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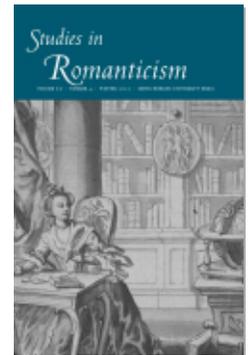
## Domestic Extracts

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MAI-LIN CHENG

# Domestic Extracts

Our “reading” is always also a writing that is imperfectly mediating itself.

—Ellen Rooney, “Live Free or Describe”<sup>1</sup>

READING, AS ELLEN ROONEY ARGUES, IS ALWAYS ALSO A KIND OF WRITING. But sometimes reading is writing in a particularly direct sense. This is so in the commonplace book, which displays right before our eyes the imperfect mediation that Rooney describes. It is all the more so in the case of the Romantic commonplace book, often thought to be a decadent example of the genre, drifting away from the epistemological and formal rigor of its early modern forerunner, with its systems of alphabetization and categorization,<sup>2</sup> and toward the raffishness of the modern scrapbook and album. Writing in the Romantic commonplace book is fluid, like the literary subject matter it seeks to capture, vividly expressing the imaginative and social engagement characteristic of Romantic reading practices while at the same time amplifying key formal problems in Romanticism, especially that of the fragment.

In this paper, I explore one characteristic commonplace book from the Romantic period, a notebook kept by the English socialite Louisa Wildman (1800–1879) over four decades in the middle of the nineteenth century. Wildman was a notable person, well known in Romantic circles, but she was not and did not aspire to be a published poet. Rather, she was connected to the Romantic literary coterie through Newstead Abbey, the ancestral estate of the family of Lord Byron that she and her husband Thomas Wildman (1787–1859) purchased from Byron in 1818 and transformed into a kind of shrine to the great writer after his untimely

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1. Rooney, “Live Free or Describe: The Reading Effect and the Persistence of Form,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 21, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 124.

2. Such systems were considered ways of “guarding against future losses of information.” Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Scholarly Information in the Early Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 73.

death in 1824. During this period, the Wildmans restored and cared for the estate, attempting to amplify its Gothic feel and enhance its aura as Byron's former home. At Newstead Abbey, the Wildmans entertained many guests, including important writers such as Washington Irving and Thomas Moore, but even these came to Newstead not primarily as writers but rather as readers and admirers of Byron and as participants in a sprawling decades-long conversation about reading that Louisa Wildman orchestrated and to which her commonplace book offers nuanced testimony.

Louisa Wildman's commonplace book is telling for several reasons. First, it is very much an expression of a generic type. As such, it helps us understand Romantic commonplacing and, by extension, Romantic reading more generally. Second, it is an example of writing by a highly literate reader who nonetheless had no pretensions of publishing herself. As such, it exemplifies a kind of writing that belongs principally to the culture of reading. Third, Wildman's commonplace book is a social document. While the principal hand in it is her own, in addition to containing the words of others—that, after all, is the point of a commonplace book—it also contains the handwriting of her husband, friends, and guests who inscribed commonplaces in it or else compositions of their own.<sup>3</sup> Fourth, Wildman's commonplace book is a powerful expression of place. It is a textual expression of Wildman's habitation of Newstead, of her very public self-fashioning as a reader and especially as a reader of Lord Byron. Finally, Louisa Wildman's commonplace book helps us resituate nineteenth-century literature in a circuit of reading and of writing in which neither is obviously privileged. It offers an opportunity to understand Romantic reading, and in particular women's reading, not only as an imaginative process but also as a directly creative one.

### Reading in Place

The story of Louisa Wildman's commonplace book is importantly also the story of Newstead Abbey, the place where Wildman lived her adult life, the place where she read and immersed herself in literary conversation. Indeed, Louisa's commonplace book begins right about the time that she and her husband moved to the estate. Wildman herself was born Louisa Preisig in Appenzell, Switzerland in 1800. In 1816 she married the Englishman Thomas Wildman II, nearly fourteen years her senior and a

3. On the sociability in readers' books, see Lindsey Eckert, "Reading Lyric's Form: The Written Hand in Albums and Literary Annuals," *ELH* 85, no. 4 (2018): 973–79; Samantha Matthews, *Album Verses and Romantic Literary Culture: Poetry, Manuscript, Print, 1780–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), esp. 4; Michelle Levy, *Literary Manuscript Culture in Romantic Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

veteran of Waterloo where he served as *aide-de-camp* to Lord Uxbridge.<sup>4</sup> Two years later, the Wildmans purchased Newstead Abbey from Byron, with whom Thomas had been in school at Harrow School, during a time of Byron's financial difficulties. Byron had been trying to sell the Abbey for about six years before Thomas stepped in.<sup>5</sup> In the following year, 1819, Louisa's commonplace book begins.

