

Anne Hunter and the Body-Snatchers: An  
Anatomy of Romantic Medicine, Politics and  
Elegy

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MA Dissertation 2010

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## Introduction

*It is a gloomy night in the depths of a chilling winter. An oppressive despondency hangs in the air. The constant threat of political discord and news from across the channel of revolutionary violence permeates the minds of those absent from the midnight streets of London. The house in Earls Court looms beyond the tall iron railings, the call of the various exotic animals which patrol the grounds are silenced as the dark fog settles, obscuring the building partially from view. Barely visible from the street, the light from the dining room casts a warm glow on the mist; the heart of the Hunters' home is alive with music, dancing and discussion. Beautiful notes flow from the piano, enchanting the guests with Scottish airs and carefully penned lyrics, as the charming hostess casts a warm eye over those she has gathered together in a coterie friendship laced with a dedication to art, literature and poetry. She is graceful and elegant, with a smile which hints at a brave yet tortured soul. While the warm glow and the faint notes filter through the midnight mists, from a small basement window a piercing clinical glare of light distracts the eye from the familial comforts of the dining room, to the haunting silhouette of a figure, hunched over a cold and lifeless form, frantically working at his grisly task with a certain deathly precision. Suddenly, a roar of raucous laughter from the party interrupts the shadowy figure; he ascends the stairs and dramatically crashes through the doors of the dining room, causing a wave of stunned silence to wash over the gathered musical professors, connoisseurs and artistic vagrants.*

*'I knew nothing of this kick-up, and I ought to have been informed of it beforehand; but as I am now returned home to study, I hope the present company will retire,'<sup>1</sup>*

*The hostess's guests bid a hasty retreat to the sound of her continuing apology. The gas lamps are dimmed and the candles decorating the upper stories of the house are snuffed out, the figure returns to his study. Faintly in the distance, a small flicker of light is emitted from the depths of the garden, as two shadowy figures slowly emerge. Slowly, they make their way to the rear entrance of the house, a heavy wooden door barring entry to a narrow stone staircase leading down to the anatomist's sinister lair. As they knock, the shadowy figure creeps up the staircase and the door creaks open. The two men haul a heavy sack down into the basement, straining as their gruesome task weighs them down. The doctor slips them a fee that quells their moral apprehension, and they escape quietly into the night with the promise of a fresh delivery within the next week. The figure turns to his most recent possession, unties the bag and grimaces at the smell that billows from its contents. This was certainly not the freshly preserved body he had requested, but with the strengthened security throughout the town's graveyards, and the dark whisperings of the 'resurrection men' haunting the fears of Londoners, he needed to be grateful for whatever he could get – even if the crawling corpse had been consuming itself for several days. This made his work more difficult; dissection is a meticulous task. He turns back to the basement room and drags the cadaver onto the cold slab, slowly closing the heavy door so as to hide both himself and his dark intent from the rest of the world.*

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<sup>1</sup>John Hunter, quoted in Stephen Paget, *Masters of Medicine: John Hunter* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897) pp.95-6

The gothic fiction of the late nineteenth century, epitomised by novels such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*<sup>2</sup>, entertained readers with the horrors of a 'science gone wrong'. From the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*<sup>3</sup> in 1818, the medical profession and the theme of re-animation and resurrection had become a critical theme of this sensationalist genre. However, while authors were successful in creating eccentric fictionalisations, their stories emerged from a very real fear that had haunted the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries following the growth, and subsequent demonization of the medical profession – in particular the advances of modern surgery. The above fictionalisation of the house in Earl's Court parodies the recognised nineteenth century anatomist figure which had been inherited from the Romantic period. This dissertation intends to be part of the movement beyond the demonization of the medical profession, as I strive to adopt the same challenge that the glowing hostess of my piece attempts through her songs and poetry. I am attempting to construct an anatomy of how the poetry of the Romantic period speaks for demonised science. Earlier literary criticisms and readings of the Romantic poets often suggested that the Romantic period was far removed from the realms of science and attempted to actively avoid any advances in the scientific world. However, recent work, especially following the new historicist application to Romantic poetry, has highlighted the influence which science had upon the literature produced during the period. Books such as Richard Holmes' *The Age of Wonder* act as a testament to the development of this academic debate:

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' *The Strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales of Terror* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2003)

<sup>3</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

Romanticism as a cultural force is generally regarded as intensely hostile to science, its ideal of subjectivity eternally opposed to that of scientific objectivity. But I do not believe this was always the case, or that the terms are so mutually exclusive.<sup>4</sup>

I hope that my dissertation will act as a contribution to an understanding of how the two seemingly separate disciplines – medicine and poetry – interacted.

The figure in the basement of the house in Earl's Court is John Hunter (1728 – 1793); famously regarded as the father of modern surgical techniques and revered as a seminal figure in the science of anatomy since his death in 1793. Various biographical and historical studies examine Hunter's extraordinary life, including *New aspects of John and William Hunter* by Jane M. Oppenheimer<sup>5</sup>, *John Hunter 1728-1793* by George Quist<sup>6</sup>, and most recently, Wendy Moore's *The Knife Man*<sup>7</sup>. These works certainly shed light on the reality beyond the gothic lens through which the lives of anatomists such as Hunter have been viewed (with fact often seeming more sensationalist than the fiction created). However, while the life and work of this illustriously interesting man has attracted much scholarly attention, his wife, an affluent poetess, has been largely overlooked. The charming hostess, whose beautiful attention to music and poetry created an ambience that filled her home with some of the most eminent names of the period, truly embodies the fears, apprehensions and debates that surrounded medicine during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. The poetry of Anne Hunter (1742-1821), allows a unique view into contemporary debates surrounding not only the world of medicine and anatomy, but also

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Holmes, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (London: Harper Press, 2008) p.xvi

<sup>5</sup> Jane M. Oppenheimer,, *New aspects of John and William Hunter* (London : Heinemann Medical Books, 1946)

<sup>6</sup> George Quist, *John Hunter 1728-1793* (London : Heinemann Medical, 1981)

<sup>7</sup> Wendy Moore, *The Knife Man: The extraordinary Life and Times of John Hunter, Father of Modern Surgery* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2005)

the delicate matter of death, mourning and elegy – two worlds that were symbiotically intertwined. I hope to illustrate that, through the marriage of John and Anne Hunter, the worlds of literature and medicine were also wed, and that Anne Hunter's actively interacts with the debates emerging from the contemporary scientific community. I will also be drawing contextual links between Anne Hunter and canonical Romantic writers and texts as a contribution to a new historicist understanding of Romantic literature and cross-disciplinary networks, by considering the literature of the period as engaging in an ongoing debate.

In 1802 Joanna Baillie convinced Anne Hunter to publish a collection of about sixty poems entitled *Poems* under the name Mrs. John Hunter, she later followed this with *The Sports of the Genii* in 1804. Until this point, Anne had seen around thirty of her poems published in broadsheets, but mostly only attributed to 'A Lady' – if not completely anonymously. The inspiration from her niece, and the financial struggle she faced following the death of her husband, encouraged Anne Hunter to take credit for her own writing. Most of the poems which have been collected by Caroline Grigson exist mostly in manuscript. Anne regarded poetry as a social form, something which could hold together friendship groups and keep relationships strong. Her poetry was circulated amongst her close group of friends, and I would like to offer her, not merely as a published poetess; but also as a coterie writer whose work is highly conversationalist and entwined with social relationships.

Anne Hunter has been largely ignored in the study of Romantic poetry, with her work existing in only a few anthologies of Romantic Women writers, such as Roger Lonsdale's

*Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*<sup>8</sup> and Andrew Ashfield's *Romantic women poets, 1770-1838: an Anthology*<sup>9</sup>. In 2009 Caroline Grigson published *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*<sup>10</sup> – a concise collection of over 200 of Hunter's poems collected from broadsheets, manuscripts and her published works. Grigson also provides an in-depth biographical study of the Hunters' lives, including their marriage and a detailed description of Anne's career. The introduction, written by Isobel Armstrong, provides a brief yet useful analysis of some of her more prominent poems, detailing some of the political and personal contexts crucial to an understanding of her literary work. To date, this is one of the only books written about Anne Hunter. My intention for this dissertation is to locate Anne Hunter firmly in her contemporary culture and within the company of other Romantic writers, in an effort to prove the unique access she enjoyed to the worlds of science and literature, and to suggest that this stance allowed her to negotiate one of the major issues haunting Romanticism – the nature of the soul. I will be composing a new historicist reading of her work to demonstrate the almost dialogic relationship which existed between the Romantic poets, their poetry existing in a conversational and responsive relationship with other texts and events.

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<sup>8</sup> *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)

<sup>9</sup> *Romantic Women Poets 1770-1838: an Anthology* ed. Andrew Ashfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995)

<sup>10</sup> Caroline Grigson *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009)



## Chapter One : Anne Hunter: Defending the Medical World

Dorothy and Roy Porter's introduction to *Patient's Progress: Doctors and Doctoring in Eighteenth-Century England* describes the eighteenth-century reaction to doctors as being an 'understandable response to inevitable tensions between customers and clients'.<sup>11</sup> John Thelwall's 1793 work *Essay, towards a Definition of Animal Vitality*, delivered at Guy's Hospital as a response to John Hunter's theories that the blood was the essential ingredient of life, begins with the argument that 'it is an apparent paradox, but it is not therefore the less true, that those ideas, or phenomena, that are the most familiar to us, should be frequently the most difficult to explain'.<sup>12</sup> Hunter's contemporary society saw issues such as anatomy, a study of the physical anatomy of the body, in terms of the uncanny – the very object that should be the most familiar was exposed as the site of seemingly inexplicable mysteries. The psychological effects of the 'unheimlich' as explored by Freud involve that when one is confronted by the uncanny – something so familiar yet so unknown – its immediate effect is to be confronted by one's own sense of mortality. This is perhaps one of the reasons why anatomists and surgeons became synonymous with death, despite their intentions to cure disease and strengthen quality of life. The stigma attached to the profession often outweighed the positive portrayal of the dedicated medical man, producing a popular image of the anatomist as a bloodthirsty criminal, earning them the grisly nickname 'sawbones' ('The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' p.7)

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<sup>11</sup>Dorothy and Roy Porter, *Patient's Progress: Doctors and Doctoring in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989) p.57

<sup>12</sup> John Thelwall, 'Essay, towards a Definition of Animal Vitality' printed within Nicholas Roe, *The Politics of Nature: William Wordsworth and some Contemporaries*, second edition (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002) pp. 96-119 p.101

The medical profession was seen, in general, to be a practice of pretension and deceit, driven by the doctor's personal need to uphold their reputation and make money - leading to a propagandist state of medical pamphleteering. The Romantic period inherited images from earlier in the eighteenth century such as Hogarth's print *The Harlot's Progress* (1732)[**fig. 1**], which depicted the argument of two well known medical men famous for their 'cures' of venereal disease. 'The two physicians care more about their reputation (their argument is about the therapeutic value of their pills) than about the dying patient near the fireplace.'<sup>13</sup> Peter Wagner's essay 'The Satire on Doctors in Hogarth's Graphic Works' also highlights the connections drawn between doctors, actors and criminals in Hogarth's crowd scenes such as *Southwark Fair* (1734) [**fig.2**].

The connection between the gallows and anatomy certainly did little for the reputation of surgeons. In 1751, Hogarth engraved a set of drawings called the 'four stages of cruelty' (1751) [**fig.3**] which told the story of a young man named Tom Nero. In the first plate Nero as a young boy tortures a dog surrounded by friends who perform various acts of cruelty to other animals. The second plate shows a grown Nero in the cruel world of work, as he whips his overworked coach horse, before the third plate sees him led into the world of theft and murder. Being found guilty of murder, Nero is sentenced to have his body dissected and anatomised by figures such as John Hunter. The Murder Act of 1752 ensured that those found guilty of murder would have their bodies given to medical science as a way of punishment in the hope that the threat of being guaranteed no everlasting peace would act as a deterrent from earthly crimes. While this damaged the view of anatomists in the eyes of the public, it is also telling that the connection between dissection and crime

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Wagner, 'The Satire on Doctors in Hogarth's Graphic Works' *Literature and Medicine During the Eighteenth Century* ed. Marie Mulvey Roberts and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993) pp.200-226 p.207

suggests the ultimate punishment would be to have the immortal soul destroyed, and this is possible by the destruction of the body:

By depicting such insensitivity and callousness on the part of participants in a dissection scene Hogarth presents the operation as a suitable and fitting punishment to fit Nero's crime – a fate worse than death. Execution, mutilation and dismemberment were terrifying punishments to all believers in the resurrection of the body. Dismemberment was thought to deny the possibility of resurrection at the day of judgement.<sup>14</sup>

Peter Wagner discusses 'The Reward of Cruelty' (Plate 4 of *The Four Stages of Cruelty*) in terms of the stereotypical views of the medical trade that had emerged during the period:

Together with the barristers, surgeons belonged to the professional groups to whom satiric tradition attributes the most callous self interest. If, in this instance, Hogarth depicts the sadistic pleasures of dissecting, the assembled surgeons enjoying their work as much as Tom Nero enjoyed his brutal deeds, it is because his stance is in tune with a popular mentalité shared by elite writers and the common people.

