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The Man That Was Used Up:
Poetry, Particularity, and the Politics of
Remembering George Washington

In the meantime were employed two pretty copious bleedings, a blister was applied to the part affected, two moderate doses of calomel were given, and an injection was administered, which operated on the lower intestines. [It was agreed] to try the result of another bleeding, when about 32 ounces of blood were drawn. . . . Vapours of vinegar and water were frequently inhaled . . . succeeded by repeated doses of emetic tartar . . . with no other effect than a copious discharge from the bowels. The power of life seemed now manifestly yielding to the force of the disorder. . . . Speaking, which was painful from the beginning, now became almost impracticable; respiration grew more and more contracted and imperfect, till half after eleven on Saturday night, retaining the full possession of his intellects—when he expired without a struggle.—James Craik and Elisha C. Dick, “Gen. Washington’s Illness”

The profusion of literary memorials to George Washington in the weeks and months after his death, on 14 December 1799, constitutes the first draft of a work of mourning that is still under revision. Washington continues to symbolize a national cultural process of postrepublican transformation to which he himself contributed pre-posthumously in his Farewell Address. The Address, cowritten with Alexander Hamilton and delivered in 1796, is one of the earliest and most complex statements on the legacy of the eighteenth century’s disembodiment of political power in modern nationalism.¹ No person, no *body*, may in this conceptualization of political tradition interpose itself between citizen-subjects and their self-actualizing

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polities. Nevertheless, over two centuries after his near-liquefaction at the hands of well-meaning surgeons, it would seem that Washington's *disjecta membra* remain touchstones of national subjectivity for many who are otherwise unconscious of or repelled by vestiges of monarchical fetishism in their experience of democratic state sovereignty.² Washington's false teeth, bits of his hair, and other personal relics have been circulating among the nation's cultural institutions in honor, recently, of the 200th anniversary of his death and also as part of the continuing effort to assess the visibility and value of his posthumous image in the changing contexts of its manipulation.³

As contributors to this ongoing work of remembrance, writers of fiction, like so many historians, biographers, and exhibit curators, have sought to portray a Washington more personally compelling than the abstract or monumental figure he commonly strikes; a Washington not yet purged of singularity; a Washington of depth, interiority, even edginess. For example, at one point in Thomas Pynchon's novel, *Mason & Dixon*, the title characters visit Washington at home, and he invites them to sample Mount Vernon's newest cash crop: a small patch of marijuana he has planted in back. Washington gives signs that he has already done so as he stares deeply into the shiny buttons of Jeremiah Dixon's coat. He also has a vision, which he relates to Charles Mason, of the British surveyor being hunted down and eaten by back-country Presbyterians. Mason is nonplussed. "Ever so kind," he replies, declining the weed, "to imagine for me my death in America."⁴

Since Washington's own death, novelists including Cooper, Thackeray, Gertrude Stein, and Gore Vidal have preceded Pynchon in taking up the challenge of imagining Washington's historically oblique character.⁵ The novel's special relation to the problem of character may help account for this perennial interest in Washington, the notorious rigidity of whose public persona undoubtedly heightens the appeal of Pynchon's bent depiction. For beyond the superficial satisfactions of irreverence, Pynchon's Washington helps gratify a deeper skepticism that manifests itself in the reiterated need for a Washington who seems close, visible, idiosyncratic. Indeed, this is what modern novels teach us that character should be. Consequently, we tend to reject characterizations that seem flat or idealized.

This novelistic thinking about character is one reason, at least, for the minimal attention paid by literary and cultural historians—especially notable in the recent commemorative moment—to the vast

poetic response to Washington's death. Michael Gilmore, for instance, invests these poems with all the scantness and banality of his own characterization of early national poetry:

Verses on Washington's death resembled most contemporaneous poems in that they were pedagogic and rhetorical, summoning listeners to draw a lesson or pursue some action. Apart from being in meter and rhyme, poetry did not seek to differentiate itself from other forms of discourse. Verse was the servant of morality and politics.⁶

A more attentive reading of these poems—one attuned, for example, to the differentiating effects of “meter and rhyme,” and to contemporaneous confidence in what E. P. Thompson calls poetry's “historical rights among other intellectual disciplines”⁷—would acknowledge the palpable, if awkward, and thus frequently idiosyncratic, vibrancy of their engagement with other “pedagogic and rhetorical,” moral and political, discursive forms. The sheer quantity of elegies for Washington helps mark his death as a watershed event in the history of nationalist commemorative practices in the United States. But my contention here is not only that the Washington elegies are essential to that history. Once seen as important sites for the operations of fellow-feeling, or sympathy, in the early republic, they should help sharpen our appreciation of poetry's role in the formation and deformation of national subjects.

In making this argument I take an unsympathetic view of a salient feature of Americanist cultural criticism—namely, its marginalization of poetic forms and its correlative commitment to the novel as a metonymy of literary culture. Lurking here, therefore, is a disciplinary argument about literacy: Americanists need to read more poetry. I hope it will be understood that I'm not trying to defend a revanchist formalism or to fetishize poetic genres as such. Instead, by focusing attention on elegy's importance within early national culture, I seek to address what Bakhtin calls the “novelization of genre,” which has made certain questions—including questions about the novel—less likely to be asked in Americanist cultural criticism.⁸

Some of the most subtle recent work on early American novels focuses on the ways in which they figure and facilitate operations of sympathy in literary, as well as broader cultural, terms. For instance, Julia Stern seeks, as she puts it:

to reveal an unappreciated level of novelistic creativity—one that expresses a dialectic of inclusion against exclusion, thereby enacting and to various degrees discomposing the way an elitist culture contains the dissent at its margins. The constitutive power and simultaneous unraveling of sympathy as an operative cultural fantasy become the abiding metaphors through which eighteenth-century American fiction figures problems of social and political cohesion.⁹

That these metaphors seem to have been wielded largely by novelists with a kind of exclusive power is an impression to which Elizabeth Barnes also contributes in her critique of the sentimental novel's seductive conservatism—its power to unite readers in circuits of convention and conventional feeling, to link them as “respondents to rather than performers of language.”¹⁰

Many people in the early United States read novels, but very few wrote them. Poetic forms, on the other hand, were at least as widely produced as they were consumed—and they were consumed voraciously. The basic point I want to make—the point that leads me to my discussion of the Washington elegies—is that whatever people were learning from reading novels about how to enter into the feelings of others can't be very well understood apart from their own various public and private enactments of the relation between literary and affective conventions—enactments that included the composition, imitation, transcription, recitation, and audition, as well as the closeted reading, of poetic genres like elegy. This point applies to elegists with all kinds of relations to literary culture, including elegists who also wrote novels. Thus, in what follows, I've tried to represent a wide range of elegiac activity, while also devoting considerable attention to elegies by two of the period's best-known novelists, Charles Brockden Brown and Susanna Haswell Rowson. My aim is not to accede uncritically to the novel's greater cultural authority but, rather, to help mark that authority as part of our current retrospective.



