

**Romantic Posthumous Life Writing:**  
***Inter-stitching* Genres and Forms of Mourning and Commemoration**



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# *ABSTRACT*

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Contemporary scholarship has seen increasing interest in the study of elegy. The present work attempts to elevate and expand discussions of death and survival beyond the ambit of elegy to a more genre-inclusive and ethically sensitive survey of Romantic posthumous life writings. Combining an ethic of remembrance founded on mutual fulfilment and reciprocal care with the Romantic tendency to hybridise different genres of mourning and commemoration, the study re-conceives ‘posthumous life’ as the ‘inexhaustible’ product of endless collaboration between the dead, the dying and the living. This thesis looks to the philosophical meditations of Francis Bacon, John Locke and Emmanuel Levinas for an ethical framework of human protection, fulfilment and preservation.

In an effort to locate the origin of posthumous life writing, the first chapter examines the philosophical context in which different genres and media of commemoration emerged in the eighteenth century. Accordingly, it will commence with a survey of Enlightenment attitudes toward posthumous sympathy and the threat of death. The second part of the chapter turns to the tangled histories of epitaph, biography, portraiture, sepulchre and elegy in the writings of Samuel Johnson, Henry Kett, Vicesimus Knox, William Godwin and William Wordsworth. The Romantic culture of mourning and commemoration inherits the intellectual and generic legacies

of the Enlightenment. Hence, Chapter Two will try to uncover the complex generic and formal crossovers between epitaph, extempore, effusion, elegy and biography in Wordsworth's 'Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg' (1835-7) and his 'Epitaph' (1835-7) for Charles Lamb. However, the chapter also recognises the ethical repercussions of Wordsworth's inadequate, even mortifying, treatment of a fellow woman writer in his otherwise successful expression of ethical remembrance. To address the problem of gender in Romantic memorialisation, Chapter Three will take a close look at Letitia Elizabeth Landon's reply to Wordsworth's incompetent defence of Felicia Hemans. Mediating the ambitions and anxieties of her subject, as well as her public image and private pain, 'Felicia Hemans' (1838) is an audacious composite of autograph, epitaph, elegy, corrective biography and visual portraiture.

The two closing chapters respond to Thomas Carlyle's outspoken confidence in 'Portraits and Letters' as indispensable aids to biographies. Chapter Four identifies a tentative connection between the aesthetic of visual portraiture and the ethic of life writing. To demonstrate the convergence of both artistic and humane principles, this cross-media analysis will first evaluate Sir Joshua Reynolds's memoirs of his deceased friends. Then, it will compare Wordsworth's and Hemans's verse reflections on the commemorative power and limitation of iconography. The last chapter assesses the role of private correspondence in the continuation of familiar relation and reciprocal support. Landon's dramatic enactment of a 'feminine Robinson Crusoe' in her letters from Africa urges the unbroken offering of service and remembrance to a fallen friend through posthumous correspondence. The concluding section will consider the ethical implications for the belated memorials and services furnished by friends and colleagues in the wake of her death.

## Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>vii</i>
<b>Introduction:</b>	
<b>Toward a Conception of Romantic Posthumous Life Writing</b>	<b>1</b>
Immortal Self: ‘ <i>Non omnis moriar, multaque pars mei vitabit Libitinam</i> ’	12
Duty of Care: ‘I do not have the right to leave him alone to his death’	22
The Profit and Use of <i>Lives</i> : ‘ <i>maxima e minimis suspendens</i> ’	42
The Design and Performance	63
<b>1. Turning Away from the Fear of Death:</b>	
<b>The Infinity and ‘endless addible’ Forms of Afterlife</b>	<b>67</b>
Fight or Fright: ‘Let us learn bravely to stand our ground, and fight Death’	71
Crossing Genres, Ethics and Forms of Commemoration	86
<b>2. The Epitaph and ‘Other Places’:</b>	
<b>Mediating Genres in Romantic Posthumous Life Writing</b>	<b>118</b>
Ejaculation of Naked Grief: ‘Effusion on Effusion <i>pour away</i> ’	126
Wordsworth Writing Epitaph-Elegy: ‘And Lamb, the frolic and the gentle’	138
The Woman without Name: ‘Mourn rather for that holy Spirit’	150
<b>3. Remember her ‘bright name’:</b>	
<b>The Secret Inscriptions of the Poet’s and the Woman’s Heart</b>	<b>158</b>
‘Bright names will hallow song’: Autography and Physiognomy of Genius	162
Gender and Genre Unbound: ‘The fable of Prometheus and the vulture’	170

**4. The *Substance* and *Shadows* of Life:**

<b>The Commemorative Power of Portraiture in Art and Writing</b>	199
Portraiture and Life Writing: ‘I am giving a portrait, not a panegyric’	206
The Collaborative Last Work: ‘How can we part? We that have loved so well’	218
‘Go, faithful Portrait’: Wordsworth and Hemans on the Portrait Self	224

**5. ‘The Last Letters of L. E. L.’:**

<b>Friendships and Solitude of a Late Feminine Robinson Crusoe</b>	240
Landon’s Letters from Africa: ‘The solitude here is very Robinson Crusoe-ish’	248
‘She died too soon’: Community of Female Robinson Crusoes	262
Guilty Guardians: ‘Let the name she bore for so brief a time be forgotten’	273

Conclusion:

‘I seemed to take up the work . . . from the very hands of the dead’	287
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<i>Bibliography</i>	291
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*'Am I my brother's keeper?'*

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## *List of Illustrations*

- |     |   |     |
|-----|---|-----|
| 1.1 | Photograph of <i>The Hardy Tree</i> , from Old St. Pancras Churchyard, London (author's own).   | 1   |
| 1.2 | Photograph of Henry Weekes's 1853-4 monument to Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, from Christchurch Priory, Dorset (author's own).  | 5   |
| 1.3 | Photograph of the original family tomb of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, from Old St. Pancras Churchyard, London (author's own).   | 10  |
| 1.4 | <i>Mary Wollstonecraft</i> by John Opie, circa 1797 (National Portrait Gallery, London).  | 55  |
| 2.1 | The 'Auto-Icon' of Jeremy Bentham, from University College of London since 1850 (author's own).   | 82  |
| 2.2 | Marble tombstone of Xanthippos, 430-420 BC, from the British Museum, London (author's own).   | 95  |
| 4.1 | 'Autographs of the Living Poets', plates no. 1 and 2, from <i>The Literary Souvenir; or, Cabinet of Poetry and Romance</i> , Alaric A. Watts (London: Printed for Hurst, Robinson and Co., 1825).   | 168 |
| 4.2 | Engraved portrait of Felicia Hemans for Letitia Elizabeth Landon's 'Felicia Hemans', from a portrait by William E. West, in <i>Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book, 1838</i> (London, Paris, and New York: Fisher, Son, and Co.; Berlin: Black and Armstrong, and Asher, [1837]).        | 179 |
| 5.1 | Engraved frontispiece portrait of Samuel Johnson, from a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, in James Boswell's <i>The Life of Johnson, LL.D. Comprehending an Account of his Studies and Numerous Works, in Chronological Order</i> , 2 vols. (London: Printed by Henry Baldwin, 1791). | 209 |
| 5.2 | <i>Wordsworth on Helvellyn</i> by Benjamin R. Haydon, 1842 (National Portrait Gallery, London).   | 215 |
| 5.3 | <i>The Ancient of Days</i> by William Blake, frontispiece to <i>Europe a Prophecy</i> , 1794, from the British Museum, London.  | 219 |

- 5.4 *William Wordsworth* by Henry William Pickersgill, circa 1850, (National Portrait Gallery, London). 225
- 5.5 Engraved frontispiece of *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* by Richard Samuel, in *The Ladies New and Polite Pocket Memorandum-book, for the Year of our Lord 1778* (London: Printed for Joseph Johnson, 1778). [By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.] 230
- 5.6 Engraved frontispiece portrait of Felicia Hemans, from a painting by William Edward West, in *The Works of Mrs. Hemans; with a Memoir of her Life, by her Sister*, [ed. Harriet Hughes], 7 vols. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons; London: Thomas Cadell, 1839). 233
- 6.1 Engraved portrait memorial of Maria Jane Jewsbury, from a painting by G. Freeman, in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book with Poetical Illustrations by L. E. L., 1839*, 4th edn. (London: Fisher, Son, and Co.; Paris: Quai de L'École, [1838]). 262
- 6.2 Engraved frontispiece portrait memorial of Letitia Elizabeth Landon, from a painting by Daniel Maclise, in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book with Poetical Illustrations by L. E. L. and Mary Howitt, 1840* (London: Fisher, Son, and Co.; Paris: Quai de L'École, [1839]). 284

## Abbreviations

- CCB* R. R. Madden, *The Literary Life and Correspondence of the Countess of Blessington*, 3 vols. (London: T. C. Newby, 1855).
- CM* Henry F. Chorley, *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans with Illustrations of her Literary Character from her Private Correspondence*, 2 vols. (London: Saunders and Otley, 1836).
- CWC* *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series, gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.; Princeton: Princeton University Press). See *Bibliography* for the volumes used.
- FDRS* All volumes of *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book*. See *Bibliography* for publication dates and details.
- LLEL* *Letters by Letitia Elizabeth Landon*, ed. F. J. Sypher (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 2001).
- LRLEL* Laman Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains of L. E. L.*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1841).
- LY* *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years 1821-1853*, ed. E. de Selincourt, rev. Alan G. Hill, 2nd edn., 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978-88).
- PW* *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940-9; 2nd edn. [of vols. i-iii], Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952-4).
- PWW* *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Alexander Grosart, 3 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, Son, and Co., 1876).

## Introduction:

### Toward a Conception of Romantic Posthumous Life Writing



Fig. 1.1 *The Hardy Tree* in Old St. Pancras Churchyard. The headstones were derived from the tombs that were dismantled during the construction of the railway.

In 1862, Hardy left Dorset for London to study architecture under the tutelage of Arthur Blomfield. His arrival in London, however, coincided with major railway works in the city, which occasionally involved cutting through city churchyards. As the son of a late Bishop of London, Blomfield was tasked with the macabre responsibility of supervising the proper removal and reburial of bodily remains at the affected sites.<sup>1</sup> Florence Hardy's biography of her late

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<sup>1</sup> For Blomfield and Hardy's involvement in the exhumation project, see Florence Emily Hardy's 'Chapter III: Work in London, 1862-1867', in *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891: Compiled Largely from Contemporary Notes, Letters, Diaries, and Biographical Memoranda* (London: Macmillan, 1928), 46-73. For the subsequent friendship between the two men, see 'Chapter 4: London', in Michael Millgate's *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 74-101, especially 75-83.

husband provides a grisly account by Blomfield of the railway company's unethical management of disinterred bodies and bones. The senior architect returned from one of these sites 'on which all the removed bodies were said by the company to be reinterred; but there appeared to be nothing deposited, the surface of the ground lying quite level as before.'<sup>2</sup> Blomfield even heard 'rumours of mysterious full bags of something that rattled, and cartage to bone-mills', fuelling his grim speculation that 'these people are all ground up!'<sup>3</sup> Acknowledging his share of negligence in this incident, the architect appointed Hardy to supervise the removal of hundreds of coffins and great quantities of bones as the Midland Railway prepared to lay their tracks through Old St. Pancras Churchyard in 1865. To ensure that the clerk-of-works was performing his duties around the clock, Hardy was asked to pay unexpected visits at the churchyard, often on evenings at pre-dawn hours. Michael Millgate even attributes the poet's dwindling interest in architecture to this traumatic graveyard experience in his more recent biography of the writer.<sup>4</sup> The new railway line and the unavoidable exhumation project were hugely unpopular. Fomented by a false rumour that 'the bones of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft were among those swept into anonymity', the headline in *Bayswater Chronicle* for 23 June 1866 called the new railway scheme 'Horrible Desecration of the Dead of St. Pancras'.<sup>5</sup> Although both Godwin and Wollstonecraft were originally buried in Old St. Pancras, their remains were moved to St. Peter's Churchyard in Bournemouth by their grandson, Percy Florence Shelley, to be buried together with Mary Shelley in 1851. Even so, the bones of Godwin and Wollstonecraft would suffer a different kind of injustice during the transfer process, a subject to which I will return later.

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<sup>2</sup> Emily Hardy, *Early Life of Hardy*, 58.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Hardy: A Biography*, 98.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Whilst Hardy superintended the gruesome removal of bones and headstones, an unexpectedly magnificent monument to the displaced dead arose out of an ingenious permutation of tree and stones. The Ash tree around which the ‘wrenched memorial stones’ were arranged in a circular ‘jumbled patch’ became known as the ‘The Hardy Tree’ (fig. 1.1). Growing amongst these nameless tombstones since Hardy’s time, the root-entangled stones have literally become part of the living system. In this endlessly generative memorial of a history brutalised by progress, the forgotten dead (and their illegible traces) partake in the continued renewal of their own posthumous life. Yet, despite this moving Romantic interfusion of stone and tree – of natural system and human work – the tree memorial is hardly a fitting compensation for the post-obit violence suffered by the unfortunate dead who lay in the tracks of inexorable progress. The effects of effacement, anonymity, disjointed remains and obliterated histories are very real and the outrage in Hardy’s ‘The To-Be-Forgotten’ (1901) is equally palpable.<sup>6</sup> After all, the Ash tree could also be viewed in negative terms as a ravenous force of nature slowly devouring all traces, stories and memories of human life. And ‘Like men foregone’ (l. 23), these unjustly disposed dead shall ‘merge into those / Whose story no one knows’ (ll. 23-4). ‘The Hardy Tree’ may be a magnificent monument to ‘men foregone’, but it is resolutely silent about the human lives it has assimilated as its own. In giving voice to the collective dead, Hardy’s verses constitute a generous expression of posthumous defence, conferring belated justice on those whom he calls ‘old friends’ (l. 3). The poet, as a mourner, as an elegist, as an epitaphist, as an architect, as a historian, and as a monitor of morals has an ethical duty to narrate and defend the lives, as well as the memory, of those who have gone before.

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<sup>6</sup>In ‘The To-Be-Forgotten’ (1901), the poet expresses his outrage at his contemporaries’ outright disrespect for the rites and ethics of burial, especially in regards to the inviolable association of epitaph and remains. See the reprinted version of ‘The To-Be-Forgotten’, in *The Variorum Edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. James Gibson (London: Macmillan London Ltd., 1979), 144-5.

Life writing, then, becomes a compelling, if not necessary, expression of the living's ethical responsibility towards the dead. Whether it takes the form of posthumous compensation or of posthumous defence, this particular mode of life writing should function to dispense justice, however belated and futile it may appear to be. One of the best, and controversial, examples of this is Lady [Jane] Shelley's closely edited counter-defence, *Shelley Memorials* (1859), to Thomas Jefferson Hogg's *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1858).<sup>7</sup> Committed to a more 'depoliticised and spiritualised' restoration of Shelley's name, the Boscombe Shelleys – Lady Shelley and her husband, Percy Florence Shelley – were engaged in a campaign to redeem the reputations of their forebears with the large collection of literary manuscripts in their possession.<sup>8</sup> These forebears included not only their parents but also Godwin and Wollstonecraft, whose posthumous standings were just as scandalous and polarising. As the heirs of this relentlessly brutalised and anathematised family history, Jane and Percy went as far as commissioning Henry Weekes to produce a memorial sculpture of Mary and Shelley modelled on Michelangelo's *Pietas* (fig. 1.2). In this monumental recasting of Mary as a pious, mourning *Madonna humilitas* and of Shelley as a Christ-like martyr of heroic struggle, Weekes's sculpture 'Christianises' the narrative of their shared lives. In effect, the flawlessly marbled celebration of traditional Christian virtues constitutes an effort to purge such unsavoury elements as atheism,

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<sup>7</sup> See Lady [Jane Gibson] Shelley's *Shelley Memorials: From Authentic Sources. Edited by Lady Shelley. To which is Added An Essay on Christianity, by Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2nd edn. (London: Smith, Edler and Co., 1859) and Thomas Jefferson Hogg's *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 4 vols. [only 2 pub.] (London: Edward Moxon, 1858). In the 'Preface to the First Edition' of *Shelley Memorials*, Jane goes as far as to suggest in her footnote that 'the erasures which he [Hogg] has already made in them [the published letters], together with the arrangement of their paragraphs, render them of doubtful value, however authentic may be the originals which that gentleman asserts he possesses' (ix).

<sup>8</sup> Pamela Clemit's introduction to Lady Shelley's *Shelley Memorials*, in *Lives of the Great Romantics III: Godwin, Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley by Their Contemporaries*, eds. Pamela Clemit, Harriet Jump and Betty Bennett, 3 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), iii. 189.

revolutionary politics, and illicit sexual practices, which had greatly defined and stigmatised their secular reputations. As Bette London points out, ‘the monument fixes the contradictions that co-



Fig. 1.2 Marble monument to Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley by Henry Weekes, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1853 and installed in 1854 as a permanent memorial to the couple in Christchurch Priory, Dorset.

nstitute and surround the Shelleyan legacy, mobilizing its own conventionalized impressions of the staple figures: the martyred, revolutionary poet and his beautiful, distraught widow.’<sup>9</sup> Considering that Weekes’s monument is part of a more ambitious project to rehabilitate Jane and Percy’s family name, the visual rhetoric of martyrdom (in that semi-naked, vulnerable, self-sacrificial posture) takes on an especially defensive role. Although Shelley’s drowning could hardly be attributed to revolutionary violence or political injustice, that helpless, fallen figure of a man whose only belated support is that of his wife is a subtle indictment of an ungrateful world. While the world is not responsible for the poet’s premature passing, the fact that only Mary

<sup>9</sup> Bette London’s ‘Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and the Spectacle of Masculinity’, *PMLA* 108/2 (March 1993), 253.

arrives at the scene to lend support to a diminished presence suggests a gross neglect on the part of the wider community to reciprocate the generous contributions of the giving writer. The wife may have arrived too late to offer any meaningful protection to her husband against the threat of drowning, but she nevertheless offers her own body as a shield to cover the exposed torso of the lifeless victim. Consistent with Weekes's iconographic language of posthumous defence, the body of Mary functions to deflect the unjust forces (conservative attacks, reviews, criticisms, etc.) threatening to incur a 'second death' on the body of Shelley.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, if it were not for her obsessive collation of the poet's writings, his literary corpus would not have survived intact. Through the highly symbolic gestures of Mary's protective body, head and hand, the lifeless *corpse* of Shelley is safely reconstituted as a *corpus* of enduring works.

Following the completion of Weekes's sculpture, Percy and Jane took the project to redeem their family name to the next level. In 1857, they offered Hogg unrestricted access to all the papers in their possession so that he could produce a fair and authoritative full-length biography of Shelley. After publishing the first two volumes of *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, it became clear to Jane that Hogg had his own agendas and that his continued involvement with the project would only inflict more damage on her father-in-law.<sup>11</sup> She even went as far as obtaining a court injunction to stop Hogg from publishing any more volumes. Rather than relying on another family friend or associate to deliver the sanitised version of Shelley they wanted, Jane hired Richard Garnett of the British Museum to help her with the sorting of letters and the writing of the biographical commentary.<sup>12</sup> It may be important to note that the couple's ambitious family defence project did not end with *Shelley Memorials*. Later Jane and Percy

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<sup>10</sup> I borrow the term 'second death' from line 6 of Hardy's 'The To-Be-Forgotten', *Variorum Edition*, 144-5.

<sup>11</sup> See Clemit's introduction to the reprinted extracts of Hogg's *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, in *Lives of the Great Romantics III*, iii. 175-6.

<sup>12</sup> See Clemit's introduction to Jane's *Shelley Memorials*, in *Lives of the Great Romantics III*, iii. 189.

would take on the challenge of revamping the much-vitiated reputations of their grandparents; and for this assignment they selected the author and publisher, Charles Kegan Paul.<sup>13</sup> Kegan Paul's full-length biography of Godwin was based on Mary Shelley's unfinished memoir, and it is the conclusion of his carefully vetted version of Godwin's life which warrants some special attention.<sup>14</sup> Even though the remains of the controversial author and his equally controversial partner had been transferred to Bournemouth before all the uproar over the detested railway works, Kegan Paul could not help linking the two events. He writes:

He [Godwin] was buried by the side of Mary Wollstonecraft, in Old St Pancras Churchyard, which even then had not entirely ceased to be a quiet nook, where Shelley had met Mary Godwin under the willow which shadowed her mother's grave. The tide of London was soon to desecrate and deform into hideous desolation a spot full of so many memories; two Railways run below and through Old St Pancras graveyard.<sup>15</sup>

Underneath the biographer's fond remembrance of the 'spot' marked by 'so many memories' is a furious condemnation of the community's collective failure to safeguard sites of great cultural significance. What is implied in this passage is that the posthumous life of an author encompasses not only his works and material remains, but also the physical sites of his once-living and *future* life activities. Here, the abruptly terminated attachment between the two authors is imagined to assume a second life in the amorous activities of Mary and Shelley. Thus, the Old St Pancras Churchyard is entwined with more than just the once-mouldering bodies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft: it is also entwined with the lives and memories of their scions. Kegan Paul's outrage is evident in his unforgiving use of such terms as 'desecrate', 'deform' and 'hideous desolation.' The image of the railways running 'below and through' the churchyard is just as potent as the churchmen levelling sacred burial grounds in Hardy's poem. Moreover, the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 3:190.

<sup>14</sup> See Charles Kegan Paul's *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*, 2 vols. (London: H.S. King, 1876). I use the select extracts in *Lives of the Great Romantics III*, iii. 227-53.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. iii. 252.

prepositional use of ‘below and through’ conveys a form of total violence against the dead. By running ‘through’ the churchyard, the railways flatten and obliterate the inscribed and visible history of the deceased (such as tombs, epitaphs, monuments, memorials, etc.). By running ‘below’ the churchyard, the railways destroy all material testaments of a deposited history (such as bodies and bones, ceremonial offerings, and personal artefacts). However, for Kegan Paul this posthumous injustice against Godwin and Wollstonecraft does not end at a mere, ill-conceived railway project.

In this meticulously crafted defence of his subject’s life, the biographer makes very strategic use of the final episode concerning the transfer of Godwin’s and Wollstonecraft’s remains from one ‘desecrated’ churchyard to another ‘intolerant’ churchyard. After citing the filial wish of Mary to have the remains relocated so ‘that parents and daughter might rest together,’ Kegan Paul juxtaposes the loving daughter (and grandson) with the bigoted churchmen.<sup>16</sup> When the authorities at St. Peter’s Churchyard were approached with the request for reburial,

Clerical intolerance uttered some protests against the inscription on the grave, where stand recorded the works by which each who lies there is best known, though it is difficult to see why words which were innocent in St Pancras’ churchyard were harmful elsewhere.<sup>17</sup>

Railways, it seems, are not the only posthumous enemies of the dead. The close positioning of grave-razing industrial machines and ‘un-Christian’ grave-denying clerics is scarcely accidental.

It should instead be construed symbolically as a communal rejection and under-estimation of both authors’ contributions to humanity. As Pamela Clemit astutely observes,

Kegan Paul’s account of Godwin’s death and burial is more than a fulfilment of nineteenth-century biographical conventions: in alluding to the ‘clerical intolerance’ . . . he highlights the need for vigilant defence of Godwin and his family against conservative critics of his own day.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Rather than reinforcing entrenched conservative perception of the author's character, the biographer recapitulates the purpose of this life writing project in the final line of his account of Godwin's burial. Quoting from Leigh Hunt's 'Abou Ben Adhem' (1834), Kegan Paul adopts the epitaphic voice of the dead and exhorts all living biographers to 'Write me [Godwin], as one that loves his fellow-men.'<sup>19</sup> Provocatively, he cites from another notorious political dissident of the Romantic period. Kegan Paul's hopeful projection for his subject's afterlife is clear: that like the name of the Muslim saint and Sufi mystic, Ibrahim Bin Adham, the name of Godwin, too, would lead 'the names of whom love of God had blessed' (l. 17). Conservative readers and critics may disagree vociferously with his life and radical writings, but at least he made a sincere effort to love 'his fellow-men'. And for that alone his name is sufficient to lead 'all the rest' (l. 18) in God's judgment. The contrast between the magnanimous hero philosopher and the small-minded men of the cloth cannot be starker.

Yet, just when one thinks the biographer has already pressed his point home, he cannily follows the quotation with the very same inscriptions which agitated the clerics. Kegan Paul concludes the account with the following epitaphs:

WILLIAM GODWIN, Author of 'Political Justice.'  
*Born, March 3rd, 1756; Died, April 7th, 1836.*  
 Aged 80 years.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT GODWIN,  
 Author of a Vindication of the 'Rights of Women.'  
*Born, April 27th, 1759; Died, Sepr. 10, 1797.*<sup>20</sup>

Their remains were removed hither from the Churchyard of St. Pancras,  
 London, A.D. 1851.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. iii. 228.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. iii. 253. Hunt's 'Abou Ben Adhem' was first published in Samuel Carter Hall's *The Amulet, or Christian and Literary Remembrancer* for 1834. I use the reprinted edition in his *The Book of Gems. The Modern Poets and Artists of Great Britain* (London: Whittaker and Co., 1838), 161. Kegan Paul quotes line 14 of Hunt's poem.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, it is hard to imagine how these terse and abbreviated summaries of Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's lives and accomplishments can elicit such a strong aversion from the religious authorities at St. Peter's. In fact, the inscriptions follow very rudimentary conventions of epitaph writing, as prescribed by eighteenth-century authorities such as Samuel Johnson and Samuel Parr and by Romantic writers such as Wordsworth and Godwin himself. The epitaphs contain the names of the deceased, the dates of their birth and death, and the defining achievements or works



Fig. 1.3 The original family tomb of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin in Old St. Pancras Churchyard, London. Their remains were later reburied in St. Peter's Churchyard, Bournemouth, in 1851. The tomb also housed the remains of Godwin's second wife, Mary Jane Clairmont.

by which they are known. While the Boscombe Shelleys' frustration with 'clerical intolerance' is understandable, the inscriptions which appeared innocent enough to Kegan Paul certainly did not appear 'innocent' or 'harmless' to conservative authorities. One only has to look at the titles of their supposedly 'best known' works (*Political Justice* and *Rights of Women*) to appreciate the

political tenor of the epitaphs and the one-sided image they were intended to promote. The inscriptions signify a deliberate exclusion of Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's literary merits. Why not *Caleb Williams* for *Political Justice*? Why not *Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* for *Rights of Women*? Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written in Sweden* was in fact her most popular and successful work in the 1790s, a book which, according to Godwin, would make 'a man in love with its author'.<sup>21</sup> Surely, if the inscriptions were intended to celebrate their mutual affections in life, Wollstonecraft's Scandinavian *Letters* would have been far more appropriate. To the politically conservative clerics at St. Peter's the epitaphs must have seemed politically charged, harbouring a subversive challenge to both state and church establishments. There is, of course, another possibility. By focusing on their political writings, the inscriptions evade any direct or indirect reference to Wollstonecraft's scandalous love life. Any mention of her Scandinavian *Letters* would have invoked her disastrous sexual relation with Gilbert Imlay, and her posthumous image as a fallen libertine. Ironically, it was owing to the excessively generous revelations of Godwin's own moving *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) which brought such privileged details of her life to public attention. Godwin's work of mourning became a devastating work of life writing, tainting the reputations of both authors.<sup>22</sup> The epitaphs may be unexpectedly minimalistic, but they are certainly not as 'innocent' as the biographer claims; rather, they intimate a cautiously vetted representation of the dead. Neither is his deployment of the grave inscriptions at the end of his writing an 'innocent' and 'harmless' act. It is integral to the system of defences the biographer has set up in his account of Godwin's death and burial. In drawing our attention to the literal titles of 'Political Justice' and

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<sup>21</sup> William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), ed. Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria Walker (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2001), 95.

<sup>22</sup> See Harriet Jump's introduction to Godwin's 1798 *Memoirs of Wollstonecraft*, in *Lives of the Great Romantics III*, ii. 7-8.

‘Rights of Women’, he reaffirms the ethical commitment to ‘Write Godwin and Wollstonecraft as those who love their fellow-men and -women.’ Just as Weekes’s sculpture confers protection upon the helpless Shelley, Kegan Paul’s account and calculated supplement of epitaphs collaborate to defend the *rights*, as well as *rites*, of commemorating his subjects against the threats of railways, clerics and unfair prejudices.

### **Immortal Self: ‘*Non omnis moriar, multaque pars mei vitabit Libitinam*’**

From elegies and epitaphs, to tombstones and monuments, and finally sculptures and biographies, it is evident that nineteenth-century writers are well-versed in the assortment of genres and media conducive to the preservation of an artist’s afterlife. More importantly, the often-mindful deployment of these strategic literary, material and visual resources suggests a noticeable, even *unethical*, limitation in the concept of survival through one’s own works. The archaic hope of self-monumentalisation via the author’s chief production is best exemplified by Horace’s confident proclamation at the end of Book III of *Odes*: *Exegi monumentum aere perennius* (‘I have raised a monument more lasting than bronze’).<sup>23</sup> Outlasting even the imperial works of gilded bronze, his poetry is the only adequate monument to himself. ‘Not all of me shall pass away’ (*Non omnis moriar*), he writes, for ‘a great part of me will cheat Libitina [Goddess of Death]’ (*multaque pars mei vitabit Libitinam*).<sup>24</sup> The relentless hold of *monumentum aere perennius* on the Romantics is a frequent cause of their chronic anxieties about death and posthumous oblivion. As John Keats muses self-effacingly in a February 1820 letter to Fanny

<sup>23</sup> For Horace’s concluding piece in Book III of his great *Odes*, I use *Horace: The Odes. Latin text, facing verse translation, and notes*, trans. Colin Sydenham (London: Duckworth, 2005), 178-9. Asserting the immortality of his achievement, the last ode opens with the triumphant line: *Exegi monumentum aere perennius / regalique situ Pyramidum altius* (‘I have raised a monument more lasting than bronze and loftier than the Pyramids’).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* lines 6 and 7.

Brawne, ‘If I should die . . . I have left no immortal work behind me – nothing to make my friends proud of my memory . . . and if I had had time I would have made myself remember’d.’<sup>25</sup> It is worthwhile to note that the letter to Fanny was written in a period of extremely poor health, for which the poet was confined to bed for more than three weeks. In anticipation of his own looming death, Keats was acutely conscious of the time needed to generate his ‘immortal work’ – time that he did not have. Time, accordingly, is a source of injustice to the young aspiring writer. But so is the time-honoured notion of the ‘immortal work’. The belief that only such a monumental achievement can make his friends proud of his memory and render his name worthy of remembrance creates an ethical crisis in the conditions of mourning and commemoration. Furthermore, what does it say about the possibility and limits of posthumous friendship? Is Keats’s life not worth remembering because he fell short of his literary aim?

Curiously, the poet turns away from this morbid and worrying reflection on time and literary afterlife to his immediate consolatory connection with Fanny. He writes: ‘Thoughts like these came very feebly whilst I was in health and every pulse beat for you – now you divide with this (may I say it?) “last infirmity of noble minds” all my reflection.’<sup>26</sup> In quoting John Milton’s celebrated pastoral elegy, ‘Lycidas’ (1638), Keats complicates the generic status of the letter. On one hand, it is a familiar letter to his beloved partner; on the other hand, it is a prose elegy emulating the loss-compensation patterns of classical elegies. To the ambitious poets, ‘*Fame* is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise / (That last infirmity of Noble mind) / To scorn delights,

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<sup>25</sup> John Keats’s February (?) 1820 letter to Fanny Brawne, in *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. with revisions and notes by Maurice Buxton Forman, 4th edn. (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 468.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

and live laborious dayes' (ll. 70-2).<sup>27</sup> However, as the shepherd poet learns from his own experience and from Phoebus's advice, true recompense ('the fair Guerdon', l. 73) lies not on this side of the grave. Those who try to seek fame and reward for all their hard work and sacrifices in this life will be prematurely cut down by 'th'abhorred shears' of the 'blind *Fury*' (l. 75). Death shall follow as the blind Fate 'slits the thin-spun life' (l. 76) of the overreaching artist. True '*Fame*' is planted and fostered in the afterlife, not on 'mortal soil' (l. 78). The Romantic reader has clearly assimilated the Horatian edict and the compensatory logic of pastoral elegy in the line 'If I should die . . . I have left no immortal work behind me'. Intimating that he would not be appreciated in life, 'the fair guerdon' is deferred to a posthumous recognition of his immortal worth. Yet, the concluding avowal of love to Fanny overturns the compensatory paradigm of Milton's 'Lycidas'. In the pastoral elegy, the shepherd poet turns to the posthumous apotheosis of Edward King as 'the Genius of the shore' (l. 183) and protector of future poet-wanderers for consolation. In contrast, Keats takes a reverse turn to Fanny, the motivating force behind his life, health and every pulsing beat, for consolation and for alleviating the 'last infirmity of noble minds'. The Romantic poet, it would seem, is repeating past conventions with obvious difference and irony. What is truly exceptional about the elegiac turn in Keats's letter is the loosening of the archaic grip 'survival through works' has on modern writers. Suggestively, the posthumous endurance of the artist is contingent not on his works alone, but also on a large community of friends, family, colleagues and readers committed to the *ethics of remembrance*.

Yet, Keats was not a unique case. The women poets of the Romantic period also faced similar anxieties about posthumous reception. Felicia Dorothea Hemans, the most widely known female contemporary of Keats in both Britain and America, was deeply apologetic about writing

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<sup>27</sup> John Milton's 'Lycidas', in *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. with introd. Helen Darbishire, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952-5), ii. 165-70.

for her family's high financial upkeep. Regrettably, she could not generate the kind of work that would immortalise her name. In her 10 February 1835 letter to Rose Lawrence, just three months prior her death, she explains the exigent circumstances of her writing:

It has ever been one of my regrets that the constant necessity of providing sums of money to meet the exigencies of the boys' education, has obliged me to waste my mind in what I consider mere desultory effusions . . . .

My wish ever was to concentrate all my mental energy in the production of some more noble and complete work; something of pure and holy excellence, (if there be not too much presumption in the thought), which might permanently take its place as the work of a British poetess.<sup>28</sup>

Like Keats's letter to Fanny, Hemans's epistolary confession echoes the elegiac convention of loss and recompense. Unlike the former, however, the female poet believes she has transgressed Phoebus's warning against seeking material reward and compensation in life. Violating this divine edict, the writer foresees her own 'second death' – her future rejection from the English literary canon – as a likely posthumous punishment. In spite of this recognition, the self-elegiac passage insinuates the unethical and impractical demands of pursuing literature without the hope of some tangible remuneration. Abandoned by her husband and left with a brood of five sons, who would raise them, feed them and pay for their education? Hemans understands the sacrifices an author is expected to make in order to assume a permanent place amongst the glorious dead. Nonetheless, in the face of the harsh conditions prescribed by the elegiac system of loss and compensation, she is first and foremost a mother. It should be noted that Hemans actually composed this letter in response to Sir Robert Peel's generous offers to obtain a Naval post and, separately, a clerkship in H.M. Customs for two of Hemans's sons, Henry and Claude,

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<sup>28</sup> Originally from Rose Lawrence's *The Last Autumn at a Favourite Residence, with Other Poems; and Recollections of Mrs. Hemans* (London: John Murray, 1836), the letter is reprinted in 'Appendix A', in *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters*, ed. Gary Kelly (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2002), 445. The offers were made following the spread of false rumours relating Hemans's financial dearth. Paula R. Feldman's careful analysis of Hemans's monetary returns from her lifetime of publications provides a contrary account of the poet's financial situation; see 'The Poet and the Profits: Felicia Hemans and the Literary Marketplace', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 46 (1996), 148-76.

respectively.<sup>29</sup> Implicitly, then, the letter presents a counter-ethic of feminine writing against the conventions of pastoral elegy and poetic practice. If she had indeed concentrated all her mental energy ‘in the production of some more noble and complete work’ throughout her literary career, her five sons, and her generative role as a mother, would not have survived. Under this revised ethical scheme of writing, the lived life of the author – the self that Horace so readily yields to Libitina – plays as great a part as her written works in her passage to immortality. After all, it is apparent in the wishful tone of the final passage that Hemans has not given up on the literary calling to produce a work of monumental scope and importance.

How, then, can Keats’s and Hemans’s related visions of an immortal work be realised in the absence of time and opportunity? Does the want of such an esteemed production justify the obliteration of an artist’s memory? Hemans’s posthumously published sonnet ‘Design and Performance’ (1834) offers an elegant and ethically sound solution for the impossible attainment of ‘some more noble and complete work’ after the death of the author.<sup>30</sup> Composed while the writer was bedridden with scarlet fever, from which she never recovered, the sonnet is morbidly anticipatory of her own impending death. Saturated with grandiose images of domes, towers and spires, the poem conveys Hemans’s late visions of yet-erected literary monuments in a language increasingly dominated by visual and architectural idioms. These unwritten ‘immortal works’, which promise to consecrate some ‘glorious altar’ (l. 7) and ‘enduring fane’ (l. 14) for the writer, manifest themselves to her as ‘fair designs’ (l. 1) only. Although the spirit is willing, and the

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<sup>29</sup> See Kelly’s footnote to Sir Robert Peel’s 7 February 1835 letter to Hemans, in *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems*, ed. Kelly, 444.

<sup>30</sup> *Records of the Autumn of 1834* consists of a sequence of ten sonnets. Most of the sonnets in the series appeared under the title *Sonnets, Devotional and Memorial* in *Blackwood’s Magazine* 36 (Dec. 1834). ‘Design and Performance’, seventh in the sonnet series, was published posthumously in *Poetical Remains of the Late Mrs Hemans* [with a memoir by D. M. Moir] (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons; London: T. Cadell, 1836). See also David M. Moir’s ‘Biographical Memoir of the Late Mrs Hemans’ in this posthumous collection of her late verses, ix-xxxii. I use the first printed edition of the poem in *Poetical Remains of Hemans*, 55.

designs for such works exist, the flesh is unfortunately deprived of ‘time and strength’ (l. 13) to execute her monumental plans. In other words, the poet is creatively inspired but unable to perform. If we follow the compensatory logic of *monumentum aere perennius*, the architectural motifs of Hemans’s sonnet can only be collectively conceived as a lamentable but inevitable artistic failure. However, this naïve estimation would overlook her revision of the egocentric praxis of *monumentum aere perennius* in the poet’s vociferous plea for posthumous aid and creative collaboration. She writes:

meanwhile the waning hour  
 Melts from me, and by fervent dreams o’erwrought,  
 I sink:—O friend! O link’d with each high thought!  
 Aid me, of those rich visions to detain  
 All I may grasp; until thou seest fulfill’d,  
 While time and strength allow, my hope to build,  
 For lowly hearts devout, but *one* enduring fane! (ll. 8-14)

As she lay dying, Hemans called upon any friend who is artistically and ethically inclined to help her record (‘detain’) her poetic designs and prosecute them (‘fulfill’d’) in writing. Significantly, her near-death conception of ‘immortal work’ is one which incorporates the other, as well as the community, into the creative process: this immortal production is no immaculate conception.

Moreover, this collaborating ‘friend’ connotes an ethical promise and generalised abstraction, whose realisation is necessarily postponed. That is, the coming of this ‘aiding’ friend can only be verified and convincingly named after the passing of the primary author. The fluid syntax of the final three lines communicates the imagined possibility of this posthumous defender, respectfully addressed by Hemans in the archaic ‘thou’. Due to the ambivalent syntax of ‘While time and strength allow’, the clause may refer to the poet’s last-ditch effort to ‘grasp’ and ‘perform’ those ‘rich visions’ before her time expires. On the other hand, the clause may be taken as a resigned acceptance of her already-depleted time and strength. Following the

syntactical logic of what is a highly fragmented sentence, ‘While time and strength allow’ may also be a couched plea to ‘thou’, the unnamed ‘friend’ who will see to it that her ‘hope to build’ ‘one enduring fane’ is ‘fulfill’d’. ‘Aid me’, she writes and pleads. This posthumous friend is tasked, as it were, to carry out the will of the dying author while he or she still has the time and strength to complete the poet’s unfinished performance. Responding to this appeal, Henry Fothergill Chorley, Harriet Mary Browne Hughes and Rose Lawrence, among others, would each offer a monument to Hemans in the form of life writing immediately after her decease.<sup>31</sup> It is also evident from Chorley’s *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans* (1836) and Hughes’s ‘Memoir of Mrs. Hemans’ (1839) that the artist’s ‘life’ and ‘works’ have evolved into mirror images of one another. Her works have effectively become a means of narrating her life and character. The ‘part of me’ which Horace casts off in *monumentum aere perennius* is resurrected in the posthumous life writings on Hemans. As a result, her ephemeral life assumes an equally monumental portion as her textual monuments. That ‘more noble and complete work’ which only exists in ‘fair designs’ is reified as an amalgamation of ‘life’ and ‘works’, of the writer’s dying call for posthumous aid and her friends’ ‘performance’ of that call to duty.

Yet, Hemans’s appeal to posthumous partnership echoes an even earlier conception of collaborative friendship after death. Francis Bacon’s ‘Essay XXVII: Of Friendship’ (1597) in *Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral* provides just such an idealised account of posthumous friendship.<sup>32</sup> He writes towards the end of the essay:

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<sup>31</sup> See Henry F. Chorley’s *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans with Illustrations of her Literary Character from her Private Correspondence*, 2 vols. (London: Saunders and Otley, 1836); Harriett Mary Browne Hughes’s ‘Memoir of Mrs. Hemans’, in *The Works of Mrs. Hemans; with a Memoir of her Life, by her Sister*, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1839), i. 1-315; and Lawrence’s *Last Autumn at a Favourite Residence*.

<sup>32</sup> Francis Bacon’s ‘XXVII: Of Friendship’, in *The Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral of Francis Bacon*, ed. with introd. A. S. Gaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 86-93. The first edition of the essay appeared in 1597, but was substantially rewritten for the expanded 1625 edition of *Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral*.

After these two noble fruits of friendship (peace in the affections, and support of the judgment), followeth the last fruit; which is like the pomegranate, full of many kernels; I mean aid and bearing a part in all actions and occasions. Here the best way to represent to life the manifold use of friendship is to cast and see how many things there are which a man cannot do himself; and then it will appear that it was a sparing speech of the ancients, to say, *that a friend is another himself*: for that a friend is far more than himself. Men have their time, and die many times in desire of some things which they principally take to heart; the bestowing of a child, the finishing of a work, or the like. If a man have a true friend, he may rest almost secure that the care of those things will continue after him. So that a man hath, as it were, two lives in his desires. A man hath a body, and that body is confined to a place; but where friendship is, all offices of life are as it were granted to him and his deputy. For he may exercise them by his friend.<sup>33</sup>

A true friend, Bacon claims, is not only affectionate and supportive in judgment but, most importantly, he must also be willing to undertake ‘all offices of life’ for his companion. Barring no exceptions, a friend should ‘aid and bear a part’ in all the activities of the other’s life. While such a conception of friendship would seem impracticable, invasive even to modern sensibilities, Bacon’s prescription was informed by an acute sympathetic awareness of human limitation. ‘No man’ can achieve everything by himself. Behind this demanding framework of friendship is a communitarian vision of human utopia in which every member’s hopes, aspirations and potentials (much like Aristotle’s *polis*) can find expression and *bear fruit*. Imitating ‘the pomegranate, full of many kernels’, Bacon’s ideal society embraces and practices friendship as a cross-fertilising and mutually generative moral agent. Hence, a friend is not just ‘another himself’ in the Aristotelian sense of equality, likeness and self-love, but ‘far more than himself’ in his unconditional acceptance of ‘the care of those things’ which the other (now dead) left unfinished, unfulfilled or unprotected.<sup>34</sup> The posthumous friend acts on the conscientious understanding that we are all mutually and collaboratively constituted. No one is a duplicate of the other in a world governed by true friendship; instead, we each adopt the other’s life as our own, even as we share

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 92.

<sup>34</sup> Aristotle makes a powerful and somewhat problematic case for friendship from the perspectives of utility, pleasure and virtue in Books 8 and 9 of *Nicomachean Ethics*. For a good discussion on the continuities between Aristotle’s and Bacon’s ethics of friendship, see Lorraine Smith Pangle’s ‘The Three Kinds of Friendship’, in *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 37-56, especially 51-6.

our own lives with the other. Life, according to this formulation, is not the property of any single individual: it is a cooperative work, an ‘immortal work’ of mutual fulfilment. Political implications notwithstanding, this final passage in the essay is particularly salient, for Bacon conceives ‘the last fruit’ of friendship as a possibility that can only be realised posthumously. Whether it be ‘the bestowing of a child’ or ‘the finishing of a work’, the ‘trueness’ and the generative promise of friendship is contingent upon one’s voluntary commitment to ensure that ‘the care of those things will continue’ after the death of his friend. Yet, the philosopher’s language does not appear to deprive the deceased of post-obit agency at all (‘For he may exercise them by his friend’). That is, even after the subject is dead – even though his rotting ‘body is confined to a place’ – he continues to partake in ‘all offices of life’ and in the ‘finishing of a work’ *with* his friend.

Guided by this vision of posthumous friendship, an alternative schema of afterlife is proposed. No longer just a summation of individual ambitions and achievements, an artist’s afterlife also entails a collaboration of communal affections and support. Recognising the ethical dimensions of this productive relationship between the living and the dead, the present study suggests the possibility of reading anticipatory death writings, works of mourning, commemorative life writings, memorial aids, and belated defences collectively as ‘posthumous life writing.’ The notion is related to, but at the same time contradistinguished from, Andrew Bennett’s original proposal of the ‘posthumous life of writing’.<sup>35</sup> Inspired by Joseph Severn’s description of Keats’s descent to death in the 6 March 1821 letter to John Taylor, Bennett establishes a tentative link between the poet’s own morbid musing (‘how long will this

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<sup>35</sup> See Andrew Bennett’s ‘Introduction: figures of reading’, in *Keats, Narrative and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1-14.

posthumous life of mine last') and the Romantic figures of reading and writing.<sup>36</sup> His analysis of the Romantic figures of reading is informed by various trends in reception theory, from Wolfgang Iser's ahistorical conception of 'implied' readers, to writers' rhetorical manipulation of reader responses, and finally the manoeuvring of embedded readers in text. More precisely, Bennett is interested in how the figures of reading affect, manipulate and help create textual meanings. Converging reader response theories with Jacques Derrida's idea of 'trace' and Roland Barthes' liberation of the text from its author, the critic argues for a Romantic notion of 'posterity'.<sup>37</sup> The reader inscribed in Romantic texts is ironically conceived as a belated scion, whose arrival is always and necessarily postponed to an indeterminate – 'undecidable' – future. Since the 'posthumous life' of the author is inscribed for this ever-absent, ever-late addressee, the meaning of the text and the posthumous survival of the author are also deferred indefinitely. Underlying this Romantic idea of posterity is an anxiety about the viability of predicating one's survival upon the response of a reader who is equally vulnerable to mortality. As Bennett points out, 'Once one becomes dependent for one's remains on others, however, then the death of the other takes on a crucial significance and there is a slippage from a concern about one's own death and remains to a concern with the death of one's readers'.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, the figures of silent, dead, ghosted and deferred reading become crucial to the deep tension between the writer's will to remain and his ironic dependence on, as well as distrust of, future reception. While Bennett's approach to the 'posthumous life of writing' focuses on reception and figures of reading, the present study is concerned with the largely overlooked connection between ethics of

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<sup>36</sup> The quotation is from Joseph Severn's account of Keats's death in *The Keats Circle: Letters and Papers, and More Letters and Poems of the Keats Circle*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), i. 224.

<sup>37</sup> Bennett would later expand on this idea in *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> *Keats, Narrative and Audience*, 13.

remembrance and strategies of representing the dead. Since no single reading, writing or criticism can possibly encapsulate the posthumous life of the author, I want to reconceptualise ‘survival’ not just as a figure of reading but as a creative outcome of multi-generic and multi-mediated collaboration between departed and living writers. Following the Baconian model of friendship and community, posthumous life writing develops from an ethic of mutual defence, reciprocal protection and cooperative fulfilment. Orientated toward and around the event of an author’s mortal dissolution, posthumous life writing encompasses the writer’s own anticipation of death and the survivor’s supplementary inscriptions of the deceased’s life in various genres and forms of commemoration.

### **Duty of Care: ‘I do not have the right to leave him alone to his death’**

Recent scholarship on works about literary death has paid rigorous attention to the poetry of mourning, specifically elegy. Notably, Peter M. Sacks’ *The English Elegy* (1985) is still considered by many as *the* groundbreaking study on pastoral elegy as a work of mourning.<sup>39</sup> In the span of a decade, Sacks’ work was followed by Celeste M. Schenck’s work on pastoral elegy in *Mourning and Panegyric* and Jahan Ramazani’s sustained engagement with modern elegies in *Poetry of Mourning*.<sup>40</sup> The growing interest in elegiac writing finally culminated in the most comprehensive collection of essays on the genre to date in Karen Weisman’s 2010 edition of *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*.<sup>41</sup> Over 38 chapters, Weisman’s compilation of elegiac studies covers an impressive historical range, from the Greeks and Romans through the medieval writers

<sup>39</sup> See Peter M. Sacks’ *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

<sup>40</sup> Celeste M. Schenck’s *Mourning and Panegyric: The Poetics of Pastoral Ceremony* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988) and Jahan Ramazani’s more recent *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>41</sup> Karen Weisman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

and eighteenth-century Graveyard poets to the Romantics and moderns. The *Oxford Handbook of Elegy* also boasts an impressive thematic range, as various specialists of the genre offer edifying eruditions about biblical elegies, pastoral elegies, churchyard elegies, Puritan elegies, American elegies, hybrid elegies, war elegies, AIDS elegies, anti-elegies, women's elegies, elegies in films, photographic elegies, etc. Although it is obvious from this compendium of essays that the study of elegy has diverged greatly from Sacks' psychoanalytic assessment of the genre, his work has set a critical framework for ensuing discourses on elegy.

Synthesising Sigmund Freud's theory of oedipal resolution and speculative conjectures in 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), Sacks develops a loss-compensation model for interpreting structural, metaphorical and psychological patterns in elegy.<sup>42</sup> For Freud, the 'work of mourning' is synonymous with a process of severance, a process which entails great expenditure of time and energy on the part of the mourner to sever his bond with the dead. 'Successful' or 'normal' mourning – or successful overcoming of the dead – reasserts the ego boundary between the living and 'the lost object' (the deceased) and restores the mourner to normative social functions. Failure to carry out this work, Freud observes, would lead to 'the loss of interest in the outside world . . . the loss of ability to choose any new love-object – which would mean replacing the mourned one – turning away from any task that is not related to the memory of the deceased.'<sup>43</sup> Indifference to the world, inability to transfer affection (or libido) to another, and unwillingness to resume social responsibilities render 'serious' or 'unsuccessful' mourning a pathological condition. Essential to this 'work' are the associated operations of renunciation (anger, hate) and substitution (literal, figural, affective), by which the mourner distances himself from the lost other and transfers his attachment from the dead to another object or objective. As Freud warns,

<sup>42</sup> See Sigmund Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, trans. Shaun Whiteside, introd. Maud Ellmann (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 201-18.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 204.

over-identification with the dead can have disastrous, even suicidal, consequences for the living.

He writes:

To each individual memory and situation of expectation that shows the libido to be connected to the lost object, reality delivers its verdict that the object no longer exists, and the ego, presented with the question, so to speak, of whether it wishes to share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of narcissistic satisfactions that it derives from being alive to loosen its bonds with the object that has been destroyed.<sup>44</sup>

Interestingly, Freud dramatises the challenge of mourning as a straightforward live (*eros*) or die (*thanatos*) question for the mourner's ego, leaving no other possibilities between these existential extremes. Even as his conjecture summarises the positive process and outcome of 'successful' mourning, the passage contains a therapeutic warning to mourners and melancholic patients against making the *wrong* choice. As the excerpt also promises, the reward for making the right choice is survival. To Sacks, Freud's description of the existential choice exemplifies the oedipal resolution of the child, and establishes the basis of his loss-compensation model.

The 'reality' which 'delivers its verdict' on the status of the 'beloved object' echoes the father figure (as the Law and the Superego) in the oedipal stage of the child. This external edict to separate ('castrate') the child from his mother – the mourner from the dead – is crucial to the extinction of one's 'primary desire' to 'remain in a state of undifferentiated union with the mother'.<sup>45</sup> Sacks draws a parallel between the infant's primal attachment to the mother, the mourner's suicidal identification with the dead, and the poet's failure to separate from his elegiac subject. Implicit in this figurative parallel is the idea of authorial voice. Accordingly, if the aspiring poet does not wean himself off ('renounce') the dead and maternal figures, his 'undifferentiated', 'unformed' and 'incompetent' voice would bring about his own literary demise.<sup>46</sup> In order to survive and 'live on', the 'castrated' elegist must internalise the language,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 215.

<sup>45</sup> Sacks' 'Chapter 1: Interpreting the Genre: The Elegy and the Work of Mourning', in *The English Elegy*, 16.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 9.

figures and legacies of his literary forefathers. Thus, inheriting the language and conventions of paternal authority (as opposed to maternal authority) becomes central to survival. As Sacks explains, ‘The elegist’s reward, especially, resembles or augments that of the child—both often involve inherited legacies and consoling identifications with symbolic, even immortal, figures of power.’<sup>47</sup> In a ‘successful’ elegy, the maturing poet embraces the ‘reality’ that the object of his primary attachment is lost, and seeks compensation for that loss through the mastery of language. For Sacks, this paternal language – and the rewarding bequest it promises – is repeated by a long succession of *male* elegists featuring Moschus, Bion, Theocritus, Virgil, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Spenser, Milton, and so on. He who masters the patrilineal conventions of pastoral elegy masters his own death. The sexist subtext notwithstanding, his study co-opts much of the renunciatory language of Freud’s writing. Invariably, pastoral elegists are impelled to undertake violent and defensive struggles with past masters in their bid for posthumous election among the ‘illustrious dead’. He states rather peremptorily: the elegist ‘must also wrest his inheritance *from* the dead.’<sup>48</sup> This violent aggression against the deceased can almost be conceived as a form of grave-robbing. However, Sacks tells us it is not enough that the poet forcefully appropriates the legacies of the dead, for ‘some act of alteration or surpassal must be made, some device whereby the legacy may be seen to have entered a new successor.’<sup>49</sup> In this telling statement, the critic formulates a combative praxis of mourning which effectively combines Freud’s abandonment of the lost object with Bloom’s anxiety of influence. Not only should the elegist renounce the deceased, but he should also assimilate the subject’s legacy and surpass it with his own.<sup>50</sup> Underrating the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. Sacks actually uses the word ‘digest’ to refer to the cannibalistic nature of any ‘successful’ elegy. The interrelated ideas of ‘digestion’ and ‘cannibalism’ and their application to Romantic poetry would feature

culture and ethics of commemoration, Sacks' notions of literary community and individual immortality essentially operate at the expense of the dead, and of the affective bond between the mourner and the mourned.

Although Schenck does not explicitly follow Sacks' psychoanalytic approach to elegy, her study methodically expands on the pastoral patterns and elegiac motifs developed in the earlier critic's work. Extremely erudite in classical knowledge of the pastoral mode, she focuses on the interpenetration of classical ceremonial scenes, rites and structures in elegy (funeral dirge) and epithalamium (nuptial poem). Significantly, Schenck's book pays more rigorous attention to the pastoral tradition established in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Theocritus's *Idylls*, and Virgil's *Eclogues* than Sacks' hasty treatment of these classical precedents. Nonetheless, subtle resonances between their studies can be clearly identified. In a way, Schenck's study is a translation of the early critic's psychoanalytic language. Castration is translated as 'initiation' and 'apprenticeship'. The 'work of mourning' consists of both 'a rite of separation' rehearsed in elegy and 'a communal ritual' of union typified by epithalamium.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, compensatory survival is recorded in the vocational lexicon of 'transcendence' and 'rebirth'. Indeed, Schenck defines an elegy as 'no more than a lyric meditation proceeding from the thought of death which signals the readiness of the pastoral apprentice for transcendence of the mode.'<sup>52</sup> In pre-Romantic elegies, the poet's anxiety about death and his faith in the transcendental and 'restorative' power of language prompt the writer to master the conventions of the classical code and mode. The writing of elegy itself, then, becomes a ceremonial self-induction in the language of pastoral praxis and the consolatory power it supposedly holds. While her work does put the generic status

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prominently in Diane L. Hoeveler's *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990).

<sup>51</sup> Schenck's "'Every Poem and Epitaph": Introduction', in *Mourning and Panegyric*, 14.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

(and naïveté) of elegy in question – something which the earlier critic neglects to do – her survey of classical, renaissance and modern elegies still adheres to Sacks’ loss-compensation model.

By the 1990s, the psychoanalytic framework of elegiac loss and compensation was challenged not only by historicists but also by psychoanalytic theorists themselves. Moving beyond the pastoral mode, Ramazani’s more recent work examines twentieth-century elegies and self-elegies by Thomas Hardy, Wallace Stevens, W. H. Auden, and Sylvia Plath, to name a few. Even though his study centres on the modern elegy, he also acknowledges the continued relevance of many of the pastoral motifs recognised by Sacks and Schenck as important to elegy.

The critic provides an astute catalogue of what he calls ‘elegiac cues’, and they include:

the poetic burial of the dead, the pathetic fallacy of the seasons, the fertility gods, the trope of the river, the recognition of the corpse, the mourner’s chaste withdrawal from desire, the dismissal of female figures, the multiple dramatic voices, and the elegiac coda in which the poet reviews the work of mourning he has just completed.<sup>53</sup>

Despite identifying these thematic patterns as ‘primary codes’ of elegy, Ramazani is sensitive to the diversity of the genre, warning his readers not to ‘pigeonhole’ every elegy to such a reading.<sup>54</sup> However, like the earlier trailblazers in the subject, he also adopts psychoanalysis as the critical framework for his discussion. Yet, his psychoanalytic method is a much more sophisticated modification of Freud’s outdated model in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, as he co-opts revisionary accounts of Freud by Karl Abraham, Melanie Klein and John Bowlby.<sup>55</sup> Unlike Sacks and Schenck, Ramazani is exceptionally mindful of the ‘complexities of the genre’ and the ‘multiple kinds of grief’ expressed in elegies.<sup>56</sup> Since the poet shares different relationships with the dead (perhaps as a friend, a husband, a citizen, etc.), no two deaths may be presumed to share

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<sup>53</sup> Ramazani’s ‘Introduction’, in *Poetry of Mourning*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> In their respective analyses, the applicability of such terms as ‘pathological’ mourning and ‘normal’ mourning to the study of elegy is thoughtfully contested.

<sup>56</sup> *Poetry of Mourning*, 30.

the same significance. Given these qualifications, the critic then concedes that ‘theoretical vocabulary is inevitably reductive’ if applied indiscriminately to every elegy without first considering its context.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, Ramazani adopts a more culturally and biographically nuanced theoretical approach to twentieth-century work of mourning. Nearly a decade after Sacks’ seminal study, it was plain to a growing number of specialists that the loss-compensation paradigm could not adequately address the histories and complexities of elegiac poetry.

Published in the same year as Ramazani’s work, Esther Schor’s *Bearing the Dead* signals a drastic departure from the psychoanalytic approach to mourning.<sup>58</sup> Unlike the critics discussed previously, Schor calls attention to the ‘culture’ of mourning and the role elegy plays as ‘a discourse among the living’ rather than between ‘the living and the (imagined) dead’.<sup>59</sup> Leaving behind Freudian preoccupations with individual bereavement and survival, she argues for a cultural history of mourning that is couched in Enlightenment discourses of sympathy. After engaging major moral philosophers of the British Enlightenment from Shaftesbury, to Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, and finally David Hume, Schor proposes an alternative method for reading the dead in elegiac poetry. Building on Smith’s ideas of value exchange and circulating sympathies, she describes a culture of mourning where the deceased are ‘both valued things *and values themselves*’.<sup>60</sup> And like commodities, they are distributed throughout a virtual network of communal beliefs and moral affirmations via the ‘dynamic process of exchange, negotiation, [and] circulation’.<sup>61</sup> The dead evokes inherited values, and as such moral feelings of authenticity and sincerity. Elegy, then, functions as a vehicle for these authentic values, exchanged and

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> See Esther Schor’s *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>59</sup> ‘Introduction’, in *Bearing the Dead*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

circulated in a society anxious for constant re-affirmations of its own besieged values. Ultimately, the goal of circulating sympathetic feelings with the dead among concerned mourners and distant spectators is to preserve social harmony and communal bond. Extending the phenomenon of mourning beyond the ambits of individual trauma to the realms of cultural history and Enlightenment moral philosophy, Schor resolutely refuses to be ‘mute about history’ and ‘silent about ethics’.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, her work features another notable departure from Sacks’ and Schenck’s studies. Whereas the latter critics privilege the classical origin of pastoral elegy, Schor regards eighteenth-century elegiac practice collectively as a satiric rejection of the pastoral mode and a patent break from the Latin elegiac distich (a hexameter followed by a pentameter).<sup>63</sup> Indeed, by the seventeenth century, the English elegiac stanza has largely broken the formal restraints of classical elegiac couplets, preferring instead the heroic quatrain of iambic pentameter lines with alternating rhyme schemes.<sup>64</sup> Inarguably, the most familiar example is Thomas Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard* (1751). Thus, the English elegy cannot be satisfactorily or univocally defined in formal terms. In fact, Schor abandons the generic taxonomy of elegy altogether, opting instead for a looser classification of *elegiac mode*. Again, Gray’s *Elegy* is vital to this generic reorientation. Observing the antithesis between the melancholic effusion of the eccentric swain and the epitaphic memorial erected in his memory, Schor deduces two divergent strands in the development of elegiac poetry. One tends toward the spontaneous language of sincerity in effusions; the other toward the traditional language of commemoration in the epitaph.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, Gray’s poem represents ‘a shift from the formal

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>63</sup> See ‘Chapter One: Elegia and the Enlightenment’, in *Bearing the Dead*, 20-1.

<sup>64</sup> For a brief history of the evolution of the elegiac form, see Paula R. Backscheider’s ‘Chapter Seven: The Elegy’, in *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 268-315, especially 271-2.

<sup>65</sup> Schor, *Bearing the Dead*, 47.

discourse of “the elegy” to a modal discourse of “the elegiac”.<sup>66</sup> Elegiac poetry is therefore not just a ‘work of mourning’ for processing one’s personal grief: it is a ‘work of culture’ for valorising the public significance of the dead.

In addition to historicist revisions of mourning, there were also endorsements for a distinctively female account of the elegiac tradition. To the feminist critics, Sacks’ work and his lopsided emphasis on male writing and patrilineal authority must have appeared appallingly flawed. As Cheryl Walker claims, poetry writing has been ‘a fundamentally different experience for women than for men’ precisely because of their alienation from the established patriarchy.<sup>67</sup> Unlike male poets, early women writers did not have ‘an established set of literary ancestors’ to turn to for symbolic support and psychological consolation.<sup>68</sup> As a result, eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century women poets had to invent their own tradition of mourning. Paula R. Backscheider, on the other hand, stresses the significant contributions late eighteenth-century women writers such as Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Anna Seward and the others made to the genre. Rather than dichotomising the tradition of elegy writing along strictly gender lines, she argues for an assessment of their poetry as part of a wider legacy of proto-Romantic experimentation with forms.<sup>69</sup> Avoiding the patriarchal tradition of the pastoral mode, ‘Women wrote all of the kinds of elegies that men did’ in a line of meditative poems from *The Wanderer*, *Pearl*, and Gray’s *Elegy*.<sup>70</sup> As Anne L. Klinck shrewdly perceives, the English elegy subsumes more than just the pastoral tradition.<sup>71</sup> It also consists of Old English poems

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<sup>66</sup> Schor’s ‘Chapter Two: Written Wailings’, in *Bearing the Dead*, 55.

<sup>67</sup> Cheryl Walker’s ‘Methodology and Mystery: Anne Bradstreet’, in *The Nightingale’s Burden: Women Poets and American Culture before 1900* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1982), 2.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Backscheider, *Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre*, 270.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 272.

<sup>71</sup> See Anne L. Klinck’s ‘Part I: The Poems and the Manuscript’, in *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 9-70, especially 11.

which share a thematic kinship with later English elegies such as Gray's *Elegy* and Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam*.<sup>72</sup> Broadly conceived, these elegies may dwell on such themes as 'exile, loss of loved ones, scenes of desolation, the transience of worldly joys.'<sup>73</sup> It is difficult to ascribe any of these themes to a specific gender camp: clearly, the right to mourn is not the sole prerogative of a bereft man or grief-stricken woman. Yet, despite this general interpenetration of themes in both male and female elegies, Anne K. Mellor insists on an essential difference between the ways men and women mourn.<sup>74</sup>

In her most recent study of British elegies by women, the critic opposes the masculine form of intellectualised grief to a feminine expression of emotionalised bereavement. Based on Terry L. Martin and Kenneth J. Doka's influential research in *Men Don't Cry . . . Women Do* (2000), Mellor juxtaposes a male 'instrumental' mourner who is preoccupied with renouncing and conquering his feelings of grief and a female 'intuitive' mourner who articulates her anguish and shares the experience with other grievers.<sup>75</sup> The former works through his grief like a pastoral elegist, while the latter lives with her grief like a melancholic swain. According to Mellor, female poets tended to shy away from the pastoral elegy precisely because the heavily coded pastoral mode is 'counter-intuitive' to the expression of authentic feelings. Even though notable precedents such as Elizabeth Tollett's *Pastoral. In Memory of Mrs. Elizabeth Blackler* (1717) and Susana Centlivre's *A Pastoral to the Honoured Memory of Mrs. Rowe* (1719) exist, pastoral elegies by women are generally rare, and when they do appear they read more like

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. Some of these poems include *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wife's Lament*, *Resignation*, and *The Husband's Message*.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> See Anne K. Mellor's "'Anguish No Cessation Knows": Elegy and the British Woman Poet, 1660-1834', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, 442-62.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 443. For an account of the categorically opposed 'intuitive' and 'instrumental' grievers, see Terry L. Martin and Kenneth J. Doka's *Men Don't Cry . . . Women Do: Transcending Gender Stereotypes of Grief* (Philadelphia and London: Brunner/Mazel, 2000).

‘workmanlike exercises’ than genuine works of mourning.<sup>76</sup> More commonly, Mellor claims, women’s elegies ‘offer no compensation, no consolation.’<sup>77</sup> Unlike the male pastoral elegist, the female poet’s ‘grief is a never-ending emotion, one that serves to sustain the powerful emotional bonds felt by wife for husband, mother for child, daughter for parents, friend for close friend, even beyond the death of the beloved.’<sup>78</sup> In contrast with Sacks’ and Schenck’s theoretical approaches to the genre, she delineates women’s elegies in the intimate terms of spousal, maternal, and familial relations.<sup>79</sup> However, the expression of unceasing grief is not particular to the works of female elegists. A well-known example is the patent rift between William Wordsworth’s ineradicable sorrow in the concluding sestet of ‘Surprised by Joy’ (1812) and the sonnet’s deceptively consolatory title, as he mourns the memory of his deceased daughter. Strictly emphasising the development of a female elegiac tradition, Mellor argues that Romantic women poets such as Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon have transformed elegiac grief into ‘a literary performance.’<sup>80</sup> The elegy, then, was no longer just a channel for articulating grief; it was also redeveloped by these women writers as a means to protest against the social condition, gender construction and sufferings of women.<sup>81</sup>

Crucial to this generic reinvention of the elegy is the rhetorical conflation of a woman’s lived life and her self-projected literary persona. Indeed, it is nearly impossible to read Charlotte

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<sup>76</sup> Mellor, ‘Elegy and the British Woman Poet’, 444.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 445.

<sup>79</sup> To be fair, however, Schenck also argues elsewhere for a tradition of female elegy where elegiac consolation, poetic transcendence, and linguistic substitutions of the dead are rejected by women poets. Cf. Schenck’s ‘Feminism and Deconstruction: Re-Constructing the Elegy’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 5/1 (Spring 1986), 13-27.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Elegy and the British Woman Poet’, 450.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 450-1. Lauren Berlant defines this new genre of elegiac poetry as ‘the female complaint’ in ‘The Female Complaint’, *Social Text* 19/20, 237-59, a term which Mellor adopts in her analysis of Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*. See also Patrick H. Vincent’s ‘7. Burying the Poetess: Disenchantment Poems, Death Elegies, Posthumous Reviews, and Obituaries’, in *The Romantic Poetess: European Culture, Politics, and Gender* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2004), 148-73.

Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-1800) without comprehending the context of her personal domestic catastrophes. Mellor puts it elegantly: 'For Smith, elegy becomes the *mode* or *tone* of her life'.<sup>82</sup> A similar pattern also evolved in Mary Robinson's own elegiac sonnets, *Sappho and Phaon* (1796), before culminating at last in Landon's and Hemans's repeated self-identification with Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* (1807) in the early nineteenth century. Effectively, fictional identification, life writing and the elegy have become inextricably bound together in female Romantic writing. Although Mellor is explicit in her rejection of the Freudian paradigm and the masculine practice of mourning, it is apparent that her study, like so many other historicist and feminist studies on the subject, reacts against Sacks' reductive loss-compensation model. It is also apparent from all the scholarly debates over the form, function and genealogy of elegiac poetry that the genre faces many unstated ethical challenges. Namely, how does – and *should* – the elegy negotiate posthumous relations between the dead and the living, the mourner and society, men and women, and the poet's actual life and afterlife persona? Pertinent still, is it even practicable for the elegy to address the full ethical ramifications of each human death? Eventually, what emerges from these heated discussions about the work of mourning is a need to develop some kind of ethical framework with which to approach the cult, culture and praxis of mourning and commemoration.

Responding to this major lacuna in existing accounts of the genre, R. Clifton Spargo espouses a novel attitude towards the work of mourning as an act of posthumous justice and defence of the dead.<sup>83</sup> Like Mellor and others, Spargo's revaluation and devaluation of the Sacks-Freudian theory of mourning is concerned with the model's preponderant support for the self-referential interest of the mourner. Be it for the social rehabilitation of the bereft or the self-

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<sup>82</sup> 'Elegy and the British Woman Poet', 451.

<sup>83</sup> See R. Clifton Spargo's 'Chapter 1: Toward an Ethics of Mourning', in *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 14-38.

canonisation of the elegist, the psychoanalytic approach to elegiac literature exemplifies an intolerant, almost hateful, relationship with the departed. In contradiction to his predecessors, Spargo promulgates the persistence of anti-consolatory and anti-compensatory language as the ethical prerequisite of any ‘successful’ work of mourning. He writes: ‘In elegy, the language of defensiveness, hovering always close to the specters of self-interest and the attempt to protect a self from the other, competes with a hypothesis to which it is always also related—an impossibly vigilant protection of the other.’<sup>84</sup> The idea of belated protection and impossible defence is central to his hypothesis of ethical agency. Since the mourner always arrives too late to postpone the unjust death of the other – as is the case with Antigone and Polyneices, Hamlet and his father, Mary and Shelley, Hardy and his ‘old friends’ – the awareness of his failed defence must necessarily compel him against any ‘movement toward consolation’ or self-exoneration.<sup>85</sup> A ‘successful’ elegy, then, must be a failed elegy, or what Spargo calls an ‘anti-elegy’. Rather than offering the dead to some immortal Muse, divine authority (pagan or Christian) or recuperative Nature, the ethical mourner recognises the futility of these compensatory gestures. He recognises, as Bacon’s ‘true friend’ recognises, his responsibility to the posthumous life, memory and legacy of the deceased other. Spargo summarises this moral sentiment rather movingly: ‘The mourner recognizes sorrowfully that he has become the only resource of the other’s meaning’.<sup>86</sup> Importantly, the critic reorients the elegiac discourse from one that is reductively absorbed in pathology, renunciation, and transcendence to one which opens up the possibility of community, reciprocity and generosity. Under this ethical schema, the dead is equally deserving of survival as the living; furthermore, this survival does not have to depend on ‘ingestion’ or the violent defeat of the other.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 26.

