Chapter V. (Undying) Death

Downstairs Death, or, Death’s Uncertainty

If, in Anne Hunter’s “Despair,” an existence beyond the grave offers the lady a glimpse of freedom, in “Fidelity” it entails inescapable devotion to a lover. Driven to anxiety not only by rushing winds and beating rain, but also the tempest’s metaphorical connection to her beloved’s own “storms of fortune,” the lady acknowledges a “wayward fate” bringing their days to an untimely end. In the final stanza, her heart is imagined both “in the world” and “in the tomb,” beating consistently not only in life but also in death.

Anne’s household was steeped in modish intrigue over the nature of death and its finality. Sparking the fascination and the anxiety was the repeal in 1745 of an old law preventing the private practice of human dissection.¹ William Hunter consequently founded a school in Covent Garden, where he taught anatomy not with dry skeletons, wax models, and animal preparations, but through the new-fangled means of dismembering real human bodies, a practice which he had observed in France before he was able to introduce it to Britain. And yet, a sizable portion of the public continued to feel that the act of human dissection was morally reprehensible -- a contention vividly depicted by William Hogarth in the final image of his series The Four Stages of Cruelty (1751, Fig. 5.1). In this gruesome scene, the villain protagonist is indelicately carved up by a wigged, bespectacled physician wielding an enormous knife, while others simultaneously probe his ankle, pluck out his eye, and load his guts into a bucket. The caption begins:

Figure 5.1 William Hogarth, *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (1751)
“The Reward of Cruelty”
Figure 5.2 [Thomas Rowlandson], *The Dissecting Room*
Behold the Villain’s dire disgrace!  
Not Death itself can end.  
He find no peaceful Burial Place:  
His breathless Corse (sic), no friend.

Nevertheless, as the title indicates, this image depicts neither “just deserts” nor a deterrent to a criminal livelihood, for it is not the criminal himself but the callous physicians and their act of dissection that are implicated as cruel.  

Neither does the viewer’s sympathy lie with the gallery of onlookers, for they observe the barbarous treatment with impossibly detached, even inhumane, coolness. Instead the viewer is provoked to pity the corpse, which, though dead, appears to retain some semblance of life in that its face suggests that it suffers very animated and excruciating pain (not to mention the lowliest affront of providing a dog’s dinner). The message revolves around questioning responsibility and shifting blame, which the teaching skeletons signify by pointing accusingly at one another; human dissection is equally or more depraved than the villain’s misdeeds in earlier installments of the series. Part of the mechanism for the viewer’s identification with, or sympathy for, the corpse is the suggestion of ambiguity between death and life.

“The Dissecting Room” (Fig. 5.2), by the English caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson, bears a resemblance to the Hogarth image. The standing figure giving directions is William Hunter; John Hunter is on his right and nephew Matthew Baillie is on his left.² The sunlights in the left corner of the ceiling suggest a cramped attic setting, but both William and John spread their work across basement and lower levels. Jessé Foot described the house on Leicester Square as having “an expansive room for his Museum, -- another, for a public medical levee, on every Sunday evening, -- another, for a lyceum for medical disputation, -- another, for his course of lectures, -- another, for a printing

² Ibid., facing 21.
warehouse and a press, -- and another, for vending his medical works.”

Anne’s house was dominated by her husband’s investigations, which were by this point probably somewhat more accepted, for the Rowlandson image displays less of the implied protest against dissection inherent in the Hogarth.

An announcement pinned to the wall in Rowlandson’s image lists “Prices for Bodys.” As teaching by dissection caught on, the demand for corpses skyrocketed beyond the legal supply (that is, cadavers of criminals) and surgeons became involved in the nefarious business of illicitly procuring additional physical specimens. If surgeons did not themselves steal bodies from hospitals and cemeteries, they hired others to “undertake” the gruesome business, and a new class of thieves arose, labeled “body-snatchers” or “resurrection men.” Public ambivalence played out in occasional riots that accompanied the delivery of even hanged criminals’ corpses for dissection.

The bitterly amusing verses (originally published in 1827) by the poet and humorist Thomas Hood (Fig. 5.3) reflect the mix of discomfort and fascination that the anatomizing of non-criminal bodies inspired. The spirit of recently buried Mary alerts her lover that there is no longer any point in his visiting her grave, for her body is now spread in bits and pieces across town. Mocking disdain informs Resurrection Men Disturbed (Fig. 5.4), a Cruikshank print from 1794, in which several men attempt to make off with freshly buried bodies in a church graveyard but are thwarted by self-inflicted panic after a mule startles and bellows in the darkness; the subtitle sums up: “a guilty conscience needs no accuser.” The discomfiting side of Hood’s humor and the moralizing of Cruikshank depend on the power of the dead to live on in commanding

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MARY'S GHOST.

