

RON

Romanticism on the Net

Bodies

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Abstract

Drawing on selected objects from *RÊVE (Romantic Europe: The Virtual Exhibition)*, this essay discusses possible ways of exploring Romantic-period bodies through their material relics, including textual inscriptions, and immaterial traces such as sensations or memories. Its focus is on artefacts that enable us to outline narratives about culture-specific notions of the physical, as well as the experiences and affects associated with it. To this end, the essay focuses particularly on exhibits related to the mourning and memorializing of a (dead) beloved body – male or female, real or imagined, and treated seriously or comically – and how they testify to an intersection of competing, though interlaced, forms of dispersal and collection, fragmentation and recomposition. Among the objects examined are Teresa Guiccioli's travelling chest, a medallion with Byron's hair, Tippoo's Tiger, and Thomas Hood's poem "Mary's Ghost." This contribution explores a portion of the vast and heterogeneous cultural corpus of conceptions and experiences of the Romantic-era body in order to trace narratives of mediation and incompleteness that may open up unsuspected new approaches to, and interpretations of, Romantic-period corporealities.

Biographical Note

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1. Exploring the connections between bodies and objects in Romantic-period cultures may appear an operation doomed to failure from the outset. Any attempt at envisaging the body within the cultural milieus of Romantic Europe conjures up a vast and heterogeneous

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panorama that seems either impossible to apprehend or dismissible as inexistent in itself. As Alain Corbin notes of its nineteenth-century manifestations, the body is “un objet historique dont la dimension défie toute tentative de synthèse véritable” (“an historical object whose dimension defies any attempt at a true synthesis”; 9).¹ More constructively, a reaction such as Corbin’s points to the critical and interpretative challenges posed by the body in the transitional decades between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and, as I suggest in what follows, objects offer ways of addressing the challenges of Romantic-period bodies only partly available to us through material relics (including textual inscriptions) and traces of their immaterial intimations such as sensations or memories. By referencing culture-specific constructions and experiences of the body, artefacts help us outline narratives about these constructions and experiences. In order to clarify the type of approach I have in mind, I will start by focusing on a body-related object in *Romantic Europe: The Virtual Exhibition (RÊVE)*, which, at one point in its history, contained a number of other body-related objects: [the travelling chest](#) (Saglia) owned by the Ravennese countess Teresa Guiccioli, *née* Gamba, Lord Byron’s “last attachment.”

2. Currently kept at Ravenna’s Biblioteca Classense and destined for the city’s Museo Byron, due to open in 2024, this solid box of mahogany was originally intended as a container for toiletries and other instruments for grooming and body care. Made in Paris by the Palma Manufacture, the producers of one of Queen Marie Antoinette’s *nécessaires de voyage* (now at the Louvre), Teresa’s travelling chest is a sumptuous artefact expressive of a privileged lifestyle.² She probably acquired it in the 1820s, and only later in life, and after her divorce from Count Alessandro Guiccioli, used it to collect her Byronic souvenirs, which she placed

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inside a woven basket ironically decorated with her mother-in-law's coat of arms. Gradually, the chest became a time capsule of memories of events and emotions associated with "her own" Byron. The miscellaneous collection comprised medallions with locks of hair (hers, Byron's, or both twined together), a handkerchief, rose petals from Newstead, Byron's letters to the countess, a handful of apricot kernels, Teresa's copy of Madame de Staël's *Corinne* (where Byron inserted a letter in English), a piece of tapestry from Byron's bedroom at Newstead, and many other assorted souvenirs.

3. The critic Mario Praz, who has been described as an "incoercible materialist" (Ficara xi), described Teresa's "mysterious mahogany chest" as the relic of a lost era, the nineteenth century, an "immense mine of things imbued with sweat and tears" and exhaling the "thick perfume" of the past (Praz 68, 69). As physiological manifestations of affective surges, sweat and tears point to an interfacing of body and psyche, materiality and the immaterial, that uncannily connects Teresa's and Byron's bodies to those of latter-day recipients, such as Praz, of the sensory and memorial suggestions enshrined in the travelling chest. The countess's box collects fragments of bodies or body-related objects and the sensorial experiences associated with them (sight, smell, taste, and touch, primarily). Superordinate to individual objects, the chest throws into relief such actions as preserving bodies, retrieving them, and feeling them again. It also emphasizes how the iterations of these actions across successive cultural-historical phases and individual experiences endlessly renew the fascination exerted by past bodies and their traces, as well as their pressing demands upon our capacity to interrogate and interpret them.

