Romantic Authorship and the Failures of Familiarity

by

Lindsey Jane Eckert

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Department of English
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Abstract

Focusing on familiarity in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, this dissertation examines how Romantic authors—especially those who published (semi-)autobiographical works—engaged both the complex legacy of sensibility and the rapidly changing literary marketplace. Exploring how and why authors’ evocations of familiarity failed to encourage readers’ and critics’ sympathy brings to the fore how the desire to feel close to contemporary authors was haunted by anxieties about vulgarity and banality. I analyze the strategies that authors used to relate (semi-)autobiographical information in a critical climate concerned that literature was, in many ways, becoming all too personal. Assessing what Pierre Bourdieu terms “the literary field” of the Romantic period, I demonstrate how fears about over-familiarity explicitly and implicitly shaped the content of Romantic texts and, just as important, their reading.

My first chapter analyzes Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*. Smith’s prefatory defences in *Elegiac Sonnets* offer one of the period’s most detailed justifications of formulaic, familiar language, and I explore how Smith answered criticisms that her emotionally-repetitive works were insincere. My second chapter analyzes William Hazlitt’s autobiographical work *Liber Amoris* in the context of the detailed theories of
familiarity outlined in his essays and the moral philosopher Adam Smith’s theories of sympathy. Examining Liber Amoris’s representations of familiarity alongside Hazlitt’s earlier theories of familiarity gives us a new perspective on both his essays and his most challenging work. Analyzing the negative reception of Lady Caroline Lamb’s famous autobiographical novel Glenarvon, my third chapter demonstrates how notions of gender difference conditioned determinations of familiarity’s proper limits. My final chapter argues that literary annuals sought to place readers on familiar terms with their famous editors and contributors by commercializing the culture of coterie manuscript exchange. I show that evocations of the type of familiarity associated with manuscript culture began to fail in the 1830s because the annuals became too common. Drawing on extensive archival research, this dissertation tracks the troubled reception histories of the works focusing each of its chapters. Overall, these case histories reveal familiarity and its failures to be key factors in the reception of literature in the Romantic period.
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Introduction

“The present age has discovered a desire, or rather a rage, for literary anecdote and private history[.]”
-Sir Walter Scott

In 1791, London buzzed with tales about Elizabeth Gunning. Gunning was caught up in a complex scandal involving ballroom dancing, young love, promised (and broken) engagements, and forged letters. In what would later be seen by many as an opportunistic desire to obtain a coronet, Gunning had, in 1790, caught the attention of the young Marquis of Blandford, heir to the Duke of Malborough. The two had danced at several balls, and soon “the report of Miss Gunning’s marriage with the Marquis of Blandford was the general topic of conversation in all the enlightened and all the enlivening circles.”

Blandford and Gunning supposedly began an intimate correspondence, yet no marriage was forthcoming. In February 1791, Gunning’s father, General John Gunning, exchanged letters with the Duke of Malborough to enquire about Blandford’s matrimonial intentions. The Duke praised Gunning but explained that his son’s heart had settled elsewhere. Soon it was discovered that persons unknown had forged the romantic correspondence between Gunning and Blandford as well as the Duke of Marlborough’s letters. General Gunning turned his daughter and his wife out of the house, claiming they had lied to him. Making matters even more complicated, the two women briefly took refuge with the Marquis of Blandford’s grandmother. Had Gunning been jilted? Did she love Blandford? Who had forged the letters? Who should be blamed?


2 A Friendly Letter to the Marquis of Lorn, on the subject of Mrs. Gunning’s Pamphlet […] by A Knight of Chivalry (London: J. Ridgway, 1791), 86.
We may never know the answers to these questions, but we do know that Gunning’s supposed siege on Blandford’s heart and her attempt to obtain a title failed miserably. While she most certainly was not repelled by faeces as James Gillray’s caricature, “The Seige of Blenheim,” would have it, the explosion of publicity did force Gunning and her mother to flee to France (Figure 1). Gillray’s print, one of three that he produced about the scandal, is telling. It depicts both Elizabeth and her mother, Susannah Gunning, unsuccessfully attacking the Duke’s residence, Blenheim Palace. The image of the cannon exploding between Gunning’s exposed legs indicates contemporary connections between female public notoriety and sex. The cannon shoots forth correspondence, including a “Letter from Marq. Blanford written by Myself,” a “Forged love Letter,” and a “Letter forg’d by myself.” The letters speak to beliefs that the forged letters revealed Gunning to be little more than a vulgar, title-hungry opportunist. Gunning’s vulnerable position—the fact that she is falling off the cannon she presumably believed she could control—reveals the problems of publicity and authenticity in the Romantic period. The supposed forgeries failed, and Gillray’s Gunning laments “Mother! my mask’d Battery is discovered & we shall be blown up!” The flurry of publicity that followed left little of Gunning’s personal life masked, and people tried to uncover the real Elizabeth Gunning behind the forgeries. She was exposed and ridiculed as the event blew up in newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, and prints throughout 1791 and 1792. London went mad for information about the scandal. As one pamphleteer describes it, “No circumstance has occurred in the variegated circle of Fashion, for a long series of years, that has excited the public attention, in so high a degree, as the recent dissentions
Figure 1. "The Siege of Blenheim, or the New System of Gunninie Discovered" by James Gillray, published in London by Humphrey, March 5, 1791. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.
which have prevailed in the family of General Gunning.” The exciting details of the whole affair seemed almost too salacious to be real.

And maybe they were. Examining the historical record, it seems that the facts of the case morphed and were exaggerated through their public circulation. Gunning and the figures surrounding her became caricatures, which were in many ways more informed by melodramatic, sentimental novels than actual events. Gunning was alternately presented as a coquette, a conniving hussy, a tragic victim, and a pawn in her mother’s marriage game. The press only encouraged the obfuscation of fiction and reality by referring to the events as “the gross fiction”—a recognition that the events had spiralled beyond reality. In the words of one eighteenth-century commentator, Gunning had experienced “the theft of her own Narrative.” How does one respond to such a theft?

Gunning took back the story of her life by writing about it herself. In 1794 when memories of the scandal would have still been in the public mind, she published her first novel The Packet. In The Packet, Gunning refers to her scandalous past, and the novel’s marriage plot hinges on forged letters. Indeed, the preface acknowledges that Gunning’s notorious name rather than her literary talents intrigued readers: “In the circles of high life I know my book will be read, if only for the novelty-sake of that name which has already afforded my dear friends a great deal of subject for conversation.”

Gunning’s italics emphasize her sarcasm; had the rumour of her engagement remained within a

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3 *A Narrative of the Incidents which Form the Mystery, in the Family of General Gunning* (London: Taylor and Co., 1791), 5.
5 *A Friendly Letter to the Marquis of Lorn*, 65.
6 Felicity Nussbaum has described the shift from object to active agent that occurs when a woman with a scandalous past turns to authorship: “Once a ‘fallen woman’ speaks a textual ‘self,’ she becomes a subject—the perceiver instead of the perceived.” Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 185.
small group, it never would have become a scandal. Without the earlier scandal, she
admits, her name alone would have earned little attention in the literary marketplace.

*The Packet*’s publication reinvigorated interest in Gunning and the events that had
ruined her name. The novel contains scathing observations about society. In her most
obvious condemnation of contemporary life, she describes one of her characters opening
the newspaper to find “several anecdotes of fashion, or, to speak with greater propriety,
of fashionable people—a most excellent species of amusement this, where thousands are
to be diverted at no greater expence than the sacrifice of a good name, or a blameless
reputation!” On the surface, Gunning attacks the gossip-craving culture of England,
implicitly blaming it for destroying her good name. Her reference to “anecdotes of
fashion” is not insignificant. Only the year before Isaac D’Israeli published *A
Dissertation on Anecdotes*. The value of anecdotes, which D’Israeli claimed “all the
world read,” and readers’ interest in them arose from familiarity. D’Israeli asserts that,
like memoirs and other (auto)biographical texts, they offer “a familiarity, which invites
us to approach” great men because the “minute circumstances” they reveal “familiarize
us to the genius of [those] whom we admire, and whom sometimes we aspire to imitate.”
Yet even D’Israeli had to acknowledge the “frivolous, insipid, and inconsequential”
nature of many anecdotes, particularly the public’s unthinking consumption of them. It
is this voracious, unreflective hunger for private information that *The Packet* criticizes.
On a deeper level, Gunning’s evocations of her ruined reputation demonstrate her
understanding that she owes *The Packet*’s marketability to the gossip-mongering press

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and 51.
10 Ibid., 73.
and its readers. Rather than move beyond her past social failures in The Packet, she offers tantalizing, self-referential asides to them.

Some thought that these autobiographical asides were too frequent and that Gunning shared too much personal information with her readers. For instance, one reviewer suggested that Gunning “endeavour to forget herself, if she wishes to interest us in her characters.”\textsuperscript{11} Gunning, it seems, just couldn’t get it right. A failed marriage plot led to novels that were critical failures as Gunning tried to capitalize on a scandal that, by 1794, was old news. Sharing details of the scandal might have gained Gunning some readers but, it seems, did not gain her sympathy.\textsuperscript{12}

The “theft” of Gunning’s narrative and her subsequent attempts to capitalize on her ruined name exemplify major trends in the Romantic period. New technologies enabled the proliferation of print and the rapid delivery of information. As never before, many readers were as interested in writers’ lives as their works, and, as Gunning’s case demonstrates, readers often read literary works because of the people who wrote them.\textsuperscript{13} The demand for details about domestic life grew throughout the eighteenth century, complicating notions of privacy and the private self.\textsuperscript{14} The end of the eighteenth century saw a flurry of works centering on the private lives of authors, playwrights, political

\textsuperscript{13} Paul Keen, for example, has suggested that in the 1790s producers of literature began to share importance with the products that they produced. Paul Keen, The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8.
figures, and even prostitutes. Even literary reviews increasingly drew on authors’ private lives to assess their works.

In many ways, the literary marketplace in the Romantic period traded on stories like Gunning’s. Willingly shared, borrowed, or sometimes downright stolen, (auto)biographical information was a central part of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature. The desire for information was so heightened that almost no one seemed “safe from the voracious alliance of biographers, readers, and publishers, eager to market lives.” There was a significant demand for biographical, autobiographical, and semi-autobiographical works that shared widely information that seemed as though it should be on the contrary limited to one’s “dear friends.” Certain writers successfully met readers on familiar terms, sharing enough of their personal lives to seem intriguing but not so much that they seemed to expose themselves vulgarly. Yet walking the line between revealing enough of one’s self in the public sphere and revealing too much was a difficult task.

One writer who famously made readers feel as though they were his dear friends was Lord Byron. In his famous review of Canto IV of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, Walter Scott describes the pride that Lord Byron’s readers felt in “being called as it were into familiarity with a mind so powerful and invited to witness and partake of its deep

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16 North, The Domestication of Genius, 29.

emotion.”

Byron’s appeal, Scott suggests, arose from the poet’s ability to bring a mass audience into his familiar circle. Though most of Byron’s readers did not know him personally, they still felt close to him. Byron’s case is not as singular as we may think. Throughout the Romantic period, being called “into familiarity” with authors was increasingly central to literary production and reception.

This new emphasis on authorial familiarity coincided with important shifts in print culture and society at large. Changes in copyright law and technological advances in papermaking, printing, and binding fundamentally altered the literary marketplace from the mid-eighteenth century onward. The reading public expanded at an unprecedented rate. As one commentator put it in 1829, “[A] great revolution there has been, from nobody’s reading any thing, to everybody’s reading all things.”

Under these new market conditions publishers, editors, and authors had to take new pains to present their relationships with readers as personal rather than strictly commercial. One way for an author to encourage familiarity with readers in a rapidly expanding literary marketplace was to include more seemingly (auto)biographical information in prefaces, reviews, and

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18 Quoted in Andrew Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 51. Elfenbein’s work analyzes Byron’s reception history and suggests “that the relations of nineteenth-century readers to Byron were intensely personal, sometimes more so than any relations existing in mere ordinary life” (49).


literary works themselves. While in theory familiarity was an advantageous quality in
literature, employing it in practice was a tricky matter.

Throughout the Romantic period familiarity was a social virtue in flux, and
authors, readers, and critics grappled with questions about whom one should, to recollect
Scott’s comments, call “into familiarity.” Familiarity was so integral to eighteenth- and
nineteenth-century life that pupils turned to didactic letter-writing manuals to learn to
write in a “familiar style.” The sizable market for manuals like Newberry’s Familiar
Letter-Writer (1788) and The Complete Letter-Writer, Containing a Great Variety of
Plain, Easy, Entertaining & Familiar Letters (1808) demonstrates that establishing
familiarity was a complex matter and one that was absolutely central to Romantic-era
life.21 Though difficult to define its proper limits, familiarity was “a central virtue” in the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was as important to cultural ideals as “civility,
politeness, and sensibility.”22 The constant danger of familiarity was that it could quickly
transition from an asset into a liability. “I know nothing more difficult in common
behaviour,” Lord Chesterfield famously admitted, “than to fix due bounds to familiarity:
too little implies an unsociable formality; too much destroys friendly and social
intercourse.”23 My argument focuses on the unstable dynamics of familiarity in
literature—its simultaneous associations with sympathy and closeness and, conversely,

21 For more on eighteenth-century letter-writing manuals and familiarity, see Sarah M.S. Pearsall, Atlantic
Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 67-
79.
22 Ibid., 56 and 57.
23 The Art of Pleasing; or, Instructions for Youth in the First Stage of Life, in a Series of Letters to the
Present Earl of Chesterfield, by the Late Philip Earl of Chesterfield (London: G. Kearsley, 1783), 91-92.
Eighteenth Century Collections Online, accessed April 30, 2013,
http://find.galegroup.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&
userGroupName=utoronto_main&tabID=T001&docId=CW122771325&type=multipage&contentSet=ECC
OArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE.
with vulgarity and banality. It was difficult for authors to negotiate the boundaries between familiarity and over-familiarity, between sharing enough and sharing too much.

This dissertation focuses on authors and genres that got this balance wrong. From Charlotte Smith’s personal poems and autobiographical works by William Hazlitt and Lady Caroline Lamb, to the notoriously vilified British literary annuals, the case studies I explore represent some of the most compelling failures of the Romantic period. While many of the works I study had reasonable market success, they were often seen as failures according to standards of taste, decorum, and style. All of these kinds of failure, I argue, can be traced back to questions of familiarity. Exploring how and why authors’ evocations of familiarity failed to attract readers’ and critics’ sympathy brings to the fore how the desire to feel close to contemporary authors was haunted by anxieties about vulgarity and banality. Despite its prominence in Romantic-era debates about morality, culture, and literature, no study of familiarity exists. Related discussions engaging sensibility, privacy, celebrity, authenticity, and sincerity that have received recent scholarly attention converge on familiarity, making familiarity an important, though hitherto neglected topic for Romantic studies.24

My work sits at the intersection of reception history, cultural criticism, and historicist formal analysis. I map the failures of literary works dependent on intimate details about authors’ lives within a rapidly changing print culture, consumer climate, and political atmosphere. Familiarity, I suggest, is a crucial component of what Pierre

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Bourdieu terms “the literary field” of British Romanticism. Literary works’ evocations of familiarity manifest larger structures of “the field as a whole, in which all the powers of the field, and all the determinisms inherent […] are concentrated.”

Bourdieu has argued that understanding “the mood of the age” is necessary to understanding the system that engenders “the material production” as well as “the symbolic production of the work.” Additionally, he suggests that “the attacks that are suffered […] can be used as the criterion establishing that a work belongs to the field of position-takings and its author to the field of positions.”

In this study, historical attacks are crucial, for in the railings against Charlotte Smith’s repetitiveness or Lady Caroline’s indecency, the historical literary field of British Romanticism begins to reveal itself with much more clarity than if we examine celebrated, canonized authors alone. The social and authorial failures represented in my case studies make visible the workings of publicity and popularity and the frameworks of literary evaluation in the Romantic period.

Familiarity’s uncertain valence and antagonistic associations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are evident in contemporary definitions of the term. According to Samuel Johnson, familiarity is “easiness of conversation” and “affability.” Likewise he defines familiar as “domestick, relating to a family,” “easy in conversation,” and “unceremonious; free, as among persons long acquainted.”

George Crabb’s later *English Synonymes Explained* (1818) makes clear the tensions inherent in familiarity in his analysis of the relationship between *acquaintance, familiarity,* and *intimacy.* Crabb

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26 Ibid., 32, 37, and 34.
explains that familiarity is “produced by a daily intercourse, which wears off all constraint, and banishes all ceremony.” While banishing all ceremony could be beneficial in some instances, universal familiarity was dangerous. In a passage similar to Lord Chesterfield’s letter quoted above Crabb writes, “‘Too much familiarity,’ according to the old proverb, ‘breeds contempt.’ The unlicensed freedom which commonly attends familiarity affords but too ample scope for the indulgence of the selfish and unamiable passions.”

Much of the discourse in the period about familiarity concerns the particular object of one’s familiarity. Unceremonious and free conduct among persons long acquainted was one matter, but indiscriminating familiarity was another. For example, one writer earlier in the eighteenth century claimed that people should have “Familiarity with none but such as are eminent for some commendable Qualifications[.]” Many believed that familiarity should only extend to those with similar socio-economic standing. Hester Lynch Piozzi’s British Synonymy; or An Attempt at Regulating the Choice of Words in Familiar Conversation (1794) offers advice about proper conduct in such situations: “[A]mong people where talents or fortune only make the difference, a strain of polished familiarity, or familiar politeness […] is the behaviour most likely to attract affectionate esteem.” Piozzi suggests that familiarity can serve as a social

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lubricant, yet her qualification that familiarity should be “polished” indicates the class awareness that should accompany it.

The line between polished and unlicensed familiarity in literature largely depended on class and gender dynamics. These social factors determined where the moving target of proper familiarity settled. In the Romantic period, class dynamics shifted significantly as cross-class contact and social mobility increased. For example, cheaper, mechanized fabric and clothing production undermined visual distinctions between the socially elite and the socially reaching. Debates about class in the eighteenth century concerned servants’ attire, in particular the fact that servants “dressed above their station.” Clothing worn by servants increasingly mirrored that of their masters, “blurring what the employing classes regarded as the appropriate hierarchical distinctions in a society where dress was expected to indicate rank.”  

Daniel Defoe famously complained in *Everybody’s Business is Nobody’s Business* (1725) that it was “a hard matter to know the mistress from the maid by their dress.” Such anxieties about visual class markers only grew as the century progressed.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries concerns about familiarity frequently aligned with concerns about domestic servants. “We do not hold it proper to converse so *familiarly* with our domestics,” wrote an observer in 1760, “it is very far from our intention to introduce a *levelling Scheme*.” While servants may have dressed

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31 John Styles, “Involuntary Consumers? Servants and Their Clothes in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Textile History* 33.1 (2002): 9. It should be noted that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reports of servants’ clothing emulating that of their masters was probably exaggerated. Styles goes on to note that while clothing trends may have been similar between classes, the quality of the fabrics and other materials would have been noticeably different (18-19).

32 Defoe quoted in Styles, “Involuntary Consumers,” 9. Moreover, the increasing availability of print made information more readily available to both aristocrats and the middling classes.

like their masters, they were not meant to act like their superiors. Manners remained the bulwark of the upper class. Offering familiarity’s open affability to those undeserving of such close candour presented problems. Extended too liberally to servants and members of the lower classes, familiarity had the potential to erode class distinctions and notions of privacy. As I describe in more detail below, the rapid growth of the reading public enabled by industrialization also contributed to concerns about rank and privacy.

**Exposing Familiarity**

Some Romantic figures such as Byron, Wordsworth, L.E.L., and Thomas De Quincey wrote about themselves in ways that evoked public interest and, in most cases, a sense of closeness with readers. While still entering the commercial literary field, their semi-autobiographical works differed from the biographies of criminals found in the *Newgate Calendar* and courtesans’ memoirs, such as those by Margaret Leeson and Harriet Wilson, which flooded the market. Unlike Grub Street literature, semi-autobiographical writing by Byron, Wordsworth, L.E.L., and De Quincey revealed personal information obliquely. These authors ostensibly retained some separation of private and public life and so remained partially, tantalizingly hidden.

Enticing revelation rather than full exposure was a key component of the reception of semi-autobiographical works in the Romantic period. The degree of perceived hiddenness formed one of the major differences between proper and vulgar familiarity. Though describing intimacy, Lauren Berlant makes a similar argument about the importance of incompleteness: “To intimate is to communicate with the sparest of
signs and gestures, and at its root intimacy has the quality of eloquence and brevity.”  

Berlant suggests that intimacy arises from the combination of sparsity and closeness—the idea that those most familiar with us “just know” what we’re thinking without us having to articulate it. Closeness, from this perspective, depends on the unspoken and the untold. Similarly, familiarity relies on imperfect revelations that the reader completes and interprets.  

In her work on privacy in the eighteenth century, Patricia Meyer Spacks similarly points to the relationship between revealing and concealing. Authors, she suggests, “guard their own privacy while appearing to reveal intimate detail […] the preservation of privacy as a mode of self-protection depends less on the nature than on the tactics of revelation.”  

Though speaking of fiction, Deidre Lynch’s comments about eighteenth-century characterization can also be applied here, for “the fleshing out” of autobiographical figures similarly involves “the fine line between the more and the less” and “the difference between enough and too much.” Lynch’s explanation of the necessity of “deferring complete explication” in the creation of round character attests to the

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35 While familiarity and intimacy are intertwined it is more fruitful to focus on familiarity since it was the term writers and critics so often returned to throughout the Romantic period. For example, we may recall Coleridge’s famous assertion that Wordsworth’s poetry aimed to awaken “the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom” and “the film of familiarity.” Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria: Or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, 2 vols, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, number 7 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 2:7. Similarly, in an oft-quoted passage from “A Defence of Poetry,” Shelley proclaims that poetry “strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms.” Percy Shelley, “A Defence of Poetry,” in *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts and Criticism*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 505.

importance of implication over detailed information. Roundness is a key for autobiographical and semi-autobiographical characters, too. Counterintuitively, then, the emotional depth accompanying familiarity in literary works was enabled by the absence of detail just as much as the presence of it. As Lord Chesterfield observed, too many details and too much familiarity “destroy friendly and social intercourse.” Thus, successful literary familiarity “enacts a complicated double movement between secrecy and openness,” with “strategic blanks” providing spaces for readers to inhabit.

The most detailed recent theorization of the relationship between authors’ public images, their private lives, and the public’s desire to read their works is Tom Mole’s *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* (2007). Mole’s work on intimacy connects Habermasian theories of the public sphere with the burgeoning celebrity culture of the Romantic period. Similar to Berlant’s theories of intimacy and Lynch’s understanding of round fictional characters, Mole’s concept of “the hermeneutic of intimacy” fundamentally relies on incompleteness. He argues that in Byron’s work his “interior [character] was hidden from the view of the undiscerning, but was also continually making itself legible, expressing itself in poems where its secrets could be read by the discerning few.” The notion that one was a discerning reader privy to these secrets allowed those reading highly commercial works “to imagine that those endlessly copied poems are for them alone, not for the careless multitude.”

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41 Ibid., 25.
Scholars such as Mole, Ghislaine McDayter, Corin Throsby, and Eric Eisner have helpfully historicized celebrity and its ability to ease “the sense of industrial alienation between readers and writers” in a rapidly changing print market and social context.\(^{42}\) However, such studies risk overestimating the novelty of Byron’s relationship with his audience, resulting in a myopic, Byron-centric understanding of both celebrity and the conditions surrounding it. Looking at celebrity in the context of familiarity provides a more inclusive approach to its cultural developments.

**Familiarity and (De)commodification**

Throughout the Romantic period individuals’ private lives became common and legitimate topics for literary works. The trend had become so marked that in January 1823 a contributor to *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* wrote: “This is confessedly the age of confession,—the era of individuality […] Writers no longer talk in generals. All their observations are bounded in the narrow compass of self.”\(^{43}\) Though some clearly saw this new age negatively, it was difficult to deny that the influence of “the narrow compass of the self” greatly expanded in the period. It was not only that the demand for works that dealt with peoples’ private lives was growing but also that the expectations for those works were changing. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions*, for example, marked a new trend toward unabashed, unashamed autobiography. According to Rousseau, “nothing,” not even the fact that he urinated in a neighbour’s cooking pot as a child,


would “remain hidden or obscure.” Similarly, Samuel Johnson argued for the type of truthful biography found in his *Lives of the Poets*, where he was surprisingly open about, for instance, Richard Savage’s drunkenness and laziness. Similarly, Johnson’s revelations about Pope (including “his petty peculiarities” arising from his weak body, suggestions that “[h]is weakness made it very difficult for him to be clean,” and his “unpleasing and unsocial qualities”) complicated readers’ admiration of Pope’s works. So too did James Boswell’s anecdotal and at times unflattering biography of Johnson demonstrate that all aspects of authors’ private lives were important.

It was exactly this trend toward exposure and seemingly indecent honesty that William Wordsworth found so objectionable. In *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* (1816) Wordsworth describes “the coarse intrusions into the recesses, the gross breaches upon the sanctities, of domestic life” that were an unfortunate trend in many biographies. Wordsworth feared that readers’ voracious appetites for biographical information about authors were superseding interest in their literary works. More specifically, Wordsworth decried the dangerous vulgarity of readers’ growing curiosity about authors’ lives. His images of intrusion and invasion in *Letter to a Friend* indicate his desire for a form of division between public life and the “recesses” and “sanctities, of domestic life.”

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46 For an analysis of eighteenth-century reactions to Johnson’s and Boswell’s biographical practices, see North, *The Domestication of Genius*, 10-30.
Wordsworth’s observations about the biographical revolution in England closely resemble Edmund Burke’s comments about political revolution in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. “All the decent drapery of life,” Burke lamented, “is to be rudely torn off,” leaving only “the defects of our naked shivering nature.” In the Romantic period, many authors and commentators were removing the drapery of private life, thus, exposing the defects of authors in unflattering and, Wordsworth thought, unnecessary ways. Although Wordsworth and Burke might have wished for a clear dichotomy between public and private life, the Romantic period blurred such divisions.

The rising demand for literary works that revealed intimate details of authors’ and public figures’ lives occurred at the same time that print culture was changing dramatically. Three major, interrelated factors at the end of the eighteenth century contributed to shifting relationships between authors’ private lives, their texts, and their readers. First, technology was changing. The Industrial Revolution advanced papermaking and printing, resulting in the unprecedented print production. Throughout the period publishers increasingly used stereotype printing plates for popular works, which minimized typesetting costs and production time. Iron (rather than wood) printing presses were introduced, making printing more standardized and rapid. Uniform publisher’s bindings and novel technologies for producing illustrated prints put new

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49 All texts had to be typeset by hand until the introduction of linotype and monotype machines at the end of the nineteenth century. Stereotype plates were cast from textblocks that had been typeset. These plates could then be used to reprint texts in subsequent editions without the need for a compositor to reset all of the type. Stereotype technology was available in the eighteenth century, but it only began to be used on a wider scale in the early nineteenth century.
emphasis on the physical aspects of texts. These innovations made printed materials available in new forms and to wider audiences.

Second, what was read and who was reading changed. The end of the eighteenth century also witnessed the rise of gossip columns, fashion reporting, and crime columns. Readers were titillated by têtes-à-têtes in the pages of Town and Country and salacious courtesans’ memoirs. The desire for personal details led Coleridge to lament that he lived in an “age of literary and political GOSSIPING.” Later in the period the new genre of silver-fork novels claimed to give wide audiences access to the social practices of the upper class. Eric Eisner summarizes: “A memoir-mad public devoured the gossip about writers’ private lives retailed not just in autobiographies and reminiscences but in reviews, romans-à-clef, and newspaper notices, and some adoring readers schemed to see in person, to get to know, even to sleep with the poets they idolized.” The end of the eighteenth century saw a burgeoning culture of fan letters, and people began to feel as though they were on familiar terms with public figures.

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50 Before the 1820s, books would have been sold either in loose sheets or in blue paperboard bindings. The bookseller or, more likely, individual purchasers would have determined the bindings of their books rather than printers or publishers.
52 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, 1:41n. Coleridge’s note quotes his earlier essay from The Friend.
54 Eisner, Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Literary Celebrity, 1.
Though offering different versions of the growth of print culture in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, scholars such as Jon P. Klancher, Deidre Lynch, H.J. Jackson, and William St Clair have all noted the marked increase in numbers of both published texts and those who were reading them.\(^{56}\) While specific literacy rates are difficult to determine, there is little doubt that by 1800 reading had become a national pastime within reach of growing numbers of people from various educational and financial backgrounds. The population growth of England and Scotland throughout the eighteenth century corresponded to an equally impressive boom in literacy; “a conservative estimate would suggest two million new readers over the course of the century.”\(^{57}\) David Allan’s study of libraries in Georgian England, for example, equates the large numbers of commercial book-lending institutions with increased access to books and, in turn, literacy.\(^{58}\) It remains uncertain whether growing numbers of readers hungry for new reading materials led to the growth in print production or if the growth of reading materials spurred more widespread reading habits, yet we do know that throughout the period both the number of readers and the availability of reading materials reached new heights.

One of the most poignant effects of the expansion of the reading public was the effacement of the lingering remnants of eighteenth-century coterie author-reader

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\(^{57}\) Elliott, “The Cost of Reading,” 376.

relationships. No longer dependent on a single patron or circle of readers, Romantic authors were faced with numerous, nameless readers. With the distance between an author and his or her readers steadily increasing, Romantic-era authorship had become an almost unequivocally commercial enterprise. Seemingly personal published texts existed in the shadow of commercial culture as part of the increasingly industrialized mechanics of the literary market. Even an inscribed copy of a literary annual or a dog-eared, annotated copy of *Childe Harold* was “haunted by the spirit of mass consumption.”\(^59\) Consequently, evocations of familiarity were undermined by the commercialized, depersonalized literary marketplace in which they were published.

The third factor precipitating failures of familiarity was consumerism. Widespread fears that voracious (often female) readers bought and read the wrong sort of literature reflected larger anxieties about industrialization and commercialization. Wordsworth’s famous invective against “sickly and stupid German Tragedies” in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* offers just one example of contemporary ideas about the dangers of the commercialized literary marketplace—a marketplace worryingly susceptible to the tastes of women.\(^60\) Worries about consumerism, morality, and shifting literary trends were prominent topics of discussion in the period, with authors such as Coleridge expressing distress about the “OVERBALANCE OF THE COMMERCIAL SPIRIT.”\(^61\) In *A Lay Sermon*, Coleridge posits that morality and perhaps subjectivity itself were framed by commercial and economic desires. The trend Coleridge saw

manifested itself in a “degrading appetite for scandal and personal defamation”—the same leering, peering tendencies of biography that Wordsworth criticized in *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns.*

Semi-autobiographical work is both a product of a commercialized and growing public sphere and a possible remedy to it. Coleridge and Wordsworth saw the growing interest in authors’ lives as potentially damaging to both individual authors and literature at large, but literary familiarity served an important social function in the period. While there were fears that monetary motivations were vulgarizing literature, even the most commercialized works could enact personal connections between authors and readers as well as communities of readers. These connections answered the challenges of changing, depersonalized urban spaces.

The growth of urban centres had the potential to erode communities and create cities populated with strangers—something Wordsworth notes in Book VII of *The Prelude:*

Above all, one thought

Baffled my understanding, how men lived

Even next-door neighbours, as we say, yet still

Strangers, and knowing not each other’s names.

William Hazlitt echoed a similar sentiment in his later essay “On Londoners and Country People.” “It is a strange state of society (such as that in London),” he observes, “where a

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62 Ibid., 171.
man does not know his next-door neighbour.” Information about public figures and events offset the impersonality and anonymity of the rapidly growing public and the cities in which many people lived. Oftentimes familiar interpersonal relationships were founded not on local, personal gossip but on shared interests articulated in the public sphere of print. Private histories and semi-autobiographical works provided common ground for conversation and interpersonal connection. Hazlitt explains, “[A] community of ideas and knowledge (rather than local proximity) is the bond of society and good-fellowship.” Even the closest friendships might come to be focused on public issues, therefore, eliding earlier distinctions between public and private social interaction. Readers wanted to know details about authors that would have been previously limited to a more circumscribed social group. However, once familiarity extended too far it “destroy[ed] friendly and social intercourse.” How, then, could one be familiar with a wide audience without becoming common or overly-familiar?

Authors, especially authors purportedly writing about themselves, had to be conscious that in the context of a commercial, industrial marketplace their attempts to establish familiar relationships with readers might be seen as just another part of a money-making literary machine. Evoking intimate relationships with readers was a difficult task that required the balancing of seemingly conflicting ideals: between the natural and the mechanical, between the marketplace and the poetic genius, between a

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65 Though speaking of celebrity specifically, Mole’s comments can apply more generally to the consequences of the period’s expanding print culture: “Providing a topic about which anyone could take a view, celebrity structured social intercourse and supplied a ligament of group identity.” Mole, Byron’s Romantic Celebrity, 2.
67 Chesterfield, The Art of Pleasing, 92.
mass reading public and a coterie audience, between literary automatism and authenticity. It is these issues I explore in the four chapters of my dissertation. This study begins by looking at how concerns about sensibility in the late-eighteenth century informed discourses about formulaic and familiar modes of emotional representation in literature. It ends by considering the material forms of literary expressions of familiarity.

My first chapter analyzes Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*. Readers were drawn to Smith because her depictions of melancholy and suffering seemed comfortingly familiar, yet they were also, according to some critics, borrowed and banal. Smith is an ideal starting point for this study because her sonnets engage directly with sensibility and its potential for inauthentic emotional display. Along with Wordsworth’s *Essays Upon Epitaphs*, Smith’s prefatory defences in *Elegiac Sonnets* offer some of the most detailed Romantic-era justifications for seemingly-formulaic language. In answering charges that her sonnets borrowed too heavily from other sources, Smith presents arguments for the value of repeated, familiar language. My second chapter analyzes William Hazlitt’s theories of familiarity outlined in his familiar essays. Hazlitt is the period’s most explicit theorist of familiarity. However, his autobiographical work *Liber Amoris* (1823) goes against Hazlitt’s own standards of proper familiarity. Reading *Liber Amoris* in the context of Adam Smith’s theories of sympathy and Hazlitt’s own ideas about familiarity clarifies why readers found *Liber Amoris* so objectionable, and my chapter presents new connections between the novel and his better-known essays. Using Lady Caroline’s famous autobiographical novel *Glenarvon* (1816) as a case study, my third chapter demonstrates how notions of gender difference conditioned determinations of familiarity’s proper limits. While critics today typically see *Glenarvon* as a weak work,
my archival research reveals that Regency readers thought that her novel was well-written. The research on reception that I have done demonstrates that, rather than poor writing, Lady Caroline’s gender and aristocratic status provoked negative critical assessments of her work. My final chapter argues that, by commercializing the culture of coterie manuscript exchange, the publishers of literary annuals in the 1820s sought to place readers on familiar terms with the famous editors of and contributors to their volumes. In the case of the annuals, familiarity was closely aligned with the volumes’ physical, mass-produced forms. I show that, while essential to the genre’s development and initial popularity, the printed literary annuals’ manuscript-like elements became increasingly ineffective at simulating manuscript album culture. I show that the genre began to fail critically and commercially in the 1830s as the annuals seemed increasingly common and familiar.

By addressing a variety of authors writing in diverse genres—sonnets, prose treatises, prefaces, semi-autobiographical fiction, and album poetry found in literary annuals—I demonstrate how fears of over-familiarity explicitly or implicitly shaped the content of Romantic texts and, just as important, their reading. Focusing on authors whose evocations of familiarity missed the mark complicates scholarly assumptions about why certain authors and genres failed to gain their contemporaries’ praise and, subsequently, attain a place in the scholarly canon. Moreover, it defamiliarizes our understanding of the spectre of consumerism in the Romantic period by showing how writers adapted to and struggled with the period’s changing expectations about self-revelatory writing and the literary marketplace.
Chapter One

“Feigning sorrow”: Charlotte Smith, William Wordsworth, and the Problem of Reading Familiarity

“Extreme sensibility, if real, is pitiable; if pretended, ridiculous.”
- The Monthly Magazine

“I am unhappily exempt from the suspicion of feigning sorrow for an opportunity of shewing the pathos with which it can be described—a suspicion that has given rise to much ridicule, and many invidious remarks, among certain critics.”
- Charlotte Smith

“[W]hen a Man is treating an interesting subject […] no faults have such a killing power as those which prove that he is not in earnest, that he is acting a part, has leisure for affectation […] This is one of the most odious of faults; because it shocks the moral sense.”
- William Wordsworth

In the Advertisement to the 1798 edition of Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth anticipates the criticism the volume might face: “It will perhaps appear to them [‘readers of superior judgment’], that wishing to avoid the prevalent fault of the day, the author has sometimes descended too low, and that many of his expressions are too familiar, and not of

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sufficient dignity.” Wordsworth argues for the power of his seemingly undignified diction, and he claims that his familiar language is especially suited to convey “human passions, human characters, and human incidents.” In the Preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth expands his previous explanation, asserting that his common, seemingly banal diction is connected to the larger goal of the collection. “The principal object then which I proposed to myself in these Poems,” he explains, “was to make incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature.” Wordsworth claims that the familiarity of both his diction and the topics his poems address is an asset. Wordsworth frames familiarity as a connective mode that allows the poet to reveal human nature and establish bonds with readers. For Wordsworth, common or familiar diction signals poetic sincerity.

Clearly Wordsworth felt that common language, though seemingly degraded, was more truthful and affecting than traditional poetic diction. His comments about affectation, quoted in my third epigraph, point to the power of authenticity. According to Wordsworth, inauthentic displays of emotion “shock the moral sense.” Concerns about familiarity and authenticity in the Romantic period, then, were not simply questions about social interaction or literary decorum; they were questions of morality. Yet discovering the motives behind familiar language was not always easy, and good reading was essential. Wordsworth believed that in the face of the “monotonous language of sorrow” a good reader with an educated sensibility will find the “substance of individual truth.”

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5 Ibid.
7 Wordsworth, “Essays Upon Epitaphs,” 47.
8 Ibid., 66.
However, in the period familiarity was not always seen in the positive light Wordsworth suggests. For example, in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Edmund Burke claims that “it is absolutely necessary” that one’s passion “not be exerted in those things which a daily and vulgar use have brought into a stale unaffecting familiarity.” He continues, “Knowledge and acquaintance make the most striking causes affect but little.”

Overexposure and over-familiarity could, Burke thought, dampen the beautiful and the sublime alike.

The difference between Burke’s and Wordsworth’s respective uses of the term points to familiarity’s complex relationship with sensibility and sincerity in the period. On the one hand, *familiar* could refer to an intimate, a person in one’s close or even familial circle. On the other hand, it could indicate associations with the everyday, low-class, and vulgar. The problems that these two senses present gesture towards the possibility that what could be good in some cases could quickly become the banal stuff of everyday life in others. While familiarity offered some poets a way to make the normative aspects of life and literature seem novel, it also was potentially dull and, even worse, crude.

Charlotte Smith’s sonnets are notable because they balance intimacy with banal familiarity. Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* were wildly popular at the end of the eighteenth

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9 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 29 and 57. Burke’s assertions about the devaluing role of familiarity represent one of the ideological differences between his philosophy and Smith and Wordsworth’s. As we shall see, both Smith and Wordsworth recuperate the familiar by arguing for its revelatory potential.

century, and she has often been credited for instigating the sonnet revival in England.\textsuperscript{11} However, by the time the sixth edition of \textit{Elegiac Sonnets} appeared she ran the risk of seeming overly-familiar.\textsuperscript{12} While her melancholy sonnets were commercially successful, Smith was criticized for her “everlasting lamentables.”\textsuperscript{13} It is for this reason that Smith and Wordsworth offer a fruitful pairing.\textsuperscript{14} Reading Smith’s sonnets in the context of Wordsworth’s work gives insight into relationships between personal despair and published texts, between literary form and the formulation of emotions, and between authorial success and perceptions of emotional automatism. How these authors engage issues of sincerity and familiarity, especially in their use of literary allusion, gestures toward larger Romantic-era struggles to establish an authentic, autobiographical style—a style that was both reassuringly familiar in its indebtedness to previous poets and authentically, personally original in its emotional expressiveness.


\textsuperscript{12} Using the bibliographer Thomas Tanselle’s definition of \textit{edition}, it remains unclear how many editions of \textit{Elegiac Sonnets} there are. Curran’s textual notes to \textit{The Poems of Charlotte Smith} refer to nine editions (\textit{Poems}, 313). However, Smith herself believed there were ten; in a letter in 1806 she told the publisher Joseph Johnson that “the 1\textsuperscript{st} volume [of \textit{Elegiac Sonnets}] is in the 10\textsuperscript{th} [edition].” Smith to Joseph Johnson, July 12, 1806, \textit{The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith}, ed. Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 742. For my purposes here, I do not use \textit{edition} in the strict bibliographical sense. Instead, I refer to six editions of \textit{Elegiac Sonnets}, this number being taken from Smith’s prefaces to the collection, the latest of which is entitled “Preface to the Sixth Edition.” For more information on bibliographic definitions, see Tanselle, “The Bibliographical Concepts of Issue and State,” \textit{Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America} 69 (1975): 17-66.

\textsuperscript{13} Anna Seward to Theophilus Swift, July 9, 1789, \textit{Letters of Anna Seward: Written between the Years 1784 and 1807}, vol. 2 (Edinburgh; London: George Ramsay; John Murray, 1811), 287.

Traditionally, Wordsworth has been recognized as the figure whose autobiographical poetry makes common life interesting and emotionally poignant.\textsuperscript{15} It has been claimed that “Wordsworthian lyric sincerity has defined romanticism implicitly or explicitly since the nineteenth century.”\textsuperscript{16} This chapter questions this critical commonplace by suggesting that Smith’s sonnets and her prefatory defences are connected to Wordsworth’s later theorizations of language and sincerity in *The Prelude* and his prose. I begin by outlining the literary strategies Smith used to court sympathetic familiarity and combat common, banal familiarity. I then examine the negative responses Smith received by asking how the historical context of the late eighteenth century shaped reactions to her pleas of authorial sincerity. I end by considering the affinities between Smith’s authorial strategies in *Elegiac Sonnets* and Wordsworth’s famous defences of his work.

In an age when sensibility was catching, making sure one’s own emotions were, in fact, one’s own was difficult. Displays of affection, despair, disgust, and a host of other strong emotions were sometimes seen as potential performances rather than spontaneous feelings. At its core, as Chris Jones has explained, sensibility “is a Janus-faced concept” because it at once “appeal[s] to unconditioned natural feelings” but at the same time acknowledges that these feelings can be cultivated and are “social construction[s].”\textsuperscript{17}

Writing of representations of sensibility in literature, Adela Pinch has similarly argued

\textsuperscript{15} Since the 1960s, Wordsworth has been celebrated as a poet of sincerity. For a brief account of the arc of scholarly interest in sincerity, see Angela Esterhammer, “The Scandal of Sincerity: Wordsworth, Byron, Landon,” in *Romanticism, Sincerity, and Authenticity*, ed. Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 101-05. While New Historicism critics, especially Marjorie Levinson, have reoriented and challenged Wordsworth’s professed sincerity, works such as *The Prelude* and “Tintern Abbey” remain the standards of sincere autobiographical poetry in the Romantic period.


that, on one hand, authors “assert that feelings are personal, that they have origins in an individual’s experience and are authenticated by their individuality. On the other hand they reveal that feelings may be impersonal; that one’s feelings may really be someone else’s; that feelings may be purely conventional, or have no discernible origins.”

