



‘A Task enough to make one frantic’: William Hayley’s Memorialising

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Hayley’s approach to, and writing about, memorialising, focusing on his manuscript collection of epitaphs, his letters to Anna Seward about her epitaph on Lady Miller, and his memoirs and biographies. How typical was he of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century memorialists? What does his writing about death—and his writing *about* writing about death—tell us about how his contemporaries were supposed to feel and express their feelings about the dead? How do his works illustrate what he and his contemporaries were expected to reveal or conceal about the dead, and about the living? How different, in that respect, were the works designed to be read by the public from those intended only for the deceased’s nearest and dearest? How did the author’s death change the expected readership?

Keywords: Anna Seward (1742–1809), epitaphs, life writing, death, William Cowper (1731–1800), William Hayley (1745–1820)

Bestselling writer William Hayley (1745–1820) collected 141 of his epitaphs, 70 accompanied by brief biographical notes, into a manuscript volume intended for publication.¹ He authored posthumous biographies of his friends William Cowper and George Romney, a memoir of his son Thomas (Tom) Alphonso Hayley, a verse epistle to his late friend John Thornton,

an unpublished memoir of his protégé Thomas Howell, and a lengthy and revealing elegy on the death of his first wife Eliza's mother, Margaret Ball. Hayley also wrote epitaphs for strangers, sometimes teaming up with his friend John Flaxman (1755–1826) to provide text for the monuments the latter sculpted. 'Few poets', he wrote in his *Memoirs*, 'have been more ready [...] to offer sepulchral tribute to the dead'.² He came to be known as 'Epitaph Hayley'—a 'soubriquet', the biographer Thomas Wright claimed, earnestly but inaccurately, 'that has nothing uncomplimentary about it'.³

Because his poetry is at best workmanlike, his once-popular writings were mocked during (and after) his lifetime, and since the difficulties of his relationship with William Blake have come to eclipse his achievements further, William Hayley remains a neglected figure. As a result, despite a recent increase in scholarly interest, there has been little inquiry into his life and death writing, and where these works are studied it is rarely on their own terms.⁴ This is a pity, as they reveal much about the genres at the time; attitudes to the dead; how his contemporaries expressed and were expected to express their feelings about the dead; ideas about which details of a life should be released into the public domain, and which were 'suited only to the inspection of private and confidential friends',⁵ and how the author's death could change this readership.

In this article I explore Hayley's approach to, and writing about, memorialising; and interrogate what this tells us about ideas around death and life writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As the list in my opening paragraph suggests, Hayley produced a huge quantity of death-related writing, most of which is under-, if not un-researched; space restrictions mean I am able to focus here on only a few examples which best illustrate his approach to the sub-genres within which he wrote: epitaph; elegy, biography and memoir. For the purposes of this article I make no definitional distinction between the two last.

In February 1782, William Hayley wrote to his friend the poet Anna Seward, critiquing a draft of her epitaph on her mentor, the Bath-based salonnière Lady Anna Miller. The letter, clearly not Hayley's first on the topic, concentrates on the conclusion of Seward's poem. 'You will think me an obstinate profane sort of a materialistical Blockhead', he writes,

[...] to oppose my Frame to your Spirit. But in Truth I cannot acquiesce in the last line of yr Epitaph—. Tho you have a little softened the Hiss of it in substituting hovering for sacred it is still very unmusical to me & I think a sister Spirit's shade—is a little like the Shadow of a Shade [...] Frame I believe is often taken for the whole mass of Soul & Body but you may obviate your objection to its personal Sense by retaining more of yr own Expression in the second line of the last stanza [...]

He offers 'kindred Frame', 'congenial Frame', and 'kindred Mind' as possible alternatives to 'Sister Spirit'. 'But', he continues, 'I beg you will always correct yr own verses yrself for nobody can do it so well—Heaven bless those good souls say I who have Patience to write an Epitaph for it is a Task enough to make one frantic — there is nothing so difficult'.⁶

Hayley's critique encompasses matters philosophical, theological and prosodical. Clearly, Seward's original draft was excessively sibilant, and his wording indicates that she had, in an earlier letter, already defended her use of 'Spirit' against his suggested 'Frame'.⁷ Hayley's assertion that the word encompasses both body and soul echoes the philosopher David Hartley's belief in the latter's 'entire dependence upon the gross body for its powers and faculties'.⁸ This was not, however, how Hayley tended to use 'frame'. It appears nine times in his collection of epitaphs, but only once in a Hartleyan sense.⁹

While Seward rejected Hayley's substitution of 'frame' for 'spirit', she did adopt 'kindred',¹⁰ settling, as Joshua Scodel notes, on 'kindred spirit'—the 'highly unusual term' Thomas Gray used for 'his desired reader' in *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751), whom, he hopes, would 'by lonely Contemplation led/[...] inquire thy fate'.¹¹ Seward, however, applies the term to the subject of her epitaph which, Scodel argues, signals the 'interchangeability of the living and the dead as imagined by both' poets. For Gray, 'kindred spirit' suggests not only a person who shares the sympathies of the deceased, but also one who is all spirit, one who has in some way transcended earthly existence and can therefore respond with the greatest sensitivity to the dead'. This sensitive response opens up the possibility of communication 'across the barrier of death'—a possibility imagined in Seward's epitaph, in 'other compositions of the period', and, as I show later, in Hayley's writings.¹² As Scodel explains, in the eighteenth century

Epitaphic poets [...] began to implore the reader play a role in rediscovering the social significance of the dead. [...] Both epitaphs and monuments increasingly implied that only through an act of sympathetic imagination on the part of the living reader and viewer could the dead [...] once more become a vital part of the ongoing social order.¹³

Whilst clearly intended to flatter Seward, Hayley's reference to the difficulty of writing epitaphs is also reminiscent of a comment in his *Memoirs* concerning his struggle to memorialise his mother. He had 'often endeavoured to express his deep sense of her various excellencies in his poetry; but never satisfied himself in his delineation of a character so infinitely endeared to him'; 'after several fruitless endeavours to satisfy his own feeling in her epitaph, trying both English verse and Latin prose, he fixed

on the latter'.¹⁴ His collection of epitaphs, however, opens with a tribute in English verse:

