Vagrancy Law, Police Reform, and the Poetics of Surplus Population

Scholars of British Romanticism have long noted the ubiquity of vagrancy in the works of early Romantic poets. A legal category dating from the fourteenth century and criminalizing a wide variety of offenses, including begging, itinerancy, prostitution, and the perceived refusal to work, vagrancy seems to acquire a particularly literary urgency in the 1790s, as poets such as William Wordsworth, Robert Southey, and Mary Robinson dwell insistently on dispossessed lyric subjects.

For example, in the pages of Daniel Stuart's reform-minded newspaper the Morning Post, between 1797 and 1800, these three poets carried on an extended conversation about poverty, politics, and vagrancy.\(^1\) Alongside many of the poems that would later comprise Robinson’s *Lyrical Tales*, including "The Poor Singing Dame," "Agnes" (which would appear, in revised form, in the *Lyrical Tales* as "Edmund's Wedding"), "The Deserted Cottage," and "Poor Marguerite," Wordsworth and Southey published their own poetic engagements with dispossession, dislocation, war, and poverty.\(^2\) The poems form a rich, intertextual network. For example, Southey's unsigned poem, "The Circumstance on Which the Following Ballad is Founded, Happened Not

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Many Years Ago in Bristol" begins with a traveler's encounter with a strange, apparently homeless woman sitting in a snowy graveyard. When she refuses his offer of help, he asks the proprietor of a local inn who she is. He responds by telling her story: she murdered her infant child and burned his corpse, and has been punished ever since with madness, manifested in her inability to feel the cold:

Would I could feel the winter wind,  
Would I could feel the snow,  
I have fire in my head, poor Martha cri'd,  
I have fire in my heart also.³

The story (as well as the name of Martha) echo Wordsworth's "Goody Blake, and Harry Gill" and "The Thorn;" all three poems offer variations on themes of supernatural terror, the ballad form, oral tradition, and opaque mystery as signified by figures of rural poverty and dispossession. The Morning Post also featured poetic evocations of vagrancy as a resource for theorizing poetry itself, as Wordsworth would go on to do throughout his career. For example, Wordsworth's 1800 "Inscription for a Seat by a Road Side, Half Way Up a Steep Hill, Facing the South," published in the Morning Post under the name of "VENTIFRONS," exhorts the non-impoverished traveler "who in youthful vigour rich, and light / With youthful thoughts, dost need no rest" to imagine the poorer travelers and vagrants who share his path:

...Should e'er thine eye  
Glance on this sod, and this rude tablet, stop!  
'Tis a rude spot; yet here, with thankful hearts,  
The foot-worn soldier and his family  
Have rested, wife and babe, and boy, perchance,  
Garb'd like his father, and already bound  
To his poor father's trade!⁴

³ "Original Poetry," Morning Post, June 11, 1799.  
⁴ "Original Poetry," Morning Post, October 21, 1800.
This contemplation of those who rest upon this seat by the road, the poem asserts, should create within the youthful traveler "a seat / Not built by hands, on which thy inner part, / Imperishable, many a grievous hour, / Or bleak, or sultry, may repose." The poem draws on vagrancy as a poetic resource for imaginative mobility.

This is precisely the relationship between dispossession and lyric that scholars have generally seen in literary vagrancy of the late eighteenth century. In her influential *Romantic Vagrancy*, for example, Celeste Langan reads the figure of the vagrant as a poetic “simulation” of the mobility, economic circulation, and self-expressive capability she attributes to the modern liberal subject. She argues that in Wordsworth’s poetry, “the vagrant’s mobility and expressivity are abstracted from their determining social conditions.” This twinned mobility and expressivity are analogous to the circulation of capital from which “the vagrant” is simultaneously abstracted: “Insofar as the circulation of capital entails infinite expansion, its movements correspond with the vagrant’s, whose comings and goings are similarly without end.” Thus, for Langan, “the vagrant” functions as an individual and abstract figure of mobility (both spatial and conceptual).

Meanwhile, a number of other scholars have built more locally historicist arguments about Wordsworth and vagrancy, as they seek to evaluate Wordsworth's political stances on dispossession and poverty in the context of vagrancy's changing stakes in the tumultuous political world of the 1790s. Their assessments of Wordsworth's political

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5 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 17.
8 Ibid., 62.
commitments vary, but these studies share an interest in Wordsworth's deployment of "the vagrant" as a kind of poetic subject that transforms dispossession into mobility, both literal and imaginative.

The eighteenth-century legal history of vagrancy, however, tells a different story. As a legal category, vagrancy does very little to name or criminalize a particular kind of person, nor is it primarily concerned with mobility. As a catchall category enabling summary conviction for a wide variety of petty offenses, vagrancy was an extremely flexible legal tool that served a variety of locally specific interests; parish Overseers of the Poor, for example, routinely used vagrancy law to expel people who threatened to cost the parish too much in poor relief, while magistrates and JPs used vagrancy law to summarily convict suspected or reputed thieves, prostitutes, or unknown persons thought to pose future threat. Legally, vagrancy was concerned less with the adjudication of individual criminal responsibility (as the allowance for summary conviction obviated the need for a trial) and more with the anticipatory management of populations associated with potential threat. For example, Richard Burn's popular instructional manual, *The Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer* (1755), details the preemptive practice of the privy search: "Every justice shall also, on receiving information that rogues and vagabonds are in any place within his jurisdiction, issue his warrant to the constable to

search for and apprehend such rogues and vagabonds.\textsuperscript{11} This is not a search for perpetrators of specific, known crimes; rather, it is a preventive search for those who might commit unknown crimes in the future, as deduced through the epistemology of vagrancy law and its link between idleness, unaccountability, and criminality:

\begin{quote}
[Justices] may examine such person on oath, as to his settlement, and means of livelihood; and the substance of such examination shall be put in writing … and if such person shall not shew, that he has a lawful way of getting his livelihood, or shall not procure some responsible housekeeper to appear to his character, and to give security (if required) for his future appearance at some other day to be fixed for that purpose, the justices may commit him to some prison or house of correction, for any time not exceeding six days; and in the mean time order the overseers of the poor, to advertise in some publick paper, a description of his person, and any thing that shall be found on him, or in his custody, and which he shall be suspected not to have come honestly by…\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

Many of these practices and their underlying assumptions were not new to this time period. However, the eighteenth century saw the emergence of a theorization of this preventive power under the rubric of police.\textsuperscript{13} In his \textit{Commentaries on the Laws of England} (1765-69), for example, William Blackstone explains the necessarily wide-ranging scope of police: "By public police and oeconomy I mean the due regulation and domestic order of the kingdom: whereby the individuals of the state, like members of a well-governed family, are bound to conform their general behaviour to the rules of propriety, good neighbourhood, and good manners; and to be decent, industrious, and inoffensive in their respective stations. This head of offences must therefore be very

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. See also J. M. Beattie, \textit{Crime and the Courts in England 1660-1800} (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), on evidence for the use of vagrancy law to incarcerate those suspected of having criminal reputations or the potential for criminality.
miscellaneous..." The offenses described in this chapter, under the heading of "Offences against the Public Health, and the Public Police or Oeconomy," include clandestine marriages, the keeping of bawdy-houses, poaching, and (most prominently), vagrancy. Markus Dirk Dubber emphasizes the centrality of vagrancy, which he terms "Blackstone's police offense par excellence," to both Blackstone's formulation of police power and the legacy of preventive policing that took Blackstone as its guide.  

As a paradigmatic target for police power, vagrancy did not index a knowable identity marked by particular qualities, but rather an unpredictable assemblage of anything that might arouse the suspicion of those keeping order. Bryan Wagner, in his reading of Blackstone and his later interpreters, thus argues that “the vagrant can exhibit no properties that matter from the standpoint of the law." How might this change the way we read the proliferation of vagrant figures in poetry of the late eighteenth century?