Instead of looking to Freud for a theory of mourning and subjectivity, Spargo turns to Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of the other and wisdom of love for a more humane concept of subjectivity in elegiac poetry. Contrary to the Freudian subject of oedipal resolution, who embraces separation and severance as conditions of ego formation, the Levinasian subject 'finds that it is for-the-other before it can be for itself'.<sup>87</sup> The self, in other words, can only be fully constituted after putting the interest of the other before its own. Subjectivity is thus founded upon the recognition of one's own ethical responsibility to the other. Although the responsibility may exceed one's capacity, especially given the range of functions Bacon's 'true friend' is deputised to perform, '*without the event of responsibility we would be less than ourselves, less than fully human*'.<sup>88</sup> To Levinas, the demise of the other signifies the consummate expression of one's ethical relation with the other, as well as the ultimate fulfilment of one's being. As the late philosopher writes in *Totality and Infinity* (1961), 'Death, source of all myths, is present only in the Other, and only in him does it summon me urgently to my final essence, to my responsibility'.<sup>89</sup> If Bacon's assertion of posthumous friendship is addressed to a reader soon to die, then Levinas's remark on posthumous responsibility is addressed to the friend who survives. In either case, the post-obit relation between the subject and the other does not terminate with death. As Spargo observes, 'the mournful cast of Levinasian ethics' 'demands a renewal of responsibility' even after 'the apparent end of relation.'<sup>90</sup> Significantly, the subject only comes to *being* (in the fullest ontological sense) when one is 'summoned' by the other – be it by the order of the deceased or by the memory of the deceased – to assume responsibility for the other's defence. Indeed, Levinas's ethics of the other can almost be interpreted as a Kantian 'categorical

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Emmanuel Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* (1961), trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 179.

<sup>90</sup> Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning*, 28.

imperative', scarcely yielding to compromises or exceptions. He says in an interview: 'I have the order to answer for the life of the other person. I do not have the right to leave him alone to his death.'<sup>91</sup> According to the logic of this ethical calculus, the mourner who does not 'answer' for the afterlife of the other and leaves the deceased to his 'second death' is not only inhumane but also inhuman. Silence and forgetfulness toward the dead epitomise more than a dereliction of one's basic human duty to the other: they epitomise a gross abandonment of one's immanent instinct to be ethical.

This voluntary duty to the care of the deceased is without a doubt a vital component of Wordsworth's political tract on *The Convention of Cintra* (1809), in which he famously asserts:

There is a spiritual community binding together the living and the dead . . . . We would not be rejected from this community: and therefore do we hope. We look forward with erect mind, thinking and feeling: it is an obligation of duty: take away the sense of it, and the moral being would die within us.<sup>92</sup>

It is somewhat astonishing that Wordsworth would invoke Bacon in a passage eventually deleted from the tract as the model philosopher whose 'comprehensive and sublime' mind 'must have had intimate communion of the truth of which experimentalists who deem themselves his disciples are for the most part ignorant'.<sup>93</sup> What the poet seems to prize above all is the depth of Bacon's moral knowledge in *Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral*, as opposed to the strength of his empirical knowledge in *Novum Organum Scientiarum* (1620). This moral knowledge – so essential to the constitution of our 'moral being' and the preservation of 'a spiritual community' – is elsewhere referred to in the pamphlet as 'paramount and infallible Conscience'.

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<sup>91</sup> Quoted in *The Ethics of Mourning*, 30.

<sup>92</sup> First published in 1809, I use the reprinted edition of Wordsworth's *Concerning the Relations of Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal, to Each Other, and to the Common Enemy, at this Crisis; and Specifically as Affected by the Convention of Cintra*, in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Alexander Grosart, 3 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, Son, and Co., 1876), i. 169-70.

<sup>93</sup> I quote from the footnote to line 3727 of the bicentennial edition of the impassioned pamphlet in *William Wordsworth: Concerning the Convention of Cintra*, A Bicentennial Critical Edition, ed. Richard Gravil and W. J. B. Owen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), 202.

Indeed, what connects Bacon's seemingly impracticable conception of posthumous friendship, Hemans's vociferous plea for both temporal and cross-temporal aid, and Wordsworth's protective 'binding together' of 'the living and the dead' is the very 'care of those things' which the survivor takes on after the departure of his companion. As early as 1809, even before the advent of Levinas's post-war promulgation of human responsibility, the philosopher poet was already looking 'forward with erect mind, thinking and feeling' with the dead as a dutiful friend who absolutely refuses to be 'rejected from this community'. Although Spargo applies 'the mournful cast of Levinasian ethics' to his reading of elegies, this ethically informed hermeneutic model has enormous ramifications for Romantic commemorative writing outside the generic confines of elegiac poetry. Considering the interpenetration between Levinas's ethical outlook, Bacon's idea of collaborative life, Hemans's appeal to cooperative fulfilment, Wordsworth's vision of 'a spiritual community', and the various forms and media of post-obit defences, the ethics of the other can apply just as readily to the defensive logic and communal character of posthumous life writing. Besides, this revisionary model of mourning and memorialisation has another positive feature: and that is its promising capacity to accommodate writers from both sides of the gender divide. Mutual defence is, after all, not the exclusive right of men. Neither is mourning the sole recourse to justice for women. Horatio could defend the afterlife reputation of Hamlet (brother for brother), but so could Laertes for Ophelia (brother for sister), Antigone for Polyneices (sister for brother), and Paulina for Hermione (sister for sister). But what form should such posthumous defence take?

As the multifarious definitions of elegy suggest, conventions of mourning and commemoration are neither static nor uniformly followed. In the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century, both male and female poets alike were keen to interrogate the generic bounds

and consolatory power of the elegy. As Stuart Curran points out, Romantic elegiac poetry by Seward, Charlotte Smith, Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Shelley illustrate what he calls ‘Romantic elegiac hybridity’, merging epic, pastoral, sonnet, blank verse and monody with the elegy.<sup>94</sup> Many scholars, regardless of their allegiance or aversion to genre, recognise the Romantic period as a crucial historical moment in the development, and for some rejection, of literary forms. Indeed, our conceptions of the Romantic genre system are often tied up with the turbulent history of the French Revolution, the evolution in print technology, the surge of circulating libraries, the increase in public literacy, and changes in the patronage system.<sup>95</sup> In ‘the dialectic of archaism and innovation’, David Duff alerts us to the fact that ‘genres cannot be studied in isolation.’<sup>96</sup> His cautionary advice against segregating generic histories applies aptly to the widespread practice of elegiac hybrids in the Romantic canon. Perceiving a generic convergence of elegy, epitaph and effusion in Gray’s *Elegy*, Schor, for instance, relinquishes the generic modality of the elegy for a psychological modality. In the wake of Gray’s churchyard poem, the generic history of the elegy would undergo a ‘sea-change’ in the Romantic period.

While Charlotte Smith was instrumental in the hybridisation of elegy and the sonnet form, Sarah Watson Finch, the second wife of Capel Lofft, would take her predecessor’s formal experimentation further. Merging the elegiac, the epitaphic and the sonnet form, Finch composed two quatorzains evocatively dubbed ‘XLV. Elegiac. Epitaphial.’ (circa 1800) and ‘XLVII.

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<sup>94</sup> See Stuart Curran’s ‘Chapter 13: Romantic Elegiac Hybridity’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Elegy*, 238-50.

<sup>95</sup> See David Duff’s comprehensive account of the various social, scientific, political, legal and cognitive trends fuelling the staggering changes in the Romantic genre system in his ‘Introduction’, in *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1-23. Cf. also Ian Haywood’s *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics, and the People, 1790-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Curran’s influential *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>96</sup> Duff, *Uses of Genre*, 20 and 19.

Elegiac. Also Epitaphial' (1800) in Capel Lofft's *Laura* (1813-4).<sup>97</sup> Influences of Gray and Charlotte Smith are everywhere traceable in the melancholic tone and diction of her sonnets. Emulating the Petrarchan model, Sonnet XLV incorporates the elegy-epitaph arrangement of Gray's *Elegy*.<sup>98</sup> Finch partitions the Peasant's lamentation for the buried swain in two distinct sections: the 'elegiac' octave and the 'epitaphial' sestet. In the octave, the poet conflates the narrator and the 'homeward' (l. 1 in Finch's sonnet and l. 3 in Gray's poem) to a Peasant wanderer absorbed in deep reflection over the 'simple mound' (l. 7) where his friend is interred. Like the sacred 'turf' (l. 14) under the 'yew-tree's shade' (l. 13) of the country churchyard in Gray's *Elegy*, Finch's Peasant also mourns over the 'consecrated Ground' (l. 4) beneath the 'Yew-Tree's shade' (l. 9). Significantly, however, his narrator can only speculate about the 'mute' and 'inglorious' history of the humble dead via second-hand accounts of his subject's life from the 'hoary-headed swain' (l. 97) and the dubiously consolatory epitaph. The deceased swain appears to be forever out of reach of any properly conceived posthumous aid. Neither a 'frail memorial' (l. 78) with 'uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd' (l. 79) nor an inscription engraved with 'The place of fame and elegy supply' (l. 82) could 'protect' his 'bones from insult' (l. 77). Memorials, sculptures, epitaphs, and elegies fail as ethical measures of posthumous protection because they do not fully resonate with the *life* they are designed to protect. Similarly, Gray's narrator struggles to launch an adequate defence of the departed because he has no reliable access to the life and memory of his subject. The elegy is, in essence, struggling to relate 'an artless tale' (l. 94) of the forgotten dead to readers and passersby alike: it

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<sup>97</sup> For the sonnets, see volume 2 of Capel Lofft's *Laura: or An Anthology of Sonnets, (on the Petrarchan Model,) and Elegiac Quatuorzains*, 5 vols. (London: Printed by R. and A. Taylor, 1813-4). According to Curran, Lofft's *Laura* provided England with one of the first extensive collections of Italian Renaissance sonnets at the time (*Poetic Form*, 228).

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Gray's *Elegy* was first published as *An Elegy wrote in a Country Church Yard* (London, 1751). I use the reprinted edition in *Poems by Mr. Gray* (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1768), 109-20.

is struggling to become the exemplar of posthumous life writing. Finch's epitaphic sestet, on the other hand, reverses Bacon's idea of posthumous aid. Rather than conferring protection on the dead, the Peasant's verbal epitaph actually invokes the dead for self-consolation. Over the 'simple mound' he will say

Sleeps one, whose memory prompts the heart-felt sigh;  
Who oft the pangs of misery allay'd.  
And kindly stopt the sorrow-streaming eye.  
Ah, whither look for aid, since he is gone,  
With whom my own, my children's hopes, are flown! (ll. 10-14)

Ironically, the characteristic self-interest of pastoral elegy is here assimilated into the epitaphic form. Yet, it is through the Peasant's self-referential recollection of the dead that readers gain a personal insight into the compassion and generosity of the deceased's character. Moreover, we can infer from this oral epitaph a profoundly personal relationship that once existed between the dead and the survivor. In conjuring up the memory of the departed, the Peasant and his friend bestow mutual protection upon one another. Compare the epitaphic sestet with the impersonal inscription at the end of Gray's *Elegy*:

*Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,  
Heaven did a recompense as largely send:  
He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,  
He gained from Heaven ('twas all he wished) a friend. (ll. 121-4)*

Unlike the anti-consolatory language in the Peasant's effusive epitaph, the churchyard inscription is presumptuous in its power to dispense posthumous compensation. Equally presumptuous is its conceited judgment of what the swain had wished – and *ought* to have wished – for recompense. 'A tear' and 'a friend' from Heaven on the wrong side of the grave are scarcely consolatory or even ethical. Implicit in this belated Christian language of compensation is an admission of its own inability to provide adequate, timely defence of the dead. The contrast between these cold, uninterested lines and the Peasant's 'heart-felt' recollection of the other could not be greater.

While the inscription offers a general statement about the swain's 'bounty' and 'sincerity', Finch's elegiac epitaph supplies a personable and relatable description of the deceased's 'bounty' in life.

Effectively, then, both Gray's *Elegy* and Finch's Sonnet XLV demonstrate a certain ethical limit to the genre of elegy. Furthermore, they intimate an emerging discourse of death which draws on the multi-generic and multi-mediated partnership of memorials, sculptures, epitaphs, elegies, and life writing. It is worthwhile noting the growing scepticism amongst the Romantics about the consolatory potential of conventional pastoral elegy. In an age that saw the emergence of what Spargo hails as 'anti-elegies' and what Schenck calls 'failed elegies' – for example, William Blake's *The Book of Thel* (1789), and Shelley's *Alastor* (1816) and *Adonais* (1821) – more and more poets were acknowledging the inadequacy of the elegiac form.<sup>99</sup> Besieged by anxieties about their own survival and endurance, male and female writers alike projected that anxiety onto elegiac poetry and prose. As is the case with *monumentum aere perennius*, writing a 'successful' elegy no longer seems sufficient for the task of self-monumentalisation. Saliently, this prevailing elegiac doubt also coincided with the multipronged rise of visual media (caricatures, engravings, portraits), sculptural art (by the likes of John Flaxman and Francis Chantrey), and life writing (autobiography, 'life-and-letters', collective biographies). Romantic writers had at their disposal an ever-growing inventory of mourning and commemorative strategies. The profusion of architectural motifs and sculptural references in Shelley's *Adonais* testifies to the vibrant and 'continuous interchange between the textual and the visual' in the period.<sup>100</sup> Although the practice of elegy persisted throughout the nineteenth century, its centrality to mourning and commemoration was supplanted by an assortment of

<sup>99</sup> See Schenck's '6. Failed Elegies: Blake's *The Book of Thel* and Shelley's *Alastor*', in *Mourning and Panegyric*, 107-22, and Spargo's 'Chapter 4: The Ethical Rhetoric of Anti-Elegy', in *The Ethics of Mourning*, 128-64.

<sup>100</sup> Duff, *Uses of Genre*,

memorial resources available to the artist. Deficient in itself as an acceptable defence of the dead, the genre was subordinated to a posthumous aid. At the same time, representing a monumental life has become just as crucial as producing a monumental work. Assimilated into the repertoire of posthumous life writing, then, the elegy collaborates with other supplements such as epitaphs, letters, portraits, sculptures, and auto/biographies to help assemble a more ethical and adequate memorialisation of the other.

### **The Profit and Use of *Lives*: ‘*maxima e minimis suspendens*’**

In elegy, the ethical status of appropriating the dead for the recuperation of one’s social competence and the attainment of one’s death-defying ambition is repeatedly called to question. Yet, a similar dilemma exists in the writing of *Lives*. The problem of what to do with the other – the other who is now lost – presents a special moral plight for a slackly defined genre which straddles public history, private memorial, and literary narrative. How, indeed, can we justify our ‘use’ of the departed figure, be it for the purpose of moral instruction, political vindication, commercial enterprise, or personal mourning? In *Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human* (1605), Bacon proposes three categories of ‘Civil History’: memorials, perfect histories and antiquities.<sup>101</sup> By memorials, he means objective narration of public deeds, orations, events, declarations and proceedings. By antiquities, he refers to remnants of records and fragments of stories extracted from a variety of scattered palaeographic sources. Concerning perfect histories, Bacon subdivides the category into three different genres to

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<sup>101</sup> The section on ‘Civil History’ first appeared in the second book of Bacon’s 1605 publication, *Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human*. For quotations from ‘Civil History’, I use a reprint of the 1876 edition of *The Advancement of Learning*, in *Collected Works of Francis Bacon, Vol. III* [in two parts], 2 vols. (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996), i. 333-40.

represent ‘a Time’, ‘a Person’ and ‘an Action’.<sup>102</sup> He dubs them ‘Chronicles’, ‘Lives’, and ‘Narrations or Relations’.<sup>103</sup> Chronicles, or ‘the history of times’, record the public life and achievements of the great man, but remain resolutely silent about his private actions and circumstances. As such, chronicles are most appropriate for representing ‘estimation and glory’ of the subject.<sup>104</sup> ‘Narrations and relations of actions’ are episodic accounts of particular events in time, which, owing to their specific and exacting scope, have more ‘verity and sincerity’.<sup>105</sup> *Lives*, on the other hand, converge both the public and private faces of eminent men, ‘commixing’ their lofty civic actions with diminutive personal deeds. Bacon famously writes:

But such being the workmanship of God as he doth hang the greatest weight upon the smallest wires, *maxima e minimis suspendens*, it comes therefore to pass, that such histories do rather set forth the pomp of business than the true and inward resorts thereof. But Lives, if they be well written, propounding to themselves a person to represent in whom actions both greater and smaller, public and private, have a commixture, must of necessity contain a more true, native, and lively representation.<sup>106</sup>

In this oft-cited passage, the essayist and philosopher promulgates life writing as a genre of history which brings balance to the overbearing ‘pomp’ and alienating seriousness of memorials and chronicles. Moreover, it is an attempt to temper the materialism and ostentations inherent in Romans’ exaltation of civic virtue with a Christian emphasis on the cultivation of inner substance. Well-written *Lives*, then, should reveal ‘the true and inward resorts’ (as in inner measures, aids, and resources, *OED*) which compelled great men to great actions. Hence, *maxima e minimis suspendens* – ‘the greatest weight [hangs] upon the smallest wires’. Every great action is built on an interwoven meshwork (or ‘wirework’) of minute actions and unrecorded intentions in the private life of the subject. As a work of persuasion, life writing lends credence and believability to canonical accounts of outstanding virtue and action. For that reason,

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid. i. 334.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

*Lives* ‘excelleth’ in ‘profit and use’.<sup>107</sup> Without the correspondence between *Lives* as a narration of individual virtue and *Chronicles* as a documentation of public works, history is at risk of losing its moral cogency, edifying influence and power to interest. While Bacon is optimistic about the ‘profit and use’ of ‘the smallest wires’ in history writing, these ‘smallest wires’ would come to bear mounting ethical stress with the ascent of biography in the late eighteenth century.

Bacon may offer a compelling case for the benefits of life writing, but he does not present us with a practical guideline for including and excluding details of the subject’s life. As James L. Clifford indicates, the question of ‘how much’ information to incorporate into a biography is not merely a numerical one.<sup>108</sup> It is, above all, a constant ethical conundrum: ‘How deeply should a biographer delve into his subject’s private life? How fully should personal secrets and idiosyncrasies be revealed?’<sup>109</sup> Although *Lives* had long been written before Johnson’s *Life of Mr Richard Savage* (1744) and *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779-81) appeared, biography was largely the province of historians. According to Clifford, debates and discussions about the ethics of writing *Lives* were for the most part absent before 1750.<sup>110</sup> Joseph Addison and Thomas Sprat were the lone voices in this curiously unexplored terrain of life writing. In No. 35 of *Freeholder* (20 April 1716), Addison demands that detailed accounts of the biographical subjects be written only after all the participants and related parties are dead.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, Sprat refuses to cite any of Cowley’s private letters in his ‘Account of the Life and Writings of

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> See James L. Clifford’s ‘How Much Should a Biographer Tell? Some Eighteenth-Century Views’, in Philip B. Daghljan (ed.), *Essays in Eighteenth-Century Biography* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1968), 67-95.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. 71.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 72.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 73.

Mr. Abraham Cowley' (1668), even though he was in possession of them.<sup>112</sup> To both writers, 'the smallest wires' of personal details and familiar letters were indecorous both to the living and the dead. Sprat's ethical stance on posthumous privacy would be overturned later by William Mason in his innovative *Life and Letters of Gray* (1775).<sup>113</sup> Casting his predecessor's moral unease aside, Mason 'does little else than present Gray's letters with minimal orienting commentary'.<sup>114</sup> Yet, his overt violation of established strictures on the publication of letters is not entirely devoid of ethical calculus. Mason opts to be a mere 'compiler' as opposed to a 'commentator' of his subject's letters so that 'Mr. Gray will become his own biographer'.<sup>115</sup> Keeping his interventionist touch as light as possible, this 'compiler' of letters tries to defer as much editorial and narrative control to the deceased himself. Mason's assertion may sound naïve and even irresponsible, but his reasoning is at least clear: no one can furnish a more accurate and authentic account of the subject's life than the subject himself.

Although both Clifford and Annette Wheeler Cafarelli hail Mason's *Life and Letters of Gray* as the earliest precedent of 'life-and-letters', they appear to have overlooked Henry Grove and Theophilus Rowe's 'The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe' (1759).<sup>116</sup> As a remarkable instance

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<sup>112</sup> See Thomas Sprat's 'An Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley' at the beginning of *The Works of Abraham Cowley. Consisting of Those which were Formerly Printed: and Those which he Design'd for the Press, Now Published out of the Authors Original Copies* (London: Printed by J. M. for Henry Herringman, 1668).

<sup>113</sup> As a disciple of Gray, William Mason was made the literary executor of his letters. See his 'Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mr. Gray', in *The Poems of Mr. Gray. To which are Prefixed Memoirs of his Life and Writings*, 2nd edn. (London: Printed by H. Hughs, 1775), 1-416. Mason is generally credited for codifying the biographical practice of 'Life and Letters'. His 'Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mr. Gray' is familiarly known as *Life and Letters of Gray*.

<sup>114</sup> Annette Wheeler Cafarelli's 'Introduction: Biography as Symbolic Narrative', in *Prose in the Age of Poets: Romanticism and Biographical Narrative from Johnson to De Quincey* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 22.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> See Henry Grove and Theophilus Rowe's 'The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe', in *Poems on Several Occasions by Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe. To which is Prefixed an Account of the Life and Writings of the Author* (London: Printed for D. Midwinter, 1759), 1-44. Elizabeth Singer Rowe employed the pseudonym of Philomela throughout her literary career. Isaac Watts, the editor and executor of her papers, published in 1737 her religious meditations under the title

of collaborative posthumous life writing, ‘The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe’ is an unusual narrative which presents the deceased’s letters as posthumous dialogues with her surviving friends. Uncannily, it stitches together Elizabeth Singer Rowe’s own reminiscence of her father’s passing, Grove’s unfinished memoir of the writer, Theophilus’s appraisal of the subject’s life and career, and her own letters of instruction to close friends after death. This collaborative account nicely illustrates Rowe’s self-conscious effort to compel and continue posthumous correspondence with the recipients of her generous epistolary bequests. Before presenting her letters in the memoir, Theophilus writes: ‘In Mrs. Rowe’s cabinet were found the following letters to several of her friends . . . which she had ordered to be delivered to the persons to whom they were directed, immediately after her decease’.<sup>117</sup> ‘The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe’ literally prosecutes and fulfils the fiction of her *Friendship in Death: In Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1728) published nearly a decade earlier.

What is important about the cooperative ‘Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe’ is that this landmark union of life and letters resulted from the combined work of both male and female writers. Unlike Mason’s *Life and Letters of Gray* and later James Boswell’s *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (1791), this short biography of the celebrated woman writer exhibits great editorial control in the initial selection of letters for publication. Rowe’s posthumous letters are as highly literary, moralistic and self-consolatory as her epistolary novellas in *Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living*.<sup>118</sup> ‘The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe’, then, is at the same time

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of *Devotional Exercises of the Heart*. The memoir of Rowe was partly written by her old friend, Henry Grove, but the rest was completed by her brother-in-law, Theophilus. For Cafarelli’s discussion of Mason’s *Life and Letters of Gray*, see *Prose in the Age of Poets*, 22.

<sup>117</sup> ‘The Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe’, 27.

<sup>118</sup> See Rowe’s *Friendship in Death: In Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living. To which are Added, Letters Moral and Entertaining. In Prose and Verse. In Three Parts. By Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe*, 5th edn. (London: Printed for T. Worrall, 1738). *Friendship in Death* was first published in 1728. Though criticised by twentieth-century scholars as overly didactic, the work was highly acclaimed and well-received at the time.

intimate yet distant, accessible yet guarded. The convergence between fiction, realism, and life in Rowe's public and private letters would not only influence Samuel Richardson in his development of epistolary narratives, but it would also signal the inevitable synthesis of life and letters in intimate biography. The shift from an objective and historical mode of writing *Lives* to a more subjective and introspective approach in the late eighteenth century has often been interpreted as the inception of Romanticism.<sup>119</sup> Although James Treadwell distinguishes autobiography from biography, he also acknowledges the dramatic increase in their circulation in the last two decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>120</sup> Interpreting consumption as a kind of dark force, he attributes the meteoric rise of autobiography to 'the gravitational pull' of public 'appetite' and 'hunger' for various narratives of self.<sup>121</sup>

By contrast, Clifford does not impute the emergence of intimate biography entirely to the Romantic veneration of intense, psychologised subjectivity or to the market forces driving consumption in the extended Regency period. Besides its connection to Romanticism, 'the rise of intimate biography', he writes, is 'even more closely allied to an increase of interest in realism in fiction.'<sup>122</sup> Recall that the purpose of writing *Lives*, as prescribed by Bacon, is to provide a 'true, native, and lively representation' of the subject. Given the 'wealth of detail, color and depth of character' in Richardson's and Henry Fielding's novels, one can see how a new form of life writing informed by fictional realism might better realise Bacon's hope for the genre.<sup>123</sup> Clifford has a point of course: 'If fictional characters can be made to appear exactly like real men and women, cannot people who have actually lived be described with the same richness and depth as

<sup>119</sup> See Clifford's 'How Much Should a Biographer Tell?', 78, and Northrop Frye's 'Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility', *ELH* 23/2 (June 1956), 144-52.

<sup>120</sup> See James Treadwell's 'I. The rise of "autobiography"', in *Autobiographical Writing and British Literature, 1783-1834* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3-31, especially 11.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* 6 and 5.

<sup>122</sup> 'How Much Should a Biographer Tell?', 79.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

fictional creations?’<sup>124</sup> Rowe, for example, certainly tried to subordinate her life to a narrative of fictional self. And she certainly dramatised her life (and demise) to the fullest in the morbidly staged act of depositing ‘posthumously’ written letters in her closet for post-obit delivery and circulation. Rowe had essentially staged her own death and resurrection many times in the process of inscribing her voice for future, though realistically impossible, exchanges with the living. At the same time, this interpenetration of fictional realism and life writing provides an ethical solution to the dilemma of disclosing ‘personal secrets and idiosyncrasies’ in the subject’s life. In describing actual people as fictional creations, intimate relations and biographical minutiae can similarly be de-familiarised and estranged from reality as codes, figures, and allegories. Nevertheless, as ‘intimate biography’ rises to prominence in the wake of Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*, the clash between indiscriminate overwriting and vigilant self-restraint has become all but inevitable.

The ethical collision between a biographer’s divergent allegiances to absolute truth and panegyric truth is unsettlingly evident in Johnson’s own inconsistent comments on the principles of life writing. His frequently cited essay on biography (‘No. 60. Saturday, 13 October 1750’) in *The Rambler* provides a telling demonstration of the practical variance between theory and execution. Put into practice almost word for word by Boswell in his *Life of Johnson*,

the business of the biographer is often to pass slightly over those performances and incidents, which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestick privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue.<sup>125</sup>

Johnson’s prescription for ‘the business of the biographer’ resonates with Bacon’s endorsement for the inclusion of ‘the smallest wires’ in the subject’s private life. Nonetheless, a notable

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Samuel Johnson’s ‘No. 60. Saturday, 13 October 1750’, in *The Rambler*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, 3 vols. [III-V of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson] (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), iii. 318-23, 321.

difference exists between Johnson's critical stance on life writing and that of his predecessor. One should keep in mind that Bacon is propositioning for a 'commixture' of the public and the private in the writing of *Lives*; as such, biography exists as an aid and link to historical chronicles. It naïvely presupposes a consistent and unproblematic correspondence between the subject's intimate tendencies and public feats. Whereas Bacon confines the historiographical endeavour exclusively to elite men, Johnson's praxis of life writing democratises both the number and breed of subjects available to biographical memorial. To the latter essayist, 'there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful.'<sup>126</sup> Focusing on the moral 'use' of *Lives*, Johnson is not concerned so much with the visible achievements of his subjects – or what he calls 'false measures of excellence and dignity' – but with the 'domestick privacies' which distinguish one virtuous man from another.<sup>127</sup> Unlike Bacon, he is predominantly interested in the 'invisible' moral truth of the person, as opposed to a biographical explanation for the person's outward greatness.<sup>128</sup> Julian North also identifies the domestic sphere as the primary realm of 'authentic' activity in late eighteenth-century biographies. For Johnson, she writes, 'the domestic space in biography was where the reader would genuinely come to know the great man because it signified the shared humanity of the subject and the reader.'<sup>129</sup> Hence, the 'intimate view was the true one' and the 'authentic measure' of the subject's public triumph.<sup>130</sup> Yet, in order to achieve this 'true' and 'authentic' account of the person, the biographer must subjugate his pious protection of deceased friends in writing and stave off from panegyric tendencies. Johnson warns, 'If we owe regard to the memory of the dead, there is yet

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid. iii. 320.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. iii. 321.

<sup>129</sup> Julian North's '1. Biography and Domestic Life', in *The Domestication of Genius: Biography and the Romantic Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 11 and 12.

more respect to be paid to knowledge, to virtue, and to truth.’<sup>131</sup> When faced with conflicting duties to the memory of the dead and to the moral call for truth, the essayist exhorts us to subordinate personal loyalties to a higher obligation to the welfare of community. To Johnson at least, the proper ends of biography are the collective ‘increase of our virtue’ and the collective enlargement of our ‘natural or moral knowledge’ of the human character.<sup>132</sup> Thus, the refusal to yield up the ‘faults or failings’ of deceased friends, while ethical, is in effect a breach of the tacit moral contract between the biographer and his reader.<sup>133</sup>

If the terms of this unspoken contract are to be satisfied, personal knowledge of the dead would be indispensable. According to Johnson, a truly competent biographer would not approach his task as a mere historian and compile a chronological account of his subject ‘from publick papers’. Instead, he should know that ‘more knowledge may be gained of a man’s real character, by a short conversation with one of his servants, than from a formal and studied narrative’.<sup>134</sup> Averse to official documentary records, the essayist advocates personal and unofficial evidentiary accounts such as familiar letters, private conversations, anecdotal incidents, and informal recollections. Ironically, Cafarelli has identified instances in Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets* where ‘reminiscences, letters, conversation, anecdotes’ were rejected as ‘institutions of biographical verification’.<sup>135</sup> Despite his insistence on writing from personal knowledge, he ‘rarely wrote of first-generation biography, used personal anecdotes very sparingly, was

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<sup>131</sup> ‘No. 60’, iii. 323.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 321.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 323. According to Boswell, Johnson maintained that ‘a man’s intimate friend should mention his faults, if he writes his life’ when questioned about the moral repercussions of relating a man’s vices in biography; quoted from *Boswell’s Life of Johnson Together with Boswell’s Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides and Johnson’s Diary of a Journey into North Wales*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, rev. L. F. Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-50), iii. 55. I use the Hill-Powell edition of *Life of Johnson* for all subsequent quotations.

<sup>134</sup> ‘No. 60’, iii. 322.

<sup>135</sup> *Prose in the Age of Poets*, 21.

distrustful of letters, often cited reminiscences to contradict them'.<sup>136</sup> In short, Johnson was sceptical of the very biographical methods which made Boswell's *Life of Johnson* so original to some, and so offensive to others. Although his manifesto on the art of writing *Lives* is convincing in theory, the essayist is also keenly aware of the ethical cost of its execution. Nowhere, perhaps, does this clash between theory and practice manifest more poignantly than in the passage below from Johnson's 'Life of Addison':

The necessity of complying with times, and of sparing persons, is the great impediment of biography. History may be formed from permanent monuments and records; but Lives can only be written from personal knowledge, which is growing every day less, and in a short time is lost for ever. What is known can seldom be immediately told; and when it might be told, it is no longer known. . . . it is surely better that caprice, obstinacy, frolick, and folly, however they might delight in the description, should be silently forgotten, than that, by wanton merriment and unseasonable detection, a pang should be given to a widow, a daughter, a brother or a friend.<sup>137</sup>

The passage aptly summarises the essayist's conception of *Lives* as distinguished from a genre of history writing. Unlike history, biography relies on ephemeral resources which only personal memory and familiar records can supply. It is also clear in the language that the writer is ambivalent about the ethical pressure to produce panegyric life writings. On one hand, he sees it as an 'impediment' to the 'business of the biographer'. On the other hand, he acknowledges the necessity of suppressing certain unsavoury details about the subject, lest they offend his surviving kin and friends. From this passage, Johnson's ethical concern appears mostly to be with the survivors. However, if we examine his reflection on the difficulty of writing *Lives* a little more closely, we will see that the greatest weight of his ethical consideration hangs on the idea of 'unseasonable detection'. The reason why it is so difficult for a biographer – and for

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> The first incarnation of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* took the form of *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets*, the first four volumes of which appeared in March 1779. In 1781, the four-volume edition of Johnson's complete *Lives* was given the title *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*. I quote from the reprinted edition of Johnson's 'Life of Addison', in *Samuel Johnson: The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on Their Works*, introd. and notes by Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), iii. 1-38, 18. I use the Lonsdale edition of *Lives of the Poets* for all subsequent quotations.

Johnson – to write from personal knowledge is precisely because he might fail to detect details that are hurtful to the living. What makes intimate biography potentially unethical is not wanton malice but inadvertent negligence. Though understated, the essayist-biographer's ethical regard for the dead other is also gathering momentum in the course of writing *Lives of the Poets*. He concludes the passage above with the following lines:

As the process of these narratives is now bringing me among my contemporaries, I begin to feel myself *walking upon ashes under which the fire is not extinguished*, and coming to the time of which it will be proper rather, to say *nothing that is false, than all that is true*.

That stirring imagery of 'walking upon ashes' connotes the double sense of treading kindly over the memory of those still alive and of treading carefully over the remains of those already gone. Johnson's self-stricture against telling all-out truth is probably the closest he comes to an ethic of posthumous life writing. In addition to being attentive to the needs of the living, a truly ethical biographer ought to be protective of the memory of the dead, lest his subject's posthumous life be 'extinguished' by imprudent overwriting and indiscriminate reporting.

As expected, the task of enforcing 'seasonable detection' in the writing of *Lives* meets its greatest challenge in Boswell's comprehensive biography of his friend and mentor. His exhaustive record of Johnson's familiar letters, private conversations, and personal reminiscences seems to have left no stone unturned. However, it is evident from Boswell's archives and the original manuscript of *Life of Johnson* that the biographer actually suppressed a substantial number of intimate remarks and details so as 'not to irritate living people'.<sup>138</sup> Yet, even with all the meticulous 'detection' and ejection of harmful revelations, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (1785) drew vociferous protests from the periodical press and stoked the ire of Edmund Burke and John Wilkes.<sup>139</sup> Reactions from his

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<sup>138</sup> Clifford, 'How Much Should a Biographer Tell?', 85.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 86.

female contemporaries were especially scathing. In a letter to Hester Lynch Piozzi, Elizabeth Montagu indignantly lampoons Boswell's moral insensitivity:

he could hardly have had any motive for his publication [*The Tour of Hebrides*] but that of making it the vehicle of censure & scandal. Certainly it does not contain any thing that could do honour to the memory of his deceased friend. . . . Would any man who wish'd his friend to have the respect of posterity exhibit all his little caprices, his unhappy infirmities, his singularities [?]<sup>140</sup>

Similar but much more tempered criticisms can also be found in James Beattie's letter to William Forbes and Hannah More's letter to her sister. The publication of *Life of Johnson* in 1791 experienced a comparable reception divide between amusement and shock. In a period when the accepted purpose of biography is to 'commemorate, not delineate', Boswell's *tour de force* innovation of the burgeoning genre is tantamount to what Robert Anderson calls a 'violation of the confidence of society'.<sup>141</sup> Paradoxically, the disciple has succeeded where his master had not, in spite of mounting hostility to this new intimate form of life writing.

Indeed, Boswell's *magnum corpus* may be construed as unethical when measured against contemporary standards of commemorative writing. At the same time, it is unusually ethical in the sense that it represents an earnest attempt to follow, complete and 'improve' Johnson's own hampered vision for the 'art' of biography as a friend. Reconciling his troubled allegiances to both friendship and historiography, he writes toward the end of the work: 'I trust that I have got through it, preserving at once my regard to truth,—to my friend,—and to the interests of virtue and religion.'<sup>142</sup> By paying respect 'to knowledge, to virtue, and to truth', Boswell's *Life of Johnson* prosecutes and monumentalises the legacy of his departed mentor through an uneasy negotiation of delineation and memorialisation. Recognising the potential of intimate biography

<sup>140</sup> The letter extract is quoted in 'How Much Should a Biographer Tell?', 87.

<sup>141</sup> First quotation is from Clifford's 'How Much Should a Biographer Tell?', 89, and second from Robert Anderson's *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., with Critical Observations on his Works*, 3rd edn. (Edinburgh: Printed for Doig and Stirling, 1815), 6. Anderson's work was first published in 1795.

<sup>142</sup> *Life of Johnson*, iv. 398.

as a model for mourning and commemorative work, Godwin's *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft is a novel interpretation of life writing. For the grief-stricken author, the writing of his subject's life is simultaneously a 'work of mourning' (in the psychoanalytic sense of the phrase) and an authentic form of posthumous defence. The fact that Godwin began cataloguing her letters and papers just three days after his wife's funeral, combined with the meticulous haste with which he compiled the story of her life within weeks of her death, is testament to his profound ethical interest in the project.<sup>143</sup> Following Boswell's decree that the most perfect biography should enable 'mankind' to 'see him [the deceased] live' and 'live o'er each scene' with the subject, Godwin presents the life of Wollstonecraft as if it were a series of portraits.<sup>144</sup> This interpenetration of portrait art and life writing is tacitly applied in the final chapter of *Memoirs*, where the biographer provides a visceral scene-to-scene account of his partner's silent, crumbling body. The provocative link between visual and textual signs is significant, given that Godwin had John Opie's portrait of Wollstonecraft placed above his fireplace as a vivid aid to the study of his subject (fig. 1.4). Like Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, and like Opie's painting, his *Memoirs* is supposed to create what North would describe as 'the impression of a real-time experience' of Wollstonecraft.<sup>145</sup> Although Godwin's biography of his wife was a lightning rod for harsh criticisms by the conservative press, it is not a self-referential work conceived only for his own emotional catharsis. The purpose of the work is not to provide an indiscriminate account of her sexual subversions and illicit relations, but to offer an outspoken defence of her passions and beliefs in vivid action. If overwriting and over-disclosure are unethical by contemporary standards of commemoration, so are underwriting and under-reporting. Without a lively and particularising narrative to support and invigorate our memory of the dead, the under-represented

<sup>143</sup> See *Lives of the Great Romantics III*, ii. 17.

<sup>144</sup> *Life of Johnson*, i. 30.

<sup>145</sup> *The Domestication of Genius*, 24.



Fig. 1.4 *Mary Wollstonecraft* by John Opie, oil on canvas, circa 1797 (768 mm x 641 mm), bequeathed by Lady Jane Shelley in 1899 to the National Portrait Gallery.

subject is potentially more vulnerable to oblivion (or ‘second death’) over time. In that regard, Godwin’s *Memoirs* exemplifies some crucial elements of posthumous life writing. Not simply a commemorative biography, it is also a work of mourning, a cross-media memorial to the dead, a defence of an ‘incomplete’ life, and a just effort to keep the other alive in memory.

Even so, the prevailing negative reception of Godwin’s *Memoirs* exposes ample resistance to the Boswellian model of intimate biography, or ‘Portrait’ of the deceased, in the Romantic period. According to North, Wordsworth and Coleridge perceived the intimate biography as a ‘commercial competitor, a popular, feminized prose form, appealing to the market in a way that their work did not.’<sup>146</sup> In her analysis, the critic combines Mary Jean Corbett’s description of Victorian women writers’ fear of alienation from the process of literary production

<sup>146</sup> ‘2. Biography and the Romantic Poet’, in *The Domestication of Genius*, 33.

and Lucy Newlyn's representation of the Romantic poet's embattled sense of self-ownership in the new literary marketplace.<sup>147</sup> The Baconian 'profit and use' of *Lives* was re-defined in the Romantic period in commercial terms, as the life of the subject became contested property and a form of consumer goods. Although some of the major Romantic authors have expressed related anxieties about the rise of intimate biography, they were not necessarily opposed to the idea of life writing in alternative forms. When Coleridge invokes Bacon's celebrated passage on the writing of *Lives* in 'A Prefatory Observation on Modern Biography' (1810), the critic vindicates the practice of biography in the manner originally prescribed by his forebear.<sup>148</sup> While it is 'natural' that readers display 'inquisitiveness into the minutest circumstances and casual sayings of eminent contemporaries', it is also imperative, he cautions, that we 'guard against' vandalising and desecrating 'the memory of the departed Great'.<sup>149</sup> Coleridge is not denouncing the activity of life writing as such, but the crude, profane and useless curiosity of the readers. Like Bacon before him, the poet-essayist is concerned with the proper use of biography as a psychological and moral exegesis for the subject's public character. He writes: 'The spirit of genuine Biography is in nothing more conspicuous, than in the firmness with which it withstands the cravings of worthless curiosity, as distinguished from the thirst after useful knowledge.'<sup>150</sup> A good and 'genuine' piece of life writing should discourage its readers from the malicious habits of idle worship, rumour-mongering, and worthless gossiping in this diseased 'age of

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 32-3 and 46-8. See also Mary Jean Corbett's *Representing Femininity: Middle-Class Subjectivity in Victorian and Edwardian Women's Autobiographies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) and Lucy Newlyn's *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>148</sup> I use Coleridge's 'No. 21, Thursday, January 25, 1810: A Prefatory Observation on Modern Biography', in *The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, 2 vols. [no. 4 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series, gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn] (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), ii. 285-7.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. ii. 285 and 286.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. ii. 286.

personality'.<sup>151</sup> Johnson does not exclude potential subjects from 'judicious narratives' on the basis of civic achievement, whereas Coleridge measures the subject's public 'Actions' (instead of 'personality') as a condition for remembrance.<sup>152</sup> The 'great end of Biography', he admonishes, 'is to fix the attention and to interest the feelings of men, on those qualities and actions which have made a particular Life worthy of being recorded.'<sup>153</sup> In other words, a life should not be recorded and preserved for perpetuity simply because the subject has a fascinating personality, a scandalous private history, or a recognisable celebrity aura. A figure worthy of remembrance should be a 'Hero' unto his fellowmen.<sup>154</sup> Coleridge's use of the term 'Hero' is especially significant here, for it accentuates once again the civic feats of the subject (or the monumental works of the poet) as the central and proper theme of biography. A genuine biographer who approaches his task as a chronicler, and as a good judge of moral 'taste', would naturally restrain from scribbling 'Trifles' on the 'Marble Monument' of the heroic dead.<sup>155</sup>

Like Coleridge, Wordsworth was also troubled by contemporary audience's predatory appetite for 'domestick privacies' and 'the minute details of daily life'. When it comes to unveiling harmful particulars about the deceased's private life, the poet displays even stronger ethical sensitivity than that of Johnson in the *Life of Addison*. In *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* (1816), Wordsworth fiercely castigates the corrupting model of Boswellian biography, which James Currie's 'Life of Burns' appears to emulate.<sup>156</sup> He explains: 'The life of Johnson by Boswell had broken through many pre-existing delicacies, and afforded the British public an

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> For James Currie's 'Life of Burns', see his edition of *Works of Robert Burns; with an Account of his Life, and a Criticism on his Writings. To Which are Prefixed, Some Observations on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry*, 4 vols. (Liverpool: J. McCreery; Edinburgh: W. Creech, 1800), i. 33-253. I use Wordsworth's *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns*, in *PWW*, ii. 5-19.

opportunity of acquiring experience, which before it had happily wanted'.<sup>157</sup> The disciple of Johnson has unknowingly given the British public a taste of the forbidden fruit, and incited a demand for the kind of sensationalist gossip material that would distract a reader's attention from Burns's poetical works. The Horatian proclamation of *monumentum aere perennius* is a subtle but recurrent theme of Wordsworth's *Letter to a Friend*, as he argues for a greater and more authentic account of the subject in his own self-speaking poetry. According to the writer's conception of poetical genius and authorial self-possession, the 'immortal work' alone should suffice as his own testimony and autobiography. After being approached by James Gray for advice on the republication of Currie's 'Life of Burns', Wordsworth recommends that the new edition follow the example of Mason's second edition of Gray's works. Namely, the publisher should '[invert] the order which had been properly adopted, when the Life and Letters were new matter, the poems are placed first; and the rest takes its place as subsidiary to them.'<sup>158</sup> In contrast to the widespread practice of prefacing an author's works with 'Life and Letters', a practice which survives to this day, the writer suggests an inversion of the structure and, more implicitly, a reversion to old literary valuation. The poet's labour and production should constitute his own monument and the proper site of his eternal residing self. However, Wordsworth is not renouncing the compilation of 'Life and Letters' as an entirely worthless literary enterprise; rather, biography should serve as a supplementary defence of the deceased subject. As he states at the very outset of *Letter to a Friend*, the purpose of his severe commentary on Currie's 'Life of Burns' is to furnish Gilbert Burns with his own 'notions upon

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<sup>157</sup> *PWW*, ii. 9.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 6. Wordsworth may be looking at a different edition of Gray's works. Mason's second edition of Gray's *Poems* actually publishes his *Life and Letters of Gray* in the first section. It should also be noted that Mason's biography of the author covers nearly four-fifths of the entire book. Gray's life is hardly 'subsidiary' to his poems.

the best mode of conducting the defence of his brother's injured reputation'.<sup>159</sup> To Wordsworth, posthumous life writing is not a historical record, a scientific inquiry, 'a question of opinion, or of taste'.<sup>160</sup> Precisely because it is intimately associated with the death of the subject, and exacts a tremendous toll on the immediate survivors, writing *Lives* is 'a matter of conscience.'<sup>161</sup> Indeed, the poet-essayist's moral outrage at the Boswellian paradigm of life writing is everywhere evident in *Letter to a Friend*. Unable to provide a meaningful biographical exegesis for Burns's creative genius, Currie's 'Life of Burns' is, in Wordsworth's estimation, 'a revolting account of a man' that is 'incomplete' in psychological attention and 'deficient' 'in essentials'.<sup>162</sup>

More importantly, Currie's 'revolting account' of Burns is 'incomplete' and 'deficient' in its ethical consideration for both the living and the dead. In response to this Boswellian narrative of a fellow poet, Wordsworth meditates on the ethical calculus of writing *Lives*. In fact, he questions the whole utilitarian premise of 'profit and use' behind the shifting aims of biography:

If, said I, it were in the power of a biographer to relate the truth, the *whole* truth, and nothing *but* the truth, the friends and surviving kindred of the deceased, for the sake of general benefit to mankind, might endure that such heart-rending communication should be made to the world.<sup>163</sup>

After weighing the tentative, universal benefit of articulating the *whole* truth at the expense of the comparative few against the overwhelming pain such disclosure would undoubtedly inflict on the survivors, he resolutely asserts 'in no case is this possible'.<sup>164</sup> Neither the dead nor their living friends and kindred are expendable in the service of some abstract, universal good, or for the 'use' of self-justified disciplinary knowledge (historical, scientific, intellectual, etc.).

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid. ii. 5.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. Since life writing is not a science, biographical truth should not be pursued as innocuous, disinterested information, according to Wordsworth. He states in the same famous letter: 'Truth is not here, as in sciences, and in natural philosophy, to be sought without scruple, and promulgated for its own sake, upon the mere chance of its being serviceable' (ii. 10).

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. ii. 5.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. ii. 8.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. ii. 7.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

Wordsworth asks, sympathetically, ‘Would a bosom friend of the author, his counsellor and confessor, have told such things, if true, as [Currie’s] book contains?’<sup>165</sup> A genuine and truly ethical biographer would enforce his art *as if* he were his subject’s ‘bosom friend’, and judiciously select details for excision, inclusion, or emphasis in his writing. Saliently, Wordsworth’s reorientation of posthumous life writing as a defence of the deceased suggests a synthesis of Bacon’s ethic of posthumous friendship and Johnson’s ethic of biographical restraint. While his *Letter to a Friend* and Coleridge’s short essay on ‘Modern Biography’ are often studied in the context of prose biography, it is worthwhile to note the intriguing crossover between their prescriptions for life writing and for rural epitaph.<sup>166</sup>

In ‘Celebrated Epitaphs Considered’ [referred to hereafter as *Essays Upon Epitaphs III*], Wordsworth effectively conflates both genres of literary writing in calling the epitaph an ‘epitomised biography’ and the epitaphist a ‘funeral Biographer’.<sup>167</sup> Moreover, one can see how closely his first essay ‘Upon Epitaphs’ [*Essays Upon Epitaphs I*] resonates with Coleridge’s concerns about contemporary biographies, published just a month later in *The Friend*.<sup>168</sup> For instance, the ‘Hero’ in Coleridge’s essay is rendered into the ‘mighty Benefactors of mankind’ in Wordsworth’s writing.<sup>169</sup> However, while the former supports a pared-down chronicle of an

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid. ii. 8.

<sup>166</sup> For a sustained discussion of the cross-generic relationship between biography and epitaph in Wordsworth’s essays and letters, see North’s *The Domestication of Genius*, especially 35-44. Her reading develops from an earlier book chapter, ‘8. Self-Possession and Gender in Romantic Literary Biography’, in Arthur Bradley and Alan Rawes (eds.), *Romantic Biography* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), 109-38.

<sup>167</sup> The first essay ‘Upon Epitaphs’ originally appeared as ‘Epitaphs *Translated from Chiabrera*’ in Coleridge’s *The Friend*, No. 25 (Feb. 22, 1810), 403-16. The second essay ‘The Country Church-yard, and Critical Examination of Ancient Epitaphs’ and the third essay, ‘Celebrated Epitaphs Considered’, were also intended for publication in *The Friend*, but Coleridge never prepared the numbers. The two unpublished essays appeared with the first in Grosart’s 1876 edition of *PWW*, ii. 41-59 and ii. 60-75, respectively. The quotations are from the third essay in *PWW*, ii. 69. The essays will be referred to hereafter as *Essays Upon Epitaphs I, II* and *III*.

<sup>168</sup> For this discussion, I use the reprinted edition of Wordsworth’s ‘No. 25, Thursday, February 22, 1810: Epitaphs *Translated from Chiabrera*’, in *The Friend*, ed. Rooke, ii. 334-46.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. ii. 345.

eminent character's public 'Actions', the latter takes the idea of a minimalist, indeed epitaphic, biography a step further. Since the 'actions' of the 'mighty Benefactors of mankind' already live on 'in the Memories of Men', they 'do not stand in need of biographic sketches, in such a place; nor of delineations of character to individualize them'.<sup>170</sup> He justifies the stripping down of the biographical subject (such as Burns) to his bare name and dates with the conviction that his master 'works' can and will speak for their author better than any intimate or anecdotal biography. By 'epitomising' long biographies in scant lapidaries, Wordsworth transfers the 'great weight' of life writing from 'the minutest circumstances' to the smallest 'wires' imaginable: name, place and dates. The poet's response to an epistolary appeal from Hippolyte de la Morvonnais for a biographical commentary on the author himself is especially edifying.<sup>171</sup> Wordsworth informs Samuel Carter Hall in an 1837 letter that the French writer was redirected to 'the date and place of my birth, and the places of my Education', for 'beyond these' he 'really [sees] nothing that the world has to do with'.<sup>172</sup> Intent on protecting his own privacy, and confident in the autobiographical voice of his own works, the poet supplies what is essentially a skeletal epitaph of himself. But what of those whose lives are cut down too soon before their time? What of Keats, Hemans, and Landon, whose *monumentum aere perennius* remain forever out of reach as unexecuted designs like Kubla Khan's 'dome in air'? In an 1819 letter to J. Forbes Mitchell, Wordsworth voices his opposition to the proposal of erecting a monument for Burns on the grounds that the subject has already raised a monument to himself through his own

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid. ii. 346.

<sup>171</sup> The response is recorded in Wordsworth's 15 January 1837 letter to Samuel Carter Hall, in *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years 1821-1853*, ed. E. de Selincourt, rev. Alan G. Hill, 2nd edn., 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978-88), iii. 347-9. The French writer in Breton was preparing a study of Wordsworth in 1834.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. iii. 348.

works.<sup>173</sup> In other words, Burns has already erected his own consolatory structures of defence and compensation outside the framework of supplementary aid. Conversely, Wordsworth would support any scheme to erect a ‘Monument to the memory of Chatterton’ or a monument to the memory of the ‘tender-hearted Michael Bruce’.<sup>174</sup> For writers whose lives and promises are nipped in the bud, the application of all available resources for memorialisation and compensation appears ethically justified. These resources may include physical monument, ‘life-and-letters’, intimate biography or panegyric epitaph. Yet, this does not mean that Burns requires no protection from the living. As is the case with Currie’s ‘Life of Burns’, Wordsworth seems to suggest that the more we minimise the practice of posthumous life writing the better we perform our duty to the dead. By the same token, if the subject is unable to fend for himself, then we ‘do not have the right to leave him alone to his death.’ As the true ‘friends’ of the departed, we are ‘summoned’ by what Wordsworth calls ‘conscience’ – or what Levinas calls the ‘final essence’ – to deploy posthumous life writing in defence of the helpless other.

From *monumentum aere perennius*, to self-elegiac letters, pastoral elegy, epitaphic elegy, funerary monuments, historical *Lives*, epistolary fiction, ‘life-and-letters’, biography, portrait painting, works-as-autobiography, and epitomising epitaph, my discussion has focused on the ethical connection between all these genres and media of mourning and commemoration. The complex negotiation between the self and the other in elegy and the problematic relation between the biographer and his subject reveal a shared concern for the proper representation of the dead. Current scholarships on elegy would do well to heed Duff’s well-founded view that ‘genres cannot be studied in isolation.’ Instead of restricting itself to a specific genre history or iconographic account of mourning and commemoration, this study will attempt a cross-generic

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<sup>173</sup> See Wordsworth’s 21 April 1819 letter to J. Forbes Mitchell, in *Letters of William Wordsworth: A New Selection*, ed. Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 202-5.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.* 204.

and cross-media assessment of the Romantic culture of death and afterlife. Collectively subsumed under the rubric of ‘posthumous life writing’, various functionally related textual practices and visual traditions are considered together as possible means and strategies of memorialisation. Uniting them is an ethic of commemoration which struggles endlessly and inadequately to maintain a just rapport between the self (either as living or dying) and the other (either as dead or coming) through posthumous support, protection, and collaboration. Hence, posthumous life writing is always ethically vested with anxieties about the survival of the subject (either as deceased already or as the one invoking aid), the preservation of friendship, and the conservation of communal bond. Although the term ‘life’ features prominently in my definition of mourning and memorial works, it refers in general to any representation of the deceased in living activity. For example, the afterlife of the subject may take the form of a figure recollected in biography, as a sitter in painting, as a body in the grave, or as a vegetative symbol in pastoral elegy. Combining genre study, cultural history and contemporary philosophy, the present work will examine the posthumous life writings of Wordsworth, Hemans and Landon, as well as those of Johnson, Godwin, Sir Joshua Reynolds, William Hazlitt and Maria Jane Jewsbury.

### **The Design and Performance**

In line with what Herbert Tucker dubs a ‘Cultural Neo-formalist’ approach to literature, my thesis will analyse a selection of Romantic prose and verse memorials in contemporary contexts of genre history, Enlightenment philosophy, and commemorative art practices.<sup>175</sup> Unlike Bennett’s approach to the ‘posthumous life of writing’, which centres on reception and figures of

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<sup>175</sup> See Herbert Tucker’s ‘The Fix of Form: An Open Letter’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 27/2 (1999), 535.

reading, the present study is concerned with the rich but under-explored connection between ethics of memorialisation and strategies of representing the dead.

Chapter One attempts to provide a cognitive map of the intellectual history behind Enlightenment discourses of death. The first part examines Adam Smith's and David Hume's philosophical observations on posthumous sympathy through humanity's shared anxiety about mortality. Importantly, Abraham Tucker attributes our irrational dread of annihilation (even our posthumous sympathy with the deceased) to all the ritualism, iconography and lexicon of death continually re-enacted and reinforced in culture. Yet, despite the rationalist demystification of death, eighteenth-century essayists and antiquarians were actively engaged in the systemisation of commemorative literatures. For these essayists, the codification of elegy, epitaph, biography and history is not simply a generic or formal issue but a profoundly ethical one. The second part of the chapter will scrutinise select essays by Johnson, Henry Kett, Vicesimus Knox, Godwin, William Shenstone, and Wordsworth with the aim of establishing a multi-generic and multi-mediated account of commemorative writing.

Chapter Two explores Wordsworth's negotiation of converging, as well as competing, genre prescriptions for works of mourning and commemoration. I draw on Wordsworth's 'Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg' (both the periodical edition and the 1836-7 anthologised edition in *Poems*) to illustrate his mediation of the various formal and generic asymmetries of epitaph, biography, and elegy. As a case of posthumous life writing, his verse memorial on Hogg and his other departed friends exemplifies an effective, yet problematic, hybridisation of elegy, epitaph, improvisation, effusion, and supplementary biography. The ethical tension behind Wordsworth's adoption and combination of these commemorative forms is clearly evident in the concurrent composition of 'Epitaph' on Charles Lamb (1835-7). This

chapter will not only offer an account of the overlapping composition histories of the two poems and the ethical implications of their generic crossovers, but it will also scrutinise the writer's problematic commemoration of a fellow woman poet.

Chapter Three assesses Landon's response to Wordsworth's inadequate defence of Hemans in 'Extempore Effusion'. Crucially, Landon's 'Felicia Hemans' (1838) is a highly experimental tribute writing. Not just an elegy in form and mode, the poem is also a remarkable fusion of elegiac stanzas, 'autographic' epitaph, portrait engraving, funerary sculpture, and interpretive biography. The verse title and the subject's 'bright name', especially, resonate with the emerging celebrity culture, Wordsworth's model epitaph and the physiognomy of handwriting. Furthermore, Landon's defensive memorialisation of Hemans's life and career is replete with intertextual echoes and replies from her subject's own verses. Devoid of 'evil-speaking' and fraught with thoughtful allusions to the deceased's life and works, her commemorative work epitomises the collaborative essence of posthumous life writing. To conclude, the chapter meditates on the larger issue of gender and genre, the identity conflict between the poet and the woman, and the uneasy relation between the poet and the poetess.

Chapters Four looks at the incorporation of visual portraiture into defensive life writing, collaborative memorial and autobiographical reflections. As early as the 1780s, Reynolds tried to combine the aesthetic of portrait painting with the ethics of commemorative life writing in his unpublished memoirs of Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, and David Garrick. Influenced by the legacy of Reynolds, Benjamin R. Haydon's *Wordsworth on Helvellyn* (1842) subtly integrates his autobiographical defence of Keats into the portrait of Wordsworth, invoking the elder poet as a joint protector of their young departed friend. The next section analyses Hemans's revisionary response to Allan Cunningham's biography of Blake in 'The Painter's Last Work' (1832), as she

exalts Blake's last portrait of Catherine as a work of cooperative fulfilment and reciprocal protection. Since both Wordsworth and Hemans adopt and reflect on visual portraiture as a means of self-preservation, the last section will evaluate their relative confidence in the portrait art by comparing Wordsworth's 'To the Author's Portrait' (1832) with Hemans's 'To My Own Portrait' (1827).

The final chapter examines the persistence of friendship between the dead and the living through posthumous correspondence and offer of services. Landon's late letters from Africa are particularly relevant, for they abound in allusions to the solitude of Robinson Crusoe and to the subject's own survival in the minds of her friends. Accordingly, I will analyse the ways in which the transplanted poet establishes intertextual links between Daniel Defoe's self-sufficient survivalist and her epistolary persona as a forlorn wife and exiled writer. The second section compares Crusoe's chauvinistic solitude with Landon's feminist solitude-as-longing in the context of Jewsbury's death and the attendant extinction of a writing community. Landon's epistolary enactment of a 'feminine Robinson Crusoe' epitomises Romantic anxieties about early retirement, premature death and obliteration from memory. The concluding section of the chapter will assess the posthumous impact of 'The Last Letters of L. E. L.' (1839) on the collaborative defences, biographical *re*-writings and cross-media commemorations of Landon's brief life.

Since Romantic posthumous life writing encompasses a wide swath of memorial literatures, as well as many mourned and mourning authors, the current study does not presume to cover everyone and everything subsumed under the topic. In order to address the full scope of posthumous life writing and its ethical programmes from the late eighteenth century to the advent of Victorianism, a far lengthier survey would be required.

## CHAPTER 1

### **Turning Away from the Fear of Death: The Infinity and ‘endless addible’ Forms of Afterlife**

We sympathize even with the dead. . . . It is miserable, we think, to be deprived of the light of the sun; to be shut out from life and conversation; to be laid in the cold grave, a prey to corruption and the reptiles of the earth; to be no more thought of in this world, but to be obliterated, in a little time, from the affections, and almost from the memory, of their dearest friends and relations.

(Smith, ‘Of Sympathy’, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*)

Adam Smith’s original contribution to the moral sense theory pivots upon a sophisticated notion of sympathy that is well-adapted to the attainment of moral self-regulation, social harmony and a virtuous life.<sup>1</sup> Influenced by David Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), Smith, too, conceives sympathy as an innate ability which enables us to identify with the joys and agonies of fellow human beings.<sup>2</sup> Hume calls it ‘a very powerful principle in human nature’ which can ‘[take] us so far out of ourselves, as to give us the same pleasure or uneasiness in characters which are useful or pernicious to society, as if they had a tendency to our own advantage or loss.’<sup>3</sup> In the language of the latter, complete sympathy or ‘*extensive sympathy*’, while difficult, dissolves the emotive distance between the spectator and the subject, and the moral disjunction between the concern for self and the concern for society.<sup>4</sup> However, both philosophers also suggest implicit psychological obstacles to complete sympathy. For Hume, the proximity of the

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was originally published in 1759. The epigraph is from ‘Section I: Of the sense of propriety, Chapter I: Of sympathy’, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006), 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> See ‘Part 3. Of the other virtues and vices’, in Book 3 of David Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), especially i. 368-78.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* i. 369 and 370.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* i. 374.

spectator to the subject – be it personal, cultural or political – is a crucial determining factor in the readiness and intensity of one’s sympathy for the other. He writes: ‘We sympathize more with persons contiguous to us, than with persons remote from us: With our acquaintance, than with strangers: With our countrymen, than with foreigners.’<sup>5</sup> Smith’s psychological account of our oft-attenuated sympathy is just as compelling. According to him, ‘What we feel does not . . . amount to that complete sympathy, to that perfect harmony and correspondence of sentiments’ because our own envy frequently obstructs our sympathy with joy and our own aversion to pain inhibits our sympathy with grief.<sup>6</sup> ‘Reluctant’ to enter into absolute emotional identification, complete sympathy is therefore always deferred.<sup>7</sup> Yet, the challenges of interpersonal distance and human predisposition, so astutely observed by both philosophers, do not seem to apply at the very limit of sensible sympathy: that is, our sympathy with the dead.

The opening passage from Smith attests to the power of human sympathy to overcome the inconceivable distance between the living and the dead, as well as our own instinctive aversion to sorrow and pain. Moreover, it unleashes a principle of human nature that is just as potent as sympathy: the fear of death. Although Smith recognises one’s posthumous identification with another’s inhumed remains as the ‘very illusion of the imagination’, he also credits this ‘dread of death’ as ‘one of the most important principles in human nature’ which

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. i. 371. Unlike Hutcheson, Hume rejects the reality of universal benevolence. It is precisely because human sympathy is weak and naturally biased that a system of justice is necessary. See Michael L. Frazer’s ‘3. Hume’s Conservative Sentimentalism’, in *The Enlightenment of Sympathy: Justice and the Moral Sentiments in the Eighteenth Century and Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 65-88, especially 74-6.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Section III: Of the effects of prosperity and adversity upon the judgment of mankind with regard to the propriety of action; and why it is more easy to obtain their approbation in the one state than in the other, Chapter I: That through our sympathy with sorrow is generally a more lively sensation than our sympathy with joy’, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 41 and 43. Although our sympathy with sorrow appears universal, Smith claims that, absent of envy, ‘our propensity to sympathize with joy is much stronger than our propensity to sympathize with sorrow’ (42).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 43. Indeed, the word ‘reluctance’ is used repeatedly by Smith in the chapter to characterise our psychological prohibition to sympathise with another completely.

‘guards and protects the society.’<sup>8</sup> In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), he does not elaborate how this dread of death can guard and protect society. Nevertheless, it is curious that he should invoke the death of the philosopher hero, Socrates, in a later chapter to exemplify how calm and selfless acceptance of death can excite and warrant the full strength of sympathy in the spectator.<sup>9</sup> Smith is by no means suggesting that this exemplary father figure of philosophy was undaunted by the prospect of death. Rather, Socrates ‘turned away’ from the thought of dying precisely because he ‘feared’ a preoccupation with it ‘might make so violent an impression upon him’ that he could no longer keep his agony and anxiety ‘within the bounds of moderation.’<sup>10</sup> Smith presents Socrates’s triumph as an overcoming of death through rational ‘aversion’ (literally ‘turning away’). The philosopher’s dialogues with Phaedo, Simmias, Cebes and the others represent an effort to formulate a ‘truer’ idea of death and afterlife by circumventing his own sorrows for the coming end. Death is ‘turned away’ from the contaminating body toward the ideal home of the soul. According to Alan Bewell, ‘the deathbed scene was the final test of philosophical principles and an expression of the completion of a good life’ in Enlightenment discourses.<sup>11</sup> Smith’s invocation of Socrates’s last moment partakes in the Enlightenment conciliation of humanity’s entrenched anxiety about death, a true test of principles and convictions informed by eighteenth-century rationalist and materialist approaches to the body.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 45-6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Bewell’s ‘Chapter Five: The History of Death’, in *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 227.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Joseph Priestley’s *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit. To Which is Added, the History of the Philosophical Doctrine Concerning the Origin of the Soul, and the Nature of Matter; with its Influence on Christianity, Especially with Respect to the Doctrine of the Pre-existence of Christ* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1777). Priestley’s dissertation is particularly important, for it reflects a major secular shift in attitude towards the relationship between body and spirit in the eighteenth century as a result of revolutions in the sciences of life and death. Cf. John McManners’s *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

Drawing on metaphysical, moral and physical arguments, Hume refutes the spiritual premise of afterlife and posthumous punishment in his controversial essay, ‘On the Immortality of the Soul’ (written circa 1755).<sup>13</sup> The philosopher-sceptic warns his readers that ‘All doctrines are to be suspected which are favoured by our passions’.<sup>14</sup> And these passions include ‘our horrors of annihilation’.<sup>15</sup> Confident in their ability to dispel this perennial dread of annihilation, ‘the philosophers of the Enlightenment set out to teach others how to die by providing them with the alternative, rationalist idea—that the dead are beyond death.’<sup>16</sup> In other words, the posthumous insensibility of the body is beyond comprehension, beyond sympathy: the dead are beyond all superstitious ritualism, fabrications, and apotheoses of that event.

Spurred by advances in the period’s secular understanding of life, the Enlightenment discourse of death aims to teach human beings ‘once more how to die in peace.’ To realise this objective, the rationalist stance on death ‘would have to replace the dangerous and empty phantasms of the imagination, linked as they were to the body, to ceremonies surrounding dying, to funerary rituals, and to the entire Church apparatus.’<sup>17</sup> Subverting traditional beliefs and representations of death, Enlightenment *philosophes* attempt to disable our ‘second nature’ (i.e. habits and conditioning) to associate macabre rites, words and images with irrational self-projections and fears. Yet, integral to the Enlightenment effort to modify humanity’s tendency for morbid feelings is an ironic deployment of, even reliance upon, the very custom, lexicon and imagery it seeks to neutralise. Although our ‘horror of annihilation’ is no less an ‘illusion of the

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<sup>13</sup> Hume himself famously questions the religious suppositions of immortality and eternal punishment in the essay ‘On the Immortality of the Soul’ (circa 1755), which was withdrawn from publication in *Five Dissertations* due to the controversy it provoked. Clandestinely circulated in 1777, the essay was not officially published until 1783 as ‘Essay II. On the Immortality of the Soul’, in *Essays on Suicide, and the Immortality of the Soul, Ascribed to the Late David Hume* (London: Printed for M. Smith, 1783), 23-39.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 38-9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 38.

<sup>16</sup> Bewell, ‘The History of Death’, 215.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 216.

imagination', Smith's enigmatic insight into the protective power of 'posthumous sympathy' affirms Hume's idea that humans are creatures of passions before they are agents of reason. The fear of death can 'guard' and 'protect' the society precisely because it vacillates between interestedness and disinterestedness, where the extinction of the other necessarily implicates the extinction of oneself. Thus, posthumous sympathy summons one to defend: to be more than just a spectator to another's dying and decease. In the first section of this chapter, I will look at Abraham Tucker's emblematic Enlightenment resistance to the cultural inducements of posthumous sympathy in *The Light of Nature Pursued* (1768-78). Importantly, the section will consider the applicability of Tucker's thesis on death in relation to William Hazlitt's essay 'On the Fear of Death' (1822) and Jeremy Bentham's commemorative 'Auto-Icon'. The second section of the chapter examines how this sympathy with the dead evolved into a complex multi-generic and multi-mediated expression of mutual protection and communal preservation. Recognising the interstitial nature of posthumous life writing, I will look at the generic and formal prescriptions of the English epitaph and its cross-fertilisations with biography, history, remains, monument, elegy and portrait painting.

### **Fight or Fright: 'Let us learn bravely to stand our ground, and fight Death'**

Smith's observation of our impossible, yet routinely evoked, sympathy with the dead alerts us to the kinds of concern which dictate the mode and content of posthumous life writing. Central to this projection of the sensible self into the future is a desire for posthumous 'conversation' with the survivors, lest we 'be obliterated, in a little time, from the affections' and 'from the memory' of our 'dearest friends and relations.' Correspondence between the living and the deceased is therefore critical to our endurance after death. Though the yoke of this posthumous conversation

falls mostly on the living, it nevertheless constitutes a basic mode and possibility of posthumous life writing. While Smith remains ambivalent about this sympathetic correspondence with the dead, Tucker, like Michel de Montaigne and Bacon before him, is determined to dismantle the dread of death with reason and empirical observation.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Smith, whose theory of sympathy descends from a line of moral sense theorists that includes Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson, Tucker is a careful reader of John Locke and ‘embraces anti-innatism in its extreme form.’<sup>19</sup> In his view, since all humans are born without ‘inscription,’ sympathetic regard for others ‘is [also] not given us by nature’.<sup>20</sup> But if our innate capacity for sympathy is not responsible for our apprehension of death, then what is?

Near the conclusion of his hefty quasi-philosophical, quasi-religious work, *The Light of Nature Pursued* (1768-77), the Lockean reader attributes our mortal fear to the social practice, language and customs of death. He writes:

Thou comest beset with pains, uneasiness, regrets, imbecility, and distaste for all common enjoyments; and . . . we are compelled to dread thee more by the behaviour, the language, and customs of the world around us. For Death is spoken of as the worst of evils, the danger principally to be guarded against before all others . . . lamentations are made for the loss of friends, as if this were the greatest calamity that could befall them, and the law denounces death as her severest punishment for the most atrocious crimes; add to which, the forlorn appearance of a dead body, the close-imprisoning coffin, the yawning grave, and melancholy pomp of funerals, striking a mechanical dejection upon the spirits . . . no wonder that all these

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<sup>18</sup> Michel de Montaigne’s essay ‘That to study philosophy is to learn to die’ (1580) is perhaps one of the most significant and influential reflections on death in the history of philosophy. Some of his arguments against humanity’s common dread of annihilation are echoed in Bacon’s essay ‘Of Death’ (published in 1612, enlarged in 1625), as well as in Abraham Tucker’s chapter on ‘Death’ in the third volume of *The Light of Nature Pursued* (1777). See the corresponding essays in *Montaigne’s Essays in Three Books with Notes and Quotations. And an Account of the Author’s Life*, trans. Charles Cotton, 6th edn., 3 vols. (London: Printed for B. and B. Barker, G. Strahan, S. Ballard, D. Browne, C. Hitch, J. Clarke, J. Brindley, B. Creake, J. Pote, R. Chandler, C. Corbett, R. Wellington, J. Hodges, C. Bathurst, E. Commyns, W. Calwell, and J. New, 1743), i. 74-95, and *Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral of Francis Bacon*, 21-3.

