



## *Romanticism on the Net*

### **Loss**

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#### **Abstract**

This article investigates the importance of loss in the Romantic period from two perspectives: as a philosophical concept that bears on Romantic linguistic theory and perceptions of history and in terms of particular objects that either bear traces of loss or point to or represent lost objects. Ruins are architectural signifiers of a Romantic feeling of the transience of time and nostalgic reminiscences of a bygone past. Bodies in particular open up a whole range of possible signification: dead poets' hair functions as a relic-like fetish, manuscripts as tokens of a material testimony of the poet's genius remind us of the connection between mind and text, and poets' statues bear witness to the transformation of the living body into a lasting cultural monument. Loss often indicates not only material loss but also the loss of original meaning, when the semantic attribution of things changes through recontextualization or relocation. Finally, when thinking about what is deemed worthy of preservation for posterity (mostly objects connected with a famous person of the period), one also needs to reflect on what is not preserved. In the context of Romantic authorship, it is very often the material belongings of women writers that were lost. The article concludes with a case study of two German Romantic writers, Emilie von Berlepsch and Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, and discusses the lack of material representation of their lives and works in a museum context.

#### **Biographical Note**

Barbara Schaff is Professor of English literature and Cultural studies at Göttingen University. Gender studies, travel writing, literary tourism and travel guidebooks are her main research areas, and she has published widely in this field. Her most recent book publication is the de Gruyter *Handbook of British Travel Writing* (2020).

1. To write about lost objects in the context of an exhibition of Romantic materialities invites us to think about how collections are constituted in the first place. History museum collections are based on what is there, something that is always contingent, and often

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arbitrary; assembled according as much to temporal criteria as to availability. What is deemed valuable in one period may be regarded less so in another, and likewise artefacts that should be in a collection, are lost, destroyed or find themselves elsewhere. Although we tend not often to think about it, missing things or blank spaces form part of every collection: the objects that are there always also gesture to those that are not. However, in the context of a collection, lost, stolen, or missing objects signify more than just an absence. They, too, can tell stories—about themselves, their creators and owners, of how and when they were lost.

2. The Romantic preoccupation with the self is one aspect of the period, another is the Romantic preoccupation with the discovery of the world. The explorations of foreign places and the encounter with its peoples shaped a modern, scientific understanding of the world which very much relied on collections sent home to be analyzed and categorized. Charles Darwin's shipments of specimens collected and sent from South America to England during his five-year-long voyage on the *Beagle* all arrived safely. They are perhaps rather the exception than the norm: shipwrecks were a constant real danger to any maritime enterprise, and they were so frequent during the period that shipwreck narratives became a popular genre in the Romantic period. As Carl Thompson observed in his study *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*:

For a nation such as Britain, for whom military and economic power, and even, to a great degree, cultural identity, were predicated on maritime prowess, shipwrecks were profoundly troubling events. They inflicted tragic and significant material losses—of

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friends and relatives on the one hand; of cargoes, business investments and so forth on the other. (3)

3. The Anglo-French explorer Henri Mouhot, who travelled through Siam and Laos in the early 1860s, may be a little more representative for the average nineteenth-century naturalist abroad. He experienced a severe setback when he learned that the *Sir James Brooke*, the ship with which he had sent boxes of collections of plants and insects to Britain, had sunk. In his travel diary, he laments their loss: “And so all my poor insects, which have cost me so much care and pains for many months, are lost—for ever—some of them are rare and valuable specimens which, alas! I shall probably never be able to replace” (Mouhot 61–62).
4. During his last expedition to Laos, he endeavoured to build up a new collection of insects—of which one chest was lost again through falling from an elephant (122): “Alas! what a journey my fragile collection of specimens, so difficult to gather together, has still to take, and what various accidents may befall them! Those who in museums contemplate the works of Nature do not think of all the perseverance, trouble, and anxiety required before they are safely brought home” (139).
5. Mouhot’s example shows us that collectors are always faced with an anxiety of loss, and that loss is ingrained in any collection. However, the idea of loss in itself has a particular significance for *RÊVE (Romantic Europe: The Virtual Exhibition)* because of the overall Romantic fascination with it. A feeling of loss is at the centre of Romantic philosophy and