In this essay, I propose that we turn away from lyric subjectivity in order to see other crucial poetic valences of vagrancy in the late eighteenth century. In particular, I track the interconnected legal and literary histories of police power and population in an era that saw intensifying political debate about proposed schemes for the development of what we would now call the modern urban police force. Late eighteenth-century police reformers are increasingly concerned with the surveillance and management of surplus or, in Malthus’s influential formulation, “redundant population.” As Catherine Gallagher has shown, some of the most canonical early Romantic poetry, traditionally

15 Ibid., 4.162-175.
read for its emphasis on the solitary lyric subject, is in fact also crucially concerned with
the problem of population as it emerged as a touchstone for political economy at the end
of the eighteenth century. Population, as Charlotte Sussman demonstrates in her reading
of Walter Scott, traverses Romantic-period political economy and imaginative writing as
a fundamentally spatial concept; theories of population were above all "concerned with
the mobility of peoples, with ascertaining how and where certain groups might be shifted
to better suit the empire's needs." Population and space are indeed intimately connected in the writings of late
eighteenth-century police reformers and in new developments in the use of vagrancy law
in the 1790s. Police power, as the legal domain tasked with anticipating and managing
future threat, is theorized in this period as a tool to reshape space, manage the movements
of goods and people, and relocate or simply disperse "surplus" populations. In what
follows, I examine how the influential magistrate and police reformer Patrick Colquhoun
figures the geography of surplus population in his Treatise on the Police of the
Metropolis (1796) as well as his other writings on police reform. Colquhoun relies
heavily on vagrancy law as his legal prototype for the kind of preventive, discretionary
power he seeks to institute as the primary role of a centralized police force. At the same
time, he is crucially concerned with surplus population as a spatial phenomenon, and his
proposals rely on imaginative geographies of London that render specific locales, such as
the docks, metonymic condensations of the global economic circulation that converges
there. In his figurations of London's docks, rhetorical surplus condenses the globe into a

19 Catherine Gallagher, The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the
Victorian Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 7-35. For the ongoing importance of
population to literary aesthetics and the politics they enable, see Emily Steinlight, "Hardy's
20 Charlotte Sussman, “The Emptiness at the Heart of Midlothian: Nation, Narration, and Population,”
literally crowded and figuratively overdetermined space. I read Colquhoun alongside the poetry of his contemporary, Mary Robinson, in order to track surprising resonances across stark differences in these authors' genre, form, and political commitments. By populating her *Lyrical Tales* (1800) with isolated, dispossessed figures that gesture towards the aggregates invoked by the idea of surplus population, Robinson draws on the legal category of vagrancy in order to critically resignify the spatial imagination of police power. Robinson's poetic engagements with vagrancy thus offer insight into how poetry and law intersected at the end of the eighteenth century, and push us to reconsider a literary-historical narrative that has long been dominated by Wordsworth. For both Colquhoun and Robinson, vagrancy operates as an index of how different forms of surplus converge: the global circulation of capital generates surplus value, while at the same time creating, relocating, concentrating, and dispersing surplus populations throughout the British Empire.

**Vagrancy Law and Police Power**

In his *Lectures on Justice, Police, Revenue and Arms*—the precursor to his monumental *Wealth of Nations*—Adam Smith defines “the objects of police” as “the cheapness of commodities, public security and cleanliness.”

To a contemporary reader, this definition of “police” may sound idiosyncratic. However, Smith’s definition of “police” is in fact representative of how eighteenth-century legal and political theorists defined the term. After all, the centralized, uniformed, and professionalized metropolitan police force is a largely nineteenth-century invention, and the notion of “police” that

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informed—but predated—this invention includes a much more capacious sense of social and infrastructural order. The “police” of a city or community, for eighteenth-century theorists, included the apparatus for law-enforcement officials such as night watchmen and constables, but also nonhuman entities like street lighting, sewage, and a diffuse sense of moral order that exceeded the reach of the law.22

For eighteenth-century Anglo-American legal theorists, “police” did not indicate a uniformed, professional law-enforcement agency, but rather the legal domain dedicated to anticipating future threats to property or security. Both legally and culturally, that possibility of future threat was commonly encapsulated in the idea of vagrancy. A juridical category used in England since the fourteenth century to criminalize homelessness and the perceived refusal to work, vagrancy took on new meaning in the eighteenth century, as labor became central to economic theories of value, emergent penitentiary institutions promoted work as a mode of criminal rehabilitation, and transatlantic debates over slavery lent new urgency to the problem of defining "free labor." As vagrancy laws granted its enforcers powers of summary conviction, these laws provided wide discretion to authorities and located a crucial category of criminality outside the scope of trial by jury.

By figuring social threat as unpredictable mobility, ambiguity, and incoherence, the rhetoric of vagrancy justified an equally expansive mobility and flexibility for police power. The formal, rhetorical valence of vagrancy law has historical links to literary and print culture. For example, in the sixteenth century, as vagrancy laws proliferated in England and vagrancy became a topic of intense legal and political concern, the language

of vagrancy statutes drew heavily on "cony-catching" pamphlets, or popular narratives of trickery and criminality that sought to entertain their readers with portraits of urban underworlds.23

At the same time, the rhetorical structure of the statutes themselves is central to the legal construction of "vagrant" as a specific, yet resolutely open-ended legal category. The 1714 Vagrancy Act (12 Ann. c. 23) consolidated previous vagrancy laws into one act and provided the basic prototype for British vagrancy law until 1824. This statute declared:

That all Persons pretending themselves to be Patent-gatherers, or Collectors for Prisons, Gaols, or Hospitals, and wandring abroad for that purpose; all Fencers, Bear-wards, Common Players of Interludes, Minstrels, Juglers; all Persons pretending to be Gipsies, or wandring in the Habit or Form of counterfeit Egyptians, or pretending to have skill in Physiognomy, Palmistry, or like crafty Science, or pretending to tell Fortunes, or using any subtil Craft, or unlawful Games or Plays; all Persons able in Body, who run away, and leave their Wives or Children to the Parish, and not having wherewith otherwise to maintain themselves … and refuse to work for the usual and common Wages; and all other idle Persons wandring abroad and begging (except Soldiers, Mariners, or Seafaring Men, licensed by some Testimonial or Writing under the Hand and Seal of some Justice of Peace, setting down the Time and Place of his or their landing, and the Place to which they are to pass, and limiting the Time for such their passage, while they continue in the direct Way to the Place to which they are to pass, and during the time so limited) shall be deemed Rogues and Vagabonds.24

The long list of categories of people deemed vagrants under the law gathers together a number of social and economic practices: unauthorized and itinerant performance, the economic fraud of “counterfeit Egyptians,” fortune-telling, and begging under false pretenses, and the simple refusal to work. The refusal to work is at the heart of the legal definition of vagrancy elaborated here; fraudulent begging, fortune-telling, and

24 Vagrancy Act 1714 (12 Ann. c. 23), in William Hawkins, *Statutes at Large from the Magna Charta to the Seventh Year of King George the Second, Inclusive* [6 vols], (London: John Baskett, 1735), 4:585.
unauthorized performance all amount to refusal to work, as these activities threaten to provide sustenance without requiring “honest” or “legitimate” labor.

The form of the list, however, is just as important as its content. While the broader category of vagrancy implies some measure of conceptual unity, the statute's long, colorful catalogue of disparate types does not propose an essential theory of vagrancy, but proliferates the many forms that vagrancy might take while leaving open the possibility that the list could expand to include figures and actions not yet imagined. This effect--not one of hierarchically organized taxonomy, but of endlessly proliferating proximities--is produced through the list's parataxis. By evoking the "vagrant" through endless proliferation rather than the theorization of a particular kind of subject, the parataxis at the heart of vagrancy law grants an equally expansive discretionary power to apprehend figures whose form cannot be known in advance.

The enforcement of vagrancy law granted wide-ranging discretionary powers to a variety of officials, and Justices of the Peace in particular. These powers, as we will see in more detail in the work and writings of Patrick Colquhoun, served as a blueprint for the kind of discretionary power that would come to define police power as the police force emerged as a professionalized law-enforcement agency. For example, in the 1785 House of Commons debate on Pitt's London and Westminster Police Bill, the Solicitor General attempted to parry accusations that the proposed system would constitute "an arbitrary system of police" that would violate personal liberty. While a petition from the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London opposed the bill on the grounds that it would

create "new officers, invested with extraordinary and dangerous powers," the Solicitor General insisted that "he had no intention of introducing any new punishment, or constituting any new crime, except by extending and enforcing in some degree the vagrant laws."27 This bill, which would have centralized policing in London, ultimately failed due to justices' opposition to regulations that they saw as encroaching on their discretion and authority, but the centrality of vagrancy law as the legal prototype for delineating police power reappeared in later, successful attempts at centralization.28

Histories of Anglo-American law and criminal punishment commonly characterize the late eighteenth century as the era of the rise of the penitentiary. Since Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, literary and cultural studies in particular have emphasized the penitentiary's emphasis on internalized discipline and moral reform. These are indeed important eighteenth-century developments, but the simultaneous emergence of "police" as a realm of legal theory reveals that the appeal to reform and discipline of the individual subject coexisted with practices aimed not at reforming individual "criminals," but with managing populations and reshaping the spaces through which these populations moved.