For the Wildmans, Newstead was at once a project. Louisa took an interest in its gardens; Thomas in the buildings. Once they took possession of the property, Thomas invested in its improvement, with an eye to preserving, even accenting, its Gothic air, and developing it as "a model of polite virtue."<sup>6</sup> According to Byron's half-sister Augusta, Thomas Wildman had "soul enough to value the dear Abbey and its ruinous perfection; so that he would not remove a stone and wishes to restore it as far as he can."<sup>7</sup> Extensive renovations were made to the buildings and grounds, and, as Stephen Daniels writes, these helped also to renovate Byron's aura: "After Byron's death in 1824, Newstead was visited as a shrine to the poet's memory, and the picturesque ensemble of gardens and Gothic architecture helped reform his reputation" along with that the "glorious remnant of the Gothic pile" that had once been his home.<sup>8</sup>

From the very start, the Wildmans' lives at Newstead were organized by a readerly sociability. Partly, this sociability was Louisa's own fabrication: the Wildmans' houseguests were writers and readers, and as her commonplace book shows, literature was a constant topic of conversation. At the same time, the Wildmans cultivated the pre-existing sociability of the place. Nor was this just a matter of memorializing Byron himself. At the estate, the Wildmans encountered Sophia Hyatt, the so-called "Little White Lady of Newstead," a Byron devotee who lived in a cottage on the property. As Irving relates, Hyatt made an immediate impression. Tiny, ethereal, dressed all in white, or sometimes all in black, she wandered the grounds of

4. Rosalys Coope et al., ed., *Newstead Abbey. A Nottinghamshire Country House: Its Owners and Architectural History 1540–1931* (Nottinghamshire: Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire, 2014), 123–39.

5. For a history of the debt and sale, see John Beckett, with Sheila Aley, *Byron and Newstead: The Aristocrat and the Abbey* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 183–239.

6. Stephen Daniels, "Gothic Gallantry: Humphry Repton, Lord Byron, and the Sexual Politics of Landscape Gardening," in *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art, 1550–1850*, ed. Michel Conan (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 334.

7. J. T. Hodgson, "Memoir of the Revd. Francis Hodgson, BD. By his Son (1878)," 2:51, quoted in Coope, 103.

8. Daniels, "Gothic Gallantry," 335. On the changes to the grounds, see Daniels, 333–36. Byron, *Lord Byron's Don Juan: With Life and Original Notes*, ed. A. Cunningham (London: Charles Daly, 1852), 333, canto 13, stanza 59, line 1.

Newstead in a “reverie,” drawing and writing, communicating only with a pencil and slate due to her deafness. According to Thomas Wildman, she seemed a “fairy spirit” clad in flesh, blood, and muslin.<sup>9</sup> Over the following years, until her death in 1825, the Wildmans continued to lodge Hyatt on the estate grounds. Louisa took a particular interest in her, copying two of her original poems into her commonplace book, including Hyatt’s meditation on Newstead as a place.

During their tenure at Newstead Abbey, the Wildmans themselves came to be strongly associated with the place and the place with them. We see this in Louisa’s commonplace book itself, with its copied passages meditating on ruins and in dedicatory “impromptus” written by the Abbey’s many visitors. Indeed, Newstead Abbey is a key *topos*—perhaps the key *topos*.<sup>10</sup> Published accounts of the Abbey from this period, including *Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey* by Irving and *Sketches of Society in Great Britain and Ireland* by another American, Charles Samuel Stewart, discuss not only the physical setting of the estate but also the hospitality, pursuits, and community of the Wildmans.<sup>11</sup>

Irving marveled at the extent to which the Wildmans had been able to preserve the feeling of the former owner.<sup>12</sup> Stewart wrote that during his visit in July 1832, the Wildmans’ renovations “are all of such perfect keeping with the primitive architecture, that not only the Byrons of the last three or four hundred years, but the old monks of the twelfth century themselves, could they rise from their graves, would find Newstead still their old and well known home.”<sup>13</sup> By contrast, William Howitt, author of *The Ruined Castles and Abbeys of Great Britain*, who visited in 1838, complained that in

9. On Hyatt as the “second poet” of Newstead, see David Herbert, “Sophia Hyatt: ‘The White Lady of Newstead,’” in *The Gothic Byron*, ed. Peter Cochran (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 158–64. On Hyatt and disability studies, Jessica Roberson, “Remembrance and Remediation: Mediating Disability and Literary Tourism in the Romantic Archive,” *Studies in Romanticism* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 85–108. For Hyatt at Newstead, Washington Irving, *Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey* (Paris: A. and W. Galignani, 1835), 157; for obituaries, “Sophia Hyatt, the White Lady,” *Morning Chronicle*, no. 17590 (October 10, 1825): 3, col. C-D, which includes the poem “My Last Walk in the Gardens of Newstead Abbey” and “The Little White Lady: Lord Byron, Newstead Abbey and Sophia Hyatt, or ‘The Little White Lady,’” *Cambridge Chronicle* 29, no. 40 (October 3, 1874): 6. Newstead Abbey holds another 1825 obituary that includes Hyatt’s, “My Last Walk,” Accession NA 2148.