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4. The chest and its contents are emblematic in that they flag a whole range of issues concerning bodies in Romantic-period cultures. An artefact made in France and associated with travel, and a collection of objects from Italy and England, they highlight how bodies and their related objects move in space and time and beyond national boundaries.³ They constitute an assemblage of objects for, but also from, the body. In addition, as evidenced by Praz, their affective potential, that is, their ability to elicit affective responses, qualifies them as objects that can morph into *things*, which Bill Brown defines as materialities that, by asserting themselves, become “less an object than a particular subject-object relation” (4). And if the question of acknowledging the thing’s independence from the human subject remains a moot point, the power of certain artefacts to exert pressure on the human subject, creating what Ian Hodder terms an “entanglement,” yet constitutes a form of agency that blurs the line between active subject and passive object.⁴

5. Byron’s skin – several pieces of friable, translucent matter similar to parchment – is possibly the object in Teresa’s travelling chest that most dramatically illuminates some of these questions. According to Geoffrey Bond and Christine Kenyon Jones, it is because Byron “fell seriously ill after being badly sunburnt when he swam out to sea in the scorching heat after attending Shelley’s cremation [in August 1822]” that we now have “[o]ne of the more bizarre mementoes of Byron”—that is, “a collection of the flakes of skin that peeled off his back and shoulders, which Teresa carefully saved” (102). The piece of paper (not in Teresa’s hand) accompanying the fragments reads: “Pelle di L. Byron cadutagli in una malattia presa per aver nuotato tre ore consecutive agli ardenti raggi del sole di agosto nell’anno 1822” (“Skin of L. Byron shed during an illness caused by having swum three

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hours consecutively in the fiery rays of the August sun in the year 1822”; Bond and Kenyon Jones 145).

6. Undoubtedly bizarre, the skin is one of the most enigmatic mementoes in Teresa’s box – certainly the most disconcerting and, for some, the most gruesome. In certain respects, it is akin to the much more common hair in Teresa’s collection of Byroniana; but, unlike hair, it has not been turned into ornaments or a part of them. It has not been remade or made useful. As Bond and Kenyon Jones observe, the skin, as well as other “physical remnants of Byron” in Teresa’s box, “remind us of Byron’s corporeality more strongly than any artwork could do” (102). This is so also because, not having been aestheticized and repurposed, it confronts us as a simultaneously familiar and strange object fraught with a wealth of body-related allusions: possibly related to Byron’s swimming, it references the active and moving body; it conjures up the body in the environment (and the effect of sea and sun on it); it signals the ill and fragmenting body, while also intimating abjectness (from *abjicio*: to cast or throw aside); and it is a remnant of the interface between the inside and outside of the body, as well as of the surface where emotions become visible. Religiously collected and preserved by Teresa, the fragments of Byron’s skin are relics endowed with synecdochic significance in relation to the Romantic-period body. They encapsulate its being at the centre of interacting and clashing currents of dispersal and collection, fragmentation and recomposition.

7. If the pieces of Byron’s skin suggest countless narratives about the body, they also alert us to the limitations of our ability to recover and reconstruct Romantic-period corporealities.

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Objects (and things) make them both excitingly present and frustratingly elusive. Though common to all past artefacts, this contradiction is especially pertinent to the body precisely because what we have are fragments, accessories, and representations of what was once alive, and which promise some form of contact with that condition, yet can only offer it in mediated, incomplete ways. On these premises, my considerations start from the possibly self-evident assumption that the body is *there* in the objects showcased by *RÊVE*, but only as a fragment (of a body, of a body-related artefact, of a cultural practice) that becomes meaningful if we narrate and interpret it. Yet, as soon as we do so, and think we have encased and preserved it in discourse, it has already eluded us. In tracing these ambivalences, I concentrate on artefacts related to the mourning and memorializing of a (dead) beloved body, which can be male or female, real or imagined, and treated seriously or comically. In fact, there are many other types of bodies on show in *RÊVE* – Black, disabled, and working-class, among others – and even more bodies are not yet represented in it. Similarly, Romantic cultures present a great variety of media for representing the body – such as marble or stone (as in the Shelley Memorial at University College, Oxford, featured in *RÊVE*) – which, however, remain outside the purview of this essay. Another important phenomenon not addressed in the following pages concerns the period-specific practices of disposing of the physical body and the complex culture of mourning, for which Esther Schor's *Bearing the Dead* (1994) remains a classic reference. Inevitably restricted, the selection of objects examined below explores a portion of this vast cultural corpus as an invitation to outline new narratives of mediation and incompleteness, the only possible ones in the case of Romantic-period bodies.

