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Non-Publication

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On 1 September 1798 the *Anti-Jacobin Review* published James Gillray's 'A peep into the cave of Jacobinism' with its portrayal of the goddess 'Truth' destroying the monstrous productions of 'Jacobinism' in the form of pamphlets entitled 'Libels', 'Defamation', 'Sedition', 'Ignorance', 'Anarchy', 'Atheism', and 'Abuse'. **['A peep into the cave'; credit line: © Trustees of the British Museum]** The importance attached by Gillray to print publications has proved to be resonant and still endures today. More recent critics have subscribed to his vision of – if not his anxiety about – a society in which the products of the printing press were central. The result has been a perception of the Romantic period as dominated by massive growth in both publishing and audiences for books, newspapers, and magazines, and by technological advances in printing and papermaking that facilitated such rapid expansion (see Paul Keen's chapter in this volume). This is all very well but it means that equally dynamic and significant aspects of Romantic period production have been overlooked. Only very recently have critics begun to challenge the supremacy of print and become newly attentive to the roles played by manuscripts and manuscript culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. D. F. McKenzie has drawn attention to those writers for whom 'printing was too impersonal, too public, too fixed'.[1] Michelle Levy has exposed as false the 'assumption that the late-eighteenth century print avalanche destroyed and supplanted earlier forms of literary dissemination'. She has, in addition, rightly argued that manuscript culture both 'flourish[ed] even in an age of intensified print production' and exerted a 'vital influence' on Romantic literary culture as whole. Yet, considering manuscripts alone runs the risk of ignoring other aspects of what might be termed the

[1] 'Speech -- Manuscript -- Print', in D. F. McKenzie, *Making Meaning: 'Printers of the Mind' and Other Essays*,

avoidance – short- or long-term – of print.[2] This chapter will argue that the presence, and persistence, of manuscript culture is part of a much wider tendency in Romantic period culture – that of non-publication.

Manuscript culture remained vital and significant in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Indeed, the manuscript was the most prevalent form. Many more manuscripts were written than books were published. As William St Clair notes, print culture was the tip of a very large iceberg composed mainly of the non-printed: 'most manuscripts were turned down' by publishers, with John Murray rejecting 700 poetry manuscripts per year by 1817.[3] Even within the select domains of print, manuscripts – or at least the idea of manuscripts - retained a formidable presence. Influential collections such as Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802) drew extensively on manuscript sources. Editors and publishers capitalized on the value of previously unpublished writings by eminent contemporaries, incorporating them into marketing strategies for new works. The title page of Joanna Baillie's edited anthology *A Collection of Poems* (1823) advertised its contents as 'Chiefly Manuscript, and from Living Authors' and included new poems by Scott, Southey and Wordsworth, amongst others. Writers themselves remained alert to the potential value and interest of manuscripts. Ann Yearsley's version of the legend of the man in the iron mask, *The Royal Captives: A Fragment of Secret History* (1795), proclaimed it was 'Copied from an Old Manuscript'. In turn, debates over the authenticity (or lack of authenticity) of Ossian and Rowley's works and of the 'Shakespearian' manuscripts 'discovered' by William Henry Ireland were focused on the status of the 'original' manuscripts from which they purported to derive. The cultural authority ascribed by Romantic authors and readers to hand-written pages that had at least the appearance of antiquity was encapsulated by Edward Williams, also known as the radical document forger Iolo Morganwg: 'If a manuscript has a little of the mould of age on it, we admit blindly more of what it says as *truth* than becomes a wise man'.[4]

Manuscripts did not just have to be old. They were not just restricted to antiquarian researches and did not just function as means of connecting the present with the past. Contemporary manuscripts had their usefulness and power. Romantic-period books, newspapers and magazines published accounts of recent events at home and abroad derived

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[2] Michelle Levy, 'Austen's Manuscripts and the Publicity of Print', *English Literary History* 77.4 (2010), 1015-16.
[3] See, for example, William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic* Period, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 159. All quotations are from the paperback edition 2007.
[4] Edward Williams, *Poems, Lyric and Pastoral*, 2 vols (London: J. Nichols for the author, 1794), II, 221.

