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Ms. Coll. 251: Literary Models, Religion, and Romantic Science in John Syng Dorsey's *Poems, 1805-1818* (Expanded)

The surgeon and poet John Syng Dorsey was born in Philadelphia on December 23, 1783 and died of typhus on November 12, 1818, shortly after giving his introductory lecture as Professor of Anatomy at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. He received a classical education at the Friends' Academy, "making more than ordinary proficiency, especially in the Latin language, for which he seemed to have had an unusual fondness" (Gross 140). At age fifteen, he began his medical education as an assistant to his maternal uncle Philip Syng Physick (1768-1837), one of the most renowned physicians in early America whose many discoveries earned him the title "the father of American surgery" (Smythe). Dorsey graduated two years early from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School at nineteen, and since he was too young to practice medicine, he spent an additional two years visiting major surgical institutions in Paris and London, where "he was not greatly impressed with the work of his European colleagues" (Smythe). Upon his return to Philadelphia in December 1804, he began to practice medicine at the Pennsylvania Hospital. During the following year, he started working on his forty-page notebook of *Poems, 1805-1818* (UPenn Ms. Coll. 251) and published five of these poems, as well as eleven not included in the manuscript, in the *Port Folio*, an influential Philadelphia literary journal. Just as Dorsey's medical career contributed to the growing field of surgery and connected him to elite Philadelphia society, his *Poems* reveal his interests in spirituality, the history of science and medicine, and classical and eighteenth-century British poetry, demonstrating several major formal and thematic trends in early nineteenth-century American literature.

Dorsey is best known as the author of *The Elements of Surgery* (1813), the first American textbook of surgery. W. Roy Smythe writes that this two-volume work of nearly 800 pages was a “monumental” achievement because Dorsey singlehandedly wrote and illustrated a thorough guide to “all major clinical areas of surgery at that time.” Smythe argues that Dorsey was uniquely qualified to write it not only because of his surgical expertise and access to Physick’s notes, but also because of his unusual skill as a writer and medical illustrator. *The Elements of Surgery* was published in three subsequent editions in 1818, 1823, and 1831 and became the standard surgical textbook in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century. It was also the first American textbook published in Edinburgh for students at the Edinburgh Medical School, which was the best medical school in the English-speaking world at the time, bringing American medical innovations to “the more established European centers of medical education” (Smythe).

Although Dorsey is remembered today as the author of *The Elements of Surgery*, his contemporaries also knew him as a poet. In an obituary published in the April 1819 issue of the *Port Folio*, a weekly Philadelphia literary journal, a mourner known as J. E. H. declared that Dorsey’s poems “evinced much classical taste and a vigorous imagination” (343). The prominent mid-nineteenth-century Philadelphia surgeon Samuel D. Gross writes that “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.,” the longest poem in MS Coll. 251, “embodies uncommon vigor of thought and power of description, and breathes throughout a feeling of piety worthy of Dante or Milton” (156). Several different hands appear alongside Dorsey’s own in the manuscript, suggesting that Dorsey circulated his *Poems* so his friends and colleagues could contribute their own voices to his collection by editing and adding on to his

work. In 1805 and early 1806, he also published sixteen poems in the *Port Folio*, allowing him to publicly participate in early nineteenth-century Philadelphia literary culture.

In addition to this commentary within the manuscript and about Dorsey's work, a poetic tribute to Dorsey further suggests that he was almost as well-regarded for his literary abilities as he was for his contributions to medicine. John Agg's 1819 collection *The Ocean Harp: a Poem, in two Cantos, with some smaller pieces; and a Monody on the Death of John Syng Dorsey, M. D.* contains an elegy for Dorsey that portrays poetry as one of the many fields at which he excelled. Either the publisher or Agg, a British immigrant to Philadelphia who was best known as the author of two Byron apocrypha, thought this poem significant enough to include on the title page. The poem imagines Dorsey's urn joining those of eminent Philadelphia physicians Benjamin Rush, William Shippen, and Caspar Wistar and describes Dorsey's inclinations toward philosophy, poetry, music, morality, and piety. The elegy's heroic couplets and imagery related to death, darkness, and the heavens recall the form and content of Dorsey's own poems such as "Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.," suggesting the influence of eighteenth-century British Augustan and Graveyard poets on early-nineteenth century poets in the United States. In the May 1819 issue of the *Analectic Magazine*, which Moses Thomas published in Philadelphia in addition to *The Ocean Harp*, a reviewer wrote that "the 'Monody' is not in good taste; a part of it is much the reverse, and is worthy of neither its subject nor its author," hinting at Dorsey's fame and skill as well as Agg's (367).

One of the greatest influences on Dorsey's *Poems* is the eighteenth-century British poet Alexander Pope, who was one of the most respected and widely read poets in both England and the United States in the early nineteenth century. Dorsey gives his manuscript the epigraph "nemo omnibus horis sapit," an abbreviated form of a Latin phrase meaning "no mortal is wise at

all times” that is also the title of an unpublished satirical poem attributed to Pope. Dorsey also selects a quote from Pope’s philosophical poem *An Essay on Man* (1734) as the epigraph to “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.,” then quotes *An Essay on Man* and Robert Dodsley’s response to it within the poem itself. *An Essay on Man* inspired Dorsey’s poem not only with its theme of the inability of human reason to understand God’s ways, but also with its use of heroic couplets. This poetic form, which Pope mastered and popularized in his original satirical verse and his translations of Homer, appears frequently in Dorsey’s manuscript, especially in its first half, where four of the eight poems from 1805 are written in heroic couplets. In “Valedictory Address to my Muse,” Dorsey names Pope and Milton as his poetic idols with whom he cannot hope to compete and praises Pope for his skillful use of meter (“suavity of numbers”). Pope’s formal and thematic influence on Dorsey’s *Poems* shows that Dorsey was well-versed with the literature of his era and demonstrates that Pope remained hugely influential even as the first generation of Romantics like Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Blake were publishing their revolutionary collections at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Dorsey’s commitment to reading and writing poetry in addition to his medical career is representative of the interconnected nature of the sciences and the humanities during his lifetime. Scholars call this interdisciplinary intellectual environment Romantic science, which flourished during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries at the same time that Romanticism was also a major literary movement; Richard Holmes, for example, dates this era from Captain James Cook’s expedition around the world on the *Endeavour* in 1768 to Charles Darwin’s voyage to the Galapagos Islands in 1831 (xvi). Romantic science celebrates “the solitary scientific ‘genius’” who makes discoveries through sudden and intuitive imaginative leaps, a model that links scientific discovery “very closely to poetic inspiration and creativity” and conflates the

figures of the scientist and the poet (Holmes xvii). Noah Heringman ascribes the development of Romantic science to a “larger economy of ideas and resources both reflected and regulated by the print culture encompassing literature and natural history in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Britain,” which created a “shared culture of ‘letters’ and of the epistemological claims of literary projects to explain the natural world” (2, 6). As the publication of introductory scientific texts and the popularization of the latest discoveries through newspapers and public lectures made science more accessible to the general public, many Romantic poets incorporated allusions to new scientific developments into their work.

At the same time, it was not uncommon for scientists to spend their free time writing poetry: the renowned chemist Humphry Davy (1778-1829), whose lectures Dorsey attended in London in 1803, wrote dozens of unpublished poems in notebooks like Dorsey’s, while the Swiss anatomist, biologist, and botanist Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777), whom Dorsey includes in a catalogue of influential physicians in “Song at the Anniversary Dinner of the Philadelphia Society 1805,” was also a prolific poet (Holmes 235, Gross 143). When Dorsey’s colleague Nathaniel Chapman gave an “Elogium on Dr. Dorsey” as a valedictory address to the graduating class of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School on March 1, 1819, he invoked the authority of classical intellectual traditions to provide an exalted history for Romantic science, explaining that “between these chaste pursuits [the humanities] and the science of medicine, there would seem to be a natural alliance. Every age shows them to have been intimately associated, and in the beautiful mythology of antiquity, the disciples of Esculapius, and the votaries of the Muses, have the same tutelary divinity” (274). These remarks portray medicine and literature as two varieties of human creativity, the larger force that inspires and unifies these seemingly unrelated fields of knowledge.

Like the works of his Romantic contemporaries, Dorsey's *Poems* contain allusions to many of the most revolutionary scientific advances of his time. Although "Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc." ultimately argues that humans cannot and should not dare to attempt to understand the mysteries of God because the secrets of Heaven will be revealed to them after death, the third verse paragraph of the poem celebrates human reason by listing several recent discoveries about the natural world. In addition to earlier contributions by Isaac Newton and Benjamin Franklin, two major milestones in Romantic science that Dorsey references are William Herschel's 1781 discovery of Uranus, which John Keats used to link literary and scientific innovation in his 1816 sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," and the Montgolfier brothers' 1783 invention of the hot air balloon, which Coleridge and Wordsworth adopted as a symbol of the imagination and which Byron and Shelley used to discuss human progress just as Dorsey does (Holmes 206, 161-2, 474). Dorsey combines poetry, religion, and science to delineate the possibilities and limits of human reason. In "Song at the Anniversary Dinner of the Philadelphia Medical Society 1805," a drinking song celebrating wine's superiority over the cures promoted by his profession, Dorsey sketches a history of eighteenth-century medicine and competing theories of disease through allusions to prominent physicians. Although these two poems are ostensibly about other subjects, they provide an evocative catalogue of contemporary developments in the natural sciences and medicine.

Although contemporary responses to his writing and the close relationship between poetry and the natural sciences in Romanticism imply that Dorsey was at home in both the literary and scientific communities of early nineteenth-century Philadelphia, Ms. Coll. 251 shows his ambivalence toward his dual passions for poetry and medicine. The cover of the notebook that Dorsey selected for his *Poems* is inscribed with "Memoranda Inertiae." Since "inertia" can

mean either “lack of skill, ignorance” or “idleness, indolence” in Latin, this phrase can be translated as “Unskilled Notes” or “Idle Notes,” suggesting that Dorsey viewed creative writing as a hobby less significant than his medical career. Indeed, in a profile of Dorsey for the *Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital*, A. Robin asserts that “his whole soul was wrapped in his chosen calling and no claims, even those of music and poetry, were superior to those of his profession” (130). Nathaniel Chapman attested to his colleague’s balanced interests by noting that “dedicated as [Dorsey] was to his profession, he still did not neglect elegant literature, or the liberal arts. But on the contrary, he cultivated them with care, and found in the intervals of his leisure, that they smoothed the ruggedness of his severer studies, and afforded a refuge from the cares and irritations of business” (274).

However, “Valedictory Address to my Muse” contradicts both of these external assessments. Dorsey cites both meanings of “inertia” as reasons why he wants to stop writing, lamenting that he is not talented enough to express himself as eloquently as Pope or Milton and that his moments of poetic inspiration distract him from his profession. He begs the Muse to “turn not from wisdom’s page astray / my wandering thoughts to trifles airy” and relates with distress how his thoughts of poetry often interrupt his study of the writings of John Hunter, an influential Scottish surgeon whom he greatly admired and to whom he refers three times in his *Poems*, more than he does to any other scientist or physician. This anguished poem inverts Robin’s and Chapman’s claims by presenting writing not as relaxing pastime but as a compulsion that threatens to overpower Dorsey’s commitment to medicine. Dorsey did not keep his promise to himself, as he wrote three more poems in his notebook in 1805 and wrote an additional thirteen pages of poetry in 1817 after a twelve-year hiatus, nearly doubling the length of the manuscript. Still, the internal conflict that Dorsey describes expresses his reservations

about poetic composition and illuminates the tension between his two major intellectual pursuits, showing that the interconnectedness of science and the humanities within Romanticism was not always easy for a multitalented creator to navigate.

In 1805 and early 1806, before and after he wrote “Valedictory Address to my Muse,” Dorsey also published “critically acclaimed” poetry in early volumes of the *Port Folio*, a weekly literary and political magazine published in Philadelphia from 1801 to 1827 that Samuel D. Gross calls “at that time the only literary periodical of note in the United States” (Smythe, Gross 156). Catherine O’Donnell Kaplan writes that this periodical was modeled on Richard Steele’s *Tatler* (1709-1711) and Steele and Joseph Addison’s *Spectator* (1711-1712), highly influential British journals “which portrayed the experience of the club to readers who might live far from a coffeehouse or salon” (21). These publications were also so popular in the American colonies that “the young Benjamin Franklin came to consider himself a British citizen entitled to the full rights of an Englishman in no small measure by assiduously copying the *Spectator*’s prose, cultivating its sensibility and entering into its imagined club” (21-22). Dorsey was fortunate to personally experience the British club and other cultural activities: during his trip to London, his connections to John Hunter’s brother-in-law Sir Everard Home allowed him to participate in London intellectual society in addition to his medical studies. He listened to famous politicians speak at the House of Commons and attended fashionable dinners, the theatre, and an exhibit of paintings by the Royal Academy of Arts; Home even introduced him to Sir Joseph Banks, the president of the Royal Society who had worked as a botanist on Cook’s 1768 *Endeavour* voyage, at one of Banks’ salons, which were “attended by all the literati of London” (Gross 142-145).

The *Port Folio* formed an equivalent intellectual space in Philadelphia, bringing the British traditions of club culture and journalism that used print culture to record and extend the

political and literary discussions that took place in clubs to a major American city. Joseph Dennie, who edited the *Port Folio* under the pseudonym Oliver Oldschool until his death in 1812, filled his publication with “contributions from around the nation and from members of the Tuesday Club, a group of educated men and women with whom he gathered in Philadelphia” (Kaplan 8). Dennie’s circle was composed of “young professionals and their cultured wives [who] wrote for the periodical, [and] convened for dinners” to discuss literature, science, and politics just as their London counterparts did. Like Dorsey, “many came from prominent local families and were beginning to follow fathers or other male relatives into respectable professional or merchant careers, even as they engaged in literary pursuits” (143).