Narrating Romantic Bodies through *RÊVE*

8. Dating back to at least Praz's *The Romantic Agony* (1930), whose Italian title is a more physical *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (*Flesh, Death and the Devil in Romantic Literature*), critical work on the body in Romantic-period literature and culture has burgeoned in recent years, stemming from perspectives as diverse as feminist theory and criticism, Foucauldian analyses of biopower, postcoloniality, theatre and spectularity, affect, and disability studies. In turn, the gallery of bodies and body types under scrutiny has expanded, and the body has become ubiquitous in Romantic-era scholarship and criticism.

9. Critical studies of British Romantic literature and culture seem to have traditionally positioned themselves between the extremes of a text-centred approach (as in Jean Hagstrum's pioneering *The Romantic Body: Love and Sexuality in Keats, Wordsworth and Blake*) and a cultural-discursive one (as in Stephanie O'Rourke's *Art, Science and the Body in Early Romanticism*). These works represent the ideal, and far from mutually exclusive, *termini* of a highly variegated terrain where shared themes and concerns abound: the production and institutionalizing of scientific knowledge about the body and related medical practices (Porter); the body as a statistical object and the question of controlling multiplying bodies (Levitan; Fairclough; Carson); normative discourses of the body, and bodies escaping categorizations (Youngquist; Eigen and Larrimore; Gilroy-Ware; Joshua); the ailing body and mind (Whitehead; Allard; Davies); the body in the context of imperialism and colonialism (Bewell); the body as an object of visual representation and related forms

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of spectacularization, and interacting bodies within changing sociocultural contexts (Roberts; Wilson; Samuelian).

10. A multifarious reality crystallizing concerns and mobilizing cultural energies, the Romantic body calls for situated readings focusing on localized variables rather than fixed, recurrent traits. And this is precisely where the nature and scope of a project such as *RÊVE* becomes relevant. For the aptness of this situated approach is borne out by the tendency, proper to Romantic-era cultures, to make the body an object of showing and a locus of show. Significant instances include exhibiting bodies, sometimes scientifically, sometimes in freak shows of curiosities and aberrations – for example, in such London venues as the Hunterian Museum, the Egyptian Hall on Piccadilly, or Madame Tussaud’s travelling waxworks, which moved around Europe before she settled in London and opened her museum in 1835. Living bodies are also on display within the frames of socializing and fashion, such as the bodies of the *merveilleuses* and the *incroyables* of the Directoire era in Paris or the dandies in Regency London. And bodies are regularly exhibited as sites of national and cultural values, as in the opening of Raphael’s tomb and exhumation of his remains on September 14, 1833, or the display of Dante’s bones, after the unification of Italy, in 1865 (Hendrix) – both occasions hinging on a staunchly patriotic spectacularization of embodied genius and creativity.

11. These and many other forms of constructing and experiencing the body gain increased visibility in Romantic-period Europe, originating networks of interrelated shifts and transformations. Underlying them is the fact that the body is caught up in a cultural force

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field in which Enlightenment rationalism (and its body-related scientific-philosophical currents such as mechanism and sensism) interacts with countervailing drives to a reenchanting of the world that valorizes the immaterial and transcendental potential of the physical. Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the taxonomic and regulatory tendencies of the former clashed and intersected repeatedly with the fluctuating, aleatory processes of the latter mode, resulting in mixed and unstable conceptions and constructions of corporeality.

12. Within this field of opposing forces, the human body appears as a mosaic of stories that we can partly retrieve through objects and organize along the axes of collecting and dispersal. The body contained in these objects is fragmented, just as their narratives are about bodies in pieces; but these objects and stories also serve to preserve and hold the body together, to deflect fragmentation and dispersal. Put differently, Romantic-period cultures bear evidence of a concern with the body as an aggregate as well as a tendency to envisage it as in pieces, dispersing, falling or already fallen apart, decaying, defunct, or dead. It is precisely this oscillatory model that lies at the heart of the volume for the nineteenth century of the pioneering *Histoire du corps* (2005) edited by Alain Corbin, and its ambitious attempt to identify shared European ways of understanding, living, and acting on the body in medicine, psychology, the arts, and sports practice, among others. As Olivier Faure observes in one of the chapters of this volume, from the revolutionary period onwards, medical approaches to the body show a general “tendance à fragmenter le corps” (“tendency to fragment the body”), while “l’environnement total du malade devient aussi un terrain privilégié de

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l'observation" ("the total environment of the patient also becomes a privileged field of observation," 16).