from what they claimed to be original manuscript sources including journals and letters written by first-hand witnesses. For example, readers interested in the fate of the French royal family had access to volumes such as *The Trial of Marie Antoinette … Compiled from a Manuscript sent from Paris* (1794) and *A Journal of Occurrences at the Temple during the Confinement of Louis XVI, King of France, by M. Clery, the King's Valet-de-Chambre. Translated from the Original Manuscript* (1798). Those interested in more local events could read pamphlets such as *The Extraordinary Case of Suicide* (1797), which contained 'an exact COPY OF THE MANUSCRIPT' which an unidentified man had written on the walls of his Bristol lodgings before killing himself. Manuscripts could cater to extra-European tastes as well. When writing his accounts of contemporary events in South America for the *Edinburgh Annual Register*, Robert Southey made use of his privileged access to a manuscript journal kept by the merchant Thomas Kinder who had witnessed at first hand the revolution in Buenos Ayres in 1808-10.[5] However, whilst manuscripts were a means of circulating information a politically turbulent age saw them as far from neutral. For British loyalists, they were objects of suspicion, their '*private*' nature potentially subversive of both the public sphere and the public good. In 1798 David Rivers noted how dissenting communities had made and 'industriously distributed' copies of the pre-publication manuscript of Paine's *Rights of Man* 'so that had it never appeared *in print*, it would have had a rapid circulation in a clandestine and *private* manner'.[6] This was, Rivers made clear, not to be approved of as the reproduction and distribution of manuscripts had the potential to subvert government regulation of printed matter and thus to imperil the well being of the nation at a time of political crisis.

Manuscripts also had a more intrinsic value. Writers themselves unsurprisingly placed great importance upon their own manuscripts. With an eye on posterity, they preserved, copied, and bound them, and weeded out those they felt to be unsuitable, consigning them to the flames. Fanny Burney, for example, burnt the manuscripts of her juvenile writings.[7] On occasion, writers gifted their manuscripts to friends who, in turn, ascribed specific, even semi-religious, value and significance to them. Southey wryly observed that Joseph Cottle

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[5] For Southey's account, drawn in part from Kinder's unpublished journal, see *Edinburgh Annual Register, for 1811*, 4.1 (1813), 395–421.
[6] David Rivers, *Observations on the Political Conduct of the Protestant Dissenters* (London: T. Burton, [1798?]), 35-6; quoted in *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* 1 (July-December 1798), 632.
[7] Levy, 'Austen's Manuscripts', 1021.

when presented with a manuscript of the epic *Joan of Arc*, which Cottle had published, valued it 'as much as a Monk does the parings of his tutelary Saints [sic] great toe nail'.[8]

As the example of Cottle shows, manuscripts played important roles in enforcing and reinforcing familial, social and cultural networks and ties. Manuscripts of unpublished writings (as well as of those never intended for publication) were often passed around or otherwise made available to carefully chosen audiences. Dorothy Wordsworth's Alfoxden journal, was read by her brother, William, and Coleridge, and the accounts she kept of tours in Scotland and on the Continent were circulated to her close friends. In the late 1790s the unpublished draft of Southey's Welsh-American epic *Madoc* was left in the shop of his publisher, Cottle, where it was read by, amongst others, the lawyer and author James Losh. Many poems central to formulations of canonical Romanticism, including Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel', circulated in manuscript for years before their publication. Wordsworth's *Prelude* too had a select pre-publication audience, which included Coleridge and Thomas De Quincey. Coleridge, the addressee of the *Prelude*, responded to the unpublished, thirteen book version by writing a poem. Published in 1817, as 'To a Gentleman. Composed on the night after his recitation of a Poem on the Growth of an Individual Mind', this had the odd distinction of appearing before the wider reading public some thirty-three years before the work that had occasioned it.[9]

What might be described as the network effect applied also to the actual process of manuscript production.[10] Manuscripts could be the work of more than one person and did not just bear the marks of the author of a literary work. Percy Shelley made substantial additions and revisions to the manuscript draft of *Frankenstein* and Wordsworth regularly called on family members, including his wife and sister, to act as amanuenses. Albums kept by women of the Wordsworth and Southey families bear further witness to this. They contain numerous autograph contributions by the two poets and by members of their circle. Transcribing verse or prose onto a fresh page or into an album was, as Samantha Matthews has shown, a way of writing yourself into a literary and social network. It could be a fraught process. Wordsworth and Southey may have contributed regularly to albums owned by their family and friends, but they also complained repeatedly about the time and energy invested in such an activity.[11]

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[8] Lynda Pratt, ed. *Collected Letters of Robert Southey. Part 1: 1791-97*, Letter 149, www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey_letters/Part_One/HTML/letterEEd.26.149.html.
[9] S.T. Coleridge, *Sibylline Leaves: A Collection of Poems* (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), 197-203.
[10] See also Michelle Levy, *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[11] Samantha Matthews, 'Importunate Applications and Old Affections: Robert Southey's Album Verses', *Romanticism* 17.1 (April 2011), 77-93.

