FOR MY POYNTEL SO RUDE YS […] YT CAN NOUGHT GRAVE : JOHN METHAM'S *AMORYUS AND CLEOPES* AND THE STAPLETONS OF INGHAM

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MOTS-CLÉS : POÉSIE, MOYEN ANGLAIS, MÉMOIRE, METHAM

Résumé : Cet article explore la représentation de la mémoire et de l'histoire dans le poème en moyen anglais *Amoryus and Cleopes* du milieu du XVe siècle, composé par John Metham. Il considère en particulier la relation entre les stratégies commémoratives de ce texte et une série de monuments funéraires consacrés à ses patrons, Miles et Katherine Stapleton d'Ingham (Norfolk, Angleterre).

Abstract : This article explores the portrayal of memory and history in the mid-fifteenth century Middle English poem Amoryus and Cleopes, by John Metham. In particular, it considers the relationship between the commemorative strategies of this text and a series of funerary monuments dedicated to his patrons, Miles and Katherine Stapleton of Ingham in Norfolk, England.

For my poyntel so rude ys […] yt can nought grave :
John Metham's *Amoryus and Cleopes* and the
Stapletons of Ingham

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At first glance, the romance of *Amoryus and Cleopes*, written by John Metham in 1449, may seem to pay little regard to history in its modern sense : although the poem's opening verses take pains to locate its events in the kingdoms of Persia and Media, recently conquered by the Roman Emperor Nero, the world that it describes is full of knights, sorcerers, and even a dragon[1]. The 'Romans' of the story dress and behave like men and women in fifteenth-century England. The poem is, however, a text that is deeply invested in notions of memory and memorialization, issues which reach their culminating point in the final image of the narrative part of the poem, the elaborate tomb erected to the protagonists by their many children. In what follows, I will consider the way in which this fictional tomb and its multiple narrative devices – 'ymages', 'superscrypciouns', 'scripture' and 'epytafy' – engage with different kinds of commemoration : textual

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[1] John METHAM, *Amoryus and Cleopes*, ed. S. F. PAGE, Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 1999 [online : http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/page-metham-amoryus-and-cleopes], ll. 2087-2107. All subsequent references are to this edition and are incorporated in the text.

transmission, audience reception, and translation, as well as the monumental orchestration of memory. A consideration of how the issues raised by the tomb interact with the rest of the poem enables us to explore the broader commemorative strategies of the text, and its approach to history.

Rather unusually for a text classed among the Middle English 'romances', *Amoryus and Cleopes* was composed within a well-defined historical context[2] Although relatively little is known about the poet himself, the patrons to whom he dedicates his text were well-known figures in fifteenth-century Norfolk, attested in documentary sources and patrons of architectural works that survive to this day. In particular, a collection of inscriptions recorded on the funerary monuments of their family provides an interesting point of comparison for Metham's poem, which, commemorating these patrons in a 120-line coda, has been described as « a kind of verbal chantry chapel for Lady Stapleton »[3].

Considering these different kinds of commemorative monuments, this paper will focus on the use of memorial inscriptions, which were an important part of how tombs constructed their narratives and orchestrated memories[4]. In

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[2] Another example is the *Romance of William of Palerne*, composed by an anonymous poet for Humphrey de Bohun, sixth Earl of Hereford and Essex [d. 1361]. See *William of Palerne : An Alliterative Romance*, ed. G. H. V. BUNT, Groningen, Bouma's Boekhuis (Mediaevalia Groningana 6), 1985 ; T. TURVILLE-PETRE, « Humphrey de Bohun and William of Palerne », *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 74, 1975, p. 250-252.

[3] I. R. JOHNSON, « John Metham, *Amoryus and Cleopes* : Prologue and Ending », in *The Idea of the Vernacular : An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. J. Wogan-Browne, N. Watson, A. Taylor and R. Evans, University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, p. 50-56, at p. 50.