10. Characteristic titles of such poems are “To the Daughters of my dear and valued Friends, Mr. & Mrs. Elliot” or “Impromptu on presenting a fickle fair one, with a bunch of violets,” in Louisa Wildman, [Commonplace Book], Clark Library, University of California, Los Angeles, MS.1950.021, 267, 123.

11. See Irving, *Abbotsford*; and Charles Samuel Stewart, *Sketches of Society in Great Britain and Ireland*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1834), in vol. 1.

12. Irving, *Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey*, 80.

13. Stewart, *Sketches*, 236–37.

their zeal for improvement, the Wildmans had changed things that ought to have been preserved in precisely the condition described in Byron's *Don Juan* during the time Byron still lived there.<sup>14</sup>

Regardless of the alterations they made to Newstead Abbey, the Wildmans saw to it that traces of Byron were everywhere. Stewart wrote, "One article, comprised in the furniture of [the library], will not soon lose its interest—the table on which the poet wrote CHILDE HAROLD."<sup>15</sup> Stewart noted additionally that the Gothic "pile" had its own "*haunted chamber*" in which terrors enough to scare a seasoned war veteran were endemic.<sup>16</sup> Byron's personal chambers, too, evoked strong reactions of both attraction and anxiety. Stewart, for one, steered clear of them at first, but finally was too curious to keep away. He penned his last letter home from there, feeling empty at the thought of leaving. So, instead of concluding with his own words, he copied to his wife, Virginia, a poem "just scribbled" by his friend Captain Bolton in Louisa Wildman's commonplace book that concludes as follows: "We go—but wander wheresoe'er we can, / We'll ne'er forget the Abbey nor Wildman."<sup>17</sup>

It is an insightful moment. Stewart, who has come to Newstead on a Byron pilgrimage, finds fulfillment not in Byron's words but in those of Bolton, another pilgrim, inscribed in the commonplace book of his host, and identifying the Abbey with the Wildmans as much as with Byron. One might expand on Stewart's and Bolton's words, about haunting and wandering and the old Gothic mansion, but for our purposes, the key fact is that here Stewart, Bolton, and Wildman are all copying furiously, writing as readers engaged in the specifically readerly sociability of Newstead.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, this kind of readerly cycling and recycling permeates not only Louisa's commonplace book but Thomas's as well. A key instance there, an entry from October 21, 1838, is Thomas's copying out of H. H. Joy's translation from Greek of an epitaph to Byron found in Thomas Moore's

14. Howitt, *The Rural Life of England* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, 1838), 386. Thomas's architectural plans are held at Newstead Abbey as well as correspondence on Louisa's garden design as praised by Edward Lytton; see Thomas Wildman, "West Elevation of Newstead Abbey: Proposed Alterations, 1817" (Newstead Abbey Collections, Nottingham, Accession number 866); and Edward Bulwer Lytton to Louisa Wildman, March 29, 1841 (Newstead Abbey Collections, Nottingham, England, Accession number NA 2148).

15. Stewart, *Sketches*, 240.

16. Stewart, *Sketches*, 242.

17. Stewart, *Sketches*, 253.

18. We might go even farther, following Deidre Lynch to find in these enthusiastic nineteenth-century reading practices an important source for the genealogy of literary criticism itself. See Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

*Life of Lord Byron*.<sup>19</sup> Thomas clearly copied the translation from Louisa's commonplace book into which it had been written by Joy himself during his visit to Newstead, ten years after Moore's own visit. In this case again, the commonplace book vibrates with social activity in which writing is less an end than a phase in an ongoing cycle of reading and extraction.

Stewart's commentary on his time at Newstead Abbey was not limited to descriptions of architecture or to reminiscences about Byron. In his account Stewart is as entranced by the rituals of the Wildmans as by the place itself, from breakfast, with coffee served by the Colonel, to evening entertainments that included music and conversation with a motley cast of characters; and, as we see in the passages above, Louisa Wildman's commonplace book itself made frequent appearances. Stewart signed the book with a simple note thanking Louisa for the opportunity of "placing my name among those of the 'chosen & the few' honored."<sup>20</sup> Captain Bolton and others took a different path, inspired by the ghost of Byron and the food and entertaining of the Wildmans, by offering little poems written as games, "impromptus," "acrostics," and "charades," or quotations they themselves had chosen. In Louisa's commonplace book, Irving copied from his short story "The Wife" about a beautiful woman who transforms a humble cottage into a castle, which in context reads as a gloss on Louisa and possibly, since Louisa repeatedly visits the topics of wife, marriage, and home in her commonplace book, as a response to Louisa's own reading of his work.<sup>21</sup>

### The Architecture of the Commonplace

In some respects, the phenomenon of the Wildmans' Newstead Abbey feels familiar today. The writer's house—the Goethe house in Weimar, the Poe house in Baltimore, the Freud house in Vienna, and so on—is now a common tourist destination, and there is much about it for which Newstead Abbey is informative. As Susan Bernstein has argued, when we visit a writer's house, the pleasure of being there (*dasein*) is visceral and powerful. It is also often flattening. When presented as "a direct link to the genesis of the literary masterpiece," the writer's house is "reified," artifacts of writing such as desk, paper, and pen are "fetishized," and the heterotopic aspect of the place of writing is foreclosed.<sup>22</sup> But this need not always be so. "The

19. Moore, *Life of Lord Byron* (London: John Murray, 1844), 642. Moore's inscription is dated January 22, 1828 (Louisa Wildman [Commonplace Book], 164). My paper for the panel "Romanticism in Pieces," North American Society for the Study of Romanticism, Providence, RI, June 24, 2018, explores Thomas Wildman's commonplace book further.

