

THE
HISTORY OF
SUICIDE
IN ENGLAND
1650-1850

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1650–1850

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INTRODUCTION TO VOLUMES 3 AND 4

At the outset of the eighteenth century, a constellation of events occurred that rendered 'self-murder' – which had never entirely left the public stage of debate – freshly topical. John Donne's controversial *Biathanatos* was published a second time, John Adams the Etonian subsequently replied with his sprawling and authoritative *Essay Concerning Self-Murther* (1700), and Thomas Creech, the celebrated translator of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, was found hanging in his lodgings above an apothecary's shop.

Creech's suicide shocked both the Oxford community to which he belonged and the public imagination more generally. Although the coroner's jury returned the *non compos mentis* verdict, and Creech was laid to rest quickly and discreetly, satirists of the time refused to let him lie quietly and subjected him to merciless and cutting treatment in send-ups like *A Step to Oxford*, which lampoons Creech as the Paris of pedantry, driven to death by the unrequited love of Philadelphia Playdell. However, this degree of levity was absent from most responses to Creech's death, which earnestly demanded what would drive a successful, widely respected and well-connected scholar to take his life, and perhaps more disturbingly, why would a clergyman (albeit a non-practising one) defy Christian scriptural and doctrinal authority by committing what was typically described as the most 'heinous of sins'.

Inevitably, Creech's intimacy with Lucretius – he was dubbed 'Lucreechius' – was cited as a factor in his death. Legends sprang up that he had scrawled in the margins of his translation 'Must kill myself when done'¹ – although he had publicly distanced himself from the Roman's Epicureanism. Interestingly, Epicurus himself had rejected suicide as a viable option for the individual whom he advised to cultivate a state of ataraxia, or the negative pleasure of emotional tranquility derived from the avoidance of disturbance in everyday life and from the acceptance that the gods take no interest in human affairs. However, the Greek philosopher's privileging of the interests of the individual over those of the state deviated from the emphasis placed by Plato and Aristotle upon the community,² and his atomism, which posited that all objects and events are determined by random interactions between particles, for later followers like

Lucretius seemed to authorize suicide under certain conditions. The pernicious influence of Epicurus was once again blamed some years later when the suicide notes of Richard and Bridget Smith, the London couple who took their lives and that of their child in 1732, alluded to naturalist ideas that appeared to be mediated by Alberto Radicati's controversial *Philosophical Dissertation on Death* that was published that same year. The modern vice of 'free-thinking' was thus traced to philosophies of the ancients like Epicureanism and Stoicism, which at their worst afforded justifications for suicide that directly contradicted post-Augustinian Christian teachings.

For all the reverence the 'ancients' commanded in so-called 'Augustan England', their influence was viewed as toxic in this regard. In 1730, John Henley's *Cato Condemn'd* imagines a Gray's Inn fellow summoning the spectres of Chrysippus, Cleanthes, Zeno and Empedocles to spur him on to the act of suicide he did later commit. This macabre dialogue of the dead is far from unique in the sermon literature and moral writing of the first half of the eighteenth century, which regularly resurrects the great Roman statesman, Cato the Younger, in order to try him in a court of modernity. In these tracts, Cato's Stoic defence of suicide and even his motives are re-evaluated and reassessed according to early modern Christian criteria. In the process, Cato's fortitude and resignation are recast as cowardice and folly, and his status as a Roman martyr figure ultimately deconstructed. Counter-defences are mustered by the likes of Alberto Radicati, but the judgment of the other camp resounds through the corridors of history, radically decontextualising deaths that in their own time had an utterly different meaning. Indeed, these post-mortem, belated 'trials' demonstrate just how contingent suicide is as a concept; at the same time, they suggest the degree to which Greek and especially Roman culture continued to shape English responses to suicide in the early eighteenth century.³ Cato and his particular brand of Roman Stoicism is put on trial precisely because of their continued appeal to those inclined to romanticize or render rhetoric the suicide of honour, as we see in the public reception of Joseph Addison's *Cato; A Tragedy* (1713). Hence the discourse of suicide, in a manner of speaking, introduces a moral dimension to the contemporary 'battle between the Ancients and the Moderns'.⁴