<sup>19</sup> James A. Harris’s ‘Introduction’ to Tucker’s *The Light of Nature Pursued*, 4 vols. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2003), vol. i, p. vii.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* vol. i, p. xi.

causes combining, raise alarm in our minds, and give us a strong desire of self-preservation with an abhorrence of whatever threatens destruction.<sup>21</sup>

The passage picks apart the ideological constituents behind our compulsion to dread extinction: namely, mourning customs, penal practice, and funerary rituals. What feeds our abhorrence of destruction, he claims, is a perverse and pervasive discourse of death which governs nearly every aspect of our social and psychological existence. Chief among these influencers is language. Acknowledging the power of language, Tucker's intimate apostrophic address of 'Death' is a masterly stroke. In presenting us the idea of annihilation in the familiar guise of allegory, he deliberately exposes the close association between our mortal fear and our compulsion to figure 'Death' as an all-consuming presence through rhetoric and writing. Moreover, the irrational hold 'Death' has over humanity is tied to a history of language preoccupied more with hearsay than with genuine understanding. 'For Death is *spoken of* as the worst of evils' is an alarming remark on our general ignorance of the phenomenon of death. Tucker's comment reveals a systemic failure to ascertain the authority of the one who speaks of it and the verity of that which is spoken. Death is not understood – it is only *spoken of* as a rumour to be circulated by mouth and by writing. Despite our imagined familiarity with this primal force of nature as a household personification, poetic language offers no true conception of what death really is or what it ought to be. Tucker's use of 'apostrophe' is especially effective, considering *ἀποστροφή* literally means 'turning away'. Just as Socrates 'turns away' from his own anxiety about death, the writer turns the allegorical language of death 'away' from its abstract referent toward the abyss of understanding which the figural use of 'Death' actually represents. In redirecting the customary

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<sup>21</sup> Originally from Tucker's (under the pseudonym of Edward Search) 'Chapter XXXVII. Death', in *The Light of Nature Pursued*, Vol. III [in four parts], 4 vols. (London: Printed by W. Oliver, 1777), iv. 366-440. The first two volumes of *The Light of Nature Pursued* were published in 1768. I use William Hazlitt's abridged version of the chapter, under the title 'Chap. VI. On Death', in *An Abridgment of the Light of Nature Pursued*, 7 vols. (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1807), v. 503-4.

language of death against itself, Tucker performs his own ‘turning away’ from the fear-vested discourse of death.

Admired by Hazlitt as ‘one of the common sense school,’ this Lockean writer approaches the subject of death, as he does all other moral and philosophical subjects, with a practical levelheadedness in a highly accessible language.<sup>22</sup> In line with other Enlightenment philosophers, Tucker, too, believes that ‘Philosophy can overcome it, enabling its possessor, like Socrates, to swallow the deadly potion as if it were a cheerful glass among his friends.’<sup>23</sup> To that end, he generates a lengthy but cogent seventeen-point analysis (ten in Hazlitt’s abridged version) to help his readers look ‘death calmly and steadily in the face; to contemplate all his features, and examine what there is terrible or harmless in them.’<sup>24</sup> It is important to study Tucker’s language closely here. In bringing down the mighty figural ‘Death’ to the small-capped ‘death’, the writer cleverly pares down the language of mortality to its proper proportions. His analysis is aimed at ‘de-facing’ the allegory of death by a committed scrutiny of each of its component parts, for the dread of annihilation, he claims, stems from a combination of different fears. He states:

In order to do this more effectually, it will be necessary to analyse the object of our dread into its component parts; for death, though considered as one thing, and called by one name, is in reality a complication of terrors springing from different quarters, and it is their combination that makes him so formidable.<sup>25</sup>

Tucker’s observation is particularly perceptive because it draws attention to the combinatory nature of the vast ideological dimension of death. These terrors do not originate from the domain of language or from the textual medium only. Just as posthumous sympathy entails the application of various senses, the attendant horrors invoked in the allegory of death are part

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<sup>22</sup> Harris’s ‘Introduction’ to *The Light of Nature Pursued*, vol. i, p. xix.

<sup>23</sup> *Abridgment of the Light of Nature*, v. 504.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* v. 505.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

verbal experience and part visual impression. In the unabridged version of the essay, Tucker explains the human susceptibility to both visual and verbal signs of mortality:

For the senses many times affect the mind by an immediate operation. . . . So the appearance of graves or skeletons or any thing that puts us in mind of death, or even expressions and single words relative thereto, strike the eye and ear with a sudden horror, though not foreboding any particular danger to ourselves.<sup>26</sup>

Although the ocular and aural effects of bodily remains and morbid words can strike an immediate impression upon the mind, our sensible susceptibility to them is not innate. True to his Lockean allegiance, he imputes these horrors of death to our ‘second nature’. He writes:

This effect does not proceed from nature but from early custom, our second nature, for there is no more reason either logical or physiological to be given, why the sight of a human skull and bones in a charnel house should shock us more than the sight of a calve’s [sic] head or pair of marrow bones in a dish, for both are emblems alike significant to remind us, that all animals must die.<sup>27</sup>

According to Tucker, our emotional response, as well as the lack thereof, to the two divergent emblems of death – one for the remains of life and the other for the remains of food – clearly exemplifies the strength of conditioning and habitual association. This second nature, synonymous with nurture in this context, teaches us to discriminate ‘human skull and bones’ symbolically as the end of human life from animal skull and bones as means of human life. More significant still, he shows that the discourse is not only manipulated at the level of language but also at the level of visual representation. Tucker’s constant application of allegory and emblems evinces just how intertwined language and imagery are in our perception and experience of death.

Literary writing is without a doubt complicit in the arbitrary production and perpetuation of these recurrent devices of mortality. Indeed, Tucker classifies such literature as a serious health threat to persons with an overwrought imagination, for such ‘disorder of the machine . . . cannot be cured by arguments.’<sup>28</sup> He even recommends readers with excessive imagination and

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<sup>26</sup> Here I use the original unabridged chapter in *The Light of Nature Pursued*, iv. 417.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. iv. 419.

sympathy against perusing melancholic writings, as ‘it will be dangerous [for them] to deal much with gloomy writers, tragical representations or doleful tales, or to converse with persons that have a knack of giving every thing a melancholy turn.’<sup>29</sup> The controversial deathbed scene of Clarissa Harlowe in Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady* (1747-8) is a potent example of such dangerous, melancholic writing. Despite the author’s good intention ‘to arm’ his readers ‘against the most affecting Changes’ and inoculate their minds ‘against the Calamities of Life’, his lesson on death was greeted with threats to boycott his work.<sup>30</sup> The sales figures for the final three volumes actually show significant reduction on account of his refusal to change the ‘gloomy scene of death, to the more pleasing one of a happy and well spent life.’<sup>31</sup> The combative responses to Clarissa’s instructive encounter with death demonstrate the gap between theory and practice. Judging from his letters to various impassioned readers, Richardson’s moral aim is in fact aligned with Enlightenment philosophy’s goal to teach humanity ‘once more how to die in peace.’ John Belford’s rapturous description of the heroine’s protracted passage to annihilation pays an unmistakable homage to Socrates’ own exemplary end. Ironically, the attempt to strengthen readers ‘against the Calamities of Life’ through moral and philosophical edification results instead in the intensification of posthumous identification. In this bizarre twist of literary reception, the readers rallied to the posthumous defence of their beloved character, while the author was demonised as an agent of injustice. Richardson’s

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> The quotations are from Samuel Richardson’s 15 December 1748 letter to Lady Bradshaigh, quoted in Tom Keymer’s ‘4. Forensic realism’, in *Richardson’s Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 202. Like many of his devoted readers, Lady Bradshaigh strenuously objected to the author’s plan to kill off Clarissa in the final installment of the book.

<sup>31</sup> Bradshaigh’s November 1748 letter to Richardson in *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, ed. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 6 vols. (London: R. Phillips, 1804), iv. 199. See also Adam Budd’s ‘Why Clarissa Must Die: Richardson’s Tragedy and Editorial Heroism’, *Eighteenth-Century Life* 31/3 (2007), 1-28, especially 1-3.

*Clarissa* illustrates, very compellingly, the enormous difficulty of maintaining a proper balance between the necessity of contemplating death and the prescribed aversion to morbid writings.

Repeating Tucker's warning against the perusal of gloomy literatures, Hazlitt characterises humanity's dread of destruction as an 'effeminate clinging to life' and attributes it to excess, indiscriminate reading.<sup>32</sup> He elaborates on this point in his own 1822 essay 'On the Fear of Death':

The effeminate clinging to life as such, as a general or abstract idea, is the effect of a highly civilized and artificial state of society. Men formerly plunged into all the vicissitudes and dangers of war, or staked their all upon a single die, or some one passion . . . now our strongest passion is to think, our chief amusement is to read new plays, new poems, new novels, and this we may do at our leisure, in perfect security, *ad infinitum*.

The remark appears ironic, given the writer's own allegiance to literature. However, his criticism of widespread social enervation and vapid reading practices is less directed against the trend of literary writing than it is against the disengaged existence and uncultivated taste of the reading public. Instead of guiding readers to reflexive examination and meaningful action in life, literature is bought and consumed purely as 'amusement'. Like an addiction, readers search constantly for fresh stimulants in 'new' plays, poems, and novels. Still more damaging, the life of action is increasingly supplanted by a vicarious, virtual life in the sheltered world of reading and writing. This 'effeminate' or flaccid hold on life makes the dread of death all the more inconsolable, for it inevitably produces the terrible awareness that one has accomplished nothing – nothing worth remembering – in life. It is at this point that Hazlitt assimilates Tucker's catalogue of extreme human motivations by which the fear of annihilation can be overcome (martyrdom, ambition, revenge, love, etc.) into his own thesis on the 'life of action and

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<sup>32</sup> First published in 1822, I use Hazlitt's 'Essay XXXIII: On the Fear of Death' in the reprinted edition of *Table Talk*, in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 9 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), vi. 288-95, 294.

danger'.<sup>33</sup> As the critic asserts, 'A life of action and danger moderates the dread of death' because individuals committed to such existential mode 'set a just value on life.'<sup>34</sup> They would go to their death 'at the shrine of love, of honour, of religion, or any other prevailing feeling' precisely because they understand 'the precarious tenure on which [they] hold [their] present being.'<sup>35</sup> Since life can cease any moment, and sometimes prematurely, it is at least better to act upon (and die for) a belief or passion with total engagement than it is to die uneventfully with half-hearted interest.

In spite of his exaltation of this all-or-nothing attitude, Hazlitt's espousal of an action-packed life leaves one profession particularly vulnerable to the fear of extinction: professional men of letters. The critic concludes: 'Sedentary and studious men are the most apprehensive on this score. Dr. Johnson was an instance in point. . . . In the still-life of a man of letters, there was no obvious reason for a change. He might sit in an arm-chair and pour out cups of tea to all eternity.'<sup>36</sup> Hazlitt even ascribes Johnson's horror of annihilation to this cause. Johnson is, after all, no Byron, and there are but a few writers capable of combining a life of study with a life of action and danger. While finishing a literary portrait of Lord Byron in 1824, the critic/biographer received news of his subject's sudden demise. The advent of the news supposedly induced him to produce one of the most memorable posthumous life writings and reflections on death in

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<sup>33</sup> In the *Abridgment of the Light of Nature*, Tucker writes: 'Religion can set it at nought, and urge the zealous believer to court a crown of martyrdom; ambition, fame, revenge will stifle it; vexation, disappointment, or any intolerable pressure will outweigh it . . . and even the whining lover has taken refuge there against an evil of his own creating; the common soldier and the sailor lose all dread of it, not by profound reasonings, but by familiarity with the object, by the taunts and jests, the intrepid countenances and behaviour of their comrades' (v. 504). See Hazlitt's paraphrastic version of the passage in 'On the Fear of Death', *Selected Writings of Hazlitt*, vi. 295.

<sup>34</sup> 'On the Fear of Death', vi. 295.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* vi. 294 and 295.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* vi. 295. For a good melancholic self-portrait of Johnson, see the reprinted edition of 'ΤΝΩΘΙ ΣΕΑΥΤΟΝ' (1772), in *Samuel Johnson: The Major Authors*, ed. Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 26-30.

Romantic literature.<sup>37</sup> Hazlitt's epitaph for Byron celebrates the ideal union of the poet's two lives. First, he honours the literary contribution of his subject, imputing the poet's posthumous endurance to the dissemination of his textual monuments among the minds of his present and future readers. He writes: 'The poet's cemetery is the human mind, in which he sows the seeds of never-ending thought – his monument is to be found in his works'.<sup>38</sup> This memorial of Byron's literary achievement is then complemented at the end of the epitaph by a hagiographic record and judgment of his life of action and danger. Hazlitt inscribes the following: 'Lord Byron is dead: he also died a martyr to his zeal in the cause of freedom, for the last, best hopes of man. Let that be his excuse and his epitaph!'<sup>39</sup> Yet, despite the consolatory fervour of the makeshift epitaph, his memorial for Byron is a powerful projection of his own frustrated hope as a writer.

Compared to the heroic action of his biographical subject, Hazlitt's own life definitely fell short of its promissory mark. Despite his effort to allay humanity's fear of death in the steps of Tucker, his essay evinces a telling slippage of his own disquietude and apprehension about death. He muses:

If I had lived indeed, I should not care to die. But I do not like a contract of pleasure broken off unfulfilled, a marriage with joy unconsummated, a promise of happiness rescinded. My public and private hopes have been left a ruin, or remain only to mock me. I would wish them / to be re-edified. I should like to leave some sterling work behind me. I should like to have some friendly hand to consign me to the grave. On these conditions I am ready, if not willing, to depart. I shall then write on my tomb – Grateful and Contented!<sup>40</sup>

Hazlitt's repeated frustrations in the arena of love and the damaging abuses he received at the hands of *The Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine* are well-known. These disappointments are poignantly, and ironically, represented in his exceedingly personal *Liber*

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<sup>37</sup> Hazlitt's portrait of Byron was first published in *The Spirit of the Age: Or Contemporary Portraits* in 1825. For the entry on Byron, I use the reprinted edition of *The Spirit of the Age*, in *Selected Writings of Hazlitt*, vii. 134-42.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* vii. 142.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> 'On the Fear of Death', vi. 291-2.

*Amoris; or, The New Pygmalion* (1823).<sup>41</sup> If the critic dreads death it would be because he feels he has been cheated of a good and complete life. Unlike Byron, Hazlitt admits he has neither heroic action nor ‘some sterling work’ on which to rest or distinguish his afterlife. As a piece of anticipatory death writing, the writer envisages a posthumous life in flux, in ‘ruin,’ ‘un-edified’ and uncertain. Moreover, his hitherto commonsensical approach to the subject of death appears to fall apart at the line ‘I should like to have some friendly hand consign me to the grave.’ Although Hazlitt specifically writes against the pathetic tendency to self-sympathise in epitaph inscriptions, his self-sympathy for the care and burial of his own posthumous remains is clearly palpable here.<sup>42</sup> Living the ‘still-life of a man of letters,’ the philosopher critic, too, is consumed by the discourse of death. Unexpectedly, what starts as a philosophical reflection on the irrational fear of annihilation is interjected with this self-pitying plea for posthumous sympathy and posthumous defence from ‘some friendly hand’. Even as Hazlitt administers the Enlightenment cure to humanity’s habitual dread of death, he undermines it by proposing alternative ‘conditions’ for overcoming his own un-readiness to die in peace. Unlike Napoleon, he has left no heroic action in the battlefield; unlike Byron, he has left no *monumentum aere perennius* in writing. His optative appeal (‘I would’, ‘I should’) to have his shattered life ‘re-edified’ as a monument (from Latin *aedificare*, literally to make a temple), ‘to leave some sterling work behind me’, and ‘to have some friendly hand consign me to the grave’ calls upon the aid of a sympathetic friend. To

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<sup>41</sup> See Jonathan Gross’s ‘Hazlitt’s Worshipping Practice in *Liber Amoris*’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 35 (1995), 707-21, and Kurt M. Koenigsberger’s ‘Libert, Libel, and *Liber Amoris*: Hazlitt on Sovereignty and Death’, *Studies in Romanticism* 38 (Summer 1999), 281-309. For an ironic reading of Hazlitt’s *Liber Amoris*, cf. Marilyn Butler’s ‘Satire and the Images of Self in the Romantic Period: The Long Tradition of Hazlitt’s *Liber Amoris*’, in G.A. Rosso and Daniel P. Watkins (eds.), *Spirits of Fire: English Romantic Writers and Contemporary Historical Methods* (London: Associate University Presses, 1990), 157-74.

<sup>42</sup> In ‘On the Fear of Death’, Hazlitt names the practice of self-sympathy in grave inscriptions as one of the agents which can incite our fear of death: ‘There is usually one pang added voluntarily and unnecessarily to the fear of death, by our affecting to compassionate the loss which others will have in us. If that were all, we might reasonably set our minds at rest. The pathetic exhortation on country tombstones, “Grieve not for me, my wife and children dear,” &c. is for the most part speedily followed to the letter’ (vi. 293).

ensure his own preservation after death, Hazlitt appeals to the community for assistance: to rebuild his life into a lasting monument, to protect his eminent works from oblivion, and to perform the rites of mourning over his remains. Beneath the façade of moderating reason, philosophical equanimity and humble resignation, his essay ‘On the Fear of Death’ is in effect a highly reflexive invocation and vindication of posthumous life writing. Just as Hazlitt defends his contemporaries in *The Spirit of Age*, this forsaken votary of Romantic *Lives* requires the support of others to protect and consecrate his memory, corpse and corpus.

While Hazlitt unravels Tucker’s philosophical aversion to the discourse of death by acknowledging the protective power of commemorative writing, Bentham picks it apart from the other end by recognising the importance of iconography to the overthrowing of our mortal fear. In addition to his great philosophical and political writings, one of his most unforgettable bequests to the world is perhaps his own body, which has been on display in University College London since 1850 (see fig. 2.1). According to his friend and disciple, Thomas Southwood Smith, Bentham’s intention to offer his corpse for use to the living dates as far back as 1769. Southwood Smith’s footnote to *A Lecture Delivered over the Remains of Jeremy Bentham* (1832) recalls these words:

This my will and special request I make, not out of affectation of singularity, but to the intent and with the desire that mankind may reap some small benefit in and by my decease, having hitherto had small opportunities to contribute thereto while living.<sup>43</sup>

As the period bears witness to the meteoric rise of the medical sciences, Bentham’s desire to bequeath his own remains for dissections and anatomical studies is an apt testament to the spirit of his utilitarian calculus. In his privately printed pamphlet, *Auto-Icon; or, Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living* (1842?), the writer describes the ‘Auto-Icon’ as ‘a man who is his own image,

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Southwood Smith’s *A Lecture Delivered over the Remains of Jeremy Bentham, Esq., in the Webb-Street School of Anatomy and Medicine, on the 9th of June, 1832* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1832), 4.



Fig. 2.1 The cabinet containing Jeremy Bentham's preserved skeleton and a wax model of his head by the French artist, Jacques Talrich, was moved to the South Cloisters of the main building of UCL in 1850. The arrangement, the attitude and the attire in which he is presented in the 'Auto-Icon' are still maintained in accordance to his last will, dated 30 May 1832.

preserved for the benefit of posterity.'<sup>44</sup> On one hand, the creation of the 'Auto-Icon' responds to the medical community's interest in anatomical knowledge and the attendant problems of bodysnatching and backdoor-trading of dead bodies.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, the 'Auto-Icon' elevates the diseased and putrefied body to a living, incorruptible sculpture, an organic *monumentum aere perennius* to an otherwise ephemeral self. As Bentham writes, the 'head of each individual is peculiar to him, and, when properly preserved, is better than a

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in C. F. A. Marmoy's summary account of Jeremy Bentham's pamphlet in 'The "Auto-Icon" of Jeremy Bentham at University College London', *Medical History* 2 (1958), 78. For the unpublished pamphlet, see Bentham's *Auto-Icon; or, Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living. A Fragment. From the MSS. of Jeremy Bentham* [Unpublished, c 1842].

<sup>45</sup> For Bentham's support of the Anatomy Act of 1832, see Ruth Richardson's 'Bentham and "Bodies for Dissection"', *The Bentham Newsletter* x (1986), 22-33.

statue.’<sup>46</sup> Both Ruth Richardson and Brian Hurwitz have observed the ‘twofold use-value’ integral to his conception of the human taxidermy: ‘transitory: “anatomical, or dissectional”; and more permanent: “conservative, or statuary.”’<sup>47</sup> In taking the place of ‘carved statuary or waxwork’ in ‘temples of fame and infamy’, Bentham’s ‘Auto-Icon’ is as portraitive as it is sculptural and as funerary as it is monumental.<sup>48</sup> In confronting mortality with transitory understanding of the material self and life-like conservation of the ideal self, the philosopher combines both visceral science and visual art to surmount his own dread of extinction.

Although Bentham’s taxidermy appears self-sufficient as an enduring memorial to himself, one should not forget that its genesis and continual ‘use’ depended very much on communal support and posthumous aid. The advocate of utility acknowledges his post-obit reliance on Southwood Smith in his own will:

My body I give to my dear friend Doctor Southwood Smith to be disposed of in a manner hereinafter mentioned . . . it is my request *he will* take my body under his charge and take the requisite and appropriate measures for the disposal and preservation of the several parts of my bodily frame in the manner expressed in the paper annexed to this my will and at the top of which I have written Auto Icon. The skeleton *he will* cause to be put together in such a manner as that the whole figure may be seated in a chair usually occupied by me when living, in the attitude in which I am sitting when engaged in thought in the course of time employed in writing. I direct that the body thus prepared shall be transferred to my executor. *He will* cause the skeleton to be clad in one of the suits of black occasionally worn by me. The body so clothed, together with the chair and the staff in my later years bourne by me, *he will* take charge of and for containing the whole apparatus *he will* cause to be prepared an appropriate box or case and will cause to be engraved in conspicuous characters . . . my name at length with the letters ob: followed by the day of my decease.<sup>49</sup> (my italics)

Bentham’s stringent instructions for the disposal of his own corpse highlight just how complicated, time-consuming, expensive and rigorous the whole operation is. Significantly, the

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<sup>46</sup> *Auto-Icon; or, Farther Uses of the Dead*, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Ruth Richardson and Brian Hurwitz’s ‘Jeremy Bentham’s self image: an exemplary bequest for dissection’, *British Medical Journal* 295 (1987), 195. The internal quotations are from *Auto-Icon; or, Farther Uses of the Dead*, 2.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 196.

<sup>49</sup> I use the reprinted copy of Bentham’s will (dated 30 May, 1832) in Marmoy’s ‘The “Auto-Icon” of Jeremy Bentham’, 80.

realisation of the ‘Auto-Icon’, as well as the ethical weight of the entreaty, rests squarely on the shoulders (and conscience) of his faithful friend. The indicative and obligatory ‘*he will*’s belie the subjunctive mood of Bentham’s implicit plea for meticulous conservation and fulfilment of his detailed wishes after death. The dead is not only asking the living to erect a monument to his memory: he is asking the survivor to ‘re-edify’ his living body, his living figure, his living attitude, his living activity and his living presence. Southwood Smith is summoned by the dead to resurrect the dead in permanent living form. While the method of such preservation work necessitates the latest knowledge in anatomical science, Bentham’s painstaking instructions are preoccupied with more than just science. The dying theorist can scarcely contain his consuming wish to be remembered for all time toward the end of his will. He inscribes this calculated hope in the tone of a postscript:

If it should so happen that my personal friends and other disciples should be disposed to meet together on some day or days of the year for the purpose of commemorating the founder of the greatest happiness system of morals and legislation my executor will from time to time cause to be conveyed to the room in which they meet the said box or case with the contents therein to be stationed in such part of the room as to the assembled company shall seem meet.<sup>50</sup>

If the first part of the will tries to enact the fantasy of his post-obit self engaged in ‘thought’ and ‘writing’, this latter part conveys a yearning to engage in posthumous conversation with the living in ‘assembled company’. The impossible enactments of working, writing and socialising with ‘personal friends’ and ‘disciples’ after ‘the apparent end of relation’ project a continuation of the deceased’s unfaltering commitment to engage the living amongst the living. In suggesting a ‘day or days’ to commemorate him each year, Bentham concedes the inadequacy of the ‘Auto-Icon’ as a stand-alone monument to guard his memory against collective forgetting. The philosopher’s afterlife, it would seem, is also contingent on the ethical resolve of the survivors to

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

recollect him and revivify him as part of their ‘spiritual community’. Like Hazlitt’s essay ‘On the Fear of Death’, Bentham’s last will shows just how essential posthumous sympathy, posthumous conversation, and posthumous protection are to any meaningful confrontation with death.

Even though Smith denounces posthumous sympathy as the ‘very illusion of the imagination’, his point about the protective power of such illusion is remarkably sagacious. Posthumous sympathy can ‘guard and protect the society’ precisely because it is an ethical force which summons one to care for the self and the other. Taking the Enlightenment posture against death, Tucker advises that we turn away from melancholic literature, morbid imagery, and funerary conventions. By dismantling the false and irrational associations between our mortal fear and ideological constructs of death, the philosopher tries to deactivate posthumous sympathy in his readers. However, Tucker overlooks the ethical dimension of this ‘second nature’, as well as its potential to overcome the very fear his application of reason seeks to subdue. Rather than turning away from words and images of annihilation, Hazlitt and Bentham deploy them as means of self-commemoration and as defences against the dread of destruction. Instead of suppressing post-obit sympathy, both writers elicit it from their respective communities of readers and friends for aid and protection when they can no longer defend themselves. More importantly, Hazlitt’s reflexive essay and Bentham’s wishful will exemplify the complex, interstitial nature of posthumous life writing, crossing different written genres (essay, epitaph, biography) and material forms (portrait, sculpture, remains). If posthumous life writing represents death ‘in all his most dreadful Shapes to our imagination’, it is only so that, to borrow Montaigne’s words, we may ‘learn bravely to stand our ground, and fight him.’<sup>51</sup> The horror of annihilation cannot be surmounted by minimising our exposure to it: only by confronting it, imagining it, contemplating it, writing it, and representing it can we evolve new strategies of mutual protection and survival.

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<sup>51</sup> *Montaigne’s Essays*, i. 81.

## Crossing Genres, Ethics and Forms of Commemoration

If posthumous sympathy constitutes the psychological and imaginative basis of posthumous life writing, it is the eighteenth-century anxiety about post-obit neglect and historical oblivion which compels its formalisation. Amongst the celebrated eighteenth-century antiquarians such as Horace Walpole, William Stukeley and Thomas Hearne, Richard Gough was perhaps the most vociferous proponent of a native brand of ethnographic scholarship which focuses on British history.<sup>52</sup> Gough's three-volume magnum opus, *Sepulchral Monuments in Great Britain* (1786-96), is especially significant, for it exemplifies how antiquaries in the eighteenth century 'became increasingly aware of how much could be learnt from physical remains on matters upon which the written sources were silent.'<sup>53</sup> Amalgamating sepulchral engravings, sculptural portraits and biographical synopses, the author was as concerned with gleaning historical truths from funerary architecture and sculpture as he was with commemorating eminent *Lives* through benevolent writing. Even the then-aspiring painter and engraver, William Blake, was tasked with the job of producing drawings of London's funerary monuments for Gough's great work.<sup>54</sup> Yet, stripped of its scholastic aura and historiographical exterior, *Sepulchral Monuments* is essentially

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<sup>52</sup> For a more recent assessment of Richard Gough's contribution to the 'science of society', see Rosemary Sweet's 'Antiquaries and Antiquities in Eighteenth-Century England', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34/2 (Winter 2001), 181-206. According to Sweet, antiquarian studies in England tended to concentrate on Greek and Roman antiquities. Gough, however, promoted the study of Anglo-Saxon antiquities, geography and architecture in an effort to preserve and establish an accurate continuum of British history.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 187. See Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments in Great Britain: Applied to Illustrate the History of Families, Manners, Habits, and Arts, at the Different Periods from the Norman Conquest to the Seventeenth Century*, 2 vols. (London: Printed by J. Nichols, 1786-96). It is worthwhile to note that Gough's work on monumental tombs was the first of such kind (and scale) since John Weever's *Ancient Funerall Monuments Within the United Monarchie of Great Britaine, Ireland, and the Islands Adjacent* (London, 1631). Weever's work was reissued in 1767 as *Antient Funeral Monuments, of Great-Britain, Ireland, and the Islands Adjacent* (London: Printed by W. Tooke, 1767).

<sup>54</sup> Sweet, 'Antiquaries and Antiquities in Eighteenth-Century England', 199. For the kind of influence these monuments had on Blake's poetry and art, see David Bindman's 'Blake's Gothicised Imagination and the History of England', in Morton D. Paley and Michael Phillips (eds.), *Essays in Honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 29-49.

a preservation work with an ethical interest at heart. According to the author, his mission was ‘to rescue them [antiquities] and their authors from oblivion.’<sup>55</sup> His mission, in other words, was to save the makers of British nation and history and their *monumentum aere perennius* from a ‘second death’. Conceived in the ethical spirit of posthumous life writing, Gough’s master work embodies one of the earliest attempts at uniting art, writing and physical remains in commemorative history.

Notwithstanding, questions about the proper methods of preserving the dead from oblivion persist throughout the century. Gough’s work constitutes but a development, albeit an important development, in the practice of mourning and commemoration. The genre of writing around which much of this debate took place is, appropriately, the epitaph. In an extensive survey of epitaphs from the latter half of the eighteenth century to the Romantic period, Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch’s identifies Addison’s essay No. 26 in *The Spectator* as the one which ‘sets the tone for much eighteenth-century graveyard-reading.’<sup>56</sup> Published 30 March 1711 (purposely on Good Friday), Addison reflects on the posthumous history, or rather the lack thereof, of the

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<sup>55</sup> Gough’s *Anecdotes of British Topography. Or, an Historical Account of what has been done for Illustrating the Topographical Antiquities of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Printed by W. Richardson and S. Clark, 1768), xxxiv.

<sup>56</sup> See Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch’s ‘The Epitaph and the Romantic Poets: A Survey’, *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 30 (1967), 139. Cf. also Geoffrey Hartman’s article on the subject, ‘Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Nature Poetry’, which was published around the same time and later reprinted in *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958-1970* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 206-30. Both seminal studies on Romantic epitaphs were inspired by Earl Austin Moore’s unpublished doctoral dissertation on ‘The Epitaph as a Literary Form in England and America’. To list some of the works garnered in Bernhardt-Kabisch’s survey of the genre: William Camden’s *Remaines of a Greater Worke, Concerning Britaine, the Inhabitants thereof, Their Languages, Names, Surnames, Empreses, Wise Speeches, Poësies, and Epitaphes* (London: Printed by G[eorge] E[ld], 1605); Thomas Bancroft’s *Two Bookes of Epigrammes and Epitaphs* (London: Printed by I. Okes, 1639); John Le Neve’s *Monumenta Anglicana: Inscriptions on the Monuments of Several Eminent Persons Deceased in or Since 1700 to the End of 1715 (1650 to 1679, 1680 to 1699, 1600 to 1649)*, 5 vols. (London: Printed by W. Bowyer, 1717-9); James Jones’s *Sepulchrorum Inscriptiones: Or a Curious Collection of Above 900 of the Most Remarkable Epitaphs, Antient and Modern, Serious and Merry*, 2 vols. (Westminster: Printed for J. Cluer, A. Campbell, and B. Creak, 1727); W. Toldervy’s *Select Epitaphs* (London: Printed for W. Owen, 1755); and *A Select Collection of Epitaphs and Monumental Inscriptions, with Anecdotes of Distinguished and Extraordinary Persons*, 2 vols. (Ipswich: Printed and Sold by J. Raw, 1806).

departed lives inside Westminster Abbey. In an acute display of posthumous sympathy, he laments the skeletal details in many of the epitaphs he perused:

Most of them recorded nothing else of the buried Person, but that he was born upon one Day and died upon another: The whole History of his Life, being comprehended in those two Circumstances that are common to all Mankind. I could not but look upon these Registers of Existence, whether of Brass or Marble, as a kind of Satyr upon the departed Persons; who had left no other Memorial of them, but that they were born and that they died.<sup>57</sup>

Johnson would have eagerly rebuffed Addison's criticism of minimalist epitaphs in this most sacred repository of British dead had they been contemporaries. According to Johnson's 'An Essay on Epitaphs' (1740), all that is required in the inscriptions of great 'men' is their 'bare name': 'The bare name of such men answers every purpose of a long inscription.'<sup>58</sup> For persons of distinction, the 'bare name' and the dates of birth and death are sufficient to construct a complete and confident report of the deceased's life. Addison, however, laments the absence of details in the lives recorded in stone, details which a passer-by such as he needs to distinguish each life from the rest of 'mankind.' Dates recorded in 'Brass or Marble' without any other inscriptional supplements satirise the departed persons because such 'bare' reports render the history of each lived life unworthy of study or remembrance. Deprived of this life history in stone, 'resurrection' of the deceased cannot be activated through live reading (on Good Friday or on any other day). Thus, Addison envisions an epitaph that is also a biography: one of the many generic crossovers that would later culminate in the Romantic practice of posthumous life writing. As Bernhardt-Kabisch observes, the essayist's censure of dates as exclusive, unremarkable 'Registers of Existence' is challenged by Wordsworth a century after in *Essays Upon Epitaphs I*. The poet would later write: 'To be born and to die are the two points in which

<sup>57</sup> I use the reprinted edition of Addison's 'No. 26. [On Westminster Abbey]', in *The Spectator*, ed. with introd. and notes by Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), i. 108-11, 109.

<sup>58</sup> Johnson's 'An Essay on Epitaphs' was first published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* x (September 1740), 593-6. I quote from the reprinted edition of the essay, in *Johnson: Major Authors*, 96-102, 97.

all men feel themselves to be in absolute coincidence.’<sup>59</sup> While Addison sees the dates of origin and demise as reductive, Wordsworth considers this reduction positively in the egalitarian light of human universality. In other words, the ideal epitaph should be readable to all without the cumbersome excess of biographical details.

It is tempting to cast eighteenth-century essayists like Addison and Johnson in opposition to Wordsworth over the proper characterisation of the dead, except that the discursive reality of epitaph writing is, in both theory and practice, much more convoluted. The Romantic perception that the ideal epitaph is one without inscription is fuelled in part by Wordsworth’s nearly ‘naked’ tombstone and Byron’s confident proclamation ‘My epitaph shall be my name alone’ (from ‘A Fragment’).<sup>60</sup> Yet, despite Wordsworth’s repeated attempts at instituting a formal description of the model epitaph, he is ambivalent about the endurance of grave inscriptions. Contemplating the physiological phenomenon of retention, Locke compares memory loss to eroded inscriptions on tombs in Book 2 of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690):

but yet there seems to be a constant decay of all our ideas, even of those which are struck deepest, and in minds the most retentive; so that if they be not sometimes renewed by repeated exercise of the senses, or reflection on those kind of objects which at first occasioned them, the print wears out, and at last there remains nothing to be seen. Thus the ideas, as well as children, of our youth, often die before us: and our minds represent to us those tombs, to which we are approaching; where though the brass and marble remain, yet the inscriptions are effaced by time, and the imagery moulders away.<sup>61</sup>

The relevance of this philosophical observation to Wordsworth’s autobiographical writings and lamentations on the vanished visions of childhood such as *The Prelude* and *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* cannot be overlooked. Paul H. Fry, for instance, discusses the relationship between Locke’s metaphors of the mind as a graveyard of forgotten ideas and Wordsworth’s

<sup>59</sup> *PWW*, ii. 35. I will quote from Grosart’s edition of *Essays Upon Epitaphs I* unless stated otherwise.

<sup>60</sup> Byron’s ‘A Fragment’, in *Lord Byron: The Major Works*, ed. with introd. and notes by Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 1.

<sup>61</sup> The first edition of Locke’s great work was issued in 1690. I quote from ‘CHAP. X. Of Retention’ in Book 2 of the 1794 canonical edition of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, reprinted in *The Works of John Locke*, introd. John W. Yolton, 9 vols. (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1997), i. 128-34, 130.

autobiographical poems as expressions of ‘epitaphic moments’.<sup>62</sup> Just as significant is the recurring metaphor of ‘brass and marble’ twenty years later in Addison’s essay No. 26. Locke conceives all ideas and memories as material inscriptions subject to decay, the imagery of which ‘moulders away’ like the corpses in the graves. The brass and marble do become satires indeed when the engraved content disappears sooner than the physical surface on which it is etched, or, metaleptically, when the soul of a life expires before the life of its vessel. If for Locke, a man becomes unreadable to himself in time, then for Addison, a man becomes unreadable to all in death. Accordingly, the latter’s distress at the empty ‘Brass or Marble’ memorials of existence in Westminster Abbey extrapolates the individual anxiety of memory loss to the larger context of collective amnesia. Implicit in his periodical essay is the question: how does a community, a society, a nation preserve the memory of all its members from the ineluctable phenomenon of forgetting? Moreover, how does posthumous life writing ‘renew’, ‘repeat’, and ‘reflect’ on our collective memory of the dead? As revealed in the brusque engagement of Addison’s sepulchral meditations, the formal and generic prescriptions of the epitaph are still in flux in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the propriety, the adequacy and the necessity of epitaph writing as the dominant medium of memorialising the dead are inconsistently contested and advocated in the period. The present section will discuss the intellectual history behind the evolution of generic prescriptions for composing epitaph and its forbidden, as well as encouraged, crossovers with history, biography, elegy, monuments, remains and portraiture.

In order to ‘resurrect’ dying ideas in human memory, Locke prescribes constant exercise of active recollection and repetition of mental impressions to help offset the effects of human physiology and time. This early philosopher of psychology goes as far as to propose artificial

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<sup>62</sup> Paul H. Fry’s ‘The Absent Dead: Wordsworth, Byron, and the Epitaph’, *Studies in Romanticism* 17 (1978), 413-33, especially 413 and 417-8.

means by which our memory (as a faculty of the mind) can facilitate the awakening and summoning of dormant ideas. He writes: ‘It is the business therefore of the memory to furnish to the mind those dormant ideas which it has present occasion for . . . consists that which we call invention, fancy, and quickness of parts.’<sup>63</sup> Locke’s suggestion lends itself very well to our understanding of the generic functions and formal arrangements of the epitaph. The principal purpose of a grave inscription is, after all, to preserve the memory of the dead and imprint certain ideas of the dearly departed in the memory of the living. To function as a memory aid, an epitaph should exhibit some measure of originality and inventiveness. John Bowden, an accomplished eighteenth-century essayist on epitaph writing, advises that ‘the more pointed and epigrammatical, the more will they excite Attention, impress the Memory, and answer the End proposed.’<sup>64</sup> The poetic epitaph is preferred to prose inscription because its measured lines, rhythms and sounds serve to reinforce our impressions of the dead through formal, aural and internal resonance. Bowden adds: ‘the versified Epitaph is here spoken of and recommended before all others (for the Generality of Readers) on Account of its assisting the Memory, and adding the Harmony of Sound to the Beauty of Description, and the Energy of Diction.’<sup>65</sup> Finally, this genre of memorial writing satisfies the third scheme of activating our faded ideas of the dead – via ‘quickness of parts’ – in the terse and simple design of English grave inscriptions. The stringent prescriptions for brevity, veracity and simplicity compel the epitaphist to convey the essence of the deceased character quickly before ‘The reader is tired’ and ‘His eyes have

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<sup>63</sup> ‘Of Retention’, i. 132.

<sup>64</sup> John Bowden’s ‘Preface, including An Essay on Epitaph Writing’, in *The Epitaph-Writer; Consisting of Upwards of Six Hundred Original Epitaphs, Moral, Admonitory, Humorous, and Satirical; Numbered, Classed, and Arranges, on a New Plan, Chiefly Designed for Those who Write or Engrave Inscriptions on Tomb-stones. . . . To which is Prefixed, an Essay on Epitaph-writing* (Chester: Printed by J. Fletcher, 1791), i-xxii, ix.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* xiii.

failed.’<sup>66</sup> Form and propriety unite in Johnson’s famous prescription for epitaph writing: it ‘ought not to be longer than common beholders may be expected to have leisure and patience to peruse.’<sup>67</sup> Notwithstanding, this commonly accepted rule of composition evokes a potential flaw in the epitaph as a genre of posthumous writing. The inflexible adherence to length means some details are ultimately left unarticulated as some unuttered remainder of life.

Nevertheless, it is this very remainder of life which renders posthumous life writing an inexhaustible, ongoing work of mourning and commemoration, as the life of the deceased takes on ‘infinite’ representations in time and *over* time. Locke’s numerical approach to the conception of infinity is especially pertinent to the possibility of an endlessly ‘addible’ corpus of posthumous writing. As he also asserts in Book 2 of *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*,

Whatsoever positive ideas we have in our minds of any space, duration, or number, let them be ever so great, they are still finite; but when we suppose an *inexhaustible remainder*, from which we remove all bounds, and wherein we allow the mind an endless progression of thought, without ever compleating the idea, there we have our idea of infinity[.]<sup>68</sup> (my italics)

The Lockean infinity is not predicated on known duration, extension or figure, but on the ‘inexhaustible remainder’ which perpetually transgresses knowable, definable and calculable parameters. In this light, the life of the immortal dead (i.e. an admirable character or benefactor of humankind) must similarly be forever out of ‘all bounds,’ undergoing endless afterlife construction without completion. Moreover, this ‘infinity’ of posthumous existence is only possible after one exits the finite bounds (and bonds) of mortality, at which time the limitless ‘remainder’ of one’s life can begin to provide ‘inexhaustible’ material for new and renewed

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<sup>66</sup> Vicesimus Knox’s essay ‘No. 93: On Monumental Inscriptions’, in *Essays Moral and Literary*, 6th edn., 2 vols. (London: Printed for Charles Dilly, 1785), ii. 47. The first edition of *Essays Moral and Literary* was published in 1778 and would later expand to three volumes.

<sup>67</sup> The quotation is originally from Johnson’s ‘Dissertation on the Epitaphs Written by Pope’, first published in Christopher Smart’s *Universal Visiter* (May 1756) and later revised for reprinting in the collected edition of the *Idler* (1767). I quote from ‘Life of Pope’, in *Lives of the Poets*, iv. 1-93, 81-2.

<sup>68</sup> ‘CHAP. XVII. Of Infinity’, *Works of John Locke*, i. 194-209, 199.

representations. Through ‘invention, fancy, and quickness of parts’, posthumous life writing becomes an indefatigable project. Following this conception of infinity as a state of unceasing flux, the post-obit existence of the illustrious dead is therefore neither static nor conclusively defined. For some, life *really* does not end with death. Locke uses the addition of numbers to illustrate how one may hypothetically realise the idea of infinity:

when the mind pursues the idea of infinity, it there makes use of the ideas and *repetitions of numbers* . . . and when it has added together as many millions . . . of known lengths of space or duration, the clearest idea it can get of infinity, is the confused *incomprehensible remainder of endless addible numbers*, which affords no prospect of stop or boundary.<sup>69</sup> (my italics)

In the context of afterlife, this ‘inexhaustible’ and ‘incomprehensible’ remainder of one’s life derives from the same process which actively maintains memory retention in the individual. For a community to preserve the memory of the dead permanently, then, endless repetitions of and additions to our ideas of the deceased become essential to the memorial process. Posthumous life writing, which repeats and adds to the life of the subject via its myriad manifestations, is therefore a communal and cross-generational work. No single afterlife representation – be it an epitaph, an elegy, a biography or a body of works – can fully delineate the entirety or ‘boundary’ of one’s life before and after death. In line with Locke’s numerical analogy of infinity ( $\infty = x + x + . . .$ ), life before death is a finite but eternally ‘addible’ base number, while life after its temporal cessation yields the true summation of human value. There is always something more to accrue to the narrative of a departed existence, some remainder which remains beyond the horizon of even the most comprehensive posthumous account. All the forms and genres of posthumous life writing are but ‘endless addible numbers’ contributing to the ‘inexhaustible remainder’ of a deceased character. Thus, epitaph writing as a genre of memorialisation is

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. i. 200.

already from the outset insufficient; in order for it to persist as an expression of posthumous life writing, other ‘additions’ would be necessary.

From both literary and anthropological perspectives, the epitaph is, as its etymology suggests, a multi-mediated tool of commemoration.<sup>70</sup> Although Johnson claims that to ‘define an epitaph is useless’ for ‘every one knows that it is an inscription on a tomb’, the genre still retained vestiges of its pagan ritual origin even as late as the eighteenth century.<sup>71</sup> Epitaph originates from the word *Τάφος* in ancient Greek, which did not cover the modern sense of inscription at first. In Homer’s *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, *Τάφος* refers exclusively to ‘funeral-rites’ and ‘funeral feast’, to the ‘funerary and burial ritual and not the actual stone.’<sup>72</sup> The more familiar senses of the ‘grave’, the ‘tomb’ and the ‘dead and buried’ only became dominant in later writings such as Aeschylus’s *Persians* and Sophocles’s *Electra* in the Classical Hellenic period (510 BC to 323 BC).<sup>73</sup> In fact, it is customary for a Greek funerary inscription to include the word *Τάφος* in its composition to mark the ritual occasion for which a tomb is erected.<sup>74</sup> The burial of the deceased – the proper disposal of one’s remains – was absolutely pivotal to one’s safe passage to Hades after death. Inadequate or careless adherence to the rite of interment was even punishable by state law. As the meaning of *Τάφος* transitioned from a ceremonially centred one to a materially oriented one, it became entwined with funerary steles, reliefs and monuments in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. The Street of Tombs (*Η Οδός των Τάφων*) in the

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<sup>70</sup> The anthropological link between epitaph writing and the pagan, Christian, as well as Enlightenment, legacies of death is elsewhere explored in Bewell’s ‘The History of Death’, 187-234.

<sup>71</sup> ‘Life of Pope’, iv. 81.

<sup>72</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott’s *A Greek-English Lexicon*, a new ed. rev. and augm. throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie and with the co-operation of many scholars, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), ii. 1761.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> One can find ample examples of the ritual mention of *Τάφος* in ‘Chapter III: Epitaphs’ of John William Mackail’s *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1906), 149-73. Mackail’s selection of epigrams derives from both the Palatine Anthology and the Planudean Anthology.

Kerameikos district of ancient Athens, for instance, contains some of the most luxuriant sepulchral monuments in the Classical period. Marble tombstones from the period show evident convergence of lapidary inscription, portraitive sculpture, and commemorative biography. The tombstone of Xanthippos demonstrates very effectively the cooperation between various inscripational, biographical and visual components (fig 2.2). Imitating the entablature of classical



Fig. 2.2 The subject of the marble tombstone is the bearded man, Xanthippos. His name is inscribed on the architrave. The two small girl figures on his sides are likely his daughters. The tombstone was made in Athens circa 430-420 BC, now in the British Museum.

temples, the architrave on top transforms the status of an otherwise domestic *Τάφος* to a fane-like monument for Xanthippos. The deliberately disproportionate portraits of the bearded man and his two (adult?) daughters echo the strategy used for differentiating gods from mortals in the Parthenon friezes. Through this extraordinary piece of funerary relief work, the human shoemaker is elevated to the god of shoemaking. Xanthippos's caring and shielding hand on the younger child signals his resolve to support and protect his family both in life and after death.

The *Táφος* appears to be a confident posthumous statement of the wealth he had accrued in life and the benefaction he would leave behind. Reciprocally, the monument demands worship and remembrance from the survivors (in their raised, supplicating hands) as a defensive veneration of the dead. Combined with these sculptural, biographical and architectural elements, the lapidary inscription signifies more than just a name: it signifies a posthumous call for grateful commemoration. More than an inscription, the epitaph embodies the sacrament of bodily disposal, pageantry of material commemoration, and performance of funerary respect at or over the grave (*epi-* ‘at, over’ + *taphos-* ‘tomb’). Remarkably, the close association between the tomb, the inscription and the body still persists to this day.

Godwin’s influential ‘Essay on Sepulchres’ (1809) promulgates the cross-media relations between these funerary implements. The essay proposes a nation-wide scheme to erect and maintain modest memorials over the remains of the illustrious dead at a liberal scale.<sup>75</sup> The memorials recommended in his writing are indeed modest, consisting ‘*very slight and cheap memorial, a white cross of wood, with a wooden slab at the foot of it (where the body had been interred in the open air)*’.<sup>76</sup> One can sense in this proposal a genuine concern for the exposure of bodies ‘interred in the open air’ to neglect, displacement and destruction. His sensationalist attachment to the body is apparent in the passage below:

I am more inclined to the opinion of the immaterialists. . . . But my acquaintance with the thoughts and the virtues of my friend, has been made through my eyes and my ears. . . . I cannot love my friend, without loving his person. It is in this way that every thing which practically has been associated with my friend, acquires a value from that consideration; his ring, his watch, his books, and his habitation.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Godwin’s ‘Essay on Sepulchres: or, A Proposal for Erecting Some Memorial of the Illustrious Dead in All Ages on the Spot Where Their Remains Have Been Interred’, in *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, gen. ed. Mark Philp, 7 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1993), vi. 5-30. The original essay was printed in 1809 (London: Printed for W. Miller), but written between 27 November 1808 and 3 February 1809.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* vi. 7.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* vi. 8.

Like Locke before him, Godwin also links memory to physiology, relying on repetitions of the total sense impressions of the subject through his ‘eyes’ and ‘ears’ to evoke the feelings of love and admiration. The memory of a loved one is thus kept alive through an empirical reanimation of the deceased, a commemorative fantasy constructed upon the assuring presence of a subject’s possessions and vestiges. Moreover, this posthumous bond between life and ‘things’ conveys the centrality of material history (in such objects as bodies, artefacts, and letters) to biographical history, without which ‘all other records and remains are left in a maimed and imperfect state.’<sup>78</sup>

For Godwin, the remains of this fictitious friend (possibly an indirect reference to Wollstonecraft) represent the ‘inexhaustible remainder’ of a life at the brink of historical oblivion. From this ‘inexhaustible’ corporeal remainder, countless material objects associated with its brief sojourn emerge as endless ‘additions’ to the afterlife of the departed. According to the essayist, the interred body constitutes the inalienable basis of post-obit life and memory:

All this consideration of *hic jacet*, it must be granted, is very little. But such is the system of the universe, that is all that we have for it. It is our only reality. The solidity of the rest, the works of my friend, the words, the actions, the conclusions of reason and the suggestions of faith, we feel to depend, as far as they are solid to us, upon the operations of our own mind. They stand, and are the sponsors, for my friend; but what the grave incloses is himself.<sup>79</sup>

One can clearly infer from this passage the indispensability of the corpse to Godwin’s system and hierarchy of posthumous representations. The corpse is not metonymically transposable to the corpus or the summation of life’s activities: the body-as-being is absolutely not substitutable. *Hic jacet* is the only reality of our life after death, the authentic (non-metonymic) proof of a being that once existed in flesh. As a result, the corpus can only ‘stand’ for his friend but not supplant him. Godwin’s outlook on literary afterlife is in stark contrast to the long-held consolatory prospect of surviving in one’s own writings. Charles Lamb’s fanciful comparison of

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid. vi. 30.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. vi. 10.

the Bodleian library to a repository of souls in ‘Oxford in the Vacation’ (1823) epitomises posthumous consolation in writing. He exclaims inside the Bodleian: ‘What a place to be in is an old library! It seems as though all the souls of all the writers, that have bequeathed their labours to these Bodleians, were reposing here, as in some dormitory, or middle state. I do not want to handle, to profane the leaves, their winding-sheets.’<sup>80</sup> In this mausoleum of ‘mouldering learning,’ the souls of writers exchange their mortal remains for literary remains, and the rows of bookshelves become rows of graves and epitaphs.<sup>81</sup> The literary souls reposing in books are resurrected through reading in the same way that the buried bodies are recalled to life upon the reading of their engraved histories.

Perceiving *monumentum aere perennius* as an inadequate means of preserving lives, Godwin’s reference to the overwrought convention of *hic jacet* in epitaph writing insists on the close nexus between body, grave and inscription. In fact, Wordsworth’s anthropologically informed definition of the epitaph in *Essays Upon Epitaphs I* reiterates Godwin’s preoccupation with the contiguity of cadaver and inscription as constituents of a proper memorial. As he states poignantly at the end of ‘Essay on Sepulchres’, ‘I regard the place of his [friend’s] burial as one part of his biography.’<sup>82</sup> A year after the publication of Godwin’s essay, Wordsworth defines epitaph as

a record to preserve the memory of the dead, as a tribute due to his individual worth, for a satisfaction to the sorrowing hearts of the survivors, and for the common benefit of the living: which record is to be accomplished . . . in *close connection with the bodily remains of the deceased*.<sup>83</sup>

This ‘*close connection with the bodily remains of the deceased*’ is necessary because ‘We respect the corporeal frame of Man, not merely because it is the habitation of a rational, but of an

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<sup>80</sup> I use the reprinted edition of Charles Lamb’s ‘Oxford in the Vacation’, in *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, 6 vols. (London: Methuen & Co., 1912), ii. 8-13, 11.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> ‘Essay on Sepulchres’, vi. 29-30.

<sup>83</sup> *Essays Upon Epitaphs I*, PWW, ii. 31.

immortal Soul.’<sup>84</sup> To Wordsworth, the buried body also represents the ‘inexhaustible remainder’ of the infinite life of the dead, and the ‘inexhaustible’ source of memory and instruction for the living. It is the most authentic ‘habitation’ and the most tangible trace of a once-living subject. Given Godwin’s anti-establishment views and republican renunciation of hereditary power and property, his proposition to preserve the dead from oblivion – even those of mediocre and questionable worth – seems uncharacteristic yet convincingly benevolent. The essay, as Newlyn astutely notes, is ‘a deeply Burkean essay – saturated with the terror of futurity that gives Burke’s *Reflections* their almost hysterical feel’.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Godwin’s essay does feel hysterical, apocalyptic at times even. However, the dominant feeling is that of traumatic loss. The emotional process of writing, collecting and memorialising Wollstonecraft’s life for the 1798 *Memoirs* likely altered his sensibility toward the influence and legacy of deceased authors. His description of the catastrophic bereavement of a familiar, hypothetical ‘friend’ leaves little doubt for the inspiration of his essay:

If this friend were my familiar acquaintance, if he dwelt under the same roof with me, if (to put the strongest case) I were so fortunate that the person worthy of all this encomium were the wife of my bosom, there is something in the nature of which we partake, that gives a value to such a possession beyond its abstract and intrinsic merits.<sup>86</sup>

Compiling her letters, communicating with her friends, and requesting information from abroad, Godwin made a determined attempt to collect everything so that he might reclaim this lost ‘possession’ – his physical bond with Wollstonecraft – from oblivion. The intense pain of domestic deprivation and failed defence sublimates into an ethical anxiety about collective

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. ii. 30.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Chapter 7: “One Power with a Double Aspect”: The Formation of a System of Defences’, in *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism*, 288. Alternatively, Paul Westover assesses Godwin’s essay in the contexts of literary tourism, cultural continuity, biography and national thinking in ‘3. William Godwin, Necro-Tourism, and the Empirical Afterlife of the Dead’, in *Necromanticism: Travelling to Meet the Dead, 1750-1860* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 48-74.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Essay on Sepulchres’, vi. 9.

extinction and group preservation. Informed by his own experience as both a widower and biographer, it is not surprising that Godwin's proposal to draft an institutional charter to erect and maintain sepulchral memorials across Britain should unite epitaph, history, biography, and physical remains.

The interpenetration of epitaph and history is obvious in one of the universally acknowledged rules of grave inscription: veracity. Johnson states in 'An Essay on Epitaphs' that a sepulchral inscription 'ought always to be written with regard to truth.'<sup>87</sup> Yet, the same essayist is aphoristically quoted by Boswell for sanctioning the use of 'exaggerated praise' in epitaph writing: 'Allowance must be made for some degree of exaggerated praise. In lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon oath.'<sup>88</sup> The irregularity in Johnson's position is edifying because it exposes a conflict of purpose (and interest) in the use of epitaph as a historiographical apparatus, as a compassionate avowal of the deceased's worth, and more subtly as a display of the epitaphist's own compositional aptitude. Even his allegedly extempore and highly acclaimed 'An Epitaph on Claudy Phillips, Musician' (1740), Anthony W. Lee argues, is a 'complex interplay of homage and hostility' to '[eclipse] the upstart Garrick' and '[establish] his moral and creative authority over the readers of his poem.'<sup>89</sup> Refusing to make allowance for poetic licence or 'exaggerated praise', Henry Kett's 'Essay on Epitaphs' (1787) criticises 'complimentary' inscriptions 'in which the dead are more indebted for their praise to invention than to merit.'<sup>90</sup> In strict observance to truth, he recommends that the 'writers of epitaphs ought to be historians, and

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<sup>87</sup> 'An Essay on Epitaphs', 100.

<sup>88</sup> *Life of Johnson*, ii. 407.

<sup>89</sup> Anthony W. Lee's 'Introduction', in *Dead Masters: Mentoring and Intertextuality in Samuel Johnson* (Lanham, Md.: Lehigh University Press, 2011), 16. For a reprinted edition of the poem, see *Johnson: Major Authors*, 9.

<sup>90</sup> Henry Kett's 'Essay on Epitaphs', in *The British Essayists; with Prefaces Biographical, and Critical*, ed. Rev. Lionel Thomas Berguer, 45 vols. (London: Printed for T. and J. Allman, 1823), xli. 211. The collection of essays is from the short-lived periodical, *Olla Podrida*, No. 1-44. The original essay was published as 'No. 39' in the periodical on 8 December 1787.

not poets.’ On one hand, the enforcement of historical objectivity and impartiality functions to purge lies, vanity and bombast from grave inscriptions. On the other hand, it serves to curb a writer’s ambition to exploit such occasions for his or her own literary end.<sup>91</sup> After examining a number of instruction manuals and essay writings on epitaph from the latter half of the eighteenth century, one can sense a broad intellectual effort to steer the genre away from its affiliation with poetry to historiography. As Vicesimus Knox observes in essay ‘No. 93: On Monumental Inscriptions’ (1778), ‘In general, the metrical are inferior to the prosaic. Some of the best are crowded with antitheses, a fault which renders them inferior to the Grecian.’<sup>92</sup> Antithesis, a common epigrammatic device which deploys witty juxtaposition and opposition of ideas, is construed by Knox as a disgraceful poetic excess to the epitaph as a genre of history writing. History does not need metrical, much less rhetorical, flourish.

By the late eighteenth century, the epitaph appears to be on the verge of a generic overthrow, whose dual allegiance to poetry and history is becoming increasingly tenuous. This double allegiance is further strained by the formal prescription for brevity in epitaph writing. Knox, especially, is revolted by the excess of words. As he observes, ‘in recording the virtues of the departed, either zeal or vanity often leads to an excess perfectly ludicrous.’<sup>93</sup> The outcome of unrestrained affection from survivors or unchecked self-aggrandisement by the deceased is an inscription saddled with lengthy exaggeration but not truth. Kett also writes: ‘Their panegyric often fatigues with prolixity, and disgusts with fulsomeness. Take away the dates from

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<sup>91</sup> Such exploitations are evident in epitaph writings by such celebrated poets as Ben Jonson, Dryden, Pope and Cowper. For the literary history and development of the English poetic epitaph, see Joshua Scodel’s *The English Poetic Epitaph: Commemoration and Conflict from Jonson to Wordsworth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>92</sup> ‘On Monumental Inscriptions’, ii. 46.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 45.

complimentary epitaphs, and they have all the appearance of dedications.’<sup>94</sup> Subtracting the historical verity of dates, the verbose dedication would simply elevate the dead ‘out of reach of human passions’ and render them ‘too transcendent for imitation.’<sup>95</sup> Lengthy epitaphs lose the force of credibility, and consequently the strength of persuasion. Knox cites Greek inscriptions as model precedents for contemporary and future epitaphs. He states: ‘The noble ancients, those patterns of unaffected magnificence, consulted real dignity in the brevity of their epitaphs. As an historical monument . . . they recorded little more than the name of the departed.’<sup>96</sup> Names and dates may seem trivial, but to Kett, Knox and the great eighteenth-century epitaphist, Samuel Parr, they exude the gravitas of empirical strength and historical exactitude. Control of length, therefore, keeps the various corrupt impulses of the dead, the living and the epitaphist in check.

However, there are also practical reasons for keeping epitaphs short. John Bowden explains in his ‘Essay on Epitaph Writing’ (1791): ‘Long Lines certainly give an Air of greater Gravity, but are often attended with great Inconvenience of Inscription on a common Tombstone, as well as consequent additional Expence, which to the Artist and his Employer are Matters of Consequence.’<sup>97</sup> As an advocate of verse epitaphs, the essayist actually extols the formal gravity and solemnity of long poetic inscriptions. Rather than compromising the truth, long lines show due reverence to the dead. As Bowden observes, ‘Probably some may think that the short, light, and jingling Measures [inconsistent] with the Gravity of a serious Epitaph.’<sup>98</sup> Short lines may even be deemed by some as incompatible with the propriety of a funerary inscription. For both cost and aesthetic considerations, he instead prescribes ‘an Epitaph of Eights and Sixes’, which

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<sup>94</sup> ‘Essay on Epitaphs’, xli. 211.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> ‘On Monumental Inscriptions’, ii. 46.

<sup>97</sup> *The Epitaph-Writer*, xx.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

‘(being indented) looks much handsomer on a Tombstone.’<sup>99</sup> While Kett and Knox exalt brevity as a rule of epitaph writing from the dual lens of a moralist and historiographer, Bowden recommends ‘Eights and Sixes’ (four-feet and three-feet lines) out of practical, ethical, and visual concerns.

With all this attention to the epitaph as a medium of historical record, one is compelled to ask: can an epitaph really be a reliable source of history? Though a sepulchral inscription should always conform to truth, Johnson also admits that an epitaph is ‘professedly a panegyric, and, therefore, not confined to historical impartiality’.<sup>100</sup> Ironically, the moral object of the epitaph to inspire respect for the dead and emulation from the living prohibits the genre from ever becoming a reliable source of historical record. After all, as Johnson explains, ‘the monuments of the dead are not intended to perpetuate the memory of crimes, but to exhibit patterns of virtue.’<sup>101</sup> Generic propriety and civic responsibility in posthumous life reporting would eventually culminate in Lamb’s precocious reflection on the dearth of criminal records in grave inscriptions. The child Lamb famously asked his sister, ‘Where are all the *bad* people buried?’<sup>102</sup> Indeed, if ‘every failing’ is suppressed in a grave inscription out of ethical consideration, how can an interested reader uncover the whole truth of the inhumed subject? Johnson suggests the following to those who are curious enough to read beyond the epitaph: ‘No man ought to be commended for virtues which he never possessed, but whoever is curious to know his faults must inquire after them in other places’.<sup>103</sup> Although Johnson does not elucidate where these ‘other

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> ‘An Essay on Epitaphs’, 100.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 101.

<sup>102</sup> See the notes to Lamb’s 19 October 1810 letter to Wordsworth, in *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marris, Jr., 3 vols. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), iii. 59. Wordsworth reiterates the same question at the beginning of *Essays Upon Epitaphs II*, PWW, ii. 41.

<sup>103</sup> ‘An Essay on Epitaphs’, 100-1.

places' are, it is not difficult to imagine that by 'other places' he is likely alluding to biography and other intimate forms of life writing.

Strangely enough, one of the earliest essayists to suggest a generic link (or cross-contamination) between biography, history, epitaph, and portrait art is Kett. He writes: 'What biography is to history, an epitaph is to biography. It is a sketch which marks the great outlines of character, and excites curiosity to view the portraits as painted on the pages of history.'<sup>104</sup> In this chiasmic analogy between the three genres of writing, an epitaph is conceived as a unit of biography just as a biography is perceived as a unit of history. As a posthumous report of the dead, the logic behind these generic relations is unambiguous. Kett extends the analogy to portrait art to help his readers visualise these generic connections: an epitaph is likened to a sketch or outline, biography to a completed portrait, and history to a book gallery of portraits. Unlike Kett, however, Knox tries to impede this cross-generic contamination by setting down a formal discrimination between epitaph and biography. After perusing numerous inscriptions in the kingdom, he complains:

The misfortune has been, that many of them have encroached on the province of biography; and real dignity has been lost in the affectation of it, in a tedious and circumstantial detail of descents, pedigrees, and relationship. The reader is tired, before he has obtained a clear idea of character and family described.<sup>105</sup>

Knox distinguishes epitaph from biography strictly in formal terms. Convinced that all lapidaries should be brief and concise, he argues that too much detail and historical information in funerary inscriptions (such as descents and pedigrees) constitute an encroachment 'on the province of biography.' In other words, the dignity and attraction of the ideal epitaph lie in its capacity to arouse curiosity through scant details. 'Tedious' and attention-demanding accounts of the dead

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<sup>104</sup> 'Essay on Epitaphs', xli. 212-3.

<sup>105</sup> 'On Monumental Inscriptions', ii. 47.

would only wear down a reader's interest in learning more about the subject's life and character. As Knox's remark implies, the grave inscription should only be a signpost to the extra-epitaphic materials which the readers must uncover on their own from 'other Places.' Biography, then, represents a genre of deferred writing for a much-deferred reading.

In spite of Knox's patent attempt at separating biography and lapidary inscription along a strictly formal line, his generic conception of biography in fact resonates with several key features of epitaph writing. It is not a coincidence that in his *Essays Moral and Literary*, the essay which follows on the heels of 'On Monumental Inscriptions' is 'No. 94: Cursory Thoughts on Biography'.<sup>106</sup> Rather than elaborating his case against the crossover of epitaph and biography, he opposes Kett's system of cross-generic relations by dissociating the latter from history. Unlike general history, Knox defines biography as

an exact and authentic account of individuals, who have greatly excelled in any of the departments of active or contemplative life, seems to be a mode of instruction best suited to an animal, like man, prone to imitation. When a single character is distinctly delineated, we can pursue the outline, with an ease equal to that with which the painter copies from the original picture placed before his eyes.<sup>107</sup>

Like an epitaph, a biography aims to be 'exact,' 'authentic' and instructive. One may even say both genres of life writing share the same core values and moral objectives. The analogy to portrait paintings indicates a conceptual overlap between Kett's and Knox's respective taxonomies of the two genres of posthumous life writing. Knox's model biography aims for the sort of character outline which Kett's ideal epitaph aspires to accomplish. To the former, the feature which distinguishes biographical writing from historical writing is the very formal attribute which limits free expression in epitaph writing. Invoking an observation from Aristotle, he writes: 'the story of an individual, as it is a single object, is comprehended more fully, and

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<sup>106</sup> Knox, 'No 94: Cursory Thoughts on Biography', ii. 48-52.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. ii. 49.

therefore attended to with greater pleasure, than a history in which many personages are introduced.’<sup>108</sup> Civil history, like terse epitaphs, can only provide a quick gloss and incomplete viewing of eminent personages. Once again, length constitutes the chief formal and generic barrier between epitaph, biography and history.

Even so, his stringent generic taxonomy cannot suppress the cross-pollination between the three genres of life writing implicit in his own discourse. His great admiration for Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus’s veracious biographies of the Roman emperors in *De Vita Caesarum* shows the extent of this cross-pollination. According to Knox, Suetonius’s biographies are

Concise, nervous, simple, they please by their perspicuity, and their freedom from ambitious ornament. To the honour of their author it must be said, that he appears to have advanced nothing through flattery or resentment, nor to have suppressed any thing through fear, but to have paid an undaunted regard to veracity.<sup>109</sup>

The critical language of his previous essay on monumental inscriptions resurfaces in this unreserved exaltation of the second-century Roman writer as a model for modern biographers. Knox’s illustration of the ideal biography typifies the ‘veracity’ and ‘impartiality’ of history and the ‘concise, ‘simple’ and unornamented characteristics of epitaph writing. Unsurprisingly, the essayist nominates Plutarch as the first example of great biographers from the Roman age. Knox venerates him as ‘a diligent collector of facts, as a warm friend to virtue, [and] as an entertaining narrator’.<sup>110</sup> His famous reflection on the ethics and methodology of biographical writing in ‘Cimon’ anticipates the perennial struggle of posthumous representation in epitaph, biography, history and portraiture alike. Plutarch writes:

Since I regard a portrait which displays a person’s character and personality as far superior to one which reproduces his body and features, in my sketch—that is, in these *Parallel Lives*—I shall include and give

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. ii. 51.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. ii. 49.

a true account of the man's actions. With this record my debt of gratitude is adequately discharged; he would have refused to accept a false and fictional account of himself as payment for his true testimony.<sup>111</sup>

The passage sets a powerful precedent for the recurring metaphor of portrait painting in eighteenth-century discourses on biography, the legacy of which is evident in the essays by Knox and Kett, as well as in James Granger's influential four-volume work on collective 'portraits-and-lives', *A Biographical History of England, from Egbert the Great to the Revolution . . . Adapted to a Methodical Catalogue of Engraved British Heads* (1769).<sup>112</sup> Preferring painting to sculpture as the most appropriate analogy for his work as a biographer, Plutarch allies himself more with a realist painter than an idealist painter. For him, the sculptural art lacks the tonal blemishes and details which a realistic portrait provides. Crucially, we find in this passage a tentative effort to conceive biography as an ethical (and grateful) expression of posthumous life writing. As a biographer, he sees himself morally obligated to repay the dead for providing posterity both cautionary and exemplary models of existence. According to this moral calculus, the 'true testimony' of a well-lived life (as an invaluable gift to humankind) must be remunerated with an equally truthful posthumous account.

However, Plutarch also acknowledges the equally powerful prohibition against speaking ill of the dead, which jeopardises the principle of veracity as the generic foundation of biography.

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<sup>111</sup> Plutarch's 'Cimon', in *Greek Lives: A Selection of Nine Greek Lives*, trans. Robin Waterfield, introd. and notes by Philip A. Stadter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 119.

<sup>112</sup> Though haphazard and disorienting in its arrangement, Granger's seminal work in the emerging genre of 'portraits-and-lives' was expanded and republished into the nineteenth century. For a later edition of his work, see *A Biographical History of England, from Egbert the Great to the Revolution: Consisting of Characters Disposed in Different Classes, and Adapted to a Methodical Catalogue of Engraved British Heads: Intended as an Essay towards Reducing our Biography to System, and a help to the Knowledge of Portraits: Interspersed with Variety of Anecdotes, and Memoirs of a Great Number of Persons, not to be found in any other Biographical Work: With a Preface, Shewing the Utility of a Collection of Engraved Portraits to supply the Defect, and Answer the Various Purposes, of Medals*. 4th edn., 4 vols. (London: Printed by W. Nicholson, 1804). William Jerdan's beautifully collated *National Portrait Gallery of Illustrious and Eminent Personages of the Nineteenth Century; with Memoirs, by William Jerdan, Esq. F.S.A. Dedicated, by Permission, to THE KING*, 5 vols. (London: Fisher, Son, & Jackson, Newgate Street, 1830-4) represents the culmination of Granger's early effort, and a crucial steppingstone to the establishment of England's first National Portrait Gallery.