On Mary Hayley the authors Mother
 Spirit of Truth thy warmest Language give
 Let all the mother in this marble live
 The Stone may boast that in her Frame combined
 Womans soft Heart and man's undaunted Mind
 But o fond Parent no sepulchral Lay
 Can speak thy kindness or thy care repay
 Death bore Thee to the Power whose Love alone
 Whose Love parental could exceed thy own
 Still Thou blest Being still my soul inspire
 Breathe from thy Tomb Religion's holy Fire
 And teach me ere this fleeting Breath shall cease
 To tread that awful path in mental Peace
 That path which Thee without a pang hast trod
 Too meet Thee at the Throne of mercy's God[.]¹⁵

It is, for the most part, typical of the epitaphs in the volume—most of which exhibit ‘the common flaw of empty generality’ that Samuel Johnson railed against in his *Essay on Epitaphs* (1740).¹⁶ Several of the words Hayley uses recur throughout, including: ‘Spirit’, in 32 epitaphs; ‘Truth’, in 52; ‘Heart’, in 58 (sometimes multiple times in an epitaph, making it the fourth most frequently used word of four or more letters); and ‘Mind’, in 50.¹⁷ Like all but five of his epitaphs (which follow a scheme of alternate lines rhyming, abab), this example is written in rhyming couplets. Like all the others (bar, perhaps, his offering on Samuel Johnson, which opens ‘The Groans of Learning tell that Johnson dies/Farewell rough Critic of Colossal size!’), it breathes a thoroughly conventional piety. It differs, however, from most in the degree to which it is personal or relevant to the author alone: ‘*my* soul inspire’, ‘teach *me* (my italics)’.¹⁸ And it is unique in explicitly attributing to its subject both feminine (‘Womans [*sic*] soft Heart’), and masculine (‘man’s undaunted mind’) qualities.

It was not only his mother Hayley found it hard to memorialise in verse. It was all the people he loved the most. As he writes in his note on the epitaph of his son Tom:

The more the subject of an Epitaph is admired & beloved by the Writer, the more difficult He finds it to satisfy his own Feelings in the Composition. This Epitaph was the third composed by the Author on his juvenile artist whose talents & virtues were such that it appeared to the Poet impossible to praise Him in Terms fully adequate to his various Merits.¹⁹

It is important to read this in the context of the relationship between emotion and production in the culture of sensibility, in Hayley's death writing, and, perhaps even more so, in his life writing. Tom Lutz—writing about Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and MacKenzie's *The Man of Feeling*²⁰—sees the tears of sensibility as offerings: the direct, 'further secularized' descendants of Robert Southwell's 'holy tears'.²¹ Hayley, writing of his willingness to serve as everyone's epitapher, described himself as 'ever ready to weep with those that weep' (a quotation from the Bible, Romans 12, v.15),²² signalling both the extent, generosity and productivity of his sensibility, and his piety. Referring to Hayley's profound and oft-expressed grief at the deaths of his most-loved friend, the poet William Cowper, and his son Tom within a week of each other, Hayley's biographer Morchard Bishop claimed his subject was 'a man much too facile in expression to feel very deeply; but [...] capable, if the phrase may be pardoned, of feeling extensively'.²³ Ignoring the astonishing glibness of this statement (no, the phrase may not be pardoned), it is notable that Hayley's facility as a versifier—Bishop describes him as 'an intolerable babbler in verse'²⁴—failed in those instances where he was called upon to memorialise his nearest and dearest. Both are examples of how, within the culture of sensibility, '[t]he ultimate emotion is inexpressible and language is always genuflecting to the inarticulateness of high sensibility'.²⁵ Paradoxically, 'this age when feelings were paramount was also a time when their expression became increasingly problematic'.²⁶ Given the biblical injunction to sympathise, this was the time when others should have been offering their tears and memorials to soothe Hayley, to have been ready to weep with him.

In the wake of the losses of Tom and Cowper in spring 1800, and that of his other dearest friend, the artist George Romney, in 1802, Hayley turned to prose to commemorate those whose absence he felt the most.²⁷ For the best part of a decade, he tells us in the third person, the 'chief occupation and delight of Hayley seems to have consisted in zealous and constant endeavours [...] to celebrate [his friends'] talents and virtues'.²⁸ He did so in book-length works. In these works—in complete contrast to his epitaph-writing—Hayley usually tries to avoid repeating himself. For instance, he directs readers from *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Hayley, Esq.* to *The Life and Letters of William Cowper, Esq.*:

all the reciprocal kindness and intimacy, that rapidly grew between the poet of Weston and the recluse of Eartham [...] are so circumstantially displayed in Hayley's Life of Cowper, that it is unnecessary to expatiate in this work on the particulars of their intercourse.²⁹

He also refers them to his memoir of his son, ‘to save both my reader and myself from painful repetitions’.³⁰ Yet he states his commitment to memorialising one or more of these three men four times in his own *Memoirs*, three times in *The Life of George Romney*, and twice each in his memoirs of Tom and his unpublished *Two Memorials of Hayley’s attempts to serve his friend Cowper*.³¹ For Hayley, writing these lives was much more than ‘one of sensibility’s most frequent indulgences’. It was a duty to the dead and an act of catharsis—a way of mourning, of processing his own feelings and managing their effects. ‘[E]xperience’, he wrote in *The Life of George Romney Esq.*,

has taught me, that nothing conduces more to soothe a feeling spirit under the loss of a beloved, and lamented associate, than a resolution to exert all the faculties it retains, in a just and generous endeavour to honor departed excellence by the genuine records of truth, and affection.³²

This suggests that Hayley differentiates between life writing (biographies, memoirs) and what we could call *death writing* (epitaphs, elegies memorialising specific deaths and perhaps even funeral sermons like the one he wrote on his estranged first wife Eliza).³³ From Hayley’s perspective, both genres have a similar pedagogical purpose: they educate readers, or spur them on to learn from the examples of the deceased. But they have different therapeutic beneficiaries. While it is the reader—usually the bereaved reader—who is ‘soothed’ by death writing, it is the author who benefits therapeutically from the process of writing works of life writing. Hayley, in his life writing (most obviously in his biography of Cowper) reconstructed his subjects’ lives largely from their correspondence. This acted to make the past if not *actually* present (given that letters are dated, and the life is told chronologically, and therefore relocates to the past), at least *feel* present. As a result, this dependence on correspondence serves to create and sustain a ‘hyperreality’ (in Baudrillard’s terms) within which communication continues ‘across the barrier of death’. In that way, although the beloved dead are not, cannot be brought back to life, they remain ‘a vital part’ of Hayley’s society, with whom he interacts—or imagines interacting with—constantly.

