

DISPOSSESSED WOMEN:  
FEMALE HOMELESSNESS IN ROMANTIC LITERATURE

BY

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## Introduction

By grief enfeebled was I turned adrift,  
Helpless as sailor cast on desert rock  
-Wordsworth, "The Female Vagrant," ll. 181-2)

If women are like soldiers to Mary Wollstonecraft, in "The Female Vagrant" William Wordsworth shows us how vagrant women are like parched, shipwrecked sailors. They are Robinson Crusoes of proto-feminism. Though he speaks metaphorically, Wordsworth's equating the female vagrant with a shipwrecked sailor is an example of an important turn toward realism that writers pursued in the Romantic era when addressing this figure. Consider that traditionally the fallen woman, who turns into the female vagrant, had for centuries been cast as not the survivor, but the storm:

He cover'd her body, then home he did run,  
Leaving none but birds her death to mourn;  
On board the Bedford he enter'd straitway,  
Which lay at Portsmouth out bound for the sea.

For carpenter's mate he was enter'd we hear,  
Fitted for his voyage away he did steer;  
But as in his cabbिन one night he did lie,  
The voice of his sweetheart he heard to cry.

O perjur'd villain, awake now and hear,  
 The voice of your love, that lov'd you so dear;  
 This ship out of Portsmouth never shall go,  
 Till I am revenged for this overthrow.

She afterward vanished with shrieks and cries,  
 Flashes of lightning did dart from her eyes;  
 Which put the ships crew into great fear,  
 None saw the ghost, but the voice they did hear.<sup>1</sup>

“The Gosport Tragedy” (c. 1760) tells the story of Molly and William, a conventional ballad narrative of a young man who impregnates a young woman and refuses to marry her before setting off to sea. After Molly pleads too much for him to marry her, William lures her to the woods, stabs her, and buries her. Molly gets her revenge by wrecking William’s ship in storms generated by her supernatural vengeance. Tanya Evans, who devotes a section on “vengeful ghosts” in her history of single mothers in the eighteenth century, explains that these tales filled the void left by the decline of parental involvement in a society growing more fluid—children were moving farther from home for work, young men were charting seas for trade and war, and young adults were seeking more autonomy in choosing their mates. “Poor, eighteenth-century unmarried mothers could do nothing to

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gosport tragedy or, the perjured ship-carpenter. Tune, Peggy's gone over sea.*, [London]: Printed and sold at the printing-office in Bow Church-yard, London, [1760?] *Early English Books Online*. 17 March 2017. Variations are titled “Pretty Polly,” “Polly’s Love,” “The Cruel Ship Carpenter,” “The Ghost Ship,” “Love and Murder,” et al.



change the story of their life,” Evans writes, “but the tales related in ballads and chapbooks of men humiliated in front of their mates, read or heard on the streets or within households at work or leisure, allowed poor, pregnant and deserted women the fantasy of revenge on lovers whom many were never to set eyes on again” (66). However, still more and more women were becoming homeless by the end of the century, and tales of supernatural revenge could no longer satisfy. The test of time, of course, had proven women have no power in death. By turning the sea witch into the sailor, Wordsworth, and the writers I consider in this project, makes an important step toward what I call *dispossessing* homeless women. They are exorcised, that is, dispossessed of their inherited demons and vengeance. Like the heroine of “The Female Vagrant,” the characters I examine are also dispossessed *of* their home and loved ones even as they are dispossessed *by* the nation in which they should be someone’s property but there is no one left to claim them.

The chapters that follow examine the profile of the homeless woman in the late eighteenth century and her representation in Romantic-era literature and the links between this character and movement toward naturalistic realism. My work tracks a coalescing of three literary and social phenomena that led to a major refiguring of the homeless woman in the public consciousness. First, across the eighteenth century and coming to a crisis in the last decades, there was a ballooning in the population of destitute and houseless women, who were either overlooked or punished by public officials. Second, a nascent movement promoting communal care rather than policing of the poor was gaining momentum. And third, by the start of the Romantic era, many critics, both literary and social, voiced exhaustion with and aversion to both the stock figure of the fallen woman in novels and ballads as well as their real life counterparts in the crowds of

desperate women on the street. These forces combined during the Romantic-era, I argue, in a way that lastingly altered the way the public not only perceived but also treated the homeless woman. William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Mary Robinson, Mary Wollstonecraft, Robert Southey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Frances Burney, Hannah More, Charlotte Smith: virtually every major (and minor) writer of the period engaged this alarming problem.

The first British Parliamentary Select Committee reports on vagrancy policy, questioning the efficacy of the administration of vagrancy laws, began in 1815 (Rogers 129). But this official report came at the end of a long process, which saw British concern over the outbreak of the French Revolution causing one of the nation's most intense crackdowns on vagrants, with federal officials essentially eliminating a local constable's discretion and requiring the whipping of male vagrants (Rogers 130). Within this time period, public discussion considered a range of extremes regarding the identification and treatment of homeless people (in addition to their distinction from criminals and idlers). I argue that not only were Romantic-era writers, particularly female writers, drawn to this controversy, but they also successfully employed new genres to complicate and expand the general perception of the dispossessed female.

### **The Burgeoning of Homelessness**

As the eighteenth century drew to an end, the population of homeless women soared to unprecedented numbers. Estimating the female homeless population is difficult, Nicholas Rogers explains, since the first numbers were not officially gathered by Parliament until the 1800s, but a profile can be drawn from quarter session reports, court

and parish records, and various parliamentary papers (129). Though Rogers focuses on “the requirements of a capitalist economy for male, mobile labour,” he nonetheless offers the clearest estimation to date of the population of female vagrants in the late eighteenth century (127). Rogers notes that from 1747 to 1798, in both Middlesex and the City of London, “there was a majority of women over men: by a ratio of 3:1 in 1757, 1758, and 1777; and roughly 2:1 in the years 1748-55, 1764-65, 1772, 1783, 1792, and 1797-8” (133). Fleshing out this profile, Robert Humphreys has written that the cost per head of the population in terms of poor rates rose from 3 shillings 10 pence in 1776 to 8 shillings 3 pence in 1801 and further, to 13 shillings 3 pence in 1818, the year before the Peterloo Massacres. In terms of population, paupers in the same years went from comprising 3.8 percent to 8.1 percent to 13.2 percent of the population – indicating that the rising costs of caring for the poor were not tied to inflation alone (79). Multiple social forces, including a series of wars, famines, and structural economic changes, led to city streets and alleys being clogged with begging women and country parishes burdened by the cost and energy of supporting, imprisoning, and/or surveilling of female vagrants. In the country and particularly in the city, many women led a “hazardous, marginal existence,” Rogers writes (134).

The problem began as the Restoration era ended and was hardly abated by waves of misfortunes in Britain across the eighteenth century that made it impossible for society to control the crisis. “In 1762 there were said to be ‘waggon loads of poor servants coming every day from all parts of this kingdom’” writes Bridget Hill, and so “great was employer preference for country girls that London servant-maids found ‘it difficult. . . to get service’” (Hill, *Servants* 4, quoting P.J. Corfield). This growing industry was troubled with social

perils, however, as more nouveau riche men became involved with their maids and cooks, leading to many girls and women becoming abused by their employers and/or losing their positions (Hill, *Servants* 44).<sup>2</sup> Other young female domestics lost work after marrying or becoming pregnant by their male coworkers. By the mid-eighteenth century, the bourgeois and upper class readily accepted the stereotype that young maids were a sexual threat to the harmony of the home. Maids commonly were either treated suspiciously by their mistresses or harassed by their masters (Hill, *Servants* 51).

The countryside had its own challenges for the poorest of women. For those who managed to marry—regardless of their class—their financial security was threatened by wars and famines. As Wordsworth painfully details in “The Female Vagrant,” these wars made paupers of destitute farmers and soldiers and then widows of their wives. Alongside losing husbands and crops, many women saw their bits of land parceled off by the local gentry in accordance with the recent enclosure laws. Hill notes that the process of enclosure, which accelerated over the eighteenth century, particularly affected poor women, especially widows and single women (Hill, *Women Alone* 17-21).<sup>3</sup> “The effect of changes in agriculture,” writes Hill, “the disappearance of commons and the destruction of cottages, the decline in farm service combined with the decline of spinning, for centuries the staple employment of women—was to reduce substantially the agricultural tasks on

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<sup>2</sup> Shoemaker corroborates Hill, elaborating that “the independence of urban women also made them vulnerable to both economic and sexual exploitation; the combination of opportunity and desperation thus created is reflected in the fact that in the early eighteenth century women accounted for more than half of all the defendants prosecuted for property crime at the Old Bailey, a rare statistic in the history of crime.” (14).

<sup>3</sup> Humphreys reports that between 1760 and 1780, there were “ten times as many Parliamentary Enclosure Bills” than in the previous 40 years. Three million acres were enclosed in this time period.

which women could be employed” (20). Women were seen as a “cheap and elastic source of labor” who could be easily hired and fired depending on the season, notes Deborah Valenze (45). Still, if unemployed and homeless women migrated to other villages, local constables would demand their pass papers allowing them to cross borders, or they were sent wandering the country highways (Humphreys 72).

The rights and responsibilities of women in the public sphere were also in flux as Enlightenment interpretations of the rights of men secularized issues of civil protection and privilege; the rights of women soon became a topic of debate, and literature “became a site for determining the relationship between individuals and legal institutions” (Nancy Johnson 269). Still, the debate was almost uniformly confined to considering “rights” of white men of property: Under laws of coverture that gave husbands and fathers ownership of their wives’ and daughters’ property, women themselves were effectively property. Britons closely watched as French revolutionaries proposed more rights for women to education, property, and divorce only to see these rights quickly revoked by Robespierre and then curbed further by Napoleon. At the same time, writers such as Rousseau had emphasized the significance of “civilized and devoted” mothers promoting national health—urging them to breastfeed and school their own children—leading more working class women in Britain as well as France to lose positions and prospects as wet nurses or governesses (Valenze 136).

Exacerbating the plight of displaced women, poor laws and vagrancy laws were long overdue for revision. Most laws and precedents regarding vagrancy were established in pre-plague days when society was more concerned with stabilizing the work force than with policing or aiding the unemployed (Humphreys 22). Medieval plagues initiated cycles

of strong labor markets; the emerging population of masterless men roamed the country searching for better prospects and causing local economies to weaken (23). These first laws bound residents to their parishes of birth, requiring passes to move to, work in, or travel through other villages. As population rates rebounded, the labor market weakened and fewer men went searching for better work, except the destitute or criminal. The pass program was retrofitted to immobilize the criminal-minded. Humphreys writes that in the last three decades of the sixteenth century, laws were enacted to hold each parish responsible for relieving its poor, lest they become vagrant and drain upon other parish coffers (50). With these laws, parishes could now turn away many poor women, regardless of whether they held passes, because constables viewed them as impregnable but not marriageable and therefore a potential strain on the village. The legacy of a series of acts and statutes between 1572 and 1601 (generally referred to as the “Old Poor Law”) was a particular “hardening of treatment” of vagrants by the government and public (Humphreys 66).

By the eighteenth century, a jumble of amendments intending to define vagrancy more comprehensively only made the crime vaguer and allowed for a wide range of punishments for an equally wide range of offenses. A vagrant could be defined as an able-bodied idler, a stranger perceived as “menacing,” or a mendicant of local birth who had lost his housing (Rose 3-4). Once a vagrant was identified and arrested, a local constable could choose from a disconcerting range of punishments, from shaming a mendicant with a “P” sewn onto his or her clothes (for “Pauper”), to deporting itinerants to home parishes, to flogging, branding, or imprisoning a “menace” (Rose 4). Some officials tolerated the travelling poor while others grappled with the expenses of taking care of those seen as

legitimately destitute even as they immobilized or removed those seen as criminal or parasitic (Benis 6).

These legal indeterminacies led to abuses of vagrant women, in particular, who either provoked great pity among the kind or inspired opportunism among the cruel. Take for example, Horace Walpole's 1742 description of the imprisoning of two dozen women. Walpole writes of "a parcel of drunken constables" that corralled and imprisoned about twenty-six women they assumed were vagrant into the St. Martin's roundhouse overnight, stifling them and killing six of them, including a "poor washerwoman, big with child, who was returning home late from washing" (as quoted in Ribton-Turner 634). To avoid such abuse, vagrant women took shelter wherever possible: hospitals, halfway houses, madhouses, workhouses, outhouses, and empty mansions (Rogers 134, 136; Hill, *Women Alone* 180). Timothy Hitchcock recounts that in 1763 a prospective buyer was touring one of the "abandoned and half-completed houses" of London where he found "the emaciated bodies of three almost naked women on the ground floor, while in the garret he found two women and a girl, alive, but on the verge of starvation" (30). Remaining just this side of starvation often meant turning to crime, particularly prostitution or trespassing, and criminal activity left this demographic prone to the cynical view that vagrant women were lawbreakers who therefore did not deserve help.<sup>4</sup> This cynicism, of course, further

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<sup>4</sup> Markman Ellis reports that in the mid-eighteenth century, prostitution reform was discussed frequently. Ellis notes the pervasiveness of prostitution, citing that Magistrate Saunders Welch in 1758 estimated "the number of women in the bills of mortality, whose sole dependence is upon prostitution, [is to] be computed at only 3000" and another observer, Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz, claimed in 1791 that "London is said to contain fifty thousand prostitutes, without reckoning kept mistresses" (161).

encouraged or justified their abuse. Francis Grose's 1796 essay on vagrant women summarizes the sentiment building among the middle and upper classes:

Pray observe that poor woman, with those two helpless babes half-naked, starving on the steps of that great house, is she an object of charity, think you? None at all; in all likelihood, one or both of these children are hired by the day or week, for the purpose of exciting charity—at best the beggar is a professional one.<sup>5</sup>

Vagrant women were stuck in a paradox—the more ubiquitous they became they less their fellow Britons could recognize them clearly.

### **Colliding with Cliché**

The ubiquity of the homeless woman and her shifting image in the public consciousness became a literary problem for Romantic-era writers. Grose's cynicism reveals how tired the public had grown of literary efforts to evoke sympathy for homeless women. This emotional fatigue accrued alongside the rise in the homeless population across the eighteenth century. First, with the revival of the oral ballad, many homeless women turned to singing tear-jerking songs of fallen women who killed themselves and their children and to selling the broadsides of these ballads on the corners of London (Shoemaker 2). Second, several writers of stalled generic experiments often relied upon the fallen woman's story—so, this stock figure became linked with “bad” writing. Laura Linker has tracked the rise and fall of novels about “female libertines” from the end of the

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<sup>5</sup> Francis Grose, *The Olio*, (London: Hooper and Wigstead, 1796) openlibrary. Web. 31 July 2012.



Restoration through the mid-eighteenth century. This character's sexual transgressions entailed "some form of correction through ridicule, scorn, or rejection," anticipating the obsession of reforming rather than aiding the female vagrant that arose by the Romantic period (10). Meanwhile, Caroline Breashears describes the short-lived genre of the memoir appeal, written by a "disreputable" woman who narrates peculiarly female distresses and appeals to the public for sympathy or aid. Breashears argues that the appeal memoir "functions as a countergenre or antigenre to the whore biography" (608). In other words the public not only had grown tired of the actual vagrant woman but also the prevalence of her representation in fictional works.

We can begin to chart a change in this narrative with William Wordsworth's attention to vagrants, both male and female, as mute, distant figures who inspired a sense of freedom. In examining the wearing down of the ballad's currency, Tim Fulford argues that Wordsworth co-opted the ballad, long since made ubiquitous by begging women, and made the female vagrant a key subject of his hybridized *Lyrical Ballads*, in order to comment on capitalism's crushing of the personal encounter in the city. While Wordsworth had found a way around the literary problem of enlivening the vagrant woman's role in literature—treating her with sympathy—he in turn created a new problem. "[Wordsworth] dramatized their interiority in uncanny terms," Fulford writes, "both like and unlike the rest of us, his ballad mothers elude conventional categorizations of the feminine without being condemned for doing so. . . . This makes them truly strange, and therefore powerful: they arouse our interest, fear, and compassion, but do not let us make them familiar enough to know which emotion to discharge toward them." We might say that Wordsworth's vagrant woman is eternally and inevitably wandering, a recurring figure entrenched in the

uncanny. She is perhaps more realistically drawn, but she is still tethered to an inevitability that led to a sense of resignation in the reader and so undermined the sensitivity Wordsworth meant to awaken.

### **Wordsworth's Vagrants**

My examination of the female vagrant springs from the dynamic historicist discussion of Romantic-era vagrants, particularly those depicted by Wordsworth, which has emerged and expanded over the past three decades. In 1989, Jeffrey Robinson first considered vagrancy through the lens of walking, prompting several decades of scholarly conversation on the importance of walking in Romantic literature. Soon after, Gary Harrison claimed that in the early 1790s, Wordsworth was directly engaging with the “politics of poverty and reform” in his first vagrancy poems (16). Harrison’s argument runs counter to older critical notions that Wordsworth’s poems exist outside or above politics. Examining vagrancy in regard to genre, meanwhile, Anne Wallace has argued that Wordsworth’s vagrant poems replace the georgic with a peripatetic mode. As the village laborer and tenant farmer disappear from the landscape of the Romantic era, the peripatetic mode allows the walking rustic to do the work of the Georgic farmer in the poem, fusing together and enacting the images and the ideas of the poem, as the concrete action of rambling fades from the reader’s focus.

More recently, taking a Marxist and phenomenological approach, Celeste Langan attempts to “examine the pathos of liberalism” that she locates in the representation of vagrants in Romantic literature. Contrasting the solitary walker of Rousseau’s *Reveries* with

the directly encountered vagrant of Wordsworth's poems, Langan claims that "the man whom we behold/with our own eyes" (*The Prelude*, XIII.83-84) is an analogy for the social contract at work in theory and practice. Langan analogizes walking to reading, claiming, "liberalism is an idea of human community partly modeled on the logic of analogy" (3). In other words, liberalism is an ongoing negotiation between laissez-fair economics and representative democracy. She at first defines vagrancy, in particular, as "the condition of having nothing to do and nowhere to go" (7). The vagrant "confounds or undoes Marx's own dialectic of progress" because the vagrant works outside the capitalist/proletarian dichotomy and acts as a double of capital – unpossessing, but unpossessed. The vagrant, in a deficit of the material, offers the poet, particularly Wordsworth, a surplus of the transcendental.

Some have argued that Langan seems to repeat a mistake made by critics of vagrants during the Romantic period: forgetting the reality of structural unemployment. Because she avoids historicizing the female vagrant, in particular, she overlooks the fact that while they are free they are also rejected. The trouble, we find, when we further historicize Langan's ideas, is that she overlooks the material realities of the vagrant, who, with such a surplus of "freedom," finds walking, standing, eating, and sleeping all to be forms of work that push transcendental freedom out of the realm of possibility. A fuller historicization also reveals another problem regarding the negative freedom that Langan claims resides in the vagrant's right "to come and go without permission and without having to account for their motives or undertakings" (15). Certainly, vagrancy appears free in this way in many of Wordsworth's poems about male vagrants in particular. But Langan

overlooks the reality that vagrants were sent back and forth between parishes, corralled into workhouses, hospitals, and prisons, and even rented to landowners.

Toby Benis has recently steered the critical conversation toward a more precise historicism, examining the homeless figure in relation to the Vagrancy Acts and the federalizing of police enforcement that came in the paranoid years following the French Revolution. Benis examines the multivalenced ways vagrants were received, ignored, avoided, abused, or cared for by local-level “overseers of the poor, churchwardens, and constables.” She claims vagrancy laws link mobility and transparency with “inappropriate occupations,” “class differences,” “unorthodox opinions,” “sedition” and “insurrection” (2). Vagrancy laws charged local officials with not only halting the individual but also the “unsettling ideas that he or she embodied.” This system, redefined in the 1740s and greatly accelerated by the 1790s, prompted parishes to oust or reject more vagrants and send them circulating throughout the nation (6). Wordsworth could have been reacting, Benis argues, to the more bureaucratic, less humane law enforcement emerging and the developing characterization of eighteenth-century law enforcement as desultory (9). Wordsworth was attuned to the discrepancy between the political version of the homeless as “lazy and deserving of punishment, and the actual dramas of their often hapless lives” (10).

Despite this productive range of scholarly work, however, the relationship between gender and vagrancy remains surprisingly unexplored. Homeless female figures often exist outside the dichotomy of political ally-threat that Benis explores. Summarizing her chapter on “Salisbury Plain,” Benis notes that homelessness releases “the poem’s female vagrant from victimization by her family, a victimization consistent with the contention by early

feminists that home life necessitates the submersion of women's individuality in gender-based roles hostile to personal inclination" (17). However, Benis's emphasis on the struggles that caused vagrancy and not the struggles that follow vagrancy implies some trading up for a better condition, which is not evident. Here we see the problem of limiting the study of female vagrants to Wordsworth's works alone: there is an implicit acceptance of Wordsworth's equating of vagrancy with freedom that Langan found.

Quentin Bailey takes Benis's approach further, as he focuses on the social and legal sense of vagrancy as represented in Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, noting that until 1800 every reference the poet makes to "vagrants" is to literal homeless people and nothing more conceptual. Bailey argues that Wordsworth is directly engaging with contemporary discussions of reform. In the late 1790s, there is a "preponderance" of poems about political prisoners and with this, a preponderance of satirical reaction to the sentimentality that skewed the real nature and crimes of those imprisoned (2). The writers and editors of the *Anti-Jacobin* had been intent on associating sympathy for the poor and marginalized with sympathy for the criminal or treasonous—anyone seen as charitable was immediately suspected to be weak and/or unpatriotic. Bailey argues that Wordsworth's poems about vagrants—criminals, especially—engage with the effect of police and penal reforms debated from the mid-1770s through the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*. Particularly, Bailey argues that Wordsworth was questioning the value of punishment, the economic and psychological motives of criminals, and the likelihood of their reform or rehabilitation. Wordsworth does so by attempting to keep the subject in the middle ground, avoiding the critical distance that allowed for exploitation or voyeurism that merely titillated readers as

well as the uncomfortable nearness that generated the sentimental, “overblown political rhetoric” that had the potential to exhaust audiences (10).

Wordsworth’s earlier poems work against Langan’s claim that his vagrants offer “a reduction and an abstraction” that equals a “transhistorical liberal text,” Bailey argues. While he concedes they dwell in a “sphere of relative indeterminacy,” as Harrison puts it, this separate sphere works to remove them from the Pitt administration’s totalizing systems of penal reformation in England. Wordsworth’s politics in this program balance a need for reform of “the Bloody Code” with a skeptical view of the proposed reforms in consideration at the time. Bailey writes: “Wordsworth remained committed to finding a way of responding to the human claims of society’s outlaws that could transcend the systemic, but narrow, solutions proposed by the likes of Pitt and Bentham without relying on older models of deference and subordination” (11-12).<sup>6</sup> In this ambiguous space, Wordsworth leaves his vagrant female characters still prone to the mystifying that these figures were steeped in the traditional ballad genre.

### **A Turn Toward Realism**

I intend more fully to explore, in isolating the homeless female figure, the need for Romantic-era writers to overcome a hard-hearted cynicism, a desensitizing caused by a glut of sentimentality—a literary-social problem that Bailey briefly mentions when he

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<sup>6</sup> The Bloody Code is the term used to describe the penal system from the late seventeenth century to the reforms of the early nineteenth century because the number of crimes punishable by death multiplied quickly. See more at The National Archive: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/candp/punishment>

explores the Romantic treatment of political prisoners. He highlights a passage by a young Robert Southey in which the poet attempts to elicit sympathy for a political prisoner that is closely parodied by the *Anti-Jacobin's* writers who were attempting to undermine such appeals for sympathy. Southey starts his passage, about a political criminal who rebelled for "peace and liberty," with the phrase "Dost thou ask his crime?" The *Anti-Jacobin* begins its satire, which focuses on a criminal who had murdered two servants, "Dost thou ask her crime?" In addressing this parody, Bailey skips over the switch in gender. This oversight, I would suggest, points to a problem in both Bailey's argument and Wordsworth's work. In reality, the female vagrant was often innocent or driven to crime as a result of being herself the victim of a crime or deeply entrenched domestic policies—her vagrancy, unlike Southey's prisoner, had little to do with her political opinions or the international scene. She accounts for the largest demographic of the vagrant population, yet Bailey's book generally overlooks her, only including her in the expressed intent to look at the treatment of and reformation of "criminals, vagrants, and madwomen." Bailey, like Wordsworth, has limited his focus on vagrancy to its relation to French-British tensions, and gender is only pronounced in the case of insanity. Bailey's trouble accounting for gender in his study, I propose, indicates that Wordsworth himself had trouble pulling the female vagrant into the middle ground and still tended to keep her at a distance in order to avoid the perils of sentimentality.

Focusing upon the figure of the homeless woman specifically as she appears in other Romantic genres might help us reconcile the tensions between Langan's theoretical interpretations of vagrants and the political and historical readings advanced by Benis, Bailey, and others over the past two decades. While these critics have done good work in

focusing on Wordsworth's consideration of vagrancy and homelessness, limiting the focus to one writer has led to a cloistered understanding of a much broader and complex issue. By turning to other authors, we can more fully understand homelessness and its role within Romantic-era writing. In addition, by focusing our study upon the female vagrant, we are able to move from a singular political agenda to a much broader social perspective, a view that better elucidates the progress toward not only a feminist ethic of care, but a general ethic of care. In terms of literary significance, a close study of the representation of the homeless woman offers a site to isolate and explore how many male and female writers approached their work differently in the Romantic Era, expanding upon some of Anne Mellor's key theories on the topic. Studying the representation of female vagrants may uncover a situation in which a number of female writers co-opted a stock figure—in varying ways—and then influenced how many male writers would treat this figure in the future. Specifically, Mary Robinson, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Maria Edgeworth were careful to draw this figure with strengths and weaknesses, a balance that forced readers to contend with their prejudices.