As word of Washington's death radiated outward from Mount Vernon in late December of 1799, the famous and the obscure began to produce verses that would not only be circulated in a variety of print media but also spoken or sung at civic processions, religious services,

and commercial theatricals around the country.¹¹ They were written by seasoned authors as well as one-time versifiers; by editors, lawyers, and politicians; by New England schoolmistresses and Masonic grandmasters; by Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Deists, and Quakers; by members of Washington's intimate circle and by strangers who had not always been well-wishers. Their elegies are formally diverse, including odes, hymns, sonnets, acrostics, ballads, and even prose poems in Ossianic measure. Many elegies were brief and epitaphic. Others were comprehensive verse eulogies hundreds of lines long. "It would seem," one contemporary observer noted archly, "as if the nine Muses were increased to nineteen; and they had all agreed to disperse and compose, according to their respective ingenuities."¹²

Yet the pressure to represent grief as a national affect, distributed among particular but not isolated persons, resulted in a remarkable expressive homogeneity. A shared idiom of woe supported assertions of fellow feeling that reached from the centers to the margins of national life. In Boston, Thomas Pemberton noted that a local paper

mentions the following as an additional evidence of the universality of the grief excited by the death of Washington. . . . At the Funeral honors ordered by [General] Pinckney at the United States garrison at South West Point—Nine principal Chiefs of the Cherokees & a large number of the common Indians appeared in the funeral procession and testified by their deportment [and] by sighs & death songs that they felt that their highly respected Father Washington is no more.¹³

This report from the Tennessee frontier, where perceptions of radical difference between Indians and whites would lead to the grief of Cherokee removal, renders a sameness of affect plausible through vagueness. Given "Father" Washington's history of paternalistic benevolence toward the Cherokees, their representatives no doubt "felt" his loss, especially in the presence of federal troops no longer under Washington's command. But the question of what specifically they might have felt—what particular sentiments might have prompted their "sighs & death songs"—is carefully avoided.

In the "death songs" of white Americans, too, the claim of grief's universality sometimes hinged upon its ineffability in problematic ways. Alluding to the mourning bands and clothing Americans were officially urged to wear in Washington's memory, as well as to the

words in which writers dressed the nation's sorrow, a South Carolina newspaper elegy, signed "Myrtilla," maintained that "Dark mourning weeds but ill express / The poignant grief that all confess." The convention of pseudonymous publication adopted by the author, Philip Freneau, reinforces a sense (compounded by cross-gendering) of the transitivity of public expression. But the poem also seeks, somewhat discordantly, to retain a sense of delicacy regarding the privacy of sentiment. It tells us, for instance, that *all* hearts congeal with "secret" woe and that tears "steal" down *each* pale cheek.¹⁴ If authorial anonymity is often a condition of generalized publicity in republican print culture, it is also a frequent token and guarantor of privacy in the elegiac tradition within which Freneau writes. His difficult goal is to establish grief's authorizing universality without compromising its authenticating reticence.

This difficulty is compounded for Freneau by the tension between his impulse as a republican to resist particularized heroization and his commitment as an elegist to his subject's individuation. Such a commitment, always in competition with the genre's parallel commitments to exemplification and sublimation, and with the deindividuating tendency of literary and social conventions, posed special problems for Washington's elegists. Throughout the 1790s, against a backdrop of faction and uncertainty, Washington provided a welcome ground for fellow feeling and, increasingly, a link between the revolutionary past and the national future. The monumentalist response to his death celebrated this effect, but it also prompted questions about the basis of one man's enduring hold over the national imagination and about his unique relevance to the continuity of union. Americans' overwhelming investment of value and significance in the person of George Washington pointed to the persistence of royalist mentality and sentiment, while concern over the Caesarian tendencies of the republican hero—a concern at the very heart of Washington's Cincinnatus role—conflicted with any truly particularized heroization, and thus with the elegist's task of individuated mourning. The childlessness that delinked biology and paternity in popular conceptions of Washington as national father enabled a diffusion of family feeling crucial to a sense of unity among national subjects—including noncitizen subjects.¹⁵ Yet the very disembodiment that made his image a powerful force for the elision of difference and conflict also made it an awkward site for authentic mourning.

At the same time, the anonymity of republican print culture and the national premium on fellow feeling as an index of social coherence discouraged elegiac self-display: for General Washington, one poem exhorts, a “general grief.”¹⁶ Many of the elegies bear titles like “America in Mourning” and “Columbia’s Distress” and are full of depersonalized sentiments: the “general sorrow,” the “People’s grief,” the “country’s woe.”¹⁷ Such figures are common to the poetry of public mourning, including the elegies Anglo-Americans had written only a generation earlier for King George II.¹⁸ But grief in a republic ought to be different, as an editorial writer for New York’s *Commercial Advertiser* insisted in defense of Washington’s effusive mourners: “It is not the ostentation of fashion, or the admiration of a stupid multitude, staring at the glitter of a crown; it is the heartfelt grief of a nation for the loss of great public and private virtues.”¹⁹ Tocqueville draws a sharp distinction between what he calls “instinctive” and “reflecting” patriotism, associating the former with monarchism and the latter with republicanism.²⁰ But the experience of forms of sentimental and rational attachment portrayed in the Washington elegies doesn’t readily conform to this opposition. Rather, it confirms the dialectic of historicism and traditionalism that generates and sustains patriotism in modern nations, where death, as Benedict Anderson observes, stands for a range of fatalities that must be given continuity and meaning.²¹

Washington’s death was more than an occasion for ceremonial remembrance, for establishing a past from which the future could depart. It was an opportunity to define a new style of relation to the dead—a style that could encompass the potentially conflicting ideals of personal freedom and civic duty. Washington himself endured this conflict famously and self-consciously throughout his life, and many of the elegies stress his sad willingness to yield to the people’s claims upon him. In his “Poem on the Death of General Washington,” David Humphreys describes Washington’s acceptance of the presidency:

To the first office call’d by every voice,
His will submissive to his country’s choice;
By reason’s force reluctance overcome,
Behold him meekly leave his darling home;
Again resign the calm of rural life,
Again embarking on a sea of strife!²²

These lines echo the characterizations of sacrifice in many Puritan elegies, where the call to public office is depicted as both a challenge to piety and an opportunity to do good. For Washington, love of domestic retirement takes the place of the Puritan inward calling to redemption in its conflict with the call to civic duty. He seeks not redemption but the privacy American independence makes possible: a withdrawal from political action consistent with patriotism. “I have the consolation to believe,” Washington wrote in his Farewell Address, “that while choice and prudence invite me to quit the political scene, patriotism does not forbid it.”²³ Posthumously, he received the commiseration of fellow citizens like Humphreys who were, at the turn of the century, themselves learning to think of patriotism privately cultivated as an alternative to virtuous public action.

Humphreys, as minister to Spain, delivered his 860-line elegy as a Fourth-of-July oration to an audience in Madrid. The poem is largely the story of Washington’s career, with special attention given to the war years. In his Advertisement to the published version of the poem, he expresses his fear that the events of the Revolution are “in danger of becoming unknown to posterity,” and he affirms his faith in poetry as both a repository of the past and an inducement to virtuous behavior in the present (*MW*, 159–61). Yet in a letter to Martha Washington on 5 July 1800, he describes the poem as “a representation . . . of my melancholy sensations,” and it is in fact full of assertions of Humphreys’s distinctiveness as a mourner (*MW*, 155). He seems to have felt that his personal relationship with Washington distinguished his pain from the sense of common loss taken for granted here as elsewhere:

Though duty calls and friendship leaves no choice,
Unutterable feelings choak my voice—
For sensibilities I bring, not less,
And greater grief than others, to express. (“P,” 21–24)

He speaks of his wish privately to “indulge the luxury of grief” (“P,” 52), though he insists two lines later that it is “Grief not confin’d to nation, sex, or age” (“P,” 54). His elegy offers a forum for both sensibility and public virtue, but it does not yet mediate critically between the two.