Wagner p.212

The literature of the Romantic period inherited the tension between anatomy and the interfusion of the body and the soul from the eighteenth century. The poem 'Mary's Ghost' by the satirical poet Thomas Hood demonstrates perfectly the mood of the country as the ghost of a young man's lover is faced with the horrors of the body snatchers:

The body-snatchers they have come,

And made a snatch at me;

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<sup>14</sup> Fiona Haslam, *From Hogarth to Rowlandson: Medicine in Art in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996)p.263

It's very bad those kind of men

Won't let a body be!

[...]

The arm that used to take your arm

Is took to Dr. Vyse;

And both my legs are gone to walk

The hospital at Guy's

[...]

The cock it crows – I must be gone!

My William we must part!

And I'll be yours in death, altho'

Sir Astley has my heart.

[...]

Don't go to weep upon my grave,

And think that there I be;

They haven't left an atom there

Of my anatomie.<sup>15</sup>

The role of satirists is highly important as a culture of fierce debate often results in parody. Anne Hunter's poetry works to combat this popular caricature and attempts to highlight the importance of genuine emotion, offering a corrective to the culture of satire which had built around her husband's work. Hood's poem certainly suggests that there is a separation between the body and the soul – as Mary's ghost is able to visit her suitor without the vehicle of her physical form, and the grave site is highlighted as not being the true centre for

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Hood, 'Mary's Ghost' quoted in Brian Bailey, *The Resurrection Men: A History in the Trade of Corpses* (London: Macdonald & Co, 1991) pp.173-5

mourning – a point that Anne Hunter is keen to emphasise throughout her poetry and a subject I will discuss in more detail during the course of this study. However, the soul is certainly not at rest, and the term ‘ghost’ in itself suggests a state of interrupted afterlife or state of suffering, most likely caused by the dissection of her body. While this satirical view of anatomists seems quite jovial, the effect that poems and popular rhymes such as Hood’s had on the impressions of an already anxious nation could be dramatic.

The Romantic interest in, and concern with, the character of the ‘mad doctor’ culminated in Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel *Frankenstein*, which as Christa Knellwolf and Jane Goodall’s introduction to *Frankenstein’s Science: Experimentation and Discovery in Romantic Culture 1780-1830* suggests:

[I]llustrates a growing discomfort with the scientists’ wish to spy ever more deeply into the borderlines between life and death. So a further parallel between the real and fictional scientist emerges as an urgent concern of the novel, consisting of the fact that neither the real nor fictional scientist were horrified by the gruesome environment of the charnel house or sufficiently awed by the idea that a dead human body was the receptacle of a recently departed soul.<sup>16</sup>

Novels such as *Frankenstein*, up to late-nineteenth-century pieces such as *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (which is said to have been inspired by the young writer’s visits to the Hunter household) were motivated by the fear of the terrifying balance between life and death, and by the scientific men who dared to tread so close to the divide. Part of the prejudice that seemed to accrue around the medical profession was the anatomist’s

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<sup>16</sup> Christa Knellwolf and Jane Goodall, ‘Introduction’ to *Frankenstein’s Science: Experimentation and Discovery in Romantic Culture 1780-1930*, ed. Christa Knellwolf and Jane Goodall (Hants: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2008) p.11

seemingly inhuman ability to be intimately faced with death on a daily basis: this was illustrated by the dark alter-ego of Dr Jekyll, described as 'hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say?' ('The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' p. 16) Judith Bailey Slagle contends that 'When [*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*] appeared in 1886, the house was still famous, and London readers could have drawn the analogy; some probably recalled stories of Hunter's attempt to restore life to hanged forger Dr. Dodd in 1777, an experiment kept secret for almost twenty years,<sup>17</sup> demonstrating the stigma that followed Hunter and survived long after his death into the following century. This was the legacy which John Hunter bequeathed to popular consciousness and fiction.

The relationship between dissection – an essential tool in the training of surgeons – and the body-snatching phenomenon, which swept England following the shortages of bodies for medical students to practice on, led to a deep social mistrust of surgeons. Robert Louis Stevenson's 'The Body Snatcher' is considered to be a fictionalisation of the exploits of the notorious Burke and Hare, two notorious resurrection men who had besmirched the professional reputation of famous anatomical lecturer Robert Knox by association. In 1832, when the Anatomy Act was passed, largely in response to these events, which allowed surgeons access to the bodies of anyone who died in workhouses or mental institutions. Until this time bodies were in short supply with the gallows providing the main source. 'Resurrection men' would be employed to steal corpses from graves for dissection. However, Burke and Hare's 'victims' were often delivered looking particularly fresh, mostly because they had never been buried, and the two men were discovered to have murdered at least 15 unfortunates in Edinburgh to supply surgeons with cadavers under the care of Dr.

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<sup>17</sup> Judith Bailey Slagle, 'Opposing the Medical World: The Poetry of Anne Home Hunter' *The Wordsworth Circle* ( Summer 2008) Vol XXXIX pp.102-108 p.103

Robert Knox. Hare managed to escape conviction, but in 1829 Burke was found guilty, hanged and fittingly, his body was sent to the anatomist school to be dissected. His skeleton remains to this day in the Anatomy Museum of the Edinburgh Medical College. Stevenson refers directly to these events in his story:

There was, at that period, a certain extramural teacher of anatomy, whom I shall here designate by the letter k. His name was subsequently too well known. The man who bore it skulked through the streets of Edinburgh in disguise, while the mob that applauded at the execution of Burke called loudly for the blood of his employer.<sup>18</sup>

The letter 'k' denotes Knox, and highlights the period's popular tendency to blame the anatomist - rather than the body snatchers for the crimes being committed – regardless of whether Knox had been aware of the murderous lengths his men were willing to go to in order to earn their pay. The report drawn up by the Committee of Investigation in 1829 concludes:

The committee have seen no evidence that Dr. Knox or his assistants knew that murder was committed in procuring any of the subjects brought to his rooms, and the Committee firmly believe that they did not.<sup>19</sup>

This links to various prints by the caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson, such as *The Resurrection Men* (1773) [fig.4] which depicts a body snatcher being arrested while the anatomist (often identified as an image of John Hunter himself) walks free and unpunished. However, while the horrifying state of grave robbing worsened during this period, the problem called for

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Body-Snatcher' *Classic Ghost Stories*, ed. John Grafton (New York: Dover Publications, 1998) p.90

<sup>19</sup> Brian Bailey, 'Appendix B: The Report of the Committee of Investigation into Dr. Knox's dealings with Burke and Hare, dated 13 March 1829' *The Resurrection Men: A History in the Trade of Corpses* (London: Macdonald & Co, 1991) p.180

legal reform to assist medical access to the materials that were so necessary to train new surgeons. While anatomists were keen to emphasise the importance of their grim task, the hypocrisy which often marred their professional attitudes is displayed in poems such as Southy's 'The Surgeon's Warning'. A surgeon reflects upon his deathbed of the inhumane and visceral projects he has undertaken during his career:

I have made candles of infants fat  
 The sextons have been my slaves,  
 I have bottled babies unborn, and dried  
 Hearts and livers from rifled graves.<sup>20</sup>

However, his lament is not regretful, but fearful of suffering a similar fate upon death:

And I who have rifled the dead man's grave  
 Shall never have rest in my own.

'The Surgeon's Warning' ll.39-40

Going to extreme lengths to protect his own corpse after his death, including lining the coffin with lead and employing watchmen to guard the grave, suggests the underlying knowledge surgeons held regarding the ramifications of their practices upon their victims. The surgeon eventually falls prey to the very human avarice which allowed him to manipulate the law and attain his materials as the guards are bribed to let the body snatchers go to their duty, and 'what became of the surgeon's soul, was never to mortal known'. ('The Surgeon's Warning' ll.167-8) The resurrection culture encouraged the Romantic period to view the body in terms of capital and consumerism, as literal prices were levied upon bodies. Surgeons fought and bartered to own the bodies of inmates at

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Southy, 'The Surgeon's Warning' *The Poetical Works of Robert Southy, Collected by Himself* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1838) Vol.VI pp.184-91 ll.33-6



prisons such as Newgate before the guilty were even hanged. As Wendy Moore describes in *The Knife Man*:

Under the laws of the black market, rising demand meant rising prices. An adult body in the mid-eighteenth century could be brought by surgeons for about one guinea, but the price had doubled by the 1780s and leapt to as high as sixteen guineas over the next twenty to thirty years. The bodies of children, known as 'smalls', were priced by the inch, while an unusual or rare medical condition could always command a premium.

Moore, p.57

The Anatomy Act certainly improved the problem of the body snatchers – although it also unearthed a host of political class issues. I will explore the effects of this medico-legal reform in the poetry of Anne Hunter and her contemporaries in further detail later in my dissertation.

Fourteen years after her death, Drewry Ottley described Anne Hunter as 'an agreeable, clever and handsome woman, a little of a *bas bleu*, and rather fond of gay society, a taste which occasionally interfered with her husband's more philosophic pursuits.'<sup>21</sup> Anne's life as a social hostess, often associated with the bluestockings, perhaps seems surprising, as it could have been expected to be sullied by the social stigma which followed her husband. The words I attributed to the shadowy doctor in my own opening fiction are those of John Hunter himself. Stephen Paget quotes Ottley's description of his famous interruption of one of his wife's dinner parties:

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<sup>21</sup> Drewry Ottley, quoted in Stephen Paget *Masters of Medicine: John Hunter* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897) p.95

On returning home late one evening, after a hard day's fag, Hunter unexpectedly found his drawing room filled with musical professors, connoisseurs, and other idlers, whom Mrs. Hunter had assembled. He was greatly irritated, and walking straight into the room, addressed the astonished guests pretty much in the following strain: 'I knew nothing of this kick-up, and I ought to have been informed of it beforehand; but as I am now returned home to study, I hope the present company will retire.' This intimation was of course speedily followed by an *exeunt omnes*.

Drewry Ottley pp.95-6

However, Anne's success as a poetess led her to become well-known in her own right, especially following successful collaborations with the composer Joseph Haydn, who set many of her songs to music; indeed 'When Hunter was at the zenith of his life, Mrs. Hunter was something more than the reflection of his light; she shone of herself; took her place in high society; was the friend of other clever and famous women - Madame D'Arblay, Mrs. Montagu.' (Paget p.97) However, their marriage seemed to be placed under significant stress due to the nature of Hunter's work, and the public enmity he constantly faced as a result. Judith Bailey Slagle suggests that 'given her domestic life and the differences between her and her husband, her composing such imaginative poetry is surprising' (Bailey Slagle p.103) and Paget argues that 'The colossal weight of Hunter's work, his overwhelming energy, then the slow ruin of his health, and the abiding fear of his death - these things ran up the price she paid for the honour of being his wife.' (Paget p.98)

As a result of the emotional tension that Anne Hunter seemed to face daily in the eyes of the public, her poetry is often laced with a melancholic anxiety. The major theme which ties most of her work is that of elegy and death as her poetry appears to be preoccupied with

imagery of tombs, graves and souls; possibly a response to the close proximity to death in which she lived. Her home had become a monument to the anatomist's work, filled with anatomical studies, taxidermy, various technical drawings and complete with fully-furnished dissection rooms in the basement. Many of these pieces went to the Hunterian Museum, which currently resides at the Royal College of Surgeons in London. Caroline Grigson's biography of Anne Hunter describes the grim realities of living as John Hunter's wife:

The house in Jermyn Street was soon full to bursting. John carried out dissections of both people and animals in the basement rooms... even experimenting on living dogs and electric eels. 'Sack-'em-up men' delivered stolen corpses in the dead of night, and Egyptian mummies were unwrapped. Patients were in and out of the consulting room on the ground floor, much of which, with the entire first floor, was crammed with specimens of his ever-growing anatomical collection, including in due course a stuffed giraffe, so tall it occupied much of the stairwell

Grigson p.30

Living with the constant reminder of the body as a physical and inanimate object had a profound effect upon the poetry Anne wrote, and I would like to suggest that it also helped to contribute to the Romantic sensibility of the revolutionary and scientific politics of death through this intimate relationship with the physical form.