We find a variety of female authors who may have influenced the way writers in the coming century would relate to social history. John Krapp, building on Mellor's influential *Romanticism and Gender*, advances the idea that women in the Romantic period were committed to writing within the parameters of history while male writers were attempting to write post-historically. Mellor, over the past few decades, has come to the conclusion that for female writers

[There] is no sharp cultural, political, or intellectual divide between 1789 and what went before or between 1832 and what came after. In other words,



there is no 'Romantic period' in women's writing. Late-eighteenth-century women writers profoundly identified with their female precursors. ("Were Women Writers 'Romantics'?" 398-9)

The handling of female homelessness in the works I address demonstrates why some writers resisted the trend of writing "post-historically," and this topic's currency indicates that this resistance was a conscious choice, not a lag or gap in authorial development or capability. There is something of a circular relationship between the historical and literary conditions women were facing in the Romantic era that explains this division. The exhaustion of audiences and critics with the tear-jerking versions of female vagrants exacerbated real-life social conditions for destitute women just as the Romantic era dawned. These historical conditions help to explain why writers, particularly female writers, rejected the movement toward defamiliarizing the homeless female to the point of being uncanny or archetypal, as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and eventually Keats did. The homeless female figure had become a key tool for male writers to turn inward and for female writers to turn outward—two of the distinct literary goals that Mellor argues divided male and female writers in *Romanticism and Gender*.

Mary Robinson, I argue in my first chapter, indeed turns outward by making her narrator of *Lyrical Tales* a female vagrant, inspired by Wordsworth's "The Female Vagrant" from *Lyrical Ballads*. We see the world alongside this narrator rather than scrutinizing her as an object with Wordsworth's autobiographical perspective. Recognizing Robinson's narrator as a homeless woman helps us to then recognize the social as well as poetic critiques Robinson was making in her volume regarding both the unrealistic treatment of this literary figure—in a time when so many real female vagrants suffered throughout the

nation—as well as the isolation of female writers from the status of literary genius. First, through this narrative maneuver, Robinson removes the figure from any objectifying gaze that defamiliarizes her humanity, thus allowing her to reveal, in her own words, the physical, social, and psychological struggles of sleeping in the rough. Robinson reimagines the female vagrant figure as full of benevolent human thought and emotion where stock representations had overlooked these capabilities by continuing traditions of depicting female vagrants as loathsome hustlers or sexualized and fallen adolescents. While showing us what dangers lay in store for women alienated from mainstream society, Robinson also shows us how contemporary poetic trends for constructing the male author-narrator as genius and turning to solitude in nature are ways in which male poets secure their privilege in the literary world. With more vagrant women on the street, more women writing, and more women reading, the formula for constructing male genius via a male subject observing and constructing a rustic female could not withstand scrutiny, and Robinson, herself in financial peril, exposes this exploitation for what it was.

Vagrant female characters were just as prolific in children's literature. In chapter two, I turn to this genre to explore an arc in the treatment of these characters that moves from sympathetic idealism in the mid-eighteenth century to a cruel cynicism by the end of the Romantic period, with a turn toward the realistic notable amidst this arc. This movement toward cynicism grows as the homeless population balloons and politicians more hotly debate whether and how much to aid the poor, coinciding with the push for the reforms of the 1830s and 1840s that will lead to the first social safety nets. John Newbery, publisher and possible writer of *Goody Two-Shoes*, simultaneously sets the standard for publishing literature for children and for treating the homeless with empathy and open-

mindedness. Though Newbery pushed the genre toward less didactic writing and toward more imaginative fiction, he takes a moment in *Goody Two-Shoes* to specifically guide children and their parents to treat the poor, such as his orphaned and homeless heroine, with compassion—for the reader could become the ostracized and destitute someday, just as the vagrant could possibly become a superior in these nascent days of mercantile capitalism. Much of Goody's story is far-fetched, however, with the vagrant girl turning into an itinerant teacher to the village's children and suddenly marrying into fortune. Maria Edgeworth reacts with a more realistic account of vagrant children and women in her *The Parent's Assistant* (1796). Edgeworth eschews the binary depictions of victim and crook that other writers use to categorize vagrants and instead features orphaned children and vagrant women at various stages of vagrancy, coping in a variety of methods, to explore the complexity of homelessness in order to help children discern between the foolish, the industrious, the opportunistic, and the kind-hearted itinerants they may encounter.

Meanwhile, Hannah More pushes aside Edgeworth's realism and exaggerates the threat of homeless women to children, stereotyping them as worse than charlatans. Her vagrant fortunetellers spread vagrancy like disease by reproducing and neglecting their children, and seducing the gullible and idle into a vagrant lifestyle. From here, Robert Southey makes the vagrant female an outright criminal who breaks into homes, destroys property, and deserves to be imprisoned as the antagonist in a seminal version of "The Story of the Three Bears." This arc in attitude toward the poor indicates that writers of early children's literature had made an impact on the hearts and minds of their readers, and conservative writers quickly jumped into this arena and fought to corrode any entrenched sympathy.

Dorothy Wordsworth gets above the push-pull dynamic in which other artists engaged when she considers a particular female vagrant in her *Grasmere Journal*. In my third chapter, I trace Dorothy Wordsworth's metacritical, complex meditations on the female vagrant, and consider how this attention seems to come at a cost to the writer's sense of her own policy when regarding vagrant characters. Dorothy Wordsworth, I argue, attempts to consider itinerant figures in solitary and iconic portraits that mimic the popular illustration genre, *Cries of London*. Like the artists who captured various specimens of London street life, Dorothy writes ekphrastically about the typical clothes, phrases, and life stories of itinerant figures of the Lake District. She attempts to develop her own tonal approach to these portraits, just as each artist of the *Cries* did, either attempting to persuade the audience to feel sympathy, cynicism or derision toward the vagrant figure. Dorothy, we find, tends to choose figures who seem to be in the rawest throes of destitution and paints them with a softer realism, negotiating the extremes of the artists who came before her. But one figure, a Tall Beggar Woman, persists in her encounters and forces Dorothy Wordsworth to consider how vagrants must construct themselves into an ideal figure before seeking charity. In her encounters with this woman and her family, Dorothy discovers herself as a stereotype as well—the sensible bourgeois woman who likes her vagrants to come with discrete needs and a trajectory away from her door. In this realization, Dorothy comes to learn and shares with readers the idea that vagrants do indeed deserve help no matter what caused their condition. Consequently, Dorothy offers us the most multi-valanced representation of female vagrancy considered in my study.

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The legacy of the Romantic treatment of the homeless woman may best be demonstrated by the dramatic way in which the tale of the Three Bears changed in a short period of time in the late Romantic period. The original protagonist was a crass, old vagrant woman who somehow becomes equated with the pretty, vulnerable Goldilocks—hardly a villain. This may seem trivial, but I would suggest that this drastic shift in such a well-known tale reveals how thoroughly the public view of the homeless woman changed in such a short time and made it possible for others, particularly nineteenth-century male writers (from John Clare to Charles Dickens to Thomas Hardy), to use the figure of the homeless woman for dramatically different aesthetic and thematic purposes. As Beatrice Webb titled part of her 1918 study of the poor laws (one of the earliest and most exhaustive efforts), this was a time that quickly shifted the public perception of the homeless population toward “Citizens, Not Paupers.”<sup>7</sup> In “Dispossessed Women” I examine how the treatment of the homeless figure in Romantic writing directed that shift.

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<sup>7</sup> Webb, Beatrice, “The Abolition of the Poor Law.” 11 December 2011. *The Webbs on the Web*. <http://webbs.library.lse.ac.uk/>

## Chapter 1

### Mary Robinson's Female Vagrant

A recurring narrator at the beginning of Mary Robinson's *Lyrical Tales* subtly introduces the theme of the volume as well as the author's poetic philosophy, but these messages can be overlooked unless we examine the identity of this narrator. "Thou art not left alone, poor boy," this speaker assures an orphan in "All Alone," "The Traveller stops to hear thy tale" (ll. 7-8).<sup>8</sup> This Traveller, who encounters the *Tales'* rustic characters and helps frame their narratives, does more than lend them an ear. The Traveller surveys these characters, sleeps near them, keeps vigil with them, and visits to gossip with them. The Traveller's intention is indeed to help these characters feel heard and connected even as this narrator attempts to feel less alone. But one thing is unclear: Who exactly is this Traveller? Critical accounts of Robinson's poetry have offered few suggestions, more often assuming the narrator is a version of the poet-traveller in Wordsworth's "We Are Seven,"<sup>9</sup> but in what follows I shall argue that we need to think of Robinson's Traveller in a new way: as a female vagrant. The Traveller's vagrancy as well as her gender have so far been overlooked not only because the narrator's own goal is to cast attention onto the characters she meets, but also because Robinson's version of the female vagrant contrasts sharply with more stereotypical representations of female vagrants that dominated the eighteenth century.

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Robinson, *Selected Poems*, ed. Judith Pascoe (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> See Betsy Bolton, "Romancing the Stone: 'Perdita' Robinson in Wordsworth's London." *ELH* (64.3) 1997: 727-759 and Michael Wiley, "Romantic Amplification: The Way of Plagiarism." *ELH* (75.1) 2008: 219-240.

By the time Robinson was writing the poems that would go into *Lyrical Tales*, authors such as Henry Mackenzie and Laurence Sterne had established a familiar deployment of the “spectacle of suffering womanhood” in order to stoke male sensibility.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the revival of balladry brought with it the figure of the fallen woman, such as “The Nut-Brown Maid,” the abandoned pregnant country girl who becomes a stock figure roaming her local village. Romantic poets such as Robert Southey and William Wordsworth drew from these traditions when they cast their own female vagrants in *English Eclogues* and *Lyrical Ballads*, respectively.<sup>11</sup> They turn to this figure to help weave together the grand-scale issues England faced in the 1790s. In describing the plight of the female vagrant these writers can encompass life in the colonies, on the sea, in the city, in the towns, and the wastelands of British territory.<sup>12</sup> But the figure of the homeless woman complicates Wordsworth’s additional interest in poetic depictions of solitude in nature. Although his narrators and other figures, such as the unseen hermit of “Tintern Abbey” and

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<sup>10</sup> Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s: Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 5. Consider, for example, Maria of Moulins, who is supposedly demented with sadness for a lost love and the subject of both Tristram and Yorick’s lavish narrative descriptions in *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*.

<sup>11</sup> On this tradition in Wordsworth and Southey, see Wordsworth’s “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface” in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944) 329-334; Tim Fulford, “Fallen Ladies and Cruel Mothers: Ballad Singers and Ballad Heroines in the Eighteenth Century.” In *Eighteenth Century: Theory & Interpretation* 47, no. 2/3: 309-329; and Michael Wiley, “Romantic Amplification: The Way of Plagiarism.” *ELH* no. 1 (2008): 219.

<sup>12</sup> The term vagrant had become a catchall for various itinerant figures who may have some precarious or temporary form of housing or employment, often illegal trades such as fortunetelling and busking. “Traveller” also is a fluid term that encompasses various degrees of housing and employment status.

“The Recluse,” find “unforced access of grace,” as Morris Dickstein puts it, female vagrants leave us to ask: can someone who has been forced into isolation access unforced grace?<sup>13</sup> There’s a troubling irony in using an ostracized character to promote self-isolation. A female vagrant is not a hermit—she is rejected, not rejecting. Robinson’s poetry focuses upon this figure to interrogate this oversight in Wordsworth’s works. If for Wordsworth the hermit can serve as an analogue for the poet, Robinson associates her role as a female writer with the subject of the female vagrant.

Robinson’s terms establish this aspect of her poetic response to Wordsworth: she chooses the word “traveller” over “vagrant” to expose the ambiguity of the homeless woman’s status, to allow her itinerant female the ability to relate with, as well as contrast to, figures of other socio-economic backgrounds. More importantly, her preference for “traveller” suggests that a female vagrant never vacates the patriarchal system of her own accord. Robinson uses vagrant only once in reference to human subjects, opting for “traveller” or “trav’llr” thirteen times.<sup>14</sup> The words vagrant and traveller were both changing in the 1790s and signaled different attitudes toward unfixed figures on the horizon. Vagrant is rooted in the medieval sense of idleness—it indicated those who could and should work in the feudal system but did not. The word’s connotation of aimless movement has endured: the Middle English *vagaraunt*, wanderer, is derived from Latin

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<sup>13</sup> Morris Dickstein, “Wordsworth and Solitude” in *The Sewanee Review* 95, no. 2 (1987): 260.

<sup>14</sup> Robinson deploys the word “vagrant” to describe birds in “Miss Gurton’s Cat,” an acorn in “The Widow’s Home,” a lamb in “The Deserted Cottage, and “the GYPSY gang” (sic) of Roma migrants in “The Fortune-Teller.”



*vagari*, to wander.<sup>15</sup> Even today, its closest synonym is tramp, a noun and verb that both imply idle, even promiscuous wandering. Travel, however, was originally the same word as the Old French word *travail* – implying labor.<sup>16</sup> Travel assumed its sense of journeying at about the same time that *vagaurant* was emerging in Middle English. In Robinson’s poems, the Traveller is working, not only to survive but also to show readers what life “in the rough” for a woman is really like.<sup>17</sup>

That Robinson would try on a different persona to serve as narrator should hardly be surprising: a trademark of her career was her use of pseudonyms such as Maria Laura, Sappho, and Tabitha Bramble, and of course she was known throughout her earlier acting career as “Perdita.” What is more surprising is that she titled her *Lyrical Tales* with her real name and that critics have assumed she had fully shirked her habit of role playing in this volume. Stuart Curran was one of the first critics to highlight Robinson’s “abundance of voices,” vestiges of her acting days. Robinson’s choice of pseudonyms correlated with her formal experimentations, Daniel Robinson teaches us, but he indicates that her dropping of an “avatar” coincided with her reaching a level of virtuosity in *Lyrical Tales*.<sup>18</sup> More

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<sup>15</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Vagrant.”

<sup>16</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Travel.”

<sup>17</sup> Throughout this chapter, I choose the term vagrant in lieu of traveller or homeless. Traveller has changed more drastically in the years since Robinson was writing than the word vagrant, which continues to ground the contemporary reader in the material reality of this figure’s life without anachronistically wrenching our sense of her in a way the word homeless might.

<sup>18</sup> Stuart Curran, “Mary Robinson’s *Lyrical Tales* in Context.” *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994, 26. Daniel Robinson, *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame*, (New York: Palgrave, 2011), 60.

recently, Ashley Cross observes that the Traveller in the *Tales* functions as a Wordsworthian first-person narrator in three poems from *Lyrical Tales*. In contrasting *Lyrical Tales* with *Lyrical Ballads*, Cross differentiates a group of poems that focus on alienated individuals and interrogate Wordsworth's romanticizing of women's linguistic power. In this chapter I extend and redirect this argument by proposing that the first set of poems, those that feature the Traveller, are concerned with the ability of women to possess and control their own voices. Robinson leaves open the question of whether the Traveller is male or female, yet I find evidence that she is not only female, but more importantly, vagrant. In turn, this female vagrant narrator not only teaches us more about the reality of vagrancy but also serves as an analogue for the female writer working in a time when only male writers were deemed capable of reaching levels of genius.<sup>19</sup>

While I will demonstrate later my greater claim that she is vagrant through a close reading of "All Alone," my suggestion that she is female can be explained through two premises. First, though Robinson avoids using gendered pronouns, Romantic-era readers tended to view the works of female authors as autobiographical because women were considered incapable of conceiving male subjectivity.<sup>20</sup> Though Robinson may have disagreed with this presumption, she would have been aware of this bias within much of

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<sup>19</sup> Robinson herself was called an "undoubted genius" by Coleridge in a letter to Southey, however, Robinson protested in *Thoughts on the Condition of Women and on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799) that gender normally precluded female writers from being considered as such. For more, see Cross, 575.

<sup>20</sup> "It was assumed that women's writing revealed their lives," Cross writes readers' assumptions, "what they wrote was read as a mirror of their selves. While several women were able to exploit their experiences as women for economic gain, their reputations were thus also dependent on these narratives of self to the extent that their popularity could be defined only on such terms. Women's writings, then, embodied their reputations as women and not as Geniuses" (573).

her audience. Second, the narrator tends to behave in stereotypically female ways for a vagrant: she spies on and hides from strange, lone men on the landscape, and she attempts to care for the vulnerable or forlorn. While she is stereotypically feminine, she is not a stereotypical female vagrant, which is the distinction I will be examining here. The Traveller redefines the female vagrant figure as fully able to think and sympathize where stock representations had reduced these capabilities in women who happened to be homeless. Interpreting Robinson's narrator in this way illuminates her goals of reappropriating the female voice and of reasserting women's poetic authority in the volume.

By casting a female vagrant as the narrator, Robinson also rejects two dominant stereotypes of female vagrants circulating at the time, what I shall refer to in what follows as the hustler and the victim-turned-ghost. In rejecting these clichés, Robinson shows the female vagrant as a more realistic character with her own plight—a plight that is not redeemed by solitude in nature. "All Alone," the first poem of *Lyrical Tales*, inaugurates the themes of isolation and community that run through the volume. It also reveals who the narrator is and encapsulates Robinson's revision of the female vagrant stereotype. In subsequent poems in *Lyrical Tales*, such as "The Fugitive" and "The Hermit of Mont Blanc," we see this narrator struggle with hermetic male characters who endanger the Traveller (and one another). In one of her signature contributions to Romantic-era verse, Robinson has her narrator force the reader to question the worth, necessity, and even possibility of self-isolation. Rather, Robinson's Traveller/poet finds community, even in her alienation, and throws into relief the vanity of those who think they are ever really "all alone."

### **The Hustler and the Ghost**

Robinson's interpretation of the vagrant woman not only rejects the reputation that this figure inherits, but also deflates an otherworldliness of stock representations that Wordsworth inherited and amplified. Two stereotypical forms of the female vagrant had developed across the eighteenth century as the population of homeless women boomed.<sup>21</sup> In the first half of the century, the revival of balladry had revived the depiction of vagrant women as pathetic victims-turned-ghosts who roam the edges of the landscape, die tragically, and then haunt their jilting lovers.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the century, with actual vagrant women not so much haunting the periphery as crowding every street corner, the figuration of the female vagrant transformed, as I mentioned in the Introduction, into a conniving and opportunistic beggar who exploits parish relief.

Well before Southey and Wordsworth begin writing, the popular opinion of vagrants was strained by their ubiquity and their draining of community coffers. The female vagrant of the 1790s was linked with selfishness, promiscuity, laziness, and theft. We have seen how Francis Grose summarizes this sentiment by claiming of homeless women, even of those with small children, that "at best the beggar is a professional one."<sup>23</sup> But well before

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<sup>21</sup> Audrey Eccles, *Vagrancy in Law and Practice Under the Old Poor Law* (Surrey England: Ashgate, 2012), 213. About 68 per cent of the adult rough sleepers were female, Audrey Eccles reports, explaining, "The disadvantaged position of women and children emerges prominently; the eighteenth century vagrant was far more often female than had been the case in earlier periods or would become the case in nineteenth century."

<sup>22</sup> Fulford, "Fallen Ladies and Cruel Mothers," and Tanya Evans, *'Unfortunate Objects': Lone Mothers in Eighteenth-Century London*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> Francis Grose, *The Olio* (London: Hooper and Wigstead, 1796).

even Grose's 1796 essay, we see this depiction in works such as William Hogarth's "The Enraged Musician" from 1741, which features a haggish balladeer with a baby at her breast and in her left hand the lyrics of "The Lady's Fall," a contemporary street ballad. Hogarth, Tim Fulford suggests, was depicting a paradox seen commonly on London's streets. Londoners picked up on the dramatic irony of a vagrant woman, babe in arms, linking her plight with a woman who lost her child and died from heartbroken guilt (312). Contemporary accounts give us a sense of just how confusing and aggravating Londoners found the rising population of destitute women. The vagrant woman's pervasiveness was explained with cynicism, Fulford notes, so that she was just a version of the broader entrepreneurial spirit driving London, "a clever capitalist rather than a victim" (315). Simply giving shelter to a vagrant—which would ostensibly negate her vagrancy—became a crime in 1740. As the century wore on, this cynicism festered and vagrancy was viewed less as a temporary condition and more as a permanent state of being.

Southey and Wordsworth turned to the same ballads that vagrant women sang in order to complicate these figures and generate sympathy for them. But in doing so, these poets assumed another stereotype, one not so blatantly cynical, but problematic nonetheless. Far less than opportunistic, the vagrant woman derived from balladry is doomed and has little to no agency during her life, Tanya Evans explains (49). Many of the plots of ballads popular in the mid-century mirrored the historic moment (Evans 49). In examining more than 6,000 revived ballads, Evans finds most could in some way be sourced to the tales of a naïve maiden, often named Molly or Polly, who becomes pregnant by a young sailor; "Billy" or "William" then kills her and absconds to the seas, such as in the "The Gosport Tragedy." Killing a pregnant woman was not a constant element, but the

naive maiden, the absconding lover, and the vengeful ghost recurred frequently. The figures of the lovers, Evans notes, can be partly explained by historical conditions; wars, the growing import industry, and the increased ease of migration gave men many opportunities to abandon their struggling families. Readers might be familiar with the real-life sight of a forlorn, desperate woman, wandering the riverbanks where she and her lover had shared a tryst that had led to a pregnancy. In the ballads, these female characters react to their fall in ways that replay over and over again: regret and self-incrimination, suicide, death by broken heart in a shady grove, or madness that lands them in Bedlam. Though the ballad settings were gothic, the characters were from everyday life, and their fates were all too common.

Various Romantic-era writers, from Southey and Scott to Dickens, drew on this version of the female vagrant that saturated ballad tradition. In light of what they reject, we can easily see why this option might seem more enlightened.<sup>24</sup> But the supernatural past of these fallen women haunted their reception in Romantic-era writing. We can see Coleridge and Keats crafting versions for “Christabel” and “Lamia.” We find her elsewhere figured as a stormy power who threatens the lives of sailors, calling forth lightning and wind to bedevil her lost lover’s ship. Some, like the figure of Crazy Jane, brought infectious madness

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<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting for a moment that Robinson herself was identified as an opportunistic whore in pornographic material and scandal stories throughout her acting career that affected her reputation and efforts in her later literary career. See Laura Runge, “Mary Robinson’s Memoirs and the Anti-Adultery Campaign of the Late Eighteenth Century.” *Modern Philology* 101.4 (May 2004): 563-586. As Runge notes, “Robinson deploys the repeated image of her public self in order to revise the trope of whore and to emphasize the economic independence she gains by writing and acting. Consequently, a surprisingly confident voice of a professional female writer emerges alongside the tale of her seduction” (564).

and prompted those they haunted to go mad and commit suicide (61). Others brought along their crying dead babies to drive their lovers mad. Sometimes, but rarely, the ghost of a thwarted male lover haunted a remarried woman. Almost none addressed the recourses living women might find. “Such stories worked as warning to conniving Lotharios and as a comfort to betrayed women,” Evans writes. And while poets such as Wordsworth and Southey worked to tell these stories in new ways, they preserved the assumption that a woman’s power manifested in death rather than in life.

Wordsworth’s depiction of female vagrants in *Lyrical Ballads*, for example, is a vexed affair. On the one hand, he exposes the cruel treatment and circumstances faced by the poor, particularly the female poor, in “The Female Vagrant.”<sup>25</sup> Trying to speak from a woman’s point of view, he devotes 265 lines to her voice and story, drawing her closer to the reader and ensconcing her in situations of contemporary interest such as wars in the colonies and property loss due to enclosure. On the other hand, the peculiarity of the female vagrant—partially acquired from balladry and partially, as I argue below, amplified by Wordsworth—has lead critics to find his sympathy for the female vagrant compromised. The haunted atmosphere in the poem represents Wordsworth’s reaction to the increased priority of individualism, social mobility, and land development, writes Katey Castellano.<sup>26</sup> In this reading, the female vagrant serves as a living ghost who haunts the world on behalf

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<sup>25</sup> William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Fionna Stafford, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 32. The poem has its roots in Wordsworth’s Salisbury Plain poems, begun in 1793. In “Salisbury Plain,” Wordsworth casts a “female wanderer” near Stonehenge, indicating he imbued this character with the mystic from the start. See Stephen Gill, *The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>26</sup> Katey Castellano, “Romantic Conservatism in Burke, Wordsworth, and Wendell Berry,” *SubStance* 40.2 (2011), 79.

of her lost rural ancestors and their culture. This “arch anomaly” disrupts the normal picturesque narrative of a pastoral poem, according to John Axcelson, and reveals the chaos of time.<sup>27</sup> Embodying “an absence of temporality,” the female vagrant allows Wordsworth to sequester time to the margins of the poem as he paints a series of portraits, with time returning along with references to self at the very start and end of each work (657). In other words, the vagrant woman exists on another plane as a spectral double for Wordsworth himself, who wanders across the land in the here and now, feeling the threat of darkness, a formula which Robinson will reveal as unacceptable.

