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Dead Poets Society: The Posthumous Reconstruction and Commoditization of Lucretia Maria
Davidson in the Nineteenth-Century American Literary Aesthetic

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Like many young women in the 19th century, Lucretia Maria Davidson, was plagued by the disease of consumption. After her death at the age of 16, Davidson's first book, *Amir Khan, and Other Poems: The Remains of Lucretia Maria Davidson*, was published in 1829. Catherine Sedgwick, who authored the "Biographical Sketch" in the second edition of Davidson's book, describes Davidson as a "fragile creature" who possessed a "physical delicacy" (26).

Continuously referred to in the diminutive, Davidson is mostly characterized by the effects of her disease and the perceived moral purity of her writings, in which she "retained unimpaired the innocence, simplicity and modesty of a child" (Sedgwick 39). Davidson's femininity was exacerbated by the resultant fragility of disease. Most critics during Davidson's time focused on her physicality and described her as a "frail female poet literally consumed by her own sensibility" (Walker 23). In the nineteenth-century, Davidson became emblematic of this archetypal female poet: fragile and sentimental. At the time, Davidson was so popular that "The name of Lucretia Davidson was familiar to all readers of poetry" (Poe, *Graham's Magazine*).

Davidson and her poetry were commoditized to reflect the aesthetic of nineteenth-century American poetry: a combination of exotic and sentimental poetry written by a consumptive female prodigy. The posthumous publication of Davidson's poetry served two functions: a mechanism of grieving, or an attempt to immortalize Davidson through her poetry, and also an effort to capitalize on the literary trends of the time period.

Cultural Appropriation: Adopting Literary Orientalism in American Romantic Poetry

The meaning of Orientalism implied an uncovering of the unknown and exotic, a glimpse into a lifestyle that was said to be wholly un-American. In nineteenth-century America, the Orient was often used as a contrasting image or experience of everything that America was not. At the forefront of establishing nineteenth-century concepts of national identity, Orientalism

denoted a clear antithesis to American identity (Said 2). Literary Orientalism, “the Western way of systematically disseminating this perception of the Orient” (Al-Bazei 2) emerged alongside nineteenth-century Romanticism, producing a new class of writers that engaged with both American Romanticism and Orientalism. Authors who inhabited this confluence include Washington Irving and Edgar Allan Poe. Their goal was “to piece together a portrait, a restored picture as it were, of the Orient or the Oriental” (Said 151). Due to their notoriety, these authors greatly influenced the version of Orientalism that Davidson reproduced in her poem “Amir Khan.”

Irving’s *The Alhambra* characterizes the Orient with nostalgia, functioning as the bridge from neoclassical representations to Romantic representations (Al-Bazei 32). Irving remained in close relation to the Davidson family, influencing and inspiring the Davidson sisters and their writings. Irving drafted the *Biography of the Late Miss Margaret Miller Davidson* (1841) to commemorate the death of Davidson’s younger sister, Margaret (Irving 245). By 1864, there were twenty editions of Irving’s biography, demonstrating how instrumental Irving was in influencing and establishing the Davidson sisters’ posthumous careers. Similarly, Poe, who reviewed a plethora of Orientalist works, inducts Davidson into the genre of Orientalism with his review of *Amir Khan*, claiming that “the versification is graceful, the story beautifully developed, and the orientalism well sustained” (Kleitz 68). Other prominent Orientalist texts during this time include *The Arabian Nights* and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan.” Given the “implantation” and presence of the Orient in schools (Said 100) Davidson’s poetry reflects the trend of Orientalism with the title of her book: *Amir Khan, and Other Poems: The Remains of Lucretia Maria Davidson* insinuating that Davidson’s “remains” are not only inextricably bound to her poetry, but that they are inextricably bound to “Amir Khan.” Since Davidson died before

the publication of her poetry, Samuel F. B. Morse, the editor, is responsible for prominently figuring “Amir Khan” and thus, characterizing Davidson and her poetry as Orientalist.

