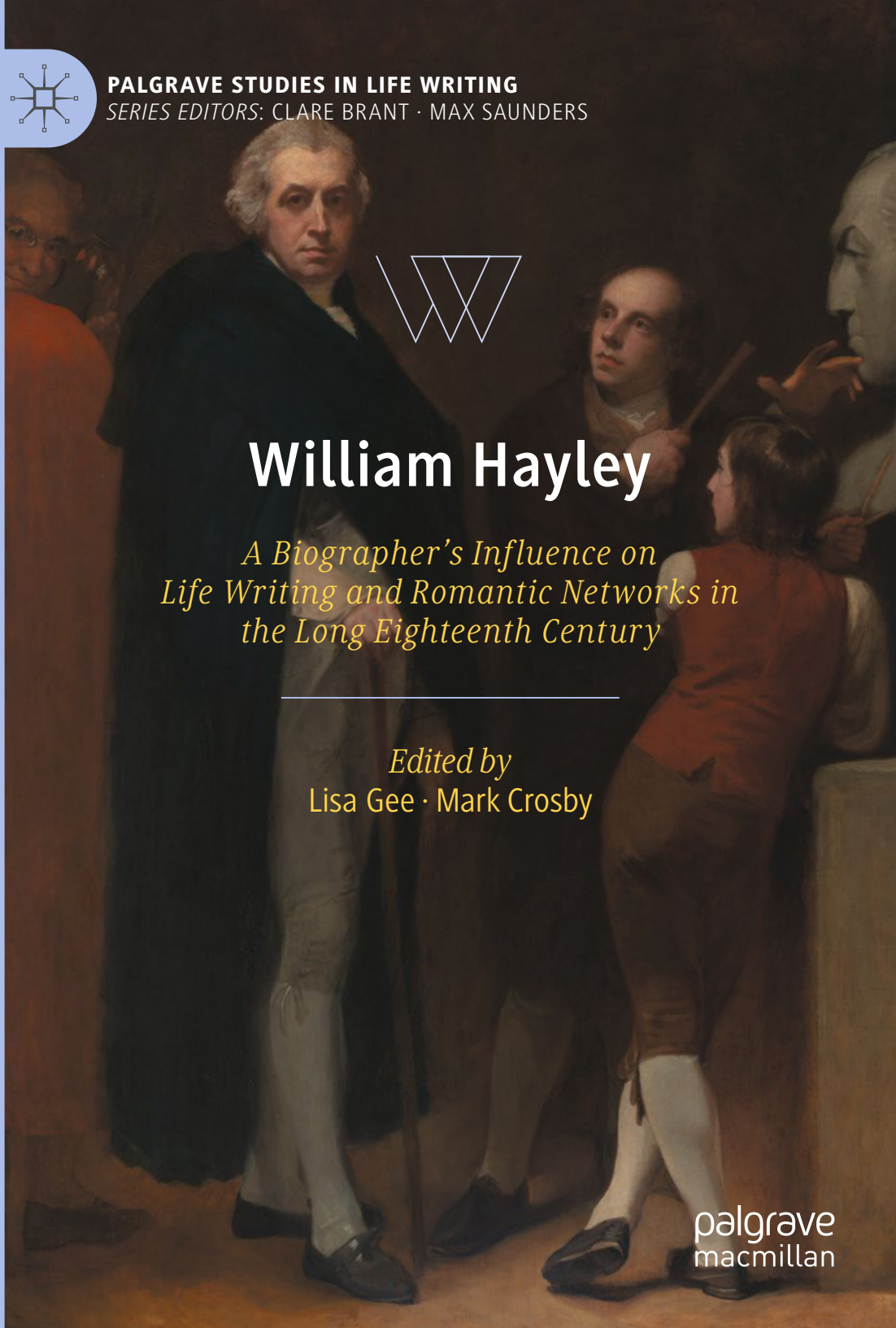

PALGRAVE STUDIES IN LIFE WRITING
SERIES EDITORS: CLARE BRANT · MAX SAUNDERS

William Hayley

A Biographer's Influence on Life Writing and Romantic Networks in the Long Eighteenth Century

Edited by
Lisa Gee · Mark Crosby

palgrave
macmillan

Palgrave Studies in Life Writing

This series features books that address key concepts and subjects in life writing, with an emphasis on new and emergent approaches. It offers specialist but accessible studies of contemporary and historical topics, with a focus on connecting life writing to themes with cross-disciplinary appeal. The series aims to be the place to go to for current and fresh research for scholars and students looking for clear and original discussion of specific subjects and forms; it is also a home for experimental approaches that take creative risks with potent materials.