A PATHETIC BALLAD.

MARY'S GHOST.

I.
O William dear! O William dear!
My rest eternal ceases;
Alas! my everlasting peace
Is broken into pieces.

II.
I thought the last of all my cares
Would end with my last minute;
But tho' I went to my long home,
I didn't stay long in it.

III.
The body-snatchers they have come,
And made a match at me;
It's very hard them kind of men
Won't let a body be!

IV.
You thought that I was buried deep,
Quite decent like and chary,
But from her grave in Mary-bone
They've come and bon'd your Mary.

V.
The arm that us'd to take your arm
Is took to Dr. Vyse;
And both my legs are gone to walk
The hospital at Guy's.

VI.
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.

VII.
As for my feet, the little feet
You used to call so pretty,
There's one, I know, in Bedford Row,
The 't'other's in the city.

VIII.
I can't tell where my head is gone,
But Doctor Carpus can:
As for my trunk, it's all pack'd up
To go by Pickford's van.

IX.
I wish you'd go to Mr. P.
And save me such a ride;
I don't half like the outside place,
They've took for my inside.

X.
The cock it crowes—I must be gone!
My William, we must part!
But I'll be your's in death, altho'
Sir Astley has my heart.

XI.
Don't go to weep upon my grave,
And think that there I be;
They haven't left an atom there
Of my anatomie.

Figure 5.3 Thomas Hood, "Mary's Ghost" (1827)
Figure 5.4 Isaac Cruikshank, *Resurrection Men Disturb'd or a Guilty Conscience Needs No Accuser* (1794)
Figure 5.5 [William Austin], *The Anatomist Overtaken By the Watch...Carrying off Miss W-- in a Hamper* (1773)
Figure 5.6 William Sharp, *John Hunter* (1788)
Engraving after portrait by Joshua Reynolds (1786)
sympathy from and shaming those they leave behind. The conscience is guilty exactly because death retains elements of life, so personalizing the crime makes it all the more egregious: the most pathetic of the startled robbers in *Resurrection Men* exclaims of the corpse he’s hoisted over his shoulder, “Mercy upon me it’s my own father -- he looked just so when I took him up.”

The Hunter brothers were themselves implicated in grave-robbery. In *The Anatomist Overtaken by the Watch...Carrying off Miss W-- in a Hamper* (Fig. 5.5), a body-snatcher, exposed by a night watchman with lantern and alarm, points a blaming finger toward a skinny gentleman with a physician’s stick, who, while tucking a skull in his coat, drops a slip of paper titled “Hunter’s Lectures.” The pilfered goods -- a deceased girl -- tumble from a woven basket. Whereas in this case the identification of the elder Hunter is hinted, the account of John’s capture of the corpse of the so-called Irish Giant was widely known and is told with relish in almost every biography:

Byrne, or O’Brien, the famous Irish giant, died in 1783. He had been in a declining state of health for some time previously, and Hunter, anxious to procure his skeleton, set his man Howison to keep watch on his movements, that he might be sure of securing his body at death. Byrne learned this, and as he had a horror of being dissected, determined to take such precautions as should ensure his not falling into the hands of the doctors; he accordingly left strict orders that his body should be watched day and night, until a leaden coffin should be made, in which it was to be inclosed, and carried out to sea and sunk. Byrne died soon after, and, in compliance with his directions, the undertaker engaged some men to watch the body alternately. [Bribery, extortion, and finally theft ensued], and in the dead of night the body was removed in a hackney-coach, and after having been carried through several streets was transferred to Hunter’s own carriage, and conveyed immediately to Earl’s Court. Fearing lest a discovery should take place, Hunter did not choose to risk the delay which the ordinary mode of preparing a skeleton would require; accordingly, the body was cut to pieces, and the flesh separated by boiling; hence has arisen the
brown colour of the bones, which in all other respects form a magnificent skeleton.\textsuperscript{5}

Apparently, the surgeon suffered no shame for his exploit: the giant’s feet hang in the corner of his most famous portrait, rendered by Sir Joshua Reynolds (Fig. 5.6).