The requirement that public grief be—and be seen to be—universally sincere made the subject, as well as the object, of repub-

lican mourning a site of conflict. Indeed the pressure to embody a “nation’s grief” could easily become insupportable, as the celebrated actor Thomas Cooper discovered during his recitation of a Washington elegy written by Charles Brockden Brown. Brown produced the elegy to help solemnize the reopening of New York’s Park Theatre. The theater, which had closed on 20 December when news of Washington’s death reached New York, resumed its season ten days later with an adaptation of Boutet de Monvel’s melodrama *Clémentine et Désormes*. Before the play began, Cooper, one of its stars, attempted to deliver Brown’s poem, with results described the next day in the *New York Spectator*:

He came on, with a bow not the most graceful in the world, but with a countenance that seemed to say, “*If you have tears prepare to shed them now,*” and in truth never was an audience more predisposed to harmonize with “*sorrows saddest note.*” His tongue, however, soon counteracted every such emotion, for he began to speak in [tones] artificial and declamatory. . . . [H]e had hardly exceeded thirty lines when . . . his words stuck in his throat, and he lost all power of recollecting a line further. . . . He edged a little nearer the prompter, caught his cue and went on—stopt again—moved on a word—stopt again—the ladies cast down their eyes—he caught another word, and went on—stopt again—the Pit groaned aloud, and a small hiss began to issue from the gallery—when some good honest fellow got up and clapped his hands, which encouraged [him] to start once more, and to go quite through the piece . . . much to our own as well as his relief. To add that he pronounced it very ill [is] unnecessary, as no man can ever speak with propriety and effect, whose whole attention is constantly occupied in the sole business of recollection.²⁴

Cooper’s performance renders the audience’s dream of sympathy his own perfect nightmare. Instead of uniting the spectators in a shared consideration of their situation as mourners of Washington, Cooper finds himself confronted with their pained consideration of the lack of sympathy with which his own situation is attended. He fails not only to project elegiac sincerity but also to achieve the theatrical dissimulation of sorrow with which his audience is “predisposed to harmonize.”

Ironically, Brown’s elegy begins by promising the audience it will be spared the trappings and the suits of woe:

No mimic accents now shall touch your ears,
 And now no fabled woe demand your tears;
 No Hero of a visionary age,
 No child of poet's phrenzy walks the stage.
 'Tis not my office, now, in such a cause
 As erst, to cheat you of your dear applause.
 'Tis no phantastic fate of Queens or Kings,
 That bids your sympathy unlock its springs.²⁵

These lines refer most directly to the plays (including the Monvel adaptation, Henry Brooke's *Gustavas Vasa*, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*) with which Brown's poem was meant on various subsequent evenings to share the bill. But they also initiate a complex assault on modes of soliciting fellow feeling, including aspects of Brown's own gothic fictions. Negative constructions fill these opening lines and dominate the rest of the poem as well. Brown describes the audience's grief ("No passing grief it is, no private woe" ["M," 11]), its object ("Not for your children's friend your tears must fall" [17]), its scope ("Not singly we, who haunt this western shore" [19]), its propriety ("No cause there is that may demand a tear" [30]), and its lasting monuments ("Not built with hands" [88]) all in terms of what they are not. In doing so, Brown seems often to echo the virtuous self-denial of civic republicanism, while also anticipating a bourgeois spirit of self-control. Indeed, in a kind of proleptic defense against the conflation of political and domestic spheres, the poem aggressively cancels the domestic scene of sentimentalism:

You are not call'd to view, bereft of life,
 By dread convulsion seiz'd, your child or wife,
 To view a parent's feeble lamp expire;
 But *Washington is dead*, his country's sire!
 Not for your children's friend your tears must fall;
 For *Washington is dead*, the friend of all! ("M," 13-18)

Washington's death matters because it is like a personal loss *and* because it transcends the sentimental ties of consanguinity and checks the unregulated indulgence of grief. The conflict manifest within the poem turns on Brown's wish to stage grief as a collective, specifically national, experience rather than a domestic one: home and nation are not yet the same thing. The paradox of national sorrow is encapsulated in the poem's insistently repeated reminder to the audi-

ence: “This woe is yours,” which it seems less likely to be, the more they need to be reminded of it.

At the same time, as Cooper found, there is a price to pay for a too exclusive devotion to the “sole business of recollection”—a price against which the poem’s distancing formalism ought to have provided indemnity. Like the figure of Washington within the elegy—who is there described as guiding, steering, teaching, subduing, and fixing—the poem itself is a model of regulation, its conventional form contrasting sharply with the chaotic mimeses of vexed subjectivity in some of Brown’s fictions. If Cooper had been given a page from Brown’s novel *Edgar Huntly* to memorize and recite, his incoherence and forgetfulness would have been at least dramatically consistent with the material. But Brown’s elegy presents no comparable stylistic challenges and gives little evidence of its hasty composition. On the contrary, it offers numerous aids to memorization and recitation. Its rhymed iambic pentameter couplets are fairly regular; its syntax and diction are never outlandish; it engages frequently in the repetition of key words and phrases; and it follows a familiar elegiac pattern of lamentation, praise, and consolation. Yet the professional, celebrated actor still couldn’t remember it—couldn’t, that is, piece it together in and as an embodiment of national sensibility. The poem, like the woe, simply wasn’t his.

Many other such poems were also originally produced for public reading, their direct appeal to communal expression itself a kind of civic action. Even without Cooper to give them special life, the contradictions these poems embody as disciplinary instruments of spontaneous, shared feeling tended to emerge at the nexus of orality and print—captured in the performance details that often accompanied the text of an elegy as it made the rounds in the press after its spoken debut. Georgetown’s *Centinel of Liberty*, for example, was one of several newspapers to reprint an “Elegiac Ode” from Fredericktown, Maryland, with the following prefatory remarks:

Last evening, the Youth of our Academy joined in the general unexampled sorrow of their country, in delivering, at the close of their Elocutionary Exercises, the following Elegiac Ode, on the death of the ever to be revered WASHINGTON, to a very melancholy and deeply affected audience. It was spoken by three young gentlemen in deep mourning, by alternate Stanzas or divisions, as it is written—and was accompanied by Solemn Music.²⁶

The “very melancholy and deeply affected audience” is offered to newspaper readers as evidence of the poem’s ability, through its young speakers, to rouse and direct the emotions of its listeners. It also reinforces the implicit exhortation to such readers to join in “the unexampled sorrow of their country.” In the poem that follows, references to the patriot’s “sympathizing groan” and “raptur’d ear” seem intended to inspire what they portray: the very practice of nationalism that David Waldstreicher locates in the “reciprocal influence of celebrations and print.”²⁷ Yet the prefatory description, in attempting to set an imaginary stage for the private reading of the printed poem, also helps ensure that its rhetorical excesses will ring false. For its plaintive exclamations (“Ah! Mourn!”; “For ah! Alas!”; “On earth ah! Heard no more”) and tolling laments (“Ah! Gone!—gone!—gone!”; “Now Dead!—Dead!—Dead!”) rather adroitly test the reader’s ability to imagine its being “spoken as it is written.”²⁸ That is, they seem to interfere with possibilities for affective consent by feeding into contemporary distrust of rhetorical ornament and stylistic affectation.