13. Objects in *RÊVE* provide evidence of how Romantic-period cultures engage with corporeality and produce the body in ways that alternate between keeping it together and preserving its cohesiveness, on one hand, and forms of fragmentation and dispersal, on the other. Some objects make one or the other mode more clearly visible, while others can sum up both. One such object is the grotto known as "[Narcissa's Tomb](#)" (Seth) in Montpellier's Jardin des Plantes, inspired by an episode in Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–45) in which a young Protestant woman is clandestinely interred at night because she cannot receive an official burial in a Catholic churchyard. Inaugurated in 1819, the tomb commemorates this moving and very popular part of the poem, thus also collecting (virtually) a whole series of parts and fragments: Narcissa's remains, the passage from *Night Thoughts* where her story is told, and the many apocryphal anecdotes circulating about this episode (for example, the widely believed tale that Narcissa was Young's own daughter, who had died of ill health in France). As with Teresa's travelling case, Narcissa's tomb is a device that gathers body-related pieces and fragments, another emblematic instance of the interrelated tendencies to collection and dispersal that inform Romantic-period approaches to, and experiences of, the physical.

14. The next sections examine these tendencies by way of selected objects made of hair, which are related to collecting through operations of entwining, recomposing, and assembling, and through objects focusing on body parts and therefore referring to acts of separating,

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disassembling, and cutting. Testifying to the body's visibility and spectacularizing, artefacts from *RÊVE* bear out this narrative woven round collecting and dispersal and provide ways of accessing a significant portion of the complex of ideas of the body, practices about it, and modes of living and experiencing it in Romantic-period European cultures.

Collecting the Body: Hair as Jewellery

15. Made from a body part literally gathered and interwoven, hair objects and especially jewellery are emblematic of the Romantic-period interest in collected corporeality. To be sure, the practice of creating jewels out of hair was nothing new and has been the object of much illuminating research, as has the Romantic interest in hair as a collector's item (Pointon, "Materializing" and "Wearing"; P. Miller; Holm; Heaton). These two interconnected strands offer insights into the period's concern with the body as an aggregate that needs to be shored up and preserved (Pointon, "Fragments").

16. One of the most significant episodes of Romantic (celebrity) hair collecting is undoubtedly that centring on Lord Byron, Lucrezia Borgia, and Leigh Hunt. In late 1816, Byron visited Milan's Biblioteca Ambrosiana, where he was fascinated by some "original love-letters and verses of Lucretia de Borgia & Cardinal Bembo; and a lock of [Lucrezia's] hair," "so long – and fair & beautiful" that in a letter of 15 October he confessed to his half-sister Augusta Leigh: "I mean to get some of the hair if I can" (Byron 5: 114, 115). The next day he wrote about it again in a similar tone to his publisher John Murray (Byron 5: 116). Eventually, Byron managed to secure – allegedly through pilfering – a lock of Lucrezia's hair, which

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he later presented to Leigh Hunt, a known hoarder of celebrity locks (the work of a lifetime, his collection featured hair from Milton, Swift, Dr Johnson, Keats, Percy and Mary Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Napoleon, among many others). Byron's gift was accompanied by a line from Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*: "and beauty draws us with a single hair" (II.28). Fascinated by the single golden hair from Lucrezia Borgia's head, Hunt described it as "sparkl[ing] in the sun as if it had been cut yesterday," mentioned it in his writings, and proudly showed it to friends and acquaintances such as Walter Savage Landor, who penned a few lines "On Lucretia Borgia's hair" (Waltman 64–65). Curiously, though, Lucrezia's hair does not appear to have been part of the collection sold by the Hunt family in 1921 and now in the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas at Austin. Yet, this additional enigmatic nuance does not diminish, but rather intensifies, the significance of this (lost) object and its condensing of a culture-specific obsession with human hair and its emotional and affective hold on individuals – that is, its "thing-power" and, because of its absence, what Sonia Hofkosh terms the "ghost dance" dynamic this power conjures up between subject and object (Singer, Cross, and Barnett 21).

