

APPENDIX

Metaphors and Similes: The Poetry of Thomas Jefferson*

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Thomas Jefferson had a romance with language. As a youngster growing up on the Virginia Piedmont; as a teenager studying at the College of William and Mary; as a young man cloistered in his suite at Monticello embosomed within his ever-expanding library; as a parent and mentor dispensing sage advice to his daughters, grandchildren, and sundry young men studying the law with him; as a middle-aged widower flirting with deliciously beautiful, fashionable, intelligent women in Europe and America; as a public official in local, state, national, and international service; as a tireless correspondent writing to old friends, political associates, and learned men in a wide range of scientific and literary fields; as a busy and productive retiree; and virtually until the day he died, Jefferson was fascinated with the written word.

Even as a very young man, Jefferson was widely perceived as one of America's most eloquent writers. Congressman John Adams, in identifying the thirty-three-year-old Virginian as the person who should write the Declaration of Independence, said that Jefferson had "a masterly Pen" and "a remarkable felicity of expression."¹ Maria Cosway, the

1. John Adams Autobiography, 1802, John P. Kaminski, ed., *The Quotable Jefferson* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 442. Hereinafter

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lovely Italian-born artist and musician who fell in love with Jefferson in Paris in 1786, often complained when Jefferson did not write or wrote short letters. "I complain of the shortness of your letters, but it is only on the first glance on the paper, but when I read, you seem to say so much in few words that I forget the little number of the syllables for the beauty of the expressions and elegant style."² Six months later, Maria wrote that "when I read your letters they are so well wrote, so full of a thousand pretty things that it is not possible for me to answer such charming letters. I would say many things if my pen could write exactly my sentiments and feelings, but my letters must appear sad scrawls to you."³ Adams hoped that Jefferson's letters would one day be published: "they will exhibit a Mass of Taste, Sense, Literature and Science, presented in a sweet simplicity and a neat elegance of Style, which will be read with delight in future ages."⁴ Throughout the years, prominent Americans have continued to quote Jefferson be it Abraham Lincoln, William Jennings Bryan, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan.

Jefferson's literary skills were vastly enhanced by his mastery of metaphors and similes. They allowed Jefferson to make difficult concepts charmingly understandable. At their best, Jefferson's writings were filled with the power, emotion, conciseness and beauty of poetry. Like salt and pepper, Jefferson's metaphors and similes seasoned what he wrote. His descriptions of Patrick Henry as a great orator but a shallow human

cited as QJ. Jefferson's mastery of language did not extend to the spoken word. John Adams recalled that Jefferson in the Second Continental Congress "never spoke in public; and during the whole Time I sat with him in Congress, I never heard him utter three Sentences together." Everyone understood that Jefferson had an eloquent pen, but could challenge no one "in Elocution and public debate." John Adams Autobiography (1802), L. H. Butterfield et al., eds., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams* (4 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1982), III, 335.

2. Maria Cosway to Jefferson, London, February 6, 1789, John P. Kaminski, ed., *Jefferson in Love: The Love Letters between Thomas Jefferson and Maria Cosway* (Madison, Wis.: Madison House, 1999), 120.

3. Maria Cosway to Jefferson, London, August 19, 1789, *ibid.*, 125.

4. Adams to Jefferson, Quincy, July 12, 1822, Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1959), 582.

being show the skill, the range, and the power of Jefferson's writing. In his autobiography written in 1821, five years before his death, Jefferson praised Henry, who spoke "as Homer wrote."⁵ But forty years earlier Jefferson had condemned his Virginia antagonist "as being all tongue without either head or heart."⁶ In but a dozen words, Jefferson deftly captured the complexity of Henry.