Manuscripts could reveal hierarchies and tensions, as much as synergies and common causes, within a group. Coleridge, for example, was in the 1790s an avid participant in manuscript exchange – making copies of his own and his friends' verses and embedding them or enclosing them in letters to members of his social network. Yet, as David Fairer has observed, to be 'a friend of Coleridge was to enter a powerful force field of someone for whom friendship was "an idea in process, changing with differing relationships"'.[12] What, then, appears on the surface to be a highly sociable act was laden with complexity. Coleridge frequently amended - perhaps he considered it improved - verses by others when transcribing in his own hand. In December 1794 he copied out a recent sonnet by Southey, which he sent to the latter 'not so much to give you my corrections as for the pleasure it gives me'.[13] This was not always well received. In 1796 Charles Lamb objected fiercely to Coleridge's alterations to his sonnets. The first person possessive pronouns of Lamb's response reassert his rights to his writing: 'I love my sonnets because they are the reflected images of my own feelings at different times … I charge you, Col. *spare my ewe lambs* …'.[14] On other occasions, Coleridge amended the writings of earlier poets in order to make a point. For example, in a letter to Southey of 13 November 1795, written at a time when the collapse of Pantisocracy had severely strained their relationship, he rewrote lines from the fourth book of *Paradise Lost*, changing Milton's

whom I seduc'd
With other promises and other vaunts
Than to submit, boasting I could subdue
Th' Omnipotent.

to: whom you seduc'd
With other promises & other vaunts
Than to repent, boasting *you* could subdue
Temptation![15]

The change of pronouns from the Miltonic 'I' to 'you' was directed at Southey, a swipe at what Coleridge saw as his chilling assertions of rectitude and false ideas of friendship.

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[12] David Fairer, *Organising Poetry. The Coleridge Circle, 1790-1798* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 211; the citation is from Gurion Taussig, *Coleridge and the Idea of Friendship, 1789-1804* (Newark: University of Delaware Press 2002), 18.
[13] E.L. Griggs, ed., *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor* Coleridge, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71), I, 146.
[14] Edwin W. Marrs Jr, ed., *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb, 1796-1817*, 3 vols (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1975-8), I, 193. See also, Felicity James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[15] *Paradise Lost* (1667), Book IV, lines 83-6; Griggs, *Collected Letters*, I, 170.

Even gifts to others of Coleridge's own poems were framed by shifting interpersonal and literary relationships. In summer 1797 he copied out into two letters the recently composed 'This Lime-tree Bower My Prison', which overtly, even lavishly, celebrates his friendship with Charles Lamb and William and Dorothy Wordsworth. He sent it to Southey, with whom he had reconciled, and Charles Lloyd, whose relationship with Coleridge was fraught with tension and ambiguity. Coleridge was not unique and was later to have the tables turned and suffer the emendation of his own writings by a member of his social network. Indeed, the poet-publisher Joseph Cottle, turned copying and altering his friends' manuscripts, particularly their correspondence, into an activity bordering on obsession. This climaxed in one of the most controversial Romantic period biographies *Early Recollections, Chiefly Relating to the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1837), notorious for its cavalier treatment of the texts of letters sent by Coleridge and others to Cottle.[16]

Romantic period letters, journals, poems, novels, and albums are important indicators of an exuberant, if complex, manuscript culture. Yet they are more than this. They offer a route into a much wider, though neglected, aspect of Romanticism – what might be termed the culture of non-publication. It is a striking – but odd – fact that many writings since seen as manifestos or key products of British Romanticism were not published at the time they were written and therefore were not widely, if at all, accessible to Romantic period readers. The list is an impressive one. It includes, amongst others, Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* and *A Philosophical View of Reform*, Keats's 'Ode to Indolence', 'The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream', and the countless statements on writing and the role of the writer found in letters and notebooks kept by individuals now seen as central to the period. This has important implications. We may not agree with the *Athenaeum's* observation on the belated publication in 1839 of Shelley's satirical drama *Oedipus Tyrannus, or Swellfoot the Tyrant*, written nearly two decades earlier, that 'Time has taken all the sting out of it', but there is no doubt that there is a major disjunction between our sense of literary history and of what and who was significant and that of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century audiences.[17] Key to this disjunction is a culture of delayed, belated or even non-publication which ensured that Romantic period literary production looked very different to, and was experienced differently by, those who were alive at the time. As the remainder of this chapter will show, the Romantic culture of non-publication took many forms, including

[16] See Lynda Pratt, '"Let not Bristol be ashamed"?: Coleridge's Afterlife in the *Early Recollections of Joseph Cottle*', in James Vigus and Jane Wright (eds.), *Coleridge's Afterlives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 21-35.
[17] *Athenaeum* 612 (20 July 1839), 589.

the suppression of completed writings; bibliophobia, an aversion to publication and to print culture; and non-execution.