**Patrick Colquhoun and the Imaginative Geographies of Surplus**

Founder of the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, acquaintance of Adam Smith, and a fellow product of the Scottish Enlightenment, Patrick Colquhoun brought his previous experience in the promotion of trade to bear on his work on police reform upon

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27 Ibid., 900; 889.
his arrival in London. His immersion in the methods and premises of political economy influence his conception of crime prevention less as a program for moral reform and more as the management of collective behavior on the scale of population. Colquhoun's actual historical importance is debated; Ruth Paley, for example, argues that his writings actually exerted far less policy influence than he has been credited with by traditional, institutional histories of the police.\textsuperscript{29} At the same time, regardless of the success of his actual proposals, Colquhoun's writings were certainly widely read and catapulted the topic of urban policing into the national political conversation.\textsuperscript{30}

In his descriptions of London, Colquhoun figures the place as the potential victim of crime. In his \textit{General View of the Depredations Committed on the West-India and Other Property in the Port of London} (1799), Colquhoun situates the theory of preventive policing in primarily spatial terms:

\begin{quote}
Police as recently exemplified, may be said to be a new science, not yet perfectly understood ... Wherever a proper Police attaches, good order and security will prevail; where it does not, confusion, irregularity, outrages, and crimes must be expected; wherever great bodies of aquatic labourers are collected together, risque of danger from turbulent behaviour, will be greater in proportion to the number of depraved characters, who, from being collected in one spot, may hatch mischief, and carry it into effect much easier in Docks than on the River. A Police only can counteract this; and to the same preventive system will the commerce of the Port be indebted for securing both the Docks and the Pool against Conflagration.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

Police here responds to a geographical contraction that London's global commerce has instigated: by concentrating so many valuable goods and so many sailors in one place, Colquhoun argues, London creates conditions for crime unprecedented in their scope, and


thus requiring an unprecedented response. Just as the causes of crime here are spatial, so is the mechanism of its prevention: the risk here comes from the density of specific populations (both "aquatic laborers" and "depraved characters") drawn into one spot. "Wherever a proper Police attaches" will be protected from disorder; the potential victims in need of protection here are not individuals, but locations and their economic activity: "the commerce of the Port" will be ensured as the River Police "secure [...] both the Docks and the Pool against Conflagration."

In this text, Colquhoun establishes the importance of regular, preventive patrols of the Thames by arguing for the river's unique economic importance: "Let the mind only contemplate this proud view of the Commerce of a Single River, unparalleled in point of extent and magnitude in the whole world." The river's "vast extent of Floating Property," Colquhoun argues, is what simultaneously elevates and endangers it; as the point of convergence for the empire's military and commercial power, the docks are where London meets the world--and is made vulnerable to it. The docks—the transnational space where people, goods, and ships converge between journeys that shape the globe in the image of the British Empire--become a metonym for the reach of imperial power, even as (Colquhoun argues) this concentration of goods and people make it uniquely vulnerable to unrest and disorder.

In his earlier Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis (1796), Colquhoun uses nearly the same language to describe not the docks, but the entirety of London, which he calls "one of the greatest and most extensive manufacturing towns, perhaps in the

32 Ibid., 4.
33 Ibid., 2.
universe; combining in one spot every attribute that can occasion an assemblage of moving property, unparalleled in point of extent, magnitude, and value, in the whole world." This language for the description of London is lifted nearly verbatim for his description of the Thames in the General View; London "occasion[s] an assemblage of moving property" while the Thames gathers a "vast extent of moving property" and the description of London's economic power--that it is "unparalleled in point of extent, magnitude, and value, in the whole world"—is retooled into a description of the commerce on the Thames, unchanged except for the deletion of "value." The easy slippage between river and city grants the river a kind of surplus signification: if the river can also rhetorically encompass the entire city, it becomes bigger than itself.

London here is primarily characterized through its ability to generate surplus--not only surplus value generated by the circulation of "moving property," but also the surplus populations that threaten this value, and the rhetorical surplus employed to figure the unprecedented scale of both profit and threat. This figuration of the city accomplishes an imaginative contraction of space through a vivid and powerful metaphor. To characterize a city primarily through its ability to condense "an assemblage of moving property" is to activate a specific theory of what a city is. This formulation de-emphasizes any sense of fixed location or boundaries as crucial to the city's identity; the demarcation of city limits, for example, is far less important to this vision of the city than is the convergence of people and goods that the city contains. "Moving property," of course, emphasizes the city's economic role above all, and it places circulation at the center of that economy; the

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34 Patrick Colquhoun, A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis; Containing a Detail of the Various Crimes and Misdemeanors by which Public and Private Property and Security are, at Present, Injured and Endangered: and Suggesting Remedies for their Prevention, 3rd ed (London: H. Fry for C. Dilly, 1796), 410.
city is not a fixed spot where wealth and power dwell, but rather a concentrated movement of goods, people, and capital. The city is not an organic whole, but rather a composite, open to constant reorganization to accommodate this endless circulation.

If a city is an "assemblage of moving property," open to constant change, then what might police surveillance of such a place look like, and what makes such a project even possible? In other words, what does it mean to know a city, if the city is far more than the sum total of its streets? Colquhoun turns to the logic and methods of political economy for an answer. To know the city, he suggests, is to anticipate the probable collective behavior of its populations. After asking the reader to contemplate London as an "assemblage of moving property," he then turns to the potentially criminal types that pose a threat to this property:

Let the mind pass from the contemplation of this vast aggregate of floating wealth, exposed to depredation in ten thousand different ways, and examine the present state of the morals of the Metropolis by a reference to the various classes of individuals who live idly and support themselves by pursuits that are either criminal, illegal, dissolute, vicious, or depraved; it will then be discovered that acts of delinquency and the corruption of manners, have uniformly kept pace with the increase of the riches of the Capital.35

Colquhoun's language of aggregation and assemblage here asserts that the two forms of surplus—surplus value and potentially criminal surplus population—are inextricably and mathematically linked, as "acts of delinquency ... have uniformly kept pace with the increase of the riches of the Capital."

The long, miscellaneous catalogue of people that follows, including categories like “Strangers out of work who have wandered up to London in search of employment,”

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“Strolling Minstrels, Ballad Singers, Show Men, Trumpeters, and Gipsies,” “Unfortunate Females of all descriptions, who support themselves chiefly or wholly by prostitution,” and “Common Beggars and Vagrants asking alms,” resembles a vagrancy law in its form and content, but with a key difference: each type is quantified, and the different classes of criminalized people are then aggregated into a single figure of 115,000 people.36

Colquhoun's quantitative tallies of vagrants and disorderly people in the Treatise suggest a theory of crime that privileges population management over individual moral reform. Early eighteenth-century criminal punishment was often predicated on a biographical theory of crime, like the kind of narrative that structures criminal biographies and execution speeches: small offenses like drunkenness, neglect of work, and keeping bad company lead inexorably down a path of increasing criminal depravity that can only end at the gallows.37 Colquhoun's tally of petty offenders, however, asserts no such narrative sequence; while offenses like prostitution, vagrancy, and public disorder are, as before, linked to the threat of more serious crime, the link does not take the form of narrative sequence or biography, but rather aggregation, probability, and contingent simultaneity. He does not claim to predict which particular vagrants will commit which particular crimes as part of any particular criminal biography, but he does claim that any city with such a high population of vagrants must necessarily be at risk.