17. In the same ghostly vein, the power of hair to set off strongly emotional responses becomes fully visible through its widespread use to make ornaments associated with persons both living and dead. Christopher Miller captures the affective intensity of this individual experience in his comments on Keats's poetic response to seeing the lock of Milton's hair in Leigh Hunt's collection and writing about it in "Lines on Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair." Miller perceptively reads this episode as an encounter that "elicits and confirms the ardency of Keats's own ambitions," the object speaking to and acting upon the poet by

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stimulating his literary aspirations (214). In this case, too, Byron provides some useful exemplifications thanks to such artefacts as his hair mounted on a medallion for Caroline Lamb or the twin brooches he commissioned for Augusta and himself respectively (Tuite 24–25; Eisler 459), both of which point to a widely shared practice. As Marcia Pointon notes, hair jewels constituted a common “material figure for memory,” which simultaneously “stage[d] the death of its subject” and “instantiate[d] continuity” (“Materializing” 45). Relatedly, Sarah Heaton highlights how nineteenth-century hair jewellery crystallized “sensibilities surrounding death” and spoke to “concerns with ideas of identity” of the subject and wearer alike (9). And, as Geoffrey Batchen argues, if hair is a “stand-in for the whole body of the missing, memorialized subject,” it can “signify either love or death (or both), and refer simultaneously to past and present” (37, 38). Just as useful is Batchen’s emphasis on the haptic, since these “representative pieces of another’s body . . . worn tight against one’s own” conjure up “a permanent but entirely private bond cemented by the act of touch” (38).

18. As these remarks make plain, hair collecting and jewellery register a broad range of perceptions, experiences, and constructions of the body. Woven and plaited, mounted and fastened, hair is a catalyst of concerns with the body as a cohesive whole. Both practices are about holding on to the body, counteracting its dispersal, a fact that Thomas Laqueur effectively illuminates by reminding us that hair is “the auto-icon par excellence” of the embodied subject, “the favoured synecdoche – the real standing for the symbolic – perhaps not eternally incorruptible but long lasting enough, a bit of a person that lives eerily on as a souvenir” (16–17). Time (memory, continuity) and contact (touch) spell out the

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simultaneously individual and collective valences of hair, the intimately emotional landscapes it encapsulates and the shared practices it instigates.

19. Hair collecting and jewellery mingle in [the medallion with Byron's hair](#) (Giuliani and Saglia) exhibited in *RÊVE*, which he gave to Teresa before his departure for Greece in July 1823. Made of gold decorated with enamel, it contains a lock of the poet's dark hair fastened with a slender ligature. To the countess, it would have signified an indissoluble link to her absent and later deceased lover, the poignant charge of her memories inscribed in the acts of seeing, touching, and handling the jewel. Before his departure, Byron commissioned another medallion in Genoa, made from their intertwined locks and bearing Teresa's "TGG" monogram. The final lock of Byron's hair in the collection was cut after his death in Greece, where he passed away wearing Teresa's medallion round his neck, hanging from a cord also made of hair. But there were many more objects made of hair in Teresa's travelling chest – Byron's and her own – or unfastened and unmounted hair, such as the braided lock of Teresa's hair, or the several locks of his hair the poet gave her at various times during their relationship (in some cases, they are preserved in paper wrappers bearing Teresa's own signature).

20. The remarkable quantity of hair in the countess's collection reveals an intricate play of interconnections based on the fact that, as a body part, the hair synecdochically stands for that entire body, yet may also become ornaments for other bodies; and within these interconnections there lies an incalculable amount of feeling and affect. For Teresa, the objects and artefacts represented a bridge between past and present, love and death, the

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immateriality of memory and the materiality of touch; and while they memorialized the lost body of Byron, they also monumentalized it as the body of genius. Moreover, Teresa's hair artefacts belong fully in her production of a heroically reimagined Byron, whom she consigned to writing in her *Vie de Lord Byron en Italie*. In this unpublished narrative, reworked until the end of her long life, she limns his physical portrait, his activity and restlessness (he is "energetic by nature"), emotional and mental processes, and spiritual life (Guiccioli 112). She delineates his body, what she calls "his physical make-up," as the repository of an ineffable, mysterious quality, which manifests itself in the "charming smiles" occasionally gracing his lips, "the surpassing melodiousness of his voice, and . . . his beauty" (118, 123). Also originally contained in her travelling chest, the manuscript biography is yet another component of Teresa's multiple approach to collecting Byron's body. She gathers body-related objects (apricot stones, for taste; rose petals, for smell; a handkerchief, for touch), wears his body through the hair ornaments, and writes his body into her manuscript. This peculiarly intricate construct reflects a unique situation. However, at the same time, the countess's treasure-box points to a wider cultural trend whereby loss is counterbalanced by containment through "irreducible material objects" endowed with "enduring form" and "the force of an unrepeatable event" (Pointon, "Materializing" 42). But, as anticipated in my introductory remarks, this endurance regularly competes with a simultaneous drift towards fracturing, dividing, and anatomizing the body, as a number of exhibits in *RÊVE* emblematically bear out.

