

Social Commonplace Books

You will see and acknowledge that the virtues of my commonplace book are great . . . I can open its leaves, and see living figures moving therein; turn to one part of the book and see feasting, and splendour, and merriment; turn to another and hear intelligent conversation, and see the brightest persons in the world.

John Hamilton Reynolds

The previous chapters explored several modes of knowing: the Romantic imagination, scientific objectivity, and historical empiricism. I argue that these epistemic cultures influenced commonplace's form as compilers abandoned Locke's index in favor of diaristic entries, real-time notes, and material cuttings. Chapter 5 marks the beginning of Part II, "Organizing People." Here, I focus on how socially embedded knowledge takes shape in Romantic and Victorian commonplace books. Specifically, this chapter features collaboratively produced collections, while Chapter 6 explores commonplace books compiled during times of mourning. Taken together, these final chapters argue that Romantics and Victorians leveraged the commonplace-book tradition to organize social networks and represent specific people. I begin here, with Chapter 5, and examine collaboratively produced commonplace books that reflect a socially oriented episteme. Indeed, for the past three decades, scholars of the Romantic period have consistently supported a view of literary culture as self-consciously sociable.¹ This work has expanded sites of literary production to

¹ See *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain 1770–1840*, edited by Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

include the coffee-house, the tavern, and the drawing room,² and has done a great deal to bring women's contributions into view.³ This chapter argues that Romantics viewed the commonplace method as a means of documenting, negotiating, and solidifying social relationships; moreover, the communal nature of many Romantic commonplace books reflects how the tradition was joining with a related form, the album. By merging these two traditions—the social and the bookish—these compilers record knowledge as a function of the group rather than the individual.⁴

Composition was (and is) rarely a solitary enterprise for Romantics (and Romanticists). Recent studies leverage commonplace books and diaries as evidence of the enormous contributions made by uncredited authors—particularly sisters and wives of more well-known writers. In this respect, Dorothy Wordsworth is prototypical: her commonplace books and diaries contain lines of verse and observations that William would later publish under his own name.⁵ Despite recent work to honor Romanticism's diversity of authors and viewpoints—primarily women—the so-called “big six” (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron, and Blake) continue to dominate Romantic studies. Wildly popular authors during the nineteenth century like Felicia Hemans and L.E.L. have only recently begun to get the scholarly attention they rightly deserve.⁶ Moreover, scholars have exposed how neglecting

² See Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580–1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³ There has been a welcome influx of group biographies in the Romantic period that shift our focus away from the individual. See Daisy Hay, *Young Romantics: The Shelleys, Byron, and Other Tangled Lives* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010); Charlotte Gordon, *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft & Mary Shelley* (New York: Random House, 2016); and John Worthen, *The Gang: Coleridge, the Hutchinsons & the Wordsworths in 1802* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁴ I am influenced by feminist epistemology, especially the work of Linda Martín Alcoff, Lynn Hankinson-Nelson, and Sandra Harding.

⁵ See Susan M. Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, rev. edn (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009) and Pamela Woof, *Dorothy Wordsworth: Wonders of the Everyday* (Grasmere: Wordsworth Trust, 2013).

⁶ See Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Lucasta Miller, *L. E. L.: The Celebrated Lost Life and Scandalous Death of Letitia Elizabeth Landon, the Female Byron* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2019); N. Sweet and J. Melynk, *Felicia Hemans: Reimagining Poetry in the Nineteenth Century* (Berlin: Springer, 2016).

female authors also entails neglecting feminized forms, such as album verse.⁷ Similarly, scholars of the Keats–Hunt circle have helped revise a conception of Romanticism dominated by the Wordsworthian image of a solitary author “recollecting thoughts in tranquility.” These scholars have shown that an ethos of communality dominated most Romantic-era literary production.⁸ Manuscript evidence abounds of social writing practices, especially in collections that knit the commonplace and album traditions together. Such a collaborative ethos within the commonplace book tradition thwarts easy categorization.

Derived from the humanist *Album Amicorum*, nineteenth-century albums were blank books in which friends and family would sign their names, often along with a motto, original verse, or an illustration. According to June Schlueter, early modern albums were tools of self-fashioning; accordingly, ambitious students asked their teachers to sign:

Typically, a contributor to an early modern *album amicorum* wrote a motto or moral, often in Latin, that served as advice to the album owner and identified the writer as one who was conversant with a classical or contemporary body of wisdom. . . . Beneath the motto, he wrote a dedication, naming the album owner and honouring him with words of respect or commendation. Usually, he placed his signature at the bottom right, and usually, though not always, he dated and signed the entry.⁹

As an early example of networking, the *album amicorum* represented an idealized version of a person's social circle, filled with famous authors and well-educated thinkers. In the sixteenth century, the theologian Philip Melancthon praised the German *Stammbuch* because it could “remind the owners of people.”¹⁰ On the evidence of the British

⁷ Katherine D. Harris, *Forget Me Not: The Rise of the British Literary Annual, 1823–1835* (Columbus, OH: Ohio University Press, 2015) and Samantha Matthews, *Album Verses and Romantic Literary Culture: Poetry, Manuscript, Print, 1780–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁸ For the important role of coteries in eighteenth-century literary production, see Michelle Levy, *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture* (New York: Springer, 2008).

⁹ June Schlueter, *The Album Amicorum & the London of Shakespeare's Time* (London: British Library, 2011), p. 9.

¹⁰ M. A. E. Nickson, *Early Autograph Albums in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1970), pp. 9–10.

Library's collection of early modern *album amicorum*, Schlueter explains how entries were socially valuable: "[n]ot only did the album owner receive the praise of his contributors with satisfaction; so also was he pleased to have subsequent contributors read what earlier ones had written."¹¹ While this particular description could equally apply to nineteenth-century albums, two significant shifts in the tradition had occurred. First, Romantics and Victorians understood albums to be feminine, and second, signatories wrote entries in the vernacular. From the early modern Latin *album amicorum* (album of friends) to the "lady's album," the tradition had shed its previous scholastic ambitions in favor of feminized domesticity. The lady's album occupied a central role in the Victorian upper- and middle-class parlor. Among all the other objects on display, Thad Logan explains that "the album was the most popular and the most sentimentally charged."¹² The tradition fits the semi-public, semi-private nature of the parlor and helped to convey the often-conflicting aims of intimacy and distance that Logan claims defined the space. Given the album's centrality, the nineteenth century produced a great deal of album verse. Indeed, as Michael C. Cohen succinctly put it, "the vast majority of poems written in the nineteenth century were never published."¹³ Yet, once women embraced this genre, its prestige plummeted: albums were scorned by illustrious authors of the day such as Walter Scott who quipped about "a society for the suppression of albums."¹⁴ William St Clair reports that "All the major poets, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Campbell, and others, not only copied extracts from their own famous works into such commonplace books on request, but composed occasional pieces."¹⁵ Friends and family of no literary renown were also asked to contribute, and those who doubted their own poetic talent benefited from the album's symbiotic relationship with the literary annual tradition, where readers

¹¹ Schlueter, *The Album Amicorum*, p. 27.

¹² Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 124.

¹³ Michael Cohen, "Album Verse and the Poetics of Scribal Circulation," in *A History of Nineteenth-Century American Women's Poetry*, edited by Jennifer Putzi and Alexandra Socarides (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 68.

¹⁴ Sir Walter Scott, *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), November 20, 1825.

¹⁵ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 225.

could find samples of the genre "Lines written in a Lady's Album" to inscribe alongside their own name.¹⁶

The album tradition's influence helped writers imagine commonplace books as living, social spaces—spaces in which the dead might live, and distant friends appear nearby. Such is how John Hamilton Reynolds described his collection in an essay aptly titled "Living Authors." He explains how he can find a community of people in the pages of his commonplace book. If he is feeling "Lockish," (referring to Locke's index), he might turn to the letter "B" and find "Byron, Lord" with his associated page number. Reynolds continues, "if I but say to my book, 'Call him, let me see him!' The spell on Manfred was not stronger: the spirit of Laura was not more charmed." And so, like a photograph from later in the century, Byron might appear before his friend through the alchemy of his verse: "I turn to the page, and, lo! There he is!—"In his habit as he lives!" There is his low soft voice, like a stormy wind controlled; there is the fine breadth and paleness of his forehead,—the black *intense* curls of his lordly hair,—the haught-lip,—the dark and dreaming blue light of his eye." Reynolds describes Byron's body, not his poetry—he sees his friend's hair, his eyes, not, for example, excerpts from *Manfred*. In Reynolds's own words, "It is not, What is the Book? it is, Who is the author?"¹⁷ Reynolds was not alone in choosing to index people rather than the general topics that Locke had recommended. As the album tradition entwined with commonplaceing, Romantics began to organize their collections by people, a pattern enforced by the consolidation of copyright laws around individual authors. Rather than "Politics" we might find "Pope," instead of "Baptisms," "Byron." This new system of organization turned commonplace books into representations of social networks—populated by

¹⁶ Lindsey Eckert, "Reading Lyric's Form: The Written Hand in Albums and Literary Annuals." *ELH* 85, no. 4 (2018): 973–97. See also Kathryn Ledbetter, *Tennyson and Victorian Periodicals: Commodities in Context* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁷ Reynolds "Living Friends," p. 135. He also advertises his friends, Taylor and Hessey's *The Literary Diary*: "In short, there are few of the modern writers whom I have not seen, at some time or other. And it is my constant custom . . . to write in a ruled commonplace-book (of reasonable size, neatly bound, ordered after the method of the great Mr Locke, to be had of two worthy booksellers, yclept Taylor and Hessey, 93 Fleet Street, price only 12s.) my observations of the day, particularly of the literary gentlemen whom it is my good fortune to encounter,—not omitting the cut of their clothes, or the colours of their conversation."

living and dead authors, family and celebrities, that linked language and ideas to groupings of people.