The term 'Life Writing' is taken broadly so as to reflect its academic, public, digital and international reach, and to continue and promote its democratic tradition. The series seeks contributions that address global contexts beyond traditional territories, and which engage with diversity of race, gender and class. It welcomes volumes on topics of everyday life and culture with which life writing scholarship can engage in transformative and original ways; it also aims to further the political engagement of life writing in relation to human rights, migration, trauma and repression, and the processes and effects of the Anthropocene, including environmental subjects and non-human lives. The series looks for work that challenges and extends how life writing is understood and practised, especially in a world of rapidly changing digital media; that deepens and diversifies knowledge and perspectives on the subject; and which contributes to the intellectual excitement and the world relevance of life writing.

Lisa Gee • Mark Crosby
Editors

William Hayley

A Biographer's Influence on Life Writing and Romantic Networks in the Long Eighteenth Century

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Lisa Gee
Department of Film and
Creative Writing
University of Birmingham
London and Birmingham, UK

Mark Crosby
Department of English
Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS, USA

ISSN 2730-9185 ISSN 2730-9193 (electronic)
Palgrave Studies in Life Writing
ISBN 978-3-031-68304-6 ISBN 978-3-031-68305-3 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-68305-3

Cover illustration: ARTGEN / Alamy Stock Photo

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

For Dora Gee, Aurelia, and Elodie Crosby
Tu ne cede malis, sed contra audentior ito
(Virgil, The Aenied, 6:95)

Acknowledgments

Mark Crosby is indebted to his co-editor, Lisa Gee, and would like to thank Suzanne Reynolds for sharing her time and knowledge of the Hayley collection at the Fitzwilliam Museum. Finally, for her support, humor, and love, Mark dedicates his work in the volume to Shirley.

Lisa Gee is equally indebted to both her co-editor, Mark Crosby, and to Suzanne Reynolds at the Fitzwilliam Museum, as well as to her former colleagues there: George Doji; Mike Jones; Stella Panayotova; Dan Pett; and Jo Vine and to Naomi Billingsley. She would also like to thank Kate Bostock and the Cowper and Newton Museum, and everyone who—over the decades—has been kind enough to listen to her chatter endlessly about William Hayley and his network.

Lisa and Mark would like to thank all the contributors to this volume for their intellectual labors and enthusiasm for the project. We'd also like to thank Molly Beck, Marika Lysandrou, series editors Clare Brant and Max Saunders and their colleagues at Palgrave for their encouragement, patience, and grace as we worked on this book.

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Diana Barsham began researching the life and works of William Hayley while living next door to Eartham House, Hayley's home in Eartham, West Sussex (now Great Ballard School). She was then Head of English and Creative Writing at the University of Chichester and co-edited with Paul Foster one of the first collection of essays on his writing, *William Hayley, Poet, Biographer, and Libertarian: A Reassessment* in 2013.

A biographer, poet, and specialist in nineteenth-century European literature, she has worked at a number of English universities including Birmingham City University, Derby, and Warwick, publishing on a wide range of topics. Her books include *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society, Arthur Conan Doyle and the Meaning of Masculinity* and, most recently, *The Touch of the Magdalen in the Writing of the Fourth Gospel*. Before her retirement, she became a professor of Cultural History at New York University in London where she taught courses on Christianity and Early Cultures as well as English literature.

Her lifelong interest in Jane Austen was reinforced while living close to Godmersham in Kent and she has lectured widely and published a number of articles on her work. She is currently extending her research into Austin's relationship with Hayley into a full-length monograph. With a special interest in Romanticism, she is a trustee of "The Friends of Coleridge" and, when in England, lives in Thomas Poole House Nether Stowey where Coleridge wrote some of his most famous poetry.

Francesca Blanch-Serrat is a postdoctoral fellow at the research project *WINK: Trans-Genre Writing and the Gendering of Intellectual Value in Early Modernity* (funded by an European Research Council starting grant and lead by Carme Font Paz) based at the Department of English at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, where she also teaches English Literature. She is also part of the national research group *Cos i Textualitats: Autories i Subjectivitats en Construcció* ("Body and Textuality: Authorships and Subjectivities under Construction"). She earned her doctoral degree in 2021 with a thesis on Anna Seward's assertion of literary authority, self-presentation, and critical reception in her later-life corpus. Her fields of specialization are literary studies, gender studies, and age studies, and her research is concerned with the construction, evolution, and representation of identity in older age. She analyzes how women writers portray their own maturity and older age in their corpora, and her principal lines of research are the intersection of age, gender, and singlehood in the self-presentation of older single women writers (singlehood); the professional relationships of older women writers with their younger counterparts (intergenerational mentoring); and the impact of age, gender, and single-hood in an author's reception.

Mark Crosby is an Associate Professor at Kansas State University and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. He has published on Blake, William Hayley, Thomas Paine, and William Godwin. Crosby co-edited *Re-envisioning Blake* (Palgrave 2012), *William Blake's Manuscripts: Praxis, Puzzles, and Palimpsests* (Palgrave 2024) and, with Robert N. Essick, *Genesis: William Blake's Last Illuminated Work* (Huntington Library Press 2012). He is currently working on a monograph about Blake's patrons, including Hayley.