Just as Colquhoun here brings in the miscellaneous catalogue of criminal types to illustrate London's character as "the general receptacle for the idle and depraved," he also uses this familiar form to gesture towards London's corresponding status as the receptacle

36 Ibid., x-xi.
for all the world's goods, whether obtained legally or not.\textsuperscript{38} As he discusses receivers of stolen goods, Colquhoun again incites the reader's affective response to his descriptions of a vast, criminal economy, hidden in plain sight: "It is a melancholy reflection to consider how many individuals, young and old, who are not of the class or description of common or even reputed thieves, are implicated in this system of depredation."\textsuperscript{39} He goes on to render this spectral network visible through another long, miscellaneous catalogue of suspicious figures, which Colquhoun reveals by imaginatively peeling away the surface visible to a passer-by on the street:

In their houses, although a beggarly appearance of old iron, old rags, or second-hand clothes, is only exhibited, the back apartments are often filled with the most valuable articles of shipstores, copper bolts and nails, brass and other valuable metals, West-India produce, household goods and wearing apparel; purchased from artificers, labourers in the docks, lumpers, glutmen, menial servants, apprentices, journeymen, porters, chimney-sweepers, itinerant Jews, and others; who, thus encouraged and protected, go on with impunity, and without the least dread of detection, in supplying the numerous imaginary wants which are created in a large capital...\textsuperscript{40}

The same parataxis that unites "lumpers," "apprentices" and "itinerant Jews" also places commodities into physical and conceptual proximity; both in the storehouses and in Colquhoun's prose, "copper bolts and nails" brush up against "West-India produce" and "wearing apparel." The stores of stolen goods, for Colquhoun, constitute a shadowy mirror of Britain's global commerce. This resonance happens through form as well as content; the contraction of so many items and people into such a small textual space figures global commerce through paratactic contraction. This is also a kind of rhetorical surplus: it makes the overstuffed warehouse contain the whole world of goods, and uses the disjunctive proximity and miscellany of the copious list to induce an aesthetic of

\textsuperscript{38} Colquhoun, \textit{Treatise}, v.  \\
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 12.  \\
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 12-13
condensed excess.

London, through the spatial contractions of global commerce and British naval power, becomes a microcosm of an empire, as the objects, people, and flows of capital coming through the city are rendered metonymic for the itineraries that brought them there. But police, according to Colquhoun, does not just respond to the global metropolis’s capacity for rapid change; it also aims to reshape the city’s geography in sweeping ways by redistributing its populations, regulating its commerce, and altering its infrastructure.

For example, he lauds the Thames River Police for its apparent success in managing or simply driving away populations associated with future threat: “By means of a Police Guard upon the Quays, which forms a collatoral branch of the General System, the Scuffle-hunters and Long-apron-men, who were accustomed to prowl about for the purpose of pillage, have in a great measure deserted the quays and landing-places.”

When he states approvingly that “not a few of these mischievous members of society have quitted their former residences, and disappeared,” he is not interested in where these people ended up or whether or not they have been rehabilitated; he is simply interested in their disappearance from a particular space. His ultimate goal is rendered in the language of population and probability: “by administering the Laws in conjunction with a very zealous, able, and humane Magistrate, in a manner rather calculated to restrain than to punish, a multitude of individuals, together with a numerous offspring, are likely to be rendered useful members of the Body Politic, instead of nuisances in Society.”

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41 Colquhoun, *General View*, 4
42 Ibid., 31
43 Ibid., 32; bolded emphasis mine.
For Colquhoun, this concentration of surplus population is ironically presented as the direct result of the enormous scale of economic activity that converges in the docks and fuels Britain's global economic and military expansion. The same geographic contraction that allows London to become metonymic for its global commercial reach also renders the city a unique vantage point for comprehending an underworld of crime: "London is not only the grand magazine of the British Empire, but also the general receptacle for the idle and depraved of almost every Country." In other words, just as the vast array of colonial goods circulating through London allows the city's populace to encounter, materially and immediately, the reach of empire, so does the quantified circulation of criminalized bodies allow Colquhoun to imagine policing as a gaze that can comprehend crime as a totality.

When Colquhoun testified in an 1816 parliamentary inquiry into the "State of the Police of the Metropolis," he reiterated the spatial concerns central to his earlier writings. For example, of "disorderly houses" (a particular focus of this inquiry), Colquhoun says: "The law, I think, at present is defective as to houses of bad fame, they can only be touched by an indictment; it is very difficult to prove what they call 'bawdry,' and they are generally convicted on the proof of their being disorderly houses; if there was a summary jurisdiction, I think it would be much more effectual." In other words, Colquhoun wishes for the power to summarily convict not only individuals, but places and the populations that occupy them.

When asked how best to prevent crime, Colquhoun repeats the definition of

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44 Colquhoun, *Treatise*, xi.
45 *Report from the Committee on the State of the Police of the Metropolis* (London: House of Commons, 1816), 48.
"police" as having an essential orientation towards preventive management of spaces and populations: he advises that Parliament consolidate criminal law, centrally regulate police, systematize vagrancy law, update the Poor Law, and “promote emigration of our surplus population to the colonies, since, from its rapid increase and the introduction of machinery, the supply of labour has for a length of time appeared to me, in almost all branches of industry, to be greater than the demand.”46 Surplus population is perhaps the central concern of police as theorized by Colquhoun. And, as his call for colonial emigration illustrates, surplus population is both produced and theorized on a global scale.

Colquhoun, alongside fellow magistrate John Harriot, was hired by the Committee of West India Planters and Merchants in 1798 to help establish a new private police force to patrol the new West India Docks.47 The construction of the docks themselves were the first project undertaken by this association, which was founded in 1793 in order to propose and lobby for the construction of new, larger docks for the West India trade in the Isle of Dogs, east of the city docks then in use.48 After extended debate with the city and with other merchants, the London Docks Bill authorizing the construction passed in 1800. Even before enlisting Colquhoun to establish the Thames River Police, the Committee of West India Planters and Merchants saw dock construction as relevant to the prevention of crime; their original proposal argued that larger docks would speed the unloading process, both cutting costs and reducing the exposure of goods to theft, and a later report of 1797 reiterates that the prospect of relocating the

46 Ibid., 33
docks "effectually destroys the whole system of plunder which is now practised on West India property."49

The West India Docks Company, which administered the docks, instituted uniquely tight controls on the space of the docks, requiring ships to use Company laborers for loading and unloading rather than allowing them to hire their own labor, and preventing anyone other than Company employees or revenue officers from entering the docks without supervision.50 This intensive control over a space designated for one specific regional trade was relatively new, but there was precedent for singling out the Thames and its docks as a uniquely important and vulnerable space requiring uniquely extensive powers of crime prevention. For example, the 1756 Lead and Iron Act (29 Geo. II c. 30) authorized magistrates to demand that those in possession of metals suspected of being stolen from ships or warehouses give an account of how these items came into their possession. Meanwhile, the Bumboat Act of 1762 (2 Geo. III c.28) allowed for the summary conviction of those in possession of cargo suspected to have been stolen from a ship in the Thames.51

Patrick Colquhoun's proposal for an officially sanctioned version of this private police force, published as an appendix to his General View, names these acts as the legal prototype for police power more generally. After critiquing existing law for being limited to “penalties and legal powers” rather than preventive policing, he argues for the

50 Stern, 75.
expansion of “provisions authorizing slight penalties, inflictable by summary procedure, on circumstantial evidence, aided by the examination of the delinquent, as under the Bumboat Act, and Stolen-metal Act, where, on regular proof, it would be felony; and for attaching upon the practice of depredation, in such stages of its progress, as are previous or subsequent to the felonious act.”  

Summary conviction was the legal tool that Colquhoun saw as absolutely central to policing the docks. As texts like Colquhoun's promote the expansion of summary conviction, summary conviction circulates in political commentary as a theory of criminal justice suited to population-oriented and probabilistic thinking. At the same time, Colquhoun's interest in summary conviction was crucial to his spatial understanding of policing: this is the particular legal tool he advocates as the best way to manage spaces and the populations that move through them.

These concerns with space and population have a very long legal afterlife. In a very different time and place—late twentieth-century California—geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes the rise of mass incarceration in spatial terms. The “prison fix,” she argues, is a spatial solution to the problem of surplus populations, as the state redistributes overwhelmingly urban populations to rural prisons, just as industry has left these cities and created the conditions for mass unemployment, underemployment, and poverty. In her overview of the standard legal common sense about punishment, Gilmore names the four aims of punishment, many of which date back to eighteenth-century thinkers like Beccaria and Blackstone: retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation, and incapacitation. Gilmore emphasizes the spatial logic of incapacitation, noting that it

52 Colquhoun, General View, 37; 43
“doesn’t pretend to change anything about people except where they are.”

Similarly, in her recent study of misdemeanor adjudication in New York City, Issa Kohler-Hausmann links the spatial logic of "broken-windows" policing to what she calls the "managerial model" of criminal justice: one concerned not with the adjudication of individual guilt or innocence of specific crimes, but rather with "managing potentially risky populations with record-keeping and sorting."

The establishment of the Thames River Police relied on an understanding of the Thames and its docks as a unique legal territory. And as tracked through print representation, the Thames docks offer us a unique vantage point: this place is imagined as the focal point for the most locally specific development of police power, but also, simultaneously, the most expansive colonial geographies. It's unusually easy to see here how the logics of police power and summary conviction--the logic of probability, suspicion, and "surplus population"—are embedded in global regimes of race and empire.