Both Smith and Wordsworth attempt to balance originality with a tendency to express emotion in familiar and repetitive language. This chapter asserts new connections between these two authors and challenges the uniqueness of Wordsworth’s literary strategies and his defences of them. Examining the role of repetition in assigning familiarity’s opposing valences, I interrogate how and why Wordsworth has been seen, from Matthew Arnold onward, as the poet who “make[s] us feel” while Smith has been the poet who merely offers us a “perpetual dun on pity.”

Charlotte Smith and the Sentimental Type

In 1797 the second volume of the new edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* was released. Smith was 48 years old and in financial trouble. Her notoriously bad marriage to Benjamin Smith and their separation had left her in precarious financial circumstances. Her father-in-law’s estate, which had been left to her children rather than to her husband, had been in litigation for more than twenty years. It was common knowledge that Smith wrote for money, and her correspondence reveals the extent to which her literary pursuits

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sometimes seemed like obligations. For example, in September 1790 she wrote to her publisher, Thomas Cadell, “I am extremely sick of my trade and am very anxious to leave it off. When ever my Childrens affairs are settled, I shall not need it for them & have at all events an independence for myself.”

Her poems, like a silversmith’s wares, were produced to be sold. And produce she did. Smith authored multiple volumes of poetry, several children’s books, and almost a dozen novels before her death in 1806.

Critics initially praised her work, especially the sensibility of her sonnets. A characteristic review described *Elegiac Sonnets* as a “small but valuable collection of poems, which breathe[s] the genuine spirit of pathos and of poetry.” Smith’s poems openly shared her sorrows and encouraged readers’ sympathy as well as their desire to purchase copies of the collection. However, the popularity of the early editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* was not without problems, and eventually the critical tide began to turn. Critics voiced concerns about the commercial aspects of Smith’s literary career. She made close to a thousand pounds from the various editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, and her market success became a liability.

One thinks of Bourdieu’s assertion that in the literary world authenticity is often demonstrated “by the fact that it brings in no income.” Binaries between high and low literature and between commercial and literary pursuits made blatant attempts to earn money the dirty underbelly of literary production. We can think here of the implicit commercial contrast Wordsworth asserts between the frantic novels

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23 It is interesting to note that Smith’s career as a novelist was even more profitable. She made more than £2500 from her novels. For a detailed account of Smith’s finances, see Judith Phillips Stanton, “Charlotte Smith's ‘Literary Business’: Income, Patronage, and Indigence,” *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Journal* 1 (1987): 375-401, especially 391-94.
he criticized and his own poetry. Like a witch trial in which innocence is only proven by death, Smith’s success seemed only to confirm allegations that her sonnets were insincere and that she falsely attracted public sympathy for financial gain. Specifically, she was accused of stealing her subscribers’ money. There was a three-year delay between the solicitation for subscriptions and the publication of the second volume of the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*. This delay led some to suspect Smith of “a design to accumulate [income], by gathering subscriptions for a work” she “never meant to publish.”

According to some critics, Smith’s repeated use of the same literary strategies—prefatory appeals to the public, increasingly unmasked references to her fraught personal life, extensive allusions to and direct quotations of other authors, ventriloquization of fictional characters, and the consistent melancholy strain of her writing—eventually undermined the emotional power of her work. An early reviewer of *Elegiac Sonnets* noted that all of Smith’s poems “contain[ed] a single sentiment.” Similarly one review of the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* noted “a want of variety” in Smith’s images. Her works’ quotations and literary allusions heightened debates about the originality and, by extension, the emotional authenticity of her sonnets. Smith’s foray into fiction seemed to support the idea that her works and the autobiographical information they offered were motivated primarily by money. For instance, reviews of her novel *Ethelinde* (1789)

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25 Though we must also not forget that *Lyrical Ballads* was partially a money-making venture to fund at trip to Germany for the Wordsworths and Coleridge.
26 Smith, Preface to volume II of *Elegiac Sonnets*, 8.
lamented Smith’s inability to resist the “pecuniary temptation” of writing works “for the dangerous amusement of love-sick boys, and the delusion of boarding-school misses.”

In short, it became unclear whether what one reviewer termed Smith’s “wild melody of elegiac woe” should evoke pity or ridicule. The shifting critical responses to *Elegiac Sonnets* suggest how difficult it was to convey familiarity in literary works.

By the end of the eighteenth century, readers’ knowledge of the poet’s life was integral to the consumption and reception of the author’s work. As the relationship between literary text and lived life grew increasingly important so too did the emphasis on authorial authenticity. One major problem for Smith was that even from the start her life seemed to be a familiar story. Smith was a recognizable type: a sentimental heroine. In her works she sought to align herself with established archetypes of female suffering. Melissa Sodeman argues that “Smith’s rehearsal of a biography of constraint and grinding poverty—so common among women writers of her day—suggests not only that she understood her situation as structurally determined, but that she recognized how the emulative quality of her own biography rendered her experience a kind of imitation.”

Moreover, the sentimental heroines of her novels were also read as autobiographical portraits, and her blending of fact and fiction provoked critics’ ire. A review of Smith’s work in *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* in 1798 claimed that her repeated “desire of obtruding on the public her own private history has given a sameness to her

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29 Review of *Ethelinde* from *Biographical and Imperial Magazine*, in *Romantic Women Writers Reviewed*, 2:293.
30 Ibid.
31 See, for example, Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s* and North, *The Domestication of Genius*.
According to critics, her repetitive autobiographical writing made her banal and predictable.

Smith’s choice of genre in *Elegiac Sonnets* heightened links between her life and work. Daniel E. White has suggested that one touchstone of elegiac poetry is its representation of “the poet’s hidden biography as the source of his [or her] alienation, and therefore as the source of his [or her] poetic meaning.” Thus, in elegy the “intertextual relationship between literary production and lived experience” is integral to poetic power. Problems arise, however, when that relationship appears to break down. If we believe Burke’s claim that “we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others,” then it seems logical that we feel betrayed when “real misfortunes” turn out to be fictional.

Smith faced criticisms that, in addition to creating the autobiographical heroines of her novels, she created “Charlotte Smith.” All writers create personae; however, distinctions between Smith and her sonnets’ speakers present unique challenges. In *Elegiac Sonnets*, ventriloquized sonnets—particularly those in the voice of Goethe’s famous sentimental hero Werther—exist alongside poems that are almost aggressively autobiographical. “Charlotte Smith,” I suggest, became a dramatic mouthpiece just as “Werter” was. Smith’s ventriloquized sonnets prefigure later poetesses’ autobiographically-charged dramatic monologues. Recognizing the way Smith’s ventriloquism works allows us to see more completely the extent of her literary

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35 Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 42.
36 Smith refers to Goethe’s hero as “Werter” rather than “Werther.” I have chosen to adopt Smith’s spelling of the name when referring to her particular use of the character, though I use “Werther” to refer more generally to Goethe’s character.
These ventriloquized sonnets represent a mediation of her own voice, and we can extend considerations of mediation and repetition and ask to what extent does Smith—especially in later editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*—ventriloquize herself? How do the Werter sonnets establish the idea of ventriloquism that applies to the entire collection? Recognizing the dramatic nature of the poems helps us get beyond the trap of tracing autobiographical reference in Smith’s work. I have little interest in estimating Smith’s emotional authenticity. Rather, I am concerned with historicizing her supposed sincerity.

**Writing Werter, Echoing Smith**

While the majority of the poems in *Elegiac Sonnets* seem to be in Smith’s autobiographical voice, the collection also includes five poems voiced by Werter. In the sixth edition Smith also included four sonnets from Petrarch and one from Metastasio, an eighteenth-century Italian poet, and other ventriloquized poems appear throughout the collection. Sonnet XII “Written on the sea Shore.—October, 1784,” for instance, alludes to Zanga’s soliloquy in Edward Young’s tragedy *The Revenge*. In some ways, Smith’s use of other voices aligns her with the ventriloquizing tendencies of the sonnet sequence.

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37 The autobiographical elements of Felicia Hemans’s “Properzia Rossi,” for example, owe much to Smith’s sonnets. Like Smith, Hemans seemingly ventriloquizes the voice of Properzia Rossi in order to address some of her own difficulties as a professional female poet. Similarly, “The Grave of the Poetess”, while ostensibly about Mary Tighe, seems to offer autobiographical reflections about Hemans’s future death and afterlife. As Paul Westover has noted, “The Grave of the Poetess” has multiple (and autobiographical) layers of ventriloquized voices. Paul Westover, “Imaginary Pilgrimages: Felicia Hemans, Dead Poets, and Romantic Historiography,” *Literature Compass* 2 (2005): 1-15.

38 For Jacqueline Labbe the question is not whether sincerity animates Smith and Wordsworth’s works “but whether the two poets are at the mercy of sincerity’s inherent insincerity, or whether they play with this tension.” See Labbe, “Revisiting the Egotistical Sublime,” 19. My work differs from Labbe’s because I am less interested in establishing Smith or Wordsworth’s connections to Victorian poets, and more focused on exploring their connections to the cultural trope of familiarity in the Romantic period.
and Romantic literature in general.\textsuperscript{39} Adela Pinch has gone so far as to describe Smith’s sonnets as “echo chambers, in which reverberate direct quotations, ideas, and tropes from English Poetry.”\textsuperscript{40} Pinch suggests that, from one perspective, quotation and ventriloquism legitimize Smith’s emotions by showing her knowledge of standard literary tropes of emotional expression. However, literary allusions are not without problems.

The contradictory aspects of quotation and allusion have been pointedly summarized by John Hollander, who suggests that while allusions can be seen as a “set of credentials, like watermarks on paper, of the creative presence of an informed will” they can also be viewed “as props to the infirmities of unoriginality.”\textsuperscript{41} Concerns about sensibility at the end of the eighteenth century only intensified the potentially dangerous conventionality of Smith’s allusions to familiar literary figures. According to its detractors, sensibility lent itself to affectation and insincerity.\textsuperscript{42} Esther Schor’s work on the reflexivity of the elegiac tradition is helpful here in understanding the conflicting discourses about sincerity and sensibility with which Smith had to contend. On the one hand, Adam Smith’s moral philosophy asserted that self-reflexivity was a necessary component for both sympathy and, by extension, emotional sincerity. Summarizing Adam Smith’s arguments, Schor explains, “The aggrieved individual, in order to secure the comfort of another’s sympathy, imagines himself in the situation of the onlooker, an

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesub{39} Curran notes that Smith’s poems emphasise “again and again that she belongs to a long tradition of singers and that her poems transmit a number of ventriloquized voices.” Curran, Introduction to Poems, xxvi.
\footnotesub{40} Pinch, Strange Fits of Passion, 60.
\footnotesub{41} John Hollander, The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 72.
\end{footnotesize}
act that mutes his passion.” On the other hand, the mitigation of one’s emotions and the self-reflexivity necessary to temper them implicitly presents emotion as performative.

Critics of sensibility were quick to accuse authors of exploiting public sympathy. These authors and their disingenuous works could, it was argued, be recognized by the very same self-awareness that Adam Smith deemed necessary for sympathy. For example, in his *Criticism on the Elegy in a Country Church Yard* (1783), John Young claims that sincere sorrow “asks for no prompting. It comes without a call. It courts not admiration. It presses not on the general eye; but hastens under covert, and wails its widowhood alone […] it remains close curtained; unfeeling, unseen. Delicacy and taste recoil at the publications of internal griefs.”  

The spontaneity of emotion that Young values seems to preclude the type of reflexive, tempered emotional sincerity that Adam Smith praises. Concerns about the appropriateness of authors’ feelings (and the quotations an author might use to express them) quickly became questions about “whether their feelings are authentic or false.” Charlotte Smith’s use of other voices encouraged questions about the authenticity of her emotions and evoked larger fears about the contagion of sensibility in the late-eighteenth century. Just as familiarity could easily become over-familiarity, so too could literary allusions easily appear tired and predictable when repeated frequently.

One place in *Elegiac Sonnets* where Smith’s poems’ intertextuality is particularly significant is in her Werter sequence. These five sonnets represent her most obvious and acknowledged literary debts in the collection. The Werter-voiced sonnets accomplish at

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45 Hollander, *The Figure of Echo*, 4.
least three things. First, they place Smith in a tradition of the sentimental hero. The hero of Goethe’s novel was so popular that Werther became “a household name in literate England” by the end of the eighteenth century. Second, they also allow Smith to objectify her emotions by vocalizing them through another writer’s fictional hero. Werter seems to offer Smith a distanced approach to her own emotions so that ventriloquization represents a coping strategy for her own heightened sensibility. Third, the Werter sonnets introduce the idea that that ventriloquism in *Elegiac Sonnets* extends beyond these five sonnets. Smith’s associations with Goethe’s character raise the possibility that she was perhaps too skilled at adopting, or even parroting, similar sorrowful stances. In terms of tone, theme, and diction, only the titles of the Werter sonnets set them apart from the other pieces in the collection. Distinctions between Smith and Werter and, therefore, between fiction and authentic autobiographical emotion, are blurred in these five poems. By extension, these distinctions are blurred throughout the entire collection. Smith seems to recycle sentiments and literary allusions alike.

Echoes between the Werter-voiced sonnets and others in which Smith herself seems to be the speaker abound in *Elegiac Sonnets*. These echoes, which often take the form of shared literary allusions to an external source, create strong links between Smith’s voice and Werter’s. References to mythology and quotations from popular poets such as Alexander Pope and Thomas Gray are often present in Smith’s sonnets.

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47 Anne Myers also points to several of these similarities between the Werter sonnets and others in *Elegiac Sonnets*; however, she suggests that the allusions serve to establish “a contrast between Werther and her female speaker.” I believe the effect of these allusions ultimately results in connections rather than the formation of gendered contrasts. Anne Myers, “Charlotte Smith’s Androgynous Sonnets,” *European Romantic Review* 13, no. 4 (2002): 380.
One example can be found in the first Werter-voiced poem, “Supposed to be written by Werter.” The poem’s focus on thorns alludes to the Philomel myth:

Like the poor maniac I linger here,
Still haunt the scene where all my treasure lies;
Still seek for flowers where only thorns appear,
“And drink delicious poison from her eyes!”

In addition to the allusion to the nightingale, Smith quotes Pope’s “Eloisa to Abelard”—a literary debt she records with quotation marks and a note. However, Smith’s allusions extend beyond mythology and literary figures such as Shakespeare, Milton, Pope and Gray. Werter’s speech is indebted to another poet: Smith.

“Supposed to be written by Werter” alludes to two earlier poems in the collection: the opening sonnet “The partial Muse has from my earliest hours” and “To hope.” Like the Werter sonnet quoted above, both these sonnets focus on painful images of thorns. In “The partial Muse has from my earliest hours,” the speaker claims that while the Muse “decks the head with many a rose,” she “Reserves the thorn to fester in the heart.”

Similarly, in “To hope,” the speaker asks hope to “renew the wither’d rose, / And clear my painful path of pointed thorn.” Beyond thorns, “The partial Muse has from my earliest hours” shares another important similarity with “Supposed to be written by Werter”; it alludes directly to Pope’s “Eloisa to Abelard.” Describing the pain that allows her to write so well, the speaker laments, “Ah! then, how dear the Muse’s favours cost / If those paint sorrow best—who feel it most!”

Smith uses italics along with a note to

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48 Smith, “Sonnet XXI, Supposed to be written by Werter,” 26, lines 5-8.
49 Smith, “Sonnet I, The partial Muse has from my earliest hours,” 13, lines 7-8.
50 Smith, “Sonnet VI, To hope,” 16, lines 3-4.
51 Smith, “Sonnet I, The partial Muse has from my earliest hours,” 13, lines 13-14.
highlight her indebtedness to Pope’s poem. The three poems—two voiced by Smith and the other by Werter—are linked to each other through connections to other sources. Such literary references point beyond Smith’s volume while simultaneously emphasizing links within it. Both Werter’s and Smith’s borrowing result in an emotionally expressive tangle of allusion and ventriloquism. The most important intertext here is neither the Philomel myth nor Pope’s poem but Smith’s own sonnets. Borrowing from great poets such as Pope or Gray, she also borrows from herself so that literary allusions are in fact self-referential allusions. In the Werter sonnets, Smith quotes herself quoting.

My emphasis here differs from the work of scholars like Pinch and White, as well as Smith’s contemporary critics like Anna Seward, who have all focused on Smith’s indebtedness to other writers. My views on the way Smith’s quotations work are more aligned with Sodeman, who has suggested that “rather than providing a window into greater literary context, Smith’s quotation acts as a citation of the literary that excludes and is exiled from its own literariness.” However, I argue that Smith’s intertextuality does not represent exile from but rather entry into “the literary.” By alluding to herself in allusions to Pope, Smith implicitly asserts her place alongside the great poets whom she quotes. Smith’s self-quotations enact the type of auto-canonicalization that has been more often associated with later female poets. Quotation establishes connections between Smith and her poetic predecessors, exemplifying the credentialing aspects of allusion. Through repeated re-quotation, the sonnets simultaneously participate in and bypass literary tradition. Smith’s quotations subvert the straightforward literariness of her poems.

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52 See especially Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion*, 60.
53 Sodeman, “Charlotte Smith’s Literary Exile,” 145.
54 Paul Westover, for example, has shown how highly intertextual poems like “The Grave of the Poetess” demonstrate Hemans’s attempt to historicize her own future death in an attempt to establish her canonicity pre-emptively. See, “Imaginary Pilgrimages,” 6-8.
and the derivative aspects of sensibility. The poems themselves—especially the first and second editions, which did not include notes acknowledging Smith’s borrowings—seem to allude to each other rather than their original, external literary sources.\textsuperscript{55} Repeated literary allusions transform into self-quotation.

The two sonnets that share the strongest connections are “To the moon” and the third poem in the Werter sequence, “By the same. To the North Star.”\textsuperscript{56} The poems’ shared thematic and verbal links become apparent when they are read together:

\begin{verbatim}
To the moon
Queen of the silver bow!—by thy pale beam,
   Alone and pensive, I delight to stray,
And watch thy shadow trembling in the stream,
   Or mark the floating clouds that cross thy way.
And while I gaze, thy mild and placid light
   Sheds a soft calm upon my troubled breast;
And oft I think—fair planet of the night,
   That in thy orb, the wretched may have rest:
The sufferers of the earth perhaps may go,
   Released by death—to thy benignant sphere;
And the sad children of Despair and Woe
   Forget, in thee, their cup of sorrow here.
Oh! that I soon may reach thy world serene,
   Poor wearied pilgrim—in this toiling scene!

By the same. To the North Star
To thy bright beams I turn my swimming eyes,
   Fair, fav’rite planet! which in happier days
Saw my young hopes, ah! faithless hopes!—arise,
   And on my passion shed propitious rays!
Now nightly wandering ’mid the tempests drear
   That howl the woods and rocky steeps among,
I love to see thy sudden light appear
   Thro’ the swift clouds—driven by the wind along;
Or in the turbid water, rude and dark,
   O’er whose wild stream the gust of Winter raves,
Thy trembling light with pleasure still I mark,
   Gleam in faint radiance on the foaming waves!
So o’er my soul short rays of reason fly,
   Then fade:—and leave me to despair, and die!
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{55} Beginning with the third edition, Smith added notes to the collection. “As a few notes were necessary,” she explains in the Preface, “I have added them at the end. I have there quoted such lines as I have borrowed.” However, these notes are at the end of the volume and were absent from early editions of \textit{Elegiac Sonnets}, an omission for which she was criticized. Smith, Preface to the Third and Fourth Editions of \textit{Elegiac Sonnets}, 4.

\textsuperscript{56} Smith, “Sonnet IV, To the Moon,” 15, lines 1-14 and “Sonnet XXIII, By the same. To the North Star,” 28, lines 1-14.
Both poems are predicated on the image of the speaker looking to an object in the night sky for guidance. Myers explains that for Smith’s Werter the North Star “becomes the parallel of the moon for the female narrator” in her female-voiced sonnet “To the Moon.” The central image in each poem is heightened by the similar diction used to describe it. The “fair planet of the night” in “To the moon” becomes the “Fair, fav’rite planet!” in the Werter-voiced sonnet.

The two sonnets are not direct reflections of each other; the Werter-voiced sonnet focuses more on emotional chaos whereas the female-voiced piece focuses more on placidity. However, both poems embrace death, and suicide is a significant trope in the collection. For example, in “To the South Down” the speaker looks upon death as the only outlet. The sonnet’s closing couplet reads: “Ah! no!—when all, e’en Hope’s last ray is gone, / There’s no oblivion—but in death alone!” The punctuated anguish of this passage aligns the poem closely with Werter’s suicidal exclamations. The Werter-voiced sonnet’s final lines are similarly broken: “So o’er my soul short rays of reason fly / Then fade:—and leave me to despair, and die!” In “To the Moon” and “To the South Downs,” nature is not as comforting as it first appears.

In some ways Werter’s death offers the clearest answer to his sorrow. His suicide both proves the authenticity of his despair and limits his own emotional repetition. Myers sees his suicide as a failing, a loss of reason that Smith does not allow the female speakers of her poems to experience. Myers claims that “Werther’s escape from his pain,

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57 Myers, “Charlotte Smith’s Androgynous Sonnets,” 380.
58 For an alternative reading of death in the collection, see Myers, “Charlotte Smith’s Androgynous Sonnets,” 380.
60 Smith, “Sonnet XXIII, By the same. To the North Star,” 28, lines 13-14.
however, occurs not through imagination or figurative transformation.”

But do Smith’s autobiographical female speakers enjoy a mode of escape that Werter does not? The repetitive sentiments in the collection suggest the speaker’s inability to enact any escape, figurative or otherwise. Thus, like Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner, she is compelled to relive and retell. She remains caught in her own narration. Like the nightingale that sings the same song again and again with its breast against the thorn, both Smith and the Mariner seem damned by their own modes of expression. And just as the Mariner’s claim that “He prayeth best, who loveth best / All things both great and small” remains an uneasy consolation for both his past experiences and his hellish punishment to retell them, so too does Smith’s half-hearted hopefulness seem just that—half-hearted.  

Smith’s work, then, became familiar on multiple levels. Most obviously, her familiarity took the shape of predictability and conventionality. She repeatedly uses the same sonnet forms. She repeatedly draws from other poets, so much so that Anna Seward accused her of plagiarism. Seward describes “Mrs C. Smith’s everlasting lamentables, which she calls sonnets, made up of hackneyed scraps of dismality, with which her memory furnished her from our various poets. Never were poetical whipt syllabubs, in black glasses, so eagerly swallowed by the odd taste of the public.” While the records left by Smith’s readers are sparse, the consistently high sales of *Elegiac Sonnets* validate Seward’s claims that many readers were eager to swallow what Smith wrote, familiar as it may have become later in her career. Critics, though, seem to have largely agreed with Seward’s assessment of the repetitive elements of Smith’s work. From Seward’s

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61 Myers, “Charlotte Smith’s Androgynous Sonnets,” 382.
perspective, the public’s seeming endorsement of Smith’s sonnets through their purchases of her “everlasting lamentables” represents one of the main challenges of the rapidly expanding print market at the turn of the century. While the public may have been fooled, critics like Seward believed that Smith’s familiar retellings of her life story grew more inauthentic and repetitive. It is this repetition of sorrow to which I now turn.

**From Familiar to Formulaic**

Bishop C. Hunt has suggested that both Smith’s and Coleridge’s poems are imbued with a similar melancholic turn. “The central theme of the _Elegiac Sonnets,_” Hunt explains, “is the gradual loss of what Coleridge calls the ‘shaping spirit of imagination.’”

We might do well to modify Hunt’s observations; the main difference between Smith and Coleridge (as well as Smith and Wordsworth) that I see is one of shifting and development. There is no gradual loss of hope or imagination in Smith’s case but a reiteration of its absence. Smith’s decline, unlike Coleridge’s despair in “Dejection: An Ode” or Wordsworth’s doubt in the early books of _The Prelude_, is not a progressive loss but a constant one.

Smith draws attention to the absence of emotional development in _Elegiac Sonnets_. While White and others have explored Smith’s relationship to the sonnet

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65 Even when _The Prelude_ shifts to lamentation, Wordsworth presents suffering as a condition of change. Though change can be painful, it still represents the possibility of growth. For instance, in Book XI of _The Prelude_ Wordsworth describes his relationship with nature after his moral crisis of 1796:

> And yet this passion, fervent as it was,
> Had suffered change; how could there fail to be
> Some change, if merely hence, that years of life
> Were going on, and with them loss or gain
> Inevitable, sure alternative?
> (11. 37-41)

At the most basic level Wordsworth points to a temporal change that implicitly instigates an emotional change.
sequence tradition, *Elegiac Sonnets* is notable for its lack of sequential force. Unlike Philip Sidney’s sonnet sequence shaped by the narrative thrust of the lovelorn Astrophil’s desire, Smith’s sonnets offer a non-narrative of sorrow. The collection is both disparate and relatively stagnant at the same time. As Susan Rosenbaum claims, *Elegiac Sonnets* “is not a progressive narrative of a poet’s growth, like *The Prelude*, but rather the repetition or piling up of her losses […] In negating the possibility of future change or movement in her sonnets, Smith upsets narratives of human progress and religious salvation.” Without the prospect of healing or the finality of death offered by Werter’s suicide “experience loses all shape, initiative loses its point of application, and time becomes a strange vacuum […] Without the promise of evolution, time is pared down to an iterative stutter, proceeding rather than progressing.” *Elegiac Sonnets* repeats the same subject position across different poems. Smith repeatedly emphasizes her unwavering sadness, indicating her knowledge that her poems may be interpreted negatively. In the preface to the sixth edition, for example, she apologizes for her “apparent despondence, which, when it is observed for a long series of years, may look like affectation.” Smith attempts to refute charges of inauthenticity by acknowledging them. The emotional consistency of her sonnets, she claims, proves their emotional authenticity.

Initial responses to her poems celebrated the emotional repetition of *Elegiac Sonnets*. In 1786, at least three sonnets addressed to Smith were published in newspapers and periodicals. “Sonnet To Mrs. Smith on Reading Her Sonnets Lately Published” by

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“D.” praises the “plaintive eloquence” of Smith’s poetry. More importantly, this sonnet to Smith repeats her claims that her sorrow cannot be permanently alleviated. Smith’s grief, “D.” claims, is one that neither “time nor hope can heal”:

Oh! could or fame, or friendship, aught impart
To cure the cruel wounds thy peace has known
For others sorrows, still thy tender heart
Should softly melt; —but never for thine own!
Till pitying all—and ev’n thy foes forgiven,

*Thy candid spirit*—seeks its native heaven.70

“D.” asserts a familiar connection with Smith. In doing so “D.” aligns her/himself with “the few” readers who possess “sensibility of the heart,” which Smith imagines in her first preface to *Elegiac Sonnets*.71 Despite the sympathy and apparent friendship that “D.” offers, the poem ultimately reiterates what Smith’s sonnets say: there is no lasting hope but in death. While such mournful celebrations of and identifications with Smith’s plight were not uncommon, they began to decrease as the poet produced more editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*.72 When viewed negatively, emotional consistency can look like formulaic feeling.

The autobiographical nature of Smith’s novels intensified accusations that she wrote formulaically about herself and her emotions. Smith repeatedly wrote autobiographical works, effectively “framing each new work within the narrative

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70 “D.,” “Sonnet To Mrs. Smith on Reading Her Sonnets Lately Published,” *The European Magazine* 9 (May 1786): 366. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online.*
71 Smith, Preface to the First and Second Editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, 3.
72 For more on sonnets written to Smith by her readers, see Claire Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition, 1780-1860: The Legacy of Charlotte Smith* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 57-67.
repeated in the prefaces to her poems and novels.”73 Two examples of autobiographical characters can be found in Mrs. Stafford and Lady Adelina from Smith’s novel, *Emmeline* (1788), published four years after the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*. Like Smith, Mrs. Stafford and Adelina were married young to debauched, wealthy men who squandered their fortunes. Mrs. Stafford attempts to help her husband’s financial problems and is frequently concerned about her children’s futures. By eighteenth-century standards Adelina’s behaviour is more morally problematic because she bears a child out of wedlock. Yet even after her husband’s death, Adelina refuses to marry her lover, Colonel Fitz-William, making them both miserable. Throughout the novel Adelina moves from despair to despair, bemoaning her fallen status, her fears that Fitz-William has forsaken her, and her realization that propriety makes reconciliation with her lover unlikely. The novel’s titular character praises Adelina’s refusal to marry Fitz-William, but critics, specifically Mary Wollstonecraft, found something disturbingly selfish in Adelina’s behaviour. Wollstonecraft’s review of *Emmeline* in *The Analytical Review* describes Adelina as “a character as absurd as dangerous.” “Despair is not repentance,” Wollstonecraft explains,

nor is contrition of any use when it does not serve to strengthen resolutions of amendment. The being who indulges useless sorrow, instead of filling the duties of life, may claim our pity, but should never excite admiration […] indeed this kind of sorrow is rather the offspring of

romantic notions and false refinement, than of sensibility and a nice sense of duty.\textsuperscript{74}

Wollstonecraft argues that passive despair only leads to a cycle of indulgent sorrow, which fails to ameliorate or improve one’s circumstances.

Wollstonecraft’s criticisms can be applied to the repetitive mourning found in much of Smith’s poetry. The consistent despair found in \textit{Elegiac Sonnets} left Smith open to the criticism that she, like Adelina, overindulged her sorrow. Smith’s prefaces to \textit{Elegiac Sonnets} demonstrate awareness that her sorrow might be seen as overindulgent or indicative of the “false refinement” that Wollstonecraft saw. In the preface to the sixth edition Smith relates a dialogue she had with an unnamed friend, claiming, “I wrote mournfully [then] because I was unhappy—And I have unfortunately no reason yet, though nine years have since elapsed, to \textit{change my tone}.”\textsuperscript{75} Smith offers her consistent despair as a sign of her emotional sincerity.

The sonnets themselves suggest that repetitive emotions are sincere emotions. Smith conveys the message that sincerity is naturally repetitive by declaring her unsuccessful attempts to be \textit{insincere}. For example, in “To Fancy” and “To Mrs. ****” Smith asserts a desire to imagine herself out of her sorrow:

\begin{quote}
Thee, Queen of Shadows!—shall I still invoke,
Still love the scenes thy sportive pencil drew,
When on mine eyes the early radiance broke
Which shew’d the beauteous rather than the true!
Alas! long since those glowing tints are dead,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{74} [Mary Wollstonecraft], Review of \textit{Emmeline}, in \textit{The Analytical Review} (July 1788), in \textit{Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle}, ed. Loraine Fletcher (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003), 480.

\textsuperscript{75} Smith, Preface to the Sixth Edition of \textit{Elegiac Sonnets},” 5.
And now 'tis thine in darkest hues to dress
The spot where pale Experience hangs her head
O'er the sad grave of murder'd Happiness!
Thro' thy false medium, then, no longer view'd,
May fancied pain and fancied pleasure fly,
And I, as from me all thy dreams depart,
Be to my wayward destiny subdued:
Nor seek perfection with a poet's eye,
Nor suffer anguish with a poet's heart!\(^{76}\)

Smith's repeated appeals to fancy are testaments of her own failed falsehood. The repetition of "still" indicates that this is not the first time she has invoked the "Queen of Shadows." The sonnet contrasts the beautiful with the sobering darkness of reality, indicating that beauteous things are, in Smith's case, untrue and false. Fancy, much like nature, offers little consolation for Smith. "[M]urder'd happiness" has seemingly also killed her connection to forms of pleasant, productive fancy.

Smith's rejection of the "false medium" of fancy—a connection one might assume necessary for a poet—also distances her from professional authorship. The final lines of the poem denounce Smith's role as a poet, and she claims she will no longer "seek perfection with a poet's eye, / Nor suffer anguish with a poet's heart!" At once praising the poet's unique ability to recognize beauty and feel intensely, Smith claims she no longer has this power. Yet in abandoning fancy Smith offers her readers (if not herself) recompense: sincerity. She reframes her seemingly stagnant subjectivity in terms of failure—failure not only to be happy but a failure to produce more interesting poems.

\(^{76}\) Smith, "Sonnet XLVII, To fancy," 44, lines 1-14.
Like Wordsworth, who in the Advertisement and Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* so flagrantly renounces his poetic heritage, Smith distances herself from the normative expectations associated with the professional poet. In the Preface Wordsworth asserts that his desire to write in “the language of men […] has necessarily cut” him “off from a large portion of phrases and figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets.” Calling attention to the ways in which his poetry will not meet his readers’ expectations and traditional notions of poetic diction, Wordsworth asserts the sincerity of his own common language. Similarly, emphasizing her inability to write emotionally diverse poems, Smith declares the authenticity of her monotonous melancholy strain.

The idea that failure produces sincerity is also clear in “To Mrs. ****,” in which Smith claims ultimate defeat:

No more my wearied soul attempts to stray

From sad reality and vain regret,

Nor courts enchanting Fiction to allay

Sorrows that Sense refuses to forget:

For of Calamity so long the prey,

Imagination now has lost her powers,

Nor will her fairy loom again essay

To dress Affliction in a robe of flowers.78

As with “To Fancy,” “To Mrs. ****” denies fictionalized sentiments by calling attention to her desire for them. The consistency of Smith’s sorrows, the poem suggests, has made

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77 Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 178.
78 Smith, “Sonnet XLVII, To Mrs. ****,” 45, lines 1-8.
it impossible for her “wearied soul” to even attempt “to stray” beyond the doleful limits of her sorry situation. The poem figures imagination and fancy as useful and pleasant tools, but tools that are useless for Smith.79

The idea that creative failure is a sign of emotional constancy is similarly presented in “To Miss C—on being desired to attempt writing a comedy”:

Would’st thou then have me tempt the comic scene
Of gay Thalia? used so long to tread
The gloomy paths of Sorrow’s cypress shade;
And the lorn lay with sighs and tears to stain?
Alas! how unfit her sprightly vein,
Arduous to try!80

Once again Smith expresses her inability to write poetry that does not reflect her mood. Comedy becomes unthinkable. It would not only be disingenuous but also impossible. While Smith asserts that her consistency signals her sincerity, it also ran the risk of seeming boring. Smith might have, to borrow Joanna Baillie’s term, overestimated her critics’ and readers’ sustained “sympathetic curiosity.”81 Subsequent editions of Elegiac Sonnets seem to offer little emotional novelty. Smith became an eolian harp with a single, sorrowful string. Smith’s repetition raises pressing questions: How can one write in the same mode without becoming predictable? How can one have an increasingly large

79 Schor reads Smith’s failure differently. She argues that in this poem and others “Smith’s sense of rhetorical failure is a displacement of her failure to move her well-placed friends to ameliorate her situation: the continuing oppression of enforced dependence on the husband whose livelihood, in fact, depended on her earnings.” Schor, Bearing the Dead, 64. The connection Schor makes between the failure of fancy in the poems and Smith’s failure to overcome her financial and legal difficulties differs from my own emphasis on Smith’s use of the rhetoric of failure to convey sincerity. My readings of the sonnets depend less on autobiographical links between Smith’s life and work than do Schor’s.

80 Smith, “Sonnet XXIX, To Miss C—on being desired to attempt writing a comedy,” 32, lines 1-6.

audience of intimate familiars without becoming commonplace? And how can one live one’s life and express one’s experience when that life and that experience sound like everyone else’s?

**Authorial Intent and Prefatory Defences**

For Romantic authors intent and authenticity were intertwined. By extension, intent became tied with concerns about the commercialization of literature. I have already suggested that Smith’s commercial authorship became a liability—especially when it seemed that later editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* offered little more than a few additional poems that were themselves often reprints of sonnets that had previously appeared in Smith’s novels. The growing mistrust of Smith’s intentions mirrors the increasing mistrust of personal testimony in legal cases at the end of the century.

Fears about authorial sincerity should be read alongside wider concerns about intention and criminality in the late-eighteenth century. Concerns about determining criminal intent were not far removed from anxieties about reading authorial intent. Contemporaneous with Smith’s sonnets and Wordsworth’s early poetry were the public, contentious trials of Warren Hastings as well as numerous treason trials against those who, according to prosecutors, imagined the King’s death. Thus, the criticisms Smith faced are more symptomatic of the period than has been acknowledged. Eighteenth-century trials and political debates promoted certain interpretative frameworks, which

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82 Hastings’s trial, especially in its early years, was at the forefront of public discourse. From newspaper reports and transcriptions of Burke’s speeches to satirical cartoons and raree shows, the trial was the most reported event in London. For information on the trial’s public, print, and theatrical circulation, see Daniel O’Quinn, *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1170-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 165-221. The most thorough examination of fears of regicide in the 1790s and their ideological and political relevance is John Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
encouraged readers to mistrust both political figures’ and authors’ assertions of innocence and virtuous intent.

Alexander Welsh has explained that throughout the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was an open “distrust [of] direct testimony.” According to prevailing understandings of circumstantial evidence defences could be co-opted by the prosecution as indicators of guilt. From the courtroom to the coffee house and parliament to the personal library, Romantic readers were interested in but inclined to question self-justification. The Romantics, according to Annette Cafarelli, often share[d] [Samuel] Johnson’s distrust of the subject’s own account as a reliable source of biographical information and impressions of character [...] [A]s autobiographies increasingly came to be printed (both by their authors and posthumously), they excited a greater skepticism, as might be expected in an era alert to the subjectivity of perception and what the mind might “half-create and what perceive.”

In Smith’s case, her insistence on her innocence fuelled criticisms against her sincerity.

How best to read sincerity and intention concerned literary critics and politicians alike. Edmund Burke’s arguments in favour of the admission of circumstantial evidence into the Hastings trial mark an important shift toward interpreting intent and action through an expanding sphere of admissible professional and private information. Though he was ultimately acquitted, Hastings’s trial is characteristic of a historical turning point

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84 Cafarelli, *Prose in the Age of Poets*, 23.
during which public figures’ private lives became central to public, political debates. Lionel Trilling has suggested that the revolutionary period witnessed “the troubled ambiguity of the personal life [...] What was private and unknown might be presumed to be subversive of the public good. From this presumption grew the preoccupation with sincerity, with the necessity of expressing and guaranteeing it to the public—sincerity required a rhetoric of avowal.” The challenges to Smith’s authenticity, then, are more centrally linked to Romantic-era political discourse than they may at first appear, and they indicate the pervasiveness of ideological debates that are often more closely tied to politics and moral philosophy.

The critical reception of *Elegiac Sonnets* offers an example of the double-bind of circumstantial evidence and the possibility that testaments of innocence could become incriminating. The circumstances of Smith’s life were used both by the poet—who cited her personal experiences to mitigate and answer the (potential) attacks of critics—and by her critics—who drew on the same evidence to bolster claims that her intentions were inauthentic. Thus, in her prefaces, Smith pointed to her financial hardship as proof that she was not “feigning sorrow.” However, her detractors pointed to those same circumstances to argue that she needed money and so wrote poems to exploit the public’s pity and their pocketbooks. Smith tried to present the circumstantial evidence in her favour and to prove her honest intentions. Her prefaces became more explicit in their

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85 This trend continued. Later in the Regency period, scandals surrounding George IV’s debauched lifestyle brought his private debts and, in 1820, his marriage to Queen Caroline into Parliamentary debate. Similarly, starting in 1809 the House of Commons addressed the Duke of York’s relationship with his kept mistress, Mary Anne Clarke, who sold military promotions through her influence with the Duke. Such public events made earlier beliefs in the separation between the domestic man and the public man much more difficult to endorse. See Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), especially 148-76.
87 Smith, Preface to Volume II of *Elegiac Sonnets*, 11.
references to her life, yet Smith’s explicitness strained the limits of familiarity. The more
details she divulged about her private life, the more she ran the risk of seeming
loathsomely forthright and overly-familiar. Kerry Sinanan and Tim Milnes have noted
that “increasingly urgent testimonies on behalf of sincerity have the curious effect of
unsettling it, in the same manner that stock can be undermined by overvaluation.” In a
political and legal climate that saw assertions of innocence as duplicitous, Smith’s
increasingly detailed defences of her sincerity were suspect.

Claire Knowles notes that Smith retained her propriety and her audience’s
curiosity by alluding to “her troubles in general terms.” She goes on to explain that
Smith’s “poetic performance of sensibility in Elegiac Sonnets is particularly effective
because it at once reveals and conceals the circumstances of the poet’s real life.” In
other words, by limiting the circumstances she revealed, Smith retained control over the
public circulation of her personal sorrow. Karen Weisman also frames Smith’s
engagement with the general and the specific in terms of the poet’s relationship with
nature rather than autobiography. “Her vagueness about her life,” Weisman writes, “gives
way to a concreteness in nature and leaves it there—that is, there in the landscape which
is named precisely in lieu of naming the original source of anguish, itself insistently
unknown.” But it is important to recall that in later editions of Elegiac Sonnets, Smith’s
vagueness largely disappears, and references to her pain are almost as concrete and
specific as references to landscape.

89 Knowles, Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition, 50.
90 Karen Weisman, “Form and Loss in Charlotte Smith’s Elegiac Sonnets” Wordsworth Circle 33, no. 1
Later editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* did much more revealing than concealing. What are hints at unhappiness in the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* become, in later editions, specific tirades against “the inhuman trustees” of her father-in-law’s estate who, according to Smith, kept possession of her children’s inheritance by “false and frivolous pretences.” Even before Smith’s antagonistic preface to the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets*, the paratextual discourses surrounding her poems (including Smith’s own novels and their prefaces) were used to complete the autobiographical blanks in the collection. For example, the preface to Smith’s novel *Desmond* (1792) references directly the financial circumstances that made it necessary for her to write rather than retreat to the private pleasures of domesticity. Smith justifies her professional authorship through explicit references to her family’s affairs “being most unhappily in the power of men who seem to exercise all these with impunity.” Unabashed references to her private, financial turmoil in her novels contextualized her sonnets’ often-vague descriptions of despondency, and they prefigure the explicit personal details revealed in the prefaces to the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets*.

In some ways Smith’s decision to reveal painful autobiographical information is in keeping with Adam Smith’s claim that sympathy requires specificity:

> General lamentations, which express nothing but the anguish of the sufferer, create rather a curiosity to enquire into his situation, along with some disposition to sympathize with him, than any actual sympathy that is very sensible. The first question which we ask is, What has befallen you? Till this be answered, though we are uneasy both from the vague idea of

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91 Smith, Preface to Volume II of *Elegiac Sonnets*, 8. As Curran notes, the preface to the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* was suppressed in subsequent reprintings of the volume in 1800. Curran, *Poems*, 6n.
his misfortune, and still more from torturing ourselves with conjectures about what it may be, yet our fellow-feeling is not very considerable.  

Charlotte Smith was in a difficult position. How much information was enough to encourage readers’ sympathy rather than their antipathy? Smith’s prefaces indicate her awareness that she might have been too explicit about her personal circumstances. In the preface to the first volume of the sixth edition she explains that she would be embarrassed were she “compelled to detail” the causes of her sorrow “more at length.” She goes on to assert, “I am well aware that for a woman—’The Post of Honour is a Private Station.’” Smith’s preface presents an implicit binary between sharing a secret—as one may choose to do with an intimate friend—and being forced into a public confession. Even before her detailed defence in the preface to the sixth edition, Smith had attempted to excuse her public autobiographical intrusions, claiming “friends, with partial indiscretion, have multiplied the [manuscript] copies [of Elegiac Sonnets] they procured […] till they found their way into the prints of the day in a mutilated state.” Elegiac Sonnets’ publication, she asserts, arose from a desire to correct the “mutilated” state of her poems rather than from a desire for fame or money. She implies that her friends’ “partial indiscretion” excuses the potential unfeminine indiscretion of publishing her poems.