Reynolds was part of a coterie surrounding Leigh Hunt at Hampstead Heath (often derided under the name “the Cockney School”). The coterie wrote verse together and for one another, which they recorded in albums and commonplace books. Hunt and Keats engaged in poetry contests and penned verse on the same topics (for example, reactions to seeing a lock of Milton’s hair). For this reason, Nicholas Roe argues that Hunt’s verse, in particular, presented “a humanized Romanticism in touch with people in their communities,” in contrast to Wordsworth’s “elemental landscapes.”¹⁸ Much evidence for this sociable Romanticism emerges in the group’s commonplace books. Jeffery Cox, for example, redefines the Cockney School as collaborative and collective, using evidence from the group’s shared commonplace books: the Reynolds–Hood commonplace book,¹⁹ George Felton Mathew’s sister’s “The Garland: consisting of Poetical Extracts both ancient and modern,”²⁰ Charles Cowden Clarke’s collection,²¹ as well as one of Hunt’s commonplace books, gifted to him by Novello.²² Positioning poets like Hunt and Keats in relation to their communal writing practices rescues them from the Wordsworthian “solitary sublime”—which, in any case, did not really apply to Wordsworth. As Cox argues, labelling Keats and Shelley “second generation poets” makes it appear as though they only share a temporal connection, when in fact they were part of “a self-consciously defined group, an association of intellectuals that centered on Leigh Hunt and that came to be known as the cockney school.”²³ Building from Roe’s and Cox’s work, this chapter explores how communal epistemologies, fostered by coterie writing practices, modified

¹⁸ Nicholas Roe, *Fiery Heart: The First Life of Leigh Hunt* (New York: Random House, 2010).

¹⁹ See Paul Kaufman, “The Reynolds–Hood Commonplace Book: A Fresh Appraisal,” *Keats–Shelley Journal* 10 (Winter 1961): 43–52.

²⁰ See Edmund Blunden, “Keats’s Friend Mathew,” *English: Journal of the English Association* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1936): 46–55.

²¹ John Barnard, “Charles Cowden Clarke’s ‘Cockney’ Commonplace Book,” in *Keats and History*, ed. Nicholas Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 65–87.

²² Leigh Hunt’s Commonplace Book. University of Iowa Library Ms/H94com.

²³ Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 4–5. See also Daisy Hay, *Young Romantics* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

commonplace-book form to incorporate elements of an adjacent notebook tradition—the album. Rather than the humanist sitting alone in his study, Hunt’s circle created commonplace books that imprint the group’s sociable writing practices. To make this argument, I turn to several understudied commonplace books, preserved primarily for their connection with John Keats. These include collections that belonged to Tom Keats, Richard Woodhouse, and Leigh Hunt. Taken together, these manuscripts illustrate how Keats’s circle negotiated dominant tropes of album and commonplace-book culture. The chapter ends with a study of eighteen commonplace books compiled by another coterie centered around Sidmouth’s Leigh family (the self-styled “Sisterhood of Slade”), along with their frequent companions John Hamilton Reynolds, Benjamin Bailey, and James Rice.

Epistemology of the Lady’s Album

Scholarly interest in the materiality and poetics of sociality, particularly as they forge an alternative to capitalist modes of exchange, has generated a fascination with the album tradition. Samantha Matthews, with incisive readings of fictional representations of album culture, argues that these manuscripts “functioned as a symbolic stand-in for the feminine body.”²⁴ The feminization of albums brought with it a general assessment of the tradition as trivial; however, this “is precisely what makes it suitable to encode unregulated and unspeakable feelings and thoughts.”²⁵ Like Matthews, Patrizia Di Bello emphasizes the tactile quality of albums as material objects that “played an important role in the construction of the genteel identity of women and their families.”²⁶ In other words, the so-called “Lady’s Album” functioned as a way to order and represent social networks that accrued non-capitalistic value. Di Bello explains that an album “demonstrates her [the lady’s] ability to socialize in a world at once fashionable and learned, using her

²⁴ Samantha Matthews, “Albums, Belonging, and Embodying the Feminine,” in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, edited by K. Boehm (Berlin: Springer, 2016), pp. 107–129, p. 108.

²⁵ Matthews, “Albums,” p. 109.

²⁶ Patrizia Di Bello, *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 3.

networking skills rather than her purchasing power to accumulate a small but perfectly formed collection."²⁷ As Matthews and Di Bello point out, the album tradition developed alongside its commercialized instantiation—literary annuals, which were anthologies of verse and light prose marketed as gifts for the Christmas season. While extremely lucrative for the celebrated authors who wrote for them (Kathryn Ledbetter reports that Walter Scott earned £500 for his contributions to just one edition²⁸), they also modelled “alternative economic practices,” to borrow Jill Rappoport’s words. “Annuals not only shaped the way women imagined giving by modeling scenes and styles of exchange but, by cultivating a larger ethos of generosity for this publishing enterprise, also positioned readers as gift recipients, placing them under the burdens and benefits of gift exchange. As gifts, annuals created a reading community . . .”²⁹ With a pervasive expectation that family, friends, and acquaintances might be asked for a page of verse, literary annuals printed samples of “Lines Written in a Lady’s Album” that modeled conventional decorum.

Positioned as a symbol of female sociality, the nineteenth-century album was increasingly mocked as a trivial pastime. Even Charles Lamb, who published an entire book called *Album Verses with a Few Others* in 1830, refers to them as “trifles.”³⁰ Later, he would defend this publication: “But if to write in Albums be a sin, Lord help Wordsworth—Coleridge—Southey—Sir Walter himself—who have not been always able to resist the solicitations of the fair owners of these modern nuisances.”³¹ All the respected poets of the time succumbed to write album verse, Lamb reasoned, so “where was the harm” in teaching others “how they might be best, and most characteristically written?”³² The very first poem in Lamb’s collection touches on the dominant themes of album verse in the early nineteenth century: the

²⁷ Di Bello, *Women’s Albums*, p. 50.

²⁸ Kathryn Ledbetter, *Tennyson and Victorian Periodicals: Commodities in Context* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 8.

²⁹ Jill Rappoport, *Giving Women: Alliance and Exchange in Victorian Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 20.

³⁰ Charles Lamb, *Album Verses: With a Few Others* (London: Edward Moxon, 1830), p. iii.

³¹ Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb, *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb: Miscellaneous Prose, 1798–1834* (London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1903), p. 340.

³² Lamb, *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, p. 341.

album’s materiality, reflections on the tradition, the scribe’s humility, praise for the album’s owner, and hints at a future when the writer would be gone but his or her verse would remain.

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; a holier Room
For names of some since mouldering in the tomb,
Whose blooming memories life’s cold laws survive;
And, dead elsewhere, they here yet speak, and live.
Such, and so tender, should an Album be;
And, Lady, such I wish this book to thee.³³

The album, Lamb explains, collects people just as a bouquet gathers flowers. He captures the tradition’s unique tenor in the Romantic period: saccharine goodness cut by death’s macabre shadow and, ultimately, transcendence through the vehicle of album verse. Though a friend’s body might be “mouldering in the tomb,”³⁴ album verse was commonly viewed as a tool that allowed her to once again “speak . . . and live.”³⁵

Following albums, commonplacings culture began to view verse as representations of the body. In particular, two bodily traces—handwriting and locks of hair—accrued symbolic value. Handwriting represented a present absence—a kind of ellipses that held the intimate imprint of a bodily encounter. Like handwriting, hair never decays; unlike handwriting, hair is not an imprint, but the thing itself. Hunt suggests creating a bookmark from a braid of hair, claiming that it was “the most precious of all keepsakes.”³⁶ As tropes that appear throughout album and commonplace culture, hands and hair resurface as meditations on embodiment and absence. With their insistence on bodily traces, Romantic albums took on a gothic modality: writers

³³ Lamb, “An Album is a Garden,” *Album Verses, with a Few Others*, pp. 1–2.

³⁴ Lamb, “An Album is a Garden,” *Album Verses, with a Few Others*, line 8.

³⁵ Lamb, “An Album is a Garden,” *Album Verses, with a Few Others*, line 10.

³⁶ Leigh Hunt, “Pocket-Books and Keepsakes,” in *The Keepsake* (London: Thomas Davison, Whitefriars, 1828), p. 18.

equated signing their names with inscribing their body. It was not uncommon for friends to add a clipping of hair along with verse that describes it as a metaphor for friendship. Consider Eliza Crooke's clipped braid in Anne Wagner's album.³⁷ Writing in 1795, Crooke's verse positions this bodily extract and its accompanying ribbon as a metaphor for friendship: "Close as this lock of Hair the ribband binds | May friendship's sacred bonds unite our minds."³⁸ Crooke's writing transforms the lock of hair as a representation of her bodily presence and the ribbon tied around it, the bonds of friendship. Even if other signatories did not enclose an actual part of their body, they hoped their handwriting would do similar work. Another friend, who goes by the name Ms Casson, hoped her entry would remind Wagner of her: "When on this page fair maid your eyes are bent, | Think on one who much your worth admires . . ."³⁹ With this verse, Casson projects a time in the future when she might not be sitting beside Wagner and asks her friend to read this verse as a proxy for her body.

Autographs

Writing around an insect "accidentally crushed" and preserved on an empty page of a Lady's Album, James Montgomery reflects on life, death, and the traces that remain.

Lie there, embalm'd from age to age!—
This is the Album's noblest page,
Though every glowing leaf be fraught
With painting, poets, and thought;
Where tracks of mortal hands are seen,
A hand invisible has been,
And left this autograph behind,
This image from th' eternal mind;
A work of skill surpassing sense,
A labor of Omnipotence!

³⁷ Wagner's album is available to view online: "Anne Wagner Album," NYPL Digital Collections, accessed December 7, 2020, <<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47db-b630-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>>.

³⁸ "Anne Wagner Album." ³⁹ "Anne Wagner Album."