To pre-empt this contradiction of interest, he tries to reach an uneasy compromise between these two ethical demands. He continues:

since it is difficult—or, more probably, impossible—to represent a man’s life as entirely free from shortcomings and blemishes, we should supply the truth . . . when dealing with the good aspects of our subject’s life. However, the flaws and defects which . . . taint his actions we should regard as lapses from a virtue rather than as manifestations of vice. We should not, then, be particularly eager to overemphasise these flaws in our account.<sup>113</sup>

If Plutarch’s effort to reconcile the good and the bad in his subject’s life appears desperate, it is because his language already betrays the impossibility of achieving ‘historical impartiality’ in biographical writing. In the end, his practice of biography consists of highlighting the good and suppressing the bad. Plutarch’s conception of biography thus echoes Johnson’s description of the epitaph. And like an epitaph, his biographical work is ‘professedly . . . panegyric, and; therefore, not confined to historical impartiality.’ More troubling still, if the flaws of the dead cannot be found in their epitaphs and biographies, where else can they be found? Knox’s hero biographer of ‘the golden age’ unwittingly discloses the ineluctable collapse from one genre of life writing into another.<sup>114</sup> The link between epitaph and biography is also evident in the essayist’s endorsement of an enlarged and improved edition of the ambitious compendium of British *Lives*, *Biographia Britannica* (1747-66).<sup>115</sup> Anticipating Godwin’s proposal to erect memorials over the remains of both proven and potential worthies, Knox’s support for more works such as

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 120.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Cursory Thoughts on Biography’, ii. 49.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. ii. 52. *Biographia Britannica* is the eighteenth-century precursor to *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB). As a splendid collation of eminent lives across the British Isles, the work is an inevitable offspring of eighteenth-century antiquarianism, nationalism, historiography and popularisation of *Lives*. The six-volume work was first published between 1747 and 1766 under the editorship of William Oldys. I use the second edition of *Biographia Britannica: or, the Lives of the Most Eminent Persons who have Flourished in Great Britain and Ireland from the Earliest Ages, to the Present Times: Collected from the Best Authorities, Printed and Manuscript, and Digested in the Manner of Mr. Bayle’s Historical and Critical Dictionary*, ed. Andrew Kippis, 6 vols. (London: Printed by W. and A. Strahan, 1778-93). Andrew Kippis edited the second edition of *Biographia Britannica* with the assistance of Joseph Towers, which appeared in five volumes between 1778 and 1793. The sixth volume appears to be lost.

*Biographia Britannica* conveys his desire to record the lives of all authors before they die. As he explains, ‘Worth is often unknown, or known imperfectly, till after death; till that period, when it is too late to learn particular circumstances with accuracy.’<sup>116</sup> Death of the subject, in other words, marks the beginning of the end for the production of an accurate biography. It heralds not only the loss of a human life but also the collective loss of a vital storage of learning and information. For Godwin, these unrecorded lives leave humanity a world that is forever ‘in its infancy’, a society in arrested development.<sup>117</sup> Knox expresses this anxiety in the ongoing loss of circumstantial details for ‘many of our second-rate authors and actors in every department of life,’ whose only surviving records are the dates of their birth and demise.<sup>118</sup> His vision of biography as a medium of post-obit life writing corresponds in principle to Godwin’s vision of epitaph as a mode of posthumous life record. William Oldys himself, the editor of the first edition of *Biographia Britannica*, confirms the commemorative purpose of such epic undertaking. The dictionary of historical personages, he explains, is ‘a kind of general MONUMENT erected to the most deserving of all ages, an expression of gratitude due to their services, and the most probable means of exciting, in succeeding times, a spirit of emulation’.<sup>119</sup> What makes Oldys’s description of *Biographia Britannica* particularly striking is the way he compares the multivolume work to a monumental edifice, ‘a palace’ even, for the illustrious dead.<sup>120</sup> In fact, the use of architectural motifs and metaphors recurs throughout his ‘Preface to the First Edition’. Like Xanthippos’s *Táφος*, Oldys’s apologia for the collection of written *Lives* exposes an understated affinity between biography and sepulchral monument in posthumous life writing.

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<sup>116</sup> ‘Cursory Thoughts on Biography’, ii. 51.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Essay on Sepulchres’, vi. 8.

<sup>118</sup> ‘Cursory Thoughts on Biography’, ii. 51.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Preface to the First Edition’, in *Biographia Britannica*, vol. i, p. x.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* vol. i, p. xvii.

In spite of these cross-generic and cross-media affinities, the genre of writing with the greatest kinship to epitaph is inarguably elegy. In ‘The Country Church-yard, and Critical Examination of Ancient Epitaphs’ [*Essays Upon Epitaphs II*], Wordsworth praises epitaphs that ‘carry conviction to the heart at once that the author was a sincere mourner’.<sup>121</sup> In order to impress upon others the sincerity of his grief, the epitaphist should compose the work of mourning with genuine interest and emotional ‘intensity’.<sup>122</sup> A sincere and earnest epitaph ought to be created with ‘the very strength of passion’.<sup>123</sup> Crucially, Wordsworth applies what had earlier been the chief anxiety among elegists in the second half of the eighteenth century – anxiety about the expression of unadulterated sorrow – to the composition of epitaph. Interrogating the sincerity of Gray’s *Elegy*, John Young, for example, stipulates the following set of expectations for the uncontrived elegy: ‘It is not a purpose, but a frame. The sorrow, that is sorrow indeed, asks for no prompting. It comes without a call. It courts no admiration. . . . Its strong-hold is the heart.’<sup>124</sup> However, in *Essays Upon Epitaphs I*, Wordsworth also advises that when writing an epitaph, the ‘passions should be subdued’ and ‘the emotions controlled’ for the ‘purpose’ of leaving a more permanent public record of ‘thoughts and feelings’.<sup>125</sup> Instead of imputing these seemingly contradictory remarks to bad faith, his recommendations should be considered together as part of an effort to amalgamate elegy and epitaph. Although William Shenstone is not particularly keen on prescribing rules for verse writing, he does stipulate the continued conservation of ‘the voice and language of grief’ in elegy.<sup>126</sup> More importantly, his

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<sup>121</sup> *PWW*, ii. 44.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 55.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 56.

<sup>124</sup> John Young’s *A Criticism on the Elegy written in a Country Church Yard. Being a Continuation of Dr. J—n’s Criticism on the Poems of Gray* (London: Printed for G. Wilkie, 1783), 11.

<sup>125</sup> *PWW*, ii. 38.

<sup>126</sup> I use the reprinted edition of William Shenstone’s ‘A Prefatory Essay on Elegy’, in *Works in Verse and Prose*, 3 vols. (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1791), i. 20. The essay and elegies were published posthumously in 1764, a

laissez-faire treatment of the genre in ‘A Prefatory Essay on Elegy’ (1764) renders it the ideal expression of grief for Wordsworth’s ‘sincere’, ‘intense’ and artless mourner. In the vaguest, free-styling terms possible, Shenstone defines ‘the style of elegy’ as ‘simple and diffuse’, ‘free and unconstrained’, and ‘flowing as a mourner’s veil.’<sup>127</sup> It may be argued that Wordsworth’s schema of the model inscription assimilates both the unconstrained emotional spontaneity of the elegy and the highly regulated historiographical nature of the epitaph. In this cross-generic vision, the ephemeral feelings of the survivors are merged with the eternal memory of the dead. Despite the transience of grief, and the impropriety of its inclusion in the epitaph as a permanent record of the deceased, the provision for lament offers the living a way to recall the deceased for belated sympathy and protection.

Shenstone’s emancipative conception of elegy notwithstanding, its praxis followed very specific metrical form in the Classical Hellenic period. In ancient Greek, an elegy (*ἔλεγχος, ὁ*) means a ‘sad song’ or a ‘song of the nightingale,’ then later a ‘lament’ and ‘song of mourning’.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, the elegy (*ἔλεγεῖον, τό*) is formally defined by its metre: a ‘distich consisting of hexameter and pentameter’.<sup>129</sup> Significantly, *ἔλεγεῖον, τό* can also refer to ‘a single line in an elegiac inscription’, an ‘elegiac poem or inscription’.<sup>130</sup> Following these formal and generic definitions of the elegy, one can easily discern the similarities between Greek laments and grave inscriptions in both subject and metre. The use of hexameters associates elegy and epitaph with the practice of Greek epigram (*ἐπίγραμμα*), which ‘in its original meaning is

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year after Shenstone’s death. It is important to note that the essay and most of his elegies were written as far back as 1745, and therefore pre-date the publication of Gray’s *Elegy*.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Liddell and Scott’s *A Greek-English Lexicon*, i. 530.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. For the elegiac metre, see also ‘I. “Imitation”’, in *The Poetics of Aristotle*, ed. with notes and trans. by S. H. Butcher, rev. 3rd edn. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902), 8-9.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

precisely equivalent to the Latin word “inscription”.<sup>131</sup> As Hoyt H. Hudson observes, the generic range of epigrammatic applications is quite exceptional, covering proverbs, gnomic verses, lyrics, satirical essays, elegies and epitaphs.<sup>132</sup> In the English tradition, efforts to differentiate epitaph from elegy often concentrated on the formal aspect of length. George Puttenham asserts this generic directive in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589): ‘So as if it exceed the measure of an Epigram, it is then (if the verse be correspondent) rather an Elegie then an Epitaph.’<sup>133</sup> The Renaissance writer goes so far as to suggest a corrective enforcement of this general stricture to curb the practice of long funerary inscriptions in churches across England. He comments, severely:

They be ignorant of poesie that call such long tales by the name of Epitaphes, they might better call them Elegies, as I said before, and then ought neither to be engrauen nor hanged vp in tables. I haue seene them neuertheles vpon many honorable tombes of these late times erected, which doe rather disgrace then honour either the matter or maker.<sup>134</sup>

The separation of epitaph and elegy according to length continues down the centuries. In an 1810 essay titled ‘Examples of that Species of Literature termed Commemorative or Monumental’, the anonymous contributor writes: ‘Epitaphs, which derive their *pithiness* and *terseness* from the brevity of the Athenian idioms . . . differ very materially from the *Elegy*, that has been handed down to us by the *Romans*, or the *Dirge*’.<sup>135</sup> By the Romantic period, the epitaph still retains the epigrammatic characteristics of ‘pithiness’ and ‘terseness’, while ‘brevity’ continues to be the

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<sup>131</sup> Mackail’s ‘Introduction’, in *Select Epigrams*, 1.

<sup>132</sup> See Hoyt H. Hudson’s ‘I. The Nature of the Epigram’, in *The Epigram in the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 1-21, especially 13.

<sup>133</sup> George Puttenham’s ‘Chap. XXVIII. Of the poeme called Epitaph used for memoriall of the dead’, in *The Arte of English Poesie. Contriuied into three Bookes: The first of Poets and Poesie, the second of Proportion, the third of Ornament* (London: Printed by Richard Field, 1589), 45.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* 46.

<sup>135</sup> ‘Examples of that Species of Literature termed Commemorative or Monumental: The Essay’, *European Magazine, and London Review* 57 (February 1810), 129. Rev. Baptist Noel Turner or Joseph Moser likely contributed to the essay. See also Bernhardt-Kabisch’s discussion of the same essay in ‘The Epitaph and the Romantic Poets: A Survey’, 142.

mainstay of a proper epitaph. However, the essayist's comparison of epitaph to the Roman elegy brings up a problematic attribute of elegy: its connection to amatory poetry.

Horace's professed distaste for the infamous *voti sententia compos* ('votive epigram of gratitude for [the lover's] granted prayer') function of elegy in *Ars Poetica or: Epistle to the Pisos* demonstrates just how deeply the lover's plaint is entwined with the genre.<sup>136</sup> Often read as an etiological account of the elegy in Latin poetry, Horace's *Ars Poetica* (in particular ll. 75-8) documents the twofold function of elegy as *querimonia* ('funerary lamentation') and *ad amores* ('to the loves'). No longer just a work of mourning, the elegy is also deployed as a votive inscription to express one's gratitude for the fulfilment of love.<sup>137</sup> Shenstone, too, views 'Love-elegy' as an effeminate corruption of the genre's original role in commemoration. Negligent of 'order and design', the amatory elegy is 'addressed chiefly to the ladies' and requires 'little more than tenderness and perspicuity.'<sup>138</sup> Unlike the moral and contemplative elegies, the 'Love-elegy' is disorderly, without skill, and devoid of universal value. Shenstone relegates it to a lesser order of elegy because it does not partake in the tradition where serious poets such as Theocritus, Virgil, Spenser and Milton have made their mark: namely, the pastoral tradition. The influence of the lover's plaint left by Ovid and Catullus is also evident in Johnson's own bifurcation of epitaph and elegy. Concerned with the mood and tone of composition, he observes:

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<sup>136</sup> See lines 73-118 of Horace's *Ars Poetica or: Epistle to the Pisos*. Horace's enigmatic lines 'Versibus impariter iunctis querimonia primum, / post etiam inclusa est uoti sententia compos' (ll. 75-6) have been frequently invoked since the Middle Ages as justification for the dual function of elegy as funerary lament and lover's plaint. I use H. Rushton Fairclough's Latin edition and translation of *Ars Poetica*, in *Horace: Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica* (London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942), especially 456-7 for the controversial lines. On Horace's aversion to contemporary offerings of votive epigram for amatory fulfilment, see Mark Edward Clark's 'Horace, *Art Poetica* 75-78: The Origin and Worth of Elegy', *The Classical World* 77 (1983), 1-5.

<sup>137</sup> See W. Ludwig's '12. Petrus Lotichius Secundus and the Roman elegists: prolegomena to a study of Neo-Latin elegy', in *Classical Influences on European Culture A.D. 1500-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 171-190, especially 176.

<sup>138</sup> Shenstone, 'A Prefatory Essay on Elegy', i. 23.

In writing epitaphs, one circumstance is to be considered which affects no other composition; the place in which they are now commonly found restrains them to a particular air of solemnity, and debars them from the admission of all lighter or gayer ornaments. In this, it is that the style of an epitaph necessarily differs from that of an elegy.<sup>139</sup>

In contrast with the restrained and solemn epitaph, the elegy is comparatively ‘lighter’ and ‘gayer’. Given the dichotomous allegiances of the elegy, the essayist is clearly referring to the *ad amores* practice of the genre, as opposed to its *querimonia* counterpart. Johnson’s differentiation of the two related genres echoes Horace’s critique against the contamination of elegy as a tragic form by the comedic yoke of love poetry. Even then, the essayist’s own definition of elegy is inconsistent at best. In *Lives of the Poets*, Johnson cites Shenstone’s definition of elegy as ‘the effusion of a contemplative mind, sometimes plaintive, and always serious, and therefore superior to the glitter of slight ornaments.’<sup>140</sup> When discoursing on the epitaph, elegy is condemned for its witty devices and amatory fulsomeness. Yet, when writing the life of an eminent elegist, he adopts a definition of elegy that is traditionally more suitable to epitaph. This contradictory deployment of genre definitions not only suggests an inconsistency in Johnson’s language, but it also reveals the extent to which both genres of mourning are inextricably bound to one another. As discussed in the previous chapter, the combinatory arrangement of the elegy-epitaph in Gray’s *Elegy* and in Finch’s quatorzains (‘XLV. Elegiac. Epitaphial.’ and ‘XLVII. Elegiac. Also Epitaphial’) exemplifies the hybridising impulse of commemorative life writing. Furthermore, one should keep in mind that not all epitaphs are grave and solemn. Humorous and satirical inscriptions endure, despite a concerted effort by eighteenth-century essayists to expunge ‘all lighter or gayer ornaments’ from epitaphs. Bowden’s 1791 collection of original epitaphs, for instance, contains a section specifically devoted to ‘Epitaphs of the Humorous and

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<sup>139</sup> ‘An Essay on Epitaphs’, 98.

<sup>140</sup> ‘Life of Shenstone’, in *Lives of the Poets*, iv. 128-9.

Satirical Kinds'.<sup>141</sup> Like elegy, the epitaph can also admit 'lighter or gayer ornaments.' Although both genres share some functional similarities, elegy is nevertheless more apt at preserving ephemeral feelings, shifting moods and fleeting occasions. Unlike lapidaries, the elegy offers, Shenstone claims, a method of conserving quotidian 'incidents in life' and 'dispositions of mind'.<sup>142</sup> In other words, it can record and valorise moments that appear incidental, trivial and unmemorable.

Since lapidary inscription is supposed to represent the dead in the most accurate and permanent way possible, the epitaphist/historian should aim to be a restrained, objective presence in the composition. However, even after committing all this intellectual resource to the formalisation of epitaph as an impartial mode of historicist writing, practice still deviates from theory. When James Mackintosh's wife died in April 1797, the renowned political writer immediately deferred questions of lapidary inscription to Parr.<sup>143</sup> Fraught with composure, affection and pain, he writes:

I have given directions for a marble tablet on which it is my wish to inscribe a humble testimonial of her virtues. But I am divided in opinion whether the inscriptions should be Latin or English. English seems more unostentatious and more suitable to her sex. But Latin is better adapted to inscriptions, and I think it difficult to compose an English inscription, which shall be simple enough without being meager. . . . The topics [for the epitaph], are so obvious. . . . Her faithful and tender discharge of the duties of a wife and a mother, my affection, the irreparable loss to her orphans. . . . I cannot suppress my desire to expatiate on her worth at greater length than may be perhaps consistent with the severe simplicity of a classical inscription.<sup>144</sup>

The letter is significant for two reasons. First, the writer's learned opinion on the ethics and aesthetics of lapidary inscription aptly summarises the contribution of eighteenth-century

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<sup>141</sup> See 'PART III. Containing Epitaphs of the Humorous and Satirical Kinds. Designed as Satires on Vice and Folly', in Bowden's *The Epitaph-Writer*, 100-52.

<sup>142</sup> 'A Prefatory Essay on Elegy', i. 23

<sup>143</sup> See James Mackintosh's 25 April 1797 letter to Samuel Parr, in *The Works of Samuel Parr, LL.D. with Memoirs of His Life and Writings and a Selection from His Correspondence*, ed. John Johnstone, 8 vols. (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1828), viii. 575. For the epitaph, see iv. 583.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

intellectual history to the formalisation of commemorative art. Mackintosh patently acknowledges the generic prescriptions for funerary inscription. The epitaph for his late wife will record her domestic worth and perpetuate her memory as a paragon of feminine virtue for posterity. In strict observance of the form, his inscription for Catherine Mackintosh will be short and unpretentious. Second, the latter part of the letter is a telling admission of the inadequacy of the grave inscription to guard and preserve the true worth of the deceased. Ironically, the 'severe simplicity' imposed by the exacting rules of inscription runs the risk of under-representing and under-reporting the life of his wife. In spite of his impressive display of fortitude at the outset of the letter, Mackintosh eventually breaks down under the weight of his grief. The 'irreparable loss to her orphans', his abiding affection, and his irrepressible 'desire to expatiate on her worth at greater length' threaten to subvert the terse and regulated epitaph with a verbose biography and an unrestrained elegy. Implicit in his epistolary communication is a longing for some hybrid of epitaph-elegy or epitaph-biography and an unmistakable urge to mount a more fulsome form of belated defence against the formal dictates of the lapidary inscription. In a momentary lapse of self-control, objectivity is replaced by subjectivity, brevity by prolixity, and self-possession by sentimental effusion. Mackintosh's letter is crucial to our understanding of posthumous life writing precisely because it concedes the limit and insufficiency of any one genre, form or medium to commemorate life.

In tracing the generic and formal development of epitaph, we acquire an appreciation for the deep interconnected structures of various memorial writings and commemorative media. More importantly, no single genre or medium can subsume all the others; instead, it is the very recognition of a given genre's limitation which compels the aid, and sometimes incorporation, of complementary forms. Even a genre as adaptable and materially grounded as epitaph is

constrained by length and morally vested interests. Be it biography, epitaph, elegy, monument or portraiture, none can adequately memorialise the dead without the support of other commemorative forms. Individually, each constitutes an ‘endless addible number’ and a finite representation of the deceased. Only by repeating the addition of these individual forms of life can we approach a conception of the ‘incomprehensible remainder’, or the ‘infinity’ of afterlife. Accordingly, the eternal preservation of a particular *Life*, as well as collective *Lives*, is contingent upon the deployment of endless anticipatory death accounts and continuing posthumous life representations. Rather than averting all textual descriptions and visual symbols of death, eighteenth-century and Romantic poets, biographers, essayists, antiquaries, artists and even philosophers repeatedly confront them, appropriate them and, at last, master them for their own conditional survival. Appearing just a decade after the advent of the nineteenth century, Godwin’s and Wordsworth’s related meditations on sepulchres represent the culmination of a century of intellectual commitment to formalise posthumous sympathy. What emerged from the process was a communal practice of posthumous life writing, which aimed to overcome collective oblivion and mutual neglect by the ceaseless yet strategic additions of epitaph, biography, elegy, portrait, letters, monument and remains.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Epitaph and ‘Other Places’: Mediating Genres in Romantic Posthumous Life Writing

Ach! sie haben	Johann Reibold
Einen braven	of
Man begraben—	Catlenburg
Vielen war er mehr—	

(Coleridge’s *Notebooks*, i. entry 418)

In May 1799, Coleridge stumbled upon this epitaph in a small village called Lehrberg while travelling in Germany.<sup>1</sup> This itinerant recorder of churchyard epitaphs jotted down the German inscription in his notebook and included it in his 19 May 1799 letter to Thomas Poole with a faithful translation.<sup>2</sup> The grave inscription is just one of the many German adaptations of Matthias Claudius’s much-beloved ‘Bei dem Grabe meines Vaters’ (‘At the Grave of my Father’, 1773). In the letter to Poole, Coleridge claims to have translated the verse epitaph ‘word for word’.<sup>3</sup> The following version, he alleges, is an exact translation of the original:

Ah! they have  
Put a brave  
Man in Grave!  
He was more than Many!

Yet, as Kathleen Coburn sharply observes, the last line is in fact a mistranslation of the German epitaph recorded in his notebook.<sup>4</sup> In spite of the poet’s well-known aptitude for the German

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<sup>1</sup> Lehrberg is about three miles from Clausthal. I quote from Coleridge’s 19 May 1799 entry, in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 5 vols. (London: Routledge; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957, 2002), i. entry 418.

<sup>2</sup> See Coburn’s *Notes* to entry 418 for the variant translations of the German epitaph by Coleridge and Wordsworth.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* The original lines in Matthias Claudius’s ‘Bei dem Grabe meines Vaters’ are as follows:

Ach, sie haben  
Einen guten Mann begraben,  
Und mir war er mehr[.] (ll. 2-4 and repeated from ll. 14-16)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

language, Coleridge appears to have ignored basic prepositional grammar. 'Vielen war er mehr' should translate as 'To many he was more'. The subtle shift in syntax and grammar changes the meaning of the last line completely. In the German epitaph, the final line conveys the communal estimation of the worth of the deceased, the personal impact of his life on the many he knew, and the memory of one whose significance transcends even the inscriptions. Coleridge's inexact variant, accidental or intentional, pronounces an objective judgment on the outstanding merit of the deceased's life, effectively distinguishing him from the unexceptional mass of humanity. The communal disposition of the German verse assumes an overbearing, if not elitist, character in the English (mis)translation. Complicating this deviation in posthumous representation is the acknowledged fact that the original line in Claudius's poem – 'Und mir war er mehr' – actually reads 'And to me he was more.' Unlike Coleridge's German transcription and English mistranslation, Claudius's line is a grief-stricken avowal of the mourner's intimate knowledge and subjective appreciation of the dead.

Confounding these attempts at translating, negotiating and mediating Johann Reibold's abiding significance to the living is Wordsworth's own German modification and translation of the recorded epitaph. In *Essays Upon Epitaphs II*, the poet-critic defends the seeming monotony of the predictable language of graveyard inscriptions. He writes:

An experienced and well-regulated mind, will not, therefore, be insensible to this monotonous language of sorrow and affectionate admiration; but will find under that veil a substance of individual truth. . . . an Epitaph must strike with a gleam of pleasure, when the expression is of that kind which carries conviction to the heart at once that the author was a sincere mourner.<sup>5</sup>

Wordsworth's vindication of monotonous epitaphs applies specifically to lapidaries in rural churchyards, not monumental inscriptions. While inscriptions for persons of fame or rank profit from the expertise of professional epitaphists or learned men of letters, epitaphs in rural

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<sup>5</sup> PWW, ii. 44.

communities often enlist the help of friends, kin or church ministers. The disparities in setting, wealth and training necessitate a different measure of 'originality' in epitaph writing. Rather than privileging the aesthetic and innovative aspect of originality, Wordsworth accords greater value to the affective originality, or authentic feelings, of the inscriber as both 'author' and 'mourner.' Through the extemporaneous craft of the sincere mourner, even monotonous expressions and familiar repetitions in epitaphs can rouse emotion and admiration in 'experienced and well-regulated' readers. Yet, how can a reader distinguish a sincere repetition from an insincere one when circumstantial details of the recollected epitaph are absent? Remarkably, Wordsworth instantiates a model for affective epitaph writing using the same inscription recorded in Coleridge's notebook. He states:

This may be done sometimes by a naked ejaculation; as in an instance which a friend of mine met with in a church-yard in Germany, thus literally translated: 'Ah! they have laid in the grave a brave man: he was to me more than many!'

Ach! sie haben  
Einen Braven  
Mann begraben  
Mir war er mehr als viele.<sup>6</sup>

The poet's conception of 'naked ejaculation' sensationally embodies both sincerity and spontaneity in the unmediated act of expression. In Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), 'ejaculation' is defined firstly as 'the act of darting or throwing out' and secondly as a 'short prayer darted out occasionally.'<sup>7</sup> The sense of 'darting out' and 'throwing out' prayers and emotional utterances connects 'ejaculation' to another popular cognate of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See the corresponding entry in volume 1 of Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language; in which the Words are Deduced from their Originals, Explained in their Different Meanings, and Authorized by the Names of the Writers in Whose Works they are Found. Abstracted from the Folio Edition, by the Author, Samuel Johnson, LL.D. To which is Prefixed a Grammar of the English Language*, 11th edn., 2 vols. (London: Printed for J. Johnson, C. Dilly, G.G. and J. Robinson, W.J. and J. Richardson, R. Baldwin, F. and C. Rivington, J. Mathews, J. Cuthell, J. Walker, W. Lowndes, J. Scatcherd, H. D. Symonds, G. Wilkie, J. Stockdale, W. Clarke and Son, Longman and Rees, Vernor and Hood, S. Bagster, Cadell and Davies, Wynne and Scholey, J. and A. Arch, Murray and Highley, T. Hurst, J. Harding, J. Wallis, and A. and J. Black, 1799).

elegiac poetry: 'effusion.' In Johnson's *Dictionary*, 'effusion' (from Latin, *effusio*) is defined as the 'act of pouring out', 'the act of shedding' and the 'act of pouring out words.'<sup>8</sup> As expected, 'effusion' is also linked to the outflow of words and fluids in ancient Greek. The Greek *ἐκχέω* is a precursor to the Latin *effusio* and covers a wide semantic field: 'to pour out liquids', 'to be drained', 'to pour forth words', and 'to give oneself up to any emotion'.<sup>9</sup> Wordsworth's 'naked ejaculation' – like Young's uncontrived sorrow and Shenstone's free-flowing grief – resonates with the multiple senses of 'effusion', converging on the image of a sincere mourner who gives himself up to verbal and lachrymose outpouring of assorted feelings. More importantly, the term 'ejaculation' (from Latin, *ex iacio*, for 'to throw out') can be construed as a play on the epitaphic convention of *hic jacet* (from *hic iaceo* for 'here lies'): the inscription signifies the locus where mourners 'throw' (*iacio*) their words and tears of woe on the body that 'lies' (*iaceo*) below.

Wordsworth's inclusion of the German epitaph transcribed by Coleridge is a powerful demonstration of his epitaphic sensibility, for it shows how affective originality contributes to aesthetic originality. Astonishingly, a close examination of the German lapidary in *Essays Upon Epitaphs II* evinces another variant and misreading of the final line. Wordsworth tessellates parts of Coleridge's transcription ('*Vielen* war er mehr') and Claudius's template ('Und *mir* war er mehr') to create his own version of the line: '*Mir* war er mehr als *viele*' (my italics). The essayist then translates this verse hybrid as 'he was to me more than many!' Compelled to valorise the deceased in both personal and monumental terms, the implied epitaphist creates a derivative yet original expression of unadulterated grief by repeating, re-synthesising and reinventing (by mistake almost!) the same line. The ethical impulse to 'ejaculate' the meaning of the dead 'to me' summons 'me' (the mourner) to 'pour out' something more permanent, more original and more

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Liddell and Scott's *A Greek-English Lexicon*, i. 526.

characteristic about the irreplaceable other in relation to the world. Like a palimpsest, Wordsworth's line contains traces of the different variants of the same epitaph. Combining Claudius's expression of private loss and Coleridge's assertion of public worth, the hybrid line brings together the contrapuntal values of transience and permanence, bereavement and consolation, and humility and celebrity. Wordsworth's 'naked ejaculation' repeats the 'monotonous language of sorrow' with both sameness and difference. The result is an aesthetic originality which arises from the combinatory mediation of posthumous life representations. And this aesthetic originality becomes, in turn, the textual evidence of an attempt at affective originality. Frances Ferguson's reading of Wordsworth's note to 'The Thorn' provides an apt summary of the poet's defence of repetition in language. She writes:

Repetition . . . [overleaps] the question of the faithful imitation of the passion. . . . The mind's clinging to words thus represents a kind of protective fidelity to the initial passion which seems to insist upon the validity of that passion precisely through being unable to find words more adequate than the ones it clings to.<sup>10</sup>

The inadequacy of finding better words to articulate the mind's 'initial passion' actually makes repetition a more faithful expression of the original passion. Repetition of language thus strengthens and validates the sincerity of one's feelings. Repeating with differences, the four resulting accounts of the dead create four distinct modes of posthumous representation: communal memory, monumental celebration, private lamentation, and original commemoration. All these subtle variations and the consequent divergences in their ethical aims only demonstrate the epitaph's richness of expression, creative potential, moral sensitivity, and diversity of attitude.

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<sup>10</sup> Frances Ferguson's '1. Writing about Language: Wordsworth's Prose', in *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 14. See the reprinted edition of 'The Thorn' (1798), in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940-9; 2nd edn. [of vols. i-iii], Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952-4), ii. 240-8. Consider Wordsworth's own note to the poem: 'every man must know that an attempt is rarely made to communicate impassioned feelings without something of an accompanying consciousness of the inadequateness of our own powers, or the deficiencies of language. During such efforts there will be a craving in the mind, and as long as it is unsatisfied the speaker will cling to the same words, or words of the same character' (ii. 513).

Nevertheless, Wordsworth's alteration of the original verse is not entirely unproblematic, especially in regards to his formulation of the ideal epitaph as a spontaneous and authentic 'naked ejaculation'. The incorporation of minor yet sense-altering elements from both Claudius's poem and Coleridge's notebook version exemplifies a deliberate effort to mediate and control expression. Even the 'darting out' and 'throwing out' of 'unconstrained' utterances appear to follow a set of planned trajectories. As I have alluded to both here and in previous chapters, Wordsworth's conception of the ideal epitaph is cross-fertilised (or cross-contaminated) with history, biography, elegy and 'effusion'. Already in the variants of the German lapidary we can detect a covert clash between the epitaphic display of restraint and permanence and the elegiac exhibition of egoism and transience. Perhaps overly reductive, Coleridge defines elegy as an absolute involution of the poetic self: 'Elegy is the form of poetry natural to the reflexive mind. It *may* treat of any subject, but it must treat of no subject *for itself*; but always and exclusively with reference to the poet himself.'<sup>11</sup> Coleridge's mistranslation of *Vielen war er mehr* from 'To many he was more' to 'He was more than Many!' certainly satisfies the public function and monumental quality of the epitaph. Johann Reibold must be remembered for all time because he is better and braver than the rest, it seems to say – not because his loss was profoundly felt by many. Conversely, Wordsworth's rendition ('he was to me more than many!') tempers Coleridge's insensitive epitaph with an elegiac focus on grief and intimate knowledge. He achieves this by inserting the figure of the sincere and protective mourner back into the depersonalised epitaph. Even as he tries to stitch together the finest fabrics of elegy and epitaph,

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<sup>11</sup> Coleridge's 23 October 1833 view on elegy was first published in Henry Nelson Coleridge's *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1835). I quote from the reprinted version in *Table Talk Recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge*, ed. Carl Woodring, 2 vols. [no. 14 of CWC] (London: Routledge; Princeton: Princeton University, 1990), ii. 266.

the attempt itself already raises questions about the suitability, adequacy and necessity of either genre to the defence of the dead and the preservation of communal bond.

Contemporary study of Romantic epitaphs shows substantial engagement with Wordsworth's inscription poems. Influenced by Bernhardt-Kabisch's and Geoffrey Hartman's forays into this under-appreciated genre of poetical writing, the subject was later taken up by Fry, Ferguson, Bewell, and more recently Bennett.<sup>12</sup> Ferguson's work, for instance, examines Wordsworth's conception of epitaph as the epitome of poetic expression and its connection to the origin of language as inarticulate, pre-linguistic signs.<sup>13</sup> Acknowledging the anthropological link between death and language, Bewell analyses the way in which Wordsworth constructs a history of death based on language as an alternative to the one furnished by Enlightenment discourse.<sup>14</sup> Since the history of language is a history of death, any deployment of language is essentially 'epitaphic'.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, despite the number of comprehensive surveys devoted to Wordsworth's 'epitaphic' writing, most critics adopt Fry's application of 'epitaphic moment' or Ferguson's use of 'epitaphic mode' in their discussions.<sup>16</sup> Since the topic has not been broached with substantial generic rigour, these studies usually revolve around familiar works such as 'Tintern Abbey', 'Lines left upon a seat in a Yew-Tree', 'The Thorn', the Lucy poems, *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*. However, none of these poems are strictly epitaphs. Although Hartman, D. D. Devlin

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<sup>12</sup> See Bennett's 'Chapter 4: Inscription poems: impossible writing', in *Wordsworth Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 78-100. Building on the works of Paul de Man and Cynthia Chase, Bennett discusses the performative act of writing in the present and the relative permanence of that very act in Wordsworth's inscription poems. Cf. also Paul de Man's 'Autobiography as Defacement', in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 67-81.

<sup>13</sup> See '5. Wordsworth's Epitaphic Mode', in *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit*, 155-72.

<sup>14</sup> See Bewell's 'The History of Death', 187-234. The idea that language is where one encounters one's own death and burial derives from de Man's influential work on the subject. Bewell resituates de Man's collapsing of language, epitaph and autobiography in a more historicist context and with greater sensitivity to the Enlightenment discourse of death.

<sup>15</sup> I highlight the term 'epitaphic' in quotations to stress the generic haze under which it is deployed in contemporary criticisms.

<sup>16</sup> Fry's 'The Absent Dead', 413, and Ferguson's *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit*, 155.

and J. Douglas Kneale have each offered their own accounts of Wordsworth's engagement with the genre, their definition of epitaph remains disconnected from the context of its genre history and practice.<sup>17</sup> In fact, other than the group of epitaphs translated from the verses of Gabriello Chiabrera, the poet has written more *about* epitaphs than epitaphs themselves.<sup>18</sup>

This common oversight may be attributed to Hartman's premature pronouncement of Wordsworth's conquest of the genre's conventions and history. He writes: 'because Wordsworth recovers the generic factor, we no longer need to recognize the genre which specialized it. Wordsworth's form appears to be self-generated rather than prompted by tradition'.<sup>19</sup> The implication of such a statement is clear. Since the poet has 'self-generated' the genre of epitaph, given it a personal stamp of innovation as it were, it is no longer necessary to pursue a specialised genre understanding of his 'epitaphic' writings. In reality, however, Wordsworth's practice of the genre is much more ambivalent and convoluted, beset at times with failures. As Joshua Scodel points out, 'Wordsworth's epitaphic poetry simultaneously combats and confirms the demise of the epitaph as a vital literary form.'<sup>20</sup> Indeed, even as the personal elegy becomes prevalent in the nineteenth century, Wordsworth continues to defend the utility of epitaph amid his own struggle with the genre's limitation. The poet's 'Epitaph' (1835-7) – redubbed later as 'Written after the Death of Charles Lamb' – is arguably one of the most outstanding examples of his struggle with both genres of posthumous life writing. During its arduous composition,

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<sup>17</sup> See J. Douglas Kneale's *Monumental Writing: Aspects of Rhetoric in Wordsworth's Poetry* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1988); Hartman's 'Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Nature Poetry', 206-30; and D. D. Devlin's *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Epitaphs* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

<sup>18</sup> For Wordsworth's translations of Gabriello Chiabrera's epitaphs, see 'Epitaphs and Elegiac Pieces', in *PW*, iv, 248-53. In the winter period of 1809-10, he translated ten epitaphs from Chiabrera, six of which were published in Coleridge's *The Friend* as 'Epitaphs Translated from Chiabrera'. Anthony Mortimer discusses Chiabrera's influence on Wordsworth's poetic practice in 'Wordsworth as a Translator from Italian', in Anthony Mortimer (ed.), *From Wordsworth to Stevens: Essays in Honour of Robert Rehder* (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 2005), especially 80-7.

<sup>19</sup> 'Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Nature Poetry', 224.

<sup>20</sup> Scodel's 'Chapter 12. Wordsworth and the End of the Epitaphic Tradition', in *The English Poetic Epitaph*, 404.

Wordsworth was also working on one of his most admired and accomplished commemorative pieces, 'Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg' (1835-7). Given the proximity of their composition histories, I will examine the generic confluence of both poems and the elaborate crossovers of improvisation, effusion, elegy, epitaph and biography in the latter poem. The first section of the chapter delves into the complex generic relationship between 'extempore effusion', improvised performance and elegy in 'Extempore Effusion'. The second section looks at Wordsworth's mediation of the formal and ethical dictates of elegy, epitaph and biography by carefully studying the tortuous composition process of his 'Epitaph' on Lamb. The final section scrutinises the disjunction in posthumous representation when genre distance is not respected, and considers its commemorative impact on the only woman writer in 'Extempore Effusion'.

### **Ejaculation of Naked Grief: 'Effusion on Effusion *pour away*'**

Composed in November 1835 and published for the first time in the *Newcastle Journal* for 5 December 1835, the poem lamenting the consecutive bereavements of Wordsworth's friends and acquaintances is often categorically defined as an elegy.<sup>21</sup> The elegiac strain of the verses is unmistakable as the supposed dirge on James Hogg, who died on 21 November 1835, grows into a larger work of mourning that takes stock of the extinction of a literary community. From Hogg

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<sup>21</sup> See Janette Currie's 'Re-Visioning James Hogg: The Return of the Subject to Wordsworth's "Extempore Effusion"', *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780-1840* 15 (Winter 2005), 7-28; Stephen Gill's "'The Braes of Yarrow": Poetic Context and Personal Memory in Wordsworth's "Extempore Effusion Upon the Death of James Hogg"', *Wordsworth Circle* 16/3 (Summer 1985), 120-5; and William Ruddick's 'Subdued Passion and Controlled Emotion: Wordsworth's "Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg"', *Charles Lamb Bulletin: William Ruddick Issue*, n.s. 87 (July 1994), 98-110. For an early publication of the poem, see Wordsworth's *Extempore Effusion, upon reading, in the Newcastle Journal, the notice of the Death of the Poet, James Hogg* in *The Athenæum*, 424 (12 December 1835), 930-1. For the poem, I use the canonical 1836-7 edition in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, 6 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1836-7), v. 335-6, and Selincourt's reprinted edition of the poem and *The Fenwick Notes* in *PW*, iv. 276-8 for the poem and iv. 459-62 for the headnote.

to Sir Walter Scott, to Coleridge and Lamb, and finally George Crabbe, 'brother followed brother' (l. 23) to the grave. The poem also features other generic characteristics of a conventional elegy. According to Sacks, some of these generic conventions include the figure of the seasonal god, redirected elegiac questioning, repetition and recognition of loss.<sup>22</sup> As chief antagonists in elegy, time and death are frequently represented in rhythmic repetitions and seasonal metaphors. The 'rhythm of lament', as Sacks calls it, is evident in such repetitions as 'From sign to sign' (l. 14) and 'brother followed brother' (l. 23).<sup>23</sup> Through this unrelenting march of sign to sign and figure after figure, 'the elegy recounts and reiterates the fact of death'.<sup>24</sup> Death is inevitable. The idea of seasonal death recurs in such commonplace vegetative metaphors as the 'groves' (l. 6) shedding their 'golden leaves' (l. 7) and the 'ripe fruit, seasonably gathered' (l. 35). Coleridge, 'The rapt One' with his 'godlike forehead' (l. 17), assumes the figure of the seasonal god whose 'every mortal power' (l. 15) is for a moment 'frozen at its marvellous source' (l. 16), but promises to return in time when thawed. Unlike the other mortal brothers, he alone 'sleeps in earth' but is not dead (l. 18). As a temporal divinity, this 'heaven-eyed' poet (l. 18) both naturalises the promise of future regeneration and reawakening and the control of time and changing seasons. This figural apotheosis of Coleridge embodies a simultaneous submission and resistance to the constants of nature and laws of decay. Wordsworth's elegiac questioning – 'Who next will drop and disappear?' (l. 28) – shifts 'his focus from the lost object . . . outward to the world', effectively redirecting his own grief and frustration to an amorphous, unresponsive audience.<sup>25</sup> The question tries to placate the sorrow of the mourner by passing on the control (and blame) of death to a silent and uncontrollable outside

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<sup>22</sup> See Sacks' *The English Elegy*, especially 18-32.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 23.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

force. Wordsworth's elegiac questioning functions to console the living through mediated self-distancing. One can discern such an effect in the rhetorical question over gratuitous attachment and display of grief: 'but why, / O'er ripe fruit, seasonably gathered, / Should frail survivors heave a sigh[?]' (ll. 34-6). Elegiac questioning becomes a vehicle for elegiac consolation. Moreover, the recognition of loss that is so essential to the process of mourning is everywhere apparent in the poem. Scott, the 'mighty Minstrel', now 'breathes no longer, / 'Mid mouldering ruins' (l. 9-10) and 'death upon the braes of Yarrow' has closed Hogg's eyes (l. 11-12). Lamb, too, has 'vanished from his lonely hearth' (l. 20). In the end, both the personified Yarrow River and Ettrick Forest mourn 'their Poet dead' (l. 44) as topographical companions to the 'Ettrick Shepherd'. As a 'work' and 'process' of mourning, the elegy moves from personal lamentations (via recollection) of the deceased to the deflection of elegiac anguish to an external audience. Under the psychoanalytic framework, the final self-distancing act in the process of mourning is achieved in the withdrawal of one's 'attachment from the dead.'<sup>26</sup> Wordsworth's poem also exhibits this self-withdrawal from the dead by transposing or 'exporting' the author's grief to the figures of the mourning river and forest in the concluding lines on Hogg, as well as on the diffuse figure of the 'Poet dead.'

There is another feature of course which links the elegiac nature of 'Extempore Effusion' to Coleridge's egoist definition of elegy. Recall his definition of elegy as a poetical genre which 'may treat of any subject, but it must treat of no subject *for itself*; but always and exclusively with reference to the poet himself.' As a centripetal expression of the poet's inner world, the elegy should be subjective and self-concerned. Through the Coleridgean lens, Wordsworth's poem becomes an autobiographical account of the author's own creative development, maturation and, of course, survival. One can clearly discern a Dante-esque quality to the work

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 24.

already in its opening stanzas. Just as Virgil is Dante's guide in his descent to the Inferno, the 'Ettrick Shepherd' is Wordsworth's 'guide' (l. 4) 'When first, descending from the moorlands' (l. 1). Upon crossing the boundary between the world of life where 'the Stream of Yarrow glide' (l. 2) and the world of death where the 'mighty Minstrel' lies, Wordsworth's 'steps' through Limbo are led by 'the Border-minstrel' (l. 8). Once Wordsworth crosses the border into the underworld where 'low' Scott lies amid 'mouldering ruins' and death has closed the eyes of Hogg, the poet is led by a poet-god to the Paradise where 'every mortal power' of genius is 'frozen at its marvellous source' for perpetuity. Coleridge gives this traveller of worlds a glimpse of that 'marvellous' otherworldly source of genius and afterlife to which Lamb has vanished. As the journey concludes, the poet pilgrim is tolled back to himself, much like Keats's narrator in 'Ode to a Nightingale', by 'A timid voice, that asks in whispers, / "Who next will drop and disappear?"' (ll. 27-8). The centrifugal journey to the outer worlds is suddenly withdrawn to an intensely subjective awareness of his own mortality, as the question beckons to his own turn to 'drop and disappear'. Still, an even more salient question underlies this sombre call of mortality: will his own artistic exertion bear fruit and elevate him to the Paradise of immortal fame? Or will his oeuvre fail him and bury him in 'mouldering ruins' in the Inferno of posthumous anonymity? Guided and led by Hogg and Scott, the survivor comes into his own as a poet and 'forth-looks' with Crabbe (l. 31) to his own seasonal maturity and literary immortality. Wordsworth's elegiac consolation for the survivors transforms into anticipatory self-consolation, as he asserts his own status as a 'ripe fruit, seasonably gathered'. Accordingly, why should he and other 'frail survivors heave a sigh' for his own deferred death? The suggestion is that posthumous lament and protection is unnecessary for an accomplished writer such as himself. At least that is the kind of conclusion one might reach if the Coleridgean approach to elegy is followed to its logical

culmination. However, if Wordsworth's 'Extempore Effusion' is really and simply an elegy, then why does the poem title deliberately evade any references to 'Elegy,' 'Monody' or 'Elegiac Stanzas'?

The title of the work is indeed significant, for it brings together the genres of extempore writing and elegiac effusion with profound sensitivity to their individual genre peculiarities. Until the appearance of the 1836-7 anthologised edition of Wordsworth's *Poetical Works*, pre-1837 publications of the composition retain the original hefty title of *Extempore Effusion, upon reading, in the Newcastle Journal, the notice of the Death of the Poet, James Hogg* (1835). This title and its minor variants can be found in *The Athenæum* and other daily newspapers. After reading a notice about Hogg's death on 21 November 1835 in an issue of *Newcastle Journal*, Wordsworth quickly composed some lines of the poem through an amanuensis.<sup>27</sup> The first seven stanzas were sent to John Hernaman, the editor of the journal, on 30 November 1835 with another three stanzas on 1 December 1835 for publication four days later.<sup>28</sup> The ten stanzas would form the bulk of the current form, while the final stanza on Felicia Hemans was composed two weeks later, privately circulated, and would not appear with the rest until the 1836-7 edition.<sup>29</sup> What is remarkable about the composition history of 'Extempore Effusion' is the astonishing speed with which Wordsworth generated these memorable lines. The poem certainly lives up to the expectation of its title as an extemporaneous work. All the occasion-bound and circumstantial details attached to the pre-1837 title are not simply extraneous supplements; rather, they perform the rhetorical function of corroborating the poem's 'extemporaneous' claim. It impresses upon its readers the immediacy of Wordsworth's response to reading and his

<sup>27</sup> See his 30 November 1835 letter to John Hernaman, the editor of the *Newcastle Journal*, in *LY*, iii. 127. Ebba Hutchinson is recorded by Francis Kilvert to have been Wordsworth's amanuensis. See *Kilvert's Diary: Selections from the Diary of the Rev. Francis Kilvert*, ed. William Plomer, 3 vols. (London: Cape, 1938-40), i. 318.

<sup>28</sup> See his 1 December 1835 letter to Hernaman, in *LY*, iii. 128.

<sup>29</sup> See Wordsworth's mid-December 1835 letter to Robert Perceval Graves, in *LY*, iii. 139.

consequent reaction in writing via the equally instantaneous medium of newspaper. The title may have a rhetorical and performative effect, but it does not in any way undermine the poet's claim to the spontaneity of his production. Ebba Hutchinson, the alleged amanuensis for the burgeoning lines of the poem, is recorded by Rev. Francis Kilvert for the following recollection:

once she was staying at the Wordsworths' the poet was much affected by reading in the newspaper the death of Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd. Half an hour afterwards he came into the room where the ladies were sitting and asked Miss Hutchinson to write down some lines which he had just composed. She did so and these lines were the beautiful Poem called *The Graves of the Poets*.<sup>30</sup>

Though no manuscript bearing this title has ever been found, the wording of it – 'The Graves of the Poets' – will be significant later in my discussion. Hutchinson's mention of this nonexistent manuscript notwithstanding, her testimonial helps substantiate the poem's claim to immediacy and spontaneity. Furthermore, it acknowledges the poet's sensitivity to the death of a fellow writer and acquaintance.

Perhaps even more intriguingly, extemporaneous composition or improvised versifying partakes of a special relation with the art of improvisation imported from Italy in the late eighteenth century. In her study of Romantic improvisation, Angela Esterhammer observes that 'Being spontaneous or "ex-tempore," this mode of composition is incommensurate with the normal span of time allotted to thought and writing'.<sup>31</sup> Unlike publishing in bound volumes for a much-deferred and exclusive readership, writing for newspapers operates in a 'real-time' reception framework that is similar to performing before a live audience. As Esterhammer notes, 'What distinguished poetic improvisation from other kinds of literary activity, then, is the presence of an audience and the "real-time" framework.'<sup>32</sup> Under such temporal condition and reception pressure, the 'Romantic improvvisatore' 'forgoes a pre-existing script or score' in

<sup>30</sup> I quote from the footnote to Wordsworth's 30 November 1835 letter to Hernaman, *LY*, iii. 127.

<sup>31</sup> Angela Esterhammer's '1. "This lightning of the mind": improvisation and performance in the Romantic era', in *Romanticism and Improvisation, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

favour of spontaneous and meaningful invention under some constraints of convention.<sup>33</sup> The composition process of Wordsworth's poem attests to these features of Romantic improvisation. Its production is swift, and its reception immediate. Yet, the poem is laden with significance and emotion because it is formulated within the 'limiting framework' of elegiac conventions, which makes meaningful allusion and interpretation possible. Although stories about Italian improvisers reached a larger English audience through Tobias Smollett's *Travels through France and Italy* (1766), it was Hester Lynch Piozzi and the Della Cruscan who started 'the direct importation of Italian improvisation into English print culture.'<sup>34</sup> Esterhammer singles out Piozzi's *The Florence Miscellany* (1785) as the work responsible for the Anglicisation of Italian improvisation.<sup>35</sup> Known for its conviviality, enthusiasm and theatricality, Della Cruscan poetry might be construed as trivial and ephemeral.<sup>36</sup> However, Piozzi's 'Preface' to *The Florence Miscellany* makes an unexpected claim about their extemporaneous verses. Though she admits that they write 'to divert ourselves, and to say kind things of each other', the poems are collected so that their 'reciprocal expression of kindness might not be lost'.<sup>37</sup> As a makeshift circle of friends in Italy, they justify extemporisation 'as one of the most durable methods to keep Tenderness alive, and preserve Friendship from decay'.<sup>38</sup> Ingeniously, Piozzi asserts a counter-claim for the durability of extempore ejaculations against other established and purposed forms of verse writing such as the sonnet, the pastoral elegy and the rule-laden epitaph. Like Shelley's 'fading coal' of momentary brilliance, friendship of pleasure owes its tender, impassioned glow

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Esterhammer, '2. Defining improvisation and improvising national identity: from grand tourists to Della Cruscan', in *Romanticism and Improvisation*, 22 and 32.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 32. See Hester Lynch Piozzi, Bertie Greatheed, Robert Merry and William Parsons's *The Florence Miscellany* (Florence: Printed for G[aetano] Cam[biagi] printer to His Royal Highness, 1785).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>37</sup> Piozzi's 'Preface' to *The Florence Miscellany*, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

to its very ephemerality. As an unlikely mode of posthumous life writing, extemporisation offers an expedient way of conserving ordinary intercourses between friends and of maintaining the few and fragile memories of an ungrounded friendship.

Far from a capricious expression of feeling, poetic improvisation is extolled by Piozzi and the Della Cruscans as a permanent and ethically minded expression of mutual preservation against the dissolution of human bonds. Robert Merry's concluding poem to *The Florence Miscellany* reinforces this point.<sup>39</sup> In 'To the Criticks', Robert Merry (or more famously known to the English public as Della Crusca) writes:

We scribble, and we print, for private pleasure,  
And at our leisure.  
.....  
[But] Now too with breaking heart,  
We all prepare to part,  
Whether to Naples, or Sienna,  
To Paris, or Vienna,  
To Sicily, or Spain:  
.....  
We never all  
Shall meet again,  
'Till Death has bound us up together,  
With everlasting leather,  
In universal Miscellany. (ll. 55-6, ll. 111-5 and ll. 118-22)

As the lines suggest, Merry's conception of extempore poetry combines both convivial pleasure and awareness of death. The poem contains sombre reminders of mortality and disintegration of community. Improvised versifying as such becomes the means by which a shared memory of bygone friendships, however brief, trivial and amusing, is preserved for all time. In the 'real-time' framework of life, every instance of social exchange is extempore, for no moment is reproducible and no friendship is duplicable. The praxis of extempore poetry therefore encapsulates the existential condition that 'We never all / Shall meet again'. In writing against

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<sup>39</sup> See Robert Merry's 'To the Criticks', in *The Florence Miscellany*, 212-6.

the proverbial 'until death do us part', extemporaneous writing becomes in turn an occasion to 'bind us up together' in 'everlasting leather'. Certainly unexpected, the value of this fleeting community of friends – and the possibility of eternal togetherness – is predicated upon the death of its members and the joint publication of their light-hearted writings. Like Bacon's ethically demanding ideal of friendship, the Della Cruscan model of friendship also derives its moral force from the posthumous condition. In spite of its seemingly light and convivial air, extempore poetry simultaneously welcomes and combats mortality as the chief impetus for urgent, uninhibited recording of communal life. Even though Wordsworth is reportedly averse to Della Cruscan poetry as a source of 'outrageous stimulation' and degrading taste, it is difficult to overlook the continuities between 'Extempore Effusion' and the poetic agenda set forth by Piozzi and Merry.<sup>40</sup> All three writers seem to converge on the fitness of extempore writing as a mode of personal expression ideally suited for commemorating friendship and for preserving the posthumous lives of those now separated and dead.

Moreover, this understated function of extempore poetry complements the elegiac timbre of effusion. As I have intimated at the beginning of this chapter, the term 'effusion' is closely associated with verbal and physiological articulations of grief. In the context of mourning, the 'ejaculation' of words and tears is symptomatic of an emotional seizure. If extempore versifying exemplifies 'real-time' invention, then effusive writing epitomises 'real-space' action. Coleridge's 1796 'Preface' to *Poems on Various Subjects* famously associates monody with

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<sup>40</sup> Jerome McGann's 'The Literal World of the English Della Crusicans', in *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 75. See also Jon Mee's 'Chapter 5: Wordsworth's Chastened Enthusiasm', in *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 214-56.

effusion as a genre of writing well-adapted for egotistical expressions of suffering.<sup>41</sup> In the following passage, he defends elegiac egotism in the practice of effusion:

But egotism is to be condemned then only when it offends against time and place, as in an History or an Epic Poem. To censure it in a Monody or Sonnet is almost as absurd as to dislike a circle for being round. Why then write Sonnets or Monodies? . . . After the more violent emotions of Sorrow, the mind demands solace and can find it in employment alone; but full of its late sufferings it can endure no employment not connected with those sufferings.<sup>42</sup>

Coleridge's apologia for the egotistical nature of effusion reverberates with his later definition of elegy in *Table Talk*. Effusion, as he explains, is naturally self-concerned for it is mind's instinctive reflex to 'violent emotions' and 'sufferings'. The act of 'pouring out' (*effusio*) and 'throwing out' (*ex iacio*) these sufferings bring solace to the mind by channelling away the excesses of grief and anguish. Hence, the physiological discharge of blood and tears is inseparably connected to the emotional discharge of 'violent emotions'. Although Shenstone also defines elegy in the context of effusion, he perceives it as 'the effusion of a contemplative mind'. While his approach to elegiac effusion is controlled, measured and regulated, Coleridge's effusion is much more dispersed, digressive and undisciplined. As Coleridge himself concedes, his poetical effusions 'do not possess that *oneness* of thought'.<sup>43</sup> Unmediated and unfocused, they flow from one form to another, from monody, to epitaph, to sonnet, to epistle and to conversational poem. Indeed, it is from this *variety* of thought that some of his most memorable poems evolved, poems such as 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton', 'To the Nightingale' ('Effusion 23'), 'To an Infant' ('Effusion 34'), and 'The Æolian Harp' ('Effusion 35').<sup>44</sup> Kneale astutely observes: 'Coleridge defines his effusions less by their positive identity than by their

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<sup>41</sup> See Coleridge's 'Preface' to *Poems on Various Subjects 1796* (London: Printed for G. G. and J. Robinsons, and J. Cottle, Bristol, 1796), v-xi.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* v-vi.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* x.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton', 1-11; 'Effusion 23', 71-2; 'Effusion 34', 94-5; and 'Effusion 35', 96-100.

self-conscious difference from the other genres and figures (*sermo*, epistle, address, aversion, conversation) that impinge on and cohabit their poetic space.’<sup>45</sup> As a distinct genre with indistinct forms, effusion is primarily concerned with the unconstrained and unprocessed relief of emotions.

Yet, despite its reflexive tendencies, effusion is also concerned with the preservation of friendship in its epistolary and conversational mode. Convinced that effusions are more than frivolous and evanescent utterances, Coleridge disputes Charles Churchill’s satirical diminution of the genre as mere ‘Effusion on Effusion *pour* away.’<sup>46</sup> Coleridge cites the line from Churchill’s *The Candidate* (1764), in which John Langhorne is lampooned for the work, *The Effusions of Friendship and Fancy. In Several Letters to and from Select Friends* (1763).<sup>47</sup> Langhorne’s instruction to a male correspondent in ‘Letter XXXVII’ asserts an informative link between effusion, epistolary writing and true friendship. He writes:

If I had not received so many interesting proofs of the sincerity of your friendship, I should now begin to doubt it. You will wonder how this should come into my head . . . when I tell you that my suspicion arises only from the different style of your letters. It is very true, my friend, your letters, which were once so easy and *dégagée*, the *careless effusions* of the heart, are now . . . polished and smoothed off . . . . Relapse into that unstudied negligence, those natural, friendly, genuine overflowing of the heart, which I have heretofore so much admired in your letters, and which delight me more than the most finished period.<sup>48</sup> (my italics)

In this correspondence, Langhorne exhorts his friend to ‘relapse’ his elegant and ‘polished’ style of epistolary writing to its former ‘unstudied’, ‘negligent’, ‘natural’ and ‘careless’ grace. Remarkably, the writer identifies effusion (or ‘genuine overflowing of the heart’) as an ‘easy’,

<sup>45</sup> Kneale, “‘Between Poetry and Oratory’: Coleridge’s Romantic Effusions”, in *Romantic Aversions: Aftermaths of Classicism in Wordsworth and Coleridge* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 48.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Preface’, *Poems on Various Subjects*, ix.

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion on the citational link between Charles Churchill, John Langhorne and Coleridge’s development of effusion as a literary genre, see Kneale’s *Romantic Aversions*, 30-33. ‘Effusion on Effusion *pour* away’ is from line 42 of Churchill’s *The Candidate*, in *The Poetical Works of Charles Churchill*, ed. Douglas Grant (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956). See also Langhorne’s *The Effusions of Friendship and Fancy. In Several Letters to and from Select Friends*, 2 vols. (London: T. Becket and P. A. De Hondt, 1763).

<sup>48</sup> *Effusions of Friendship and Fancy*, i. 163-6.

'dégagée' and 'careless' expression, wanting style, effort and focus. Raw effusions are the true 'proofs of the sincerity' of friendship, and genuine avowals of friendship should pour spontaneously from one subject to another without stylistic mediation or over-thinking.

One can see the careless, digressive and natural appeal of effusion to Wordsworth, considering how his own supposed effusion on Hogg digresses and meanders from one dead poet to another. This easy, negligent and digressive flow of thoughts and feelings evinces another cognate property of effusion: and that is 'efflux' or 'effluxion', the flowing out of water.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the flowing out of water (and tears) forms both the topographical and tropological background of Wordsworth's 'Extempore Effusion'. Already from the outset of the poem, the 'Stream of Yarrow' leads the mourning poet to his shepherd guide. Then 'along its banks' he 'wandered' (l. 5) and finds the 'Border-minstrel.' This 'effluxion' temporally fades away as he climbs to the 'mountain-summits' (l. 21) to commune with Lamb and the 'rapt One.' The ascent to the 'marvellous source' of genius also marks the crescendo of Wordsworth's grief, whose attachment to both Coleridge and Lamb as a brother unto brothers is most intense and indissoluble. At the end of the poem, the 'efflux' of tears returns with a vengeance in the figure of 'Yarrow smitten' with 'sharper grief'. Importantly, then, Wordsworth's amalgamation of 'extempore' expression with careless 'effusion' signifies an effort to combine the formal and moral characters of both genres for the 'occasion' of mourning and writing.

Given the complementary effects of this generic crossover (or addition), 'extempore effusion' can be construed as an alternative manifestation of 'naked ejaculation'. The goal of both broadly conceived genres is, after all, to turn words into incarnations of sincerity and friendship, stripped of ornament, style and appearance. In *Essays Upon Epitaphs III*, Wordsworth articulates just such an expectation for the language of epitaph. He reflects: 'If

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<sup>49</sup> See Johnson's *Dictionary*, i. 293.

words be not . . . an incarnation of the thought but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift'.<sup>50</sup> The poet's idea of words as things applies not just to epitaph writing but to all forms and genres of writing and communication. Devoid of verbosity and mockery, the poet's words 'incarnate' the sincerity of his posthumous friendship with all the deceased writers. Defying the generic bounds of elegy, the compound title 'Extempore Effusion' serves to better realise the epitaphic origin of words as 'naked' embodiments of thoughts and feelings. The inspired spontaneity of extempore, the unregulated rawness of effusion and the 'naked' materiality of epitaph are all woven together as a means of preserving transient relations and intimate moments.

### **Wordsworth Writing Epitaph-Elegy: 'And Lamb, the frolic and the gentle'**

From Wordsworth's repeated meditations on epitaph, we can see the centrality of the genre to his grand notion of poetic language. As an epitaphist, the poet's words embody the remains of his subjects. And the idea of binding his friends together in words (in 'everlasting leather') recalls us to the original title of 'Extempore Effusion': 'The Graves of the Poets'. Representing his earliest conception of the poem, the precursor title evokes the possibility of reading 'Extempore Effusion' as a disguised collection of epitaphs. If we treat the stanzas pertaining to each of the named subjects in 'Extempore Effusion' discretely we can discern the inscription quality of the lines. Alternating between four-and-a-half and four-foot lines in four-line stanzas, each stanzaic unit exemplifies the brevity and symmetry of the lapidary form. Short, uniform lines of 'Eights and Sixes' are, after all, recommended by Bowden in his practical approach to epitaph writing. Since marble is not indigenous to England, a typical English gravestone is smaller than those found in

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<sup>50</sup> *PWW*, ii. 65.

Italy. The length of an English grave inscription is therefore limited by the shape and size of the stone surface. The lines on Coleridge and Lamb are particularly relevant to the generic sensibilities of epitaph writing. If permuted in a slightly different way, one can see how the lines bear semblances of an epitaph. For instance, consider this arrangement:

[Here] every mortal power of Coleridge  
[Lies] frozen at its marvellous source;  
The rapt One, of the godlike forehead,  
The heaven-eyed creature sleeps in earth. (ll. 15-18)

Consider an even simpler version of the lines on Lamb:

[O] Lamb, the frolic and the gentle,  
Has vanished from his lonely hearth. (ll. 19-20)

Lines on Coleridge rearticulate the conventional Christian belief of death as sleep: the departed poet is thought to lie in a kind of suspended ('frozen') animation until the Day of Judgment and resurrection. As Samantha Matthews observes, nineteenth-century England was still 'psychologically committed' to 'the body's continuing integrity even after death . . . in the metaphor of death as rest or sleep'.<sup>51</sup> His 'mortal power' lies dormant but is not gone. The proverbial description of a deceased's slumber and the associated expression of Christian common hope represent Coleridge's posthumous state in 'the general language of humanity'.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, the ensuring epithets of 'The rapt One' and 'The heaven-eyed creature' with 'the godlike forehead' delineate the life and character of a subject distinct from the undifferentiated mass of humanity. These epithets give the epitaphic verse a 'characteristic' feel.

Since generating a characteristic account of the deceased through epitaph writing is something of an obsession to Wordsworth, Chiabrera's long, individualising epitaphs provide

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<sup>51</sup> Samantha Matthews's 'Introduction', in *Poetical Remains: Poets' Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>52</sup> *Essays Upon Epitaphs I*, PWW, ii. 35.

obvious templates for study and emulation. Not only does Chiabrera appear in *Essays Upon Epitaphs III* as the model epitaphist who unites the 'characteristic' with the 'general' in the practice of the genre, but he is also Wordsworth's model for the bloated epitaph on Lamb.<sup>53</sup> He writes to Edward Moxon in a 20 November 1835 letter: 'Chiabrera has been here my model—tho' I am aware that Italian Churches, both on account of their size and the climate of Italy, are more favourable to long inscriptions than ours—His Epitaphs are characteristic and circumstantial'.<sup>54</sup> 'The rapt One' with 'the godlike forehead' delineates not just the physical peculiarity of Coleridge as an irreproducible individual. To the initiated reader, the epithetical descriptions epitomise the widely held perception of the 'heaven-eyed' poet as one who imagines big but achieves little. Like Kubla Khan, Coleridge often dreams of poetical projects too great and too challenging for him to realise. He, too, 'would build that dome in air,' but alas that dome can never be brought down to earth from heaven.<sup>55</sup> Yet, as heaven-bound and godlike his creative vision was in life, he is also a 'creature' who perishes and 'sleeps in earth' as all mortals must invariably do. Uniting both divine and mortal attributes, this posthumous account of Coleridge fulfils the most basic principle in Wordsworth's own 'notion of a perfect epitaph'.<sup>56</sup> As Chiabrera's epitaphs demonstrate, the 'perfect epitaph' should subordinate 'what was peculiar to the individual' to 'a sense of what he had in common with the species.'<sup>57</sup> The sense of Coleridge as a 'godlike' individual is ultimately subordinated to the general sense of him as an

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<sup>53</sup> See *PWW*, ii. 69: Chiabrera brings 'forward the one incidental expression, a kind of commiseration, unite with it a concern on the part of the dead for the well-being of the living . . . and let this commiseration and concern pervade and brood over the whole, so that what was peculiar to the individual shall still be subordinate to a sense of what he had in common with the species, our notion of a perfect epitaph would then be realized; and it pleases me to say that this is the very model upon which those of Chiabrera are for the most part framed.'

<sup>54</sup> *LY*, iii. 114.

<sup>55</sup> I quote line 46 of 'Kubla Khan: Or, A Vision in a Dream', in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Major Works*, ed. H. J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 102-4, 104.

<sup>56</sup> *Essays Upon Epitaphs III*, *PWW*, ii. 69.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

everyman who dies. It may be worthwhile at this point to compare Wordsworth's tender lines with Hazlitt's tongue-in-cheek estimation of Coleridge. The critic writes in *The Spirit of the Age*: 'All that he has done of moment, he had done twenty years ago: since then, he may be said to have lived on the sound of his own voice. Mr. Coleridge is too rich in intellectual wealth, to need to task himself to any drudgery'.<sup>58</sup> Shorn of the dubiety and prolixity of Hazlitt's mock praise, Wordsworth condenses and euphemises all the defining attributes of his subject, including his 'godlike' but unapplied 'frozen' power, in strictly positive and sympathetic terms.

While Wordsworth's epitaphic memorial for Coleridge exhibits an ethic of care, his effort to commemorate Lamb in the epitaphic form is beset with practical, emotional and ethical setbacks. At the time when 'Extempore Effusion' was being composed, the poet was concomitantly engaged in the production of a 'characteristic' epitaph for Lamb. The anthologised edition of the 38-line 'Epitaph' on Lamb was completed just a week before the first version of 'Extempore Effusion' was sent to the editor of *Newcastle Journal* for publication.<sup>59</sup> An even earlier 34-line prototype of the epitaph is attached to the 20 November 1835 letter to Moxon. In the same letter, Wordsworth reflects on the 'extreme length' of his composition and the deficiency of its 'characteristic' feature. Though he tries to defend the failings of his work, his frustration is discernible in the following extracts:

The first objection that will strike you, and every one, is its extreme length, especially compared with epitaphs as they are now written—but this objection might in part be obviated by engraving the lines in double column, and not in capitals.

. . . . I cannot conclude without adding that the Ep: if used at all, can only be placed *in* the church. It is much too long for an out-door stone, among our rains, damp.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> 'Mr. Coleridge', *Selected Writings of Hazlitt*, vii. 99.

<sup>59</sup> For Wordsworth's 'Epitaph' on Lamb, see *PW*, iv. 272.

<sup>60</sup> *LY*, iii. 114 and 115.

Wordsworth's repeated mention of the epitaph's 'extreme length', along with his suggestions to circumnavigate this delicate problem, utterly confounds Hartman's adulation of the poet's 'self-generated' innovation of the genre. In reality, the poet has tremendous difficulty in putting his own prescriptions for epitaph writing to practice. What distresses him even more is that, despite the extreme length of his 34-line inscription, the purpose of this undertaking is not achieved. Even after transgressing the most basic rule of epitaph writing, he still has yet

to touch upon the most striking feature of our departed friend's character and the most affecting circumstance of his life, viz, his faithful and intense love of his Sister. Had I been pouring out an Elegy or Monody, this would and must have been done.<sup>61</sup>

Unable to give a characteristic account of Lamb's life and character, the generic and ethical obligations of the work remain unfulfilled. Wordsworth's recognition of his failure and transgression as an epitaphist is also significant in a couple of ways. First, his conception of elegy makes allowance for the profusion of biographical details on the mourned subject. This allowance casts doubt on the status of 'Extempore Effusion' as an elegy, for if it really is just a monody, then where are the 'characteristic' and 'circumstantial' details of his friends? Furthermore, Wordsworth's early attempts at Lamb's epitaph are already nearly as long as 'Extempore Effusion', a work which commemorates not one but multiple individuals. How should readers reconcile these egregious formal disparities? Second, the poet's epistolary confession essentially insists on hybridising epitaph with biography, an insistence that would surely have irked the likes of Knox. In *Essays Upon Epitaphs III*, Wordsworth espouses John Weever's definition of an epitaph as not 'an abstract character of the deceased but an *epitomised biography* blended with description by which an impression of the character was to be conveyed' (my italics).<sup>62</sup> An epitaphist, he argues, is therefore a 'funeral Biographer'.<sup>63</sup> The poet's crossing

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. iii. 114.

<sup>62</sup> PWW, ii. 69.

of epitaph and biography is noteworthy for it explains in part his trouble in tackling the intractable composition of Lamb's epitaph. No matter how well the 'Epitaph' epitomises his subject's life, he always seems to find it deficient in length and content.