Dismembering Bodies: A Tiger and a Song

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21. The artefact now known as “[Tippoo’s Tiger](#)” (Fournier) arrestingly epitomizes such corporeal modes as the body in fragments, the dismembered body, or the body about to fall apart or die. A painted wood sculpture with a mechanical organ representing a man being attacked by a tiger, it was originally commissioned and owned by Tipu Sultan of Mysore (1751–99), also known as the “Tiger of Mysore.” It was removed from Tipu’s palace after British forces stormed his capital, Seringapatam, in 1799, and was then presented to the East India Company Board of Directors. In 1800, the contraption was brought to Britain and exhibited first in the Tower of London and then in the Indian Museum or Oriental Repository that opened in East India House in 1801 to show the variety of artefacts channelled into Britain through the company (Desmond). Initially little patronized, the repository became a favourite attraction in 1808 when it acquired Tippoo’s Tiger, which soon turned into one of the most popular sights in London (Sweetman 94, 163).⁵

22. Romantic-era visitors were drawn by the object’s mechanical ingenuousness, as well as by its gothic-orientalist depiction of an exotic (Indian) animal mauling a white body dressed in the army uniform of the East India Company. With its two superimposed bodies, one human and one animal, this mini-drama of imperial conflict gave its viewers a *frisson* of anxiety over the fate of a (Western and British) body legible as both individual and collective.

23. Charged with political implications and erotic overtones, which have attracted a fair amount of critical attention, Tippoo’s Tiger is an enigmatic object, whose ultimate original significance, in Tipu’s intentions (who may have provided “iconographic instructions” to the artists), still remains a matter of discussion (Davies 149). Its meanings are complicated

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further by the intertwined processes of its appropriation, relocation, and revalorization. As Richard Davis remarks, on one hand, as a “multivalent signifier” in Hindu and Muslim heraldic-political rhetoric and discourse, the tiger spoke to the various communities in Tipu’s kingdom. On the other, in the British context, it offered an “ironic representation of the Indian despot’s imagined victory overturned by British forces” (150, 152, 173). But relocation to London did not neutralize the tiger’s polysemy, nor did it reduce it to a simplified *insigne* pointing to the territorial and cultural-political subjugation of Tipu’s Mysore.⁶ Shifting from India to Britain, it was a transcultural object from the outset. As Jean-Marie Fournier explains, “the tiger was manufactured in 1793 by Indian craftsmen to accommodate a mechanism devised by a French toy mechanic and an organ of Dutch conception.” Structurally, it is a moving sculpture, an automaton, that houses a musical organ. In terms of imaginative suggestions, Fournier adds, it combines “high-brow sophistication and popular culture,” as well as “the taste for stupendous machinery with a fascination for wild life.” Moreover, in terms of corporeal categories, it enmeshes animal and human, the latter an intact body about to be torn to pieces. Most conspicuously and strikingly, Tippoo’s Tiger is a machine producing a multi-sensorial experience of an impending dismemberment, and, as it moved from India to Britain, it started to resonate with the current fascination with physical fragmentation and dispersal.