Judith Bailey Slagle's recent essay 'Opposing the Medical World: The Poetry of Anne Home Hunter' argues that the poetess faced a constant struggle to make her voice heard alongside the infamous name of her husband. She claims that it was only following John Hunter's death in 1793 that his wife was truly able to establish a career as a writer; widowhood allowed Anne Hunter some poetic freedom: 'No longer simply the wife of John Hunter, the

widowed Anne was ready for reinvention.' (Bailey Slagle p.104) Paget highlights that 'The Hunterian Orator of 1821 [Thomas Chevalier] paid to her memory this heavy compliment - that 'she had sustained an honourable widowhood, estimable for talents of her own, and venerable as the relict of her illustrious husband," (Paget p.99) which demonstrates the success she achieved on the publication of *Poems* in 1802. However, I would like to argue that instead of placing a constriction upon her poetry, her position within the medical world actually allowed Anne a unique perspective from which to negotiate the issues surrounding the human understanding of death and the afterlife. In marrying John, Anne Hunter united and anatomised the disciplines of literature and medicine. Wendy Moore notes that 'In an era not known for sexual equality, there was between them a strong mutual respect; while neither ever truly engaged in the other's world, each allowed the other sufficient freedom to pursue their individual interests.' (Moore, p.172) John Hunter's career, constantly scrutinised by the opinions and prejudice of the public, found a foundation of support in his wife's poetry. Although written some time after John's death, her poem 'Song July 1818: The Wither'd Heart' was written to defend her late husband's name. Mourning had an important place in Anne Hunter's contemporary society, but 'The Wither'd Heart' argues that grief cannot resurrect the dead in terms of any physical life or being – what is dead must remain so and can only be 'resurrected' emotionally through memories and affection (and, possibly, through poetry). This suggests a system of support for her husband's work, as it advocates the fact that the body left behind is nothing but an empty vessel: 'when the life of Love is fled /No pow'r can warm its cold remains'.<sup>22</sup> The physical remnants of the body are of no use to the dead, the only ones who could possibly gain comfort from them are those who remain in the living world. Therefore, through the use of cadavers as tools in

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<sup>22</sup> Anne Hunter, 'Song July 1818: The Wither'd Heart' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) p.143 ll.9-10

training surgeons, the body could be used to prevent another 'wither'd heart' and to break the cycle suggested by the two repeated final lines 'The wither'd heart, must so remain'. ('Song July 1818: The Wither'd Heart' l.12)

Any profession which is focused upon a close study of the human body has often found itself thrust into the realms of debauchery in public consciousness. The contemporary criticisms which surrounded dissection had also been suggested to hinge upon the pornographic in terms of the enjoyment which the anatomists were commonly believed to feel in conducting their work, especially as they represented what Fiona Haslam describes as 'an exclusively male fraternity.' (Haslam p. 280) As Marshall notes, 'The first chapter of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* describes the primal scene of the body-snatching era: the spectacle of the condemned man on the scaffold, the visible scene of crowds and power'. (Marshall, p.15) The medical profession is often considered closely linked with sexual power politics and titillation in literature and art, and as Julie Peakman notes 'Boundaries between science, medicine and literature remained blurred, with erotica as much a part of popular entertainment as art, science and literature'<sup>23</sup>. Prints such as Rowlandson's 'The Persevering Surgeon' [fig. 5] were particularly responsible for the stigma that haunted those who studied the body:

Here the practitioner is dissecting a female cadaver. His lascivious expression and raised phallic scalpel whilst thus 'ravishing' the body in his possession again expresses prevalent ideas as to the activities of these gentlemen.

Haslam p.282

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<sup>23</sup> Julie Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books: The Development of Pornography in Eighteenth Century England* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) p.24

In his 1852 work, *Great Artists and Great Anatomists*, Robert Knox criticised those who drew dissected bodies as though they were alive. Cecil Helman's book *Body Myths* describes Knox's attitude towards the representation of the dead body:

Instead of drawing such a 'galvanised corpse,' they should follow the lead of da Vinci: 'Draw the dead as dead - the living as living; never depart from the truth.' There was to be no confusion, on the page, between the two inevitable states of humanity.<sup>24</sup>

This suggests the continued difficulties which medicine faced in separating its practices from being purely seen as consumption of the body throughout the nineteenth century:

The dissecting room shows us the difference between erotic art and pornography, between human experience and the worship of parts. For the true parallel of dissection, as an esoteric form of performance art, is pornography. It is the same reduction of the human images into slices of helpless meat, ripped out of context. Whatever the caring aim of medicine, all this is only one stage beyond those vermilion cuts of meat you see hanging in a butcher's shop.

Helman p.121

He continues to compare this pornographic view of dissection to meat presented in a supermarket: 'Like other forms of art, they are commodities to be bought, to be taken home, to be displayed to other people, to be cooked and then consumed.' (Helman p.121) Medicine had become twinned with sexual intent during the Romantic period, not only in the hands of the satirists through caricatures of doctors enjoying the bodies of their patients and leading debauched lifestyles, but also through medical leaflets which bordered on the pornographic, selling tips on sexual pleasure and gratification. They were often more titillating than informative. Helman describes his reaction to one of the engravings in the

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<sup>24</sup> Cecil Helman, *Body Myths* (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd, 1991) p.119

1858 textbook *Grey's Anatomy*, entitled 'The Female External Genitalia,' 'Each time I read underneath it, with that same baffled joy, the description of the vagina. 'The female organ of copulation' it says, is a 'fibromuscular tube lined with stratified epithelium.' A fibromuscular tube! It has a sound like Latin poetry, a moist mysterious opening of language and flesh' (Helman p.12) Richard C. Sha's essay *Medicalizing the Romantic Libido: Sexual Pleasure, Luxury and the Public Sphere* offers an explanation for the link between medical literature and erotica:

Knowing how properly to experience sexual pleasure... helped justify one's inclusion in the public sphere. Medical literature helped to efface this gap between the ideal proper experience of sexual pleasure and the somatic experience of that pleasure in part by pathologizing those bodies that did not understand the true meaning of pleasure.'<sup>25</sup>

This pornographic vision of anatomy and bodily consumption are aspects which Hunter found himself fighting against - medicine and science had become intimately linked with spectacle in popular belief. As scientific historian Richard Holmes notes in discussing the dissecting rooms in Windmill Street where John Hunter trained his young apprentice John Abernathy, 'There is a curious *Ackroydian* historical resonance in the fact that a century later this became the home of the first English burlesque and nude tableaux shows' (Holmes p.308) This is possibly why Anne was so keen to draw attention away from the physical form in her poetry, and to re-focus people's attentions upon the life which that person led and the things they had left behind which were not physically consumable in a pornographic or sensationalist sense.

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<sup>25</sup> Richard C. Sha, *Medicalizing the Romantic Libido: Sexual Pleasure, Luxury and the Public Sphere* Sha, Richard C, 'Medicalizing the Romantic Libido: Sexual Pleasure, Luxury and the Public Sphere' *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* (March 2005) vol. 27 pp. 31 - 52 p.51

The Romantic fear of the anatomist finds its true irony in medicine's purpose and objectives. The anatomist is also the surgeon; while maintaining an intimate relationship with death, the dissector also learns how to preserve life. Figures like John Hunter gave the body a purpose in death, but the very nature of medical training was difficult for the public to come to terms with: in order to succeed by developing surgical skills, it was necessary that medicine should initially fail and provide schools with the spoils. This unease was present in the literary world also; 'in nineteenth-century discourse, surgical metaphors for literary techniques appear antipathetic to both poetry and biography; going under the knife denotes destructive dissection, not constructive surgery'. (Matthews p.53) I would like to offer a vision of Anne Hunter's objective to eliminate of the assumed connection between surgery and death, and to contrast a vision of death itself with a resurrectionary mode, capable of creating and prolonging life. 'The Mulberry Tree: An Elegy' (1766-7) is perhaps most useful in proving the defensive stance Hunter's poetry takes regarding her husband's work. If the 'I' of the poem (which in Anne Hunter's hand looks very similar to her letter 'J') refers to John Hunter, then the fourth stanza suggests the life affirming purpose of the medical profession:

For bright ey'd science mark'd the growing Shade

That Shade which I\_\_\_\_'s friendly hand improv'd

His care more fresh its early Verdure made

Ye Muses mourn the Tree, your I\_\_\_\_\_ so lov'd<sup>26</sup>

This analogy denotes a humanisation of the anatomist figure and his work in relation to the demonization John Hunter had faced from his harshest critics and satirists. If anything, a

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<sup>26</sup> Anne Hunter, 'The Mulberry Tree an elegy' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) pp.100-111.13-16



description of John Hunter's early life by his niece Agnes Baillie seems to lend itself firmly to the education within nature which Romantics such as Wordsworth and Coleridge so idealised:

He would do nothing but what he liked, and neither liked to be taught reading nor writing nor any kind of learning, but rambling amongst the woods, etc... looking for birds nests, comparing their eggs – number, size, marks and peculiarities<sup>27</sup>

Anne describes his work in terms of love and care, as she seemed to genuinely believe that this is where her husband's interest in the medical profession stemmed from. Despite the power of his care, the tree still dies. I ascertain that Hunter was careful to ensure the public that medicine had not attempted to take the role of God, and that it remained a natural, human force - a comforting reminder of the continual power death holds to connect all human beings through experience.

One of the most famous events in Romantic history has become known as the 'Immortal Dinner', an occasion which saw poets William Wordsworth, Charles Lamb and John Keats gathered in December 1817 by the painter Benjamin Haydon in a debate about the powers of religion over science, following the completion of Haydon's painting *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*. The painting figures portraits of Wordsworth, Keats, Newton and Voltaire. Richard Holmes describes the increasingly raucous (and drunken) conversation in *The Age of Wonder* as a misleading suggestion that the Romantic poets showed no interest in the scientific world:

The destructive and reductive effects of the scientific outlook were mocked.

Warming to the theme, Lamb mischievously described Newton as 'a fellow who

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<sup>27</sup> Agnes Baillie, quoted in George Quist, *John Hunter, 1728-1793* (London, 1981) p.4

believed nothing unless it was as clear as the three sides of a triangle'. Keats joined in, agreeing that Newton had 'destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to a prism'.

Holmes p.319

This conversation is seen to be intimately linked with Wordsworth's poem 'The Tables Turned', which moves the criticism from physics to medicine:

Sweet is the lore which nature brings  
Our meddling intellect  
Misshapes the beauteous form of things:-  
We murder to dissect.<sup>28</sup>

While Wordsworth appears to condemn science, and in particular dissection, as an attempt to remove the mystery, and therefore the beauty from nature; Holmes highlights the conflicting arguments which surfaced during the period throughout the scientific, poetic and philosophical communities in quoting John Abernathy's description of Hunter at work:

He would stand for hours motionless as a statue, except that with a pair of forceps in either hand he was picking asunder the connecting fibres of some structure... patient and watchful as a prophet, sure that the truth would come: it might be as in a flash, in which, as with inspiration, intellectual darkness became light.<sup>29</sup>

I believe that Anne Hunter's poetry attempts to show the same depth of care in her husband's work, in an attempt to prove that 'the act of dissection could also be seen as one of profound attention and reverence for nature' (Holmes p.320) and that her interjections and contributions to the contemporary debates would have earned her a firm place seated

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<sup>28</sup> William Wordsworth, 'The Tables Turned' *William Wordsworth: the major works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp.130-1 ll.25-28

<sup>29</sup> John Abernathy, quoted by Druin Burch, *Digging up the Dead: The Life and Times of Astley Cooper* (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd, 2007) pp.154-5

at the table of the 'Immortal Dinner', where her unwavering support for her husband would have shone through.

The Romantic period has seen a revolution in literary analysis following the rise of New Historicism. Jerome McGann, one of the leading figures of this movement, described the poetry of Romantic poets as ‘everywhere marked by extreme forms of displacement and poetic conceptualization whereby the actual human issues with which the poetry is concerned are resituated in a variety of idealized localities’<sup>30</sup> Romanticism is often associated with an escapism into nature, and as Kenneth Johnston notes, ‘[a]mong the “variety of idealized localities” we find in Romantic poetry, Nature in its infinite aspects is perhaps the largest or most frequently resorted to, and the tone with which the resituating displacement is effected is, as often as not, an elegiac one.’<sup>31</sup> Johnston’s essay refers to the role of elegy in Romantic political displacement, and suggests that it provides the perfect form for Romantic writers to use to negotiate the political mood of the country as it strikes the delicate balance between personal and private grief, ‘[t]he grief-work of elegy has its human function, too, for which we might use Robert Frost’s distinction between grief and grievance: the former, personal; the latter, social or political.’ (Johnston p.26) Johnson argues that to use displacement; even when discussing political matters, is in itself a political choice, and turning to nature is especially significant as it is something which cannot be affected by human politics. This is also true of the forces of death, which is completely untouchable by even the most traumatic of political or social upheaval. This made the elegiac form a perfect tool in Romantic political negotiations.

The decade of John Hunter’s death saw some of the most tumultuous political strife in English history, and the poetry produced during the 1790s certainly reflects this. Burke’s

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<sup>30</sup> Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) p.1

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth R Johnston, ‘The Romantic Idea-Elegy: The Nature of Politics and the Politics of Nature’ *South Central Review* (Spring, 1992) vol. 9 pp. 24-43 p.25

*Reflections on the Revolutions in France* speak of the Revolutionists dragging ancient and respected sovereigns from the quiet of their graves - which represents the symbiotic relationship between the language of politics and the language of medicine and body-snatching. Contemporary scientific debates permeated the political discourse of the period, creating a taxonomy of political resurrection.

