

ARTICLE

Romantic objects, Victorian collections: Scribal relics and the authorial body

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Email: tim.sommer@uni-passau.de**Abstract**

Over the course of the nineteenth century, literary manuscripts came to be seen as tangible evidence of the creative process and as a key to the personality of the author. The material traces of writing were understood to outlive their creators and promise to resurrect the authorial body through the magic of the relic. This article reconstructs how authorial script gradually transformed into a collectible object pursued as a memento and a commodity. Letters, drafts, and fair copies by major modern writers found their way into the collections of British aristocrats and American industrialists at the same time that hunting for literary autographs diversified into a middle-class pursuit. Surveying recent scholarship on nineteenth-century collecting and material culture, the essay offers a condensed cultural history of the literary manuscript as a collectible and draws attention to how collectors and collecting feature in fictional texts of the period. It focuses on the artefactual mobility and custodial afterlives of Romantic papers in Victorian literature and culture, exploring a form of collecting which crossed boundaries between periods and national literary traditions.

KEYWORDS

archive, authorship, collecting, literary manuscripts, relics, Romanticism, Victorianism

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1 | LITERARY REMAINS

When Percy Shelley's mutilated and decomposed body was found on the shore near Viareggio in July 1822, Edward Trelawny rushed to the scene to take care of his drowned friend's remains. He arranged for the cremation of the corpse and distributed the personal effects of the poet. Shelley's ashes were buried in Rome, the papers and books recovered from the foundered boat were passed on to Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt. When it was Byron's turn to die 2 years later, Trelawny once again took charge of the situation. After arriving at Missolonghi, he 'looked over Byron's papers' and charted the contents of 'several journals and note-books' which 'contained memorandums of his thoughts, [...] Italian and English letters, fifteen stanzas of the seventeenth canto of "Don Juan", [...] several songs finished, and sundry beginnings of poems, [...] continuations of "Childe Harold" and the "Deformed Transformed", and other fragments' (Trelawny, 2013, p. 216). A diligent cataloguer, Trelawny soon became an avid collector of Shelley and Byron relics, to the extent that he is chiefly remembered today for assembling reminiscences of the Romantic writers with whom he associated. The main source for the rich details of his activity in the aftermath of Shelley's and Byron's deaths was Trelawny himself, who in his later years enjoyed a career as a celebrated memoirist. His *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (1858)—reprinted twenty years later in a second, revised and expanded edition as *Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author*—capitalized on a contemporary vogue for literary life-writing.

Trelawny's approach to the collecting of memories and memorabilia sat well with the more general mood for material commemoration which dominated how the Victorians looked back on Romanticism. Himself a living relic surviving into another age, Trelawny was a perfect embodiment of the continuity between the two periods. Born in 1792, he was the contemporary of Shelley, Byron, and Keats. When the *Records* were published in 1878, all three had been dead for more than half a century, while Trelawny would go on to live into the following decade.¹ His long life as a literary executor, collector, and compiler points to a larger argument pursued in a growing body of recent research on nineteenth century literature. Since around the turn of the millennium, scholarship has increasingly acknowledged that the period boundary between Romanticism and Victorianism is more porous than literary histories and teaching curricula have traditionally suggested. There has been important work on late Romanticism and early Victorianism as a moment of transition (Cronin, 2002; de Groote, 2022) as well as on the afterlives of Romantic writers in the Victorian era (Elfenbein, 1995; Gill, 2001). New attention has been drawn to the extended careers of figures such as Henry Crabb Robinson and Thomas Carlyle, who—like Trelawny—were at home in both periods (Barfoot, 1999). Other scholars—among them Andrew Radford and Mark Sandy (2008) and, in particular, Tom Mole (2017)—have highlighted the extent to which 'Romanticism' itself only became visible as a coherent cultural formation as the result of a Victorian (re)construction, a process in which the preservation, collection, and interpretation of material objects played a key role.