The Tuesday Club and its print offshoot, the *Port Folio*, show that intellectual activity in the young nation was centered in Philadelphia, especially since the journal had “subscribers not only throughout New England and the mid-Atlantic but also in the south and as far west as Kentucky” (140-141). By allowing residents of various far-flung states to indirectly participate in the Tuesday Club by reading and submitting to the magazine, the *Port Folio* helped create the national intellectual community of the young United States. More specifically, it influenced early nineteenth-century American poetry: In addition to publishing American voices, Dennie “also brought British authors to American readers, including William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas Moore, and Thomas Gray” (8-9). Dorsey could also have been exposed to Romantic poetry along with other recent cultural developments during his trip to London, which strengthens the parallels between his dual medical and literary education and careers in Europe and in Philadelphia. His intellectual journey mirrors that of the *Port Folio* and of the United States itself, in which American readers copied British journalistic and poetic

traditions in order to consume and then contribute to transatlantic Anglophone literary movements.

In 1805, Dorsey published five of the nine poems that he wrote that year in Ms. Coll. 251. However, the publication order (“Song at the Anniversary Dinner of the Philadelphia Medical Society 1805,” “Written on a Fine Evening,” “Valedictory Address to my Muse” and “Written at the urgent request of a lady,” “Invocation to Oblivion”) is substantially different from the order of the poems in the manuscript (“Written on a fine summer evening,” “Written at the urgent request of a lady,” “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.,” “Invocation to Oblivion,” “Advice to a young lady,” “Valedictory Address to my Muse,” “Song at the Anniversary Dinner of the Philadelphia Medical Society 1805,” “Impromptu occasioned by the preaching of the Reverend Mister S.kinner,” “Another on the doctrine that it is a sin for sinners to pray”). This discrepancy raises the possibility that Dorsey may have composed his poems elsewhere and then copied them into this notebook, especially since the manuscript has virtually no revisions in Dorsey’s hand. Although “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.” was not published in the *Port Folio* and does not appear to have been published anywhere else, Dorsey’s son Robert Ralston Dorsey notes that it is “copied in Charles’ hand writing,” making it unclear where Charles copied it from and why Dorsey did not write it in his own hand like he did all of the other 1805 poems. A. Robin and Samuel D. Gross seem to have only read it in this manuscript. Robin calls “Written on a fine summer evening” Dorsey’s “first recorded verse,” reprints Robert’s addition to “Written at the urgent request of a lady,” and lists Dorsey’s 1805 poems in manuscript order, so Robin examined the manuscript but did not account for and possibly did not examine Dorsey’s contributions to the *Port Folio*. “Advice to a young lady,”

“Impromptu occasioned by the preaching of the Reverend Mister S.kinner,” “Another on the doctrine that it is a sin for sinners to pray,” and the 1817 poems are also unpublished.

The published versions of the poems show little revision, with only minor changes in punctuation, stanza breaks, and word choice, suggesting that the manuscript versions are Dorsey’s original drafts and that Dennie made these editorial changes; the poems were not copied from the *Port Folio* because the manuscript versions do not include these changes. The published version of “Invocation to Oblivion” has the most substantial changes in phrasing and, more significantly, includes a dedication to Matilda and an additional stanza about her, reframing the poem as an expression of the romantic longing that exacerbates if not causes Lucio’s anguish rather than a Romantic lyric about Dorsey’s desire to be free of troublesome “stormy passion.” The published versions of “Valedictory Address to my Muse” and “Song at the Anniversary Dinner of the Philadelphia Medical Society 1805” include Latin glosses of Dorsey’s lines, though they are not always the same ones given in the manuscript. The *Port Folio* published original poetry in French and Spanish and translations from Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, Persian, and Chinese, attesting to its educated audience’s knowledge of and interest in foreign languages and world literature.

Contributors to the “Original Poetry” section of the *Port Folio* generally published under pseudonyms. As Decius, Dorsey published five of the manuscript’s 1805 poems and “To the Club” (May 25, 1805 p.160), which states that men find enjoyment in drinking and each other’s company while love causes them pain and makes them lose their “wit and folly.” This poem is an example of the *Port Folio*’s many pieces satirizing how “men attracted to women lost their judgment and dignity—and the women who sought to attract men did so too” (Kaplan 158). Dorsey switched his pseudonym from Decius to Lucio so he could publicly put a stop to his

poems on varied subjects such as drinking, the history of medicine, and reflections on sunsets and mortality and start his cycle of poems courting Matilda. The fact that he anonymously published “Written at the urgent request of a lady” on the same page as Decius’ farewell poem “Valedictory Address to my Muse” shows that he wanted to separate Decius the poet from the courting lover and makes “Written at the urgent request of a lady” his transitional poem between these two modes of authorship. He began publishing as Lucio with “Invocation to Oblivion,” the only Lucio poem in Ms. Coll. 251, and continued with eleven poems that are not in the manuscript.

“To Her Who Loves Me” by L—o (July 13, 1805 p.216) tells the speaker’s beloved to make her desire known and return the speaker’s love. On the same page, “To Matilda, Who Calls Me a Flatterer” by Lucio calls Matilda “the grossest of flatt’rers.” In “To Matilda” (August 10, 1805 p.247), Lucio loves Matilda not for her beauty, “witching graces,” or singing voice but for her “soul, replete with virtue, honour, / Truth, and sensibility”; in the final stanza, he declares that his “soft impressions” toward Matilda “form’d my future life to cheer” and that Matilda is “more loved, more lovely, each succeeding year.” On the following page, “A Wish” by Lucio has a prefatory note that reads, “See “A Wish by S. Rogers, Esq” beginning with “Mine be a cot beside a hill”—”. This note implies that Lucio’s poem, in which the speaker imagines being so wealthy that he could enjoy himself and not have to marry (“with Plutus’ aid from Hymen free”) because “to lovers rich, the girls are kind,” is a parody of “A Wish” by the British poet Samuel Rogers (1763-1855), a poem imagining blissful life and marriage in a village.

In “To a Pretty Little Shrew,” however, Clarissa inspires Lucio to go beyond merely praising her beauty and allows him to ask Apollo to “fill [him] with poetic fire.” Clarissa’s beauty gives him the inspiration to write about subjects “loftier” than love; Dorsey specifies that

her beauty is greater than that of the nine Muses and Apollo combined but designates the task of describing her appearance to inferior “others.” Consistent with the *Port Folio*’s satirical view of lovers’ impaired judgment, the last line states that Clarissa is also a scold, adding to the tension between Dorsey’s lofty creative ambitions and the flawed, mundane subjects that enable his writing. On a lighter note, “Song” (August 17, 1805 p.255) condemns drunkards who are “devoid of wit, humour, and spunk” when sober, then declares, “We’ll drink, while we’ve wit to inspire us, / And women our joys to refine, / We’ll drink, while their beauty can fire us.” This poem demonstrates the importance of intellectual exchange in social spaces like the Tuesday Club, where women inspire conversation and merriment just like they inspire poetry in “To a Pretty Little Shrew.” Another “Song” (September 14, 1805 p.288) celebrates the joy that drinking brings, then adds “The charms of the lasses / Enhanced by full glasses, / Shall shield us from dull melancholy” to continue with the theme of women as inspiration. While “To the Club” portrays love as a threat to the homosocial “joy” that stimulates male “wit,” these two drinking songs merely ignore the fact that women participated in the Tuesday Club and contributed to the *Port Folio* by presenting them as valued but passive guests whose invigorating or pleasantly intoxicating effects on men are akin to those of alcohol.

However, the remaining Lucio poems trace the intensifying courtship of Matilda begun in the earlier poems. The opening lines of “Addressed to a Friend Who Never Loved” (August 31, 1805 p.272), in which Matilda is absent but will return, summarize Lucio’s exploration of the pains and joys of love: “With all its pangs, I’d not forgo / The dear, delusive dreams of love.” “Song” (October 26, 1805 p.336) features the prefatory note, “Mr. Oldschool will recognize, in the following Stanzas, the hand-writing, and perhaps the odd notions, of an old Correspondent, who once more claims his usual lenity and indulgence,” allowing Lucio to continue wooing

Matilda and Dorsey to continue publishing. In this poem, a maiden is so attractive that Lucio has not noticed exactly what she looks like even though he knows that she is not beautiful; as they argue, she punches him and knocks him into a muddy puddle, “and since, I’m afraid that she does not much love me.” In the final stanza, Lucio concludes, “I like her, for all, and, as soon as I’m able, / To pay for a bed, and find meat for the table, / I’ll court her, and wed her, and never forsake her, / But if she won’t have me,—the devil may take her.” Unlike Lucio’s other poems to Matilda, particularly the unhappy “Addressed to a Friend Who Never Loved,” this “Song” presents a practical and nonchalant attitude toward love.

Lucio’s final poems in the *Port Folio* were published on page 144 of the March 8, 1806 issue. The first poem’s prefatory note implies that Lucio is no longer a lover: “Mr. Oldschool, Lucio, when a lover, was a rhymer, and has occasionally found you indulgent enough to insert his “effusions” in your Miscellany. The following is now at your disposal.” In this poem, Matilda seems to have rejected Lucio, who imagines that she would be upset to find out that she hurt him. He declares that she “deserve[s] a crown; / And not to grace a wretch’s arms, / Exposed to fate and fortune’s frown” and vows that if she finds another lover, “I’ll ne’er complain, / Nor shall a sigh my passion tell!” He implies that he is unworthy of Matilda and so has no right to object to her future happiness with a more suitable partner. On the contrary, the second poem’s speaker, named Sam to represent a typical American man, explains that he is upset not over love but rather money lost at gambling: “I lost with my *heart* seven hundred, at loo!” The prefatory note “Mr. Oldschool may laugh at the loss of a heart, but it is not always a trifling loss” contributes to this mockery of not only the first poem, but also of many of the Lucio poems and love poetry in general. These final contributions are examples of both types of verses that Dorsey published but did not include in Ms. Coll. 251, the first dramatizing the pains and

pleasures of courtship with a specific woman and the second satirizing love while only celebrating the pleasures of female company in the context of extolling traditionally male pastimes like drinking, gambling, and writing poetry and having intellectual conversations inspired and enlivened by female beauty. This juxtaposition allows Dorsey to comment on his own poetry, creating a dialogue in his contributions that explores the tension between the *Port Folio*'s satirical view of love and his own desire to express the emotional realities of his romantic experiences.

Dorsey married Maria Ralston on April 30, 1807, just over a year after this final poem was published, so the Lucio poems dedicated to Matilda could be addressed to her as a means of making their courtship public (Geni). Ira M. Rutkow writes that "Dorsey devoted time to writing romantic poetry as a manner of courting his future wife, much of which was published in *The Portfolio*" (1043). This assessment disregards the love of writing for its own sake that torments Dorsey in "Valedictory Address to my Muse" and does not account for his poems about religion and science, suggesting that Rutkow did not examine Ms. Coll. 251, but it provides a useful framework for reading most of Dorsey's contributions to the *Port Folio*. After the general celebration of female company in Decius' "To the Club" and the anonymous author and beloved of "Written at the urgent request of a lady," the Lucio poems dramatize the progression of a courtship with a particular beloved, beginning with the anguished admiration of "Invocation to Oblivion" and then progressing from Lucio and Matilda's struggles to mutually acknowledge their desire to the couple's separation, arguments, and concrete plans for marriage. Dorsey perhaps encouraged Maria to love him by publishing poems that not only praised her but also showed how her rejection hurt him; he possibly stopped publishing these poems when Maria accepted his advances, then later fulfilled the promise of providing for his beloved that he makes

at the end of the “Song” published on October 26, 1805. In this light, the Lucio poems that are not addressed to Matilda are evidence that Dorsey continued to satisfy his muse’s demands by writing about diverse subjects rather than directing all of his creative energy toward courtship, even if they did succeed in impressing Maria.

Samuel D. Gross’ assessment of Dorsey’s poetry helps explain the differences between the poems published in the *Port Folio* and those included in the manuscript. He writes that “to [the *Port Folio*’s] pages Dorsey occasionally sent a poetic effusion, generally dashed off in the leisure moments of his practice, without, it may be supposed, much study or care in regard to composition. Most of the pieces are, nevertheless, characterized by uncommon rhythmical beauty, force of expression, and purity of sentiment, and would be worthy, were they collected, of a permanent place in our lighter literature” (156). Unlike Robin, who only comments on Ms. Coll. 251, Gross forms his opinion of Dorsey’s skill as a poet by examining his published poems with the addition of “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.”, which he praises because it “comprises nearly two hundred lines, and bears the marks of having been written with unusual care” (157). Gross suggests that there is a distinction between the lighthearted drinking songs, commentaries on love, and love lyrics addressed to Matilda published in the *Port Folio* and the manuscript’s poems about science, religion, and the act of writing. Together with Gross’ claim that “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.” “embodies uncommon vigor of thought and power of description, and breathes throughout a feeling of piety worthy of Dante or Milton,” this opposition implies that the manuscript verses are not only more serious, but also more personal and less conventional because they explore intellectual and spiritual ideas in the tradition of great poets rather than describing romantic attraction (156).

However, “Song at the Anniversary Dinner of the Philadelphia Medical Society 1805”’s celebration of medicine alongside wine, the relatively impersonal and conventional “Written on a fine summer evening” and “Written at the urgent request of a lady,” and the equally anguished “Valedictory Address to my Muse” and “Invocation to Oblivion” (explicitly fashioned as a love poem in print) all appear both in the *Port Folio* and in the manuscript, disproving the idea of a binary division between Dorsey’s “lighter” published work and his “uncommon[ly] vigor[ous]” manuscript. The published poems and the manuscript can be read as two overlapping but distinct collections curated for different purposes and audiences, selected not only by form and theme but also in line with the different print and manuscript cultures of sharing that allowed Dorsey’s poems to alternately circulate among the *Port Folio*’s large American audience and within his own circle of friends, perhaps even in Joseph Dennie’s Tuesday Club.