24. From a multisensorial perspective, the sound produced by the grind organ goes on to increase the visual impact of the contraption. On turning a handle, it emits an indistinct sound between a growling and a groan, seemingly merging the voices of beast and man, the agent of dismemberment and its victim. With this multimedia *mise en scène* of a human

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body being mauled, the tiger-man machine remediates scenes, common in Gothic fiction, centred on the destruction of human bodies by angry mobs, as in Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), William Godwin's *St Leon* (1799), or Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), but also and more aptly their destruction by exotic creatures as in Lewis's "The Anaconda" (1808) or Walter Scott's "The Surgeon's Daughter" (1827). Scott's narrative stands out, in that it features Tipu as one of its main characters and because its plot is scattered with references to tigers as a physical presence ("footmarks," "skin," "body" and "skull and bones"; Scott 269–70) lurking in the jungle as a constant threat to human life. In addition, when, in the tale's climax, an enraged elephant kills the villain Richard Middlemass by "stamping his huge shapeless foot upon his breast," the man's dying scream is "mimicked by the roar of the monster" (284), a detail that intriguingly echoes the sound effect produced by Tippoo's Tiger.⁷ Chiming with this array of Gothic topoi, the machine makes such moments of terror present through a composite, affecting scene of imminent physical destruction and dispersal. Its terrifying effect is then multiplied and heightened by the open-ended and unresolved nature of this performance of impending dissolution, reinforced by the sound that accompanies the never-ending agony of the prostrate body.

25. From a broader viewpoint, therefore, Tippoo's Tiger testifies to a culture-wide interest in the body in pieces, which had one of its key literary manifestations in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and, specifically, the importance of anatomy to Victor's scientific and medical training at the University of Ingolstadt, the seat of the renowned Alte Anatomie theatre. Thus, the novel registers the advances in anatomical knowledge in the years between the

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eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the discipline “flourished . . . as never before or since” (Talairach 75). It also mirrors the increasing centrality of anatomy in medical training, which *RÊVE* references through [the page from Keats’s anatomy notebook](#) (Bertonèche) dating back to his traineeship at Guy’s Hospital in London. This novel relevance of anatomy is yet another aspect of what Faure describes as the nineteenth-century emergence of new “code[s] de lecture et de pratique du corps” (“code[s] of bodily interpretation and practice”) and their diffusion to all cultural levels (17). Burgeoning developments in anatomical science urged practitioners publicly to voice demands for a legal reform of the possibility of employing unclaimed corpses for study, starting with John Abernethy’s suggestion, in his 1819 Hunterian Oration to the College of Surgeons, to use paupers’ bodies for dissections (Talairach 77; Marshall 9). Dissections, anatomical exhibitions, and related experiments attracted the public’s attention (both William Godwin and Percy Shelley attended some of these events).⁸ Relatedly, another key manifestation of this period’s concerns with corporeal dispersal was body-snatching, which came to prominence thanks to the notorious case of William Burke and William Hare, guilty of several murders in 1828 to provide materials to the anatomist Robert Knox, founder and curator of the Edinburgh Museum of Comparative Anatomy and a highly successful lecturer on the subject. Knox’s figure aptly takes us back to the museum and the collection. For it was the decades between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that saw the creation of collections of anatomy and comparative anatomy like the Hunterian Museum, personal collections such as Sir Joseph Banks’s phrenological gathering of skulls from around the world (Fulford, Lee, and Kitson 33–45), and places of public entertainment centred on the body such as Madame Tussaud’s (Altick 332–49).

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26. A *RÊVE* exhibit that highlights the anxieties raised by grave-robbing from the distancing perspective of humorous inversion is Thomas Hood's "[Mary's Ghost or the Favorite Anatomy Song](#)" (Rhodes) a poem first published in his collection *Whims and Oddities* (1826) and later set to music by J. Blewitt. Mary's spectre appears to her widowed fiancé to inform him that all the parts of that body he used to adore are now scattered around London's anatomical theatres, surgeries, and laboratories. Accordingly, the poem functions as a mock Renaissance blazon in which Mary's doleful tone translates into highly amusing reversals:

I vow'd 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. (Hood 235)

Mixing pathos and humour, these lines emphasize a concern with disintegration and dispersal, and the countervailing aspiration to (self-)gathering and (re)collection. On one hand, the text is bookended by Mary's opening complaint that her "everlasting peace / Is broken into pieces" and her final lament that the body-snatchers "haven't left an atom there, / Of my anatomie" (235, 236). On the other, it conveys her implicit desire to recollect herself, to piece herself together again, in ways that recall the one-legged Silas Wegg's confession to the taxidermist and articulator of bones Mr Venus (who holds the bone from his lost leg) in book I, chapter VII, of Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*: "I tell you

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openly I should *not* like – under such circumstances, to be what I may call dispersed, a part of me here, and a part of me there, but should wish to collect myself like a genteel person” (88).