Lisa Gee is Assistant Professor in Creative Writing and Digital Media and Research Fellow in Future Thinking at the University of Birmingham. She has been researching William Hayley and his network since the mid-1990s. She has recently contributed a chapter—"Digital Editions: rethinking how we preserve, present and explore literary correspondences"—to *The Routledge Companion to Literary Media* (edited by Astrid Ensslin, Julia Round, Bronwen Thomas, Routledge, 2023), "'A Task enough to make one frantic': William Hayley's Memorialising to the European Journal of Life Writing" (Vol. 9, 2020) and co-edited the digital publication *Ego Media: Life Writing and Online Affordances* (Stanford University Press, 2023) with Max Saunders.

Claudia Thomas Kairoff is Professor Emerita of English at Wake Forest University, where she taught for 36 years, where she also served as Associate Dean of the College. She is the author of *Alexander Pope and his Eighteenth Century Women Readers*, and *Anna Seward and the End of the Eighteenth Century*. She co-edited, with Jennifer Keith, *The Works of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea* (two vols.), and, with Catherine Ingrassia, *More Solid Learning: New Perspectives on Alexander Pope's Dunciad*. She has written numerous articles and book chapters on Pope, Finch, Seward, and other women writers of the long Eighteenth Century.

Alex Kidson was Assistant Keeper and then Curator of British Art at the Walker Art Gallery Liverpool and Lady Lever Art Gallery Port Sunlight from 1982 to 2008. Although his remit covered 600 years of British art he specialized in late eighteenth-century painting, and he curated for the Walker monographic exhibitions on George Romney (2002) and (with Elizabeth Barker) Joseph Wright of Derby (2007). He also wrote permanent collection catalogues on the earlier British paintings in both galleries. From 2008 to 2015 he was Special Projects Fellow at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, London, completing a catalogue *raisonné* of Romney's paintings. Since 2015 he has been a freelance art-historian. His most recent book, *After Darkness Light* (2020) is a study of the first six Autumn Exhibitions held in Liverpool 1871–76.

Peter Knaus is an independent scholar and currently works as a teacher in southern Germany. He has been researching the miniature painter Jeremiah Meyer since 2007. The State Office for the Preservation of Historical Monuments in Baden-Württemberg has commissioned him to make transcriptions of old manuscripts, some of which have been published. Peter is currently writing a monograph on Jeremiah Meyer, including a comprehensive catalogue raisonné entitled *Jeremiah Meyer R. A. (1735–89) Royal Academician and Miniature Painter to his Majesty—His Life, Works and Family*, which will be published by the University Press Tübingen in 2024–25. Peter is also a member of the Arbeitskreis Werkverzeichnis (Working Group on Compiling a Catalogue Raisonné) and published at the International Conference at Celle Castle, Germany, in the following proceedings: Artists, Functions, Techniques, and Collections: *The Life and Career of Jeremiah Meyer R.A. (1735–89), during the Reign of King George III*. Peter is currently a consultant and member of the preparatory team and a contributor to the forthcoming

catalogue on Jeremiah Meyer, which will accompany the exhibition at the Stadtmuseum Tübingen, Germany, in October 2024.

Susan Matthews is the author of *Blake, Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness* (2011) and co-editor of *Romanticism and Illustration* (2019).

Morton D. Paley is co-editor of *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly*. He has published a number of books on literature and art in the Romantic period, including *The Apocalyptic Sublime*, *Portraits of Coleridge*, *The Continuing City*: William Blake's *Jerusalem*, and *The Traveller in the Evening*. He has been a Guggenheim Fellow twice, a Senior Fulbright Lecturer at the University of Heidelberg, a Research Fellow of the National Endowment of the Humanities, and an Andrew W. Mellon Research Fellow. He received the Distinguished Scholar Award of the Keats-Shelley Association of America in 2002. He co-edited *The European Reception of William Blake*, published in two volumes by Bloomsbury, and is doing research for a study of George Romney and the literary imagination.

Silvia Riccardi is a postdoctoral researcher at Umeå University specializing in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature and visual culture. She is the author of articles and chapters on Blake, Fuseli, and on the reception of Dante in Romantic England, including Blake's illustrations of the *Commedia* in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly*. She is currently working on Blake's graphic and textual forms of biomorphism alongside a book project on Dark Romanticism.

Annise Rogers (she/her) is a Postgraduate Researcher focusing on William Blake's *Vala*, or *The Four Zoas* and biblical poetical forms. She has written for *VALA, the Journal of the Blake Society*, and has a chapter on the connections between the visual art of Tolkien and Blake in the upcoming book *The Romantic Spirit in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien*. She is communications director for *Global Blake*, an international network of scholars focusing on the art and poetry of William Blake. Her areas of interests include Blake's art, poetry, the influence of John Milton on Blake, magical realism literature, and alternative readings of Blake and J.R.R. Tolkien.

