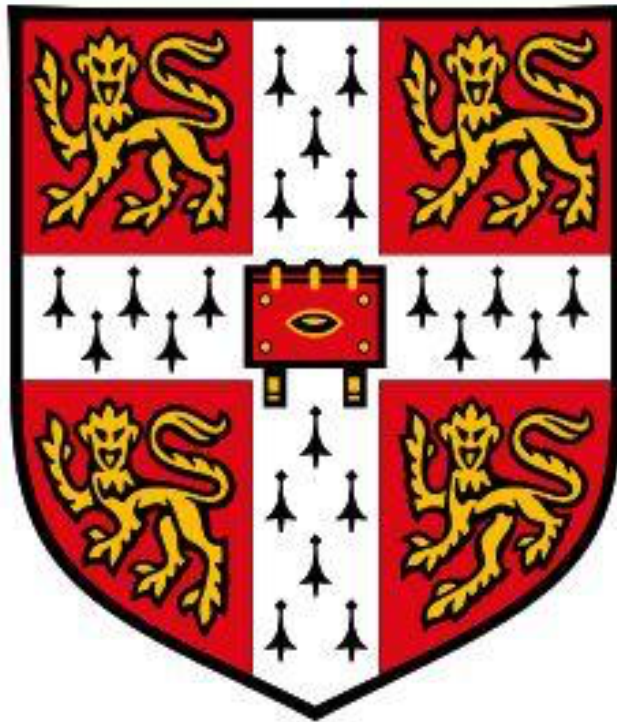


‘Unsettled Minds’ in England and Wales, 1800-1834.



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March 2020

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of History | Clare College

Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work. It includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in the preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the History Degree Committee.

Abstract

Jake Ben Ladlow

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This thesis is set to analyse pauper letters to provide a new critical framework to access the emotional lives of what Edward Thompson once called ‘people from below’ under the last years of the Old Poor Law. The concept and spectrum of ‘unsettled mind’ is to be introduced as the central interpretive framework through which the content and emotional dimensions of pauper’s requests for relief will be examined. The hypothesis of unsettledness is that ordinary people in England and Wales experienced a constant state of flux in their mental well-being and moved across an experiential spectrum. This ranged from deeply embedded contentment with the self and their human situation, to confinement, usually in asylums, in mental institutions. The study is based upon close readings and detailed analysis of the corpus linguistics found in pauper letters from 1,499 individual letter sets across eight different typological and topographical regions. Five different typologies of unsettled mind will be presented and analysed, with a view to reconstructing the emotional lives of the poor. The introduction and subsequent use of the spectrum of unsettledness locates this study at the liminal intersection of the historical literatures of madness and emotion. The argument will be made that the accounts from unsettled paupers allow historians to: look beyond the realm of the asylum and notions of madness to consider contemporaries’ experiences of mental distress in the words used by the affected to describe their experiences; present a history of the emotional dimensions of poverty, a wide-scale study of the emotions of the lower classes, and offer a new window into contemporaries’ actualised experience(s) of illness; and to demonstrate how the letters give testimony to the exercise and limits of paupers’ agency in the early nineteenth century. This thesis aims, ultimately, to present an emotional history of poverty in the words of those that endured its effects and provide a privileged space for their accounts of pauperism and unsettledness to be heard.

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Acknowledgements

My first debt is owed to my supervisor, Dr Elizabeth Foyster. Her support was unfailing throughout my time in Cambridge. I have been extraordinarily fortunate to have received further guidance from an array of academics during my time as a student. Those with significant roles included: Professor Lauren Kassell, Professor Pete King, Dr Malcolm Noble, and Professor Keith Snell. Special mention must go to my mentor, Professor Steven King. Steve's influence has been unique and transformative throughout my time as a student and it has been a privilege to collaborate and learn from him. I will forever be grateful. I am also grateful to my examiners, Dr Samantha Williams and Professor Alannah Tomkins, for devoting their time and expertise to review my work and for their informative feedback.

In financial terms, I am indebted to the funding provided by CHESS to conduct my doctoral studies at the University of Cambridge. The Clare College Mellon Fund enabled me to enjoy a semester of study at Yale University which was productive and fulfilling. While in New Haven, I enjoyed the hospitality of Professor Flora Vaccarino who graciously permitted me to live in her beautiful home, drink her wine, and walk the dogs.

My time at Clare was spent in what I now recall as a constant state of giddy delirium and, as such, I forged some memorable ties with the staff. Foremost among them was with the Porters, particularly Kevin Price and Geppetto Price, Pete Evans, and Keith Pearson. Alan Lloyd will expect top billing and he truly deserves it. As do the computer office gang, especially Allison Lewis and Ian Elliot.

My uncle Chris Ladlow and his partner, Di, have offered an endless supply of encouragement and often a welcome distraction. My father, David Ladlow, and his wife, Jo, have always been supportive and useful allies in locating the best pubs in the city when they visited.

Finally, my mother, Claire Morrissey, has always given me every chance not only to succeed, but to be happy. I hope completing this thesis and the journey it has come to represent ultimately honours her many sacrifices.

Abbreviations

BRO	Berkshire Record Office
CURO	Cumbria Record Office
GLRO	Gloucestershire Record Office
GWRO	Gwent Record Office
HRO	Hampshire Record Office
ORO	Oxford Record Office
SRO	Surrey Record Office
ESRO	East Sussex Record Office
WSRO	West Sussex Record Office
EYRO	East Yorkshire Record Office
WYRO	West Yorkshire Record Office

Introduction

At the core of this thesis resides a deceptively simple hypothesis: that ordinary people in England and Wales, 1800-1834, experienced a constant state of flux in their mental well-being and moved across an experiential spectrum. This ranged from deeply embedded contentment with the self and their human situation, to confinement (usually temporary) in mental institutions. This spectrum of experience and related questions about why people experienced changes in their mental state, how they understood the potential spectrum of experiences, and how they wrote about and rhetoricised it, has been the subject of sporadic and imperfect historical investigation, with a distinct skewing towards the better-off more literate classes.

Using the concept of ‘unsettled minds’, the thesis is located at the liminal intersection of two literatures. First, is the madness literature which has indelibly linked pauper lunacy and confinement in mental institutions. Such literature neglects the central fact of madness in historical populations, namely: that most of those who were mad did not end up in asylums and vast numbers of poor people would have experienced successive or periodic bouts of unsettled minds without becoming mad. Second, the literature regarding the history of emotions. This has, either deliberately or because of source and literary constraints, generalised the emotional framework of middle-class actors to the labouring poor of eighteenth-and nineteenth-century England.

Through a detailed analysis of the corpus linguistics of pauper letters written between 1800 and 1834, the central aim in what follows is to provide a new critical framework to explore what historians such as Edward Thompson have called ‘people from below’ in their letter writing activities; these were the poorly educated in an oral culture who might appear to have been marginalised but in fact spoke often about their emotional as well as economic well-being in the voluminous correspondence of poor law archives.¹ Pauper letters represent a major source that has been used for various purposes while their wider utility is yet to be comprehensively explored through other lenses. Even welfare historians have engaged only passingly with these unique sources, a feature which this study looks to rectify; and in so doing, study the emotional experiences of the poor for the first time through interpretation of

¹ Thompson, Edward. *The Making of the English Working Class*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963.

their unsettled minds.² The richness of these historical actors' oral testimonies – sometimes scribed for them, occasionally mediated by an epistolary advocate, or more commonly written with an immediacy and intensity that gave voice to emotional soliloquys – merits a close textual reading of the linguistic dynamics of how paupers expressed, understood, and managed their emotional lives.³ These in turn reflected how their states of mind and well-being ebbed and flowed across their life-cycles and how they constructed a sense of self.⁴ Qualitative methods will be used to examine how written words were first and foremost oral testimonies. These revealed, in the repetition of emotional descriptions or key emotive phrases, certain catalysts and key yardsticks about the extent to which disturbed minds were met with human action and empathy. Examining pauper letters is also concerned with locating and critiquing individual histories of those living predominately on the threshold of

² It is important to distinguish between paupers and the poor. Paupers were those in receipt of poor relief. The poor lacked financial means; they were simply poor. For more on how pauper letters have been viewed by historians, see Sokoll, Thomas. *Essex Pauper Letters 1731-1837*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; Jones, Peter and Steven King. "From Petition to Pauper Letter: The Development of an Epistolary Form." In P. Jones and S. King (eds). *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2015: 53-77; King, Steven. *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s-1830s*. Toronto: McGill University Press, 2019.

³ This study is set to be the first of its kind because the wider critical literature on pauper letters has not focused on emotional reading of these sources. For evidence, see any of the works by the following authors: Bailey, Joanne. "'Think Wot a Mother Must Feel': Parenting in English Pauper Letters c.1760-1834." *Family and Community History* 13, 1 (2010): 5-19; Englander, David. "From the Abyss: Pauper Petitions and Correspondence in Victorian London." *London Journal* 25, 1 (2000): 71-83; Gestrich, Andreas and Daniella Heinisch. "'They Sit for Days and Have Only Their Sorrows to Eat': Old Age Poverty in German and British Pauper narratives." In B. Althammer, L. Raphael and T. Stazic-Wendt (eds). *Rescuing the Vulnerable: Poverty, Welfare and Social Ties in Modern Europe*. Oxford: Berghahn, 2016: 356-81; King, Steven. "Friendship, Kinship and Belonging in the letters of Urban Paupers 1800-1840." *Historical Social Research* 33, 3 (2008): 249-77; -- "English Pauper Letters, 1790s-1830s." *Groniek* 204/205 (2015): 305-16; -- *Writing the Lives*; Shave, Samantha. *Pauper Policies: Poor Law Practice in England 1780-1850*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017; Sokoll. *Essex Pauper Letters*; Tomkins, Alannah. "'Labouring On a Bed of Sickness': The Material and Rhetorical Deployment of Ill-Health in Male Pauper Letters." In A. Gestrich, E. Hurren and S. King (eds). *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor*. London: Continuum, 2012: 51-68.

⁴ On matters of constructing the self, the most accomplished works include: Eckerle, Julie. *Romancing the Self in Early Modern Englishwomen's Life Writing*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013; French, Henry and Jonathan Barry. "Identity and Agency in English Society, 1500-1800: An Introduction." In H. French and J. Barry (eds). *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2004: 1-37; Gerber, David. "Ethnic Identification and the Project of Individual Identity: The Life of Mary Ann Woodrow Archbold (1768-1840) of Little Cumbrae Island, Scotland, and Auriesville, New York." *Immigrants and Minorities* 17, (1998): 1-22; Martin, Luther, Huck Gutman and Patrick Hutton (eds). *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988; Nussbaum, Felicity. *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989; Porter, Roy. "Introduction." In P. Burke and R. Porter (eds). *Language, Self and Society: A Social History of Language*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991: 1-20; -- "Introduction." In R. Porter (ed). *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*. London: Routledge, 1997: 1-14; Regard, Frédéric. *Mapping the Self: Space, Identity, Discourse in British Auto/Biography*. St. Etienne: University of St. Etienne Press, 2003; Shepard, Alexandra. "Honesty, Worth and Gender in Early Modern England 1560-1640." In H. French and J. Barry (eds). *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2004: 87-105; Spicksley, Judith. "A Dynamic Model of Social Relations: Celibacy, Credit and the Identity of the 'Spinster' in Seventeenth-Century England." In French & Barry. *Identity and Agency*: 106-46; Wahrman, Dror. *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth Century England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

relative to absolute poverty, to reconstruct how it was that particular paupers, endeavoured, in effect, to write themselves settled. For too long historians have ‘heard’ but not necessarily ‘listened’ to the remarkably evocative voices in pauper letters and the emotional capacity they were capable of expressing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵ This thesis will provide evidence to explore William Reddy’s idea that the act of writing on paper in an oral culture could be both self-refining and life-changing.⁶ It builds on the meticulous work of Thomas Sokoll by first allowing the voices of the letter authors to be read out loud as they were once by a chain of historical actors from scribe, to overseer, to vestrymen, and back again to their original author with a poor law decision and, within this, privileges the emotive dimensions of the testimonies made by the claimants for relief.⁷ By studying the impact of poverty and mental disturbance as experienced and expressed by pauper letter writers, historians may, for the first time, access and interpret an emotional history of those from below in their own words.

The history of emotions has provided a new means to analyse the self.⁸ Work in this field led to a recognition and established a place for considering how contemporaries understood themselves as emotional beings and, accordingly, how such historical actors’ emotions were defined by their own interior feelings and senses. At the heart of this study, therefore, is its conception of selfhood. In the period immediately prior to that which this analysis concerns itself, a change has been identified in the way the self was defined, located, and experienced. This understanding was most skilfully explained by Roy Porter, who argued that there was a gradual shift amongst people from external measures of self toward interior reference points of selfhood.⁹ Broadly, the transition towards an individualistic culture under the Enlightenment left people, Porter argues, with multiple overlapping and competing means of

⁵ Bartlett, Peter. “The Asylum, the Workhouse and the Voice of the Insane Poor in 19th Century England.” *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 21, 4 (1998): 421-32. Note, also the following have not acknowledged these texts in their histories of literacy, see Lyons, Martyn. “Ordinary writings or how the illiterate speak to historians.” In M. Lyons (ed). *Ordinary Writings, Personal Narratives: Writing Practices in 19th and early 20th Century Europe*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007; -- *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010; -- *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe c.1860-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013; -- “Writing Upwards: How the Weak Wrote to the Powerful.” *Journal of Social History* 48, 2 (2015): 311-36; Vincent, David. *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁶ Reddy, William. *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

⁷ Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters*.

⁸ A fuller discussion as to the significance and value of Histories of Emotion with respect to pauper living is provided later in this chapter, see: 8-11. Note the key text is, once again: Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*.

⁹ Porter, Roy. “Introduction.” in R. Porter (ed). *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*. London: Routledge, 1997: 1-14. See also Mascuch, Michael. *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997.

defining themselves. In this context, historians face problems in elaborating these processes of self within society because they were obliged to trace it with the evidence presented by the literate classes; with subsequent scholarship having dedicated itself to the middle and aristocratic classes.¹⁰ Even so, Porter's interpretation(s) have not gone uncontested amongst those working on the self, with Dror Wahrman, for instance, identifying a substantial period of overlap and transition between different systems of selfhood.¹¹ Be that as it may, this study represents a division from this existing literature, shifting the focus to the poor, less literate, and less independent. While historians have dealt skilfully with broad concepts of self portrayal in working-class autobiographies, Methodist conversion narratives, trade unionism speeches, and when people were to be found in court testifying for activities such as poaching, there is both a chronological and class gap in the existing literature.¹² Between the 1790s and 1840s there is notably little insight or study into how the dependent poor understood and constructed a self and personae. The question this raises is: why are the dependent poor missing? There are two reasons: first, the poor were not people who widely wrote autobiographies or were to be found in the Chartism movement, nor were they ever a focus of the contemporary literature of wider culture. Second, and linked, is that the selfhood of the poor has only been elaborated through the mechanism of authorship – one written and understood as Lyons, put it, in terms of the 'democratization of writing'.¹³ This limits the extent to which it has been possible to talk in terms of selfhood when the documents required for this purpose have not previously been identified and collected on the scale required. The result is historians have not known how the dependent poor before this identified time – significantly, after the period under review here – formed their sense of self. Against this backdrop, readers of this thesis must understand the definition of self (located below) and the nature of the processes through which the self can be captured by historians when new sources of a different period are presented and their interpretive restraints taken into account.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Regard, Frédéric. *Mapping the Self: Space, Identity, Discourse in British Auto/Biography*. St. Etienne: University of St. Etienne Press, 2003.

¹¹ Wahrman, Dror. *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth Century England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004

¹² Burnett, John. *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s*; Burnett, John, David Vincent and David Mayall (eds). *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated Critical Bibliography, vol. 1: 1790-1900*. Brighton: Harvester, 1984; Vincent, David. *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; Rogers, Helen. "Singing in Gaol: Christian Instruction and Inmate Culture in the Nineteenth Century." *Prison Service Journal* 199 (2012): 35-43; Rogers, Helen and Emily Cuming. "Revealing Fragments: Close and Distant Reading of Working-Class Autobiography." *Family and Community History*, 21 (2019): 180-201.

¹³ Lyons, Martyn. *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe, c. 1850-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 8-10.

Introduction

This thesis is underpinned by the conviction that the pauper self was, in the broad canvas of selfhood, distinctive. While paupers moved – through their act of writing – to define their sense(s) of self with reference to interior indicators, they were, nevertheless, unique amongst all social groups in having to retain fixed exogenous reference points to their sense(s) of self. Paupers were defined by not being able to change or escape these influences. The most significant and relevant of these was their existence within the time and influence of the Old Poor Law. The upper and middling sorts could define themselves exclusively through their personal internal variables. Paupers were not free. They had, instead, to define themselves in relation to various spectrums that included, for instance: sanity/(un)settledness; being alone versus within a family; and, being independently poor versus being responsible and accountable to others. Unlike the middling sorts, paupers had to shift between having an independent and dependent self as only a few were lifelong dependent paupers. Shaping their constructions of self was the need of each pauper to internalise the views of others in order to survive, of which the Overseer was the most significant barometer. For paupers, the views and judgements of others toward them could become entrenched in themselves and they were left – through their need to please and conform to external expectations – to determine which self they identified with at any moment. The constructions of self by the dependent poor were, therefore, defined by inter-linked and accretive processes. At the centre is the significance of writing – not only in terms of the act in and of itself – but, also, in terms of what feedback loops this could expose to its authors and the emotional shifts writing could cause in the relevant historical actor. The words expressed by the semi-literate did not appear by accident and, accordingly, it is possible to conduct close interpretation of the linguistic register of the poor. Finally, uniting the processes, is an understanding that paupers' letters represent a historical source from which it is possible to trace constructions of pauper self through sequential writing. The consequence of these influences was that the sense of self for paupers was superficial, fragile, and fluid.

Historiographical Review

The following analysis is set to thematically explore why the emotional lives of ordinary people have not been represented in the relevant historical literatures of madness and emotions. These areas will be critiqued with a view to explaining (and later acting upon) the opportunity presented by pauper letter writers who documented their experiences of unsettled minds. Through these testimonies it is possible to construct a study that begins to fill the current gaps in historical discourse. A full and separate discussion of pauper letters – one that pertains to the sources' construction, usefulness, representativeness and authorship – is to be found in the next chapter.¹⁴ Before one can appreciate the source and its potential to recreate the emotional dimensions of pauperism, it is necessary to consider why the 'unsettled mind' concept need be applied and to what end it may help to create emotional histories of the ordinary poor. Pauper letters were, after all, written for welfare purposes and have an accordant place in the welfare literature to which this thesis will continually refer. But the welfare literature is not critiqued here as it is essential to affirm that the aim of this study of poverty will re-purpose an established historical source for new and unique interpretive ends, one that must begin with reference to the histories of emotion and madness.

Madness

The study of madness has been rich and varied. At its core stand Michel Foucault's ideas regarding the 'medical gaze' and exercise of power.¹⁵ He went on to describe the 'classical age' of the second half of the late seventeenth-century as an era of 'great confinement' with those deemed mad sent to asylums and institutions. The impact, Foucault argued, was that it:

hid away unreason, and betrayed the shame it aroused, but it explicitly drew attention to madness, pointed at it.¹⁶

Debate has developed amongst historians notably including William Parry-Jones, Ida MacAlpine and Richard Hunter, Andrew Scull, Anne Digby, Leonard Smith, Jonathan Andrews, and Christopher Philo, as to the role of the asylum in English and Welsh society

¹⁴ See Chapter Two – Reading Pauper Letters: 37-64.

¹⁵ Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of the Clinic: an archaeology of Medical Perception*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1973. Roy Porter was later inspired to shift the interpretive discourse by encouraging historians to 'lower the historical gaze'. Porter, Roy. "The Patient's View: Doing Medical History from Below." *Theory and Society* 14, 2 (1985): 192.

¹⁶ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin, 1991: 65.

and to the veracity of Foucault's notions that it was an instrument of state power.¹⁷ Each asylum study provided new insight. But these works held a collectively narrow focus, especially as it has since become generally accepted that: 'the great confinement has largely been discounted with regard to Britain'.¹⁸ As historians recognised that many, if not most, of the mad in British society were not institutionally confined, their attention has shifted to the presence and displays of madness outside the asylum, principally through the work of Peter Bartlett, Bill Forsythe, Joseph Melling, and David Wright. Collectively, these authors have highlighted the absolute necessity to start 'thinking of the asylum with, rather than in isolation from, society'.¹⁹ Akihito Suzuki and Catherine Smith later took up the cause presenting effective critiques of the familial dynamics involved with caring for the mad.²⁰ However, while historians have successfully moved the location of madness, the conceptual problems of studying 'madness' for understanding historical instances of mental illness remain. The choice to focus specifically on the most extreme forms of mental distress has made it extraordinarily difficult to locate the voice of those that suffered. Reliance upon the interpretive dichotomy between sanity and madness has led the historical discourse to overwhelmingly present only the imposed narratives of the institutions and the families' of those that endured madness. Histories of the mad, then, have customarily struggled to

¹⁷ Parry-Jones, William. *The Trade in Lunacy: A Study of the Private Madhouses in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. London: Routledge, 1972; MacAlpine, Ida and Richard Hunter. *Psychiatry for the Poor: 1851 Colney Hatch Asylum - Friern Hospital 1973: A Medical and Social history*. London: Dawsons, 1974; Scull, Andrew. *Museums of Madness: The Social Organisation of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England*. London: Allen Lane, 1979; Digby, Anne. *Madness, Morality and Medicine: A Study of the Yorkshire Retreat, 1798-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; Smith, Leonard. *Cure, Comfort and Safe Custody: Public Asylums in Early Nineteenth-Century England*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1999; Andrews, Jonathan and Andrew Scull. *Customers and Patrons of the Mad-Trade: The Management of Lunacy in Eighteenth-Century London. With the Complete Text of John Monro's 1766 Case Book*. Berkeley: California University Press, 2003; Philo, Christopher. *A Geographical History of Institutional Provision for the Insane from Medieval Times to the 1960s in England and Wales: The Space Reserved for Insanity*. Lewiston: Edward Allen Press, 2004.

¹⁸ Smith, *Cure, Comfort and Safe Custody*, 13.

¹⁹ Wright, David. *Mental Disability in Victorian England: The Earlswood Asylum 1847-1901*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001: 8. Bartlett, Peter and David Wright (eds). *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: The History of Care in the Community, 1750-2000*. London: Athelone, 1999; Forsythe, Bill and Joseph Melling, *Insanity, Institutions and Society, 1800-1914 (Studies in the Social History of Medicine)*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1999; Wright, David. "Getting Out of the Asylum: Understanding the Confinement of the Insane in the Nineteenth Century." *Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 10 (1997): 137-55.

²⁰ Suzuki, Akihito. "Enclosing and Disclosing Lunatics Within the Family Walls: Domestic Psychiatric Regimes and the Public Sphere in Early Nineteenth-Century England." In P. Bartlett and D. Wright (eds). *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: The History of Care in the Community, 1750-2000*. London: Athelone, 1999: 115-131; Suzuki, Akihito. *Madness at Home: The Psychiatrist, the Patient and the Family in England, 1820-1860*. Berkeley: California University Press, 2006; Smith, Catherine. "Family, Community and the Victorian Asylum: A Case Study of the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum and its Pauper Lunatics." *Family and Community History*, 9 (2006): 109-24; Smith, Catherine. "Insanity and the 'Civilising Process': Violence, the Insane and Asylums in the Nineteenth Century." In Watson, Katherine (ed). *Assaulting the Past: Violence in Historical Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 250-68.

integrate the perspectives of the mad themselves. These troubles have been recognised, with some critical attention given to the language of madness. Allen Ingram and Katherine Hodgkin offered inventive critiques of the madness described and experience by the literate middling sorts.²¹ Crucially, however, the experiences of madness for the working classes have yet to be explored by historians of medicine.

More substantive work has been conducted upon casebooks. Michael MacDonald's analysis was the first of its kind and revealed remarkable insight into the emotional experiences and 'mental disorders' of contemporaries from the seventeenth century.²² Later work on the case books of Simon Foreman and Richard Napier's medical records, led by Lauren Kassell, has successfully captured the contemporary terminology used by patients disturbed in mind and their 'passions'.²³ However, it is worth noting the periodisation of these works pre-dates the era of this thesis and that their focus has been upon the categories and diagnosis used by the medical practitioners. By looking at pauper's words, the purpose of this thesis is to preserve the anachronisms of historical actors' language, rather than to define in medical terms what contemporaries experienced. The limit of all the studies cited thus far has been what Roy Porter once surmised as their interpretive inability to lower 'the historical gaze onto the sufferers'.²⁴ In turn, Porter's rallying cry for a medical "history from below" drew special attention to the 'key gap, a silence ... about mad people themselves.'²⁵ His solution was to begin thinking in terms of not only the outcome of madness, but upon the:

first-hand experience, from day to day, of becoming disturbed, of teetering towards the precipice.²⁶

This is an essential interpretative concept as it made space for thinking beyond the binaries of sanity/madness. Jonathan Andrews recognised this in regard to the 'enigma of lunacy', explaining that: '[it has] too often been treated as a social and medical issue virtually

²¹ Ingram, Allen. *The Madhouse of Language: Writing and Reading Madness in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Routledge, 1992; Hodgkin, Katherine. *Madness in Seventeenth-Century Autobiography*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007.

²² MacDonald, Michael. *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

²³ Kassell, Lauren. "How to Read Simon Forman's casebooks: Medicine, Astrology and Gender in Elizabethan London." *Social History of Medicine* 12, 1 (1999): 3–18; Kassell, Lauren and Michael Hawkins, Robert Railey and John Young. "The Casebooks Project: A Digital Edition of Simon Forman's and Richard Napier's medical records 1596-1634". *Casebooks Project*: <http://www.magicandmedicine.hps.cam.ac.uk>.

²⁴ Porter, "The Patient's View": 192.

²⁵ Porter, Roy. "'The Hunger of Imagination': Approaching Samuel Johnson's Melancholy." In W. Bynum, R. Porter, and M. Shepherd (eds). *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry, vol. 1*. London: 1985: 63.

²⁶ Porter, "The Hunger of Imagination": 64.

synonymous with that of lunacy, or dealt with as a subordinate corollary to madness, rather than a subject in itself.²⁷ Thinking beyond madness encourages one to think in terms of the processes, with histories of madness having not allowed for such nuance, because institutionalization has been presented as the endpoint to a linear narrative in which the voice of the sufferer is eventually lost.²⁸

Porter's work was important because he provided the basis for thinking in terms of the self being constructed, arguing against the Foucauldian line regarding the role of institutions in shaping identity. Instead, for the mad 'writing their own stories formed their one way of maintaining their identity or indeed fighting back, at least in their mind'.²⁹ A person's sense of self came from within and their expressions of distress were 'secular, outwardly controlled and inner-directed'.³⁰ However, there was a limit to Porter's interpretive vision. Though he changed the analytical perspective to examine the experiences of the patient, it was still configured in terms of the doctor/patient relationship; and, notably, on the grounds of institutionalised madness. Nonetheless, these ideas matter, because they indicate Porter's ideas regarding interiority and a sense that the experiences of being ill and mad were a 'process'. This notion of process did not, however (at least in Porter's conception), allow for the affected contemporary to move in and back out of their states of mind. This has been the major underpinning problem in the entirety of studies into mental illness and madness. This thesis will look to address this problem through using the unsettled minds expressed by paupers to showcase how the poor actively constructed their senses of self, and to introduce the concept of a spectrum to account for contemporaries moving in and out of their settled and unsettled states of mind. Histories of madness are innately complex to conduct and there can be no doubt that those working within the field have been skilful in pushing the historical discourse to this point. This said, it is clear that the interpretive framework of madness has, at times, limited what historians have been able to learn. This includes: the focus upon imposed narratives; difficulties finding, accounting for, and interpreting the voice of the sufferer; and an inability to see experiences beyond a linear narrative to madness. To realise the hope of Porter to have a 'history from below', this thesis examines mental states of mind outside the

²⁷ Andrews, Jonathan. "Identifying and Providing for the Mentally Disabled in Early Modern England." In D. Wright and A. Digby (eds). *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency: Historical Perspectives on People with Learning Disabilities*. London: Routledge, 1996: 65.

²⁸ For more, see: Bartlett, Peter. "The Asylum," 421-32.

²⁹ Porter, Roy. *A Social History of Madness: Through the Eyes of the Insane*. New York: Grove, 1987: 231.

³⁰ Porter, *Social History of Madness*, 5. For more on my definition of selfhood, see Chapter One – Introduction: 3-4.

medical and context, and does so by adapting and integrating some of the further studies found in the history of emotions.

Histories of Emotion

This thesis proposes that the unsettled emotions expressed by pauper letter writers offer a unique interpretive starting point, as careful adaption of William Reddy and Barbara Rosenwein's concepts of 'emotives', 'emotional regimes and refuges' and 'emotional communities', may lead one to interpret the voices and emotions of the dependent poor for the first time. Experts working within the historical field of emotions have previously expressed their 'ambitious' desire to integrate medical histories into their research in order to 'recover the emotional experiences of historical actors', and have found their efforts thwarted due to difficulties in locating an appropriate source base and interpretive framework to conduct such a study.³¹ Susan Matt and Peter Stearns later summarised the wider methodological challenges of this form of research having explained that the need for comprehensible sources (written by the literate classes) has led to serious problems for those wanting to study the emotions of the working-classes, the poor, the enslaved, and the dispossessed.³² They brought further attention to the lingering 'question of geography', explaining when it comes to emotional histories 'a regions' distinctiveness through any real kind of comparative analysis against another regional case', has yet to be given.³³ Before analysing historical displays of unsettledness in different regions across England and Wales, it is necessary to recognise the main reason these geographical dimensions have not been explored. Notably, those driving research within histories of emotions, including the aforementioned Reddy and Rosewein, alongside the likes of Peter Stearns and Caroline Stearns, Thomas Dixon, Fay Bound Alberti, Joanna Bourke, Susan Matt, have been otherwise engaged with establishing the critical and interpretive credentials of this field of research.

'[E]motional communities', as defined by Rosenwein, represent the first of the three key emotional history concepts that may be adapted to study pauper's unsettledness.³⁴ Her argument was that while a multitude of rules governing a society's emotional life and expression existed, one must also be sensitive to individuals' reality within communities.

³¹ Dixon, Thomas. "Patients and Passions: Languages of Medicine and Emotion, 1789-1850." In F. Bound Alberti (ed). *Medicine, Emotion and Disease, 1700-1950*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006: 25.

³² Matt, Susan and Peter Stearns. "Introduction." In S. Matt and P. Stearns. *Doing Emotions History (The History of Emotions)*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014: 6.

³³ Matt & Stearns, *Doing Emotions History*, 7.

³⁴ Rosenwein, Barbara. "Worrying About Emotions in History." *American History Review* 107, 3 (2002): 842.

While an individual needed to adhere and adapt to a communities' rules, they also need to move between communities. The notion of movement coupled with 'norms' of behaviour within emotional communities represents the analytical hook for this study. The act of writing can be seen to represent a fundamental shift in the sense of self of individual pauper letter writers as they consciously moved themselves from a different emotional community from poor to dependent pauper. Rosenwein suggests that 'emotions as depicted in sources are unlikely to be windows onto an objective external reality', but that they 'do help to reveal the subjective reality of the writer of the source'.³⁵ This study will thus concern itself primarily with what pauper letter writers felt and perceived; rather than the traditional analytical focus upon the various dimensions associated with poor law bureaucracy. While Rosenwein's conceptual framework has been criticised for not having considered 'the actual processes by which the meanings of emotions themselves were produced and contested', the study of pauper letters is set to exhibit these precise dynamics.³⁶ The coming analysis will show how the awareness of unsettled contemporaries as to their isolated status at being unsettled undermined their attempts to become settled and thereby operate in their accepted emotional communities. Pauper letters record their authors' capacities to be driven to the edges of a community in which they should, at a theoretical level, have been able to fulfil a core role. By logical corollary of her idea, Rosenwein suggested some inherent community to suffering; this thesis will explore whether, by writing, the unsettled identified themselves as feeling part of a community. There was certainly a feedback loop to writing and feeling unsettled, but what form this took is a question only provoked and not answered by a dependence on the emotional communities concepts. For answers, one has to adapt Reddy's emotional frameworks of 'emotional regimes' and 'refuges'.³⁷

Reddy argued that the codes of expression available for people were subject to the established emotional norms of a society. The 'refuges' were the spaces a contemporary could frequent without the fear of judgement from the 'regimes'. Pauper letters, it will be shown, were the forum available to contemporaries to express and have their grievances heard, and, crucially, be acted upon. However, Reddy's concept is not without limitations. Rosenwein was particularly insightful on the topic having highlighted how:

³⁵ Rosenwein, Barbara. "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions." *Passions in Context* 1 (2010): 16.

³⁶ Bound-Alberti, Fay. "Introduction: Emotion Theory and Medical History." In F. Bound-Alberti (ed). *Medicine, Emotion and Disease, 1700-1950*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006: xvi-ii.

³⁷ Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, 129.

Reddy sees only one sort of “emotional refuge”, and in so doing presented an interpretive model which is fundamentally binary in nature.³⁸

This is a vital nuance for considering pauper letters. What will differentiate these sources is how their authors, those unsettled in mind, looked for a refuge in the societally-endorsed forum of letter-writing, but by doing so, contravened the very boundaries of what was permitted even within this nominal refuge. Reddy did not allow for consideration of how a refuge could in itself become a regime. Analysis of pauper letters will exhibit this hitherto unforeseen phenomena, thereby adapting the current history of emotions framework.

Adaptations made to ‘emotional communities’ and ‘refuges and regimes’ promise to be an effective interpretive tool for analysing the unsettled minds of paupers when the third and final concept of ‘emotives’ is fully incorporated into analytical proceedings. Reddy’s revolutionary idea was that when a historical actor uttered an expressive emotive word the emotion itself would become crystallised to a depth, and on a level, that could not be appreciated or understood before such an act by the individual. How this ‘attempt inevitably has *effects on the activated thought material* and may have the effect of activating or altering still other thought material within the vast terrain of currently inactive sensory input and procedural and declarative memory’, is the key point.³⁹ This last notion of altering, coupled with the assertion that ‘emotives is a two-edged sword in that they may have repercussions on the very goals they are intended to serve’, embodies the other key point of the argument: the impact of feedbacks loop.⁴⁰ The essence of the feedback loop was that a person got back what they put in, but knew not what the effect would be, nor how they would find themselves changed in doing so. This is crucial for understanding the unsettledness of paupers because this is what they faced as they defined their sense(s) of unsettled self through writing. However, in attempting to appreciate these dynamics, once again a re-thinking of Reddy’s framework is necessitated as he referenced these ideas specifically to speech acts. Crucially, Sokoll has masterfully explained that pauper letters existed on their own terms as ‘oral

³⁸ Plamper, Jan. “The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein and Peter Stearns.” *History and Theory* 29, 2 (2010): 255-6.

³⁹ Italics by author. Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*: 102.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 104-5.

writings'.⁴¹ It is, therefore, to the letters crafted by paupers that told of their move along a spectrum of unsettled that this thesis turns in order to institute a history of below; which will rely upon a heavily adapted history of emotions framework alongside a understanding of what the fields of research in madness, poverty and emotions have already accomplished.

Working Definitions

Pauper letters must be understood as part of the genre of appeal, strategy, and agency that is common to letter writing across the class, thematic, chronological and literacy spectrum.⁴² These includes prisoners' letters to the Bank of England, those sent from debtors' prisons, correspondences of the Foundling Hospital, and letters of appeal to charities and estate owners.⁴³ Jonathan Healey has explained how pauper letters also share some of the same features and functions of petitions, such as those to magistrates and the Foundling Hospital, in terms of the mechanisms involved for eliciting relief or action.⁴⁴ In terms of pauper letters, historians now understand them as a core part of the genre of familiar letters, rooted in the basic frameworks of contemporaries' letter-writing between friends, family and business associates: that they had formal openings and closings; writing often embodied partial truths; letters contained strategic and rhetorical motifs designed to emphasise connection to the recipient so that they would take action and, that paupers, like writers from other classes, wrote what they thought the recipient most wanted to hear.⁴⁵ Unlike so many official letters, those written by paupers are much more variable in style and format, and do not adhere to conventions and norms in the way much correspondence produced by bureaucrats.⁴⁶ However, a new approach is advanced in this study, which proposes to move the critical gaze onto the pauper's emotions by reading the letters as an emotional document. Thus, while

⁴¹ How this impacts this study is discussed in Chapter One – Reading Pauper Letters: 37-64. See Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters*: xiii.

⁴² For a comprehensive discussion of the interplay of appeal, strategy and agency and the elisions between the familiar letters written by the poor and those written by other classes in the modern and early modern periods, see: King, *Writing the Lives*, 90-115, 177-4.

⁴³ Paley, Ruth. *Prisoners' Letters to the Bank of England, 1781-1827*. London: Boydell, 2007; Foyster, Elizabeth. "Prisoners Writing Home: The Functions of the Letter, 1680–1800." *Journal of Social History* 47, 4 (2014): 943–67; Clark, Gill. *Correspondence of the Foundling Hospital Inspectors in Berkshire, 1757–68*. Reading: Berkshire Family History Society, 1994; Houston, Rab. *Peasant Petitions: Social Relations and Economic Life on Landed Estates, 1600–1850*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

⁴⁴ See Healey, Jonathan. *The First Century of Welfare: Poverty and Poor Relief in Lancashire, 1620–1730*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2014; Levene, Alys (ed). *Narratives of the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Britain Volume 3. Institutional Responses: The London Foundling Hospital*. London: Pickering, 2006.

⁴⁵ King, Steven, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s-1830s*. Toronto: McGill University Press, 2019.

⁴⁶ This is discussed below, see discussion on p.20.

Introduction

King and other historians of welfare read these documents as parts of a process of negotiating relief in which parties used the same referential and linguistic structures and had broadly the same set of expectations, this study reads them as essentially records of an emotional engagement between the writer and their own mental and material world or that of their families. More than this, pauper letters can be read as a forum in and through which emotions were concretised, the point at which they became 'real', and (in some cases) a mechanism through which their emotional turmoil was exacerbated. Even in the latter context, however, this study understands the act of writing as an attempt, perhaps even a last attempt, to confront and pull back from unsettledness.

There is no single typology of unsettled mind hence the need for the following definition/clarification. At the core of this thesis is the concept of the unsettled mind and a related contention that the basic human condition (within a day, hour, or life-cycle), and the emotional complexion of ordinary people, varies on a spectrum between the serene/contented and the unbalanced or mentally unstable on a scale severe enough to warrant institutional confinement. Applying this idea to historical populations is complex and involves not a retrospective diagnosis but an identification of the way in which ordinary people understood, experienced, constructed, and reconstructed their spectrum of emotional and mental wellbeing or instability. Underpinning my argument is the idea that historical actors rarely experienced a completely stable emotional or mental state. Nor, given the universality of the human emotional condition, would we expect such stasis. This much is to be seen from the narrative testimonies found in court cases, diaries, and even autobiographies. Rather, the mental state of ordinary people moved on a spectrum between the two extremes of contentment and the verge of what we now understand as lunacy or madness. The intertwining issues of how contemporaries understood, constructed, and rhetoricised this emotional and mental fluidity lies at the heart of the core questions that drive this thesis.

This key issue of the detection is one bound to an acceptance of the spectrum as an analytical framework because at its crux resides a fundamental acknowledgement that those who were not 'serene' were nevertheless capable of introspection upon their condition. Therefore, detection of an unsettled mind becomes a question of considering its expression by afflicted contemporaries within their specific historical time, place, and conditions relative to the societal norms of behaviour and expression. In doing so, both the universal and individualised aspects of emotion can be considered in the context with which they were articulated. The aim must be to document what being unsettled in mind was in the words

expressed by those who experienced it. Nonetheless, one cannot simply consider all experiences ‘in the round’ and so to stratify the voices and emotions we see contained within the pauper letters five typologies of the unsettled mind are to be located and analysed. The use of these five particular typologies will not be prescriptive in terms of how an individual’s unsettled state will be assessed. They are not designed to fit entirely cleanly onto a particular person as a diagnosis might, but are used to reveal the central tendencies of an experience of one individual in order to compare this with other contemporary experiences of unsettled mind.

First, there were those ‘Laid-low’ by sudden triggers.⁴⁷ The people who fit this category were those to whom illness (whether in themselves or family), or a depression in trade or some other life-cycle event, caused them a shock triggering their unsettled state of mind. They endured a brutal sudden experience of finding themselves unsettled and it was this shock of finding oneself unsettled that acted as the pivot that inspired them to write of their unsettledness. Second, are those in the typology of ‘Status-stress’.⁴⁸ Within this typology the impact of unemployment and its unsettling effects is cited by the affected paupers as the primary – often single – trigger for their move along the spectrum. Third, comes the typology of ‘Compromised Identity’.⁴⁹ This is concerned with issues of masculinity and femininity which arise from an affected person’s inability to fulfil the societal role they felt they should be able to accomplish, but which their unsettled state prevents. Fourth, is the experience of unsettled mind resulting from ‘Cumulative Troubles’.⁵⁰ The people who fit this typology were those unsettled in mind because of the grind of the pauper life-cycle and their inability to make something positive of it. These paupers were not unsettled by an event, but by the way in which the ability to lead their normal life became diminished, and, as they recognised their pains, they turned in earnest to write their letters. The fifth and final typology concerns those paupers who foreshadowed their death in their letters.⁵¹ It is their sense of being worn out, of abandonment, and of reimagining the end of their life then becoming ill because of it, which is all bound to a feeling of terminal decline that defines their unsettledness.

Of course, the use of these typologies marks only one of a number of ways this research could have been conducted. The approach adopted in this thesis is developed to allow for

⁴⁷ For a full break-down of the typology, see: Chapter Two – Laid-low: 65-94.

⁴⁸ See: Chapter Three – Status-stress: 95-132.

⁴⁹ See: Chapter Four – Compromised Identity: 133-162.

⁵⁰ See: Chapter Five – Cumulative Troubles: 163-188.

⁵¹ See: Chapter Six – Death: 189-208.

contemporaries' movement along a spectrum of unsettledness in both positive and negative terms. Thus far, the main gap in research into the lives of the 'mad' has come about because it has not allowed for the affected to be afflicted in the short-term. Being mad has been equated to either institutionalisation or them being a noticeable deviant within the local community. These various typologies enable one to think beyond 'madness' and look at perfectly ordinary people having emotional outbursts. This study will be reading emotions into pauper letters because the best means to establish such a study is to focus upon the most extreme messages conveyed in their contents, which happens to be pauper's unsettledness.

Set against this backdrop comes the question of what forms of unsettledness might be over-represented. Certainly the likelihood of Status-stress (invocations of work being the trigger for unsettledness) appearing disproportionately in the data is obvious. To some extent, this is offset by the ways in which one must look to the other typologies. For instance, although loss of/trouble finding work might have been the trigger for a certain pauper to write and become unsettled, the manner in which they accomplished this feat may have showcased a different form of experience that fits along the unsettledness spectrum. Thus, a pauper who wrote of the unsettling impact of losing their work and of their absolute confidence that finding new employment would fully address their fall, might – with further inspection – be reflective of a pauper who used the language of work to describe their having been Laid-low; which is different to what will be termed Status-stress.⁵² Moreover, a region which experienced periodic plunges into economic downturns and poverty might be a place which made its inhabitants more likely to fall into unsettledness. But this was the case for every region as each had their own complications which led people to suffer.

More pressing, however, is the greater dangers of over-representation of unsettledness itself. In searching for unsettledness in these letter sets, one encourages oneself to see it. The danger is this becomes self-reinforcing. On one level, this is a necessary correction against previous work which has not read these sources for their emotional dimensions. But, on a deeper level, there is the problem that, once seen, it can be difficult to read the comparatively 'ordinary' letters for how they were written. In seeking unsettledness, there is the temptation to extrapolate more from an equivalent case in which the same/similar conditions for unsettledness may exist (and that one may have witnessed before), yet in this particular case,

⁵² Herein it is important to emphasise the innate fluidity of the typologies of unsettledness. This being so, a certain cross-over is inevitable and, in fact, necessary as each experience, for all that it was individual to the person that experienced it, nevertheless existed in a wider context of paupers' experiences.

the necessary equivocation of the author as to their unsettled state of mind does not appear.⁵³ Once one is aware of unsettledness it is often best to look for ways to see how an author may not have been unsettled; and err to this side of classification. This is why – in Chapter One – ordinary pauper letter accounts will be presented first before the analysis moves on and it is possible to read and effectively interpret the words of their unsettled counterparts.

Research Questions

The key questions set to be explored in order to achieve these stated aims are:

1. What were typical life-cycle pivot points to unsettling a person's mind in this period?
2. What were the feedback loops of writing and recognising oneself as unsettled?
3. How were pauper letters used by the mentally unsettled to cope with their unsettled minds? And how, through these letters, did they come to understand their condition and reconcile it with their sense of self and to what end?
4. To what extent did pauper letters serve as a psychological prop as well as a functional one to their mentally unsettled authors?
5. How did ordinary people use the act of oral writing to shift their emotional states?
6. What impact did geographical location make upon how people's mind became unsettled and was treated, and the way the affected thought of it?

Clearly, approaching these questions requires that we think about the conceptual notion of unsettledness (both in general and in the particular forms identified for this thesis) in relation to a reading of the sources. Searching for unsettledness is at first a passive process of reading as many letters as possible and, ideally from one select parish/region from which it is possible to see the local conditions, life-cycle triggers, and accepted language of the relief negotiation process. Often it will be the case that one recognises the signs of unsettledness in an

⁵³ At this juncture it is essential to read and interpret each letter set on the terms the author laid out with a view to how others have written, but with greater emphasis given to their personal construction of their story. This can be troublesome when, for example, one reads three consecutive cases of status-stress in West Yorkshire and then the next is from a man in the same place that also fretted his own loss of employment. It does not follow that he was status-stressed too.

individual by witnessing their relative exceptionality compared with other writers that wrote of similar experiences in different terms and without the equivalent emotional outbursts.

There is no single word that accurately denotes an experience of unsettledness. But those in the different typologies had certain identifying features and expressions that, for those looking for it, might see evidence of a form of pauper unsettledness.

The Laid-low, for example, typically relied on the word 'low' or the phrase 'low in spirits'. While these expressions were not exceptional, amongst the Laid-low it carried the implication that it was used to make an unflattering contrast to the life they led before this need to write for relief. Words like 'disappointment', 'misfortune' or a variation on the fear that someone had 'forgot' them was a feature that evidenced how their current predicament came as a shock and that letter-writing was to be an essential part of their fight to re-establish themselves.

For the Status-stressed an obsession with 'work' and 'employment' defined their accounts of unsettledness. Rarely in these cases will one find eloquent expression of internal turmoil but rather a trenchant need to modify the almost ubiquitous word 'distress' by preceding it with 'utmost' and 'great'. The Status-stressed relied on the relative obviousness of the precariousness that came from a lack of employment. One of the challenges in interpretation is that those suffering unsettledness were obliged to use the traditional pauper language of economic distress in order to gain relief. However, in reality this had a dual meaning, as it also articulated their emotional distress: so whilst a narrow textual reading points to economic distress, a contextual reading against the grain reveals emotional suffering. In this sense it is necessary to handle the language used in each letter with some care.

Those that suffered with Compromised Identity, meanwhile, had a talent for switching between 'us' when explaining the family predicament that then often led into a greater reflection of how it affected 'I'. In these accounts there is the sense of the individual being overwhelmed by the interplay and need to manage everything which might include obligations to children, parents, their spouse, work, and paying rent. The expressions of unsettledness were often naked and eloquent, given with almost the sense of the confessional or of a release for its author.

The Cumulatively Troubled often spoke of 'miseries'. The key to their unsettledness was how they recognised themselves as being on the wrong side of the passage of time and that future suffering almost certainly lay ahead.

The Dying, by contrast, spoke of the potential ‘release’ from their suffering and were comfortable talking of ‘death’. What defined the letters of the Dying was their fear of even greater indignities being inflicted upon them and that, in writing, they were acting against that eventuality and therefore had a right to express themselves (and their unsettledness) without censure.

As with so many other sources that have been re-purposed to underpin the recent groundswell in histories of emotion, identifying emotional language and general and variations of emotional language in particular is an inexact science that can turn on the multiple understandings of a word or phrase. This does not, however, make the exercise less valid as a form of historical analysis. Just as historians have recently been re-reading physical objects in new emotional terms, so it is possible and desirable that we should do so with pauper letters.

Pauper letters are part of a wider genre of sources. But they are not letters of appeal as, for instance, those to the Bank of England, Foundling Hospital, or other petitions are.⁵⁴ Pauper letters are free-form letters, as described by Sokoll.⁵⁵ The resonance of the letters is most closely aligned to emigrant letters.⁵⁶ But, even then, pauper letters are different and particular for the way they embody strategy, rhetoric, the conveying of information, and hope. No other source is like a pauper letter. For my research I had access to thousands of pauper letters transcripts that are not available in the public domain. In looking for unsettledness, it was fundamental exercise to refine down the letters to a useable sample using the linguistic approaches identified above. I did not need to use printed primary sources as I had the transcripts and photos of the letters. In the course of my research I did look at the work previously done by historians but there works left little space to impose an analysis of unsettledness and part of this project was to showcase the undiscovered depths and range of the source.

Old Poor Law

The Old Poor Law bestowed the right for a person to apply for relief. But it did not guarantee their right to receive relief. The process of relief-giving was one of negotiation between pauper and their home parish. If a certain historical actor was located within their place of

⁵⁴ See Paley, *Prisoners' Letters to the Bank of England*; Clark, *Correspondence of the Foundling Hospital*; Houston, *Peasant Petitions*.

⁵⁵ Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters*.

⁵⁶ Gerber, “Ethnic Identification”; -- “Acts of Deceiving”, -- “Epistolary Ethics”; McCarthy & Coleborne, *Migration, Ethnicity, and Mental Health*.

settlement when they fell into the need for relief, they had the option to visit their Overseer.⁵⁷ This course of action was not always adopted as those in need of relief could be too sick, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to instigate the necessary meeting even in cases of able bodied paupers, many chose to write rather than attend. The options available to those duly indisposed and in need of relief was to send someone to petition on their behalf or to write a letter.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, if the person in need of relief was to be found outside the boundaries of their parish settlement their options were as follows: to return and make their case in person; to ask another to petition on their behalf; or to send a letter. If these options were unavailable to the individual in need they could be moved back to their parish of settlement. As the number of people outside of their place of settlement increased in the eighteenth century and as the postal service became more reliable and cost effective the number of pauper letters rises. Writing became the normal way people not in their place negotiated poor relief. The key point is that these paupers – whether settled their parish or resident elsewhere – often travelled back to their parish either to claim relief or simply for other reasons. It was rare that a person would leave the parish and never be seen or heard from again. The writers of pauper letters were not unknown to the community from which they requested their relief and they often stressed this connection.

The term ‘unsettled’ has multiple layers of meaning. The first relates to the mind, specifically seen in this thesis of the unsettled minds of paupers with a troubled sense of self. The second layer to unsettledness refers to the legal and administrative context of belonging under the poor laws. In the majority of cases pauper letter writers were absent from their parish of settlement, but it was not uniformly the case that those who wrote for relief were physically absent from their parish. Some paupers may have been too ill to meet the Overseer in person or the parish might have been too large to easily travel. Moreover, while there were many historical actors who were unsettled in the sense of not being in the parish this did not necessarily mean that they were forever absent and could visit before leaving again. There is the further distinction that some people might have been born in a parish and acquired their settlement this way and yet moved away and were unsettled for their lifetime. The final layer of unsettled comes in terms of the impact of being mobile and absent had people’s mental health. Migrants could have lost the continuity and self-identity that came from staying in

⁵⁷ King, Steven. “‘It is impossible for our Vestry to judge his case into perfection from here’: Managing the Distance Dimensions of Poor Relief, 1800–40.” *Rural History* 16, 2 (2005): 161-82.

⁵⁸ Jones, Peter. “‘I Cannot Keep My Place Without being Deascent’: Pauper Letters, Parish Clothing and Pragmatism in the South of England, 1750-1830.” *Rural History* 20, 1 (2009): 31-49.

their stable residence and, as writers, attempted to make themselves known and elaborate upon possible shared histories.⁵⁹ Many pauper letters writers had moved from rural areas to urban centres.⁶⁰ Against this backdrop the act of writing can be interpreted as an embodiment of unsettledness as a form of therapy or an act which both exemplifies and intensifies the experience of unsettledness.⁶¹ These, however, are matters of interpretation.

The question of contemporaries' construction of their unsettled mind rests upon their own personal awareness of having become unsettled and subsequently having articulated the experience to themselves. With this act of revelatory construction, that of rhetoricising being unsettled, comes a crystallising effect of the emotion itself, whereby it accrues a power hitherto impossible to comprehend by the affected historical actor precisely because comprehension of their condition has catalysed this new insight. The construction of the emotion renders it recognisable. Thus the concurrent experience acquires an emotional resonance and power to the individual which defines that respective person's sense of self, and with it, their state of mind. Yet such construction and the interaction of its feedback loops were themselves dependent upon the detection of an unsettled sense of self.

Methodology

The letters used for the thesis were photographed, transcribed, and made available by various scholars working on or (for their own research) alongside the project 'Pauper Narratives in England and Germany 1780-1929', led by Professors Andreas Gestrich and Steven King. Letters for Oxfordshire were located and transcribed by Dr Richard Dyson. Letters for Surrey, Sussex, Westmorland, and Hampshire were located and transcribed by Dr Peter Jones. Letters for East Yorkshire and West Yorkshire were transcribed by Professor Steven King, Dr Ben Harvey and Dr Peter Jones. Letters for Gloucestershire and Gwent were located

⁵⁹ Gerber, David. "Ethnic Identification and the Project of Individual Identity: The Life of Mary Ann Woodrow Archbold (1768–1840) of Little Cumbrae Island, Scotland, and Auriesville, New York." *Immigrants and Minorities* 17, 1 (1998): 10. For more on migrant identity and writing see: Gerber, David. "Acts of Deceiving and Withholding in Immigrant Letters: Personal Identity and Self-Presentation in Personal Correspondence." *Journal of Social History* 39, 2 (2005): 315–30; -- "Epistolary Ethics: Personal Correspondence and the Culture of Emigration in the Nineteenth Century." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 19, 1 (2000): 3–23; McCarthy, Angela and Catharine Coleborne (eds). *Migration, Ethnicity, and Mental Health: International Perspectives, 1840-2010*. London: Routledge: 2018.

⁶⁰ King, Steven. *Writing the Lives*, 5-6, 9-11.

⁶¹ The matter of whether writing intensified paupers' experience of unsettledness is a theme addressed throughout the thesis, often referred to in terms of 'feedback loops'. As a typology, however, the Cumulatively Troubled especially insightful case studies on the matter as they, see Chapter 5 – Cumulative Troubles: 163-88.

and transcribed by Dr Ben Harvey.⁶² Harvey's PhD thesis as part of the project covers the particularities of pauper letters in Wales and the Welsh borders. The letter set for Westmorland is published in 2020 as P. Jones and S. King, *Navigating the Old English Poor Law* (Oxford University Press, for the British Academy). The entire German and English letters sets will be in an online edition hosted by the University of Trier in 2021.

The thesis is framed with the theoretical models of emotives and emotional communities, as described above. Against this backdrop, an initial task was to construct a representative sample of pauper letters. This is a deceptively simple task, since one might ask: 'representative of what?' Key drivers might have included gender, age structure (in so far as it can be gleaned from pauper letters), ethnicity, period, occupation, and coverage of exogenous shocks such as war and trade depression. The project is constrained by the well-known fact that the main body of pauper letters is available only after the 1780s and, more specifically, after 1800 and, that the New Poor Law redirects that pauper writing from the locality to the centre. These are issues revisited in Chapter Two.⁶³ In this context, the key issue was to be able to achieve a sensible geographical coverage (discussed above) and to ensure that male and female voices could be heard across the typologies outlined above. This resulted in the analysis of 1,449 individual sets of letters. Evidence of unsettledness was found in 292 cases.⁶⁴ However, on the face of it, reliance upon only these 292 cases to form an analysis would appear problematic. But it is not. On the contrary, when one looks to previous traditions of historians' work in the fields of pauper letters and in the history of emotions, it is clear that it has been accepted and common practice to focus analysis upon individual texts or a small corpus when using methods which are familiar in the conduct of historical sociolinguistics.⁶⁵ Accordingly, those working on pauper letters have produced

⁶² Harvey, Ben. "Pauper Narratives in the Welsh Borders: 1750-1840." Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Leicester, 2016.

⁶³ Expressions of unsettledness were found in 20.15 per cent of all the analysed pauper letters. A breakdown of the underlying numbers concerned with each unsettledness typology may be found in their respective chapters.

⁶⁴ See Chapter Two – Reading Pauper Letters: 37-64.

