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"A Sort of Pain, Which Is New": Unresolved Grief in British Romantic Literature

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**“A SORT OF PAIN, WHICH IS NEW”:
UNRESOLVED GRIEF IN BRITISH ROMANTIC LITERATURE**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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December 2022

untuk Bapak, Ibu, Abi, dan Om Yanto

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the cultural phenomenon of mourning in relation to British Romantic Literature. In chapters on the work of William Wordsworth, Jane Austen, Felicia Hemans, and Charles Lamb, it argues that the Romantic period, as a time of increased mobility due to three revolutions, wars, and the expansion of empire, was a moment when unresolved grief became a common experience. Using the psychologist Pauline Boss's concept of "ambiguous loss" as a lens for a new reading of British Romantic writing, and distinguishing this concept from the modern concept of "nostalgia," this dissertation analyzes poetry, novels, and essays written by both male and female authors in order to show the pervasiveness of ambiguous loss in this period's literature. In the process, this dissertation provides a new way of understanding the distinctively modern, elegiac mood in much British Romantic writing.

Introduction

December 2019: I just learned the term “ambiguous loss” when the first cases of COVID-19 were reported from Wuhan, China; the news felt like something happening in a remote place that somehow would not affect the United States of America. Three months later, on March 11, 2020: After more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries and 4,291 deaths, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic (*WHO Director-General’s*). Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards declared a statewide public health emergency; the following day Louisiana State University announced the cancelation of classes the week of March 16 prior to the Spring break and moved classes online beginning March 30. Students living on campus were encouraged to go home; international travel was prohibited; domestic business travel was limited. Little did I know that I just embarked into a shared experience of ambiguous loss with the rest of the world.

Ambiguous loss is a term that first came to be used in the late twentieth century. In the 1970s, Pauline Boss was researching the families of the pilots missing in action in the Vietnam war. The families did not know whether their loved ones were still alive or already dead, and they found themselves ambivalent about their status (e.g., is one still a wife or has she become a widow?) and what to do. To explain the sense of loss they were experiencing, Boss coined the term "ambiguous loss" to name “a unique kind of loss that defies closure, in which the status of a loved one as ‘there’ or ‘not there’ remains indefinitely unclear” (*Ambiguous Loss* 6). She contrasts it with what she considers “the most obvious ordinary loss”: death, “an event codified by official verification—a death certificate, a funeral ceremony, and a ritualized burial, entombment, or scattering of the ashes” (*Ambiguous Loss* 9). Ambiguous loss results from various causes, ranging from catastrophe, such as a pandemic, to common, everyday separations, such as breakups, divorces, migration, and adoption.

What makes a loss ambiguous is the fact that the loss “remains unclear and without official verification” and that “immediate resolution . . . may never be achieved” (*The Myth* 3). In the twenty first century, what was thought to be a short period of precaution turned out to be a global fight that was not yet over on the second anniversary of the WHO declaring COVID-19 a pandemic. Earlier in March 2022, the WHO released data showing that the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a 25% increase in anxiety and depression worldwide (“CDC Museum COVID-19 Timeline”). The COVID-19 pandemic had altered all aspects of human lives and created multiple levels of loss. A lot remained unknown, confusion and doubt about what was happening still abound, and questions about if and when it would be over were yet to be answered. May 2022: WHO estimated 15 million direct or indirect deaths (or “excess mortality”) caused by the COVID-19 pandemic globally from January 2020 to December 2021. The number of recorded deaths in the U.S. reached 1 million (1,000,000) on May 12, 2022; the firearm homicide rate had increased 35%, the highest rate in more than 25 years; and the firearm suicide rate remained high worldwide (“CDC Museum COVID-19 Timeline”). Eerily in the midst of a time of uncertainty and change, I found myself writing a dissertation about ambiguous loss that became pervasive in late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century British literature.

Although ambiguous loss as a term is relatively new, as an experience it existed long before the term was coined. In “*A sort of pain, which is new*”: *Unresolved Grief in British Romantic Literature*, I argue that the experience of ambiguous loss was a central feature in writing of the British Romantic period, which coincided with a moment of rapid historical change between 1785 and 1832. British Romantic authors repeatedly capture the uncertainty of ambiguous loss – even though the term did not yet exist.

If “ambiguous loss” was not a recognized term in the British Romantic period, the phenomenon it describes was coming to be familiar at the time. Ambiguous loss thus provides a helpful signifier for a range of responses to grief that were becoming increasingly common in the so-called Age of Revolutions. As a psychological and cultural phenomenon, ambiguous loss is pervasive in British Romantic literature, and it makes its way through the work of various authors and of different genres. This study covers the work of two poets, William Wordsworth (April 7, 1770 – April 23, 1850) and Felicia Hemans (September 25, 1793 – May 16, 1835), a novelist, Jane Austen (December 16, 1775 – July 18, 1817), and an essayist, Charles Lamb (February 10, 1775 – December 27, 1834). While all these authors deal with death, they draw readers’ attention frequently and powerfully to other kinds of loss and mourning. There are different forms of such loss in these authors’ writing. Some involve separation when loved ones leave their homeland for various reasons. Poverty and war force a husband to enlist, and his wife dies waiting without knowing whether he is still alive or is already dead. Different social standing separates lovers. After eight years of separation, the man returns from the sea, but both are uncertain whether their love stands the test of time. With global mobility, family members at home and abroad are struggling with the sense of loss resulting from the separation. A mother creates a make believe that she knows where their four children are, imagining their graves scattered all over the globe. A bachelor may experience additional loss, working long hours dealing with stuff from far away without ever leaving the city where he lives. Reading poetry, novel, and essays by British Romantic authors allows readers to see how painful ambiguous loss is and how difficult it is to deal with. Romantic literature becomes a space for making such socially invisible losses visible to the reader, for recording such losses and showing how characters suffer from and process them.

Revolutions, the British Empire, and Wars

Late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Britain witnessed three revolutions – the American Revolution (1775-1783), the French Revolution (1789-1790s), and the Industrial Revolution (c. 1760-c. 1840) – creating a migratory culture and triggering rapid social changes that made ambiguous loss a common experience. To finance the American Revolutionary war, Britain increased its national debt, necessitating raising taxes, which fell heavily on the poor. Despite the establishment of an unprecedented size of armed forces, Britain lost its American colonies, which ended the First British Empire. The Second British Empire began with colonies consisting of India and considerable conquests in Africa. An important agent of British imperialism and colonialism was the East India Company. Originally established in 1600s for the exploitation of trade with East and Southeast Asia and India, by the mid eighteenth century it had become the world’s largest corporation with its own considerable armed forces, exercising military power, ruling, and assuming administrative functions. By the early nineteenth century, the number of soldiers the East India Company had doubled that of the British Army.¹ One direct consequence of the expansion of British empire is an increasing voluntary and forced global mobility. Thus, more British people in the Romantic period than in the previous era were on the move among, stayed in, or were born in British colonies. The global separation created a tension between presence and absence: those far away were longing for home and for things that represent home; those at home were wondering and worrying about their loved ones far away.

¹ In *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756-1833*, H.V. Bowen notes: “By 1830 the Company employed 895 civil servants and 745 medical officers in India, and the ‘European’ element of the Company’s Indian army had reached 36,409 men within an overall establishment of 223,476. In sum, therefore, it can be estimated that around 40,000 men were on the Company’s payroll in India during the early 1830s, and, under the terms of Charter Act of 1813, there were 20,000 regular troops on the subcontinent who were paid for by the Company” (262).

Britain was able to reach the peak of its empire in the nineteenth century, owing to its growing naval strength. The early nineteenth century marks the high point of British interest in the sea. In *Written on the Water: British Romanticism and the Maritime Empire of Culture* (2010), Samuel Baker argues, "British writers reconceived the idea of culture as they came to grips with how the material work of cultivating growth had become less a matter of working the land than of extending commercial, industrial, and military efforts across land and sea" (83). Baker marks the transition from a traditional basis in the soil to a new locus in the ocean as it became the most significant focus of British expansion in the Romantic era. But the further people were away from home, the more likely they were to suffer from the condition known at the time as "nostalgia." The word "nostalgia" has a more positive association in the modern era than it did in the Romantic era. Merriam-Webster defines it as "a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition" or "the state of being homesick ("Nostalgia"). But in the Romantic period, nostalgia was still considered as a pathology, a physical illness. One of the eighteenth-century definitions of medical nostalgia, as Kevis Goodman points out is a "disease system circulated around the emerging of imperial system, with British doctors on voyages of conquest and exploration, and with the nation's armies fighting on the continent" ("Uncertain Disease" 197). Jean Starobinski and William Kemp note: "It was one thing to leave willingly, ... and another to be forced to leave, ... From the seventeenth century on, this was the fate of the Swiss soldier serving in foreign lands; it was equally the fate of the English sailors who were impressed into the service of the Navy" (86). Longing for home manifests in physical illness that could lead to death.

What also contributed to the rise of the British Empire as the world's foremost power were the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). Fearing a French invasion led by Napoleon, the British

increased the size of the army and navy, and the public rallied behind the British military.

Napoleonic wars also shaped the nation's mourning culture. David A. Bell points out that the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815) were the first to involve citizen armies on such a grand scale and millions of war deaths. In *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (2007), he argues that those wars were the first total war due to their scope and intensity of warfare.² Bell provides figures, showing the fast-growing and unprecedented death toll: "During the Napoleonic period, France alone counted close to a million war deaths, possibly including a higher proportion of its young men than died in World War I. The toll across Europe may have reached as high as 5 million" (7). Such mass deaths left many more million non-combatants back home struggling to mourn the loss of loved ones being away in relatively distant lands and foreign circumstances.

British wars may have happened in faraway places, yet the impacts were felt by people back home who were not directly involved in the wars. Commenting on the insistence of the safety of home as opposed to the danger of distant wars, Mary A. Favret asserts, "Yet the everyday in this period of imperial expansion was simultaneously wedded to an awareness of war: in many cases the everyday emerged as temporal and experiential structure for wartime, reiterating on home turf the experience, however distant and haunting, of combat" ("Everyday War" 612). Many Romantic literary works capture the experience of people not directly involved in a war but suffered what Favret calls "human consequences of war at a distance":

² David A Bell argues that historians believe two different factors contributed to the intensification of wars after 1792: "First, they cite revolutionary ideology, suggesting that the wars grew out of a conflict between fundamentally incompatible belief systems: one radically egalitarian and the other conservative and hierarchical. Second, they invoke nationalism, arguing that even though earlier wars had pitted dynastic houses against each other, these new conflicts took place between entire nations that were coming to new states of self-consciousness" (9).

These consequences were of the most fundamental sort: most strikingly, we will see that distant war unsettled basic temporal experiences of the British population. How time and knowledge were registered in daily life became newly uncertain. And with that uncertainty came a set of disturbing affective responses, including numbness, dizziness, anxiety, or a sense of being overwhelmed. (*War at a Distance* 11)

Favret is describing in many ways the experience that Boss, initially in relation to the Vietnam War, names as “ambiguous loss.” The uncertainty of absence and presence affects those who are away from the battleground. While some mourned the death of their loved ones, some never had proof of their loved one's death, making mourning more complicated. Wars at a distance create uncertainty and ambiguity. But, as Boss also observes—and as we see in the chapters of my dissertation—even in times of peace, many other aspects of human lives are prone to ambiguous loss.

Ambiguous Loss and the Culture of Mourning

One definition of mourning as a psychological phenomenon is offered by Sigmund Freud. In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud differentiates between two reactions to loss: the “normal” mourning and “pathological” melancholia. Both are “the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (153); and they share similar symptoms: “a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity” (153).

Although involving withdrawal from the regular attitude to life, there is nothing to worry about in mourning. It only takes a lapse of time for the work of mourning to be completed, which requires accepting the fact that the loved object no longer exists and withdrawing all the libido from its attachment to the object. For Freud, a healthy mourner exists only when he is capable of rejecting attachments to lost others, no longer having an emotional tie to the lost object of love and finding a new object to which the free libido is reattached. Otherwise, the person would suffer from melancholia.

Ambiguous loss is more difficult to overcome because the object itself is never definitely lost. It is traumatic and can cause ambivalence, which can overwhelm the sufferer's ability to cope. Although resembling a trauma that causes PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), ambiguous loss, according to Boss, is different from PTSD because the traumatizing experience remains in the present and often continues for an indefinite time (“The Trauma” 139).

Ambiguous loss also causes ambivalence. According to Boss, in the fields of psychology and psychiatry, the focus on ambivalence is on contrasting impulses in the psyche, but in sociology, “ambivalence results from mixing the elements of cognition (such as social definitions of roles and status) and emotion (which includes conditioning and learned behavior)” (*Ambiguous Loss* 62). A person can be ambivalent about the ambiguity of not knowing who can be included in her family. For example, a wife postpones making big decisions until her missing husband returns, or a family insists on having the head of the family lead the family’s celebration rituals despite his inability to do so due to dementia.

Boss believes that ambiguous loss has psychological and sociological effects that manifest in multiple levels: individual, family, and community levels. At the individual level, “grief is frozen and thus is complicated; cognition remains confused, so coping and decision-making processes are blocked” (“Families” 524). Acknowledging Freudian melancholic reaction to loss, Boss differs from Freud, who considers melancholia pathological. For Boss, melancholia is normal for the victim of ambiguous loss: “In the case of ambiguous loss, however, melancholia or complicated grieving can be a normal reaction to complicated situation” (*Ambiguous Loss* 10). With no verification of death, shifting the perceptions about absence and presence becomes more challenging. Moreover, no ritual is generally available to help people who suffer unclear loss, which complicates grief, confuses relationships, and prevents closure. At

the family level, ambiguous loss breaks relationships, hinders the family's normal dynamic, and confuses family membership and boundaries. At the community level, the absence of certified death makes it difficult for the community to acknowledge ambiguous loss as a real loss. In such a case, ambiguous losses "lead to a disenfranchised grief because others did not see the loss as credible and worthy of grief" (*The Myth* 3). The victim is denied open mourning when the loss is not acknowledged. The community also tends to withdraw from giving the needed support. The failure of the community in assisting victims of ambiguous loss finds its representation in the Romantic British literature that I discuss in this dissertation.

Many psychological (including Freudian) and cultural theories on mourning are over-reliant on death that is certain. In such a normal loss, the psychological work of mourning assists a mourner in coping with the grief, and the community provides rituals to help as well. Focusing on mourning more as a discourse "among the living" than "between the living and the (imagined) dead," Esther Schor suggests, in *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria* (1994), that "mourning is a cultural rather than psychological phenomenon ... a force that constitutes communities and makes it possible to conceptualize history" (3-4). She argues that by sharing grief and through a thoughtful exchange, mourning becomes a process that creates, preserves, and moralizes social relations. The sympathy exchanged at the grave becomes the basis of social sympathy in life. Peter M. Sacks claims that mourning and elegy share the same aim: "One of the major tasks of the work of mourning and of the elegy is to repair the mourner's damaged narcissism" (10). While Freudian mourning finds consolation in human replacement, elegy offers literary fictions as the substitute of the lost object. In traditional elegies, there is a movement from grief to consolation. Mirroring the three stages of loss, elegies start with the speaker lamenting the dead when he or she is expressing his

or her grief, continue with praising the dead, showing admiration and idealization of the dead, and end with a moment of consolation and solace.

Literary critics of the twentieth and twenty-first century have already addressed mourning and loss in the Romantic British literature, but they tend to overlook the “sort of pain, which is new” in the period: ambiguous loss. The loss under scrutiny is usually associated with death that is certain and how those who survive the dead respond to it. For example, Schor emphasizes, inter alia, how sympathy exchanged at the grave becomes the basis of social sympathy in life. Assimilating Adam Smith’s theory about sympathy for the dead, she writes, “I would suggest that Smith’s sense of an unpayable debt to the dead reflects his conviction that the debt to the dead is not confined to the solitary sympathizer, but is rather distributed among the members of society at large” (36). Similarly, in *Buried Communities: Wordsworth and the Bonds of Mourning* (2004), Kurt Fosso argues “it is not the community that leads to a connection with the dead so much as it is the dead, and more specifically the relationship of the living with them, that leads to community” (7), through the collective and inconsolable act of mourning. What if there is no certainty that death has occurred. Is there any ritual for those who are mourning such uncertainty?

Ambiguous Loss in British Romantic Literature

The idea of ambiguous loss permeates the genre of sentimental novels, often written by woman writers in the late eighteenth century. It is a convention of the genre that young women are orphaned and exist in an ambiguous relation to their parents. In *Evelina: Or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), Frances Burney places her heroine, Evelina, in an ambiguous social position of not knowing her birth father while being raised by her tutor and guardian. In Ann Radcliffe’s gothic novel *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), its heroine, Adeline, already having lost her mother at the age of seven, wonders why her father is so cruel to

her, and she declares, “Since he can forget ... the affection of a parent, and condemn his child without remorse to wretchedness and despair – the bond of filial and parental duty no longer subsists between us –” (81). Having no knowledge of her father, Evelina thinks that he might be out there. Adeline is thrown into a gothic plot of terror and monstrosity caused by a man whom she thinks is her father. In both sentimental novels, the absence of clear familiar relationships propels the plot. Set in wider geographical locations than *Evelina* and *The Romance of the Forest*, Walter Scott’s *Guy Mannering* (1818) exemplifies severed family ties that result from forced migration by having the protagonist, Harry Bertram, be kidnapped as a little boy. Growing up as Vanbeest Brown, travelling to India, and enlisting in the army, the then young cavalry officer is uncertain of his parentage. He was told that he was born in Scotland and was rescued from smugglers at a young age. However, he was raised in Holland. The ambiguity of not knowing his biological parents’ identity and whereabouts complicates his adult life. The plots of all these late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century novels revolve around the absence of parental and familial figures one would expect to be present in a child’s upbringing.

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) complicates the tension of absence and presence: the hero, Victor Frankenstein creates a creature that has neither biological nor filial ties to any human being. Shelley sets her gothic-science fiction in a setting that ranges even more widely than that of Burney, Radcliffe, and Scott. Frankenstein moves throughout much of Europe – England, France, Germany, and Switzerland – and also across the globe. Walton narrates the novel’s story from the Arctic Ocean, travelling to Russia while attempting to find a new route for his expedition around the globe; Safie comes from Turkey; Clerval plans to relocate to India; and the creature that Victor creates proposes moving to South America. Victor’s created monster is denied his claim of connection to his creator. He is also denied his hope of forming an alliance

with his own kind and of building his own family: Victor destroys his creation of female monster before finishing it. Alienated, desolate, and enraged, the monster kills Victor's loved ones: his youngest brother, his close friends, and his bride. Victor also loses his father who dies of grief. At the end of the novel, the creature is mourning Victor's death, but he has experienced the loss even long before that: "I seek not a fellow-feeling in my misery. No sympathy may I ever find... that virtue has become to me a shadow, and that happiness and affection are turned into bitter and loathing despair, in what should I seek for sympathy?" (159). Lacking a mother and having now lost a surrogate father, the creature claims that he will soon die. These four Romantic novels – representing different genres of narrative fiction – dramatize the separations and migrations that are central to the experience of ambiguous loss that I explore in this dissertation.

The British Romantic literary works that I analyze show ways in which individuals are forced to grieve in isolation for losses that cannot be defined. Each of the four authors whose works I discuss here show keen awareness of how the rapid changes happening in their era created this new mode of unresolved grief. Each of these four British Romantic authors – like almost all people – experienced both definite and ambiguous loss. Wordsworth lost his brother John, a captain working for the East India Company, who died along with his crew on-board the *Earl of Abergavenny*, in 1805. Earlier in 1791, the younger Wordsworth visited revolutionary France. Falling in love yet lacking the means to support a family, he left his pregnant French lover Annette Vallon in Orleans. The outbreak of war between England and France the following year lengthened their separation. In 1802, when it had become politically safe for him, Wordsworth was finally able to return to France and meet his daughter Caroline. Austen also experienced the losses brought about by the French Revolution. During the Reign of Terror (September 5, 1793 – July 27, 1794), Austen's cousin, the Comtesse Elizabeth de Feuillide came

to live with the Austen family after her first husband was guillotined. She would later marry Henry, Austen's brother (Roberts 19-20, 146). Later in her life, Austen would experience both definite and ambiguous loss with the death of her father, the Reverend George Austen on January 21, 1805. Having no legal right to own property, the Austen women were forced to move from one dwelling to another. Austen did not find a permanent home until her brother Edward gave them a house at Chawton in 1809. Hemans lost her father in 1812, two years after he left his family to migrate to Canada. Six years into her married life, a young mother of five sons, Hemans was abandoned by her husband in 1818, and they lived separately until she died in 1835. Lamb lost his mother to a matricide by his sister in 1796 and spent the rest of his life in constant anticipation of his sister's absence when she suffered episodes of mental breakdown. When she published her first book on ambiguous loss in 1999, Boss identified two types of ambiguous loss: physical and psychological. Physical ambiguous loss or "leaving without goodbye" is a loss where a person is physically missing but cannot be mourned, such as a soldier missing in action or a kidnapped family member. Psychological ambiguous loss, or "goodbye without leaving," refers to a situation in which a person is psychologically absent, although physically present, for example, a person who suffers from dementia or brain injury. Such biographical information on the lived experience of losses helps to explain these British Romantic authors' keen awareness of losses happening around them that they captured in their work. Their losses link their personal lives to their historical period.

The narrative of unresolved grief that I trace in British Romantic literature runs from William Wordsworth to Jane Austen, Felicia Hemans, and Charles Lamb. Chronologically speaking, Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" was composed near the end of eighteenth century but set further back at the time of the American war. Austen's *Persuasion* was written in 1815-

16, but it was set in 1814 during the brief peace moment of the Napoleonic wars. Hemans's various poems that I discuss come mostly from 1823-1830 at the beginning of the Second British empire. Lamb composed individual essays and published them in *The London Magazine* from 1820 to 1825, and they were published as collections in 1823 and 1833. Although the essays do not make direct reference to the empire, the essays' principal figure, Elia works for the East India Company. The sequence of the chapters represents movement from personal experience of ambiguous loss to more societal experience of such unresolved grief.³ In terms of spatial setting, "The Ruined Cottage" and *Persuasion* are set in England; Hemans's poems place the speakers all over the world; and the Lamb essays bring back this narrative to England.

Chapter 1, "Feeding on disquiet': Wordsworth's Tales of Loss," talks about Wordsworth's poems, whose subject is mostly common people. This chapter explores the uncertainty of ambiguous loss and how it perplexes the victims and the ones witnessing such a loss. These feelings are exemplified in "The Ruined Cottage." However, when discussing the poem, critics tend to ignore, overlook, or bypass the central fact of ambiguous loss. Stephen Gill accurately says that "The Ruined Cottage" is "a powerful depiction of how calamitously the sufferings of the poor are intensified in time of war" (xvi). Instead of focusing on Margaret and Robert, Fosso focuses on the relationship between the Pedlar and the narrator, to whom the Pedlar accounts the story of Margaret. Fosso claims that the relationship between Margaret and the Pedlar "is altered by the pedlar's narrative of Margaret and by their response to it. ... [their] friendship is localized and specific, ... [based on] particular sources of loss, shared by particular

³ William Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" was written in 1797. His other poems that I discuss are from *Lyrical Ballads*, originally published in 1798 and later edition in 1800. Jane Austen's *Persuasion* was published posthumously in 1817. Felicia Hemans's active career covers the span of 1808-1835. Her selection of poems discussed in this dissertation come mostly from 1823-1830, the middle phase of her career. Charles Lamb's poems are from late 1790s and the essays are from the collections published in 1823 and 1833.

people in a specific place” (107). Thus, they create a community of mourning. Such reading shifts the attention from Robert’s and especially Margaret’s experience of loss to how people can benefit from mourning their loss.

The concept of ambiguous loss helps us to see the difficulties in making sense of loss that defies closure. Before Robert physically leaves her, Margaret has sensed that Robert is slipping away. When Robert is not absent from home wandering, his mind seems to be somewhere else. Margaret does not have words to describe her feeling of loss for her psychologically absent husband. After Robert enlists, Margaret keeps on looking for him though she knows she will not find him on land. The Pedlar, meeting Margaret every now and then, follows the progression of Margaret’s losses but does not know what to do, not even able to offer consolation. The Pedlar’s failure to understand and comfort Margaret comes from the fact that the loss does not yet have a name. When he tells the story of Margaret years after her death, the unnamed loss still troubles him. Robert and Margaret experience loss without closure. Wordsworth does not have a descriptor for the loss, but in “The Ruined Cottage” and in many other poems he portrays the different forms of unresolved grief, thereby conveying how important they were for this era of national and global migration.

Chapter 2, “‘Half agony, half hope’: Ambiguous Loss and Non-Closure in *Persuasion*,” explores both definite and ambiguous losses in Austen’s last novel, *Persuasion*. Discussing the psychological impact of the social arrangement in *Persuasion*, Claudia Johnson comments on Jane Austen’s affiliation with the eighteenth-century tradition of liberal psychology: “by linking women’s confinement within their changeless neighborhoods to the strength and longevity of their feelings, she develops this tradition with particular emphasis on women’s problems” (159). Talking about a psychological aspect of loss, Nina Auerbach says,

“*Persuasion* is defined by its blended tone of elegiac departure and the "senseless joy" of renewal and reconciliation. Its action touches extremes of loss and desolation, but out of each desolation comes the grace of recovery and enrichment of what was lost" (112). In her Lacanian reading of loss, Daniela Garofalo believes that Wentworth's sense of loss is framed by his feeling of being abandoned by Providence. Anne, on the other hand, has always embraced loss, "her loss does not depend on the Providential fantasy, that is not about having, but about circling around an absence, a lack" (75).⁴

While Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" describes only the person who stays at home and is denied a reunion with her loved one, Austen's *Persuasion* exemplifies the dispersal of family members. But those who leave have the chance to come home, albeit possibly temporarily. Anne Elliot is seen as having lost her youth and bloom after breaking off her engagement with Captain Frederick Wentworth eight years before the opening of *Persuasion*. At the end of the novel, Ann gains a husband whose large fortune comes from serving the British Empire. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), Edward Said, discussing Austen's other novel *Mansfield Park*, claims that Austen is aware of the importance of imperialism by having Sir Thomas support and maintain his estate, Mansfield Park with the money from his plantation in Antigua. We can see such similar awareness in *Persuasion* with the Navy gaining new wealth and better social standing. Yet, Austen's treatment of imperialism is more positively geared to how it benefits the heroine – and her friend for that matter. My reading of the novel focuses on the sense of loss experienced by Anne and Wentworth as they individually recollect the past

⁴ Lacan's masculine side of sexuation, according to Daniela Garofalo, is "a subjective position which promises enjoyment from the attainment of phallic objects, such as wealth and prestige. Phallic enjoyment offers the illusion that one may escape loss, and the incompleteness and vulnerability brought on by castration" (62). When Wentworth heard Anne's declaration of her commitment to loss, he admitted his loss and vulnerability.

eight years of absence from each other. The heroine's disenfranchised grief and forced mobility trigger the movement from pathological to curative nostalgia that propels the novel's narrative of non-closure. Thus, for Austen, ambiguous loss has its potential to heal while retaining its non-closure characteristic.

Chapter 3, “‘Sever’d far and wide’: Hemans and Affective Consequence of Life at a Distance,” probes into the ambiguities of empire, as they affect the experience of loss both at home and abroad. Critics of Felicia Hemans tend to focus on her interest in imperialism at the expense of the complicated dynamics of loss that the British Empire generates. They tend to focus on the imperial readings of Hemans's poems that enhance her status as the poet of Victorian imperial and domestic ideology. In his colonial and imperial reading of “The Graves of a Household,” Stuart Peterfreund considers it as “the main cautionary tale about the possible consequences of serving abroad in the forces of British Crown, whether in the military or in some colonial enterprise” (29). He claims that the children in the poem are “participants in and victims of the action of the British Empire in its colonies” (29) because their graves, each of which is described by the mother, are severed all over the world. Tricia Lootens argues, “the poem signals the end not only of the possibility but of the memory of living domestic love. On the other side of Hemans's imperial appropriation through burial stands the dissolution of domestic identity, familial and national” (250). I differ from Peterfreund and Lootens because I focus not on burial or graves, but on the absence of the confirmed death.

Ambiguous loss is a complex phenomenon which speaks to the complexity of Hemans's ideological position that makes it challenging to pinpoint her politics of empire. Similar to Wordsworth who chooses common people and ordinary lives as the subject of his poems, Hemans also portrays incidents of common British families in many of her poems. Unlike

Wordsworth, Hemans depicts not only British people in their homeland but also the ones abroad. The mothers in Hemans' poems stay home, but they are aware of the distant places where their children possibly go, yet they do not know precisely where and how the children are. The children who are at sea or in a foreign land long for home, not knowing whether they will ever return. When husband and wife are not separated, migration comes not without conflicts. In her exploration of familial separations, voluntary and forced migration, and wars, Hemans touches on the issue of imperialism and shows the complexity of losses that often do not involve confirmed death. While similar to Wordsworth and Austen in exploring separations and migrations, Hemans expands her subject by including the perspectives of those who are away from home.

Chapter 4, “‘Absence of mind’ and ‘presence of body’: Lamb’s Art of Ambiguous Loss,” examines Charles Lamb’s art of ambiguous loss in his essays featuring Elia. The subtlety of Elia’s losses – no family separation and hardly any global mobility – serves as a perfect subject for the final chapter of this dissertation. Lamb describes very different family situations defined by feelings of ambiguous loss. Marriage never happens in Charles Lamb’s life; the drama of his writing is not centered on husbands and wives, such as in “The Ruined Cottage,” nor on lovers, such as in *Persuasion*, nor on mothers, exemplified by Hemans’s “The Graves of a Household.” Ambiguous loss is everywhere in Lamb’s essays. In “Dream-Children,” Elia wakes up from a dream about his children who turn out to be not his because their mother is married to another man, which according to Andrew Miller, “A hard thought to bring home emotionally, ... you recognize your childless reality and try desperately to recapture the promise of your dream” (213). However, Judith Plotz argues that Lamb does not love children in general because Lamb’s “tenderness and empathy are reserved for himself when young rather than for other youngsters”

(89), which is evident in "A Bachelor's Complaint of the Behavior of Married People," where Elia shows no interest in admiring children. The essay, according to Seamus Perry, "is underwritten by a real sense of awful, mundane social agony and a kind of self-hatred" (87).