20. Louisa Wildman, [Commonplace Book], 247; original emphasis.

21. Irving, inscribed in Louisa Wildman, [Commonplace Book], 243.

22. Bernstein, *Housing Problems: Writing and Architecture in Goethe, Walpole, Freud, and Heidegger* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 14. On the desk as

facticity of the house,” Bernstein continues, “points to a limit of thinking, an undercurrent of the untheorized and excluded materiality that is a condition of possibility of architecture or writing.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, the writer’s house may also be a site where we encounter “resistance” to the “architectonic” narrative of authorship in the very materiality of the place.<sup>24</sup>

This may be so at Newstead. Certainly, the site offers material reference points for Byron’s life and writing, even if many of them—the scratches in the dining room where Byron is said to have chained a bear—may be fabulous.<sup>25</sup> But, for a variety of reasons, Newstead does not now nor did it in the time of the Wildmans entirely conform to the model that Bernstein lays out. First, it was Byron himself who first cultivated the mythology of Newstead, just as it was Byron who first cultivated the mythology of Byron.<sup>26</sup> Second, Newstead Abbey, during the period of the Wildmans, was never really a tourist destination, since its visitors were personally known to the Wildmans, and since, during their time, no tour of authors’ houses in Great Britain was yet possible.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Newstead Abbey was no “unmoving relic,” to use Bernstein’s characterization of the house museum.<sup>28</sup> At the

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the “scene of writing” in authors’ houses, see Nicola J. Watson, chap. 4, “Furniture: Shakespeare’s Chair and Austen’s Desk,” in *The Author’s Effects: On Writer’s House Museums* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 95.

23. Bernstein, *Housing Problems*, 13–14.

24. “On the one hand, this general architectonics effaces or exceeds the sharp specificity of architecture; it is valid for other arts and regions of experience as well. On the other hand, architecture forms its most powerful metonymy; it gives it its most solid consistency, objective substance. . . . Hence the resistance: the resistance of materials,” notes Jacques Derrida, *Psyché: inventions de l’autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), 482, cited in Bernstein, *Housing Problems*, 13.

25. Scratches noted during a tour of Newstead Abbey, April 2019. On Byron’s bear, see Byron to Elizabeth Pigot, October 26, 1807, Newstead Abbey, Accession NA 948/n. Thanks to Simon Brown, Curator, Newstead Abbey.

26. On Byron and celebrity, see Eric Eisner, “Systems of Literary Lionism,” in *Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Literary Celebrity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 20–47; Omar F. Miranda, “The Celebrity of Exilic Romance: Francisco De Miranda and Lord Byron,” *European Romantic Review* 27, no. 2 (2016): 207–31.

27. See Watson, *Author’s Effects*. Two different examples of the writer’s house, cultivated as architectural spectacles by their author-owners during the authors’ own lifetimes, are Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill and Walter Scott’s Abbotsford. On Abbotsford as home, archive, and museum, see Paul Westover, “The Transatlantic Home Network: Discovering Sir Walter Scott,” in *Transatlantic Literature and Author Love in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Paul Westover and Ann Wierda Rowland (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2016), 153–74. On Abbotsford’s archive of guest books, Caroline McCracken-Flesher, “Six Degrees from Walter Scott: Separation, Connection and the Abbotsford Visitor Books,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 47 (2017): 19–35.

28. Bernstein, *Housing Problems*, 13. For alternative perspectives on literary tourism, see Nicola J. Watson, *The Literary Tourist: Readers and Places in Romantic and Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Alison Booth, *Homes and*

Wildmans' Newstead, the "facticity of the house" energized a sociability that fuzzed the relationship between what was inside and outside literature just as did Louisa Wildman's commonplace book.

As we have seen, Louisa Wildman's commonplace book was a markedly social object, read, shared, and inscribed by many. But the bulk of the text is in Louisa's hand and, as in most commonplace books, is made up mainly of quotations from published writers. Among these are Homer, the poets of the Greek Anthology, William Shakespeare, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Amelia Alderson Opie, Felicia Dorothea Hemans, Mary Shelley, Julie S. H. Pardoe, Louisa Anne Twamley, Margaret Oliphant, Walter Scott, Thomas Moore, and, of course, Byron. As this list suggests, women's writing mattered to Louisa, and gendered dynamics play out in much of the material she places in her book.