The proliferation of Cato-oriented writings also thrust into the foreground of contemporary debate the bearing of social rank on acts of suicide. The appeal that Cato's 'honour suicide' possessed for many eighteenth-century aristocrats led some to see it as a vice confined to the elite. However, clergymen such as William Fleetwood sought to counter this misconception by addressing their sermons to the labouring classes who were not exempt from this 'vice'. Others insisted that suicide was an issue confined largely to the class of 'middling sort of People',⁵ while still others maintained that

We have had *Suicides* of both the Sexes, of all the Orders in Life, the upper, middle, and lower, and as well among the Illiterate as among the Learned in every Profession, who have gone into this Error, and have left Arguments behind them in Defence of *Self-murder*.⁶

Suicide, as this author insists, transcends the categories of class and gender, although the popular image of the male, upper-class suicide nonetheless carried considerable currency, particularly in the fiction of the period.⁷

From the perspective of eighteenth-century 'social guardians', modernity had introduced new challenges to existence in the form of new temptations and self-destructive practices, with the vices of gambling and duelling merely positioned on one end of a continuum of suicide. In 1720, the fantasy of instant wealth that had drawn English investors from every rank to the South Sea Company was abruptly shattered when the 'bubble' created by the illusory inflation of their shares burst and sent the market plummeting. The company, which dealt mainly in supplying slaves to plantations in South America, had agreed to underwrite the national debt (and thereby help finance England's war with France) in exchange for a perpetual annuity from the government. The catastrophe hence had profound implications for the national economy, and the directorship of the company and officials in various high-level positions in the government were held accountable for the missteps that had led to the bubble. Many of these individuals took their lives in the fallout of the event, the casualties of which extended to every segment of the population. Although in reality, the event triggered 'a small wave of suicides',⁸ as MacDonald has noted, the press sedulously reported on these deaths, many of which were determined to be the result of 'lunacy' by generally sympathetic coroner's juries. At any rate, the suicide rate in England appeared to climb from this time forward, while the event provided fresh impetus to the anti-suicide cause and another reason for moralists like Isaac Watts writing in its wake, to castigate the vices of the age.

In *The Female Spectator* (1744–6), Eliza Haywood dates 'from the Fatal Year 1720' the 'extravagant Itch of Gaming, which, like the Plague, has spread its contagion through all Degrees of People'.⁹ The bubble, as she writes, 'converted Gaming from an Amusement into a Business' with its 'fleeting visionary Schemes of a luxurious [living]'.¹⁰ Haywood blames this event for cultivating a taste for luxury and producing as a corollary the suicide epidemic of the day. The self-inflicted deaths of individuals who lost their fortunes either to the stock-jobbers, or to the gaming table like Fanny Braddock in 1731, marked the entry point of suicide into the luxury debates of the time, scoring a point for those who argued that commodity culture had heightened materialism to the point that one's material worth outweighed the value of one's life.

Although this is the period in which suicide gradually came to be viewed less as a sin than as a product of insanity,¹¹ writings of the first half of the eighteenth century reflect a far from coherent and unified discourse of suicide. In advancing physical and psychological causes for suicide, an emergent medical model in turn impinged on legal definitions of ‘lunacy’ and bolstered the popularity of the *non compos mentis* verdict; at the same time, religious sanctions remained strong and the state remained inflexible in maintaining its harsh laws against suicide, even if the juries were not consistently enforcing them at the local level. In the first decade of the century, a veritable industry of anti-suicide writing temporarily flourished, led by John Adams’s formidable *Essay* and John Prince’s *Self-Murder Asserted to Be a Very Heinous Crime* (1709). In the decades that followed, sermon literature and other moral writings regularly appeared, often in reaction to momentous national events like the South Sea Bubble or more personal occurrence like Richard and Bridget Smith’s 1732 suicide. Although most writings reiterate the standard Pythagorean, Socratic, Augustinian and Thomistic arguments, some clergymen sought out new reasons for condemning suicide: the ‘self-murderer’, one writer insists, ‘is not only the *Butcher* of the Person kill’d, but of those also, who might have descended from him.’¹² Suicide is a form of ‘patricide’, one writer insists and ‘parricide’, according to another who views the act as tantamount to the murder of nature. Meanwhile, another cleric warns that one person’s suicide incites many emulators, whose spirits will subsequently torment the instigator in the afterlife. The tone of these tracts is not uniformly admonitory, however, with many focusing on prevention and care of the self as a prophylactic to suicide. To this end, in his direct address to the suicidal, the Devonshire minister, John Prince, poetically recommends ‘Walking ... by Chrystal Streams in verdant Fields’ to ward off melancholy.

