive obedience of Stuart ideology, conscientious obedience represents an absolute obedience to God’s law (understood as Justice, Reason, or Nature’s Law) *through*, but not *to*, the just magistrate. The obedience is not, strictly speaking, an obedience to the magistrate as human authority but rather as God’s vicegerent.

The political theories of both Defoe and Sidney are premised on the ideal (albeit improbable) figure of the just monarch. Derived from both Aristotle’s King-by-Nature and English Puritanism’s godly magistrate, this ideal monarch establishes the criteria by which both the governed and governed must act (II.i.81). In the presence of such a man, “’Twere better for us to be guided by him, than to follow our own judgment; nay, I could almost say, ’twere better to serve such a master, than to be free.” (II.i.81). Importantly, Sidney insists that one should defer to the excellencies of the King-by-Nature “because ’tis better for a people to be governed by him, than to enjoy their liberty; or rather they do enjoy their liberty, which is never more safe, than when it is defended by one who is a living law to himself and others” (II.x.132). Sidney’s attention to the King-by-Nature’s capacity to function as a “living law to himself and others” highlights a central aspect of seventeenth-century classical republicanism as filtered

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through radical Protestant conceptions of Christian liberty: the possibility that liberty is more readily preserved through submission and obedience to a just external authority than in the absence of external restraints.

According to Defoe and Sidney, the “living law” must extend to both the governed and governing, to both the civic subject and the magistrate. As Defoe remarks at the end of book VIII: “So let all Governments their Rights withdraw, / When Kings forget their due Regard to Law.” (581-2). As Defoe suggests, both the “People Honest” and the “Monarch Just” must work in tandem, taking equal responsibility for the security of the nation’s virtue (IV: 577). “The Bond’s Reciprocal,” Defoe writes, precisely because it is “form’d above” and modelled on humanity’s relationship to God (IV: 578). Justice rules the nation, Defoe insists, only when the just Monarch obeys the same law that he enforces. Like Sidney, Defoe recognizes the necessity of civil subordination when a just king rules. “Subordination kept alive the State,” Defoe writes, “None better rul’d, and better none obey’d” (VIII: 247, 250). This is the success of the Roman republic as Defoe sees it. Kings knew how to reign and subjects saw “the Reason and the Benefit of Law” precisely because it was equally distributed to both the governed and the governing (VIII: 252).

Defoe understands Law to be synonymous with both Reason and Nature’s Law; both terms, in turn, embody the conveyance of divine law to humanity. The standard by which divine law guides civic law is Justice. He argues that the first “Forms of Government, in Nature [were] fram’d,” and the “Terms of Subjection, and of Rule” were agreed upon (VIII: 473-4). The justness of a law by which both the King governs and the subjects obey derives from the perfect agreement of civic law “with Heavens Intent” (IV: 575). Checking “their Purses” and commanding “their Hearts,” Justice represents the standard by which civil law adheres to God’s commands, the standard by which secular government’s “High Engagement” with God’s will is secured (IV: 573). “Justice,” he writes in a footnote, “as it is the Foundation of Government,” is also “the Bond of Government”:

it directs the Duty of every Relation, and maintains an Equality in due Proportions on every side; it obliges the Prince to proper Systems and Limitations, as the Bounds and prescrib’d Extent of his Government; it obliges
the Subject to such Submissions and Subjections as are properly their due, and as ’tis just they should, yield to their Prince.39

Sidney similarly reasons that if justice is the chief end of government, and justice inheres in knowing what is due to God, then it is “impossible for any man to perform the part of a good magistrate, unless he have the knowledge of God; or to bring a people to justice, unless he bring them to the knowledge of God, who is the root of all justice and goodness”(II.i.83). Contrasting the divine right theory espoused by writers such as Robert Filmer, Sidney argues that “all princes therefore that have power are not to be esteemed equally the ministers of God”(III.x.372-3).

Sidney’s King-by-Nature functions, in this sense, as God’s minister on earth, conveying His law to humans in the civic realm. Obedience to the magistrate is required, therefore, only insofar as the magistrate obeys the same divine law that he enforces. Thus, the self-governance of the magistrate qualifies him to govern, since he is not, strictly speaking, judging others, but simply applying God’s laws. This is why Defoe can argue in Jure Divino that absolute obedience to an unjust magistrate can only ever be a “limited Obedience” given the fact that the “Passive Slave” who is bound to the “Commands of the Prince” necessarily “resist[s] both the Laws of God and Nature” in offering the monarch such obedience.40 In this sense, Jure Divino clearly follows Milton’s Paradise Lost in its republican insistence that there can be no legitimate analogy between divine and human authority, and that to claim to exercise such authority is in fact a sign of rebellion against God. As Defoe suggests, those who pledge passive obedience to monarchs who are not guided by the divinely sanctioned standard of Justice are “Traytors” to “the Entails of Sense” and “Rebels to the Laws of Providence”(VIII: 561-2). Defoe stresses that absolute obedience to a monarch is only possible if such obedience is coterminous with absolute obedience to God. Yet Defoe provides an important caveat to Milton’s puritan republicanism. By insisting on the mutual obedience of both magistrate and subject to God’s law, Jure Divino conflates divine and human authority so that legitimate human authority can only function as the

39 Defoe, Jure Divino, IV: 572n.

40 Defoe, Jure Divino, IV: 494, IV: 494n.
transmission of God’s law through the just magistrate. The analogy between divine authority and human power is therefore circumvented in favour of a republican flattening of magistrate and subject as equally bound to God’s Law. In stark contrast to Locke’s refutation of divine right theory, a refutation grounded in the principle that no secular authority is divinely appointed, Defoe follows Sidney in allowing for the possibility that a magistrate may and should function as a Pauline minister of God on earth.41

Following from this premise, both Defoe and Sidney argue that law should promote virtue rather than simply punish transgressors. In his introduction to Jure Divino, Defoe picks up Sidney’s suggestion that the role of just government is to retrieve men from vice and return them to God and virtue. Accordingly, Defoe prefaces his satire on unjust government with the suggestion that enslavement to vice predisposes some men to overrule their peers and some to accept subordination. This enslavement to vice destroys his attention to reason and nature: “His will corrupted, and his Judgment weak” (Introduction, 71). By following the Devil’s rule (i.e. that of obedience to the passions) rather than God’s rule (i.e. that of obedience to reason), the individual becomes: “A General Slave to Universal Vice, / So fond of Chains, does so his Fate despise; / He seems to own his Slavery as his Choice, / And Damns his Freedom with subjected Voice” (Introduction, 64-67). In contrast, submitting to God’s Law is not enslavement but emancipation from vice. As Sidney suggests, civil liberty is “not a licentiousness of doing what is pleasing to everyone against the command of God; but an exemption from all human laws, to which they have not given their assent” (I.ii.9). Civil liberty is not, as Sidney argues, “an exemption from the laws of God, but in a most perfect conformity to them…and those who most delight in the glorious liberty of the sons of God, do not only subject themselves to him, but are most regular observers of the just ordinances of man, made by the consent of such as are concerned according to the will of God” (I.ii.9).

The concept of liberty favoured here by Sidney and Defoe involves a specific freedom from the shackles of vice. Amounting to nothing less than a conventional puritan understanding of a freedom to virtue, what Luther calls a Christian liberty through

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41 See Sidney, Discourses, III.x.371-2.
subjection to Law, Sidney and Defoe’s conception of civil liberty (libertas) fundamentally differs from that of Locke’s definition. In contrast to Locke’s rights-based liberty, one opposed to authority and conceived primarily as a juridical concept, Defoe and Sidney understand liberty as restricting immorality while enabling the piety of the nation. Rather than placing a restraint upon personal liberties and creating what Locke calls “a standing Rule to live by, common to everyone of that Society...a Liberty to follow my own Will in all things, where the Rule prescribes not,” Sidney and Defoe understand the law of the state (imperium) as the general condition for personal liberty in the vivere civile (civil life). Locke’s understanding of liberty enabled through a “standing Rule” is distinct from Filmer’s notion of liberty as (according to Locke) “a Liberty for every one to do what he lists, to live as he pleases, and not to be tyed by any Laws.” In this sense, Locke’s insistence on liberty through adherence to civil law sounds strikingly similar to Sidney. However, unlike Sidney and Defoe, civil obedience does not in Locke’s estimation emancipate the individual. In contrast to Locke’s understanding of liberty as a rights-based juridical concept and Law as a “fence” to protect civic rights by punishing transgressors, Sidney insists that there is an “inherent good” embodied in the law of the state; this law is alone able to wield “a power over the conscience, whereas the coercive is merely contingent”(III.xi.381). In contrasting conscience over coercion, Sidney seeks “another rule of our obedience” that replaces Stuart concepts of non-resistance with something akin to informed consent (III.xi.381).

Explaining the strength of Roman law, Defoe writes: “Justice and Vertue Regal Power began, / Justice and Vertue Regal Power maintain, / Without them Power’s inverted and in vain”(VIII: 253-55). Defoe’s conjoining of justice with virtue is

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42 For a more detailed discussion of Christian liberty and its relevance to political subjectivity, see the previous chapter; for Luther’s notion of Christian obedience, see Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” 31: 327-77.


44 Locke, Two Treatises, 283.

45 Locke writes: “To be free from such force is the only security of my Preservation: and reason bids me look on him, as an Enemy to my Preservation, who would take away that Freedom, which is the Fence to it”(Two Treatises, 279). See also Locke’s comments regarding the insecurity of the state of nature: “for if it be asked, what security, what fence is there, in such a state [of nature], against the violence and oppression of this absolute ruler? the very question can scarce be borne”(ibid., 328).
underscored by his opening dedication to Lady Reason, the only just monarch of the world; similarly, the only Law by which subjects must give absolute obedience is the “Royal Justice” of Lady Reason’s commands (p. 33). Defoe’s attention to the subject’s duty to “pay a voluntary Homage” by practicing an “Absolute Obedience” to the Law of Reason (Law of Nature/God’s Law) signals the constitutive elements of Defoe’s ideal government: a voluntary absolute subjection to a just human authority acting as God’s vicegerent (p. 34). Extending the parameters of obedience beyond the constitutional contractualism posited by Locke, both Defoe and Sidney advocate what the latter calls a “conscientious obedience” (III.xi.381). Conscientious obedience trumps Stuart notions of passive obedience by bypassing the individual will of a human ruler in favour of a universalized conception of equity and justice rooted in God’s authority. Conscientious obedience is, by extension, the rightful due of a ruler who, ruling with inherent goodness and rectitude according to the eternal standard of Justice, simply enforces divine law.

Sidney’s most important contribution to Defoe’s political thinking is his insight into the manner in which civil disciplining prepares the citizen for conscientious obedience. In contrast to the laissez-faire theory of liberty that stresses liberty from the state, Sidney’s vision of the state extends beyond the mere containment of vice to suggest the notion of a coercive liberty achieved through the state. As we have seen, in a political community where both governed and governing must obey the same set of laws, private morality and political stability are explicitly linked. Imagining civil subjects as “rough pieces of time or stone, which ‘tis necessary to cleave, saw, or cut,” Sidney insists that magistrates function as “political architects” responsible for disciplining and moulding the individual to suit the common interests of the political community (II.i.83–4). Importantly, the disciplinary action of Sidney’s “duly created magistracy” is not characterized by benevolent paternalism (II.xix.188). Rather, by internalizing the same divine-civil law as the civil subject, the just magistrate cleaves, saws, and cuts the “rough pieces” of the subject simply by providing a “living law to himself and others.” By submitting to God’s law, the just magistrate both encourages

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46 See Scott’s contention: “For Sidney the whole point of politics lay in the positive potential of the state as a coercive moral instrument, for the (if necessary, compulsory) political and religious betterment of its members. A ‘good’ government was not a popular one but one that brought its members closer to the nature of God” (Restoration, 226–7).
the obedience of the civil subject while avoiding the need “to diminish the strength of
the people, which is their own, and by which they subsist” (I.xix.188).

Sidney’s contention that the rough lumber of an individual may, by efficacious
laws and just governance, be hewn into a serviceable member of the polis follows
naturally from his comments regarding the capacity of law to promote virtue. In 1706,
Defoe only hints at the stress Sidney places on civil disciplining through his reference to
the reciprocity of the bonds between subject/citizen and monarch. By 1719, Defoe
dramatizes a model of internalizing divine law that adopts Sidney’s metaphor of hewing,
cleaving, and cutting and applies it to the ascetic practices of Crusoe’s island life. Among
Crusoe’s ascetic practices is a mode of obedience by near-starvation achieved through a
voluntary submission of self-interest to physical necessity.

Starvation and the “certain Rule” of Providence

In a number of his novels, Defoe reveals a fascination with the physiological and
psychological aspects of starvation.47 This is no less the case for Defoe’s Crusoe
narratives. Crusoe’s subjection to Providence in volume I, as well as Susan the Maid-
Servant’s suffering and the political subjection of Will Atkins and the Reprobates in
volume II, are informed by instances of near-starvation. Similarly, three of the major
scriptural allusions within the text—the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15), the
reference to Psalm 78.19: “Can God spread a table in the Wilderness?”, and the story of
Elijah and the Ravens (I Kings 12-17)—concern themselves with the relationship
between starvation and obedience to God.48 In all cases, Defoe’s interest in near-

47 See, for example, A Journal of the Plague Year (1722), in which two starving brothers, John, the Biscuit-
Maker and Thomas, the Sail-Maker, debate the possibility of removing to another town to find victuals.
John questions what right the townspeople have to “deny me Provisions for my Money, is to say the
Town has a Right to Starve me to Death, which cannot be true” (Daniel Defoe, A Journal of the Plague
Year, ed. Louis Landa [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969], 123). Thomas responds that the
townspeople “do not deny you Liberty to go back again from whence you came, and therefore they do not
starve you” (124). Defoe’s attention here to the issue of “Right” and “Liberty” underscores his interest in
the relationship between instances of physical deprivation like starvation and political and personal
autonomy. Similarly, in the earlier pages of Defoe’s Roxana (1724), when asked by Amy if she would deny
the Landlord should he offer food in exchange for sex, Roxana ardently responds, “No, I’d starve
first” (Daniel Defoe, Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress, ed. John Mullan [Oxford: Oxford University Press,
1998], 28.

48 For a discussion of Crusoe’s scriptural allusions, see Austin, “Jesting with the Truth,” 16; J. Paul Hunter,
The Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe’s Emblematic Method and Quest for Form in Robinson Crusoe (Baltimore: Johns
Hopkins University Press, 1966), 136; Novak, Master of Fictions, 541; Robert W. Ayers, “Allusive
Allegorick History,” PMLA 82.5 (1967): 400-1; Paula R. Backscheider, “Defoe’s Prodigal Sons,” Studies in
starvation reflects a concern with what choices an individual might make when faced with the prospect of extreme physical deprivation and/or death. As with the Defoe’s repeated concern with necessity as a casuistical recourse to justify morally questionable actions, starvation becomes a test case to consider to what extent an individual would willingly renounce his/her personal needs. Despite some attention to starvation in the *Crusoe* narratives, scholars have neglected to consider the manner in which Defoe’s interest in starvation unpacks the problematic notion of volitional renunciation of individual liberties at the heart of the rights-based Whig political ideology of the early eighteenth century.

Defoe is clearly making a quick joke about arbitrary power when he describes Crusoe’s domestication of his goats by near-starvation. Crusoe summarizes his plan by stating that “hunger will tame a Lyon” (123). He explains that if he left his goat in the pit for “three or four Days without Food,” only then carrying it some “Water to drink, and then a little Corn,” the fierce He-Goat would “have been as tame as one of the Kids, for they are might sagacious tractable Creatures where they are well used” (123-4).

Reducing the animal to the margins of physical necessity by withholding food, Crusoe renders the goat both malleable and “tractable.” Despite the apparent levity of the scene, Defoe’s attention to the efficacy with which “hunger will tame a Lyon” should alert us to the similar importance of near-starvation during Crusoe’s sickness and conversion. The physical reduction caused by Crusoe’s sickness brings about not only a religious conversion but also a recognition of, what one scholar calls, “the otherness of divinity itself, the absolute moral standard now so inescapable.”

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50 For one of the few discussions of starvation in the Crusoe trilogy, see Zimmerman’s contention that starvation functions alongside the text’s discourse on cannibalism; caught between two forces that exceed the bounds of civil society, Crusoe is driven into a Hobbesian state of nature governed by fear for one’s survival (“Robinson Crusoe and No Man’s Land,” 522). See also James Maddox, Jr., “Interpreter Crusoe,” *English Literary History* 51.1 (1984): 33-52.

51 Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 323. While McKeon’s focus on Crusoe’s capacity to transform his economic activities into a religious calling diverges from my own focus, his attention to the capacity of Crusoe’s isolation to provide
law (Providence), Crusoe’s selfish “Inclination” is checked (34). The internalization of this law occurs when Crusoe transforms the involuntary suffering of his sickness into an annual day of voluntary fasting.

The structural and thematic importance of Crusoe’s conversion is by this point axiomatic; the extent to which Crusoe’s physical and spiritual subjection under God provides the template for the civic disciplining of both himself and Will Atkins, however, requires further attention. As Manuel Schonhorn thoughtfully remarks: “we trivialize Defoe’s story by overlooking the inherently religious foundation” of Crusoe’s “unregulated acquisitive spirit,” how Crusoe’s religious outlook “has allowed him to internalize the limits of permissible accumulation.” Following Schonhorn, we might ask how Crusoe’s physical and spiritual subjection under God provides the prerequisite for membership and/or leadership in the political community that follows. How does the subjection of Crusoe under the physical necessity of his illness provide the template for the civic disciplining that both he and Will Atkins choose to undergo?

By taking into account the manner in which Crusoe’s conversion represents the epitome of self-interest (Inclination) checked by an external law (Duty), we begin to see how the seemingly disparate issues of religious waywardness and political rebellion become linked in Defoe’s mind as part of the common problem of self-interest detailed in so many of his contemporary pamphlets. The external law, in this case, is provided by the dictates of Providence. Contemplating the vast order of a providential design in “which I could no way have been the Agent in delivering myself,” Crusoe commits himself to being guided by divine law. He relates his revelation in the following terms:

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the “psychological discipline to transform his activity into his calling” is in keeping with my attention to the internalization of divine law as an ascetic prerequisite to civic duty (323).

52 To this day, G. A. Starr’s *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965) and Hunter’s *Reluctant Pilgrim* remain crucial sources for scholars seeking to understand Defoe’s indebtedness to various traditions of Christian narrative.


54 See McKeon’s suggestion that Defoe advocates a rule under which Crusoe’s self-interest is checked, noting that Crusoe’s incapacity to limit his desires by sensing the natural and providential limits of his situation is what makes him successively a prodigal son, an unethical trader, and an imprudent trader (Origins of the English Novel, 322).
How when we are in (a *Quandary*, as we call it) a Doubt or Hesitation, whether to go this Way, or that Way, a secret Hint shall direct us this Way, when we intended to go that Way; nay, when Sense, our own Inclination, and perhaps Business has called us to go the other Way, yet a strange Impression upon the Mind, from we know not what Springs, and by we know not what Power, *shall over-rule us to go this Way*, and it shall afterwards appear that had we gone that Way, which we should have gone, and even to our Imagination ought to have gone, we should have been ruined and lost. *Upon these and many like Reflections, I afterwards made it a certain Rule with me, that whenever I found those secret Hints or pressings of my Mind to doing or not doing any Thing that presented; or going this Way, or that Way, I never failed to obey the secret Dictate,* though I knew no other Reason for it than such a Pressure or such a Hint hung upon my Mind. (148, emphasis added)

This recognition of Providence’s “secret Hint,” a recognition that compels Crusoe to obey the “secret Dictate” or “certain Rule” of God’s will, represents what Michael McKeon calls a “human internalization of divinity.”\(^{55}\) The form of this internalization involves Providence’s capacity to “over-rule” Crusoe’s “Sense” or “Inclination.”

Prior to the onset of his illness, Crusoe admits to having “no divine Knowledge” and scarcely “one Thought that so much as tended either to looking upwards toward God, or inwards towards a Reflection upon my own Ways” (76). Crusoe functioned like “a meer Brute from the Principles of Nature, and by the Dictates of common Sense only,” giving little credence to “a God, or a Providence” (76). Indeed, the narrative leading up to the shipwreck reveals Crusoe’s “chronic incapacity to rationalize worldly activity by the sanctions of a perceived moral duty” (McKeon, 322). In retrospect, however, Crusoe recognizes his actions as a direct defiance of his divinely-ordered moral duty. “When I was deliver’d and taken up at Sea by the Portugal Captain,” he confesses, “well us’d, and dealt with justly and honourably with, as well as charitably, I had not the least Thankfulness on my Thoughts” (76). Furthermore, when he is shipwrecked,

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\(^{55}\) Ibid., 333. Yet, as McKeon notes, this internalization is not simply religious but socio-political in nature, providing the “psychological equipment” necessary to succeed as “the self-possessed and enlightened capitalist entrepreneur of the modern age” (334). On Crusoe’s engagement with the Providence tradition, see Hunter, *Reluctant Pilgrim*, 73-4.
“ruin’d, and in Danger of drowning on this Island, I was as far from Remorse, or looking on it as Judgment; I only said to my self often, that I was an unfortunate Dog, and born to be always miserable”(76). When Crusoe becomes sick, however, and has time to reflect upon “the Miseries of Death…before me,” the voice of Providence he had so consistently ignored in the past begins to make sense (77). In this regard, it is not so much the moment of Crusoe’s conversion that affords this clarity, but the preceding onset of sickness which, reducing Crusoe to a state in which repentance is possible, structures Defoe’s larger concerns with the internalization of law central to the ascetic disciplining of the civic subject.

The religious utility of the sickness is its ability to exhaust “Nature” or natural Inclination. Only when Crusoe’s natural Inclination is weakened by the combined physical necessities of fever, hunger, and thirst, does his “Conscience that had slept so long, [begin] to awake”(78). Just as Providence is recognized as the “certain Rule” to check the immorality of self-interested “Inclination,” the physical reduction of near-starvation caused by the ague functions as a method of soliciting obedience to God’s will and, consequently, of substituting God’s will (Crusoe’s Duty) for his own will (Crusoe’s Inclination). By disabling Nature, Crusoe is liberated from “something fatal in that Propension of nature” that has motivated his behaviour up to this point (5). Rather than simply reducing his physical condition to that of his spiritual condition, as Paul Hunter suggests, the ordeal of sickness needs to be understood in relation to its capacity to transform a submission to Providence out of fear and necessity into a voluntary pledge of obedience to divine law.56

To understand this transformation we need to consider the transition from the reduction to physical necessity caused by his sickness to his decision to inaugurate an annual day of fasting. It is only after these solemn fasts are begun that Crusoe can describe his subjection under Providence’s “secret Dictate” as a voluntary instance of conscientious obedience. From Crusoe’s initial illness comes the recognition that “if God has made all these Things, He guides and governs them all…having sole Power, not only of me, but of every Thing that happen’d in the World”(79). Importantly, the initial prayer to God that immediately precedes this recognition is not a voluntary

56 Hunter, Reluctant Pilgrim, 160.
thanksgiving to God, not “a Prayer attended with Desires or with Hopes,” but instead “the Voice of meer Fright and Distress” (78). Crusoe’s subjection under God’s law at this point is not ultimately acceptable. It is a product of fear and cannot, therefore, be construed as a voluntary pledge of submission to God’s law.

Arguing in Jure Divino that obedience to human authority is similar to obedience to God in that both depend upon the hope of future reward, Defoe remarks that in both cases “Fear’s a Bondage, not a Loyalty” (IV: 186). Which is to say, individuals do not pledge obedience to either God or Monarch out of loyalty, but rather (in keeping with Hobbes) out of fear that a failure to obey will disqualify them from receiving the reward: “No Man regards the Law that once despairs” of receiving the reward (IV: l. 187). Defoe makes a crucial distinction, however, between active obedience to Law and the passive “sordid Submissions” exacted by Necessity. In a footnote to the line, “Self-Love’s the Ground of all the things we do,” Defoe provides an important caveat to the belief that there is no other guiding principle than the love of God:

They that obey Tyrants, do it from some absolute Necessity, as being void of Means to resist, or must be esteemed as Men depriv’d of their Civil Understandings; and whenever Extremities reduce them to their Senses, they will certainly put a stop to their sordid Submissions.58

The subject who, in Jure Divino, must obey the Tyrant “from some absolute Necessity,” is the subject who, in Robinson Crusoe, must make the choice between obeying the law of Providence and starving. Like those who “obey Tyrants” out of absolute necessity because “void of Means to resist,” Crusoe’s acceptance of God’s authority out of fear is as “sordid” as that of men “depriv’d of their Civil Understandings.” To transform the sordid submission caused by Crusoe’s physical necessity into a conscientious obedience, Crusoe must restage the involuntary reduction to physical necessity caused by his sickness into a voluntary act of ascetic self-mortification. Crusoe’s ability to shift the

57 In the case of obeying God, the reward is entrance into Heaven; in the case of obeying the monarch, the reward is the protection of one’s Property in the broadest Lockean sense of the term: “that is, his life, liberty and estate, against the injuries and attempts of other men” (Locke, Two Treatises, 323).

58 Jure Divino, IV: 173n.
pusillanimous obedience of his sickness into a voluntary restaging is achieved by his solemn vow to establish an annual day of fasting.

On the first anniversary of his landing, Crusoe vows to keep the day “as a Solemn Fast, setting it apart for Religious Exercise, prostrating my self on the Ground with the most serious Humiliation, confessing my Sins to God, acknowledging his Righteous Judgments upon me, and praying to him to have Mercy on me”(88–9). The decision to fast on the anniversary of his landing amounts to Crusoe’s intention to voluntarily reduce himself to his senses, replicating the insight previously provided by his sickness. Restaging his subjection to physical necessity as a self-willed “way of living” involves a transformation from involuntary to voluntary mortification that is central to the internalization of Providence as a stated rule of pious self-management (83). Crusoe’s decision to fast “till the going down of the Sun” can be seen, in this sense, as the voluntary self-imposition of a “certain Rule” on his tendency to follow his Inclination rather than his Duty, to wander (morally, ethically, religiously, and physically) rather than attend to his calling (89). This transformation from an involuntary to voluntary exercise is crucial for understanding the way in which the “sordid Submissions” of Crusoe to God in times of extreme danger are transformed into a self-directed and internalized observance of the Law.

“A standing Rule to us all”: Will Atkins and the Reprobates

In much the same way that Crusoe’s sickness and religious conversion precede his accession as sovereign of the island, his decision to appoint Will Atkins as de facto civic leader is prefaced on Atkins’ own religious conversion. As Atkins’ transformation from political dissident to sober magistrate illustrates, the curbing of private interest and realignment of self-interest with public welfare so central to the political efficacy of Crusoe’s island community is enabled by the citizen’s voluntary subjection to (and internalization of) Law.

Given Defoe’s understanding of civic law as synonymous with divine law, his persistent use of religious metaphors of subjection and obedience to elucidate the parameters of civic duty seems more deliberate. It is precisely here, at the intersection between a voluntary subjection to divine law and a dedication to public welfare, that the relevance of religious self-restraint for civil liberty is apparent. Distinct from Locke’s
notion of civil liberty as a freedom from the state, Defoe and Sidney advocate a coercive liberty from vice achieved through the state. Characterizing this process as cleaving and hewing of the “rough pieces” of the citizen into something useful to the community, Sidney’s understanding of civil disciplining is carried forth by Defoe in his narrative of both Crusoe’s and Will Atkins’ repentance/ conversion as precursory to their respective accessions to public office (II.i.83). The religious conversions of Crusoe and Atkins, premised on the subjection of both the physical body and the soul, are offered as analogies for the voluntary subjection of the citizen to the demands of a collective political body.59

The island narrative of Farther Adventures is, by and large, devoted to charting the course from monarchy to republican commonwealth as it concerns the civic disciplining of Atkins and the Reprobates. The benevolent Spanish Governor explains to Crusoe how Atkins and the Reprobates repeatedly threatened their pious kinsmen, burning down their huts and destroying their crops on two separate occasions. In both cases, the Spanish Governor intervenes to drive the Reprobates from the community. When the Reprobates return, they are “tir’d with Wandring, and almost starv’d with Hunger”(59). Importantly, it is this reduction to physical necessity that produces the “very submissive humble Manner” in which the Reprobates “begg’d to be receiv’d again into the Family”(59). As with the capacity of Crusoe’s illness to curb his obstinate waywardness and irreligion, the Reprobates’ near-starvation similarly “reduc’d them to their Senses,” to the kind of “sordid Submissions” Defoe condemns in Jure Divino. Such reduction, by forcing the Reprobates to obey whoever can feed them, is at best a precarious pledge.

The main issue that the Spaniards face in dealing with the recalcitrant Englishmen is similar to that which Defoe grapples with in the pamphlets written during the same period. Whether Defoe is writing about the self-interested party politicians who threaten the security of the Whig party or those who threaten the peerage by ennobling foreigners, the central issue is the problem of self-interest. Atkins and the Reprobates appear incapable of, or at least unwilling to, permit the common interests of the island community to guide or influence their actions. Like many

59 On this point, see Fliegelman’s discussion of religious conversion and political leadership (Prodigals and Pilgrims, 67-78).
Williamite Whigs, Defoe believes that, while some resistance is justifiable (e.g. that underwriting the Revolution of 1688), the extreme form expressed by the Reprobates is unacceptable. What makes the Reprobates’ demotic authority unacceptable is its overwhelming reliance on self-interest as a guiding principle. As Schonhorn usefully indicates, Defoe’s society was one “of hastening complexity [that] could never be regulated by the fragmented will of innumerable self-seeking individuals.” As the Spanish Governor explains to the men, if they “would but live sociably and friendly together, and study in the whole the Good of the Plantation,” the Spaniards and good Englishmen “would be content to work for them, and let them walk about and be as idle as they pleas’d”.

Pinpointing the exact moment in which the Reprobates are reconciled with the community reveals some important correlations between the religious and political discourses of the text. By the time the savages attack the island for the second time, Atkins has become a “most daring bold Fellow…[and] most useful Fellow,” a crucial member of society whose conduct embodies “a standing Rule to us all” (108-9, 197). Yet the first moment in which Atkins and the Reprobates appear to consider the “Good of the Plantation” over their own interests is immediately after the first attack of the savages. Having just survived the attack, the two good Englishmen return home to find their homes and “all their Improvements destroy’d” (105). The rest of the community immediately pitches in, assisting the men in their efforts to rebuild. Significantly, Atkins and the Reprobates are among those who offer their services:

Their three Countrymen, who were not yet noted for having the least Inclination to do any Good, yet as soon as they heard of it (for they living remote Eastward, knew nothing of the Matter ‘till all was over) came and offer’d their Help and Assistance, and did very friendly work for several Days, to restore their Habitation, and make Necessaries for them. (105-6)

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60 Schonhorn, “Literature of Politics,” 22. Over the course of his lifetime, Defoe’s attention to the “necessity for, a unitary executive sovereignty” marks his distance from the anti-monarchism of Locke (ibid., 22). On Defoe’s concerns with unrestrained demotic authority, see Bell, “King Crusoe,” 33-4.
The first attack explicitly refers to “the two English Men” and their families as the only participants in the battle (105). How then are we to understand the Reprobates’ sudden change of heart? To suggest that the first attack of the savages forces the Reprobates to conceive their private interests as contingent on the common interests of the community is inaccurate given the fact that their individual possessions were not threatened by the attack (something that clearly is the case during the second attack of the savages). Hence, the effect of battling an external enemy could not have had the effect of reconciling the reprobates to the community. While Atkins’ central role in the second battle with the savages is crucial for illustrating his enhanced role as community member and martial leader, it does not explain the initial shift from social deviant to friendly neighbour.

I would argue that between the Reprobates’ final altercation with the community and their offer to assist their countrymen, the three men enter into a voluntary compact with the island community that transforms their “sordid submission” to the Spanish Governor into a conscientious obedience based on an express consent to obey the law. Initially insisting that the Reprobates be banished from the community, the two good Englishmen are reminded by the Governor that “it will be long e’er they can raise Corn and Cattle of their own, and they must not starve” (77, emphasis added). The fact that they must “therefore allow them Provisions” finds the Spanish Governor insisting that “they should have none of these Tools, or Provisions, unless they would swear solemnly, that they would not hurt or injure any of the Spaniards with them, or of their Fellow Englishmen” (77). In exchange for protection from starvation, the Reprobates must “swear solemnly, that they would not hurt or injure any” member of the community. By permitting the Reprobates the opportunity to voluntarily and actively consent to the terms of society, the Governor offers the means for the Reprobates to transform the “sordid Submissions” attendant on their forced submission to the Spaniards in moments of physical necessity into a voluntary and lasting obedience. In exchange for their solemn oath to submit to the law of the community and respect the property of the other inhabitants, they are given provisions and tools. The introduction of the oath as a marker of active obedience mirrors the process by which Crusoe’s involuntary subjection (through the sickness) is transformed into a conscientious obedience to God’s law through the introduction of annual fasts.
It is from the point of taking the oath, of actively committing to obey the laws of the community, and not the introduction of an external enemy, that all altercations between the Reprobates and the community cease. By the time Crusoe arrives on the island to reunite with the mutineers, Atkins and the Reprobates assure Crusoe that “they would never have any Interest separate from one another” (134). By arguing that they must not starve, the humane Governor insists that their obedience to society must exist independently of the “sordid Submissions” caused by physical necessity. Insisting that the community has an obligation to prevent them from starving, the Governor’s actions suggest that a viable political community cannot be based on coerced obedience but must involve the voluntary and conscientious obedience to civil law that the ascetic prerequisite of their near-starvation has encouraged.

While they no longer pose a threat to the community, Atkins cannot rise to a position of civic authority until he fully internalizes, not only civic law, but also the divine precedent upon which it is based. Defoe insists that only when Atkins fully repents his former actions and resolves to re-form his life will the self-discipline required of the ascetic citizen be complete. As the French priest reminds Atkins, it is not enough to simply “persevere in that good Disposition he was in” (188). Atkins must take the further step to consciously “forsake his Crimes” and honour “the Grace of God” by a voluntary decision to “support the Convictions that were upon him by a Resolution to reform his Life” (188). Where Crusoe’s reformation takes the form of inaugurating an annual day of fasting, Atkins’ “resolution to reform” takes the form of catechizing, baptizing, and officially marrying his native wife. By insisting on Mary Atkins’ religious education, Atkins enforces the strictures of divine law as the necessary criterion for his own civic authority. It is only after the “most pleasant, agreeable Day” of Atkins’ marriage that Crusoe feels comfortable to leave the island to its inhabitants (188).

As Foucault explains most prominently, the right to govern others is premised on self-governance, a faculty that is enabled, I would argue, by the internalization of divine law. As Crusoe explains, the “sharing out the Land” to the inhabitants “I left to Will. Atkins, who indeed was now grown a most sober, grave, managing Fellow, perfectly reform’d, exceeding Pious and Religious, and...a true sincere Penitent” (191).

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61 See, for example, Foucault, “Ethic of Care for the Self,” 118-9; Foucault, Care of the Self, 41-53; Foucault, Use of Pleasure, 76.
As Sidney and Defoe's endorsement of the Aristotelian King-by-Nature makes clear, to instil civic virtue and moral rectitude in the citizens, the governor must be "a living law to himself and others" (II.x.132). In this regard, the conversion of Atkins' wife speaks as well to the importance of converting the entire civic community for securing the moral character of the community. The repentance of its leaders is, therefore, crucial to providing the "living law" that alone can secure the repentance/conversion of the islanders.62

Commenting in _Farther Adventures_ on the "Government and Laws among them," Crusoe explains how he was "not capable of giving them better Rules, than they were able to give themselves" (192). Yet to arrive at this point of self-governance, Defoe has repeatedly emphasized the necessity of spiritual self-governance for civic responsibility. Giving Will Atkins a bible, Crusoe remarks with wonder how the "most profligate Creature, desperate, headstrong, outrageous, furious, and wicked to a great Degree" had become "a standing Rule to us all" (197). Importantly, the capacity of the Spanish Governor's administration to establish external "standing Rule[s]" is repeatedly shown to be insufficient for curbing the self-interested actions of the English mutineers. Only when the "standing Rule" of civil law is transformed into a "living law" residing in the breasts of each individual does Crusoe feel confident in leaving his subjects to their own devices. By internalizing divine law the inhabitants internalize the civic law of the community, forging, as Defoe would have it, a reciprocal bond between governed and governor that is "form'd above" and modelled on humanity's absolute obedience to God. Only then can the islanders of _Farther Adventures_ promise "to live in Love and good Neighbourhood with one another" (192).

In seeming reaction to the rampant party-interest and economic self-interest Defoe persistently criticizes in pamphlets written between 1717-19, the vision of "a Plantation of sober and religious People" represents an optimistic qualification of the Whig ideal of a rights-based contractual society favoured by the ministries of Stanhope and Sunderland after the departure of Walpole and Townshend in 1717.63 In contrast to

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62 For a discussion of the relationship between political leadership and public piety in the _Crusoe_ narratives, see Austin, "Jesting with the Truth," 14, 20.

Locke’s recommendation of juridical means to protect individuals from their neighbour’s overreaching interests (his “standing Rule”), Defoe recommends a “living law” that qualifies the Whig ideal of Lockean contractualism with a classical republican emphasis on civic virtue. Yet, rather than simply evoking a throwback to puritan ideals of the godly magistrate, the commonwealth plantation of Farther Adventures offers an alternative to institutional restraint as a viable check on self-interest, favouring instead a religiously imbued self-government marked by a classical republican equivalent of the Gospel’s Golden Rule. This equivalent offers a moral standard by which private interest might be successfully assimilated with a concern for public welfare. Unfortunately, however, the capacity of this moral standard to balance civic rights with civic duties and responsibilities in the manner suggested by Sidney is seriously undermined by Crusoe’s adventures after he leaves the island for the last time.

The Failure of the Ascetic Prerequisite

The spectre of self-interest always threatens to derail the republican aspirations of the Crusoe narratives. When Crusoe first returns to the island in Farther Adventures, he resumes his role from volume I as absolute monarch. His meeting with the inhabitants is characterized as one between “Ambassadors of Noblemen” (rather than sailors or ordinary men) “and I a Monarch or a great Conqueror”(43). One is struck by the strange conflation of absolute monarchy with the contractual commonwealth established during Crusoe’s absence. Schonhorn reads Crusoe’s aspirations to monarchical authority as Defoe’s effort to sustain “the ideal of the warrior-king” at a time when he was extremely “skeptical about the idea of a secular social contract and unconvinced that legislative sovereignty could contain the tensions of a changing world.”64 It would be a mistake, however, to accept Crusoe’s aspirations as Defoe’s facile endorsement of “the sword in the hands of a providential monarch.”65 Defoe’s texts certainly depict something of a political teleology from absolutism to self-governing republicanism. Yet it would be equally misleading to consider the transition from Crusoe’s initial assumption of autocrat to his later assumption of benevolent governor

64 Schonhorn, Defoe’s Politics, 4.

65 Ibid., 129. For a careful consideration of Crusoe’s authority as based on contractual relationships, see Kay, Political Constructions, 75-92.
as a straightforward whiggish history lesson depicting the consolidation of mixed monarchy under William III after the reigns of Stuart absolutism. What makes the specific telos of the political narrative difficult to discern is the fact that Defoe’s persistent efforts to find a means of checking self-interest are repeatedly shown to be ineffective in eradicating or harnessing self-interest in the service of the common good.

In Crusoe’s first adventure after leaving the island, Defoe confronts the spectre of self-interest in all its horror. Arriving in Madagascar, the English sailors with whom Crusoe is travelling enter into a safe trading zone agreed upon by Europeans and Madagascans. An English sailor named Thomas Jeffrys breaches the safe trading zone, however, by offering “some rudeness” to a native woman (224). Unwilling to respect the collectively agreed upon terms of the safe zone, Jeffrys refused to “quit his Prize…[and] carried her out of…Sight among the Trees” (224-5). In retaliation for the rape/abduction of this woman, the natives kill thirty-two Europeans. His enraged countrymen go ashore to seek revenge. Finding Jeffrys “hang’d up naked by one Arm, and his Throat cut,” the seamen raze the village to the ground, exterminating many natives in the process (231). Defoe’s point is clarified by Crusoe’s allusion to the biblical story of Dinah’s rape and retaliation (Genesis 34:1-31). As Crusoe notes: “I thought they had carried their Rage too far, and thought of Jacob’s Words to his Sons Simeon and Levi; Cursed be their Anger, for it was fierce; and their Wrath, for it was cruel” (237). As with the biblical narrative, the unrestrained self-interest of one individual threatens the entire community who seek revenge in the most extreme terms. Structurally, the biblical analogy makes perfect sense. In much the same manner that the unrestrained actions of Simeon and Levi threaten Jacob’s reputation and safety in the larger territories of the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the carnal passions of one sailor endanger the security of the whole crew. By further comparing the Jeffrys incident to “Oliver Cromwell taking Drogheda in Ireland, and killing Man, Woman and Child,” Defoe underscores the presence of a rage incapable of being curbed (234). For Crusoe, Dinah, Drogheda, and Madagascar were “Instances of a rage altogether barbarous, and of a Fury, something [sic] beyond what was human, that we thought it impossible our Men could be guilty of it” (234, emphasis added). Defoe’s decision to place these events directly after the hopeful consolidation of the island’s republican commonwealth
indicates something of Defoe’s own doubts regarding the capacity of the ascetic prerequisite to protect the community against the excessive passions of the individual. While Crusoe takes the moral high ground with regard to the Madagascar Massacre—distancing himself as a critical observer in a way that we would expect Defoe’s protagonist to react given the lessons learned during his own ascetic isolation on the island—, his subsequent involvement in the razing of the Tartar village severely undermines the effect of the ascetic prerequisite. Crusoe’s initial admiration for the Tartar people quickly “turn’d to Rage” upon observing the pagan idol (331), Cham-Chi-Thaungu, in the centre of the village (see Fig. 2). In a manner that closely parallels that of the English sailors during the Madagascar Massacre, Crusoe is unable to restrain his anger and resolves “to go and destroy that vile, abominable Idol” (332). Further emphasizing the parallel, Crusoe restates the events of the Madagascar Massacre to his men prior to razing the Tartar village: “When I had done [relating the massacre], I added, that I thought we ought to do so to this village” (333). The manner in which the English sailors set fire to the Madagascans’ huts and then “knowck[ed] them on the Head” as they came out, is echoed by Crusoe’s own burning of the Tartars’ tents and “knocking the Creatures that were there on the Head when they came out” (232, 335). While Defoe certainly makes a distinction between the two events on the basis of Crusoe’s demolition of pagan idols in the service of Christianity, he also underscores Crusoe’s ultimate inability to restrain his own passions. Indeed, Crusoe’s willingness to engage in a series of actions he so ardently condemns on a previous occasion is only slightly less striking than the celerity with which his admiration quickly escalates into an uncontrollable rage. By comparing the Madagascar Massacre with the razing of the Tartar village, Defoe demonstrates the ultimate insufficiency of the ascetic prerequisite to effectively internalize self-restraint in his protagonist.

Readers will not, of course, be especially surprised by Crusoe’s moral vacillations at this late point in the narrative. Still, one is somewhat surprised at Defoe’s apparent willingness to undercut Crusoe’s island education so unequivocally. Crusoe’s vacillations begin much earlier at the apex of his conversion when his spiritual insights are threatened by his personal aspirations to political power. During his fourth annual
Fig. 2. Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner* (1876).  

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fast, Crusoe connects spiritual sovereignty with kingship and imperial authority:

In the first Place, I was remov’d from all the Wickedness of the World here. I had neither the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eye, or the Pride of Life \[1\text{ John }2.16\]. I had nothing to covet; for I had all that I was now capable of enjoying: I was Lord of the whole Mannor; or if I pleas’d, I might call my self King, or Emperor over the whole Country which I had Possession of. There were no Rivals. I had no Competitor, none to dispute Sovereignty or Command with me.

\[(109)\]

The terminology employed here typifies Crusoe’s strangely conflicted desire to both restrain his Inclination and indulge the overwhelming temptation to personal gain. Coupled with self-congratulations for freeing himself from the fetters of carnal lust, an emancipation laughably enabled by the decided lack of any present temptations, is Crusoe’s characteristic stylization as absolute monarch or emperor. While there is something of a Pauline militarism implied by the proximity of spiritual independence and political sovereignty, Crusoe’s yoking of spiritual freedom with an unrivalled possession of the entire island reveals Defoe’s persistent scepticism regarding the ability to effectively curb self-interest.

The contradictions between religious humility and political imperiousness are brought to fore by Crusoe’s conversations with the Banished Prince of Tobolski. Occurring near the close of Farther Adventures, this meeting appears to undercut the capacity of an ascetic prerequisite to check self-interest. In one of his less humble states, Crusoe expatiates on the security of his political authority while on the island. Interrupting the Prince, Crusoe boasts of being “a greater and more powerful Prince than ever the Czar of Muscovy was, tho’ my Dominions were not so large, or my People so many”\((350)\). In contrast to Crusoe’s claims, the Prince informs him, “with a Sigh, that the true Greatness of Life was to be Master of ourselves”\((351)\). Deploying a Pauline rhetoric of his own, the Prince rehearses the point that Crusoe’s “Lord of the Mannor” speech alludes to: personal victory against one’s inherent sinfulness is more valuable

than secular sovereignty. The Prince argues that he has found “more Felicity in the Retirement he seem’d to be banish’d to there, than ever he found in the highest Authority he enjoy’d in the Court of his Master the Czar” (351). The Prince’s phrase “seem’d to be banish’d to” is crucial to his mindset. Just as Crusoe comes to realize after his second annual fast that “it was possible I might be more happy in this Solitary Condition, than I should have been in a Liberty of Society,” that it might be possible to change “both my Sorrows and my Joys,” the Prince’s contentment is grounded in his ability to transform involuntary banishment into voluntary retirement (96). Echoing Crusoe’s own provisional triumph over Inclination, the Prince explains that “the Heighth of human Wisdom was to ring our Tempers down to our Circumstances; and to make a Calm within” (351).

Despite Defoe’s insistence on belabouring such wisdom, Crusoe struggles to implement the central lessons that have been made so clear to the reader. As his claim to being the “Lord of the whole Mannor” attests to, Defoe’s notion of real sovereignty embodies a tenuously held balance between a spiritual liberty defined by freedom through obedience (positive liberty) and a civic liberty defined by the unfettered pursuit of self-interests (negative liberty). In the end, the reader is left with the troubling irreconcilability between King Crusoe and Lockean Crusoe, between Crusoe’s satisfaction in relating to the islanders of “in a kind of haughty majestick Way, like an Old Patriarchal Monarch” and his willingness to relegate his “influence over them” to that of a “Father and Benefactor, [who] had no Authority or Power, to Act or Command one way or other, farther than voluntary Consent mov’d them to comply” (Farther Adventures, 217). Ian Bell explains the recurrence of Crusoe’s absolute authority as an “interim patriarchy” acceptable only during times of war (32). Lacking the ability to establish legislative and executive branches of government, his government is necessarily a “transitional stage between the state of nature and the state of society” (33). Bell’s attempt to explain away the apparent contradiction between republican values and Crusoe’s self-fashioning as an absolute monarch, however, underestimates the persistent threats of self-interest that recur in the later sections of Farther Adventures.