The West Indies Dock Company's leadership and investors, for example, included some of the most prominent slave traders and representatives of the pro-slavery lobby in London at the end of the eighteenth century. The work of securing larger docks for the West Indies trade and policing the space of those docks went hand in hand with the work of defending slavery and the slave trade in political lobbying and in the public sphere.

54 Ibid., 14.
57 Draper, 438-41. However, as Draper shows, investors with ties to the slave economy were not necessarily united in support of the West Indies Dock Company; slavery was "fully integrated into the City's commercial and financial structure," and thus cannot be localized in just one group or political interest (432). For the increasing coherence of West Indies planters and merchants as a political lobby in the second half of the eighteenth century, see Andrew O'Shaughnessy, “The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West India Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution,” The Historical Journal 40.1 (1997): 71-95.
The London docks, in Colquhoun's writing, are above all a condensation of both surplus value and surplus population. They offer an imagined prospect of the global networks they materially condense. In the final section of this essay, I now turn to the resonance of this global imaginative condensation with eighteenth-century poetic engagements with surplus value, surplus population, and forms of rhetorical surplus enlisted to enact a strikingly similar form of geographic contraction to that which appears throughout Colquhoun's writings.

**Mary Robinson and the Poetics of Surplus**

Figurations of the eighteenth-century London docks offer a particular insight into what Lisa Lowe terms "the intimacies of four continents." For Lowe, modern liberalism, which she defines as "a project that includes at once both the universal promises of rights, emancipation, wage labor, and free trade," simultaneously relies on and occludes colonial violence and the "racialized distributions of freedom and humanity." These occluded "intimacies of four continents," which Lowe tracks across colonial state archives, are of particular interest to me because in the specific eighteenth-century poetic mode I examine first here—the locodescriptive—such intimacies are not hidden at all. Indeed, whereas the colonial archives that form the backbone of Lowe's reading divide the world into distinct regions requiring specific modes of colonial rule, the spatial imaginary of eighteenth-century locodescriptive poetry does precisely the opposite: it collapses distance, traverses dizzying extremes of geographic scale, and attempts to render the economic and political forces of an emergent global capitalism a

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59 Ibid., 3; 36.
visible feature of the landscape. These poems rarely offer critique of commercial or colonial expansion—indeed, poetry is, as Suvir Kaul argues, perhaps the eighteenth-century literary genre most aggressively imperial in its political and aesthetic visions.60

And so before turning to the (generically and politically) distinct works of the Romantic poet Mary Robinson, I offer a brief foray through the earlier eighteenth-century locodescriptive poems that I have never been able to avoid recalling when reading works of late eighteenth-century police reform. I'll begin with the most literal resonance: the river. Pope's *Windsor-Forest* (1714) ventriloquizes Father Thames in a moment of imaginative expansion across space and time:

The time shall come, when free as seas or wind
Unbounded Thames shall flow for all mankind,
Whole nations enter with each swelling tide,
And seas but join the regions they divide. (397-400)61

Pope's couplets create a bounded space for boundless imaginative expansion; while the first couplet's first line proposes the endless expansiveness of "free as seas or wind," the following line resolves this expansiveness by condensing it into the Thames—which at the same time dialectically enlarges to accommodate this expansion, becoming "unbounded" and reaching "all mankind." The port of London, by proxy, accomplishes a similar expansion in the next couplet. Metonymy transforms ships into the "whole nations" that sent them, which in turn lends London the capacity to encompass the entire world by receiving these nations "with each swelling tide." This synechdochal geography of empire reaches into an anticipated futurity, as on the banks of the Thames, "where towering oaks their growing honours rear, / And future navies on thy shores appear"

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In eighteenth-century Britain, poetry was perhaps the literary form for imagining national geographies, colonial expansion, and the place of Britain in global histories of empire. I now turn briefly to one of the century's most canonical, respected, and widely read poems of imaginative geography: James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730). *The Seasons* is a dizzying feat of scale, both geographical and temporal. Book II, “Summer,” which traverses the most globally expansive scope, begins with the widest possible prospect of space and time, as Thomson places the Earth in cosmic time and the motion of the planets. The cosmic prospect then narrows to the merely global, as Thomson follows the light of the sun to Earth, associating their influence with the appearance of precious metals underground. These metals, the physical traces of unseen planetary forces, then resolve into other unseen forces, commerce and war:

Hence Labor draws its tools; hence burnished War 
Gleams on the day; the nobler works of Peace 
Hence bless mankind, and generous Commerce binds 
The round of nations in a golden chain. (II.136-39)\(^{62}\)

A vein of precious metal, according to this theorization of space, is the product of cosmic forces and the engine of global ones. A prospect view that includes this vein of metal is simultaneously a gesture to these larger forces, which are made visible through the concrete metaphor of the "golden chain." Global commerce is rendered a material feature of the imagined landscape.

From the cosmic to the planetary, the poem’s gaze then contracts suddenly to the minute. After a meditation on how, under the sun, “full Nature swarms with life; one wondrous mass / Of animals, or atoms organized,” Thomson narrows the scale to a few

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humble scenes: an orchard, a pond, a stream (II.289-90). These, in turn, lead to yet another jump in scale, to the smallest imaginable, as Thomson describes the microscopic life forms populating these scenes:

> The downy orchard, and the melting pulp
> Of mellow fruit, the nameless nations feed
> Of evanescent insects. Where the pool
> Stands mantled o’er with green, invisible,
> Amid the floating verdure millions stray.

[...]

> ...Nor is the stream
> Of purest crystal, nor the lucid air,
> Though one transparent vacancy it seems,
> Void of their unseen people. These, concealed
> By the kind art of forming Heaven, escape
> The grosser eye of man: for, if the worlds
> In worlds enclosed should on his senses burst,
> From cates ambrosial and the nectared bowl
> He would abhorrent turn; and in dead night,
> When silence sleeps o’er all, be stunned with noise. (II.301-17)

Figure works here to link the scales of the natural world to the geopolitical one; the insects are “nameless nations” that populate ripe fruit, and the microscopic life hidden in air and water are “unseen people.” This trope, which Kevis Goodman terms the "microscopic eye," had proliferated across genres since the publication of Hooke's *Micrographia* (1665) and the accompanying widespread awareness of the possibility of visual perception that exceeded the capacity of the human eye. As she argues, the invocation of perceptual surplus here gestures towards economic surplus, as the operations of global commerce produce visible effects, yet operate according to forces imagined to be as invisible as the "nameless nations" hidden in the pond: “The microscopic eye momentarily runs the reification of commodities in reverse. There are

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This effortless move between scales primes us to link an English pastoral landscape with vaster temporal and geographic scales, as Thomson constructs the spatial architecture of the poem (the sun is the link between the cosmic and the earth, and it sets global economic flows into motion, and it also populates every seemingly tranquil landscape with unseen forces, whether that’s microscopic life that flourishes in sunlight or the economic forces spurred by the precious metals supposedly planted in the earth by the light of the sun and the other planets.) Britain rides the coattails of this power; by echoing the sun, Britain effortlessly takes its place at the center of a cosmography already set up by the poem’s prospects of scale:

A simple scene! yet hence Britannia sees
Her solid grandeur rise: hence she commands
Th’ exalted stores of every brighter clime,
The treasures of the Sun without his rage
Hence, fervent all, with culture, toil, and arts,
Wide glows her land... (II.423-29)

Just as “nameless nations” are hidden within a supposedly familiar pastoral scene, this “simple scene” is actually charged with expansive power, as “hence Britannia sees / Her solid grandeur rise” to command the “treasures of the Sun” in “every brighter clime.” From commanding the “treasures of the Sun,” Britain quickly supplants the sun altogether: “Wide glows her land...” The rhetorical surplus of the poem--the copia at the heart of the locodescriptive mode--helps render surplus value visible by constructing an imagined geography through which the reader can traverse "th'exalted stores of every brighter clime" and see the world through a perceptual apparatus that renders a single pond the home of seemingly infinite "nameless nations."