In 1828, almost a year before the publication of the poem, a review was published in New York’s *The Critic: a Weekly Review of Literature, Fine Arts, And the Drama* introducing Davidson as Southey’s student and stating that Davidson’s work is a “poem in two parts; the scene, as its name implies, oriental.” Though *Amir Khan, and Other Poems: The Remains of Lucretia Maria Davidson* is comprised of 278 poems, “Amir Khan” is figured more prominently as the titular poem. At the time of publication it became both Davidson’s most widely circulated poem and also emblematic of the entirety of her writings. An epic poem divided into two parts, Davidson’s “Amir Khan” constructs the story of a Subhadar’s attempt to court the object of his admiration, Amreta, with the help of a prophet. Davidson’s depiction of Orientalism is noticeably exhibitionistic:

Though round her, Cashmere’s incense streamed;

Though Persia’s gems around her beamed;

Though diamonds of Golconda shed

Their warmest lustre o’er her head;

Though music lulled each fear to sleep,

Soft as the night-wind o’er the deep; (Davidson 3)

Davidson utilizes elements of the exotic in her poem to perform Orientalism. In this instance, Davidson uses the distinctly distant locations of “Cashmere” and “Persia” to render the scene of the poem, and subsequently the subject matter as foreign. In her notes, Davidson articulates that Cashmere is “the happy valley, the garden in perpetual spring, and the Paradise of India” (25). Davidson’s description of Cashmere posits it as a mythical location, one that could only exist in

the imaginations of Americans, not in reality. Furthermore, the protagonist of “Amir Khan” is a Subhadar, a sort of royal official, marking the Orient as a remnant of the Old World’s monarchical organization and amplifying the “otherness” of the Orient. The most interesting element of Orientalism in this poem is the apparent sensuality and mysticism of the Orient. One imagines that opium is involved in the “incense streamed” denoting a potential altered state of mind (Davidson 25). The invocation of the verb “lulled” adds to the hypnotism of the incense and contributes to the sensual language, illustrating an all-consuming and intimate experience. In bringing this sensuality and desire to the forefront of the poem, Davidson employs one of the most common tactics of Orientalism: salaciousness. As a result of the sensual language, this passage, and subsequently Davidson, becomes fascinating to the American public in its decadency, obscenity, and unfamiliarity.

The unabashed Orientalism of “Amir Khan” is not only evident in the language and imagery Davidson employs in the poem, but also in its blatant emulation of other popular Orientalist works. Often, critics disregard Davidson’s exoticism, believing it to be derivative of other Orientalist poems (Loeffelholz 283). Evidenced by the similarity of their titles, Davidson’s poem “Amir Khan” bears a striking resemblance to Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan.” Intending to test the strength of Amreta’s love for him, the Subhadar, at the advice of a prophet, inhales the pollen of a special flower to render himself unconscious (Davidson 11). Consequently, only the sorrowful song of a loved one can rouse the Subhadar, echoing “Kubla Khan.” The lines “Could I revive within me / Her symphony and song” (Coleridge, lines 42-43) invert Amreta’s exaltation of “such notes as repentance in sorrow might sing” (Davidson 19). Furthermore, in both texts, the male protagonist erects a “pleasure-bower” as a means of seducing and enshrining his beloved (Loeffelholz 283). Additionally, Amreta appropriates a distorted variation of Eve’s lines

from Milton's *Paradise Lost* ("Hee for God only, shee for God in him" PL IV. 299) when she exclaims, "My Heaven is only with thee!" (Loeffelholz 284). Though Eve and Amreta's roles in both epics are eerily similar, they are not necessarily foils. Instead of embodying Eve's recalcitrance, Amreta is a more self-assured character, hinting at the possibility of a proto-feminist character.

Thus, Davidson becomes a novel Orientalist, one who advances beyond the sensationalism of the Orient. Amreta's resistance of the Subhadar's advances contributes to her attempt "to resist becoming Eve in Milton's paradise or the muse for Coleridge's pleasure-dome" (Loeffelholz 285). Davidson portrays Amreta's actions as a deviation from Orientalism's exploitative tropes of female characters. Davidson's writing takes on an "exhibitionistic schoolgirl orientalism" that overstates the sensuality of Orientalism (Loeffelholz 286). Rather than forge a new and individualistic interpretation of Oriental poems, Davidson models her poetry after common tropes. For example in "Exit from Egyptian Bondage" Davidson constructs, or rather reconstructs, the oft told plight of the Israelites:

An impious Pharaoh 'neath the raging wave,
 With all his army, finds a watery grave
 Rejoice, O Israel ! God is on your side,
 He is your Champion, and your faithful guide; (Davidson 85)