Hayley’s prose memorials suggest a drive towards honesty, openness and a biographical specificity that is, with one significant exception, mostly absent from his epitaphic writings: that exception being a tendency to include references to illness—physical or mental.³⁴ Scodel argues that, while the epitaph Gray inserted into his *Elegy* indicates that ‘the poet longs for someone to “inquire his fate,” he also hopes that this sympathetic inquirer will not attempt to discover more of his virtues or faults than he sees fit to tell’.³⁵ Hayley read Gray, dedicated his *Essay on*

Epic Poetry to Gray's biographer William Mason, and modelled his biography of Cowper on Mason's then-innovative life-and-letters format. This approach—with its focus on the intimate, the personal and the present—exacerbated the inevitable tensions between the biographer and other keepers of the subjects' memories, usually relatives, who were anxious to protect both their loved ones' and their own reputations.

Hayley was forced to address this concern repeatedly in his correspondence with Lady Hesketh, William Cowper's cousin, who asked Hayley to author Cowper's biography and controlled much of the material he needed to write it. Hesketh repeatedly attempted to discourage Hayley from revealing much about Cowper, arguing that 'the events of his Life are few, and there are some which we would wish to Shield from the Publick eye'.³⁶ In the midst of preparing his life of Romney (and trying to manage his difficult relationship with the artist's son), Hayley wrote to their mutual friend, the sculptor John Flaxman, 'We are both aware that it is a Task of great delicacy to satisfy both Friendship & Conscience in the History of a Life so singularly chequered by Genius, Virtues, & Infirmities'.³⁷ He also described this sensitivity early in Romney's biography:

It is a moral question of great delicacy, how far it may be incumbent on a confidential biographer to display, or to conceal, the imperfections of his departed friend: could the great artist himself answer such a question from the tomb, I am confident he would reply in the words of his favorite Shakespeare:

*'Speak of me as I am: Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in Malice.'* [...]

[...] he would wish even those infirmities to be recorded, as far as the record of them may be productive of good to the great interests of human nature, and by extending the knowledge of mental weaknesses, advance the progress of mental discipline and improvement.³⁸

There is no evidence that the two men had discussed this. Combining the use of a quotation from Shakespeare (Romney's 'favorite') with 'I am confident he would'—an apparently unequivocal phrase, the inclusion of which paradoxically introduces a hint of equivocation—suggests Hayley felt some uncertainty over whether Romney would have agreed with him about which of 'his infirmities' should be 'recorded' in so public a way. And, while taken as a whole, the passage suggests Hayley has some confidence in his own ability to 'respond with the greatest sensitivity to the dead' and therefore 'somehow' communicate 'across the barrier of death', stating that Romney can't 'answer such a question from the tomb' suggests a lack of faith in the veracity of this communication.

In November 1801, Hayley wrote to the Reverend John Johnson, Cowper's cousin and, during the latter part of the poet's life, his carer:

My heart and soul are so full of those two dear affectionate angels, *Cowper* and *Tom*! that I seem to converse with them on my pillow before the dawn of day and after requesting the dear filial angel to inspire me with some ideas, that may be particularly pleasing to our beloved bard, I composed a few lines the other morning, to place over, or near, the dear and meritorious Mary.³⁹

Hayley came from a church family (his grandfather and great uncle were both deans of Chichester), and he professed a conventional Anglican faith—one to which he appears to have held increasingly close as he aged. But he almost certainly read Swedenborg,⁴⁰ and when he penned the letter to Johnson he was in the near-constant company of Blake, who, in his letter of sympathy on Tom's death, had written

I know that our deceased friends are more really with us than when they were apparent to our mortal part. Thirteen years ago I lost a brother & with his spirit I converse daily & hourly in the Spirit & See him in my remembrance in the regions of my Imagination. I hear his advice & even now write from his Dictate.⁴¹

Dent and Whittaker argue that 'Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal is significant to a writer such as [...] Blake [...] in that visions that may overwhelm the imagination are also the maps through which the transformed and transforming imagination may traverse'.⁴² I would argue that writing the lives of Romney, Cowper and Tom enabled Hayley's imagination to traverse through the grief that—particularly during and after his son's slow and painful decline—'almost overwhelmed' his 'faculties'.⁴³

It is, of course, impossible to establish whether, in reality (or hyper-reality), Hayley imagined communicating 'across the barrier of death', believed that he was doing so, or wanted to believe that he was doing so. It is also entirely possible that he occupied all of these positions at different times—perhaps even, on occasion, simultaneously. But, in common with the above passage from his biography of Romney, Hayley's '*I seem* (my italics) to converse with them'—contrasting, as it does, with Blake's '*I know* (my italics) that our deceased friends are more really with us'—suggests an ambivalence that is also displayed in the second of his unpublished *Two Memorials of Hayley's Endeavours to serve His Friend Cowper*.