The Romantic period witnessed political and cultural upheaval and attempts of varying success to use legislation to control the trades of authorship, publishing and bookselling (for the political aspect of these textual controls see David Worrall's chapter in this volume). There was a 'sustained attempt' by the British state 'to control the minds of citizens by controlling their access to print'. The Seditious Societies Act (1799) decreed that any form of printed material had to be traceable back to its author and printer, and legislation also dealt with seditious and blasphemous writings and copyright. The result was that 'textual controls were tighter than they had been since the seventeenth century'.[18] Authors and publishers were thus rendered very vulnerable, exposed to possible prosecution and imprisonment. The threat was not an idle one. In 1798 Gilbert Wakefield was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and fined £500 for his authorship of *A Reply to Some Parts of the Bishop of Llandaff's Address*, and the publisher and booksellers involved in distributing the volume were also convicted. The proceedings, lamented the Whig politician Charles James Fox, had 'virtually destroyed' the 'liberty of the press'.[19] This was one of many such incidents. In December 1812, John and Leigh Hunt were convicted, jailed and fined for publishing a 'foul, atrocious and malignant libel' on the Prince Regent in the *Examiner*. Five years later, in 1817, William Hone was thrice tried and thrice acquitted for blasphemy. His offence was to have written and published three political parodies. In a repressive and restrictive climate, some publishers took pre-emptive action. James Johnson, threatened with prosecution by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, withdrew Shelley's satirical drama *Oedipus Tyrannus, or Swellfoot the Tyrant*, composed at the time of the Queen Caroline crisis in 1820, after the sale of only seven copies.

Official, public attempts at censorship inevitably impacted more broadly on the culture of print (and non-print) and led to more closeted, private acts of suppression. Some Romantic period writings were not published at the time due to the direct intervention of others, particularly publishers, who were fearful of both what they might lead to and the responses they might elicit. On 23 September 1819 Shelley sent a copy of a topical new poem – 'The Mask of Anarchy' – to Leigh Hunt, for publication in the *Examiner*. Hunt, afraid of prosecution, did not publish it. Instead, he held it back until 1832, when it appeared as *The*

[18] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, 309, 311.
[19] *Correspondence of the Late Gilbert Wakefield, B.A., with the Late Right Honourable Charles James Fox* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1813), 67.

Masque of Anarchy. A Poem. Shelley's response to Peterloo was thus unpublished until the year of the passing of the Great Reform Bill. It was not a special case. As Michael Scrivener has noted, 'none' of Shelley's 'interventionist poetry [of 1819-20] did much intervening at the time it was written' as very little of it was published then.[20] The casualties included a 'little volume of popular songs wholly political, & destined to awaken & direct the imagination of the reformers'.[21] Shelley was far from unique. In 1812 Walter Savage Landor dedicated an attack on the Tory ministry to James Madison, the President of the United States, at a time when the country was about to go to war with the United Kingdom. Although it was printed, the volume's prospective publisher John Murray got cold feet and decided against publication. It was Murray too who helped deter Byron from publishing the dedication to *Don Juan*, and who ensured neither Byron's name nor his own appeared on the title page of Cantos 1 and 2 of the poem. Murray's cautiousness and the culture of suppression and non-publication it embodied encompassed personal morality too. On 17 May 1824 his London office was the venue for the destruction of the manuscript of Byron's unpublished memoirs on the grounds of their scandalous, highly personal content. Yet whether motivated by politics, morality or a combination of the two, these multiple acts of suppression are significant both for our understanding of what print culture actually made available and for our awareness of the impact – or lack of impact – of Romantic period writers and their writings on the public sphere.

On occasion, authors themselves exercised self-censorship, deliberately holding back work from publication. A case in point is Wordsworth, whose career of non-publication began early. In the 1790s his direct contemporaries Coleridge and Southey issued poetry and prose that established them as key players in a radical 'NEW SCHOOL'.[22] In contrast, Wordsworth wrote much but published little. Works written but unpublished at this time included poems (*Salibsury Plain* and *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*), prose (*Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*), and drama (*The Borderers*). Wordsworth's reticence did not just encompass his radically charged early writings. *The Prelude* did not appear until after his death in 1850 on the grounds that 'publication had been prevented merely by the personal

[20] Michael Scrivener, 'Introduction' to *Reading Shelley's Interventionist Poetry, 1819-1820*, www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/interventionist/scrivener/scrivener.html.
[21] Shelley to Leigh Hunt, May 1820; *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), II, 191. See also Susan Wolfson, 'Popular Songs and Ballads: Writing the "Unwritten Story" in 1819', in Michael O'Neill, Anthony Howe and Madeleine Callaghan (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 341-59.
[22] See *The Anti-Jacobin; or, Weekly Examiner* 1 (20 November 1797), 6.