A decade after the Hunter brothers published their neither-dead-nor-alive images in the Gravid Uterus, John presented his own research on the “recovery of persons recently drowned” to the Royal Society, in which he also speculated on a future in which frozen humans would be brought back to life. On the more (intentionally) humorous side, freshly revived and re-animated medical specimens surround William in The Resurrection (Fig. 5.7): the doctor bemoans, “O what a smash among my Bottles & Preparations! Never did I suppose that such a day would come” while the female specimen to his left demands “Restore to me my Virgin-honor did I keep it inviolated 75 years to have corked up at last” (this in contrast to the man on his right who queries plaintively, “where’s my head?”).\textsuperscript{6} As in Hunter’s Sunday evening “medical levee,” science mingles with entertainment in these examples, a mingling also seen in J. B. Winslow’s volume The Uncertainty of Signs of Death and the Danger of Precipitate Interments and Dissections, the translation of which from the French in 1746 was probably inspired by the new human dissection law in London during the previous year.\textsuperscript{7} Winslow’s “demonstrations” include evidence from “laws of animal economy,” from “the structure of the parts of the human body,” and tellingly, from “a great variety of amusing and well-attested instances of persons who have return’d to life in the coffins, in their

\textsuperscript{5} Stephen Paget, John Hunter, Man of Science and Surgeon (1728-1793) (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897), 89, quoting Ottley.

\textsuperscript{6} Part of the discomfort over the Hunters’ activities is clearly motivated by a sense that the violation occasioned by their scientific endeavors is of a sexual nature; see Chapter IV.

\textsuperscript{7} J. B. Winslow, The Uncertainty of the Signs of Death and the Danger of Precipitate Interments and Dissections, Demonstrated (London: M. Cooper, 1746).
Figure 5.7 [Thomas Rowlandson], The Resurrection or an Internal View of the Museum in W-dm-II Street, on the Last Day (1782)
Figure 5.8 Selected plates from J. B. Winslow, *The Uncertainty of Signs of Death* (1746)
graves, under the hands of surgeons, and after they had remain’d apparently
dead for a considerable time in the water.” In one case an apparently dead
person startles as an overturned candle lights her bed afire; in another, a
female corpse collects herself from mild shock as her would-be thief passes
out cold (Fig. 5.8).

“Fidelity”

It is against this backdrop of intense interest in the transition between
life and death that Anne Hunter produced the text of “Fidelity.” The first
three verses evince a sense of torment and impending doom:

While hollow burst the rushing winds
And heavy beats the show’r,
This anxious aching bosom find[s]
No comfort in its pow’r.

For ah! My love it little knows
What thy hard fate may be;
What bitter storms of fortune blows,
What tempests trouble thee.

A wayward fate hath spun the thread
On which our days depend,
And darkling in the checker’d shade
She draws it to an end.

But after the third verse’s suggestion of life dwindling down towards death
like a thread thins on the loom, the fourth verse portrays a truly double
consciousness:

But whatso’er may be our doom
The lot is cast for me;
For in the world or in the Tomb,
My Heart is fix’d on thee.

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8 Ibid., table of contents.
Example 5.1 Joseph Haydn, *Dr Haydn’s VI Original Canzonettas* [1794]  
Example 5.1 (continued)

Ah, my love, it little knows what thy hard fate may be,

What bitter storm of fortune blows, what tempests trouble thee,

Tempests trouble thee, what tempests trouble

A wayward fate hath spun the thread on which our days depend, and darkling in the checkered shade, she
Example 5.1 (continued)

[Music notation image]
Example 5.1 (continued)

Adagio  Tempo I

in the world or in the tomb, my heart, my heart is fix'd on thee, my

But

what-soe'er may be our doom, the lot is cast for me, is cast for me, is cast for

me, for in the world or in the tomb, my heart is fix'd on thee, is fix'd on

thee, is fix'd on thee; for in the world or
Example 5.1 (continued)
While the text saves this remarkable condition for the conclusion, Haydn’s musical setting (Ex. 5.1) suggests from the very opening that something more than a straightforward death scenario is afoot. The tempestuous, cross-handed keyboard prelude sets the instrument apart as an independent contributor: not limited to a preview of the first melody (unlike in the five previous canzonets), the introduction sets forth unique 32nd note motives and a striking chromatic descent in mm. 6-8, totaling four octaves from highest to lowest pitch. It then proceeds, again in unique fashion, to interrupt the melody with its 32nd-note motive once the voice enters. Throughout the piece, the keyboard maintains its separate presence by foreshadowing new material before the voice enters, as in mm. 13 and 15; 25 and 27; 45 and 47 (as it also does in 59 and 61 in the fourth verse). The keyboard’s independent “voice” and its power to comment meaningfully will be crucial in the fourth verse.