Nicholas Shrimpton taught at the Universities of Liverpool and Oxford where he is now an Emeritus Fellow of Lady Margaret Hall. His new edition of the *Selected Poems of William Blake* for Oxford World's Classics was published in 2019. He has also edited Trollope's *The Prime Minister*, *The Warden*, and *An Autobiography*, and Disraeli's novel *Sybil*. His recent

publications include '"To Tirzah", or William Blake's Changes of Mind' (*Essays in Criticism*, January 2021), '"Players and painted stage": Symbolising the Future in Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*' (*Symbolism*, Spring 2021), 'Dreaming spires? Arnold's Oxford' (*The New Criterion*, September 2023), and 'Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* and the "Panoramic" Novel' (*Essays in Criticism*, September 2023).

Jason Whittaker is Head of the School of English and Journalism at the University of Lincoln. He has written extensively on William Blake and his reception, and his most recent works are *Divine Images: The Life & Work of William Blake* (Reaktion Books, 2021) and *Jerusalem: Blake, Parry and the Fight for Englishness* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

Abbreviations

William Hayley's Works

Anecdotes	*Anecdotes of the Family Life & Writings of William Hayley the Biographer of Cowper*. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, GEN MSS VOL 352.
Two Memorials	*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.
Painting	An *Essay on Painting: in two epistles to Mr. Romney* (London: T. Payne, 1778).
History	*An Essay on History; in three epistles to Edward Gibbon, Esq.* (London: J. Dodsley, 1780).
Triumphs	*The Triumphs of Temper* (London 1781). There were eighteen editions of *Triumphs* published during Hayley's lifetime. With each edition, he revised and edited the poem. In the following chapters, contributors have used different editions. We have included dates in parenthesis to denote the different editions.

Epic Poetry	*An Essay on Epic Poetry* (London: J. Dodsley, 1782).
Old Maids	*A Philosophical, Historical, and Moral Essay on Old Maids.* 3 vols. (London, 1785).
Poems and Plays	*Poems and Plays, By William Hayley Esq.*, 6 vols. (London, T. Cadell, 1788).
Milton (1794)	*The Life of John Milton*, 3 vols. (Boydell and Nicol, 1794–7).
Milton (1796)	*The Life of John Milton* (London, Cadell and Davies, 1796).
National Advocates	*The National Advocates* (London: J. Debrett, 1795).
Sculpture	*An Essay on Sculpture: in a series of epistles to John Flaxman, Esq.* RA (London, T. Cadell, 1800).
Cowper (1803)	*The Life and Letters of William Cowper, Esq. with Remarks on Epistolary Writers* 3 vols. (London, J. Johnson and Co., 1803–4).
Cowper (1812)	*The Life and Letters of William Cowper, Esq. with Remarks on EpistolaryWriters. A New Edition.* 4 vols. (London, J. Johnson and co., 1812).
Romney	*The Life of George Romney, Esq.* (Chichester, 1809).
Memoirs	*Memoirs of the life and writings of William Hayley, written by himself. With extracts from his private correspondence and unpublished poetry. And Memoirs of his son, T.A. Hayley* (London: Henry Colburn, 1823).
Memoirs of TAH	*Memoirs of Thomas Alphonso Hayley* (as above).
Young Widow	*The Young Widow; or, the History of Cornelia Sedley, in a series of letters.* (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson. 1789).

Other Sources

Bishop	Morchard Bishop, *Blake's Hayley, the Life, Works, and Friendships of William Hayley* (London: Gollancz, 1951).
Erdman	Erdman, David. V., ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, revised edition (New York, 1982). Unless otherwise noted, all references to Blake's texts are taken from Erdman followed by the relevant page number.

	Original spelling and grammar have been maintained throughout.
Fitzwilliam	Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.
OSB	*James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection*, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
WSRO	West Sussex Record Office. Chichester, West Sussex.

List of Figures

William Hayley: Milton Biographer and 'Violent Republican'

William Hayley and the Paintings of George Romney

William Hayley and the Paintings of George Romney

Introduction: 'Another Honest Chronicler'

Mark Crosby and Lisa Gee

William Hayley was a poet, biographer, man of letters, and cultivator of influential literary and artistic networks during the final decades of the eighteenth century. Considered one of the brightest stars in the poetical firmament, Hayley is now chiefly remembered for his patronage of William Blake, and his friendships with George Romney and William Cowper. As a poet, Hayley's importance during his own lifetime has been overshadowed by various disparaging remarks about his poetry: his literary star began to wane after the publication of *The Triumphs of Music* in 1804, which the *Poetical Register* described as a "most feeble production."[1] In *English Bards and Scottish Reviewers*, Byron echoes the *Political Register* in his

[1] *Poetical Register*, (London 1804) 483.