What are metaphors and similes? "A metaphor compares two unlike objects or ideas and illuminates the similarities between them. It accomplishes in a word or phrase what could otherwise be expressed only in many words."⁷ As long ago as ancient Greece, the value of metaphors was apparent. Aristotle wrote that "The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learned from others; it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an eye for resemblance."⁸ Similes also compare two unlike objects or ideas. But similes explicitly compare by using the words *as*, *like*, or *as if* to announce the comparison.⁹

We all use metaphors and similes in our daily language although most of us are unaware that we are doing so. "To be the apple of someone's eye"; "to be as eager as a beaver"; "to sit in the catbird seat"; "to have butterflies in one's stomach" are everyday examples. Jefferson's genius was his ability to use new and old metaphors and similes creatively and cleverly.

Jefferson was a remarkably prolific correspondent. He wrote literally thousands of personal letters. He delighted in corresponding with dear friends, especially as these dear friends became dear, *old* friends—men such as Benjamin Rush, James Madison, and John Adams, and women like Angelica Church, Maria Cosway, and Abigail Adams. It was in this correspondence—called by Jefferson himself the "balm to my soul"¹⁰—that Jefferson's language flowered poetic.

Jefferson's use of metaphors and similes is most developed in his

5. Jefferson's *Autobiography*, 1821, QJ, 412.

6. Jefferson to George Rogers Clark, November 26, 1782, QJ, 411.

7. Elyse Sommer with Dorrie Weiss, *Metaphors Dictionary* (Detroit, Mich.: Visible Ink Press, 1996), vii.

8. Aristotle, *De Poetica*, 322 B.C., quoted in *ibid.*, vii.

9. Sommer, ix.

10. Jefferson to Nathaniel Macon, Monticello, November 23, 1821, QJ, 198.

correspondence. In fact, some of his letters have been individually “named” by the specific metaphor or simile used. Perhaps his most endearing letter is the love letter to Maria Cosway written in Paris in October 1786 as Jefferson sat “sad and solitary” before his fireplace using his left hand because of the pain in his dislocated right wrist. This six-page letter, known as the “head and the heart letter,” is a dialogue between Jefferson’s head and heart over his love affair with Maria. The letter itself is packed with metaphors and similes.¹¹ Jefferson’s head warns his heart “do not bite at the bait of pleasure till you know there is no hook beneath it.”¹² His heart responds that “we have no rose without its thorn; no pleasure without alloy. It is the law of our existence, and we must acquiesce. It is the condition annexed to all our pleasures, not by us who receive, but by him who gives them.”¹³

In the “Cap of Virtue” letter, Jefferson again wrote to Maria Cosway

I wish they had formed us like the birds of the air, able to fly where we please. I would have exchanged for this many of the boasted preeminencies of man. I was so unlucky when very young, as to read the history of Fortunatus. He had a cap of such virtues that when he put it on his head, and wished himself anywhere, he was there. I have been all my life sighing for this cap. Yet if I had it, I question if I should use it but once. I should wish myself with you, and not wish myself away again.¹⁴

Another letter that has taken on special significance is Jefferson’s “Adam and Eve” letter written to William Short, America’s chargé d’affaires in Paris and Jefferson’s protégé and former private secretary. In this 1793 letter, Jefferson admonished Short not to send any more official reports of the atrocities being committed during the French Revolution’s Reign of Terror. Such letters assisted Jefferson’s greatest political adversary, Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, who opposed Jefferson’s policy to align America with France or at least be neutral in the European war then occurring. In the “Adam and Eve” letter, Jefferson argues that

11. For the entire letter, see Kaminski, *Jefferson in Love*, 44–62.

12. Jefferson to Maria Cosway, Paris, October 12, 1786, QJ, 323.

13. *Ibid.*, 325.

14. Jefferson to Maria Cosway, Paris, December 24, 1786, QJ, 296.

In the struggle which was necessary [during the French Revolution], many guilty persons fell without the forms of trial, and with them some innocent. These I deplore as much as any body, & shall deplore some of them to the day of my death. But I deplore them as I should have done had they fallen in battle. It was necessary to use the arm of the people, a machine not quite so blind as balls and bombs, but blind to a certain degree. A few of their cordial friends met at their hands the fate of enemies. But time and truth will rescue & embalm their memories, while their posterity will be enjoying that very liberty for which they would never have hesitated to offer up their lives. The liberty of the whole earth was depending on the issue of the contest, and was ever such a prize won with so little innocent blood? My own affections have been deeply wounded by some of the martyrs to this cause, but rather than it should have failed, I would have seen half the earth desolated. Were there but an Adam & Eve left in every country, & left free, it would be better than as it is now.¹⁵