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Romantic creativity. Paul de Man has called the Romantic recognition that the objects of the world don't correlate with language, the Romantic "nostalgia for the natural object," an acknowledgement of the fact that words and things are not congruent, and that between them something is lost to which no writer has access (de Man 69). Looking at Hölderlin's and Wordsworth's nature imagery, de Man observed how individual poetical imagination prevails over the representation of reality because language and object can never be one, and language can at best be appropriate. World and language stand apart, and the Romantic imagination attempts to bridge this gap and understand the "things for ever speaking" (Wordsworth 188–89). The *RÊVE* collection features one object which perfectly illustrates the Romantic view of the inadequacy of language, on the one hand, and the expectations associated with the medium of paper as a carrier for thoughts, emotions, and communications. on the other. In Hermann von Pückler-Muskau's tongue-in-cheek [letter to Bettine von Arnim](#) (Bohnenkamp), we are confronted with a nearly blank page which by its address—Bettine!—is identifiable as a letter, but otherwise remains completely blank. Anne Bohnenkamp identifies several losses Pückler-Muskau was experiencing at the time—financial, material (a manuscript had been lost), and emotional. Perhaps these losses turned out to be too overwhelming to be put into words, which is why the blank page alone had to suffice as a substitute.

6. A similar awareness of a loss of unity between man and the natural world in the Romantic period informs W. T. Mitchell's article "Romanticism and the Life of Things," in which he draws attention to the "new heightened perception of thingness" in the Romantic period which at the same time is informed by an anxiety of loss (173). Mitchell takes the image

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of the fossil and the totem as a cue to draft a Romantic material turn or awareness of things that allows humans for the first time in history a window “into the childhood of the human race and the earliest stages of its planet. . . . The fossil is a trace of a vanished life-form and a lost world; the totem is the image of a vanishing, endangered life, the trace of a world disappearing.” (178) This is nothing less than an epistemic revolution which both expands a sense of history beyond the human and at the same time points to the possible end of human histories. Many objects in *RÊVE*, particularly those connected with colonial enterprises, bear in them traces of an envisaged ending of history. The vast number of artefacts that James Cook brought back from his three Pacific voyages, about two thousand objects in total, signify not only the “discovery” of the—in Europe until then unknown—Polynesian world, but at the same time indicate a point in Polynesian history where their loss of cultural integrity is already on the horizon. The one element from Cook’s collection featuring in *RÊVE* works as an appropriate metaphor in this context. It is a [heva](#), a mourning dress from Tahiti which would, soon after Christianity was introduced to the Polynesians, fall out of use because the traditional funereal rites would be replaced by Christian ones (Schaff). Similarly, [John Soane’s sarcophagus](#) is a testimony not only to Romantic Egyptomania, which Sophie Thomas reminds us peaked around 1820 in the wake of Giovanni Belzoni’s spectacular discoveries at Luxor and in the Valley of the Kings, but also to his illustrated *Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries*, published by John Murray in 1820. Both as a container for the dead body of King Seti I and a carrier for his journey into the afterlife, the sarcophagus is also a powerful material reminder of the transience of human life, and more generally of human cultures; a notion which Shelley explored in his sonnet “Ozymandias”: “Nothing beside remains. Round the decay / Of that

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colossal Wreck, boundless and bare / The lone and level sands stretch far away” (lines 12–14).