Davidson is simultaneously indulgent and nondescript in her portrayal of The Exodus. The exaltation for Israel to "rejoice" adopts the pedagogical tone of sermons, underscoring Davidson's tendency toward imitateness. Loeffelholz believes that Davidson is merely regurgitating the version of the Orient she became familiar with during her studies at Emma Willard's Seminary (282). However, Davidson approaches this subject with the fascination of a

schoolgirl, highlighting the mysticism of the “raging wave” and the sensationalism of the “watery grave.” Davidson does not approach the subject of Orientalism with the imitative speculation of an inexperienced writer, intent on exploring the literary trends of the time. Although, Davidson did not forge a new path with her Orientalist writings, her poetry was advertised as such: highlighting the exoticism of what were actually fairly standard poems into an exaggerated image of its original state.

The Consumption of Consumption: The Tragedy and Genius of Romantic Poets

Concurrent to this trend of Orientalism in nineteenth-century American writing, the disease of consumption, or pulmonary tuberculosis, plagued many prominent nineteenth-century American authors. It was popular myth that dying of consumption engendered an erratic burst of poetic genius and became a “glamorous wasting disease of poets and beautiful women” (Lawlor 3). This mythos surrounding consumption engendered a phenomenon that Lawlor coins “the consumption of consumption” (6). Popularized in Britain and America by the famous deaths of the Brontë sisters and John Keats, consumption became significantly intertwined with the genius of poets. It was said to be a “confirmation that the individual concerned was a true poet,” because consumption “along with madness, was the malady of poets” (Lawlor 6-7). Even before she died of consumption, Davidson and her poetry embodied this myth of the consumptive genius.

Ultimately, any rendering of Davidson’s poetry and personality is merely a reconstruction produced by friends and family. Melissa White’s *“Edited by Her Friends”: Claiming Posthumous Poetry in Nineteenth-Century America* states that the reason for the popularity of posthumous publication was due to “the widespread practice of amateur poetry writing and the grim facts of common early death and high general mortality” (1). Due to her early death, readers

of Davidson's poetry reconstruct their image of Davidson using the content and language of her own poetry. In sketches of her life, Sedgwick documents Davidson's tendency to seclude herself when writing and to destroy any unfinished or unworthy poems (35). In addition to her self-inflicted isolation, Davidson was also forced into isolation by her disease. Given Davidson's numerous poems on death e.g. "Death" "The Sick Bed" and "Feats of Death" the public perceived her as a feeble and melancholic figure (Davidson xxviii). As a result, her writing centered on sickness: either her own or others. The speaker foresees the grimness of death in "The Sick Bed" and warns others of its imminence: "O pause, one moment, o'er death's seal, / There's no repentance in this tomb" (Davidson 120-121). The speaker emphasizes the finality of death and its tomb, reinforcing the notion that Davidson was engrossed with the imminence of her own death.

As Sedgwick states, Davidson was not only forced to reconcile the complications of her own disease, but also her mother's failing health and her father and brother's consumptive deaths (Sedgwick 25). To readers of her poetry, the image of Davidson and the imminence of her death could not be separated. For example, Davidson's first encounter with consumption and poetry occurred at the age of 13, with her elegy of Henry Kirk White:

In yon lone valley where the cypress spreads
 Its gloomy, dark, impenetrable shades,
 The mourning *Nine*, o'er White's untimely grave
 Murmur their sighs, like Neptune's troubled wave.
 There sits Consumption, sickly, pale and thin,
 Her joy evincing by a ghastly grin ;
 There his deserted garlands with'ring lie,

Like him they droop, like him untimely die. (Davidson 78)

Davidson personifies “Consumption” as a vindictive woman, illustrating the antagonistic nature of the disease. Additionally, the “lone valley” harkens back to the impenetrability of the “tomb” in “The Sick Bed.” The figure of Consumption, the physical manifestation of the disease, is “ghastly” in her appearance, calling to mind images of the afterlife and death. Furthermore, the word “mourning” is almost interchangeable with its homophone “morning” when read aloud, suggesting the presence of doublespeak in the poem. This doublespeak is then exacerbated by the inclusion of the pronoun “they” in the last line, as its antecedent could either refer to the garlands or the mourners. Thus, doublespeak establishes a precedent of double meaning and substitution in the poem. In a way, this poem can be read as an elegy of Henry Kirk White or as a preemptive elegy of Davidson herself. Evidenced by the phrase “like him,” Davidson anticipates the presence of “Consumption” in her own life (78). Therefore, the pervasiveness of the disease and the damage it inflicted, are evident in the explicit descriptions of consumption in Davidson’s poetry.