Relics of, or associated with, the (predominantly male) writer's body were among the most highly prized treasures in the world of nineteenth-century literary collecting. They encouraged practices of canonization and veneration and symbolically betokened the physical survival of the author beyond the point of death. Accumulated during the Victorian period, many such artefacts subsequently entered the collections of public institutions, where they survive as part of the historical record. The British Library, for example, owns a set of Shelley relics composed of a lock of his hair and what allegedly is a small part of his ashes, collected by Trelawny after the cremation and later owned by Claire Clairmont, Mary Shelley's stepsister and one of Byron's mistresses (see Figures 1 and 2). These items form part of a hybrid object which is part shrine and part book, part souvenir and part archival object.² Shelley's hair and ashes have been incorporated into the binding of a volume which contains a series of manuscript letters. This combination of corporeal and textual remains is emblematic of how closely the writer's two bodies—the body of the work and the natural body—were linked during the nineteenth century. Organic matter like hair or bone fragments along with other kinds of artefacts (items of clothing, writing implements, and the like) came to be understood as capable of conjuring up the presence of the author.

These dynamics were also at work in the case of authorial script—even more so, perhaps, to the extent that autographs—as quintessential 'artifacts of origin' (Enniss, 2001)—represented the interface between author and text,

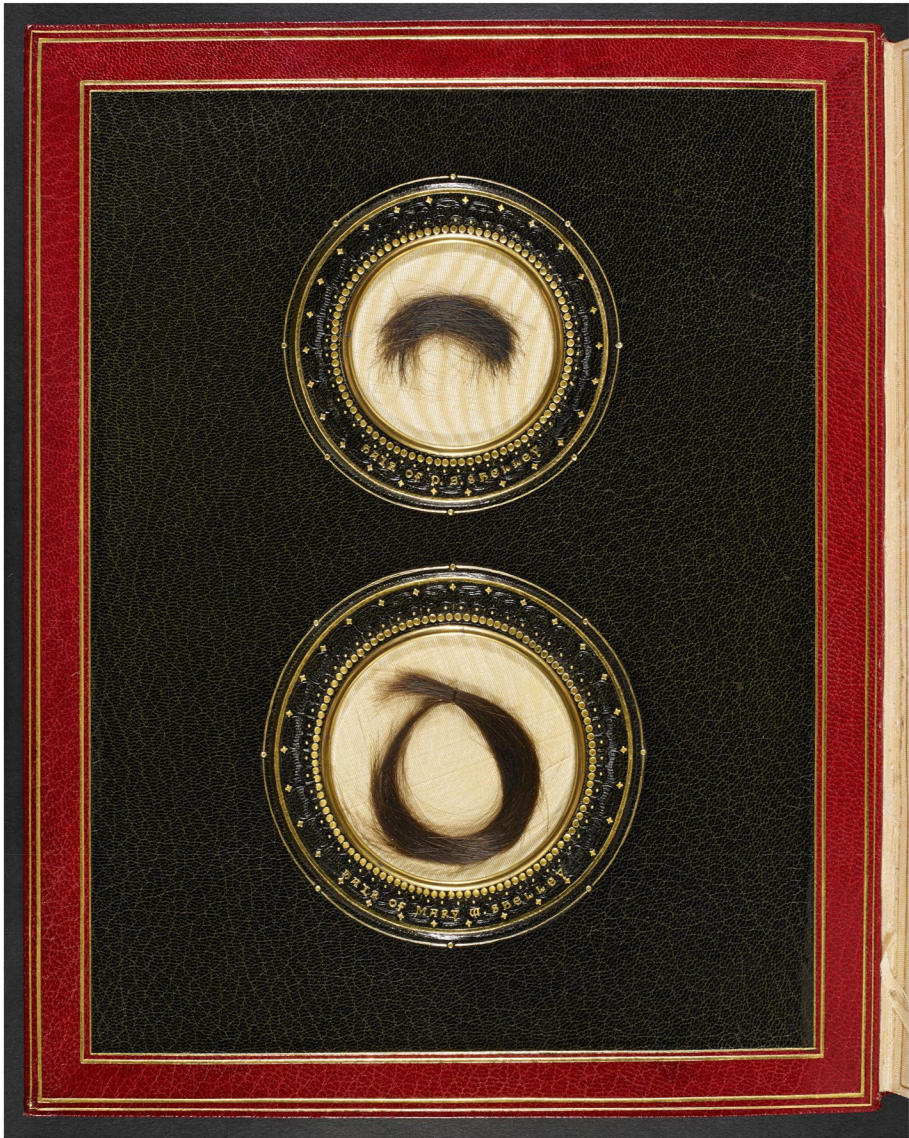


FIGURE 1 Locks of Percy and Mary Shelley's hair. British Library, Ashley MS 5022. <https://www.bl.uk/britishlibrary/~/-/media/bl/global/dl%20romantics%20and%20victorians/collection-items-manual/hair-percy-mary-shelley.jpg>.