Though frail as dust it meet thine eye,
He form'd this gnat who built the sky.
Stop—lest it vanish at thy breath,
This speck had life, and suffer'd death.⁴⁰

The crushed flea, in Montgomery's interpretation, is an imprint left behind by "a hand invisible." Distinguished from the "tracks of mortal hands," such as his own entry, Montgomery reads the crushed fly as divine autograph. With his final lines, Montgomery reminds his readers of their own living bodies, filled with breath that might disturb the gnat. As further protection, Montgomery wrote his poem around the gnat, as though protecting it from the careless breath of future readers who might not have realized that they gazed upon holy signatures in a seraphic book. In another poem written in a lady's album, Montgomery ends with the hope that all the collected signatures will be transposed into "His Book of Life"—as though writing one's name into an album was an act of alchemical significance. Like the gnat, preserved beyond its death, each mark, "embalm'd from age to age," would outlast its signatory.⁴¹

While Montgomery struck a decidedly religious tone in his album verse, others worried over what their handwriting might reveal. Some speculated on the new physiognomic research coming from the continent that suggested a person's handwriting contained clues to his or her mind. Johann Kasper Lavater briefly mentions handwriting in his *Essays on Physiognomy*, where he suggests that it was "highly probable that each of us has his own hand-writing, individual and inimitable."⁴² Furthermore, he expounded on script's diversity, exclaiming that "the least word communicated to paper, how many points, how many curves does it not contain!" Lavater's work was followed in earnest by Édouard Auguste Patrice Hocquart, who, in 1812, published an entire book devoted to the connection between script and a person's internal world, *The Art of Judging the Character of Individuals from their*

⁴⁰ Montgomery, James. "Epitaph on a Gnat found Crushed on the Leaf of a Lady's Album." In *Forget Me Not*, 67. London: R. Ackermann, 1829.

⁴¹ Montgomery, "Epitaph," p. 67.

⁴² Johann Kaspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, trans. C. Moore, vol. 4 (London: W. Wilson, 1797), p. 200.

Handwriting and Style.⁴³ Offering samples from the pens of famous figures, Hocquart attempted to extrapolate personality traits from the curvature of script. He reads “the most palpable frivolity” in “ridiculous flourishes,”⁴⁴ or a “lady distinguished by a cultivated mind” because her writing exhibits “exactness without minuteness.”⁴⁵ Having seen Hocquart’s book in France, Isaac Disraeli published a reflection on the changing nature of handwriting. Like a person’s voice or face, Disraeli exclaims: “Assuredly Nature would prompt every individual to have a distinct sort of writing.” However, he cautions, a newly “regulated” style transformed writing into a “mechanical process.”⁴⁶ All students learn a similar hand and are “forced in their automatic motions, as if acted on by the pressure of a steam-engine.”⁴⁷ Here Disraeli registers a fear of mechanization, which, extended to the hand, would diminish the value of an autograph by making it less variable and, therefore, less personalized.

Because of the perceived connection between mind and hand, a person’s writing seemed to lay bare their interiority. Thus, an album’s value depended upon the signatures it contained — with each signature valued, at least in part, for its physical connection to the signatory. As a result, writers often paused to consider theories of handwriting. Charles Lamb references this new science of physiognomy in verse written for the album of his adopted daughter, Emma Isola. Under the title “What is an Album?” Lamb describes the new importance of autographs:

And since some Lavaters, with head-pieces comical,
Have pronounce’d people’s hands to be physiognomical,
Be sure that you stuff it with autographs plenty
All penn’d in a fashion so stiff and so dainty,
They no more resemble folk’s ordinary writing
Than lines penn’d with pains to extempore writing . . .⁴⁸

⁴³ Edouard Auguste Patrice Hocquart, *The Art of Judging the Character of Individuals from their Handwriting and Style*, ed. Edward Lumley (London: John Russell Smith, 1875). Originally published in French as *Le Secrétaire de tout le monde, ou, la Correspondance usuelle*.

⁴⁴ Hocquart, *The Art of Judging*, p. 37. ⁴⁵ Hocquart, *The Art of Judging*, p. 40.

⁴⁶ Isaac Disraeli, *Curiosities of Literature: Consisting of Anecdotes, Characters, Sketches, and Observations, Literary, Critical, and Historical* (London: J. Murray, 1791), p. 164.

⁴⁷ Disraeli, *Curiosities of Literature*, p. 164.

⁴⁸ Charles Lamb, “What Is an Album?,” in *The Life, Letters, and Writings of Charles Lamb* (London: W. W. Gibbings, 1892), pp. 324–325.

Lamb questions Lavater’s logic because, he explains, albums collect samples of a person’s best handwriting—“so stiff and so dainty.” Lavater himself anticipated this objection and reasons that the fact that writers’ handwriting varies based on mood and situation only strengthens his theory because it demonstrates how interior conditions such as anxiety or calmness reveal themselves in script. The pressure of writing in an album, given its ties to self-representation, would suggest that contributors put their finest selves forward; thus, Lavater reasoned, their signatures captured their best attempt to represent themselves.

The history of handwriting up to the nineteenth century is one of “simplification and standardization,” as Aileen Douglas teaches us.⁴⁹ By the seventeenth century, Jonathan Goldberg explains, the earlier secretary hand was replaced by italic hand, which led to round hand from which “our modern hand descends.”⁵⁰ Eighteenth-century writing manuals such as George Bickham’s authoritative *The Universal Penman* taught round form. Bickham’s title suggests that handwriting was becoming increasingly regulated. In place of the many hands that identified writers in the early modern period, round hand became the norm. The self-proclaimed writing master, Charles Snell, went so far as to demonstrate *mathematically* “how better alphabets . . . may be performed than has ever yet been published in Great Britain.”⁵¹ His instructions reference geometry—perpendicular lines, arches, circles—and he offers diagrams for each letter. Standardized handwriting, which Snell and Bickham inherited from the seventeenth century, produced “the individual with one hand or one spelling of the name.”⁵² Paradoxically, with the consolidation of the signature as an italic form, autographs became the mark of an individual; the standardized form made individual differences all the more visible. Regulating handwriting was, in a sense, also regulating the body. For example, Joseph Champion, who published

⁴⁹ Aileen Douglas, *Work in Hand: Script, Print, and Writing, 1690–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 8.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 53.

⁵¹ Charles Snell, *The Standard Rules of the Round and Round-Text-Hands: Mathematically Demonstrating How Better Alphabets of Those Hands May Be Performed than Have Ever yet Been Publish’d in Great-Britain . . .* (London: Printed for and sold by Henry Overton and John Hoole, 1728), title page.

⁵² Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, p. 244.

Penmanship or the Art of Fair Writing in 1770, offers “directions for Holding the Pen; extending the Arm; and position of the Body.”⁵³ Choreographed writing such as this further enforced a connection between handwriting and the body that produced it.

With its prismatic ability to represent the writer’s personhood, handwriting was among the best representations of a person before photography became widely accessible. In this view, albums were proto-photographic in their desire to capture physical presence in such a way that it would outlast the living body. By the early nineteenth century, as Douglas notes, handwriting seemed to offer an unadulterated glimpse into a writer’s “interior space of thoughts.”⁵⁴ Album culture absorbed the enormous value placed on handwriting at the turn of the nineteenth century. Hegel, for example, meditated on the hand as “an instrument of will.”⁵⁵ Therefore, collecting autographs was a practice predicated on the idea that albums were collecting not only handwriting, but also a privileged view into an interior, authentic self. Handwriting manuals along with album culture primed Romantics to invest self-formation in handwriting. Indeed, as an extension of the anatomical, grasping hand, handwriting could represent the entire body. Hence, writing in another person’s commonplace book or album signaled an embodied intimacy—one which thrilled John Keats’s friends and family.

Keats’s Hand

The Fault is in the quill.
John Keats, writing to Fanny Brawne⁵⁶

Writing to his friend Dilke in 1820, Keats alludes to Lavater’s physiognomy, saying “that the Character of a Man may be known by his

⁵³ Joseph Champion, *Penmanship: Or, the Art of Fair Writing. A New Essay, Etc.* (London: Printed by the author, 1770), p. 7.

⁵⁴ Douglas, *Work in Hand*, p. 42.

⁵⁵ Hegel, G. W. F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Revised ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 178–179. See also Pamela Gilbert’s fascinating discussion of legality and handwriting in *Victorian Skin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), especially ch. 8, “Tattoo.”

⁵⁶ John Keats, in *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 262.

handwriting.”⁵⁷ Like his contemporaries, Keats worried over the degradation of script in the early nineteenth century. This anxiety is especially pronounced in a letter to Fanny Brawne, written that same year: “I have been writing with a vile old pen the whole week, which is excessively ungallant. The fault is in the Quill . . . However, these last lines are in a much better style of penmanship [though] a little disfigured by the smear of black currant jelly.”⁵⁸ Here, Keats highlights the technologies of letter writing: the “vile old pen” makes for a less elegant “hand.” In other words, Keats’s writing in this instance should not be taken as a reflection of his character, but of a faulty tool. Similarly, the “smear of black currant jelly” draws attention to letter writing’s other essential technology, paper. Both the faulty pen and jelly mar the letter, but in their imperfection, they also make the underlying technologies visible. With its stain, the jelly highlights the paper’s physicality, its very presence as it lay on Keats’s writing desk. By drawing attention to his pen and paper’s defects, Keats also emphasizes how technologies of writing necessarily mediate his body. In the same letter, he suggests that he views Brawne’s letters as proxies for her body, when he admits to taking them to bed. “I read your letter in bed last night, and that might be the reason for my sleeping so much better.”⁵⁹ While this letter’s underlying eroticism might be debatable, Keats clearly notes a relationship between reading a lover’s letter and bodily needs, such as sleeping. Along similar lines, Keats’s friends placed a high value on the ingenue’s handwriting, especially as it appeared in their own personal commonplace books.

In fact, Keats’s first poems circulated, not in print, but in manuscript commonplace books kept by friends and family. His brother Tom, who would die from tuberculosis, that “family disease,” kept one such collection. The poet’s publisher, Richard Woodhouse, kept another. Across the Atlantic, Keats’s brother and sister-in-law, George and Georgiana, transcribed his poetry as they received autograph versions by mail. Though Keats rarely wrote in these manuscripts, wherever the poet’s hand appeared, the owner would inscribe a note, lest anyone overlook that this was, in fact, John Keats’s hand. One such friend, Richard Woodhouse kept a collection of verse authored by his friends,

⁵⁷ Keats, *The Letters*, p. 272.