In her weakened state, Davidson and her writing were afforded semi-liberation. In a way, her disease prevented her from fulfilling the domestic roles of wifedom and motherhood, so her poetry reflected this absence (Ashworth 422). Instead of poems that would typically fall under the genre of republican womanhood, Davidson could be more exploratory in her writings. Although, Davidson’s age and disease prevented her from being wholly representative of the normal standards of republican womanhood, she was still limited by the social constructs of the time (Herndl 5). Davidson wrote exotic epics like “Amir Khan” and “Chicomico” which became her most well known poems, yet she also wrote poems of reverence for Shakespeare and Byron,

demonstrating her knowledge of established writers and her ability to inhabit both the roles of the Orientalist and the Sentimentalist.

Effectively, a constructed idea of Davidson persists beyond her death where she is rendered as soft and feminine, a sentimental poet. Readers are “drawn into a fiction of intimacy with the poet while also being limited by the poet’s ultimate absence in death” (White 3). By exacerbating Davidson’s physical fragility, her poetry begins to reflect her physical weakness. Loeffelholz calls Davidson a “sentimental dead girl poet” (Loeffelholz 282). In fact, this false intimacy is especially potent in the works of feminine poets as part of the greater domestic-tutinary complex. Loeffelholz defines the domestic-tutinary complex as a “restructuring of social space” that possesses the ability to “illuminate the special role of poetry in both public and private arenas of instruction” (Loeffelholz 274). In essence, the convergence between the private duties of women, the intimacy of writing, and the public sphere of publishing is evident in many works by female poets in the nineteenth-century, especially Davidson.

Correspondingly, the domestic-tutinary complex generated a genre of works in the nineteenth-century, in which female authors used moral and religious writing to convey intimate experiences. More simply this poetry represented the ultimate conflict of republican womanhood: the battle between the head and the heart (Loeffelholz 274). During this time period, it was expected for women to not only be educated and well-versed in classic literature, but also for them to be the moral arbiters of society. Loeffelholz says that poetry exemplary of noble womanhood “evoke feelings at once excessive and excessively mediated...feelings lettered, rather than feelings spontaneous” (275). For female authors, an antinomy emerged; suddenly the intimate space of writing was elevated to an exceedingly public sphere (Loeffelholz 273).

As a consequence of her consumption, Davidson's poetry was rendered more accessible for public in both a literal and metaphorical sense (Walker 23). Due to the fact that much of Davidson's personal life was on display, albeit posthumously, readers of her work were better able to yoke together Davidson's public and private spheres, without any interference from Davidson herself. Davidson and her poetry are offered up to the public as a sensationally sick and sentimental woman (Ashworth 420). There is a resultant tension mirroring the opposing forces present in Loeffelholz's domestic-tutelary complex: the public's image of Davidson and her own self-image. This tension between these two images means that readers develop a tendency to read Davidson's poems as autobiographical. For example, readers interpret Davidson to be the speaker of "To My Mother" instead of reading the "infant" and the "falcon-eyed" mother as universal figures (Davidson 122). This disparity between the conflicting public and private images is emphasized by the fact that her poetry was published posthumously. Since Davidson died at the age of sixteen, it is unclear whether or not she had any intentions of publishing her poems; instead, the choice was left to her surviving family members. As a result, poems highlighting her supposed domesticity were teased out as representative of Davidson as a whole. This is partially because poems concerning women's role in the domestic space were marketable for mass consumption, meaning that Davidson's poetry was more likely to gain popularity if it was advertised as, poems for and by a "domestic" woman. Consequently, there exists a new disparity between authorship and authorization.

A Literary Machine: The Rise of Authorization and Posthumous Publication

Like many poets whose work was published posthumously, more established writers authorized Davidson with endorsements and reviews. As a result of this trend, many of these unknown poets were authorized by more established writers who could vouch for them.