character of the subject'.[23] For a writer acutely attentive to his own image and posterity, there was, perhaps, more to the 'merely' than met the eye, particularly because, as the *Eclectic Review* noted, the existence of *The Prelude* had long been an open secret: 'For well nigh thirty-four years the public curiosity has been excited by the knowledge that there existed in MS. … [a] poem, of very high pretensions, and extraordinary magnitude'.[24] There is, however, no doubt that Wordsworth's non-publishing habits meant that his contemporaries' sense of his writing life was radically different from our own. Our access to multiple manuscript versions of *The Prelude* means that we have, as Nicola Trott notes, 'stolen a march on … [Wordsworth's] contemporaries' in terms of seeing how the poem fits into his personal literary history.[25] Yet it also means that we need to be careful not to use this privileged knowledge to falsify our sense of how those same Romantic period contemporaries perceived and engaged with Wordsworth.

The anxiety about print culture and consequent resort to the tactics of delayed and non-publication displayed by Wordsworth are well known.[26] Less familiar is how such bibliophobia was shared by and impacted on his contemporaries, particularly at a time when legislative measures against writers, publishers and booksellers coincided with an aggressive review culture. The Nottingham-born poet Henry Kirke White drew attention to the potential impact of a savage notice on an ambitious young writer, observing that the *Monthly Review's* assessment of his first volume *Clifton Grove* had 'cut deeper than you could have thought; not in a literary point of view, but as it affects my respectability'. For the Evangelical White, the offending article assumed a spectral, even demonic presence: 'this review goes before me wherever I turn my steps; it haunts me incessantly, and I am persuaded it is an instrument in the hands of Satan to drive me to distraction'.[27] Contemporaries echoed his concerns. Coleridge lamented an age in which books had been 'degraded into culprits to hold up their hands at the bar of every self-elected … judge' (for the judicial tone of contemporary reviewing, see William Christie's essay in this volume).[28] Southey eschewed the language of

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[23] William Wordsworth to Thomas Noon Talfourd, [c. 10 April 1839], *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, 2nd edn, vol. VI, *The Later Years. Part III. 1835-1839*, rev. Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 680. Talfourd had earlier seen 'a small part' of the poem in manuscript.
[24] *Eclectic Review*, 28 (November 1850), 550.
[25] Nicola Trott, Wordsworth: the shape of the poetic career', in Stephen Gill, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9.
[26] See Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 91-135.
[27] Robert Southey, *The Remains of Henry Kirke White, of Nottingham, Late of St John's College, Cambridge; with an Account of His Life*, 6th edn, 2 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1813), I, 27.
[28] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), I, 57.

the courtroom, invoking in its stead a piratical culture. He advised young writers to opt for the safer option of publishing first in periodicals rather than book format because the former were 'fishing boats, which the Buccaneers of Literature do not condescend to sink, burn, and destroy'.[29] Keats, another victim of ferocious reviews, stated his 'wish to avoid publishing – I admire Human Nature but I do not like *Men* – I should like to compose things honourable to Man – but not fingerable over by *Men*'.[30] In the 'Preface' to *Adonais*, Shelley proclaimed reviews to be death-dealing. He asserted that the *Quarterly Review's* 'savage criticism' of Keats' *Endymion* had 'produced the most violent effect on his [Keats'] susceptible mind … [and] ended in the rupture of a blood vessel in the lungs; [the result was that] a rapid consumption ensued'. The fear of printed, vicious reviews articulated by writers echoes a wider concern in the period about the degeneration of the published word, a belief that books themselves had now become things of 'horror and alarm' as fear inducing and potentially deadly as the cholera pandemics of the 1820s and 1830s.[31]

Yet bibliophobia and a sense of the perils of publication ran alongside the consciousness of the impact of non-publication on posterity, an awareness of the importance of print in establishing a writer's place in literary history. The ambiguity is seen at work in what those same bibliophobic individuals chose to publish. Even Wordsworth managed to put aside his fear of print in order to publish enough poetry and prose to fill several volumes. It is found too in Romantic writers' editorship of their contemporaries or near contemporaries in order to establish or perpetuate their reputations, for example in the posthumous editions of Shelley and Coleridge produced by members of their families. Even the hostile review culture could, on occasion, be turned to benefit. Henry Kirke White's editor, Robert Southey, recalled how the harsh notice in the *Monthly Review* that had driven White to near despair had resulted in a longer term good. It roused Southey, who had himself been on the receiving end of similar attacks, to 'indignation … [at] a criticism at once so cruel and so stupid'. He wrote to White, established a relationship with him, and after his death agreed to edit White's literary remains. Without the review, then, White's 'papers would probably have remained in oblivion, and his name in a few years have been forgotten'.[32] Eternal oblivion was, presumably, something that most writers did not care to contemplate. Just how easily that state could be achieved is shown in an editorial commission rejected by Southey who, after

[29] Southey, *Remains*, I, 14.
[30] Hyder E. Rollins, ed., *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), I, 415.
[31] F.R. Dibdin, *Bibliophobia. Remarks on the Present Languid and Depressed State of Literature and the Book Trade* (London: H. Bohn, 1832), 15, 6.
[32] Southey, *Remains*, I, 27.

having a minor success with White's *Remains*, was routinely solicited to do the same for others. In 1815 he turned down a request to edit the poems of James Dusautoy who, like White, had died whilst a Cambridge undergraduate. The result was that the poems never made it into print and any chance Dusautoy had for posthumous fame was lost.