One of the most important aspects of John Hunter's work explored the difference between living and the dead organisms. Even though both had the same system of organs and material properties, Hunter argued that there needed to be a super-added presence – or a soul - which excited the body into life, which he believed to reside in the blood. As a young apprentice of Hunter, and a close associate with John Abernathy, the surgeon William Lawrence's first lecture at the Royal College of surgeons in 1816 outlined a challenge to John Hunter's work, suggesting that 'life was the result of organization,'<sup>32</sup> and that life was not a 'superadded substance' which made something live, but a consequence of the system of organs – A material product. '[H]e implied that there was nothing beyond the material, no transcendent, immaterial bodies, in other words, no soul.' (Ruston p.71) This defied John Hunter's theory of the blood's vitality and the separation of the physical body and the immaterial soul – and also appears to conflict the views of his wife's poetry. Lawrence was attacked in the 1820s piece *The radical triumvirate, or infidel Paine, Lord Byron, and Surgeon Lawrence*<sup>33</sup> and Lawrence retracted his work soon after its publication. This method of thinking saw the soul as not being available to 'check' behaviour, and thus 'crimes were

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<sup>32</sup> Sharon Ruston, 'Natural enemies in science, as well as in politics: Romanticism and scientific conflict' *Romanticism* (2005) vol. 11 pp. 70-83 p.71

<sup>33</sup> Anonymous, *The radical triumvirate, or infidel Paine, Lord Byron, and Surgeon Lawrence: colleaguig with the patriotic radicals to emancipate mankind from all laws human and divine ... A letter to John Bull* (Francis Westley, 1820) pp. 43-44

considered merely disorders of the bodily structure' (*The Radical Triumvirate* p.19). This was quickly linked to political radicalism by the conservative journal, as contemporaries lamented 'Here then is liberty for all at once.' (*The Radical Triumvirate* p.19) This makes John Hunter's work particularly important in the study of Romantic poetry – as the conflicts concerning the nature of the soul which lie at the heart of the medical debate were being fought over a political and literary battlefield.

John Thelwall's political career saw him spending most of his life socially exiled and constantly concerned for his own safety as the government identified him as one of the most potentially dangerous 'mischief-making Jacobins.' (Roe p.87) His political actions earned him a great deal of notoriety. As a member of the London Corresponding Society, he spoke publically of his reformist beliefs. Arrested in May 1794, he was tried for High Treason and, although managing to escape from any serious punishment, his political activism was certainly curtailed, and the years 1797-1801 were spent in an uncomfortable inability to achieve a settled domestic existence. The Gagging Acts of 1795 were arguably drawn up to silence his political voice. However, his earlier work certainly shows the political resonance of his writing, and his wide range of interests reflects the ability that political debate had to emerge in all areas of public life. His interest in science and particularly anatomy emerged in his connection to John Hunter through lectures given between 1791 and 1793 at Guy's Hospital (incidentally, this is also where Keats studied - although by the time he attended John Hunter had died, though his influence lived on strongly in the institution.) Nicholas Roe's discussion of Thelwall's *Essay, Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality* in his book *The Politics of Nature: William Wordsworth and some Contemporaries*, begins with four comparative statements taken from John Hunter,

William Wordsworth and John Thelwall, which proves the interfusion of language and debate across two disciplines of science and literature:

The body dies without the motion of the blood upon it...

John Hunter

We are seeking for an *imaginary something*..

John Thelwall

And even the motion of our human blood

Almost suspended, we are laid asleep

In body, and become a living soul...

William Wordsworth, 'Tintern Abbey', 45-7

No one will, therefore, contend, that air and water are alive...

John Thelwall

Quoted in Roe p.87

The motion of blood and air had been put under fierce debate, entered by both scientific and literary writers. The circulation of the blood was being constantly investigated by John Hunter and his contemporaries in an attempt to find the 'vivifying principle' of life. Contemporary materialists John Ferriar and Joseph Priestly argued that life is contingent upon a specific physical organisation - what Mary Woolstonecraft called 'organised dust'.<sup>34</sup> Thelwall is perhaps not a materialist as such, but does seem keen to bring these arguments into his discussion. In his *Essay, Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality* he attempts to define the essential difference between a 'vital principal' and a 'state of vitality' - one being a product of the other. This is offered as an analogy for the spread of revolutionary political ideals throughout the country through political propaganda and through the words of

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<sup>34</sup>Mary Woolstonecraft, 'Letters written during a short residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark' *The Works of Mary Woolstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler 7 vols. (London, 1989) vol.vi p.281

campaigners such as Coleridge and Thelwall. Roe notes Thomas Hardy's statement that the Sheffield Constitutional Society had 'animated [members of the London Corresponding Society] with additional ardour - when they were informed that others in a distant part of the nation had thought [in the same way] - and so began to act in the same way with themselves.'<sup>35</sup> Roe further states:

Animation, ardour, thought and act: in Hardy's anecdote, the diffusion of political information was analogous to the 'vivifying principle' or 'electrical fluid' coursing through the human body. Political information was the something equivalent to an 'electrical fluid', which when diffused throughout the country would animate and renovate the 'natural order of things' (Paine's words).<sup>36</sup>

The reformers believed that this could be an 'effectual mode of restoring to our constitution its pristine vigour and purity.' (Hardy quoted in Roe, p.18) As the 1790s progressed, reactionary elements began to view political agitation as a poison spreading through the body; such a diffusion of reformist or even revolutionary aspiration would have 'mortal' results for the old 'body politic'.

Nicolas Roe uses John Thelwall's *Essay, Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality* to contrast his work with the scientific politics of Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey':

Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,  
 And even the motion of our human blood  
 Almost suspended we are laid asleep  
 In body, and become a living soul:

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas Hardy, quoted in Nicholas Roe, *The Politics of Nature: William Wordsworth and some Contemporaries, second edition* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002) p.92

<sup>36</sup> Nicholas Roe, *The Politics of Nature: William Wordsworth and some Contemporaries, second edition* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002) p.92



While with an eye made quiet by the power

Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,

We see into the life of things.<sup>37</sup>

Wordsworth's poem suggests that, given the perfect balance of tranquillity and peacefulness it is possible to experience the true 'vivifying forces' which permeate nature. Wordsworth's notion of the principle of life is not as engineered as Hunter's seems to suggest, and is not merely a by-product of the blood coursing through the veins of the body. Although Hunter spoke of a 'super-added presence', Wordsworth seems to suggest that there is a stronger force at work within nature, and that it is possible to attain this force through an almost meditative state. For Wordsworth, the act of being close to nature allowed one to experience their own mortality.

Where, then, was the soul generally believed to exist? Various questions were posed during the period concerning the very nature of the 'vivifying presence' which brought life: is it a *physical* substance within itself, in which case does it need to exist within a physical location/plane. Is it an electrical substance? In which case does this also denote physicality? Or is it a conceptual construction, created in the minds of those left behind? Coleridge's letter to Thelwall 1796 discusses the debates which had been introduced in the eighteenth century concerning the nature of the soul:

Dr Beddoes and Dr Darwin think that life is utterly inexplicable, writing as materialists... Monro believes in a plastic immaterial nature – all-pervading... Hunter that the blood is the life – which is saying nothing at all... Plato says, it is harmony,

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<sup>37</sup> William Wordsworth, 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, 13 July 1798' *Romanticism: an Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) pp.407-411 ll.44-50

and I, tho last not least, I do not know what to think about it – on the whole I have rather made up my mind that I am a mere apparition – a naked spirit! And that life is I myself!! Which is a mighty clear account of it.<sup>38</sup>

Roe discusses Coleridge's 'Effusion XXXV' (also known as 'The Aeolian Harp') as a means of highlighting a Neo-Platonist view of nature and the intelligence which could be attributed to the soul:

And what if all of animated nature  
 Be but organic harps diversely fram'd  
 That tremble into thought as o'er them sweeps  
 Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,  
 At once the soul of each, and God of all?<sup>39</sup>

Coleridge had described this poem as his favourite in a letter to John Thelwall in 1792. The tone of the poem appears to denote the view that there was a 'super-added' presence within nature which could be denoted as 'life.' The Aeolian harp seems to have been the perfect instrument to demonstrate the borders between contemporary science, nature and art, as it is a delicate combination between scientific engineering and natural forces to produce music. It gave the proof that, when twinned with nature, science could be beautiful. Anne Hunter's poem 'To the Aeolian Harp' suggests a very similar view to that of Coleridge, as the 'viewless fingers' which play the music denote an organised intelligence behind the forces of nature. She also uses the term 'magic power,' which when read alongside Coleridge's extensive work on the magic within nature suggests the animating principle of life which is continually existing throughout all of nature and the universe.

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<sup>38</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters*, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford; 1956) 6vols. Vol.I pp.294-5

<sup>39</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Effusion XXXV, Composed 20 August 1795, at Clevedon, Somersetshire' *Romanticism: an Anthology*, ed, Duncan Wu, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) pp.600-605 ll.36-40

Hazlitt's *The Indian Jugglers* praises John Hunter as 'a great man - that anyone might see without the smallest skill in surgery. His style and manner showed the man. He would set about cutting up the carcass of a whale with the same greatness of gusto that Michael Angelo would have hewn a block of marble.'<sup>40</sup> Surgery and dissection were such intricate practices that they could be admired almost in the same concept as pieces of art. In commenting upon Hazlitt's comments, F. Gonzalez-Crussi wrote about the story of Mrs Martin Van Butchell:

In the West, embalming and greed seem to have been wedded from the beginning. [In 1775] John Hunter, younger brother of the Scottish anatomist, came across an exceptional opportunity to employ his brother's methods. A wealthy woman, Mrs Martin Van Butchell, under motives obscure and indecipherable, wrote a peculiar will. It was her intention, duly legalised by seals and signatures, that her surviving husband should have control of her fortune only for as long as she would remain above ground. Upon her demise, her husband acted with a determination all the more admirable for being mixed with grief. John Hunter was summoned to the homestead. Mrs Van Butchell's remains were injected intra-arterially with fluids of recent invention, and the lady ended up, fashionably clad in her best finery, inside a glass-lidded container, before which she received friends and relatives.<sup>41</sup>

Marshall highlights the social consequence of this incident: 'Not many women had the art of exercising control over their husbands down to quite so fine a point. Mrs. Martin Van Butchell is making 'cultural capital' out of her body.' (Marshall p.81) However, it also

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<sup>40</sup> William Hazlitt, 'The Indian Jugglers' *Table Talk: Essays on Men and Manners* (Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2009) pp.103-120 p.114

<sup>41</sup> F. Gonzalez-Crussi, *Notes of an Anatomist* (London: Picador, 1986) p.2

showed the link between artistry, culture and anatomy as 'When he calls Hunter 'a great man', Hazlitt is in effect calling him a 'creative genius'. The approbation implicitly carries the full ideological weight of the term 'genius' in romantic philosophy; As Bourdieu observes, the genius enjoys truly human creativity' (Marshall p.83) He also quotes directly from Bourdieu:

Art is called upon to mark the difference between humans and non-humans: artistic experience, a free imitation of natural creations, *natura naturans*, whereby the artist (and through him the beholder) affirms his transcendence of *natura naturata* by producing a 'second nature' subject only to the laws of the creative genius, is the closest approach to the divine experience of *intuitus originarius*, the creative perception which freely engenders its own object without recognising any rules or constraints other than its own.<sup>42</sup>

In performing experiments such as this however, John Hunter seemed to be removing the fear from death. As Cecil Helman notes 'the real agenda of dissection is the taming of Death, or rather the fear of death' he comments that in order to learn from anatomy, the body is reduced to 'raw clay or pigment.' He argues 'in turning the body into a soft book, we are doomed to be copyists. We are fakers who can only reproduce in cut flesh the abstract aesthetic of the anatomy book, with its lonely limbs and organs. Our signatures must remain hidden away, somewhere inside ourselves. In taming death, we have also tamed the anomalies of life.' (Helman, p.117-8) Hazlitt's praise for Hunters' creative genius attempts to draw him out of this company of copyists.