Authorization, in this context, was a process by which reviews or recommendations of prominent literary figures functioned as a seal of approval. Well-known authorizers included then British Poet Laureate, Robert Southey, who was instrumental in the authorization of unestablished poets and had “made a career out of editing the works of consumptive poets that he had ‘discovered’... adding further value to their reputation and consequently their price and profitability” (Lawlor 13). Interestingly, Davidson was not only one of the few American authors to receive Southey’s praise, but also one of the few women to gain his endorsement. The commercial and critical success of Davidson’s work depended on the authorization of two noteworthy figures: Robert Southey and Samuel F. B. Morse.

Essentially, Southey’s authorization of Davidson was not an abnormality, but rather standard practice at the time. Southey endorsed the young consumptive poet Henry Kirk White, before he endorsed Davidson (Loeffelholz 277). Due to the fact that Southey was such a prominent figure in the literary world, his endorsement was crucial to valorizing Davidson’s poetry. Southey credited Davidson’s work with an innate sense of genius and the “true spirit of poetry” (White 31). In addition to Southey’s praise, Morse’s approval and biography acts as an affirmation of Lucretia’s talent. Not only does Morse say that Davidson’s genius was evident in her “love for books” and her “distaste of domestic duties,” but Morse also commends Davidson’s “uncommon maturity of mind” (Davidson xiii-xx). Moreover, Morse goes so far as to offer up a comparison of Davidson’s writings to Milton’s paraphrases of Psalms at the age of fifteen. Essentially, Morse posits that there are much “stronger reasons to form high expectations” of Davidson’s writings at the age of fifteen, than Milton (Davidson xx-xxi). Considering the fact that his “Prefatory Remarks” and “Biographical Sketch” prefigure Davidson’s poetry, Morse is solely responsible for crafting an image of Davidson for her readers before they even engage

with her writing. Evidently, Morse has sketched an image of Davidson as a precocious and laudable poet. Further, Morse's constructed image of Davidson persists beyond Davidson's life, rendering both his description of Davidson and Davidson herself, immortal.

This authorization was intended for one purpose: to generate interest in Davidson's poetry. Posthumous poetry is akin to a puzzle or mystery, where the reader endeavors to uncover the truths of the poet in their poetry, without any confirmation or negation from the author (White 31). Posthumous poems cannot exist separate from the death of the poet as they are consistently read as the "remains" of the poet. The endeavor to "solve" poets occurs with all poems; however, it is exacerbated when the publication is posthumous. Readers engage in a one-sided dialogue with the poetry, sustaining a connection with the departed poet by proxy of their poems. Thus, Davidson's posthumous poetry generates both intrigue and profit. Loeffelholz calls this "the productive family machine of her posthumous representation" (280). It appears that Davidson's family engendered a fortuitous career out of her consumptive death. Loeffelholz refers to Lucretia Davidson as a "family enterprise, a cottage industry, a culminating discursive formation, as well as the proper name of a dead girl" (271). The Davidson family, not only published Davidson's poetry out of grief, as a way to commemorate her life and writing, but also out of opportunity, as a way to establish a family literary legacy.

Perhaps, the most central family figure that aided Davidson's posthumous career was her mother Margaret Davidson. After Davidson's death and the successful publication of the first edition of *Amir Khan*, Margaret worked with a new publishing company and author, Catherine Sedgwick, to release the second edition: *The Poetical Remains of the Late Lucretia Maria Davidson collected and arranged by her mother: with a biography by Miss Sedgwick*. Figure 1 prefaces the second edition of Davidson's book; note the removal of "Amir Khan" from the title.

Margaret Davidson has ensured that any “errors” have been corrected to more closely resemble Davidson’s “original design” (Davidson 8). Interestingly, Margaret’s use of the word “design” connotes a preconceived arrangement; calling into question Davidson’s intentions, or lack thereof, for the dissemination of her poetry. Both Sedgwick and Morse document Davidson’s habits of sequestering her writings to herself, and then destroying them upon discovery, hinting at the possibility that Davidson would be averse to publishing her writings (Davidson xxv).

This new Edition has been carefully revised, and the errors corrected. Upon the first publication of *Amir Khan* some few stanzas were omitted, in consequence of the difficulty of decyphering, or some other good cause. Those stanzas are here restored, according to the original design of the author.