Other early hints at the scope of the song appear in the harmonic and melodic material: the tessitura and melodic contours vary from wide-ranging and jagged, for example in mm. 9-12, which move up and down as if tossed by the storm they describe -- to quite narrow, as in the following phrase (m. 13ff.) which hovers closely around C. There is some foreground-level harmonic ambiguity here due to the emphasis on the upper and lower neighbor notes D-flat and B natural which overpower the C, the fifth of the tonic triad leaving instead a lingering sense of an inverted German-6th chord (D-flat, F, A-flat, B-natural). Suspense increases: verse 3 (m. 37ff.), also stepwise, becomes more agitated, with its repeated notes in the accompaniment and doubled rhythm (eighths instead of quarters) in the melody. The A-flat major of this new material arrived abruptly at the beginning of v. 2 (m. 20) preceded only by the
dominant of F minor. Harmonic surprise, too, is set up as significant in ways that will be of consequence in the fourth verse. As a result of the lack of preparation, the A-flat seems distinctly “bright” in contrast; the clashing E-flat versus F-flat in mm. 25, 27, 29, in turn, are especially piercing.

Suggestions of unfolding meaning are further heightened by the replacement of the expected stanzaic musical structure with a less predictable, almost improvisatory through-composed structure. The first three verses serve as a precursor to the fourth, which describes the heart both “in the world” and “in the tomb.” This last verse receives an astounding amount of almost maniacal, obsessive repetition, thus taking up a greater number of measures than the first three verses combined (so many that the length of this canzonetta is nearly double that of others in the set).

Much of the material has been prepared: the vocal rhythm (four quarters, dotted quarter, eighth) of phrases beginning at mm. 45, 53, and 61 derive from v. 1; the E-naturals emphasized in mm. 48, 50, 51, 52, each the low point of the phrase, provide a counterpart to the F-flats of v. 2 which were each high; the Es were first heard at the low points of the first and second vocal phrases, mm. 10 and 17. The chromatic descent of mm. 65 and 97 harken to the octaves in the prelude (mm. 6-7). But the frenzied fourth verse is set apart in its choppy phrasing and insistent, seemingly endless repetitions of “is cast for thee” (twice three times) and “is fixed on thee” (more than twice as frequently). The voice is especially breathless, repeating two-note motives (such as C-D and E-F in mm. 68-73 and 100-105). The effect is epigrammatic -- nearly, but not quite, irrational. For even as the phrase “is fixed on thee” shrinks to just “on thee” (five repetitions in mm. 107-110) the “heart” retains its command of the concluding imagery, twice highlighted by an Adagio.
tempo marking and fermata. This isolated organ, a body part standing for the lady herself, continues beating despite the mercurial and volatile backdrop against which it lies.

The postlude sums up the sense of life/death doubleness. The descending motive of m. 76, based on the F minor triad, becomes F major in m. 110, whereas F major and F minor are directly superimposed on one another in the final bars, mm. 115-21. As in m. 65, the chromaticism was foreshadowed by the octave descent of mm. 6-7 in the introduction. By this point, however, the closing ambiguity between F minor and F major reflects the protagonist’s double consciousness, a heart both dead and alive. It is an ambiguity that appears in service to the final message assuring the female heart’s ultimate fixity. That is, in light of a tempestuous struggle borne of the vagaries spun by fate, the male’s lot is yet unknown, while the female’s is certain. She remains faithful, no matter whether “in the world” or “in the tomb.” Her heart, like that of the frog in John’s museum, continues to beat for her lover even after death. Haydn’s musical setting, then, seizes upon the blurry life-and-death divide, not simply to present the shocking-yet-appealing entertainment of medical anecdotes, but to deliver an ideological message: while masculine fate may be open-ended, feminine fate is secure and predetermined.

Upstairs Death, or, Death’s Muse

Sometime between 1766 and 1772, Anne Hunter posed for the artist Angelica Kauffmann (1741-1807). In the portrait (Fig. 5.9), Anne, her hair decorated with flowers and her dress classically cut and draped, embraces the base of a large, ornately decorated urn while leaning her forehead gently on it.
Figure 5.9 Angelica Kauffman, [Portrait of Anne Hunter] [between 1766 and 1772]