27. Themmatizing “the disassembly of the bodily whole” (Rhodes), Hood’s poem mines the hilariously absurd contrast between the living body part (an object of love) and its current condition as a specimen for (real) doctors and scientists such as the neurologist Charles Bell, the plastic surgeon Joseph Constantine Carpue, and the surgeon specializing in the vascular system Sir Astley Cooper. The body is reduced to its parts, which are now tools with different uses. The original individual is still entire only in the ghost – and ironically so, since she is now an immaterial entity detached from the body. In addition, the ostensible simplicity of “Mary’s Ghost” conceals a variety of metaliterary complexities. Not unusually for such a self-conscious author as Hood, the poem voices concerns over its own nature as a text, since, as Rhodes perceptively remarks, “Mary’s posthumous predicament, and the material afterlife of the poem itself, raise questions about the materiality or immateriality of body and text and about the relationship between dissection and collection.” At the end of the song, the scattered physical body coexists with Mary’s entire but now spectral body – a split themmatizing of the corporeal that mirrors the condition of the song itself, in which physical fragmentation is given cohesion, though only temporarily so, by rhymed and metered language.

28. “Mary’s Ghost” is humorous verse that elicits laughter to exorcise anxiety about the dispersal of the body. It also tells some interesting tales about anxiety over the status of

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corporeality oscillating between cohesion and disaggregation, as well as with poetry and music as media caught between preservation and oblivion. In this respect, the poem vibrates with what Hofkosh, as seen above, terms a “ghost-dance,” that is a “dynamic, intimate transaction between person and thing” swinging between presence and absence and thereby problematizing “the relations between reader and text, returning us to the text itself as a transgression into the not-quite-human” (Singer, Cross, and Barnett 21).

29. In several ways, the tensions at play in “Mary’s Ghost” express some distinctive features of the narrative of objects, things, and bodies outlined in this essay, including, thanks to the laughter it generates, the affective charges emanating from what Praz called the “immense mine of things” of the nineteenth century. The poem is also a telling instance of the explorations of Romantic-period ideas and experiences of the body made possible by *RÊVE*: it confirms that reconnecting body-related pieces of the past into a cohesive picture can only ever result in an endlessly re-rearranging mosaic of the ways in which the body was experienced, imagined, and formulated between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Stephanie O’Rourke has recently drawn attention to how Romantic-period artworks “participated in a widespread crisis concerning the body as a source of reliable scientific knowledge,” placing the empirical body at the centre of a crisis set off by “controversies around electricity, mesmerism, physiognomy and other popular sciences” that made it an unstable, contended space of cultural formation and intervention. Placed across a similar fault line and over the same time span, the narratives I have traced set into high relief the knot of fascination and concerns about the body that was peculiar to British Romantic-period culture and presents similar manifestations in other contemporary European

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contexts. These narratives speak of a cultural phase when the body is more and more accurately examined and tabulated, but also when its hold on the imagination and overall cultural presence increases exponentially. They are multiple and discontinuous narratives, issuing from a plurality of materialities (and their immaterial extensions, such as memories and affects) that defy critical-historical streamlining and, instead, require us to deploy reading strategies that value plural, unfixed, and constantly mutating forms of the physical.

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Notes

¹ All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

² For a picture and detailed description of the travelling chest, see Saglia; on Marie Antoinette’s chest, see Bascou et al. (502).

³ The objects examined in this essay principally belong to the British cultural domain. As *RÊVE* features a wealth of body-related objects from other cultural areas, countless additional narratives may be traced that reveal lines of development and intersection not only within the British but also across European Romantic-period cultures more broadly.

⁴ In “Materializing Mourning,” Marcia Pointon critiques the idea that objects act upon human beings (43); in contrast, Jonathan Lamb endorses the difference between objects and things that “communicate directly only with themselves” (xi).

⁵ As Richard H. Davis remarks, Tippoo’s Tiger is possibly “the most famous Indian sculpted object outside the subcontinent” (149).

⁶ For a definition of the *insigne* in processes of appropriation, see Young 120–25.

⁷ See Rafiq for analyses of Tipu's figure in Scott's *Surgeon's Daughter*, Philip Meadows Taylor's *Tippoo Sultan: A Tale of the Mysore War* (1840) and G. A. Henty's *The Tiger of Mysore* (1895).

⁸ On November 2, 1796, as noted in his diary, William Godwin attended a lecture by his friend Sir Anthony Carlisle, a leading anatomist. On Percy Shelley's attendance at John Abernethy's anatomical lectures in the spring of 1811, see Bieri (135).