M. M. D.

Saratoga Springs, March, 1843.

Fig. 1 Margaret Miller Davidson's note from: Davidson, Lucretia. "Poetical Remains of the late Lucretia Maria Davidson." p.8

Given the fact that Davidson was unable to offer any input into the publication of her poems, the authorization extends beyond its typical role of endorsement to the role of complete control over the publication. Both Morse and Margaret eclipse Davidson’s role of author in the process of editing and arranging *Amir Khan*. Under the guise of Margaret, the second edition of Davidson’s book is noticeably different than the first edition, in that it appeals more to the ‘*remains*’ of a sentimental poet, than the trend of Orientalism. Davidson’s original intent is skewed by Morse’s interpretation. Morse chooses to include explanatory notes, denoted with an asterisk, at the end of “The Family Time-Piece” in which he posits that Davidson might be “alluding to the late war scenes at Plattsburgh” (Davidson 112). This interjection is mostly based on conjecture, exemplifying the complete and total influence that Morse had in reconstructing

Davidson and her poetry. Furthermore, Morse's inclusion of his initials after every editorial note demonstrate the way Morse is able to interject into Davidson's writings, thus altering Davidson's original and intended state of her poetry. Finally, Figure 2 illustrates the way in which Morse gains complete editorial control over Davidson's poetry by excerpting lines of verse that he

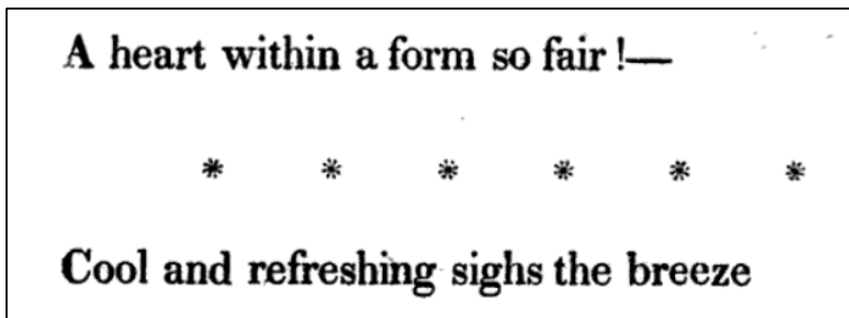


Fig. 2. Excised portion from: Davidson, Lucretia. "Amir Khan." p.5

deemed unfinished or unrefined. Essentially, Morse is responsible for the arrangement of these poems and subsequently, the arrangement of Davidson's

'remains.' The "Contents" of *Amir Khan*, therefore, become the contents of Davidson's life.

Essentially, Davidson's poems act as a proxy for the intimate details of her life. More importantly, Morse is responsible for determining what he will not include in his rearrangement of Davidson's remains.

After Davidson's death, her younger sister, Margaret Miller, who was also a writer, passed of consumption. In 1841 a book of her poetry called the *Biography and Poetical Remains of the Late Margaret Miller Davidson* was published posthumously. The titles of both Lucretia and her sister's books are reminiscent of each other. The Oxford English Dictionary defines remains as "a part or the parts of a person's body after death; a corpse" (OED). Both use the word 'remains' as a way of stimulating the interests of readers. Thus, Davidson's poems are the only remaining pieces of her livelihood; though macabre, *Amir Khan* is essentially rendered a 'part' of Davidson, one that persists beyond her death.

Essentially, Davidson's book functions as an extension of herself and a pseudo-grave marker: Here lie the "remains" of Lucretia Maria Davidson. Moreover, Figure 3 reads, "the remains of Lucretia Maria Davidson, who died at Plattsburgh, N.Y. August 27, 1825, aged 16 years and 11 months," and is thereby reminiscent of a gravestone in its descriptiveness and detail (Davidson). Therefore, the title page memorializes Davidson and