Figure 5.10 W. W. Ryland, *In Memory of General Stanwix’s Daughter* (1774) Engraving after Angelica Kauffman
and lowering her eyes. She is here already a pensive muse, for the painting predates her popular moniker “Haydn’s Muse,” acquired during the composer’s London visits. Kauffman later reused this image of Anne in her painting *In Memory of General Stanwix’s Daughter, Who Was Lost in Her Passage from Ireland*, which was engraved by Bartolozzi in 1772 and again by W. W. Ryland in 1774 (Fig. 5.10). The latter engraving in particular was a popular, highly consumer-oriented product, printed in bright sanguine, framed by verse, trimmed to an oval format for wall decoration, and made from a stipple plate, all of which suggest that it was intended for a large market. According to David Alexander, it is a “striking and novel object,” which, thanks to its connection to a tragic story, “appealed in a way that many in the Age of Sensibility found irresistible.” Death -- especially the death of a beautiful young lady -- entertained; “beautiful death,” in particular, thrilled, engaged, and delighted, and as such made a fitting decoration for the wall of sitting room, bedroom, or passageway. Likewise, as is apparent in Table 5.1, which catalogues canzonets on the topic of death, it must have pleased many of those who gathered in drawing rooms to hear a lady sing such canzonets.

The muses are traditionally depicted with objects appropriate to their pursuits: Astronomy carries a globe, History a scroll, Lyric a lyre and so forth. In the Kauffman portrait, Anne, as muse, appears with an urn, which supports her as she listens attentively, apparently consumed by recollection. More than just a vessel, the urn carries connotations of a memorial, a monument to and a

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Table 5.1 Death in Canzonets

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Short Title of Collection</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abington, William</td>
<td><em>Six Favorite Canzonets... Opera 1mo</em></td>
<td>1795</td>
<td>“Jane of Dover”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abrams, Miss</td>
<td><em>A Second Sett of Italian and English Canzonettas, for One, Two, and Three Voices</em></td>
<td>1785?</td>
<td>“Weep Gentle Shepherds”; “Tell Me Thou Dear Departed Shade”; “Tis Not Your Saying”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusta, Sophia</td>
<td><em>Six Canzonets... Dedicated to... The Queen</em></td>
<td>1810?</td>
<td>“And Canst Thou”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aylward, Theodore</td>
<td><em>Eight Canzonets for Two Soprano Voices</em></td>
<td>1800?</td>
<td>“Done to Death”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cipolla, Francesco</td>
<td><em>Six Italian &amp; English Canzonettas, with an Accompaniment for the Piano Forte or Harp... Op 3</em></td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>“Unexpected Departure”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coombs, James Morris</td>
<td><em>Eight Canzonets with an Accompaniment for the Piano Forte, etc.</em></td>
<td>1810?</td>
<td>“The Wand’ring Boy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dussek, Jan Ladislav</td>
<td><em>Six Canzonets ... It &amp; Eng. Op 52</em></td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>“Now While the Moment”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essex, Timothy</td>
<td><em>Six Canzonetts, the words from the poems of the late Mrs. Robinson Op. 7</em></td>
<td>1802</td>
<td>“Ah Cease”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giordani, Sigr</td>
<td><em>Six Canzonets for the Voice</em></td>
<td>1795</td>
<td>“When a Lovely Woman Stoops to Folly”; “Blest as the Immortal Gods”</td>
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<td>Hook, James</td>
<td><em>The Hours of Love, a Collection of Sonnets, Containing Morning, Noon, Evening, and Night</em></td>
<td>1780 (ca.)</td>
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Table 5.1 (continued)