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68 On the defining characteristics of negative and positive liberty, see Skinner, “Republican Ideal,” 293-309.
Defoe’s *Crusoe* narratives provide three distinct versions of political authority: Stuart absolutism, Williamite monarchy, and liberal republicanism. Importantly, despite repeated hopes that an *ascetic prerequisite* might succeed in transcending the contradictions between these models, the *Crusoe* narratives reveal the ultimate inability of such prerequisites to guarantee the civic virtue demanded of the citizen of a self-governing republic. Seemingly against the author’s desire to establish a viable solution to the irreconcilability of self-interest and public service, the *Crusoe* narratives betray a persistent suspicion regarding the efficacy of such solutions. While it is difficult to ascertain whether Defoe questions the efficacy of the *ascetic prerequisite*, or whether his conflicting allegiances to law/order and entrepreneurial interests inadvertently subvert his intentions, I suspect that Defoe’s articulation of an ascetic prerequisite is offered as a sincere alternative to the political aporias of his time. Defoe's will to transcend the threat of self-interest is ultimately derailed by deep-seated cultural anxieties regarding the irreconcilability between the self-interest and self-sacrifice central to civic duty in a self-governing republic. Ultimately, Defoe's vision for the Hanoverian citizen is forced to acknowledge that the citizen is haunted by both the prospect of Crusoe as absolute monarch and the prospect of Crusoe as republican magistrate. In the next chapter, we will investigate Richardson's use of asceticism to figure a more complex mode of ascetic citizenship, one that confronts directly the very contradictions that Defoe struggles to circumvent. Favouring deferral over transcendence, Richardson’s *Clarissa* provides a crucial development of Defoe’s inaugural investigation of the relevance and limitations of deploying ascetic tropologies to explain civic subjectivity.
Chapter Two
Ascetic Deferrals: Fasting as Weaning-Time in Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa

LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me; Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.

—Psalms 131:2

The previous chapter identified the ultimate inefficacy of the ascetic prerequisite as a viable mode of ascetic citizenship. The capacity of Robinson Crusoe’s exemplary solitude and religiously influenced self-restraint to provide the conditions necessary for disciplining the individual civic subject was found insufficient to check and moderate self-interested inclination with a keen sense of the duties and responsibilities owed to the commonwealth. Crusoe’s efforts to transform his banishment into willful reclusion and his ability to transform the involuntary near-starvation he experiences during his sickness into a voluntary ritual of annual fasting are undercut by his inability to internalize the lessons of his isolation in the manner of the Banished Prince. The ascetic life as a rhetorically persuasive analogy for the self-abnegation inherent in republican models of civic duty is found to depend upon more than simply physical isolation from society, a point the Banished Prince repeatedly insists upon.

In Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa; or, the History of a Young Lady (1747-8), the protagonist suffers a similar banishment from society. As Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse suggest: “Richardson, one could argue, simply replaces Crusoe’s island in the New World with the interior spaces of the household, the female body, and the private world of the emotions.”1 While their comment certainly reduces the complexity of both novels it is nonetheless suggestive of their thematic similarities.

Where Crusoe’s failure to exercise moral restraint in his economic pursuits results in his exile on the island, Clarissa Harlowe’s failure to obey her father’s prohibition against corresponding with the infamous libertine, Robert Lovelace, inaugurates a chain of events that involve her estrangement from her family, her entrapment and subsequent rape at Mrs. Sinclair’s brothel, and her eventual seclusion and death at the Smiths’

1 Armstrong and Tennenhouse, “American Origins,” 390. While the authors compare Richardson’s Pamela with Defoe’s iconic castaway, their suggestive comparison holds true for the similarities between Clarissa and Crusoe as well.
residence. The most glaring distinction between Defoe and Richardson’s protagonists is, of course, their gender. As I hope to illustrate, however, the specific issue of gender is one that ascetic citizenship attempts to circumvent in favour of a more general Christian civic identity. As such, I would argue that Richardson’s heroine is an ascetic citizen that is female rather than, strictly speaking, a female ascetic citizen.

In the final volumes of Richardson’s narrative, Clarissa engages in a far more extreme (and ostensibly more sincere) regimen of self-mortification than Defoe’s protagonist. The extreme nature of Clarissa’s religious practice—and one might think of the macabre and seemingly unprecedented purchase and decoration of her own coffin—makes explicit the religious context of self-mortification inferred by Defoe’s narrative. In addition to rendering the religious dimension of Clarissa’s voluntary suffering more overt, Richardson shifts the express purpose of Clarissa’s ascetic practices. On the one hand, Clarissa’s rigorous fasting, her divestment of worldly possessions, her purchase of a coffin, and her composition of farewell epistles to her friends signal a keen awareness of the steps necessary to secure a holy death. Importantly, however, the ascetic regimen that Clarissa pursues in order to repent and atone for her sins is neither aimed at reintegration into society nor ultimately at reconciliation with her family. Thus, in the most general sense, Clarissa’s actions do not serve the same purpose as they do for Crusoe: that of ostensibly preparing the subject for the demands of civic membership. Despite Clarissa’s desire to gain the pardon and blessing of her parents and relatives prior to her death, her regimen of self-mortification consistently points out of this world. In seeking reconciliation with God, Clarissa’s asceticism dramatizes the well-established Christian paradox of being “in the world, but not of the world.” Living in the world while ostensibly absenting oneself from participating in secular affairs keys into the body/soul duality implied by Christian

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2 Such steps are repeatedly outlined in seventeenth-century devotional manuals such as Jeremy Taylor’s The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying (London, 1739) and William Sherlock’s A Practical Discourse Concerning Death (London, 1742). First published in 1651 and 1689 respectively, Taylor and Sherlock’s contributions to the ars moriendi tradition are among the most popular manuals on holy dying. In a 15 December 1748 letter to Lady Dorothy Bradshaigh, Samuel Richardson hopes that Bradshaigh will “be pleased...to honour the volumes [of Clarissa] with a place with your Taylor’s Living and Dying, with your Practice of Piety, and Nelson’s Fasts and Feasts”(Anna Laetitia Barbauld, ed., The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson (London, 1804), 4: 237-8). On Richardson’s relation to this tradition, see Margaret Anne Doody’s excellent reading in A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 150-87.
philosophies of *contemptu mundi*: the soul is purified and elevated to the extent that the physical body is debased. Interestingly, despite Richardson’s repeated characterization of Clarissa’s devotional regime in terms of this duality, *Clarissa* achieves its most poignant statement of individual religious subjectivity in what we might call an *ascetic deferral* between the various binary oppositions that the dizzying polyvocality of the novel’s epistolary exchanges repeatedly introduces.

Between the characters’ various assertions of right/wrong, black/white, sacred/profane, and body/soul, *Clarissa* reveals Richardson’s interest in the possibility of postponing the moment of deciding between such polarized categories.3 Within the formal structure of the novel, Clarissa’s ascetic self-regulation forges a space of rhetorical suspension or deferral at the threshold between absolute moral categories. While her dogged preparation for a holy death most obviously points *out of this world*, prior to her death Clarissa spends the greatest portion of her time achieving a provisional state of other-worldliness in this world. In this sense, her devotional practices do not simply lay the groundwork for an easy transition to the afterlife, but confront the contradiction between life and death as an irreconcilable opposition similar to that between right/wrong and sacred/profane. Her efforts, therefore, seek to establish what she repeatedly calls a “weaning-time” between life and death, a space characterized by a disposition to defer choosing between the mutually exclusive categories of carnal mortality and pious immortality.4 In doing so, Richardson’s text qualifies Defoe’s *ascetic prerequisite*, the facile equation of civic identity with physical isolation and bodily self-mortification, with a more complex conceptualization of ascetic citizenship as an *ascetic disposition* defined by a deferred endurance of the various paradoxes of the times.

In the postscript to the first edition, Richardson underscores the “religious plan”(1495) and the “*Christian System* on which [his novel] is formed”(1498). This chapter argues that Richardson’s “*Christian System*” provides a site of rhetorical refuge

3 Tom Keymer is certainly correct to suggest that, in preferring “investigation to pronouncement,” Richardson’s evaluation of Clarissa’s plight “voices and explores both contrary extremes, finding rights and wrongs on either side” (*Richardson’s Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 122-3).

4 Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa; or, the History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (New York: Penguin, 1985), 1227, 1306. Hereafter cited within the text.
for the reader, allowing him/her to exist in the moment of indeterminacy and, like the
author himself, refuse to decide on the text’s most important questions. Clarissa’s
various rituals of physical asceticism (fasting, sleep deprivation, solitude) redouble the
rhetorical asceticism of the narrative as a whole. In forging a “weaning-time” between
life and death through physical asceticism, Clarissa addresses the novel’s central
epistemological scepticism by producing a rhetorical site of critical deferral. By invoking
the orthodox Christian paradox of being in this world but not of this world, Clarissa
provides a useful analogy for understanding the position of Richardson’s readers.
Withdrawn from the partisanship of this world, Richardson’s readers occupy the
precarious position of considering and judging the various arguments presented by the
text’s characters without ever taking a side. This does not, however, represent a
comprehensive quietism. In making non-partisanship an exemplary Christian virtue,
one that defers partial human judgment to God’s superior judgment, Richardson
identifies self-denial, and particularly the subordination of mortal judgment to the
ultimate inscrutability of divine knowledge, as the central tenet of his Christian System.

Ascetic practice cuts across Richardson’s text in complex but consistent ways.
For the most part, it is presented as at best a laughable and outmoded religious practice
and at worst a dangerous perversion of Protestant piety. Commenting on the effects of
Jack Belford’s intimate attendance of Clarissa, Lovelace writes that by the time he
returns from Paris he expects his friend “will be all crusted and bearded over with
penitence, self-denial and mortification; a very anchorite, only an itinerant one,
journeying over in hope to cover a multitude of his own sins, by proselytizing his old
companion”(1432). For Lovelace, asceticism figures a self-indulgent and superstitious
religious piety associated with the Roman Catholic monastic tradition. Clarissa similarly
evokes Catholic asceticism when she comments on the pains her family suffers in trying
to convince their obdurate daughter. “Were ours a Roman Catholic family,” she explains
to her friend Anna Howe, “how much happier for me, that they thought a nunnery
would answer all their views!”(83). Once again, asceticism figures the Catholic monastic
tradition in something less than a positive light. Yet, as I suggested above, Richardson’s
text does not accept the *ascetic prerequisite* as a viable model for disciplining the civic
subject. In addition to the problem of Catholicism, shipping Clarissa off to a nunnery
would not succeed, any more than Crusoe’s tenure on the island, in fostering an internalization of divine-civic law.

Balancing these playful jabs at ascetic practice, however, are the text’s consistently positive endorsements of asceticism. As we shall see, much of the heroine’s devotional regimen in the final volumes of Clarissa—her incessant fasting, praying, watchfulness, and withdrawal from society—are characteristically ascetic in nature. In the revised postscript to the third edition, Richardson argues that in an age where “Scepticism and Infidelity [are] openly avowed, and even…propagated from the Press” the “great doctrines of the Gospel [are] brought into question”(349). Specifically, the doctrines of “self-denial and mortification [are] blotted out of the catalogue of christian virtue”(350). Richardson’s interest in religious self-denial as a viable antidote to freethinking crops up in his correspondence as well. Responding to Miss Highmore, Richardson argues: “You call that maxim cruel, which teaches to act against inclination, and call it my maxim.”

While Richardson insists that he is “far from thinking it a maxim that is always to be followed,” he does admit that “it is a safer rule than to pursue an inclination.” As I hope to argue, any understanding of Richardson’s interest in ascetic regimens of self-denial must be balanced by attending to his concern with the excessive abuses of such practices, abuses mockingly figured in the text by the Catholic tradition.

Among the books that Clarissa finds in Mrs. Sinclair’s closet is John Inett’s Devotions (525). The text in question is Innet’s A guide to the devout Christian. In three parts…To which is added, A guide to repentance: (1723). Commending the ritual of private fasts practiced by the primitive Christians, Inett’s text is characteristic of Richardson’s tempered endorsement of asceticism. In its careful warning against the dangers of overzealous self-mortification, Inett’s text (like Horneck’s Happy Ascetick) is characteristically anxious about differentiating a rigorous Protestant practical piety from the perceived irrational enthusiasms of Roman Catholic asceticism. Speaking of the

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5 To Miss Highmore (1749-50?), Barbauld, The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson, 2: 221. For a slightly different reading of this passage, see Allan Wendt, "Clarissa's Coffin," Philological Quarterly 39 (1960): 484n8.

6 Inett’s Devotions was first published in 1688 (London). Later editions of the text published in the eighteenth century appended Innet’s A Guide to Repentance; Or, The Character and Behaviour of the Devout Christian in Retirement (London, 1692). This additional section contains a fascinating discussion of religious isolation and private devotions. All references are to John Inett, A Guide to Repentance; or, the Character and Behaviour of the Devout Christian in Retirement (London, 1692).
abuses of fasting, a topic particularly relevant to Richardson’s heroine, Innet explains that the fasting penitent “does not abandon the Station God has set him in; he does not fly to a Cloyster or a Desart, nor believe he shall be more serviceable to God by rendring himself useless to Men; that Walls will purge the Corruptions which lodge in his Nature, or Solitude quench the Fire he carries thither in his Blood”(3). While he admits that fasting and “frequent retreats from the World, to abandon and lay aside the pursuit and thoughts thereof” are efficacious, he insists that “God [never] intended we should banish our selves from Society”(4). It is not, therefore, ascetic practice that is being criticized but the perversion of such practices, perversions that, tellingly enough, immure the individual in the desert or the cloister. Self-denial and mortification should not, as Richardson suggests, be “blotted out of the catalogue of Christian virtues.” These practice, however, are only laudable if they enable individuals “to act against inclination.” Where Crusoe’s ascetic prerequisite ultimately fails to curb self-interest, Clarissa evokes an asceticism grounded in the patient endurance and humble deferral of human judgment to God’s wisdom, an asceticism that proves that “cloistered confinement was not necessary to make English women excel”(1469).

Caught Birds and Starving Birds

The threat of excessive asceticism is announced most poignantly by Lovelace’s simile of the caught bird. Writing to Belford, Lovelace discuss the libertine’s approach to seduction by introducing the “simile of a bird new caught” to explain a model of passive obedience strikingly similar to the obedience by starvation trope deployed by Defoe. Struggling with the recognition that he might have to forgo the sweet “joys that come with willingness” if he fails to persuade Clarissa to voluntarily relinquish her chastity, Lovelace asks what is to be expected from “a woman of education, and a lover of forms” such as Clarissa (556-7). To make this compromise he puts forth a model of obedience that allows for “consent in struggle” and “yielding in resistance”(557). The simile of the caught bird attempts to explain how, after “the first conflict is over,” resistance will become “weaker and weaker, till willingness follow”(557). In much the

7 While, admittedly, I have taken this quotation out of context, I find it to be extremely suggestive of Richardson’s larger characterization of ascetic practice. Howe’s remarks here refer to Clarissa’s fine needlework and Morden’s desire to carry it to Italy to prove to the nuns of that country that retirement from the world is not a prerequisite for the production of such fine arts.
same way that Crusoe learns that “hunger will tame a Lyon,” Lovelace’s description of the “sportive cruelty” of young boys catching birds reveals the “charming gradations by which the ensnared volatile has been brought to bear with its new condition” (557). At first, the caught bird “refusing all sustenance...beats and bruises itself against its wires” (557). Tirelessly, it struggles with “renewed rage” to free itself from its “well-secured cage.” Eventually, finding its efforts unsuccessful, “it lays itself down and pants at the bottom of the cage, seeming to bemoan its cruel fate and forfeited liberty” (557). Fully defeated, the caught bird’s “new habitation becomes familiar; and it hops about from perch to perch, resumes its wonted cheerfulness, and every day sings a song to amuse itself, and reward its keeper” (557). So far the comparison with Crusoe’s model of obedience by starvation holds. As we have seen, through suffering near-starvation, Crusoe’s goats, Will Atkins and the Reprobates, and Crusoe himself are brought into (if only temporarily) a cheerful submission to external authority.

In the months after her rape, Clarissa embarks on a wilful regimen of fasting, one that threatens to descend into self-starvation. This is the underlying threat inherent in Lovelace’s simile, a threat that invalidates his model of obedience. Tom Keymer rightly notes that the analogy begins to elude Lovelace with his admission that “I have known a bird actually starve itself and die with grief, at its being caught and caged” (557). His admission introduces the danger inherent not only in this model of obedience, but in ascetic practice more generally. In the model proposed by Defoe or Lovelace, this possibility serves no one: Crusoe’s goats die; the valuable contribution of the recalcitrant Mutineers is lost; Lovelace’s goal of seducing the obdurate maiden ends with her death by starvation. Lovelace wonders which scenario will apply to his seduction of Clarissa: “how shall I know whether this sweet bird may not be brought to sing me a fine song, and in time to be as well contented with her condition as I have brought other birds to be” (557). Clarissa is, as we know, not like other birds. Yet while Lovelace ultimately robs Clarissa of her chastity, he is unable to persuade her to give it up. Only by drugging her with laudanum can he penetrate her. Rape replaces seduction

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and Clarissa’s will remains inviolate. Importantly, Clarissa’s impenetrable wilfulness is attended by what appears to be a perverted example of penitential fasting, an example that ultimately leads to self-starvation and death.

The possibility of the self-starving captive bird provides an important unifying logic to the polyvocality and chaos of Clarissa’s world. In its excessive wilfulness, it implies a dangerous zeal, one that has significant affinities with the excessive religious practices of Catholic asceticism. Why, we might ask, does Clarissa insist on such a rigorous and wilful regimen of fasting and self-mortification after her rape? Certainly part of her devotion stems from a need to atone for her sins (ultimately that of disobeying her father’s demand to cease correspondence with Lovelace). This chapter argues that, on another level, Clarissa’s devotional regime represents a perverse dramatization of the model of obedience informing both Lovelace’s libertine creed and the Harlowes’ insistence on absolute filial obedience.

The clearest example of the affinities between the Harlowes’ disciplinary regime and Clarissa’s private devotions is the question of the Harlowe curse. While Richardson certainly seems the conservative in his insistence on filial obedience, he also seems keenly aware of the abuse of too much power, or of power illegitimately exercised. The quasi-ecclesiastical authority expressed by the Harlowes’ cursing and banishing of their daughter dramatizes Richardson’s concern with the perversion or abuses of religious authority and, more generally, with the justness of divine authority exercised through human hands. It is for this reason that Clarissa’s eventual acceptance of the suffering that attends her initial disobedience is matched by her increased questioning of the capacity of her father’s malediction to bind her sin in the next world. Her forced isolation at Harlowe Place is thus transformed into a voluntarily assumed “shining-time” of adversity in which Clarissa hopes to reconcile herself, no longer with her family, but with God (579). Richardson is careful, however, to qualify Clarissa’s “shining-time” by peppering the text with suggestions that she may shine too brightly.

In one of the few readings of the parental curse in Clarissa, Florian Stuber notes that Mr. Harlowe represents authority in general. In this way, Richardson “presents in Clarissa a society with a weakened and weakening sense of and respect for ‘authority’”(Stuber, “On Fathers and Authority in Clarissa,” Studies in English Literature 25.3 [1985]: 560). Maud Ellmann similarly notes that “the novel hints that it is not the father who destroys Clarissa so much as the absence of an ultimate authority to guarantee the morals or the meanings of her world”(Maud Ellmann, The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing & Imprisonment [London: Virago, 1999], 75).
In shining too brightly, Clarissa simply internalizes the excessive authoritarianism of the Harlowes. Yet, as we shall see, the excessive discipline of the Harlowes and the equally excessive self-discipline of her “shining-time” are offset by Clarissa’s efforts to forge a “weaning-time.” Her “weaning-time” functions as a crucial interim space that seeks to balance the extreme polarities of her world, polarities that place the inefficacy of mortal decision-making in high relief.

The Authority of Humans to Condemn

Any discussion of the political import of Richardson’s *Clarissa* must attend to the complex and nuanced manner in which the author weaves political, religious, moral, and domestic analogies and allusions together to produce an ironic and often contradictory network of cultural discourses. In considering the broader questions of obedience and authority, Richardson presents Clarissa’s concluding devotional regime, no less than Mr. Harlowe’s curse, as politically relevant events. Similarly, the larger debate concerning filial disobedience in the first instalment encodes important religious analogies as well as the more obviously political ones. While I concede the political importance of filial disobedience for Richardson, I want to highlight the other parallel conflation he draws attention to, that of the conflict of man with God. Richardson’s attention to James Harlowe’s curse, as the most extreme example of the abuse of parental authority, can be also understood as an illegitimate appropriation of divine authority.

One of the most striking examples of Richardson’s tendency to address political or civic issues through religious discourse is his correspondence with the young Hester Mulso (Chapone). Between 12 October 1750 and 3 January 1751, Mulso corresponded extensively with Richardson. A prominent bluestocking and author of *Letters on the*

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Improvement of the Mind (1773), Mulso was one of the most critically acute of Richardson’s correspondents, recommending over six revisions to Clarissa, which the author seems to have complied with. Mulso’s extended debate on Clarissa’s filial disobedience and the justness of her father’s authority is most interesting, however, for the source texts with which Mulso and Richardson underscore their respective points. While Richardson’s corresponding letters are not extant, from the context of Mulso’s responses it is clear that her persistent quotations from natural law theorists such as Locke, Pufendorf, and Grotius respond to Richardson’s equally persistent quotations from devotional works. In her third letter (3 Jan 1751), Mulso outlines the members of a moral triumvirate in a conciliatory effort to agree with Richardson (at least provisionally) on the issue of Clarissa’s disobedience. In their moral “league in triumvirate,” they will “admit the good Bishop Fleetwood into the confederacy,” but “bar Bishop Hall, who would reduce me to the condition of an Indian screen, and allow my father to item me amongst his goods and chattels” Joseph Hall’s dogmatic views concerning the absolute authority of the father are expelled, as are Richard Allestree (“the author of the Whole Duty of Man”)’s remarks that “rational beings [are] the property and possessions of a fellow creature” (91-2). “Algernon Sydney [sic] is admitted,” she notes, “who speaks of the duty of children as arising from benefits received,” as is Mulso’s (and Richardson’s) favourite, John Locke (92).

The debate between Mulso and Richardson over the most appropriate theorists provides a useful context for understanding the larger political implications of Richardson’s novel, implications that American readers at the turn of the century were

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12 See Keymer, *Richardson's Clarissa*, 97, 115, 121.

13 Hester Mulso [Chapone], *The Posthumous Works of Mrs. Chapone. Containing Her Correspondence with Mr. Richardson* (London: John Murray, 1807), 2: 91. Hereafter cited within the text.


15 In Mulso’s first and second letters, she quotes Locke’s theories on filial duty in the chapter “Of Parental Power” (Locke, *Two Treatises*, 304-318).
quick to point out. In John Adams’ oft-quoted letter to William Cunningham (15 March 1804), threats to the freedom of the American democratic citizen are figured as Lovelacean individuals. As Adams suggests, “Democracy is Lovelace and the people are Clarissa.” While we will have more to say about Adams’ remarks in the following chapters, it is worth emphasizing the acuity of Mulso’s observations regarding the political dimension of Richardson’s text. In response to Richardson’s apparently consistent recourse to religious doctrine to buttress his argument concerning reciprocal duties, Mulso retorts by summoning a bevy of Whig political theories on natural liberty, gratitude, and contractual relations. Where Richardson recommends the superior judgment of the parent over the child, Mulso responds by asking whether breached contracts nullify the terms of obedience.

Mulso’s trenchant reading of civic obedience, contractual authority, and natural liberty into Richardson’s text is matched by the author’s obdurate unwillingness to concede the political relevance of Clarissa’s central debates of filial obedience and parental tyranny. Yet, if Mulso’s quotations from Richardson’s letters are any indication, he seems less concerned with ousting Locke and Sidney in favour of Hall and Allestree (he himself quotes Locke at length in *Vade Mecum* and apparently introduces Sidney to Mulso) than he is with impressing upon his young protégée a general need for obedience and respect of authority. While Richardson refuses any frank political evaluation of Clarissa’s plight, his novel consistently engages with what Rachel Carnell and Keymer have identified as a “broader debate about obedience and authority,” one that betrays both an “instinctive authoritarianism” and a “fear of insurrection.” In the very least, Mulso’s comments should remind us of the relevance (for eighteenth-century readers) of Clarissa’s plight to broadly construed political questions concerning what it means to be a female civic subject in Hanoverian England.

Such questions are most pointedly addressed by Clarissa’s attention to the manner in which parental authority is contingent upon the relationship between earthly and divine fatherhood. In the subtitle to *Clarissa*, Richardson insists upon the

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17 Carnell, “Treasonable Correspondence,” 276; Keymer, *Richardson’s Clarissa*, 120, 122.
misconduct of both Clarissa and her parents. While “the Faults of the one Party, in a reciprocal Duty, were not sufficient Justification of the other for a Failure in his or hers,” Richardson draws the reader’s attention to both filial duty and parental abuse of power, a topic that Richardson insists provides “the Foundation of the whole” and “a good deal of the instruction essential to a work of this nature.” By insisting on the reciprocal duties of parent and child, Richardson situates his text within a larger body of eighteenth-century conduct literature on relative duties by authors such as William Fleetwood and Patrick Delany. Fleetwood explains that “forasmuch as parents are, next to God, the authors of our being. God indeed is properly our father, and earthly parents do but convey to us that being which God produces: but the consequence from this is, that although we owe more absolute and unlimited obedience to God, the Fountain of our existence; yet we are to honour parents, as his substitutes upon earth” (141-2). As Keymer right notes, “in contemplating the conflict of child with father, the reader also contemplates the conflict of people with prince and the conflict of man with God. A kind of conflation is at work, confirming Clarissa’s resistance to ‘authorities so sacred’” (120).

Like his contemporaries, however, Richardson recognizes the limits of such sacred authorities. If Clarissa serves to promote the “needful Doctrine” of filial duty, it also serves as “a Warning to Parents in the Punishment worse than that of Death, of the Harlowe-Parents for their defects in theirs.” “Is not the Intent of the History of Clarissa,” he asks Mrs. Chapone, “to condemn and punish by the Consequences of their


19 Keymer provides a fascinating historical account of Richardson’s interest in contemporary debates on filial obligation and parental fallibility in texts such as Patrick Delany’s Fifteen Sermons Upon Social Duties (London, 1744) and William Fleetwood’s The Relative Duties of Parents, Husbands, Masters and Children, Wives, and Servants (London, 1705). See Keymer, Richardson’s Clarissa, 95-105; Carnell, “Treasonable Correspondence,” 273-7. Fliegelman argues that Clarissa is “the quintessential presentation of the inner drama that would inform the rhetoric and ideology of the American revolution against patriarchal authority,” effectively linking rational and scriptural traditions in a way that American revolutionaries would do in understanding “America’s flight from its parental tyrant, England, and later its ‘treacherous ally,’ France” (Prodigals and Pilgrims, 83).

20 Carroll, Selected Letters, 199-200.
Richardson’s admonition against excessive punishment, against the Harlowe curse as a “punishment worse than that of Death,” reflects the fraught casuistical discussions of filial obedience put forth by writers such as Delany and Fleetwood. While Richardson repeatedly clarifies that, despite the injustice of her parents’ actions, he is not excusing Clarissa’s disobedience, he repeatedly introduces the possibility of the Harlowes’ impious usurpation of divine authority to call vengeance down upon their daughter. As Fleetwood notes, parental authority is issued under “strong and strict Commands of God, under severe Penalties, and huge Rewards, so that whatever Christian [parent] now neglects the performance of them, he shall not only be accounted heedless, ill advis’d, and unnatural, but highly sinful and provoking, and shall without Repentance be severely punished” (163–4).

Richardson’s apparent scepticism over the divine bestowal of authority to earthly parents signals the chief question of Clarissa’s relationship with the Harlowes: who is justified to act as God’s representative, conferring punishment and reward at His behest? Robert Erickson, in his excellent book, *The Language of the Heart, 1600–1750*, notes that while no one can curse but God, “Clarissa’s father is not God, but a father speaks with the sanction of the Lord, and even in the early eighteenth century, a father’s word still had the reputed power of that sanction.” I would argue, however, that Erickson’s understanding of parental authority as an unproblematic conflation of earthly and heavenly fatherhood is not reflected by Richardson’s own views on the subject. Richardson draws a distinction between justified and unjustified parental authority that derives from the difference between punishment as correction and punishment as condemnation. Suggesting that Clarissa’s parents have assumed an illegitimate authority to condemn, Richardson notes that the Harlowe parents should “leave Vengeance to Him to whom Vengeance belongs.” The distinction between corrective or castigatory punishment and denunciative punishment is most strongly confronted with the parental curse. The issue of the curse, more than any other, questions the legitimacy of the Harlowe parents’ authority.

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21 Ibid., 204.


The Efficacy of a Father’s Curse

As Anna Howe notes to Clarissa in the immediate aftermath of receiving the curse: “None but God can curse; parents and others, whoever they be, can only pray to Him to curse.”24 Perhaps the most important recommendation Mulso makes to Richardson concerns Clarissa’s reaction to her father’s curse. As Mulso never tired of asking Richardson: “Why is Clarissa, who is drawn as a woman of so good an understanding, and who reasons so justly on all other subjects, to be so superstitious and weak in her apprehensions of parental authority?”(33). Responding to Richardson’s recourse to Isaac’s blessing to explain Clarissa’s fears, Mulso insists that this example, one of blessing and not of cursing in no way “convince[s] me of the efficacy of such unholy petitions” as Mr. Harlowe’s curse (79). Quoting James 5.16, Mulso explains that “Though ‘the prayer of a righteous man availeth much,’ the imprecations of an enraged and unnatural father can have no other effect than to bring down vengeance on his own head”(80). Unwilling to allow superstition in a character as pious and rational as Clarissa, Mulso admits that it “would have been unnatural in her character not to be shocked at it, to the last degree; particularly for her father’s own sake”(81). As Shirley Van Marter notes, “Though Richardson never relinquishes his general belief that it is natural for Clarissa to feel pain at such a rejection, he does shift the reasons for her pain away from fear for herself and toward concern for her father.”25 Mulso’s reference to the possibility of future punishment for her father for unjustly assuming the authority of God is worth noting. Clarissa “had indeed reason to fear,” Mulso continues, “that he had drawn on himself divine displeasure”(81). Mulso argues persuasively that Clarissa’s concern “for his eternal welfare and worldly fame, who had none for hers, is a most notable, and amiable grief, worthy of Clarissa, worthy of a Christian”(81).

The scepticism expressed by Mulso and Howe regarding the efficacy of the Harlowe curse reflects a larger concern during the first half of the eighteenth century with the congruence between divine and earthly authority. As a truly biblical man, James Sr. emphasizes the paternal role of educating his children in the morality of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. Unsurprisingly, Clarissa faints at her father’s


25 Marter, “Richardson’s Debt,” 26; see also Duncan and Eaves, Samuel Richardson: A Biography, 316.
demand that she marry Solmes specifically because, “as a remarkably dutiful Christian daughter with a keen awareness of the Old Testament force of blessings – and withheld blessings – she places the highest value on her parents’ combined verbal approval.”

We should remind ourselves, therefore, that the issue is not of a father assuming a prerogative not normally ascribed to him, but whether or not James Sr.’s assumption of divine power is justly exercised. Remarking on the “verbal power of annihilation—both oral and written—in the Old Testament,” Erickson explains how divine power is canonically embodied in the father even when the father remains silent (210). The ambiguous relationship between parental and divine authority, therefore, consistently haunts Clarissa’s consciousness precisely because she is aware of its scriptural precedence.

The presentation of the Harlowe curse occurs at several removes. In Letter 147, Arabella sends her sister the curse. The letter contains an initial description of the enclosed malediction, ending with the remark: “Read the inclosed and tremble” (509). Importantly, what follows is not a direct transcription of James Sr.’s curse but Arabella’s annotated commentary on their father’s malediction. Imbedded in Arabella’s remarks is a direct quotation from the original curse: “that you may meet your punishment, both here and hereafter, by means of the very wretch in whom you have chosen to place your wicked confidence” (509). The fact that Clarissa does not even receive the curse first-hand speaks to the problems of deputized power that pervade Clarissa’s negotiations with her family. By the time the curse is sent to Clarissa (Arabella suggest that it “has lain ready” for sometime), the corrective intention has been altered. Arabella notes in her preface to the curse that “I believe that design [i.e. to “bring you back by proper authority”] is over” (509).

The curse begins by referencing the authority of the malediction. Tellingly, the Harlowe curse does not overtly cite God’s authority, but depends upon the deputized authority of Clarissa’s father. “My father,” Arabella writes, “in the first agitations of his mind on discovering your wicked, your shameful elopement, imprecated on his knees a


27 Peter Hynes usefully notes that the father’s curse is transmitted through various intermediaries before it arrives at Clarissa (“Curses, Oaths, and Narrative in Richardson’s Clarissa,” *English Literary History* 56.2 (1989): 317). On the relevance of the curse’s transmission for the larger deputization of parental authority, see Keymer, *Richardson’s Clarissa*, 118-19.
fearful curse upon you” (509). James Sr.’s kneeling position while issuing the curse alludes to the father’s appeal for divine sanction without explicitly referencing it. The circuitous authorization of the curse is, as we have seen, central to Richardson’s portrayal of the malediction, a portrayal that constantly raises the question of whether the father’s curse is endorsed by God. In calling down God’s judgment to punish Clarissa in this world and the next, Mr. Harlowe cuts his daughter off from God’s protection and, in the language of excommunicative practice, effectually delivers her unto Satan. What is most noteworthy about Mr. Harlowe’s curse in this regard is his assumption of divine judgment. While a parent may possess the capacity to curse a child in this world, to extend this to the next implies an authority that only the Church (if any worldly institution) can assume.

The curse then moves to a discussion of the physical sequestration of Clarissa:

Your drawings and your pieces are all taken down; as is also your own whole-length picture in the Vandyke taste, from your late parlour: they are taken down and thrown into your closet, which will be nailed up as if it were not a part of the house; there to perish together: for who can bear to see them? Yet, how did they use to be shown to everybody: the former for the magnifying of your dainty fingerworks; the latter for the imputed dignity (dignity now in dust!) of your boasted figure; and this by those fond parents whom you have run away from with so much, yet with so little contrivance! (509)

The Harlowe curse effectively erases Clarissa’s identity as a member of the Harlowe family by physically removing her presence. All of Clarissa’s painting are taken down from the walls, including Clarissa’s “own whole-length picture in the Vandyke taste.” Not only is Clarissa’s portrait removed, but by throwing all her paintings into her closet and nailing the door shut, the family anathematizes, not only their daughter, but the whole section of the house that she dwelt in. The family’s nailing up of her room “as if it were not a part of the house” effectually effaces Clarissa’s filial membership. Importantly, this physical separation extends to a more general exclusion of the accursed from her community. Striving to reduce Clarissa’s membership in the family to that of the excluded member, Arabella and James Jr. push their sister outside the
bounds of religious and filial authority in ways that resemble Agamben’s *homo sacer*. As Arabella’s address to Clarissa announces, the effect of this physical separation is to reduce Clarissa to a “sister that was” (509). Arabella’s constitution of Clarissa as the defiliated sister is redoubled by her brother’s vow not to recognize his sister as such if he sees her on the street, declaring that “he will treat you…like a common creature” (509).

By conceiving of her closet “as if it were not a part of the house,” the Harlowes exhibit an anxiety about the contagious nature of Clarissa’s transgression, as if standing in the room where she was so recently confined might infect the piety of the other family members. In receiving the curse, Clarissa writes to Anna, asking her to “think not of corresponding with a wretch who now seems absolutely devoted!…I can only repeat: shun, fly, correspond not with a wretch as devoted as "[T]"” (508). Clarissa’s use of the term “devoted” has unique connotations in the eighteenth century that may be lost on modern readers. The OED defines the term during Richardson’s lifetime in two senses: i) to be appropriated or set apart by a vow; and ii) to be formally consigned to evil or destruction. Clarissa’s advice to her friend is, thus, not merely a reflection of the public calumny she fears will accompany the issuance of the curse. More specifically, Clarissa’s suggestion that Anna “shun, fly, [and] correspond not with a wretch as devoted” as Clarissa, speaks to the contemporary anxieties regarding the capacity to clearly differentiate the realms of the sacred and the profane. This anxiety about the offender’s capacity to infect his/her community underlies the attitude of both Clarissa and her family respecting her expulsion. Just as her family refuses to eat with their daughter or allow her to go to public church services, Clarissa’s recommendation to Anna to “shun, fly, correspond not with a wretch so devoted” reveals a keen understanding of the threat posed by the accursed for consolidating the larger community of the familial sacred.

To this end, the Harlowe curse insists on the comprehensiveness of the malediction: James Sr. invokes a punishment that extends “both *here* and *hereafter*” (509). In addition to James Sr.’s insistence on the efficacy of the curse in the afterlife, a point that particularly frightens Clarissa, the curse quite specifically affects Clarissa’s life in this world. Refusing to send her books, money, or jewels (her clothes are sent only at

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her mother’s behest), the Harlowes cruelly wish that Clarissa “may be seen a beggar along London streets!” (510). The Harlowe curse ends with a catalogue of each family member’s renouncement of relationship to Clarissa, a catalogue that amounts to the unanimous collective censure of Clarissa Harlowe.

My uncle Harlow renounces you for ever.
So does my uncle Antony.
So does my aunt Hervey.
So do I, base unworthy creature!
....
You worthy Norton is ashamed of you…
Everybody, in short, is ashamed of you. (509-10)

Clarissa’s confinement reveals larger anxieties about the threat posed by the contagion of the profane. By first sequestering their daughter to a specific portion of the house and secondly by nailing up her former quarters, the Harlowes struggle to enforce mutually exclusive categories of sacred and profane (right/wrong) onto a set of circumstances that, as Richardson has been at pains to illustrate, are stubbornly resistant to facile polarization. In this regard, the Harlowes’ actions against Clarissa reflect as much a displaced anxiety surrounding the amorality of Lovelace’s libertinism as an anxiety about Clarissa’s threat to the family’s honour.29 When Arabella conveys her father’s curse to her sister she prefaces it by explaining its intention in terms of preserving the purity of the family’s reputation: “It was designed…to send you whither the disgraces you have brought upon us all should be in the likeliest way, after a while, to be forgotten” (509). Clarissa’s own advice to Anna to “shun, fly, [and] correspond not” internalizes the strictures governing the Harlowes’ struggle to maintain the mutually exclusive realms of the sacred and the profane by driving their daughter into the wilderness.

29 On the relationship between family’s reputation and Clarissa’s piety, see Donnalee Frega, Speaking in Hunger: Gender, Discourse, and Consumption in Clarissa (Columbia, SC.: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 7-12.
God’s Thunder or Earthly Cracker: Divine Knowledge and the Limits of Human Judgment

Questioning the capacity of humans to discern divine judgement is central to Clarissa’s consideration of her father’s curse. The Gospel of St. Matthew succinctly explains the nature of Clarissa’s anxiety: “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (18:18). Declining confidence during the early eighteenth-century in the correlation between the binding of sin by earthly vicegerents and the future binding of sin by God helps explains both Clarissa’s uncertainty and Hester Mulso and Anna Howe’s incredulity regarding the Harlowe curse. As Howe insists: “to entitle those horrid words [of the curse] to efficacy, the parents’ views should be pure, should be altogether justifiable; and the child’s ingratitude and undutifulness without excuse; and her choice too, as totally inexcusable” (512).

Keith Thomas points out that in post-Reformation Europe the efficacy of a curse in bringing down God’s judgment depended on whether it was justified. If the person deserved the sentence issued by the human authority of the Church then God would endorse it; if not, the sentence remained an earthly censure. Despite official legislation against cursing, popular belief about the efficacy of cursing continued through the end of the seventeenth century. Importantly, while belief in the efficacy of the curse began to wane throughout the seventeenth century, belief in the efficacy of the father’s curse remained intact for a substantially longer period. Clarissa’s persistent anxiety concerning the efficacy of the curse can be seen as a product of a larger cultural shift away from a belief in God’s direct endorsement of human maledictions. 30

Yet the problem facing Clarissa is not simply a question of whether or not God endorses the self-interested proscriptions of her family, but whether or not God himself (independent of the Harlowes) desired Clarissa’s punishment. It is Clarissa’s ultimate inability to decipher God’s intention regarding her earthly suffering that structures her later thinking on the curse. As one theologian discussing ecclesiastical censures colourfully puts it, while some individuals “may still (if they please) be frighted out of their little Wit with…the Thunder [that] comes from Heaven…I doubt not, but to

prove how far it is a meer earthly Cracker, and a Bug-bear, and frights none but Women and Fools.”

Scriptural references to God’s authority as thunder abound and clearly Clarissa alludes to such passages when she writes that “the thunder slept till I awakened it, the curse extends to the life beyond this” (508). Yet the “wilderness of doubt and error” that Clarissa finds herself in stems from her inability to clearly differentiate between divine thunder and “meer earthly Cracker,” an inability that prevents her from categorically disregarding the efficacy of her family’s curse (853). As Clarissa’s favourite biblical ally repeated asks: “the thunder of his power who can understand?” (Job 26:14).

Like Clarissa’s plight, Job’s suffering stems in large part from the “great things” that God does, “which we cannot comprehend” (Job 37:5). The inscrutability of God’s complete wisdom works against the partial judgment of mortals, causing not only “Women and Fools,” but all God-fearing humans, to ask of those that threaten to excommunicate them: “Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?” (Job 40:9). Indeed as Peter Hynes suggests, there is a “consistent strain of rational or demythologizing discourse [that] effectively criticizes the power of the curse to work evil.”

I would argue, however, that it is the intense religious orthodoxy of Richardson’s text, rather than a rational demythologization, that conveys a qualified reticence about the dismissal of earthly curses.

Ultimately, the issue is not whether Clarissa (or the reader) can determine the efficacy of the curse; Richardson seems to defer such clarity until the afterlife. Given the lack of full knowledge in this world, Clarissa honours the curse for what it might be: a divine judgment conveyed through human (albeit flawed) hands. Unable to accurately determine whether her father’s curse is thunder or “earthly Cracker,” Clarissa justifiably fears the capacity of the malediction to punish her “both here and hereafter” (509). As Jeremy Taylor conservatively remarks, if the church’s human authority to censure “be rightly used, they bind or lose respectively; but if they err, they affect not the Subject at

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33 Stuber remarks that James Harlowe’s voice is one “of thunder, making his sake God’s sake, as if convinced his authority were sanctioned by a kind of Divine Right” (“On Fathers and Authority,” 561). Interestingly, by the final council scene in which Clarissa’s will is read, her father has lost his voice; he is speechless and robbed of his power (ibid., 561).
all, they neither bind nor lose.” Taylor qualifies these remarks by warning that disregarding a mortal censure that may not be sanctioned by God compounds the “first trifling Sin” with an additional “Contempt that is to be severely accounted for before God.”

Mulso misses the point slightly, therefore, when she asks Richardson why Clarissa is “suffering as much horror and dread from her father’s diabolical curse, as if he had really the power of disposing of her happiness in the next world as well as in this?”

Mulso partly answers her own question, stating:

But though I think Clarissa had not the least shadow of reason to fear that her father’s curse would be prevalent with God, yet I allow that it would have been unnatural in her character not to be shocked at it, to the last degree; particularly for her father’s own sake.

Yet religiously speaking, for both Job and Clarissa there is always a “shadow of reason to fear” that God might have endorsed an unjust parental curse. Anna Howe similarly overstates the simplicity of Clarissa’s predicament. “If you consider this Malediction,” she advises, “as it ought to be considered, a person of your piety must and will rather pity and pray for your rash Father, than terrified yourself on this occasion.”

Importantly, Howe is not a person of piety like her friend; if she was she might have seen that praying for God’s forgiveness of her father’s probable rashness does not necessarily exclude the possibility that God intends Clarissa’s punishment. As Clarissa’s final appreciation of her trials and tribulations as divine mercies attests to, she ultimately remains unsure as to the justness of her father’s curse.

Faced with this uncertainty as to God’s intentions, an uncertainty that characterizes not only Clarissa’s favourite book of Job but also Richardson’s larger argument concerning the insufficiency of human judgment to discern God’s wisdom, Richardson’s text advocates a position of ascetic deferral as the only viable option.

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and ignoring it as unsanctioned by God, Clarissa chooses to actively defer judgment. Making the decision not to decide situates Richardson’s protagonist at the threshold between both options, painfully enduring both the justness of the curse and the suspicion of its baselessness.

Clarissa’s inability to ascertain whether God has sanctioned her father’s curse raises the larger thematic question posed by the indeterminacy and chaos of Richardson’s text. Richardson’s apparent unwillingness to reduce the complexity of the text’s moral quandaries to a set of clearly-defined moral absolutes is informed by his fairly orthodox approach to Providence. In the postscript to Clarissa, Richardson “propogate[s] another sort of dispensation” far more traditional than the special interventions of God that pepper Defoe’s Crusoe narratives (1495). Rather than advocating a providential model favoured by latitudinarian divines in which piety is consistently rewarded in this world and evil is consistently punished, Richardson explains that mortal life is a “state of probation” in which God “hath intermingled good and evil as to necessitate them to look forward for a more equal Distribution of both” (1495). It is this recognition of the general inscrutability of God’s design that unifies the Book of Job and, to a large extent, explains the kinship Clarissa feels with her biblical type. This inscrutability also informs Richardson’s didactic intentions for Clarissa.

Writing to Lady Bradshaigh, Richardson succinctly expresses the intended role his readers must assume; insisting that he intends “some Imperfection…in my best Characters,” Richardson “leave[z] it to my Sovereign Judges the Readers, to agree as well as they can, which to blame, which to acquit.” Keymer usefully terms this willingness on Richardson’s part to let his readers sift through the often contradictory evidence of the text and come to their own conclusions the forensic paradigm of the text. “Richardson’s concern,” Keymer argues, “is not just to complete the awful

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36 On Richardson’s more traditional understanding of God’s providence, see Keymer, Richardson’s Clarissa, 206-12. For a useful qualification of Keymer’s reading, see Lois A. Chaber, suggestion that a “tragic providential nemesis” links Clarissa’s initial filial disobedience with her eventual rape and death (“Christian Form and Anti-Feminism in Clarissa,” Eighteenth-Century Fiction 15.3/4 [2003]: 517-26).

37 8 Feb 1754, in Carroll, Selected Letters, 280.

38 Keymer notes that it is not simply in the plentifulness of Richardson’s novel, but “in the unreliability of its presentation that Richardson’s novel is most truly and brilliantly forensic” (Richardson’s Clarissa, 242). The forensic paradigm, Keymer argues, derives from the refusal of Richardson’s text to offer anything in
indeterminacy of human life: he has created a chaos not for its own sake but so that the reader will take on the mantle of the novel’s missing judge and strive to order it himself” (243). I want to build on Keymer’s suggestive notion of a forensic paradigm to argue that while Richardson encourages his readers to exercise their own rational judgment in determining the moral quandaries of Clarissa, he also evinces certain doubts about the capacity of the majority of his readers to do so. His concluding remark—“to agree as well as they can”—may betray scepticism regarding the capacity of his readers to objectively arrive at a judgment. Richardson furthers this scepticism in the following sentence when he states, “I find not often two of the same Mind, in relation to the more delicate Circumstances.” Elsewhere he admits that “all my girls but you [Miss Highmore] have mistaken me on this point.” If Richardson’s extended debates with his correspondents over the controversial death of Clarissa are any indication, Richardson himself (no less than his heroine) experienced first hand the vagaries of human judgment.

His observation that no two readers will make the same decision regarding the “more delicate Circumstances” points towards a tempered scepticism of his own forensic paradigm. Keymer is certainly correct to caution against characterizing Richardson’s intention as that of “bringing the reader to a radical scepticism about values and judgments, by embodying in the novel a view that right and wrong are merely our own constructions” (243). Indeed, while the novel certainly presents a world marred by chaos and indeterminacy, Richardson is “himself no relativist.” Yet recognizing that Richardson is not a relativist does not foreclose the possibility that he harbours some doubts about the capacity of the average reader to judge correctly. If he sets out to “settle the boundaries between right and wrong,” it is not apparent that his readers are capable of the same acuity.