Inevitably, his effort to merge the genres of epitaph and biography puts him on a collision course with generic propriety. If an epitaph is an 'epitomised biography', then what aspect of the subject's life should one epitomise in inscription? What detail should be suppressed and what attribute be made public? After adding four more lines to the 34-line draft, Wordsworth writes to Moxon in the 24 November 1835 letter:

I hope the changes will be approved of, at all events, they better answer my purpose. The lines, as they now stand, preserve better the balance of delicate delineation, the weaknesses are not so prominent, and the virtues placed in a stronger light; and I hope nothing is said that is not characteristic.<sup>64</sup>

The passage plainly illustrates the poet's awareness of epitaphic propriety. As a panegyric form of writing, epitaphs should suppress the weaknesses of their subjects and promote their virtues. However, as he also concedes in the last line of the letter extract, he might have included excessive details about the deceased in violation of the genre's governing sensibility. Even though the epitaph on Lamb has already by this time overrun to 38 lines, the poet is determined to expand it further. He continues in the same letter:

If the length makes the above utterly unsuitable, it may be printed with his Works as an effusion by the side of his grave; in this case, in some favorable moment, I might be enabled to add a few Lines upon the friendship of the Brother and Sister.<sup>65</sup>

Wordsworth is acutely conscious of the extent to which he has breached the prescribed length of a conventional epitaph. Furthermore, the passage shows the indelible mark of an intertextual and cross-generic confluence between the 'Epitaph' and the contemporaneous composition of 'Extempore Effusion'. The epitaph on Lamb is verging dangerously close to a free-flowing

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> *LY*, iii. 120.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

'effusion by the side of his grave', while 'Extempore Effusion' is looking more and more like a collection of epitaphs by comparison. The understated desire to add a few more lines on the affectionate bond between Lamb and Mary in the future again attests to Wordsworth's impulse to merge epitaph with biography. And within a month Wordsworth achieves just that. By December, the 'Epitaph' explodes to 131 lines, becoming a bona fide elegy. Scodel summarises this convoluted negotiation of epitaph and elegy on Lamb rather aptly. He writes: 'Treating his inability to write a brief, impersonal epitaph as an expression of his profound grief, Wordsworth makes his response to the impersonal epitaph that he could not write the occasion of his personal elegy.'<sup>66</sup> As an objective and permanent record of the dead, the composition of an epitaph necessitates a detached and mediated study of the deceased's history. Expression of grief, while permitted, should be tempered and memorably rendered. Ironically, 'Extempore Effusion' typifies these generic traits of epitaph better than the 'Epitaph' itself.

The intensity of Wordsworth's emotional involvement with Lamb's inscription renders a concise and impartial representation of the deceased impossible. His 10 December 1835 letter to Moxon exposes his mounting grief as he continues to push the length of his verse memorial for Lamb. The writer confesses how he was overtaken by sorrow while working on the poem:

The verses upon dear Lamb, threw my mind into that train of melancholy reflexion which produced several things in some respects of the same character, such as those lines upon Hogg and some others brought forth with more reflexion and pains—for on turning over an old vol: of Mss, I met with some verses that expressed my feelings at the Grave of Burns 32 years ago.<sup>67</sup>

This letter extract is exceptional, for not only does it evince a generic confluence between the 'Epitaph' and 'Extempore Effusion', but it also represents an emotional confluence of the various outflows of grief. Pain after pain, brother after brother, the effusion of melancholic tears finds many sources and many tributaries. The close cluster of deaths and the recent lines on

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<sup>66</sup> Scodel, *The English Poetic Epitaph*, 399.

<sup>67</sup> *LY*, iii. 135.

Lamb, as Stephen Gill indicates, even prompted Wordsworth to revisit the 'Ejaculation' on Burns, which he penned thirty-two years earlier, and explode the three-stanza poem to the much-extended graveyard reflection, 'At the Grave of Burns. 1803'.<sup>68</sup> Stricken with sad remembrances, both old and new, the poet's natural effusion leads to a careless and unregulated ejaculation of words, bursting the banks of the inscription to 131 lines. The extraordinary length which results from this uncontrolled endeavour ultimately upsets the appearance of epitaphic propriety he has heretofore struggled to maintain. Indeed, how can Lamb's 'weaknesses' in life stay suppressed and his 'delicate delineation' balanced in a text fraught with excess biographical details and circumstances? This problem inevitably comes to light when Mary raises

an objection to the allusion to her brother's troubles, which she herself brought upon him, and which she would rather should not be inquired into by those who may visit his grave. But she would not object to the allusion in a distinct Poem.<sup>69</sup>

In trying to convey the friendship between the loving brother and sister, Wordsworth overly characterises their relationship and oversteps the boundary of privacy and epitaphic propriety. The poet has, in short, been overwritten not just in length but also in content. Eventually, only three lines from the 38-line version are adopted for his memorial (not his grave) in Edmonton Church:

. . . At the centre of his being lodged  
A soul by resignation sanctified . . .  
O, he was good, if e'er a good Man lived! (ll. 30, 31 and 38)<sup>70</sup>

Compare that mutilated inscription to the lines in 'Extempore Effusion':

[O] Lamb, the frolic and the gentle,  
Has vanished from his lonely hearth. (ll. 19-20)

<sup>68</sup> See Stephen Gill's '5. Where Once We Stood Rejoicing', in *Wordsworth's Revisitings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 155-78, especially 172-8.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. I quote from the footnote to Moxon's 8 December 1835 letter to Wordsworth.

<sup>70</sup> For the difficulty Wordsworth had in composing the epitaph and the eventual selection of ll. 30, 31 and 38 for inclusion in the memorial, see E. V. Lucas's 'Chapter XIX: 1834', in *The Life of Charles Lamb*, 2 vols. (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), ii. 386-93.

Although the actual epitaph contains a general panegyric on the goodness of the deceased, it conveys very little about the man. Lamentably, the idiosyncrasies and circumstances that make Lamb a unique and memorable individual are absent in a general epitaph such as this. The same epitaph could be applied universally to all the decent men in the world. Though fraught with intriguing semiotic possibilities and figurative meanings, the ellipses in the inscription alert readers to the violent and unethical act of dismembering those lines from their original context.

If the poet's goal is to generate a 'characteristic' epitaph, then the latter variant is surely more suited for the task. First, it fulfils Johnson's requirement of including the subject's name in the inscription.<sup>71</sup> Second, as an 'epitomised biography' of Lamb's life, the two brief lines movingly recapitulate his idiosyncrasies ('the frolic and the gentle') and personal circumstance ('his lonely hearth'). The epithet 'the frolic' refers to the subject's playful temperament both in life and in the fictional persona of *Elia*. To appreciate the frolicsome nature of Lamb, one only has to recall Benjamin R. Haydon's unforgettable portrayal of him at 'The Immortal Dinner' in 1817. Appropriately, the epithet alludes to Lamb's unembarrassed love of eating, drinking and leisure hours: 'the frolic' is 'driven for the Life of life'.<sup>72</sup> As to 'the gentle', the sobriquet epitomises both Lamb's strong affection for his friends and, most importantly, his sister.<sup>73</sup> More familiarly, 'the gentle' puns on Lamb's 'gentle name', which the subject himself immortalises in his 'The Family Name' (1818).<sup>74</sup> After meditating on the uncertain genealogy of his family, the

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<sup>71</sup> In 'An Essay on Epitaphs', Johnson writes: 'It may seem very superfluous to lay it down as the first rule for writing epitaphs that the name of the deceased is not to be omitted' (100).

<sup>72</sup> The second quotation is from Lamb's 16 April 1815 letter to Wordsworth, in *Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, iii. 141.

<sup>73</sup> For Lamb's unique contribution to the theory and practice of Romantic friendship and sociability, see Felicity James's *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>74</sup> In 'The Family Name', Lamb reflects on his family genealogy and his own unknown, possibly great or possibly humble, origins. The sonnet was first published in *The Works of Charles Lamb* (1818). I use the reprinted edition of the sonnet in *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, iv. 44.

writer consoles his own sense of lost origins with the heroic couplet: 'Whate'er the fount whence thy beginnings came, / No deed of mine shall shame thee, gentle name' (ll. 13-14). In this positive affirmation of self-worth, Lamb effectively defends his own name as an expression of self-possession, as opposed to a sign of hereditary property. By inscribing 'the gentle' into his lapidary-like commemoration of Lamb, Wordsworth repeats the subject's own attempt at self-preservation with a targeted emphasis on his 'gentle name'. As an instance of 'naked ejaculation', the epithet is a faithful avowal (and repetition) of the writer's 'initial passion' toward a departed friend and his unceasing commitment to protect the other's name.

Just as he had mediated the interest of the living and the interest of the dead in his modified version of the German epitaph, his lines on 'the gentle' Lamb mediate his own grief at the loss of an intimate friend (who 'Has vanished from his lonely hearth'). The voices of both the living and the dead converge upon this 'naked ejaculation' of posthumous sympathy and friendship. To the initiated reader, 'his lonely hearth' is an unmistakable reference to Lamb's family tragedy and domestic situation. He remained single throughout his life in part because his love was never reciprocated, but mostly it was due to his own sense of duty to assume the care of his sister. Significantly, this humble tribute to his subject's caring quality and brotherly devotion is itself an allusion to the prevailing practice of familiar biography. Recall Johnson's influential edict for all would-be biographers: 'the business of the biographer is often to pass slightly over those performances and incidents, which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestick privacies, and display the minute details of daily life'. Wordsworth's own sensibility of self-possession may be averse to the biographical practice, but the celebration of 'domestick privacies' is certainly an appropriate way of memorialising Lamb. The poet's 'funeral biography' of his subject is neither a pronouncement of his public benefaction nor a promulgation of his

immortal genius (as is the case with Coleridge). Yet, by exhibiting his friend's inner life in the domestic context of a 'lonely hearth', readers can readily identify with his subject and recognise his extraordinary worth. Lamb may not have been a hero in the battlefield, a champion of public service, or even a figure of exalted brilliance, but his private affections, personal friendships and brotherly devotion have consecrated him above all others as a hero of the hearth. Like a true Della Cruscan extempore, the lines do not commemorate a monumental action; instead, they preserve the fleeting moments of Lamb's private heroism in that iconic image of the 'lonely hearth'. Drawing on the ethical energies of extempore, epitaph and biography, Wordsworth's two-line memorial epitomises the 'friendship of the Brother and Sister' far more succinctly and poignantly than the elusive 'Epitaph'.

In the 1836-7 anthologised edition of 'Extempore Effusion', Wordsworth supplies another addition to the poem to reinforce its structure as a collection of epitaphs. The writer includes a catalogue of names and dates in his note to the piece:

Walter Scott died	21st Sept. 1832.
S. T. Coleridge	25th July, 1834.
Charles Lamb	27th Dec. 1834.
Geo. Crabbe	3rd Feb. 1832.
Felicia Hemans	16th May 1835. <sup>75</sup>

This exact recording of mortuary details exemplifies the historiographical nature of epitaph as a provider of veritable information on the life of the deceased. Unlike a pastoral elegy, the use of classical sobriquets and allegorical pseudonyms ('Sappho', 'Adonais', 'Satyrane', etc.) is clearly forbidden. As a rhetorical and documentary device, the use of numbers reinforces the eighteenth-century conception of epitaph as a form of history. The dates authenticate Wordsworth's reporting of the dead, conferring an aura of verity and objectivity on his versified documentation of the departed writers. Unlike a familiar biography, 'Extempore Effusion' is presented as a

<sup>75</sup> Moxon's 1836-7 edition of *Poetical Works*, v. 388.

collective history of five male *Lives* (followed later by an entry on Hemans) in the appearance of a condensed dictionary of literary personages. However, the disciplined suppression of anecdotal details, embarrassing situations and character pitfalls demonstrates a blatant effort to keep the epitaphic accounts not only impartial but also ethical. A good indicator of this generic boundary is Wordsworth's stanza on Crabbe:

Our haughty life is crowned with darkness,  
Like London with its own black wreath,  
On which with thee, O Crabbe! forth-looking,  
I gazed from Hampstead's breezy heath. (ll. 29-32)

The moralising function of the epitaph is evident in the first two lines of this stanza, as Wordsworth associates the material corruption of contemporary life with the heavily industrialised London. Driven by an insatiable demand for wealth and luxury, metropolitan life is moving away from traditional pursuits of excellence ('laurel wreath') toward pursuits of material ascendance ('black wreath'). Amidst all this smoke of corruption, Crabbe stands together with Wordsworth on top of Hampstead Heath, looking forth to an existence beyond earthly interests and material concerns. Together they gaze into the higher truths of life. The message seems clear: in order to 'cheat Libitina' and live on after death, one must follow the steps of Crabbe and rise above the darkness and smoke of worldly existence. This exalted celebration of Crabbe appears to conform to the panegyric trait and propriety of epitaph. Unlike Wordsworth's scathing memoir of Crabbe in *The Fenwick Notes*, here Crabbe's 'weaknesses are not so prominent, and [his] virtues placed in a stronger light', just as one would expect from a 'funeral biography.'<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> For *The Fenwick Notes* on Crabbe, see Selincourt's 'Notes', in *PW*, iv. 460-1. Wordsworth dictated these notes to Isabella Fenwick in 1843, and the notes were later incorporated into Christopher Wordsworth's posthumously published *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1851). In the 1857 collected edition of Wordsworth's poetry, the notes were published as 'headnotes' to individual poems, including the long prefatory note to 'Extempore Effusion'. *The Fenwick Notes* are collected and printed in full for the first time in *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993).

One can sense from Wordsworth's addition of the mortuary note and his gruelling memorialisation of Lamb a profound tension between the need to assimilate different genres of commemorative writing and a concomitant resistance to that need. And yet both his need and aversion are driven no less by ethical considerations. Compelled by his responsibility to the dead, Wordsworth carefully balances the most appropriate and applicable elements of extempore, effusion, elegy, epitaph and biography in 'Extempore Effusion'. However, the introduction of *The Fenwick Notes* to posthumous editions of Wordsworth's poetry also draws attention to the ethical cost of dovetailing epitaph, biography and elegy when their genre aims collide. Indeed, not all posthumous life writings can contribute to the 'inexhaustible remainder' of a subject's afterlife – some do the opposite. Unlike the verses on Lamb, the contiguity between Wordsworth's verse tribute to and prose recollection of Hemans exposes a different set of problems and challenges for the Romantic practice of posthumous life writing.

### **The Woman without Name: 'Mourn rather for that holy Spirit'**

*The Fenwick Notes* on 'Extempore Effusion', which was first published in 1857 as a headnote to the piece and then to all its subsequent republications, evinces a serious generic tension between epitaph and biography. In the headnote to the poem, Wordsworth describes Crabbe as a womaniser and a careless mercenary writer who writes 'less correctly' once he has established his reputation.<sup>77</sup> The poet-biographer also tells us that 'in miscellaneous society [Crabbe's] *talk* was so much below what might have been expected from a man so deservedly celebrated, that to me it seemed trifling.'<sup>78</sup> According to Wordsworth, the only time when Crabbe's *talk* was ever

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<sup>77</sup> *PW*, iv. 460.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

elevated beyond trivial and lowly discourse was the time when they '[rambled] together on Hampstead Heath'.<sup>79</sup> His concluding judgment on the subject's literary life is even more scandalous. The poet muses in disgust and disbelief: 'Is it not to be lamented that a man who was so conversant with permanent truth . . . should have *required* an impulse from [the spur of applause]?'<sup>80</sup> Embodying literary corruption, Crabbe's corpus seems 'crowned with darkness' and 'black wreath'. Nevertheless, out of epitaphic propriety, Wordsworth suppresses all these damaging observations and places the recollection of that high-minded exchange on Hampstead Heath 'in a stronger light'. Following Johnson's directive on epitaph writing, Wordsworth's 'Extempore Effusion' is not the place where a curious reader should hunt for his subject's private failings: the reader 'must inquire after them in other places'. However, the attentive reader does not have to stray far from the verse to satisfy his curiosity, for the poem's own headnote offers just such a place.

Although the proximity of the headnote to the stanzas makes plain the generic boundary between biography and epitaph, their close proximity already contravenes the prime edict of keeping grave inscription at a safe distance from scurrilous biography. When Johnson asks the reader to enquire after the dubious particulars of the subject's life in 'other places', this 'other place' should not be merely a page away. The overly critical, and biographically nuanced, notes are literally too close to the grave. With regard to the headnote's negative delineations of Hogg, Crabbe and Hemans, this biographical appendage functions not as an 'addition' to but as a 'subtraction' from the posthumous lives of the writers. Owing to this unfortunate arrangement, the latter half of the headnote, which is entirely devoted to his reminiscence and assessment of Hemans, collaborates with the belated stanza in the 1836-7 edition of 'Extempore Effusion' to

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. iv. 461.

devalue the subject's posthumous life. As Deborah Kennedy points out, both the biographical note and the stanza on the 'poetess' reflect Wordsworth's troubling attitude towards literary ladies in general.<sup>81</sup> Relegated to the end of 'Extempore Effusion', and inserted after all the ripe fruits have been 'seasonably gathered,' Hemans is a writer who arrives too late in the season, too late for the harvest and apotheosis of souls. Although she died nearly six months before Hogg, the stanza on Hemans (now stanza 10) was composed nearly two weeks after his verses on the men had been completed. The stanza appears as follows:

Mourn rather for that holy Spirit,  
Sweet as the spring, as ocean deep;  
For Her who, ere her summer faded,  
Has sunk into a breathless sleep. (ll. 37-40)

The mood evoked by these lines is that of untimely foreclosure ('ere her summer faded') and precipitate burial ('sunk into a breathless sleep'). Hemans has 'sunk' before she could rise to the height of her promised genius. She has 'faded' before the 'summer' (the peak) of her literary output. Devastatingly, Hemans died before she could fulfil her literary potential and mature into a 'ripe fruit' (l. 35) herself. Wordsworth invokes the loaded image of the 'ripe fruit' as a metaphor for consolation and attainment, a posthumous compensation available only to the male writers hitherto commemorated.<sup>82</sup> Since Hogg, Scott, Coleridge, Lamb and Crabbe have more or less lived up to their literary potential in life, the mourning work for these 'seasonably gathered' writers is essentially complete.

'Mourn rather', Wordsworth beckons, for that 'other' female writer who has yet to earn the claim to eternal fame, who has 'faded' and 'sunk' unseasonably before her time. The posthumous repercussion of failing to meet the mark is also considerable in another way. Unlike

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<sup>81</sup> See Deborah Kennedy's 'Hemans, Wordsworth, and the "Literary Lady"', *Victorian Poetry* 35 (Fall 1997), 267-85.

<sup>82</sup> To his credit, Wordsworth also conjures the image of the 'ripe fruit' as a moral corrective to King Richard's curt, sardonic tribute to John of Gaunt – 'The ripest fruit first falls, and so doth he' (2.1.153) – in *Richard II*.

the male writers, who appear either in their own names or literary monikers, Hemans alone emerges in the general description of 'that holy Spirit'. Sunk before her name could be raised, the poetess is deprived of an identifiable name in the epitaphic stanza. As a result, the stanza assumes the form of a nameless epitaph. More poignantly, the suggestion to 'Mourn rather' is an implicit rejection of 'Extempore Effusion' as a work of mourning, or an elegiac lament. The poem may be an extempore, an effusion, or even a collection of epitaphs, but it refuses to recognise itself as an elegy. In a troubling turn, it is the very introduction of the woman writer to the late autumnal scene (perhaps even winter?) which alters the generic status of 'Extempore Effusion' to an elegy (*ἔλεγος, ὁ*), to a 'song of the nightingale' and a 'song of mourning'. Since Hemans has arrived too late, and died too prematurely, Wordsworth's call to mourning is a reflexive admission of the elegist's own failed defence and tardy rescue of the 'unripe' poet.

Wordsworth's own attitude toward the immaturity of Hemans's writing is tellingly recorded in Sara Coleridge's 12 July 1835 letter to Emily Trevenen. She writes:

Mr W. says it is a great thing to have said of her that she has given so much innocent pleasure—and that her verses may be more useful to the Americans—with whom she is a favourite—in their present state of intellectual culture, than more powerful productions.<sup>83</sup>

That her works had a huge following in America was a widely acknowledged fact. However, in measuring Hemans's poetic strength against an undeveloped readership, Wordsworth puts down both the woman writer and the American readers. In his view, her less powerful and immature productions are more useful to a burgeoning nation with feeble taste and character. Immediately after Wordsworth's appraisal of Crabbe's corrupt literary character, the headnote follows up with a related comment on the weak nature of Hemans's poetical writings. The poet-biographer furnishes this assessment:

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<sup>83</sup> The letter is quoted in *LY*, iii. 139.

Mrs. Hemans was unfortunate as a poetess in being obliged by circumstances to write for money, and that so frequently and so much, that she was compelled to look out for subjects wherever she could find them, and to write as expeditiously as possible.<sup>84</sup>

Writing to sustain a large household, Hemans is compelled by the misfortune of her domestic situation and financial circumstance to churn out mediocre productions. Unlike Crabbe who, according to Wordsworth, writes for reputation, the 'unfortunate poetess' writes for money. While their motives for writing are different, the outcome of their respective oeuvres is equally lamentable. For Crabbe, his later verses are less profuse and less rigorous; and for Hemans, her poetry is only suitable for a weak intellectual culture. Consequently, Hemans – the 'expeditious' writer, the 'unfortunate poetess' and 'that holy Spirit' – is 'mortified' in Wordsworth's verse as an unfinished, dismembered and disembodied writer.<sup>85</sup> Yet, his criticism of the deceased writer is not confined to her implied poetical incompetence. The biographical headnote goes so far as detailing Hemans's ignorance of housewifery, bemoaning her inability to 'manage' the 'needle' as easily as the 'spear of Minerva'.<sup>86</sup> In trading her *needle* of domestic harmony for the *spear* of competitive writing, she fails, from the perspective of the elegist, as both writer and housewife. Through this reductive and mortifying description of Hemans's double failure, Wordsworth's elegiac epitaph and critical memoir amount to a 'double subtraction' from her afterlife. The metaphoric description of a figure sinking and drowning in 'a breathless sleep' is particularly potent, given the strong fixation on drowned bodies in the history of epitaph.

For the ancient Greeks, whose livelihood and supremacy depended on the sea, death by drowning is a frequent occurrence. To die in such a way, where one's own remains are beyond the hope of recovery, was fearful and hateful to the ancient mariners. To them, 'death at sea had a

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<sup>84</sup> *PW*, iv. 461.

<sup>85</sup> I borrow the term 'mortification' from Matthews to cover all the semantic possibilities of humiliation, discipline and necrosis. For Matthews's discussion of the mortification of the feminine corpse and corpus, see '3. "The Grave of a Poetess"', in *Poetical Remains*, 77-9.

<sup>86</sup> *PW*, iv. 461.

great horror and anguish attached to it; the engulfing in darkness, the vain struggles for life, the loss of burial rites and all the last offices that can be paid to death, made it none the less terrible that it was so common.'<sup>87</sup> In 'Extempore Effusion', all the male dead are either interred in or associated with some form of terrestrial setting, except for the remains of Hemans. Since their remains are restored to the earth, their posthumous existence can be materially and topographically marked in the memory of the living. Wordsworth's stanza on Hemans displaces her remains from the earth and deposits them in 'ocean deep', in one of the worst forms of death. Not surprisingly, drowning is a recurrent trope in the poet's own writings, appearing even in *Essays Upon Epitaphs I and II*.<sup>88</sup> Wordsworth's awareness of drowning is no doubt informed by the untimely drowning of John Wordsworth on 5 February 1805 off Portland Bill. Stanza 4 of his 'Elegiac Verses in Memory of my Brother, John Wordsworth' (composed in 1805) recapitulates the instance of his brother's drowning:

How miserably deep!  
 All vanished in a single word,  
 A breath, a sound, and scarcely heard. Sea—  
 Ship—drowned—Shipwreck—so it came, The  
 meek, the brave, the good, was gone;  
 He who had been our living John  
 Was nothing but a name. (ll. 34-40)<sup>89</sup>

Even more terrifying than the loss of his brother's remains, which were recovered a month later, is the dispossession of language and expression as the ocean water smothers his breath and muffles his sound. Hemans's 'breathless sleep' echoes this sudden, traumatic loss of voice and self-expression, as her expeditious writings and weak verses succumb to this figural drowning.

<sup>87</sup> Mackail, *Select Epigrams*, 75. See 'Chapter III: Epitaphs' for samples of Greek epitaphs on drowned sailors, 154-9.

<sup>88</sup> For references to drowning in *Essays Upon Epitaphs I and II*, see *PWW*, ii. 29-30 and ii. 41-3.

<sup>89</sup> *PW*, iv. 263-5. Wordsworth's elegiac stanzas to his brother, 'Elegiac Verses in Memory of my Brother, John Wordsworth', was composed in 1805 and published in 1842. His elegiac verses and Milton's 'Lycidas' converge powerfully on the theme and figure of drowning. Like Lycidas, John also drowned in a 'perilous flood' (l. 185).

However, unlike the female poet, John's stifled voice (or at least some semblance of it) returns posthumously in the form of an epitaph. Wordsworth writes in stanza 7:

—Brother and friend, if verse of mine  
Have power to make thy virtues known,  
Here let a monumental Stone Stand—  
sacred as a Shrine;  
And to the few who pass this way,  
Traveller or Shepherd, let it say,  
Long as these mighty rocks endure,—  
Oh do not Thou too fondly brood,  
Although deserving of all good,  
On any earthly hope, however pure! (ll. 61-70)

The above stanza represents an effort to restore that 'breath' and 'sound' of John's final, inaudible utterance right before drowning in the language of inscription. As an epitaph that seeks to record the voice and character of his 'Brother and friend,' the stanza functions as a posthumous 'addition' to the 'infinite' life of John. Similarly, Wordsworth's stanzas on his brothers and friends in 'Extempore Effusion' exemplify how extempore versifying, poetic effusion, and epitaph writing can collaborate as 'additions' to the posthumous life of the artist. Nevertheless, Wordsworth's stanza on Hemans raises questions about the propriety and feasibility of protecting and preserving women writers from oblivion with posthumous life writing.

In the course of this discussion, we have discerned the complex and uneasy negotiation of various genres of posthumous life writing in Wordsworth's 'Extempore Effusion'. Given the generic crossovers between improvised versifying, careless effusion, conventional elegy, impartial epitaph and prosy biography, it is indeed inadequate to interpret the poem simply as an elegy or monody. Furthermore, each of these genres of writing is defined not only by theme and form but also by its implicit ethical application. It should also be apparent in this account of the poem's composition history that Wordsworth's conception of the perfect epitaph inherits many

of the genre's rules and caveats from the eighteenth century. Unexpectedly, even as Wordsworth struggles with the length and propriety of the 'Epitaph' on Lamb, 'Extempore Effusion' has succeeded where the intended 38-line inscription failed. What is at stake in the selection and implementation of an affective and effective vehicle for posthumous life representation is the preservation of his friends and friendships. If properly deployed, the different genres of life and death writings can cooperatively exert their commemorative function as 'additions' to the 'inexhaustible remainder' of the deceased other. However, as the insertion of *The Fenwick Notes* reveals, improper collation of epitaph and biography can also result in the diminution of a subject's afterlife. Wordsworth's biographical and epitaphic representations of Hemans show how these subtractions can be compounded when both forms of life writing are arranged in close proximity. Yet, his disconcerting accounts of the female poet hints at a much larger problem. At its core is the question: is there a commemorative form or generic hybrid that is better adapted to the defence and protection of the female dead? To address this issue, the next chapter will look at the relationship between gender and genres of posthumous life writing.

## CHAPTER 3

### Remember her ‘bright name’:

### The Secret Inscriptions of the Poet’s and the Woman’s Heart

But success is an offence not to be forgiven. To every petty author, whose works have scarce made his name valuable as an autograph, of whose unsold editions load his bookseller’s shelves—I am a subject of envy— . . .

(Landon, *LLEL*, June 1826)<sup>1</sup>

When a malicious report of her sexual indiscretions was circulated in 1826, reaching its height in the period between October and November of the same year, Landon was understandably hurt and outraged.<sup>2</sup> The June letter to Katherine Thomson addresses attacks on the ‘immoral and improper tendency of [her] productions’ and allegations of her illicit liaison with the editor of *The Literary Gazette*, William Jerdan.<sup>3</sup> She imputes these public calumnies to the ‘envy’ of unpopular authors and a general lack of sympathy and understanding for writers without ‘rank and opulence’.<sup>4</sup> Incensed by the classist prejudice and male chauvinism of her age, the poet writes: ‘It is only because I am poor, unprotected, and dependant on popularity, that I am a mark for all the gratuitous insolence and malice of idleness and ill-nature.’<sup>5</sup> She is, in other words, a victim of ‘the cravings of worthless curiosity’ which, according to Coleridge, define

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<sup>1</sup> Landon’s letter to Katherine Thomson, June 1826, was originally printed in Laman Blanchard’s *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1841), 53-6. The letter was also reprinted in Katherine Thomson’s *The Queens of Society*, published with her son J. C. Thomson, under the pseudonyms of Grace and Philip Wharton (New York, 1860), 158-9. I use the annotated edition in *Letters by Letitia Elizabeth Landon*, ed. F. J. Sypher (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 2001), 28.

<sup>2</sup> See Glennis Stephenson’s ‘2. The historical text’, in *Letitia Landon: The Woman Behind L.E.L.* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995), especially 35-8. A series of libellous attacks on Landon’s character and dress appeared in the satirical magazine, *The Wasp*, from October to November of 1826.

<sup>3</sup> *LLEL*, 28. William Jerdan discovered Landon’s poetical talent in early 1820 and facilitated the launch of her career with the publications of her poems in *The Literary Gazette*, which was under his editorship until 1850. Early letters between Landon’s cousin and tutor, Elizabeth Landon, and Jerdan offer a valuable account of the start of her accomplished career, especially in the letters dated 13 February 1820 and 14 February 1820.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

the 'age of personality': she is a victim of malicious life writing. Her rage and indignation notwithstanding, the defensive extract also provides useful insights into Landon's own conceptions of genius, fame and 'autograph'. She explains to Thomson that it is not her name which imbues her oeuvre with worth and staying power; rather, it is the prolific dissemination of her 'works' which inaugurates her name as a durable 'autograph'. Abstracting the human from the process of production, the *value* and *survival* of an author's autograph are determined by the successful circulation and reception of his 'works'. Landon can legitimate herself as a viable author and endure as a 'valuable' autograph ('– I [L. E. L.] am a subject of envy –') because, unlike 'every petty author,' works of her genius do not overload 'bookseller's shelves' as excess, unmarketable commodities.

Landon's conception of the autograph as a durable voice for her collected *monumentum aere perennius* is particularly pertinent, for it suggests an alternative commercial expression of posthumous life writing. Surmounting what Glennis Stephenson calls 'the gutter press', the autograph (with its attendant shades of popularity, profitability and celebrity) confers lasting protection upon the author's life and character against envy and abuse.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, Landon's defensive valorisation (literally, to raise the value) of her own autograph resonates with the celebratory deployment of 'bare names' in monumental inscriptions. In English poetic epitaphs, the classical dictates of epigrammatic brevity, public praise and impersonal grief were revised and simplified even further by sixteenth-century humanist sensibilities.<sup>7</sup> The humanist emphasis on deeds and virtue meant that 'the name of the deceased is epitaph enough', for 'those who had truly earned their fame needed extensive praise no more than a grand tomb.'<sup>8</sup> Just as Landon's autograph is authorised by 'works' alone, an ideal epitaph should be a name

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<sup>6</sup> *The Woman Behind L.E.L.*, 36.

<sup>7</sup> See Scodel's 'Introduction', in *The English Poetic Epitaph*, 1-11.

<sup>8</sup> Scodel, 'Chapter 2. Much in Little: The Poetics of Brevity', in *The English Poetic Epitaph*, 53 and 52.

supported by public achievements only. While the woman writer conjures her epitaphic name in the related contexts of popularity and profitability, Wordsworth's poetic of the rural epitaph restores the 'bare name' to its humble origin in nature. Nevertheless, one can perceive a possible relation, as well as conflict, between Landon's enviable autograph and Wordsworth's ideal epitaph in their respective verse memorials for Hemans. The former's two-phase commemoration of the deceased began in 1835 with 'Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans' and 'On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings', before consummating in 'Felicia Hemans' two years later.<sup>9</sup> Published in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book* [abbreviated hereafter as *FDRS*] for 1838, Landon's 'Felicia Hemans' is an exceptionally compelling work of mourning and commemoration not only because it responds to Wordsworth's stanza on Hemans in 'Extempore Effusion', but also because it calls attention to the uneasy gender-genre relation in Romantic posthumous life writing.<sup>10</sup>

Recent critics such as Jacqueline M. Labbe and Lucy Morrison detect in 'Felicia Hemans' an anxiety, as well as envy, of the subject's influence, success and reception both at home and abroad.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, both conclude that 'Landon's chief object' in the poem is

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<sup>9</sup> The 1835 verse and prose were originally published in *New Monthly Magazine* 44 (1835). I use the reprinted edition of 'On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings' [referred to hereafter as 'Character of Hemans's Writings'], in *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings*, ed. J. McGann and D. Riess (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1997), 173-86. 'Felicia Hemans' was first published in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book, 1838* (London, Paris, and New York: Fisher, Son, and Co.; Berlin: Black and Armstrong, and Asher, [1837]), 10-11. See also the annotated version of 'Felicia Hemans', in *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 582-4. I use the original publication in *FDRS*.

<sup>10</sup> For a more comprehensive study on how Romantic women writers contributed to the development of genres and forms in the early years of the nineteenth century, see Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Cecilia Pietropoli (eds.), *Romantic Women Poets: Genre and Gender* (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2007).

<sup>11</sup> See Jacqueline M. Labbe's 'Re-membering: Memory, posterity, and the memorial poem', in Matthew Campbell, Jacqueline M. Labbe and Sally Shuttleworth (eds.), *Memory and Memorials 1789-1914: Literary and Cultural Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2000), 132-46; and Lucy Morrison's 'Effusive Elegies or Catty Critic: Letitia Elizabeth Landon on Felicia Hemans', *Romanticism on the Net* 45 (2007), <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2007/v/n45/015820ar.html?vue=integral>.

'herself and her role as a woman poet.'<sup>12</sup> While Landon's compulsion to project herself in the verse is a well-recognised fact, such impulse is commonplace among works of mourning. However, to contract all the hermeneutic possibilities of the poem to her self-concerned role as a maligned writer is to overlook its potential as an experimental work of commemorative life writing. 'Felicia Hemans' is not just a self-interested expression of individual survival. It is, more importantly, a collective memorial and corrective defence of women poets who have 'sunk', as Hemans has, 'into a breathless sleep'. Furthermore, one should not underestimate the formal tension and fusion between the poem as a rural epitaph – brief in its inscription, and general in its praise – and the poem as an effusive elegy – generous in its sympathies, and intimate in its grief.<sup>13</sup> Significantly, the genre-crossing of epitaph and elegy evinces a gender rift in posthumous life representation between the universal 'Poet' as an abstract ideal and the personal 'Woman' as a domestic construct. By allegorising the deceased as a Promethean artist in pain, whose 'poet's and . . . woman's heart' (l. 56) are perennially tormented by the conditions of life and writing, Landon's poem brings critical questions to the fore. Should readers sympathise with Hemans the poet or with Hemans the woman? Equally, should Hemans be remembered (and thus preserved in canon) as a poet then a woman or as a woman then a poet? Complex in both scope and ambition, the 1838 verse is a fusion of epitaph, elegy, life writing and portraiture, a work of circulating secrets and sympathies, and an innovative attempt at posthumous protection. The present study will reassess 'Felicia Hemans' in two sections. In the first section, I will explore formal similarities between the epitaph and the autograph in relation to the title of Landon's verse memorial. The next section looks at how the

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<sup>12</sup> Morrison, 'Effusive Elegies or Catty Critic', paragraph 36.

<sup>13</sup> See Schor's 'Written Wailings', in *Bearing the Dead*, 48-72. According to Schor, 'Effusion' and 'elegy' became synonymous through 'common association of elegy with fluidity' by the late eighteenth century (51). As I have shown in the previous chapter, the generic conceptions of 'effusion' and 'elegy' do indeed interpenetrate, but the former is not formally restricted to verse and not limited by mood.

actual elegy assimilates Wordsworth's model epitaph, Hemans's autograph and visual portraiture under the cloak of a protective biography. Recasting Hemans as an androgynous Promethean artist, Landon generates a commemorative life account that is more subversive, more monumental and more 'autographical' than a reductive reporting of her subject's life.

### **'Bright names will hallow song': Autography and Physiognomy of Genius**

From the outset, the terse, annunciatory title of Landon's verse tribute already distinguishes it from typical elegiac writings of the time. Addressing the dead with unreserved directness, 'Felicia Hemans' stands out as both a name on the poet's headstone and an autograph on her oeuvre. The verse title completely ignores the practice of proclaiming reverential distance, occasion for writing and generic intent in the title of a conventional work of mourning and commemoration. Consider, for instance, the familiar titles of Elizabeth Rowe's 'On the Death of Mr. Thomas Rowe' (1717), Anna Seward's 'Elegy Written at the Sea-side, and Addressed to Miss Honora Sneyd' (1773), Shelley's *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats, Author of Endymion, Hyperion, etc.* and Wordsworth's 'Extempore Effusion on the Death of James Hogg'.<sup>14</sup> Continuing the revisionist tradition of female biography established by Mary Hays's *Female Biography* (1803) and Matilda Betham's *A Biographical Dictionary of the Celebrated Women of Every Age and Country* (1804), Hemans also adopts the names of female historical figures directly as eponymous titles ('Arabella Stuart', 'Properzia Rossi', etc.) for her own *Records of Woman* (1828).<sup>15</sup> Framed within quasi-dramatic monologues, Hemans's subjects

<sup>14</sup> Christina Rossetti would later repeat and mock Landon's unconventional practice in her own satirical tribute to the poet, 'L.E.L.'. 'L.E.L.' was first published in *The Victoria Magazine* I (May 1863), and later in *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1866), 136-8.

<sup>15</sup> In the 'Preface' to *Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of All Ages and Countries*, 6 vols. (London: Printed for Richard Phillips, 1803), Mary Hays outlines the feminist bent of her

often enact private moments of forgotten history in the first person, speaking as 'the undead' in their own 'names.' Although the series of speaking portraits in the *Records of Woman* exhibits an unmistakable affinity with collective biographies and dramatised histories, it is also, as Paula R. Feldman observes, 'an extended elegy' for her mother, who died a year before its publication.<sup>16</sup> The collection of female lives 'projects Hemans's own attendance by her mother's deathbed,' re-enacting 'the traumatic deathbed scene in various imagined times, places, and circumstances.'<sup>17</sup> Like Hemans's *Records of Woman*, Landon's poem appears to be just as ambivalent in its genre affiliation. Devoid of lucid genre signposting, 'Felicia Hemans' embraces the possibilities of an elegiac address to the dead, a biographical entry in collective *Lives* and a monumental inscription on stone. Labbe extrapolates the deletion of the 'to' in the poem's title as the author's strategy to present 'the named forebear more as a figurehead than a person to be addressed.'<sup>18</sup> The result of which is an encomium that is not offered 'to Hemans, or even about Hemans', but in actuality a 'story of Landon's life transplanted onto Hemans'.<sup>19</sup> But what if 'Felicia Hemans' is more than a transplanted self-reference? What if the title is formulated as such to assert both Landon's confidence in the endurance of her subject's name and her doubt in the power of *monumentum aere perennius* to speak for the dead?

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collective biographies: 'my book is intended for women, and not for scholars; that my design was, not to surprise by fiction, or to astonish by profound research, but to collect and concentrate, in one interesting point of view, those engaging pictures, instructive narrations, and striking circumstances, that may answer a better purpose than the gratification of a vain curiosity' (vol. i, p. vii). See also Matilda Betham's *A Biographical Dictionary of the Celebrated Women of Every Age and Country* (London: Printed for B. Crosby and Co., 1804). Both Hays's and Betham's biographical dictionaries are important to this revisionist tradition, for they address the exclusionary tendencies and masculine scholasticism of *Biographia Britannica* and its predecessors. Chantel M. Lavoie discusses the importance of names, sobriquets and titles of address to the biographical status and social body of female writers in '2. Piling and Compiling: The Works and Days of Elizabeth Rowe', in *Collecting Women: Poetry and Lives, 1700-1780* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2009), 36-53, especially 42.

<sup>16</sup> Feldman's 'Introduction' for the reprinted edition of Hemans's *Records of Woman with Other Poems*, ed. Paula R. Feldman (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), xxii.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> 'Re-membering: Memory', 141.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

If the eponymous 'Felicia Hemans' is indeed an epitaph, then her name alone should suffice as a sombre call to veneration and remembrance. As a writer of 'surpassing excellence' in 'literature', surely her epitaph does not 'stand in need of biographic sketches' 'nor of delineations of character to individualise [her].'<sup>20</sup> At least that is Wordsworth's principle on sepulchral inscriptions for first-rate men. With regards to the most successful Romantic woman writer, a simple tribute consisting of her 'naked name' and 'a grand comprehensive sentiment of . . . human admiration' should fulfil the basic provisions for erecting a permanent memorial.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the justification for her remembrance is 'already done by [her] Works, in the memories of men', or so the logic of self-monumentalisation goes.<sup>22</sup> Wordsworth's 'naked name' immediately harkens back to Johnson's stringent attribution of the 'bare name' to epitaphs of great 'men': 'The bare name of such men answers every purpose of a long inscription.' Decades later, the 'bare' and 'naked' name as an autograph of the dead continues to be promulgated by the renowned nineteenth-century antiquarian, Thomas Joseph Pettigrew. He accords the privilege of such 'bare' tribute to an exclusive league of acknowledged geniuses in 'An Essay on Epitaphs and Other Monumental Inscriptions' (1857):

There are few, however, who can in this respect [in the composition of an epitaph] admit simply of the inscription of their name; there are few whose genius is immortal. To such only can this most terse of inscriptions apply.<sup>23</sup>

In keeping with Wordsworth's minimalist standard for lapidary dedications to the 'mighty benefactors of mankind,' Pettigrew's epitaph for the illustrious dead is an earthly signpost to the 'immortal' contributions which out-speak and out-last the corpse.<sup>24</sup> The ideal epitaph is a

<sup>20</sup> *Essays upon Epitaphs I*, PWW, ii. 40.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Joseph Pettigrew's 'An Essay on Epitaphs and Other Monumental Inscriptions, with Incidental Observations on Sepulchral Antiquities', in *Chronicles of the Tombs: A Select Collection of Epitaphs* (London: H. G. Bohn, 1857), 24.

<sup>24</sup> PWW, ii. 40.

watermarked autograph undersigning its author's deeds and works. Moreover, it renders any additional effort to individuate the deceased biographically as redundant and unnecessary. Thus, the terseness of the select monumental lapidaries should not be taken as negative elocution in self-modesty and self-effacement; instead, it should be construed as a positive affirmation of self-confidence and enduring strength.

Landon's faith in her compatriot's name (and fame) is not completely unwarranted. As Chorley recalls, Hemans was constantly besieged with admirers and autograph seekers from England and America during her three-year residence in Wavertree, just outside Liverpool. His 'Personal Recollections of the Late Mrs. Hemans' (1835) document 'every species of literary homage' paid to her.<sup>25</sup> Even though the weight of these solicitations and intrusions 'pressed upon her', 'she was never so delightful, never so happy as when she could come in . . . to the firesides of the few who understood her' and make 'most pleasant merriment of the *notorieties* of her lot'.<sup>26</sup> Chorley's anecdotal characterisation of Hemans is rather suggestive because it presents a refreshing image of the poet which diverges from the conventional self-effacing ethos of early nineteenth-century women writers. While the dissemination of her cherished autograph no doubt provides a source of pride and merriment, it is also a contested property for the relic-seeking public and the self-possessing author. Hemans records her frustration with autograph seekers in a letter to Chorley:

They had an album with them, absolutely an album! . . . when the little woman with the inquisitorial eyes, informed me that the tall woman with the superior understanding—Heaven save the mark!—was *ambitious* of possessing my autograph—and out 'leaped in lightning forth'—the album. A most evangelical and edifying book it is truly, so I, out of pure spleen, mean to insert in it something as strongly savouring of the Pagan miscellany as *I dare*. Oh! the 'pleasures of fame'!<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Chorley's 'Personal Recollections of the Late Mrs. Hemans' appeared in three separate issues of *The Athenæum*: 398 (13 June 1835), 452-4; 400 (27 June 1835), 493-5; and 402 (11 July 1835), 527-30. I quote from *The Athenæum* 398 (13 June 1835), 452.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

In this humorous struggle for the repossession of her own autograph, the writer exhibits an extraordinary awareness of what her autograph signifies and its vulnerability to misappropriation. In this case, Hemans does not wish her name, her handwriting and her character to be misrepresented and misappropriated for evangelical purposes or for other religious and political agendas. Her autograph represents more than just her literary repute and newfangled celebrity status: it is a distilled expression of her life and character. After all, the word 'autograph' is not semantically restricted to the modern sense of a signature. It also refers more commonly in the period as a 'manuscript written in the author's own handwriting' (*OED*). To late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century physiognomists, a person's handwriting encapsulates his hidden histories – all the emotional, intellectual and physical dimensions of his life.

Romantic writers would have been well-acquainted with the physiognomic connection between character and handwriting, especially in the wake of Johann Kaspar Lavater's highly regarded essays on physiognomy, *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (1775-1778), and Édouard Hocquart's influential *L'Art de juger du caractère des hommes sur leur écriture* (1816).<sup>28</sup> Hocquart's work is of special interest here, for it would later inspire Isaac Disraeli's call to preserve the 'true physiognomy of

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<sup>28</sup> For samples of handwriting by Louis XIV, Voltaire, and Marie Antoinette, see the new and augmented edition of Édouard Hocquart's *L'Art de juger du caractère des hommes sur leur écriture: avec vingt-quatre planches représentant les écritures de divers personnages célèbres, gravées d'après les originaux autographes* (Paris: Chez Saintin, 1816). The work first appeared in 1812 under the title *L'Art de juger de l'esprit et du caractère des hommes et des femmes, sur leur écriture* (Paris: J. H. Miller, 1812). Hocquart's work took its cue from Johann Kaspar Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (1775-8). The first French edition of Lavater's magnum opus appeared in 1803, and was followed by a more extended version in 1806 with the new title *L'Art de connaître les hommes par la physionomie*, 10 vols. (Paris: Chez L. Prudhomme, 1806-9).

writing' in his own essay on 'Autographs' (1823).<sup>29</sup> Concerned by how Britain's 'rising generation' is taught to emulate a 'monotonous' and 'mechanical' set of writing habits, Disraeli's essay insists on the return of a more naturalised and individuated sort of writing.<sup>30</sup> As a natural extension of the wider aesthetic debate on the relative merits of originality and reproduction, the work espouses the free development of original character, as opposed to the mass duplication of approved temperament. Echoing the physiognomists before him, Disraeli writes: 'The flexibility of the muscles differs with every individual, and the hand will follow the direction of the thoughts and the emotions and the habits of the writers.'<sup>31</sup> In the contexts of physiognomy and Romantic anxiety about mechanical reproduction, the autograph becomes a natural emblem of self-expression, self-possession, and original character. The first publication of *The Literary Souvenir* in 1825 certainly capitalised on the aesthetic value and commercial implication of this physiognomic link between autography and literary genius.<sup>32</sup> In addition to literary contributions from Hemans, Landon, Jerdan, Amelia Opie and Robert Southey in the inaugural edition, the pocket-sized annual also features 'three plates of facsimiles of the autographs of the living Poets of Britain' and a concluding essay 'On Autograph'.<sup>33</sup> Featuring facsimiles of autographs from Byron, Coleridge, Southey, Hemans, Landon and others, *The Literary Souvenir* advertises itself as a kind of literary collector item 'hallowed' by what Byron

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<sup>29</sup> The essay was first published in 1823, and later collected in Isaac Disraeli's *A Second Series of Curiosities of Literature: Consisting of Researches in Literary, Biographical and Political History; of Critical and Philosophical Inquiries; and of Secret History*, 2nd edn., 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1824), ii. 208.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 208 and ii. 207.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 208.

<sup>32</sup> See *The Literary Souvenir; or, Cabinet of Poetry and Romance*, ed. Alaric A. Watts (London: Printed for Hurst, Robinson and Co., 1825). The popular pocket-sized annual ran from 1825 to 1837, and saw frequent contributions from Hemans, Landon, Maria Jane Jewsbury, Jerdan, Scott, Robert Southey and Watts himself.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 'The Preface' to the 1825 edition, vi. The essay 'On Autograph' appears at the end of the annual, 383-91.

aptly dubs as 'bright names' (see fig. 4.1).<sup>34</sup> To complement these signatures, the essay elaborates on Disraeli's earlier criticism. Eagerly promulgating the physiognomic link between

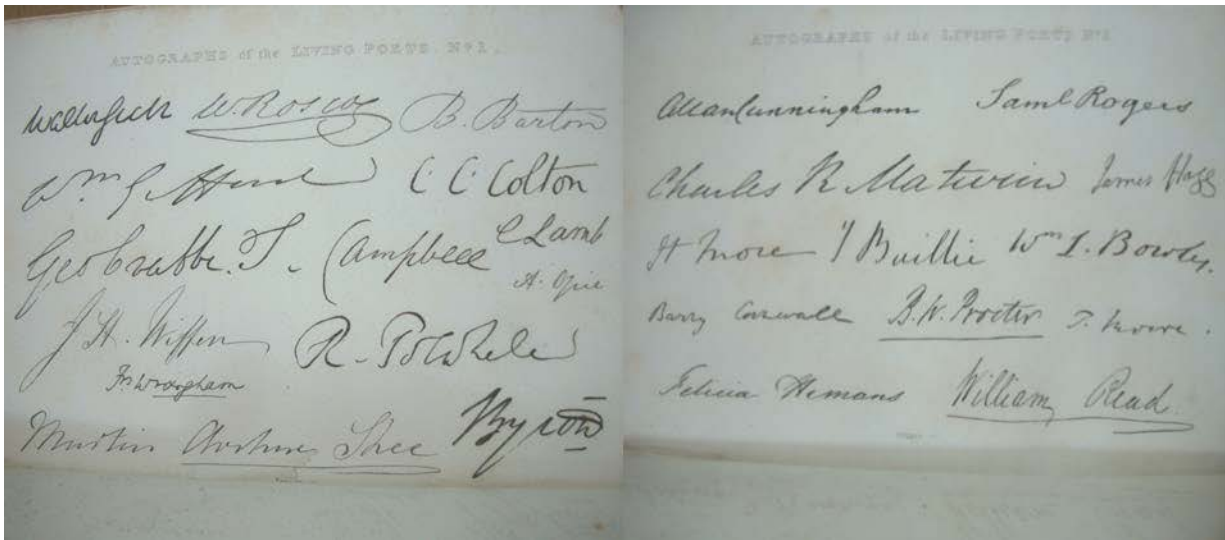


Fig. 4.1 On the left is plate No. 1 of the three plates of 'Autographs of the Living Poets', and on the right is plate No. 2. Facsimiles of Lamb's, Amelia Opie's and Byron's autographs are visible on the right of plate No. 1. Joanna Baillie's autograph is located in the centre and Hemans's on the bottom left of plate No. 2. Both plates are published in *The Literary Souvenir* (1825).

individuality and handwriting, the anonymous essayist remarks, 'nothing bears so exclusively the stamp of the individual as his handwriting.'<sup>35</sup> However, it is also evident that the discussion in *The Literary Souvenir* concentrates more on the meaning of signature than on the sense of handwriting. He observes, 'it is so strongly indicative of the individual, that the legislature of every nation has attached more importance to a signature than to the testimony of numerous

<sup>34</sup> Reflecting on the death of Major Frederick Howard, a relative of Byron's who perished at the Battle of Waterloo, Childe Harold invokes the 'bright names' of the war dead to valorise his own elegiac hymn on the wreckage of hope and ambition. I quote from Canto 3 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1816) in *Byron: The Major Works*, 112:

Their praise is hymn'd by loftier harps than mine;  
Yet one I would select from that proud throng,  
Partly because they blend me with his line,  
And partly that I did his sire some wrong,  
And partly that bright names will hallow song[.] (Canto 3, stanza 29, ll. 253-7)

<sup>35</sup> 'On Autograph', 384.

witnesses'.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, the autograph does not only characterise one's inner life: it also authorises one's own voice as the voice of truth.

Like epitaph writing, the autograph also lays claim to truth. Terse, natural, truthful and distinctive, the autograph conforms formally, as well as functionally, to Wordsworth's conception of the characteristic epitaph. In light of the rich physiognomic discourse on handwriting, Hemans's and Landon's respective epistolary remarks on the autograph acquire additional nuances. Indeed, as important contributors to the first edition of the literary annual, both women would certainly have been conscious of the emblematic and talismanic power of the autograph. Since Chorley's 'Personal Recollections of Hemans' were published three years prior to 'Felicia Hemans', Landon would have read about the deceased's amusing and troubled history with her own 'bright name'. Thus, the poet's audacious title should not be treated as strictly self-interested, but instead it should be regarded as a sophisticated statement of her subject's personal experience with publicity and self-possession. Vested with all the natural, physiognomic, characteristic and celebrity *stamps* of her once-lived life, Landon invokes Hemans's own 'bright name' to guard and memorialise the dead. Acting as the smallest wire upon which the burdens of survival and protection hang, the subject's autographic signature reifies Bacon's prescriptive notion of *maxima e minimis suspendens*. However, despite all the triumphant accounts and promises of the handwritten signature, the author of the essay 'On Autograph' also acknowledges its limitation to convey a discernible character. He writes: 'we would caution our readers against forming an estimate of the character of a person's handwriting from his signature alone . . . it [is] impossible that the autograph of a mere name should be as indicative of character as a few lines from a letter or literary composition.'<sup>37</sup> It would appear that 'bright name' alone cannot fully epitomise the author; it also needs to be

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 385.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 391.

supplemented by 'works', letters and other 'endless addible numbers'. The autograph, then, represents just one of the infinite but necessary additions to the artist's afterlife. 'Felicia Hemans', like so many other Romantic posthumous life writings, must also incorporate other genres and forms to mount an effective defence of its subject.

### **Gender and Genre Unbound: 'The fable of Prometheus and the vulture'**

Ironically, Landon's faith in the commemorative assurance of the 'autographic' epitaph is later contradicted by the inclusion of five prolix stanzas and an engraved portrait of Hemans's 'lovely' genius.<sup>38</sup> Landon seems to harness and, at the same time, question the capacity of the 'bare name' to memorialise the dead. The poem begins with a phatic expression of loss and gratitude toward the deceased:

No more, no more—oh, never more returning,  
 Will thy beloved presence gladden earth;  
 No more wilt thou with sad, yet anxious, yearning  
 Cling to those hopes which have no mortal birth.  
 Thou art gone from us, and with thee departed,  
 How many lovely things have vanished too:  
 .....  
 And feelings, teaching us our own were true. (ll. 1-6 and 8)

The incantatory repetition of 'No more, no more—oh, never more' is noteworthy for its suggestive allusion to Hemans's 'Properzia Rossi'.<sup>39</sup> Properzia, a celebrated Bolognese sculptor and poet, is often represented as a Sappho-Corinne figure and victim of unrequited love. In this highly reflexive work, the subject is cast at the height of her powers in a scene of abortive labour. Teetering on the brink of completion and failure, the sculptor's culminating

<sup>38</sup> In the 1838 volume of *FDRS*, the verse memorial is accompanied by a stipple engraving of William Edward West's 1828 portrait of Hemans.

<sup>39</sup> For 'Properzia Rossi', I use the reprinted edition in *Felicia Hemans*, ed. Wolfson, 351-6.

and 'parting work' (l. 76) – a basso-relief of Ariadne (another casualty of frustrated love) – emerges as both a self-monument and a suicide note.<sup>40</sup> On one hand, the artist's work of fame is intended to 'leave [her] name . . . awhile to live' (ll. 121, 123). On the other hand, it is relegated as 'a sound, / A spell o'er memory, mournfully profound' to the man who betrayed her affections. Hemans's poem depicts the tragedy of a female artist's defeated ambition in the wake of a deluded romance. Properzia exclaims: 'That which I have been can I be no more[?]' (l. 86).<sup>41</sup> To which she herself answers in quick succession: 'Never, oh! never more' (l. 87) and repeated again six lines later 'Never, oh! never more' (l. 93). She can 'no more' be an artist satisfied with vocational triumphs; she can 'never more' be an artist of 'Worthless fame' (l. 81). What is really lost and mourned here is the woman's concurrent identity as an artist. Psychoanalytically, Landon's 'No more, no more—oh, never more returning' constitutes a call to both herself and sympathetic readers to complete the work of mourning and let go of the object of attachment.<sup>42</sup> Yet, as a posthumous life writing, the first line already acknowledges its belatedness, and its failure to protect the artist from the injustice of annihilation. Landon's allusion to Properzia's unfinished relief of Ariadne thus implicates the author (Hemans) as an unfinished *monumentum aere perennius*.

Appropriately, then, the start of the stanza laments the brevity of life and unfulfilled ambition. Landon's emotive invocation of bereavement satisfies Wordsworth's 'first requisite' for the ideal epitaph, which stipulates that it be inscribed in the 'general language of humanity'

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<sup>40</sup> The state of the relief work is equivocally maintained in Hemans's composition. For a good discussion of Hemans's revisionary approach to Romantic ekphrasis in 'Properzia Rossi', see Grant F. Scott's '2. The Fragile Image: Felicia Hemans and Romantic Ekphrasis', in Nanora Sweet and Julie Melnyk (eds.), *Felicia Hemans: Reimagining Poetry in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 36-54, especially 41-49.

<sup>41</sup> Hemans's line echoes and revises Wordsworth's celebrated line 'The things which I have seen I now can see no more' (l. 9) in *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* with tremendous feminist urgency. For Wordsworth's great self-elegiac and self-consolatory work, see *PW*, iv. 279-85.

<sup>42</sup> To see how women elegists maintain dialogue with the dead, see Melissa F. Zeiger's '3. The Fading of Orpheus: Women's Elegies', in *Beyond Consolation: Death, Sexuality, and the Changing Shapes of Elegy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 62-82, especially 63.

'connected with the subject of death'.<sup>43</sup> This 'general language of humanity' is articulated in the lines 'Thou art gone from us, and with thee departed, / How many lovely things have vanished too'. The honorific addresses, plain language and absence of overwrought poeticism convey the inconsolable loss of a sage figure to the community of readers and writers. Meanwhile, the references to 'sad, yet anxious, yearning' and 'hopes which have no mortal birth' are deliberately kept obscure. They may be subtle biographical cues to Hemans's wrecked marriage. Or, as Morrison claims, they may allude to her failed aspiration to produce 'some more noble and complete work' before death.<sup>44</sup> Any initiated reader would have had some vague knowledge about Hemans's marital debacle, a scandalous subject that even her biographers, Chorley, Hughes and Lawrence, desisted from reporting in detail. Taken together, the double allusion evokes a more general condition of women writers in a period where conventions of authorship remain at variance with the ideal of femininity. As Landon muses in 'Character of Hemans's Writings', it is this conflict that renders the professional world 'a place of trial', where 'its severity would seem the lot of genius in a woman.'<sup>45</sup> In just eight lines, the stanza moves from a universal lamentation on death to a resigned acceptance of women writers' thwarted 'hopes', and then to a collective mourning over the loss of a genius.

The suggestion that 'many lovely things' – 'works' both existent and inchoate – can 'depart' and 'vanish' in the event of death further attests to the vulnerability of a woman poet's fame to collective amnesia and literary oblivion. As a connoisseur of Hemans's 'lovely' artifacts and writings, Landon assumes the role of a posthumous defender, advocating her compatriot's 'works' and 'bare name'. Foiling the 'attacks of time' on 'unassisted' 'first names', Landon serves as an 'interpreter' for her subject's corpus and unwritten (now

<sup>43</sup> *Essay upon Epitaphs I, PWW*, ii. 35.

<sup>44</sup> 'Effusive Elegies or Catty Critic', paragraph 9. The critic is referring to Hemans's 1835 letter to Rose Lawrence, discussed earlier in my Introduction.

<sup>45</sup> *LEL: Selected Writings*, 179.

'vanished') things.<sup>46</sup> In the second half of the stanza, she models Hemans's poetical character after a transcendental consciousness interfused with nature. She writes:

Thou hast been round us, like a viewless spirit,  
Known only by the music on the air;  
The leaf or flowers which thou hast named inherit  
A beauty known but from thy breathing there:  
.....  
The likeness from itself the fond heart gave;  
As planets from afar look down on ocean,  
And give their own sweet image to the wave. (ll. 9-12 and 14-16)

Far from writing her subject into dissolution, Landon's repeated association of the 'viewless spirit' (*spiritus* as the 'breath' of the Divine) with its etymological complements – 'air', 'music' and 'breath' – elevates Hemans to the 'Author' of both language and beauty. Endowing 'leaf or flowers' with sounds of beauty and traces of her undying genius, Hemans survives as naturalised sounds.

Instead of disappearing into thin air, the enjambment following the word 'inherit' stresses her continuity and endurance. This 'poetic inheritance' is founded on Hemans's alleged power to inspire a new poetic tradition (and hence lineage) for not just nature but also for others, like Landon, to succeed in.<sup>47</sup> She 'names' what other writers can only sketch, imitate and *inherit*. Moving from soundscape to landscape, Landon's lines extol the ability of her subject to recreate the world in her own manifold image. First, the body of the deceased diffuses into an indistinct Miltonic spirit which permeates and beautifies nature. Then, it consolidates into a reflexive creator-like consciousness remaking the world from its own likeness. Finally, it multiplies and sublimates into cosmic emanations (as 'planets') of the

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<sup>46</sup> The quotations are from Johnson's 'An Essay on Epitaphs': 'None but the first names can stand unassisted against the attacks of time, and if men raised to reputation by accident or caprice have nothing but their names engraved on their tombs, there is danger lest in a few years the inscription require an interpreter' (97). The essayist forewarns the need to enlist a posthumous 'interpreter' for an unsupported 'bare name' on epitaph.

<sup>47</sup> Zeiger, *Beyond Consolation*, 63.

poet's own multifaceted yet unified 'one life' (as one 'sweet image'). From humble leaves to lofty planets, Hemans is reinterpreted and reconceived as a naturalised genius whose posthumous presence saturates the physical world.

In infusing her predecessor's 'viewless' genius with the immense dominion of nature, Landon also adheres to Wordsworth's ethic of commemorating a departed friend in epitaph.<sup>48</sup> That is, when delineating the dead, 'The character of a deceased friend . . . is not seen, nor ought to be seen, otherwise than as a tree through a tender haze or a luminous mist, that spiritualises and beautifies it'.<sup>49</sup> Through the 'hazy' and 'misty' abstraction of the 'parts and proportions' of Hemans's person, a more general and 'beautified' character of the poet (as opposed to the character of the woman) comes into view. Epitaphic 'spiritualisation' obscures and suppresses the earthly particularities of her personal history. The poet becomes a metaphor, as it were: a 'tree' that is part seen and part imagined. Defying the generic prescriptions articulated by eighteenth-century essayists, the subject of Wordsworth's ideal epitaph in *Essays Upon Epitaphs I* is purged of biographical details and sublimated by natural abstractions. Although he perceives this posthumous 'beautifying' of the dead to be 'truth' of 'the highest order', his figuratively charged language of nature betrays a penchant for poeticising the deceased.<sup>50</sup> Following the ethical and aesthetic schema of Wordsworth's 'funeral biography', Landon's lines accomplish just that: they privilege the 'Poet' but preclude the 'Woman.' Her epitaphic 'spiritualisation' and romantic 'naturalisation' of the eponymous subject subordinate the hardships and 'domestick privacies' of her life. Despite his transgression of the genre,

<sup>48</sup> Given Landon's own morbid fascination with churchyard graves, she would have been familiar with Wordsworth's *Essays Upon Epitaphs I*. For a good example of her interest in churchyard cemeteries, see Landon's 'The City Churchyard', first published in *FDRS* for 1836. The poem will be discussed in a later chapter. Arguably, the most sustained literary engagement with country churchyards in the Romantic period is Caroline Anne Bowles's *Chapters on Churchyards*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood; London: T. Cadell, 1829). She would later become Southey's second wife.

<sup>49</sup> *Essays Upon Epitaphs I*, *PWW*, ii. 36.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

Wordsworth defends the controlled excision of disagreeable human traits in epitaph writing as 'the joint offspring of the worth of the dead and the affections of the living'.<sup>51</sup> After all, 'to analyse the characters of [the dearly departed] . . . is not a common or natural employment of men at any time.'<sup>52</sup> Wordsworth's 'truth' of 'the highest order' is first and foremost a loving truth, and at its heart is one's immanent duty to the preservation of the departed other through careful and caring remembrances.<sup>53</sup> According to this edict, human truth supersedes factual truth. It is not just adequate but also ethical that only 'the trunk and the main branches of the worth of the deceased be boldly and unaffectedly represented.'<sup>54</sup> Given the manipulative licence of the Wordsworthian epitaph, Landon's effort to 'beautify' Hemans in the most congenial, and sometimes exaggerated, terms should similarly be construed as genuinely protective.

Even so, the poet's attempt to consecrate the subject's memory for posterity is probably as self-concerned as it is generous. Indeed, if a writer as illustrious as Hemans is susceptible to a 'second death', then what are the chances that her own oeuvre and autograph will endure? Boldly asserting the universal renown of her subject, the writer exalts Hemans in the second stanza as more than a mere 'British poetess': Hemans is also a 'World poet.' Transcending cultural barriers and national boundaries, the subject is lauded as an immortal ruler of a 'sweet empire over land and sea' (l. 26). She accomplishes this feat by bringing 'forth foreign lands their treasures' (l. 17) through literary translations and adaptations. Landon's poet-*empress* assimilates 'the softness of Italian measures' (l. 19), 'the grave cadence of Castilian song' from Spain (l. 20) and the 'echoes of the Susquehanna's waters' from America (l. 29) into a grand

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. ii. 35.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. ii. 36.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. ii. 37.

vision of universal literature. This literary union of nations is not founded on violence or domination, but on a 'general bond of union' (l. 21) engendered through the 'gentle sway' (l. 25) of her writings. The poet personifies the 'general bond' of humanity, and 'By [her] immortal verse is [the universal] language known' (l.22). Suffused with imperial, cultural and moral undertones, the panegyric tribute to Hemans becomes an encomium to the 'Poet' as an idea and symbol – as an embodiment of world community and languages. Repeating the smokescreen effect of epitaphic 'spiritualisation,' Landon first abstracts the temporal 'female' – the 'Individual' – from the life of the deceased. Then, she recasts Hemans as a 'General' and 'Universal' writer, as 'One glorious poet [who] makes the world *his* own' (l. 24, my italics).<sup>55</sup> By subtly inverting the gender of her subject, Landon monumentalises Hemans in overtly masculine terms. No longer just a poet struggling to repossess her 'bright name', she/he is now a proprietor of the world.

Immortal and cosmopolitan, Landon's posthumous life representation of 'Felicia Hemans' seems well-positioned for canonisation both inside and outside England. Yet, considerable disjunction exists between this audacious hope and the poems of banishment and bereavement euphemistically touted as 'Italian measures,' 'Castilian song' and 'echoes of the Susquehanna's waters'. 'Italian measures' such as 'The Sicilian Captive' (1825) and 'Properzia Rossi', 'Castilian song' such as 'The Songs of the Cid' (1822) and American 'echoes of the Susquehanna's waters' such as 'Madeline, a Domestic Tale' (1828) and *The Forest Sanctuary* (1825) all reverberate themes of betrayal, exile and death.<sup>56</sup> As Angela Leighton observes, Hemans 'is inherently a poet of exile and displacement', whose 'imagination, far from remaining safe within its own "spot" of home, constantly travels abroad . . . in search of other

<sup>55</sup> On Coleridge's privileging of 'symbol' over 'allegory,' and its relationship with the 'individual' and the 'general,' see the reprinted edition of 'Lay Sermons, I', in *Coleridge: The Major Works*, 661.

<sup>56</sup> For 'The Sicilian Captive', I use the reprinted edition in *Felicia Hemans*, ed. Wolfson, 407-9. The poem was first published in *New Monthly Magazine* 14 (August 1825), 122-3.

lands for poetry.<sup>57</sup> 'The Sicilian Captive' exemplifies the woman poet in exile rather vividly. Captured by the Vikings after a fierce battle in Sicily, the Sapphic protagonist is wrenched from her home in warm Sicily and forced to sing as an improvisatrice of her 'sunny land' (l. 41) in cold Scandinavia. As she translates vignettes of her distant home into song, the captive girl performs the desperate and self-depleting role of the 'wild bird' (l. 30) in Hemans's 'The Dying Improvisatore' (1828), pouring its music to 'a fleeting lay' (l. 32).<sup>58</sup> The 'Lute, voice, and bird, are blending' ('The Sicilian Captive', l. 69) in the songs of these distressed songstresses. The caged improvisatrice is thus a plausible mouthpiece for Hemans's own sense of estrangement and claustrophobic imagination as a captive writer banished to a northern 'home' for life.

Though anxieties of creative exile and death are rife, they are tentatively relieved by Landon's recognition of the mighty 'sway' of circulating sympathies and mass printing. The rest of the second stanza addresses the interrelated themes of home, motherhood, reception, circulation of print and sympathies, and literary afterlife. She writes:

Many a stranger and far flower was blended  
 In the soft wreath that glory bound for thee.  
 The echoes of the Susquehanna's waters  
 Paused in the pine-woods words of thine to hear;  
 And to the wide Atlantic's younger daughters  
 Thy name was lovely, and thy song was dear. (ll. 27-32)

As a major commercial waterway, the Susquehanna River flows through New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland. Just as the 'pine-woods words' of Hemans are commodified and shipped to the New World by 'ocean' and 'wave,' the 'echoes' of praise circulate back via the 'Susquehanna's waters' and 'wide Atlantic' to England. Landon's allusion to her subject's cross-Atlantic success is not unfounded. Hemans's works were so fashionable that her 'books

<sup>57</sup> Angela Leighton's 'Felicia Hemans', in *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 25 and 23.

<sup>58</sup> For 'The Dying Improvisatore', I use the reprinted edition in *Felicia Hemans*, ed. Wolfson, 433-4. The poem was first published in *New Monthly Magazine* 22 (May 1828), 403-4.

were widely pirated, especially in America, and her poems were often reprinted without permission in periodicals and anthologies.<sup>59</sup> Though Morrison identifies a hint of Landon's 'envy of Hemans's far-reaching "gentle sway"' in these lines, the poetics and politics of the 'far flower' and 'soft wreath' are much more nuanced than a mere surreptitious rivalry.<sup>60</sup>

Aside from the apparent autobiographical resonances, Landon's lines present a complex allegory of circulating sympathies, audience formation, and literary mothering. This allegory expands on the conjunction of 'works' and 'flowers' already established in Hemans's 'Books and Flowers' (1832).<sup>61</sup> In that poem, 'deathless pages' (l. 5) and 'flowers' 'shedding, / O'er Milton's page' (ll. 29-30) empower the caged female genius to envisage a boundless 'empire' of 'mind and nature' (l. 40). In Landon's stanza, the works (as 'flowers') of Hemans's creative labour leave their maternal 'maker' for the far transatlantic shore. These 'far flowers' then 'blend' with 'Many a stranger,' converting American strangers into her sympathetic readers and, in time, her literary scions as 'Atlantic's younger daughters'. Once these diasporic 'daughters' are reared, the final phase of this literary exchange is complete. Following the chain of floral metaphors, Hemans's 'far flowers' are reprocessed and revaluated as a 'soft wreath' in a homeward journey 'bound for', or recirculation back to, the literary matriarch. As the stock emblem of a poet's initiation to immortal fame, the 'soft wreath' invokes the poet's laurel and eminent forebears such as Petrarch, Tasso and the fictional Corinne. Even more potent than the evanescent 'soft wreath', the continuing 'echoes' of Hemans's works among her 'younger daughters' strengthen her fragile floral works into perennial 'pine-woods words'. In spite of the syntactical break between 'pine-woods' and 'words', the semi-alliterative juxtaposition of 'words' and 'woods' encourages the transposition between words that wither and writings that

<sup>59</sup> Feldman's 'The Poet and the Profits', 151.

<sup>60</sup> 'Effusive Elegies or Catty Critic', paragraph 10.