The Essays of Elia and *The Last Essays of Elia* capture Lamb's art of ambiguous loss in his treatment of confirmed death, bachelorhood, and employment for the British imperial project, exemplifying an existence shaped by distance and absence. Lamb presents the speaker openly lamenting the death of loved ones in the poems written while he was a young poet. In the essays featuring Elia, deaths are recalled as a vehicle to talk about subtle losses. Lost opportunities make up the experience of ambiguous loss that Elia experiences in his life: years of courting in a failed romance, bachelorhood that denies parental relationships, and years spent working that rob him of the pleasures of youth. The essays employ retrospection to touch on various matters, including painful materials, in light and humorous ways. In such a style, Lamb perfects the art of ambiguous loss in his essays while pointing out the impact of imperialism for people at home. One of Lamb's distinctions from Wordsworth, Austen, and Hemans is the fact that separations in Lamb's essays often happen at the level of fantasy – Elia loses children that he never has – and global mobility is often treated not in terms of familial relationship. Lamb's essays show different aspects of ambiguous loss in the Romantic period from what Wordsworth, Austen, and Hemans present in their works.

"A sort of pain, which is new": Unresolved Grief in British Romantic Literature explores the manifestation of ambiguous loss and how it works in various genres of Romantic-period literature, both prose and poetry, fiction and non-fiction, written both by women and by men. The close readings of works by Wordsworth, Austen, Hemans, and Lamb show that ambiguous loss is difficult to locate and identify. Such difficulty arises from the undefined and undefinable

nature of what has been lost, but once we realize that the experience of ambiguous loss is driving the representation of grief in these literary works, we can begin to see it in many different places. The repetition of the motif of ambiguous loss suggests how important these uncertain feelings of grief were for these authors, and how much they reflected the zeitgeist of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. To acknowledge the centrality of ambiguous loss in works of British Romantic period literature is to be able to link them together in new ways, and it helps us to understand what the critic William Hazlitt called “the spirit of the age” in a new light.

Chapter 1. “Feeding on disquiet”: Wordsworth’s Tales of Loss

Critics routinely talk about Wordsworth’s “We Are Seven” (1798) as a poem that contrasts the adult’s and the child’s understanding of death.⁵ In the poem, the male narrator tries in vain to teach a cottage girl that, when two of her seven siblings are dead, only five of them are left. The girl insists on repeatedly saying “we are seven”:

“How many are you, then,” said I,
“If they two are in heaven?”
Quick was the little Maid’s reply,
“O Master! we are seven.”

“But they are dead; those two are dead!
Their spirits are in heaven!”
’Twas throwing words away; for still
The little Maid would have her will,
And said, “Nay, we are seven!” (61-69)

The man’s badgering meets the girl’s resistance, indicating that they will not reach any agreement. But if the poem obviously focalizes the opposition between an innocent and an experienced understanding of death, my interest in the poem, at the beginning of this chapter on Wordsworth’s representations of ambiguous loss, is the way it lays out the historical conditions of its time, conditions that explain the emergence of a new kind of grief within the history of mourning.

When I talk about the history of mourning, I am acknowledging that mourning is a cultural practice which changes according to time and place. Boss coined the term “ambiguous loss” in the late twentieth century, but Wordsworth was beginning to sense analogous phenomena in his particular historical moment and to recognize that there were some

⁵ “We Are Seven” was first published in the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection of poems by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, first published in 1798 and generally considered to have marked the beginning of the English Romantic movement in literature.

increasingly common modes of grief that were connected to that moment. What Boss and Donna A. Carnes describe as “a unique kind of loss when a loved one disappears in body or mind” (456) is a concept that makes perfect sense for us nowadays, as in some ways it has made sense to humans across all of time, but in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century it was not really understood as a category of grief. Wordsworth helped make what we now call “ambiguous loss” tangible, by beginning to explore the concept and thus helping to consolidate it as a more widely recognizable form of grief.

The social and historical contexts of “We Are Seven,” whose heroine is a little girl Wordsworth met near Goodrich Castle in 1793, serve as the springboard for my discussion of ambiguous loss in Wordsworth’s other poems. In his Preface of 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth states his preference for “incidents and situations from common life” as the object of his poems: “Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language” (245). David Simpson observes that Wordsworth’s poems are “full of allusion to and representations of social-historical phenomena in their conjunctions with poetic subjectivity,” such as *The Prelude* in “its description of the French Revolution, and of the perceived relations between city and country” (186). Thus, a dialogue between a simple cottage girl and a passer-by in “We Are Seven” can reveal poverty in and movement out of a rural area. A couple of other poems in *Lyrical Ballads* present similar situations. Luke in “Michael” and Leonard in “The Brothers” leave their rural home to better their lives; the first moves to London and the latter goes out to sea. Two other Wordsworth’s poems from the collection, “Ruth” and “The Mad Mother” portray rural women pitted against

poverty and homelessness after being abandoned by their husbands.⁶ Wordsworth explores his interest in rustic figures, in individuals under strong influence of emotion, in figures marginalized by their class, locale, gender, and race, in role of war, politics and history in his many other poems.

In “We Are Seven,” the girl’s perception of her two dead siblings puzzles the male interlocutor, and presumably the adult reader of the poem, but it speaks even more of the historical changes taking place in the period. The girl refers to her sister and brother using an active verb, “Two of us in the church-yard lie” (21 & 31), which the man changes into a passive one, “If two are in the church-yard laid, / Then ye are only five.” (31-2). For the girl, the dead siblings are still actively present; their bodies are in the graves only twelve steps away from her house, and she does her daily activities in their presence. Aggravated, the man exclaims, “But they are dead; those two are dead! / Their spirits are in heaven!” (65-66), only to become more baffled by the girl’s strong will in the last line of the poem, “Nay, we are seven!” (69). Her exclamation shows that even though she explicitly acknowledges her siblings’ death – “The first that died was sister Jane” (49) and “My brother John was forced to go” (59) –, she refuses to see death as a marker of separation. The adult draws a clear line between life and death, bodies and spirits, and earth and heaven, but the child refuses such exclusionary, binary, and logical thought. Wordsworth would later say that the poem deals with “the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our utter inability to admit that notion” (176).⁷ What is important from the poem is not the disagreement over numbers, which produces this

⁶ “Ruth,” “The Brothers,” and “Michael” were first published in Volume Two of the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* whose Volume One consists of the poems in the 1798 edition of the collection.

⁷ Reference to “We Are Seven,” “Ruth,” “The Brothers,” and “Michael” in this chapter comes from the of *Lyrical Ballads* (1968) edited by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones.

perplexity and obscurity, but the historical conditions that contribute to what is a new, perplexing, and obscure understanding of loss.

“We Are Seven” is not only about a dialogue between a rigid older man and an innocent little girl but also about the changes that the modern world is wreaking on the British countryside. The subject of the poem, as its first line announces, is “A simple child” (1), which immediately brings to mind the modesty, innocence, and inexperience associated with children in general but especially when it refers to an eight-year-old “little cottage Girl” (5). The modifiers used to describe the girl are associated with nature: she has unruly hair, “thick with many a curl” (7), “a rustic, woodland air” (9), and fair eyes. She lives in a cottage in the churchyard where cemeteries are also located, showing old ways of life that revolved around the church. Without any modern form of birth control, large families such as that of the girl were common, and families generally stayed in the same villages for generations. The girl knits her own stockings and hems her kerchief (41-42), representing the self-sufficiency of a remote rural village not yet touched by industrial advancement. Her simple supper most likely comes from the produce grown in her village. However, the fact that four of her siblings no longer live there exemplifies the new mobility, where people leave their ancestral villages to move to larger towns or one of Britain’s distant colonies. Of the seven siblings, two of them “at Conway dwell. / And two are gone to sea” (19-20). Conway is a market town on the Northern coast of Wales, where her siblings presumably had to move to earn money. Such mobility, motivated by the industrial revolution, exemplifies what Wordsworth says about “the increasing accumulation of men in cities” (Preface 249). Nicholas Daly notes: “If the countryside seemed empty, it was because the towns and cities had grown apace: London grew from under a million inhabitants in 1801 to 4.5 million in 1901 (though the Greater London population was 6.5 million), as the population of

Britain went from 8.8 million to more than 32 million” (2). The cottage girl’s being “wildly clad” (10) implies the poverty her siblings would try to escape. The other two siblings have gone even further away to “the sea” which represents either Britain’s military involvement or its imperial enterprises. Writing in the rural Lake District, Wordsworth was especially intimate with this concept of ambiguous loss, witnessing families having been broken up by the pursuit of money and by the governmental use of people’s bodies in the war machine and colonial enterprise.

Poverty, mobility, and familial separation are the dynamics that condition the representation of ambiguous loss in “The Ruined Cottage.”⁸ Although writing the poem while England was at war with France, Wordsworth set the poem’s story during the American War (1775-1783), saying, “I was born too late to have a distinct remembrance of the origin of the American war; but the state in which I represent Robert's mind to be, I had frequent opportunities of observing at the commencement of our rupture with France in 1793” (Knights 5).⁹ The poem calls its story “a tale of silent suffering” (II, 233). Jonathan Wordsworth highlights Wordsworth’s capability in exploring sufferings as the representation of “the deepest and noblest human emotions” (1). Exploring the uncertainty of loss that denies closure, Wordsworth would agree that ambiguous loss would comprise such deepest and noblest human emotions. Both the narrative structure and the narrative content of “The Ruined Cottage” contribute to the exploration of the uncertainty surrounding unresolved grief that was becoming common experience in the late eighteenth-century Britain due to the social upheavals in the period.

⁸ “The Ruined Cottage” was written in 1797-8 as an independent work and published in 1814 as Book First – The Wanderer of *The Excursion*.

⁹ In *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth Vol. V*, William Knights notes, “*The Excursion* was written at intervals between 1795 and 1814. The story of Margaret, in the first book, was begun at Racedown in 1795, and continued at Alfoxden in 1797-8” (16). French Revolutionary Wars involving Great Britain, the Holy Roman Empire, Prussia, Russia, and several other monarchies lasted from 1792 to 1802.

The Narrative of Uncertainty

“The Ruined Cottage” is framed with multiple narrative voices. It begins with the narrator describing his meeting with the Pedlar in a ruined cottage and ends with both leaving the ruin.¹⁰ Chronologically speaking, we hear Margaret’s stories as she tells them to the Pedlar, who tells them to the narrator, who tells them to us the readers. Therefore, we can see the many layers of mediation involved in this tale of sufferings. In the first part of the poem, the narrator learns about the ordeals that Margaret and Robert had gone through. The second part starts with the narrator recollecting what he calls “that simple tale” about Margaret that “Passed from my [his] mind like a forgotten sound” (II. 203-4), yet he admits that the Pedlar “had rehearsed / Her homely tale with such familiar power,” making him eager to know more. When resuming his narrative, the Pedlar calls it “a common tale / By moving accidents uncharactered, / A tale of silent suffering,” (II. 231-3). He notes how he was powerless in offering any comfort upon hearing “This tale did Margaret tell with many tears” (II. 274). Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines tale as “a series of events or facts told or presented” (“Tale”). In the poem, the tale is becoming more emotionally charged as it is moving temporally further away from the events being told. The subjects of the tale experience a distinctive kind of loss that is not yet familiar to themselves and others. The poem offers moments where both the narrator and the Pedlar are puzzled by the sufferings experienced by Margaret and Robert, who are also perplexed by what is happening to them, thus reflecting how complicated it is to explain this kind of suffering at that time.

¹⁰ All references to “The Ruined Cottage” in this chapter come from the text printed in *The Ruined Cottage, The Brothers, Michael* edited by Jonathan Wordsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

One such moment happens at the end of the First Part. These last eighteen lines of the First Part may seem unremarkable at first, but a closer look at them would show how destabilizing they are. This is the first time we read Margaret's direct speech, and it is the only moment in the poem where three voices blend in the narrative.

And 'twas a piteous thing to see the looks
Of the poor innocent children. "Every smile",
Said Margaret to me here beneath these trees,
"Made my heart bleed."
At this the old man paused,
And looking up to those enormous elms
He said, 'Tis now the hour of deepest noon.
At this still season of repose and peace,
This hour when all things which are not at rest
Are chearful, while this multitude of flies
Fills all the air with happy melody,
Why should a tear be in an old man's eye?
Why should we thus with an untoward mind,
And in the weakness of humanity,
From natural wisdom turn our hearts away,
To natural comfort shut our eyes and ears,
And feeding on disquiet, thus disturb
The calm of Nature with our restless thoughts?' (I, 182-199)

The complicated speaking situation signifies multiple levels of mediation between us and Margaret's story. We are reading the narrator who is listening to the Pedlar, who is narrating a moment when he was conversing with Margaret, who was telling him about her husband and children. The mechanics of writing help us identify who is speaking: single quotation marks signal the Pedlar, double quotation marks signal Margaret, and no quotation mark indicates the narrator. Thus, the first-person object pronoun in "Said Margaret to me" (184) refers to the Pedlar whom the narrator mentions as "the old man," who soon also refers to himself not using a first-person pronoun but a common noun in "an old man's eye" (102). Margaret is describing Robert's cruel treatment of their children, but instead of commenting on him, she points out, ironically, not their children's sadness but their smiles. The pause that the narrator reports to us

marks a moment of uncertainty where Margaret concludes her story without any further explanation, and the Pedlar withdraws from the disturbing past moment and locates himself in the present but with two unsettling questions about his tear and restless thought.

The Pedlar's questions point to the ambiguity of Margaret's grief. One way of reading the questions is to consider them as part of the Pedlar's instructions as he is teaching the narrator to forget the tale of sufferings and turn to nature for peace of mind. Peter Cohen argues that the narrator "looks at nature from a human perspective" while the Pedlar "looks at human action from a natural perspective" (188) that enables him to distance himself from human experience and gain meditative union with nature. At this point, the narrator is considered as not having been able to do the same. However, I am inclined to consider them as genuine questions representing the Pedlar's own confusion; he is intensely affected by Margaret's grief, but he is also not yet accustomed to the kind of grief that she is experiencing. If Margaret's loss were a simple loss, such as if she was grieving her husband's death, it would be easier for the Pedlar to respond. People would readily offer consolation for a person mourning the death of a loved one, knowing that the person will soon get over it and move on with her life.¹¹ Robert is very much alive at that point, but Margaret's sense of loss is so intense and real that years later her grief still aggravates the Pedlar's "untoward mind" and "restless thought." Despite the calm and jovial nature that surrounds him, the Pedlar cannot help shedding a tear and posing questions – possibly the same recurring questions. Instead of dwelling with Margaret's grief, he deflects to nature, but his tear and his disturbed mind prove that turning to nature is a continuous renewed effort. His questions mark the unstable moment when he seems confused by his unwillingness to allow the

¹¹ In Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, discussed in chapter 2 of this dissertation, Captain Benwick excites sympathy for his loss of his fiancée, but his mourning seems to be a performance as he soon moves on to engage with another girl.

conventional elegiac consolation (from nature) to function. Simple loss provides closure that unresolved grief – experienced by both Margaret and Robert – lacks.

Sympathy is often difficult to achieve when we are facing people who are suffering, and it could be more complicated when we are twice or thrice removed from the sufferers.¹² The focus of the Pedlar's tale is Margaret; thus, we could easily miss the fact that she is not the only sufferer in it. Margaret is in fact witnessing and narrating her husband's sufferings. The Pedlar's description of Robert starts with "She had a husband, an industrious man, / Sober and steady. I heard her say / That he was up and busy at his loom" (120-2). What follows is the description of what can be seen or heard about Robert. When it comes to Margaret's expression of affect, the Pedlar pauses. While the expression "one's heart bleeds (for)" is used to express sincere anguish, it also conveys sympathy for other people's suffering. The Pedlar and the narrator seem to only see that Margaret is suffering because of Robert while Margaret is in fact grieving for her husband.

Robert exemplifies a condition where people can live through a mourning process without even having a physical loss. The poem lays out ways in which the economic system is creating a particular form of what we might call depression as Robert is experiencing a loss of himself without having left. Wordsworth combines "the plague of war" (l. 139) with "two blighting seasons" (l. 137) that take their toll on Robert. Hardworking man, Robert is pictured as working not only during daylight but also into the evening, and the couple live "in peace and

¹² Merriam-Webster Dictionary notes the difference between sympathy and empathy: "*Sympathy*, constructed from the Greek *sym*, meaning "together," and *pathos*, referring to feelings or emotion, is used when one person shares the feelings of another, as when one experiences sadness when someone close is experiencing grief or loss. *Empathy* is a newer word also related to "pathos." It differs from *sympathy* in carrying an implication of greater emotional distance. With empathy, you can imagine or understand how someone might feel, without necessarily having those feelings yourself". (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/sympathy-empathy-difference>)

comfort” with their two children before bad harvest and war, whose impact does not seem to discriminate: “When Many rich / Sunk down as in a dream among the poor, / And of the poor did many cease to be,” (II. xx). Terrible weathers in the years 1787 – 1789 led to ruinous harvests causing prices to rise steeply. Representing the poor, Robert falls into worse situation when falling ill in the second year of bad harvest. His long illness and his external situations rip him from his capability to provide for his family. While his physical body is intact, his mental and emotional strength is deserting him. The turning of “good humor” into “a weight that strips pleasure” (I. 172-3) marks the beginning of Robert’s gradual mental deterioration. The Pedlar is deliberate in mentioning that it is poverty that “brought on a petted mood / And a sore temper” (I. 172-174), suggesting Robert’s mental ailment is caused by external conditions and that his lower-class status makes it even worse.

The unprompted tale of Margaret’s death and sufferings and its abrupt diversion at the end of the First Part is followed in the Second Part by the narrator’s experiencing his moment of uncertainty. He notices how the Pedlar, who seems to be intensely disturbed by Margaret’s words, somehow does seem to talk himself out of the sadness. The Pedlar’s “easy cheerfulness, a look so mild” (II, 201) momentarily distracts the narrator as they continue chatting about “trivial things.” However, Margaret’s story, which initially “Passed from my [his] mind like a forgotten sound” soon comes forward from the back of his mind, making him look disturbed and admitting “a heartfelt chillness in my [his] veins” (II, 213). Unlike the Pedlar, who is able to stay still and put a rest to his agitated thought by “looking up to those enormous elms,” the narrator feels the need to rise, “turning from that breezy shade/went out to the open air and stood” (II. 214-5). Nature is not enough for the narrator to ease his troubled feelings. The Pedlar and the narrator share the same space, what the Pedlar calls “still season of repose and peace” (I, 188) and the

narrator calls “that tranquil ruin” (II, 218), yet peace and tranquility are what the narrator lacks at this moment. He cannot even stay long seeking and drinking “the comfort of the warmer sun” (II, 216); he is feeling the urge to know more of Margaret’s “homely tale” (II, 209)

Some prominent critics pay attention to the relationship between the Pedlar and the narrator in their response to the recollection of Margaret’s sufferings. Schor argues that the two faces of grief in “The Ruined Cottage” proffer two theories of ethics: one represented by the narrator whose “ethical ‘wisdom’ results from both recognitions of loss and redemptive narratives of human history” and the other exemplified by the Pedlar whose “morals ‘[grow] with thought,’ identifying a human sympathy with (and faith in) nature as the ground of ethical consciousness” (124). In other words, one puts his faith in human feelings, and the other believes in the permanent nature. While not disagreeing with such a reading, I find it fails to really pay attention to Robert’s and Margaret’s loss because it gets distracted by intellectualizing the loss and setting it in broader, more recognizable history of mourning. To understand Robert’s and Margaret’s loss as they are experiencing it, one has to rewrite the history of mourning and understand that there is a new mode of grief coming to be at this moment.

The Pedlar’s description of Robert represents his own uncertainty about what he is describing and highlights Robert’s bewilderment about what is happening to himself. Of what Robert is doing in and around his house, the Pedlar says that everything is now done “with a strange / Amusing but uneasy novelty” (I. 168-9). In contrast to his previous description of Robert always busy at work doing different things at different times (of the day or of the seasons), the Pedlar says that Robert “blended where he might the various tasks / Of summer, autumn, winter, and of spring” (I. 169-170). The word ‘novelty’ emphasizes unprecedented happenings. The enjambment suggests that the word refers also to the Pedlar’s response, that for

him what Robert does is unusual or surprising in a way that is unsettling or hard to understand. With his random acts in disorienting sense of time, Robert is lost in space and time while remaining where he is. What he experiences resembles what Susan Roos would consider as a living loss or chronic sorrow, “frequently misunderstood, unrecognized, pervasive, continuing, and resurgent grief responses that result from coping with ongoing loss due to significant permanent injury, illness, disability, or progressive deterioration of oneself (self-loss) or another living person (other-loss) to whom there is a deep attachment” (231).

As the Pedlar carefully mentions, Robert’s long illness prevents his from earning a living and exhausts his savings. When he recovers, he is in the middle of “a sad time of sorrow and distress” (I. 138) and is described as not doing anything productive (no longer working on his loom). The Pedlar seems to lack the vocabulary to represent Robert’s state of mind, so he is describing instead what Robert is doing that speaks to his agitated mind, such as whistling “a snatch of merry tunes / That had no mirth,” and carving “uncouth figures.” The auditory imagery entails a paradox: merry yet without mirth. Carving is an activity that denotes artistic skills, but the results are figures dubbed as coarse and improper. Robert is no longer able to control his speeches and actions. His alternation of moods resembles a symptom of manic depression: “One while he would speak lightly of his babes / And with a cruel tongue; at other times / He played with them wild freaks of merriment,” (II. 179-181). He is losing his parental capacities with his children but most likely does not fully realize it. The children’s innocence spares them from understanding their father’s condition but intensifies Margaret’s grief.

The Pedlar’s regard of Margaret is Wordsworth’s extended meditation on the uncertainty regarding such loss, of not knowing what he is looking at. As he is drooping, Robert starts leaving his house rambling, which signifies his sense of loss yet also of not knowing what he

loses. When leaving home, Robert is either “to the town/Without an errand” or to “wander here and there among the fields” (l. 177-8). When he is at home, he is no longer himself. The Pedlar is fluent when narrating facts, but he struggles to find vocabularies when it comes to affect. When citing Margaret’s remark on how she feels about Robert, the Pedlar stops and diverts his story. The Pedlar’s description of Robert comes from Margaret who witnesses her husband losing himself, and his turning from his words to Margaret’s own words in closing his description of Robert shows his struggle to find the right vocabulary to describe Margaret’s sense of loss. He compliments Margaret’s resiliency, her ability to get “through those calamitous years / with cheerful hope” (l.150-1), yet he does not know how to describe Margaret’s grief as she is witnessing the father of her children breaking down. While still having his physical presence, Margaret has lost Robert psychologically as a husband and a father. It is a goodbye without leaving. Her acknowledgment of her bleeding-heart points to her awareness of the loss and her anguish for not knowing what to do. That the Pedlar stops after Margaret’s expression of grief hints that her series of losses have just begun.

On the one hand, the expansion of Robert’s physical space and his mobility show signs of his mental disturbance. On the other hand, they speak to the failing of self-sufficiency of rural communities. The late eighteenth-century England witnessed huge increase in geographical mobility from rural to urban spaces and overseas, such as portrayed in “We Are Seven” with four siblings living away from home. Michael, in Wordsworth’s other eponymous poem, sends his only son, Luke to the city to learn trade and earn fortune to keep the family from losing their patrimonial land. Luke ends up going further “beyond the seas” (455). Leonard in “The Brothers” leaves her younger brother James “chiefly for his brother’s sake, / Resolved to try his fortune on the seas” (301-2) after their protective grandfather dies, and all his estate, house, and

sheep are sold. Their mobility seems to be motivated by economic reason, an effort to avoid poverty. Robert's departure is triggered by similar economic conditions.

Textile manufacturing and the innovation of the steam engine characterize the first Industrial Revolution, and a hand-skilled weaver working from home like Robert suffers dear consequences. In 1764, James Hargreaves invented a mechanized loom called the spinning jenny. When combined with steam engine, invented by James Watt in 1776, the mechanized loom is seven times more efficient than a handloom. The revolution in the textile industry started, and handloom weavers soon lost their jobs. Later in the early nineteenth century (starting in 1811), a group of skilled textile workers being replaced by machines would start the Luddite movement, protesting mechanized manufactures and their unskilled laborers, often by destroying the machines. But at the end of the eighteenth century, the American war provided an immediate alternative for an unemployed weaver like Robert. When staying home no longer supports a living, he is wandering aimlessly, expanding his space. His final option is a more global reach: joining "a troop/Of soldiers going to a distant land" (II. 268-9). Stephen Conway notes that near the end of the American war, "more than a quarter of a million British and Irish subjects of King George were serving in the official armed forces (110,000 in the army, 107,000 in the navy, and about 40,000 in the English and Welsh militia and Scottish fencibles)" (130). The number is significant because it means that one in seven or one in eight men joined armed forces, leaving women and children temporarily or permanently husbandless and fatherless. The uncertainty of whether the separation is short-term or long-lasting creates the experience of ambiguous loss, as exemplified by Margaret after Robert enlists.

The Tales of Unresolved Grief

Wordsworth begins to create a theory of this kind of loss that defies closure. He juxtaposes the physical loss of somebody – a person is physically missing but psychologically present – with its

psychological version where a person is psychologically absent from the bodily presence.¹³

Margaret's life rotates around Robert's presence and absence, and she inescapably experiences loss both when he is psychologically absent and especially when he is not present physically. Her first presented dialogue with the Pedlar reveals her loss for her psychologically absent husband, and it gets worse when she can no longer see him. Her second presented dialogue with the Pedlar indicates the high level of uncertainty involved in her loss. When she starts informing him of her husband's disappearance, Margaret is said to appear in "a face of grief / Unutterably helpless" (II. 254-5) while the Pedlar registers his immediate reaction, "As she spake / A strange surprise and fear came to my heart, / Nor had I power to answer ere she told / That he had disappeared" (II. 257-60). There was no tear involved when Margaret expressed Robert's psychological absence, but she "wept bitterly" before announcing his physical absence. The word "strange" which was previously used to describe Robert's behaviors is now used to describe the Pedlar's response, signaling worse inflictions of psychological ambiguous loss and the bewilderment experienced by both the victim and the witness.

In addition to showing a more global understanding of the world in the period, Wordsworth exemplifies here how war is no longer what happens far away and has nothing to do with people back home. "The Ruined Cottage" portrays not only how by the end of the eighteenth century, common people must have had some knowledge of British imperialism and

¹³ Ambiguous loss, as Boss explains, is "externally caused (e.g., illness, war), not by individual pathology" ("The Trauma" 138). She differentiates two kinds of ambiguous loss: physical and psychological ambiguous loss (1999). The physical ambiguous loss or "leaving without goodbye" is a loss where a person is physically missing but cannot be mourned, such as a soldier missing in action and a kidnapped family member. The psychological ambiguous loss, or "goodbye without leaving," refers to a situation in which a person is psychologically absent, although physically present, such as a person who suffers from dementia or brain injury. She adds that both types of ambiguous loss can happen simultaneously in one person or family.

Britain's distant colonies but also how war affects domestic life.¹⁴ While never having been away from home herself, Margaret is aware of "a distant land" and what could happen there. Not being given an option to go with her husband, Margaret is different from the heroine of "Ruth". Remarkable pictures of America that the Youth tells her enchant the newlywed, Ruth. America has become a second home for the Youth, who "Had roam'd about with vagrant bands / Of Indians in the West" (113-14) that he often feels nostalgic and wants to go back.¹⁵ Being asked to go with him, Ruth reluctantly yields: "Sweet Ruth alone at midnight shed / A solitary tear, / She thought again—and did agree / With him to sail across the sea" (92-5). While there were a lot of women immigrants in the Romantic period, many other women never had the experience of sailing across the sea to a distant and unknown land.

The thought of leaving the only home that she knows must be unbearable for Ruth, but similarly Margaret would have agreed to accompany Robert had he asked. Margaret said, "Poor man, he had not heart / To take a farewell of me, and he feared / That I should follow with my babes, and sink / Beneath the misery of a soldier's life" (II. 270-3). Margaret's initial grief of being abandoned by her husband is a mix of hope and denial, focusing on his sacrifice to endure such affliction himself. The people passing by her cottage, whom she would inquire of her husband, include, "A man whose garments shewed the soldier's red, / Or crippled mendicant in sailor's garb" (II, 463-4), implying that men who enlist could end up being disabled and homeless.¹⁶ In another poem from *Lyrical Ballads*, often considered as a poem of social protest, "The Female Vagrant" (composed 1793-7), the wife follows her husband who enlists, and she

¹⁴ As I already mention in the Introduction, Mary Favret calls it "human consequences of war at a distance."

¹⁵ The first permanent British colony was established in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607. In the poem, the Youth is said to come from Georgia.

¹⁶ Red was the color worn by the British army until the end of the nineteenth century.

ends up losing her husband and three children who die abroad.¹⁷ Sailing back home, she soon finds herself being a vagrant in her homeland. Not following her husband, Margaret loses her two children nonetheless, and her husband may still be alive somewhere while she suffers a slow demise.

“The Ruined Cottage” suggests a higher level of difficulty in dealing with physical absence because the missing person retains his psychological presence. After Robert left, instead of expressing her anger about being abandoned, Margaret emphasizes her husband’s sacrifice to save his family from further misery. Although the Pedlar finds her inquiring about her husband with “with a face of grief / Unutterably helpless,” (II. 261-262), he remarks, “I left her busy with her garden tools,” (II. 283). She still has an interest in the outside world and is not withdrawn from her regular attitude of life. In their first meeting that early spring after her husband enlisted, Margaret does not even seek consolation from the Pedlar. She is sending him off, giving blessing “With tender cheerfulness, and with a voice / That seemed the very sound of happy thoughts.” (II. 287-8). The word cheerfulness, which is also used previously in describing Margaret’s attitude towards the unfortunate years, points to her resilience during hard times. The happy thoughts that the Pedlar hears in Margaret’s voice signify her hopes for a better future, which also means that for her, Robert has not left psychologically. Their second encounter reveals Margaret trying to make sense of what is happening to her. She realizes that she has been spending too much of her time trying to find her husband. The way she informs him that her son has died shows that death is more bearable than not knowing if her husband is still alive. Death provides closure. While accepting the death of her son, she is blaming herself for neglecting the

¹⁷ Such story must have been common in this period and can be find also in the Victorian literature, such as in Elizabeth Gaskell’s domestic novel, *Cranford* (1851) where a character has lost six of her seven children while following her soldier husband.

younger one who is still alive: “And to myself,” said she, “have done much wrong, / And to this helpless infant” (II. 363-4). The acknowledgment of shame and guilt represents her melancholia.