Hence, within these writings, a range of opinions is discernible, from the more lenient, broadly sympathetic expressions of ‘Ralph Freeman’ to the anonymous nonconformist author of *A Discourse upon Self-Murder ... in a Letter to a Free-Thinker That Despised Life* (1732). The latter position maintained that sin is the root of self-murder: ‘this may be fixed as a general Truth, *That a vile corrupt Soul, or a loathsome, base, detestable State of Mind within, is the Cause and Ground of Self-Murder; and that where-ever a Man falls by his own Hand, it is Satan the Murderer that directs and guides it.*’¹³ Tracts like these mingle blame of the devil and insistence on individual responsibility. Even a nonconformist writer like Isaac Watts, for whom Satan continues to act as an instigator in every case of suicide, can suggest that an individual’s laxity, inadequate vigilance, immoral lifestyles and excesses leave him or her open to satanic temptation.

Madness, for these writers, is seldom an excuse, since it also results from a pre-existing state of sin and a series of critical moral missteps that lead to loss of control. As one unusually harsh tract claims, in the case of suicide:

whatever the Cause at first may be, or however innocent, yet there is, at present, a Mixture of Sin in the Mind, which creates the Sting; as a Distrust in God, a fainting or repining under his Correction, or the like, which ought to be purged out by the foregoing Directions.¹⁴

Thus, an emphasis on personal accountability persists even amid arguments for satanic influence and psychological disruption, which is why these writers call not only for an enforcement but also an intensification of the penalties for self-murder. Watts's text betrays a tension between pastoral care for the living and the punitive approach to dealing with the dead that is characteristic of much of the sermon literature on 'self-murder':

Perhaps 'twere much better if this Practice were revived again; for since the Laws of Men cannot punish their Persons, therefore their dead Bodies should be expos'd to just and deserved Shame, that so this Iniquity might be laid under all the *Odium* that human Power and Law can cast upon it, to testify a just Abhorrence of the Fact, and to deter Survivers [sic] from the like Practice.

The family of the deceased falls into the space opened up by this apparent contradiction, left to suffer under the following rationale:

Were a Person sure that his Estate would be forfeited, and his Effects carried away from his Wife, Children and Family, were he sure that his dead Body should be publicly expos'd, bury'd in the High-way, and with a Stake driven through it as a Mark of huge Infamy, perhaps he would give way to calmer Counsels, and be content to bear a little Shame, or Pain, or Loss, till God saw fit to put an End to all his Sufferings by natural Means: And therefore an Instance or two of such Severity as is legal, well and wisely chosen, might prove a greater Preservative against these Violences, than such a constant and expected Mercy, as we always find on these Occasions.

Members of coroners' juries, confronting both the material effects of forfeiture and the emotional trauma experienced by the families made to endure the brutal treatment of their loved one's body, were not able to deal in the hypotheticals of prevention quite so easily. Punitive measures did not deter those determined to take their lives, nor did this chorus of strident voices succeed in swaying coroners' juries to deliver the *non compos mentis* verdict less frequently. Newspaper reports and the data compiled by MacDonald and Murphy suggest that jurors and coroners continued to rule in favour of 'lunacy', reserving the *felo de se* verdict for cases where questionable behaviour was a factor in an individual's death. An elderly ostler who had hanged himself when intoxicated was found to be a felon,¹⁵ as was a cleaning-woman who appeared to have accidentally killed herself in the midst of a theft,¹⁶ both of which events suggesting that the *felo de se* verdict was frequently reserved as a punishment for those who had forfeited claims to sympathy not through their suicides but through misdeeds at or directly prior to the time of death.