Yet these same features, through their very conventionality and stylization, open up a space between text and reader for the representation and solicitation of a depersonalized, national sensibility. For this rather straightforward reason, it seems to me that these sorts of poetic texts are improperly understood—or rather too quickly dismissed—by literary scholars of the period as irrelevant to discussions of what is these days mysteriously referred to as “sentimental form.”²⁹ A further example helps make the point. Frequent reprintings of one elegiac hymn for Washington include the following framing account of its initial performance:

A stranger who attended divine service, on Sunday, at the 1st Episcopal Church in this town, upon entering was struck with reverential awe and affected even to tears at the testimonials of affliction there exhibited. The pulpit, chancel, organ, gallery, and state pew were hung in black. A discourse, worthy of the author, was delivered by the Rev. Mr. [James] FREEMAN; the subject the illustrious WASHINGTON. After which the following “Occasional Hymn” (having been previously distributed) was sung.

I.

ASSEMBLED round the patriot’s grave,
Pity, O Lord, a nation’s sighs:

We mourn our chief, the warrior brave;
Low in the dust the hero lies.

II.

By thee inspir'd with warlike art,
He urg'd the fight, or bade it cease:
Not less he fill'd the statesman's part;
Our guide in war, our head in peace.

III.

His country happy, great, and free,
Hail'd him her father, hope and pride;
But fix'd, O God, his hope on thee,
He liv'd thy friend, thy servant died.

At the first line, the whole congregation actuated by one sentiment, immediately rose and joined in the singing.³⁰

By combining the text of the poem's broadside version with an account of its incantation, this newspaper item encourages a sympathetic reading through a fantasy of participation. The text begins by smoothly interpellating the reader as a "stranger" in a way analogous to that in which epitaphic inscriptions conventionally hail the stranger or traveler: by reaching out, in this case, not from the dead to the living but from the local to the extralocal.³¹ At various removes—temporal, geographical, denominational—readers could enjoy the sense if not the sensation of being "struck with reverential awe and affected even to tears," of being "actuated" by a single sentiment shared not just by the King's Chapel congregation but by an entire nation. Readers are invited, along with the congregation, to participate, to "rise" and "join" in a liturgical enactment of unity. Everyone sings, everyone mourns. The conventions of Protestant hymnody, adapted to the political occasion, appear in this newspaper account as a republican counterpart to the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers: voicing the new civic liturgy is an expression of the national right to interpret republican principles. The alleged involuntariness with which stranger and congregant alike submit to the scene's coercive sentimentality ("upon entering," "at the first line") does not suggest a mere uniformity of feeling. It suggests—through both descriptive and conscriptive methods that include the distancing effects of poetic

form—a prior uniform disposition to be moved that should enable the newspaper reader readily to inhabit the phrase “We mourn.”

But the nation was a unified subject only in fantasy, and along with proliferating assertions of affliction came increasing evidence of a general unwillingness to credit the genuineness of those assertions. A flood of skepticism and Juvenalian satire kept pace with the flood of tearful elegies. Often the cries of insincerity were politically motivated. The pseudonymous “NO TORY,” for example, railed against the “crocodile” elegies of the Federalists, while New York’s *Commercial Advertiser* opined that, in order to estimate the “sincerity and value” of “Jacobin” accusations of Federalist idolatry, “we must wait till some Jefferson shall die.”³² Party rancor was the most overt, commonly shrill, expression of a strong cultural preoccupation with representations of sensibility free from threatening vagaries of interest and subjectivity—threats at the heart of contemporary fears about the novel’s ability to collapse the distance between text and reader. “Far from a mere literary trend,” Waldstreicher observes, the cult of sensibility “was a cultural imperative of international dimensions.”³³ Yet as a literary trend, it occupied the attention not only of powerful newspaper editors but also of the current steward of federal feeling—President Adams—who was by no means above faking it. In the midst of writing thank-you notes for the Washington tributes that inundated the executive mansion at Philadelphia, Adams seems to have been estimating his own chances for lasting fame when he expressed the hope that “[we] no longer disturb his ghost with fulsome adulation.”³⁴

Adams’s impatience with the mourning contest Washington’s death inspired probably had more to do with personal ambition than with the critique of sentimental forms. He nevertheless read many of these tributes with specifically literary interest. He took notice, for instance, of an elegy by a young poet named Charles Love and wrote him a detailed response. Praising Love’s poem for its “invention & judgment,” as well as for its successful imitation of Milton, Adams honored what he called a “talent worth cultivating” with both criticism and compliments: “The versification,” he wrote, “is in some places negligent & wants labor. The heart which appears in it is pure & amiable in a high degree.”³⁵ From Alexandria, Love whipped back a long reply full of youthful gratification, self-absorption, and ambitiousness. He thanked Adams for his salutary criticisms but was especially pleased with the president’s endorsement of his sensibility: “He,” Love ven-

tured, “who in his writings displays the ‘Pure Heart’ the chaste sentiment—can not be said to have written in vain.”³⁶

The Adams-Love exchange reads more like one between teacher and student than between president and citizen. It is a sign that the sentimentalization of virtue was a lesson Americans were still learning, from the schoolroom setting of the Frederick Academy to King’s Chapel to the home of the president. With a strong civic tradition in colonial Anglo-America and a foundational connection to contemporary poetics of sensibility, elegy was, unsurprisingly, a common tutelary genre.³⁷ But even for more experienced poets, elegy was a challenging venue for the expression of fellow feeling. Despite the codes of anonymous or generalized mourning, and the political pressure to conform to such codes, the very conventions of elegiac tradition also, ironically, encouraged elegists to argue for their own uniqueness and special sincerity. Humphreys, for example, recognized the legitimating force of both generality and self-assertion, and he struggled in his Madrid elegy to mediate between the two. Self-conscious about this struggle within the poem, Humphreys prefaced the published version with not one but two dedicatory letters to Martha Washington, whose public status as a mourner was no less complex for being self-evidently legitimate. As Washington’s widow, hers was acknowledged to be the “greater grief,” but as the symbol of a “widow’d country,” as another elegist put it, her grief was also deemed representative.³⁸ As Washington’s widow, she was a political figure, subject to partisan identification and attack, but as a woman she was excluded from the realm of political representation. Like the widely circulated images of Columbia weeping, Martha’s image feminized national affect but was also deployed as a model for the regulation of private feeling—its subordination to the common interest located in a general, genderless sympathy.