Began in 1819, about the time that the Wildmans took possession of Newstead Abbey, and continued for decades, Louisa's commonplace book sets out, as one might expect, with a flurry of quotations from Byron, but not Byron alone. Early on, we also find Scott, Shakespeare, Pope, and Moore. Establishing precisely when Louisa Wildman made many individual entries in her commonplace book presents challenges. The earliest date in the book is 1819, and the latest is 1879, the year of Wildman's death, but the bulk of entries come from the period 1819–1839. On a weekly or monthly basis, Louisa used the volume irregularly. Year to year, however, she used the book fairly steadily during the first two decades.

There is no doubt that at the start Byron predominates. Or, perhaps better put, at the start, Louisa, it seems, is concerned with establishing her literary relationship to Byron, with whom the Wildmans already had a personal relationship. Of course, at this point, none of Byron's poetry was *old*. Byron was only thirty-one in 1819, living in Ravenna and working on the continuation of *Don Juan*. Still, Louisa's selections in these first several pages of the commonplace book are notably recent. Five of six come from Eastern Tales Byron published in 1813 and 1814; the other, from the short poem, "On Parting," from 1812.<sup>29</sup>

Frequently, Wildman's selections touch on women, home, and reading, expressing the tension between domesticity and the life of the mind as well as the very material challenge—or *pathos*, to borrow from Mary A. Favret—of reading.<sup>30</sup> From Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, Louisa

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*Haunts: Touring Writers' Shrines and Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); and *Writers' Houses and the Making of Memory*, ed. Harald Hendrix (New York: Routledge, 2008).

29. Louisa Wildman, [Commonplace Book], 11.

30. Favret, "The Pathos of Reading," *PMLA* 130, no. 5 (2015): 1318–31.

copies out the much-debated concluding speech characterizing men, who endure “painful labor,” as sovereign over women, who lie “warm at home, secure and safe,” and, in a similar vein, John Dryden’s translation of *The Wife of Bath*.<sup>31</sup> From modern literature, she copies out the dedication to the *sexe aimable* in a manual of mythology by the eighteenth-century French writer, Charles-Albert Demoustier, and, a decade after the death of Colonel Wildman, a speech about the permanence of the marriage bond from Margaret Oliphant’s novel *At His Gates*.<sup>32</sup> The last of these, typical of Wildman’s selections, concludes with an evocation of place. In the scene that Wildman quotes, a widow, Helen Drummond, rejects the proposal of her dead husband’s friend, Dr. Maurice: “Yes, he is dead, but I do not see what difference that makes,” says Helen, “I am his wife.” Alone in his house now, Maurice gives a long sigh, and says aloud, “‘Perhaps it is quite as well it has ended so. Probably we should not have liked it had we tried it,’ and then went up to his lonely chamber, hearing, as he thought, his step echo over all the vacant house. Yes, it was a vacant house. He had chosen that it should be years ago, and yet the feeling now was dreary to him, and it would never be anything but vacant for all the rest of his life.”<sup>33</sup>

Wildman also collected passages from people within the orbit of Newstead Abbey such as Irving (“There is in every true woman’s heart a spark of heavenly fire, which lies dormant in the broad daylight of prosperity”), Moore (“kind words are said of friends and home / and soon, too soon, we part with pain”), and Hyatt, whose two original poems, “To the Author of *Childe Harold*” and “My Last Walk in the Garden of Newstead,” eulogize Byron and frame Hyatt’s departure from Newstead as a tragic echo of Byron’s own.<sup>34</sup> Almost certainly, it was Hyatt’s death in 1825, only a year after Byron’s, that prompted Louisa to copy out Hyatt’s poems. Characteristically, Louisa reinforces their resonance by following them in her text with a meditation on mortality from the seventeenth-century English poet Francis Quarles and then a long passage from Mary Shelley’s apocalyptic novel *The Last Man*.<sup>35</sup> From Quarles, she extracts, “The grass withers the tale is ended / The bird is flown the dew’s ascended / The hour is short the span not long / The swan’s near death man’s life is done.” The selection from *The Last Man* concludes with a kind of succor to counter grief: “And is not love a gift of the divinity?”

31. Louisa Wildman, [Commonplace Book], 66, 24.

32. Wildman, [Commonplace Book], 12–13, 272.

33. Oliphant, *At His Gates* (London: Tinsley Bros., 1872), 3:64.

34. Louisa Wildman, [Commonplace Book], 243, 164, 94–97. Byron died April 19, 1824; Hyatt died September 23, 1825.

35. Quarles, “On Man’s Mortality,” quoted in Louisa Wildman, [Commonplace Book], 98–99.

Love, and her child, Hope, which can bestow wealth on poverty, strength on the weak, and happiness on the sorrowing.”<sup>36</sup> Louisa’s volume also contains numerous original compositions written by Thomas Wildman and dedicated to Louisa, as well as drawings, sketches, and watercolors by Thomas’s sister, Maria Gardiner, holiday cards, images clipped from other sources, ciphers, and more.