between the writing body and the written corpus. The Victorian interest in the scribal legacy of the immediate literary past manifested itself, among other things, in a pursuit of completeness. The short-lived second-generation Romantics had left behind much unpublished manuscript material and a whole critical industry emerged out of the effort to gather these often scattered fragments—Trelawny's list of Byroniana offers a glimpse of such fragmentariness—and make them available in print. This mindset resulted in posthumous editions such as Richard Monckton Milnes's *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats* (1848) and Richard Garnett's *Relics of Shelley* (1862). The historical and philological impulse behind these and many similar publication projects was only one aspect of the period's interest in manuscripts, however.³ The other was a fascination with authorial handwriting in its own right. Literary autographs were seen as transcending the status of mere documents with textual content. They were getting chased



FIGURE 2 Alleged fragments of Shelley's ashes. British Library, Ashley MS 5022. <https://www.bl.uk/britishlibrary/-/media/bl/global/dl%20romantics%20and%20victorians/collection-items-manual/shelley-ashes.jpg>.

and collected as material extensions of the author's body, as physical evidence of the act of creation, and as unique objects with a future investment value.

In what follows, I first provide a survey of current research on nineteenth-century attitudes towards authorial relics and literary remains. In the subsequent section, I look at the *fin-de-siècle* autograph market to illustrate the wide contemporary reach of manuscript collecting and to analyse how the image of authors' papers as relics circulated in the popular imagination. Turning to late-nineteenth-century fiction, part four suggests that writers themselves increasingly came to reflect on the cultural significance of collecting the past. I conclude by arguing that Victorian collection building and the period's notion of authorial paperwork as secular relic and priceless heritage continue to shape how we think about literary history and literary materiality today.

2 | COLLECTING BODIES IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

As Mole and others have pointed out, 'what the Victorians made of Romanticism' was something closely bound up with 'material artifacts' and the 'cultural practices' that clustered around them (Mole, 2017, p. 2). Coming in the wake of what Lyn Pykett in 2004 identified as a 'material turn in Victorian studies' (see Pykett, 2004), much recent work in the field has sought to shed light on the relationship between 'bodies and things' in the nineteenth century (Boehm, 2012). A number of different disciplines has contributed to this line of enquiry, ranging from literary studies and cultural history to the history of the book, material culture, and media studies. Some of this scholarship has built on the critical insights generated during an earlier boom of collection research in the 1980s and 90s, with influential monographs by Susan Stewart (1984), Krzysztof Pomian (1987), Werner Muensterberger (1994), and Susan Pearce (1995) exploring the history, psychology, theory, and practice of collecting.⁴

While not specifically dealing with collecting as such, Samantha Matthews's *Poetical Remains: Poets' Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century* (2004) provided the first major discussion of the period's concern with the physical death and material survival of the author. Focusing on Romantic and Victorian poets, Matthews explains the prominent role which 'representations of [...] deaths, burials, textual and material memorials' played in a literary culture that 'personalized the relationship' between writers and readers (Matthews, 2004, pp. 8, 10). As she demonstrates, literary 'remains'—understood in broad terms both as physical objects and as a publishing genre—came to symbolize the spiritual aura of the modern writer in an increasingly secular age. Judith Pascoe's *The Hummingbird Cabinet: A Rare and Curious History of Romantic Collectors* (2006) covers some of the same ground as Matthews's study but is more immediately concerned with the social and cultural history of collecting. Offering a comprehensive account that goes well beyond the literary, Pascoe is interested in the personalities and individual preferences of

collectors. As 'the halfway point between the princely private enthusiasms of the Renaissance wonder cabinet and the public institution of the Victorian museum' (Pascoe, 2006, p. 5), collecting in the Romantic period to Pascoe combined idiosyncratic tastes with a new tendency to popularize and systematize the practice.