<sup>61</sup> 'Books and Flowers' was first published in the literary annual, *The Winter's Wreath* (1832). I use the reprinted edition in *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems*, ed. Kelly, 396-8.

endure. Landon's inclusion of Hemans's engraved portrait bolsters this chain of metonymic associations. In the engraved portrait, the loosely veiled maternal figure rests her half-clasped hand beneath the base of her neck with a small flower between the fingers (see fig. 4.2). The lush arboreal pattern on the silk screen reinforces the metaleptic slippage between 'pine-woods' and 'words'. Meanwhile, the flower serves as a deictic device drawing readers' attention to the



Fig. 4.2 The stipple engraving of Felicia Hemans in *FDRS* for 1838 is by W. Holl, after William E. West's 1828 portrait of the sitter at the request of Alaric A. Watts.

woman in the portrait, just as her poems beckon readers to the 'lovely' author behind their production. Hemans is the beauty's incarnate which her 'Works' and 'Nature' inherit. The effects of these interacting metaphors converge on the last line of the stanza: 'Thy *name* was lovely, and thy song was *dear*' (my italics). In this circuitous interplay of textual and visual signs, the reference to the 'lovely name' returns our attention to the actual autograph of 'Felicia Hemans' at the bottom of the portrait engraving. Significantly, the iconography and the facsimile of her handwritten signature come together to conjure an animating presence of the

author preserved at the prime of her powers. The final line of the stanza thus links the promissory durability of the autograph and the inexhaustible vitality of the portrait with commercial valorisation through circulation. To purchase her dear song is to own an autographic and iconographic record of her life and character. Consequently, the stanza transforms the deceased into a commemorative commodity for what Stephen C. Behrendt calls 'a community of ownership'.<sup>62</sup> As the chief editor of *FDRS*, and as its main contributor, Landon's publication of 'Felicia Hemans' in the annual may seem self-serving at first. However, considering the fact that the annual was being published and distributed in such cosmopolitan centres as Paris, Berlin, New York and St. Petersburg, the publication of 'Felicia Hemans' in *FDRS* would surely have aided the global circulation of her subject's autograph and fame. Unlike Wordsworth's anti-utilitarian stance on posthumous life writing, Landon assimilates practices of goods exchange and material ownership to her unique brand of defensive commemoration. As part of this posthumous community of readers, Atlantic's younger and elder daughters disseminate the legacy of their literary matriarch through the possession of her image and valorisation of her 'bright name'.

The intertextual references and metonymic associations notwithstanding, 'Felicia Hemans' would have been complete as an epitaph if the tribute piece had ended with a headstone and two stanzas. As Wordsworth asserts, in an epitaph the 'passions should be subdued' and 'the emotions controlled' in the interest of preserving a lasting inscription for 'universal perusal'.<sup>63</sup> In other words, fulsomeness should be avoided in poetic epitaphs.<sup>64</sup> Apart from the brief outbreak of grief-stricken effusions over Hemans's death at the beginning of the

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<sup>62</sup> Stephen C. Behrendt's '4. Experimenting with Genre', in *British Women Poets and the Romantic Writing Community* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 190.

<sup>63</sup> *Essay upon Epitaphs I*, *PWW*, ii. 38.

<sup>64</sup> See Scodel's 'The Poetics of Brevity', 50-85. Owing to humanist influence, 'Brevity in poetic epitaphs was encouraged' to 'say a great deal in a small compass' (52).

first stanza, Landon's emotionally 'subdued' verse has on the whole focused on 'the trunk and the main branches' of her subject.<sup>65</sup> But this epitaphic self-control ruptures spectacularly in the third stanza:

Was not this purchased all too dearly?—never  
 Can fame atone for all that fame hath cost.  
 We see the goal, but know not the endeavour  
 Nor what fond hopes have on the way been lost.  
 What do we know of the unquiet pillow,  
 By the worn cheek and tearful eyelid prest,  
 When thoughts chase thoughts, like the tumultuous billow  
 Whose very light and foam reveals unrest?  
 We say, the song is sorrowful, but know not  
 What may have left that sorrow on the song [.] (ll. 33-42)

The barriers to sympathetic identification between the living and the dead, the author and the reader, and the poet and the woman are greatly diminished here, as bodily wasting and gushing effusions 'billow' from the grave of the deceased. Collapsing these barriers is the 'we' voice which Landon now 'assumes' to '[align] her own experiences with those she ascribes to Hemans' and to 'simultaneously [position herself] with readers.'<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, I disagree with Morrison's interpretation of the enjambling 'never' at the start of the stanza as Landon's delayed rejection of the belief that 'fame is worth anything.'<sup>67</sup> After all, it is inconceivable that the poet would renounce 'fame' as a transgressive sin right after extolling the commercial process by which its 'gentle sway' can be won and 'extended' in the previous stanza.

Rather than being a reductive renunciation of fame, Landon's ambivalent lines vacillate between an account of Hemans's success in life and a lament on the stigma of writing for fame and money. The pithy 'Can fame *atone* for all that fame hath *cost*' appears in the poem as an alternative take on the detrimental consequence of success in 'Character of Hemans's

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<sup>65</sup> *PWW*, ii. 38.

<sup>66</sup> Morrison, 'Effusive Elegies or Catty Critic', paragrah 11.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Writings' – 'But never can success repay its cost.'<sup>68</sup> However, the line also echoes the epigraph of the present chapter, which bears repeating: 'But success is an offence not to be forgiven. To every petty author, whose works have scarce made his name valuable as an autograph . . . —I am a subject of envy.' In the rhetoric of self-defence, the reference to 'atonement' in the stanza can and should be taken as secular irony: since success is not really an offence, fame should not be a sin. Only a 'petty author' whose name is yet 'valuable' as an autograph would regret the 'cost' of fame and question its compensatory worth. Just as Landon is unapologetically elevated to the position of peerless success, so Hemans is ironically mourned and enthroned on a lonely pedestal: 'Alas! The kingdom of the lute is lonely— / Cold is the worship coming from afar' (ll. 47-8). Ruling the 'kingdom of the lute' may be lonely, but only a writer privileged with 'valuable' (and marketable) talent can be 'a subject of envy' and receptacle of autographic fame. For Landon, fame can 'never' 'atone for all that fame hath cost', for fame has nothing to atone for. Contrary to its cautionary tenor, the implied message is that a woman writer should at some level be 'willing' to incur the necessary cost of transaction between private life and public reception. Hence, instead of foreclosing a female artist's futile relation with fame, the enjambment suspends what is till now an over-generalised account of the 'Poet,' where the history of the 'Woman' remains largely concealed.

Moving away from the generalising tendency of the epitaph, the stanza incites posthumous identification with the deceased as both a woman and a writer. Linguistically, Landon seems intent on roping us into intimate sympathies with Hemans through the choric 'we' voice ('we see', 'we know', 'We say', and 'we feel') and the plethora of 'W'-starting words ('Was', 'We', 'What', 'When', 'Whose', followed by another repeating 'We and 'What'). Created by interlinking 'V's' and resonating feminine 'voices,' the letter 'W' signifies

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<sup>68</sup> *LEL: Selected Writings*, 184.

'Women's Writing,' 'Women's Works' and 'Women Writers.' Short, general and impartial, the epitaph as such is an inadequate mode of commemoration for women writers. Moreover, the privileging of 'works' over the 'author,' and the 'general' (the Poet) over the 'particular' (the Woman), distorts the reality of Hemans's literary production. Importantly, Landon's ideal poet closely resembles the one celebrated in Hemans's 'Scenes and Passages from the "Tasso" or Goethe' (1834): 'Not alone' in 'the cathedrals of nature', 'the poet bear[s] into the recesses of woods . . . a heart full-fraught with the sympathies . . . fostered by intercourse with his kind, a memory covered with the secret inscriptions which joy and sorrow fail not indelibly to write'.<sup>69</sup> Hemans's 'poet' embodies both natural sublime and social sympathies. Hence, the third stanza leads the dead out of the lonely 'cathedrals of nature' into the crowded and noisy scene of posthumous intercourse. From an epitaph steeped in nature to an elegiac overflow of grief, 'Felicia Hemans' fluctuates between a universal poetic consciousness and a personal 'memory covered with the secret inscriptions' of 'joy and sorrow'. Due to the presence of these 'secret inscriptions', Landon's verse memorial cannot offer readers an accessible, straightforward account of Hemans's life and character. Consider the following examples: 'We see the goal, but *know not* the endeavour / *Nor* what fond hopes have . . . been lost'; 'We say the song is sorrowful, but *know not* / What may have left that sorrow on the song'; and 'However mournful words may be, they *show not* / The whole extent of wretchedness and wrong' (ll. 43-4, my italics). In the end, we know 'nothing' and are not privy to any intimate knowledge about the woman behind the poet. Yet, the insistence on what we do not know and cannot see indicates a formal and ethical crisis in Landon's adoption of the epitaphic form. Constrained by what the form can communicate and *is allowed to communicate*, the sympathetic 'we' voice articulates a

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<sup>69</sup> Hemans intended a series of German studies, but only 'No. I. — Scenes and Passages from the "Tasso" of Goethe' was published in *New Monthly Magazine* 40 (Jan. 1834), 1-8. I use the reprinted edition in *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems*, ed. Kelly, 371.

desire to rebel against the form. Outgrowing the generic confines of epitaph, Landon's commemorative writing is evolving into a kind of elegiac biography or biographical elegy.

The third stanza, functioning like the antistrophe ('a turning against') in an ode, turns away *from* and *against* Wordsworth's ideal of epitaph completely. Her verse memorial is no longer 'exposed to all – to the wise and the most ignorant' or to 'the stooping old man' and 'the child' – as an egalitarian aid to reflections on life and mortality.<sup>70</sup> Moving toward a more personal and exclusionary display of grief, Landon's epitaphic writing undergoes a generic shift to an elegiac lament on private loss. Despite the fact that the mourning writer has never known the deceased personally in life, the sense of privacy and secrecy exuding from the stanza places her within the intimate circle of the subject. As Behrendt points out, the readership for these privately occasioned elegiac poems is often 'rhetorically framed as an audience of one'.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, 'these poems typically share with their readers something quite personal about their subjects' and in the process '[increase] the sense of privacy by treating this shared knowledge almost as a secret.'<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, the 'we' voice is not an inclusive reference to some amorphous mass of readers 'worshipping' from 'afar', but a self-reference to Landon as Hemans's model audience and posthumous defender. As her ideal reader, she alone possesses 'the secret inscriptions' to her buried memory – the real epitaph adequate for the commemoration and preservation of a fellow woman writer. In the subsequent stanzas, Landon supplies what is missing in the image of the universal poet with secrets of the private woman in an effort to excite posthumous sympathy and collective responsibility.

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<sup>70</sup> *Essays upon Epitaphs I*, PWW, ii. 38.

<sup>71</sup> *British Women Poets*, 191.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

To bridge the distance between the deceased and her readers, the elegist marshals the trope of secrecy to help instigate sympathetic identification. The fourth stanza exploits this trope rather outstandingly:

Yet what is mind in woman but revealing  
In sweet clear light the hidden world below,  
By quicker fancies and a keener feeling  
Than those around, the cold and careless, know? (ll. 49-52)

On one hand, the mechanism of enjambment sets free the flowing tendency of a woman's mind toward transparency ('mind in woman' is 'but *revealing*'). On the other hand, it suspends the motion of this exhibitionist mind, literally, in the vast blank of the page where everything is apparent but nothing is revealed. If this seems paradoxical it is because the lines already educe a contradictory pull 'in woman' toward self-display and self-concealment. Indeed, how can a mind be transparent and possess a 'hidden world' at the same time? Even Hemans is known to identify herself exactly with her own writings. She relates so fondly to Corinne's line '*Oh! mes Amis, rappelez-vous quelquefois mes vers; mon âme y est empreinte*' ('Oh! my Friends, remember my verse sometimes; my soul is imprinted there') that she adopts it as the epigraph to her autobiographical poem, 'A Parting Song' (1828), to close the *Records of Woman* volume.<sup>73</sup> However, she is also known for the famous 'death-bed injunction, "Oh! never let them publish any of my letters!"'<sup>74</sup> Sensitive to Hemans's autobiographical plea for posthumous remembrance and the simultaneous injunction against overexposing her subject's life, Landon's verse tribute is a careful mediation of her 'hidden' and 'publishable' worlds. According to Norma Clarke, 'Fame was a burden because fame was unwomanly' for Hemans –

<sup>73</sup> The original quotation is from 'Dernier Chant de Corinne' ('The Last Song of Corinne') in book 20, chapter 5, of de Staël's *Corinne*. Chorley records her attachment to 'The Last Song of Corinne' in his 'Personal Recollections of Hemans', *The Athenæum* 402, 529. For 'A Parting Song', see the reprinted edition in *Felicia Hemans*, ed. Wolfson, 425. She is recorded for having written 'C'est moi' ('It's me') at the end of book 4 of *Corinne* in *CM*, i. 304. Vincent discusses the influence 'The Last Song of Corinne' had on Romantic women writing in '2. Last Songs: The Romantic Poetess and the Elegy', in *The Romantic Poetess*, 26-51.

<sup>74</sup> Hughes's 'Memoir of Mrs. Hemans', *The Works of Mrs. Hemans*, i. 1.

it strips the writer of her prescribed modesty and subjects her body to the objectifying 'glare of publicity'.<sup>75</sup> For women writers, their ('bare') public personae do not reflect the "unnatural" lives' they lead in split allegiance to domestic duty and individual ambition.<sup>76</sup> Outwardly, they must uphold the appearance of unity with their pristine inner life. Privately, they must suppress their own aspirations for fame in the 'hidden world below'. A brief epitaph inscribing the public persona of the deceased is an ineffective way of soliciting sympathy, for it moderates effusions of personal pain and suffering. Smith defines 'sympathy' in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as 'our fellow-feeling with the sufferings,' and *not* 'with the enjoyments, of others.'<sup>77</sup> To incite our posthumous sympathy with Hemans, Landon must do more than just celebrate her subject: she must also reveal her subject's 'sufferings'. Motivated by the dual aims of protection and remembrance, the unspoken 'sufferings' of the poet's putative double-life are 'revealed' through controlled allusions to convert 'cold and careless' readers to warm and caring friends.

If readers fail to comprehend these 'secret inscriptions', Hemans's dichotomous life experience is featured again at the start of the fifth stanza. Her private struggle is no longer a subject of speculation but a cause for resolution:

What on this earth could answer thy *requiring*,  
 For earnest faith—for love, the deep and true,  
 The beautiful, which was thy soul's *desiring*,  
 But only from thyself its being drew. (ll. 65-8, my italics)

What appears to be another lamentation on the irredeemable cost of fame is quickly consoled by the compensatory production of beautiful verses in life. Reading through the complex syntax, the lines offer to reconcile the perennial clash between what is culturally 'required' of a woman

<sup>75</sup> Norma Clarke's 'Contrary to Custom', in *Ambitious Heights: Writing, Friendship, Love – The Jewsbury Sisters, Felicia Hemans, and Jane Welsh Carlyle* (London: Routledge, 1990), 34.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 32.

<sup>77</sup> 'Part 1. Of the Propriety of Action', *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 41.

('earnest faith' in God, in love 'deep and true') and what a woman-as-writer 'desires' from the depth of her soul ('beautiful' verses drawn from her 'being'). The problem of personal cost is thus 'answered' by the beautiful works she writes. Reversing the logic of posthumous compensation in pastoral elegies, the 'sin' of Hemans's fame is 'atoned' for *in life* (as opposed to after death) by her own redeeming oeuvre. However, Landon's consolatory language also anticipates the possibility of posthumous misunderstanding and misrepresentation. For instance, the epithetical 'cold and careless' in the fourth stanza is lifted from 'Character of Hemans's Writings' not in the context of cold 'worship coming from afar', but as a reference to the poet's 'immediate circle, who neglects and misunderstands him'.<sup>78</sup> Careless misunderstanding does not necessarily evolve from malicious criticisms. Consider Maria Jane Jewsbury's promotional sketch of 'Felicia Hemans' in *The Athenæum* (1831): 'Were there to be a feminine literary house of commons, Felicia Hemans might very worthily be called to fill the chair as the speaker.'<sup>79</sup> The humorous election of the poet as a paragon of 'feminine' writing must have appeared somewhat pert and reductive to her friend. Unsure of the identity of the contributor, Hemans responds modestly, and disapprovingly, in an 1831 letter: 'Some parts of it are, however, beautifully written, though . . . I utterly disclaim all wish for the post of "Speaker to the Feminine Literary House of Commons."' <sup>80</sup> Unfortunately, intimacy does not guarantee understanding and distance does not necessarily translate into indifference.

The 'secret inscriptions' of pain presume the 'knowability' of the poet's private character; that is, they presuppose a biographical accessibility to some absolute 'truth' and 'essence' of the writer. Landon exalts the function of pain in the fostering of poetic sensibility:

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<sup>78</sup> *LEL: Selected Writings*, 173.

<sup>79</sup> Originally appeared as 'Literary Sketches No. 1: Felicia Hemans' in *The Athenæum* 172 (12 February 1831), 104-5. I quote from the reprinted edition in *Felicia Hemans*, ed. Wolfson, 562.

<sup>80</sup> The letter was written after 12 February 1831 to an unknown addressee. I quote from the reprinted letter in *Felicia Hemans*, ed. Wolfson, 513.

'What is to feed such feeling, but to culture / A soil whence pain will never more depart?' (ll. 53-4). What lies in the 'viewless' and 'hidden world below' is this 'soil' of 'pain' on which the creative spirit is 'cultured' and nourished, the 'soil' with which 'One glorious poet makes the world his own.' To acquire knowledge of this pain is to glimpse at the 'truth' of the woman hidden away in the 'viewless' depths of the poet. In addition to venerating the name, achievements, and general character of the poet, Landon's verse provokes readers' interest in the character of a woman who is allegedly ill-treated and 'misunderstood' by an ignorant world:

How is the warm and loving heart requited  
 In this harsh world, where it awhile must dwell.  
 Its best affections wronged, betrayed, and slighted—  
 Such is the doom of those who love too well. (ll. 69-72)

Against the cold 'worship coming from afar' and 'the cold and careless' nearby, 'the warm and loving' woman is lionised as both a forlorn victim and a suffering hero. It would be reductive to ascribe these lines solely to Landon's own transplanted distress and disappointments. Rather, her depiction of the poet suffering in private (while wetting the 'unquiet pillow') stages a kind of spectacle, a spectacle of her 'heroic magnanimity' to detractors and devotees alike.<sup>81</sup> As Smith observes, 'our sympathy with pain' always 'falls greatly short of what is naturally felt by the sufferer'.<sup>82</sup> In order to elicit 'complete sympathy' and 'admiration' from strangers, the sufferer must show 'heroic magnanimity' to one's spectators in a 'surprise' spectacle of emotional 'fortitude' and 'insensibility'.<sup>83</sup> By insinuating a 'hidden world' of Hemans's life which readers *know not* and words *show not*, Landon's verse achieves just that: a spectacle of her subject's 'heroic magnanimity' in public. One is more amenable to surprise when one is unaware of these 'secret inscriptions' of suffering. And it is this dramatic tension between the

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<sup>81</sup> Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 45.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 42.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 45.

seen and the unseen which naturally prompts the reader's sympathetic imagination to amplify the extent and generosity of Hemans's sacrifice as a woman in pain.

The character of a woman poet in pain is potently represented with an ekphrastic reference to the 'fable of Prometheus' in the fourth stanza. She writes:

The fable of Prometheus and the vulture,  
Reveals the poet's and the woman's heart.  
Unkindly are they judged – unkindly treated –  
By careless tongues and by ungenerous words;  
While cruel sneer, and hard reproach, repeated,  
Jar the fine music of the spirit's chords. (ll. 55-60)

The trope of self-sacrificial pain reaches a climax in the 'fable of Prometheus', where Prometheus, the vulture, the poet, the woman, the critics and readers all take part in the spectacle of Hemans's heroic suffering and silent magnanimity. But the question of attribution lingers: whose heart(s) does the fable really reveal? Noticing a biographical disjunction between the reception reality of Hemans's oeuvre and the spectacular vignette these lines conjure, Labbe deduces that 'It was Landon, not Hemans,' who was 'unkindly judged' and 'unkindly treated'.<sup>84</sup> She also asserts that it is the deceased that the poem 'repositions' 'as the outcast poetess.'<sup>85</sup> According to Labbe, the combination of substitution and entombment obliterates the 'real' Hemans, and creates a mourning community which 'comes to *bury* the poetess, not to celebrate her posthumous life.'<sup>86</sup> Indeed, one only has to peruse several prominent reviews from the period to gauge the level of enthusiasm and admiration with which Hemans's poetry was greeted.<sup>87</sup>

Yet, one can also detect a language of mild disdain underneath all the glowing acclaims for her works. Susan J. Wolfson notices the reductive tendency among many nineteenth-

<sup>84</sup> 'Re-membling: Memory', 144.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Labbe echoes Bennett's reading in '3. Engendering posterity', in *Culture of Posterity*, 81.

<sup>87</sup> See, for instance, *Edinburgh Monthly Review* 2 (August 1819), 194-209, and *British Review and London Critical Journal* 15 (June 1820), 299-310.

century critics to identify Hemans 'as the epitome of the "feminine," or more essentially, "female."' <sup>88</sup> This praise-as-slight double bind is clearly recognisable in Francis Jeffrey's review of the second editions of *Records of Woman* and *The Forest Sanctuary*. He writes: 'We think the poetry of Mrs. Hemans a fine exemplification of Female Poetry—and we think it has much of the perfection . . . of female genius.'<sup>89</sup> On one hand, as the critic claims, it is this essentialist 'female' quality of her poetry – domestic, sentimental, religious, etc. – which distinguishes her as a 'female genius.'<sup>90</sup> On the other hand, it is also this 'femaleness' which prevents her from writing 'the best imaginable poetry' and becoming 'the very highest commanding genius'.<sup>91</sup> Jeffrey's ostensibly generous accolades are at the same time fraught with 'unkind' and 'unwelcoming' gate-keeping criticisms, questioning her fitness to be listed among the greats. Elsewhere, the reviewer credits women's instinctive superiority in character discernment, self-sacrificial attachment and sympathetic exchange.<sup>92</sup> Regrettably, the same 'quick tact' which promotes these 'natural' talents also precludes women from 'long works,' 'long doubt,' 'long labour' and 'all other intellectual efforts'.<sup>93</sup> What enables women writers to thrive is what deprives them at the same time. This 'femaleness' that Jeffrey approvingly attributes to Hemans's poetry acts like a slow poison, destroying the more authentic voice 'of equivocation, of poignant protest, and of shadowy critique' embedded in her writings.<sup>94</sup>

In a review of *Tales, and Historic Scenes* (1819), the anonymous critic first praises her as one who 'has long wandered in the Olympian bowers', but concludes that 'Mrs. Hemans's

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<sup>88</sup> Wolfson's 'Felicia Hemans and the Revolving Doors of Reception', in Harriet Kramer Linkin and Stephen C. Behrendt (eds.), *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 214.

<sup>89</sup> Francis Jeffrey's review was published in *Edinburgh Review* 50 (October 1829), 32-47. I use the reprinted edition in 'Appendix B: Views and Reviews of Hemans' of *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems*, ed. Kelly, 460.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 458.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Wolfson, 'Revolving Doors of Reception', 221.

talents . . . are not of the highest order' because her poems 'do not possess that uniform deep colour of poetic feeling, by which the touch of a master-poet is so easily distinguished'.<sup>95</sup> The lack of consistently 'deep' productions, which require long hours of labour and mental application, harkens back to Jeffrey's essentialist formulation of 'female genius.' Even more crucial is the masculine-inflected title of 'master-poet,' whose pensive poems remain forever a cut above the desultory writings of laurel-seeking 'poetesses'. The categorical distinction between master-poet and first-order poetess warrants some attention here. Significantly, Wolfson discerns the derogatory and patronising undertone with which the term 'poetess' is deployed by later reviewers and biographers such as George Gilfillan and William M. Rossetti.<sup>96</sup> In the 'Prefatory Notice' to *The Poetical Works of Mrs. Felicia Hemans* (1873), Rossetti commends the skill, aptitude, and accomplishments of the deceased author, and then criticises her poetry for not only being too 'feminine' but also being too 'female'.<sup>97</sup> After a didactic statement on how a poet must *not* write, and making 'all [the] proper deductions' for the proper definition of a poet, he decides that 'it may be gratefully acknowledged that Mrs. Hemans takes a very honourable rank among *poetesses*' (my italics).<sup>98</sup>

What Hemans tried to achieve in life, her critics take away in death. Wolfson convincingly demonstrates that the title 'poetess' is 'not only a diminutive, but also a negative wrapped in faint praise.'<sup>99</sup> By probing the double-edged nature of praise-as-scorn in these flattering reviews, one can see how vultures may sometimes assume the shape of love-offering doves, and how 'unkind' judgments and 'ungenerous words' may sometimes take the form of

<sup>95</sup> First appeared in *Monthly Review*, 2nd series, 90 (December 1819), 408-12. I quote from the reprinted edition in *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems*, ed. Kelly, 450.

<sup>96</sup> See 'Revolving Doors of Reception', especially 219.

<sup>97</sup> See the 'Prefatory Notice', in *The Poetical Works of Mrs. Felicia Hemans*, ed. W. M. Rossetti (London: E. Moxon and Son, 1873). I quote from the reprinted edition in *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems*, ed. Kelly, 487 and 488.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 488.

<sup>99</sup> 'Revolving Doors of Reception', 219.

accolades. As a prolific author, journal editor and essay writer, Landon possesses practical reception insight that should not be underestimated or overlooked. Hemans may exalt the mirror relation between genius and 'works', but the latter clearly understands from firsthand experience the role literary magazines and reviews plays in the construction of genius.<sup>100</sup> Instead of reading 'Felicia Hemans' as a transplantation of Landon's own life onto the dead, the poem should be approached as a posthumous dialogue conducted with understanding and insight. Furthermore, the unkind judgment and unkind treatment that women writers experience collectively ('Unkindly are they judged – unkindly treated') should not be narrowly interpreted as rejection and condemnation only (as 'cruel sneer' and 'hard reproach'). They may also include half-hearted praise, negative compliment and condescending dismissal, which fall under the category of 'careless tongues' and 'ungenerous words'. Indeed, the unkindest language is that which harms while pretending to be kind. 'Unkindly' undermining its own claim to permanence, the label 'poetess' designates a category of poets in continual exile, living and dying (and thus barely surviving) at the margins of history and oblivion. Paradoxically, the 'heart' of this gender divide could not have been revealed without the vulture-like critics.

So exactly what does Landon reveal in 'the poet's and the woman's heart'? More pertinent still, what does she not reveal? Rather than acquiring some transcendental revelation about the poet's heart, readers are led to reflect on the ideological structures that have come to formulate the poet as deep and contemplative. Instead of obtaining some essentialist knowledge about the woman's heart, readers are compelled to confront an ideal of femininity that subjugates the woman at home and subordinates her talents at work. The gendered characters of both poet and woman seem to collapse on a shared Promethean heart. After all, is not the cross-gendered invocation of Prometheus an ironical reference to Shelley? The unmistakable allusion

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<sup>100</sup> See David Higgins's *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

to Shelley is echoed in Gilfillan's posthumous evaluation of Hemans's oeuvre, in which he lists the 'many points' where 'Mrs. Hemans reminds us of a poet just named . . . namely, Shelley.'<sup>101</sup> Before remarking on the similarities between their poetical temperaments, of which there are five, he primes each point of comparison with an emphatic 'like him'. In the last of these 'like him' statements, he writes: '*like him*, she was gentle, playful, they could both run about their *prison* garden, and dally with the *dark chains* which, they knew, *bound them till death*' (my italics).<sup>102</sup> First, Gilfillan describes their shared nervousness and masochistic obsession with melancholic poetry. Then, he associates their common disposition with the self-sacrificing Prometheus through graphic reminders of torture and bondage.

Even as Gilfillan's similes create a Promethean 'semblance' of male and female equals, they would reinforce the injunction against 'absolute' identity between the two genders (and species) of genius. Hemans is *like* Shelley, but alas she is *not* a poet like Shelley. In Gilfillan's jaundiced formulation of poetical identity, Hemans can only be acknowledged as Shelley's doppelganger, a fringe figure that can never quite consummate creative subjecthood. After establishing their similitude and the permeable relations between the poet, the poetess and Prometheus, the critic resolutely interrupts the mergence of these two literary personalities. He declares: 'Mrs. Hemans, indeed, was not like Shelley, a *vates*; she has never reached his heights, nor sounded his depths'.<sup>103</sup> Though not vicious, Gilfillan's simultaneous inflation and deflation of Hemans's artistic worth echoes Wordsworth's failed defence of the writer at the end of 'Extempore Effusion'. Dwarfed by his masculine intellect and colossal achievements, the

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<sup>101</sup> First appeared as 'Female Authors. No. I.—Mrs. Hemans' in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 14 (June 1847), 359-63. I use the reprinted edition of 'Mrs Hemans', in George Gilfillan's *A Second Gallery of Literary Portraits* (Edinburgh: James Hogg; London: R. Groombridge and Sons, 1852), 266. It should be noted that there are only three women writers in Gilfillan's three-volume work, and they are Hemans, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Mary Shelly.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

feminine double/shadow is consigned to the position of a stunted literary pygmy. Reacting to Wordsworth's stanza and contemporary reception of Hemans, Landon's redeployment of the Promethean myth represents an earnest effort to recuperate her subject – and her 'bright name' – from the shadows of giants and the pens of critics. Still, Landon's allusion to 'the poet's and the woman's heart' is more than just an anticipatory defence of the deceased from unfair diminution and misrepresentation. It is also an instance of corrective biography. In fact, we can discern a close correspondence between the poet's line and Chorley's proclamation that '*The woman and the poetess* were in her [Hemans] too inseparably united to admit of their being considered apart from each other' (my italics).<sup>104</sup> On one hand, the parallel underscores the intimate relationship between Landon's verse memorial and Chorley's prose memorial. On the other hand, the repetition with difference epitomises a radical subversion of the essentialist gender divide. Not only does Landon revise Chorley's 'poetess' to 'poet', but she also reshuffles the order of Hemans's identity and existential purpose. Contradicting the biographer's formulation, the elegist's subject is *first* a poet, *then* a woman. Against this backdrop of gender/genre difference, Landon's celebration of the dead as an androgynous, double-life Prometheus unites the poet's mind with the woman's heart, 'subdued' epitaph with effusive elegy, and public record with 'secret inscriptions'.

Through the crossing of genders, genres and forms, the poem unbinds the deceased from a lapidary on the tombstone, from the autograph on her manuscripts, and reanimates her as a secular *tableau vivant*. In spite of Landon's claim that 'mournful words' (l. 43) 'cannot paint the long sad hours' (l. 45) of her subject's unseen suffering, her verse repeatedly calls on the support of visual imagery with sculptural properties. Moreover, the admission that 'mournful words' 'cannot paint the long sad hours' suggests the inability of the textual medium

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<sup>104</sup> *CM*, ii. 355.

to adequately convey arresting, physiognomic impressions. In fact, lines 43 and 45 contain a textual cue to the reader to flip the page back and meditate on Hemans's tormented hidden life through the evocative aid of her portrait and autograph. Interleaved between two pages of the actual text (forty lines each), the engraved portrait effectively divides the poem in half. As part of the reading experience, lines 43 and 45 recall us to the picture and signature we have just casually skimmed through or hurriedly skipped over. Recent studies tend to analyse the text in isolation, but the original publication of 'Felicia Hemans' in *FDRS* is arranged as a cross-media memorial. Writing at the limit of the printed word, Landon's lines summon the cooperative aid of visual portraiture and original autograph. Consequently, the poem is no longer just a multi-generic tribute: it is also a multi-mediated remembrance. Building upon Hemans's physiognomic features and characteristic handwriting, the poet intensifies the multimedia experience with an even more audacious use of sculptural idioms in the final two stanzas.<sup>105</sup>

Combining the power of language and the immediacy of iconography, Landon tries to show us the 'hidden world below'. First, Hemans is graphically allegorised as an eviscerated Prometheus, then later as a 'weary dove' closing 'its pinion' (l. 73) and 'golden wings' to 'be at peace' (l. 74). The ekphrastic compulsion to monumentalise the dead in earthly forms, even as she coaxes the poet to cease her 'earthy cares and earthy sorrows' (l. 76), is palpable in the shape-shifting representations of Hemans. The 'viewless spirit' and watery 'echoes' of the early stanzas become increasingly sensuous, as the subject takes on the sculptural features of

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<sup>105</sup> Like Shelley, Hemans and Hunt, Landon's poetical works are also highly ekphrastic. Peter Simonsen discusses the practice of ekphrasis among the late Romantic writers in 'Late Romantic Ekphrasis: Felicia Hemans, Leigh Hunt and the Return of the Visible', *Orbis Litterarum* 60/5 (2005), 317-43: 'the late eighteenth and early centuries witnessed an increasing interest in works of plastic art, which – combined with easier access in new institutions, forms of publication and types of discourse – translated into a widely shared desire to render them in language' (319). It is not a coincidence that the Romantic period also witnessed the unprecedented upsurge of British funerary sculptures. See Nigel Llewellyn's *Funeral Monuments in Post-Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Nicholas Penny's *Church Monuments in Romantic England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977).

Prometheus with twin blood-mangled hearts, before metamorphosing into an embodied avian spirit. Revising the cliché Christian symbol of the white dove, Landon adds to it her own splash of gold. The 'golden wings' of the 'weary dove' likely constitutes another subversive stroke. Challenging the moral normative of surrendering worldly ambition for spiritual compensation, Landon represents Hemans as one who has laboured ('weary') and been justly recompensed with literal 'gold'. Stressing the material present, both toil and reward are predicated as necessary conditions for resting the poet's pen ('close its pinion'), and for resting amongst the greats in the 'serene dominion' (l. 75) of literary afterlife. Equally important, this visual melange of Christian, anti-Christian (Prometheus as the Gnostic serpent of knowledge-giver), pagan and secular symbols resists the tendency of epitaph to reduce the dead to 'a cultural artifact' for religious appropriation.<sup>106</sup> More elaborate than what is necessary on a churchyard tombstone, the emblems of 'Prometheus and the vulture' and 'the weary dove' with 'golden wings' strike readers more as decorative mortuary sculptures than as conventional elegiac imagery.

A grand monument for Hemans is arguably raised in the last two stanzas of the poem amidst 'busy, noisy, [and] unclean' crowds of sympathetic audience, neglectful friends, 'careless' strangers, and 'ungenerous' critics. Although the plethora of approving and disapproving voices threaten to annihilate the lone voice of the author, the elegist nevertheless invokes the power of popular reception and circulating sympathies for protection. In the same way that her autograph is 'echoed' and valorised by her transatlantic 'daughters', her works will survive by circulating among 'other lips the joy [her] own had not' (l. 62). And '*now* replying, / A thousand hearts their music ask of thine' (ll. 77-8, my italics). The heart of Hemans, then, is not only inscribed as an epitaph on stone, it is also echoed in the lips of her

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<sup>106</sup> Schor, *Bearing the Dead*, 47.

audiences. The 'anxious yearning' to be canonised is being 'replied' to *now*, not postponed and certainly not relinquished for some ethereal form of posthumous remuneration. Landon's subject would not 'welcome thankfully the slumbers' of death (l. 63) and go quietly into the night until she has garnered the 'echoes', ventriloquised the 'lips', conscripted the 'hearts', valorised her autograph, immortalised her image, and stretched the 'golden wings' of 'Fame.' Nature may be where a poet like Wordsworth is consecrated, but the marketplace is where the 'bright name' of a woman writer accrues value and endurance strength.

The disparity in the mode of remembrance for a male writer and a woman poet is evident in the closing couplets of 'Felicia Hemans' and its companion piece, 'Rydal Water and Grasmere Lake: The Residence of Wordsworth' (1838):<sup>107</sup>

Sleep with a light the lovely and undying  
Around thy grave—a grave which is a shrine. (ll. 79-80, 'Felicia Hemans')

What need hast thou of sculptured stone?—  
Thy temple, is thy name alone. (ll. 107-8, 'Rydal Water and Grasmere Lake')

Although both poems share the trope of spiritual refuge ('shrine' and 'temple'), their conclusions are radically different. The memorial for Hemans deploys a number of forms, genres, media, allusions and imagery to 'enshrine' the dead. The tribute for Wordsworth, in contrast, requires no verse, no monument and no stone other than his name alone. His 'bare' and 'naked' autograph on the lapidary epitaph is all, and his works will speak on his behalf in perpetuity. Conversely, the 'undying' (reading and writing) 'light' at Hemans's graveyard shrine refers indirectly to the 'thousand hearts' and 'lips' who read, echo and reply the dead. The 'light' will keep burning, as long as other posthumous remembrances like 'Felicia Hemans' follow – as long as readers do not forget their duty to 'remember her verse sometimes' as friends. Despite Landon's dissatisfaction with the limitation of epitaph, its

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<sup>107</sup> Landon's 'Rydal Water and Grasmere Lake: The Residence of Wordsworth' was also published in the 1838 volume of *FDRS*, see 30-2 for the poem.

potential to preserve her subject's memory is meticulously explored in this experimental work of mourning and commemoration. The movement from a naturalistic representation of Hemans, to an emotional representation of Hemans, and finally to a spectacular representation of Hemans demonstrates a multiform collaboration between autograph, epitaph, elegy, biography, portraiture and monument. 'Felicia Hemans' is a canny example of how gender/genre-crossing and intertextual writing can re-engage the deceased in posthumous dialogue, reinterpretation and re-identification. Innovative and ethically sensitive at the same time, Landon's verse tribute tries to recover the lost name in Wordsworth's 'Extempore Effusion' and protect her subject's 'bright name' from future misrepresentations. Writing and rewriting, insisting and resisting, in the conventions of elegy, epitaph and biography, she rehearses more than a century early Elizabeth Bishop's directive to '*repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise*' (l. 20) the traditional work of mourning.<sup>108</sup> As an echo of Hemans's 'elder daughters,' Landon's poem recovers the dead from exile and furnishes a 'home' in which a makeshift family of women writers can carry on their posthumous correspondence with a desk light 'lovely and undying.'

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<sup>108</sup> Elizabeth Bishop's 'North Haven', in *The Complete Poems: 1927-1979* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1944), 188-9.

## CHAPTER 4

### **The *Substance* and *Shadows* of Life:**

### **The Commemorative Power of Portraiture in Art and Writing**

‘Here daily do we sit,  
.....  
And thinking of my Brethren, dead, dispersed,  
Or changed and changing, I not seldom gaze  
Upon this solemn Company unmoved  
By shock of circumstance, or lapse of years,  
Until I cannot but believe that they—  
They are in truth the Substance, we the Shadows.’

(Wordsworth, ‘Lines Suggested by a Portrait from the Pencil of F. Stone’)<sup>1</sup>

After returning from his Grand Tour of the Continent, the great portrait artist of the age David Wilkie shared this stirring lament by a Paduan Monk with Wordsworth’s household.<sup>2</sup> The mournful utterance was allegedly inspired by Titian’s *The Last Supper*. Since the anecdote is ‘first communicated to the Public in this Poem,’ according to Wordsworth, it is almost impossible to verify whether his verse transcription of the original is faithful or even true.<sup>3</sup> What is curious about the Monk’s poignant remark on remembrance, mutability and extinction is its depressing, somewhat awkward, inclusion in the poem. After all, ‘Lines Suggested by a Portrait from the Pencil of F. Stone’ (1834-5) is supposed to celebrate the thinly painted portrait of his

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<sup>1</sup> The epigraph contains lines 109 and 112-17 of the ‘Lines Suggested by a Portrait from the Pencil of F. Stone’.

<sup>2</sup> The poem was probably composed between July and November 1834, revised around November and December 1834, and published for the first time in 1835. I use the reprinted edition of ‘Lines Suggested by a Portrait from the Pencil of F. Stone’, in *PW*, iv. 120-4. For David Wilkie’s anecdote about the Monk, see *The Fenwick Notes* on the work, in *PW*, iv. 428-9. The composition history of ‘Lines Suggested by a Portrait’ is carefully summarised in the Cornell Wordsworth volume of *Last Poems, 1821-1850*, ed. Jared Curtis with associate editors Apryl Lea Denny-Ferris and Jillan Heydt-Stevenson (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 269-70. The original ‘Part 2<sup>nd</sup>’ of the poem was revised and expanded to form a new separate work, ‘The Foregoing Subject Resumed’. Although an 1833 pencil drawing of a young woman by Frank Stone survives in the album of Jemima’s sister, Rotha, it is probably not the original portrait which inspired Wordsworth’s composition.

<sup>3</sup> *PW*, iv. 429.

godchild, Jemima Quillinan, which has hung for many years in the cottage's sitting-room.<sup>4</sup> The portrait of his young godchild and the group portrait of Jesus and the Apostles may seem unrelated and incommensurable at first. How, indeed, is Frank Stone's humble domestic portrait of a young girl comparable with Titian's masterpiece of the great Eucharistic moment? The connection between the two is perhaps not as tenuous as we think if viewed in the context of the poem's principal theme: the power of portrait painting to capture the 'Substance' of life. Wordsworth praises it as 'Art divine, / That both creates and fixes, in despite / Of Death and Time' (ll. 76-8). Like monuments, epitaphs, and biographies, the practice of portrait painting is also 'In visible quest of immortality, / Stretched forth with trembling hope' (ll. 90-1). The living Jemima would eventually age and fade. So, too, would the affectionate bond between the poet and his goddaughter. The 'shock of circumstance' and the 'lapse of years' which parted the first Christian fellowship are perennially and universally felt. What parted them are the same forces that have dispersed the Monk's 'Brethren' and shall one day separate Wordsworth from his household and friends. Both portraits are therefore united in the Poet/Monk's ventriloquist anxieties about change, death, and dissolution. In its 'visible quest of immortality', portraiture brings together the religious conception of spiritual life and the secular representation of posthumous life. Just as the countless artistic representations of the Last Supper help perpetuate the lives of Jesus and his Apostles, the private portrait of Jemima could potentially accomplish the same. Conflating the liturgy of transubstantiation and Milton's distinctive play of opposites, the impermanent body (the 'Shadow') of Jemima is 'translated' (in the Christian sense of being 'conveyed to heaven without death', *OED*) into timeless, sacred 'Substance'. Significantly,

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<sup>4</sup> The real subject of Wordsworth's poem remains uncertain. Eric Gidal, for instance, nominates Rotha as the most probable subject of the poet's interpretive two-part sketch in '4. Ekphrasis and Empire: Wordsworth's Egyptian Maid', in *Poetic Exhibitions: Romantic Aesthetics and the Pleasures of the British Museum* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2001), 163-207, especially 190-3.

Wordsworth's line 'They are in truth the Substance, we the Shadows' is a direct allusion to Milton's eminently obscure description of Death in Book II of *Paradise Lost* (1667):

If shape it might be calld that shape had none  
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,  
Or substance might be calld that shadow seemd,  
For each seemed either; black it stood as Night[.] (ll. 667-70)<sup>5</sup>

While the 'shape' of Milton's Death is awfully indeterminate, Wordsworth's unambiguous ascription of 'Substance' to the 'Company' of sacred dead simultaneously pays homage to the first Christian brotherhood and avers the uncanny power of portraiture to be truer than life.<sup>6</sup> Clearly echoing Godwin's line 'Shadows certainly they are, no more than we are shadows' in 'Essay on Sepulchres', Wordsworth wrestles with the shapeless uncertainty of Death by co-opting a substance 'that is not flesh and blood' in his own vigorous conception of a 'populous' spiritual community: namely, the substance of paint.<sup>7</sup> Like epitaph, visual portraits can distil the whole span and experience of a life into epitomised moments, moments that best represent and best defend the subject from the decay and fallibility of human memory. Appropriating the Monk's moving reflection on the vicissitudes of community, Wordsworth's poem celebrates iconography as a promising medium for conserving human fellowship and material afterlife.

Given his fierce objections to the Boswellian biography and the 'life-and-letters' model of life writing, the poet's exaltation of visual portraiture as an alternative *and better* form of

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<sup>5</sup> I use the reprinted edition of *Paradise Lost* in *Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. Darbishire.

<sup>6</sup> The allusion to Death in *Paradise Lost* has important implications for Wordsworth's attitudes to literary authority and the writing subject. For a discussion on the aesthetics of indeterminacy and sublimity in Milton's characterization of Death and its influence on Wordsworth's poetry, see Newlyn's "'Questionable Shape": The Aesthetics of Indeterminacy', in John Beer (ed.), *Questioning Romanticism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 209-33.

<sup>7</sup> 'Essay on Sepulchres', vi. 23. Godwin writes: 'The men that have lived, are they less important than the men of the present day? Had their thoughts less of sinew and substance . . . than ours? He must be a man of feeble conceit and a narrow soul, to whom they are like the shadows of a magic lantern. Shadows certainly they are, no more than we are shadows. To him who is of a mind rightly framed, the world is a thousand times more populous, than to the / man, to whom every thing that is not flesh and blood, is nothing.'

commemorating and immortalising *Lives* is particularly salient. Thomas Carlyle's 3 May 1854 letter to David Laing succinctly highlights the century-long ascension of iconography as a potential replacement for biography in Britain. He writes:

Often I have found a Portrait superior in real instruction to half-a-dozen written 'Biographies,' as Biographies are written;—or rather, let me say, I have found that the Portrait was as a small lighted *candle* by which the Biographies could for the first time be *read*, and some human interpretation be made of them; the *Biographied* Personage no longer an empty impossible Phantasm, or distracting Aggregate of inconsistent rumours . . . but yielding at last some features which one could admit to be human.<sup>8</sup>

Considering the growing alliance between biography and visual portraiture in the emergent genre of collective 'portraits-and-lives' – for instance, John Thane's *British Autography* (1793-8?), John Burke's *Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Females* (1833) and Gilfillan's *Gallery of Literary Portraits* series (1845-55) – the writer's opinion appears all but inevitable.<sup>9</sup> However, contrary to conventional wisdom, Carlyle accords exceptional value to portraiture not because it idealises or abstracts the subject but because it humanises the '*Biographied* Personage'. In spite of its claim to domestic and documentary truth, biography can be as inaccessible as it is inconsistent. One only has to look at how the problem of biography's truth claims is sceptically and satirically addressed in *Sartor Resartus*, published and serialised exactly twenty years before the 1854 letter to Laing. Even as the Editor acknowledges the invaluable addition of a biography to the works of Professor Teufelsdröckh, the imaginary philosopher of Clothes, he admits that

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Carlyle's 3 May 1854 letter to David Laing, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. Kenneth J. Fielding, Ian Campbell, Aileen Christianson, Sheila McIntosh and David Sorensen, 39 vols. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1970- ), xxix. 84.

<sup>9</sup> See the 1819 reprinted edition of John Thane's *British Autography. A Collection of Fac-similies of the Hand Writing of Royal and Illustrious Personages, with Their Authentic Portraits*, ed. Thomas Thane, 2nd edn., 3 vols. (London: Published by J. Thane, 1819), and John Burke's *Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Females, Including Beauties of the Courts of George IV and William IV*, 2 vols. (London: Bull and Churton, 1833). Gilfillan's first *Gallery of Literary Portraits* contains portrait sketches of Godwin, Shelley, Carlyle, Wordsworth and Lamb. See his *A Gallery of Literary Portraits* (Edinburgh: William Tait; London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co.; Dublin: J. Cumming, 1845).

‘there were no adequate documents’ and ‘no hope of obtaining such’.<sup>10</sup> Furnishing his own documentary support and personal reminiscences, the Editor endeavours to overthrow Hofrath Heuschrecke’s biography of Teufelsdröckh with a more rigorous account of his life and opinions. Heuschrecke’s version, he asserts, is unreliable precisely because ‘he hung on the Professor with the fondness of a Boswell for his Johnson.’<sup>11</sup> In other words, when friendship and proximity take precedence over objectivity and distance, a flawed and biased report of the subject invariably follows. Yet, given the unavailability of ‘adequate documents’ and the fragmentariness of the Editor’s own biographical material, it is impossible to know if his competing narrative is any more accurate or any less affecting than Heuschrecke’s. In fact, Carlyle’s letter raises some doubts about the hope of ever compiling a cogent, truthful and relatable biography.

The context of the letter is worth mentioning. As a fervent supporter of Philip Henry Stanhope’s antiquarian project to establish a gallery of historical portraits, Carlyle was instrumental to the founding of the National Portrait Gallery in 1856 and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in 1882.<sup>12</sup> Elaborating his vision for a *General Exhibition of Scottish Historical Portraits*, the letter to Laing declares his commitment to provide ‘*real*’ as opposed to ‘*imaginary*’ access to the historic dead and to answer our universal attachment to an authentic past.<sup>13</sup> This

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<sup>10</sup> Carlyle’s ‘Chapter II: Editorial Difficulties’, in *Sartor Resartus* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1896), 7. His work was first published and serialised in *Fraser’s Magazine* between 1833 and 1834.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Chapter III: Reminiscences’, in *Sartor Resartus*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> For the histories of the galleries, see Eilean Hooper-Greenhill’s ‘The Collections of the First Decade of the National Portrait Gallery, London’, in *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 23-48; Charles Saumarez Smith’s *The National Portrait Gallery* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1997); and Duncan Thomson’s *A History of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> *Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane*, xxix. 85. Carlyle believes that the innate ‘Historian’ can be awakened in every mortal ‘who has a *memory*, and attachments and possessions in the Past’ through the viewing of historical portraits: ‘I suppose there is absolutely nobody so dark and dull, and every way sunk and stupified, that a Series of Historical Portraits, especially of his native country, would not be of real interest to him;—*real* I mean, as coming from himself and his own heart, not *imaginary*, and preached in upon him by the Newspapers; which is an important distinction.’

direct, sensual experience of history harks back to Godwin's preoccupation with tangible remains in 'Essay on Sepulchres'. More pertinent still, Carlyle's letter also concedes the inadequacy of privileging an author's 'works' and 'actions' (*monumentum aere perennius*) as self-explanatory biography. Even though 'a man's *actions* are the most complete and indubitable stamp of him', 'without these aids, of Portraits and Letters, they are in themselves so infinitely abstruse a stamp, and so confused by foreign rumour and false tradition of them, as to be oftenest undecipherable with certainty.'<sup>14</sup> Carlyle's espousal of 'Portraits and Letters' is extraordinary, for it represents the culmination of over a century of intellectual and commemorative efforts to shift traditional perceptions of worth and genius from 'sterling' production to 'other Places.' Integral to his promotion of portraits and letters as real and direct humanising 'aids' to works and biographies is the ethic of defence. Not only do these aids proffer a characteristic and identifiable stamp of the human subject, but they also protect him from unsubstantiated rumours and misrepresentations. Echoing Wordsworth's surprising reversal of opposites, the image of the '*Biographied Personage*' becomes the light-giving 'candle' and 'Substance', while the subject in works and biography becomes the 'undecipherable' 'Shadow' and 'impossible Phantasm'.

Although Carlyle recognises the commemorative and defensive strength of both portraits and letters, it is also clear in the letter that he perceives iconography as 'the first and directest' reification of an otherwise 'vague Historical *Name*'.<sup>15</sup> As I have intimated in the previous chapter and elsewhere, visual portraiture assumes a prominent position in memorial writing and posthumous defence. The goal of this chapter is not to provide a comprehensive history of British portrait painting in the Romantic period, or to collapse the distinction between image and text. Rather, the current study will investigate the incorporation of visual portraiture into

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. xxix. 84-5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. xxix. 84.

Romantic posthumous life writing, and assess the viability of such strategy. In *The Elements of Life* (1990), Richard Wendorf shows how the structures of eighteenth-century ‘visual and verbal portraiture’ are sometimes ‘literally or metaphorically incorporated into the other’.<sup>16</sup> Wendorf’s pioneering work is important, for it traces the interpenetration of portrait engraving and life writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The close connection between text and image is of course nothing new. Jean Hagstrum conflates the ‘sister arts’ of pictorial imagining and poetic writing in his definition of ‘iconic’.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, there is a clear distinction between Hagstrum’s deployment of ‘iconic’ and Wendorf’s application of the same term. While the former ‘contemplates a real or imaginary work of art he describes or responds to in some other way’, the latter involves explicit adaptation of portrait images in life writing.<sup>18</sup> Combining both definitions of ‘iconic’, the current chapter will consider *iconic life writing* as a contemplative response to the afterlife of the portrait subject. Most recently, Elizabeth A. Fay identifies the Romantic period as a crucial transition in the development of portraiture – more specifically, the ‘portraitive mode’ – from a representation of surface identity to a reflexive expression of interiority. Anxious about the schism between an objectified, bodily self and an inner sense of authentic self, Romantic portrait practices ‘function as vehicles for subjective reflexivity at a time when the need for creating pathways between inner and outer worlds . . . was great.’<sup>19</sup> In a period bombarded by visual signs and fashionable commodities, poets like Wordsworth and Hemans reacted to portraits of themselves with a conflicted blend of naïve optimism, reflexive anxiety and posthumous sympathy. Divided into three sections, the first

<sup>16</sup> Richard Wendorf, ‘Chapter I: Representing Historical Character’, in *The Elements of Life: Biography and Portrait-Painting in Stuart and Georgian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 19.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Hagstrum, ‘Chapter I: Classical Antiquity’, in *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 18.

<sup>18</sup> Wendorf, *Elements of Life*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth A. Fay’s ‘One: The Portraitive Mode’, in *Fashioning Faces: The Portraitive Mode in British Romanticism* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2010), 8.

section will look at the aesthetic and ethical crossover of portrait painting and biographical writing in Sir Joshua Reynolds's unpublished *Character Sketches of Oliver Goldsmith, Samuel Johnson, and David Garrick*. The section concludes with a reflection on Benjamin R. Haydon's belated defence of Keats in his autobiography and his quintessential portrait of the Romantic poet, *Wordsworth on Helvellyn* (1842). Published in 1832, and inspired by the author's reading of Blake's life, Hemans's fictional re-enactment of Blake's deathbed scene in 'The Painter's Last Work' offers a stellar example of iconic life writing. The second section, therefore, analyses the strategies she uses to project her vision of reciprocal protection and cooperative fulfilment in the final moments of her subject's life. Since the practice of portraiture raises questions about the surface and content, absence and presence, and ephemerality and durability of an authentic authorial self, the last section will compare Wordsworth's and Hemans's responses to their own portraits from the perspective of a posthumous commentator in 'To the Author's Portrait' (1832) and 'To My Own Portrait' (1836), respectively.<sup>20</sup>

### **Portraiture and Life Writing: 'I am giving a portrait, not a panegyric'**

While perusing Wordsworth's 'Lines Suggested by a Portrait', one may be compelled to ask: if portrait painting is such a potent medium of self-preservation and self-expression, why does he

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<sup>20</sup> Wordsworth's 'To the Author's Portrait' was composed in response to Henry William Pickersgill's portrait of the poet at Rydal Mount for St. John's College, Cambridge. The sonnet was written by 19 September 1832 and published in 1835, 1836 and 1838. I use Curtis's Cornell Wordsworth edition of Wordsworth's *Last Poems*, 228-9. Hemans's 'To My Own Portrait' was composed in response to William E. West's portraits of her in Rhyllon, the autumn of 1827. Of the three portraits made, one was presented to her sister, Hughes, and appeared later as an engraved frontispiece to her 1839 edition of *The Works of Mrs. Hemans*. The other two portraits were in the possession of Watts, the editor of *The Literary Souvenir*, and Professor Norton in America. The poem appeared for the first time in *Poetical Remains of Hemans* (1836). I use the annotated edition in *Felicia Hemans*, ed. Wolfson, 467-9. For the histories of Hemans's and Wordsworth's portraits and busts, see Richard Walker's *Regency Portraits*, 2 vols. (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1985), i. 245-6 and i. 571-8, respectively.

bother with autobiographical and epitaphic writings? Portrait painting is undoubtedly a direct and vivid way of safeguarding the posthumous life of the artist. However, the poet also acknowledges the necessity of complementing visual portraiture with textual reflection.

Wordsworth even apologises for the application of ‘Words’ in the same poem:

Words have something told  
More than the pencil can, and verily  
More than is needed, but the precious Art  
Forgives their interference . . . (ll. 73-6)

Perhaps deliberately ironical, the syntactical arrangement of the lines subordinates the supposed ‘needlessness’ of his writing to the indispensable expository advantage of pen over pencil. In trying to reconcile these two commemorative forms, the poet exclaims near the end of the poem: ‘Domestic Portrait! have to verse consigned / In thy calm presence those heart-moving words’ (ll. 122-3). It is vital to consign Jemima’s domestic portrait to verse precisely because it is a ‘Companion mute’ (l. 129), incapable of articulate self-account and verbal consolation. As an instance of iconic life writing, Wordsworth’s ‘Lines Suggested by a Portrait’ tries desperately to preserve and restore Jemima’s inarticulate past, figure and memory. In the final lines of the piece, he bids an emotional farewell to his godchild’s portrait avatar as both a parting muse and an incarnation of memory: ‘On thee I look, not sorrowing; fare thee well, / My Song’s Inspirer, once again farewell!’ (ll. 130-1). This concluding couplet is significant because it hints at the incapacity of visual portraiture to offer adequate consolation to the mourning poet without ‘endless addible’ words. Gainsaying the Monk’s plaintive ejaculation, Wordsworth’s lines suggest that it is only possible to look at the image of the deceased – to conjure the memory of the departed – without ‘sorrowing’ *after* his elegiac ‘Song’ is sung, *after* a textual account of the mourned is written. More concisely, portrait painting needs to be infused with life writing (as

‘Substance’ infused with ‘Shadows’) in order to recollect the dead and comfort the living effectively and responsibly.

Wordsworth’s ‘Lines Suggested by a Portrait’ may be a sophisticated meditation on the interplay between visual and textual chronicling of *Lives*, but the connection between portraiture and biography is already well-established in the eighteenth century. Towards the end of ‘Cursory Thoughts on Biography’, Knox exhorts contemporary biographers involved in the second edition of *Biographia Britannica* to prefix ‘every life’ with ‘elegantly engraved heads’.<sup>21</sup> In conjunction with ‘traditionary reports’, or private anecdotal details that can only be procured from living authorities, the ‘engraved heads’ help distinguish and ‘authenticate’ each life.<sup>22</sup> However, Knox sees portrait engraving as more of a visual aid to assist our conception of an artist’s character – it is by no means a dominant medium in commemorative praxes. As Wendorf points out, it is not until Johnson’s death that a near-collaborative relationship between painter and biographer is attempted in Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* and Reynolds’s character sketches of Johnson and friends.<sup>23</sup> His study of the comparative histories of these ‘sister arts’ reveals how Boswell co-opts Reynolds’s portrait of *Dr. Samuel Johnson* in the narrative as a ruling image of Johnson’s life (fig. 5.1).<sup>24</sup> The biographer writes:

I found that I had a very perfect idea of Johnson’s figure, from the portrait of him painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds soon after he had published his Dictionary, in the attitude of sitting in his easy chair in deep meditation, which was the first picture his friend did for him . . . and from which an engraving has been made for this work.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Cursory Thoughts on Biography’, ii. 52.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Elements of Life*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> See Wendorf’s ‘Chapter 9: Boswell’s Flemish Picture’, in *Elements of Life*, 261-94, especially 289.

<sup>25</sup> *Life of Johnson*, i. 392. Boswell appropriates and heightens Bennet Langton’s reaction to the ‘aweful’ sight of Johnson. Consider the biographer’s account of Langton’s first meeting with ‘the sage’ in 1752: ‘Mr. Langton was exceedingly surprized when the sage first appeared. . . he fancied he should see a decent, well-drest, in short, a remarkably decorous philosopher. Instead of which, down from his bed-chamber . . . came . . . a huge uncouth figure’ (i. 247). Compare that to Boswell’s account of his own first meeting: Mr. Davies ‘announced his [Johnson’s] aweful

Adopted as the frontispiece to *Life of Johnson*, and as his own introduction to the stage-like appearance of ‘the sage’ via the vicarious response of the young Bennet Langton, ‘Reynolds’s painting is more direct, more efficient, more immediate than a full-length portrait in prose’.<sup>26</sup> Although ‘a portrait is more “occasional” than a biography’ and ‘Biographies, on the other hand, almost always celebrate—or at least chronicle—the dead’, Reynolds’s own memoirs of Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, and David Garrick exhibit a powerful interpenetration of the two arts.<sup>27</sup> As Frederick W. Hilles astutely observes, ‘Sir Joshua’s memoir is not a rambling series of anecdotes’

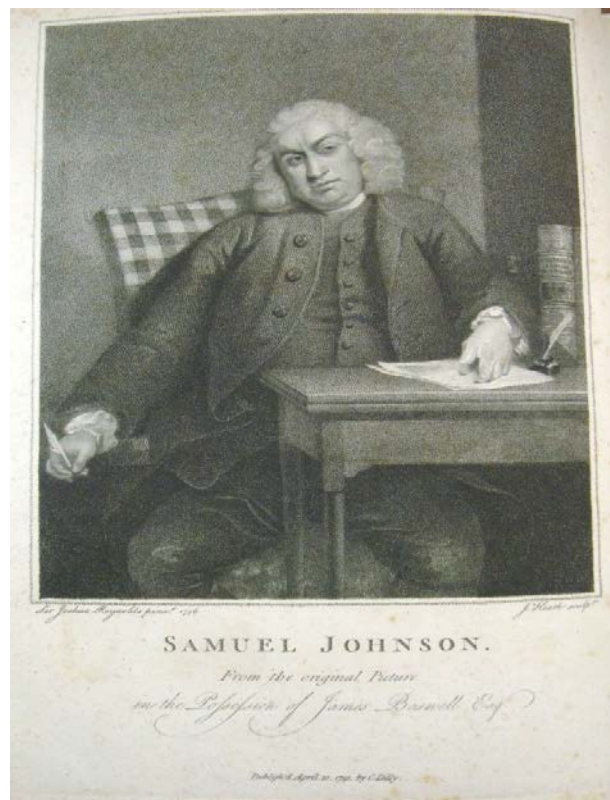


Fig. 5.1 Engraved frontispiece portrait of Samuel Johnson by James Heath, from a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, in James Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* (1791).

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approach to me, somewhat in the manner of an actor in the part of Horatio, when he addresses Hamlet on the appearance of his father’s ghost, “Look, my Lord, it comes” (i. 392). Crossing theatre and iconography, the writer resurrects his deceased friend and mentor, quite unforgettably, as a revenant of the sublime and sensual.

<sup>26</sup> Wendorf, *Elements of Life*, 289.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 13. The memoirs, unpublished in Reynolds’s lifetime, appear for the first time in *Portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds: Character Sketches of Oliver Goldsmith, Samuel Johnson, and David Garrick*, introd. and notes by Frederick W. Hilles (New York, Toronto, and London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1952).

but ‘a word-portrait’.<sup>28</sup> Despite his disclaimer about the incompatibility between his profession and the demands of life writing at the opening of his memoir of Johnson, he is nonetheless successful in applying his artistic theory to this unlikely undertaking. First, he declares his own unsuitability for the charge originally propositioned by Boswell:

The habits of my profession unluckily extend to the consideration of so much only of character as lies on the surface, as is expressed in the lineaments of the countenance. An attempt to go deeper and investigate the peculiar colouring of his mind, as distinguished from all other minds, nothing but your earnest desire can excuse the presumption even of attempting.<sup>29</sup>

Constrained by the habits of his professional practice and ideological allegiance, Reynolds’s disclaimer indicates a clear departure from Boswell’s own habits of life writing. Unlike the painter, the latter clings to Johnson’s recommendation that ‘the business of the biographer’ be ‘to pass slightly over those performances and incidents’ and ‘display the minute details of daily life’. While Boswell’s biographical writing relies on anecdotal, minute particularities of life, Reynolds’s method draws on the visible and apparent generalities of his subject. The merit of visual portraiture, however, is not lost on Boswell, as he collaborates with the painter over the composition of *Life of Johnson* and assimilates ‘lineaments of the countenance’ into his most memorable and iconic descriptions of Johnson.<sup>30</sup> The portrait-biographer’s adherence to general ‘lineaments of the countenance’ is perhaps not surprising, considering his deep-seated partiality for general effects over exact expressions in portrait painting.

Reynolds’s *Discourses on Art* repeatedly emphasises this idealising principle in his ambitious project to promote the ‘Grand Style’ of history (*istoria*) painting. He asserts in *Discourse XI* (delivered on 10 December 1782):

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<sup>28</sup> ‘4. Johnson and Reynolds’, in *Portraits by Joshua Reynolds*, 71. The memoir was either written in 1786 or 1787.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 74.

<sup>30</sup> Bruce Redford charts the extent of the collaboration, as well as transactions, between Boswell’s verbal portraits of Johnson and Reynolds’s visual portraits of the great dictionary-maker in ‘2. Representing Johnson’, in *Designing the Life of Johnson: The Lyell Lectures, 2001-2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 51-80.

The excellence of Portrait-Painting, and we may add even the likeness, the character, and the countenance, as I have observed in another place, depend more upon the general effect produced by the painter, than on the exact expression of the peculiarities, or minute discrimination of the parts.<sup>31</sup>

Reynolds extends his ruling tenet on portrait painting to his own memoirs. His memoir of Goldsmith (probably written in 1776), for instance, does not delve into the particularities of his subject's notorious awkwardness and absurdities amongst friends and acquaintances. Amalgamating the aesthetics of portrait painting and the ethics of remembrance, the artist's character-sketch actually attempts to redeem Goldsmith from his oft-demeaning peculiarities and behaviours in life. Reynolds writes:

He was of a sociable disposition. He had a very strong desire, which I believe nobody will think very peculiar or culpable, to be liked, to have his company sought after by his friends. To this end, for it was a system, he abandoned his respectable character as a writer or a man of observation to that of a character which nobody was afraid of being humiliated in his presence. This was his general principle.<sup>32</sup>

In a few brief lines, the painter reduces all of his subject's disagreeable actions in the company of his friends and acquaintances to one identifiable, universally shared human characteristic: the desire to be liked by his friends. Like his paintings, this poignant defence and explanation of Goldsmith's social awkwardness is also 'more direct, more efficient, more immediate than a full-length portrait in prose'. Moreover, it is his 'general principle' to be liked by all – to be at home with both the high and low – which makes him such an approachable, unthreatening and, above all, generous character. Although Reynolds allows that 'some circumstances of minuteness and particularity' may 'give an air of truth to a piece', he also recognises that 'the usual and most dangerous error is on the side of minuteness; and therefore [he thinks] caution most necessary

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<sup>31</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourse XI*, in *The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, First President of the Royal Academy. To which is Prefixed, a Memoir of the Author; with Remarks on his Professional Character, Illustrative of his Principles and Practice*, ed. Henry William Beechey, 2 vols. (London: T. Cadell, Strand; Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1835), ii. 32.

<sup>32</sup> '3. Goldsmith and Reynolds', in *Portraits by Joshua Reynolds*, 46-7.

where most have failed.’<sup>33</sup> The belief that ‘The general idea constitutes real excellence’ is as much an aesthetic principle about the *grand style* as it is an ethical aversion to over-reporting and over-illustrating.<sup>34</sup> Lecturing from his own experience with visual portraiture, these remarks from *Discourse IV* predate Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets* by nearly a decade and Boswell’s signature work by two. Considered alongside his thoughtfully constructed memoirs of Goldsmith, Johnson and Garrick, Reynolds’s *Discourses on Art* should be regarded as one of the earliest attempts at constructing an aesthetic, as well as ethical, framework for posthumous life writing.

When speaking of Johnson’s ‘disposition to insanity’ and ‘vile melancholy’, Reynolds avoids the use of incriminating examples and imputes his subject’s condition instead to ‘the horror he had of being alone’.<sup>35</sup> According to the painter, ‘Solitude to him [Johnson] was horror.’<sup>36</sup> Remarkably, the post-obit subject is transformed from a tiresome manic-depressive to a figure deserving of posthumous sympathy. As is the case with Goldsmith’s character-sketch, Reynolds’s inner artist takes over to produce a word-portrait of Johnson with all his idealised imperfections without resorting to mean or prosy anecdotes about his life. At the end of the memoir, he even offers this advice to would-be biographers:

This caution appears to be necessary to a biographer, supposing the biography to consist in anecdotes, as in Dr. Johnson’s case. . . A short book containing an account of all the peculiarities or absurdities of a man would leave on the reader’s mind an impression of an absurd character.<sup>37</sup>

Especially noteworthy is the similarity (in principle and in practice) between the artist’s conception of portrait-biography and Johnson’s proposal of the ideal epitaph. As an example of memorial writing and posthumous defence, Reynolds’s memoir of Johnson exemplifies

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<sup>33</sup> *Discourse IV* (delivered to the students of the Royal Academy on 10 December 1771), in *Literary Works of Joshua Reynolds*, i. 346.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Reynolds’s memoir of Johnson, *Portraits by Joshua Reynolds*, 75 and 76.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 76.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 87.

important ethical conventions of writing *for* and *about* the dead. The painter-biographer repeatedly reminds his readers that ‘It is always to be remembered that I am giving a portrait, not a panegyric, of Dr. Johnson.’<sup>38</sup> The reminder is of course an allusion to Johnson’s comment on the panegyric nature of epitaph writing in his own ‘An Essay on Epitaphs’. In other words, the word-portrait is not meant to be epitaphic. Yet, Reynolds collapses both genres of life writing in another follow-up reminder. He writes: ‘you must recollect I am not writing his panegyric, but as if upon oath not only to give the truth but the whole truth.’<sup>39</sup> On one hand, he tries to dissociate the portrait-biography from epitaph; on the other hand, he defends his memoir as essentially a generic extension of Johnson’s model epitaph, or what Wordsworth later calls an ‘epitomised biography’. Reynolds’s words not only recall his friend’s incoherent rules for funerary inscriptions – ‘In lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon oath’ and an inscription ‘ought always to be written with regard to Truth’ – but also render them consistent by subsuming both moral and historiographical principles of epitaph writing under his own aesthetic system. Reynolds’s memoir accentuates the general qualities of his subject and shuns any damaging particular of his life, even as it expounds the truth – more accurately, the ‘whole’ general truth – of his character. Though by no means panegyric, the work, like an epitaph, noticeably suppresses ‘all the peculiarities or absurdities’ (or ‘Shadows’) of a man. And as if upon oath, the painter-biographer gives the whole truth without violating the memory of his friend with unnecessary minor truths.

Even though Reynolds never quite excelled in epic or history painting, his best portrait works provide outstanding demonstrations of how such art can convey general statements about the life and character of poets and writers.<sup>40</sup> David Piper’s study of Romantic portraiture and its

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>40</sup> For Reynolds’s impact on Romantic portraiture, see David Piper’s ‘Byron and the Romantic Image’, in *The Image of the Poet: British Poets and their Portraits* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 91-145.

contribution to popular conception of the archetypal Romantic poet documents Reynolds's legacy amongst the works of Thomas Lawrence, who painted Robert Southey, and Thomas Phillips, who painted Blake.<sup>41</sup> More significantly, Reynolds's discourse on portrait practice provides a crucial foil to Haydon's and Hazlitt's divergent practices with regard to portraiture. Hazlitt celebrates variety, particularity and stylistic difference in art as marks of original genius. To Hazlitt, John Barrell argues, 'the representation of actual nature *is* the representation of individuals'; 'the highest art', therefore, 'is to be looked for in the representation of individual character.'<sup>42</sup> The centrality of portrait painting to the artist-critic's notion of original genius is evident in his sensitive discrimination of Titian's, Raphael's and Vandyke's individual aptitudes for portraiture in his essay 'On a Portrait of an English Lady, by Vandyke' (1826).<sup>43</sup> Such fertile discrimination is possible because the 'human face is not one thing . . . nor does it remain always the same': the human face 'has infinite varieties'.<sup>44</sup> Hence, an artist displays his genius by drawing out 'a particular portion, a particular aspect, of a various and variously aspected nature'.<sup>45</sup> The perfect portrait, then, seeks not to expound a general statement about the subject's life but seeks instead to express likeness to an epitomised aspect of the sitter's 'infinite varieties'.

Although Haydon also disputes Reynolds's edict to 'generalise without knowing the particulars,' he extols his predecessor's portraits for their excellent balance of 'smaller parts' and 'larger qualities.'<sup>46</sup> Uniting both the general and the particular, 'Reynolds appears to have hit the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 95 and 113.