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95 Smith, Preface to the First and Second Editions of Elegiac Sonnets, 3.
96 Smith, of course, evokes common tropes found in other eighteenth-century autobiographical works. For example, like Smith, George Whitefield’s Journal of a Voyage from London to Savannah “excuses its publication on the grounds that a surreptitious copy was previously published without the author’s consent […] The journal is paradoxically judged worthy of a large public audience if the author is excused from responsibility for its escape from his hands.” Nussbaum, The Autobiographical Subject, 27.
The sheer amount of detail that Smith provides complicates the binary between authorial choice and compulsion. In her prefaces, Smith goes to increasingly extensive lengths to convince her audience that her authorial intentions were noble and that her sad sonnets reveal authentic autobiographical sentiments. Her repetitive prefaces make “the idea of advertising that she really feels the feelings expressed in the poems seem gimmicky […] an idea invented to make her poems more valuable.”

Smith’s interest in the reception of her poems and their explicit relationship to her finances goes against the ideal of the authentic, disinterested author. Her last hope was to interest her readers.

Smith’s preface to volume II of the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* speaks directly to charges that she had failed to fulfil her obligations to her subscribers and readers. Importantly, these claims shift responsibility from herself to her readers. She explains, “[T]he present is not a time when the complaints of individuals against private wrong are likely to be listened to” but “so much has been said […] of the delay of this publication, that it becomes in some measure a matter of self-defence.”

Smith presents herself not only as a victim of depressing private circumstances but also the victim of professional critics who fail to take into account the personal suffering of which her poems speak. Misinterpretations of the publication’s delay, she explains, are “the least among the mortifications” to which Smith claims she has been subjected.

Smith justifies her actions by attacking those who doubted her:

> Let not the censors of literary productions, or the fastidious in private life, again reprove me for bringing forward “with querulous egotism,” the mention of myself, and the sorrows, of which the men, who have withheld

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97 Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion*, 60.
98 Smith, Preface to Volume II of *Elegiac Sonnets*, 8.
99 Ibid.
my family property, have been the occasion. Had they never so unjustly
possessed, and so shamelessly exercised the power of reducing me to
pecuniary distress, I should never, perhaps, have had occasion to ask the
consideration of the reader, or to deprecate the severity of the critic. 100

But who were these censors? To whose severity was Smith subjected?

Throughout this chapter I have been analyzing Smith’s response to her seemingly
numerous critics. Smith’s prefatory claims and contemporary accounts suggest that she
needed to be rescued from critics who, according to W. Hamilton Reid in 1790, had
“lately raised an outcry against the sonnets of Mrs. Smith.” 101 Much of our own critical
reception of Smith assumes that her aggressive defences in her prefaces respond to
equally aggressive reviews. There are some. Even those who appreciated her sonnets
recognized their repetitive nature. Many of the sonnets addressed to Smith that appeared
in periodicals at the end of the eighteenth century encourage her to write of something
other than melancholy. For example, “T.B.” urges Smith to “choose no more this sad
ungenial theme.” 102 Overall, though, the historical record of Smith’s negative reception is
not as robust as we may have suspected. It seems that the handful of Smith’s vocal
detractors, particularly Anna Seward, with whom scholars are most familiar may not, in
fact, be representative. If that’s the case, then why did Smith so frequently allude to her
critical failure? Do her prefaces counterattack critics who had not criticized her in the
first place? Why?

100 Ibid.
101 W. Hamilton Reid, “On the various Ideas of Poetical Excellence and Unlettered Genius” from Walker’s
102 T.B., “Elegiac Sonnet. To Charlotte Smith” from Biographical and Imperial Magazine, in Romantic
Women Writers Reviewed, 2:294.
Modelling her own failure created a sense of exclusivity for her audience. Smith’s sounding the call of attack and mounting what may be, in hindsight, a preemptive strike, brought scores of popular readers to her defence. Smith used the spectre of her critical failure to promote familiarity with her readers. Overstating negative criticism may have been a tactic to make her audience seem more intimate and discerning than it may in fact have been. Smith used her prefaces to divide readers into two categories: the sympathetic, welcoming public and the antagonistic, probing “censors of literary productions.”

Aligning “the public” with her “particular friends” in the preface to the third and fourth editions, Smith implies that she is supported by both equally and, therefore, conflates her general readers with her intimate circle of friends. Excluded from this sympathetic group are, of course, critics. Smith manages to extend the bounds of her familiarity beyond those whom she would have known personally.

Whether or not Smith’s emotions were authentic, we know that she banked on the marketability of personal revelations of pain and their ability to call her readers into her familiar circle. Her relations to her “friends,” her critics, and her subscribers demonstrate how she outlined multiple audiences explicitly in her prefaces and implicitly through the methods of her texts’ publications. Publication by subscription could work in two ways. On the one hand, it could function as a vestige of eighteenth-century patronage. On the other hand, subscription could be seen as a form of literary charity or even begging. As

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103 Smith, Preface to Volume II of *Elegiac Sonnets*, 8.

literary production became more connected to the capitalist marketplace, connections between authorship and beggary grew. As Daniel Hack suggests, “challenges await[ed]” authors “intent on charting a course between market exchange and begging.”

Hess also identifies the difficulties of the Romantic-era marketplace, asserting that authors had to construct their identities by “reject[ing] both patronage and the marketplace.”

Authorial appeals to the public’s pity have a long history, yet by the end of the eighteenth century “virtually everyone who discusses how writers should live rejects begging as a legitimate option.”

Smith viewed subscription negatively, explaining to her publishers in 1805 that she objected to “humbling” herself with another subscription edition. By 1805, Smith had humbled herself twice, publishing the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1789) and the first edition of the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797) by subscription. The humble nature of Smith’s subscription publications is evident in the low subscription price of half a guinea.

Smith’s preface to the first and second editions claims that her poems were originally penned privately for herself and distributed to her friends, whose sympathy we may infer was with Smith. Smith’s paratextual discourse divides her readers into public friends and harsh critics and allows readers who appreciate her sonnets to count

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107 Hack, *Material Interests*, 81. Wordsworth’s opinion of begging differs from Smith’s. He seems simultaneously to legitimize begging and authorship. For instance, “The Old Cumberland Beggar” forwards ideological arguments for the social necessity of begging while also asserting connections between the poet’s endeavours and the beggar’s. However, it is clear that while Smith’s poems frequently align her with destitute individuals, she frowned upon literary begging, even when forced to do it by her circumstances. For a more detailed discussion of Wordsworth and begging, see Hack, *Material Interests*, 74-76.
109 For more information on Smith’s publication by subscription, see Stanton, “Charlotte Smith’s ‘Literary Business’”, 387.
themselves among those “few, who, to sensibility of heart, join simplicity of taste.”\textsuperscript{110}

The preface to the third and fourth editions reinforces her connections with the public through references to the positive “reception given by the public, as well as my particular friends” to \textit{Elegiac Sonnets}.\textsuperscript{111} Her diction places the burden of reception on the reader. He or she is responsible for recognizing the sensibility of Smith’s familiarity. In other words, it was not Smith’s responsibility to make those qualities immediately recognizable to all readers; it was bad readers who were projecting their own false sensibility into her texts. Smith’s ideas about reading familiarity anticipate Wordsworth’s attempts to divide his reading public into his contemporary critics and the sympathetic readers whose taste he will create.

\textbf{The Power of Common Language}

In his Prefaces, “Essays Upon Epitaphs,” and \textit{The Prelude}, Wordsworth, like Smith, addresses sincerity and the relationships it fosters between author and reader. Wordsworth recognizes authorial intent as an essential element of sincerity. His description of affectation shocking “the moral sense” gives us an idea of just how important sincere intent is to Wordsworth.\textsuperscript{112} However, a problem arises because intention must be read, and “the only evidence for the writer’s feeling \textit{is} the external signs or words.”\textsuperscript{113} Like Smith before him, Wordsworth addresses this problem by transferring responsibility from author to reader. For example, in the \textit{Essay, Supplementary to the Preface} Wordsworth outlines the defects that make classes of

\textsuperscript{110} Smith, Preface to the First and Second Editions of \textit{Elegiac Sonnets}, 3.
\textsuperscript{111} Smith, Preface to the Third and Fourth Editions of \textit{Elegiac Sonnets}, 3.
\textsuperscript{112} Wordsworth, “Essays Upon Epitaphs,” 70.
\textsuperscript{113} Esterhammer, “The Scandal of Sincerity,” 105.
readers (i.e., men of mature age, the young, and the religious) susceptible to bad reading. The 1815 version of the Essay, Supplementary contrasts Wordsworth’s “judicious Reader[s]” with “the ignorance of those who have chosen to stand forth” as his “enemies.”

No less important is Wordsworth’s treatment of audience and sincerity in “Essays Upon Epitaphs.” In the first essay, published in The Friend on February 22, 1810, Wordsworth explains that an epitaph should employ “the general language of humanity.” According to Wordsworth, “general language may be uttered so strikingly as to entitle an epitaph to high praise.” In the second essay he explains the value of general language, arguing that it would be “obviously unjustifiable” to “slight the uniform language” of many epitaphs. Offering the example of the similar epitaphs found in a coastal churchyard, Wordsworth shifts the responsibility of sincerity from the epitaphs themselves to the reader. He writes, “These [epitaphs] are uniformly in the same strain; but surely we ought not thence to infer that these words are used of course, without any heart-felt sense of their propriety. […] 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.”

A good reader, Wordsworth suggests, can see beyond banal familiarity in order to achieve a

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114 Wordsworth, Essay, Supplementary to the Preface, in vol. 3 of The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 62. Wordsworth’s Essay famously opens with a division of his audience into “classes of Readers”: “the young,” those of “middle and declining age,” and the many for whom “poetry has continued to be comprehended as a study.” Wordsworth goes on to claim that within these categories “Critics abound in them all.” He discounts further the critics of his poetry by claiming that “their incompetence [is] more flagrant than their malice. The effect in the eyes of the discerning is indeed ludicrous.” He implies, then, that his sympathetic readers possess both the discernment to recognize the value of his poetry and the absurdity of his critics. Wordsworth, Essay, Supplementary, 62.
116 Ibid., 65.
117 Ibid., 65-66.
familiar connection with a text, its author, and its subject. Later in the essay Wordsworth argues that sincere intentions can efface linguistic and stylistic problems altogether: “[T]here are no errors in style or manner for which it [sincerity] will not be, in some degree, a recompence.”\(^{118}\) Without sincerity, epitaphs (and by extension poetry in general) fail emotionally and aesthetically. Of course, the problem becomes how to assess sincere intent if original language and style are not reliable indicators. Wordsworth prefaces his example of several epitaphs “ordinarily found in our Country Church-Yards at this day” with an accusation of his reader’s unfeelingness: “If those primary sensations upon which I have dwelt so much be not stifled in the heart of the Reader, they will be read with pleasure; otherwise neither these nor more exalted strains can by him be truly interpreted.”\(^{119}\) Reminiscent of Smith’s earlier prefatory defences, Wordsworth’s words present a challenge to his readers: if they are not affected the problem is with their reading rather than with his examples.

Both Smith and Wordsworth attempt to educate their readers’ perceptions of sincerity. The project of the “Essays Upon Epitaphs,” Wordsworth claims, is to educate readers to have the proper reflective habits. But in his claims to educate his audience, Wordsworth implicitly recognizes readers’ tendencies toward misinterpretation and miseducation. In Wordsworth we can hear an echo of Smith’s persistent pleas that her poetry was authentic. His attempts to divide and create his audience can be seen across his oeuvre from the Prefaces to *The Prelude* and indicate that, like Smith, he positions his work as potentially misreadable. Like Smith, he tries to protect himself from these misreadings by placing responsibility with his readers, whom he saw as distinct from his

\(^{118}\) Ibid., 70.
\(^{119}\) Ibid., 92.
critics. For example, in the *Essay, Supplementary* Wordsworth claims that the faults his critics see in his poetry arise from “phantoms of their own brain.”\(^{120}\) Wordsworth’s remarks reflect aesthetic guilt back to his critics. Moreover, Wordsworth’s celebrations of his own discerning eye reinforce the binary between proper and improper reading.

He further shields himself from criticism by describing situations in which the vulgar and the miseducated could misread sincerity. However, he demonstrates his own education by reading these situations with an acute sensibility that recognizes the value of the familiar. For example, in Book XXII of *The Prelude* Wordsworth describes his triumphs of “reading” on the public road.

When I began to inquire,

To watch and question those I met, and held
Familiar talk with them, the lonely roads
Were schools to me in which I daily read
With most delight the passions of mankind,
There saw into the depth of human souls—
Souls that appear to have no depth at all
To vulgar eyes. And now, convinced at heart
How little that to which alone we give
The name of education hath to do
With real feeling and just sense, how vain
A correspondence with the talking world
Proves to the most[.].\(^{121}\)

\(^{120}\) Wordsworth, *Essay, Supplementary*, 62.

In this passage Wordsworth equates vulgarity with the misreading of “real” feelings. His willingness to converse on familiar terms with strangers he met gave him insight into the depths of humanity. Wordsworth sees beyond the potentially common, negative aspects of familiarity and reaps the benefits. He asks his readers to do the same. A good reader can make the banal into the revelatory by shifting familiarity’s focus.

Wordsworth insists that intention rather than content should determine authenticity. From his perspective, quotation and common language do not automatically indicate plagiarism or false emotions. Similarly, singularity does not signify authenticity. The onus for interpretation is divided between author and reader, but ultimate responsibility is given to the reader. It is her job to read beyond linguistic noise—whether that is a large number of gravestones or a sea of London advertisements—in order to recognize true intentions.

Throughout The Prelude Wordsworth attempts to educate his audience by reflecting on his own exemplary reading habits. Wordsworth is not fooled by the empty London spectacles of Book VII and reads them as what they are—“common produce.”

Wordsworth draws attention to the concept of familiarity and the ease with which it can become the unnoticed banality of everyday life. “Thus have I looked,” he writes,

Until the shapes before my eyes became
A second-sight procession […]
And all the ballast of familiar life—
The present, and the past, hope, fear, all stays,
All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man—

122 Ibid., 7.582.
Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known.\textsuperscript{123}

Later describing the chaotic atmosphere of St. Bartholomew’s Fair, Wordsworth again points to difference and singularity as contributing to regularity and banality. He describes how the plethora of people and objects are “melted and reduced / To one identity by difference.”\textsuperscript{124} The overproduction of difference ultimately creates sameness. It is only the observing reader who can see through both difference and sameness. For the poet of nature or perhaps a sympathetic reader, these common sites reveal familiarity’s connective potential. From the “invisible” Jack the Giant-killer and the blind beggar’s note to the “Advertisements of giant size” and the chaos of the fair, the literal and figurative texts that Wordsworth reads are not the important part. It is the fact that his reading of them is ultimately connective, producing “a feeling of the whole.”\textsuperscript{125}

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Beyond the “monotonous language of sorrow”}
\end{quote}

The focus on audience that we find in both Smith and Wordsworth gestures toward new understandings of sincerity and the self in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Smith’s and Wordsworth’s assertions about the power of seemingly common, repetitive language in establishing familiarity demonstrate just how important perspective is in reading and creating authorial sincerity. 

Like \textit{The Prelude}’s “invisible” Jack the Giant-killer, who literally labels himself, Smith metaphorically labels herself as a type: a sentimental heroine. Like Wordsworth’s figure, she attempts to construct her story, evoke pity, and through that pity gain emotional and (by implication) monetary support from the reading public. Wordsworth,

\begin{scriptsize}
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 7.599-607.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 7.703-04.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 7.210 and 7.713.
\end{scriptsize}
too, positions himself as a special type—a good reader. His work creates the type of reader he encourages his audience to be. Supplying his readers with numerous examples of how the familiar can be revelatory, Wordsworth demonstrates to his readers the proper habits of reading and sensibility. The representations of reflection, reading, and familiarity in Smith’s and Wordsworth’s works aim to offer educative examples of proper, generous readings of their own writing—writing which may upon first reading seem common or borrowed. Indeed, Smith’s use of quotation becomes a form of literary labelling that, through repeated use (many sonnets instead of a single beggar’s sign), runs the dangerous risk of seeming inauthentic. Quotation becomes quotidian. In the end, these writers suggest that it is our responsibility as critics and readers to see the sincerity behind the “monotonous language of sorrow” and read the circumstantial evidence around poetic composition with a sympathetic eye. In other words, it becomes our decision which sense of familiar we apply.

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126 For more on Wordsworth’s use of types and typology, see Rosenbaum, Professing Sincerity, 45-47.
Chapter 2

“The whole cursed story”:

William Hazlitt and Indiscriminate Familiarity

“The same things that tell, perhaps, best, to a private circle round the fireside, are not always intelligible to the public[.]”
-William Hazlitt¹

“[C]onstant intercourse and familiarity breed weariness and contempt[.]”
-William Hazlitt²

In August 1820, William Hazlitt moved into lodgings at 9 Southampton Buildings in London. It would prove a pivotal move in both his professional and personal life. He soon met and fell madly in love with Sarah Walker, his landlord’s nineteen-year-old daughter. Believing that Sarah’s tepid response to his courtship arose from the fact that he was married, Hazlitt went to Scotland in early 1822 to obtain a divorce from his wife, Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt. The expensive proceedings took several months to negotiate; the divorce was finally granted on July 17, 1822. Later that month Hazlitt returned to London only to be rejected by the younger Sarah. She had fallen in love with another man.³

Hazlitt’s courtship left him heartbroken and angry. He told anyone and everyone who would listen about his troubles in love. The poet Barry Cornwall, for instance, recalled how his friend Hazlitt

¹ William Hazlitt, “The Same Subject Continued [On the Conversation of Authors],” Selected Writings, 8:34.
³ This man, John Tompkins, was one of her father’s former lodgers. Though it appears that Sarah Walker never married Tompkins, they did spend their lives together and had children. Duncan Wu, “Hazlitt's Liber Amoris: A Defence,” Wordsworth Circle 31:1 (2000): 22.
was, for a time, unable to think or talk of anything else. He abandoned
criticism and books as idle matters, and fatigued every person whom he
met by expressions of her [Sarah Walker’s] love, of her deceit, and of his
own vehement disappointment. […] Upon one occasion I know that he
told the story of his attachment to five different persons in the same day.
And at each time he entered into minute details of his love-story.⁴

Hazlitt’s need to tell his tale became Ancient Mariner-like in its pathology. “I could not
help myself,” Hazlitt confessed,

It all came out; the whole cursed story. Afterwards I went to look at some
lodgings at Pimlico. The landlady at one place, after some explanations as
to rent, &c., said to me very kindly, “I am afraid you are not well, Sir?”
“No, Ma’am,” said I, “I am not well;” and on enquiring further, the devil
take me if I did not let out the whole story from beginning to end.⁵

In telling a landlady he had just met the details of his unsuccessful love affair, Hazlitt
certainly went beyond the bounds of acceptable, class-based standards of familiarity. His
drive to share his painful history indiscriminately with everyone made him an object of
ridicule. The aftermath of his rather public heartache suggests that his later comments
from The Plain Speaker (1826) were correct: certain tales “are not always intelligible to
the public.”⁶

Hazlitt’s indiscretions went beyond regaling friends, acquaintances, landladies,
and coffeehouse patrons with the history of his unrequited love. In 1823 he published his

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⁵ Quoted in Le Gallienne, Introduction to Liber Amoris […] with Additional Matter, xiv.
⁶ Hazlitt, “The Same Subject Continued [On the Conversation of Authors],” 8:34.
autobiographical work, *Liber Amoris, or The New Pygmalion*. It relates in barely-fictionalized form his love for and rejection by Sarah Walker. Divided into three parts, the text recounts H.’s passion for S. The first section presents short dialogues between H. and S., while Parts II and III are epistolary. The letters H. sends to his friends and S. track his divorce from his wife in Scotland and the realization that S. loves another man.

The work’s thoroughly autobiographical nature spurred criticism. Blackwood’s *Magazine* and other Tory publications like *John Bull* lampooned Hazlitt’s amorous failure and his surprising decision to write about it. The general critical consensus since its publication has been that *Liber Amoris*, compared to Hazlitt’s celebrated writing for periodicals and essay collections, is a grave embarrassment. According to one of Hazlitt’s late-nineteenth-century editors, “a man could hardly have done a more deliberately stupid injury to his fame” than publish *Liber Amoris*. While sometimes mentioned as an unfortunate anomaly, *Liber Amoris* is often left out of serious studies of Hazlitt’s oeuvre. It remains one of his most difficult works to address and connect to his other writing.

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8 Le Gallienne, Introduction to *Liber Amoris* […] with Additional Matter, xx.

In this chapter I read *Liber Amoris*’s reception history in order to explore the cultural and literary factors that led so many of Hazlitt’s contemporaries to see it as a resounding critical failure. I ask why, for many of its original readers, *Liber Amoris* invited “pain and disgust, instead of producing respect and admiration.”\(^\text{10}\) Investigating the text’s engagement with familiarity clarifies its reception history, its relation to Hazlitt’s familiar essays, and Romantic-era debates about sympathy and privacy. I analyze the theorizations of familiarity in Hazlitt’s essays and then read these theorizations and his later *Liber Amoris* back into their contemporary social context. I open by outlining Hazlitt’s views about familiarity in his essays, and I read Hazlitt’s assertions about familiarity alongside Adam Smith’s theories of sympathy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. I also analyze how Hazlitt uses literary allusions to different effect in his familiar essays than he does in *Liber Amoris*. Overall, this chapter addresses questions about how sympathy and familiarity were heavily intertwined during Hazlitt’s lifetime.

It is ironic that Hazlitt’s own theorizations of familiarity damn *Liber Amoris*. *Liber Amoris* differs from Hazlitt’s ideas about familiarity in his essays and contemporary understandings of sympathy in two interrelated ways. First, the text itself concerns what many saw as Hazlitt’s improper familiarity with a woman socially beneath him, and it represents the type of class-crossing he criticized in his familiar essays. Second, *Liber Amoris* centres on embarrassing details, and it reveals Hazlitt’s emotions in a rather raw form to a wide audience. These details defy Smith’s understanding that in

\(^{10}\) “Notice of *Liber Amoris*,” *The Times*, May 30, 1823, 3.
order for passions to produce sympathy they must be expressed within “a certain degree of moderation.”  

Despite Hazlitt’s declaration in the advertisement to Liber Amoris that he hoped the volume would evoke the “amusement or sympathy of the reader,” the volume found few sympathetic readers. Turning to the text, it is perhaps not difficult to see why. In one of Liber Amoris’s most striking scenes H. describes an uncontrollable fit of rage that overcame him during one conversation with S.: “I shrieked curses on her name, and on her false love; and the scream I uttered (so pitiful and so piercing was it, that the sound of it terrified me) instantly brought the whole house [...] They thought I was destroying her and myself.” Such divulgences earned Hazlitt little sympathy, and Liber Amoris “was reviled as disgusting, vulgar, depraved, and the work of an insane libertine, inspiring one reviewer to defend Hazlitt by discrediting its attribution to him altogether on the grounds that only a fool could have written it.” Hazlitt was soon identified as the author of the anonymous work, and he was attacked viciously in reviews. One writer for John Bull, for instance, feigned a desire to stop displaying Hazlitt’s “stupidity and folly” to his readers but simply could not help himself: “Little more can be wanting to display this lecturer upon SHAKESPEARE in his proper colours. But let us wait awhile and see—perhaps one or two more specimens may not be unamusing.” Others similarly relished the revilement they piled upon Hazlitt. The Country Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review proclaimed

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12 Hazlitt, Liber Amoris, vol. 7 of The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, ed. Duncan Wu, 3. Unless otherwise noted, all further references to Liber Amoris are to this edition.
13 Ibid., 58
that *Liber Amoris* insulted “public decency and public morals[.]”\(^{16}\) No less critical, *Blackwood’s Magazine* declared that “nothing so disgusting as this has ever fallen in our way.”\(^ {17}\) Even after Hazlitt’s death in 1830, the stories about his folly continued to circulate. For example, Douglass Jerrold’s short story “The Metaphysician and the Maid,” published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1839, parodies *Liber Amoris* and “is a remarkable testimony to [its] notoriety.”\(^ {18}\)

Notwithstanding the vituperative criticism *Liber Amoris* received, it seems that it was reasonably successful. It may have been issued as many as three times in 1823.\(^ {19}\) The reception history evident in letters and published reviews suggests that *Liber Amoris* was a text that people enjoyed reading and disliking. It is a Romantic-era example of our contemporary culture’s interest in hate-watching—watching television “you think is awful purely for the joy of laughing at it.”\(^ {20}\) Perhaps anticipating an audience of hate-

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\(^{16}\) Quoted in Wu, Introduction to *Liber Amoris*, xvii.

\(^{17}\) Review of *Liber Amoris*, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 13, no. 77 (June 1823): 645.


\(^{19}\) Geoffrey Keynes, *Bibliography of William Hazlitt* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1931), 63. Questions of how many issues, states, or even editions of *Liber Amoris* originally appeared in 1823 remain unsatisfactorily resolved. Keynes asserts that the different coloured silk bindings indicate discrete issues; hence, his claim that the work was issued three times. Given that standardized publisher’s bindings were a relatively new feature of books in the 1820s, I am much more hesitant than Keynes to equate different binding colours with new issues. However, it is worth noting that in most extant copies of *Liber Amoris* D1 and G8 are cancellations, perhaps indicating the presence of two editions of the work: one censored and one not censored. However, exploring the bibliographic details, fascinating though they may be, is beyond the focus of the present argument.

readers, Hazlitt’s publisher paid him the impressive sum of £100 for the copyright.\textsuperscript{21}

*Liber Amoris* fuelled negative assessments of Hazlitt’s literary works and personal life, and its relative popularity demonstrates public interest in gossip. Similar to Patricia Meyer Spacks’s account of the functioning of verbal gossip, the almost gleefully critical reviews of *Liber Amoris* fostered reviewers’ “sense of superiority” and constituted “an oblique moral discourse.”\textsuperscript{22} Since its publication, much interest in the work has arisen not from its literary merit or connection to Hazlitt’s other works but from its retelling of obsessive, failed passion.\textsuperscript{23}

Whether that failure arose from Hazlitt’s behaviour or Sarah Walker’s continues to be the source of contentious debate. Duncan Wu, Hazlitt’s most recent biographer and avid defender, justifies *Liber Amoris*’s publication by pointing to Hazlitt’s emotional instability at the time, which, he argues, resulted from Sarah Walker’s coquettish ways. Wu has gone so far as to claim that Sarah Walker “proved to be exactly what he [Hazlitt] feared: a snake, a succubus, a lodging-house decoy.”\textsuperscript{24} In other articles, Wu has also argued that *Liber Amoris* had relatively little to do with Sarah Walker and instead was a wilful act of aggression toward Tory critics. The negative reviews of *Table Talk* that appeared in 1821-22 ridiculed Hazlitt’s autobiographical style, and they specifically pointed to the essays’ thinly-veiled references to Sarah Walker. According to Wu, “Hazlitt must have determined no longer merely to allude to the failed affair in his essays,

\textsuperscript{21} Le Gallienne, Introduction to *Liber Amoris* […] with Additional Matter, xx.


\textsuperscript{23} Nicola Parsons’s work on gossip may suggest an additional reason why readers were so interested in Hazlitt’s decision to publish his private affairs. “[G]ossip,” Parsons suggests, “is a participatory discourse, it creates a bond of intimacy between those who engage in its processes.” *Liber Amoris* fuelled gossip surrounding Hazlitt’s private life, and therefore became a point of familiar connection for his audience. I explore gossip in more detail in my next chapter. Parsons, *Reading Gossip*, 34.

but to give his admiration of ‘his landlord’s daughter’ the full treatment. Such candour was an act of open defiance.”

Conversely, feminist critics such as Catherine Burroughs and Sonia Hofkosh suggest that Liber Amoris and its critical reception represent gendered power structures of literature, identity, and class in the nineteenth century. In direct contrast with Wu, Hofkosh reads Liber Amoris as a testament to the tenuous social positions women held in the period. Connecting Hazlitt’s relationship with Sarah Walker to an earlier incident in 1803 in which he accosted a local village girl in Keswick, Hofkosh argues that literary history’s tendency to privilege male perspectives “perpetuat[es] the masculine narrative of the romantic tradition.”

There are reasons to question Hazlitt’s vitriolic recollections in Liber Amoris as well as a literary tradition that has often defended or excused him. Like Burroughs and Hofkosh, I agree that we must read the events recorded in Liber Amoris with the constant knowledge that other (female) perspectives are absent. Still, my primary goal here is not to retrieve those voices; nor is it my intention to belabour distinctions between fact and its fictionalized form in the work. I am not convinced that it remains productive to defend, excuse, or condemn Hazlitt for his relationship with Sarah Walker and the book he wrote about it. Instead, here I attempt to understand both the negative reactions the work evoked for Hazlitt’s contemporaries and Hazlitt’s varying engagements with the politics of familiarity.

Sympathetic Familiarity

Familiarity’s crucial role in Liber Amoris is revealed through the great difficulty H. has in interpreting S.’s familiarity with him. Attempting to justify one of his frightening outbursts to her father, H. points to S.’s frequent familiarity with him. “I did not see how it was in human nature,” H. explains, “for any one who was not rendered callous to such familiarities by bestowing them indiscriminately on every one, to grant the extreme and continued indulgences she had done to me, without either liking the man at first, or coming to like him in the end, in spite of herself.”28 Within his framework, S.’s familiarities must indicate something—either she was callous and improper or she had at one point truly loved him.

Liber Amoris reveals Hazlitt’s suspicions that Sarah Walker was equally forward with other male lodgers. Hazlitt claims that he would have been consoled had he discovered Sarah’s feelings had altered when he was away in Edinburgh, but he was particularly galled to find that she had been on intimate terms with him and John Tompkins (another lodger) at the same time: “But it comes out that she had gone on in the most forward and familiar way with both at once.”29 Earlier in the book he voices fears that Sarah’s “lips were as common as the stairs.”30 Hazlitt’s simile connects S.’s supposed loose sexual morality to the boarding house in which they live. The stairs were a shared physical space in the house, and no one lodger would have had exclusive access to them. His acknowledgement of her commonness plays with three interrelated definitions of the word: “vulgar,” “Publick” or “serving the use of all,” and without

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28 Hazlitt, Liber Amoris, 59.
29 Ibid., 71, my emphasis.
30 Ibid., 14.
These concerns exemplify how the scope of one’s audience influences familiarity. If limited, familiarity can encourage closeness; if extended too far it can seem vulgarity. If Sarah’s familiarity went beyond him to a larger audience, then it signalled her “want of both common propriety, and I might say, of natural feeling.” Or, as Hazlitt put it more bluntly in his private correspondence, without love, Sarah Walker’s familiarities simply indicated that she was a “bitch [who] wants a stallion.” Hazlitt’s point here is really about how familiarity manifests sensibility. “[W]ithout either liking the man at first, or coming to like him in the end,” Sarah Walker revealed her wanton sexual desire and perhaps a disregard for the bounds of propriety.

Interestingly, Hazlitt’s willingness to tell almost anyone he encountered about his failed courtship exemplified his own lack of “common propriety.” The publication of Liber Amoris replicated similar indecorous “familiarities” arising from his willingness to bestow “them indiscriminately on every one” who could afford to buy or borrow the book. According to Hazlitt’s wife, he admitted that he had betrayed Sarah Walker’s trust and reputation. Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt’s journal recounts how Sarah Walker’s “character began to be blown now, for he had told everybody the whole of her conduct to him.” Sarah Hazlitt also chided him for indiscreet references to Sarah Walker in the essays he published in periodicals: “I told him he had done a most injudicious thing in publishing what he did in the [New Monthly] Magazine about Sarah Walker, particularly at this time, […] and that every body in London had thought it a most improper thing.”

31 Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language, s.v. “common.”
32 Hazlitt, Liber Amoris, 60.
34 Hazlitt, Liber Amoris, 59.
35 Ibid.
36 Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt’s Journal, in Liber Amoris […] With Additional Matter, 328.
37 Ibid., 330.
For example, his essay “On the Knowledge of Character” depicts Sarah Walker in an unflattering light. “The greatest hypocrite I ever knew,” he writes,

was a little, demure, pretty, modest-looking girl, with eyes timidly cast upon the ground, and an air soft as enchantment; the only circumstance that could lead to a suspicion of her true character was a cold, sullen, watery, glazed look about the eyes, which she bent on vacancy, as if determined to avoid all explanation with yours. I might have spied in their glittering, motionless surface, the rocks and quicksands that awaited me below!\(^{38}\)

This reference to Sarah Walker would have been recognizable to many readers and critics when the essay was published in 1822. Sarah Hazlitt’s journal indicates that at some point her husband admitted the folly of sharing private information so widely: “[H]e said that he was sorry too […] and that it had hurt the girl too, and done her an injury.”\(^ {39}\)

Hazlitt’s tendency to tell publicly and in great detail the story of his unrequited love—a story perhaps best reserved for “a private circle around the fireside”—made him an object of scorn.\(^ {40}\) Barry Cornwall was not the only one of Hazlitt’s contemporaries to note his unrestrained desire to tell his story. In his essay “Recollections of Charles Lamb” Thomas De Quincey recalled that Hazlitt “went up and down London, raving about this girl […] to the most indifferent stranger, he would hurry into a rapturous account of her beauty. For this he was abundantly laughed at.”\(^ {41}\) Hazlitt’s indiscriminate “raving[s]” demonstrate not just his compulsion to confess but also a rejection of the proper bounds

\(^{38}\) Hazlitt, “On the Knowledge of Character,” Selected Writings, 8:272.

\(^{39}\) Liber Amoris […] With Additional Matter, 330. The essay that Sarah Hazlitt seems to have in mind is “On Great and Little Things,” originally printed in volume 4 of the New Monthly Magazine in 1822.

\(^{40}\) Hazlitt, “The Same Subject Continued [On the Conversation of Authors],” 8:34.

of familiarity that he outlined in his familiar essays. Moreover, Liber Amoris’s evocations of familiarity run counter to prevailing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories of sympathy.

Hazlitt’s theorizations of familiarity in his essays from Table Talk (1821-22) conflict with his practice of familiarity in Liber Amoris. Hazlitt’s emphasis on familiar conversational style is a cornerstone of his essays. Indeed, the titles of his two most famous collections, Table Talk and The Plain Speaker, assert their connections to “a natural discourse” rather than the stuffiness “of a studied recitation.” Hazlitt’s personal tone is evidenced in “On Living to One’s Self,” in which Hazlitt begins by drawing close not only to his fire but also to the reader. The essay opens: “I was never in a better place or humour than I am at present for writing on this subject. I have a partridge getting ready for my supper, my fire is blazing on the hearth, the air is mild for the season of the year, I have but a slight fit of indigestion today (the only thing that makes me abhor myself), I have three hours good before me, and therefore I will attempt it.” In setting the stage for his composition, Hazlitt invites his readers into his parlour with him. He reveals information both banal (his dinner menu) and personal (his digestive difficulties) that one might relate to a familiar friend.

Hazlitt’s focus on proper familiarity in his essays and his criticisms of Sarah Walker’s improper familiarity indirectly condemn his own disregard in Liber Amoris for familiarity’s boundaries. His essay “On Vulgarity and Affectation,” which appeared before Liber Amoris, speaks to his awareness of the class-based distinctions inherent in

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43 Hazlitt, “On Living to One’s Self,” Selected Writings, 6:78.
decorous familiarity. The essay criticizes the vulgarity of a stereotypical “fashionable Miss” who scorns an unfashionable bonnet worn by “a country-girl who comes to be hired by her Mamma as a servant.” Hazlitt postulates that this same Miss “would herself the next day be delighted with the very same bonnet if brought her by a French milliner and told it was all the fashion, and in a week’s time will become quite familiar with the maid, and chatter with her (upon equal terms) about caps and ribbons and lace by the hour together.” Hazlitt highlights a variety of issues: gender, fashion, nationalism, and class. Importantly for the argument at hand, Hazlitt’s comments demonstrate the hypocritical application of decorous class distinctions. Initially, the girl scoffs at the new servant. Rejecting the servant and her country bonnet demonstrates the girl’s flawed class-consciousness, which depends on little more than fashion sense. Hazlitt emphasizes the impropriety of her relationship with the maid by drawing attention to the “equal terms” upon which they converse. Hazlitt’s comments and the little Miss’s impropriety reflect eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourses about dangerous familiarity between servants and those they served. Because “servants occupied an important role in defining class attitudes,” overly-familiar relations between domestics and their employers undermined social hierarchy. In his other essays Hazlitt is even more direct about class distinctions. He claims that “[s]o little is there in common between the different classes of society” that it is “impossible […] ever to unite the diversities of custom and knowledge which separate them.” Hazlitt’s essays demonstrate how improper familiarity equalized and thus undermined distinctions that should be preserved.

45 Hill, Servants, 6.
Hazlitt expands his thoughts on class, character, and decorum in “On the Knowledge of Character,” an essay that also predates Liber Amoris. “Familiarity,” he explains, “confounds all traits of distinction: interest and prejudice take away the power of judging […] We do not see the features of those we love, nor do we clearly distinguish their virtues or their vices.” Even at its best, familiarity precipitates failures in judgements of character and conduct. Hazlitt’s easy familiarity with both Sarah Walker and those to whom he subsequently confessed his heartache suggest that his judgement of decorum was suspended—at least in the early 1820s. Hazlitt’s decision to expose his story to everyone from landladies to members of the public with access to Liber Amoris placed him on equal terms with a large audience. The content of Liber Amoris as well as his decision to publish it enacted the very type of “levelling Scheme” resulting from “convers[ing] so familiarly with our domestics” that social critics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries found so worrisome. By publishing the book Hazlitt replicated a similar social misstep to that of the girl in Hazlitt’s “On Vulgarity and Affectation.”

While Hazlitt believed that “no good society” could exist “without perfect freedom from affectation and constraint,” he also claimed that “[i]f the unreserved communication of feeling or opinion leads to offensive familiarity, it is not well.” In his later 1826 Plain Speaker essay “Hot and Cold,” Hazlitt reiterates his earlier point: “imperfect sympathy […] in the recoil produces the greatest antipathy.” Gesturing toward Charles Lamb’s essay “Imperfect Sympathies,” Hazlitt recognizes how prejudice

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47 Ibid., 6: 278.
48 Jonas Hanway quoted in Hill, Servants, 110.
50 Hazlitt, “Hot and Cold,” Selected Writings, 8:160.
and personal experience inform our (un)sympathetic responses to others’ emotions.

Imprudently extending familiarity could prompt disgust rather than sympathy.

Hazlitt’s explanations of sympathy and familiarity allude to Adam Smith’s claims in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* about the unequal sympathies that different passions evoke. For Smith, sympathy is our natural reaction to emotional displays in others: “[T]he emotions of the by-stander always correspond to what, by bringing the case home to himself, he imagines should be the sentiments of the sufferer.”51 However, not all passions equally affect our imaginative capabilities and their resulting sympathies.

According to Smith, we are less likely to respond sympathetically with particularly violent passions, especially anger. “There are some passions,” Smith writes, “of which the expressions excite no sort of sympathy, but before we are acquainted with what gave occasion to them, serve rather to disgust and provoke us against them.”52 Though sympathy is natural to human nature, both Smith and Hazlitt believe that it involves evaluative elements.

When evaluating the propriety or impropriety of passion, Smith argues that “two different aspects” or “two different relations” must be considered: “first, in relation to the cause which excites it, or the motive which gives occasion to it; and secondly, in relation to the end which it proposes, or the effect which it tends to produce.”53 For nineteenth-century readers, there was a mismatch between Hazlitt’s passion and its object as well as between his passion and its literary portrayal. Many contemporaries believed that the cause—unrequited love of a lower-class woman—was disproportionate to Hazlitt’s

52 Ibid., 11.
53 Ibid., 18.
resulting passion. It remained unclear why he felt so strongly for a woman who, by contemporary accounts, was unremarkable.

Yet Hazlitt’s failure of familiarity arose not only from his original passion but also from his decision to display that passion widely. This failure points to a third aspect of Adam Smith’s theories of decorous passion: the relationship between expressions of passion and audience, or, put differently, the relationship between evocations of familiarity and the people to whom it is directed. This third aspect of sympathy is at issue throughout *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Smith claims that we must expect different levels of sympathy from different audiences. His comments about sympathy bear a striking resemblance to discourses about the dangers of familiarity at the time—the fact that extended too far, familiarity was transformed from an asset into a liability. Moral questions about sympathy are also social questions about familiarity. If we misunderstand our level of familiarity with others and do not adjust our emotional display accordingly, we will fail to gain sympathy:

> We expect less sympathy from a common acquaintance than from a friend: we cannot open to the former all those little circumstances which we can unfold to the latter […] We expect still less sympathy from an assembly of strangers, and we assume, therefore, still more tranquillity before them, and always endeavour to bring down our passion to that pitch, which the particular company we are in may be expected to go along with it.\(^{54}\)

When one treats “an assembly of strangers” in the same way one would treat a friend, the result is more likely to be disgust than sympathy.

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\(^{54}\) Ibid., 23.
The more familiar we are with someone, the more sympathy we can anticipate from this person. Adam Smith explains that our sympathetic imagination increases with interpersonal familiarity: “[M]y imagination is more ductile, and more readily assumes, if I may say so, the shape and configuration of the imaginations of those with whom I am familiar.” Thus, familiarity does not simply facilitate “easiness of conversation” and “affability,” as Johnson’s *Dictionary* indicates; it promotes sympathy. At their heart, Smith’s assertions about sympathy’s audience are claims about the improper extension of familiarity’s boundaries. Yet there were lines of propriety that, when crossed, revealed just how complex sympathies and familiar ties were. Indeed, we may recall Hazlitt’s comments about Sarah Walker’s familiarity—if extended to other male lodgers her familiarity exemplified a “want of both common propriety, and I might say, of natural feeling.”

Problems arise when one fails to understand how familiarity informs sympathy. Hazlitt’s actions during and after his relationship with Sarah Walker crossed class boundaries; after all, not only did he cross class lines in courting her, he was repeating his tale of heartache across class lines to landladies, indifferent strangers, and anyone who could obtain his book. His indiscretions represent violations of the nineteenth-century class politics governing familiarity. De Quincey’s analysis of *Liber Amoris* speaks directly to Hazlitt’s indifference to his audience. “It was an explosion of frenzy,” De Quincey wrote about *Liber Amoris*, “[Hazlitt] threw out his clamorous anguish to the clouds, and to the winds, and to the air; caring not who might listen, who might sympathise, or who might sneer. Pity was no demand of his; laughter was no wrong; the

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55 Ibid., 29.  
sole necessity for him was—to empty his overburdened spirit."^58 Hazlitt’s raw emotional display is exactly the type of passion that Adam Smith believed would encourage antipathy rather than sympathy. Though Hazlitt should have expected less sympathy from the public than from a friend, he “open[ed] to the former all those little circumstances” which he should have reserved for “the latter.”^59 That Hazlitt had experienced a romantic failure would have in and of itself made him a target for the Tory press and perhaps more generally. That fact that Hazlitt had failed to court his landlord’s daughter successfully made him especially vulnerable.