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<sup>42</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, trans. R. Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1984) p.491

The events detailed here are especially important in the study of the negotiation between exactly what is living and what is dead, and between the differences inherent between a physical life and a spiritual existence. The story of Mrs. Van Butchell, I believe, also sparks further debate concerning the 'social existence' of the dead – as in this scenario the physical body, regardless of failing to have a 'vivifying principle' coursing through its veins, holds legal power, and is thus retains a social existence. This calls into question the nature of the social consideration of the dead, both in legal and in relative terms. Wordsworth suggested that 'We respect the corporeal frame of Man, not merely because it is the habitation of a rational, but of an immortal soul.' ('Essays upon Epitaphs' p.326) and yet, in this case it is the physical corpus which demands legal respect. Godwin, in his 'Essay on Sepulchres' wrote, 'I know (first) that 'scarcely any thing can appear to be of less value, and nothing less admirable, than a dead human body.' When the intellectual spirit is gone, the carcass of a man appears to be altogether worthless.'<sup>43</sup> This is also pertinent politically as the bodies of the dead are used, especially by Edmund Burke in his 'Reflections on the Revolution in France' to express a political and national sense of pride and belonging:

In England we have not been completely disembowelled of our natural entrails; we still feel within us, and we cherish and cultivate, those inbred sentiments which are the faithful guardians, the active monitor of our duty, the true supporters of all liberal and manly morals. We have not been drawn and trussed, in order that we may be filled, like stuffed birds in a museum with chaff and rags, and paltry, blurred shreds of paper about the rights of man. We preserve the whole of our feelings still

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<sup>43</sup> William Godwin, 'Essay on Sepulchres' *Political and philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp (London: William Pickering, 1993) Vol.VI pp.1-31 p.7

native and entire, unsophisticated by pedantry and infidelity. We have real hearts of flesh and blood beating in our bosoms.<sup>44</sup>

For Burke, the importance of tradition is essential to a sense of national belonging and true citizenship, and this is attainable through values such as chivalry. Paine took great measures to attack this reliance upon what he saw as an outdated and overly artificial form as irrelevant to their modern existence by offering his counter-arguments in plain, uncomplicated 'democratised' language. The foundations of this traditional state are built around memories of the dead, especially one's ancestors. As Esther Schor highlights in her book *Bearing the Dead: the British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoriana*, Burke argues that 'the dead, far from being lost, are constantly retained, their graves annexed to a community defined by "our hearths, our sepulchres and our alters." One arm of the body politic is itself a dead hand which clutches traditions "grasped as in a kind of mortmain forever."<sup>45</sup> Burke's fanciful scene at the arrest of Marie Antoinette, contrasted to the peacefulness of a paternal governing system based upon the perfect English family, perfectly depicts the values which he felt were pertinent to the success of a government; including the importance of the class system and the strength of ancestry – a concept largely celebrated at the grave site. In a similar way to Mrs. Van Butchell's body retaining its legal status, Schor suggests that:

What Burke perceived in the ethics of sentimental circulation, was, very simply, the vitality of the dead. If the dead, by virtue of our feelings for them, are essential to the moral sanity of the society, might it not be said that they retain their

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<sup>44</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the revolution in France,; and on the proceedings in certain societies in London relative to that event. : In a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris* (London: J. Dodsley, 1790) p.128

<sup>45</sup> Esther Schor, *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoriana* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994) p.83

membership of that society even in death? Might it not even be said that they are, despite the ghostly status of their membership, the crucial component of the enduring body politic? The consequences of such thinking inform not only Burke's propounding of the English moral "nature," but also his execration of the French revolutionaries. If, as Burke claims, the ways of the English dead are a living part of English social life, the Revolution in France raises the spectre of a people who, having "murdered" their dead, are able and willing to murder their living priests and kings.

Schor p.82

Anne Hunter's poem 'Winter: A Sonnet' (1802) has a tone very similar to that of Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' and Thelwall's 'To the Infant Hampden', two poems which some new historicists have argued consciously allude to the political strife which gripped the nation during the 1790s and the early 1800s. The 'gloomy tyrant' and 'icy chains' of Hunter's poem are reminiscent of the 'secret ministry of cold'<sup>46</sup> which denotes the chilling political presence of Coleridge and Thelwall's poetry. It is possible that the similarity in tone could lead to a common political sympathy in the manner that Hardy described; Anne certainly condemns tyrannous rule as poverty thrives in the conditions which Hunter describes in a nation placed under the oppression of an absolute rule. Anne and John Hunter would have also shared a similar social experience to Coleridge and Thelwall, as all had faced public accusation and demonization; albeit for various different reasons. Their situations would have seemed highly familiar, and as such their poetry of favourable society exile seems to share a sympathetic call to a united brotherhood of humanity. Anne Hunter believed that strong social friendships and relationships could cure the turmoil which gripped the country

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<sup>46</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Frost at Midnight' *Romanticism: an Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) pp.624-629 ll.77

politically, and it is when people start to act as individuals, by giving way to avarice and greed, that tyrants are allowed free reign. Her poem is a communal call to arms, an attempt to highlight the natural community of humanity.

'Ode in 1767' (1767) is one of Hunter's earliest poems. It acts as an appeal for the fears and troubles that plague the heart to be removed. Its political interventions throughout, suggest that she was more than willing to interact within her contemporary political climate. 'Bind in chains the captive soul'<sup>47</sup> is particularly politically resonant, reminiscent of the 'mind-forged manacles'<sup>48</sup> of William Blake's 'London'. This suggests the crippling, paralysing effect which fear can have upon a nation and upon its culture – unable to produce anything of beauty when confronted by such compelling terror. The description of 'kind oblivion's peaceful source' ('Ode in 1767' l.12) in relation to the afterlife is an example of Hunter's earliest writing about death. 'Oblivion' suggests nothingness, but when appended to 'kind' there is an added sense of humanity which is not typically associated with the term. 'Peaceful' also denotes a sense of companionship. This is suggestive of an afterlife which is pleasant precisely *because* it is full of nothingness – a communally comforting absence. What is the political resonance of this belief that absence can be positive? 'Source' is also an unusual word to use to represent death, normally denoting a starting point. Does this suggest a return to a 'pre-life' state? If a soul is immortal, does this mean it is necessary to have existed before its 'life' truly highlighting mortality as a temporary state? It can be unusual for an elegiac form to denote an afterlife which does not resemble mortal existence. Throughout the poem, there is a noticeable lack of judgement involved in the

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<sup>47</sup> Anne Hunter, 'Ode in 1767' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) pp.98-99 l.4

<sup>48</sup> William Blake, 'London' *Romanticism: an Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) pp.199-201 l.8



afterlife. There is no social divide placed between class or gender. A comforting 'levelling' in political terms – relating to Godwin's work, which denotes similar ideas – an issue I will be highlighting in my next chapter.

'Ode to the Old Year, 1787,' one of Anne's most famous poems, is an optimistic response to the darkly rendered 'November 1784.' Biographers of Anne Hunter have struggled to find a reason for her writing 'November 1784' at this point in her life, though it seems that John and his brother, fellow surgeon William Hunter, had recently suffered the professional argument which would lead them to an estrangement from which they never recovered. The poem has been suggested to communicate a deep depression, and Judith Bailey Slagle alludes to its intentions to suicide. 'November 1784' is a melancholic ode which laments the autumnal depression which had swept the country, following the political unrest caused by events such as the violent anti-Catholic Gordon Riots and the decline into madness shown by their king George III. In this poem medical imagery is used to represent the sickness felt by the country in a period of national turmoil. 'November 1784' is almost a snap-shot in time. Anne does not attempt to make any firm political choice or to support the Catholics or the monarch, or to speak against either. Instead, in showing the country in a state of volatile politics, or sickness, she is able to, as Armstrong illustrates, 'show how a mood of fear, violence and panic permeates the cultural imagination of a society'.<sup>49</sup> This is echoed in the 'trembling string'<sup>50</sup> ('November 1784' l.6) which join the harrowing chorus of the 'winds howl', the 'night birds scream' and the 'yelling ghosts' – political turmoil has managed to extend its reign of fear into the realms of nature, and even threatens to extend its reach

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<sup>49</sup> Isobel Armstrong, 'Introduction' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) pp.1-11 p.4

<sup>50</sup> Anne Hunter, 'November 1784' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) pp.171-173 l. 6

even further, into death. Stability is the very zenith of happiness, and as such Anne writes various Odes which illustrate the importance of constancy – even if this is only achievable in death in such a troubled period, as ‘Ode on 1767’ suggests. The neighbouring poem ‘Ode to the Old Year 1787, is far more optimistic, but as Isobel Armstrong notes:

[I]n placing ‘November 1784’ at the lead of her collection in 1802, Anne Hunter would have understood its prophetic resonance. Her readers would have known that the optimism of 1787 was transitional. It’s as if this juxtaposition deliberately historicizes these two poems.

Armstrong p.5

The final line of the penultimate stanza reads ‘And leaves the soul in peace its tenement of clay.’ Armstrong suggests that, for Anne Hunter and her contemporaries, ‘happiness is always provisional, for the soul is temporarily lodged in the material body, the ‘tenement of clay’. (Armstrong p.5) Particularly important considering the instability of the periods between the composition of the first poems of the volume in 1784 and their publication in 1802 – the pair of poems are concerned with states of the transitional, with poetry existing as the only eternal and boundless entity available to them.

Anne’s poetry is not interventionalist in any obvious way. Her poems do not overtly settle upon a political agenda on either side of the Revolutionary debate, but they do highlight the damaging effect which political upheaval can have upon the hearts and minds of the nation; and in turn the effect which it can have upon the literature the period produces. I offer a reading of Anne’s poetry which intends to remain ambiguous about her personal political loyalties, in order to refrain from alienating any corner of society from her poetry. This

works to connect her readers universally in the same way that her more personal poetry strengthens the relationships and affections of her coterie.

### Chapter Three: The Gravesite and the (Un)locatability of Death

The social controversy surrounding anatomical studies - such as accusations of grave robbing - can be said to have set back the course of medical advances, and in so doing damaged society by prejudicing developments that would have benefited people's length and quality of life. In 1819, John Abernethy delivered *The Hunterian Oration*, named after John Hunter. In it, he campaigned for the reform of this self-deprecating public opinion toward anatomical study:

In our progress, we must frequently take up our abode with death and corruption; we must adopt loathsome diseases for our familiar associates; or we shall never be thoroughly acquainted with their nature and dispositions; we must risk, nay even injure, our own health in order to preserve or restore that of others. Yet if we do this, our profession will be held in the highest respect... Opportunities of dissection should therefore be afforded us... [If] the directors of hospitals, poor-houses and prisons were to establish it as a regulation, that the body of any person dying in these institutions, unclaimable by immediate relatives, should be given to the surgeon of the establishment for dissection, upon his signing an obligation so to dispose of it as to give no offence to decency or humanity, I am convinced, that it would greatly tend to the increase of anatomical knowledge amongst the members of our profession in general, and consequently to the public good.<sup>51</sup>

By 1832, this resulted in the Anatomy Act. However, the Anatomy Act itself was considered to have been manipulated by contemporary social prejudice. As Tim Marshall notes 'The Anatomy Act was to benefit the rich and the middle classes with the prospect of improved

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<sup>51</sup> John Abernethy, *The Hunterian Oration* (London, 1819) p.159

medical education and exemption from dissection.<sup>52</sup> Mary E. Fissell's study *Patients, Power and the Poor in Eighteenth Century Bristol* highlights the effect of the Anatomy Act upon the public view of surgeons:

Surgeons gained authority by their roles in dissection of felon's bodies and testimony in court. Although surgeons were not supposed to *steal* bodies... they were *given* bodies in a highly public display of the power of the law... Such public acts symbolised the surgeons control over the bodies of the poor and criminal.<sup>53</sup>

Marshall uses Godwin's *Essay on Sepulchres* to illustrate the political resonance of mourning and the grave site, exploring exactly why the resurrection men and the laws passed as a result of their dark activity posed such complex social issues

'Godwin's proposal, which went ignored, was to use public subscriptions to erect plain wooden crosses over the graves of the deserving dead, as a proof of human progress and a store of knowledge for future generations. The crosses would be easily renewable and in the permanent honouring the dead there would be no distinctions of rank. The essay makes no reference to the contemporary grave robbing, but there could hardly be a more direct negotiation of these sentiments than a deliberate violation of the grave and its contents.'

Marshall p.180

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<sup>52</sup> Tim Marshall, *Murdering to Dissect: Grave Robbing, Frankenstein and the Anatomy Literature* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1995) p.12

<sup>53</sup> Mary E. Fissell, *Patients, Power and the Poor in Eighteenth Century Bristol* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p.166

Wordsworth speaks of the graveside being a place that 'gathers all human beings to itself, and 'equalises the lofty and the low.'<sup>54</sup> He highlights death as being a force that is powerful enough to highlight the naturally inherited connection between all members of mankind:

We suffer and we weep with the same heart... Let an epitaph, then, contain at least these acknowledgements to our common nature; nor let the sense of their importance be sacrificed to a balance of opposite qualities or minute distinctions in individual character.

'Essays on Epitaphs' p.334

Wordsworth calls for the elegiac form itself to be an equalising force as 'To be born and to die are the two points in which all men feel themselves to be in absolute coincidence.'