⁵⁹ Keats, *The Letters*, p. 262.

⁵⁸ Keats, *The Letters*, p. 272.

especially Keats and John Hamilton Reynolds.⁶⁰ On one page, Keats's "living hand" makes a brief appearance to correct a single word in Woodhouse's transcription of "To Sleep." Woodhouse documents his friend's presence when, on the verso, he explains, "This word 'lulling' is in K's handwriting. The correction was made when he borrowed this book to select a small poem to write in an album, intended to consist of original poetry for a lady."⁶¹ Likewise, the poet's sister-in-law, Georgiana, kept a scrapbook filled almost entirely with newspaper articles. She reserves a single page to commemorate John Keats's death. Here she pastes obituaries above a fair copy of the poem he had written for her, "Nymph of the Downward Smile and Sidelong Glance." Like Woodhouse, Georgiana highlights how this page contains the poet's hand: "The following M.S. with signature is by Mr. J Keats, poet whose death is mentioned beneath from the Literary chronicle March 31st 1821."⁶² Georgiana created a cenotaphic memorial for her brother-in-law, an impulse that we will explore further in Chapter 6. (See Figure 5.1.)

Like Woodhouse and Georgiana Keats, the poet's ill-fated brother Tom kept a notebook filled almost entirely with John's poetry. Tom transcribed "Calidore," a poem in which the eponymous character is "burning to hear of Knightly deeds."⁶³ In Keats criticism, this poem is understood as an early representation of Leigh Hunt's influence on the budding poet because it includes Hunt's favorite stylistic elements: Spenserian echoes (the name Calidore comes from the *Faerie Queene*), chivalric themes, and open couplets. And indeed, Tom's commonplace book reveals that Hunt approved of the poem. This copy reveals Hunt's markings—marginal lines and boxes around words—which signal his appreciation and congregate around references to chivalry, rich descriptions of landscapes, and open couplets. These lines, though they don't change the content of the page, shift the reader's focus and

⁶⁰ Incidentally, Woodhouse served as legal counsel to the publishers Taylor and Hessey and kept his collection in a dummy copy of their *Literary Diary or An Improved Commonplace Book* (discussed in Chapter 1).

⁶¹ Richard Woodhouse, "Commonplace Book of Poems Mainly by John Keats" (1819), MS Keats 3.3.1, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁶² Georgiana Keats, "Scrapbook and Commonplace Book Entries Written in Several Hands..." MS Keats 3.3.4, Houghton Library, Harvard University. For more on these memorial practices see Jillian M. Hess, "This Living Hand: Commonplacing Keats," *Keats-Shelley Review* 24 (2010): 15–21.

⁶³ Tom Keats, "Commonplace Book Compiled by Tom Keats," 1814. MS Keats 3.3.5.

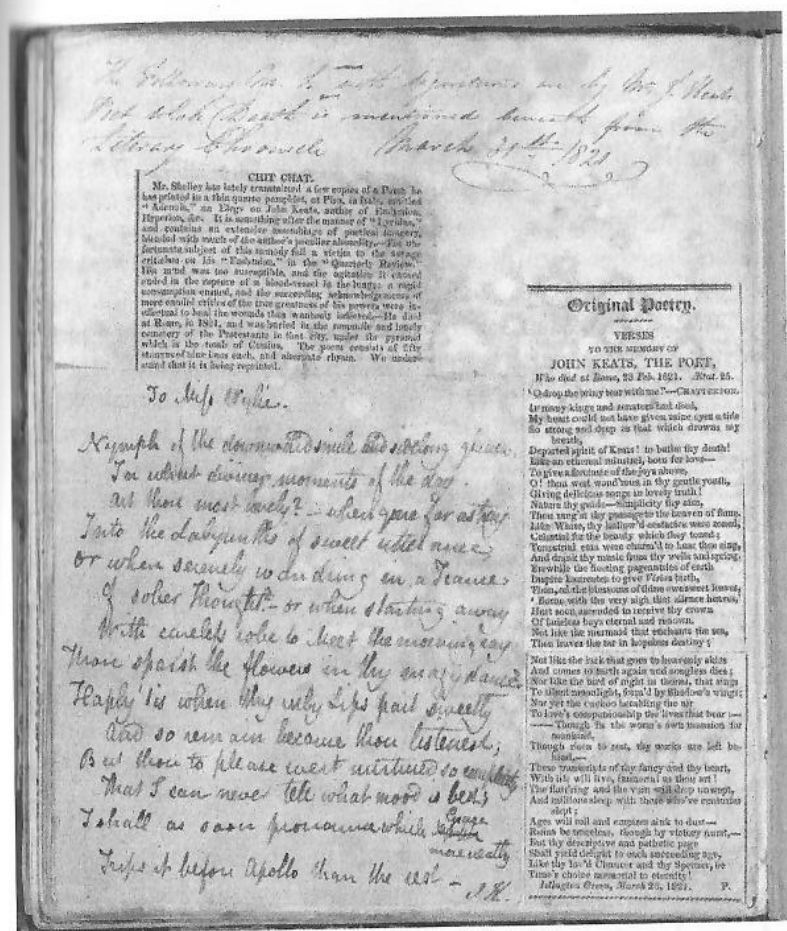


FIGURE 5.1 Georgiana Keats's Memorial Page for John Keats. John Keats Collection (MS Keats 3.3.4), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

become entangled with the poem itself. Hunt used Tom Keats's commonplace book as a kind of pedagogical tool—a space to instruct his friend on effective elements of versification. Equally important is the fact that Tom Keats cared enough about Leigh Hunt's markings to record what would otherwise have been anonymous. Tom Keats

writes: "marked by Leigh Hunt—1816."⁶⁴ This note implies that he expected future readers to flip through the pages of his collection. Certainly, he didn't need to remind himself that the markings belonged to Hunt. In May of the same year, Hunt would be the first to publish a poem by John Keats ("On Solitude") in his liberal weekly, *The Examiner*. And, that October, he formally introduced Keats (along with John Hamilton Reynolds) in an essay titled "Young Poets." Here Hunt publishes another poem that Tom Keats had transcribed, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer." By way of introducing the poem, Hunt draws his readers' attention to particularly beautiful lines or words: "we do not hesitate to pronounce excellent, especially the last six lines. The word swims is complete; and the whole conclusion is equally powerful."⁶⁵ With his comments, it is as though Hunt has taken a pen to Keats's verse yet again, marking off the sonnet's concluding sestet and directing readers' attention to the word "swims." Hunt teaches his readers to think in terms of extractions, to focus on sections of a text worthy of remembrance.

The fragment, Romanticism's most recognizable form, primed readers to approach incomplete texts as indeterminate.⁶⁶ Marjorie Levinson has argued that the fragment was a "peculiarly Romantic form," and that as it spread throughout the early nineteenth century, it took a variety of configurations because it was "an ideological as well as formal issue."⁶⁷ The fragment, then, serves to forestall an ending—leaving verse incomplete opens an infinite space for revision, or so Romantics thought. And because the fragment seemed almost polygenic, with its ability to grow new life from its original form, it transcends the author's life, with its completion eternally imminent. The incomplete nature of Romantic poetry emerged from what Schlegel understood to be its inherent desire to combine and "fuse" different genres and material:

⁶⁴ Tom Keats, "Commonplace Book."

⁶⁵ Leigh Hunt, "Young Poets," *The Examiner* (The British Library, December 1, 1816), <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/young-poets>>.

⁶⁶ In fragment 116 of the *Athenaeum Fragments*, Schlegel characterizes Romantic poetry as process rather than product; it is, he argues, "still in the process of becoming; indeed, that is its true essence, that it can only eternally become and never be perfected." See Friedrich von Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 175.

⁶⁷ Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form*, new edn (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 5.

"poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and that of nature."⁶⁸ Moreover, he imagined poetry as a function of life, and life a function of poetry: "to make poetry lively and social and to make life and society poetic."⁶⁹ This is precisely the philosophical crux of the Keats-circle commonplace books, which brought poetry into life and life into poetry. Just as handwriting seemed to capture a person's vitality, samples of hair were, to Hunt's mind, "the most precious of all keepsakes."

Milton's Hair

... It is easy to combine with a literary keepsake the most precious of all the keepsakes—hair. A braid of it may be used instead of ribbon to mark the page with, and attached to the book in the usual way of a register.

Leigh Hunt, writing for *The Keepsake*, 1828

Many albums and scrapbooks radiate from a central desire to represent people, especially those who remained inaccessible—often through death or celebrity. Leigh Hunt was, himself, a collector of hair. He kept a scrapbook that he filled with locks of hair cut from the heads of famous people. Hunt organizes his collection with an index of people whose hair graces the pages of his book—including George Washington, Napoleon, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and John Keats. Hunt often proves the authenticity of these cuttings with descriptions of how certain locks of hair came into his possession. The carefully noted provenance of these objects recalls Romantic-era collections of ballads discussed in the previous chapter; however, unlike ballads, hair is a physical object with a precise origin. Of all the hair in his scrapbook, Hunt was particularly enamored with a small strand of John Milton's hair. He notes the chain of ownership that brought the poet's hair into his possession: "Milton—given by Dr. Johnson to Hooke, and by Hooke

⁶⁸ Friedrich von Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 31.

⁶⁹ von Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 31.

to Dr. Batty, who gave it to me. L.H.”⁷⁰ This level of historical empiricism registers a similar concern for authenticity that increases in relation to historical distance. The sample of hair from Keats, for example, required no such authentication. Rather than a chain of oral transmission (“from the mouth of a milkmaid,” for example) Hunt narrates a chain of ownership. (See Figure 5.2.)