Gross’ classification of most of Dorsey’s poetry as “lighter literature” also affects the interpretation of the phrase “Memoranda Inertiae” inscribed on the cover of the manuscript. Gross suggests that the published poems are Dorsey’s truly “idle thoughts,” yet the notebook’s cover implies that all poetry is a diversion from the serious work of medicine. Still, Gross adds that Dorsey was a dedicated poet regardless of the ultimate quality of his verse and the relationship between his writing and his career: “That he was not, however, able altogether to resist her [his muse’s] blandishments, appears by the fact that he occasionally, after” he published “Valedictory Address to my Muse,” “indulged his taste for versification. A fondness for poetry was evidently deeply implanted in his breast; and although he felt that his muse was a dangerous companion, he found it impossible wholly to abandon her.” “Even his prose writings,” such as his introductory lecture on anatomy delivered at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School shortly before his death, “strongly partook of the poetical,”

showing not only the link between the sciences and the humanities in Romantic science but also Dorsey's own literary inclination and talents (157).

Dorsey's professional achievements and growing family occupied his time from the spring of 1806 to 1817, a decade in which he either stopped writing poetry altogether or simply did not write in Ms. Coll. 251. He became an adjunct professor of surgery at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1807 in order to take over some of the chronically ill Physick's teaching responsibilities; he became a professor of materia medica (pharmacology) in 1813 and was appointed to the chair of that department in 1816, and in 1818 he was appointed to the Chair of Anatomy, "considered among the most prominent medical positions in the United States" (Rutkow). He married Maria Ralston in 1807 and had three children, and he worked on *The Elements of Surgery* from 1807 to 1813 (Smythe). Curiously, a poem published in the May 1, 1817 issue of the *Port Folio*, "To Matilda" by L., laments that the speaker and Matilda have parted. If L. is short for Lucio and the poems addressed to Matilda were indeed intended for Maria, this outlier publication may simply be evidence of Dorsey indulging himself in writing again in his limited spare time in the manner that Gross describes.

The United States National Library of Medicine notes that Dorsey "has been suggested as the author" of the anonymous *Elegiac poem, on the death of Dr. Benjamin Rush, professor of the institutes and practice of medicine and of clinical practice in the University of Pennsylvania, who fell a victim to the prevailing typhus fever, on the 19th of April, 1813*, a short book published in 1813 and dedicated to medical students at the University of Pennsylvania. Its epigraph, "Actis aevum implet, non segnibus annis" ("He fills his lifetime with deeds, not with inactive years"), is a quote from the *Consolatio ad Liviam* ("Consolation to Livia"), an elegy spuriously attributed to Ovid for Nero Claudius Drusus, the son of Nero and Livia and the

stepson of Augustus (Peirano 205). Accordingly, this 24-page poem in heroic couplets contains many footnotes that explain allusions in the text to Rush's achievements and incidents in his life and identify inspirations for certain lines. The author writes that his sources include Alexander Pope's translation of the *Iliad* (1715-1720); the story of Caesar crossing the Rubicon; the British poet and satirist John Williams (1761-1818), who wrote under the pseudonym Anthony Pasquin; Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751); a quote from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* misattributed to Virgil; and Horace, whom Dorsey cites twice in his *Poems*.

These texts are a combination of classical and eighteenth-century British poetry, the same types of sources that Dorsey quotes in his *Poems*; however, they do not prove that Dorsey is the author of the *Elegiac poem* because these authors were among the most important and widely read influences on most, if not all, early nineteenth-century poetry in English. In a note on page 19 about Rush's involvement in treating the Yellow Fever of 1793, an epidemic that killed over 5,000 people in Philadelphia in the fall of that year, the author writes that he was "then about eight years old." Dorsey was nine years old at the time, so this aside supports the possibility that he wrote this tribute to his famous colleague. The elegy's final stanza extends the poem's subject to an expression of its author's ambition: "O! grant, indulgent Providence, that I / Like Rush may live, like pious Rush may die!" This wish expressing the author's hope to succeed in medicine is poignant considering Dorsey's premature death five years after the poem's publication, while the aspiration to die "like pious Rush" recalls Dorsey's resolution in the final verse paragraph of "Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc." to "serenely welcome death" like John Hunter allegedly did. The act of writing the elegy also suggests the author's literary ambitions, and its publication perhaps proves that they have been realized.

When Dorsey resumed writing poetry in Ms. Coll. 251 in 1817, he dealt almost exclusively with religious themes, returning to the issues of human reason and the afterlife that he explored in his 1805 manuscript poems. In “Lunatic Stanza’s,” he acknowledges that humans cannot go to Heaven and learn about its mysteries until they die, as he explains in “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.”; however, instead of declaring that God’s limits are absolute and hoping to “serenely welcome death,” he now wistfully wishes that he could access this forbidden knowledge in the present. “Religion as a duty and a sorrow” also shares the theme of “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.”, but, like “Lunatic Stanza’s,” it laments the frustrating nature of the doctrine that people can use science to discover every secret of nature except those pertaining to Heaven. “Religion as a duty and a sorrow” is written in heroic couplets like those of “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.” and is an intellectual discussion of the knowledge that Dorsey wants to gain, while “Lunatic Stanza’s” uses celestial imagery to evoke this knowledge’s physical source to which Dorsey wishes he could travel. “Lunatic Stanza’s” is written in quatrains in iambic tetrameter, a form that Dorsey adopts for many of his 1817 poems as his work becomes more lyrical and ambivalent toward Christianity; this formal change mirrors the transition in English literary trends from Pope’s satirical and didactic poems in heroic couplets to the Romantics’ lyric poems, many of which are written in quatrains.

The 1817 poems make religion more personal, both when Dorsey expresses his frustration with the teachings of his faith in “Lunatic Stanza’s” and “Religion as a duty and a sorrow” and when he hopes for his own, his son’s, and a family friend’s son’s virtue and salvation in “Hymn Written for Robert R. Dorsey + Henry Roberts.” The only secular poem that Dorsey wrote in 1817 is “In Memory of Alexander James Dallas,” an elegy for a Philadelphia

politician. Dorsey notes that it was “writ in his [Dallas’] daughter’s common place book fill’d with poetry,” suggesting that the grieving girl enjoyed this poem so much when it was circulated in manuscript that she found it worthy of copying into a selection of her favorite quotations. Still, the elegy fits in with the religious poems surrounding it because it defines and celebrates virtue and continues to explore the theme that Christians should welcome death because it reveals previously inaccessible knowledge and rewards them for lives spent serving God and other people.

The 1817 poems also demonstrate Dorsey’s engagement with Philadelphia society. While he participated in the literary culture of his city and of his young nation by publishing many of his early poems in the *Port Folio*, and “Song at the Anniversary Dinner of the Philadelphia Medical Society 1805” mentions fellow University of Pennsylvania medical school professors Benjamin Rush and Nathaniel Chapman, his later work contains dedications that reveal his familial and professional connections to groundbreaking Philadelphia charitable endeavors. “Hymn written for Robert R. Dorsey and Henry Roberts” is dedicated in part to the young son of the merchant Josiah Roberts, who founded the Pennsylvania Bible Society along with Dorsey’s father-in-law Robert Ralston and Benjamin Rush in 1808. This group was the first American Bible society, organizations that distributed affordable Bibles; in 1812, the Society published the first Bible in the United States printed using the mass-production process of stereotyping (Pennsylvania Bible Society). Members of Dorsey’s inner circle demonstrated a commitment to promoting literacy and religious education and took advantage of innovations in book production.

“Hymn Written for the Orphans (At the Asylum)” is dedicated to the beneficiaries rather than the leaders of another project. In 1814, a group of women founded the Orphan Society of

Philadelphia, the first non-sectarian orphanage in Pennsylvania. The first Directress was Sarah Ralston, Dorsey's mother-in-law and the daughter of Matthew Clarkson, the mayor of Philadelphia from 1792 to 1796, while the second Directress was Benjamin Rush's wife Julia Rush (Caldwell). Just as *The Elements of Surgery* was a groundbreaking work in American medicine and medical education, Dorsey's family members and colleagues were prominent and influential citizens who were leaders in many fields besides their chosen professions. Their activities also suggest a gendered division of charitable labor in which men organized the intellectual and religious project of distributing Bibles while women extended their own housekeeping and childrearing duties to the city's less fortunate by helping vulnerable children.

At the very back of the volume, separated from Dorsey's *Poems* by dozens of blank pages, are three pages of jokes and riddles in verse that provide another testament to their author's place among early nineteenth-century Philadelphia's elite. On the first of these pages, titled "Sea shore Badinage 1818," "Charade" is a riddle on the surname of Dr. Isaac Wayne Snowden, a young physician from a prominent family who trained in the office of Nathaniel Chapman (*History of Cumberland and Adams Counties, Pennsylvania 179-180*). Within "Sea Shore Badinage 1817," "Impromptu Conundrums on names of persons at the table" suggests that Dorsey visited a Long Branch, New Jersey seaside resort with Mary Nelson Barker, the wife of Major General John Barker (1746-1818), who served as the mayor of Philadelphia in 1808, 1809, and 1812; their son James Nelson Barker (1784-1858), who served in the War of 1812, wrote several successful plays, and served as the mayor of Philadelphia in 1819; Mary Chew Nicklin (1800-1864), the daughter of Philadelphia merchant Philip Nicklin and the granddaughter of Benjamin Chew, a prominent lawyer with professional and personal connections to several Founding Fathers; Alexander J. Dallas' youngest daughter Matilda, to

whom Dorsey dedicated “Advice to a Young Lady”; and Elizabeth Powel Francis Fisher (1777-1855), “a prominent white Philadelphia society matron closely connected to the oldest Philadelphia families” who was the widow of merchant Joshua Fisher (1775-1806) and the sister-in-law of wealthy merchant George Harrison (1761-1845) (Simpson 25-28, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts 141, Maillard 27, Harrison xli). These references suggest that the act of writing poetry, and perhaps even the very notebook in which those poems were written, functioned as a status symbol that not only attested to Dorsey’s education and accomplishments but also was a means of creating a record of vacation time spent with some of Philadelphia’s most prominent residents, placing Dorsey on the level of well-to-do professionals who had enough leisure and money to visit Long Branch.

These pages at the back of the volume also support Dorsey’s view of his creative writing as “Memoranda Inertiae.” These “badinages,” which the OED defines as “humorous, witty, or frivolous conversation; banter,” are designated mere “amusements” in opposition to the generally serious poems in the rest of the manuscript. The organization of the manuscript, in which the poems are written neatly at the front of the volume while the verse and prose “amusements” are relegated to the pages next to the back cover rather than integrated into the other poems from 1817, implies that Dorsey dedicated this notebook solely to his poetry but found it a convenient place to jot down a few “idle notes” in addition. The dates of the “amusements” correspond to the period when Dorsey resumed writing poetry in this notebook, which he took with him on his trips to Long Branch. These parallel entries show that place affected what Dorsey wrote about, since he penned jokes and riddles at the shore but apparently wrote his serious poems at home in Philadelphia. However, the manuscript’s only other reference to the location of an entry’s composition suggests that Dorsey viewed both his *Poems* and “amusements” as “Memoranda

Inertiae” compared to his surgical career, making poetry as much of a vacation as a trip to a beach resort. Dorsey notes that he wrote “Lunatic Stanza’s,” a grave reflection on religion and death, in 1817 at Mount Peace, the estate of the Ralston family on the outskirts of Philadelphia, yet “Impromptu at Mount Peace” is a short, playful riddle about the name Chester written directly beneath “Sea shore badinage 1817.” This evidence that he wrote two very different kinds of leisure poetry in the same place, year, and manuscript suggests that he viewed all forms of creative writing as “Memoranda Inertiae” but saw his *Poems* as more significant than mere “amusements.”

The final entry in Dorsey’s *Poems* is written largely in a different hand and contains little of Dorsey’s own work. This poem is a continuation of Dorsey’s “last numbers” written by his son Robert Ralston Dorsey (1808-1869), who revised his father’s manuscript toward the end of his own life. Robert, who was Dorsey’s eldest child and only son, never married and received a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania but never seriously practiced as a physician (*Geni*). These revisions allowed him to preserve and build on his father’s literary legacy even though he did not continue Dorsey’s familial or professional ones. Most of Robert’s notes and revisions in graphite, which I have italicized, are comparatively minor: he marked the beginning of each poem with *P* or *P.* and occasionally changed the phrasing of a line. He also added classical allusions to the manuscript by quoting or paraphrasing Horace and Propertius whenever one of Dorsey’s lines recalls a line by a Roman poet, and even provided a paraphrase in Italian of a quote by the sixteenth-century poet Torquato Tasso; I have translated Robert’s marginal notes in Latin. He was perhaps inspired by a note that Dorsey himself made to “Valedictory Address to my Muse” quoting the line from Horace’s *Odes* that he freely translated for use in his own poem, a practice that poets also used in the *Port Folio*. These allusions, just like Dorsey’s

quotations of eighteenth-century British poets in “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.,” help situate Dorsey’s *Poems* within literary history and provide examples of his thematic and stylistic models. Robert even imitates the form and content of his father’s “sea shore badinages” with a similar short, witty rhyme written during a vacation to Long Branch commenting on his experiences at the resort. In addition to this mimicry, this page before “Sea Shore Badinage 1818” includes two versions of the same lines and a prose explanation of the poem’s subject matter and the circumstances of its composition, aspects of Robert’s style consistent with the nature of his revisions and completion of Dorsey’s poetry.