Louisa Wildman’s commonplace book itself constitutes a literary place, but not in the “architectonic” sense that most concerns Bernstein. Figuratively, it functions not as a synecdoche for the “gothic pile” but a metonymic vehicle for the imaginative life of Newstead, the traces of which it contains between its covers. If Byron joked that the sprawling abbey required him to “walk half a mile to my bedchamber,” the space of the commonplace book collapses distance, creating a chaotic intimacy of disparate things.<sup>37</sup> If we wish to think of Louisa’s commonplace book as having a conceptual architecture, it would be in the counter-architectonic tradition of Gothic revival bounded at one end by the ecstatic fantasia of Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill and at the other by the Wildmans’ Newstead Abbey, renovated to fulfill a reader’s notion of the landscape of Byron’s imagination. These, Bernstein writes, aggressively “rejected the ‘methodization’ of the classicizing architecture dominant in the Georgian period in England.” In its place, they adopted, to use Walpole’s favored garden-design principle “sharrawaggi” (also spelled “sharawadgi”), or want of symmetry, an effect that parallels the “amphigurish” explored by Goethe: “Both words indicate the pleasure in the reified independence of signifying elements—their simultaneous tendency to mean, the monstrous persistence of details and pieces that cannot be assimilated into a whole.”<sup>38</sup>

36. Shelley, *The Last Man*, quoted in Wildman, [Commonplace Book], 98–99.

37. George Gordon, Lord Byron to Augusta Leigh, August 30 [31?], 1811, in *Byron’s Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 11 vols. (London: J Murray, 1973–), 1:86.

38. Bernstein, *Housing Problems*, 46–47. On “sharawadgi,” and British and Chinese aesthetics, see: Yu Liu, “Changing Chinese Ideas into a Native English Tradition: The Complex Consequences of Horace Walpole’s Horticultural Nationalism,” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 52, no. 3 (2019): 37–60; Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain’s Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), esp. 28 on the term as “the central term in a lexicon of Chinese difference”; part 4 of David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). On Strawberry Hill, see Marion Harney, *Place-Making for the Imagination: Horace Walpole and Strawberry Hill* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013); Walpole’s own *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole, . . . at Strawberry-Hill near Twickenham, Middlesex. With an Inventory of the Furniture, Pictures, Curiosities, etc.* (Strawberry-Hill: Printed by Thomas Kirgate, 1784); Sean R. Silver, “Visiting Strawberry Hill: Horace Walpole’s Gothic Historiography,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 21, no. 4 (2009): 535–64.

From a formal point of view, the commonplace book in general is characterized by asymmetry. It is a terrain of fragments, or, to use a geological metaphor, *erratics*, objects lifted up and transported out of place. The early modern commonplace book, methodical as it was meant to be, struggled mightily against these characteristics. John Locke's 1706 manual on commonplacing is an explicit attempt to subject the heterogeneous results of literary extraction to an architectonic principle.<sup>39</sup> And yet that very attempt communicates Locke's recognition of the paradoxical nature of the enterprise. The premise of the commonplace book is the fragmentation of, and as Lynch argues, at the limit, even the destruction of the original work. She suggests that at a certain point loving books easily spills over into destroying them by literally extracting passages with scissors: "Book love so practiced shocked, because it betrayed the lover's propensities for book destruction."<sup>40</sup>

This doubleness is implicit, too, in the term commonplace. The "common place," or heading under which passages from reading are recorded in commonplace books had long been understood as both a topic category and as a physical location in a notebook or collection. Thus, even as they attempted to impose a rational framework upon the collection, Locke and his predecessors treated the commonplace book as a material object, devoting careful attention to its crafting as such. The commonplace book, as Locke understood it, was as much a physical device as an intellectual one. Meanwhile, its contents, methodized as they were, reflected a circumstantial itinerary through the world of books marked by affect (in the selection of passages), imagination (in the construction of categories), and experience (reading and writing). The Lockean commonplace book was a prosthesis, a materialization of memory outside the body, outside the person. It was an extension of the self that could also be alienated, transplanted, and given new life. In other words, from the standpoint of 1819, it was always already Gothic.

### Domesticating Byron

As the title at the top of her first page suggests, for Louisa Wildman, whatever else it may have been, the commonplace book was a book of "extracts."

39. Locke, *A New Method of Making Common-Place-Books* (London: J. Greenwood, 1706). On the early modern commonplace, see Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Scholarly Information in the Early Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 255–81; Barbara M. Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Richard Yeo, *Notebooks, Virtuosi, and Early Modern Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