An important unifying logic of Richardson’s text is the movement from positions of extreme opposition to that of moderation or balance. Initially, Clarissa insists: “there

39 8 Feb 1754, in Carroll, Selected Letters, 280.
40 To Miss Highmore (1749-50?), in Barbauld, Correspondence, 222.
41 Keymer, Richardson’s Clarissa, 243.
is a right and wrong in everything, let people put what glosses they please upon their actions” (290). In contrast to Clarissa’s faith in clearly demarcated moral binaries, what one critic has characterized as her naïve exegetical approach, Lovelace recognizes the dangers of such thinking, dangers that he repeatedly capitalizes upon. Lovelace’s duplicity and linguistic sophistications clearly depend upon the moral standards he repeatedly flouts. Writing to Belford, he acknowledges that, “as every cause has a black and a white side, I gave the worst parts of our story the gentlest turn” (780). The implication here is that the moral absolutes of black and white (of right and wrong) enable Lovelace to gently turn the interpretation, to blur the categories into a self-flattering grey. As he says to Belford: “he must be a silly fellow who has not something to say for himself, when every cause has its black and its white side” (1031). Characteristically dizzying in the sophistication of his wit, Lovelace responds to Anna Howe’s fiancé, Mr. Hickman, by chastising his own actions. “You see, sir, I speak against myself,” Lovelace insists, “for libertine as I am thought to be, I never will attempt to bring down the measures of right and wrong to the standard of my actions” (1096). Lovelace playfully subverts the relationship in which individual actions are gauged by established moral standards, a scrutiny Clarissa repeatedly places Lovelace under, suggesting instead that the “measures of right and wrong” cannot be judged by the “standard of my actions.” While effectively routing Hickman’s judgment of the moral propriety of his actions, what Belford calls the “jesuitical qualifyings” of Lovelace’s casuistry are just as dependent upon absolute categories of right and wrong as the moral simplicity of Clarissa’s understanding of the world (958).

From Clarissa’s initial dependence on moral blacks and whites, and Lovelace’s consistent abuse of such categories, the narrative moves towards a space of grey indeterminacy, a space most clearly figured by Belford’s epistles. Keymer is certainly correct to suggest that Belford “begins to point to a middle way between the untenable moral simplicities and polarities favoured by Clarissa’s most devoted adherents and the

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42 Terry Castle understands Clarissa’s initial moral idealism as evidence of her naïve exegetical approach, one that assumes “words embody, absolutely and transparently, the inner life of the speaker” (Clarissa’s Ciphers: Meaning & Disruption in Richardson’s Clarissa [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982], 55).

43 For a discussion of these passages and the importance of absolute moral categories, see Keymer, Richardson’s Clarissa, 179-80; On Lovelace’s relationship to moral absolutes, Keymer, Richardson’s Clarissa, 186. See also William Beatty Warner, Reading Clarissa: The Struggle of Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 17-21.
specious extenuations of her opponents—a middle way in which the possibility of an appropriately measured, complex and impartial judgment at last appears to view” (240). Between the misrepresentations of Lovelace and the Harlowes and the belief in the transparency of language expressed by Clarissa, “the rigorous circumstantial realism” of Belford’s letters attempts a via media between the excessive faith of moral absolutes, on the one hand, and the unfettered abuse of such faith, on the other hand (Keymer, 241). Belford’s attempt to achieve a middle ground is, of course, ultimately flawed. In noting the exact time of Clarissa’s death, he fails to appreciate the significance of her dying words: “It is good for me that I was afflicted!—Words of Scripture, I suppose” (1362). If Belford’s ultimate failure to represent the totality of Clarissa’s world—a failure that stems, importantly, from his humorous lack of fluency with scripture—introduces yet another form of unreliability into the text, it also introduces yet another example of the limitations of human judgment.

As Keymer rightly indicates, Richardson’s interest in the capabilities of human judgment has much in common John Locke’s thoughts in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) where he argues that God has “afforded us only the twilight, as I may so say, of probability; suitable, I presume, to that state of mediocrity and probationership, he has been pleased to place us in here.” God’s intention in reducing humans to a “state of mediocrity,” Locke argues, is “to check our over-confidence and presumption, [so that] we might by every day’s experience be made sensible of our short-sightedness and liableness to errour” (652). Importantly, Locke contrasts human judgment against a “state of greater perfection” that is achieved only in the afterlife. If full knowledge is a state generally unavailable to human mortals, then the rational faculties of judgment, Locke suggests, simply give humans “a taste of what intellectual creatures are capable of, to excite in us a desire and endeavour after a better state” (652). By employing “those talents God has given them here [in this world],” humans “shall accordingly receive their rewards at the close of the day [i.e. at the end of life]” (652).

For all Locke’s celebration of the powers of rational judgment, his Essay betrays a

44 Quoting Psalms 119:71; see also Keymer, Richardson’s Clarissa, 242.

certain scepticism regarding its ultimate efficacy, going so far to suggest that God intends to limit the capacity of human judgment in this world as a necessary check on over-confidence.

If Richardson’s forensic paradigm owes something to Locke’s understanding of human knowledge, it also owes something to Locke’s insight into the limitations of human knowledge. This latter point is more explicitly articulated in Locke’s later treatise, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), a text Richardson explicitly quotes in his earliest known book, *The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum* (1734).46 In the concluding section of *Vade Mecum*, Richardson moves to defend the “Interests of the Christian Religion, of late so boldly and barefacedly attack’d by Infidels of several Denominations”(x). Richardson’s anxiety over the influence and authority of freethinking, atheism, scepticism and deism during the period informs his larger efforts in the manual to “enable an ingenious Mind to oppose the idle Cavils and impertinent Witticisms of the Scoffers of the Age”(x). Rather than representing freethinkers simply as men without laws, however, Richardson characterizes these “Scoffers of the Age” as men “as incapable of thinking freely, as they are of thinking justly, and they must, and do, place somewhere that implicite Confidence which they deny to the Word of God”(60-1). Thus, in Richardson’s mind, the freethinker poses a dual threat, both trampling under existing moral laws while placing implicit faith in fallacious laws. Hence the issue is not a lack of faith but the wrong kind of faith, not a failure to follow rules (thinking freely) but a failure to correctly identify the right rules (thinking justly). For Richardson the threat of freethinking epitomizes the fallibility of human judgment. Unsurprisingly, his most pointed attack against freethinking takes the form of locating an infallible moral code or law that supersedes the self-interested (and, in his mind, misguided) interpretations of mortals.

Quoting from Locke’s *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Richardson highlights an important distinction between moral laws and human interpretation. According to Locke, Jesus Christ’s gospel provides for the first time “a full and sufficient rule for our

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46 *Vade Mecum* is a rigorous conduct manual intended for young apprentices working in the city. The professed aim of Richardson’s manual is “to regulate the Behaviour, and improve the morals of the Youth of this Kingdom” (*The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum; or, Young Man’s Pocket-Companion*, ed. Alan Dugald McKillop [Los Angeles: Augustan Reprint Society, 1975], iii). Hereafter cited within the text. For an excellent discussion of the aims and historical moment of *Vade Mecum*, see Keymer, *Richardson’s Clarissa*, 143-50, 157-65; and Duncan and Eaves, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography*, 550-1, 555-6.
direction,” one that is “conformable to that of reason.” Yet despite his discussion of moral law deriving from reason, Locke insists that it is simply “too hard a task for unassisted reason, to establish morality, in all its parts, upon its true foundations”(60). This is why Richardson can quote Locke’s assertion that Christ’s gospel gives “morality…a sure standard, that revelation vouches, and reason cannot gainsay, nor question”(60). Richardson’s attention to Locke’s discussion of the superiority of divine law over human judgment provides compelling evidence of Richardson’s doubts about the efficacy of his readers’ judgment. Faced with the threats of freethinking, Richardson’s recourse to a transcendental and “unerring Rule” that circumvents human judgment is clearly appealing.

Given the fallibility of human moral judgment, only a complete subordination of one’s self to divine law can ensure correct action. Following Locke, Richardson acknowledges that God gave humans both reason and a law to follow; yet the limitations of human judgment, Locke implies, enable the Saviour’s request for obedience from his followers. This privileging of divine knowledge over limited human interpretation is most clearly expressed in Richardson’s views on Providence. In the revised postscript to the third edition of Clarissa, he insists that he is “well justified by the Christian System, in deferring to extricate suffering Virtue to the time in which it will meet with the Completion of its Reward”(351). Qualifying Locke’s understanding of the reasonableness of Christianity with a more traditional providentialism, Richardson calls on his Christian readers to weigh the evidence while withholding their judgment indefinitely. Richardson’s own “deferring to extricate suffering Virtue” until the afterlife, mirroring his intentions for his readers, represents an implicit pronouncement that human judgment is necessarily fallible.

In a world in which God’s design appears so inscrutable, it makes sense that Richardson would have some misgivings about the capabilities of human judgment. Just as Locke argues that the exercise of human judgment in this world of “mediocrity and probationership” will only receive its reward “at the close of the day,” Richardson insists on “look[ing] forward” to the afterlife for a more comprehensible balancing of moral

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accounts. To argue for Richardson’s scepticism regarding the capabilities of human judgment is not to argue that Richardson lacks faith in moral standards. As Richardson himself claims, he is “apt to argue for the right, or against the wrong, with some strictness, in order to settle the boundaries between right and wrong.”\textsuperscript{48} The point is rather that he doubts the capacity of most individuals to correctly distinguish between right and wrong in “in relation to the more delicate Circumstances.”\textsuperscript{49} In a very important sense, \textit{Clarissa} is an extended dramatization of not only the limitations of human judgment and the deceptive abuses of casuistical reasoning, but also of the inevitable position of deferred judgment when faced with the inscrutability of God’s plan.\textsuperscript{50}

William Warner has argued that Lovelace’s penchant for casuistry and relativist reasoning, his privileging of artifice over truth, “implies the absence of any ground upon which to posit a nature or identity for the self.”\textsuperscript{51} Similarly, in her discussion of the strange absence of James Harlowe Sr.’s authority in all but deputized forms, Maud Ellmann argues that “the novel hints that it is not the father who destroys Clarissa so much as the absence of an ultimate authority to guarantee the morals or the meanings of her world.”\textsuperscript{52} The apparent nihilism that both critics identify in Richardson’s text fails to make a crucial distinction between the viable moral standard that Richardson locates in divine law and his pessimistic portrayal of human efforts to ascertain such a moral code. With regard to Lovelace, Richardson deliberately stops short of representing his libertine as an infidel. Despite the observation of Richardson’s friend that Lovelace’s machinations amount to his desire to “undermine the foundations of all Laws, divine and human,” Richardson’s postscript to the third edition insists that Lovelace is “every-

\textsuperscript{48} To Miss Highmore (1749-50?), in Barbauld, \textit{Correspondence}, 221.

\textsuperscript{49} 8 Feb 1754, in Carroll, \textit{Selected Letters}, 280.

\textsuperscript{50} On Richardson and casuistry, see Keymer, \textit{Richardson’s Clarissa}, 87-96.

\textsuperscript{51} Warner, \textit{Reading Clarissa}, 34. While the critical insights into the linguistic and hermeneutic dimension of Richardson’s project provided by scholars such as Castle, Warner, and Terry Eagleton are elucidating in their own right, they neglect the larger religious context for Richardson’s discussion of absolute Truth and the relative constructions and misrepresentations of Lovelace and the Harlowes. See Terry Eagleton, \textit{The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson} (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1982), 49, 62.

\textsuperscript{52} Ellmann, \textit{Hunger Artists}, 75.
where made to treat jests on sacred things and subjects, even down to the Mythology of
the Pagans, among Pagans, as undoubted marks of the ill-breeding of the jesters;
obscene images and talk, as liberties too shameful for even Rakes to allow themselves.”

Like Clarissa, Lovelace does not seek to undermine “the foundations of all Laws,
divine and human,” but exists in something of a fearful awe of divine knowledge. In this
regard, Clarissa’s own interpretative skills are not so much naïve as typically Christian
in their privileging of divine wisdom over partial human judgment. Espousing a notion
of right reason or an inborn sense of morality, Clarissa insists that her motives arise
from “what offers to my own heart…[and] its judgment of the fit and unfit” (596).54
Importantly, Richardson characterizes Clarissa’s standards of right and wrong as
phantasmatically transcending the vagaries of human judgment. They are “principles,
that are in my mind,” she insists, “that I found there; implanted, no doubt, by the first
gracious Planter” (596). By insisting on the divine origins of Clarissa’s moral sense,
Richardson locates correct moral judgment beyond the pale of human reasoning. In
doing so, however, Richardson seeks to have it both ways, striking a precarious balance
between a textual world rife with moral confusion and self-interested
misrepresentations and the dream of a standard of right/wrong external to human
endeavour.55

While Clarissa never completely transcends the thunder of her father’s curse,
she does come to recognize a difference between her earthly father and her spiritual
father. This recognition effectively challenges the conflation of earthly and divine
authority underwriting contemporary insistences on absolute filial obedience. In
Meditation XIV, couched between quotations from the nineteenth of Job, Clarissa

55 Scott Paul Gordon argues that Richardson’s text circumvents the prevailing eighteenth-century
Mandevillian reading of all actions as inherently self-interested by appealing to an economy of affect and
of involuntary tears (Power of the Passive Self, 197). While I find Gordon’s reading to be especially
suggestive, as I note below, his discussion of Clarissa’s passivity neglects the larger theological
assumptions of Richardson’s text.
suggests this difference: “Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh?” (32). It is Clarissa’s differentiation between the punishments to “my flesh” that her earthly father is supposedly justified in exacting as reparation for her disobedience and the punishments to her soul that only her heavenly father may exact that marks Clarissa’s insight. While the thunder never fully dissipates into “meer earthly Cracker,” Clarissa achieves some perspective by disconnecting the conflated authorities of heavenly and earthly power that her father has invested himself with through the issuance of the curse. This separation is evident in her remarks to Belford: “I hope, clasping her hands together, uplifted, as were her eyes, my dear earthly father will set me the example my heavenly one has already set us all; and by forgiving his fallen daughter teach her to forgive the man who then, I hope, will not have destroyed my eternal prospects, as he has my temporal!” (1102). Yet, as we have seen, even if Clarissa could be sure that her father’s actions were unjust, this would not foreclose the possibility that her trials were intended by God. Faced with the inability to categorically determine whether the curse is divinely sanctioned, the only viable option for a devout Christian such as Clarissa is to humbly embrace the adversity ostensibly caused by the curse as a mercy granted by God to purify her soul. She does this by embarking on a rigorous regimen of fasting and self-mortification. Clarissa’s private devotions represent the most dramatic example of the text’s unwillingness to apply a partial human reason to questions of divine intention.

**Clarissa’s Weaning-Time**

*Clarissa* is certainly no more a conduct book than it is a political allegory. But like the political discourse of the novel, Richardson weaves devotional materials through his text in ways that are both complex and contradictory. Scholarship on the religious aspects of Richardson’s *Clarissa* is vast. The majority of studies, however, have not

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paid close enough attention to either the specific devotional texts or the specific scriptural references cited by Richardson within his novel. Instead, many of these studies argue for an overly generalized (and not particularly helpful) puritan context for understanding Clarissa. The work of Margaret Anne Doody, Robert Erickson, Tom Keymer, and John Dussinger are notably exceptions to this trend and have greatly enhanced our understanding of Richardson’s complex relationship to both the bible and reformed Christianity.

The most important aspects of Clarissa’s devotional regime are her fasting and her wilful reclusion. To return to Lovelace’s “caught bird” simile, Clarissa dramatizes the dangerous possibility of the bird that would rather starve itself to death than submit cheerfully to captivity. Anticipating Lovelace’s simile, early on Clarissa explains that “my brother has got me into his snares and I, like a poor silly bird, the more I struggle, am the more entangled”(119). Here Clarissa identifies her situation with the early stages of Lovelace’s caught bird, the caged animal that “beats and bruises itself against its wires.” Importantly, however, Clarissa’s fasting regimen fails to rehearse the endpoint of this simile. Unlike Crusoe’s English Reprobates, she is never “brought to bear with [her] new condition” of “forfeited liberty.” Moreover, Clarissa’s understanding of “forfeited liberty” diverges dramatically, in this sense, from both Lovelace and the Harlowes’ sense of the term.

Clarissa’s devotional regiment figures a submission to divine law that implies a specifically Christian liberty from the carnality of the secular world. The specific means by which Clarissa-as-exiled-bird is freed takes the form of liberation from the bodily self, liberation facilitated by rigorous fasting. This is nowhere more evident than in her own use of avian similes. Clarissa refigures the notion of captivity and “forfeited liberty” in the comparison of her condition with a further series of birds. In her meditation, “On being hunted after by the enemy of my soul,” she identifies herself with the banished yet liberated solitary “pelican of the wilderness…[the] owl of the desert…[and the]
sparrow along upon the house-top” (*Psalms* 102; 122:1). In comparing herself with the Pelican she finds herself, as one contemporary theologian explains, “flying even the sight and society of Men, thro’ shame and confusion of Face”; in comparing herself with the Owl she “takes up her Lodging in ruinous Houses, not inhabited”; in comparing herself with the Sparrow she flies “the Company of Sinners…solitary, serious, and studious how to escape the Snares of Sin below, and mount up my Soul to Heaven above.”  

The central means by which the sinner escapes the “snares of Sin” and flies up to Heaven is the mortification of the physical body.

In the tenth emblem of his famous emblem book, Francis Quarles suggests the relevance of avian imagery for discussions of religious self-mortification. Visualizing *Psalms* 142:7: “Bring my soule out of Prison that I may Praise thy Name,” Quarles provides the image of an angel releasing the penitent sinner from a gilded cage (see Fig. 3). The epigraph reads: “Imprison’d in this Cage of Flesh, / We earnestly
Enlargement wish; / In Hopes that God Relief will bring, / The caged Bird its Song will sing”(146). The appending gloss elaborates on the image of the soul’s physical captivity. "My Soul is like a caged Bird,” Quarles writes, “That would its Freedom gain, / But with the Bars of Flesh immur’d, / Her Labour is in vain”(147).

Quarles’ orthodox representation of the liberated soul/caged body duality informs Clarissa’s intentions in fasting. A central aspect of the Harlowe curse and of Clarissa’s anxiety concerning its efficacy is the distinction made between its effectiveness in this world (the here) and the afterlife (the hereafter). In a late plea to her sister, Clarissa asks Arabella to intercede on her behalf to ask their father to “revoke that heaviest part of the very heavy curse he laid upon me, which relates to HEREAFTER: for, as to the HERE, I have, indeed, *met with my punishment from the very wretch in whom I was supposed to place my confidence*”(1122). Clarissa’s orthodox privileging of the afterlife over the carnal world carries forth to two additional set of binaries. In a letter to Mrs. Norton on the virtues of the “school of affliction,” Clarissa

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59 On Richardson’s relation to the emblematic tradition, see Brown, “Emblemata Rhetorica.”

60 Francis Quarles, *Emblems and Hieroglyphics of the Life of Man, Modernized* (London, 1766), 146.
makes an important distinction between inner and outer health (1121). She notes: “I have as humane a physician (whose fees are his least regard), and as worthy an apothecary, as ever patient was visited by. My nurse is diligent, obliging, silent, and sober. So I am not unhappy without and within—I hope, my dear Mrs Norton, that I shall be every day more and more happy within” (1122).

The contrast Clarissa makes between physical health (without) and spiritual health (within) extends naturally from her earlier discussions of “my best self” (974). Clarissa identifies her “best self” as her spiritual self or soul. In the aftermath of her rape, she identifies her violated body as “my lost self,” as “this vile, this hated self”—I will shake it off, if possible” (974). Just as Quarles’ emblem envisions the caged soul emancipated from the odious body, Clarissa’s “best self” is purified only when it has “shaken off the encumbrance of body,” only then will her true (spiritual) self have “escaped” (974). Richardson’s deployment of the avian simile figures Clarissa moving from a captive bird struggling against her fetters to a liberated though exiled bird, banished from her community yet emancipated from the physical self. Just as her beloved Job is “driven forth from among men…to dwell in the cliffs of the valleys, in caves of the earth, and in the rocks”, so too is Clarissa exiled from her family and friends (30.5–6). Just as Job’s exile brings him closer to God, so too does Clarissa’s banishment purify and ready her soul for the afterlife.

Several scholars have focused on Clarissa’s tendency towards self-starvation. Perhaps the most rigorous and persuasive treatment of this issue is Donnalee Frega’s Speaking in Hunger (1998). Frega thoughtfully indicates the important affinities between Clarissa’s “private devotions” and the proscriptions placed upon her by her family (82). Yet in arguing that “Clarissa’s asceticism is an attempt to cast off her body and to embrace spirituality at the expense of her social interactions,” Frega appears to overemphasize the positive potential of Clarissa’s actions (112). By paying close

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61 On Clarissa’s affinity with Job, see Richardson, Meditations Collected from the Sacred Books; and Adapted to the Different Stages of a Deep Distress; Gloriously Surmounted Ny Patience, Piety, and Resignation. Being Those Mentioned in the History of Clarissa as Drawn up by Her for Her Own Use…. (New York: Garland, 1976), vi; see also, Keymer, “Richardson’s Meditations.”

62 See Ellmann, Hunger Artists; Sabor, "Feasting and Fasting"; and Frega, Speaking in Hunger. Ellmann’s otherwise suggestive reading is hampered by a failure to consider the specific religious context of Clarissa’s practices. Sabor’s thoughtful discussion, covering all three of Richardson’s novels, is simply unable to deal with Clarissa’s fasting in the depth required in the span of a short article.
Fig 3: Francis Quarles, *Emblems and Hieroglyphicks of the Life of Man, Modernized* (1766)."
attention to the devotional texts on fasting directly cited in *Clarissa,* we gain a more complete picture of contemporary anxieties concerning overzealous fasting in general and Clarissa’s culpability in particular.\(^\text{64}\) Emphasizing Clarissa’s faults, even at the height of her apparent apotheosis, brings us closer to Richardson’s qualified endorsement of Clarissa’s “Triumphant Death”(1498). Rather than representing either a model of exemplary piety or a sign of resistance to the modes of authority articulated in the text, Clarissa’s fasting and reclusion embody a recapitulation of her family’s proscriptions, a recapitulation that transforms the forced punishments exacted by her brother into a decision to rigorously limit her consumption of food and drink and “sequester herself from the world”(1117).

In James Jr.’s imperious letter to his sister, he begins by forbidding Clarissa to come into her parents’ or her uncles’ presence. Secondly, she is forbidden to go into her beloved garden without Betty Barnes’ presence. Thirdly, she is forbidden “to correspond with the vile Lovelace” or with Anna Howe (121). In addition, she is further confined to her room: “You are not to be seen in any apartment of the house you so lately governed as you pleased…[you] are strictly to confine yourself to your chamber,” using only the backstairs when necessary (121). Perhaps the most crucial privilege that Clarissa is denied is that of eating with the family. As Mrs. Harlowe makes clear, Clarissa’s presence at family meals is contingent upon her willingness to marry Solmes.

Commenting on her mother going down to breakfast, Clarissa notes:

> I was not fit to appear; but if I had been better, I suppose I should have been sent for; my papa’s hint, when in my chamber, being to bring me down, of worthy of the name of a daughter. That, I doubt, I never shall be in *his* opinion, if he be not brought to change his mind as to this Mr. Solmes. (103)

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\(^64\) In Frega’s view, Clarissa’s self-mortification “functions as a private image of union with her God, it is important to recognize that it also constitutes a crucial image of union with her neighbours, a demonstration of her ability to transfer her wisdom and goods, to provide charitable service to others. The wealth she shares is both a physical and a spiritual wealth, effectively allowing her to bypass the traditional hierarchies of family and clergy without seeming to do so. Clarissa’s individual and direct union with God allows her to usurp a clerical authority that she has long desired but never has been able to attain”(*Speaking in Hunger*, 100). While Richardson’s text clearly endorses these kinds of effects, it also qualifies such positive impact by balancing Clarissa’s actions with accusations of possible pride, vanity, and impatience.
James Sr. similarly makes collation dependent on obedience when he orders his wife and daughter downstairs for dinner only if Clarissa be “worthy of the name” of daughter (93). As Frega notes: “As a focal point of family unity, all meals become symbolic, political, part of a viscous interchange of prerogatives and conditions that strengthen a collaborative system of deceptively polarized enemies”; she explains that “the core of Christian unity should be a symbolic meal or that denying a meal should represent rejection and expulsion from the community.”65

Prohibiting her from being seen in “any apartment of the house” but her own bedroom has the effect of excluding her from communing with her parents and siblings as a member of the family around the dinner table (121). Effectively included in the family only by virtue of her exclusion from the most important family gatherings, Clarissa begins to feel the effects of this punishment when she is forbidden to come down to dinner when Dr. Lewen visits. “This was the first time,” she writes, “since my confinement, that I thought it a hardship not to dine below” (293). In the larger context of Richardson’s discussion of filial obedience and the potential abuses of parental tyranny, these few hints encode a wealth of meaning not only about the Harlowe’s disciplinary program, but also about Clarissa’s ultimate restaging of these proscriptions as voluntary ascetic practices.

Clarissa’s recapitulation takes the form of a moderating practice or a via media, ostensibly using social isolation and fasting as a means of enduring the irreconcilable relationship between the carnality of the secular world (the self-interested concerns motivating both Lovelace and the Harlowes) and the spirituality of the afterlife. Yet despite her best intentions, Clarissa ultimately fails to sustain this state of mediocrity, falling prey to overzealous self-mortification and excessive piety. This failure to moderate appears to result in her eventual death. Despite the dramatic and tragic evidence of such failure, we should not ignore the importance Richardson places on her concerted efforts to the contrary. As her warnings to Anna Howe against excessive behaviours attest to, Clarissa’s devotional practices are chiefly motivated by an

65 Frega, Speaking in Hunger, 38, 112. Frega is certainly correct to direct our attention to Clarissa’s taking of the Eucharist. I would argue, however, that Frega’s trenchant analysis is only germane to Clarissa’s life after leaving Harlowe Place. My discussion builds on Frega’s reading to show how Clarissa’s devotional practices at Mrs. Sinclair and the Smiths develop out of Clarissa’s exclusion from the Eucharist while still living at home.
excessive desire to achieve a provisional balance, a sanctioned perversion of normative devotional practices that, as I have been arguing, is central to Protestant asceticism.

While the achievement of mediocrity through extreme measures appears counterintuitive, it nonetheless structures Clarissa's experience of the culturally imposed binaries (black/white, life/death, right/wrong) as an ascetic withdrawal from decision-making into a threshold of deferral between the competing poles. The specific terms of Clarissa's existence involve a concerted effort to embody what she calls a "weaning-time," a state of deferral or pause between the categories of the here and the hereafter, the within and the without, and her best self and her lost self. Importantly, while Clarissa's devotional regimen attempts something of a reconciliation with her family and the specific terms of their malediction, this is never ultimately achieved. The image of the "weaning-time," a recognized theological concept within reformed Christianity, provides an important unifying trope for understanding not only Clarissa's relationship to her family's authority but Richardson's understanding of the insufficiency of human judgment in the face of divine knowledge.

As we have seen, a major element of the Harlowes' proscriptions is their denial of Clarissa's right to eat communally. The forced deprivation of food does not end with Clarissa's departure from Harlowe Place, but figures predominantly in her private devotions. Among the many devotional texts that Clarissa finds in Mrs. Sinclair's closet is Feasts and Fasts by the prominent nonjuror, Robert Nelson (525). For eighteenth-century Anglicans, Nelson's text provided the most comprehensive rubric for understanding Richardson's representation of Clarissa's fasting regimen. Accompanying Clarissa's unwillingness to honour Lovelace by dining with him is a simultaneous heightening of Clarissa's fasting practices. At Mrs. Moore's, she desires only "A bit of bread, if you please, and a glass of water: that's all I can swallow at

present”(799). By the final days of her life, Belford provides Lovelace with the somewhat macabre report of “what a lovely skeleton…thou hast, in a few weeks, reduced one of the most charming women in the world”(1231). It is during the period of Clarissa’s incarceration, however, that her fasting reaches dangerous and excessive proportions. As the reports of Mrs. Sinclair’s officious assistants, Sally Martin and Polly Horton, mockingly attests to: “She must be fasting: nothing but her prayers and tears, poor thing!”(1053-4). Inquiring “whether she had eat or drank anything,” Sally is informed that her gaoleress “could not prevail upon her to taste a morsel, or drink a drop”(1054).

According to Nelson, the aim of religious fasting is to “humble our selves before God, in punishing our Bodies, and afflicting our Souls in order to a real Repentance”(333). Nelson recommends fasting in two important cases. Firstly, the practice allows the sinner “by outward significations” to testify “our Grief for Sins past,” using the mortifications as a security against returning to one’s sinful ways (333). Secondly, Nelson argues that fasting is suggested by Nature as a “proper Means to express Sorrow and Grief; and as a fit Method to dispose our Minds towards the Consideration of any thing that is serious”(334). In this regard, religious fasting functions by linking the inward condition with the outward condition. That fasting must be of a degree “that afflicts us” is clear from Nelson’s text (334). As he suggests, fasting is intended to be violent and self-abusive in a corrective sense:

To express Revenge against our selves for the Abuse of those good things God alloweth us to enjoy; and of which we have made our selves unworthy by sinful Excesses. When ’tis used as a Piece of Self-denial, in order the better to command our Fleshly Appetites; and as a means to raise in our Minds a due Valuation of the Happiness of the other World, when we despise the Enjoyment of this. (339)

As with Horneck’s recommendation of ascetic practice to jump-start a slumbering religious consciousness, the crux of Nelson’s discussion is the ability of fasting to reassert a balanced religious life. By raising a “due Valuation of the Happiness of the other World,” we begin to “despise the Enjoyment of this” world. Lewis Bayly’s popular The Practice of Piety, a text that the Harlowes send to Clarissa, corroborates this
purpose, arguing that “by the Hunger of our Bodies, thro’ want of these earthly Things, our Souls may learn to hunger more eagerly after spiritual and heavenly Food.” Just as Crusoe’s annual fasts humble the body by reducing it to its bare requirements, a “lawful” abstention from food or drink facilitates, according to Bayly, an analogous abstention “from Sin which is altogether unlawful.” The intention of religious fasting is to reassert an imbalanced constitution, to achieve a religious via media in which the individual arrives at the threshold between being in this world and being of this world. To arrive at this threshold, theologians sanction an extreme practice for the express purpose of re-establishing a balance. In one sense, Clarissa’s fasting attempts to re-establish this ideal balance between secular and spiritual concerns, while ultimately refusing to decide between either option. In doing so, the ostensibly castigatory intentions of the Harlowe curse are restaged by their daughter through a wilful and self-abusive corrective devotional regimen.

While Nelson recommends the inherent violence of the practice, he warns (as do many theologians) against the potential abuses of fasting. The chief danger facing the fasting penitent is vanity. There is always a danger, Nelson warns, of “valuing our selves upon such Performances”(342). We must avoid proclaiming our achievements to others. Writing to Belford, Lovelace accuses Clarissa of just such vanity: “Therefore tell the dear creature she must not be wicked in her piety. There is a too much, as well as a too little, even in righteousness”(1308). Connected to the threat of vanity is the threat of excessive rigour. The fasting penitent must not fast, Nelson insists, “to destroy the Health of our Bodies, and thereby make them unfit Instruments for the Operation of our Minds, or the Discharge of our worldly Employments”(342). “Particular care ought to be taken,” he warns, “that we do not grow thereby morose and sour, peevish and fretful towards others, which Severity to our selves may be apt to incline us to”(342). Jeremy Taylor concurs, remarking that “all fasting is to be used with Prudence and Charity…And therefore it must [not]…become an Enemy to our Health”(Holy Living, 220). All of these theologians, however, hint at the central problem underlying any recommendation of fasting as a corrective form of religious self-revenge. Allestree’s The Whole Duty of Man, a text that Richardson apparently recommends to Hester Mulso,

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67 Bayley, Practice of Piety, 284. On Clarissa’s receipt of this book, see Clarissa, 561.
pinpoints the precarious balance between an excessive and inappropriate fasting and a tempered and appropriate fasting. On the one hand, the author notes that fasting has the “advantages of kindling our zeal, which is never more necessary, than when we beg for pardon of sins,” carrying with it “somewhat of Revenge, which is reckoned as a special part of Repentance.” Yet in the same breath, Allestree is at pains to indicate that while fasting is “acceptable to God...the oftener the better,” it must not be “hurtful either to our healths, or to some other duty required of us.” Yet Clarissa’s fasting clearly does affect her health and ultimately precipitates her demise.

In an important sense, Clarissa’s ascetic regimen embodies a precarious yet crucial space just prior to excess. Curbing an unhealthy attachment to the material world through practices of self-revenge, ascetic regimens carry the seeds of their own transgression within their putative aims. For Clarissa, it is the threat that an overzealous regime of fasting will ultimately result in her death, an eventuality that evinces Clarissa’s lack of patient resignation to God’s plan. Sally and Polly are among the first to raise the possibility that Clarissa’s fasting may be impious. “This is wrong, Miss Harlowe!,” Sally remarks, “Very wrong!—Your religion, I think, should teach you that starving yourself is self-murder” (1054). While Richardson’s readers surely recognize that these two criminals lack the religious context for understanding Clarissa’s devotions, contemporary discussions of religious fasting raise similar concerns over excessive fasting. Yet just as Richardson remains ambiguous regarding the debate over filial obedience, he refuses to categorically condemn Clarissa’s fasting as either excessive or impious. This is partly a product of contemporary theologians’ own qualified endorsement of such practices and partly a product of Richardson’s own forensic paradigm, his own unwillingness to impose an authorial reading on his novel. As such, amidst claims to the profanity of Clarissa’s self-mortification, Richardson’s text goes to great lengths to posit the opposite conclusion.

Clarissa’s privileging of the within over the without underwrites many of her discussions of fasting. Like Sally and Polly, both Clarissa’s apothecary and her doctor suspect that she may be trying to starve herself: “The lady, said he, will do very well if

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68 See, for example, Mulso’s disapproval of “the author of The Whole duty of Man” in her third letter to Richardson (Posthumous Works, 2:92).

she will *resolve upon it herself*...The doctor is entirely of this opinion” (emphasis added, 1129). The question of Clarissa’s resolve is key here. While both Clarissa and her friends recognize the voluntary nature of her decline, they have strikingly different interpretations of its justness. Where the apothecary gives Clarissa a physical regimen of bed rest, “water-gruel, or milk-pottage, or weak broths,” Clarissa thinks only of a religious regimen of rigorous prayer and vigilant watchfulness (1129). Putting less faith in the care of her physical condition, Clarissa notes that her religious “method” has done more “to calm my disturbed thoughts, and to bring me to that perfect resignation which I aspire after” than all the “weak jellies, and innocent cordials” that the doctor orders (1140, 1129).

Still, despite her insistence on spiritual health (*within*), Clarissa is well schooled enough in reformed Christianity to recognize the “guilty impatience” attending any desire to die more quickly than God intends (755). She must not be seen to precipitate her demise; yet, she need not postpone what she sees as the inevitable. In a letter to Anna Howe, Clarissa insists that “I will do everything I can to prolong my life, till God in mercy to me shall be pleased to call for it. I have to think my punishment is but the due consequence of my fault, and I will not run away from it; but beg of Heaven to sanctify it to me” (1117). In this regard, Clarissa exemplifies the Christian virtue of resignation and patience under affliction. The orthodox point that a lack of patience in adversity questions God’s wisdom is made most forcefully in *Drexelius Upon Eternity* (1684), another of the books sent to Clarissa by her family. The author writes: “Behold heaven and the house of thy Eternal rest and pleasure! Be content to suffer for a while, a little sorrow, and some pains: For thou shalt shortly be where thy Rachel is; and there thou shalt be the more joyful and blessed...be of good courage, shew Christian fortitude and patience. *Eternity*, blessed *Eternity* is more worth, infinitely more worth, than all that we can do or suffer.”70 In order to assure her friends that she “possessed [her] soul with tolerable patience,” Clarissa promises that “When appetite serves, I will eat and drink what is sufficient to support nature. A very little, you know will do for that” (1117-8). In an important addition to the third edition of *Clarissa*, Anna provides the following eulogic comments:

She was extremely moderate in her diet. ‘Quantity in food,’ she used to say, ‘was more to be regarded than quality: That a full meal was the great enemy both to study and industry: That a well-built house required but little repairs.’

By this moderation in her diet, she enjoyed, with a delicate frame of body, a fine state of health; was always serene, lively; cheerful of course.\(^7\)

Both Clarissa’s admission to only eat what is necessary to sustain life and Anna’s reflection on her “extremely moderate” diet indicate that Richardson’s heroine does not will death but rather the provisional state of being in this world while not of this world.

Doing only what is necessary to avoid the stigma of self-murder, Clarissa insists that she will “avoid all wilful neglects. It would be an unpardonable fault, and very ill become the character I would be glad to deserve”(1129-30). Clarissa’s fasting regimen walks the same precarious line identified by contemporary theologians, a line between the violent self-abuse necessary to render fasting a viable tool for humility and repentance and the dangerous tendency of overdoing it to the detriment of her health. Poised between these two extreme scenarios, religious fasting (as with all forms of self-mortification) represents a razor’s edge of devotional practice. In a letter to Anna, Clarissa admonishes her to “learn, to subdue your own passions. Be the motives what they will, excess is excess. Those passions in our sex, which we take no pains to subdue, may have one and the same source with those infinitely blacker passions which we used so often to condemn in the violent and headstrong of the other sex”(550). Between these two extremes lies an ideal space of deferral, an ascetic pause between the here and the hereafter, between a complete annihilation of Clarissa’s “hated self” and a complete disembodiment of her “best self,” between care for the self within and care for the self without. Richardson’s text exemplifies the specific rhetorical modality of the ascetic citizen, a modality that exists at the border between irreconcilable binaries. Clarissa’s endurance of life and death—of death in life and life in death—marks the political utility of her example. The threshold that Clarissa endeavours to sustain through her private

devotions is space that reformed theologians during the period refer to as the weaning-
time.

Belford reports that, in response to her doctor’s request for her to contact her relatives, Clarissa remarks:

This is kind, very kind in you, sir. But I hope that you do not think me so perverse and so obstinate as to have left till now any means unessay’d, which I thought likely to move my friends in my favour…and perhaps if I found they still loved me, wish to live; and so should quit unwillingly that life which I am now really fond of quitting, and hope to quit, as becomes a person who has had such a weaning-time as I have been favoured with. (1277, emphasis added)

Similarly, in describing her coffin to Belford, she remarks that the level of preparedness for death that purchasing her own coffin attests to “may appear affected: but to me, who had so gradual a weaning-time from the world,” it seems only the natural extension of a holy preparation for death (1306). In a posthumous letter to her father, Clarissa returns to this central concept, reflecting that the trials and tribulations she has suffered have been “so many mercies dispensed to wean me betimes from a world that presented itself to me with prospects too alluring” (1372). Clarissa’s attention to her trials as weaning her from “prospects too alluring” underscores the corrective punishments embodied in her family’s punishments and in her fasting regimen.72

The theological notion of a weaning-time extends naturally from the concept of *contemptu mundi*, or contempt of the world.73 As William Law explains: “this is the mark of Christianity; you are to be dead, that is, dead to the *spirit* and *temper* of the world, and live a new life in the *Spirit* of Jesus Christ” (309-10). Devotional manuals such as Jeremy Taylor’s *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, Allestree’s *The Whole Duty of Man*, and Bayly’s *The Practice of Piety* consistently advocate self-mortification to this end. “To mortify all our

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72 Frega remarks that “suffering [*serves*] as penance, a purging and weaning experience that will leave her purified and ready to meet her maker” (*Speaking in Hunger*, 96).

73 See, for example, Matthew Henry’s popular biblical commentary on *Galatians* 6: “That he was dead to the World. By Christ, or by the Cross of Christ, *the World was crucified to him, and he to the World*; he had experienced the Power and Virtue of it in weaning him from the World, and this was one great Reason of his glorying in it” (*Matthew Henry, An Exposition of the Several Epistles Contained in the New Testament, Viz. Romans, I. Thessalonians, James, I. Corinthians, II. Thessalonians, I. Peter….* (London, 1721-5), 6:177-8.
inordinate Appetites and Desires,” William Sherlock writes, “is our mystical dying to this world.” The theological notion of being in the world but not of the world carries with it the practical issue of how this can be maintained. Sherlock is perhaps most explicit on this front, articulating an intermediate stage between life and death. “To take a timely leave of the World,” he writes, one must “withdraw from the Noise and Business of it; when they are placed just in the Confines of both Worlds, to direct their Face wholly to that World whither they are going, to spend the little remains of their Lives in conversing with themselves, with God, and with the other Word”(130). Similarly, Clarissa’s weaning-time is marked by both her penchant for fasting and her wilful reclusion at the Smiths’ residence.

Sherlock’s attention to the individual’s placement “just in the Confines of both Worlds” situates the weaning-time on or at the threshold between the here and the hereafter. The concept of a weaning-time provides both a temporal and physical space between these two worlds, allowing the dying individual the time to say goodbye so that “we may not carry any hankerings after this World with us into the next”(137-8). “It is very fitting,” Sherlock concludes, “that there should be a kind of a middle State between this World and the next, that is, that we should withdraw from this World, to wean ourselves from it”(137-8).

Weaning has obvious implications for Richardson’s discussion of filial disobedience. As one late seventeenth-century theologian remarks: “we bear with children when it is their weaning time. Truly our suffering time is our weaning time: and God saith, Bear with such an one, it is his weaning time”; “as suffering times are soul-assuring times; so suffering times are weaning times.” Literally indicating the movement from one form of nourishment (mother’s milk) to another (adult food), weaning also carries with it connotations associated with maturation and the increasing independence of children from parental authority. Given Clarissa’s consistent focus on

74 Sherlock, Practical Discourse, 62. First published in 1689, Sherlock’s discourse was immensely popular during the eighteenth century, being reprinted over thirty-seven times. Hereafter cited within the text.

75 William Bridge, Seven Sermons, by That Learned and Laborious Servant of Christ... (London, 1789), 219; William Bridge, Seasonable Truths in Evil-Times in Several Sermons; Lately Preached in and About London (London, 1668), 47. Bridge (c. 1600-1670) was an Independent minister during the seventeenth century.

76 For a discussion of the relationship between political authority and images of maternity during the eighteenth century, see Toni Bowers, The Politics of Motherhood: British Writing and Culture, 1680-1760 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); especially her chapter on Clarissa (196-224).
filial disobedience, Clarissa’s “weaning-time” conflates the spiritual independence of Richardson’s heroine from her parents’ authority with a progressive replacement of physical nourishment with the food of angels, consuming as Sally Martin puts it, “nothing but her prayers and tears” (1054). Similarly, alluding to Psalms 78:24-5, Lovelace remarks to Belford with contempt: “For, as to substantial food, she, no more than other angels” (738).

Moreover, both Clarissa’s increasing dependence on the food of angels and her increasing independence from her parents’ authority are directly related to her rising publicity as religious exemplar. Richardson’s use of the term “weaning-time” matches up with the text’s repeated references to Clarissa’s “shining-time.” The two “times,” however, function as a complimentary halves making up the whole of Richardson’s “Christian system.” Indeed, Clarissa’s capacity to “shine,” to embody the kind of publicly-accessible exemplary piety Howe hopes to publish as “a shining example to our sex,” is inversely affected by Clarissa’s capacity to withdraw from the public eye, to “wean” herself from the material world (1152). As Scott Paul Gordon trenchantly remarks, the only way in which Clarissa can remain immune to the misrepresentations of her actions by Lovelace and the Harlowes is to “keep her actions out of circulation.”

Yet her ability to remain unobserved is strangely predicated on her enhanced exemplarity in the larger epistolary public of the novel. The correlation between Clarissa’s “shining-time” and “weaning-time” underscores a crucial point about Clarissa’s actions. Rather than a retreat into passivity, as Gordon suggests, Clarissa’s reclusion and self-mortifications signal an affirmation of willful self-abnegation, that ontologically paradoxical position of the ascetic citizen. Gordon remarks that “the novel both struggles to preserve Clarissa’s will and denies her use of it” (195). His attention to the bizarre nature of Clarissa’s liberty, as a freedom that cannot be exercised, points to the paradoxical condition of Clarissa’s existence, one that confronts publicity and reclusion yet openly disavows taking a side. As we will see, Clarissa’s ascetic endurance of the aporia, of the apparent contradiction between spiritual withdrawal from the carnal world and increased public exemplarity, is picked up by Eliza Wharton, the heroine of

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77 Ross, Clarissa, 1519n1.

Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette* (1797), as central to her confrontation of the irreconcilable differences between the opposed identities of *feme sole* and *feme covert* offered to the post-Revolutionary American woman.

Richardson’s use of religious discourses of ascetic self-management derived from seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Anglican theology permits him to endorse absolute obedience as necessary for sustaining a civic society that lacks a strong external authority. In the absence of a strong monarchical figure (such as the George II’s compromised constitutional role), the partial moral judgment of the civic subject is balanced by an internalization of complete divine knowledge. By using religious terms of self-management, Richardson avoids taking a direct stance on either Jacobite notions of passive obedience and absolute authority or Lockean/Pufendorfian theories of natural liberty and liberal democratic individualism. While Richardson obsesses over the problem of filial obedience he does not (as his letters with Mulso reveal) confidently endorse the political corollary of this point. Depending on the religious and figural dimensions of filial obedience, Richardson develops a more acceptable and palatable discourse for upholding a marginalized and increasingly unpopular political view. This deliberate deployment of religious language and imagery to figure obviously political issues finds Richardson himself employing an ascetic politics of deferral to endure the irreconcilable contradictions of his day. For Richardson, ascetic citizenship provides a methodology for confronting the perceived moral decay of society by applying individual models of practical piety to general questions of political obedience and authority. By addressing the question of civic and political authority through the lens of the Harlowes’ quasi-ecclesiastical power Richardson circumvents the more directly political questions underwriting questions of filial disobedience and parental tyranny. Yet if Richardson feels compelled to recommend a regimen of self-denial as the only viable antidote to the “Scepticism and Infidelity” plaguing his society, *Clarissa* graphically dramatizes the dangers of such a rigorous approach to the reformation of manners. The possibility announced by Lovelace’s caught bird simile, the possibility of
the bird that “actually starve[s] itself and die[s] with grief, at its being caught and caged,” is the resounding figure of Richardson’s novel. In the concluding days of Clarissa’s life, the threat of excessive behaviour that runs through the entire text takes centre stage and forbids “this sweet bird” to sing “a fine song” and be “well contented with her condition” (557). The ideal mediocrity of a happy asceticism, or a contended self-abnegation, figured by Clarissa’s patient endurance of the “weaning-time” is ultimately foreclosed by her very human drive to excess. Whether driven by her “secret pride and vanity” or simply defeated by despair, Richardson’s heroine, as much as Lovelace and the Harlowes, falls prey to extreme actions (333). Seemingly against the text’s efforts to downplay such threats of excess, Richardson’s Clarissa expresses a resounding fidelity to representing extremism in all its forms. Such fidelity betrays Richardson’s ultimate lack of faith in human judgment.

In the postscript to the first edition he explicitly states that Clarissa’s slow decline and ultimate demise is intended to recommend “piety,” “diffusive charity,” “steady virtue,” “Christian humility,” “forgiving spirit,” “meekness,” and “resignation”—everyday Christian virtues that “HEAVEN only [can] reward” (1498). While Clarissa indeed embodies all of these virtues, the postscript attempts to gloss over the uncontrollable elements of her character—the excessive traits that characterize the narrative’s indeterminacy as well. We might justifiably identify Clarissa’s “weaning-time” as the ideal, but it is an ideal that Richardson’s own desire to “shine” struggles against. His authorial interventions effect something of an ascetic deferral itself, an unwillingness to make a decision between the various options—a deferral that attempts to pull back from the extreme perversion, the excessive obstinacy, the overblown parental tyranny, and the monomaniacal machinations of libertinism represented so vividly within the novel.