By transposing the female vagrant onto this plane, Wordsworth creates a tension between the reader and the character: the female vagrant becomes “truly strange,” as Fulford puts it. Wordsworth’s depiction of homeless women, in order to come close to the emotional complexity he wanted to preserve from old ballads, required a “narrative minimalism” that “dramatized their interiority in uncanny terms.” By never fully explaining their appearance, Wordsworth allows these female figures to elude judgment and also remain “truly strange, and therefore powerful” (Fulford 327). But the vagrant characters themselves never realize the power Fulford senses. Martha Ray of “The Thorn,” for instance, sees no change in attitude among her community, and the eponymous female vagrant derives no satisfaction from telling her tale to a stranger.

This peculiarity derives from the middle distance in which Wordsworth frames her—trapped in the reader’s gaze. She is closer than ever, but still held at a distance. She is true, but still “strange.” And, as is the case with the familiarly unfamiliar, she rises to the

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<sup>27</sup> John Axcelson, “The ‘Dial’s Moral Round’: Charting Wordsworth’s Evening Walk,” *ELH* 73.3 (2006), 654.



level of an archetype, associated with a sense of the eternal. This configuration has simultaneously social and literary consequences: It traps women in the role of object, rather than subject, so that they never gain a voice or find a home in the real or literary worlds. Robinson will return a voice to her, a step toward helping her find a home.

### **Photographing a Ghost**

To understand how Robinson's Traveller reinvents the female vagrant, we must first recognize certain limits of sympathy and realism she would have spotted in Wordsworth's attempt to emblemize this figure. Wordsworth exaggerates the inherited peculiarity in "The Female Vagrant" to the point that the title figure does not merely accrue stereotypical traits and behaviors from ballads but manifests as a biblical archetype, a trap from which Robinson aims to free her. Wordsworth alters the narrative frame and grounds the lyric in biblical imagery to elevate what is the basic narrative of the Polly-and-Billy ballad, and his allusions inflate the significance of her character as her situation becomes more and more desperate and intractable. Inside the frame, "The Female Vagrant" tells a story of what life might have been like for "The Nut-Brown Maid," the heroine of a classic ballad that regained popularity in the eighteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Wordsworth's female vagrant "artlessly"

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<sup>28</sup> "The Nut-Brown Maid" was included in Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, published in 1765. In the poem, a banished squire tells a baron's daughter that he must leave for the greenwood and that he doubts her fidelity while he is gone. She insists she is faithful and pledges to follow him despite the danger, and hardships she will face. After she pledges so many sacrifices, he reveals he is actually of noble birth, not banished, and he proposes marriage. Wordsworth singled Percy out for praise for these achievements in the 1815 essay prefacing his own imitations.

tells her personal narrative that records calamity after calamity.<sup>29</sup> The poem canvasses many of the social ills of late-eighteenth century Britain, focusing heavily on the trials faced by her father and her husband, rather than on the title character herself. The frame is narrow and intrudes only in the second and then the last four lines of the poem's thirty stanzas, but it has a crucial impact on the tale. The narrator calls our attention to the relationship between the narrative and the lyric by insisting that this tale is told "artlessly." His comment on the vagrant's narrative style generates more questions than it answers: are the lines as we read them her own or his "artful" restyling? Wordsworth would eventually claim, in the 1815 preface to his collected *Poems*, that the "the Narrator, however liberally his speaking agents be introduced, is himself the source from which everything primarily flows."<sup>30</sup> And, of course, in the 1802 version of the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, he advised that the incidents of the narrative come from "common life" while the lyric works to "throw over them a certain colouring of imagination" (Gill 596-7).

If in Wordsworth's "Female Vagrant" the narrator's lyric alters the main character's tale, he works to recast her as a biblical figure. The narrator claims she confesses to him, "But, what afflicts my peace with keenest ruth / Is, that I have my inner self abused," never indicating any moral injury (ll. 258-9). Without a clue as to how she abused her inner self,

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<sup>29</sup> "By Derwent's side my Father's cottage stood,/ (The Woman thus her artless story told)" (ll. 1-2) of "The Female Vagrant."

<sup>30</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 627.

her allusion to the Biblical Ruth fills the void and haunts the lines.<sup>31</sup> Ruth, like *The Nut-Brown Maid* and this poem's subject, also follows her family into dangerous and difficult situations and comes to serve as a female role model of selflessness and fortitude. The vagrant's father is exalted as a "master" and a "sire," spreading his nets and tending his flocks. Like God to Jesus, he commands his daughter to pray. At the same time, the vagrant claims, "From all hope I was forever hurled," using Milton's language to align herself with the devil (l. 169). When the narrator intrudes again at the end, he tells the reader, "She wept," using the famously short sentence of Jesus's crucifixion. In the last line we glimpse her afterlife: she will forever carry "the perpetual weight on which her spirit lay." The female vagrant roams from one Biblical archetype to another while at the same time roaming from one typical contemporary British tragedy to another.

The female vagrant's strangeness is no longer rooted in the sense that she will exact revenge as a ghost, but in a sense of sanctified eternity. Here Wordsworth participates in what Michael Wiley calls a "pattern of amplification" in his study of the reappropriations between Wordsworth, Southey, and Robinson as they reworked "Ruined Cottage" poems among others (229).<sup>32</sup> We see this amplification of a stock figure into an archetype in "The Female Vagrant" best in the poem's allusions to Eve in Eden. The description of the female

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<sup>31</sup> Wordsworth would later include a poem titled, "Ruth," about a similar vagrant girl, still depicted as a classical or biblical archetype, in the second volume of the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.

<sup>32</sup> Wiley examines variations of a similar poem—Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage," Southey's "The Ruined Cottage," and Robinson's "The Deserted Cottage"—to track ways in which the poets one-up each other. Wiley writes that Wordsworth generally only participated in these "patterns of amplification" with writers whom his "literary, social, and political interests" roughly coincide.

vagrant's world with her father encompasses a vast universe that contracts as they are cast out of their paradise:

By Derwent's side my Father's cottage stood,  
 (The Woman thus her artless story told)  
 One field, a flock, and what the neighbouring flood  
 Supplied, to him were more than mines of gold.  
 Light was my sleep; my days in transport roll'd:  
 With thoughtless joy I stretch'd along the shore  
 My father's nets, or watched, when from the fold  
 High o'er the cliffs I led my fleecy store,  
 A dizzy depth below! his boat and twinkling oar.

(ll. 1-9)

This stanza maps a self-contained world of oceans, cliffs, plains, and a cottage. All is “supplied,” as in Eden, until the property contracts to a “hereditary nook” after they lose their home (ll.4 and 44). Like the original tenants of Eden, they initially live in “thoughtless joy.” And, of course, there is the poet’s capitalization of “The Woman”: she is the only woman in the world of this poem.

While a great deal of attention has been paid to the voyeuristic narrator of “The Thorn,” we can see the same scopophilic attention here in a poem that ostensibly intends to generate sympathy for what had become an unsympathetic figure in late eighteenth-century England. Wordsworth crafts a tension between the desire of his vagrant figure to hide (in the “hereditary nook,” on the sea, in an outhouse, from the narrator’s face) and the desire of a frame narrator to examine her and capture her authenticity, as if photographing

a ghost. In other words, while Wordsworth places the female vagrant into the fore, he still keeps her distant. Her narrative effort to come to terms with her traumatic past is complicated by her suggestion that she did something wrong and the frame narrator's intrusion and wresting of the lyric. Wordsworth restrains himself from the full posture of a female subject and keeps the female an object in the frame. Even as the female vagrant becomes an "I," the narrative frame of the poem limits her subjectivity. By making the female vagrant a narrator, Robinson will stunt this scopophilic urge and force attention onto other figures, indirectly forcing our attention onto the female vagrant's words and relationships rather than upon her figure in the landscape.

### **Looking Back and Having Her Say**

Contrasted with Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, Robinson's broken narrative frames and her deflated, more realistic depictions of vagrancy in *Lyrical Tales* appear in greater relief. Robinson's vagrant narrator not only regains control of her own voice but allows other figures in her world to have some control over their own stories—this distinction is best revealed in Robinson's message that none of us is ever alone but "All Alone," a message about simultaneous individuality and community, particularly in the literary world. Unlike the narrator through whom all flows in *Lyrical Ballads*, Robinson frequently allows her narrator to interact with the "speaking agents" in a way that allows them to participate in the poems. This difference in narrative approach is established right away in "All Alone," in which Robinson rejects the inherited version of female vagrant as object and reinvents her as the narrator, a subject. Robinson amplifies her voice while deflating the characteristics

that would paint her as stereotypical or even archetypical. Aligned more with the lyric but still active in the narrative, the vagrant woman is never isolated or held at a distance that depicts her as beyond, or apart from, humanity.

In “All Alone,” the narrator encounters a child crying in a graveyard and encourages him to share his story and accept her sympathy. The child, wary of the narrator, tells a version of the Polly-and-Billy ballad, detailing how his father died at sea but only vaguely explaining his mother’s death. Similar to “The Female Vagrant,” there is a series of calamities, but they happen in shorter order and are more personal, less emblematic of the nation-state. The father dies at sea, and the mother and child lose their animals and then their home to lightning and flood. The town’s people ostracize them until the mother—professing the child won’t be left alone—inexplicably dies. Did a force of nature also kill her or did she jump from the cliffs where we last see the pair? Perhaps she hanged herself with the ozier bough that the child had been weaving? The setting recalls the scene of the “hereditary nook” in “The Female Vagrant”: waterside, cliffs, flocks, and cottage.<sup>33</sup> And like the child of the other poem, the boy is careful to defend his parent: he praises her fortitude and care. He repeats the word “still” to describe her devotion after each loss is recounted, revealing his awareness of the emotional strain his mother suffered: “And still my mother stay’d with me,/And wept by night and toil’d by day” (ll.75-6). But Robinson’s narrative moves much quicker than Wordsworth’s, and deflates the grandiose sense of the national or biblical. The calamities pile upon each other and rob the child at a much younger age.

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<sup>33</sup> Many critics have associated “All Alone” with Wordsworth’s “We are Seven,” but this poem also conflates images and themes from “The Female Vagrant” as well as “The Thorn,” inverting the infanticide story into an orphan’s story. Many poems in *Lyrical Tales* conjure two or more poems from *Lyrical Ballads*, creating a complex reflection of *Lyrical Ballads*.

Vagrancy here strikes literally and metaphorically like lightning. There's less room for memory and regret, and what little space there is for memory is intruded upon by the narrator who wants to hurry along the child's grief so she can make her own connection with him.

The conflict of the inner narrative is the death of the traditional version of the vagrant woman, whom Robinson fixes in her grave. This female vagrant, the orphan's dead mother, is no longer a question of erotic mystery, no longer a ghost. We sense from the child's tale that his mother deeply grieved her husband's leaving but also struggled to keep that grief from turning into derangement. Rejecting the choices of hustler or ghost, Robinson depicts the dead vagrant mother as vulnerable but valiant, having endured a series of losses with the child and struggling to survive as long as possible. The mother promises her child that he won't be left alone, but after her death, she does not return to him as a ghost. The child's insistence to the narrator that he is alone indicates that her presence is completely gone: her tale is told via the male orphan, and the reader experiences her pains through the child. In this way, Robinson protects the vagrant woman from the reader's gaze.

Meanwhile, in Robinson's narrator we find a reimagining of the female vagrant voicing the poem. She refers to herself as "The Trav'ler" (l. 8) and reveals herself to be vagrant through the level of detail she shares when describing the orphaned boy she spies sleeping in a cemetery. Unlike Wordsworth's narrator of "The Female Vagrant" who speaks to an unknown frame-narrator, Robinson's narrator directly addresses a familiar child. The poem works as a call-and-response, giving the child the last word and forestalling the narrator's ability to draw conclusions about the orphan's future. The narrator shares

minute details of what she has seen of the child's life before and after his mother's death. Her use of the words "oft" and the child's use of the word "still," along with the frequent turn to the imperfect tense, imply a sense of the ongoing. Her familiarity reveals that she too has endured the struggles of sleeping rough and must also be homeless: "And oft I hear thee deeply groan," she says of their nights spent in the graveyard (l.22). They seem as intimate as those who share a bedroom. We assume her breast, like the orphan's, "meets the gale," that her feet also are "wounded sore/with naked thorns," and that she also has endured the elements by day and night near him:

The rain has drench'd thee, all night long;  
 The nipping frost thy bosom froze;  
 And still, the yew-tree shades among,  
 I heard thee sigh thy artless woes;  
 I heard thee, till the day-star shone  
 In darkness weep—and weep alone!

(ll. 31-36)

The narrator's vagrancy is overshadowed by her fixed attention on the child, and the child's shared vagrancy keeps the narrator grounded in the moment rather than cast onto any mythological or archetypal plane.

At times, Robinson's Traveller blurs with an omniscient narrator, revealing the Traveller's sense of authority and her discernment about when and why to tell tales. For example, in "The Widow's Home," the narrator does not announce herself as explicitly as she does in "All Alone." Instead, she turns more toward the reader than the widow of the poem in order to connect more deeply with the reader, even as she protects the widow. At



first the narrator seems to be a different, omniscient narrator because she knows that the husband/father at the center of this tale has died at sea, even as she paints the bright and gentle picture of the mother and son unknowingly going on with their lives. Still, our Traveller is revealed as the narrator, within the first stanza of this tale. The “weary traveller” finds a “rude seat, with an ozier canopy” welcoming her (ll. 4-5). Her presence on the edge of the tale indicates, first, the kindness and openness of the widow who welcomes weary strangers. Second, there is the sense of routine with the imperfect tense as if the Traveller and the Widow are well acquainted. Our vagrant narrator may have learned of the father’s death from another source in her circuit. She does not tell the widow the sad news but confides it to the reader. Then she compares the widow’s warm home and the sailor’s unmarked grave to the cold grandeur of national monuments at the poem’s end. Here Robinson points toward the collective guilt of the nation rather than an isolated individual, but at the same time, she gives us an example of homosocial companionship, providing consolation and rehabilitation, rather than self-isolation.

### **The Dangers of Self-Isolation**

With her presentation of vagrancy in *Lyrical Tales*, Robinson offers a critique of the tendency by poets such as Southey and Wordsworth to exploit a figure forced into solitude to promote their poetic ideal of self-isolation. The critical understanding of Wordsworth’s espousal of isolation has long been established and qualified. Poems such as “Tintern Abbey,” “Lucy Gray; Or Solitude,” and “The Recluse” clearly broadcast his value of isolation. In isolation, Wordsworth (through his narrators) still communes with readers but shows

that a measure of solitude is necessary for “unforced access of grace,” as Dickstein puts it, which in turn fosters sincerity and honest self-exploration. (260, 263) At the same time, Wordsworth seems to self-identify with his female vagrant in problematic ways. Perhaps Mary Robinson read Wordsworth’s representation of the female vagrant in a similar fashion to Axcelson, who thought he was taking the liberty of seeing the female vagrant as an autobiographical subject.<sup>34</sup> Through several more Traveller poems Robinson works to reveal male self-isolation as a rejection of women and an endangering of self. Ultimately, we see Robinson not only promoting the benefits of community but also questioning the effectiveness and necessity of isolation, in real life as well as in artistry. The myths of the rugged individualist or the solitary genius are predicated upon exploiting the community and its “vagrants,” such as Robinson herself, who actually foster poetic growth and progress.

The Traveller becomes doubly rejected in “All Alone,” which dwells on the vagrant’s paradox of being perpetually alone and constantly exposed to other people. We see this as the Traveller desperately tries to connect with the child and we see it as the child feels vulnerable to unwanted attention, attempting to find a private space to grieve. The reader’s sympathies are torn between the Traveller, who encourages the child to share his story and accept her sympathy, and the child, who is wary of trusting the narrator. “I follow’d thee,” the narrator confesses to the child—she has watched him at all hours of day, she has heard

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<sup>34</sup> Robinson may have noticed many gender inversions in Wordsworth and Southey’s works in the late 1790s and took license from these experiments to overturn not just gender but also object-subject relationship of narrator and rustic characters. Curran observes several inversions in the back-and-forth of Wordsworth’s and Southey’s ruined cottage poems (Wiley 222).

him all night, she has mounted hills “up the woodland’s shad’wy way” in her desire either to protect or possess him (l. 127). We feel the narrator’s desperate need to connect, and we might admire her sympathy, but we also perceive the child’s fear and sense of threat when we realize the energy and distance the child is walking to escape this very kind of surveillance. This ambivalent relationship between narrator and child triangulates the reader: we sympathize with both while we see how each is mired in obsessive thought—her with him, and him with his loss. The child will not hear the narrator’s voice, rejects her presence, remains obsessed with his mother (the dead version of the female vagrant), and insists on his solitude even as we witness that he is not and need not be alone.

In addition to feeling rejected, the Traveller is endangered by male self-isolation. In “The Hermit of Mont-Blanc,” another “traveller” dies when mistaken for a threat. Our Traveller, the narrator, is summoned to the site by another image of welcome: “a tinkling bell/Oft told the weary Trav’ller to approach/Fearless of danger” (ll. 54-6). But a second traveller turns out to be a fleeing nun, the hermit’s lost love who had been sent to a convent when they were young. Robinson draws our attention to the dichotomy of a woman forced into seclusion and a man who chose it:

He, solitary, wander’d; while the Maid  
Whose peerless beauty won his yielding heart  
Pined in monastic horrors!

(ll. 152-17)

In the dark on his mountain, the sound of groans and the sight of a torch near his summit terrify the hermit. He wanders into the darkness, braves the night, and in the morning finds “some night traveller” dashed on the rocks with a trail of blood tracing her descent from

the summit. The traveller turns out to be his “darling Maid” who had been the only person to have remembered and loved him, according to our Traveller-narrator, who calls the hermit’s initial motive for self-exile “false Ambition” (l.14). Here, Robinson shows that the separate spheres in which these characters lived were only the result of the male figures’ choice to isolate themselves, at the peril of the women they left behind, including female writers on the literary plane.

Isolation proves dangerous for men, too. In “The Lascar” men are more directly threatened as two lone males on a dark horizon must determine their safety. Here the title character runs toward a “night-bewilder’d Traveller,” yelling, “Stop! Stop!” The narrating Traveller, spying from a dale, describes the nonverbal moment of terror between a Lascar and this other traveller before one reflexively kills the other out of fear of being robbed or killed:

The Trav’ler was a fearful man—  
 And next his life he priz’d his gold!—  
 He heard the wand’rer madly cry;  
 He heard his footsteps following nigh;  
 He nothing saw, while onward prest,  
 Black as the sky, the Indian’s breast;  
 Till his firm grasp he felt, while cold  
 Down his pale cheek the big drop roll’d;  
 Then, struggling to be free, he gave—  
 A wound to the Lascar Slave.

(231-240)

The suggestion that this other Traveller “priz’d his gold” indicates his difference from our initial female vagrant traveller, who must endure nights in the graveyard. The poem also reveals the strange sense of danger found in encountering other travellers, other versions of oneself. Robinson shows how the male traveller’s “struggle to be free” entails danger to the self or to others. Meanwhile, the female Traveller is forced into a darker, more covert form of solitude in order to remain safe.

It is significant that Robinson questions whether such solitude is even necessary to achieve a sense of grace or self-revelation. In “The Hermit,” the reader recognizes the irony that the hermit is sought for and found by a woman who was forced into isolation. She risks her life for companionship while he voluntarily secludes himself. In “All Alone,” the reader can see that the boy needs help and is not, as he insists, alone. That point becomes even clearer as we travel with the female vagrant and meet several other characters, such as the widow, who welcome her and share tales. The female vagrant is safest and happiest when in the company of others who narrate with her.

Robinson more specifically subjects this privileging of solitude to critique and proposes her own poetic agenda in “The Fugitive,” where we find a double for Wordsworth himself. Robinson returns to the circumstances of “All Alone” in “The Fugitive,” where the Traveller watches a young male vagrant from afar and lyricizes his presence. The narrator speaks like the self-styled Traveller of “All Alone,” revealing the extent of her surveillance while attempting to paint an accurate portrait of the fugitive. Her vigil lasts from sunset until the “morning sails upon the breeze.” Robinson interchanges the terms fugitive and traveller as the narrator describes the other vagrant and records his words from afar:

This world is now, to me, a barren waste,

A desart, full of weeds and wounding thorns,  
 And I am weary: for my journey here  
 Has been, though short, but cheerless." Is it so?  
 Poor Traveller! Oh tell me, tell me all—  
 For I like thee, am but a Fugitive  
 An alien from delight, in this dark scene!

(ll. 30-36)

The subject equates herself with the object. He becomes a Traveller and she a Fugitive. She empathizes with his exile, his loss of his family and desire to make sense of "calamity": "Who, that lives, Hath not his portion of calamity?" the narrator asks him. Just as she insists they are the same, she repeats her initial refrain, "thou art not alone!" (l. 53)

The narrator's depiction of the fugitive, the person fleeing to the countryside, resembles Wordsworth himself, or at least, his poetic self-construction. Robinson's "Fugitive" is "like a Truant boy," seated until dawn on a hill (l. 23). He is bent over "the page of legendary lore" and "pours the cherish'd anguish of his Soul":

He is young,  
 And yet the stamp of thought so tempers youth,  
 That all its fires are faded. (ll. 18-20)

This description might match the impression Wordsworth made upon the 41-year-old established poet when reading the younger poet's attempt at wisdom and refuge in "Tintern Abbey."<sup>35</sup> Here, Robinson fully turns the tables on "The Female Vagrant," making

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<sup>35</sup> Two years after the newer, younger poet Wordsworth published *Lyrical Ballads*, the older, more established poet Mary Robinson published *Lyrical Tales*. The closeness in title

the narrator the object of the female vagrant's gaze. But, because they are still trapped in their solitude, neither the fugitive nor the narrator earns or loses much power with the reversal. In this way, Robinson depreciates the "abundant recompence" that Wordsworth hoped to bestow upon his sister/reader and depicts his reflection in the countryside as the "blunted feeling" of a "poor Priest" (ll. 41-2). The solitude that the fugitive either seeks (such as Wordsworth from the city) or endures (such as a political exile) weakens his ability to make meaningful connections with other people. Robinson implies that by posturing himself as different and lone, the self-exiled male poet destabilizes his message of hope and peace, and in response she offers her own poetic agenda. At the end the narrator tells the fugitive, "Be cheerful! Thou art not a fugitive!/All are thy kindred" (ll. 75-6). Our Traveller encourages us to see that even as we are each all alone, this shared struggle also makes us all kindred.

### **All Alone?**

With this narrator's identity as a vagrant in mind, we can return to the first poem and find the theme of the volume and Robinson's current poetic agenda embedded in the title "All Alone." She fills her volume with Lascars, fugitives, hermits, grief stricken orphans, and heartbroken bridegrooms hiding in the woods and then steers her narrator toward them, to seek connection with them, and to propose the idea that solitude is only possible

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as well as topic irked Wordsworth enough to grumpily consider changing the title of his imminently due second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* to *Poems*.<sup>35</sup> The disparate number of first editions—her 1,250 to his 500 copies—certainly wouldn't have made Wordsworth more comfortable.

through the rejection of the presence of others. Must we ever actually be “all alone”? The first missed connection, between the vagrant woman seeking friendship and the grieving orphan in the graveyard, reveals two ostensibly isolated characters at a point of opportunity for bonding. They are each alone. They are together alone. The message works something like Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass,” but doesn’t deny that we are each working in our sense of rejection or alienation, some overindulging in that sense, others calling out to deaf or hardened ears. And the portrait works on two levels. As the Traveller, we see and hear how easily a vagrant woman passes as a reasonable and sensitive subject who attempts to work with and for segments of community where she successfully establishes a connection. And the Traveller works as a female poet attempting to find connection in the literary world but unnecessarily rejected by others who wish to indulge in isolation. The only real solitude seems to come in the state of being rejected, and in that state, there is still the possibility of connection.

Yet, despite Robinson’s call for community and her refrain that we need not be alone, contemporary critics accused Robinson of painting too bleak a picture. The *Monthly Review*, in a critique printed in September 1801, goes so far as to advise readers to avoid her “gloomy representations of our present state”: “She takes her harp from the willow on which it hung, to attune it to sounds of woe, to harrow up the soul, and to impress on the imagination the melancholy truth that human life is indeed a vale of tears” (as quoted in Pascoe 386). Perhaps the fact that Robinson was dislodging the sense of the eternal from the rustic scene was more daunting and depressing than bearable in the face of the actual “gloomy” “present state,” for if we are *not* fated always to have vagrant Eves roaming the



world, then we must actually do something to help them. Robinson's call to be cheerful because we are all akin is a step toward recognizing the vagrant population as human.

Perhaps the sense of kinship to which Robinson appealed was only gloomy to those threatened by it. At the same time that she was working on *Lyrical Tales*, she was attempting to create a kinship between female writers and artists via her *Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*. How do the conditions of being locked outside the realms of artistic genius and of being locked outside Romantic-era England's socio-economic constructs inform one another? The question reveals that the established literary world possibly was less skeptical of female genius than threatened by it both artistically and monetarily. Robinson recognizes Wordsworth's poetic self-construction as an isolated genius as a version of the role playing she mastered throughout her own life to get by—as an actress, as a royal mistress, as refugee from gossip, and as a poet of many noms de plume. She deflects the cynicism directed toward female vagrants back toward the men who also sing ballads for money, but legally and for more profit. To be sure, Robinson did publish nearly three times as many first volumes, but she still died soon after, deep in debt, and having spent some of her last months in debtor's prison, not too far from vagrancy herself.