Margaret’s melancholic response to her ambiguous loss manifests in a strong urge to stay away from home, the main representation of her loss. A passing stranger tells the Pedlar that Margaret “was used to ramble far” (II. 324), and upon coming after dark, she admits: “But in good truth I’ve wandered much of late (II. 351). In saying that she has wandered much, Margaret must have recalled the things her husband did when he started mentally deteriorating. Her wandering is a sign of her withdrawal from her normal attitude to life, and the Pedlar notices earlier when he walks into the garden: “It was changed” (II. 321). Her withdrawal from tending the garden is just the beginning that leads to the deterioration of her body and mind. While nothing is said about what was going on in Robert’s mind as he was wandering aimlessly, Margaret expresses her own awareness of what is going on with her, “And sometimes, to my shame I speak, have need / Of my best prayers to bring me back again’ (II. 351-3). When she refers to home, not only does she talk about the physical home that she needs to go back to, but she also means her anguished mind. Home for Robert and Margaret represents their loss. Robert is said to “wander here and there among the fields” (I. 181). His loss is psychological: his capability to provide for his family. Robert earns a living by working from home, and he wanders aimlessly in search of something that he can no longer do at home. After Robert left, Margaret’s loss is mainly physical. She knows what she is looking for, “About the fields I wander, knowing this / Only, that what I seek I cannot find” (II. 360-1). It is excruciating knowing that she is searching in vain. Yet, she keeps on searching anyway because Robert is crucially important physically, psychologically, and financially for her to function at home.

We can see the similar kind of wandering in “The Brothers.” Wordsworth complicates wandering in search of a loved one: looking for his brother, James wanders sleepwalking. While presenting Margaret’s struggles to keep both ends meet, Wordsworth shows James as possessing all that he needs but the only thing that is dearest to him. The community sustains James: “He was the child of all the dale” (338), yet his deepest desire to meet his brother remains unfulfilled. The yearning manifests in his unconscious act of searching for Leonard.

(A practice till this time unknown to him)
That often, rising from his bed at night,
He in his sleep would walk about, and sleeping
He sought his brother Leonard. (346-9)

James’ obliviousness of his act presents a sharp contrast to Margaret’s awareness. Similarly, both Margaret and James never find what they are looking for. Robert’s absence results in Margaret’s five years of “unquiet widowhood;” Leonard’s absence creates James’s sleepwalking: “A habit which disquietude and grief / Had brought upon him;” (391-2). Ironically, this new habit is what kills James, quite instantly, leaving the “twenty homes” that host him since Leonard leaves.

The cottage’s gradual ruination parallels Margaret’s gradual deterioration. Whenever the Pedlar describes Margaret’s mental state, he always diverges – sometimes abruptly – to describing the condition of her cottage with its garden. After detailing the uncertainty of Margaret’s husband being dead or alive, which is the exact representation of ambiguous loss, the Pedlar turns to the condition of the house.

I found her sad and drooping; she had learn’d
No tidings of her husband: if he lived
She knew not that he lived; if he were dead
She knew not he was dead. She seemed the same
In person [] appearance, but her house
Bespoke a sleepy hand of negligence; (II. 408-413)

The second spring after her husband left, Margaret still does not know anything about him.¹⁸ Margaret never has any proof either of her husband being alive or of him being dead. To show the impact of such uncertainty, the Pedlar points out the contrast between Margaret's mental state and her physical appearance. Although he thinks that her appearance remains the same, his description of her house shows that she has not been able to function well. Eventually, even her physical appearance matches with the condition of her house, "her poor hut / Sunk to decay" (II. 491-2) as Margaret herself "In sickness she remains" (II. 506). The longer the husband is missing – and we must remember that it is impossible to distinguish his absence from his poverty and his victimization by British imperial ambition – the more difficult it is for Margaret to handle the double strikes of poverty and grief.

Margaret is caught in ambivalence: she clings to her love for her children and her hope that her husband is still alive although the hope is thinning. Previously she said, "I could never die" (II. 377), but then the Pedlar reports that she has become suicidal: "She had no wish to live, that she must die / Of sorrow. Yet I saw the idle loom / Still in its place" (II. 443-5). Margaret hopes for the best for her children, but her hope contrasts with her wish to die. Although she wishes to die, she keeps her husband's things in place, meaning that she still hopes for his return. Her keeping her beloved husband's things represent the ambivalence as well: a form of denial, memorializing a lost love while denying its loss at the same time.¹⁹ Intriguingly, Margaret does

¹⁸ Boss says, "Most people need the concrete experience of seeing the body of a loved one who has died because it makes loss real. Most families of missing persons never find such verification of death and thus face greater challenges in shifting their perceptions about absence or presence. (*Ambiguous Loss* 26).

¹⁹ Boss offers a different perspective of ambivalence. In psychology and psychiatry, the focus on ambivalence is on contrasting impulses in the psyche. From a sociological perspective, "ambivalence results from mixing the elements of cognition (such as social definitions of roles and status) and emotion (which includes conditioning and learned behavior). Thus, from this perspective, ambivalence can result from the ambiguity of not knowing who is included in the structure that is supposed to be one's family" (*Ambiguous Loss* 62).

not seem to mourn the loss of her children. After both of them have died and her husband is still missing, Margaret is ambivalent about her status.

Five tedious years
She lingered in unquiet widowhood,
A wife and widow. Needs must it have been
A sore heart-wasting. (II. 460-3)

She is still the mother of her dead children, but is she still a wife, or has she become a widow?

The word *linger* implies reluctance and ambivalence. *Linger* is defined as “to remain alive although gradually dying” and “to be slow in parting or in quitting something” (“*Linger*”).

Without Robert, nobody is taking care of her and the cottage, and it is gradually decaying and failing to offer protection to its inhabitant; “Her tattered clothes were ruffled by the wind / Even at the side of her own fire” (II. 485). Margaret’s insistence to never leave the cottage speaks to her abiding longer, even too long, in grief that prevents her from moving forward. She stays restless and anxious in “unquiet widowhood” because she cannot be sure of her own status. Being a wife and a widow at the same time is unsettling, and the “sore heart-wasting” represents the devastating effect of the ambivalence.

Margaret experiences loss at multiple levels. At an individual level, the uncertainty of the loss of her husband perplexes and freezes her. She does not know how to cope with such loss. At a family level, it affects her family, as can be seen from the impact on her baby. Her mind focuses on the missing husband, and her grief manifests in her baby who “caught the trick of grief / And sighed among her playthings” (II. 423). At a community level, the absence of a structure that acknowledges such loss causes people to withdraw, not knowing how to offer comfort. Looking at the poem from the perspective of Romantic psychiatry, Piotr Kałowski believes that “The Ruined Cottage” exemplifies moral therapy. A dominant paradigm in the Romantic psychiatry is based on John Locke’s notions that human mind is a “blank slate” and

that mental processes combine and process stimuli. The typical treatment in moral therapy involves “listening to the suffering person, trying to make sense of their experience, and gradually convincing them to behave more in line with society’s expectations” (Kałowski 22). For the male speakers in the poem, Margaret’s sufferings function merely as diagnostic material: “The women merely serve as examples with which to give advice and life lessons among men” (Kałowski 24). Thus, in the poem, moral therapy works for people who are still alive, and it happens only after Margaret dies. Her death serves the community, but her community fails to help her while she is still alive. I read it as a community’s failure to give aids to the victim of ambiguous loss.

Ambiguous loss is confusing not only for Margaret but also for people around her. They do not understand her loss, and consequently they are not able to offer any consolation. The psychological insight in “The Ruined Cottage,” according to Johnathan Wordsworth, “creates for Margaret a sympathy that will be carried over into the main body of the poem” (8). The Pedlar sympathizes, but sympathy does not make him do something for Margaret. In my opinion, the Pedlar’s inability to do more is also caused by a lack of social resources. The Pedlar’s restless thoughts and his turn to nature are the representation of the lack of social support for people who experience ambiguous loss. Society and religion offer rituals to deal with death that provide support for mourners to grieve and then move forward with their lives. There is no such ritual available yet for the kind of loss that Margaret is experiencing.

Margaret is left alone with her living loss. Earlier, the Pedlar leaves Margaret in her psychological ambiguous loss without offering any help nor even consolation because her loss is not of an ordinary kind: the husband is still alive and physically present. Despite having deep sympathy for Margaret, the Pedlar admits that he is barely able to comfort her when he is told

about the vanished husband. The Pedlar wishes to comfort Margaret but is unable to do so.

Margaret is comforting herself at this point.

This tale did Margaret tell with many tears,
And when she ended, I had little power
To give her comfort, and was glad to take
Such words of hope from her own mouth as served
To cheer us both. (II. 270-277)

Schor attributes the failure of sympathy partly to Margaret's character: "Sympathy fails, in part, because Margaret's character is defined by her refusal of comfort – 'She thanked me for my will, but for my hope/It seemed she did not thank me' (385-92) – a refusal that restricts her human connections to an endless series of comfortless meetings" (118). Schor suggests that sympathy is part of social ritual. It is not enough though to say that sympathy fails because Margaret refuses comfort. If we go one step further, sympathy fails because the participants in the exchange do not know what they are dealing with; neither of them really understands what kind of comfort and what kind of hope are required here. This other moment of uncertainty suggests that even the ritual of kindness, of thanking someone for their care, is becoming unrecognizable. Robert has been gone for more than a year, and Margaret becomes desperate. In this second encounter, the Pedlar leaves her, "With the best hope and comfort I [he] could give (I. 390-2). As the Pedlar points out, Margaret does thank him for his will, but he suspects that she does not thank him for his hope. The newness of unresolved grief baffles mourning and exchange of sympathy, as exemplified by Margaret who is deemed not wanting hope, and hope is most painful when one is waiting without certainty.

Another moment of uncertainty occurs when Margaret comments on a dying young apple tree. Margaret says, "I fear it will be dead and gone / Ere Robert come again." (11.419-26). We know that Robert never comes back, but Margaret keeps the thinning hope that blends with

uncertainty. What would have happened had Robert come back? Would Margaret have been there to welcome him? We can only imagine such an eventual moment, but Wordsworth shows what could happen in "The Brothers." Leonard does come home, hoping to meet James. The least comfort that Leonard gets is the assurance that James did not commit suicide and that before he died "he saw many happy years" (381) due to the community support, something that Margaret lacks in her last years.

Wordsworth does not offer an account of how to help Margaret but shows instead how her suffering and grief benefit other people who can learn from her experience after she is dead. As he is narrating Margaret's story, the Pedlar invites the narrator to share his grief for her. The daughterly love that the Pedlar believes he gets from Margaret resonates with the brotherly love that the narrator feels for her, "Reviewed that Woman's sufferings, and it seemed / To comfort me while with a brother's love / I blessed her in the impotence of grief" (II. 514-6). Sharing the Pedlar's grief gives a sense of comfort to the narrator. The shared mourning, according to Kurt Fosso, is the foundation of the Wordsworthian community. He says, "Community in 'The Ruined Cottage' is woven from the threads of vexed mourning, produced by mourners' shared, but unfinished, ceaseless grieving for the dead" (99). Of the tranquility achieved at the end of the poem, James Averill believes it is due to the psychological process equivalent to Aristotelian katharsis: "Beginning in uneasiness and despair, the characters meditate upon the tale of sorrow, give themselves up to it, and are purged of their previous feelings. The calm of nature is the metaphor by which the poet describes the cathartic effects of Margaret's tragedy" (60). By default, the purgation happens to the observers. Just like Oedipus, who is left to live in exile after losing his mother/wife and blinding himself, Margaret is also left to suffer and die.

In “Ruth,” Wordsworth captures a different picture of the lack of resources for the community to offer help for the victim of ambiguous loss. After being deserted, Ruth is deemed mad, so she is “in a prison hous’d” (171), and when she escapes nobody takes care of her. She wanders on her own. The narrator expresses his sympathy, but he cannot think of any consolation to offer while Ruth is still alive, as can be seen in the concluding of the poem.

Farewell! and when thy days are told Ill-fated Ruth! in hallow’d mold
Thy corpse shall buried be,
For thee a funeral bell shall ring, And all the congregation sing
A Christian psalm for thee. (223-6)

The narrator is almost wishing for Ruth’s death. There is this sense of not knowing how to deal with Ruth in the present, so the poem leaps forward to the future. The weird desire to have Ruth dead offers an opportunity to free Ruth from her anguish but most importantly also for people to deal with Ruth through social and religious rituals for the dead. In the present moment, even poetry is baffled, and when the future does happen, they know what kind of poetry to write: the Christian psalm.

Ambiguous loss asks a lot from a person, and it requires great efforts and support systems to cope with the loss. When trying to make sense of what happens to her, thus trying to find meaning, Margaret seeks help from religion and spirituality which manifests in her reliance on her “best prayers to bring me back again” (II. 353) and her hope ““that heaven / Will give me patience to endure the things / Which I behold at home”” (II. 358-60). Unfortunately, without any help, she cannot proceed any further.²⁰ She does not even have any help in finding information

²⁰ Since the ambiguity in ambiguous loss may last longer or forever, Boss and Carnes suggest an alternative to cope with it by shifting perception: When facts are lacking, the only window for hope and change lies in a person’s ability to shift perceptions. When a situation of loss will not change, one’s view of it can. Through the shifting of perceptions, we can be empowered to see our ambiguous loss in a new way, one that no longer renders us powerless (“The Myth” 465). One needs to grasp the absurdity of finding hope in ambiguous loss, and Boss refers to John Keats’ ‘negative capability’ which describes the skill required for to discover new hope by

about her husband. The Pedlar notices her books that used to be placed neatly now “Lay scattered here and there, open or shut, / As they had chanced to fall” (408-9). While full of knowledge, her books do not offer information that Margaret needs. She does not seem to have access to printed periodicals that could possibly give her more information about her husband.

John Keats uses the phrase “negative capability” to refer to a quality “when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mystery, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Scott 60). In “The Ruined Cottage,” negative capability works for the Pedlar and the narrator; their so-called purgation partly results from their acceptance of not knowing what happens to Robert. However, Margaret is not negatively capable of grasping the absurdity of finding new hope. She lingers in her expectation of finding out about her husband and having him back, “and still that length of road / And this rude bench one torturing hope endeared / Fast rooted at the heart” (II. 503-5). The Pedlar notes the progression of Margaret’s hope since her husband left, from her hope for the four of them as a family to the hope for her children but not for herself. The Pedlar points to the “one torturing hope endeared” that marks Margaret’s persistence in not leaving her place where she becomes “Last human tenant of these ruined wall” (II.509). The word torturing does not seem to represent a new hope, while Margaret’s community does not seem to help either.

The community fails to help Margaret because, in “The Ruined Cottage,” the community itself is changing by the dispersal of its members. Margaret’s family represents the smallest unit of the community, and it gets ruined by Robert’s leaving the family. She reaches out to her local community, “Expecting still to learn her husband’s fate, / Made many a fond inquiry; and when they / Whose presence gave no comfort were gone by, / Her heart was still more sad” (II. 482-4).

“ceasing to reach after facts and reason and simply being comfortable with half knowledge”
(*Loss* 179)

The irony lies in the word “whose presence gave no comfort” and that they “were gone by” which points to the fact that the community is absent most of the time, but even when it is present, it does not help. The same thing applies to the Pedlar, who is among the people who are not able to give comfort. K. E. Smith argues: “The Pedlar’s involvement and comforting are real enough, yet they are imbued with distance that comes not only from his temperament but also from his marginal position” (46). His own survival depends on his wandering for a living. I agree with the Pedlar’s contribution. Even though the Pedlar keeps coming and leaving, he is the only person who seems to have personal and constant relations with Margaret. On the one hand, he represents a member of the community, but his constant dispersal also represents the failure of the community. On the other hand, Margaret’s seeming refusal to take comfort from him points to the fact that his dispersal also creates ambiguous loss for her as she is losing her community. Margaret never knows when she can expect to see the Pedlar again or whether she will. The dispersal of its members prevents the community from taking better care of its member(s) who stay.

Wordsworth’s interest in the social, political, and historical situations of his era is relatively easy to notice in poems such as “The Ruined Cottage,” yet he also presents a phenomenon that is not immediately visible: unresolved grief. “The Ruined Cottage” captures sufferings resulting from blighting seasons and failed harvests, from man-made catastrophes such as war, and from the rapid changes and alienation caused by mechanization and new mobility. But Wordsworth brings to his audience’s attention different kinds of loss in the suffering of Margaret and Robert. The Pedlar struggles to make sense of the pain that he witnesses in Robert and Margaret; Robert mourns a loss that he does not understand; Margaret cannot recuperate from the uncertainty of Robert’s fate. In “The Ruined Cottage,” Wordsworth

represents ineffable forms of loss that were becoming more common at a time of increased mobility. Turning now to Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, we see how the dynamics of ambiguous loss play out in a British Romantic novel whose central problems grow from this fact of the period's increased mobility.

Chapter 2. “Half agony, half hope”: Ambiguous Loss and Non-closure in *Persuasion*

Wordsworth's “The Ruined Cottage” and “Ruth” present women suffering the uncertainty and ambiguity of circumstances that are beyond their understanding let alone their control. Confined in the domestic sphere, Margaret and Ruth have a vague knowledge of the global world. Margaret has heard of “the misery of a soldier's life” (II: 270-3) yet is never given a chance to confirm it. Ruth imagines, based on what the “Youth from Georgia's shore” tells her, the exotic places she would go when “She thought again—and did agree / With him to sail across the sea” (100-1), but she is deserted at the seashore on the eventful day. Margaret withers and dies from unresolved grief, and Ruth falls into madness. In contrast, Anne Elliot in Jane Austen's *Persuasion* has more agency. Her suitor, Frederick Wentworth, goes back to sea angry and heartbroken because Anne breaks their engagement. Unlike Margaret who relies on asking any sailors coming back on shore if they have any news about her husband, Anne follows newspapers and navy lists to track Wentworth. Yet, like Margaret and Ruth, she suffers uncertainty and ambiguity that ironically get even more intense when Wentworth comes back into her social circle. The novel covers a period of nine months, from the summer of 1814 to the spring of 1815, but the narrative presents recollections of the heroine's two pivotal moments of loss and their effects: her mother's death in 1801 and the broken engagement in 1806. Because Anne has previously lost her mother, her grief is magnified with her loss of Wentworth. The reverberations between these two losses—one literal, one ambiguous—create the elegiac mood of the novel.

Unlike Wordsworth, whose poems are about common people from the lower class, Austen presents the society of the middle and upper class. The representations of definite and ambiguous losses in *Persuasion* are tied to the tension between the landed gentry (or nobility)

and the rising professional middle class, upward social mobility, and the flourishing naval society. Anne's marriage to Captain Wentworth at the end of the novel fits the romantic plot, yet it could have happened eight years earlier had she, the daughter of a baronet, not been persuaded to reject him, then a poor naval commander. The eight years that it takes to unite the lovers is how long it takes for them to process and recover from their ambiguous loss of one another; in Boss's words, theirs is a "kind of loss that defies closure, in which the status of a loved one as 'there' or 'not there' remains indefinitely unclear" (*Ambiguous Loss* 6). It is also the time that enables the rigid society to slowly adapt to the social changes. By the end of the nine months covered by novel's plot, aristocracy, landed gentry, and sailors have all shared the same social space. Both the eight-year separation and the nine-month period that bring together the two lovers are charged with various kinds of loss. A narrative of non-closure, *Persuasion* depicts romance within a period of historical change. In it, Austen both acknowledges the importance (or power) of ambiguous loss and offers healing for such loss through curative nostalgia.

In *Persuasion*, death is both everywhere and nowhere. By the beginning of the narrative three daughters have become motherless. Four ladies and two men are widowed. A mother has lost a sailor son, and another sailor lost his fiancée, who was the dearest sister to her brother. If those confirmed deaths result in grief, most of them are not complicated. Austen seems to pour these deaths out in order for us to be skeptical about the sincerity of normative mourning. Benwick excessively mourns Fanny Harville, even though her brother soon laments, "Poor Fanny! she would not have forgotten him so soon!" (II: 187). Mr. Elliot is wearing mourning attire, but people know that he does not grieve his wife. *Persuasion* is a novel that is suspicious about the mourning of definite losses. The only person who genuinely grieves and mourns Lady Elliot is Anne, yet we learn that "the blooming, silent, unformed girl of fifteen" (II: 124)

continues blooming until she experiences another loss at the age of nineteen. Wentworth's return opens up the extraordinary feeling of ambiguous loss; Anne resumes her agitation, uncertain of what is lost and what is not. The necessity of renting out the Elliots' ancestral home, Kellynch Hall, to Admiral and Mrs. Croft speaks to the more general sense of ambiguous loss that defines this transitional historical moment, in which an older way of life, associated with the stability of property, gives way to a less stable modern way of life. Possessing "retentive feelings" (I: 53), Anne actively courts the grief associated with this new world defined by transience and letting go, painfully embracing "circumstances, recollections and feelings" (I: 30) in such a way that propels the plot and defines the narrative of *Persuasion*, allowing unresolved grief to heal.

"Oblivion of the past": Confirmed Death and Normative Mourning

From the very beginning, *Persuasion* announces itself as a novel about loss. Sir Walter inserts "most accurately the day of the month on which he had lost his wife" into his favorite book, "the Baronetage," which also mentions and dates the death of "a still-born" (I: 9). However, although their deaths are announced on the novel's first page, neither Lady Elliot nor her still-born son are much mourned. When the novel starts, everyone in the Elliot family seems to have moved on with their lives. Sir Walter has made one or two attempts to remarry, though he remains single. The oldest daughter Elizabeth has claimed her mother's authority to preside over Kellynch Hall for thirteen years. With such a status and being her father's favorite daughter, Elizabeth does not have any reason to grieve her mother, and neither does Sir Walter to grieve his wife. The father and daughter "had gone on together most happily" (I: 11). They do not seem to have any problem severing their attachment to the lost object – part of the Freudian work of mourning when "the libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to this [lost] object" (Freud 154). Sir

Walter and Elizabeth quickly find a new object of love in one another.²¹ Their attachment also explains the reason why Sir Walter and Lady Russell, a widower and a widow living in proximity and having been intimate friends, do not get married. For Lady Russell, remaining a widow is a better option since it “is rather apt to be unreasonably discontented when a woman does marry again” (I: 11). In nineteenth-century Britain, a titled widow with fortune has a better chance of being happy, not only because she does not have to deal with personal relationships but also because she has more power, independence, and stature than a married woman does. In terms of the work of mourning, Lady Russell takes Anne as a substitute for Lady Elliot: “it was only in Anne that she could fancy the mother to revive again” (I: 11). The revival of her best friend in her goddaughter motivates Lady Russell to advise Anne on suitors (three men in the course of the novel) she should not or should marry. The youngest daughter, Mary, finds a new love object, while also detaching herself from her father, by marrying the “son and heir of Charles Musgrove, Esq. of Uppercross” (I: 9) in the neighboring village. The way that people in *Persuasion* simply replace the people they have lost is striking. But this is not what Anne does. Her feelings are “retentive” (I: 53). The Elliots’ and Lady Russell’s uncomplicated work of mourning contrasts with Anne’s more difficult grief.²²

For one thing, Anne lacks a community to mourn with. When it comes to a confirmed death, one can normally rely on family and community’s support to cope with the loss, but Anne

²¹ Severing an attachment to the lost object is part of Freudian work of mourning. I discuss the work of mourning laid out by Freud in “Mourning and Melancholia” in the introduction of this dissertation.

²² What Freud calls melancholia or complicated work of mourning is often called by modern therapists as complicated grieving, a condition where an individual remains stuck on and preoccupied with the lost object. As a clinical term, Complicated Grief (CG) is defined as “a form of prolonged, unrelenting grief [whose] symptoms include intense yearning and longing for the deceased, difficulty accepting the death, frequent intrusive thoughts of the loved one, anger and/or bitterness regarding the death, recurring pangs of painful emotions, and avoidance related to reminders of the loss” (Sung et al. 453).

is denied such support since nobody around her ever seems to grieve. Mourning is typically described as “the social expressions or acts expressive of grief, which are shaped by the practices of a given society or cultural group” (Stroebe & Schut 7). Anne belongs to a group that does not share her mourning. Even worse, she is physically separated from them. After her mother dies, instead of being secured in the community of mourning among her family, Anne is immediately sent away to Bath: “Anne had gone unhappy to school, grieving for the loss of a mother whom she had dearly loved, feeling her separation from home, and suffering as a girl of fourteen, of strong sensibility and not high spirits, must suffer at such a time” (II: 123). Thus, Anne is experiencing multiple losses at once. Grief is often differentiated from mourning as an internal experience of loss versus its external expression. The word “grieving” implies that Anne is denied a chance to express her feelings of loss in the presence of her immediate family.

If Anne had remained at home after the death, she might still not have found any consolation from her father and sisters, but she would have been in the company of her loving godmother, Lady Russell. Being sent away while still grieving results in not only the absence of sympathy from her inner circle but also the additional loss of being uprooted, though temporarily. Boss includes (em/im)migration among the experiences of ambiguous loss. She warns about the danger of “the ambiguous loss—the incomplete or uncertain loss—that is inherent in uprooting, and brings into the incongruence between psychological and physical family, the legacy of frozen grief” (*Ambiguous Loss* 3-4). Anne is away for only three years, but those are her years of adolescence. Louis E. LaGrand suggests, “there are five psychological issues of adolescence and early adulthood: identity, autonomy, intimacy, sexuality, and achievement” (174). During this process of identity formation, the loss of a family member through death can be especially traumatic, making the social support system even more

significant. So, Anne is not only grieving the loss of her mother; she is also grieving the loss of her home, as well as the absence of a support system.

Other characters are presented as having uncomplicated mourning, either by performing cultural mourning and getting over it or even by performing mourning without grieving. We are told that Mrs. Smith “had been very fond of her husband, - she had buried him” (II: 125). The burial implies that the death is confirmed, the community assists with the religious and communal practices, and a sense of closure is attained. Mrs. Smith moves on with her life. Austen lays out reasons for her moving on: “She had been used to affluence: it was gone. She had no child to connect her with life and happiness again, no relations to assist in the arrangement of perplexed affairs, no health to make all the rest supportable” (II: 125). Mrs. Smith’s ability to deal positively with a string of absences amazes Anne. In contrast, a recently widowed Mrs. Clay seems relieved in becoming a widow and is ready to move on from “unprosperous marriage, ... with the additional burden of two children” (I: 19) by setting up “her designs on Sir Walter” (I: 184) to improve her financial and social status by marriage. Although Mr. Elliot “was very unkind to his first wife. ... and he had never loved her” (II: 170), he and his servant are noticeable in Lyme and Bath from their mourning attire. Although Elizabeth does not have any positive sentiment for Mr. Elliot, she is following proper decorum for her cousin: “she was at this present time (the summer of 1814) wearing black ribbons for his wife” (I: 13). As a sign of respect, acknowledging the death of a relation is obligatory, and Elizabeth chooses the cheapest way to do so by trimming her gown and cap with black ribbon. A failure to follow social mourning rituals comes with consequences. The relationship between the Elliots and the Dalrymples is breached for years because of such a failure. As she was busy taking care of Sir Walter’s illness, Lady Elliot failed to send a letter of condolence to Ireland when Viscount

Dalrymple died, and consequently “when poor Lady Elliot died herself, no letter of condolence was received at Kellynch” (II: 121); it ends the relationship among cousins.

Confirmed death provides opportunities for open mourning that invite sympathy from the community. When meeting Wentworth, Mrs. Musgrove revisits the loss of her son, Richard Musgrove, who died at sea two years earlier. It is during his six months in the *Laconia*, under the guidance of Wentworth that Richard wrote, “the only two disinterested letters; all the rest had been mere application for money” (I: 47). His death seems to save his family from disgrace and does not seem to be mourned. Although Mrs. Musgrove’s belated grief for her son sounds artificial - the narrator mockingly comments on her “large fat sighings over the destiny of a son, whom alive nobody had cared for,” (I: 59) - Wentworth attends to her mourning “with so much sympathy and natural grace” (I: 59). Wentworth’s sensitivity to others’ grief is a positive sign of his character, and it indicates why he is a good match for Anne. Harville mentions to Anne his gratitude for what Wentworth does in providing support for Benwick. When Fanny dies in June, Benwick is still at sea. His ship, the *Grappler* arrives in Portsmouth in early August, while Wentworth’s ship, the *Laconia*, had come the previous week in Plymouth, where Harville had been waiting with the bad news for Benwick. Wentworth takes the time to travel day and night to meet Benwick, staying with him for a week before the Harvilles take Benwick to stay with them. In Lyme, we are told that “the sympathy and good-will excited towards Captain Benwick was very great” (I: 82). There are two reasons that people in this world of performative but insincere mourning readily show sympathy: because the engagement is acknowledged, and because the death is confirmed.