It is exactly this state of deferral that Clarissa attempts to prolong with her studied regimen of fasting. Eating just enough to sustain life, Clarissa slowly eases herself out of the here into the space between the here and hereafter. Spending her remaining time, as Sherlock and Taylor recommend, in constant prayer and retirement from the carnal world, Clarissa constitutes an important border subjectivity poised at the threshold between the sacred and the profane. Constituted on a paradoxical

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Richardson, Hints of Prefaces, and Postscripts, 369.
inclusion/exclusion from society, Richardson’s protagonist attempts to transcend the mutually exclusive realms of sacred and profane, realms dramatically enforced by the Harlowes’ act of nailing up and anathematizing their daughter’s belongings in her former room. By pausing at the brink between the sacred and the profane, Richardson not only expresses a scepticism regarding the capacity of a partial human judgment to discern God’s plan, but also identifies the specific nature of Clarissa’s independence as a liberty that, existing in theory, cannot be put into practice. Clarissa maps the specific parameters of ascetic citizenship, not so much in the seclusion of one’s closet, as in the freedom not to act.
Since the eighteenth century, hermitic figures have dotted the American cultural landscape. From Quaker abolitionist Benjamin Lay’s (1681-1759) fanatical decision to live self-sufficiently in a cave as a protest against slave labour, to African-American recluse Robert Voorhis, the Hermit of Massachusetts (b. 1769/70) and Henry “Box” Brown (1815-c.1879), to iconic figures like Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), John Muir (1838-1914), Thomas Merton (1915-1968), and Edward Abbey (1927-1989), many Americans have expressed their critical voices through voluntary reclusion from society. The last decade and a half of the eighteenth century, however, appears to have been an especially busy time for the American hermit. During this period, American printers and booksellers published an unprecedented number of tales and anecdotes about the lives of hermits. The popularity of what I am calling the hermit’s tale is witnessed by the ubiquity of the hermit as a staple element of both early almanac writing (1757-1815) and juvenile/didactic texts such as Richard Johnson’s popular The hermit of the forest, and the wandering infants. A rural fragment (Boston, 1789) and Mary Pilkington’s Tales of the hermitage; written for the instruction and amusement of the rising generation (1800). In addition, numerous novels published during

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2 Eric Slauter, in his study of isolation in the early republic, locates the high point for the popularity of the hermit figure in the 1780s, with 1788 being the decade’s apogee. While the prevalence of hermit figures in almanacs and magazines appears to occur during this period, a wider canvas of textual references to hermitic figures, taking into account the hermitic and ascetic practices of individuals not exclusively identified as hermits, reveals a longer period of vogue, extending the cultural cachet of the hermit figure through until at least the turn of the century (“Being Alone,” n9-10).

3 Richard Johnson, The Hermit of the Forest, and the Wandering Infants. A Rural Fragment (Boston, 1789). Johnson’s text was republished each year between 1791-4 (twice in 1792 & 1793), 1798, 1800 (three
this period focus intensively on the figure of the hermit, ascetic, or cloistered monk/nun.⁴ Such texts ran the gamut from sentimental/seduction narratives to oriental tales and gothic novels.

During this period, America saw the publication of *A Wonderful discovery of a hermit, who lived upwards of two hundred years* (1786), *An Account of the Wonderful Old Hermit’s Death, and Burial* (1787), “The Hermit’s Soliloquy” (1788), Abraham Panther’s *A Surprising Account of the Discovery of a Lady who was taken by the Indians in the year 1777, and after making her escape, she retired to a lonely Cave, where she lived nine years* (1788), the narrative of Amos Wilson’s hermitic withdrawal as a result of his sister’s trial and execution for infanticide (*A Faithful Narrative of Elizabeth Wilson, Who was Executed at Chester, January 3, 1786. Charged with the Murder of her Twin Infants* [1786]), “The Hermitess; Or, Fair Secluder” (1790), Anne-Therese de Marguenat de Courcelles, Marquise de Lambert’s *The Fair Solitary; or, Female Hermit* (1790) and Peter Longueville’s *The English hermit: or, The unparalleled sufferings and surprising adventures of Philip Quarll, an Englishman…* (1795). These seemingly ephemeral texts were reprinted numerous times during the period, attesting to a sustained cultural interest in both male and female hermitic figures during the 1790s.⁵

⁴ A larger survey of the influence of the hermit’s tale would consider versions of Native American hermitic behaviour. Texts such as Crevecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (1789), Bernardin Saint-Pierre’s *Paul and Virginia, an Indian story. Translated from the French of J.H.B. de St. Pierre, author of the Studies of nature. By H. Hunter, D.D.* (1799), Chateaubriand’s *Atala, or, The love and constancy of two savages in the desert* (1803) would be crucial in this regard. Additionally, later texts on African-American hermitage would greatly enhance our understanding of the relevance of the hermit’s tale (see n1).

Perhaps the most significant indication of the young republic’s interest in hermits is the persistent republication of hermit poems by British authors. From the 1750s well into the nineteenth century, Thomas Parnell’s “The Hermit,” James Beattie’s “The Hermit”, and Oliver Goldsmith’s “Edwin and Angelina” (excerpted from *The Vicar of Wakefield*) continued to be prominently published by American printers, in numerous poetic anthologies of British verse, as individual texts, and as epigrams to various nineteenth-century American novels dealing with the reclusive life. As early as 1791, British hermit poems occupied a prominent place in American anthologies of British poetry. Mathew Carey’s *The Beauties of Poetry, British and American…* (1791) contains the hermit poems of Parnell, Beattie, and Goldsmith, while George Jerry Osborne’s *The Poetical Miscellany; Containing a Collection of the Most Valuable Pieces from Goldsmith, Blair, Warton, Parnel, Pope, Gray, Mallet, Watts, Addison, &c.* (1793) includes Goldsmith and Beattie alongside William Wilkie’s verse-fable “The Rake and Hermit.” These anthologies appear until the late 1810s. Of particular note is an anonymous miscellany called *The Hermit, being a miscellaneous collection in prose and verse* (1808), which pairs excerpts from Parnell, Beattie, and Goldsmith with the author’s own lugubrious introspections.

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8 *The Beauties of Poetry, British and American…* (Philadelphia: Carey, Mathew, 1791); *The Poetical Miscellany; Containing a Collection of the Most Valuable Pieces from Goldsmith, Blair, Warton, Parnel, Pope, Gray, Mallet,
The Politics of the Weeping Hermit

What was so appealing about the figure of the hermit to the postrevolutionary American political consciousness? Why is it that Thomas Parnell’s poem, “The Hermit,” and Lambert’s “The Fair Solitary; or, Female Hermit,” are first published as individual texts in America? What cultural importance would readers have placed on the fact that Thomas Hopkinson’s political poem, Liberty (1768), was subtitled: Lately found in a bundle of papers, said to be written by a hermit in New Jersey? While clearly the discovery of the hermit’s manuscript, like the interception of a packet of epistles, had become something of a literary convention, I would argue that there is something more significant about early America’s fascination with hermits, something that is explicitly political in nature.

In a recent article, Eric Slauter provides an insightful analysis of the political relevance of the hermit. Understanding the hermit as a product of an “age obsessed by the social contract, by the public sphere, [and] by sociability itself,” he argues that figures of voluntary retirement raise the important question of the compatibility between individual liberty and collective authority, private life and the public sphere. The reason for the rise of hermits during the constitutional period is explained by a public obsession with determining whether individuals are the product of the state or whether the state is a product of individuals. Such debates over natural law and the constitution of individual political subjectivity are, thus, central to the appeal of the hermit (Slauter, par. 4). By withdrawing from society, postrevolutionary hermits opt out of a social world overburdened by social distinctions. Providing narratives of “postsocial individuals,” narratives of hermitic life enunciate the failure of sociability itself. The figure of the hermit, Slauter contends, counters “the social contract’s narrative of individuals voluntarily leaving the state of nature for the protections of civil

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9 Lambert’s text was never published in Britain as a separate text, appearing only as part of The Works of the Marchioness De Lambert, 2 vols. (London: W. Owen, 1769).


governments” (par. 5). While Slauter is undoubtedly correct in linking the presence of the hermit to larger contemporary arguments about the social contract, his identification of American hermits as “postsocial individuals” belies the uniquely liminal status of such figures, a status that paradoxically includes the hermit within the community on the basis of his/her exclusion from society. In fairness, Slauter admits that, while a more comprehensive reading is beyond the bounds of his article, the question of how these texts function as “radically alternative narratives about society and about individualism” needs to be considered (par. 29). This chapter builds on Slauter’s trenchant observations, attempting to provide some answers for what these “radically alternative narratives about society” might tell us about postrevolutionary American political subjectivity. Neither strictly social nor postsocial, the hermit’s rhetorical stance derives from his/her confrontation and endurance of the irreconcilable fissures between the categories of sacred and profane, public and private, and society and nature. While the figure of the hermit certainly provides an apt vehicle for political commentary in postrevolutionary America, such commentary derives from the hermit’s rhetorical gesture of deferred judgment, a gesture that inheres in his/her persistent unwillingness to weigh in on the specific political and social dilemmas of his/her time.

As early as 1789, Daniel Bowen’s itinerant wax museum contained a wax replica of “An Old Hermit.” One of the most popular forms of entertainment during the late eighteenth century, travelling wax museums first began touring the eastern seaboard of the American colonies in 1749. Daniel Bowen’s museum was one of the first to display waxworks, travelling between Boston, Philadelphia, and New York between 1789-1810. Among the figures of Bowen’s exhibit, we find the historical figures of George Washington, King George III, Queen Sophia, the Prince of Wales, Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock, Alexander Hamilton, the Duchess of Orleans, and Baron Trenck flanked by personifications of Liberty, Justice, Peace, and Plenty. Alongside such personifications, viewers were treated to archetypal figures such as “A Nun at

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Confession—or, Innocence and Beauty,” “A Priest in a Roman Catholic dress,” “A Fine Woman asleep—or, the Sleeping Beauty,” “Jack, just arrived from Sea, by the side of a Country Lass,” “An Indian Chief—painted and dressed in his war habit, holding a real scalp,” “An Old Hermit,” “Darby and Joan,” and “A Mad Woman”

On first glance, one might be tempted to lump the Old Hermit with the examples of Roman Catholic extremism represented by the Nun and Priest; however, the figure of hermit achieved something of an iconic status during the last two decades of the century, a status characterized by its distance from Catholic extremism. Commenting on the presence of the two Georges (King George and George Washington), Julia Stern rightly notes that “in its elaborate totality, [Bowen’s] exhibit constitutes a narrative representation of early national identity formation at work.” As Andrea Stulman-Dennett observes, waxworks such as Bowen’s provided audiences with a “pasteurized interpretation of the past,” one that standardized and stereotyped historical figures and moments to forge a “common vision of the past” (107). Yet Stern’s suggestion that Bowen’s vision of national identity can be reduced to an image of patriarchal power ignores the important themes conveyed by the other figures.

Consistently including such figures as the Nun, Priest, Mad Women, Sleeping Beauty, Darby & Joan, Jack reunited with a Country Lass, the Indian Chief, and the Old Hermit, Bowen’s waxworks represent a much more complex and nuanced picture of early national identity. If, as Stern insists, the waxworks represent “what we might call the ‘consolidated ego ideal’ of the Federalist elite” (128), then this ego ideal must include both images of excessive love/sentiment represented by the Mad Woman, Jack and the Country Lass, and Sleeping Beauty and images of stoic withdrawal and self-restraint represented by the Nun, the Priest, the Indian Chief, and the Old Hermit. Between these two extremes, the figure of Darby & Joan offers the pedestrian ideal of bourgeoisie mediocrity. If Bowen’s tableau embodies popular images of American political identity then it must be one that recognizes, not only the complicated relationship between historical figures of patriarchal authority (the two Georges, Franklin, Hamilton) and

14 “Advertisement [Waxworks Exhibited at No. 74, Water Street].”

symbolic figures of Liberty, Justice, Peace, and Plenty, but also the counterintuitive relationship between the bourgeois ideal of mediocrity and the archetypal expressions of excessive sentiment and self-restraint. To appreciate the connection between George Washington, on the one hand, and the Old Hermit, on the other hand, we must recast the relationship between excessive behaviour and mediocrity so that the via media presented by Darby & Joan is enabled by the extreme behaviour of the Mad Woman, the Nun, and the Old Hermit.

In his eulogy to David Rittenhouse (the late president of the American Philosophical Society) delivered in 1796, Benjamin Rush describes the “artless” simplicity of Rittenhouse’s tombstone. Describing how different “the monument of his worth and fame [would have been], had not the gratitude and affection of his friends been controuled by his dying request,” Rush provides the following telling description of an overly sentimentalized memorial:

His head would have reclined in marble, upon the lap of religion. At his feet, science would have sat—bathed in tears; while the genius of republican liberty, in the figure of a venerable hermit, bending over his grave, would have deplored the loss of his favourite son.  

Only slightly more striking than Rush’s sardonic disapproval of the monument’s saccharine symbolism, is his inclusion of the image of the venerable hermit as a symbol for “the genius of republican liberty.” Rush’s inclusion of the venerable hermit illustrates how conventional and culturally recognized the hermit figure had become as a marker of political liberty. Indeed, by 1796, the political utility of the venerable hermit had become established enough to justify its inclusion in Rush’s description as representative of the kind of mourning practices he contemns.

The connection between hermits, mourning, and political liberty is further evinced by the persistent quotation by American political writers of William Collins’ “Ode: Written in the beginning of the Year 1746.” Rounding out the British hermit poems, Collins’ ode represents the most interesting example of the political relevance of

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16 Benjamin Rush, *An Eulogium, Intended to Perpetuate the Memory of David Rittenhouse, Late President of the American Philosophical Society….* (Philadelphia: J. Ormrod, 1797), 44.
the hermit figure in America.\textsuperscript{17} Undoubtedly reflective of the increasing British momentum and declining Jacobite strength in the months preceding the latter’s defeat at the Battle of Culloden (16 April 1746), Collins’ two-stanza ode was easily adaptable to the American political context:

\begin{quote}
How sleep the brave, who sink to rest,
By all their country’s wishes bless’d!
When spring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallow’d mould,
She there shall dress a sweeter sod
Than fancy’s feet have ever trod.

There \textit{Honour} comes, a Pilgrim grey,
To bless the Turf that wraps their Clay,
And \textit{Freedom} shall a-while repair;
To dwell a weeping Hermit there!\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

On 4 July 1786, Congregationalist minister Enos Hitchcock (1744–1803) delivered a sermon to the Society of the Cincinnati, commemorating the anniversary of the American Revolution and the heroic efforts of America’s soldiers.\textsuperscript{19} Marking the occasion by a call to veterans to shed “a generous tear to the memory of your worthy brethren,” Hitchcock trusts that the sympathetic moment is best conveyed by Collins’ ode, “the page that speaks the rest”(25). Appreciating the resonant imagery of a country retired from the ravages of martial life, Hitchcock’s quoting of Collins introduces an apt metaphor for American political identity. Interestingly, Collins’ metaphor makes more sense in the American context than it does in the context of the Jacobite Uprising of

\textsuperscript{17} First published in \textit{Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects} (London: A. Millar, 1746), William Collins’ “Ode” was published in America in \textit{The Poetical Works of William Collins....} (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1789).

\textsuperscript{18} Collins, \textit{Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects}, 19.

1745. Comparing the American War of Independence to a hermit’s withdrawal from the violence of martial life seems especially germane. In this regard, it is not difficult to appreciate the appeal, for certain postrevolutionary writers and thinkers, of conceptualizing America’s rebellion against Britain as an act of hermitic withdrawal itself.\(^{20}\)

The metaphor achieves its full strength, however, in the nation’s valorization of its first president. Adapted as part of a larger piece of sacred music to be played during Washington’s funeral procession, Collins’ ode became well known to American readers by the frequent reprinting of this choral adaptation, most popularly in *The Federal songster: being a collection of the most celebrated patriotic songs, hitherto published. With a variety of others, sentimental and convivial* (1800).\(^{21}\) By connecting Collins’ image of the weeping hermit with the memorialization of the nation’s premier leader, the figure is transformed from a metaphor of sorrow expressed to fallen soldiers into a metaphor of collective mourning for the father of American independence. No longer simply an appropriate response of gratitude to those who have died to secure the freedom of the republic, the image of the weeping hermit provided a viable trope for those Americans struggling to reconcile a nascent American national identity with a British colonial heritage. For those sympathetic to such imagery, to be an American might justifiably be understood as a hermit’s withdrawal from the British colonial world, publicly expressing his/her dedication to the cause through a distanced mourning for the nation’s great preserver of liberty. “To dwell a weeping hermit” was to continue the always-unfinished project of republican liberty begun by the Revolution and carried forth by Washington. By 1804, the project of democracy suggested by the presence of

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\(^{20}\) The image of American independence as hermitic withdrawal from Britain is repeated during the close of the War of 1812. On three separate occasions, Collins’ ode is used to bolster the fallen spirits of men harassed by the human costs attendant on sustained political independence. See James Foster, *The Capitulation, or, a History of the Expedition Conducted by William Hull, Brigadier-General of the Northwestern Army by an Ohio Volunteer* (Chillicothe, OH: James Barnes, 1812), 57; Lucius Horatio Stockton, *An Address Delivered before the Convention of the Friends of Peace of the State of New-Jersey, July 4, 1814* (Trenton, NJ, 1814), 10; and John Lathrop, *Oration in Celebration of the Peace….* (Boston: E. G. House, 1815), 9.

Collins’ ode in Washington’s funeral procession remained unfinished: “the awful spirit of Democracy,” John Adams remarks, is still “in great progress.”

Yet if, as Collins’ ode suggests, freedom is understood as that which exists in retirement from society, how might republican liberty be exercised? What might a democratic freedom that insists on dwelling in the shadows of society look like? For postrevolutionary Americans, Collins’ ode raised important questions regarding the value of a liberty that cannot be tested in society but must only exist in withdrawal from the res publica. In Adams’ famous letter to William Cunningham (15 March 1804), he figures the threat to the freedom of the democratic citizen of the young republic as Richardson’s archetypal libertine, Robert Lovelace. In a view clearly not endorsed by men such as Thomas Jefferson, Adams suggests that “Democracy is Lovelace and the people are Clarissa.”

The remedy for this danger, however, is left unstated. If the freedom of the American people, in Adams’ estimation, is in need of protection from the libertine propensities of a Lovelacean democracy, the persistent allusion to Collins’ ode suggests a specific course of action for ensuring its protection. While the “courtship” of the people by the figure of the libertine familiarizes the American citizen with the “artful villain[y]” of democracy, reducing them to the “condition of the poor girl [i.e. Clarissa],” the concerted voluntary withdrawal from the public world of political courtship implied by the figure of the weeping hermit provides the necessary security against such threats. Separated from a dangerous public circulation amongst libertines and politicians, the Clarissean democratic citizen forges a new form of public identity, one based in a retired public mourning for the causalities of democracy’s unfinished project. In the shades of democracy the grey Pilgrim Honour and the weeping Hermit Freedom enunciate the particular criteria by which the democratic subject might be protected. In much the same way that America’s withdrawal from British political tyranny was envisioned by some as hermitic, the public civic duty and responsibility of the postrevolutionary American citizen coalesced around obligations of deferred critique and stewardship of the struggling republican project.

22 Correspondence between the Hon. John Adams and the Late William Cunningham, Esq. (1823); see chapter 2, n16.
In one sense, the notion of the American citizen as a weeping Hermit clearly draws on the tradition of the American jeremiad defined by Sacvan Bercovitch. Central to Bercovitch’s understanding of the jeremiad as a “prophetic vision that unveils the promises, announces the good things to come, and explains away the gap between fact and ideal” is its insight into the manner in which Christian self-discipline leads to a “liminal state” of antinomianism and self-interest, the religious and economic extensions of unfettered individualism. The American jeremiad prevents these extremes by turning such liminality (a cultural no-man’s land where all social norms may be challenged) into a mode of socialization. Unlike the privileged critical stance of the American Jeremiah as a “right to withdraw from what is America,” the ascetic citizen refuses to either engage or withdraw from what is American (181). Instead, the American ascetic citizen forges a critical space that exists separate from the jeremiad/anti-jeremiad dyad, one that confronts and endures the division between sacred and profane, between present dissolution and future promise. As the image of the weeping Hermit suggests, the gaze of the American ascetic citizen is both forward and backward, firmly situated between the moment of mourning past causalities and the moment of looking forward to a brighter future. It is inaccurate, however, to suggest that the ascetic citizen’s backward glance is simply the enabling factor for forward-looking progress. The ascetic citizen’s political critique never “explains away the gap between fact and ideal,” never folds dissent into a future promise of consensus; rather, the ascetic citizen insists on underscoring and maintaining the “gap between fact and ideal” that the American jeremiad seeks to paper over (Bercovitch, 16).

The location of the postrevolutionary American citizen is in the moment of the pause itself, the moment in which Freedom “a-while repair[s]” or dwells in the shadows. Like Collins’ hermit, the ascetic citizen exists in this repaired moment. Dwelling at the threshold between conservative and radical ideals, the ascetic citizen eschews dreams of political transcendence and ideological phantasm by announcing the ultimate irreconcilability of such extreme positions. The American ascetic citizen is, in this sense, as much a rhetorical stance, as much a discursive positioning between opposed extremes, as a physical reclusion from society. As an ideal civic figure, he/she

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preserves politically extreme positions only by refusing to engage them, only by suspending them in a space of indefinite cultural deferral. In an important sense, the figure of the ascetic citizen that emerges during the late eighteenth century looks ahead to the studied critical deferral encapsulated by Bartleby’s maxim: “I would prefer not to.”

By juxtaposing Adams’ Richardsonian evaluation of democracy alongside the use of Collins’ ode to figure democratic freedom as a weeping hermit, we gain a richer insight into the specific iconographic relevance of figures of isolation, reclusion, and hermitic life, an iconography that figures the postrevolutionary citizen as both the victim of seduction and the hero of voluntary withdrawal, as both Clarissa Harlowe and Robinson Crusoe. Unsurprisingly, the two chief literary influences upon which the America Hermit’s Tale gains its aesthetic coherence are the sentimental seduction narrative and the Robinsonade.

**Refiguring the Castaway Narrative as a Hermit’s Tale**

The Hermit’s Tale is a highly formulaic genre, and like any formula is adopted by various authors in more or less pure forms. The basic structure of the Hermit’s Tale is quite simple. An old hermit (usually male) is discovered by one or two travelling adventurers. In the American context, such adventurers are often setting out to the western territories in search of riches and curiosities. The hermit is discovered in a cave (or hut) nestled in some secluded Edenic valley, far from the intruding eyes of the public world. Attention to the length of his seclusion and the age of the hermit (often of biblical proportions) are among the first items of conversation. The hermit is invariably hospitable, inviting the travellers into his/her humble dwelling and treating them to a simple (often vegetarian) meal. When the meal is finished, the travellers solicit the requisite iteration of the hermit’s life to explain why and how he arrived at this point. The hermit’s backstory represents the main thematic thrust of the Hermit’s Tale, explaining his/her reasons for withdrawal while underscoring the central critique of society that the hermit’s actions point to. As we will see, this backstory invariably involves the hermit’s self-delusion or betrayal by the false pleasures of a frothy and

frivolous urban society. The false pleasures of urban life include unchecked social climbing, unhealthy adherence to social status, coquetry, libertinism, and seduction. Like Crusoe’s retrospective narration, the hermit’s backstory is told with a religiously imbued appreciation of both the hermit’s previous lack of prudence and society’s shortcomings. Such evaluations regularly open up to larger more general religious concerns of resignation to God’s Providence and opening one’s heart to the Saviour. Thus, not only are the false pleasures of the world replaced by the more substantial pleasures of divine communion, but the selfish affections of the libertine, fop, or coquette are replaced by a heart-felt affection for God.

With the completion of the hermit’s backstory, the travellers announce their departure, insisting that the hermit return with them to society. Most often the hermit declines to leave his/her seclusion, departing on good terms with the travellers. The final crucial element of the Hermit’s Tale is an overt self-consciousness on the part of the hermit that his story will become publicized. This is often marked by the discovery or gifting of the hermit’s manuscripts to the departing travellers, with a request that they be organized and published for the greater benefit of society. As we will see, this self-consciousness is crucial for understanding the political relevance of the hermit’s tale. Indeed, the consistent presence of the hermit’s manuscript speaks to the hermit’s keen awareness of his/her own publicity. That is to say, in the presence of the hermit’s manuscript, the hermit’s withdrawal into a privatized seclusion is always already conceived as a very public declaration of ascetic politics. Like Clarissa’s devotional regimen, the American hermit’s exemplarity depends upon his/her preference not to engage, upon his/her privileging of a provisional “weaning-time” over deliberation. The hermit’s manuscript marks this particular “weaning-time” or “zone of irreducible indistinction” as a zone existing at the threshold between inclusion and exclusion. The textual artefact of the hermit’s wilful reclusion sustains the ascetic citizen’s liminal status by grounding the hermit’s otherworldliness in the materiality of the manuscript.

As the following discussions of Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette* and Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* will reveal, this public textual declaration of ascetic politics finds Foster and Brown confronting the irreconcilable differences between the

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25 On Clarissa’s “weaning-time,” see chapter 2; on sacred man’s “zone of irreducible indistinction,” see Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 9.
competing political platforms of classical republicanism and liberalism, Federalist and Jeffersonian politics, and the competing religious platforms of Old Light rational Calvinism and New Light affective Calvinism. In Eliza Wharton’s deathbed writings, Edgar Huntly’s epistle to his fiancé, and Clithero Edny’s hidden manuscript, the presence of the hermit’s script serves to justify his/her reclusion while consolidating their public existence as members of the community of which they have opted out.

The textual self-consciousness expressed by the hermit’s careful preparation of his/her manuscripts finds its origins in the hermit tale’s affinity with Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Roughly sixty years before James Fenimore Cooper would shamelessly revise Defoe’s text in *The Crater; or, Vulcan’s Peak: A Take of the Pacific* (1847), Americans were already conceiving of themselves as American Crusoes, castaways of the Allegheny Mountains rather than the Orinoco River. The consistent popularity of Defoe’s hero in America has been well documented by scholars such as Jay Fliegelman. What has not been noted, however, is the iconographic currency of Robinson Crusoe for the development of the American hermit. In *A Wonderful discovery of a hermit, who lived upwards of two hundred years* (1786), the hermit is described: “His head was bald, his beard was long and white which covered his breast: —his body was covered with fur and skins of beasts” (7). Perhaps most convincing, however, is a comparison of the frontispieces from the first edition of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) (fig. 4) with that of *Wonderful discovery* (1786) (fig. 5).

The similarities between these two illustrations are striking. Down to the dual fowling pieces, scabbard, hat, and sinking ship in the background, the wonderful hermit is visually depicted as an American Crusoe. One should not, however, overlook the larger political relevance of the Wonderful Hermit’s arrival in America as a latter-day Crusoe. In the course of narrating his life, the Wonderful Hermit explains to his two visitors, James Buckland and John Fielding, that he was born two hundred twenty-seven years ago (9). Given the supposed date of his discovery, this would place the hermit’s birth at approximately 1558. As the title page suggests, he has lived in his present location “upwards of two hundred years.” Roughly calculated, the hermit was shipwrecked at the age of twenty-seven in the year 1585. This places the Wonderful

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Hermit’s arrival in America in exactly the same year that Sir Walter Raleigh’s first group of colonists landed on Roanoke Island. Leaving the fledging colony with a promise to return the next year, their leader, Sir Richard Grenville, never saw the starving colonists again. In *A Wonderful discovery*, the hermit explains how, being shipwrecked on the eastern seaboard, he “left [his] companions and betook [himself] to the wilderness” (10). It is difficult to say whether his companions were the other members of the lost colony. Yet, while the question of whether the Wonderful Hermit represents that last known survivor of the Roanoke colony is unclear, *A Wonderful discovery* nonetheless involves itself in a mythic refiguring of American origins, a refiguration that places the first European inhabitant of the continent before the Puritan settlers.

The characteristic self-consciousness of the public circulation of the American hermit’s tale is a direct legacy of Defoe’s unique fashioning of the castaway narrative. Even a cursory glance at the unwieldy body of narratives identified as castaway narratives reveals a number of generic and thematic affinities. While Crusoe’s trilogy certainly casts a long shadow over the castaway novels that follow it, the most important difference between early castaway narratives such as Henry Pitman’s *A Relation of the Great Sufferings and Strange Adventures of Henry Pitman, Chyrurgion to the late Duke of Monmouth, containing an Account…* (London, 1689), or the various versions of Alexander Selkirk’s narrative and those following the publication of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is this newly acquired self-awareness of the narrative textuality of their lives.

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Fig. 4. Daniel Defoe, *The life and most surprising adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, mariner*...

I have used the third abridged edition of Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Most Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner*... (London: A. Bettesworth, 1726) simply because it provides the best available reproduction. This illustration appears in all of the early editions of Defoe’s text, beginning with the first edition.
Fig 5. A Wonderful discovery of a hermit, who lived upwards of two hundred years (1786).
As one scholar puts it, *Robinson Crusoe* is not only “a primer on how to live on a remote island, but on how to write the experience up.”³¹ Defoe’s Crusoe trilogy represents a protracted exercise in self-fashioning in which the subjection of the individual life to the rules of narrative form replicates the religious and political renunciations required by the citizen in the political realm. The narrators of both Peter Longueville’s *The Hermit; Or, the Unparalleled [sic] Sufferings and Surprising Adventures of Mr. Philip Quarll* (1727) and *The Female American; or, the Adventures of Unca Eliza Winkfield* (1767) reveal a similar awareness that their lives are not only fit to be narrated but that the textual artefact of such narratives, the so-called hermit’s manuscript, will extend beyond their deaths, intersecting with a network of readers and providing sage wisdom and judicious admonitions to those living in the world.³²

Longueville’s *The Hermit*, a text popular on both sides of the Atlantic during the eighteenth century, represents this transformation of the castaway into the hermit. Rehearsing conventional religious calls to eschew worldly concerns in favour of eternal rewards, Longueville’s text is unabashedly derivative of Defoe’s text. Like Crusoe, a hermit named Philip Quarll escapes drowning but fears starvation. Early days on the island are spent searching for food, building fires, and scanning the horizon for ships. As with his forbearer, Quarll succeeds in building a rude dwelling, learns to domesticate the local fauna, surveys the island, and begins a regimented program of daily religious devotions. More obviously indebted to Defoe’s narrative, Quarll finds some peas in his coat pocket, “the Gifts of Providence,” by which “in four Years time, [he] rais’d Seed enough to stock of Piece of Ground, out of which I gather a sufficient Quantity for my use, besides preserving fresh Seed”(27). Like Crusoe, he figures his predicament on the island through metaphors of execution and reprieve. “One under Condemnation of Death,” he writes, “and just arriv’d at the Place of Execution, could not be more rejoic’d at the Coming of a Reprieve, than he was at the Sight of this Fish”(160). Quarll also follows Crusoe’s devotional regimen, enacting a series of religious fasts as reminders of God’s Providence (187). Like Crusoe, Quarll is anxious about intruders, becoming


³² The *Female American; or, the Adventures of Unca Eliza Winkfield, Compiled by Herself* (London, 1767). This text was subsequently reprinted twice in America (Newburyport, MA, 1800; Vergennes (or Randolph), VT, 1814), but only once in England, suggesting America’s greater interest in the tales of hermits.
extremely distraught at the discovery of a canoe moored on the coast. While Crusoe’s visitors are natives from the nearby mainland, Quarll’s intruders are French privateers. Similarly, while Defoe’s hero educates and catechizes Friday, Quarll takes in a young Frenchman left behind by the privateers, teaching him English and educating him in Christian doctrine (235-41). Given the popularity of Defoe’s text it is not at all surprising to find Longueville cribbing so closely from the former’s narrative; there are many examples of such derivativeness. What is unique about The Hermit, however, is the way in which Longueville adopts Crusoe’s self-conscious narration of his own life.

Meeting Mr. Dorrington, Longueville’s hermit retrieves the manuscript for his visitor remarking that it is written “in a rough and unpolite Language; for I did not write it out of Ostentation or to exert my Parts, but to keep in the mind of the many Mercies I have receiv’d from Heaven ever since my Youth, and to record the wonderful Effects of Providence”(41). This initial disclaimer against self-flattery is overruled, however, by the palpable excitement Quarll expresses at the prospect that his life will be extended through publication. As he notes to Doddington,

now my Intent is in some measure answered, expecting you will revise and publish it when you come to Old England; I must rejoin you not to give it out as my own Dictation, but as History taken from Heads out of my Memorial; for I have been oblig’d to insert Particulars, and use such Expressions, without which the Account I give of my self would have been imperfect, and which being related as by me, may chance to be accounted Self-flattery, which is a Censure I would willingly avoid”(42)

Prior to Doddington’s arrival (in fact, at the very moment of writing his memoir) Quarll is conscious of the prospective reader. As with Crusoe, there is an underlying optimism that inheres in the hermit’s manuscript, an optimism derived from the likelihood of the future reader. Longueville’s detailed description of Doddington’s redactions emphasizes the centrality of a publicly-circulating manuscript to the genre of the hermit’s tale. By taking up Defoe’s characterization of Crusoe as a castaway cognizant of his own publicity, Longueville’s text makes explicit what is only implicit in Defoe’s novel. That is to say, by transforming the castaway into a hermit, the material document of the
hermit’s life becomes the centrepiece of a new genre devoted to explaining how private experience might serve the common good of humanity.

Winkfield’s narrative redoubles the textual self-consciousness of Longueville’s novel while establishing the specific American-ness of the castaway as hermit. *The Female American* begins in much the same manner, with prefatory remarks that echo Quarll’s intentions in writing his own memoirs:

> If this book should ever fall into the hands of any person, it is to inform him that I lived on this uninhabited island forty years; but now, finding the symptoms of death upon me, I am going to retire to another stone room, where I shall lay me down, and, if God pleases, rest for ever from my troubles. (I: 70)

As with Quarll’s narrative there is a heightened self-awareness of the composition and transmission of the hermit’s narrated life, understood as a material artefact that travels from the confines of the island to the reader. Unceremoniously cast on what initially appears to be a deserted island, the eponymous female American finds the manuscript of the island’s previous hermit in one of a series of interlocking caves. By reading the manuscript of the hermit, Winkfield learns how to make a fire, how to catch the plentiful goats on the island, how to tame the goats, and how to salt their meat. In short, the hermit’s manuscript provides Winkfield with the skills necessary for survival. Importantly, Winkfield expresses a broader bookish appreciation of hermitic life. Discovering the previous inhabitant’s cell, she concludes that

> this was the habitation of some human being: but this gave me no alarm; for as I had read of hermits, who frequently retire from public life to enjoy their devotions in private, I imagined, from what I saw, that this must be the habitation of such a one, from whom I did not doubt but I should meet with protection and spiritual consolation. (68-9)

Winkfield’s textual familiarity with narratives of hermitic life is evinced by the staging of her own narrative as an intertext in existing hermit tales. As Laura Stevens rightly observes, Winkfield’s text depicts the “task of surviving on the island as a skilled
reader."

For Winkfield, the discovery of the hermit’s manuscript is crucial: “had not the hermit made these discoveries, and left the means of my coming at the knowledge of them, how miserable must have been the state of a lonely woman!” (I: 89). While Winkfield learns that her hermit (much like Longueville’s hermit) had previously spent the first thirty years of his life “consumed in more than useless follies; in vices that had well nigh brought him to a shameful exit,” it is the presence of the hermit’s manuscript as a public behest from the secluded hermit that saves the protagonist and enables the future consolidation of her “Christian country” (I: 113, 128).

Winkfield imagines her text as predating Robinson Crusoe. As Stevens notes, The Female American presents “an allegory of reading and writing” that imagines the anonymous author “obviously is writing after having read Defoe, but he or she also is writing about the acts of reading and rewriting Defoe” (148). Yet, as the author’s comments suggest, this claim is coupled with a prescience of Defoe’s coming novel. Winkfield’s claim that the “imaginary scenes” of “some future bold adventurer’s imagination” will only “have a temporary effect, but not permanent, like the real ones of mine” makes the familiar criticism that Defoe’s text is inferior because it is fictitious (II: 15). The Editor provides a footnote to this passage, explaining that “Our authoress here seems to please herself, with the thoughts of the immortality of her history, and to prophesy of that of Robinson Crusoe, which only is inferior to her own, as fictions is to truth” (II: 16). The rhetorical ruse being staged here raises two significant points. The understanding of the “immortality of her history” is contingent upon the comparison of The Female American with a yet unwritten Robinson Crusoe, a comparison based on the superior virtue of Winkfield’s narrative as non-fiction. The understanding of the life of her text (and of the text of her life) is based on an assumption that her manuscript will circulate in the public alongside Defoe’s ostensibly inferior text.

As with Quarll’s text, the shift in Winkfield’s perspective from initial despondency at arriving on the island as the result of “human treachery” to a “more comfortable view of my condition” centres around the presence or transmission of a particular text (I: 91). In one sense, Winkfield embodies Quarll’s prospective reader, the

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33 Laura M. Stevens, “Reading the Hermit’s Manuscript: The Female American and Female Robinsonades,” in Approaches to Teaching Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, eds. Maximillian E. Novak and Carl Fisher (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2005), 149. I am indebted to Stevens for highlighting the importance of the hermit’s textual legacy and for coining the term hermit’s manuscript.
morally or physically stranded individual how expresses intense thankfulness at “finding such a resource in my captivity, as the hermit’s book” (I: 91). Winkfield announces that she had “no less cause to be thankful to [God] who influenced [the hermit’s] heart to leave behind him the history of his life, which proved the preservation of mine” (I: 89-90). It is specifically Winkfield’s acquisition of the hermit’s manuscript that causes “an inward persuasion” in her mind “that I should escape from this island...[and causes] every uneasy thought” to disappear (I: 91). In educating herself with the hermit’s manuscript, Winkfield effectively becomes the newly self-conscious hermit of the island and perhaps the first female hermit in Anglo-American literature.

The comments of Winkfield and Quarll’s editors underscore the general point about the public circulation of hermitic narratives. Central to the thematic message of the castaway’s life is the narrator’s recognition that the hermit’s manuscript will reach a wider readership. Put another way, the formal structure of the castaway narrative presents the value of the hermit’s manuscript as its capacity to “replace and extend the life” of the individual hermit.34 In doing so, the castaway narrative is transformed into a hermit’s tale, a genre that self-consciously announces itself as an *ex post egressio* textual presence recording a life of privatized reclusion that exists at and on the threshold between inclusion/exclusion.

The characteristic self-consciousness of the British hermit’s tale is carried across the Atlantic, representing one of the chief characteristics of the early American hermit’s tale as well. In the unofficial (and potentially satirical) sequel to James Buckland’s *A Wonderful Discovery* (1786), *An Account of the Wonderful Old Hermit’s Death, and Burial* (1787) foregrounds the importance of the hermit’s manuscript. In this fascinating text, the narrator, one Dr. Samuel Brake, is impelled to seek out the Wonderful Hermit precisely because he has seen and read Buckland’s publicized account. From the beginning, Brake’s version is enabled by the textual circulation of the previously published life of the hermit. Unlike the first narrative, Brake explicitly foregrounds the textual life of the hermit. Staying with the hermit for several days, Brake finds “several things which were not discovered before.” Most importantly, the narrator discovers “Two Books in particular, which he brought with him from England, one in Poetry the

34 See Harpham, *Ascetic Imperative*, 5.
other in Prose.” The discovery of the books allows the narrator to transform the hermit from an uncouth misanthrope into a recluse with “a good education” and “a surprising greatness of mind.” Underscoring the hermit’s education, the narrator depicts the Wonderful Hermit showing Dr. Brake his writings, of which “he had a larger Pile of them in one corner of his Cave.” In much the same way that Quarll gives Dorrington “a Memorial” of his life written on parchment (18), the Wonderful Hermit offers Brake “a copy of the Hermit’s Composition,” written on “barks of trees, and some on skins made into a kind of Parchment.” Among the writings, Brake also finds the Hermit’s will, which bequeaths his cave and his manuscripts to his initial discoverers, Buckland and Fielding. Publicity is necessary, in the context of the hermit’s tale, for conveying the wisdom learned in seclusion to the public. If the hermit serves a public role, and I believe he/she does, then it must operate through a textual publicity of private life.

Examples of the prominence of the hermit’s manuscript could be quoted ad nauseam. Suffice to say, by the antebellum period, the hermit’s manuscript developed into a text in its own right. Take, for example, The Hermit, or an Account of Francis Adam Joseph Phyle (1811) and Amos Wilson’s The Sweets of Solitude (1822).35 In the account of Phyle’s life, the supposed author, John Atkinson, continues the third-person discovery narrative characteristic of earlier hermit tales. In keeping with the requirements of the genre, the narrator discovers “a blank book in which [Phyle] had drew or delineated sundry religious pieces, with a black-lead pencil”(98). As with Quarll’s opening poem in Longueville’s The Hermit, Atkinson’s recognizes the continued cultural interest in specifically what the hermit says, formally staging the findings of Phyle’s manuscript with a concluding poem by the hermit. Interestingly, we begin to see a shift away from the extensive transcription of the hermit’s own narration of his life (as in the texts of Longueville and Winkfield) to an increased interest in the hermit’s wisdom, in the lessons learned from the sequestered philosopher. Atkinson’s text is accordingly less concerned with the hermit’s backstory (the reasons for the hermit’s decision to withdraw) than with the accumulated wisdom that solitude obtains.

35 Wilson’s manuscript was originally published on its own as The Sweets of Solitude! Or Directions to Mankind How They May Be Happy in A ‘Miserable World’ .... (Boston: John Wilkey, 1822); it was subsequently published with an introductory biographical sketch as The Pennsylvania Hermit…. (New York: Smith and Carpenter, 1888).
This new focus can be seen most demonstratively in Amos Wilson’s *The Sweets of Solitude*. Subtitled, *Directions to Mankind How They May be Happy in a “Miserable World,”* Wilson’s text announces both its strongly religious tone and its self-consciously didactic intentions. Representing the total writings of Amos Wilson while retired in the woods of Harrisburgh, Pennysylvania, *The Sweets of Solitude* embodies the natural extension of the hermit tale’s focus on self-conscious textuality. By 1822, we find the frame device of the discovery of the hermit and his/her manuscript falling away, leaving only the didactic essence of the hermit’s wisdom. This distillation of the hermit’s didactic message as a text of its own finds its obvious culmination in Henry David Thoreau’s declared intention, in *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854), “to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life…and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.”

**Transcending Crusoe’s Ascetic Prerequisite**

Despite the many similarities between Defoe’s iconic castaway and the American hermit, many eighteenth-century American writers make the comparison only to underscore their scepticism regarding the viability of the political model depicted in *Robinson Crusoe*. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Crusoe’s temporary tenure on the island functions as an *ascetic prerequisite* or a provisional period in which the individual learns to voluntarily check self-interest for the good of the whole community before re-entering society. This prerequisite, as I have attempted to illustrate, is ultimately insufficient to internalize the classical republican ideals of civic virtue that were thought by some to be necessary for sustaining a self-governing republic. This same scepticism regarding the efficacy of the *ascetic prerequisite* can be found in early American discussions of Defoe’s text. While Fliegelman is certainly correct to suggest that more than any other British novel, *Robinson Crusoe* “clarifies the moral, political, and spiritual significance of filial disobedience for the American reader on the eve of the Revolution,” Defoe’s novel clarifies a great deal less about either the specific design of

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government or the specific civic duties of the young republic.\textsuperscript{37} Describing his experience of revisiting Defoe’s classic text as an adult in 1804, Charles Brockden Brown discovers something “entirely new” in \textit{Robinson Crusoe}.\textsuperscript{38} What Brown finds so singular about Defoe’s text is its portrayal of, firstly, “the workings of a mind, left to absolute and unaccustomed solitude,” and secondly, its depiction of “the foundations laid of new and civilized communities” (133). Neither Brown’s attention to the psychology of solitary existence nor his interest in the “foundations of new kinds of society” is particularly unique. Yet Brown’s attention to these two areas confirms a sustained interest by Americans, well beyond the eve of the Revolution, in \textit{Robinson Crusoe} as an important limit case for discussing the relationship between reclusion and social progress.

The interest Brown expresses in \textit{Crusoe}’s narrative of solitary life is echoed by James Wilson’s lecture to the College of Philadelphia, “Of Man, as a Member of Society” (1790-1). An active member of the Federal Convention, the Pennsylvanian Ratifying Convention, and the Pennsylvanian Constitutional Convention of 1789-90, as well as a signer of the \textit{Declaration of Independence}, the Scottish born and educated Wilson brought the philosophical heritage of the Scottish Enlightenment (and particularly Francis Hutcheson and Thomas Reid’s emphasis on moral sense) to bear on the paradoxical question of how to reconcile a strong central government with the concept of popular sovereignty.\textsuperscript{39} As James Kloppe nberg explains, representing “at once the fulfilment of the Puritan concept of the covenant, the republican idea of a public-spirited citizenry, and the liberal idea of responsibly self-interested individuals exercising their right to self-government,” the notion of popular sovereignty was crucial for understanding the relationship between individual freedom and institutional restraint.

In an attempt to reconcile the competing claims of individual liberty and central

\textsuperscript{37} Fliegelman, \textit{Prodigals and Pilgrims}, 67.


\textsuperscript{39} On Wilson and Scottish thinkers such as Hutcheson, Reid, Adam Smith, David Hume, and Dugald Stewart, see Mark David Hall, \textit{The Political and Legal Philosophy of James Wilson, 1742-1798} (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 68-72; see also James H. Read, \textit{Power Versus Liberty: Madison, Hamilton, Wilson, and Jefferson} (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 89-91.
government, Wilson advocates a model of restrained liberalism that depends upon an optimistic faith in the inborn moral sense of humanity, a faith in what Mark David Hall has called a “democratic epistemology.” Tellingly, it is to Robinson Crusoe that Wilson turns to illustrate the dangers of unrestrained liberalism.

“Let us suppose,” he states, “a man of full strength, and well instructed in all our arts of life, to be reduced suddenly to solitude, even in one of the best of soils and climates: could he procure the grateful conveniences of life?”

He continues:

It will not be pretended. Could he procure even its simple necessaries? In an ingenious and excellent romance, we are told this has been done. But it will be remembered, that the foundation of Robinson Crusoe’s future subsistence, and of all the comforts which he afterwards provided and collected, was laid in the useful instruments and machines, which he saved from his shipwreck. These were the productions of society. (235)

While Wilson’s rejection of Crusoe as a morally self-sufficient man is in keeping with his larger political and philosophical aims, his decision to use Defoe’s iconic dramatization of isolated life to prove the necessity of social interaction seems somewhat strange. What Wilson’s use of the Crusoe archetype does indicate, however, is the sustained cultural cache of Robinson Crusoe, not simply as a celebration of the heroic individualism favoured by liberal republican politics and laissez-faire economics, but as a warning against the dangers of an overly romanticized political model of zoon politikon in isolation. Thomas Paine, in his discussion of the just ends of government, confirms Wilson’s scepticism of the isolated political man dramatized in Crusoe, yet distances himself from Wilson’s faith in an inborn moral sense. Paine remarks that placing “a

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40 According to Hall, Wilson’s democratic epistemology yokes a positive view of human nature with Scottish theories of moral sense: “Since most moral problems can be solved through the use of moral sense, and because this sense is available to all persons equally, it follows that whatever most people think is morally correct is, indeed, correct” (The Political and Legal Philosophy of James Wilson, 87). For this reason, Hall argues, Wilson comes to trust majority opinion and collective judgement in ways that Alexander Hamilton or Madison never could (ibid., 88). On restrained liberalism, see James T. Kloppenberg, “The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse,” The Journal of American History 74.1 (1987): 25.

small number of persons settled in some sequestered part of the earth, unconnected with
the rest” will quickly reveal that “the strength of one man is so unequal to his wants,
and his mind so unfitted for perpetual solitude, that he is soon obliged to seek assistance
and relief of another.” Assuming both the necessity of “reciprocal blessings” in order to
survive and an inherent unfitness of humans for solitude, Paine’s model depicts an early
society without government or laws (4). Existing only so long as men “remained
perfectly just to each other,” he insists that “it will unavoidably happen that in
proportion as they surmount the first difficulties of emigration, which bound them
together in a common cause, they will begin to relax in their duty and attachment to
each other: and this remissness will point out the necessity of establishing some form of
government to supply the defect of moral virtue”(4). Just as James Madison observes
that “if men were angles, no government would be necessary,” Paine insists that the
“origin and rise of government” is necessary because of the “inability of moral virtue to
govern the world”(5).