[4] Although my focus is on monumental inscriptions, it is important to remember that they were part of a much broader phenomenon of text in sacred space. See R. MARKS, « Picturing Word and Text in the Late Medieval Parish Church », in *Image, Text and Church, 1380-1600 : Essays for Margaret Aston*, ed. L. Clark, M. Jurkowski and C. Richmond, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2009, p. 162-202. On the use of

discussing how ideas about death and memory are negotiated by both the tomb and the text as commemorative objects, it will draw on Armando Petrucci's study of writing practices associated with death, particularly his concept of « exhibited writing' » and its attendant emphasis on the audience and reception of memorials[5]. In his study of the different writing strategies that western culture uses to express its relationship with its dead, Petrucci remarks that memorial inscriptions, particularly those written directly onto tombs, create a « problematic nexus » between the dead, their immediate audience and future generations who encounter the monument[6]. To an immediate audience, an inscription can transmit a variety of messages, including information about status, wealth, piety, familial and political affiliations. But, metaphorically and literally engraved in stone, it also explicitly engages with ideas about permanence. As « exhibited writing », he argues, funerary inscriptions implicitly address themselves to a future audience that is largely unknown, even imagined, an audience that Petrucci describes as being « someone and nobody at the same time […] a potential public both real and false »[7]. The monument gains its ultimate meaning through its potential to be re-visited and re-viewed by successive audiences, who engage with its original messages in a series of complex ways : through prayer, through memory, through academic study. Although Petrucci deliberately passes over literary texts in his survey of inscriptions, registers, obituaries, etc., the concept of « exhibited writing » is useful for a study of Metham's text, whose nesting layers of inscriptions similarly problematise

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English in commemorative inscriptions, see D. GRIFFITH, « English Commemorative Inscriptions : Some Literary Dimensions », in *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval England*, ed. C. M. Barron and C. Burgess, Donington, Shaun Tyas, 2010, p. 251-270.

[5] A. PETRUCCI, *Writing the Dead : Death and Writing Strategies in the Western Tradition*, trans. M. Sullivan, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

[7] *Ibid.*

concepts of audience, involving audiences both internal and external to the text in its commemorative strategies.

Amoryus and Cleopes survives in a single manuscript, Princeton University Library, MS Garett 14, together with several other, non-narrative texts by the same author[8]. It has received little critical attention, even within studies of Middle English romance, and is chiefly known as a fifteenth-century reaction to the poetry of Chaucer[9]. As Stephen Page and Roger Dalrymple have shown, the narrative is largely based on the Pyramus and Thisbe story from Book Four of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with some elements apparently drawn from the Alexander the Great tradition[10]. Like Chaucer in his *Legend of Good Women*, Metham omits the actual « metamorphosis » of Ovid's tale, the staining of the white mulberry fruit by the

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[8] These are edited in *The Works of John Metham : Including the Romance of Amoryus and Cleopes. Edited from the Unique M.S. in the Garrett Collection in the Library of Princeton University*, ed. H. CRAIG, London, Kegan Paul (Early English Text Society, o.s. 132), 1916.

[9] The few studies of the poem published in recent years have approached it from this angle. See S. F. PAGE, « John Metham's *Amoryus and Cleopes* : Intertextuality and Innovation in a Chaucerian Poem », *Chaucer Review*, 31/2, 1996, p. 201-208 ; R. DALRYMPLE, « *Amoryus and Cleopes* : John Metham's Metamorphosis of Chaucer and Ovid », in *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, ed. P. Hardman, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2002, p. 149-162 ; J. C. Fumo, « John Metham's "Straunge Style" : *Amoryus and Cleopes* as Chaucerian Fragment », *Chaucer Review*, 43, 2008, p. 215-237. The poem's literary reputation has not profited from this comparison : Derek Pearsall described Metham's verse as « virtually unreadable » : D. Pearsall, « The English Romance in the Fifteenth Century », *Essays and Studies*, 29, 1976, p. 56-83, at p. 69.

[10] They both consider the influence of moralised versions of the *Metamorphoses* on Metham : S. F. PAGE, « Intertextuality and Innovation », *op. cit.*, and R. DALRYMPLE, « Metamorphosis of Chaucer and Ovid », *op. cit.* ; see also R. M. LUMIANSKY, « Legends of Alexander the Great », in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, vol. 1, *Romances*, ed. A. Hartung et J. B. Severs Connecticut, 1967, p. 101-113.

doomed lovers' blood[11]. Unlike Chaucer, however, he replaces it with a more substantial transformation for, rather than leaving his lovers dead, Metham extends the narrative to give an account of how a passing hermit prays to the Virgin Mary, causes the lovers to be resurrected and, in the words of Page, turns « pagan tragedy into Christian comedy »[12]. *Amoryus and Cleopes*' tomb, effectively commemorating the 'second death' of the characters after a long life as Christian converts, is thus a key part of Metham's re-working of his source material.