One sees this sort of deployment in author-identified elegies by prominent poets like Humphreys and Richard Alsop, where Martha is invoked as a figure of silent, inviolable grief, illustrating the “convergence of femininity and the unrepresentable” that Eva Cherniavsky locates in the early national discourse of sympathy.³⁹ One sees it also in a cheap anonymous broadside elegy called *Lady Washington’s Lamentation for the Death of Her Husband*, a dramatic monologue in which Martha anatomizes her own sorrow only to reject its particularity in the final stanza:

But why with my own single grief so confounded,
 When my country's sad millions in sorrows are drowned,
 Let me mingle the current that flows from my bosom,
 With my country's vast ocean of tears while they lose them.⁴⁰

One can easily point to the sheer awfulness of rhyme here. Indeed, we have to strive rather mightily to ignore the ludicrousness of “bosom”–“lose them” in order to read this poem with the respectful attentiveness we have learned customarily to bring even to the tinniest prose. Which is to say that we require ways of distinguishing between stylistic defects that seem to verge on self-parody and formal effects of distancing against which the novelization of genre militates. In contrast to the “one sentiment” supposed to unite the King’s Chapel congregation in spontaneous public display, Martha’s “single grief” represents individuated affect literally out of touch with collective sorrow. The imprecision of the former helps ensure its generalizability; the particularity of the latter leads to a vexed (“confounded”) interiority. To regulate her feeling (her “grief unconfined”) and to join the national body, the broadside Lady Washington commits herself to the solvent tears of “sad millions.”

Yet as Martha narrates her own dematerialization in the text of the elegy, the accompanying cut depicts her as strikingly embodied (see fig. 1). The relative size of the four surrounding figures, though recognizable as children, makes the seated Martha appear monstrous in the crude carving. As the children—two boys and two girls—buzz about her with their open books, she seems to stare quietly past them. The image prompts the recollection that Martha had borne four children in her life—Daniel Parke Custis’s two sons and two daughters—all of whom, by this point, were dead. Indeed, Washington’s celebrated status as the country’s father begs the question of the significance of Martha’s motherhood in the context of national mourning. As if in response, the broadside’s text and image conflate individual and collective mourning, maternal embodiment and political abstraction, reflecting the complexity of the period’s feminization of loss.

Recent criticism associates this phenomenon most strongly with sentimental fiction—crucially with what Julia Stern calls the “sentimental *urtext*” of the 1790s, Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple*, against the sympathetic vision of which Brockden Brown’s novels, most notably, would offer a gothic (and arguably feminist) dissent (*PF*, 31). As we have seen, Brown’s elegy for Washington also reveals



**LADY
WASHINGTON'S
LAMENTATION FOR THE
DEATH OF HER HUSBAND.**

WHEN Columbia's brave sons sought my hero to lead them,
To vanquish their foes and establish their freedom,
I rejoic'd at his honors, my fears I dissembled,
At the thought of his dangers my heart how it trembled,
Oh, my Washington! O my Washington!
Oh, my Washington! all was hazardous.

The contest decided, with foes to the nation,
My hero return'd 'midst loud acclamation,
Of men without number and praise without measure,
And my own heart exulted in transports of pleasure,
Oh my Washington. Oh, &c. all was hazardous.

Our freedom with order by faction rejected,
A new constitution our country elected,
My hero was rais'd to preside our the union,
And his cares interrupted our bliss and communion.
Oh, my happiness! &c. &c. how precarious.

Declining the trust of his dignified station,
With joy to the seat of his dear estimation,
Surrounded with honors he humbly retreated,
Sweet hope softly whisper'd my bliss was completed.
Oh, my happiness! &c. &c. how precarious.

When the pangs of disease, had, ah! fatally seiz'd him,
My heart would have yielded its life to have eas'd him,
And I pray'd the Most High if for death he design'd him,
That he would not permit me to loiter behind him.
Oh, my Washington! &c. &c. all was dubious.

When my hopes had all fled, and I saw him resigning
His soul to his God without fear or repining,

What, my heart, were thy feelings? lamenting, admiring,
To behold him so calmly, so nobly expiring.
Oh, my Washington! &c. &c. has forsaken us.

When I follow'd his corpse with grief unconfined,
And saw to the tomb his dear relics consigned,
When I left him in darkness and silence surrounded,
With what pangs of fresh anguish my bosom was wounded!
Oh, my Washington! &c. &c. has forsaken us.

An aspect so noble pale grave clothes disfigure,
His conquering arm is despoil'd of its vigour,
On those limbs which dropt wisdom is silence imposed,
And those kind beaming eyes now forever are closed,
Oh, my Washington? &c. &c. has forsaken us.

When with tears of sweet musing I ponder the story,
Of his wars, of his labours, his virtues and glory,
I breathe out a pray'r with sad order of spirit,
Soon to join him in bliss and united inherit
Endless Blessedness! &c. &c. oh, how glorious.

But why with my own single grief so confounded,
When my country's sad millions in sorrows are drowned,
Let me mingle the current that flows from my bosom,
With my country's vast ocean of tears while they lose them,
Tho' my Washington, &c. &c. has forsaken us.

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CORNER THEATRE-ALLEY, Milk-Street—BOSTON.

Figure 1 *Lady Washington's Lamentation for the Death of Her Husband* (Boston: Nathaniel Coverly Jr. [1800]). Photograph courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.

skepticism about the authenticity of collective grief even as it registers the success of sentimental literature, not merely in depicting but even inspiring just that sort of powerful, collective feeling. *Charlotte Temple* may well have been on Brown's mind as he attempted, in composing his elegy, to construct Washington as an object of shared, active mourning. Rowson's novel is famous, after all, for having inspired its

own cult of memory; it moved masses of readers to visit the supposed grave of a fictional character, where droves of Rowson's readers apparently used to congregate and weep. (The grave can still be visited in New York City's Trinity Churchyard.) Indeed, as the new century began, the cults of George Washington and Charlotte Temple vied for national attention, helping to blur the distinctions—including gendered distinctions—between real and fictional embodiments of national self-understanding. Stern notes that despite the distance between Washington's "exalted masculinity" and Temple's "degraded femininity," their two cults functioned similarly, "channeling both political and sentimental affect" (*PF*, 11). While readers found in Charlotte Temple a kind of postrevolutionary catharsis, girls at schools like Rowson's celebrated Young Ladies' Academy circulated Washington elegies in their letters and diaries and learned needlework by copying the Washington memorial prints that were part of a lucrative commercial industry fueled by his never-ending apotheosis.⁴¹

Indeed, any simple distinction between Washington's "exalted masculinity" and Temple's "degraded femininity" is untenable when we consider, on one hand, the dignity conferred upon Charlotte's abjection by her popularity and by the novel's commercial success and, on the other hand, the incongruity of merchandizing Washington—the very image and pattern of self-sacrifice—in the service of economic self-interest.⁴² Whether as an opportunity for moving masses of souvenir handkerchiefs or as an inspiration for sentimental verses, Washington's memorialization was by no means consistent with popular notions of masculine virtue. In the elegies, one encounters repeated suggestions of an odd passivity in relation to other men. Kind hands hold him powerless, for example, in one of the most widely reprinted elegies, where he is a superannuated spirit "lead, enrapt" by the ghosts of thronging generals who died in their prime.⁴³ And Humphreys's elegy emphasizes the pathos of enforced self-denial, referring to Washington as "submissive," "overcome," "meek" ("P," 588–90). Furthermore, if Washington's attenuated presence in the whole range of elegies for him is a function of sound republican mourning practice, it also contributed to fears that the virtues with which he was associated would be "obscured [rather] than rendered more [vivid and] impressive."⁴⁴

Brown himself reviewed many of the Washington elegies and apprehended motivation, not dullness, behind their decorous abstraction.