Not having received the needed support for the loss of her mother, Anne also does not obtain any aid for the second loss, her loss of Wentworth. Nobody provides her with the

opportunity of open mourning either. It does not involve death and is hardly known by other people. The loss of Wentworth is equally important as the loss of her mother as can be seen from Anne's recollection of both losses: "Excepting one short period of her life, she had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to, or encouraged by any just appreciation or real taste" (I: 42). Anne is referring to the brief period of her engagement with Wentworth. Losing Wentworth, Anne loses the only person with whom she shares mutual respect and understanding. In a number of places, the novel shows how Wentworth can understand Anne as nobody else does. He claims to be able to distinguish the tones of Anne's voice "when they would be lost on others" (II: 191). The feelings are mutual, as Anne also believes that she can understand Wentworth's facial expressions, emphasizing that "it was too transient an indulgence of self-amusement to be detected by any who understood him less than herself" (I: 58). Wentworth can be seen as the new object of love for Anne after she loses her mother, and the fact that their relationship begins and ends very briefly does not make it easier for Anne to recover. As the narrator describes, "A few months had seen the beginning and the end of their acquaintance, but not with a few months ended Anne's share of suffering from it" (I: 28). Just as nobody seems to care for Anne's feelings in losing her mother, nobody seems to be aware of her sense of loss related to Wentworth. Such lack of an awareness is reasonable enough though since Anne had agency in the loss and ended the relationship herself

Anne's disenfranchised grief – a form of ambiguous loss - is by default unacknowledgeable. Kenneth J. Doka defines disenfranchised grief as "the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported" (4). He proposes three reasons why grief is disenfranchised: the relationship is not recognized, the loss is not recognized, and the griever is not recognized (5-7).

Anne is anxious in anticipating Wentworth's return into her social circle, but ironically "she was assisted, however, by that perfect indifference and apparent unconsciousness, among the only three of her own friends in the secret of the past, which seemed almost to deny any recollection of it" (I: 30). There is a paradox in this statement. Only three people know about Anne's relationship with Wentworth, and it was also so brief that Lady Russell might be the only one who acknowledges that the engagement ever existed. However, they never talk about it when it is over. Her father and Elizabeth cannot care less what happens to Anne nor what she thinks or feels. Therefore, Anne's relationship with Wentworth, her loss of him, and herself as a griever are not recognized. While other people's ignorance may mean that Anne can hide her pain, and it may ease her anxiety, it also prevents Anne from getting the support that she needs to cope with her grief.

Neither Anne's grief for her mother nor that for Wentworth is straightforward; she is radically alienated from her family and social group, which is yet another source of grief. Anne's deep, sincere, yet complicated experiences of grief stand in striking contrast to the others' frivolous, theatrical, and insincere mourning rituals devoid of any feeling. *Persuasion* as a novel is not much interested in straightforward and confirmed loss. It is more sympathetic with what it considers the "deeper" and more sincerely felt losses that the world does not acknowledge or even recognize.

"A state of alteration, perhaps of improvement": Loss That Comes with Historical Change

The elegiac feelings evoked in *Persuasion* are nothing if not ambiguous, and the novel narrativizes this distinctly modern form of mourning in this moment of historical change. The plot starts with a narcissistic landed gentry in distress for overspending, threatened by the prospect of losing the family home that symbolizes centuries of respectability. Solutions are sought, and the beginning of chapter three presents the desired situation: "This peace will be

turning all our rich naval officers ashore” (I: 20). The Treaty of Paris was signed on May 30, 1814, and it established peace between France and the Allies (Austria, Great Britain, Prussia, Russia, Sweden, and Portugal). However, after escaping from his exile in February 1815, Napoleon reassumed control of France. The allies formed the Seventh Coalition and defeated him at Waterloo in June 1815, and it ended the Napoleonic wars. By setting the beginning of the novel in the summer of 1814, Austen brings the characters of naval officers into the story. Deidre Lynch comments, “we see private life being rendered in terms that pointedly call up a crucial phase of the nation’s public history” (xvii). By September 29, Kellynch Hall has been taken over by Admiral Croft and his wife, and Anne resumes her agitation over having Mrs. Croft’s brother, Captain Wentworth, back in her social circle. Lady Russell’s proposal to let Kellynch Hall is initially rejected by Sir Walter, but a few days later he agrees to move to Bath.²³ Both letting Kellynch Hall and moving temporarily to Bath mean accepting the new social dynamics for engagement with the rising middle class of naval officers. Sir Walter’s favorite book the *Baronetage*, always opened on the same page of “Elliott of Kellynch Hall,” shows that Sir Walter overvalues his high rank in society, yet it also hints at the instability of class structure. The two confirmed deaths listed in the *Baronetage* represent not only losses that affect the family dynamics but also potential loss that threatens the family’s social standing.

The death of the male heir of Kellynch Hall leaves the Elliot sisters in a position similar to that of the Bennet sisters in Austen’s earlier novel *Pride and Prejudice*. The pompous, obsequious clergyman Mr. Collins is the heir to the Longbourn estate. When informing his wife that they are expecting a guest, Mr. Bennet explains who the guest is: “my cousin, Mr. Collins,

²³ Austen was famously miserable when she had to move to Bath with her family in 1801. She stayed in Bath for six years. The death of his father in 1805, as mentioned in the Introduction, forced the family to move from one place to another.

who, when I am dead, may turn you all out of this house as soon as he pleases” (*PP* 96). When Mr. Collins comes to meet the Bennet sisters for the first time, his intention is to marry one of them as a favor to “save” at least one of them. Finding out that the eldest Jane is soon to be engaged, he proposes to the second eldest Elisabeth, who refuses him. Unlike Mr. Bennet who is pleased in knowing his favorite daughter rejects Mr. Collin’s proposal, Sir Walter tries to get his favorite daughter to marry his heir Mr. Elliot. As a young girl, having no brother and being aware of the existence of the heir presumptive of Kellynch Hall, Elizabeth “meant to marry him, and her father always meant that she should” (I: 12). The expected marriage is a natural way to keep the family estate within a closed circle. Lady Elliot’s death prompts immediate efforts to connect with Mr. Elliot. Sir Walter’s introduction is ignored, so “in one of their spring excursions to London, when Elizabeth was in her first bloom, Mr. Elliot had been forced into the introduction” (I: 13). The phrase “forced into introduction” suggests that Mr. Elliot does not share mutual feelings with Sir Walter and Elizabeth. He is invited to Kellynch Hall but never comes. The following spring, Mr. Elliot is “again encouraged, invited, and expected, and again he did not come” (I: 13).

G. E. Mingay notes that lesser landlords or gentry would not be capable of maintaining a great house and making a few-week annual visit to London (21). Although not yet a baronet, Mr. Elliot must have been Sir Walter’s financial equal since he can afford annual visit to London. Yet, he prefers “a rich woman of inferior birth” (I: 13) to the Baronet’s daughter. Accordingly, years later when he is seen in Lyme, Mr. Elliot is identified as “a gentleman of large fortune” (I: 88). On the contrary, since the death of Lady Elliot, Sir Walter’s income has been mismanaged and is no longer sufficient to support his lavish lifestyle.

If Sir Walter and Elizabeth could immediately move on after Lady Elliot's death, they eventually must face the secondary loss, not in the physical absence but in the accompanying loss of Lady Elliot's non-physical traits: her capabilities in well-managing the household and in holding Sir Walter in check. Elizabeth's thirteen years of being the "mistress of Kellynch Hall, presiding and directing" (I: 12) bear witness to the secondary loss, "the losses that follow as a consequence of a primary loss," such as in a situation where "the death of a person may engender a wide range of losses in its wake, such as the loss of other, dependent relationships (e.g., in-laws, friends), losses of income, hopes, even perhaps of faith" (Martin & Doka 12). Simply put, Sir Walter and Elizabeth lack Lady Elliot's "method, moderation, and economy" and indulge in the absence of "right-mindedness" having no idea of doing better. Elizabeth joins her father in not being able "to devise any means of lessening their expense without compromising their dignity or relinquishing their comforts" (I: 14). Their bad managerial skills put Kellynch Hall at stake, forcing them and Anne out of it. Having moved to Uppercross Cottage, a quarter mile away from the Great House of Uppercross, Mary does not have to share the consequence.

Eight years earlier, Kellynch Hall represents the rigidity of social structure when Anne has to break her engagement with Wentworth. Though "a remarkably fine young man, with a great deal of intelligence, spirit, and brilliancy" (I: 26), Wentworth does not have title nor fortune to match Anne Elliot "with all her claims of birth" (I: 27). Sir Walter does not consider Wentworth as a potential suitor. But what motivates Anne to break the engagement is not primarily her father's "negative of great astonishment, great coldness, great silence" (I: 27) but Lady Russell's objection. On a personal level, Lady Russell sees Wentworth's "sanguine temper" in his promising future as "an aggravation of the evil. It only added a dangerous character to himself" (I: 27). On a social level, Lady Russell strongly holds her bias in judging

Wentworth's social standing: "a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in the profession" (I: 27). At this point of the narrative, Lady Russell's social circle has not included relations with men of profession who successfully attain considerable fortune, so it strengthens her sentiments against those who do not belong to the nobility or landed gentry.

William Price, a naval midshipman in *Mansfield Park*, gets the help needed to advance his career from his uncle, Sir Thomas Bertram. But Wentworth is an orphan, and his nearest relation known at that time is his brother, the curate of Monkford, not the kind of connection that can recommend him in the Navy. An officer with no fortune in "a most uncertain profession," Wentworth is certainly much less preferable than the nobility or the landed gentry. By becoming Mrs. Charles Musgrove, Mary is considered by Sir Walter to have "acquired a little artificial importance," but it still disappoints Sir Walter that even though the Musgroves are "old country family of respectability and large fortune," their lack of title means that Mary "had therefore given all the honour and received none" (I: 11). Having no regard for Anne, Sir Walter's hope relies solely on Elizabeth to marry suitably, and "thinking himself and Elizabeth as blooming as ever" (I: 12), Sir Walter is content that Elizabeth's marriage to a baronet will happen.

Elizabeth is not as contented as Sir Walter in her prospect of marrying suitably, and she falls victim to their shared conviction that she will only marry a baronet that is equal to his father's heir. Elizabeth has already hoped to marry Mr. Elliot, so his failure to meet her expectation angers Elizabeth for many years, and more so because she – sharing the Elliot family pride with her father – does not meet any baronet whom she likes and considers equal to Mr. Elliot. In an era when the only career for an upper-class woman is to marry well to secure her

financial security and her social importance, losing a prospect of marrying well can be a big loss. Women's situations are more challenging than men's because, as Henry Tilney in Austen's *Northanger Abbey* says, in marriage, "man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal" (NA I: 54). Elizabeth cannot refuse when she is not chosen. She used to value the Baronetage, but "always to be presented with the date of her own birth and see no marriage follow but that of a youngest sister, made the book an evil" (I: 12). The Baronetage becomes a painful reminder for Elizabeth who is still waiting to be "properly solicited by baronet-blood" (I: 12) at the age of twenty-nine. Her remaining single becomes a form of ambiguous loss. Elizabeth is performing the same tasks as Lady Elliot but with an awareness that her position is temporary unless she can marry the heir of the family home or the heir to another titled landed gentleman.

Landlords and landed gentry enjoy the privilege of inheriting fortunes and social status that men in the professions have to earn. With sailors, the labor always involves potential loss. Captain Harville offers Anne his perspective on separation when a sailor goes off to sea: "if I could but make you comprehend what a man suffers when he takes a last look at his wife and children, ... 'God knows whether we ever meet again!' the glow of his soul when he does see them again" (II: 189). While he does come back for his family, Captain Harville exemplifies another form of loss: suffering a severe wound two years earlier, he has become disabled. Luckily, he has earned enough fortune to support his modest life style. Similar to any other professions, the navy does not always offer opportunities that come in time to everybody. Richard Musgrove never makes any fortune and never comes back. Fanny and Benwick get engaged and wait a year or two for him to earn enough before getting married, but ironically, "Fortune came, his prize-money as lieutenant being great; promotion, too, came at last; but Fanny Harville did not live to know it" (I: 81). The younger, poor Wentworth believes that he is

also favored by Providence to get his own fortune and social status. All he needs is time to grab opportunities. Anne shares his sentiment but is too weak to refuse Lady Russell's persuasion. In other words, the teenaged Anne seems to be in-between: still believing that social order is ordained by God while aspiring to social mobility. The adult, mature Anne looks back at her younger self not without regret.

Being in the Navy in the age of global imperialism meant being intimate with the idea of ambiguous loss with its uncertainty of ever coming back once one sails across the sea. The ones left behind would undoubtedly be prone to such a loss as well. However, joining the Navy also meant an opportunity for upward social mobility, a fact that the baronet finds offensive "as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of" (I: 22). The Navy represented threats to the power of the aristocrat and the landed gentry. When Anne was engaged to Wentworth in 1806, Sir Walter did not consent, thinking it "a very degrading alliance" (I: 27). When they get married in 1815, he does not disapprove because "Captain Wentworth, with five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and as high in his profession as merit and activity could place him, was no longer nobody" (II: 199). However, the eight years of separation and estrangement bring a deep sense of loss for both Wentworth and especially Anne, though it manifests differently for each of them.

"When existence or when hope is gone": The Plot of Ambiguous Loss

Many commentators, looking at "Anne's melancholy about missed chances and lost youth," are inclined "to discover a mood of wistful nostalgia" in *Persuasion* (Lynch xxxii). It should be noted though that our modern notion of nostalgia is different from that in Austen's era. Swiss physician Johannes Hofer coined the word "nostalgia" in 1688 from Greek words "the one of which is Nosos, return to the land; the other, Algos, signifies suffering or grief; so that thus it is possible from the force of the sound Nostalgia to define the sad mood originating from the desire

for the return to one's native land" (Anspach 381). Tracing the history of nostalgia or homesickness, Starobinski and Kemp claim: "By the end of the eighteenth century, throughout all the countries of Europe, all doctors recognized nostalgia as a frequently fatal disease" (95) leading to death. Goodman reaffirms the eighteenth and nineteenth-century notion of nostalgia as pathology: "medical nostalgia acquired international recognition as a disability of wartime and colonial mobility, a somatic and psychological protest against forced travel, depopulation, emigration, and other kinds of compulsory movement" ("Uncertain Disease" 199-200).

According to Nicholas Dames, nostalgia takes a central role in nineteenth-century British novels as they increasingly describe memory in a time of growing mobility and rapid changes. He argues that Jane Austen revises the old notion of nostalgia and "replaces it with a series of psychic movements that permit the formation of a depathologized, in fact curative, nostalgia" that comprises five interdependent strategies: "(1) pleasure; (2) temporal rather than spatial orientation; (3) disconnection; (4) naming or categorizing; (5) communal dissemination" (35). Dames convincingly shows how *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* exemplify the notion of curative nostalgia. His basic premise is: "Austen's treatment of memory: the general lack of remembrance from her narratives" (21). In a series of rhetorical questions, he asks what Marianne of *Sense and Sensibility* remembers of her deceased father, what Anne remembers of her mother, and what Fanny of *Mansfield Park* remembers of anything about Portsmouth. While Marianne and Fanny may hardly remember any of those, I would disagree about Anne. Anne remembers a lot, and her acts of remembrance affect her psyche and personality.

In the opening chapter of the novel, when outlining problems and seeking solutions to save Kellynch Hall, the narrator presents Anne's remembrance of Lady Elliot that manifests in terms of the values that Anne learns from and shares with her mother. In a single paragraph, the

narrative presents Lady Elliot's excellent roles as a wife and a mother in the seventeen years of her marriage. For her husband, Lady Elliot "had humoured, or softened, or concealed his failings, and promoted his real respectability" (I: 10), which she seems to have done gracefully without any difficulty. But to cover Sir Walter's failure as "a conceited, silly father" (I: 10), Lady Elliot seeks help from Lady Russell to instill "the good principles and instruction which she had been anxiously giving her daughters" (I: 10). Thus, parallel to the fact that nobody but Anne seems to mourn Lady Elliot, her principles seem to have vanished from Kellynch Hall, except in Anne. Instead of feeling responsible and accountable for the mismanagement of Kellynch Hall, Sir Walter and Elizabeth feel "ill-used and unfortunate" and stubbornly resent "compromising their dignity, or relinquishing their comforts" (I: 14). Thus, when asked to advise a solution, Lady Russell consults Anne who strongly believes in the principle of "honesty, justice, and equity." Anne is fully aware that her father and Elizabeth will object to her "rigid requisitions," for "a quicker release from debt," to forego "Every comfort of life Journeys, London, servants, horses, table--contractions and restrictions every where" (I: 17). Such conviction and awareness show that Anne remembers her mother in ways that her father and sisters do not.

If Kellynch Hall represents Anne's lost object, her Freudian work of mourning requires her to sever her attachment to it. Nostalgia as homesickness represents that detachment process, whose failure would manifest in symptoms of ambiguous loss. Anne's preference among the three alternatives for quitting Kellynch Hall shows a symptom of nostalgia/homesickness. Dames argues that Marianne's reluctance to leave Norland Park and her consistency in remaining nostalgic about the Dashwoods's family house make her the representation of nostalgia as an illness because "its referent is a real place, not an inaccessible time" (25). Similarly, Anne

prefers a small house in Somersetshire to Bath and London because staying in the neighborhood with “the pleasure of sometimes seeing the lawns and groves of Kellynch, was the object of her ambition” (I: 17). At this point, while anticipating a future movement, Anne has already built a desire to return home, a real place called Kellynch Hall. Although Lady Russell knows Anne’s objection to moving to Bath, she believes it will “do both health and spirits good” for Anne whose “spirits were not high” (I: 18). What Lady Russell may unwittingly forget or refuse to acknowledge is that Anne associates Bath with her loss and traumatic experience.

Persuasion shows the movement from nostalgia as pathology to curative nostalgia, and both result from Anne’s two losses: one confirmed, the other ambiguous. Long before Anne has to experience “forced mobility” to move to Bath for the family to let Kellynch Hall, she has already experienced it twice. Lady Russell’s recollection of Anne’s experience shows how even Anne’s closest companion does not understand Anne’s sentiments about Bath: “And with regard to Anne's dislike of Bath, she considered it as a prejudice and mistake arising, first, from the circumstance of her having been three years at school there, after her mother's death; and secondly, from her happening to be not in perfectly good spirits the only winter which she had afterwards spent there with herself” (I: 18). By calling it “a prejudice and mistake,” Lady Russell dismisses Anne’s feelings and experience. Losing her mother and being immediately sent away from home must have been traumatic experiences for Anne. But Lady Russell recalls it simply as a piece of factual information. Anne recalls her three years in Bath as a period of misery when she suffers “the want of near relations and a settled home” (II: 123). Anne is yearning for Kellynch Hall as a real place with people whom she has known since birth, including Lady Russell. Although Lady Russell knows the reason for Anne’s being “not in perfectly good spirits” in her second stay in Bath, Lady Russell also does not acknowledge it, suggesting that

she thinks Anne should have been over it. However, Anne frames her recollection of the second visit to Bath differently. The visit immediately follows the breakup with Wentworth and is recalled among the reasons she hardly moves on. In saying “no aid had been given in change of place (except one visit to Bath soon after the rupture)” (I: 28), the narrator implies that Bath should have been helpful in easing Anne’s pain, but it never has.

The anticipation of moving to Bath triggers Anne’s nostalgic feelings. When Mary asks Anne to stay with her in Uppercross, consequently delaying her moving to Bath by few weeks, Anne willingly agrees to stay in her “own dear country” (I: 32). Anne’s comparison of Somersetshire and Bath reflects her melancholic disposition, “dreading the possible heats of September in all the white glare of Bath, and grieving to forego all the influence so sweet and so sad of the autumnal months in the country” (I: 32). The word “grieving” appears only four times in the novel, and the other three that appear later refer to Henrietta’s grieving Louisa’s fall (the near death), Anne’s grieving her mother, and Harville’s recollection of how he and Anne were grieving Benwick’s loss of Fanny. Anne’s melancholic nature resonates with the sweet and sad autumn, a season often associated with death. Thus, when the time arrives for Anne to leave for Bath, we are reminded that Ann “persisted in a very determined, though very silent disinclination for Bath” (II: 111). The pairing of “very determined” and “very silent” hints at the quality that Wentworth accuses Anne of lacking and that Louisa claims to possess (leading to her fall on the Cobb) and at Anne’s silence when overhearing their conversation. In their conversation that Anne overhears, Wentworth praises Louisa, “*yours* is the character of decision and firmness” (I: 74), which later prompts Louisa not to listen to Wentworth’s reasoning not to jump, stubbornly saying: “I am determined I will” (I: 91). The phrase “very silent” also represents the fact that nobody in Kellynch Hall listens to Anne, so she often chooses to just remain silent.

Silence marks Anne's existence, representing her marginal position and her mental distress in volume one. Part of her father's response to her engagement is "great silence." When she learns from Mary that Wentworth claims she has changed, unrecognizable to him, Anne accepts Mary's words at face value, "fully submitted, in silent, deep mortification" (I: 53). Having no resemblance to her father, Anne is the least favorite daughter; she "was nobody with either father or sister; her word had no weight, her convenience was always to give way" (I: 11). Her father and sister do not involve her in deciding to move to Bath and choosing the right place. Still, Kellynch Hall is the only place that Anne calls home at this point in the narrative. On the day the Crofts are scheduled to move in, from Uppercross Anne could not help but feeling homesickness: "Anne's heart must be in Kellynch again. A beloved home made over to others" (I: 43). Anne cannot think of anything else the whole day, in contrast to Mary's remark in the evening when she remembers but is glad that she "did not think of it before" (I: 43). Mary has found home in Uppercross, so Kellynch Hall does not mean much to her anymore except in the insistence that it represents the Elliot countenance and pride.

Uppercross functions as a buffer zone – so to speak – for Anne's movement from experiencing older nostalgia to modern nostalgia and for her opening up to a renewed sense of ambiguous loss. Initially Anne does not want to remain in Somersetshire when her family is moving to Bath. A sense of duty – Mary needs her – makes her agree to stay in Uppercross. She remarks though on her disinclination to stay in Uppercross: "a removal from one set of people to another, though at a distance of only three miles, will often include a total change of conversation, opinion, and idea" (I: 36). Anne must mean that she would have to adapt to different kinds of conversation with different people of different opinions and ideas. What she does not foresee is how her stay in Uppercross would be a starting point for the transformation of

her conception of home.²⁴ Her first reconnection with Wentworth happens not in Kellynch Hall but in Uppercross. The lovers' journey to their separate yet shared sense of ambiguous loss starts there. Wentworth returns. Now that they are physically within reach of each other, is their love for each other still there?

The narrative calls the broken engagement “the misery of a parting, a final parting” (I:28), and while it is a painful moment for both, each recalls it differently: Wentworth with anger, Anne with regret. Feeling ill used, Wentworth would implicitly express his rancor to others, such as when he praises Louisa's determination and alludes to Anne's succumbing to persuasion as “the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character” (I: 74). Anne, on the other hand, takes everything inside, though its impact is visible in her appearance: Sir Walter, who believes that he and Elizabeth do not age, thinks Anne “haggard.” Anne is prematurely aging physically and mentally: “Her attachment and regrets had, for a long time, clouded every enjoyment of youth, and an early loss of bloom and spirits had been their lasting effect” (I: 28). Elizabeth Dalton claims, “the loss of Wentworth produces so deep melancholy in Anne, and reverberates so widely throughout the novel, because it recapitulates some earlier and even more profound loss” (81). But we can also see it the other way around: the loss of Wentworth is not an extension of the loss of her mother. The real final parting is between Ann and her mother in the impossibility of Lady Elliot to physically come back. When it is so profound, Anne's loss of her mother shapes Anne's experience and becomes a springboard for Anne to navigate her sense of loss of Wentworth.

²⁴ This is also implicitly a comment about places like Bath which essentially become resorts—i.e., places that people visit rather than places they live—Austen's last unfinished novel *Sanditon* is also set at a spa—. In addition, the idea of the “resort,” the temporary place to visit, contrasts with the landed property, and thus represents the historical transformation that is taking place at the time.

With the death of Lady Elliot, the next generation's mother needs to be installed. While the immediate effort is to arrange a marriage between the eldest daughter to the heir presumptive, the failure of that first attempt means that the middle daughter has to pick up the baton. Anne recalls, "When I yielded, I thought it was to duty" (II: 197). The aristocratic and landed gentry families are closed circles, maintaining their boundaries and not allowing outsiders in. Lady Russell persuades Anne not to marry Wentworth because she is seeking a form of closure that reproduces the family structure placed within the idea of Anne replacing her mother. The nineteen-year-old Anne still does not know how not to conform to that idea: "She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older: the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" (I: 30). Anne soon learns her mistake; something about desire, love, and romance makes such closure seem less appealing. At the age of twenty-two, Anne declines the proposal to marry an heir "whose landed property and general importance were second in that country, only to Sir Walter" (I: 28), and Lady Russell cannot do anything but lament the refusal.

Persuasion is a novel of ambiguous loss and a narrative of non-closure, presenting romance within a moment of historical change. Nina Auerbach notes: "It is significant that in *Persuasion* we are placed on the fringes of the aristocracy from the beginning. The hero of this book breaks into the equivocal shelter of England's past, and links the heroine with forces of future hope and change" (121). Such forces are not immediately convincing for Anne. It takes eight years for Anne to learn and for Wentworth to prove himself. The contrast of England's noble past and England's modern future is represented by the Baronetage and the Navy Lists. Elizabeth reads the Baronetage; Anne peruses navy lists. For Elizabeth, there is "not a baronet from A to Z whom her feelings could have so willingly acknowledged as an equal" (I: 13) to the heir presumptive of Kellynch Hall. For Anne, nobody "had ever come within the Kellynch circle,

who could bear a comparison with Frederick Wentworth, as he stood in her memory” (I: 28). And yet, both sisters experience the ambiguous feelings of romantic absence. Elizabeth is waiting for an additional information to her name in the Baronetage; Anne is following the fate of the only man she loves with uncertainty whether he will come back for her. Both sisters are confined within a “scanty neighborhood” and “the small limits of the society around them.” Elizabeth does not have any other choice but to wait, while Anne chooses to live in the ambiguity of her situation.

The degree of mobility and the limits of the society create different perceptions of time and acts of remembrance. After a very brief meeting with Wentworth, Anne is trying to understand the resumption of her agitation after eight years of separation. She reasons: “What might not eight years do? Events of every description, changes, alienations, removals--all, all must be comprised in it, and oblivion of the past-- how natural, how certain too!” (I: 53). But not much has happened in Anne’s life in the past eight years. She has never left Kellynch but for a short visit to Bath. She could have moved to Uppercross Cottage, but Mary did instead. Wentworth on the other hand can name the year of their engagement, 1806, but frame it with his career movement: “That happened before I went to sea in the year six” (I: 55). Anne believes that Wentworth must also associate year 1806 with their broken engagement, yet she does not think that he feels “equal pain.” If both Anne and Wentworth are mourning the loss of their short-lived engagement, Wentworth has the opportunity of open mourning through displacement. Anne can only keep it to herself. The few months that they shared took place in Kellynch, and when Anne looks back, her nostalgia is a form of pathology. The eight years have witnessed her losing her bloom, making her “faded and thin.” Learning the possibility of Wentworth’s sister living in Kellynch Hall, she experiences “a revival of former pain” (I: 30). When Anne hears the prospect

of meeting Wentworth, her cheeks become hot and red. She is agitated after their first meeting. Anne feels no pleasure in recalling what happened within the last eight years. Wentworth on the other hand can find pleasure in his remembrance. His eight years bring him advancement in his naval career and large fortune. He has no attachment to places that he visits, thus his orientation is temporal and not spatial. He names and categorizes which ships and which appointments bring him which luck. Of the unpleasant memory, he disconnects it, such as the storm that could have killed him: “Four-and-twenty hours later, and I should only have been a gallant Captain Wentworth, in a small paragraph at one corner of the newspapers; and being lost in only a sloop, nobody would have thought about me” (I: 57). While Anne shudders listening to such dreadful possibility, Wentworth enjoys communal dissemination of his memory.

Anne’s movement from nostalgia as pathology to curative nostalgia must start with severing her ties to Kellynch Hall and everything associated with it. Initially not wanting to stay in Uppercross, Anne finds out that it actually does her good: “Her own spirits improved by change of place and subject, by being removed three miles from Kellynch” (I: 42). The Musgroves do not belong to the nobility, yet they perform well their responsibilities as the landed gentry, and they are popular in the neighborhood. Anne is already different from her family – she does not share the vanity nor the Elliots’ pride – yet she still learns an important lesson: “the art of knowing our own nothingness beyond our own circle” (I: 38-9). The excessive preoccupation with ranks and dignity in Kellynch Hall and Kellynch Lodge (Lady Russell’s residence) does not concern the Musgroves. Anne also observes that “The Musgroves, like their houses, were in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement” (I: 37-8), with the parents representing the old English style and the young people the new. Alistair Duckworth argues: “Anne's reaction to what she sees is nostalgic and resigned; the possibility of a return to order

seems remote” (185). I argue that such a reaction is the beginning of her severing her attachment to Kellynch Hall. With everybody finding a confidante in her, Anne recalibrates her own take on the changes that are taking place. Looking at the Musgrove sisters, Anne knows she would not want to lose “her own more elegant and cultivated mind” but wishes she could have their “good-humoured mutual affection” (I: 38) with her own sisters. In mediating their concerns, Anne “could do little more than listen patiently, soften every grievance, and excuse each to the other; give them all hints of the forbearance necessary between such near neighbours” (I: 42); earning their respect and affections, Anne learns her own worth. The “she was only Anne” (I: 11) in Kellynch Hall has a different meaning in Uppercross: only Anne can function as a confidante to everybody. Anne’s enforced move to Uppercross leads to a voluntary move to Lyme, which provides a turning point in the narrative. Anne’s esteemed position is heightened after Louisa’s fall, and she also enjoys the advantage of “having the bloom and freshness of youth restored” (I: 87). When Anne meets Lady Russell in Kellynch Lodge, at the beginning of volume two of the narrative, Lady Russell notices the change and compliments her. Receiving the compliment, Anne “had the amusement of connecting them [improved in plumpness and looks] with the silent admiration of her cousin” (II: 101), which triggers Wentworth’s jealousy.