**Ruins**

7. Shelley’s poem also hints at the wider context of the well-known Romantic poetics of ruins. The medieval ecclesiastical ruins in Gothic novels signifying anxieties of a sinister Catholicism, the fragments of the Egyptian statue in “Ozymandias,” or Byron’s evocation of a decaying Venice: they all point to the metaphorical notion of the ruin as a signifier for destruction by time and politics. This is poetically highlighted in Byron’s “Ode on Venice”: “Oh Venice! Venice! when thy marble walls / Are level with the water, there shall be / A cry of nation o’er thy sunken halls,” as here the rhymes “halls” and “walls” echo the envisioned “fall” of Venice (lines 1–3; Von Koppenfels 100). Although strictly speaking the ruin is perhaps only a half-lost object, its semiotic substance is all loss. Its materiality refers to a lost wholeness and material function as dwelling or a site of worship, which turns it into a projection foil for the Romantic observer who can invest it with nostalgic reflections about time, transience, and political hubris. Romantic ruinophilia found its expression in various forms. Gothic literature is replete with ruins, so is Romantic landscape painting, and often enough ruins were deliberately created as testimonies of the fragile divide between nature and culture. “Ruins,” observes Svetlana Boym, “make us think of the past that could have been and the future that never took place, tantalizing us with utopian dreams of escaping the irreversibility of time” (58). Although depictions of ruins in Romantic landscape paintings on the surface mostly comply with Gilpin’s aesthetic

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ideal of the picturesque, inviting the observer to reflect nostalgically on the transience of time, they are sometimes connected with concrete political claims to amend territorial losses. Asker Pelgrom reminds us in his comments on [B. C. Koekkoek's series of paintings](#) of Luxembourg landscapes and ruins, which had been commissioned by William II, how these newly acquired properties of the king are less a nostalgic glance back into the past than a political statement, "claiming the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg for the House of Orange. The commission to Koekkoek can be read as the symbolic support to these claims, in which the presence of ruins represents the continuity and legitimacy of political power."

8. If ruins occupy a twilight zone between architectural integrity and decline, many buildings of course have not stood the test of time and were demolished. Only their representations in art or literature remind us of their loss. Ellen Harvey's art project "The Disappointed Tourist" (last exhibited at the *Museum der Moderne* in Salzburg in 2022) is a collection of paintings of lost sites from different historical periods; buildings destroyed in wars and natural disasters or demolished in processes of restructuring and rebuilding. Among them is a painting of William Beckford's [Fonthill Abbey](#) (Harvey), which is based on J. M. W. Turner's watercolour from 1799. Fonthill is an exemplary lost dwelling which embodies Romantic medievalism and remains, as Nicola Watson has put it, "a lost exercise in the architectural expression of a Romantic self, in company with Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill, Sir John Soane's house in London, and Walter Scott's Abbotsford" (Watson qtd. in Harvey). Fonthill Abbey is a building in which loss and transitoriness are doubly inscribed: in its eclectic Gothic style as well as in its unsound structures and excessive dimensions, which led to its collapse and early demolition. Beckford, one of the

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richest men in England at the time because of his extensive Jamaican sugar plantations, had commissioned architect James Wyatt to build a spectacular Gothic Revival building and insisted on speedy construction. The building, however, proved to be short-lived. The 270-foot-high tower, which could be said to mirror its fictional counterpart, the gigantic tower in Beckford's orientalist fantasy *Vathek* (1786), collapsed and was rebuilt three times shortly after completion. By the 1820s, Beckford had spent so much money on the building and consequently lost two of his Jamaican plantations that he was forced to sell Fonthill. Today it has mostly disappeared.

### **Bodies**

9. In spiritual and religious frameworks, the short-lived human body has always been regarded as a reminder of the transitoriness of life, or in other words, a *memento mori*. Consequently, the Christian religion invested relics of saints with beliefs in life-transcending powers. In the Romantic period, however, the fragile integrity of the human body also became prominently visible in two other contexts: the life sciences and war. The exponential growth of anatomical knowledge around 1800 not only led to more sophisticated answers to questions about life and death but also introduced a view of the body as fragmented and as lifeless substance. Illustrated anatomical treatises showcased separate parts and structures of the body, public dissections performed the transition from human body to matter before an audience, and gruesome anatomy-related crimes such as body snatcher incidents or the famous Burke and Hare murders in Edinburgh in the 1820s were voyeuristically exploited by the media. They all focused on broken and disintegrated



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aspects of the human body which found their most famous and iconic literary representation in 1818 in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, Or the Modern Prometheus*. Lesser-known texts such as Thomas Hood's comical ballad "[Mary's Ghost](#)," represented in *RÊVE* in the form of a song sheet, also point to a fascination with dismembered bodies (Rhodes). In this ballad, the ghost of a woman whose body was stolen from the grave and given to anatomists appears to her fiancé and gives him a detailed account of her posthumous fate:

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.