The manuscript’s provenance reveals that Dorsey’s descendants had an increasingly prominent place in elite mid-Atlantic society. The free front endpaper contains the owner’s signature of Bessie Gardner du Pont, Dorsey’s great-granddaughter. Dorsey’s youngest child Maria Ridgley Dorsey (1816-1900) had a son named Dorsey Gardner (1842-1894) with her first husband, Charles Casenove Gardner (1817-1844). After Charles’ premature death, Maria married Horace Buttolph (1815-1898), the first superintendent of the pioneering New Jersey State Lunatic Asylum (now the Trenton Psychiatric Hospital), and had another son, Frank Dix Buttolph (1855-1890). Dorsey Gardner married Margaretta Sherman Potts (1842-1872) and was the father of Bessie Gardner (1864-1950), who married her cousin Alfred Irénée du Pont, an industrialist and philanthropist from an extremely wealthy and powerful Delaware dynasty of gunpowder manufacturers (Geni). Dorsey’s descendants and their spouses’ affluence and prominence in the medical and scientific fields give the manuscript a distinguished legacy as an artifact attesting to social mobility and a family’s scientific tradition.

Dorsey’s *Poems* are notable for their synthesis of seemingly disparate intellectual influences. Dorsey finds formal and thematic inspiration in the didactic, ornate works of

Alexander Pope as well as in the Romantics' lyric poetry, showing that the influence of the former persisted even as the latter rose to prominence in the literary cultures of England and the United States. The interplay between the sciences and the humanities in Dorsey's life and poetry reveals the interdisciplinary nature of Romanticism, a movement that came into conflict with Dorsey's Christianity as he explored the limits of the imagination and the mysteries of the natural world. The poems that he published as Lucio in the *Port Folio* allow him to comment on love and gender while describing his own experiences of courtship, themes that he only addresses in his *Poems* in the unpublished "Advice to a young lady." His involvement in Philadelphia's literary culture and his connections to groundbreaking charitable organizations and the elite residents who founded them exemplify the innovation that characterized the young United States and one of its major cities. Dorsey's work refutes binary divisions between Augustan and Romantic poetry and between science and literature, providing a valuable glimpse of the intellectual environment of the early nineteenth century.

(Epigraph)

Nemo omnibus horis sapit¹.

(Page 1)

P Written on a fine summer evening.

1805

With tints far richer than of Tyrian dye,
 The sun declining paints the western sky.
 Lost is the splendour of his noontide blaze
 Lost the effulgence of his ev'ning rays!
 'Tis so with man;—he rises from the womb
 Then shines a while, and sinks into the tomb.
 Alas! how few who to their zenith rise.
 And all their course pursue thro' cloudless skies!
 Vapours and mists², that rising from the earth
 Obscure the sun receive from him their birth.
 'Tis so with man, the ills that cloud his brow
 And all his mis'ries from his follies flow!

P Written at the urgent request of a lady³

Two lines I write;—enough to prove
 That writing less than thee I love!

+ *I must make your 2 lines 4*
By wishing you'd loved writing more!

RRD—1854

¹ The epigraph Dorsey gives to his poems is an abbreviated form of “nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit,” Latin for “no mortal is wise at all times.” This phrase is also the title of an unpublished satirical poem attributed to Alexander Pope (GB 206-GB 206 Brotherton Collection MS Lt q 61, University of Leeds Special Collections).

² The published version on page 144 of the May 11, 1805 issue of the *Port Folio* exchanges this phrase for “The mists and clouds,” writes out “thro’” as “through,” and replaces the exclamation points with commas or periods. The note above it, presumably from Dorsey, says, “Mr. Oldschool, If you are as great an admirer of a fine evening as I am, you will not think the following lines bombastic, and if you do not, you will flatter their author by publishing what follows.” This was the first poem that Dorsey published in the *Port Folio* after “Song at the Anniversary Dinner of the Philadelphia Medical Society” and the first that he published under the pseudonym Decius. The published version is titled “Written on a Fine Evening” while this manuscript version specifies a summer evening.

³ This poem was published anonymously alongside “Valedictory Address to my Muse” on page 168 of the June 8, 1805 issue of the *Port Folio*. Instead of a title, a prefatory note introduces the poem: “Mr. Oldschool, A young lady was very anxious that a gentleman should write some poetry in her pocket-book: after several unavailing denials, he complied, by writing the following Impromptu.” This title summarizes the published anecdote, which supports Rutkow’s claim that Dorsey wrote much of his poetry in order to court Maria Ralston. The prefatory note also provides a glimpse of early nineteenth-century manuscript culture in which friends wrote verses in each other’s notebooks on various occasions. By publishing this poem, Dorsey makes his reluctant compliance with the young lady’s request public in addition to or instead of doing so by writing in the young lady’s pocket-book.

(Page 2)⁴

P. Reflections on the
Incomprehensibility of God etc.
Copied in Charles' hand writing 1805
"Wait the great teacher Death, and God-adore!"⁵

Immur'd in clay within its narrow home,
The struggling soul in vain desires to roam.
Vain is the wish on Angels wing to rise,
And soar seraphic through unbounded skies:
Vain her attempt—e'en nature to explore
Where sulph'rous flames, in Etna's caverns roar.
In vain she strives, her wandering self to scan,
And wonders still o'er "all the maze of man."⁶
But vainer far, and impious the design,
To fathom Godhead with a mortal line!

Can man, weak man, uplift the corner stone
Of nature's fabric? Drag the lightning down?
Arrest the whirlwind in its vapid course?
Restrain th' impetuous billows by his force?
Darken the planets? Bid the sun to rise?

Marshall⁷

(Page 3)

Marshall the glittering legions of the skies?
Vain thought—! not all his science,—all his art,

⁴ Charles left the verso of Page 1 blank and began copying Dorsey's poem on the next recto page. I have marked the start of this poem Page 2 in order to simplify the numbering of the uninterrupted 39 pages of poetry that follow that blank verso page.

⁵ Dorsey quotes Pope's didactic poem *An Essay on Man* (1734), a philosophical work in which Pope attempts to "vindicate the ways of God to man," a goal which is itself modeled on Milton's purpose of "justify[ing] the ways of God to men" in *Paradise Lost*. Pope argues that people must accept the position that God has given them in the Great Chain of Being, a Neoplatonic hierarchy of all life forms that influenced the Enlightenment idea that we live in the best of all possible worlds; in this particular quote, Pope claims that people should have faith in God while they are alive because they will only be able to understand his ways and the mysteries of the universe after death. In this poem, Dorsey imitates Pope's celebration of scientific progress and human reason tempered by his condemnation of human attempts to understand God using similar Enlightenment methods.

⁶ "All the winding maze of man" is a quote from Robert Dodsley's 1734 poem *An Epistle to Mr. Pope, Occasion'd by his Essay on Man*. Dodsley writes that he initially found Pope's poem difficult but later reread it and was impressed by its portrait of human nature and man's place in the universe (the "maze of man").

⁷ In this poem and on the recto pages of "Lunatic Stanza's" and "Hymn Written for Robert R. Dorsey + Henry Roberts," the manuscript includes a catchword, or the first word of the following page, at the bottom of each page. Catchwords appeared in early printed books to help printers and bookbinders check that the pages of a book were bound in the proper order. The practice fell out of favor during the growth of industrial printing techniques toward the end of the eighteenth century, just before Dorsey wrote his *Poems* (OED). In the two poems from 1817, Dorsey seems to have included a catchword in order to aid his own composition process, but the consistent use of catchwords on the recto and verso pages of this poem indicates that Charles used them to help him copy Dorsey's work from its source, just as medieval monks did when they invented the practice of inserting catchwords while copying manuscripts.

Can tell what moves one fibre of his heart!

All hail Philosophy! thy praise resound
 Throughout an empire wide as nature's bound.
 Far 'oer the globe thy ample pow'r proclaim.
 Through earth, air, ocean, high exalt thy fame!
 Go bid the stars conceal'd in yonder sky.
 Unveil their glories to a Herschells⁸ eye,
 Proclaim when Sol obscures his noontide blaze
 The silver moon hides her extinguish'd rays.
 Planets eclips'd their borrow'd light resign
 And Newton's name in all their splendor shine!
 Electric thunders at thy word grow tame.
 And wish their lightnings gild a Franklin's name!
 For him the angry billows cease to foam.
 And ruled by thee conspire to waft him home! +
 Go! wish Montgolfier⁹ mount thy airy boat.
 O'er top the clouds, and through Olympus float
 But ne'er presume, stamp'd with a mortal form
 To "ride the whirlwind or direct the storm!"¹⁰
 Go! mount "through nature up to natures God,"¹¹

+ His discoveries of Electricity + oil on water +c¹²

But

(Page 4)

But then avaunt! nor tempt his angry nod.
 Confess a pow'r which nobler beings own,
 And humbly bow before Jehovah's throne!
 Tis his, to govern, to create, to cause:—
 Thine to obey; to admire; unfold his laws;
 He bids a universe in chaos hurl'd
 Arrange its atoms and produce a world!
 Be thine the humbler task to praise his name

⁸ William Herschel (1738-1822) was an astronomer best known for his discovery of Uranus in 1781 (Holmes 96).

⁹ Brothers Joseph-Michel and Jacques-Étienne Montgolfier invented the first hot air balloon in 1783 (Holmes 128).

¹⁰ Dorsey paraphrases a line from *The Campaign* (1704) by Joseph Addison (1672-1719), a British writer and politician best known for cofounding *The Spectator* magazine with Richard Steele (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). In an epic simile, Addison compares General John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough's effective leadership at the Battle of Blenheim to that of an angel who, "pleas'd the Almighty's orders to perform, / Rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm." Dorsey writes that humans can perform great deeds and make scientific discoveries but should not dare to perform the work of God or attempt to understand his laws.

¹¹ Another quote from *An Essay on Man*, which explains that anyone who "looks through nature up to nature's God" can perceive the Great Chain of Being that unifies all things. Dorsey qualifies Pope's statement by saying that humans can seek to understand natural laws through science but should not incite God's wrath by trying to understand his laws.

¹² In addition to his foundational discoveries about the nature of electricity, Benjamin Franklin noted that pouring oil on bodies of water calms waves—why "for him the angry billows cease to foam" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Dorsey alludes to this discovery again in an image in the final lines of "Invocation to Oblivion," suggesting the power of new scientific advances to both situate the place of human inquiry and knowledge in the Great Chain of Being and represent an individual's anguished emotions.

And thro' the earth his boundless pow'r proclaim.
Mortal! would'st thou depict his awful form?

Sol's contour must the glowing pencil warm,
Thro' all immensity thy canvass stretch
With vivid lightning, bright the outline sketch!

Not Bacchus, Ceres, nor triumphant—Jove,*
Not the lewd Goddess of the Italian grove,
Not the poor Indian's rude misshapen clay
Alla, nor Ibis, nor the God of day
Vary in essence or in feature more
Than Gods whom sapient—infidels adore.
Fair on his pallet—ev'ry wish display'd
Each paints the God his fancy has portray'd
The pliant pencil moved,—the colours blend
*Tasso says very beautifully "*Quel Dio che fea tutti e Giove*¹³" RRD

The

(Page 5)

The canvass brightens, and the lines extend.
The picture finished, let them all appear!
No two alike, and yet one name they bear!

One dreads the vengeance of his potent arm
Frighten'd from vice, but blind to virtue's charm,
He pleads conformity to ev'ry law,
Yet shudders at the danger of a flaw.
Doubts if his God be able to forgive
And bid the guilt-confessing Sinner live!

Behold, how different in his present form!
Not more bright noontide, from the midnight-storm
Now mercy triumphs; vengeance dies away
And gay Lothario¹⁴ swears he need not pray!

"If God creates us, surely 'tis his place,
To guard from evil, all his human race.
Such is their doctrine, such their vain belief,
Who charge their maker with each silly grief,
And trust that in a future world of bliss
He will reward them for the ills of this!

¹³ Robert alludes to Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), an Italian poet whose work influenced many English Elizabethan poets. Robert paraphrases a line from Canto 4, Stanza 42 of Tasso's most famous work, *La Gerusalemme liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*), an epic poem about the First Crusade published in 1581. English translations of *Jerusalem Delivered* were first published in 1594 and 1600; it is possible that Dorsey read John Hoole's 1772 translation in heroic couplets. Tasso writes "testimon'è quel Dio, ch'a tutti è Giove," meaning "witness is the God who to everyone is Jupiter," in a passage that gives equal weight to both Christianity and Islam, just as Dorsey refers to the gods of various religions ("each paints the God his fancy has portray'd") (Elosen).

¹⁴ In *El Curioso Impertinente* (*The Impertinently Curious Man*), a narrative imbedded within *Don Quixote*, Lothario attempts to seduce his friend's wife when his friend asks him to test her fidelity. The name became a synonym for a male seducer, especially an obsessive or callous one (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

There are who place upon this earthly ball
 Their hopes of happiness, their heaven, their all!
 Content, if they may but endure a day,

Gaily

(Page 6)

Gaily to trifle all its hours away
 And wishing caprice bow to passion's sway.
 Which some deny such folly, and declare
 The path of pleasure a seductive snare,
 "All shall be saved at last" one sinner cried
*Who but the fanatic His truth denies?*¹⁵
 Who but fanatics this plain truth denies!
 Another gravely tells us, God's elect
 How precious the blessings they expect.
 The die is cast, and all must now await
 The final exposition of their fate
 Unchanged it rests, nor can th'almighty arm
 Rob them of peace, or those preserve from harm!
 "And is that arm Almighty" others ask,
 "Which cannot readily perform the task?"

Thus Man in spite of nature will be wise; +
 Imagination every want supplies.
 Should reason err, and understanding fail }
 Fancy impels him with propitious gale, }
 Wafts him in oceans never plow'd before }
 To trace the wonders of some distant shore,
 Guides him thro' Aether¹⁶ to yon realms of light,
 When endless noon expels the shades of night.
 +making God as father! Brown¹⁷ says after his own image v. Lot
 thus inventing the order of creation. Volney¹⁸ has said something

¹⁵ Here Robert crosses out his own revision, evidently finding that he preferred his father's phrasing after all.