⁶⁵ The key works in this field include: Weinreich, Uriel, William Labov and Marvin Herzog. "Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change." In Winfred Lehmann and Yakov Malkiel (eds). *Directions for Historical Linguistics*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968: 95–188; Romaine, Suzanne. *Socio-historical linguistics. Its Status and Methodology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; Hernadnez-Campoy, Juan Manuel and Juan Camilo Conde-Silvestre. *The Handbook of Historical Sociolinguistics* (Blackwell Handbooks in Linguistics). Oxford: Blackwell, 2012; Nevalainen, Terttu and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg. *Historical sociolinguistics. Language Change in Tudor and Stuart England*. London: Routledge, 2016; Brinton, Laurel (ed.) *English Historical Linguistics. Approaches and Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

For more recent and specific work in this field on the English poor, see Hodson, Jane. "Talking Like a Servant: What Nineteenth Century Novels Can Tell Us About the Social History of the Language." *Journal of Historical*

transformative works from a small sample. For instance, Pamela Sharpe relied on a total of 17 letters to conduct her study.⁶⁶ James Stephen Taylor used six.⁶⁷ Thomas Sokoll, meanwhile, expanded the analytical scope by considering the impact of age, but even this study – still, rightly, considered an essential buttress of the scholarship – was constructed through an interpretation of 750 letters.⁶⁸ Most recently, Steven King produced a monograph dedicated to the source which contained an analysis of around 500 cases from a wider sample of 26,000 letters.⁶⁹ When one takes into account the analytical approach of this thesis – the interpretation of pauper emotion and experience through their expressions along the spectrum of (un)settledness – alongside this wider context of previous studies, it becomes clear that this is set to be a substantial study in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

Place of Relief	Laid-Low	Status-Stress	Compromised Identity	Cumulative Troubles	Death	Total
Berkshire	6	1	6	6	4	23
Cumbria	8	5	9	13	3	38
Gloucestershire	6	4	10	7	4	31
Gwent	3	1	7	4	1	16
Hampshire	10	5	6	3	0	24
Oxford	4	2	2	1	1	10
Surrey	8	7	8	5	2	30
East Sussex	9	9	9	3	4	34
West Sussex	14	5	20	6	2	47
East Yorkshire	4	4	6	4	1	19
West Yorkshire	6	7	2	3	2	20
Overall	78	50	85	55	24	292

Sociolinguistics 1, 2 (2016): 27-46; Hintikka, Marianna and Minna Nevala. “Representations of Prostitutes and Prostitution as a Metaphor in Nineteenth-Century English Newspapers.” *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics* 3, 2 (2017): 135-150; But, Roxanne. “He Said He Was Going on the Scamp’: Thieves’ Cant, Enregisterment and the Representation of the Social Margins in the Old Bailey Sessions Papers.” *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics* 3, 2 (2017): 151-172.

⁶⁶ See Sharpe, Pamela. “Parish Women: Maternity and the Limitations of Maiden Settlement in England, 1662-1834.” In Jones & King. *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute*: 168-92.

⁶⁷ See Taylor, James Stephen. “A Different Kind of Speenhamland: Non-Resident Relief in the Industrial Revolution.” *Journal of British Studies* 30, 2 (1991): 183-208.

⁶⁸ See Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters*.

⁶⁹ See King, *Writing the Lives*.

Table 0.1 – Unsettled Cases.

Gender	Laid-low	Status-Stress	Compromised Identity	Cumulative Troubles	Death	Total
Male	42	47	51	25	9	174
Female	36	3	34	30	15	118
Overall	78	50	85	55	24	292

Table 0.2 – Cases of Male and Female Unsettledness.

As was explained earlier, and as the tables 0.1 and 0.2 show, the letters were read in their entirety and in relation to certain key words and phrases to identify possible experiences of unsettledness. This was a considerable task based on the full sample of 2,878 letters which made up 1,449 individual cases. These cases were dispersed across eleven distinct geographical regions. This diversity in location was intentional to allow for coverage of different rural and urban contexts and for different community types. When distinguishing between the 292 cases of unsettledness and to present them it was necessary to look to balance characteristics such as the age of the writer, sex, and the cause of poverty and unsettledness. In each sub-group related to a form of unsettledness the challenge was to present cases which held the clearest examples of the typology and this meant cohering to certain key features.

There are eight emergent criteria one may use to recognise cases of unsettledness upon which my analysis came to rely. Before these are outlined it is important to remember that assigning an individual pauper to a typology is a fluid, subjective process; it is not meant as a retrospective diagnosis but as a means for appreciating the full interpretive dimensions of these paupers' accounts. The cases presented in this thesis are those that conveyed all the typical thematic features of one specific typology. This means that there are other accounts that might have been used. But an editorial choice had to be made to show those cases that were most expressive of the distinguishing themes of a particular typology and which reflected the differences to other typologies. Looking for and defining the differences between the typologies is a way of finding the key features that united the experiences of

unsettled paupers. When searching for cases of unsettledness, one should look for evidence of the following of eight themes:

1. The unsettled pauper understood that act of writing as a conscious choice to address their self-identified emotional distress.
2. The unsettled pauper accepted in the specific moment they wrote that they were unsettled and tried to account for its cause and effects
3. The unsettled pauper tried to convince themselves that their unsettledness was not a permanent condition.
4. The unsettled pauper refused to accept the blame for having become unsettled.
5. The unsettled pauper considered their agency to be impaired due to the impact of their unsettledness and, in writing and possibly receiving relief, represented the best means to re-asserting agency over their troubled sense of self.
6. The unsettled pauper understood their recovery to be dependent upon help from their Overseer.
7. The unsettled pauper wrote in a manner that subverted traditional letter-writing relief request conventions, but they still retained a genuine desire to be found worthy recipients for relief.
8. The unsettled pauper relied upon the common language of pauperism and suffering to articulate deeply personal and complex feelings regarding their experience of unsettledness.

It is not possible to find cases of pauper unsettledness without evidence of these features. The typologies are, in some respect, constructed through reference to them as it makes it possible to distinguish different forms and experiences of unsettled behaviour. The precise distinctions are set to be covered in the conclusion sections of each dedicated chapter.

An example of what a researcher might look for is the attitude of an unsettled actor regarding the possibility of recovery. Those in the Compromised Identity typology constructed belief in their ultimate recovery through their conviction that they had already survived the full misery that their poverty could inflict upon them. This group of the unsettled lacked the conviction retained by the Laid-low and Status-stressed who maintained that receiving relief would allow them to recover unchanged and unaffected by their pivot into unsettledness. The

Cumulatively Troubled differed as they had learned through personal experience that being granted relief did not mean an end to their troubles. They were capable of requesting assistance while unsettled more for a desire from the Overseer to signal to them that they believed that they were worth helping and that, by extension, their troubled circumstances did not necessarily condemn them to lasting misery. The Dying, meanwhile, sought a recovery from their mental unsettledness even as their bodies failed them. Writing represented an opportunity to have their voices be heard and, if they were granted even token relief, they hoped to die having reasserted sufficient agency to placate their troubled senses of self. Each typology had its own special interplay of these all these features and the cases selected for analysis are those in which their authors captured the defining essence of their typology of unsettledness.

A key methodological task was to achieve a useful regional distribution of the destination of pauper letters in order to account for issues of representativeness. This is by no means easy and no regional distribution will be without flaws because historians have defined regions and spatial regularities and located them in a variety of ways. For instance, Charles Phythian-Adams had eight cultural regions; Margaret Lyle six bastardy regions; while those working on the Industrial Revolutions have identified eleven economic regions; and Steven King's work found five different poor relief regions.⁷⁰ If we were to take each region presented and superimpose them onto each other there would be very little regularity, if any. Questions of regionality are complex and have, rightly, attracted voluminous works. However, if we accept that many aspects of the everyday life of paupers have a regionality, even if we cannot agree upon where to draw the lines on the map, then it follows one must identify differences either between unsettledness or differences in the way people talked about unsettled minds on a spatial basis. This thesis tests the hypothesis that there were differences in the way people exercised their unsettled mind, the way they wrote of it, the language they used to express it and was interpreted by the recipient. The most relevant context to note regarding this issue of regionality is of the general east to west trend, and the north to south divide, where in the South poverty was (arguably) higher and the poor law more generous. Nevertheless, it must be said that no single county may provide a socio-economic, cultural and welfare framework that coloured English and Welsh society in the early nineteenth century. This being so, the

⁷⁰ Phythian-Adams, Charles. *Societies, Cultures and Kinship 1580-1850: Cultural Provinces and English Local History*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1996; Lyle, Margaret. "Regionality in the late Old Poor Law: The Treatment of Chargeable Bastards from Rural Queries." *The Agricultural History Review* 53, 2 (2005): 141-57; and King, Steven. King, Steven and Geoffrey Timmins (eds). *Making Sense of the Industrial Revolution: English Economy and Society, 1700-1850*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001.

counties and places chosen for analysis in this thesis have been selected from a much wider range of possibilities to achieve broad coverage of the core socio-economic typologies recognisable from well-established debates about the nature of urbanisation, the character and scope of the Industrial Revolution and the immense variety of landscapes and production regimes encapsulated by terms such as the agrarian revolution.

Against this backdrop, the counties selected generally overlap with Phythian-Adams' cultural regions, with each possessing notable characteristics. By accounting for each region's typologies it is possible to consider the particular influences these places might have on their paupers' states of mind.

Berkshire and Hampshire fit the archetypes of southern lowland and downland England. Industry had waned here in the late years of the Old Poor Law, whether it be in mining, weaving, straw hat or lace making, and charcoal burning. Similarly, the military equipment industry of the New Forest had also declined. These problems were underpinned by greater challenges. The most note-worthy of which included: the early turn to enclosure, significant concentration of landownership, structurally low wage rates, over-population, weakening of women's work, limited and late urbanisation (at least outside Reading), links to London, heavy out- and through-migration, and a rapidly rising poor relief bill. The social structure was mixed. In all senses, these counties had troubles in relations to their poor. Poverty could be especially grinding at both the individual and familial level owing to the decline in women's work in this region. In both counties the unsettled continually emphasised the adverse cumulative effects of the grind of pauper living – the sense of deepening and inescapable hopelessness of their positions – which defined many of their letters.⁷¹ The ease of migration in these places could mean there were often less reliable kinship networks for these paupers to call upon, hence their need to rely, instead, upon the parish. The unsettled writers of this region wrote often and with rare emotional intensity that may owe to the underlying conditions of their counties.⁷²

⁷¹ Wales, Tim. "Poverty, Poor Relief and the Life-Cycle: Some Evidence from the Seventeenth-Century Norfolk." In Smith, Richard (ed). *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984: 351-404; Thane, Pat. *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle Under the English Poor Law, 1760-1834*. (Royal Historical Society). Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011; French, Henry. "An Irrevocable Shift: Detailing the Dynamics of Rural Poverty in Southern England, 1762-1834: A Case Study." *Economic History Review* 68, 3 (2015): 769-805.

⁷² In Berkshire the rate of unsettledness was an unusually high at 30 per cent (23 from 76 individual cases). While in Hampshire it was a little lower but still substantial 22 per cent of cases containing unsettledness (24 from 109 cases).

The second cultural region is Surrey and Sussex in which heavy poverty existed by virtue of vagrants moving through. The population was transient and its industries served London. It was a highly commercial region with an extremely hierarchical social structure. Further, the region of Surrey and Sussex faced high levels of poverty and saw a spread of cases across the unsettledness spectrum.⁷³ Upon first glance it would appear there was gender bias with males more prone to unsettledness than women. In basic terms this was true: in Surrey there were 19 male and 11 females cases; in East Sussex 22 male and 12 females; while West Sussex bucked but did not over-turn the trend with 23 male to 24 female cases of unsettledness. Yet, more interesting, is the fact that the rates of unsettledness were basically the same across genders if one removes incidences of Status-stress.⁷⁴ While a discussion of the gender dynamics of Status-stress will come later in this thesis,⁷⁵ it is pressing here to recognise that amongst these counties there was a consistent rate both of the incidences of Status-stress, across the five unsettledness typologies, and generally in-line with the other regions.⁷⁶ Surrey is remarkable in so much as it represents those trends, whereas in Sussex there were to be two notable outliers of unsettledness. First, in West Sussex there was an extraordinarily high – 20 – cases of Compromised Identity. Second, cases of unsettled Death/Dying women writing of their unsettledness was a prevalent theme, especially in East Sussex and, to a lesser but notable extent, in West Sussex.⁷⁷

The third cultural region of Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire was one in which poor relief had been relatively generous and the social structure hierarchical. These counties were archetypally midland in their characteristics experiencing relatively late enclosure, had many large estates, a good mixed economy between industry and agriculture, and, with each dominated by one town – Bristol and Oxford. The result was wages were higher than in the south and poverty less endemic. With the notable exception of Bristol which grew rapidly, migration was usually circular rather than towards towns. Further, John Langton has shown a clear link for Oxfordshire between poor relief and landscape in terms of obligation,

⁷³ The Surrey sample contained 30 cases of unsettledness from 133 (22.5 per cent). In East Sussex there was very similar rates with 34 unsettled cases from the sample of 140 (24 per cent). West Sussex had 47 cases from a sample of 186 (25 per cent).

⁷⁴ There were 7 male cases against 0 female ones in Surrey, 9-0 in East Sussex, and 5-0 in West Sussex.

⁷⁵ See Chapter Four – Status-stress: 133-62, for a comprehensive discussion of this issue.

⁷⁶ Laid-low cases: Surrey, 8; East Sussex, 9; West Sussex, 14 Status-stressed: Surrey, 7; East Sussex, 9; West Sussex, 5. Compromised Identity: Surrey, 8; East Sussex, 9; West Sussex, 20. Cumulative Troubles: Surrey, 5; East Sussex, 3; West Sussex, 6. Death: Surrey, 1; East Sussex, 4; West Sussex, 2.

⁷⁷ There were 4 in East Sussex and 2 in West Sussex.

entitlement and dispute.⁷⁸ These general effects mean that the poor relief was relatively generous and with pauper rights clearly established. In the Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire region poverty was related to life-cycle position on the one hand, and the weather and its effect on agriculture on the other. The relatively rich makeshift economy and the possibility of work in the towns meant young people had comparatively better prospects than those in the south, and these were the regions in which religion remained strong with the poor retaining their obligations to go to church.⁷⁹ These factors may explain why rates of unsettledness in Gloucestershire were low.⁸⁰ Conclusions from the Oxford sample must be more cautiously handled because the sample was far smaller, and yet similar features appeared here.⁸¹ The letters from the unsettled from both samples rarely obsessed or sought to explain their difficulties solely through issues of employment, but rather often used the letters to frame greater questions about their identities.⁸²

East Yorkshire is the fourth featured region and typifies the eastern cultural region. It was defined by being one of the major bread baskets of England with its agriculture having been highly commercial from an early age.⁸³ The domination by old towns such as Beverley and York meant there was limited out and in migration. The poor law system was static and though agriculture could dominate, the reach of traditional market towns created viable opportunities for alternative employment and a richer makeshift economy. There was a strong coastal trade and vibrant set of industries, especially weaving and food preparation. The social hierarchy was mixed. Most tellingly, the relief granted here was the most generous to be found in England.⁸⁴ One might expect work (and with it Status-stress) to feature heavily in the East Yorkshire letter set. Here the poverty was life-cycle poverty but the region had a

⁷⁸ Langton, John. "The Geography of Poor Relief in Rural Oxfordshire, 1775-1832." In Jones & King. *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute*: 193-234.

⁷⁹ For more on how women in urban economies had greater opportunity in the family economy and that religion continued to shape attitudes in relation to Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, see Urdank, Albion. *Religion and Society in a Cotswold Vale*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. For more general insights into urban work for females, see: Tomkins, Alannah, "Pawnbrokers and the Survival Strategies of the Urban Poor in 1770s York". In King, Steven and Alannah Tomkins. *The Poor in England, 1750-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003: 166-198; and Williams, Samantha. *Unmarried Motherhood in the Metropolis, 1700-1850: Pregnancy, The Poor Law and Provision*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018.

⁸⁰ 31 from 178 cases were unsettled, with 16 males and 15 females.

⁸¹ 30 per cent of cases exhibited unsettledness, which is 10 of the 30 individual cases. There were 6 male cases and 4 female of unsettledness.

⁸² Thus, cases of Status-stress were low with 4 from Gloucestershire and 2 in Oxford.

⁸³ Thirsk, Joan. *The Rural Economy of England*. London: Hambledon, 1984; -- *Agricultural Regions and Agrarian History in England, 1500-1750*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1987.

⁸⁴ For more see: King, Steven. *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: A Regional Perspective*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.

strong economy, kinship networks were good, and the possibility remained for people to find work in the towns. The unsettled here did indeed write of Status-stress but it was matched – in terms of incidences – by those being Laid-low and suffering from Cumulative Troubles.⁸⁵ But it was only men who wrote of their unsettledness in terms of Status-stress.⁸⁶ Total rates of unsettledness were relatively equal.⁸⁷ Again, the typology of Compromised Identity was most numerous, but not by much.⁸⁸ This sample rather reflected the full range of the unsettledness typologies.

By contrast, the neighbouring county of West Yorkshire was defined by the great woollen industry and had a massive industrial presence.⁸⁹ There was huge population movement and inflows here, with high wages and a very strong makeshift economy meaning that poor relief was not generous as it did not need to be. This was the second fastest growing county outside Lancashire. However, the early nineteenth-century saw it racked by periodic trade and domestic crises, with the region prone to bad weather which could force hundreds of thousands out of work. It was also multi-urban with very significant reach of urban demand for everything into the countryside and had a large freehold land market because of early enclosure.⁹⁰ West Yorkshire suffered from episodic but often severe poverty with rates of unsettledness relatively high.⁹¹ Those who became unsettled were often concentrated amongst certain life-cycle positions or else between migrants yet to establish themselves. Hence we see relatively high-rates of Status-stress. Accordingly, there was the clearest gender imbalance between not only who pauper letters, but also of those that wrote of their unsettledness.⁹² However, although the language and impact of work were spread throughout the letters from West Yorkshire, matters of employment were not the only way or terms in which the unsettled saw their move along the spectrum. The region witnessed each of the unsettled typologies and at rates similar to those in the other counties; the obsession with the issue of work does not mean that their other reasons for requesting relief should be over-

⁸⁵ There were 4 cases each of contemporaries being Laid-low, Status-stressed and enduring Cumulative Troubles. In total there were 21 cases of unsettledness in the sample of 70 letters. (27 per cent were unsettled).

⁸⁶ 4 men, and 0 women.

⁸⁷ With 11 men and 8 women having written.

⁸⁸ There were 6 cases of Compromised Identity. These were divided equally between males and females – 3 and 3.

⁸⁹ For more on West Yorkshire textile industry, see: Hudson, Patricia. *The Genesis of Industrial Capital*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986: 25-52.

⁹⁰ Hudson, Patricia and Steven King. "Marriage in Two English Textile Manufacturing Townships in the Eighteenth Century." *The Economic History Review* 53, 4: 706-41.

⁹¹ 19 of the 81 cases had unsettledness (23 per cent).

⁹² Of the 81 writers, 56 were male and only 25 were female. In terms of unsettledness, 15 were male cases and 4 female.

looked.⁹³ For all that West Yorkshire differed from other regions and while taking into account the peculiarities of this place, it nevertheless conformed to the wider trends of unsettledness found amongst pauper letters.

The sixth region of Gwent was again different, fitting the Welsh archetype. This upland area was marked by late enclosure, heavy out-migration to London and the midlands, and substantial poverty. Relief was relatively ungenerous because of the limited rate base. There was a meshing together of industry and agriculture, but much of the agriculture was poor. In the period under review, anti-English sentiment was regularly to be found amongst its people, as well as high rates of Methodism. It had a flat social structure with few elites. The high and ingrained poverty of Gwent rendered its pauper inhabitants with little hope of escape and betterment, and was reflected in the high rates and style of expression found in many of the pauper letters.⁹⁴ These authors' sense of their problems having mounted and consumed them was a regular theme amongst the unsettled writers.⁹⁵ But there were, as with every other region, those who felt/told themselves that theirs was a temporary set-back and, being Laid-low, clung to the idea of their recovering themselves through the act of writing.⁹⁶

Underpinning the accounts of the unsettled – and the more generic pauper letter writers in this region – was their reliance upon religious rhetoric and, with it, their individual but collectively-felt fear of failing due to their parsimonious and unforgiving parish authorities.⁹⁷

Following Gwent's pattern, the seventh and final region of Kirkby Lonsdale/Westmoreland was another poor upland area that experienced high rates of out-migration. Yet this was a classic English upland region. Industry was shallow and weak and what little did exist was set around the extractive and manufacturing industries of gunpowder, lead and arsenic. There was a heavy emphasis on farming but the land was poor, and there were no large towns or solvent industry. The social structure was very hierarchical. This county (and its people) was – with Gwent – the poorest analysed in the thesis. The high and ingrained poverty of Kirkby Lonsdale/Westmoreland rendered its pauper inhabitants with little hope of escape and betterment, and was reflected in the high rates and style of expression found in many of the

⁹³ While there were 7 incidences of Status-stress, there were also 5 of paupers being Laid-low, 2 suffering from Compromised Identity, 3 from Cumulative Troubles, and 2 from the unsettling effects of Dying.

⁹⁴ Though from a smaller sample, it is striking how 32 per cent of the cases from this sample contained unsettled paupers. (17 from 53 letter sets).

⁹⁵ Hence, there were 7 Compromised Identity cases and 4 pertaining to Cumulative Troubles.

⁹⁶ There are 5 Laid-low cases.

⁹⁷ Harvey, "Pauper Narratives in the Welsh Borders: 1750-1840."

pauper letters.⁹⁸ These authors' sense of their problems having mounted and consumed them was a regular theme amongst the unsettled writers.⁹⁹ But there were, as with every other region, those who felt/told themselves that theirs was a temporary set-back and, being Laid-low, clung to the idea of their recovering themselves through the act of writing.¹⁰⁰ The Cumbrian region was one wherein the majority of the population was out of place when they wrote their letters. This may explain why there was such a volume of letters and, accordingly, letters from the unsettled.¹⁰¹ With kinship networks and the makeshift economies being weak, writers often worked to convey their fear(s) of being abandoned or forgotten by the parish. Indeed, this was often a trigger for the Laid-low, those with a Compromised Identity, the Cumulatively Troubled and the Dying to write of their unsettledness.¹⁰² Meanwhile, though oft-mentioned, matters of employment were less central to the requests by Cumbrian paupers, who seemed instead more worried by the parish and how one's reputation could easily be undermined through miscommunication, thereby placing them in further material and emotional jeopardy.¹⁰³ But again, for all the individualities of the region and experiences of their paupers, this was like any other examined in the thesis wherein rates of unsettledness were steady between around 20-30 per cent and spread across the five typologies.

Naturally, it would have been possible to construct a sample with alternative focus. These regions do not cover everywhere in England and Wales and there are notable omissions. London is missing because as a region it is too large and cumbersome to effectively analyse. Scotland has been omitted entirely from this study because of the different way the poor law was administered and relief requests were written.¹⁰⁴ Further, Cornwall and the North-East have not been included.¹⁰⁵ The sample also omits the largest and fastest growing cities and towns, something which is unavoidable given that the speed of growth is correlated with poor

⁹⁸ Though from a smaller sample, it is striking how 32 per cent of the cases from this sample contained unsettled paupers. (17 from 53 letter sets).

⁹⁹ Hence, there were 7 Compromised Identity cases and 4 pertaining to Cumulative Troubles.

¹⁰⁰ There are 5 Laid-low cases.

¹⁰¹ There were 156 individual correspondences, 38 of which contained pauper unsettledness. This amounts to 24 per cent of the cases being unsettled ones.

¹⁰² There were 8 cases of Laid-lowness, 9 of Compromised Identity, 13 of Cumulative Troubles and 3 from the Dying.

¹⁰³ As such, there was only 5 cases of Status-stress.

¹⁰⁴ For a definitive account on the Scottish Old Poor Law, see: Mitchison, Rosalind. *The Old Scottish Poor Law in Scotland: The Experience of Poverty, 1574-1845*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

¹⁰⁵ In Cornwall no records of note survive. While the North-East because it was a coal heavily industrialised region which had important consequences for the operation of the Poor Law. Rushton, Peter and Gwenda Morgan. "Parish, River, Region and Nation: Networks of Power in 18th-century Wearside." In A. Green & B. Crosbie (eds.) *Beyond Coal and Class – Economy and Culture in North-East England, 1500-1800*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press. 2018.

record keeping and preservation, something that has been consistently noted by poor law historians working in the period prior to the 1840s.¹⁰⁶ On a more positive note, even by the 1810s most of the population lived in communities of the sort that I investigate here and so the sample is at its broadest extent, representative.

Chapter Structure

Chapter One explores pauper letters as a source. The analysis is driven by the conviction that it is possible to use them to construct the first emotional histories of the poor. A critique is made of historians' utilization of ego documents such as autobiographies, diaries and family letters, with a view to explaining why and to what effect pauper letters have generally been over-looked. The truthfulness and representativeness of the letters is considered. The pauper letters of John Painter, George Cleaver, Hannah Watson, and Isabella Harrison, will be reproduced in full with an emotional reading of their testimonies offered as a guide into how the letters can be read. This chapter will introduce and demonstrate the methodology for reading pauper letters that is then followed in the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter Two presents the first typology of unsettledness: 'Laid-low'. Through an analysis of the letters from paupers such as Maria Longhurst, Anne Parker, Timothy Pinnock, Herbert Whitefield, and Elizabeth Bull, the critique will illustrate how ordinary people were moved to express and realised their unsettledness through the act of writing. This chapter covers extensive critical ground in seeking to establish the first emotional reading of pauper letters, present the first form of the concept of unsettledness, and in so doing, elucidates the specific characteristics of the Laid-low typology. Within the analysis of each selected individual's letter-set, greater shared themes of the unsettling experience will be identified. The concept of Laid-low thus will be explored in depth, always with a view to the individual pauper's voice and its place (and that of unsettledness) amongst their contemporaries, and set against the other typologies of unsettledness identified in this thesis.

¹⁰⁶ Particularly influential here was Jeremy Boulton's and Leonard Schwarz's work on St Martin. See: Boulton, Jeremy and Leonard Schwarz. "'The Comforts of a Private Fireside'? The Workhouse, The Elderly and the Poor Law in Georgian Westminster: St Martin-in-the-Fields, 1725-1824". In J. McEwan and P. Sharpe (eds). *Accommodating Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor, c.1600-1850*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010: 122-45; -- "The Medicalisation of a Parish Workhouse in Georgian Westminster: St Martin in the Fields, 1725-1824." *Family and Community History* 17, 2 (2014): 122-40.

Chapter Three continues the analysis of unsettledness but focuses on the second typology: 'Status-stress'. The letters of Peter Newman, Thomas Cox, Jon and Martha Davis, Hannah Brown, Elizabeth Pepall, and Ester Hanson are re-produced with accompanying critiques. This chapter explores the unsettling impact of the issues of work and employment. Within this chapter there is a discussion of the possible regional dimensions to incidences of status-stress and the language used by different people in different places to describe it. Further, the vast difference in rates between incidences between males and females will be explored. However, the gender dynamics will not be over-played, since the next chapter will find ways, other than through the terms associated with work, that paupers used to write about their unsettled selves.

Chapter Four is intimately tied to the one that preceded it and is focused upon the third typology: 'Compromised Identity.' Letters from Harriet Hughes and Samuel South are used as case-studies. Within the depths of the unsettled experiences they documented, specific consideration will be placed upon how these paupers did not define themselves primarily through their relations to work but to their wider identities. The precise nature could differ between individuals – as could their accompanying unsettledness – nevertheless they were united in the style and very need to express their unsettledness. The analysis will consider the different forces defining male identity versus those of female contemporaries. The argument will be made that, nuances aside, there was little significant gender difference in the experience of this typology and unsettledness. The analysis will then focus away from seeing unsettledness in gendered terms and in terms of Compromised Identity, alongside the Laid-low and Status-stressed, as part of wider emotional shared yet individualised experience of pauperism.

Chapter Five focuses on the fourth unsettledness typology: 'Cumulative Troubles.' The similarities between the likes of the Laid-low, Status-stressed, and the Compromised Identity will be thrown into relief by the contrast made with the accounts of the Cumulatively Troubled, as exhibited by in the letters of Anne Baker, Ann Rhodes, and Robert Pearson. It will be shown how these Cumulatively Troubled paupers may have conformed to any of these other typologies, but as they felt compelled to write repeatedly for relief, their awareness of the inescapable grind of their poverty increased, their sense of self shifted, and their unsettledness took this new form. Thus, their journey in losing the conviction that letter-writing would end their unsettledness is tracked, and contrasted with those that held onto it,

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and those who relied upon this belief as the link back to their settled self. Alongside, and influencing this, however, is the paradox that the Cumulatively Troubled still persisted in writing – while doubting whether it could effectively counter the ill-effects of the lifecycle – due to the emotive release they obtained from expressing their unsettledness.

This release gained by paupers from writing of unsettledness is further contextualized and explored in the final typology, Chapter Six: ‘The Dying’. The testimonies of Hannah Beck, Joseph Himsworth, and Richard Massey form the basis of an investigation into the unsettled that used writing at their self-perceived final moments of life, as they wrote while inspired by the unsettling thoughts that they were to die without dignity. Death was acceptable to these paupers on the terms set out in their requests to their Overseers: before they died, they were to be granted their dying wishes. It will be shown how these paupers exploited the rhetorical power of their forthcoming death to justify emotional outbursts set out in their terms, rather than those required by their parish. The Dying believed their suffering put them beyond reproach. While the Laid-low, Status-stressed, those with Compromised Identities, and the Cumulatively Troubled could be tipped into unsettledness by their fears of mortality, the unsettled Dying were perversely liberated and wrote of their coming end as a release. But, as with the other unsettled paupers, the Dying needed someone (the Overseer) to hear and acknowledge their suffering. As we will see, they could embrace death if it came on their own terms and re-established their agency, which they put in terms of securing themselves one final gift of relief; within this their tactical use of religious rhetoric will be assessed. This craving for dignity, for their pains to be heard, and to feel themselves acting against their unsettledness through letter-writing, united all of the unsettled, irrespective of their typological differences of their experiences.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to utilize pauper letters for the first study of the emotional dynamics of what it was for an ordinary person to be unsettled in early nineteenth-century England and Wales. The analytical category of ‘unsettledness’ is to be introduced as a means for moving away from studying incidences of ‘madness’ that have usually not accounted for the perspective of the sufferer. The unsettled pauper is not viewed as a patient – although a nod is made to Porter’s desire to move toward the ‘patient’s view’ of their illness – as the act of writing is viewed as a specific act by the affected pauper which displayed their agency (to

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themselves and their contemporaries), with the act itself informing their sense of self relative to their (un)settledness. By interpreting the capacities of the authors to express themselves in relief negotiation, a shift is made – once advocated for but not acted upon by Sokoll and King – to read the emotions of these letter writers. This is not only momentous for studies of the poor, but for histories of emotion which have, for the most part, struggled to locate a source base to conduct an investigation into the emotional lives of the poor. By using the interpretive framework of unsettledness – and in locating five distinct albeit inter-linked typologies – the first major step is to be taken to present an emotional history of life (and death) under the Old Poor Law. It is not a history of madness conducted upon analysis of various asylums and through the interpretive prism of Foucauldian notions of power. Nor will it be a traditional study of the bureaucracy that defined welfare and poverty. Equally, it is not a regional study of the impact of industrialization. Finally, it is not even a classic study of pauper letters. This is a story of emotion, of mental ill health outside the auspices of the asylum, with the interpretive vehicle of pauper letters used to present new insight into the spectrum of unsettled minds.

Reading Pauper Letters

Historians' analyses of pauper letters have showcased the value of these documents. Yet, hitherto, the full interpretive potential of this source for constructing emotional histories of the labouring classes has not been fulfilled, as I have already suggested. By utilising these ego documents my thesis addresses this issue while recognising the possible interpretive pitfalls associated with the letters. These include questions of: authorship; truthfulness; representativeness and bias; and, how and to what end the letters may be read. The following chapter will address each criticism in turn by arguing that each of these issues has been overstated, while none serves to diminish the essential value of the source. The analysis will introduce how pauper letters may be re-purposed by historians to gain unprecedented insight into the emotions of the poor.

Ego Documents

'[T]he coming of age of egodocuments' was once heralded by Rudolf Dekker, as he defined them in terms of being texts written about individuals' lives from their own point of views and which, in the act of being written, the authors worked to construct their lives.¹⁰⁷ Mary Lindemann recognised the potential capacity of egodocuments in 'endowing ordinary lives with, agency, dignity and texture'.¹⁰⁸ However, the term and its uses remains contested, with Dekker having conceded: '[t]he question of what makes an egodocment is still open to debate'.¹⁰⁹ The concept of 'life-writing' has since gained prominence through the works of Martyn Lyons and Clare Brant. While Brant cautioned that her commitment was 'first and foremost to letters as literary objects', the crux of her argument was that 'life-writing' gets one closer to the author's dual purpose of recording and conveying his or her life and the author's ability to re-construct it.¹¹⁰ For example, one might look at prisoner letters as life-writing.¹¹¹ While Martyn Lyons and Sigrid Wadauer have looked at the writings of tramps

¹⁰⁷ Dekker, Rudolf. (ed). *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing in its Social Context since the Middle Ages*. Hilversum: Verloren, 2002: 17.

¹⁰⁸ Lindemann, Mary. "Sources of Social History." In P. Stearns (ed). *Encyclopaedia of European Social History I*, 6 vols. Detroit: Scribner's Sons, 2011: 36.

¹⁰⁹ Dekker, *Egodocuments and History*, 13.

¹¹⁰ Brant, Clare. *Eighteenth Century Letters and British Culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006: 3.

¹¹¹ Foyster, Elizabeth. "Prisoners Writing Home: The Functions of the Letter 1680-1800." *Journal of Social History* 47, 4 (2014): 943-67.

and beggars, for the most part, historians have focused upon autobiographies, diaries and familial letters.¹¹² Thus, the focus of historians has been upon the most literate people post-1850 wherein it has been perceived that literacy rates had improved. The corollary of this observation has meant historians' ability to talk of emotional landscapes of people and their constructions of self has been strictly limited. Insofar as historians have endeavoured to look at ordinary peoples' life-writing, there has always been a struggle with issues of mediation and self-writing. The likes of Henry French and Alexandra Walsham have argued that, in these instances, the individual voice is dimmed and that it therefore cannot be considered true life-writing.¹¹³ This may or may not be true, and it is not the intent of this thesis to resolve this issue per se, but to act upon the idea, namely: a new source is required if one is to analyse the emotions of the poor. Pauper letters are presented for their capacity as a source in which the authorial voice was shaped by expectation but not standardised. This thesis contends that within each pauper letter it is possible to see the landscapes of individuality of the poor and their emotions.

Authorship

Pauper letters reflected the unique thoughts, feelings, and material experiences of the claimant in whose name the relief request was made. Yet questions pertaining to authorship of the letters have consistently been raised, with the efficacy and utility of them often on the line. However, rather than undermining the value of the letters, each query has come to accentuate their usefulness to historians. For instance, in arguing that the working classes did not have access to the requisite skills to construct a letter until the 1860s, David Vincent's study of literacy rates inadvertently illustrates how pauper letters have been over-looked as a source.¹¹⁴ The need to write for relief – a process which switched from petitioning to letter-writing – in fact drove the rise of literacy rates from the 1740s onwards; with Sokoll having found that by the 1790s 'even those at the very bottom of society' had benefitted from the

¹¹² Lyons, Martyn. "Ordinary Writings or How the Illiterate Speak to Historians." In M. Lyons (ed). *Ordinary Writings, Personal Narratives: Writing Practices in 19th and early 20th Century Europe*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007; Wadauer, Sigrid. "The Usual Suspects. Begging and Law Enforcement in Interwar Austria." In B. Althammer, A. Gestrich, J. Grundler (eds). *The Welfare State and the 'Deviant Poor' in Europe, 1870-1933*. Basingstoke, 2014: 126-149.

¹¹³ French, Henry. "An Irrevocable Shift: Detailing the Dynamics of Rural Poverty in Southern England, 1762-1834: A Case Study." *Economic History Review* 68 (2015): 769-805; Walsham, Alexandra. *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.

¹¹⁴ He argued that literacy may even have declined by the early nineteenth-century. Vincent, David. *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989: 95.

diffusion of the ‘technology of writing.’¹¹⁵ The practise of pauper letter writing therefore validates Martin Lyons past contention that the labouring poor were more literate than has been previously appreciated or evidenced.¹¹⁶

However, Keith Snell questioned whether the poor wrote letters for themselves by arguing that they may instead be products of a collective endeavour reflective of ‘multi-voiced dictation’.¹¹⁷ Sokoll similarly cautioned that ‘a pauper letter may represent several “voices”’.¹¹⁸ King has since admitted that: ‘teachers, clergymen, military-men and others were enjoined to write letters’.¹¹⁹ However, he goes on to explain how infrequent and impractical this practice would be, insisting – unlike in Europe – there was scant evidence of the use of full-time scribes; or that paupers copied from letter-writing manuals. Indeed, it was ‘implausible’ that paupers could have found the same person to write for them over periods of time or on a sustained basis.¹²⁰ Moreover, there is ‘surprisingly little’ evidence, King maintained, of collective writing in pauper letters, with the letter writers having tended to be self-referential even in the shorter series of correspondences.¹²¹ Pauper letters privileged the voice of its named author, and upon occasion, the voice(s) of those for whom they cared – such as their spouse or children – whose voices were woven by the individual into the narrative. Both King and Sokoll have recognised that our interpretation of the author is not adversely affected by these crossovers. King used his latest work to re-affirm his support for Sokoll’s main argument that pauper letters: ‘record [the] words of the poor as expressed by themselves.’¹²²

¹¹⁵ Sokoll, Thomas. *Essex Pauper Letters, 1731-1837*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001: 5. For more detail see: King, Steven. “Negotiating the Law of Poor Relief in England 1800-1840.” *History* 96 (2011): 410-35.

¹¹⁶ Lyons, Martyn. “Writing Upwards: How the Weak Wrote to the Powerful.” *Journal of Social History* 48, 2 (2015): 311-36.

¹¹⁷ Snell, Keith. “Belonging and Community: Understandings of ‘Home’ and ‘Friends’ Among the English Poor, 1750–1850.” *Economic History Review* 65 (2011): 2.

¹¹⁸ Sokoll, Thomas. “Writing for Relief: Rhetoric in English Pauper Letters, 1800-1834.” In A. Gestrich, S. King and L. Raphael (eds). *Being Poor in Modern Europe: Historical Perspectives 1800-1940*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2006: 105.

¹¹⁹ King, Steven. *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s-1830s*. Toronto: Magill University Press, 2019: 33.

¹²⁰ King, *Writing the Lives*, 33-4.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Sokoll, “Writing for relief,” 91.

Historians' growing understanding of pauper letters has led them to reject the argument that we can 'only assume the identity of the author of a letter'.¹²³ Instead, King and Sokoll have invited us to think that while exact identification of pauper authorship is useful and desirable, not having it does not prevent an appreciation and understanding of the plight of the poor. They are correct insofar that the material realities of pauperism can (and have been) effectively attested to. This has been best explained with reference to the role played by advocates in the creation of the letters. King and Jones have proven that although advocates could write on behalf of a pauper, the claimant had the letter written in their presence and, crucially, always with their input.¹²⁴ With the exception of advocate letters written by doctors, advocates never confined themselves simply to the reportage of facts but reported the emotional states of those on whose behalf they wrote. Detailing the emotional dynamics of the case was not necessary to secure relief, yet, as this thesis will show, the advocates consistently persisted to record such details. This tells us that paupers and advocates operated within the same shared emotional landscape. This is significant because the letters by advocates were interspersed with the poor's own writings. The structure, style, content and sentiment of advocates' letters were rarely different from that of pauper claimants' as both were framed with similar emotive terms. While the testimonies of advocates do not offer the exact words of their pauper claimants, their letters do convey their emotions and thoughts. However, King's acceptance of the ambiguities of pauper letter authorship has reflected and perhaps perpetuated the indisposition amongst historians to engage with the emotional dimensions of pauper life. Engaging with the emotions of paupers depends upon clear identification of an individual paupers' authorial voice. This cannot be achieved in every case. The premise of this thesis is not to argue that it can, but rather that in cases where it is possible to locate the author's individualised voice it is incumbent to read the emotional dimensions of their testimony in view of their material and rhetorical claims. This critical stance competes, yet ultimately compliments, those such as by King and Sokoll as there remains an understanding that the letters were 'owned' by those who purported to sign them, with them embodying the voice of the poor.¹²⁵

¹²³ Taylor, James Stephen. "Voices in the Crowd: The Kirkby Lonsdale Township Letters 1809-36." In T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds). *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997: 116.

¹²⁴ Jones, Peter and King, Steven. "Voices from the Far North: Pauper Letters and the Provision of Welfare in Sutherland, 1845-1900." *Journal of British Studies* 55 (2016): 76-98.

¹²⁵ King, *Writing the Lives*, 33.

Reading Pauper Letters

Truthfulness

Pauper letters have long been deemed a ‘highly credible source’ with their contents judged to be ‘broadly truthful’.¹²⁶ This fact is not disputed here (as there is no credible counter-argument to be made), though it is incumbent to consider how historians have reached this understanding for it reveals how one might conduct an emotional analysis of the poor.¹²⁷

It is possible to read pauper letters as having been written strategically with one audience in mind, the Overseer. Indeed, some of those who have considered pauper letters in this way and have doubted the veracity of the sentiments therefore expressed.¹²⁸ But this assumes that every letter-writer relied on a common emotional currency that was used and understood by all in order to secure relief. Those paupers would present themselves as helpless supplicants and their recipients would understand and appreciate this display and react in accordance with that writer’s wishes or they may fail to act if the expression of these emotions and experiences was not in the correct form. While this is a legitimate way to read the source, King has explained how pauper’s stories could be strategically ‘fictive and confected’ but ‘they were not fictional or invented’.¹²⁹ Paupers’ accounts were checked and verified meaning historians can read them as genuine emotional statements and while the language of pauperism was not deployed consistently between every pauper, the accounts given by an individual could represent an accurate reflection of their condition. All of the advantages and disadvantages of considering pauper letters is that they are capable of supporting both of these readings. In this analysis, I prefer the reading which focuses on upon the genuineness of the emotions expressed.

‘[O]utright lies’, meanwhile, were an exceptional occurrence within the letters owing to the Overseers’ ability to inspect the claimant. Checks happened with sufficient frequency to discourage such overt deception or outrageous embellishment.¹³⁰ Relief claimants understood that to be caught lying imperilled their chance of ever obtaining relief. Pamela Sharpe’s critique of the Hall families’ ‘tactical move’ to embellish their requests, has shown that such

¹²⁶ Sokoll. “Writing for Relief,” 108; King, *Writing the Lives*, 40.

¹²⁷ Thomas Dixon explored how ‘truth’ manifests itself through writing an emotion. Dixon, Thomas. “‘Emotion’: The History of a Keyword in Crisis.” *Emotion Review* 4 (2012): 338-44.

¹²⁸ Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*; Williams, Samantha. *Unmarried Motherhood in the Metropolis, 1700–1850: Pregnancy, The Poor Law and Provision*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018.

¹²⁹ King, *Writing the Lives*, 337.

¹³⁰ King, Steven. “English Pauper Letters, 1790s-1830s.” *Groniek* 204/5 (2015): 17.

endeavours could be treated as ‘acts of criminal deviousness’.¹³¹ The risk was too great as neighbours, colleagues and officials would inform the relevant authorities.¹³² Moreover, the letters of the poor were public documents that could be read by others and ‘they were certainly read out and circulated upon receipt’, and would ‘seep into the various publics’ rendering any deception by the pauper ineffective.¹³³ There is little evidence to suggest that when checks were made or more information sought by the parish authorities that paupers were found to be lying. The letters were, after all, ‘one element of the patchwork of contact between paupers and officials’ and, within this context, maintaining a lie was almost impossible.¹³⁴

More pressing is King’s conclusion on matters of pauper letter truthfulness: ‘The frequent claim in pauper letters ... that the writer had told officials only the half of their suffering seems to ring true.’¹³⁵ The full dimensions of this matter may be appreciated with reference to David Gerber’s argument that for letter writers, the ‘narrative truth’ could be more important than literal truth.¹³⁶ King and Sokoll have been at pains to explain how in pauper letters the ‘reporting of fact, embellishment, appropriation of the voices of others, rhetorical flourishes, half-truths, and a strong emotional backbone’ was woven into each narrative.¹³⁷ After all, the rhetorical manoeuvres made by paupers were ‘the integral and most specific part of an individual narrative of a particular case.’¹³⁸ Historians of pauper letters have obsessed over the material truths and realities of pauperism. But paupers wrote their own ‘narrative truth’. As this thesis will demonstrate, theirs was an emotional truth as well as a material one. Appreciating the plight of the poor is not simply a matter of recording the clothing they had or the amount of relief they may have received, but what it felt like to find oneself needing to write for relief.

¹³¹ Sharpe, Pamela. “‘The Bowels of Compaion’: A Labouring Family and the Law, c.1790-1834.” In Hitchcock, King & P. Sharpe, *Chronicling poverty*, 96.

¹³² Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters*, 65.

¹³³ King, *Writing the Lives*, 40.

¹³⁴ King, *Writing the Lives*, 41.

¹³⁵ King, *Writing the Lives*, 42.

¹³⁶ Gerber, David. “Epistolary Masquerades: Acts of Deceiving and Withholding in Immigrant Letters.” In B. Elliott, D. Gerber and S. Sinke (eds). *Letters Across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006: 320, 322.

¹³⁷ King, “English Pauper Letter,” 19.

¹³⁸ Sokoll, Thomas. “Writing for Relief: Rhetoric in English Pauper Letters, 1800-34.” In A. Gestrich, S. King, R. Lutz, (eds). *Being Poor in Modern Europe: Historical Perspectives, 1800-1940*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006: 92.

But before we can move on it is essential to consider how to go about interpreting the interplay between truth, strategy, and rhetoric within letters from those paupers that described suffering the effects of mental ill-health and to distinguish what this means for how historians may interpret their accounts. Alannah Tomkins pioneered the way with her study of Samuel Parker's letters within which she identified how he was able to express 'how he thought poverty jeopardized his health by undermining his state of mind'.¹³⁹ At the heart of Tomkins' critique was an effort to distinguish between Parker's rhetoric and that of his genuine emotion. Tomkins conceded of Parker that his 'continued flow of letters itself contradicts the idea of a deep paralysing depression'.¹⁴⁰ But she took a wider view of the letter set and (rightly) concluded that Parker was essentially truthful, reflective of his ongoing struggle to 'impress letter recipients and readers with the sincere deprivations of poverty.'¹⁴¹ These was therefore an implicit acceptance made by Tomkins that a level of rhetoric was necessary in all pauper letters but that their authors – even, or perhaps especially, those suffering from mental ill-health – were capable of exercising agency and telling their truth(s) through writing. This thesis attempts to take analysis of pauper letters from those with self-described mental ill-health (unsettledness) a step further. But there is the possibility that such individuals wrote in such terms owing to a perceived strategic necessity rather than real emotion. The chapters dedicated to the five typologies will show how writing of unsettledness was a conscious and potentially self-destructive act with those moved to write motivated by their sincere belief this act would help them alleviate their suffering from the effects of their poverty and unsettled mind.

Mention of emotions in respect to the truths of pauper letters raises questions as to whether emotive appeals were a successful strategy employed by the poor. The evidence of the case of John Sayer cited by Tomkins suggests expressions of emotional distress could generate emotional obligation from the parish official, after Sayer memorably described himself as: 'Labouring on a Bed of Sickness'.¹⁴² Tomkins duly noted that he received substantial relief. Sokoll's work on old-aged paupers indicated that expressions of emotional distress tended to be produce more successful results and, more broadly, he later clarified how 'Overseers did

¹³⁹ "'Labouring on a Bed of Sickness": The Material and Rhetorical Deployment of Ill-Health in Male Pauper Letters.' In A. Gestrich, E. Hurren and S. King (eds). *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor*. London: Continuum, 2012: 63.

¹⁴⁰ Tomkins, "'Labouring on a Bed"', 62.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

not normally run the danger of falling victim to “mere rhetoric.”¹⁴³ This context of the potential value of emotional expression to paupers is especially useful when taking into account how ‘lucid, literate, self-aware’, Samuel Parker failed to secure any relief from his seven letters.¹⁴⁴ King later suggested:

[W]e jettison binary concepts of success and failure in favour of experiential and mutable indicators such as hope and disappointment.¹⁴⁵

This idea opens a conceptual space for examining the efforts of the unsettled (and the likes of Samuel Parker) as it allows historians to think in terms of other benefits besides financial gain. King then pointed to how replies by officials carried value over and above the words and that, despite their protestations to the contrary, writers often wanted to establish a dialogue that became on-going.¹⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the depressed Samuel Parker and the unsettled alike might reasonably be read as having, in Tomkins words:

a tone that may be anti-strategic in terms of securing relief but may be usually revealing to a modern reader¹⁴⁷

The word ‘anti-strategic’ captures the essence of the accounts by unsettled writes that are exhibited later in this thesis. But with the interpretive basis established for how paupers might have something to gain through the act of writing beyond receiving financial remuneration, it raises a final interpretative consideration as to issues of emotional truth, rhetoric, and strategy.

From an interpretive standpoint it is reasonable to wonder whether there was room for distance between a pauper recognising themselves as unsettled and constructing themselves as unsettled in writing. Pauper letters were, as King noted, a product of a process.¹⁴⁸ In that process, paupers had come to understand what they were applying for and why they were doing it. This meant they devoted significant thought to what they would put into their letters.¹⁴⁹ Historians have already learned from analysis of the primary materials how, for

¹⁴³ See Sokoll, Thomas “‘Stop this Overwhelming Torment of Destiny’: Negotiating Financial Aid at Times of Sickness Under the English Old Poor Law, 1800-1840.” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 79, 2 (2005): 228-60.; -- “Writing for relief,” 108.

¹⁴⁴ Tomkins, “‘Labouring on a Bed”, 62.

¹⁴⁵ King, *Writing the Lives*, 110.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Tomkins, “‘Labouring on a Bed”, 63

¹⁴⁸ King, *Writing the Lives*, 118-31.

¹⁴⁹ King, *Writing the Lives*, 161.

instance, there was a notable infrequency of crossings-out on letters and have interpreted this as evidence that paupers dedicated a great deal of thought to the contents of their relief requests.¹⁵⁰ There is no reason to dispute this. It follows that it was inevitable that a pauper would attempt to articulate something that was meaningful. But this does not mean that all that a pauper wrote was strategic. 'A single letter could fulfil multiple purposes and thus meld together a rich and colourful rhetorical canvas.'¹⁵¹

In this context, it is possible to hypothesise a 'distance' between a pauper recognising themselves as unsettled when writing and how they recorded that unsettledness when writing for relief. However, it is not a possibility that should distort the analysis. While the unsettled could experience such distancing, their unsettledness meant they were uniquely disincentivised as they could find, through the act of writing, a way to recognise and address the needs of their troubled senses of self. The act of writing was vital to that process. Those that wrote of unsettledness believed they would be helped by fully exploring the depths of their unsettledness because, through writing, they could recognise how they required more than an alleviation of their momentary material crisis and sought closure to the events that had imbalanced their sense(s) of self. The emphasis of their writing (and the corresponding distancing between an emotion and its expression), differs between the typologies that I employ.

For example, one might look to differences between how the Laid-low wrote compared with those found in the Death typology. The Laid-low freely admitted unsettledness in order to move on and recover from its effects. They saw their unsettledness as a temporary situation and that, by granting them relief, they would recover thereby removing the need to make further requests. The Laid-low would try to impress upon their Overseers how their circumstances could deteriorate if they were refused relief; with the added implication that this would increase their suffering and might make them a costly burden upon the parish. The Laid-low were candid as they attempted to air the full extent of their grievances with a view to having them solved. The nature of their relatively common material difficulties meant it might have been possible for the Laid-low to mask their unsettledness behind the regular language and rhetoric found in relief requests. While they – as with the other unsettled paupers – did rely upon the common language of relief writing, the Laid-low were momentarily out of their

¹⁵⁰ King, *Writing the Lives*, 23.

¹⁵¹ King, *Writing the Lives*, 180.

element and their need to write reflected that lack of control over their sense of self and writing of it was their chosen means to try to recover.

The Dying found and simultaneously exploited the freedoms of writing. Dying put them beyond reasonable reproach. Often alone, these writers fought to be heard and had little reason to moderate especially because they were often less concerned with changing their circumstances (preventing their death) than being able to die with dignity. There are variations of a dignified death, but this unsettled group made an active choice to make sure they were heard and exploited that the Overseer had to listen to them. The Dying, like those in the other typologies, could have hidden behind rhetoric and perhaps some did, but the main point of writing was to express the truth of their impoverished condition and the fact of their existence to the world one last time and be heard. In turn, we can move from considerations of the way that letters were written and might be read to the question of the reliability of the contents themselves.

Representativeness and Bias

Determining whether the surviving letters are representative of those sent by paupers and mirror the rhetoric, strategies, and feelings contemporaries expressed in person to their Overseers has been a considerable task. While King has emphasised that there are 'remarkable collections' of letters to be found from both rural and urban areas, he added the caveat that relatively few letters, which are known to have been sent, remain for the largest urban areas.¹⁵² Before him, Langton offered caution in highlighting the complexities of the typographical and topological variables that came to define Poor Law sentiments and pauper agency.¹⁵³ 'The letters were 'built-in' to the very fabric of the poor law system'.¹⁵⁴ Further studies indicated that there was no distinction in terms of structure, intent, rhetoric or content from the surviving physical letters compared with those that were read out at vestry meetings or noted in minutes. When letters did not survive, they were often recorded as being received, read and replied to.¹⁵⁵ For example, King has shown how the overseer of the parish of Thrapston in the county of Northamptonshire copied the incoming items of parochial

¹⁵² King, *Writing the Lives*, 29.

¹⁵³ Langton, John. "The Geography of Poor Relief in Rural Oxfordshire, 1775-1832." In P. Jones and S. King (eds). *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2015: 193-234.

¹⁵⁴ King, Steven. "Friendship, Kinship and Belonging in the Letters of Urban Paupers, 1800-1840." *Historical Social Research* 33, 3 (2008): 252.

¹⁵⁵ King, *Writing the Lives*, 38.

correspondence alongside their replies. Aside from random use of capitalisation, the letters, he argued, ‘appear faithful copies of the content, structure and spelling’.¹⁵⁶ He concluded that there was ‘no difference at all in the characteristics of these letters when set against those from the wider corpus’.¹⁵⁷

This said, one might ask about the representativeness of pauper letters against the context of those that were able to negotiate with their settlement parishes in person. Being a visible presence in the parish may have made it easier for the claimant to appear trustworthy and deserving; they were able physically to convey their emotions. It is possible such contemporaries called upon different tactics to those used by the letter writers. The issue is how many people were ‘out of their place’ and writing letters. While no national perspective is obtainable, King has highlighted that ‘for some places ... those who remained in the parish were un-representative’ and that ‘only a minority of those who could have been removed actually were’.¹⁵⁸ The work of Samantha Williams, which effectively linked family reconstitution to the poor law, was located in areas that had relatively high percentages of people and who had remained in their home parish.¹⁵⁹ In many other places there were higher turnover of people which often led to more out-parish relief and more letters. Colin Pooley and Jean Turnbull’s work explained the interplay between life-cycles and the need to migrate and suggested that the ‘average’ person experienced multiple life-cycles, moving around the parish and region of their birth.¹⁶⁰ Esther Hampson emphasised in her study of Cambridgeshire that non-resident relief had become a ‘considerable item’ in the parochial accounts by the 1790s and that: ‘It was to "casual" charges, moreover, that an ever larger proportion of the poor-rate was devoted.’¹⁶¹ Further, ‘a surprising number’ of the in-parish poor, King has argued, both appeared before the Overseers and wrote the letters either

¹⁵⁶ King, *Writing the Lives*, 43.

¹⁵⁷ King, *Writing the Lives*, 43-4.

¹⁵⁸ King, *Writing the Lives*, 45.

¹⁵⁹ Williams, Samantha. “Caring for the Sick Poor: Poor Law Nurses in Bedfordshire c.1770-1834.” In P. Lane, N. Raven and K. Snell (eds). *Women, Work and Wages in England 1600-1850*. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004: 141-69: -- “The Experience of Pregnancy and Childbirth for Unmarried Mothers in London, 1760-1866.” *Women’s History Review*, 20 (2011): 67-86; -- *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle Under the English Poor Law 1760-1834*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011; -- *Unmarried Motherhood in the Metropolis: Pregnancy, the Poor Law and Provision*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018.

¹⁶⁰ Pooley, Colin and Jean Turnbull. *Migration and Mobility in Britain since the Eighteenth Century*. London: UCL Press, 1998.

¹⁶¹ Hampson, Ethel. *The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire 1597-1834*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934: 189.

contiguously or sequentially.¹⁶² The very dichotomy of in- and out-parish is, therefore, misleading. The issues of representativeness – and before it, those of authorship and truthfulness – is best served by King's conclusion:

Even if some historians are uncomfortable with the view that such letters provide us with an – or perhaps *the* – authentic voice of the poor, we can have confidence that they represent and embody a set of rhetorical and strategic models and approaches to agency that were recognisable across the spectrum of pauper types and by a range of recipients.¹⁶³

With this in mind, it is now possible to examine a selection of pauper letters with a view to understanding the operation of the Poor Law and their potential to be read as documents that embody and construct pauper emotion.

John Painter

On 27 August 1835 and 14 September 1835, John Painter wrote letters from his residence in London to the Overseers of his home parish Tilehurst, Berkshire, which exhibited some of the key features of pauper letter writing:¹⁶⁴

No 4 Little Minories

London

27th Aug 1835

Sir

I have taken the liberty of troubling you with this letter to say that since I was with you that I have not been able to follow my employment through illness, and if that was not the case, trade is so very bad I should find it a difficult matter to get a job in my line owing to the many saw mills now in use. I have with held troubling you as I promised for a twelve month, and have endeavoured during that time to get a starving living, that I am now obliged to ask you for some assistance to pay my Rent and other expenses which I have been obliged to get credit for, I shall feel greatly by you sending me what you think proper, to save me and you the expence of my coming down.

I am Sir

¹⁶² King, *Writing the Lives*, 45.

¹⁶³ King, *Writing the Lives*, 46.