I vowed that you should have my hand,

But fate gives us denial;

You'll find it there, at Doctor Bell's,

In spirits and a phial. (lines 21—28; Hood qtd. in Rhodes)

Similarly, mass slaughter during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and in particular the media coverage of the battle of Waterloo and the ensuing battlefield tourism, exposed contemporaries to the perishability of the human body on a grand scale. Thomas Hood wrote another comic poem, "A Ballad of Waterloo," with a similar focus on a fragmented

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body: here, a dying soldier lists his various injuries and bids his lover and his comrades goodbye, pointing to the final extinction of the body by cremation:

Farewell, my regimental mates,  
With whom I used to dress!  
My corps is changed, and I am now  
In quite another mess.

Farewell, my Patty dear, I have  
No dying consolations,  
Except, when I am dead, you'll go  
And see th' Illuminations. (Hood 435)

It is perhaps little wonder that discourses and practices emerged in the early nineteenth century which countered the inevitable loss of the human body with a focus on its—at least partially—more durable bodily matter such as bones and hair. The veneration of writers' hair relics, often elaborately framed, points to vestiges of religious or magical beliefs in the auratic power of their owners. Locks of hair were often, but not exclusively, given to lovers: often preserved in medallions, they could be worn around the neck in closest proximity to the body of the owner. Two examples in the *RÊVE* collection, [a lock of Goethe's hair](#) (Hearn and Reynolds) and [a lock of Byron's hair](#) (Guiliani and Saglia), illustrate the complex symbolism connected with hair. Byron, according to Claudia Guiliani and Diego Saglia, had been in the habit of freely dispensing his locks as well as receiving hair, as

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sentimental love tokens or reminders of death. The lovely golden medallion, decorated with blue and black enamel, contains a lock of his hair given to his lover Teresa Gamba Guiccioli as a parting gift before his departure for Greece in July 1823. This clearly is a private exchange between two lovers who were in the habit of exchanging locks as metonymic icons of their affection and perhaps also magical charms warding off death or separation—another medallion in Teresa’s collection has both her and Byron’s hair braided together. Quite a different symbolism is connected with [the lock of Goethe’s hair](#), also part of the *RÊVE* collection (Hearn and Reynolds). Goethe’s hair, presented in a gilded frame, which also contains a small sketched portrait and a violet, refers to an entirely different context. Cut from his head after Goethe had been seriously, and nearly fatally, ill by his friend Johannes Falk, a poet, this lock must have been an enormously prestigious object for the recipient: Germany’s national poet and hence a most public figure in the German national consciousness at least partially became a cherished family possession for many generations, until the lock was ultimately given in 1953 by a descendant of Falk to the Taylor Institution library.

10. Harald Hendrix has shown how the rediscovery and showcasing of [Dante’s bones](#) in Ravenna in 1865 not only testifies to the cult of the author in the Italian national narrative but also to the desire to reconstruct Dante’s head and visualize artistic genius in his physical features for posterity. Dante, as a poet whose works could never be connected with a face or body—as no portrait exists—challenges the imagination of readers in a particular way. Culturally ingrained ideas about the congruence between the look of an artist and his work, crystallized in such well-known phrases as Matthew Arnold’s view of Shelley as a