Yet that very decorousness also provoked him to expressions of ambivalence and aggressivity. In a long review of an elegy by Charles Caldwell, he wrote:

We wished to find, under a mantle of such glossy texture and luxuriant folds, a body, graceful, vigorous, and well proportioned. A meager, distorted, tottering and limping frame, covered with tissue and embroidery, is always a mournful, and sometimes a disgusting spectacle. The mind is shocked by the incongruity between the vestment and the wearer, and our displeasure is increased by our disappointment. A crazy body is expected to accompany rags and rents, and its garment may be threadbare and dingy with impunity; and yet may it not be said, that a shewy garb is of more value to the skeleton than to the perfect man? The latter may shew himself, unbedecked, with more advantage than the former; and where the form beneath is disgusting or ridiculous, may we not thank the tailor who has thus dexterously covered up deformity, and afforded us, at least, the spectacle of a magnificent outside?⁴⁵

This passage, in its allegory of the dialectical relation between style and form, has left far behind the particular elegy under review. Indeed Brown goes on to say that he does not mean to imply that Caldwell's poem is in any way "disgusting" or "loathsome." Yet the elegy is his occasion for a complex critique of decorousness that reveals concern about Washington's "exalted masculinity." Brown is alarmed at the incongruity that decorousness might just as readily reveal as conceal. It is difficult, for example, not to hear in this passage anxiety about the mournful spectacle of Washington's body—once famously "graceful, vigorous, and well proportioned"—now distorted in the public imagination by age, illness, and death.⁴⁶ One also hears the gothic novelist's preoccupation with depth and interiority—the anxiety that interiority is itself a kind of deformity that delineations of character, however decorous their surface, risk revealing.

Brown's outburst dramatically confirms his ambivalence about the Washington elegies. As a literary critic, he faults certain poems for failing to honor elegy's commitment to individuation, while seeming to fear the spectacle such a commitment might entail. Devoted in his major novels to detailing psychological complexity, Brown's own elegy falls substantially in line with Washington's prescriptions for his notoriously opaque public image. As an elegist, Brown participates

in the awkward but widespread poetic effort to reconcile protoliberal ideals of individuation and republican ideals of depersonalization. Yet he maintains an antagonistic distance from sentimental fiction's parallel effort to generate sympathy through the representation of affect unmediated by complexities of character, as in the case of Rowson's Charlotte.

Indeed, one could infer from their respective fictive strategies for representing character that Washington would have been a more suitable subject for Rowson than for Brown. She is in fact credited with writing a number of Washington elegies and dirges, two of which were set to music by the contemporary composers Oliver Holden and Caleb Carr. Of more certain attribution is "Eulogy to the Memory of George Washington," published in her 1804 *Miscellaneous Poems*. Like Brown's "Monody," it depicts an abstract, depersonalized Washington. But in other respects it is a very different kind of poem. It lacks, most obviously, the other elegy's uneasy penchant for negation. Furthermore, whereas Brown's elegy was produced for public reading and circulated (after its disastrous debut) as a kind of approximation of public remembrance, Rowson's seeks not merely to reproduce but to transform the experience of hearing a poem recited. Her elegy subjects the motif of civic action to imaginative introjection and makes the spectacle of mourning Washington an episode of inwardness.

Capitalizing on Washington's famous impulse toward withdrawal from public life, Rowson opens the poem by imagining her own retreat to the romanticized precincts of Mount Vernon:

Where the Patomac, with majestic wave,
Washes the borders of Virginia's shore;
Once the retreat of him most wise most brave,
Our sainted hero! now, alas, no more;—
Oft has my fancy took delight to stray,
Pensive, beneath the high cliff's craggy side;
List to the dashing of the foaming spray,
Or undulating murmurs of the tide.⁴⁷

In this setting, she is approached by "visions" and "airy forms" ("E," 11, 12), whose dreamlike procession offers a private alternative to the parades, ceremonies, and theatrical gatherings so widely enacted and reported on in the early months of 1800, some of which may have featured Rowson's own earlier verses:

a celestial band appears;
 Some bearing wreaths, with cypress twin'd,
 Others with measured step and slow,
 Drest in the sad habiliments of woe,
 Whose brows funereal honours bind,
 And others lingering far behind,
 With veils that flutter in the wind,
 Conceal the mournful face, and dry the gushing tears.
 ("E," 19–26)

The pageant, led by "Fancy," includes personifications of the "Social Arts," "Bellona," "Death," "Wisdom," "Poesy," and "Commerce," who speak or gesture to the fantastic crowd as it expands beyond the reach of any human orator's voice.

It is tempting to read this poem, which appears to have followed several publicly performed dirges by the same author, as an instance of elegiac poetry's withdrawal from civic and even interpersonal realms to a more self-reflexive world of poetic sensibility. Rowson begins by displacing the already vague, lost object of mourning from his place of retirement and transforming the landscape into an amalgam of late-eighteenth-century views of Severn and Snowdon. There, in language borrowed most directly from the elegiac sonnets of Charlotte Smith, she focuses on possibilities for imaginative compensation:

There rapt, entranc'd, each anxious thought, each care,
 And each corporeal sense would dormant lay;
 While visions, ever bright and ever fair,
 In airy forms would round my temples play.
 Keen winter's chilling blast is never felt,
 While beatific scenes the fancy throng;
 The heart in Zembla's frozen clime will melt,
 When FANCY leads the fetter'd soul along. ("E," 9–16)

While Washington is being "led, enrapt" to his martial heaven, Rowson goes to meet a different kind of rapture and suspension of embodiment. Despite the claim of sensual dormancy, the landscape and Rowson's self-projection into it are palpable, even quietly eroticized. Her poem transforms the national-domestic shrine to public self-effacement into the very ground of sentimental subjectivity.

Rowson's encounter with her own fancy has, at one particularly emphatic moment, the semblance of autoerotic revelation: "She

comes! she comes! a stream of light, / Bursts on my aching wondering sight" ("E," 17–18). Yet the vision to which her ecstatic withdrawal gives rise is a funeral procession, and the pageant conjured by her "Fancy"—which includes speeches by personifications of various aspects of national life (war, literature, commerce, memorialization)—suggests an expansive rather than contracted range of public commitments, even as the poem maintains its distance from actual scenes of public bereavement. For example, Rowson's own footnote to one of the speeches indicates that part of it was quoted "in manuscript, by Dr. Bartlett . . . in his Oration on the death of Washington."⁴⁸ The note confirms the poem's legitimating connection to civic culture while at the same time drawing attention to the localized and occasional nature of its earlier, partial dissemination. In the context of the poem, the speech is the product of the poet's private reverie and has no other human audience. Yet it is imagined to achieve universal audibility.