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<tr>
<td>Jackson, William</td>
<td>Twelve Canzonets... Opera Nona</td>
<td>1770</td>
<td>“Time Has Not Thinned My Flowing Hair”; “Sad is My Day”</td>
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<td>Jones, Frances Harriet</td>
<td>Six Canzonets</td>
<td>1802 (WM)</td>
<td>“How Sweetly Could I Lay My Head”</td>
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<td>Linley, William</td>
<td>Six Canzonetti</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>“Despair Alone Soft Sleep Denies”</td>
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<td>Lyon, Thomas</td>
<td>Six Canzonets... and a Glee for 4 Voices</td>
<td>1795</td>
<td>“Dying Swan”</td>
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<td>Martin Y Soler, Vicente</td>
<td>Six Italian Canzonetts with English Translations... With an Accompaniment...</td>
<td>1795?</td>
<td>“Lover's Advice”</td>
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<td>Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus</td>
<td>Mozart’s Celebrated English Canzonets</td>
<td>1802</td>
<td>“The Laurel and the Willow”</td>
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<td>Pinto, Geo[rge]. Fred[erick].</td>
<td>Six Canzonets</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>“The Distress’d Mother”</td>
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<td>Pinto, George Frederick</td>
<td>Four Canzonets and a Sonata, etc [edited by S. Wesley]</td>
<td>1807</td>
<td>“Alas What Pains”; “Canzonett on the Death of a Friend”</td>
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<td>Pollard, W. H.</td>
<td>Six Canzonettas for the voice</td>
<td>1808</td>
<td>“Sweet Lavendar”</td>
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<td>Poole, Miss [Maria]</td>
<td>Six Canzonetts &amp; a Lullaby for the Voice</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>“The Broken Heart”; “Lulla By”</td>
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<td>Salomon, Johann Peter</td>
<td>Six English Canzonets</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>“The Fatal Moment”</td>
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<td>Composer</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<td>Shield, William</td>
<td><em>A Collection of Canzonets and an Elegy</em></td>
<td>1796</td>
<td>“Gentle Mary”; “The Old Shepherd and His Dog”</td>
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<td>Spofforth, Reginald</td>
<td><em>Six Favorite Canzonets with an Accompaniment for the Piano Forte, etc.</em></td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>“Sally”; “Henry’s Grave”</td>
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<td>Stevenson, Dr. [Sir John Andrew]</td>
<td><em>Twelve Canzonets, for the Voice with an Accompaniment for the Piano Forte, etc.</em></td>
<td>1796</td>
<td>“Sweet Zephyr”</td>
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<td>Tremain, Thomas</td>
<td><em>Thirteen Canzonets for Two Voices ... Op. 5</em></td>
<td>1786</td>
<td>“Unconquer’d Hope”</td>
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<td>Webster, John</td>
<td><em>Twelve Canzonets, composed in an easy familiar Style, etc</em></td>
<td>1785?</td>
<td>“My Love Was Sweeter than the Rose”</td>
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<td>Williamson, T. G.</td>
<td><em>Six Canzonets... The words of several, being translation from the poems of celebrated Hindostanee authors.</em></td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>“The Daffodil”</td>
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</table>
commemoration of one who has passed away. The urn depicted with Anne hearkens to the memorial urn found in the garden of poet and landscape gardener William Shenstone (1714-1763): inscribed to Maria Dolman, a relation who died of smallpox at age twenty-one, it reads,

AH MARIA
PVELLARVM ELEGANTISSIMA,
AH FLORE VENVSTATIS ABREPTA,
VALE!
HEV QVANTO MINVS EST
CVM RELIQVIS VERSARI,
QVAM TVI
MEMINISSE!12

Ah! Maria
most elegant of nymhs!
Snatched from us in thy bloom of beauty
Ah! farewell!
How much inferior
is the living conversation of others
to the bare remembrance of thee!

The urn, which often carries human ashes, supports or props up the muse because it memorializes the dead, but it also celebrates and relishes death. Not only does Shenstone’s inscription luxuriate in the sentimental representation of the elegant young Maria, it pays homage to her existence-in-death that is superior to (in terms of beauty, power, or influence) beings who are truly, literally alive. Memory, then, enables the power of Death’s muse. Samuel Rogers’ s poem The Pleasures of Memory (discussed in Chapter VII) refers to Shenstone’s urn, specifically crediting memory with the power to preserve a voice:

Thus, thro’ the gloom of Shenstone’s fairy grove,
Maria’s urn still breathes the voice of love.13

13 Samuel Rogers and Edward Bell, The Poetical Works of Samuel Rogers (London: George Bell, 1875), 22 (Part II, ll. 183-84).
Memory (who was, after all, mother of all the muses in classical mythology) empowers this muse by creating opportunities to listen for recollections of the dead and to commune with them. In the Kauffman portrait, Anne is the muse of death. That death itself should have its own muse asserts its status as an art form itself, a form of expression that, through but also like poetry, music, and lyric, moved the passions and inspired emotions of pain, love, fear, hope and relief. Death, in its many representations, including canzonets (for which the urn was a common cover page decoration (Fig. 5.11)), was a means to engage the senses. In the form of entertainment, however, death was no termination of life but rather a continuation in a new form. Empowered by memory, death’s impulse is to preserve.