Poetry had a social function for Hunt’s circle, as demonstrated by their occasional verse and literary contests. Yet, this community extended beyond the living and tools like this scrapbook of hair allowed Hunt to converse with his favorite authors. For example, he imagines Milton’s hair as a conduit for intimate conversation.⁷¹ This particular sample of hair inspired occasional poetry written by Hunt and Keats to commemorate “the poet of *Paradise Lost*.” These poems capture different reactions to the same organic matter, and each is a study of each poet’s relationship to their own embodiment. While Hunt responds with “the pleasure of tender human contact,” Keats shuns his own body as he attempts “a grandeur appropriate to the poet of *Paradise Lost*.” Hunt’s easy engagement with Milton’s hair licenses him to include his own verse alongside the lock. His poem begins by putting his own body in relation to Milton’s hair, “It lies before me there.” Hunt’s verse focuses on the immediacy of the cutting, and the power of his own breath to animate it:

It lies before me there, and my own breath
Stirs its thin outer threads, as though beside
The living head I stood in honored pride,
Talking of lovely things that conquer death.
Perhaps he pressed it once, or underneath
Ran his fine fingers, when he leant, blank-eyed,
And saw, in fancy, Adam and his bride
With their rich locks, or his own Delphic wreath.
There seems a love in hair, though it be dead.

⁷⁰ Leigh Hunt, “Collection of Hair” (c.1820–c.1860), Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, <<https://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15878coll14/id/186/rec/3>>.

⁷¹ For an analysis of poetry about hair as ekphrasis see Leila Walker. “Percy Bysshe Shelley and the Ekphrasis of Hair.” *European Romantic Review* 24, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 231–50.

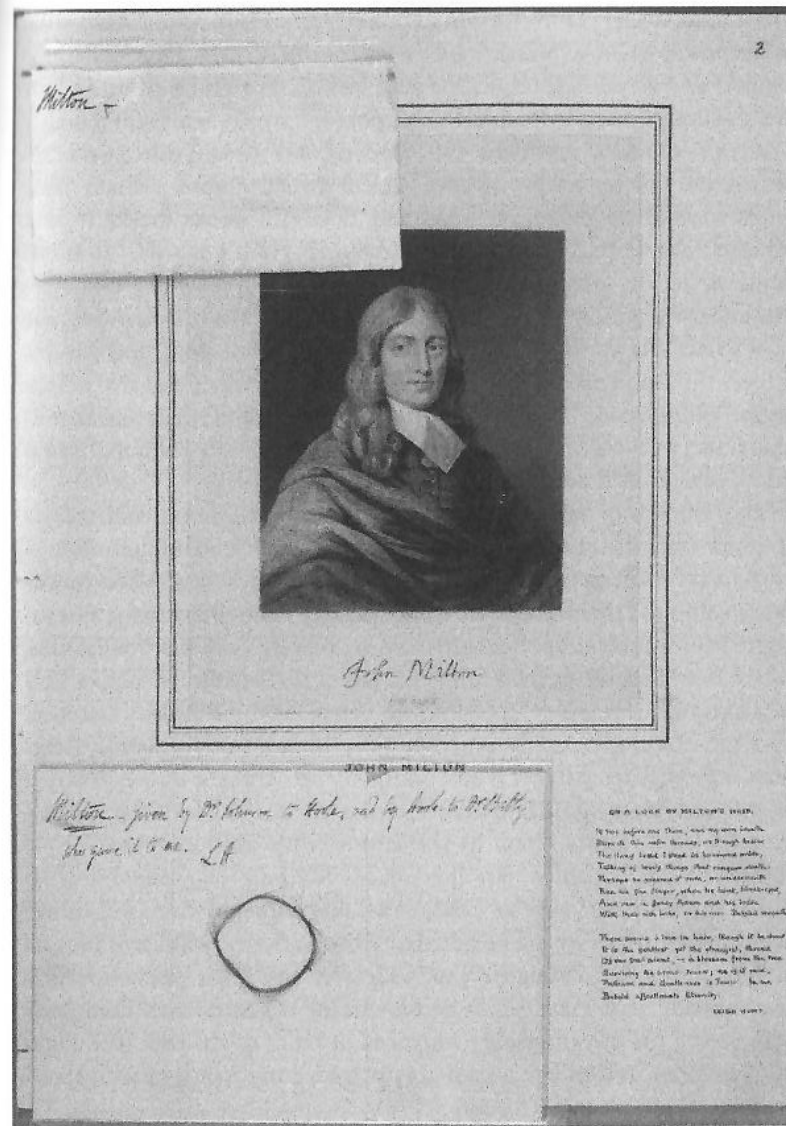


FIGURE 5.2 Leigh Hunt’s Scrapbook of Hair, Milton’s Page, STARK 6693 STK, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas.

Hunt finds infinite conversation in this strand of hair. While marveling at his power to move Milton's hair with his own breath, Hunt positions himself as a physical interlocutor with Milton. For Hunt, Milton's hair is a medium through which the great poet might still maintain a bodily presence, albeit a fractured one. Indeed, his description seems to anticipate the seemingly magical talent of telegraphy, which used wires to connect distances. That hair does not decay marks it as a uniquely stable part of human anatomy. In Hunt's words, "It is the gentlest, yet the strongest thread." And as though it were a talisman, Hunt feels an almost bodily connection to Milton. His breath moves the poet's hair, the very hair that Milton himself (Hunt imagines) ran his fingers through while penning his description of Adam and Eve's "rich locks." Hunt braids his own living breath with Milton's hair and that of characters in *Paradise Lost*. It is only with the sonnet's volta that Hunt acknowledges Milton's death.

That threads of hair could serve as communication channels, traversing not only distance but also time, appears as the central conceit of both Leigh Hunt's poem on Milton's hair and John Keats's verse on the same subject. The primary difference is that Keats imagines a disembodied communication; he ignores his own body until the final stanza, which describes his flushed forehead. Keats reads Milton's lock of hair as a powerful symbol—"the simplest vassal of thy Power,"⁷²—rather than as a tool to converse with the poet. Significantly, because Keats does not register Milton's embodiment, he writes a more abstract poem than Hunt. Rather than conjuring an image of Milton writing *Paradise Lost*, Keats refers to the author with abstractions: "spirit," "beauty," and "melody." In this sense, Milton's hair enables what Yohei Igarashi describes as Keats's "fantasy of rapid communication at a distance, offset by the heightened sense of the difficulties of mutual understanding."⁷³ Though Keats addresses the great poet, this is a conversation that takes place across the ether. Keats was fascinated with seeing his own mortality mirrored in relics of the past (the Elgin Marbles or a Grecian Urn). Looking upon Milton's hair, one wonders if

⁷² John Keats, "On Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair," in *The Complete Poetical Works of John Keats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1934), line 35.

⁷³ Yohei Igarashi, *The Connected Condition: Romanticism and the Dream of Communication*. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2019), p. 143.

Keats anticipated that a cutting of his own hair would reside in the same book only a few short years later. The verse offers hints to this effect with its notice of maddening "glimpses at futurity":⁷⁴ when Keats suggests a bodily effect on his own forehead, it is also a patch of skin close to his own hair. And yet, even such a diminutive representation—Milton's "bright hair"—forcefully exerts the poet's brilliance for Keats, as well as his former physicality, suddenly and startlingly. The immortality of Milton's words seems to meet the mortality of the man's body in this lock of hair: a Miltonic extract that was not a quotation.

If hair is a kind of communication network—as Hunt's and Keats's verses suggest—what kind of information does it convey? And how are we to "read" a lock of hair? The budding communication network of telegraphy accepted a notion of communication distributed in code through a series of taps that could then be translated into words.⁷⁵ Something similar happens here in the ways that Hunt and Keats envision Milton's hair as a conduit, an opportunity for what would otherwise be an entirely impossible interaction. Milton's hair can be understood as a technology insofar as it enables a relationship that transcends time and space as it is simultaneously embodied and disembodied. By placing Milton's lock of hair within his scrapbook, Hunt places it into a network for many more "threads," each of which is only a fragment, a "cutting," and a partial representation. This is precisely why Hunt's collection of hair maintains such power: it carries with it all the force of the fragment, Romanticism's favored lyric form. Like the Romantic fragment, Milton's hair is open to interpretation—it is always in a process of reaching back in time, continually open to new narratives.

Milton's lock of hair resembles a textual quotation: extracted from a larger entity, they both gesture back to their origin while also explicitly marking a separation. Susan Stewart notes the "ambivalent" status of quotation, which "appears as a severed head, a voice whose authority is grounded in itself, and therein lies its power and its limit."⁷⁶ The

⁷⁴ Keats, "On Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair," line 31.

⁷⁵ Standage tells us that Victorians referred to telegraphs as the "highway of thought." See Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-Line Pioneers* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), p. xviii.

⁷⁶ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984), p. 19.

meaning of hair transforms in the album, becoming symbolic rather than functional. The hair no longer covers Milton's head, but, rather, evokes the head it once lay upon. Unlike a printed quotation, however, Milton's hair is no longer reproducible. In its singularity, it attests to an authenticity that remains debatable. Like so much of the fraudulent empiricism discussed in the previous chapter, considerable doubt remains over the true origin of this particular lock of hair. As Hunt's friends died, his collection grew with samples of hair taken from William Hazlitt, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Godwin Shelley, and, of course, John Keats. These extracts taken from his friends combine to form a ghostly representation of his former "round table."

Leigh Hunt as a poet and essayist wrote with an air of familiarity and conviviality. For example, the periodical he formed with Hazlitt, *The Round-Table*, was meant to mimic the cheerful conversations that occurred at his own dining table. And once many of his friends had died, Hunt continued to include them as quotations in his work. In his *Autobiography*, he quotes epigraphs from a friend, Egerton Webbe, to "give my jaded spirits lift."⁷⁷ Yet, Hunt pauses to reflect that while he sits beside the fire, laughing over Webbe's jokes, the same friend can no longer visit for tea. As he reflects, "All these lovers of books have themselves become books!"⁷⁸ For Hunt, books were not inanimate objects, but company. In his ode to bibliophilia, "My Books," he describes his library as though he were sitting in the middle of a crowded room: "I looked sideways at my *Spencer*, my *Theocritus*, and my *Arabian Nights*; then above them at my Italian poets; then behind me *Dryden* and *Pope*, my romances, and my *Boccaccio*; then on my left side at my *Chaucer*, who lay on a writing desk..."⁷⁹ Hunt uses the relative pronoun "who," as though his Chaucer were an actual person. All of this makes it quite understandable that Charles Lamb might kiss a folio of Chapman's *Homer*. Once Hunt's friends died, he transferred his affection for them to their writing—a distinctly Romantic logic that conforms to the larger *topos* of inscribing one's self within a person's album, as we will see in the next section.