Deborah Lutz (2015) and Karen Swann (2019) have more recently returned to the theme of death and commemoration in nineteenth-century literature and culture. Lutz's *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2015) reads texts by Emily Brontë, Charles Dickens, Alfred Tennyson, and Thomas Hardy to write the history of what she calls 'Victorian relic culture' (p. 5), a widely shared disposition to remember the dead through treasuring their bodily remains and personal belongings for the memorial and narrative values contained in them.⁵ In her *Lives of the Dead Poets* (2019), one of the latest additions to this field of research, Swann builds on Matthews and others to look at how different types of source material (texts, material objects, personal recollections) fed into the nineteenth-century enthusiasm for literary biography. Concentrating on Keats, Shelley, and Coleridge, Swann locates such memorialization at the intersection of life-writing and celebrity culture and draws attention to the fascination that biographical frames of reference continue to hold for contemporary readers of Romantic literature.

Pascoe's focus on collecting and its institutional environments is shared by Nicola Watson's (2020) monograph *The Author's Effects: On Writer's House Museums*, which offers a wide-ranging history of author-related artefacts and the exhibition spaces in which they appear for public consumption. Watson here reflects on the presence effect of the relic to unpack the complex ontology of the literary museum object:

It appertained to someone judged to have been important, and its value depends in large part upon narrating it as a relic, something through which to remember that particular body and that particular life. It remembers a life that modernity has agreed to keep in perpetual resurrection through preserving it from the twin oblivion of charnel-house and auction-house to supplement the literary legacy. Its value depends on how intimate, intensive, or paradigmatic the association between writer and object was, and very often on deriving from a finite resource, or on being unique as an item, or unique to an event. The value of a literary relic [...] rests upon its ability to summon up, to be inserted in, and to evidence the truth of writing. (p. 12)

As Watson points out, such processes are at work in many different kinds of hallowed literary objects that over time have accrued museum quality and exhibition value. Yet nowhere is the connection between the 'relic' and 'the truth of writing' more immediately apparent than in the literary manuscript, which represents a part of the author's corpus in a double sense. It is both a textual fragment of the literary oeuvre and a contact relic touched by the living hand of the writer. Most of the scholarship discussed here addresses autographs among a wider range of material objects, but a comprehensive study of the cultural history of the modern literary manuscript remains to be written.⁶

3 | VICTORIAN AUTOGRAPH COLLECTING

Watson's remarks on the uniqueness value of museum objects draw special attention to the economic dimension of relic worship. Collecting is almost invariably tied to notions of scarcity and to systems of exchange. In the Victorian period, written artefacts, in particular, were not only revered as sacrosanct treasures but also bought and sold as tradeable commodities. The second half of the century saw the rise of a burgeoning transatlantic autograph and rare book market, an economic configuration that institutionalized already existing bibliophile networks.⁷ In Britain, associations such as the Roxburghe Club (established in 1812) defined collecting as an aristocratic endeavour for the wealthy few; in the United States of the Gilded Age era, enterprising capitalists such as John Pierpont Morgan and Henry E. Huntington built major collections of European art, books, and manuscripts (private property which was in many cases later transformed into public libraries and museums). If much of this high-end collecting focused its energies on lavish older material such as medieval illuminations or incunabula, there was at the same time an awakening interest

in literary manuscripts by modern and near-contemporary authors. More readily available than the objects targeted by affluent buyers yet still scarce enough to possess collecting value, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century autographs were within the range of a new middle class of market participants that emerged as the result of a 'popularization of collecting', which, as Pascoe reminds us, commenced during the Romantic period (2006, p. 6).

As the autograph market was drastically expanding over the course of the century, demand for advice literature on the subject was growing. In the 1880s and 90s, collecting manuals introduced neophytes to the practice—offering, in the words of one of these publications, 'to furnish such practical suggestions as shall guide the beginner, and point out the best means of obtaining, and afterwards of arranging and displaying his treasures' (Scott & Davey, 1891, p. xi). In his book *Autograph Collecting* (1894), subtitled 'a practical manual for amateurs and historical students', Henry Thomas Scott pointed his readers to modern literature as a particularly rewarding field with much untapped potential for the aspiring collector. 'Of the poets and other writers of the past 150 years', he noted, 'there are stores of rough or unpublished manuscripts dispersed among friends and acquaintances, often unregarded in the possession of descendants who know nothing respecting them' (1894, p. 70).