¹⁶⁴ King has shown that London was the single biggest sending community and that most places of settlement had at least one pauper writer in London. See King, *Writing the Lives*, 26.

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Your most Obt servt

John Painter¹⁶⁵

Second Letter:

No 4 Little Minories

London

14th Sept 1835

Sir

I took the liberty of writing to you about a fortnight back requesting you to send me some assistance according to your promise twelve months ago, but I am sorry to say I have not as yet heard from you; you are well aware through age, that I am not able to follow my employment, and if I could the Trade is so very bad that I should not be able to get any thing to do. I hope I shall not be disappointed hearing from you some time this week – if not myself and Wife will be under the necessity of coming down which I should wish to spare you the expence by you sending to me.

I am Sir

Your Obt Servt

John Painter¹⁶⁶

Painter began his request for relief with a deferential acknowledgement of the Overseer's authority and cited the 'liberty' he took in writing. Such displays of respect were a universal feature found in these sources; although how this was achieved differed according to individual stylistic preference. Failure to conform to this form of address imperilled the chances of the claimant receiving relief. By conforming, Painter – and his pauper contemporaries – helped ensure that their claims would be considered; and at a deeper level, confirmed their understanding of their role in the dialogue between pauper and Overseer. Letter writing was accepted as the communicative tool for both parties to negotiate relief.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ BRO D/P 132/18/15.33, letter, 27 August 1835.

¹⁶⁶ BRO D/P 132/18/15.34, letter, 14 September 1835.

¹⁶⁷ Note too, that it is clearly a letter. The form of writing followed the patterns of letter writing rather than a petition.

Painter continued his request by explaining how he had written before ‘a fortnight back’, and in lieu of a reply from the Overseer felt it was necessary (and his right) to re-state his case. Crucially, once poor people such as Painter felt their circumstances necessitated that they write to the parish for relief, the claimants were determined to be heard. This was the accepted grounds of relief negotiation between the two opposing yet collaborating sides. On one side resided the Overseer, who was willing to judge claims on the basis that the claimant displayed their deference and worthiness for relief. While on the other side, paupers calculated that their act of writing (when in accordance with the customs of the format), would result in their receiving a reply, and most likely, lead to relief. The clash between pauper and Overseer displayed in all pauper letter writing occurred between the former group’s self-proclaimed moral rights to relief, set against the latter’s legislative prerogative to determine the issue.¹⁶⁸ Painter made oblique reference to this dynamic when he conceded of the Overseers that: ‘I have not heard from you’. He could do nothing to change this but write again. While the power was with the Overseers, paupers like Painter possessed the means and exercised their agency through letter-writing to register their needs with a view to their needs being resolved. This is why, rather than chastise or bemoan them for not having helped him before, Painter chose to re-familiarise his Overseers with the particulars of his case.

‘You are well aware through age, that I am not able to follow my employment’, Painter continued in his attempt to ingratiate and render himself a sympathetic figure. All paupers did this to varying extents, with Painter assuming a familiarity owing to his having written of this matter previously; and yet, in most cases, the claimant expected the Overseer to be cognizant with their suffering, sometimes despite them not having previously made contact. Adopting such a tone allowed the likes of Painter to fully personalise their case. The underpinning logic of such an act was that it emphasised to the Overseer that this claimant was truly their responsibility and, concurrently, made it more justifiable for them to grant relief to someone whose circumstances they were personally acquainted and could be more sympathetically disposed. At the same time, Painter had framed the cause of his request in the easily appreciable terms of his illness and troubles with work. Both issues were common, understandable and ordinary grounds for granting relief. Yet Painter, like many before and

¹⁶⁸ Jonathan Healey argued that paupers felt they had the right not to relief, but not to starve. Healey, Jonathan. *The First Century of Welfare: Poverty and Poor Relief in Lancashire, 1620-1730*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2014. However, Healey’s analysis focused on a period before the timeframe of this thesis and it must be noted that King has since noted that by the beginning of the nineteenth century paupers had been using the rhetoric of starvation in letters to hark back to an absolute requirement – that referenced by Healey – for the Old Poor Law in 1601 to prevent starvation. See Healey (above) and King, *Writing the Lives*.

after him, was careful not assign all the blame for his plight upon himself as he combined self-justifications with self-pity in warning that even if he had been able to work: 'Trade is so very bad that I should not be able to get any thing to do.' Painter had placed his difficulties into a wider context whilst reiterating to the Overseer that he had no alternative but to seek their support. To this end, he re-affirmed his 'hope I shall not be disappointed hearing from you some time this week'.

Declarations of hope were essential to the composition of relief requests because they affirmed to their authors their own chance of recovery and highlighted to their audience that they were worth the temporary expense of relieving them. Painter combined his invocation of hope with a subtler registering of his hurt, of being 'disappointed', imbuing his request with an urgency that the Overseers swiftly acquiesce to his needs. This need was strengthened by his reminder that it was not only he that toiled, but his wife too. Then as his last act of persuasiveness Painter deployed the greatest tool a pauper possessed in his second letter, intimating that if relief was not forthcoming he and his wife:

will be under the necessity of coming down which I should wish to spare you the expence by you sending to me

The power in this statement comes from paupers having known that the expense of removal for a pauper was greater and potentially more troublesome for the home parish than sending money to the claimant. Paupers may not have had a legal right for relief under the Old Poor Law, but they knew and were able to leverage their knowledge that it was simpler and more cost effective to pay them what they wanted rather than have to pay for them to return to the parish, to ensure they received relief. All paupers recognised this, with Painter having made this point masterfully, saving it as his last and most compelling persuasive flourish. He even framed his point in terms of him helping out the parish in requesting relief thereby saving them the coming cost of his and his wife's move back to Berkshire. Yet all the same, he completed his letter with another show of deference to his Overseers, referring to himself as 'Your Obt Servt'. Nor had Painter underplayed his position: it remained the privilege of his Overseers to determine what became of him; they could grant him relief, pay for his relief, or even ignore his request again. Beyond writing, Painter was powerless: the very fact he found himself having to write confirmed to himself how desperate he had become. Quite apart from the causes that compelled the likes of Painter to request relief, the act itself could be an intensely personal and emotive process.

George Cleaver

The letter sent by George Cleaver on 22 October 1825, from Kidderminster, Worcestershire, to his home parish of Tetbury, Gloucestershire, offers one example of a standard pauper letter from which emotional dimensions may more effectively be read:¹⁶⁹

Gentlemen

It is by the greatest necessity that I am now compell'd to address you with the following request in consequence of my own age & infirmity and also that of my Wife together with our affliction which is altogether very great it is now three years the 8th of this Month scince my wife was seized with a Parylatic stroke which nearly deprived her of the use of her limbs in short she is become a child which we may expect she being in her 79 or 80th year, & myself 67 years & on the 2nd of last June she was taken speechless but it came again & whenever she is taken with her complaint it nearly leaves her the same way I cannot leave her in consequence of her affliction & as my employer allows

me to work at home I am able to attend upon her myself and as I cannot do but little work myself and haveing no friend I find my income scarcely able to find us the common necessaries of life indeed that we never have for nearly 3 year past I have not done above five score in two weeks and that of the coarsest sort I am sorrey [sic] that I should be under the disagreeable necessity of thus addressing you under the aforementioned'd circumstances but as honest poverty is no disgrace I make bold to solicit your kindness to take into consideration our case and hoping you will be so good as to allow me if it is but sufficient to pay my rent you know I have been a poor Man all my life in this Town about 30 Years & never troubled you for any thing before nor would not now was it not a case of extreem poverty which oblidges me to this step by your complying to my request you will lay me under the greatest obligation

& will for ever ascribe myself

Your much Obedient Ser^{vt}

George Cleaver¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Each pauper letter presented within this thesis retains the original stylistic features as the sources were originally transcribed. No changes have been made to spelling, while page breaks and changes of hand-writing are noted where appropriate.

Reading Pauper Letters

Kidderminster

W^m Pitt Overseer

Sir

We wish to say that Geo. Cleaver has been in our employ more than Thirty years – he is a deserving man & we believe the above report of him to be Trufully correct-

We are Your hble Serv

postmarked Kidderminster OC22 1825 131

To the Parish Officers Tetbury

Gloucestershire

8 14 22

As with Painter before him, Cleaver had been moved by the effects of ‘old age & infirmity’ to seek the support of his parish. Although his account opened with similar deference to the Overseer by citing his ‘greatest necessity’, it differed to the case analysed above owing to the emotional depths its author explored. This may be witnessed in the contrast between how Cleaver took the earliest opportunity to share the suffering he and ‘my wife together’ endured, whereas Painter had neglected to mention his own wife until the end of his account(s). While little further may be read into Painter’s intentions, much may be seen in Cleaver’s as he added depth to his request, citing how:

our affliction which is altogether very great it is now three years the 8th of this Month since my wife was seized with a Parylatic stroke which nearly deprived her of the use of her limbs

Such detail was not uncommon in pauper letters.¹⁷⁰ But it is significant because a blander statement of illness would have provided sufficient information for the Overseers. The implication is that Cleaver felt it necessary – for himself and his wife – to have the extent of their suffering fully recognised: they had been struggling for three years. This impressed upon their audience that they had chosen to wait to apply until they became desperate and that they now needed someone to acknowledge and reward their efforts by sending relief. Cleaver insisted they had reach breaking point now ‘she is become a child’. He went on to re-

¹⁷⁰ GLRO P328 OV 7-8, letter, 22 October 1825.

¹⁷¹ For more, see Taylor, James Stephen. “A Different Kind of Speenhamland: Non-Resident Relief in the Industrial Revolution.” *Journal of British Studies* 30, 2 (1991): 183-208; -- “Voices in the Crowd,” 109-26; Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters*.

affirm his and his wife's worthiness for relief by repeating the fact of their old ages and emphasising that his wife 'was taken speechless'.

At the same time as invoking the suffering of his wife, Cleaver crafted a space in the letter to seek understanding for his personal problems. Hence he added:

I cannot leave her in consequence of her affliction & as my employer allows me to work at home I am able to attend upon her myself

The effect left him feeling that he had 'no friend' while 'scarcely able to find us the common necessaries of life'. Yet there is an irony, if not a paradoxical quality, to his words as it is clear at the end of the letter he had an ally, since an advocate supported his claim for relief. While the advocates' role in this tale will be explored further on, for now, it is more pressing to consider the impact of Cleaver's words. He had described himself as being friendless and alone, yet an advocate clearly lent their help. But it would be a fundamental mistake to conclude Cleaver was lying. Pauper letters retained the emotional truths of their authors. In Cleaver's case, he felt so desperate that at the moment he wrote he felt utterly friendless and, in turn, friendlessness and the 'currency' of friends – both neighbours and family members and formal advocates – is a compelling theme in the pauper letters more generally. Further, his invocation of the 'common necessaries of life' suggested an emotional dynamic to the regular props and forms of support that were offered by the parish.

Cleaver's advocates backed-up his claims by describing him being 'deserving' and 'Trufully correct'. Cleaver justified an emotional reading of his words from his Overseer by crafting his letter through the standard frameworks of a relief request.¹⁷² He highlighted the pivot points for his need to write such as his troubles with work:

we never have for nearly 3 year past I have not done above five score in two weeks

Moreover, and as with most paupers, Cleaver took care to highlight the exceptionality of his case having expressed being 'sorrey' for the 'disagreeable necessity' of his having to write. He reinforced his own claim by insisting that 'honest poverty is no disgrace'. Again, on one level this was true: the Poor Law was in place for this sort of eventuality if you were judged to be deserving.¹⁷³ Yet, Cleaver's very need to state this suggests that he had to work through

¹⁷² Jones & King, "Voices from the Far North", 76-98.

¹⁷³ For more on the purpose of the Poor Law, see Fideler, Paul. *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England: The Old Poor Law Tradition*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006; Harris, Bernard. *The Origins of the British Welfare State: Society, State and Social Welfare in England and Wales, 1800-1945*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004;

the potential ‘disgrace’ in having to write. After all, he had made it a point of pride earlier in the letter that it had taken him so long before succumbing to this need to write – and many pauper writers did the same. There was an element of persuasion that took Cleaver from enduring his struggles to the point when he had to write of them. The pivot point is witnessed in the testimony of his advocate:

Sir We wish to say that Geo. Cleaver has been in our employ more than Thirty years – he is a deserving man & we believe the above report of him to be Trufully correct-

Or, to be more precise, the phrase ‘has been in our employ’ is the telling admission. The implication was that Cleaver was no longer employable. Cleaver himself strengthened this notion with his previous reference of the difficulties he had in working. The evidence presented by Cleaver and his advocate, William Pitt, was that while he had been able to work, those in Kidderminster had been willing to help him and his wife. But as he lost the capacity to work it had become incumbent for him to apply to his home parish in Tetbury.

Cleaver had been persuaded that there was ‘no disgrace’ in having to write for relief. Where this thought came from matters less than the fact Cleaver mentioned it and, accordingly, it would be absurd to think it was not his voice, ultimately, that one hears in his account. Even if someone else – such as an advocate – had suggested this to him, it was Cleaver who had used letter writing to declare: ‘I have been a poor Man all my life’. His testimony nevertheless raises the issue of shared authorship, and it must be recognised that this style of interaction with him writing and an advocate supporting what he said, was the regular style of writing found in the source base of this thesis.¹⁷⁴ In cases where there was shared or muddled authorship it is, typically, extraordinarily simple to recognise. For instance, a letter allegedly sent by Thomas Baley to the Lyndhurst parish in Hampshire was clearly written by his wife as she justified ‘these few Lains’ on account of my Destreest as my Husband have been Out of work’.¹⁷⁵ Meanwhile it was likely that an advocate wrote on the behalf of Sarah White and let her sign the letter herself, when she wrote her request to the Carlisle Overseers on 19 June 1831 entirely in the third person:

Hollen-Lees, Lynn. *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People 1700-1948*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

¹⁷⁴ Jones, Peter and Steven King. “From Petition to Pauper Letter: The Development of an Epistolary Form.” In P. Jones and S. King (eds). *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2015: 53-77.

¹⁷⁵ HRO 25M84 – PO71-28-7-1, letter, dated only 1833.

I have to inform you that Sarah White your parishes are so bad in health that she has to have a girl to wait on her¹⁷⁶

Supportive statements were often given by advocates, but the system of relief had greater scrutiny of paupers' claims as the cases of George Gillham and George Crossland illustrate. In the former's case, a letter was sent on 31 August 1816 to the Overseers of Ticehurst in East Sussex by the doctor John Mays (and counter-signed by the surgeon Charles Newington), explaining how Gilham was now 'in good health' and there would 'be no danger from his applying himself to light employment'.¹⁷⁷ The implication was he need not be given further relief, and it was a point reinforced by a follow-up letter by an advocate on 3 February 1817 which described how, amongst other things, Gilham had been 'twice committed to the House of Correction' and was deemed to be 'a very Idle Insolent man'.¹⁷⁸ In West Yorkshire, an advocate wrote on 4 August February 1834 to caution the Overseers that, although George Crossland was a consistent recipient of relief:

as Soon as he gets it he Drinks it', and has become a 'A Common Desturber to his Nabours'¹⁷⁹

The poor law was a functioning system in which those it affected had a vested interest in how it was run and who was granted relief. The system and its guardians were not easily cheated. Those who applied for relief were likely to be truthful in their accounts as they knew that, otherwise, advocates would not support their case, with Cleaver's request representative of the vast majority of cases in which the author stated their case in the most honest terms possible.¹⁸⁰

Cleaver was not alone in believing his case was special or 'extrem'. All paupers sought to impress upon the Overseers the exceptionalities of their case, with the irony that together the letters read in similar ways. But again, this does not undermine the feelings and situation Cleaver had expressed. The rhetorical basis of his claim rested upon his character as a man well-acquainted with poverty – he did not dispute the suffering that came with being a pauper. What he sought to address through writing was his sense that his poverty had become overwhelming, even 'extrem', thus meriting not only that he wrote, but that the Overseers in his home parish intervene on his behalf. Cleaver was forced to write back to Tetbury because

¹⁷⁶ CARO PR-5-67-33a,b, letter, 19 June 1831.

¹⁷⁷ ESRO PAR 492-37-18-3, letter, 31 August 1816.

¹⁷⁸ ESRO PAR 492-37-18-4, letter, 3 February 1817.

¹⁷⁹ WYRO WDP20-9-3-18-10a, letter, 4 August 1834.

¹⁸⁰ Jones & King, "Voices from the Far North.": 76-98.

it appears that despite having been ‘a Man all my life in Town about 30 years’ in Kidderminster, he had never gained settlement there. Cleaver’s relief request was both financial and emotional. Any analytical attempt to distinguish or isolate the financial imperatives of a letter against the emotional dynamics expressed by paupers risks missing the essence of their author’s intent. If relief was granted it would signify to Cleaver and his wife that they were worth helping and that their hopes to rectify their decline were not in vain.

The emotional poignancy of paupers’ attempts to navigate the relief system may be read further in Cleaver’s ‘bold’ hope: ‘to solicit your kindness to take into consideration our case’. He had to request this not from those he knew, but to the people of a place from which he had moved away a ‘life’ ago. It is little wonder that Cleaver invested the negotiation with an imprint of his emotions; it would have been almost impossible not to. This feature is present in most, if not all, the pauper letters examined in this thesis: the very act of writing for relief often signified a momentous event for their authors as they admitted, recognised, and shared their suffering. However, much as Painter and Cleaver may reveal about the workings of pauper letter writing, it is necessary to highlight that both their accounts are slightly unrepresentative merely for the fact of the constructive skill and literary clarity of their accounts. Yet, as we shall now see, the same underpinning themes extant in Cleaver and Painter’s letters are to be found even in the letters of those for whom writing was a more daunting task. Every pauper who submitted a request possessed the means for their voice and emotions to be heard.

Hannah Watson

On 7 December 1832 Hannah Watson wrote the following request while situated in Hutton Cranswick, East Yorkshire, to the Overseers of her home parish of Beverly, East Yorkshire:

December 7 1832

Cranswick Bar

M^r Westrily Sir

I take the Libty of right to you to Now how you think I am to do with out the money you have Stopt I wish to state to you that whe have to Live on is six Shilins A weak wich I toald you be for I Came hear and h of that it Cost me 3 shilins A weak hout of that for fier and Candel four Nights in A weak I am at oblige to be hup for the Carers as for my Little girl She whants Shoes and Petticoats to keep her warm all so my self sute me for the place is so Bleek and

Reading Pauper Letters

Cold I hop thay will Continuer to Allow it me for if I Could do with out it I would not Ask for it. it would be Mor pleasuer to me than to recive it as for my Mother She is in her seventy too years of Age and is all to do for Like A Child she is nearly Blind I hop you will be so good as to Ancer this and send me the money by the Carer to morrow and by so doen you will

Ablige me

Hannah Watson¹⁸¹

Her request mirrored those made by all paupers with the immediate adoption of a deferential tone as Watson referenced how ‘I take the Libty of right to you to Now’. But it is immediately apparent that her words lack the precision and literary skill exhibited by Painter and Cleaver. Watson’s letter is harder to interpret being replete with spelling errors and devoid of all but the most basic grammar. But she was not alone in submitting such request. one should not expect the quality of pauper letter writing to be exemplary.¹⁸² A lack of punctuation did not stop Watson (or those like her) from effectively presenting their cases in the form of a letter; and the Overseers were duty bound to read them. Watson soon dispensed with the pleasantries – but not before displaying her working knowledge of their uses – before stating her:

we have to Live on is six Shilins A weak wich I toald you be for I Came hear and that it Cost me 3 shilins A weak hout of that for fier and Candel four Nights in A weak

Her tone was emotional and confrontational. Watson’s relief had been suspended and she was suffering. Posing the question: ‘how you think I am to do with out the money?’, forced the Overseers to consider, if not empathise, with her position and she created the need for a reply. Having set out her position, Watson moved to appraise her audience of her material conditions. Within her account was an admonishment that she had previously informed the Overseers of her needs to which they seemingly had not complied and which (she believed) led to her suffering and of the need to write. It is difficult to miss the emotional content. Watson referenced both the suffering of her ‘Little girl’ and how she herself suffered in a ‘Bleek and Cold’ place. Watson cast herself as a mother struggling to care for her daughter,

¹⁸¹ EYRO PE1-702-35, letter, 7 December 1832.

¹⁸² Historians do not agree on the extent to which the poor had functional literacy by this period with some suggesting minimal attainment rates, while others point to more sustained acquisition of literacy. Broadly, we now understand that literacy better than initially acknowledged by Vincent. See, also: Crone, Rosalind. “Reappraising Victorian Literacy Through Prison Records.” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 15 (2010): 3-37; -- “The Great ‘Reading’ Experiment: An Examination of the Role of Education in the Nineteenth-Century Gaol.” *Crime, History and Societies* 16 (2012): 47-72; -- “Education in the Working-Class Home: Modes of Learning as Revealed by Nineteenth-Century Criminal Records.” *Oxford Review of Education* 41, 4 (2015): 482-500.

making it obvious why they required relief. But she was careful not to wallow, and having stated her case, she assured the Overseers that: ‘if I Could do with out it I would not Ask for it’. This could be dismissed as the ‘usual’ rhetoric a pauper incorporated to emphasise their worthiness for relief. But it was more than this: there was a conviction to Watson’s words – underpinned by her emotive pleas – that she wrote out of desperation, and did not want to have to ask for relief. Having to ask confirmed to Watson that her child’s situation was perilous. This theme continued as she reminded the Overseers that she had the additional burden of her elderly mother to consider now she was ‘Like A Child she is nearly Blind’. Loading the letter with every conceivable complaint was a common ploy by paupers like Watson, not only to make them seem more sympathetic, but as way for themselves to voice all of their cumulative frustrations. This was a chance to share them with someone (the Overseer) who could listen and perhaps help to rectify them. As with John Painter and George Cleaver before her, Watson concluded powerfully:

I hop you will be so good as to Ancer this and send me the money by the Carer to morrow
and by so doen you will Ablige me Hannah Watson

She had adopted the ‘correct’ tone writing in terms of ‘hope’ while pushing for a quick reply and conveying the best means for doing so. Watson had attempted to remove all obstacles for sending her relief. There was a skill to her account and yet hers is one of the minority of cases from the East Yorkshire sample in which the aid of an advocate was unlikely to be granted.¹⁸³ Her account was emotive and, at times, unclear. The quality of her writing was poor; and in places she was confrontational. Each of these features an advocate would have looked to rectify. That they remain – and the fact she made no mention of any advocate – strongly suggests there was no outside influence. Watson’s writing underscores the issue that paupers had a working knowledge of how one might construct a letter to the Overseers. It is telling that amongst the entire sample this thesis called upon, every writer, more or less, was able to conform to the standards of writing such a letter.¹⁸⁴ Watson is emblematic of these paupers’ assertion of their right to be heard. They may not always have written the perfect letter, but were sufficiently skilled to ensure that they submitted a document that could, and therefore

¹⁸³ Of the 70 relief cases analysed in this region, 43 were written by or with the help of advocates. These rates are in line with what might be expected based on the previous findings of Jones & King in: “Voices from the Far North.”

¹⁸⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of how letters were constructed and standards of writing, see King, *Writing the Lives*, 32-60.

would, be read. Isabella Harrison's letter, which follows, shows how such letters could result in the granting of relief.

Isabella Harrison

Isabella Harrison wrote the following letter on 24 February 1823 from Workington, Cumbria, to her home parish of Kirkby Lonsdale, Westmorland:

Mr Gibson

Workington Feb 24th 1823

Sir/

I again Trouble you with a few lines to Inform you that I received the Enclosure of one Pound and am thankfull to you and the Gentlemen concerned in the sending of it for my relief, but am very sorry that I am informed in the same letter that they do not feel themselves inclined to continue my little Pension, except that I come to the House which is a thing quite Contrary to my Wish, as I am not able to assist my self in Dressing and undressing My self with Out Help; and my son whom I reside with at present has only 13s per Week and a rising family, and it cannot be expected that he can do any thing for me only give me House Room, and his wife assists me in my frail situation, and I Earnestly hope you wil have the Goodness to lay my Case before the Vestry Meeting and I think they will send me my Pension as usual and again what would it advantage the Parish of an infirm Woman to come in to be troublesome to all those about her and no advantage to the Parish no not in the least, but if there is any Paerticular Objection that my pension e not stopped I am Willing to Dispense with 1s/6d per Week Which I hope there will be no Objection to that so God Almighty may Prosper you all and do what is just and Charitable which I doubt not but you will I have nothing More to say only hope your answer will be favourable and direct for me to the care of Peter Kerr Coal Leader Went Workington Cumberland –

So I Remain your most Humble and Obedt Well Wisher in My poor afflicted state

Isabella Harrison¹⁸⁵

You will I hope send me One Pound this time & do accordingly after as the Gentlemen may think proper to Consult among themselves

Granted 1/6 P week¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ KLRO WPR19-7-6-15-13a,b, letter, 24 February 1823.

¹⁸⁶ The different hand is that of the Overseer recipient.

In response to her letter it appears – marked at the bottom of her letter – Harrison was successful in negotiating the re-instatement of her weekly relief. There was already a precedent for her being granted relief, which she was trying to invoke, but the way she achieved this mirrored the methods deployed by other paupers, as discussed above. For instance, Harrison began by paying tribute to the authority of her Overseers, thanking them for the relief they had previously enclosed. She explained how she had been ‘informed’ of the Overseers’ disinclination to ‘continue my little Pension’. The ‘little’ was a skilful touch reminding the Overseers of the relatively small cost of acceding to her needs, especially as she set it emotively against their demand she ‘come to the House’, which she maintained was ‘a thing quite Contrary to my Wish’. This was forceful writing, and from this literary position of strength, she cast herself as a more sympathetic figure:

I am not able to assist my self in Dressing and undressing My self with Out Help

Harrison then lent her request a deeper context by explaining that her son and his family were also suffered in the face of the parish not granting her relief and were also unable to support her. Once she had reiterated her ‘frail state’, Harrison switched to the practicalities of her case: citing how:

I Earnestly hope you wil have the Goodness to lay my Case before the Vestry Meeting and I think they will send me my Pension as usual

The last part is classic pauper writing in the sense that it was a true statement – she did think that once people heard her case her pension would be granted – but it also had that rhetorical element of subtly shaming her Overseers into action. Harrison knew she could not force them to help her, but she tried every means of persuasion and posed the question in terms of: ‘what would it advantage the Parish of an infirm Woman to come in to be troublesome’, before she immediately gave the answer herself: ‘no advantage to the Parish no not in the least’. There was an oral quality to these words – and the letter is most powerful if read aloud – that highlights how these sources were, as Sokoll put it, ‘oral writings’. Harrison’s next endeavour reveals how the negotiatory nature of securing relief when she admitted to being ‘willing to Dispense with 1s/6 d per Week’, if there was a reasonable cause. Her very act of writing to the Overseers is the clearest possible signal she could give to dispute this point. Harrison went on to employ more rhetoric as she linked the religiosity of the act of giving

her relief, describing it as ‘just and Charitable’. Invocations of Christian philanthropy were often employed by paupers as a way of indicating their worthiness for relief.¹⁸⁷

Reading this letter, one might ask how a person that is sickly enough to need help dressing was able to construct it. There was no indication that an advocate helped write it and one cannot say whether Harrison’s son or his wife helped with its composition. What seems clear is that it represented the feelings of Isabella Harrison. If someone else was writing on her behalf they may have been able to resist stating ‘I have nothing More to say’ before repeating all of the key tenets of her request. Thus, Harrison’s request expressed the ever-present ‘hope’ of paupers for an answer, moving onto a re-statement of her worthiness and deference, before reminding them of ‘my poor afflicted state’.

Squashed underneath her signature Harrison re-affirmed her desire for ‘One Pound’. Beneath this and in a different hand, it appears Harrison was eventually granted the relief she sought. This is useful information – and would have had important ramifications for Harrison – but for historians it is not as useful as it first would appear. While Harrison was granted relief it does not offer an explanation for why she was given it. This thesis is not primarily concerned with why but with the emotional dynamics and interplay involved with paupers’ stating their (sometimes unsettled) cases for relief.

Behind each individual case, from John Painter, George Cleaver, Hannah Watson, to Isabella Harrison, there was a deep personal story within which one can begin not only to see the material dynamics around relief negotiation, but also the hitherto unappreciated emotional dimensions of what it was to be a pauper needing to write for relief. However, although the letters featured in this chapter, especially those by Isabella Harrison, provide emotional insights, none displayed the unsettledness typologies. This thesis will shift to analysis of the testimonies of unsettled writers because these were the most emotional and expressive writers to be found. The contested nature of their requests – how, why and to what end they made them – mean that a more detailed understanding of the wider workings of the Poor Law will be found because the testimonies of the unsettled invoked such passions and harder negotiations between the pauper, Overseers, and advocates. Most significantly, it is contended that the authorial voices of the unsettled were those most likely to be truthful. The unsettled had every reason to hide or distort the voice of their conditions because admitting

¹⁸⁷ For more, see: Fidler, Paul. *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England: The Old Poor Law Tradition*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006.

such experiences contravened accepted societal standards and made it less likely that they would receive relief. Writing of one's emotions, especially unsettledness, could and often did backfire, lessening their chances to obtain relief, yet by virtue of their unsettledness, they felt emotionally compelled to give full voice to their feelings of what it was to live as a pauper.

Conclusion

Pauper letters as a source have been put to an array of uses by various historians. They reveal much about the nature and operation of the poor laws, about concepts of trust and about the process by which overseers sought to balance their duties to ratepayers, the poor and their advocates. They also crucially reveal that the allowances written with finality in the overseers' accounts were, in fact, contested and negotiated and, as King suggested, had variable meanings. But the context and rhetoric of pauper letters can take us further as they allow one to read the emotion and understand the dignity of the poor. Accessing these emotions and effectively exploring their full interpretative dimensions requires a focus upon a small sample of pauper experience, with very close readings of individual letter sets and an acceptance of the potential multiple readings of the words and sentences. This is one of the few ways we have of gaining some access to paupers' experiences. By extension, deep analysis of supplementary materials such as overseers' accounts and vestry minutes will not be present in the forthcoming discussion because these (and any other such related) sources will not provide direct access to the voices of the poor. This will not be a study of poor relief or even of the poor law process. It is a study of how the poor constructed their place and shaped their emotional landscapes. This is a complicated process requiring a closely defined method and direction. To read pauper letters one must locate and read for the silences they hold.¹⁸⁸ Within this, one may find examples of self-defined unsettledness. By focusing on unsettledness – the extremity of the experience and the vigour with which it was often described – it is possible to secure greater insight into the emotional dimensions of pauperism. As we shall see, unsettledness (in its many forms) was often a part of being poor and in need of relief. By using the interpretative framework of 'unsettledness' this thesis will, as I suggested in the previous chapter, present the first emotional reading of pauper letters and a new way of interpreting their themes.

¹⁸⁸ The author may choose to add or omit factors that motivated them to write. This means that which is not mentioned in the letters can be as telling for historians as that which may be directly referenced by paupers.

Laid-low

As she laboured to articulate her own desperate need for relief to the Overseers of her home parish of Worthing, Sussex, on 13 May 1834, Maria Longhurst recognised that her stresses weighed ‘very hard on my mind’. Alone and isolated, Longhurst could not have known that her experiences, while personal, also followed certain thematic experiential patterns shared by a significant number of her contemporaries across the country that were reflective of their unsettledness, that of being ‘Laid-low’.¹⁸⁹ For her part, Longhurst had found herself momentarily overwhelmed by the interrelated and perpetuating troubles with illness, rent, food, work, raising her child, and the machinations of the poor law. Her letter, even the very need to write it, reflected her emotional turmoil which encompassed the hurt, frustration, and anger at her perceived losses of agency, and dignity; the need to find a reason for its onset; a denial of responsibility for her troubles; and a deep desire to be mentally settled once more.¹⁹⁰ Using the words and stories of selected paupers like Maria Longhurst alongside those of Ann Parker, Timothy Pinnock, Elizabeth Bull, and Herbert Whitefield, this chapter will analyse how these themes could be indicative of both a person who had been Laid-low and how their own awareness of their condition led them to write to their parish. This will help address the previous gaps in the histories of madness and mental aberration by carving the necessary critical space to begin to reflect upon the dynamics of agency and spectra of unsettledness which contemporaries expressed, yet have been absent from previous analyses for this group of the marginal and poor.

The experience of being ‘Laid-low’ was unique to each individual pauper, yet familiar to many contemporaries of early nineteenth-century England and Wales who moved along the spectrum of unsettled mind. While each letter set may illuminate an individual emotional journey, there are unifying features. Accordingly, the letters are examined with reference to a number of contributory factors which include: gender, age, and the cause(s) of poverty. It is important to recognise here that multiple readings of the letters are possible. The letters presented in the ensuing analysis are a selection of those in which the principles of being a

¹⁸⁹ The full letter and an analysis of the contents is produced later in this chapter. WSRO Par.29-37-10-6a,b,c, letter, 13 May 1834. For more on emotional landscapes, see: Bound Alberti, Fay. (ed). *Medicine, Emotion and Disease, 1700-1950*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006.

¹⁹⁰ Reddy, William. *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Laid-low pauper are clearest. These are as follows: first, their act of writing was a knowing and direct challenge to their unsettled state; second, in needing to do this, they were sufficiently self-aware to identify a cause and effect to their unsettledness; third, they refused to believe their condition was permanent; fourth and linked to the previous point, was their resistance to finding oneself unsettled; fifth, they refuted personal responsibility for their conditions; sixth and crucially, they had a crisis of agency which reflected a crisis of dignity and was configured around acknowledgement of their troubles by the Overseer; seventh, they were able to exploit the traditional function of pauper letters to exercise a sense of control, but in so doing they could be left facing the full extent of their unsettledness while shorn of any means to tackle it, with letter writing itself having been the last resort to do so and; finally, while they used the letters to express their unsettled self, nonetheless the poor whose cases feature here had to work within the restraints of acceptable comprehensible common language in order to be understood and classed as a worthy recipient of relief.¹⁹¹ The interplay of these principles mean of all the typologies of unsettledness described by various paupers and detailed in this thesis, the Laid-low had the clearest journey back to being settled and, as such, they existed on a point of the (un)settledness spectrum that was closest to the settled end. The reason for this is that although these historical actors were unsettled, they were so in a manner which meant they were aware of what it meant to be, and therefore what they had to do, to be settled again. Through the case studies we may begin to read emotion into pauper letters thereby contributing to the history of emotion literature which has generally had to rely on sources related to upper and middling-sorts.¹⁹² Case studies of the Laid-low promise a new perspective on the dynamics of agency exercised by paupers.

There were seventy-eight individual cases of paupers being Laid-low in the sample employed for this thesis.¹⁹³ Forty-two of the cases concern males and thirty-six regard females. Of the original seventy-eight cases, thirty-six contain the input of an advocate within the

¹⁹¹ The cases will cohere to most, if not all the features described. What matters is that the cases presented are emotionally consistent with the notion of 'Laid-low' and the unsettled mind. The aim is not to retrospectively impose a definition. Rather, it is to represent the full range of unsettled emotions felt by contemporaries thereby attributing the appropriate significance to their words and experiences.

¹⁹² Even the most recent and definitive works on pauper letters have not dealt with emotion. See: King, Steven. *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s-1830s*. Toronto: Magill University Press, 2019.

¹⁹³ This figure is taken from the 1449 cases examined, of which 292 are unsettled. For more detail, see: Introduction: 17.

Laid-low

individual's correspondence(s).¹⁹⁴ Table 2.1 below illustrates the regional break down of the figures:

Place of Relief	Male	Female	Advocate(s)	Total
Berkshire	2	4	3	6
Cumbria	4	4	6	8
Gloucestershire	2	4	2	6
Gwent	2	1	1	3
Hampshire	7	3	5	10
Oxford	2	2	3	4
Surrey	5	3	3	8
East Sussex	5	4	5	9
West Sussex	6	8	5	14
East Yorkshire	2	2	2	4
West Yorkshire	5	1	1	6
Total	42	36	36	78

Table 2.1 – Laid-low Cases.

Of the unsettled cases examined in this thesis, the Laid-low cases comprise just over 25 per cent of the documented experiences.¹⁹⁵ Table 2.1 highlights three significant points. First is the gender parity in the expression of being Laid-low: both men and women expressed it and at similar rates.¹⁹⁶ Second, there is a regional dynamic to the reporting of Laid-lowness to the Poor Law authorities with the Southern regions of Hampshire, Sussex and Surrey all having higher rates than the rest of the country. The same has been said of rates of lunacy in mid-

¹⁹⁴ For a full explanation of what constitutes a representative source base refer to detailed explanation concerning pauper letters found in Chapter One – Introduction: 1-36.

¹⁹⁵ 78 of 292 unsettled cases. Or 26.7%.

¹⁹⁶ As we shall see, this was the usual pattern in the unsettledness typologies. For a full discussion, see Chapter Three - Status-stress: 95-132. In the Status-stress typology the trend of relative gender parity in the experience of unsettledness is spectacularly broken and reasons are given as to why and what this reveals about the wider experiences of pauperism for men and women.

nineteenth-century Britain.¹⁹⁷ This observation notwithstanding, the experience of lowness, followed similar patterns and was expressed in broadly similar terms. In this sense, a range of expected influences on the nature of the rhetoric and practice of expressing the emotion of being laid low are missing. Third, the impact of gender will be seen to have had an influence but not a defining effect on this experience of unsettledness. The women to be examined in this chapter grounded their travails in terms of motherhood. By contrast the men – as may be viewed with reference to Herbert Whitefield’s letters – phrased their complaints in reference to family as a whole; wife and child were included. Where Laid-low women felt they could not rely on their husbands, men equally could feel a burden in having to provide for theirs. Underpinning the experiences of both genders was their sense of isolation, but these pressures were rarely understood as the cause of their condition. Gender may have had an influence on experience but it did not define it. Additionally, there was little patterning in terms of age or the causes of poverty. Laid-lowness was fundamentally personal to each writer and the descriptions they gave were layered with individual meaning. As with all approaches to pauper letters, multiple and contradictory readings of the same sources are possible. We must return to the words of Maria Longhurst and those like her – including the aforementioned Ann Parker, Timothy Pinnock, Elizabeth Bull, and Herbert Whitfield – for it was their individual and particular use of their pauper letters which defined their personal experiences of being Laid-low.¹⁹⁸

Maria Longhurst

¹⁹⁷ For details on nineteenth-century lunacy see, Bartlett, Peter. *The Poor Law of Lunacy: The Administration of Pauper Lunatics in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1999; -- “Legal Madness in the Nineteenth Century.” *Social History of Medicine*, 14, 1 (2001): 107–31; Jones, Kathleen. *Asylums and After: A Revised History of the Mental Health Services from the Early 18th Century to the 1990s*. London: Athlone, 1993; Melling, Joseph and Bill Forsythe. *The Politics of Madness: The State, Insanity, and Society in England, 1845–1914*. London: Routledge, 2006; Oppenheim, Janet. *Shattered Nerves: Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; Wright, David. “Getting Out of the Asylum”: 137–55; -- “The Certification of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales.” *History of Psychiatry* 9 (1998): 267–90.

¹⁹⁸ Close readings have become the established and normative method used to conduct studies in the histories of emotion. Most relevant to this thesis is Olivia Weisser’s study in which she used the technique to examine over fifty contemporary cases of the experience of illness in seventeenth and eighteenth century England. See Weisser, Olivia. *Ill Composed: Sickness, Gender, and Belief in Early Modern England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. Other examples of close readings by historians of emotion include: Kaster, Robert. *Emotion, Restraint, and Community in Ancient Rome*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; Konstan, David. *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006; Liliequist, Jonas. *A History of Emotions, 1200-1800 (Studies for the International Society for Cultural History)*. London: Routledge, 2012. McMahon, Darrin. *Happiness: A History*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006; Newton, Hannah. *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580-1720*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; Paster, Gail, Katherine Rowe and Mary Floyd-Wilson (eds). *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004; Rosenwein, Barbara (ed). *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Laid-low

Maria Longhurst's words captured much of the essence of what it felt for the poor to be Laid-low. Her letter comprised a single correspondence to the Overseer and is produced in full:

To the Overseers of the Parish of Worthing Sussex

From Maria Longhurst Brighton requesting Relief

Dated May 13th 1834

Brighton May the 13th

Gentlemen, I am Sorrey to be under the Necistey of Troubling you but it is illness that as Drove me to it I have been ill for some time past but I am unable to Eren a Moral of Bread My illness is Abses in My Eyes and Mr Pritcherd a Surgen of Cavendish Place attends me all I Ask Gentlemen is a little assistance untill Please God I am Better and as I have a Child to Mentain it is very hard on my mind I pay 2s per Week for my Room and for the Present I have not a Penney in the World or I Would not trouble you and if Gentlemen you Would have the Goodness to Send me a Little to Asist me in my illness I shall be very thankfull Worthing is my Parish and I have no other Way to Claim your Assistance

I am Gentlemen very Respectfully

Maria Longhurst¹⁹⁹

at Mr Newman N3 Norfolk Buildings Nr Westren Street Brighton

Longhurst's account of pauperism was not unusual.²⁰⁰ Troubles with food, rent and maintaining children were a common theme amongst those who wrote such letters. Yet emotion was embedded into her words. When the emotions are acknowledged and appreciated it becomes difficult to dispute that Longhurst had been using her letter to recognise, articulate, and come to terms with her unsettled sense of self. Longhurst herself invited her readers to think this by revealing that her problems had become 'very hard on my mind'. The phrase is, by pauper letter standards, extraordinarily emotional.²⁰¹ Contemporaries in comparable material circumstances did write to their respective Overseers, but rarely

¹⁹⁹ WSRO Par.29-37-10-6a,b,c, letter, 13 May 1834.

²⁰⁰ The actions paupers could take has been explained, see King, *Writing the Lives*, 256-281.

²⁰¹ For more on the standard form of pauper letters writing, see King, *Writing the Lives of the Poor*, 311-39.

ventured beyond expressing some form of ‘distress’.²⁰² Longhurst’s choice to emphasise the stress upon her ‘mind’ thus distinguishes her from other paupers; and she must have done this knowingly. The question is: what did she mean by this and what was she trying to convey? By comparing what she felt in this moment with her past feelings, Longhurst highlighted the troubles she faced. She appeared to have reached a pivot point. The story Longhurst told confirms this: it was not her illness alone, but the new inter-woven difficulties of paying the rent, maintaining her child, and finding nourishment, alongside her incapacity, which had combined all at once compelling her to take action.²⁰³ Tellingly, it was this new pressure upon her ‘mind’ which catalysed this, as she implicitly used the letter to make a distinction between her old comfortable self and this new beleaguered one. Longhurst existed outside of her normal self – her ‘mind’ – and was writing to explore how this had come about and, perhaps more significantly, how she could recover.

The story of Longhurst’s letter parallels with the principles of Laid-lowness. First, was her insistence that she had been ‘Drove to’ writing her letter. The implication is that she did not want, but had to do it.²⁰⁴ That she found herself needing to write to the Overseer came as a shock to Longhurst. It seems to have been a blow as her words suggest a pride in not having to do it before. The word itself, ‘drove’, belies a conflict in Longhurst’s decision to write. That she – and it is crucial that we believe, as we should, that it was she who – chose to write this letter and, therefore, challenge her own muddled sense of self demonstrated Longhurst’s conscious decision to confront those feelings. Further, ‘drove’ also attests to her ownership of this process: she acknowledged how she had lost some semblance of control due to her troublesome material circumstances thus was having to write. But in recognising this and by writing her letter, Longhurst understood herself beginning to be taking back control of her plight. Writing was the start of a process to release those ‘hard’ pressures on her mind. By corollary, it is incumbent to recognise her self-awareness as she identified specific reasons for her troubles. Illness ‘drove’ Longhurst but it was the new perpetuating pressures of being

²⁰² Such is the ubiquity of pauper’s use of this word, it was robbed of any collective meaning beyond that it was something one used to convey a need for relief. The word ‘distress’ and the variants of its spelling, are almost as common as the author signing their name.

²⁰³ The situation Longhurst endured was not uncommon as Samantha Williams showed that women were more likely to experience poverty than men due to their poorer earning power and the difficulties of raising children alone. She went on to explain that there was a ‘strong cultural belief in the deserving nature and dependency of women.’ See Williams, Samantha. *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle under the English Poor Law, 1760-1834*. (Royal Historical Society). Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011: 125.

²⁰⁴ And, as was explained in the preceding analysis, the primary motive for writing seems to have been tied more to an emotional need. In most in standard pauper letter writing the practical and materials needs are the primary focus of the relief request.

‘unable to Eren a Moral of Bread’, with ‘a child to Mentain’, and not having ‘a Penney in the world’ to pay her rent, which triggered her need to write the letter. Illness alone, as Longhurst said herself, was not reason enough to write. These features cohere with the principles of being Laid-low and underpin the defining theme of this typology: the person’s shock at finding oneself unsettled.²⁰⁵ With shock there is often denial, and Longhurst’s reaction to her unsettledness proved no exception to this maxim and, in so doing, she exhibited more of the principles of Laid-lowness.

In her efforts to refute both the permanence and responsibility for her unsettled sense of self Longhurst’s employed some typical strategies of Laid-low paupers. These are captured in her assertion: ‘all I ask Gentlemen is a little assistance until Please God I am better’. Evidently, she expected to recover. But the emotional tone of her letter encouraged Longhurst’s readers to think of it beyond the typical rhetoric employed by paupers.²⁰⁶ This is because of the way she used religion to frame her request. Such a feature was unusual in standard pauper letters but common in those of the unsettled.²⁰⁷ Without reading the emotions of the letter this use of God seems without obvious purpose as it would not have added to her material claim(s). But, when read emotionally, it is clear there was a rationale to it. By referencing the influence of God over her condition, Longhurst used her religiosity as a way to apportion the blame and responsibility for her troubles away from herself so she did not have to face their consequence(s) alone. In seeking the Overseers’ help and in citing God she also gave herself hope of recovery; and one which, crucially, she was not solely responsible for so could not be damned if it failed. Such a coping mechanism was typical of many Laid-low paupers as it appealed to the notion of Christian charity and forged an expectation of officials that they ought to act.²⁰⁸ Longhurst’s letter is notable for her skill in creating the emotional space in which she could countenance her unsettled state in terms of how she could recover from it, while at the same time, unburdening herself of the blame for its onset and the pressures of tackling it in the future. However, her need to do this – to write to the Overseers and cite God – reflected an underlying crisis in her agency: by ceding some control of it to the Overseers, Longhurst created a reliance upon them to validate her feelings and help her recover.

²⁰⁵ By contrast, in Chapters Five and Six one may find that the Cumulatively Troubled and unsettled Dying were reconciled to their states which invoked a different style and experience of unsettledness.

²⁰⁶ King, *Writing the Lives*, 145-176.

²⁰⁷ For a full discussion of the link between religiosity and unsettledness refer to Chapter Six – Death: 189-208.

²⁰⁸ Taylor, James Stephen. *Poverty, Migration, and Settlement in the Industrial Revolution: Sojourners’ Narratives*. Palo Alto: SPSS, 1989: 78-91.

The trouble Longhurst had was that it was dependency that had been the original trigger for her unsettledness. She had once equated not needing to rely on the Overseer with being settled. But in having to write, Longhurst had been forced to deepen her reliance upon them.²⁰⁹ When her story is taken as a whole, it is clear she knew and resented this need to write and become dependent. The key aspect to note is this: Longhurst had already come to accept her illness and poverty before she wrote her letter, but it was finding herself dependent and the lack of agency which was subsequently crystallised to her, which left her feeling unsettled. The shock of needing to write had made Longhurst Laid-low and the testimony Longhurst came to write is indicative of all the essential features of this typology of unsettledness.

The ability of Longhurst to write a coherent letter is testament to her not being mad. The ability to formulate such thoughts and to have such a conscious sense of self differentiates Laid-low people from those in the asylums deemed ‘mad’. Laid-low people attempted to use their letters to moderate their own feelings and behaviours, whereas a mad person would not ever be aware of the need or possess the ability to do so. Thus, the mad are mad, while the Laid-low are definably on a different place on the unsettled spectrum. Longhurst’s letter was structured as pauper letter custom required, with respects paid to the Overseer at the start and end, but with a key difference.²¹⁰ In the middle she knowingly subverted the standard form by writing about her state of mind.²¹¹ Thus, Longhurst demonstrated her capacity to reason and create a space for her voice to be heard. However, in the same stroke, in needing to do this, Longhurst identified herself both to the Overseer and herself as ‘different’ which was captured in her plea that: ‘I have not a Penney in the world’. This phrase was rhetorical and could have been understood as such by the Overseers. But their reaction – or more particularly, the lack of reaction in not granting her relief or even a recorded response – suggests that it was an expression that operated outside of the boundaries of the acceptable Pauper-Overseer discourse.²¹² It was understood by both parties to have represented more than a conventional relief request. The statement had been emotional and was read as such. Essential to this is that Longhurst felt the statement to be true; and whether this was the case

²⁰⁹ Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*: 1-14.

²¹⁰ Sokoll, Thomas. *Essex Pauper Letters, 1731-1837*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001: 1-33.

²¹¹ King, *Writing the Lives*, 311-39.

²¹² Normal interplay of the letters revolved around the shared understanding of the paupers’ right to detail their poverty to receive help coping with its effects.

or not matters far less than the fact she felt this way.²¹³ In not responding to her request the Overseers had not disputed her plight but her right to write of it in such terms; the implication was she had been overly emotional in her request therefore they would and could not help her. The question: how did it come to this and what implications does it have for understanding the experiences of the unsettled? The answers are to be found with reference to the further case, that of Elizabeth Marley.

On 9 March 1835, Elizabeth Marley was to be found to be in a position not unlike the one Maria Longhurst had been in less than a year before. But Marley had an advocate stating her case and the letter read as follows:

From Mr. Frankland respg. Elizabeth Marley Dated March 9 1835

Mr. Frankland calls Mr Pollard's attention to the case of Elizabeth Marly who states that she is momentary expectation of being delivered of a child. She seems to have been a dissolute character, but must not be allowed to perish for want of food & shelter. Mr. Frankland begs Mr Pollard to take as his guide on this occasion, the decisions against overseers (who have refused timely relief) which have lately appeard in the Public Prints.

Mr. F. will be on the Bench at Worthing on Wednesday when he will be happy to investigate the case further.

Muntham March 9th 1835²¹⁴

The Overseer replied:

Mr. Pollard has the accompanying note from Mr. Franklands respecting Elizabeth Marley and should Mr. Newlands think she is an object who might be relieved he may dignify the same by writing his name at the foot of this and returning it to him by the bearer Marley

I will call*

Relive her 1s. to Nov

John Newland Guardian²¹⁵

March 9 1835

Worthing

²¹³ The dynamics of truth and rhetoric in pauper letters are critiqued in: Sokoll. *Essex Pauper Letters*: 3-17; King, *Writing the Lives*: 3-32; and this thesis, see Chapter One – Reading Pauper Letters: 37-64.

²¹⁴ WSRO Par.29-37-10-32a,b, letter, 9 March 1835.

²¹⁵ WSRO Par.29-37-10-39, letter, 9 March 1835.

On the verge of giving birth, the advocate had emphasised that while ‘timely relief’ had been refused before, Marley ‘must not be allowed to perish for want of food & shelter.’ Crucially, this was to be given in spite of her ‘dissolute character’, and accordingly, she was granted 1 shilling. This indicates two significant features: first, the Overseer had a moral requirement to help those in need; and, second, that same right could be compromised in the eyes of the Overseer when they were confronted with a deviant pauper, especially one who expressed their case emotionally.²¹⁶

In Chapter One we considered multiple questions as to how to read pauper letters bias, representativeness, and truth. We also considered the question of what might make success in a pauper application and whether measures of success can be adequately employed when considering pauper letters as in embodying emotions. Tomkins’ analysis of pauper Samuel Parker’s letters presented convincing evidence to this effect that submitting emotionally-wrought requests to secure relief was not an effective strategy.²¹⁷ The aforementioned Parker’s seven letters to his home parish of Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, between February 1833 to March 1834 illustrate the efforts of a desperate man. Tomkins identified his set of letters as being ‘unusually rich’ due to Parker evidently having possessed ‘a keen capacity for imagining the emotional responses of his readers.’²¹⁸ But, Parker’s emotional eloquence did not lead to success in securing relief. This process was exemplified in his last attempt when he tried to shame his overseer, writing:

[U]nless a little Assistance is procured from you – and the hopes of that is nearly Blasted – It appears no feeling no Entreaty will do.²¹⁹

Tomkins has surmised that Parker never did secure relief during this period because of his mistake in arguing from an emotional dimension to parish welfare.²²⁰ ‘Feeling’, to use Parker’s word, was not the rhetorical device a pauper was encouraged to deploy. There is an

²¹⁶ For more on birth and maternity, see Probert, Rebecca (ed). *Cohabitation and Non-Marital Births in England and Wales, 1600-2012*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014; Sharpe, Pamela. “Parish women.” In P. Jones and S. King. *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute*: 168-92. For more on the significance of advocates, see Jones, Peter and Steven King. “Voices from the far North: Pauper Letters and the Provision of Welfare in Sutherland, 1845-1900.” *Journal of British Studies* 55, 1 (2016): 76-98.

²¹⁷ Tomkins, Alannah. “‘Labouring on a Bed of Sickness’: The Material and Rhetorical Deployment of Ill-Health in Male Pauper Letters.’ In A. Gestrich, E. Hurren and S. King (eds). *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor*. London: Continuum, 2012: 62.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.* 61.

²¹⁹ Samuel Parker’s letters are presented in full in S. King, S. Nutt, and A. Tomkins (eds). *Narratives of the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Britain Volume 1. Voices of the Poor: Poor Law Depositions and Letters*. London: Pickering, 2006: 271 (The original reference for Parker’s letter is: SRO DR3891/6/102, letter, 30 March 1834).

²²⁰ Tomkins, “‘Labouring on a Bed’”: 62.

implication to Parker's phrase that he was frustrated that it should 'do' and resented that it did not. That frustration and self-defeating tendency is common amongst letters from the unsettled who often sought more than simple financial gain when sharing their troubles.

Within this context Elizabeth Marley is a useful case because she was granted relief in no small part because her advocate used a letter to create a distance between this 'dissolute character' the Overseers were being asked to help and their own obligation to do so. In effect, the Overseers were able to give relief without endorsing the character flaws of the person they were helping. In fact, a condition of relief appears to be the implication that the person who received it would address their flaws. By contrast, Maria Longhurst and many 'Laid-low' like her, would remove all of that essential deniability; much like the way Samuel Parker did in his flawed way.²²¹ Longhurst's letter displayed her unsettledness plainly so as to have it acknowledged and provide her the chance to write herself settled. This was set against the Overseers' own pressing need to not acknowledge/endorse such an act. If they helped one person who expressed themselves in such an unmoderated way they would leave themselves open to everyone else doing so.²²² Additionally, the Overseer had what amounted to a pastoral role for the local community, to that end, allowing its people to voice all their complaints in Longhurst's manner must have seemed entirely counterproductive.²²³ These complexities hint as to why there has been no attempt in this thesis to trace the literal success of requests for monetary or material relief because close reading from the testimonies of the unsettled suggest these paupers used letter-writing to seek deeper meaning and the act had a greater significance than merely securing financial aid.

The unsettledness of Longhurst's mind and sense of self invites an assessment of her significance. Viewed in isolation her case may be intriguing but insignificant; one pauper in a particular region who experienced a personal emotional crisis and wrote about it is not enough to justify invoking a new critique of how to read to all pauper letters. But Maria Longhurst was not the only pauper to express this type of experience, as the cases of Anne Parker and others begins to show, and which is suggestive of the importance of Longhurst –

²²¹ These two cases were selected to draw this distinction clearly. It is not always so in other examples, but the essence of the acknowledgement/deniability conundrum runs through all of the interplay between unsettled paupers and their Overseers.

²²² This was hopelessly impractical as the money for relief came from local rates which they set and for which they would, rightly, be held accountable.

²²³ Charlesworth, Lorie. "How Poor Law Rights Were Lost but Victorian Values Survived: A Reconsideration of some of the Hidden Values of Welfare Provision." In A. Hudson (ed). *New Perspectives on Property Law, Human Rights and the Home*. London: Cavendish Publishing, 2005: 271-93.

and those like her, that include Parker – for invoking a new study into the emotional lives of the poor.

Anne Parker

‘I was distressed and laid low again’, wrote Anne Parker to her home parish of Chepstow, Gwent on 19 July 1817, as she sought the aid of those same Overseers whose neglect had, in her mind, caused her sorry condition.²²⁴ Both letters that detail Parker’s move along the spectrum of unsettledness are (re)produced here in full and offer new insights into Laid-lowness:

First Letter:

Dear Sir

I am very sorry to be so troublesome to you you forgot your promise to send me a parcel by James Edwards and the order to Mr Williams to let one have things out of this that I waited for th. Boat yesterday Evening and found by James Edwards there was nothing sent by him I was distressed and laid low again I must beg of you to send next week I would not trouble you with letters on any account but fearing you had forgot

Caerleon 19th July 1817

Your very humble servt. Ann Parker²²⁵

Mr Gardner Malster [sic] Overseer of Chepstow

Second Letter:

Caerlion 27th July 1817

Dear Sir/

I being in great distress and lowness of sprit now having waited a fortnight for the orders of the payment of my weekly allowance you may be assured Mr Gardner that I have no means of subsisting upon. I wrote to you last week about the order for the Payment and the payment you Promised me and waited for the arrival of the Boat on friday last when to my surprize there was neither payment or orders for payment of weekly allowances sent am very sorry to trouble you with letters but I have now sent the bearer on Purpose hoping it will find the desired effect the Person or Widow of the late John Baidzman is going to continue in business

²²⁴ For a study of paupers in Wales, see Harvey, Ben. “Pauper Narratives in the Welsh Borders: 1750-1840.” Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Leicester, 2016.