⁷⁷ Leigh Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt* (London: Smith, Elder, 1850), p. 430.

⁷⁸ Leigh Hunt, "My Books," in *Selected Writings of Leigh Hunt*, ed. Robert Morrison, 6 vols, vol. 3 (Brookfield, VT: Pickering & Chatto, 2002), p. 36.

⁷⁹ Leigh Hunt, "My Books," p. 24.

The Sisterhood of Slade

Keats's hand and Milton's hair fit into the larger Romantic *topos* of social memory located in metonymic representations of the body. Album culture, with its economy of the gift and embodied poetics, exemplifies how social circles established and organized relationships. Here I focus on the "Sisterhood of Slade," which included the three Leigh sisters—Thomazine,⁸⁰ Sarah, and Mary—along with their cousin, Maria Pearse Leigh. The women lived in the coastal town of Sidmouth in Slade House, which, according to an 1816 description, was "[p]laced at the head of a most beautiful and richly wooded vale, commands a delightful view of the sea: it was built by the late William Leigh, Esq. and is now the residence of his widow and family."⁸¹ From 1814 to 1817, Benjamin Bailey, James Rice, and, later, John Hamilton Reynolds befriended (and flirted with) Thomazine, Sarah, Mary, and Maria. Thomazine records meeting James Rice on June 26, 1814 while taking tea. On the following day, Rice would introduce the sisters to Benjamin Bailey. Thus, the original circle of six was set. They celebrated their friendship by planting six sweetbriars in Slade Valley's garden. After reading and copying Wordsworth's "Poems on the Naming of Places"⁸² into their commonplace books, they "made a walking tour of the coast, naming six rocks of the Dunscombe Cliffs for each of the group and adding a seventh 'Union Rock' to symbolize their closeness."⁸³ The group located their friendship in the cliff's dramatic landscape as well as the pages of their notebooks, now gathered in the Keats House's "Leigh Brown-Lockyer Collection." While not necessarily unique in

⁸⁰ Thomazine's name appears with various spellings throughout the Keats House collection. When members of the coterie spell her name "Thomazin" or "Tamsine," they are referring to the same person. In these pages, I refer to Thomazine by her official name. The Unitarian Historical Society records the birth of her daughter, named "Thomazine": "She was born at Sidmouth on June 4 1822, the daughter of Thomazine Pearse and Captain John Carslake, R.N.,... Thomazine Carslake married Samuel Woolcott Browne of Bridgwater in 1850.... The couple lived in Bridgwater, where their daughters Annie Leigh and Thomazine Mary were born, before moving to Clifton."

⁸¹ *The Beauties of Sidmouth Displayed* (Printed for John Wallis, 1816), p. 61.

⁸² See Worthen, *The Gang*, p. 11 for the social environment in which Wordsworth composed this poem.

⁸³ Leonidas M. Jones, *The Life of John Hamilton Reynolds* (Burlington, VT: University of Vermont, 1984), p. 59.

content, these seventeen manuscripts are unique in having remained together. They were donated to the Keats House Museum by Thomazine Leigh Carslake's grandchildren, Annie Leigh Browne⁸⁴ and her sister Mary, who later became Lady Lockyer.

The friendship plays out through hundreds of entries in the sisters' commonplace books. Though John Hamilton Reynolds would not meet the sisters for another year, Bailey and Rice transcribed their friend's verse into the Leigh commonplace books. In October of 1815, Rice spoke of Reynolds in a letter to "My dear little Tamsine [*sic*]—Friend by Choice & Sister by adoption." Rice describes his friendship with John Hamilton Reynolds, who "our delightful & dear Sisterhood of Slade"⁸⁵ had not yet met, though Bailey had transcribed Reynolds's verse in the sisters' commonplace books. In this sense, Reynolds was part of the coterie before he had met the sisters. Indeed, he had helped Bailey and Rice pen a poem for Sarah's birthday in November of 1815. As Bailey describes it: "Reynolds late in the Evening regretted that we had not sooner thought of writing a Poem on the occasion in *triplets*. Each person writing a line . . . I therefore immediately produced the paper, and wrote the first line . . ."⁸⁶ Borrowed from *Macbeth*, Bailey titles the verse "Thrice to Thine" and begins with ocean waves, the landscape of their friendship.

1
Sarah! The wave that dances on the sea
Whose face reflects each summer beam like thee
Hast all thy gladness, all thy melody.

2
Oh Thou! Adopted sister—chosen friend
Awhile our hearts thy softer spirit lend—
And with our thoughts thy happy mildness blend.

⁸⁴ Annie Leigh Brown, an educator and suffragette, established a trade union for women and founded a college hall for London University's female students.

⁸⁵ Clayton E. Hudnall, "John Hamilton Reynolds, James Rice, and Benjamin Bailey in the Leigh Browne-Lockyer Collection," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 19 (1970): p. 32. Though written in 1970, Hudnall provides the fullest account of the Leigh Browne-Lockyer Collection of commonplace books. See also Andrew Motion, *Keats: a Biography*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 185–187.

⁸⁶ John Hamilton Reynolds, *The Letters of John Hamilton Reynolds*, ed. Leonidas M. Jones (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), Bailey to Sarah Leigh, November 24, 1815.

3
Fair as the star that haunts the western sky,
Gazing the silent moon that looks from high
Before whose lovely light the dark clouds fly;—

4
Fresh as the flowers that fringe thy leafy shore
Listening in gladness to the wild wave's roar
Ere vestal Evening's Emerald hues are o'er:—⁸⁷

The poem continues for three more stanzas, after which, the authors sign their names. As Bailey would explain in his letter, part of the fun was in trying to "puzzle" the person writing next. The three friends worked together to write verse typical of the lady's album tradition—simple, rhymed triplets that catalogue the recipient's virtues. The verse is also clearly situated in Sidmouth—with the waves' "roar" and "the flowers that fringe thy leafy shore." Even as the friends wrote this verse in London, it honors the geographic specificity of their friendship. The waves crash on the shore of Sidmouth's beach, sourced from the English Channel. The language recalls other samples of occasional verse the friends wrote into the Leigh commonplace books. In volume three of Thomazine's collection, for example, Bailey describes the "ocean's waves . . . as they 'curled their heads.'"⁸⁸ The quotation marks suggest that Bailey collaged a bit of their conversation into his verse. On the recto, Bailey wrote another sonnet titled "Written in commemoration of a walk to the beach at Slade;" underneath the title, he has written the names of the three participants in a box, as though keeping them close together: "Tamsine, Maria + BB."⁸⁹ And Mary inscribed verse that Sarah composed "On seeing a Pen which Tamsine found on the beach among the Seaweed after a very stormy night. The pen had ink about it. The sea was very rough Saturday Jan 4th 1817."⁹⁰ Here Sarah captures an image that aligns the group's perennial themes—the ocean, writing, and death—three topics that the group knit through so many lines of verse inspired by seaside walks and meditations on life's impermanence. In this particular poem, Sarah begins by addressing the pen's former owner—a mariner, she imagines, dead at sea:

⁸⁷ See Jones's description in *The Life of John Hamilton Reynolds*, p. 64.

⁸⁸ London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), K/MS/01/048, p. 204.

⁸⁹ LMA K/MS/01/048, p. 205. ⁹⁰ LMA K/MS/01/058, p. 131.

Oh Mariner if thou hast lost thy home
 If thou art wandering in another Sphere
 Let thy flown spirit hither quickly roam
 and teach regret to write thy memory here

Sarah memorializes the imagined sailor with a cenotaphic meditation on how the act of writing performs a kind of memory work. Here, Sarah commemorates the imagined sailor and his acts of writing that are lost to the sea, while, underneath the poem, Maria commemorates the occasion: "Written after a delightful walk to the beach M.P.L." The group's verse returns to the *topos* of inscribing the body with pen and paper as an act of remembrance against the "fleeting hours,"⁹¹ as Sarah wrote in Thomazine's collection.

While published album verse tended to be written (begrudgingly) by men for women,⁹² the coterie in Sidmouth often thwarted these trends. There is a welcome rebuke of gendered norms in these collections. Rather than bemoaning the decline of literature at the hands of lady's albums, Bailey, Reynolds, and Rice embraced the tradition as equally deserving of men's attention. Another page records verse Reynolds wrote to his friend Rice. He pens a familiar plea for remembrance, and hopes that the lark's sound at daybreak will recall their friendship:

When the morning is first in the blushing East waking
 And the lark in the fresh air is drying his wing . . .
 Then think on the friend who is far from thy sight
 Who is happy when with thee and sad when away
 He would love to be near at the earliest light
 With the friend of his soul o'er the mountains to stray.⁹³

At the bottom of the page, Thomazine notes the moment Reynolds wrote this verse, and enshrines it for future readers, because, as she admits, she can never forget her friend: "J.R. wrote this 24th April 1815 just before dinner, however, there is no memorial required to fix stamp him indelibly on our memory and hearts."⁹⁴ Thomazine's note frames the poem in a moment of sociality. Here, she contrasts different forms of writing—that done with the pen and the other inscribed through

⁹¹ LMA K/MS/01/046, p. 36.

⁹² See Matthews, *Album Verses and Romantic Literary Culture*, esp. ch. 4.