M. Crosby
Department of English, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, USA
e-mail: crosbym@ksu.edu

L. Gee (✉)
Department of Film and Creative Writing, University of Birmingham, London and Birmingham, UK
e-mail: mailme@lisagee.net; l.h.gee@bham.ac.uk

L. Gee, M. Crosby (eds.), *William Hayley*, Palgrave Studies in Life Writing, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-68305-3_1

assessment of Hayley's poetry as "For ever feeble and for ever tame."[2] As poetic fashions shifted at the turn of the nineteenth century, public taste for poetry like Hayley's diminished and his reputation suffered. In his 1824 review of Hayley's posthumous *Memoirs*, Southey characterizes his poetry as displaying a "constitutional feebleness": he had written to Byron on 4 August 1802 arguing that "Everything about that man is good except his poetry".[3] In 1830, George Romney's son John attacked Hayley's character rather than his poetry, accusing him of deceit, selfishness, and flattery, further claiming that "there was a wrong-headedness in the general conduct of Mr Hayley".[4] An 1837 review of *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781) conflates these strands of criticism to describe the poem as "dull, tedious and prosaic", adding that, "the mind of Hayley was not of a high order; and it is therefore scarcely to be wondered at that he became a spoiled and pampered man—spoiled by the world, which so vastly overrated his powers".[5] As Jason Whittaker and Annise Rogers explore in Chap. 2, Hayley's reputation has also suffered at the hands of Blake's biographers and critics. Armed with Blake's correspondence from 1802 onwards, which charts his increasing dissatisfaction with the reproductive engraving work for Hayley, and a series of satiric epigrams directed at Hayley that Blake composed c. 1809, Blake scholars and biographers typically cast Hayley as a creatively benumbing patron and an unimaginative and tedious man. Unfortunately, many Blake biographers and scholars

[2] Byron's description of Hayley's poetry comes in the following stanza:

> In many marble-cover'd volumes view
> HAYLEY, in vain attempting something new.
> Whether he spin his comedies in rhyme,
> Or scrawl, as WOOD and BARLAY walk, 'gainst time,
> His style in youth or age is still the same;
> For ever feeble and for ever tame.
> Triumphant first see "Temper's Triumphs" shine!"
> At last I'm sure they triumph'd over mind.
> Of "Music's Triumphs" all who read may swear
> That luckless Music never triumph'd there.

See Lord Byron, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*; A Satire, 2nd edn. (London, James Cawthorn, 1809) ll. 303–312.

[3] Southey, Robert. 1856. *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, ed. Wood Warter, John 4 vols. London: Longman. 1:156.

[4] Romney, John. 1830. *George Romney*. London: Baldwin and Cradock 139.

[5] *The Book of Gems, the Poets and Artists of Great Britain*, ed. S.C. Hall (London 1837), 246.

ignore or disregard Hayley's own view of Blake, including a published description that positions Blake in a manner comparable with Hayley's view of his friend George Romney rather than associating Blake with what was considered the less prestigious, more mechanical (and therefore less creative) trade of engraving: "My friend, Mr. Blake, the Artist […] a person of varied talents, and of a creative imagination".[6] As Nicolas Shrimpton persuasively shows in Chap. 14 of this volume, revisiting Hayley's relationship with Blake with nuance and care yields insights into their relationship and its productive effect on Blake.

Most of Hayley's contemporaries considered him the poetical successor to Alexander Pope and his published work, which comprises plays, poems, a novel, didactic prose and biographies, appealed to educated and fashionable tastes. Indeed, Hayley was so popular during the final decades of the eighteenth century that in the *Quarterly Review* Southey concedes that despite his own view "[Hayley] was the most fashionable of living poets [who] would, in no inconsiderable degree, excite the attention of what is called the reading public".[7]

The reasons behind the comparative lack of critical engagement with Hayley's contributions to the art of life-writing are, perhaps, more complex. As a biographer, Hayley's career began with a controversial life of John Milton in the mid-1790s, before focusing on members of his own circle—achieving his greatest critical and commercial success with *The Life and Letters of William Cowper, Esq.* (1803–4)—and concluding with an account of his own life, and that of his son, Thomas Alphonso Hayley. Hayley's biographies of Milton and Cowper are particularly notable for how he—forced by others to omit key details from these works—sought other means to communicate these omissions to interested readers (see Chaps. 5 and 10).

It's clear from the final paragraph Hayley contributed to his *Memoirs* (added to and edited posthumously by his friend, William Cowper's cousin and carer the Reverend John Johnson), and from the quantity and content of his extant correspondence, that Hayley both hoped and anticipated that his life would be edited and—and subsequently—written to reveal much that he couldn't make public in his lifetime. The paragraph, (written, as the *Memoirs* are throughout, in the third person), reads:

[6] Hayley, William 1802. Preface to *Designs to A Series of Ballads.* Chichester: J. Seagrave i.
[7] Southey, Robert. 1824. *Quarterly Review* (July) 31:263.