However, the case of a woman whose poverty may have driven her to desperate measures in 1747 indicates that leniency was not altogether the prevailing paradigm. A 19 February 1747 notice in Eliza Haywood's *Ladies Magazine* reported that:

Though human nature is by various authors represented in the most fair amiable light, yet, on particular occasions, we have the most glaring and palpable instances of its corruption and depravity. The Truth of this observation was never more remarkably verified than in a late accident, for a poor woman happening to die in her lodgings in Hatton-wall, was unfortunately suspected to be guilty of suicide, or what we commonly call self-murder, and was accordingly treated like a person of that kind, since she was buried in a cross-way, and had a stake driven through her body, to the seeming satisfaction of a numerous mob. This procedure, however grateful to the brutal part of the human species, must certainly disgust a Christian and a man of sense; for 'tis certain that poverty may produce death as well as poison; the former we are sure the woman labored under; but we cannot be certain that she was so impious as to destroy herself by the latter, so that we have just reason to call aloud for the *nobile officium* of Judges, which is no more than a recession from the strict letter of the law, when charity and equity require it.

This notice is significant in respect to its sympathy for the woman's plight, its objection to the treatment her body received owing to the suspicion of suicide and its call for legal reform. Even while expressing skepticism that the woman could have resorted to such an 'impious act', the piece calls for a softening of penalties where 'charity and equity require it'. Although Murphy and MacDonald observe that coroners' juries in this period increasingly delivered the *non compos mentis* verdict that preserved the deceased from both the posthumous desecration described here and forfeiture of his or her property to the state, attitudes had not entirely softened, as the cruel mob scene recounted here suggests. Moreover, while women were less likely to be found *felo de se*, being seen as incapable of completing suicide owing to their strong domestic ties and inadequate mental and physical fortitude,¹⁷ clearly they were not entirely exempt from the reprisals shown here, nor was poverty viewed as sufficient grounds for compassionate treatment of the remains. Indeed, the article refutes the 'secularization thesis' by framing its call for leniency within strongly religious and moral terms; in the writer's view, the woman's body, regardless of the cause of death, should be treated with the respect and dignity demanded by Christian charity. Meanwhile, the attitude of the 'mob' suggests that very little had changed in a popular sense; the contrasting attitudes of brutal reprisal and clemency grounded in rational restraint obviate the possibility of viewing a picture of suicide in the eighteenth century with any degree of clarity, and support Susan Morrissey's claim that a 'metaphor of hybridization'¹⁸ would be more useful than Murphy and MacDon-

ald's 'secularization' thesis in assessing the effect that medical, moral, legal and political discourses had on the perception of suicide in the period.

Although suicide was never deemed a wholly personal affair, as attested by the severity of the post-mortem desecration of the suicide's corpse, which persisted in Britain as a practice up until 1824, the act became increasingly the 'nation's business' in direct proportion to England's derivation of its character from suicide. Each instance of suicide confirmed popular opinion regarding the pathological character of the nation. The notion that the English were a nation of melancholics given to self-slaughter predates the eighteenth century and is reiterated in the earliest texts from this period. England's reputation as 'a land of suicide' became only more pronounced as the century progressed, and the burgeoning newspaper and periodical industry reported on individual cases with increasing frequency. Clergymen, journalists and pamphleteers all took up this subject with increasing urgency, some claiming that self-murder is a 'Vice almost peculiar to Britain'. The language of contagion is frequently invoked, with suicide configured as an 'Epidemical Distemper' that could, in the words of one particularly apocalyptic tract, 'destroy the Order and Weal of Society, and introduce the most black and dreadful Character of Mankind'.¹⁹ In his *Defense against the Temptation to Self-Murder* (1726), Isaac Watts dwells upon the mimetic aspect of suicide, claiming that 'oftentimes where *Self-Murder* is practised, it fills the Heads of other melancholy and uneasy Persons with the same bloody Thoughts, and teaches them to enter into the same Temptation'. The case of the young Earl of Bath who took his life several weeks after his father's own suicide in 1702 only confirmed suspicions that suicide could 'run in families' either congenitally or through the power of suggestion. The very notion of an epidemiology of suicide counters the Thomistic notion frequently reiterated in the anti-suicide tracts that self-preservation is a natural law. Moreover, the fact that so many individuals were able to overcome this 'instinct' appeared to contradict the argument that suicide violated the law of nature.