¹⁶ Aether, also spelled ether, is the element that fills all space beyond the terrestrial sphere and makes up the spheres of the stars and planets in the geocentric model of the universe. Beginning in the seventeenth century, scientists proposed luminiferous aether as the medium that allowed light and other forms of electromagnetic radiation to propagate through empty space, but the Michelson-Morley experiment disproved the concept in 1887 (OED). This image suggests Dorsey's familiarity with ancient and contemporary theories in physics and cosmology.

¹⁷ John Brown (1722-1787) was a Scottish theologian best known for *The Self-Interpreting Bible* (1778), a widely read commentary on the Bible that explained it to lay readers (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

¹⁸ Constantin François de Chassebœuf, comte de Volney (1757-1820) was a French philosopher, politician, and historian best known for *The Ruins: Or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires* (1791), an essay on human history and the origin of religion. Volney argued that Christianity grew out of a combination of ancient Egyptian, Persian, Syrian, and Hindu mythologies and that Jesus was not a historical figure but rather a mythical character. This denial of the existence of Jesus—and, by extension, the authority of the Bible which Dorsey makes the subject of his poem—which Volney first proposed along with Charles-François Dupuis became known as the Christ myth theory (Carroll and Prickett xxxii-xxxv). Robert's note hints at his father's liberal religious ideas: like Volney, Dorsey

very similar RRD

“*Qui [non venit]? -caelum ipsum petimus stultitia*” RRD¹⁹

The

(Page 7)

The universe exposes to his view
 Now stops at this, but scans its author too!
 Delusion efforts all! the unrefin'd
 Imagination, with foul reason join'd
 And ev'ry daring faculty of mind
 Should [strive] with efforts [moderate] and bold
 To praise his counsels, his designs unfold,
 Can [more] that effort worthy of his rod,
 Who tells us “Man by reason knows not God”
 A nobler faculty than this I ask
 Or humbly shrink from the unequal task
 Death shall hasten it, and the soul refine
 From all the dross that fills its earthy mine.

Sun, moon and stars, must fade before my sight
 And nature's glories sink in endless night:
 On evening gale soft melodies shall float
 No more to lull me with pathetic note,

equates the gods of various ancient and modern civilizations as all being the same almighty God that he praises in his poem, claiming that man created God “after his own image” and not vice versa as the Bible teaches.

Volney's religious and political ideas were highly influential in post-Revolutionary America. In *The Ruins*, Volney also analyzed the causes of various revolutions throughout history and argued that self-government and the separation of church and state are necessary for empires to flourish. Thomas Jefferson loved Volney's Enlightenment ideas, which he thought were equivalent to the ones behind the American Revolution, and translated the first twenty chapters of *The Ruins* into English. Fearing that openly endorsing Volney's radical religious ideas would jeopardize his candidacy for the 1800 presidential election, Jefferson anonymously published his translation, along with Joel Barlow's translation of Volney's last four chapters, as *A New Translation of Volney's Ruins* in 1802 (“From Thomas Jefferson to Volney, 20 April 1802”).

¹⁹ In a note written vertically across the right margin, Robert glosses the bracketed couplet with a famous quotation from Horace's *Odes* 1.3, “caelum ipsum petimus stultitia” (“in our foolishness, we seek the sky itself”), adding “qui non venit” (“who does not come [to this]”) to indicate the universality of this impulse. Horace's poem condemns the audacity and impiety of sailors and mythological figures who endanger themselves and challenge the gods' will by undertaking perilous journeys into realms not intended for human exploration. In the late eighteenth century, this phrase became associated with early hot air balloon attempts, such as the experiments of the Montgolfier brothers that Dorsey alludes to earlier in the poem; for example, it serves as the title of Paul Sandby's satirical 1784 print of an exploding balloon. It is also the epigraph of “To Mr. Blanchard the Celebrated Aeronaut in America” by Philip Freneau (1752-1832), an American poet and Federalist whose poems, like Dorsey's, show the influence of neoclassicism and Romanticism and anticipate the Gothic and Transcendentalist movements in mid-nineteenth-century American literature. Jean-Pierre Blanchard was a French inventor who popularized ballooning; his ascent from Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia in 1793, the first manned balloon flight in the Americas, is the subject of Freneau's poem (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Freneau tells the balloonist to wait for the Christian afterlife to understand the mysteries of nature instead of daring to rise to heaven through human technology, a theme also found in “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.”

No more the voice of love shall meet my ear
 No footstep hasten my return to cheer,
 No more my lip shall taste the balmy kiss
 By pure affection heighten'd into bliss.
 The pains of sense, its pleasures shall depart

No

(Page 8)

No grief dispels, no joy renews my heart;
 Anger no more shall reign within my breast
 No baleful passion rob my soul of rest.
 No newest sorrow turn to sighs my breath
 But all be touch'd by the cold grasp of Death!
 Mysterious death! ah [? art thou] bad?
 Why shrinks the soul at thy approaching tread?
 Impenetrable darkness veils thee 'round,
 Hush'd is each whisper, silence how profound!
 Terrific death! when the black midnight storm,
 Bears thee triumphant in each horrid form
 Thy ruler sees the liquid mountains roll
 + *brightly blaze the heavens from pole to pole* *
~~And bright the heavens blaze from pole to pole,~~
 Mid yawning caverns, hideous rooks surround
 And deafening thunder o'er his head resound
 The blast resistless bellows o'er the deep
 The lofty surges proud Olympus sweep,
 The bolt descends:—thy hand directs the course,
 It strikes thy victim with infuriate force,
 The gulf receives him, and the swelling wave
 Buries the wretch in an untrophied grave!

Triumphant death! when the proud banners wave
 *~~end not this read better?~~ RRD

And

(Page 9)

And the shrill trumpet bids each heart be brave
 Opposing legions meet in dread array
 And gallant chieftans hail the bloody day.
 In war's fell danger do thy ease delight
 And martial horrors recreate thy sight;
 Quick is the heart, thou guid's't the pearled steel,
 As quick the emptying streams of life congeal:
 Thy voice loud issues from the cannon's throat,
 To summon myriads with tremendous note.
 Thou lends't thy wings, and swift the deadly Call
 Flies thro' the ranks, and mighty warriors fall!
 By thee commission'd, Lodis' hero raves
 And millions perish in untimely graves.

Relentless death! borne on the dogstar's ray²⁰
 The fiend of pestilence treads on the way.
 The poison'd chalice, and the adder's fang,
 Rending each nerve with agonizing pang.
 The rival's poignard; the assassins steel—
 These are thy ministers of potent zeal.
 Despair and horror marshall'd in their train
 With ev'ry dark variety of pain
 Proclaim the tyrant, absolute of sway

Whom

(Page 10)

Whom peasants dread, and monarchs must obey.

But welcome death! there are who do not fear,
 Or shed at thy approach th'unwilling tear,
 Who wait thy coming, and resign their breath
 And with a smile, serenely welcome death!
 Hunter²¹, a name to science ever dear,
 With soul elate and conscience, void of fear,
 Saw thee advance without a single sigh,
 And dying cried; how pleasant 'tis to die!
 Thus let me hail thee, and with smile serene,
 Sink unto dust and quit earth's transient scene!
 Then shall my eager soul throw off the clod
 That keeps her from the presence of her God,
 Then shall her faculties resplendent shine
 Reflecting wisdom from a source divine.
 Then shall obscurity forever cease;
 The veil of mystery shall be removed,
 And God revealed shall be supremely lov'd!
 Oh! for a muse with heav'nly fire to raise
 A note more lofty in Jehovah's praise!
 Archangels tune your voices! Seraphs join

²⁰ A reference to Sirius, a star system which appears during the hottest part of the summer; this timing made the ancient Greeks believe that it brought death and disease, especially to dogs (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

²¹ John Hunter (1728-1793) was a Scottish surgeon who made many discoveries related to human and comparative anatomy and was an early advocate of applying the scientific method to medicine, elevating surgery to a scientific profession based on biological principles. He also mentored most of the founders of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School and took a particular liking to Dorsey's uncle Philip Syng Physick (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Dorsey greatly admired his work and lamented in the preface to *The Elements of Surgery* that Hunter's writings were "unknown or disregarded throughout the continent of Europe" (quoted in Smythe). During his 1803 trip to London, Dorsey was received by the surgeon Sir Everard Home, Hunter's brother-in-law and former student, and took courses at the Theatre of Anatomy founded by Hunter's older brother William (Robin). Samuel Taylor Coleridge saw Hunter's work as a foundation of Romantic medicine, which combined the humanities, the natural sciences, and spirituality in an attempt to understand life as a force greater than material principles (Holmes 316-321). Although Dorsey states in this passage that he merely wishes to die as peacefully as his fellow surgeon, this identification with his predecessor perhaps suggests that he hopes to make similar scientific advances before he dies and gain earthly knowledge before he accesses divine wisdom.

And

(Page 11)

And hail his majesty with song divine
 Thro' all eternity the strain prolong!
*RRD*²² Melodious heaven! echo with the song!
 Bid all thy gleaming worlds that shine around
 Responsive emulate the glad'ning sound
 Let nature^{pour} from her ten thousand throats
 The joyful, grateful, tributary notes!
 And let my humble pen²³ this tribute pay,
 How'eer unworthy prove the artless lay!
²⁴Convinced of ignorance, still let me trust
 Whate'er the fate of man that God is Just!

(Page 12)

*P. Invocation to Oblivion*²⁵

1805

Gentle nymph of brow serene,
 Ruffled ne'er by grief or woe,
 Calm contentment's placid queen,
 Ruthless memory's conquering foe!
 Oblivion! from heaven descend
 The wretches' dearest choicest friend!
 With thee bring an ample cup,
 Fill'd from thy Lethean urn,
 All my care to pleasure turn!
 Lov'st thou at departed day
 On Lethe's sober banks to pray
 Or seek'st thou pensive solitude
 In the dark, deserted wood?
 Where no mortal step profane
 Dares molest her quiet reign?
 Oft I've sought thee mid the crowd
 That round the festive board convene,

(Page 13)

Mirth was there, and laughter loud,
 Wine, and wit, and jest obscene
 Pleasure fled; and haggard care

²² *RRD* appears in graphite in the left margin next to this line, though there are no other notes or revisions on this page.

²³ Just as Pope delineates the Great Chain of Being in *An Essay on Man*, Dorsey situates himself within a natural hierarchy of life forms that praise God and trust his judgment.

²⁴ Brackets in graphite in the left margin mark this final couplet; perhaps Robert selected these lines as a concise summary of the poem's theme.

²⁵ Published with significant changes (see introduction) on page 208 of the July 6, 1805 issue of the *Port Folio*.

Told me thou wa'st never there!
 To the midnight female throng
 Pleasure seemed to track thy way,
 Through the mazy dance along
 I sought thee till returning day.
 Then returning doubt and fear
 Told me thou wast never there!
 On the busy mart I sought
 The vain relief from anxious thought
 From all the tumults of the breast,—
 From care's corroding canker rest;—
 Bus'ness soon I found a snare,
 Gilt with many a splendid care
 T'was in vain I sought thee there!

Fancy once with everlasting smile
 Strove my sorrows to beguile.

(Page 14)

Printing out thy fairy form
 Like Iris bright amid the storm!
 In thy hand a chalice borne
 Fill'd from Lethe's flowing urn!
 'Twas at eve when Cynthia's²⁶ ray
 Emulous of parted day
 Playful, with reflected beam
 Glittered in the silver stream,
 At thy presence nature brighten'd
 Hush'd was every noisy breeze
 Free from care my bosom lighten'd
 Tasted all the charms of ease.
 Future years seem'd form'd for pleasure
 Friendship, mirth, the muse, and love.
 Love! life's richest choicest treasure
 Foretaste of the joys above!
 Cruel memory undeceiv'd me
 Soon these fancied joys were gone!
 Quick of pleasure she bereav'd me
 Sweet oblivion thou had'st flown!²⁷

(Page 15)

Fancy still with boundless eye
 Peeps into futurity
 Hope with her ten thousand charms

²⁶ Cynthia is an epithet of Artemis which refers to her role as the goddess of the moon; here Dorsey describes moonlight.

²⁷ After this line, the published version inserts an additional stanza: "With thee too, Matilda vanish'd, / Once I hop'd to find her true— / From her presence now I'm banish'd, / And without one fond adieu!"

Gives Oblivion²⁸ to my arms!
 Soon hope's visions melt to air
 Chas'd by the demon of despair!

Oh! once again from Heav'n descend:
 The wretches choicest dearest friend.
 Root each sorrow from my breast
 Soothe each tumult into rest!
 For thine alone the magic art
 To quell the tumults of the soul,
 For ev'ry grief a balm t' impart
 And ev'ry bitter pang controul.
 Like oil upon the raging deep
 'Tis thine to smooth the brow of care.
 Each stormy passion hush to sleep
 And shield the wretched from despair!

1805

(Page 16)

P. Advice to a young lady

1805
 When foplings address you with flattering speeches
 And swear you're an angel, or call you divine
 Believe me Matilda²⁹ 'tis reason that teaches
 The fools and their flatt'ry alike to decline
 The butterfly fluttering from flower to flower.
 Inconstant and gaudy was lately a worm
 His beautee poor insect endure but an hour
 Like the fop, all his charms are his dress + his form
 The fop lover it is true with entire devotion
 Not fickle (believe me) but true and sincere,

²⁸ The published version replaces "Oblivion" with "Matilda," reframing the poem as an expression of the romantic longing that exacerbates if not causes Lucio's anguish rather than a Romantic lyric about Dorsey's desire to be free of troublesome "stormy passion."