> 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 as peculiarly delight in the history of authors; a branch of literature perhaps inferior to none in its attractions, and also in its utility![8]

We can surmise, then, that Hayley's approach to biography follows James Boswell's precept that the biographer must not write a "panegyrick, which must be all praise, but his Life".[9] As Boswell notes, such a life "must not be supposed to be entirely perfect".[10] Hayley was also informed more directly by William Mason's *Poems and Letters of Thomas Gray: With Memoirs of His Life and Writings* (1775) in using the subject's own writings. While Hayley is often concerned with recuperating and memorializing his subjects (himself included), like Boswell and Mason he considers that the duty of the biographer is to present unvarnished accounts: although, as Lisa Gee shows in Chap. 9, there were limits to what should be presented, and these limits were gendered. In his biography of Milton, Hayley sought to recuperate the poet, yet refused to shy away from Milton's private life and, as Mark Crosby shows in Chap. 10, his republicanism, even though he was writing during the politically charged period of the early 1790s. At the same time that he was working on the *Life of Milton* (1794–6), Hayley assisted John Baker Holroyd, Lord Sheffield in preparing Edward Gibbon's papers and manuscript autobiography for publication. These experiences in life-writing clearly informed his next published work of life-writing: with *The Life and Letters of William Cowper, Esq.*, Hayley interpolates personal correspondence, aiming to offer direct access to his subject's internal life, his debilitating spiritual struggles, alluding as directly as possible to his friend's mental health issues. As Hayley states, the inclusion of such material enables Cowper to "display [himself] as far as possible, in his own interesting language".[11] Yet, while allowing Cowper to

[8] *Memoirs*, 2:76.

[9] Boswell, James. 1934–64. *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, ed. Hill, G. B., rev. L. F. Powell. 6 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1:30.

[10] Ibid.

[11] *Cowper* (1812), 1:ix.

reveal his character and "speak for himself", the editing and publication of the letters and manuscript poems was also informed by Lady Harriet Hesketh's determination that her cousin's mental illness be downplayed.

Hayley's inclusion of Cowper's letters also speaks to the circulation of letters in the eighteenth century. As Clare Brant writes: "Correspondence helped construct the reputation of men of letters", and, "[p]eople became letter-literate in new ways". "Reviewing people's lives through their letters was a properly melancholic engagement with personal 'remains'. … [L]etters became no longer just 'words' but a form of the men themselves".[12] Hayley tells us in a letter printed in his *Memoirs* that "I esteem letters most sacred things".[13] Thus, publishing Cowper's correspondence in this context was both about memorialising and effective, immersive storytelling. After all, letters were central to the development of the novel, with one estimate suggesting that between 1741 and 1800 "a total of almost one-fifth of the entire fictional output" (including Hayley's sole published novel[14]) was epistolary.[15] The Mason-ic life-and-letters approach was, of course, most effective when the letters were written by people who—like Cowper—wrote beautifully. Hayley had a much trickier task when he came to write his life of Romney, whose correspondence tended to the perfunctory.

Born in Chichester in 1745, like his friend Gibbon, and frenemy George Steevens,[16] Hayley attended Dr. Woddeson's school at Kingston upon Thames (now Kingston Grammar School). After he contracted a fever there and nearly died, he was privately educated before attending Eton. He started at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in 1763, leaving three years later—like many gentlemen—without a degree, and attempted to establish himself as a playwright in London. Despite initial encouragement from David Garrick, none of his work made it to the stage. Hayley's first play *The Afflicted Father* (1770), which was conceived as a cautionary tale against suicide was followed by a translation of Pierre Corneille's *Rodogune*,

[12] C. Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 48, 2, 58.

[13] *Memoirs*, 1:224. The context is him sharing a letter from Gibbon, and permitting Eliza to show it to her host, William Melmoth, but no-one else.

[14] Hayley, *The Young Widow; or, the History of Cornelia Sedley, in a series of letters* (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1789). See Chap. 7 in this volume for more on this novel.

[15] Godfrey Frank Singer, *The Epistolary Novel: Its Origin, Development, Decline, and Residuary Influence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933) 99–100.

[16] See *Memoirs* 1:296–297.

re-titled *The Syrian Queen*. Neither were performed, so Hayley turned his attention to poetry.

After his first (secretly contracted) engagement ended dramatically, Hayley married Eliza Ball, and, in 1774, the couple, together with Hayley's mother, returned to Sussex, settling at his family's small estate of Eartham, about nine miles from Chichester.[17] Despite adopting the moniker "Hermit" and writing in an elegy of how "Ne'er will he wish thy tranquil shades to leave, / And fly ignobly to the shrines of power",[18] Hayley was a frequent visitor to London, usually staying with friends—most often Romney or the surgeon William Long—and, in 1787 "provided himself with a cheap, pleasant, and useful residence in town, for literary purposes".[19] Hayley's "literary purposes" typically involved the business of bringing works to the press. Most of Hayley's writing was done in the rural retirement, in Sussex, first at his Eartham estate then later at his Marine Turret in Felpham.