## Chapter 2

### **“A Land of Housebreakers”: Vagrant Women in Romantic-Era Children’s Literature**

“Once upon a time,” Robert Southey’s original version of the Goldilocks story tells us, the home of three bears was broken into not by a curious child but by an old woman. A kindly old granny, perhaps? Hardly. “She could not have been a good, honest old Woman; for first she looked in at the window, and then she peeped in at the keyhole; and seeing nobody in the house, she lifted the latch,” Southey’s narrator, Dr. Doncaster recounts (328). The break-in is achieved easily enough, for the Bears would never have thought to keep their house locked. “The door was not fastened, because the Bears were good Bears, who did nobody any harm, and never suspected that any body would harm them.” The bears never do come to any harm, but it would be difficult to say the same of Southey’s young readers (and those being read to), who are learning very early on how to think about the behavior and character of homeless women. Southey’s “Story of the Three Bears,” geared for adult as well as child readers, essentially refashioned folklore motifs to make the case that vagrant women were not worth sympathy or charity. And in this he was not alone: his efforts were in fact the culmination of a rising tide of skepticism toward the poor that threads through Romantic-era children’s literature.

Like the governess of the Victorian era, beggar women haunt the periphery of juvenile fiction in the Romantic period. They talk to child protagonists, trick them, amuse them, and once in a while even protect and save them, as writers try to work out how they perceive vagrant women and what they want to teach children—and their parents—to do

when encountering them. While critics such as Ian Hancock have argued that the “gypsy woman” and her alter egos offer children a sense of suspense or romantic escape, there is also evidence to suggest that in the Romantic-era, these figures advanced the movement toward realism and played an important role in debates about how to treat the poor.<sup>36</sup> Children encountered real vagrants in various ways at this time. Homeless women of all ages, sometimes alone and sometimes in small groups would sneak into any kind of domicile to find privacy and shelter. A child might find one hidden in an outhouse, barn, church, hovel, empty house, or even his or her own home (Hitchcock 30). No matter the era, children are wont to sneak into these same places, and parents living in times of peak homelessness needed help preparing their children for these inevitable encounters.

Tales by John Newbery, Maria Edgeworth, Hannah More, and Southey written across the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries become, perhaps counterintuitively, less and less charitable as the nation moves toward social welfare reform. The fatigue of seeing more and more vagrant women who do not turn out to be idealistic “Goody Two-Shoes,” the increased encounters with these women in daily life, the growing expense of parish relief, and the real and rising fear of becoming vagrant help to account for the emerging pessimism that we find in treatment of vagrant women in Romantic-era children’s literature. In addition, the success and increased acceptance of children’s literature and the awareness of its dual audiences made writing tales regarding vagrancy an attractive

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<sup>36</sup> Hancock, I. “The Origin and Function of the Gypsy Image in Children’s Literature.” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 11.1 (1987): 47-59. Web. 18 Aug. 2016. For a good encapsulation of the contemporary question of how much to aid the poor, and of how critics differ on William Wordsworth’s take on this debate, see R. Clifton Spargo’s “Begging the Question of Responsibility: The Vagrant Poor in Wordsworth’s ‘Beggars’ and ‘Resolution and Independence’” in *Studies in Romanticism*. 39.1 (2000): 51-80. Web.

project for many Romantic-era writers. As a fresher genre, where writers realized they could both shape the attitudes of new readers while still reaching older ones, children's literature became an important site for directing public attitudes in regard to reform of poor laws.

To examine representations of homeless female characters is to comprehend the breadth of political engagement in the growing genre of children's literature. "At first sight, early British children's books were very seldom explicitly political," writes Matthew Grenby, despite the political turmoil of the 1790s and 1800s, but veiled political messages did indeed churn beneath the plots of many works, as suspected by loyalist conservatives such as Sarah Trimmer(1). Trimmer's *Guardian of Education* (1802-1806), "gave the impression that almost the entirety of children's literature was suffused with Jacobinism." Grenby validates Trimmer's fear, post facto, as he lists the number of Dissenting, Unitarian, and radical writers who also wrote children's literature at the time: William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, John Aikin, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Amelia Opie, Harriet Martineau. "Given that the rational Dissenting nexus was also intimately connected with radicalism in the 1790s," Grenby argues, "it would seem surprising if the children's books produced by the Unitarians remained untouched by politics" (1). In the decades since, others have particularized how revolutionary ideals found their way into children's literature. Andrew O'Malley argued that children's literature in the late eighteenth century not only transitioned from chapbook literature to didactic stories tailored for young readers, but that these works were designed to help middle-class children self-differentiate from the classes above and below. (17) Complicating O'Malley's argument, Susan Manley demonstrates that some writers, such as Maria Edgeworth, took aim at the middle-class

moralizer's attempts to control the poor, and according to Megan A. Norcia many more writers such as Wollstonecraft and Mary Martha Sherwood wrote stories encouraging middle-class children to spend their disposable wealth in a way that would benefit the poor. While Judith Plotz has examined how the material realities of child homelessness and child labor helped create the ideal of the Romantic "day-dream child," and Eric L. Tribunella shows that a child version of Balzac's flâneur threads through children's literature, little work has focused on how vagrant women are treated in children's stories of the Romantic period. In this chapter I develop the premise of Grenby's study to argue that more conservative writers quickly jumped into this arena and fought to corrode any sympathy for homeless female characters that had accumulated from previous works.

Earlier in the eighteenth century, John Newbery's *The History of Goody Two-Shoes* (1765) set the standard for publishing in children's literature, and developed a clear policy for how to view and treat destitute females: with open-mindedness and empathy. Before the unnamed writer of the narrative can begin, the "editor"—presumed to be publisher Newbery himself—tells the tale of Mr. Meanwell, a good tenant farmer and advocate for the poor, who was turned out of his home after Sir Timothy Gripes and Farmer Graspall conspire to unite all twelve of Gripes's rented farms and gut the parish relief. The chapters in *The History of Goody Two-Shoes* that follow document how Meanwell's daughter Margery is orphaned, abandoned, and then slowly rises through good works and diligence to become a lady. At the height of the book, Margery is suspected of witchcraft, and Newbery's young readers are told that "the true source from whence Witchcraft springs is *Poverty, Age, and Ignorance*; and that it is impossible for a Woman to pass for a Witch, unless she is *very poor, very old*, and lives in a Neighbourhood where the People are *void of common*

*Sense*" (127). He leaves no room for doubt about how he feels the poor should be treated, nor whom he is addressing.

Before Margery's narrative begins, this editor lectures adult readers on the threat that further enclosure of the land will create a nation of homeless beggars:

Do you intend this for Children, Mr. NEWBERY? Why, do you suppose this is written by Mr. NEWBERY, Sir? This may come from another Hand. This is not the Book, Sir, mentioned in the Title, but the Introduction to that Book; and it is intended, Sir, not for those Sort of Children, but for Children of six Feet high, of which, as my Friend has justly observed, there are many Millions in the Kingdom; and these Reflections, Sir, have been rendered necessary, by the unaccountable and diabolical Scheme which many Gentlemen now give into, of laying a Number of Farms into one, and very often of a whole Parish into one Farm; which in the End must reduce the common People to a State of Vassalage, worse than that under the Barons of old, or of the Clans in *Scotland*; and will in Time depopulate the Kingdom. (11-2)

Even though enclosure marched forward, Newbery's populist view became entrenched in British society. The popularity of *Goody Two-Shoes* cannot be underestimated. The work, long attributed to Oliver Goldsmith, was continuously in print from 1765 until the end of the nineteenth century. If few copies remain, Julian Roberts suggests that this is because children "read them all to pieces" (67).

Although Newbery's (or Goldsmith's) fears of increased vagrancy came true, his policy of empathy was challenged by later writers of children's literature, many of whom grew up reading his works. As the rates of homelessness continued to grow with the rise of

capitalism and with the struggles of famine and war, so did the burden of parish relief. Newbery's tenderhearted view of the poor could, in the Romantic era, clash with the strain that parish relief placed on a middle class that also struggled to avoid vagrancy. We can track this strain evolving into a deeper cynicism as we move across the juvenile stories of Maria Edgeworth, Hannah More, and Robert Southey. Their accounts of vagrant women show that as adults, they rejected the extravagant hopes that Newbery's *Goody Two-Shoes* could set up in young readers' minds.

Edgeworth scatters vagrant and Roma women throughout the short stories of *The Parent's Assistant* (1796) in order to teach children to discern vagrants who value hard work from those who only value the vanity of good luck. "In a commercial nation it is especially necessary to separate, as much as possible, the spirit of industry and avarice," writes Edgeworth, "and to beware lest we introduce Vice under the form of Virtue" (ix). Her treatment of vagrants is qualified: their value is determined by their character and habits, not their appearance or class. In this way, Edgeworth's definition aligns with a contemporary trend toward defining vagrancy by a person's actions rather than his or her living conditions. Some of Edgeworth's vagrant women are concerned only with grabbing easy money while others model diligence and unwavering honesty. Edgeworth helps children discern between the foolish, the sinister, and the kind-hearted vagrants they may encounter, and shows them what lessons they can learn from each.

Less discerning is Hannah More. The vagrant woman poses an active threat in More's *Stories for the Young Or, Cheap Repository Tracts: Entertaining, Moral and Religious*. In the tale of "Tawney Rachel" (1801), for instance, More depicts a vagrant woman who contrives to get into homes where she can steal or dupe the superstitious and gullible out

of their money. More's tale reinforces contemporary suspicions that most vagrants were "impostors" who chose their lifestyle and did not deserve or need charity, and in this way her depictions move even further from Newbery's sympathetic *Goody Two-Shoes*. In "Tawney Rachel," More details all the ways in which female vagrants and vagabonds cheat and deceive the kind-hearted, dim-witted, or desperate. Not only do such stories work to warn young readers to avoid vagrants, but the outcomes of her homeless characters also warn her readers to not become seduced by the easy "vagabond life." More's stories of Rachel and her family of vagrants—who encounter and cheat an ensemble of other parish characters such as the parson/magistrate, farmer, milkmaid, school boys, and widows—warn that sympathizing with or giving them charity amounts to sin. "All property is sacred," More's narrator insists, as she criticizes Rachel's intrusions and petty thieving. This moralizing reinforces the movement toward enclosure and more privatization of property while also answering for evangelical doctrines of predestination in an increasingly capitalistic world.

Finally, Southey's 1837 "The Story of the Three Bears," which features a vagrant woman in place of Goldilocks, lampoons the vagrant female in the most damning terms. Southey's home intruder is sneaky, vulgar, and filthy. This version differs in important ways from an 1831 manuscript by Eleanor Mure, which also features an old woman as the home intruder, but reorders the class structure of the tale: while Mure features an uppity noblewoman who is rebuffed by merchant-class bears, Southey rewrites the class dynamics to make his intruder a vagrant. At the close of Southey's tale, his narrator muses that the intruder jumped out of the bedroom window and should probably be locked up in the



House of Corrections, but he can't be certain what her fate was, "for a vagrant as she was, I cannot tell" (329).

### **"Little Employments"**

Newbery's treatment of vagrants is remarkably simple and clear: Vagrant people were poor people, and poor people deserved kindness and the benefit of the doubt. However, vagrancy in terms of the law and its manifestation on the street was far less clear. By 1714, after centuries of amassing and rewriting laws concerning vagrancy and poverty, the Old Poor Laws categorized illegal vagrancy in multiple ways and made some complicated exceptions.<sup>37</sup> C. J. Ribton-Turner's *A History of Vagrants and Vagrancy* (1887), a representative account of late-nineteenth century thought on homelessness, notes that the seventeenth-century settlement laws endorsed the rounding up of vagrants into workhouses or their transportation to colonial plantations, extreme punishments that led to an increase in people pretending to be mentally ill in order to avoid transportation (165; 172). But as officials began cracking down on people displaying forged insignia from Bethlehem Hospital (the infamous Bedlam), vagrants became more creative about how not to appear "idle," or to simply make money (depending on one's point of view). Aside from

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<sup>37</sup> 13 Anne, an act "for Reducing the Laws relating to Rogues, Vagabonds, Sturdy Beggars and Vagrants, into One Act of Parliament," identified a litany of vocations and avocations as vagrant, including wanderers, beggars, jugglers, bearwards, minstrels, players (actors), gypsies, and those pretending to be gypsies. According to Audrey Eccles, the law offered great discretionary power to justices of the peace in terms of punishment and even offered rewards for those who brought in vagrants—a particularly confounding addition considering part of the law deemed "collectors" for the prisons or gaols to be vagrant themselves (6).

military men, “pedlars, petty chapmen, and tinkers” were overlooked from this expansive definition of vagrancy but were included in others.

Vagrancy had become intensely taxonomized. The breadth and depth of related statutes continued to expand over the next century. Ribton-Turner includes in his history an index specifically for types of vagrants that distinguishes between beggars or rogues and vagabonds. These become further classified, with beggars divided into the categories of “afflicted,” “distressed” or “religious.” Meanwhile, “rogues” and “vagabonds” splinter off into several branches under the major rubrics of “cheats” and “sharpers”; “sham and vagabond employments”; “fortune tellers”; “professors of palmistry and physiognomy”; “prostitutes”; “proglers for girls”; “rapparees and Tories”; “thieves”; “instructors of thieves”; and “retired thieves.” Even under the category of retired thieves there are subclassifications (“archisuppots,” “upright men,” “writers of begging letters or petitions,” and “jack or jarkmen”). This cluster of categories and subcategories give some indication of just how confusing the street scene was for the settled middle and upper classes. It also indicates how much migration was occurring across the nation, and how frequently people encountered strangers. The number of livelihoods, no matter how frowned upon or even criminal, was multiplying as people out of “legitimate” work searched for ways in which to make money and not appear blatantly idle.

In *The Parent's Assistant*, Edgeworth braves the subcategories and complications of vagrancy that Newbery elides. In doing so, she complicates the portrait of the female vagrant through various representations. In “The Orphans,” for instance, the titular heroes are pestered by a superstitious, lazy vagrant called Goody Grope, who extorts them out of the money that keeps them just out of vagrancy themselves. In “The Barring Out,”

meanwhile, a nouveau-riche boarding school boy recruits a fortuneteller to con help him con his way to the head of the class. In the end, the fortuneteller steals from him, threatens the health of a community with a feverish virus, and ends up in jail. With this imprisonment, the old order of the community is restored and the boy learns to work hard and to fit in. But Edgeworth does not flatly condemn all vagrants. In “The Basket Woman,” an honest, hardworking vagrant woman helps save two children and is rewarded for her honesty with the capital to expand her weaving business and apprentice the two children. Edgeworth even manages to find forms of vagrancy that were not already labeled and that defy efforts to distinguish some jobs as real and others as “sham.” Perhaps most importantly, she shows readers how many vagrant people were honestly searching for new ways to be useful in order to make money and how con artists came from various classes to prey as much upon the poor (if not more) as they did upon the middle and upper classes.

The first and last of the sixteen tales in Edgeworth’s *Parent’s Assistant*, “The Orphans” and “The Basket Woman,” specifically address the survival stories of children on the verge of vagrancy who use ingenuity and team work to survive. In the first tale, which closely mirrors *Goody Two-Shoes*, an old widowed spinner dies, leaving her four children to fend for themselves. A greedy land agent evicts the orphans from their home, but Mary, the oldest child at twelve, convinces him to allow her family to squat in the ruins of an Irish castle on his employer’s land. Though she is so nobly self-reliant that she refuses to ask her poor neighbors for help, they assist the children anyway, helping the children build a hovel in an enclosed portion of the castle. The narrative then follows a formula that repeats several times: Mary and her siblings make one honest endeavor and thus are rewarded with a new and better form of work. Ultimately they are well enough off to rent a cottage.

But just when this relief is in sight, a chimney crumbles in their castle/hovel, revealing a pot of old gold that attracts the treasure-digging Goody Grope. Their fate at this point becomes surprisingly complex: the land agent essentially steals the fortune they try to return to the rightful landowner, while Goody Grope extorts all their savings by threatening to dig for more gold and precipitate the fall of their already crumbling hovel. At last, with the help of the vicar's educated and kind-hearted daughter's, the land agent is found out, the orphans are rewarded a cottage by the landowner, and Goody Grope is left to lament her fate.

In the first instance, this tale is a heavy-handed endorsement of honesty and hard work. A younger reader likely would be impressed by the dialogue and the narrator's outright endorsements of the value of labor. For example, at the end of the tale, Goody Grope cries out a lengthy lament about her bad luck. But Betsy, the postmaster's daughter chides, "Mary has been working hard, and so have her two little sisters and her brother, for these five years past; and they have made money for themselves by their own industry—and friends too—not by luck," (393). The narrator also paints a happy scene of the village children rushing from school to Mary's hovel to help her make a special shoe she has invented for the folks in service at the vicarage. "All who could get employment were pleased," the narrator reports, "for the idle ones were shoved out of the way" (380). Over and over, Mary has a chance to ask her benefactresses, the vicar's sensible daughters, for money, but she only ever asks them for materials with which she can work more effectively. Still, Edgeworth seeds the tale with indications that charity is still important and that luck does in fact exist.

Older or more thoughtful readers will see Edgeworth's subtle messages about not relying solely upon work. The children's widowed mother at the tale's start dies after she "overworked herself at last," and from her deathbed she wishes, "you'll find some friend—some help—orphans as you'll soon all of you be" (370). The story details a series of steps toward middle-class safety, little vignettes of happy industriousness, until the castle in which the orphans are living begins to fall apart. Their fates too fall apart after they have worked a great deal and earned a sufficient amount to keep them comfortable. Once they approach real wealth, their situation becomes precarious again: the older and keener the reader, the more likely he or she will catch this contrast between a capitalist economy and the simultaneous crumbling of the traditional landed system.

The more sophisticated reader also will find this level of complexity in Edgeworth's portrayal of Granny Grope, who turns out to be more like Mary than is apparent. Ostensibly Goody Grope is a "bad" character in the tale. The younger reader would hang her understanding of vagrancy upon the narrator's descriptors like "provoking" and "tormentor." But a more sophisticated reader—even one at the age of twelve, as Mary is—might catch the comparison Edgeworth makes between Mary and Goody. Goody was about the heroine's age when she heard a prophecy that she would find treasure within twenty miles of her "bog." She too was a destitute child. But she didn't have a mother like the tale's widow to model or preach the value of hard work and to make a dying wish for her to receive kindness. A third vagrant is hidden in Goody Grope's past—a fortune-teller who preyed upon the child and set her on the wrong path. In fact, Goody Grope is justified when she cries out at the end of the tale:

Bad luck to me! bad luck to me!—Why didn't I go sooner to that there castle? It is all luck, all luck in this world; but I never had no luck. Think of the luck of these childer, that have found a pot of gold, and such great, grand friends, and a slated house, and all: and here am I, with scarce a rag to cover me, and not a potato to put into my mouth!—I, that have been looking under ground all my days for treasure, not to have a halfpenny at the last, to buy me tobacco!

(393)

Edgeworth explores the complexity of Goody Grope's bad fortune of not having a role model who would have taught her to value hard work over luck—a role this story might intend to provide for other children in a position as vulnerable as Goody Grope's. Fortunetelling in general was made illegal in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but a century earlier, a 1531 statute made it expressly illegal for "outlandish people calling themselves Egyptians" (what came to be known as "gypsies") to use palmistry to tell fortunes (Cressy 49). Laws like these simultaneously policed immigrants and vagrants as well as protected the gullible against fraud. We meet a contemporary fortune-teller in More's "The Barring-Out," in which a woman spies on children, makes up fortunes that children want to hear, cons them as long as possible, and then flees the neighborhood. Goody Grope, readers would recognize, was still under the influence of her fortuneteller about fifty years after first hearing her "prophecy." The narrator tells us she has squandered her wealth and lost her shelter not only to dig for treasure but in buying alcohol and tobacco. We might recognize her today as possibly mentally ill, addicted, or both. To the child reader of Mary's adventures, however, she is merely the type of vagrant Mary is toiling to avoid becoming. But she has heeded her

mother's counsel to be kind as well as diligent. Before being extorted, Mary gives Goody Grope one of her best potatoes and a cup of milk. She is predisposed to value charity and feel kindness for the likes of Goody. It is only when Goody puts her self-interest first that Mary's benevolence erodes into a desperate desire to avoid Goody and all that she symbolizes.

Edgeworth not only shows the reader more complex versions of the female beggar, but she also instructs different kinds of readers in how to perceive and even endure vagrancy. Mary, like Goody Two-Shoes, raises herself and her family from poverty. But she is more realistic than Goody Two Shoes: she does not magically learn to read, but barter with a schoolmistress to get an education. She uses the lingering hours of the day to teach her sisters by the light of her brother's homemade rush candles rather than roaming the countryside, teaching children above her station to read. She never marries a rich man, but merely gets a comfortable cottage close to where her brother works in service. Without the strain on plausibility upon which *Goody Two-Shoes* relies, the high points for readers of Mary's tale are the moments of ingenuity: the littlest girls find a way to make money ripping rags at a paper mill, the older brother makes rush candles using reeds and grease drippings, and Mary's hemp-heeled shoes make service life quieter and cleaner. Even the castle-turned-hovel would fill children with a sense of achievable empowerment. The "little employments" offer an alternative to the litany of those vagrant occupations that Ribton-Turner indexes. They also open minds to how the vagrant experience could be both legitimate and helpful.

We find another set of orphans in "The Basket Woman" who invent "little employments" and are rewarded with larger employments at the story's end. Again we

meet orphans on the verge of vagrancy trying to return money to a rightful owner, and a middle-class man in “legitimate” work tries to rob them. The basket woman, another type of vagrant, intrudes upon the scene at the plot’s crisis, just as Goody Grope does in “The Orphans.” Yet, this time the vagrant woman effects the children’s happy ending rather than making their situation more precarious. If a modern reader of “The Basket-Woman” might wonder, “What is a basket woman?” a reader in Edgeworth’s time would probably first wonder, “Which kind?” The label points to a complex figure. Ribton-Turner does not index the basket woman neatly, and his unusual uncertainty about this figure suggests that vagrant women were much harder to categorize than vagrant men. Men tended to group together and choose a method by which to get by, but the character of an individual woman could not be easily discerned by the company she kept. And the significance of a basket was confounding as well. Take, for example, an 1839 confession by a thief:

For the last four years, up to 1839, I have “travelled” for a maintenance. I carried a covered hawker’s basket, with an oil case on the top, with cutlery, trinkets, braces, Birmingham fancy goods, buttons pearl, bone, and wood; it was the excuse for traveling. There are cant words for everything you use or do. I have seen some old cant in print, but it is nothing to the cant now used. There are three sorts of cant, the gypsies, the beggars (such as pretended sailors and others), and the thieves. (245)

He goes on to tell how many of the vagrants refused to steal or made a living turning in other thieves. He also confesses that he stole fruit and then sold it in his basket. Males with baskets, traveling together, were categorizable and used some form of “cant” that would



help shroud them from the law but also help identify them and their habits to one another. A female with a basket, however, tended to go alone, and was a complicated sight.

The purpose of her basket was also complex, but it did signal her vagrancy under the law, regardless of her living conditions. A 1773 law ruled that Irish basket carriers could be arrested as vagabonds and sent to the House of Industry (Ribton-Turner 692). In Ireland, many older women with baskets were destitute—having come from England to make money for their children back home, they now only used the baskets as props to avoid being seen as merely idle beggars (Ribton-Turner 270). In England or Ireland, she might be a “bawdy basket,” for which Ribton-Turner offers two very different accounts. First, she might be selling “indecent ballads,” or she might be bartering notions and trinkets to maids in exchange for bits of food when the master or mistress was away. On the most literal level, a basket woman might actually be making and selling baskets and woven-goods—which would seem the most industrious and legitimate version of the basket woman but which is labeled by Ribton-Turner as a gypsy (497). Edgeworth draws upon these many kinds of basket women in order to teach children about the relativity of vagrancy and of morality and, I think, to comment on the injustice of laws that categorize vagrants in such reductive ways.

Another example of this lesson in relativity, “The Basket Woman,” starts out as an inversion of “The Orphans.” An old spinner adopts two vagrant children after their father, a beggar, dies. She teaches the children to “scotch” passing carriages: placing rocks behind their wheels when they reach the top of a hill, giving the horses a rest before moving on to nearby Dunstable. For each chaise, the children receive a halfpenny from the travellers. Again, their ingenuity leads to ambiguous fortune: Paul invents a “scotcher” by attaching a

wooden block to the end of an old crutch, which makes their job easier. A gentleman distracted by this scotcher mistakenly gives them a guinea, and the children, realizing the money is dishonestly earned, set off for Dunstable to return it.<sup>38</sup> At an inn-yard, the children encounter a landlady, a hostler, a waiter, postilion, and a basket woman, all busy and posing a confusing scene for our heroes. The waiter and postilion treat the children dismissively but the hostler advocates for them to enter the yard. A gentleman's servant at the inn and the postilion contrive to steal the guinea while the children help a traveling basket woman who has spilled her basket full of colorful woven hats, boxes, and slippers. For their help, the basket woman sets out to reveal to the gentleman inside that both he and the little scotchers were cheated, leading to the immediate dismissal of the postilion and servant, with a guinea's worth of larks on the table and claret spilled in surprise.

When the children are promised as apprentices to the basket woman, again, the most obvious moral is to work hard and support the community, but the tale also critiques class assumptions and warns children that character is not correlated with social station. In both tales, the middle-class character strives to cheat the rich and blame the poor. The land agent in "The Orphans" steals the gold buried under the landowner's ruined castle and blames the orphans. In "The Basket Woman," the criticism of class is more complicated: the inn-yard folk are on equal footing but each servant treats these vagrant children differently. Edgeworth establishes here for child readers that honesty and kindness are relative to personal character, not to any vocation or class.