Mr. Elliot exemplifies tension between economic and emotional concerns, and he also functions as a catalyst in the transition from the old to the new way of life. His earlier disdain for the baronetcy denies Elizabeth the closure that she needs to maintain her position in presiding over Kellynch Hall. His wife’s death leaves Mr. Elliot prosperous and frees him to navigate plans to secure his future baronetcy. When he renews his connection with Sir Walter, “he was already the richer of the two, and the Kellynch estate would as surely be his hereafter as the title” (II: 114). Although his admiration for and interest in Anne are genuine, Anne soon becomes part

of his plan to secure his future baronetcy. Marrying Anne will give him “a son-in-law’s rights” of watchfulness to keep Sir Walter from remarrying and producing a legitimate heir. For Wentworth, Mr. Elliot’s admiration towards Anne rekindles his love for Anne, and he soon realizes he has a competitor for her love. Anne never wavers in her love for Wentworth, yet she now has a comparison to Wentworth. Among her new acquaintances in Bath, Anne sees “nobody equal to him [Mr. Elliot]” and in acknowledging his earnestness in looking at her, Anne “knew it well; and she remembered another person’s look also” (II: 120). Anne is considering her final decision to stay in the older society or to move to a new one.

Anne is the mirror of Lady Elliot; in her absence, Anne looks back and uses her mother’s experience as life lessons. Lady Elliot’s attachment to life came from her duties, friends, and children. When she died, she quit them after seventeen years of living the consequence of “the infatuation which made her Lady Elliot” (I, 10). In the last eleven years of her life, she was also mourning a still-born son. The unhappy marriage and the loss of an only son would have been more than enough to make her “not the very happiest being in the world” (I, 20). When Lady Russell tells Ann: “You are your mother's self in countenance and disposition” (II, 130), it implies that Anne also possesses her mother’s melancholic trait. Lady Russell continues with her persuasion for Anne to replace her mother “in situation and name, and home, presiding and blessing in the same spot, and only superior to her in being more highly valued!” (II: 130). The idea of marrying Mr. Elliot to become Lady Elliot and restore Kellynch Hall is a temptation that Anne cannot instantly resist. After a month of getting acquainted with Mr. Elliot in Bath, Anne knows that he highly values her, yet she suspects that something is off with his character; “She distrusted the past, if not the present” (II: 130). Therefore, Anne soon realizes that “the charm of Kellynch and of "Lady Elliot" all faded away” (II: 130).

Enforced mobility turns out to be a fertile ground for Anne to cultivate curative nostalgia and reject the narrative of closure in her society's demand for a proper marriage. On her way to Bath, Anne "looked back, with fond regret, to the bustles of Uppercross and the seclusion of Kellynch" (II: 110), and Anne entered Bath "with a sinking heart, anticipating an imprisonment of many months," and anxiously saying to herself, "Oh! when shall I leave you again?" (II: 111). She soon learns that it is not Uppercross nor Kellynch as places that she longs for when looking back but the moments that she shares with people who share mutual affection with her. Once she arrives at Camden Place, the Elliot residence in Bath, she knows that she does not care about what makes the place favorable for her father and sister. She soon learns that Bath is not a bad place when she can have the society of the Musgroves, the Crofts, the Harvilles, and Captain Wentworth there. Place does not really matter, and she finds the proof when Sir Walter and Elizabeth visit the White Hart: "the door was thrown open for Sir Walter and Miss Elliot, whose entrance seemed to give a general chill. Anne felt an instant oppression, and wherever she looked saw symptoms of the same" (II: 182). Part of what makes Anne reject Mr. Elliot is his similarity to Sir Walter in overvaluing rank and connection, of only caring to be "among his equals or superiors" (II: 123). Anne on the other hand, to her father's dismay and disdain, prefers being in the company of "a mere Mrs Smith" to being among "the nobility of England and Ireland" (II: 128). Elizabeth would have happily accepted Mr. Elliot's offer to keep her name, but Anne is not persuaded to be satisfied with such a closure; "It was now some years since Anne had begun to learn that she and her excellent friend [Lady Russell] could sometimes think differently" (II, 119). Anne willingly courts ambiguous loss. Earlier when Anne rejects Charles Musgrove's proposal, she does not know whether Wentworth will ever come back. When she rejects Mr. Elliot, she is still uncertain about Wentworth. When Louisa expresses her "admiration and

delight on the character of the navy; their friendliness, their brotherliness, their openness, their uprightness” (I: 83), Anne has known those qualities much earlier.

At the end of the novel, Anne joins Wentworth in curative nostalgia. Anne is looking back at the persuasion, naming and categorizing it, and finally disconnecting from it. She believes that she did the right thing, “much as I suffered from it” because she would have suffered more in her conscience if she had continued the engagement, and she concludes: “a strong sense of duty is no bad part of a woman's portion” (II: 198). Wentworth also looks back, asking Anne whether she would have renewed the engagement if he had asked her in 1808, two years after the broken engagement. Learning that Anne would have done that, he admits his mistakes of being “too proud to ask again,” of not understanding and doing Anne justice, causing their “six years of separation and suffering.” His remembrance is framed as a lesson and disconnection: “It is a sort of pain, too, which is new to me. . . . I must learn to brook being happier than I deserve” (II: 199). What used to be recalled as painful experience becomes pleasure. Much earlier in the narrative, Anne was mortified when she heard that Wentworth thought she was “wretchedly altered” (I: 54), but she is pleased when Wentworth admits, “to my eye you could never alter” (II: 196). Instead of confronting the inconsistency between Wentworth’s previous claim and his present confession, “Anne smiled, and let it pass. It was too pleasing a blunder for a reproach” (II: 196). Similarly, when recalling the incident in Lyme, Wentworth names and categorizes it: “The horror and distress you were involved in, the stretch of mind, the wear of spirits! I should have thought your last impressions of Lyme must have been strong disgust” (II: 148). But Anne disconnects that past incident from the present: “The last hours were certainly very painful,” replied Anne; “but when pain is over, the remembrance of it often becomes a pleasure” (II: 148). The lovers have gone through curative nostalgia.

Austen is similar to Wordsworth in attending to her era's social, political, and historical changes and relating these to the experience of ambiguous loss. However, *Persuasion* comparatively begins at a point where "The Ruined Cottage" ends, years after the separation of the hero and heroine. At a psychological level, the opportunity to look back far enough into the past after having had enough time to process the change provides opportunities to heal. At a social level, the gap allows sufficient time for new formations to solidify –for "men of the profession" to better their social standing and for the nobility and landed gentry to accommodate such transformation. In having Anne reopen the past and court the strong feelings she attaches to it, Austen shows that ambiguous loss, which can be a painful experience, can also become a noble emotional state. Such a noble emotional state is attained partly through curative nostalgia, where one can disconnect unpleasant memories, give new meanings, and move on with life. Thus, Anne is capable of taking pride in a woman's constancy, "of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone." It is only natural that some changes cause pain. Anne's choice to embrace a new form of society led by the profession requires that "she must pay the tax of quick alarm" as a sailor's wife. Her marriage both offers and defies closure, in a world where non-closure can also be dynamic and signify progress.

Chapter 3. ‘Sever’d far and wide’: Hemans and Affective Consequences of Life at a Distance

And thou—how far thy gentle sway extended!
The heart’s sweet empire over land and sea;
Many a stranger and far flower was blended
In the soft wreath that glory bound for thee.
The echoes of the Susquehanna’s waters
Paused in the pine-woods words of thine to hear;
And to the wide Atlantic’s younger daughters
Thy name was lovely, and thy song was dear.

-- Letitia Elizabeth Landon
“Felicia Hemans”

Persuasion ends with Anne “belonging to that profession ... more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance” (203). Austen is conversant with details about the Navy because her two brothers are naval officers.²⁵ Yet Austen chooses to talk about the naval officers’ private lives on dry land instead of their heroism at sea (with its horror and harsh realities). In contrast, Hemans, with two brothers serving in the army fighting in the Peninsular War (1808-1814), started her career as a poet of patriotism. Austen portrays sailors’ “domestic virtue”; Hemans explores a different aspect of such “domestic virtues” and “national importance,” by focusing on the affective experience of distance and loss. Hemans has earned various labels (domestic, anti-domestic, liberal, sentimental, imperial, etc.) depending on which of her poems critics analyze and draw their conclusions from. However, my interest lies in the poems that do not exactly support the idea of an “imperial Hemans”—poems drawn mostly from the middle and later phases of her career.²⁶ This selection of poems, which Nanora Sweet and

²⁵ Austen’s older brother Francis entered the Royal Naval Academy, Portsmouth in 1786, followed by her youngest brother Charles five years later. Francis rose to become Senior Admiral of the Fleet in 1865. Charles was stationed in North America from 1805-1811.

²⁶ Nanora Sweet and Julie Melnyk divide Hemans’s active career into three phases: “*early* [1808-23], public and largely occasional poetry; *middle* [1823-30], more intimate and haunting lyric poems; and *late* [1830-5], experiments toward a new, scriptural polity” (4-5). Two of Hemans’s

Julie Melnyk identify as “more intimate and haunting lyric poems” and as “experiments toward a new, scriptural polity” (4-5), represent a more complex and humane Hemans, who is not merely a sentimental or domestic poet, but a poet of ambiguous loss.

Felicia Hemans was only 41 years old when she died on May 16, 1835, but she was already the most widely read woman poet in the nineteenth-century English-speaking world, having published twenty volumes of her work within 27 years of her career. Hemans’s contemporary, Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838), in an elegy titled “Felicia Hemans” that she published in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book, 1838*, calls Hemans an unhappy poet--a situation female poets were prone to in that era.²⁷ In the brief note that follows the poem, Landon tells of Hemans’s birth, marriage, and separation, before describing the effect of the split-up:

The simple fact of her separation from her husband afforded sufficient ground for melancholy reflection, at the same time that it renders intelligible to the reader, those touches of sadness, those shadows of deep and early disappointment, which render her poetry so congenial to the feelings of the sensitive and sorrowful. It is remarked of Mrs. Hemans, that of this affliction she never complained: if, however, the fountain of her sorrow was in one sense sealed, it found a natural outlet through the medium of verse, for never were the chords of human feeling touched by a hand more skillful in the native melody of grief, than by that of this gifted and high-souled woman.

Landon seems to diminish Hemans’s remarkable poetic career into a product of a sad, acquiescent, but talented woman lacking a husband. I would argue that the sadness from her poems springs from her acute observation of the various losses and especially the unresolved grief that leaves the victim with lack of closure.

Hemans’s diverse work is of course more than just personal grief and sorrow, though even twentieth-century and twenty-first-century critics like to relate her poems to her story of

most often cited poems of domestic imperial ideology, “The Domestic Affection” and “England’s Dead,” come from the early period.

²⁷ Tricia Lootens explores the complex figure of these poetesses in terms of their national, racial, and gender politics in her book *The Political Poetess: Victorian Femininity, Race, and the Legacy of Separate Spheres*.

domestic tragedy. For Anne Mellor, Hemans “situated herself and her poetry wholly within the category of feminine domesticity: her poetry celebrates the enduring values of domestic affections, the glory and beauty of maternal love, and the lasting commitment of a woman to her chosen mate” (124), with the longing for familial unity in her poems motivated by her broken marriage. Myra Cottingham argues that Hemans, through her display of dead and dying bodies, critiques warfare and its effects on women like herself who, “while not being spared the pain of loss, nonetheless take over traditional masculine areas of leadership in the home” (290) when their husbands leave or are broken by military experience--in Hemans’ case, Captain Hemans “returned from the Peninsular War ‘broken up’” (276), necessitating his move to Italy for health reasons and leaving Hemans to raise five sons on her own. Hemans never publicly acknowledged the pain of the separation, yet it may have forced her into increased productivity. Quoting Hemans’s letter, Chorley shows Hemans’s possible resentment of the financial restraints that necessitate her writing: “It has ever been one of my regrets that the constant necessity of providing sums of money to meet the exigencies of the boys’ education, has obliged me to waste my mind in what I consider mere desultory effusions” (257). What Hemans considers as “desultory effusions,” we should add, are admirably rich literary work - mostly in poetry with some plays, translations, and commentaries.

What is worth noting is that Hemans published her first collection of poems under her maiden name Felicia Browne when she was just 15 years old, another collection before she got married, and some more poems before her separation. Thus, although her marital situation matters in some of her work, it is fair to say that she is more than just a poet of domestic tragedy. She is a product of her historical period, writing in active response to the first decades of what some historians call the British Imperial Century. Historian Ronald Hyam notes: “By 1815

Britain emerged from the Napoleonic Wars unchallenged and almost unassailable at sea.... Because of the improved command of communications established after 1815, the navy was much more dispersed over the world than it had been in the eighteenth century” (16-17). Vital in its complex relationship with government, industry, and commerce, the maritime power of the British Navy touched on Hemans’s entire life. Born to a Liverpool merchant and a sister to three brothers, Hemans had first-hand experience of family members emigrating from Great Britain, even though she herself never set foot in foreign lands. Having had the family business at home disrupted by war and failing, Hemans’s father George Browne tried his luck abroad, leaving his family in 1810. He never came back and two years later died in Quebec, Canada. One of Hemans’s brothers also never returned from his assignment as Deputy Assistant Commissary-General in Upper Canada; he died in Kingston in 1821. Two of her brothers served in the army fighting in the Peninsular War (1808-1814); one returned home to build a prominent career in the army, and the other later moved to Ireland to become Chief Commissioner of Police there. Hemans married Captain Alfred Hemans in 1812, and six years and five sons later, he left the family to permanently dwell in Italy, later refusing her proposal to join him. In 1831, when her health was declining, Hemans sent her two oldest sons to live with their father.

As a young poet, Felicia Browne was interested in the patriotic struggle against Napoleonic France manifested itself in the monumental collection of her juvenile poems, *England and Spain; or, Valour and Patriotism* (1808). This was not a conventional subject for a female writer, let alone for an adolescent. Justifying her engagement with patriotism and war in the poems, the fifteen-year-old Hemans wrote to her aunt: “though females are forbidden to interfere in politics, yet as I have a dear, dear brother, at present on the scene of action, I may be allowed to feel some ardour on the occasion” (Chorley v.1 31). Her next collection of poems,

The Domestic Affections, and Other Poems (1812), as the title suggests, starts to make connections between the traditionally feminine space of the home and the public and political “scene of action.” The volume “signals the formation of a gendered nationalist poetics,” according to Juan Sanchez, which “both feminizes her conspicuous political engagements and politicizes the home as a site for development of Britain’s national and imperial mission” (409). Such a perspective is in line with Lootens’s assertion that Hemans conceives “of the home as both separate empire and the prerequisite for empire” (412). In “England’s Dead” (1823), Lootens argues, mourning leads Hemans to connect the subject of domesticity to that of empire: “For just as domestic mourning makes the empire into a home, expanding affection in terms of latitude and longitude, until it reaches and symbolically appropriates the final resting place of the beloved and honored dead, so domestic love makes the home into an empire” (Lootens 248). For such engagement with domesticity and imperial ideology, Hemans becomes, in Norma Clarke’s words, “the undisputed representative poet of Victorian imperial domestic ideology” (45).

Though interested in the effects of empire on the domestic sphere, I focus on a specific aspect which involves the evolving realities of mourning in the early nineteenth century: the dispersal of family members across the globe and the ambiguous sense of loss that resulted from it. In reading Hemans, some of the questions I ask include: How do spatial and temporal distance affect her poetry’s representation of family unity and especially motherhood? What would it mean for children growing up into adults, leaving home, and perhaps dying far away from home for a cause whose ethical and moral basis is uncertain? How would one deal with uncertainty of not knowing the loved ones’ whereabouts and their fate?

Considering those who die away from home, Lootens says: “the graves of what Hemans loved to call the “honored dead” could symbolize the general fact of loss and the specific battles

of national heroes; these sites could render the rational and universal impulse of patriotism local and spiritual” (247). But what if there is no certainty whether loved ones are dead or still alive? What if there is no memorial site? In poems like “Come Home” (1826) and “The Graves of a Household” (1825), where loss is ambiguous and mourning complicated, the fictive inter-affiliation that Lootens mentions becomes harder to sustain. Hemans’s poetry of bereavement shows how the British imperial project complicates and disrupts normative mourning practices. While exploring the victimization of mothers and children - thus critiquing its cause - Hemans can also be said to be complicit, an apologist for British imperialism whose poems evoke the feelings we call ambiguous loss as an aesthetic affect to soften the grief and thus to mute the anger that it might elicit. Her probing into these ambiguities of empire, as they affect the experience of loss both at home and abroad, speaks to the challenge of pinpointing Hemans’s politics of empire. Ambiguous loss is a complex phenomenon which reflects the complexity of Hemans’s ideological position as well.

“A soil that is not ours”: Hemans and Emigration

As the epigraph of this chapter suggests, Hemans’s literary expansion and fame are transatlantic, and her beloved poem, “The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England” (1825), a classic in America, represents the intricacy of emigration in intertwining spiritual motives and colonial ambition.²⁸ The title refers to the British colony in America founded by the pilgrims who escaped religious persecution in England in the 1600s, whom Hemans calls “a band of exiles” instead of emigrants. While both terms evoke feelings of loss and grief, emigration is often a voluntary act as opposed to people in exile who most likely are banished, typically for political or punitive reasons. Hemans makes sure to state the pilgrims’ apolitical intention: “Not as the conqueror

²⁸ Unless otherwise mentioned, reference to Hemans’s poems in this chapter is from *The Poems of Felicia Hemans, Complete Copyright Edition*, William P. Nimmo, 1875.

comes, / They, the true-hearted, came” (9-10); but the fact that they land “On the wild New England shore” (8) when “the heavy night hung dark” (4) seems to complicate their claim not to subjugate the land. The word “wild” suggests space that is not inhabited or cultivated, and “darkness” is often used to convey negativity: evil, death or the unknown. When “wild” also takes its other meaning of not subject to restraint or regulation, the pilgrims would be free to do whatever they want, including negating the existence of and removing the indigenous inhabitants.

It is worth noting that the pilgrims do not come “in silence and in fear” (14), and as they move deeper into the land, they sing “hymns of lofty cheer” (16) and “the anthem of the free” (20). The claim on the newfound land is made in the next stanza where the native eagle’s soaring and roaring are taken as “their welcome home” (24). However, the speaker of the poem insistently claims that they are motivated by a spiritual drive:

What sought they thus afar?—
Bright jewels of the mine?
The wealth of seas, the spoils of war?—
They sought a faith’s pure shrine! (33-6)

The insistent spiritualization of the emigration bears an irony. The pilgrims are pursuing a space where they have “freedom to worship God,” and they will call the land where they are going to build their “pure shine,” their “holy ground.” Yet, a physical pilgrimage to a holy land involves a temporary stay to perform religious rituals; pilgrims are wanderers or foreigners, not inhabitants. What the poem rejects as their motives are exactly what the pilgrims need to survive and flourish on their new soil. The negation in fact enforces the necessity of those material things.

The poem’s epigraph frames the pilgrims’ colonial motive even more overtly than the poem does:

“Look now abroad! Another race has fill’d
Those populous borders—wide the wood recedes,
And towns shoot up, and fertile realms are till’d;
The land is full of harvests and green meads.” Bryant (Wolfson 416)

The passage, taken from William Cullen Bryant’s *The Ages* (1821), highlights the success of European people in building a new life while at the same time replacing the indigenous people – and even the land’s native plants. In Charlotte Sussman’s opinion, the epigraph shows “the way in which emigration tended to subsume the category of exile during the first decades of the nineteenth century” (493). Yet a different reading is made available when the poem appears in the *New Monthly Magazine*, where Hemans first published it with a different epigraph:

“Their dauntless hearts no meteor led
In terror o’er the ocean;
From fortune and from fame they fled
To Heaven and its devotion.” – An American Poet (Wolfson 417, 2n)

The epigraph from the earlier publication of the poem emphasizes the sense of exile: highlighting the terror of being expelled from one’s country and the sacrifice of leaving “fortune and fame” back home to what was seemingly a still uncertain future of worldly matters to pursue spiritual triumph. The revised epigraph included in the collection *Records of Woman* (1828) presents the glorious result of colonizing new land. The different epigraphs, and the fact that Hemans decided to replace one with the other, show two different ways of reading emigration in Hemans’s poems.

In the earlier poems, Hemans presents emigration in terms that evoke imperialism and patriotism. The speaker in *England and Spain; or, Valour and Patriotism* encourages the youth: “Proceed, proceed, ye firm undaunted band! / Still sure to conquer, if combined ye stand” (277-8). The optimistic and encouraging tone continues: the gallantry of “sons of Albion” is likened to that of the Spartans, “Bold in the field, triumphant on the wave” (74). The colonial spirit is

invigorated in the opposition of past failures that motivate future triumph. The speaker says it does not matter having been denied “Peruvian mines and rich Hindostan’s pride, / The gems that Ormuz and Golconda boast, / And all the wealth of Montezuma’s coast” (82-4) because there are still other places to conquer: “Yet fearless Commerce, pillar of thy throne, / Makes all the wealth of foreign climes thy own; / From Lapland’s shore to Afric’s fervid reign” (94-6). The poem summarizes the “failure” of British imperial projects prior to the early nineteenth century and seems to predict more success in the future, which comes true with the fact that the later part of the nineteenth century witnesses the peak of British imperialism. In “The Domestic Affection,” emigration as an imperial project is encouraged and tied to domestic ideology. Wherever British sons are in the wider world, domestic affection would warm and strengthen their hearts: “E’en *there*, affection’s hallow’d spell might pour / The light of heaven around th’ inclement shore! / ... Teach the pure heart with vital fires to glow, / E’en ’midst the world of solitude and snow!” (145-6, 149-50). The subjugation of a foreign land is rectified by the “light of heaven,” a “pure heart,” and “vital fires” that together assuage pain and adversity.

In Hemans’s later poems, the patriotic, idealistic voice of the speaker from home imagining what happens far away is replaced by the nostalgic voices of those who are far away, or the voices of those witnessing the pain abroad and at home. As I showed in Chapter 1, in Wordsworth’s “The Ruined Cottage,” we get a sense of this “disability of wartime ... mobility” in the representations of Robert and Margaret, for whom the experience of ambiguous loss is debilitating. As I have noted in my discussion of Jane Austen, Goodman argues that before nostalgia assumed its modern, sentimental meaning during the course of the nineteenth century, it was conceived as a medical pathology in the eighteenth century. In her earlier view of nostalgia as illness, it was seen as “a disability of wartime and colonial mobility, a somatic revolt

against forced travel, depopulation, emigration, and other forms of transience” (“Uncertain Disease” 199). But Hemans’s “Far Away” (1833) instead exemplifies the later, modern form of nostalgia as wistful sentiment.

As the poem shows, Hemans makes nostalgia into something more ambiguous and malleable because it is about feelings rather than physical debilitation. The speaker is recalling his brothers playing in the woods and his sister singing. His longing for home is intensified in his recollection of his mother: “Gentle child!” my mother seems to say, / “Follow me where home shall smile again, /Far away!” (8-10). From the abandoned home in “The Forsaken Hearth” (1828) come the questions: “But *are* they speaking, singing yet, as in their days of glee? / Those voices, are they lovely still, still sweet on earth or sea?” (13-4), suggesting that displacement robs even one’s memory of native language and childhood songs. The answer is in another poem, “Sister, Since I Met Thee Last” (1833) which claims to know the sister’s heartbreaking experience “In the woods and valleys lone / Music haunts thee, not thine own / Wherefore fall thy tears like rain?” (13-4). The only solution would be for the sister to come back home, because “Home alone can give thee rest” (23). One poem in *Records of Woman*, “Madeline, A Domestic Tale” (1827) depicts a mother who is parting with her daughter, a newly wed who follows her husband abroad. Before they reach their destination, the husband dies. Desolated in a foreign land, the daughter pleads for her mother to “Take back thy wanderer from this fatal shore /Peace shall be ours beneath our vines once more” (101-2).

Many of Hemans’s later poems that explore the enticement and challenges of emigration seem also to advocate against it. Each of the five stanzas of “Come Away” (1834) records stages in a person life from childhood to adulthood in terms of migration. The child hears the call of emigration with its “glad voice” and “tone of hope” (3-4) that soon “the youth in joy is led” (9).

In the third stanza, the man is facing harsh reality, yet he hears the same tone “on restless manhood calling, / Urge the hunter still to chase, to win” (13-4). As he grows older, things get worse, but he cannot resist the temptation to go on: “Yet a breath can still those words awaken, / Though to other shores far hence they woo” (18-9). The final stanza suggests the inevitability of ignoring such a call: “Still their music wanders—till the dying / Hears them pass, as on a spirit’s wing:” (23-24), and the poem ends with the same exclamation that ends every stanza: “Come away!” In “The Two Homes” (1828), a young man proudly describes his happy home and asks his counterpart, “where is thine?” (20). The “sad stranger” answers with nostalgic recollections of his happy home, claiming that he too has all the love and joy there, only that it is so far away, and he will not see it again. Thus, in the final stanza, the stranger says:

Go to thy home, rejoicing son and brother!
Bear in fresh gladness to the household scene!
For me, too, watch the sister and the mother,
I well believe—but dark seas roll between. (33-6)

Reading “Come Away” and “The Two Homes” side by side, we can infer that once one wanders, there is no turning back—thus the wanderer advises against it. And when one does come back, nothing is ever the same.

The perspective of one who comes back is described by the speaker in “The Return” (1830). The poem is divided into two parts: questions in the first four stanzas are asked by the trees, the streams, and the air of his native land that he answers in the second four stanzas. All of the answers are gloomy: his pure childhood heart has gone, the lights in his soul have died, and he comes back “darken’d and troubled” (27). The speaker of the poem seems to come home having lost everything that matters to him. However, the last stanza appears to offer a glimpse of hope:

But I bear from my childhood a gift of tears,
To soften and atone.
And oh! ye scenes of those bless'd years,
They shall make me again your own. (29-32)

Thus, while childhood innocence is gone, the tears are believed to at least make up for what is lost. Tears symbolize realization of truth, acceptance of reality, and embrace of a new self. But tears are also about grieving; what has been lost will always haunt.

The apolitical migration in the above poems is challenged by an ethical question that ends “Song of Emigration” (1827) in which Hemans addresses emigration and colonialization. The poem is set as a conversation between a couple on a ship that is taking them to the new land. The joyful and hopeful voice of the husband on board meets the “plaintive tone” of his wife’s response. While the husband is looking forward to a future triumph, the wife is looking back to the home she has left behind. She responds to her husband’s optimism about emigration by calling attention to its affective consequences in the domestic sphere. The “plains whose verdure no foot hath press’d” (15), which are seen as a source of wealth for the husband is compared to the loss of “the homesteads, warm and low, / By the brook and in the glen” (19-20). When the husband pictures their fruitful orchard trees and their free-range herds in the savannah, the wife thinks of the space as an unhappy place for their children to play. The husband’s excitement for the freedom to exploit the wild forest does not seem to be worth the loss of a civilized and religious community, with “the shelter’s garden-bower” (39).

The imperial and colonial pursuit gets more intense and explicit as the poem progresses and reaches its climax in stanza nine. The husband eagerly describes his ambition to conquest the new land.

“We will give the names of our fearless race
To each bright river whose course we trace;
We will leave our memory with mounts and floods,

And the path of our daring in boundless woods;
And our works unto many a lake's green shore,
Where the Indians' graves lay, alone, before." (41-6)

That there are Indians' graves means that the new land is not without inhabitants. In identifying himself as part of the "fearless race," coming to and claiming the land "whose wealth is all for the first brave guest" (16), the husband is aware of the possible combat against the indigenous race when taking over their native land. In Nancy Moore Goslee's argument, "the vanishing Indians is interpreted by the land's new occupants more as an image or icon that marks their own state of exile than as an actual person" (242). Such a perspective negates the existence of the rightful occupants of the land and justifies the acts of robbing them of their possessions.

Moreover, the existent graves in general serve as memorial, so the act of "leave[-ing] our [the emigrants'] memory" means erasing the memory of the native inhabitants as well and replacing it with that of the emigrants. The wife has the final words: "But who shall teach the flowers, / Which our children loved, to dwell / In a soil that is not ours?" (47-9). Hemans chooses to pose an ethical question that represents conflicting moral choices and dilemmas whose solutions would be anything but simple. While also addressing family separation in other poems, in many poems such as this one, Hemans keeps the nuclear family intact when detaching them from their homeland. In such a situation, Hemans shows how the dispersal of families in the age of empire requires not only teaching and learning how to live "in a soil that is not ours" but at times also how to witness or face death far away from home.

"Hath conquer'd" but "shall not slumber there!": Hemans and Burial Far Away

I turn in this section to focus on Hemans's poetry of bereavement in an era of global mobility. As I noted in the introduction, mourning is, as Schor points out, "a cultural rather than psychological phenomenon" (3): it comprises diverse rituals and customs to help people coping with the loss. Hemans shows how a culture of emigration makes these rituals of mourning more complicated.

As a cultural phenomenon, mourning with its rituals are taught and learned. As I point out in the previous chapter, Austen shows her characters performing practices of mourning, such as what is visible in appearance (Elizabeth's black ribbons and Mr. Elliot's mourning attire). Hemans also shows mourning as cultural practices in poems, such as "Dirge of a Child" (1818), "Epitaph: Over the Grave of Two Brothers, a Child and a Youth" (1826) and "The Farewell to the Dead" (1826).

The mother in "Dirge of a Child" is mourning her child, and she takes consolation partly from the child's grave.

Thy grave shall be a blessed shrine,
Adorn'd with Nature's brightest wreath;
Each glowing season shall combine
Its incense there to breathe; (31-4)

The grave keeps the memory alive, and its breath is maintained throughout the years amidst seasonal changes. Addressing the mother, the speaker in "Epitaph" asks, "Look on this tomb!— for thee, too, speaks the grave, / Where God hath seal'd the fount of hope He gave" (11-2). As an inscription in verse or prose upon a tomb, an epitaph offers consolation after a funeral is over. "The Farewell to the Dead" starts with a child summoned to see the deceased brother's face for one last time.

Come near! Ere yet the dust
Soil the bright paleness of the settled brow,
Look on your brother; and embrace him now,
In still and solemn trust!
Come near!—once more let kindred lips be press'd
On his cold cheek; then bear him to his rest! (1-6)

Based on the Greek funeral service, where relatives and friends are invited to embrace the deceased and to bid their last goodbye, the poem exemplifies how a child is being taught and is learning rituals involved in a funeral.