²²⁵ GWRO Chepstow D.365.79, letter, 19 July 1817.

and I should feel obliged you would send the order to Anne Baidzman your taking this into your consideration will oblige your poor distressed pauper and save her from the pit of dispair.

Anne Parker²²⁶

Mr Gardner Overseer of the Poor Chepstow Anne Parker

Caerleon 27 July 1817

Parker's openness about being 'laid low' and her subsequent 'lowness of spirit' that it entailed raises the question of what she meant by those words. Direct use of the word 'laid low' by paupers was uncommon and yet notably familiar to the unsettled in Gwent suggesting there was a regional dynamic to the use of the terms.²²⁷ On 16 August 1818, less than a year after Parker's own troubles, Thomas Jones was compelled to detail the 'melancholy' death of his wife and how this, coupled with his children who were 'now a Heavier Burthen on my hands than when their monther was living', and the Gwent Overseers reticence in sending relief, left him as: 'laid low as any man could be'.²²⁸ The unsettled paupers of Gwent appear to have shared an understanding about how they could use the local vernacular language to their own ends. But, as with all other expressions of unsettledness, shared understanding was mediated and changed by the personal inflection bestowed by each and every writer to their case(s).

Anne Parker was no different. One would be forgiven for reading her expressions 'lowness of spirit' and 'pit of despair' as evidence of her being down, inactive, and depressed. Leaving aside the complexities of using these terms for the moment, the tone and intent of the letter contradicts this first impression. With closer inspection it is clear that, though Parker used those words effectively to describe her unsettled sense of self, the over-arching message of the letter is of her activeness. Parker had anxiously waited for the Gwent Overseers' correspondence, and when the first letter had failed her, she immediately wrote again.

As with most Laid-low people, Anne Parker's letters served her as a means of expressing and challenging her unsettled state and the style of her letters changed accordingly. The first opened with a polite reminder of the Overseers' obligation to her, whereupon she reserved mentioning her emotional state until late in the letter, and even then it was buttressed with the

²²⁶ GWRO Chepstow D.365.64, letter, 27 July 1817.

²²⁷ However, the experiences recognisable under the typology of 'Laid-low' were very similar whether the word itself was omitted or used.

²²⁸ GWRO Chepstow D.365.65, letter, 16 August 1818.

finale: 'I would not trouble you'. The second letter found her more desperate and it was shorn of the previous reservations as she fired her grievances at them:

I being in great distress and lowness of sprit now having waited a fortnight for the orders of the payment of my weekly allowance you may be assured Mr Gardner that I have no means of subsisting upon.

Nor did she stop there. This letter was longer than the previous account corresponding with Parker's increased loss of control over her sense of self. The ending was particularly imaginative and visceral as Parker beseeched they: 'oblidge your poor distressed pauper and save her from the pit of dispair'. Yet unsettled though she was, it is impossible to miss that she had voiced her pains in a manner that was understandable to her Gwent contemporaries. She had not been mad. Parker used her letter to confront her unsettled state and, to do this, she must have been self-aware. This awareness was captured in her fear of being 'laid low again'. The 'again' part is critical as it suggests a fascinating possibility: she had been laid low before and had recovered. This means it is not so much appropriate but essential to interpret these letters with a view to a spectrum of unsettledness.

Self-awareness also aided Parker's interpretation of the reasons for her troubled state and the local/regional conditions which defined it. Being in Gwent, she had found herself isolated and left waiting for a boat to bring her relief. Underpinning this was the fear the Overseer 'had forgot'. This fear, personal and genuine to Anne Parker, was nonetheless familiar to many who were Laid-low. By invoking this language of fear and by tacitly blaming the Overseer for it, Parker found a way of disputing that her unsettled state was a permanent feature. The link she made was between being granted relief and her emotional well-being and that it was the Overseers' fault for her being unsettled. Writing in this way allowed Parker to believe that her condition was not permanent because there was an obvious and accessible way to address it. Parker had created the emotional space to tell herself that she was doing all she could to recover. Further, Parker distanced herself from the worst excesses by referring to herself in the third person: 'save her from the pit of despair'. Such denial of personal responsibility was a standard feature of Laid-low cases. But though Parker's successful manipulation of the structure and common language of her pauper letters had enabled her to voice her unsettled self, one is forced to conclude that she was in a poorer state than when she had originally written. She was no closer to being settled and was left with a clearer sense of her own emotional peril; and this feedback loop of unsettledness was extremely common in all the typologies. Parker was not alone in being a Laid-low pauper

whose challenge to their unsettledness faltered even as they tried to write themselves sane - it was a defining feature of paupers moving along the spectrum.

Timothy Pinnock

Timothy Pinnock's Laid-low experience linked a festering resentment of his Overseers and his perpetuating failure to be settled. He wrote the following letter to his parish in Hampshire on 29 October 1825:

To the Overseers of the Parish of St Johns, Winchester London

29 Oct^r 1825

Gent,

I wrote to you on Wednesday last stating the deplorable state I am in to which I have recd. no reply what am I to do Gent. I have had no bed for five nights and for as many days nothing but dry bread let me entreat you to let me hear from you on Wednesday Morn^g. any little trifle you think proper to send tomorrow night by the Mail in a parcel directd to me to be left at the Coach Office Bell and Crown Holborn I shall receive safe I trust in God you will not disappoint me for I am starving and perishing for want

I am Gent Your ob^t S^t Tim^y Pinnock²²⁹

Having waited in vain for a response to his 'deplorable state' he had become disillusioned. Pinnock's awareness of his lowly state catalysed his troubles as he was left to rue 'what am I to do [?]' Feeling that the Overseer had failed him before served to undermine his confidence, yet in asking for help, Pinnock had sought a way out of his predicament. To that end, he used the standard common language of the day describing how he was 'starving and perishing for want'. Pinnock's material circumstances were likely as described – he was living off 'dry bread' – but reading the letter one is stuck more by the emotion. More than food, what Pinnock really required was recognition of his troubled feelings and the harm caused by leaving him to suffer. Here it is possible to witness the corrosive and isolating effect being unsettled could have; and how the unsettled were able to exploit the standard functions of the pauper letter to make their points. The Overseers' lack of response to Pinnock's grievances acted as pivot point which was almost more unsettling than his basic materials wants. This

²²⁹ This is the one surviving letter, but it is clear there must have been another as he mentioned writing it a week before. HRO 88M81W-PO7-30-1,2,3, letter, 29 October 1825.

lack of recognition fed a barely repressed fury as Pinnock blamed their apparent neglect of him for his ills. Thus he turned the blame for his condition back onto the Overseer by rhetorically invoking religion stating: ‘I trust in God you will not disappoint me’.²³⁰ Pinnock thereby unburdened himself of some of the responsibility for becoming and dealing with being unsettled.²³¹ Proof that Pinnock was specifically voicing Laid-lowness cannot be found through his testimony alone, but through comparison to his contemporaries who were definably settled. John Brooks was one such person and it is to his case which we must turn.

In a manner strikingly reminiscent of Timothy Pinnock, John Brooks had written to his home parish in Henfield, West Sussex on 12 September 1825, chiding the Overseer for not having sent him relief. He wrote:

Sir

I have to inform you it is my intention to go to Brighton Parish some time to morrow in order to be reliev’d, and taken home to my respective Parish – To suffer in the manner I have done since last Tuesday, sick in bed neither or food several times – I am determin’d not to endure it any longer ~~unless the parish will grant some allowance~~ the poor house will be preferable to my present condition.

I am Sir Yours truly

John Brooks²³²

Brighton 12 Sepr 1825

The similarities between the two paupers are obvious: there was the frustration with the Overseer; the implicit suggestion that the suffering was due to the Overseers negligence toward them; and an assumption that with their aid the situation could and would become better. In this respect, the letters of Brooks and Pinnock were almost identical requests: both authors had used the rhetoric standard in pauper letters – such as mentioning hunger – to make personal claims for relief. Yet Brooks’ letter must be read as a superb example of a pauper knowing how to use their rhetoric to make a claim for relief, while Pinnock’s case is a true example of Laid-lowness. The reason for this is simple: agency.

²³⁰ This was in the same style and to the same effect that Maria Longhurst had referenced God in her letter.

²³¹ However, it could reasonably be argued that this critique of Timothy Pinnock’s is based on a specific reading of his rhetoric which is compelling primarily because it is set within a wider critique of Laid-lowness.

²³² Brooks wrote this one letter that survives. WSRO Par.183-37-3-12, letter, 12 September 1825.

Though Brooks sought to emphasise his helplessness his letter was riven with a clear sense of his rights as he declared: ‘it is my intention to go to Brighton Parish some time to morrow in order to be reliev’d, and taken home to my respective Parish’.²³³ Nor did this seem to be an idle threat as he made it clear that: ‘I am determin’d not to endure it any longer’. Brooks ended by trying to shame his Overseers with a final rhetorical flourish that: ‘the poor house will be preferable to my present condition’. All of these statements were calculated to ensure he got relief; but not only that, there was a fundamentally calculative even cynical aspect to the way he deployed those statements. Brooks’ letter was an assertion of his rights and his agency. But the unsettled and especially the Laid-low were shaken in having that same belief. It was the sense of a lack of agency which was unsettling and Pinnock’s letter encapsulated this. As much as Brooks’ letter had confidence, Pinnock’s had dashed hopes and doubts as to his worthiness for relief as he asked ‘what am I to do’, then put ‘trust in God you will not disappoint’. Where Brooks had dictated, Pinnock could only meekly request ‘any little trifle you think proper’. Pinnock was not a man comfortable in his rights or his own sense of self. The resultant lack of agency he recognised in himself caused him to veer across the spectrum of unsettled mind. Timothy Pinnock had become Laid-low and his letter was this process writ large for all to see. His case, like Longhurst’s and Parker’s before him, thus begs the question: why did the Laid-low write? The answer was exemplified in the letters of Herbert Whitefield who was able to use his letters to actively write himself more settled.

Herbert Whitefield

Confined to Westminster Infirmary in 1808, Herbert Whitefield had reached physical and emotional breaking point and wrote back to his home parish, in Lewes, East Sussex, in order to help himself and family.²³⁴ This first letter came at the point he was Laid-low, yet his

²³³ The rights of paupers become a contested issue amongst historians once Lorie Charlesworth introduced the alternative perspective that paupers had rights under the Old Poor Law, see Charlesworth, Lorie. *Welfare’s Forgotten Past: A Socio-Legal History of the Poor Law*. London: Routledge, 2009. However, it is important to note that this reading has not received wide support. Historians of pauper letters have continued to work on the understanding that paupers did not have legal ‘right’ but moral ones, a view effectively advanced and explained most recently in: Jones, Peter and Steven King (eds). *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2015.

²³⁴ There is a diverse array of scholarship on the experience of the sick poor in institutions. For instance, see Bartlett, Peter. “The Asylum, the Workhouse and the Voice of the Insane Poor.” *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 2, 4 (1998): 421-32; Fissell, Mary. “The Disappearance of the Patient Narratives.” In French, Roger and Andrew Wear. *British Medicine in an Age of Reform*. London: Routledge, 1991: 91-108; Scull, Andrew. *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain, 1700-1900*. New Haven: Yale

subsequent correspondences testified to his positive movement along the spectrum of unsettledness. His three letters are produced in full:

First Letter:

Postmarked 1808

Mr Hobden Cooper Scane Hill Lewis Sussex

Sir,

I have taken the Liberty to inform you that I have been very Ill this twelve months past & have not been able to do any work for this six months and having a wife and three Children to provide for which makes my preasant case very distressing and I am low of spirit I have been in the Hospital for somtime past having it not in my power to Labour for my family they are much in want of som assistance I did not like to apply to the parish hear in town for releif as it might have been attended with trouble thay might have wanted to have sent me to my one parish – I am getting better but it will be a great while be for I shall be able to go to work to suport my fammily which I should take great pleasure in doing should not have made this applycation to you if I was not realy obligd to do by my distress –

I hope you will have the goodness to take my case into Consideration and to be so kind to afford me som releif as I am much in want of it

I beg the favour of an answer to this saying if you will do any thing for me pleas to direct for me Lukes Ward Westminster Infermary York Street London

from your Hbl Sert.

Herbert Whitefield²³⁵

N.B. Pleas to Remmember me to my mother and sister

Second Letter:

University Press, 1993; Siena, Kevin. *Veneral Disease, Hospitals and the Urban Poor: London's 'Foul Wards', 1600-1800*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004; Smith, Leonard. *Lunatic Hospitals in Georgian England 1750-1830*. London: Routledge, 2007; Wannell, Louise. "Patients' Relatives and Psychiatric Doctors: Letter Writing in the York Retreat, 1875–1910." *Social History of Medicine* 20, 2 (2007): 297-313; Wright, David. *Mental Disability in Victorian England: The Earlswood Asylum, 1847-1901*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

²³⁵ ESRO PAR 414-35-1-27a,b, letter, dated only 1808.

Laid-low

Mr. Charles Hobden Cooper Scane Hill Lewis Sussex
Lukes Ward Westminster Infirmary

London 27 Sept. 1808

Dear Sir,

I recvd. your Letter with the Inclosed £1.0d for which I return you & the rest of the gentlemen my sincer thanks hope by the Blessing of god shall soon be in a state of health to have it in my power to suport my family – as I have a friend in Town that will advance me a litle monney should take it as a favour if you yould send the weekly pay by the month I have not seen your Brother in law as yet pleas to give my love to my mother & sister and tel them I am better pleas to Dereect to me as be for

I Remains Dear Sir your Hbl. Servt.

Herbert Whitefield²³⁶

Third Letter:

Febuary 28 1809

Sir

i have the Opertuny to wright to you Mr Obdon Conserning my self and famuly For i Still continue very ill i have a Recom dation from a gentilman to a fresh Surgeon i find my self better since i have Gone to him and i am in great hopes he will do me good can i but Stop in London to attend on him But my Self and family is in a very Low way But With out mor assistance i Cannot stop For i have maid of with all i had Expectin from one weak to an other of giting better So i shall be glad to have an answer from you for it mus now com to a turminasion an

i shall be glad to now from you to now Witch way i Shall com home So i Shall be Glad for you to Rember me to my mother & Sister

So no more at presant from me

herbert Whitiefield²³⁷

²³⁶ ESRO PAR 414-35-1-28, letter, 27 September 1808.

²³⁷ ESRO PAR 414-35-1-3, letter, 28 February 1809.

With the declaration ‘I am low of spirit’, Whitefield used his first letter to disclose his unsettledness. By writing he confronted the shift of self he felt; and intimated his own self-awareness. His hope that ‘I am getting better’ captured his conviction of the impermanence of this state. By writing to the Overseers and blaming his state on physical illness Whitefield pushed the responsibility for recovering away from his sole person. These are all classic Laid-low signs, yet his emotional journey followed a different path to other such unsettled contemporaries.

Whitefield wrote again later in the same year re-affirming his expectation to ‘soon be in a state of health to have it in my power to support my family’. This emphasised how he hoped his condition was impermanent and, more significantly, linked his troubles to his inhibited agency. He had explained that what unsettled him was not his illness per se. Rather, it was the emotional trouble caused by not being able to fulfil his role as husband and father.²³⁸ The contemporary understanding of recovery diverged from today’s notion. Hence, Whitefield could be comfortable knowing he may never be perfectly healthy but still be unsettled when his health crossed a boundary of suffering or induced an incapacity which he was not willing/able to tolerate. This would be the case for every pauper, yet the effects would be defined on a personal basis.²³⁹ But having received relief, and by implication having had his concerns acknowledged by the Overseer, Whitefield’s sense of (un)settledness seemed to have swung, albeit slowly, in a positive direction.

By the third and final letter Whitefield had ‘great hopes’ to ‘find myself better’ but was still not settled. His troubled agency remained an issue as he implored: ‘but With out mor assistance I Cannot stop’. Despite his hopes, he still had a dependence upon the Overseer helping him. Further, the original trigger for Whitefield’s Laid-lowness stemmed from his

²³⁸ In this respect he could be read as a case for the Status-stress typology. Many of the cases analysed in each respective chapter in this thesis carry with them a certain ambiguity which only goes to confirm the necessity of thinking terms of spectrum of unsettledness. That said, while Whitefield may well have exhibited signs of Status-stress, the way his unsettledness was caused, expressed and reacted to fits more of the principles associated with Laid-lowness.

²³⁹ This in part explains why, hypothetically, there could be two paupers from the same place and with the same needs and stresses but one becomes unsettled while the other does not. For more on the emotion of despair see, Boddice, Rob. *Pain and Emotion in modern History*. Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2014; Bourke, Joanna. *The Story of Pain: From Prayer to Painkillers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014; MacDonald, Michael. “The Medicalization of Suicide in England: Laymen, Physicians, and Cultural Change, 1500–1870.” In C. E. Rosenberg and J. Golden (eds). *Framing Disease: Studies in Cultural History*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997; Newton, Hannah. *Mirth to Misery: Recovery from Illness in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018; Rey, Roselyne (trans. Louise Elliott Wallace). *The History of Pain*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995; Schmidt, Jeremy. *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy, and Madness*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007; Sullivan, Erin. *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

inability to help his family, yet as he wrote this last letter both he and his family remained ‘in a very low way’.²⁴⁰ Though he had successfully used the form of pauper letter to confront his fluctuating sense of self he had not mastered it. His problems still remained. It was ironic that Whitefield created a new dependency with his dual need to write and have the Overseer to respond to his concerns. Nevertheless, the narrative from the first letter through to his last suggests an improvement in his state of mind. Writing helped Herbert Whitefield but he could not allow himself to be triumphant as he had become increasingly aware of the precariousness of his emotional condition. Once recognised, the Laid-low could not forget their unsettledness and they would fear another descent down the spectrum. While Whitefield knew this, the likes of Elizabeth Bull lived it and put it into words.

Elizabeth Bull

The sudden and tragic death of her son documented in her letter on 13 January 1833, marked the start of a period of Laid-lowness in Elizabeth Bull’s life in which she veered across the spectrum of unsettledness. Her five letters written from Gosport back to her home parish of Horley, Hampshire, detailed those variances in her sense of self. To fully appreciate the significance all of the relevant correspondence are represented below:²⁴¹

First Letter:

January 13th 1833

Gentlemen

Pardon the liberty I have taken in troubling you but I beg leave to state that I have had the misfortune to lose my Poor Boy by a sad accident he has been to a Place about three weeks merely for his Victuals untill he could become expert when he would have had a trifle weekly but his master unfortunately sent him into a store where there was some Bit of Tar which caught Fire and he was burnt to Death in a few minutes, I have been very ill and still remain so with the fright it occasioned I have been to a great expence with medical advice and other things I therefore most humbly hope you will take my case into consideration and assist me with a trifle being in very distressed circumstances having myself and three small Children to

²⁴⁰ This shared experience is an important backdrop to unsettledness but better understood with reference to the Chapter Four - Compromised Identity: 133-62, and Chapter Five - Cumulative Troubles: 163-188.

²⁴¹ There were 5 letters in total. For a complete discussion of matters of selfhood and its construction relative to paupers refer to Chapter One – Introduction: 3-5.

Laid-low

maintain by my own industry your answer will be most thankfully received by your most obedient Servant

Elizabeth Bull²⁴²

Second Letter:

Gosport May 10th 1833

Gentlemen

Pardon the liberty I have taken in troubling you but I beg leave to state that every since the accident of my Poor Child I have had a very bad State of health and the Doctor who attends me says unless I lay by a few weeks I shall never regain my strength it is wholly out of my power to do so without your additional aid I therefore most humbly hope you will take my case into consideration and allow me a trifle more for a few weeks I will not trouble you further Your absver will be thankfully received and was gratefully acknowledged by your most obedient Servant

Elizabeth Bull²⁴³

I hereby certify the inclosed is a true & faithful statement deserving favourable consideration,
G Chute Surgeon Gosport

Third Letter:

To the Guardians for Manageing the Poor of the Parish of Horley

Gentlemen

With the Greatest respect I beg leave to state that owing to the new regulations that has taken place in the poor laws the Parish of Gosport has Declined paying for any other Parish than their own - As I cannot Possibly do without your Assistance I will thank you Gentlemen to pay my relief to my Brother Edward Sherwood who will remit it to me – my relief was stop't here on the 23rd September Your Answer Gentlemen will be thankfully received

Your most Oedt Humble Servt

Elizabeth Bull²⁴⁴

²⁴² HRO 25M60-PO35-1271, letter, 13 January 1833.

²⁴³ HRO 25M60-PO35-1432, letter, 10 May 1833.

Laid-low

Gosport October 5th 1834

Fourth Letter:

Gosport Jany 7th 1835

Sir

Pardon the liberty I have taken in troubling you but I beg to state that I am in very distressed circumstances owing to my not receiving the weekly allowance for my Child and myself and if it is not continued I must go home to the Parish for I am in a very ill state of health and incapable of doing any work if I had it to do I therefore hope you will still continue the payment your answer will much oblige your most obedient servent

Elizabeth Bull²⁴⁵

Titchens Court Upper South Street

Fifth letter:

Sir

With the greatest respect I beg leave to state that I applied to the Guardians for managing the Poor of the Parish of Alverstoke for some relief last Wednesday and was informed that they had nothing to do with me – that I belong'd to the Parish of Fawley they very well knew that I had sworn to that Parish about three years ago I gained a settlement in that Parish by living at service therefore I must apply to the Parish officers for relief – I am sorry to say that I am very ill at this present and my Child is very bad indeed she is much worse than when I apply'd to you last – I will thank you to present this to the Gentlemen of the Committee next Thursday – and I most Humbly beg of them to grant me and my Child some immediate relief I will thank you for an answer as soon as you can

Your Most Obed Humble Servt

Elizabeth Bull²⁴⁶

Gosport March 17th

1835

These letters are significant not only because Laid-lowness is evident but because Bull indicated how it could repeatedly occur within the same life experience. Her first letter was

²⁴⁴ HRO 25M60-PO35-1598, letter, 17 March 1834.

²⁴⁵ HRO 25M60-PO35-1714, letter, 7 January 1835.

²⁴⁶ 25M60-PO35-1730, letter, 17 March 1835.

the major occasion of Laid-lowness as she recorded: ‘I have been very ill and still remain so with the fright it occasioned’. Her sense of shock was palpable and her pain on-going as she brooded on how her boy ‘caught Fire and he was burned to Death in a few minutes’. The key to reading these words and registering Bull’s unsettledness resides in the sad fact that the death of children was not unfamiliar to contemporaries.²⁴⁷ The way Bull wrote of it, however, was unusual for it was excessive in its emotional content. There was an irony too, in that she had taken the right action in writing to the Overseer in this scenario; Bellah Preston did likewise on 6 February 1821 writing to Kirkby Lonsdale, but in limiting herself to saying:

I beg you will be so kind as to send me some Money to pay the Doctor and Funeral Expences of my child.

Preston did not unnerve the Overseer with overt displays of emotion that could be seen as unsettledness.²⁴⁸ Bull, on the other hand, seemed compelled by her need for them to hear her pain and her inability to move beyond it – this is typical Laid-lowness and it continued four months later when she wrote her second letter.

‘Ever since the accident of my Poor Child I have had a very bad state of health’, wrote Bull on 10 May 1833, linking her emotional and physical well-being together. ‘Health’ was a curious phrase to use because in absolute terms the child’s death did not physically hurt her yet she was in pain; it must then have been emotional pain to which she referred. In the confrontation of the problem and the recognition she gave to it, Bull demonstrated two principles associated with being Laid-low. Further, the assertion:

says unless I lay by a few weeks I shall never regain my strength it is wholly out of my power to do so without your additional aid

was riven with a denial of her personal responsibility for her state and the implicit blame that came with it. Crucially, she was heart-broken at her sudden dependency, and in revealing this Bull elucidated her Laid-lowness and the pivot points for it, namely: a loss of agency which threatened her and her children’s well-being. Joanne Bailey’s work on representations of motherhood in pauper letters provides instructive context here as she explained how ‘the

²⁴⁷ Wrigley, Edward, Jim Oeppen, and Roger Schofield (eds). *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1580-1837*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 103-152.

²⁴⁸ Preston’s letter was almost a model request in how to document the death of child in a manner useful to the Overseers. For Bellah Preston, refer to KLRO WPR19-7-6-14-7, letter, 6 February 1821. For Sarah Simmer, see WSRO Par.206-37-8-27, letter. 6 February 1821.

rhetoric of “distressed” parenting was deployed by the labouring poor’.²⁴⁹ But a distinction must be made between the pauper letters Bailey examined and those from the unsettled exhibited throughout this thesis. The difference is that while Bailey has ably accounted for how paupers’ fears over providing for their children could be used rhetorically to ‘heighten the need of the paupers’ claims’, the evidence found in the letters of the unsettled – exemplified by Bull – was that these individuals deployed those same rhetorical tools to express genuine emotional turmoil.²⁵⁰ When seen in this light, it is no coincidence that eighteen months on from her second letter, Bull wrote again fearing the effects of changes to the Poor Law and what it meant for her relief and children.²⁵¹

On 5 October 1834, Bull felt it necessary to inform her Overseers once again that ‘I cannot Possibly do without your Assistance’. This declaration was to mark her second descent in Laid-lowness. However, before this is examined, the fact that Bull had not felt the need to write for eighteen months needs to be recognised as significant. The very act of choosing to write again indicates that she gleaned some benefit from it before and that, in the intervening period, she had, perhaps, not needed to write. Within the context of her unsettledness, it is possible to read this as her having moved along to a more settled side of the spectrum; albeit temporarily. More to the point, this signifies how important Bull’s decision to write again must have been. Last time she had baulked at her perceived loss of agency which writing represented, and yet, here, she emphasised her need for the Overseers’ help. Something fundamental must have happened to Bull for her to have felt the need to write again. The threat of Laid-lowness thus makes sense in this context, especially as her original letter meant Bull crystallised her troubles to herself and gave them a form. This is the paradox of unsettledness. Through writing a pauper could try to write themselves settled, but in doing so writers formulated their troubles. Once spoken, their unsettledness could not be forgotten nor could their knowledge of it be ignored. The need to challenge their Laid-lowness and the unsettledness they felt led paupers like Bull to write their letters. The trigger for writing a third letter was the same as the last time, namely: she feared her lack of agency which led to

²⁴⁹ Bailey, Joanne. ““Think Wot a Mother Must Feel’: Parenting in English Pauper Letters c. 1760–1834.” *Family and Community History* 13, 2 (2010): 17.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ For insight into the New Poor Law, see Crowther, Anne. “Health Care and Poor Relief in Provincial England.” In O. Grell, A. Cunningham, and R. Jütte (eds). *Health Care and Poor Relief in 18th and 19th Century Northern Europe*. London: Routledge, 2002: 203-19; Gestrich, Andreas, Elizabeth Hurren and Steven King (eds). *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor, 1780-1938*. London: Bloomsbury, 2012; Williams, Samantha. *Unmarried Motherhood in the Metropolis: Pregnancy, the Poor Law and Provision*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018.

an inability to care for her children. However, there were key differences to the letter as Bull's child had not died and the Poor Laws were changing.

By 5 October 1834 Bull was citing 'the new regulations that has taken place in the poor laws', as the reason for her discontent. She was not alone in being alarmed by such changes.²⁵² Although her concerns related to a local issue about the parish of Gosport, such consternation was shared by contemporaries across the country.²⁵³ Unlike before, this time Bull's unsettled feelings grew the more she wrote and experienced the effects of the changes. By 7 January 1835, she was 'in very distressed circumstances owing to not receiving the weekly allowance'; then by 17 March 1835, having been informed by another Parish that she had a 'nothing to do with them', she was left desperate: 'sorry to say that I am very ill at this present and my child is very bad indeed'. These last words parallel Bull's original unsettled complaints and it is worth remembering that then and seemingly now she had linked her emotional travails with her physical ones. Feeling Laid-low physically wounded Elizabeth Bull. Her case is one that proves how people could become Laid-low, move along a spectrum, and how this could happen multiple times. Nevertheless, while each analysis of people like Bull has provided personal insight into the experience, there is a final need to consider the Laid-low typology as it relates to the unsettled mind spectrum.

Conclusion

The cases of Maria Longhurst, Ann Parker, Timothy Pinnock, Herbert Whitefield, and Elizabeth Bull and those Laid-low like them (often explored in supplementary footnotes here so as to preserve the integrity of the case studies) shared compellingly similar features of unsettledness. There are eight broad observations to me made.

First, the purpose and act of writing the letter was not merely the attempt by the affected pauper to document their experience(s). It was a direct confrontation of their unsettled

²⁵² This is a topic covered at length in later chapters, see in particular: Chapter Four – Compromised Identity: 133-62.

²⁵³ King has argued that the changes wrought by New Poor Law were temporary. This has been disputed by Williams who identified the more far-reaching and sustained impact of the changes to the organisation of and authority over poor relief. On balance, the Williams' perspective would seem the more likely reading. See King, Steven. "Rights, duties and practice in the transition between the Old and New Poor Laws 1820s-1860s." In P. Jones and S. King (eds). *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2015: 263-91; and Williams, *Unmarried Motherhood*.

feelings. The Laid-low individual had made a conscious choice both to articulate and address their feelings. Letter writing was their chosen way to do so.

Second, in recognising this need to use the letter(s) to essentially write themselves settled, Laid-low people were fundamentally self-aware. They identified a cause and effect to their own emotional troubles and attempted to use their letters to moderate their own feelings and behaviours. The mad were thought of as such because of their essential inability to do this. This feature, while not unique to this typology, is nevertheless significant because this is the only typology where this feature is essential as it is not possible to have a Laid-low case in which the historical actor is not directly aware of their unsettled state and using their letter to counter its impact. As subsequent chapters will show, in other unsettledness typologies the lines between cause and effect, the authors' intention in writing, and the expected outcome of their letter(s) could, for various reasons, become blurred even to the author themselves.²⁵⁴

A third observation, and one linked to the need for control, was the dependent need of Laid-low sufferers to deny that their condition was permanent. The ability to do so was tied to a belief in their ability to recover.

Fourthly, the awareness of Laid-low sufferers of their condition was interwoven with a fundamental resistance to it as the affected paupers refused to accept their fluctuating senses of self. While the process of writing may have helped them recognise and express these feelings their intent in writing was to find a way to take back control of their emotions.

Fifth, and linking the two preceding principles, was the need for the Laid-low to deny a personal responsibility for the onset of unsettledness. Many, if not all of the writers, sought to distance themselves by blaming its manifestation on factors outside of their control; with the implication being that they were victims who would not suffer in silence. The Laid-low constructed their letters motivated by the need to exercise this sense of injustice; it inculcated them against some of the dangers of the feedback loop. Accordingly, the contents of their words would often be highly, even excessively, emotive. They may have espoused irrational reasons for their states, yet even the most fantastical reasons that they gave were grounded in a twisted form of rationality – it was same rationality which informed the author's choice to voice their (unsettled) feelings with the world. But admittance of their culpability for being Laid-low would be tantamount to accepting it. It was the precise ability and need to push

²⁵⁴ For detailed coverage of those differences refer to the specific chapters dedicated to the other unsettledness typologies, specifically: Chapter Three - Status-stress: 95-132; Chapter Four – Compromised Identity: 133-162; Chapter Five – Cumulative Troubles: 163-188; and, Chapter Six – Death: 189-208.

away blame for their troubles which tethered the Laid-low to, at the very least, the ideal of their relatively settled sense of their self. Conversely, the ‘mad’ found in asylums would be liberated by not being aware of their condition(s). The lot of the unsettled, especially the Laid-low, was to be haunted by this sense of inferiority and loss. But, paradoxically, it was these same feelings which drove the Laid-low to write, to try to recover, and kept them from ever becoming mad. The Laid-low used their denials to power their fight to become settled.²⁵⁵

A sixth feature found amongst the Laid-low is their struggle to become settled was defined by their acute sense of lost agency. The key distinction is that few, if any, paupers questioned or resented their material dependence upon the parish. Their dependence offered the opportunity and ability to write, to share their troubles, and potentially receive help. There was an essential acceptance of pauperism and poverty by those who endured it. However, those who were Laid-low did not experience their pauperism in traditional ways. What the Laid-low required of the parish was not merely material but emotional relief and, accordingly, their ability to receive relief was wrought into questions about their self. It was this desperate and frequently unrequited need for their emotional turmoil not only be listened to, but understood and acknowledged, which rendered the Laid-low truly exposed. It meant they surrendered some of their agency over their sense of self. Recognising this unsettled them, for in having to write, the Laid-low suffered the realisation of their fundamental loss of agency which was ultimately configured in various crises of dignity – and, for many, it was too much to bear.

Yet, and as a seventh observation, while Laid-low paupers experienced significant compromises in their agency, at the same time, their determined attempts to exploit the functions of the classic style of pauper letters were a mark of their successful efforts to retain some control over their sense of self. The choice to invoke their emotional conditions was a choice to break the traditional functions of the letter. That they were able to make such decisions suggests not all personal agency was lost; and it again elucidates the difference between the unsettled and the mad. Nevertheless, while the choice to write may have been true to the individual, the letters were catalysed and corrupted by unsettledness. It was this that made them write, and it was this too, which made it likely they would receive nothing of

²⁵⁵ This was not the case for every typology. Those in the Chapter Six – Death: 189-208, will be shown to have experienced a sense of liberation in writing. The unsettled are linked not so much by the nature of their troubles but in the shared awareness they had of their unwanted move along the spectrum unsettledness and of the belief that writing of their experience may help to overcome its effects.

value from the Overseer. In winning the battle to have their grievances heard, the Laid-low could lose the war to be truly settled.

Finally, the ability and agency to be settled was further complicated by the need of the Laid-low poor to be understood and accepted. They had to rely on common language to express deeply personal feelings and were capable of skilfully imbuing the words of pauperism with their deeply personal messages and meanings regarding their sense of self. This adds two layers of complexity in how these paupers' words should be read. First, there is a danger of equating their language with our own contemporary understandings: to be 'Laid-low' does not equate to or describe what we may understand to be depression; nor did their use of the word 'low'. The second point builds on the first as it might be the case that the Laid-low used the same words that denoted different highly individual meanings. The linguistics are important to consider not with a view to diagnosing a condition, but to be used as way into understanding the themes that united paupers' stories to see what it meant to be Laid-low. The experience of being Laid-low was a paradox: uniquely personal to each who experienced it yet following a familiar pattern of pain, denial and, ultimately, hope.

Status-stress

‘I have nothing now to live on so that I am quite starving and low’, wrote Peter Newman on 16 November 1826, to his home parish of West Grinstead in West Sussex.²⁵⁶ Newman’s worries encapsulated a wider frustration – often shared amongst his contemporaries – of someone whose status and concurrent sense of self depended upon his ability to work. The actuality or even the threat of being unable to find employment could lead the poor to become unsettled. Newman recognised this and sought to fight the effects of unsettledness through letter writing. Men are to be the focus of this chapter for it was they who, overwhelmingly, described experiencing the effects of this second typology termed: ‘Status-stress’.

While masculinity was a multi-layered concept in the period covered by this study, male work was central to the economic stability of most households and thus of the ability of the man to fulfil his gendered role. Work, and particularly the public persona that it and the rituals connected with it involved, was also a crucial factor in the way in which a man’s internalised sense of self might develop.²⁵⁷ While later chapters will elucidate how a pauper’s identity could be unsettled in other ways, for men at least, work was the key arbiter of status and sense of self. The impact of being unable to work could have profoundly unsettling effects for pauper men, with the causes and consequences of their unsettledness realised through the letters they sent to their Overseers. There is also a rich literature on questions of women’s status in both the family and external economies. We now understand that women were integral for the family in terms of their participation in both the waged labour and

²⁵⁶ WSRO Par.95-37-3-11, letter, 16 November 1826.

²⁵⁷ There is an extensive literature on these issues including Bailey, Joanne. “‘A Very Sensible Man’: Imagining Fatherhood in England c.1750–1830.” *History* 95 (2010): 267-292; -- “Paternal Power: The Pleasures and Perils of ‘Indulgent’ Fathering in Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century.” *The History of the Family* 17, 3 (2012): 342-62; Cohen, Michele. *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Routledge, 1996; Foyster, Elizabeth. *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage*. London: Longman, 1999; -- “Boys Will Be Boys? Manhood and Aggression, 1660–1800.” In T. Hitchcock and M. Cohen (eds). *English Masculinities, 1660–1800 (Women and Men in History)*. London: Routledge, 1999: 151–66; Harvey, Karen. “The History of Masculinity, circa 1650–1800.” *Journal of British Studies* 44, 2 (2005): 296-311; -- *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; Shoemaker, Robert. *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres? (Themes in British Social History)*. London: Routledge, 1998; Delap, Lucy, Ben Griffin and Abigail Wills (eds). *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009; and Hunt, Margaret. *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and Family in England, 1680–1780*. Berkeley: California University Press, 1996.

domestic production spheres.²⁵⁸ In respect to the poor law, this issue is brought into sharp relief by the work of Williams on nursing and her most recent work on women in London.²⁵⁹ While work was important in the specific context of writing about eligibility of relief, men were heavily and disproportionately inclined to link such claims to work on the one hand and sickness on the other. A further clarification is needed in that this chapter focuses specifically upon those sufficiently troubled to break the rules of pauper requests. Such a person, when aware of their need to speak out of turn regarding their unsettledness, may have utilised classic tropes of identity, of which gender and work were obvious options.

To understand the documented experiences of Status-stress it is necessary to reflect upon work and the place it held in the minds of contemporaries at a time of great change and disruption. The later years of the Old Poor Law (from 1800 onwards) witnessed significant societal shifts affecting the working sorts. This included: the rise of Methodism and declining rates of Anglicanism; a shift from domestic work to workshop labour that ushered in an identity of the workshop workforce; while, at the same time, the declining rates of apprenticeships meshed with the rise of leisure opportunities.²⁶⁰ For ordinary people such fluidity of identity markers was potentially problematic, not least because the reach of the state was extending and the imposition of identities and versions of self onto individuals was

²⁵⁸ For more, see: Horrell, Sara and Jane Humphries. "Women's Labour Force Participation and the Transition to the Male-Breadwinner Family, 1790-1865." *The Economic History Review* 48, 1 (1995): 89-117.

²⁵⁹ For more, see: Williams, Samantha. *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle Under the English Poor Law, 1760-1834*. (Royal Historical Society). Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011; --"Caring for the Sick Poor: Poor Law Nurses in Bedfordshire c.1770-1834." In P. Lane, N. Raven and K. Snell (eds). *Women, Work and Wages in England 1600-1850*. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004: 141-69; -- *Unmarried Motherhood in the Metropolis, 1700-1850: Pregnancy, The Poor Law and Provision*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018.

²⁶⁰ For the rise of Methodism and decline of Anglicanism, see: Mack, Phyllis. *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. For declining apprenticeships, refer to: Honeyman, Katrina. *Child Workers in England, 1780-1820: Parish Apprentices and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force*. London: Routledge, 2007. For wider reading on the nature of work, one might begin with those on child labour: Humphries, Jane. *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011; -- *English Apprenticeship: A Neglected Factor in the First Industrial Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. - - "Child Labour and the British Industrial Revolution." *Economic History Review* 66, 2 (2013): 395-418. For women's work: Horrell, Sara and Jane Humphries. "Old Questions, New Data and Alternative Perspectives: Families' Living Standards in the Industrial Revolution." *Journal of Economic History* 52, 4 (1992): 849-80; Verdon, Nicola. *Rural Women Workers in Nineteenth-Century England: Gender, Work and Wages*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002. For men's work: Timmins, Geoffrey. *The Last Shift: Decline of Handloom Weaving in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993; Allen, Robert. "Progress and Poverty in Early Modern Europe." *Economic History Review* 56, 3 (2003): 403-443; Hudson, Patricia. "Industrial Organisation and Structure." In Roderick, Floud (ed). *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain: Volume 1 Industrialisation 1700-1860*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004: 28-56.

rising.²⁶¹ Historians have, therefore, generally displayed a limited understanding and concern as to how the dependent and marginal poor understood their sense of self and their constructions of identity. Yet it remains clear that work/employment was a key pillar of identity, masculinity, and selfhood for men and that, such men, when in poverty, experienced the same essential pressures as those in the wider labouring classes.²⁶² Joseph Harley and Peter King shed further light onto the issues involved in work and worklessness by showing how improving and retaining their material possessions was a marker of identity and ‘success’ for ordinary people.²⁶³ Running alongside this sentiment was the notion that ‘having a voice’ was essential to contemporaries’ construction and maintenance of individual and collective senses of identity.

The evidence found in other historical sources suggest that the ability for contemporary actors to hold their heads up high in public and recognise themselves as part of their neighbourhood was an important marker of status and identity at the time of the Old Poor Law.²⁶⁴ This context helps to explain how, when one defined their sense of self relative to their status and in terms of work, troubles with or outright loss of employment could trigger forms of unsettledness showcased throughout this chapter. The impact that losing status had to these men, alongside the effect(s) caused by the accompanying loss of identity and compromised selfhood, made it challenging for them to prevent themselves falling deeper into unsettledness. It remains an essential telling irony that by no means every pauper without

²⁶¹ For a discussion regarding how the state imposes identities, see Higgs, Edward. *Identifying the English: A History of Personal Identification 1500 to the Present*. London: Continuum, 2011: 79-120.

²⁶² For scholarship dedicated specifically to the masculinity of the lower classes, see: Barker, Hannah. “Soul, Purse and Family: Middling and Lower-Class Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Manchester.” *Social History* 33, 1 (2008): 12-35; Baron, Ava. “Masculinity, The Embodied Male Worker, and the Historian’s Gaze.” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 69 (2006): 146-7; Clark, Anna. *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*. London: Routledge, 1995; Harvey, Karen. “Craftsmen in common: Objects, Skills and Masculinity in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries.” In H. Greig, J. Hamlett and L. Hannan (eds). *Gender and Material Culture in Britain since 1600*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015: 68-89; Hitchcock, Timothy. “Tricksters, Lords and Servants: Begging Friendship and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century England.” In L. Gowing, M. Hunter and M. Rubin (eds). *Love, Friendship and Faith in Europe 1300-1800*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005: 177-96; Strange, Julie-Marie. “Fatherhood, Providing, and Attachment in Late Victorian and Edwardian Working-Class Families.” *The Historical Journal* 55, 4 (2012): 1007-1027; Tosh. “Masculinities in an Industrializing Society”: 330-342. See, also, those works cited above in footnote 2 by the likes of Bailey, Cohen, Foyster, Harvey, and Tosh.

²⁶³ King, Peter. “Pauper Inventories and the Material Lives of the Poor in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries.” In T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds). *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997: 127-54; Harley, Joseph. “Material Lives of the Poor and their Strategic Use of the Workhouse during the Final Decades of the English Old Poor Law.” *Continuity and Change* 30, 1 (2015): 71-103.

²⁶⁴ Porter, Roy. “Introduction.” In R. Porter (ed). *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*. London: Routledge, 1997: 1-14; Regard, Frédéric. *Mapping the Self: Space, Identity, Discourse in British Autobiography*. St. Etienne: University of St. Etienne Press, 2003; and Wahrman, Dror. *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth Century England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

work was a victim to unsettledness. The unsettled – in this case the Status-stressed – were special precisely because they took a standard experience of the suffering, and, through their letters, tied their torments to greater questions about their troubled sense(s) of self. No settled person needed to do this and, owing to their unsettledness, the Status-stressed were more likely to lose the necessary markers of status, identity, and self – not least work, itself – because of their unsettledness.

The Sample

A quantitative break-down of the Status-stress is necessary for the dimensions of the typology to be fully appreciated and to explain why this was such an overwhelmingly male form of articulating and experiencing unsettledness. The source base yielded fifty individual causes of a pauper having been Status-stressed in England and Wales from 1800 to 1834.²⁶⁵

Table 3.1 below illustrates the regional and quantitative break down of the figures:

Place of Relief	Male	Female	Advocate(s)	Total
Berkshire	1	0	1	1
Cumbria	5	0	4	5
Gloucestershire	3	1	1	4
Gwent	1	0	0	1
Hampshire	5	0	2	5
Oxford	1	1	0	2
Surrey	7	0	4	7
East Sussex	9	0	3	9
West Sussex	5	0	1	5
East Yorkshire	4	0	1	4
West Yorkshire	6	1	6	7
Total	47	3	23	50

²⁶⁵ This figure is taken from the 1449 cases examined, of which 292 are unsettled.

Table 3.1 – Status-stress Cases.

Forty-seven of the cases involved males and only three cases of female experiences of Status-stress. Of the original fifty cases, twenty-three contained the input of an advocate within the correspondence(s). This is hugely significant as the data is extracted from the widest sample of paupers assembled and analysed. Of the unsettled cases examined in this thesis, the Status-stress cases comprise 17 per cent of the documented experiences and those examined below were emblematic of the wider emotional experience.²⁶⁶ The table highlights three issues. First, and most significant, is the major gender disparity in the rate of incidences of the experience (47:3). Second, rates of reported Status-stress differed within regions: there were high rates in Surrey, East Sussex, and West Yorkshire compared to areas such as Berkshire and Gwent. But every area contained paupers who experienced it. Status-stress was a universalising experience.²⁶⁷ Third, is the relative preponderance of testimonies by advocates in aid of the Status-stressed with nearly half of all unsettled cases including at least one letter written by an advocate.

Incidences of Status-stress can be understood with reference to four intersecting contextual issues. First, the harshening of the poor law meant relief requests had to be more sophisticated by the early nineteenth-century, and within this culture, the subject of work came to hold an unusual place within the language of relief negotiation.²⁶⁸ Citing work was the most acceptable and common way of making a claim. Overseers were likely to judge issues with unemployment harshly and see it as a regrettable situation.²⁶⁹ Having employment could act as tacit endorsement of one's character and not having it or losing it could – particularly amongst the working poor – be troublesome on both a material and emotional level. From the time of the crisis of the Old Poor Law in the 1780s the young unemployed

²⁶⁶ 50 of 292 unsettled cases. Or 17.1%. With historians that use pauper letters accustomed to utilising only a few cases and being able to extract a great deal of analysis and insight, it is clear that 50 clear Status-stress cases represents a huge and significant experience described by paupers.

²⁶⁷ Reasons for this disparity will be proffered through the subsequent analysis. The industrial districts are well-established both in terms of which declined and which expanded. For more: King, Steven and Geoffrey Timmins (eds). *Making Sense of the Industrial Revolution: English Economy and Society, 1700-1850*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001; and Lee, Clive. "Economic Progress: Wealth and Poverty." In T. Devine, C. Lee and G. Peden (eds). *The Transformation of Scotland: The Economy since 1700*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005: 100-158.

²⁶⁸ For detailed studies of the harshening of relief, see Hollen-Lees, Lynn. *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People 1700-1948*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

²⁶⁹ There was almost an institutionalised empathy for those who had worked but had suddenly struggled to do so.

had been particularly harshly viewed while the aged workless were not.²⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Henry French's work on Terling introduced the nuance that while parish resources in the eighteenth century had been focused on women, children, and traditional life-cycle recipients, by the nineteenth century men with families dominated the relief list.²⁷¹ The Status-stressed were a sub-set of a large mass of paupers who cited work as their primary cause for writing for relief. They came to use the language bound to traditional relief claims to express and challenge their new unsettled identity at a time when work had become more precarious, more difficult to cobble together multiple jobs, and children's and women's work was declining.²⁷²

The second theme is that due to the nature of employment and the social, economic, and cultural customs in the early nineteenth century, there could be a distinct regional character to employment-related relief requests. Employment opportunities varied in each region according to the extent of industrialisation, trade-cycles, seasons and strikes with contemporaries expecting and reconciled to having some unemployment. A key distinction to note is the trigger for Status-stress was not simply unemployment, but the time element of being unemployed and reflection upon how their troubles felt unsolvable. This time-dependency to unsettledness dovetailed with the issue of structural decline in certain regions such as Lancashire, Sussex, and West Yorkshire where, for many, it was easy to lose hope of regaining employment. This made it quicker for some paupers to fall into unsettledness. As we shall see, claims in the heavily industrialised areas of West Yorkshire had a different style, character, and content to those found in other regions. Nevertheless, while the triggers for lack of employment and the very culture of work could be different, the experience that was described amongst the Status-stressed bore the same defining characteristics irrespective of where it took place.

Third, and linking with the regional and identity issues, is the theme of gender.²⁷³ Status-stress was arguably a gendered experience. Certainly, the rates were significantly higher

²⁷⁰ For more on the economy of make-shifts refer to: Sokoll, Thomas. "Old Age in Poverty: The Record of Essex Pauper Letters, 1780-1834." In Hitchcock et al. *Chronicling Poverty*: 127-54; Thane, Pat. *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; -- "An Untiring Zest for Life: Image and Self Image of Old Women in England." *Journal of Family History* 25, 2 (2000): 235-47.

²⁷¹ French, Henry. "How Dependent were the 'Dependent Poor'? Poor Relief and the Life-Course in Terling, Essex, 1762-1834." *Continuity and Change* 30, 2 (2015): 193-222.

²⁷² Humphries, *English Apprenticeship*; -- *Childhood and Child Labour*; Sharpe, Pamela. *Adapting to Capitalism: Working Women in the English Economy, 1700-1850*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996.

²⁷³ For more context, see Burnette, Joyce. "Decomposing the Wage Gap: Within - and Between - Occupation Gender Wage Gaps at a Nineteenth-Century Textile Firm." In A. Greif, Lynne Kiesling, and J. Nye (eds).

amongst men than women. But this owed more to the customs of society at the time. Men were the heads of the household and expected to be the breadwinners, therefore work itself was an entirely valid means from which to orientate their relief requests.²⁷⁴ Many women who were not unsettled constructed accounts in which they described themselves as having worked on behalf of their family. But there are still precious few cases of female Status-stress. It was not necessarily assumed women would work thus they may have lacked the same moral authority possessed by their male counterparts to make such claims. In many instances women were more effectively served by rhetoricising their claims without mentioning work.²⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the story of Status-stress was not a simple tale of male strife with the unsettling effects often shared amongst families.²⁷⁶ But how Status-stress came to be articulated was often in the authorial voice of men who worked within the societal expectations and customs bound to identity, regionality, gender, and pauper letter writing.

Letter writing and the role of the advocate is the final contextual concern. Due to the acceptability of citing work as a reason for relief the selected pauper requests contained significant involvement of advocates. The Status-stressed often required an advocate because making a claim around work was standard so they needed to exhibit the exceptionality of their requests. The role of advocates may have presented a conceptual difficulty in witnessing a true rendition of the experience of Status-stress due to the mediation effect of the Overseers' input.²⁷⁷ But, in fact, the determination of the unsettled to write themselves settled had the opposite effect: having the standard Overseer description of the problem provides a natural point of contrast to compare with the unsettled letters. The moves made by the Status-stressed to write their own letters in addition to those that may have been penned on their behalf is suggestive to their unsettledness in needing to write, and conversely, their non-madness in their ability to recognise this need to challenge their unsettled sense of self through writing. There were two forms of this: those who were stressed were more likely to

Institutions, Innovation, and Industrialization: Essays in Economic History and Development. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014: 379-96.

²⁷⁴ But Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries in their classic *International Review of Social History* article claim a different and later chronology for the male breadwinner norm. Horrell, Sara and Jane Humphries. "The Origins and Expansion of the Male Breadwinner Family: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Britain." *International Review of Social History* 42, 5 (1997) 25-64. Samantha Williams recently executed a powerful intervention on the particularities of the contributions made by urban women. See: Williams, *Unmarried Motherhood*.

²⁷⁵ For an analysis see Chapter Four – Compromised Identity: 133-162; and Chapter Six – Death: 189-208.

²⁷⁶ For work on masculinity and strife refer to: Foyster. *Manhood in Early Modern England*; Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*; Delap, *The Politics of Domestic Authority*; Gowing. *Gender Relations*; Roper, Michael and John Tosh. *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*. London: Routledge, 1991.

²⁷⁷ For more on the role of advocates and how one reads pauper letters, refer to Chapter One – Reading Pauper Letters: 37-64.

lose identity markers; and those who lost identity markers key to the self were more likely to sink into mental unsettledness. Both were more likely for men who had a narrower range of potential identity markers than women. It is to a few of the most emblematic cases from Peter Newman, Thomas Cox, Jon and Martha Davis, and Elizabeth Pepall that this thesis now turns to explore the essence of what it meant to be Status-stressed.

Peter Newman

In his petitions to his Overseers in the parish of West Grinstead, West Sussex, Peter Newman defined his personal experiences of unsettledness, and through his words (and those of others like him) one may witness the effects of their Status-stress. Newman wrote twice:

First Letter:

Yalding Novr 16th 1826

Sir

I am Obliged to trouble you with a few lines for to send me a little money for I am in great distress or else I would not but I have not any work nor I cannot get any and my wife and Children have been very ill nearly all the summer that i have had a great deal to oat the doctor so that I have nothing now to live on so that I am quite starving and low i do assure you I hope Sir you will be so kind as to send as soon as you can for I have got one Child ill at this time and I realy have not a farthing to get any thing for my Child so I hope you will not forget me

I am Sir your Obedient Servant

Peter Newnum²⁷⁸

Second Letter:

Yalding March 8th 1827

Dear Sir

²⁷⁸WSRO Par.95-37-3-11, letter, 16 November 1826.

I have taken the opportunity of writing these few lines through Great Distress I Have Done
No work Since I was Down with you neither have I any Prospect at present of having any for
some time to come of my account and I Should Be very Glad if you will send me up Some
Money as Soon as you can for Two of my children have been very unwell for this last
fortnight and I Nor none of My Family have not earned one penny all the time So pray Do
Send as Soon as possible for I Really am in Great melancholy

So I Remain your Humble Servant

Peter Newman²⁷⁹

Yalding

Sent per post on the 28 March 1827 No.2195 Guildford Jno. Coates

In both letters Newman consciously addressed his unsettledness, first registering how 'I am quite starving and low', and then later recounting the causes and effects which resulted with his 'Great melancholy'. He recognised that in writing to his Overseer he was to undertake a journey which he 'hoped' would end with his recovery. Newman had willingly, albeit reluctantly, reconciled himself to being momentarily unsettled upon the understanding that his condition was not permanent because, in writing to the Overseer, he would obtain the support required to alter the conditions that had brought him 'low'.

Newman's unsettledness exemplifies the key characteristics of the Status-stress typology. He, as a man, explained all his unsettling troubles through the prism of work, bemoaning in his first letter that while (and in part because) his wife and child were ill: 'I have not any work nor I cannot get any'. The description Tomkins once applied to another pauper, Samuel Parker, applies readily to that given by Newman, specifically that:

[h]e was constructing a picture of his own mental health as dependent on the well-being of the rest of his nuclear family.²⁸⁰

Both men had emphasised to their Overseers that they had tried their utmost and that they were not to be blamed for the family's suffering or their descent into despair. The pair felt they merited the Overseers' sympathy. In his second letter Newman expanded upon the theme by explaining:

²⁷⁹ WSRO Par.95-37-3-13, letter, 8 March 1827.

²⁸⁰ Tomkins, Alannah. "'Labouring on a Bed of Sickness": The Material and Rhetorical Deployment of Ill-Health in Male Pauper Letters.' In A. Gestrich, E. Hurren and S. King (eds). *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor*. London: Continuum, 2012: 61.

Two of my children have been very unwell for this last fortnight and I Nor none of My Family have not earned one penny all the time.

Earnings lay at the heart of the family's troubles, and with Newman himself unable to provide for his ailing family, he had become unsettled. While Tomkins never used the unsettledness spectrum to review Samuel Parker's letter – all seven of which were sent between February 1833 and March 1834 – she too alighted upon the notion that: 'financial relief represented mental alleviation.'²⁸¹ Parker himself recorded his thought evocatively when he wrote 12 March 1834, that:

I feel myself happy when I have my health and work to do and to be Independent from my fellow Creatures²⁸²

This link between work and mental well-being was a common thread that links Status-stressed males. George Edwards of Surrey neatly summarised the concern when he wrote in 1830:

I am so grieved Because of my Sad Condision i am in a very Poor State to do any Work for myself or any other man.²⁸³

Newman, Parker and Edwards, as with other Status-stressed contemporaries, used the language of work to infer that their unsettledness was an understandable reaction to their troubled circumstances, and it was not their fault, or, entirely, their responsibility for having become unsettled. Status-stressed men did not see themselves in terms of the middle-class ideal of the breadwinner with sole responsibility to provide for the family.²⁸⁴ But rather, they were leading the way as the primary source of income to be supplemented by the efforts of the rest of the family. For if Newman and those like him believed in the breadwinner role they would not have felt the need to expand upon their children's troubles with work. That he

²⁸¹ *Ibid.* 62

²⁸² Samuel Parker's letters are presented in full in S. King, S. Nutt, and A. Tomkins (eds). *Narratives of the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Britain Volume 1. Voices of the Poor: Poor Law Depositions and Letters*. London: Pickering, 2006: 270. (The original reference for Parker's letter is: SRO DR3891/6/102, letter, 30 March 1834).

²⁸³ SRO 1505-Box37-F1-9, letter, dated only 1830.

²⁸⁴ For more on this topic, see: Horrell, Sara and Jane Humphries. "Women's Labour Force Participation and the Transition to the Male-Breadwinner Family, 1790-1865." *Economic History Review* 48, 1 (1995): 89-117; Wall, Richard. "Some Implications of the Earnings, Income and Expenditure Patterns of Married Women in Populations in the Past." In J. Henderson and R. Wall (eds). *Poor Women and Children in the European Past*. London: Routledge, 1994: 312-35; -- "Families in Crisis and the English Poor Law as Exemplified by the Relief Programme in the Essex Parish of Ardleigh 1795-7." In E. Ochiai (ed). *The Logic of Female Succession: Rethinking Patriarchy and Patrilineality in Global and Historical Perspective*. Kyoto: International Research Centre for Japanese Studies, 2002: 101-27.

and Edwards did is suggestive as to a denial of the responsibility for having become unsettled that was essential in enabling them both to believe in and to commit to recovery. Letter writing was Newman and Edwards' means to accomplish it. Having written of his and the family's suffering, Newman gifted himself the motivation and ability to rid himself of the effects of his Status-stress. He explained to the Overseers precisely what relief would mean for him and later remarked in his second letter that: 'Do Send as Soon as possible for I Really am in Great melancholy'. This need to over-explain reflected Newman's unsettling doubts regarding his agency.