Whether informed by a Hutchesonian faith in moral sense or a
Hobbesian/Mandevillian pessimism of humanity’s inherent self-interestedness, the
qualifications put forth by Wilson and Paine underline an established cultural
understanding of the early American political project as, in some sense, driven by a need
to transcend the life of Crusoe on the island. If all American citizens are in the
beginning American Crusoes then they must find a more efficacious way to channel self-
interest into public service than Crusoe’s ascetic prerequisite. This new disposition must
approximate both the message of the Banished Prince in the Crusoe narratives and the
concerted “weaning-time” of Richardson’s Clarissa, forging a more permanent ascetic
disposition that, recognizing the ultimate irreconcilability of self-interest and disinterest,
favours critical deferral over simple physical isolation.

Central to the ascetic disposition of the American ascetic citizen is his/her use of
ascetic practices to live more effectively within society. Extremely popular on both sides
of the Atlantic, Johann Georg Zimmermann’s Solitude Considered with Respect to its


43 Federalist Papers (No. 51), in Jacob E. Cooke (ed.), The Federalist Papers (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan
Influence upon the Mind and the Heart (1791) clearly outlines the philosophical and religious context for a socially useful brand of wilful reclusion.\textsuperscript{44} Cited by Charles Brockden Brown on several occasions and apparently owned by Henry David Thoreau, Zimmermann’s treatise is crucial for understanding prevailing cultural assumptions about solitary life.\textsuperscript{45} Like Horneck before him, Zimmermann is at pains to distance his version of ascetic reclusion from “all those Catholic notions, once so celebrated, of a total seclusion from the world and its concerns,” notions that “appear altogether impracticable, and equally absurd”\textsuperscript{(6)}. In contrast to the Roman Catholic version of ascetic withdrawal as the cloistered life, the uniquely Protestant brand of ascetic practice introduced by Horneck and further advocated by Zimmermann is inextricably bound to its social utility. Importantly, what differentiates the Protestant ascetic from his/her Catholic counterpart is, as previously discussed, his/her moderation, his/her pursuit of the via media inherited from both seventeenth-century Anglicanism and eighteen-century British political moderatism.\textsuperscript{46} As with Horneck, Zimmermann assures his readers that he will “warn” them against “those dangerous excesses into which some of asceticism’s disciples have been betrayed”\textsuperscript{(6)}.

From the outset, Zimmermann’s evaluation of a distinctly Protestant pursuit of solitude rests on its capacity to teach individuals how to better live within society as excluded members (see Fig. 5). While rendering the mind “independent of human assistances” may be a noble enterprise in Zimmermann’s eyes, what is more noble is


\textsuperscript{45} For Brockden Brown’s familiarity with Zimmermann, see, for example, his reference to Solitude in “A Lesson on Concealment; or, Memoirs of Mary Selwyn,” in Somnambulism and Other Stories, ed. Alfred Weber (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 68. Brown also cites Zimmerman in “The Use of Anecdotes,” The Literary Magazine and American Register for 1806: From January to June, Inclusive, (1806), 53-57. For Thoreau’s acquisition of Zimmermann’s text, see Loomis, “Thoreau and Zimmermann.”

\textsuperscript{46} Henry May argues that in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, the combined influence of mixed monarchy and rationalism struggled against revivalism and popular emotions to ensure order, balance, and stability after generations of upheaval. By the end of the century, the legacy of British moderate Whiggery had thoroughly infused the university of the young republic, educating men such as Madison in the principles of political moderation. See The Enlightenment in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 3, 42, 93, 312.
teaching “the art of living happily in the bosom of society, and of rendering ourselves useful and agreeable to the rest of mankind”(6). As Zimmermann’s translator insists, “the author is not one of those extravagant Misanthropes who would compel mankind, born for Society, and connected with it by a variety of indissoluble ties, to retire into forests, to inhabit dens and caves, and to live only with wild beasts”(i). Rather, Zimmerman is “a friend to humanity, a sensible and virtuous individual, and honest citizen”(i). Solitude does not, therefore, entail a complete and sustained reclusion from society, nor does it entail a temporary ascetic prerequisite necessary for ideal civic action. Rather, the social utility of the Protestant ascetic disposition is grounded in its capacity to harness excessive emotions and sentiments to sustain the via media.

Beginning from Defoe’s central questioning of solitude’s capacity to discipline individuals for civil society, Zimmermann’s treatise revises the role played by solitude in re-channelling excessive passions and selfish affections into disinterested social affection. Unlike Defoe’s obedience by starvation trope, Zimmermann’s model depicts this re-channelling, not through a repression of the excessive passions attending romantic love, but through a confrontation and harnessing of such passions. The danger of any attempt to reform excessive passions is that one is placed in very close proximity with the hazardous excess he/she seeks to harness. This is a danger that Horneck repeatedly identifies as inherent in ascetic practice more generally. “I shall endeavour,” Zimmermann writes, “to warn my readers against those dangerous excesses” that attend selfish passions.

Paramount in Zimmermann’s mind is romantic passion. He explains that those individuals who lead lives of selfish passion “insensibly lose the power of acting from themselves, and depend for every thing on those about them”(15). With the loss of independence, the man dedicated to the pursuit of his own pleasure is rendered unable “to perform good and virtuous actions during the intervals of suspended pleasure”; he can “render no services to friendship! to his country! to himself”(17). In this regard, solitude is offered as a nostrum for self-interested man, for individuals whose lifestyles have rendered them unfit for social service. “How much more readily,” he notes, “we forget all the pains and troubles of a wounded heart on the borders of a gentle stream”(7). In solitude, “the bleeding heart withdraws the attention of the mind from every living object”(23). In doing so, “the most irregular inclinations of the heart” are
Fig. 5. Zimmermann, frontispiece to *Solitude* (1799)\(^{47}\)

\(^{47}\) This illustration is from the title page to the second volume of *Zimmermann, Solitude* (London, 1799). It also fronts Zimmermann, *Aprohisms and reflections on men, morals and things*… (London, 1800).
moderated by the pleasing simplicity of solitary life (46). Much as Horneck justifies ascetic practice as a necessary jump-start to the soul, Zimmermann insists that in solitude the soul, “animated by the charm of friendship, springs from its sloth and apathy” and becomes “fixed upon discharging the duties of humanity” (22, 32).

The centrepiece of Zimmermann’s theory is Francesco Petrarch. He explains how the fourteenth-century Italian sonneteer “who at the feet of women wept, sighed, and sobbed like a child” no sooner looked to Rome “than his style assumed a bold and manly tone” (336). Late in life, Petrarch abandoned chanting “amorous verse at the feet of his relentless mistress” and, “with a republican intrepidity...regenerated the love of liberty through Italy” (337). What Zimmermann finds so compelling about Petrarch is his ability to transform the excesses of romantic love into disinterested, and specifically republican, affection. “Notwithstanding the violence of his passion,” Petrarch was able to enjoy “all the advantages of Solitude” (337). Chief among these advantages is the capacity to regenerate self-interested passion, transforming his love for an “imperious female, from whom he only received marks of contempt and aversion,” into publicly directed civic service.

The key to Petrarch’s regeneration, and the most important advantage of solitude in Zimmermann’s mind, is the transformation (but not destruction) of individual passion. Zimmermann quite explicitly praises the value of individual passion. While solitude may not succeed in conquering personal love, it nonetheless “refines and sanctifies the most ardent flame” (338). “The passions which the God of nature originally planted in the heart of man,” Zimmermann insists, “ought to remain undestroyed within his breasts” (338). The preservation of individual passion is qualified by the proscription to “learn to direct them to their proper ends” (338). This is essentially what solitude affords the individual. By harnessing and moderating the violent passions of romantic love, solitude preserves the “ardent flame” by transforming it into disinterested benevolence and sympathy. Importantly, Zimmermann’s approach to solitude diverges from the ascetic prerequisite of Defoe’s text, a model that seeks to annihilate Crusoe’s selfish inclinations through near-starvation. For Zimmermann, solitude balances the “mind and the heart” until they are “in harmony with each other...capable of preserving the noblest sentiments in the soul, of raising the understanding to the highest degree of elevation, [and] of filling the bosom with new benevolence” (340). By balancing the head
and the heart, the rational faculties with the affective faculties, “the attacks of ill-humour are by this means subdued, the violence of the passions moderated, and the bitter cup of affliction sweetened”(340).

Yet Zimmermann’s belief in solitude’s capacity to realize a harmony between the head and the heart seems slightly too optimistic for the American hermit. While the American hermit subscribes to Zimmermann’s contention that solitude provides a “rational and moderate absence from the tumults of society” in which one can confront the dangerous excesses of passionate self-interest, American hermits such as Amos Wilson diverge from Zimmermann’s optimism that such absences can resolve the irreconcilable polarities confronted within society (380). In this sense, the American hermit struggles to surpass the ascetic prerequisite dramatized in Crusoe, taking up Zimmermann’s contention that the excessive passions originally planted in the heart of man by God should not be destroyed but refined and sanctified. Underlying hermit tales such as Wilson’s text is the very real sense that the contradictions of society cannot be reconciled, that transcendence is not possible. Indeed, the hermit’s physical withdrawal from society redoubles a more broadly epistemological withdrawal from the polemical debates of the hermit’s world. Rather than simply embracing excess in the hopes of refining and sanctifying its “ardent flame,” the American hermit endures the opposition between the polarized categories of society/solitude, life/death, head/heart, and self-interest/disinterest by preserving a state of deferral at and on the threshold itself.

Amos Wilson’s The Sweets of Solitude is a fascinating text, providing a detailed and fully developed articulation of hermitic theology.18 In striking similarity to the putative aims of Clarissa’s fasting regimen, the central tenet of Wilson’s theology is the capacity of solitude to provide a weaning stage. Arriving minutes after his sister’s execution with pardon in hand, “Providence seemed now to interfere to blast [Wilson’s] fondest hopes”(4). The initial shock of God’s apparent disapproval of his actions throws Wilson into “a state of insensibility”(4). A shock too severe for him to overcome, Wilson “for many months...remained in a state of perfect delirium”(4). Once

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18 I did not have access to the 1838 edition of The Pennsylvania Hermit. However, this text is available online at http://www.seclusion.com/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=4. Wherever possible, I have corroborated the online version with the 1840 reprint (Saint John, N.B.) of the 1839 Philadelphia edition. Unless otherwise noted, all references are to the 1840 edition; hereafter cited within the text. There are some sections of the original New York edition that are not reprinted in the 1840 edition; these sections are identified accordingly.
his senses are partially restored, he makes the predictable declaration that “the wound that he had received was incurable; that the world had now no pleasures for him, and that it was his determination the remainder of his days to seclude himself from human society” (4–5).

During the course of his reclusion, Wilson composes his requisite hermit’s manuscript, a series of religious and social observations that are reprinted in their entirety as *The Sweets of Solitude*. Central to Wilson’s religious outlook is a conventional support for solitary existence as a deliberate contraction of one’s life, a concerted effort, as Thoreau puts it, “to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life…to drive life into a corner and reduce it to its lowest terms.”49 “Engaged in a multiplicity of absurd pursuits,” Wilson notes, “intranced in the delirium of gaiety, inflamed by the continual ebriety which raises the passions and stimulates the desires, every connexion between God and man is dissolved; the bright and noble faculty of reason obscured” (18). In contrast to solitude’s capacity to moderate the passions, society, Wilson contends, is a state of excited and excessive passions and desires. Solitude “refines our moral sentiments, disengages the heart from every vain desire.”50 In much that same manner as Zimmermann, Wilson implies that solitude permits “vain desire” to be transformed into something more elevated, less self-interested and more divine. Central to solitude’s capacity to transform “vain desire” is its tendency to encourage a happy submission to divine law. Much like Horneck’s happy ascetic, Wilson is a man “who cheerfully submits to the will of Providence...content with his lot in a cheerful and quiet resignation to the appointments of an impartial God” (14).

On the surface, the ascetic disposition advocated by Wilson resembles a drive towards moderation, a desire for the *via media*. In Wilson’s mind, “excess is ever criminal...it becomes every man to live with restriction” (15). In removing ourselves from the gaiety and pleasures of the world, the recluse’s connection to worldly pleasures is weakened and the strength of rationality reassumed. Importantly, however, Wilson does not eschew “innocent pleasures.” (17). Rather, like both Zimmermann and Horneck, he insists that the task involves “keeping within bonds,” yet confronting, the “excessive

50 Omitted from the 1840 Saint John’s ed.; taken from the online New York edition of 1838.
indulgence of pleasure” (17). “We find in our minds,” Wilson contends, “many virtuous and kind affections, which are overlooked in the hurry of life.” The recluse “who examines his own heart with attention,” however, will see “the necessity of exerting the one [the mind] to assist the other [the heart].” The primary obstacle of the carnal world is its tendency to unbalance the faculties of the heart and the mind, to tip the individual into rational or affective excess. While checking, on the one hand, the excesses of the heart, solitude similarly checks an over-reliance on the intellect. Only by understanding the relationship between the heart and mind as mutually moderating faculties does the American hermit perceive him/herself as a “compound of [those] terrestrial and celestial natures” that characterizes the hermit’s weaned state.51 Hence, the drive towards moderation that Wilson articulates is ultimately a means to an end. The ultimate goal is that of abstraction or elevation, not into some ideological phantasm of harmonious reconciliation, but an elevation above judgment, above deciding between options. Faced with impossibility of reconciling the contradictions of his/her society, the American ascetic citizen announces the decision not to decide as a weaning or abstracting of oneself from social existence.

“The only man who can be considered happy,” he remarks, “is he who can reconcile himself to his circumstances, be they what they may; who can wean himself from the fashionable follies of the world” (12). As our discussion of Clarissa’s “weaning-time” indicates, the notion of weaning oneself from the carnal world is central to theological notions of holy dying and ascetic traditions of contemptu mundi. Religiously speaking, the hermit’s weaning stage represents a fairly orthodox attempt to abstract oneself from the fashionable follies of the carnal world by balancing the need to be in the world with periodic withdrawals from the world. As Bryce Traister recently remarks, aspirations to “the status of abstraction itself,” in their capacity to substitute the particularities of individual experience with a “paradigmatic generality,” enact the central drama of Protestant conversion in which the Holy Spirit replaces the soul of the individual penitent.52 Yet, as we have seen with Clarissa’s devotional regime, the “weaning-stage” provides a unique temporal space on and at the boundary between

51 Unpaginated references in this paragraph are taken from the online New York edition of 1838.

52 Traister, “Invention of the Secular,” 331.
polarized categories, not the least of which being the antimonies of particularity and universality inherent in Protestant didacticism. Put another way, Wilson’s emphasis on a weaning stage foregrounds, not so much the reconciliation of particularity with an imitable generality, as the specifically interstitial precincts of an ascetic citizen who refuses to privilege either element. Wilson’s withdrawal from society is informed by a concomitant withdrawal from the polemical debates of the period. This does not, however, imply a transcendence of such polemics but rather an equanimous confrontation of both extremes. As Wilson suggests, “to talk of abstracting ourselves from matters, laying aside body, and being resolved as it were, into pure intellect, is proud, metaphysical, unmeaning jargon” (17).

Citing the orthodox body/soul duality, Wilson eschews the possibility of transcending the body. Just as Clarissa’s fasting regimen ultimately aims at balancing the body and soul between life and death rather than destroying the body to free the soul, Wilson identifies such disembodiment as vain intellectualizing. We cannot, he insists, abstract ourselves from the physical world; we can only “abstract ourselves from the prejudices and habits and pleasures and business of the world” (17-18). Those who can do this, he insists, those who “can become weaned from the world, and content themselves to spend a portion of their lives in solitude, may in their retreat elevate their souls to a higher station” (17-18). Yet this elevation to a higher state is not a disembodiment but an abstraction, in the sense of a withdrawal or separation, from the cares of the world. Abstracted from the specific prejudices of the world, Wilson elevates himself above the extremity of partisan thinking.

As Michael Warner has suggested, the early American citizen is he “who brackets the particularities of his life in order to make entry into political discourse.” Wilson’s move to abstraction bears striking similarities to Warner’s citizen. Yet, unlike Warner’s citizen, the political identity of the American hermit is not constituted on the bracketing of his particulars, but on the bracketing of ideological particulars. The civic identity inferred by hermitic writers such as Wilson is constituted through an ascetic practice marked by a bracketing, abstracting, and withdrawing from the specific political issues, prejudices, and opinions of the times. The ascetic citizen confronts the

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very tension that Warner discovers in the late eighteenth-century public sphere between “the personalizing value of participation—virtue—and the negating universality of the discourse” (72). Importantly, however, the ascetic citizen’s confrontation of the particularizing threats of private affection and the universalizing threats of rational discourse is unique in its refusal to embrace either particularity or universality. In doing so, the American ascetic citizen is placed on the threshold more than a pedestal, confronting the binary opposition of various particularities while resisting phantasms of universality.

Weaned from the world, Wilson’s ascetic citizen is still very much in this world. As with Zimmermann, Wilson is clearly not advocating misanthropy; instead, he recommends solitude as an exercise of mindfulness that “will render life more agreeable and death less terrible” (17-8). As such, the weaning stage is directed to this world, to providing the tools necessary to make life on earth more manageable. Unsurprisingly, Wilson’s example for the weaning stage is that of Scipio Africanus Major (17-8). For the same reasons that Zimmermann cites Petrarch’s example, Wilson’s connection of the religious dimensions of the weaning stage with the political retirement of Scipio Africanus Major underscores the importance of ascetic withdrawal as a viable mode of political critique. In this regard, Wilson’s text carefully blends the ascetic prerequisite put forth by Defoe’s text with the ascetic disposition of deferral put forth by Richardson’s text. In doing so, he announces the specific locale of the American ascetic citizen as a rhetorical gesture of critical deferral confronting the aporia of society at the threshold between inclusion and exclusion.

The specific contradictions of Wilson’s milieu are worth pointing out, as they factor into the succeeding discussions of Foster’s The Coquette and Brockden Brown’s Edgar Huntly. Wilson explains that the American hermit does not have “recourse to the visions of fanatics, or to the dreams of enthusiasts” (20). Wilson’s use of catchwords such as “fanatics” and “enthusiasts” should not be overlooked. Easily recognized as a pejoration of post-awakening evangelical Calvinism, Wilson identifies the hermit in opposition to the excessive affective enthusiasm of Jonathan Edwards’ followers. Yet while Wilson distances himself from the New Lights, he equally distances himself from rational Old Light Calvinists like Charles Chauncey who opposed the Edwardseans. Religion, Wilson insists, should not be “the cold and barren offspring of speculation, but
the warm and vigorous dictates of the heart."\textsuperscript{54} Located equidistance between New Light Enthusiasm and Old Light rationalism, Wilson’s ascetic citizen stands at the threshold between the major theological distinctions of late eighteenth-century American society:

Enthusiasm has swelled with unnatural conceptions, and obtruded a spurious offspring on the world, instead of the engaging child of reason and truth—whilst the lukewarm have rested in a few outward duties, which have had no vigour, and as they spring not form the heart, never entered the temple of the Most High. (20-1)

While the emotional excesses of the New Light enthusiasts threaten to occlude the important role played by reason, followers of the “lukewarm” school of theology threaten to reduce piety to a legalistic display of outward duties, duties that lack any affective “vigour...as they spring not from the heart.” Real piety, Wilson insists, confronts these two extremes, transcending the doctrinal polemics of early American religious culture.

Importantly, however, the hermit’s social action does not involve a physical return to society. His/her position of abstraction, of elevation above judgment, does not permit so reductive a move as re-inclusion within society. Necessitating a weaning stage between life and death no more so than between inclusion and exclusion from society, the ascetic citizen achieves this liminal status by offsetting his/her physical withdrawal with the textual circulation of the hermit’s manuscript. As discussed above, the hermit opts for a unique brand of textual proselytizing enabled by the publication and circulation of the hermit’s manuscript. Similar to Warner’s articulation of an early American citizenship that functions through the technology of print culture, Wilson clearly announces the nature of his legacy to society as text-based.\textsuperscript{55} As the editor of The

\textsuperscript{54} Omitted from the 1840 Saint John’s ed.; taken from the online New York edition of 1838.

*Sweeds of Solitude* notes: “in a corner of his cave was found a bunch of manuscripts, among which was that of which the contents of the following pages is an exact copy, and which he requested particularly might be published, and in conformity to which, we here present it to the public” (11). Wilson’s particular request to have his manuscript published signals both the didactic import of the hermit’s tale and the specific relationship of hermitic reclusion to social life. As the subsequent chapters will illustrate, the substitution of physical for textual presence provides a vital alternative for individuals who felt disenfranchised by the strictures of conventional society. Importantly, the public circulation of the hermit’s manuscript enables the ascetic citizen’s abstraction from the partisanship of the world. Eschewing a physical presence in society, Wilson bequeaths a textual presence, “a legacy, which, if attended to, might prove for their earthly as well as spiritual good” (11). To Wilson’s observation, we might add a political good as well.
Chapter Four
Public Piety and the Female Ascetic Citizen in Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette*

And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

—Revelations 12:6

In “Sketch of a Modern Novel” printed in *The Inquisitor; or, Invisible Rambler* (1793), Susanna Rowson provides a sardonic indictment of the conventional motifs of the American sentimental novel. Concluding the novel with a duel, “and, if convenient, a suicide might not be amiss,” and a series of “wonderful trials” for your heroine to suffer, the sentimental heroine must display “the fortitude of an anchorite” and the “patience of an angel” (153). If Rowson’s comments can be taken as representative, the American sentimental heroine, imbued with an evangelical sense of personal piety and a republican commitment to the public good, typically assumes the guise of a female ascetic. Of course, the connection Rowson draws between ascetic practice and sentimental fiction is not a particularly novel assertion. Indeed, as Donna Bontatibus recently notes, the Anglo-American sentimental seduction narrative generally adheres to a formula in which, “because all the fallen heroines are described, at some point, as emaciated, depressed, and desirous of death, their suffering becomes an essential component of the seduction paradigm.” A revised seduction formula would, therefore, include, not only the woman’s seduction, her abandonment by family and friends, the resulting social stigma, and death arising from complications during childbirth, but also her withdrawal from society, her physical emaciation, and the inauguration of a rigorous religious program of atonement and repentance. Interestingly, a consideration of American hermit tales published in the last two decades of the eighteenth century finds

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2 Donna R. Bontatibus, *The Seduction Novel of the Early Nation: A Call for Socio-Political Reform* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1999), 104. While I find Bontatibus’ study to be less rigorous than it might be, she is one of the few scholars who take seriously the physical suffering that the heroine undergoes in some many of the seduction novels. For the standard formula, see for example, ibid., 35.
this formula to be operative in the recluse’s life as well. The seclusion of the eighteenth-century Anglo-American hermit is consistently identified with an earlier life of licentious urban living, lack of moral prudence, and dangerous (often illegal) actions. It is not an exaggeration to say that the hermit is an erstwhile libertine, rake, or bigamist. In its female form, the hermit is most often a coquette or, in the very least, an imprudent maiden who, refusing the council of parents and friends, ends up in a dangerous game of seduction with a predatory libertine.

Starting from John Adams’ oft-cited comment—“Democracy is Lovelace and the people are Clarissa”—scholars such as Jay Fliegelman, Bryce Traister, and Leonard Tennenhouse have argued for the political importance of libertinism in early American society.¹ Embodying the threat of demagogic persuasion announced by the liberal politics of the Jeffersonian persuasion, the libertine’s “capacity to persuade or absorb his listener using only words” reified the “contradictory constructions of individualism operative in the postrevolutionary and early republican periods.”⁴ In a society that placed a premium on public opinion, the particular seductions of the libertine “threatened not only the individual mind by misrepresenting the world to the informing senses, but also the collective national mind…the republican experiment would be radically jeopardized if public opinion were manipulated rather than informed.”⁵ It should come as no surprise, therefore, that a series of female hermit tales developed alongside such national anxieties. The appearance of the early American female hermit undoubtedly owes its origins to the popularity, during the postrevolutionary period, of Richardson’s Clarissa.⁶ As discussed in Chapter Two, Richardson’s text depicts the heroine’s decision to withdraw from society into self-starvation and endless prayer as a

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¹ Correspondence between the Hon. John Adams and the Late William Cunningham, Esq. (1823); see chapter 2, n16.


³ Fliegelman, Prodigals and Pilgrims, 235-6. Tennenhouse argues that in addition to such threats, the libertine identifies the early republic’s longing to constitute an American family in ways that transcend the British familial model based on kinship and the primogenitary transmission of large estates. The figure of the American libertine, in this regard, posed a serious threat to an exchange of women based on the British model of the family (Importance of Feeling English, 45).

unique blend of Protestant practical piety and emerging notions of individual subjectivity. In the years succeeding the initial popularity of Clarissa’s ascetic example, it was inevitable that a woman might best voice the hermit’s critique of a licentious and libertine social world.

What makes the sentimental/seduction paradigm so amenable to the hermit’s critique of society is its capacity to confront the extremes of the libertine’s sensual indulgence and the heroine’s austere piety with a gesture of critical deferral. As we have seen, the particular theology of the hermit juxtaposes the excessive passions of social life against the calm moderation and resignation of his/her life in seclusion to recommend a regimen of self-restraint for curbing the excessive individualism encouraged by self-governing republics.7 I would not reduce the cultural critique provided by the female hermit tale simply to issues concerning sex and gender inequality; indeed, more general attempts to reconcile what Elizabeth Barnes identifies as the “conservative republican values of duty to others with a liberal agenda of self-possession” stands behind these specific claims.8 In many respects, the hermit’s tale voices the story that cannot be told by a member of early American society: the failure of community and the triumph of self-interest. To evade this potential reality, the hermit’s tale narrates a community constituted by the stories its excluded members choose to tell. With its focus on the public circulation of its didactic message, the female hermit’s manuscript permits the withdrawn female to address the early republic’s rabid anxieties about libertinism without being physically exposed to its threats.9

In texts such as The Female American, the narratives of Elizabeth Wilson and her hermitic brother, Amos (1786, 1822), Abraham Panther’s “A Surprising Account of the Discovery of a Lady who was taken by the Indians in the year 1777, and after making

7 Fliegelman, Prodigals and Pilgrims, 67. Fliegelman’s attention to Robinson Crusoe and Clarissa as the most important source texts for American conceptions of political independence clearly influences my own discussion. I differ from Fliegelman’s excellent analysis in considering the way in which the thematic approach of these two novels is significantly altered by its conflation in the hermit’s tale.


her escape, she retired to a lonely Cave, where she lived nine years” (1787), “The Hermitess; Or, Fair Secluder” (1790), the Marquise de Lambert’s The Fair Solitary; or, Female Hermit (1790), and Charles Dibdin’s tediously pedestrian Hannah Hewit; or, the Female Crusoe (1792), the connection between seduction and/or attempted rape and seclusion from society is made explicit. If the lives of female hermits like the protagonist of the Panther Captivity, women whose only defence against sexual assault is an absolute seclusion from society, represents what Annette Kolodny calls “the new nation’s choice of defining fantasy,” then clearly such a defining fantasy must insist on the place, not only of the autonomous and self-sufficient white woman, but of the autonomous and self-sufficient white woman in seclusion. The defining fantasy of the new nation, as told by the female hermit tales of the 1780s-90s, is one that supplements the emaciating and suffering exemplarity of captivity heroines such as Mary Rowlandson with the robust and decisive capabilities of the white woman in complete isolation and reclusion from sociability.

The relevance of the female hermit to defining fantasies of national identity is suggested by Nancy Armstrong’s thinking on gender and political power during the eighteenth century. As she famously notes, “the modern individual was first and foremost a woman.” Privileging a modern (middle-class) individualism premised on moral values rather than political affiliation, the emergence of the modern political subject valorized the privatized domestic experience of the woman as inherently political (Armstrong, 14, 26). Elizabeth Dillon expands Armstrong’s remarks, explaining that women’s relegation to the private sphere did not simply represent a spatial relegation; rather, women’s privacy represented a temporal site imbedded within

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10 Charles Dibdin, Hannah Hewit; or, the Female Crusoe. Being the History of a Woman of Uncommon, Mental, and Personal Accomplishments; Who, after a Variety of Extraordinary and Interesting Adventures in Almost Every Station of Life, from Splendid Prosperity to Abject Adversity, Was Cast Way in the Grosvenor East-Indianman: And Became for Three Years the Sole Inhabitant of an Island, in the South Seas. Supposed to Be Written by Herself, 3 vols. (London, 1792). For full information on the remaining sources, see “Threshold (II),” n5.


liberal narratives of an emerging masculinized civic identity.\(^\text{13}\) This narrative of liberal subjectivity, Dillon contends, moves from privacy (the space of individual needs and desires) outward into the public sphere where these needs and desires are ostensibly transformed into rights secured by the state. “Women’s location in a prepolitical realm,” Dillon insists, “can be understood less as an exclusion from the public sphere than as an inclusion within a liberal narrative, albeit a narrative that tends toward the end of masculine agency”(19). Understanding female civic subjectivity as a temporal narrative charting the movement from the margins to the centre of civic publicity helps explain the particular relevance of ascetic citizenship for the eighteenth-century Anglo-American woman.

Ascetic citizenship for women would, in this regard, entail a confrontation of the temporal liberal narrative, of the movement from exclusion to inclusion on masculine terms, in the same way that homo sacer confronts the distinction made between civic membership and social exile. In terms of polarized gender identities such as *feme sole* and *feme coverta*, the female ascetic citizen marshals the temporalizing narrative structure of liberalism against itself, announcing the gap between inclusion and exclusion, independent woman and covered woman, as an insurmountable fissure. In doing so, the ascetic citizen announces what Dillon calls “the antimonies of liberal subjectivity (embodiment/abstraction, private/public, female/male),” not so much transcending as embodying their central irreconcilability (25).

Traister has recently identified the “dual, and paradoxical, position” of early American female piety as ascetic in nature.\(^\text{14}\) He explains how the “ascetic interiority of Protestantism—its antiworldly ambition to force the self to imitate the Word—could also be ‘feminine’ insofar as self-renunciation was central not merely to Protestant redemption theory but to the patriarchal ordering of women’s individual place and social role”(329). “Ascetic and patriarchal discourse,” he rightly notes, “together created the conditions for potentially abjected female subjectivity”(329-30). If, as Traister suggests, the female body itself becomes “a metaphor for the practices of self-denial and bodily negation required of Protestant subjectivity in general”(330), this same female


\(^{14}\) Traister, “Invention of the Secular,” 329.
ascetic self seeks to transcend the specific bodily horizon of the female biological self. To suggest that ascetic Protestant subjectivity depends upon both the evacuation of individualized identity in favour of universal exemplarity and the effacement of the bodily self signals the most radical implications of a woman’s assumption of the ascetic disposition. That is to say, to speak of the ascetic citizen as a female threatens to obscure her efforts to maintain a site of deferred critical judgment as, first and foremost, a Christian and a citizen, rather than as a woman.

The ascetic citizen’s privileging of Christian identity over gendered identity is suggested by Benjamin Rush’s definition of the Christocrat. As he states in 1813: "I have been alternately called a democrat and an aristocrat. I am now neither. I am a Christocrat...He alone who created and redeemed man is qualified to govern him." Faced with a limited set of political options, Rush chooses not to decide between the liberal pursuit of self-interest favoured by the democrat and the oligarchic structures favoured by the aristocratic. The Christocratic stance that Rush assumes late in life suggests the same critical withdrawal from the factional politics of his time that the female ascetic citizen assumes. Resisting identification as either democrat or aristocrat, Rush announces both a deferral and transcendence of these categories. It is this choice not to decide that informs, not only the larger political relevance of ascetic citizenship that we have been attempting to chart, but the specific constitution of Rush’s identity as a Christocrat. Rather than balancing Federalist’s eschewals of solitude with Jeffersonian valorizations of the self-sufficient yeoman farmer, Rush’s Christocratic citizen identifies civic subjectivity at the boundary between these categories, in the liminal space of the Christian ascetic who is in this world but not of this world.

Rush’s Christocrat, much like Agamben’s bandit (banned-It), suggests the relevance of a woman’s assumption of ascetic practices for political ends. For a biologically female individual, assuming an ascetic disposition of deferral attempts to confront the claims, to borrow a phrase from Judith Butler, of “those ontologically consolidated phantasms of ‘man’ and ‘woman’” that insist on identifying women as

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15 Quoted from a letter from Rush to David Ramsay, repr. in part in David Ramsay, An Eulogium Upon Benjamin Rush, M.D....Who Departed This Life April 19, 1813...Written at the Request of the Medical Society of South Carolina, and Delivered before Them and Others, in the Circular Church of Charleston, on the 10th of June, 1813 (Philadelphia, 1813), 103.
passive/active, feminized/masculinized, emotional/rational, or privatized/publicized. The especial appeal of ascetic citizenship for women derives from its radical eschewal of an identity as either bad copy or originary source—as either fallen woman or pious woman. The specific modality of female ascetic citizenry does not seek to transcend these gendered categories but to announce the insurmountable contradiction that exists between categories that refuse to be reconciled.

By revising the formula of the seduction narrative with the conventions of the hermit’s tale, we can return to canonical seduction narratives with a new insight into the importance of the heroine’s concluding demise. No less than Richardson’s Clarissa, early American seduction novels such as William Hill Brown’s The Power of Sympathy (1789), Susanna Rowson’s Charlotte Temple (1791–4), and Hannah Webster Foster’s The Coquette (1797), emphasize the final decline of the seduced heroine into physical emaciation and absolute seclusion. While the examples provided by Brown and Rowson partake of many of the conventions of the hermit’s tale, they fail to capture the full import of this genre, lacking as they do, a strong sense of the volitional dimension of the heroine’s reclusion and self-mortification. In this sense, Hannah Webster Foster’s The Coquette provides the clearest example of the conflation of the hermit’s tale with the American seduction novel.

In an early letter to Lucy Sumner (Freeman), written after losing her virginity to Sanford, Eliza Wharton characterizes herself as a reclusive anchorite. Following Rowson’s insistence in “Sketch of a Modern Novel” that the sentimental heroine must “have the fortitude of an anchorite; the patience of an angel,” Eliza remarks: “I am now trying what a recluse and solitary mode of life will produce.” Eliza’s decision to forgo the “company and amusements of the town” is marked by a growing insistence that

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“The world is to me a desart!” (213–4). Eliza’s self-stylization as an anchorite is further reinforced by the text’s repeated references to her rejection of food, her gruesome emaciation, and her consumptive decline. These late comments characterizing Eliza’s actions as ascetic are, by no means, isolated occurrences. Rather, they unify Foster’s efforts to deploy a discourse of asceticism to create an alternative model of female public piety during the 1790s. This chapter argues that Eliza’s failed attempts consolidate an alternative model of female public piety by forging platonic friendships with the men in her life and by achieving a public textual presence through a wilful reclusion from society are unified by her persistently articulated deferral of options. From her stolid unwillingness to decide between Boyer and Sanford to her unwillingness to allow the female chorus’ epitaphic summation of her life its full hegemonic authority, Eliza’s narrative exemplifies the relevance of ascetic deferral for postrevolutionary American women.

As early as Eliza’s third letter to Lucy, she considers the relationship between virtue and reclusion in her discussion of the domestic confinement attending a union with the text’s stalwart minister, Mr. Boyer. “You are not so morose,” she asks Lucy, “as to wish me to become a nun, would our country, and religion allow it” (109). In a subsequent conversation with Mrs. Richman on the prospect of marriage as a curtailment of Eliza’s newly-found social freedom, she explains how she “despise[s] those contracted ideas which confine virtue to a cell. I have no notion of becoming a recluse” (114). Similarly, in contemplating the prospect of marriage to Boyer, Eliza remarks: “If I am to be a recluse, let me, at least, enjoy those amusements, which are suited to my taste, a short time first” (173). Ironically, of course, and I would argue that Foster’s text is deeply ironic, Eliza does become, as Julia Granby notes, “what she once dreaded above all things, a recluse!” (193).

From the outset, Foster’s text stages the tension between confinement and freedom by repeated references to religious ascesis. Importantly, as we will see, Eliza’s love of liberty, while clearly opposed in her mind to the confinement of the “hymenial chain,” is not opposed to her love of virtue (114). Central to Eliza’s deliberations concerning a future husband is the difficulty of choosing between the virtuous life embodied by Boyer and the graceful pleasures embodied by Sanford. What makes this decision so difficult, I would insist, is Eliza’s persistent desire to lead a virtuous life in
"Why are not the virtues of one [Boyer],” she asks, “and the graces and affluence of the other [Sanford] combined?” (145). As this chapter argues, Eliza’s life charts the ultimately irreconcilable fissures that erupt when attempts are made to link discourses of personal piety with discourses of graceful sociability. Eliza’s efforts to move virtue out of its cloistered cell call upon, counter-intuitively, the generic conventions of the hermit’s tale. Despite Eliza’s ultimate withdrawal from society into the kind of confinement she so ardently eschews earlier in the novel, a careful consideration of Eliza’s increasingly religious diction towards the end of the novel finds Foster’s protagonist, not so much acquiescing to the terms of domestic confinement voiced by Boyer and the women of the text, as confronting and announcing the aporetic conditions of postrevolutionary femininity. In this regard, the specific ascetic practices of Foster’s heroine, her fasting and wilful reclusion from society, serve as analogies for the gestures of critical deferral Eliza assumes when faced with the impossibility of reconciling the expectations of the *feme sole* with those of the *feme covert*.

To date scholars have resisted focusing on the specific religious dimension of Foster’s text, a point that seems surprising given Foster’s own religious upbringing and marriage to a minister. By foregrounding the ascetic language of Eliza’s own understanding of confinement, marriage, and social withdrawal, I want to insist that contemporary religious discourses are foremost in Foster’s mind when characterizing the life of the coquette. By figuring her reclusion as a voluntary religious withdrawal, Foster adopts many of the generic conventions of the hermit’s tale discussed in the previous chapter. Central to Foster’s adoption of these conventions is her depiction of Eliza’s hermitic manuscript. To ensure the public utility of Eliza’s reclusion from society, the tearful repentance of her privatized existence must be transcribed and publicized. As we will see, the discovery of Eliza’s deathbed writings represents the conventional discovery of the hermit’s manuscript, ensuring that her reclusion will not be construed as misanthropic. Eliza’s hermitic manuscript guarantees the conventional didactic import of the seduction narrative while bolstering a specific brand of Protestant

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asceticism. Eliza’s hope that her “unhappy story [may] server as a beacon to warn the American fair” against the dangers of libertinism carries with it a viable model for postrevolutionary female citizenship, one that consolidates the community of republican femininity enunciated by the female chorus on the basis of that which exceeds the ideological framework of eighteenth-century doctrines of the separate spheres (233).

In publicizing her withdrawal into privacy, Eliza preserves her right to circulate in the public sphere with moral propriety while protecting herself from the threat of seduction. In this regard, Foster identifies female moral propriety as a textual presence contingent upon physical withdrawal. Publicizing what we might call a narrative of Eliza’s physical privatization, Foster’s text offers a dubious alternative for the postrevolutionary woman, an alternative that identifies the public role of women in her physical absence from the social sphere. Such an alternative to the limited options afforded the postrevolutionary woman both accepts and modifies contemporary discourses surrounding the gendered separation of public and private realms as the only viable site of female empowerment.19

“Friendship in the Place of Love”: The Possibilities of Platonic Friendship

The bulk of scholarship on Foster’s text contrasts the views of the female chorus against those of Eliza and Sanford. Invariably the female chorus, with its emphasis on mutual dependence, confederated society and an eschewal of solitary actions, is associated with the prevailing federalist politics of the 1790s. By contrast, the ardently individualist pursuit of pleasure and personal liberty espoused by Sanford and Eliza is identified as a reflection of an emerging liberal political tradition.20 As historians have shown, by the late eighteenth century political liberalism began to challenge the cultural orthodoxy of an American politics influenced by classical republicanism. Supplanting the classical republican focus on civic self-sacrifice, the liberal ideal encouraged a “society of achievement, a social order of competitive individualism, in


which social mobility was possible and the rightful reward for ingenious people of talent and hard work.”

Accordingly, Jared Gardner argues that Eliza “reads as the lone republican—or more accurately as a protoliberal individualist.”

Taking a slightly different tack, Laura Korobkin insists that while Eliza’s individual self-fulfilment appears to indicate a protoliberal outlook her desires are not for freedom and self-sufficiency but for self-indulgence and the consumption of luxury goods. In Korobkin’s analysis, the thrust of Foster’s critique is directed at “the tendency of undisciplined individualism to become self-absorbed materialism” (80).

Julia Stern thoughtfully remarks that privileging either the republican discourse’s focus on the self-sacrifice of private interest to the greater good, or the liberal discourse’s focus on the autonomous individual’s pursuit of individual freedom and economic gains, obscures the complexity of Foster’s political observations. To fully understand the political relevance of Eliza’s ascetic practices we must preserve the tensions that existed in postrevolutionary America between liberal and republican political models.

Despite the validity of Stern’s observation that Foster’s text stages contemporary political tensions between “an increasingly ossified and inward-turning Federalist elite” and “the incursion of a rising oppositional force, personified in two

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24 Stern, Plight of Feeling, 72–3. On Eliza as a protoliberal figure, see ibid., 191–2.

25 The question of the mutual opposition between the liberal and republican origins of American politics remains a hotly contested historiographical issue. While I recognize the potential dangers (insofar as actual policy-making and constitutional debates are concerned) of defining the two political models as clearly differentiated traditions, my reading of Foster’s text deliberately preserves something of the monolithic and mutually exclusive nature of their opposition, an opposition that, I would argue, Foster’s text reproduces in schematic form. Contemporary debates during the postrevolutionary period over the most viable political model undoubtedly drew on both traditions; however, the sustained tension that existed between the two speaks to contemporary anxieties among the general public concerning a perceived irreconcilability between liberalism’s endorsement of self-interest and classical republicanism’s valorisation of civic disinterestedness. On the republican side, see Robbins, Eighteenth Century Commonwealthman; Pocock, Machiavellian Moment; Bailyn, Ideological Origins; Wood, Creation of the American Republic; and Wood, Radicalism of the American Revolution. On the liberal side, see Appleby, Liberalism and Republicanism; Drew R. McCoy, The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982); and Kramnick, Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism. For a good synthesis of the debate, see Appleby, “Republicanism and Ideology,” 461–73.
economically ambitious individuals [Eliza and Sanford](74–5), an unwillingness to appreciate how the discourses of liberal economic self-interest and classical republican civic austerity compliment and check one another, threatens to obscure the extent to which Eliza’s reclusion sustains the tensions between these opposed models. At the threshold between what Stern calls the united federalist chorus of Boyer and the women and the proto-liberal (or Jeffersonian) individualism of Sanford, Eliza establishes a *via media* that not so much transcends as ossifies the factional politics of the 1790s at the very moment of their irreconcilability. Endorsing republican notions of self-sacrifice alongside liberal pursuits of individual freedom, Eliza’s reclusion signals contemporary anxieties concerning the gendered division of public and private spheres.

As historians of women’s history have noted, between 1785–1815 a shift occurred in the cultural evaluation of maternity. Linda Kerber’s well-known articulation of Republican Motherhood trenchantly explains the cultural consensus that emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries:

> a mother, committed to the service of her family and to the state, might serve a political purpose. Those who opposed women in politics had to meet the proposal that women could—and should—play a political role through the raising of a patriotic child. The Republican Mother was to encourage in her sons civic interest and participation. She was to educate her children and guide them in the paths of morality and virtue. But she was not really a constituent...responsibility for maintaining public virtue was channelled into domestic life.

With this valorization of republican maternity came a realignment of conventional notions of public and private. The old notion of privacy as connoting self-interest came

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29 As Rush remarks, “There is but one method...of rendering a republican form of government durable, and that is, by disseminating the seeds of virtue and knowledge through every part of the state, by means
to signify benevolence, human compassion, kindness, and loyalty. In the aftermath of the Revolution, a new form of female patriotism evolved, one that refigured women’s passive sacrifice of luxury goods and family members to military service into an active patriotic self-sacrifice. In doing so, it brought politics into the private sphere, channelling female patriotism into benevolence, charity, and service. This shift enabled women to conceive private domestic responsibilities as inherently public in scope. As Nancy Cott has observed, this realignment of public and private realms derived from the conventional puritan (and later evangelical) dismissal of the earthly delights and material possessions of the ‘the world’ in favour of the “eternal blessings of true faith.” In the increasing secularization of the 1780s-1790s, the familial transmission of piety came to be regarded as the essential bulwark against societal decline. As such “the contrasts of Heaven versus ‘the world’ and bourgeois virtue versus the ‘gay world’” came to be aligned with “the contrast between the domestic fireside and the world outside.” Hence, when women referred to a life of retirement, they were referring to a “withdrawal from the world in solitary religious devotion and also to her repose at home.”

As Cott’s remarks suggest, late eighteenth-century understandings of domesticity, in its efforts to “implant, in the family, social control of a kind that seemed necessary and appropriate in a democratic republic,” implied a decidedly ascetic

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31 Kerber, Women of the Republic, 105-6, 110-11.

approach to women’s public participation.\textsuperscript{33} Envisioning a very public and political private sphere, the doctrine of republican motherhood conflated the ascetic’s emphasis on \textit{contemptu mundi} with an emerging middle-class valorization of domesticity based in moral self-restraint. Emphasizing the public utility of private life as much as the political importance of the personal, shifting conceptions of gendered separate spheres, bolstered by an emergent evangelical focus on public service and charity, identified women’s civic role as a characteristically ascetic citizenship.\textsuperscript{34} It is within this transitional period of shifting definitions of public/private that we need to appreciate how Eliza’s reclusion. Foster’s text does not attempt to reconcile the disparities between public-male and private-female subjectivity; rather, it painfully exposes contemporary efforts to lionize a cloistered female piety through an ideology of separate spheres. \textit{The Coquette} carefully maps competing definitions of female duty onto the factional politics of the 1790s in a way that draws upon political valuations of women’s public role as overseers of the republic’s moral self-management. By resisting the urge to divide the characters’ opinions into classical republican and liberal camps, we remain true to the political relevance of Eliza’s ascetic gestures of deferral and her efforts to forge a new vision of female public behaviour at the gap between competing visions of early American female subjectivity.