Spoken by the figure of "Gratitude," the speech recommends a temperate alternative to sentimental effusiveness, rejecting "useless grief" in favor of the terms of remembrance established by Washington himself in his Farewell Address: a paradoxical combination of "independent mind" and national "unanimity" (FA, 151, 153). The speech urges a rational response but does so through the figure of an emotion—gratitude—rather than through the figures of "Wisdom," "War," and "Commerce" that also appear in the poem. The speech appeals to reason—to the idealized rational citizenry that is the implicit universal subject of republican mourning in most of the Washington elegies—but because of its affective basis, counts upon reaching "even savages, untaught and rude" (FA, 136), such as the Tennessee Cherokees that Thomas Pemberton read about in his Boston newspaper. The poem understands its audibility, and the vision of nationalistic union it promotes, to depend upon this dual appeal.

This sort of self-understanding is typical of the mass of Washington elegies and relocates Rowson within the realm of republican poetics from which she also seems fantastically to depart. Rowson joins her masculinist peers, for instance, in aligning herself explicitly with the oldest traditions of poetry and panegyric. She is mindful of how "ancient poets gain'd immortal fame" and says she need not envy Homer because she has an even "nobler theme" to treat ("E," 97, 106). Yet the framing devices of withdrawal and self-entrancement help distinguish Rowson's elegy from those of her peers to the extent to which

it illustrates how the appeal to national sensibility could be made on behalf of imaginative as well as civic action. Her elegy does not seem to have been written for public performance; it was published belatedly in book form rather than hard upon the event in newspapers or broadsides; and it depicts a moment of explicitly private fancy rather than a shared vision. She reaffirms here what she had already argued elsewhere: that the indulgence of fancy is not incompatible with civic-mindedness. In her preface to *Charlotte Temple*, she asks that the book be considered “not merely the effusion of Fancy, but as a reality,” and stresses her desire to “be of service” and “of use” to the widest possible readership.⁴⁹ Part of that usefulness was to give popular form to the young nation’s continued engagements with grief for individual and collective losses. But if Rowson was helping to remake the novel into a kind of mourning genre, through which feelings were solicited for the furtherance of sympathetic union as well as personal edification and satisfaction, then she, her fellow novelists, and countless other professional and nonprofessional writers were also adapting traditions of elegiac poetry to new civic and imaginative requirements, including the rise of sentimental culture and its later emergence as domestic ideology. A proper history of literary mourning in the early United States must consider how elegy, too, helped instruct Americans in the imaginative basis of national self-understanding. As part of such a history, the troubled commemoration of George Washington also helps illuminate the troubled self-constitution of elegy’s own national tradition as, under the pressure of the nation’s postrepublican transformation in the early nineteenth century, the genre adapts to new memorial requirements for its proliferating subjects—from heroic personages to cherished infants, from known individuals to entire groups and classes of the unnamed dead.

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Notes

I am grateful to the Massachusetts Historical Society for permission to quote from materials in their collection and especially for granting me a Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati Fellowship, which facilitated the research and writing of this essay.

- 1 Bruce Burgett reads the intricate “logic of corporeal nationalism” in the Farewell Address and shows how the Address helped set the terms for

later struggles over Washington's memorialization (*Sentimental Bodies: Sex, Gender, and Citizenship in the Early Republic* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998]).

- 2 For the full text of the doctors' report on Washington's deathbed scene from which I quote in the epigraph, see James Craik and Elisha C. Dick, "Gen. Washington's Illness," *Dedham (Mass.) Columbian Minerva*, 16 January 1800, 4.
- 3 Some of the larger exhibits mounted between 1998 and 2000 include *George Washington: American Symbol* (Museums of Stony Brook, Long Island; and Museum of Our National Heritage, Lexington, Massachusetts); *The Great Experiment: George Washington and the American Republic* (Huntington Library, Los Angeles; and Morgan Library, New York City); "*His True & Impressive Image*": *Portraits of George Washington* (Mead Art Museum, Amherst, Massachusetts); *The Power and the Glory: George Washington and the Birth of Fame in America* (New-York Historical Society, New York City); *Treasures from Mount Vernon: The Man behind the Legend* (New-York Historical Society, New York City; Huntington Library, Los Angeles; Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; Atlanta Historical Society; and Chicago Historical Society); *Washington in Glory: America in Tears* (Fraunces Tavern Museum, New York City). On 18 December 1999, the lavish bicentennial reenactment of Washington's funeral at Mount Vernon drew 5,000 visitors and was covered in a live, three-hour broadcast on C-SPAN. For an excellent history of mass-culture transformations of Washington's image from Philadelphia's Centennial Exhibition to Superbowl XIX, see Karal Ann Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876–1986* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988).
- 4 Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), 280. Pynchon's scene has its basis in fact: Washington did grow hemp at Mount Vernon, whence it was sold to rope and textile makers. For the license he took, Pynchon could have found inspiration in Alfred Quiroz's 1994 painting, *George Washington Inspects the Hemp Crop*, in which Washington shares a toke with two merry companions.
- 5 See James Fenimore Cooper, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (New York: Wiley and Halstead, 1821); William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Virginians* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1859); Gertrude Stein, *Four in America* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1947); and Gore Vidal, *Burr* (New York: Random House, 1973).
- 6 Michael T. Gilmore, "The Literature of the Revolutionary and Early National Periods," in *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume One: 1590–1820*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 593.
- 7 E. P. Thompson, "Commitment in Poetry," in *Making History: Writings on History and Culture* (New York: New Press, 1994), 339.

- 8 M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 5–8.
- 9 Julia A. Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1997), 3. Further references to this source will be cited parenthetically as *PF*.
- 10 Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997), 63.
- 11 Of these many poems, a few survive in manuscript; some in the assembled works of recognized poets and in volumes of Washingtonia; some in pamphlets and broadsides; and, in their greatest numbers, in periodicals of the time.
- 12 *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 8 January 1800, 2.
- 13 Thomas Pemberton, “Massachusetts Chronology,” vol. 71.9, 30.42, 50; Thomas Pemberton Papers, Box 1, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. Another example comes from Surinam, where Turell Tufts was (unhappily) stationed as U.S. consul. In January 1800, Tufts wrote President Adams a long letter fishing for a secretaryship in France. Toward the end of the letter, he accounted for the poem he had enclosed: “I take the liberty to enclose the efforts of a Creole Muse to brighten the glories of our departed Washington. It would seem there must be an uncommon cause to excite in this state of the degradation of man—veneration for virtue—and to teach the uncouth & unfeeling Holland Faal to flow in beauteous and Elegiac Rhyme” (Turell Tufts, letter to John Adams, January 1800, Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston).
- 14 Myrtille [Philip Freneau], “Stanzas, Occasioned by the Death of General George Washington,” *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 10 January 1800, 3.
- 15 Richard Allen, minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church of Philadelphia, delivered a widely reprinted prose eulogy in which he demonstrates the flexibility of this paternal convention by describing Washington’s posthumous emancipation of his slaves as an act of fathering: “If he who broke the yoke of British burdens ‘from off the neck of the people’ of this land, was hailed his country’s deliverer, by what name shall we call him who secretly and almost unknown emancipated his ‘bondmen and bondwomen’—became to them a father, and gave them an inheritance!” (“Interesting Specimen of African Eloquence,” *New Bedford Columbian Courier*, 17 January 1800, 4). Generous to Washington’s memory, Allen’s language nevertheless suggests the ambiguousness (“by what name,” “secretly and almost unknown”) of his national legacy for African Americans. On Washington, race, abstraction, and family structure, see Russ Castronovo, *Fathering the Nation: American Genealogies of Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1995).
- 16 “To the Memory of General Washington. . . ,” (*Richmond*) *Virginia Federalist*, 8 January 1800, 2.