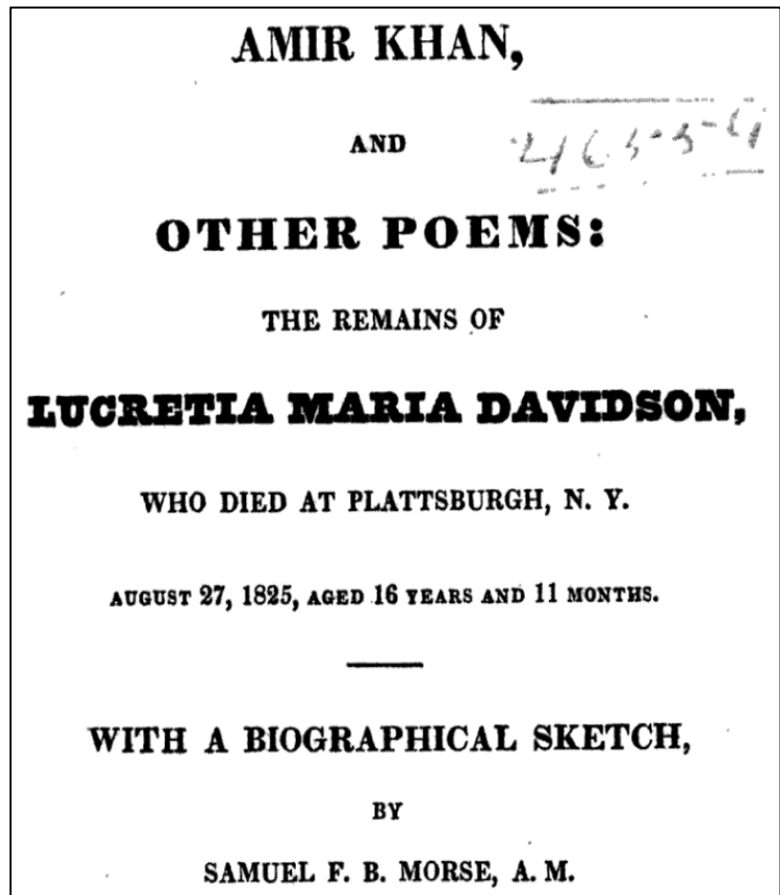


Fig. 3. Title page from: Davidson, Lucretia. "Amir Khan."

enshrines the version of her that exists in Morse's reconstructed sketch. Furthermore, the title page also includes an excerpt of a poem from William Cullen Bryant:

In the cold moist earth we laid her, when the forest cast the leaf,
 And we wept that one so lovely, should have a lot so brief;
 Yet not unmeet it was, that one, like the young friend of ours,
 So gentle and so beautiful should perish with the flowers. (Davidson)

The poem memorializes Davidson both literally and figuratively by describing the actions of her burial process, and also inscribing her life in the pages of the book. Moreover, the poem mirrors the sentiments Davidson expressed in her elegy of Henry Kirk White, by mourning the untimeliness of such a "young" death and the tragedy of a life ended too soon. Additionally,

Southey and Morse's reviews illuminate the Orientalism of "Amir Khan," yoking together the appeal of exoticism and sentimentalism. Therefore, readers are enticed to buy into both the sensationalism of Davidson's writings and the sensationalism of her tragic death.

Conclusion:

Once a prominent name in nineteenth-century American poetry, Lucretia Maria Davidson, was sensationalized to be emblematic of the most popular literary aesthetics of the time. Davidson's poetry was simultaneously lauded as being emblematic of Orientalism and Romanticism, while her character was described as the symbol of noble womanhood coupled with the erraticism of poetic genius. Neither the content of her poems, nor the claims of her character were Davidson's most defining trait; instead, Davidson was best defined by her early and consumptive death. Out of tragedy, her family immortalized and commoditized Davidson to become an emblem of the "dead poet." In a way, the posthumous publication of her poetry functioned as an extension of the grieving process (White 60). Davidson's *'remains'* are memorialized in the form of a book, *'arranged'* by the mortician-like editorial figures of Morse, Sedgwick, and her mother, and distinguished by the gravestone like marker of *Amir Khan's* title page. Davidson, or rather the posthumous representation of Davidson, is simultaneously asymptomatic and emblematic of the standards of the nineteenth-century American literary aesthetic. Due to the fact that the words of her editors, her biographers, and her family members create multiple representations of Davidson, readings of both her and her poetry are entirely dependent on the individual that authorized them. In this case Davidson's work, though representative of the literary standards of the time, is overshadowed by the emphasis on her early death. Both Davidson and her poetry are both immortalized and commoditized in what can be deemed an unfinished state.

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