Newman's need to explicitly state his need for money was included not for the Overseer's benefit but his own, as the ability to secure a wage to provide and protect his family was the key measure through which he judged his self-worth, and having lost it through unsettledness, letter-writing became his way of re-establishing his status and agency. This is why the content of his request was so emotive and why Newman fretted: 'I hope you will not forget me'; and, equally, why the similarly Status-stressed Edwards implored that: 'my distress is more than you are a Ware of or a man can bare'. Similarly, Samuel Parker, with his customary elan, decried how:

not being a little released out of poverty it brings on every thing that is bad till a person becomes a bad Member to Society²⁸⁵

Though each statement and the accompanying content of these men's letters retained a rhetorically persuasive tone there is, nevertheless, every indicator that these descriptions represented the narratives truth to these authors. Newman's hopes that he not be forgotten and his requests acceded to by the Overseers – and, likewise, Edwards's desire that his distress be noted and acted upon and Parker's that he be spared all moral degradation brought about by continuous rejections to relief – were their means of imparting a positive reading of their relations with the Overseer as they attempted to assert their agency while confronted with the effects of their Status-stress.

Having written two coherent (albeit non-standard) relief requests regarding the on-going damage wrought by his unsettledness, Newman demonstrated that its impact upon him was not so severe that he had lost the capacity to construct his thoughts, and equally, he retained the vestiges of self-control and awareness which might enable him to recover. But it was

²⁸⁵ See King et al, *Narratives of the Poor*: 268. (The original reference for Parker's letter is: SRO D3891/6/100, letter, 21 July 1833).

clear that he had written himself into a position of grudging acceptance with his condition and new-found sense of self. Newman's letters represented a step towards him acknowledging something he sensed was set to explore: unsettledness. It is notable Newman's thoughts developed on this topic which one may see in the opening sentences of both his letters:

First Letter: I am Obligated to trouble you with a few lines for to send me a little money for I am in great distress.

Second Letter: Dear Sir I have taken the opportunity of writing These few lines through Great Distress.

In both efforts Newman had begun by expressing the more accepted complaint of 'great distress' rather than launching immediately into any direct invocation of his Status-stress. The effect would have been to draw the Overseer in, especially as the rest of the opening line was suitably deferential and conventional. This shows that while Newman may have had the capacity to write a perfectly ordinary letter request he chose not to.²⁸⁶

Instead, he decided to continue by expressing his Status-stress; and when writing in this way his admissions of unsettledness were forthright. However, Newman still detailed his unsettledness within a standardised relief request. Closer inspection of his opening lines reveal a telling difference. In the first instance he spoke of being 'Obligated'. In the second he had changed and saw writing to the Overseer as an 'opportunity'. The second letter was written four months on from his first and there is the suggestion that in the intervening period there had been a face-to-face meeting between Newman and his Overseer as he described having accomplished no work 'Since I was Down with you'. It is not clear whether Newman had wallowed in his unsettling thoughts for the entire period between writing, or if he had written only on the days of feeling Status-stressed, or whether he had temporarily found work and been restored to settledness. But, the fact remains, that in certain moments when unsettled Newman had attempted to cope by writing, and on the second time of doing so, he had shifted to understand writing of his troubles as an 'opportunity'. There is the implication that Newman derived some benefit from contact with his Overseer which he had not altogether anticipated when he wrote his first letter. His second letter supports this as he implored that they: 'Do Send as Soon as possible for I Really am in Great melancholy'. For all the explicit

²⁸⁶ Pauper letter historians have not previously registered this level of choice, skill and agency on the part of the dependent poor to express their feelings through writing.

misery and unsettledness in the statement there was also a confidence – perhaps even an assumption – that the Overseer would send him relief and reinstate his former self and that a third party could help rescue his former self, which he could not do so alone. This evidence stands in contradiction to Roy Porter’s conceptualisation of ‘interiority’ of the self having come from within and without external markers because, amongst all unsettled paupers, it is clear that they expected that either the Overseer would stop their further descent into their troubles or help them change so they would not have to suffer.²⁸⁷

Newman retained the view that because it was possible to help him he should be helped. This was despite expressing an unsettledness which made it far less likely the Overseer would share his perspective. Nothing Newman cited to explain his situation was exceptional compared with the regular pauper experience, save for his unsettled emotive reaction to finding himself unable to provide for his family. Yet amongst the Status-stressed, Newman’s account reads as one of many, with William Parker of Gloucestershire having expressed similar sentiments having been unsettled on the basis that:

it will be some time before I shall be able to follow my labour to support myself and Family as I ought to do.²⁸⁸

Newman, and those like him that expressed Status-stress, risked falling into the feedback loop of unsettledness by writing to the Overseer. By committing their feelings of an unsettled self to words, they made it undeniable and had to recover from it. Only a Status-stressed person such as Newman would have been willing to think of themselves in such unsettling terms: the effect of losing status meant he was more likely to lose more of his status-markers. It is not known whether he did receive relief, but it is enough that we know Newman thought having it would help and that he chose to write based on his belief that he could recover, and this is what inspired him – for the betterment of his family - to try.

The deeper insight Newman gained from writing about his Status-stress led him to attach a greater prominence to his unsettledness in his letters as he cautiously subverted the traditional forms and practices found in pauper letter writing. In his second letter he concluded by noting his ‘great melancholy’. This was the last thought he left his Overseer to contemplate. Newman appears to have picked up on a new language by appropriating ‘melancholy’ from

²⁸⁷ Porter, *Rewriting the Self*, 1-14.

²⁸⁸ GLRO P328a OV 7-17, letter, 16 May 1833.

the middling women who typically used the term.²⁸⁹ Moreover, in deploying it, Newman made the connection with his unsettledness as a mood (rather than madness, which is a state of being), with the effect that it implied he felt his Status-stress could be lifted and changed. His first letter also finished with an emotive plea but focused on his regard for his children and the fear of being forgotten, while the outright assertion of unsettledness was left in the middle: ‘I am quite starving and low’. As with all the Status-stressed and the unsettled paupers more widely, Newman balanced expressing his troubled status with wanting to the Overseer to take his case seriously. It is therefore likely that his emotive expressions were as close to what he felt as it was possible for him to articulate. That Newman chose to dramatically emote intimates that he needed to express being ‘low’ and ‘melancholy’. At the same time, Newman needed to be understood to write away his unsettledness.

For all that Newman felt compelled to break the conventions of pauper letter writing, it was notable that where he could, he did his best to work within the common language of relief writing, signing-off with: ‘I am Sir your Obedient Servant’ and ‘I Remain your Humble Servant’. Edwards and Parker did likewise. For Newman and the other Status-stressed examined in this chapter, writing of their unsettledness was a moment to exercise their remaining control over their senses of self and it came to represent their way to institute a positive shift back to relative settledness. Newman’s case exhibits all the themes of the Status-stress typology and his account of it, though personal to his individual place and circumstances, was one mirrored across every region analysed in this thesis. For example there was: John Wiggins in Berkshire; Robert Lawson in Cumbria; Joseph Pearce in Gloucestershire; Nathaniel Croft in Gwent; James Plaskett in Hampshire; John Sharpe in Oxford; George Edwards in Surrey; James Turner in East Sussex; John Luckins in West Sussex; William Lacey in East Yorkshire; and William Townsend in West Yorkshire.²⁹⁰ However, the universalising nature of the Status-stress typology may only be fully

²⁸⁹ Jackson, Stanley. *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic times to modern times*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986; Berrios, German. “Melancholia and depression during the 19th century: A conceptual history.” *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 153, 3 (1988): 298-304; Radden, Jennifer (ed.) *The Nature of Melancholy from Aristotle to Kristeva*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Ingram, Allan, Stuart Sim, Clark Lawlor, Richard Terry, John Baker, Leigh Wetherall-Dickson (eds). *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century Before Depression, 1660–1800*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011.

²⁹⁰ BRO D/P 132/18/12, letter, 5 February 1824. KLRO WPR19-7-6-4-19, letter, 27 August 1811. KLRO WPR19-7-6-4-22a,b, letter, 27 October 1811. KLRO WPR19-7-6-6-7, letter, 17 March 1813. GLRO P193 OV 7-1, letter, undated. GWRO D.365.651, letter, 15 February 1818. D.365.651, letter, 26 April 1818. HRO PO71-8-1,2, letter, 6 August 1817. ORO PAR 236/5/A13/2/1, letter, 5 March 1832. SRO 1505-Box37-F1-9, letter, dated only 1830. ESRO PAR 411-35-1-27a,b, letter, 11 September 1827. WSRO Par.183-37-3-5a,b, letter, 29 May 1925. WSRO Par.183-37-3-16a,b, letter, 12 November 1825. EYRO PE1-702-22a, letter, 16 December 1823. WYRO WDP20-9-3-9-20a, letter, 25 November 1820.

appreciated when one looks toward West Yorkshire – a place where one might expect it be special – and see that what the likes of Thomas Cox described may have differed in small ways from others, nevertheless retained all the defining features of the typology which were to be found elsewhere.²⁹¹

Thomas Cox

The defining features of Status-stress were captured within the correspondences from 1826 between Thomas Cox and the Overseers of his home parish in Sandal Magna, West Yorkshire. Through analysis of their content and its context one may see how the language used to make relief requests could vary between regions and individuals, while the essential experiential dynamics of this unsettledness typology endured by paupers was fundamentally the same across England and Wales.

In the West Yorkshire letter set there was an obsession with the issue of work shared amongst the Overseers and relief claimants alike. This was a region, along with Lancashire, hit by a structural and cyclical employment crisis in the 1820s.²⁹² This meant the paupers of these regions were more likely to write of work troubles and had to be sophisticated in their requests to stand-out. This is why Cox's case is both a rewarding and challenging one through which to understand the themes of the typology. Yet, the key point remains: for all that one must acknowledge that the letters of the West Yorkshire Status-stressed offer profound insight into the typology – with some of the most illuminative cases of this form of unsettledness to directed there - nevertheless, the defining characteristics of the typology which were to be found amongst all Status-stressed contemporaries. To see what the main

²⁹¹ West Yorkshire was special because of the domestic nature of industrial work and its essential instability. See, Hudson, "Industrial Organisation and Structure," 25-56.

²⁹² See Timmins, *The Last Shift*: 35-70. This correspondence raises an issue that is latent throughout the thesis. While most pauper letters received by any place were sent from the immediate locality and we can assume that the conditions described in a letter were both common knowledge and likely to be shared across broad sub-regions, this assumption is more difficult when letters were sent over long distances or from on sort of an area to another. In the case of Cox, a letter from Bolton to Sandal Manga connected two places which might have had rather different economic pressures even if they were jointly affected by large trade downturns. On the other hand, wider studies of pauper letters mean it has become increasingly clear that pauper writers were very much in tune with the economic conditions in the areas to which they wrote and assumed that conditions in their host parish would be widely known. In other words, they assumed a common frame of reference. For more on this, see: Sokoll, *Thomas. Essex Pauper Letters, 1731-1837*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; King, Steven. *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s-1830s*. Montreal: McGill University Press, 2019; and Sharpe, Pamela. "The Bowles of Compation": A Labouring Family and the Law, c. 1790-1834." In T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds). *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997: 87-108.

themes were and why West Yorkshire was both unique and entirely ordinary when it came to unsettledness one must look, ultimately, to Cox.

On 9 December 1826, Thomas Cox had struggled to pay the rent for his home in Astley Bridge near Bolton, Lancashire, and constructed a letter in which he blamed his employment difficulties for his strife:

Wakefield

December 11, 1826 87

BOLTON DE10

The Overseers of the Poor of Sandel Magna Near Wakefield Yorkshire

Tho.^s Cox Dec^r. 9th 1826^s

Bolton Dec^r 9th 1826

Gen,

I beg leave to state to you my Circumstances and hope you will take my case into consideration – I have been out of Employ since August last and am very unwell and if I had employ I could not at Present work – My daughter Mary died on the 6th Sup and it has put me much about the expences Indeed we are in great distress at Present I hope you will consider my circumstances – and should feel happy if you would Remit me something to assist us until I recover – and I hope I shall meet with employ – I am behind with my Rent and my Landlord threatens me with distress – And If you do not remit me something I must have my goods Sold and most likely they will get a Removal Order for me I hope from this you will assist me – direct for me No. 16 Taylor Row Astley Bridge near Bolton

I Remain Genⁿ your most humble Serv^t Thomas Cox²⁹³

Answer Thomas Cox, The Select Vestry have directed me to send you a Pound Note to relieve you at this time of your distress, but they hope you will not trouble them with any further Complaints. please to acknowledge the receipt of it by return of the Post.

John Firth Sandal Magna

Overseer

15th Dec. 1826.

²⁹³ The transcript is produced in full and includes the reply by the Sandal Magna Overseer, John Firth on December 15, 1826. WYRO WDP20-9-3-11-22a, letter, and WYRO WDP20-9-3-11-22b, letter.

Cox was exceptional in how he requested relief. But to fully appreciate his words and how they signified to the Sandal Magna Overseers that he was unsettled it is necessary to examine how the standard relief requests pertaining to work would have been composed in West Yorkshire. The letter sent by George Middleton on 7 May 1821, is a perfect example:

Leeds 7th May 1821

Gentlemen,

I George Middleton a Woolcomber am upwards of 60 years of age have been working for Misses Abram Rhodes and am now incapable of working at my Trade and as I belong to your parish most humbly solicit relief at your hands until I am so far recovered as to be able to follow my employment which I hope will be in a few weeks, am sorry to trouble you in this manner and nothing but absolute necessity would have compelled me to it There is plenty of work for me where I am and have reason to believe I am respected on that account I desire to stay Trusting you will take my case into consideration and afford me that Relief I so earnestly desire

I subscribe myself Gentlemen

Your Most Obedient Humble Servant

George Middleton²⁹⁴

Sined by me Thomas Whitaker Overlooker of the Wool Comber at Woodhouse

Middleton's request contained none of the emotional framing evident in Cox's request with Leeds a town in which unemployment commonly occurred. While Middleton's reasons for suffering were not unusual it benefited him to be articulate without resorting to emotive and anguished pleas.²⁹⁵ Although it was a relatively long account the coherence of Middleton's message was unmistakable as he detailed being 'now incapable of working at my Trade'. He made a compelling case about his needs and why it was the parish of Woodhouse that should respond to his humble solicitation as he maintained a dutiful and deferential tone to declare his worthiness. This was all in stark contrast to Cox. Further, a common – one might even say typical – feature in West Yorkshire was the advocates' petitioning on the behalf of paupers. A possible reason for this is that with unemployment and instability thought to be a normal occurrence and the associated rhetorical language associated with relief requests being weak,

²⁹⁴ WYRO WDP20-9-3-9-15b, letter, 7 May 1821.

²⁹⁵ On Leeds, see Hudson, Patricia. *The Genesis of Industrial Capital: A Study of the West Riding Wool Textile Industry, c. 1750-1850*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

the best move for a struggling man to make was to find an advocate who could vouch for them by telling the Overseer how their case was special.²⁹⁶ The advocates wrote successfully in a style quite different to that exhibited in Cox's request as can be seen in the case of David Higgins that was sent to the parish of Sandal Magna on 13 January 1829.

Higgins was advocated for by the Overseer of Dursley, Thomas Oldfield, who wrote the following on Higgins' behalf – and it is an exemplar of the relief claiming format:

To the Overseers of Sandal Magna

Jany. 13 1829

This is to certify that David Higgins is without work and has a family of five children all without work and assure you stands in great need of relief

Yours Tho.s Oldfield

Overseer of Dursley²⁹⁷

No extraneous detail was given with the advocate having trusted that the statement of Higgins and his family being in 'great need' would suffice. It appears Oldfield had been content to rely upon his status as an Overseer and, crucially, recognised that a basic form of petitioning was acceptable (even preferable) to secure relief under the Old Poor Law. These facts, and the context they provide, lead us back to Cox and his 'hope' that his audience 'will consider my circumstances'. If one heeds Cox and explores the emotive dimensions of his words it is possible to see how he used writing to articulate and challenge what is understood to have been his unsettled Status-stressed mind.

The question of why to read Cox's relief request as a description of his Status-stress can only be answered with reference to its emotional content, the context within which it arose, and the wider dynamics of this unsettledness typology as a whole. His lament that he 'should feel happy if you would Remit me', was Cox acknowledging having moved from a state of happiness to a worse place, and it may reasonably (though errantly) be said that he was not talking about moving negatively along the spectrum of unsettledness.²⁹⁸ Cox's very need to

²⁹⁶ For advocate roles, see: King & Jones, "Testifying for the Poor.": 784-807.

²⁹⁷ WYRO WDP20-9-3-13-17, letter, 13 January 1829.

²⁹⁸ For more on happiness, see: Braddick, Michael and Innes, Joanna (eds). *Suffering and Happiness in England 1550-1850: Narratives and Representations: A Collection to Honour Paul Slack*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017: 1-22. Other useful texts include: Dixon, Thomas. *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears*.

write such a letter explaining how he could ‘not at Present work’ denoting the negative impact on his family signified to himself and his audience that he had lost his which unsettled him. Cox’s relative restraint when compared with the unsettled found in other typologies owes to how he viewed the unsettling effects of work and being unable to provide for his family as a self-explanatory issue for his Overseer to understand. Yet, Cox emoted expecting them to empathise with his situation by describing how. He continued by offering the explanation as to how the recent death of his daughter had ‘put me much about the expences’. In doing so, Cox – as with all the Status-stressed contemporaries – consciously challenged his underlying troubles having sought to prevent them escalating by exercising his remaining agency through writing. He was reliant on the Overseer perceiving the emotional weight of his disclosures as he balanced trying to be considered an appropriate person for the parish to relieve and asserting his agency to change his circumstances. His unsettledness lay in the way he was driven by fears of his family enduring further suffering and his paralysing doubt as to whether he was capable of securing work to help lift their collective burden. Cox’s troubles were two-fold in that he first had to care and secure aid for his family and find a way to restore his sense of self. Cox felt an irresolvable conflict: he had not emoted on his family’s behalf or expressed his unsettledness for them, but for himself. But were it not for his family – with his sense of self orientated around caring for them – he would not be unsettled. Cox’s letter carried with it an extraordinary emotional candidness. Woven into his use of the common language of relief and what he wrote, he conveyed both his honest appraisal of his unsettledness and his hope that, through writing and with the aid of the Overseer, he could restore himself to a settled sense of self.

‘I hope from this you will assist me’ Cox concluded, with his request holding the assumption that the Overseers of West Yorkshire would deign to help him, the pauper whose self-declared reason for writing rested upon his problems with work and despite his having expressed his unsettledness. Cox’s attitude, alongside the evidence of other Status-stress cases, raises a question: in West Yorkshire was the way work (and unsettledness) was experienced and written about by paupers and reacted to by the Overseers special? The evidence from the Status-stressed letters certainly suggests those who endured it thought it was. Cox is an excellent example of one of the many unsettled paupers within this region to have believed that because they cited work as the cause of their troubles the full

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015; McMahon, Darrin. *Happiness: A History*. New York: Atlantic Press, 2006.

responsibility for their decline did not reside with them and that because the Overseer possessed the power – as the Status-stressed saw it – to help, they therefore must do so. It was for this reason Cox laboured with extraneous detail to explain how granting him relief would be beneficial:

If you do not remit me something I must have my goods Sold and most likely they will get a Removal Order for me.

Other Status-stressed men expressed similar sentiments. John Ellis wrote of his ‘dread’ on 17 January 1821, having not worked in eight weeks and was left fretting that ‘I do not know were to go to get it’.²⁹⁹ Richard Broadhead’s travails with employment reduced him implore the Overseer: ‘I Do Not Want to be a Common pauper’.³⁰⁰ Uniting the cases of the Status-stressed of West Yorkshire was their author’s insistence that work was the yardstick for measuring their sense of self. Finding themselves without work unsettled them. Further, each man clung to the idea that if they were to resolve their work troubles they would end their unsettledness and that this (partly) depended on the Overseers’ attitude toward them which they could guide but not control. Thus, they put a positive interpretation upon their relations with their Overseers. This is why Cox ended his case citing his ‘hope’. More to the point these men relied upon the language of work to free themselves to write emotively. There was an understanding amongst the Status-stressed likes of Cox, Ellis, Broadhead and others in this region that because work was such a common and accepted reason to apply for relief, it followed that they were able to emote when it unsettled them; in part, because the Overseer must understand what they were referring to and why.

The language of relief and terms of relief in West Yorkshire was indelibly tied to work and for this reason we find a preponderance of male cases against female cases (8:1). Moreover, the female cases of unsettledness had work at their core. Ester Hanson’s petition is a precious source as she was one of only three women studied across the country to have described her unsettledness in terms of Status-stress. She wrote from Barnsley on 27 May 1834 to share how:

²⁹⁹ WYRO WDP139-7-8-10a and WYRO WDP139-7-8-10b, letter, 17 January 1821.

³⁰⁰ WYRO WDP20-9-3-7-4, letter, undated.

I am in the utmost distress being out of employment and having a Child to Support, I have done my best to obtain employment in Barnsley but without Success, and in consequence of which am in a State of Starvation, misery and want.³⁰¹

That Hanson was married and made no mention of it is significant as her language was notably genderless. If we accept her silence was a matter of choice then it is clear she tried to convey a message about the universal condition shorn of questions of age, gender or even location. Women were buffeted by conditions and experience which were universal amongst paupers. Although not Status-stressed, Ann Bennett referenced work and an inability to provide for her family as contributing factor to her troubles that: ‘forsed to go from door to door to Beg My Bread’.³⁰² But unlike the men, there was not the same expectation that women like Bennett or Hanson would be working or earning. Women lacked the familiarity men had with making claims and orientating their sense of self around the issue of work. The language of work was essential to relief claims made in West Yorkshire and amongst the unsettled.

Cox proves useful because it does appear his request secured him relief:

The Select Vestry have directed me to send you a Pound Note to relieve you at this time of your distress, but they hope you will not trouble them with any further Complaints

John Firth Sandal Magna

Overseer

15th Dec. 1826.

In the decision to grant him relief, Cox’s Overseers were not enamoured with his request and he was not encouraged to write again. Almost in spite of himself, Cox got relief. In this respect, Cox differed from typical writers found in this unsettledness typology. Cox’s good fortune may owe to his having written to the Overseers of West Yorkshire who were more receptive to work-based claims for relief. Therefore, if the region has a claim to being special, it would be that a small amount of lenience was granted to expressions of Status-stress.

Through analysis of Cox and those Status-stressed like him it is possible to see how individual circumstances and regional contexts of relief giving did not, fundamentally, alter the essential dynamics for what it was like for contemporary men to experience being out of work. The troubles wrought by Status-stress were remarkably similar in character for all the

³⁰¹ WYRO WDP20-9-3-23-2a and WYRO WDP20-9-3-23-2b, letter, 27 May 1834.

³⁰² WYRO WDP20-9-3-22-4a, letter, 19 February 1840.

male paupers one could analyse. Analytical reference to Cox in West Yorkshire has also introduced the nuanced place for women in the narrated experiences of Status-stress. With notable exceptions such as that of Ester Hanson, few if any women used the language of work and Status-stress to describe their unsettledness. Yet, it would be remiss simply to presume that the impact of Status-stress did not – in certain places and families – affect some women. The analysis will therefore shift to look at the cases of the Davis and Edmeads family to illuminate that while male paupers within a family might have endured an unsettledness cohering to the Status-stress model, the unsettling impact of the familial conditions could also lead to females within families enduring their own forms of unsettledness.

John and Martha Davis

Thus far this analysis has outlined the significance of work for male contemporaries in orientating their sense(s) of self and, concurrently, how some men suffered their own individualised experience of the Status-stress. Those men who wrote of Status-stress cases have rendered other family members as silent, passive victims to their struggles. There are precious few female Status-stress cases to consult; and, as we shall see, those that exist are peculiarly unrepresentative of women's documented experiences of the poor law, with these authors having written in a manner which – their name aside – could easily be mistaken for a man's relief request. However, through study of the correspondence of John and Martha Davis to their Overseers of Hampshire from 1821 to 1828 – and with further reference to other cases – it will be shown how the impact of Status-stress described by the male head of the household did not exist in a vacuum. The underlying conditions of poverty and unemployment – and the difficulties suffered by the writer – could lead to others in the same household experiencing their own descent into unsettledness; although rarely (if ever) in the form of Status-stress. The testimony of Martha Davis when set alongside her husband's laments on his Status-stress may elucidate how the transmission of unsettledness was not infectious, but rather could reverberate through families, with both writers having exercised their agency through letter-writing to construct their own sense of unsettledness, which in turn was influenced, but not defined by the other.

Eight letters detail the plight of John and Martha Davis, the first four of which are reproduced below for it was here – in the space of ten months across 1821-2 and in reference to one another’s struggles – both wrote of their individual forms of unsettledness. Mere examination of John’s Status-stress would not do justice to the complex unsettling emotional realities evident in his and wife’s accounts. Their correspondence began on 31 December 1821 when Martha Davis beseeched their Overseer:

First Letter:

Overseers of St John Parish Winchester Hants

Blandford S^t mary Decr 31 1821

Gentelman

I am sorry to trouble you which I hould not if I Could help it Since Davis have been at home he has had Scarsly any thing to do and this three weeks he has had nothing at all to do Worke is very bad at present I hope it will be better soon and my Self has been ill this two months the Doctor says I must wean the Child or I shall never be no better So Genteleman for want of work and illniss we are in Great distress

your humble Servant

Martha Davis³⁰³

Martha used her husband’s troubles with ‘Worke’ to justify her need to write about her own unsettledness. As with many married pauper women, Martha’s agency and identity was defined by the capabilities and presence of her husband. Yet, by writing for herself, Martha proved that she had both agency and an identity in her own right. But there was a clear limit to this agency. The freedom to petition the Overseer depended on her husband’s incapacity/indisposition to do so for himself and the family; and, as we shall see, once he was capable, Martha immediately lost this role and her ability to write for herself. Martha’s two letters were written at the time her husband, John, had been unable to write. This was the case for many female married paupers. The impact of Status-stress could, in some cases, have an especially pernicious unsettling effect as evidenced in the experiences of the Davis and Edmeads families. In the latter case, the self-described ‘wife of Jon Edmeads’ had explained to the Overseers of Surrey that as she wrote on 20 October 1832, she had been reduced to ‘a state of starvation’, while ‘a hundred miles from home’ with three children to care for, and,

³⁰³ HRO 88M81W-PO7-1-1,2, letter, 31 December 1821.

having ‘not herd from him [her husband]’ for four months as he endeavoured to find employment.³⁰⁴

For her part, Martha Davis possessed sufficient agency and a sense of personal identity to not simply define herself by the name of her husband. Nevertheless, she had been unable to escape the unsettling impact of her husband’s Status-stress.³⁰⁵ The language and impact of work invoked by both Martha Davis and John Edmead’s wife to explain their plights in terms of their husband’s failings formed the basis and provided the key rhetorical justification for their requests. But neither woman proffered nor requested a solution to the problems of work and left the issue open to the discretion of the Overseers and their (absentee) husband’s endeavours. Yet, though the men in question were missing from the immediate dialogue, the voice of these married men was powerful and present in their wife’s letters to their Overseers. Martha’s letter – and that of Edmeads’ wife – appear geared to the simpler end of registering their author’s emotional torment(s) rather than solving the employment difficulties. However, in not seeking a solution to the employment troubles – or by offering to work themselves – these women revealed how, unlike their male counterparts and spouses, their sense of identity was distinct from work. Martha Davis, for instance, sought to explain her role differently with the issue of work rendered a conduit to the troubles she maintained had been brought about by her husband. Martha’s identity was tied not to work but to her role as a mother – one that had been impinged due to her husband’s Status-stress – that, in turn, had unsettled her, but which she herself sought to alleviate the effects through pauper letter writing. Martha Davis, had in, effect tried to write away her unsettledness. With this context, the question of why she did not use her letter to stress her material concerns beyond what it meant for her role as mother and wife may be answered. Martha was content to conclude with her ‘hope it will be better soon’, because her letter was both an admission of the doubt which had unsettled her and her recognition that it was John’s place – with the help of the Overseers – to rectify the family’s plight.

Having written of her unsettledness and explored its depths through corresponding with the Overseer, Martha had established the platform to do so again. Two weeks after her first letter, on 14 January 1822, Martha Davis wrote citing the unresolved nature of her troubles:

Second Letter:

³⁰⁴ SRO 1505-Box37-F1-40, letter, 20 October, 1832.

³⁰⁵ A critique of John’s status-stress is to be found later in this analysis as it switches to the Davis family’s third and fourth letters.

Overseers of St John Parish Winchester Hants

Blandford S^t mary Jan'y 14
1822

Gentleman

I am sorry and sore troubled to trouble you as I Send a fortnight ago and have had no answer to the lett^{er} this is now five weeks that Davis has been out of work and has had earned but 4^s-3^d Since I wrote last so that my Children is three parts Starv^d at this present moment I have nothing to Give them to eat not even a morsel of Bread except ther father had work to do and then it is as much as we can do as our familly is very large and I am Very much afflicted not able to do for my familly half my time but how do I pray to the Lord to Remove is hand from me for Distress poverty and affliction is a heavy Burden to Bear

Gentlemen I Remain your humble Servant

Martha Davis³⁰⁶

This letter held Martha's veiled complaint that the Overseers had not sufficiently responded to her previous letter, as she admitted: 'I am sorry and sore troubled to trouble I Send a fortnight ago and have had no answer to the letter'. Her obvious intent was to secure a response and by framing her frustration through the deference of being 'sorry' she felt emboldened to rhetorically push the Overseers to provide what she wanted. However, by emphasising that she felt her family's troubles – including her own personal suffering – was caused by her husband she merely emphasised to the Overseer that it was ultimately John that mattered when it came to the resolving the fate of the Davis family. Tellingly, it was John who would write the subsequent letters on behalf of the family. John's problems with work were written of in terms of how Martha herself was 'not able to do for my familly half my time'. Martha had made it difficult for her Overseers to respond in the way she desired because she had again omitted a clear statement of financial need in her request and allowed herself to wallow in the murky emotive ambiguities of her unsettled feelings. Nevertheless, Martha's concern as to the plight of her children highlighted how with Status-stress cases a man that was head of a household dependent upon his employment – as most pauper men were – and who subsequently became unsettled, could endanger the physical and mental well-being not only of himself, but also his wife and children.³⁰⁷ The nature of pauper letter writing was that, typically, one hears the voice of a man; and in his stead, his spouse; and never young children. Yet the suffering evident in the Davis family case may not have been

³⁰⁶ HRO 88M81W-PO7-2-1,2, letter, 14 January 1822.

³⁰⁷ This distinction also highlights female dependence upon men.

limited to those who could write, with Martha having fretted her children's plight since she had: 'nothing to Give them to eat not even a morsel of Bread'. But while Martha had been unsettled due to the effects of her husband's Status-stress, her unsettledness does not fit the same unsettledness typology.

Women like Martha Davis – and the wife of John Edmeads – used their letters to find a voice for their unsettledness. In a break with the style of her previous letter and a sign of her increased desperation as the Overseer had not responded to her request, Martha had chosen to rhetoricise God. 'I pray to the Lord to Remove his hand from me', was a telling admission as it demonstrated how she felt unable to fully rely on other sources of comfort, primarily her husband, and secondarily the Overseers themselves. The invocation of God was a means by which Martha found a way to express her unsettling discontent and personalise her letter specifically to end the suffering of 'me'. However, by choosing to frame this second letter around John and his troubles with work, Martha had again neglected to request more than that her fears be heard and acknowledged. The business of resolving the Davis family's material strife was once again left to the mercy of John Davis and the Overseers. The significance of this may only be fully appreciated when one considers the dilemma Martha Davis and other women married to Status-stress men could be faced with: how could they maintain their voice and articulate their unsettledness when their husbands decided to write on the family's behalf? The letters of John Davis regarding his Status-stress illuminate how women in his wife's position – being dependent on a Status-stressed man – they could be confronted with the cumulative problem of becoming speechless in the very moment they found the need to voice their unsettledness.

Between 1822 to 1828 John Davis regularly documented how his 'cup of sorrows' was filled in times when he found himself unable to work. Upon such occasions his burden to care for his family could become so overwhelming it led him to flit in and out of states of unsettledness. On 22 January 1822, eight days after Martha had written her second letter, John sent his own relief request:

Third Letter:

To Overseers of the Parish of S^t John near the City of Winchester Hants

1822 Jan^y 22

Blandford St Mary

Gentelmen

I am Very Sorry that I am Obligated to take My pen to Address you as My Wife have Before described the Suitation [sic] that We are at the present placed in I now State the Case Wich We are at this Moment that I now Write placed in Without a Morsle of Victuls to Eat having had not two Meals altogether for this Wick past and not nowing Where to get a Bit to East Likewise in Expectation of having our few goods Seized for Rent Every Day as We now [sic] 1£ 10 Shillings for house Rent Wich is impossible for any person to avoid as I have not Earned 10 shillings for the Last 6 Weeks and for 3 months Before that Some times 10 Shillings and Some times 12 therfore I Leave you to judge Gentelmen if you have the feeling of British humanity left in your Bosems the Situation that I and my family now Stand in therfore if you Do not take into Concoideration to Send Some Assistance that I am Detirment under the painfull Necissity of throwing my family on Blandford St mary parish and cause them to Be Brought home With a Order

Gentelmen I Remain your

Most Afflicted Sufferer

John Davis³⁰⁸

The key message of this letter is found in John's questioning whether the Overseers had 'British humanity left'. It was an arresting rhetorical ploy designed to draw attention to his and the Davis families' suffering. But such an exclamation went far beyond the typical persuasive techniques utilised by men without work. It spoke instead to his underlying unsettledness. While John Davis can offer another compelling case to explore the dimensions of male experiences of Status-stress, his usefulness may be seen more in what his letter can reveal about his wife's experiences of unsettledness and what it means for the Status-stress typology.

It was John himself who justified his writing a letter on the grounds that Martha had already written but had (seemingly) not received a reply. He opened his statement, remarking:

I am Obligated to take My pen to Address you as My Wife have Before described the Suitation.

The implication was he had trusted her to try to secure relief but the Overseers had not taken heed of her words thereby forcing John to write. The difference between John's style of writing compared with his wife's was stark as he was more specific in citing their material hardships. Unlike Martha, John was clear about what was required and what the consequences would be if relief was not forthcoming. He warned of the potential 'painfull

³⁰⁸ HRO 88M81W-PO7-3-1,2, letter, 22 January 1822.

Necessity of throwing my family on Blandford St mary parish'. For all his stated resentment at having been forced to write, John demonstrated greater skill in constructing his petition for relief by invoking the language and rhetoric associated with work and his role as head of the family. He therefore displayed an ownership of the responsibility to protect his family – with the role previously having been partially delegated to Martha – and had, whether knowingly or not, effectively conspired with the Overseers to silence his wife. The implication is that when writing about the problems caused by lack of employment – and its impact upon the affected family – it helped to be a man because they had access to the language of economic distress in a way that the women of this period simply did not. Yet the extent of Martha's cumulative silences can only be fully appreciated in light of the rest of the family's correspondence with the Overseer in which, despite her earlier efforts or because they had failed, she was increasingly rendered a mute and passive victim to John's troubles.

By the time of the fourth letter – 22 September, 1822 – the problematic material conditions that had seen both Martha and John Davis become unsettled had returned, as John explained:

for Me and my Wife and 5 Children to Be Cooped up on One Room is not at all proper
Beside it is so Injuris to the health of my Wife to Be so Closly Confined that While Staying
So She Will never Regain her Strength.³⁰⁹

Martha was once again at the mercy of elements outside of her personal control which she and her husband recognised owed to his failure to secure a wage for the family. Yet the most significant admission – and the key feature of this letter – was how John was privileged to speak on his wife's behalf. That Martha suffered was incontrovertible as John added how:

My Wife Says that She would Rather Be Situated in the Corner of a Workhouse than Be So
Confined.

But Martha herself was not afforded the freedom to say this for herself. John's description cast her as a pathetic even hysterical figure. But while before, Martha had at least been able to detail her sufferings in her own personal way, the grim fact that it was caused by John's troubles with work meant he, as the male head of the household, was able to confide and seek comfort from the Overseer while she was not. Martha's silence deepened over time.

On the last recorded occasion of interaction between Davis family and the Overseers, John complained that the 'Burthen' of care for the family 'has Wholly Lain on me'. This lament

³⁰⁹ HRO 88M81W-PO7-4-1,2,3, letter, 22 September 1822.

came at a time – 14 May 1828 – when a daughter was ill and he was unable to work as he made a curious admission that, though it was only he for whom the burden of care fell, the rest of his family – Martha included – could suffer the impact as he warned:

We therefore Cannot possibly Support her altogether Without Throwing Rest of the family to greater distress than what it is already.³¹⁰

John had conceded that his family could suffer but it was his right and responsibility to resolve their difficulties which he sought to accomplish through pauper letter-writing. This is significant because the evidence of Martha's submissions to the Overseer prove that she also felt a burden of care for her family that could lead to unsettledness. But her perspectives did not hold the same weight in the format of relief requests. Martha was a woman adversely affected, even unsettled, by her husband's troubles with work but it was he that held the primary right to speak of them.³¹¹

The way women's voices can be silenced may be seen in how, at times, the letters were signed.³¹² The sixth letter in this case – dated 10 December 1826 – intimates how even when the letter is co-signed, one author could have a greater voice than the other. In this example, one exclusively hears John's voice as he recalls having:

Accedintly Slipped and Strained my Back In Such a manner as to Render my Work Suspended for More than a Month.³¹³

He went on to bemoan his 'Cup of Sorrows' and how he lost the only other 'means that We Have to Be any Support to the family', due to his eldest son having contracted smallpox. As with the daughters she sought to protect, Martha was portrayed as helpless and unable to contribute. This helps to explain why women were reluctant (and unsuccessful) in making requests around issues of (un)employment: an acceptance that they could be effective in work or even that they should have employment was not often present in the assumptions of those who wrote and received pauper letters. Although this letter had been signed by John and Martha Davis together it was only his voice that can be discerned. Martha had been silenced again.

³¹⁰ HRO: 88M81W-PO7-8-1,2, letter, 14 May 1828.

³¹¹ Pamela Sharpe has distinguished the difference between male and female letter writers: Sharpe, Pamela. "The Bowles of Compation': A Labouring Family and the Law, c. 1790-1834." In T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds). *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997: 87-108.

³¹² HRO 88M81W-PO7-6-1,2,3, letter, 10 December 1826.

³¹³ HRO 88M81W-PO7-6-1,2,3, letter, 10 December 1826.

The final way pauper letters pertaining to the underlying issue of work could silence women such as Martha Davis is illuminated by the role played by advocates. No advocate helped nor supported Martha's claims. Yet her husband consistently found support for his letter writing with one advocate willing to write:

on behalf of John Davis of your Parish & his family, who is in great distress, owing to the want of employ.³¹⁴

One may make the presumption that this advocate, Thomas Lacey, was entrusted above Martha to construct a successful request. While this was standard pauper letter writing convention it also illuminates how men's views could be given more credence than women's and how women like Martha – who were at the unsettling mercy of her husband's Status-stress – could be left stranded with the advocate having omitted all the passion and rhetorical power that styled her request. Her husband's need was placed above hers by the advocates with their opinion taken to matter more than her own. The contrast with this exemplary form of relief request set against Martha's individualistic style heightens how stranded she had been when she had expressed her unsettledness and how the conventions of pauper writing worked against her. When it came to matters of (un)employment, Martha had recognised a role and burden for herself relative to her family. But her advocates never expressed such a recognition and instead emphasised her husband's responsibilities. Hence it was written by an advocate on 3 March 1828, that:

I think him [John] a hard working industrious man, but having 5 others dependent on him for support & work having been very scarce it has reduced him a great deal.³¹⁵

It was John's need that mattered with Martha registered as another of his dependents. Whether or not this was a rhetorical tool employed by the advocates to secure the entire family relief and comfort is a moot point. Of greater significance is how, again, it shows a woman in Martha's position – vulnerable to her husband's Status-stress or even just employment difficulties – could have her voice silenced. This is especially striking as it is clear that Martha herself had turned to writing in order to articulate and challenge the sense of unsettledness that assailed her as consequence of what, she feared, was John's failure to find work. The combined problems of husbands writing on their behalf, issues with co-authorship,

³¹⁴ HRO 88M81W-PO7-5-1,2, letter, 31 January 1826.

³¹⁵ HRO 88M81W-PO7-7-1,2,3, letter, March 1828.

and the role of advocates, meant that pauper women faced enormous challenges registering their discontent when reliant on the rhetorical language of work.

Hannah Brown, Elizabeth Pepall, and Ester Hanson are notable for being the minority of women identified in this thesis that did write letters that conformed to the major signifiers of the Status-stress typology and there is value in briefly focusing upon their testimonies. Notably, their accounts exhibited few obvious novelties as they were each written in similar styles used by their unsettled male counterparts. Elizabeth Pepall, of the St. Clements parish in Oxford wrote the most detailed letter of the three women.³¹⁶ On 26 March 1833 she submitted the following request to her Overseers:

Kingstone March 26 1833

Gentⁿ

I am truly sorry I am under the Necessity of writing to you again but tis now 13 Weeks since I received any thing from you – and I now assure you I am so distress'd I know not what to do – I have had but very little employment this Winter – indeed – and owing to your haveing taken off a Shilling pr week – I have been oblidge'd to go into debt – and I fear I shall never be able to pay it unless you would please to consider my Situation and allow for the future the Shilling which has been taken off – I do assure you I have strove very hard and have felt more distress this Winter than ever I did in my Life – I am sorry to say I am now out of employ and my Girl can earn nothing – and I must beg to say that if I do not get more employment than I have had – I must be oblidge'd to come home for it can not be worse with me than it is now – Hoping to hear from you as soon as possible

I remain your obedient Servant

Eliz^h Pepall³¹⁷

If one were to ignore the signature one might assume this was a clear case of male Status-stress. Pepall's letter conformed to all the usual yardsticks of the typology as she consciously and directly linked being 'so distress'd I know not what to do' to having 'very little employment'. Further, Pepall had accepted her situation on the condition that it was not permanent. She believed that the aid from the Overseers would help her and was sustained by her conviction that she should be helped having 'strove very hard'. Within these words was Pepall's lament that her state was not her fault and she had done everything possible to

³¹⁶ It is important to note that abandoned women and those whose husbands were away often wrote in this fashion. See: King. *Writing the Lives*: 61-175.

³¹⁷ ORO, MSS. D.D. Par.c.25, letter, 26 March 1833.

prevent her current plight. Finding and securing work – with the temporary aid of the Overseer in the meantime – was how Pepall envisaged her recovery and was able to emote accordingly about having ‘have felt more distress this Winter than ever I did in my Life’. Within this, too, Pepall had called upon the common linguistic trope associated with relief requests concerning unsettledness and work by framing her request in terms of what it meant for her family. Elizabeth Pepall’s case is a classic of the Status-stress typology. But she was a woman. Such cases rarely appear. It was, after all, one of only three identified in this thesis. The others by Brown and Hanson followed the same patterns as Pepall’s letter, with the former requesting that the Overseers:

grant me the favor of sending me a little as I have no labour to do And the wether been so severe that I was not able to come up myself.³¹⁸

Hanson, meanwhile, had written that:

I am in the utmost distress being out of employment and having a Child to Support, I have done my best to obtain employment in Barnsley but without Success, and in consequence of which am in a State of Starvation, misery and want.³¹⁹

Nothing other than their names ever signified these women to be anything other than Status-stressed men. This is extraordinary. In most pauper letters, including those by the unsettled, women wrote of their identity differently to men. There were fundamental differences in the way men and women framed their relief requests even if the experiences of poverty and unsettledness they endured was similar. The notion of family – with the wife at its centre caring for the children while he worked – was the established register for a male pauper writing about work and through which he orientated his sense of identity.³²⁰ As we have seen, for Status-stressed men such as Peter Newman and Thomas Cox the impact of their unsettledness was explained through reference to the hurt inflicted upon their wives for it was the strongest representation to themselves (and to the Overseers) of the extent of their failings. But Status-stressed women did not employ this rhetoric or register. Pepall, Brown and Hanson did not mention husbands/partners; or even if they were widows. This was curious, even for unsettled paupers. In every other typology women made reference to their marital status in their letters. It was essential context for the Overseer to judge their cases and a way for women to orientate and explain their senses of self; hence, for instance, the Dying

³¹⁸ GLRO P328a OV 7-19, letter, 17 January 1836.

³¹⁹ WYRO WDP20-9-3-23-2a-2b, letter, 27 May 1843.

³²⁰ See Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*.

unsettled would mention being widowed as a way of emphasising no one was left to help them.³²¹ The seemingly conscious refusal by the Status-stressed women to make any mention of their marital status – especially in light of the fact they each had children – was highly unusual. Pepall, Brown, and Hanson had chosen to write of their unemployment and the unsettling impact it had upon them in a male style of pauper letting writing and, with it, implied that they had taken on the male role. Defining the strangeness of this decision is the context that their female contemporaries rarely did so because it was not an effective means for them to secure relief; as the fate of Martha Davis proves. But Pepall, Brown, and Hanson either in spite or perhaps, because of their unsettledness, had chosen to defy common pauper wisdom and convention in sending what were, essentially, a man's style of relief request which leaves the question: what is the value of their testimonies?

While their accounts reinforced the themes of the Status-stress typology these women's letters tell little of the experience beyond what could have been gleaned from male accounts. Yes, women suffered Status-stress but the number that did remains almost vanishingly small. This fact instead re-focuses the analysis onto the importance of the likes of Martha Davis account. Martha's voice was liminal to the story of Status-stress in the sense that the experience of the typology belonged to her husband yet she was unsettled by its reverberating effects and how she wrote of it, and, crucially, how she was silenced, offers insight into emotional world of paupers. Martha's testimony contextualises why there were few female Status-stress cases as the reference points for identity and unsettledness were not often the same as for these men when pertaining directly to matters of employment. Instead, and as will be shown in the study to come in Chapter Four, Compromised Identity, Martha's perspective highlighted how women's sense of identity – like men's – could be subject to any number of different factors and reference points.

The Status-stressed were so precisely because they were people for whom work was the key yardstick to measure their sense of self. When they found themselves without (or unable to) work they became unsettled. Underpinning this resides the complex and changing dynamics of collaboration that could occur within marriages over who and when one was permitted to write on the family's behalf, and in turn, of their personal plight. Alongside this was the issue of whose voice/perspective the Overseers placed most trust which was brought into focus by the involvement of advocates. It was advocates – a male non-family member – whose

³²¹ For more, see: Chapter Six – Death: 189-208.

account was given most credence often above or at least equal to the male that cited Status-stress, and always above those wives who may have written of how the effects of their husbands troubles could unsettle them. Martha Davis showed there were other ways in which paupers could be unsettled with work a contributory factor but it was not the only challenge that confronted paupers and it is to the phenomena of the unsettledness termed ‘Compromised Identity’ which this thesis will examine next.

Conclusion

Status-stress was a form of mental torment brought about by troubles with or a loss of employment. The act of writing by the Status-stressed was both a preventative measure taken against falling into further unsettledness and the start of their fight to become settled once more. The hopes of the Status-stressed rested on their idea that by writing they were exercising agency over their states of mind which had previously felt too troublesome to effectively control.

The reassertion of control over their unsettled self was couched by the Status-stressed directly or indirectly in terms of dignity. Dignity was contingent upon the Status-stressed accepting that they had become unsettled. By acknowledging unsettledness, they gave themselves the emotional space to reject the idea that its impact and effects upon them would be permanent; being able to write and letter and secure relief signified to themselves that their circumstances could change. Some – like Peter Newman – had written knowing this might not be true but felt they owed it to themselves and their families to try and express their hopes through writing. By persuading the Overseers to help them whilst unsettled, the affected felt they would be/were enacting their hitherto dormant agency which in turn signified that further control over one’s circumstances and state of mind was possible and that their unsettledness would end. It was for the same reasons that the Status-stressed clung to the hope that their conditions were impermanent that they – of all the unsettled analysed in these chapters – were faced with the greatest risk of encountering feedback loops as they tried to write themselves settled.

The belief of the Status-stressed that they could be helped meant their requests were imbued with the argumentative assumption that they should be helped which was often not shared by their audience, the Overseer. This contradiction fermented a feedback loop of unsettledness. The problem started with the issue of work itself which was a common source of complaint cited amongst paupers. While the likes of the Dying unsettled exploited their approaching

death as an effective excuse to express themselves as they wished, with the Overseer effectively obligated by courtesy to listen, the Status-stressed failed to cite any specific extraordinary grounds for their self-indulgence in articulating their unsettledness caused by troubles with work. By talking about such a common topic in such emotive fashion they marked themselves out to their contemporary judges as different and therefore not necessarily deserving of the relief they coveted. The danger of the unsettling feedback loop for the Status-stressed was the emotional impact of finding oneself without the status they had become accustomed to was unsettling, and the unhinging effects of Status-stress meant the affected was more likely to lose the markers of status they held owing to the impact of their conditions.

Underpinning the conviction of the Status-stressed that their conditions would be ameliorated through pauper relief was their insistence that the onset and effects of unsettledness was not solely their fault. The letters were defined by their authors' having accepted becoming unsettled on the condition that it was understood by their audience that its appearance was not their fault and that their efforts merited recognition. Amongst all the irrationalities wrought by unsettledness, the denial of responsibility and belief in recovery was ultimately the Status-stressed's tether to settledness. It intimated their understanding of what they had lost, wanted back and, by corollary, how they could regain it. In possessing such awareness the Status-stressed were not so different from those found in all the other unsettled typologies.

Status-stress was defined for the affected by their sense of compromised agency. For most men without the hope of being able to work was a fundamental blow to their sense of self. For many women of the period, though they worked, having the status that came with work was not fundamental to their sense of self in the same way. Indeed, Wahrman noted how in 1780-1800:

this relative porousness, which allowed eighteenth-century categories of gender to be imagined as occasionally mutable, potentially unfixed, and even as a matter of choice, disappeared with remarkable speed. ... [L]ong-standing forms and practices that had formerly capitalized on (and sometimes wallowed in) the acknowledged limitations of gender boundaries now became socially unacceptable and culturally unintelligible.³²²

³²² Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, 40-1.

The key word in status-stress was ‘work’. Male and females were able to cite problems with employment as the crux for their case for relief. But the language of work and its rhetorical levers were better-suited to men who were, by the standards of the day, expected to orientate their sense of self through work and might therefore write a pauper letter that privileges work as their primary issue that merited them receiving relief. An unsettled man writing for relief through the language of work carried with him its rhetorical power and helped him conform to the established masculine gender role. The unsettledness context is key because these were pauper men using writing not simply to secure relief, but to use the language of work to explore and hope to rectify their unsettled sense of self. Women could – and, as we shall, a few did, call upon the language of work to help express their unsettledness – but, as paupers, there was comparatively less freedom of expression within that identity of working woman and to exploit the rhetorical levers of troubles with employment for their own emotive unsettled needs. For males, this came relatively naturally. But for female paupers there were other societally-endorsed and easily reconciled forms of constructing oneself and the claims they could make successfully for parish relief. An unsettled woman, it follows, was better-suited to having her needs met by leaning into her gender role as a wife or mother more than into the predominantly male space and language of work, despite the fact that women were often working the same jobs as their male counterparts.

For male paupers, work was an established form of distress and valid reason to request relief. The status-stressed man viewed their unsettledness through the prism of work and exploited its language to reconcile their sense of self. But the key to the typology, of an unsettled person fitting the Status-stress category, lies in how they spoke of their self and sought their emotional salvation through reference primarily, overwhelmingly, through work. The cases found in the Compromised Identity chapter record similar forms of suffering caused by unsettledness and poverty but issues with work were not presented in these cases as the core cause; even though employment difficulties might be cited in a list of factors cited as a cause for the affected pauper’s unsettledness it was never privileged as the main issue.

The Status-stressed were also compelled to acknowledge that their recovery depended upon the discretion of the Overseer. If positive measures were not taken on their behalf of the Status-stressed by the Overseer, then the unsettled risked further torment and could lose hope regarding their recovery. Overseers could not give their respondents permanent work; though it is now clear that parish work schemes were much more widespread and long-lasting than

early commentators on the Old Poor Law could ever have conceived.³²³ But they could give temporary relief to ward off mental instability and physical degradation and, when they did grant such relief, we might regard it as a symbolic currency, a sense that the parish supported its poor and it had confidence in the relief claimant. Such symbolism had power in the labour market, even from a person that was geographically far away from the parish itself and may have made a pauper more employable rather than less. In this context, the Status-stressed had to be persuasive and it was ironic that to be settled they had to accept a momentary loss of agency to restore it. It would simplify matters if one were to read the positive words used by the Status-stressed in their quest for parochial action as embellishment or rhetoric to further that end. But such expressions may not have been read as such. Instead, while retaining such qualities, the words used by these unsettled paupers were deployed to impart a positive spin on their relationship with their Overseers in their wish to assert agency. It was perfectly compatible for the Status-stressed to have been using positive words with negative opposites, to make their case both to themselves and the Overseer regarding their recovery from the effects of unsettledness.

The increased consciousness of their compromised agency led the Status-stressed to subvert the traditional functions of pauper letter writing. Although they wretched their claim within the accepted pauper realm of work, their choice to emotively link their inability to sufficiently do it broke the accepted customs of relief requests. The Status-stressed were aware of their dual but competing needs to both emote for their own benefit and to appear worthy for relief for the Overseer. Tellingly, despite the presence of unsettledness in these dialogues between pauper and parish, the negotiatory process of relief-giving remained. While the need to be on the right side of this interaction meant that the Status-stress were compelled to give a full account of their unsettledness there was, nevertheless, every motivation not to tarnish their account with embellishments – it was enough that the paupers were articulating unsettledness. The accounts of the Status-stress must be read as representative of a true rendition – that is, true to how it felt within the limits of their use of language – of what it felt to be Status-stressed.

³²³ See Sokoll, Thomas. "Families, Wheat Prices and the Allowance Cycle: Poverty and Poor Relief in the Agricultural Community of Ardleigh 1794-1801." In Jones & King. *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute*: 78-106. See also Boyer, George. *An Economic History of the English Poor Law, 1750-1850*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; and Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle*.

Finally, the pleas of the Status-stressed relied upon their exploitation of a common language to define their experience and recovery from unsettledness. Key to the process was their faith in the Overseers' capacity to grasp the emotional weight of their words and act accordingly. This rested on the perception amongst the Status-stress that in expressing their unsettledness through work they shared a linguistic platform with their Overseers and were therefore appealing in a clear, recognisable way. Disclosure of their unsettledness depended on the deeper hope of the affected paupers' in their own capacity to return to being settled; a hope which was inexorably tied to their ability to write away their troubles. Writing was the symbolic and actualised available means for the Status-stressed to enact a positive shift along the spectra of unsettledness.

The preceding reflections upon the letters of the Status-stressed have helped to begin filling the gaps within the relevant historical literature. For when it comes to the histories of madness driven by theoretical notions and interpretations of Foucault, the testimonies of the Status-stressed shift attention to the historical and lived realities of ordinary people for the first time. In doing so, a spectra dynamic – first seen in the Chapter Three – Laid-low, developed further here, and again in later chapters – has been introduced. This necessitates a focus in future away from the climaxes of madness and onto the emotions of paupers with their accordant ebbs and flows of (un)settledness. Analysis of pauper letters shifts the analytical focus away from flawed conceptions of the coercive power of the state and onto the agency of those who experienced the effects of unsettledness, and reaffirms a fundamental contention of examining these sources, that: paupers had agency to construct their senses of self; and did so through pauper letting writing. By using these sources the essential flaw within asylums studies is bypassed because one is able to ascertain and hear the voice of the actor who suffered.³²⁴ Finally, the preceding contentions is that common inattentions in the history of emotions field are also addressed. While most previous studies have obsessed with one emotion detailed by the urban, educated, middling sorts, this study of the Status-stressed has accorded new insight into a range of emotions found amongst both the rural and urban poor. The testimonies of the Status-stressed offer proof as to the existence of an emotional landscape, through which it is possible to gain insight into the agency and lives of the poor. The Status-stressed were not unique and this thesis is set to pivot toward experiences detailed by similarly troubled paupers who, nevertheless, declined to explain

³²⁴ This is precisely what was called for by those historians who sought to study madness outside the locus of the asylum, most prominent among them: Bartlett and Wright, *Outside the Walls of the Asylum*.

their unsettledness through reference to unemployment and instead located other factors that led caused their unsettling experiences of Compromised Identity.