In James Hook’s “Farewell My Dear Girl” (Ex. 5.2) a male lover dares his female beloved to die. He urges that she, for the sake of affection, “pursue the example I’ve given” and “leave the world that you hate” in order to join with him in death. For it is death, he claims, that reunites lovers: “let our souls know the union our hearts are denied, for they cannot divide us in heav’n.” The simple, two-part texture and minor key combine with the remarkable indication *sempre piano* (from the very beginning, until *pp* in the last two bars) to create a distant, almost otherworldly sound. It is an aural effect that insists on attention from the ears, the way a hushed voice might be used for emphasis. The beginning of the second stanza, meanwhile, refers even more directly to death’s engagement of the senses, this time both aurally and visually. At “O list for the bell that shall toll for my death” (m. 25), the accompaniment thins out to include only wedge-marked A octaves in the left hand: they are bells of death that toll in ominous, deep tones. “From the sight of sad sorrow ne’er turn,” he continues, as the accompaniment sinks to its
Figure 5.11 James Hook, *Six English Canzonets*, Op. 18 [1780] Frontispiece
Example 5.2 (continued)
Example 5.3 T. G. Williamson, Six Canzonets [1800] "The Daffodil"
lowest point, the A below the bass staff. Finally the urn itself appears in m. 32, at which moment two low As, two octaves apart, toll again in recollection -- hence superimposing both the sound and sight of death at the mention of its signifier. Engaging the ears and the eyes, death preserves a union between lovers.

When death’s muse inspires canzonets, death goes hand in hand with continued devotion. T. G. Williamson’s “The Daffodil” (Ex. 5.3, said to be “translated from the poems of Yuqueen, a celebrated Hindostanee author”) queries of the flower in a graveyard “why it hung its head, and why in grief it seem’d to pine?” In response, the daffodil personifies the dead lover whose grave it adorns: “‘I am the eyes of him,’ it said, ‘who lies beneath this lowly shrine.’” The eyes are “sad emblems of despair” that seek to behold the dead one’s (still living) beloved. The narrator offers this conclusion: “It does, alas, from this appear / that love admits of no release.” Unending devotion is captured -- in this case, personified, and marked musically by a German augmented sixth chord that sets up a change of texture (m. 22ff.) -- by undying devotion: a strand of life that goes on even in death.

Some of the preservational capacity of death rubs off on the lady herself, and this is to her benefit. Memory provides that good qualities are compounded in death. Harriet Abrams’s beloved Delia, for example, is addressed as “sacred”:

Weep gentle shepherds
Fair Delia is no more
No, in strains of plaintive woe
Her hapless fate deplore.
Where are her charms, her heav’nly grace;
That won the raptur’d sight
Ah! Lost, the glories of her face
No more the World’s delight.
[Largo:]
Sleep sacred dust within this tomb
[Affetuoso:]
Sweet by thy dreams of joys to come.

Delia, like Maria of Shenstone’s urn, is recalled in laudatory tones: she was not only fair but also replete with charms. And yet these qualities, even in life, transcended the worldly: her grace was already “heavenly,” her appearance already “raptur’d.” Most explicitly, the reference to the “glories of her face” directly connects her visage during her lifetime to a godly countenance. It seems that while the text mourns Delia’s no longer being “the world’s delight,” it simultaneously establishes that she never was “of the world” in the first place. But the pedestal on which she stands, though it may be high, is still narrow, given its context within tropes of perpetual devotion.

If memory empowers a sort of death that equates with time eternal, the “fatal moment” in Anne Hunter’s and Johann Peter Salomon’s canzonet of that name (Ex. 5.4) is no fleeting instant but a continuous and unalterable state. The focus of the first stanza is the specific moment in which the lady notices her admirer’s eyes fixed upon her:

The fatal moment I beheld those eyes
So fondly fixed on me
Some magic sure my heart compell’d
To place my dearest hopes on thee.

As is by now not surprising, when represented by a body part the man is represented by eyes, in this case eyes “so fondly fixed,” which are the organs of seeing and source of the gaze -- this in contrast to the female body part which is typically fixed, namely the heart, as in “Fidelity,” discussed above. The text’s initial focus on the “moment” translates into a certain choppiness in the music; neither lyrical nor melodic, it consists of a series of brief motives and many rests. The particular “fatal moment” itself is captured at the word
Example 5.4. J. P. Salomon, Six English Canzonets [1801]. "The Fatal Moment"
Example 5.4 (continued)
“magic” in m. 17, where the dominant of D minor is followed directly by the unexpected dominant of B-flat major, a “mysterious” move not explained by conventional means. The second stanza (m. 33ff.) continues in this episodic vein, painting “woes” with a diminished seventh chord, and, significantly, “anguish” with a recollection of the magic “fatal moment”: the dominant of D minor again moving in unanticipated fashion, in this case to G minor.

Nor dangers past nor woes to come
Thy image from my soul can part
Through years of anguish to the tomb
It follows this devoted heart

By the last page, where the last two lines of text move their focus from “the moment” to eternity, the accompaniment, still more choppy than lyrical, expands flexibly.