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<sup>38</sup> Edgeworth repeats the effort by poor children to return money to the wealthy. She might be, on the one hand, teaching her poorer child readers what to do when they encounter lost money, or on the other hand, showing adult readers an alternative view of the poor.

Throughout *The Parent's Assistant*, the vagrant female's status emerges as more complicated than in Newbery's *Goody Two-Shoes*. Her financial state is fluid. Her disposition and character are diverse. She is simultaneously upwardly bound, mired in mental illness, and a contented charlatan. Edgeworth depends upon the effectiveness of realistic portrayals because in many cases her young readers were already familiar with real-life vagrant women. She argued that not only do children, be they "in public schools or private families," become bored by the conventions of fantasy, but that it is the writer's obligation to present the world as children see it lest she undermine any practical lesson of industry and morality. As Edgeworth economically puts it, "There is a great deal of difference between innocence and ignorance" (ix).

### **"Clear the country of such vermin"**

Hannah More did not mind seeming heavy handed. In *Stories for the Young* (1801) she moves from Edgeworth's clear-eyed assessment of vagrant women, and even farther from Newbery's sympathetic view of poor women vilified by ignorant country folk. In "Tawney Rachel," More paints the vagrant woman as an active threat, a heartless and cunning predator who uses her intelligence to prey upon the desperate and less intelligent. Most importantly, for More vagrancy is a choice and giving money to vagrants is a sin. Rachel's tale not only serves as a warning to young women to avoid vagrant women and to avoid becoming vagrants themselves, it also functions as a primer in the ways of the con artist. More schools her readers in all the ways vagrant women will try to dupe victims, particularly as fortune tellers, and she prepares her readers for their approach. To More,

the best approach is not sympathetic care, but keeping the vagrant woman out of the house and in full view of the public, where she can be policed.

We meet “Tawney Rachel” after first reading stories about her husband Black Giles and his “bad boys.”<sup>39</sup> Rachel is barely a part of the family, only coming home to their hovel on Sundays to wash clothes. The rest of the time she travels far from her place at the edge of the parish. She also carries the typical wares of a basket woman with laces, ballads, and cabbage nets to sell on the street as a guise for her more lucrative role as a fortuneteller. Rachel’s main goal is to get inside the homes of superstitious and naïve women left alone. She first cons Mrs. Jenkins out of five gold pieces when she promises to reveal to this farmer’s wife how she can find treasure buried in her cellar. Next she attempts to con milkmaid Sally Evans out of half her twenty-pound inheritance/dowry when she teams up with a wandering gardener who wants to steal Sally’s heart from a hard-working and honest farmhand, Jacob.<sup>40</sup> When the gardener double-crosses Rachel, her ways are exposed but not before Sally dies poor and broken hearted. In the final part of the story, Farmer Jenkins returns to charge Rachel with defrauding his wife. Rachel is arrested and transported to Botany Bay for robbery.

In narrating this arc that ends in transportation to a penal colony, More emphasizes that vagrancy is a lifestyle choice, repeating how “prudent” and intelligent Rachel and Giles are. She leaves no room for sympathy for the two main characters and little for other vagrants as well. In fact, one might be impressed, even intimidated, by Giles and Rachel, but

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<sup>39</sup> More identifies Rachel by her complexion just as she does Rachel’s husband “Black Giles,” indicating More’s concept of vagrancy conflated anxieties about race and foreign cultures.

<sup>40</sup> Due to seasonal unemployment, milkmaids were often unemployed and relied heavily on begging to survive the year (Hitchcock 192).

not sympathetic: “They had a sort of genius at finding out every unlawful means to support a vagabond life” (208). Rachel’s shrewdness is not merely dictated by the narrator but demonstrated in the efforts she goes to in order to work as a fortune-teller. She seems to enjoy her vagrant life much more than her home life and responsibilities as a mother. In the tale of Black Giles, where Rachel is first introduced, More tells us she is a “wretched manager” who never mends her children’s clothes. The only time she ever spends at her home—a “mud cottage, with the broken windows stuffed with dirty rags, just beyond the gate which divides the upper from the lower moor”—is Sunday morning when she does her own washing (not her children’s) and mixes up diluted bottles of peppermint water to hawk as medicine (181). More imagines Rachel wandering far and wide, seeking out new villages to pester and then laying in wait for the right mark. “She was too prudent to go twice to the same house,” More tells us, and so Rachel “contrive[s]” to get Mrs. Jenkins just when her husband is in the field and the other maids are out haymaking (189). As her scam unfolds, Rachel must think through exactly how long it will take before Mr. Jenkins would return and demand something from the cellar, thereby forcing Mrs. Jenkins to reveal the fortune-teller’s visit, in order to make a safe getaway. Her victims are superstitious and foolish, but Rachel is always calculating and deliberating: she chooses her life of crime.

More’s calumnies against fortune-telling vagrants like Rachel are aligned with a typical view of vagrants at the time. Take, for example, Robert Burns’s 1785 ballad “Jolly Beggars” (which Ribton-Turner offers as an examples of the “imposture” of begging):

What is title, what is treasure,

What is reputation’s care?

If we lead a life of pleasure,

'Tis no matter how or where.

(632)

More, like Burns, seems to buy into a growing notion that the current charity and welfare system only encouraged people to remain vagrant. The Reports of the Bettering Society railed against workhouses, which were more comfortable than sleeping rough, because they spread, "THE INFECTION OF IDLENESS AND IMMORALITY throughout the land" (Roach 69). And this perception is not completely unrealistic. Just as the line between working and begging was blurred, so was the line between begging and thieving, according to Timothy Hitchcock (51). Not all vagrants were victims of circumstance, and even some who fell into vagrancy took to the life. The popularity of *The Beggar's Opera*, Hitchcock writes, led to many men adopting the life of a thief—Hitchcock cites the example of Paul Lewis, a convicted highwayman, who cited lines from the opera at his execution (212-3). Still, most "imposters" were men, while women with children in tow were legitimately poor and descended through the stages from desperately seeking any work to desperately seeking any charity, to finally turning to crime.

One variety of "impostor," the fortuneteller, blended rather than blurred the states of begging, working, and thieving. The attitude toward fortune-telling and witchcraft was mixed in the eighteenth century, with many people becoming aware of the potential for fraud while a great many others still harbored faith in these practices. The Witchcraft Act of 1735 outlawed "pretended" use of "witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment, or conjuration" [sic] in addition to fortune-telling (Boaz 1). At the same time, the act prohibited victims from prosecuting "actual practice of witchcraft." In other words, the law presumed most people had seen through these practices when in actuality, many did not. "Well into the nineteenth

century,” Boaz writes, “many people in Britain continued to assert that they had been bewitched” (4). In consequence, if a fortune-teller got away with defrauding someone, that victim had no recourse. Boaz notes that these laws were created with the intent of protecting society as a whole, not individual cases. Witches, fortune-tellers, palm readers, and occultists were arrested and imprisoned for the greater good, not to punish individual cases of fraud or theft. “The central purpose was to create an obligation to work,” Boaz writes (5.) By the end of the century, however, the focus began to shift toward protecting individuals. The Society for the Protection of Vice formed in 1802 in order to protect individual victims of fortune-telling fraud, and the 1824 Vagrancy Act added the clause “to deceive or impose upon his majesty’s subjects” to its prohibition of “crafts” such as palmistry and fortunetelling (5).

Perhaps this shift in legal focus from the nation to the individual reflects a drop in the number of women turning toward these careers, or perhaps a decline in the number of potential victims still swayed by occult practices. In either case, this shift is reflected in Newbery and More’s accounts of women accused of occult powers. In Newbery’s *Goody Two-Shoes*, the community accuses a woman who has not self-identified as a fortune-teller or a witch. This much Newbery and More’s stories have in common: both authors feature intelligent vagrant women and both authors warn children not to believe in witchcraft. But Newbery warns children against following the group impulses of the community that leads to punishing an innocent woman. “And they have taken up Mrs. Margery then, and accused her of being a Witch, only because she was wiser than some of her Neighbours!” he writes. He implies the community was merely jealous of this vagrant woman, who had taught so many of the local children and was on the verge of respectability. She is a threat to the

order of the community, and the collective tries to restore order by accusing her of witchcraft. Newbery's sympathies lie with the vagrant woman, and he urges children to place theirs there as well. His concern is helping children not be afraid of witches and he resolves this concern by exposing to children that witchcraft is an invention of ignorant and petty adults.

More's "Tawney Rachel" is more localized. Newbery has told the tale of a vagrant who through industriousness rises up, a case one would think More would endorse. But More rejects this version and tells a tale of a self-interested charlatan. Her self-constructing fortune-teller travels far to find a potential victim. She is interested in getting out of the public space and into a private space where she can delude her victims. The victims already believe in and value witchcraft, rather than fear it, and Rachel merely seizes upon the opportunity to play the role of the witch. Sally celebrates Rachel as a witch when her fortune—rigged for her to meet a true love with the initials R.P.—seems to come true: "Robert Price! that is R.P. as sure as I am alive, and the fortune-teller was a witch. It is all out; it is all out! O the wonderful art of fortune-tellers!" she tells herself (218). Where Newbery chastises the general public for falsely condemning an honest woman with no power, More condemns the individual victim who bestows the fortuneteller with false power. She makes no effort to condemn or reform the vagrant woman—to More, Rachel is past hope. More is more interested in reforming would-be victims of these crimes. Her ending, of course, condemns Rachel severely, sentencing her to jail and then to transportation, just to make sure that readers do not find this way of life alluring. However, More spends extra time emphasizing Sally's complicity and weakness:



I have thought it my duty to print this little history, as a kind of warning to all young men and maidens, not to have any thing to say to cheats, impostors, cunning women, fortune-tellers, conjurers, and interpreters of dreams. Listen to me, your true friend, when I assure you that God never reveals to weak and wicked women those secret designs of his providence, which no human wisdom is able to foresee. To consult these false oracles is not only foolish, but also sinful.

(219)

Sally's sinfulness would then become clear when the reader recalls the extent to which she invested her time and faith in the occult. Before even meeting Rachel, Sally, we're told, indulged in dream-books, picked up horseshoes while going to church, "would rather go five miles about than pass near a churchyard at night," and "had so many unlucky days in her calendar, that a large portion of her time became of little use" (212). More insinuates that Sally's superstitions enable a certain idleness that is akin to vagrancy, a vagrancy of morality.

Rachel and Sally's story serves as an example of what other anti-witchcraft advocates foresaw as a national threat. While the law was being reconsidered to address individual cases, many activists like More were worried about the seductiveness of these types of careers. "Some anti-'gypsy' activists argued that their way of life was infectious," writes Boaz, "and that if not suppressed, they would encourage others to abandon their hard-working attitude" (6). Enabling prosecution by individuals would possibly dissuade others from turning to these livelihoods. This threat appears in More's *Strictures on the*

*Modern System of Female Education* (1799), which worries that if young women do not preserve their religious values and chastity, common sense cannot prevail:

I do not wish to bring back the frantic reign of chivalry ... But let us not forget ... that it was religion and chastity, operating on the romantic spirit of those times, which established the despotic sway of woman...let her remember that it is the same religion and chastity which once raised her to such an elevation, that must still furnish the noblest energies of her character.

(*Strictures* 19-20)

More prescribes a life of monitoring and helping the poor, through good works rather than monetary aid, which in turn regulates women, and thus regulates the behavior of men upon whom More believes young women hold such “influence.” “[Unregulated] women were just as dangerous as the unregulated poor,” writes Emily Rena-Dozier, “True charity involved supervision and instruction” (211). More interpreted the Bible as warning against giving too much, lest the charitable have nothing left to give. “[But the Bible] seems to intimate the habitual attention, the duty of inquiring out all cases of distress, in order to judge which are fit to be relieved,” More notes in the *Strictures*.

To More, neither Rachel nor Sally observes her true duties as a woman. They are thinking only of themselves rather than monitoring and caring for the community. However, More’s narrator is modeling true charity by exposing what transpires in Mrs. Jenkins and Sally’s homes to the public. It is her “duty” to share the tale, just as it is Farmer Jenkins’s duty to track Rachel down and turn her in: “He had taken pains to trace her to her own parish: he did not so much value the loss of the money, but the thought it was a duty he owed the public to clear the country of such vermin” (219). Mr. Wilson, the parson and

magistrate of her village, who has been trying to reform Giles and his boys, sentences Rachel to transportation. As More tells us in her *Strictures*, some “cases of distress” are not “fit” to be helped.

### **“Not in its place”**

In the arc from Newberry forward, Robert Southey offers the most damning treatment of the vagrant woman, portraying her as a filthy, encroaching villain against a family of humble bears. While More wants to keep the vagrant woman in the public eye where she can be policed, Southey emphasizes exclusion, warning readers to lock her out of our homes. As the public became increasingly aware of distinctions among vagrants and more callous toward their plight, a destitute person of no fixed abode could no longer just pretend to be insane or a fortune-teller to keep out of the workhouse or off the ships bound for plantations. The only thing left to do was find a place to hide—not just for the night or to get out of the rain. By the 1790s, London was filled with shoddy buildings, thrown up by speculators, and filled with the renting poor. “House collapses occasionally crushed whole families in their beds,” Hitchcock writes (10). Vagrants found shelter, for both the long and short term, in these ruined buildings, under bulks (the display shelves outside shops that predate window displays), in warm animal stalls and the annealing yards of glass factories, beside kitchen doors, or in hundreds of “stables, barns, outhouses, bog-houses and kitchens, tucked away but still accessible” (Hitchcock 25). In one case, three emaciated female bodies and three alive but starving females were found in an “abandoned and half-completed” house on Stonecutters Street by a prospective buyer (30). Few working class

and poor people had much real privacy—most slept several to a bed in houses filled with multiple families or lodgers. But vagrants sleeping rough were half expected to be found seeking solitude in auxiliary buildings and hovels. One need only think of Wordsworth's "Female Vagrant," who spent a night in an outhouse with chickens as she tried to "frame" her tongue to the "beggar's language."

At the same time, Britain was paying more attention to home security, Amanda Vickery has shown, and more frequently enforcing an antiquated burglary law that dated to 1641. Vickery studies how Londoners conceived and policed the internal spaces of homes filled with ever growing numbers of lodgers and strangers. While personal and psychological privacy were privileges increasingly sought by the upper classes, as Patricia Meyer Spacks has shown, Vickery examines the habits of landladies with their jangling keychains and boarders with their personal locking boxes to demonstrate that physical privacy was also a concern "found throughout the social pyramid, even if its enjoyment was unequally distributed" (152). The boundary of the house to the public is the first level of privacy an individual (who has shelter) can afford. And it is at this level that privacy starts to shift from being a privilege to being a right. Violation of this right, of course, became the crime of housebreaking.

Through most of the eighteenth century, magistrates would enforce housebreaking laws if the property owner could prove he or she had indeed locked his windows and doors and that the entry occurred during the night (Vickery 155). The discrepancy between time of day, and between truly breaking in versus walking in, was a great one to constables of the time: "breaking and entering a house in the night-time constituted the hanging offence of burglary, even if the burglar failed in the attempt to steal" (155). However, an open door,

even just open shutters, seen during the day could be interpreted as an invitation. The homeowner had a right to privacy at night upon locking the doors and barring the windows, but a vagrant ostensibly had the right to enter if she found a door unlocked during the day. Even a constable with a search warrant could not break a door or window but “may break open inward doors” if he found the outer door unlocked and then entered. Given these complex discriminations, Londoners became obsessed with locks and bolts, Vickery writes, describing a “frenzy of fortification.” Robert Southey, witnessing in 1807 the “battery of defences” and “elaborate festoon curtains and Venetian blinds” of a ground-floor London parlor remarked, “at night you might perceive you are in a land of housebreakers, by the contrivances of barring them, and the bells which are fixed on to alarm the family, in case the house should be attacked” (Vickery 156). What, then, should we make of Southey’s “Story of the Three Bears?” In his version, long considered the earliest version of the famous tale in print, an old vagrant woman, rather than the later Goldilocks, enters the home of the three bears uninvited. Is she in desperate need of privacy, or is she a housebreaker?

In “The Story of The Three Bears,” which appears in Vol. 4 of *The Doctor, &c.*, Southey sets at odds a humble, hardworking middle-class set of bears and a loathsome vagrant woman. The three bears—“little, small, wee,” middle-sized, and “great, huge”—are not necessarily a family, but co-lodgers. All the seemingly male bears share a tidy cottage “of their own.” Some of the details that we might take for granted now—the fact that each has a bowl, a chair, and his own bed—seem near luxuries when examined in light of how many city folk slept several to a bed in the Romantic era. While the bears are walking in the wood, waiting for their porridge to cool, a little old woman surveys the house, lifts the latch

and comes in to eat the porridge, sit in the chairs, and sleep in the beds. The significance of Southey's version lies in the striking way in which he treats his intruder. Rather than a curious child, as in the later version of the tales, she is an intrusive, foul, immoral contamination to the house. The old woman spies in the window, listens at the door, then lifts the latch to enter the home, where she not only samples the bears' comforts but messes up their home and judges them as not good enough for her. She tastes each pot of porridge, saying "wicked" words at each for being too cold, too hot, or not enough and leaves the spoons standing in each bowl. She rumples each chair before breaking through the bottom of the wee bear's chair, swearing wildly. And when she finally sleeps in the wee bear's bed, after pulling the pillows and bolsters off the others, the narrator focuses closely on her contamination of the bed: "upon the pillow was the little old Woman's ugly, dirty head—which was not in its place, for she had no business there." The narrator contrasts the vagrant woman's treatment of the home with that of the bears, who were "good, tidy" critters. Southey seems to tie together the concepts of cleanliness and goodness, and these are exhibited in housekeeping, in both senses of the word.

Southey's sense of the home had already evolved into a complex knot of personal, social, artistic, and political meaning that became more complex as he grew more agoraphobic later in life and is particularly manifest in *The Doctor, &c.* "The Story of the Three Bears" epitomizes the domestic, middle-class, and agoraphobic preoccupations of *The Doctor*. At the start of the book, there is a rich description of Dove Cottage, detailing the view of the home, the garden, the comforts and treats of the kitchen, the style of the furniture, and the sentimental value of all of the belongings. The author moves through the home in much the same way the narrator moves through the Three Bears' home—from

kitchen, to sitting room, to bedchamber. By the time the reader reaches the Three Bears in the fourth volume, he or she is so familiar with Dr. Doncaster's home and domestic life that it would be easy to assume the bears live in Dove Cottage.

Lurking beneath this tale, as well as the full collection, is a threat that Southey threads to this domestic bliss that Christopher J.P. Smith claims haunted most of Southey's works and his life. Southey began his career and his work much like the female vagrant, a parentless figure devastated by grief and searching for a home. He, as well as his characters, behaved like the "lost son, dressed in a dead man's clothes, thrust out from acceptance and respectability on to the road" (9). Later, having found respectability and having cared for his wife and her two sisters at Greta Hall in Keswick for the second half of his life, Southey became protective of the *home* on personal, economic, artistic, and political levels. In old age, he began to retreat into his home and into his books, away from personal connection more and more. "Perhaps his greatest unspoken fear was of being subjected to an English revolution in which his books and his personal space are taken from him and destroyed," Smith writes (333). Essentially, Southey became the opposite of a vagrant: a shut-in.

Southey's fear of invasion from the very poor becomes even clearer when we contrast his bears" tale with what was later discovered to be the oldest extant copy of the story. Eleanor Mure printed in 1831 "The Story of the Three Bears, metrically related," which was included in a donation to the Toronto Public library in 1949, and a facsimile of the manuscript was published by the Oxford University Press in 1967 (Bruce).<sup>41</sup> In Mure's version, the class relations are inverted: The monied woman is being criticized. The

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<sup>41</sup> The Mure version of the tale is still difficult to find in print or digital versions.

bears—also not necessarily a family, but here “rough,” “gentle” and “little”—are upwardly mobile working class folk who “rebuff” the dame who invades their home after working herself “into a pet” when the bears “give themselves airs” and refuse her efforts to “make their acquaintance.” To punish the uppity bears, she waits for them to go to work and takes the day to explore their “large house already furnished” with “good milk” and beds “the best of their kind.” The old woman calls the bears “impertinent,” and wonders what could be “their title to give themselves airs.”

The narrator indicates her own politics at the start when she tells the reader that her tale comes from a time when animals could speak and govern themselves just like humans:

Many ages ago, it was common, I find,  
 For dumb creatures to talk just as well as mankind:  
 Birds and Beasts met together t’arrange their affairs;  
 Nay! The Frogs of the day, must needs give themselves airs,  
 And apeing their betters, not pleas’d with their station,  
 Talk’d of having a King to rule over their nation.

She balks at the frogs who “must needs give themselves airs” by appointing a king. Speaking and governing appears to be a capability in presumably lesser creatures that has been suppressed while designing hierarchy based on royalty is something only one species decides to “ape” out of pretense. The narrator seems to indicate that all creatures had been considered equal with humans, but since have been oppressed, and still others are mistakenly trying to establish similar oppressive systems. When readers finally meet the antagonist, they can presume she represents a petty and anxious landed class who is



threatened by the bears. These bourgeois bears return from a day of work “tired, hungry, and longing for food and rest” only to find an idle rich woman breaking and wasting their hard-earned property.

That Southey and Mure’s stories were printed in the same decade highlights the class debates of the times. Readers must have been familiar with oral versions of the fairy tale, since both authors self-consciously refer to them in their prefaces.<sup>42</sup> But each alters the tale to make opposing arguments. Mure’s version evokes the discourse surrounding the French Revolution: the rich are threatening and corrupt, but in the end, you will win: Mure’s bears toss and impale the old noble woman onto the steeple of St. Paul’s Cathedral. In Southey’s tale, the poor threaten the middle class, and the outcome is unclear. The old woman, in her fear, tumbles out the window, but the narrator can only muse that she might have broken her neck or been taken to the House of Corrections by a constable for being vagrant. No one knows for sure as the bears are powerless even to the end.

Paying particular attention to how Southey’s vagrant enters the bears’ home, we see him making the case for better laws regarding home intrusion, and with this case comes a sense that the middle class is too strained by the very poor. While his attitude toward the very poor might now seem cruel, and although the vagrant woman has long been replaced by cute little Goldilocks, Southey’s argument was one that carried weight and participated in the language of Malthusian reforms. Southey’s comment that the sleeping vagrant woman’s head “was not in its place, for she had no business there” very closely resembles

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<sup>42</sup> Little is known about the earlier oral versions of the tale, but according to David Bruce, Joseph Jacobs published a tale called “Scrapefoot” in 1894 that he claimed predated and inspired Southey’s version. In “Scrapefoot,” the conflict arises between a very curious middle-class fox and three bears living in a “castle in a great wood.”

Thomas Malthus's much-quoted "nature's feast" argument from the second edition of *An Essay on the Principle of Population*:

A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, has no claim of right to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. (Malthus 249)

Here Southey represents that feast as the bear's home full of comforts.

Under laws still in force from two centuries earlier, Southey's bears would have no recourse if they tried to press charges against the vagrant woman. They left the door unlatched for her to enter, and they left their bedroom window open for her to exit, and all of this in the light of day. Southey dwells on these points, the weaknesses in their would-be defense. As the old woman sneaks in, the narrator defends the bears' choice to leave the door unlocked: "The door was not fastened, because the bears were good bears, who did nobody any harm, and never suspected that anybody would harm them." To Southey, locking doors is a sign of suspicious behavior, reserved for those with something to hide. And when the old woman tumbles from the bedroom window, again the narrator argues, "Now the window was open, because the Bears, like good, tidy bears as they were, always opened their bedchamber window when they got up in the morning" (329). To Southey, decent people don't bar and lock windows and doors during the day. In other words, good people don't need to guard their privacy—it's their right, not a privilege. But here the current laws threaten decent people, or bears.

Historicizing this tale helps us better understand the long-debated moral of “The Three Bears,” which is particularly confusing in its longer-lasting Goldilocks variation.<sup>43</sup> Are today’s children to sympathize with Goldilocks or Baby Bear? Some have argued that the tale teaches moderation, and the Goldilocks principle is often cited in physics and economics. David Mamet made an elaborate Freudian argument that the tale explores a child’s latent desire to kill baby siblings. But to Southey, the tale functions more as a warning to the middle-class: lock your doors. He sympathizes with why they might not do so, but he shows readers the consequences. Along the way, he condemns the female vagrant to more deflated, less sympathetic terms than even More offered. At the very least, More’s Tawney Rachel interacted with other women, women who willingly handed over their money. But Southey’s vagrant woman is an insidious threat, which can only be handled by locking out of homes and locking up in the House of Corrections.

### **Back in the house**

The trajectory of these stories aligns with the steady rise of population and vagrancy that allowed Malthusian-style reformers to push for a ban on “outdoor relief” in 1844. Outdoor and indoor relief had been differentiated by the Gilbert’s Act (1782), which

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<sup>43</sup> See Alan C. Elms, “‘The Three Bears’: Four Interpretations.” Elms compared three different critical interpretations and synthesized his own Freudian reading that the story focuses on both the child and the baby bear’s movement from the oral to the anal stages, charting their growing and competing needs for orderliness. Allan Ahlberg’s *The Goldilocks Variations*, a 2012 children’s book that includes seven versions of the tale, offers a fun example of how generative this tale can be.

encouraged poor law unions to consolidate parish relief efforts (Patriquin 110). The “impotent poor,” such as orphans, the elderly, and the disabled, were to be the sole residents of workhouses or other institutions, while the “able-bodied” were to only receive outdoor relief, chiefly donations of money, food, or clothing from the parishes. Outdoor versus indoor relief was a point of contention in early nineteenth century debates on how to reform the Old Poor Law of 1601. Malthus’s work had led many to believe that outdoor relief only encouraged vagrants to remain vagrants, a common theme in More’s stories. A policy of “deterrence” was proposed with the New Poor Law in 1832, and the prohibition of outdoor relief was proposed a few times in the 1830s until finally accepted in 1844. Vagrants could now only seek relief inside the workhouse, which was reconceived as a place of hard labor: “If truly indigent, they might avail themselves of it rather than starve, but after experiencing the rigours of the institution would surely discharge themselves and go to any lengths to find the necessary employment for sustenance” (Brundage 78). In a sense, vagrants were evicted from the house and then wrangled back inside.