40. Lynch, *Loving Literature*, 140.

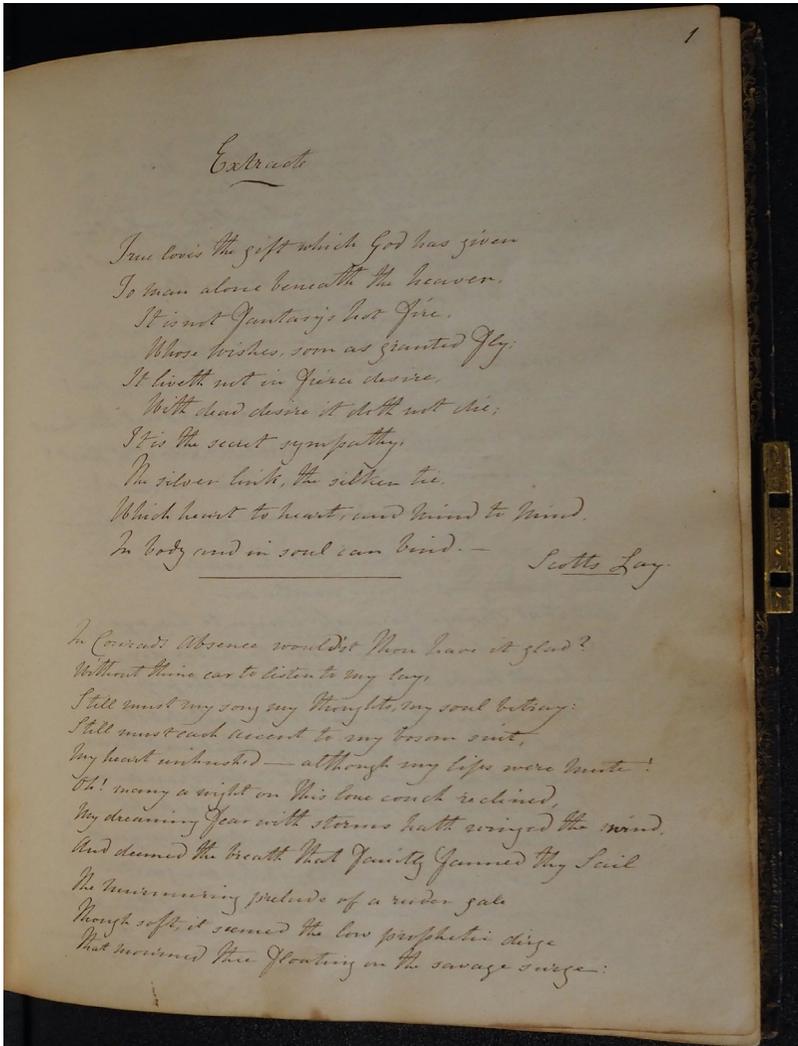


Figure 1. First page of Louisa Wildman's *Commonplace Book*. The William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles. Photo by Daniel Rosenberg.

Wildman uses the term as a descriptive noun, but “extract” is also a verb, as the *OED* reminds, quoting Samuel Johnson's eighteenth-century dictionary: “To take from something of which the thing taken was a part’ (Johnson)”; “To draw out of any containing body or cavity’ (Johnson).”<sup>41</sup> To

41. *Oxford English Dictionary*, (2000), s.v. “extract,” noun.

extract, and then the extract. We encounter, then, a slippage between agency and product, activity and output, the act of writing and the written words, between copying and creating.<sup>42</sup> She draws out familiar names from literary history (Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, Scott, Thomas Moore, Mary Shelley, Byron), and those less familiar or once forgotten (Sophia Hyatt, George MacDonald, Anonymous, Julia Pardoe). Are these extractions themselves a kind of close reading? To draw out, to extract: that is of course what we do so often as literary critics, and it is not hard to see in Wildman's work something that resembles our critical reading practices. We also take such textual places apart, and remake a place for them according to our interests and feelings. But it is at least as important to recognize in Wildman's practice of extraction a mirror of the literary writing upon which her text operates, a writing that itself is fascinated with repetition, fragmentation, and abstraction.

In Wildman's commonplace book, this literary doubling begins right away in her first extracts from Byron's *Eastern Tales*, *The Corsair*, *The Bride of Abydos*, and *The Giaour*. These are poems of love, of longing, and of absence, and, especially in the case of *The Giaour*, with its broken-apart narrative, of fragmentation.<sup>43</sup> Not all of us, of course, read Byron's *Eastern Tales* the way Louisa Wildman did. For her, they were a sort of self-help manual for the lovelorn. They were consolations.<sup>44</sup> She did not draw out from them the themes of exoticism and difference that have been so important in recent Byron criticism.<sup>45</sup> To the contrary, her extractions suggest that she saw them as speaking very much to the place that she articulated around herself at Newstead. In other words, while she found the *Eastern Tales* to be potent fantasies of

42. On practices of literary extraction after Locke, see esp. David Allan, *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jillian M. Hess, "Coleridge's Fly-Catchers: Adapting Commonplace-Book Form," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 73, no. 3 (July 2012): 464; Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Andrew Piper and Jonathan Sachs, "Introduction: Romantic Cultures of Print—From Miscellaneity to Dialectic," *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* 57–58 (May 2010): n.p.; Corin Throsby, "Byron, Commonplacing and Early Fan Culture," in *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750–1850*, ed. Tom Mole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Samantha Matthews, *Album Verses and Romantic Literary Culture: Poetry, Manuscript, Print, 1780–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020); Ellen Gruber Garvey, *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

43. On reviewers excerpting Byron, see Jerome Christensen, *Lord Byron's Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1993), 104.