Even those closest to Hazlitt were confused by his infatuation with Sarah Walker. Contemporary observations, biased as they may be, suggest that she was not well educated.\(^60\) It is clear that Sarah Walker had some education, since she and Hazlitt had a brief correspondence while he was in Edinburgh obtaining his divorce. He also lent her several books, including copies of his own work, a book of prayer, The Vicar of Wakefield, The Man of Feeling, and Nature and Art.\(^61\) However, she was certainly not educated to the high degree of other women Hazlitt had known, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Lamb, for example. Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt’s journal reveals that those who met Sarah Walker or read the letters she wrote to Hazlitt were unimpressed. Her acquaintance Mr. Bell, who helped with the divorce proceedings, “said he had seen some passages of

^59 Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, 23.
^60 This not a valuation of Sarah Walker’s intellect but an observation about her class status and the education she would have been likely to receive as a tailor’s daughter.
^61 For examples of Hazlitt lending Sarah books, see Liber Amoris, 61.
her [Sarah Walker’s] letters, and they were such low vulgar milliner’s or servant wench’s sentimentality that he wondered Mr. Hazlitt could endure such stuff."62

Hazlitt’s own changeable opinion of Sarah Walker echoes concerns that she was vulgar. In a conversation he had with his ex-wife, which she recorded in her journal, he acknowledged his fears that Sarah Walker might not have been as angelic as he would like. Hazlitt confided that Sarah Walker’s mother

was the most disgusting, vulgar old wretch that could be, and corrupted her children’s minds by her bawdy indecent conversation, though he had never heard an improper or indelicate word from the girl; yet it had often struck him that they had never objected to the girls of the town coming up to him continually, and that Sarah would often send them up when her mother had said he was not at home, for which they praised her and said she was a nice girl. I told him it showed what the house and the people were well enough.63

The comments recorded here are striking for several reasons, perhaps not the least of them Hazlitt’s frank admission that he “continually” had prostitutes visiting him in his lodgings.64 Sarah Walker’s willingness to send Hazlitt prostitutes presents her as perhaps even more crass than her “disgusting, vulgar” mother.

Beyond perhaps indicating Sarah Walker’s loose moral compass, her actions, as Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt claims, indicate the type of house that the Walkers kept. They kept

62 Sarah Hazlitt, Liber Amoris […] with Additional Matter, 275. Of course, it is possible that Bell may have been trying to flatter Sarah Hazlitt by criticizing her husband’s new love interest.
63 Sarah Hazlitt, Liber Amoris […] with Additional Matter, 329.
64 Hazlitt’s fondness for prostitutes was not a secret. Elsewhere in her journal, Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt criticizes him for bringing their young son with him when he sought out women of the town. See, Sarah Hazlitt, Liber Amoris […] with Additional Matter, 256.
a lodging house—a significant detail. Lodging houses and, to a greater extent, inns were places of sexual freedom. These expectations undoubtedly framed Hazlitt’s behaviour while he was at 9 Southampton Buildings. Sarah Walker’s willingness to send prostitutes to Hazlitt is perhaps less reflective of her own moral discretion than of her class and the boarding house her parents ran. Sarah Walker’s parents, as both Hofkosh and Burroughs have emphasized, ran a business, and it was part of her job to keep the clients happy.65

Sarah Walker inhabited a vulnerable position as the serving girl who brought Hazlitt his meals and his visitors. We know that she performed other basic servants’ duties in the house, which provided opportunities for her to be alone with Hazlitt and the other (male) lodgers. In Servants: English Domestics in the Eighteenth Century Bridget Hill details the dangers female servants faced. They were seen to be “sexually available” by those who employed them, making sexual advances and, in turn, the threat of sexual violence a common occurrence.66 Conduct manuals advised female servants how best to avoid or decline gracefully the advances of male masters. For example, Eliza Haywood’s A Present for a Servant-Maid (1743) includes a specific section on “Temptations from your Master.” Haywood explains that female servants must reject the “Importunities” of lustful masters “which it must be confessed are not easy to surmount”; if one’s master is a single man, then he is “under less Restraint […] Opportunities will not be wanting to prosecute his Aim.”67 Connections between service and sex were widespread in the period. Interpretations of Sarah’s interactions with Hazlitt must consider the power

66 Hill, Servants, 49.
dynamics informing their relationship.\textsuperscript{68} Reading Sarah Walker’s behaviour is a much more complicated task than Hazlitt, Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt, and, most recently, Duncan Wu have made it seem.\textsuperscript{69}

**A “degrading infatuation” and the Familiar Language of “Standard Authors”**

While “sexual encounters with servants seemed ‘natural’ and were ‘socially acceptable’—at least to the upper class,” emotional attachment to a servant girl was quite another matter.\textsuperscript{70} Critics thought Hazlitt’s love for Sarah Walker nothing more than “a degrading infatuation.”\textsuperscript{71} Mockingly imitating Hazlitt’s own disregard for class-informed propriety, reviews of Liber Amoris also claimed to be unconcerned with class distinctions. Despite Sarah’s low birth, the reviewer for John Bull declares his intention to rescue her from Hazlitt’s immoral advances and his decision to publish his book:

Never, perhaps, was a poor, honest, sublime little girl in SALLY’S station made the subject of a seven shilling and sixpenny book—as it is, we have done our duty—rank to us signifies nothing, and we will not submit to have beastliness and folly stuffed down the public throat, or a virtuous

\textsuperscript{68} It should be noted that Burroughs suggests that Sarah Walker may have been sexually interested in Hazlitt, see “Acting in the Closet,” 128-29.
\textsuperscript{69} For example, in his biography of Hazlitt, Wu argues that Sarah Walker “took a malicious pleasure in exerting her influence” over Hazlitt. He goes on to write, “Accusations of Hazlitt’s ‘sexual harassment’ are a testimony to the stupidity of modern literary criticism […] Not only do such critics know nothing of the social and sexual norms of Hazlitt’s day, but they fail to recognize the anachronism inherent in the application of twenty-first-century American values to the English lower middle class in early-nineteenth century London. Sarah did not think of herself as harassed or would surely have reported Hazlitt’s conduct to her parents, which she never did. […] she encouraged and teased him[…]” Wu’s unquestioning acceptance of Hazlitt’s version of his relationship with Sarah seems suspect since, as Hofkosh has noted, her thoughts on the matter are absent from the historical record. Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 328-29. See also Wu’s defence of Hazlitt in “Hazlitt’s ‘Sexual Harassment,’” 199-214.
\textsuperscript{70} Hill, *Servants*, 50.
\textsuperscript{71} “Notice of Liber Amoris,” 3.
female calumniated groundlessly, though her libeller be a cockney lecturer on Shakespeare, and she no better than “a tradesman’s daughter.”

The sarcastic references to Sarah’s sublimity reinforce her common class status and Hazlitt’s overzealous praise of her. In the reviewer’s eyes, Hazlitt’s misplaced affections implicated him in larger misunderstandings of cultural and commercial nuances.

It is also no small matter that the review points to Liber Amoris’s relatively high price of more than seven shillings. For the reviewer, it was not simply that Liber Amoris represented Hazlitt’s misplaced notions of authorial greatness (indeed, as I detail below, Liber Amoris aligns itself explicitly with other confessional works, specifically Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s) but the disjunction between the relatively high cost of the book and its focus on Hazlitt’s obsession with a tradesman’s daughter. Moreover, Liber Amoris awkwardly combines different genres including epistolary fiction and, importantly, the secret history. The ease with which H. and other characters in the book were identified with their real-life counterparts aligns it with the barely-masked versions of private lives (and often affairs) found in secret histories. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the genre of the secret history “takes the form of narratives variously exposing government and its machinations, secret clubs and societies, conspiracies and revolutions, spies and espionage, as well as the most delicate personal matters, including clandestine love

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72 Review of Liber Amoris, John Bull, no. 132 (23 June 1823): 198
73 By way of comparison, octavo editions of Byron’s poems such as The Giaour, The Corsair, and Hebrew Melodies were sold for 5.5 shillings each. Thomas De Quincey’s Confessions of an English Opium Eater (1822) could be purchased for 5 shillings. See St Clair, Reading Nation, 585-87 and 596.
74 Assigning a genre to Liber Amoris is not straightforward. Gary Kelly identifies Liber Amoris as one of the primary examples of what he terms “the quasi-novel”: “frame narratives, in which a prose fiction frame contains inset material, such as verse, dialogues, or factual essays, normally appropriate to other genres.” We can also see connections between Liber Amoris and other autobiographical novels of the period such as Lady Caroline Lamb’s Glenarvon, which I explore in the following chapter, and Mary Hays’s Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796). Kelly, English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 252-59. For more on the links between Liber Amoris and Memoirs of Emma Courtney, see Mee, Conversable Worlds, 271-76.
affairs, illegitimate children, lives of dissipation, [and] private quarrels.” While secret histories were “ingrained in public discourse” in the nineteenth century, they were often associated with hack writers who bribed and blackmailed people for the information contained in their volumes. What makes Hazlitt’s engagement with the genre of the secret history especially intriguing is his decision to expose himself. From its silk binding to its price, Liber Amoris was at odds with its subject matter. Yet the price and physical appearance of the volume declare boldly Hazlitt’s belief in his work’s literary value and the respectable audience for whom he wrote.

Hazlitt had been attacked for the high price of his volumes before. In 1822 a Blackwood’s Magazine review of Table Talk mocked the high cost of the two volumes: “Eight and twenty shillings for Hazlitt’s Table-Talk! Good heavens! […] It is truly wonderful, that even a Cockney should have thought people would give eight-and-twenty shillings merely to hear in what horrible dudgeon a single unfortunate author has taken the ill-treatment of the critics and of the public.” The reviews of Table Talk and Liber Amoris contrasted the relatively high price of the volumes with the Cockney origins of their author. While readers might be willing to read Hazlitt’s essays in their original context of periodicals like the New Monthly Magazine, collecting them in a volume and selling them for 28 shillings seemed, to some reviewers, a sign that Hazlitt did not understand his place in a literary pecking order. According to negative reviews, Hazlitt’s work was more akin to the type of literary hack writing associated with Grub Street. By

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76 Ibid., 77. In other instances, almost no effort was made to mask these supposedly “secret” facts. For example, see John Wade’s The Black Book; or, Corruption Unmasked! (1820), which is explicit about the bribery and debauchery of politicians and aristocrats.
77 Review of Hazlitt’s Table Talk in Romantics Reviewed; Part C, 1:156.
lecturing on great writers such as Shakespeare and charging a high price for his printed works, Hazlitt attempted to align himself with respectable notions of reception associated with “the symbolic giving and receiving of texts between great writers and singular, sensitive readers,” which seeks to move authorship outside the market economy. Counterintuitively, though, such movements were often predicated on high prices. Expensive volumes excluded a common readership; a book’s price could at once remove an object from the negative pole of market consumption and tacitly acknowledge its place within the commercial marketplace. Sensitive readers, Hazlitt’s antagonistic reviewers argued, would not be fooled so easily; they would recognize Hazlitt’s publications as the low-class and immoral works they supposedly were.

Even before the fiasco surrounding Liber Amoris, Hazlitt was no stranger to class-informed personal attacks parading as literary criticism. His passion for a servant seemed only to justify these earlier attacks on his vulgarity. The most notable of these is John Wilson’s “Hazlitt Cross-Questioned,” published in Blackwood’s Magazine in 1818. The attack claimed that Hazlitt was nothing more than “a mere quack, Mr Editor, and a mere bookmaker; one of the sort that lounge in third-rate bookshops, and write third-rate books.” According to Wilson’s review Hazlitt was not a respectable author but a lowly “bookmaker” catering to an uneducated mass readership who frequented unprestigious bookshops. Hazlitt’s taste in women, which, in addition to Sarah Walker, included prostitutes, only inflamed attacks about his low-class tendencies and moral depravity.

79 A modern example of this strategy is the tagline from the advertising campaign for Stella Artois beer in the United Kingdom, which from 1982-2007 was “Reassuringly Expensive.”
80 Quoted in Wu, William Hazlitt, 254.
Criticisms of Cockney school writers including Leigh Hunt, John Keats, and Hazlitt often pointed to their social inferiority—an inferiority that, critics argued, displayed itself in the Cockneys’ want of education. In one of the most famous invectives against the Cockney school and its supposed leader, Leigh Hunt, “Z.” (most likely John Gibson Lockhart) made much of Hunt’s imperfect classical education: “He knows absolutely nothing of Greek, almost nothing of Latin, and his knowledge of Italian literature is confined to a few of the most popular of Petrarch’s sonnets and an imperfect acquaintance with Ariosto, through the medium of Mr. Hoole.”81 Pointing to Hunt’s lack of classical languages, just as he would in his later review of Keats’s *Endymion* in 1818, “Z.” accused the Cockney school writers of vulgar morals and vulgar education. The review of Hazlitt’s *Table Talk* in *Blackwood’s Magazine* also emphasized issues of education and cultural capital. The reviewer ridiculed Hazlitt’s presentation of himself as well-travelled. After quoting a passage from *Table Talk* the reviewer writes, “Now, the object of the above passage is to puff Mr Hazlitt as a travelled man. He has, it appears, (we really never suspected it before,) made the grand tour of Oxford and Blenheim, and also lounged in the long gallery of the Louvre. […] What a fine thing to be in FRANCE, understanding, as it appears, only English[.]”82 The reviewer mockingly compares Hazlitt’s travels in Oxfordshire and London with the European grand tours taken by many men of the period, especially those with money and of gentle birth, neither of which Hazlitt had. Implicitly, too, the review criticizes the circumstances under which Hazlitt travelled to Paris in 1802 shortly after the Treaty of Amiens was signed. Unlike the slew of aristocratic travellers from England who went to Paris in the summer of 1802,

82 Review of *Table Talk*, in *Romantics Reviewed; Part C*, 1:163.
Hazlitt went not as part of a tour but as an employee. Mr. Railton from Liverpool had commissioned him “to copy ten paintings in the Louvre.” Moreover, Hazlitt’s excitement about his travels, reported in his essay “On Going a Journey,” would have reminded readers of his political zeal for the revolution taking place in France. Such reviews saw his education and his prose as both common and dangerous.

Hazlitt offered direct justifications of his common language in his essays. In his famous defence of his writing in “On Familiar Style,” Hazlitt explains, “I have been (I know) loudly accused of revelling in vulgarisms and broken English. I cannot speak to that point: but so far I plead guilty to the determined use of acknowledged idioms and common elliptical expressions.” Here, like Charlotte Smith and Wordsworth before him, Hazlitt frames familiar, common language as a virtue—something that connects him with his audience. His claims are similar to Wordsworth’s rejection in the Advertisement to Lyrical Ballads of “the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers” in favour of his own common language. Like Wordsworth, who asserts in the Preface that his poetry “adopt[ed] the very language of men,” Hazlitt argues that to “write a genuine familiar or truly English style is to write as any one would speak in common conversation, who had a thorough command and choice of words, or who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes.”

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83 Wu, William Hazlitt, 79.
84 Moreover, the review’s emphasis on Hazlitt’s education answers Hazlitt’s attacks on established hierarchies of education in Table Talk. In “On the Aristocracy of Letters” Hazlitt lambastes what he sees as false signs of knowledge and genius: “Among other things, the learned languages are a ready passport to this sort of unmeaning, unanalysed reputation. They presently lift a man up among the celestial constellations, the signs of the Zodiac (as it were) and third heaven of inspiration, from whence he looks down on those who are toiling on in this lower sphere.” “On the Aristocracy of Letters” Selected Writings, 6:185.
86 Wordsworth, Advertisement to Lyrical Ballads, 49.
Hazlitt’s comments in “On the Prose-Style of Poets” suggest that flourishes of quotation should be used only sparingly, especially in prose. For Hazlitt, ideal prose is aligned with conversation: “No style is worth a farthing that is not calculated to be read out, or that is not allied to a spirited conversation.” Specifically contrasting poets with prose writers, Hazlitt claims, “The poet spreads the colours of fancy, the illusions of his own mind, round every object, ad libitum; the prose-writer is compelled to extract his materials patiently and bit by bit, from his subject. What he adds of ornament, what he borrows from the pencil, must be sparing, and judiciously inserted.” Though Hazlitt does not directly address quotation here, his earlier reference in the same paragraph to the “frequency of epithets and ornaments” that characterizes Milton’s Latinate prose suggests that quotation provides one type of literary ornament. Hazlitt’s reference to the pencil—a tool more often associated with artists than writers—rather than a pen connects poetry with art and fancy. Too much poetic fancy, Hazlitt argues, awkwardly elevates prose, making it affected rather than sincere. The weakness of Milton’s prose, according to Hazlitt, rests in its indebtedness to classical language.

Again, Hazlitt’s theories about quotation gesture toward Wordsworth’s earlier desire expressed in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* to distance himself from “a large portion of phrases and figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets.” For both writers, quotation and overwrought literary language deaden a text’s originality and power. In some ways,
though, his asserted disdain for elevated prose reads like grandstanding. Many of Hazlitt’s essays hinge on the very pedantic and oratorical flourishes he critiques.

Quotations and literary allusions feature prominently in much of Hazlitt’s writing, and his extensive references to a vast array of both popular and classical literary works seem designed to answer accusations that he was uncultured and commonly educated. These quotations signal literary knowledge and his participation in a literary community. As I argued in my first chapter on Charlotte Smith, here also I contend that Hazlitt’s literary references signal a “set of credentials.” Yet in Hazlitt’s case censorious critics saw his literary credentials as forged documents. His allusions to authors such as Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton as well as his contemporaries such as Wordsworth and Coleridge demonstrate his familiarity with a literary economy of knowledge that some felt that he and other Cockney writers were not entitled to have. Marjorie Levinson’s analysis of the critical reactions to Keats’s style applies to Hazlitt’s. Not unlike the mediated classical references in Keats’s poems, literary references in Hazlitt’s prose function as “props, or material signs of literary reality.” Hazlitt’s self-consciously intertextual, quotational prose “is aggressively literary and therefore not just ‘not Literature’ but, in effect, anti-Literature: a parody.” In Hazlitt’s case, though, this parody seems inadvertent. He, unlike Keats, does not call attention to his love of literature by flaunting his lack of Classical knowledge.

Even largely sympathetic reactions to Hazlitt’s writing identified problems with his frequent literary allusions. Responses from his contemporaries indicate that some

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92 Hollander, The Figure of Echo, 72.
94 Here I am thinking of how, for instance, Keats calls attention to his mediated knowledge of Homer in “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer.”
thought his essays, like Charlotte Smith’s sonnets, borrowed too heavily from other writers. Thomas De Quincey, for instance, thought that Hazlitt had a “habit of trite quotation […] which places the reader at the mercy of a man’s tritest remembrances from his most school-boy reading.” For him, Hazlitt’s quotations presented the reader with a rather unpleasant reminder of mindless repetitive school exercises. De Quincey’s assertions recall one of the central criticisms against Hazlitt and the other members of the Cockney school—that their literature displayed a common and even vulgar “stock knowledge.” Rather than a mark of literary prowess, then, the quotations littering Hazlitt’s prose seem perfunctory. His works’ intertextuality becomes a nervous schoolboy tic. De Quincey casts Hazlitt as a pedant.

At times, however, Hazlitt actively embraces his pedantry and uses quotations to connect with his readers. Many of Hazlitt’s quotations, as De Quincey noted, would have been recognizable to a significant portion of his audience. These literary references serve as common points of connection between author and reader. Thus, these familiar quotations represent commonplaces in the traditional sense of the word: “a passage of general application.” If, as Graham Good contends, “[t]he connections between thoughts in the essay are often made through things, rather than being linked directly in a continuous argument,” then in Hazlitt’s essays quotations are these “things.” Hofkosh has also asserted the thing-like quality of Hazlitt’s quotations, describing them as “verbal tokens, words that are things.” In his familiar essays, Hazlitt often employs quotations transitonally to shift from his personal observations to his more theoretical assertions,

95 Quoted in Cafarelli, *Prose in the Age of Poets*, 113-14.
linking personal experiences to more abstract, universal thinking. These links established through quotations form the crux of the familiar essays.

Theorizing the familiar essay, Uttara Natarajan has claimed that for Hazlitt “the poetics of familiarity” depends on the “association of particular and ideal.”\(^{100}\) Hazlitt personalized his writing and invited his readers into an imaginative, sympathetic discourse with him. Describing the autobiographical elements of Hazlitt’s familiar essays, Christine Chaney has noted that Hazlitt’s “self-revelation comes mostly in small doses and primarily as it intertwines with his philosophical and cultural inquires.”\(^{101}\) Hazlitt’s contemporaries noticed the way his essays connected the personal with the philosophical; a reviewer for the *London Magazine* explained, “There is no other critic who thus makes his comments part of ourselves for ever after. […] He puts a heart into his abstrusest theories.”\(^{102}\) In his familiar essays, Hazlitt uses his personal experiences as a springboard for observations about larger and often theoretical issues of literature and subjectivity. For example, his famous *Table Talk* essay “The Indian Jugglers” begins with an admission of self-doubt:

What have I been doing all my life? Have I been idle, or have I nothing to shew for all my labour and pains? Or have I passed my time in pouring words like water into empty sieves, rolling a stone up a hill and then down again, trying to prove an argument in the teeth of facts, and looking for causes in the dark, and not finding them? […] What abortions are these


\(^{102}\) Review of *Table Talk*, *Romantics Reviewed; Part C*, 2:599. It should be noted that the *London Magazine* had an interest in the positive reception of *Table Talk*, since many of Hazlitt’s essays from the volumes had already appeared in the magazine.
Essays! What errors, what ill-pieced transitions, what crooked reasons, what lame conclusions! Hazlitt’s doubts about his own work lead him into a more general meditation on aesthetics: “Objects, like words, have a meaning; and the true artist is the interpreter of this language, which he can only do by knowing its application to a thousand other objects in a thousand other situations.”

Beyond framing his philosophical ideas with his personal experiences, Hazlitt also connects with his readers in his essays through common familiar literary works. We can see Hazlitt’s quotations at work in “On the Conversation of Authors.” Hazlitt explains that certain writers “have bequeathed a lasting legacy to posterity; and such persons have become standard authors.” Hazlitt’s references to these “standard authors” establish the bounds of familiarity’s exclusivity. Outlining his own relationship to authors, Hazlitt defines his relationship with his readers, a strategy that Jon Klancher has identified as a crucial element of Romantic-era literary culture. Indeed, one cornerstone of familiarity is the fact that it “excluded as much and as many as it included.” Familiarity “carved out a particular social space […] in which certain freedoms were permitted” but this social space and these freedoms were not extended to everyone. “In order to form the mode of reception for one audience,” Klancher argues, “the writer has to produce, at the same time, another audience-text relationship, and this

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103 Hazlitt, “The Indian Jugglers,” Selected Writings, 6:68.
104 Ibid., 6:71.
106 Pearsall, Atlantic Families, 57.
107 Ibid.
exerts an internal pressure against which he defines his relation to his own readers […] one’s awareness of belonging to a particular public can only be acquired *relationally.*”¹⁰⁸

One’s (in)ability to identify Hazlitt’s source texts defines one’s place in the essay’s rhetoric of exclusion, which compares “us” scholars and authors with the common people. In the following passage, for example, Hazlitt quotes *Paradise Lost* and then *Macbeth:*

> We visit at the shrine [of great authors], drink in some measure of the inspiration, and cannot easily “breathe in other air less pure, accustomed to immortal fruits.” Are we to be blamed for this, because the vulgar and illiterate do not always understand us? The fault is rather in them, who are “confined and cabin’d in,” each in their own particular sphere and compartment of ideas, and have not the same refined medium of communication or abstracted topics of discourse.¹⁰⁹

Hazlitt’s “refined medium of communication” is based, at least partially, on intertextuality and acquaintance with the standard authors he praises at the beginning of the essay. Thus, to “understand us” also means to recognize them—writers who “have bequeathed as a lasting legacy to posterity.” The essay employs this exclusionary dichotomy throughout: “Happy is it, that the mass of mankind eat and drink, and sleep, and perform their several tasks, and do as they like without us—caring nothing for our scribblings, our carpings, and our quibbles.”¹¹⁰ Those who identify with Hazlitt have presumably felt their own interests summarily discounted, and Hazlitt’s categorization of authorship and intellectual debate as mere scribblings, carpings, and quibbles establishes

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¹¹⁰ Ibid.
connections to his audience. Through their shared exclusion from vulgarity and the happy “mass of mankind” Hazlitt and his imagined readers inhabit a common but importantly limited space conducive to congenial familiarity. Known only to some, Hazlitt’s literary references establish interpersonal familiarity with his bookish readers. Importantly, though, Hazlitt’s references would have been recognizable to a growing audience of self-taught readers. Indeed, Milton and Shakespeare would have been accessible to autodidacts as well as those with a classical education from the elite universities.

The Failure of Familiar Literary Language

While the allusive strategies in Hazlitt’s familiar essays and Liber Amoris are similar, they seem to arise from different motivations. In the familiar essays quotations are used to demarcate Hazlitt’s audience, and they help establish familiarity with readers based on a common literary language. In essays such as “The Indian Juggler” and “On the Conversation of Authors” Hazlitt’s personal experiences and literary quotations always ultimately move beyond the individual to broader topics. In this way, Hazlitt’s familiar essays validate the importance of what Adorno has called “individual experience, unified in hope and disillusion.” The individual’s experience “gives depth to its observations by confirming or refuting them” and, as a result, demonstrates the essay’s relationship with “the all-encompassing experience of historical humanity.” In Liber Amoris Hazlitt employs similar references to the same standard authors, but they do not gesture outward to an “us” that includes the reader. Instead, they reflect inward toward Hazlitt’s own experiences and the text’s apparent narcissism.

112 Ibid., 156 and 158.
Other scholars have noted *Liber Amoris’s* intertextuality. Marilyn Butler has called it “the most continuously literary of love affairs.”\(^{113}\) Similarly Robert Ready has noted how in *Liber Amoris* autobiographical absorption goes hand in hand with an “almost hyper-literary sensibility.” For Ready, *Liber Amoris* is “betokened by the physical presence of books,” and Hazlitt’s frequent quotations “give substance to his unreciprocated love.” This hyper-literariness, Ready suggests, helps Hazlitt create “the complete man of feeling who projects the world from his own centre and whose fallacies are truly pathetic.”\(^{114}\) Hazlitt may be a man of feeling, but pathetic is certainly not the same as sympathetic. *Liber Amoris* does not shift from personal experience to wider ideological issues as the familiar essays do. As a result, *Liber Amoris* leaves less space for the reader. According to the standards of familiarity outlined in his essays, *Liber Amoris* is detailed to a fault.

In “On Why Distant Objects Please,” Hazlitt explains, “Whatever is placed beyond the reach of sense and knowledge, whatever is imperfectly discerned, the fancy pieces out at its leisure.”\(^{115}\) Hazlitt’s comments about obscurity apply to the way familiarity works; or, rather, how it does not work well when too much detail is provided. The idea that imperfect knowledge promotes sympathy is at the heart of theories of emotional connection from the eighteenth century to today. These theories clarify why, for its original readers, *Liber Amoris’s* abundance of detail exemplified indecorous, overly-forward familiarity. Adam Smith’s ideas about overabundant emotional display


\(^{114}\) Ready, “The Logic of Passion,” 51.

similarly apply: “We are disgusted with that clamorous grief, which, without delicacy, calls upon our compassion.”

Liber Amoris leaves little room for delicacy and emotional obscurity, which Hazlitt himself suggests are necessary for emotional interest. For instance, in his 1826 essay “On Novelty and Familiarity,” Hazlitt asks,

[D]oes not our familiarity with nature, with science, and with art breed an indifference for those objects we are most conversant with and most masters of? I am afraid the answer, if an honest one, must be on the unfavourable side; and that from the moment that we can be said to understand any subject thoroughly, or can execute any art skillfully, our pleasure in it will be found to be on the decline.

He goes on to observe that the absence “of novelty, of curiosity, and of mystery” results in “an end also of our transport, our wonder, and our delight.” He elaborates his thinking about indecent information: “There is a craving after information, as there is after food; and it is in supplying the void, in satisfying the appetite, that the pleasure in both cases chiefly consists. When the uneasy want is removed, both the pleasure and the pain cease.”

Supplying readers with details about his failed relationship may be initially intriguing but does not invite more complex, lasting emotions.

Little about Hazlitt’s love is left hidden in Liber Amoris. Hazlitt admits, for instance, to being unmanned by Sarah and “doat[ing] on her” extravagantly. He confesses that his unrequited love has thrown him into “dumb despair” and suicidal thoughts. He recounts his unseemly shrieking fit after Sarah rejects him. In other words, Hazlitt

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118 Ibid.
119 Hazlitt, Liber Amoris, 30 and 32.
appears to exhibit the same type of extravagant “feminine” behaviour and prose—a muse which “talks indelicately like a tea-sipping milliner girl”—that *Blackwood’s Magazine* associated with the Cockney school. Many of these details are dressed in literary language and references.

The quotations in *Liber Amoris* offer conceptual scaffolding. If our sense of our own subjectivity is, as Hofkosh has suggested, “our familiarity to ourselves,” then I posit that Hazlitt uses these standard authors to help make his experiences familiar and interpretable to himself. References in *Liber Amoris* to literary characters from the standard authors whom Hazlitt quotes in his familiar essays frame Hazlitt’s experiences with Sarah Walker. Butler explains: “From the start he depicts a series of scenes in which he plays, by turns, the parts of Young Werther, Hamlet, Othello, Iago, and Lovelace.” The fictional and highly literary framework of the text enacts possession over Sarah and, more generally, over Hazlitt’s experiences. “Fictionalizing the story,” Butler argues, “is a device for objectifying it, above all for setting up a distance and some measure of control between the author and H—.” Not unlike Smith’s ventriloquism in her sonnets, then, Hazlitt’s allusive literary language offers a template for the experiences portrayed in *Liber Amoris*. While the work’s literary references mediate selfhood and may make Hazlitt familiar to himself, they do not necessarily precipitate familiarity with and sympathy from readers.

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121 Hofkosh, “Broken Images,” 47.
122 Butler, “Satire and the Images of Self in the Romantic Period,” 159, 163. Jonathan Gross has posited similar ideas about how writing “creates its own object”: “No sooner has Hazlitt ‘lost’ Coleridge, Napoleon, and Sarah as objects of worship, than he has gained them on his own terms as literary commodities: ‘My First Acquaintance With the Poets,’ *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, and *Liber Amoris*. Yet Hazlitt substitutes these literary commodities for people only at the price of gutting his object of reverence, hoisting Coleridge, Napoleon, and Sarah on the petard of his intellect.” Gross, “Hazlitt’s Worshipping Practice in *Liber Amoris*,” 712.
The painter Benjamin Robert Haydon certainly thought *Liber Amoris* was not about connecting with readers. He believed *Liber Amoris* was a cathartic endeavour Hazlitt used to regain control over his emotions; he claimed Hazlitt made arrangements to publish the book “in order to ease his wound […] He will sink into idiocy [sic] if he does not get rid of it.”\(^{123}\) If we apply Haydon’s observations to Hazlitt’s intertextual literary language, then it seems that literary references in *Liber Amoris* concern Hazlitt alone rather than his relationship with readers. Both the overabundance of literary references and the source texts that Hazlitt chose worked against sympathetic familiarity.

Joanna Baillie’s thoughts about the negative effects of florid language in drama apply here:

> [T]he passions have been robbed of their native prerogative; and in adorning with their strong figures and lofty expressions the calm speeches of the unruffled, it is found that, when they are called upon to raise their voice, the power of distinguishing themselves has been taken away. This is an injury by no means compensated, but very greatly aggravated by embellishing, in return, the speeches of passion with the ingenious conceits, and compleat similies of premeditated thought.\(^{124}\)

In other words, over-embellishment has a desensitizing and even vulgarizing effect. Like Adam Smith, Baillie identifies the necessity of balance in representations of emotion. In *Liber Amoris* Hazlitt challenges this notion of balanced familiarity. His expressions of passion are interwoven with quotations and literary expressions of the type and frequency that Baillie claims deaden emotion.

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\(^{124}\) Baillie, *Plays on the Passions*, 22.
The end of Part I of *Liber Amoris* includes lines “Written in a blank leaf of Endymion.” The *Endymion* Hazlitt mentions presumably refers to Keats’s volume, published in 1818. Keats’s poem relates Endymion’s love for the goddess Cynthia, his eventual rejection of her in favour of the Indian maiden, and the final realization that his two loves are, in fact, the same. The text mimics the heightened sentimentality of the volume in which H. supposedly writes: “But by her dove’s eyes and serpent-shape, I think she does not hate me; by her smooth forehead and her crested hair, I own I love her; by her soft looks and queen-like grace (which men might fall down and worship) I swear to live and die for her!” Ready has suggested that the note’s inscription “in a blank leaf of *Endymion* allies H. with the prototype of a man who falls in love with an ideal woman.” Of course, in hindsight, the irony of Hazlitt’s comparison of himself with Endymion becomes clear; Sarah Walker, it turns out, is not the ideal goddess he originally imagines. The reference also proclaimed Hazlitt’s allegiance with Keats’s most negatively reviewed poem, and solidified his associations with the Cockney school.

In other places in the text, diverse literary references cluster together, and the appropriateness of their application to Hazlitt’s situation is less evident. In the passage below, for example, he draws from several different sources in a matter of only a few sentences, giving the work a frantic feel. At this point in the text, H. has realized that a marriage with S. will not happen:

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125 Duncan Wu, Robert Ready, and Gregory Dart all agree that the *Endymion* to which Hazlitt refers is Keats’s.
128 Hazlitt’s disappointment also emphasizes the irony of the classical allusion he makes in the work’s subtitle: “The New Pygmalion.” Indeed, unlike Pygmalion’s animated statue, Sarah Walker resolutely refuses to conform to his ideals, leaving him angry and disillusioned.
With the morning’s light the conviction glared in upon me that I had not only lost her for ever—but every feeling I had ever had towards her—respect, tenderness, pity—all but my fatal passion, was gone. The whole was a mockery, a frightful illusion. I had embraced the false Florimel [sic] instead of the true; or was like the man in the Arabian Nights who had married a goul. How different was the idea I once had of her! Was this she,

Who had been beguiled—she who was made

Within a gentle bosom to be laid—

To bless and to be blessed—to be heart-bare

To one who found his bettered likeness there—

To think for ever with him, like a bride—

To haunt his eye, like taste personified—

To double his delight, to share his sorrow,

And like a morning beam, wake to him every morrow?

I saw her pale, cold form glide silent by me, dead to shame as to pity.129

Hazlitt’s references change abruptly throughout the passage. The associations between S. and “false Florimel” recall Book III of Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*. Perhaps realizing that S.’s “deceptions” are badly fitted to a Spenserian framework, Hazlitt moves in the same sentence to a reference to “The History of Sidi-Nouman” in the *Arabian Nights*. This reference appears more fitting, as Sidi-Nouman unwittingly married an evil corpse-consuming witch who turned him into a dog and beat him, and at this point in the text H. suspects S. of deceit. The passage then moves quickly to a quotation from Leigh Hunt’s

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The Story of Rimini (itself an adaptation of the Paolo and Francesca episode in Canto V of Dante’s *Inferno*) to contrast the deceitful “true” Sarah Walker with the ideal lover whom Hazlitt imagined.

The rapid transitions between these different references reveal the inadequacy of each allusion to capture Hazlitt’s situation. Upon closer inspection the references to both Spenser and Hunt reveal how uneasily they fit Hazlitt’s relationship with Sarah Walker. The allusion to the false Florimell of Book III of *The Faerie Queene* refers to the witch’s deception of her son, who lusts after the chaste, beautiful Florimell. At first glance, Hazlitt’s reference seems to emphasize falsity, but upon closer examination the allusion proves more problematic. Taking refuge with the witch and her son, Florimell “grew familiare” with them. Her familiarity causes the witch’s son to conceive of “affection bace, / And cast to loue her in his brutish mind; / No louve, but brutish lust, that was so beastly tind.” His wicked desire for Florimell causes her to flee, leaving him in a lovesick frenzy. In order to “heale her sonne, whose senses were decayd,” the witch fools him by creating a false Florimell who looks exactly like the original (3.8.4). The more we explore Hazlitt’s allusion, the more its application to his love for Sarah Walker appears clumsy or at least implicitly damning of his own actions. Spenser’s Florimells, both original and false, are persecuted figures. They are subject to relentless, unwanted male attention. Repeatedly almost victims of rape, these Florimells depict female virtue under assault. Though, in addition to deceiving the witch’s son, the false Florimell also fools Tromparts and Braggadochio and seemingly changes her affections easily, she is consistently portrayed as an object of male lust. She may not be as virtuous as the true

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Florimell, yet Spenser demonstrates that those she betrays are no less to blame. To them she is nothing more than beautiful “spoyle,” and she is prized for her appearance not her virtue (3.8.13). On the surface, Hazlitt’s reference to Spenser seems to portray him as a victim of deception; however, its resonances are much more complex and damning than it may first appear.

Although some readers might not have understood the full depth of Hazlitt’s allusions, few would have missed the references he made to the scandalous work *The Story of Rimini*. Hazlitt’s quotation from Hunt’s poem is also complex. *The Story of Rimini* was the focus of “Z.”’s notorious review article “On the Cockney School of Poetry” published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in October 1817. The initial review was followed by several more equally vitriolic instalments through 1818. One main point throughout the series is the “extreme moral depravity” of *The Story of Rimini*.131 “Z.” argued that Hunt’s detailed, sympathetic portrayal of Paolo and Francesca’s incestuous love was particularly offensive.132 Other authors, specifically Byron, who treated similar topics, “avoided all the details of this unhallowed love.”133 Conversely, Hunt was explicit in his treatment of the lovers, and his damnation was in the details—details to which Hazlitt alludes in *Liber Amoris*. The passage Hazlitt quotes comes from the third canto of Hunt’s poem at the point when Francesca’s marital fidelity fades. Thus, Hazlitt’s lament about what he had thought Sarah was—his ideal woman—compares her to an adulteress. Francesca’s immorality and Hunt’s supposedly immoral portrayal of her point to a reception history that hinges on impropriety of details—details that were “likely to

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132 Francesca, of course, was not related to Paolo by blood, but he was her husband’s brother. Z.’s reviews of the poem return again and again to the issue of incest.
corrupt milliners and apprentice-boys.”\textsuperscript{134} The wealth of detail makes both \textit{The Story of Rimini} and \textit{Liber Amoris} indecorous. Divulging these details in \textit{Liber Amoris} and then framing them with quotations from contemporary works accused of immorality strengthened associations between Hazlitt’s work and vulgar literature.

Descriptions of H.’s physical intimacy with S. offer the same type of details for which Hunt’s text was criticized. For example, he writes to C.P— in Part II, “She is my heart’s idol; and believe me those words of yours applied to the dear saint—‘To lip a chaste one and suppose her wanton’—were balm and rapture to me. I have \textit{lipped her}, God knows how often, and oh! is it even possible that she is chaste, and that she has bestowed her loved ‘endearments’ on me?”\textsuperscript{135}

The number of personal, embarrassing details Hazlitt included in \textit{Liber Amoris} was not unprecedented. His compulsive confessions have a Rousseauian lineage. Interestingly, Hazlitt’s most explicit references to Rousseau are entangled with failure. Hazlitt admits that his Rousseauian literary language failed to alter Sarah Walker’s opinion of him. In a letter to C.P— in Part II of \textit{Liber Amoris}, H. compares his courtship of S. to Rousseau’s love for Sophie d’Houdetot in his \textit{Confessions}: “I don’t believe that any woman was ever courted more passionately than she has been by me. As Rousseau said of Madame d’Houptot \textit[sic] (forgive the allusion) my heart has found a tongue in speaking to her, and I have talked to her the divine language of love. Yet she says, she is insensible to it.”\textsuperscript{136} This passage at once calls attention to and apologizes for its reference to Rousseau’s unrequited love for his friend’s mistress. The request for forgiveness may be an acknowledgement of the drastic differences between Hazlitt’s own situation and

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 1:60.
\textsuperscript{135} Hazlitt, \textit{Liber Amoris}, 29.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 29.
those reflected in his source text. Indeed, Rousseau’s Madame d’Houdetot, as Gregory Dart notes, is wildly different from Sarah Walker; while both women are the objects of unrequited love, the similarities stop there. “Rousseau’s words,” Dart explains, “were addressed to an elegant young aristocrat and framed by a beautiful pastoral landscape.” Conversely, Hazlitt’s were aimed at a tailor’s daughter—a woman existing in a liminal space between a servant and independent person—and, thus, “were ‘cribb’d, cabin’d and confin’d’ by their Cockney setting.”

The disjunction between Hazlitt’s literary language and the woman to whom he applied it shocked more than one nineteenth-century critic: “To think of Hazlitt gravely lavishing his choice Elizabethan quotations on the hussey [sic], not sparing even to lay at her feet his sacred passion for Napoleon!” When it initially appeared, “[h]ostile critics of Liber Amoris returned again and again to the lodging-house setting, contrasting the grubby, cramped milieu of the story—the sheer littleness of it—with the soaring, self-important language in which it was couched.” Henry Crabb Robinson, for example, recorded his shocked response to Liber Amoris in his diary: “Finished early Hazlitt’s disgusting New Pygmalion. One can tolerate the passion of a St. Preux or a Werther as it is set off by the eloquence of Rousseau or Goethe, but such a story as this is nauseous and revolting. It ought to exclude the author from all decent society.”

According to Robinson and his contemporaries, neither the topic nor the execution of Liber Amoris justified Hazlitt’s frequent flights of literary fancy.

137 Gregory Dart, ed., Liber Amoris and Related Writings (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), 226n.
138 Le Gallienne, Introduction to Liber Amoris […] with Additional Matter, xxv.
139 Dart, Introduction to Liber Amoris, 7.
140 Quoted in Charles Mahoney, “Liber Amoris: Figuring out the Coquette,” 50.
Hazlitt repeatedly attempts to frame his failed courtship in terms of familiar literary tropes, yet the variety of his references only calls attention to their inapplicability. The frequency with which Hazlitt changes his literary frame of reference—moving as we have seen, from Spenser to the Arabian Nights to Leigh Hunt to Rousseau—testifies to the difficulty of relating his experiences with Sarah Walker to the literary tradition of his “standard authors.” It is as if he were trying on different hats until finding one that fits. The variety of the texts becomes almost overwhelming and conveys the sense that the author simply cannot find a trope that fits his situation and his love’s social station.

According to Hofkosh, quotation “always signals that something has been broken” so that Liber Amoris “presents itself as a layered transcription, a palimpsest that is also always in some sense under pressure.” I agree but would push the brokenness of Hazlitt’s quotation further. The fractures between H.’s situation and the quotation-infused descriptions of it demonstrate what we might describe as Hazlitt’s familiar style broken. In the end, the connections between Hazlitt’s source texts and his experiences break down and, as a result, so too does his ability to bring his readers into familiarity with him. Liber Amoris recreates on a stylistic level the problems that his contemporaries saw with his decision to write about his failed courtship of a lower-middle-class woman.

In Liber Amoris Hazlitt addressed the wrong type of spectator. Rather than open himself to the practiced moderation of Adam Smith’s impartial spectator, Hazlitt opened himself familiarly to too many people. Moral conduct, Smith argues, is the constant moderation guided by our internal spectator so that the habit of guiding our passions and our displays of them “become perfectly familiar.” Clearly Hazlitt failed to guide his

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feelings “according to those of this awful and respectable judge.”  Instead, he displayed them openly to the public—a public that Coleridge, only six years earlier, had described as the “nominal despot on the throne of criticism.” Rather than open his emotional torment to his friends around the fireside, Hazlitt ignited public ridicule. As Hazlitt himself said, “familiarity breed[s] weariness and contempt.” Hazlitt’s indiscriminating familiarity with both Sarah Walker and his audience seems to bear out that assertion.