('Essays on Epitaphs' p.331)

The grave site as a physical location was highly important, both in political and social terms as this is the place where ancestry becomes most apparent. This sensibility features heavily in the poetry of Anne Hunter. 'A Pastoral Elegy on the Death of the Earl and Countess of Sutherland, July 1766' is an early poem which perhaps seems to contest the idea of Anne Hunter's poetry supporting her husband's work on the surface. It seems to posit the burial site as an emotional location, suggesting that the physical remains should be left undisturbed. The fifteenth stanza suggests that the couple would have been happiest in spirit if they had been buried in the same grave – as if physical proximity suggests the emotional strength of the connection of the soul:

And Happy Lovers shall be said

Whom Death wou'd not divide

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<sup>54</sup> William Wordsworth, 'Essays upon Epitaphs' *Selected Prose* (Middlesex: Penguin Classics, 1988) pp.322-371 p.334

But in one Grave together lai'd

Close-by each others side<sup>55</sup>

A similar position is taken in the poem 'The Ballad of William and Nancy' written several years later in 1799. The poem outlines the story of a married couple. William died at sea, and in her grief, his wife, Nancy, threw herself into the ocean to drown, joining him in death. This certainly suggests the importance of a physical proximity in death, as 'She flew, and with a fearful bound/ drop'd in her William's arms below'<sup>56</sup> – Nancy obviously felt that it was detrimental to their fate if she were to die within the same place, or at the very least in the same manner. However, the ocean is so huge, and in such a constant state of motion, that it is impossible that the pair should be physically re-united in its depths. This perhaps contests, in a manner which Anne's earlier poetry is less overt in suggesting, that it is the *conceptual* idea of space and location which is important, rather than the physical or 'real'. 'The Mulberry Tree an elegy' also responds to the role of physical space, remains and the role of poetic elegy. While the burial plot remains significant, the verse is given expressed importance. This offers poetry itself as conceptual site of mourning in the absence of a physical site, as 'verse just points to Memory where they Lie'. ('The Mulberry Tree an elegy' l.32)

Hunter's later poetry demonstrates a development of her beliefs upon the burial site, and while the constant conflict in her poetry suggests that she had not completely settled her own belief on the subject, her later poetry certainly presents a stoic belief in the separation

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<sup>55</sup> Anne Hunter, 'A Pastoral Elegy on the Death of the Earl and Countess of Sutherland, July 1766' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) p.96-8 ll. 56-60

<sup>56</sup> Anne Hunter, 'The Ballad of William and Nancy' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) pp.106-7 l.23-4

between the body and soul upon death. 'The Spirit's Song' is one of the best examples of Anne's argument that the grave site is neither the best or the only place of mourning. She instructs the reader not to sorrow over 'cold ashes',<sup>57</sup> as 'my spirit wanders free/ and waits till Thine shall come.' (Anne Hunter, 'The Spirit's Song II. 3-4) The resonance of this in regards to John Hunter's work, which represents the destruction of the physical body, suggests Anne's support of the argument that the immortal spirit cannot be disturbed by destruction of the physical form. The body itself is no longer of importance, as the soul would not be present within the now hollow vessel, resulting in a complete separation of body and soul upon death. A similar belief is expressed in 'Elegy' (1802) which questions:

Why mourn the throbbing heart at rest?

How still it lies within the breast!

Why mourn, since death presents us peace,

And in the grave our sorrows cease?<sup>58</sup>

Compared with 'Mary's Ghost: A Pathetic Tale' by Thomas Hood, this suggests the strong contemporary conflict of views. Hood's poem 'Mary's Ghost' suggests the destruction of the body as intimately linked with the disruption of the soul, meaning the grave site needed to be preserved as sacred. Wordsworth's 'We are Seven', offers a similar perspective of the mourning site as the young child plays alongside her siblings by the graves which reside in their garden – suggesting an emotional connection to the physical space. Wordsworth exposes the innocent view of a child, forced to experience the death of her siblings, and yet perhaps endowed with a greater understanding of the nature of the human soul. When asked by the adult narrator how many siblings she has, the little girl answers 'seven are

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<sup>57</sup> Anne Hunter, 'The Spirit's Song' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) pp.122 l.8

<sup>58</sup> Anne Hunter 'Elegy' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) pp.208-9 ll.5-8



we,<sup>59</sup> despite two of them having died. The child is unable to distinguish between living and dead, and this suggests a view of the everlasting soul as connected to nature; and thus accessible by its most innocent of creatures – the child. The narrator attempts to correct the child with the rational explanation that:

'You run about, my little maid,  
your limbs they are alive;  
If two are in the churchyard laid,  
Then ye are only five,'

'We are Seven' ll.33-36

However, the response given is that 'Their graves are green, they may be seen,' ('We are Seven' l.37) and she further insists that she and her brother play alongside her departed siblings in the churchyard. The mind of the child, unspoilt by social teaching, is in a perfect position to consider the possibility of immortality, and yet incapable of feeling the true depth of human grief as it has no sense of death or finality. 'We may then, be justified in asserting, that the sense of immortality, if not a co-existent and twin birth with Reason, is amongst the earliest of her offspring: and we may further assert, that from these conjoined, and under their countenance, the human affections are gradually formed and opened out.' (Wordsworth, 'Essays upon Epitaphs' p.325) Without the threat of death, human relationship would die away, as it would become less temporary:

If the impression and sense of death were not thus counterbalanced, such a hollowness would pervade the whole system of things, such a want of correspondence and consistency, a disproportion so astounding betwixt means and ends, that there would be no repose, no joy. Were we to grow up unfostered by this

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<sup>59</sup> William Wordsworth, 'We are Seven' *Romanticism: an Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) pp.327-374 l.18

genial warmth, a frost would chill the spirit, so penetrating, that there could be no motions of the life of love; and infinitely less could we have any wish to be remembered after we had passed away from a world in which each man had moved about like a shadow.

'Essays upon Epitaphs' p.32

While a variation exists between concerns of the importance of the gravesite, both Anne Hunter and Wordsworth held some belief in an eternal existence - and its intimate relationship with poetry. In the same manner that the adult Wordsworth uses poetry in order to access the innocent world of the child within nature, Anne Hunter suggests that elegy should act as a link to the immortal soul.

The grave imagined in 'A Pastoral Elegy on the Death of the Earl and Countess of Sutherland, July 1766' is immersed within natural imagery – not within a town graveyard. Wordsworth describes the parish church located in the countryside as 'a visible centre of a community of the living and the dead'. ('Essays upon Epitaphs' p.330) However, the crowded cities provided a very different outlook. Brian Bailey describes the dreadful state of Britain's churchyards as being a prime factor in the 'body-snatching' culture as they were so poorly maintained:

The condition of British churchyards at that time was such that obtaining a fresh corpse was a relatively easy matter, and it is a nice irony that the Church, which led the strong opposition to legal dissection, also provided the means of its illegal practice... One London churchyard of less than an acre in size received fourteen thousand bodies in the course of twenty years. No wonder grave diggers had to get drunk before they could do their jobs, and sometimes only buried corpses two or

three feet deep because of obstruction by old coffins and the quantity of bones in the soil.

Bailey p.15

In Romantic poetry nature becomes a sanctuary, a private place of mourning – not a place for public consumption. It could possibly also refer to the most idyllic site of burial being within nature as it does not carry the practical dangers of the body-snatchers, who preyed upon cemeteries within cities as they were the easiest to steal from. This perhaps is also why there is no mention of a marking of the site of burial, to keep it well hidden?

'To the Memory of John Hunter' (1817) exemplifies the debates which were circulating during the period, and poignantly exists as a fitting tribute to the struggles which Anne and John Hunter faced publically. The grave where Hunter was buried was located in St. Martin's church – where physical monuments with written epitaphs were forbidden from being laid. The prologue to the poem acts as an explanation of the heartache this had caused his wife upon his death, and highlights the role of both his work, and of poetry, in maintaining his memory and ensuring his name continued to be known. The poem itself acts as a conceptual grave site – and the introducing line to the poem, 'Here rests'<sup>60</sup> suggests that this could have easily been engraved onto a gravestone – had inscriptions been allowed. This gives an interesting lens through which to view the poem, as it is being written as if to mark a physical location, while the poem itself is not written in any fixed place – and exists far apart from the space which it refers to. John Hunter's works have become his monument – and this is what he has been remembered for. In extending and researching the preservation of life, he has also ensured his own 'social immortality' in the

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<sup>60</sup> Anne Hunter, 'To the Memory of John Hunter' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) p.144 l.1

public memory. As long as his name is read on a piece of paper, or someone knows something about his life or work, his immortal soul continues to exist as he is alive within a collective conceptual space (linking again, to the idea of an over-reaching human intelligence) This is the heart of Anne Hunter's argument. The suggestion that it was Hunter's intention 'to sooth the ills humanity must share' ('To the Memory of John Hunter' l.7) – acts as a response to Wordsworth's essays, as although the line seems to attend to a 'levelling' of suffering and a shared human experience, the practice of medicine is designed specifically to combat this. It allows a prolonged and better quality of life for those who could afford it – and often at the expense of those who were poor, especially following the passing of the Anatomy Act, which ensured that those who had led unfortunate lives would be offered as dissecting practice. The advances in medicine were also, perhaps, helping to eliminate some of the common human fear which surrounded death, as, for example in Mrs. Van Butchell's case – the dead are even able to withhold their earthly wealth. Does medicine threaten to place a hierarchy upon death? Anne is keen to highlight the humanity involved in her husband's work, perhaps in response to the demonization he faced from his contemporaries.

William Wordsworth described the monument or tomb as being 'a shrine to which the fancies of a scattered family may repair in pilgrimage; the thoughts of the individuals, without any communication with each other, must oftentimes meet here. - Such a frail memorial is not without its tendency to keep families together; it feeds also local attachment, which is the tap-root of the tree of patriotism.' (Wordsworth, 'Essays Upon Epitaphs' p.371) This suggests the political connection connected with the epitaph form. It brings families together - which in turn brings patriotism. Once the motif of the dead body

reached this pinnacle of social importance, it is only natural that the very act of mourning should become a politicised action in itself. It is therefore possible to consider the epitaph, the literary mode of mourning, as being highly and inescapably embroiled within the political mode – including the epitaph writing of Anne Hunter.

## Chapter Four: An Anatomy of Elegy

A concern haunting the Romantic consciousness was the role of memory in constructing the immortal soul. Are we, through memory, actually *creating* or resurrecting the soul? Can something immortal exist in our world if there is no-one who remembers it? The idea of memory, and in particular the role which the elegy form plays in producing an immortality through literature is something which I shall investigate during this final section of my dissertation.

The elegy of the Romantic period inherited a heavy influence from the pastoral eighteenth century poetry of Gray and the Graveyard School of poetry which produced poems such as Edward Young's *Night thoughts*<sup>61</sup> (1742) and Robert Blair's *The Grave*<sup>62</sup> (1743). It also bequeathed onto the nineteenth century a politicised apprehension of the elegy genre. Steve Vine suggests that 'In 'Deaths and Entrances,'[Dylan] Thomas' poems simultaneously preserve loss by refusing to convert it into meaning and affirm poetic articulation in the face of loss'<sup>63</sup> adding that 'Peter Sacks argues that the elegiac speaker characteristically displays an anxiety about the very use of language, since the elegist's 'reluctant submission to language' involves a relinquishment of the lost object to the substitute labours of signification - as if to mourn was in some sense to collude with loss.' (Vine p.149) Vine looks to Thomas' poem 'A Refusal,' which refuses to mourn a young girl killed in a London air raid. He does this because 'language murders the singularity and particularity of the child's death as surely as the bombs reduce her to nothing. To refuse to mourn the girl's death, in this

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<sup>61</sup> Edward Young, *Night thoughts*, ed. Stephen Cornford (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1989)

<sup>62</sup> Robert Blair, *The grave : a poem* (London: T. Bensley, 1813)

<sup>63</sup> Steve Vine, "Shot from the Locks': Poetry, Mourning, Deaths and Entrances' *New Casebooks: Dylan Thomas*, ed. John Goodby and Chris Wigginton (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001) pp. 140-157 p.149

way, is to refuse to convert death into meaning; it is, instead, to preserve death as unrecoverable loss.' (Vine p.150) The nineteenth century inherited a concern that language began to represent an emptiness of mythologized ideals, rather than actually hold any individual meaning. I believe that tensions which surfaced during the Romantic period led to the concern that elegy endangered the true vitality of language through a lack of genuine emotion, and that these apprehensions are present within Anne Hunter's poetry.

The elegiac form is one which is designed to evoke public sympathy following the death of one of its citizens. The idea of a collective social sympathy is highly pertinent considering the political aspects which surrounded the period, making the composition of a public elegy a political act. Esther Schor highlights the importance of sympathy within the political context of the Romantic period:

The Revolution controversy, which saw the rhetoric of sentiment become a powerful political instrument, eventuated in a crisis in the meaning and value of sympathy that would resonate well into the Victorian era. In 1789, the word *sympathy*, which had widened in the eighteenth century to include the sense of "commiseration with suffering" had not yet come to mean an explicitly political inclination or predisposition; during the Revolutionary-Napoleonic period, however, the rhetoric of political favour would become soldered to the discourse of morals. One legacy of this conjunction is the term "political sympathy"; the OED cites Southy's *History of the Peninsular War* (1823) as the first reference in English to a political "sympathy", but the transition can be glimpsed a good deal earlier.