Compromised Identity

Constructions of the self have driven this thesis and will continue to have a background importance here, with specific reference(s) to matters of pauper identity. Paupers were capable of identifying themselves through reference to various societal yardsticks. Williams has drawn historians' attention to the impact of the life-cycle and the alternating periods of poverty and prosperity the poor endured and working within this influence came paupers' personal attitudes to their lack of means, the challenges they faced with parenthood, and the pressures of marital responsibility.³²⁵ Since many of these paupers switched multiple times between dependence and independence, locating and portraying a self at any chronological point was problematic. In any given moment, such influences had a profound impact upon individuals' thoughts and feelings and could shape – in the relevant cases – pauper's experiences of unsettledness. Unsettledness added a further layer of complexity to the way that the self was understood, maintained, and projected. However, insofar that these influences of identity can be described it will be done, but they must not distract from the greater goal of accessing the experiences of unsettledness.³²⁶

Against this backdrop it is important to understand two tropes of work on pauper identity and belonging. Beginning with belonging, Snell argued that each person had a legal and administrative belonging but that this existed to different degrees and intensities amongst individuals.³²⁷ Whether a person was proximate to a place or far away did not undermine those same categories of belonging. Indeed, we often see in pauper letters a sense of 'home' in the rhetoric of those who wrote from some distance. Snell then clarified how sub-groups existed amongst the poor that did not possess or had only a marginal sense of belonging and were, essentially, not a part of their community. Such individuals, Snell explained, would have been aware of their tenuous belonging.³²⁸ This is the basis for thinking in terms of

³²⁵ For more on the pauper life-cycle, see Williams, Samantha. *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle Under the English Poor Law, 1760-1834*. (Royal Historical Society). Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011: 101-30; and Tomkins, Alannah. *The Experience of Urban Poverty, 1723-82: Parish, Charity and Credit*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.

³²⁶ The action to be taken will not alter the definition of self detailed in the thesis Introduction. For how this works in practice, refer to the discussion dedicated to Harriet Hughes, found below.

³²⁷ Snell, Keith. *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity, and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005: 1-27.

³²⁸ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, 81-161.

unsettledness and the category of ‘Compromised Identity’ because the individuals that lacked a sense of belonging and were poor may have been more vulnerable to mental ill health. The focus on paupers in this thesis means King’s work to the interpretive fore here because he introduced three components to the construction of pauper identity.³²⁹ First, was how pauper identity can be found in any letter on a simple basis – for instance, whether a writer was a man or woman – and, crucially, that this same pauper would identify themselves by the simple labels others attached to them.³³⁰ Second, came King’s argument that paupers also had an identity that was shaped by personal experience; and which mapped onto Porter’s ideas regarding the rise of the individual self.³³¹ Lastly, King explained that the poor represent a unique group in the way they held onto their capacity to define themselves amongst their cohort and how they continued to navigate through their individual and group identities.³³² This issue becomes particularly complex with those suffering from Compromised Identity.

Paupers constructed an identity when they wrote their letters. It is possible therefore that a man that was unsettled would rely upon the natural masculine and accepted forum of work to voice their emotional distress. This they could do even do cynically, knowingly, by exploiting the rhetoric of work to speak seek answers to a deeper problem – that was part of the appeal of writing for the unsettled. But in this case that man reliant upon the language work and the practical difficulties it gave him in life inexorably impacted the way he constructed his sense of self and defined his unsettledness. This, after all, came at the time Wahrman identified as when ‘acknowledged limitations of gender boundaries now became socially unacceptable and culturally unintelligible.’³³³ While a man found in the Compromised Identity chapter might have very similar experience they were different because they came to define their self primarily through different reference points; even if work was one issue it was never the main one for them.

For status-stressed women – those that saw themselves as such – theirs was not the same license to use work as way to explore their unsettledness. Those few that did wrote letters that describing their experience of unsettledness caused by what is termed Status-stress in a

³²⁹ King, Steven. *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s-1830s*. Montreal: McGill University Press, 2019: 311-41.

³³⁰ King, *Writing the Lives*, 313.

³³¹ King, *Writing the Lives*, 316.

³³² King, *Writing the Lives*, 317-20.

³³³ Wahrman, Dror. *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth Century England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004: 40-1.

manner that did not invoke any rhetoric of femininity to secure relief and submitted what were almost genderless accounts at a moment in time when gender identity was recognised as an important determining factor in people's lives.

With Status-stress there is a shared understanding between writer and Overseer that success in relieving the employment difficulty will alleviate the unsettledness. Men were almost incentivised by societal values and expectations and their own fears of their unsettled sense of self, to see their troubles through the prism of work and, therefore, of Status-stress. Work could, after all, be found and any man set to do it. When a man with Compromised Identity cited a similar level of distress and experience but wrote to the Overseer neglecting specific reference to the role of work in their unsettledness, they left themselves open to having to face and reconcile themselves to all their problems at once and made them, perhaps, more difficult to solve and more distressing. Status-stressed men, by contrast, could at least fixate upon one over-arching problem for which there was a societally-accepted solution.³³⁴ Men with Compromised Identity might be exposed to think upon more challenges of which work could be one. Women are rarer to find as Status-stressed cases not because women did not work, but because they had available to them a greater rhetorical range of expression of the troubles with pauperism caused therefore did not give primacy to unemployment as its defining challenge to them. Women with Compromised Identity, like their male counterparts, fixated at challenges outside of mere employment and upon their wider identity as paupers and the societal roles they had to perform and felt themselves to be failing to fulfil.

While identities shifted relative to circumstances necessitated by life under the poor law, those with Compromised Identity found themselves dispossessed of the necessary agency to effect positive meaningful change(s) to their surroundings. The forms this took varied endlessly between each affected individual relative to their circumstances and within the wider prism of pauper living. The questions the Compromised asked of themselves and the Overseer were often posed by men unable to provide for their families and women who could not satisfactorily mother their children. The cases studies of Samuel South and Harriet

³³⁴ For a discussion what could happen to paupers that became increasingly disillusioned and unsettled serial set-backs and see Chapter 5 – Cumulative Troubles: 163-88.

Hughes will illuminate to what end those with Compromised Identity wrote of their unsettledness offering new insight into contemporaries' experiences of poverty.³³⁵

The problem which confronted the likes of South, Hughes, and those similarly Compromised was stark. But it came with a promised mercy that their unsettling inability to fulfil their role meant their declining fortunes would fester until the moment that they secured relief, but once it was obtained, they could reverse the effects of their (mis)fortunes. What the Compromised chose to do in writing of their ills to the Overseer fitted the mandated recourse promoted by society, specifically: if a pauper was in trouble they should write to the parish. The Compromised duly wrote in the times they thought their lives had reached its lowest point. The presence of their unsettledness was corruptive, however. This led to the morphing of the standard proceedings of relief negotiation into deeper self-enquiry of the Compromised's own sense(s) of self. To what use those with Compromised Identity put their letters and how this group fell uniquely upon the spectrum of unsettledness is the focus of this chapter.

The letters of the Compromised were overly emotive. Self-awareness of how a combination of factors led to their emotional impasse meant the Compromised rarely fixated on one theme or grievance; with stresses such as rent, clothing, food, and the need to provide for family, all frequently cited together in relation to their wider identity. While this group of unsettled paupers had clung to the hope that they could recover, the shock to their identity made them question their lack of control with the letters used as a space to question and test their fragile sense of agency. Realising this, the Compromised tried to limit their personal responsibility for their unsettledness by citing the impact of the pauper life-cycle upon them and tying their fates to the actions of their Overseer and a belief that their plight could not be worse. They did not see failure to recover when in receipt of relief as their fault. Thinking in those terms inculcated the Compromised from taking all the blame for their troubles but at the cost of admitting their Compromised agency and lower social position, which they had to regain to see themselves as settled again. The concerns of those with the unsettledness of Compromised Identity differed to the unsettled paupers we have seen in previous chapters. While the Laid-low attributed their unsettled position to events outside of their control and the Status-stressed understood their troubled sense(s) of self in relation to difficulties with

³³⁵ Historians of pauper letters have generally viewed individual actors in terms of the poor's collective and societal dependence upon poor relief. For instance, the foremost works in the field by King and Sokoll exhibit this approach. See King, *Writing the Lives*; and Sokoll, Thomas. *Essex Pauper Letters, 1731-1837*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Compromised identity

work, the Compromised feared their current inability to provide for their families was not singularly related to work and nor could their situations be attributed to mere unfortunate happenstance.

There were eighty-five cases of paupers with Compromised Identity.³³⁶ Fifty-one of the cases concern males, thirty-four regard females. Of the original eighty-five cases, thirty-four contain the input of an advocate(s). Table 4.1 below illustrates the quantitative and regional break down of the figures:

Place of Relief	Male	Female	Advocate(s)	Total
Berkshire	2	4	3	6
Cumbria	7	2	0	9
Gloucestershire	5	5	5	10
Gwent	6	1	3	7
Hampshire	3	3	3	6
Oxford	2	0	1	2
Surrey	4	4	4	8
East Sussex	7	2	5	9
West Sussex	10	10	7	20
East Yorkshire	3	3	3	6
West Yorkshire	2	0	0	2
Total	51	34	34	85

Table 4.1 – Compromised Identity Cases.

Of the unsettled cases examined, the Compromised cases comprise 29 per cent of the documented experiences.³³⁷ The table highlights three noteworthy features. First, there are seventeen more males than female cases, yet both genders are represented in this typology in relatively high numbers. There were gendered aspects to the way Compromised Identity was

³³⁶ This figure is taken from the 1449 cases examined, of which 292 are unsettled. For more detail, see: Introduction: 17.

³³⁷ 85 of the 292 unsettled cases. (29.1%).

described by paupers, but it is too simplistic to say it was a gendered experience. The previous chapter that discussed Status-stress indicated how women had more identity markers than men and it would be a reasonable expectation, perhaps, to see more female cases than male in the typology dedicated to changing forms of identity. It is notable that the rates of unsettledness among females in this typology is high and reflects their wide range of identity markers and concurrent ways of interpreting their identity. But it remains the case, and as we have seen throughout this thesis, that more men wrote pauper letters. These distinctions in no way detract from the value of the accounts offered by male and female Compromised paupers as their testimonies present a diverse and nuanced perspective into living under the poor law. More to the point, the wider themes of self and identity closely cohered between men and women. Second, there is little discernible regional variation to be found, save for the preponderance of cases found sent to Overseers in West Sussex; which will be explored further later in the chapter. The main noteworthy is how each county consistently recorded experiences of Compromised Identity. On one level, this is surprising since one might have expected identities (and thus the terms in which paupers talked about the compromise of that identity) to vary between urban and rural communities, between north and south, or between those of different ages in different areas. The lack of any such nuance points tentatively to the existence of a shared set of core features by which lower class individuals understood and constructed an identity. Third, and finally, advocate involvement is high: nearly half of the cases contain their involvement.³³⁸ The advocates' role and the impact it had upon the expression of Compromised Identity can most effectively be explored with reference to case studies of Samuel South and, first, Harriet Hughes, whose documented experiences present rich insight into the world a pauper enduring the unsettledness of Compromised Identity.

Harriet Hughes

³³⁸ As we saw in Chapter One – Reading Pauper Letters: 37-64, paupers would choose to involve advocates in the process of formulating their requests. The very act of this choice and expression of agency might be read or interpreted by the pauper concerned as one that affirms their status and identity. The role of advocates in the workings of the poor law was integral, with Steven King and Peter Jones having recognised and explained their significance in King, Steven and Peter Jones. “Testifying for the Poor: Epistolary Advocates for the Poor in Nineteenth Century England and Wales.” *Journal of Social History* 49 (2016): 784-807.

Compromised identity

The contents of Harriet Hughes' two letters to her Overseers in the parish of Pangbourne, Berkshire, detailed the unsettling Compromised Identity she experienced in 1827. Her testimony provides insight into the female experiences of this typology and an explanation of why there were comparatively so few female Status-stress cases to be found in pauper letters; as was seen in the previous chapter. The emblematic case of Hughes read as follows:

First Letter:

March 23rd 1827

Sir

I hope you will excuse my righting to you but I have no other remedy for I am in place but my Wages are so very low that I cannot keep myself in Common nessecaries being so very short of things at first and must beg of you, to send me some shoes and stockings and changes – as I cannot keep my place its without being deasent my child as been very ill but is now got well – and if I am obliged to leave my place we must both come down again which is what I should not wish to do if I can help it but I have no chance of another place if I cannot keep this pleas to let me hear from you very soon. I live at the Rose & Ball Bennetts Hill Docktors Commons

Your Humble

Harriet Hughes³³⁹

Second Letter:

London July 29th 1827

Gentlemen

I have taking the liberty of writing to you to let you know my baby is dead and hope you will be so Good as to assist me in putting it under the ground as i am very much distressed on account of her being ill soo long my mother is likewise very ill and not near able to help herself for some time so hope you will take it into consideration to send us some money to relieve us as soon as you can as it is time my baby was in the ground as soon as possible you can

Your servant Harriet Hughes³⁴⁰

The first letter was defined by Hughes's desperation in her role as a mother. 'My child' she explained 'as been very ill', and it was her fear that the effects of poverty endangered this progress which had driven her to write a letter that was riven with unsettledness. However,

³³⁹ BRO 6 D/P 91/18/4/2 19, letter, 23 March 1827.

³⁴⁰ BRO 6 D/P 91/18/4/2 22, letter, 29 July 1827.

upon first reading it may not be immediately obvious that Hughes was a pauper suffering the effects of Compromised Identity. In some basic respects her letter was ordinary for the deference she gave to the Overseer, as she implored: ‘I hope you will excuse my righting to you’.³⁴¹ The significance is that Hughes was not a claimant who had lost control to the extent she could not fashion a reasonable request, yet, at the same time, the story she told retained an unmistakable emotive tone and content; and which broke the usual conventions of this form of writing. Hughes confessed to having ‘no other remedy’ but to request their help. When read carefully it is clear that Hughes’ request was one that did enough to fulfil the base requirements of pauper letter writing, but in the same moment exploited the language, structure, and form as a means to explore her deeper troubles with unsettledness.

Hughes’ emotive admission that ‘I cannot keep myself in Common necessaries’, bore stylistic resemblance to Status-stress cases. But it would be wrong to interpret her testimony through this lens because – unlike the Status-stressed – Hughes did not give primacy to the issue of work with respect either to how she interpreted the cause of her troubles or judged her sense of worth. In fact, her letter intimates that while she had work and that her ‘very low’ wages were a problem, it was one of many factors that troubled her. This is a key distinction for it helps to explain why there were so few female cases to be found in the Status-stress typology and why, relatively speaking, there were so many female Compromised Identity cases. The case of Hughes is emblematic of this trend because of the holistic interpretation she gave to her troubles, which, while including work, also cited her shattered dignity that came with the struggles to find adequate clothing to be ‘decent’, and, most importantly, her need as a mother to provide for her child. Hughes was not alone in such endeavour or in the unsettledness its challenges could cause.³⁴²

In the early 1830s the Surrey Overseers of Oxted, St Mary, had been exercised by the conduct of John Stenning a man of ‘unsound mind’ whose very appearance was an ‘unpleasantary

³⁴¹ Thomas Sokoll has covered the familiar form of address used by paupers to their Overseers in various works that include: Sokoll. *Essex Pauper Letters*; -- “Negotiating a Living: Essex Pauper Letters from London, 1800-1834.” *International Review of Social History* 45, 8 (2000): 19-46; -- “Writing for Relief: Rhetoric in English Pauper Letters 1800-1834.” In A. Gestrich, S. King and L. Raphael (eds). *Being Poor in Modern Europe: Historical Perspectives 1800-1940*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2006: 91-112.

³⁴² For more on mothers and their children suffering together, see: Bailey, Joanne. “‘Think Wot a Mother Must Feel’: Parenting in English Pauper Letters c. 1760-1834.” *Family and Community History* 13, 2 (2010): 5-19; Williams, Samantha. “‘I was Forced to Leave My Place to Hide My Shame’: The Living Arrangements of Unmarried Mothers in London in the Early Nineteenth Century.” In J. McEwan and P. Sharpe (eds). *Accommodating Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor, c. 1600-1850*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010: 101-219; -- *Unmarried Motherhood in the Metropolis, 1700-1850: Pregnancy, The Poor Law and Provision*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018.

amounting to a Disgrace', and who came to their attention through the concerns of his mother, Mrs Longhurst.³⁴³ She was said to be 'in hourly dread of his coming to some untimely end'.³⁴⁴ Her advocates stressed how 'the poor woman is certainly in great distress', and how it was she alone that was 'compelled to support him' when all others failed. The tone of the advocates was sympathetic to her plight, even above her son's. There was an understanding that a mother who felt herself failing in her role merited sympathy and a hearing from the Overseers. In this light, it is clear that Harriet Hughes' concerns about her own child were not unreasonable fears to express.³⁴⁵

The styles for requesting relief were different for women. While men were free to cite work and expect to receive relief, women's submissions more closely cohered to their role as carers in the family in a broader sense of providing emotional as well as economic support. But where women with Compromised Identity differed to settled paupers, much like their male counterparts, was in their need to over-emote and reveal too much of their emotional torments in order to try to return to their settled state of mind. Hughes's need to emotionally express herself was the exemplar of this process. She was adamant that it was time for her to be granted relief as she explained:

If I am obliged to leave my place we must both come down again which is what I should not wish to do if I can help it.

On one level, this expressed the reasonable hope that if relief were to be granted Hughes could spare the parish of the expense of removing her. But it also held an implicit accusation that if this was not realised then she was not blame for her troubles. Hughes's use of 'we' was telling for it reinforces the interpretation that her primary concern was the welfare of her child. The child had just recovered from a long illness (and one for which she had not requested help), and now Hughes worried that by the potential ill-grace of the Overseer her child could be endangered again.

³⁴³ SRO P3-5-40-38, letter, 18 June 1831.

³⁴⁴ SRO: P3-5-39-11a,b, letter, 22 January 1830/1.

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Bailey, Joanne. *Parenting in England 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; Foyster, Elizabeth. "Parenting Was for Life, Not Just for Childhood: The Role of Parents in the Married Lives of their Children in Early Modern England." *History* 86, 283 (2001): 313-27. For a deeper discussion on the specific pauper context, see King, *Writing the Lives*: 282-310.

Mary Ann Jones similarly emoted when she became unsettled. For Jones, little sympathy was to be found amongst any parish to care for her 'bastard' child. She complained to the Farnham, Surrey Overseers, on 21 May 1834, that: 'I have tryed to suport myself and Child and have lived a half starved life all this time till I cannot do it any longer.'³⁴⁶ She therefore resolved to 'put the Child in the House and go to service'. The next record of her came just over a year later, penned by her mother, in which it recorded the 'sorry and unhappy' matter that her daughter Mary Ann had died on 9 June 1835.³⁴⁷ No mention was made to the fate of the child. While Mary Ann Jones and Harriet Hughes had broken convention to articulate their unsettledness, there was a tragic poignancy in their need to do so. Questions may have been asked regarding the veracity of their accounts but the facts of their cases illuminate that their concerns had a valid link to reality. Within a year of having fretted what might become of herself and her son, Mary Ann had died. For Harriet Hughes, it was just over a month after articulating that her unsettledness stemmed from the need to care for her baby, that she then wrote to tell the Overseers of its death.³⁴⁸

The way Hughes composed her second letter reveals deep layers to female contemporaries' experiences of Compromised Identity as her style shifted from a desperate to desolate woman. While Hughes had confirmed how her worst fears had been realised there was a definitive shift in the tone of her writing. The space Hughes gave to emotional reflections was sparse, and where she did, it occurred in a highly standardised way: 'i am very much distressed'. There was control within this letter which made it seem a more regular form of request. Hughes did not look to cast blame or chide the same Overseers who had failed to prevent the catastrophe of her child's death. It was too late.

The struggle to fulfil the role attributed to themselves as mothers was common amongst pauper women as they fought the impact of their poverty. The accounts of Hughes in her two letters captured the distinction between constructions of self and identity that were originally referenced at the beginning of this chapter. With the untimely death of her child, Hughes went from being a mother obsessed with the health of her child and the fulfilment of her

³⁴⁶ SRO 1505-Box37-F3-13a,b, letter, 21 May 1834.

³⁴⁷ SRO 1505-Box37-F4-25, letter, 9 June 1835.

³⁴⁸ For more on the topic of illegitimacy, here is a sample of the most informative works: Griffin, Emma. "Sex, Illegitimacy and Social Change in Industrializing Britain." *Social History* 38, 2 (2013): 139–61; Williams, Samantha. "'A Good Character for Virtue, Sobriety, and Honesty': Unmarried Mothers' Petitions to the London Foundling Hospital and the Rhetoric of Need in the Early Nineteenth Century." In A. Levene, T. Nutt and S. Williams (eds). *Illegitimacy in Britain 1700-1920*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005: 86-101. For the earlier period. see: Adair, Richard. *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996.

motherly duty and shifted, instead, in her next letter, to being a daughter that cared for her ‘very ill’ vulnerable mother and who had not been ‘near able to help herself for some time’. The outward expression of identity was necessitated in the act of applying for relief as Hughes had no choice but to reference her troubles in terms of the interests and concerns of her Overseer. But it is essential to understand that while Hughes expressed a shifting of her identity, her unsettledness stemmed from her self-identified inability to fulfil her societal role. The identity of Hughes changed in the course of her writing but her sense of self remained fluid and fragile as she languished with the impact of finding herself unable to cope with her unsettledness.

It could be argued, too, that Hughes did not risk further displays of emotion lest it prejudice the Overseers against giving her relief. But this had not stopped her before. While Hughes had intended to ‘secure some money’, at the same time, she had wrestled with having to move onto this new crisis before she had found closure for the last. She felt that she had not become settled after her last letter and this was the fault of the Overseer. Once again, Hughes believed if relief was forthcoming it could help restore her identity. Accordingly, though she did not admonish the Overseers, Hughes did appear to doubt them. She repeatedly emphasised how: ‘it is time my baby was in the ground’. Hughes had to wait for them to act while she suffered.³⁴⁹ The undercurrent of resentment is evident in how, unlike in her previous letter, she did not sign herself as a ‘humble servant’. Previously Hughes had sought to persuade and emote, but as she came to write again she lacked hope; her fixation on receiving the Overseers aid to bury her child reflected this. Hughes was not able to make the shift to her new role of caring for her mother without the Overseers’ help. But she doubted they would help her and she struggled to come to terms with the loss of her child. Her difficulties made her question her sense of self. Hughes’ determined efforts to secure a positive response were illustrative of how she used writing to explore her agency in light of her Compromised Identity. When one reads her second letter in view of her story it is clear that Hughes’ words carried profound emotional depth and a plea from a woman whose identity remained unsettlingly Compromised.

Samuel South

³⁴⁹ On waiting, refer to Hurren, Elizabeth and Steven King. “Public and Private Healthcare for the Poor, 1650s to 1960s.” In P. Weindling (ed). *Healthcare in Private and Public from the Early Modern Period to 2000*. London: Routledge, 2015: 15-35.

Compromised identity

The correspondence of Samuel South to his home parish of Steyning, West Sussex, offers another emblematic case of Compromised Identity. In the late months of 1825 South had narrated how his family's struggles with poverty adversely impacted his own sense of self as he struggled to accomplish his combined roles as husband, father, and head of household. Read together, his four letters showcase the causes, experiences, and outcomes involved with becoming – and then fighting – the impact of Compromised Identity.

On 10 September 1825, South wrote his first request for relief but did not intimate that he was unsettled. However, within two months his sense of identity had been unsettled to the extent he despaired of his 'broken mind'.³⁵⁰ This first letter intimates the beginnings of this journey through Compromised Identity and helps to establish a baseline for understanding his interactions with the parish and his own sense of self:

Brighton Sepr. 10th 1825

Mr Gates

Sir, I am sorry in troubleing you with this, but it is to inform you that I am under an Obligation of Coming to Steyning to morrow, as my little Children now lays dead and they must be inter'd on Monday as we Cannot keep them any longer, the One Died on Monday last, and the other yesterday, Was Oblig'd to have two Coffins as we Could not leave the House, and the Expencc of Burial &c. is so Expensive, that I cannot Clear it Without assistance, I hope you will be so good as to Explain it to Mr Woolger, I took the liberty of Writing to you as you might wish to call a Vestry –

Will much Oblige your Hble Servant,

Samuel South³⁵¹

Confronted with the blow that 'my little Children lay dead', South reacted in the conventional pauper way electing to focus upon the practical expenses involved with coffins and burials. South was not unsettled then as he retained the capacity to fully comply with the necessities conferred by his inter-woven social positions as a father, head of household, and former inhabitant of Steyning Parish. The need to inform the Overseers' led to his opening and closing statements that:

³⁵⁰ The key letter for witnessing his unsettledness is the third letter written on 28 November, 1825. WSRO Par.183-37-3-35a,b, letter.

³⁵¹ WSRO Par.183-37-3-10, letter, 10 September 1825.

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I am under an Obligation of Coming to Steyning to morrow

I took the liberty of Writing to you as you might wish to call a Vestry.

Taken together, and in wider view of the composition of the letter, it is clear South knew the proper practice of pauper letter writing and could – and, in this case, did – cohere to it, but with the twist that he thought his case and position was of sufficient importance and perilousness that it justified a full vestry meeting.

South's plea for assistance held an implicit understanding that the Overseers would appreciate the gravity of his situation and his need for practical support. He did not need to dwell nor emote on the topic of children's deaths because it was self-explanatory.³⁵² This judgement and emotional reserve would desert South when he became unsettled, alongside his willingness and ability to travel to see the Overseers when he began to see the parish as a cause for his continued troubles. Yet, before the unsettling effects of Compromised Identity hit him, South could accurately discern and fulfil his key roles as member of his parish. Moreover, his admission that 'One Died on Monday Last, and the other yesterday', carried no introspection on why these children had died. Prominent instead, was the need for his children to be accounted for, as he admitted: 'We Cannot keep them any longer'. South's attention had turned to protecting the family that remained; he had little space or money to spare for those that had died. Within weeks, the unsettled South would decry how he 'Cannot Live' as he was momentarily incapable of providing food and shelter for his remaining family. Yet death itself was not a trigger to him becoming unsettled.³⁵³ The sadness death invoked could be accepted as a fact of pauper life, provided the surviving pauper held sufficient agency to mediate the ancillary effects of unsettledness in the late moments of life.³⁵⁴

³⁵² The death of children was regularly reported throughout pauper letters. They were not shocking, but a sorry fact of pauper living and were recorded as such, both by parents and the Overseers alike. For instance, see Hurren, Elizabeth and Steven King. "Begging for a Burial: Death and the Poor Law in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century England." *Social History* 30, 3 (2005): 321-341.

³⁵³ Although it may be argued that the deaths recorded in this first letter affected the way South thought about his later problems, nevertheless he does not mention them again.

³⁵⁴ For context, see Houlbrooke, Ralph. *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*. London: Routledge, 1989 and Hurren, Elizabeth. "Whose Body Is It Anyway?: Trading the Dead Poor, Coroner's Disputes, and the Business of Anatomy at Oxford University, 1885-1929." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 82, 4 (2008): 775-818; -- *Dying for Victorian Medicine: English Anatomy and its Trade in the Dead Poor, 1832 to 1929*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012; -- "'Other Spaces' for the Dangerous Dead of Provincial England, c.1752-1832." *History* 103, 354 (2018): 27-59. On grief, see Jalland, Patricia. *Death in the Victorian Family*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; Wolfe, John, *Great Deaths: Grieving, Religion, and Nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. On the emotional dimension of death, refer to Bound Alberti, Fay. "Bodies,

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The effects of Compromised Identity later led South to change his approach as he poured emotion into his letter-writing. This shift is showcased in his second letter to the Overseer on 8 October 1826:

Mr Marshall

Brighton Octob ye 8th 1826

Sir

I am Sorry in troubling you, but it is necessity drives me to do it, begging the favour to Speak to the Gentelmen of Steyning to assist Me and my famely, as work is so Scarce at present that my Earnings is not sufficient to support them, as I have no regular Work and my Wife has been lately confin'd Which has increas'd my family one more in member and drawn me low in mind, and for the last five Weeks my earnings has not Exceeded 12 Shillings P Week by which I am not able to pay the Expence we have lately had, I was in hopes by the information of Mr Woolger and Mr Gates that you would assist us with a Mangle and as that would bring in Something weekly which wold be a great help with what I can get myself, as we shall not be able to get a living without Something more as there is Eight of us in family, and within the last three weeks I have been Oblig'd to sell some of the goods to help to support them, the Landlord of the House I live under Cal'd last week for the Half years rent, which was Due on the 20th of last August, as I took possession on the 20th of Feby. I inform'd him I would speak to my friends and would give him an answer as soon as possible, and beg to Solicit your favour to Speak to the Gentlemen for these favours to Assist us, which will be thankfully reciev'd by

your Most Obedient and Humble Servant

Saml. South

Sir, I will take the liberty of Calling on you in a few days.³⁵⁵

There was a sense of urgency to South's words not found in his first letter as he explained how his ongoing efforts were 'not sufficient' to support 'me and my famely'. South had written while in thrall of being 'low in mind', rather than as before, when he reflected upon past disappointments. This emotional plea to the Overseer – which went against pauper letter writing convention – was inspired by his fear of being unable to fulfil his duties to his family. Integral to this was the 'necessity' to earn, with South finding work 'so scarce' that he was unable to effectively contribute to their well-being. The rent had been due for weeks, and

Hearts and Minds: Why Emotions Matter to Historians of Science and Medicine.' *Isis* 100, 4 (2009): 798-810; Dixon, Thomas. "The Tears of Mr Justice Willes." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 17, 1 (2012): 1–23.

³⁵⁵ WSRO Par.183-37-3-33a,b, letter, 8 October 1826.

despite having ‘to sell some of the goods’, South was in no position to pay; hence he wrote to the Overseer. South did not think of himself in terms of his work as the Status-stressed did. He viewed work in relation to greater concerns with how he could ‘help to support’ his family. The inability to find work, paying rent, and having to sell possessions, reflected to South his own failings in his role and duty to his family. South’s identity and sense of self depended upon him having sufficient agency to be able to help those who depended upon him and being unable to fulfil the roles he expected of himself could render him unsettled.

However, for all that South and his family suffered at the time of writing the second letter, he retained a limited sense of control and cautious ‘hopes’ regarding their plight. South asserted his remaining agency, detailing how: ‘I will take the liberty of Calling on you in a few days’. South reasserted his expectations of relief and showed that his family had at least ‘something’ to live on. This ‘something’ came from his earnings ‘for the last five weeks’, and while not sufficient to satisfy all the family’s needs, nevertheless highlighted his own ongoing resilience and effort on their behalf. South also suggested the Overseer help him procure a tool for work, a mangle, which would reduce the need to rely upon the parish and enable the rest of his family to earn thereby lessening the burden on himself. These assertions, ploys, and requests of South were all configured to ensure the best outcome for his family, and for this reason, it is curious that he jeopardised the effectiveness of his own request by introducing such an overt display of emotion in writing of being ‘low in mind’.

The phrase ‘low in mind’ was a telling indulgence as South needed someone to hear how he felt. He could not have turned to his family because they looked to him for support so South shared his feelings with the Overseer; the irony being that, while as a pauper he should have turned to them in his moment of greatest need, South should not have articulated such emotion. Emoting was a way for South to do something on his terms, with the rest of his letter acting as a way for him to work through and rebuke his growing sense of powerlessness and lack of agency over his sense of self.³⁵⁶ The roles South had as a father, husband, and head of household, were integral to his wider identity. The effects of poverty meant he momentarily had greater trouble in fulfilling those roles for the benefit of his family. South’s identity was becoming Compromised as he foresaw his families’ deepening crises and his

³⁵⁶ The key text is Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*. For another useful reference point, see Stearns, Peter and Carol Stearns. “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards.” *The American Historical Review* 90, 4 (1985): 813-836.

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own powerlessness in preventing them. This process would climax in the unsettledness of his third letter to the parish.

Having endured a further six weeks of escalating poverty, South wrote his third letter on 28 November 1826, detailing the unsettling effects of his Compromised Identity:

Brighton Nov. ye 28th 1826

Mr Woolger

I have taken the Liberty of Writing these few lines to inform you of the Situation of My self and family, as I have no regular Work nor any view of any untill the Spring, and What I get now by Jobbing is not Sufficient as our family is Nine in Number, and if you Consider of that in your own Mind that twelve and fourteen Shillings P Week and Sometimes less, Will go but a verry little way with so many, and if your intention is to do any thing for me and family, I should thank you to bring it to a resolution as I ^{am} getting behind every Week and I owe the Baker now at this present time better than Thirty Shillings or Bread and flower and he Will not trust me any longer, and My Daughter has laid out all her Money upon us Since she has been at home so my mind is broken,

I was in hopes you would have assisted us with a Mangle that it might have help'd us this Winter as you partly promis'd Me we should have One; we have been selling and pledging of goods for this 10 Weekes past for to support the family, and if there is Not Something done for us you will Cause me to leave my family to your Expence as we Cannot live any way as it is, as my Children have hardly a Second Change to put on there backs, which I think is a Verry hard Cause, and hopes that you and the Gentlemen of Steyning will take it into Consideration as Something must be done

From your Most Obedient and Hble Servant

S South³⁵⁷

I should thank you to let me hear from you in a few days, to know if you intend to do anything for us

The times of merely being 'low in mind' had passed for South. He acknowledged his emotional shift along the spectrum of unsettledness by explaining: 'my mind is broken'.

³⁵⁷ WSRO Par.183-37-3-35a,b, letter, 28 November 1826.

These words carried the suggestion that South felt he had passed the point of endurable pain. While he had previously cited the negative impact caused by his inability to provide for his family, by the time of writing the 'situation of My self and family', had significantly worsened. The problems caused by his insufficient and irregular wages were exacerbated with no regular work anticipated and his nine-fold household now. The extra family member was accounted for by the return home of his daughter that had 'laid out all her Money upon us'. Immediately after volunteering this information South wrote of being 'broken'. It seems the ultimate pivot point for South's descent into unsettledness was the self-defined shameful necessity of his daughter having to provide for his family. By willingly forfeiting her own means for South she joined the rest of the family in being dependent upon his failing care and an active reminder of it. South recognised this change to be a devastating blow to his sense of self. In times gone by, he had been able to rationalise the deaths of two of his children in terms of the wider pauper life-cycle. But the incessant and escalating need to provide for his family coupled with his inadequacy in doing so triggered South's unsettledness and rendered him desperate, confessing: 'we cannot live any way as it is'.

South's introduction of the term 'we' marked a revealing stylistic shift in his relief request which signified his clashing motivations for writing, and with it, his attitude to his newfound sense of Compromised Identity. In the first section of the letter South built up to the admission of his unsettled 'broken mind' by citing all the disquieting factors over which he had lost control. Within this, he distinguished his own needs from those of his family through fastidious employment of the terms 'I' and 'myself'. Driven by the seemingly impossible burden of his family's collective need, yet inspired by his own personal sense of dread and shame, South had used writing to share his personal torment with an audience he hoped would be sympathetic to his plight. He may have emoted to the Overseer in this manner due to a desire not to further burden his family with his suffering; not only because they were already struggling, but because, in his mind, as head of the household, he was the only one they could turn to for support.

In these opening sections of the letter South had written of the family's pains in relation to his own. He was the subject of discussion and this would not change until he had articulated his sense of being 'broken'. South could have finished his letter there. But, instead, his emotional outbreak was relatively sequestered amongst a wider request which pivoted toward the practical needs of his family. And, although writing allowed South to brood on the predicament that led to his Compromised Identity, it is notable that he never apportioned

blame for its development onto his family. On the contrary, South's sense of duty as a husband and father meant he became unsettled because the effects of poverty forced him to confront – through the need and act of writing a pauper letter – the increased and perpetuating evidence of his own failings that had caused his family to suffer. South's sense of their continued need of him was the motivational force which not only caused him to write about 'I' and 'myself' in reference to his unsettledness, but also to make the necessary switch, once he had fully acknowledged his unsettling demons, to think and act in terms of 'we' the family's collective need. It was almost as if he had to articulate his unsettledness to move past it, for the good of his family. It is impossible to determine whether South did this consciously, but its effect changes how one interprets the letter because he had distanced his family from direct association and implication with his unsettledness. Moreover, once South had worked through his own emotions and moved onto acquiring solutions, he utilised more inclusive terms when describing his family, admitting: 'we cannot live any way as it is'. There was an emotional earnestness to South's relief request in which he described events exactly as he perceived them without the traditional requisite moderation expected of paupers; which further attests to his unsettledness. South was a husband and father who found himself failing by the standards of his time to fulfil such roles and had become unsettled as a result. But by using his letter to confront his Compromised Identity, South was one amongst many of his contemporaries that tried to mediate the unsettling effects catalysed by poverty. South was not alone as a man to be found in such a predicament, with Thomas Webb writing from the Old Bailey to his home parish of Farnham, Surrey, on 27 January 1838, arguing:

it is painfull to my feelings to think that I am compelled to make application to the parish I cannot see my Wife and Children starve any longer.³⁵⁸

Webb was another married man with young children for whom to provide. Both South and Webb were incensed to the point of becoming unsettled by the pain inflicted upon their families that stemmed from their limited agency to provide sufficient support in the face of their descent into poverty. Webb explained how he had 'parted with every thing I was posed of ... even the bed', with South matching such endeavour with the 'selling and pledging of goods for this 10 Weekes/'. In highlighting their efforts, they told the Overseers and reassured themselves that they were doing all that could possibly be expected of them, and retained a semblance of dignity by doing so. However, a feedback loop existed wherein

³⁵⁸ SRO 1505-Box37-F4-17a,b, letter, 27 January 1838.

as much as Webb and South could point to the earnestness of their commitment, the very fact that they could not find work and had to sell their goods served to highlight their own powerlessness. Webb and South notably regarded their employment status as one factor amongst many through which they formulated their identities; which contrasts with the primacy the Status-stressed gave to the matter. This sense of powerlessness was exemplified in South's case when he referred to his deteriorating relations with his baker, as his newfound inability to pay them was not only a practical problem, but also intimated his loss of social standing and the 'trust' of his local community.

Thomas Pepall, writing in 1831, had felt similar consternation when his credit was not sufficient for the baker to provide his wife with bread while he was away, hence, upon writing to his home parish of St Clements, Oxford, he exploded at his Overseers:

you may Depend on it if you Dont Send in a few Days for I never will come to Oxford I will Dround my Self furst you may Depend on.³⁵⁹

Unsettling to South and Webb (and presumably Pepall, too) was how they felt they had done everything men in their position could do, yet their families' suffering persisted. The greatest symbol of their decline due to poverty, and the fall into unsettledness that accompanied it, was represented to themselves in their troubles to supply sufficient clothing for their children. Despite having 'made way with every article of Clothing and furniture', Webb raged at how: 'my family are nearly naked'.³⁶⁰ South, meanwhile, thought it 'a Verry hard Cause' that 'my Children have hardly a Second Change to put on there backs'. While nakedness as fact and rhetorical concept might have been deployed here to elicit sympathy, shame and relief (indeed, it has been constructed in this way by Peter Jones and Vivienne Richmond) in the context of this chapter it might be suggested that issues with clothing highlighted to both South and Webb alike their self-identified greater failings as husbands and fathers which underpinned their fall into unsettledness; with the common pauper problems locating regular employment, rent, and food, having combined to leave them feeling bereft of agency.

³⁵⁹ ORO MSS. D.D. Par. c.25, letter, 19 January, 1831.

³⁶⁰ For more on nakedness in the period, see Jones, Peter. "'I Cannot Keep My Place Without being Deascent': Pauper Letters, Parish Clothing and Pragmatism in the South of England, 1750-1830." *Rural History* 20, 1 (2009): 31-49; Richmond, Vivienne. "'Indiscriminate liberality subverts the Morals and depraves the habits of the Poor': A Contribution to the Debate on the Poor Law, Parish Clothing Relief and Clothing Societies in Early Nineteenth-Century England." *Textile History* 40, 1 (2009): 51-69; -- *Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

However, though South's testimony offers a representative experience of the majority of experiences of Compromised Identity detailed in pauper letters, the dimensions of this typology could be more complex as the claims of John Osborne, Henry Townsend, Henry Rutter and Thomas Vines will now show.

The experiences of Osborne and Townsend profoundly differed to South as they believed their unsettling Compromised Identities were caused by the deviancy of their family. John Osborne blamed his wife's 'infamous conduct'³⁶¹ for his need to write to his Overseers in Pangbourne, Berkshire, on 10 October 1829, detailing how:

I have been so unsettled for 5 or 6 weeks past, that I am in a very unhappy state of mind.³⁶²

Osborne's sense of Compromised Identity was linked to a dispute with his wife which had led to her obtaining a 'false warrant' that resulted in his imprisonment for three days. Once released and occupying separate lodgings, Osborne wrote at this time due to the 'settlement, to take place this day between me, my wife, and family'. The details of the dispute remain unclear with Osborne having been more interested in the fallout and resolutions to his emotional strife which came with being unable to fulfil his role as father and husband.³⁶³ For instance, for all her alleged infamy, Osborne maintained how 'it is my wish to live with my Wife and Family'. The thought of her and one of his sons, Charles, being in a 'state of starvation' had catalysed Osborne's sense of Compromised Identity by highlighting his own limited agency. His commitment to reuniting his family meant Osborne had, to some extent, forgiven his wife. Through his writing he found a new target for his ire, blaming 'all these unpleasant proceedings' on the failure of the Overseers to 'advance me £2'. His suggestion was that were it not for the Overseers' failings toward his family the conditions for their suffering would not have existed. John Osborne, therefore, placed responsibility for the onset of his unsettledness and its resolution of the problems it had caused onto the Overseers, with the warning if they failed to help him provide his family: 'I shall remain a most miserable man'.

Osborne was not alone in presenting his family and the Overseers as the cause of his descent into unsettledness. Henry Townsend wrote to his parish of Lewes, St John, in East Sussex, on

³⁶¹ BRO D/P 91 18/7 3, letter, 3 October 1829.

³⁶² BRO D/P 91 18/7 4, letter, 10 October 1829.

³⁶³ The tone of and style of his letters conveyed his assumption that the Overseers were already intimately appraised of the situation, but at the same time were not sufficiently cognisant of its adverse impact upon him hence his need to write.

11 April 1820, to furiously denounce how: ‘the infernal hoare of a Wife of mine has been my ruin’.³⁶⁴ Left to fend for himself and with his young children ‘almost’ naked to the World’, the pressures of fulfilling his role overwhelmed Townsend inspiring his unsettledness as: ‘nobody any Ways decent Will take us in’. Further, amongst some advocates there could be a willingness to explain how the head of a household could adversely be impacted by the troubles of others in their family. This was the case for Thomas Harrison for whom an advocate explained to his parish in Kirby Lonsdale on 11 September 1822, how the ‘mental derangement’ of his wife had reduced him from a state of comparative care and comfort to great poverty and distress.³⁶⁵ While in the cases of South and Harrison a direct and inalienable link was made between the pain of seeing their family suffer and the causes of their Compromised Identity, by contrast, the effect of Osborne and Townsend’s letters obscured this connection. Through his self-indulgent tone Townsend blamed the Overseers and their family for unsettledness. He saw their families’ suffering not so much as the ultimate cause of their unsettledness, but rather as a symptom/reference point to their fall down the social scale.

Seeing oneself unfavourably in terms of the social scale could be a potent trigger for Compromised Identity, as Henry Rutter’s testimony elucidates. On 23 April 1833 Rutter wrote of his sense of Compromised Identity to the Overseers of Farnham, Surrey, having been ‘almost driven to desperation’ by the scandal enveloping him.³⁶⁶ Although Rutter never submitted the precise details, he indicated in his previous letter that his descent into ‘my awkward and distressed’ situation, had begun with ‘the Bennett family’ and their ‘Misrepresentations of me’.³⁶⁷ Rutter wrote with the skill and clarity of an educated man. He longed for a return to his old status when he worked ‘principally with Solicitors, Bankers, and Merchants’, and away from ‘unpleasant family circumstances’. Rutter had been humiliated by his fall down the social scale caused by scandal, with his need to write multiple pauper letters acting both as a symbol of his unsettling decline and, conversely, the means for him to self-justify and rectify his problems.

The likes of Osborne, Rutter, and Townsend represent a small but significant group for whom Compromised Identity was not triggered by how they believed they were failing their family, but how they felt factors such as their family and poor management of poor relief caused their

³⁶⁴ ESRO PAR 412-35-13, letter, 11 April 1820.

³⁶⁵ KLRO WPR19-7-6-15-25a,b, letter, 11 September 1822.

³⁶⁶ SRO 1505-Box37-F2-21a,b, letter, 23 April 1833.

³⁶⁷ SRO 1505-Box37-F2-21a,b, letter, 23 April 1833.

despair. Accordingly, their cases have a less sympathetic tone than that found in Samuel South's account of unsettledness with the self-pity evident amongst Osborne, Rutter and Townsend, rarely found even amongst those with Compromised Identity.

Uniting all the cases of Compromised Identity examined is how each man professed to believe and aimed to ensure their recovery from unsettledness through writing. Samuel South's third letter most clearly shows this process in action. South came to recognise the unsettling impact of his 'broken mind' through writing and resolved: 'Something must be done'. The very fact he wrote confirms his belief in the possibility of recovery, but in doing so he tied himself (and his sense of self) to his interactions with his Overseer. A cursory reading of the letter could lead one to think that South had constructed a standard request with notable moments of emotive embellishment. But the story he told and the emotional weight South lent it, makes it clear that he regarded his circumstances to be exceptional. For example, he wrote of the 'Liberty' he took in 'writing these lines', which is significant because previously – before unsettledness hit him – in his letters South had left open the possibility of his being able to visit the parish in person. The implication was that he was either no longer capable of doing so and/or he took some comfort in writing which he could not derive by seeing them in person. This lends credence to the notion that the act of writing itself felt useful for South and that what he expressed was necessary, albeit shameful. He took care justifying his request with due deference to the authority of the Overseer, admitting: 'I should thank you to bring it to a resolution'. South knew and was able to cohere to the expectations of the Overseers. But the effects of South's unsettledness led him to twist the process of writing for relief by using the standard rhetoric and style of writing to moderate his invocations of his Compromised Identity. Thus, he wrote:

I was in hopes you would have assisted us with a Mangle that it might have help'd us this Winter as you partly promis'd Me we should have One.

While it was true that South required a mangle and had requested it previously, there was also the implicit blame he placed upon the Overseer for his and the family's suffering; which he cites as the reason for his mind being 'broken'. Hence his 'hopes' were spoken of in the past tense leaving the implication that he had lost them and, crucially, that the Overseer had let him down.³⁶⁸ His rush to judge the Overseers spoke of South's need to see them in the worst

³⁶⁸ One might ask whether there was significance to South having addressed the three different Overseers by their names? It was an enormous parish with multiple and changing Overseers and a valid pauper strategy to establish a personal connection was through the use of names.

possible light: it had been a little over a month since he had last written to them mentioning his need for a mangle but it appears he quickly lost faith in what they had ‘promis’d’. But, while being acutely conscious of their apparent failings toward him, South still chose to write to the Overseers again. His obsession with the mangle may be explained by what it came to represent as the inability to procure it through help from the Overseers reflected his failings in providing for his family. South fought the effects of having to acknowledge his own failing agency. He needed the Overseer to see him worthy of help to confirm to himself that he (and therefore his family) could recover. This process was complex because South interpreted failure to receive relief as evidence that more relief should be sent and that his unsettled pleas were fully justified. South clung to the notion that his family’s suffering was not entirely his fault, and that by securing the Overseer’s aid, he could protect and fulfil his duty to his family thereby restoring his agency. In some respect, this was perfectly sound pauper reasoning and the type every applicant made, for example:

we have been selling and pledging of goods ... to support the family.

This admission, South hoped, showed that his promises still had meaning, that he was honest, the family were worthy of relief, and that any (perceived) intransigence by the Overseer could be ruinous. However, the emotion South regularly injected into his letter writing illuminates the impact of his unsettledness, with his last line proving emblematic of his intent and concerns:

I should thank you to let me hear from you in a few days, to know if you intend to do anything for us.

While South’s words began with the requisite flattery to the Overseer and expressed a reasonable need for news it was, ultimately, undermined by the pithy use of ‘anything’ for this implied that unless they acted it was (partially) their fault that he and his family suffered. South, like most contemporaries with Compromised Identity, also felt he possessed an inalienable moral right to articulate his unsettledness. But he recognised the need to moderate his language to ensure he could not be ignored. This meant he had to balance what he wrote between a standard request and a move to voice his unsettledness. Consequently, South found limited comfort in writing of his unsettledness as it forced him to fully confront its effect which motivated his recovery for the good of his family. Recovery seemed possible because there appeared no alternative to it. This inability and unwillingness to conceive of a fate worse than the one they were already experiencing was peculiar to those with Compromised

Identity. By contrast, and as will be shown in the next chapter, those that suffered from the unsettling effects of Cumulative Troubles were distressed precisely because they could imagine their situations worsening as they found themselves lacking the agency to prevent it. The Compromised, however, were saved from this gloomy outlook by their relative lack of imagination.

Six months after Samuel South complained of his 'broken mind', his wife was moved to write the following letter:

May 26th 1827

Sir

I take the liberty of writing these few lines to you and to inform you that I am in great deal of trouble about my Husband and Family and I should feel much oblige if you would speak to the Gentleman of Steyning to assist me untill my Husband returns as it will be five weeks come next Friday before I expect him home I went to Brighton Parrish on Tuesday and they said that wee do not belong there that Steyning is our Parrish the Gentleman says if wee come troublesome to them they would send us home to Steyning without any further orders and I should wish to now what you intend to do as it is impossible that wee can live the little money that get by the Mangle as it is much as I can do raise mony in a week to pay the rent as there is Eight in Family I should be glad if you would send me a note by Drect on Tuesday what I am to do

I Remain your Obedient Servant

Mrs South³⁶⁹

Sent on 26 May 1827, Mrs South charted the key developments from Samuel's last correspondence with the Overseers of Steyning. Of immediate note is that it was Mrs South that wrote; her husband was away finding work. This represented a significant change both in terms of family dynamics and their subsequent relief requests. Tellingly, Samuel's previous wish for help acquiring a mangle had appeared to have been granted; and had been to enable his wife to work with him freed to look for employment elsewhere. But having the mangle did not lift the burden of poverty upon the family as his wife explained:

it is impossible that wee can live the little money that get by the Mangle

³⁶⁹ WSRO: Par.183-37-3-39a,b, letter, 26. May 1827.

Her letter nevertheless retained the expectation that the Overseers would ‘send me a note by Drect on Tuesday what I am to do’, which hints that she and the family had learned to expect swift responses from their Overseer, and, that in her husband’s absence, it fell to her to make such demands. This also throws light onto Samuel South’s previous engagements with the Overseers for it reinforces the argument made earlier that many of his problems stemmed not from what he was asking of the parish, but rather the way he framed his requests by expressing his unsettled mind. It is a remarkable feature of those in the Compromised Identity typology that they found such willing advocates on their behalf.

The difference between a conventional pauper relief claimant was not what Samuel South requested in material terms from their Overseers, but the unconventional way he and others like him cited their material needs though expression of their unsettled Compromised Identities. The case of South is useful because his wife became the one to write to advocate on his and the family’s behalf. Through this case study it is possible to discern the other (often silent) side of the story of Compromised Identity from the perspective of those whose suffering Samuel’s unsettledness inadvertently caused owing to the effect of his unsettled troubles. The absence of her husband meant Mrs South had to take on his role of writing to the Overseer, requesting they ‘assist me untill my Husband returns’.³⁷⁰ The indication was that upon Samuel’s return he would resume responsibility for any further letter-writing. Until then, the burdens she carried were substantial as she descried how ‘I am in great deal of trouble about my Husband and Family’. It is notable that Mrs South detailed her caring role for Samuel as he did for her. The irony exists that Samuel had been unsettled, in part, by a sense of isolation in the care for his family and yet his wife, in turn, experienced similar emotional challenges. However, she never disclosed having become unsettled.

Unencumbered by the unsettledness that dogged her husband, Mrs South was in the painful but not uncommon position of a pauper women waiting for their spouse to return home.

While in Samuel’s South mind he was isolated and the sole provider, in reality his wife was working and they represented an economic partnership – as most marriages were – and while she suffered in his absence she remained in control of her family, husband, and her mind.

Conclusion

³⁷⁰ WSRO Par.183-37-3-39a,b, letter, 26 May 1827.

Paupers unsettled by Compromised Identity chose to confront the impact of their troubles. Their decision to articulate their feelings to the Overseers through letter writing was a conscious act through which they sought to come to terms with their changed circumstances. The act of writing a pauper letter was essential in shaping how the Compromised configured their shift along a spectrum of unsettledness and their subsequent place within society. Recognition of the need to write about Compromised Identity was inspired by the sufferers' self-awareness of the causes of their distress. In contrast to the Status-stressed who obsessed about work as the source of their decline, the Compromised paupers tried to distinguish and address the impact of the competing and perpetuating factors causing their unsettling crisis of identity. No single theme or cause was elevated in importance as it was the combination of influences which defined experiences of Compromised Identity. Instead, difficulties finding work, paying rent, caring for children, providing food, clothing and comfort for family, were consistent factors cited by the likes of Harriet Hughes and Samuel South to their Overseers, but varied according to each affected individual. Collectively, however, the compromised were united in the way they explored their troubles through writing, citing the same pivot points and beseeching the Overseers for help. The Compromised detailed their unsettling failings having – through the need and act of writing – found themselves (at least momentarily) unable to fulfil the societal roles and functions expected of them.

To institute a positive move along the spectrum the Compromised clung to the belief that their troubles were impermanent and recoverable. The same held true for the Laid-low and Status-stressed. Yet the effects of these hopes galvanised the Compromised differently. They sought more nuanced senses of themselves than the Laid-low and Status-stressed who advantageously used their momentary reconciliation with unsettledness to push themselves toward recovery. In so doing, they made a necessary, albeit reluctant, acquiescence with their unsettledness. The Compromised, by contrast, were less accepting: their troubles led them to question what is was to be a pauper whose control over their own sense of self could be altered by changes in circumstances over which they, in turn, had little or no control. The way South and Hughes pushed their Overseers for responses – in threatening to visit the parish and insisting upon replies – represents a wider exploration of personal agency undertaken by the Compromised set against their newly realised helplessness with respect to their senses of self. Unlike the Laid-low and Status-stressed who through pain, shame, and denial refused to believe anything worse could befall them, those with Compromised unsettled senses of self could not be pacified merely with the prospect of a return to the

material and emotional comforts they held prior to the onset of their unsettledness. Their compulsion to reflect upon their senses of self and place in society shook the Compromised so profoundly that their cases more closely resemble those found in the Cumulative Troubles and Dying unsettled typologies found in later chapters. Then again, the Compromised were different even amongst the unsettled because these sufferers thought they had reached the brink of what could be endured. They were determined to recover not necessarily because they believed they could but because they thought the worst had already happened. All that remained to them was the opportunity bestowed by letter-writing try to wrench back control of their Compromised selves.

Writing became an assertion by the Compromised of their remaining agency over their state(s) of mind, with their letters the process and means through which they challenged their unsettledness. The Compromised sought to reduce personal responsibility for the impact of their unsettledness and their potential failure to recover by highlighting the role of the pauper life-cycle and how the Overseers' response determined their fate. By extension, they believed that if relief was forthcoming they could sufficiently alter their circumstances to return to their settled identity. While the Cumulatively Troubled learnt through experience to lessen their belief in the power of relief leading to their unsettling self-narrated and self-fulfilling decline, the Compromised, as with the Laid-low and Status-stressed before them, were inculcated against such effects due to their unyielding faith in recovery made possible through their continued ability to write of their unsettledness to the Overseer. Inability to become settled immediately upon the receipt of such relief was not seen by the likes of Harriet Hughes, Samuel South, and Thomas Webb as their failure, but evidence that more relief should be sent and that their unsettledness-inspired requests were justified. This coping-mechanism mixed belief with denial, and as South, and Webb's cases show, advocates frequently had significant roles enabling such thought processes and helped to push the blame for suffering onto the parish. The Compromised were sustained by the notion that their unsettledness was not (entirely) their own fault and that recovery was possible if relief was granted; even, and occasionally in spite of, directly contradictory evidence to that effect. In one sense, the obsession of the Compromised to believe in the power of relief was nothing more than perfectly ordinary pauper letter-writing. However, the desperation, denial, and sheer emotion poured into this standard practice by the Compromised reveals their differences to their contemporaries, driven, as they were, by self-identified unsettledness.

When suffering unsettledness, the Compromised (re)interpreted the established remit of the Overseer as they saw them as arbiters of whether they could return to their settled state. This could be liberating for the Compromised unsettled. With the Overseer involved in their case, their own personal responsibility for their condition was diminished while they were free to tell themselves they had challenged the causes of their distress. Yet doing so meant having to emotionally come to terms with the loss of social position caused by their descent into unsettledness. The Compromised did so grudgingly. The result was the Compromised believed in and worked towards becoming emotionally (re)settled due to the entwined thoughts that: first, they had suffered to the extent further suffering was not conceivable; second, the Overseer's intervention would begin the end of those troubles; and, finally, that their actions in requesting relief, alongside their awareness of their compromised state, meant they were in the process reasserting agency over their sense of self.

To successfully answer their own unsettling questions of agency, the Compromised were moved to twist the standard established forms of pauper letter writing. Bold emotional pleas were woven into the letters as they searched for affirmation from their Overseers. Yet, as with the previous typologies, the irony remained that such emotional invocations were unsuited to this form of writing. It made it less likely the Overseer was receptive to their case, but the sufferers were somewhat mollified by the notion that someone at least heard their pain.³⁷¹ Their letters were a negotiation not only between Overseer and pauper, but within the Compromised pauper themselves about how much of their unsettledness they could express and result in them receiving the help they required.