The notion that the English were, in the words of the Dissenting minister, James Foster, 'more apt than any other nation in Europe (where such a dismal catastrophe is very rare and unusual) to assault a Life so strongly and peculiarly guarded by the wise Author of our being',²⁰ was shaped by both foreign and domestic perspectives. The English accepted the views of others that they were inordinately suicidal and promoted it themselves, prefacing nearly every discourse on suicide with an expression of dismay regarding their nation's predilection for 'self-murder', as in the essay published in the 8 July 1737 issue of the *Weekly Miscellany*, which begins, 'The unusual frequency of *Self-executions* among us seems to demand our Attention: Scarce a Week passes, but the public Papers are charged with some melancholy Instance of this nature'. The reasons given for this predilection for suicide were manifold, ranging from 'the change-

able Nature of the Soil, the Variety in Diet, or in the animal Temperament consequent thereupon,²¹ to the *climate*, to any thing *singular* in the *complexion* of the inhabitants, or to the *gloomy sentiments* of *Religion*’ as Foster argues in his essay on ‘duelling and self-murder’. Outside of England, Protestantism was held responsible for promoting self-destruction owing to its individualist emphasis in contrast to the highly incorporated aspect of Catholicism, which, as John Shebbeare observed, provided a natural outlet to the afflicted through the rite of confession.²² Indeed, the more rigid strains of Calvinism could breed a form of religious melancholy,²³ which figures largely in Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Criticism*. Melancholy, meanwhile, had become codified as a defining characteristic of the English owing both to Burton’s work and George Cheyne’s 1733 treatise, *The English Malady*,²⁴ that helped construct the notion of ‘nervous man’²⁵ and represented England as a nation of hypochondriacs and proto-neurotics.

The English Malady is, of course, a kind of ‘ecological fallacy’, which, on the basis of statistical data, makes assumptions about the ‘nature of individuals’ based on the communities in which they live, presuming that all members of a group are somehow homogeneous. Although the suicide rate among the English in the eighteenth century is impossible to determine, as MacDonald and Murphy note,²⁶ it is unlikely that it significantly surpassed that of other nations. According to Minois, the ‘English Malady’ ‘seem[s] to have been the combined effect of improved statistical techniques, sociocultural evolution among the aristocracy, a climate of intense religious rivalry, and the astonishing growth of the press.’²⁷ In a 1933 essay Roland Bartel exploded the notion of an English Malady, arguing that it was largely a myth constructed by newspapers, Bills of Mortality, and alarmists who viewed suicide as a symptom and expression of the freethinking and ‘free-living’ tendencies that increasingly defined the age.²⁸ Eighteenth-century writers also had their suspicions, with Voltaire observing that the ‘tragical stories which swarm in the English newspapers, have made the rest of Europe think that, in England, men kill themselves more willingly than elsewhere.’²⁹ In Voltaire’s view, suicide was a public event in England in contrast with the rest of Europe where it remained a ‘private occurrence’ never ‘exposed to public slander’. One might add that, alongside the ‘over-reporting’ of suicide in the English press, the copious number of publications, in the form of pamphlets, sermon literature, broadsides and works of fiction that contributed to a discourse of suicide in the period, also helped promote the reputation. Suicide, in many ways, became a ‘textual event’, a kind of constructed crisis that was no less distressing for all its fallaciousness. Meanwhile, the preponderance of *non compos mentis* verdicts helped confirm suspicions that the English were more prone to madness; as the narrative of a visit to Bedlam in a letter from a ‘Moor in London’ observes that ‘The people of

England in general are more subject to madness than any nation in the world; and it may very properly be term'd, *The English Malady*’.