Suppression and bibliophobia play key roles in the literary history of Romantic non-publication. Yet they often involved works already written, in part at least. Co-existing with them was something rather different – a culture of non-execution and non-realisation. This ran alongside Romantic print culture and offers an alternative and compelling literary history of the period – a narrative of paths not taken.

In April 1797 Coleridge described how he would go about writing an epic:

> I should not think of devoting less than 20 years to an Epic Poem. Ten to collect materials and warm my mind with universal science. I would be a tolerable Mathematician, I would thoroughly know Mechanics, Hydrostatics, Optics and Astronomy, Botany, Metallurgy, Fossilism, Chemistry, Geology, Anatomy, Medicine – then the *mind of man* – then the *minds of men* – in all Travels, Voyages and Histories. So I would spend ten years – the next five to the composition of the poem – and the five last to the correction of it.
>
> So I would write haply not unhearing of that divine and rightly-whispering Voice, which speaks to mighty minds of predestinated Garlands, starry and unwithering[33]

Coleridge here presents the literary equivalent of a wish-list: the proposed epic was never written. It was, however, in good company. Coleridge spawned 'plans like a herring'.[34] His projected works are correspondingly numerous. They include a translation of Boccaccio's prose; a study of Jakob Boehme; 'The Brook', a poem that gave 'freedom for description, incident, and impassioned reflections on men, nature, and society'; an essay on 'the uses of the Supernatural in poetry and the principles that regulate its introduction';[35] a blank verse translation of Thomas Burnet's *Telluris Theoria Sacra*; a satire that included swipes at 'Canning & the Anti-Jacobins'; an essay on 'my system of balanced opposites'; a 'Greek and

[33] Griggs, *Collected Letters*, I, 320-1.
[34] Ian Packer and Lynda Pratt, eds, *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey. Part Two: 1798-1803*, Letter 703, www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey_letters/Part_Two/HTML/letterEEd.26.703.html.
[35] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I, 196, 306.

English Lexicon' 'on philosophical Principles'; and an ode and an essay on punning.[36] His was a far from unique case. Projecting and planning were endemic amongst Romantic period writers. The ranks of what Keats described as 'Poem[s] that … [are] to be – ' and Southey as 'unborn Works' are well-populated.[37] They include Byron's proposed epic on Bosworth Field, the unwritten cantos and stanzas of *Don Juan*, and 'The Highland Harp', a collection of his translations from Erse; the unwritten sections of Wordsworth's 'The Recluse', and Shelley's 'Triumph of Life'; Shelley's poem on the Roman emperor Otho, of which just a few lines survive; and Keats's plan to fulfill his 'greatest ambition' by writing 'a few fine Plays', including one on 'The Earl of Leicester's historry [sic]'.[38] Some of these proposed works were merely ideas mentioned in letters, some never got beyond a few stanzas or pages, whilst others were started but never finished and survive only as fragments. So, what is the point of considering works that had little, if any, physical existence apart from occasional mentions in letters or commonplace books or as unfinished manuscript drafts? Why does this matter?

In terms of our understanding of the careers of individual Romantic writers it matters because it shows the range of their interests and the scope of their literary ambitions. Unachieved projects can indicate a writer's investment in different subjects and genres and also the plethora of writing opportunities available to an author in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They show that in the Romantic period there were many different ways of having a literary career. Considering what writers did not do – what they did not write – also reveals the contingencies that govern literary history and offers a salutary corrective to the linkage of non-execution with failure. It reminds us that often one thing gets written simply because something else does not. The chances and accidents of a life lived might intervene and reshape a career. Death too might – as the examples of Austen, Scott, Shelley and Wollstonecraft show – leave incomplete writings that might, or might not, have been finished. Richard Holmes has observed that biographers always write knowing the end point of their work, the death of their subject, and that they thus run the risk of giving their subject's career a shape and coherence that are artificial.[39] The same is true of looking at a