Hayley believed that biographers should be driven only by 'the influence of tenderness and truth'.⁴⁴ In the two instances (his lives of Cowper and Romney) where his writings would impact on surviving family members, Hayley allowed 'the influence of tenderness' to temper that of truth. However, he wrote to Lady Hesketh in January 1801 that he planned to prepare for posthumous publication (a process which could enable him to communicate in the opposite direction 'across the barrier of death')

three articles relating to our beloved Bard [...] 1st a Record [...] containing the steps by which Providence conducted me to secure [...] the Pension for our Friend—2dly a Record of the well-intended but not successful Endeavour to revive our dear Friends dejected Spirit by the services of Letters [...] & 3dly the Correspondence of Cowper & Hayley [...]⁴⁵

The first of the *Two Memorials*, dated 1794, tells of how and why Hayley lobbied the government for a pension for Cowper. The second, prefaced with a dedicatory letter to Johnson (dated 1809), provides 'a minute account of Devices employed to restore His [Cowper's] dejected Spirits'.⁴⁶ Hayley felt it 'incumbent' on him 'to leave, for future publication, a faithful account of what we attempted'.⁴⁷ He considered it his 'posthumous duty to elucidate' Cowper's 'mental state' as far as he could.⁴⁸ He could not, however,

print such a History in my Life-time, without seeming to take too great a Praise in my own Project; & in the Favor, we experienced from the several truly good, & illustrious Men....—But there can be no Pride in the Grave: — we may therefore say of a posthumous publication what Eloise [*sic*] & Pope have said of a Lover's Letters,

'It spares the Blush, & pours forth all the Heart.'⁴⁹

While there 'can be no Pride in the Grave', there can, as Hayley's choice of quotation suggests, also be no embarrassment. Information that could benefit the living should pour forth, even where—especially where—this involved making public deeply personal details about the private lives and mental health issues of the dead. As indicated in his life of Romney, in Hayley's hyperreality his deceased subjects understand and approve the sharing of their personal information where such sharing is in the public (and, arguably, Hayley's) interest.

On 20 June 1797, after having heard nothing from Cowper for several years, as the poet's mind had, in Hayley's words been 'afflicted with constitutional Melancholy, & [...] overwhelmed with an Idea, the most dreadful & oppressive, that could arise in any human spirit, the express enmity

of God',⁵⁰ Hayley received the following unsigned letter in his friend's handwriting:

To
 William Hayley Esqr
 Eartham
 near Chichester
 Ignorant of every thing but my own instant & impending Misery, I know neither what I do, when I write, nor can do otherwise than write, because I am bidden to do so. Perfect Despair, the most perfect, that ever possessed any Mind, has had Possession of mine, you know how long, and knowing that, will not need to be Told, who writes.⁵¹

Four days later Hayley replied, describing a vision:

I beheld the Throne of God, whose Splendor, tho in Excess, did not strike me blind, but left me power to discern, on the steps of it, two kneeling angelic Forms.

[...] these heavenly Petitioners were your lovely Mother, & my own; [...] I sprang eagerly forward to enquire your Destiny of your Mother. [...] she smiled upon me, & said: 'Warmest of earthly Friends! [...] know, as a Reward for thy Kindness, that my Son shall be restored to Himself, & to Friendship.'⁵²

Cowper's recovery would 'be gradual', and

[...] preceded by the following extraordinary Circumstances of signal Honour on Earth. —He shall receive Letters from Members of Parliament, from Judges, & from Bishops, to thank Him for the service that He has rendered to the Christian World by his devotional Poetry. These shall be followed by a Letter from the Prime Minister to the same effect; & this by Thanks expressed to Him on the same account, in the Hand of the King Himself.⁵³

Hayley claimed Cowper's mother instructed him to pass on this information, and asked his friend to let him know if any letters should arrive. He next contacted John Johnson—under whose care Cowper was living—and Hesketh to explain his plan, and pressed several of his influential contacts to write to the poet. Despite Hesketh's concerns that Hayley's invocation of 'the throne of God' presented 'rather too bold & hazardous an Image', she and Johnson complied: Hesketh even persuaded the Bishop of London to write to Cowper.⁵⁴

The 'vision' arose, Hayley told Lady Hesketh,

from my very acute sense of our dear Friend's Sufferings, & my intense desire to relieve them. —After reading his most affecting Billet of Despair, I

fell into deep Meditation upon it; & while my Eyes were covered by my Hand,
I seemed to behold something very like the Vision, I have described.⁵⁵

Hayley's use of the word *seemed* might, as suggested above, signal an ambivalence about his belief in the authenticity of his interactions with the dead. In this instance, it could also be a confession of disingenuousness: the vision was not a vision, but a careful construction cooked up for Cowper's benefit. Or it could be an example of wishful thinking put to practical effect. We also cannot rule out the possibility that Hayley did experience a vision and did 'converse' with 'those two dear affectionate angels', but was reticent about admitting this to the more conventional Hesketh and Johnson. Either way, it has echoes of Coleridge's introduction to 'Kubla Khan' which—according to Coleridge's prefatory note to the poem, authored for its publication in 1816—was also written in the summer of 1797.⁵⁶

Hayley attempted to cure Cowper's mental illness, supported Romney during his periods of depression and once "gradually charmed away" Gibbon's "sense of pain" when he was 'suffering not a little from [...] "the gout"' by reading from 'a manuscript poem in cantos'.⁵⁷ He also (as he tells us in his *Memoirs*), 'acted as a village doctor, for more than twenty-five years'.⁵⁸ Perhaps unsurprisingly, given both his practical involvement in physic and his commitment to publishing private information in the public interest, the *Two Memorials* can be seen as life (or death) writing, not as commemoration, but as medical case study. Brian Hurwitz describes how, in the eighteenth century, such case studies 'employ dramatic devices to delay the moment of diagnosis or the outcome of a story, in order to heighten narrative tension and degrees of physician involvement with suffering subjects'. They 'display a dialogical quality' which, Hurwitz writes, reflects 'what Roy Porter calls "a rough parity in the doctor-patient relationship"'.⁵⁹ Hayley's life-and-death-writing case studies fit this description, and his stated intention for these texts to be of practical use also situates them within this genre. He hoped 'the record of' Romney's 'infirmities' would be 'productive of good to the great interests of human nature',⁶⁰ and that the *Memoirs of Thomas Alphonso* might possibly 'lead even one father to preserve his child from a similar martyrdom'.⁶¹ Additionally, Hayley and his friend Thomas Carwardine are believed to have preserved the manuscript of Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno* (written around 1759–1761, and first published in 1939) 'as a fair specimen of the nature of poetic insanity, and therefore of some value when they were dealing with Cowper'.⁶²