However, even if we accept Voltaire’s opinion and that of most contemporary historians, we must nonetheless grapple with the questions that Max Novak in the closing remarks of his review of Georges Minois’s *History of Voluntary Death* so cogently poses: ‘If ... there was no English Malady, why was the idea embraced so eagerly by both the English and foreigners? What did it mean for the English to think of themselves as prone to suicide in both their literature and in the way they lived?’³⁰ The literature provides some clues by positioning suicide as a social rather than an individual problem, and a public rather than a private concern, contrary to the claims put forward by the ‘free-thinkers’ and other controversialists that it was entirely a personal affair. Writers seek to counteract the perceived ‘alienating effect’ of Protestantism – seen as a factor in suicide in the work of Emile Durkheim, as late as the turn of the twentieth century – by emphasizing communal values, the importance of social networks and the indissolubility of family ties. Social commentators also emphasize the responsibility of family members and caregivers to the members of the population seen as being ‘at risk’, with the anonymous *Discourse on Self-Murder* recommending that negligent caregivers be harshly disciplined for failing in their duty to keep their charges alive. The divide between self and other becomes blurred in these tracts as suicide becomes a public health issue and the state increasingly undertakes to ‘manage the living’.³¹

Medical discourse and religious writings represent suicide as a blight upon the national character, and a threat to national stability, population and its reputation abroad. However, even though the English for the most part appeared to view their unfortunate reputation as deserved, there was a tendency to rehabilitate the national character by suggesting (albeit in a muted and understated way) that suicide might be construed as a by-product of the civil liberties and ‘voluptuous’ lifestyles that the English enjoyed. Referred as a ‘functionalist’³² argument and usually ascribed to Whig promoters of mercantile, commercial and middle-class interests, this position lamented the prevalence of suicide but nonetheless viewed it as an index of progress and, paradoxically, a healthy economy, one writer even venturing so far as to accredit the fact that England had ‘more Instances of *Lunacy* than any other Country’ to ‘the Goodness of our *Genius*, and Greatness of our Wit’.³³ These writers were often the ones who celebrated Cato as a champion of freedom, although the cult of Cato did not necessarily belong to any one party, given the fondness of prominent Tory literati like Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift for both the Roman Stoic and Addison’s representation of him.

Curiously, writers on both sides of the suicide debate accepted the English Malady, rarely questioning the grounds on which this reputation was based. One might speculate that the preponderance of *non compos mentis* verdicts arose

from a sense that English identity was inherently pathological, that somewhere in every citizen lurked a latent self-destructive gene that need only be activated by a revolution in one's material, spiritual or romantic circumstances. Perhaps the sermon writers were moved by a sense of urgency to remind their parishioners of God's providence, of the 'unnaturalness' of self-murder, of the need to remain in 'one's post', but suspected they were fighting a lost cause. Whatever the case, suicide remained an integral concern of the print culture of the early eighteenth century. Far from 'taboo', it was debated, anatomized, castigated, celebrated and even satirized in writings from every press across Britain and its colonies. Although the act continued to elude understanding, a satisfactory term emerged at this time to replace the appalling descriptor 'self-murder', which did not dissuade philologists like 'J. B.' from experimenting with their own unwieldy coinages like 'apstophonia'.

By the midpoint of the eighteenth century, Cato's star had waned in England, eclipsed by figures (both literary and historical) like Werther and Thomas Chatterton who epitomized the sensibility of the 'man of feeling'.³⁴ The preoccupation with melancholy that contours the discourse of suicide in the century's first half remains central to the new paradigm of sensibility, however, and the relationship between the two 'halves' of this century is one of continuity rather than disruption, at least in regard to writing and thinking about self-destruction.