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“beautiful and ineffectual angel” (203–04), have long informed the reception of texts, bridging the gap between the life and work of an author. Unsurprisingly, the desire to reconstruct Dante’s visage from mortal remains that had been lost for 350 years and could now give the nation a fitting vessel for the poet’s genius, was further fuelled in the 1920s and 1930s by a zeitgeist informed by dubious pseudo-scientific craniological theories. A contentious debate evolved around the question of whether the material reconstruction of Dante’s head, rather than the restitution of the lost body, would trivialize the poet’s memory and desacralize the bodily remains. Finally, the materialist faction opting for reconstruction won, and the ensuing transnational distribution of the bust of Dante, which found its way into academic institutions all over the world, proves once more how the loss of the human body, and in particular the loss of a revered author, painfully disturbs the culturally established conflation between an author’s physical and textual corpus or, as Thomas Prendergast has put it more pointedly, between the corpse and the corpus.

11. Similarly, [the Shelley Memorial](#) by Edward Onslow Ford at University College, Oxford, tells us about the desire to turn the loss of the poet’s dead body (and in this case a spectacularly lost body, as it was washed up on the Ligurian shore mangled by fish, decomposed, and finally cremated on the beach) into a lasting material document of eternal youth and beauty. As Nicholas Halmi points out, it is the drowned body that is represented in the memorial, not the living poet. Two bronze plaques on the dark green marble plinth refer to Shelley’s “Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats,” a poem which transforms the grief over the loss of the poet’s physical existence into the recognition of the eternal life of the spirit, and stands, just as the sculpture, as a testimony to the longevity

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of art. In “Adonais,” Shelley performs, as Arden Hegele has suggested, a textual postmortem, which provides the reader with a diagnosis for the cause of death in stanza 36 (86). Shelley then gradually replaces the body of Keats with his elegy as a textual embodiment, turning physical death into poetic creativity that overcomes the material body: Adonais, Shelley claims, “is not dead, he doth not sleep, / He hath awakened from the dream of life” and “outsoared the shadow of our night” (stanzas 39–40), whereas the grieving mourners “decay / Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief / Convulse us and consume us day by day” (stanza 39). Edward Onslow Ford’s monument takes up Shelley’s literary conceit of a gradual textual transformation of body into text but expresses it in the language of sculpture. Details such as the grieving muse and the quotations from “Adonais” take up the grief over the dead body, but most importantly, it is the synchronicity of death and life in the material of the white marble, the representation of the dead body which is yet unharmed by decay, that mythologizes the poet’s body as a monument of eternal beauty in which death and eternity are both inscribed.

### **Manuscripts**

12. Anxiety of loss informed Romantic writing on its most mundane level: the fear of losing a manuscript of which no fair copy existed. The famous story of Carlyle’s draft for his book on the French Revolution, which he had given to John Stuart Mill for comments, and which was allegedly used by Mill’s illiterate maid to light the fire so that Carlyle had to rewrite the book from memory, is probably not the only case of a manuscript lost through accident. Jeff Cowton has shared the story of the [Malta Notebook](#): a collection of then unpublished

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poems by Wordsworth, transcribed for Coleridge by William, Dorothy, and Mary in a vellum-bound notebook of 186 leaves for his sojourn on Malta. Because putting it together from various sources had been, in Dorothy's words, such an "intricate and weary job," they made a second back-up copy just in case the one intended for Coleridge got lost (Wordsworth qtd. in Cowton). An incident on Coleridge's voyage home in 1806 proves that a sea journey in these times was indeed dangerous: the ship was attacked by Spanish privateers, and "boxes of government papers in which Coleridge has entrusted his own, were thrown overboard as a safety measure" (Cowton). Thankfully, the Malta Notebook was not among them.