Hayley also reserved his own memoirs (and those of Tom) for posthumous publication. These were edited by John Johnson and appeared three years after his death. About two thirds of the way through the first volume, Hayley elected to include an 'ELEGY: On a Lady who laboured under an Insanity of many years, and recovered in the close of a long

life an imperfect use of her reason. 1783'. It was, he relates, written on the death of Margaret Ball, the mother of his first wife, Eliza. Whatever wishful thinking might have characterised the process of Hayley's writing about Tom, Cowper and Romney, whatever hyperreality he might have occupied while writing them, are absent here. He explains that he did not publish the elegy before, because 'it contained domestic anecdotes suited only to the inspection of private and confidential friends'. '[S]ome stanzas', however, 'from the opening and the close of it, seem to claim a place' here. Twenty-eight stanzas appeared in the published *Memoirs*.⁶³ Although they refer to his mother-in-law's 'mental discord', 'moody madness' and 'crazed spirit', this extract is comparatively anodyne; the extended version Hayley appears to have intended for publication is not.

The extant part of the memoir manuscript (titled *Anecdotes of the Family, Life, and Writings of William Hayley by himself: The Friend and Biographer of William Cowper*) includes 44 stanzas of the 'Elegy'.⁶⁴ These are preceded in the narrative by the story of how Eliza's brother-in-law Charles had persuaded the vulnerable Margaret to write a will leaving most of her property to him and his wife, and how this 'fraud' was discovered.⁶⁵ Eight of the redacted stanzas and an accompanying commentary (also cut) are on this subject. The remaining eight describe Margaret's illness, the circumstances of Eliza's conception and birth, and the impact of these on Eliza.

While Hayley's published *Memoirs* reveal that Margaret had 'lost her senses, in losing several children [...] and [...] had a daughter, named Eliza, born at a subsequent period',⁶⁶ they omit the information that Eliza was conceived after, having attempted all other available remedies, the physician William Battie advised Margaret's husband Thomas Ball that having another child might cure her.

'Weak medecine [*sic*] fails: kind Nature oft bestows
The long-sought Aid, that baffled Art denies:
From Children dead thy Wife's Distraction rose;
Her Reason, with a new-born Child, may rise.'

He spoke: & Nature shudder'd at the Word:
But anxious Love the bold Idea caught:
With trembling Awe the dread advice He heard;
Yet sees it prosper in his sanguine Thought.

Haste, friendly Night! to spread thy darkest Veil!
View not ye chaster, radiant Orbs above,
A sight, to turn impassion'd Nature pale!
Distraction panting in the clasp of Love!⁶⁷

It is obvious from the above stanzas both that Eliza was conceived through her father raping her mother, and that—while he understood his father-in-law's motives—Hayley viewed Ball's actions as rape. Unsurprisingly, this treatment proved ineffective, and 'where infant Sounds a Mother's aid implore: /Unmov'd she hears the supplicating Cry, /And looks, unconscious, on the Babe, she bore'.⁶⁸ In other words, Margaret lacked the capacity to care for Eliza practically or emotionally. There is a tension here between Hayley's call for this assault to be concealed from 'ye chaster, radiant Orbs', while he elects to reveal it to the reading public. Although, in the manuscript, the stanzas telling the story of the fraudulent will and the accompanying commentary are struck through in pen and accompanied by corrections in Hayley's hand, indicating that he redacted some parts of the 'Elegy' himself, the stanzas describing Margaret Ball's illness and rape, together with later ones detailing Eliza's sufferings and her aversion to sex (see below), are left to stand. This, together with a pencilled annotation—'[o]mit this dull elegy on account of its recurring [*sic*] to Mrs. Hayley's misfortunes'—indicates that it was probably Johnson who was responsible for cutting them.⁶⁹ Given that everyone involved was dead, it seems that Hayley's intention was for some of the most intimate details of his wife's and parents-in-law's lives to be made public.⁷⁰

One caveat: assuming it is extant, I have, as yet, been unable to track down the original manuscript of Hayley's 'Elegy'. It is therefore impossible to assess what proportion of the work he deemed inappropriate for publication, or whether it included other 'domestic anecdotes suited only to the inspection of private and confidential friends'. There is also no evidence to confirm that Hayley wrote it at the time Margaret Ball died: edits in the manuscript indicate that he redrafted at least one stanza while writing his memoirs. Either scenario is possible. In 1783 Hayley's friendship with Anna Seward, the 'Inventress of the Epic Elegy',⁷¹ was at its peak, and he could have been inspired by her example to attempt something similarly ambitious. The descriptions of 'The Child, whose rights Fraud led Thee to betray, /Feels thy Injustice, but absolves thy Heart', 'poor Eliza's wounded breast', and the following stanzas could have been written to 'soothe' Eliza after her mother's death, and to articulate how deeply her husband sympathised with, and understood, her idiosyncrasies and sufferings.

Poor piteous Babe! in Life's first Hour forlorn!
 How strange thy Entrance on this troubled Earth!
 Thy guardian Angel seems his Charge to mourn,
 Amaz'd, & startled at thy wondrous Birth!

While his pure Eyes thy little Frame behold,
 I seem that heavenly Minister to hear;

His Words thy future Character unfold
 In this prophetic Sound to Fancy's Ear.
 'Hard is the Lot, this infant Girl must Know,
 Child of cold Pity! not of ardent Joy!
 Alive to every varying Touch of Woe,
 What Pains must Wound her! & what Cares annoy!
 She ne'er can feel what all her Sex have felt,
 The glowing Impulse of impassion'd Fire
 Stranger to genial Warmth, she neer can melt
 In the sweet Trance of satisfied Desire.
 Yet may she prove those pleasures, more refin'd,
 That Wit, that Virtue for her Votary gains:
 The chaste Enjoyments of the cultur'd Mind!
 But mixt with restless Fancy's wayward pains!
 So spake her Genius; & beneath his Guard
 In Wit & Beauty, young Eliza grows;
 While from the dearest Duty still debarr'd,
 Her senseless Mother sinks in blank repose.⁷²