Chapter Three
Female Folly and the Dangers of Familiarity:
The Case of Lady Caroline Lamb

Why should I hide men’s follies, whilst my own
Blaze like gas along this talking town?
-Lady Caroline Lamb

[M]ay those who so well know & speak of my errors &
follies pardon some of them […] when they hear & see the
strange circumstances into which I have been placed[.]
-Lady Caroline Lamb

In November 1813, visitors to Thomas Phillips’s studio would have seen two portraits
hanging side by side. Some believed they were a single composition. In one sits an
attractive man with a cleft chin, full lips, and dark hair; he wears a black robe and a white
shirt. In the other stands a woman with cropped curly hair dressed as a pageboy; a black
dog looks longingly at the platter of fruit she seems to offer someone beyond the canvas.
The man is Lord Byron. The page is Lady Caroline Lamb. While Lady Caroline’s picture
eventually retreated into relative obscurity, Phillips’s “cloak portrait” would become one
of the most canonical and reproduced images of Byron for decades. Considered
separately, the portraits are fairly innocuous. Displayed together, however, they

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2 Lady Caroline to Lady Morgan, n.d. [watermark 1823], Forster MS 328, Item 31, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Items in this collection are hereafter cited as Forster MS 328.
4 Tom Mole describes the importance of visual images of Byron, particularly Phillips’s “cloak portrait,” to which I refer above, and Richard Westall’s portrait of Byron in Albanian dress. While Mole’s work has drawn attention to the visual aspects of Byron’s public image, his arguments about the “cloak portrait” do not consider its original placement beside Lady Caroline’s in Phillips’s studio. Mole, Byron’s Romantic Celebrity, 81-83.
immediately recall Lady Caroline and Byron’s public, tumultuous affair, which lasted for several months in the spring of 1812.

Phillips’s studio was a semi-public space, so many of Lady Caroline’s contemporaries, especially her aristocratic peers, would have seen the two paintings together. Lady Caroline was enraged by the gossip Phillips’s display caused. She wrote a frustrated letter to John Murray: “I was asked whether I was painted at Phillips as a Page Holding a plate of Fruit to Lord Byron as [a] friar! Will you tell Phillips to put my picture out of sight […] every one going in sees us two together.”5 In Phillips’s studio, their affair was on display for “every one” to see and misinterpret. Byron’s presence in the adjacent canvas reframed Lady Caroline’s portrait. In offering him grapes, she becomes subservient to Byron—a conception her cousin Harriet Elizabeth Cavendish seconded when she described the general state of their affair: “Lord Byron is still upon a pedestal and Caroline William doing homage.”6 It is true that Lady Caroline did sometimes accept this role; after all, she did refer to herself in one of her commonplace books as a “Bitch whom Lord Byron took a fancy for.”7 Still, Lady Caroline’s angry response to misreadings of her portrait should make us question whether more recent understandings of her entire career may, like her portrait’s placement in Phillips’s studio, uncritically privilege her associations with Byron. Lady Caroline has, it seems, settled into the colourful footnotes of literary history, and her place there has not been questioned.

With few exceptions, Lady Caroline’s important role in the creation of “Byron” has been written out of Byron’s life and literary career. Tom Mole’s *Byron’s Romantic*

5 Lady Caroline to John Murray, November 9, 1813, quoted in Douglass, *Lady Caroline*, 156.
Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy, for instance, is often cited as one of the most important recent books on Romantic-era celebrity. While Mole’s work has pointed to the power Byron’s audience had over the poet’s public image, he tends to focus on male agency: Byron’s and Murray’s. His study neglects the important role that women played as purposeful, active creators of Byron’s public image. Lady Caroline is not mentioned, even though her affair with Byron significantly shaped his public image when he became famous in 1812. Moreover, her first novel Glenarvon (1816), which is partially based on their relationship, influenced Byron’s public reputation after he left for the Continent in 1816. Andrew Elfenbein’s work on Byron’s reception history touches on many of the biographies and memoirs written about the poet, but, like Mole, he addresses Lady Caroline only in passing. Elfenbein places Byron at the centre of the lives and works of nineteenth-century female authors such as Felicia Hemans, Mary Shelley, Charlotte Brontë, and Lady Caroline, arguing that these women “reproduced the Byronic hero in their writing not merely as an object of desire but as a figure for themselves as authors. Rather than trying to reinvent the Byronic hero as a heroine, they used the hero himself as the center of their plots.”[^8] Such Byron-centric approaches common in scholarship today undermine the very real influence that women like Lady Caroline had over the public conception of Byron and the Byronic hero.[^9] Lady Caroline and other female figures in Byron’s life did not simply appropriate the Byronic hero in their writing; their fiction helped define what “Byronic” meant.

[^9]: Eric Eisner’s work considers both male and female celebrities, and he argues that (female) celebrity poets influenced Byron’s image. However, like Mole and Elfenbein, Eisner does not address how Byron’s celebrity was shaped by Lady Caroline. Eisner, *Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Literary Celebrity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
A growing number of scholars have begun to take Lady Caroline’s work more seriously. James Soderholm’s *Fantasy, Forgery, and the Byron Legend* explores how Lady Caroline, Lady Blessington, and Teresa Guiccioli influenced Byron’s image. Duncan Wu, Nicola Watson, Paul Douglass, and Rosemary March have also argued that Lady Caroline’s literary works seek to control Byron’s public reputation. While this control is important, it is only one element of Lady Caroline’s writing. Examining Lady Caroline’s life and work exclusively in terms of Byron leaves us with, if not a completely wrong impression, then at least an incomplete one.

One challenge facing the scholar who tries to recover a full picture of Lady Caroline’s career is the emphasis placed on *Glenarvon*, a work that has long been considered weak. Even though in *Glenarvon* Lady Caroline employed many of the same autobiographical literary strategies as Byron did in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*—especially the strategy of half-heartedly denying a work’s autobiographical content in order to point toward its autobiographical references—she failed to encourage her readers’ sympathy. Why? What makes Byron’s references to his personal life compelling and Lady Caroline’s embarrassing?

12 There is some truth to the claim that *Glenarvon* is a bad novel. It has a complex, confusing plot. It draws idiosyncratically on several genres such as the secret history, historical novel, sentimental novel, and gothic novel. For example, *Glenarvon’s* supernatural gothic elements remain largely unincorporated into the rest of the plot. Belfont Abbey, where Lady Calantha meets Lord Glenarvon, appears to be inhabited by ghostly presences, which do not appear again. At the novel’s abrupt conclusion, Glenarvon suddenly dies while being pursued by a ghost ship. Also, for much of the novel, Glenarvon has the inexplicable ability to masquerade as a character named Viviani without raising anyone’s suspicions.
This chapter troubles the terms in which scholars have usually understood Lady Caroline’s authorial failure by resisting the established stories about her life and aesthetic evaluations of her work. I analyze Lady Caroline’s writings in a wider context than previous critics have, paying particular attention to unpublished archival material pertaining to her relationships with Byron, her family, her friends, her publishers, and her critics. While Byron was undoubtedly important to Lady Caroline, my research reveals other significant aspects of her life. It is clear, for example, that she considered herself a serious author. After her affair with Byron ended and after *Glenarvon* appeared, Lady Caroline published two poetic parodies of Byron’s *Don Juan* entitled *A New Canto* (1819) and *Gordon: A Tale* (1821). She wrote two more novels, *Graham Hamilton* (1822) and *Ada Reis* (1823). Her poetry appeared in popular literary annuals such as *Friendship’s Offering, The Keepsake*, and *The Bijou*. She produced numerous sketch and manuscript commonplace books for her social circle. She also corresponded with the intellectual and literary luminaries of her day, including John Murray, Thomas Malthus, William Godwin, Lady Morgan, and Amelia Opie. In this wider context Lady Caroline’s historical portrait is not as straightforward as it may initially seem.

If we look at Lady Caroline’s work in the context of its literary field of production, it becomes clear that her failure to establish sympathetic familiarity with readers is less a reflection of the poor quality of her work than of gendered conceptions of propriety, authorship, and class. Byron’s and Lady Caroline’s different reception histories point beyond aesthetic valuations toward larger issues of symbolic production, which, as Bourdieu points out, are synonymous with “the production of the value of the work.”

My research demonstrates that the nineteenth-century literary field was positioned to

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13 Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, 37.
assess the works of an autobiographical female novelist very differently from those of a male poet. Specifically, the autobiographical nature of Lady Caroline’s novel signalled its similarity to popular secret histories, *romans à clef*, and silver-fork novels. These genres were associated with the vapid, voracious reading habits of female consumers whose influence on the literary marketplace was undeniably increasing. The mass reading public’s “uncultured” tastes were often gratified by the famous *tête-à-têtes* described in the pages of *Town and Country* and salacious courtesans’ memoirs. Though they were often attacked by literary critics, “true” and “secret” tales were in high demand. The public’s desire for stories about debauched aristocrats manifested blurred divisions between social classes and also signalled the new systems of authority and consumerism that shaped a rapidly expanding print market.

This tension between high and low popular literary culture reminds us that the struggle for legitimacy in the field of cultural production—the struggle “to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer”—reflects other struggles for social and political legitimacy.¹⁴ Lady Caroline’s willingness to expose herself and her peers to mass public ridicule was recognized by critics as a betrayal of her class as well as conservative notions of female propriety. As I demonstrated in my previous chapter, in *Liber Amoris* Hazlitt reveals embarrassing details about himself; in *Glenarvon* Lady Caroline went beyond revealing her own life and depicted unflattering portraits of her

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¹⁴ Ibid., 42.
elite peers.\textsuperscript{15} The subgenres with which her novel was associated aligned it with low hack writing.

Complicating these pre-existing genre valuations is the fact that Byron initially became famous for \textit{Childe Harold} while Lady Caroline initially became famous for her indiscreet behaviour. It was difficult for Lady Caroline to distance herself from the scandalous information circulating about her in the public sphere, and her career provides a compelling case study of the dynamics of Regency author-reader relationships. These relationships were informed by the burgeoning celebrity culture in the period, and a side effect of my research is a more complete understanding of how celebrity authors like Byron and Lady Caroline negotiated and shaped their public identities. Clara Tuite has suggested that within “the Romantic literary marketplace, the culture and economy of celebrity might […] be said to offer a repertoire of forms, techniques, and technologies for the production of intimacy, all geared towards the transformation of the stranger into an intimate.”\textsuperscript{16} One of my concerns here is tracking the processes that enabled the production of this intimate sense of familiarity between authors and readers.

Lady Caroline and Byron invited opposite senses of familiarity: vulgar and sympathetic. Examining Lady Caroline’s and Byron’s relationships with familiarity provides a new lens through which to examine the reception histories of their works. In this chapter, I will first explain Lady Caroline’s engagement with the public sphere prior to \textit{Glenarvon}’s publication. I will then provide an overview of \textit{Glenarvon}’s publication history and its popularity. My research into \textit{Glenarvon}’s Regency reception reveals that

\textsuperscript{15} While other authors such as Mary Anne Clarke and Benjamin Disraeli wrote books that represented and mocked the hypocrisy of the English aristocracy, they were not, like Lady Caroline, born into the elite society their novels portrayed. Lady Caroline’s decision to write such an unflattering novel seemed a grave affront against the power and legitimacy of her class.

Lady Caroline’s contemporaries thought her novel a failure of judgment though not necessarily one of narrative craft. The latter part of this chapter focuses on Lady Caroline’s efforts to distance herself from her negative public image. As a case study, the negative critical reactions to Lady Caroline’s works demonstrate that as the public’s interest in understanding the inner workings of (debauched) aristocratic life increased, contemporaryvaluations of literature in many ways became more entrenched in conservative standards of decorum. Lady Caroline’s betrayal of aristocratic folly to Regency readers, then, represented a gross breach of class- and gender-encoded bounds of familiarity.

**Biographical Background and Glenarvon’s Publication History**

Lady Caroline’s infamy did not begin with her relationship with Byron. Even before she met him, she had courted single men and bad press. Her affair in 1810 with the popular gallant Sir Godfrey Vassal Webster, Lady Holland’s son by her first marriage, prefigured her later indiscretions. Members of her family, particularly her mother-in-law Lady Melbourne, were appalled by the public nature of her affair with the young soldier. After Lady Caroline had been particularly indiscreet at a party about the nature of her relationship with Sir Godfrey Webster, Lady Melbourne wrote angrily, “Yr behavior last night was so disgraceful in its appearances and so disgusting in its motives that it is quite impossible it should ever be effaced from my mind. When one braves the opinion of the World, sooner or later that [sic for ‘they’] will feel the consequences of it.” Lady Caroline responded with histrionic letters. Her correspondence about Webster flirts with

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18 Lady Melbourne to Lady Caroline, April 13, 1810, quoted in Douglass, *Lady Caroline*, 91.
contrition and blame just as her later correspondence about Byron would. On one hand she admits, “I can most truly & painfully feel for your reproof & the grief & infamy I am bringing on myself & family.” On the other, she accuses her husband William Lamb of corrupting her morals, explaining, “William himself taught me to regard without horror all the forms & restraints I had laid so much stress on.”¹⁹

Lady Caroline’s behaviour reached new extremes when she met Byron. From waiting outside balls for Byron and disguising herself in a page’s outfit to gain access to his rooms during their affair, to stabbing herself at a ball and burning him in effigy after it ended, Lady Caroline knew how to make a scene and had few qualms about doing so. In the scolding words of her mother’s personal maid: “[A]las you have exposed yourself to all of London you are the talk of every Groom and Footman about Town.”²⁰ Notably, the focus of Mrs. Peterson’s comments is not Lady Caroline’s immoral behaviour per se but its public consequences.

Affairs were far from exceptional among Regency aristocrats. The Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Caroline’s aunt, lived for many years with her husband and Elizabeth Foster—her friend and the Duke’s mistress.²¹ The outward respectability of women like Lady Caroline’s aunt, mother, and mother-in-law (all of whom had affairs) depended on keeping the details of their extramarital relationships known only within a circumscribed group. A lady’s reputation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while theoretically

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equated with private morality, depended more on “the public recognition of her virtue.”

According to Ben Wilson it was possible for a member of the aristocracy “to lead a scandalous private life and retain one’s good name as long as the private did not intrude upon the public.” Lady Caroline’s private affairs did intrude upon the public and, as a result, set all the footmen and grooms in town talking.

Published articles about her behaviour only intensified the gossip surrounding her. The most famous example is an incident at Lady Heathcote’s ball on July 5, 1813. Both Lady Caroline and Byron were in attendance, and after an altercation Lady Caroline cut herself. Rumours quickly circulated that she had attempted suicide. Several days later Byron reported having heard “a strange story of C[aroline]’s scratching herself with glass—& I know not what besides—of all this I was ignorant till this Evening.”

According to Lady Caroline, she had not stabbed herself intentionally, and the stories about the event were grossly exaggerated. She explained the events of that night several years later: “I clasped a knife, not intending anything […] Lady Rancliffe & Tankerville screamed and said I would [stab myself]; people pulled to get it from me; I was terrified; my hand got cut & the blood came over my gown. […] It was in all the papers & put not truly.” One of the papers to which Lady Caroline might be referring is The Satirist, which printed a detailed article about the ball. Its author claimed that Lady Caroline “in a paroxysm of jealousy […] took up a dessert-knife and stabbed herself. […] The desperate

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23 Ben Wilson, Decency and Disorder: The Age of Cant, 1789-1837 (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 150.
25 Lady Caroline to Thomas Medwin, November 1824, Selected Letters of Lady Caroline Lamb, 204.
Lady was carried out of the room, and the affair endeavoured to be hushed up.” These endeavours were unsuccessful; very few of Lady Caroline’s affairs remained out of the press. Her private calamities provided familiar topics of public attention (and ridicule). Notices about her appeared in *Bon Ton Magazine, The Morning Post,* and *The Morning Herald* throughout her lifetime.  

The publication of *Glenarvon* on May 9, 1816 only made matters worse. Her circle thought the novel crossed lines that should divide private life and public gossip. Augusta Leigh, Byron’s half-sister, wrote to John Cam Hobhouse shortly after its publication: “What I hear of Glenarvon is really enough to rouse every feeling of indignation—it has revived all the sad business, indeed I have not time by this post to say all I have to say about it.” The “sad business” that *Glenarvon* revived was Byron’s torrid affair with Lady Caroline, and its publication only added to the bad press surrounding the poet in 1816. Byron had recently separated from his wife, Lady Byron (Annabella Milbanke) and fled England amidst rumours and massive debt. *Glenarvon* appeared roughly two weeks after Byron’s departure.

The novel’s title character, Lord Glenarvon, was immediately recognized as a portrait of Byron. Lady Byron’s correspondent Robert Wilmot-Horton (who was also Byron’s cousin) explained, “[N]obody doubts the correctness of Glenarvon’s

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27 Even her less scandalous behaviour was noted in the periodicals of the day and demonstrates the extent to which her private life was of public interest. For example, the birth and death of her infant daughter was reported in *Bell’s Weekly Messenger* just six days after it occurred; “Births,” *Bell’s Weekly Messenger* February 5, 1809: 48, *Eighteenth Century Journals,* accessed February 12, 2013, http://www.18thc journals.amdigital.co.uk/contents/document_detail.aspx?documentid=280288.

28 Augusta Leigh to John Cam Hobhouse, May 21, 1816, Deposit Lovelace Byron 361, unfoliated, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. Items in this collection are hereafter cited as Dep. Lovelace.
Lady Calantha Avondale, one of Glenarvon’s amorous conquests, was read as an autobiographical representation of Lady Caroline. The novel also featured other people, including William Lamb as Lord Avondale, Lord and Lady Melbourne as Sir and Lady Mowbray, Samuel Rogers as the Pale Poet Tremore, Lady Holland as Princess Madagascar, Lady Oxford as Lady Mandeville, and Sir Godfrey Webster as William Buchanan. Large portions of the plot bear a striking resemblance to Lady Caroline’s life before and during her affair with Byron. Much like Lady Caroline’s marriage to William Lamb, Calantha’s marriage to Lord Avondale is a love match. Eventually, however, Lord Avondale’s political and social responsibilities cause him to neglect his young wife. Largely left to her own devices in London society, Calantha’s tolerance for immorality increases. She eventually falls in love with Lord Glenarvon, an irresistible, deceptive aristocrat with political and poetic proclivities. He abandons Calantha after a brief affair. She is disgraced and eventually dies repentant in her husband’s arms. Despite the fact that Glenarvon centres on the Irish Rebellion of 1798, the majority of readers seem to have been primarily interested in the sordid details it supposedly revealed about Lady Caroline, Byron, and their aristocratic contemporaries.

Many readers made keys to help them identify the real people portrayed in Lady Caroline’s novel. Multiple copies of Glenarvon that I have consulted contain manuscript keys. A copy now held at the British Library contains a manuscript key inserted after the title page of the first volume (see Figure 2). The back fly leaf of another copy once

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31 Glenarvon (London: Colburn, 1816), N.1834 (vol. 1), British Library, London. This particular copy was recovered in 1946, so it is difficult to tell exactly when the key was added. However, the key is written in laid paper (though the watermark is not visible), and to me it seems contemporaneous with the text.
Figure 2. Manuscript key to *Glenarvon* (London: Colburn, 1816), N.1834-36 (vol. 1). Copyright the British Library Board.
owned (and perhaps annotated) by Alexander Dyce identifies Princess Madagascar as Lady Holland, Bombay House as Holland House, and the “poet of an emaciated and sallow complexion” as Samuel Rogers.32 A copy of the fourth edition of Glenarvon inscribed to the physician George Hamilton Roe “from the author” contains a similar manuscript key on one of the flyleaves of the first volume.33 Keys were also exchanged in letters. Robert Wilmot-Horton wrote a letter to Lady Byron explaining, “Of course Lady C[aroline] & W[illiam] L[amb] you will easily recognise. […] Lady Mandeville is Lady Oxford—P[rincess] Madagascar, Lady H[olland] […] Some say that Buchanan is Sir G[odfrey] Webster, others that Lady Augusta is Lady Jersey, others that Lady Margaret is the present D[uchess] of D[evonshire].”34

Glenarvon was an immediate commercial success. The novel’s original print run of 1500 copies—1000 more than the first run of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage—sold out in a matter of weeks.35 By June 1816 a revised edition of the novel was published, and it was reprinted again later that year. A fourth edition appeared in 1817. There was also an American edition of Glenarvon printed by Mose Thomas in Philadelphia in 1816. French translations appeared in 1819 and 1824.36

32 Comments in the rear endpapers of the second volume attest to the accuracy of Lady Caroline’s descriptions of Lady Madagascar’s extravagant personal staff: “P. 158 ‘besides a cook,’ etc. It is quite true that Lady Holland (the Princess Madagascar) used to travel with such a train.” Glenarvon (London: Colburn, 1816), Dyce Collection, D. 12. E. 28, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

33 Glenarvon (London: Colburn, 1817), PO4859.L5G5 1817 c. 1, Eisenhower Rare Book Collection, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.


35 In a letter written shortly after the publication of Glenarvon, Lady Caroline claimed that the publishers had written to her “to say that the 1500 copies are sold & a new Edition is wanted.” Lady Caroline to Lady Melbourne, May 9, 1816, Add. 45546, fol. 91v, Lamb Papers, British Library, London. For information about Byron’s popularity and print runs of his works, see William St Clair, The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially 585-90.

36 For more information about the novel’s editions, see Paul Douglass, ed., Glenarvon, vol. 1 of The Works
Glenarvon also had an impressive cultural impact beyond the printed page. Frederick Burwick has recently uncovered two different stage productions of Glenarvon premiering in London on July 13, 1819 and December 3, 1821. While relatively little is known about the productions, the “discovery of these two adaptations of her first novel reveal that her literary reception was much more dynamic than has been previously perceived.”

In addition to these stage adaptations, popular musical arrangements of Glenarvon’s poems and songs kept Lady Caroline and her novel on the cultural scene. When it was originally published, Glenarvon contained fourteen songs and sheet music composed by Isaac Nathan, who had also composed the music for Byron’s Hebrew Melodies (1815). Nathan’s compositions and other adaptations of Glenarvon’s songs were sold individually and performed publicly. For example, Francis Joseph Klose’s scoring of the song “And Canst Thou Bid My Heart Forget” from the novel went into at least four editions through the 1820s and, according to the title page, was performed to great applause in both London and Bath. Glenarvon was also the name of a two-year-old colt racing successfully in York and Newcastle in 1818. Glenarvon’s commercial

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of Lady Caroline Lamb, ed. Leigh Wetherall Dickson and Paul Douglass (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), 387. Unless otherwise noted, all further references to Glenarvon are from this edition. See also Wilson, Introduction to Glenarvon, ed. Frances Wilson, xxiv.


39 F[ransic] J[oseph] Klose, And Canst Thou Bid My Heart Forget. Elinor’s Song from “Glenarvon” (London: Mayhew, [182?]). The various editions of this work are undated. The British Library catalogue estimates that Klose’s setting of And Canst Thou Bid My Heart Forget was published between 1820-1827. Burwick asserts that the first edition of And Canst Thou Bid My Heart Forget was published in 1820.

Burwick, “Glenarvon on Stage,” 143. I have located an earlier advertisement for Klose’s setting in 1818; see “New Music,” The Morning Post, October 28, 1818.

success and its adaptations across forms indicate its cultural resonance and the public’s continued interest in Lady Caroline.

**Controlling Autobiography, Controlling Byron**

*Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* offered Lady Caroline an important literary precedent not only for *Glenarvon*’s autobiographical resonances but also her denials of them. By the time Murray printed the third canto of *Childe Harold*, readers had come to disregard all distinctions between Harold and Byron. The *Edinburgh Review* claimed, “[W]e must say, that it seems no longer possible to ascribe them [i.e. the sentiments of the poem] to the ideal person whose name it bears, or to any other than the author himself.”

In his work on nineteenth-century biographical readings of Byron’s poetry, Elfenbein concludes that though “only a few readers actually knew Byron personally, many supposed that his poems provided an almost unmediated knowledge of his mind.” Byron’s rhetoric, Elfenbein argues, promotes autobiographical sincerity by ostensibly refusing to emphasize the autobiographical experiences that inform *Childe Harold*. “The sole proof of his sincerity,” Elfenbein explains, “was the vividness of the descriptions themselves […] Because his descriptions seemed to exceed the powers of mere invention, they supposedly had to be records of the truth of his experience.”

The knowledge, conveyed in the poem’s notes, that Byron had travelled throughout the Mediterranean lent an authenticity to Harold’s journey. That these descriptions of places were based in fact of these resources were accessed through the 19th Century British Library Newspaper Collection database, [http://find.galegroup.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/bncndispBasicSearch.do?prodId=BNCN&userGroupName=utoronto_main](http://find.galegroup.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/bncndispBasicSearch.do?prodId=BNCN&userGroupName=utoronto_main).

41 [Francis Jeffrey], Review of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, Canto the Third*, *Edinburgh Review* 27 (December 1816): 293. For the full text of this review, see *Romantics Reviewed, Part B*, 2:864-81.


43 Ibid., 15.
suggested to readers that Harold’s descriptions of his emotions were also autobiographically informed. The general consensus, according to one reviewer, was that it was “impossible for us to divide Lord Byron from his poetry.”

Byron, however, strove to maintain distinctions between himself and Harold. “I by no means intend to identify myself with Harold,” Byron wrote to his friend Robert Dallas, “but to deny all connexion with him.” Yet his prefatory denials about autobiographical connections in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* only intensify those same connections. In the preface to the first two cantos, Byron claims,

> A fictitious character is introduced for the sake of giving some connexion to the piece; which, however, makes no pretension to regularity. It has been suggested to me by friends, on whose opinions I set a high value, that in this fictitious character, “Childe Harold”, I may incur the suspicion of having intended some real personage: this I beg leave, once for all, to disclaim—Harold is the child of imagination, for the purpose I have stated. In some very trivial particulars, and those merely local, there might be grounds for such a notion; but in the main points, I should hope, none whatever.

Byron’s admission of similarities in minor details only calls attention to possible similarities in the main points. As Gérard Genette has observed, prefatory denials of autobiographical resemblances have “always had the double function of protecting the

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45 Byron to [Robert Charles Dallas], October 31, 1811, in *BLJ*, 2:122.
author from the potential ‘applications’ and, inevitably, of setting readers in search of them.”

Byron suggests the autobiographical nature of his poem by rejecting it.

Similarly, Lady Caroline’s preface to Glenarvon overtly denies connections between fact and fiction and, as a result, emphasizes them. The second and subsequent editions of Glenarvon included a ten-page preface that objected to biographical readings of the novel. The addition of the preface was accompanied by numerous other stylistic revisions. Superficially, the preface seems meant to mitigate the scandal that Glenarvon instigated, and it attempts to discourage readers from seeing the novel as a roman à clef or secret history. Lady Caroline explains that Calantha, the Miss Seymours, and Lady Dartford may be loosely correlated with many people, suggesting that she drew from general character types rather than specific individuals. She insists, “Miss St.-Clare and Lady Margaret Buchanan are more entirely fictitious.” Lady Calantha, Glenarvon, and Princess Madagascar (Lady Holland’s double) are conspicuously absent from this list. This absence suggests by omission these characters’ basis in reality, and the preface to later editions of Glenarvon did little to appease Lady Caroline’s family and her Regency peers. “The real Princess,” Lady Caroline’s cousin explained, “is very angry.”

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48 It should be noted that the preface to the fourth edition of Glenarvon, published in 1817, differs from the prefaces to the second and third editions published in 1816. The later preface is mystical in its tone and content; it is focalized through Calantha’s spirit prior to her decision to renounce her “etherial [sic] nature, and to become an inhabitant of the earth.” Preface to the Fourth Edition of Glenarvon, 360.
51 Caroline George Lamb to Lady Byron, May 7, 1816, Dep. Lovelace, 78, fol. 25r.
Holland was not alone in her outrage. The family of the deceased doctor Sir Richard Croft were so incensed by allegations that he was one of the characters in *Glenarvon* that they took out corrective advertisements in *The Morning Post*.

Lady Caroline’s assertion that the events of her novel “have no foundation in fact” performs the same function as Byron’s prefaces to *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. Lady Caroline states that the “crimes related in these volumes are evidently imaginary; the situations fictitious.” Her “evidently” recalls Byron’s “I should hope,” and both authors invite the autobiographical readings they purport to discount. Employing the same techniques of autobiographical denial that Byron does, Lady Caroline’s novel reflects back upon the boundaries Byron tried to establish between himself and Harold as well as the literary tactics he used to draw and cross those very boundaries. For instance, her preface includes a long explanation of painting, describing how the painter well knows, that, when he is sketching the personages of history, or the creatures of his imagination, the lineaments, with which he is most familiar, will sometimes almost involuntarily rise beneath the touch of his pencil. The same cause has perhaps produced in this work, those resemblances, if resemblances they be, which have been recognized, admitted, claimed with so much eagerness, and then condemned with so much asperity.

Lady Caroline attempts to naturalize her novel’s autobiographical elements by claiming that her characters’ resemblance to real figures is involuntary. Readers and critics who

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54 Ibid., 353.
55 Ibid.
have jumped upon general resemblances between fiction and fact in *Glenarvon* should, she suggests, take more responsibility for the social commotion they have caused. Lady Caroline, then, is not unlike Charlotte Smith and Wordsworth who attempted to shift the responsibility for recognizing sincerity from author to reader. Lady Caroline attempts to deflect criticism of her semi-autobiographical novel by reflecting blame back on her scandal-mongering readers and critics. Despite Lady Caroline’s prefatory protestations, Regency readers continued to read *Glenarvon* biographically. One major difference between Lady Caroline’s prefaces and Byron’s in *Childe Harold* is the explicitness of her novel’s autobiographical content.

Both Elfenbein and Mole theorize that Byron’s creation of sympathetic, intimate relationships with readers depends on incompleteness. According to Elfenbein, the “central paradox of Byron’s rhetoric was that he was taken to be at his most confessional when he was at his most abstract.”56 Mole similarly suggests that Byron’s “hermeneutic of intimacy” relied on autobiographical revelations in his poetry that were “never stable or complete.”57 The fact that information is missing—that there is not always an easy one-to-one correlation between Byron’s hero and his life—made *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* that much more compelling to readers. Byron’s appeal, according to Mole, derives from the idea that his interior self “was hidden from the view of the undiscerning, but was also continually making itself legible, expressing itself in poems where its secrets could be read by the discerning few.”58 We can see again exclusivity’s importance in establishing familiarity. Byron gave the appearance of only inviting the “discerning few” into his familiar circle.

58 Ibid., 25.
In *Childe Harold* Byron creates a sense of exclusivity through his use of obscurity. Byron points to the hiddenness of Harold’s emotions, and in doing so he alludes to the evocatively hidden nature of his own feelings. At the beginning of Canto I, for example, Byron describes the ease with which Harold is able to hide his emotions from his companions:

Yet oft-times in his maddest mirthful mood
Strange pangs would flash along Childe Harold’s brow,
As if memory of some deadly feud
Or disappointed passion lurk’d below:
But this none knew, nor haply car’d to know;
For his was not that open, artless soul
That feels relief by bidding sorrow flow,
Nor sought he friend to counsel or condole,
Whate’er his grief mote be, which he could not control.\(^{59}\)

The supposed difficulty of discovering Harold’s emotions and the vague reasons for his unhappiness seem to represent Byron’s own closed emotional nature, which may be opened by perceptive readers. Byron places readers in the role of the familiar “friend[s] to counsel or condole,” whom Harold lacks.

The ambiguity of Harold’s hidden emotions speaks to late-eighteenth-century theories about emotional interest, which I explored in my previous chapters. Edmund Burke and Joanna Baillie each suggest that mystery and incompleteness heighten interest and sympathy. Burke writes, “In reality a great clearness helps but little towards affecting

the passions, as it is in some sort an enemy to all enthusiasms whatsoever." Burke's comments about human nature, emotion, and curiosity similarly privilege the power of hidden passions. Baillie suggests that just as all people inevitably harbour within them passions that are “concealed from the world’s eye,” they naturally wish to discover these secret emotions in others. If it were possible, Baillie claims, we would follow someone “into his lonely haunt, into his closet, into the midnight silence of his chamber.” The image of the private closet secretly observed carries a sense of transgression. Baillie’s invisible observer would have access to the man’s authentic, concealed passions by crossing the boundary between public identity and private space. On the surface, Byron’s and Lady Caroline’s prefaces refuse to open the closet of their emotions by rejecting their works’ autobiographical referentiality. However, their denials invite readers in by the back way and send them searching for hidden autobiographical information.

In Lady Caroline’s case, there was much less to hide. It appeared that all there was to know about her (or at least all that was worth knowing) had already been exposed by the press. In many respects, clarity, which Burke claims is antithetical to emotional enthusiasm, was Lady Caroline’s problem. As we have seen with Hazlitt’s Liber Amoris, too much personal detail often discouraged rather than encouraged readers’ sympathetic familiarity. The gossip surrounding Lady Caroline before Glenarvon made her a familiar, scandalous public figure, and, as a result, she was almost too entirely known to the public. Gossip, Patricia Meyer Spacks explains, enacts “power by the illusion of mastery gained through taking imaginative possession of another’s experience.” This imaginative possession can have a flattening effect, since the desire for a good story, in

60 Burke, Philosophical Enquiry, 56.
62 Spacks, Gossip, 22.
many cases, overrules the accurate presentation of complex events. Scandalous celebrity of the sort that Lady Caroline had gives readers a false sense of complete understanding. Thus, when *Glenarvon* appeared in 1816, Lady Caroline had less room to play the half-hidden poet than Byron did, and the novel lacks the autobiographical coyness found in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. Much more obviously than the text of Byron’s poem, the explicit autobiographical material in *Glenarvon* undermines Lady Caroline’s prefatory assertions about the work’s fictionality.

Readings of the novel as a semi-factual document were further enabled by the absence in 1816 of any biographies of Byron. According to Peter W. Graham, *Glenarvon*’s Regency readers “would have had no reason not to accept Lady Caroline’s portrait [of Byron] as an accurate one.”

Specifically, *Glenarvon*’s conversations and correspondence with Calantha seem based on exchanges between Byron and Lady Caroline. Claire Clairemont told Byron, “Some of the speeches in [*Glenarvon*] are yours—I am sure they are.” Hobhouse also recognized Byron in *Glenarvon*: “[T]here is not the least merit in the book in any way except in a letter beginning ‘I love you no more’ which I suspect to be yours.”

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63 This is not to say that no biographical information was available. Since the publication of *Childe Harold* Byron’s life became a topic of increasing public interest. In 1819, for example, the *New Monthly Magazine* ran several articles with biographical information about Byron. For more information about the attention paid to Byron’s private life in the periodical press, see Samuel C. Chew, *Byron in England: His Fame and After-Fame* (London: Murray, 1924), especially 115-17. Soon after his death in 1824 the marketplace was flooded with “a mass of biographical material relating to Byron, some flimsy, some important” (MacCarthy, *Byron*, 541). Thomas Medwin’s controversial *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron at Pisa* appeared in 1824, published, like *Glenarvon*, by Henry Colburn. Thomas Moore’s *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron with Notices of His Life*, the most respected nineteenth-century biography of Byron, was published by John Murray in 1830. Lady Blessington’s *Conversations of Lord Byron* was serialized in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1832 and 1833; Henry Colburn published it as a book in 1834.


65 Claire Clairemont to Byron, October 1816, quoted in Douglass, *Lady Caroline*, 203.

66 Hobhouse to Byron, May 26, 1816, quoted in Clubbe, “*Glenarvon Revised*,” 213.
According to Lady Caroline, one of the most significant letters in *Glenarvon*—the one that Hobhouse misquotes above—is a copy of the letter to her in which Byron ended their affair. The letter is worth quoting at length:

Lady [Calantha] Avondale,

I am no longer your lover; and since you oblige me to confess it, by this truly unfeminine persecution,—learn, that I am attached to another; whose name it would of course be dishonourable to mention. I shall ever remember with gratitude the many instances I have received of the predilection you have shewn in my favour. I shall ever continue your friend, if your ladyship will permit me so to style myself; and, as a first proof of my regard, I offer you this advice, correct your vanity, which is ridiculous; exert your absurd caprices upon others; and leave me in peace.

Your most obedient servant,

GLENARVON.

This letter was sealed and directed by Lady Mandeville; but the hand that wrote it was Lord Glenarvon’s; and therefore it had its full effect.67

As others have noted, the account of Glenarvon’s letter and the circumstances around it are a blatant retelling of Byron’s break with Lady Caroline.68 Leslie Marchand’s edition

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of Byron’s letters accepts the authenticity of the letter to Calantha, and the general scholarly belief is that Lady Caroline reproduced the letter almost verbatim.\textsuperscript{69}

The publication of Byron’s letter would have been disconcerting for several reasons. For one, it publicly displayed Byron’s cruel behaviour towards Lady Caroline. More importantly, its inclusion in \textit{Glenarvon} mirrors Byron’s own practice of sharing Lady Caroline’s letters with his circle and therefore, according to James Soderholm, strikes “back at his betrayals by imitating his crime.”\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Glenarvon}, though, goes beyond Byron’s betrayal. While he shared Lady Caroline’s private correspondence with others, he did so “within a tightly circumscribed private circle” of Whig aristocrats.\textsuperscript{71} The recontextualization of his letter within her novel exposed his correspondence to a much wider audience. Though when Hobhouse read the novel he could separate Byron’s letter from Lady Caroline’s Byronic forgeries, it is probable that the novel’s general audience would have taken the author of \textit{Glenarvon} at her word, or, rather, taken her words for Byron’s.\textsuperscript{72} The published letter makes explicit the extent to which Byron’s “private life and work are always another’s imaginative property.”\textsuperscript{73} Lady Caroline’s novel enacts this paradigm. She commandeers her contemporaries’ biographies and, thus, reverses the power dynamics of public gossip that had victimized her.

\textsuperscript{69} BLJ, 2:242.\textsuperscript{70} Soderholm, \textit{Fantasy, Forgery, and the Byron Legend} (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 59.\textsuperscript{71} Tuite, “Tainted Love,” 67.\textsuperscript{72} John William Polidori’s \textit{The Vampyre} (1819) presents a close, but distinctly different case for comparison. When originally published in the \textit{New Monthly Magazine}, Polidori’s work was attributed to Byron. Given that the story was published without Polidori’s knowledge, it is unlikely that this confusion was purposeful on Polidori’s part. The editors of the \textit{New Monthly Magazine} did capitalize on the confusion surrounding \textit{The Vampyre}’s authorship, and the work’s connection to Byron certainly helped it sell. Still, Polidori’s text was not read biographically to the same extent that \textit{Glenarvon} was. The character Lord Ruthven was viewed as Byronic rather than a portrait of Byron.\textsuperscript{73} Sonia Hofkosh, \textit{Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 51.
Lady Caroline’s exposure of her peers thematizes the public nature of private life. Her autobiographical novel demonstrates a self-conscious and thorough engagement with the blurry lines between reputation, identity, and public exposure. However, while “the identification made between Byron and Childe Harold was the source of Byron’s success,” Frances Wilson explains, “the possible relation of Lamb to Calantha (let alone the identification of Lamb with [the character] Glenarvon) was seen as cheapening the tone of *Glenarvon*.“74 One reason why *Glenarvon* received so much criticism was that it was dangerously similar to the licentious gossip columns that had already exposed Lady Caroline’s misdeeds to the reading public. Becoming overly-familiar with her audience, Lady Caroline ran the risk of seeming distastefully forthright. Moreover, her life already seemed to resemble those of familiar lovelorn lovers and debauched aristocratic women from popular novels and secret histories.

**The Trouble with Types**

In many respects, *Glenarvon* was a casualty of its readers’ expectations as well as common associations between female autobiographical writing and low literature. Felicity Nussbaum’s work on dissenting spiritual biographies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is applicable here. Nussbaum asserts that “identities interact with generic conventions” so that genres provide important templates for subjectivity.75 Nussbaum focuses on authorial intention, arguing that female eighteenth-century spiritual autobiographers attempted to represent their own subjectivity within established frameworks. The danger is that the “attention that we give to any such individual or

74 Wilson, Introduction to *Glenarvon*, xxv.
collective pattern [...] veils the many divergencies from it.” Complexity can be lost by “attempting to fit lived experience and subjectivity within the parameters of credible frameworks.” Of course, as we saw with the case of Elizabeth Gunning that I examined in my introduction, readers as well as authors employed these frameworks.

Lady Caroline’s personality and actions were already dramatic enough for fiction, and responses to her lived experiences were informed by Romantic-era novelistic expectations. Wilson has argued that the public representation of Lady Caroline’s and Byron’s relationship conforms to the specific requirements of fictional melodrama in that it is reduced to the bare bones of a narrative structure alone. Melodramatic characters are drained of psychological depth and stripped of the complexity necessary for biographical or fictional realism. They represent instead symbolic types: mother, father, child; innocence and guilt. Lady Caroline’s story was a familiar one of a woman ruined by immoral love, and its familiarity effaced the uniqueness of the characters involved.

One compelling example of a reader fitting Lady Caroline into a literary (though unflattering) framework can be found in an unpublished character sketchbook kept by Annabella Milbanke, later Lady Byron. (Annabella Milbanke was William Lamb’s cousin and so was related to Lady Caroline by marriage.) In one of her character sketches, Lady Byron draws explicit comparisons between Lady Caroline and “Lady

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76 Ibid.
Delacour in Miss Edgeworth’s Belinda.” The seven passages from Belinda that Lady Byron quotes are all confessions of folly and guilt, and she uses Lady Delacour’s speeches to reinforce her observations about Lady Caroline. These quotations follow two pages of scathing observations about Lady Caroline’s character. Lady Byron claims, for instance, that Lady Caroline’s “coquetry is thoughtless and un governable imprudent to excess.” In the list of quotations from Belinda Lady Byron has transcribed a passage in which Lady Delacour admits her coquettish ways: “A coquet I have lived, & a coquet I shall die.” At the beginning of the character sketch, Lady Byron describes Lady Caroline’s shamelessness: “[S]he dares not lose its [the world’s] notice & its wonder, by descending from the conspicuous heights of Folly to the humble path of Reason. She has the pride of a spoiled child; glorying in stubbornness and ashamed of concession—It is thus that ‘false shame makes her act as if she had no shame.’” In this passage, Lady Byron incorporates a sentence from Belinda that is then quoted at length at the end of her entry on Lady Caroline; Lady Delacour admits, “False shame made me act as if I had no shame. You would not suspect me of knowing any thing of false shame, but depend upon it, many who appear to have as much assurance as I have are secretly its slaves.” Lady Byron envisions Lady Caroline’s follies ventriloquized through Lady Delacour so that Lady Delacour’s speeches serve as imagined confessions from Lady Caroline. According to Lady Byron, Lady Caroline’s outlandish behaviour has a fictional precedent in Lady

78 Lady Byron, loose character sketches, May 17, 1816, Dep. Lovelace, 118/2, fol. 3v.
79 Lady Byron, character sketches, Dep. Lovelace, 118/2, fol. 1v.
80 Lady Byron, character sketches, Dep. Lovelace, 118/2, fol. 4r.
81 Lady Byron, character sketches, Dep. Lovelace, 118/2, fol. 1v.
82 Lady Byron, character sketches, Dep. Lovelace, 118/2, fol. 3v.
Delacour, and she uses Edgeworth’s famous character to represent and read Lady Caroline.83

While there is no evidence that Lady Caroline ever read Lady Byron’s character sketch, her correspondence indicates her keen awareness that her life was being read within familiar frameworks. Beyond Lady Delacour, Lady Caroline was also represented as a ridiculous forlorn lover. Shortly after the Byron affair ended, Lady Caroline wrote, “When I am unhappy I cannot appear otherwise – however do not say I am so – let me not be thought a love sick deserted Lady that is all I request.”84 Her request to her mother-in-law, Lady Melbourne, is more complex than a simple act of saving face. Lady Caroline was particularly conscious of her public portrayal as the typical abandoned woman.

Despite Lady Caroline’s protestations, most of the female characters in *Glenarvon* embody stereotypical, melodramatic women. These weak female characters seem to affirm connections between Lady Caroline and fallen women in fiction. One exception is Elinor St Clara, who remains at the forefront of the Irish Rebellion even after Glenarvon deserts her. She, like all of the women Glenarvon seduces, dies; nonetheless, Elinor commits suicide by galloping her horse off a cliff, which suggests more active agency than the deaths of the rest of novel’s doomed women. Glenarvon’s other conquests, including Calantha, behave in ways that are typical of fallen sentimental heroines of the period. It is implied that Calantha dies from the combination of her broken heart and her

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83 It should be noted that Lady Byron’s observations were not limited to Lady Caroline. Lady Byron’s other peers, particularly female ones, were the topic of similarly scathing character sketches. In 1813, for example, she wrote an unflattering character sketch of Maria Edgeworth, describing her gaiety as self-serving and affected. Lady Byron, loose character sketches, 1813, Dep. Lovelace, 118/4, fols. 40-41.