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[36] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Notebooks*, vols 1-3, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957-73), I, 61, 567; III, 3400, 4210, 3542; Griggs, *Collected Letters*, II, 999.
[37] Rollins, *Letters of Keats*, II, 235; Ian Packer and Lynda Pratt, eds, *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey. Part Four: 1810-1815*, Letter 2024, www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey_letters/Part_Four/HTML/letterEEd.26.2025.html.
[38] Rollins, *Letters of Keats*, II, 234.
[39] Richard Holmes, 'Death and Destiny', *The Guardian* (24 January 2004), http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/jan/24/featuresreviews.guardianreview1.

writer in terms of what they did do rather than what they thought about doing but did not do, of taking into account literary history but ignoring the possibility of an equally compelling and realizable counter-factual literary history. Thinking only of what was written, finished, even published, rather than reflecting as well on what was not produced gives an artificial sense of unity to a career that might, in fact, have been random, accidental and chaotic. In other words, what a writer chooses not to do can be as significant and interesting as what they choose to do. The unachieved can be as important as the achieved. Imagine, for example, how different Wordworth's writing life might have looked if he had eschewed autobiographical blank verse in favour of the poetic routes taken by some of his contemporaries. How would we have viewed him had he completed the list of potential projects advanced in the opening book of *The Prelude*:

> Sometimes …
> I settle on some British theme, some old
> Romantic tale by Milton left unsung;
> More often resting at some gentle place
> Within the groves of chivalry I pipe
> Among the shepherds, with reposing knights
> Sit by a fountain-side and hear their tales.
> Sometimes, more sternly moved, I would relate
> How vanquished Mithridates northward passed
> And, hidden in the cloud of years, became
> That Odin …
> … Or I would record
> How in tyrannic times, some unknown man,
> Unheard of in the chronicles of kings,
> Suffered in silence for the love of truth …[40]

Although generic elements of the pastoral, romantic and heroic are taken up and transformed in the *Prelude* itself, none of the individual works projected here came to fruition.[41] Wordsworth thus rejected the route he rehearsed for himself and the rest, we might say with the benefit of hindsight, is literary history.

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[40] Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), Book I, lines 177, 179-88, 201-4.

[41] For 'generic transformation' in *The Prelude*, see Alan Liu, *Wordsworth. The Sense of History* (Stanford, CA: University of Stanford Press, 1989), esp. [359]-366.

Moreover, what is projected but not completed let alone published has broader significances and implications. Thinking about what is not written, as opposed to about what is written and, possibly, published, highlights the need to consider unachieved works in order better to understand both the Romantic period and constructions of Romanticism. We need to pay attention to what was not actually written, the road(s) which individually and collectively romantic period writers did not take. We often think of the complexities of Romanticism's achieved forms and genres, experiments with epic, romance, pastoral, prose, but pay scant attention to its unachieved forms.

Non-execution, then, plays a key part in the Romantic culture of non-publication. It does not just have to include literary works. In one spectacular and surprising example it shaped a major public role. The case in question was Southey's Poet Laureateship. Southey might seem, at first, an odd figure to mention in the context of non-publication and non-execution. He is famed, even notorious, as one of the most prolific authors of his day, producing nearly two hundred volumes.[42] Yet the conventional image of a writer churning out publication after publication masks a more complex situation, one with the potential to unsettle any certainty about the ability of Romantic writers to impact on and shape the public sphere. Central here is what Southey did and did not do as Poet Laureate from taking the post in late 1813 to his death in 1843. In the early nineteenth century the Laureateship was held in low regard and the holder was potentially subject to ridicule and accusations of selling out to the establishment that paid his salary. When he accepted the job after the death of the poet-politician Henry James Pye, Southey was determined to do something with it. He desired to make it relevant, to ensure that its incumbent was an influential voice in public debate and, with an eye on posterity, to make it 'an honour', rather than dishonour, for 'him who shall be thought worthy to wear it after me'.[43] Initially he set to the task with characteristic vigour. Between 1814 and 1822 Southey issued five official volumes of poetry. The New Year's Ode *Carmen Triumphale* was published on 1 January 1814 and was followed by *Congratulatory Odes* (1814), two occasional longer pieces, *The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo* (1816) and *The Lay of the Laureate* (1816), and *A Vision of Judgement* (1821). Southey's appointment to the Laureateship in 1813 had caused some bemusement and a great deal of controversy. William Hazlitt was not alone in pointing out the 'inconsistency between some of Mr. Southey's former [radical] writings, and his becoming the *hired panegyrist* of