As Isaac Kramnick reminds us, “it is a mistake, however, to see this change simply as a withdrawal from public activity to a private, self-centered realm”\textsuperscript{(196)}. More accurately, the gradual and overlapping shift from classical republicanism to liberalism involved a larger transformation of what constitutes public behaviour.\textsuperscript{35} By the 1790s, the legacy of a rigorous Puritan austerity shifted to “a new, privatized virtue characterized above all by moral propriety, the centerpiece of what would become the


\textsuperscript{35} See Kramnick, \textit{Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism}, 196; Appleby, “Republicanism and Ideology,” 469-70.
Efforts to comprehend this new privatized virtue involved a wide array of cultural discourses. Chief among them was the influence of evangelical Protestantism. As Daniel Walker Howe observes, the voluntary discipline characteristically associated with evangelicalism during the Victorian period carried with it the eighteenth-century evangelical focus on individual autonomy. Similarly, eighteenth-century Whitefieldian evangelicalism was not entirely blind to the need for voluntary self-restraint. Combining what Howe calls the “hard side” of Edwardsean evangelical calls for discipline and order with the so-called “soft side” of popular enthusiasm for individual freedom, American evangelicalism of the late eighteenth century embodied the kind of “restrained liberalism” that James Kloppenberg alludes to. Foster’s text encapsulates contemporary tensions between the hard and soft sides of American Protestantism inherent in the debates between New Light and Old Light Calvinism in both its portrayal of the female chorus’ efforts to control Eliza’s wayward desires and in Eliza’s own decision to exercise self-control, a decision that culminates in absolute reclusion from society.

The basic trajectory of Eliza’s life involves her initial emancipation from an unwanted engagement to the ailing Mr. Haly, her re-entry into the freedom of social life, her avoidance of too quickly entering another confining engagement, and her final reclusion, first in her mother’s home, and then in an isolated Salem tavern. Over the course of the entire narrative, a discourse of confinement is deployed as the central figure for evaluating competing claims on Eliza’s independence. In Cathy Davidson’s groundbreaking reading of Foster’s text, she contextualizes Eliza’s distaste for marriage within eighteenth-century legal codes of coverture. In opposition to the cultural reality of a married woman’s social and legal erasure, Eliza Wharton represents “the ideas and aspirations of a feme sole—the independent, unmarried woman.” In contrast to Eliza’s status as the independent women, the Richman marriage is identified as an egalitarian


37 Ibid., 17-8.

and companionate marriage. Central to the marital ideal represented by the Richmans is its idealized balance of self-interest and collective commitments. As Eliza reports to Lucy, with the Richmans “every enjoyment is centered” (115). What distinguishes the Richmans’ union is “the purest and most ardent affection, the greatest consonance of taste and disposition, and most congenial virtue” (114).

In opposition to the confinement that a marriage to Boyer presents, Eliza explains to Mrs. Richman:

I am young, gay, volatile. A melancholy event has lately extricated me from those shackles, which parental authority had imposed on my mind. Let me then enjoy that freedom which I so highly prize. Let me have opportunity, unbiased by opinion, to gratify my natural disposition in a participation of those pleasures which youth and innocence afford…But I despise those contracted ideas which confine virtue to a cell. I have no notion of becoming a recluse. (113–4)

In this oft-quoted passage, Eliza’s use of terms such as “shackles,” “confine,” “contracted ideas,” and “cell” make her evaluation of marriage all too obvious. In deferring her decision to accept Boyer’s hand, she harps on the “scene of constraint and confinement” that such a union would entail, insisting that Boyer should not consider her “confined to [his] society, or obligated to a future connection” (126). “I recoil at the thought,” she

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39 See Davidson, Revolution and the Word, 225. Stern, for example, identifies the Richman marriage as a characteristically federalist or republican marriage (Plight of Feeling, 316). For a discussion of the historical development of the republican marriage, see Lewis, “Republican Wife.” For a discussion of the gradual liberalization of marriage practices from arranged to companionate marriages, see Irene Fizer, “Signing as Republican Daughters: The Letters of Eliza Southgate and The Coquette,” The Eighteenth Century 43.3 (1993): 257–8.

40 Yet as Barnes has shown, underlying the benign companionship of the Richman marriage is the tendency of republican marriage to reinforce the dominant politics of paternalism, illustrating how private relations between spouses figure a public model of sociability. “Making what is public, or political, appear more natural and intimate,” Barnes argues, “republican marriage contributes to the domestication of authority by embodying a patriarchal structure and representing it as benign” (States of Sympathy, 67). Stern argues that Eliza’s analysis of the Richmans’ “centered” union “reveals the contradiction lying at the heart of early national domestic ideology; it is not the protoliberal Eliza who seeks to retreat into the recesses of privacy but rather the ‘disinterested’ and civic-minded Richmans who mask their possessive individualism with the rhetoric of late-eighteenth-century American republican marriage” (Plight of Feeling, 131-2).
tells Lucy, “of immediately forming a connection, which must confine me to the duties of domestic life” (126).

Yet Eliza’s resistance to marriage is not motivated simply by an unwillingness to leave the pleasures of public life. More important to Eliza’s equation of marriage and confinement is its tendency to limit benevolence. “Marriage,” she argues to Mrs. Richman, “is the tomb of friendship. It appears to me a very selfish state. Why do people, in general, as soon as they are married, center all their cares, their concerns, and pleasures in their own families?” (123). Eliza insists that marriage dissolves the “tenderest ties between friends,” causing “benevolence itself [to move] in a very limited sphere” (129). While most scholars agree that Eliza sees marriage as destroying the important network of support provided by her female friends, Eliza is addressing two specific and slightly different effects of marriage here. On the one hand, Eliza is concerned that marriage will alienate the affections of her female friends. On the other hand, she voices a more general concern over the capacity of marriage to limit benevolence. The two effects do not represent a single effect. The destruction of female friendship is markedly different from the curtailment of benevolent action. The support network offered by Eliza’s friends represents a private network of individuals intimately related; by contrast, benevolence implies a more general goodwill that extends beyond those that are personally and intimately known to us. This second effect is, I would argue, what Eliza finds most damaging about marital confinement. Given the growing association of female public action with morality and virtue, Eliza’s concern over the limitation of benevolence registers a more broadly based social critique. Her resistance to marriage figures a resistance to surrendering one of the only socially acceptable modes of female public participation available to the postrevolutionary woman.

The problem Eliza faces is how to transplant the piety of private life into the public sphere while obviating the social obloquy associated with the feme sole. This

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problem, of course, informs much of the contemporary support for republican femininity. As Jan Lewis observes, the role of the republican woman was to seduce the man into virtue. After marriage, “the married woman’s task was to preserve her husband in the exalted state to which her influence had raised him”(701). Hence, it is the female management of masculine morality, a management that begins in the private sphere and subsequently influences the public sphere, that ensures the piety of the republic. Yet what Eliza consistently resists is this requisite cloistering of women in the private sphere, a cloistering that, most importantly, forecloses the possibility of deferring the choice between a public and private existence.42

Eliza’s concern with the public piety of the republic is signalled early on by her decision to participate in political conversation. In the much discussed drawing room scene, Miss Laurence and Mrs. Laurence break away from the political discussion of Eliza and the Richmans to listen to Sanford’s “sage remarks on the play, which he still kept in his hand”(139). Responding to Mrs. Laurence’s insistence that women should not meddle in politics, Mrs. Richman argues that “Miss Wharton and I…think ourselves interested in the welfare and propensity of our country”(139). Richman’s “truly Roman…truly republican” comments claim not only a political role, but a political responsibility, for the American woman (139). Lucy’s comments on the “pernicious effects on society” of the libertine follow suit (154). Her concern with public morality centres on, not only the individual “American fair” but, like Richman, on the moral state of republic itself. “I wish they [young women] would more generally espouse their own cause,” she writes, “It would conduce to the public weal and to their personal respectability”(154).

For Eliza, what most forcibly derails the ability of single women to “espouse their own cause” is the gendered segregation of social interaction. In the epistle that immediately precedes Eliza’s renouncement of Sanford, much of Lucy’s argument against Sanford focuses on the value of a man’s domestic graces as opposed to his social graces. The “specious manners” of the rake “may render them agreeable companions abroad,” Lucy asserts, “but at home the evil propensities of their minds will invariably

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42 Schweitzer remarks that Eliza’s desire is for “liberty, in the form of a literal and imaginative freedom to dispose of oneself that is restricted to white men, and connection, in the form of dyadic intimacy and larger sympathetic networks, as well as the ability to circulate freely in both the private/domestic world and the public/social sphere” (Perfecting Friendship, 109).
predominate” (150). “They are steeled against the tender affections,” she notes, “which render domestic life delightful; strangers to the kind, the endearing sympathies of husband, father, and friend!” (150). It is telling that Lucy harps on Sanford’s incapacity for “endearing sympathies of husband, father, and friend.” Unable to convince Eliza that a married domestic life is more secure and felicitous than the social possibilities afforded the unmarried woman, she switches her focus to Sanford’s inability to express the kind of private affections that characterize the cloistered piety of the domestic sphere.

Sanford is a completely public figure and, by this token, is dangerously disconnected from the moderating influence of domestic piety.

If a republic needs to protect itself, as John Adams suggests, from the threats of libertine democracy, Foster’s text seems to suggest that women must be able to exercise their moral influence abroad, among men who, disconnected from the home, need it most. In her immediate rejoinder to Lucy’s epistle, Eliza responds specifically to her friend’s use of the terms home and abroad. Commenting on her inability to persuade General Richman to accompany her to the assembly, Eliza remarks that

he had rather enjoy her company at home, than any which is to be found abroad. I rallied him on his old fashioned taste; but my heart approved and applauded his attachment. I despise the married man or woman, who harbors an inclination to partake of separate pleasures. (153)

Despite her consistent distaste for the “hymenial chain,” it would appear that what she most disapproves of are couples who “partake of separate pleasures.” Importantly, the focus here is not so much the seclusion of women to the domestic sphere as it is the separation of the sexes into separate domains. As she notes, “I despise the married man or woman” who endeavours to pursue separate pleasures. Her attention to “pleasures” is in keeping with her unwillingness to forgo the entertainments of the social world; yet her resistance to a life of gender separation echoes her persistent deferral of Boyer’s marriage offer.

In contrast to Eliza’s concerns, Mrs. Richman’s defence of republican marriage insists that the matrimonial state does not foreclose a woman’s moral influence on society as a whole. “It is the glory of the marriage state,” Richman explains, “to refine,
by circumscribing our enjoyments” (123). While admitting that “we cannot always pay that attention to former associates, which we may wish,” Richman insists that “the little community which we superintend is quite as important an object; and certainly renders us more beneficial to the public” (123). Echoing the shifting valorization of domesticity, Richman argues that the domestic sphere, “the little community,” does not limit benevolence. “True benevolence,” she insists, “though it may change its objects, is not limited by time or place. Its effects are the same, and aided by a second self, are rendered more diffusive and salutary” (123). Eliza expresses doubts, however, that marriage can diffuse benevolence by creating, as Richman suggests, a second self. Richman’s quotation from Joseph Addison’s popular play, Cato, provides the means by which Eliza develops an alternative model of public benevolence. Taken from Portius’ speech to Marcus (II.i: 7-10), Richman notes: “The friendships of the world are oft / Confed'racies in vice, or leagues in pleasure: / Our's has the purest virtue for its basis; / And such friendship ends not but with life” (123).43

Importantly, Richman misquotes Addison in the penultimate line of the passage. Where Addison writes “Our’s has the severest virtue for its basis” (emphasis added), Richman writes “Our’s has the purest virtue for its basis.” While this misquotation may be accidental on Richman’s (or Foster’s) part, it does suggest an important adaptation of the Catonic image of friendship to the republican model of marriage. Schweitzer notes that Richman’s use of Addison effectively “deploys republican male and brotherly friendship in the service of romantic passion,” an analogy Eliza appears to endorse in her own description of her friends’ marriages. Yet while she undoubtedly employs a model of classical friendship, her model of friendship is not the Catonic, but rather the Platonic, model of friendship. The decision Eliza must make is not, in her mind, simply a question of deciding between the confinement of the stuffy Boyer and the freedom of frivolous social engagements with Sanford. Intending to balance the two extreme positions, Eliza contrasts Richman’s characterization of marriage as a male homosocial friendship based in the “purest virtue” with an alternative model of platonic intersexual friendship based on the “severest virtue.” By switching the model from same-sex to opposite-sex friendship, Eliza strives to create a socially acceptable model of male-

female interaction separate from, on the one hand, the limitations of the standard courtship model and, on the other hand, the dangers of the seduction model.

When she observes that Boyer and her “shared that social converse, which is the true zest of life, and which, I am persuaded, none but virtuous minds can participate,” she is not arguing for a life of unfettered sociability (127). As Sharon Harris rightly notes, Eliza’s desire for social converse represents a “desire to find another ‘language’ that is appropriate to women like herself” (5). This new language is an enjoyable and socially acceptable mode of socializing that balances pleasure with virtue. While Eliza’s endorsement of “a friendly and social intercourse” with Boyer is undoubtedly intended to buy herself more time to consider his offer of marriage, it is also much more seriously intended by Eliza as a viable way of perpetuating her deferral of making any choice between social freedom and domestic seclusion (141). “An epistolary communication between the sexes,” she argues, “has been with some, a subject of satire and censure; but unjustly, in my opinion” (141). “With persons of refinement and information,” however, such communication might be “a source of entertainment and utility” (141).

Eliza’s attention to both entertainment and utility speaks to her efforts to balance the pleasures of sociability with a dedication to pious behaviour and benevolent action. “The knowledge and masculine virtues of your sex may be softened, and rendered more diffusive,” she suggests, “by the inquisitiveness, vivacity, and docility of ours; drawn forth and exercised by each other” (141). Interestingly, Eliza employs exactly the same term as Richman uses to describe marriage (“more diffusive”) to describe the benefits of platonic friendship. Where Richman’s husband, her “second self,” renders the effects of benevolence “more diffusive,” the mutually improving platonic friendship of Boyer and Eliza renders the knowledge and virtues of the man equally diffusive. In opposition to the discourse of republican maternity implied by Richman’s “little community,” Eliza seeks to “soften” the men of society in a manner similar to that reserved for the republican mother who inculcates moral virtue within the domestic sphere. In this sense, both models claim for women the same responsibility for moral education. The benefit, however, of Eliza’s model is that it allows her to retain her identity as feme sole, free to enjoy the pleasures of the public sociability without the negative connotations of sexual impropriety.
That Eliza has benevolence in mind when she recommends his model of friendship to Boyer is evidenced by its placement directly after Boyer’s quotation from James Thomson’s *The Seasons*. In Boyer’s previous letter to Eliza, he pleads the benefits of marriage by suggesting its affinity with the Christian ideal of cloistered virtue.

—"An elegant sufficiency,
Content, retirement, rural quiet, friendship;
Books, ease and alternate labor, useful life;
Progressive virtue, and approving heaven;
These are the matchless joys of virtuous love.” (137)

It is in direct response to Boyer’s celebration of a life of “elegant sufficiency” that Eliza presents her model of platonic friendship. Eliza’s particular qualms concerning Boyer’s marital vision return again to the question of benevolence. She asks, “is it difficult to ascertain what we can pronounce ‘an elegant sufficiency’?” (142). “Perhaps you will answer,” she continues, “as some others have done, We can attain it by circumscribing our wishes within the compass of our abilities” (142). Clearly the reference here is to Richman’s vision of a contracted (yet concentrated) “little community.” Again, Eliza eschews a model of ascetic piety grounded in a contracted existence and questions the extent to which marriage severs the couple from the bonds of, and duties to, society as a whole. As she concludes to Boyer, “I know you are not a misanthrope” enough to seclude yourself completely in the insularity of a marital union (142).

The argument made against a misanthropic brand of religious life is most clearly iterated by the preceptress of Foster’s second novel, *The Boarding School* (1798). In this more overtly didactic text, Mrs. Williams explains:

Religion will not deprive you of temporal enjoyments; it will heighten and increase them. It will not depress, but exhilarate your spirits. For it consists not in a gloomy, misanthropic temper, declining the social and innocent delights of

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life; but prepares the mind to partake with satisfaction of every pleasure which reason approves, and which can yield serenity and peace in the review.45

Foster’s *The Coquette* maps out tragically what *The Boarding School* states rather optimistically: that is, the pitfalls that accompany any attempt by women to conflate personal piety with public identity. Foster’s consistent disavowal of misanthropy underwrites Eliza’s efforts to balance the extremes of Boyer and Sanford in way that permits her to practice piety without depriving herself of the pleasures of a social life. In this regard, marriage is to be avoided, Eliza suggests, specifically because it amounts to misanthropy, a hatred of humanity in the sense that it denies the duties of benevolence required of the Christian. Boyer himself comes to much the same conclusion after he loses patience with Eliza. “I at last vanquished, as I thought, every tender passion of my soul,” he explains to her, “(for they all centered in you) and resigned myself to my God, and my duty”(188). By “devoting those affections to friendship, which had been disappointed in love,” Boyer succeeds in transforming his “centered” love (again, Richman’s term for the marital ideal) for a single individual into a more diffusive benevolence for humanity at large. In this sense, Boyer proves Eliza’s assertion that he was not such a misanthrope to confine his virtue to the cell of marriage. Of course, Boyer does find another wife relatively quickly; but if his admissions can be taken at face value, his affection for his new wife was not “of that passionate kind, which ends in death and despair,” not of that kind that revels in “mere sensual gratification,” but a more dispassionate kind that is “governed by reason, and had a nobler object in view”(188).

The same model of platonic friendship informs Eliza’s continued relationship with Sanford. Despite Eliza’s recognition that Sanford often “deviated far from the character of a friend and brother, with which [he] consented to rest satisfied,” she consistently attempts to figure her relationship with Sanford on the platonic model outlined above. Writing to Lucy, she explains:

45 Hannah Webster Foster, *The Boarding School; or, Lessons of a Preceptress to Her Pupils: Consisting of Information, Instruction, and Advice, Calculated to Improve the Manners, and Form the Character of Young Ladies...By a Lady of Massachusetts; Author of the Coquette*. (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 111.
The substitution of friendship in the place of love for Major Sanford, I find productive of agreeable sensations. With him, he assures me, it is a far more calm, and rational pleasure. He treats me with affection and tenderness of a brother; and his wife, who exceeds him in professions of regard, with all the consoling softness, and attention of a sister. Indeed, their politeness has greatly contributed to revive the cheerfulness of my natural disposition. (207)

While certainly naïve in her belief that a professed libertine would be satisfied with the kind of mutual improvement she recommends to Boyer, Eliza, nonetheless, resists the entreaties of both her mother and Julia Granby to travel to Boston in favour of remaining in Sanford’s company. Rejecting the network of female friendship she had so heavily leaned upon earlier in the text, Eliza clearly favours a model of platonic friendship. “She was flattered into the belief,” Julia writes, “that [Sanford’s] attention to her is purely the result of friendship and benevolence” (208). Of course, just as much as Eliza’s model of platonic friendship previously failed with Boyer, so too is it doomed to fail with Sanford. Refusing the possibility of female public sociability beyond the bounds of the dialectic of courtship/seduction, Boyer insists that she cannot “talk of friendship with a man of [Sanford’s] character” (167). “Between his society and mine,” he insists, “there is a great contrast. Such opposite pursuits and inclinations cannot be equally pleasing to the same taste. It is therefore necessary, that you renounce the one, to enjoy the other” (167). Not for the first time, Boyer succeeds in missing the point. While Eliza does indeed find both Boyer’s virtue and Sanford’s graces pleasing, a point she repeatedly admits to her female correspondents, she is more interested in deferring the choice between the opposed qualities of either suitor.

**The Pleasantness of Religion: Public Piety and Female Propriety**

From the beginning of the novel Eliza is concerned with virtue and benevolence. Following Haly’s death, Eliza hopes that this event will “teach me the fading nature of all sublunary enjoyments, and the little dependence which is to be placed on earthly felicity” (107). Sounding on the one hand extremely hollow given Eliza’s succeeding life of frivolity and gaiety, the conventional pieties Eliza expresses at the outset are not simply rhetorical gestures. Eliza consistently expresses a concern with personal piety; it
is this concern, I would argue, that unifies her social life and her reclusive life. While the closing stages of Eliza’s life are marked by an increasing religious self-awareness, her earlier social life is similarly characterized by keen attention to personal piety. We must take seriously Eliza’s “wish to cultivate” the “disposition of mind” which she feels after Haly’s demise: “Calm, placid, and serene; thoughtful of my duty, and benevolent to all around us, I wish for no other connection than that of friendship”(108).

In opposition to Eliza’s apparent concern with piety, Foster emphasizes her protagonist’s love of social pleasures. The text opens with her exclamation to Lucy: “It is pleasure, pleasure, my dear Lucy, on leaving my paternal roof!”(107). “The idea of relinquishing,” she notes, “those delightful amusements and flattering attentions, which wealth and equipage bestow, is painful”(146). Expressions such as these have led most scholars to condemn Eliza’s love of social pleasures as morally and religiously wayward. Elizabeth Dill observes that Foster’s text “invites us to explore the way in which desire presents a politicized mode of sociability offering a civic role for women in contrast to marriage.”46 Yet by insisting on Eliza’s palpable sexual desire as the motivating factor for all her actions, Dill reduces Eliza’s pleasures to those of an “unencumbered, sexualized, excessively social” nature (256). Similarly, Irene Fizer insists that sexual pleasure is “the single synonym for female liberty in the novel,” while Korobkin identifies Eliza’s pleasure with a “luxury-loving materialism” and a desire “to live as a wealthy aristocrat”(79).47

What these readings of Eliza’s social life fail to acknowledge is how religious piety consistently provides an additional pleasure for Eliza. While it is certainly difficult to reconcile her desire for placidity and serenity with her seemingly oppositional exclamation—“I am young, gay, volatile”(114)—it is specifically this irreconcilability that Foster’s text seeks to preserve. Neither her wish for “no other connection than that of friendship,” nor her desire to be “benevolent to all around us,” is invalidated by her excitement at entering society. Opposed to her condemnation of marriage as limiting one’s capacity for benevolent action, Eliza’s freedom in the social sphere partakes of both the unfettered social circulation enjoyed by the feme sole and the moral propriety


47 Korobkin, “Luxury and False Ideals,” 79; Fizer, “Signing as Republican Daughters,” 244.
attached to an unencumbered expression of benevolence enjoyed by the *feme covert*. This is not to suggest, of course, that Eliza does not love the dazzle and glitter of social life. She certainly does. What I am arguing, however, is that, despite her insistent deferral of Boyer’s offer, she consistently celebrates the ideal life of pious retirement embodied by a marriage to Boyer. “I really esteem the man,” she asserts, “My reason and judgment, as I have observed before, declare for a connection with him, as a state of tranquillity and rational happiness”(146).

While one would be hard pressed to locate any particularly benevolent actions carried out by Eliza, Foster’s protagonist repeatedly deploys the idea of public benevolence as a way around the limited options available to both the single woman and the covered woman. For Eliza the ideal of public benevolence enunciates an additional pleasure, a pleasure of public piety that travels along the threshold between public and private expressions of femininity—a pleasure that the necessity of deciding on marriage would foreclose. Her repeated conflation of benevolence with publicity and marriage with private affection makes any identification of Eliza’s possible pleasures difficult to ascertain. An acolyte of the social life, we might justifiably say that Eliza is devoted to all that it offers: sexual promiscuity, frivolous amusements, displays of affluence, and opportunities of benevolence.48

Clearly Eliza is unwilling to give up the social life; yet she seems equally unwilling to give up the prospect of marriage to Boyer. While one can easily contempt Eliza’s actions as self-interested hedging, her refusal to make a choice between social life and married life parallels the economy of deferral that structures her unwillingness to decide between Sanford and Boyer. “What a pity,” she tells Lucy, “that the graces [of Sanford] and virtues [of Boyer] are not oftner united!”(121). Later, she makes the same comment to Mrs. Richman, arguing that if she could keep both men in her life she “should then have been happy indeed! But, as the case now stands, I am loath to give up either”(146). Of course, since there is no available suitor who embodies the extreme qualities of Sanford and Boyer, Eliza faces two options: either decide on one man or

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48 On the importance Foster places on urban life, see Hamilton, “Assault on the Will,” Hamilton argues that by presenting Eliza’s social life in such ambiguous form, Foster places her readers in an equally difficult position, caught between condemning Eliza’s frivolous pursuit of earthly riches and ephemeral pleasures and sympathizing with her efforts to forge a morally-acceptable alternative to the courtship/seduction paradigm (135, 140).
defer the choice indefinitely. As Kristie Hamilton argues, by deferring her choice between the two men, Eliza is ultimately condemned as a coquette “because she attempts to balance all of her opportunities, sanctioned and unsanctioned, until one should present itself as that which will best satisfy her in her pursuit of happiness”(148). Gardner similarly remarks that Eliza’s “right to refuse such choices” represents a concerted effort to “occupy both positions simultaneously”(751). Foster’s novel, he argues, “works to resist the either/or poverty of these choices, trying to have it both ways”(751). Yet while Eliza certainly strives to have it both ways, the ultimate irreconcilability of the two options forces Foster’s heroine to have it neither way. Rather than occupying “both positions simultaneously” as Gardner contends, Eliza’s persistent deferral situates her on the threshold between the two options. Her specific resistance to “the either/or poverty” of available options signals the aporetic nature of their opposition.

Gardner’s reading situates this dual occupation, not as bland neutrality but rather as an effort to transcend the factional politics of the 1790s. While it makes sense to align Eliza’s personal choice between Sanford and Boyer to political differences between Republicans and Federalists it fails to account for either the religious context or Eliza’s concern with moral self-management. What she hopes to retain by having it both ways are, as she tells Boyer, “the charms of youth and freedom, regulated by virtue and innocence”(126). When Lucy admonishes her to “act then with that modest freedom, that dignified unreserved which bespeaks conscious rectitude and sincerity of heart,” Foster is being only slightly ironic (125). That Lucy echoes Eliza’s own desires underscores both the central point of Eliza’s social life while foreshadowing the ultimate failure of her friends’ efforts. Despite Eliza’s struggle to circulate within the social sphere independent of cultural narratives of courtship and seduction, her efforts to forge a “modest freedom” are hindered by her friends’ insistence on categorizing her actions in accordance with prevailing discourses of coquetry, discourses that, following Rousseau and Wollstonecraft’s evaluation of the coquette, deny the feme sole any subjectivity other

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than that of the “antitype of republican virtue.” As Jeffrey Richards notes, “female self-determination is only possible when sexual conduct remains part of the public accounting, where the assertive display of chastity repels a woman’s—a nation’s—seducers and preserves her liberty to act uncompromised by pregnancy, shame, or abandonment.” It is this limited horizon of options endorsed by the female chorus that Eliza seeks to escape by withdrawing from society.

Identifying the particular elements of Eliza’s religious persuasion is a difficult task. Foster presents her beliefs as a vague jumble of puritan and evangelical Protestantism. Yet, while the specifics of Eliza’s faith are vague, Boyer’s religious affiliation is much more easily ascertained. By identifying Boyer’s affiliation we gain a clearer sense of what Eliza’s oppositional theology might entail. Leonard Cassuto correctly highlights the importance of rationalism for Boyer’s faith. Consistently, Boyer couples a call to piety with an attention to reason. Speaking to Eliza, he exclaims: “I have traced (I believe aright) the cause of your dissimulation and indifference to me. They are an aversion to the sober, rational, frugal mode of living, to which my profession leads” (171). Similarly, he insists that “reason must be our guide, if we would expect durable happiness” (145). The larger community of women endorses Boyer’s rational theology. Lucy remarks that, “as to external parade, it will not satisfy the rational mind” (150). Similarly, Lucy’s endorsement of Mr. Bowen’s wax museum is recommended because it represents “a source of rational and refined amusement” (196). “Let reason and religion erect their throne in your breast,” she tells Eliza, “obey their dictates and be happy…Date then, from this, a new era of life; and may every moment be attended with felicity” (191). “Rigid and bloodless,” Cassuto argues, Boyer’s religious faith has “lifted rationality out of the context of humanity” (107). Yet, Boyer’s rationalism is not simply, as Cassuto contends, evidence of his careerist approach to

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52 While Cassuto’s assessment of Boyer’s faith is generally accurate, his discussion of the minister’s “old style Puritanism” is too vague to be particularly helpful. Cassuto incorrectly identifies Boyer with Edwards’ rational pursuit of religious emotion in ways that are not immediately evident from Foster’s text (“Seduction of American Religious Discourse,” 106-8).
religion (109). Rather, Boyer’s rational approach to faith is typical of Old Light Calvinism.

Originating in opposition to the emotionally fuelled enthusiasm of the first Great Awakening, the Old Lights, under men such as Rev. Charles Chauncey, became synonymous with rationalism and the substitution of morality for theology in religion. Characterized by what Jonathan Edwards would call their “legal scheme,” his anti-revivalist opponents professed that “man is—or should be—a rational being, one who derives his standards of virtuous behaviour from an observation of the external world.”

By contrast, the so-called New Lights, led by Edwards and later Samuel Hopkins, advocated the necessity of God’s inner workings on the spirit of man. For men such as Edwards, religious affections, emotional effusion, and experiential piety were paramount. The importance of the distinction between rational and evangelical/affective religion should not be underestimated. As Alan Heimert remarks, “while there were more than two theologies at work in post-Awakening America, the intellectual life of American Protestantism was clearly dominated and substantially defined by the spokesmen of rationalism and of evangelical religion.”

In this context, Foster’s insistence on representing Boyer’s theology as rationalist begins to make more sense. Functioning as a necessary check on excessive emotions, Boyer’s repeated calls to reason signal, not only a shared Enlightenment heritage, but a deliberate opposition to the awakened piety of Edwardsean theology. Accordingly, Boyer expresses his struggle to “not suffer my judgment to be misled by blind passion” (117). Here “blind passion” is contrast against the controlling faculty of rational judgment. Similarly, during a particularly trying interview with Eliza, Boyer struggles to suppress his emotional response: “The tear of sensibility sparkled in his eye. I involuntarily gave him my hand, which he pressed with ardor to his lips. Then rising, he walked to the window to conceal his emotion” (127). No man of feeling, Boyer expresses a sense of shame at his inability to control his emotions. The aftermath of his

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decision to reject Eliza is, unsurprisingly, marked by a triumph of reason over emotion. From the initial “fever of resentment, and the tumult of passion” he feels in giving up his pursuit of Eliza, a fever that “perfectly unmanned” him, he is moved to remember “that resignation to an overruling providence which the religion I profess, and teach, requires me to cultivate” (170). By the time he responds to Eliza’s assertive declaration of love, he has fully extirpated his emotions: “I at last vanquished, as I thought, every tender passion of my soul” (188). Sounding somewhat slighted, he insists that “the regard which I felt for you was tender and animated, but it was not of that passionate kind which ends in death or despair. It was governed by reason, and had a nobler object in view, than mere sensual gratification” (188). In linking his stoic eschewal of emotional interaction with an overruling governance by reason, Boyer identifies himself squarely with the Old Light Calvinism against which Edwards and his followers were opposed.

By contrasting the religious outlook of Boyer with that of Sanford we gain a clearer perspective on Eliza’s faith. While it would be inaccurate to claim any religious faith to Sanford, his persistent use of religious terminology succeeds in identifying him in contrast to Boyer’s faith. “No devotee could be more sincere,” he argues, “in his penitence, than I was in mine…and this atones for all past offences, and procures absolution for many others yet to be committed” (205). Not unlike Richardson’s Lovelace, Sanford’s self-stylization as a religious penitent is further accentuated by his comparison of the trials of the suffering Christian with those of the rake: “I shall be the more interested, as I am likely to meet with difficulties; and it is the glory of a rake, as well as a Christian to combat obstacles” (130). While Sanford is both mocking the religious pretensions of his opponent and bolstering the importance of his own libertinism, Foster’s placement of religious rhetoric in the mouth of the seducer should alert us to the theological polemic Foster’s text attempts to map unto Eliza’s two prospective suitors. Where Boyer appears stolid and heartless in his unwillingness to let Eliza explain what he thinks he saw in the garden, Sanford appears overly emotional. Sanford is repeatedly characterized by “his zeal, his pathos” (143). Unlike Boyer whom Sanford describes as one of “these stoic souls who are good for nothing,” Sanford is

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“not stoic enough, tamely to make so great a sacrifice” as restricting his relationship to Eliza to “the character of a friend and brother” (198, 114).

While it would be a stretch to argue that Sanford represents an Edwardsean acolyte, it is not a stretch to draw attention to the fact that Sanford embodies many of the chief characteristics of evangelical Calvinism in a secularized and perverted form. It is Sanford’s enthusiastic zeal that most clearly opposes him to Boyer. Threatening to give her hand to Boyer unless Sanford acted more openly, he “appeared thunderstruck at this declaration. All his words and actions were indicative of the most violent emotions of mind” (174). In contrast to the pathos and violence of Sanford’s emotions, Boyer boasts that, despite his admiration of Eliza, “I am in no danger, however, of becoming an enthusiastic devotee. No, I mean to act upon just and rational principles” (111). Boyer’s use of the highly charged and easily recognizable tag for evangelical revivalism here is noteworthy. It suggests that Boyer’s opposition to Sanford is, more broadly construed, an opposition to the excesses of religious enthusiasm endorsed by Edwards and his followers.

Foster’s text addresses the question of public piety in postrevolutionary society by asking how the pleasures of social life might be combined with the pieties of private life. To answer this question, Foster juxtaposes the Old Light rationalist religious discourse presented by Boyer with Eliza and Sanford’s post-awakened evangelical appreciation of the pleasures of religious life. Politically speaking, Eliza’s oscillation between Boyer and Sanford suggests an oscillation between the communitarian values of federalism and the liberal individualism of antifederalism. By refocusing our attention on the competing versions of Calvinism in the text, we gain a clearer understanding of how Eliza’s reclusion figures a viable mode of public participation.

**Seducible Objects: Eliza’s Hermitic Manuscript**

Eliza’s transformation from a self-stylized sentimental heroine to a female hermit is central to the political utility of Eliza’s disposition to defer judgment. Even before Eliza is actually seduced she begins to assume the guise of archetypal seduced heroines such as Clarissa Harlowe. In this sense, Eliza proves Mrs. Richman’s early association of herself with Richardson’s heroine: “I hope, madam, you do not think me an object of seduction,” she exclaims (134). Richman responds,
I do not think you seducible; nor was Richardson's Clarissa, till she made herself the victim, by her own indiscretion. Pardon me, Eliza, this is a second Lovelace. I am alarmed by his artful intrusions. His insinuating attentions to you are characteristic of the man. (134)

As with Clarissa Harlowe, Eliza seeks to atone for her sins with “the severest pains, both of body and mind”(229). Clearly not a death wish, Eliza explains that “should it please God to spare and restore me to health, I shall return, and endeavor, by a life of penitence and rectitude, to expiate my past offences”(231). Further in keeping with Richardson’s model, Foster’s text details how Eliza’s “bloom is decreasing; [her] health is sensibly impaired”(190). The physical emaciation of the seduced heroine is indicated by Julia’s involuntary tears upon seeing how altered Eliza has become. As Sanford observes, Eliza’s “fixed melancholy” has impaired her health: “She thinks herself rapidly declining; and I tremble when I see her emaciated form!”(218). Julia and her mother strive to get Eliza to eat, but to no avail. “Supper was brought in,” Julia reports, “and we endeavored to prevail on Eliza to eat, but in vain. She sat down, in compliance with our united importunities; but neither of us tasted food. It was removed untouched”(224). Much like the conventional pieties previously expressed by Eliza, her consumptive physical decline marks her progress along a conventional sentimental seduction narrative.

To fully appreciate how Eliza’s reclusion signifies an alternative act of public participation, however, we must go beyond the obvious parallels between the texts of Foster and Richardson, to consider how her reclusion introduces a formal transition from Eliza’s epistles to her manuscript, a transition that is matched by a growing self-consciousness concerning the publicity of her life. Commenting on Julia’s surprise that she should be seducible, Eliza remarks: “Your surprise is very natural…The same will doubtless be felt and expressed by every one to whom my sad story is related”(222). Similarly, Foster’s protagonist hopes that her “unhappy story [may] serve as a beacon to warn the American fair of the dangerous tendency and destructive consequences of associating with men of your character”(233). The relationship between Eliza’s
reclusion and her awareness of the future publicity of her life story places Foster's text firmly within the generic conventions of the hermit's tale.

C. Leiren Mower thoughtfully suggests that Eliza's move to seclusion represents an “arrested motion, a partial status” rather than a “recognition of defeat” and “gradual retreat from the public sphere” (335). While Mower is certainly correct that Eliza's seclusion does not entail a recognition of defeat, the specific cause of this stasis derives from Eliza's decision to maintain physical stillness and epistolary silence. Noah Webster's evangelical dictionary tellingly defines the stillness that characterizes Eliza's reclusion as emancipatory:

STILLNESS, n.
1. Freedom from noise or motion; calmness; quiet; silence; as the stillness of the night, the air or the sea;
2. Freedom from agitation or excitement; as the stillness of the passions; 3. Habitual silence; taciturnity.

Richard Rabinowitz identifies an increasing valorization of silence and stillness, during the 1790s, as markers of anti-revivalist piety. The political and social turmoil following the Revolution refuelled the scepticism expressed by Old Light (and often federalist) Calvinists, towards the emotional excesses of the First Awakening. Struggling to retrench a rigorous sense of piety in the postrevolutionary years, evangelicals identified “visions, voices, jerky movements, disorder, impulse, imagination, passion, noise, even sociality” as enemies to Christian sobriety (39). In the place of such frenetic expressions of piety, they recommended a regimen of stillness and silence. Both conservative and

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57 Mower's trenchant analysis is significantly different than my own. She argues that Eliza's wasting body functions as an extreme form of the Lockean paradigm of laboured proprietorship, taking "its logic a step further, so that the body itself becomes the sole evidence of labor, exclusive of the world. Within this scenario, Eliza's wasting body exhibits a self-mastery that visibly registers her increased (body) proprietorship while at the same time exiting the public sphere that brought about the crisis of self-management." ("Bodies in Labor: Sole Proprietorship and the Labor of Conduct in The Coquette," American Literature 72.2 (2002): 335-6).

Calvinist to the extreme, evangelical stillness represented not only a freedom from the excessive passions of the Edwardseans and frothy din of sociality, but a veritable substantiation of Calvinist predestinationism. With the inefficacy of individual moral action in the face of predetermined divine election, stillness and silence represent the most obvious practical outcomes of such a belief. The culmination of this apotheosis of stillness is, of course, found in death itself. As Rabinowitz remarks: “Stillness, then, was an experimental dying in the midst of life, a temporary abstractedness from biological momentum that could, like the approach of death itself, be used to glimpse eternal destiny.”

Thus, when Eliza thinks “of becoming a predestinarian, and submitting implicitly to fate, without any exercise of free will,” she follows Boyer’s Old Light resistance to Edwardseanism. Eliza’s withdrawal from society into reclusion and silence can be seen, in this sense, as consistent with larger Old Light critiques of New Light affective piety. Yet as we have seen, Eliza cannot be easily aligned with either the federalist evangelicalism of Boyer or the affective religiosity of Sanford. Rather, Eliza’s move to seclusion structures the opposition between these two extremes, drawing on both affective piety and silent immobility to carefully negotiate how the private voice of the republican woman might be made public without transgressing the boundaries of female propriety. By appealing to both extremes to characterize her reclusion, Eliza attempts to ameliorate the cold rationalism of Boyer’s theology and the extreme emotional indifference and self-righteous censure of the female chorus. That Eliza resists embracing either extreme speaks to the moral bankruptcy of either option for postrevolutionary American femininity.

Eliza’s seclusion, in this sense, marks the second of two attempts to confront the specific aporias of postrevolutionary female subjectivity. The first attempt, platonic friendship, achieves its culmination in the perceived masculine assertiveness of her proclamation of love to Boyer, a form of public independence labelled as coquetry and

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60 Hamilton has argued for the influence of Jonathan Edwards’ conceptualization of free will on Eliza’s actions (“Assault on the Will,” 136). For a discussion of Eliza’s decision to become a predestinarian, see ibid., 122. On the issue of predestination as it pertains to Old Light and New Light Calvinism, see Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 34.
deemed unacceptable by the female chorus. In her second attempt, Eliza withdraws from the public sphere entirely. In moving into total seclusion, Eliza ironically achieves total visibility while simultaneously marking the limits of women's liberty in the new republic. Embodying a public freedom expressible only in privacy, Eliza's reclusion constitutes the community from which she withdraws by articulating the border between inclusion and exclusion. As Barnes argues, Foster's text "reminds us that the belief in self-determination…must be continually undercut in order to prove that it still exists. To see choice—and woman's choice in particular—through to the end, unmediated by the effects of seduction, is to come face-to-face with the limits of free will. And, in a democratic society, this is the story that cannot be told" (72). Yet this is exactly the story that Eliza chooses to tell. Her physical withdrawal from society signals the culmination of her efforts to disavow the limited options offered to her as a single woman. It is precisely Eliza's unwillingness to make a choice between Boyer/Sanford, social life/married life, or public/private that reifies her autonomy as a female subject.

Most scholars agree that in the wake of her rejection, and especially after her seduction, Eliza loses her voice. Eliza’s move to seclusion first, in her mother’s home, and then in the Salem tavern, is accompanied by a virtual surcease of epistolary correspondence between the protagonist and the other characters of the text. Davidson characteristically remarks that Eliza’s “long protracted fall and the silence that surrounds it constitute the invisible centre around which this sentimental novel turns” (229). Eliza’s silence explains that a woman with no voice and no will can be seduced precisely because she has no say in the matter (Davidson, 228). Eliza’s retreat into silence is equally understandable to Dorothy Baker given Eliza’s “waning confidence in the ability of language to convey meaning and to express truth.” Finding no language to support her desires for public piety, Eliza stops speaking. Similarly, scholars have argued that the end of Eliza’s epistolarity marks the political failure of republican independence. In a society in which the letter represents the site of a republican daughter’s virtual independence, a way in which to broach subjects that

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could not be spoken of in public (e.g. sexuality), Eliza’s failure to continue her correspondences amounts to her eschewal of postrevolutionary individualism.  

In most readings of Eliza’s gradual decline her silence is regarded as evidence of the triumph of the female chorus, the triumph of existing discourses of female propriety marked by the ideals of republican marriage.  

Bruce Burgett explains that as Eliza’s clandestine relationship with Sanford is privatized, her public letters between friends “lose their counter-hegemonic force and, eventually, vanish altogether”; the protagonist’s decline in letter writing “deprives Eliza of publication as a means of expressive self-determination by confirming the separation of public and private spheres”(106). I would argue, however, that Eliza’s move to reclusion offers a more viable model for deferral based on a second alternative model of publication: that of the hermit’s manuscript.

While most scholars note the decline of Eliza’s epistolary correspondence, no one has drawn attention to the fact that Eliza does not completely cease to write. Rather, her public correspondence between friends is transformed into the composition of privatized religious sentiments. Eliza’s own reclusion from society is not marked simply by an increased religious self-awareness but by the inauguration of private devotional writings addressed to a prospective future audience. In place of her epistolary correspondence with her friends, Eliza begins to write supposedly religious or philosophical observations on her condition, writings that are collected by her brother after her death in the form of a hermit’s manuscript. While Eliza’s earlier attempts to forge a female public piety based in platonic intersex friendship are marked by an effort to constitute an identity that, as Eva Cherniavsky remarks, “cuts across the division of private and public space, turning the feminine inside out,” her subsequent reclusion signals a confrontation along the border between private and public space that exposes the fissures in an ideology of the separate spheres.  

The central characteristic of this

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63 See, for example, Barnes’ claim that, while Eliza’s earlier status as a coquette signifies a mastery of language, ultimately Eliza is “sentenced to the word others use against her”; she becomes, as it were, “pure text, bound from first to last by a title instead of a name” (States of Sympathy, 70–1). See also Stern’s suggestion that the appearance of Julia Granby near the close of the narrative “usurps the last vestige of control” from Eliza, “the power to tell and shape her own destiny” (Plight of Feeling, 141).

exposure is Eliza’s continued (albeit transformed) writing practices while in seclusion. Eliza’s self-conscious recognition that her cloistered writings will circulate publicly after her death reflects her desire to reassert a public identity from afar, to resituate the role of the *feme sole* as a necessarily reclusive figure who participates publicly by withdrawing into absolute privacy.

Why, one might ask, do seduced heroines repeatedly withdraw into seclusion? Clearly, they exceed the bounds of societal propriety and, thus, seek an escape from the town talk that only reclusion can provide. But there is a larger reason. If public female propriety is controlled by the epistolary community of women attempting to guide and restrain Eliza’s public actions, then her eventual self-exile represents her circumvention of efforts to silence her. When Eliza withdraws to the Salem Tavern, her friends’ efforts to conceal her actions are turned on their head. The seduced hermit represents, in this regard, a public declaration of privatization, a full disclosure of both her liberty and her transgression that is enabled by her rejection of epistolarity in favour of sole authorship. That is to say, Eliza Wharton epitomizes the particular sacredness of the ascetic citizen poised between the categories of inclusion/exclusion and public/private she insists on deferring.

In this regard, Stern’s contention that “the dream of an imaginable female language that in fact will never materialize becomes Foster's most powerful metaphor for the failed promise of women's expression in Federalist America” seems to miss the importance placed on the funereal writings discovered by Eliza’s brother (135). After Eliza’s final seclusion and isolated death in Salem, her brother visits her “last retreat…to learn the particulars of her melancholy exit”(236). He relates:

> she was well accommodated, and had every attention and assistance, which her situation required. The people where she resided appear to have a lively sense of her merit and misfortunes. They testify her modest deportment, her fortitude under the sufferings to which she was called, and the serenity and composure, with which she bid a last adieu to the world. *Mr. Wharton has brought back several scraps of her writing, containing miscellaneous reflections on her situation, the death of*

65 Stern argues that Eliza’s life moves from active to passive, from being the first-person author of epistles to being the third-person object of the chorus’ sentimental discourse (*Plight of Feeling*, 150).
her babe, and the absence of her friends. Some of these were written before, some after her confinement. These valuable testimonies of the affecting sense, and calm expectation she entertained of her approaching dissolution, are calculated to sooth and comfort the minds of mourning connections. They greatly alleviate the regret occasioned by her absence, at this awful period. (236, emphasis added)

In some sense, these scraps of writing, with their focus on “her situation, the death of her babe, and the absence of her friends,” mark the gap between the surveillance of the female epistolarity community and the stasis produced by Eliza’s death. Eliza’s deathbed writings retain control of her narrative in a manner that epistolarity cannot. “Calculated to sooth and comfort the minds of mourning connections,” these writings tell the story that cannot be told. In commenting on “her situation,” Eliza’s manuscript publicizes the events of Eliza’s life that are effaced by the female chorus’ epitaph:

THIS HUMBLE STONE,
IN MEMORY OF
ELIZA WHARTON,
IS INSCRIBED BY HER WEEPING FRIENDS,
TO WHOM SHE ENDEARED HERSELF BY UNCOMMON TENDERNESS AND AFFECTION.
ENDOWED WITH SUPERIOR ACQUIREMENTS,
SHE WAS STILL MORE DISTINGUISHED BY HUMILITY AND BENEVOLENCE.
LET CANDOR THROW A VEIL OVER HER FRAILTIES,
FOR GREAT WAS HER CHARITY TO OTHERS.
SHE SUSTAINED THE LAST PAINFUL SCENE, FAR FROM EVERY FRIEND;
AND EXHIBITED AN EXAMPLE OF CALM RESIGNATION.
HER DEPARTURE WAS ON THE 25TH DAY OF JULY, A.D. —.
IN THE 37TH YEAR OF HER AGE,
AND THE TEARS OF STRANGERS WATERED HER GRAVE. (242)

In the official version of Eliza’s life penned by the collective consciousness of the female chorus the “uncommon tenderness and affection” of her friends is self-congratulated. Much like Richardson’s heroine, Eliza’s conventionally sentimental pieties—her “humility and benevolence,” “her charity to others,” and her “calm resignation”—are extolled, while “candor throw[s] a veil over her frailties.” As Stern astutely remarks, in death Eliza “becomes a monumental and voiceless spectacle, transformed into the object of a gaze she can no longer legislate by a chorus that refuses to harken to her transgressive language” (138). Fetishizing Eliza’s body as an “object of the press,” the female chorus “penetrated [Eliza] by the gaze of the communal eye and devoured [her] by a popular appetite for scandal” (Stern, 145). Yet the female chorus’ triumphant version of their friend’s life tells only half of the story. Stern’s contention that Eliza’s manuscript is taken up by the chorus and circulated “as community property, enabling the chorus to re-cover its vision of Eliza by selectively revising the words its members have found so problematic” is simply not indicated by the text (143).