84 Lady Caroline to Lady Melbourne, n.d. [library estimates after October 15, 1812], Lamb Papers, British Library, Add. 45546, fol. 41v.
guilty conscience. By incorporating recognizable character types from sentimental and
gothic fiction in *Glenarvon*, Lady Caroline reinforced associations between her life and
popular literature.

Of course, Lady Caroline was not the only writer or public figure linked to a
literary type. Indeed, Byron was often associated with the Byronic hero—a type drawing
on established conventions and literary figures. Peter J. Manning has suggested that
*Childe Harold*’s novelty arises “not from its independence from precedent but from its
polyphony—or to detractors, cacophony—of styles in themselves familiar.”85 In creating
the Byronic hero, Byron combined established literary tropes in a way that seemed
original and uniquely his own. While he might not have had control of the Byronic hero
once it entered the public sphere—indeed the proliferation of what “Byronic” meant was
beyond Byron’s or John Murray’s power to manage—he did have the appearance of
originating his own mould. While “Byron” “was a creation of the literary institutions of
nineteenth-century Britain,” his poetry was undeniably influential in the creation of his
image.86 The illusion of Byron’s autonomous self-production retained its power, despite
his incomplete control over his public image in practice. Conversely, Lady Caroline’s
debut novel and its autobiographical female characters did little to challenge pre-
established understandings of her public identity. *Glenarvon*’s publication also added to
her scandalous associations because it shared her private secrets with a mass public.

85 Peter J. Manning, “*Childe Harold* in the Marketplace: From Romaunt to Handbook.” *MLQ* 52, no. 2
(1991): 171. For a thorough analysis of the Byronic hero, see Peter Larsen Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero:
Types and Prototypes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962).
**Familiarity and Inappropriate Audience**

Much of the criticism levelled against *Glenarvon* and its author was related to Lady Caroline’s liberal familiarity and had little to do with the novel’s artistic strengths and weaknesses. In fact, there were quite a few readers who liked *Glenarvon* and thought it well-written. Lady Byron’s father, for instance, seems to have enjoyed it. Judith Noel Milbanke wrote to her daughter, “Dad is reading Glenarvon—and teases me to tell him the Characters, which I cannot do entirely—he likes some parts very much.”87 That Sir Ralph was reading the novel at all perhaps seems strange. That he was enjoying it—despite what it revealed about his daughter’s estranged husband—is even more intriguing and suggests that the current tendency to discount *Glenarvon* does not reflect the tastes of Regency readers. Indeed, according to Percy Shelley, the painter James Northcote “had recommended Godwin to read Glenarvon, affirming that many parts of it exhibited extraordinary talent.”88 Edward Bulwer was also struck by *Glenarvon* when he read it as a boy: “[It] made on me a deeper impression than any romance I remember.”89 Caroline George, Lady Caroline’s cousin, similarly “appreciated the cleverness of many parts.”

However, for her, *Glenarvon*’s strengths could not outweigh its flaws. She wrote to Lady Byron, “I cannot forgive her, for the ridicule that she showers on William, by publishing all their private secrets—wherever he appears, there is a whisper & laugh.”90 The main criticism was that Lady Caroline’s novel gratified her desire for attention without regard

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87 Judith Noel Milbanke to Lady Byron, June 16, 1816, Dep. Lovelace 36, fol. 55v.
88 Percy Shelley, quoted in Clubbe, “Glenarvon Revised,” 207. Lady Caroline and Godwin were friendly correspondents. He read her later works, so it is not improbable that he also read *Glenarvon*.
89 Edward Bulwer, quoted in Clubbe, “Glenarvon Revised,” 207.
90 Caroline George Lamb to Lady Byron, May 7, 1816, Dep. Lovelace 78, fols. 24v-25r.
for decorum or the public reputations of her circle. Lady Cowper, Lady Caroline’s sister-in-law, believed she had a “wish to show off which never can be quietted [sic].”

Critics attacked *Glenarvon* for its immoral content and breaches of class- and gender-based decorum. While the *Theatrical Inquisitor* admitted that *Glenarvon* possessed an “animated style, brilliance of imagery, and the skilful delineation of gloomy and mysterious characters,” it also claimed that the novel would “inevitably corrupt the young and virtuous.” Elizabeth Thomas, author of the commercially successful parodic novel *Purity of Heart [...] Addressed to the Author of “Glenarvon”* (1816), was shocked by *Glenarvon*’s “horrible tendency, its dangerous perverting sophistry; its abominable indecency and profaneness.” People believed that *Glenarvon*, in addition to encouraging women to cuckold their husbands as Calantha does, represented a distasteful familiarity with its readers.

As I suggest below, Lady Caroline’s aristocratic status became a rallying point for her critics. Conversely, Byron’s aristocratic status prompted sympathy and interest from his readers. Byron, as Elfenbein has argued, used his status as a Lord to attract his readers: “Reading Byron through Harold’s sensibility grounded the poem’s

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91 Lady Cowper to Frederic Lamb, March 31, 18[--] [watermark 1816], Papers of the Lamb Family, D/ELb F82/31, fol. 2v, Hertfordshire County Records Office, Hertford (England).
92 Unsigned review of *Glenarvon, Theatrical Inquisitor* 8 (August 1816): 122 and 125.
93 [Elizabeth Thomas], *Purity of Heart, [...] Addressed to the Author of “Glenarvon”* (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1816), vi. Thomas’s novel went into a second edition in 1817, and there was at least one American edition. Lady Caroline read *Purity of Heart* and described it as “not very witty though meant to be so.” Lady Caroline to Lady Melbourne, [after October 1816], Lamb Papers, British Library, Add. 45546, fol. 103r. Her correspondence with Henry Colburn also paints a negative picture of the novel: “the Author of Purity of Heart has less idea even of common humour – & liveliness than any one I ever met with.” Lady Caroline to Colburn, n.d. [1816], Forster MS 328, Item 18.
94 The majority of contemporary reviews express fears that Lady Caroline’s work was corrupting, but I have located one review that suggests *Glenarvon* “may be serviceable as a fearful beacon to warn the young and inexperienced.” Unsurprisingly, this review appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine*, which Colburn owned. Unsigned review of *Glenarvon, New Monthly Magazine* 5 (June 1816): 443.
commodification of polite language in the body of a ‘real’ aristocrat.”95 In his essay “On the Aristocracy of Letters,” William Hazlitt similarly points to the power of Byron’s peerage: “If the poet lends a grace to the nobleman, the nobleman pays it back to the poet with interest. […] His name so accompanied becomes the mouth well: it is repeated thousands of times, instead of hundreds, because the reader in being familiar with the Poet’s works seems to claim acquaintance with the Lord.”96 Hazlitt condemns readers for assuming a familiarity that they, in fact, do not possess, yet he recognizes the appeal that Byron’s aristocratic status had for Regency readers. Byron invited familiarity without becoming vulgar. Lady Caroline became overly-familiar and invited ridicule. Byron maintained his aristocratic respectability in his writing; Lady Caroline’s novel compromised hers.

According to Lady Cowper, Glenarvon’s attraction of a mass, non-aristocratic audience was one of its most objectionable features. Her letter explains that she had returned to town in 1816 to find Glenarvon “upon every Table and the subject of general conversations & animated discussion.”97 The tables Lady Cowper encountered would have presumably been aristocratic, yet her angry letter to Lady Caroline goes on to detail the worrying reach of Glenarvon’s readership:

[F]or every thing you ever did I could and did try to find some excuses, but for this there is none it is no accident, no weakness but a deliberate Voluntary act and there are none but bad feelings that could dictate such a course to sit down calmly & write for public inspection all that is malicious & without an object but to offend and to hold up to ridicule

95 Elfenbein, Byron and the Victorians, 31.
97 Lady Cowper to Lady Caroline, [1816], Lamb Papers, British Library, Add. 45548, fol. 144r.
those who have been your Friends, to disclose to the world (to all the Chamber maids and Footmen) a Story which most people would have given their fortune to buy up, if any scribbler had threatened to write of them.  

She also berates Lady Caroline for giving “the spiteful & curious part of society […] an opportunity […] of ridiculing those they feel above them by reviewing their whole lives and endeavouring to find some traces of resemblances between them and even the most abandoned Characters you have drawn.” Airing the scandal surrounding her affair with Byron, *Glenarvon* exposed the folly of Lady Caroline’s family and her class to those beneath them. Indeed, Lady Cowper was particularly dismayed by the fact that the servants—all chambermaids and footmen—were talking. It was not just the Regency elite who could identify the “real” characters in the novel, but the mass reading public, whom Lady Cowper associates with spiteful intentions.

Lady Cowper’s epistolary invective also associates Lady Caroline’s novel with the type of work that a common “scribbler” would threaten to write. According to her, Lady Caroline is not an author or a novelist but the vulgar hack writer of a shameful “Story.” By divulging her family’s private lives to London’s chambermaids and footmen, Lady Caroline lowers herself to their level. Lady Cowper claims that any rational Lady would risk financial ruin to avoid the voluntary public ruin Lady Caroline had brought upon herself. In fact, Lady Caroline’s willingness to publish information about her life

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98 Lady Cowper to Lady Caroline, [1816], Lamb Papers, British Library, Add. 45548, fol. 143r-v.
99 Lady Cowper to Lady Caroline, [1816], Lamb Papers, British Library, Add. 45548, fol. 144v.
was one of the factors in her in-laws’ attempt to declare her insane and institutionalize her.  

Lady Cowper was probably not alone in seeing connections between Lady Caroline’s novel and other degraded forms of writing familiar to Regency readers. Though Lady Caroline was a member of the aristocratic elite, the semi-autobiographical novelistic subgenre in which she wrote was imbued with low-class associations. It was associated with sexual and authorial promiscuity. Lady Caroline probably did not write the keys to Glenarvon that circulated after its publication; however, the clear connections between the novel’s characters and their real-life counterparts established ties between her work and the subgenre of the secret history. Drawing from popular chronique scandaleuse based on the French court, secret histories were known for revealing personal details, often sexual in nature, about the social and political elite.  

As a member of the leading Whig circle, Lady Caroline was particularly well positioned to reveal information about the social and political elite surrounding her. While Ina Ferris has observed that secret histories slowly began to have more of a “scholarly inflection” during the Romantic period, it was a “low genre rooted in scandal-chronicles and party polemics exposing corruption in high places, [and] it was linked throughout the eighteenth century to fraud, fiction, and self-serving fantasies.” So low was the genre

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100 In one letter, Lady Caroline refers to promises she was forced to make “when a straight waistcoat & a Mad Doctor” were present. Lady Caroline to Lord Melbourne, [April or May 1816], Selected Letters of Lady Caroline Lamb, 150.


102 Lady Caroline’s husband William Lamb (later Lord Melbourne) went on to become Queen Victoria’s first Prime Minister.

103 Ina Ferris, “The ‘Character’ of James the First and Antiquarian Secret History,” The Wordsworth Circle 37.2 (2006): 74. Isaac D’Israeli’s work attempted to reclaim secret history as a valid and valuable method
that it was “banished from serious literary consideration.”\textsuperscript{104} Thus, it is not simply that secret histories operated “on the margins of historians’ histories,” but that the genre was aligned with hacks whose writing preyed on the mass public’s desire for salacious details about the aristocracy.\textsuperscript{105}

Lady Caroline’s choice of publisher strengthened ties between her novel and scurrilous fictions popular in the Regency period. By the time \textit{Glenarvon} was published, Henry Colburn had already made a name for himself by “recruiting authors with aristocratic blood or connections and printing puffing reviews and advertisements strongly suggesting that his novels were \textit{romans à clef}.\textsuperscript{106} Colburn was famous for producing scandalous, semi-autobiographical novels, particularly the genre of the silver-fork novel, which developed from the genre of secret histories. Silver-fork novels were particularly popular in the 1820s because they depicted “not just fashionable society but specifically those elements of fashionable society directly involved in the leading circles of Parliament of the pre-Reform Bill constitution.”\textsuperscript{107} Tuite explains that silver-fork novels were “so low within the generic hierarchy […] that Benjamin Disraeli, one of Colburn’s authors, figured Colburn as a brothel madam, referring to him as ‘Mother Colburn’ and to himself as a ‘literary prostitute.’”\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Glenarvon}’s publication in 1816, however, predates the seminal works of the silver-fork genre, like Benjamin Disraeli’s \textit{Vivian Grey} (1827) and Edward Bulwer Lytton’s \textit{Pelham} (1828), by more than a decade. It is perhaps more accurate to consider \textit{Glenarvon} as an influential transitional novel that

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{107} Kelly, \textit{English Fiction}, 223.
\textsuperscript{108} Tuite, “Tainted Love,” 71.
points from secret history toward the emerging genre of the silver-fork novel. While socially Lady Caroline’s circle was aristocratic, her literary works keep company with Colburn’s stable of hack writers. This disjunction between her elevated social position and the debased genres that Colburn’s name and Glenarvon’s autobiographical content evoked demonstrate the power of genre divisions within the literary field at the time. Moreover, her case exemplifies the difficulty of shifting one’s place in the field once those associations are firmly in place. Lady Caroline betrayed her class by engaging a literary form that was beneath her—a genre loaded with figurative promiscuity.

Glenarvon’s autobiographical elements also connected it to eighteenth-century scandal memoirs and actresses’ autobiographies, which often included information about their authors’ amours. One reviewer even compared Glenarvon to John Cleland’s pornographic Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure.¹⁰⁹ In many ways, Lady Caroline’s seeming admissions of guilt and repentance in Glenarvon—Calantha dies in disgrace, after all—mirror eighteenth-century “confessions” by scandalous female authors. According to Nussbaum, autobiographical works by courtesans such as Constantia Phillips, Ann Sheldon, Elizabeth Gooch, and Margaret Leeson “celebrate and apologize for their behavior.”¹¹⁰ Importantly, however, such confessionary “apologies” lack contrition.¹¹¹ More often than not, memoirs of fallen women implicate other figures, so much so that “writing finds its genesis in an accusation.”¹¹² For example, Apology for the Conduct of Mrs Constantia Phillips (1748) details, among other things, its author’s rape as a young girl, her life as a courtesan, and her financial disasters. While ostensibly an

¹⁰⁹ Unsigned review of Glenarvon, Theatrical Inquisitor, 125.
¹¹⁰ Nussbaum, Autobiographical Subject, 139.
¹¹¹ For more on courtesans, confession, and contrition, see Katherine Binhammer, The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 40-71.
¹¹² Nussbaum, Autobiographical Subject, 139.
apology, Phillips “tries to have it all ways, as sentimental heroine, social critic and self-apologist.” Phillips’s work inaugurated a genre of scandalous confessional texts by women (often courtesans, prostitutes, and actresses) who had turned to authorship once their finances and sexual appeal were diminished. While such memoirs were popular and tantalizing, they were also considered vulgar literary works in which women tried to justify their wrongs by revealing them. Unlike Phillips or Leeson, Lady Caroline was not an actress, abandoned woman, or avowed courtesan, and her willingness to participate in a memoirist tradition associated with whores and hacks further lowered *Glenarvon* in the eyes of her family and her critics. 

Lady Byron certainly thought that Lady Caroline’s confessional tendencies were, like those of other scandalous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century memoirists, motivated not by a desire to admit guilt but by an attempt to justify her actions. Lady Caroline, she explains,

>  
> tries to disarm the condemnation of her friends, by unreserved confession of her errors, and our generosity may at first be touched […] But its frequent repetition destroys all esteem for the motive. An avowal of this kind is easy & degrading, often the sense of humiliation, which made it a virtuous effort, is worn out. Her confidence is also diminished by

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114 Somewhat ironically, Lady Caroline was enraged by the publication of Harriette Wilson’s *Memoirs of Herself and Others* (1825), which revealed its author’s various sexual liaisons. Wilson was a noted Regency courtesan, and Lady Caroline’s brother-in-law Frederick Lamb was one of her clients. Her *Memoirs* revealed information about both Frederick and Lady Caroline’s marriage to William Lamb. See Douglass, *Lady Caroline*, 275-78.
perceiving a delicate attempt at self-justification, through the apparent
candour of self-reproach.\textsuperscript{115}

It should be noted that this description was written in 1813—after Lady Caroline’s affair
with Byron ended but prior to \textit{Glenarvon}’s publication. Still, Lady Caroline’s lack of
contrition and seeming pride in her bad behaviour were noted by her peers. Lady
Caroline’s confessional habits, according to Lady Byron, lose their power because they
are employed repeatedly. Even the preface to the second edition of \textit{Glenarvon}, which I
examined above, offers justification masked as confession.

Lady Byron’s critiques of \textit{Glenarvon} similarly point to Lady Caroline’s desire for
display and self-justification. She believed that Lady Caroline’s intention in publishing
\textit{Glenarvon} “however disguised to herself appears to be is to create a sensation.”\textsuperscript{116}
Lady Byron’s comments interestingly slip between referring to Lady Caroline, to Calantha, and
to Lady Caroline as Calantha. She claims that the reader

must look upon her throughout as a very weak woman having no existence
but in the opinion of others—Philosophers have said “I think—therefore I
am”—but Calantha’s metaphysical creed is—“I am \textit{thought of}—therefore
I am”—She perhaps endeavours to fix the identity of this being by the
present work—and as Natural History would inform her that the \textit{butterfly}
only lives of Summer, she may seek to prolong her ephemeral
existence.\textsuperscript{117}

It is unclear whether the initial “her” is Lady Caroline or Calantha, though the end of the
passage seems to shift to an indictment of Lady Caroline. From Lady Byron’s

\textsuperscript{115}Lady Byron, loose character sketches, Dep. Lovelace 118/2, fols. 1v-2v.
\textsuperscript{116}Lady Byron, loose character sketches, Dep. Lovelace 118/4, fol. 7v.
\textsuperscript{117}Lady Byron, loose character sketches, Dep. Lovelace 118/4, fol. 7v.
perspective, Lady Caroline was clamouring for public notice. Lady Byron’s assessment resembles more recent conceptions of celebrity as “flaunting its performance and trying desperately to keep our attention.”\footnote{Leo Braudy, “Knowing the Performer from the Performance,” in “Celebrity, Fame, Notoriety,” ed. Joseph A. Boone and Nancy J. Vickers, special issue, \textit{PMLA} 126, no. 4 (2011): 1072.} In Lady Caroline’s correspondence about \textit{Glenarvon} and its preface “appeasement gives way to self-justification and then counter-attack.”\footnote{Douglass, “Twisty Little Passages,” 79.} Her unfeminine, indecorous aggression, like Smith’s in her prefaces to the later editions of \textit{Elegiac Sonnets}, invited readers’ interest but not their sympathy.

Beyond Lady Caroline’s circle of intimates, \textit{Glenarvon} was widely ridiculed for its unwomanly, open representation of female misdeeds. Like Lady Byron, the \textit{British Critic} criticized Lady Caroline’s lack of shame: “She speaks not in the language of a repentant sinner; she appears to glory in her guilt, even though she represents herself as writing under its punishments […] Every great and good mind must stand appalled at the crimes, which now no longer are veiled in secrecy, but openly defy public decency.”\footnote{Unsigned review of \textit{Glenarvon}, \textit{British Critic} 5 (June 1816): 628-29.} The \textit{Monthly Review} damned both the novel’s content and its genre playfulness, calling it a work “of the \textit{doubtful gender}, though a feminine production.”\footnote{Unsigned review of \textit{Glenarvon}, \textit{Monthly Review}, 80 (June 1816): 217-18, italics original.} Lady Caroline’s authorship, according to the reviewer, is a monstrous public display of her folly, which betrays not just her family or her class but her gender.

Elizabeth Thomas’s \textit{Purity of Heart […] Addressed to the Author of “Glenarvon”} (1816) similarly focuses on the unfeminine aspects of Lady Caroline’s novel. Thomas’s novel traces the virtuous Camilla’s reconciliation with her husband. While Camilla is the model of decorum, her acquaintance Lady Calantha Limb is not. In her preface Thomas explains that the “speeches of Lady Calantha Limb, are many of them copied from
She also explains that Calantha Limb’s behaviour is generally based on Lady Caroline’s. Even without Thomas’s preface, the similarities between Calantha Limb, Glenarvon’s Calantha Avondale, and Lady Caroline Lamb would have been obvious to Regency readers. For example, describing Calantha Limb, Thomas writes,

[T]here was a sort of masculine daring in her air and manner; which terrified and alarmed; and she was so totally dissimilar from all other women […] Lady Calantha possessed not the timidity of feminine feeling […] she needed not supporters when she mounted her horse; but vaulting gaily into her saddle, she rode forth upon every public occasion, to see, and to be seen.123

Calantha Limb does not fit into the normative role of feminine passivity and so becomes transgressive and terrifying. Thomas’s criticism of Calantha’s unfeminine equestrian independence is particularly biting; Lady Caroline was known for being an avid and skilled horsewoman.124 Purity of Heart demonstrates the extent to which all that Calantha/Lady Caroline does can be read through the lens of immorality and indecorous masculinity. Thus, everything from confidence to equestrian skills seems to reflect specific scandalous behaviour like an affair.

Purity of Heart’s more subtle personal slights are accompanied by explicit criticisms of Lady Caroline’s turn to authorship. Calantha Limb publishes a book about her affair with the Byronic poet De Lyra. Mrs. Merton, one of the more traditional,

122 [Thomas], Purity of Heart, vi.
123 Ibid., 67-68.
124 Many of Lady Caroline’s surviving letters contain references to her horses, one of which was named Glenarvon. In a particularly poignant letter to her husband shortly after their separation, she repeatedly begs him to send over her horses, claiming, “my Health depends upon riding”; Lady Caroline to William Lamb, postmarked September 12, 1825, Papers of the Lamb Family, DE/Lb/F32/5, fol. 1v.
matronly characters, berates Calantha Limb for her new novel: “You have written a book [...] which others must blush to read, and which will stand up to outraged posterity, as the work of a woman of quality; had it been written by a man I should have burnt and forgotten it, now I shall never hear it named without a blush.” Mrs. Merton emphasizes the disjunction between Calantha Limb’s aristocratic status—her position as “a woman of quality”—and the tell-all work she has published. As with the class-specific criticisms of Lady Caroline that I explored earlier, here a woman’s elevated social position intensifies the negative reception of her scandalous amours and her authorship. More generally, Mrs. Merton’s comments point to how the standard for female conduct differed from that for male conduct, and she holds Calantha Limb (and by extension Lady Caroline) to it without question. According to Mrs. Merton, a man’s scandalous novel or affair could be forgotten; a woman’s similar transgressions would prove permanently damning.

Lady Caroline’s personal experiences bear witness to the accuracy of Mrs. Merton’s words. Lady Caroline’s family was reluctant to trust her after the novel appeared and encouraged William Lamb to separate from her. Several of her acquaintances dropped her entirely after Glenarvon. Lady Byron describes the social ostracism that followed its publication: “Lady C. Lamb was at Anglesea house the other night, and nobody spoke to her.” It would seem, then, that Lady Caroline embodied the socially disgraced woman. However, an additional type with which Lady Caroline also had to contend was the scandalous celebrity.

125 [Thomas], *Purity of Heart*, 114-15.
126 Mrs. Merton’s critical words, though, have their root in Glenarvon. In her novel Lady Caroline acknowledges the gendered double standard to which women are held: “That which causes the tragic end of a woman’s life, is often but a moment of amusement and folly in the history of a man.” Lady Caroline, *Glenarvon*, 274. In Byron’s *Don Juan*, Julia also voices similar sentiments in her letter to Juan, see I.194.
Alongside celebrity politicians like Napoleon and Wellington, other fashionable, scandalous people captivated public attention and the periodical press in the Romantic period. For example, Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, was a frequent topic of newspaper reports and caricatures.\textsuperscript{128} Leigh Wetherall Dickson has described how the Duchess’s “popularity […] led to intense scrutiny in the press, elevating her popularity into the phenomenon of celebrity.”\textsuperscript{129} Later, the dandy George “Beau” Brummell became a male icon, though he had seemingly done little—other than dress well—to become a fashionable public figure.\textsuperscript{130}

The public attention focused on celebrities like the Duchess of Devonshire, “Beau” Brummell, and Lady Caroline coexisted with press coverage about celebrity authors like Byron and Walter Scott, but the two groups are fundamentally different. What I term illegitimate or unproductive celebrity is based primarily on scandal. Conversely, legitimate or productive celebrity of the sort that Byron had is based on productive skill or talent. This kind of celebrity involves active ability, which can take many forms, from athletic prowess and singing ability to artistic and literary skills. Importantly, productive celebrities have some talent, some characteristic that sets them

\textsuperscript{128} The Duchess, along with Byron and Lady Caroline, was born with what Chris Rojek terms ascribed celebrity, which is conferred through lineage and bloodlines. At the end of the eighteenth century, respect for and interest in those with aristocratic blood was becoming less automatic. In many ways, the questioned validity of ascribed celebrities made Lady Caroline’s exposure of her family and class particularly dangerous. For more on ascribed celebrity, see Rojek, Celebrity (London Reaktion, 2001), 17-18.
\textsuperscript{129} Leigh Wetherall Dickson, “Authority and Legitimacy: The Cultural Context of Lady Caroline Lamb’s Novels,” Women’s Writing 13, no. 3 (2006): 372. The Duchess was a continual presence in the press. For instance, the reoccurring column “The Fashionable World” in The Morning Post recorded the Duchess’s movements to and from London, the places she frequented, the company she kept, and the attire she wore, see, for example, “The Duchess of Devonshire’s Public Breakfast,” The Morning Post, June 22, 1801. For information about visual images of the Duchess, see Amelia Rauser, “The Butcher-Kissing Duchess of Devonshire: Between Caricature and Allegory in 1784,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 36, no. 1 (2002): 23-46.
\textsuperscript{130} For information about Brummell’s celebrity life and afterlife, see Clara Tuite, “Trials of the Dandy: George Brummell's Scandalous Celebrity,” in Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750-1850, ed. Tom Mole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 143-67.
apart from and above the crowd. The second category of unproductive or illegitimate celebrity consists of people who seem to have done nothing noteworthy to achieve the public notice they receive. Contemporary society is full of such people, Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian among them. These figures, more often female than not, seem to have bypassed the criterion of skill or talent that sets legitimate celebrities apart. While there is certainly a skill-set involved in provoking and maintaining public attention, self-making in the public sphere seems legitimate only if it is tied to certain activities. Some qualities, notably those associated with being fashionable, are consistently valued less than other skills such as athleticism or authorship. Productive celebrity is more readily conducive to sympathetic familiarity while unproductive celebrity almost seems to preclude it.

These two categories of celebrity may seem to point towards common distinctions between fame and celebrity, where celebrity is seen as fame’s more immediate, degraded form. In many ways, the long history of fame is predicated on these distinctions. Traditionally, as Eric Eisner has pointed out, fame connotes “virtue and achievement through heroic action.” At the turn of the nineteenth century, however, distinctions between “true” and “false” fame became difficult to navigate. Even though my categories of unproductive or illegitimate celebrity and productive or legitimate celebrity suggest variant standards of posthumous acclaim, I am far more concerned with the

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131 My categories of legitimate and illegitimate celebrity are similar to Rojek’s categories of achieved celebrity—“individuals who possess rare talents or skills”—and attributed celebrity—those who become famous as a “result of the concentrated representation of an individual as noteworthy or exceptional by cultural intermediaries.” I believe that my terminology makes the cultural valuations of different types of celebrity more immediately apparent. Moreover, I am claiming that not all talents and skills are valued equally, no matter how rare they may be. Rojek, Celebrity, 17-18.

132 Even the Romans had two distinct understandings of public recognition: “At one extreme is the Fama that runs around the world to spread gossip with a thousand tongues […] at the other is the fama that warriors properly seek, […] which the gods control, the poets dispense, and men ought to strive for.” Leo Braudy, The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 125.

133 Eisner, Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Literary Celebrity, 3.

134 See Braudy, Frenzy of Renown, 420-33.
immediate nineteenth-century discourses surrounding celebrity figures, wherein these distinctions were not always clear.

The number of scandalous, illegitimate celebrities in the Romantic period suggests that “the economy of celebrity does not rely purely on fame as positive publicity but can incorporate and capitalize on the effects of negative fame or notoriety.” Tuite argues that “scandalous celebrity” has the ability to translate “bad fame—or infamy and notoriety—into good fame.” Put differently, some figures can transition from illegitimate to legitimate celebrity. Lady Caroline’s case suggests that it was difficult for women to capitalize on bad press, even if they had written it themselves. Indeed, as Tuite has noted, Lady Caroline offers a “comparative failure of translation from succès de scandale to redemptive posterity.” I have been demonstrating that she failed in part because she started from a different point than Byron did. One who has established an intimate connection with an audience may be better equipped to channel bad press and scandal into positive press. A person like Lady Caroline (or Elizabeth Gunning before her) beginning from the pole of scandal has a harder time getting beyond infamous familiarity to a more productive form of fame.

Lady Caroline’s experiences exemplify the difficulty of writing oneself out of vulgar familiarity. Lady Caroline’s novels after Glenarvon obviously move away from Byron. While Glenarvon engaged directly the scandal surrounding Lady Caroline, her second novel Graham Hamilton marks an important shift in her career.

136 Ibid.
137 Ibid., 81.
Beyond Byron: Lady Caroline’s *Graham Hamilton*

Lady Caroline’s second novel *Graham Hamilton*, published by Colburn in 1822, focuses on the making and breaking of public reputations. *Graham Hamilton* owes surprisingly little to Lady Caroline’s affair with Byron. It is perhaps because of the novel’s lack of autobiographical reflection that it has received scant scholarly attention. Though read by few scholars today, *Graham Hamilton* offers a damning indictment of gendered judgements about female reputation. It questions the familiar marriage plots of other popular Romantic-era novels and, as a result, the ideals they represent. Criticizing novelistic trends and normative standards of female morality, Lady Caroline also criticizes a society that made it easy for women to fail socially, morally, and economically.

Despite the social disaster of *Glenarvon*, Lady Caroline’s family (or at least her husband) seemed to embrace her foray into more legitimate authorship with *Graham Hamilton*. They perhaps hoped that respectable authorship might rehabilitate her scarred public reputation and her associations with vulgar familiarity. She worked with William Lamb to correct and edit *Graham Hamilton*’s page proofs. A letter to an unnamed correspondent indicates not only her husband’s willingness to edit *Graham Hamilton* but also Lady Caroline’s interest in allowing him to do so: “Mr Lamb in kindness to me says if he can have the whole of Graham Hamilton a MS in Mr Colburns hands he will now until the meeting of Parliament devote his time to correcting it[.] I should be pleased therefore if this could be done as he seemed to like the manner in which it was

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138 Leigh Wetherall Dickson is the only scholar to address *Graham Hamilton* in detail. Her foundational research in the introduction to the novel for *The Works of Lady Caroline Lamb* foregrounds *Graham Hamilton*’s biographical references, specifically to Lady Caroline’s aunt, the Duchess of Devonshire. She also outlines some of the novel’s literary connections, especially to Mary Wollstonecraft’s writings. My own work seeks to analyze further the novel’s connections to other literary works.
written.” Other letters entreat Colburn to send her additional proofs and indicate her intimate involvement in the final stages of the book’s production. For instance, she writes, “I beg you also to remember that I must see each proof from the beginning.”

Lady Caroline also sent letters to fellow novelists, including Lady Morgan and Amelia Opie, requesting feedback about her ideas for the novel. Lady Caroline exchanged several letters about *Graham Hamilton* with William Godwin, one of her frequent correspondents. In one she explains that the novel’s straightforward plot was suggested by her friend, the Italian novelist Ugo Foscolo. Foscolo advised her “to write—to take one simple plot [and] describe one character.” Lady Caroline’s correspondence with her peers while drafting *Graham Hamilton* may be one reason why it is her best work.

As *Graham Hamilton*’s publication date neared, Lady Caroline worried about its public reception: “I feel very nervous that it should not be liked—after all publishing has more pain with it than pleasure suppose it be reckoned stupid—bad—How can I bear it?” Lady Caroline, of course, was interested in *Glenarvon*’s reception, too. Her correspondence about her first novel repeatedly references the reviews and reactions of critics, her family, and more general readers. Still, her letters about *Graham Hamilton*

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139 Lady Caroline to unnamed recipient, n.d. [1822], Forster MS 328, Item 32. William Lamb’s involvement with the prepublication stages of *Graham Hamilton* is entirely different from his response to *Glenarvon*. While Lady Caroline was eventually given leave to publish additional editions of *Glenarvon*, William Lamb wrote an angry letter after the first edition of *Glenarvon*, claiming the novel was “published by the Author without any consultation with her friends” and that it was his “determination that for the present at least there shall be published no second edition.” William Lamb to Colburn, May 17, 1816, Forster MS 328, Item 12.

140 Lady Caroline to Colburn, dated “rec’d March 12 1822,” Forster MS 328, Item 33. See also William Lamb’s letter to Colburn on the same subject, March 18, 1822, Forster MS328, Item 35.

141 Lady Caroline’s letter does not specifically name the two works that she desires Opie to read. However, I am confident that her reference to “the Tame & the wild one” refers to *Graham Hamilton* and *Ada Reis* respectively. Lady Caroline to Amelia Opie, postmarked January 2, 1822, Add. 50142, fols. 8-9, British Library. Wetherall Dickson has written thoughtfully about Lady Caroline’s female writing circle in “The Construction of a Reputation for Madness: The Case Study of Lady Caroline Lamb,” *Working with English: Medieval and Modern Language, Literature and Drama* 2 (2005-2006): 32-36.


143 Lady Caroline to Colburn, n.d. [May-June 1822], Forster MS 328, Item 20.
have a different tone. Her minute instructions about everything from the style of the epigraph to the novel’s punctuation suggest a new seriousness that differentiates *Graham Hamilton* from her first novel.

*Glenarvon* “made a great noise in London” and was “more blamed than admired.”

With *Graham Hamilton* Lady Caroline sought less noise and more praise. Technically, *Glenarvon* was published anonymously, but neither Colburn nor Lady Caroline strove to keep her identity secret. After the publication of the first edition she told Colburn, “[I]t is useless to deny it—every one knows who wrote the Book.” By contrast, both parties took *Graham Hamilton*’s anonymity more seriously. Lady Caroline’s withholding of her name is more significant than it may at first seem. Women were, by the end of the eighteenth century, more likely to attach their names to their literary productions than men, and anonymous female authorship was not necessarily the favoured method of publication.

Lady Caroline’s scandalous name would have undoubtedly helped the sale of *Graham Hamilton*, and she was certainly aware of her name’s monetary value. In an undated letter Lady Caroline asks Colburn to publish an unnamed work, perhaps *Glenarvon*. In order to lower his financial risks in publishing the work, she offers him her name as collateral. “[M]y name,” she writes, “would make the sale such as to enable you to perform my wishes.”

Lady Caroline was proud of *Graham Hamilton*; she wrote to Colburn, “It was my wish to put my name […] I had rather stand by what I write however bad.”

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144 Caroline George Lamb to Lady Byron, May 7, 1816, Dep. Lovelace, 78, fol. 24v.  
145 Lady Caroline to Colburn, n.d. [The letter’s reference to the preface of the second edition of *Glenarvon* places it between May 17, 1816 and before mid-June 1816], Forster MS 328, Item 13.  
147 Lady Caroline to Colburn, n.d. [1822], Forster MS 328, Item 4.  
148 Lady Caroline to Colburn, [1822], in *Selected Letters of Lady Caroline Lamb*, 183.
did, however, appear anonymously. Her correspondence reveals that she feared her second novel would fail critically if it were associated with *Glenarvon* and her bad reputation. Her letters to Colburn about *Graham Hamilton* frequently warn him about leaking her identity. In one letter she implores him to “perform yr promise and by no suggestion allow Graham Hamilton to be thought mine […] pray be guarded in this & in other respects and let it steal quietly out & not make a noise like Glenarvon.”\(^{149}\) In another she reminds him, “If you wish to publish Graham Hamilton before the 1\(^st\) of May you must do so, but pray remember yr promise this year of inviolable secrecy […] remember yr promise & to let it come out quite quietly.”\(^{150}\) When Lady Caroline’s authorial identity was discovered and published in the *Analytical Review*, she complained to Colburn, writing of the review, “they ought not to put my name.”\(^{151}\) She was concerned that her name’s negative associations would colour the text’s reception, making it seem more linked to Byron and her scandalous past than it was.

The work’s literary allusions and Lady Caroline’s correspondence about it point beyond Byron. *Graham Hamilton* and Lady Caroline’s correspondence about it reveal the novel’s connections to female novelists of the period, including Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, and Frances Burney. In a letter to Thomas Malthus requesting him to read a draft of her novel, she explains, “since the Fashion is to call every thing in the manner of *Pride & Prejudice*, sense & sensibility, I have named mine *Principle & passion*.”\(^{152}\) While

\(^{149}\) Lady Caroline to Colburn, n.d., Forster MS 328, Item 57.

\(^{150}\) Lady Caroline to Colburn, “rec’d Mar. 12 1822,” Forster MS 328, Item 22.

\(^{151}\) Lady Caroline to Colburn, n.d., Forster MS 328, Item 55.

\(^{152}\) Lady Caroline to Thomas Malthus, [1821-1822], *Selected Letters of Lady Caroline Lamb*, 177. While undated, the content of this letter suggests that Lady Caroline is referring to an early draft of *Graham Hamilton*. Lady Caroline appears not to have known Malthus well but was, according to Douglass, aware of his “stellar reputation as a critic.” Malthus, it seems, rejected her request for feedback and suggested she send her material to a mutual acquaintance. Douglass, *Lady Caroline*, 226.
the novel’s title changed, Lady Caroline’s reference to Austen shows an interest in conforming to, or at least taking note of, current novelistic trends.

*Graham Hamilton*’s title character converses with an older gentleman at an inn and reveals the circumstances that have ruined him. Graham’s miserly, wealthy uncle Sir Malcolm adopts him in his youth. He moves to London, leaving Scotland and his childhood love Gertrude. Made into a gentleman, Graham soon enters London society where he meets the astonishingly beautiful Lady Orville. Appearances are deceiving, however, and he soon realizes that behind Lady Orville’s gaiety is a miserable marriage and extravagant debt. Graham involves himself with Lady Orville and her financial affairs, despite his attachment to Gertrude in Scotland. Graham’s friendship with Lady Orville remains chaste, yet gossip destroys her reputation, and she is forced into obscurity in the country. Graham is sent to debtors’ prison, and Gertrude dies of a broken heart.

*Graham Hamilton* can be read as a skilled, sardonic sequel to Burney’s *Evelina* (1778). Lady Caroline’s critiques of the novelistic conventions of “the Burney school” signal her increasing desire to be considered an author in her own right, not just one of Byron’s conquests. Lady Caroline’s decision to name her central female character “Lady Orville” immediately establishes a connection between her novel and *Evelina*. Burney’s novel concludes with Evelina becoming Lady Orville through her marriage to wealthy, handsome Lord Orville. Lady Caroline’s novel begins after Lady Orville has been married several years; she has become a bored, neglected wife and mother needing only slight temptation to push her towards social disgrace. *Graham Hamilton* seems to

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153 Wetherall Dickson has also noted the connection between *Graham Hamilton* and *Evelina*; however, her work on the novel focuses more on potential biographical and autobiographical connections in *Graham Hamilton*. Wetherall Dickson, Introduction to *Graham Hamilton*, in vol. 2 of *The Works of Lady Caroline Lamb*, x-xi. Paul Douglass also mentions that *Graham Hamilton* is “perhaps modelled on Jane Austen’s or Fanny Burney’s work,” but does not offer an analysis of those connections; “The Madness of Writing,” 65.
bring the story of Lady Orville full circle, narrating her eventual return to relative anonymity and unimportance in the country where Burney’s heroine, Evelina, began. In following Graham’s entrance into the world, Lady Caroline offers a darker male version of Evelina’s introduction to society. Importantly, Graham’s entrance into London society is entwined with Lady Orville’s disastrous exit from it. *Graham Hamilton* borrows Burney’s framework for tracking the development of female morality, yet she undermines Burney’s message through a novel that avoids a happy ending. Unlike *Evelina*, *Graham Hamilton* has no dashing suitor who believes in identity and personal worth beyond a name. We must not forget that Lady Caroline’s heroine is a married woman. Lady Orville differs from other disgraced female fictional characters from the period—Lady Delacour from Edgeworth’s *Belinda* comes to mind—since the possibility of her reform remains remote and unconvincing. In *Graham Hamilton*, Lady Caroline suggests that women fall and fail easily and permanently.

Lady Caroline’s desire to make an authorial name for herself unsullied by her previous critical authorial failure and associations with Byron emphasizes the importance of naming in *Graham Hamilton*’s publication history and content. Substituting the famous names of Burney’s characters for the notoriety of her own name, Lady Caroline shapes her authorial identity within a familiar, non-Byronic literary tradition. She engages Burney’s fiction to criticize aristocratic English society and challenge traditional, optimistic conclusions presented by popular female novelists of the period. In her criticisms of the novel of manners and Regency society more broadly, Lady Caroline begins to offer her own theories about how celebrity and notoriety function. These theories challenge the period’s dominant understandings of public female folly.
Graham Hamilton illustrates that personal identity is always mediated. Like
Burney, Lady Caroline demonstrates just how important the circulation of a name is.
Burney’s Evelina fears her reputation will be harmed by the public exposure of her name.
For example, she is mortified by her cousins’ liberal use of her name to gain the
patronage of Lord Orville, and she is embarrassed by Macartney’s public poetic
celebration of her circulated at the pump house. Names are no less important in Graham
Hamilton. Graham Hamilton’s Lady Orville is also unable to control the circulation of
her name once she has been falsely identified as Graham’s lover. Lady Caroline’s
characters exchange their private identity for public ones controlled by gossip and
newspapers.

Graham finds it “difficult to believe how many unfounded stories were circulated
by malice,” and he is at a loss how to control them. Graham’s words recall Lady
Caroline’s own astonishment at the false stories circulated about her: “I have every
fault—but you know them & yet it is strange people say things of me most false—and
though perhaps not as bad as the truth always yet so utterly different that I scarce know
how to defend myself.”

Trying to help Lady Orville out of her financial difficulties, Graham only fuels public gossip. Lady Orville’s possessions are in danger of being
confiscated for unpaid debts. Graham pledges his uncle’s fortune in an attempt to save
Lady Orville from the public shame of her debt. In fact, his actions only further her social
disgrace. Graham explains, “I entered a coffee-house—I took up the newspaper in the
morning, and to add to the horrors of my situation, found it full of paragraphs, founded
upon the events of the preceding night, the most injurious both to me and to Lady

155 Lady Caroline to Lady Byron, n.d. [the content of this letter suggests that it was written in the fall of
1816], Dep. Lovelace 78, fol. 177r.
Orville.” According to Graham “the beautiful Lady Orville’s reputation was for ever destroyed” by injurious stories in the papers. He laments that “no inquiry would be made by the multitude whether the report were true or false – no trial would ensue in which the guiltless might find justification.” Just as women in Lady Caroline’s final novel Ada Reis are punished not for “any actual misconduct” but “for having fallen under the suspicion of errors,” Lady Orville suffers from the tension between perceived public truth and private reality.