Schor, p.74

Schor compares this with Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra* which reads

[E]very person... would carry both into his conflicts with the enemy in the field, and into his relations of peaceful intercourse with the inhabitants, not only the virtues which might be expected from him as a soldier, but the antipathies and sympathies, the loves and hatreds of a citizen - of a human being - acting, in a manner hitherto unprecedented under the obligation of his human and social nature.<sup>64</sup>

Schor notes that 'When Wordsworth finds sympathy emerging from one's "human and social nature," he emphatically identifies humans as "citizen[s]," not members in some theoretical social order'. (Schor p.74) The soul as a social construction and as capable of social interaction and representation was thrown into the revolutionary debate, and as Schor recognises, 'Once it was acknowledged that pathos could be produced and then deployed, sympathies were evoked, organised and directed to serve a variety of political goals.' (Schor, p.75) One of the ways in which this political sympathy could be achieved was through the elegy or epitaph as this was a highly emotive form which could appeal to the entire of human kind through a shared experience or fear of death. Wordsworth realised the importance of the elegy in his essays, suggesting the democratic potential of the form:

an epitaph is not a proud writing shut up for the studious: it is exposed to all - to the wise and the most ignorant; it is condescending, perspicuous and lovingly solicits regard; its story and admonitions are brief, that the thoughtless, the busy, and indolent, may not be deterred, nor the impatient tired.

'Essays upon Epitaphs' p.334

This exemplifies the equalising presence of the elegy and introduces it as an extremely public and accessible form. Its intention is to bring people together in a common human experience: death.

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<sup>64</sup> William Wordsworth, 'Convention of Cintra' *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Rev Alexander B. Grosart (Cirencester: Echo Library, 2006) pp.31-83 p.31



The role of poetry in conserving a person's memory is a highly important concept in the elegy genre. Anne Hunter's 'A Monody on the Death of Mrs Gilbert of Bodmin Priory Cornwall April the 8<sup>th</sup> 1818' questions:

Can love so nurtur'd, e'er decay?

Ah No! While Memory shall last

This solitary heart must pay

Its sacred tribute: to the Past.'<sup>65</sup>

This suggests that as long as a person is remembered, their soul is immortalised through a social construction of remembrance, friendship and sympathy. This is where the elegy becomes incredibly important, as allows for a literary appropriation of the soul. The poem 'Lucy's Urn', written by Anne Hunter at an undetermined date (though definitely pre-1818) marks the interaction which her poetry played in ongoing debates surrounding the sacred status of the burial site, and also the social status it played. Comparable in theme to the 'Lucy' poems by Wordsworth and Keats' 'Ode to a Grecian Urn', I would like to offer Anne's poem as existing in a continuing contemporary debate about the 'true' nature of burial, and the role of the physical memorial in preserving a person's memory. Lucy (a friend of the Hunter family) had died in Lisbon, and was buried there; meaning that family and friends had no physical location of mourning within their own country. This poses two crucial issues – what is the effect of not having a site of burial for the family in Britain? And what is the effect of the memorial acting as a point from which to be mourned by strangers and

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<sup>65</sup> Anne Hunter, 'A Monody on the Death of Mrs Gilbert of Bodmin Priory Cornwall April the 8<sup>th</sup> 1818' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) pp.152-153 ll.19-22

travellers? The lack of a burial site which is easily accessible for Lucy's family and friends to mourn besides would seem to suggest a lack of physical, and therefore spiritual closeness, as is felt by the child in Wordsworth's 'We are Seven' when she plays beside the grave of her deceased brother and sister. In Wordsworth's poem, the children are resurrected through a feeling of close physical proximity. In 'Lucy's Urn', this is not afforded by the mourners, and it is the poem itself that adopts the role of the physical memorial site amongst Anne's circle of friends. However, the site of Lucy's death is described as being reduced to a tourists' spectacle:

The sacred spot of Lucy's rest  
 Shall teach the traveller to mourn  
 With foreign flowers the Wreath be drest  
 Which strangers hang on Lucy's urn.<sup>66</sup>

This is suggestive of the 'pornographic consumption' of death as a social curiosity, and links strongly to Anne's poem 'A Pastoral Elegy on the Death of the Earl and Countess of Sutherland, July 1766' in which Anne emphasises the importance of genuine and lasting emotion in mourning. There is a hint of disdain for the fate of the couple in the terms of their memory: 'and ev'ry youth and village maid/ shall annu'l garlands bring.' ('A Pastoral Elegy on the Death of the Earl and Countess of Sutherland, July 1766' ll.53-4) This appears to suggest a depreciation of feeling, and pornographic consumption of the grave site and of the 'myth' of the couple – especially noticeable as the 'youths' would be too young to actually remember the couple in life after a few years had passed. This reflects the anxieties inherent in 'Lucy's Urn', as Lucy is also mourned by strangers in a foreign land. This became particularly pertinent following her claim that:

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<sup>66</sup> Anne Hunter, 'Lucy's Urn' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) p.135 ll. 5-8

Far heavier griefs this bosom mourns  
Griefs lasting as severe  
Which will not change as the season turns  
But saddens all the year

'Lucy's Urn' ll.20-4

This links to the 'annu'l' wreathes placed by the maids, and also to the turning of the season in 'Lucy's Urn', as the tourist season would bring travelling mourners. The poem thus begins to act as a criticism of temporary or insincere grief, brought about in part by the placement of a monumental, physical epitaph at the gravesite.

Wordsworth believed the oral epitaph to be more genuine than that which is written- describing it as more 'faithful and more kind' than the written epitaph:

Green is the churchyard, beautiful and green,  
Ridge rising gently by the side of ridge,  
A heaving surface, almost wholly free  
From interruption of sepulchral stones,  
And mantled o'er with aboriginal turf  
And everlasting flowers. These Dalesmen trust  
The lingering gleam of their departed lives  
To oral record, and the silent heart;  
Depositories faithful and more kind

Than fondest epitaph: for, if those fail,  
 What boots the sculptured tomb?<sup>67</sup>

Schor suggests that this is because the written epitaph has a different purpose to the oral:

According to Wordsworth's poetics of the epitaph in the *Essays*, a written epitaph ought not to give us images of the dead, but rather a 'tender haze or luminous mist' that improves upon their character. Generality is not merely to be emphasised; it is to subsume particularity.

Schor p.181

Wordsworth's description of the oral epitaph, however, is one which demands particularity and clarity, a true description of a person. This is an interesting point of note against Anne Hunter's poetry and her attitude towards immortality through poetics. If a written memorial such as Anne's is suggestive of a 'haze' of a person's being, rather than referring directly to their character, she invites her readers to create a mythologized or idealised version of a person's memory through poetic interaction with genuine emotion. This reading of Anne's poetry isn't without its difficulties: those tourists who mourn at the site of Lucy's urn are criticised for their lack of genuine emotion - but as Anne's poetry creates but a 'haze' does this suggest that she, too, is guilty of encouraging this? However, I believe Anne's intentions as a poetess is to simply create an authenticity of emotion, without encouraging sensationalism.

Godwin's attitude toward the death and immortality of poets and writers suggested his beliefs in the connection between the physicality of memory and immortality, as he considers visiting the physical locations which are connected to the great poets:

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<sup>6767</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Excursion: A Poem* (New York: C.S. Francis & Co, 1850) II.605-615

I am not contented to visit the house in Bread-Street where Milton was born, or that in Bunhill-Row where he died, I want to repair to the place where he now dwells. Some spirit shall escape from his ashes, and whisper to me things unfelt before... I wish to live in intercourse with the Illustrious Dead of All Ages.<sup>68</sup>

Matthews adds:

Godwin's attitude is a peculiar fusion of rational conviction that the 'Illustrious Dead' can speak across time through their works, with a superstitious or supernatural yearning that the 'spirit shall escape from his ashes' in the present. Godwin interprets Milton's 'ashes' as poetical remains in a broader sense, relics capable of evoking sentiments possessing the imaginative power, insight, or sensibility of the poet's works.

Matthews p.4

This suggests the significance of physical and poetic remains during the period, and certainly infers that the physical location does not hold the same sympathetic and ethereal posterity as the works which a person produced during their lifetime. In writing poetry, one is exposing their soul and allowing it to survive past their own physical mortality.

In her book *Poetical Remains: Poets' Graves, Bodies and Books in the Nineteenth Century*, Samantha Matthews describes the inspiration left behind by the work of deceased poets as 'the source of nourishment found in the 'literary remains': the 'life' of the poet, his immortal genius or original spirit, which has passed from the body to the book.'<sup>69</sup> The soul of a writer exists and survives in the work he leaves behind. The concept of immortality, an incredibly

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<sup>68</sup> William Godwin, *Poetical and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin* Ed. Mark Philip 7 vols (London: Pickering, 1993) vol. vi p. 22

<sup>69</sup> Samantha Matthews, *Poetical Remains: Poets' Graves, Bodies and Books in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004) p.1

important motif in Romantic literature, was also highly connected to the idea of an authorial afterlife which could be experienced through the works which a writer left behind. Thomas Lovell Beddoes wrote that when a poet dies 'they die,- a weeping willow & an elegy stick over their graves, and as the tree draws nourishment out of their decaying corporeal substance, a younger rival sets the roots of his fame in their literary remains, and flourishes as these latter rot.'<sup>70</sup> The anxieties which lay at the heart of the literary world were intimately linked with those of the anatomical world - as the dead are believed to be violated in order to benefit the living, suggesting a lack of respect for the deceased. It also suggests the cyclical nature of literature, as the works of those which have been deceased are still able to inspire and influence new texts, ensuring the immortality of the written word. However, this is not always a positive relationship, as Matthews notes, 'Beddoes's rooting and flourishing imagery condemns the living poet as a parasite or literary flesh-eater, consuming the surviving texts until they are exhausted.' (Matthews p.1)

The Romantic culture was highly preoccupied with the prospect of death and memory, and the role of poetry in constructing an authorial afterlife was a subject embraced by many Romantic writers, as they attempted to negotiate the survival of their work as an extension of themselves after their death.

The nineteenth-century sensibility that interpreted the book as the embodied medium of the dead poet's spirit, while the body was attributed with a lingering spiritual aura, can be evoked by briefly considering the sub-genre of posthumous publications... Literary and poetical 'remains' flourished in the period: predicated on the author's death, they were composed of selections of poems and other

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas Lovell Beddoes, 'To T. F. Kelsall, 29 September 1825' *The Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*, ed. H. W. Donner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935) pp.606-7

fragments, typically accompanied by passages from letters, and a biographical introduction in which the poet's death-bed, last wishes, last words and burial place often featured conspicuously... When a writer dies, biography and works are explicitly brought together.

Matthews p.4

Lord Byron appealed for the case of the poet Joseph Blacket, who he argued could face no worse injustice than to have his poorest poetry published posthumously when he could not defend his own work, referring to these publishers as 'resurrection men.' Matthews questions:

What does it signify whether a poor dead dunce is to be stuck up in Surgeon's or Stationer's Hall? Is it so bad to unearth his bones as his blunders? Is it not better to gibbet his body on a heath, than his soul in an octavo? As Byron's topical reference to 'resurrection men' suggests, poets shared with the public a common discourse drawn from the period's intense engagement with burial issues.

Matthews pp.6-7

The construction of a collected works after a poet's death was considered to be highly insensitive, as it did not truly allow for the writer to have any specific control over that which is published, and which becomes a part of the publically constructed immortal 'mythology'; as Jeremy Stubbs notes, 'The writer, the poet, can aspire to a form of immortality, but only by complete effacement of their own person before the symbolic power of language... Thanks to work, death brings not oblivion but communication.'<sup>71</sup> This is especially concerning for the Romantic writer who began to lose faith in the true power of

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<sup>71</sup> Jeremy Stubbs, 'Surrealism and the Death Mask' *Dying Words: The Last Moments of Writers and Philosophers*, ed. Martin Crowley (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000) pp. 69-73 p.69

language, highlighting its limitations and weaknesses in constructing a true and undistorted representation of reality.

However, poetry is not merely able to offer immortality to the poet, but also to the subjects of their poems. In writing elegy, Anne Hunter attempted to do what could not be achieved by the work of her husband in granting immortality through memory, rather than through physicality. Her poems are written to sustain a person's memory after their death in an attempt to preserve their immortal soul through the act of reading, as her poem 'The Song at Maria's Grave' highlights, her intentions as a writer of elegy are to 'raise the song, a name so clear/ From cold oblivion's power to save.'<sup>72</sup> The Romantic period saw a revolution in the power of poetry as a natural force of immortality, and while some of her contemporaries were concerned about the manipulative force of language once it had been released into society, Anne appeared determined to actively embrace its ability to influence memory.