This typology was one in which rates of unsettledness were high between both men and women, with 53 male and 34 female accounts of Compromised Identity. The testimonies offered by Harriet Hughes and Samuel South indicate that there were certainly aspects to unsettledness, as with all life for early nineteenth-century paupers, that meant one's gender influenced their respective experiences. However, the essence of being unsettled in terms of finding oneself feeling incapable of fulfilling one's societally-endorsed role was shared between both men and women. While the influences and pressures may have been different and their roles configured in different terms, the harsh realities of poverty meant the dependent poor of both genders were capable of falling into their personal form of the

³⁷¹ King made the argument that all letter writers received some form of a response to their petition. Financial remuneration was not the only form of relief the parish might offer to those in need. See, King, *Writing The Lives*: 90-115.

unsettling sense of Compromised Identity. Such experiences were not obviously defined by regional dynamics which supports the notion that this typology was defined more by its rootedness in the conditions of poverty and how pauper constructed their sense of self relative to their varying capacity to manage their life-cycle. The role of advocates was prominent within the typology of Compromised Identity as their involvement was in 34 of the 85 cases. This is significant because it lends weight to the contention of this analysis that paupers who wrote about Compromised Identity detailed an experience that was, at the very least, comprehensible and, under specific circumstances, even understandable to their contemporaries, whether it was a man's crisis of masculinity in being able to care for his family or a mother's fear of being unable to sufficiently provide for her children.

Those with Compromised Identity follow the likes of the Laid-low and Status-stressed in their ability to voice and construct their senses of self through writing in a manner which not only demonstrated their capacity to recognise and express their agency, but also that they exploited the act of writing to express their emotions. As the next chapter will show, the Cumulatively unsettled were not swept up in the immediate pain of the moment like the Compromised, but had, over time, and through the impact of their experiences, been led to conclude that, even with relief, little hope for their selves could be found. The Compromised might have become Cumulatively Troubled were it not for their continued belief that obtaining poor relief could lead to their recovery.

Cumulative Troubles

While in the throes of unsettledness, the Cumulatively Troubled retained the ability to write compellingly functional pauper letters to their Overseer, and their testimonies represent the purest form of pauper letter writing exhibited by the unsettled analysed within this thesis. The reason the Cumulatively Troubled could cohere to the standard styles and functions required by those to whom they petitioned while also exploring their unsettledness was because their stories detailing the grinding nature of the life-cycle and their decline was not unusual. Overseers expected such tales from those in need. Advocates were able to identify clear reasons to lend their support. By asking for help in mediating the effects of the typical pauper-life-cycle, the accounts the of Cumulatively Troubled could resonate with their wider community and be met with a degree of sympathy and (limited) understanding. Such understanding was far harder to come by for the unsettled that were Laid-low, Status-stressed, or those with Compromised Identity. But the emotional release offered by Overseers in the form of financial relief could often become viewed as inadequate by the Cumulatively Troubled. The precise nature of their emotional needs and how they sought greater meaning for their suffering was explored in great depth in their letters. The result is the cases of the Cumulatively Troubled offer historians some of the most insightful accounts of what it felt to be unsettled under the Old Poor Law.³⁷²

In this context the issue of kinship is crucial as King has shown.³⁷³ The role of family and kinship in the economic and social-cultural lives of the poor was complex and shaped how one may read the words of the Cumulatively Troubled. Historians have traditionally understood the poor to have been affected by nuclear family hardship.³⁷⁴ The idea was, for

³⁷² It has been argued by some historians that, in effect, those facing cumulative troubles ended up in asylums, but the perspectives drawn here would suggest otherwise. See, Andrews, Jonathan and Andrew Scull, *Customers and Patrons of the Mad-Trade: The Management of Lunacy in Eighteenth-century London. With the Complete Text of John Monro's 1766 Case Book*. Berkeley: California University Press, 2003; Scull, Andrew. *Museums of Madness: The Social Organisation of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England*. London: Allen Lane, 1979; Smith, Leonard. *Cure, Comfort and Safe Custody: Public Asylums in Early Nineteenth-Century England*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1999; and Wright, David. *Mental Disability in Victorian England: The Earlswood Asylum 1847-1901*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

³⁷³ King, Steven. "Forme et fonction de la parenté chez les populations pauvres d'Angleterre, 1780-1840." *Annales*, 65 (2010), 1147-74.

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Laslett, Peter. "Family, Kinship and Collectivity as Systems of Support in Pre-Industrial Europe: A Consideration of the 'Nuclear-Hardship' Hypothesis." *Continuity and Change* 3, 2 (1988): 153-175.

instance, that by the time an elderly historical actor had to turn to their children for aid was around the same point upon the life-cycle that their children were ill-equipped to help, owing to their own need to prioritise providing for their off-spring. While young adults held the advantage in their ability to earn that ability was diminished once they had multiple children. The pauper is an integral actor in this experience as they had the weakest family economies. Historians later came to question the significance of nuclear hardship. Sokoll led this shift having highlighted the complexities and large sizes of pauper households.³⁷⁵ King examined the role of kinship showing how those familial links were deep and useful.³⁷⁶ Williams refuted the Malthusian perspective on family by showing that the poor were sensitive to local family needs, the family economy, and local makeshift economy.³⁷⁷ The testimonies of Cumulatively Troubled paupers exhibit those features and contribute to individuals' experiences of unsettledness.

The paradox faced by the Cumulatively Troubled was brutally simple but almost impossible for them to resolve: while the advocates maintained the unsettled pauper could recover, the Cumulatively Troubled themselves doubted whether they could. The advocate role within this typology is crucial as their expectations for those they helped present an independent perspective regarding what certain paupers endured and what society expected of claimants for relief. The affected unsettled individuals contemplated the extent of their own decline and how this lesser sense of self might stay with them indefinitely. Such corrosive thoughts became self-fulfilling. Fear for themselves, coupled with the effects of poverty, led the Cumulatively Troubled to half-believe and half-hope their suffering was not entirely their fault. By blaming the harshness of the Old Poor Law and the machinations of those charged with running it, the unsettled shifted some of the burden for their suffering onto another source. In seeking to blame others for their suffering the Cumulatively Troubled were not so different from those found in the other unsettledness typologies. Thus their letters can be viewed as a critique upon the limits of poor relief. But they were also more than that. The

³⁷⁵ Sokoll, Thomas. "The Household Position of Elderly Widows in Poverty: Evidence from Two English Communities in the late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries." In J. Henderson and R. Wall (eds). *Poor Women and Children in the European Past*. London: Routledge, 1994: 207-24; "Old Age in Poverty: The Record of Essex Pauper Letters, 1780-1834." In T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds). *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997: 127-54.

³⁷⁶ King, Steven. "Friendship, Kinship and Belonging in the Letters of Urban Paupers 1800-1840." *Historical Social Research* 33 (2008): 249-77.

³⁷⁷ Williams, Samantha. "Malthus, Marriage and Poor Law Allowances Revisited: A Bedfordshire Case Study, 1770-1834." *The Agricultural Historical Review* 52, 1 (2004): 56-82; *Poverty, Gender and Life-cycle Under the English Poor Law, 1760-1834*. (Royal Historical Society). Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011: 131-59.

Cumulative Troubles

Cumulatively Troubled cases were unique because it is possible to discern both the build-up to and explosion of unsettledness felt by the affected unsettled actor; whereas in the other typologies one is able to witness only the peak of unsettledness about which the sufferer chose to write. On the surface, at least, the Cumulatively Troubled appear to have endured the least extreme form of unsettledness in that their contemporaries could relate to their central grievance with the lot that came with pauper living. Yet that did little to ease the pain of those who felt their suffering was unique and almost impossible to relieve.

There were fifty-five cases of paupers being Cumulatively Troubled.³⁷⁸ Fifty-five of the cases concern males and thirty regard females. Of the original fifty-five cases, forty contained the input of an advocate(s). Table 5.1 below illustrates the quantitative and regional break down of the figures:

Place	Male	Female	Advocate(s)	Total
Berkshire	3	3	4	6
Cumbria	6	7	7	13
Gloucestershire	4	3	6	7
Gwent	3	1	2	4
Hampshire	0	3	1	3
Oxford	1	0	1	1
Surrey	2	3	5	5
East Sussex	1	2	3	3
West Sussex	2	4	6	6
East Yorkshire	1	3	3	4
West Yorkshire	2	1	2	3
Total	25	30	40	55

³⁷⁸ This figure is taken from the 1449 cases examined, of which 292 are unsettled. For more detail, see: Introduction: 17.

Table 5.1 – Cumulative Troubles Cases.

Of the unsettled cases examined, the Cumulative cases comprise 19 per cent of the documented experiences.³⁷⁹ The table highlights the following noteworthy features. First is the relative gender parity in the rate of incidence of the experience: there are only five more female cases compared with men. When compared with the gender disparities found in the Status-stress cases which were skewed highly toward males this is important, but the primary aspect of this feature worth noting is how the rates are similar and imply a non-gendered cause/trigger for this typology. Closer investigation will reveal how the way men and women experienced Cumulative Troubles could be influenced by gender, however. Second, there is little discernible regional variation to be found. The impact of the familial experience of Cumulative Troubles, coupled with the gender dynamics are features which alongside the themes of the typology, can be most effectively be explored with reference to the cases of Anne Baker, Ann Rhodes and Robert Pearson.

Anne Baker

The travails documented by Anne Baker on 27 March 1815 and sent to her home parish of Lewes, St John in East Sussex featured many of the associative characteristics of Cumulative Troubles. Her single surviving letter to the parish read as follows:

Sir,

The death of a beloved Sister, who died only three days ago, has brought such an additional affliction to the miseries under which, both in Body and Mind! I have been long labouring, that I feel neither strength of spirits sufficient to attend the Vestry as you suggested. I must therefore humbly implore you, Sir, to become the Advocate of the Orphan and Widow, whose extreme Petition extends no further than the same measure which is meted to others may be meted to them. Justice and Humanity require that a child who is using every endeavour, but who is, yet, incapable of supporting herself, should be assisted with such cloaths as Nature and Decency demand, and which the Liberality of the Parish has never hitherto refused to others under similar, if not less deserving, Circumstances. To alleviate their burthen, to the utmost of my feeble power, I have exerted myself even beyond my strength, and to an extent that has tended to the utter ruin of a Constitution naturally far from robust! Is it then just, or even politic, to repress those energies by withholding that encouragement the hope of obtaining which was the only stimulus to their exertion?

³⁷⁹ 55 of 292 unsettled cases. (18.8%).

Cumulative Troubles

I humbly aver, Sir, that had a little more commiseration, a little more Feeling been manifested towards me or my orphan Children in the first instance such an indulgence would have been, 'ere now, repaid by a saving of scores of pounds to the Parish, but no! it was determined that we should drink the cup of misery and Abasement to the very dregs! If the Gentlemen of St. John's disapprove of my plan for the maintenance of my child; if they have formed any other which they consider advantageous, God forbid that I should oppose any measure, conceived in the Spirit of real Benevolence, the true object of which may be to ensure a better future provision for my helpless Infants than I have the faintest prospect of obtaining for them!

Humbly begging pardon for this intrusion, I remain, with sincere Respect, Sir,

Your most humble and obedient Servant Anne Baker³⁸⁰

Southover 27th March 1815

The most striking feature of Baker's letter is how, upon first reading, one might think she had been Laid-low by the death of her 'beloved' sister. It certainly shook her. But the way Baker outlined this pivot point in her writing to the Overseer belied the unsettledness created by Cumulative Troubles and is evident in the perverse way she construed her sister's death as significant, primarily because it:

brought such an additional affliction to the miseries under which, both in Body and Mind! I have been long labouring.

Unlike with the Laid-low, the pains Baker endured had been long in the making. The death of her sister came to represent a self-fulfilling marker to Baker's own misery. Her choice to write represented a conscious decision to address her emotional and material troubles like those analysed in previous typologies. But there is less, if any, sense of Baker directly challenging her unsettledness. The grievance that drove her to write to the Overseer was not unsettledness itself but the fear that the grind of pauper living and its ensuing indignities had become her permanent normative experience.³⁸¹ Even as Baker wrote to find hope with

³⁸⁰ ESRO PAR 412-35-102, letter, 27 March 1815.

³⁸¹ Tomkins suggested similar in relation to elongated sickness, see Tomkins, Alannah. "“Labouring on a Bed of Sickness”: The Material and Rhetorical Deployment of Ill-Health in Male Pauper Letters." In A. Gestrich, E.

reassurance from the Overseer, she faced having to come to terms with the full extent of her suffering, which, ironically, reinforced her despair as it made her doubt if it could ever end. Unlike the Laid-low, Status-stressed, and those with Compromised Identity who all (to differing degrees) marshalled a self-fulfilling belief in their capacity to recover, Baker lacked the same self-sustaining conviction. This was her Cumulative Troubles in action and is the defining theme of the typology: by writing, Baker examined her unsettledness, and through this act, began to recognise the causes, forms, and ramifications of her unsettledness.

‘I feel neither strength of spirits sufficient to attend the Vestry as you suggested’, Baker wrote, heralding a previous dialogue between herself and the Overseers. Her words gave every indication that the troubles she recounted had mounted upon her up to this moment of imbalance when, finally, she had been compelled to write. Baker endeavoured to avoid a personal meeting which, inevitably, would have required her to express these sentiments verbally. This she felt she could not do. Baker turned instead to pauper letter writing as the way to express her unsettledness. She openly acknowledged how this letter represented an ‘extreme petition’ which, in turn, indicates she had not written in this manner before. She felt the extremities of her feelings in that moment made her special amongst those who sought relief; nothing else would allow her to ignore the Overseers’ advice to attend the vestry. This refusal guarded her against the possibility of her story being questioned, challenged, or interrupted while she told it. By choosing to write rather than speak, Baker had chosen the space and terms upon which the dynamics of her unsettledness and accompanying relief request would be interpreted. This exercise of control and awareness intimates her rationality without ever casting doubt upon the unsettledness she described. Baker’s uniqueness as a pauper letter writer was defined by Cumulative Troubles but articulated in terms of a frustration at the poor law and the Overseers’ intransigence in the face of her suffering.

Yet, almost in spite of herself and the associated troubles of unsettledness, Baker retained the wherewithal to finish her request by ‘Humbly begging pardon’ from the Overseer ‘for this intrusion’. Her statement of ‘respect’ was situated at the letter’s conclusion and served the dual purpose of not distorting her central message by interrupting her tirade, while, at the same time, preventing her from seeming so hostile or deviant as to disqualify her from relief. There is even a sense of Baker having successfully vented her feelings to their exhaustion

Hurren and S. King (eds). *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor*. London: Continuum, 2012: 51-68.

enabling her to add the requisite dutiful sign-off. If one reads the letter in this way, it is possible to envisage that the very act of forming this petition had an emotional benefit for Baker. This need for ‘respect’ went both ways. The essence of Baker’s appeal was that by refusing her relief, the Overseers were negligent toward her as she:

[S]hould be assisted with such cloaths as Nature and Decency demand, and which the Liberality of the Parish has never hitherto refused to others under similar, if not less deserving, Circumstances.

Baker felt persecuted. Helping her to care for her daughter was a question of basic ‘decency’ and dignity, and one she felt the parish had answered in the case of other relief claimants but not herself. The sense of injustice, of events conspiring against a person, is a powerful theme of Cumulative Troubles.³⁸² It was obvious to Baker that her troubles had built to the moment of unsettledness upon which she despaired:

To alleviate their burthen, to the utmost of my feeble power, I have exerted myself even beyond my strength, and to an extent that has tended to the utter ruin of a Constitution naturally far from robust!

Baker played into the established trope of a weak and feeble woman in need while, simultaneously, she showed herself to be irreducible to this traditional image. She decried the seeming injustice of life’s events compounded by the Overseers’ inability to judge who was truly deserving of relief. Yet for all that, Baker’s unsettledness – self-fulfilling and expressed through a critique of the poor law operation – was mediated by her continued belief that her recovery hinged on securing relief. Other Cumulatively Troubled contemporaries learned through the hard experience of writing multiple relief requests that this was not necessarily true, and it is to these paupers’ letters that we know turn.

³⁸² This theme appears in the other typologies and there can be overlaps. But it is to the cases of the cumulatively troubled cases one must look is where first for this unsettledness born out of a greater sense of grievance(s).

Ann Rhodes

‘My own constitution has been broken’, Ann Rhodes lamented to Overseers in her home parish of Lyndhurst, Hampshire.³⁸³ Her letters told a story of loss, shame, and reluctant dependency upon the poor law that exemplified the experiential dynamics associated with a pauper’s descent into Cumulative Troubles. As Rhodes struggled to secure herself relief in her adopted home in Hampton Wick, Middlesex, her awareness of the material and emotional decline she endured came to be reflected and reinforced with each new letter, and served to deprive her of the relative comfort afforded to Anne Baker – which came courtesy of her own naivety – to believe that once she received relief her unsettledness would end. The torments endured by Rhodes left her more sceptical, trapped by her Cumulative Troubles, as writing about her unsettledness became her last option.

Six letters pertaining to Rhodes’ case survive. In chronological terms, two letters by advocates pre-date any letters written by Ann herself. The first, on 18 October 1821, was an unremarkable request, though it is worth noting that Rhodes was said to be with ‘her Son in Law’ and referred to her as ‘Mrs Ann Rhodes’ at this point in time.³⁸⁴ The second letter came two months later on 12 December 1821, written by a different advocate, and had an entirely different tone as he complained about ‘stupid or uncivil’ parish officers who had failed ‘Mrs Rhodes’ in not ‘allowing her the sum mentioned in a former letter’.³⁸⁵ The suggestion is that this advocate had written for her before and was incensed on her behalf as she and her three surviving daughters ‘can no longer do for themselves’. It seems likely that Ann had not received relief which had previously been promised. On the overleaf of the letter was a note signed by Rhodes herself, stating: ‘if the Gentleman would be pleased to comply with the context of this I should feel much Oblight.’³⁸⁶ This intervention marked the first time her own hand was recorded.

In 1824 Ann wrote a full letter and referred to herself as the ‘wife of William Rhodes’, albeit that she said that since her husband ‘had left me about 9 years ago’ which meant she had ‘no means of Knowing whether he is dead’.³⁸⁷ She then added how: ‘my husband told me that

³⁸³ HRO 25M84 – PO71-24-7-1,2,3, letter, dated only 1824.

³⁸⁴ HRO 25M84 – PO71-13-5-1,2, letter, 18 October 1821.

³⁸⁵ HRO 25M84 – PO71-13-6-1,2,3,4,5, letter, 12 December 1821.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ HRO 25M84 – PO71-24-7-1,2,3, letter, dated only 1824. The dating of letters is often ambiguous and Sokoll, for instance, has noted that sometimes paupers deliberately wrote only the year because they expected officials to remember prior correspondences. For more on the topic, see: Sokoll. *Essex Pauper Letter*: 1-70.

after his Death there would be something for my benefit out of the Estate'. Writing represented a way for Ann to clarify whether she was entitled to this 'benefit', which she believed could lead to an alleviation of her troubles. Five years later, in November 1829, she wrote a second letter no longer signing her name as the 'wife of William'. Instead, she bemoaned her state and reminisced about a more stable time: 'when my husband served the office of the overseer'.³⁸⁸ Ann gave every indication that she did not know whether she was a widow or not, and therefore refrained from using the term. The final two letters of her case were written by advocates on Ann's behalf. The penultimate letter was dated on 30 January 1831, and, tellingly, described Rhodes as a 'widow'.³⁸⁹ But on 12 June 1831, in the sixth and last letter, another advocate wrote for clarification to the parish on this very matter.³⁹⁰ This letter outlined how Ann and her husband had been 'dependent on the Funds of your Parish' but they themselves had been 'separated some years'. This led to Ann's advocate feeling it necessary to point out:

you recently wrote Widow in one of your Communications this is the only information she has had respecting the death of her Husband but if such is the fact and you will be so Kind as to inform me if she is likely to be Correct in this.

It was never satisfactorily resolved whether Ann's husband was alive. Not knowing kept Ann on edge, feeling unsettled. The nature of her troubles was marred, even defined, by the instability caused by her husband's absence and uncertain fate. The troubles of Ann Rhodes cumulated due to the combination of William's absence, her problems in working out where he was and subsequently defining her status under the Old Poor Law, her own self-identified inability to act as the type of mother she wanted to be, and how even she, as someone who knew the poor law, was still plagued by its machinations.

The depths of Ann Rhodes' unsettledness and the impact her Cumulative Troubles had are evident in the two letters she personally wrote to the Overseers.³⁹¹

³⁸⁸ HRO 25M84 – PO71-22-10-1,2,3,4, letter, dated only November 1829.

³⁸⁹ HRO 25M84 – PO71-24-2-1,2,3,4, letter, 30 January 1831.

³⁹⁰ HRO 25M84 – PO71-24-7-1,2,3, letter, 12 June 1831.

³⁹¹ The quotes offered before must be given in full to appreciate the context to Rhodes' expression. Taking words and phrases will not accurately convey the sentiments of her testimony. More to the point, the full letter would have been read by contemporaries and interpreted as such.

First Letter:

To the Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of Lindhurst New Forest Hants 1824

Gentlemen I am very sorry to be obliged to trouble you but the circumstances in which I am will I hope be a sufficient excuse – I have been Married now about 38 years and for the first part of the Time I should not have thought of being now in the situation I am, but my Husband left me about 9 years ago with a Family which I endeavoured to support by my own labour without being obliged to apply to you, I succeeded in bringing them all up and from their marrying there is only one of them that can now ever be chargeable to your Parish but I am sorry to say that in laboring to support them my own constitution has been broken – I have been lately in service but was obliged to leave it 2 years ago when I was ill for 7 months and obliged to part with some of my things for my support on recovering I again went to service and tho I was not capable of doing much my Mistress was good Enough to keep me till there was no longer any hope of my being ever able to do the work again I was therefore obliged on the 21st of August to leave that and tho I would still try to do the best I can if you would please to assist me yet I Cannot now do any longer without help my husband told me that after his Death there would be something for my benifit out of the Estate that M^r Phillips had of him by the Goose Green but I have no means of Knowing whether he is dead or if I had I cannot tell how it was left I should be very thankif you will Please to write to me as soon as possible for I am in distress and melancholy must apply to this Parish if I do not hear from you and then they will pass me to you which would prevent me from making use of the Friends I have hereabouts and make me entirly dependant on the parish which I would indeavour to do without if you would allow me 2 or 3 Shillings a week to pay my rent which I hope considering my age and my circumstances you will not think too much, and I Remain Gentlemen with great Respect your Humble Servant

Ann Rhodes wife of William Rhodes³⁹²

If you will Please to direct for me at John Dobsons Baker Hampton Wick Middx it will be thankfully Received by me

³⁹² HRO 25M84 – PO71-24-7-1,2,3, letter, dated only 1824.

Second Letter:

To the Overseers of Lindhurst in the new forest Hants

November 1829

Gentlemen,

I am very much obliged to you for the very Kind letter you sent and also for allowing me the 2 Pr week but am very sorry to say the parish of Hampton Wick where I lived with my daughter only allowed me the said sum for 2 weeks tho the overseer knows how poor I am and that my daughter cannot support me having a family of Children to maintain – but the reason they give is that they do not know how they are to be paid again and they say they have wrote to you 2 letters and have had no anserr therefore gentlemen tho I am sorry to be so troublesome I beg you will please to consider my distress'd Situation for had it not been for my daughter I must have been pass'd home to you before now and I cannot think of robbing her Children without some hopes of paying them again which I hoped to be able to do if a letter had been received from you for this parish to pay from the first – Therefore Gentlemen I hope you will be so kind as to write to me to tell me what I am to do and be assured that if I did not want it I would not apply for it but age and infirmities have brought me to what in younger days I should not have thought of when my husband served the office of overseer in your parish I had better hopes but times are changed and my shame is complete.

So hoping Gentlemen you will Please to write soon –

Your ever Oblight Humble Servant Ann Rhodes³⁹³

Please to direct to me at Mrs Dobsons Hampton Wick Middlesex

Rhodes used her first letter in 1824 to explain to the Overseers how her request for assistance arose from the accumulation of long-term difficulties catalysed by her husband's continued absence which had compelled her to write. Until this moment, she had endeavoured to support herself and daughters 'by my own labour without being obliged to apply to you'.³⁹⁴ The newfound need to personally request relief was a significant blow to her self-esteem and pride as the inability to work signified to Ann how her self-sufficiency had become destabilised. By writing about her practical concerns she did not so much consciously challenge her sense of unsettledness, but began the process through which she would force

³⁹³ HRO 25M84 – PO71-22-10-1,2,3,4, letter, November 1829.

³⁹⁴ While advocates had written on her behalf, the suggestion is that this is the first time Ann herself felt her circumstances merited she write.

herself – through the act of writing – to come to terms with the unsettling impact of her Cumulative Troubles.

This notion of an unconscious reckoning with unsettledness is supported by Rhodes' fixation upon inheritance and her continued understanding that receiving relief would solve her problems. Hence, she argued: 'I Cannot now do any longer without help ... but I have no means of Knowing whether he is dead'. In seeking practical answers and solutions to her problems Ann's words were accordingly open and emotional. Nevertheless, implicit within her words was an accusation that the poor law caused her problems; and, significantly, this was a sentiment supported by advocates who had previously denounced the 'uncivil and stupid' parish officers, and would later go on to condemn the suspension of her allowance 'without any signification' which left her 'greatly distressed'. Later on, she decried the 'totally inadequate' and 'scantly pittance' they afforded her.³⁹⁵ Yet Ann's problems of an errant husband and difficulty providing for her children were typical within pauper letters, which meant that her words would not immediately have stood out to her Overseers. Ann's case was ironic because her advocates' willingness to help suggests that while she may have been deserving of relief she was not in any way special. Yet it was Rhodes' very need to see her suffering as unique which compounded her unsettling isolation and despair.

'In labouring to support them my own constitution has been broken', was the expression that opened this case study, and, at this point with the context fully explored, it is clear that Rhodes has been intimating that her trigger to write went beyond the failings of her husband and his nine-year absence, as she linked her unsettledness to the wider inability to work and provide for her daughters. The pressure became almost unbearable as she fretted about no longer harbouring 'any hope of my being ever able to do the work again'. Rhodes' own inability to work sharpened the focus upon the loss of her husband as she reasoned, if he was present, her employment difficulties might not be so damaging. These factors cohere with the themes found in the cases of both Laid-low and Status-stressed paupers. Yet Ann herself explained why she fits neither category: the cause of her anguish and resentment was in having seen these problems cumulate while 'ill for seven months'. This led to her despairing request for relief, which was an act she had never previously felt necessary to do herself, and which reinforced her sense of her decline. But while Ann felt she had endured uncommon indignities and pain, she had at that point not lost hope that the Overseers could help reverse

³⁹⁵ HRO 25M84 – PO71-13-6-1,2,3,4,5, letter, 12 December, 1821. HRO 25M84 – PO71-24-2-1,2,3,4, letter, 22 January 1831. HRO 25M84 – PO71-24-7-1,2,3, letter, 17 June 1831.

the sorry direction she felt she had taken. Her sincerity and conviction is to be witnessed in how skilfully she attempted to negotiate with the parish as she ably cajoled the Overseers by reminding them how she had ensured only one of her daughters ‘can now ever be chargeable to your Parish’. More impressively, Rhodes threatened to become ‘entirely dependant on the parish’ if they did not help, while adding the incentive to that if the Overseers accommodated her now she would be less of a burden in future as she could make ‘use of the Friends I have hereabouts’. Rhodes had achieved the rare feat of combining the classic pauper threat of becoming permanently dependent upon the parish and positively asserting her agency at the time she felt most vulnerable. This proves unequivocally that Rhodes was not mad. But nor was she entirely settled. Rhodes herself had chosen to write a letter describing her and feelings of ‘distress and melancholy’.

No evidence exists to suggest that, five years on, any of these difficulties had changed for the better and, by December 1829, Rhodes’ unsettled troubles had cumulated to the point that the survival of this once proudly self-sufficient woman had become dependent upon the ‘very kind’ actions of the Overseers. Ann had once seen writing as an exceptional act. But with the troubles she endured having increased, her words expressed familiarity and despondency with the unsettledness she continually endured. Ann’s awareness of this fall into unsettledness was essential to its experience. Originally Ann had not set out to address self-identified unsettledness, but the act of writing and the need to do so again, coupled with the evidence of her own experiences, confirmed and reinforced her unsettling sense of decline. The inadequacy of the poor law was essential to this process as Rhodes was: ‘only allowed the said sum for 2 weeks tho the overseer know how poor I am’. Previously, she had retained the dignity derived from her confidence and skill at negotiating relief which helped preserve her sense of self. But this had gone. Even the aid of ‘Friends’ of which she had once boasted seemed no longer to be of any use or comfort. Ann began, in earnest, to recognise that her problems came from within. Her words belied how, even as she requested relief, she no longer expected a profound shift in her circumstances even if it was forthcoming. Her narrative of decline had become self-fulfilling. The paradox of Rhodes’ account, and what distinguishes it from typical settled paupers in similar circumstances, is that while realising her unsettledness through writing served to reinforce it, she nonetheless refused to accept its presence. Ann Rhodes tried to write herself settled while doubting whether she truly could write away her unsettledness. Such emotional contortion could only come from a mind afflicted by unsettledness.

Rhodes framed the entirety of her sense of shame and indignity with reference to her inability to provide for her children.³⁹⁶ Again, this was a pivot point to unsettledness sketched in her first letter but fully realised in her second. Before, she had struggled to care for her daughters and now the roles had reversed: ‘my daughter cannot support me having a family of Children to maintain’. This was devastating for Rhodes. ‘I cannot think of robbing her Children’, she went on to write as her concern for her family and her perceived negative impact upon them consumed her with guilt. Ann was different to her settled contemporaries because while they too frequently regretted burdening their families, Ann believed the suffering she both caused and suffered was extraordinary. Her words were therefore imbued with an unsettled resonance, with even her husband’s absence construed merely as a marker of the scale of her increased troubles:

but age and infirmities have brought me to what in younger days I should not have thought of when my husband served the office of overseer in your parish.

The contrast made to her current position was stark because William Rhodes had once decided which paupers deserved relief. But now Ann was in position of asking for herself she found she could not secure the requisite help. This deeper humiliation was unusual even to other Cumulatively Troubled paupers that each tried to convince themselves their unsettled states were not permanent despite the evidence of their experiences. Rhodes’ problems were acuter than most because she had presumably seen this story (happening to others) so many times before. Tellingly, while most Cumulatively Troubled paupers grasped at any and every possible way out of their predicaments, Ann neglected mentioning the possibility of receiving an inheritance. This was significant because in her previous letter she had linked the inheritance to her recovery. Yet here her reference to her husband went no further than a reminiscence. This depiction of the hopeless Ann Rhodes is supported by the later actions of her advocates. After Ann stopped writing they applied for her on her behalf and referred again to the possible inheritance and for information to be ‘had respecting the death of her Husband’. The inheritance was important as a symbol of how the advocates and those who

³⁹⁶ While in other typologies of unsettledness it is not unusual for women to cite the shaming impact of feeling unable to provide for their offspring, what distinguishes the cumulative nature of Rhodes’ unsettledness is found in the way she used such a reference point to explain how her torments had built over time and that led her to write. For more context on the emotional struggles pauper mothers endured see, Bailey, Joanne. “‘Think Wot a Mother Must Feel’: Parenting in English Pauper Letters c. 1760–1834.” *Family and Community History* 13, 2 (2010): 5-19.

knew her believed she could and should be helped. But there was no conviction, or even a suggestion by Ann in the last letter she wrote, that she could be helped.

Reflecting upon her past enabled Ann Rhodes to draw back from the normal and unsettling concerns with the poor law and, instead, allowed her the emotional space to grieve for the life she felt she had lost. Ann wrote for herself. She was not mad. Her letter was coherent. But by recounting her past life with her husband and explaining her Troubled feelings, Ann Rhodes set herself apart from how settled contemporaries or advocates would write. She knew she was deserving, and how to express this, but she used the opportunity afforded by pauper letter writing to emote. It was ironic and perhaps fitting that the frustrations she expressed led to a defiant attack on the collective failure of the Old Poor Law system. There can be no greater example of what it felt to be Cumulatively Troubled than the ending Ann gave to her story: 'I had better hopes but times are changed and my shame is complete'.

For all that Rhodes exercised her agency and displayed her personality one is left to ponder how unremarkable she was; for all her knowledge of the relief-giving process and with advocates backing her cause, she never received more than the average pauper. From the first letter concerning her fate to the last, she was portrayed as ever wearier. Rhodes' understanding of the poor law functioned as a feedback loop which made her aware of the consequences that she tried in vain to escape. Her own words were a burst of energy, of defiance and outrage, that lost potency as she resigned herself to her misery. That Rhodes' gender, role as a mother, and status as a married woman/widow all shaped her experience and perceptions of being Cumulatively Troubled may be effectively contrasted with an analysis of the poor and lonely man, Robert Pearson.

Robert Pearson

The Cumulative Troubles endured by Robert Pearson, of Kirkby Lonsdale, led to him on 3 October 1813, to despair at how: 'I am inirley out of all sorts of mind'.³⁹⁷ Within six months of writing this letter he was dead. The letter which recorded his death referred to him in an almost incidental manner, more concerned with the bureaucratic necessities pertaining to his remaining family who had, throughout Robert's decline, not aided what informed observers

³⁹⁷ KLRO WPR19-7-6-6-17a,b, letter, 3 October 1813.

described as this ‘very poor and feeble old man’.³⁹⁸ While the unsettled decline recorded in his letters was a tale similar to the cases examined before, Pearson’s case provides new insight and a contrasting perspective of what it was to be Cumulatively Troubled. As a man, Pearson faced different obstacles fighting the effects of what was, ostensibly, a similar experience of unsettledness due to the interrelated effects of his being old, (presumably) widowed, both unemployed and employable, unable to move either his advocate or Overseer to consistently help and, crucially, a parent whose adult child could and would not help their father.³⁹⁹ By the time of his letter the effects and cumulated experiences of his poverty made Robert reconcile himself to his decline and accept that it could not be reversed. He merely sought to mitigate his pain. It was the knowledge of his own helplessness and futility, however, which unsettled Robert Pearson. He could not bring himself to accept unsettledness as part of his suffering and he sought to use his letters as a way of articulating and exercising what remained of his agency over his troubled sense of self.

The key letter that pertains to Robert Pearson’s case reads as follows:

For Mr Stephen Garnet Over Seer Kirkby Lonsdale Westmoreland

Whitehaven

October the 3d 1813

Mr Garnet,

I am much under the Nessesity of writing to you and in great want of all Kind of Nesecerys I have Nothing Neither to keep me Warm nor yeat Clean and Mr Gilson does not wish me to do aney thing of that kind without orders from you and it is Very Little wearing apparel that I have Even gott so that I am inirley out of all sorts of mind so I desire you will Either send or other wise Write to Mr Gilson and Impower him to Act in the same

I am Yours Robt Pearson⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ KLRO WPR19-7-6-6-3, letter, 4 February, 1813.

³⁹⁹ Widowhood is presumed as he made no mention of a wife and had at least one adult child.

⁴⁰⁰ KLRO WPR19-7-6-6-17a,b, letter, 3 October 1813.

While there is enough in these words to elucidate the Cumulative Troubles typology, it is necessary to consider the context of this letter and how Pearson had reached this lowly point. This was the fifth of six surviving letters relevant to his personal case and the last written by him before he died.⁴⁰¹ The first came at an unspecified time in 1809 and adds little to his case beyond that trouble with the poor law authorities was a pivot point to distress. To Robert's mind, they had been '2 weeks past the time' for sending his 'Pention', which he warned: 'dos very Badley for me'.⁴⁰² Beyond this, and the fact it shows he was a capable of writing a conventional request, Pearson's first letter adds little for understanding his unsettledness. The second letter was signed by the advocate George Gibson. He wrote compellingly on behalf of Pearson, and in the process, revealed more about some of the practicalities of being Robert than the man himself managed to convey. It transpired Robert was:

a very poor and feeble old man 81 years of age there is no removing him ... and it would be a wild Scheme to do it.⁴⁰³

The advocate Gibson continued, outlining how 'he [Robert] would be content with 3/P. week', and added, how: 'he is badly off for Shirts not having more than two these 4 years'. The appeal ended with Gibson reiterating his 'pleasure' to try help the man for whom: 'Old age and poverty press heavy upon him'. This account corroborates Robert's own previous depiction of himself and shows that his contemporaries thought he was a worthy recipient of relief, suggests that he had previously been given relief, and that he retained support for future relief.

The next two letters were by Robert Pearson himself and came within a month of one another. The first, on 15 August 1809, described how: 'I am in great want of Cloths'.⁴⁰⁴ He proceeded to tell the Overseer 'not to delay sending my Pention' warning them that a 'Magestrate' would otherwise 'give me an order'. He concluded resentfully, adding: 'do not fail in sending it [the pension]' and 'besids it Costs me 1s 4. Eath time'. The last words were especially unusual and formed a complaint at the basic administrative costs of the poor law. Pearson seemed rattled; with his clothing being acutely problematic. His frustration and

⁴⁰¹ The 'personal' is key because, as we shall see, his son John also mentioned his father in his own letters to the parish.

⁴⁰² KLRO WPR19-7-6-2-8a,b, letter, dated only 1809.

⁴⁰³ KLRO WPR19-7-6-4-29a,b, letter, undated.

⁴⁰⁴ KLRO WPR19-7-6-2-25a,b, letter, 15 August 1809.

anxiety led him to write a blunt letter which, although it did not cross the boundaries of acceptability, was nevertheless not a letter likely to be viewed sympathetically. But Pearson had shown a keen awareness of the negotiatory process involved with poor relief. The next letter was in the same vein, and was sent a month later, on 28 September 1809. In it, he begrudged: ‘the Necessity of writing to you again for Cloathing’.⁴⁰⁵ His threats about the ‘Magistrate’ were not maintained as he struck a different more defeated tone, admitting: ‘I am quite Naked’. ‘You must send more suport’, he went on, ending morosely: ‘I am not able to earn aney thing to help it so I need not say aney more about it’. By 1809 he and his advocate, Gibson, had revealed Robert to be a poor and helpless man, unable to work, find adequate clothing, or even ensure his pension arrived when he needed it. These were all pivot points to distress but underlying this was a greater sense of lost dignity. Pearson would, as we have already seen, write again in 1813 on similar themes and was clearly Cumulatively Troubled by then. However, there is a final letter to consider before one can fully appreciate the dynamics of Pearson’s self-defined unsettledness.

Gibson was the last to write concerning the fate of Robert Pearson, and on 24 March 1814, recorded how: ‘R. Pearsons son came to tell me he was dead’.⁴⁰⁶ For his part, Gibson made no further mention of Robert, and instead ‘immediately’ concerned himself with ensuring the remaining Pearson family who ‘are very poor’ obtained some monetary support. It was Robert’s son, John Pearson, who found his deceased father. John’s introduction at the end of Robert’s narrative of decline is significant because, preceding the death itself, he may have been able and even expected to help his father with his material needs. But John’s personal letters to the Overseer intimate that the pressures of pauper living for himself and the unsettledness it could cause.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ KLRO WPR19-7-6-2-30a,b, letter, 25 September 1809.

⁴⁰⁶ KLRO WPR19-7-6-7-3a,b, letter, 24 March 1814.

⁴⁰⁷ The dimensions of which, will be covered in greater detail below. Here is it worth noting that twenty-one letters concerning John Pearson’s applications for poor relief - between January 1812 to December 1823 – survive, and detail John Pearson’s interactions with the parish and his experiences with unsettledness. Four were written while Robert Pearson lived; although only one mentioned him directly, and even this was in passing: ‘I John Pearson the son of Robert’. KLRO WPR19-7-6-5-1a,b, 25 January 1812. For all 21 letters, see KLRO WPR19-7-6-5-2a,b, letter, 25 Jan 1812. KLRO WPR19-7-6-6-3, letter, 16 February 1812. KLRO WPR19-7-6-6-10a,b, letter, 4 February 1813. KLRO WPR19-7-6-9-12, letter, 25 April 1813. KLRO WPR19-7-6-11-29, letter, 20 October 1816. KLRO WPR19-7-6-11-33, letter, 23 October 1818. KLRO WPR19-7-6-11-38, letter, 29 November 1818. KLRO WPR19-7-6-12-31a,b, letter, 13 December 1818. KLRO WPR19-7-6-13-19, letter, 1 December 1819. KLRO WPR19-7-6-14-1a,b, letter, 3 August 1820. KLRO WPR19-7-6-15-7, letter, 4 January 1821. KLRO WPR19-7-6-14-39a,b, letter, 2 May 1821. KLRO WPR19-7-6-15-34a,b, letter, 31 October 1821. KLRO WPR19-7-6-16-14a,b, letter, 30 October 1822. KLRO WPR19-7-6-16-15, letter, 25 February 1823. KLRO WPR19-7-6-16-21a,b, letter, 26 February 1823. KLRO WPR19-7-6-16-59a,b, letter, 21 March 1823.

Staying with his father for now, Robert Pearson's feelings regarding his descent into unsettledness was preserved in his last letter to the Overseers on 3 October 1813, as the Overseers were compelled to hear his thoughts one last time. Robert was 'in great want of all Kind of Nesecerys'. Although he consciously intended to address his material difficulties through this effort, he instigated a despairing reflection upon his unsettling Cumulative Troubles. Robert had to turn to the Overseers rather than his son because John was unable to share in the burden of his care, believing his family duties extended exclusively to his wife who was 'lying Bad' and the 'three helpless Childer which I am not able to suport'.⁴⁰⁸ The Overseer was Robert's only option. Hence, he informed them: 'I have Nothing Neither to keep me Warm nor yeat Clean'. It was humiliating to have to request clothes again, having done so before in 1809. Within this request thus resided the definable sense that the clothes previously granted had worn out and both parties had almost expected, at the time, that he would never again ask for more – most likely, because he would have died. The supplicatory nature of Robert's tone stemmed not from a hope that his situation could drastically be improved. The realities of his experiences had proved this to be impossible. But the tone of his words showed he needed to find someone who believed he was worth trying to help. A crisis of dignity thus belied Pearson's request for clothing as he went on to add: 'it is Very Little wearing apparel that I have Even gott'. This fixation with clothing, might, on the surface, reflect that he could work within the accepted standards of pauper letter requests. However, he neglected to mention either his age or work status which would have been equally and additionally effective at securing relief. One is left with the sense that Robert spoke of clothing because it offered the best opportunity through which he could emote to the Overseer. The irony was that his problem with clothing was a legitimate reason to write a request and it was impossible to refute that he needed new clothes. Yet, for all that Pearson tried his best to go through the motions of writing a standard request, the effects of unsettledness that were reinforced through the symbolism of his continued need for clothing, burst forth into his letter.

'I am inirley out of all sorts of mind', Robert went on to write, giving rhetorical shape and emotive form to his move along the spectrum of unsettledness. His troubles had cumulated to

KLRO WPR19-7-6-16-58a,b, letter, 11 May 1823. KLRO WPR19-7-6-17-9a,b, letter, 11 December 1823. KLRO WPR19-7-6-17-21. 28, letter, February 1824.

⁴⁰⁸ KLRO WPR19-7-6-6-3, letter, 4 February 1813.

this point of emotional explosion. However, his words had a contradictory quality to them for as much as he decried his lack of control over himself, in writing about it Robert demonstrated he still retained some control. His letter acted as a simultaneous exploration and rebuke to his own sense of unsettledness. Self-pity underpinned this process as Robert used his letter to pass the blame for his struggles onto those who had neglected to help. To this end, he finished by telling the Overseer: 'I desire you will Either send or other wise Write to Mr Gilson and Impower him to Act'. Ordinarily one might read this as an effective threat made by the pauper to ensure the Overseer gave them relief. But Robert Pearson's case is the exception. This was a man who struggled even to 'Impower' himself. If he truly retained the wherewithal to impel Gibson to help him he would doubtless have done so. Far from showing his strength, Robert highlighted his weakness. The responsibility for his decline into Cumulative Troubles was foisted onto those who failed to help him. For his part, Robert seemed to anticipate his request would fail. Yet he was compelled to write regardless of this fear; the forces of unsettledness had driven him on. Then again, Robert proved able to exploit the functions of pauper letter writing to grant himself the freedom to say what he liked. The tragedy was that all Robert was in position to do was to write about his unsettledness and critique the role of the poor law in his suffering.

As a workless man, Robert Pearson, unlike Ann Rhodes, was not able to consistently rely on the help of his family, advocates, or even much sympathy from the Overseers.⁴⁰⁹ His son, John Pearson, would one day become unsettled too, decrying how: 'I think I am born to Crisis and hard fortune', which led him to 'take serous thought of my hard fortune and it trouble me'.⁴¹⁰ The difference between Robert and John was that Robert, the father, was at a later stage in the pauper life-cycle and free to brood upon how his troubles had built over time. It was not the case that only the 'old and feeble' like Robert Pearson could be in the Cumulative category, but simply that they fitted more smoothly into it as the catalyst of their writing was their grudging acceptance of their lost agency relative to what it had once been. John Pearson, meanwhile, never quite fell into Cumulative Troubles because of his persistent belief in his capacity to work and to provide for his family. As the case of Robert Pearson illuminates, the letters of the Cumulatively Troubled served as their authors' last strangled cry of agency from paupers who feared that perpetual poverty had stolen it away from them,

⁴⁰⁹ For more on men without work and unsettledness, see Chapter Three – Status-stress: 95-132.

⁴¹⁰ KLRO WPR19-7-6-15-34a,b, letter, 30 October, 1822.

Cumulative Troubles

leaving them with nothing but unsettled thoughts and taunting memories of a life lived and steadily lost.

Conclusion

The experiences of the Cumulatively Troubled cohered closely to the typical pains and grievances described in the letters of paupers to their Overseers, yet the effects of their unsettledness led them to believe their suffering was special. The accounts of the Cumulatively Troubled were not shocking to contemporaries as they added an emotive twist to the familiar pauper tale of decline.⁴¹¹ The heavy presence of advocates amongst these cases supports this assessment, with their role adding new insight into what it was acceptable to describe and how to negotiate with the Overseers. Yet the most telling aspect of the letters of the Cumulatively Troubled was how, in their extreme moments of distress, they relied upon their own hand to describe the dimensions it was to be unsettled. The determination of the Cumulatively Troubled to have their own voices be heard is especially useful for historians. Their emotional openness means these letters are the most accessible cases to interpret, especially as these unsettled paupers wrote primarily about their decline and are, notably, missing from the histories of madness and emotions.

While there was a relative gender parity with respect to the incidences of Cumulative Troubles, the cases of Ann Rhodes and Robert Pearson and others like them, intimate how gender could shape the experiences of how a Cumulatively Troubled pauper experienced their unsettledness. Unlike with Status-stress, there was no special regional dynamic to this experience. In fact, a defining theme of Cumulative Troubles is how it occurred across the country. Regional differences had little obvious impact upon the rate of incidences as the causes and proffered solutions for this unsettled experience could be found in every parish. However, it is significant that this is a typology that includes more female cases of unsettledness than males. When taking to account the argument made in Chapter Four – Compromised Identity, there is a logical reason for why there are more female cases: as women had more identity markers to define themselves by, they had more ways to feel overwhelmed and fall into Cumulative Troubles. The impact of a pauper's decline coupled

⁴¹¹ For more on the normative life-cycle experiences as described in pauper letters, see King, Steven. "Stop This Overwhelming Torment of Destiny": Negotiating Financial Aid at Times of Sickness Under the English Old Poor Law, 1800-1840." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 79, 2 (2005): 228-60; -- *Sickness, Medical Welfare and the English Poor 1750-1834*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018; Pearson, Jane. "Labor and Sorrow": The Living Conditions of the Elderly Residents of Bocking, Essex, 1793-1807." In S. Ottaway, L. Botelho and K. Kitteridge (eds). *Power and Poverty: Old Age in the Pre-Industrial Past*. Westport: Greenwood, 2002: 125-42; and Sokoll, Thomas. "The Household Position of Elderly Widows in Poverty: Evidence from Two English Communities in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth centuries." In J. Henderson and R. Wall (eds). *Poor Women and Children in the European Past*. London: Routledge, 1994: 207-24.

with their unsettledness could lead to a shared despair within families, as in the case of Pearson and, especially, Rhodes.

The simplicity of the causes and nature of suffering in Cumulatively Troubled cases mean this typology can be viewed as a banner for the other unsettled typologies. It was possible, for instance, to see a Laid-low person eventually become Cumulatively Troubled; and the same may be said for those with Status-stress and Compromised Identities. However, it is important to respect the peculiarities associated with Cumulative Troubles as those who experienced the unsettling effects wrote of various themes and experiences, hitherto undocumented by historians, and detailed here for the first time.

The Cumulatively Troubled came to see their unsettledness through writing, rather than using writing as a way to address already recognised unsettledness. Their testimonies lacked the same certainties regarding the origins of the suffering that are found within the cases of the Laid-low, Status-stressed, and Compromised Identity. Instead, the style of their letters was more openly emotional and exploratory as they sought both answers and solutions for their suffering. This distinctive nuance of the Cumulative Troubles typology owes much to differing levels of faith amongst the unsettled in the capacities of the Old Poor Law. For instance, while the Laid-low felt a sudden need to rely upon it and seek help, the Cumulatively Troubled had, over time, come to accept their reliance upon it. Hence, when they found themselves despairing (as they had long ago come to terms with what they hoped would be the full extent of their own inadequacies), initially it felt simpler to wonder aloud whether it was the system that was failing them rather than themselves. Their letters were therefore a rendering of this process and the sad realisation that although the machinations of the poor law may have exacerbated their troubles, the unsettledness came from within the Cumulatively Troubled themselves. It was this crisis of dignity borne out of unwilling and incidental self-awareness which shaped the despair of the Cumulatively Troubled.

Underpinning crises of dignity was the self-sustaining need of the Cumulatively Troubled to believe that their unsettled condition was not permanent. Yet such hope inevitably clashed with the material realities of their conditions. While the Laid-low, Status-stressed, and Compromised Identity sufferers were inspired to write due to their self-sustaining determination that their fall into unsettledness would be temporary and that the Overseers must aid them to this end, the Cumulatively Troubled lacked this same self-preserving conviction. Instead, their fear was that living had become no more than an increasingly

helpless decline that might, at best, be managed with assistance from the Overseers. This process of increasing disillusionment could span years and the unsettling feelings parasitically grew with each need to write to rectify some new painful indignity. The letters of the Cumulatively Troubled thus had a more supplicatory tone as they needed the Overseers (and those who advocated on their behalf) to affirm, through securing them relief, that they could and would be worth saving. It was not the case that the Cumulatively Troubled necessarily wanted to wallow in unsettling poverty; but they had become so acquainted with suffering that it became difficult to envisage a way back to their former settled life. This gloomy outlook was not typically shared by the Laid-low, Status-stress, and Compromised paupers.

In the thesis Introduction the argument was presented that the pauper self was fluid, fragile, and shallow. The experiences of this group of unsettled actors shows clearly that these characteristics were fundamentally understood by the paupers themselves and they were sufficiently self-aware to the degree that they generated compensatory emotional mechanisms in order to defend their senses of self, even as they traversed the spectrum of unsettledness. The loss of control over their senses of self meant the Cumulatively Troubled tried to deflect the responsibility for the onset of their unsettledness away from themselves and implicitly onto the means and functions of the early nineteenth-century poor law and the society it operated within. Unlike the Laid-low, Status-stressed, Compromised, and Dying, the Cumulatively Troubled learned through bitter experience not to expect an end to their unsettledness, even if relief was granted. The best they could hope was for sympathy and some compensatory allowance for their suffering. The paradox the Cumulatively Troubled faced was whatever relief was given could not provide a reversal of their misfortune(s) because what they truly faced and what they decried, was pauper living and the limited practical and mediatory role the poor law had in preserving and protecting them. That is not to say each affected contemporary wrote coherent critiques; rather, each one sensed and exhibited an essential disquiet in how their treatment (or lack thereof), had created the conditions for them to languish in unsettledness. It was easier for the Cumulatively Troubled implicitly to blame the Overseers because, as paupers, they already bore the significant burden of their poverty and its accompanying sense of powerlessness.

The irony exists that insofar that the Cumulatively Troubled attempted to blame their unsettledness on matters out of their control, they behaved in much the same way as those in all the other typologies found in this thesis. But their motivation and way of expressing this

blame intimates a feedback loop specific to this typology: the unsettledness the Cumulatively Troubled brought to their writing meant their narration of their perceived decline became self-fulfilling. Though they had little choice but to write to the Overseer for help, in doing so, the Cumulatively Troubled often reinforced to themselves how helpless they were. They had wanted to dismiss the continued existence of unsettledness within themselves, but they struggled to believe the circumstances that inspired this could ever be effectively changed. The more they wrote, the more their troubles accumulated. This worked on two fronts: first came the initial life-cycle troubles of pauperism that initiated the need to write; second, came the problems associated with writing to the Overseer and having confirmed how little could be changed. By writing for relief, the Cumulatively Troubled faced the cruel irony of highlighting to themselves their own crippled sense of self and, by corollary, could deprive themselves the means to the recovery they so desperately coveted.

With their loss of agency clear for them to see, often the Cumulatively Troubled wallowed in honest and strategic self-pity. Consequently, the consistent presence of advocates writing on behalf of these paupers becomes significant as they were able to act as mediators between the unsettled pauper and their parish. Such willingness to help the Cumulatively Troubled indicates that their complaints regarding the suffering brought about by the grind of the pauper life-cycle were not unusual amongst the wider pauper population and evoked sympathy. In this way, the letters found in this typology were the most accessible and relatable for their contemporaries. Yet it would be a mistake to consider such testimonies as having been normal. In fact, the advocates' willingness to try to help the Cumulatively Troubled serves to highlight how they were, in some ways, the most in need of the unsettled paupers studied in this thesis.

While the unsettled featured in the other chapters became unsettled by sudden shocking events, traumas, or an immediate sense of their impending death, the Cumulatively Troubled as a collective took what was a relatively typical if unfortunate fact of pauper living, and through the effects of unsettledness, singled themselves out as special, uniquely pained and vulnerable. This created a specific need for outside intervention which, even when it was forthcoming, could not solve the underlying problem: unsettledness. While this outcome was the same amongst each unsettledness typology, the journey followed by the Cumulatively Troubled was very different and this, again, owed to the impact of the advocates' substantial role in constructing their stories. In the cases of the Laid-low, Status-stressed, Compromised Identity, and Dying the unsettled actor used the opportunity to write as a chance to write

away their unsettledness. In contrast, the suggestion is that by dint of their condition, the Cumulatively Troubled did not believe recovery was possible. The advocates intervened here because they, conversely, thought it was possible as they had seen the material circumstances cited by the Cumulatively Troubled as unremarkable, and was in fact, precisely what the poor law existed to address.

The interpretive nuances that the Cumulative Troubles framework provides allows historians to think not only in terms of unsettledness as a momentary event, but to consider the construction of emotions over a (documented) life. This has clear implications for histories of emotion which have generally focused upon one form of emotional expression. The study of the unsettled allows a new style of study, and again, one targeted at the social group that such studies have failed to reach: the poor. Furthermore, thinking in terms of the Cumulatively Troubled allows one to examine a type of person who may, at a different point in their lives, have ended up in an asylum. But a study constructed in the manner propounded by the analysis within this chapter enables one to think in terms of movement along a spectrum and consider the journey to unsettledness, and perhaps even madness, endured by contemporaries. While studies of madness have failed to capture the voice of the mad, studies of the Cumulatively Troubled allow one to hear contemporaries' voices both in terms of their settled and unsettled states of mind. This notion of movement along a spectrum dictated by the pauper themselves and described and shaped by the act of writing to the Overseer is encapsulated in the testimonies of the Cumulatively Troubled such as Anne Baker, Ann Rhodes and Robert Pearson. However, for all their worth, the letters of the Cumulatively Troubled only hint at the end of their unsettling stories. There is a final typology to which this thesis now turns in which the affected contemporaries wrote their own conclusions to their stories as they reflected upon their lives and how, in the midst of their poverty, they understood their movement along the spectrum into unsettledness – these were the unsettled Dying.

Death

There is a considerable literature on death, dying, and the spectre of death on the imagination which acts as background to this chapter.⁴¹² However three essential problems exist within this historiography when related to the experiences of dying paupers who used their letters to articulate their unsettled minds. First, is the complication that apart from generalised statistics regarding death rates, the focus of historians has overwhelmingly been directed toward the fate of the middling sorts.⁴¹³ Second, insofar as attention has been paid to links between death and mental aberration, it has almost exclusively focused upon suicide and deaths in the asylum.⁴¹⁴ More to the point, neither of these critical perspectives can shed any significant light upon the experiences and fear of death in relation to unsettledness amongst the poor and dependent poor population. Third, historians have favoured looking at the event of death rather than the process of dying.⁴¹⁵ The combination of these problems means that while key themes of experiences have been identified – including the issues of Christian resignation, self-awareness, sense of martyrdom, and the need for closure expressed by those who were dying – the historiography regarding these issues has nevertheless been fractured and the

⁴¹² Gittings, Clare. *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England*. London: Routledge, 1984; Houlbrooke, Ralph. *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*. London: Routledge, 1989; Litten, Jullian. *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral since 1450*. London: Routledge, 1991; Jupp, Peter and Howarth, Glennys (eds). *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997; Strange, Julie Marie. “‘She Cried a Very Little’: Death, Grief and Mourning in Working-Class Culture c. 1880–1914.” *Social History* XXVII, 2 (2002): 143–61. Hurren, Elizabeth. *Dying for Victorian Medicine: English Anatomy and its Trade in the Dead Poor, 1832 to 1929*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012; -- “‘Abnormalities and Deformities’: The Dissection and Interment of the Insane Poor, 1832-1929.’ *History of Psychiatry* 23, 1 (2012): 65-77; --“Other Spaces” for the Dangerous Dead of Provincial England, c. 1752-1832.’ *History* 103, 354 (2018): 27-59.

⁴¹³ Hurren and King broke the trend with their analysis of pauper burials, see Hurren, Elizabeth and Steven King. “‘Begging for a Burial’: Form, Function and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Pauper Burial.” *Social History* 30, 3 (2005): 321-41.