Lady Orville’s selfhood depends on the public circulation of her name, despite the problems that such dependence entails. Wetherall Dickson has described Lady Orville as “paralysed by the fear of losing her identity” so much so that her “existence is only validated in the gaze of others.” If Evelina is about what it takes to make a place and gain a name for oneself in the world, then Graham Hamilton is about what it takes to retain that name. Early in the novel Graham explains that “Lady Orville’s name was the most frequent in the public papers; her house was the most splendid; her extravagance was said to have exceeded that of any other lady, whether in dress, magnificence, or donations to the distressed.” Yet all this public recognition has seemingly emptied Lady Orville of her personal value. Even with the danger of a separation from her husband looming, Lady Orville rejects the proposal to retrench and live in the country. She will lose herself, she explains, if she ceases to be admired and if her name ceases to be public currency. She tells Graham, “[T]he friends who now consider me as their first object – my parties […] – my suppers, at which politics are debated, and where statesmen

156 Lady Caroline, Graham Hamilton, 93.
157 Ibid., 94.
159 Wetherall Dickson, Introduction to Graham Hamilton, xv.
settle their measures – all these will be lost for ever, and the world will seek some other general place of union, if I give up my present place in society, and retire into the country.”

Important here is not the idea that dinners and debates will cease without her but that such events will no longer orbit *around* her. Lady Orville must be publicly acknowledged in order to have value; she is no one—not even to her familiar circle—if she is not publicly recognized as someone. As yet another name appearing in “The Fashionable World” columns in periodicals, Lady Orville is a familiar figure—an aristocratic type that will be supplanted by the next lady who gains a title and a public reputation through marriage.

Lady Orville is trapped by her title and the expectations associated with it. Everyone, it seems, is waiting for her to fail. Throughout the novel Lady Orville regrets that she is, in fact, Lady Orville at all. Brought to public attention through her marriage, she acknowledges that by taking up that name she has also taken up an unhappy, limited life. Even though Graham, like *Evelina*’s Lord Orville, may revere Lady Orville, he cannot, like the hero in Burney’s text, save the day and marry the girl. What little agency and mobility Lady Orville had were given up with her marriage. Lady Caroline portrays her as a woman without possibilities. Importantly, recourse to language is not even presented as a viable option. Lady Orville explains, “[W]rite I do; but were I to publish what I write, I should only make enemies, or incur censure.”

Unlike the fallen Lady Orville, Lady Caroline did write, did publish, and did make enemies and incur censure. Her own life and the harsh reactions to *Glenarvon* gave her firsthand experience with the gendered politics of scandalous notoriety. While

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161 Ibid., 66.
*Glenarvon* employs semi-autobiographical authorship in a seemingly aggressive attempt to set the record straight, *Graham Hamilton* criticizes the social system that records and circulates those records in the first place. Lady Caroline’s novel, then, is not the character study, which her friend Foscolo suggested she write when she began *Graham Hamilton*. Instead, it is a study of the larger structures governing reputation and social interaction in Regency England. While *Evelina* provides a humorous portrait of character types—the dandy, the French fop, the debauched spinster, the noble aristocrat—and a portrait of London life, overall Burney is much less critical of the world her heroine inhabits than Lady Caroline. Burney’s *Evelina* is always on the verge of failure: failure to retain respectability, failure to regain her name, and failure to obtain a husband. In the end, of course, she triumphs. Equilibrium is restored, reinforcing the validity of social assumptions about the inherent interrelation between a title and one’s entitlement to an influential, esteemed social position. *Evelina* is rewarded by an outward, public display of her private virtue in the form of her new, titled name: Lady Orville. Lady Caroline’s text, on the other hand, demonstrates that private identity and the public circulation of that identity often do not coincide.

*Graham Hamilton* exposes the typical marriage plot as a sham, and its female characters from Lady Orville to Graham’s love Gertrude experience failure personally and publicly. The mechanisms of unproductive, scandalous celebrity surrounding the characters in *Graham Hamilton* fundamentally inform their interpersonal relationships. Graham’s childhood love Gertrude eventually dies of a burst blood vessel after she reads false newspaper reports about his behaviour in London. His intimate, private relationships and indeed his identity are subsumed into a public reputation beyond his
control. Even those closest to him believe the papers rather than what they know of his character. Lady Caroline demonstrates that it is not only sympathetic familiarity with a wide audience that is precluded by illegitimate celebrity and scandalous gossip but also sympathy from one’s familiar circle. Graham Hamilton poignantly presents the gendered framework within which a woman’s public reputation is made, managed, and destroyed.

Conclusion
Considerations of Lady Caroline’s reputation and career have accepted too easily her bad reputation and have often failed to look beyond her case to the larger structures of identity and authorship that facilitated her fall from respectability. If we look closely, Lady Caroline is much more than the “impersonation of the romantic author” scholars have typically seen.¹⁶³ She is a legitimate author in her own right, and her career represents an important case study for the workings of public identity politics and authorship in the early nineteenth century. Resisting the familiar authorial portrait of Lady Caroline that has circulated since the nineteenth century, I have offered a corrective history of her authorship and Regency reactions to her works. This history suggests that Lady Caroline’s autobiographical works were not necessarily unsuccessful because she was a bad writer. Instead, her inability to alter her earlier reputation is connected to the structuring role that gender hierarchy had within the social, literary, and cultural field of which she was a part. Current scholars, however, have done relatively little to question the terms of the criticism Lady Caroline received in her life, and she remains a marginal figure in Romantic scholarship. Common and often misinformed assumptions about Lady Caroline—she was an insane stalker, an embarrassment, a failed author—continue to

circulate. These misconceptions often reinforce the notion that Lady Caroline was a failure.

Of course, she was a failure. But in this chapter I have suggested that she failed differently and much more complexly than is apparent if one takes only *Glenarvon* into account. Considered within a framework including Lady Caroline’s subsequent authorial endeavours, the socio-literary field in which she lived and wrote, as well as the archival records informing both, her failure to establish sympathetic familiarity with readers and critics seems to have much more to do with Romantic-era ideologies of gender, authorship, and propriety than her novel’s presumed aesthetic failures. The struggles Lady Caroline faced moving beyond her familiar, scandalous reputation are symptomatic of a culture in which women failed easily and frequently. And it is this culture of female failure that Lady Caroline depicts with biting accuracy in *Graham Hamilton*.

While Lady Caroline was seemingly unsuccessful in establishing familiar ties with her reading public, my research suggests that her work is neither mad nor bad but instead a damming indictment of the gendered identity politics of the Regency period. Lady Caroline remained confident that at some point her indecorous behaviour would be partially vindicated. After her affair with Byron, she aggressively assured Lady Melbourne that “some day or other facts & not vile words shall be judg’d of.”164 Perhaps the time has come for us to consider the historical facts surrounding the vile words and harsh criticisms Lady Caroline has received in her day and in ours.

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164 Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Melbourne, n.d. [1812-1814], Lamb Papers, British Library, Add. 45546, fol. 75r.
Chapter Four
Mediating Manuscript Culture:
Authoring Familiarity in Literary Annuals

Were we required to characterize this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it [...] the Mechanical Age [...] Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also.
-Thomas Carlyle

Writing in the *Edinburgh Review* in the same year that produced the famous literary annual the *Keepsake* for 1829, Thomas Carlyle summarized contemporary fears about the effects of industrialization by claiming that people were living in “the Mechanical Age.” Carlyle’s comments are indicative of widespread concerns that mechanization had negative social and personal consequences. There were anxieties that people were beginning to act, think, and feel by rote. The artist Isaac D’Israeli had similar concerns about modern society, even going so far as to say that the methods used to teach penmanship were leading to mechanical writing and, by extension, worryingly standardized notions of selfhood. D’Israeli argued that “the true physiognomy of writing will be lost among our rising generation” because students were being taught “by a mechanical process.” People, he claimed, wrote through “automatic motions, as if acted on by the pressure of a steam-engine” and thus produced “fac-similes” that seem to “have come from the same rolling-press.”

Carlyle’s and D’Israeli’s comments reflect pervasive concerns about industrialization’s effacement of distinctions between authentic

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individuality and industrial production. The Romantic period saw innovations, such as John Isaac Hawkins’s polygraph in 1803, that unsettled lines between original and copy, between authentic and performative, and between reality and fiction. Moreover, changing methods of print production that characterized the machine-press period in the nineteenth century, such as the increased use of stereotype plates, the introduction of steel-plate engravings, and the rise of uniform publishers’ bindings, made printed materials increasingly available to a wide audience. Art was no longer limited to the academies and private collections; engravings allowed a whole new class of consumers to view and own likenesses of famous art pieces—and people. These concerns about mechanization, the prominence of commercial culture, and the democratization of high culture coincide with the heyday of British literary annuals. Carlyle’s “Mechanical Age” was also the age of the literary annuals—one of the most criticized genres of the 1830s. While initially popular in the 1820s, the annuals quickly became predictable, banal, and utterly familiar.

Physically striking, annuals employed state-of-the-art technologies. Annuals embraced new steel-plate engraving techniques popularized in the 1820s, and they included numerous detailed illustrations, especially of literary and aristocratic figures. Many innovations, such as dual-colour embossing, George Baxter’s patented colour

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3 For information about the polygraph and its most famous user, see Silvio A. Bedini, *Thomas Jefferson and His Copying Machines* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984).

printing techniques, and the introduction of silk as a binding material, saw their first
large-scale commercial production in the pages and on the covers of literary annuals. For
example, powerful Imperial Arming Presses embossed beautiful leather and cloth
bindings at speeds unmatched by manual labour (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Embossed leather cover. The Remembrance [for 1831], ed. Thomas Roscoe (London: Jennings and Chaplin, [1832]). Courtesy of the Robertson Davies Library at Massey College in the University of Toronto.](image)

Though annuals were produced in massive print runs, individual volumes were
used to encourage familiar relationships. In fact, the intimate import of the annuals was

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one of their essential marketing features. One reviewer of *The Literary Souvenir*, an annual published in 1825, suggested that if the volume were used as a tool of courtship the odds are “a hundred to one that you are a married man in six weeks or two months; nay if it be a ‘large paper copy’ one flesh will ye be before the new moon.”

The pages of literary annuals reveal exciting and counterintuitive connections between high literary culture and low commercial culture as well as between intimate and common familiarity. Editors tried to sell high culture and previously-elite cultural practices to a wide audience. The annuals’ circulation as social objects manifests the ways in which nineteenth-century authorial evocations of familiarity increasingly played on the complex dynamics of the growing middle- and upper-middle-classes. Writing against both Romantic-era dismissals of literary annuals as “vapid books” and contemporary scholarship’s consistent neglect of the genre, I argue that the annuals are a particularly fruitful resource for examining relationships between literary form and material form and between print and manuscript culture. Exchanged between lovers, family members, and friends, annuals were wildly popular from their introduction in 1822, though the tide of favour shifted rapidly in the 1830s. The arc of the annuals’ success and later critical and commercial failure reveals shifting boundaries between personal familiarity and common, commercial familiarity.

Connections between literary annuals and late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century manuscript culture have been largely overlooked, yet they are crucial to understanding the success and failure of the genre. Today, the annuals are primarily known for their lavish bindings, detailed steel-plate engravings, and contributions from

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authors such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, L.E.L., Walter Scott and their aristocratic contemporaries, including Lady Caroline and Lady Blessington. However, annuals published in the 1820s also contained elements that demonstrate their indebtedness to other genres popular in Britain in the early nineteenth century: almanacs, pocketbooks, diaries, and manuscript albums. Through these ties to manuscript practices, literary annuals demonstrate what Andrew Piper has called the centrality of sharing in the Romantic period. Annuals encouraged readers to share the books with each other and, by adding manuscript additions to their printed books, to share the experience of writing (in) them.  

This chapter argues that the early annuals’ popularity is largely a result of their explicit ties to genres associated with coterie manuscript exchange. Annual-editors in the 1820s attempted to overshadow the negative connotations of mass consumption in their printed volumes through allusions to manuscript albums. Tracking the annuals’ indebtedness to manuscript culture alongside the genre’s shift in the mid-1820s away from its didactic predecessors illuminates Romantic-era fears about the depersonalization of social interaction and mechanical notions of selfhood. Annuals cultivated familiarity—between readers, between readers and the physical volumes, and between readers and the annual-contributors—by including in their printed pages direct allusions to manuscript albums. Thus, the literary annuals’ appeal was not simply that they put readers on familiar terms with popular (aristocratic) Romantic authors but also that they gave readers access to a previously-exclusive cultural practice. Mimicking manuscript albums and the social process of their exchange between familiar friends, family members, and

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close acquaintances, literary annuals allowed a new class of readers to participate in a simulacrum of aristocratic literary culture.

**Printing and Marketing a Manuscript Ethos**

In their material form and literary content, the annuals elude their commercial roots by emphasizing their connections to album culture. Deidre Shauna Lynch’s comments about sentimental possession are applicable here; by attaching value to the annuals through social exchange and personal manuscript additions, purchasers, owners, and readers enacted a type of sentimental possession that “decommodifies” an individual volume “by detaching it from the marketplace’s system of objects.”

9 Annuals encouraged decommodification through personalization. That is, the literary annuals employ strategies—such as including album poems, lithographed autograph plates, and inscription plates—that invited readers to use, annotate, and contribute to the volumes they purchased. At the height of their popularity, the giving, receiving, and displaying of annuals signified one’s participation in a specific economy of gift exchange and good taste. Annuals became status objects, artefacts whose place on a coffee table or in a library indicated participation in a specific community. The social significance of the annuals was so pervasive that, according to Robert Southey, the annuals became “the only books bought for presents to young ladies, in which way poems formerly had their chief vent.”

10 From one perspective, the familiarity of the annuals involves seemingly authentic connections between owners and purchasers of the volumes. From another,

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annuals precipitate consciously commercialized constructions of familiarity, evident in both the marketing of the annuals and their value as objects for display.

Judith Pascoe has identified the annuals’ importance as sentimental and commercial objects; thus the annuals illustrate what she terms their “souvenir ethos.” Pascoe’s souvenir ethos alludes to two developing senses of the word *souvenir* in the Romantic period: an older notion of the word “as a remembrance, a memory” and a later sense as a material object “something (usually a small article of some value bestowed as a gift) which reminds one of some person, place or event.” While editors attempted to highlight the annuals’ potential as familiar (and material) tokens of friendship and love, they often attempted “to downplay the frankly commercial nature of their undertakings.” The annuals’ printed content supports not only a souvenir ethos but also what I call a *manuscript ethos*. I want to reframe the tensions Pascoe identifies between the affective, commemorative aspects of the annuals and their commodified marketability. These tensions also reveal how the non-commercial value of the annuals depended not on their gift exchangeability in general but on the way their material form and literary form attempted to emulate the type of exchange found in album culture—a culture often associated with literary and aristocratic circles. Thus, it is not simply that these volumes were souvenirs that marked familiar interpersonal relationships but that the annuals and the relationships tied to them also evoked the personal handwritten word.

In this argument, I use *manuscript culture* to refer to the practice of exchanging handwritten works (specifically manuscript albums and commonplace books) to establish

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and build social relationships. While there may be a danger of homogenizing the idea of manuscript culture, the term remains helpful to highlight how the handwritten word retained a valued place at a time when print production was growing rapidly. Comparing annuals to their manuscript predecessors, as I do in more detail below, helps us understand why they appealed to so many people hankering to get close to the literary elite. It also sheds light on the attacks on the annuals made by arbiters of taste, such as William Makepeace Thackeray, who criticized the way annuals were democratizing both art and literature. I suggest that the annuals attempted to accomplish a counterintuitive goal: commodifying elite cultural practices by making them common to a growing audience while also making these commodified objects vehicles of interpersonal familiarity.

Sonia Hofkosh has argued that in purchasing annuals, “the middle-class reader bought the privileges of ownership, [and] a bourgeois semblance of aristocratic (self) possession.”¹⁴ In some ways the annuals manifest the bourgeois social reaching evidenced in the growing popularity of silver-fork novels in the 1820s. Silver-fork novels’ popularity coincided with the rise of the annuals; however, the two genres are importantly different. Whereas those reading Lady Caroline’s Glenarvon and later silver-fork novels were able to read about the habits of the aristocratic elite, those buying annuals were able to participate in a similar cultural practice. For twelve shillings, one could buy a volume containing “album” poetry by the elite of the day. The annuals, then, did not just “reproduce a system of value styled on the appearance of aristocracy for an

emulous, upwardly mobile reading public.”¹⁵ Instead, in the act of reproducing this system, annuals allowed readers and purchasers to partake of it.

Ultimately, the relationship between printed annuals, almanacs, diaries, and the manuscript albums kept by privileged, and often female, members of society, exposes a new type of what William St Clair terms “tranching down.”¹⁶ In The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period, St Clair identifies a trend to sell works at successively lower price points and material formats. Once a market for a certain work at a certain price was saturated, publishers would produce it in a less expensive format. The annuals, however, do not represent a tranching down of a particular title down a demand curve—a title being produced and sold in cheaper formats from quarto to octavo to duodecimo. Instead, the annuals enacted a tranching down of a cultural practice through a shift from manuscript to print—print that alludes to previously elitist practices such as creating albums, keeping diaries, and using decorative, didactic almanacs. Interestingly, the tranching down of this cultural practice involved a tranching up of the material formats of later annuals; subsequent editions of many titles increased in format from small duodecimos to octavos and, eventually in the 1830s, quartos.¹⁷ In an attempt to make annuals seem to be exclusive luxury items, they were published in larger, more lavish formats. However, the economy of scale at this point allowed even physically large

¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶ St Clair, Reading Nation, 32.
annuals to be produced at prices similar to those of some small duodecimos of the 1820s.\textsuperscript{18}

Though the annuals gestured toward luxury and the elitism that went along with it, they were not produced “exclusively for the elite of English society. The tastes of belles and beaux of the boudoir of all grades aspiring to distinctions were to be catered for.”\textsuperscript{19} This type of socio-literary reaching inherent in the consumption of the annuals indicates the success with which annual-editors, especially those in the 1820s, were able to produce volumes that bridged the gap between high cultural notions of reception and the negative associations of commercial consumption. Annual-editors attempted to overshadow the associations of mass consumption with allusions to seemingly authentic albums. Individual “album” poems purportedly transcribed from manuscript albums and then printed in the pages of literary annuals push the limits of their printed contexts. Alluding to an “original” context that, in fact, probably never existed, these poems actively complicate their printedness by alluding to a previous intimate writtenness.

The connection between print and manuscript is complex in the pages of the annuals, which work against distinctions between manuscript and print. Speaking of the major differences often associated with manuscript and print culture at the end of the eighteenth century, Margaret Ezell explains that we see

the replacement of the “social” author and manuscript practice, which involved the active participation of both writer and reader in sustaining a dynamic of literary culture, by that of the marketing agent and the passive


purchaser. This can be seen as a shift from the role of the reader as participating in creating and producing literary texts […] to the reader as anonymous consumer and collector.\textsuperscript{20}

Such binaries do not apply easily to the annuals. Annual-editors intentionally sought to conflate the roles of creator and consumer by infusing their printed works with allusions to album culture. The volumes contained printed poems directly alluding to manuscript album culture as well as blank spaces that encouraged readers to make their own manuscript additions.

While I am not the first to recognize the counterintuitive and even contradictory connection between literary annuals and manuscript culture, such connections have been explored only briefly. Notably, Michelle Levy has described “the sociability that the annuals sought to initiate but, on a structural level, could not reproduce.”\textsuperscript{21} Annuals, especially those after the landmark 1829 \textit{Keepsake}, were not able to reproduce the communal aspects of manuscript culture in their printed forms, yet they continued to be popular into the 1830s.\textsuperscript{22} My focus on the verisimilar evocation rather than the direct reproduction of manuscript culture helps us begin to understand how annuals challenge boundaries between manuscript and print, between public and private, and between the intimately familiar and the vapidly, commonly commercial.

\textsuperscript{20} Margaret Ezell, \textit{Social Authorship and the Advent of Print} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 142.

\textsuperscript{21} Michelle Levy, \textit{Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture} (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2008), 170.

\textsuperscript{22} Depending on which index to annuals one uses (Faxon’s or Hootman’s) the major year of decline shifts slightly. Harry Hootman’s economic-intensive study of the annuals suggests that the significant drop in annual production can be seen as early as 1834, “British Literary Annuals and Giftbooks, 1823-1861,” (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 2004), 22-25.
Developing the Genre of Literary Annuals

Early annuals published between 1822 and 1827 encouraged reader and purchaser personalization much more than later annuals did. By *personalization* I mean the inscriptions written by annual-purchasers to their eventual owners, readers’ marks of ownership, diary entries, and other marginalia. Though some work has been done to explore the development of the annuals as a distinct printed medium with its own genre conventions, little has been said about the way in which the physical and printed aspects of early annuals invited readers and purchasers to interact with them in different and, I would suggest, more intimate ways than did later annuals.²³

Emulating books produced in France and his native Germany, Rudolf Ackermann published the first literary annual in Britain, *The Forget Me Not* for 1823, in the fall of 1822.²⁴ Ackermann’s first annual set off a publishing phenomenon. Two years after the first *Forget Me Not* appeared, there were nine competing annuals; by 1832 there were sixty-three.²⁵ It is not simply the number of titles available that is impressive but also the size of the print runs. In his preface to the *Forget Me Not* for 1827, Frederic Shoberl claims that the demand for the 1826 edition of the work was so great that the print run of close to 10,000 copies “was exhausted some time before Christmas, and the publisher received orders for thousands more than he was able to supply,” prompting a “much

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²⁴ Dating the annuals can be a confusing issue because the publication information in the annuals themselves does not correspond with the actual years in which they were published. The dating of annuals can be thought of much like modern calendars, which are published in the year before they are meant to be used. For example, the *Friendship’s Offering* for 1825 was actually published and sold in the autumn of 1824. For clarity, I have tried consistently to refer to the intended year in which the annual was to be read, i.e. the *Friendship’s Offering* for 1825; however, the reader should bear in mind that it was in fact published the previous fall.

²⁵ Faxon, *Literary Annuals*, xi.
larger edition” for 1827.\textsuperscript{26} Similarly, Charles Heath, editor of The Keepsake, told Robert Southey that fifteen thousand copies of the 1828 edition had been sold.\textsuperscript{27} Even taking into account the annual-editors’ characteristic exaggeration of these figures, the influence of the annuals on the literary market remains staggering; Katherine D. Harris has calculated that in 1828 “100,000 copies of fifteen separate annuals were sold.”\textsuperscript{28} Such figures become even more impressive if we consider that, with the exception of books such as Richard Bentley’s Standard Novels and Romances series, “most books were published in runs between 500 and 1,500 copies.”\textsuperscript{29}

Though the annuals became almost instantaneously popular, the period from 1822-1827 shows the genre in development. This period reveals the solidification of specific characteristics that came to define and, I argue, to constrain the genre until its decline in the 1830s. Ackermann’s original Forget Me Not for 1823 included many of the features that would come to characterize the annuals: a combination of previously-unpublished poems and short fiction, numerous high-quality steel-plate engravings, and an elaborately decorative publisher’s binding. The development of the annuals depended largely on innovation. For example, the Forget Me Not’s inscription plates in the mid-1820s and early 1830s used cameo embossing and dual-colour printing techniques recently patented by Sir William Congreve (Figure 4). The technique, originally developed to combat the forgery of paper money and documents, really only began to be

\textsuperscript{26} Frederic Shoberl, Preface to Forget Me Not; a Christmas and New Year's Present for MDCCXXVII (London: Ackerman, [1826]), vi.
\textsuperscript{28} Katherine D. Harris, “Feminizing the Textual Body: Female Readers Consuming the Literary Annual,” The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America 99, no. 4 (2005): 575.
\textsuperscript{29} Lee Erickson, The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800-1850 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 5. William St Clair suggests in Reading Nation that Bentley’s novel series, begun in 1831, had much larger than average print run, ranging from 8,000-15,000 copies (565).
used for commercial printing in 1826.\textsuperscript{30} Despite the importance of such innovations, it is also important to recognize the annuals’ development as a process of exclusion. Annuals published after 1827 became less obviously tied to manuscript albums, commonplace books, diaries, and almanacs. For example, sanctioned spaces that encouraged purchasers and readers to write in the annuals slowly diminished and eventually disappeared.

Notably, famous annuals of the later period such as \textit{Fisher’s Drawing Room Scrap-Book} and \textit{Heath’s Book of Beauty} did not even contain inscription plates, which were an essential feature of earlier annuals.

In the late 1820s there was also a decisive shift away from didactic literary pieces and practical almanac content. In the early 1820s links between other genres and annuals were often made explicit, yet later editors’ attempts to move beyond their predecessors were also clear. For example, the preface to \textit{Friendship’s Offering} for 1824 explains its relationship to the practical pocketbooks that were popular at the time: “By the continuation of a work like the present, it is hoped that the mere \textit{Pocket-book} of the year (the purposes of which it is particularly intended to supply) will be elevated in character, and rendered more generally useful and interesting than hitherto.”\textsuperscript{31} Movement away from established genres like that of the pocket-book shaped the genre history of annuals; a reviewer of \textit{The Literary Souvenir} for 1825 explains, “When these undertakings were first commenced, they retained, for a season, the character of the almanack […] Now, with the exception of a few minor productions, they exclude every feature which would


\textsuperscript{31} Thomas, K. Hervey, Preface to \textit{Friendship’s Offering, or the Annual Remembrancer A Christmas Present or New Year’s Gift for 1824} (London: Lupton Relfe [1823]), iv.
seem to attach them to one year more than another.” By the mid-1820s, annuals had become far less reliant on the type of content found in other genres.

Like the early annuals, almanacs provided useful information, select literary pieces, illustrative plates, and blank pages for writing. Similarly practical, tasteful, and decorative, pocketbooks were small volumes that combined literary content with useful diary pages. Carrying on this tradition of beauty and utility, early annuals contained diary pages, which encouraged readers and owners not only to read but also to use and personalize their volumes. The encouragement of written personalization combined with the annuals’ miscellaneous literary content points to an intentional connection with manuscript album traditions in England. Manuscript albums—bound blank pages into which the owner and her (or his) friends would copy passages from works of prose and poetry, write original occasional literary pieces, and illustrate pages with drawings and water colours sketches—provided a material space which recorded both an album owner’s literary tastes and her social connections with familiar friends and, for those in privileged circles, literary figures.

It is worth noting that the term commonplace book implies a systematic handwritten volume, perhaps organized using one of the indexing systems forwarded by thinkers like John Locke, whereas the blank pages of manuscript albums were filled through a more organic, communal process resulting in miscellaneous handwritten

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entries, newspaper clippings, and illustrations.\textsuperscript{33} Judging from the manuscript volumes I have examined, commonplace books are also more likely than albums to be the production of a single hand. For example, Felicia Hemans’s commonplace book seems to have functioned as a notebook of sorts, perhaps along the lines of Coleridge’s famous fly-catchers. It contains miscellaneous notes from “Lalla Rookh” and passages from Richardson’s \textit{Pamela} as well as Hemans’s personal observations about landscapes.\textsuperscript{34} I am less concerned with the sometimes hazy distinctions between commonplace books and albums. I am more interested in handwritten volumes used to record thoughts, literary passages, and original content often supplemented by illustrations and drawings.\textsuperscript{35}

Stephen Colclough, who has undertaken the most extensive survey of Romantic-era manuscript albums and commonplace books, has identified the intimate, social importance of these manuscript volumes: “Although some manuscript books created during the early nineteenth century were clearly produced by individuals as private documents, the majority of ‘albums’ were group or family productions. It was common for visitors and friends to be asked to contribute to an album that was put on display as a public document. Adding to the manuscript was seen as an important ritual of friendship.”\textsuperscript{36} Despite the fact that albums were compiled by limited groups of people, the volumes fulfilled a relatively public role; thus, they make dichotomies between public

\textsuperscript{33} In addition to Locke’s original treatise on commonplace books, there were numerous revisions and adjustments to his system throughout the eighteenth century. One such example is \textit{The Common-Place Book, for the Pocket, Formed Generally Upon the Principles Recommended and Practised by Mr. Locke} (Dublin: Robert Egan, 1778).

\textsuperscript{34} Felicia Dorothea Brown Hemans, Commonplace book manuscript, [18--], MS Eng 767, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

\textsuperscript{35} Library cataloguing practices further complicate distinctions between albums and commonplace books, for they are both catalogued under the same “commonplace book” subject heading.

\textsuperscript{36} Stephen Colclough, \textit{Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695-1870} (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 130.
and private writing complicated to navigate.\textsuperscript{37} For example, Sarah Welch’s mid-nineteenth-century album begins with a poetic address to the reader. Welch explains that in the volume one will find all her “favourites” and “choicest treasures.” She explicitly tells her imagined reader that “to please you all it is my aim,” indicating that the volume, while a personal effort, is also positioned to engage an external audience.\textsuperscript{38}

In many cases, manuscript albums were intended for display and were read by a much wider audience than those who helped compile and contribute to them. This display can be thought of in two ways. First, the volumes were aesthetically pleasing. Colclough describes them as “often neatly copied and finely bound,” making them perfect artefacts “to display publicly the taste and artistic ability of their creators.”\textsuperscript{39} These albums were artefacts adorning rooms rather than books hidden on the shelves. The manuscript volumes I have examined confirm Colclough’s assertions. For example, Lady Caroline’s manuscript books, though often in her own hand, were written by and for her friends and family. One of her commonplace books, now held at the John Murray Archive, contains several occasional poems by her aunt the Duchess of Devonshire, a poem by William Lamb, and pieces by Lady Caroline commemorating the deaths of those in her circle.\textsuperscript{40} What is now known as her blue commonplace book was created especially for Byron,


\textsuperscript{38} Sarah Welch, Manuscript commonplace book, [18--], MSS 04214, vol. 1, unpaginated, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

\textsuperscript{39} Colclough, \textit{Consuming Texts}, 124.

\textsuperscript{40} Lady Caroline Lamb’s commonplace book, Acc. 12604/4106, John Murray Archive, Edinburgh.
while an earlier volume was made expressly as a gift for her husband and is bound in bottle-green leather with gold accents.\textsuperscript{41}

The idea of display, however, was not only involved in the material and pictorial content of the albums; albums also recorded both their owner’s literary tastes and her social connections with familiar friends. Charles Lamb’s poem “In the Album of a Clergyman’s Lady,” gives us some indication of the multiple uses these manuscript albums had:

An Album is a Garden, not for show
Planted, but use; where wholesome herbs should grow.
A Cabinet of curious porcelain, where
No fancy enters, but what’s rich or rare.
A Chapel, where mere ornamental things
Are pure as crowns of saints, or angels’ wings.
A List of living friends[.].\textsuperscript{42}

What is interesting about Lamb’s poem is his assertion that the album is meant for use rather than for show. Yet the fact that manuscript volumes were exchanged among friends and acquaintances indicates that part of their “use value” depended on their display value. What is being shown and cultivated in the album are not only didactic literary excerpts and “ornamental things” but also social connections. As Bourdieu has argued, social relations are objectified in material objects.\textsuperscript{43} Manuscript albums provide a material record of one’s social relations. At a time when, according to Robert Southey,

\textsuperscript{42} Charles Lamb, \textit{Album Verses, with a Few Others} (London: Moxon, 1830), 43.
\textsuperscript{43} Bourdieu, \textit{Distinction}, 76-80.
books were “articles of fashionable furniture more than anything else,” manuscript albums functioned as both adornments to a drawing room as well as valuable objects displaying one’s social circle.\(^{44}\) As Lamb’s poem indicates, the album functions as “A List” of friends to record and maintain social alliances. In the Romantic period, manuscript books became literary records of familiar relationships.

One helpful example of the social nature of manuscript volumes is Ann Frances Bacon’s commonplace book. Compiled from 1799 to 1801, the volume not only contains transcriptions of published poems by Robert Southey, Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, and Alexander Pope but also original contributions by friends and admirers, many of a military bent.\(^{45}\) It includes eleven poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge as well as entries by the poet’s brother Edward. Edward Coleridge’s short poem, “On Miss Bools and Miss Bacon having their hair cut off,” demonstrates the type of occasional, personal poetry that was often found in albums. Alluding to the mock-heroic language of Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*, he laments:

Oh! hapless locks soon doom’d to part!

No longer now ye wound the Heart.

No longer must your tresses flow

O’er lovely hills of purest snow.

Yet Bacon’s Eyes of darkest hue

And yours, sweet Bools, celestial blue

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\(^{45}\) For example Major L.’s poem “The Invitation written on the Miss Bedingfeld’s (6r); Major Montressor, Aide de Camp to General Garth’s “Verses on the Miss Bedingfeld’s,” (9r); and Heyrick of the 9th Light Dragoons’s “To a lady addicted to fashionable hours—with a violet” (10r-10v). Commonplace Book of Ann Frances Bacon, 1799-1801, Coleridge Collection, S MS F1.15, E.J. Pratt Library, Victoria University in the University of Toronto.
Shall ever mourn that spreading Hair,
Which e’en the Queen of Love might wear.

E. Coleridge

Other poems such as “On Miss Duncan’s losing her Veil on Board ye Kent” by Major L., “On being decided to write a few lines in a Lady’s Book of Poetry” by W. Raymond, and “To Miss Dashwood Bacon of Devonshire” by S.T. Coleridge similarly testify to the personal nature of the manuscript book. Often humorous, these poems record seemingly banal experiences (such as Ann Bacon cutting her hair), and in doing so they transform these events into literary records of familiar relationships and shared experiences. Beyond simple regurgitations of favourite published passages, the occasional poems found in manuscript albums such as Ann Bacon’s and Lady Caroline’s suggest that composition—in terms both of creating new content and of the physical act of writing in an album—were valued testaments of friendship.

As sites of social connection, material manifestations of friendship, and records of interaction with authors, albums, like the literary annuals that would follow them, gained their value from personal associations and gift exchange. Though Robert Southey, writing in February 1828, could not believe that The Keepsake had sold fifteen thousand copies even though it was “bought merely for presents,” the annuals’ social status as “mere” presents is not insignificant. Emphasizing the role of the gift in the history of the annuals gives us insight into how they managed to maintain and affect familiarity’s more positive associations despite the fact that their highly commercialized aspects also made them seem familiar in other ways—predicable, common, and banal. Though their

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46 Commonplace Book of Ann Frances Bacon, 28v.
47 Southey to Caroline Bowles, February 24, 1828, New Letters, 2:324.
mechanical reproduction seemed to take away from their connection to the original literary and pictorial work contained in the volumes, the annuals’ owners and purchasers added originality and authenticity into these mass-produced volumes. While what Walter Benjamin would term the “aura” of the “original” manuscript album-like elements in annuals was diminished in the printed pages of these volumes, readers’ manuscript additions partially replenished it. While the reproduction of album culture in the annuals “substitute[d] a plurality of copies for a unique existence,” the manuscript additions from annual-readers “reactivate[d] the object reproduced.” Often given as gifts, the annuals gained value through non-commercial exchange.

The Printed Power of the Impersonal

The most obvious representations of manuscript culture in the printed annuals can be seen in poems claiming to be originally from albums. Poems with titles such as “Lines Written in An Album,” “Impromptu Writing in a Lady’s Album,” and “Written in a Lady’s Album” frequently appeared in annuals from the 1820s. By emphasizing each poem’s “original” album context, annual-editors shifted focus away from the commercial printed word to the purportedly handwritten word. John Malcolm’s poem “Written in a Lady’s Album” from The Literary Souvenir for 1826 contradicts its status as an annual rather than an album piece:

I ask not for the meed of fame,
   The wreath about my rest to twine,—
Enough for me to leave my name
   Within this hallowed shrine;--
To think that o’er these lines thine eye
   May wander in some future year,
And Memory breathe a passing sigh
   For him who traced them here.  

In this case, the “hallowed shrine” is no longer a personal album, the “thine” no longer a known, individual reader, and the lines are no longer traced in script but in typography, yet the poem’s inclusion in the printed volume seeks a connection between manuscript and print, between album and annual. Much of the album poetry that appeared in the annuals encouraged readers to imagine themselves into the place of the original poetic recipient. While sometimes a recipient is specified as in Charles Lamb’s “Verses Written in Lady Barton’s Album,” more often than not the addressee is left either blank as in Captain William Elliot’s “For _____’s Album” or unspecified as in “Written in a Young Lady’s Album” by Mrs. Cockle. Eliza Richards has argued that blank spaces in poems encourage “readers to interpret poems as acts in interpersonal dramas that mediated spiritual, erotic, and conversational exchange when imagining their relation to writers

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they had never met.” Vaguely-addressed album poems in literary annuals became sites of imagined familiar interactions between authors and readers.

The manuscript ethos exemplified by Malcolm’s poem and those like it went beyond the content of the poems to their presentation on the page. One example is “Written in an Album” by W.A. (William Alexander), which was included in the *Literary Souvenir* for 1826. While the text of the poem is interesting, what is more intriguing is that the author’s initials appear *beneath* the poem (Figure 5). While the other pieces in the

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Figure 5. W.A., “Written in an Album,” in *The Literary Souvenir* [for 1826] (London: Hurst, Robinson, and Co., [1825]). Private Collection.

53 W.A., “Written in an Album,” in *The Literary Souvenir; or, Cabinet of Poetry and Romance* [for 1826], 180.
volume follow the format of title, author’s name, text, this particular album poem is
printed with title, text, and then the author’s initials. Altering the presentation of the
poem gestures toward the way in which poems were entered into manuscript books, with
contributors’ names often following their entries. W.A.’s initials signal not just the author
of the poem but also a manuscript signature translated into print. His printed initials
suggest that in its “original” album context, the poem was signed. The printed album
poem mediates its original context but the printed organization of the poem on the page
signals the category of personal album poetry and, by extension, familiarity.

**Signing Familiarity and the Mediation of Print**

At a time when, along with phrenology, handwriting analysis was becoming a popular
activity, the annuals’ repeated references to the written word in their printed pages show
editors’ attempts to link them not with technological and commercial possibilities but
with the authenticity and singularity of handwritten manuscripts. One example is “An
Impromptu, Addressed to a Lady who required a Specimen of the Author’s Hand-
writing” by M.A. Shee, published in the *Literary Souvenir* for 1827. Shee’s poetic
handwriting sample self-consciously refers to its status as a written manuscript:

> As I write the pen shakes in my hand, when I think
> I’m depicting myself in a permanent ink;—
> How, by carelessly cutting my letters, my name
> I myself may scratch out from the records of Fame.
> But your will is the law—I obey the decree;—
> There’s a chance of escape still for scribblers like me:
Such writing my character cannot declare,

For ’tis plain there’s no legible character there.⁵⁴

These lines compellingly deny their printed form, while also playing with the multiple meanings of character—both letterform and the poet’s nature. What precludes analysis of Shee’s character, though, is not that “there’s no legible character there” but instead the fact there is no “dash of the pen” to decipher, only the typographical text. The poem contributes to the manuscript ethos of the volume through its explicit evocation of its status as a written, scribbled object. The poem’s “original” status as a personal, manuscript poem resists the negative commercial overtones associated with the literary annuals’ anonymous audience.

It is not simply their material printed form that the album poems in literary annuals resist, then, but the impersonal, commercial apparatus surrounding the printed volumes in which they are contained. The supposed “original” context of the album poems in the annuals points both to the imagined manuscript text and the community around it. Even for poems such as Shee’s the tension between typography and handwriting is not, I argue, the most important disconnect that occurs. Rather, the primary tension is between the familiar, personal connections the “original” manuscript would have signalled as a written album poem and the highly commercialized, mass-produced form of the printed literary annual. Editors and authors tried to undermine this tension by emphasizing the supposedly non-commercial and reader-generated elements of their volumes’ production.

The annuals’ editors and authors also deemphasized the fact that some contributors—especially famous ones—were paid vast amounts of money.\textsuperscript{55} According to Lodge, “contributors frequently also conveyed the sense that their work in the annual had originated in a private context of unpaid literary exchange. […] Such elements blurred the boundaries between the commercial annual and the personal album.”\textsuperscript{56} The annuals’ album poems represent significant instances of the volumes’ explicit attempts to evoke manuscript culture’s associations with interpersonal familiarity.

The album poetry found in annuals seems to reach beyond its material context by alluding to a (nonexistent) manuscript context. In the annuals, performativity does not simply describe the way in which the printed text mediates its (hand)writtenness. Printed album poems, stripped of their original, intimate writtenness, perform one half of a manuscript exchange, leaving conceptual space for the reader to perform the role of the unspecified receiver of the poem. Another reason why printed annuals were able to point to a culture of familiarity based on manuscript exchange is that at least in volumes published before 1826, the printed “manuscript” album poems coexisted with elements that encouraged the givers, purchasers, and owners of the volumes to add manuscript additions and inscriptions.

Album poems like Shee’s “An Impromptu, Addressed to a Lady who required a Specimen of the Author’s Hand-writing” also represent a desire to incorporate elements


of the growing craze for autographs and handwriting analysis into the pages of the annuals. In addition to poetic allusions to album culture, annual-editors found other ways to offer readers verisimilar contact with famous authors and with a coterie manuscript culture that would have been unavailable to many of those who read the annuals. In addition to poems and prose works by famous writers, the annuals’ other extraliterary content signified familiar encounters with published writers, even when such encounters would not have been possible to all (or even most) annual-owners and annual-readers.

Alaric A. Watts introduced the practice of including facsimile autograph lithograph plates in the *Literary Souvenir* for 1825. In addition to the ten steel-plate engravings, the volume contained three pages of signatures from the leading literary lions of the day, among them James Hogg, Felicia Hemans, Barry Cornwall, Charles Lamb, William Wordsworth, and Robert Southey (Figure 6). As with the album poems in the annuals, the value of these facsimile signatures was not their “writtenness” alone but their signification of a wider culture of familiar interaction and signatory exchange. The signature plates offer a mediated version of real autograph collecting. Having Hemans’s autograph alongside a few lines of poetry in a personal album would have signalled some level of familiarity, though perhaps not actual friendship.\(^57\) Having the “signature” of someone like Hemans in an annual plays on a similar desire for familiarity, a desire to possess a writer through his or her hand. Tamara Plakins Thornton has written

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\(^57\) It is interesting here to note that in some instances, “intimate” album poems were far more mechanical and distanced than they may appear. For instance, Thomas Colley Grattan, who met Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1828, was skeptical of their personal and impromptu contributions to the album of Mrs. Pryce Gordon. He explains, “Both pieces seemed to have been kept ‘ready cut and dried’ for such an occasion, and they might possibly have previously done similar service in the same way, for they were contributed at the very first asking and in the room with a dozen people.” Grattan, *Beaten Paths; and Those Who Trod Them* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1862), 2:138.
extensively on the role of handwriting in the nineteenth century and suggests that throughout the period “handwriting was perceived as a transparent medium of the self. Unlike typeface, with its mathematical design, the handwritten alphabet reflected its human origins […] There was also a sense in which handwriting as an act, not just an aesthetic form, partook of the human body.”⁵⁸ Handwriting and signatures brought attention to the somatic nature of inscription and authorship, so that an author’s physical presence was felt, or at least implied, by their handwritten signature. In the nineteenth century, as the physical distance between author and reader grew and relationships between the two were increasingly mediated by typography, the importance of the

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authorial hands also grew. Even when signatures were bought or traded, thus effacing the personal encounters originating them, they were still perceived as being indicative of the singer’s true self. As the essay accompanying the plates in *The Literary Souvenir* explains: “Of all the performances of man, nothing bears so exclusively the stamp of the individual as his handwriting.”59 The autograph plates in annuals appeared to recreate flawlessly authentic signatures, yet the mass-produced plates call attention to the commodified status of the signatures (producing multiple autographs on a single plate, for instance).