In one great and terrible letter written in April 1820 Jefferson has three powerful metaphors, one of which has been misread and misunderstood for more than half a century. Writing to Congressman John Holmes of Maine, Jefferson denounced the Missouri Compromise of 1820 for prohibiting slavery north of a line drawn mid-way across the land obtained in the Louisiana Purchase. Because of this compromise, Jefferson ominously predicted the end of the Union and a bloody civil war. His only consolation was that he would not live long enough “to weep over it.”

But this momentous question [over the Missouri Compromise], like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell of the Union. It is hushed indeed for the moment. But this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence. A geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated; and every new

15. Jefferson to William Short, Philadelphia, January 3, 1793, QJ, 120.

irritation will mark it deeper and deeper. I can say with conscious truth that there is not a man on earth who would sacrifice more than I would to relieve us from this heavy reproach [i.e., slavery], in any *practicable* way. The cession of that kind of property, for so it is misnamed, is a bagatelle which would not cost me a second thought, if, in that way, a general emancipation and *expatriation* could be effected: and, gradually, and with due sacrifices, I think it might be. But as it is, we have the wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other.¹⁶

Virtually every time this letter has been printed and in the many, many times that it has been quoted, the metaphor incorrectly reads “we have the wolf by the ears.” One great historian even titled his book *The Wolf by the Ears*,¹⁷ while one of the foremost Jefferson scholars allowed the misreading to appear in his popular collection of Jefferson’s writings.¹⁸ These misreadings create a visual picture of a man holding the wolf outstretched with one hand on each ear which is very different from Jefferson’s image of a man with outstretched hand(s) holding a wolf by only one ear. The error may not change the essence of the letter, but the image and the impact that Jefferson wanted to portray is definitely altered.

In analyzing Jefferson’s many metaphors and similes, we can approach the study in one of two ways. We can look at a person or subject and see what metaphors or similes Jefferson used, or we can look at a particular metaphor or simile and see the various uses which Jefferson made of them. Jefferson described both John Adams and Alexander Hamilton as a Colossus—Adams in the Second Continental Congress¹⁹ and Hamilton in the partisan public debate of the 1790s.²⁰ Jefferson also

16. Jefferson to John Holmes, Monticello, April 22, 1820, QJ, 377–78, 388.

17. John C. Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery* (New York: The Free Press, 1977, and reprinted with the same error in the title fourteen years later by the University Press of Virginia in Charlottesville).

18. Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1434.

19. Jefferson’s conversation with Daniel Webster, 1824, QJ, 399.

20. Jefferson to James Madison, September 8, 1793, QJ, 408.

referred to Adams as “our main pillar”²¹ and Hamilton as “a host within himself.”²² Jefferson referred to Benjamin Franklin as the “ornament of the age and country in which he lived,”²³ and Edmund Randolph as “the poorest Cameleon” for his sycophancy in President George Washington’s cabinet.²⁴ He called Aaron Burr (Jefferson’s first vice president) a “perverted machine” and “a crooked gun”²⁵—our modern-day equivalent would be a loose cannon. Jefferson on a number of occasions referred to himself as “the hermit of Monticello,”²⁶ “a son of science,”²⁷ and “a son of nature.”²⁸

Jefferson’s application of metaphor to the subject of death reveals what he believed death to be. On various occasions Jefferson described death as “my last sleep,”²⁹ “our journey’s end,”³⁰ “the sleep of death,”³¹ “the stillness of the grave,”³² the bosom of the grave,³³ “the end of our journey,”³⁴ “the evening of life,”³⁵ “the friendly hand of death,”³⁶ and “our great retirement.”³⁷ As he got older Jefferson lamented that “the hand of age is upon me.”³⁸ He remembered the many contemporaries

21. Jefferson to Benjamin Waterhouse, Monticello, January 31, 1819, QJ, 400.

22. Jefferson to James Madison, September 8, 1793, QJ, 408.

23. Jefferson to Samuel Smith, Monticello, August 22, 1798, QJ, 405.

24. Jefferson to James Madison, Philadelphia, August 11, 1793, QJ, 429.

25. Jefferson to William Branch Giles, Monticello, April 20, 1807, QJ, 403.

26. Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, Washington, March 2, 1809, QJ, 2078.