Equally, they could have been written much later, in the same way that Hayley wrote Eliza's epitaph several years after her death.⁷³ It is also possible that, even if Hayley wrote this elegy after Eliza's death, he could still have written it (at least in part) to tranquilise Eliza's 'agitated spirits'.⁷⁴ After all, Scodel identifies the 'interchangeability of the living and dead'⁷⁵ in epitaphic writing of the time, and Hayley's 1801 letter to John Johnson refers to 'some ideas, that may be particularly pleasing to our beloved bard' in the present tense. Whatever the case, it is undoubtedly life writing designed to function as medical case study. Battie had been 'too daring'. The advice he gave Thomas Ball was 'desperate' and 'the birth of [...] Eliza, had not relieved (as the presumptuous physician too rashly expected) the Insanity of her Mother'.⁷⁶ Maybe, had these stanzas reached the press, they could have discouraged a future physician from recommending similarly 'desperate' treatments, ensuring that, although dead, Hayley—who tended to write with at least one eye on posterity—remained 'a vital part of the ongoing social order'.

To return to Hayley's epitaphs, these, like virtually all his occasional poetry, tended to be prosodically and theologically conventional, repetitively platitudinous and suited those for whom they were written. While not conforming to all his stipulations, they performed at least one of the functions Samuel Johnson demanded of epitaphs. They 'set virtue in the strongest light'.⁷⁷ They tell us what was generally acceptable in the form—in the same way, perhaps, that poems in mass-produced greetings cards

tell us about how many people today express their deepest sympathy to each other without actually expressing their deepest sympathy to each other. Hayley's extended works of life writing, however, tell us more about the limits of what was generally acceptable. From the filleting of his *Life of Milton* by its original publisher—George Nicol, the King's bookseller—to tone down Hayley's references to Milton's republicanism, through his tussles with Lady Hesketh over how much detail about Cowper's health to include in *The Life and Letters of William Cowper, Esq.*, to the way in which the Reverend John Johnson cut anything remotely controversial from Hayley's posthumously published *Memoirs*, Hayley repeatedly pushed for greater openness than many of his contemporaries found acceptable—especially when it came to matters of mental health.

Time mattered to Hayley too. As his withholding of both his own *Memoirs* (including the elegy for Eliza's mother) and the *Two Memorials* until after his own death demonstrates, Hayley believed that, beyond a subject's death, public interest trumped their private reputation: an attitude that was, perhaps, ahead of its time. However, it is also significant that there were aspects of his own life that he withheld from his *Memoirs*. Mary Cockerell-Tom's mother and Hayley's long-term mistress, who features often in his correspondence with Eliza and in letters to and from friends—warrants only one (possibly accidental) mention in print, in the *Memoirs of Thomas Alphonso Hayley*.⁷⁸ Eliza, although possessed of 'a lofty mind' as Hayley wrote in her epitaph, is represented throughout Hayley's *Memoirs* as 'his poor' or 'pitiable' Eliza, suffering from what he at one point terms 'marvellous mental infelicities'.⁷⁹ At no point is the reader given any sense of the spiky intellect and opinionated bitchiness revealed in her letters. And, while his separation from, continued support of, and goodwill towards Eliza is stressed throughout, he only offers a vague allusion to the failure of his second marriage, which ended in entirely credible allegations of cruelty and domestic violence.⁸⁰ This suggests two ideas. First, that Hayley's attitude to the relationship between public good and posthumous reputation is highly gendered: the former only trumps the latter in the case of men; the reputations of dead women still both require and deserve protection. And second, Hayley was a hypocrite. *His* reputation was more important than public good. While this idea is supported by much of the material he selected for publication, which more than tends to the self-justificatory, two factors render it questionable. The first is Hayley's final sentence in his *Memoirs*:

He resigns the pen, therefore, in a pleasing persuasion, that the person who devoted so much of his time and labour to render all the justice in his power to the talents and the virtues of several among the most deserving of his contemporaries, will, in due time, find another honest chronicler who may be more

highly qualified to estimate the extent of all his merits, and of all his defects; and to form, from a judicious contemplation of them, useful literary, and moral lessons for the amusement and the instruction of such readers [...]⁸¹

It is not, in other words, Hayley's job to reveal this information. That is the responsibility of 'another honest chronicler'. The second—which supports this reading of his intentions—is that Hayley preserved many materials for this 'honest chronicler' to contemplate (judiciously), in order to both instruct and amuse readers, and to memorialise Hayley as he had memorialised others.

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- Hayley, William. Letter to John Flaxman, 12/11/1807. Fitzwilliam Museum, Hayley.IX.18.
- Hayley, William. Letter to Anna Seward, 11/02/1782. Fitzwilliam Museum, Hayley.XII.11.
- Hayley, William. Letter to Anna Seward, 13/07/1783. Fitzwilliam Museum, Hayley.XII.34.
- Hayley, William. Letter to Anna Seward, undated (probably early 1784). Fitzwilliam Museum Hayley.XII.40.
- Hayley, William. Letter to Thomas Alphonso Hayley, 17/11/1797. Fitzwilliam Museum, Hayley.XX.58.
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William Hayley (1745–1820)—a digital edition of letters to and from William Hayley, the pilot for which is running at The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. She is Research Fellow in Future Thinking at the University of Birmingham and Associate Fellow, the Centre for Visual Culture, University of Cambridge. E-mail: lisa.gee@kcl.ac.uk.