Foster’s deliberate attention to the presence of Eliza’s hermitic manuscript complicates the facile characterization of Eliza’s demise as the triumph of the female chorus’ hegemonic narration. As Claire Pettengill usefully reminds us, Foster’s text ends in a “guardedly optimistic” manner. While the monumental epitaph does, on one level, announce the dubious friendship of the chorus, it also hints that “there is more than one way of seeing (and using) even the most conventional moral tale.” Given the complex portrayal of Eliza’s life through the competing epistles that precede the epitaph, the closing monument is surely intended to seem patently one-sided. Moreover, the presence of Eliza’s hermit manuscript allows Foster to provide the possibility of an alternate version, the existence of which all readers are aware. Juxtaposing the funereal

66 See also Brown, “Consent, Coquetry, and Consequences,” 642; Richards, “Politics of Seduction,” 253-4.

67 Pettengill, “Sisterhood in a Separate Sphere,” 199. See also Davidson’s suggestion that, while the end provides the moral that conservative moralists demanded at the time, “the circumstances of her death seem designed to tease the reader into thought” (Revolution and the Word, 230).
writings with the official epitaphic record, Eliza’s legacy as an ascetic citizen announces the distance between the female chorus’ hegemonic policing of coverture and the moral (in)proprieties of the single woman.

While we are not given many facts about the contents of Eliza’s manuscript we are informed that they contained “miscellaneous reflections on her situation, the death of her babe, and the absence of her friends.” Written both “before, some after her confinement,” Eliza’s manuscript provides “valuable testimonies of the affecting sense, and calm expectation she entertained of her approaching dissolution.” What the hermit’s manuscript most clearly reveals is “the absence of her friends” during the crucial moment of seduction and the alienation of their affections after marriage. In this context, Lucy’s concluding maxim—“To associate, is to approve; to approve, is to be betrayed!”—seems ironically double-edged. Failing to receive approval from the chorus, Eliza is betrayed by her friends, choosing to withdraw from their association and refusing to tell anyone where she absconded. Secondly, the manuscript makes reference to the physical evidence of Eliza’s impropriety, discussing the presence of a baby that would render the veiling of her frailties impossible. Thirdly, the manuscript’s attention to “her situation” is perhaps most telling. Among possible “situations” cited, it is unlikely that Eliza would not comment on the precarious situation of her social life as a feme sole and her failed attempts to forge a public identity outside the existing cultural narratives of coquetry, seduction, and republican marriage.

Given the fact that these writings were composed “before, some after her confinement,” one can assume that it is the manuscript that Eliza has in mind (prior to confinement) when she makes reference to “the American fair” reading her “unhappy story.” As such, Eliza’s hermit manuscript refuses to silence the version of her story that is effaced by the hegemonic version articulated by the epitaph. In supplementing the epitaph with Eliza’s writings, Foster’s text reveals the fissures between feme sole and feme covert that an ideology of separate spheres attempts to occlude. Not confident to ensure the lesson to the American fair to the female chorus,

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68 See Schweitzer’s contention that the collective mourning of the friends reveals the failure of friendship to sustain Eliza; a contraction of the bounds of friendship that occurs as a result of the federalist model of marriage (Perfecting Friendship, 130); see also Brown’s suggestion that the novel invalidates the witnesses of the female chorus, “refus[ing] to celebrate Eliza’s republican-minded friends” (ibid., 643). Indeed, they are seen to be superficial parrots of gender and propriety—in effect, plagiarizing Whitman’s epitaph in constructing Eliza’s inscription (ibid., 643).
Eliza provides a set of writings that diverge from the conventional pieties of the sentimental model presented by the epitaph. The manuscript composed by Eliza while in seclusion tells the story of a religious republican self-sufficiency that cannot adequately be reduced to the extremes embodied by either Boyer or Sanford. Balancing the active sociability of Sanford with the cloistered piety of Boyer, Eliza forges a model of female ascetic citizenship marked by a public deferral of private experience, an expression enabled by the textual presence of a publicly circulating account of her reclusion from society. Foster tells the story of a privatized existence that, while removed from social life, nonetheless offers an important and critical insight into the public realm. Dramatizing the emergent hegemony of a cult of domesticity, Eliza’s actions represent the only viable model of female public piety as an ascetic deferral of limited choices, exercised from the seclusion of the hermit’s cell. Importantly, by ensuring the textual circulation of her seclusion, Eliza guarantees that the didactic message of her textual life (her virtue) will not be confined to a cell as its author necessarily must be. The emergent privatized publicity of Eliza as female hermit is necessary for preserving a republican insistence on public civic action while necessarily denying female access to it. The female hermit dramatizes the simultaneous covering/uncovering of republican women at and on the boundary between these categories. Tellingly celebrating her own marital state, Lucy assures Eliza that “we will ramble together in those retired shades which friendship has rendered so delightful to us” (196). As Foster’s text would have it, Lucy and Eliza (feme covert and feme sole) cannot ramble through the retired shades of cloistered domesticity so much as meet each other at the threshold of the domus.
Chapter Five
Ascetic Sympathy and the Failed Promise of Sentimental Democracy in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* and “Death of Cicero"

We become intolerable to one another. I can neither support your company, nor you mine. You are confounded at my violence and passion, and I am enraged at your cold insensibility and want of feeling.

—Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

In “Objections to Richardson’s *Clarissa*”(1800), Charles Brockden Brown insists that Clarissa Harlowe dies, “not a martyr to any duty, but a victim of grief, a grief occasioned by an unreasonable value set on things of which she is deprived, not by her own fault, but by that of others.”¹ Appearing in the November 1800 issue of Brown’s *Monthly Magazine* (3.5), “Objections” establishes the crucial distinction between dutiful martyrdom and personal mourning, a distinction that informs Brown’s conception of the postrevolutionary American ascetic citizen. In “Walstein’s School of History”(1799), Brown had already addressed the shortcomings of Richardson’s text.² “Walstein” offers an imaginary writer named Engels and his fictional biography, *Life of Olivo Ronsica*, as an archetype of didactic fiction. The stoic fortitude of Engels’ *Ronsica* is contrast against

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the sentimental piety of Richardson’s *Clarissa*. Central to Brown’s preference for Engels’ text is its application of Ronsica’s talents “to reform the vices of others, to defeat their malice when exerted to his injury, to endure, without diminution of his usefulness or happiness, the injuries that he cannot shun.” In both *Clarissa* and *Ronsica*, the suffering individual resigns him/herself to that which he/she “cannot shun.” Yet by over-appreciating the “value of parental approbation and fair fame,” Clarissa “deprecate[s] the means of [her] usefulness”(156). While Ronsica chooses “to endure” with heroic fortitude, Clarissa, at least in Brown’s estimation, dies “not a martyr to any duty, but a victim of grief.”

In “Objections,” Brown insists that while Richardson’s text promotes “the purest maxims of wisdom, it tends to obscure our notions of rectitude”(102). Focussing on Richardson’s overriding stress on the virtues of filial obedience, Brown notes that “duty to parents is not the sole, or the chief duty of man, and is to give way when it clashes with other and higher duties”(101). While Brown is not ignorant of the very real conflict of duties (filial, religious, social) Clarissa faces, her repeated failures to correctly identify these “higher duties” are identified by Brown as “blemishes on her character”(101). Specifically, it is Clarissa’s “difficulty in resisting the petition” of her father when her “duty to herself, to God, and to others, forbid her to obey” that fuels Brown’s censure (101). In doing so, Brown identifies social or public duty (to others), alongside personal and religious duties, as superior to filial duty.4

Recognizing that Clarissa’s “powers over others was large,” Brown’s “Objections” insist that “her duty lay in exerting this power to the utmost, and most beneficially”(102). “Clarissa’s chief fault,” he argues, “is of an extreme and delicate nature”(101). Her actions are extreme, Brown suggests, because she fails to moderate

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4 On early American understandings of the Revolution against Britain as a familial drama of filial rebellion against the patriarch, see Fliegelman, *Prodigals*, 5. In this sense, Brown’s privileging of public and religious duty over filial duty is, perhaps, not especially surprising.
private concerns (personal grief) with public concerns (dutiful martyrdom). It is Richardson’s insistent portrayal of Clarissa’s excessive grief and tragic death “as meritorious and worthy [of] imitation,” rather than as “infractions of duty,” that Brown criticizes (102). What Brown faults in Richardson is the insistently self-regarding orientation of Clarissa’s actions, as opposed to Ronsica’s consistently other-regarding efforts (despite adversity) to “reform the vices of others.” That is to say, the depiction of suffering virtue presented by Richardson is useful in its ability to engage the affections, but faulty in its failure to apply these affections to a greater good (“Walstein,” 156). By contrast, Ronsica refuses to allow personal sufferings to diminish his usefulness to society. By restraining bodily affect under adversity, by limiting the sentimental effusion of emotions with a stoic adherence to fortitude, Ronsica presents a model of suffering virtue that the spectator can sympathize with. For the same reason, the didactic impact of Richardson’s Clarissa is diminished, and the “means of usefulness” are depreciated, to the extant that excesses of bodily affect mark Clarissa’s apparent victimhood.

Central to the didactic utility of both texts is not so much the question of heroic fortitude in the face of adversity but of martyrdom to the most correct and highest duty (i.e. to others). “Was it just, was it noble, was it exemplary,” Brown asks in “Objections,” to “suffer the groundless anger of kindred; restraint upon her liberty; and an involuntary violation; to bereave her, first of her tranquillity, next of her senses, and lastly, of her life?” (102). If Brown’s use of adjectives like noble, just, and exemplary sounds strangely classical that is because his privileging of Ronsica over Clarissa embodies a more general privileging of stoicism over sentimentalism. In the “Henrietta Letters,” one of Brown’s earliest attempts at fiction, he pairs the stoic philosophy of the ancient Romans with the sentimentalism of Richardson. Presenting her lover with two options for female heroism in the face of affliction, Henrietta exclaims:

I, a poor unlearned, unphilosophical creature, shall never become a Stoic, never emulate the heroism or admire the exploits of Lucrece or Portia. I am a disciple of that religion and philosophy of which the effects are to be seen in the conduct

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of Clarissa. O best of men! Most eloquent of writers! It is from thy immortal production that I have imbibed the love of virtue; of moral harmony and beauty.⁶

Throughout the “Letters,” Brown pointedly characterizes Henrietta as an archetypal sentimental heroine. Yet here, with characteristic self-effacement, she seems to accept the sentimental piety of Richardson’s Clarissa as a second-place prize to the preferred stoic austerity of Lucretia or Portia. The relevance of stoicism for Brown’s critique of Clarissa in “Objections” is revealed by the question of Clarissa’s death. Is the “immediate phrenzy, and ultimate death” that succeeds the heroine’s rape, Brown asks, an argument for “virtue or vice…fortitude or weakness?”(101). For Brown, the question is whether “either moral or religious duty enjoins us to live or to die; to be passionate in lamentation, or serene in fortitude?”(101-2).

Brown’s return to the dialectic of stoic fortitude and sentimental effusion expressed in the “Letters” is not, it should be noted, a criticism of Clarissa’s justifiable distraction in the wake of forced confinement and rape but rather a critique of Richardson’s representation of a “grief inconsistent with life”(101). While the display of immoderate affect is inconsistent with the encouragement of a resignation to the authority of “one perfect in goodness and wisdom”(101-2), Brown’s attempt to balance excessive affect with classical conceptions of noble fortitude and public duty figures what Bryce Traister calls the “gap between exemplary and extraordinary experience,” between one’s “representative role as redeemed sufferer and [one’s] unique identity as a traumatized individual.”⁷

The stoic examples of Lucretia and Portia (and, I would argue, of Olivo Ronsica) represent an idealized public application of personal virtue to the common good through an effective transference of sympathy, while the sentimental example of Clarissa represents a personal virtue expressed through a heightened bodily affect that widens the gap between individuals which sympathy seeks to overcome. Colin Jeffrey Morris persuasively argues that early texts by Brown such as the “Henrietta Letters” illustrate “the powerful capacity of the romantic-sentimental idiom for thwarting the self’s


⁷ Traister, “Invention of the Secular,” 324.
potential for public action”; presenting a world in which politics are either abstracted or occluded, he observes that the “Letters” fail to answer the question as to how a rational sympathy might be extended beyond private relations between individuals to the public-political realm. Morris is certainly correct to argue that Brown’s early inquiry into sentimentalism, romanticism, and Godwinian rationalism in turn, ultimately reveals that sympathy cannot be harnessed for public virtue. This chapter extends Morris’s observations on Brown’s early writings to argue that the twin models of stoic self-command and sentimental identification introduced in “Letters” continue to inform the vision of a passionate society forged through sympathetic connection represented in Brown’s novels. While his repeated questioning of the relevance of sentiments for public virtue ultimately reveals the irreconcilability between dutiful martyrdom and personal grief, Brown locates a viable model of ethical behaviour in the citizen’s patient endurance of the aporia between stoicism and sentimentalism.

When he stumbles across Clithero’s emaciated body in the wilds of Norwalk, Edgar Huntly debates how best to dissuade him from starving himself. Doubting the capacity of words to “arrest his foot-steps and win his attention,” Huntly offers a sympathetic solution to the irresolvable relationship between civic self-sacrifice and private emotion, one that insists on a sympathetic transference of bodily affect between individuals. If Huntly could only “set by him in silence, to moisten his hand with tears, to sigh in unison, to offer him the spectacle of sympathy,” perhaps then he might “be able to insinuate the lessons of fortitude” in his wayward companion. Brown’s attention to “spectacle[s] of sympathy” and “lessons of fortitude” signal two important contexts for understanding Edgar Huntly: or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker (1799). Linking eighteenth-century theories of sympathy with stoic conceptions of fortitude Brown offers a model of constitutional American citizenship that insists upon a mutually self-surveilling

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community of political independent subjects constituted through a sympathetic network of impartial spectators. That Brown’s vision for constitutional America depends upon these two contexts is signalled by the deliberate appending of his short story, “Death of Cicero,” to the end of *Edgar Huntly*.

In 1799, Hugh Maxwell published Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* in three volumes. In 1800, only volume III was republished (also by Maxwell). In this reprint of volume III, Brown’s short story, “The Death of Cicero” is appended to *Edgar Huntly*. Maxwell reprinted all three volumes of *Edgar Huntly* in 1801, wherein “Death of Cicero” retains its place at the end of the novel. Containing no significant changes from the first printing, volume III of the novel appears to have been reprinted for the sole purpose of including “Death of Cicero.” What was so important about “Death of Cicero” in relation to *Edgar Huntly* that Brown felt the need to reprint his novel? What relationship does this short tale bear to the larger novel? How might the paralleling of one of Rome’s most famous stoics with *Edgar Huntly*’s anti-hero radically alter our understanding of Brown’s darkest tale?

Brown’s “Death of Cicero” provides a crucial context for understanding *Edgar Huntly* and, in particular, the relationship between Clithero and Huntly. Indeed, the relationship between Cicero and his dutiful servant, Tiro, replete with Tiro’s anxiety about how best to save Cicero from assassination while respecting his master’s wishes to the contrary, closely mirrors the fraught relationship between Clithero and Huntly. In his introduction to the bicentennial edition of *Edgar Huntly*, Sydney Krause argues that the well-documented doubling of Clithero and Huntly is suggested by the anagrammatic reordering of Huntly and (Clithero) Edny’s names. While this may be the case, an equally persuasive argument can be made for the phonetic similarity between Clithero and Cicero.

“Death of Cicero” carefully balances the emotional exhibitionism of Tiro against the stoic emotional self-command of Cicero to recommend an ethic of moderation.

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between these two extremes. In Brown’s mind, the Stoic’s austere dedication to the common good threatens to ignore the importance of sentiment and sympathy as necessary checks on the cold calculation of rational thought, a faculty that Brown repeatedly shows to be wanting. In his/her dedication to affective connection and emotional identification between individuals, the sentimentalist risks limiting the utility of his/her personal virtue to a privatized realm detached from the public sphere.

Most importantly, it is Tiro’s ability, at the moment of execution, to emulate his master’s moderation of his passions that reminds Tiro of his duty to Cicero: “These impulses of grief were repressed by the remembrance of the duties” he owed to others. Tiro’s ability to restrain his passionate response to Cicero’s actions is what permits him to reconcile his sentiments with his duty to both his master and the republican cause of liberty. Indeed, by restraining his emotional response to Cicero’s death, Tiro checks a misguided benevolence produced by excessive sympathy. In doing so, Tiro preserves Cicero’s character for posterity as stoically self-controlled.

Brown’s attention to the opposing examples of stoic and sentimental subjectivity reflects his larger concerns with the subjectivity of the constitutional American citizen. Comparing Brown’s “Death of Cicero” and Edgar Huntly alongside the political theories of James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, this chapter scrutinizes Brown’s deployment of Adam Smith’s discussion, in The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759-90), of a stoically self-restrained sympathetic community as a solution to federalist visions of late eighteenth-century America. Brown’s interest in how sentiment functions in the civic realm aligns him with contemporary understandings of sympathy as providing a crucial link between the disparate individuals of the young republic. As we shall see, however, the spectacles of sympathy figured in “Death of Cicero” and Edgar Huntly present the possibility of a sympathetic society grounded in the abstemious management of bodily affect only to announce its inefficacy. The idealization of a sympathetic society detailed in “Death of Cicero” is offered as a contrast to the more pessimistic portrayal of its inadequacy in Edgar Huntly. Much like Defoe’s Crusoe narratives, the rigorous adversity and physical self-mortification attending the wilderness adventures of Clithero and Huntly is found to be ultimately insufficient to check either Huntly’s

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misguided benevolence or Clithero’s maniacal designs. Adopting the more complex ascetic modality of Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*, Brown’s texts depict the retreat of the constitutional subject from the challenging twin duties of self-management and civic self-sacrifice into a position of critical deferral ensconced in the cloistered safety of an authoritative model approximating monarchy.

**Adam Smith and the Federalists: The Ascetic Morality of Sympathy**

For some time scholars have understood Brown’s career as a progression from the naïve sentimentalism of his early years to the sophisticated Gothicism of his middle “productive” period, to the artistic decline into the mass-market domestic novels, editorship, and partisan journalism of his final years. Whether we are talking about Henry Pleyel and Theodore Wieland, Edgar Huntly and Sarsefield, Ormond and Constantia, Stephen Calvert and Sydney Carleton, or Jane Talbot and Henry Colden, Brown consistently opposes expressions of extreme rationalism against expressions of extreme sensibility. Various scholars have identified the sentimental conventions present in both Brown’s earliest works (“Henrietta Letters,” “The Story of Julius,” “The Rhapsodist,” and “Cuilli de Vaud”) and his final two novels, *Jane Talbot* (1801) and *Clara Howard* (1801). Similarly, since the publication of Leslie Fiedler’s *Love and Death in American Novel* (1966), Brown’s mid-career novels have been largely categorized as American Gothic. While the identification of various gothic or sentimental

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13 Scholars invariably identify this political shift from radical to conservative in the year 1800. For an overview and critique of this narrative, see W. M. Verhoeven, “‘This Blissful Period of Intellectual Liberty’: Transatlantic Radicalism and Enlightened Conservatism in Brown’s Early Writings,” in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality in the Early Republic*, eds. Mark L. Kamrath, Philip Barnard and Stephen Shapiro (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 7-40.


conventions in Brown’s texts is undoubtedly accurate in itself, I want to resist the desire to identify Brown with either intellectual heritage. Brown does indeed abandon gothic conventions in *Jane Talbot* and *Clara Howard*; yet, the sophistication that readers note in the novels of the middle period (most especially, *Wieland, Edgar Huntly, and Ormond*) is directly attributable to the unsettling confluence of sentimental and gothic forms in these texts, a formal hybridity that complicates our understanding of sympathy/sentiments by confusing the positive affective communication inhering in sentimental novels with the excessive and dangerous expression of passions characteristic of the gothic.

In this regard, Paul Downes is surely correct to characterize the gothic space figured in *Edgar Huntly* as, more broadly considered, “the space of a revolutionary interruption of rational principles and pre-democratic social organization.” What is most disturbing about the gothic is the threat that excessive passions will undermine the capacity of rational thought to protect a coherent self from the ravages of irrational sensibility. The presence of irrational sensibility or excessive emotions implies a threat to democratic revolution that reveals itself in the excessive proliferation of sympathetic connections between individuals. As we will see, this threat of excessive proliferation characterizes James Madison’s preoccupation with majority factionalism. The gothicization of the political landscape depicted in Brown’s novels of the middle period, however, is inscrutable without attention to the equally persistent sentimentalization of political identity. If the formal elements of the gothic provide a rubric for understanding the dangers inherent in democratic subjectivity, the formal elements of the sentimental provide the terms necessary for identifying the management and containment of sentiments as indispensable for the maintenance of postrevolutionary democratic

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Brown’s pessimistic vision of constitutional America is characterized, not by opposing or privileging either the gothic or the sentimental, but by confronting the irreconcilability of the head (reason) with the heart (emotion). Brown’s late comments regarding the need for a moderated prose style are not exclusively the product of mature retrospection; Brown’s entire oeuvre is marked by a desire (more or less successfully achieved) to transcend the irrevocable gap between reason and passion, gothic and sentimental. The works of Charles Brockden Brown attempt a politics of mediocrity in an effort to paper over the widening fissure between the increasingly obsolete austerity of Revolutionary-era classical republicanism and the emergent liberal democracy of the early nineteenth-century. The novels written between parts I and II of Arthur Mervyn (March 1799-July 1800) provide the most demonstrative example of Brown’s attempt to forge a postrevolutionary civic identity out of the dialectic of rationalism and sentimentalism. It is his most ambitious project, and one that he retreats from in defeat by the time he composes Clara Howard (1801) and Jane Talbot (1801). Yet, while his last novels retreat from his most ambitious project, the periodical writings during the last decade of his career consistently reflect

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17 Stern posits that a hierarchy of literary forms in which “the gothic bedrock masked by a sentimental topsoil. In this sense, sentimentalism is vitally related to fetishistic practices of disavowal and substitution, enabling the presence of violence to be disclaimed and covered over by an outpouring of feeling that carries only positive valence” (Plight of Feeling, 9).

18 Verhoeven insists that Brown’s writings “constitute a sustained if not systematic assault on the Enlightenment’s rational, cognitive systems of signification by questioning and upsetting some of the binaries upon which those systems are based (rational/irrational; truth/falsehood; self/other; public/private; free will/determination)” (“Transatlantic Radicalism,” 10). One of the chief ways in which Brown upsets these binaries is by situating postrevolutionary American civic identity at the threshold between these two poles.

the terms of the civic identity haphazardly figured in works such as *Edgar Huntly* and “Death of Cicero.”

Arguing that Brown’s political philosophy (always abstract and never pragmatic) is “at once radical and conservative,” W. M. Verhoeven identifies a combination of the “conservative ideology of Congregational, republican America with a sincere and open-minded engagement” with the chief thinkers of eighteenth-century European philosophy, men such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, D’Alembert, Holbach, and Condorcet. The resulting blend constituted an “enlightened conservatism” shared by many of Brown’s age, background, and class (most typically, those of Elihu Smith’s *The Friendly Club*). Verhoeven’s observations provide an important broadening of our understanding of Brown’s philosophical influences beyond simply Rousseau, Richardson, and Godwin. By considering Brown’s intellectual heritage as a mishmash of various (often extreme) positions, we can appreciate Brown’s attention to balancing and moderating Enlightenment or Godwinian rationalism and eighteenth-century sentimentalism to achieve what Warner Berthoff calls “a mediate stability” halfway between the “righteous severity” of his early years and the “benign watchfulness” of later years. The mediate stability of Brown’s perspective strives to overcome what he perceives to be the alienation and lack of public morality prevalent during the constitutional period by recommending a self-restrained affect. This recommendation finds Brown adopting Smith’s theory of moral sentiments in light of Federalist anxieties concerning the uncontrolled contagion of sympathetic relations.

For the early American reader, an understanding of sympathy and sympathetic connections derived from two distinct sources: eighteenth-century British sentimental

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fiction popularized by Richardson and eighteenth-century Scottish moral philosophy.\textsuperscript{22} Aside from David Hume and Thomas Reid, Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith were the most influential Scottish philosophers in America (May, 111). During the constitutional crisis of the early republic, sentiment and sympathy provided a set of basic assumptions relating to the psychology of the democratic citizen.\textsuperscript{23} As Steven Watts suggests, Scottish moral philosophy helped to transform the anti-patriarchalism of the early republic into “an ethic of private character, nurture and growth, affection and education.”\textsuperscript{24} Characterizing America’s opposition to the political parentage of Britain in affective terms, Andrew Burstein defines America’s “sentimental democracy” as “a constant vocabulary of sympathy based on national affinities and the resulting shock that came from the unanticipated loss of that sympathy” when beset by the “unjust or tyrannical unfeeling” of Britain (“Political,” 608). As Thomas Paine characteristically describes in \textit{The American Crisis}: “We had no other law than a kind of moderated passion; no other civil power than an honest mob; and no other protection than the temporary attachment of one man to another.”\textsuperscript{25} This political deployment of self-
restrained sympathy provided citizens critical of the unfeeling austerity of classical republican citizenship with a means to envision “the temporary attachment of one man to another.”

It is to Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a text well known among educated Americans both before and after the Revolution, that we must look to explain the relevance of Scottish moral theories for America’s efforts to forge temporary attachments between its citizens.26 The general popularity of Scottish common-sense thinkers in eighteenth-century America notwithstanding, there is ample evidence of Brown’s familiarity with Scottish philosophers such as Adam Smith. In an inaugural speech to the “Belles Lettres Club” (1786 or 1787), Brown shows a precocious knowledge of the Scottish school, alluding to David Hume’s “ideal commonwealth” and Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* in turn.27 During his attendance at Elihu Smith’s *Friendly Club* (1796-7), Brown may have discussed Adam Smith’s theory. Among the reported topics appearing in Elihu Smith’s diary, Adam Smith is cited separately as a political thinker and, alongside Thomas Reid, James Beattie, and Dugald Stewart, as a metaphysician.28 Perhaps most significantly, Brown describes Edgar Huntly’s sympathetic connection with Clithero in terms lifted directly out of Smith’s treatise. Sitting by Clithero in silence, Huntly hopes “to moisten his hand with tears, to sigh in unison, to offer him the spectacle of sympathy” (106, emphasis added).

Recent studies on American sympathy by Julia Stern, Elizabeth Barnes, Caleb Crain, and Bruce Burgett all draw to a certain extent on Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

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Sentiments. What is noticeably absent from these otherwise fine studies is a consideration of the actual practical work that sympathy requires at the individual level. If the conclusions of these studies are valid (and I believe, in the main, they are), it behooves us to ask what this sympathetic citizen might look like and how such a citizen might contribute to the maintenance of a passionate society. Smith’s theory of the moral sentiments provided Americans with an established theory for an ethic of private character based on an ascetic moderation of the passions, a practice for which Smith is indebted to the stoic virtue of self-command. Perhaps more than any other text of the period, Theory of Moral Sentiments provides a sophisticated and pragmatic approach to how the individual citizen might fulfil his/her duty in a passionate society. The specific appeal of Smith’s theory is its insistence that the success of the sympathetic project depends upon the internalized self-monitoring of one’s sentiments. Practically speaking, Smith structures sympathy around the intersubjective monitoring of individuals enabled by a correspondence of sentiments.

Building on Francis Hutcheson’s notion of an inborn moral sense that “determines us to approve the Actions which flow from this Love in our selves or others,” Smith understands humanity to be naturally sympathetic. Locating the source of fellow-feeling in a “changing [of] places in fancy with the sufferer,” Smith understands sympathy as a faculty for empathy, not theatrical. The use to which these scholars put Smith’s theory is limited in a way that restricts their understanding of sympathy to an a priori faculty like Platonic recollection or Kantian intuition. The reason for this limited view is that these studies depend upon David Marshall’s trenchant (and certainly not limited) reading of Smithian sympathy as theatrical (David Marshall, The Figure of Theatre: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith and George Eliot [New York: Columbia University Press, 1986], 167-192). What these scholars neglect to address (yet what Marshall and Barnes, nonetheless, do underscore) is the importance of self-command to Smith’s conception of sympathy.

29 Stern, Plight of Feeling; Crain, American Sympathy; Barnes, States of Sympathy; Bruce Burgett, Sentimental Bodies: Sex, Gender, and Citizenship in the Early Republic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). See also Ashley Hales, “Was It Proper to Watch Him at a Distance? Spectatorship, Sympathy and Atlantic Migration in Edgar Huntly,” Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations 10.2 (2006): 133-46. By and large, the use to which these scholars put Smith’s theory is limited in a way that restricts their understanding of sympathy to an a priori faculty like Platonic recollection or Kantian intuition. The reason for this limited view is that these studies depend upon David Marshall’s trenchant (and certainly not limited) reading of Smithian sympathy as theatrical (David Marshall, The Figure of Theatre: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith and George Eliot [New York: Columbia University Press, 1986], 167-192). What these scholars neglect to address (yet what Marshall and Barnes, nonetheless, do underscore) is the importance of self-command to Smith’s conception of sympathy.

30 First published in 1759, The Theory of Moral Sentiments was revised in 1761. Editions 3-5 (1767-81) reproduce the second edition. In 1790, a sixth heavily revised and reorganized edition appeared. In the following discussion, the selected passages have been taken from the sixth edition, unless otherwise noted. See The Theory of Moral Sentiments, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), hereafter cited within the text.

come to conceive or to be affected by what he feels,” Smith argues that sympathy functions by an imaginative extension of emotions between individuals (I.i.1: 10). For every passion that arises in the sufferer, an “analogous emotion” arises in the heart of the spectator (I.i.1:10). The deliberate theatricality of Smith’s model of sympathy is redoubled by the need to achieve “some correspondence of sentiments” between the spectator and the suffering individual. Given the inherent partiality of human beings, however, the sympathetic self defends itself by setting up “in our own minds a judge between ourselves and those we live with…an impartial spectator who considers our conduct with the same indifference with which we regard that of other people.” This “supposed impartial and well-informed spectator, to that of the man within the breast” is central to Smith’s understanding of sympathy (III.2:130). More reliable than a public witness, the impartial spectator “is guaranteed to enter into our feelings…both compensating for and substituting for those spectators who withhold their sympathy” provided a correspondence of sentiments is achieved. To achieve this correspondence, a balancing of passions between sufferer and spectator must occur. As Smith notes,

He can only hope to obtain this by lowering his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him. He must flatten, if I may be allowed to say so, the sharpness of its natural tone, in order to reduce it to harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about him. (I.i.4:22)

Through a rigorous self-restraint and matching of passions that resembles the ascetic practices of both the pagan and Christian traditions, individuals achieve a concurring sympathy.

The problem posed by the overly effusive individual—an individual who, like Edgar Huntly, neglects to restrain his/her emotions—is that he/she disables this

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33 As are most scholars, I am indebted to David Marshall’s trenchant remarks on the theatricality of Smith’s theory. See Figure of Theater, 172; David Marshall, The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 4–5.

34 Taken from the 2nd edition of Moral Sentiments, ed. Raphael and Macfie, 129.

35 Marshall, Figure of Theater, 189. Arguing that “self-deceit” is a “fatal weakness of mankind,” Smith highlights the necessity of some supplementary moral authority, some second-order tribunal that might ensure the propriety of individual action in the face of self-love and self-deceit (Moral Sentiments, III.4: 158). The figure of the impartial spectator provides this necessary supplement.
sympathetic correspondence by making it impossible for the spectator to “bring his case home.” As David Marshall astutely notes, Smith’s theory “stands for the opposite of exhibitionism” (*Figure of Theater*, 184). Related to the problem of emotional exhibitionist is the possibility of the non-sympathesizer, the individual unwilling or uninterested in entering into another’s pain. Between these two extreme scenarios—the individual who disables sympathy by excessive bodily affect and the individual who refuses to care—Smith advocates a passionate society that insists upon a rigorous emotional asceticism. Smith’s theory offers, in this sense, an antitheatrical depiction of social harmony. Yet while one should, as Marshall suggests, “avoid exposing oneself as a spectacle before unsympathetic eyes,” Smith insists that sympathy is necessary for social cohesion (184–5). Smith’s model of an *expressive yet moderated* sympathy is premised on a distinctly ascetic understanding of social interaction.

That Smith conceives of sympathy as an ascetic practice is clear from his comparison of “the futile mortifications of a monastery… [to the] hazards of war.” To argue that a single day spent in a monastery could equal a life spent in the trenches is “surely contrary to all our moral sentiments; to all the principles by which nature has taught us to regulate our contempt or admiration” (*III.2:134*). The main principle by which nature has taught us to regulate our approbation or disgust for ourselves and others is, as Smith has already established, the principle of sympathetic connection. Sympathy requires community. Making roughly the same point as Horneck and Zimmermann, Smith insists that sympathy cannot function in the isolation and solitude of the monastery. The “mortifications” of the monastery are not ruled out on the basis of their ascetic practices of self-mortification. Smith’s theory insists upon the necessity of such rigorous emotional self-restraint.

What troubles Smith about monastic mortification is its tendency to relegate praise for the “spirit” of self-mortification/self-command to the socially isolated religious devotee. Monastic asceticism fails to serve the greater good of the community. Like the solitary man cut off from sympathy, monks and friars rob the community of the benefit bestowed by infusing civic duty with ascetic self-command. In opposition to the monk/friar, Smith idealizes the patriot who “appears to view himself in the light in which the impartial spectator naturally and necessarily views him, as but one of the multitude…of no more consequence than any other in it, but bound at all times to
sacrifice and devote himself to the safety, to the service, and even to the glory of the greater number” (VI.ii.2:228). Unlike the cloistered self-interest of the monk/friar, the patriot straddles self-care with public duty. His rigorous attention to ethical behaviour is saved from descending into self-congratulation precisely because he is “bound at all times” to the “glory of the greater number.” In this sense, Smith’s description of sympathy as an ascetic practice is characterized by a very specific strain of asceticism, one that derives from the this-worldly asceticism of the Stoic tradition.

Numerous scholars have identified Smith’s indebtedness to stoic philosophy. Most notably, Raphael and Macfie, in their introduction to Theory of Moral Sentiments, identify stoic philosophy as the primary influence on Smith’s ethical and economic theory.36 The influence of Stoic thought on Smith’s ethical theory of moral sentiments is nowhere more strongly felt than in his consistent endorsement of the virtue of self-command. The self-command of the passions advocated by the stoics is the logical outcome of their cosmology of an atomistic universe in which each individual, representing simply a part of the greater whole, is bound together by a system of sympathetic interchangeability. While clearly advocating the stoic virtue of endurance under affliction, Smith’s ethical philosophy, with its emphasis on the rigorous self-command of one’s emotions, identifies the specific goal of such self-management as individual civic responsibility. The goal of self-command, Smith insists, is to acquire a “sturdy severity” that can be re-introduced into softer society as a check against the weakness of excessive passions. Smith’s sympathetic Self is useful only to the extent that an ascetic restraint of the passions, first learned through solitary affliction, is applied to sympathetic relations within society. Smith’s contribution to what Andrew Burnstein calls sentimental democracy is his insight into the importance of stoic self-command for moderating bodily affect.37


37 Burnstein defines sentimental democracy as “a physiological phenomenon that found expression as voluntary self-monitoring behaviour for any man who wished to evidence public spirit” (Sentimental Democracy, 21).
feelings between members of society provides the constitutional subject with a pre-monarchic resource for tempering sentimental volatility. Smith’s theory outlines a model of ascetic citizenship that encourages this correspondence while protecting society from the excesses of the emotional exhibitionist and the non-sympathesizing citizen. Yet this model of, what I would call, an ascetic sympathy offers more of a fantasy of transcendence than an actual solution to the problems faced by the constitutional American citizen. As with Defoe’s Crusoe narratives, this dream of reconciliation is ultimately forced to address the aporetic relationship between self-interest and civic duty that the ascetic prerequisite seeks to transcend.

The phantasmatic nature of ascetic sympathy derives from the fact that “lowering his passions to that pitch” in which others can empathize can only produce an imperfect correspondence of sentiments. As Smith suggests, the sympathetic self “almost identifies himself with” the impartial spectator, “he almost becomes himself that impartial spectator, and scarce even feels but as that great arbiter of his conduct directs him to feel”(III.3:146-7, emphasis added). Falling short of complete identification, sympathy produces a fragmented subjectivity similar to Shaftesbury’s “Doctrine of Two Persons in one individual Self.”

To manage the split subjectivity or moral doppelganging of the sympathetic self, Smith suggests: “I divide myself, as it were, into two persons, and that I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of”(III.1:113). During “paroxysms of distress,” the divided sympathetic self finds it difficult to reconcile “his own natural feelings of his own distress” with the simultaneous judgment of the impartial spectator. In such moments, the sympathetic Self does not, however, identify with either the examiner/judge or with the examined/judged. The sympathetic self “does not, in this case, perfectly identify himself with the ideal man within the breast, he does not become himself the impartial spectator of his own conduct”(III.3:148). Yet given the imaginative act of distancing himself from the suffering Self (in this case, himself), he no longer fully identifies with this latter Self. Distanced from both selves, the sympathetic self listens “from the place and with the eyes of a third person, who has no particular connexion

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38 See Shaftesbury’s “Treatise III: Soliloquy: Or, Advice to an Author,” in Anthony, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, ed. Douglas Den Uyl (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), quoted in Marshall, Figure of Theater, 177. On Smith’s divided self, see Marshall, Figure of the Theater, 175-77, 190.
with either” (III.3:135). “The different views of both characters,” Smith explains, “exist in his mind separate and distinct from one another, and each directing him to a behaviour different from that to which the other directs him” (III.3:148). Smith’s conceptualization of sympathetic relations between individuals posits a liminal subjectivity located at the border between the self-interest of the examined/judged and the putative objectivity of the examiner/judge. Similar to Agamben’s homo sacer, Smith’s sympathetic self is enabled by a voluntary withdrawal from complete ownership of his/her own sentiments. Neither completely owning nor completely disowning one’s moral actions, the constitutional citizen is caught at the threshold between self-governance and external authority, offering his motives and desires to public scrutiny while remaining personally responsible for his actions.

Brown’s fiction shows an awareness of the self-divided subjectivity posited by both Shaftesbury and Smith. In many of Brown’s novels, the deliberate paralleling of character’s lives serves the immediate purpose of externalizing and bifurcating particular aspects of the protagonist’s conflicted selfhood. As Berthoff colourfully puts it, Brown’s fiction is characterized by the “mental parade of motives, possibilities, and consequences.” 39 As Edgar Huntly’s final apology to Sarsefield for his misguided benevolence suggests, Brown’s protagonist is situated between his tedious and often faulty internal deliberations and the external judgments offered by his erstwhile mentor. It is this double imperative of circumspection and compliance, of self-control and external control, that reduces the sympathetic project of constitutional America to a fantasy of transcendence by deferring the choice between the rigorous austerity of republican self-sacrifice and the emergent discourse of privatized sentiment.

As Gordon Wood observes, the ratification of the American Constitution announced the end of classical politics, a finale to the vision of society as a “simple and harmonious system”; rather than a homogenous people bound by “their unity of interest,” constitutional America resembled a Hobbesian “agglomeration of hostile individuals coming together for their mutual benefit to construct a society.” 40 While


Wood necessarily simplifies the matter here, his suggestion that the erasure of existing social bonds by the American Revolution ushered in a series of “new republican adhesives” based on love and benevolence is certainly accurate. Arguing that classical notions of virtue were too rigorous for the young republic, Wood suggests that American society shifted from a model of civic disinterestedness based on “the harsh self-sacrifice of antiquity” to a new domesticated civic virtue based on politeness and sympathy; more Addisonian than Spartan, the constitutional American citizen’s obligation to sympathy and benevolence is played out, not in government, but in society.

Michael Warner’s groundbreaking study of republican print culture in eighteenth-century America maps out this paradigm shift in greater detail. “In the republican narrative,” he argues, “the need for esteem is the problem to be transcended. And it can be transcended only through the fundamentally performative virtue of literature.” During the 1790s, American print culture witnessed a transformation from a classical republican rubric of lettered transcendence, civic virtue, and strategies of disclosure to a liberal-nationalist model centered on narratives of love and the “problems of intersubjective recognition and mutual esteem”(170). The novel, Warner argues (and he has in mind Brown’s *Arthur Mervyn*) “was already turning the civic ideology of publication into the kind of private imaginary appropriate to nationalism”(172). In the emergent liberal-national imaginary represented by the novel, the distinction between imaginary and actual participation in the public order (a distinction vital to classical republicanism) fell away. In its place, a vocabulary of sentiment emerged. This new vocabulary, Warner argues,

was designed to attribute public value to reader identification. And the triumph of sentiment in the novel marks a crisis for the paradigm of republican literature...The turn toward sentiment can be seen as a key element...in the emergence of a liberal paradigm for appreciating printed texts. If the privatizing

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42 Ibid., 216-7.
discourse of sentiment marks a break with the republican paradigm of diffused literature, nevertheless in the 1780s and 1790s the two lead a tense coexistence in the American novel. (174)

As this chapter argues, the novels of Charles Brockden Brown are situated between these two competing discourses of print culture, advocating an ascetic citizenship that strives to suture the rift between the austere self-sacrifice of classical republicanism and the dangerous freedoms of a privatized liberal-national citizenship. This affective individualism is accomplished by qualifying sentiment and sympathy with an appeal to the stoic virtue of self-command. By making sympathetic connection depend upon the ascetic management of bodily affect, Brown attempts to publicize sympathy in a manner analogous to The Federalist Papers.

In much the same way that Smith understands sympathy as ascetic practice, James Madison’s solution to majority factionalism attempts to curb excessive sympathy while maintaining sentiment as the predominant adhesive between the people and the state. In The Federalist Papers (X), Madison provides the well-known explanation for how faction develops. “A common passion or interest” is invariably felt by the majority; in a pure democracy, in which the people “assemble and administer the government in person,” these common passions potentialize a dangerous “communication or concert” of mutual sentiments. The solution to this threatening communication is to interrupt or divide the fiery passions between individuals before they spread into “a general conflagration” (X, 64). Madison is quite clear that the threat of majority factionalism is caused by the uncontrolled communication of sentiments. He writes,

> Either the existence of the same passion or interest in a majority at the same time must be prevented, or the majority, having such coexistent passion or interest, must be rendered, by their number and local situation, unable to concert and carry into

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44 While I employ Lawrence Stone’s term “affective individualism” more loosely than he does, Stone’s attention to new familial structures as “bound together by strong affective ties” is germane to my concerns with a society bound by emotional ties of sympathy (The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800 [New York: Harper & Row, 1977], 7).

effect schemes of oppression. If the impulse and the opportunity be suffered to coincide, we well know that neither moral nor religious motives can be relied on as an adequate control. (61, emphasis added)

Madison regarded the balance of reason and passions, public spirit and ambition, through institutional measures as the main goal of government. I would argue that, for Madison and the federalists, this politics of moderation took the specific form of tempered sympathy, encouraging yet controlling the sentiments and emotions of the citizen in the hope of protecting postrevolutionary society from the antinomian and anti-rationalist elements of American radicalism.

Alexander Hamilton evokes a similar discourse of sympathetic connection to explain the citizen’s confidence in the government. As with Madison, Hamilton had little faith in the public reason of the citizenry. Given this limitation, Hamilton redefines civic duty from the classical republican notion of vigilance to one of responsibility (for the leaders) and one of confidence (for the citizens). Opposed to the “ever-suspicious eye” of the classical republican (or Jeffersonian) citizen, Hamilton’s citizen expresses civic virtue by displaying confidence in its chosen leaders. In terms reminiscent of the seventeenth-century Whig republicanism of Algernon Sidney, Hamilton identifies the solution to republicanism, not in a closer relationship of the people to the government, but in a greater reliance on the nation’s leaders, a political stance indebted to a controversial meritocracy.

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46 May, Enlightenment in America, 89. May argues that the Federalists (and Madison in particular) represent the pinnacle of the Moderate Enlightenment in America and the principle of moderation in general. Balanced between a need to curb excessive sentiments before they erupt into majority factions and need to preserve an emotional attachment to national sovereignty, the federalist project strove to achieve a “delicate balance between religion and science, reason and passion, aristocracy and democracy, freedom and order” by paving a middle path through the landscape of the heart (ibid., 100).

47 See May, Enlightenment in America, 93.

48 Robert W. T. Martin argues that the Hamiltonian politician was called upon to act boldly in the people’s interest, a course of action demanding non-interference from his constituents (“Reforming Republicanism: Alexander Hamilton’s Theory of Republican Citizenship and Press Liberty,” Journal of the Early Republic 25.1[2005]: 21-46). The possibility of citizens instructing their leaders threatened to “undermine the notion of a deferential public, one that had enough confidence in elected officials to let them govern unquestioned”(ibid., 25). Martin suggests that Hamilton’s conception of deferential confidence led to the necessity of curbing popular dissent embodied by the Sedition Act crisis of 1798-1800 (ibid., 93-7).
The model of deferential civic confidence advocated by Hamilton can be seen, no less than Madison’s solution to factionalism, as a product of his faith in sympathetic citizenship. Grounding the legitimacy of the federal government in custom and habit, Hamilton evokes a discourse of sympathetic connection to explain the citizen’s confidence in the government. Only a “national authority” that “enters into those objects which touch the most sensible chords and put in motion the most active springs of the human heart,” can hope to gain “the respect and attachment of the community” (XXVII, 173, emphasis added). Like Madison, Hamilton insists that the legitimacy of the national authority depends upon activating the “springs of the human heart” to foster an emotional or sympathetic “attachment” of the citizen to the government. Government can gain the deferential civic confidence of the people only to the extent that they can gain control over their hearts.

By appealing to the hearts of the American citizenry, the federalist plan for constitutional America grounds itself in something of an anti-theatrical sympathetic platform—one that, while characterizing the threat of factionalism as uncontrollable sympathetic contagion, nonetheless endorses sympathy as the necessary precursor for federalist visions of a deferential civic confidence in its elected officials. More than anything else, it is a failure of sympathy that threatens the nation. As the Federalist Papers repeatedly suggest, while excessive passions or sentiments pose a serious threat to the nation, an underlying faith in the tendency of human beings to sympathize with each other is central to forging the necessary attachment to national authority upon which federalist politics rests. The constitutional ascetic citizen confronts the incompatibility between the young republic’s need for sympathetic connection and its fear of sympathy’s excessive proliferation. Deferring between either options, the ascetic citizen keeps the question of republican liberty open. By refusing to test the self-evidence of the nation’s foundational truths, the ascetic citizen preserves the theoretical freedoms and liberties of the young republic.