²⁹ This poem is most likely addressed to Matilda Dallas, the daughter of the prominent Philadelphia politician Alexander James Dallas (see note 60). It is likely coincidental that Dorsey addressed his Lucio poems in the *Port Folio* to a woman named Matilda, who is probably his future wife Maria Ralston. Matilda Dallas was born on November 23, 1798, making her 6 or 7 years old at the time of the poem's composition (Geni). Dorsey gives the small child advice for the future about how to choose a proper husband and resist the flirtations of the fops who will inevitably pursue her. Consistent with their depiction as stock characters in Restoration comedy, he describes fops as narcissistic, superficial, and vain young men whose appeal lies only in their transient youth. In contrast, a suitable husband is considerate and virtuous. Dorsey discourages Matilda from marrying for money because her family's wealth has secured her financial future, and his assumption that she will choose her own husband based on his personality rather than marry a man selected by her parents to obtain his money or social position demonstrates the Enlightenment ideal of companionate marriage. In 1818, Matilda married William Wilkins (1779-1865), a prominent Pittsburgh judge and politician (Belohlavek 191). Apart from a short riddle in "Sea shore badinage 1817," this poem is the manuscript's only instance in which Dorsey addresses gender and marriage.

Of himself he has always so lofty a notion
 That woman ne'er costs him a sigh or a tear!
 Let the youth of your choice be with prudence selected,
 No vain silly boy full of love for himself
 Nor should you, since fortune has always protected
 From want and from poverty, choose him for pelf³⁰
 With virtue!—~~with~~ and courage, to guide and defend you
 His morals unblemish'd his honour unstained
 His manner so polish'd as ne'er to offend you
 Forever obliging yet never constrain'd!
 (Page 17)

Such a youth you deserve, such a youth would deserve ^ you
 Then heed not sweet lady what foplings may say
 The poet how blest! should his maxims preserve you
 Oh deign then to trust him, and list to his lay!

P. Valedictory³¹ Address to my Muse³²

1805

Hence wanton muse! no longer tease me
 No longer do I covet thy smiles
 For now I know thy artful wiles
 In vain again thou'lt strive again to please me
 Thy fire inconstant ne'er can guide me
 Through clouds of dullness to Parnassus' top
 And never will my restless spirit stop
 * Midway content, with Milton's³³ self beside me!³⁴
 And since to rival thy lov'd Pope³⁵

³⁰ A synonym for money, often with a negative connotation (OED).

³¹ Although this poem is meant to mark Dorsey's farewell to writing poetry, he writes three more poems dated 1805. After a twelve-year break during which he apparently kept the promise he made in this poem (or at least did not write poetry in this particular notebook), he resumes with "Lunatic Stanzas" in 1817 and doubles the length of this manuscript by the time of this death. This divides his poetry into two compositional periods, 1805 and 1817.

³² Published on page 168 of the June 8, 1805 issue of the *Port Folio* with the subtitle "Poeta loquitur" ("the poet speaks") and the note, "Mr. Oldschool, Your former goodness in publishing several efforts of my wayward muse, gives me a kind of claim on your indulgence, and an assurance that you will not reject the last petition, which, in all probability, you will receive from your obliged and Obed. Serv. D." "In all probability" suggests that Dorsey is not totally renouncing poetry; indeed, he anonymously published "Written at the urgent request of a lady" on the same page. In a section entitled "To Readers and Correspondents" on the previous page, Oldschool comments, "We pray that "DECIUS" may not keep his vow. Why should he abjure the easy exercise of the pen, and renounce the charming courtship of the Muse?"

³³ Although Pope's preferred form of heroic couplets, as well as multiple quotations from his poems, permeate Dorsey's poetry, here Dorsey names Milton as another influence. Since he accuses his own writing of "dullness" in this phrase, he perhaps saw Milton's religious content as a thematic inspiration and used Pope's "suavity of numbers" as a formal guide.

³⁴ After this line, the published version inserts an additional stanza: "In vain with ode or song or sonnet, / Dost thou fill my fertile brain, / For never, more (depend upon it) / Will I attempt to rhyme again."

³⁵ Dorsey calls Pope a favorite of the Muse and envies his eloquence and metrical skill. Although many of Dorsey's other poems are written in heroic couplets modeled on Pope's, this poem takes a different form than the

In fire or suavity of numbers
 I scarce with modesty can hope
 Pray gentle muse, resign me to my slumbers!
 **Non ego possum rivalem ferre Jovem—Propertius—RRD*³⁶

(Page 18)

Fill not my head with visions gay
 Of moonlight scene and dancing fairy
 Turn not from wisdom's page astray
 My wandering thoughts to trifles airy!
 No longer force me to resign
 The lessons grave of Locke or Newton³⁷
 For bards³⁸ with awkward wit who shine
 Like 'prentice boy with Sunday suit on!
 Off' when my midnight taper burns
 To shed a ray on Hunter's³⁹ page
 My wayward fancy briskly turns
 And quits for thee th' instructive sage!⁴⁰

Hence! and no longer force me rhyme
 Nor wage with native dullness wars
 Fill not my head with strains sublime

"numbers" at which he thinks he is inexpert, alternating between iambic tetrameter and iambic pentameter. It also contains the first reference to Dorsey's model by name. The published version lists two great poets "Homer, Pope" instead of singling out "thy lov'd Pope" as the Muse's favorite

³⁶ Robert changes the word order of a line from Propertius' *Elegies* II.34.18, "rivalem possum non ego ferre Jovem" ("I myself am not able to bear Jove as a rival"). He applies Propertius' condemnation of jealousy between men who desire the same woman to Dorsey's envy of Milton's and Pope's far superior abilities. Dorsey laments that he isn't skilled enough to express himself as well as his models, and he thinks that writing inadequate poetry has become so frustrating that he wants to give it up. Instead of this Propertius quote, the *Port Folio* glosses this line with the more blunt "Aut Caesar, aut nihil!" ("either Caesar or nothing!"). This phrase was the motto of the power-hungry fifteenth-century duke Cesare Borgia, whom Machiavelli discusses in *The Prince* (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

³⁷ The published version reads "Bacon, Locke, or Newton" to add a reference to Francis Bacon (1561-1626), a philosopher and statesman who developed the scientific method and who inspired John Locke's empiricist ideas. In a 1789 letter, Thomas Jefferson called these figures "the three greatest men that have ever lived" for their foundational work "in the Physical and Moral sciences," a declaration which perhaps influenced the *Port Folio*'s decision to alter Dorsey's line (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

³⁸ The published version specifies "modern bards," suggesting that contemporary Romantic poets are immature. This editorial addition emphasizes the theme that reading and writing poetry is less useful than gaining scientific knowledge because current poets—including Dorsey—are inferior to the great poets of the past like Homer, Milton, and Pope.

³⁹ Scottish surgeon John Hunter (see note 21).

⁴⁰ The published version of these lines emphasizes Dorsey's constant need to write poetry and the inability of the candle illuminating his medical texts to compete with this creative urge: "And when my midnight taper dimly burns, / Shedding a feeble ray on Hunter's page; / How like a weathercock my fancy turns, / And quits for thee the grave, instructive sage." The image of Dorsey's fancy as a weathercock directed by the wind suggests that he is helpless to stop the involuntary urge to follow his Muse, who has become "grave" yet still more "instructive" than the great surgeon Hunter.

Nor crack my skull against the stars *
 Leave me and never more return
 Pegasus waits thee at the door
 I'll hold the stirrup quick begone!
 And never let me see thee more!—
 * “Sublimi feriam sidera vertice” Horace⁴¹

(Page 19)

Song

Song at the Anniversary Dinner of the
 Philadelphia Medical Society 1805

Port folio vol 5.855⁴²

A fig for the doctor that never will join
 His good humour'd friends o'er a bottle of wine
 For tho' he may know how to cure a disease
 'Tis plain he don't know what to do with his fees!
 Apollo refuses protection to those *
 Who to Venus and Bacchus declare themselves foes
 So that no one need hope much in physick to shine
 Unless he enliven his genius with wine!

Philosophers long have disputed in vain
 To find how ideas are formd in the brain
 They need not have puzzled their brains much to find
 How vastly good liquor enlivens the mind:
 Cornaro⁴³ they tell us was very well fed

⁴¹ This final line of Horace's *Odes* 1.1 means “with head lifted, I will strike the stars.” Horace ends the first poem in his collection with his desire to be immortalized as a great poet, the type of glory that Dorsey rejects because he wants to be able to focus on science instead of being distracted from his medical career by poetic inspiration. Here Dorsey provides the line that he has paraphrased, unlike the classical allusions in the rest of the manuscript, where Robert adds the Latin text that his father references. The published version of the poem emphasizes Dorsey's feelings of inadequacy by translating the quote from Horace as “Fill not my head with notions too sublime, / Lest my thick skull be crack'd against the stars.”

⁴²A. Robin, who examined this manuscript, incorrectly thought that the “Song” was the last poem that Dorsey wrote in 1805, but two religious poems follow the “Song.” Like this note indicates, the “Song” was published on page 55 of the February 23, 1805 (Volume 5) issue of the *Port Folio*, then reprinted on page 20 of the November 20, 1805 issue of the Boston periodical *The Literary Tablet* under the heading “From The Port Folio.” This was the first poem from the manuscript that Dorsey published in the *Port Folio*; it was published anonymously as a “SONG, sung at the anniversary dinner of the Philadelphia medical society, February 15, 1805, by one of the members.” The minor revisions found in the published version (4-line instead of 8-line stanzas, the addition of several commas throughout and parentheses around line 14, no underlining or exclamation points to emphasize “wine,” minor word choice substitutions like “heads” instead of the repeated “brains” in line 11 and the rephrasing of line 6 as “Who to Venus and Bacchus have shewn themselves foes”) suggest that this manuscript version is the poem's original draft because someone copying from the *Port Folio* would have included those changes.

⁴³ Alvisse (Luigi) Cornaro (1467-1566) ascribed his poor health in middle age to his indulgence in food, alcohol, and sex and developed a calorie restriction diet which he described in *The Sure and Certain Method of Attaining a Long and Healthful Life* (1550). His life and work increased interest in the possibilities of not only living into old age, but

With a glass of cold water and crust of dry bread
 With Cornarno all those who love water may join
 But for my part contented I stick to my wine!

+ Sine venere, fuget Apollo”⁴⁴

(Page 20)

John Hunter⁴⁵ has taught us there’s life in the blood
 A doctrine admitted when well understood
 But e’en were it dead, as a fact I’d maintain
 That a bumper can quicken the blood in each vein!
 Doctor Black⁴⁶ and the wise modern chemists declare
 That animal heat is derived from the air
 Whilst each jolly vot’ry at Bacchus’s shrine!
 Well knows that its source is a bumper of wine!

Brown’s “excitement”⁴⁷ by whiskey was often increased
 But at length it wore out, and the Doctor deceased
 While Haller⁴⁸ himself who drank water alone
 Was tortured to death by the gout and the stone.
 With Rush⁴⁹ I like bleeding, because I’m right here
 There are fifty diseases ~~which bleeding~~ the lancet can cure
 But the tapping a vein I’d with pleasure resign
 For the pleasure of tapping a hogshead of wine!

also aging well, future benefits which Dorsey disregards in favor of enjoying wine in the present. Indeed, he even says that being able to enjoy social drinking is an important part of being a good doctor (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).⁴⁴ “Without Venus, Apollo flees” —Dorsey contradicts Cornaro’s condemnation of alcohol and sex as unhealthy, instead claiming that wine and love are essential for doctors because they stimulate the mind. By the poem’s end, wine becomes even more pleasurable than practicing medicine. The published version includes this Latin paraphrase of Dorsey’s lines.

⁴⁵ This marks Dorsey’s third reference to the Scottish surgeon (see note 21). Here he alludes to Hunter’s extensive research on blood and blood vessel growth, including the revolutionary idea that inflammation is a symptom of disease rather than a disease in itself.

⁴⁶ Joseph Black (1728-1799) was a Scottish doctor and chemist who made several chemical discoveries, including that of latent heat (“animal heat is derived from the air”) (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

⁴⁷ Scottish doctor John Brown (1735-1788) created the Brunonian system of medicine, which treats disease as the result of too much or too little “excitement.” His principle of life as “vital energy” or “excitability,” combined with John Hunter’s conception of life as a force greater than the material components of the body (which was itself influenced by Brown’s ideas), formed the basis of Romantic medicine in England and Scotland (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

⁴⁸ Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777) was a Swiss physician, politician, and poet who conducted research on anatomy, developmental biology, and botany (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

⁴⁹ Founding Father Benjamin Rush (1745-1813) was a social and political reformer in Philadelphia and a professor of medicine and chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania, where he taught alongside Dorsey and greatly influenced the development of the medical profession in post-Revolutionary America (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Dorsey, who attended to Rush during his final illness, refers to Rush’s famous eagerness to use bloodletting on his patients. The published version reads “’Tis true I like bleeding” as if Dorsey didn’t want to name his more accomplished colleague in a poem that satirizes medicine by arguing that the competing theories of prominent physicians and scientists are all inferior to alcohol.

(Insert to p20)⁵⁰

In Cullen's⁵¹ nosology [reason] you'll find
 The source of disease, of body + mind
 All authors of medic in vain you'd combine
 To give such relief as a bumper of wine
 [Marked] action say's Rush is the only divine
 Cut that with the lancet and pocket your fees
~~One disease we'll admit Jove would try~~
~~For us patent that drink~~ turn ?
 But Chapman⁵² say's no; there are ~~fifty~~ could.
 + [In here]
 + ~~off these~~ good madeira can cure fifty more

(Page 21)

P Impromptu occasioned by the preaching
 of the Reverend Mister S.kinner⁵³ 1805

When from dread Sinai, thunder roar'd around,
 Aghast the Sinner shudder'd at the sound,
 But when o'er Calv'ry's⁵⁴ top the Christian's eye

⁵⁰ This final stanza is written on a square of paper pasted in the empty space at the bottom of the page, below what appears to be the original end of the poem. The hand is much more cramped and messy than Dorsey's large, evenly spaced hand in the rest of the manuscript and doesn't match the hand of Robert's notes, suggesting that it was written by another person—perhaps a fellow physician who also knew Rush and Chapman—and added later as a continuation of Dorsey's poem.