13. Manuscripts can be lost for posterity in many ways. Accidentally, or deliberately, when authors destroy them themselves or sell them to publishers who do not keep them after printing. Perhaps it is fair to say that it is more surprising if a manuscript of a printed work survives than if it is lost (as is the case with Jane Austen's six novels, of which no manuscript survives). However, a nostalgic grief for the lost urtext often informs contemporary attitudes to manuscripts. We deplore the fact that there is no original, although the printed version is very probably quite faithful. Dominik La Capra has stimulated a debate about the theoretical and methodologically naïve fetishization of manuscripts (Capra qtd. in Taylor 197). The implicit accusation contained in the use of the term *fetish* is that the manuscript is invested with a misplaced desire for a lost object or origin to which posterity has no access. As an object physically connected with an author in the creative process, the manuscript is fetishized as a surrogate for the author as well as a particular authentic historical moment inaccessible for later readers. John Keats explored

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the opposition between the perishable physicality of the writer's hand, associating it with the medium or tool by which thoughts can be turned into a material object, and the more durable materiality of the text in a poem. "This living hand, now warm and capable" is contrasted with a haunting premonition of death. This also finds its formal expression in the poem's composition as a fragment—as if the writer had had to stop in the process of writing.

14. Because manuscripts bear the imprint of a writer's hand, they retain an auratic value as a *pars pro toto* the printed text has not. This is even more the case when a manuscript is lost without having gone into print, subjecting it to a whole range of speculations. Francesca Benatti's analysis of [Lord Byron's lost manuscript memoirs](#), which were committed to the flames in John Murray's office, illustrates how a lost text runs the risk of becoming mythologized as a possible last biographical clue. Already during his lifetime, Byron's memoirs were "a hot literary commodity" (Benatti). Byron had given the manuscript to his friend Thomas Moore on condition that they would not be published during his lifetime. Moore, who was chronically short of money, in turn had sold the manuscript to Byron's publisher Murray on condition that he could buy it back at any time during Byron's lifetime for the same sum. Byron, however, died before Moore could get hold of the memoirs again. Murray, Byron's executor John Cam Hobhouse, and Augusta Leigh, Byron's half-sister, all feared that their publication could bring compromising details of Byron's life to light and cause a scandal and, even worse for Murray, result in a decline in the sale of Byron's other works. Consequently, the manuscript was burned in John Murray's office in what Fiona MacCarthy has called "the most famous sacrificial scene of literary history" (539).

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The spectacle of this staged *autodafé* may, however, have eclipsed the fact that, as MacCarthy claims, over twenty people had read the memoirs over the years, making extracts and copies and each coming out with their own version of Byron (540). All subsequent lives of Byron turned the poet's life into an object of speculation, interpretation, and mythologization, deleting the authorial subject, the autobiographical voice of the author. What was lost to posterity, then, was perhaps not so much any unknown fact of Byron's life but the manuscript as a physical testimony of his writing.

15. A similarly speculative biographical interest is connected with another lost book, [Shelley's copy of the \*Iliad\*](#) (Varinelli). It was part of the 1801 edition of Homer by Thomas Grenville owned by Shelley. Why only the *Odyssey* survived and the *Iliad* was lost is another of the mysteries posterity will never be able to solve completely, but it can hypothesize, conjecture, and fabricate its own narrative of loss. Valentina Varinelli offers an appealing version in her contribution on Shelley's Homer. He had especially requested for the Homer to be sent to him to Italy in October 1821. Shelley had much preferred the *Iliad* over the *Odyssey* and declared it an absolute masterpiece. Wouldn't it be plausible that he took his most cherished book with him on his last fatal sailing trip, perhaps reading how Homer frames the attacking Greeks in an elaborate extended sea metaphor, while the storm was gathering over the Ligurian sea? We will never know. Lost texts are, more than any others, open texts, challenging readers to conjure their own textual and contextual interpretations.
16. I would like to conclude by connecting the topos of lost materialities with the category of gender. This is of course an obvious one, and ever since Marilyn Butler, Stuart Curran,