Hemans shows that people need to learn to accept death when no body is returned to be buried. Graves mark confirmed death, but in the era of global mobility, death may happen in a remote place that makes it impossible for the family to participate in the burial. “The Child’s First Grief” is a lesson not only about grief but also on imagining the dead without a grave. Set in the summer, it starts with a child frantically looking for his brother, “OH! Call my brother back to me!” (1). An adult, presumably his mother, tells him that he has to play alone because his brother, “On earth no more thou’lt see. /.../ Thy brother is in heaven” (16, 20). The boy is trying to make sense of what he just hears, posing a series of questions: “And must I call in vain?” (22); “Will he not come again?” (24); “Are all our wanderings o’er?” (26). Unlike the girl in Wordsworth’s “We Are Seven” who witnesses her two siblings die, the boy in Hemans’ “The Child’s First Grief” does not seem to know what exactly happened to his brother but appears to immediately understand that it involves permanent separation. Without waiting for any answers to his questions, he says, “Oh! While my brother with me play’d, / *Would I have loved him more!*” (27-8, italics in original). While the girl in Wordsworth’s poem does not show any sign of grief and acts as if the siblings were still with her, the boy’s nostalgic remarks in the last two lines of the poem show that he is heartbroken and wishes to go back in time.

My juxtaposition of “We Are Seven” and “The Child’s First Grief” contextualizes this chapter’s focus on Hemans’ poems. Both Wordsworth’s and Hemans’ poems present a conversation between a child and an adult related to the child’s dead sibling(s) amidst circumstances of changing society, marked by family members having to move to bigger cities to earn money or to go off to sea in the service of the British imperial project. The adult man in “We Are Seven” is baffled by the girl’s insistence that the siblings are still with her in her daily activities, because “Their graves are green, they may be seen” (37). In contrast to this, there is no

grave in “The Child’s First Grief.” But still, the adult does not have any difficulty in introducing the concept of death, referring to the brother’s absence with a metaphor: “A rose’s brief, bright life of joy, / Such unto him was given” (17-8). The seemingly simple child-adult conversation touches on several issues that Hemans complicates in her other poems: loss, distance, and ambiguity. The uncomplicated grief in “The Child’s First Grief” results partly from the orthodox Christian ideology, which allows the child to believe that his brother is in a better place. But where has his brother been? What has taken place between their last summer’s wandering and his present summer’s absence? The lack of a grave in the poem means that he has not come home—we are, once again, in the region of ambiguous loss. His brother has probably emigrated and died somewhere. Or maybe not.

Emigration complicates mourning, even when it involves funerals and physical graves. The wife in “Song of Emigration” is melancholic about the prospect of living in the land of the Indian, and the wife in “The Burial of a Child in the Forest” (1833) is mournful about multiple losses while already in the American forest. Agnes is losing a son while the family is on the move in what she describes as “the gloomy woods / So terrible with their dark giant boughs, / and the broad, lonely river!” (3-5). She has lost a daughter back in England, and she laments the additional loss of no longer being able to see her child’s grave. She will soon be denied the chance to see her son’s grave. Thus, she resists her husband’s will to bury her son immediately and continue their journey. Responding to her resistance, Edmund accuses Agnes of not being as mournful over losing her son as when she lost her daughter. In doing so, Edmund denies Agnes’s right to mourn. When she is trying to explain her multiple losses, saying that being able to visit her daughter’s “near household grave ... midst England’s valleys” (38, 48) eases her grief, her husband replies, “Dost thou grieve, / Agnes! that thou hast follow’d o’er the deep / An exile’s

fortunes?” (49-51). The question oversimplifies the idea of grief, by denying Agnes’s experience of ambiguous loss. Agnes is forced to negate her loss, so she acknowledges it one last time:

My Edmund, pardon me! Oh! grief is wild—
Forget its words, quick spray-drops from a fount
Of unknown bitterness! Thou art my home!
“Mine only and my blessed one! Where’er” (55-8).

The word wild is defined as “not subject to restraint or regulation; emotionally overcome; marked by turbulent agitation; going beyond normal or conventional bounds; indicative of strong passion, desire, or emotion” (“Wild”). Agnes’s “wild grief” points to the fact that while grief is a natural human response to loss, it is also untamed and uncontrollable. Mourning rituals help to cope with grief, regulating one’s responses to loss, but the grief itself remains wild, springing from “fount of unknown bitterness.” Edmund’s rushed burial of their son makes it harder for Agnes to cope with her grief.

“Song of Emigration” and “The Burial of a Child in the Forest” exemplify gender difference in the experience of ambiguous loss. Hemans seems to suggest that women are more prone to ambiguous loss than men. Men’s insistence on mobility in both poems is motivated by potential advancement and achievement. In both poems, women are bound to the domestic sphere wherever they are, and moving from place to place would not give them any sense of achievement. Voluntary mobility for the men is forced mobility for the women. In “The Burial of a Child in the Forest,” since she cannot feel at home being away from home, Agnes is giving up the idea of home as bound to physical space and chooses to attach it to her husband’s presence. In reading *Persuasion* in Chapter 2, I argue that Anne Elliot goes through the process of curative nostalgia by detaching her ties to Kellynch Hall as a place. While it is hard, Anne does so voluntarily. When Agnes goes through a similar process in “The Burial of a Child in the Forest,” Hemans shows the dark side of such a curative nostalgia. Agnes is forced to disconnect her past

from her present. She must tell Edmund: “Thou art my home! / ... Where’er” because she does not have any other choice but to follow her husband.

Another poem that depicts the complications of loss at a distance from home is “The Burial in the Desert” (1831). A band of soldiers are burying another soldier at the end of that day’s battle in Egypt. While performing the funeral, they lament not only their loss but what they consider the dead soldier’s loss: he deserves better than the “sad and hurried rite” (9) far-away from England. His grave “in the shadow of the Pyramid” (14) is compared to his ancestors’ “knightly tombs” (20) and funeral rituals involving “torch-light and with anthem-note, / And many waving plumes” (21-2). In contrast, the funeral consists of only “a few brief words of soldier-love” (24) even though he is “the last and noblest / Of that high Norman race” (22). Calling him “the noblest” may be just part of elegizing him, but identifying him as “the last” of his race suggests a failure beyond that of just losing a battle: there is no one to whom he can pass on his legacy. Hemans seems to question whether the cause is worth this grievous loss. The only consolation is that he is buried in Egypt “with those who bear their fame / Unsullied to the grave!” (34-5). He may be far away from home, but he is home in a different way—with his great Egyptian forebears.

“The Burial in the Desert” is an extended version of a two-stanza section of “England’s Dead” (1822), in which Hemans lists various places across the globe where “slumber England’s dead.” The first place mentioned is Egypt, followed by India, Columbia, the Pyrenees, and the Northern Pole. Each is described with its natural adversity: the scorching desert, the hurricane, the torrent floods, the mountain storm, the frozen desert, and the raging waves. The English sons must have been in battles with people from all those places because: their “task is done,” “their toils are gone,” “the Roncesvalles’ field is won,” and “*Their* course with mast and flag is done.”

Thus, none of those adversities would bother them anymore. The question that starts the poem, “Son of the Ocean Isle! / Where sleep your mighty dead?” (1-2) gets answered in stanza 13:

The warlike of the isles,
The men of field and wave!
Are not the rocks their funeral piles,
The seas and shores their grave? (49-52)

The innocent son of the Ocean Isle has turned to become hostile men on land and on the ocean. They may have won or lost their fights, but now they all belong to the new places that they fought for; will stay there forever.

Lootens’ imperial Hemans would endorse their acts and their sense of entitlement to the new land. But a look at another poem by Hemans, “The Burial of William the Conqueror,” can challenge such a claim. The poem was first published in *The New Monthly Magazine* in 1826, and Hemans added a subtitle and changed the epigraph when she republished it in *National Lyrics, and Songs for Music* in 1834. A similar argument can be made about Hemans’s decision to change the epigraph for “The Burial of William the Conqueror; at Caen in Normandy-1087,” and for “The Pilgrim Fathers” discussed above: that Hemans uses epigraphs to show more overtly the colonial drive in her poetry. As the title suggests, the poem describes the burial of William the Conqueror. The procession is interrupted by Asceline Fiz Arthur, the true owner of the land where William is about to be buried, who claims that William has no right to be buried there. The two epigraphs – the earlier is in France and quoted from Sismondi’s *Histoire des Français* and the later from Lingard’s *History of England* – frame the event differently. The earlier epigraph starts in media res: Ascelin interrupts Gislebert, Bishop of Evreux when he pronounces his panegyric right before William’s body is covered with earth.

Cet homme dont vous venez de prononcer l'éloge, vous allez l'enterrer dans une terre qui est à moi. Ici même étoit ma maison paternelle, et il l'enleva à mon Père contre toute justice, sans jamais la lui payer, pour y bâtir cette Eglise. Je vous interdis, au nom de

Dieu, de couvrir le corps du Ravisser, avec une terre qui m'appartient.' (Wikisource)
(‘This man you have just eulogized, you are going to bury him in land that is mine. Here was my father's house, and he took him away from my Father against all justice, without ever paying him, to build this Church there. I forbid you, in the name of God, to cover the body of the Captor, with a ground which belongs to me.’)

The Lords and the Bishops are said to be feeling guilty and immediately collect money to pay for the burial lot on site and promise to pay for the rest later. The later epigraph provides more background information with proper names. People assemble in the Church of St. Stephen, founded by William, and among them is William’s third son Prince Henry. Ascelin’s protest is more direct: “He whom you have praised was a robber. The very land on which you stand is mine. By violence he took it from my father; and, in the name of God, I forbid you to bury him in it” (Hemans 537). There is no statement about any feeling of guilt or moral scruple upon hearing the protest. In the poem, Hemans writes: “Shame glow'd on each dark face / Of those proud and steel-girt men,” (45-6), and they pay immediately, which is in line with the first epigraph. The reason for such an act is that “a peasant’s tale could dim / The name, a nation’s star!” (47-8). Thus, the motivation to settle the dispute seems to be not to serve justice but to protect William’s reputation.

Hemans’s decision to change the epigraph can be read as a response to those who believe in the legitimacy of the colonial project. Her critique is made more apparent in the final stanza.

One deep voice thus arose
From a heart which wrongs had riven,
Oh! who shall number those
That were but heard in heaven? (49-52)

In the later epigraph, Asceline is said to have “often, but fruitlessly, sought reparation from the justice of William” (Hemans 537), so the Norman prelates must have been aware of that fact, yet they call and pay Asceline only “after some debate.” The epigraph frames the poem’s representation of the native inhabitant of the colonized land, of their objections which tend to be

dismissed and thus unheard. If the Duke of Normandy, who conquers and becomes King of England, is deemed guilty of unrightfully claiming a piece of land in a country that he rules and is denied his right to be buried there, what right can the dead in “England’s Dead” have to their burial places in lands that are not theirs?

“Where finds it you”: Hemans and the Culture of Ambiguous Loss

Hemans’s poetry is full of death, even in their titles. She writes at least seven poems which she calls “dirges.”²⁹ Three poems discussed in the previous section bear the word ‘burial’ in their titles. In Jerome McGann’s opinion, “Hemans’s works understand that they are haunted by death” (220). Gary Kelly argues that Hemans is the major British poet of Romantic death, “which was figured as meaningful death and set against the meaninglessness of mass death, which in turn was widely used to summarize or represent the Revolution and the Napoleonic adventure” (197). In her discussion of maternal suicide in Hemans’ poetry, Kelly McGuire argues: “Hemans’s poetic personae are active figures who seek out and embrace death in acts framed as heroic defiance” (121). But whether it is Romantic death or heroic suicide, these ways of understanding death are conventional and include closure. All of the terms these critics use become more complicated when we consider Hemans as a poet of ambiguous loss, whose works are haunted not only by death but often by death at a distance, death without closure, which can make them seem (counter to Kelly’s claim) less than fully meaningful or (counter to McGuire’s claim) harder to read as heroic.

As shown in the previous section, the dispersal of family members around the globe has a devastating impact on the already devastating experience of grief. Death that happens far from

²⁹ In the chronological order of publication, they are “Dirge of a Child,” “Dirge of the Highland Chief in ‘Waverley,’” “A Dirge,” “The Exile’s Dirge,” “The Brother’s Dirge,” “Dirge at Sea,” and “Dirge.”

home can trigger or heighten other kinds of loss. In “The Brother’s Dirge” (1833), a young man laments the death of his brother—but not his death per se so much as the condition related to his death. Each of the three stanzas starts with a reference to England. In the first stanza, “the proud old fanes of England” (1) highlights the honor given to the adorned graves of the English warrior-fathers. In the second stanza, “the old high wars of England” emphasizes the gallant fathers’ patriotism and sacrifice on behalf of their country. As such, they deserve the honor cited in the previous stanza. The dead brother, “the best and bravest heart of all” (7), only has “dark billows” over his grave because, ironically, as the living brother laments: “*Thy* life-drops flow’d for me” (14). A sister is said to live alone in “a shelter’d home of England” (17). The poem suggests that the first brother left home, and the second brother lost his life while looking for him. The living brother probably has confirmed information about his dead brother, in which case, he might soon get over his grief. The sister, however, may never know her brothers’ fate:

She little dreams, my brother!
Of the wild fate we have found;
I, midst the Afric sand a slave,
Thou, by the dark seas bound. (21-4)

While the confirmed death of a brother provides some kind of closure, the last stanza bears two possible outcomes that, in their uncertainty, resist closure. Firstly, enslaved, the brother must have much less freedom than a free man, so it will be harder to imagine his going back home. Hemans’s active career coincides with the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807 and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. While none of her poems mentions African slaves, here she imagines the reverse position of an English boy being a slave in African land. This is a sharp contrast with the patriotic lines from *England, and Spain; or, Valour and Patriotism*: “O glorious isle!—O sovereign of the waves! / Thine are the sons who “never will be slaves!” (171-2). Secondly, no longer having connection with his homeland, he might be forgotten. This enslaved

brother is probably also more anxious about his own death down the line, that nobody will remember him and mourn his departing the world.

In “Greek Parting Song” (1835), Hemans compares the fate of the dead and the exile. The dead are mourned and commemorated; their memories are kept alive. The exiles, in opposition, “depart like sound, like dew, like aught that leaves on earth / No trace of sorrow or delight, no memory of its birth!” (61-2). Such annihilation would be unbearable. Secondly, the living brother in “The Brother’s Dirge” could expect his sister to remember him, but he also would not know if the sister would still be alive to do so. For the sister, whose only last knowledge of her bothers is “the sound / Of footsteps that are gone” (19-20), the burden of not knowing would be her main ambiguous loss. Her call for her brothers to go home is represented by the voice in “O’er the Far Blue Mountains”: “Since thou art gone; / Sisters are mourning thee— / Come to thine own!”(10-2). The assertion “Come to thine own” suggests that some brothers must have built other homes far away, yet either for personal or political reasons, they are called to come back to their own home, which should be sufficient.

Hemans pictures the ideal home in “Homes of England” (1827), whose second stanza offers a picturesque view of the domestic space, an image of the family hearth with its comfort, coziness, and joyfulness—a haven in a heartless world. Hemans employs visual, auditory, and kinesthetic imageries to convey the harmony of domestic life predicated on the presence of women and children. Women make sure that some “childish tale is told / Or [that] lips move tunefully along / Some glorious page of old” (15-6). They are the keepers of the hearth, keeping tradition alive. When it was first published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1827, the epigraph quoted from Joanna Baillie starts with “—————A land of peace” followed by lines describing the native land with its inhabitants – human, fauna, and flora – that have never known

“a stranger’s stall.” With this epigraph, the value of preserving old ways of life is intensified. The poem glorifies English homes, from “the stately” to “the cottage”; all are merry, blessed, fair, and free, and all are places of natural beauty, domestic bliss, and pure faith. Thus, to highlight that patriotism, Hemans replaced the epigraph for the 1828 version in *Records of Woman*, quoting Walter Scott’s *Marmion* (1808): “Where’s the coward that would not dare / To fight for such a land?” (Canto IV, lines 633-34). Yet, how would one fight for his native land when he is not even there?

In “Come Home,” Hemans shows what home has become when emptied of those who are supposed to fight for it. Its first stanza immediately repudiates the ideal domestic bliss, claiming “The tones in every household voice / Are grown more sad and deep” (5-6). This is in opposition to the second stanza of “The Homes of England.” In “Come Home,” while being assigned an important role as the hearth’s keeper, the sanctuary for virtues and morality, women find themselves in a vulnerable position of not knowing their loved ones’ whereabouts. The dispersal of their families through the imperial project disrupts their domestic harmony. The poem begins with “a sorrowing breath” that immediately sets the grieving tone. A mother is grieving the loss of her sons, whose whereabouts are unknown. The plea for the sons to come home is immediately followed by the sorrow resulting from their absence. The tactile and auditory imageries – the flower-scent and the music – heighten the sense of loss, how the home is no longer the same, and the memories bring back only sadness. Hemans still refers to the same scenes of everyday life – music, flower, etc. – but the loss of the sons overshadows everything and sets the mood for the home. In the second stanza, the same event that marks domestic bliss elevates the loss, “The time of hearth-light and of song / Returns-and ye are gone!” (10-11). Not only are they separated by physical distance, but they also are disconnected by temporal distance.

The last two lines of the stanza, “Burdening the heart with tenderness, / That deepens ‘midst the gloom” (15-16), highlight that everything associated with the sons brings only pain. The word “tenderness,” which is generally used to represent love and affection, takes on another meaning, the sensitivity to pain.

The mother in “Come Home” is described as painfully overwhelmed by uncertainty, not knowing where her sons are or what their situation is. The question that begins the stanza represents no fact to clarify whether they are still alive or dead. If they are dead, there is also no information as to where their remains are located. The uncertainty of the sons’ whereabouts and fate triggers the version of ambiguous loss that Boss calls “leaving without goodbye”: the sons are physically absent, but they are kept psychologically present by the mother because their circumstances are unknown. The similar reference to the domestic space in “The Homes of England” that brings joy becomes the source of sorrow in “Come Home” because the children that constitute the hearth are no longer there. The sons are psychologically present “in music, flower-scent, the time of hearth-light and of song, forsaken room,” all of which is “With mournful memories blent.” The reference to time suggests that the sons have been gone for a long time, so the mother must have experienced chronic sorrow and lingering grief. The grief becomes complicated by uncertainty, which causes the suffering mother to keep hoping for their return.

Hemans seems ambivalent in positioning the mother in relation to the imperial project. The mother in “The Graves of a Household” presumably has always stayed at home and never been anywhere else. However, from her list of possible places her sons may be, she seems to be aware of what is going on:

Where finds it you, ye wandering ones?
With all your boyhood's glee

Untamed, beneath the desert's palm.
Or on the lone mid-sea?
By stormy hills of battles old?
Or where dark rivers foam?
Oh! life is dim where ye are not
Back, ye beloved, come home! (17-24)

Not naming colonized places and simply expanding and reducing them to generic descriptions of faraway locations is a staple characteristic of colonialism. The mother still thinks of her sons in terms of their “boyhood’s glee,” currently “untamed” in a foreign land. Foregrounding their innocence, the mother denies their sons’ accountability even when they are participating in violent “battles of old.” Hemans on the one hand seems to condone colonialism, or at least to excuse it as innocent boyish whimsy: the privilege of Englishness. On the other hand, the grieving mother makes it clear that the negative impacts of colonialism affect not only the colonized people but also those who are left behind. The loss is marked by uncertainties. Instead of using the word “under,” the mother says, “beneath the desert’s palm,” implying the possibility of death (burial beneath the palm). The “dark rivers” imply wilderness and threat as danger lurks everywhere in the dark. Hence, the mother is full of fear and anxiety for the safety of the sons if they are still alive. The word “glee” is paired with the word “dim,” suggesting thinning hope, but still the sons are expected to come home.

The mother is also described as having unsettled temporal experiences. The time reference in the second stanza – “The hour / Of many a greeting tone, / The time of hearth-light and of song” (9-11) – is imprecise and personal. Implied in “Our love is grown too sorrowful” is the fear that the separation is not temporary but permanent. The call to bring back the youth and sunny life may also mean that time is pressing. The plea for the sons to come home is intensified as the sons are not only asked to come home but also to “Bring us its youth again / Bring the glad tones to music back!” (28-29). These two lines mark the debilitating effect of ambiguous loss:

the loss of happiness, which can be restored only when the loved ones return, an insistence of hope amidst the grief of uncertainty. Yet, the insistence on the restoration of youth implies not only the loss of youth and innocence but also the time that has elapsed.

Even when they are back, their participation in the colonial project may change them into figures unrecognizable by the mother. The last three lines resonate with the last stanza of “The Homes of England.”

The free, fair Homes of England!
Long, long, in hut and hall,
May hearts of native proof be rear'd
To guard each hallow'd wall!
And green forever be the groves,
And bright the flowery sod,
Where first the child's glad spirit loves
Its country and its God! (33-40)

This last stanza highlights the importance of home as the sanctuary for domestic virtues, morality, and patriotism. There is an irony in the words “free” and “fair”: those coming from “free, fair Homes of England” are themselves free while they are unfairly oppressing the rest of the world. The ending of “Come Home” echoes this: “Still, still your home is fair. / The spirit of your sunny life / Alone is wanting there!” (30-32). Representing the domestic ideology, the plea reflects the threat to a woman's identity as the keeper of the hearth. Losing her children would strip off the most important identity culturally essential for a woman as mother, and that would contribute to more complicated grief, a deepened ambiguous loss. Hemans seems to be critiquing the imperial project: the English home would still be fair without the children having to extend its vastness. The uncertainty of the occurrence of death means that there is still hope to amend the damage of colonialism.

The mix between hope and despair that marks ambiguous loss is presented differently in “The Graves of a Household.” Hemans again employs a trope of the domestic hearth and the

empire to convey a sense of loss and mourning with the narrator going back and forth between past and present time. The grieving mother similarly keeps recalling the memories of her children. The opening stanza immediately juxtaposes geographical and temporal distance: home vs. away and past vs. present. The children constitute her domestic bliss. The word glee, which means great delight, comes from Old English gléo, which means “music” or “entertainment,” but this idealized home is soon invaded by harsh reality: not only are the grown-up children gone, but they have never made it back home. The opposition between the children growing up "side by side" and their graves being "severed" suggests separation and disunity. The literal meaning of severed, to break or separate, especially by cutting, may also allude to cutting the umbilical cord that ties a baby to its mother. Growing up together, the children are geographically distanced from home and temporally distanced from their childhood.

The first three lines of the second stanza represent the domestic ideology that characterizes the family home as the particular domain of the woman represented by the mother taking care of the children as they were growing up. The synecdoche in the second stanza, which uses the word “brow” to represent each child, is followed by the metaphor of a "folded flower" to refer to the children's innocence. They have yet to bloom. That the mother "had each folded flower in sight" suggests that she is the center of spiritual good for the family, making sure that the children are safe physically and morally. The dash after the third line suggests that it takes some time for the mother to come back to the present reality where her children are all already gone. Addressing the children as "dreamers" in the last line of the second stanza may indicate the contrast between the domestic and public life: at home, the mother brings their children to bed to have sweet dreams every night, but the children may have left home to pursue their own dreams in life. The question that ends the second stanza, “Where are those dreamers now?” recalls the

similar question asked by the mother in “Come Home.” The main difference is that the mother in “The Graves of a Household” claims to know the answer to her own question.

Each of the following four stanzas is dedicated to the grave for each of her four children. The first mentioned son is said to be amidst the wilderness of the West. The second son lies in the ocean. The third son is portrayed as dead in the battlefield and the only daughter in Italy. For Stuart Peterfreund, the first two sons “clearly perished as participants in and victims of actions of the British Empire in its colonies,” the third son was a victim of war, and the daughter died due to “a wasting disease [that] may be psychosomatic as well as bacterial”; with no brother left, she does not have any reason to live (29-30). The poem thus functions as “a cautionary tale about the possible consequences of serving abroad in the forces of the British Crown, whether in the military or in some colonial enterprise” (27). According to Mellor, though, “The Graves of a Household” is a poem about what is left behind, exemplifying the British home as “*annihilated by death*” (127). Unlike Peterfreund and Mellor, I argue that the graves themselves are imaginary—exactly as the poem represents them to be—and that the poem as a whole is an exercise in grieving ambiguous losses, in building resilience as a coping mechanism for the non-closure of loss at a distance amidst the ambiguities created by the imperial project. The mothers in “Come Home” and “The Graves of a Household” live with a lack of factual information; they do not know when or if their situation will be alleviated and live in confusion and doubt as to what is happening and what they can do. The mother in “The Graves of a Household” has a greater awareness of the vastness of the British Empire than does the mother in “Come Home,” and she uses this to imagine graves whose locations span the globe—a worst-case scenario, which perhaps softens the experience of grief.

The imaginary graves create room for readers' imagination to range across Hemans's various poems about ambiguous losses. The first son's grave is known only by the Indian. The son might be the dead husband in "Edith: A Tale of the Woods" (1827), so she could find a consolation that the dying son had been with his loving wife until the moment he took his last breath. In this case, the Indian who knows where his grave is located would be the Indian chief and his wife who adopt Edith and take her to live with them in "that lone cabin of the woods" (66). The mother might also imagine the son to be from "The American Forest Girl" (1828), "a fair-hair'd youth of England" who is held captive, soon to be killed by the Indian, yet an American forest girl "dares intrude /On the dark hunters in their vengeful mood" (51-2) to save him. The second son, "the loved of all" (15), could be the young Casabianca, "the boy [who] stood on a burning deck" (1) in "Casabianca" (1826). His mother would have been proud of his being simply "beautiful and bright," but he has to also be "heroic" and "proud" for him "to rule the storm" which entails performing the filial duty to his father. The third son, the one who "wrapt his colours round his breast /On a blood-red field of Spain" (19-20), must also be heroic and courageous. It may also be that the grieving mother wants to persuade herself that her sons were heroic despite her ambivalence about the project they were engaged in. While his brother in the previous stanza is described amidst violence, bloody acts, the description of the daughter is adorned with feminine images of beauty and peace: myrtle showers, soft winds, and flowers. She might have gone to Italy to pursue domestic bliss in the neighboring European country. The word "faded," meaning to gradually grow faint and disappear, suggests that the daughter died of illness. If she shared a similar fate to Madeline in "Madeline, A Domestic Tale," her mother could still expect her return.

Using the lens of ambiguous loss to analyze Hemans's poems, we see the ways that the British imperial project complicates traditional forms of mourning. Ambiguous loss allows Hemans as a poet to make mothers' losses more remote, which makes her political view of the imperial project more slippery and difficult to gauge. Without the certainty of a body to mourn, grief becomes more aesthetic, softened, and less raw. Yet Hemans also highlights the pain of this ambiguity. The last stanza of "The Graves of a Household" tells us that, if her children are indeed in graves, the Christian mother can hope to meet them in the afterlife, although this belief seems to crumble in the concluding lines: "Alas! for love, if thou wert all, /And nought beyond, oh earth!" (31-2) The mother's cry realizes the cruelty of imperialism. The fiction of imaginary graves loses its power because it does not do anything for her anymore. In "Better Land" (1826), Hemans presents a dialogue between a mother and child, who reminds his mother of the better land she once mentioned. Eager to find it, the child asks, "Shall we not seek it, and weep no more?" (4). In the next two stanzas, the child lists several candidates for this "better land," all of which are exotic and Orientalized locales. The mother keeps denying the possibility: "'Not there, not there, my child!'" In the last stanza, the mother basically says that such a better land does not exist; no human sense ever captures its existence. If the mother is trying to caution her child against his colonial imaginings, the promise of a better land "beyond the clouds, and beyond the tomb" will not work to quench this. Does Hemans then promote or critique the British imperial project? That we still ask such questions is one way in which Hemans's poetry of loss preserves its vital ambiguity.

Chapter 4. “Absence of mind” and “presence of body”: Lamb’s Art of Ambiguous Loss

On Thursday evening, September 22nd, 1796, Charles Lamb came home from his work at the East India Company to a horrific scene. Five days later, he would describe it to Samuel Taylor Coleridge: “My poor dear dearest sister in a fit of insanity has been the death of her own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a mad house, from whence I fear she must be moved to an hospital.”³⁰ The verdict of lunacy saved Mary from what could have been life imprisonment. The oldest brother, John Lamb wanted to put Mary in a public mental facility. Rejecting the suggestion, Charles Lamb took the legal responsibility to care for Mary. In a letter dated April 7th, 1797, Lamb informed Coleridge that he had taken Mary out of the hospital and placed her in a house at Hackney, near London, visiting and staying with her on Sundays and holidays: “She boards herself. In one little half year’s illness, and in such an illness of such a nature and of such consequences! to get her out into the world again, with a prospect of her never being so ill again” (*Letters* 103). Such a “prospect” would never come to be; Lamb would repeatedly be temporarily separated from Mary when she suffered episodes of mental illness. Lamb himself had been admitted to a mental facility at Hoxton for six weeks in 1795, but he never suffered another episode of mental breakdown after that—perhaps because he could not allow himself to; “thank God I am very calm and composed,” he wrote on the evening of the family tragedy, “and able to do the best that

³⁰ *The Letters of Charles Lamb to Which Are Added Those of His Sister Mary Lamb. Vol. 1.* ed. E. V. Lucas (London, 1935) (hereafter *Letters*). On the account of the matricide, Lamb continued: “God has preserved to me my senses, — I eat and drink and sleep, and have my judgment I believe very sound. My poor father was slightly wounded, and I am left to take care of him and my aunt” (*Letters* 39). The aunt, Sarah Lamb or Aunt Hetty died the following year, in February 1797. When John Lamb, their father died in 1799, Lamb took Mary home and they lived together for the next 35 years until Lamb died in 1834. Mary Lamb survived thirteen more years to the age of 83 in 1847.

remains to do” (*Letters* 39). He continued to do “the best that remains to do” for the rest of his life.