27. Jefferson to Marc Auguste Pictet, Washington, February 5, 1803, QJ, 316.

28. Jefferson to Maria Cosway, Paris, April 24, 1788, QJ, 21.

29. Jefferson to William Duane, Monticello, August 12, 1810, QJ, 287.

30. Jefferson to John Page, Shadwell, July 13, 1763, QJ, 273.

31. Jefferson to Samuel Brown, Monticello, July 14, 1813, QJ, 175.

32. Jefferson to Jean Nicholas D emeunier, Paris, January 24, 1786, QJ, 137.

33. Jefferson to Baron von Alexander Humboldt, December 6, 1813, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

34. Jefferson to John Page, Washington, June 25, 1804, QJ, lvii.

35. Jefferson to James Maury, Monticello, April 25, 1812, QJ, 287.

36. Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, October 12, 1823, QJ, 279.

37. Jefferson to Robert Morris, Monticello, February 19, 1795, QJ, 282.

38. Jefferson to James Maury, Monticello, April 25, 1812, QJ, 287.

who had already died as filling “a field of battle,”³⁹ while he remained “as a solitary trunk on a desolate field.”⁴⁰

Retirement is another subject that Jefferson’s metaphors illustrate, as few other literary devices can. Jefferson “permanently” retired from public service three times—first in 1781 after two one-year terms as governor of Virginia, second after four years as U.S. secretary of state, and last after two terms (eight years) as the third president of the United States. Each time Jefferson looked upon retirement “with the longing of a wave-worn mariner,”⁴¹ “a sailor who has land in view,”⁴² as a passenger swaggering on deck” while others were left at the helm, or “like a superannuated soldier, with forty years of honorable service.”⁴³ He “felt as if he had gained the harbor.”⁴⁴ Jefferson not only saw the “duty of retirement,”⁴⁵ but when he did retire from “the theatre of public life” he felt like “a prisoner released from his chains.”⁴⁶

Jefferson reserved some of his most caustic metaphors and similes in describing the federal judiciary. Not, however, in 1789, when Jefferson called for a federal bill of rights to be added to the new Constitution that would serve as a “legal check” in “the hands of the judiciary” to protect the liberties of the people.⁴⁷ But during the 1790s Jefferson increasingly pictured the federal judiciary as a partisan tool of Federalist

39. Jefferson to Francis A. Van Der Kemp, Monticello, January 11, 1825, QJ, 279–80.

40. Jefferson to Maria Cosway, Monticello, December 27, 1820, QJ, lvii.

41. Jefferson to George Washington, Monticello, September 9, 1792, QJ, 281.

42. Jefferson to Thomas Pickering, Philadelphia, November 8, 1792, QJ, 281.

43. Jefferson to Spencer Roane, Poplar Forest, September 6, 1819, QJ, 288.

44. Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, Washington, March 2, 1809, QJ, 285.

45. Jefferson to Governor James Sullivan, Washington, March 3, 1808, QJ, 284.

46. Jefferson to the Inhabitants of Albemarle County, Va., April 1, 1809, Peterson, *Jefferson: Writings*, 550; Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, Washington, March 2, 1809, QJ, 285.

47. Jefferson to James Madison, Paris, March 15, 1789, Julian P. Boyd et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950–), XIV, 659.

oppression which threatened the rights of individuals especially in cases brought under the Sedition Act of 1798. Jefferson's fear of and animosity toward the federal judiciary heightened as Chief Justice John Marshall's Supreme Court regularly expanded the power of the federal government at the expense of the states by broadly interpreting the Constitution, specifically through the contract and commerce clauses and more generally through the implied powers of Congress.