The purpose and role of poetry became the topic of many debates during the period, as the literary market was constantly changing. It is a popular belief that the Romantic period saw a generation of writers who ceased to write for either money or fame, as Andrew Bennett suggests 'The poet... no longer writes for money, contemporary reputation, status or pleasure. Instead he writes so that his identity, transformed and transliterated, disseminated in the endless act of reading, will survive.'<sup>73</sup> Personally, I am unconvinced that any of the Romantic poets wrote with no financial intention, I do believe that Anne Hunter's writing had been constructed for social and pleasurable purpose prior to the death of her

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<sup>72</sup> Anne Hunter, 'Song at Maria's Grave' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) pp.215-220 ll.13-14

<sup>73</sup> Andrew Bennet, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p.2



husband, as she circulated poetry amongst her friends and rarely published aside from in occasional broadsheets. Despite being thrust into fiscal difficulty following the death of her husband, Anne alludes to a continued wish of writing purely for social benefit, without seeking any critical recognition for her work in her Epilogue to the 1804 published collection *The Sports of the Genii*, as she appeals:

Critics sharp, with brow severe,  
 Our small volume come not near:  
 Authors grave, and learn'd, and wise,  
 Never this way turn your eyes<sup>74</sup>

It is through a social construction and preservation of memory that a writer's work attains its immortality, and the very act of reading alone enables the writer to outlast their mortal lives, though the act of criticism suggests a detrimental act of destruction. As long as a piece is being read and enjoyed in its purest form, its writer's soul will remain in a state of immortality as it fires the thought and imagination of another human mind.

'To the Memory of a Lovely Infant, written seven years after his death' was written for Anne's son, James (nicknamed 'Jemmy') who died in February 1775, at the age of only a few months. This poem represents the role of poetry as a device of personal mourning or therapy following the death of a loved one. It is certainly a means by which grief is communicated and transformed from personal emotion to a public display – the purpose of the elegiac form. The poem is written seven years in retrospect of Jemmy's death. This certainly suggests the importance she places upon lasting memory; as highlighted in the poems 'Lucy's Urn' and 'A Pastoral Elegy on the Death of the Earl and Countess of

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<sup>74</sup> Anne Hunter, 'Epilogue' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) p.228 ll.1-4

Sutherland, July 1766'. Time is an important aspect of the poem, and certainly acts as a healer for both the reader and for the poetess herself. Time can also act as a preserver when matched with affection. John Hunter, however, appears to have been notably less affected by death than his wife. He wrote to his brother-in-law James Bailie:

As to myself, with respect to my family, I can only yet say that I am happy in a wife, but my children are too young to form any judgement of. They consist of a stout red-headed boy, called Jock [...] and a weekly girl call'd Mary Ann [...] We lost a fine boy called Jemmy [...] and Anny is near her time of a fourth.<sup>75</sup>

John Hunter seems to be far less emotionally affected upon the death of his son than his wife, perhaps owing to his career which led to a constant negotiation with death, and perhaps this also led to a hesitation to form too strong a bond with his children, having seen so many cases of infant mortality pass through his own dissecting room doors. The letter written by John is sharply contrasted in its calmly accepting language by Anne's lines 'I wildly press'd/the lovely image to my aching breast/ and felt the fearful chill of nature's awful rest'.<sup>76</sup> While Anne felt a far more emotional and social connection to death, John's understanding took a far more reasoned and scientific form. This is expressed through his case notes, which are highly emotionally detached, as these case notes from his 'Case from Mr Baldwin - No. 117' suggest:

Opened October the 3rd 1766 two days after he died. and very putrid. In cutting through the cellular membrane and muscles of the abdomen, the fat in the cellular membrane before I came at the muscles, was two inches. (He never had the least

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<sup>75</sup>Steven Paget, *John Hunter. Man of Science and Surgeon (1728-1793)* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897) pp119-20

<sup>76</sup>Anne Hunter, 'To the Memory of a Lovely Infant, written seven years after his death' *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) p195-197 ll.25-27

appearance of a fat man: but rather florid;) and the muscles very thin and pale. When I had cut into the abdomen there was a great discharge of foul air; the stomach and intestines were [also] vastly distended with air, but seemed all perfectly sound... The kidneys were very large and flabby... The liver seemed to look like one boiled, but not the least of any hardness or scirrhusity in it.<sup>77</sup>

From these notes, it is easy to see why Hunter has been demonised as his work appears to be so far removed from the humanised form – though this was probably through necessity. Anne's poetry counteracts this cold practice with genuine, socially afflicted emotion in an attempt to re-assess the public view of her husband's purpose.

The poem 'Time' (1802) reflects the importance of the grieving period in 'Lucy's Urn' and various other pieces of Anne's poetry, which she feels should lead to everlasting remembrance. Memory and friendship become the true motifs of immortality in this poem, as they are able to outlast time. However, it is through poetry and the 'muse' which this immortality is granted. Without a poetic reminder, the memory of a person would die whenever all of those who knew them died – it is like a second, social death. Time is the true enemy of this 'social existence,' and yet poetry is able to outlast time. The repetition of the urn motif is especially important when viewed in the context of Keats' 'Grecian Urn,' which claims to be able to freeze time through the medium of art. Anne Hunter seems to suggest that even this is going to eventually crumble – Does this also then suggest that poetry, as it exists as a physical page, will too, eventually be destroyed? What emerges here is a contesting view between the physicality of art/poetry and the lasting memory it has upon the soul/mind over time. This is precisely the same argument which is being fought

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<sup>77</sup> John Hunter, *The Case Books of John Hunter FRS* Ed. Elizabeth Allen, J. L. Turk & Sir Reginald Murley (London: Royal Society of Medicine Services Ltd, 1993) pp.354-5

over the dead body/soul. From this reading emerges a poem which criticises the false culture of mourning which is encouraged through curiosity, consumption and idealism without being followed through with actual feelings. If this is the sort of mourning which the physical grave and headstone encourages does this emerge as a critique; not of the burial space, but of the marked memorial in terms of the people left in the living world? The final stanza suggests that the grave should only be of comfort to those who had died – and this importance was probably only held in life for sentimental reasons, as once they died their spirits were able to wander freely. The emphasis, therefore, should not be placed upon the living left behind. The poem is also concerned with ideas of mythologizing a person's life after their death. The tale of the lovers is spread amongst the town and romanticised, but is this a good thing? While it does ensure a memory, it also represents an almost falsified or empty mourning, as they are mourning an *ideal*, not a reality. What is the effect of the construction of a memory by someone who had no prior knowledge of experience of the person who has died when they were alive? Does this taint or contaminate the publically conceptualised immortal memory of that person? How is the 'social afterlife' left behind by a person affected by this? In writing poetry, does Anne Hunter's elegiac form have the same effect, as strangers would read and construct their own memories which would lead to the former person's life mythology?

Jerome McGann suggests that Romanticism's 'greatest moments of artistic success are almost always those associated with loss, failure and defeat.' (McGann p.132) In writing elegy, the poet attempts to re-immense himself within human society during a period of personal grief by communicating it publically. It is an example of the power society holds to soothe personal suffering. Elegy as a genre is consistently marked by a tone of failure or

eventual and inevitable defeat – it is part of the soothing nature that the poet is reminded that every person must die at some point, an important part of their re-introduction into the company of other human beings. This also makes it a particularly fitting genre for Anne Hunter to defend her husband's work, as surgery, no matter how advanced it becomes, is only temporary, and while it may prolong or improve life, it is certainly not capable of escaping the clutches of death altogether. Anne's elegiac tone reminds society that, although her husband may have attempted to remove the imminent threat of death, he still does not attempt to achieve immortality – death as the untouchable political leveller remains invincible. Anne certainly turns to nature in her elegy, and there is a degree of escapism in her writing which could suggest that she was attempting to evade both the political unrest of the period, and the social problems which followed her personally as the wife of a man who stood at the very centre of ethical debate. However, in writing elegy she also attempted to bring these debates into an idealised and natural conceptual location, perhaps highlighting the role of her husband in improving society, and yet still concribing to the laws of nature and death.

## Conclusion

Anne Hunter's poetry acts as a deft negotiator of the debates which were happening in her contemporary society; in terms of political confrontation, medical and scientific conflict and the constant moral sensibility which plagued the boundaries between life and death, physicality and ethereality. Her coterie writing proves the importance which she felt poetry played within society and the strength it held to bring people together, while the political allusions in her writing suggest just how detrimental a tumultuous political climate could have upon the human imagination. Most importantly, however, I believe her work acts as a social appeal, and at times even apology, for her husband's work. In emphasising her belief that the soul and the body are two separate entities, and in attempting to break the stereotype between destructive dissection and constructive, life affirming surgery she attempted to present a poetic and public humanisation of her husband's work – especially important in a period which used a medical taxonomy to communicate destructive political power. While Judith Bailey Slagle criticises contemporary Romantic audiences for not recognising Anne Hunter's talents apart from her husband's (Bailey Slagle p.104) a review given by Francis Jeffery in his 1803 Edinburgh Review I feel perfectly reflects and exemplifies Anne's intentions as both a poetess and social critic, and so it is with his words that I shall conclude my dissertation:

Such a union of science and genius has seldom been contemplated by the world, as in the persons of John Hunter and his lady... The characteristics of Mrs J. Hunter's

poetry are feeling and expression: feeling, devoid of artifice or affectation; and expression, uniting strength with elegance.<sup>78</sup>

I feel that the poetry of Anne Hunter earns her a firm place in the study of Romantic literature, and would like to see her work engaged in future scholarly debate. While my dissertation can do little but scratch the surface regarding the importance of her writing, I hope that it may encourage further research into this illustrious poetess. The role of science, and in particular medicine, in Romanticism is enjoying a particularly successful revival following the rise of New Historicism, which has seen literary study move beyond the merely textual to resurrect the context of the period. I believe that Anne Hunter's work is a vital tool in understanding the Romantic sensibilities and anatomies of death and politics.

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<sup>78</sup> Frances Jeffery, quoted in Caroline Grigson, *The Life and Poems of Anne Hunter: Haydn's Tuneful Voice*, ed. Caroline Grigson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) p.74

Appendix 1: Illustrations



Fig 1 Hogarth, *The Harlot's Progress*



Fig.2 Hogarth, *Southwark Fair*



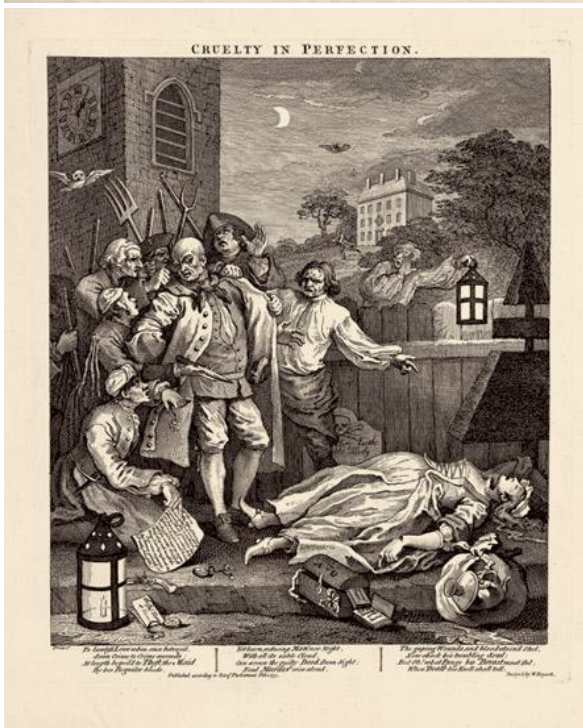
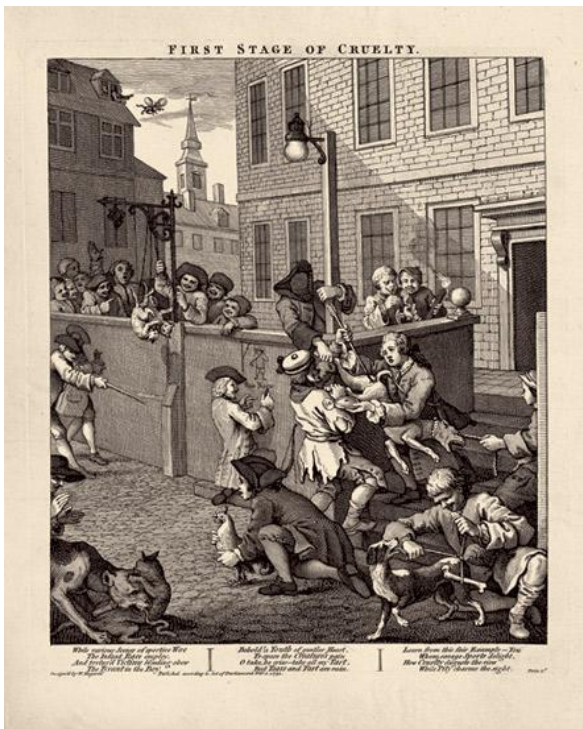


Fig.3 Hogarth, *The Four Stages of Cruelty*



**Fig.4** Rowlandson, *The Persevering Surgeon*



**Fig.5** Rowlandson, *The Resurrection Men*

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