Charles Lamb would express grief over other losses he experienced after that pivotal night in poetry that he published two years later in *The Blank Verse* (1798), a collaborative work with his friend, the young poet Charles Lloyd. These losses were various: in February 1797, Lamb bid adieu to Sarah Lamb: “Farewell, good aunt!” (“Written on the Day of My Aunt’s Funeral” line 15).³¹ Her death left him as the sole guardian of his ailing father. Later that year, in September 1797, he wrote “Written a Twelvemonth after the Events,” lamenting the loss of his parents: “I only am left, with unavailing grief / To mourn one parent dead, and see one live / Of all life’s joys bereft and desolate” (51-3).³² After mentioning his dead mother, he talks about his father, who was still alive but incapacitated until his death in 1799. However, Lamb’s gravest sense of loss was manifested in a poem about his sister, “Written on Christmas Day, 1797,” which begins: “I am a widow’d thing, now thou art gone! / Now thou art gone, my own familiar friend, / Companion, sister, help-mate, counsellor!” (1-3).³³ What does it mean for Lamb to call himself “a widow’d thing,” and to address his sister as “gone”? After a few months at Hackney, Mary was then admitted again to an asylum that December 1797; and a year earlier, Lamb had told Coleridge, “My sister, indeed, is all I can wish in a companion” (*Letters* 74). But here he was mourning as if he had lost a spouse through death.

In these early poems, published when he was just 23 years old, we heard the direct autobiographical voice that many critics have tried to extract from Lamb’s later and more well-known essays. From 1820 to 1825, by then in his mid-forties, he started to contribute essays to

³¹ All references to the poems are from *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb: Volume V Poems and Plays*. d. E. V. Lucas (London, 1903) (hereafter *Poems*) p. 20.

³² *Poems* p. 20-1.

³³ *Poems* p. 22-23.

The London Magazine under the persona of Elia.³⁴ The collection of the essays was first published in book form as *The Essays of Elia* in 1823, followed by a second volume, *The Last Essays of Elia*, in 1833.³⁵ Despite the fact that the older Lamb never mentions the matricide in these essays, critics of the essays almost never fail to mention it. In her analysis of Lamb’s urban taste, Denise Gigante states, “A careful study of his letters from 1796 through 1800 reveals that Lamb gave up his poetic ambitions in response to the “day of horrors,” . . . , and that his identity as well as metaphoric preoccupation with taste was forever marked by the event (90). Gigante shares this view with many others who see Lamb as a constant mourning machine with his constant low level of grief as a result of the traumatic event of September 22, 1796. Gerald Monsman argues that Lamb “gains public esteem by writing an autobiographical prose without confessing,” adding that his essays function as a defense against the trauma of the murder: “The essence of Lamb’s persona is the absence of any explicit narration of the pivotal ‘day of horrors’ which nevertheless everywhere informs the contours of Elia’s essays” (13). The phrase ‘day of horrors’ is taken from the opening lines of Lamb’s 1798 poem “The Old Familiar Faces”:

“Where are they gone, the old familiar faces? / I had a mother, but she died, and left me, / Died prematurely in a day of horrors—” (1-3).³⁶ Intriguingly, Lamb removed these lines in the 1818 and later version of the poem—anticipating the erasure of this incident from his subsequent essays.³⁷ Another major critic, Thomas McFarland, focuses more on the “smothering burden” that the horrific incident placed on Lamb’s “possibilities of happiness,” and claims that the

³⁴ Lamb had previously written essays under a different persona, such as that of Moritorus in “On Burial Societies; and the Character of an Undertaker” (1811).

³⁵ When I mention “the essays” in this chapter, I refer to the essays in *The Essays of Elia* and *The Last Essays of Elia*.

³⁶ *Poems* p. 23-4

³⁷ The changes both Lamb and Hemans make to their writing represent one way they deal with ambiguous loss.

essays “were designed to defend him, in the daily round of existence, from the stark realization of” his suffocating legal, financial, and emotional responsibility for Mary (26). Seeing Mary as simply a burden, however, is not quite accurate, for even in the earlier poems, Lamb writes warmly of sharing his life with his sister: “Yet I will not think, / Sweet friend, but we shall one day meet, and live / In quietness, and die so, fearing God” (“Written a Twelvemonth after the Events” 15-17).³⁸ Charles and Mary had shared a mutual relationship since before the matricide.³⁹

The real limitation of the way critics have thought about Charles Lamb’s essays comes from the assumption that the prose’s seemingly personal accounts are inseparable from the biggest tragedy of his life, despite the fact that the essays themselves—while they do incorporate some biographical information--are not exactly tragic. Indeed, though an elegiac mood governs the tone of the essays, Lamb rarely talks about death in them. Still, whenever he describes an encounter with everyday loss, we can feel a weird kind of mourning at play. This is the sense of ambiguous loss that I have been describing as an increasingly widespread and recognizable affect during this period. Ambiguous loss shapes Lamb’s entire life as a life defined by absences, by having just barely missed out on possibilities, and by never quite getting his objects of desire. Even before considering the “day of horrors” and its various after-effects, Lamb, as an employee of a modern company engaged in global commerce, is in many ways the ideal subject of ambiguous loss. Working for the East India Company – he had worked for the company since 1792 – Lamb spent his long days connected to the world of colonialism, keenly aware of and implicated in the distance and alienation that are hallmarks of empire and modern capitalism. He

³⁸ *Poems* pp. 20-1

³⁹ Valerie Sanders discusses the relationships between the Lambs (Charles and Mary) and the Wordsworths (William and Dorothy) in the second chapter of her book, *The Brother-Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature*.

works with money and numbers, for a business that is located in a place he will never even visit. Lamb was an accounting clerk who spent long hours working with tedious bookkeeping. He is rooted in London, but the colonial commerce in which he is engaged is halfway around the world. Lamb's status as a mundane modern individual, working for a global commercial company from a position of distance and marginality, gives all of his writings an overlay of ambiguous loss, even before the actual losses of his life are taken into account.

In such a status, Lamb reflects the period in which he lives. *The Essays of Elia* and *The Last Essays of Elia* are not so much a product of the traumatic event in the 1790s as a product of being a historical figure of the early nineteenth century, caught up in the workings of empire and commerce, during a period of increased mobility, all of which is essential to the emerging culture of ambiguous loss. Such a complexity begins to explain his distinctive style as an essay writer. He plays with many of the major characteristics of ambiguous loss, such as the conflation of absence and presence, the everyday lived experience of uncertainty, and the repeated failure to achieve closure for the multiple griefs that modern daily life inflicts upon individuals. All of this is then compounded by the background presence of that "day of horrors," which never goes away and continues to shape the "smothering burden" of Lamb's daily life.

This chapter will bring together these different aspects of Charles Lamb's essayistic art of ambiguous loss. In the first section, I discuss the representation of confirmed deaths in *The Essays of Elia* and *The Last Essays of Elia*—losses that are not ambiguous—and I show how Lamb yet draws our attention to the sense of ambiguity involved in those deaths through his elegiac style of writing. In the second section I focus on Lamb's account of bachelorhood, in particular on the idea of what Andrew Miller calls "lives unled," to show how Lamb employs a fantasy of parenthood to imbue his personal and professional lives with a permeating sense of

loss. Lastly, I consider Lamb as a reluctant participant in the British imperial project, using the final section of this chapter to focus on how Lamb represents Elia as never having set foot in the British colonized spaces his daily employment is concerned with, thus showing how his whole existence is framed by a world of global commerce that is defined above all by distance and absence.

Deaths, Elegies, and Tinges of Ambiguous Loss

Claiming that the person speaking in Lamb's poems in *The Blank Verse* is the poet himself is less problematic than arguing that the persona Elia is Charles Lamb. Lamb is more direct in expressing his loss in *The Blank Verse* than in *The Essays of Elia* and *The Last Essays of Elia*, and his autobiographical voice is also more obvious in the poems. The seven poems that Lamb contributes are (in chronological order): "To Charles Lloyd", "Written on the Day of My Aunt's Funeral," "Written a Year after the Events," "Written Soon after the Preceding Poem," "Written on Christmas Day, 1797," "The Old Familiar Faces" (Original Text), and "Composed at Midnight." Undoubtedly, the poems represent real-life events in Lamb's life, and the titles of four poems identify when they were written and what occasions triggered the writing—details left missing from Lamb's Elia essays. In "Written on the Day of My Aunt's Funeral," while lamenting being motherless and 'auntless,' he is also mourning his father's declining health. The next poem, "Written a Year after the Events," commemorates the September 22nd incident. He addresses his sister:

Thou, and I, dear friend,
With filial recognition sweet, shall know
One day the face of our dear mother in heaven;
And her remember'd looks of love shall greet
With looks of answering love; (25-29)

These lines avoid blaming Mary for the death of their mother.

Mary was indeed facing a very challenging situation that led to her mental breakdown: in addition to working long tedious hours as a mantua maker to support the family financially, she was taking care of her parents – both were demanding and in poor health – and managing the household. To make matters worse, Mary was not getting much-needed love from her mother. In a letter to Coleridge dated October 17th, 1796, Lamb quoted Mary’s letter to him and commented, “Poor Mary, my Mother.... in opinion, in feeling, and sentiment, and disposition, bore so distant a resemblance to her daughter, that she never understood her right....— but met her caresses, her protestations of filial affection, too frequently with coldness and repulse” (*Letters* 47). Acknowledging the poor mother-daughter relationship – too late to amend – Lamb places his hope in the afterlife.

In his next poem, written a month later, Lamb explores his sense of guilt. Apostrophizing his mother, Lamb in “Written Soon after the Preceding Poem,” laments her death and wishes her alive so that he, “A wayward son oft-times was I to thee” (22), could do better. In the same poem, he is also grieving his psychologically absent father, whose “heart is sick” and in the earlier poem is described as “a palsy-smitten, childish, old, old man,” (“Written on the Day of My Aunt’s Funeral” 26). In the essays, however, Lamb never mentions the death of his mother and his aunt nor his father’s ailing health. The two deaths mentioned are those of Mrs. Field whom critics believe to be Lamb’s grandmother (who died in August 1792) and John L (or James Elia), his brother (who died on October 26, 1821). Their deaths happened before Lamb began writing the essays, and long after the momentous events described in *The Blank Verse*.

Creating the persona of Elia is part of Lamb’s refined art in representing loss. The essays do incorporate autobiographical information, yet when working with such information, Lamb

separates himself as the author from the object of his writing.⁴⁰ The elaboration of Elia's personality in "New Year's Eve" (January 1821) best exemplifies such distancing.⁴¹ Lamb is scrutinizing the man Elia, "this stupid changeling of five-and-forty" who is "light, and vain, and humorsome; a notorious ***; addicted to ****: averse from counsel, neither taking it, nor offering it;—*** besides; a stammering buffoon" (*Elia* 28). He then compares the grown man with the five-year-old Elia whom he describes as being sophisticated, honest, courageous, religious, imaginative, and hopeful (*Elia* 28). This essay is one of the only two in which Lamb mentions his mother, and it is not at all a lamentation. Elia recalls himself suffering from smallpox. The child Elia went to bed in fever and woke up "in surprise at the gentle posture of maternal tenderness hanging over it, that unknown had watched its sleep" (*Elia* 28). The other essay, "My First Play" (December 1821), describes Elia's first experience watching a play's performance, and he recalls what the six-year-old child did in a brief intermission: "I reposed my shut eyes in a sort of resignation upon the maternal lap" (*Elia* 98). Both recollections involve moments of the child Elia being asleep: recovering and recharging under his mother's care.

This nurturing image is far different from what we see in the poems. The following lines from "Written on the Day of My Aunt's Funeral" provide a sharp contrast with the essays' representations:

Oh my dear mother, oh thou dear dead saint!
Where's now that placid face, where oft hath sat
mother's smile, to think her son should thrive
In this bad world, when she was dead and gone;
And when a tear hath sat (take shame, O son!) (18-22)

⁴⁰ All references to the essays in this chapter are taken from *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb: Volume II Elia and The Last Essays of Elia*. Edited by E. V. Lucas, Methuen & Co., 1903. (hereafter *Elia*)

⁴¹ When an essay is mentioned for the first time in this chapter, the information of its original publication date in *The London Magazine* is provided in brackets.

In the poem, the young Lamb writes an elegy to his aunt and, not yet recovering from the grief of losing his mother, uses the same poem to lament the loss of his mother. The focus of those lines is her absence, what is no longer available. Twenty years later in his essays, Lamb chooses not to revisit his raw feelings of loss but to recall instead the tender and fond memories of the mother. While the same poem also recalls the aunt's good deeds to the child Lamb, it starts with the emphasis on the loss: "Thou too art dead" (1), and, to transition from lamenting an aunt to lamenting a mother, the speaker of the poem says: "Go thou, and occupy the same grave-bed / Where the dead mother lies" (16-7). Lamb avoids this kind of lamenting in the later essays. Describing the aunt in "My Relations" (June 1821), he emphasizes Elia's special status in his aunt's regard and likens her to a mother: "when she thought I was quitting it [the world], she grieved over me with mother's tears" (*Elia* 70). Lamb merges the aunt figure into that of the mother, and he displaces his grief of losing her, imagining instead that his aunt was mourning his death. The good, kind aunt had previously appeared in an earlier essay, "Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago" (November 1820), bringing homecooked meal daily to school. Thus, the aunt and the mother are presented not in their absence but in the active acts of nurturing.

The elegiac recollection of the grandmother's death in "Dream Children: A Reverie" (January 1822), focusing more on her excellent qualities, subtly suggests a different kind of loss. A great dancer in her youth, Mrs. Field is "a tall, upright, graceful person," and though cancer caused her pain and stopped her from dancing, "it could never bend her good spirits, or make them stoop, but they were still upright" (*Elia* 101). The word "upright" is repeated twice to describe her physical and mental characteristics. To highlight her respectability, her funeral is said to be attended by "a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighbourhood for many miles round," (*Elia* 101). The grieving community attending the

funeral, ranging from the impoverished to the wealthy and including people from a wide area, exemplifies Schor's notion of mourning as a socially productive and connective "discourse among the living" (3). Death prompts a sense of togetherness, with all the people attending her funeral sharing in sympathy and providing Elia with a consolatory community of fellow mourners.

However, looking at another aspect of Elia's recollection of his grandmother, we might say that mourning is also a discourse of *nothing*: of nothingness and absence, and not only because of the physical absence of the deceased. Lamb plays with the idea of absence and presence in Elia's comments on his grandmother's acts of love while she was alive. On October 17, 1796, Lamb wrote to Coleridge about how their mother should have loved Mary better: "She loved her, as she loved us all, with a Mother's love.... Yet she would always love my brother above Mary, who was not worthy of one tenth of that affection, which Mary had a right to claim" (*Letters* 47). In the essay, Lamb replaces the mother with Mrs. Field. Elia tells his children that "their great-grandmother Field loved all her grand-children, yet in an especial manner she might be said to love their uncle, John L —" (*Elia* 102). In both the letter and the essay, while being very careful in making sure that he does not insinuate disrespect for both the mother and the grandmother, Lamb is mourning psychological absence within physical presence. However, instead of ranting about how his cousin should not have deserved such special love, Elia justifies the grandmother's preference, describing John's qualities and even admitting that as a child John was "a king to the rest of us" (*Elia* 102). There is tint of jealousy and pain in acknowledging the fact that John "grew up to man's estate as brave as he was handsome, to the admiration of every body, but of their great-grandmother Field most especially" (*Elia* 102).

Written after the death of Lamb's brother, "Dream Children: A Reverie" is the only essay that presents the obvious work of mourning, and it functions as a steppingstone for Lamb to talk about other losses. Lamb juxtaposes the words 'kindness' and 'crossness' in describing what Elia misses from John L. – whose personality is described more fully in "My Relations" (June 1821). Margareta Eurenus Rydbeck argues that Lamb's adoration of his brother in "Dream Children" "emanates from such feelings of remorse that almost everybody is bound to experience at a near relative's or friend's death. John's death coming so close upon the publication of 'My Relations' might have added to Charles' compunction" (52). In the essay, Elia says of his cousin (called John L. or James Elia in the essay): "his enviable leisure is consumed at Christie's, and Phillips's" (*Elia* 73), and such a lavish lifestyle can be read as Lamb criticizing his brother's unwillingness to contribute to Mary's care, despite the fact that John was more financially capable than Lamb. Describing John L. in a satiric tone, Elia elaborates him as a person who "is affected by the sight, or the bare supposition, of a creature in pain, ... The animal tribe in particular he taketh under his especial protection.... The contemplation of a lobster boiled, or eels skinned alive will wring him so, that all for pity he could die" (*Elia* 74). Such "sympathy" for animals contradicts the fact that while John Lamb should have known that Mary would have suffered more if placed in a public mental facility, he did not want to facilitate better options. Yet Elia justifies John's idiosyncrasy: "With great love for *you*, J.E. hath but a limited sympathy with what you feel or do. He lives in a world of his own" (*Elia* 74).

In "Dream Children: A Reverie," Elia focuses more on praising, idealizing, admiring John and lamenting his death. The description of John L. follows the same pattern as that of Grandmother Field: starting with physical characteristics and moving to non-physical traits. The description of his death comes right after his act of kindness, highlighting Elia's sense of grief.

How I bore his death as I thought pretty well at first, but afterward it haunted and haunted me, and though I did not cry or take it to heart as some do, and as I think he would have done if I had died, yet I missed him all day long, and knew not till then how much I had loved him. I missed his kindness, and I miss his crossness, and wished him to be alive again. (*Elia* 103)

In Elia's claim that John would have cried and been deeply affected had Elia been the one who died, Lamb employs the familiar pattern of displacement that he used when talking about his aunt.

But in this instance, Elia's open mourning can be read as mirroring Freud's concept of mourning. Freud says that when losing an object of love, a person goes through the work of mourning, a process whose primary goals are to break ties with the lost object and invest in a new relationship with another object of love. The griever severs attachments primarily through a labor of memory: "Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected" (154). While painful, this normative process of mourning eventually comes to an end. Recalling both John's kindness and crossness and admitting to being haunted by the death, Elia is in the process of severing his attachment to his cousin. But at the point where Elia's description of his loss of John L is heightened, and the children start to cry, Lamb presents a twist. Lamb has the children ask a crucial question, "if their little mourning which they had on was not for Uncle John," querying their father not to go on but tell them instead "some stories about their pretty dead mother" (*Elia* 103). In a single sentence, Lamb covers multiple layers of grief, where Elia projects his grief onto his children, but the children remain amazingly aware that their grief is not for the same lost object of love as their father's. Or is it?

What comes next highlights the uncertainty and ambiguity about what, exactly, Elia is mourning. If the children's mother is dead, Elia must have mourned her death as much as his

children, and it must have been the most painful among the three losses. However, unlike his description of the grandmother and cousin, Elia does not start with praising his deceased wife but with describing a lengthy agonizing experience: “how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W—n” (*Elia* 103). Readers of *The London Magazine* may have recalled the same statement of seven years spent wooing Alice W—n in “New Year’s Eve,” published a year earlier. They would probably have noticed two months later in “A Chapter on Ears” (March 1821), where Elia praises a gentlewoman singer whose song has the power “to make him glow, tremble, and blush with a passion, which was afterwards destined to overwhelm and subdue his nature quite, for Alice W—n” (*Elia* 38). Elia’s fixation with Alice W—n reoccurs even three years later in “Blakesmoor in H – shire” (September 1824). While admiring a family portrait, Elia exclaims, “... with the bright yellow H – shire hair, and eye of watchet hue—so like my Alice!” (*Elia* 157). Such instances show that even though Alice W—n is physically absent, she is psychologically present that Elia can find ways to associate things with her.

Some critics suggest that Alice W—n is Ann Simmons, who lived near Blakesware and whom Lamb fell in love with at the age of 19 in 1794-5. A more plainly and painfully stated reference than those in the essays, however, occurs in the 1798 poem “The Old Familiar Faces”:
“I loved a love once, fairest among women; / Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her —” (7-8). The second line suggests that their failed romance is due to outside forces; Lamb’s grandmother, Mrs. Field is thought to have closed the doors on his love for Ann Simmons because of the history of mental illness in the Lamb family (Prance 307, 360). While still admitting the failed romance as painful, the essays show how Lamb has distanced himself from the painful experience. In “New Year’s Eve,” Lamb makes Elia take the experience as part of

life-learning opportunities: “Me- thinks, it is better that I should have pined away seven of my goldenest years, when I was thrall to the fair hair, and fairer eyes, of Alice W__n, than that so passionate a love-adventure should be lost” (*Elia* 28). Lamb pushes the reflection further into didactic material for Elia in “Dream Children,” when he says, “I explained to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial meant in maidens” (*Elia* 103). As we read the description, we would be tempted to expect a happy ending that marks the end of those seven years of uncertainty and ambiguity. But soon we are presented with a more complicated love and loss story that involves a fantasy of parenthood: the children never exist in the first place.

As we have seen, Lamb often writes about various happenings in his life. But while it is more obvious what he is grieving in his late 1790s poems, it is not easy to pinpoint what Lamb is mourning in his essays. Often, we perceive that Elia is grieving one thing, yet it turns out that he is grieving something else. Lamb’s artful way of handling loss – by creating the persona, “Elia,” and through a style rich in ambiguity and ambivalence – shows that he meditates on ambiguous loss even when the loss is not all that ambiguous, such as when he elaborates on the (confirmed) deaths of his grandmother and brother. Part of what makes it difficult to pin down the presence of ambiguous loss in the *Essays of Elia* is Lamb’s habitually indirect approach to grief in his essays. We have seen the ambiguity in Lamb’s thinking about loss. Now I turn to the actual experience of ambiguous loss – as it is properly defined – which serves as a primary subject in his writing, especially when Lamb is contemplating lives unled and musing on an unfulfilled fantasy of parenthood.

The Unled Life and the Fantasy of Parenthood

Lamb’s bachelor life seems to be powered by thoughts of what he does not have, and the sense of loss this entails is not always necessarily ambiguous (we all have things to regret). However, Lamb’s ability to imagine “what might have been” infuses the bachelorhood in the essays with

the distinctive elegiac quality associated with the world of ambiguous loss. Lamb introduces Elia's bachelor status in "New Year's Eve," presents the social anguish of such status in "A Bachelor's Complaint of the Behavior of Married People" (September 1822), and complicates it with the fantasy of parenthood in "Dream Children: A Reverie." I am framing my discussion in this section by using what Miller calls moral perfectionism and the optative when he talks about the aesthetic, ethical, and emotional power of realistic fiction: "If moral perfectionism is inclined to the future, and to entering the life one might have in that future, the optative is a complementary mode inclined to the past, and to all the tracks down which one's career might have gone but did not" (192). In presenting Elia as a persona whose mind is "painfully introspective," Lamb plays with moral perfectionism and more so with the optative, even with Elia claiming that he "would no more alter" any of the incidents in his past.

A prominent feature that is immediately identifiable in Lamb's creation of Elia as a persona is Elia's love of retrospection. Elia's self-analysis in "New Year's Eve" elaborates on his character and posits two possibilities for that trait: it is either inherent to his personality or shaped by his circumstances. Both are beyond his control, so Elia seems to say that he should not be held accountable but should instead earn sympathy for his love of retrospection.

That I am fond of indulging, beyond a hope of sympathy, in such retrospection, maybe the symptom of some sickly idiosyncrasy. Or is it owing to another cause; simply that being without wife or family, I have not learned to project myself enough out of myself; and having no offspring of my own to dally with, I turn back upon memory and adopt my own early idea, as my heir and favorite? If these speculations seem fantastical to thee, reader – (a busy man, perchance), if I tread out of the way of thy sympathy, and am singularly-conceited only, I retire, impenetrably to ridicule, under the phantom cloud of Elia (*Elia* 28-9).

Elia juxtaposes inherent and extrinsic factors that shape his peculiarity. The word "sickly" implies acknowledgement that it may not be a favorable trait. The word "simply" hints at circumstances that are thrust at him instead of resulting from his own choices. He forewarns his

reader that if he is judged to be “singularly-conceited,” he cannot (will not) do anything about it but retreat “under the phantom cloud of Elia.” Of this frequently quoted phrase to differentiate Lamb from his persona, John Coates says, “This self-consciousness on Lamb’s part, his own awareness of exactly what he was doing, is the most striking fact about Elia as a persona” (225). Elia’s “phantom cloud,” and his whole statement gently mocking his “sickly retrospection,” function as a safeguard against the reader’s criticism.

But it is also a part of Elia’s reflective nature, which contributes to the success of the essays. Elia’s retrospection allows Lamb to touch on various matters, including painful materials, in light and humorous ways. Broaching the issue of mortality, for example, Elia starts with an observation on how a child and a young adult would not concern themselves with (their own) death. In contrast, the forty-five-year-old Elia admits that the inevitability of approaching death bothers him: “I do not want to be weaned by age; or drop, like mellow fruit, as they say, into the grave.—Any alteration, on this earth of mine, in diet or in lodging, puzzles and discomposes me” (*Elia* 29). Elia’s melancholic tone in listing all things he enjoys from life that would be lost in death blends with a humorous question: “Can a ghost laugh, or shake his gaunt sides, when you are pleasant with him?” (*Elia* 30). Elia’s refusal to take any consolation from a traditional view of the afterlife speaks to his own description of himself as “averse from counsel, neither taking it, nor offering it” (*Elia* 28). He scorns “an indifference to life” that promotes death as sanctuary, “a port of refuge,” and the grave as “soft arms” providing comfortable rest. His mockery is aimed at the idea of finally having what one wants in life only in the afterlife — “For what satisfaction hath a man, that he shall 'lie down with kings and emperors in death,' who in his lifetime never greatly coveted the society of such bedfellow?” (*Elia* 30). His humorous tone in clinging to the present contrasts with his melancholic tone in refusing to let go of the past. He

believes that experiencing a family misfortune that loses him a large amount of money is better than not having learned the harshness of the world. Without such a misfortune, he would have been unaware of the presence of bad people; he would have been left “without the idea of that specious old rogue” (*Elia* 28). The restrained, didactic tone of looking at painful experience as life-learning opportunities is paired with another humorous rhetorical question in refusing a promise of comfort in the afterlife: “or, forsooth, that ‘so shall the fairest face appear?’ – why to comfort me, must Alice W-n be a goblin?” (*Elia* 30). The failed romance led to Elia’s old bachelor status, and Lamb continues to treat bachelorhood with humor.

Lamb plays with absence and presence as essential elements of bachelorhood in "A Bachelor's Complaint of the Behavior of Married People." Like much of Lamb’s prose, this essay contains a litany of complaints that carry a humorous yet sorrowful tone. The essay starts: "As a single man, I have spent a good deal of my time in noting down the infirmities of Married People, to console myself for those superior pleasures, which they tell me I have lost by remaining as I am" (*Elia* 126). There is ambiguity in the statement. Elia is told that he loses “those superior pleasures” from not having been married, and in response he lists what is wrong with married people. Does he not agree with them? Is he in denial of such loss? In short, in Elia’s opinion, married people can be ignorant, irrational, insulting, and even offensive to single people. Many of the complaints are addressed to the wives: from the fact that he is not the chosen man by any of them – “It is enough that I know I am not: I do not want this perpetual reminding” (*Elia* 127) – to the bitter reality that they disrupt his friendships: “Innumerable are the ways which they take to insult and worm you out of their husbands’ confidence” (*Elia* 130). His friends who used to esteem him start to doubt him under their wives’ influence. Having their physical presence, Elia feels that he has psychologically lost his married friends.

Their children are also problematic. Elia feels that he is always at fault in whatever attitude he has when visiting a household with children. If he ignores the children, he will be accused of being a child-hater, but if he engages with them, the parents will send the children to another room as if jealous of his attention:

I could forgive their jealousy, and dispense with toying with their brats, if it gives them any pain; but I think it unreasonable to be called upon to love them, where I see no occasion,—to love a whole family, perhaps eight, nine, or ten, indiscriminately,—to love all the pretty dears, because children are so engaging! (*Elia* 128)

Here is another form of displacement. On the one hand, Elia projects the pain that he feels for not having children to the parents, as if the parents were in pain of losing their children when they were playing with Elia. He shows that he is capable of sympathizing with other people's loss. On the other hand, in saying that he could forgive and could be fine not playing with the children, Elia implies that he is the one being hurt. The request to love other people's children does not make sense to Elia. He reasons that the proverb "Love me, love my dog" does not apply to children because "children have a real character, and an essential being of themselves: they are amiable or unamiable per se; I must love or hate them as I see cause for either in their qualities" (*Elia* 129). While his reasoning makes sense, the statement represents his loss: Elia refuses to take other people's children to replace the lost object – the children that he never has.

More emotionally intense and obscure is the idea of absence and presence in "Dream Children: A Reverie." Elia is with his two children, Alice and John. Elia is in the middle of explaining to his children his courting their mother when he is disrupted by a vision that puzzles him. Little Alice merges with Alice W—n who looks out through little Alice's eyes. While Elia is trying to make sense of what he is seeing, the children are disappearing. Earlier in the essay, Elia talks about the ghosts of infants gliding up and down the stairs of the great house where Grandmother Field resides. The child Elia never sees the ghosts but still feels terrified. The adult

Elia is now seeing his children turning into apparitions.

...while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech; "We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice called Bartrum father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name – and immediately awaking, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor arm-chair (*Elia* 103).

Elia wakes up from his dream, which does not even let him make up for all the losses of his life.

The dream denies his romance with Alice W—n, whose children are fathered by Bartrum. The children, who are supposed to be his, declare that they are not even children.

How would it feel losing children that one never had? Miller explains the agony of being denied paternity: "Children can present to us—with whatever truth—the hope that our futures might be different from our pasts, that indeed we might become new people, reborn, living beyond our deaths" (214). The storytelling scene that opens the essay functions like an idealized template of what the children would do later down the road with their own children: Elia's stories will be told to his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The details in the disappearance of the dream children are filled with ambiguity; the "two mournful features" seem to project Elia's grief-stricken loss of them. Seated in his bachelor armchair, Elia looks back on how paternity could have looked for him. He imagines himself as a loving and affectionate father, who earns his children's respect through commanding discipline, manner, and religiosity. When hearing how pious her great-grandmother is, "little Alice spread her hand" (*Elia* 101), mimicking the image of Jesus with his outstretched arms that represents acceptance and love. He envisions himself having almost intuitive communication with his children.