Jefferson came to view the Constitution "as a mere thing of wax in the hands of the judiciary."⁴⁸ He deplored the Marshall Court as "an irresponsible body . . . working like gravity by night and by day, gaining a little to-day & a little to-morrow, and advancing its noiseless step like a thief" to alter the balance of power by creating a consolidated government very different from the federal government intended by the Constitution's framers.⁴⁹

Jefferson's complex ideas about liberty are captured metaphorically with remarkable brevity, clarity, and drama. "The ball of liberty . . . now so well in motion" would surely "roll round the globe."⁵⁰ "The disease of liberty is catching."⁵¹ The acquisition of Cuba and Canada added to the Louisiana Purchase would create an "empire for liberty."⁵² He hoped that the young men of the Revolution who had "sucked in the principles of liberty as it were with their mother's milk"⁵³ would lead the way in preserving liberty and even emancipating slaves. It would not be easy, Jefferson warned, for "we are not to be translated from despotism to liberty in a feather bed."⁵⁴ "The ground of liberty," Jefferson wrote, "is to be gained by inches, that we must be contented to secure what we can get from time to time, and eternally press forward

48. Jefferson to Spencer Roane, Poplar Forest, September 6, 1819, QJ, 259.

49. Jefferson to Charles Hammond, Monticello, August 18, 1821, QJ, 261.

50. Jefferson to Tench Coxe, Monticello, June 1, 1796, QJ, 121.

51. Jefferson to the Marquis de Lafayette, Monticello, December 26, 1820, QJ, 122.

52. Jefferson to Madison, Monticello, April 27, 1809, QJ, liv, J. Jefferson Looney et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), I, 169.

53. Jefferson to Richard Peters, August 7, 1785, QJ, 374.

54. Jefferson to the Marquis de Lafayette, New York, April 2, 1790, QJ, 120.

for what is yet to get. It takes time to persuade men to do even what is for their own good.”⁵⁵

Jefferson believed that the “sacred fire of liberty” needed constant attention.⁵⁶ In some of his most controversial letters, Jefferson wrote how important rebellions were in preserving liberty. “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots & tyrants. It is its natural manure.”⁵⁷ The few minor uprisings in America were “a proof that the people have liberty enough, and I would not wish them less than they have. If the happiness of the mass of the people can be secured at the expense of a little tempest now & then, or even of a little blood, it will be a precious purchase. *Malo libertatum periculosum quam quietam servitutem* (I prefer dangerous liberty to a quiet servitude).”⁵⁸ To James Madison, Jefferson wrote “that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, & as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical. Unsuccessful rebellions indeed generally establish the encroachments on the rights of the people which have produced them. An observation of this truth should render honest republican governors so mild in their punishment of rebellions, as not to discourage them too much. It is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government.”⁵⁹ He wrote Abigail Adams that “The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions, that I wish it to be always kept alive. It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all. I like a little rebellion now & then. It is like a storm in the Atmosphere.”⁶⁰

Jefferson’s inventiveness was boundless, even as he used things familiar to his readers. The ocean and sea were used to depict a bountifulness or overwhelming force. He recalled the commitment that he and his fellow patriots made to “the ocean of revolution” back in 1776.⁶¹ As he anticipated becoming president, he dreaded “the stormy ocean of

55. Jefferson to Charles Clay, Monticello, January 27, 1790, QJ, 119.

56. Jefferson to John Hollins, Monticello, May 5, 1811, QJ, 17.

57. Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, Paris, November 12, 1787, QJ, 391.