Brown’s novels advocate a model of citizenship similar to that recommended by Smith and the Federalists. This is accomplished by qualifying sentiment and sympathy with an appeal to the stoic virtue of self-command. By making sympathetic connection depend upon the ascetic management of bodily affect, Brown attempts to manage sympathy in a manner analogous to The Federalist Papers. Brown argues that a nation in
which sympathetic relations are safely controlled requires the kind of stoic self-command endorsed by Smith. The abstemious management of bodily affect is the condition necessary for translating feeling from its individual expression to the level of political abstraction required to figure the political identity of the constitutional subject.49

**Emotional Exhibitionism and the Lessons of Liberty in Brown’s “Death of Cicero”**

Based on John Dryden’s translation of Plutarch’s *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, Brown’s “Death of Cicero” focuses on the last days of Cicero’s life after he is driven into exile by the proscriptions of Mark Anthony and the Second Triumvirate.50 Brown’s version contains a number of important interpolations, interpolations that signal its affinity with the concerns of *Edgar Huntly*. The four significant interpolations that Brown makes all serve to sentimentalize Plutarch’s version. Firstly, where Plutarch describes the initial journey towards the sea at Astura in simple terms, describing a party “overwhelmed with sorrow…[that] condoled with one another”(1068), Brown extends this passage into a highly sentimentalized scene of the servants’ tearful remorse at Cicero’s banishment. “Stretched upon the bare earth, in this wretched hovel,” Cicero’s affliction “affected all of us alike”(11). The shared image of affliction spreads through the group sympathetically with Chlorus “set[ting] us the example of this weakness” as he “sobbed aloud”(11). Stressing the capacity for sympathetic contagion identified by Madison, Brown describes how “every bosom seemed to swell with the same sentiment, and required the relief of tears”(11). In contrast to the effusive emotions of the passionate community of servants, Cicero exercises a stoic emotional restraint and a heroic fortitude at the prospect of his inevitable death. Importantly, while Cicero accepts

49 While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to consider, the relationship between the regulation of excessive passions and political subjectivity suggests an important new context for Brown’s fixation with the pathology of love. While excessive love/passion presents serious problems for many of Brown’s characters, love is, nonetheless, found to be the binding force of community. See No. 12 (21 April 1788) of *The Man at Home* series in which Brown provides a series of examples to illustrate the effects of passionate love. In all cases, excessive passions are shown to result in the morbid display of ascetic self-mortification and absolute reclusion from society (“The Man at Home, No. Xii,” in *The Rhapsodist and Other Uncollected Writings*, ed. Harry R. Warfel (New York: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1943), 86-91.

his death with the characteristic *apatheia* of the stoics, he diverges from this school of 
thought in placing a premium on the affective connections between himself and his 
friends. In keeping with a discourse of sentimental democracy, Brown contrasts the 
sympathetic connections between the men with the unaffective tyrannical authority of 
Mark Antony and his executioners. As we will see, however, while the passionate 
community of Cicero and his friends figures the republican liberty threatened by 
Cicero’s proscription and death, this sympathetic community is only achieved by the 
rigorous management of passions.

In contrast to Cicero’s stoic command of his emotions, his servant, Tiro, 
responds with emotional effusion. Crucially, Cicero makes a distinction here between 
laudable passions and the emotional exhibitionism exemplified by his servant, insisting 
on the retention of his blood’s warmth while distancing himself from “passion and 
inconstancy”(18). Combing stoic self-command with Smith’s appreciation of the power 
of sympathy, Brown’s “Death of Cicero” balances the excessive *apatheia* of the stoics 
against the emotional exhibitionism of sentimentalism in a way that echoes Smith’s ideal 
of moderated passions. Despite Cicero’s insistence, however, Tiro remains (as does 
Huntly) committed to “saving” Cicero. Tiro’s insistence, marked by his effusive affection 
for his master, threatens to foreclose Cicero’s legacy as champion of republican liberty.

In the third interpolation, Brown significantly expands Plutarch’s discussion of 
the entreaties of Cicero’s servants, making their passionate requests for Cicero’s escape 
the central thematic issue of his narrative. In Brown’s retelling, the question of 
appropriate duty becomes the central point of contention. “By the duty which you owe 
me,” Cicero exclaims, “I command you to forbear”(36). As with Edgar Huntly, however, 
Tiro is especially susceptible to the conflict of duty that presents itself:

> With whatever sternness these commands were delivered, they would not have 
> made me hesitate or faulter. I was prepared to conduct myself, not agreeable to 
> his directions, but to the exigencies of the time; I was willing to preserve his life 
> even at the hazard of offending him beyond forgiveness; but my companions 
> were endowed with less firmness. Go on, said I, to the bearers, heed not the 
> words of a desperate man. It is your duty to save him, though you forfeit your 
> lives by your disobedience—. (37)
The specific cause of Tiro’s conflict stems from his inability to see Cicero’s decision to die with resolution and fortitude as more befitting the cause of republican liberty than his ignominious flight to Macedonia.

Fourthly and finally, where Plutarch describes Cicero’s heroic fortitude in calling for his servants to stop the litter so he can await his death with dignity, Brown’s version problematizes Cicero’s stoic fortitude. Consistent with his objections to Clarissa, Brown questions what the most noble and civically responsible course of action might be. In Brown’s version, the passive acceptance of Cicero’s actions by his servants is downplayed in favour of Tiro’s debate over the civic utility of Cicero’s actions. The question of the public utility of Cicero’s resolution to meet his executioners rather than continue his flight is central to Tiro’s moral dilemma. Yet Tiro’s appeal to public utility is marred by his inability to understand Cicero’s actions independent of his emotional reaction. Tiro’s emotional distress at the imminent loss of his master distorts his rational judgment, thereby threatening the public utility of Cicero’s martyrdom.

The crux of Tiro’s moral dilemma and, indeed, the central question of Brown’s text, is whether a heroic fortitude in the face of adversity is more worthy of Cicero’s “understanding and his virtue” than a cowardly flight (20). Which option more aptly preserves the republican liberty that Cicero’s life stood for? Brown’s short story concludes with Tiro’s attempt to reconcile Cicero’s actions with the republican cause of liberty. Ultimately, Tiro decides that it was indeed cowardice to refuse to engage in war and to resign military duties to younger men; that it was indeed better to struggle for life than serenely wait for death with majestic composure; that it was indeed dishonourable to mourn for your country and be to be impatient of living, when life becomes wretched and divorced from liberty. As Tiro’s succeeding remarks make clear, at “the close of thy day,” Cicero’s actions are “worthy of the beginning and progress” of his life (48).

In much the same way that the tearful sympathy expressed by Cicero’s friends is represented as that which tyranny cannot take away, Tiro’s awareness of the necessity

51 Discussing Tiro’s dilemma in relation to Brown’s “Walstein’s School of History,” Scheiding argues that Tiro’s conflict is that of the historical writer, “making sense of Cicero’s death...by imposing on his experience of events a specific form of historical interpretation” (“Plena exemplorum,” 47).
of emotional self-restraint is that which enables the abstraction of privatized remorse in the service of republican liberty. By curbing his excessive sympathy, Tiro not only embodies a stoic self-command of the passions but also preserves Cicero’s own stoic self-command for posterity. Brown’s conclusion implies that Tiro’s ability to restrain his own emotions enables him to convey *in writing* the story of Cicero’s final days to Atticus. In narrating the last days of Cicero, Tiro preserves the cause of liberty through a textual publicity more fully than Cicero’s continued flight would have achieved.

In restraining his own emotions, Tiro favours a publicly viable form of sympathy grounded in an abstemious management of bodily affect expressed through writing. As we will see in *Edgar Huntly*, the capacity of the narrator to manage his own bodily affect is inextricably bound to the capacity of the narrative to elicit sympathy in the reader. By checking his excessive bodily affect Tiro enables the abstraction of private sentiment necessary to transform the meaning of Cicero’s death from private sorrow to public proclamation. Brown’s treatment of the duty of self-sacrifice and its relevance for public service in “Death of Cicero” finds the author combining stoic and sentimental conceptions of affective communication with Smith’s insistence on the moderation of the passions. With this in mind, we need to return to one of Brown’s most complex novels, *Edgar Huntly*, to consider how the various models of constitutional subjectivity represented by the characters of Clithero, Sarsefield, and Huntly problematize the ideological phantasm of an ascetic citizenship grounded in sympathy.

**Huntly’s Secret Revolution of Sympathy**

Brown’s “Death of Cicero” bears a number of important similarities to the narrative of Clithero in *Edgar Huntly*. Both Clithero and Cicero strive to die with dignity, embarking on a path of fortitude and affective self-command that involves the patient acquiescence of voluntary death. Both Huntly and Tiro attempt to misguidedly “save” their companions from voluntary death by attempting to reconnect them emotionally with society. There are, however, two important distinctions to be made between the two narratives. Firstly, in “Death of Cicero,” Tiro is finally brought to an understanding of the public utility of Cicero’s death, ultimately learning to check bodily affect in the service of republican sympathy. In *Edgar Huntly*, the protagonist never fully appreciates Clithero’s decision to abscond to Norwalk and starve himself, persisting (to
the detriment of both himself and Clithero) in retrieving his wayward companion. Huntly's persistence relates directly to his emotional exhibitionism, his inability to temper his effusive expressions of emotion. Secondly, in “Death of Cicero” Brown insists that the cause of liberty is best served by Cicero’s actions. In Edgar Huntly, however, Brown qualifies the ascetic prerequisite dramatized by Clithero’s ascetic reclusion. While exemplary of the kind of self-command that Huntly fails to exhibit and of the kind of self-command Brown wants to underscore, Clithero’s actions are not made serviceable to the public; the ascetic prerequisite does not refer back to society.

Brown’s interest in the utility of individual solitude can be seen in any number of his works. Whether he is depicting the romantic flights of “The Rhapsodist,” the Wielands’ insular community at Mettingen, or Stephen Calvert’s withdrawal to the shores of Lake Michigan, the effects of isolation bear an important relation to the cohesion of society from which the individual retreats. As with the cloistered lives of Brown’s other characters, Edgar Huntly depicts the isolated existences of Clithero, Sarsefield, Weymouth, and Waldegrave.52 Carrying the ascetic subtext to its conclusion, Clithero is described in distinctly hermitic terms. “Famine and remorse have utterly consumed him,” Huntly explains to Sarsefield:

He has immured himself in the desert. He has abjured the intercourse of mankind. He has shut himself in caverns where famine must inevitably expedite that death for which he longs as the only solace to his woes. (264)

Like Waldegrave’s isolated life “with his sister, disconnected with its other inhabitants,” Clithero’s cloistered existence is found to be lacking (148). Unlike the rhapsodist’s claim to be “incapable of tasting pleasure, when he is indebted for it to the presence of a third person”(6), Edgar Huntly and “Death of Cicero” consistently follow Smith in arguing that, while isolation provides an important prerequisite for social intercourse, a harmonious society needs “the presence of a third person” to offset the excessive passions and ratiocinations of the isolated individual. Just as the insularity of the

Wielands leaves them open to the machinations of Carwin, isolation in and of itself is insufficient as a viable civic model for postrevolutionary America.

What disqualifies Clithero’s example, but qualifies that of Sarsefield and Weymouth, is his failure to apply the lessons of fortitude and self-command learned in solitude to a role within society. Like Brown’s assessment of Richardson’s heroine, Clithero’s trials of adversity are inwardly directed, thereby lessening their usefulness to society. In many of his novels Brown struggles with how to constitute the self-monitoring political subject in a republic in which guarantees of individual liberty have removed the presence of external standards of moral propriety. Pamela Clemit is surely correct to suggest that “for Brown it is this freedom from needful controls, rather than the repressive power of social institutions, which leads to psychic dislocation” (137). Yet unlike the ultimate retrenchment of “inherited precedent and tradition” exemplified by Clara Wieland’s departure from America for to the cultural heritage of Europe, Edgar Huntly finds Brown unwilling to abandon the precarious dreams of the new republic despite the inability of his protagonist to accept the new responsibilities devolving on the constitutional subject. What renders Edgar Huntly such a dark novel is, on one level, this insistence on forging a viable model of civic harmony out of the political contradictions of the constitutional moment. Paul Downes rightly notes that Brown’s “sleep-walker argues for the effect of a constitutive undecidability, a necessary excess, in the intentional experience of the modern subject.” The civic model Brown proposes consistently registers the disparity between the excessive stoic self-command exemplified by Clithero’s isolation and the equally excessive emotional exhibitionism of Huntly’s “misguided…but powerful benevolence” as an ontological crisis for the constitutional subject (290).

Edgar Huntly begins as does “Death of Cicero” with the fulfilment of an obligation to tell a tale. Where Tiro must fulfil his duty to Cicero by explaining his master’s last days to Atticus, Huntly sits down to comply with his fiancé’s request to explain his recent adventures. In conventional sentimental fashion, Huntly acknowledges the relationship between bodily affect and the act of writing, “Till now,”

53 On the limits of rational judgment in Wieland and need for external standards of authority, see Clemit, Godwinian Novel, 131-8.

he begins, “to hold a steadfast pen was impossible; to disengage my senses from the scene that was passing…could not be”(5). Even now, distanced from the trauma of his wilderness adventure, there is a certain narrative insufficiency in translating events to the page. Huntly wonders whether his emotions are “sufficiently stilled” to write a coherent narrative. He worries that “emotions” may be “re-awakened by my narrative, incompatible with order and coherence”(5). As with Brown’s other novels, there is an overwhelming concern with the balance of reason and sentiment. From the outset, emotions are contrast against the “order and coherence” of a rationally-structured linear narrative (5).

As Peter Bellis thoughtfully remarks, Brown expresses the tension between the proscriptions of linguistic form and the “formless emotional content of memory.” The text as a whole, Bellis insists, represents a struggle between emotions and an incompatible rational narrative.55 I would argue, however, that Huntly’s larger inability to order his emotions for the purposes of narration disable, not only a coherent narrative, but also any correspondence of sentiments between himself and Clithero. Characteristically, Huntly expresses anxiety about occluding either extreme: “In proportion as I gain power of words, shall I lose dominion over sentiments?”(5). Huntly’s hope is that by reducing his experience to words he will not lose the power of sentiments to convey sympathy to his fiancé. Yet as he discovers with Sarsefield’s return, sympathy is equally threatened by an inability to lower the pitch of one’s emotions to a register that the spectator can emphasize with. While his “looks and gestures would suffice to communicate” the sentiments of his adventures, he reconciles himself to the written page with the hope that Mary “wilt catch from my story every horror and every sympathy which it paints”(6). Despite the ambiguous depiction of Huntly’s sympathetic relationship with Clithero (and the effects it produces on both

Clithero and Mrs. Lorimer’s unborn child), Huntly is guided by a hope that his narrative will cause Mary Waldegrave to “dissolve into tears…[and] share in all my tasks and all my dangers”(6). The “narrative economy” that Edgar has devised depends upon this conversion of words into sentiments through “readerly absorption.”

Yet Huntly’s conventionally sentimental understanding of the relationship between text and reader, what Beverley Voloshin calls Brown’s “affective narrative theory,” depends upon the narrator’s ability to sufficiently lower the pitch of his sentiments to permit their abstraction into words on the page. As Brown makes clear, the ability to moderate the passions for linguistic translation is directly connected to Huntly’s ability to moderate his bodily affect. As Geoffrey Harpham insightfully remarks, textuality “constitutes an ascesis, a deadening, a purging of materiality and mutability” that stabilizes the wandering subject. By “submitting life to the rules of grammar, rhetoric, and generic convention,” bodily affect is disciplined and humbled (Harpham, 14). The capacity of a reader (such as Mary Waldegrave) to absorb the sentiments of the text depends upon such an ascetic moderation of the passions, one that originates in the narrator’s abstemious management of bodily affect. However, the relationship between bodily and textual ascesis implied by Brown’s text is never fully recognized by its protagonist. Huntly’s narrative economy is doomed to fail to the extent that he is unable to check the bodily affect upon which successful narration depends. In this sense, the narrative economy of Huntly’s tale provides an analogy for the duties of the ascetic citizen dramatized by Huntly’s adventures.

The narrative of Edgar Huntly is not a full-scale critique of sympathetic relations but, to borrow Dana Luciano’s phrase, an “ethic of masculine self-management” that balances sympathy with self-command. Huntly’s relationship with Clithero is marked by an ambiguous and constantly oscillating pattern of disinterested benevolence, sympathetic identification, and selfish curiosity. On first discovering Clithero’s strange

58 Harpham, Ascetic Imperative, 14.
59 Luciano uses the term in a slightly different context, arguing that Edgar Huntly promotes self-management as a containment of racial anxieties achieved through exile and genocide (“Perverse Nature,” 17).
nocturnal activities, Huntly suspects Clithero of Waldegrave's murder. Urged on by an “insanity of vengeance and grief,” it takes Huntly “Time and reason” to reconcile his excessive passions with the “dictates of duty and discretion”(8). Yet in the same vein as Crusoe’s persistently vacillating moral decisions, Huntly fools himself into thinking that he has achieved such a reconciliation. Driven by his perceived duty to punish Waldegrave’s murderer, he argues that “to forbear inquiry or withhold punishment was to violate my duty to my God and to mankind”(8). Huntly’s keen sense of duty to justice is, however, upset by the introduction of a conflicting obligation, that of pity or sympathetic benevolence.

There are three main scenes of sympathetic connection between Huntly and Clithero: the initial interview, Huntly’s discovery of Clithero in the wilderness, and his reunion with a dying Clithero. Witnessing Clithero sobbing while digging under the tree, Huntly recognizes how “sorely charged was indeed that heart whence flowed these tokens of sorrow”(11). Huntly’s capacity to imaginatively feel Clithero’s “heart-bursting grief” marks the beginning of a sympathetic relationship with Clithero despite Huntly’s suspicions of the latter’s guilt (11):

Every sentiment, at length, yielded to my sympathy. Every new accent of the mourner struck upon my heart with additional force, and tears found their way spontaneously to my eyes…My caution had forsaken me, and instead of one whom it was duty to persecute, I beheld, in this man, nothing but an object of compassion. (11)

Importantly, Huntly’s initial outpouring of affection for Waldegrave’s ostensible murderer is completely one-sided. Watching Clithero from afar, as a “casual observer,” Huntly’s expression of bodily affect does not represent (by Smith’s standards) a socially useful act of sympathy. While Brown’s representation of Huntly’s emotions closely follows Smith’s conception of sympathy—the passions arising from Clithero clearly produce “an analogous emotion…at the thought of his situation, in the breast” of Huntly

(I.i.1:10)—this correspondence of sentiments fails to join the two men in a mutually surveilling moral relationship. This one-sided situation produces an imperfect sympathy. Such imbalanced sympathetic relations, Smith insists, result in the breakdown of fellow-feeling upon which social harmony is premised. As the epigram to this chapter suggests, “We become intolerable to one another. I can neither support your company, nor you mine. You are confounded at my violence and passion, and I am enraged at your cold insensibility and want of feeling”(I.i.4:21). Without the necessary emotional self-restraint that the presence of the spectator provides, one’s effusions threaten to be excessive. While Huntly’s initial display of emotion signals his capacity to internalize Clithero’s emotions as his own, the absence of Clithero’s response forecloses the full implications of sympathy to restrain the actions of the two men.

“Every faculty in one man,” Smith writes, “is the measure by which he judges of the like faculty in another”(I.i.3:19). Without Clithero’s corresponding expression or denial of sympathy, there is no measure against which the propriety of either Huntly or Clithero’s actions can be judged.

When he confronts Clithero a second time, Huntly “felt nothing but the tenderness of compassion”(31). Still believing Clithero’s guilt, Huntly explains that the sympathy evoked by Clithero’s confession will render the crime “sufficiently expiated”(32). In much the same way that Cicero remains stolid in response to Tiro’s impassioned entreaties, Clithero remains unaffected by Huntly’s benevolent offer to hear his confession. Discovering “no tokens of a change of mood” in Clithero, Huntly expresses “uneasiness at the fixedness of his features and attitude”(31).

Crucially, Huntly appears to have some awareness of what is required for sympathetic connection. Faced with Clithero’s stolidity, Huntly assures him that an emotional recitation of his crimes “need not divest you of the fortitude becoming a man”(31). Huntly’s insistence that emotional expression is neither incompatible with stoic self-command nor with masculinity finds its corollary in Smith’s assessment. “Our sensibility to the feelings of others,” Smith writes, “so far from being inconsistent with the manhood of self-command, is the very principle upon which that manhood is founded”(III.3:152). The same principle that permits us to empathize with another’s sorrow allows us to check the excessive expression of our own emotions. The logic of Smith’s remarks derives from his insistence that sympathy only functions through the
ascetic self-management of emotions. Joining “the soft, the amiable, and the gentle virtues” of sensibility with “the great, the awful, and the respectable” of stoic *apatheia*, citizens of a passionate community ensure social harmony by fostering a sympathetic correspondence of feelings, a correspondence that requires an ascetic deferral from privileging either sentimental receptivity or stoic fortitude (Smith, III.3:152). “I can feel for you,” Huntly tells Clithero, “I am no stranger to your gnawing cares”(32). Faced with Huntly’s benevolent display of affection for Clithero, the latter remained unable to speak until “tears came to his relief”(32). Despite Clithero’s admonitions that Huntly’s “misguided zeal, and random efforts” have “brought [Clithero’s] life to a miserable close,” rather than “imparting consolation,” it is at this moment that Huntly and Clithero achieve a provisional sympathy with one another (36). The effect on Huntly is described as follows:

My stormy passions had subsided into a calm, portentous and awful. My soul was big with expectation. I seemed as if I were on the eve of being ushered into a world, whose scenes were tremendous, but sublime. The suggestions of sorrow and malice had, for a time, taken their flight, and yielded place to a generous sympathy, which filled my eyes with tears, but had more in it of pleasure than of pain…He, indeed, said I, is the murderer of excellence, and yet it shall be my province to emulate a father’s clemency, and restore this unhappy man to purity, and to peace. (33)

The effect on Clithero is noticeably different. While the correspondence of sentiments ushers Huntly into a new world of “generous sympathy,” this same linking of hearts causes Clithero to retreat in haste. Typical of Brown’s fiction, it is often difficult to consider such scenes as anything but ironic given Huntly’s presumptions to noble purpose.61 It is my contention, however, that Brown resists the desire to ironize the

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61 I follow Michael Warner (*Letters of the Republic*, 153) and David Larsen in seeing Brown’s depiction of sentimentalism and benevolence as sincere rather than ironic. As Larsen accurately notes, while it is difficult for modern readers to see Brown’s treatment of benevolence as anything but ironic, given the popularity of philosophical treatments of benevolence during the eighteenth century by thinkers such as Shaftesbury, Adam Smith and his successors, it seems unlikely that Brown, while certainly noting its limitations, is rejecting benevolence outright (“Arthur Mervyn, Edgar Huntly and the Critics,” 209). On Brown and benevolence more generally, see Witherington, “Benevolence.”
power of sympathy, choosing instead to ironize the self-assurance of the protagonist’s claims to sympathetic connection while retaining a positive evaluation of affective communication. Reminiscent of the irony of Robinson Crusoe, the irony of Edgar Huntly is that the protagonist fails to learn the lesson that his repeated insights into how sympathy functions point to. As Huntly’s reunion with Sarsefield reveals, while Huntly appears to recognize the need for an ascetic restraint of bodily affect in order to achieve a correspondence of sentiments, he is incapable of curbing the exhibition of his emotions. In this regard, Edgar Huntly repeatedly undermines Brown’s putative vision for postrevolutionary America. I would argue, however, that Brown’s vision does not ultimately rest on the transcendental dream of harnessing individual sentiments for the public good, but rather in the less satisfying deferral of the promises of sentimental democracy.

The irony of Brown’s portrayal of his protagonist should not, however, blind us to Brown’s consistent representation of sympathetic relations as, in some sense, an amelioration of the threatening violence and dislocation of the gothic landscape. Indeed, despite Clithero’s hasty retreat from Huntly’s company, the sympathetic connection between the two men causes him to announce in “an hollow and tremulous voice” that he will relate his story to Huntly (32). When Huntly discovers Clithero’s bedraggled and emaciated body in the wilderness, the sight of his suffering overwhelms him. “His misery,” Huntly notes, “thrilled to my inmost heart. Horror and shuddering invaded me as I stood gazing upon him” (104). For several minutes Huntly “was without the power of deliberating on the measures which it was my duty to adopt for his relief” (104). The specific question raised by Huntly’s deliberations is whether or not it is his duty to relieve someone who has voluntarily withdrawn from society to starve him/herself. Huntly’s moral conundrum here is identical to that of Tiro’s when faced with the prospect of passively watching his master being executed. As with Tiro, Huntly debates how he might dissuade Clithero from starving himself. How might I, Huntly asks, “insinuate the lessons of fortitude” in Clithero? (106). Huntly’s solution is characteristically sympathetic in nature:

Could I arrest his foot-steps and win his attention, I might be able to insinuate the lessons of fortitude; but if words were impotent, and arguments were nugatory, yet
to set by him in silence, to moisten his hand with tears, to sigh in unison, *to offer him the spectacle of sympathy*, the solace of believing that his demerits were not estimated *by so rigid a standard by others as by himself.* (106, emphasis added)

Brown alludes to two important contexts for Huntly’s deliberations. Firstly, his attention to “lessons of fortitude” raises the question as to whether or not Clithero’s actions represent fortitude or pusillanimity. As with Tiro’s deliberations in “Death of Cicero,” the question of Clithero’s desire to starve himself is open for debate. While Huntly seems sure that Clithero’s actions do not constitute acts of fortitude, Brown’s appending of “Death of Cicero” to *Edgar Huntly* raises the alternate possibility that, if not for Huntly’s misguided benevolence, Clithero might have led a stoically self-commanding and fortitudinous life.

Secondly, the use of the term “spectacle of sympathy” strongly suggests Brown’s interest in Smith’s figuration of sympathetic relations as a theatrical projection of sentiments between the suffering Self and the impartial spectator. Further to this, Huntly’s suggestion that, by offering a sympathetic connection Clithero might recognize that the rigorous standard he set for himself was totally inconsistent with his “demerits,” is in harmony with Smith’s evaluation of the dangers of isolation. Smith argues that the “man within the breast” (conscience), when unchecked by the impartial observation of a real spectator, is sometimes induced “to make a report very different from what the real circumstances of the case are capable of authorizing”(III.4:156-7). Bring the individual back into society, Smith contends, and “he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before”(III.1:110). In providing Clithero with a “spectacle of sympathy” Huntly hopes to show Clithero the deformity of his own self-judgment. Intent on saving Clithero from the “fatal resolution” to starve himself, Huntly returns with provisions (107). While Huntly recognizes that the “headlong and ferocious energies” of Clithero would not be swayed by “efforts so undisciplined as mine,” he nonetheless places a supreme faith in “the magic of sympathy, the perseverance of benevolence, though silent…[to] work a gradual and secret revolution” in Clithero’s mind (111). Here we see the full irony of Huntly’s actions; his well meaning efforts to check the extreme behaviour of Clithero by fostering a correspondence of sentiments are ironically disabled by his own excessive expression of sympathetic
regard for his emotionally unresponsive companion. Functioning as the two threats to Smith’s model of sympathy, the emotional exhibitionism of Huntly and the non-sympathizing resilience of Clithero foreclose the possibility of forging a passionate community.

As Burstein notes, “if fearful republicans knew that untoward ambition would kill a republic, perhaps sensibility could at least contribute to stabilize it.” It is this stability that Huntly seeks by attempting to “work a gradual and secret revolution” in Clithero’s heart. The secret revolution, like America’s political revolution, involves the replacement of patriarchal authority with sympathetic identification. Whether construed as British authority or, in Clithero’s case, as a cultural heritage of social deference, class hierarchy, and patronal rewards such as gratitude, the American political revolution removed the existing bonds of society. Increasingly, Americans felt that classical republican doctrines of austere self-command and public disinterestedness had not sufficiently replaced the previous bonds of social deference and class hierarchy.

In this sense, Brown’s “secret revolution” is partly a critique of postrevolutionary efforts to establish a constitutional society governed by classical republican calls to civic austerity. In hoping to incite a revolution in Clithero’s heart, Huntly seeks to divest his friend of the guilt/pain associated with outmoded duties of patronal reward. Huntly’s “secret revolution” attempts to dislodge what Downes refers to as “the persistence of a feudal or monarchic logic within [the] post-feudal social order” of the early republic; Clithero’s extreme self-denigration stems from his insistence on “the possibility of a locus of wisdom and just authority” embodied by his patron, Mrs. Lorimer. The spectacle of sympathy endorsed by Huntly seeks to transfer Clithero’s loyalties, as it were, to an intersubjective model of authority grounded in affective communication. At the same time, the secret revolution staged by sympathy struggled to provide the necessary check on the dangers of individual liberty. The dangers of individual liberty and the erasure of existing social bonds leaves the constitutional subject in the condition of Clithero or Huntly, alone in the wilderness

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64 Downes, “Sleep-Walking,” 420; see also Hinds’ reading of the threat posed by Clithero as a tension between inherited property rights and the capitalist marketplace (“Deliberate Unknowing,” 133-46).
with only self-approbation as a guide. The ascetic prerequisite is revealed to be dangerously insufficient to manage the excesses of the constitutional subject. If, as many scholars have shown, the narratives of Clithero and Huntly parallel each other, this is most clearly seen by the extremity of their behaviour in the absence of an external monitor.\textsuperscript{65}

The final scene of sympathy between Huntly and Clithero occurs when the dying body of the latter is brought into the farmhouse where Huntly is recuperating. In contrast to Sarsefield’s unwillingness to attend to Clithero’s medical needs, Huntly “hung over the unhappy wretch whose emaciated form and rueful features, sufficiently bespoke” the recent severity of captivity (269). “I was sensible of nothing but compassion,” Huntly remarks, “I acted without design, when seating myself on the floor I raised his head and placed in on my knees (269). Despite the havoc caused by Huntly’s misguided benevolence, Brown privileges sympathy’s capacity to bypass rational decision-making (acting without design) in fostering benevolent actions. Clithero himself identifies the sympathetic connection established between himself and Huntly as responsible for saving him from starvation. “I wanted to assure thee,” he tells Huntly, “that thy efforts for my benefit were not useless. They have saved me from murdering myself”(270). With Huntly’s delivery of provisions, Clithero “determined to live, to resume the path of obscurity and labour…and wait till my God should summon me to retribution”(270).\textsuperscript{66} Despite the positive outcome at his juncture, Huntly’s sympathetic project generally produces disastrous effects. Clithero’s desperate act of murder/suicide and the miscarriage of Mrs. Lorimer’s unborn child both appear to signal Brown’s


\textsuperscript{66} Ironically, however, as successful as Huntly is in saving Clithero, he is also responsible for plunging Clithero back into self-destructive despair. Returning to retrieve his puzzle box, Clithero finds it has been opened and the manuscript taken. With this news, he returns to the wilderness “determined anew to perish”(271). In opposition to the ostensibly disinterested act of saving Clithero, Huntly’s own self-interested curiosity causes Clithero’s relapse. On opening the box, Huntly argues: “I intended to benefit myself without inflicting injury on others”(115). Huntly’s decision to open the box “which all the maxims of society combine to render sacred,” marks the return of the central conflict between Huntly’s rapacious Enlightenment quest to hunt down the murderer of Waldegrave and his benevolent desire to ease the pain and suffering of Clithero (114).
scepticism of ascetic sympathy as a viable check on self-interest. A consideration of Huntly's reunion with Sarsefield, however, complicates Brown's evaluation of sympathy considerably.

Despite Huntly’s efforts to persuade him to attend to Clithero’s medical needs, Sarsefield is vehement in his denouncement of the latter as a “thankless miscreant” (262). Huntly is noticeably taken aback by the cold indifference of his former mentor. “Clithero had been delivered from captivity,” Huntly muses, “but was dying for want of that aid which Sarsefield was able to afford. Was it not inhuman to desert him in this extremity?” (268). Brown’s characterization of Sarsefield’s stolid indifference to the suffering of another human being as “inhuman” not only signals the shortcomings of Sarsefield’s rational approach to life but aligns him with the negative implications of stoic apatheia. The unemotional rationalism of Sarsefield is contrasted against the effusive and erratic sentimentalism of Huntly in a manner (much like that which characterizes the relationship between Huntly and Clithero) that disallows a reconciliatory balance. Huntly’s failure to follow the advice and accept the censure of his mentor results from the complete incompatibility between the epistemes of the two men. The fact that Sarsefield’s emotional stolidity appears as flawed as Huntly’s emotional exhibitionism signals the prevailing paradox that Brown’s vision of constitutional American struggles to transcend.

Huntly’s attempts at “conquering Sarsefield’s abhorrence” of Clithero involve efforts to “soothe him into pity by a picture of remorse and suffering” (273). “This could best be done,” Huntly suggests, “by a simple recital of the incidents that had befallen, and by repeating the confession which had been extorted by Clithero” (273). Huntly’s efforts to convince Sarsefield of Clithero’s innocence adopt the same manner of sentimental narration that Huntly employs in relating his sufferings to Mary. Just as he hopes his narrative might “dissolve Mary into tears” (6), he hopes his recitation of Clithero’s narrative might convince Sarsefield that all Clithero’s “moral propensities seemed to have resolved themselves into gratitude, fidelity, and honour” (274). The sentimental narrative of Clithero’s trials has as little effect on softening Sarsefield’s heart as the elder’s chastisement has on lowering the pitch of Huntly’s sentiments. In

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67 On the question of whether Clithero’s death is self-willed, see Krause, introduction to Edgar Huntly, xx. On Huntly’s culpability in Mrs. Lorimer’s miscarriage, see, for example, Dillon, Gender of Freedom, 172.
the concluding letters between the two men, Huntly stubbornly maintains a faith in the purity of his intentions despite his unwillingness to take responsible for its disastrous results. The reason for Huntly's unshakable faith in the nobility of his actions is clear. While his impetuous plan of reuniting Clithero and Mrs. Lorimer stems from "the deepest sympathy" in the absence of any correspondence of sentiments between Huntly and Clithero or Huntly and Sarsefield, Brown's protagonist is left, as it were, alone in the wilderness, bereft of any spectator to judge the propriety of his actions.

Wasting Sympathy: Isolation and the Absence of the Spectator

Just as Huntly repeatedly insists that bringing Clithero back into a community of men will provide the sympathetic mirror with which to curb his excessive self-denigration, Huntly's own sojourn in the wilderness echoes the effects of isolation on the individual's capacity for sympathy. Huntly's entire time in the wilderness can be seen as a narrative of increased fortitude at the expense of declining sympathy. When he initially emerges from the cave, he easily perceives that he could "escape, unperceived, and without alarming the "[native-American"] sleepers"(174). However, much like Crusoe's decision to intervene with the cannibals, it is his recognition of the need to save the captive girl that checks Huntly's self-interest. "My wishes," he contemplates, "were now not only to preserve myself, and to frustrate the future attempts of these savages, but likewise to relieve this miserable victim"(175-6). At this early point Huntly is still motivated by a benevolent desire to assist others. His first attack on the natives is similarly marked by a reluctance to do harm to another human being: "My aversion to bloodshed was not subdued but by the dire necessity"(178). Yet as he proceeds through the wilderness and is confronted by more native adversaries, the "sober views" of Huntly's socially conditioned sympathy "speedily succeeded to the present tempest of my passion"(187).

As Jared Gardner notes, Huntly's increasing distance from civility is figured by the physical transformation of his body into that of his Mohawk adversaries. "My

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countenance was wan and haggard,” he explains, “my neck and bosom were died in blood, and my limbs, almost stripped by the brambles of their slender covering, were lacerated by a thousand wounds” (195). Despite the racist assumptions that scholars have rightly identified as underlying Brown’s depiction of the bloodthirsty Delawares, there is an appreciation of (even admiration for) the stoicism and fortitude exercised by the native actors. Recalling the bloodshed that occurs at Old Deb’s hunt, Huntly comments on the three natives who “full of energy and heroism, endowed with minds strenuous and lofty, poured out their lives before me” (194). This admiration for the native’s patient endurance under affliction becomes a source of self-appraisal for Huntly:

My frame was in miserable plight. My strength had been assailed by anguish, and fear, and watchfulness; by toil, and abstinence, and wounds… I had delighted, from my childhood, in feats of agility and perseverance… I had put my energies both moral and physical, frequently to the test. Greater achievements than this had been performed, and I disdained to be out-done in perspicacity by the lynx, in his sure-footed instinct by the roe, or in patience under hardship, and contention with fatigue, by the Mohawk. I have ever aspired to transcend the rest of animals in all that is common to the rational and brute, as well as in all by which they are distinguished from each other. (212, emphasis added)

While Huntly clearly bestializes the Mohawk in this passage, aligning him with the animalistic virtues of the lynx and the roe, his appreciation of the Mohawk’s fortitude is just as sincere as his adulation for the perspicacity and agility of the other animals. Much like the fortitude exhibited by Clithero in endeavouring to starve himself, the isolated wilderness adventures of Huntly require a similarly rigorous self-command under hardship. But the gains of self-command come at a price. By focusing so intently

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71 Witherington accurately reads this passage as part of the humorous modulations in Huntly’s claims to expertise, from the seasoned frontiersman defending his family to the inept villager bumbling through the wilderness trying not to get himself killed (“Not My Tongue Only,” 167-72).
on his own self-preservation, Huntly’s attention to benevolence begins to flag. “I was not,” he admits, “governed by the soul which usually regulates my conduct”(192).

By the time Huntly fires pre-emptively on the native crawling through the thickets, the tension between sympathy and detached fortitude is palpable. Justifying to himself that this native would go on to massacre more settlers, Huntly decides that “one essential duty remained to be performed”(201). Yet, in shooting the native he is only maimed. Watching the native squirm in agony, “horror, and compassion, and remorse, were mingled into one sentiment”(201). While the pre-emptive attack represents the actions of a man most removed from the moderating effects of fellow-feeling, the sight of the native’s suffering reignites his sympathy. His initial impulse to run from the scene is rejected as “pusillanimous and cowardly”(201). The primary “duty” to kill the native is coupled with an additional duty to end his suffering: “To kill him outright, was the dictate of compassion and of duty”(201). With “unconquerable abhorrence,” Huntly fulfills the “loathsome obligation” of ending the native’s life, an act “worthy of abhorrence...[,] prescribed by pity”(201). This is, apparently, the last act of sympathy Huntly is capable of mustering in the wilderness.

When he arrives at Selby’s farm and finds Mrs. Selby and her child quivering in the barn, the exigencies of survival have all but drained Huntly’s capacity for sympathy. Choosing to ignore “the discord and domestic miseries” caused by Mr. Selby’s drunken rage, Huntly announces that “this was no time to waste my sympathy on others. I could benefit her nothing”(229). Given Huntly’s persistent efforts to connect emotionally with Clithero, not to mention his internal struggles with ending the suffering of the native he pre-emptively shoots on the path, his callous remark about “wasting his sympathy” at this juncture is striking. This event, of course, occurs near the end of his harrowing trial in the wilderness, a trial that, while vividly portraying Huntly’s acquisition of fortitude, temporarily annihilates his capacity for sympathy.

The narrative that Brown presents in Edgar Huntly is one that (like many of his novels) pits scenes of extreme sensibility against scenes of extreme rationalism. Brown’s appending of “Death of Cicero” to his novel underscores the positive elements of Clithero’s character: an ability to exercise self-command and fortitude in choosing a path he believes is most serviceable to both himself and the community. However, as we have seen, the isolated model of self-command exemplified by Clithero (i.e. the ascetic
prerequisite) is limited by the absence of an external impartial spectator, thereby encouraging the excessive self-denigration that characterizes his actions. Without this spectator, Clithero’s self-judgment is excessive and inaccurate, leading him by the close of the novel to acts of an extreme and irrational nature. While Huntly is unable to retrieve Clithero from the wilderness, Huntly does return to a society of his peers. Within the narrative economy of Brown’s text, Huntly’s return to society should bring the lessons of fortitude and self-command learned in the wilderness to bear on the expression of his sentiments within society. Put another way, the teleology of Brown’s narrative, no less than that of Defoe’s Crusoe narratives, sets the reader up to expect the ascetic prerequisite of wilderness life to moderate Huntly’s previous penchant for emotional exhibitionism.

In keeping with the lack of closure that characterizes Brown’s other novels, however, this is an unacceptable outcome. In much the same way that texts such as Wieland and Memoirs of Stephen Calvert posit a provisional moderation of extreme passion/reason only to announce its inefficacy, Brown’s memoirs of a sleepwalker presents the criteria necessary for a passionate community grounded in the ascetic self-restraint of excessive emotional expression only to stage its dissolution. This dissolution is dramatized by Huntly’s reunion with Sarsefield. Upon his return Huntly is emotionally overwhelmed by the appearance of “the parent and fosterer of my mind, the companion and instructor of my youth” in a manner resembling his initial effusions to Clithero (240). In a typically overwrought sentimental scene, Huntly’s reunion with his mentor figures his relationship to the authority of Sarsefield in distinctly affective terms. 72 “The petrifying influence of surprise,” he notes, “yielded to the impetuosities of passion” (241). He continues:

I held him in my arms: I wept upon his bosom, I sobbed with emotion which, had it not found passage at my eyes, would have burst my heart-strings. Thus I who had escaped the deaths that had previously assailed me in so many forms, should have been reserved to solemnize a scene like this by…dying for joy! (241)

72 On the stock sentimentality of this reunion, see Witherington, “Not My Tongue Only,” 173.
Invalidating the gains of his wilderness experience in a single moment, Huntly pitches his sentiments at the same heightened register as he had initially done with Clithero. Just as Huntly’s vengeful sentiments towards Clithero “yielded to my sympathy” at the beginning of the narrative, Huntly quickly yields once again “to the impetuosities of passion.” Similar to the responses of both Cicero and Clithero to the emotional outbursts of their companions, “the sterner passions and habitual austerities” of Sarsefield “exempted him from pouring out this testimony of his feelings” (241).

Repulsed by Huntly’s appearance and unaware that his former student (of whose death he twice believed he had witnessed) stood before him, Sarsefield’s emotional detachment is ascribed by Huntly to “the loss of his affection” (241). Huntly’s tears return from feelings of rejection: “My master! my friend? Have you forgotten? have you ceased to love me?” (241). While the stakes are slightly different this time around and, admittedly, Huntly may have more to be upset about given his mentor’s apparent rejection of him, Brown once again underscores the irreconcilability between Huntly’s uncontrollable bodily affect and his companions’ unwillingness or inability to sympathize with him. Brown’s interest in sympathy as the basis for a harmonious constitutional society is both sincere and extremely topical. However, Huntly’s inability to “flatten…the sharpness” of his emotions’ “natural tone” finds Brown’s protagonist unable, as Smith would have it, “to reduce it to harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about him” (I.i.4:22).

The crucial difference between Huntly’s initial emotional exhibition to Clithero and his subsequent exhibition to Sarsefield is, of course, the ascetic prerequisite ostensibly provided by the intervening wilderness narrative. The lessons of fortitude learned during this intervening narrative underscores the irony of Brown’s text. The structure of Brown’s narrative emphasizes the fact that Huntly should know better by now; he should have learned to moderate his emotions in the presence of others if he expected any sympathy. In failing to apply an ascetic logic of stoic self-command to bodily affect, Huntly forecloses the correspondence of sentiments Smith identifies as “sufficient for the harmony of society” (I.i.4: 22). In staging the terms of contemporary political debate alongside Smith’s theory of the moral sentiments, Edgar Huntly offers a practical political solution that seeks to reconcile the threat posed by uncontrolled sympathetic connection with the necessity of encouraging sympathy as a viable method
of managing the individual morality of the constitutional American citizen. The concluding scenes of Brown’s novel, however, suggest that the specific demands devolving on the constitutional subject of a sympathetic republic are beyond the capacity of the average citizen to achieve. The constitutional subject is more properly left at the threshold, enduring the experience of the aporia.

The return of an external authority/monitor in the figure of Sarsefield provides Huntly with a safe alternative to the rigorous self-command of emotions demanded of the ascetic citizen. Huntly’s insistence that he is “dying for joy” at the return of his mentor points to the protagonist’s unwillingness to accept the responsibilities of the ascetic citizen. The insertion of the final three letters at the end of *Edgar Huntly* provide a conspicuous formal marker for the reintroduction of an external judge of Huntly’s actions. While Luciano is surely correct that it is Edgar’s “investment in the power of sympathy, or the more ‘perfect’ communicative abilities embodied in speech” that explains the switch to the immediacy of the final letters, I would argue that the final letters announce Huntly’s rejection of a sympathetic model of ascetic citizenry in favour of a model of patriarchal authority. Robbed of any community through most of the narrative, Huntly achieves a necessary (yet belated) evaluation of his actions with the return of Sarsefield. In response to Huntly’s erratic actions, Sarsefield assures his protégé that his “philosophy has not found itself lightsome and active under this burden” (293). “You acted in direct opposition to my council,” Sarsefield notes, “and to the plainest dictates of propriety. Be more circumspect and more obsequious for the future” (293). Unlike the retrenchment of patriarchal authority implied by Clara Wieland’s departure for Europe in *Wieland*, the reintroduction of Sarsefield’s authority is justified by Huntly’s apparent inability to recognize “the plainest dictates of propriety.” Sarsefield’s suggestion that Huntly be “more circumspect and more obsequious for the future” encapsulates the chief tension of American constitutional subjectivity. Circumspection suggests mindfulness of consequence and, as such, implies a certain capacity to monitor one’s own actions. Obsequiousness, on the other hand, suggests deference, an ability to follow orders and a capacity for compliance. Joined together, Sarsefield’s proscriptions to Huntly privilege the oppositional categories that

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Smith’s model of theatrical sympathy seeks to suture. Promoting individual liberty (and the responsibilities it entails), Sarsefield’s remarks insist that the constitutional subject must be both self-monitoring and subject to external authority.

Of all the characters in “Death of Cicero” and Edgar Huntly, Tiro is alone capable of embodying Brown’s ideal. That Tiro’s sentimental education is distanced historically from Brown’s America in the classical republicanism of Rome indicates something important about Brown’s lack of faith in the ascetic citizen. By placing “Death of Cicero” at the end of Edgar Huntly, Brown reminds readers specifically where Huntly fails. By illustrating the manner in which Tiro learns to restrain his earlier emotional exhibitionism in the service of republican liberty, Brown insists on a particular reading of Edgar Huntly, one that situates the failure of the constitutional subject to live up to the demands of ascetic citizenship at the boundary between republican liberties and the civic self-sacrifice needed to secure them.

Following Hamilton’s model of civic confidence, Brown advocates the necessary restraint of individual affections by an external more competent monitor. Underlying Brown’s endorsement of a passionate community, in which individual citizens participate in the moral judgment of themselves and their neighbours via sympathetic connection, is a nagging pessimism that the individual is ultimately incapable of such responsibility. In the kind of extensive republic advocated by the federalists, sympathy is necessary for managing the morality of the citizenry. Yet in a society bereft of men such as Tiro, obsequiousness is necessary to restrain the dangerous waywardness of men such as Clithero and relatively benign waywardness of men such as Huntly. In this regard, Brown’s novel intervenes in the debates of The Federalist Papers on the importance of sympathy. His specific intervention is aptly symbolized by the lacunae of Huntly’s sleepwalking adventures: “What has eluded my sagacity may not be beyond the reach of another”(245).

Advocating an external impartial spectatorship as a vital supplement to the maintenance of a passionate community guaranteeing individual freedoms and liberties, Brown combines sympathy and stoic self-command with deference to rational authority in an effort to preserve the public utility of an increasingly privatized discourse of the sentiments. Attempting to bridge the gap between classical republicanism and liberal nationalism, the failed promise of Brown’s model of ascetic sympathy raises important, if
unsystematic, questions regarding the constitution of a civic subjectivity that recognizes both the importance of a Jeffersonian vigilance of individual liberty and the necessity of a Hamiltonian deferential confidence in constitutional democracy.\footnote{Gardner argues that Huntly's submission to Sarsefield's authority is the only way in which he can be cured of "his vulnerability to aliens, Indians, and dangerous writing" ("Alien Nation," 451-2). Downes identifies Sarsefield's authority with the legality of law; functioning as both jailor and tyrant, Sarsefield "justifies his intervention as an act of compulsion, an act, moreover, which requires a kind of theatrical self-distancing" ("Sleep-walking," 426); see also Witherington, "Not My Tongue Only," 173–4.}
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