Notes

1. Others reported that he leafed through his copy of Donne's *Biathanatos* in the moments before death (J. Donne, *BLAΘANATOS [Biathanatos]: A Declaration of that Paradoxe, or Thesis, That Selfe-Homicide Is Not So Naturally Sinne, That It May Never Be Otherwise* (London, 1644)).
2. G. Cahn, *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 17.
3. The writings from the early part of this period are especially laden with Greek and Latin references.
4. It should be noted, however, that many of the anti-Cato writers attempt to recuperate the reputation of the ancients by pointing to the numerous philosophers that reject suicide as a viable option, including Pythagoras, Socrates (via Plato), Aristotle, Virgil and Cicero. Defenders of the 'pagans' include John Tillard, who, in the course of his ill-advised paper war with William Warburton, insists that '*the Heathens did not think Suicide in Misfortunes right and laudable, [and] that they did not incourage or approve of Self-Murder*'. J. Tillard, *A Reply to Mr. Warburton's Appendix, in His Second Volume of the Divine Legation of Moses*, 2 vols (London, George Hawkins, 1742).
5. *British Gazette*, 6 July 1728.
6. *Universal Spectator*, 26 August 1732.
7. Detractors of the cult of Cato sought to discourage suicide by portraying it as an act that actually undermined an individual's masculinity. John Adams consistently returns to this point in his *Essay Concerning Self Murther*, which suggests that to fail in one's spiritual

and social duty to remain alive until summoned is to render oneself effeminate for 'self-murder' is the act of women and weak-minded individuals.

8. M. MacDonald and T. R. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 322.
9. E. Haywood, *Selections from the Female Spectator*, ed. P. Meyer Spacks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 43.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
11. For an excellent collection of essays dealing precisely with this subject, please see J. R. Warts (ed.), *From Sin to Insanity: Suicide in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).
12. *Read's Weekly Journal*, 6 November 1731.
13. Anon., *A Discourse upon Self-Murder ... in a Letter to a Free-Thinker That Despised Life* (London, Thos. Green, 1732).
14. *Ibid.*
15. *London Journal*, 8 September 1733).
16. *Weekly Packet*, 24 December 1715.
17. For an especially illuminating account of the 'gender paradox' of suicide, please see H. Kushner, 'Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity' in J. Weaver and D. Wright (eds), *Histories of Suicide: International Perspectives on Self-Destruction in the Modern World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 19–52.
18. See S. Morrissey, 'Drinking to Death: Vodka, Suicide, and Religious Burial in Russia', *Past and Present*, 186 (2005), pp. 117–46. For a powerful rebuttal to the 'secularization thesis' see D. Andrew, 'Debate: The Secularization of Suicide in England 1660–1800', *Past and Present*, 119 (1988), pp. 158–65.
19. *The Old Whig*, 25 August 1737.
20. J. Foster, 'Of Duels and Self-Murder' in *Sermons on the Following Subjects*, 4 vols (London, J. Noon, 1744), pp. 123–58.
21. *Universal Spectator*, 26 August 1732.
22. *Ibid.*
23. See J. Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).
24. G. Cheyne, *The English Malady* (1733), ed. Roy Porter (London: Tavistock Routledge, 1991).
25. G. S. Rousseau, *Nervous Acts: Essays on Literature and Sensibility* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).
26. MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, p. 253.
27. G. Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture*, trans. L. G. Cochrane (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1999).
28. R. Bartel, 'Suicide in Eighteenth-Century England: The Myth of a Reputation', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 23 (1967), pp. 145–58.
29. Voltaire's subsequent reflection, 'I know not but there are as many madmen or heroes to be found in Paris as in London' ironically invokes the dominant ways in which suicide was categorized outside the moral and religious discourse of the time. Voltaire, *The Works of Voltaire: A Contemporary Version*, trans. William F. Fleming, 21 vols (New York: E.R. DuMont, 1901), vol. 19, pp. 39–43.
30. M. E. Novak, 'Boundaries of the Self: Crises of Mind and Body' (Review), *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37:4 (2004), pp. 683–6, on p. 686.

31. Although Michel Foucault argues that this 'biopolitical' development transpires later in the century, the contents of these volumes suggest that this trend towards 'life management' begins much earlier. See especially *The History of Sexuality. Volume One*, trans., R. Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990).
32. See M. Healy, *Fictions of disease in Early Modern England: Bodies, Plagues and Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
33. *Universal Spectator*, 26 August 1732.
34. See MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, p. 334. In America, where republicanism was in its ascendancy, Carø remained topical and relevant, and his female counterpart, the matrona Lucretia, never entirely loses her appeal.

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