At a point at which it was still possible to acquire a letter by Keats, a poem by Wordsworth, or a fragment from De Quincey at a reasonable price, building an autograph collection could be seen as both an act of literary connoisseurship and a sign of business acumen. '[L]ike good wine', Scott suggested, documents in the author's own hand 'increase in value with age, and the scarcity and consequent cost of the [latter] are appreciably greater year by year' (p. 26). The special status of the manuscript is here linked to its identity as a singular object. Whereas '[c]oins and pictures, postage-stamps and books, exist in quantities', the autograph is 'absolutely unique' (Scott, 1894, p. 29), an exceptionalism that underwrites both its exchange value and its distinctive aura as an artefact that renders history palpable. To Victorian autograph lovers like Scott, 'no relics [were] so interesting' or 'carr[ie]d so much of the past about them' as original manuscripts (p. 27). Towards the end of Victoria's reign, the pursuit of such 'autographic treasures' (Scott, 1894, p. 2) had turned into a collective passion that played out in the context of a vibrant marketplace. Turning potentially intimate papers into the objects of economic transactions, this cultural environment troubled the distinction between the private and the public and established a new, impersonal sense of the ethics of ownership and of the role of the collector-owner, who was no longer necessarily thought of as a disinterested custodian of the past but as a savvy hunter-gatherer. With its emphasis on the ideals of uniqueness and scarcity, the late-Victorian autograph market also, ironically enough, offered a fertile ground for a thriving forgery industry, which created an artificial supply for a growing demand (the ubiquity of this practice can be gauged from the fact that Scott devoted several chapters of his manual to the detection of fakes). If forgeries posed a threat to the integrity of the historical record and the perceived authenticity of the manuscript as a material witness of the past, such anxieties about authority and reliability had in fact been part of the retrospective commemoration of Romanticism all along (as Trelawny's activities as a collector and [auto]biographer illustrate).

4 | FICTIONS OF COLLECTING

The closing decades of the century not only witnessed the height of the manuscript collecting boom; it was also the time during which contemporary authors themselves began to show an interest in the phenomenon. It is in the fiction of the period that some of the most striking dissections of autograph mania can be found. Henry James, for example, devoted himself to the subject in several of his texts. He was intrigued by the exploits of the American Shelley aficionado Edward Silsbee and his dealings with Claire Clairmont (the owner of Romantic literary relics, as we have seen above). James summarized the outlines of Silsbee's story—which he had been told about in the winter of 1887—in a brisk notebook entry:

Miss Claremont [*sic*], Byron's *ci-devant* mistress (the mother of Allegra) was living, until lately, [...] in Florence, at a great age, 80 or thereabouts, and with her lived her niece, a younger Miss Claremont—

of about 50. Silsbee knew that they had interesting papers—letters of Shelley's and Byron's—he had known it for a long time and cherished the idea of getting hold of them. To this end he laid the plan of going to lodge with the Misses Claremont—hoping that the old lady in view of her great age and failing condition would die while he was there, so that he might then put his hand on the documents, which she hugged close in life. [...] Certainly there is a little subject here: the picture of the two faded, queer, poor and discredited old English women—living on into a strange generation, in their musty corner of a foreign town—with these illustrious letters their most precious possession. Then the plot of the Shelley fanatic—his watchings and waitings—the way he covers the treasure. (James, 1987, pp. 33–34)

What grew out of this sketch was the novella 'The Aspern Papers' (1888), a text in which James filters the drama of acquisition through the consciousness of the collector, whom he turns into the ethically compromised protagonist of his tale. Much of the original historical context found its way into the fiction, with figures like Shelley, Trelawny, Silsbee, and Clairmont constantly hovering in the background. Modelled on Silsbee, the story's unnamed narrator is spellbound by the literary manuscripts he wants to touch and own, 'sacred relics' which promise an initiation to 'esoteric knowledge' about the life and work of the author he cherishes (James, 1999, pp. 254, 255). Like many of his real-life Victorian contemporaries, James's protagonist is haunted by a desire for authorial presence. The hallowed papers, he muses at one point, 'made my life continuous [...] with the illustrious life they had touched at the other end' (p. 254). A firm believer in the metaphysics of the manuscript, he at the same time reduces Aspern's literary remains to their monetary exchange value when negotiating about their potential sale.