64 Ibid., 60.
This spatial imaginary was not confined to poetry alone, and the theorization of scale that dominates the attention of poems like *The Seasons* can be seen across seemingly disparate genres. Frans de Bruyn argues that the new genre of the statistical table, for example, owed much of its geographic logic to eighteenth-century poetry. When statistics emerged as a new science in eighteenth-century Germany, it was a specifically geographical form of knowledge: a method for comparing different states (hence the name) across multiple standardized variables such as population, agricultural production, imports, and exports.65 While the chorography privileges what is visible to the eye, the statistical table, de Bruyn argues, draws on the epistemology of the poetic prospect in order to “posit the existence of an ideal reader with the acuity to see the underlying pattern in the particulars.”66 Just as the prospect offers the reader a view that exceeds the reach of the human eye and renders intangible things like nations, economic flows, and deep time as visible as the ships, rivers, and plants that index them, the statistical table offers the reader the possibility of “seeing” a state on the page.67

Indeed, as the poetic prospects elaborated by Pope and Thomson resonate with Colquhoun's imagined prospects of the London docks, these poets' engagements with geography, perception, and surplus also live on in Romantic poetry, even as georgic and locodescriptive modes were eclipsed by variations on the lyric; as Kevix Goodman argues, "after the taste for formal imitation subsided, the georgic mode could persist in concerns for positioning and sense reception, for the instruments and feelings—the channels of sensation and perception—by which later readers sought to know the

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66 Ibid., 119.  
67 Ibid., 115-118.
world.”

One of these later attempts to "know the world," I argue, can be seen in the works of Mary Robinson. I read Robinson's critical engagement with vagrancy in her last collection of poetry, the *Lyrical Tales* of 1800. From "The Lascar" to "The Alien Boy" and countless other figures of exile and loss, the *Lyrical Tales* foreground the dispossessed, the stateless, and the fugitive. Vagrancy, for Robinson, takes on a global scope, bringing the distant dispossessions of colonial exploitation and war into immediate view. Throughout the collection, Robinson gathers vagrant figures along the lines of Colquhoun’s global geography, but in a text avowedly critical of the economic and political systems constituting this geography and rendering the subjects of these poems the “redundant populations” who move along lines of what Colquhoun terms “assemblages of moving property.”

The *Lyrical Tales*, one might say, begins with vagrancy. With no prefatory material like the manifesto that had graced Wordsworth and Coleridge’s 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, the *Lyrical Tales*’ opening image is a homeless child in a churchyard, disturbing his poet-interlocutor with his insistence on remaining unincorporated into community or narrative—on remaining out of place. The opening lines of the first poem, “All Alone,” voice the speaker’s attempt to hail a singular figure into a sentimental narrative of recognition and sympathy:

Ah! Wherefore by the Church-yard side,  
Poor little LORN ONE, dost thou stray?  

The speaker asks the boy why he weeps, positioning their encounter and the

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aestheticization of the boy’s suffering as a potential reincorporation into the social world:

Thou art not left alone, poor boy,  
The Trav’ller stops to hear thy tale; 
No heart, so hard, would thee annoy!  
For tho’ thy mother’s cheek is pale,  
And withers under yon grave stone,  
Thou art not, Urchin, left alone. (7-12)

The speaker’s long description of the boy’s material and affective deprivation—noting that his “eyes are dim, [his] looks forlorn” (21) and that his “naked feet are wounded sore / With naked thorns” (25-26) ends with a command to end his mourning and rejoin the social world from which he has been totally unmoored:

Weep, weep no more; on yonder hill  
The village bells are ringing, gay;  
The merry reed, and brawling rill  
Call thee to rustic sports away.  
Then wherefore weep, and sigh, and moan,  
A truant from the throng—alone? (43-48)

The boy, however, refuses the speaker’s invitation to have his suffering incorporated into the social world through poetic representation. He rebuffs his poet-interlocutor’s claims of affiliation through sympathy, and insists that he will stay at his mother’s grave until he, too, is dead. The boy's vagrancy does not ultimately consist of wandering, displacement, or motion; it is his refusal to leave his mother's grave, his insistence in remaining motionless and out of place, and his refusal to live a legible life. While Colquhoun figures vagrancy as the infinitely mutable potential of the unknown body to do anything, the boy in "All Alone" resists all attempts to predict his future actions by refusing to do anything at all.

The *Lyrical Tales* are densely populated with such solitary figures: people who have disappeared from somewhere else, only to end up here. From "The Alien Boy," who
"lives / A melancholy proof that Man may bear / All the rude storms of Fate, and still
suspire / By the wide world forgotten" (137-40) to the "Poor, Singing Dame," who dies in
prison, and "The Fugitive" and "Poor Marguerite," the Lyrical Tales portray countless
figures displaced by war, the administration of the law, and simple social abandonment.
When the "wan Youth" of "Edmund's Wedding" makes himself and his reasons for
"sighing so deeply" and "frantically raving" known, it is to court his own prosecution and
execution for desertion (2-3), while the protagonists of "The Shepherd's Dog" are saved
only by their total disappearance from the social world.

In “The Lascar,” Robinson is perhaps most prominently engaged with
contemporary debates about policing, labor, and global commerce. In her narrative of an
Indian sailor who escapes London only to be denied charity and finally killed by a
fearful, confused traveler in the English countryside, Robinson’s portrayal of vagrancy
stages the geographies of police power with which authors like Colquhoun are intimately
engaged. In this poem, the lascar’s status as discarded labor for the East India Company,
displaced and idle in England, registers a specifically global scale of dispossession and
population management.70

Humberto Garcia has recently placed "The Lascar" in a broader historical context
of colonial dispossession, as he examines the production and portrayal of lascars as
"useless and invisible figures who were nonetheless indispensable to capitalist modes of
production on a global scale."71 Robinson’s poem, he argues, "reveal[s] the historical
logic by which British exploitation in the colonies engenders precarious wageless life in
the metropolis.” At the same time, however, he points out Robinson’s use of tropes common to antislavery writing, which enable her to mobilize cross-racial sympathy while shoring up white women’s moral and poetic authority. The lascar’s protest, after all, takes the form of the ventriloquized plea of “Am I not a man and a brother?” that circulated as the signature appeal of British antislavery:

> ‘What have I done?’ the LASCAR cried—  
> ‘That Heaven to me the pow’r denied  
> To touch the soul of man, and share  
> A brother’s love, a brother’s care?  
> Why is this dingy form decreed  
> To bear oppression’s scourge and bleed?— (245-50)

While Robinson certainly draws on conventional antislavery appeals to sympathy, she also uses vagrancy to do something other than hold up an individual lyric subject for sympathetic identification. When she engages with vagrancy, in fact, I argue that she turns away from the individual subject and gestures towards population, surplus, and the spatial imagination of policing. By identifying the lascar with the juridical and epistemological structures of vagrancy, Robinson expands her critique of failed sympathy to encompass a broader indictment of the structures of knowledge that render bodies out of place enemies of the “police of the metropolis” and figure the preservation of public order as the common business of being British.

For example, the lascar’s fatal encounter with a traveler in the woods brings into sharp relief the violence of the system that underpins his experience in England. The failures of sympathy the poem documents are not simply cases of hard-heartedness, indifference, or individual prejudice; rather, they are a necessary element of a structure of knowledge that defines some bodies as proper objects of preemptive violence:

72 Ibid., 262.
And now again the cavalcade
Pass’d slowly near the upland glade;—
But HE was dark, and dark the scene,
The torches long extinct had been;
He call’d, but, in the stormy hour,
His feeble voice had lost its pow’r,
‘Till, near a tree, beside the flood,
A night-bewilder’d Trav’ller stood. (221-238)

The description here—that the traveler supposedly cannot see the lascar in the darkness because his skin is also dark, and that the lascar cannot be heard because he has lost his voice through thirst or exhaustion—literalizes the lascar’s earlier complaint that his skin and voice fail to achieve sympathetic recognition from passers-by. The material conditions of his deprivation here render him invisible, and, as Robinson reminds us, this deprivation is structured by race. But, as above, the ability of the lascar’s dark skin to “disappear” him into the dark landscape is not necessarily an empirical statement; rather, this is a reflection of the traveler’s perception of the scene in front of him. And it is the traveler’s (racially inflected) perception that turns this encounter violent:

The LASCAR now with transport ran
‘Stop! stop!’ he cried—with accents bold;
The Trav’ller was a fearful man—
And next to life he priz’d his gold!—
He heard the wand’rer madly cry;
He heard his footsteps following nigh;
He nothing saw, while onward prest,
Black as the sky, the Indian’s breast;
Till his firm grasp he felt, while cold
Down his pale cheek the big drop roll’d;
Then, struggling to be free, he gave—
A deep wound to the LASCAR Slave. (229-240)

The racialized invisibility of the lascar here is reiterated; to the traveler, he is utterly invisible, and then suddenly, terrifyingly present as he hears the lascar's cries but cannot track them, seeing only “nothing” as the lascar, “black as the sky,” cannot be
distinguished from the landscape. The traveler fears for his property, identifies the formless, unseen figure as an unknowable threat, and responds with the discretionary violence that considers a literal stab in the dark a legitimate form of self-defense. Everywhere and nowhere at once, unknown and thus carrying potentially unknowable threat, the embodiment of every danger that might befall a propertied traveler on the road: the lascar here is perceived by the traveler as the quintessential vagrant according to police power.

