

Poetic Genres of Futurity: A Response to Baker and Han

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By way of opening the floor to discussion, I'll take my primary duty as reminding us of what we've read, but will also suggest possible connections between the two essays and raise a few broad questions. In a late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century moment, and particularly in terms of the phenomenally popular Robert Burns and William Wordsworth's response to him, Samuel Baker describes two discontinuous modes of remembering the past as a way of staging the future—the georgic and the gothic—themselves at play in a moment where Enlightenment and emergent Romanticism contend. The nationally focused, improving, and culturing georgic, with its dominant temporality of cyclic productivity, stands in tension with the gothic's focus on the spectral, nature's resistance to improvement, and a revolutionary temporality of “sudden intensities and slow ruination.” Samuel approaches both these modes as practices and theories of mediation and remediation; responsive, as they are, to landscape (georgic) and architecture (gothic). In the case of Burns's own poetry, these media platforms position him alternatively (and simultaneously) as democratic national bard or fatalistic singer of the dead driven under the georgic plough. For Wordsworth's stages of response to Burns—during his tour of Scotland in 1803, in poems drawing on that trip published in 1807, in the 1816 *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns*, and then in a series of Burns-themed verses of 1842—Burns variously plays the role of cautionary example in a tale of moral improvement, object of a love which asks no reasons and resists the call of reason, and entombed bard who posthumously haunts the everyday doings of national life. As such, the Burns-Wordsworth relation suggests an ongoing entanglement of the discontinuous mediations of georgic and gothic in our own projections of a future.

John Han considers two contrasting instances of the same genre—the prospect poem—in Alexander Pope's *Windsor Forest* and Anna Barbauld's *Eighteen-Hundred and Eleven*. John sketches the parameters of the prospect poem in terms of what he calls “the garden state,” a nationalistic, imperialist imagining of a coherent triumphalist history, insuring a future by connecting it to a stable present and a mythic past. The prospect lays the foundation for this coherent narrative by writing into existence a punctuated present moment, spatially stable in its positing of a fixed position from which to view a fixed and particularized landscape and temporally stable in its notion of itself as instantaneous, unhaunted by past and future and therefore able to thematize them with confidence. Within the canonical prospect poem—and Pope's poem plays this canonical role—this instantaneous moment allows the commanding viewer to posit a mythic history of recurrence and the return of a Golden Age, a temporality materialized in the practice of the eighteenth-century garden and its chronotope of meditative reflection and improvement. For John, Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* occupies the prospect poem in order to subvert it, substituting a global perspective for local particularity, a moment of transnational simultaneity for the instantaneous fixed present, empty homogenous time and an open future for the guarantees of cyclic recurrence, and multiple viewers for the stilled stable viewer of *Windsor Forest* (not to mention substituting a turbulent weather for the predictability of the seasons, and an ungrounded mobile Spirit for the grounded material observer). Barbauld thus, in John's view, un-writes the prospect poem as a way of undermining Britain's colonial prerogative.

Connections between these papers are many, and I hope I'm not led just by the contrastive structure of each to wonder if Barbauld's focus on the future ruins of London and “the fairest flowers expand[ing] but to decay” is an instance of Samuel's gothic mode. By proposing an or-

ganic setting for ruination, those decaying flowers might suggest that a historical triumphalist is simply someone who never visits greenery after mid-October or, alternatively, that a Gothacist is someone unwilling or unable to believe in perennials against the evidence of his own sight. Given John's focus on the instantaneous present of the prospect poem, I'm also intrigued by the particular organic present tense of these lines: "But fairest flowers expand but to decay: / The worm is in thy core, thy glories pass away" (313-4). What the prospect poem seems unable to imagine in John's view is *duration*, preferring instead a punctuated present from which to view its stable past and golden future. Duration, in Bergson's landmark formulation, is "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances," and given Samuel's description of gothic temporality as one of "slow ruination," I begin to wonder if what matters in gothic time is not whether it involves expansion or decay, but that its present is one of unfolding duration rather than of a picturable snapshot of time, a participle time of expanding, decaying, gnawing and swelling (and connections to Jonathan's notion of an emergent slowness in the period also cry out to be made). Since John connects Barbauld's corrective of Pope to empty homogenous time, and to the abandoning of sequence, I think there's matter for discussion as to whether her alternative to garden time is gothic, homogenous, or something else—or is it where all these temporalities intersect?

I'd also like to invite Samuel to think aloud about the other aspect of gothic temporality he identifies: sudden intensities. Here, I am also thinking of the role that intensity plays in Jonathan Sachs's paper, where intensification can characterize acceleration but also slowness. My question is still fairly vague, but since intensity plays such a large role in the gothic and since the question of temporality's relation to affect was broached yesterday, I would welcome a chance for the group to think about the temporality of intensity. And since John's "stilled observer" of the prospect poem represents the physical disposition of a temporal belief in coherent, triumphalist history, I am curious to re-raise the matter of walking (which came up briefly yesterday) to ask how that physical disposition—as reflected in a differently inflected type of loco-descriptive poetry—might invoke different temporalities. The Pope-Barbauld contrast structures an opposition between the grounded but motionless in Pope and the ungrounded but mobile in Barbauld—which makes me want to revive the excluded term of the grounded and mobile, as it is found in the representation of walking. I'll do my best to guide the itinerary of comments now, but also to give our authors the chance to respond if they wish.