⁴¹⁴ Moreover, as Barbara Gates noted: ‘[O]pen discussion of suicide was unusual except in the case of the impoverished, the ill-famed, or the self-sacrificial.’ See Gates, Barbara. *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989: p. xv. On suicide, see Anderson, Olive. *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; and Bailey, Victor. *This Rash Act’: Suicide Across the Life Cycle in the Victorian City*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. On death in asylums, refer to Andrews, Jonathan. “Case Notes, Case Histories, and the Patient’s Experience of Insanity at Gartnavel Royal Asylum, Glasgow, in the Nineteenth Century.” *Social History of Medicine* 11, 2 (1998): 255-81 and Melling, Joseph and Forsythe, Bill. *The Politics of Madness: The State, Insanity and Society in England, 1845–1914*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

⁴¹⁵ For example, Laurence, Anne. “Godly Grief: Individual Responses to Death in Seventeenth-Century Britain.” In Houlbrooke, Ralph (ed.) *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*. London: Routledge, 1989: 62-76; Houlbrooke, Ralph. *Death, Religion and Family in England 1480-1750*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; and Vaught, Jennifer (ed). *Grief and Gender, 700-1700*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003.

ensuing interplay left unexplored. By analysing the letters of self-described and self-identified dying paupers, we can explore the central tendencies of the language and rhetoric they used to define their unsettled experiences, with a particular critical emphasis given to the multi-faceted ways they used religious language to secure themselves a settled end.⁴¹⁶

‘Death I hope will release me from all my troubles’, wrote Jane Buckeridge to her Overseer in 1827. She articulated the impact of her sense of lost dignity as she came to accept her own mortality as a means of escaping the effects of her unsettledness. And her voice was not a lone lament amongst her contemporaries who lived and died under the last embers of the Old Poor Law. This chapter will demonstrate how the letters from Jane Buckeridge, Hannah Beck, Joseph Himsworth, and Maria Tarrant (amongst others) can reveal highly personal yet definably similar experiences of being unsettled by the process of death. The analysis begins with Buckeridge because her case proves emblematic of the experiences of many elderly widowed women who faced dying alone and came to welcome death as a release from their troubles. Himsworth’s case will introduce how religious rhetoric was deployed by the those on the verge of death in a manner amenable to the Overseers, and yet, couched in a way that allowed the unsettled Dying to reflect upon their crisis of dignity. This emotional trauma, it will be shown, had a male dimension in the way paupers such as Himsworth relied specifically upon the language of work to express themselves. Finally, Maria Tarrant’s correspondence is showcased as a counter-point to many of the experiences of other unsettled paupers detailed in this thesis as it provides an example of how an unsettled paupers’ state of mind was actively improved through writing to the Overseer.

As this chapter will show, the greatest feature of the Dying unsettled typology was not death itself, but how the affected tried to die on their own emotional terms, fighting to assert their agency over their unsettled sense of self through their letters.⁴¹⁷ Alongside this struggle lay another with the machinations of the Old Poor Law: in a few cases the affected would blame the law and its operatives, the Overseers, as the cause of their unsettledness; while in others the effects of the law could compound the unsettling difficulties attached to their poverty.

⁴¹⁶ This is an unfashionable direction to take, but one proven to be an effective approach for exploring the emotional and spiritual experiences of contemporaries’ medical perceptions and treatments. See Newton, Hannah. *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580-1770*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; Newton, Hannah. “‘Rapt Up With Joy’: Children’s Emotional Responses to Death in Early Modern England.” In K. Barclay, K. Reynolds and C. Rawnsley (eds). *Death, Emotion and Childhood in Premodern Europe*. London: Palgrave, 2016: 87-107; Newton, Hannah. *Misery to Mirth: Recovery from Illness in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁴¹⁷ For more on how the poor understood the act of dying and the ‘terrifying’ spectacle of having a pauper funeral, see Laqueur, Thomas. “Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals.” *Representations* 1, 1 (1983): 109–31.

Death

There were twenty-four individual cases of paupers befitting the Death typology of unsettledness.⁴¹⁸ Nine of the cases involved males and fifteen regarded females.⁴¹⁹ Of the original twenty-four cases, five contain the input of an advocate within the individual correspondence. Table 6.1 below illustrates the quantitative and regional break down of the figures:

Place	Male	Female	Advocate(s)	Total
Berkshire	2	2	0	4
Cumbria	1	2	0	3
Gloucestershire	2	2	3	4
Gwent	0	1	0	1
Hampshire	0	0	0	0
Oxford	0	1	0	1
Surrey	1	1	1	2
East Sussex	0	4	1	4
West Sussex	0	2	0	2
East Yorkshire	1	0	0	1
West Yorkshire	2	0	0	2
Total	9	15	5	24

Table 6.1 – Death Cases.

Of the unsettled cases examined in this thesis, the Death cases comprise just over 8 per cent of the documented experiences. This is a relatively low figure when compared with the other typologies. This may be understood with further reference to the table which highlights two

⁴¹⁸ This figure is taken from the 1449 cases examined, of which 292 are unsettled. For more detail, see: Introduction: 17.

⁴¹⁹ Family cases are those in which there is a shared expression and experience of unsettledness. For instance, when a husband and wife sign a letter together and it is indistinguishable whose hand wrote it.

significant features that will provoke lengthy discussion throughout this chapter.⁴²⁰ First, is a gender disparity in the rate of incidences of the experience of dying with unsettledness - there was almost double the amount of women compared to men.⁴²¹ Second, there were few discernible regional variations as to how this form of unsettledness was recorded.⁴²² We can witness how these themes came about and how they affected those who experienced unsettledness due to their encroaching death in the testimonies of Jane Buckeridge and others who, like her, used their pauper letters to try to cope with the unsettling effects of dying in poverty.⁴²³ It is to the words of the unsettled Dying that this analysis now turns to facilitate the progression of a historical discourse upon dying paupers that has remained unchanged since the work of Hurren and King.⁴²⁴

Jane Buckeridge

Confined to Lambeth Workhouse on 22 February 1827, Jane Buckeridge could be found alone and dying slowly as she wrote to her home parish in Pangbourne, Berkshire, to seek to restore a little of her shattered dignity. Her letter captured the process of dying and the unsettling impact it could have:

London 22nd Feb 1827

Sir

I beg to be excused for troubling you but old age and the Inclemency of the wether as compeled me to do it. I should be verry thankfull if the Gentlemen Overseers will be kind enough to allow me a little Money to Purches some Extra Covering for my Bed for the wether is so severe I am nither warm night nor day God knows I shall not trouble you long for any thing, as I am confined to the house and Death I hope will soon release me from all trouble, I have no one to help me to any thing but my son Edward. I hope Gentlemen you will not deny

⁴²⁰ 24 of 292 unsettled cases. (8.2%).

⁴²¹ Albeit admittedly from a relatively small sample. As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, gender could play an influential role in how people experienced certain types of unsettledness. However, these numbers give little sense of the experience itself.

⁴²² That is not to say that there were not regional factors that affected people, but like Status-stress there is little clear link between a particular region and the onset of this particular typology of unsettledness.

⁴²³ The people have been selected as case studies because each individual expressed their unsettledness in ways that capture defining themes and principles of the death typology. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to imply that the cases cover it completely. At best they offer a representative sense of what many unsettled paupers felt as they faced death.

⁴²⁴ See Hurren & King, "Begging for a Burial."

Death

me this small favour as it is the last I shall ask of you. Gentlemen if you consent to allow me any thing I should take it as a particular favour and be verry thankfull for they same
Gentlemen if you are kind enough to allow me any thing I should be oblidge to you to be so kind as to send an Order for me to receive it at Lambeth Workhouse

Your very Humble servant

Jane Buckeridge⁴²⁵

Buckeridge's letter intimated the material and emotional ills she endured while 'confined to the house'. While many of her widowed contemporaries in the workhouses across the nation would have found themselves in similar situations, Buckeridge was one of a significant few that was self-identifiably unsettled and used letters to confront those feelings.⁴²⁶ Where once, ten years previously, she had been capable of writing to the Overseer to correct a payment to her and bemoan her three sons' lack of employment, by 1827 she was 'old' and with one son unable to help.⁴²⁷ Nor was there a husband to speak of. Left isolated, she could not know that there were other elderly, lonely women like her. Elizabeth Hawkes of Surrey was similarly beleaguered with her husband having 'dide in the Workehouse' and she 'so very Bad in body and mynd'.⁴²⁸ Hannah Beck, meanwhile, was moved to write to her parish of St. Johns, Lewes, declaring:

To the Minister & Churchwardens of the Parish of St. Johns, Lewes. 1815

Gentlemen,

I venture most respectfully to address you, and to implore your benevolent assistance on my behalf who am a Poor Old decrepid Widow of 84. I lately received a note from Mr Bartlett, stating that no further relief would be paid to me, but that I might return to the Poorhouse. Will you condescend to use your benevolent influence to prevent my being compelled to do so. I wish to finish the few remaining days of my life under the care of my daughter. The cup

⁴²⁵ BRO 6 D/P 91/18/4/2, letter, 22 February 1827.

⁴²⁶ For more on the lives of widows see in particular: Cavallo, Sandra and Lyndan Warner (eds). *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Harlow: Longman, 1999; Siena, Kevin. *Venereal Disease, Hospitals and the Urban Poor: London's 'Foul Wards', 1600-1800*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004. Also: Moring, Beatrice and Richard Wall. *Widows in European Economy and Society, 1600-1920*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017; Ottoway, Susannah. *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

⁴²⁷ BRO 2 DP 91/18/3, letter, 20 March 1817.

⁴²⁸ SRO 1505-Box37-F1-29a-,b, letter, dated only 1815.

Death

of poverty is bitter enough at all times but this proposal adds greatly to my affliction If you can prevent my being deprived of the weekly relief 2s/6d which I have hitherto received my heart will be ever grateful for your kindness.

I am, Gentlemen, Your Most humble Servant

Hannah Beck⁴²⁹

In essence, Beck feared experiencing the same fate as Jane Buckeridge. These three women and others like them, who were hit by the later stages of the early-nineteenth century life-cycle and left facing their old-age, widowhood, and the prospect of the workhouse, were ultimately unsettled by this process of dying.⁴³⁰ The workhouse occupied a special place in the minds some dying unsettled paupers as they equated being in a workhouse with a loss of their dignity. This was a fear shared by Buckeridge, Hawkes, and Beck, but it did not necessarily appear in the same form amongst other unsettled typologies because the definition of a workhouse in the dying years of the Old Poor Law was, as Timothy Hitchcock and King have shown, profoundly difficult to define.⁴³¹ The work conducted by King, Samantha Shave and, especially, Alannah Tomkins, demonstrated that some people had a positive experience of workhouses (when narrowly defined as workhouses in this context).⁴³² It is likely that when it came to the experiences of those paupers already experiencing mental instability, they were especially, perhaps uniquely, affected by questions around the workhouse and their sense of self.

‘God knows I shall not trouble you long’, continued Buckeridge as she used the rhetoric of death to cast herself the victim of a cruel unsettled fate from which death itself was her only escape. While previous chapters emphasised the ways religion was used as a rhetorical vehicle by various unsettled types, the unsettled Dying had particularly intense and

⁴²⁹ ESRO PAR 412-35-74a,b, letter, 26 March 1824.

⁴³⁰ For more on the life cycle, Thane, Pat. *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000: 21-4; Thane, Pat. “Social Histories of Old Age and Ageing.” *Journal of Social History* 37, 1, Special Issue (2003): 93-111.

⁴³¹ See Hitchcock, Timothy. “The English Workhouse: A Study in Institutional Poor Relief in Selected Countries, 1696-1750.” Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Oxford, 1985; King, Steven. “Poverty, Medicine, and the Workhouse in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: An Afterword.” In J. Reinarz, & L. Schwarz (eds.) *Medicine in the Workhouse*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013: 228-252.

⁴³² King, “Poverty, Medicine, and the Workhouse”; Shave, Samantha. *Pauper Policies: Poor Law Practice in England 1780-1850*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017; Tomkins, Alannah. “Workhouse Medical Care from Working-Class Autobiographies, 1750-1834.” In J. Reinarz, & L. Schwarz (eds.) *Medicine in the Workhouse*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013: 228-252.

Death

complicated ways of invoking God. Buckeridge presents an illuminative case, having connected her unsettledness to religion by capitalising both terms ‘God’ and ‘Death’ to highlight their significance. Yet more curious is the way she split the clauses of her sentences, the effect of which was to have religion act as a way of justifying her request for relief, hence: ‘God knows I shall not trouble you long’. Herein God was rendered essentially passive and tokenistic to her account. Death, meanwhile, was removed from the doctrinal auspices of religion where it normally resides in pauper letters, and instead defined as the agent of her situation. Crucially in this scenario she understood unsettledness to be her state of being. Death was the ‘release’ she sought from this state. Religion was not included in the key dialogue as the cure for her condition with Buckeridge having deployed religious rhetoric to demonstrate her religious conformity which was an important factor for the Overseers’ to judge which paupers were worthy for relief.⁴³³

Buckeridge’s case appears extraordinary and very different from what other historians looking at other evidence on dying have found.⁴³⁴ William Dunks’ account shows how and why:

Tunbridge Wells Hond Uncle

29 July, 1829

I have to Inform you of Death of my mother She Died yesterday morning wich Is a Happy Release that God have Tacken Her Out of Her misery as she Have kept He Bed ever since I Came Home From Lewis I shall Take It a favour If you will Lett my Uncle John Know of my Mothers Death as soon as you Can as she was a great sufferer and God have done Great things For her In Tacking her Out of her misery Now I am Left a Lone without a friend so speack to My Kind Respects to Mrs Carter

I remain your Dutiful Nephew

Wm Dunks⁴³⁵

While Buckeridge had sought to distance God and her release, Dunks’ letter followed a more orthodox line by equating his mother’s death and how it ‘God have Tacken Her Out of Her

⁴³³ For more on how the Overseers were influenced by notions of Christian paternalism see Fideler, Paul. *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England: The Old Poor Law Tradition*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006.

⁴³⁴ For instance, Steven King has identified religion as a key rhetorical tool particularity of the dying poor which this thesis does not. For more, see King, Steven. *Sickness, Medical Welfare and the English Poor, 1750-1834*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018: 220-48.

⁴³⁵ ESRO PAR 411-35-1-26, letter, 29 July 1829.

misery'. Here God is the agent and death the state, with no overt reference made to unsettledness, even if Dunks was 'without a friend'.

Citing God allowed both Buckeridge and Dunks to shift responsibility for their troubles which necessitated that they emote in their correspondence with the Overseer. In Dunks' case, in which he appears to have been charged with providing care for his mother, he greets her death as a mercy having seen her 'suffer'. Hence, he highlighted God's goodness and mercy. Doubtless Dunks believed there was mercy in his mother no longer having to suffer, but it was also a convenient thought as it enabled him to be without guilt regarding her death.⁴³⁶ The way Dunks ended his letters implied that the 'suffering' was not his mother's alone; the implication is that he had endured it too and wrote from a place of emotional exhaustion. His faith lets him believe that there was a reason for suffering and that he can move on, but only with the benevolence of God and the Overseer.

Buckeridge's display of religiosity, though deployed defensively, offered no such scope for emotional escape from the traumas of death. She cited God only once. The effect was to reduce her faith almost to a narrative trope, seemingly included more for the benefit of the Overseers who would look favourably upon displays of faith, than for her own peace of mind.⁴³⁷ Buckeridge chose or did not seem able to use the language of religion as a crux to reconcile her troubled sense of self. Strikingly, in the same moment she felt unable to rely upon herself she seemed unable to trust God; this is not a cause and effect of her unsettledness per se but symptomatic of her troubled sense of self. While Dunks was able to use his religious rhetoric to pacify his own stresses, Buckeridge was incapable of finding comfort. This difference can be explained in terms of how their letters came to be written: Dunks wrote retrospectively regarding his difficulties once he had taken back control of his emotions and been able – through religion – to rationalise his problems, enabling him to cope by clinging to the hope that his life would improve. Buckeridge, by contrast, wrote while aware of her conditions prior to dying and used letter writing to work through her present unsettled feelings. Writing left her emotionally desolate not so much because of the encroachment of her death, but because dying forced her to reflect upon the possibility of doing so without dignity. To prevent death without dignity, Buckeridge seems to have

⁴³⁶ This is not to say he is to blame, merely that in thinking of her mortality in spiritual terms he did not have to question his own role and find ways to blame himself. This is a rational mechanism of emotional self-defence.

⁴³⁷ See, Fideler. *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England*.

eschewed a dependence upon God, and instead focused solely on the material and immediate comforts the Overseer could provide.

The defining difference between Dunks and Buckeridge was not that he was religious and she was not. The key is that while Dunks was able to use his faith and the language of religion to orientate his muddled sense of self, Buckeridge was suffering a moment of such unsettledness that she could not. This distinction shows why Dunks should be read as a liminal case of unsettled mind while Buckeridge is a definitive example of the death typology. Yet both Buckeridge and Dunks were sufficiently emotionally moved by their conditions to break established custom and write of their emotions to the Overseer. Nor did they do so in the suicidal manner that historians have come to expect from people with mental troubles in this period. Dunks was comparatively fortunate because he was able to use the medium of letter writing and his religious rhetoric to cope. By contrast, the atypical expression of religiosity by Buckeridge belied her unsettledness.

Through explaining that this letter would be 'the last I shall ask', Buckeridge tried to assert the unique worthiness and quality of her request in terms the Overseers could justify to themselves; on a practical level they were not being bound to continual relief and on a spiritual/human level there was an incumbency to grant the wishes of lonely dying women whose costs to the Overseer were time limited (even if this later proved to be false). Nor was Buckeridge unique in this endeavour. The aforementioned Hannah Beck went to similar lengths in exploiting the language of pauperism, citing the 'bitter cup of poverty' to assert her special status as a dying pauper in order to address the self-identified problems of being unsettled.

For all of the unsettled Dying, writing a letter was in itself a release. They felt their privileged status as dying people enabled them to express themselves in an unmediated manner. Yet they still needed to be understood or face being ignored. The need for recognition meant Buckeridge and James would likely have tried to give a true rendition of their feelings. This led them to accept being momentarily unsettled in their letters on the condition that they could not be blamed for their plight and that doing so would allow them to recover.

Responsibility then fell upon the Overseers and their reaction to the respective letters of the Dying unsettled. The paupers featured here were willing for this to happen because they had nothing left and implicitly recognised the paradox of their existence: while dying itself may not have unsettled them, the need to die with their dignity intact highlighted their own lack of

agency over their lives. It was the possibility of dying without dignity that was truly unsettling.⁴³⁸

Buckeridge wrote to restore her sense of agency. If she did not receive help, she could then blame another (the Overseer) for her lowly position and be partially inculcated against the effects of finding herself unsettled. Alternatively, if relief was secured, Buckeridge had freed herself to die with the feeling that she had reaffirmed her agency thereby becoming more settled. Her personal need for emotional closure led Buckeridge to this point of teetering self-destruction, but the irony she and those like her enjoyed, was that they had nothing left to fear – they realised that the worst was already happening to them. As historians, we are left pondering the curiously unsustainable closure found in the testimony of Buckeridge, who, while undeniably unsettled the moment she penned her letter, was nevertheless hopeful and in the moment we find her writing to the Overseer, was enjoying a rare release. Jane Buckeridge represents the personification a particular style of Dying unsettledness found predominately amongst elderly widows, but there were other ways in which gender affected experiences and it is to these we now turn.

Joseph Himsworth

‘I hope you will excuse Me for My Days are almost consumed & vanished, away’, lamented Joseph Himsworth as he reluctantly came to terms with his reduced position as a man unable to work and began in earnest to resign himself to the inevitability of his death. Written from his adopted home in Millthrop, Cumbria, in 1824, to his home parish of Sandal Magna, West Yorkshire, his words detailed the now familiar grasping expectation held amongst the Dying unsettled that their Overseers hear, acknowledge and accept their errant expressions of distress due to the mitigating power of their precarious mortality. This characteristic of those residing in the death typology was dependent upon a self-awareness of their condition and a subsequent ability to use the form of letter writing as a way of working through the experience, and his words represent one of the finest examples.⁴³⁹ That said, the way Himsworth and other men like him defined their experiences was subtly different to the

⁴³⁸ Settled relief applicants would not inflict these thoughts upon themselves. They may have written to the Overseer for relief when in dire need but did so without creating a situation in which the Overseer’s response affected how they construed their sense of self. Additionally, see: Hurren & King. “Begging for a Burial.”

⁴³⁹ For context, see Scheer, Monique. “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion.” *History and Theory* 51, 4 (2012): 193-220.

women analysed previously, and within his testimony one reads an alternative perspective concerning the impact of gender and religion upon the experience of unsettled death:

Gentlemen &c. who attend Sandal Church Vestery, &c.

1824

I

Joseph Himsworth of Millthorp, do give you all, humble Thanks, for your Charity to Me.

But if I be that I cannot help Myself I shall be in Need of Something more. And I hope God will reward you all for your Charity and I know My Duty to God is to worship Him, truly. Every Day and Hour, so long as I shall live. (except I be asleep) but not to neglect My Business when I can work, but I commonly have got out of Bed, about 4 O Clock: and gets to Bed about 7. In Winter, and I commonly work all the Time that I am out Bed, and very hard. Yet I am never free'd from neither Pain nor Strife.

Yet I am willing to work very, hard at such Employ-ment as I can do yet I have more Work than I can do, but His fine work

As to My work a Millthorp, It is too tedious to express. For near ten years back. Which I haee done without any Wages. Viz. mending and repairing 2 small Buildings, & very, oft, to do or mend &c. My Garden to cultivate &c. & My Hous to order & clean. & a maney Things therein to mend & some to make. & my old Cloaths offen to mend. I have mended a Cart Road leading. From My House to Millthorp Town Well. Nearly. I believe ever since these Commons were taken in.

Gentlemen I hope you will excuse Me. For My Days are almost consumed & vanished, away⁴⁴⁰

Unlike the aforementioned widows, Himsworth omitted reference to his family and his anxieties were not bound to the spectre of the workhouse, but instead configured in the more immediate terms of his struggles with 'Pain' and 'Strife' but remained 'willing to work very, hard'. Himsworth equated his ability to work with his sense of self-worth. The women did not do this; and as was shown in Chapter Three – Status-stress, men were peculiarly affected by work as trigger to unsettledness. Yet the tone and contents of Himsworth's letter are far more representative of someone in the Death typology of unsettledness rather than Status-stress. Though he emphasised the importance of work Himsworth also underplayed its

⁴⁴⁰ WYRO WDP20-9-3-9-19, letter, dated only 1824. This is the only surviving pauper letter that pertains to the life of Joseph Himsworth.

influence describing how 'it is too tedious to express'. Work did not matter to him so much as the fact that its language enabled him to find a way to share his fears associated with dying. His story was of man exhausted by life and resigned to its end. As we have seen, Himsworth's letter reflected a crisis of dignity brought about by death itself: 'My Days are almost consumed & vanished, away'.

The nature of the Himsworth's compromised dignity can be understood in his cry that: 'I cannot help Myself I shall be in Need of Something more.' The 'Something' could be read as helping with financial assistance, work itself, or even just to find better clothes for him as he begrudged 'my old Cloaths'. The Overseer was in a position to help, but the message of Himsworth's letter is that they could address 'Something' it could not change the fundamentals of his fate.⁴⁴¹ Death unsettled him not because he was going to die but because it had made him aware of his own inability to sort these difficulties for himself. John Lumley of East Yorkshire experienced a similar crisis:

Hull Janry 5th - 1835

Mr Westoby,

Sir

I shall be much Oblig'd to you and the Gentlemen of this Committy to remit me my Quartly allowance of one pound Likewise 6 shillings over above as I am oblig'd to pay 6 shillings per Quarter For a Plase to Work Sir and I am afraid their is somthing worse coming to me I am afraid I am going to Loose the use of my left side and if that should be Case I do not now what will become of Me but I hope that I shall be able to hern a Little support Wile I have to stay in this World which I think will No [sic] be Long has I find myself Very Week

If the above can be Comply with will greatly oblige your Humble Serv^t

John Lumley⁴⁴²

⁴⁴¹ Asking for unspecified relief was normal amongst paupers, see King, *Writing the Lives*, 32-60. But asking for it here at the end of one's life had a powerful symbolism.

⁴⁴² EYRO PE1-702-128, letter, 5 January 1835.

In both Lumley's and Himsworth's accounts resolving the basic material necessities would be useful but doing so could not address their true causes of emotional disquiet. In Lumley's case his emotional distress was his growing disability: the shillings might help momentarily, but to him, they represented the wider failing of his body. Both men used the language of familiar material pauper poverty for the benefit of their own peace of mind. Their letters were knowing acknowledgements that their Overseers could not help but that they needed someone to hear their fears and pains and feel a little less alone (after all, neither man mentioned family or friends). As unsettled paupers, their choice to write to the Overseer was a perversely rational choice because who else could have more knowledge of poverty and death? Both Lumley, and especially Himsworth, resented their loss of control in their lives rather than the impending end of their lives. Yet, unlike the women analysed earlier, these men did not seek to shift responsibility or blame for their fates. Their words were riven with an acute sense of their own failings. Death for Lumley and Himsworth represented a release from the pains that their self-identified failings had come to symbolise.

The release sought by Himsworth can be understood through his sense of Christian resignation that 'I know My Duty to God'. Religion acted as his linguistic crux from which he tried to explain his situation. Unlike Beck and Buckeridge, his invocations of God were not fleeting and cursory, nor is it plausible to read them as his attempt to play to the needs of their Overseers. Instead, Himsworth's religious rhetoric seemed an earnest indulgence geared toward his own peace of mind as it added no practical or emotional substance to his claim.⁴⁴³ By contrast, Lumley entirely omitted references to God. These features are significant because of the implicit gender dynamics: while the aforementioned women were at pains to rhetorise God in ways amenable to their respective Overseers, Himsworth and Lumley were able to trust to their status as working men to earn themselves a fair hearing and therefore chose to use or omit religion as they saw fit to their own personal need. Nevertheless, the sample of death typology cases remains too small to present any more definitive or sweeping conclusions regarding gender. Instead, one is better served looking to other cases studies like that of Maria Tarrant to gain deeper insight into the typological features unsettled dying.

⁴⁴³ For more on peace of mind religion rhetoric see, Fideler. *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England*; Innes, Joanna. "Happiness Contested: Happiness and Politics in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries". In. M. J. Braddick and J. Innes. *Suffering and Happiness in England, 1550-1850. Narratives and Representations: A Collection to Honour Paul Slack*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017: 87-110.

Death

Maria Tarrant

Maria Tarrant wrote two letters from Canterbury, Kent, back to her home parish in East Sussex describing her descent into an experience akin to unsettled death. The first letter was written on 28 June 1820 and is produced in full:

Canterbury

Sir

I hope you will excuse the Liberty I take in writing to you as I am in Such a Low State that I Die as I Goo the Friend that Called upon me said he Should not be able to hear from his friend under a fortnight and Now it is above a month ago I have been to the overseers of Westgate and they think itt very hard that I should remain in this Dying State and Nothing to Support with, There is a Gentleman in Canterbury wishes me to write to you Gentlemen hoping that you will take itt in Consideration and Send me Some Relief the Gentlemen think itt hard that I Dont receive 16d pr Week that the Gentlemen at Lewes promised I should have; if the Gentlemen think I Dont belong to Lewes then they must put me on Lower hardres Parish I woud not Trouble the Gentlemen if I could help itt I had a few Hops to tye but I was soo bad I could not Doo them Sir please to Send me an answer Immediately that I may know what too Doo for Some Step must be Taken as I cannot lay & Die for Want So No more at present from your Humble Servant

Maria Tarrant⁴⁴⁴

June 28th 1820

Sir Please to Direct for me at the Blue Anchor North Lane Canterbury

Tarrant's second letter came a month later:

august 16th 1820

Dear Sir

I have made the best use of what money you sent me and am Compeled to trouble once more if you please to assist me with a little more for I am in a poor low way what to do I Know not but hope you will do something for me speedily or I must be brought home which Trouble I dont wish to give if you will send some money to Relieve my wants I Cannot walk down for I

⁴⁴⁴ ESRO PAR 412-35-17a,b, letter, 28 June 1820.

Death

have no shoes to my feet nor no work to go to nor nothing to make shilling of but if please to allow me my weekly pay That you have Stopped I will indeavour a while longer if not I must Come for I am in a state of Starvation will Humbly thank you to answer this as soon as possible

I am your Humble Obedient Servant Maria Tarrant⁴⁴⁵

North lane near the Blue anchor Canterbury

All the typical markers of the Death typology are evident: there is the conscious decision of Tarrant to address her unsettledness through writing using the form of the letter and exploiting the common language to do so; the self-awareness of her change and need to die on her own terms; an acceptance by Tarrant that she was unsettled, but on the condition that it would help her move on from and overcome it; the need for her suffering to be recognised and validated by the vestry; the liberation death allowed her to give an honest representation of her feelings; the determination to not find herself responsible and, by extension, to blame the Overseer; and, most tellingly, that Dying unsettled had become defined by Tarrant's own loss of agency. Most intriguing was her striking melancholy tone. In June, Tarrant had highlighted how 'I am in Such a Low State that I Die', yet still felt 'I cannot lay & Die for Want'. The contrast made with the second letter in August is subtle but vital. Having been lucky enough to receive relief, Tarrant noted how:

I have made the best use of what money you sent me... assist me with a little more for I am in a poor low way.

While her lot had not improved greatly and the financial assistance was not enough, she had nevertheless, yielded some benefit from writing. If Tarrant had not benefited she would not have written again. Tarrant's words in this second letter still expressed a deep grief about the loss of her agency, her dignity, and her settledness, but she had stopped directly obsessing about death itself. More to the point, she made it easier for the Overseer to help her by including in her request items which the Overseer could comfortably provide, such as shoes and food. Tarrant's language was still desperate and distraught as she spoke of 'starvation'. But her words also intimate a willingness to play the role expected of her and she was able to use the traditional rhetoric of pauper letter writing to get what she wanted. Tarrant had not given up on life in her second letter; writing seems to have helped. Her case represents a rare

⁴⁴⁵ ERSO PAR 412-35-23, letter, 16 August 1820.

example in this typology where it is possible to follow the journey of unsettledness on various points through the same voice. Tarrant is significant because she elucidates what Jane Buckeridge, Hannah Beck, Joseph Himsworth, John Lumley, and Mary Chapman had all in their own unique ways tried to achieve in writing to their Oversees about their unsettledness. Tarrant was different for being able to become a tiny and crucial bit more settled through writing to the Overseer.

Conclusion

The unsettled Dying had to fight to get their stories to be heard with no two cases the same in spite of their similarities. The poor law had a significant role in each story: for some it would be blamed as the cause of unsettledness itself, while in most its operation could compound the indignities suffered by the unsettled. Yet all the paupers examined in this chapter – and the wider thesis – turned to letter writing and sought the affirmation of the Overseer as a means of helping them come to terms and cope with their unsettledness.

While there could be advantages to locating the circumstances and burials of the dying unsettled paupers, a systematic attempt to do so was not made in this thesis. This is because for every Jane Buckeridge who records show was buried aged seventy-six in Lambeth on 12 October 1828 and Joseph Himsworth who is recorded to have been buried aged 92 in Sandal on 30 November 1826, there are, unfortunately, paupers such as Hannah Beck and Maria Tarrant who have no surviving or accessible records detailing their fate.⁴⁴⁶ Fixation upon pauper's deaths would risk shifting the analytical focus away from the active thoughts and feelings expressed by the dying in their pauper letters.⁴⁴⁷ The accounts of the unsettled dying were first-hand and present a unique perspective regarding their experiences.

⁴⁴⁶ For more on Jane Buckeridge, see: St Mary, Lambeth burials 1777-1838. [<http://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBPRS%2FD%2F345025109%2F1>, accessed 22 September 2020]. For Joseph Himsworth, see: National Burial Index for England and Wales. WDP 20/1/4/1. Wakefield District Burials West Yorkshire Burials. 30 November 1826. [<http://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBPRS%2FD%2F446040964%2F>, accessed on 22 September 2020].

⁴⁴⁷ Research conducted but not ultimately included in this chapter on Richard Massey is illustrative to this point. There are four paupers for which it is possible to find but the one that most closely resembles the Richard Massey of my studies was recorded to have died on 28 December 1832. But the pauper whose account wrote of unsettledness and dying dated their letter on 30 April 1833. For his letter see GLRO P328a Ov 7-19, letter, 30 April 1833. For on the recorded death of a Richard Massey see Wiltshire Burials Index. [<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBPRS%2FWILTSHIRE%2FFHS%2FBUR%2F0452328>, accessed on 22 September 2020].

The experiences of unsettled dying amongst paupers was defined by how they attempted to use their letters to ensure they died a settled person. Their letters were defiant invocations of their agency to their respective Overseers, wrought from the pain of recognising their regressive movement along the (un)settledness spectrum catalysed by the processes of dying. The act of writing helped them recognise and begin to address their needs. Each affected individual came to ponder the role of the poor law in their decline, the feedback loop, and wrestled with variants of the same underpinning experiential paradox: while dying may not have been truly unsettling, the need to die emotionally settled and the struggle for their agency that this entailed only served to highlight how little agency they, the unsettled, now possessed. This newfound realisation of their inability even to die on their own terms without the aid of the Overseer could be unsettling. Nevertheless, little, if anything other than unsettledness, could have compelled these paupers to publicly bare their troubled sense of self in the manner they did. They unsettled Dying sought to define what it felt to try to live as paupers while dying under the Old Poor Law and their insights, captured by this analysis, begin to address many of the criticisms of the established historical discourse regarding death, mental illness, and the lives of the poor.

There are two key contextual themes that pertain to the unsettled Dying and shape the conclusions. First, in numerical terms, this typology of 24 cases is small relative to the whole set of 296 unsettled cases. This may be because the typology is very specific in requiring a historical actor who not only felt that they were dying but who also turned to writing to resolve their problems. In some ways such people might be privileged, as not every contemporary reached the point in their life-cycle where they were able to reflect upon the dying process itself – many deaths were, of course, unexpected and sudden. Nonetheless, the numbers of unsettled dying are significant enough to suggest that it was a notable contemporary experience; besides, even one example would be note-worthy as it would show that pauper letters can be read for emotion and unsettledness. Within the twenty-four cases, there was a clear gender disparity within the rates of incidence with women (fifteen cases) experiencing this typology of unsettled almost twice more than men (nine). Again, the small number of total cases may exaggerate the difference, but the disparity is noticeable. This second theme can be explained in two parts: first, the higher rates of women may be understood by their absence in the Status-stress typology – indeed, the Joseph Himsworth and John Lumley death cases cited trouble with work and could, but for relative nuances, be organised into that typology instead; and second, the classic image of this typology is an old

widow left alone to die with her letter acting as her last cry for help. Nevertheless, each story was united more by what miseries men and women shared than those they escaped.

A challenge has been made to the assumption that the voices of the poor regarding death cannot be found nor effectively interpreted. This chapter proves they can and provides a new reading of death. Furthermore, while suicide has traditionally been the only historical tale told about mental aberration and death, the accounts of the unsettled reveal quite different experiences - none of the unsettled can be read as suicidal. A final original analytical perspective provided by this chapter is its focus upon the contemporary experience of the material and emotional processes that led to death, as opposed to the event itself and its after-effects. In seeking to analyse the processes a history from below has been rendered possible as the voices of those who personally felt the effects of dying and unsettledness are able to speak for themselves through their letters.

What remains is the need to consider the characteristics which distinguish paupers who experienced unsettled Dying. As with all the typologies outlined in this thesis, the choice to write represented a conscious decision by the affected historical actor to address their unsettled sense of self. Letter writing was the affected paupers selected means to try to write themselves settled. Letter writing rested on a fundamental self-awareness and recognition of the need of unsettled paupers to write themselves settled. Yet unlike in the other typologies, these contemporaries did not use their letters to fight the effects of their poverty and the life-cycle. The letters of the unsettled Dying were an acknowledgement that they had been moved out of their normal settled sense of self and acted as means to dignity in death. Thus they wrote to the Overseer for a sense of closure: they wanted their fears to be heard and their final requests responded to. Their letters were used to combat their unsettledness. But the form and hold of their unsettledness was unique to this typology.

Linked to the struggle for dignity was the Dying's compromised acceptance of their unsettledness. In the precise moment that these unsettled paupers chose to write, they had accepted that they had moved along the spectrum and were facing death. This was special. In the other typologies analysed in this thesis was a denial to accept the presence of unsettledness within themselves and formed the basis from which affected paupers tried to build their recovery. However, the Dying unsettled used their letters to accept the physical and material realities of their situation which had, by their own reckoning, pushed them out of their usual sense of self (hence their writing in the first place) in order to exert a control

over their emotions. This was unusual as those featured in other typologies demonstrated less nuance in their conception of their unsettledness as material, physical, and emotional conditions were spoken of inter-dependently. The suggestion was that one aspect of their troubles inexorably fed the others as physical troubles would lead to material and then emotional difficulties (or in any other such combination). The unsettled Dying consciously broke this pattern with their letters and essentially delivered an ultimatum to their Overseers to accept they are to die but they be facilitated to die on their own terms and with dignity.

The Dying risked little by admitting their unsettled condition as they were already at their lowest ebb. In the Laid-low, Status-stress, Compromised Identity, and Cumulative Troubles typologies the unsettled sufferers were chocked by a fear of making the situation worse and invoking a feedback loop to unsettledness. The dying were not so inhibited and were inculcated against finding themselves even more unsettled. Their letters represent a full exploration of the depths of their emotion to fully resist their unsettledness. For this reason, the act of letter writing could have a liberating effect, and owing to the fact they were dying, the Overseer could not simply ignore their request(s). Yet, unlike the truly mad who could be liberated and condemned to speak their madness and not be heard, the Dying unsettled still needed to feel understood. This meant they had to voice their unsettledness in an intelligible way and give a true rendition of their unsettled feelings.

The self-awareness of the Dying to their unsettled state led them to momentarily accept that they were unsettled. But they never conceded they were wholly responsible. Their letters were filled with a self-pity that suggested their troubles had been inflicted upon them. Consequently, many rhetorised God in curious ways, and as was evidenced in the contrast made between Jane Buckeridge and Hannah Beck with Joseph Himsworth and John Lumley, this use of rhetoric could fall under gendered lines. But the Dying unsettled all craved recognition for their plight.

The trial for the Dying to become settled was defined by their loss of agency. Their acceptance of dependency – which was linked to their grudging acknowledgement of their physical decline – owed to their understanding that their fears would be heard by the Overseer. It was their lack of control to this end, not dying itself, which threatened to compound their unsettledness. As paupers, the Dying still faced the difficulties associated with negotiating relief. In fact, owing to their declining health and the parish's fear that they would become frequent expensive claimants, they were in an extraordinary position: to their

mind, they could die peacefully only if the Overseer granted their last request. But this was not a foregone conclusion as the parishes were disinclined to intervene too early and become liable for continued relief costs. The letters of the Dying could reflect their crises in dignity as their authors laid their sense of self bare and yet still might not find suitable mercy.

The agency of the Dying to satisfactorily address their unsettledness was further complicated by the problem familiar to all paupers, that of having to express deeply personal feelings through the common language. To a degree, they had to rely upon the empathy of the Overseer to understand the full ramifications of their story. This, in turn, depended on the affected unsettled pauper's own belief in their residual settledness as they had to believe themselves capable of fully expressing their unsettled feelings. Doing so meant that they had to exercise some residual control over their fluctuating sense of self. Loss of control might lead to madness. But as this thesis has been at pains to emphasise: paupers did not move from straight from sanity to madness. That the unsettled Dying were able to write suggests that they could move along a spectrum of unsettledness and articulate their experiences. Living and dying under the Old Poor Law was a unique experience captured in the words of paupers and, for the most vivid emotional accounts, one must look first to those it unsettled to truly understand its impact.

Conclusion

This study of working-class experiences of poverty in the early nineteenth century across regions of England and Wales under the Old Poor Law has focussed on the forms of unsettledness paupers expressed in their quest for relief. This conclusion is set to reflect upon the historiographical advancements made in the preceding analysis by considering the following issues: what was the gap in the relevant established historical literature; how this study filled those gaps; and what changes to the discourse this thesis inspires.

What Was the Gap?

Through analysis of the ‘unsettledness’ expressed by certain paupers in their letters seeking relief from their Overseer(s) this thesis has addressed three core gaps within the relevant historical literatures devoted to madness, emotion and poverty.

The first gap is located within histories of madness. Historians of this field who focus upon the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in England and Wales have, traditionally, linked pauper lunacy with confinement in mental institutions. In focusing upon the place, role, and impact of asylums historians subsequently neglected how, in historical populations, most of the mad were not confined to asylums. Moreover, sufficient space or concession was not ceded to the notion that the poor experienced forms of successive or periodic bouts of unsettled mind that did not result with their descent into madness. The critical approach generally adopted led to the limited scope and insight into studies of madness, which include: the reliance upon imposed narratives; the voice of the sufferer rarely being accessed or interpreted; and an unwillingness/inability to look past a linear narrative to madness. The confluence of these factors meant testimonies of the poor with respect to their experiences of their unsettledness has hitherto been unexplored.

The second key gap is found within histories of emotion. Those working upon the eighteenth and nineteenth century generalised the emotional framework of middle-class actors to the labouring poor of England. The emotional experiences of the working classes, poor and dispossessed were judged inaccessible due to the need for sources with sufficient literary quality to draw conclusions. Further, the need to account for and interpret regional distinctiveness between historical actors was raised but this ‘question of geography’ has

remained unanswered. Historians of emotion therefore remain open to accessing and analysing the emotions of the working classes across different regions of England and Wales and recognise the potential significance, yet have failed to find a way to incorporate such studies into the historical discourse.

The third and final gap is to be found in histories of welfare. While historians working with pauper letters established the relevance and significance of the source they did not exploit its full interpretive value. The emotional dimensions of poverty expressed by contemporaries in their letters have not been recognised or considered in what is otherwise an increasingly vibrant and dense literature.

How Was the Gap Filled?

This thesis addressed the gaps identified in the relevant historical literatures of madness, emotions, and poverty by re-purposing an established historical source with the first detailed analysis of the corpus linguistics of pauper letters written in various regions from 1800 until 1834. The contents of pauper's 'oral writings' have been reconstructed through qualitative research methods to establish how the marginalised poor articulated their emotional and economic well-being and constructed their place and emotional landscape(s). The emotional dimensions recorded by paupers in their testimonies to the Overseer(s) were privileged to locate and critique individual accounts from those who lived on the edge of poverty and reconstructed how, in specific cases, these historical actors attempted to write themselves back to settledness.

Central to the analysis has been the creation and implementation of the critical framework of the 'unsettled mind'. The guiding principle was the idea that in extracting the most extreme expressions articulated by unsettled contemporaries one may access the emotional dimensions to their poverty. The concept of the unsettled mind works into its understanding that historical actors rarely experienced a completely stable emotional or mental state. This spectrum was introduced to think in terms of how a pauper might have moved between extremes of contentment to what might be termed lunacy or madness. The letters were analysed to examine how unsettled paupers may have understood, constructed, and rhetoricised their emotional and mental fluidity. Five distinct but inter-related typologies of unsettledness were identified through the words of the unsettled who were located across a range of different geographical regions which each retained distinct core socio-economic

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typologies. The typologies of unsettledness were as follows: the ‘Laid-low’; the ‘Status-stressed’; those with ‘Compromised Identity’; ‘Cumulative Troubles’; and the ‘Dying Unsettled’. The typologies captured individual paupers’ movement along the spectrum of unsettledness and the language they used to describe it amongst a wider collective rendition of what a life of poverty under the Old Poor Law entailed.

The introduction of the analytical construct of the spectrum of unsettledness has begun to fill the noted gaps within histories of madness. By considering incidences of unsettledness outside of the established sanity/madness dichotomy a necessary analytical shift has been made to move the historical discourse beyond the limited focus upon the spectacular forms of mental distress exhibited by contemporaries that ended with institutional confinement. The framework of unsettledness has facilitated a critique outside of the traditional form of imposed narratives which have defined asylum studies. The thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of the working class as to their self-identified movement along the spectrum of unsettledness – and the reactions they received – has instead been sought and used to demonstrate how these historical actors utilised the act of writing a letter to recognise, construct, and challenge their unsettled sense(s) of self. Built within this spectra analysis was the capacity for the affected to articulate how they were capable of moving not only between various unsettled typologies, but also forward and back across their spectrum depending on their individual circumstances and conceptions of their unsettledness. The unsettled have been recognised for their capacity to occasionally not be unsettled; a nuance not found in studies constructed through the analytical prism of sanity to madness. For the first time, the perspectives of the poor relative to the mental traumas their poverty caused have been accessed, recorded, and interpreted through their own words.

The gaps identified in histories of emotion similarly have been addressed through the adaptation and re-application of the concepts of ‘emotives’, ‘emotional regimes and refuges’ and ‘emotional communities’, to provide an emotional history of the poor and poverty. Owing to perceived source and literary constraints such a study has previously been judged by historians of this field to have potential value but to be unobtainable. Analysis of the pauper emotions through their unsettledness recorded in this thesis shows that it is possible to access the voice of the working class and that theirs are a perspective from which it is valuable to listen.

What Changes?

The impact of this first study of the emotional dimensions of poverty through the analytical paradigm of ‘unsettled mind’ transforms how one may interpret the inter-related historiographies of madness/ asylums, emotions, welfare, and pauper letters. In analysing the words paupers used to (re)construct their senses of self relative to their unsettledness through their act of writing for relief, a new analytical direction has been presented that may form the interpretive basis from which to construct the emotional history of the working classes under the nineteenth-century Old Poor Law.

The typologies of Laid-low, Status-stress, Compromised Identity, Cumulative Troubles, and Death give compelling answers to the research questions raised at the beginning of this thesis and to which this analysis now returns. The testimonies of the Laid-low by Maria Longhurst, Anne Parker, Timothy Pinnock, and Elizabeth Bull reveal various pivot points toward unsettledness and how letter writing was used as a prop by such unsettled historical actors to re-establish their settled sense of self. Their accounts introduced the underpinning loss of dignity and sense of isolation that accompanied their need to write for relief having found themselves to be unsettled. The relief requests of the Laid-low establish how the unsettled – and, arguably, paupers more generally – did not confine their negotiations to material wants, but sought to engage their audience with the emotional dimensions of their suffering. The awareness of the Laid-low as to their suffering, which they came to recognise and define through their act of writing, exposed their state of mind and suggested that it was only through having their emotional grievances heard that recovery from unsettledness could be achieved.

The Status-stressed possessed similar wilful recklessness by exposing their troubled senses of self and in expressing their dependency upon the Overseer to exercise control over it, but the unsettledness they articulated was exclusively couched in terms of work. Letters by Thomas Cox, Peter Newman, and Jon Davis showcase this second typology which, in turn, began to explore the regional and gender dynamics influencing contemporaries’ experiences of unsettledness. Troubles with work were a legitimate way of requesting relief from the Overseer. Men who were unsettled by the inability to work and provide for their families were thus able to adapt the typical language of such relief requests to detail their Status-stress. The causes of such strife could be two-fold: temporary/short-term work which made it difficult to secure a consistent wage; and the structural changes that could include

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industrialisation, trade-cycles, seasons, and strikes. In places such as West Yorkshire, the case study of Thomas Cox shows how these forces could combine and triggered descent into unsettledness. However, the actualised experience of what it was to be Status-stressed was shared across the country indiscriminate of personal and local differences. This message of the shared experience – which accounts for personal and local dimensions – is a significant feature of not only this study, but in particular to the typology of Status-stress. The place of women within this typology of unsettledness was fascinating and quite as informative as to working class experiences of poverty as their unsettled male counterparts. In the rare cases of recorded Status-stress as exemplified in the testimonies of Hannah Brown, Elizabeth Pepall, and Ester Hanson, their letters were remarkable for how their names were the only signifier for them having been women. This is extraordinarily significant when one factors in the case study of Jon and Martha Davis, in which Martha set about documenting her husband's Status-stress and describing how she had become unsettled due to the reverberating impact of John's unsettledness. What was remarkable in Martha's case is how her form of unsettledness – triggered by her husband's – did not conform to the same Status-stress typology. More striking still, was how Martha voice regarding her unsettledness was later silenced, with Jon having written wrote on the pairs' behalf. The wider implication is that work and Status-stress was an experience of unsettledness women could have, but such were the societal conventions, few ever constructed their sense of self, as men did, primarily in relation to their (in)ability to work.

The typology of Compromised Identity worked in tandem with that of Status-stress offering an explanation for how pauper men and women framed their relief requests, identities, and sense of self differently through letter-writing, yet in experiential terms the impact of poverty and unsettledness was the same. Harriet Hughes and Samuel South's case studies show that work was not the only way of configuring one's self through pauper letters as the burden to fulfil societally-endorsed roles was expected of the pair. The common presence of advocates writing on behalf of those with Compromised Identity suggests that the nature of their stresses were comprehensible even if their reactions in becoming unsettled were not desired. Men such as Samuel South recounted having experienced a crisis of masculinity as the head of a household, while women like Harriet Hughes had a crisis of femininity that often stemmed from their inability to fulfil what they perceived to be their roles as wives and mothers.

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Paupers located within the Cumulatively Troubled typology existed along the same spectrum of unsettledness that carried with it the Laid-low, Status-stressed and Compromised Identity. Nevertheless, the evidence presented by Anne Baker, Ann Rhodes, and Robert Pearson distinguished significant, albeit understated, differences of the experience of unsettledness for those whom endured Cumulative Troubles. While all paupers faced feedback loops when they wrote of their unsettledness, the Cumulatively Troubled were uniquely exposed as their compulsion to write over long periods of time increased and reinforced their awareness of the inescapable grind of poverty. The Cumulatively Troubled could have been paupers that were, for instance, once Laid-low but had begun to lose hope that in receiving relief their troubles would end. It was a sad irony that the triggers for unsettledness amongst the Cumulatively Troubled often originated from the standard pressures that came from being relatively poor and having to endure the early nineteenth-century life-cycle. But while relatively settled members of the poor were able to recognise and generally reconcile themselves to this unresolvable injustice, the unsettled and, specifically, the Cumulatively Troubled, were special in the manner in which they felt their suffering was greater than their contemporaries. It was this sense of exceptionality which drove the Cumulatively Troubled deeper into their unsettledness. This group of unsettled paupers revealed to themselves the full extent of their crisis of dignity through writing. They invoked the paradox that while they were sceptical of the value of the Overseer's aid, the emotive release of voicing their pain and constructing their self, was such that they continued to document their troubles.

The Dying unsettled found a similar release to the Cumulatively Troubled in expressing their decline and broken dignity. But the self-identified fact of their looming death gave paupers such as Hannah Beck and Joseph Himsworth the confidence to fully exploit the forms of pauper letter-writing to ensure their concerns be heard. The unsettled Dying accepted their death on the condition that they would die with their dignity intact. Submission of a successful pauper letter to the Overseer was a way of ensuring they died on their own terms with the procurement of relief taken as a re-assertion of their agency and dignity. The Dying are special even amongst the unsettled for the power of their letters. They often exploited the rhetorical power of religion to justify the reasons for acquiescing to their demands and to give a full unrestrained voice to their pain and torment. Dying, they believed, put them beyond reproach. At the same time, they recognised in themselves through the act of writing, that their pain and fears needed to be acknowledged. Uniting the Dying with the unsettled in the other typologies was how they all had relied upon writing to the Overseer as their last

meaningful resort. Individually and collectively unsettled paupers reflected upon the impact of the Old Poor Law on their poverty and used their act of writing to attempt to restore their dignity, reconstruct their troubled senses of self, and have their voices be heard.

Final Thoughts

This thesis contends and has given exhaustive evidence to the effect that unprecedented historical value may be found within pauper letters constructed by those that moved along the spectrum of (un)settledness. However, an adherence to the analytical paradigms of the ‘unsettled mind’ is not, ultimately, presented with the fanaticism that disguises a secret doubt. While the typologies of unsettledness have been shown to be useful in accessing the voices of paupers for the first time, using the constructs of unsettledness is not the only way the sources might be analysed and any later re-interpretations are (cautiously) welcomed. The greatest outcome of this thesis was to draw out the most extreme forms of emotions expressed by paupers in their letters and this has been achieved and, accordingly, is set to alter the related histories of madness, emotion and poverty. The testimonies of unsettled paupers across England and Wales in the early nineteenth century reveal unique and special insight into the lives of the poor and present a new history of poverty in the words of those who once lived it.

Pauper letters may illustrate contemporaries’ experiences of poverty and the interplay within them of dignity, agency, and, potentially, resilience. The letters from the unsettled carried a rhetorical emphasis weighted toward finding, asserting, and exploiting their agency to alleviate their emotional suffering. Theirs was a fight for dignity shared amongst the poor and impoverished but rendered extreme through the impact of their unsettledness. The resilience of those with unsettled mind was often implied or interpretable through their subtext or, in some cases, was evidenced through their fear that they had exhausted their resilience at the moment of their greatest need and wrote from their sense of desperation to restore it.

Research into the middling sorts (albeit much of it focussed in the chronological period immediately before that considered in this thesis) suggests they similarly grappled with issues of dignity, agency, and resilience, and that they expressed and understood similar fears of loss of status and position.

As Henry French, Margaret Hunt and others have shown, the networking, office holding, inter-marriage and mutuality of the middling sorts often trumped personal dislikes and transient disagreements because men and women of this group recognised all too keenly the

fragility of their lifetime and intergenerational successes.⁴⁴⁸ While these lessons do not extend seamlessly to the middle class of the early nineteenth century, the presence of the poor – those who had fallen from positions of material and occupational security – in the public life of early nineteenth century England suggests that there was an equal fragility amongst this group.⁴⁴⁹

Of course, economic and social ‘trouble’ and existential threat to social position could generate illness and unsettledness in the minds of middling actors as well as the poor, and there are important overlaps between approaches and rhetoric here. Thus, as with paupers, middling men and women could express their troubles through reference to gendered roles and religious rhetoric while individual actors retained sufficient agency to defy those societal norms if, as Olivia Weisser explained, it meant they could ‘communicate the severity of their suffering most effectively’.⁴⁵⁰ Some subtle differences are identifiable, for instance, between how men of the middling sorts often cited ‘internal, less visibly debilitating disorders’ to explain why they could not work, rather than the more formulaic responses of the less-educated poor, which almost always resorted to traditional languages of associated with the poor and focused on the material realities of their circumstances. But both they and male paupers collectively recognised the significance of work in the formation and maintenance of their dignity.⁴⁵¹ However, further research is required before more sweeping conclusions might be made. This thesis limits itself to highlighting how the impact of pauper’s proximity to the threat and realities of poverty means it is possible for future research to ask greater questions regarding the interplay of agency, dignity, and resilience in their accounts. This study into unsettledness has engaged with some of those questions raised the evidence it presents might be said to cohere with a founding principle of studies into emotion to show how ‘all humans have the potential to live emotionally similar lives’.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁸ French, Henry and Jonathan Barry. “Identity and Agency in English Society, 1500-1800: An Introduction.” In H. French and J. Barry (eds), *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2004: 1-37; Hunt, Margaret. *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and Family in England, 1680-1780*. Berkeley: California University Press, 1996; Davidoff, Leonore and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, 3rd edition. London: Routledge, 2019.

⁴⁴⁹ Earle, Peter. *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society, and Family Life in London, 1660-1730*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989; Williams, Samantha, *Unmarried Motherhood in the Metropolis, 1700-1850: Pregnancy, The Poor Law and Provision*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018.

⁴⁵⁰ Weisser, Olivia. *Ill Composed: Sickness, Gender, and Belief in Early Modern England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015: 133.

⁴⁵¹ For work on life writing amongst the middling sorts, see: Amelang, James. *The Flight of Icarus: Artisan Autobiography in Early Modern Europe*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

⁴⁵² Lutz, Catherine and Geoffrey White. “The Anthropology of Emotions.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986): 408. [405-36]

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The wider corpus of pauper letters – which includes the majority of historical actors that were unaffected by definable bouts of unsettledness – may provide historians with clearer, identifiable narratives of pauper's resilience. In these accounts one might more easily discern the traditional life-cycle pressures and how paupers both practically and emotionally coped with those challenges. Future studies into the lives of settled and unsettled paupers may co-exist as it is clear even when isolated from the wider corpus the pauper letters, that the unsettled experienced and deployed a hitherto unaccounted for range and extremity of emotion regarding their poverty. It follows that the same interpretive methods (especially when appropriately adapted), might be applied to accounts from emotionally settled paupers and that, in their depths and analysed alongside the unsettled, historians will appreciate the full depth and range of the poor's fight for dignity, their skilful exercises of agency, and the powerful resilience retained by those forced to cope with the challenges of the working-class life-cycle and the impact of their poverty.

In this thesis pauper letters have been disembodied from the wider archives in which they ended up. Although this approach sits easily with recent attempts to exploit and locate the pauper voice by Sokoll, King, Taylor, Sharpe, and others, it stands in distinction to the detailed empirical approaches to poor law accounts (and to a lesser extent) vestry minutes, settlement examinations, and other poor law documents that formed the basis of much early work on the Old Poor Law. The latter approaches have been taken to a new level of detail and ambition by scholars such as Williams and French. The holy grail of poor law studies would be the fusion of an extraordinarily large parochial collection of pauper letters and detailed poor law accounts, vestry minutes, and other local poor law documentation. The coincidence of these sorts of sources is extremely rare, as the insightful work of Sokoll suggests. This thesis stood with the recent traditions of analysing pauper letters and its approach was calibrated to the particular analysis of emotions in these sources. In the future an ambitious project would be the systematic exploitation of the poor law archives linked by paper letters, which would involve a single receiving community and perhaps ten to fifteen core sending communities. Such an approach would be one way of utilising the important methodological and thematic perspectives developed by poor law historians such as Williams, French, and Tomkins on the one hand, and those who have concentrated solely on pauper letters on the other.

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