In considering this migration in and out of shelter, we might view the movement toward and away from the vagrant figure. The difference between “let alone” and “leave alone” gives an indication of how privacy is being conceived and applied to vagrant women between Newbery and Southey’s representations. One might prefer to be “let alone,” as it implies liberty, rather than “left alone,” which indicates abandonment. When U.S. Justices Louis Brandeis and Samuel Warren wrote their groundbreaking article, “The Right to Privacy” (1890), they referred to the right “to be let alone.” The migration over the twentieth century of grammatical acceptance from “let alone” to “left alone” parallels the change in attitude toward vagrancy among the writers I have considered. In *Goody Two*

*Shoes*, Newbery's narrator chides the villagers for intruding upon Margery Meanwell's privacy, an abstract threshold that exists no matter how physically exposed Margery is. Edgeworth's stories, with their complex representations of vagrant women, trouble privacy. We wish Granny Grope would not intrude upon Margaret's hospitalities, but we are nonetheless pleased when the basket-woman is able to enter the inn. Edgeworth's conception of privacy matches what Spacks refers to as a "tangle" of "intertwined, sometimes contradictory attitudes ... in a time when, a place where, privacy had no legal status and in which its social meanings remained ambiguous and confused." Privacy could imply furtiveness or propriety (15). But More shifts the value of privacy over to the domiciled and pushes the vagrant woman back over the threshold that Newbery conceived. She actively encourages women to survey the itinerant poor until Southey becomes even more troubled by the vagrant's threat to the homeowner's privacy. Whether the vagrant receives any privacy is of little concern to him: he advocates locking her up. But we know what's to come: Victorian England, and America pursuant, starts reconceiving the welfare state. Brandeis and Warren will redefine privacy as "letting someone alone," and that definition would be redefined over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and continues to be reconsidered, to find ways to include those with no physical threshold behind which to retreat. In literature, Dickens will follow his Little Dorritt in and out of the workhouse. Goody Two-Shoes, Margaret, and Tawney Rachel will fall from favor while dozens of other writers will reshape the Three Bears tale to shift sympathies from the Baby Bear to the orphan Silver-Locks and then to the cherub Goldilocks. And the vagrant woman is cast out entirely.

## Chapter 3

### Dorothy Wordsworth and the Tall Beggar Woman

Pamela Woof's meticulously edited index of Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journals* reveals strata of characters in the patchwork of lyric, narrative, jottings, and lapses that Dorothy wrote from 1800-1803. On the top tier is beloved William, for whom the journal was written. His name does not appear on every page but does so frequently that Woof must subcategorize his entry, which sprawls over four columns of two pages. Next, the entries for Dorothy's dear friends and family, such as Coleridge, Sara Hutchinson, Mary Hutchinson, and John Wordsworth, each dominate half a page of the sixteen-page index. Nearly rating the same level of emphasis are her neighbors and servants: Molly Fisher, Dorothy's housekeeper, is referred to as many times than Sara Hutchinson. Molly's name is tied to an important moment when Dorothy spills forth her acute sensibility: Dorothy attends to her housekeeper's vigorous cleaning of the rugs on March 5, 1802, and exultation of how lucky she is to be situated at Dove Cottage just hours after encountering a "half stupid" ragman who had lost his way in Easedale (Woof 75).<sup>44</sup> This point leads to the last category of people found in the index, itinerants, whom Woof treats as two categories: "People Encountered on the Road" (15 characters) and "People Who Call at DC" (18 characters).

While Dorothy writes about itinerants frequently—they appear on a quarter of the pages of the journal—each itinerant figure is an isolated reference, a one-off. The Ragman is there, and although in his portrait Dorothy calls him "the old Ragman *that I know*" (my

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<sup>44</sup> Woof refers to this entry about Molly in the index as "shakes carpet, happy in her work."

emphasis), his familiarity does not mean he will reappear. Yet the rarity of these figures in Dorothy's journal gives them value. They won't appear again, but Dorothy invests in them a level of description not offered to a stratum of characters who appear more frequently. Between Molly and the ragman is a tier of acquaintances and characters whose names occur more occasionally but add little to the diary's content. For example, the Miss Cockins, with whom Dorothy simply drinks tea in Keswick, are mentioned three times, but they do not rate a narrative and are simply recorded to accurately account for a day's activities. The Cockins live much farther than the old ragman, and their quick phrases of reference make no emotional impact compared to the ragman's seven lines that trigger in Dorothy a feeling of being "sadly mortified" at the day's close. The itinerants who are encountered on the road or who knock on Dorothy's door and then granted descriptions or narratives thus derive more power from their singularity.

These characters indexed together are generally vagrant, which is not to say they are all the same. Rather, Dorothy seems to have chosen each to act as a specimen, offering a unique variety of vagrancy for Dorothy to encapsulate in portraiture.<sup>45</sup> She seems to be offering a sampler of vagrants, patching together the "Woman of Rydal," an example of a woman in good clothes asking for money for the first time, with the "Little Girl from Coniston," who slept outside all night after being thrown out by her family, alongside the "Leech-gatherer," the well-known subject of "Resolution and Independence," and "Sailor

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<sup>45</sup> Frances Wilson comments on the otherworldliness of Dorothy's vagrants, "[In] this other world material details such as money and clothes feature, and people have firm and clear voices, with accents and attitudes. But at the same time as fleshing these figures out, Dorothy represents them as ideas and not individuals" (74). These entries also seem to work like her brother's "solitaries," discussed by Scott Dykstra. See "Wordsworth's 'Solitaries' and the Problem of Literary Reference," *ELH* 63.4 (1996): 893-928.

Isaac Chapel,” who earns a seat by Dorothy’s fire where he recounts his adventures aboard a slave ship. Each will appear only once (1,3, 23-4,78-9). Even “our patient, bow-bent friend, the letter carrier” is listed once in the index, though she claims him as a friend (64).

Still, one figure along with her family recurs and straddles both the categories of people encountered and people who visit: the “Tall Beggar Woman.” This mother encounters Dorothy at least three times and troubles her memory still more. Her son, indexed as “the pretty little boy,” reminds Dorothy of little Basil Caroline Montagu, the motherless young child whom Dorothy fostered from 1795 to 1798 at Racedown Lodge in Dorset (Woof, *Young Woman* 135). From the start, Dorothy struggles to keep the Tall Beggar Woman and her sons, especially the youngest, from slipping out of the role of itinerant and into the category of neighbor, or even relative, shifting from being a specimen of study to a friend or acquaintance.

The Tall Beggar Woman has garnered interest from scholars because a later journal entry on her briefly stymied William’s efforts to compose a related poem, “Beggars”: “After tea I read to William that account of the little Boys belonging to the tall woman & an unlucky thing it was for he could not escape from those very words, & so he could not write the poem, he left it unfinished & went to Bed” (Woof 77). Scholars have debated why the Tall Beggar Woman and her sons confounded William so. Thomas Frosch, most notably, argues that the Dorothy’s journal itself works as an analogue for the tall woman’s maternal character: both are sustaining and depleting. William could never achieve “a strong recognizable self of his own” within this particular poem, according to Frosch, because like the mother of the lying and wild vagrant boys, the journal is both “nurturer and an impeder, or destroyer,” a “provider or withholder of nurture,” and a source which cannot



be overpowered (634). Dorothy's use of "perfect iambic tetrameter" when describing the Tall Beggar Woman—"her face was excessively brown, but it had plainly once been fair"—may have thrown William off balance, according to Lucy Newlyn ("Experimental Style," 344).<sup>46</sup> Dorothy's description may have conjured up images of "The Thorn," and revived political questions William engaged in *Lyrical Ballads*, which made it "it difficult for him to resist Dorothy's influence when he came to shape his poem," Newlyn explains ("Experimental Style," 344). In other words, Dorothy actually acts as the strong poet in a case of anxiety of influence.

John Worthen dismisses the "the brief instance of writer's block" that Frosch underscores. Worthen reminds us—in an endnote—that William often responded to Dorothy's suggestions by putting them aside and addressing them after a night's sleep. "[Compare] the way 'Beggars' stalled at night, was left unfinished, and WW went tired to bed, but—the following morning—finished it before he got up," Worthen writes, with "how the first writing of 'The Leech Gather' had sent WW to bed 'nervous and jaded in the extreme,' but he then wrote several stanzas in bed the following morning" (319n). Worthen rightly notes that one night of contemplation is not really writer's block, but William did revise this poem occasionally until 1817 (Frosch 635).

The figure of the Tall Beggar Woman, I would like to argue, also poses a captivating distraction to Dorothy, as evidenced by her inability to let this character go as she does with so many other itinerant figures. The Tall Beggar Woman and her brood spill over into six entries, and possibly three more that hint at her recurrence that I will address later.

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<sup>46</sup> Newlyn, Lucy, "Dorothy Wordsworth's Experimental Style." *Essays in Criticism*. 57.4 (2007): 325-349. Web. 31 Jan. 2017.

Nine entries may not seem many, but this family's persistence seems much more significant when we recognize how systematically Dorothy paints and dismisses other itinerant figures. Though many scholars have highlighted her preoccupation with the poor and her formula for handling their portraiture, little has been written of Dorothy's effort to contain these figures to single entries.

When critics turn their focus from William's to Dorothy's writing to examine the tall beggar sequence, they generally consider individual entries concerning this figure and not her overall presence in the journal. In this way, the Tall Beggar Woman has served for critics primarily either as evidence to support a claim about how to understand Dorothy's general writing style or her attitude toward the poor (particularly if the critic is looking solely at the earliest entries), or to demonstrate a claim about whether Dorothy's journal was more than a cataloging of details at William's request (particularly when looking at the later entries). For example, Susan Levin examines the earliest appearance of the Tall Beggar Woman to prove that Dorothy's journaling resists any narrative ordering, even an order constructed by the reader while filling in lapses, and the encounters with and portraits of itinerants particularly work to resist any form of narrative emerging (31). She argues that within this journal entry there is a contiguous connection between the appearance of the beggar and the warm, comfortable situation within Dove Cottage. This opposition of inner and outer confirms Levin's argument that Dorothy writes metonymically. Dorothy allows the outer to intrude or interrelate with the interior, making the "most feared inner possibilities—dislocation, disintegration, destruction" arise in the reader's mind. (34)

Meanwhile, Sarah Houghton-Walker looks at the later entries on this figure to show that William's identification of the Tall Beggar Woman as a "gypsy," as seen in his poem "Beggars," was "strikingly absent" in Dorothy's journal. Where most critics find evidence that William was hamstrung by Dorothy's version of the encounter, Houghton-Walker claims William tried to suppress Dorothy's version of the narrative and steer the tone from benevolent suspicion toward "uncomfortable association" (26). Like Levin, Houghton-Walker also sees both writers addressing an unsettling familiarity with the itinerant figure. Her browned skin, in which William found license to interpret the beggar woman as a "gypsy" and compare her to Egyptian royalty, was more likely for Dorothy a reflection of herself, Houghton-Walker claims, citing De Quincey's later observation of Dorothy that "rarely, in a woman of English birth, had I seen a more determinate gipsy tan" (as quoted in Houghton-Walker, 26). Further, she identifies the begging boys as sons of the Tall Beggar Woman by seeing the reflection of their mother in their face, which would entail a reflection between the older "beggar boys" and Dorothy, and she explicitly states there is a likeness of little Basil Montagu in the youngest of the boys.

Still, Dorothy finds ways of identifying with many of her itinerant characters such as the Cockermouth traveler, born in the same year and town as Dorothy, and sailor Isaac Chapel, "excessively like my brother John." (95, 78-9) The question arises, why do these multiple reflections drive Dorothy to return to the Tall Beggar Woman and her sons and not to others such as the Cockermouth woman or Isaac Chapel? The answer may be that this persistence may not have been Dorothy's choosing, and the consequence of the Tall Beggar Woman's insistence on being seen. Dorothy found herself struggling with her awareness of how she wanted to view vagrants and how they construct themselves to

match that ideal. In this chapter, I argue that the Tall Beggar Woman forces Dorothy to see vagrancy more holistically, almost metacritically, or in other words to see how picturesque vagrants are the consequence of both the artist/writer eliding their truth as well as vagrants themselves lying to become the version of beggar that people expect or want to see. Dorothy comes to recognize that vagrancy is more complex than the depictions of the pathetic or the duplicitous homeless people circulating in her time. Breaking this binary, she starts to see that even when a vagrant lies, she might still be in need and deserving of charity.

In order to demonstrate the Tall Beggar Woman sequence as an important aberration in Dorothy's treatment of the itinerant, and then to begin to understand why this figure haunts her, I must first explain the general pattern by which Dorothy addresses other itinerant figures, which closely parallels the genre of *Cries of London* illustrations. As if she were creating her own hybrid, a *Cries of Grasmere* perhaps, Dorothy tends toward a formula in each portrait of her most indigent characters. I will unpack this formula and its relation to the *Cries of London* in my second section before turning to the many scenes of the Tall Beggar Woman in the third. Returning to the comparison of the *Cries of London*, we will see that the vagrant female figure is too complex, too shifting to fit neatly into the compartment of a stereotype, and ends up troubling her brother's prioritizing of the power of the local, the neighborhood, as well as the worth of charity to the donor. Dorothy herself cannot decide what affect correlates with this character and what aesthetic hold she conveys, simply because those answers multiply. The poetic challenge that William eventually masters in writing about these figures seems to stem not only from Dorothy's strong poetic journaling, but also from fears of what Dorothy's preoccupation with this

figure may have generated for William in poetic, political, and personal terms. The crisis within each writer, and between brother and sister, resolves briefly once William pins these characters down in “Beggars.” What Dorothy could not frame in ekphrasis, William contains in poetry, clearing Dorothy’s conscience and helping her meet her initial rhetorical purpose of giving William “pleasure” via her journaling.

### **The Influence of the Cries of London**

The Cries of London, a genre of popular illustration that ranged from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, categorized and caricatured people one would encounter on city streets. Tim Fulford demonstrates that the Wordsworths engaged with the broadside ballad genre, and these ballads were often sold side-by-side with Cries of London prints and ensembles (318). Critics have already linked Dorothy’s ekphrastic writing to the tradition of the picturesque found in contemporary landscape painting and travel writing.<sup>47</sup> The Cries genre had been elevated in stature by the 1790s when British illustrators had distinguished themselves on the continent, and the number of prints exported had started to outpace those imported (Shesgreen 118). Francis Wheatley showed his fourteen Cries of London at the Royal Academy in 1792 and 1795, and effectively shifted the tone of the genre from the satiric (as cast by William Hogarth and Paul Sandby, earlier in the century) toward a more benevolent, serious, and somber mood, intended to appeal to women, Sean

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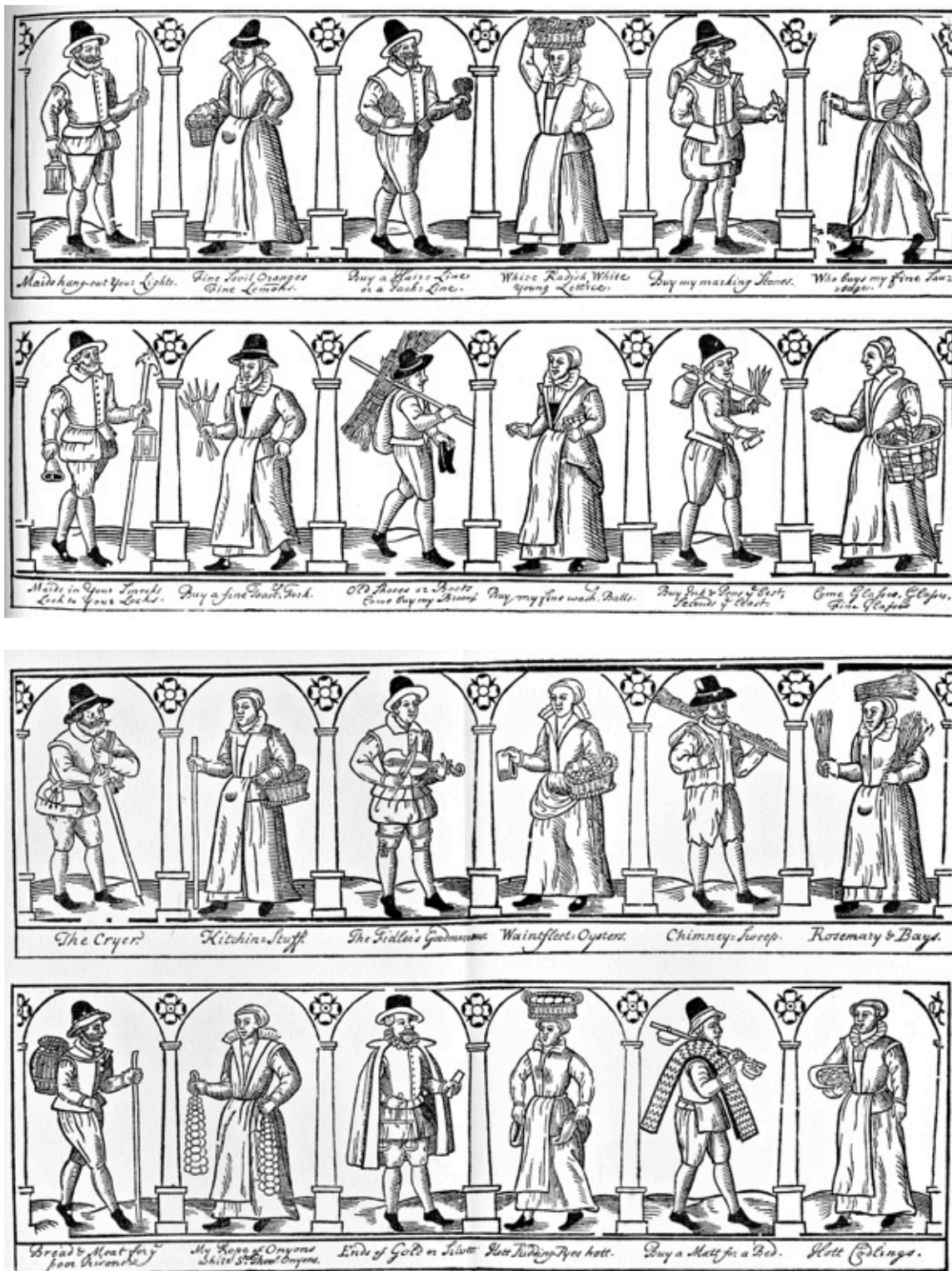
<sup>47</sup> For more on Dorothy’s interest in art and ekphrastic writing, see Denys Van Renen, “Decomposing the Picturesque and Re-collecting Nature in Dorothy Wordsworth’s Scotland;” John Nabholtz, “Dorothy Wordsworth and the Picturesque;” and Richard Swartz, “Dorothy Wordsworth, local tourism, and the anxiety (or semiotics) of description.”

Shesgreen writes (132). In other words, not only would Dorothy have been familiar with the Cries of London, having been attuned to the art world, she also may have seen it as a relevant or worthy tradition in which to participate. The key elements of the Cries of London genre, in fact, closely match her methods when sketching full-frame portraits of itinerants around Grasmere. Each of her entries on an itinerant figure (those where she spends more than a few words on them) captures a unique kind of vagrant like a specimen for a butterfly collection.

The genre started in the sixteenth century as broadsheet depictions of working-class occupations, isolating characters into rows according to their class and into cells according to their particular work (see fig. 1). Some might feature mercantile occupations such as the baker, the draper, the glazier, and the tea dealer, all of whom have established locations for their work. More often they represented itinerant peddlers, and the categories of occupations multiplied to include less recognizable or legitimate forms of work as the genre evolved. We might find among the fishmongers and knife sharpeners the outlawed street performers, flower girls, and outright “beggars” (see fig. 2). The broadsheets were very popular and sold on the streets to customers from every walk of life; tourists might use them as a guide or a souvenir while well-to-do collectors found an insouciant joy in them. The Cries helped anyone new to the city make sense of the busy, noisy streets. In the early eighteenth century, the mode of Cries of London changed to ensembles of individual prints that could be picked apart, writes Shesgreen (118-9). As the debates leading up to the Vagrancy Act of 1741 lumped more and more types of activity under the crime of “vagrancy,” artists such Marcellus Laroon and Jacob Amigoni started differentiating these activities and their agents in the Cries of London with what Shesgreen

calls “innovative naturalism” (45). Though the faces of Laroon’s characters were fairly blank and standard, Laroon’s prints stood apart from the broadsheets of old by elevating the level of detail devoted to each character’s dress and posture (45). Where Laroon magnified dress and dispositions, Italian artist Amigoni magnified their facial expressions, focusing on child hawkers and developing their pathos (Figures 3 and 4). While Laroon’s work was diffuse, growing to seventy-four different prints, and Amigoni’s was more cohesive, generating a theme for his collection, both artists brought to the genre more formal proficiency and with this level of skill, the attention of gentile clientele (86). The genre jumped in status among British connoisseurs and attracted new artists who wanted to make the genre distinctively British.

This change in mode subsequently leveled the hierarchy of the characters depicted and made it possible for their order to be jumbled, resulting in a democratizing effect—as each character stood alone, its image would rise to the level of icon. The prints from ensembles were also more public than the broadsheets; these would be hung in the hallways and social spaces of homes, inns, and businesses where they could be communally observed and enjoyed (118). As the century wore on, the prints started to incorporate more and more text describing whom the illustration depicted, the location of the scene, and the refrains each figure cried.



**Figure 1:** Anonymous. "A Very Antient Sett thereof, in Wood, with the Words then used by the Cryers," early sixteenth century. Woodcut. Pepys Library, Cambridge, England.





The London Beggar  
*Le Gueux de Londres*  
*(Le pauvre de Londres)*

*Marcellus Laroon delin.*

*J. Dreyer fecit*

**Figure 2:** Laroon, Marcellus. "The London Beggar," 1687. Engraving. The Lilly Library, Bloomington, Indiana.



**Figure 3:** Laroon, Marcellus. "A Brass Pott or an Iron Pott to men," 1687. Engraving. The Lilly Library, Bloomington, Indiana.



**Figure 4:** Amigoni, Jacob, "Golden Pippins," 1739. Engraving. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

This accumulation of text led to the genre's switch to yet another mode, the codex. By the mid-eighteenth century, publishers started to bind and print *Cries of London* as books, in which more annotation could be added. Some books collected miscellaneous cries while others promoted a particular artist. Books, according to Shesgreen, made the genre more elite and more private (150). *Cries of London* books were personal objects, meant to be looked at in seclusion and possibly passed among one's family or friends. It makes sense that this hybrid form of art and writing would intrigue Dorothy—many *Cries* books even included verses of poetry below each character (91).

As advances in printing made it more financially feasible to produce and to buy the prints domestically, English artists worked to distinguish themselves in their trade and among customers (90). Most importantly, William Hogarth successfully pushed the genre into the realm of satire, imbuing into each scene varying attitudes toward the poor. L. P. Boitard feminized, modernized, and even eroticized his London cries, incorporating more current dress and idealized settings, while Paul Sandby presented a “low burlesque” of figures who were at times “grotesque, criminal and sometimes murderous” (125). Where rivals Laroon and Amigoni were distinguished by their attention to drapery or to facial expression, now artists were distinguished along a tonal spectrum running from saccharine to acerbic. In the 1790s, Francis Wheatley and Thomas Rowlandson vied to espouse sympathetic pragmatism or lewd, cartoonish humor as the *Cries*' standard tone. Wheatley revived the mood of Laroon and Boitard, reacting against the comic ridicule and satire of Hogarth and Sandby (132). His stippled scenes coupled rich and poor in acts of charity, dramatizing the itinerant character in receipt of aid from a refined woman of sensibility (133, see fig. 7). Dorothy's portraits trend toward Wheatley's style, prioritizing sensibility.

At worst, she may seem wearied or annoyed by a beggar, sometimes suspicious, but never caustic or belittling. Her most distinct contribution, in terms of her attitude toward the wandering poor, is her gentle sense of humor, which Wheatley and his influences did not pursue. Dorothy often laughs with her characters, or remembers them with only lightly mocking humor.<sup>48</sup>

Conventions followed by Cries artists seem to correlate with those Dorothy set for herself when writing ekphrastic portraits of the poor. Cries of London prints, as in Dorothy's entries, start with a sort of label for a subject, a short, handy way of referring to a type of person. In the Cries, we meet "Chimney Sweeper," "the Famous Dutch Woman" (an acrobat), and "Sock Vendor" while in Dorothy's journal we meet "Half-Crazy Old Man," "The Road Lass," or "Drunken Soldiers." They are rarely named and more often identified by category. Each figure usually appears with a characteristic prop: in the Cries, it might be the fish monger's basket or the chair mender's reeds; in the *Grasmere Journals*, Dorothy highlights the "beggar's wallet" (a satchel) over the shoulder of an old soldier, the letter of the runaway from Coniston, and the old ragman's sack. While none of the particular characters reappear, the props do: we routinely hear of letters and wallets. Next, both artists and writer pay careful attention to distinctive garb, whether it's Marcellus Laroon's attention to the frayed edges of a jerkin in "A Brass Pott or an Iron Pott to mend" or Dorothy's noticing the ragman's coat "of Scarlet in a thousand patches" (74)(see fig. 3). If, as Woof notes, William never really used the rich descriptions of clothing that Dorothy

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<sup>48</sup> A good example is the "old soldier, family dead in Jamaica," as Woof indexes him. Dorothy talks with him a while at the door to Dove Cottage before giving him a piece of cold bacon. He reacts, "You're a fine woman!" Dorothy reflects, "I could not help smiling. I suppose he meant 'You're a kind woman.'" (103) This entry is as close to lewd as Dorothy dares.

provided him, then why did she continue to pursue that particular writing challenge?<sup>49</sup>

Dorothy's attention to clothing is a strong indicator that she was inspired by the Cries of London and was refining an ekphrastic technique.