NOTES

- 1 Hayley, William. *A Collection of Epitaphs: with Brief Biographical Notes*. West Sussex Records Office, Add MSS 2758. The verses are mostly in other hands, the notes (on the first 70 epitaphs only) are in Hayley's. As he wrote to John Flaxman, dropping a fairly strong hint about accompanying illustrations: 'I should greatly like to make a volume of them with slight outlines, engraved in Imitation of Sketches with a Pen, from a certain dear Monumental Designer, who has so often cooperated with me in honouring the Dead.' 12 November 1807, Fitzwilliam Museum, Hayley.IX.18.
- 2 Hayley, William. *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Hayley, Esq.: The Friend and Biographer of Cowper, Written by Himself with Extracts from his Private Correspondence and Unpublished Poetry. And Memoirs of his Son Thomas Alphonso Hayley, the Young Sculptor*. London: Henry Colburn and co., 1823 (2:40). The *Memoirs* are written in the third person.
- 3 Wright, Thomas. *The Life of William Cowper*. London: T Fisher Unwin, 1892 (554).
- 4 *The Life of Milton* being a particular case in point here, studied mostly because of its obvious relevance to William Blake.
- 5 Hayley, William. 1823 (1:299).
- 6 William Hayley to Anna Seward, 11 February 1782. Fitzwilliam Museum, Hayley.XII.11.
- 7 While Hayley's letters to Seward dating from 1781 are in the Fitzwilliam Museum; Seward's letters to Hayley from this time are currently untraced.
- 8 Hartley, David. *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations*. London: Reprinted for J. Johnson, by W. Eyres, 1801 (2:402).
- 9 Hayley, William. *Epitaphs* (6): 'On Doctor Theodore Ayleward [*sic*] [...] Harmonious skill thy rapid Hand possesst/And moral Harmony enrich'd thy Breast/For Heaven most largely to thy *Frame* assign'd/Benevolence the music of the mind'.
- 10 Seward, Anna, 1742–1809, and Walter Scott. *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward: With Extracts From Her Literary Correspondence*. Edinburgh: J. Ballantyne and co., 1810 (2:183). The epitaph was also used on Lady Miller's tomb.
- 11 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' (ll. 95–96), Thomas Gray Archive, <https://www.thomasgray.org/cgi-bin/display.cgi?text=elcc> (accessed 20/08/2019).
- 12 Scodel, Joshua. *The English Poetic Epitaph: Commemoration and Conflict from Jonson to Wordsworth*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991 (327).
- 13 Idem (311).
- 14 Hayley, William, 1823 (1: 147, 139). The Latin prose, which also references his father and older brother Thomas (both died before Hayley's fifth birthday), is inscribed on an oval tablet, sited on the west wall of the nave of St Margaret's Church, Eartham.
- 15 Hayley, William, *Epitaphs* (1). All quotations from this MS follow the spellings and punctuation therein. Hayley offers no indication of whether this epitaph was one of his memorial tablet rejects, or whether he wrote (or revised) it subsequently.
- 16 Scodel, Joshua, 1991 (336).
- 17 I've included 'spirit' only where the word is used as a noun. The heart(s) Hayley references are sometimes those of his subjects, sometimes those of their mourners.

- 18 For comparison, Hayley's epitaph on his son uses the pronoun 'we', in order, presumably, to include Tom's mother, Mary Cockerell; *Epitaphs* (15–16). Hayley references his relationship to Thomas Steele (idem, 31–33), and also inserts himself into several other epitaphs where he has a personal connection with the subject.
- 19 Hayley, William, *Epitaphs* (15). The notes are written in the third person.
- 20 Two works of fiction that were central productions of, and central to the consumption and expression of the culture of sensibility. As Lady Louisa Stuart wrote to Sir Walter Scott in 1826 about the latter: 'I remember so well its first publication, my mother and sisters crying over it [...] when I read it, as I was a girl of fourteen not yet versed in sentiment, I had a secret dread I should not cry enough to gain the credit of proper sensibility'. Partington, Wilfred (ed.). *The Private Letter-Books of Sir Walter Scott*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930 (273).
- 21 Lutz, Tom. *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001 (48–49).
- 22 Hayley, William, 1823 (2:7).
- 23 Bishop, Morchard. *Blake's Hayley: The Life, Works, and Friendships of William Hayley*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1951 (250).
- 24 Idem (246).
- 25 Todd, Janet. *Sensibility: An Introduction*. London & New York: Methuen, 1986 (125–126).
- 26 Brown, Marshall. *Preromanticism*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991 (82).
- 27 In the same way that he had commemorated his mother in his verse *Essay on Epic Poetry*, Hayley also wrote about Tom in his verse *Essay on Sculpture*, completed during the months Tom was dying slowly, in great pain, and published later in 1800.
- 28 Hayley, William, 1823 (2:45).
- 29 Idem (1:428).
- 30 Idem (2:10).
- 31 Idem (1:477; 2:45, 65); Hayley, William. *The Life of George Romney, ESQ.* London: T. Payne, 1809 (183, 215–216, 262–263); *Memoirs of Thomas Alphonso Hayley* (in Hayley, William, 1823 (2:204, 503)); *Two Memorials of Hayley's Endeavours to serve His Friend Cowper. The First Relating to his Fortune in a Series of Letters Addressed by William Hayley to his Son in 1794. The Second Relating to his Health Compiled Several Years after his Decease with an Introductory Letter to his Favourite Kinsman the Rev'd Dr Johnson dated July 1809*. British Library, Add MS 38887 (123, 258–259).
- 32 Hayley, William, 1809 (3).
- 33 Hayley included a draft of this in a letter he wrote to his son Tom dated 17 November 1797. Eliza had died on the 8th. Fitzwilliam Museum, Hayley XX/58.
- 34 For the latter, see his epitaphs on Romney which includes the lines 'When mental Health allowed thy Heart to feel/Truths tranquil charm and Friendship's fervent zeal'; his epitaph on Collins (written collaboratively with John Sargent) who '[...] pass'd in maddening pain life's feverish dream' and his wife Eliza, whose 'deep nervous woes of wondrous weight, /Love could not heal, nor sympathy relate'. *Epitaphs* (10, 17 and 2 respectively).
- 35 Scodel, Joshua, 1991 (321).
- 36 *ORIGINAL Correspondence of William Hayley, the Biographer of Cowper, with the Poet's Cousin, Harriet, daughter of Ashley Cowper and Widow of Sir Thomas Hesketh, 1st Bart.; 1797–1803*, British Library ADD MS 30803 A, letter dated 05 July 1800. The events Hesketh felt should be concealed included Cowper's doomed love affair with her sister Theodora and his episodes of mental ill-health.
- 37 William Hayley to John Flaxman: letter. 3 November 1807, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Hayley. IX.17.
- 38 Hayley, William, 1809 (9).