In another text written a few years after 'The Aspern Papers', James returned to the theme of collecting and the mental pathology of the collector. *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), originally serialized as *The Old Things*, turns away from literary relics proper but further develops the image of collecting as a profoundly individual undertaking and the idea of the collectible as a quasi-animate agent that transcends mere objecthood. As Bill Brown has noted, the novel is 'a pivotal text for apprehending the fate of things within fiction' (Brown, 2003, p. 148). Its tight plot revolves around the widowed Mrs Gereth, a fanatical lover of paintings, sculpture, and furniture whose feckless son dispossesses her of the collection she has spent a lifetime assembling. There is a strong 'element of creation, of personality' in the way Mrs Gereth had gathered and arranged her precious items, to the extent that losing them appears to her as a violent act of 'amputation' (James, 1980, pp. 18, 51). In an ultimately futile effort to bring home to her son the personal significance of the collection, she describes the special rapport that exists between herself and the objects that she and her late husband 'worked for and waited for and suffered for':

There are things in the house that we almost starved for! They were our religion, they were our life, they were us! [...] There isn't one of them I don't know and love—yes, as one remembers and cherishes the happiest moments of one's life. Blindfold, in the dark, with the brush of a finger, I could tell one from another. They're living things to me; they know me, they return the touch of my hand. (James, 1980, pp. 24–25)

James is here expanding on the popular nineteenth-century image of the collectible as a medium of contact. Neither fungible commodity nor dead matter but a sentient organism, the object becomes something literal rather than metaphorical; it not only represents but in fact embodies the past. Mrs Gereth's impassioned pleading is to no avail, however: *The Spoils of Poynton* ends with the destruction of the collection through fire (the same fate reserved for the literary manuscripts at the heart of 'The Aspern Papers').

5 | THE AFTERLIVES OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY COLLECTING

Published towards the close of the century, James's novel in retrospect may appear like an elegiac monument to a bygone age of collecting as a way of life. Yet the model in which private collectors assembled their idiosyncratic

Wunderkammer was in fact already fading during the Victorian period itself. What developed over the course of the long nineteenth century was a different style of collecting, taxonomizing, and displaying. The birth of the modern institutions of the museum, the library, and the archive ushered in a new period in which ideas of public ownership and objectivized knowledge moved to the centre. No longer seen as Jamesian 'sacred relics' or 'living things', the items brought together in these environments tended to be understood as numb objects that needed to be impartially preserved, catalogued, described, and curated. At the same time, however, once powerful notions of object agency and of a past that becomes tangible through its material remains have lingered on into the twenty-first century. Indeed, the shift from private to public forms of collecting and exhibiting never fully displaced earlier ideas of a personal encounter with symbolically charged material artefacts. In today's institutional spaces, the private and the public, the detached and the intimate are closely intertwined.

That the legacy of nineteenth-century collecting is still very much with us can be felt in the kind of frisson an object like the British Library's Shelley reliquary may still cause today (even when it is mediated through a digital image).⁸ A similarly strong, though arguably less macabre appeal is present in contemporary perceptions of authorial script. A striking illustration of this came in the spring of 2021, when Sotheby's announced plans for an auction to sell a large private collection of nineteenth-century British manuscripts and rare first editions. Assembled by the wealthy Victorian mill owner William Law, the collection was known, after its location in Yorkshire, as the Honresfield library. The auction was cancelled when a consortium of cultural institutions and private donors led by the Friends of the National Libraries pledged to raise the eight-figure sum needed to acquire the complete collection—which, the public fundraising appeal stressed, comprised 'an early volume of poems by Robert Burns in his own hand', 'the complete working manuscript' of Walter Scott's *Rob Roy*, and 'two hugely significant letters' by Jane Austen, among many other items (FNL forms consortium to save literary treasure trove for the nation, 2021). Accompanied by an emphasis on the inherent place-boundedness of literary manuscripts, the rhetoric of national pride and collective identity was prominent both in the campaign and in the media coverage that the transaction received.⁹ Even more pervasive, however, was the expression of a more general belief in the auratic qualities of the manuscript as a means of accessing the personality of the dead author, who is imagined to survive, animistically or totemically, in his or her papers. The widely shared assumption was that reading Burns's poetry, Scott's fiction, or Austen's correspondence in modern critical editions was fundamentally different from encountering their words 'in [their] own hand'. What the case of the Honresfield sale illustrates is that literary autographs are still capable of capturing the popular imagination and that the nineteenth-century fascination for scribal relics and the authorial body continues to resonate today.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Work on this article was supported through a Postdoctoral Fellowship funded by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation. I would like to thank fellows and staff at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh, where part of the research for this article was undertaken during my time as a 2021–22 Visiting Research Fellow. I also wish to thank the journal's two anonymous readers for insightful comments.

Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ For comprehensive accounts of Trelawny and his career, see St Clair (1977) and Crane (1998).
- ² Samantha Matthews describes it as 'a decadent example of a nineteenth-century tradition of memorial objects that transgress boundaries between literary and literal memorials and remains, a booklike container that enshrines textual and physical *disjecta membra*. The volume is presented as a barely secular reliquary, a sumptuous setting for unique priceless objects hallowed by association' (2004, p. 152). It should be pointed out, however, that the elaborate binding is the early-twentieth-century work of the British bibliophile collector (and forger) Thomas J. Wise and thus the result of a post-Romantic fascination with authorial relics. While it is thus not itself a "genuine" expression of the nineteenth-century's concern with

scribal and corporeal remains, its extravagant showcasing of this earlier concern nevertheless points back to the Romantic and Victorian periods. The manuscripts gathered in the volume include an important letter from Mary Shelley to her friend Maria Gisborne in which she provides details about her husband's death. Following Percy Shelley's death, she became the main custodian, curator, and editor of his literary remains.

- ³ The Victorian period's philological and editorial interest in Romantic literary manuscripts was revived in the second half of the twentieth century, when the principles of modern textual criticism began to be applied to the British Romantic canon. This approach yielded major critical editions, including the twenty-one-volume Cornell Wordsworth (1975–2007), Jack Stillinger's *The Poems of John Keats* (1978), and Jerome J. McGann's seven-volume *Complete Poetical Works* of Byron (1980–1993).
- ⁴ See also Goggin and Tobin (2009), Potvin and Myzelev (2009), and Burrows and Johnston (2019) for recent work in collecting studies.
- ⁵ Lutz deals with the relic phenomenon as a pervasive nineteenth-century cultural practice. See Kammer (2013) for an account that more specifically addresses literary relics.
- ⁶ Christian Benne's German study on 'the invention of the manuscript', published in 2015, is a notable exception (see Benne, 2015). Michelle Levy's *Literary Manuscript Culture in Romantic Britain* (2020) and Kathryn Sutherland's *Why Modern Manuscripts Matter* (2022) explore eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary remains and their cultural contexts.
- ⁷ In two recent studies, Denise Gigante (2022) and Danielle Magnusson and Laura Cleaver (2022) retrace the historical outlines of this context and its links to the cultural histories of bibliophilia and book and manuscript collecting in the long nineteenth century.
- ⁸ The digital sphere, more generally, has become a key environment in which twenty-first-century readers encounter and experience Romantic writers' material remains. Libraries and archival institutions are increasingly making their content available remotely—the British Library's digital collections (<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues-and-collections/digital-collections>), the website of the Wordsworth Trust (<https://wordsworth.org.uk/the-collection/>), or the digitized items in the Keats collection at Harvard University's Houghton Library (<https://library.harvard.edu/collections/harvard-keats-collection>) offer important resources for the historical context discussed here. There are also initiatives that operate at a supra-institutional level. Examples of the latter include the Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts Digital Edition (<https://janeausten.ac.uk/index.html>) and Romantic Europe: The Virtual Exhibition (RÊVE) (<https://www.euromanticism.org/virtual-exhibition/>), which offers a multilingual digital museum of Romantic material culture.
- ⁹ The main aim of the campaign was to prevent the collection from being sold piecemeal to private collectors. Following the successful acquisition of the material by the consortium in December 2021, the individual items were scheduled to be passed on to libraries and author museums across Britain (including the British Library, the National Library of Scotland, Scott's Abbotsford home, and Austen's house in Chawton) (Flood, 2021).

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How to cite this article: Sommer, T. (2024). Romantic objects, Victorian collections: Scribal relics and the authorial body. *Literature Compass*, e12703. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12703>