<sup>42</sup> John Barrell's 'Chapter V: Benjamin Robert Haydon and William Hazlitt: Two Encyclopaedia Articles', in *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: 'The Body of the Public'* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 318 and 321.

<sup>43</sup> The essay 'On a Portrait of an English Lady, by Vandyke' was first published in *The Plain Speaker* (1826). I use the reprinted edition in *Selected Writings of Hazlitt*, viii. 261-73.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. viii. 267.

<sup>45</sup> Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*, 317.

<sup>46</sup> The first quotation is from Benjamin R. Haydon's 'Lecture IV. Conclusion on the Subject of Form' and the second and third from 'Lecture V. On Composition', in *Lectures on Painting and Design*, 2 vols. (London:

exact point' between Titian's aptitude for characterisation and Raphael's grand historic air.<sup>47</sup> Haydon's much-loved and much-praised *Wordsworth on Helvellyn* aims to achieve this very unity (see fig. 5.2). After seeing the painting, Wordsworth commends the artist's success at coalescing general idea with individual traits. He writes to Haydon: 'I myself think that it is the best likeness, that is the most characteristic, which has been done of me.'<sup>48</sup> 'Likeness' here does not mean exact imitation but selective representation of some specific individualising quality of

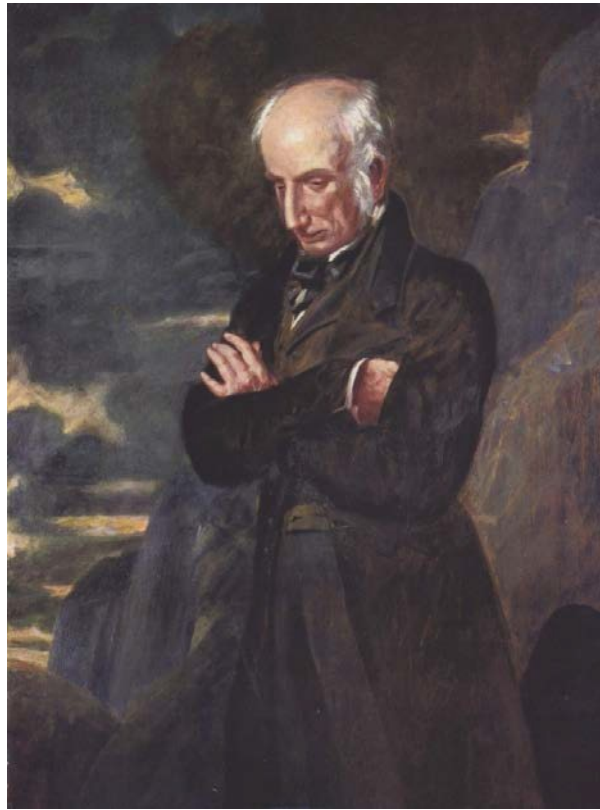


Fig. 5.2 *Wordsworth on Helvellyn* by Benjamin R. Haydon, 1842. The portrait was painted to commemorate Wordsworth's sonnet on Haydon's picture, *Wellington musing on the Battlefield of Waterloo* (1839). Oil on canvass, 1240 x 990 mm. National Portrait Gallery.

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Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1844), i. 204 and i. 224, respectively. Haydon admired Reynolds's portrait works so much that he considered them finer than the portraits of Titian, Rubens, Raphael, and Vandyke.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* i. 224.

<sup>48</sup> Wordsworth's 24 January 1846 letter to Haydon, in *LY*, iv. 753. For a detailed survey of the composition histories behind contemporary portraits of Wordsworth, see Frances Blanshard's *Portraits of Wordsworth* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1959), and Walker's *Regency Portraits*, i. 575-6.

the subject by which he can be distinguished from others. Not surprisingly, Hazlitt's instinctive reaction to his first meeting with Wordsworth is to compare the poet's physiognomic traits with Chantrey's bust and Haydon's drawing of his head in *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* (1814-20).<sup>49</sup> The critic considers the latter version – later readapted for *Wordsworth on Helvellyn* – for being 'the most like his drooping weight of thought and expression.'<sup>50</sup> Dressed in grey trousers and dark brown coat, the flushed and white-haired poet is depicted in focused, solitary contemplation against a stormy mountain backdrop. The interfusion of landscape, weather and character through pathetic fallacy and colour progression immortalises the poet as a force of sublime nature and as a protective spirit (a *genius loci*) of Helvellyn. Haydon's portrait of Wordsworth is important, for it unites the Romantic exaltation of individuality and variety with Reynolds's promulgation of general beauty and principle. Combining 'smaller parts' with 'larger qualities', the poet's characteristic attitude of thought is assimilated to a grand aesthetic vision of sublime nature and creative calling.

While conventional scholarship tends to embrace *Wordsworth on Helvellyn* as the quintessential image of Wordsworth's creative genius, the back stories of Keats and Charles Gough suggest a commemorative bent to the underlying object of the portrait. Haydon, of course, remembers Keats's homage to the older poet in the complimentary sonnet 'Great spirits now on earth are sojourning', which he received on the evening of 19 November 1816.<sup>51</sup> In his autobiography, the recollection of the sonnet exchange between Wordsworth, Keats and himself

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<sup>49</sup> See Hazlitt's 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', *The Liberal* 3 (April 1823). I use the reprinted edition of his autobiographical reminiscences in *Uncollected Essays*, in *Selected Writings of Hazlitt*, ix. 95-109. Cf. also Robert Woolf's 'On approaching Romantic Icons', in Robert Woolf and Stephen Hebron's *Romantic Icons: The National Portrait Gallery at Dove Cottage, Grasmere* (Grasmere: The Wordsworth Trust, 1999), ix-xxiii, especially xx-xxii.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* ix. 105.

<sup>51</sup> For Haydon's acquaintanceship with Keats, anecdote about the sonnet, and posthumous defence of the poet, see the reprinted edition of Tom Taylor's *Life of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1853), in *The Autobiography and Memoirs of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. with introd. Aldous Huxley, 2 vols. (London: Peter Davies, 1926), especially i. 251-3.

is followed by an affectionate account and belated defence of the young writer's death. The aspiring poet of 'high calling', according to Haydon, 'died a victim to mistakes on all hands, alike on the part of enemies and friends.'<sup>52</sup> Coincidentally, inscribed on the back of *Wordsworth on Helvellyn* in brown paint are the following words: 'W<sup>m</sup>. WORDSWORTH / Painted by / B. R. HAYDON 1842. / "High is thy calling FRIEND!"'.<sup>53</sup> Since the inscription alludes to the poet's 1815 sonnet 'High is our calling, Friend! – Creative Art' to Haydon, the portrait is often considered in the context of gift exchange.<sup>54</sup> However, as the painter asserts in his autobiography, 'Keats was the only man I ever met with who seemed and looked conscious of a *high calling*, except Wordsworth' (my italics).<sup>55</sup> In light of this revelation, the 'high calling' of the older writer connotes not only an expectation for continuing works of excellence, but also a sacred obligation to preserve an 'unripe' artist who 'dropped' and 'disappeared' prematurely from life. This ethical feeling is consistent with Wordsworth's and Scott's respective verse memorials for Charles Gough, another young artist who died before his time while touring Helvellyn in April 1805.<sup>56</sup> (The former's 'Fidelity' and the latter's 'Helvellyn' were both composed in the same year.) Thus, the pensive Wordsworth in Haydon's portrait can be construed alternatively as a fellow mourner charged with the responsibility of protecting the memory – and fulfilling the promise – of young departed friends. Haydon's praxis may diverge from Reynolds's theory of art, but his painting of Wordsworth shows a compelling interrelation between visual portraiture, life writing and posthumous defence.

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* i. 253.

<sup>53</sup> Walker, *Regency Portraits*, i. 575.

<sup>54</sup> Composed on 21 December 1815, 'High is our calling, Friend! – Creative Art' was one of three sonnets dedicated to Haydon by the writer. The poem was later printed in John Scott's *The Champion* (4 February 1816) and in Hunt's *The Examiner* (31 March 1816) after he sought the permission from Wordsworth to publish it.

<sup>55</sup> *Autobiography and Memoirs of Haydon*, i. 253.

<sup>56</sup> See January Searle's *Memoirs of William Wordsworth* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1852), 219-20.

### The Collaborative Last Work: ‘How can we part? We that have loved so well’

The anxiety of premature death and the protective power of iconography also feature prominently in Hemans’s highly ekphrastic corpus. ‘The Painter’s Last Work’ is an especially edifying case of her obsession with the link between *monumentum aere perennius* and the completion of a good life.<sup>57</sup> Like ‘Properzia Rossi’ and ‘Design and Performance’, ‘The Painter’s Last Work’ is concerned with the final moments of an artist working both at the fringe of life and at the cusp of immortality. Based on Hemans’s note to the poem, the dramatic conversational piece between the fictional painter, Eugene, and his beloved wife, Teresa, was inspired by Allan Cunningham’s account of Blake’s ‘closing scene’ in life.<sup>58</sup> Beautifully presented, Cunningham’s narrative of Blake’s last moments contributes to both the mythic aura of his life and the sanctification of his posthumous image as a dedicated artist and husband. As Hemans’s generic title suggests, her poem is not as concerned about a specific painter as it is about the archetypal artist. Echoing Reynolds’s precepts about art, Blake’s last work is generalised as ‘The Painter’s Last Work’. Like Cunningham’s commemorative life writing, Hemans’s work reconfigures her subject’s deathbed scene as a stage for moral instruction and mutual preservation.

The verse title is arguably misleading (perhaps deliberately so?), for Blake’s ‘last work’ (and Eugene’s last work) involves not just one painting but two. Her poem likely alludes to the following passage in Cunningham’s biography:

The Ancient of Days was such a favourite with Blake, that three days before his death, he sat bolstered up in bed, and tinted it with his choicest colours and in his happiest style. He touched and retouched it—held it at arm’s length, and then threw it from him, exclaiming, ‘There! that will do! I cannot mend it.’ He saw

<sup>57</sup> The conversational piece was first published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* for the February 1832 issue. I use the reprinted edition in *The Works of Mrs. Hemans*, ed. Hughes, vii. 210-5.

<sup>58</sup> See Allan Cunningham’s ‘William Blake’, in *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, 2nd edn., 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1830), ii. 143-88, especially ii. 179-82.

his wife in tears—she felt this was to be the last of his works—‘Stay, Kate! (cried Blake) keep just as you are—I will draw your portrait—for you have ever been an angel to me’—she obeyed, and the dying artist made a fine likeness.<sup>59</sup>

It is not difficult to see why his account of the dying author is such a compelling source of inspiration for Hemans’s own dramatic enactment of the painter’s final moments. Originally published in 1794 as the frontispiece to *Europe a Prophecy, The Ancient of Days* was one of Blake’s favourite designs to copy (fig. 5.3).<sup>60</sup> Commissioned by Frederick Tatham for three and a half guineas, Blake touched and retouched the specimen throughout the rest of his life until that

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Fig. 5.3 William Blake’s *The Ancient of Days*, frontispiece to *Europe a Prophecy*, 1794, relief etching with pen and ink, watercolour on paper. 233 x 168 mm. British Museum.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. ii. 179-80.

<sup>60</sup> See also Alexander Gilchrist’s ‘Chapter: XXXVII’, in *The Life of William Blake*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1863), ii. 359-60.

climactic proclamation ‘There! that will do! I cannot mend it’ within days of his death. This oft-cited exclamation in the posthumous life writings of Blake repeatedly affirms the triumphant completion of the subject’s life and work. Just the Ancient holds his divine compass over the dark primordial void as an expression of creative order, the whole span of the artist’s existential sojourn is meaningfully rendered by the tools of his trade. However, while the retouched drawing completes and ‘mends’ Blake’s disappointing professional life, it is his *last* ‘last work’ – the portrait of Catherine (now missing) – that completes his domestic life as both man and husband. Crucially, Cunningham’s passage does not depict the artist as one who is entirely fixated with personal ambitions and achievements, but as one who sacrifices his final chance at raising another public *monumentum aere perennius* for a private act of love as care for the other.

Hence, portrait painting represents not only a memento of death but also a gift of life. Still, in spite of Cunningham’s vivid word-portrait of Blake’s deathbed scene, the account confines Catherine to a silent muse-figure who remains as spectral as the elusive portrait. The narrative is essentially a dramatic monologue in the guise of a man-to-wife dialogue. Consider these deathbed utterances allegedly by Blake:

‘I glory,’ he said, ‘in dying, and have no grief but in leaving you, Katherine; we have lived happy, and we have lived long; we have been ever together, but we shall be divided soon. Why should I fear death? Nor do I fear it.’<sup>61</sup>

Possessed of Socratic fortitude and Horatian confidence, the biographer’s subject is ready to embrace death without fear. Yet, the painter’s half-mournful and half-consolatory words intimate the ineluctable dissolution of community, as well as his continued responsibility for the survivor. While Bacon places the burden of posthumous responsibility on the living, Hemans’s approach to Blake’s deathbed scene recognises that mutual care (of the dying and the living) is a bilateral process. Depriving Catherine of the opportunity to articulate her own feelings and reactions at

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<sup>61</sup> Cunningham, ‘William Blake’, 179.

this affirming moment of spousal love, Cunningham's narrative, while moving, fails to address the ethical dimensions of reciprocal remembrance and fulfilment. If Blake's final act on earth is to mend his own work and life, then Hemans's fictional adaptation is arguably an attempt to mend the biographer's incomplete report of his subject's final act. Like a stage performance, she sets the scene at the very outset of the piece in an 'English Cottage' with the window open 'upon a Landscape at sunset.' The setting provides what is effectively a pastoral background for the word-portraits of a dying husband and his grieving wife on a lifelike canvass. Appropriately, 'The Painter's Last Work' refers not to *The Ancient of Days* but to Blake's unrecovered portrait of Catherine. Eugene explains his resolve to generate 'One last work' as a 'memorial' to their collaborative existence and deep affections:

But I have said farewell,  
Farewell to earth, Teresa!—not to thee;  
Nor yet to our deep love, nor yet awhile  
Unto the spirit of mine art, which flows  
Back on my soul in mastery.—One last work!  
And I will shrine my wealth of glowing thoughts,  
Clinging affections, and undying hopes,  
All, all in that memorial! (ll. 18-25)

According to Blake's fictional double, the artist is not preoccupied with the glorification of his own genius in a final tour-de-force production. Rather, this 'One last work' is meant to immortalise their 'deep love,' 'Clinging affections, and undying hopes' as a collective enterprise. Unlike Cunningham's account, Hemans's rendition of Catherine is a very visible and audible presence in the compositional process of their joint *monumentum aere perennius*. Teresa responds to Eugene's avowal of love with these words:

How can I bear on?  
How can we part? We that have loved so well,  
With clasping spirits link'd so long by grief,  
By tears, by prayer? (ll. 42-5)

As a memorial to their enduring attachment and as a gift of consolation to his wife, Eugene leaves ‘One record’ of their ‘ethereal flame’ (l. 49) in his portrait of Teresa. The preservation of the survivor is realised by the hands of the dying, and the ‘ethereal’ essence of their bond is reified as tangible remains. What follows is a twenty-line detailed portrait of his companion’s face interpenetrated with physiognomic comments about her delicate and devoted character. Teresa’s ‘soft form’ (l. 55), ‘quivering smile’ (l. 56), ‘pensive lips’ (l. 69) and ‘dark eye’ (l. 70) are all transubstantiated ‘Unto the canvass’ (l. 71) of Hemans’s own imaginary word-portrait. As ‘The dear work grows / Beneath [his] hand,—the last!’ (l. 84), Teresa, following the poet’s stage direction, falls ‘on his neck in tears’ and cries ‘Eugene, Eugene / Break not my heart with thine excess of love[!]’ (ll. 85-6). If the dramatisation of their exchange seems somewhat campy and overwrought, it is deliberately done so as a defensive work of feminist commemoration. Combining the feminist exigencies of first-person persona in *Records of Woman*, the domestic privacies of biography, the directness and immediacy of visual portraiture and the dramatic licence of theatre, ‘The Painter’s Last Work’ tries to recuperate the missing woman in Cunningham’s account. By indulging herself in effusions of tears and words, Teresa asserts her absolute moral right (in the place of Catherine) to mourn, protect and remember the dying.

The result of Hemans’s posthumous rewriting is thus two-fold. First, the poet reinserts Catherine into the picture as a collaborative force in the painter’s completion of a good life. Second, the detailed re-enactment of the sitter’s expression supplants her absent visual record with an equally, if not more, substantial word-portrait. Commemorating the lives of the painter and his wife, Hemans’s word-portrait offers a more dramatic, impactful, efficient and ethical memorial for both the living and the dead. This is not to say that ‘The Painter’s Last Work’ has entirely relinquished the power of visual portraiture in its alternative retelling of Blake’s final

moments. On the contrary, the work shows the extent of Hemans's debt to visual language and portraiture effects in her own practice of commemorative life writing. As Boswell reminds his contemporaries, a good biography should enable readers to 'see him [the deceased] live' and 'live o'er each scene' with the subject. What Hemans tries to achieve in this piece is precisely that: to help her readers live over the final 'scene' with both Blake and Catherine. On one hand, her conversational poem exudes the scene-to-scene vividness promulgated by Boswell; on the other hand, its re-enactment of a selective moment in Blake's life reverberates with Hazlitt's definition of visual portraiture. According to Hazlitt, 'Portrait-painting is . . . painting from recollection and from a conception of character, with the object before us to assist the memory and understanding.'<sup>62</sup> Hazlitt is of course writing against the mechanical 'copying' of a live sitter. What is infinitely more valuable than the mere duplication of a human face is a painter's evocative recollection and interpretation of the subject's temperament (the 'hidden soul' as it were) in an epitomising moment.<sup>63</sup> The portrait painter should not simply commit a fixed image to canvass, but should instead seek to capture the elusive motion and 'changeableness' of human character.<sup>64</sup> Hemans's poem is a memorable word-portrait of her subject because it reanimates and extrapolates a moment of Blake's life which best exemplifies her conception of the ideal artist. But 'The Painter's Last Work' is more than an epitomising word-portrait. In 'mending' the lack of Cunningham's biography, Hemans's commemorative work also gives an emotional and sympathetic account of the 'final essence' of a caring husband and an anguished wife. Like Blake's last portrait of Catherine, the dramatic verse memorial is an expression of cooperative conservation and fulfilment of posthumous responsibility.

<sup>62</sup> 'On a Portrait of an English Lady', viii. 268.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. In order to encapsulate the human subject in painting, Hazlitt contends, 'You must feel what *this* / means, and dive into the hidden soul, in order to know whether *that* is as it ought to be; for you cannot be sure that it remains as it was.'

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

### ‘Go, faithful Portrait’: Wordsworth and Hemans on the Portrait Self

As is the case with Hemans’s ‘The Painter’s Last Work’, Wordsworth’s verse responses to visual portraits grapple with the posthumous preservation of community and shared lives. His sonnet ‘Upon a Portrait’ (1840) opens with a demoralising reflection on the inevitable dissolution of human fellowship.<sup>65</sup> After gazing at Margaret Gillies’s miniature portrait of the presumptive Isabella Fenwick, Wordsworth writes:

We gaze, not sad to think that we must die  
 And part; but that the love this Friend hath sown  
 .....  
 Shall pass so soon from human memory  
 And not by strangers to our blood alone  
 But by our best descendants be unknown[.] (ll. 1-2 and 5-7)

The poet’s attendant anxiety about death notwithstanding, what is far more disquieting than individual extinction is our diminishing memory of those whose lives once connected with our own. Far more precious than a rigorous record or authoritative memorial is the continued upkeep of a subject’s fleeting but intimate relations with others in communal, as well as familial, memory. Like the portrait cameos and medallion portraits popularised in eighteenth-century England, the miniature portrait of Fenwick in ivory functions as a personal memory aid.<sup>66</sup> Even though the ‘portable’ depiction of a life can be inherited as a household object, the significance and meaning of that life within a network of interacting affections cannot. A word-portrait such as the sonnet is therefore an indispensable complement to a fuller representation of Fenwick, commemorating not just her life but also her friendship with the poet. While Gillies’s visual

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<sup>65</sup> Possibly composed on 1 January 1840 in response to Margaret Gillies’s portrait of Isabella Fenwick painted in November or December 1839. Transcribed by his wife under the label ‘*Private Memorials / not to be printed*’, the sonnet was first printed by Christopher Wordsworth in *Memoirs of Wordsworth*. See Curtis’s note to the piece in *Last Poems*, 482-3; I use the reading text on 337-8.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Cosway and Josiah Wedgwood were central figures in the marketing and proliferation of miniature portraiture objects. See Fay’s ‘Three: Consuming Portraits’, in *Fashioning Faces*, 87-141, especially 89-90 and 95-7.

portrait of Fenwick preserves the ‘flower’ (l. 14) – or her bodily image – in colour, Wordsworth’s word-portrait (in the sonnet frame) ensures that ‘Some lingering fragrance of [their] pure affection’ (l. 13) survives. Indeed, it is no accident that his extempore verse on Fenwick’s portrait is written in the sonnet form. His poetical responses to Gillies’s miniature portraits of Mary and Dora are all composed as sonnets.<sup>67</sup> Even the highly reflexive ‘To the Author’s Portrait’ is no exception.

Commissioned for St. John’s College, Cambridge, Henry W. Pickersgill possibly made the first portrait of Wordsworth from life at the time.<sup>68</sup> Pickersgill produced many variants of the original (fig. 5.4).<sup>69</sup> Around late August or early September, he sketched out the sitter’s head at

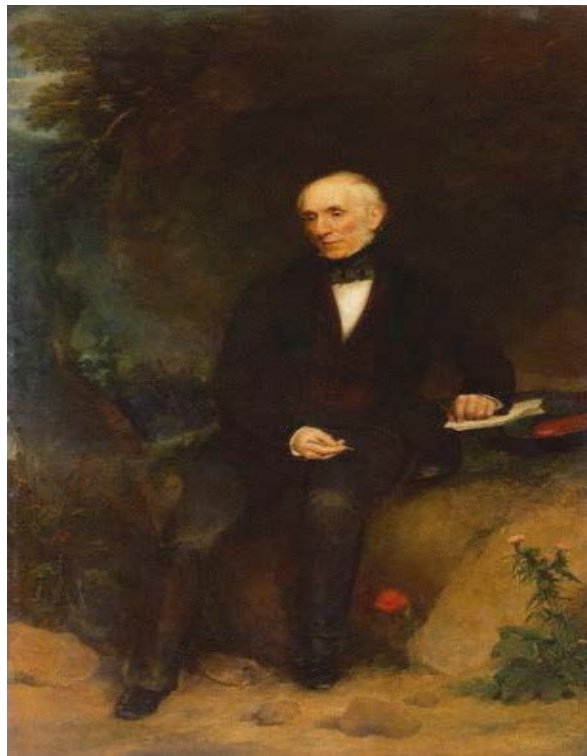


Fig. 5.4 *William Wordsworth* by Henry William Pickersgill, circa 1850. Oil on canvass, 2172 mm x 1334 mm. A reproduction based on the 1832-3 original in St. John’s Cambridge. National Portrait Gallery.

<sup>67</sup> See also ‘To a Painter’ (1840) and ‘On the Same Subject’ (1842), in *Last Poems*, 333-5.

<sup>68</sup> See Blanshard’s ‘Part Two: Catalogue of Portraits’, in *Portraits of Wordsworth*, 137-89, especially 158.

<sup>69</sup> Four additional copies of the painting were made for Wordsworth’s family and friends, while a variant of 1840 was made for Sir Robert Peel. Peel’s copy is now at Dove Cottage. See Walker’s *Regency Portraits*, i. 576.

Rydal Mount for the 1832-3 half-length reproduction which now hangs in the college. Despite his well-known habit of pacing back and forth while dictating his works, Wordsworth is staged as a poet of nature sitting amidst rocks and vegetation with the usual props of writing. Moved by Pickersgill's 'faithful' portrait of himself, the poet addresses the painted double as his second life:

Go, faithful Portrait! and where long hath knelt  
 Margaret, the saintly Foundress, take thy place;  
 And, if Time spare the colours for the grace  
 Which to the work surpassing skill hath dealt,  
 Thou, on thy rock reclined, though Kingdoms melt  
 And States be torn up by the roots, wilt seem  
 To breathe in rural peace, to hear the stream,  
 To think and feel as once the Poet felt.  
 Whate'er thy fate, those features have not grown  
 Unrecognised through many a household tear,  
 More prompt more glad to fall than drops of dew  
 By morning shed around a flower half blown;  
 Tears of delight, that testified how true  
 To life thou art, and, in thy truth, how dear! ('To the Author's Portrait', ll. 1-14).

Wordsworth's confidence in the enduring power of visual portraiture is apparent. The portrait's quest of immortality is echoed in the poet's desire to be canonised with Lady Margaret Beaufort, the 'saintly Foundress' of not only St. John's but also Christ's College, Cambridge. In that apostrophic command, 'Go, faithful Portrait!' the poet-father issues forth the portrait as his self-representative and second incarnation. The apostrophic order is significant, for it betrays an anxiety about his lack of control over the propagation of his own image.<sup>70</sup> In proclaiming his authorial command at the outset of the poem, Wordsworth re-conceives the portrait as a collaborative outcome of the poet's life and the artist's 'surpassing skill'. Nevertheless, the poet acknowledges the complimentary power of portraiture to assist in his own survival. The epistolary exchange between Wordsworth and Haydon reveals the extent of this multi-mediated

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<sup>70</sup> Although many portraits of Wordsworth were made, the writer only allowed illustrations to be engraved after Sir George Beaumont's paintings. See Woolf's 'On approaching Romantic Icons', *Romantic Icons*, xx.

cooperation. In a May 1831 letter, the painter pleads to the writer for a poem to accompany his portrait of Napoleon with the humorous appeal and play on Richard III's proverbial line 'My Kingdom for a Sonnet.'<sup>71</sup> To which Wordsworth replies with equal jest a month later: 'On the other side is the Sonnet, and let me have your "Kingdom" for it.'<sup>72</sup> Joking aside, the poet's response to Haydon's request actually has great bearing on the apocalyptic sentiment expressed in his own poem. Though 'Kingdoms melt / And States be torn up by the roots,' his portrait shall live on amidst the ruins of the future world as the sole survivor, 'breathing', 'hearing', 'thinking' and 'feeling' as 'the Poet' *once* did. In fact, both letter and verse are deeply political. In the same letter to Haydon, Wordsworth unreservedly denounces Napoleon's miserable work and character:

I think of Napoleon pretty much as you do, but with more dislike probably; because my thoughts have turned less upon the flesh and blood man than yours and therefore have been more at liberty to dwell . . . upon his various libercide projects and the miserable selfishness of his sprit. . . . How, then, with this impression, can I help despising him?<sup>73</sup>

Though indirect, the connection is nevertheless salient. The post-apocalyptic landscape of melted Kingdoms and torn-up States starkly contrasts Napoleon's destructive method of self-monumentalisation and the life-giving capacity of iconography. As Fay rightly observes, 'the real push for a collected national portrait came with the reaction to Napoleonic aggressive empire building and the erasure of history it threatened.'<sup>74</sup> It seems that not even the combination of political greatness and military deeds can ensure posthumous survival as effectively as the partnership between honest portraiture and a well-lived life.

If the first eight lines of the sonnet announce the public, hagiographic and political functions of Pickersgill's portrait of Wordsworth, then the succeeding sestet displays a conscious

<sup>71</sup> See the footnote to Wordsworth's 11 June 1831 letter to Haydon, in *LY*, ii. 396.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* The sonnet to which Wordsworth refers is 'To B. R. Haydon, on seeing his picture of Napoleon Buonaparte on the island of St. Helena.'

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 397.

<sup>74</sup> 'Two: Making Faces', in *Fashioning Faces*, 85-6.

effort to restore it to private significance. Regardless of what happens to the painting after its inception, the poet tells us, the personal meaning attached to his tinted features will ‘not [have] grown / Unrecognised through many a household tear’. What matters in the end is the celebratory reception and remembrance of an artist’s life among friends and family. The ‘many a household tear’ refers of course not to tears of sorrow but to the ‘Tears of delight’ promptly shed by his extended household. They are happy that a ‘true-to-life’ representation of Wordsworth is at last made for perpetuity and for their own remembrance. While the first two quatrains exalt the visual portrait of the poet, the contrapuntal sestet evinces the power of a word-portrait to confer communal significance. This internal dialogue between the visual and the textual also appears in the rhyme structure of the sonnet. Symbolically, the enclosed rhyme order of the first eight lines (*abba acca*) underpins the sonnet form as a fixed structure (or portrait frame), enclosing the subject’s life within a set conceptual border. However, the irregular rhyme scheme of the sestet (*def dfe*) defies the rigid frame and restrictive containment of visual portraiture. In other words, the private meaning of the poet’s life cannot be reduced to a set of aesthetic criteria or values. Wordsworth’s general statement about Pickersgill’s portrait at the outset of the poem transitions progressively toward a private meditation on posthumous care and commemoration. Projecting into the future, Wordsworth hopes that the visual portrait and the attendant word-portrait can incite ‘Tears of delight’ to fall ‘More prompt’ and ‘more glad’ than ‘drops of dew’ among his immediate survivors. Yet, the tears he demands are not tears of mourning. What he expects are tears of affirmation, tears which extol and aver his successful self-defence (‘Tears of delight, that testified how true / To life thou art, and, in thy truth, how dear!’). Should his second self become unrecognisable to posterity down the ages or should its colours fade from the effects of ‘Time’, his iconic life writing will safeguard the link and identity between the ‘Portrait’ and the ‘Poet’.

Given the poet's distrust of biographers, his sonnet presents an alternative schema for cooperative conservation. Rather than relying on other authors for defence and protection, Wordsworth entrusts his own survival to the mutual assistance of his portrait self and his writing self. Although his portrait doubles are themselves collaborative offspring with other artists – 'another himself' co-sired with Haydon and Pickersgill – he assimilates them as part of his own autobiographical defence. In this iconographic conception of afterlife, visual portraiture instances the other 'smallest wire' (in addition to the 'bright name' of the artist) upon which the image-conscious poet hangs the weight of his survival.

Wordsworth and Johnson were certainly not the only beneficiaries of visual portraiture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The beauty, intelligence and sensibility of the Bluestocking women writers – such as Frances Boscawen, Hannah More, Anna Seward and Elizabeth Montagu – were also exuberantly preserved in paint.<sup>75</sup> The term 'Bluestocking' originally appeared in 1756 as a metonym for Benjamin Stillingfleet, who showed up in one of Montagu's gatherings with blue worsted stockings.<sup>76</sup> In spite of the anecdotal connection to Stillingfleet, the term had been closely associated with women writers and intellectuals since the 1770s.<sup>77</sup> The pre-eminence of the Bluestocking community is exemplified by Richard Samuel's popular 1777 print of the dominant women intellectuals of the age, *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* (fig. 5.5).<sup>78</sup> On the left are Charlotte Lennox, novelist and poet, Catharine

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<sup>75</sup> See Elizabeth Eger's discussion of the origins of the Bluestocking women with interleaving portraits in 'The Bluestocking Circle: Friendship, Patronage and Learning', in Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz's *Brilliant Women: 18th-Century Bluestockings* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2008), 20-55. Cf. also Allan Ramsay's 1747-8 portrait of Frances Boscawen and his 1762 portrait of Elizabeth Montagu. John Opie's 1786 portrait of Hannah More shows her gazing fiercely into the distance with an air of purpose and authority. Meanwhile, Tilly Kettle's 1762 portrait of Anna Seward depicts her reading Milton.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 29-30. The story is memorably repeated in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, iv. 108.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>78</sup> Richard Samuel's 1777 print was commissioned by the publisher Joseph Johnson for *The Ladies New and Polite Pocket Memorandum-book, for the Year of our Lord 1778: Being the Eighteenth of King George III and the Twenty-*

Macaulay, the historian with a writing tablet, More, poet and playwright, Montagu, literary critic and leader of the circle, and Elizabeth Griffith, novelist and playwright. In the middle is Elizabeth Sheridan. On the right are Angela Kauffmann, the seated artist with her easel, Anna Barbauld, poet and writer, and Elizabeth Carter, poet and classics scholar.<sup>79</sup> Heeding Reynolds's

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<http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/detail/FOLGERCM1~6~6~73760~105752:The-Ladies-new-and-polite-pocket-me?qvq=q:the%2Bnine%2Bliving%2Bmuses%2Bof%2Bgreat%2Bbritain;lc:FOLGERCM1~6~6,BINDINGS~1~1&mi=0&trs=4>

Fig. 5.5 *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* by Richard Samuel. First published in November 1777 as etching with some engraving. The print was commissioned by Joseph Johnson for *The Ladies New and Polite Pocket Memorandum-Book*, 1778. By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

discourses on *istoria*, the artist attires his subjects in ‘classical dress, poses and settings’ in order to exude the timeless quality of what his predecessor calls the ‘antique air’.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the print is not as concerned with ‘iconographic exactitude’ as it is emphatic about the active intellectual and

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*seventh of the New Stile of Great Britain: Embellished with a Beautiful Copper Plate Representing the Nine Living Muses of Great Britain in the Temple of Apollo* (London: Printed for Joseph Johnson, 1778). Samuel would later convert the popular 1777 print to oil on canvas in 1778 as *Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1779.

<sup>79</sup> See Peltz's discussion of Samuel's 1777 print and 1778 painting of the same subject in ‘Living Muses: Constructing and Celebrating Professional Woman in Literature and the Arts’, in *Brilliant Women*, 56-93. Cf. also Eger's analysis of the work in ‘Representing Culture: “The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain (1779)”’, in Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clíona Ó'Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (eds.), *Women Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 104-32.

<sup>80</sup> Peltz's ‘Living Muses’, 61.

professional roles women played in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>81</sup> After Samuel's print appeared in Joseph Johnson's *Ladies New and Polite Pocket Memorandum-Book* for 1778, it garnered extraordinary reception. Montagu's 24 November 1777 letter to Carter is especially revealing. She writes:

Mr Johnson, the editor of a most useful pocket book, has done my head the honour to putt [sic] it into a print with yours, & seven other celebrated heads, & to call us the nine Muses. . . . & it is charming to think how our praises will ride about the World in every bodies pocket . . . I do not see how we could become more universally celebrated.<sup>82</sup>

Montagu's excited response to Samuel's print demonstrates the intricate relationship between celebrity, portraiture, and the commodification of images. The collective fame of the *Bluestockings rides* on the proliferation of their pocket-size portraits. Still, her enthusiasm is not universally shared among members of the circle. Though commissioned by her friend, Boscawen, More sat with great reluctance for Opie's 1786 portrait of her. She even complains to Boscawen that she had 'such a repugnance to having my picture taken, that I do not know any motive on earth which could induce me to it but your wishes.'<sup>83</sup>

Hemans does not share More's revulsion at visual portraiture, but nor does she embrace it with the same naïve giddiness as Montagu. When visiting Angus Fletcher's studio in the summer of 1830, Hemans was utterly terrified by the number of busts made of her. She writes:

Imagine my dismay on visiting Mr. Fletcher's sculpture-room, on beholding at least *six Mrs. Hemans*, placed as if to greet me in every direction. There is something absolutely frightful in this multiplication of one's self to *infinity*.<sup>84</sup>

In the presence of these sculptural clones, the poet was confronted with the loss of self-possession and self-identity. Unlike Locke's idea of infinity, Fletcher's busts of Hemans do not so much multiply her authorial self as divide it among duplicates, where each sculptural self

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Eger's 'Representing Culture', *Women Writing and the Public Sphere*, 122-3.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Eger's 'The Bluestocking Circle', *Brilliant Women*, 22.

<sup>84</sup> *CM*, ii. 150.

constitutes but a mere fraction of the original. The ‘incomprehensible remainder’ of Romantic afterlife is not the endless summation of unoriginal self-duplications but inexact additions of what Coleridge calls ‘likeness in the difference, difference in the likeness’.<sup>85</sup> Joining Reynolds’s idea of general portrait and Hazlitt’s ideal of characteristic portrait, each visual, sculptural and textual commemoration of the subject should *repeat with difference* in order to show the true varieties of an infinite self. The allegorical portrait of Montagu in Samuel’s print is, after all, inexact. Hence, it does not pose the same threat to her identity as do Fletcher’s multiple lifelike copies of Hemans. While Joseph Johnson’s pocketbook disseminates a variegated emblem of public female achievement, the sculptor’s portrait busts represent a proliferation of competing substitutes for the original author.

Her fear of Fletcher’s busts notwithstanding, the practice of portraiture does feature prominently in one of Hemans’s most absorbing verse reflections on mortality, memory and endurance. Posthumously published in *Poetical Remains of the Late Mrs Hemans* (1836), ‘To My Own Portrait’ records the poet’s response to one of William Edward West’s three portraits of herself. Edward Scriven later made an engraving of the same painting for Blackwood’s 1839 edition of *The Works of Mrs. Hemans* (fig. 5.6). Like Wordsworth, Hemans addresses her own portrait as a prosopopoeial figure from the perspective of a posthumous commentator. She writes:

How is it that before mine eyes,  
 While gazing on thy mien,  
 All my past years of life arise,  
 As in a mirror seen?

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<sup>85</sup> The second quotation is from Coleridge’s ‘Lecture XIII: On Poesy or Art’, in *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. H.N. Coleridge, 4 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1836-9), i. 220. The lecture was first given as part of his 1818 *Lectures on the Principles of Judgment, Culture, and European Literature*. In the same lecture, Coleridge goes on to say ‘a good portrait is the abstract of the personal; it is not the likeness for actual comparison, but for recollection’ (i. 225). The portrait painter’s contribution to the posthumous image of his subject is this very ‘abstraction’ through idealisation and difference. His goal is not to ‘copy’ and ‘imitate’ the original but to capture the ‘motion’ and the ‘life’ of his subject (i. 220). In other words, the ideal portrait should not focus on representing a character in detail; it should instead illustrate a life in motion.

What spell within thee hath been shrined.  
To image back my own deep mind? (ll. 1-6)

The portrait that so captivates her gaze is not a static image or person even; rather, it is a magic mirror in which past memories are conjured after one another. What the poet sees is not the portrait double but a series of autobiographical recollections. The ‘mirror’ effect of the self-replicating rhyme scheme (*ababcc*) synergises with the reflected self in the portrait mirror to ‘image back’ Hemans’s ‘own deep mind’. The textual structure, the graven figure and the mind’s



Fig. 5.6 Engraved portrait of Felicia Hemans by Edward Scriver after William E. West’s 1827 portrait, frontispiece to Harriet Hughes’s edition of *The Works of Mrs. Hemans* (1839).

eye all implicate one another in the ‘spell’ of reciprocal mirroring and mutual invocation. As scenes of her past flood to the surface, the image takes on an embodied, sensual life of its own. The portrait becomes ‘a song of other times’ (l. 7), ‘a sound of vesper-chimes’ (l. 9) and ‘a scent of vernal flowers’ (l. 11). The ekphrastic operation (from Greek *ἐκφράζειν* for ‘giving voice and

language to the otherwise mute art object') is undoubtedly at work here, as the picture breaks its silent containment into other media of self-expression.<sup>86</sup> Equally significant is the profound undertone of death which runs through the first three stanzas of the poem. To Hemans, the portrait is more than a reminder of 'past years', of 'other times', of 'vesper-chimes', of 'departed things' (l. 10) and of 'vanished hours' (l. 12): it is a former self repeated as her second life. The poet's expression of self-sympathy is palpable in this autobiographical projection of annihilation. Just as Wordsworth re-conceives Pickersgill's portrait as a second incarnation of his thoughts and feelings, Hemans envisions her own portrait as a resurrected emblem of a bygone life. The key word here is 'arise' in line 3, for it intimates the resurrection (from *resurgere* for 'to rise again') of the body and all its attendant senses. Unequivocally, the third stanza substantiates the inextricable link between visual portraiture and posthumous life writing. She writes:

Such power is thine!—they come, the dead,  
 From the grave's bondage free,  
 .....  
 And voices that are music flown  
 Speak to me in the heart's full tone. (ll. 13-14 and 17-18).

West's drawing emancipates a hitherto-deceased Hemans from the graveyard of memories. Interesting still is how the impact of the portrait on the viewer goes beyond its occasional and epitomising frame. What returns is not one notable, defining moment of Hemans's life, but a whole series of sounded reminiscences. Supplying more narrative depth and tone to the picture, the 'Shadows' of her life return in verbal 'Substance' as 'voices that are music flown'. The visual portrait is woven into the word-portrait to produce a posthumous autobiographical account.

Like Wordsworth's sonnet meditation, Hemans's verse also tries to restore private significance to what is essentially a public portrait. After all, West's painting of the poet was

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<sup>86</sup> Hagstrum, *Sister Arts*, 18.

originally commissioned by Alaric A. Watts, the editor of the *Literary Souvenir*, for his ‘gallery of portraits of the living authors of Great Britain.’<sup>87</sup> The image of the poet was intended for mass distribution in literary annuals, magazines and collective biographies. However, Hemans turns her autobiographical word-portrait into a private work of mourning. In the fourth stanza, the viewer’s visually inspired ‘thoughts of happier years’ (l. 20) suddenly becomes ‘A sudden fount that must have way’ (l. 24), overflowing in ‘child-like tears’ (l. 22). Although Wordsworth’s emotive response to his own visual portrait also evokes ‘many a household tear’ and a slight melancholic disruption in the poem’s rhyme structure, it is no elegiac effusion. His sonnet does not mourn the possibility of a ‘second death’; instead, it celebrates his assured survival in ‘Tears of delight’. In contrast, Hemans’s lyrical verse breaks, very visibly, from the portrait’s contained and controlled frame, ‘gushing’ sorrowfully to seven sestets as ‘Effusion on Effusion *pour* away.’ This self-elegiac turn shifts the reader’s attention away from the painted image to the hidden life of the subject, which surfaces recurrently as textual hints. Increasingly steeped in autobiographical musings, the poet’s ambivalence about the power of visual portraiture begins to grow. After all, ‘To My Own Portrait’ is not a naïve acceptance of West’s portrait as the authoritative defence and representation of her own posthumous life. She writes:

But thou, the while—oh! almost strange,  
 Mine imaged self! It seems  
 That on *thy* brow of peace no change  
 Reflects my own swift dreams!  
 Almost I marvel not to trace  
 Those lights and shadows in *thy* face. (ll. 25-30)

Despite Hemans’s elated approval of the painting’s likeness to herself (as her mirror image), her language also acknowledges the difference between the unchanging image and her evolving self. Though dismayed by Fletcher’s multiple busts of herself, the poet also concedes that portrait

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<sup>87</sup> Hughes’s ‘Memoir of Mrs. Hemans’, *The Works of Mrs. Hemans*, i. 129.

painting lacks the range of action intrinsic to the sculptural form. She compares the two commemorative arts in a late summer letter from 1829:

sitting for a bust, awful as it may sound, is by no means an infliction so terrible as sitting for a picture; the sculptor allows much greater liberty of action, as every part of the head and form is necessary to *his* work. My *effigy* is now nearly completed, and is thought to be a performance of much talent.<sup>88</sup>

Implicit in her jocular complaint about the physical discomfort of sitting for painting is an astute discrimination of the relative powers of both commemorative media. Unlike visual portraiture, the sculptural effigy incorporates ‘every part of the head and form’ in action. Ironically, the cause of estrangement between the picture and the sitter is precisely the ‘mimetic immediacy’ of portrait art, which ‘imposes strict limitations on its ability to represent a character’s development, inconsistencies, or complexity.’<sup>89</sup>

Paradoxically, a painting that is too faithful to its subject engenders an alien self, for it cannot capture change. The above stanza, then, sensitively conveys Hemans’s awareness of the image’s inability to communicate the moment-to-moment vacillations of her ‘own swift dreams’. Worse still, this inherent deficiency of visual portraiture nearly undermines her appreciation (‘marvel’) of the ‘lights and shadows’ of her painted double. The discordant syntax of the lines – for instance, the awkward placements of ‘no change’ and ‘Almost’ – further compounds the disjunction between Hemans’s imaged self and embodied self. Indeed, one cannot help but detect some degree of visual illegibility and grammatical impenetrability in her iconic life writing. The disorienting incongruence between a pictorially epitomised self and an actively evolving self shatters the ‘mirror’ and ‘spell’ of superficial correspondence between mind, image and text. This unravelling incongruity persists in the sixth stanza:

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<sup>88</sup> Written after visiting Robert Liston at Milburn Tower in the late summer of 1829, the letter was reprinted in *CM*, ii. 66.

<sup>89</sup> Wendorf, *Elements of Life*, 14.

To see *thee* calm, while powers thus deep—  
 Affection—Memory—Grief—  
 Pass o'er my soul as winds that sweep  
 O'er a frail aspen leaf! (ll. 31-4)

Considered by her family as the best portrait of the three, the poet's second incarnation is calm, buoyant and contented. Yet, the picture only represents a prelapsarian image of Hemans's past life (her 'happier years') before her domestic situation took a turn for the worse. Absenting 'Affection', 'Memory' and 'Grief', the painted Hemans fails to embody the true deep powers that 'sweep over' the 'hidden soul' of the 'frail' and damaged Hemans. Viewed through this autobiographical lens, West's occasional and overly idealised portrait of the poet is at best an inadequate commemoration of the afflicted life of his subject.

Even so, Hemans tries to subdue the strangeness of her own mirror image and assimilate it to a controllable narrative of life. The final stanza recapitulates the poet's resolve to appropriate her visual double as a posthumous avatar of herself. She writes:

And if sweet friends there be  
 That when my song and soul are gone  
 Shall seek my form in thee,  
 Tell them of One for whom 'twas best  
 To flee away and be at rest! (ll. 38-42)

Given the inherent limitations of visual portraiture, Hemans's defence of the medium seems puzzling. Is this a case of bad faith? And if her form can be sought in the painted image after her 'song and soul are gone', what, then, is the purpose of penning this verse? Rather than an expression of bad faith, the concluding stanza may be better appreciated as a case of Romantic irony. As evidenced by Hemans's repeated prosopopoeial address to her own portrait, the poet's picture is already from the outset a figure in writing, a figural creation of her posthumous life writing. If her 'song' (and writing) really were to vanish from earth, the painting, likewise, would not survive. Without this autobiographical mediation of text and image – of 'Shadow' and

‘Substance’ – West’s portrait of her would be devoid of both content and context, much like Pickersgill’s portrait of Wordsworth. The epitaphic quality of its closing lines again underscores the multi-mediated and multi-generic nature of the work. Brief and concise, the stanza possesses the form and impact of a grave inscription. Addressing anonymous ‘passers-by’ as ‘sweet friends’, the stanza calls upon posterity and prospective readers for continued care and support. Meanwhile, ‘my form in thee’ draws on the time-honoured convention of *hic jacet*, substituting mortal remains with portrait painting. Restating Johnson’s proposition to enquire after biographical details ‘in other places’, Hemans’s inscription directs us to ‘seek’ her inner life in the portrait form. The concluding couplet not only exudes the air of finality in a typical Christian epitaph, but it also offers consolation and instruction to both the departed figure and the grieving mourners. Confident and at the same time sceptical about the commemorative power of portraiture, Hemans’s ‘To My Own Portrait’ subtly co-opts autobiography, elegy and epitaph in the hopes of inducing future ‘sweet friends’ to remembrance.

The importance of visual art to a writer’s quest for immortality cannot be overstated. Both Reynolds’s *Character Sketches* and Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* demonstrate how biography and portrait painting are congenially and inextricably linked in the eighteenth century. Although Hazlitt and Haydon diverge from Reynolds’s aesthetic principles, their own portrait practices (in writing and in painting) are nevertheless indebted to the legacy of their common forebear. Immersed in the artistic clime and commercial environs of the Regency period, both Wordsworth and Hemans are attuned to the commemorative, as well as other symbolic, use of portraitive objects. However, as Fay points out, the enthusiasm with which Romantic writers embrace iconography is also tempered by an anxiety about the proliferation of image and the representational gulf between outer and inner selves. Like the other genres of memorial writing

discussed in earlier chapters, visual portraiture, too, has its own share of strengths and failings as a medium of mourning and commemoration. That said, Haydon's *Wordsworth on Helvellyn*, Cunningham's biography of Blake and Hemans's 'The Painter's Last Work' all seem to argue for the ethical application of portraiture as a means of collaborative fulfilment and protection. With the ability to apprehend a subject's inner life and outer form in one epitomising moment, Wordsworth and Hemans capitalise on this promising medium for their own survival. Yet, neither writer would capitulate to the power of visual portraiture completely. As we have seen, both poets meditate on the necessary supplementation of iconic life writing to their imaged selves as a way to control and perpetuate their second life as painted figures. They may agree on the need for some form of textual complement to iconography, but their prosecutions of it differ greatly. While Wordsworth's 'To the Author's Portrait' unreservedly affirms the poet's continued endurance through 'Works' and 'faithful Portrait' alone, Hemans's 'To My Own Portrait' is a far more nervous projection of the subject's posthumous viability. Without a *monumentum aere perennius* of her own, Hemans predicates the persistence of her living form on a host of interpenetrating genres and media and their joint capacity to rouse the sympathy of cooperative readers. Like other prematurely deceased artists, her survival is reliant on the possibility of posthumous correspondence and communal remembrance. The final chapter will explore the practicability of correspondence between the living and the dead, and its role in the conservation of human fellowship and the defence of a fallen friend.

## CHAPTER 5

### ‘The Last Letters of L. E. L.’:

#### Friendships and Solitude of a Late Feminine Robinson Crusoe

I pray thee, lay me not to rest  
Among these mouldering bones;  
Too heavily the earth is prest  
By all these crowded stones.

(Landon, ‘Scenes in London: IV. The City Churchyard’, ll. 1-4)<sup>1</sup>

Landon’s ‘The City Churchyard’ (1836) is the last of the four poetical commentaries on the conflicts between dead and living, past and present, and alienation and sympathy in city burial grounds. The plea to be inhumed anywhere but in a city churchyard conveys an anxiety about a possible ‘second death’ or double entombment, as the ‘mouldering bones’ and ‘crowded stones’ of others press on her grave. One may not suspect the morbid and elegiac nature of her subject matter in the eponymous titles of ‘Piccadilly’, ‘Oxford Street’ and ‘The Savoyard in Grosvenor Square’, the first three of the 1836 verse group. The first poem sketches the temporal convergence and divergence of England’s ‘old historic hours’ (l. 4) and the ‘busy hour of noon, / When man must seek and strive’ (ll. 35-6).<sup>2</sup> On one hand, past tradition and achievements are touted as the bedrock of London life, contributing to the zenith (‘hour of noon’) of England’s imperial and economic might. This history is all ‘round us’ in the ‘old spires’ of the timeless cityscape (l. 61) as ‘light . . . from the dead’ (l. 64). On the other hand, it is also during this ‘busy hour of noon’ that ‘The pressure of our actual life’ (l. 37) leads ambitious, wealth-making

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘Scenes in London’ verse group is comprised of four poems: ‘Piccadilly’, ‘Oxford Street’, ‘The Savoyard in Grosvenor Square’, and ‘The City Churchyard’. They first appeared as separate, scattered works in *FDRS* for 1836. The four poetical sketches of London were posthumously published together under the heading ‘Scenes in London’, in *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L. E. L. with a Memoir by Emma Roberts* (London: Fisher, Son, and Co., 1839), 178-94.

<sup>2</sup> For ‘Piccadilly’, see *Zenana*, 178-82.

Londoners to a mutually alienating frenzy and a callous neglect of the dead. That Landon is a fervent advocate of metropolitan life, as opposed to life in the rural country, is evident in many of her letters and poems. However, the writer's attitude toward her own future resting place is rife with apprehensions about the deplorable state of London cemeteries. In the prose addendum to 'The City Churchyard', the narrator declares that 'No one can love London better than I do; but never do I wish to be buried there. It is the best place in the world for a house, and the worst for a grave.'<sup>3</sup> The reasons for her professed aversion to interment in a metropolitan churchyard echo Wordsworth's animadversions on the sooty, overcrowded city churchyards in *Essays Upon Epitaphs I*. Landon explains her position in the short but significant supplementary note:

If there be one object . . . more revolting, more gloomy than another, it is a crowded church yard in a city. It has neither sympathy nor memory. The pressed down stones lie heavy upon the very heart. The sunshine cannot get to them for smoke. There is a crowd, and, like most crowds, there is no companionship. Sympathy is the softener of death; and memory of the loved and lost is the earthly shadow of their immortality.<sup>4</sup>

This sad reflection on the lamentable condition of city churchyards was a widespread sentiment throughout the nineteenth century, as churchyards, chapels and private burial grounds reached their capacity to accommodate the dead.<sup>5</sup> By the 1830s, London was 'expected to cope with over 40,000 deaths annually, fuelled by cholera epidemics, and a vast increase in the population.'<sup>6</sup> While cemetery reforms were taking effect in foreign cities in India, Turkey and France, London was lagging behind in its effort to establish public cemeteries. It was only after a series of cholera epidemics struck London in January 1832 that a putative link between the pungent

<sup>3</sup> 'The City Churchyard', *Zenana*, 194.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> See Hugh Meller and Brian Parsons' 'One: History', in *London Cemeteries: An Illustrated Guide and Gazetteer*, 4th edn. (Amersham, UK: Avebury Publishing Company, 1981), 1-11. Cf. also George Alfred Walker's *Gatherings from Grave Yards Particularly Those of London: With a Concise History of the Modes of Interment Among Different Nations, from the Earliest Periods and a Detail of Dangerous and Fatal Results Produced by the Unwise and Revolting Custom of Inhuming the Dead in the Midst of the Living* (London: Messrs. Longman and Company, 1839).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 1.

graveyards and the rampaging disease spurred the Parliament to grant the London Cemetery Company (formed in 1830) to open Kensal Green Cemetery.<sup>7</sup> The beautiful West Norwood Cemetery followed in 1836, while the Arcadian resting place of Marx, George Eliot and the Rossetti family – Highgate Cemetery – was founded in 1839.<sup>8</sup>

Confronted with high mortality rate and explosive population growth, Landon is fighting for her own survival on two different fronts, and on both sides of the grave. Not only does she have to outcompete other writers for a place among the living and deceased authors, but she also needs to preserve her grave as the site of an active memorial and continual dialogue with posterity. For many Europeans, an 'abiding fear during the early nineteenth century was that of being buried alive.'<sup>9</sup> However, Landon's 'The City Churchyard' evinces another abiding fear: namely, that of being 'mixed up' with the crowded dead. The threat posthumous 'miscellany' poses is none other than perpetual anonymity. The reason why an overcrowded city churchyard 'has neither sympathy nor memory' is apparent in Charles Dickens's famous depiction of the dilapidated London churchyards in 'XXIII. The City of the Absent' of *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1860-9):

Such strange churchyards hide in the City of London . . . always so pressed upon by houses; so small, so rank, so silent, so forgotten, except by the few people who ever look down into them from their smoky windows. . . . The illegible tombstones are all lop-sided, the grave-mounds lost their shape in the rains of a hundred years ago. . . . Contagion of slow ruin overhangs the place.<sup>10</sup>

Unkempt and smelly, the city churchyards are anything but inviting. The mood and ambience of the sepulchral environment are corrosive to sympathy, and elicit, rather, *antipathy* and further

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>8</sup> For the founding histories of Highgate and West Norwood Cemeteries, see Hugh Meller and Brian Parsons' 'Gazetteer', in *London Cemeteries*, 187-92 and 339-43, respectively.

<sup>9</sup> Julian Litten's 'The Common Funeral', in *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral Since 1450* (London: Robert Hale, 1991), 166.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Dickens's *The Uncommercial Traveller and Reprinted Pieces*, introd. Leslie C. Staples (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1958), 233.

neglect from the inhabitants of the city. In Dickens's description, the form and content of London cemeteries are being corrupted by the 'contagion of slow ruin'. As markers of human remains, lop-sided tombstones, illegible epitaphs and misshapen grave-mounds dislocate the material vestiges of the deceased from their inscribed identity and memory. Against the 'contagions' of overcrowding and neglect, not even tombs and lapidaries can provide adequate means of post-obit defence and commemoration.

To counter the urban reality of ruin and oblivion, Landon's prose addendum to 'The City Churchyard' presents a mechanism for lasting 'sympathy and memory' through solitary correspondence with the dead. Since 'there is no companionship' where 'There is a crowd', solitude and exclusivity constitute the basis of a new ethic of self-care. Indeed, Landon's cemetery meditation resonates deeply with the one defining theme of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719-20): solitude. In the first chapter ('Of Solitude') of the third and final volume of Crusoe's autobiographical account – titled *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* – the narrator writes:

I can affirm, that I enjoy much more Solitude in the Middle of the greatest Collection of Mankind in the World, I mean, at *London*, while I am writing this, than ever I could say I enjoy'd in eight and twenty Years of Confinement to a desolate Island.<sup>11</sup>

According to Defoe/Crusoe, the universal solitude of everyman is amplified not by physical isolation but by social isolation. In other words, the greater the 'collection of Mankind' the more impersonal human relations become and the more intensely one feels at home with oneself. Hence, 'by the Power of Sympathy . . . all the solid Reflection is directed to our selves.'<sup>12</sup> In

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<sup>11</sup>Daniel Defoe's 'Of Solitude', in *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: With His Vision of the Angelick World* (London: Printed for William Taylor, 1720), 4. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was originally published in three volumes from 1719-20. *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* was published in 1719 as the first volume and remains the most beloved and printed of the three. His *Serious Reflections* is virtually forgotten now.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

Crusoe's view, sympathy with fellow human beings should serve to facilitate the centripetal movement of the mind, leading us back to 'our Dear-self' as the 'End of Living.'<sup>13</sup> For Ian Watt, this Puritan ethic of individual responsibility becomes in *Robinson Crusoe* an enduring expression of modern individualism and solipsism.<sup>14</sup> It may be argued that Landon's supplementary note to 'The City Churchyard' goes a step further. Her 'Dear-self' is not only the end of living, but it is also the end of living *on*. Inspired by Crusoe's ethical self-interest, her own anticipatory thoughts on death call upon true companions to sympathise with her 'Dear-self' and protect her equally dear 'autographic' name.

Sympathy and companionship are effectively code words for Landon's aspiration to survive as a legible and tangible presence in the memory of the living. Nevertheless, the question remains: how should the writer forge such intense sympathy and exclusive companionship with her readers and friends? As an avid letter writer herself, epistolary correspondence offers just the kind of commemorative medium which promises to preserve the authentic character of the writing subject and the intimate bond between writing friends. After all, letters of friendship were increasingly formalised and saturated with ethical significance in the eighteenth century. Ever since John Hill's *The Young Secretary's Guide; or Speedy Help to Learning* appeared in 1687, an extensive collection of epistolary manuals sprang up in the eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup> In addition to popular compendia of literary letters such as Eliza Haywood's *Epistles for the Ladies* (1749) and Knox's *Elegant Epistles* (1790), there were also more critical, explicatory manuals

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> See Ian Watt's 'Robinson Crusoe', in *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 141-71.

<sup>15</sup> John Hill's *The Young Secretary's Guide or Speedy Help to Learning* was so authoritative that it ran through multiple editions in England and in America throughout the eighteenth century. For instance, the 20th edition was printed in London for H. Rhodes, 1719, and the 24th edition was printed and sold in Boston by Thomas Fleet, 1750.

such as *The New Art of Letter-Writing* (1762) and *The Correspondent* (1796).<sup>16</sup> *The Correspondent*, for instance, promulgates letter writing as an indispensable aid to the conservation of friendship. The anonymous author of the manual writes: 'The only means of keeping alive the warmth of friendship in absence is by an epistolary intercourse; that neglected, no warmth of esteem is able to resist the unvarying effects of time'.<sup>17</sup> Like biographies, epitaphs, portraits and monuments, epistolary correspondence is a practical method of inscribing oneself in the memory of one's friends. However, given its centrality to nearly every activity of civil life, letter-writing is ethically prescribed to *demand* response. Not surprisingly, then, the assurance of continued affection and the expectation of future service remain the principal topoi in letters of friendship. As Eve Tavor Bannet observes,

The writer of a letter of visit or friendship had to reassure his absent correspondent that their erstwhile affection remained unaffected by absence, time or distance; that the writer fully understood the importance and pleasures of friendship . . . and above all, that he remained willing to 'serve' him if necessary.<sup>18</sup>

Although Bannet perceives these topoi of friendship as rhetorical conventions, it is not difficult to discern the moral feelings and considerations which underpin these conventions. Since 'There is no Sympathy so perfect, that is not mixed with some Contrariety' or subject to 'decay with Time', epistolary expressions of unceasing assurances, affirmations and affections are

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<sup>16</sup> See Eliza Haywood's *Epistles for the Ladies* (London: Printed and published by T. Gardner, 1749); Knox's *Elegant Epistles, being a Copious Collection of Familiar and Amusing Letters for the Improvement of Young Persons and for General Entertainment* (Dublin: Printed for Messrs. H. Chamberlaine and Rice, P. Wogan, P. Byrne, W. Porter, J. Moore, J. Jones, Grueber and M'Allister, W. Jones and J. Milliken, 1790); a Gentleman of Fortune's *The New Art of Letter-Writing, Divided into Two Parts: the First Containing Rules and Directions for Writing Letters on all Sorts of Subjects . . . the Second a Collection of Letters on the Most Interesting Occasions in Life*, 2nd edn. (London: Printed for O. Osborne, 1762); and *The Correspondent, A Selection of Letters from the Best Authors, Together with some Originals, Adapted to all the Periods and Occasions of Life*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1796). For a comprehensive discussion of these epistolary manuals, see Eve Tavor Bannet's 'Chapter 2: Manual architectonics', in *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1680-1820* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 54-102.

<sup>17</sup> *The Correspondent*, i. 224.

<sup>18</sup> Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, 60.

necessarily guided by an ethic of mutual care to mend the daily 'Breach' in the 'strongest Friendships'.<sup>19</sup> If properly applied, epistolary correspondence can summon the 'final essence' of the living to render 'posthumous services' to the absent friend: to defend him from injustice and recover him from oblivion. This vital relation between letter writing and posthumous defence is the focus of the current chapter.

Ironically, or proleptically to many of her contemporaries, Landon did perish outside London. Even though she did not wish for her remains to be buried in London, she certainly did not expect to be interred in a colonial outpost in Africa, displaced from her readers, colleagues and friends. After Landon's closet wedding in London with George Maclean, the *de facto* Governor of Cape Coast Castle, the two sailed for Gold Coast on 5 July 1838.<sup>20</sup> They arrived a month later at the former administrative centre of British transatlantic slave trade in West Africa.<sup>21</sup> On the morning of 15 October 1838, Landon's body was discovered on the floor of her room with a small phial of prussic acid in her hand, according to the deposition of her servant, Emily Bailey.<sup>22</sup> The official cause of death was accidental overdose of prussic acid, although no post-mortem was performed. Others suspected foul play, implicating Bailey, Maclean and his native mistress, Ellen, in various incriminating accounts.<sup>23</sup> Regrettably, all the forensic attention

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<sup>19</sup> *New Art of Letter-Writing*, 140.

<sup>20</sup> For recent biographies of Landon, see Stephenson's *The Woman Behind L.E.L.* and F. J. Sypher's *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: A Biography* [referred to hereafter as *LEL: Biography*] (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 2004). Laman Blanchard's *Life and Literary Remains of L. E. L.*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1841) was the first authoritative biography on Landon.

<sup>21</sup> For the slave trade history of Cape Coast Castle, see William St. Clair's 'Introduction', in *The Grand Slave Emporium: Cape Coast Castle and the British Slave Trade* (London: Profile Books, 2006), 1-10.

<sup>22</sup> For Bailey's deposition, see Brodie Cruickshank's *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa*, 2 vols. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1853), i. 225.

<sup>23</sup> Bailey was implicated by both Cruickshank and Richard Robert Madden. See R. R. Madden's 'Memoir of L. E. L.' and 'Memoir of L. E. L. continued', in *The Literary Life and Correspondence of the Countess of Blessington*, 3 vols. (London: T. C. Newby, 1855), ii. 260-78 and ii. 279-92, respectively. Michael Gorman, an alleged great-great-grandson of Landon, places the blame squarely on Maclean's African mistress, Ellen, in the biographical novel,

on her death in the ensuing century distracted efforts to provide more rigorous assessment of her late writing. Perhaps a more pertinent question would be: to what extent did Landon's own late writing contribute to all the posthumous interest in her private life and dubious death? Furthermore, how was this late writing exploited to promote her literary afterlife? As she wrote to Edward Bulwer-Lytton before departing for Africa, she planned to keep a journal of her sojourn, no doubt for publication as well.<sup>24</sup> It would seem that she was set to make good on the promise 'to write for England when far away from its shores', as advertised in her 'Preface' to *FDRS* for 1839.<sup>25</sup> Though only extracts of her sea-faring journal survived for publication in Laman Blanchard's *Life and Literary Remains of L. E. L.* (1841), it might help to regard her African letters collectively as a replacement for this unfinished phantom work.<sup>26</sup> In addition to being an epistolary journal of exile, Landon's letters of friendship from Cape Coast are at once a sophisticated Crusoe-esque narrative of island solitude and an incendiary portrayal of domestic injustice. As a quasi-literary travelogue, these late communications repeatedly draw on her experience of solitude to strengthen her ties with friends in England and promote her post-obit image as a female Robinson Crusoe. The present study will evaluate Landon's African letters and their repercussions in three sections. Rather than unravelling the facts from fiction as many before have done, the first section explores the ways in which Landon dovetails her real and imaginary experiences of colonial life in Cape Coast through epistolary life writing. To compare Defoe's and Landon's ethical conceptions of solitude, the second section will look at the longings and anxieties of the 'feminine Robinson Crusoe' in the contexts of early death, unfinished work, communal remembrance and mutually assured survival. The concluding section

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*L.E.L.: The Life and Murder of Letitia E. Landon. 'A Flower of Loveliness'* (London: Olympia, 2008), see especially 85-6.

<sup>24</sup> Sypher's '9. Marriage and Africa', in *LEL: Biography*, 203.

<sup>25</sup> 'Preface' to *FDRS* for 1839.

<sup>26</sup> The extracts first appeared in *LRLEL*, i. 186-9.

examines how friends, biographers and posterity rally to the defence of her scandal-ridden life, her dislocated grave and her violated name following the publication of her last letters.

### **Landon's Letters from Africa: 'The solitude here is very Robinson Crusoe-ish'**

Accounts of Landon's last days are split between her supporters and Maclean's. In the personal account of his *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa* (1853), Dr. Brodie Cruickshank, the governor of Anomabu fort in the 1830s, stridently defends Maclean against speculations of his involvement in possible foul play. He writes: 'The public, robbed of its favourite, required a victim on which to wreak its vengeance, and sought it in him, who was the heaviest sufferer. All manner of outrageous reports were circulated, and eagerly believed.'<sup>27</sup> Cruickshank represents the colonial administrator as a victim and scapegoat in the court of public opinion. Even Emma Roberts, a close lifelong friend and colleague of Landon, vouches for Maclean's conduct and integrity in her 'Memoir of L.E.L.' (1839).<sup>28</sup> The twentieth-century historian, G. E. Metcalfe, is conceivably one of the staunchest and most recent advocates of Maclean's career and character. He interprets Landon's motive to marry the colonial administrator as no less than mercenary and desperate, and Maclean's as imprudent and regrettable but nevertheless honourable.<sup>29</sup>

On the other side of this verbal attrition, Dr. Richard Robert Madden, a major anti-slavery proponent who was sent to Cape Coast in 1841 as a Commissioner of Inquiry into the British administration of African coastal settlements, portrays Maclean in the worst possible light. Madden harshly calls him 'a colonial sybarite, with . . . all the unpleasing peculiarities of

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<sup>27</sup> Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years*, i. 230.

<sup>28</sup> See Roberts's 'Memoir of L.E.L.', in *Zenana*, 5-36.

<sup>29</sup> See G. E. Metcalfe's 'Chapter 10: L.E.L.', in *Maclean of the Gold Coast: The Life and Times of George Maclean, 1801-1847* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 204-42.

valetudinarian', who became 'cynical' from 'long privation of the humanizing influence of the society of educated women'.<sup>30</sup> As a result of his supposed masculine cynicism and retarded sensibility, Maclean 'had unfortunately no sympathy with her [Landon's] poetic tastes and literary pursuits.'<sup>31</sup> He even went so far as showing 'his contempt for verse-making.'<sup>32</sup> Others like the Countess of Blessington, Samuel Carter Hall and his wife, Anna Maria Fielding Hall, have all voiced comparable allegations. Whichever representation (or misrepresentation) of George Maclean one is inclined to believe, the posthumous publication of Landon's African letters in various print media clearly played a pivotal role in the ensuing controversy and war of competing defences.<sup>33</sup>

Arguably, one of the most damning accusations directed against Maclean was his indelicate and demeaning treatment of Landon, which is routinely alluded to in her letters. Nearly every communication she writes to England contains a disgruntled litany of her menial responsibilities in the Castle. In her long letter to Anna Maria Hall, first published in newspapers the following year and then in *Gentleman's Magazine* as one of 'The Last Letters of L. E. L.', the poet complains that 'every morning I take my way to the store, give out flour, sugar, butter, &c., and am learning to scold if I see any dust, or miss the customary polish on the tables.'<sup>34</sup> Her 27 September 1838 letter to Whittington Landon reads:

I will give you the history of one day:—I rise at seven, breakfast at eight—give my orders—give out everything—flour sugar, &c., from the store—see to which room I will have cleaned, and then sit down to write—lunch at one on roasted yam, then write—much interrupted by having to see to different things.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> CCB, ii. 268.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. ii. 268 and ii. 269.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. ii. 269.

<sup>33</sup> For public reaction to the news of her death, see Sypher's '10. Aftermath', in *LEL: Biography*, 222-65.

<sup>34</sup> The long letter written after 15 August 1838 to Anna Maria Fielding Hall, reprinted in *LLEL*, 186. 'The Last Letters of L.E.L.' appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* 11 (February 1839), 150-2.

<sup>35</sup> *LLEL*, 192.

Landon's daily frustration with household duties, the 'utter want of the commonest necessities' like 'saucepan, jug, or pail', and the constant interruption they bear on her literary output is palpable.<sup>36</sup> Still, the most damaging protestation of her marital suffering comes from a short letter allegedly written to Whittington on the same morning of her death. She writes: Maclean 'expects me to cook, wash, and iron; in short, to do the work of a servant. . . . He says he will never cease correcting me until he has broken my spirit'.<sup>37</sup> Together marital servitude, housekeeping onus, insensitive husband and lack of companionship paint a dismal picture of the writer's exhausted and maltreated condition.

Yet, according to Cruickshank, Landon's 'perplexities about housekeeping, the difficulty of getting anything to eat, and the blunders of the servants' were all, in private, subjects of amusement to her.<sup>38</sup> Metcalfe argues that the writer was merely adjusting to her new position, and that she was content with her new life and had not felt 'the want of society'.<sup>39</sup> They are not alone in this assessment. Anne Katherine Elwood, a renowned biographer of contemporary women writers, interprets the above report of domestic grievances as one 'of several places' where '[Landon] playfully describes her troubles in housekeeping'.<sup>40</sup> How, then, should we reconcile these contradictory accounts of Landon's experience at the Cape Coast Castle? As there was 'no European lady in the country at the time', with the exception of her servant, Emily Bailey, the writer 'would have to depend entirely upon the resources of her own mind . . . upon the pleasures of domestic happiness . . . and upon the sympathy of strangers'.<sup>41</sup> His allegiance to Maclean notwithstanding, Cruickshank's observation identifies a critical resource of Landon's

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<sup>36</sup> September 1838 Letter to Catherine Jane Landon, in *LLEL*, 194.

<sup>37</sup> 15 October 1838 [?] letter to Whittington, in *LLEL*, 197.

<sup>38</sup> *Eighteen Years*, i, 220.

<sup>39</sup> *Maclean of the Gold Coast*, 234.