Anthony Ashley Cowper, the third earl of Shaftesbury, offered a formulation of retirement—as a necessary restorative prelude to social and political re-engagement in the *polis*—that informed the popular perception of retirement during Hayley's day. Such a view is described in a letter to the *London Chronicle*, in which the anonymous author claimed to: "have exchanged [...] active life for rural solitude and proposed to keep up no other than literary intercourse with the world".[20] Hayley's approach to rural life appears to adapt Shaftesburian retirement by incorporating the communal notion of retirement articulated in the pastoral poetry of James Thomson and William Shenstone. Yet, unlike these poets, Hayley also saw that retirement was not subjective; it was not confined to expounding the pleasures rural retreat and the perils of the metropolis. Anticipating William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Hayley saw retirement, and the works produced in retirement, in terms of the formation and interaction of a close circle of like-minded individuals. Many of the first poems Hayley composed at Eartham were directed at people he either knew or wanted to know. *An Essay on Painting* (1778), for example, was dedicated to the painter George Romney, and while providing an

[17] See Gee's discussion of Hayley's engagements and marriages in Chap. 9 of this volume.
[18] Ibid., 1:129.
[19] Ibid., 1:355.
[20] Quoted in Marcia Pointon, "Gainsborough and the Landscape of Retirement" *Art History* 2:4 (December 1979) 452.

historical survey of European painting, the poem champions Romney as the pre-eminent artist in Britain. In *An Essay on Epic Poetry* (1784), dedicated to Mason, Hayley deploys the metaphor of rural toil to describe the process of literary composition. The poetic muse is transformed into a swain, whose "labor" is inspired by his surroundings, which "provide the Golden Harvest of the mind".[21] Retirement also encouraged the imaginative potential, and offered the perspective from which to engage with, and attempt to improve, polite society. Hayley's first—and most successful—publication directed at polite society was *The Triumphs of Temper*. This poem announced his arrival to the wider public as poet and commentator.

In the preface to the first edition of *Triumphs*, Hayley situates his vocation and his poem in the Shaftesburian tradition of poetry: "It seems to be a kind of duty incumbent on those, who devote themselves to poetry, to render a powerful, and too often a perverted, art as beneficial to life, and manners, as the limits of composition, and the character of modern times, will allow".[22] Aimed at instructing young women, *Triumphs* is a mock epic that invokes Homer, Dante, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope to set out a model for the regulation of female sensibility. Comprising six cantos that alternate between drawing-room melodrama and the allegorical realms of spleen, sensibility and wisdom, the narrative follows Hayley's heroine Serena as she negotiates the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Hayley explains that to achieve his objectives, he felt it "absolutely necessary to introduce both the agency and abode of SPLEEN", acknowledging the challenges of following Pope in doing so.[23] It's spleen—manifesting as:

> The sullen passion, and the hasty pet;
> The swelling-lip, the tear-distended eye,
> The peevish question, the perverse reply;
> The moody humour, that, like rains and fire,
> Blends cold disgust with unsubdu'd desire,[24]

—that regularly jeopardises this transition. While, as the poem demonstrates, it's not only young women who fall victim to this particularly

[21] Hayley, *Works* II: 68.
[22] Hayley, *Triumphs*, 3rd End v.
[23] Hayley, *Triumphs*, 3rd Edn vi.
[24] Ibid., 13.

grumpy form of low mood—Serena's father and her spinster aunt Penelope are also afflicted—Hayley's central conceit is that by experiencing—and triumphing over—'Mental strife' via her struggles with spleen, Serena is transformed from a naive girl-child into adult, 'accomplished wife' material. Deploying satire in his descriptions of the quotidian instigators of spleen, Hayley highlights the inconsistency of Whig policies, the superciliousness of the aristocracy, and the regulation of female sexuality by older women. In the Preface, Hayley defends his use of satire as an instructional device, arguing that like Alessandro Tassoni before him he had created a new species of poetry by adapting Augustan satire for a contemporary audience:

> I imagined it might be possible to give a new character to this mixed species of poetry, and to render it by its object, though not in its execution, more noble than the most beautiful and refined satire can be. We have seen it carried to inimitable perfection, in the most delicate raillery on female foibles: - it remained to be tried, if it might not also aspire to delineate the more engaging features of female excellence.[25]

Hayley believed that his version of the mock-heroic was sufficiently capacious to accommodate satire and epic, the serious and the comic, the visionary and the real, to achieve the same purpose: instructing young women to exercise their temper to regulate the socially damaging effects of spleen.