The lascar’s “transport” and its effect on the traveler acquires a rich resonance with these practices of policing the global metropolis when read through Miranda Burgess’s recent inquiry into “transport” as a Romantic theory of circulating affect that condenses what Adela Pinch terms the “vagrancy of emotions” into “removals of the body both imaginative and physical.” These removals, Burgess argues, link the material capacities of transport—the ever-increasing mobility of goods, people, and information between colony and metropole, and throughout the globe—to the particular anxieties attending the possibility of being emotionally moved against one’s will: “In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, new transportation technologies, with the associated potential for circulating texts and feelings, made the prospect of global traffic newly available as an object of anxious representation, an overwhelmingly spatial version of the they who are not-I.”

When the lascar runs “with transport,” his transport is thus richly multivalent. After the slow, plodding movement of the previous stanza, the lascar’s run is indeed a

sudden removal of the body from one place to another. At the same time, his sight of the traveler—the last chance he has to seek help—is a sight that moves the lascar rapidly from one emotional state to another, as his “feeble voice” is transformed into “accents bold.” But might we also, following Burgess, read this “transport” as the lascar's capacity to incite unwilled affect in the traveler, and in the reader? His very bodily presence in the English countryside and the perceptual frames available through which Britons might interpret that presence all point to the unbreakable link between his body’s capacity to incite feeling (whether pity, terror, or disgust) and the global transports of goods and labor through the geographies of colonial extraction that dislocated him.

The anxiety of transport, I want to suggest, also draws on the geographic imaginary of the emerging project of policing the imperial metropolis. Bodies out of place, as writers like Colquhoun stress, signify a protean threat that could have originated anywhere, and that threatens to disrupt the processes of global commerce, colonial extraction, and enclosure that dislocated these bodies in the first place.

Robinson places the figure of colonial dispossession squarely in the picturesque English countryside, allowing his death to intrude where “the Lark, on flutt’ring wings, / Its early Song, delighted sings” and “the Swains their flocks to shelter lead” (293-94; 296). But Robinson also narrates the movement from city to country, dramatizing in the account of one body’s dislocations a dizzying permeability between city and country, colony and metropole. The lascar’s global vagrancy—both his geographic displacement and his exclusion from economic personhood and survival—renders him a force that blends disparate spaces together:

Shut out the Sun, O! pitying Night!
Make the wide world my silent tomb!
O’ershade this northern, sickly light,
And shroud me, in eternal gloom!
My Indian plains, now smiling glow,
There stands my Parent’s hovel low,
And there the tow’ring aloes rise
And fling their perfumes to the skies!
There the broad palm Trees covert lend,
There Sun and Shade delicious blend;
But here, amid the blunted ray,
Cold shadows hourly cross my way! (37-48)

The lascar’s descriptions here bring metropole and colony into the same frame; he registers both the immediate imaginative presence of his “Indian plains” that “now smiling glow” and their immense distance from where he stands under the “blunted ray” and “cold shadows” of England. These geographies are further mingled later; suffering under the heat of the midday sun in a "sultry waste" (108), he wanders through an English countryside rendered in terms that could equally call to mind colonial figurations of India.75

While, in the earlier poetic critique of dispossession that is Goldsmith’s “The Deserted Village,” the permeability between spaces—city and country, metropole and colony—is a symptom of the enclosure that has destroyed the Edenic integrity of the English countryside, Robinson’s account implies that this space has never been so innocently bounded to begin with. The speaker of “The Deserted Village” paints a fantasy of rural retirement innocent of the commercial depredations of urban life:

How blest is he who crowns in shades like these,
A youth of labour with an age of ease;
Who quits a world where strong temptations try,
And, since ’tis hard to combat, learns to fly.
For him no wretches, born to work and weep,

75 This palimpsestic contraction of space is an effect Kevis Goodman identifies with nostalgia "as a disability of wartime and colonial mobility, a somatic and psychological protest against forced travel, depopulation, emigration, and other kinds of compulsory movement" (Goodman, "Uncertain Disease": Nostalgia, Pathologies of Motion, Practices of Reading," Studies in Romanticism 49 [2010]: 99-100.)
Explore the mine, or tempt the dangerous deep;  
No surly porter stands in guilty state  
To spurn imploring famine from his gate… (99-106)\textsuperscript{76}

In Goldsmith’s account, refraining from greed—that is, the consumption of imported luxury goods and the enclosure of the commons—proffers a fantasy of extracting oneself from capitalism, as indexed by the protection of private property by the “surly porter” or the global divisions of labor represented by miners and sailors.

Robinson, by contrast, places the lascar in this supposedly innocent landscape in order to implicate the economic geography of the entire nation. He encounters the denial of charity condemned by Goldsmith, but not as an aberrant encounter with pathological greed; rather, the “surly porter” is systematic, as necessary to the everyday functioning of the world around him as is the circulation of silver and other products of the mine, or the unending supply of maritime labor to fuel both naval and commercial shipping. Indeed, as Robinson emphasizes, one could not live in England and be innocent of the shipping industry’s endless hunger for labor, and it is this demand—as well as the danger that led to the loss of so many English sailors to death, desertion, or impressment on the way to India—that has brought the lascar to England in the first place:

\begin{quote}
Was it for this, that on the main  
I met the tempest fierce and strong,  
And steering o’er the liquid plain,  
Still onward, press’d the waves among?  
Was it for this, the LASCAR brave  
Toil’d, like a wretched Indian Slave;  
Preserv’d your treasures by his toil,  
And sigh’d to greet this fertile soil? (49-56)
\end{quote}

The apostrophe here—as he insists that he has “preserv’d your treasures by his toil”—leaves the object of address open and nonspecific; all who live on English “soil,” the lines

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{76}{Oliver Goldsmith, \textit{The Deserted Village} (London: for W. Griffin, 1770).}
\end{footnotes}
imply, are the beneficiaries of the colonial extraction of his labor: the “toil” that appears in quick succession, beginning and ending successive lines and rhyming with the evocation of English earth that is in no way innocent of the exploitation carried out by its agents abroad.

Finally, “The Lascar” attempts a poetic evocation of the dehumanization of the “idle” that is at the center of so many contemporary political and legal definitions of vagrancy. In poems like “Expostulation and Reply” and “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” Wordsworth's engagements with idleness serve as reclamations of a maligned (non-)activity; idleness, he often argues, is actually an activity of incalculable, extra-economic value. Robinson, however, leaves idleness idle. Instead of attempting to reclaim idleness as an activity of value, she evokes a subjective experience of valuelessness. If vagrants, as Marx proposes in the 1844 Philosophical and Economic Manuscripts, “do not exist for political economy,” but are instead “specters outside its domain,” then Robinson seeks to portray what it feels like to be such a specter. If political economy can only recognize life as the animation of the body to labor and its reproduction, then claims of activities’ productive value—even if that value is asserted to be noneconomic—run the risk of instituting another such remainder, in which life outside of productivity is expelled from the social and material possibility of living. Robinson literalizes this dynamic. Instead of assigning idleness value as productive activity of another order, she evokes idleness as a kind of living death—which, for capital, it is.

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77 See also Anne D. Wallace, who argues in Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of the Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) that Wordsworth uses walking as a resignification of Virgilian georgic, thus transmuting agricultural to imaginative labor (9).

The poem’s opening, for example, establishes the lascar’s enforced idleness as a stalled, suspended temporality:

‘Another day, Ah! me, a day
   Of dreary Sorrow is begun!
And still I loathe the temper’d ray,
   And still I hate the sickly Sun! (1-4)

In this stasis, in which he “waste[s] the vapid hours away” (16), all times are confused and yet nothing changes at all:

    O! darkness come! come, deepest gloom!
Shroud the young Summer’s op’ning bloom;
[...] Or, hence, broad Sun! extinguish’d be!
For endless night encircles Me! (17-18; 23-24)

Only through dying can the lascar attain the audience he has sought all along. At the poem’s conclusion, the villagers gather to hear and see him: "They hear the wounded LASCAR groan! / Far off they mark the wretch, as he / Falls senseless, from the tall Elm tree!" (306-8) The lascar’s only possible incorporation into the countryside that so insistently indexes England is as a dead body: an abandoned byproduct of the global commerce that even the most poetically idyllic rural villagers inhabit.