<sup>40</sup> Anne Katherine Elwood's 'Mrs. Maclean', in *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England: From the Commencement of the Last Century*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1843), ii, 328.

<sup>41</sup> *Eighteen Years*, i, 212.

resistance to feelings of solitude and isolation: her writing. Landon herself assures Anna Maria Hall in the long, posthumously published letter: 'You cannot think the complete seclusion in which I live, but I have a great resource in writing, and I am very well and happy.'<sup>42</sup> This 'great resource in writing' and imagination is splendidly demonstrated in her epistolary compositions, which abound in fertile allusions to Robinson Crusoe.

The first reference to Robinson Crusoe appears in a separate, short and unpublicised letter to Anna Maria Hall, purported to be written shortly after she landed in the English settlement.

The full length of this letter is transcribed below:

The native huts I first took for ricks of hay, but those of the better sort are pretty white houses, with green blinds. The English gentlemen resident here have very large houses, quite mansions, with galleries running around. Generally speaking, the vegetation is so thick, that the growth of the shrubs rather resembles a wall. The solitude here is very Robinson Crusoe-ish. The hills are covered to the top with what we should call calf-weed, but here is called bush; on two of these are small forts, built by Mr. Maclean. The natives seem obliging and intelligent, and look very picturesque, with their fine dark figures, with pieces of the country cloth flung round them; they seem to have an excellent ear for music.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike the long letter to Anna Maria Hall, this brief communication reads more like a draft and was not printed until 1841 in Blanchard's biography of Landon. Signs of class difference and racial division are apparent in the disproportionate housing conditions among the indigenous population and English settlers, consisting mostly of merchants. The descriptive remark on the natives, focusing chiefly on their body parts, apparel and overall aesthetic effect, conveys the superficial nature and extent of Landon's interaction with local inhabitants. Devoid of personal relationships, the indigenous people appear in her epistolary writing as interesting but strange, 'picturesque' but silent, and musical but unproductive. The colonial undertone of this passage is undoubtedly significant, but even more salient is how the content of this written communication is copied and edited into her other letters intended for two different correspondents. Sentences 5

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<sup>42</sup> *LLEL*, 186-7.

<sup>43</sup> The short letter written after 15 August 1838 to Anna Maria Hall, in *LLEL*, 187-8.

and 6, which run from 'The hills are covered to the top with what we should call calf-weed' to 'they seem to have an excellent ear for music', turn up nearly word by word in the long letter to Anna Maria Hall. Meanwhile, sentences 1 to 4, including the famous line 'The solitude here is very Robinson Crusoe-ish', are incorporated almost exactly into her 12 October 1838 letter to Robert Fisher.<sup>44</sup>

Of particular interest is how Landon inserts that familiar psychological statement into her October letter to the publisher of *FDRS*. The picturesque nature of her solitude in the original letter draft to Anna Maria Hall is transformed into a vocational one in the 12 October 1838 letter to Fisher. She explains to her superior:

The solitude here is very Robinson Crusoeish, and I find my habit for doing even half the *Drawing-room Scrap Book*. This note will reach you a little after Christmas—any thing you send then will be with me in six weeks, and I should have many opportunities of resending to England in less than seven weeks. I really shall not know what to do with all my accumulated poetry. I have so long accustomed myself to give the poems a collected form in the *scrap-book*, in which my best poems have appeared, that I shall quite grudge scattering them through periodicals.<sup>45</sup>

Writing with the goal to secure further publication opportunities for her 'accumulated poetry', 'The solitude here is very Robinson Crusoeish' connotes a set of conflicting feelings. On one hand, her estrangement from the English community of writers is a key cause of her 'Crusoeish' solitude. On the other hand, this 'Crusoeish' solitude serves to increase the efficiency and quality of her poetical production. As a positive force, solitude provides time and impetus for writing and for maintaining friendships. Moreover, Landon's constant allusion to the scrap-book reassures Fisher the importance of his annual to her professional and personal life. She not only reassures him of efficient exchange between raw material (random engravings and poems) and processed good (collation of edited poems and engravings), but she also promises him quality

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<sup>44</sup> See her 12 October 1838 letter to Fisher, in *LLEL*, 196-7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 196.

output. Having edited and contributed to the literary annual since its inception in 1831 (published in 1832), the writer regards the '*scrap-book*' as more than an ephemeral collection of her poetry. *FDRS* is in effect her *monumentum aere perennius*, embodying years of her mature poetical labours and diligent editorial efforts. Nevertheless, Landon is not writing to her publisher from a position of strength. The fact that he needs to be reminded of her merits and commitment reveals the uncertain and provisional terms of her continued editorship. The editorial position is, to put it bluntly, hers to lose. In light of her anxiety about possible dismissal from Fisher's literary venture, Landon's epistolary display of 'Crusoeish' solitude is not simply descriptive but also strategic.

The fact that the short letter draft supplies the backbone for two separately dated letters suggests a conscious effort to select, organise and replicate her expressions to convey a certain epistolary ethos to her readers and elicit the desired effect from her correspondents. In *A Book of Memories* (1871), Samuel Hall praises Landon not only for her literary industry but also for her unfaltering dedication to keep up correspondence.<sup>46</sup> Even F. J. Sypher, her most recent biographer, notices how she 'seems, in her letters from Africa, to have used similar phrases over and over again in letters to different correspondents.'<sup>47</sup> What, then, might be the cause of these repetitions? In her final letter from Africa, composed and addressed to Marie Fagan the same morning she was found dead, the writer begins the epistolary conversation by asserting her identity with Robinson Crusoe, but with a feminine twist. She writes: 'My dearest Marie,—I cannot but write to you a brief account how *I enact the part of a feminine Robinson Crusoe*' (my

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<sup>46</sup> First published in 1871, I use the reprinted edition of Samuel Hall's 'LÆTITIA ELIZABETH LANDON', in *A Book of Memories of Great Men and Women of the Age from Personal Acquaintance*, 2nd edn. (London: Virtue and Company, 1877), 276.

<sup>47</sup> Sypher's footnote to Landon's 15 October 1838[?] letter to Whittington, in *LLEL*, 198.

italics).<sup>48</sup> Following this prefatory opening to what is essentially a diarial narrative, the writer-turned-dramatist goes to relate her insular castle life, her regimented schedule each day, her awkwardness at being 'the only lady' present, and her embarrassment at entertaining the Dutch Governor on behalf of her absent husband. The circumstantial account then succumbs to a prosy effusion over the evocative rising and dashing of the waves and the exotic 'Arabian Nights'-like landscape at twilight. The letter ends finally with the conventional topoi of friendship and a request for continual correspondence. Before her final letter to Fagan, Landon has twice insisted on the similarity between her solitude and that of Crusoe, but she takes the comparison further in this letter by role-playing a lone traveller shipwrecked upon a foreign life, society and environs. The shipwreck simile, however, extends beyond the referential frame of Landon's life in Africa; as an existential condition, it encapsulates the experience of exile commonly shared by women writers of her time.<sup>49</sup> In 'Character of Hemans's Writings', she recalls a conversation she had with the late Jewsbury. During the exchange, Jewsbury tells Landon: 'Like Sinbad, the sailor, we are often shipwrecked on a strange shore. We despair; but hope comes when least expected.'<sup>50</sup> Incidentally, the mutual friend of Hemans and Landon also died 'on a strange shore.' After sailing to India with her husband in late September of 1832, Jewsbury contracted cholera in Sholapore around the summer of 1833 and died that October at Poona.<sup>51</sup> Landon's invocation of the quintessential male explorer-diarist for imaginary 'enactment' thus serves to authorise the exiled writer (and wife) to engage in her own confessional life writing through letters. Even as

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<sup>48</sup> 15 October 1838 letter to Marie Fagan, in *LLEL*, 198.

<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the theme of exile pervades much of women's poetry in the Romantic period. Some of the most recognisable examples include Helen Maria Williams's *A Farewell, for Two Years to England. A Poem.* (1791), Mary Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon* (1796), and Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* and *Beachy Head* (1807).

<sup>50</sup> *LEL: Selected Writings*, 182.

<sup>51</sup> See Eric Gillet's 'Maria Jane Jewsbury: A Memoir', in *Maria Jane Jewsbury: Occasional Papers, Selected with a Memoir* (London: Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1932), lxiv.

she despairs, she hopes to return to England (like Crusoe) with unexpected gains to her literary enterprise.

However, in order to grasp some of the deeper nuances of Landon's 'enactment' of a 'feminine Robinson Crusoe', it is necessary to examine the reception of Defoe's hallmark work in the Romantic period. Already before the time she started writing, *Robinson Crusoe* was available in many editions and was one of the most widely read titles both in England and in Continental Europe. After the British House of Lords rejected the existence of a perpetual common law copyright in the 1774 *Donaldson v Beckett* case, Defoe's classic underwent many print runs and became available in cheap editions.<sup>52</sup> Its popularity on the Continent cannot be overstated.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps no one contributed more to the promotion of *Robinson Crusoe* as the representative text of the Enlightenment than Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>54</sup> His famous 1762 pedagogical tract, *Émile, or Treatise on Education*, promulgates a self-made Enlightenment hero of the senses, a pragmatic, industrious, utilitarian, self-reliant and self-responsible student – eventually master – of nature. This democratising ideal of cultivated, as opposed to inherited, abilities is embodied by none other than the model survivalist: Robinson Crusoe. The appeal to the Enlightenment writer is obvious, for the 'story shows us someone learning without books'.<sup>55</sup> According to Rousseau, the only book Émile needs to prepare himself for natural manhood is the

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<sup>52</sup> See St. Clair's '5. Book costs, prices, and margins. Romantic period and later', in *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 507-8. Cf. also Michael J. Preston's 'Rethinking Folklore, Rethinking Literature: Looking at *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* as Folktales, A Chapbook-Inspired Inquiry', in Cathy Lynn Preston and Michael J. Preston (eds.), *The Other Print Tradition: Essays on Chapbooks, Broad-sides, and Related Ephemera* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 19-73.

<sup>53</sup> See Martin Green's '2. *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)', in *The Robinson Crusoe Story* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), especially 20. After translating the first volume of *Robinson Crusoe* into French in 1720, the translation was reprinted in 1721, 1722 and 1726; meanwhile, the Dutch translation was reprinted in 1721, 1736, 1752 and 1791.

<sup>54</sup> See Green's '3. *Emile* (1762)', in *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, 33-47.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

author's own ruthlessly edited, abridged and secularised version of Crusoe's island adventure.<sup>56</sup>

He offers this advice to Émile in Book 3:

This book shall be the first which my Émile will read; for a long time it will of itself constitute his whole library, and always hold a distinguished place in it. It shall be the text on which all our conversations on the natural sciences will serve merely as a commentary. . . . What, then, is this wonderful book? Is it Aristotle? Is it Pliny? Is it Buffon? No; it is Robinson Crusoe.<sup>57</sup>

Under this new Enlightenment regime of subject formation, the manual of practical learning is esteemed above all theoretical (even bookish) discourses of philosophy and natural history.

To the English Romantics, the appeal of Crusoe assumed a very different character from that of Rousseau's chosen mascot of Enlightenment. Less concerned with Defoe's patriotism and Protestant fervour, Coleridge, Scott and Lamb were drawn to the plain-speaking style of his writings and the common nature of Crusoe's temperament.<sup>58</sup> Coleridge's lecture note on *Robinson Crusoe*, for instance, praises the universal and unexceptional spirit of Crusoe as an enterprising wanderer. He writes:

The charm of De Foe's works, especially of Robinson Crusoe, is founded on the same principle. It always interests, never agitates. Crusoe himself is merely a representative of humanity in general; neither his intellectual nor his moral qualities set him above the middle degree of mankind; his only prominent characteristic is the spirit of enterprise and wandering.<sup>59</sup>

The very charm of Defoe's protagonist lies in the realism of his everyman quality, in his ability to carry out the early Romantics' project of speaking in the language of ordinary men. To Scott, it is the artless, 'loose and inaccurate' nature of Defoe's language which gives 'an appearance of

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>57</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 'Book Third—Émile from Twelve to Fifteen', in *Émile, or Treatise on Education*, trans. abridged and annotated by William H. Payne (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918), 162-3.

<sup>58</sup> For the reception of Defoe's works in the Romantic period, see Pat Rogers's 'Introduction', in *Daniel Defoe: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Pat Rogers (New York: Routledge, 1972), especially 17.

<sup>59</sup> 'Lecture 11', in *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes, 2 vols. [no. 5 of CWC] (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), ii. 192.

REALITY to the incidents which he narrates.’<sup>60</sup> According to him, the reason why his predecessor’s narratives are so convincing to readers is because the writer makes no effort at concealing the crass and unimaginative texture of his writing. The simplicity of the writing and its ‘reference to common life’ successfully conjure the illusion of truth, thereby suspending the reader’s disbelief. Thomas De Quincey’s commentary on the verisimilitude of Defoe’s falsified records is especially insightful. In his essay on ‘Homer and the Homeridae’ (1841), he asks, rhetorically, how is that ‘De Foe is the only author known who has so plausibly circumstantiated his false historical records as to make them pass for genuine, even with literary men and critics[?]’<sup>61</sup> Even Johnson was duped by his falsified records. The reason, De Quincey tells us, is simple. Defoe hoodwinks his readers by ‘inventing such littler circumstantiations of any character or incident as seem, by their apparent inertness of effect, to verify themselves’.<sup>62</sup> In other words, by inventing a plethora of seemingly irrelevant and innocuous details, readers are coaxed by the factual draw of the writing and its inert semblance of truth. We naively and implicitly trust information that is without perceptible design. Like Crusoe’s meticulous reckoning of razors, scissors, knives and forks in the drawer of the capsized ship, Landon’s uninteresting accounting of keys, scissors, saucepan, jug, plate, glass, flour, sugar and yam in her letters enhances the verisimilitude of her epistolary narrative.<sup>63</sup> Still, this is not to say that Landon’s letters are somehow falsified records. Rather, the inclusion of superficially

<sup>60</sup> Scott’s critical study of Defoe’s corpus was originally published in John Ballantyne’s editions of Defoe’s novels, which were available from 1810 onwards. I use the reprinted study in Rogers’s ‘12. Scott on Defoe’s life and works’, in *Daniel Defoe*, 72.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas De Quincey’s essay on ‘Homer and the Homeridae’ was first published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* (October to December 1841). I use the reprinted edition in Rogers’s ‘21. De Quincey on verisimilitude’, in *Daniel Defoe*, 117.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 117-8.

<sup>63</sup> See the reprinted edition of *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* [referred to hereafter as *Robinson Crusoe*], ed. W. R. Owens, in *The Novels of Daniel Defoe* [gen. ed. Owens and P. N. Furbank], 10 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), especially i. 97 and 99. See Landon’s 27 September 1838 letter to Whittington and September 1838 letter to Catherine Jane, in *LLEL*, 192 and 194, respectively.

unnecessary details in her epistolary writing functions to augment, if not exaggerate, the veracity of her experience in Africa.

Consequently, Landon's letters should also be read as the critical heritage of *Robinson Crusoe*. Her allusions to Defoe's character evoke the double character of her late letters as both fictional and biographical, a double character which her forebear effectively imparts to his novels as well. De Quincey writes: Defoe 'gains the opportunity of impressing upon his tales a double character: he makes them so amusing that girls read them for novels; and he gives them such an air of verisimilitude that men read them for histories.'<sup>64</sup> The 'double character' of such verisimilitudinous writing appeals to both fact-seeking instinct and fanciful imagination, and to readers on both sides of the gender divide. Significantly, De Quincey's observation attests to the popularity of *Robinson Crusoe* as a staple in the growing children's book market. Scott affirms the universal reception and 'enactment' of *Robinson Crusoe* among the young readers. He writes: 'It is read eagerly by young people; and there is hardly an elf so devoid of imagination as not to have supposed for himself a solitary island in which he could act *Robinson Crusoe*, were it but in the corner of the nursery.'<sup>65</sup> It is not surprising, then, that this favourite childhood reading of Landon's should figure so prominently in the most stressful and challenging transition period of her life.

According to Sypher, Defoe's signature work provides the template for two of Landon's short stories in *Traits and Trials of Early Life* (1836): namely, 'The History of a Child' and 'The Indian Island'.<sup>66</sup> The former is a contracted account of her formative years from the age of seven

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<sup>64</sup> 'De Quincey on verisimilitude', 118.

<sup>65</sup> 'Scott on Defoe's life and works', 78.

<sup>66</sup> See Landon's 'The History of a Child', in *Traits and Trials of Early Life* (London: Henry Colburn, 1836), 281-312.

at Trevor Park.<sup>67</sup> The latter is a 'children's version of the story' probably 'made up by Landon and her brother . . . to devise their own adventures on her little island at Trevor Park.'<sup>68</sup> The importance of *Robinson Crusoe* to her late letters is evident in a retrospective confession from 'The History of a Child':

For weeks after reading that book, I lived as if in a dream; indeed I scarcely dreamt of anything else at night. I went to sleep with the cave, its parrots and goats, floating before my closed eyes. I awakened in some rapid flight from the savages landing in their canoes. The elms in our hedges were not more familiar than the prickly shrubs which formed his palisades.<sup>69</sup>

To the young Landon, Defoe's narrative substituted one reality for another, so much so that the virtual dreamscape of the book became equally familiar as her early home in Trevor Park. As she later reflects, this first reading experience 'was an epoch in my life, it is an epoch in every child's life'.<sup>70</sup> However, the writer also describes her literal 'enactment' of a 'feminine Robinson Crusoe' in this autobiographically inflected story. By chance, the young Landon – so we are told – stumbled upon a 'solitary pond' with a charming 'little island' in it, and became the 'fairy Queen' and 'Monarch' of the island.<sup>71</sup> The island became her favourite haunt, and she even adopted a stray pointer named Clio as 'an excellent representation of "my man Friday."<sup>72</sup> 'The History of a Child' is without doubt a significant intertextual reference, for contemporary and recent biographers frequently cite it as proof of Landon's lifelong attachment to Defoe's novel and another children's classic, *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*. Nevertheless, her autobiographical account is as much a historical artefact as it is a work of fiction. Blanchard offers a similar evaluation when he notes that 'the whole bear the same relation to reality that phantasies bear to

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<sup>67</sup> See '2. London and Trevor Part', in *LEL: Biography*, 25-30.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

<sup>69</sup> *Traits and Trials*, 294-5.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 294.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 295-7.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 299.

facts.'<sup>73</sup> As Landon already states at the very outset of *Traits and Trials*, this childhood account is one of the 'principal narratives' designed to 'soften the heart by a kindly regret for unmerited sorrow' and to destroy 'selfishness' through 'participation in the sufferings' of others.<sup>74</sup> Since 'Sympathy is surest destruction of selfishness', a work of 'unmerited sorrow' would simultaneously strengthen one's capacity for endurance and one's regard for the other.<sup>75</sup>

In the words of the young Landon, 'The only thing that [she] could not understand were Robinson Crusoe's lamentations over his solitude'.<sup>76</sup> As an adult take on this childhood mystery, 'The History of a Child' is a quest to understand Crusoe's lamentations over his solitude. In this short autobiographical romance, these lamentations manifest as elegiac mourning for a succession of traumatic, irrecoverable losses. Even the book *Robinson Crusoe* was itself a parting gift from a nurse to the child Landon before the mother-like figure embarked on her new life with a sailor full of 'wild histories of the Buccaneers'.<sup>77</sup> Then, Clio, her Man Friday was put to death after being bitten by a viper. As she 'began to take an interest in decorating [her] grave,' another character, Lucy, 'came to [her] assistance.'<sup>78</sup> By assisting young Landon with her memorial for the canine Man Friday, Lucy in effect supplants Clio as the second Man Friday. As a token of her gratitude and friendship, the young protagonist began reading to her friend's blind grandmother on a regular basis. Unfortunately, this burgeoning companionship was not meant to last. One day, Lucy 'was caught in a tremendous shower,' succumbed to a chill, and 'in four and

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<sup>73</sup> *LRLEL*, i. 22. North also identifies a hidden quixotic link between Landon's childhood reading and the Romantic quest narrative in Blanchard's biography. See '6. The Female Poet: The AfterLives of Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon', in *The Domestication of Genius*, especially 223-5.

<sup>74</sup> 'Preface' to *Traits and Trials*, iii.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 294.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 284.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 305.

twenty hours, Lucy was no more'.<sup>79</sup> When she went to her companion's place to see her body, she saw not just one corpse but two. Lucy's grandmother, in staring at her granddaughter's corpse, turned into one herself. Again, the young Landon, upon the 'touch' of death, 'had lost [her] gentle companion for ever.'<sup>80</sup> This precipitate increase in body count must surely inspire much 'regret' and all kinds of 'unmerited sorrows.' Recall the initial solitude of Defoe's character was also caused by the 'unmerited' wholesale death of his crewmates during the fateful shipwreck. The macabre parallel between the two texts is therefore no accident. Yet, as Martin Green observes, *Robinson Crusoe* is a 'liturgy of masculinism', it 'has no women characters, and its men feel nothing for women.'<sup>81</sup> In contrast, 'The History of a Child' is a story of Landon acting out the role of a 'feminine Robinson Crusoe' – and her distinct stamp of solitude – in the wake of an extinct 'feminine' community. With the disappearance of her nurse and the subsequent deaths of Clio, Lucy and her grandmother, Landon's solitude as the lone survivor exudes an undeniably fatal and mournful aura. The strong intertextual links between her late letters and 'The History of a Child' only reinforce this tragic self-dramatisation. Even more notable is the role of the beloved nurse, whose departure cannily echoes that of Jewsbury in 1832. Before leaving for the subcontinent with her husband, Jewsbury offered Landon a gift verse ('To L. E. L. – After Meeting Her for the First Time'), which the poet published under the title 'Miss Jewsbury' for the 1839 volume of *FDRS*.<sup>82</sup> To see how Landon projects her vision of friendship after death, it is necessary that we visit this chanced product of posthumous collaboration.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 311.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 312.

<sup>81</sup> 'Introduction', in *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, 6.

<sup>82</sup> For 'Miss Jewsbury', see *FDRS* for 1839, 24-5. The valedictory tone of the poem is discernible in these lines:

GOOD night! I have no jewels  
As parting gifts to bring;  
But here's a frank and kind farewell,  
Thou gay and gifted thing! (ll. 1-4)

### 'She died too soon': Community of Female Robinson Crusoes

Commemorating the meeting and the subsequent friendship of two women writers, 'Miss Jewsbury' is an ethical expression of cooperative mourning, posthumous defence and mutual protection. In addition to the feature poem, the composition is comprised of a short prefatory note by Landon, an engraved portrait of Mrs. Fletcher by J. Cochran (see fig. 6.1), and a prose addendum containing Hemans's remembrance of her friend. By the time Landon prepared the proofs for this piece and the others for the 1839 volume of *FDRS*, Hemans was also 'dropped' from life and she herself did not live to see its publication. Amalgamating Landon's commemorative headnote, Jewsbury's verse offering of friendship and Hemans's lamentation for



Fig. 6.1 Engraved portrait of Maria Jane Jewsbury by J. Cochran after G. Freeman for the 1839 volume of *FDRS*. The portrait memorial is featured in 'Miss Jewsbury'.

the early departed, 'Miss Jewsbury' stages a posthumous dialogue between friends across the grave. Suspended in the virtual time bubble of this expertly permuted cross-media and cross-generic memorial, the subject continues to address her friend (and mourners) in the perpetual present as 'Miss Jewsbury'. Like 'Felicia Hemans', the title of this collaborative remembrance is immensely significant. The honorific 'Miss' and the retention of her maiden name 'Jewsbury' indicate a thoughtful attempt to distance the dead from the association (and taint) of marriage while preserving her memory at the height of her career. 'Miss Jewsbury' – as a title, a poem, a portrait engraving, a token commemoration, a gift verse, a valediction, and a work of mourning – is a powerful statement of feminist autonomy, strength and community.

The threat that marriage posed to a woman's career in writing, particularly during the nineteenth century, was acutely felt by Jewsbury. As Norma Clarke observes, 'The pain Maria Jane's celebrity had caused William Fletcher became . . . Maria Jane's pain' and his 'difficulties of adaptation to a life lived alongside a woman of high achievement and considerable experience, became her difficulties.'<sup>83</sup> Notably, Jewsbury had domestic duties and household burdens heaped on her at a young age when her mother passed away in 1818. Fulfilling motherly, daughterly and wifely duties at the same time, she took control of the household, the care of her siblings, and became a companion to her irascible father.<sup>84</sup> Despite her admirable effort at keeping the family from falling apart, it was evident that the exacting demand of managing a large household impinged on her literary cultivation at an early age. She laments the onus of never-ending obligations at home in a letter: 'My life after eighteen became so painfully, laboriously domestic, that it was an absolute duty to crush intellectual tastes.'<sup>85</sup> As Jewsbury states in an account of her early life, her duties were so laborious that she 'could neither read nor write legitimately till the

<sup>83</sup> 'The Comforts of Others', in *Ambitious Heights*, 160.

<sup>84</sup> See 'The Pride of Literature', in *Ambitious Heights*, especially 52.

<sup>85</sup> *CM*, i. 165.

day was over.'<sup>86</sup> Even so, she wanted to be a writer and was every bit as ambitious as Landon. Jewsbury was but nine years old 'when the ambition of writing a book, being praised publicly, and associating with authors, seized [her] as a vague longing.'<sup>87</sup> The young aspirant 'sat up at nights, dreamed dreams, and schemed schemes.'<sup>88</sup> The prospect of sacrificing her high calling for the quiet tedium of married life in India, removed from the centre of the literary scene, must have been difficult for her to reconcile. Landon found herself in a similar predicament to Jewsbury's in 1838.

Landon's frustration with the possibility of early retirement, and its implication for her unfinished *monumentum aere perennius*, echoes a comparable crisis in Jewsbury's professional life as a writer – a crisis that could spell an author's 'second death'. The latter's long 1832 letter to Hemans casts an intensely morbid pall on these related anxieties. Concerned by the inferiority of her current oeuvre, Jewsbury wishes desperately to restart her writing career shortly before her departure from England:

I would gladly burn *almost* every thing I ever wrote, if so be that I might start now with a mind that has seen, read, thought, and suffered, something at least approaching to a preparation.<sup>89</sup>

What comes off as a vehement repudiation of her corpus betrays a frantic yearning for a literary second life and a universal longing for posthumous endurance. The desire to *live on* after death is keenly felt in her correspondence with Hemans, and that violent and urgent desire arises in part as a reaction to the adverse pressures in life. The looming reality of marriage and exile forestalls all hopes of continuing artistic maturation and creative autonomy. Deplorably, she writes:

*I have done nothing to live*, and what I have yet done must pass away with a thousand other blossoms, the growth, the beauty, and oblivion of a day. The powers which I feel, and of which I have given promise,

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. i. 166.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. i. 165.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> *CM*, i. 170.

may mature, may stamp themselves in act, but the spirit of despondency is strong upon the future exile, and I fear they never will[.]<sup>90</sup>

Jewsbury has 'done nothing to live' because she was besieged with unremitting domestic duties for much of her adult existence. And what she has yet done – namely, all the experiences and experiments necessary to the growth of her powers – will most likely remain undone in the 'future exile' of a wedded life. Jewsbury's letter to Hemans effectively conjures up the romantic portrait of a young artist, depicting herself as a promising talent with unspent powers and unrealised potential but arrested at her prime by hostile fortune. Expectedly, the prospects of a career-ending marriage and a mind-wasting 'exile' invariably lead to 'thoughts of death.'<sup>91</sup>

However, the subject of death was not simply an occasional topic of poetic and epistolary intercourse between the two women writers. Jewsbury reminds her friend in the same letter its centrality to her finest works, and to the future state of her poetry. She explains:

In the best of every thing I have done, you will find one leading idea—*death*; all thoughts, all images, all contrast of thoughts and images, are derived from living much in the valley of that shadow. . . . My poetry, except some half-dozen pieces, may be consigned to oblivion.<sup>92</sup>

It is understandable why death features so prominently in her production and in women's writing of the period. As Clarke points out, 'the failure of bodily health following, with grim regularity, on the completion or success of a piece of work' was 'characteristic of so many women writers in the nineteenth century'.<sup>93</sup> One can discern a clear psychosomatic link between the heavy toll of writing, protracted spells of sickness and disintegration of body from the letters of Hemans and Landon.<sup>94</sup> After completing her triumphant inaugural work, *Phantasmagoria; or, Sketches of*

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> *Ambitious Heights*, 159.

<sup>92</sup> *CM*, i. 171.

<sup>93</sup> *Ambitious Heights*, 51.

<sup>94</sup> See, for example, Hemans's 4 April 1832 letter, in *CM*, ii. 272-3. Also, Landon's March 1838 letter to Fisher offers an edifying glimpse into the long duration of illness regularly experienced by nineteenth-century women writers, in *LLEL*, 177.

*Life and Literature* (1825), Jewsbury's health broke down within months of its publication.<sup>95</sup> Severe outbreaks of cholera all over England and Ireland in 1832 only reinforced the ubiquitous presence and threat of death. Still, as the final line of the passage suggests, Jewsbury is as anxious about physical death as she is about literary survival. She is deeply worried that all but a few of her poems will endure after her career ends and her body rots away in a foreign clime. Marriage, exile, premature retirement, unfinished work, arrested development, unfulfilled potential, death and literary extinction form a network of interconnected doubts and dreads in Jewsbury's morbid correspondence with Hemans.

Since the aforementioned letter was published in Chorley's biography of Hemans, Landon must have read it and identified with those very fears and anxieties. It is proper, then, that the elegiac addendum to 'Miss Jewsbury' should adopt an epistolary effusion by Hemans on the death of her friend, also published in Chorley's work.<sup>96</sup> More crucial still, the themes evoked in this plaintive letter resonate closely with Jewsbury's own despondent self-projections. Landon invokes Hemans as a fellow mourner and defender of their mutual friend:

Mrs. Hemans, in describing the effect produced upon her feelings by the tidings of Mrs. Fletcher's decease, uses the following language. 'It hung the more heavily upon my spirits, as the subject of death, and the mighty future, had so many times been that of our most confidential communion. How much deeper power seemed to lie *coiled up* as it were in the recesses of her mind, than was ever manifested to the world in her writings! Strange and sad does it seem, that only the broken music of such a spirit has been given to the earth, the full and finished harmony never drawn forth.'

The epistolary passage rehashes the circular link between death, future ambitions, unexpressed potential and unfinished work. Without a *monumentum aere perennius*, literary death would soon

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<sup>95</sup> *Ambitious Heights*, 53. Though satirical in nature, *Phantasmagoria; or, Sketches of Life and Literature*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for Hurst, Robinson and Co., 1825) is saturated with such reflexive themes as female authorship, mortality and literary endurance. Understandably, Dennis Low interprets the work as a self-ironical critique of the literary marketplace in '5. Maria Jane Jewsbury', in *The Literary Protégées of the Lake Poets* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 143-74.

<sup>96</sup> For the letter, see *CM*, ii. 312-3. Hemans's effusion on the unexpected death of Jewsbury was penned in Dublin on 28 June 1834. According to the biographer, the contents and fragments of the letter appeared in multiple letters to friends.

follow the annihilation of the body. This 'mighty future' alludes to none other than the celebration and persistence of one's literary afterlife. Read in this context, the extract becomes a veiled apologia for the absence of such 'full and finished harmony' in Jewsbury's corpus and, reflexively, in Hemans's and Landon's respective oeuvres. The true cause of mourning is not the untimely departure of a writer, but the absence and abortion of 'some more noble and complete work'. 'She died too soon', laments Landon in a separate recollection of Jewsbury.<sup>97</sup> Appropriately, the recipient of 'To L. E. L. – After Meeting Her for the First Time' has the last word in 'Miss Jewsbury'. Hemans's epistolary remembrance of Jewsbury is followed by Landon's epitomising record of significant dates and places in her life. She concludes the memorial with this dispassionate epitaphic note: 'Miss Jewsbury, a native of Warwickshire, was born in the year 1800 married the Rev. Kew Fletcher, August 2d, 1832; and proceeded with him to India, where she died, October 3d, 1833.' Since the epitaph should be in '*close connection with the bodily remains of the deceased*', Landon's prose inscription performs a figural retrieval of her subject's exiled remains for re-interment in the 'everlasting leather' of *FDRS*. In 'Miss Jewsbury', the posthumous friend has erected a more accessible, more permanent and more active site of memory for her comrade's body, words, life, autograph, friendships, and physiognomy of genius. Putting together various genres, media and framing devices, as well as living and posthumous voices, 'Miss Jewsbury' envisions a community of 'feminine Robinson Crusoes' committed to the care and preservation of each other. More importantly, this ethical vision represents a sympathetic and communal alternative to the solitary and solipsistic practice of *monumentum aere perennius*. Given the convergence between *Robinson Crusoe*, 'The History

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<sup>97</sup> 'Character of Hemans's Writings', *LEL: Selected Writings*, 184. After commenting on the character of Hemans's poetry, Landon 'cannot resist a brief recollection' of 'Miss Jewsbury' in the lengthy note to the essay.

of a Child' and 'Miss Jewsbury', Landon's African letters and her 'Crusoe-ish' solitude might be better appreciated in the contexts of friendship, remembrance and mutual conservation.

Writing within the confines of the Castle and diligently fulfilling her household duties, Landon enacts the role of a domestic – and *domesticated* – 'feminine Robinson Crusoe.' Unlike Defoe's Crusoe, she is no builder, hunter, farmer, blacksmith, liberator or even a contrite agnostic-turned-Christian. Their resemblance, however fictive and imprecise, is perhaps more basic than these superficial identities. Like Crusoe, Landon must frequently keep inventory of everyday necessities, follow a regimented schedule of managerial activities, and distribute provisions from the store (as Crusoe does every day with his goats, dog and parrots).<sup>98</sup> The former exemplifies the Protestant work ethic in order to survive in a civilised pattern; the latter is perpetually plying her pen for she 'had the necessity forced on her, at a very early age, of pursuing literature for a livelihood, (and for the support too, for many years, of an aged mother)'.<sup>99</sup> More basic still, Crusoe works for the survival of his body, while Landon works for her literary survival. Constant work is imperative to the lives of both figures not only because it is essential to their individual survival, but also because it is ethical. To Crusoe, work is redeeming and purposeful, deterring one's descent to chaos and savagery; to Landon, work maintains support of an aged mother and close connection with her friends. Both are preoccupied with confessional life writing as a means to address and negotiate their respective psychological needs and emotional excesses. Crusoe justifies his diarist activity in the following excerpt:

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<sup>98</sup> See Crusoe's 'Nov. 4' entry in *Robinson Crusoe*: 'This Morning I began to order my times of Work, of going out with my Gun, time of Sleep, and time of Diversion, viz. Every Morning I walk'd out with my Gun for two or three Hours if it did not rain, then employ'd myself to work till about Eleven a-Clock, then eat what I had to live on, and from Twelve to Two I lay down to sleep, the Weather being excessive hot, and then in the Evening to work again' (i. 110).

<sup>99</sup> *CCB*, ii. 263.

I drew up the State of my Affairs in Writing, not so much to leave them to any that were to come after me, for I was like to have but few Heirs, as to deliver my Thoughts from daily poring upon them[.]<sup>100</sup>

Here we find one major difference between his solitude and Landon's 'feminine' variation. For Crusoe, solitude is to be enjoyed as a meditative state in which the subject converses with himself. He writes for that exact same purpose. In the third volume of *Robinson Crusoe*, the narrator explains that 'In Solitude a Man converses with himself' and that he who 'understands the Meaning of the Word, [learns] to retire into himself: Serious Meditation is the Essence of Solitude.'<sup>101</sup> To this quintessential hero of the Enlightenment, solitude facilitates the centripetal withdrawal or 'retirement' of the mind to itself so that the human subject can be reconstituted internally as an independent, inviolable and self-sufficient entity. He reasons thus: 'Man can never want Conversation, who is Company for himself'.<sup>102</sup> Solitude, retirement and withdrawal are therefore synonymous for the same existential process, and diary writing is but an aid to this 'sublime' activity of life. Crusoe's '*fear of Man*' after seeing the 'Print of a Man's Foot' demonstrates how the company of another is perceived as a violation rather than alleviation of Crusoe's solitude.<sup>103</sup> Even when he finally decides to save Man Friday from the cannibals and recruit him into his fold, his decision is neither compelled by humanitarian concerns nor inspired by the want of society. He becomes a liberator strictly because it 'was my Time to get me a Servant, and perhaps a Companion, or Assistant'.<sup>104</sup> Crusoe's motive is pragmatic and egocentric through and through.

Unlike Crusoe's masculine solitude, the solitude of the 'feminine Robinson Crusoe' characterises a state of intense longing and need for community, specifically a writing

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<sup>100</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, i. 106.

<sup>101</sup> *Serious Reflections*, 10 and 11.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>103</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, i. 177. Crusoe's mention of the '*Snare of the Fear of Man*' is a reference to Proverbs 29:25: 'The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.'

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* i. 207.

community. According to Cruickshank, Landon 'occupied herself more and more in writing to her friends in England' as the day of his departure for England approached. Elwood also marvels at the indefatigability of her pen in spite of the constant maelstrom of household activities around her. She writes: 'Indeed, during her short abode in Africa, her pen appears, notwithstanding the climate, and other various calls upon her attention, to have been quite indefatigable.'<sup>105</sup> The urgent call for remembrance and continued correspondence is also evident in her last letter to Fagan on the day she was found dead. Landon concludes the letter with this exigent plea: 'Dearest, do not forget me. Pray write to me. . . . Write about yourself; nothing else half so much interests your affectionate L. E. Maclean.'<sup>106</sup> Although she confessed to Cruickshank just the night before the fatal event her desire to establish an instant 'medium of communication for all that her heart wished to express', her letters, like Crusoe's diary entries, are late communications destined for deferred readers.<sup>107</sup> Writing for an imagined and delayed reader/correspondent may not be instant communication, but it does afford the 'feminine Robinson Crusoe' time to shape her epistolary ethos and affect the reception of her life story. The abruptness of her death is tragic for sure, but it also renders the situation of her unanswered (and unanswerable) correspondence from Africa an unpredictably fruitful one.

Her late letters became public properties amid a frenzy to circulate them on the heels of her publicised death in January 1839, appearing in *Gentleman's Magazine*, *The Times*, *The Morning Chronicle*, and other memoirs and biographies.<sup>108</sup> Anna Maria Hall, for instance, published the long letter to herself and the final letter to Fagan in the February 1838 issue of *Gentleman's Magazine* under the sombre title 'The Last Letters of L. E. L.' Not only were these

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<sup>105</sup> Elwood, *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England*, ii. 327.

<sup>106</sup> *LLEL*, 199.

<sup>107</sup> *CCB*, ii. 273.

<sup>108</sup> See Sypher's '10. Aftermath', in *LEL: Biography*, 222-45, especially 222-9.

'last letters' published to the exclusion of all other equally *last* letters, but they were also selected as public memorials. The opening advert reads: 'The following letters of the late Mrs. Maclean, which have appeared in the public newspapers, are, we think, worthy of preservation in a more permanent form, as the last memorials of a lady whose talents and whose fate have excited a very general admiration and sympathy.'<sup>109</sup> Conscious of the role private correspondence plays in commemorative life writing, Anna Maria Hall urges readers to keep admiring Landon's 'talents' and keep sympathising with her 'fate' through a careful selection of epistolary memorials. As a gesture of belated defence, she publishes the final communications of the 'feminine Robinson Crusoe' to stimulate the public's moral interest in the unjust, untimely and 'melancholy' death of the writer. In her prefatory epistle to the editor of *Gentleman's Magazine*, Anna Maria Hall goes so far as to suggest that the published letters contain incriminating hints of 'some painful surmises in reference to the melancholy death of Mrs. Maclean.'<sup>110</sup> Some injustice has been perpetrated against an author to whom we owe so much, it seems to say, and for whom we have done so little. No longer just addressed to Anna Maria Hall and Fagan, the proliferation of these two letters expands Landon's potential addressees and posthumous correspondents. Indebted to those enjoyments 'she so largely contributed', 'She will be lamented by [the] millions' who are now called upon to preserve her memory 'in a more permanent form'.<sup>111</sup> Responding to the 'feminine Robinson Crusoe' in Landon's last letters and to Anna Maria Hall's public reminder of collective responsibility, other writers and friends would come to the defence of the dead again and again with their own memorial offerings.

Although Landon's African letters repeat the conventional 'topoi of remembering and forgetting' commonly prescribed in manuals for letter writing, the exigency with which she

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<sup>109</sup> 'The Last Letters of L. E. L.', 150.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

maintains old friendships through correspondence is genuine.<sup>112</sup> According to Bannet, conventional topoi of friendship in letter writing 'stemmed from the conviction that to be far from sight was to be far from mind' and 'that being far from mind meant being forgotten when benefits and sinecures were being handed out.'<sup>113</sup> Despite writing for both personal and professional reasons, Landon's repeated allusions to Crusoe help fashion an epistolary *dramatis personæ* that is at once familiar, relatable and memorable. These allusions keep her alive in the minds of her correspondents so that she will not be forgotten when their services are required. By 'enacting' Crusoe's survivalist and diaristic temperaments in letter writing, letter writing becomes for the exiled writer an act of adaptation to her new life in Africa and a way of 'keeping alive the warmth of friendship' across vast distance and time. Yet, Landon's feminine stamp of 'Crusoe-ish' solitude resists Defoe's solipsistic solitude absolutely. Nervous about the prospects of early retirement and early death, she inscribes her own experience as that of the 'feminine Robinson Crusoe' with the aim of staying alive in the memory of a reading and writing community. The double character of her epistolary ethos is thus as real as it is imaginary, as factual as it is fictional, and as playful as it is mournful. The repercussions of this self-characterisation (or self-reinvention) may have precipitated the war of words between her sympathisers and Maclean's supporters after her mysterious death. However, it is also this solitary 'feminine' Crusoe of letters in Africa who gained a great many posthumous echoes and replies in the forum of defensive and commemorative life writing.

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<sup>112</sup> Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, 87.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

### **Guilty Guardians: 'Let the name she bore for so brief a time be forgotten'**

As the previous section shows, posthumous life writing is never a one-sided activity in which the living writes or overwrites the dead. The relationship between anticipatory death writing and posthumous commemoration exemplifies a profound ethical rapport between the writer and the reader. No single work of mourning and memorialisation has monopoly over grief or proprietorship over the deceased. Both the reader and the writer – the living and the dead – are obliged to negotiate a way of reading that can accommodate one and many voices at the same time. In the case of Landon, trust and friendship form the basis of her post-obit relationship with Blanchard, her authoritative biographer. In *A Book of Memories*, Samuel Hall's opening comment on Blanchard demonstrates the inseparable connection between the biographer and his subject. He writes: 'The name of LAMAN BLANCHARD may be rightly associated with that of Lætitia Elizabeth Landon, for he wrote her 'Life,' and did ample justice to her memory.'<sup>114</sup> The audacious claim that the biographer 'wrote her "Life"' evinces Samuel Hall's absolute confidence in the ethical capacity of life writing to memorialise the human subject justly and fully. Her *Life* (as we know it) is the product of joint authorship. In other words, the 'memory' of Landon's life, and by implication her survival, is as dependent on the pen of her biographer as it is on her unfinished *monumentum aere perennius*. Landon's epistolary enactment of a 'feminine Robinson Crusoe' makes plain that the protection of her memory requires the lifeline of continued correspondence and compassionate remembrance.

After all, the association between Landon and Blanchard is not simply a professional one, but one that originates from a 'friendship . . . which did not terminate with her death.'<sup>115</sup> In Samuel Hall's view, the memory of Landon survives precisely because this unbroken friendship

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<sup>114</sup> Samuel Hall's 'SAMUEL LAMAN BLANCHARD', in *A Book of Memories*, 282.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

and mutual allegiance did not expire with her premature demise. Even when the power of the biographer seems absolute, he reminds his readers of the ethical cause and condition of Blanchard's participation in Landon's afterlife. Samuel Hall observes: 'Foreseeing what "might be," she had laid a duty on him before her departure for Africa, and the pledge he gave was faithfully kept.'<sup>116</sup> Whether the writer actually foresaw her own end before departing for Africa is a matter of debate. Nevertheless, Landon must have envisioned how a different sort of death 'might' befall her 'bright name', career and autonomy should she marry Maclean and forsake her literary calling. Considering what happened to Jewsbury, the popular notion of dying from colonial diseases in 'foreign' climes 'might' also have crossed her mind.<sup>117</sup> Whatever it is that she foresaw exactly, she entrusted her works and letters to Blanchard, and appointed him 'to act as her literary agent, and to be her literary executor, if necessary.'<sup>118</sup> With all the formality of pledge and promise, the biographer is left to discharge the will and legacy of his friend and client. The language with which Samuel Hall reports this conferral of 'duty' exudes an awful sense of solemnity and inviolability, far exceeding the customary language of professional transaction. It recalls Bacon's immortal words, 'where friendship is, all offices of life are as it were granted to him and his deputy.' As the guardian of Landon's fame and name, Blanchard *is* this 'deputy' – the other participant of her 'two lives'.

The weight of this responsibility is poignantly stated in a letter to Samuel Hall and his wife, which accompanies a copy of the *Life* he recently completed. The biographer writes:

For two reasons you will try to like the long-looked for. The first and strongest refers to the glorious creature who is gone; and the second to one whom you know to have striven hard to vindicate her name, and to keep her memory as a pleasant odour in the world. If I have failed, it is because there were

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> See Bewell's 'Introduction: Colonialism and Disease', in *Romanticism and Colonial Disease* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 1-26.

<sup>118</sup> Sypher's '8. Engagement', in *LEL: Biography*, 194.

difficulties in the way that I cannot explain; and if some of her enemies escape, it was because I was fearful of injuring her.<sup>119</sup>

Blanchard's letter is significant for it clearly explains to the Halls how his biography of Landon should and should not be read. First and foremost, it should be read as a celebration and vindication of her 'name'. The primary aim of his work is not to display all the 'performances and incidents' and the 'minute details' – indeed every 'small wire' (*maxima e minimis suspendens*) – of his subject's private life. It is a posthumous life writing designed to keep 'her memory as a pleasant odour in the world', purged of all disagreeable stench. Blanchard's ethic of biographical writing is not unlike Wordsworth's ethic of the ideal epitaph. To the poet-essayist, a good epitaph ought to portray 'The character of a deceased friend' 'as a tree [seen] through a tender haze or a luminous mist, that spiritualises and beautifies it'. Blanchard's apology for omitting some of the names of her 'enemies' (specifically, her unhappy liaisons with Bulwer-Lytton, Daniel Maclise and William Maginn) affirms the ethical connection between both genres of life writing. While the biographer's subject wafts incorporeally in the air as a 'pleasant odour', the poet's subject appears indistinctly in the 'tender haze' as a spiritualised tree. Prompted by posthumous sympathy, Blanchard's 'fear of injuring her' shows unswerving regard for Landon as a living and sensible presence – still vulnerable to injuries and still in need of protection. Most importantly, his fear betrays the unremitting influence the dead still has on the living. Although there are unspeakable difficulties in withholding certain, no doubt damaging, materials from publication, the 'interminable' pledge of trust and friendship prohibits him from writing an indiscriminate account of her life. Samuel Hall is not entirely correct in asserting Blanchard's sole authorship of Landon's *Life*, for the work was already from its outset a collaborative *monumentum aere perennius* erected by both the dead and the living.

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<sup>119</sup> *A Book of Memories*, 282.

What is also evident in this interminable friendship between the poet and her biographer is the exclusivity of their professional and personal relations. The exclusivity of this intimate community of friends inevitably develops into 'a rather proprietary attitude towards Landon' and escalating jealousy of Maclean's sudden prominence in her life.<sup>120</sup> Saliently, this 'proprietary attitude' and escalating jealousy triggered a concerted group effort by Blessington, Madden, Fisher and the Halls to reclaim Landon's grave with memorials of their own and restore her autographic signature from the taint of marital association. Even though Madden's official mission to Cape Coast in 1841 was to investigate allegations of British complicity in African slave trade, his unofficial commission was to erect a memorial for Landon at the behest of Blessington. He discloses this secret commission in his 'Memoir of L. E. L.': 'Shortly before my departure from England, Lady Blessington charged me with a commission, to be executed on my arrival at Cape Coast—namely, to obtain the permission of Mr. Maclean to erect a monument, at her Ladyship's expense, over the remains of her deceased friend.'<sup>121</sup> It is obvious that Blessington, a close friend and colleague of Landon for many years, had little confidence in Maclean's will or ability to raise a fitting memorial for her compatriot. However, when Madden communicated her desire to render this posthumous service for a fellow writer, 'Mr. Maclean said it was unnecessary', for 'he had already ordered out from England a mural slab, with an inscription; and it had been lying for some time in a store in the Castle, and he would have it put

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<sup>120</sup> Sypher, *LEL: Biography*, 184.

<sup>121</sup> *CCB*, ii. 279. Landon and Blessington edited the hugely popular and beautifully illustrated annual, *Heath's Book of Beauty*, which was published from 1833 to 1849. Charles Theodosius Heath hired Landon in 1832 as the initial editor of the founding volume, a position soon succeeded by Blessington in the following year for the 1834 volume. The abrupt change in editorship may suggest some sort of professional rivalry between the two authors. However, as Ann R. Hawkins rightly points out, Landon's lucrative editorship of *FDRS* owed in part to Blessington's generous recommendation and influence over its publisher. Cordial correspondence between the two writers persisted, and their mutual contributions of verses and plates continued. See Hawkins's 'Marguerite, Countess of Blessington, and L.E.L. (Letitia Elizabeth Landon): Evidence of a Friendship', *A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 16/2 (2003), 27-32.

up shortly.'<sup>122</sup> Maclean's resolve to put up the memorial must have seemed half-hearted to the commissioner, for more than two years have passed since Landon's death. Furthermore, the mural slab containing the lapidary inscription 'had been lying for some time in a store in the Castle'; presumably, it would have remained there if Madden had not goaded him to action with Blessington's proposal.

Madden's dreadful depiction of the castle and its surroundings in his memoir of Landon evinces considerable sensitivity to his subject's fear of crowded burials and to the inviolability of her mortal remains. Justifiably outraged, his description of her burial site in the Castle reiterates all her anxieties about being interred beneath 'crowded stones' with 'no companionship' in 'The City Churchyard'. Madden writes:

The spot that was chosen for the grave of this accomplished but unhappy lady could not be more inappropriate; a few common tiles distinguish it from the graves of the various military men who have perished in this stronghold of pestilence. Her grave is daily trampled over by the soldiers of the fort. The morning blast of the bugle, and roll of the drum, are the sounds that have been thought most in unison with the spirit of the gentle being who sleeps below the few red tiles, where the soldiers on parade do congregate.<sup>123</sup>

Buried among the mouldering bones of 'various military men' with a few tiles to distinguish her remains, Landon's worst fear was realised. Like a crowded city churchyard, her final resting place in the castle courtyard 'has neither sympathy nor memory.' Indeed, too little was done to mark her grave. Only the letters 'L.E.L.' were cut into the stones placed on her burial spot.<sup>124</sup> Madden himself reinforces the descriptive link between the neglected city churchyard and the lifeless castle courtyard. Deplorably, 'There is not a plant, nor a blade of grass, nor of anything green, in that court-yard, on which the burning sun blazes down all day long. And this is the

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<sup>122</sup> *CCB*, ii. 279.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 280-1.

<sup>124</sup> Gorman, *The Life and Murder of Letitia E. Landon*, 35.

place where they have buried L. E. L.'<sup>125</sup> The 'soothing influences of Nature' prescribed by Wordsworth are equally absent in the cramped city churchyard and the hard castle courtyard.<sup>126</sup> Additionally, the daily trample, the morning bugle, and the rolling drum recall the 'busy hour of noon' and the 'pressure of our actual life' in London. All the noise and bustle of city life, now re-enacted as part of castle life, not only disrupt the peace of the dead but also evict them from the thoughts and memory of the living. The dread of oblivion in Landon's anticipatory death writing is visually and aurally represented in Madden's vivid account of her posthumous condition under the boots of the congregating soldiers. After reading his report on the unenviable state of her burial, Samuel Hall laments, 'It is, I presume, a vain hope that someone hereafter may transport her remains from that wretched "settlement," and place them in some God's acre of English ground'.<sup>127</sup> Landon herself acknowledges in 'The City Churchyard' that without sympathy and memory there is no 'earthly shadow' of 'immortality.' Unfortunately, Maclean created a disjunction between her 'earthly shadow' and her hoped-for 'immortality' when he erected the memorial containing the epitaph *not* on her grave but in the castle wall opposite her grave.<sup>128</sup> Disregarding Godwin and Wordsworth's joint insistence on the '*close connection*' between body, lapidary and grave, Maclean's epitaph for his wife is literally dissevered from her remains. The memorial fails to mark the very physical 'remainder' which grounds all works of consolation and remembrance, and the memory of Landon is left in a 'maimed and imperfect state.' Even the epitaph, it seems, is not without controversies.

Not surprisingly, contest over the ideal epitaph on Landon dominates the next phase of Madden's doomed project to reclaim her posthumous life from Maclean. Perhaps unable to resist

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<sup>125</sup> CCB, ii. 281.

<sup>126</sup> *Essays upon Epitaphs I*, PWW, ii. 32.

<sup>127</sup> *A Book Of Memories*, 281.

<sup>128</sup> CCB, ii. 279.

the funerary customs of the military, the widower inscribed the marble tablet in Latin, an increasingly defunct language for epitaphs in the nineteenth century.<sup>129</sup> The inscription goes:

Hic jacet sepultum  
Omne quod mortale fuit  
LETITIAE ELIZABETHAE MCLEAN,  
Quam, egregià ornatam indole,  
Musis unicè amatam,  
Omniumque amores secum trahentem,  
In ipso aetatis flore,  
Mors immatura rapuit,  
Die Octobris XV., A.D. MDCCCXXXVIII.,  
Ætat. 36.

Quod spectas viator marmor,  
Vanum heu doloris monumentum,  
Conjux moerens erexit.<sup>130</sup>

The Latin inscription is followed by an English translation:

Here lies interred  
All that was mortal  
Of Letitia Elizabeth Maclean  
Adorned with a pure mind  
Singularly favoured by the Muses,  
And dearly beloved by all.  
She was prematurely snatched away  
By death in the flower of her age,  
On the 13th of October 1838,  
Aged 36 years.  
The marble which you behold, oh traveler,  
A sorrowing husband has erected,  
Vain emblem of his grief.<sup>131</sup>

Emulating a conventional epitaph, it contains the usual motifs of *hic jacet* and *siste viator* ('oh traveler'). The irony is that 'All that was mortal / Of Letitia Elizabeth Maclean' absolutely does not lie under the displaced monumental slab. And only soldiers, not travellers, are likely to walk

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<sup>129</sup> For contesting claims over which language to use for lapidary inscriptions, see Pettigrew's 'An Essay on Epitaphs and Other Monumental Inscriptions', *Chronicles of the Tombs*, 55-59.

<sup>130</sup> I use the Latin inscription printed in *CCB*, ii. 280.

<sup>131</sup> I use the English inscription printed in *The Life and Murder of Letitia E. Landon*, 35.

by the marble tablet, assuming they can read Latin and do not trample on her grave first. The Latin template and the English translation differ, however, on one salient detail: the date of her demise. In the Latin epitaph, Landon dies 'correctly' on the 15th of October ('Octobris XV'), but in the English epitaph, she dies 'incorrectly' on the '13th of October'. Michael Gorman is the first to notice this mistake in the translation, and he makes a good case for Maclean's careless treatment of his wife – whether she be dead or alive.<sup>132</sup> If the bereft husband really is intent on preserving the memory of a writer 'prematurely snatched away' and on expressing his overwhelming grief for her, the very least he could do is ascertain the date of her passing in the English inscription for 'travelers' who do not read Latin. A 'vain emblem' indeed.

In contemporary debates over the use of Latin or English for lapidary inscription, it was agreed that Latin be used if the 'epitaphs were addressed only to the learned' in the 'seats of learning, at our universities.'<sup>133</sup> Cape Coast Castle hardly qualifies as a seat of learning, let alone a gathering place for the learned. Recognising the insincerity and pomposity of Maclean's failed epitaph and failed commemoration, Madden furnishes his own as a kind of revenge writing on behalf of Landon:

This monument is the only memorial  
That is left at Cape Coast Castle,  
Of the untimely fate  
Of a woman everywhere else beloved,  
And honoured for her genius.  
Who died here, after a residence of two months,  
Wearied of life, and wanting all  
Sympathy, where Nature itself has nothing  
That is cheering in its aspect  
Or its influences.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 35-6.

<sup>133</sup> Pettigrew, *Chronicles of the Tombs*, 55 and 59.

<sup>134</sup> *CCB*, ii. 280.

It is inconceivable that Madden would intend this mock epitaph for the real thing had the widower accepted Blessington's offer. Regardless, his intense disgust at Maclean's conduct toward Landon before and after her 'untimely fate' is plainly evident in this scathing example of posthumous care and defence. First, he deplores the governor's shabby monument as the 'only memorial / That is left at Cape Coast Castle', for no proper or extensive effort is put into preserving her remains. Second, the poet is 'everywhere else beloved' *but* here, and that anyone with conscience and sympathy would have raised a more careful and caring memorial than Maclean. Third, she died after only two months of residence in Africa because she was depleted by the unremitting demands of household duties and was deprived of sympathetic support from an unloving husband and far-off friends. As Madden puts it grimly, the Cape Coast is but a 'beau ideal of desolation', which offers neither consolation nor inspiration for an anguished and 'broken' mind.<sup>135</sup> Responding to Landon's epistolary persona, his fictive epitaph subtly contrasts an unsociable and exploitative 'masculine Robinson Crusoe' (i.e. the slave-trading Maclean) with a 'feminine Robinson Crusoe' tormented by physical exhaustion and psychological exclusion. Poignantly, Madden's 'funeral biography' is not so much an encomium to celebrate the dead as it is a censure to chastise the living. The mock epitaph becomes, at the hands of a protective friend, an unforgiving weapon of delayed but necessary justice.

Madden is undeniably extreme in his effort to invalidate Maclean's shoddy memorial for Landon, but Samuel Hall would go even further in his project to reclaim 'L. E. L.' When his wife finally received the long letter from Landon on 3 January 1839, which she later published as one of 'The Last Letters of L. E. L.', the Halls noticed a peculiarity at the bottom of the text.<sup>136</sup> Apparently, the writer made an error while signing her name. Samuel Hall remarks: she 'had

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid. ii. 287.

<sup>136</sup> See *LLEL*, 187, and *A Book of Memories*, 281.

signed her name “L. E. Landon,” but had erased “Landon,” and written in “McLean,” adding, “How difficult it is to leave off an old custom!”<sup>137</sup> In his mind, the conscious self-erasure and the difficulty of relinquishing ‘an old custom’ provide ample justification to effect the restoration of her original ‘bright name’. He issues two nationwide edicts on this ‘smallest wire’ of her literary afterlife: ‘Let the name she bore for so brief a time be forgotten; let her be known in the literary history of her country only as Lætitia Elizabeth Landon.’<sup>138</sup> Evidently, the Halls intend to use this signing error or signing custom to sanitise their memory of the writer, and restore a prelapsarian semblance of self-possession to her commandeered name. The word ‘Maclean’ is perceived as an agent of contamination that must be excised from her history, her autograph and her afterlife. As far as her posthumous defenders are concerned, ‘McLean’ *is* the colonial disease that killed their beloved friend. If she had not married him, she would not have left England for Africa and ended her writing career in such calamitous manner. Landon’s own apprehensions about early retirement, unfulfilled ambitions, literary exile and premature death find accidental expression in a deeply significant signing mistake. Rarely in history does so much weight ‘hang’ upon a writer’s last name. It may be tempting to attribute Samuel Hall’s reclamation of Landon’s ‘bright name’ to an exaggerated (mis)reading of an honest slippage of pen. However, as already discussed in Chapter Three, Landon herself vigorously promoted the competitive advantage of valorising one’s own autograph through circulation. Moreover, in all the letters written after her wedding to Maclean, she never once failed to sign her husband’s patronymic name. For an expert letter writer with the habit of making drafts, this blatant error seems all the more suspicious and suggestive. Indeed, why even add the postscript ‘How difficult it is to leave off an old custom’? Could the slip-up be a conscious insinuation of her longing for pre-marital autonomy and

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<sup>137</sup> *A Book of Memories*, 281.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

recognition as a major author and editor? Surely, her friends and biographers would have been well-informed of her habits and ambitions. Blanchard astutely perceives 'the compromise between the anonymous and the full announcement' in her customary initials, and realises how its 'partial revelation' and 'the namelessness of the name' had 'the effect of stimulating curiosity.'<sup>139</sup> Mary Howitt's memoir of Landon in the 1840 volume of *FDRS* also corroborates this view when she consecrates the palindromic 'L.E.L.' as 'talismanic letters' representing 'the genius of the very interesting and gifted creature'.<sup>140</sup> Redeploying her natural but suppressed signature as the smallest unit of posthumous life writing, both Hall's and Howitt's memoirs of Landon respond passionately and protectively to the 'feminine Robinson Crusoe's' epistolary call for faithful support and remembrance.

The commemorative value of her African letters cannot be underestimated, for the author's epistolary characterisation of her 'Crusoeish' solitude urges just that: a rendering of posthumous services to the dead correspondent. Incorporating Landon's poetry, autograph, letter, monument, epitaph and portrait, Fisher's special frontispiece to *FDRS* for 1840 is an impressive hybridisation of various commemorative genres and forms (see fig. 6.2).<sup>141</sup> Building on the strategies developed forty years ago in Thane's *British Autography*, the memorial coherently integrates a number of material and visual elements to maximise the impact of presence and immediacy. The tomb-like outline of the portrait frame, the statuesque portrait of a dignified, incorruptible beauty, and the epitaphic composite of verse, signature, place and date collaborate seamlessly to create an accessible and respectable memorial – one which her husband was too callous to erect. Seated in a plain white dress with an unadorned hair and an amiably intent look,

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<sup>139</sup> *LLEL*, 31.

<sup>140</sup> Mary Howitt's memoir of 'L. E. L.', in *FDRS* for 1840, 5.

<sup>141</sup> For Fisher's memorial, see the second frontispiece to *FDRS* for 1840. Howitt had by this time succeeded Landon as the new editor for the annual.



Fig. 6.2 Published as a commemorative frontispiece to the 1840 volume of *FDRS*, J. Thomson engraved the portrait of Letitia Elizabeth Landon after Daniel Maclise's 1830-6 pencil painting of the sitter.

this iconographic representation of the poet defies the scandal-ridden image of a fallen woman. Moreover, the loose extension of the left hand suggests a simultaneous offer and solicitation of friendship. The offer/solicitation of posthumous support and sympathy is exigently conveyed by the directional lay of the hand, which guides the reader's gaze to the inscription below:

*'Alas! hope is not prophecy,—we dream,  
But rarely does the glad fulfilment come;  
We leave our land—and we return no more!'*

These prophetic lines are deliberately extracted from lines 8-10 of Landon's 'Shuhur, Jeypore' (1834), a poem which, incidentally, reflects on the lonely grave of an English expatriate 'removed from all kindred ties' (l. 1) and 'from friends and home' (l. 3).<sup>142</sup> Consistent with 'The

<sup>142</sup> See 'Shuhur, Jeypore', in *FDRS* for 1834, 49.

City Churchyard' and her letters from Africa, the verse muses on posthumous exile and solitude, as well as aborted fulfilment and sympathy. The autographic inscription of '*L. E. L. Cape Coast Castle October 12*' at the bottom of the frontispiece is particularly noteworthy because, contrary to expectation, it does not record the date of her demise. In fact, 12 October 1838 is the date of Landon's epistolary appeal to Fisher for job assurances, which I analysed in the first section. Recall how she pleaded to the publisher for the continuation of her editorship with the familiar line 'The solitude here is very Robinson Crusoeish'. Besides commemorating the death of a colleague, the lapidary-like '*L. E. L. Cape Coast Castle October 12*' commemorates the date on which Fisher was summoned by his 'final essence' to admit his complicity in Landon's 'Crusoeish' solitude, and atone for his belated protection of a *dear* friend. Lurking beneath this elaborate memorial, then, is an unstated recognition of their collective guilt, tardiness and responsibility. Yet, mourn and commemorate they must, for there is no other responsible recourse than the rendering of these posthumous services.

In spite of the belatedness of these variegated defences, one cannot deny the ethical candour with which Blanchard, Madden, the Halls, Howitt and Fisher honour their friendship with the dead. Together, their memorials of Landon attest to the indissoluble link between the interrelated genres and media of mourning and commemoration and the 'inexhaustible' and 'incomprehensible' remainder of an artist's life. Moreover, all these protective gestures to reclaim and restore Landon's name, fame and remains are testament to the success of her self-representation in writing. Ultimately, her epistolary enactment of a 'feminine Robinson Crusoe' more than contributed to her popular ethos as a solitary writer deprived of sympathy and companionship. In time, this well-expressed and well-performed solitude proves to be an effective rallying call for endless renewals of friendship after death and prolific offerings of

service through posthumous life writings from both sides of the gender divide. Critics such as Julian North and Linda H. Peterson are certainly correct in their assessment of Romantic and early Victorian life writings as accounts of 'originality', 'genius' and 'domestic paragons.'<sup>143</sup> However, the epistolary memorials, the biography, the memoirs, the physical remains, the sardonic epitaph, the portrait engraving, the autographic signature and the letter date all point to a powerful organising ethic behind their cooperative deployments. Neither uniquely Romantic nor exclusively Victorian, this ethic of unending care for others – and responsibility for others – develops from the 'initial' and 'final essence' of human kindness. The aftermath of Landon's death is a crucial event in English literary and cultural history, for it epitomises the century-long maturation, explosion and collaboration of a multitude of commemorative rules and forms. The afterlife of 'L.E.L.' represents an emphatic shift from the pre-Romantic, 'Work'-based, solitary conception of *monumentum aere perennius* toward a model of remembrance founded on posthumous guilt, cooperative fulfilment and mutual services.

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<sup>143</sup> Linda H. Peterson's '4. Parallel Currents: *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* as Mid-Victorian Myth of Women's Authorship', in *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 133. For her view on the hagiographic accounts of literary women in Romantic and early Victorian biographies, see 132-9.

## Conclusion:

### **‘I seemed to take up the work . . . from the very hands of the dead’**

We too must eventually depend on others’ voices for our continued existence, and our lives are also stories whose authorship we control for but a short while, and even then not wholly. Our lives must also be relinquished to the community, private life giving way to public narrative.

(Bewell, ‘The History of Death’, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment*)<sup>1</sup>

No matter how hard Romantic writers try to exert control over their own life, image and reception, that control is at best transitory and limited. Letters are published, personal relics are circulated, rumours are disseminated, ‘domestick privacies’ are revealed, and detailed *Lives* are written. Yet, Bewell’s conclusion to ‘The History of Death’ is ambivalent. On one hand, the idea that ‘Our lives must also be relinquished to community’ connotes an inexorable sense of resignation and dispossession. On the other hand, the belief that ‘We too must eventually depend on others’ voices for our continued existence’ conveys an absolute confidence in mutual support and cooperation. Although Bewell is equivocal about the potential use and abuse of an artist’s life, he is unequivocal about the reliance of the dead upon the living for endurance. Nevertheless, his observation leaves a number of important questions unanswered. Questions such as how should the survivors exercise their partial authorship over the deceased, and how should they translate the private lives of the dead into public narratives? Even more urgently, what is the responsibility of the living toward the dead and the dying? In response to these morally and philosophically inflected questions, this thesis looked to the works of Bacon, Smith and Levinas for an ethic of remembrance founded on reciprocal care, posthumous sympathy, mutual fulfilment and cooperative defence. Moving beyond the psychoanalytic framework of loss and

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The History of Death’, 233.

compensation, renunciation and transcendence, the thesis examined practical convergences between rules, genres and forms of eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century commemoration. After surveying Johnson's ethic of life writing, Knox's ethic of collective biography, Godwin's ethic of material preservation, Wordsworth's ethic of epitaph writing, Hemans's ethic of secret inscriptions, Reynolds's ethic of memorial portraiture and, finally, Landon's ethic of epistolary service, we have uncovered a wealth of commemorative writings whose rules and terms of existence are dictated not so much by formal or genre strictures but by the necessity of care between the dead, the dying and the living.

As a true friend to the departed, the survivor has an immanent duty to fulfil 'all offices of life' and complete all unfinished work for the prematurely obliterated other. Upon her debut as the next editor of *FDRS* in 1839, Howitt pays homage to her predecessor with a trembling mix of awe, guilt and reverence: 'I seemed to take up the work, as it were, from the very hands of the dead.'<sup>2</sup> As an unexpected beneficiary of her friend's untimely demise, the survivor clearly acknowledges her mere supplementary and participatory role in Landon's unfinished *monumentum aere perennius*. Admittedly, *FDRS* would not have thrived so well had it not been for the exemplary dedication and productivity of her forebear. Seeing how lightly Johnson treads on the memory of Addison, she, too, imagines herself '*walking upon ashes under which the fire is not extinguished*'. Like Godwin, Wordsworth, Reynolds, Haydon, Hemans and Landon, Howitt must also honour her responsibility to the other with all the sympathy and care as befit her conscience. And like them, her life – her 'bright name' – would in turn be fulfilled and remembered *with* the glorious mute.

Incorporating a variety of commemorative genres and forms, posthumous life writing challenges the hegemonic hold elegy has on mourning studies, and introduces new possibilities

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<sup>2</sup> 'Preface' to *FDRS* for 1840.

into the emerging field of literary biography. As we have seen, the subtle hybridisation of elegy, epitaph, effusion and epitaph in Wordsworth's 'Extempore Effusion' is not only aesthetically driven but also ethically and emotionally inspired. It is inadequate to assess Romantic hybridisation of genres purely on aesthetic and formalist grounds. Since many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers were comfortably acclimated to their visual and material environs, it is important to consider potential cross-fertilisations between different genres of writing, portraits, obituaries, graves, monuments, architectures, and even sculptures. For instance, the Romantic ethics of remembrance can be readily applied to funerary monuments and portraiture busts by John Flaxman and Sir Francis Chantrey, as well as to Shelley's 'Notes on Sculptures in Rome and Florence' (made in 1819) and Hemans's verses and epistolary writings on sculptural memorials. One of the things I have alluded to in this study is the practicability of posthumous dialogue. Combining conversation, satire and life writing, Lucian of Samosata's *Dialogues of the Dead* (2nd century CE) has enormous implications for the defence of the self and other in Sarah Fielding's *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* (1757), Jewsbury's 'A Vision of Poets' (1825), Hemans's posthumous dialogue with Coleridge in 'On Reading Coleridge's Epitaph Written by Himself' (1834), and Bentham's '*Dialogues of the Dead*' in *Auto-Icon; or, Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living*. One may even look at the moral exigency of failed protection in Haydon's earnest but belated support of Keats, the son's vitriolic defence of the painter in 'B. R. Haydon. *The Story of His Life*' (1876), and Elizabeth Barrett's 'inactive', self-incriminating 'hand' in Haydon's gruesome suicide. Equally interesting is how class, gender, community and ideology might influence the application and synergy of mourning and commemorative strategies. However, perhaps the most immediate and compelling extension of the ethics of posthumous life writing would be to test the *limit* and *limitlessness* of posthumous care and sympathy. To that

end, one could investigate the sincerity and viability of commemorating an anonymous, absolute other in such poems as Burns's 'A Bard's Epitaph' (1786), Wordsworth's 'A Poet's Epitaph' (1800), Coleridge's 'A Tombless Epitaph' (1809), Hemans's 'The Grave of a Poetess' (1827) and Landon's 'The Poet's Grave' (1839). The stakes of such a study are high to say the least, for the ethics and praxes of remembrance 'guard and protect' the cohesiveness of society, the dignity of literature, the dignity of every human life, and the 'final essence' of human good.

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