44. On readers' marks and affect, see Andrew M. Stauffer, *Book Traces: Nineteenth-Century Readers and the Future of the Library* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021) and his "The Date-Stamped Book" in *The Unfinished Book*, ed. Alexandra Gillespie and Deidre Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

45. Mai-Lin Cheng, "Lara's Stutter," *Studies in Romanticism* 54, no. 5 (Winter 2015): 503–23.

place, what interested her most were not the inert places depicted therein but the process by which the poems themselves made these places into places. As Wildman's choices constantly suggest, this is not only what Byron's poems do, it is also what so many of them are about: the mutual construction of places of imagination and places of reading. Louisa's own efforts to this end took the form of tending to Byron's estate and unfolding her reading of Byron and the Romantics more generally in the space of her commonplace book.

The places most vividly depicted in Wildman's extractions from Byron's *Eastern Tales* are domestic scenes, scenes from the home front. When Wildman extracts from *The Corsair*, Byron's tale of the pirate Conrad who takes on a pasha to free his harem, it is not Conrad's voice we hear nor that of the characters he encounters in his travels, but that of his wife Medora who dies at home before Conrad returns from his voyages. From *The Corsair*, she extracts a passage about Medora waiting for Conrad, watching ships come and go, longing for his ship to finally arrive. Without context, it's hard to guess how the quoted incident fits into the larger narrative. In the extracted passage, Medora thinks she sees Conrad's ship, but realizes eventually that it is in fact not his. The passage is a song from Medora, describing her fruitless search for her husband:

In Conrad's absence wouldst thou have it glad?  
 Without thine ear to listen to my lay,  
 Still must my song my thoughts, my soul betray:  
 Still must each accent to my bosom suit,  
 My heart unhush'd—although my lips were mute!  
 Oh! many a night on this lone couch reclined,  
 My dreaming fear with storms hath wing'd the wind,  
 And deem'd the breath that faintly fann'd thy sail  
 The murmuring prelude of the ruder gale;  
 Though soft, it seem'd the low prophetic dirge,  
 That mourn'd thee floating on the savage surge:  
 Still would I rise to rouse the beacon fire,  
 Lest spies less true should let the blaze expire;  
 And many a restless hour outwatch'd each star,  
 And morning came—and still thou wert afar.  
 Oh! how the chill blast on my bosom blew,  
 And day broke dreary on my troubled view,  
 And still I gazed and gazed—and not a prow  
 Was granted to my tears—my truth—my vow!  
 At length—'twas noon—I hail'd and blest the mast  
 That met my sight—it near'd—Alas it past!<sup>46</sup>

46. Louisa Wildman, [Commonplace Book], 2. See also Byron, *The Corsair*, in *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Press,

Three things stand out here. First is that Medora's name slips away. It appears in Byron's text in the line that immediately precedes what Wildman copies out. Conrad's name remains in the extract, while Medora's identity is rendered obscure and her lament generalized. Second is the extract's focus on returning home, marriage, and longing. Third is the interruption, or reshaping, of narrative context. She models the "reader as gleaner [who] is making something new and personal to herself."<sup>47</sup> The passage Wildman copies ends with the speaker still searching for her beloved: "At length—'twas noon—I hail'd and blest the mast / That met my sight—it near'd—Alas it past!" But, in the very next line of Byron's text, Medora spots Conrad's ship: "Another came—Oh God! 'twas thine at last!"<sup>48</sup> It is a tragic passage in the poem. Medora finds Conrad this time, but a re-reader, as Wildman clearly was, knows that Medora's lament is prescient: in the end, Medora will not live to see Conrad's return. In the full poem, the near tragedy of the scene builds a tension that will only be fulfilled later. Wildman, in her excerpt, draws out the emotional heart of the passage as that early feeling of loss which the poem will eventually render permanent as "the immediate projection of what it nonetheless incompletes."<sup>49</sup>

Wildman's treatment of this passage from Byron helps clarify what extraction does, by extension, what the commonplace genre meant for her. The commonplace book is frequently understood as a device for sorting, storing, and retrieving information, whether as a work of reference or as a mnemonic tool. In Wildman's case, the commonplace book was most importantly something else. We can see by the way that she excises Medora's lament that Louisa knows very well who Medora is and remembers what happens to her. Rather than helping Wildman recall such things, her commonplace book helps her set these things aside. What she extracts is what is most important to her, the fragment of the poem that she wants to share. It is an expression of an interpretation and a moment in a conversation, such as the ones we observed in her conduct with Thomas Wildman, Washington Irving, and others, through fragments. Moments such as these also help us understand that, rather than a "writer's house," in the period of the Wildmans, Newstead Abbey is best understood as a "readers' house," the commonplace book as its signal artifact, and extraction as the paradoxical act that holds it all together.

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1981), 3:163, canto 1, stanza 14, lines 366–87.

47. Deidre Lynch, "Paper Slips: Album, Archiving, Accident," *Studies in Romanticism* 57, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 107.

48. Byron, *The Corsair*, 3:163, canto 1, stanza 14, line 388.

49. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Phillip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 43.

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