And my true faith can alter never
Though thou alas art gone forever

The last utterance of “never” stretches out indefinitely, liberated by the rallené and a fermata, and the tempo-change to lento. The last two words, “gone forever,” are rendered ad lib. The eight-bar keyboard postlude, with its two-note slurred sixteenths in the right hand against eighths in the left, has a Baroque air, a recollection of a older sound as well as a glance back through the story told by the song, as it touches on D minor, B-flat major, and G minor, the main keys of the piece. Exactly because it was fatal, the moment lives on.

Upstairs death, a genre unto itself and advanced by its own muse, took shape not only in canzonets but in literature, art, sculpture, and drama; even private letters and diaries, as Philippe Ariès has shown, could be saturated with the delectation of death.14 Because canzonets of death were largely sung by and marketed to women, they were vehicles for ideological assertions

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about women’s true nature -- a public agenda, as it were, hidden under death’s cloak. On the one hand, death’s muse inspires a sung death that equates with entertainment: it is an opportunity to relish sentimental texts and evocative tones, and, moreover, to elevate the female to a beloved, even supernatural standing. But even as they seek to elevate, canzonets of death seek to define. Death, which is apparently an end, a divider between lovers, serves in this repertoire as the ultimate test to female fidelity: upstairs death, beautiful death, unites rather than separates the female from her beloved. With its downstairs shades of “uncertainty” or lingering life, this death proves that “love admits of no release” for the singing female. Love is her innate reason for being. For Anne, in the role of death’s muse, death is the truest proof of love. Undying devotion, despite itself, begins in a “fatal moment.”

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The marriage of Anne and John Hunter provides a window through which one can observe shared topics of concern and modes of expression between the spheres of public and private, surgeon and poet, husband and wife. The meanings of these overlaps were by no means univocal; indeed, they varied widely according to the point of view of the subject. For John Hunter, connection to his wife’s world offered legitimacy and respectability. An atmosphere of suspicion beleaguered the fields of anatomy and surgery: surgeons had separated from the Company of Barbers in 1745, but the public still tended to associate them with brutal medieval barber-surgeons who cut both hair and flesh. Surgeons performed operations -- jobs physicians would not condescend to do -- and were excluded from the highest ranks of society. While physicians were respected intellectuals, educated in universities or
private courses; surgeons were considered tradespeople who worked with their hands and learned their skill through the more lowly apprenticeship. When Hunter’s biographer Jessé Foot drew attention to his subject’s background as a carpenter, he discredited Hunter by drawing implicit parallels between the two “journeyman” occupations: “A wheel wright or a carpenter he certainly was, until the event of [John’s brother] William Hunter becoming a public lecturer in anatomy, changed the scheme of his future occupations, and determined him to accept the invitation of his brother: to lay down the chisel, the rule and the mallet, and take up the knife, the blow pipe and the probe.”

Foot’s jealous and often venomous attacks notwithstanding, Hunter, in fact, came to be idolized as the founder of scientific anatomy. Though the full force of Hunterian mythologizing was undertaken more by successive generations, Hunter himself started the process with his efforts to cultivate high society and reach the cultural elite by emphasizing the “artful” and “beautiful” of dissection and anatomy (as well as fueling and capitalizing on contemporary fascinations). The upstairs world he borrows from is represented by the Psyche described by Nares: moral, chaste, and elevated -- all qualities that anatomy sought to adopt.

Anne Hunter’s incorporation of “the clinical” into her poetry, meanwhile, can be seen as a partaking of popular contemporary themes and images -- but moreover, by infusing poetry with “downstairs” currency, Anne expands the scope of an ostensibly limited form of domestic entertainment to public-sphere (supposedly masculine) concerns. The myth of Cupid and Psyche may be of further relevance here. Psyche, disregarding strict

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15 Foot, The Life of John Hunter, 10.
instructions never to look at Cupid, succumbed to her own curiosity, hiding a lamp under her bed in order to catch a glimpse of her sleeping lover. When read against the clinical backdrop of John’s world, Anne’s poetry suggests a “scientific” curiosity, an effort to join a discourse from which her private realm was otherwise excluded. If her texts hint at a possibility of subversion, though, Haydn’s musical settings, while taking notice of that subversion, sidestep it and redirect it towards the status quo. The musical disappointments suffered by the protagonists of “Despair” and “Fidelity” serve as reminders that Psyche is destined not for the role of investigator but investigated. Set to musical accompaniment -- and re-eroticized as the Psyche who reigns over the Celestial Bed -- the lady-at-music no longer comments on the stultifying stillness of the clinical gaze, but falls victim to it.