58. Jefferson to Ezra Stiles, Paris, December 24, 1786, QJ, 390.

59. Paris, January 30, 1787, QJ, 390.

60. Paris, February 22, 1787, QJ, 390–91.

61. Jefferson to John Dickinson, Washington, December 19, 1801, QJ, 20.

public life [where] the billows are more furious, the blasts more deadly, than those which assail the bark moored in a retired port.”⁶² The momentous times in which he lived forced him to leave the pursuit of science and instead to navigate “the boisterous ocean of political passions.”⁶³ He tried to mend friendships that were threatened by an “ocean of slander, of falsehood, and of malice”⁶⁴—a never ceasing “ocean of newspaper lies”⁶⁵ that public figures must endure. In pondering foreign affairs, Jefferson wished “that there were an ocean of fire between us & the old world.”⁶⁶ In responding to a request for advice from President James Monroe on a new foreign policy that came to be called “the Monroe Doctrine,” Jefferson stressed the importance of the matter—the most momentous “since that of Independence. That made us a nation, this sets our compass and points the course which we are to steer thro’ the ocean of time opening on us.”⁶⁷ “Timid men,” Jefferson knew, would “prefer the calm of despotism to the boisterous sea of liberty,” which “is never without a wave.”⁶⁸

The *parent* of a thing focused his reader’s attention on that intimate relationship they had with their parents from whom everything flowed. Sensibility, he wrote was the parent of every virtue, but it is the parent of much misery too.”⁶⁹ Especially in poetry, “misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches.”⁷⁰ Jefferson’s generation had spent the prime of their lives in procuring . . . the precious blessings of liberty” so that the next generation could show that liberty “is the great parent of science and virtue.”⁷¹ But Jefferson warned against having too much

62. Jefferson to Carlo Bellini, Monticello, April 24, 1799, QJ, 74.

63. Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, Washington, March 2, 1809, QJ, 285.

64. Jefferson to James Monroe, Washington, March 10, 1808, QJ, 223.

65. Jefferson to James Monroe, Monticello, January 1, 1815, QJ, 348.

66. Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, Philadelphia, May 13, 1797, QJ, 35.

67. Jefferson to James Monroe, Monticello, October 24, 1823, QJ, 115.

68. Jefferson to Philip Mazzei, Monticello, April 24, 1796, QJ, 121; and Jefferson to the Marquis de Lafayette, Monticello, December 26, 1820, QJ, 122.

69. Jefferson to Lucy Paradise Barziza, Paris, July 8, 1788, QJ, 222.

70. Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1782, QJ, 23.

71. Jefferson to Joseph Willard, March 24, 1789, QJ, 315.

public confidence in government, which would be the “parent of despotism.”⁷²

Jefferson also realized that he and man in general were the beneficiaries of undeserved *gifts*. As a farmer, Jefferson was forever grateful for the soil that was “the gift of God to the living.”⁷³ “The spontaneous energies of the earth are a gift of nature, but they require the labor of man to direct their operation.”⁷⁴ To assist in drawing forth the riches of the field, the plow was to the farmer “what the wand is to the sorcerer.”⁷⁵

Jefferson was a man who enjoyed the comforts of life. Repeatedly he referred to *happiness* as an object to be pursued as in the Declaration of Independence, but more importantly to be attained. Jefferson greatly admired Frenchmen, who “have as much happiness in one year as an Englishman in ten.”⁷⁶ He felt that “the happiness of the domestic fireside is the first boon of heaven; and it is well it is so, since it is that which is the lot of the mass of mankind.”⁷⁷

Tranquility was also a primary goal for all men. It “is the old man’s milk,”⁷⁸ “the *summum bonum* (the supreme good) of a Septagenaire,”⁷⁹ and “the balm of life” and “the last and sweetest asylum of age.”⁸⁰ “To procure tranquility of mind we must avoid desire & fear, the two principal diseases of the mind.”⁸¹ From observation and experience, he knew that “it is tranquility and occupation that give happiness.”⁸²

Jefferson led an eventful and stressful life. He often expressed a desire for a respite from the buffetings of a controversial career. He sought comfort, which he likened to a pillow. The public approbation of his

72. Kentucky Resolutions, October 1798, QJ, 156.

73. Jefferson to John Wayles Eppes, Monticello, June 24, 1813, QJ, 319.

74. Jefferson to Charles Willson Peale, March 17, 1813, QJ, 8.

75. *Ibid.*, QJ, 9.