Watts’s inclusion of signature plates played on this craze for autograph collecting in the Romantic period. Collecting signatures and handwriting samples was a popular pastime, yet the possession of autographs was not always indicative of personal familiarity. Evidence reveals that writers such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and later John Ruskin were frustrated by the public’s desire to have examples of their hand.60 In a letter to J.H. Green, for instance, Coleridge mocked the practice of providing album poetry and autograph samples. “A portly Dame,” the poet explains, would fain have something in the Ottigraph way, from *me* in the splendid Book which by a somewhat *italianized* mode of pronunciation she calls her *O*lbum or *A*wbum—Would this do?

Parry seeks the Polar Ridge:

But rhymes seeks S.T. Coleridge

Fit for Mrs Smudger’s *O*lbum

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60 According to A.N.L. Munby, Ruskin answered requests for his autograph with a printed response: “Mr Ruskin never gives autographs but to his friends, and of late has scarcely, even for them, consented to add in any way to his usual task of daily penmanship—irksome enough even when reduced within the narrowest possible limits,” *The Cult of the Autograph Letter in England* (London: Athlone Press, 1962), 10.
Or to wipe her Baby’s small bum.\(^{61}\)

Mocking both autograph collecting and solicitations for album poetry, Coleridge’s comments and humorous poem reveal that even authentic manuscript signatures might not have been entirely noncommercial. A.N.L. Munby’s work on autograph letters in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has shown that the craving for an authentic piece of a writer’s manuscript could often be a commercial enterprise or, at the very least, a rather impersonal one.\(^{62}\) Thus, the signature plates in the annuals are complexly connected to a heritage of manuscript exchange but that heritage is also connected to the marketplace, where autographs were exchanged and sold.

Despite the commercial and seemingly impersonal undertones of autograph exchange, there lingered a belief in palaeography of the soul; to many nineteenth-century autograph-collectors, a signature, no matter how it was collected, displayed a person’s essence. Dawson Turner, one of the foremost English collectors of autographs and manuscripts in the period, claimed that autographs “are indicative of the movements of the mind as well as of the pen. Even where mere signatures, they have their value […] so universal is this feeling, that an autograph appears at the present time a no less indispensable accompaniment to biography than a portrait; and both for the same cause, as clues to the deciphering of character.”\(^{63}\) We can see the reductive, metonymic tendencies of autograph collecting, with the “hand” standing in for the “self.”\(^{64}\) Moreover, since signatures were often removed from the once-intimate correspondence

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\(^{62}\) Munby, *Cult of the Autograph Letter*.

\(^{63}\) Dawson Turner, *Guide to the historian, the biographer, the antiquary, the man of literary curiosity, and the collector of autographs* (1848), quoted in Munby, *Cult of the Autograph Letter*, 48.

\(^{64}\) Thornton makes a similar connection about the double meaning of “character formation” in *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History*, 71.
to which they were attached, they literally became disassociated parts of a specific (con)textual whole. The original context, however, seemed to matter little in the widespread consumption of palaeographic samples in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the autograph, which Turner claims is an “indispensable accompaniment to biography,” would presumably be a facsimile bound in the printed volume.

The accessibility and familiarity evoked by these autographs was, of course, undermined by the fact that these signatures were mass-produced on lithograph plates. Additionally, the fact that in the annuals multiple signatures appeared on each plate, rather than individually, further emphasizes each signature’s value not in and of itself, but in relation to other signatures and in relation to a volume that depends on mass-production and massive sales. The essay accompanying the signature plates in the *Literary Souvenir* disagrees with Turner’s assertions about the value of signatures, cautioning readers “against forming an estimate of the character of a person’s handwriting from his signature alone,” for many factors “render it impossible that the autograph of a mere name should be as indicative of character as a few lines from a letter or literary composition.” If the signatures could only be of limited value in determining character, what, one asks, are they doing in the volume? The signature plates were included and prized, I argue, because they signify personalization and gesture toward the decipherability that handwriting, rather than print, can offer.

Katherine D. Harris has also emphasized the importance of these signature plates, yet I disagree with her assertion that the plates undermine “the owner’s written influence on the work.” In fact, these signature plates allow an owner or purchaser to participate

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66 Harris, “Borrowing,” 17.
vicariously in coterie manuscript practices and imaginary exchanges with famous authors and aristocrats. An owner’s or giver’s inscription at the front of the volume implicitly engages in a dialogue with the lithographed signatures. The owner’s or inscriber’s influence is not excluded through the signature plates. Rather, the decommodifying influence of his or her manuscript inscription gives authentic, personal weight to the mass-produced signatures in the volume. Andrew Piper’s work on miscellanies and anthologies, categories in which he includes literary annuals, is helpful here. He contrasts inscriptions and autographs, claiming that the “inscription that framed writing with one’s hand in miscellanies […] functioned as a crucial counterpoint to the romantic fascination with the autograph. The inscriptions captured the fundamental sharedness of writing—that it could be owned and given away.”

Going beyond Piper’s and Harris’s explanations I suggest that the lithograph autographs in annuals function as signatures and, importantly, as quasi-inscriptions. In the annuals personal inscriptions, dedications, and marginalia brought the facsimile autographs into the realm of “sharedness,” gift exchange, and personal familiarity.

Watts’s introduction of signature plates in Literary Souvenir for 1825 must have been received well; he also included signature lithographs in the 1826 edition of his annual. In subsequent years, the trend spread to other annuals. The Amulet: or Christian and Literary Remembrancer for 1827 also included two autograph plates; attentive to his intended audience’s religious interests, the editor included the autographs of two bishops and five archbishops alongside those of John Milton and, interestingly, Anne Boleyn.

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67 Piper, Dreaming in Books, 137.
1828, both *The Amulet; or Christian and Literary Remembrancer* and *The Bijou* incorporated autograph plates.\(^{68}\)

The signatures in the *Bijou* for 1828 allude directly to inscription practices that would have taken place in the pages of a personal manuscript album. Rather than include entire lithograph plates of signatures like in the *Literary Souvenir*, the *Bijou* replicates the practice of signing one’s name after a poetic composition. The volume contains translations of “The Epistle of Servius Sulpicius to Marcus Tullius Cicero” and “The Epistle of Marcus Tullius Cicero to Servius Sulpicius.”\(^{69}\) Each translation is, like “Written in an Album” by W.A., followed by a name. Yet in this case, the signatures are lithograph facsimiles of the translators: King George IV and the recently late Royal Highness the Duke of York. By appearing next to each other, complete with signatures, these pieces signal that the royal translators are in dialogue with each other. However, in the preface the editor explains that both pieces were “written as [school] exercises at a very early age,” which means it was highly unlikely that they were personal. What is important, then, is not that these translations represent an actual instance of manuscript exchange reprinted faithfully in the annuals. Instead, the value of these two pieces and their accompanying signatures rests in their evocation of a manuscript exchange, feigned as it might in fact have been.

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\(^{68}\) The plates found in these two volumes are not signatures of famous authors but instead of famous public figures. *The Amulet* includes signatures of “The Principal Officers Employed Against the Spanish Armada.” The list of plates also includes a reference to autographs of those involved in the Gunpowder Plot, but the text that is linked to the autographs explains that the plate had to be annexed for lack of space. *The Amulet; or Christian and Literary Remembrancer* [for 1828], ed. S.C. Hall (London: W. Baynes & Son and Wightman & Cramp, [1827]), 419. Though not of a literary nature, these signatures seem to represent a perceived desire for (and the marketability of) connections to famous individuals.

\(^{69}\) *The Bijou; or Annual of Literature and the Arts*, ed. William Fraser (London: William Pickering, [1828]), 183-90. The Robertson Davies Library, Massey College, in the University of Toronto has four copies of *The Bijou* for 1828. Fascinatingly, one of the copies, McLean D 0089, has different pagination than the other three copies. The pagination given above refers to that found in McLean D 0088 copies 1-3.
Early Annuals: A “tale of industry and use”

Individual poems in the annuals contributed to the manuscript ethos of the printed volumes. Chris Smart’s “Lines for a Lady’s Pocket Book” is one example. His poem emphasizes the benefit of using the diary pages found at the back of The Remember Me! for 1825, the volume in which his poem appeared. These diary pages offer a practical function and, according to Smart, using them adds value to the volume:

This volume soon shall worth derive
From what your industry shall hive,
And then in every line produce
The tale of industry and use.
Here too let your appointments be,
And set down many a day for me.70

Smart’s poem is interesting for a number of reasons. It appears to have been written in a particular pocketbook and for a particular lady. And even though the poem is printed, we can still see what Meredith McGill terms “the phantom presence of handwritten forms in print.”71 In Smart’s imagined volume, the owner’s industrious manuscript additions will give the book value. Yet apart from the “tale of industry and use,” the volume will also record the story of social interaction. Thus, Smart’s encouragement to write in the annual along with white spaces in the volumes that were specifically reserved for readers’ and owners’ writing frames early annuals as records of *use* (i.e. keeping appointments) and the social connections associated with that use.

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70 Chris Smart, “Lines for a Lady’s Pocket Book,” in *Remember Me! A New Years Gift or Christmas Present, 1825* (London: I. Poole [1824]), 47.
More than later volumes, annuals published between 1822 and 1825 encouraged didactic use. In many cases, this use took the form of an owner’s or purchaser’s unique manuscript additions. One significant shift away from the annuals’ roots was *The Literary Souvenir* for 1825, edited by Alaric Watts, which eliminated the didactic “almanac-like informational pages and excluded album-like blank pages” of earlier annuals.⁷² This format was universally adopted; I have been unable to locate any annual published after 1826 that contains diary pages. Yet textual elements of other annuals published in the same year as the *Literary Souvenir* for 1825, specifically the *Remember Me!* and the *Friendship’s Offering*, allude to almanacs and manuscript albums.

*Remember Me! A New Years Gift or Christmas Present* for 1825 is an important volume to consider because it includes obvious connections to earlier genres that depended on readers’ annotations and marginalia, and thus explicitly embodies the annuals’ connection to other printed and manuscript genres. Like the first *Forget Me Not* for 1823, the *Remember Me!* for 1825 also contains useful almanac information. Readers could have used the volume to locate the offices of bankers in London and Westminster by referring to a table in the back of the volume. Likewise, they could reference the term dates and schedules for Oxford and Cambridge, a table of holidays and transfer days, a record and brief description of “Sovereign Princes of Europe with their births, marriages and issues,” and a list of the courts of laws. Such practical information made annuals like *Remember Me!* more than just beautiful books for display; they were meant to be useful, to be consulted, to be written in.

*Remember Me!* for 1825 also has a calendar and twenty-four album pages. The calendar recreates popular pocket-diary formatting, with two months per page separated

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⁷² Harris, “Feminizing the Textual Body,” 583.
by a vignette wood engraving. The blank pages encourage the type of effusions and literary transcriptions one would find in manuscript albums. While neither the calendar nor the album pages have been used in most extant library copies of the *Remember Me!* for 1825, I find it difficult to believe that these sanctioned writing spaces were regularly left blank. H.J. Jackson’s work has shown the shifting value placed on marginalia, which in turn has influenced the acquisition practices of libraries and private collectors. Until recently there was a strong preference for clean copies of books, unless notes had been made by established literary or historical figures. Thus, it is probable that the lack of marginalia and personalization in library copies of early annuals does not accurately represent the way these book objects were used in the nineteenth century.

Like the *Remember Me!* for 1825, the *Friendship’s Offering* for the same year also contains didactic material. There are descriptions of prominent cities (Constantinople, St. Petersburg, Berne, and Naples), and one of the engravings of a landscape by Claude Lorraine is accompanied by a two-page biography of the painter. There is also an “Account of the Jubilee, proclaimed for 1825, at Rome” and a “Compendious Weather Guide.” Such material connects this *Friendship’s Offering* with the useful material found in the first instalment of Ackermann’s *Forget Me Not* and, more importantly, with printed almanacs. Appearing the year before the first annual, the *Vox Stellarum: Or, a Loyal Almanack for the Year of Human Redemption, 1822* contains material similar to that which appeared in the early annuals. For example, the *Vox Stellarum* for 1822 contained a table of Terms and Returns for the Year 1822; term tables

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were an annual feature of the almanac. A similar table appeared in the 1825 Remember Me!. The meteorological focus of the almanacs is evident in early annuals, exemplified in the Friendship’s Offering for 1825’s “Compendious Weather Guide.”

Additionally the Friendship’s Offering contains twenty-five charades, twenty-two riddles, and a sixty-page diary section. The popularity of manuscript volumes comprising riddles and charades signals yet another connection between print and manuscript. We need only recall Emma Woodhouse and Harriet Smith’s project of “collecting and transcribing all the riddles of every sort […] into a thin quarto of hot-pressed paper” in Jane Austen’s Emma as evidence of the social import of charades and riddles. Indeed, the inclusion of Mr. Elton’s “friend’s” gallant riddle in Emma and Harriet’s volume—which Mr. Elton claims his “friend” would consider “the proudest moment of his life”—indicates the way such manuscript contributions were used to solidify familiar relationships and, in some cases, further romantic intentions. In these early annuals pages with riddles beg for written responses and blank calendars call for appointments.

In fact, in two copies of the Friendship’s Offering now held at the Robertson Davies Library at Massey College in the University of Toronto diary pages have been filled, riddles have been solved, and charades have been answered. Friendship’s Offering for 1825 also has a section for recording daily events and appointments. In Copy 2 of the volume held at the Robertson Davies Library, the inscriptions are minimal, but

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74 Francis Moore, Vox Stellarum: Or, a Loyal Almanack for the Year of Human Redemption 1822 (London: Company of Stationers, 1822), 27.
75 See for example Collection of enigmas, rebuses, conundrums and charades, with answers, 1828, MS Am 1177, Houghton Library, Harvard University. The volume is dated 1828 and so coincides with the popularity of the annuals.
77 Friendship’s Offering; or the Annual Remembrancer: A Christmas Present or New Year’s Gift, for 1825, ed. Frederic Shoberl (London: Lupton Relfe, [1824]), McLean Collection, D 0418 copy 1 and copy 2, Robertson Davies Library, Massey College in the University of Toronto.
on 2 January someone has written “14” in faded pencil. The following day records “14 pd.” Are these records of bills and their payment? Did the owner have ideas of keeping track of the year’s finances in the calendar, or were these pages used to jot a note? Though the rest of the calendar yields no further indication of its use, even these limited notes indicate that the calendar was perceived as a sanctioned writing space.

Copy 1 of Friendship’s Offering is more evocative; both January and February contain lengthy notes. Interestingly, the writing space was not used for keeping appointments. Someone, perhaps Miss Eliza Jane Altree whose name is inscribed at the front of the volume, has used the space for January to record a brief history of the monument pictured in the engraving. “North Foreland Lighthouse,” someone has recorded, “is a strong Octagon tower built of Brick, which was erected in 1683 […] it is near 80 feet high, & consists of many lamps which are kept burning all night, to be a guide for ships sailing near the coast, the cape on which it is situated projects far into the sea, in the form of a bastion” (Figure 7). It is clear that the owner of this volume did not perceive it as simply a text to be read but one that could also be written in.

This example of someone creatively using the sanctioned writing space in annual aligns with practices of writing in almanacs and pocketbook diaries. For example, the diary section in Sarah Langley’s copy of The Ladies’ Own Memorandum-Book for 1784 has not been used to record appointments or special days. Instead, Langley has used the blank space to transcribe poetic passages and practice drawing caricatures (Figure 8). Similarly, Lord Byron’s copy of Peacock’s Polite Repository, or Pocket Companion contains many of the poet’s schoolboy notes. Like Sarah Langley, Byron has not used the
Figure 7. Diary page. *Friendship’s Offering; Or, the Annual Remembrancer: A Christmas Present of New Year’s Gift for 1825* (London: Relfe, [1824]). McLean Collection, Copy 1. Courtesy of the Robertson Davies Library at Massey College in the University of Toronto.

Figure 8. *The Ladies’ Own Memorandum-Book; or, Daily Pocket Journal, for the Year 1784* (London: G. Robinson, [1783]), Annotated by Sarah Langley. B-12 9666, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto. Courtesy of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.
calendar and the accounts section for their intended purposes. Instead, the notebook contains the names of his fellow students at Harrow.\textsuperscript{78}

The presence of album and diary pages, along with informative charts and tables of the sort that would have been found in almanacs, frames early annuals as semi-didactic volumes to be used and personalized rather than lavish books only to be read or displayed. In the two copies of the \textit{Friendship's Offering}, answers to riddles and charades have been written in the margins. For instance, below the riddle “Why is a basket of apples like an army of volunteers?” someone in Copy 1 has written in pencil: “Each has its corps.”\textsuperscript{79} In the charades section of the same copy, ten of twenty-five charades have been answered in pencil. Copy 2 records similar reader interaction with the text. Alongside Charade 4 the answer “carpet” is written in response to a poem which ends: “yet, e’en in these luxurious days, / ‘Tis trampled under foot.”\textsuperscript{80} In all, sixteen of twenty-five charades and five of the twenty-two riddles have been answered in pencil. The presence of such marginalia suggests that once one marks a book in one place, it is perhaps easier to write in other places as well. In this way, early annuals are more akin to miscellanies than fine editions. “[M]iscellanies,” according to Piper, consistently used white space to encourage their users to write within them. Unlike the white space of critical editions that functioned as a kind of immaculate border insulating the author’s work from that of the editor, white space in the miscellanies was an invitation to cross the boundaries

\textsuperscript{78} Byron’s Harrow Notebook, Deposit Lovelace Byron 156, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Oxford.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Friendship’s Offering}, McLean Collection, D 0418 cop. 1, 279.
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Friendship’s Offering}, McLean Collection, D 0418 cop. 2, 272.
between reader and author and produce the presence of multiple hands on the page.81

The pages of the early annuals promoted the permeable boundary between printed text and readers’ marginalia.82

The answers to the riddles and charades are just one example of how readers used the annuals’ margins to become contributors rather than mere consumers of the volumes. Even some of the later annuals that I have consulted also contain marginalia, even though the white spaces of the annuals increasingly became boundaries that excluded (or at least discouraged) readers’ manuscript additions. For example, the back of a vignette title page of The Remembrance for 1831 held at the Robertson Davies Library has a packing list: “3 Drawers | 4 trousers | 2 Ft Shirts | 1 C. Wo[?] | 2 Jackits [sic] | 1 Bag | 1 Hat 13 Peices [sic].”83 Similarly, the back flyleaf of the Friendship’s Offering for 1831 at the E.J. Pratt Library contains an unfinished text about birds.84 Though limited, these examples, combined with the personalized copies of the Friendship’s Offering for 1825 demonstrate that at least some readers saw the annuals as more than literary art books. Though the annuals that have survived in libraries and private collections are not resplendent with marginalia and personalization, that fact may have more to do with acquisition practices rather than with the volumes’ original use.

81 Piper, Dreaming in Books, 129.
82 Katherine D. Harris offers a contrasting view, asserting that annual inscription only on rare occasions extended beyond prescribed spaces. Harris, “Feminizing the Textual Body,” 589. Again, H.J. Jackson’s comments about acquisition practices go a long way in explaining the relative absence of marginal notes in library copies of annuals.
83 The Remembrance, MDCCCXXXI, ed. Thomas Roscoe (London: Jennings and Chaplin, 1831).
84 Friendship’s Offering: A Literary Album, and Christmas and New Year’s Present, for MDCCCXXXI, ed. Thomas Pringle (London: Smith, Elder, and Co, [1830]), Blake no. 1072 1831, E.J. Pratt Library, Victoria University in the University of Toronto.
Authoring Familiarity

Annuals cultivated a manuscript ethos through extra-literary touches like facsimile signatures plates and blank spaces that encouraged users to add personal annotations. The implicit dialogic interaction between an author’s facsimile signature and a personal inscription at the front of a volume was enhanced by the presence of a reader’s handwritten text within the printed annual. Moreover, editors’ own “inscriptions” and dedications in the front matter of the annuals mirrored in print the anticipated handwritten inscriptions readers and purchasers would make. For example, *The Comic Offering* for 1834 featured a printed inscription by Louisa Henrietta Sheridan: “To the Ladies of Great Britain this the fourth volume of the Comic Offering is Most Respectfully Inscribed.”

Another important feature of the annuals that led to the diminishing distance between reader and authorial producer is the notes often found in the front of annuals, which encouraged readers to submit their own writing for publication. Supposedly, selections from these submissions would be included in the following year’s annual. Similar to the way in which Walter Benjamin’s “letters to the editor” function, the annuals blur “the distinction between author and public.” By encouraging (or at least giving the impression of encouraging) amateur contributions that would appear alongside those of Walter Scott, Wordsworth, and L.E.L., editors sought to efface distinctions between professional author and amateur author, between annual-producers and their consumers. Annuals conveyed the idea that they were communal rather than simply commercial products.

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Editors intentionally framed their endeavours as friendly rather than occupational, commercial enterprises. For example, in his preface to the *Literary Souvenir* for 1825, Alaric Watts notes an important exception to the literary contributors who have “kindly allowed” him “the countenance of their names,” by stating in a footnote that “the beautiful Poem from the pen of Mr. [Thomas] Campbell, which will be found at page 149 [entitled “Lines on Leaving a Scene in Bavaria”], was not contributed by that gentleman, but transcribed from the album of a mutual friend.” Watts’s comment frames his annual within a culture of familiar friendship and manuscript exchange. His preface is full of references to friends’ contributions, making it seem as though the volume was a community project—a community project in which the reader and purchaser of the volume could play an active contributing role. Moreover, the volume’s three signature plates heighten the manuscript aesthetic of the volume by shifting the focus away from “literary” to “friends” in Watts’s reference to “the names of my literary friends.” Just as the mutual friend shared his album poem from Campbell with Watts, the preface and the signature plates give the impression that now it is Watts’s turn to share his authorial friends with his (purchasing) public “friends.”

Once the editorships of titles such as *Fisher’s Drawing Room Scrap-Book* and *Heath’s Book of Beauty* were taken over by women like L.E.L. and Countess Blessington, invitations to buy their volumes were more obviously invitations to participate in their coterie circle. That is, readers could imagine that they were in fact reading L.E.L.’s album or the Countess’s commonplace book. Like Lady Caroline’s manuscript commonplace books, *Fisher’s Drawing Room Scrap-Book* often contained

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87 *The Literary Souvenir: Or, Cabinet of Poetry and Romance* [for 1825], viin.
88 Ibid., viii.
purportedly personal poems that Landon had written to commemorate dead friends, like Thomas Moore, and to celebrate those still alive, as Landon does in “To Marguerite, Countess of Blessington.” 

Thus, while later annuals lost many of the features that encouraged readers to write in them, the volumes still attempted to point to the aristocratic practice of exchanging manuscript albums and writing personal, occasional pieces for one’s familiar social circle. Hofkosh has also specifically identified the importance of aristocratic names in the annuals: “Descended from the pocket-book album, a combination of almanac and scrapbook in vogue in the early 1820s, in which Leigh Hunt remarks, ‘people read the names of dukes and marquises, till they fancy coronets on their own heads,’ the annuals simulate elite wealth and status.”

Once prominent, socially-elite and often titled women took editorial control of the annuals, the connection between annuals and aristocracy only intensified. By 1829, the reliance on aristocratic names became too conspicuous for one reviewer, who complained that the *Keepsake* for 1829 “trusts too much, we fear, to titles; and waxes proud as a piper at the sign of so many coronets. Now, for our own parts, a great quantity of lords in an Annual ceases to affect our imagination […] One bursting upon you in all his effulgence, every hundreth page or so, makes quite a new era in a volume; but a continuous series is apt to drawl.”

Readers’ imagined interactions with both elite cultural practices and people extended into the pictorial elements of later annuals. The annuals’ steel-plate engravings represent a democratization of the public’s access to art. As Vanessa Warne has noted,

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90 Hofkosh, *Sexual Politics*, 87.
throughout the Romantic and early Victorian periods “the material possession of original works of art remained the domain of the upper classes […] The publishers of literary annuals responded to these circumstances, offering audiences an opportunity to view reproductions of privately owned and otherwise inaccessible works of art.”

The portraits of ladies like the Duchess of Bedford are consistently referred to as private, with editors offering profuse thanks to the owners of such paintings. Possessing an annual, then, expanded the space of the aristocratic drawing room; an annual owner had access to these “private” portraits from the rooms of the social and economic elite.

The autobiographical nature of many of Landon’s and Blessington’s annual poems further enhanced the understanding that annuals shared private portraits and poems reserved for the contributors’ familiar circle. For instance, several of the poems in the 1839 edition of Fisher’s Drawing Room Scrap-Book (the last that Landon would edit before her marriage to George Maclean and her mysterious death in Cape Coast) focus on departure. “The Farewell” is told from the perspective of a man leaving on a voyage, as Landon was soon to do when she composed the poem. Despite the gender difference of the poem’s speaker, it would have been difficult not to read the lines biographically.

I dare not look upon that face,

My bark is in the bay,

Too much already its soft grace

Has won from me delay.

A few short hours, and I must gaze

On those sad eyes no more,

A dream will seem the pleasant days

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Past on this lonely shore.\textsuperscript{93}

The poem reads as a poetic counterpart to Landon’s preface in which she takes leave of her readers. Other poems in the same volume, especially Miss Jewsbury’s previously unpublished poem “To L.E.L.—After Meeting Her for the First Time,” give the impression that we are reading a printed version of Landon’s own album. In volumes that complicate divisions between producer and consumer, such seemingly personal poems enhance further the notion that the printed annuals were prized items dependent on the familiar relationships they seemingly record. Even though reader participation and the manuscript culture itself were mediated in the annuals’ printed forms, they still held appeal for thousands of readers.

Understanding the annuals’ attempts to collapse relationships between authors and readers, between manuscript and print, and between producers and consumers addresses the organizational strategies of annual-editors who, unlike Landon and Blessington, had to arrange pieces by a variety of contributors. Michelle Levy has noted that, despite their close ties, “Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth are curiously alienated from one another” in the pages of the \textit{Keepsake} for 1829; the \textit{Keepsake}’s editor, Frederic Mansel Reynolds, made “no mention of their personal relationship” when he printed the Lake Poets’ poems in his annual. Specifically, Levy notes that Wordsworth’s poem “The Triad” is about Dora Wordsworth, Edith Southey, and Sara Coleridge, yet the original subjects of the poem are obscured in the pages of the annual.\textsuperscript{94} Levy is right to point to the apparent oddity of minimizing such obvious ties between authors. Coleridge suggested that his decision to write for the \textit{Keepsake} was, in addition to the handsome

\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Fisher’s Drawing Room Scrap-Book} [for 1839], 5.

\textsuperscript{94} Levy, \textit{Family Authorship}, 169.
payment of £50, influenced by the fact that Southey and Wordsworth were contributing. In a letter to his friend Alaric Watts, editor of the Literary Souvenir, Coleridge explained his decision to send six poems to the competing Keepsake: “I caught at the opportunity for spite of the Fifty Pound & its convenience, the disinclination to reject W[ordsworth]’s request & advice, arising in part from feelings of friendship to Wordsworth & in part from the fear of my refusal to add my name to his & Southey’s being misinterpreted at Keswick, was beyond all comparison the more efficient Motive.”

Behind the scenes, then, Coleridge’s contributions were made with personal rather than commercial intentions in mind. Coleridge’s contributions to the Keepsake for 1829 represent an example of authentic interpersonal relationships actually shaping the content of the annuals.

Reynolds, however, spread pieces by the Lake Poets throughout his volume. He deemphasized the poets’ familiar connections with each other by separating their works. While Reynolds’s decision may strike us as odd, it seems to have arisen from a desire to emphasize the wider dialogic aspects of the volume by refusing to demarcate different literary schools and exclusive literary communities. Such obfuscation of relationships between authors actually fits the annuals-editors’ attempts to cultivate a democratizing aesthetic, which gave readers imaginative possession of and interaction with authors. Thus, it makes sense that the triadic relationship that Reynolds sought to emphasize was not the personal connections between three famous Lake Poets but instead connections between authors and readers (and between readers and readers) through the material medium of the book. Poems, essays, and inscription plates encouraged readers to author marginalia, diary entries and dedications, and they enhanced further the annuals’

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95 Coleridge to Alaric Watts, September 14, 1828, Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 6:761.
connections to manuscript practice. In the early annuals, readers became co-contributors to the ready-made volumes they read.

**Failing to Inscribe Familiarity**

In order to facilitate the annuals’ role as potential intimate gifts, editors often included steel-plates specifically designed for inscription. These plates functioned as blank forms on which names and sentiments of friendship or love could be entered. In some cases, the plates themselves offered advice on how to inscribe them. The steel-engraved inscription plate for the 1835 *Keepsake*, for example, gives the instructions that entries should “be written with a hard pencil.”  

Leigh Hunt’s essay, “Pocket-Books and Keepsakes,” published in the *Keepsake* for 1828, invites purchasers, readers, and owners to write in their annuals. Hunt claims that “one precious name, or little inscription at the beginning of the volume, where the hand that wrote it is known to be generous in its wishes, if not in its means, is worth all the binding in St. James’s.” Hunt is clear: personalization adds far more value to a volume than gold block, gilt-edged paper, or detailed engravings. Importantly, Hunt’s essay was published when the annuals were changing in significant ways.

By the late 1820s the value of individual annuals became recursively tied to the perceived social value of the genre as a whole. As Paula Feldman has argued, for a young lady not to receive an annual was an embarrassment, so much so that what “otherwise might have been a discretionary purchase became for some young women an essential

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96 *The Keepsake* [for 1835], ed. Frederic Mansel Reynolds (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, [1834]).

item for the drawing room table.” Just as one may desire a Valentine’s Day card more for the idea of receiving one than for what the card actually says, purchasers and receivers of literary annuals, I suggest, came to view the volumes as necessary though also somewhat empty gifts. The editors of the annuals, then, came to rely on the genre’s status as essential social artefacts rather than their potential as items to personalize. Arjun Appadurai’s theories about commodities apply here. Through marketing, Appadurai contends that “goods are placed in a sort of pseudoenclaved zone, as if they were not available to anyone who can pay the price.” Yet as the annuals were less conducive to personalization in the late 1820s and 1830s, it was difficult for the contributors, publishers, and editors to position their annuals in this “pseudoenclaved zone.”

Furthermore, later annuals became even more elaborate than those produced in the early 1820s. Watered silk, fly-embossed leather, and gold-blocking took the place of printed paperboard covers. One important result of this trend toward more elaborate beauty was a waning willingness to corrupt or desecrate volumes through marginalia and inscription. According to St Clair, later annuals “left nothing for the owner to write except her name.” The positive aspects of familiarity that the early annuals so expertly evoked in the early 1820s began to fade as the printed texts of later annuals increasingly left little space, both materially and ideologically, which individuals could use to personalize them.

While the margins of the annuals increased in dimension, the white space designated for readers’ annotations decreased. Harris’s bibliographic research demonstrates that the printed text blocks of annuals changed very little over the 1820s.

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100 St Clair, Reading Nation, 229.
and 1830s; however, the physical dimensions of the volumes increased and drew attention the wide margins of fine hot-press or India paper. These new larger annuals sometimes contained “engravings that were larger than the text blocks,” which signalled “the eventual shift away from the annual’s literary contents towards its visual contents.”\footnote{Katherine Harris, Introduction to \textit{Gothic Short Stories in British Literary Annuals} (Zittaw Press, forthcoming). I thank Professor Harris for allowing me to read her introduction prior to its publication.} Specifically, the inscription plates at the front of the volumes also grew more elaborate. Even this minimal amount of personalization was limited by the confines of the plates provided.

In fact, it seems that the majority of inscription plates were left blank. The most extensive study of annual inscriptions was done by Paula Feldman, who had access to a private collection of 354 British literary annuals from 1824-1859.\footnote{Feldman, “Women, Literary Annuals, and the Evidence of Inscriptions,” 56. We should again remind ourselves of the challenges of seeing the inscribed books that survive as representative of how they were or were not used. Our understanding of nineteenth-century inscription practices in annuals is filtered through the shifting values that both libraries and collectors have placed on books with marginalia.} Only forty percent of the annuals she examined were inscribed. If we look closer at the plates themselves, it becomes clear that the plates are perhaps less straightforwardly inscribable than they may at first appear. The pressure to remain on the cutting edge of aesthetic and technological display led many annual-editors to produce elaborate inscription plates that many users might not have wished to mar with their own manuscript personalization. For example, inscription plates from the \textit{Forget Me Not} and \textit{The Gem} published in the late 1820s and early 1830s used exciting new cameo embossing and dual-colour printing techniques.

While the quality of presentation plates and their connection to illustrative plates produced by the same engravers such as Charles Health would not necessarily have precluded personalization, I argue that inscription plates’ increasing elaborateness shifted
them closer to the realm of art. Writing on them might have seemed to “ruin” the plates. I see such a shift from utility to beauty as a manifestation of a more general shift away from the lingering manuscript traditions out of which the annuals arose.

It is difficult to overestimate the potential connections between a decrease in personalization—a minimization of the annuals as records of positively familiar relationships—and a mechanized and commercial culture that was increasingly difficult to obfuscate. As H.J. Jackson has observed, “the better produced and the more beautiful the book is, the less hospitable it is likely to be to manuscript additions.” Jackson’s assertion applies directly to the changing ways that the literary annuals were framed. As the reviewer of the 1832 Keepsake put it: “As a literary collection, it contains little more than is calculated to amuse for the passing moment; and then it is chiefly the rank of the writer, or the beauty of the accompanying picture which induces perusal.” As the annuals developed distinct genre-specific qualities, the volumes became more akin to art books rather than volumes that encouraged the simultaneous existence of manuscript and print in one book. Editors engaged conflicting discourses of value and value-making by asserting that their volumes were desirable for two reasons. First, they were expensive to make and, thus, had value based on economic considerations alone. Second, this basic economic value was only increased by the personal value of manuscript additions like those encouraged by Hunt’s essay. It was this user-added content that gave the annuals their value. What we see in the annuals is a tilting of the balance between these two

103 Jackson, Marginalia, 235.
105 Levy has also noted the seemingly conflicting discourses editors engaged in their prefaces and advertisements. Levy, Family Authorship, 168.
reasons, with the annuals’ value being increasingly dependent not on their evocation of a manuscript ethos but on their value as annuals in and of themselves. By the mid-1830s, many annuals excluded inscription plates entirely, ridding the volumes of any sanctioned writing space for readers. The value of annuals became dislocated from their manuscript heritage and the personal connections that that heritage fostered.

The annuals attempted to commercialize the culture of coterie literary production and reception. Yet the mechanized processes that were employed to evoke and mediate manuscript albums and didactic almanacs undermined their ability to replicate the same type of sociability encouraged by these earlier genres. One major difference between early annuals and those published from the late 1820s onward is a growing sense of the printed book as a stagnant object. The annuals became familiar in the most boring sense of the word. The annuals gradually were seen as banal, common, and predictable. Distinctions between titles such as The Keepsake or The Literary Souvenir became less clear to the reviewers and the purchasing public. Even contributors began to confuse the very annuals to which they were contributing. For example, in November 1828, James Hogg wrote to Thomas Pringle, editor of Friendship’s Offering: “But so perfectly am I confounded by the number of annuals that […] at this moment I do not know which is your’s and which I have wrote for and which not!”\(^{106}\) The annual genre failed, then, because the volumes flooded the market with their sameness and with pages that discouraged personalization and marginal markings. As a result they became familiar and un(re)markable.

Conclusion

“Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar[,]”
-Percy Shelley¹

Shelley’s assertion from “A Defence of Poetry” quoted in my epigraph suggests that getting beyond familiarity is a key component of poetry. According to Shelley, familiarity is banal and deadening, something which obscures the beauty of the world. But my research shows that familiarity was not always a barrier in the Romantic period. It was also a quality that authors sought to evoke in their self-revelatory works. From autobiographical poetry and novels to familiar essays and literary annuals, many Romantic-era texts depended on familiarity to establish connections with and elicit sympathy from readers and critics. From this perspective, what Coleridge termed the “film of familiarity” connected readers and authors rather than obscured meaning.² Of course, as I have shown, not all authors and genres successfully created this type of connective, sympathetic familiarity. By focusing on failures—works that, while sometimes commercially successful, were criticized by reviewers and popular readers alike—my research questions our understanding of Romantic culture and its anxieties about self-revelatory writing, celebrity, consumerism, and the literary marketplace. Re-examining Romantic authorship, we realize that familiarity is, in fact, everywhere. It haunts Romanticism.

It is helpful to think of familiarity in the Romantic period as a spectre or, at the very least, a shadow of the type of familiarity that readers would have had with people

² Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, 2:7.
they would have known personally. Removed from actual interpersonal interactions with a growing audience of anonymous readers, Romantic authors struggled against an expanding literary marketplace. Under new conditions of literary production and reception, authors had to find ways to make their texts seem as though they were personal, authentic, and sincere. My research illuminates the period’s distinctions between familiarity’s associations with sympathy and closeness as well as its more negative associations with banality and vulgarity. In many ways, these transitions from one type of familiarity to another are also narratives of media transitions. From manuscript to print and from one type of printed form to another, the Romantic period gave rise to anxieties about and explorations of media that intensified concerns about familiarity. New printing presses and technologies fundamentally altered not only the way that Romantic texts were printed and bound but also what kinds of texts were written and how they were read. Romantic authors from Charlotte Smith and Lady Caroline to William Hazlitt and contributors to annuals tried to invite readers into their familiar circle of close friends by revealing and alluding to seemingly-private information. They did so, I suggest, to combat (and exploit) the undeniable commercial atmosphere of the literary marketplace and to offer an anodyne to the increasing anonymity of urban life and the public sphere.

However, conjuring familiarity was certainly not the same thing as controlling it, as James Gillray’s print suggests (Figure 9). The demon of forgery and publicity that Elizabeth Gunning conjured up during the scandal surrounding her in 1791-92 ultimately
Figure 10. Detail of “Betty Canning Revived: or a Peep at the Companion of Mary Squires, & the Gypsey Family,” by James Gillray, published in London by Samuel William Fores, March 25, 1791. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.
proved uncontrollable.\(^3\) Importantly, Gillray’s caricature of Gunning and her family
to the strategies people employed to encourage familiarity in the public sphere.
One strategy that Romantic authors like Gunning used to try to shape, challenge, and
extend their public reputations was providing readers with more detailed information
about their personal lives. We can see this in Gillray’s image. On the right side of the
print Gunning’s mother Susannah and aunt Margaret (also known as the novel-writing
Minifie sisters) are “cook[ing] up the Coronets,” a reference to the fact that people
believed Elizabeth Gunning had tried to seduce the young Marquis of Blandford to obtain
his heart and his fortune.\(^4\) The bellows that Susannah uses on the fire is made from a
book entitled “Letter to the D—of A” (Figure 10). This is not just any book but the
pamphlet about the scandal that Susannah Gunning published in 1791. With *A Letter
from Mrs Gunning, Addressed to His Grace the Duke of Argyll*, Susannah Gunning
attempted to gain public sympathy for her daughter. She explains in characteristically
hyperbolic language, “I write for *more* than *life or fame*: my pen and my heart are
employed in the vindication of *injured*, of *oppressed* innocence; *that Innocent*, my *own*,
my *only*, my *beloved* child.”\(^5\) Like so much of the material produced about the Gunnings

\(^\text{3}\) Gillray’s image also conjures up memories of the famous mid-eighteenth-century mystery that surrounded Elizabeth “Betty” Canning, a servant woman who disappeared for four weeks in 1753. A criminal court case ensued in which Canning accused Mary Squires, a gypsy, of abducting her, stealing her stays, and attempting to turn her into a prostitute. Squires was convicted, but soon a counterattack was launched, and Canning was convicted of perjury and sentenced to transportation to New England. Much like Gunning, Canning captured the public’s imagination. For more information on Canning, see John Treherne, *The Canning Enigma* (London: Cape 1989).

\(^\text{4}\) The sisters’ sentimental novels were reasonably popular but were met with criticism; the adjective *minific* was used in the period to describe hyperbolic prose. Susannah’s pamphlet utilizes the hyperbolic diction of her novels—a characteristic noted by both her contemporaries and current scholars. See Pam Perkins, “The Fictional Identities of Elizabeth Gunning,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 15.1 (1996): 83-98 and Todd, *Sign of Angellica*, 184. For more detailed discussion of the Minifie sisters, see Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 120-40.

in the early 1790s, Susannah Gunning’s pamphlet contains copious amounts of information about Elizabeth’s character and the defamation of her name.

The image of Susannah puffing the fire with her book-as-bellows reminds us how personal details of the sort included in her pamphlet influenced public perceptions. It also reminds us of how difficult it was to manipulate these perceptions in practice. Much like the increasingly personal prefaces to Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* or the explanatory preface that Lady Caroline added to the second edition of *Glenarvon*, Susannah Gunning’s decision to provide the public with more information about Elizabeth Gunning in *A Letter from Mrs Gunning* did little to stem the tide of negative publicity surrounding her family. Indeed, if the example of Gunning and the other case studies explored in my research demonstrate anything, it is that trying to evoke familiarity in the public sphere is akin to playing with fire.

In many ways, later Victorian revisionings of Romantic authors bear the burn-marks of the previous era, and I want to conclude by suggesting that the Victorian reception of Romantic authors was heavily inflected by anxieties about familiarity. These anxieties continued to shape literary production and reception throughout the nineteenth century and, in turn, have informed our own understanding of Romantic authorship. The Victorians are known for reshaping the less decorous aspects of Romantic writers’ lives—Shelley’s radicalism or Byron’s sex life, for example. Julian North has noted the “imperative” of many Victorian biographies and editions was “to confer respectability on the Romantic subject, for the middle-class readership, by dint of censorship, editing, and invention.”

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Questions of how to confer prestige or respectability on certain authors, I think, are questions about how readers apply different types of familiarity to the texts, authors, and physical books that they read. As I suggested in my first chapter, Charlotte Smith and Wordsworth assert the importance of their audiences’ reading of familiarity into their texts. My final three chapters have demonstrated in different ways how texts—familiar essays, semiautobiographical novels, literary annuals—try to encourage readers to recognize the “right” kind of familiarity in sometimes banal or even scandalous texts. Yet scholars have had trouble understanding how to read familiarity because, as my work has demonstrated, it meant different things to different readers. It was, as Lord Chesterfield admitted, so very difficult “to fix [familiarity’s] due bounds.” But somehow authors and their readers did negotiate familiarity, and in the reception history of Romantic-era texts we can see familiarity’s shifting boundaries take shape.

Romantic authors invited readers home with them; we might, for instance, recall Coleridge’s famous domestic scenes in “Frost at Midnight” or “Reflections Upon Leaving a Place of Retirement.” Readers also played an important role in recognizing familiarity. In the Victorian period we see authors being brought home, personalized, and familiarized in new ways. As social and literary values changed in the Victorian period, authors of the previous generation were made to conform to these new bounds. Those who were harder to bring into the fold, the scandalous writers like Gunning, Lady Caroline, and Hazlitt or those that seemed all too common or too familiar like Smith or the contributors to literary annuals receded into the margins of literary history. And as the literary history of the past recedes behind us, it becomes increasingly difficult to figure

out why certain authors like the ones I have studied here have been ignored or marginalized by posterity.

Of course, our understanding of literary history is changing. Some of the material I have studied throughout this dissertation has begun to attract more scholarly interest as a result of the recovery work begun in the late 1980s. But recovering works is not the same as understanding why they were forgotten or marginalized in the first place. The works I have examined here were in many ways popular successes, yet they were also seen by many critics and contemporary readers as failures of judgement, decorum, and taste. Like familiarity’s mutable boundaries, the lines between authorial success and failure in the Romantic period were, I have shown, blurred. It is often context rather than a text itself that determined what type of familiarity people saw in it and, as a result, whether a work failed. Studying the attacks levelled at works as well as authors’ (preemptive) responses to them, I have tried, with I hope more success than Elizabeth Gunning, to conjure up the shadows of familiarity, of success and failure, and of the literary field of the Romantic era.

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