Most importantly, Cries artists as well as Dorothy were careful to always include the cry, the identifying and repeated phrases of the character. In the Cries of London, the earliest artists captioned each cell in the broadsheet grids with the figure's characteristic cry: "Buy a Matt for a Bed," "Buy Pens, Pens, Pens, Pens of the Best," "Good Sasages" [sic]; these were the most commonly heard cry of each character – what they would yell out in the city streets or market place. Just as the popularity of including spoken text grew within the Cries genre, so too do Dorothy's figures grow more verbal. In the earlier *Alfoxden Journal*, we meet young girls worrying over their petticoats and a razor grinder and his son lumbering along (144, 147). They never speak, but in *the Grasmere Journals*, every vagrant described is given a voice, and the voices grow stronger as the journal progresses. Still, there is a set of common points that beggars express in these entries—either because these are the things beggars commonly say, or these were common questions Dorothy wanted to address (likely a combination of the two). In most entries we learn from where the itinerant is coming and to where they say they're going, we learn whether or not they want some help (though we don't always learn whether Dorothy provides it), and we learn a little about how they have come into the predicament of being vagrant and how they cope with that state. Most of Dorothy's beggars seem to want to demonstrate how great their

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<sup>49</sup> Woof writes in her introduction, "Wordsworth rarely made use of the fustian or grey cloth of breeches, the patches of darker blue where buttons had been, the paler cloth where seams had been let out; he did not need ultimately the specific misfortunes, so carefully listed" (xvi).

need is, hoping to make it seem urgent but discrete. There is an implicit sense that if beggars make it clear they have become vagrant from understandable (though unjust) causes, that they have an itinerary and a plan, and that they don't need too much, they will be helped. Their words imply a promise that they will leave and not ask for help again. But the Tall Beggar Woman troubles this convention from the start.

### **The Cries of Grasmere**

Because the most popular Cries of London artists were still circulating when Dorothy was writing her journals—Laroon, for example, was reissued until 1821—we see myriad influences emerge in her portraits. As I noted, her general attitude toward her itinerant subjects seems in line with Wheatley's, yet her oeuvre of portraits, when we extract them from the journals and lay them side by side, are extremely varied in technique. Sometimes a sketch will prioritize clothing, in the vein of Laroon; others will lampoon a character in the style of Sandby. To clarify the parallel between Dorothy's work and a classic work from the Cries of London, compare her depiction of the "Road lass," described on Feb. 14, 1802 (68-9) with Jacob Amigoni's seminal "Golden Pippins" (1739). In this piece, Dorothy aligns the young girl in her focus with the horses dragging her family's carts just as Amigoni aligns his young subject with the apples she sells (see fig. 4). These girls are examined ethologically, viewed as natural and vivacious specimens of a breed, behaving uninhibitedly in a distinct habitat. Time and place unify in Dorothy's portrait of the Road lass in the way Shesgreen has identified in Amigoni's portrait of a cherubic girl pushing a wheelbarrow of golden apples toward the London skyline at

daybreak (79). Amigoni attends to accurately portraying the girl in her natural condition: she appears at dawn, when fruit sellers worked; she is commuting to the city with a tuft of apple blossom tucked in her pinafore, indicating she has trudged from the rural outskirts; legs and body lunge forward to show her energy and speed. Her mouth is open presumably to cry out the print's title, "Golden Pippins," a varietal of apple grown in the county of Sussex, and in this case, her title. She is defined as a particular example of this variety of peddler, just as she is associated with this particular cultivar.

We see the same formula at work in the *Road lass*, where Dorothy identifies a young girl traveling with her family and defines her by her habitat, simultaneously rusticizing and domesticating her:

About 20 yards above glowworm Rock I met a Carman, a Highlander I suppose, with 4 carts, the first 3 belonging to himself... The Carman was cheering his horses & talking to a little Lass about ten years of age who seemed to make him her companion. She ran to the Wall & took up a large stone to support the wheel of one of his carts & ran on before with it in her arms to be ready for him. She was a beautiful Creature, and there was something uncommonly impressive in the lightness & joyousness of her manner. Her business seemed to be all pleasure—pleasure in her own motions—& the man looked at her as if he too was pleased & spoke to her in the same tone in which he spoke to his horses. There was a wildness in her whole figure, not the wildness of a Mountain lass but of a *Road* lass, a traveller from her Birth, who had wanted neither food nor clothes. (her emphasis, 68-9)



Here Dorothy identifies for us an example of the species “Road lass,” as distinguished from its cousin the “Mountain lass,” as well as its habit and its behavior: born on the road, adapted to the road, light, joyous, “a beautiful creature,” to whom the older carman speaks with the nonverbal cheering he uses for his workhorses. She is more of a domesticated animal than a threatening beast. Dorothy’s attitude toward her is approving and she finds her “impressive,” but she also treats her as different species and normalizes her life on the road. The reader need not feel any call to action, just distant admiration as one might feel for a beautiful mare or dog. As a distinct, noble, but separate species, the Road lass seems divorced from Dorothy, and in this encounter, the writer does not project herself or relate with the lass and her family. They are familiar, yet strange, timeless human species associated with life on the road outside of the English economy and not needing assistance.

“The Road lass” is a lengthier piece and differs from many of Dorothy’s portraits of the poor in that she and the subject do not interrelate. Usually, as Woof indicates in her index subheadings, they meet at her door or they encounter each other on the road, with some recognition occurring between subject and observer. But while many elements of Dorothy’s approach to painting vagrants are consistent—the prop (the Road lass’s rock), the label, the itinerary (up and over the road by Glowworm rock), the sense of how she came to be vagrant (born into it), and her appearance (fresh and wild)—Dorothy doesn’t doggedly follow a formula, but allows some element to dominate and convey the affect she encountered in meeting each character.

Sometimes she will focus tightly on a face, such as the Cockermonth woman’s anguished look, in which “her eyes rolled about” (95), in the vein of Paul Sandby’s works like “Wine Seller” and “Last Dying Speech” (figs. 5 and 6). Though his sketches are more



**Figure 5:** Figure 5: Sandby, Paul. "Wine Seller," 1759. Drawing. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.



**Figure 6:** Sandby, Paul. "Last Dying Speech," 1759. Drawing. Yale Center for British Art. New Haven, Connecticut.

cynical than those of Dorothy, Sandby introduced figures who look directly at the observer and reveal their character and condition via facial contortions. While Sandby's figures register outrage and derangement, Dorothy's Cockermouth woman demonstrates the pain of being left vagrant, with two children in tow, on mountainous roads, when her husband left her for another woman:

The mother when we accosted her told us that her Husband had left her & gone off with another woman & how she '*pursued*' them. Then her fury kindled & her eyes rolled about. She changed again to tears. She was a Cockermouth woman—30 years of age a child at Cockermouth when I was—I was moved & gave her a shilling, I believe 6d more than I ought to have given.

(95)

Note how Dorothy and William, who have just come from a sunny picnic with Coleridge, “accost” the Cockermouth woman—she’s careful to remember that this woman did not pursue them. They intrude upon her very real grief. There is a closeness that is disconcerting: not only do we stand and watch with Dorothy as the woman quickly vacillates through her emotions, we also see Dorothy recognize herself in this woman of nearly the same age who was born in Dorothy’s hometown. The word “pursuing” is doubly emphasized, indicating the amount of eeriness Dorothy felt and the amount of anger the Cockermouth woman revealed in saying it. But still, Dorothy attends to the props (a “half starved” child in her arms and another at her side), the clothing (one child uncomfortably wears slippers obviously donated by a well-to-do family), the itinerary (coming from

Cockermouth, going toward the fleeing husband), the cause of vagrancy (abandonment), the cry (“pursue”) and the label (a Cockermouth woman).<sup>50</sup>

When emotion is withheld, attire becomes the focus in Dorothy’s account of an old sailor she and William met near White Moss:

His coat was blue, frock shaped coming over his thighs, it had been joined up at the seams behind with paler blue to let it out, & there were three Bell-shaped patches of darker blue behind where the buttons had been. His breeches were either of fustian or grey cloth, with strings hanging down, whole & tight & he had a checked shirt on, & a small coloured handkerchief tied round his neck. His bags were hung over each shoulder, and lay on each side of him, below his breast. One was brownish & of coarse stuff, the other was white with meal on the outside, and his blue waistcoat was whitened with meal. In the coarse bag I guessed he put his scraps of meat &c. He walked with a slender stick decently stout, but his legs bowed outwards.

That this portrait seems so similar to Marcellus Laroon’s “A Brass Pott or an Iron Pott to Mend” (1687) is striking, for as Shesgreen notes of Laroon’s work, “Such images of intense misery are rare in all Cries” (52, also see fig. 3). Laroon stood apart for his careful attention to the materiality of poverty and the minute details of vagrant dress when other artists elided these realities in favor of posture, scenery, or trade. In the case of the old sailor, Dorothy seems to be focusing on his physical distress in the absence of emotional distress—indeed, critics often attended to this figure because Dorothy curiously “tries” this

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<sup>50</sup> Return to Figure 2 to observe how children stand in for identifying props when the Cries subject is a beggar with no trade.

man, passing him to see if he would beg of her. Feeling her heart “smote” when he does not, she turns back and confronts him. His portrait is meant to convey the stoicism and noble endurance of some vagrants. And of course, these portraits incorporate Dorothy herself in the act of giving charity to both, a stylistic hallmark of Wheatley’s *Cries*, which featured women of sensibility interacting with the Crier (see fig. 7).

These three examples—the Road lass, the Cockermouth woman, and the old sailor—begin to chart distinct varieties of vagrants—the happy child, the anguished mother, the stolid veteran—and elicit different reactions: happy admiration, a gothic thrill, and solemn recognition. While keeping to her genre, Dorothy captures many other distinct figures and moods: drunken soldiers whom she and Mary Hutchinson seem to giggle at from afar are harmless rascallions who elicit light humor (44); a teenage girl run out of her house sparks mystery (3); a “half-crazy old man” who begs for a pin for his pincushion and gobbles two-quarts of porridge in her neighbor’s kitchen captures a strange mix of neighborly conviviality and pity for the elderly man (3). Dorothy seems to have a special regard for soldiers, old men, and families, but she is careful to distinguish each as unique. A key contrast is her accounting of two families: one vagrant family stands apart from the soldiers streaming up the road on November 28, 1801, because the father holds their child and the mother holds a bundle and a gun; it was “such a pretty sight” that the affect prompts her to give “some halfpence” (43). In contrast, the “dismal” sound of a baby’s cries prompts Dorothy to look out the window on February 12, 1802 and watch a family lumber by with a cart at night; she calls them a “wild & melancholy sight” (67). What we learn by focusing on Dorothy’s vagrants is that not all families, not all soldiers, not all vagrants

generate the same affect, even when we control for variables such as dress, possessions, and trajectory.

But not all of Dorothy's subjects fit nicely into her plan of addressing them. One thing most have in common is that they leave and never come back. The Road lass trudges on with the Highland carman just as Amigoni's Golden Pippins girl will march beyond the margins of her frame. But the Tall Beggar Woman does not do this. She keeps appearing, and in any given instance Dorothy seems to struggle with which element to emphasize, which mood to tether to this woman and her children.



**Figure 7:** Wheatley, Francis, "New Mackrel, New Mackrel," 1796. Engraving. The Lilly Library, Bloomington, Indiana.





**Figure 8:** Boucher, Francois, "Little Boy with a Scythe," 1757. Etching. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



**Figure 9:** Boucher, Francois, "Pastoral Repast," 1769. Painting. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland.

**'But a *common case*'**

The "Pretty Little Boy" entry on June 16, 1800 works like other sketches of vagrants that hearken the Cries of London, but there is an important twist: he will later be linked to several other entries on the Tall Beggar Woman in the journal rather than be dismissed. Dorothy does her best on this particular day, though, to contain him in this one entry. This small boy found on a forest path near Skelleth recalls a bucolic piece by Francois Boucher, known for inspiring Cries artists such as L. P. Boitard and Francis Wheatley to incorporate more pastoralism into their engravings (Shesgreen 123). Dorothy and William meet this boy while walking "to Brathay by Little Langdale & Collath & Skelleth." For several sentences, Dorothy works to build a picturesque backdrop upon which to paint this child she intends to recall for the reader:

Collath was wild & interesting, from the Peat carts & peat gatherers—the valley all perfumed with the Gale & wild thyme. The woods about the waterfall veined with rich yellow Broom. A succession of delicious views from Skelleth to Brathay. We met near Skelleth a pretty little Boy with a wallet over his shoulder he came from Hawkshead & was going to 'late' a lock of meal. He spoke gently & without complaint. When I asked him if he got enough to eat he looked surprized & said 'Nay'. He was 7 years old but seemed not more than 5. We drank tea at Mr Ibbetsons & returned by Ambleside.

Dorothy hits the usual marks—the prop, the clothes, the cry of "laiting" (begging for food), the label, and here she chooses to emphasize the backdrop. The layers of scenery and the fullness of the flowers and fragrance seem to move the reader's mind more toward

landscape painting than toward etching, until we have such an intimate encounter with this child. Boucher, of course, mastered both the picturesque pastoral painting and the etched portrait (see figs. 8 and 9).

Yet Dorothy does not connect for the reader—be it William, herself, or one of posterity—that this little boy appeared one page earlier. She does not clarify that connection until two years later. The Pretty Little Boy is the son of the Tall Beggar Woman, and with her, he haunts the journal, though, sometimes it seems as if Dorothy herself doesn't realize she is repeatedly encountering or thinking about these characters. When we scan the journal for moments when the Tall Beggar Woman's family occurs, we start to see how often Dorothy muddles time and characters, as well as poems and poetic motifs connected with the family.

Here is what Dorothy makes clear in the earliest entry: On May 27, 1800, the Tall Beggar Woman comes to Dorothy's door with a small child, about two years old. She tells Dorothy that they could not keep a house, so they travelled. Later that day, Dorothy encounters the father, earlier referred to by his wife as a "tinker," lying in the grass with two small children playing nearby. He does not speak to Dorothy. It is unclear how she knows this man is the Tall Beggar Woman's husband.

Still later on the same day, she sees two boys, ages eight and ten, playing a quarter of the mile on as she walks toward Ambleside. She insists that they are the Tall Beggar Woman's boys based on their resemblance. They insist their mother is dead and their father is a potter. That afternoon, she sees the boys again in Ambleside, pretending to be forlorn and fatigued at a friend's front door.

Finally, that evening, Dorothy encounters the Tall Beggar Woman once more on her way home, with two small children tucked into baskets on the side of an ass. Dorothy does not mention whether one of these children is the one who came to her door or the two who played with the man lying in the grass. All of the previous events are recalled on June 10, 1800, when Dorothy records telling William about this family while walking to Ambleside on this day. Less than a week later, on June 16, 1800 Dorothy and William encounter the “Pretty Little Boy” near Skelleth. Dorothy does not mention the Tall Beggar Woman in her journal entry that describes him. We find out much later this same child is her son. She claims in this entry that he is about 7 years old, which means he would be either one of the small children stuffed into a basket in the May encounter, or the younger of the boys whom she encountered on the way to Ambleside. Or, he was not present at all that day—he doesn’t seem to match the description of either set of children.

Nearly two years later, on February 12, 1802, The Tall Beggar Woman comes to beg rags for a wound on her husband’s leg because he had injured himself while repairing a hole in the slate roof of their house after a storm. Dorothy does not refer to her as the Tall Beggar Woman but we discern her from the new description of her “strong bones” and weathered complexion that Dorothy emphasized before. She now tells us that the boy with her is the “pretty little fellow” she had seen at “Skelwith Bridge” and “whom I have loved for the sake of Basil.” There is a sense of Dorothy doubting the woman in this entry, where before she had given her bread and trusted her story. Dorothy writes, “a poor woman came, *she said* to beg some rags ... but she has been used to abegging, for she has often come here.”

One month after her reprisal, on March 13, 1802, William and Dorothy discuss his writing a poem based on these characters. They talk about the family while walking to Rydal and they read the journal account of the two older boys chasing a butterfly. On this day, Dorothy claims William struggled to “escape her words.” At last, William writes “Beggars” on Sunday, March 14, 1802 and also writes “To a Butterfly” inspired by a discussion of how the siblings treated butterflies in a very different fashion as children. Circling back through the journal, evidence starts to arise to connect the Tall Beggar Woman and the Pretty Little Boy to the following entries, which occur in the expanse of time between Dorothy’s first meeting this family and then encouraging William to write about them: on Nov. 7, 1800, “The poor woman and child from Whitehaven drank tea” are granted a familiar “the” in their label, indicating these might be the Tall Beggar Woman and the Pretty Little Boy, based on Dorothy’s revelation on Feb. 12, 1802 that the Tall Beggar Woman and her son “often come here;” and on Wednesday, Dec. 23, 1801, a tall woman in “tawdry style” with a muslin pinafore and a beaver hat comes to the door and claims her husband has been buried at Whitehaven and that her daughter and a soldier have preceded her up the road. The details of the daughter and soldier make it less certain that this is the Tall Beggar Woman, though the word “claims” and the fact of her height suggest this could be the Tall Beggar Woman with yet another version of her tale for Dorothy.

Dorothy’s tendency to draw solitary pictures of vagrants and then dismiss them simultaneously makes it hard for readers to notice the reappearance of the Tall Beggar Woman and makes it clear that she has, in fact, returned. The spaces of time between her appearance along with Dorothy’s habit of drawing solitary figures lulls readers into a sense of pattern and makes less aware when the Tall Beggar Woman returns. Yet, if we attend to

Dorothy's own formula of accounting for a stereotyping title, props, and cry, we can distinctly see a similar tidy, tanned, and tall woman with a child come begging at her door frequently. In addition to the haphazard frequency of her sketching itinerants, Dorothy's entries don't precisely square with one another, and sometimes there are discrepancies within the same entry, making it harder to Dorothy that she does refer to this woman and her family, as well as echoes of this "type" of woman, throughout the journals. Dorothy makes us grasp for a smooth narrative: Is the Tall Beggar Woman's husband a tinker or a potter? Do they have a house or not? The attention Dorothy gives to the beggar's complexion and her son's malnourishment in addition to her skepticism about why the beggar woman came for rags in the Feb. 1802 entry indicates that this woman probably was still sleeping in the rough. In addition to the Tall Beggar Woman's unreliable accounts, Dorothy herself seems to make assumptions and omissions: How does she know the man in the grass is the Tall Beggar Woman's husband—did he have tinkering tools? Had she seen this family before and never described them? After all, she is recording their appearance two weeks later when we first learn of them. Whether intentional or not, the erratic way in which the Tall Beggar Woman's story unfolds reveals some conflict within Dorothy. She seems to resist accounting for them, and yet she accounts for them much more frequently than she does for any other itinerant character.

The Pretty Little Boy manages to work as a Cry of Grasmere, I would suggest, because he is so credulous, incapable of lying. Like the old sailor whom Dorothy passes and the Cockermouth woman she accosts, she finds him in a genuine state of need. The other Tall Beggar Woman's entries, however, trouble Dorothy's ability to contain an itinerant to a spot of time, as it were, as well as to create a cohesive narrative, no matter how short. This

woman's family, save this small child, force Dorothy to confront the reality that beggars construct *her* as a particular audience and perform in particular ways to encourage her to give to them. Dorothy finds herself struggling to be the author of portraits as the subjects stare back at her.

Consider the first time the pretty little boy must have appeared. Dorothy struggles to corral these many figures into her normal method for painting vagrants, as the characters scatter across the neighborhood and move in and out of the frame. On that particular day, when their thread first pierces into the journal, Dorothy encounters separate groups of the same family five times. First, the Tall Beggar Woman comes to her door with a two-year-old. Later, a man, whom Dorothy determines is the Tall Beggar Woman's husband, lies in the grass on a roadside nearby, watching two small children. Up the road, she meets two vagrant boys. Later, she encounters the same boys in Ambleside. When returning home, Dorothy sees the Tall Beggar Woman with two small children in baskets hanging from her donkeys. Dorothy attempts to tell their story as one narrative whole, though it is clear other events occurred between these encounters. Just by virtue of their movement, her movement, the movement of time, and their regrouping, she loses control of any unity of place or time in which to fully frame a single figure, as in her Cries format.

In the retrospect of journal writing, she attempts to organize miniature portraits emphasizing three particular moments: the Tall Beggar Woman's first appearance, the exchanges of observation that take place between her and the older boys, and the last glimpse of the Tall Beggar Woman at day's end. Dorothy gives credence to this woman upon first and very close inspection. She stresses her height and complexion: "a very tall



woman, tall much beyond the measure of tall women, called at the door. She had on a very long brown cloak, & a very white cap without Bonnet—her face was excessively brown, but it had plainly once been fair.” As I noted earlier, when Dorothy encounters a lack of demonstrable affect in her subject, she emphasizes physical appearance, such as the clothes of the old sailor she “tried” near White Moss. But the extended description of the old sailor’s clothes worked to demonstrate his hardship and endurance. Here the physical description seems to stress this woman’s superlative otherness: she is hyperbolically tall, clean, tanned, and altered from “fair.” The description is not lengthy, but the contrast between her brownness, her tallness, and fairness quickly conveys that Dorothy perceives this woman as fallen from some state of privilege and nobly trying to maintain her dignity. She earns a bit of bread.

But the Tall Beggar Woman’s older sons force Dorothy to see vagrancy from a very different angle. They quickly and unabashedly transform from carefree boys making flower crowns and chasing butterflies to begging and whining when *they* perceive *her*. The boys have sized her up instantly and with no compunction switch gears to perform their vagrancy for her. She calls this *Cry of Grasmere*, “Begging cant.” They tell her the things they think will make her give them charity: their mother is dead and their father is a potter—not a tinker—in the next town over. Having a dead mother would generate pity, having a father in an established but humble profession such as potter, rather than a more ignoble, itinerant profession such as tinker, would not push their mark to close up her purse in exasperation. Their need is urgent and discrete. Dorothy insists she saw their mother earlier and even works to assure herself, William, or perhaps, us, in the journal that these really are the Tall Beggar Woman’s sons. Dorothy seems to struggle to reconcile these

separate but related portraits when she worriedly claims, "I could not be mistaken," that they were too similar in appearance. Later, she observes the boys get into character to approach her friend Matthew Harrison's house in Ambleside. The boys who flitted with the butterflies now trudge with "their wallet upon the elder's shoulder, & creeping with a Beggars complaining foot." Like the phrase "beggar's cant," Dorothy identifies this act as characteristic of a class. She attributes their behavior to the routine acts of beggars who construct themselves in the fashion most likely to earn them bread or money. A "Beggars complaining foot," and "a beggar's cant" seem to imply that Dorothy has seen this act before and on this particular day, she has encountered two boys, less adept at performance, demonstrating what she has always suspected. The phrases also imply there is some sort of formula for begging behavior that has coalesced as common or acceptable on the part of beggars who have learned through trial and error what works with the general public. Where the contrast of weathered skin and neatness earned their mother bread, now the contrast of genuine joy and pretended struggle mean the boys will receive nothing.

When Dorothy sees the Tall Beggar Woman again in the evening, her appearance seems diminished, and there is a tone of suspicion in Dorothy's description that she did not strike before. The small child who appeared with her door that morning worked as a prop to generate sympathy in Dorothy. But at day's end, she observes the mother "chiding & threatening with a wand" the two children she was trying to contain in a pannier (basket) on the side of her asses, whom she is driving on. The Tall Beggar Woman seems more mundane in this moment—neither flitting after butterflies like her carefree sons, nor putting on a brave face; she is simply an exhausted mother. In this uninhibited moment, the Tall Beggar Woman reveals her full Scottish accent as she chides her children, and Dorothy

finds in this detail proof of authenticity in the stories the woman had told her that morning. In the end, the Tall Beggar Woman's behavior reveals that her performance at Dorothy's door that morning was closer to genuine than that of her sons, if in retrospect less heroic. The full entry gives the most complex and realistic account of vagrancy in the journal.

As Dorothy thinks through these discrepancies in the journal, the full effect is one of ambivalence. We see ambivalence in the individual descriptions, such as when she says that the older boys were "wild figures, not very ragged, but without shoes & stockings" and that when they gave up on her charity, they flew like "lightning" but moments later had "sauntered so long." And we see these ambivalences in the entry as a whole, with a mother begging earnestly, a father not bothering, and the boys assuming the "beggar's cant." This one entry includes several episodes with competing affects that make it work in complete contrast to all of the other entries that mimic Cries of London. On this day, in this entry, the props (the wallet, the children, the asses, the reed) change hands, the clothes are varied (wild but not very ragged, crowns of flowers but no shoes), and the cries themselves change and cannot be pinned down. The subjects resist the genre.