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Anne Mellor, and others started questioning a nearly exclusively male Romantic canon, the successful hunt for lost women writers and their manuscripts has steadily been reorganizing the Romantic canon. Looking at the *RÊVE* collection, it seems likely that Romantic materiality is best preserved when its owners were famous in their lifetimes: in other words, mostly men. The retrieval and excavation over the past four decades of so many texts by forgotten women from the Romantic period has brought forgotten manuscripts or publications from archives to light that never made it into the literary memory of following generations. As testimonials to female Romantic authorship, texts—either as manuscripts or in print—have shown themselves to be much more resilient than other artefacts from these women’s lives. If women writers’ homes were not turned into museums, as, for instance, Jane Austen’s home, the chances that mundane artefacts from their lives survived are low. Such is the case with the German writer Emilie von Berlepsch. Emilie, although not as famous as her contemporaries Bettine von Arnim, Sophie Mereau, Dorothea Schlegel, or Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, was still a renowned and widely published author in a range of fields. She was a feminist, propagating female autonomy and women’s right for divorce (she herself divorced her first husband in 1795); a travel writer who published the first German travelogue about Scotland in 1800; and a poet. Because she had embarked on a mostly peripatetic life after her divorce, apart from her publications and correspondences, no other material traces of her are left, neither in the family archive of her first husband nor from her second marriage with August Heinrich Harms, with whom she acquired the country estate and vineyard Mariahalden in Switzerland in 1806. Financial difficulties required its sale in 1817, and for the rest of her life, Emilie von Berlepsch lived in various places in straitened circumstances.

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17. Even one of the most important women poets of German Romanticism, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, who has two dedicated literary museums in Germany, is scarcely represented in these with personal belongings. Born in Burg Hülshoff, a sixteenth-century moated castle in North Rhine Westphalia, she moved together with her mother and sister, after the death of her father in 1826, into a nearby eighteenth-century country house, the Haus Rüschaus, now the main Droste museum in Germany. Here she lived for twenty years, occupying three rooms and writing most of her work in the drawing room—called by her the “Schneckenhäuschen” (snail shell). During the COVID-19 lockdown, the museum produced [four poetic virtual tours](#) through the Haus Rüschaus that give intimate insights into the poet’s rooms, work, and domestic and material conditions of her life such as travel or religion and connects them with her texts. The present interior of her study is arranged according to a sketch left by the poet, but no original furniture is left, only a desk which, as the guide explains on a virtual tour through the museum, is similar to the one she would have used. Similarly, the Droste museum Fürstehäusle Meersburg in southern Germany, where she lived intermittently between 1841 and 1848 and where she died in 1848, is furnished only with period objects and furniture but has no personal belongings (however, the Meersburger Nachlass contained all her letters, private papers, and manuscripts). Droste-Hülshoff is an example of a woman writer who is part of the Romantic literary canon and the cultural memory, but perhaps because she had not enough literary success during her lifetime, her personal belongings no longer exist. The Romantic cult of genius which has left us so many material testimonies, stands thus in opposition to an overall ephemerality of female Romantic materiality. However, the Droste museum is

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also a prime example of how material losses can be countered in creative ways, and how a lack of authentic testimony can be compensated by an associative web of references. Droste-Hülshoff's birthplace is today part historical museum, part centre for literature which enriches the literary museum experience with innovative projects (Center for Literature Burg Hülshoff). The 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her birth in 2022 gave occasion to a variety of projects, many of them also digitally available. The exhibition *Droste Digital*, which opened on September 15, 2022, takes selected digitized parts of her manuscripts as an opportunity to introduce the public to the vast digitization project of her oeuvre. A number of artists have transformed six rooms of the Burg Hülshoff into spatial reimaginings of main topics and motifs in her work. Her most famous novel, *Die Judenbuche*, was turned into a multimedia performance taking place under eight different trees in the park. And last but not least, the frequent motif of ghosts in Droste-Hülshoff's work is honoured in the project *Mit den Gespenstern leben (haunting / heritage)* which builds on the assumption that ghosts or revenants are not just literary phenomena but paradoxical figures that come from the past to the present and belong to neither of them, existing both inside and outside of time, inside and outside of history. The figure of the ghost is perhaps the most apposite figure to think through material loss, because its spectral presence assures us that nothing is forever lost but only transformed into different forms, media, and modes that make us remember the past and imagine the future.

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