76. To Abigail Adams, Paris, August 9, 1786, QJ, 38.

77. Jefferson to John Armstrong, Monticello, February 8, 1813, QJ, 100.

78. Jefferson to Edward Rutledge, Philadelphia, June 24, 1797, QJ, 225.

79. Jefferson to John Melish, January 13, 1813, QJ, 225.

80. Jefferson to P. H. Wendover, Monticello, March 13, 1815, QJ, 225; and Jefferson to Spencer Roane, Monticello, March 9, 1821, QJ, 279.

81. Jefferson to William Short, Monticello, October 31, 1819, QJ, 225.

82. Jefferson to Anna Jefferson Marks, Paris, July 12, 1788, QJ, 235.

service would “soften the pillow of my repose thro’ the residue of life.”⁸³ Tranquility in old age and ignorance, he wrote to close friends, would be his “softest pillow.”⁸⁴ Early in life Jefferson seriously thought about the hereafter. But, after having no success in unraveling the mysteries of life after death, he “for very many years ceased to read or to think concerning them, and have reposed my head on that pillow of ignorance which a benevolent creator has made so soft for us, knowing how much we should be forced to use it.”⁸⁵ Throughout his life, Jefferson kept commonplace books to store passages from his widespread readings. He wrote his mentor George Wythe that the commonplace books would be “his pillar.”⁸⁶ Often, this quotation has been misread as “pillow” instead of “pillar,” a completely different metaphorical image from the one Jefferson evoked.

Perhaps Jefferson’s favorite metaphor—in fact probably his favorite word—was *bosom*. Far more maternal than sexual, Jefferson repeatedly used this wonderful word as a source of tranquility, comfort, serenity, and security. He delighted in having breakfast, dinner, reading, writing, and receiving company while serving as U.S. secretary of state at his Philadelphia house “entirely embosomed in high plane trees.” He longed for the day when Monticello would be so embosomed.⁸⁷ He looked forward to retiring to the bosom of his family, neighbors, and friends, to the bosom of his farm and his native county. And certainly, he longed for the bosom of his books. He talked about being bosom friends and about the necessity of the President having a cabinet of his bosom confidence. As President, he determined quite early not to respond to applicants for office—not even to his most bosom friends. He opened his bosom or unbosomed himself to his closest confidants, James Madison, Benjamin Rush, William Short, and Elbridge Gerry. He strove to avoid war because the love of peace was so cherished in the bosom of our citizens. As he grew older he anticipated without fear or trepidation the

83. Jefferson to John B. Colvin, Monticello, September 20, 1810, QJ, 72.

84. Jefferson to William Short, Monticello, May 5, 1816, QJ, 225; and Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, March 14, 1820, QJ, 89.

85. Jefferson to Isaac Story, Washington, December 5, 1801, QJ, 366.

86. Jefferson to George Wythe, Philadelphia, February 28, 1800, QJ, 83.

87. Jefferson to Martha Jefferson Randolph, Philadelphia, July 7, 1793, QJ,

bosom of the grave⁸⁸—the serenity of that final sleep. When he was ill or grieving, “how sweet,” he felt, “to have a bosom whereon to recline our heads, & into which we may pour the torrents of our tears!”⁸⁹ With such a comfort, Jefferson felt that “Grief was almost a luxury.” But perhaps most tenderly and romantically, he wrote to Maria Cosway as he prepared to bring his daughters back to America in 1789. Afraid of ocean travel, Maria would never come to America and Jefferson could never live in England. Thus, he wrote to Maria that “When wafting on the bosom of the ocean I shall pray it to be as calm and smooth as yours to me.”⁹⁰ Jefferson truly was a poet and a master of the metaphor.

88. Jefferson to Baron Alexander von Humboldt, December 6, 1813, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

89. Jefferson to Maria Cosway, Paris, October 12, 1786, QJ, 225.

90. Jefferson to Maria Cosway, Paris, May 21, 1789, QJ, 298.