This figuration of living death is at the heart of Robinson's poetic engagement with surplus population. The Lascar is just one of many figures of dispossession, disappearance, and displacement that populate the Lyrical Tales. But he is perhaps its most extreme example of the condition of being part of a redundant or surplus population. The Lascar's abandonment to enforced idleness and death marks him as what Grace Kyungwon Hong terms "existentially surplus."79 While Marx's surplus populations

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are produced as a proletariat, made available for exploitation in wage labor, Hong characterizes the existentially surplus as specifically racialized and gendered populations produced "as nonlaboring subjects, that is, the populations that are surplus not to production but to speculation and circulation." The existentially surplus, she argues, "are not necessary to capital as potential sources of labor, but instead are useful for their intrinsic lack of value." Hong's example is a contemporary one, but one rooted in much longer histories of racialized criminalization and carceral logics; she argues, following Ruth Wilson Gilmore, that "prison populations function within the prison-industrial complex not as labor but as raw material." For Hong, racialized "criminalization ... is not only a way to relegate subjects to surplus labor pools but also a way to relegate to surplus existence. ... To be 'surplus' in this moment is to be valueless, unprotectable, vulnerable, and dead." A racialized and criminalized nonlaboring subject, relegated by capital not to alienated labor, but to abandonment and living death: Robinson's vision in "The Lascar" imagines a vagrant not as the vogelfrei dispossessed, but as the existentially surplus.

Hong's engagement here is with contemporary neoliberal capitalism in the United States, and so both the racial logics and economic structures are necessarily quite different than those in operation in the British Empire at the end of the eighteenth century. Nonetheless, her analysis resonates with the histories of populations, such as lascars in England, who were produced as racialized surplus populations, marked for

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80 Ibid., 92.  
81 Ibid.  
82 Ibid.  
83 Ibid.
abandonment rather than for incorporation into wage labor. As the replacement for an English sailor lost through death, desertion, or impressment into the Navy, the lascar is not made available for incorporation into an economy as a wage laborer; instead, he is there to extend the labor-power of a lost English sailor just long enough to allow the East India trade to continue, unimpeded by this loss. One might call him a specter outside political economy's domain in more ways than one--and by critically taking up the spatial imagination of policing, Robinson populates the *Lyrical Tales* with the stubbornly spectral, surplus, and disappeared.

Wordsworth's *Female Vagrant* echoes, at one point, the Lascar's lament that he is "doom'd ... to perish in the peopled street" (29-30), when she insists that it is "Better our dying bodies to obtrude, / Than dog-like, wading at the heels of war, / Protract a curst existence" (123-25). However, her "dying body," unlike that of the Lascar, does not ultimately "obtrude" into public view; she lives to tell her story on Salisbury Plain. Wordsworth's *Old Cumberland Beggar* is granted a retreat into an unseen death, away from poetic view, and his projected death "in the eye of Nature" is figured as an alternative to the workhouse against which the poem registers its protest (189). The Lascar's death, by contrast, is relentlessly and materially visible.:

And he was faint, and sick, and dry,  
And bloodshot was his fev'rish eye;  
And livid was his lip, while he  
Sate silent in the tall Elm tree— (283-86)

Instead of persisting as a speaking subject, the Lascar loses the ability to speak and ends the poem as a dead *body* that can only be perceived by the "village throngs" as such:

Swiftly they cross the river wide
And soon they reach the Elm tree's side,
But, ere the sufferer they behold,
*His wither'd Heart, is DEAD,—and COLD!* (309-12)

Visible only as a corpse, the Lascar here is no longer a lyric subject. In fact, it is
in death that he most insistently indexes vagrancy's concern with population and surplus.
Robinson figures vagrancy not as a kind of subjectivity or mobility, but as the production
of surplus bodies whose status as surplus becomes most legible with their deaths. In
particular, she engages the Malthusian logic of "redundant population" that renders
excess life apprehensible as excess death. For Malthus, after all, redundancy is life that
exceeds the capacity for life's material sustenance; it is through premature *death* that a
life is most definitively visible as having been "redundant."

In his much-expanded 1803 edition of the *Essay on the Principle of Population*,
Malthus elaborates on the threat that “redundant population” poses to human happiness.
Redundant population is rendered most visible through death, both statistically and in
Malthus’s turns to figure and narrative:

> The power of population is so superior to the power in the earth to produce
> subsistence for man, that, unless arrested by the preventive check, premature
depopulation must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are
> active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great
> army of destruction, and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should
> they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemicks, pestilence, and
> plague, advance in a terrifick array, and sweep off their thousands and ten
> thousands. Should success still be incomplete, gigantick inevitable famine stalks
> in the rear, and, with one mighty blow, levels the population with the food of the
> world.\(^\text{86}\)

But, of course, Malthus also refers to some of the living as “redundant,” and it is the
populations of gaols, workhouses, and the lowest classes of laborers that form this group.

specifically designates the life enabled by parish support as redundant by definition; in arguing that poor laws “increase population without increasing the food for its support,” he claims that “they may be said, therefore, to create the poor which they maintain.”87 If redundancy is ultimately defined as the exposure to a premature death that is rendered inevitable by the "laws of nature," and yet some living populations may be named confidently as redundant while still alive, then Malthusian redundancy occupies a curious space between life and death.88 It is this theory of population, I want to suggest, that Robinson echoes in her figuration of the Lascar's existence first as living death, and finally as silent corpse.

Indeed, Malthusian redundancy works as, among other things, a theory of vagrancy. Malthus explicitly draws on Colquhoun's portrayals of criminal populations in his descriptions of the threat posed by redundant population in London, citing the Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis extensively: "According to Mr. Colquhoun, above twenty thousand miserable individuals of various classes, rise up every morning, without knowing how, or by what means, they are to be supported during the passing day; or where, in many instances, they are to lodge on the succeeding night. It is by these unhappy persons that the principal depredations on the public are committed."89 When he argues that "a mob ... is generally the growth of a redundant population," he uses redundant population to anticipate not only criminal, but also political threat.90

Furthermore, vagrancy is a crucial metaphor for Malthus's theory of redundancy and for his rhetorical recourse to "nature" as the ultimate authority behind his claims. In a

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87 Ibid., 409.
88 Ibid., 11.
89 Ibid., 514.
90 Ibid., 526.
curious parable, he elaborates his axiom that no society can safely support existence outside of wage labor:

A man… If the society do not want his labour, has no claim of right to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature’s mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. She tells him to be gone, and will quickly execute her own orders, if he do not work upon the compassion of some of her guests. If these guests get up and make room for him, other intruders immediately appear demanding the same favour. The report of a provision for all that come, fills the hall with numerous claimants. The order and harmony of the feast is disturbed, the plenty that before reigned is changed into scarcity; and the happiness of the guests is destroyed by the spectacle of misery and dependence in every part of the hall, and by the clamorous importunity of those, who are justly enraged at not finding the provision which they had been taught to expect. 91

As the multitudes who intrude upon the feast and disrupt the guests' pleasure with their "spectacle of misery and dependence" are stand-ins for the "redundant" births that, Malthus argues, result from parish support for the poor, vagrancy here becomes a metaphor for existing-while-surplus. Being born is rendered equivalent to begging, and death is figured as nature's enforcement of vagrancy laws, as she turns away the imagined beggar who "has no business to be where he is." In this logic, life itself is reduced to vagrancy, and indeed, I want to suggest that this seemingly extreme deployment of the concept of vagrancy is in fact the logical conclusion of vagrancy's legal structure as a capacious, flexible, and discretionary category indexing imagined future threat rather than individual criminal responsibility.

Vagrancy becomes a crucial theory of population in the late eighteenth century, both in law enforcement and political economy. At the same time, however, the ability of vagrancy's legal capaciousness to condense seemingly infinitely expansive and globally-scaled surplus population into a single embodied figure offered a potent poetic resource,

91 Ibid., 531.
one that could be deployed towards radically critical ends. The vagrant figure, for
Robinson, resembles less the spectral double of the poet than it does the Thames in
Pope's "Windsor-Forest," as both figures metonymically condense global geographies
into one place or person. For Mary Robinson in particular, vagrancy is far less a tool for
theorizing the lyric subject than it is a surprising and radicalized inheritance of the
locodescriptive tradition and its poetics of surplus.