⁹³ LMA K/MS/01/048, pp. 238–239. ⁹⁴ LMA K/MS/01/048, p. 239.

memory. The Leigh sisters' commonplace books unfold an embodied and situational knowledge. Their collections value emotion and communality as epistemically salient. For example, poems like Sarah Leigh's "Lines written to a Sister on presenting her with a Lock of hair" foregrounds the body and meditates on the kind of knowledge it contains. A cut lock of hair retains its "hue," in contrast to a future when age will gray her hair. ✓✓

Oh when these locks were of this hue
 This heart was then to childhood true
 But time hath made their colour borrow
 A ray of something touching sorrow

This poem is both a repository of emotion and embodiment as it preserves both Sarah's hair and handwriting. To further establish the living bodies of writer and recipient, the poem's last stanza marks its date and depicts the scene of gift-giving:

Tuesday night October 15- 1816 sitting with
 Dear Tamsine who is the form of friendship
 From whom may I ever borrow my
 Morning and my evening happiness⁹⁵

In addition to being consciously social productions, the group's verse also establishes the body as a vehicle of knowledge and understands emotion to be epistemically powerful. The evidence of these social commonplace books suggests that many commonplacers imagined that they were collecting people primarily, and poetry secondarily. Consider Maria's "General Index." Far from the Lockean tradition of organizing topics, Maria orders entries chronologically and with a focus on people. She lists titles followed by their author. As most of the entries were written by members of the coterie, she only includes initials: BB, JHR, JR, SPL. For instance, Maria indexes the poem to the lost mariner with the first sentence and its author's initials: "Oh Mariner if thou has lost thy home SPL."⁹⁶ (See Figure 5.3.)

Susan Stewart's theorization of the souvenir helpfully illuminates the kind of work the friends expected their verse to do. As Stewart explains, the souvenir "is by definition incomplete," which allows it to be

⁹⁵ LMA K/MS/01/051, p. 48.

⁹⁶ LMA K/MS/01/058, p. 175.

General Index		Pages
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	on the death of White & Consumption	55
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	to a Paper and Consumption to	58
	Reflections to	59
	to a Paper to	60
	to a Paper to	61
	A Sister's Lament for the loss of her Brother RB	62
	to a Paper to	63
	to a Paper to Maria A Line by Thompson	65
	Lines by Moore, Ode of Malby, to Larks have their A	66
	The Lament of Memory JMB	67
	The farewell to a Lady Byron & the Lady RB	68
	The Legitimate Margaret JMB	69
	to a Paper RB	71
	Representation of Books RB	73
	Epitaph on a Royal Lady by L	74
	to a Paper on leaving England Cyprus	75
	Journal & Walk to the Beach	77
	Journal written at Midnight	78
	The tender grasp that early Springs RB	79
	to JMB with a King RB	81
	A War Song JMB	82
	Lines written in a lady's Album	83
	A. therefore seek a smaller Air JMB	84
	How like a fresh Summer is music to me JMB	85
	to a Paper with my sister RB	86
	Left on her tears her gentle breathing name RB	87
	to a Paper JMB	88
	Lines written on a sugar Banging Ground	89
	to a Lady on the death of her infant	90
	to a Paper to a friend	91
	to a Paper to a friend JMB	92
	to a Paper to a friend JMB	93
	to a Paper to a friend JMB	94
	to a Paper to a friend JMB	95

FIGURE 5.3 Maria Pearse Leigh's Index, London Metropolitan Archives K/MS/01/058. Image courtesy of Keats House, City of London.

"supplemented by a narrative discourse."⁹⁷ Just as a small model of the Eiffel Tower is not the structure itself, so Sarah's handwriting is not Sarah's body—even as it intimates a former physical closeness. Sarah's poem, like so much album verse, imagines a time in the future when Thomazine might read her handwriting as a manifestation of love. This verse marks Thomazine's commonplace book as a personal collection—one which exceeds the value of the book itself. As Stewart explains while discussing scrapbooks and other types of mementos: "These souvenirs absolutely deny the book's mode of mechanical reproduction" because "you cannot make a copy of a scrapbook without being painfully aware that you possess a mere representation of the original."⁹⁸ In the case of the Leigh commonplace books, that is because the body's immediacy disappears through reproduction. Consider how, writing over a century later, Walter Benjamin narrates the power of physical contact when he describes placing his own hands on "two albums with stick-in pictures" that his mother had compiled as a child.⁹⁹ This description evokes a sense of hands touching through time by the power vested in personal mementos. The image of two hands reaching out is an elegiac *topos* that the next chapter will explore in more detail. Clearly these notebooks stored more than ideas; they are also archives of embodied people and the relationships they shared.

Along with commonplaceing themselves, the Slade Valley coterie commonplace their favorite authors—most of whom were their contemporaries—and transcribed many texts that are now viewed as cornerstones of Romantic literature. Maria, for example, copies "Extracts from Wordsworth's Excursion to page 53."¹⁰⁰ The fifth volume of Thomazine's collection (1817) contains an extract from one of Hazlitt's essays in which he claims that the "habitual study of poetry and works of imagination is one chief part of a well-grounded education."¹⁰¹ As in response to Hazlitt's recommendation, in September of 1816, Thomazine transcribes John Keats's poem, "To Charles Cowden Clarke." Here, Thomazine has underlined the phrase, "And drop like hours into Eternity"—a line that emphasizes the album's thematic interest in

⁹⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 136.

⁹⁸ Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 139.

⁹⁹ Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 66.

¹⁰⁰ LMA K/MS/01/058, p. 174.

¹⁰¹ LMA K/MS/01/050, p. 145.

mortality and preserving a bit of oneself in album verse.¹⁰² (This also recalls Queen Victoria's vigorous underlining of sections of *In Memoriam*, discussed in the next chapter.) And Keats and Hazlitt were not just literary figures but living authors befriended by the male members of the group. Upon meeting Hazlitt, John Hamilton Reynolds wrote to Mary Leigh to confess his admiration. Reynolds writes that the great essayist was "full of eloquence... warm, lofty, & communicative on everything imaginative..." Reynolds assumes Mary might be interested in his character sketch because they had read Hazlitt's essays together:

I fear you will be tired with this long personality, but I remember having read a few papers of his to you, and therefore imagine that you will not be wholly uninterested in him. What a fine hour was that in your room with Eliza,¹⁰³ Maria & yourself!—Do you remember it? I have not forgotten a single slope, brake, or tree, which feasted my eyes when I was sojourning at your green, romantic & sea-crowned home...¹⁰⁴

Reynolds describes Hazlitt, the man, as an accompaniment to the prose they had read and transcribed. For Reynolds and his friends, commonplace books recalled relationships because they were often compiled in company.¹⁰⁵ For this group, sharing literature conveyed affection; thus, it is not surprising to find that flirtation motivated many entries in the commonplace books.

Benjamin Bailey, in particular, was infatuated with Thomazine. Biographers have pointed out that when Keats wrote that Bailey "was very much cut up about a little Jilt," he might have been referring to Thomazine (though this is debatable). Hudnall points to verses Bailey penned in Thomazine's commonplace books as proof of Bailey's interest: "I love, I plead in vain"; "Tis past! I am now thy friend."¹⁰⁶ Bailey showed his affection by making commonplace books for Thomazine,

¹⁰² LMA K/MS/01/050, p. 146.

¹⁰³ Eliza Drewe sometimes joined the group at Slade Valley and would eventually marry Reynolds.

¹⁰⁴ Reynolds, *Letters*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Reynolds kept another shared commonplace book once he married. See Paul Kaufman, "The Reynolds-Hood Commonplace Book: A Fresh Appraisal," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 10 (Winter 1961): 43–52.

¹⁰⁶ Hudnall, "Leigh Browne-Lockyer Collection," p. 16.

complete with alphabetical indexes and his own original poetry. Reading through Bailey's entries in the Leigh sisters' commonplace books reveals, as Hudnall explains, that "he soon acquiesced in the role of friend and brother to all the girls..."¹⁰⁷ Still, it was Bailey's affection for Thomazine that likely motivated the group's practice of commonplacing. Bailey had kept a Lockean commonplace book, which he fit with two indexes: he indexed general topics in the front and particular topics in the back of the book. In later years, he would return to pages and leave comments. For example, on a page obviously influenced by Lockean epistemology, Bailey meditates under the general topics "Logic" or "Independence of Mind." He begins with reference to Locke's distinction between simple and complex ideas. However, Bailey proceeds to argue that though ideas might be original, they are still dependent on "the almighty for giving him the faculty of perception" as well as "the object that caused the idea." He signs this entry "B(ailey)." Years later he returns to this page and pencils in a note explaining that while "these speculations were written some years ago... the confused way of reasoning and the unpolished language will plainly testify; yet I think there is some truth in them."¹⁰⁸ Bailey's meditations reflect an understanding of knowledge as situational, claiming that our understanding of the world is filtered through our perceptions. At the same time that he was creating his own commonplace books, Bailey constructed others for Thomazine. He gave the first collection he made for her a title page, much like those found in printed commonplace books, with epigraphs on productive reading penned by Bacon and Milton. (See Figure 5.4.) It is likely that Bailey gifted this book to Thomazine because she has written her married name on the inside cover: "T. Carslake." Bailey follows the title page with a "Preface" in which he explains that he intends this collection as a kind of education in great literature:

The following selections are from authors, which have lain within my more serious enquiries of the last year. They are intended for the perusal of those, among whom studies the original may not naturally fall. I have enclosed in the few extracts, which space would allow, from each, to give something of the character of the several writers.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Hudnall, "Leigh Browne-Lockyer Collection," p. 17.

¹⁰⁸ LMA K/MS/01/044, pp. 113–114.

¹⁰⁹ LMA K/MS/01/045, p. i.