⁵¹ A central figure of the Scottish Enlightenment, William Cullen (1710-1790) was a physician, chemist, and agriculturalist who was also an influential professor at the Edinburgh Medical School, which was the best medical school in the English-speaking world in the eighteenth century. He taught several influential physicians mentioned in Dorsey's poem: Joseph Black, Benjamin Rush, and John Brown, whose Brunonian system of medicine rivaled his own system of nosology. Building on the work of Albrecht von Haller (also mentioned by Dorsey), Cullen argued that disease was caused by an imbalance of irritability and sensibility, or disturbances to the nervous system causing irregular muscle movements (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

⁵² Like Dorsey, Virginia native Nathaniel Chapman (1780-1853) graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1800, studied and traveled in Europe, and returned to Philadelphia in 1804 to practice medicine. Chapman became a professor of midwifery at the University of Pennsylvania in 1806 and was offered a position as chair of materia medica in 1812, which Dorsey ultimately filled in 1813. Chapman then served as the Chair of Theory and Practice of Medicine from 1815 until his retirement in 1815. He also helped found the *Philadelphia Journal of the Medical and Physical Sciences* in 1820, helped transform the publication into *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* in 1828, and became the first president of the American Medical Association in 1847 (Coughlin). The distinguished career of Dorsey's colleague suggests what Dorsey might have achieved if he had not died young.

⁵³ Dorsey uses the superscript abbreviation Rev^d M^r and gives the reverend's name as only S., which Robert completes in graphite. A. Robin, who examined this manuscript, thought that the "Song" was the last poem that Dorsey wrote in 1805, but this poem and the companion piece "Another on the doctrine that it is a sin for sinners to pray" show that Robin was incorrect.

⁵⁴ Sinai and Calvary are two sacred biblical mountains, the former from the Old Testament and the latter from the New Testament. In the Book of Exodus, God gives Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, while according to the Gospels, Calvary (Golgotha) is the site outside Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. Together, as Dorsey writes, they represent the laws that Christians must follow and the possibility of redemption for sinners

Beholds a saviour calm the troubled sky
 Bright Hope succeeds to cheer his anxious heart
 And Faith, and Charity then balm impart
 Thus from the pulpit when Fanatic's rave,
 And dare to curse, whom Jesus died to save
 Launching anathemas with ev'ry breath
 To frighten fools and babes with hell, and death
 Preaching the law;—the gospel quite forgot,
 No hope of heaven to cheer the sinners lot;—
 The Christian confident in JESUS' grace
 Beholds unaw'd the angry preachers face
 Bids him rail on till lungs or hearing fail,
 And then renew the oft repeated tale,
 JEHOVAH. slander'd looks indignant down;
 Mercy the brightest jewel of his crown;
 (Page 22)

'Cease railer cease! be [one]; no more rejoice
 'To deal damnation with unhallow'd voice,
 'Go! imitate the Saviours milder mien,
 'Who to be lov'd needs only to be seen,
 'Pray more';—preach less;—and penitently own,
 'That GOD has mercy tho' thyself has none!

P Another on the doctrine that it is a sin
 for sinners to pray.

His Rev'ence points out very clearly the way
 That leads to the deepest damnation
 He says 'tis a sin for a sinner to pray
 And from this warns his vile congregation!

If pray'r be a crime, and no hope then remain,
 To comfort a heart-broken sinner,
 One question occurs, very simply and plain
 Should he trust to his bible or Sk— r?

(Page 23)

P Lunatic Stanza's—for [ship] R.R.
 written by moonlight at Mount Peace⁵⁵ 1817

who break those laws, as well as the movement from divine judgment and human fear to divine forgiveness and human salvation (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Dorsey creates a similar contrast between the Reverend's fearmongering and the truth of God's mercy that the Reverend ignores.

⁵⁵ Mount Peace was the estate of the Ralston family on the outskirts of Philadelphia. In 1846, Dorsey's brother-in-law Robert Ralston (1795-1889), who lived at Mount Peace, founded the Church of St. James the Less to serve the rapidly developing suburbs near the estate. In 1856, the Mount Vernon Cemetery Company purchased part of

How sweetly beams thy silver ray
 To glad the weary pilgrims eye
 And cheer him on his lonely way
 Fair traveler thro' the trackless sky!

Oh could I mount your darting beam
 And ride my native planet o'er
 And skim wide ocean's troubled stream
 Unmindful of the billows roar

or still more daring upward soar
 Through realms of pure Empyrean space
 Where ne'er did mortal eye before
 The wonder of creation trace—

There catch an unreflected beam
 From Sol's bright orb to guide my course
 From star to star;— this vivid stream
 Of light (without the lightning's force).
 (Page 24)

Each planet orb might well display
 And warm o'er Saturns chilly pole
 Then safe conduct my homeward way
 Before dull earth had made one roll!

So swiftly flies the solar light!
 So swift the moon-beam darts afar!
 And seraph forms of angels bright
 Thus journey on from star to star!

But not to mortals is it giv'n;—
 Their clay confin'd to native earth
 Must never raise itself to heaven
 'Till it receive another birth

Still tho' by earthy clogs confin'd
 The restless spirit dares to rise
 And often the immortal mind
 Aspires to gain its native skies

(Page 25)
 Fancy with rapid pinion cleaves
 Etherial realms, and swift as light

Fancy

Mount Peace's land and built Mount Vernon Cemetery there, and in 1865, the Odd Fellows' Cemetery Company purchased the rest of the land and turned it into the adjacent Mount Peace Cemetery (Webster).

This orb terrestrial sportive leaves
And wings to other worlds her flight

Hymn written for Rober^t R. Dorsey + Henry Roberts⁵⁶

Who shall my [ancient] blessings claim
And who my infant lays?
JEHOVAH! Thine the sacred name
My lisping tongue shall praise

2

For thou hast form'd me by thy voice
To thee my life I owe
Teach me my dutee to fulfil
Thy holy love to know!

3

Thy tender care my life preserv'd
When danger's form appall'd
And when from duty's path I've swerv'd
Thy warning voice recall'd.
(Page 26)

4

Protected by thy watchful care
My feet can never stray
Where guilty pleasure spreads the snare
If Thou direct their way

5

Thou lying lips O GOD of truth!
And a blaspheming tongue
Preserve my feeble faltr'ing youth
Amid temptations strong:

6

Teach me in honour's path to tread
In virtue's narrow way
Correct my heart;— improve my head

⁵⁶ Henry Roberts (1803-1876) was a British architect born in Philadelphia who designed Fishmongers' Hall on London Bridge and innovative forms of workers' housing (Dictionary of Scottish Architects). On November 10, 1808, Dorsey's father-in-law Robert Ralston wrote a letter to Henry's father Josiah Roberts—a fellow merchant and former neighbor who was one of the original managers of the British and Foreign Bible Society, which was founded in 1804—about "his desire to start a Bible Society in America." The first formal meeting of the Pennsylvania Bible Society, the first of its kind in the United States, took place at Ralston's home on December 12 of that year; Benjamin Rush began the meeting and was the Society's first vice president. Bible societies focus on distributing affordable Bibles. In 1812, the Pennsylvania Bible Society, which had changed its name to the Bible Society of Philadelphia, published the first Bible in the United States printed using the mass-production process of stereotyping (Pennsylvania Bible Society). This poem, in which the speaker asks God to teach him how to be virtuous, presents Dorsey's spiritual hopes for the members of a new generation; its title reveals Dorsey's family and professional connections to pioneers in American religious print culture, perhaps implicitly extending the hymn's dedicatees from two young men to a young nation.

With wisdom's purest ray!	7	
Should life be long,—preserve me Lord! From sorrow and from sin And teach me by thy holy word To keep my conscience clean.		Should
(Page 27)	8	
Should death an early visit pay Receive my latest breath Oh! take my willing soul away And bid me welcome death!	9	
To all thy mercies dearest Lord Oh! may I grateful prove But chiefly prize thy holy word And Jesus' dying love!		
Hymn written for the Orphans (at the Asylum) ⁵⁷		
JEHOVAH, guardian, parent, friend! Inspire our infant lays, And teach our voices to ascend In anthems to thy praise!	2	
Will God in heaven, with pity hear The humble orphan's cry? Oh yes! for hallow'd is the tear That gems the orphan's eye!	3	
(Page 28)	4	
And God will wipe that tear away And bid each sorrow cease Hark! angel whispers seem to say My children shall have peace!		
Of earthly parents, though bereft We've one in heaven above A tender father he that's left,		

⁵⁷The Sisters of St. Joseph founded St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum in 1797 in response to the yellow fever epidemic that ravaged Philadelphia in 1793. In 1814, a group of women founded the Orphan Society of Philadelphia, the first non-sectarian orphanage in Pennsylvania. The first Directress was Sarah Ralston, Dorsey's mother-in-law and the daughter of Matthew Clarkson, who was the mayor of Philadelphia from 1792 to 1796, while the second Directress was Benjamin Rush's wife Julia Rush (Caldwell). Dorsey perhaps wrote this poem in response to the Orphan Society's founding by members of his family and professional circles.

And boundless is his love!

5

E'en when in anger he reproveth
 Rich mercies are in store,
 He only chastens, those he loves
 To make them love him more!

6

Then teach our LORD to kiss thy rod
 And praise thee here below
 Be thou our father, and our GOD
 Here and hereafter too!

(Page 29)

Religion as a duty and a sorrow

* Religion as a duty stands display'd
 In EAVEN stars so strong of light and shade,
 That he who needs may see upheld to view
 All articles of faith and practic'd law
 Writ as with pen beam'd on a darken'd wall
 They strike the eyes and conscience of all.
 No Idiot so dull or void of brain
 But pride the lesson as the daylight plain!
 There beams dark clouds of ignorance dispel
 And radiant shine from heaven to warn from hell!
 The Christian doctrine their resplendent shine
 And prove their nature as their source divine
 Rich legacy from GOD; own dying son
 Bequeath'd to save a world by sin undone!

Religion as a science! oh how hard
 To open gates which god's own hands have barr'd
 Portals of light on ev'ry theme but this
 Stand wide and open as the realms of bliss.

* *This is much in Cowper's*⁵⁸ *style 1827*

(Page 30)

All nature's wonders are expos'd to view
 But Revelation holds conceal'd a few,
 And man inquisitive forever pries
 And searches there, with fire-beclouded eyes,

⁵⁸ William Cowper (1731-1800) was a British poet whose interest in daily life and nature helped inspire British Romanticism. He was extremely popular in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, especially for his evangelical Christian hymns (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). In 1805, a column in eight issues of the *Port Folio* reprinted several of Cowper's letters, suggesting that the magazine's subscribers were eager to read his opinions about literature, politics, religion, and his interactions with prominent figures in late eighteenth-century England. The *Port Folio* also occasionally reprinted some of his poems, attesting to his popularity in early America.

The mole shall find the sun, and quit his clod,
E're man unfold the mysteries of GOD!

Written at Elizabeth town-point on a tavern wall.
The walls + windows of which were covered with names.⁵⁹

When glass shall break, and cedar rot
And walls be crumbled into dust
And these proud names shall be forgot
As they who bore them shortly must,

Oh then may my blest name appear
Writ in the book of life above
To last through each succeeding year
A proof of my REDEEMER'S love!—

(Page 31)

P In Memory
of Alexander James Dallas⁶⁰ writ in his daughter's
common place book
fill'd with poetry

Mid the gay flowrs that here display their bloom
Aloft the solemn cypress scans his head
And casts a melancholy withering gloom
O'er the cold precincts of the silent tomb
Where Dallas now reposes with the dead.

Beneath this shade the muse inscribes a page
With the brief record of departed worth
For oft her smiles had beam'd upon the sage
Whose worth redeeming a degen'rate age
Evinc'd it gave one honest Statesman birth*⁶¹

⁵⁹ Dorsey claims to transcribe an anonymous poem he saw in a public space, adding to the impression (as we see when Robert notes that "Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc." was "copied in Charles' hand writing") that he wanted other people to write in his notebook, which he must have circulated among his friends and colleagues, and welcomed the inclusion of others' voices among his own work. Instead of having people he knows contribute directly to his notebook, here Dorsey writes down someone else's work with religious themes similar to those found in his own poetry.

⁶⁰ Alexander J. Dallas (1759-1817) was an American lawyer and politician who acted as the Secretary of the Treasury from 1814 to 1816. Dorsey perhaps knew of him through his work in Philadelphia as the reporter of decisions for the Supreme Court and as the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Like the monody that John Agg wrote in memory of Dorsey, this elegy praises Dallas' various virtues, such as wisdom, generosity, compassion, and strong leadership. While Dorsey alludes to many literary and scientific figures in his 1805 poems, this marks his only tribute to a political figure.

⁶¹ This asterisk, probably written in graphite, does not correspond to a revision or note at the bottom of the page as Robert's asterisks normally do.

Genius did all her energies impart
 To store with Science his capacious mind
 And honour stamp'd her image on his heart
 So deep, that not its latest throb could part
 The lov'd impression she had left behind
 (Page 32)

That heart replete with love for human kind
 Polish'd his manners with resistless grace
 Each social virtue in his bosom shrin'd
 Shed the mild lustre of a soul refin'd
 O'er the bright beamings of his manly face

Persuasive eloquence in deep debate
 And wit that sparkled never to offend
 And wisdom's maxims that sustain'd the state,
 When war had urg'd the crisis of her fate[.]
 These stamp'd the patriot his country's friend.