Thus, when learning that as a youth, the great-grandmother was the best dancer, "Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement," but she immediately stops when noticing her

father's disapproval, simply from seeing her father "looking grave" (*Elia* 101). Another proof that Elia has succeeded in making his children understand what is expected of them shows in the fact that he does not have to explicitly say what he wants them to do. Little John "slyly deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes" upon hearing his father as a boy was able to resist "the sweet flavours of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such-like common baits of children" (*Elia* 101). Ironically, when Elia is consciously making a choice on how to exercise his paternal role in educating his children on the complexity of adult relationship, trying his best to explain "as much as children could understand" (*Elia* 101), it becomes a crucial moment that reveals the optative: the children are what might have been if Elia had married Alice W_n. The allusion to Lethe marks what did not and will not happen. When drunk, the water from the river Lethe in Greek mythology makes the souls of the dead forget their lives on earth. But Elia's children have never even been born in the first place.

Elia's fantasy of parenthood manifests in an unclear sense of loss that results from remaining single, which the psychologist Jeffrey B. Jackson calls "singlehood ambiguous loss." A single adult who desires to get married may feel ambivalent about a potential spouse and children; both are psychologically present while still physically absent. Jackson says, "The degree of ambivalence experienced from adult singlehood ambiguous loss likely varies according to the developmental timing of singlehood, decisions between settling and prolonged singlehood, the existence of unviable potential spouses, and non-materialized children" (214). In many cultures, marriage is a milestone that marks the transition between adolescence and adulthood. Not to experience this is to lose out on a major part of the narrative that individuals are conditioned to expect for themselves. Thus the forty-five-year-old Elia looks back to the moment when he was striving to complete that milestone though eventually lost his "goldenest

years.” A keen sense of ambivalence and ambiguous loss is represented by how he recalls the courting: “in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever” as already mentioned above. Elia’s fixation with Alice W_n shows how the psychologically present Alice casts a shadow on Elia’s decision to settle with another girl (the inability to sever the attachment to the lost object of loss is a symptom of melancholia in Freudian terms). The married women in “A Bachelor’s Complaint” are unviable potential spouses as they have decided on who they prefer for their spouses; as Elia bitterly complains, “you cannot be in their company a moment without being made to feel, by some indirect hint or open avowal, that you are not the object of this preference” (*Elia* 127). Married people and their children are a perpetual reminder of what Elia does not have; His agonized sense of loss finds an outlet in the fantasy children in “Dream Children.”

The way Lamb handles fantasy of parenthood shows his mastery of the art of ambiguous loss. In Wordsworth’s “The Ruined Cottage,” Margaret is ambivalent about her relational status: “She lingered in unquiet widowhood, / A wife and widow.” With the uncertainty of her husband being alive or dead, Margaret is in limbo, “linger[ing]” in what could-be her “widowhood” which is described as “unquiet,” unsettled. She cannot be a wife when her husband is not there, yet she cannot claim to be a widow when her husband may be alive. In Hemans’s “Come Home,” the mother is similarly ambivalent about the status of her children; she is in despair due to their absence, yet still hopes for their return. The mother in “The Graves of a Household,” decides to imagine their children’s graves to create a closure to her unclear loss. The experience of ambiguous loss is underwritten by the fantasy that the lost loved ones are still alive somewhere. In “Dream Children”, Lamb complicates the sense of loss by presenting it in multiple layers. He starts by presenting stories of confirmed deaths of Elia’s relatives and, in

what seems to be coming out of the blue, of his children's "pretty dead mother." At this point in the essay, Elia the widower becomes an inverse of the women in Wordsworth's and Hemans's poems. But unlike the women whose husband or children are previously physically present but are gone and may never return, Elia's wife and children never materialize at all. How could one expect such non-existence to ever return? Lamb's ability to vividly imagine what might have been – the optative – brings the fantasy to life enough that we can feel the loss.

We have seen how Lamb treats actual grief ambiguously, and how his essays introduce something we can now recognize as "ambiguous loss" when describing a life that he did not live: his fantasy of parenthood. In the next section we will see how ambiguous loss, as rooted in his day-to-day working life in the East India Company, permeates his essays. His experience as a distant and indirect participant in England's imperial project is at the heart of what makes ambiguous loss in the period possible.

Elia as Reluctant Participant in British Imperialism

The fantasy of parenthood and the sense of ambiguous loss in Lamb's essays are not merely personal qualities. They also speak to the historical period of the early nineteenth century Britain. What is lost with the death of Mrs. Field in "Dream Children" is also Elia's access to the great mansion that she housekeeps, where as a child he used to roam, admiring the carved wood ornaments and spending hours "gazing upon the old busts of the Twelve Caesars" (*Elia* 102). The old mansion represents the changing world in the period of growing mobility. Its owner prefers living somewhere else, and the great house "came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's other house" (*Elia* 101). As an adult, Elia in "Blakesmoor in H----shire" witnesses the mansion as a ruin, "a few bricks only lay as representatives of that which was so stately and so spacious" (*Elia* 154). John L shares Elia's love for the mansion, "but had too much spirit to be always pent up within their boundaries"

(*Elia* 102). The young John L's love for riding a horse that would "carry him half over the county in a morning" and joining hunters represents imperial spirit of expedition and conquest.

It is not arbitrary that Lamb chooses to open *The Essays of Elia* with "The South-Sea House" (August 1820). The old building, which "was once a house of trade – a centre of busy interests" (*Elia* 1), has long passed its glorious days. The South Sea House used to be the headquarters of the South Sea Company, built in 1710 and given the monopoly of trading in the Pacific Ocean and along the East Coast of South America. The company collapsed in 1720 due to its failed financial scheme, known as the South Sea Bubble. Although the monopoly ended in 1806, the company continued to exist until 1853. Lamb situates *Elia* in a bigger world by including a comparison and contrast between the buildings housing the South Sea Company and the East India Company: "with the Bank, and the 'Change, and the India-house about thee, in the hey-day of present prosperity, with their important faces, as it were, insulting thee, *their poor neighbour out of business*—to the idle and merely contemplative,—to such as me, old house!" (*Elia* 2). The East India Company, founded in the end of the sixteenth century, grew in wealth and power through its trade with India and elsewhere in the Far East. When the South Sea Company lost its monopoly, the East India Company still had its monopoly for valuable trade with China until 1833. The East India Company was defunct in 1858. David Higgins argues that the South Sea House represents the outdated version of empire while the India House with the Bank and the Change represent the new commercial empire. As a *memento mori*, the South Sea House also suggests the "obsolescence and destruction that awaits the grandest imperial projects" (134). Both companies provide Lamb with the backdrop to touch on loss that results from the imperial, global, and commercial world.

Not all about the South Sea Company and the East India Company in the essays is sheer fact. The Lambs are closely associated with the South Sea Company. Samuel Salt – Barrister, Bencher, and Sub-Treasurer of the Inner Temple – for whom Lamb’s father worked for forty years was also a director of the South Sea Company. He found a position for Lamb’s brother in the company and contributed to Lamb’s entry there. Before working for the East India Company, Lamb spent five months (from September 1, 1791 to February 8, 1792) working for the South Sea Company. Lamb worked in the Accountants’ Office of the East India Company, yet Elia says, “Living accounts and accountants puzzle me. I have no skill in figuring” (*Elia* 2). In “The Superannuated Man” (May 1825), Elia says, “Melancholy was the transition at fourteen from the abundant play-time, and the frequently-intervening vacations of school, to the eight, nine, and sometimes ten hours' a-day attendance at a counting-house” (*Elia* 193). Lamb left school at Christ’s Hospital in 1791 but started working for the East India Company on April 5, 1792. While Elia prefers losing his seven “goldenest years” to missing out on the adventure of love, he is ambivalent about all these years spent working, “to waste the golden years of thy life—thy shining youth—in the irksome confinement of an office,” and he can only admit that “time partially reconciles us to anything” (*Elia* 193). Yet, Lamb managed to spend thirty-six years at the East India Company, retiring with pension on March 29, 1825.

Describing the clerks of the South-Sea House, Lamb draws the parallel between those clerks and Elia with his agony at his own clerical job. Elia starts his introduction to the clerks by mentioning, “They were mostly (for the establishment did not admit of superfluous salaries) bachelors” (*Elia* 3). Elia suggests that for the South Sea House clerks, bachelorhood is more an economic transaction than a romantic decision: they simply cannot afford a family with their income. It is as if some of them were married to the company. Evans the cashier is described as

“melancholy as a gib-cat over his counter all the forenoon” (*Elia* 3). In addition to having reduced sexual desire, a gib-cat or an old male castrated cat tends to be less aggressive and less likely to roam. Thus, the cashier can be expected to focus only on his job and not get distracted by unrelated matters. John Tipp the accountant takes his job so seriously that “the striking of the annual balance in the company's books ... occupied his days and nights for a month previous,” and he is not interested in anything else, neither romance nor politics. Even newsprint “was thought too refined and abstracted. The whole duty of man consisted in writing off dividend warrants” (*Elia* 3). James Watt argues that Tipp is described as functioning in a kind of asocial vacuum because “he is associated with the near-defunct South Sea Company, and therefore in effect could only ever have played at, or gone through the motions of, being an accountant (178). But Lamb shows that Elia, who works for a far from defunct East India House, also feels similar alienation from the outside world. At least Evans could enjoy “the [glorious] hour [at 6 pm] of tea and visiting” when he would “chirp and expand over a muffin!” (*Elia* 3), and for Tipp, “the fiddle relieved his vacant hours” (*Elia* 4). Elia on the other hand hardly has such leisure time. He complains: “Besides my daylight servitude, I served over again all night in my sleep, and would awake with terrors of imaginary false entries, errors in my accounts, and the like” (*Elia* 194). It feels worse for Elia since he does not share Tipp’s false consciousness in thinking “an accountant the greatest character in the world, and himself the greatest accountant in it” (*Elia* 4). In calling himself “a votary of the desk—a notched and cropt scrivener—” (*Elia* 7), Elia does not seem to have pride in what he does for a living.

In “Oxford in the Vacation,” Lamb involves the optative mode by dwelling on the lost opportunity of education in youth and the resulting loss of freedom in adulthood. Elia defines himself as one who “has been defrauded in his young years of the sweet food of academic

institution,” so he loves visiting universities where he can “play the gentleman and enact the student” (*Elia* 9). Lamb plays with another form of the optative here. In imagining the fantasy of parenthood, Elia is performing the optative in his mind, but in imagining the fantasy of a man of letters, he is literally performing the optative in actions, staging the performance in the real place and enjoying the unsuspecting participation of others. Elia freely chooses to act various respectable characters depending on his mood: a sizar, a servitor, a Gentleman Commoner, or a Master of Arts – claiming that he fits any of these characters.

I have seen your dim-eyed vergers, and bed-makers in spectacles, drop a bow or curtsy, as I pass, wisely mistaking me for something of the sort. I go about in black, which favours the notion. Only in Christ Church reverend quadrangle, I can be content to pass for nothing short of a Seraphic Doctor (*Elia* 9).

What makes Elia’s performance possible is that the real gentlemen and students of Oxford are also on vacation; they are not there at the university. The only remaining gentleman-scholar that Elia meets is G. D. who is busy researching old manuscripts, and he is ironically “the most absent of men,” but his undivided commitment to his profession earns Elia’s respect (and envy).

The character of G. D. allows Lamb to explore the dynamic between absence and presence in a sort of positive way. Elia humorously tells an anecdote of G.D.’s unplanned visit to their mutual friend, M. in Bedford square during his walk one morning. Three hours later, passing through the same neighborhood and getting the same enticing images of the inner house, he pays a second visit, forgetting that the owners are still out of town. Once again, he asks for the guest book “to record the failures of the untimely or unfortunate visitor” and realizes his mistake: “in the line just above that in which he is about to print his second name (his re-script)—his first name (scarce dry) looks out upon him like another Sosia, or as if a man should suddenly encounter his own duplicate!” (*Elia* 11). G.D.’s mistake is an innocent one, yet the experience of encountering one’s double or being emptied out exemplifies alienation from oneself, experienced

by more people in the early nineteenth century than in the previous era due to the rise of capitalism. In terms of his enviable (to Elia) profession, Elia says, “For with G.D. – to be absent from the body, is sometimes (not to speak it profanely) to be present with the Lord” (*Elia* 11). G.D. is contentedly committed to his job, so that while he is physically stuck in place, mentally and intellectually “he is on Mount Tabor—or Parnassus—or co-sphered with Plato—or, with Harrington, framing ‘immortal commonwealths’—devising some plan of amelioration to thy country, or thy species—”(Elia 11). The job metaphorically transports G.D. The last sentence of the essay represents Elia’s (Lamb’s) vision of the work that is most worth living for: “when he [G.D.] goes about with you to show you the halls and colleges, you think you have with you the Interpreter at the House Beautiful” (*Elia* 12), being the true aesthetic critic for all the creative minds of all generations.

In time of unprecedented mobility and widening global distances, a jarring sense of absence and presence defines communication and results in a perplexing sense of temporality. In "Distant Correspondents: In a Letter to B. F. Esq. at Sydney, New South Wales " (March 1822), Lamb explores the complications of intercontinental correspondents. For Elia, communication by mail consists of three things: news, sentiments, and puns. News conveys truth, but with the vast distance – from London to Sydney – and the length of time needed for a letter to reach its recipient, Elia asks, “But what security can I have that what I now send you for truth shall not before you get it unaccountably turn into a lie?” (*Elia* 104). The possibility that “news from me must become history to you” also applies somewhat similarly with sentiment, which “requires to be served up hot” (*Elia* 104) and that “a pun, and its recognitory laugh, must be co-instantaneous” (*Elia* 107). The problematic lapse of time that Elia talks about may not be a problem in normal situations. But the early nineteenth century was also a time of war, and such

lapse of time becomes problematic. Mary Favret in *War at a Distance* calls the lapse between the delivery of the previous news to the next “the meantime,” which “brings with it affective and epistemological effects that fall out of or away from the reassurance of chronological time” (70). The belatedness could become more crucial and important than just simple annoyance.

This lack of reassurance associated with chronological time is amplified when one does not love what he does for a living; there is a double sense of alienation, both from time and from one’s labor. Although in terms of time, Lamb was a clerk first and an author only second, he most values the use of his pen. Elia says that he needs a break from “the contemplation of indigos, cottons, raw silks, piece-goods, flowered or otherwise,” and such a break is only possible at the end of the day when he is done with his clerical work: “The enfranchised quill, that has plodded all the morning among the cart-rucks of figures and cyphers, frisks and curvets so at its ease over the flowery carpet-ground of a midnight dissertation.—It feels its promotion” (*Elia* 8). The word “plod” means to walk doggedly and slowly with heavy steps, and it can also mean to work slowly and perseveringly at a dull task. The quill becomes a metaphor for Elia; during the day it plods, but at night it gets enfranchised, liberated, and even elevated. The value of literary writing shows in Elia’s meditation on death in “New Year’s Eve” where he addresses his books as if they were lovers: “And you, my midnight darlings, my Folios! must I part with the intense delight of having you (huge armfuls) in my embraces?” (*Elia* 30). In contrast, Elia does not have any problem saying farewell to his accounting books at the East India Company: “There let them rest, as I do from my labours, piled on thy massy shelves, more MSS. in folio than ever Aquinas left, and full as useful! My mantle I bequeath among ye” (*Elia* 197). While acknowledging that the records of his labor are “useful,” he is more than ready to let them go.

Elia's disconnection from his accounting books speaks to his disconnection from his job, which makes him a reluctant participant in the British imperial project. Comparing Lamb's contemporaries Sir William Jones (a judge in the Supreme Court of Bengal) and Thomas Love Peacock (an officer in the examiner's office at India House), Watt claims that "Lamb might be regarded as someone who was 'networked,' by virtue of his occupation, but who nonetheless failed or refused to identify any larger purpose to make his daytime labors seem meaningful" (169-70). Elia sees himself as dealing with "commodities incidental to the life of a public office" (*Elia* 8). Unlike the clerks at the South Sea House mentioned above who can live in illusion of the importance of their job, Elia does not see his job as important. Imperialism is not a calling; it is merely "incidental to the life of a public office." He calls his job an "unhealthy contributor to my weal, stern fosterer of my living," so that his coworkers' jokes and riddles smooth "the ruggedness of my [his] professional road" (*Elia* 197). Elia does not seem to have any personal connections with his coworkers beyond the workspace. On Sundays he wanders by himself, and even London on Sundays betrays Elia's longing for connections. The city does not have the weekday sociability that Elia loves: "I miss the cheerful cries of London, the music, the ballad singers – the buzz and stirring murmur of the streets. ...ostentatiously displayed wares of tradesmen ...busy faces ...the very busy face of business" (*Elia* 193). Elia looks forward to a full week off in the summer to go to his "native fields of Hertfordshire," but his anxiety to get the best of it ruins the week, and Elia finds himself "at the desk again, counting upon the fifty-one tedious weeks that must intervene before such another snatch would come" (*Elia* 194).

Even Hertfordshire presents a sense of loss for Elia, for the mansion of his childhood memories has been destroyed. In "Blakesmoor in H——-Shire" (September 1824), Elia recalls roaming the mansion as a lonely child: "The solitude of childhood is not so much the mother of

thought, as it is the feeder of love, and silence, and admiration” (*Elia* 155). Therefore, he scorns the owners of the mansion who “had long forsaken the old house of their fathers for a newer trifle,” and since he can better appreciate the values of the mansion, Elia claims that he is “the true descendant of those old W——s” (*Elia* 156). Elia is dealing with a different relation of absence and presence in the modern world: the necessity of paid employment rips him away from the dynamics of the city, while the old building of the India House in London confines and shuts him off from the city. Blakesmoor provides sanctuary for him, but it is no longer there. Looking at the ruin, Elia says, “Death does not shrink up his human victim at this rate. The burnt ashes of a man weigh more in their proportion” (*Elia* 154). Elia specifically mourns the room where his grandmother died, what he calls the haunted room where he used to come “with a passion of fear; and a sneaking curiosity, terror-tainted, to hold communication with the past” (*Elia* 154). When Elia asks, “—How shall they build it up again?” (*Elia* 154), what he means must be more than just the physical building, but other non-physical things associated with it. Part of the answer lies in the storytelling scene at the beginning of “Dream Children: A Reverie” when Elia communicates the past, including the old mansion, to his (fantasy) children.

In *The Essays of Elia* and *The Last Essay of Elia*, Charles Lamb creates a new aesthetic of ambiguous loss that does not seem to involve loss. Global separations and mobility are central to Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" and many of his poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, Austen's *Persuasion*, and Hemans's various poems. In contrast, Lamb's Elia never leaves England, and the familial separations that he experiences are examples of confirmed loss: the death of his grandmother and his cousin. Yet, Elia's bachelorhood complicates Wordsworth's treatment of uncertainty (in Margaret) and Austen's treatment of constancy (in Anne). Lamb's representation of the British imperial project is more explicit than that of the other three authors: Elia works for

the East India Company, the agent of British colonialism. However, the sense of ambiguous loss he presents is relatively subtle and not immediately visible. But the more we see the sense of ambiguous loss that Lamb presents, the more we feel it resonates with our modern lives.

Epilogue

Jakarta, June 2016: I was in the middle of an interview with the Indonesian Fulbright Selection Committee for DIKTI-funded Fulbright Grants for Indonesian Lecturers. One of the interviewers represented the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education. He looked at my file in his hands and asked whether I had previously applied for doctoral programs or any other scholarships. I never had. He curiously asked: "It has been a while since your master's study. What took you so long to apply for a doctoral program?" I hesitated for a second. I won the Fulbright Master's Degree Scholarship in 2006 and earned my master's degree from Kansas University in 2008. It had been almost ten years since then. I could have presented a valid reason: some of my colleagues were still pursuing their doctoral studies. The English Department of Diponegoro University must wait for them to return before allowing others to start. Such an answer would have sounded more professional. But that was not the real reason. After a few more seconds of silence, I decided to tell them the truth; unfortunately, it came out in a raw and unpolished sentence: "I have been trying to conceive." I immediately thought that the answer was a mistake. Firstly, I should have rephrased my statement: "I have been trying to build a family." Secondly, that was a too personal fact that they would not care to hear. The two Indonesian male interviewers looked taken aback, but the female American interviewer made a gesture of understanding to let it pass. She asked me another question related to my research. I was glad that she did. She might have sensed my uneasiness or probably even my grief.

Baton Rouge, August 2017: After a few cool days in Bloomington, Indiana, the heat and humidity of Louisiana took me by surprise—even though I had come from a tropical coastal city less than 500 miles from the equator! I had only been away for less than two weeks, but the weather had already made me miss home. My husband would join me the following year, but I

strongly felt his reservation. Having to move ten thousand miles from home, speak a language not his own, and put his life on hold for four to five years, he surely would not be excited. Time would tell if things would go as planned, and I had known the taste of waiting in uncertainty.

Baton Rouge, October 2019: I was working on an essay analyzing William Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" and Felicia Hemans's "The Graves of a Household." I was captivated by the poems' presentation of uncertainty, loss, grief, and conflation of absence and presence. But I also struggled to find the right words to describe the puzzling sense of loss experienced by the women in those two poems. One afternoon, after listening, again, to my description, my professor told me: "You should read this book by Pauline Boss about ambiguous loss." Not only did I find a new vocabulary, but I also discovered a topic for my dissertation.

My biggest fear when I was in Kansas was the possibility that one of my parents would pass away while I was there (my grandfather did). During the first few months in Louisiana, I was struck by a realization that I no longer feared losing my parents. I could be the one leaving my family for good! How would they feel when that happened? The news would reach them instantly, but it would take them at least the twenty-nine-hour flight to come to meet me. If they wanted to bury me at home, it would take days for the paperwork and other annoying hurdles. I dreaded the thought of putting my family to such trouble. I did not know then why I was thinking about my own death. Maybe because I already knew the pain of grieving: after Kansas and before Louisiana, I lost both of my grandmothers and (shockingly, excruciatingly painful) my father. Maybe I was persuading myself of a better option to avoid grieving all alone, so far away from home.

I could have done my doctoral study back home; it would have been easier in many ways, but I never wanted to. Also, after postponing it for many years, I would probably have to be

classmates with one of my undergraduate students, a constant reminder that I had put my academic and professional career on hold for something that even then was still up in the air. Besides, I needed a break from having to answer questions about children. It turned out that I was wrong, thinking that being in a country famous for individualism and respect for privacy would spare me from dealing with such “normal” questions: “Are you married? How many children do you have? Is your husband here with you?” It was only the first semester. I might as well finish my study as fast as possible and go home. I would transfer credit hours from Kansas University so that I could speed up my study. I was wrong again: I forgot that learning takes the time that it needs; rushing does not make it work.

I never heard about Charles Lamb. His sister killed their mother?! Horrific. Read “Dream Children: A Reverie!” It's beautiful. So I heard.

Children love to listen to stories about their elders, when they were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle, or grandame, whom they never saw. It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about me the other evening to hear about their great-grandmother Field, who lived in a great house in Norfolk (a hundred times bigger than that in which they and papa lived) which had been the scene—so at least it was generally believed in that part of the country—of the tragic incidents which they had lately become familiar with from the ballad of the Children in the Wood (*Elia* 100-1).

Those first two sentences of the Lamb's essay brought me back to my childhood, to my grandparents' big house. It was not a mansion, but it had a big yard with tall trees that I liked climbing. Sometimes my aunt would call out from below because I had climbed so high that she could not see me. She would be the last one to marry among her siblings. Already in her fifties, she had to give up hope of getting pregnant. One day she told me that once, a young widower with a little girl courted her. She was young and single then; she did not think her parents would approve. She recollected: “If I had known that I would eventually have had to marry an old widower, I would have accepted that young one. That little girl would have taken me as her

mother, and I could have had more children.” Would she have been happier then? Would it have been as a similarly blissful moment as that of Elia when my aunt gathered her children and told them stories about their elders? When would she have told the little girl about the other mother whom both of them never saw?

In Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot offers to stay at home and forego dinner at the Great House in Uppercross because her nephew's mother, when asked if she could “be comfortable” while “spending the whole evening away from [her] poor boy?” answered: “Yes; you see his papa can, and why should not I?” (50). Anne is happy with her duty as an aunt: “Leave little Charles to my care. Mr and Mrs Musgrove cannot think it wrong while I remain with him” (50). It seems only natural for an aunt to do what she can do to help. My aunt had a similar experience. She was staying with her older sister for a couple of years while working at her first teaching job. Having more time than her older sister, working nine to five, who was also busy taking care of the first daughter, my aunt became the second mother of her nephew. The same thing happened again when her youngest sister had a son. I do not live close enough to my sisters to care for their children. Besides, they are stay-at-home mothers. At work, however, when there are academic-related events on the weekend, my colleagues would naturally think that my time is more flexible than that of my female colleagues with children. Like Anne, I do not mind performing my duty. I love my job.

In William Wordsworth's “The Ruined Cottage,” unemployed Robert enlists and goes to America so that he can leave the bounty for his wife and children. We never know what happens to Robert afterward. Robert's decision is voluntary, but the reasons behind his decision qualify for a category of forced mobility. Sometimes, when it comes to the consequences of an action, it does not much matter whether one is imposed upon to do something or does it willingly. When

my husband, my biggest supporter, joined me in the US, despite it being a mutual agreement, I felt guilty that I had uprooted him. He never said it explicitly, but I knew he was not happy, and how could I be when he was not? Ripped from his role as a provider, one of his primary social signifiers as a man, he found his pride deeply hurt. He was also remorseful for not being able to help take care of his ailing mother. His only sister also had just lost her husband, leaving her with three young daughters. It was as if he ran away from his responsibilities as a son and a brother. He wanted to go home.

In Hemans's "Song of Emigration," the husband says: "We will rear new homes under trees that glow / As if gems were the fruitage of every bough;" (21-22), to which his wife replies: "But woe for that sweet shade / Of the flowering orchard-trees," (27-28). The wife will probably love her new home when she allows enough time to adapt. I am not that wife. I wanted to come to a foreign land, not against anybody's will. I knew that by the time I grew to love the new place, I would have to leave, so I might as well not develop any attachment. But still a part of me does not want to leave. I have been away long enough to become a different person; going home would mean restarting my "operating system." I have been watching social changes happening in my country these past five years. I also notice that the longer we are separated, the harder it becomes for me to communicate intimately with family and friends back home. At least I will return to my teaching position, having more to offer my students than when I left. Unfortunately, my husband will need to start all over again.

My parents got married when they were both college students. Having earned her bachelor's degree, my mother did not continue to become a certified pharmacist as she had hoped to do. The university in the city she moved to did not offer the program. Besides, then a young family of four, they were struggling to make ends meet. She was offered full-time jobs at

a pharmacy and a pharmaceutical company, but who would take care of my brother and me? I grew up proudly telling people I would be a pharmacist to match my middle name Farmacelia. I did not. Meanwhile, as a child, I also learned that it was unfair that my intelligent, multi-talented mother gave up so many opportunities. But years of practice as a mother of four made my mother believe that a woman should be a wife and a mother before she was anything else. She did not seem enthusiastic when I told her about my efforts to advance my academic career. Whenever I mentioned doctoral study, she would say I should have at least one child first. I listened to her. One day, after my younger sister gave birth to her first daughter, following three miscarriages, my mother said I could go ahead applying for a doctoral program. I wished she had said that when my father was still there to be proud of me.

Gradually I have come to understand why the concept of ambiguous loss resonates with me. I have been living amidst such feelings of unresolved grief my whole life, without knowing it. Now I can see it everywhere.

This dissertation project started with my fascination with the concept of ambiguous loss and the independent women in nineteenth-century British literature. In my initial prospectus, I ambitiously and naively wanted to cover the whole nineteenth century period: the first half would discuss work by the Romantic poets Wordsworth and Hemans (in the first chapter) and by the Romantic novelist Austen and essayist Lamb (in the second chapter); the second half would turn to the Victorians, covering early-Victorian novels by Anne Brontë and Charlotte Brontë (chapter three) and later work by Margaret Oliphant (chapter four), plus, in a last chapter, the collection of letters by Oliphant's Javanese counterpart R.A. Kartini. I dropped the second half of my plan, but my curiosity remains. I do not think that I have the courage of a Lucy Snowe or Kirsteen Douglas, nor do I have the strength to endure their loss. Twenty-three-year-old Lucy

leaves the English countryside to go to London, boards a ship for Labassecour (Belgium), and travels to the city of Villette. To avoid forced marriage, Kirsteen runs away from her family in Scotland and resides in London. My favorite passages from Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and Margaret Oliphant's *Kirsteen*, not surprisingly, are the following.

Peace, be still! Oh! a thousand weepers, praying in agony on waiting shores, listened for that voice, but it was not uttered—not uttered till; when the hush came, some could not feel it: till, when the sun returned, his light was night to some!

Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life. (Brontë 477)

“After he had received his death stroke he must have found means of extracting a handkerchief from the breast of his uniform, and lay when found holding this to his lips.” (Oliphant 98)

She had looked up, her lips had dropped apart, her hands still holding the silk had fallen upon her lap. Her face was without a trace of colour, her bosom still as if she were no longer breathing. She looked like some one suddenly turned into marble, the warm tint of her hair exaggerating, if that were possible, the awful whiteness. (Oliphant 99)

Both passages represent moments of closure. In *Villette*, prior to that moment, Lucy has prepared everything for M. Emmanuel's return. After three years of separation, Lucy says, “I thought I loved him when he went away; I love him now in another degree: he is more my own” (Brontë 477). In *Kirsteen*, news of a battle in India is being read to mantua maker girls in the workroom one morning. A few paragraphs earlier, readers are informed that Kirsteen is waiting for her lover, “a man who was so near on the verge of return that in a year or two, ‘in two-three years’ he might be back,” and that the request “‘Will ye wait for me till I come back?’ was the whisper which was always in her ears” (Oliphant 95). The story being read does not identify the dead soldier, but Kirsteen believes it must be her lover holding the handkerchief she gave him. Later that night, Kirsteen searches the newspaper and finds: “no further doubt, ‘Captain Drummond’: his name and no other. ‘Will ye wait till I come back?’ He was standing by her saying it—and

lying there—with the handkerchief” (Oliphant 105). Both Lucy and Kirsteen have been waiting for years. Charlotte Brontë ends *Villette* with ambiguity, leaving a space for readers to create their own preferred ending. Kirsteen retrieves the blood-tainted handkerchief sent to Drummond’s mother. Both novels make her heroines remain single but thriving, but their lives are also colored by ambiguous grief for what they have lost.

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