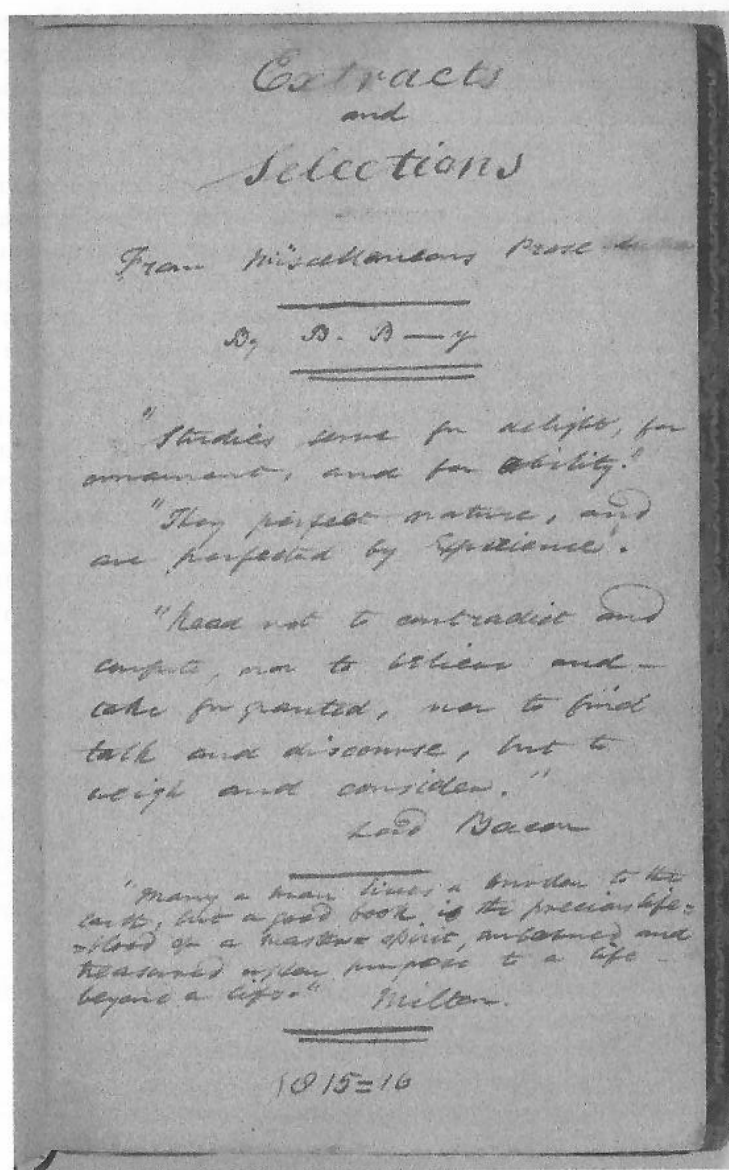


FIGURE 5.4 Title page for the Commonplace Book Benjamin Bailey made for Thomazine Leigh; London Metropolitan Archives K/MS/01/045. Image courtesy of Keats House, City of London.

As a personalized anthology, Bailey intended this book to be “the beginning of a series of Prose Common-place books.” Like other editors of anthologies, he acknowledges that the collection does not contain as much as he would have liked.

Bailey also began another collection designed explicitly for Thomazine, inscribed “From a friend & brother.”¹¹⁰ He titles it “Extracts from Various Authors | Vol. I,” and describes the contents as immortal flowers, a “wreath of blooming flowers | whose lustre fades not with the fading hours.”¹¹¹ He locates immortality in verse and offers it to “T.L. . . . For her, whose soul breathes softly as the lyre.”¹¹² Bailey fills the following pages with extracts from Moore, Burns, and Tighe, as well as a sonnet from Petrarch translated by Ms Smith and an extract from Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, which Bailey describes as “Parting of two lovers” in the index. This would be the first of Thomazine’s five volumes of “Extracts from Various Authors.” In “Volume 2,” she continued Bailey’s format:¹¹³ she includes selections from Byron’s “Childe Harold” and verse written by Burns, Moore, and Bailey which she would index in the back of the book. The first page includes album verse written by Thomas Moore: “There is one leaf reserved for me, | From all thy sweet memorials free . . .” The same verse also appears in Maria’s album under the title “Written on the Blank-Leaf of a Lady’s Common-place Book.” Moore’s verse sets up the metonymic relationship between writing one’s name on a leaf of paper and inscribing remembrance in the owner’s mind. Underneath Moore’s verse, Sarah writes her own rhymed quatrain that attempts a similar figuration of the page as memorial:

And when you ope’ this little book
And steal a glance across this page
Remember on a heart you look
That will be yours from youth to age¹¹⁴

This verse, typical of Romantic-era albums, locates presence within handwriting. The power in entries like Sarah’s come from the overlay of meditations on handwriting written out by hand. In other words,

¹¹⁰ LMA K/MS/01/046.

¹¹¹ LMA K/MS/01/046.

¹¹² LMA K/MS/01/046.

¹¹³ LMA K/MS/01/047.

¹¹⁴ LMA K/MS/01/047.

samples of handwriting were not quite as powerful without personalized meta-musings typical of albums. Given all of this, it is no wonder that collections of thumbprints, marketed as the new social media later in the century, failed to capture the emotional import of handwritten album verse.

Thumb-O-Graphs: The New Signature

The latest and newest form of science and amusement is to collect imprints of thumbs.

Thumb-O-Graphs

The album and coterie commonplace books of the early nineteenth century thrived in a media environment that revered handwriting as a mark of authenticity. The new technologies of the nineteenth century, however, swiftly destabilized handwriting's privileged position. Typewriters, for example, proliferated, and soon many homes had their own mini printing press. Typewriters added another level of mediation to writing—what typists gained in neat print, they lost in its connection to individuality. New technologies lessened writers' reliance on handwriting and in their stead, substituted new, mechanical traces of the hand. For example, Arthur Conan Doyle hinges one of Sherlock Holmes's discoveries on a typewriter. In "The Adventure of a Case of Identity," the master detective claims: "It is a curious thing . . . that a typewriter has really quite as much individuality as a man's handwriting." If the machine is not new, he explains, "some letters get more worn than others, and some wear only on one side"¹¹⁵ making it so that every typewriter has its identifying mark. Following centuries of attention to handwriting, Doyle plays on his readers' expectation of machines as uniform.

It was also around this time that new forensic science elevated the fingerprint as a unique mark of identification. By 1901, Scotland Yard instated the first "Fingerprint Bureau." Although fingerprints were used as identification markers as early as 1858 by Sir William Herschel

¹¹⁵ Arthur Conan Doyle, "Adventure III.—A Case of Identity," in *The Strand Magazine* (London: Burleigh Street, Strand, 1891), p. 256.

in India, Francis Galton popularized the technique with his 1892 pamphlet, *Finger Prints*.¹¹⁶ Here, he advocates for a "lucrative" partnership between fingerprinting and photography, if photographers could convince "customers to have prints taken of one or more of their fingers, and enlarged photographs of those prints supplied to them. The object would be to have an unchangeable personal record in a clearly legible form, that will ever after serve as a sure means of identification."¹¹⁷ Galton's argument entwines photography with fingerprinting as technologies with similar goals; perhaps it was no accident that the rise of fingerprinting followed shortly after the rise of photography. At the same time, a campaign was underway to normalize fingerprinting so that it could be better incorporated into police practices. Fingerprints offered "an (almost) infallible and succinctly stored proof of identity" for criminal cases.¹¹⁸

One of the more popular strategies for "domesticating" fingerprinting was the book, *Thumb-O-Graphs*, printed by Dow and Lester in London. Craig Robertson suggests that these books were meant to instruct users to view thumbprints alongside photographs as a way to "visually remember friends and family."¹¹⁹ The book's title page also announces itself as a technology of memory as it claims, "We'll note you in our Booke of Memory." With the archaic spelling of book, the editors cast this collection as part of an established, familiar tradition, insinuating that an early modern *Album Amicorum* might feature thumbprints. Attempting to initiate a new generation of would-be lady's-album compilers, *Thumb-O-Graphs* came with a box of ink and instructions, "press the thumb on the pad and then on the page." To us, these instructions seem absurd, but they suggest how foreign the very idea of fingerprints were at the end of the nineteenth century. Each

¹¹⁶ See Sir William James Herschel, *The Origin of Finger-Printing* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916).

¹¹⁷ Francis Galton, "Finger Prints," *The American Annual of Photography and Photographic Times Almanac (1887-1902)*. New York, United States: Center for Research Libraries, (January 1, 1894): 218

¹¹⁸ Haia Shpayer-Makov, *The Ascent of the Detective: Police Sleuths in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 50.

¹¹⁹ Craig Robertson, *The Passport in America: The History of a Document* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 241.

thumb would be accompanied by its owner's dated signature. Thumbprints, it would seem, still required handwriting's authenticating mark.

Though a fingerprint's swirls could represent a unique identity, it was a poor substitute for handwriting—fingerprints were merely biological, foreclosing any access to the owner's internal world. The thumbprint proved a blunter tool than handwriting, which had benefited from centuries of meditation on its significance. Even if the fingerprint also marked a unique presence, it appeared coldly bureaucratic. The *Thumb-o-Graph*, therefore, enjoyed a far shorter life span than the lady's album. Ultimately, the hand that grasps another in a handshake and the hand that writes carried more symbolic weight than a thumbprint. The next chapter will take up the hand (once more) as a representation of the absent body in elegiac verse.

Commonplace Books of Mourning

If we cast back our remembrance to Jane Smithson, whose commonplace book began this history, we will find the remains of a flower plucked from her grave and pasted into her collection. Picked nearly 200 years ago, little of the flower remains: the petals have disintegrated to skeletal relics and the stem has fallen off, yet each left its outlines imprinted on the page, a ghostly presence that signals the flower that once was and the ravages of time on organic matter.¹ This flower, like the woman whose handwriting fills subsequent pages, is both present and absent (see Figure 6.1). In this, the final chapter, I argue for the cultural resonance of such an extract as I explore strategies of mourning associated with commonplace books. Every culture finds ways to mourn its dead; the Victorians turned to extractions. Whether a pressed flower or a sample of handwriting, mourners built a sense of presence using the same logic underpinning album culture discussed in the previous chapter. In fact, album culture had almost primed the commonplace book to become a kind of *memento mori*, a space that anticipates death with an accompanying faith in immortality. After all, poetry “fades not with the fading hours”² as Benjamin Bailey writes in Thomazine Leigh’s collection. The previous chapter argued that commonplace books were socially resonant spaces, where friends imagined, recorded, and negotiated relationships. Collections kept by the “Sisterhood of Slade,” for example, reflect a culture of shared reading and writing practices; throughout,

¹ For a beautiful meditation on the intertwined functions of lyric and picked flowers, see Andrew Stauffer *Book Traces: Nineteenth-Century Readers and the Future of the Library*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), especially ch. 2.

² LMA K/MS/01/46.