[42] For Southey as a projector and planner see Lynda Pratt, 'What Robert Southey Did Not Write Next', *Romanticism*, 17.1 (April 2011), 1-9.
[43] Lynda Pratt and Ian Packer, eds., *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey. Part Four: 1810-15*, Letter 2329 [add link]

the court'.[44] The volumes Southey published in his official capacity ensured that his profile remained high and that the debates continued. The *Examiner* described *Carmen Triumphale* as a 'vulgar mistake', and parodied Southey as a poetry-writing court-hireling, prepared to sing 'Glory to Kings' for the payment of a hundred pounds, a swipe at the Laureate's annual stipend.[45] *The Lay of the Laureate* was described by the *Monthly Review* as evidence of Southey as the '"*Versifier Ego"* of the day'. The *Edinburgh Review*, commenting on the same poem, dismissed Southey's 'resolution' 'to claim a real power and prerogative in the world of letters, in virtue of his title and appointment' as self-serving and silly, cautioning the 'King's house-poet' to 'keep the nature of his office out of sight' as much as possible.[46] Contemporary critical antagonism climaxed with Byron's *The Vision of Judgment* (1822). The partial allusion to the title of Southey's *A Vision of Judgement*, published in the previous year, signalled Byron's revisionary intentions. His *Vision* damned the Laureate as one who had 'turn'd his coat – and would have turn'd his skin' and whose corruption was bodied forth in works 'buoy'd' not by their cultural power but 'By their own rottenness'.[47]

Controversial it certainly was, but Southey's Laureateship was characterised by non-practice as well as practice. Non-publication played a central role in this. Southey's non-publishing Laureateship took two main forms. Firstly, he, unlike his immediate predecessors, did not publish all of his Laureate poems at their time of composition. Thus his New Year's Ode for 1819 on the death of Queen Charlotte did not appear in print until 1828 when it was published in the fashionable annual *Friendship's Offering*.[48] Even then its origins as an official Laureate production were not indicated, perhaps to save Southey any embarrassment that might arise from his recycling of an official poem for commercial gain. His departure from customary practice could be connected to the unusual, and unprecedented, situation when Southey took up the post. The incapacity of George III had caused the Laureate's usual duties of writing annual odes for the New Year and the monarch's birthday to be suspended since late 1810. Secondly, after December 1822 Southey retreated from the public duties of the Laureateship, possibly stung by the reaction to the *Vision of Judgement* and his failure to effect the transformation of the office he had intended. His final Laureate composition was a New Year's Ode for 1823.[49] For the remaining twenty-years of his Laureateship he produced

[44] *Morning Chronicle* (18 September 1813).
[45] *Examiner*, 316 (16 January 1814), 42.
[46] *Monthly Review*, 82 (January 1817), 91; *Edinburgh Review*, 18 (June 1816), 412.
[47] Madden, *Critical Heritage*, 300, 301.
[48] Robert Southey, *Later Poetical Works*, gen. eds. Tim Fulford and Lynda Pratt, 4 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), III, 135-42.
[49] Southey, *Later Poetical Works*, III, 201-215.

no new official poems. He thus did not commemorate key events such as the death of George IV, the coronation and death of William IV, and the coronation of Victoria. The man who had embarked on the Laureateship determined to reinvigorate it fell silent. At one level this seems to be a failure. It is also, of course, a discomforting revelation of the inability in practice of poets and poetry to influence and shape the public sphere. However, Southey's refusal to fulfill the terms of his appointment, to write poems to order, can also be read as a kind of strange success. Southey was not upbraided by his Courtly paymasters for his silence and was not called upon by them to write anything. He continued to draw his annual salary and thus was paid for doing nothing for the last two decades of his tenure. Southey had therefore managed to change the customary practices of the Laureateship and obtained, in an extremely roundabout way, the terms and conditions he had requested when he took up the post. It became the norm during his Laureateship for the Laureate not to be enslaved by the demands of composing annual New Year and Birthday odes, and this custom of minimum obligation is still observed today. In the Romantic period, then, the Poet Laureateship, the most public of poetic posts, became defined by non-practice and non-publication – by what its holder did not do – rather than by practice and publication. This set an important precedent. When Wordsworth accepted the Laureateship in 1843 he did so on the terms that he would not be compelled to write anything. By so doing, he was following the practice, or rather non-practice, of Southey.

Our understanding of the Romantic period and our constructions of Romanticism have long been dominated and shaped by a belief in the supremacy of print. We have assumed, too readily perhaps, the centrality of writing and publishing in inscribing and defining an age. The examples given in this chapter remind us of a cultural phenomenon that coexisted with and ran counter to this familiar narrative.. They reveal the persistence of a vital manuscript culture in an age saturated with the printed word. They demonstrate too the importance of acts of avoiding or delaying publication, of projecting but not executing and even, in extreme circumstances, of refusing to write. The Romantic culture of non-publication thus played a powerful role in shaping both the Romantic period and our own sense of literary history. It is not well known enough and is certainly worthy of our attention.

List of Further Reading

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