- 17 [John?] Elliot, "Illustrious Shade, Accept These Artless Lays," *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 8 January 1800, 1; "Monody, Performed at the New-Theatre, in Honour of the Late Commander in Chief of the Armies of the United States," *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 28 December 1799, 3; "On the Death of Washington," *Providence Journal, and Town and Country Advertiser*, 1 January 1800, 4.
- 18 See, for example, Hannah Griffiths, "On the Death of King George the 2d," in which a Pennsylvania woman, lamenting George's death, "joins a Nation's Sigh." Her "Nation," in 1760, is England. Yet the poem also suggests that this "joining" means overcoming a protonationalist sense of republican difference: "Here on Sylvania's Shores the humble Maid, / Far from the Influence of her Princes Eye, / If not in public Pomp of Woe array'd / Drops the warm Tear & joins a Nation's Sigh" (*Milcah Martha Moore's Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America*, ed. Catharine La Courreye Blecki and Karin A. Wulf [University Park: Pennsylvania Univ. Press, 1997], 184).
- 19 *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 11 January 1800, 3.
- 20 See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, rev. ed., 2 vols. (New York: Vintage, 1990), 1: 241–44.
- 21 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 9–12.
- 22 David Humphreys, "Poem on the Death of General Washington," *Miscellaneous Works* (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1804), 179. Further references to this poem are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically as "P," using line, rather than page, numbers. Further references to *Miscellaneous Works* will be cited as *MW*.
- 23 George Washington, Farewell Address, *Writings*, ed. John Rhodehamel (New York: Library of America, 1997), 963. Further references will be cited parenthetically as FA.
- 24 "Theatrical Communication," *New York Spectator*, 4 January 1800, 4.
- 25 Charles Brockden Brown, "Monody, On the Death of Gen. George Washington, Delivered at the *New-York Theater*, On Monday Evening, Dec. 30, '99," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 2 January 1800, 3. Further quotations from this poem will be cited parenthetically as "M," using line, rather than page, numbers.
- 26 "Elegiac Ode," *Centinel of Liberty, or George-town and Washington Advertiser*, 31 December 1799, 2.
- 27 David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997), 18.
- 28 The reference to "Elocutionary Exercises" is a sign of poetry's contemporary status as both a spoken and a written genre. It is also a reminder that late-eighteenth-century rhetorical studies emphasized oral delivery and that the neoclassical ode was part of a rhetorical as well as a poetic tradi-

- tion. On the eighteenth-century “elocutionary revolution” and its impact in America, see Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993), 28–35. Gordon Bigelow discusses the extravagance of figure and gesture in the neoclassical ode in *Rhetoric and American Poetry of the Early National Period* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1960), 70–72.
- 29 Note, for example, the frequent repetition of the term “the form” in June Howard’s essay “What Is Sentimentality?”, where this tag is meant to evoke “variety and flexibility” but in fact only ever refers to prose fiction (*American Literary History* 11 [spring 1999]: 63–81). Seeking to disrupt “an unremarked, confusing elision between sentimentality and domesticity” (73), Howard is unable to see beyond the unremarked, confusing elision between form and prose fiction that helps to keep the early-national-antebellum divide inadequately historicized.
- 30 *Providence Journal, and Town and Country Advertiser*, 8 January 1800, 4.
- 31 On epitaphic address, see Richmond Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1942), 230–37. Louis Althusser might have recognized in the *sta viator* tradition the hail that never (as opposed to hardly ever) misses. Indeed, the tombstone’s call to the passerby is an admirably material example of the way in which “rituals of ideological recognition . . . guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects” (*“Lenin and Philosophy” and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971], 172–73).
- 32 *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 11 January 1800, 3.
- 33 Waldstreicher, *Perpetual Fetes*, 74.
- 34 John Adams, letter to Colonel William Smith, 3 March 1800, Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.
- 35 John Adams, letter to Charles Love, 16 April 1800, Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.
- 36 Charles Love, letter to John Adams, 21 April 1800, Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.
- 37 The cultural work of elegy in the early national period is part of the history of what Richard Brodhead calls the “domestic-tutelary complex” in nineteenth-century America (see *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993]). Mary Loeffelholz extends Brodhead’s prose-oriented analysis to include the “special role of poetry in both public and private arenas of instruction” during the same period analyzed by Brodhead in terms of the novel (“Who Killed Lucretia Maria Davidson? or, Poetry in the Domestic-Tutelary Complex,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 10.2 [1997]: 274).
- 38 Theodore Dwight, “Far, far from hence be satire’s aspect rude. . . ,” (*Hartford*) *Connecticut Courant*, 6 January 1800, 3.

- 39 Eva Cherniavsky, *That Pale Mother Rising: Sentimental Discourse and the Imitation of Motherhood in 19th-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995), 11.
- 40 *Lady Washington's Lamentation for the Death of Her Husband* (Boston: Nathaniel Coverly Jr. [1800]).
- 41 See Betty Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers and Pictorial Needlework, 1650–1850*, 2 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1993); see also, Sally Ripley, “Diary of Sally Ripley, 1799–1801,” *Women's History Sources*, vol. 1, Collection 7671, 36–37, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.
- 42 In a letter to his wife, Hannah, Thomas Dwight marks how sympathy's nationalizing power unravels amidst the commodification of Washington's memory. While participating in Washington mourning ceremonies in Boston in late January, Dwight is mindful of the need to acquire souvenirs for his children and young relations: “Major [William?] Pyncheon will carry you four Washington medals of white metal—one of which Miss Nancy Archbald presents to Mary—another is for my son John—another for Henry Bliss *my little son*—another for William B. Bliss, who I am sure will accuse his uncle of *barbarous* partiality, if forgotten in regard to the medal” (letter to Hannah Dwight, 29 January 1800, Dwight-Howard Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston).
- 43 “Lines on the Death of General Washington,” *New London Bee*, 1 January 1800, 4.
- 44 *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 4 January 1800, 2.
- 45 Charles Brockden Brown, review of Charles Caldwell, “An Elegiac Poem on the Death of General Washington,” *Monthly Magazine, and American Review*, March 1800, 218.
- 46 Records of personal encounters with Washington—particularly by the French—are full of signs of admiration for his “external attributes” and “exterior form.” Numerous assembled excerpts may be found in Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *The Republican Court; or, American Society in the Days of Washington* (New York: D. Appleton, 1855). See also Rembrandt Peale, “The Person and Mien of Washington,” *Crayon* 3 (April 1856): 100–101; and Gilbert Chinard, ed., *George Washington as the French Knew Him: A Collection of Texts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1940).
- 47 Susanna Rowson, “Eulogy to the Memory of George Washington,” *Miscellaneous Poems* (Boston: Gilbert and Dean, 1804), 44; further references to this poem are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically by line number as “E.”
- 48 Rowson, *Miscellaneous Poems*, 53.
- 49 Susanna Rowson, preface to *Charlotte Temple*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 5.