What Dallas was the muse could still rehearse
 And bid our unavailing sorrows flow[.]
 But vain—the dirge of dull funereal verse
 The death bell sounds;—rolls heavily the hearse,
 And leaves our aching bosoms lasting woe.
 Aug 1817⁶²

(Page 33)

P. Christian Honour addressed to [RRD]
 Whilst others sing the hero's fame
 Whose blood-stain'd banner floats afar,
 And crown with loud applause a name
 Splendent⁶³ in victory and war!
 Be mine the task in humbler verse
 The Christian's monument to raise
 The good man's virtues to rehearse
 Whose modest merit shrinks from praise!
 Yet I will praise thee man of GOD
 Above the illustrious proud and great;
 Thy soul now prisoned in its clod
 Is heir to more than regal state.
 A crown of glory brighter far
 Than ever grac'd a monarch's brow
 Thine honour'd tempter soon shall wear

⁶² While Dorsey usually notes the date of his poems to the right of their titles, here a different hand has ornamentally dated the poem inside the loops of the curlicue used to mark the end of each poem.

⁶³ An archaic word meaning "shining brightly" (OED).

Tho' bleach'd by cares and sorrows now.
 Who can discern this man of GOD?
 describe the livery he wears?
 'Tis he who dreads his master's nod
 And trembles at temptation's snares.

(Page 34)

Justice o'er all his acts presides
Mercy delights him more than gains
Humility his footsteps guides
 Conscience from daring sin abstain.
 Apall'd by slander's venom'd tongue
 His meekness bears him harmless through
 Repays with kindness cruel wrong
 And prays that GOD may pardon too.
 How soars his lofty soul above
 The vengeance of th' ignoble crowd
 Who by the bloody duel prove
 That e'en a coward may be proud—
 For cowards often dare to fight
 Who dare not brave the scoffer's tongue
 Too timid to defend the right
 They basely do, and suffer wrong.
 Tho' Coward call'd by fool or knave
 Whose villainy traduc'd his name
 Yet wisdom whispers he is brave
 Who dares for Christ to risk his fame.

(Page 35)

His fame! his honour! aye his life!
 If ventured in his Saviour's cause
 He'd nobly dare in any strife
 To stake and to abide the loss!
 Martyrs attest that glorious truth
 And angels witness it above
 From hoary age to feeble growth
 Thousands have died for JESU'S love.
 Jesus for them had done the same
 For them had died upon the tree
 Then welcome death! the stake;—the flame;—
 No horrors, Christian, have for thee!
 But not a Christian life or death
 Can earn a mansion in the skies
 All done, the last, the parting breath!
 Must call on mercy for the prize
 For man e'en in his best estate
 Is prone to sin as sparks to rise
 That pow'r alone that could create

Can raise him to his native skies.
 (Page 36)
 Sad that some praise shall barely raise
 All who believe th'unerring word
 And humbly join the song of praise
 Not [mortal son] but thee O LORD!!!
 [? JSD:] 1817

Those of the following lines contained in Brackets
 were written + left unfinished by my father
 shortly before his death, + are I believe his last
 numbers: those succeeding I designed to com-
 plete the subject.⁶⁴

Sep. 1826. RRD—

1.
 There is a moment hastening on
 When I must bid this earth, farewell,
 When, all my number'd moments gone,
 My soul must steer for Heaven or Hell.
2.
 At that dread hour how shrinks the soul!
 The body trembles, too, with dread,
 Long joined, one sympathetic whole
 (Page 37)
 The man must mingle with the dead.
3.
 The dead! ah what mysterious change
 Does Death inflict on Adam's race!
 J. S. D. 1818⁶⁵ Thro' what unheard of scenes to range
 Thro what infinity of space!
4.
 The mighty realms where all the dead
 Repose! there, he in yonder grave
 For whom ten thousand vainly bled,
 Whom tens of thousands could not save.
5.
 And there the slave who feared his rod,
 Yet now might smile to see his fate,
 Lord only of the wormy sod
 Whom nations styled the lord of Fate.
6.
 Vainly we ask, '+ why this change,
 'When once the spirit spurns it clod,

⁶⁴ This note and the whole of the following poem are written in Robert's hand, suggesting that Robert copied Dorsey's lines from an original document into his father's notebook before adding his own concluding stanzas.

⁶⁵ This marginal note marks the end of the brackets and Dorsey's last known line.

‘Why is the soul thus forced to range?’
Be silent — ‘tis the will of GOD.

7.

(Page 38)

Be silent — thus doth death advise—
With doubts, no longer vex thy brain,
Learn that the Spirit never dies,
The body too shall live again

8

But this, oh man! be this thy care—
That Death’s grim touch may not fight
Thy parting soul thy soul prepare
To travel thro the realms of night.

9

When doomed Death’s dreary vale to tread
*shalt*⁶⁶

A staff to prop thee thou will find;
Softly thro every danger led,
What will it fool that thou wert blind?

10.

shalt

Shortly will every doubt remove;
Thou shalt rejoice in scenes of bliss,
&, happy in a world of love,
Cease to regret one tear in this.

11.

“Whence comes the wind or whither tends,
“Define its course⁶⁷” — the Saviour said,
(Page 39)

In vain man strives to learn the ends
Of things his maker wisely made.

12.

Wisely, be sure— tho’ to thy mind
The subject seem a gloomy night—
Say could’st thou ever to the blind
Convey a just idea of light?

13.

Yet, light in glory to surpass

⁶⁶ Robert corrects himself in graphite just as he corrects several of his father’s poems. Here and in the following stanza, he substitutes a more formal verb reminiscent of biblical diction to better match his religious topic.

⁶⁷ “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (*King James Version*, John 3:8). This biblical verse evokes humans’ inability to explain how people are born of the Spirit. In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that people cannot enter or know about the kingdom of God until they die and are born again in Heaven, a doctrine that Dorsey references in many of his poems and that Robert also includes in this stanza.

Nature exhausts her stores in vain—
Golconda's⁶⁸ brightest purest mass
Its splendor's shadow could not feign.

14.

But from this thought derive content,
Hereafter angels shall relate
To those whose lives in peace were spent
and love to GOD the laws of fate.

15.

With lore like this to moral giv'n
Now poor & wretched were his state!
What tho' he saw the bliss of Heaven,
while unto him was barred its gate!
(Page 40)

16.

Disgusted with this earth too soon
His soul by life not yet reformed
Wretched indeed would prove the boon
Of knowledge to his sinful mind!

17.

refined

But when ^ from earthly dross,
When in affliction's furnace tried,
Firmly he bears & loves his cross,
That cross on which his Saviour died.

18.

Now asks what's death? Oh no, to him
Faith hath revealed that death is peace
Yet failed hath Faith's most glowing beam
R.R.D.⁶⁹ To point those joys that ne'er shall cease.

(Back page written horizontally in graphite—verso)

<i>Tis no longer a screen</i>	<i>When a Bombazet⁷⁰</i>
<i>But a bombazeen</i>	<i>Gets very wet</i>
	<i>No longer a screen</i>
	<i>Tis a {Bombazeen}⁷¹ RRD</i>

⁶⁸ Golkonda is a region in Southern India famous for its diamond mines; the name is a synonym for a rich mine or source of fantastic wealth (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

⁶⁹ Robert marks the end of his continuation of Dorsey's poem with this left-hand marginal note rather than the curlicue that Dorsey draws below the last line of each poem. Since Dorsey wrote fewer than three of the poem's eighteen stanzas, the poem is an example of Robert's work rather than Dorsey's.

⁷⁰ Bombazet is a thin, smooth wool fabric with a plain or twill weave. It was "a cheaper fabric than bombazine" (Olsen 210).

⁷¹ Bombazine, also spelled bombazeen or bombasine, is a fabric with a twill or corded (corduroy) weave. It is usually made of silk and worsted (high-quality wool yarn) but can also be made of cotton and worsted or worsted alone. Black bombazine was a popular fabric for nineteenth-century mourning dress (OED).

The above were written at Long Branch + allude to the ladies' bombazet bathing gowns—RRD

(Back page 1)

Sea shore Badinage⁷² 1818—May [of]

Charade

My first fair natures fairer child
 From heaven pure descended
 My second such in desert wild
 By savage beasts defended
 My whole denotes a gallant youth
 Of matchless heaven faith + truth. —

D^r Snow-den.⁷³

Conundrum

The Ramparts of the British shore
 The place, to cross a river o'er
 Guess there and you'll be quickly able
 To name a lady ^now at ~~the~~ table—

M^{rs} Clifford

(Back page 2)⁷⁴

Sea shore badinage 1817—

What young ladies do when they get married!—

Miss M^{ac}. Masters.

Impromptu at Mount Peace—

An Indian game of ancient date
 Which when you lose, you gain a mate.
 The latin; add to this, for thrice
 And you may name him in a trice!⁷⁵

Chester.

Another

What misers store with richest food
 And what all do, who are not good!—

Chester.

⁷² Humorous, witty, or frivolous conversation; banter (OED).

⁷³ Dr. Isaac Wayne Snowden (1794-1850), a member of one of the oldest and most prominent families in Pennsylvania, trained as a physician in the office of Dorsey's colleague Dr. Nathaniel Chapman, whom Dorsey (or the author of the insert to the poem) mentions in "Song at the Anniversary Dinner of the Philadelphia Society 1805." Snowden joined the United States Army as an assistant surgeon in 1816 and served in the First Seminole War under General Andrew Jackson. After resigning from the military in 1823, he settled in Mifflin County, Pennsylvania, where he practiced medicine until his death (*History of Cumberland and Adams Counties, Pennsylvania 179-180*).

⁷⁴ One recto page is left blank between "Sea shore Badinage 1818" (verso) and "Sea shore badinage 1817" (verso).

⁷⁵ Instantly (OED).

(Back page 3)

Sea shore amusements — Long branch⁷⁶ 1817

A Riddle

Some blackberry merchants sallied forth
 The one went south, the other north
 But strange as the thing may seem to you
 That they both went together is strictly true!

Impromptu Conundrums on names of persons at the table

What dogs always do, when they sound an alarm
 And what men always do when they do any harm!
 M^{rs} Bark-er⁷⁷

A [Rein] of time
 And three fourths of a line Miss Nick-lin⁷⁸

When backwards you spell
 A plant you love well
 T'will furnish the name of a blooming belle.
 Sallad — Miss Dallas.⁷⁹

What we all eat
 And what we all do M^{rs} Fish-er⁸⁰

a ladies upper garment, with $\frac{3}{4}$ ^{ths} of a yard
 cut off from it. M^{rs} Shaw } an L cut off
 from shawl

⁷⁶ Long Branch, New Jersey became a summer beach resort in the 1780s (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

⁷⁷ Possibly Mary Nelson Barker, the wife of Major General John Barker (1746-1818), who served as the mayor of Philadelphia in 1808, 1809, and 1812; their son James Nelson Barker (1784-1858) served in the War of 1812, wrote several successful plays, and served as the mayor of Philadelphia in 1819 (Simpson 25-28).

⁷⁸ Possibly Mary Chew Nicklin (1800-1864), the daughter of Philadelphia merchant Philip Nicklin and the granddaughter of Benjamin Chew, a prominent lawyer with professional and personal connections to several Founding Fathers. In 1825, she married "Edmund Carmick Watmough (1796-1848), who became United States Consul at Trinidad de Cuba" (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts 141). In 1816, her sister Sophia (1798-1869) married Alexander J. Dallas' son George Mifflin Dallas (1792-1864), who served as the 11th vice president of the United States under James K. Polk from 1845 to 1849 (19).

⁷⁹ Alexander J. Dallas, for whom Dorsey wrote an elegy for in this notebook (see note 60), had three daughters, Maria, Sophia, and Matilda. Sophia married Richard Bache in 1805 and Maria married Alexander Campbell in 1813, so this riddle is another reference to Dallas' youngest daughter Matilda, to whom Dorsey dedicated his 1805 poem "Advice to a young lady" (Belohlavek 191).

⁸⁰ Possibly Elizabeth Powel Francis Fisher (1777-1855), the widow of merchant Joshua Fisher (1775-1806) and the sister-in-law of wealthy merchant George Harrison (1761-1845) (Harrison xli). Mary Maillard describes her as "a prominent white Philadelphia society matron closely connected to the oldest Philadelphia families" (27).

(Loose square 1)⁸¹

Alas! for Pope! if Poetry this be,
 How far removed from excellence is he,
 If rhyming only doth compose a verse,
 Then surely this is smooth enough & terse!
 But if poetic measure must combine
 With rhyming; then there's not a line
 Worthy of taking up the readers time,
 For this is only a mean sounding chyme.⁸²

Impromptue on reading this
 pamphlet.

(Loose square 2—recto)⁸³

His Rev'ence points out very clearly the way.
 That leads to the deepest damnation
 He says "'tis a sin for a sinner to pray,"
 And from this warns his vile congregation.

Since pray'r is a crime, & no hope can remain,
 To comfort the heart broken sinner
 One question occurs— very simply and plain—
 Should he trust to the bible or Sk— r

(Loose square 2—verso)

Amaz'd the sinner stood + heard the sound
 who to be lord

on hearing a sermon by the revd. M^r— in his hell
 fire style

⁸¹ This poem is written in a hand not found anywhere in the manuscript and supports Dorsey's ideas about poetry. While Dorsey praises Pope's "suavity of numbers" in "Valedictory Address to my Muse," the author of this "Impromptue" derides another poet for his inept use of meter.

⁸² Chyme is the semi-fluid mixture of gastric juices and partially digested food that moves from the stomach to the small intestine (OED). This comparison, which implies that the poetry being discussed is clumsy and underdeveloped, suggests that the author of the "Impromptue" may have been a fellow physician or had medical training.

⁸³ This poem in Dorsey's hand is "Another on the doctrine that it is a sin for sinners to pray" with alternate punctuation.

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