- 39 Hayley, William, 1823 (2:130). From a letter to John Johnson dated 8 November 1801. Mary is Cowper's companion, Mary Unwin.
- 40 In a letter to Hayley dated 10 February 1784, John Flaxman, a follower of Swedenborg asks 'Pray when you have a favourable opportunity, let me have Swedenborg,' (Flaxman, John. *The Flaxman Papers*. British Library, ADD MS 39780, vol. 1).
- 41 Keynes, Geoffrey, ed. *The Letters of William Blake*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956 (46).
- 42 Dent, Shirley and Jason Whittaker. *Radical Blake: Influence and Afterlife from 1827*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2002 (55).
- 43 Hayley, William, 1823 (*Memoirs of Thomas Alphonso Hayley* [2:491]).
- 44 Hayley, William. *The Life and Letters of William Cowper, Esq.: with Remarks on Epistolary Writers*. London: J. Johnson, 1812 (1:12).
- 45 ADD MS 30803 A, undated letter, January 1801; Hesketh's response indicates she received it 27 January. I have seen no evidence that Hayley ever got around to preparing an edition of his correspondence with Cowper.
- 46 Hayley, William. *Two Memorials* (118). The letter is dated 1809. Hayley does not specify if this date also applies to the writing of the *Memorial*.
- 47 Idem (119–20).
- 48 Idem (123).
- 49 Idem (120).
- 50 Idem (24).
- 51 Idem (126–27).
- 52 Idem (129–30).
- 53 Idem (130–31).
- 54 Idem (218, verso).
- 55 Idem (142–43).
- 56 Coleridge, S. T. *Christabel, &c.* London: John Murray, 1816 (1–54).
- 57 Hayley, William, 1823 (1:359).
- 58 Idem (1:388).
- 59 Hurwitz, Brian. 'Form and Representation in Clinical Case Reports.' *Literature and Medicine* 25:2 (Fall 2006), The Johns Hopkins University Press. DOI: 10.1353/lm.2007.0006. (236).
- 60 Hayley, William, 1809 (10).
- 61 Hayley, William, 1823 (*Memoirs of Thomas Alphonso Hayley*, 341).
- 62 Smart, Christopher and W. F. Stead. *Rejoice in the Lamb: A Song from Bedlam*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1939 (15).
- 63 Hayley, William, 1823 (1:299–303).
- 64 Hayley, William. *Anecdotes of the Family, Life, and Writings of William Hayley by himself: The Friend and Biographer of William Cowper*. Yale University, Beinecke Library, GEN MSS VOL 352. Available online as individual images at https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vu-find/Search/Results?lookfor=GEN_MSS_VOL_352&type=CallNumber&sort=title (accessed 13 June 2019). Some parts of the manuscript (those corresponding to 1:100–209, and 2:194–222 have not been found). Vol.2:77–193—comprised of correspondence between Hayley and his editor, the Reverend John Johnson—is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, although this has been disassembled into its constituent letters (see Bentley, Jr., G. E. and Martin K. Nurmi. *A Blake Bibliography: Annotated Lists of Works, Studies, and Blakeana*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964 [28]).
- 65 William Hayley to Anna Seward, 13 July 1783, Hayley/XII/34. Margaret's late husband had felt that, given her lack of mental capacity, she should die intestate, so her property—some £4,000—would be divided equally between Ann and Eliza. *The Mausoleum*—published the year after Harward's actions were discovered—also features a fraudulent will, although in this instance, the perpetrator is a lawyer rather than a clergyman.

- 66 Hayley, William, 1823 (1:33).
- 67 Hayley, William, *Anecdotes* (4:29–30).
- 68 Idem (4:30).
- 69 Idem (4:25, verso).
- 70 Although one of Charles and Ann's daughters was still alive, which might explain why—assuming he did so—Hayley chose to cut the part relating to Margaret's will.
- 71 'yr Friend Darwin adored you, as the *Inventress of the Epic Elegy*'. William Hayley to Anna Seward: Letter, undated (probably early 1784), Fitzwilliam Museum, Hayley. XII.40.
- 72 Hayley, William, *Anecdotes* (4:30–32).
- 73 As he explained to Flaxman, 'I was enabled to compose on a sudden, the other morning at the dawn of day, what I had wished to do in vain for some years:— I mean an Epitaph, that may, I think, be unexceptionable on that wonderful Being, my poor Eliza!' (Letter: William Hayley to John Flaxman, 18 October 10 1801, Fitzwilliam Museum, Hayley. IX.8). Hayley's *Memoirs*—where the epitaph is reproduced—do not mention the hiatus between Eliza's death and its composition, but simply record that 'The poet attempted a tender and faithful delineation of her merits and misfortune, in the following verses intended for her monument' (Hayley, William, 1823 [1:484]). Eliza's epitaph is positioned directly after Mary Hayley's in Hayley's collection (Hayley, William, *Epitaphs* [2]). The title and punctuation vary across the three instances, but the wording remains consistent.
- 74 Hayley, William, 1823 (1:299).
- 75 Scodel, Joshua, 1991 (327).
- 76 Hayley, William, *Anecdotes* (1:79).
- 77 Anon. *A Collection of Epitaphs and Monumental Inscriptions, Historical, Biographical, Literary, and Miscellaneous, to which is prefixed An Essay on Epitaphs by Dr. Johnson*. London, Lackington, Allen, & Co., 1806 (vii).
- 78 Hayley, William, 1823 (2:83–84), in a letter to Eliza. It is, however, important not to rule out the possibility that Mary asked or instructed Hayley *not* to write about her.
- 79 Hayley, William, 1823 (1:339).
- 80 As the manuscript of this part of Hayley's *Memoirs* is lost, it is possible Johnson edited these details out. However, where he cut swathes of material detailing the end of Hayley's first engagement, he adds a footnote to explain his redactions (see idem [1:73]).
- 81 Idem (2:76). The remainder of the book is cobbled together by Johnson from letters Hayley wrote to him, and contributions about Hayley Johnson solicited from Hayley's surviving friends.