Triumphs was a critical and commercial success with 18 editions published in Britain during Hayley's lifetime. The poem was frequently anthologized with many reviewers lauding the book. *The Gentleman's Magazine* compared Hayley to Pope, declaring:

> In heroic-comic poetry Pope has hitherto been unrivalled and of all his productions his 'Rape of the Lock' displays the greatest and most original beauties. Happily for the present age, we now can boast another, and as to its moral tendency [it] is much superior.[26]

When Hayley died in 1820, Amelia Opie composed his epitaph, celebrating his status as most popular poet of the period: 'Fashion smiled upon Serena's Bard.' Buoyed by both the commercial success of *Triumphs* and

[25] Hayley, *Triumphs* 1st edn. viii–ix.
[26] *Gentleman's Magazine* (1781) 51:228.

the critical successes of his 1778 *Poetical Epistle to an Eminent Painter* and 1780 *Essay on History*, Hayley composed *An Essay on Epic Poetry*, which sets out his ideas for improving British poetry, and by implication, society. Hayley conceptualizes this improvement by presenting a peripatetic muse that leaps through history, between poets and nations. Inspired by his own difficulties composing an epic about the *Magna Carta*, Hayley claims that the epic form has virtually ceased to exist. This was due, in part, to the rise of the novel, but for Hayley it was the critical perception of the epic form that had caused most damage. Hayley argues that an over-reliance on a system of rules inherited from classical poets, and codified by subsequent poets and critics, inhibits the imaginative freedom necessary for the composition of epic poetry. Following Dryden and Pope, Hayley claims that the chief culprits of the systematization of epic poetry were literary critics such as Samuel Johnson and Joseph Warton, who had subjected the epic to a strict nexus of rules.[27] In his notes to the *Epic Poetry*, Hayley states:

> A critic [Bishop Warburton], who lately rose to great eminence in our own country, has endeavoured by a more singular method to damp the ardour of inventive Genius, and to annihilate the hopes of all who would aspire to the praise of originality in the higher species of poetical composition.[28]

Hayley's own criticism is written in heroic couplets, which may be an ironic attack on what he saw as the systematization of poetry prevalent in the eighteenth century.[29] The aim of the poem is to revive the epic form by encouraging future poets to cast off the neoclassical rules that have been imposed on epic poetry and embrace imaginative freedom in order to compose a new epic. Hayley does, however, impose some of his own rules on this new epic, which should be composed by a British poet and concern a specifically British subject:

[27] Hayley's dislike of critics prompted him to begin composing a five-act play in 1800 satirizing critics, see Osborn MSS, file. 6923. In a letter to the printer John Nichols of 17 April 1810, Hayley also complains about "so many anonymous Malignants [who] assume the Mask of periodical criticism to indulge their Hatred, Malice, & all uncharitableness". Osborn MSS, file, 17291.

[28] Hayley, *Works* II:104.

[29] Philip Cox argues that Hayley's use of Augustan couplet is evidence of his "essential conservatism", which runs counter to the "imaginative freedom" called for in the poem. See Philip Cox, *Blake, Hayley and Milton: A Reassessment*, *English Studies 5* (1994) 434.

> …… in our land, the nation of the earth
> Ordain'd to give the brightest Heroes birth! –
> By Some strange fate, which rul'd each Poet's tongue,
> Her dearest Worthies yet remain unsung[30]

The concept of freedom is central to the poem. Invoking the republican tradition of the epic, Hayley anticipates many of the debates regarding the circulation of ideas and freedom of speech in the 1790s with his insistence that literature can only flourish in a climate of freedom. Despite not achieving the commercial success of *Triumphs*, *Epic Poetry* received favourable reviews that highlight Hayley's extensive knowledge of his subject—evident in the copious notes to the poem that include the first published English translations of extended extracts from Dante's *Inferno*, as discussed by Silvia Riccardi in Chap. 8, and Ercilla's *La Araucana*. Hayley's impressive scholarship led Southey to remark that, "A greater effect was produced upon the rising generation of scholars, by the Notes to his Essay on Epic poetry, than by any other contemporary work."[31] While *Triumphs* established Hayley's contemporary popularity, and provided much-needed income (Hayley was not as well-off as previous commentators have assumed), *Epic Poetry* established his reputation as a literary scholar and led to William Pitt's offer of the laureateship. The prospect of the becoming poet laureate was, for Hayley, an "intended Favor", and one that he declined. Despite informing Pitt that he wasn't worthy of the role, Hayley wrote, in the first of his *Two Memorials* that he turned down the offer for a combination of "personal & patriotic reasons", which were founded

> first on the absurd duties annex'd to the office, & secondly on the very shattered state of my own Health & Faculties.—I thought I could not express my Gratitude to Mr Pitt in any mode so worthy of us both, as by persuading him first to render the ridiculous office infinitely more fit for a man of Genius & character to hold, & then by saying with great sincerity detur dignion.[32]

For some of Hayley's contemporaries, it was his championing and translating of Dante's *Divine Comedy* that proved most influential. For others—Southey and Blake, in particular—it was his work on Milton. Throughout

[30] Hayley, *Epic Poetry* 110.
[31] Southey, *Quarterly Review* (July 1824) 31:283.
[32] *Two Memorials* 42–43.