Dorothy seems to attempt to recuperate her methodology when she attends to the Pretty Little Boy in the June 16, 1800 entry, six days later, but the persistence of the family, particularly the mother, in returning to her home troubles Dorothy's policy in accounting for itinerant figures. Two years later, this method seems to break down entirely when she chooses to address a character for a second time, and this exception to her method essentially moves these figures out of her subconscious index of "people encountered" and into a more intimate category. With this switch, Dorothy's desire to help them seems to

grow and manifest in her pursuit of William's writing about them. With his attendance to this desire, the family will disappear from the journal.

On February 12, Dorothy is recopying *The Pedlar* when the Tall Beggar Woman comes to her door again.<sup>51</sup> On this day, William and Dorothy toil at this poem which will become part of *The Excursion*, and the day ends with another vagrant family wandering past, an infant crying as asses slowly drag a vagrant family's carts up the road just at the point that brother and sister are most exhausted. Writing, vagrancy as an idea, vagrancy as a reality, and exhaustion all conflate. Recalling that Dorothy is writing in retrospect when she is composing her journal entry, we see her poetic toiling color her description of the Tall Beggar Woman from the first sentence, which is filled with exasperation:

In the afternoon a poor woman came, *she said* to beg some rags for her husbands leg which had been wounded by a slate from the Roof in the great wind—but she has been used to abegging, for she has often come here. Her father lived to the age of 105. She is a woman of strong bones with a complexion that has been beautiful, & remained very fresh last year, but now she looks broken, & her little Boy, a pretty little fellow, & whom I have loved for the sake of Basil, looks thin & pale. I observed this to her. Aye says she we have all been ill. Our house was unroofed in the storm recently & so we lived in it for more than a week. The Child wears a ragged drab coat & a fur cap, poor little fellow, I think he seems scarcely at all grown since the first time I saw him. William was with me—we met him in a lane going to Skelwith

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<sup>51</sup> According to Woolf, *The Pedlar*, not published until 1814, became the Wanderer character of *The Excursion* (214).

Bridge he looked very pretty, he was walking lazily in the deep narrow lane, overshadowed with the hedge-rows, his meal poke hung over his shoulder.

He said he was going 'a laiting.' He now wears the same coat he had on at that time. Poor creatures! When the woman was gone, I could not help thinking that we are not half thankful enough that we are placed in that condition of life in which we are. We do not so often bless god for this as we wish for this 50£ that 100£ &c &c. We have not, however to reproach ourselves with ever breathing a murmur. This woman's was but a *common* case... (67)

The fatigue of the day and of the persistence of vagrants—at her door, on the pages, out her window, and in an “affecting conversation” she has with William before going to bed in a “melancholy” mood—renders this particular passage spotty in terms of how the sentences fit together, but also more emotionally honest. We learn from this entry how Dorothy feels when encountered by vagrants who persist.

The emphasis on the first “she said” implies that Dorothy listens but is in doubt from the moment the Tall Beggar Woman opens her mouth. There is an interesting contrast between her detail that this character has been “used to abegging, for she has often come here” and the non sequitur that “Her father lived to the age of 105.” Dorothy implies that despite their familiarity, these two women seem to pretend upon each encounter to meet anew. There is a pretense of unfamiliarity upon which the women have tacitly agreed. This time, the woman tells a new story, or new details—her father lived to 105 and the family now has a home that has been damaged by a storm—Dorothy doubts she needs rags to mend a wound. Dorothy undercuts everything she recounts of the Tall Beggar Woman's story, and yet she continues to listen. When considering all of the encounters with vagrants

across the journal, one of the most generous forms of charity Dorothy offers is the chance to have a full conversation, either at her door, in a seat by the fire, or on a mountain path. Whether or not the woman is here for rags, or with a pretext to beg, or even if her father really did live to 105, does not matter. We can infer that Dorothy was moved enough to give her time to talk.

Dorothy seems to find the evidence she needs to support her sympathy in physical details, rather than in this figure's cry. First, though still "of strong bones," the beggar woman's height is now less exaggerated and Dorothy tells us she has become "broken." The Pretty Little Boy wears the same coat he wore when Dorothy and William encountered him upon the path to Skelleth two years earlier, and appears thin and pale, "scarcely at all grown." This physical contrast is the only one Dorothy ever examines because this is the only time she revisits a vagrant subject to consider the effect of time. Here, she comes to terms with the fact that the subjects she has painted do not remain static. In this realization, she dramatically shifts these particular characters out of category of "people encountered" and into that of relations as she confesses she has "loved" the "pretty little fellow" "for the sake of Basil." In the son, she sees a loved one, Basil, and by extension, she sees herself in the Tall Beggar Woman, and she worries for the mother as well as for herself: "Poor creatures! When the woman was gone, I could not help thinking that we are not half thankful enough that we are placed in that condition of life in which we are." For the rest of the day, this worry transfers over into her toiling with William at a poem about vagrancy to keep them afloat, only to end the day with "dismal sound of a crying Infant" coming from the family of vagrants passing by at bedtime.

While many critics, including Levin and Frosch, argue that Dorothy and William seem to identify with or project self-portraits through their vagrant characters, in this instance, when Dorothy returns to a figure she had attempted to dismiss, she elucidates clearly that she does indeed identify this figure with a member of her intimate circle. Her mind seems to have churned over this encounter for a month when, suddenly, she and William discuss and work actively at “the poem of the Beggar woman taken from a Woman whom I had seen in May—(now nearly 2 years ago)” (77). Troubling this word “taken,” I see Dorothy as attempting to transfer the Tall Beggar Woman’s needs into her worry and from her worry into her brother’s work. Dorothy “sate with him at Intervals all the morning,” writing his stanzas. Later that day, she reads to him from her journal the words she wrote about the boys. While we know that William read and used her journal to help frame poems, this entry is the only moment within the journal itself with such a self-referential description—another example of the Tall Beggar Woman forcing Dorothy to make an exception to her general policy on how to write and use the journal.

A tension seems to quickly build until William writes “Beggars.” At the day’s end, Dorothy bemoans her having referred to the journal, “an unlucky thing it was,” because it seems to slow rather than speed William’s pen. The last sentences of the day indicate Dorothy was worried that this particular poem would not get written and that she regretted turning to the journal: “In our walk from Rydale he had got warmed with the subject & had half cast the Poem.” Suspense mounts as she describes William at work on the poem the next morning. This entry is another rare instance in which Dorothy paints a portrait of William, almost like a Cry of Grasmere. We see him framed in the kitchen, with his props (his pen and paper in addition to “his Basin of Broth before him untouched & a

little plate of Bread & butter”), his attire (“shirt neck unbuttoned, & his wait coat open”), and his cry in the form of “Beggars” and a subsequent poem, “To a Butterfly.” Her joy is conveyed in the exclamation mark that concludes his having finished both poems, and her relief manifests in her luxuriating on a “fur gown before the fire.” From this day forward, no matter how frequently this woman begs, Dorothy will no longer mention her.

### **Most Graceful**

After the release of seeing the poems written, the Tall Beggar Woman and her boys now secured in lines, Dorothy recalls how the second poem, “To a Butterfly,” was inspired. This poem comes easily to William, and Dorothy recounts how they had, at some unspecified time, discussed their differing ways of treating butterflies as children: he hunted them as “Frenchmen” and killed them while she was “afraid of brushing the dust off their wings” (78). The butterflies, of course are linked to the beggar boys. Dorothy and William had discussed these siblings chasing butterflies, as recounted in her journal entry the day before. In “Beggars,” William not only features them chasing a single crimson butterfly, he also transforms the boys into butterflies: “Wings let them have, and they might flit/Precursors to Aurora's car, / Scattering fresh flowers.” The “beggar boys,” as Dorothy calls them, become both hunters and the hunted, subjects and objects. And through this equation of vagrants with butterflies, William subtly tucks into the second poem his awareness of the difference in how he and his sister behold the poor. While he will “rush/ Upon the prey:—with leaps and springs” “from brake to bush,” Dorothy is less assured that



this policy of collecting butterflies is not harmful. Ironically, her obsessive returning to the Tall Beggar Woman was rooted in a desire to let her go.

Drawing a satisfying conclusion to any study of how the Wordsworths perceived and treated the poor is problematic. R. Clifton Spargo has nicely summarized the back and forth between critics such as Marjorie Levinson and James Chandler who have treated William as more progressive and David Simpson and Gary Harrison who have considered the poet as more reactionary (54). Spargo himself argues that in 1802, the year “Beggars” was written, William is becoming the late Wordsworth, “a poet who withdraws from the specter of his more liberal, even revolutionary politics of the 1790s” (56). Further, Scott Dykstra has shown that in his own “solitaries,” William was committed to a certain level of ambivalence toward his subjects, writing that “ambiguity...is a distinguishing feature of Wordsworth’s solitaries—what makes them always seem to extend beyond their overt fictive roles as representatives of ‘nature’s law,’ ‘perfect peace,’ ‘resolution and independence” (904). Further, “Wordsworth’s poetry actually invites the sort of ‘merciless’ interrogation that its more vigilant readers are encouraged to pursue.” If Dykstra is correct, then on this morning when William pins down the beggar boys as butterflies for future audiences, he seems also to be aware that his sister was not up for that “merciless interrogation” and ambiguity that would distance these figures from their real needs and from their reflections of friends, relatives and herself. The Tall Beggar Woman forces Dorothy to confront how an individual itinerant figure cannot work independently but only within a system—the system of her own family, the system of the neighborhood, and the system of the culture that has made her “but a *common* case.” Her brother’s belief that, as Woolf puts it, “individual acts of charity are of value to the giver as well as to the receiver”

has been tested and strained by this one woman's need that persisted beyond the piece of bread Dorothy gave her on May 27, 1800 (188). Dorothy may not have been simply struggling to determine how she felt about her vagrant subjects, but how she felt about her brother's policies toward his own "solitaries," too.

While there is no more reference to the Tall Beggar Woman after William writes his poems, she seems to linger upon both journalist and poet's minds. William continued to revise the poem "Beggars" until it evolved into "Sequel to the Foregoing" (Spargo 77) And in the *Grasmere Journal*, on June 1, 1802, Dorothy observes a Columbine plant growing alone amid rocks. Here, we might even see Dorothy thinking about the Tall Beggar Woman as in some way better off in her vagrant state, hinting to why she needed to let this figure go. She notes, "it is a graceful slender creature, a female seeking retirement & growing freest & most graceful where it is most alone. I observed that the more shaded plants were always the tallest."

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## Epilogue From Goldilocks to Tess

They had proceeded thus gropingly two or three miles further when on a sudden Clare became conscious of some vast erection close in his front, rising sheer from the grass. They had almost struck themselves against it. "What monstrous place is this?" said Angel.

-Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

On Stonehenge, Thomas Hardy sacrifices his chronically vagrant Tess Durbeyfield. In this monumental scene, he shows us that despite a century of social and literary reform since William Wordsworth first conceived his female vagrant trekking across Salisbury Plain, the cultural lag owed to a longer history of religious oppression, superstition, and balladry still engulfs and destroys women's lives. In the century between Wordsworth's "The Female Vagrant," and Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, politicians and reformers fought to allow women to gain custody of their children, divorce more easily, and maintain their own property in the event of death, marriage, and divorce, as well to send their children to school and protect them from dangerous work conditions.<sup>52</sup> A woman such as Wordsworth's female vagrant should be now in better straits, but in Tess we find an echo of Wordsworth's character hunted by the police, racing with her husband through the New Forest for the past three days and sleeping in an abandoned house the night before. Just like Southey's vagrant old woman in his "Story of the Three Bears," Tess and Angel take shelter by breaking and entering, testing the chairs and the beds, but Tess's fate will be far worse than Southey's prescribed conviction to the House of Corrections. She will be

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<sup>52</sup> See the Custody of Infants Act of 1839, Factories Act of 1847, Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, Education Act of 1870, and Married Women's Property Act of 1882.

hanged. Yet these final pages of vagrancy are her happiest, “all that’s sweet and lovely,” after chapters and chapters of having been pitted against nature, man, God, other women, and herself (390). Tess thinks of her short future as well as the pagan history of her altar and her family, and tells Angel, “So now I am at home” (393). Hardy repossesses her.

*Tess of the D’Urbervilles* reprises many of the themes and tropes discussed in this dissertation but from a modern historic and generic perspective. By the turn of the next century, Tess can be much more than “a female vagrant”; she is a tragic heroine. My evidence demonstrates how Romantic writers had paved the way for Victorian writers to construct heroines in the epic convention. Vagrancy, seen in all its material reality, proved to be a hell into which writers could hurl women, giving them the opportunity to test their identities and values, an Elysian Field on which these characters might find redemption.

My work introduces a discussion of Romantic literature’s engagement with female vagrancy and realism, and I’ve made the case that this field deserves more attention. Certainly, Mary Wollstonecraft’s Jemima, in *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*, works as a composite of all the types and causes of vagrancy that many women faced. As Wollstonecraft’s title implies, vagrancy often resulted from mistakes made by women in the context of a patriarchal system that oppresses them. Frances Burney demonstrates that vagrancy affected every class with her “everywoman” protagonist in *The Wanderer*, while Thomas De Quincey explores the relationship between prostitution and vagrancy in his character Ann in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Competing with these historically grounded depictions, we could consider Keats’ “Lamia” and Coleridge’s Geraldine of “Christabel” as metaphysical extensions of female vagrants and question how these

contrasting approaches might produce a more complete understanding of the perception of vagrant women in this era. Interesting work remains to be done in regard to this figure.

Still, with my evidence, we can estimate how the Romantic treatment of the female vagrant impacted Victorian writers. This figure branches in different directions, evolving into the Victorian orphan as well as becoming incorporated into the Victorian heroine/antiheroine. Writers such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot preferred the orphan as a more sympathetic figure to press questions concerning the need for social safety nets and communal care. Meanwhile, vagrancy becomes a convention in constructing strong protagonist females, a criterion for novelists to meet in order for their female characters to rise to the level of heroine. Vagrancy becomes a chapter of one's life rather than an all-encompassing identity.

We can see how writers came to prefer the orphan to the adult female vagrant by observing how Southey's vagrant woman transformed into the figure of Goldilocks. David Bruce charts the history of this evolution noting that in 1850, 12 years after the publication of Southey's version, Joseph Cundall casts the home intruder as "Silver Hair," an orphan with an old woman's hair, an eerie but less threatening figure. Later authors transformed "Silver Hair" into "Silver Locks," and since silver is an odd hair color for a child, others soon made her "Golden Hair" and then "Golden Locks." Bruce tells that "Goldielocks" emerged in *The Home Fairy Tales*, an English translation of *Contes du Petit-Chateau* (1867) by Jean Macé. But it is Cundall's child named "Silver Hair" who circles readers back a century to Newbery's *Goody-Two Shoes*, an orphaned vagrant girl, wise beyond her years, and a vehicle through which Newbery questioned enclosure, rotten borough districting, and the

poor laws, all of which were being addressed by the time Goldilocks cements her place in the canonical tale.

To generate more sympathy for the poor, Victorian writers made the vagrant more beautiful, then younger, and finally, an orphan to promote their views on an ethic of care. While this might seem like a movement away from even-handed realism toward sentimentalism, remember that many vagrant women once were either orphans or were abandoned or rejected by their families: the categories greatly overlap. Orphans were a “particularly unfortunate” subset of the vagrant community, according to Audrey Eccles (217). Parishes were harsher on pregnant vagrant women, often forcing them to marry men from other neighborhoods in order to reduce strain on parish relief funds. Often husband and mother would then abscond, leaving the child as a burden upon the initial parish. These children were either apprenticed to abusive masters or sent to severe workhouses in the hope that the child would run away and be a burden elsewhere. Girls were particularly vulnerable, since they weren’t chosen for apprenticeships, and were more likely to be subject to prostitution and sexual abuse (214). These girls eventually found themselves in the same situations their mothers faced before abandoning them.

Critics generally acknowledge that writers use orphan characters as a *tabula rasa* that allows any reader to relate to the work, and that these characters throw into relief that status of the family, and by extension the nation. As Laura Peters writes, “[The] reality was the family needed orphans. The family and all it came to represent—legitimacy, race, and national belonging—was in crisis” (1). Yet, orphans weren’t just literary tropes: they were real children in crisis, and we should explore the ways in which Victorian writers spoke literally of their material realities. In the long nineteenth century, orphans engaged many

political issues regarding rights to inheritance and education as well as protection from abuse at home and in the workplace. Bastards, akin to orphans, had begun gaining rights to inheritance in the 1790s, making them a particularly charged figure for progressive writers, explains Malini Roy (as quoted in McGavran 26). For example, Wollstonecraft's orphaned Jemima generates the pathos needed to make the case for these legal changes. The affinity between vagrant women and orphans makes sense if we remember that both were treated as property, were most representative of the homeless population, and helped address similar thematic goals. This transition of the emblem of social injustice is foreshadowed in the works I've addressed: We found Mary Robinson's travelling narrator talking to an orphan in the graveyard, Dorothy Wordsworth drawn to the "Pretty Little Boy," and Maria Edgeworth championing "The Orphans."

From here we can start to see how the movement toward the orphan steers toward the construction of the most iconic heroines of nineteenth century novels. Jane Eyre, Catherine Earnshaw, Estella Havisham, Becky Sharp, and Tess Durbeyfield are either orphans, self-fashioned waifs, or children pushed from their homes too soon. Each protagonist spends some paragraphs to chapters sleeping in the rough or precarious situations. Several novels move a hybrid of orphan/female vagrant into a home, though not truly her own home. For example, in Jane Austen's Fanny Price of *Mansfield Park* and Charles Dickens's Estella of *Great Expectations*, we have the opportunity to explore the relationship between the orphan/vagrant and the pervasive appeal of Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House." Grounded in the truth of what struggles homeless women of the Romantic era faced, we can keep in context the question, what must these girls do to keep

from outright vagrancy? In this light, the angel seems less sentimental or mawkish, but a rational response to dire prospects.

Vagrancy thus emerges as an antagonistic force, a challenge for these characters to surmount to maintain their moral code. If the conventional epic hero<sup>53</sup> is a moral exemplar who must take a “long, perilous journey, often involving a descent into the Underworld,” as Philip V. Allingham explains it, then Jane Eyre rises to the level of epic heroine when, after her flight from Thornfield, she finds herself sleeping on the ground in unknown countryside:

What was I to do? Where to go? Oh, intolerable questions, when I could do nothing and go nowhere!—when a long way must yet be measured by my weary, trembling limbs before I could reach human habitation—when cold charity must be entreated before I could get a lodging: reluctant sympathy importuned, almost certain repulse incurred, before my tale could be listened to, or one of my wants relieved! (Brönte 275-6)

Through the condition of vagrancy, writers could take a woman’s integrity and identity to the brink while testing her survival skills. Recall my reference to *Robinson Crusoe* at the start of this dissertation. The adventures of orphans and vagrant women work like those of picaresque heroes who model for readers persistence and moral fortitude in worst case scenarios.

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<sup>53</sup> And like other heroes, these heroines come from noble lineage but grow up believing they are orphans in rustic settings. Consider that Jane’s uncle eventually leaves her a great inheritance and that Tess Durbeyfield actually is a descendant of the D’Urbervilles, despite what impostor Alec tells her.



Due to its realistic treatment by Romantic era writers, vagrancy arises as a credible scenario in the lives of women who by the Victorian era had heard, seen, read, and understood its consequences. This inheritance—a common understanding of the plausible threat of vagrancy—underscores the choices made by so many beloved heroines, some more subtly, others quite palpably. The loss of a home is a possibility in the lives of all of Austen's heroines, all of the Brontës' heroines, all of Dickens's heroines, several of George Eliot's heroines, and most of Thomas Hardy's heroines, and these characters can no longer be culturally naïve to what vagrancy entails. Consider how many times Tess Durbeyfield appears vagrant: She must leave her home for the Tantridge poultry farm, trudge back to her parents' cottage from the site of her rape, trek through various terrains to the Talbothay's dairy, journey miles from her honeymoon suite to a starve-acre farm, to and from the her husband's childhood home, back to her childhood home where her father's death results in her entire family's vagrancy, then to Stonehenge from the seaside resort where she has murdered the man who gave her family a home at the price of her integrity. Vagrancy is a constant factor in her life and by the novel's end, Tess is no longer daunted by it.

Just as Milton subsumed all preceding epics into *Paradise Lost*, Hardy subsumes all of the vagrant woman lore into this grand-scale novel that shows that despite the progress of the century, swaths of the nation still existed where reform was nascent and flimsy, and superstitious ways still oppressed girls like Tess. Tess's story is set in motion by her mother's love of fortune and prophecy. Hardy, aware of the lessons told by Wordsworth, Hannah More, and Maria Edgeworth, weaves them together to show a girl caught in a time warp:

Tess, being left alone with the younger children, went first to the outhouse with the fortune-telling book, and stuffed it into the thatch. A curious fetishistic fear of this grimy volume on the part of her mother prevented her ever allowing it to stay in the house all night, and hither it was brought back whenever it had been consulted. Between the mother, with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter, with her trained National teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code, there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood. When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed. (111)

Here in this outhouse haunts Wordsworth's female vagrant who hid in a privy overnight, attempting to "frame" her "tongue" to the "beggar's language" for the first time (ll. 186-9). In this scene, Tess's mother Joan mirrors the marks of More's duplicitous fortune-telling vagrant, "Tawney Rachel," and in Tess we find an alternate version of Edgeworth's Granny Grope, doomed to vagrancy by a fortune told to her in her youth. Tess will soon find herself lured into the wood by Alec like the fallen maidens of balladry who turned into Wordsworth's "The Female Vagrant," and "The Thorn." The fortune-telling book symbolizes centuries of superstitious culture against which Tess must constantly fight for a place in the house.

While subsuming the canon of female vagrant lore and conventions into the novel, Hardy rises above this theme further with a nearly omniscient narrator. Though Hardy wrests away from Tess the narratorial power that Mary Robinson and Charlotte Brönte gave to their female vagrant characters, Hardy shows us that Tess is acutely aware that she

is being watched. Traveling quickly to avoid stares while on her climb to Flintcomb-Ash, she observes the curious attention she receives when she wears her fine wedding clothes and the lewd attention she receives when she dresses in drab work clothes. She chooses secluded paths to go unseen but then finds herself dangerously alone with a man who “stared hard at her.” This man looms as a sexual threat and Tess, like Daphne in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, “took to her heels with the speed of the wind” and “plunged” into the forest “deep enough” to be safe from discovery. So while Hardy returns the narration to the male voyeur, as in Wordsworth’s “*The Female Vagrant*,” he aligns with Mary Robinson in questioning whether a woman can as easily find recuperative solitude in nature. More compelling, Tess is aware of how both Alec and Angel can be as fickle as the writers and artists of the late eighteenth century who argued whether she is a sinner or a saint, the debate into which Dorothy Wordsworth found herself pulled and attempted to resist. Tess speaks directly to us as well as her oppressor, Alec, asking, “How do I know that you would do all this? Your views may change—and then—we should be—my mother would be—homeless again” (355). Her question is not only for Alec, but also for us: Why should she believe that reformed laws could counter the cultural habit of viewing female vagrants as madwomen or harlots? Hardy has risen above the back-and-forth of the past century to show how constant variance in attitude toward unfortunate women still hurts and shapes them more than government can help.

Hardy shows us that progress for women is still so tenuous that we can find ourselves back on the Druid plane, watching a woman being sacrificed again. He seems to let Tess know this, too, as she urges Angel to use all he has learned to help her younger sister, Liza Lu, benefit from his enlightenment when she is dead. Yes, Hardy kills this female

vagrant and with her, all her interpretations. But unlike the early modern ballads of Molly and Billy where the ship's carpenter kills his maiden, Hardy allows Tess to kill Alec, who represents the old, unreliable culture that doomed her. Hardy promises us a new world for Liza Lu with a reformed Angel. And then he turns his attention to Sue Bridehead, the New Woman.

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## Abstract

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*Dispossessed Women: Female Homelessness in Romantic Literature*

Dissertation directed by Sarah Zimmerman, Ph. D.

“Dispossessed Women” examines the status of homeless women in late-eighteenth and early nineteenth century literature, with special attention to both the cultural assumptions and aesthetic power that accrued to these figures. Across the Romantic era, vagrant women were ubiquitous not only in poetry, children’s fiction, novels, and non-fiction, but also on the streets of towns and cities as their population outnumbered that of vagrant males. Homeless women became the focus of debates over how to overhaul the nation’s Poor Laws, how to police the unhoused, and what the rising middle class owed the destitute in a rapidly industrializing Britain. Writers in the Romantic period began to treat these characters with increasing realism, rather than sentimentalism or satire. This dissertation tracks this understudied story through the writing of Mary Robinson, Maria Edgeworth, Hannah More, Robert Southey, and William and Dorothy Wordsworth.



## **Vita**

Melissa Jane Hurwitz, daughter of Suzanne and William Tyrrell was born August 24, 1972 in Wilmington, Delaware. In 1995, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Delaware, where she was editor-in-chief of *The Review*. In 1997, she earned a master's in journalism from Northwestern University and spent the decade working at various newspapers as a general assignment and features reporter, covering housing, crime, cooking, education, politics, and everything in between. In 2001, she was honored with a Freedom Forum Robert F. Kennedy Award honorable mention for an examination of protection from abuse orders in York County, Pennsylvania. In 2010, she earned a master's degree in English from Hunter College, where she earned the Norman Knox Prize for best English MA thesis of the year. In March 2010, she gave birth to Laura and received her acceptance letter to Fordham University's doctoral program. While at Fordham she earned a Senior Teaching Fellowship and participated in the Jesuit Pedagogy Seminar.