I will explore Metham's approach to this double act of translation (both textual and bodily) more fully below. Firstly, however, I want to consider some aspects of the poem's social context which suggest how its tomb might have been understood by Metham's patrons, Miles and Katherine Stapleton. Several previous discussions of *Amoryus and Cleopes* have drawn attention to the Stapletons' participation in a close-knit East Anglian society intensely involved in collecting and commissioning literature[13]. Miles was a close associate of Sir John Fastolf and the Paston family, both known to have been collectors, readers and patrons of texts in English and

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[11] Geoffrey CHAUCER, *The Legend of Good Women*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, dir. L. BENSON, Oxford, 1987, p. 587-630, at p. 606-608 ; *Ovid's Metamorphoses, Books 1-5*, ed. W. S. ANDERSON, Norman, OK and London, University of Oaklahoma Press, 1997, ll. 55-166 ; *Ovid : Metamorphoses*, trans. M. M. Innes, London, Penguin, 1955, p. 95-98.

[12] S. F. PAGE, « Intertextuality and Innovation », *op. cit.*, p. 208.

[13] See S. MOORE, « Patrons of Letters in Norfolk and Suffolk, c. 1450 », *Publications of Modern Language Association of America*, 27, 1912, p. 188-207 and S. F. Page « Introduction », *Amoryus and Cleopes, op. cit.*, p. 20-23. For an overview of East Anglian literary culture, see R. BEADLE, « Prolegomena to a Literary Geography of Later Medieval Norfolk », in *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts : Essays Celebrating the Publication of "A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English"*, ed. F. Riddy, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1991, p. 89-108.

French[14]. Katherine herself had a distinguished literary pedigree : her cousin William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk (1396-1450), was not only a patron of John Lydgate, but also married Alice Chaucer, granddaughter of Geoffrey, in 1430[15]. It has been suggested that Metham's connection to the Stapletons was due to his employment as a clerk, or even « ties of kinship » between their families[16]. This should not obscure the fact that an association with a poet would have been highly desirable for the Stapletons, enabling them to participate fully in Norfolk's self-conscious culture of literary production and consumption. Indeed, in his coda Metham claims to have written a number of other texts for them, ranging from romance (« Alexander Macedo » [*Amoryus and Cleopes*, l. 2144]) to religious works (« Josue » and « Josepus », l. 2145), all apparently praising their nobility and beneficence as patrons[17]. Within this context, *Amoryus and Cleopes* can be read, Jamie Fumo has recently argued, as part of a « flourishing fifteenth-century East Anglian literary milieu – which included John Lydgate, John Capgrave, Osbern Bokenham, Stephen Scrope and the Pastons »[18].

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[14] G. A. LESTER, « Books of a Fifteenth Century Gentleman, Sir John Paston », *Neuphilolohische Mitteilungen*, 88, 1987, p. 200-217 ; J. HUGHES, « Stephen Scrope and the Circle of Sir John Fastolf : Moral and Intellectual Outlooks », in *Medieval Knighthood*, IV : *Papers from the Fifth Strawberry Hill Conference*, 1990, ed. C. Harper-Bill and R. Harvey, Woodbridge, Boydell, 1992. John Fastolf was named as an executor in Sir Miles' will, which is edited in J. LEE-WARNER, « The Stapeltons of Ingham », *Norfolk Archaeology*, 7, 1879, p. 183-223, at p. 218-221. Sir Miles' relationship with the Pastons was rather less cordial : he is referred to as a « fals shrewe » and « knavysshe knight » by John Paston I (*The Paston Letters*, ed. N. DAVIS, Oxford and New York, 1913, p. 95).

[15] S. MOORE, « Patrons of Letters », *op. cit.*, p. 201-204 and John METHAM, *Amoryus and Cleopes, op. cit.*, p. 23.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[17] For a consideration of the Stapletons' library, see *ibid.*, p. 21-22.

[18] J. C. FUMO, « John Metham's "Straunge Style" », *op. cit.*, p. 216.

Less often remarked on, however, is the relationship between the Stapletons' role as literary consumers and their profound investment in another, superficially rather different, set of textual practices. The church of Holy Trinity Priory, Ingham, once contained a splendid series of memorial brasses commemorating four generations of Sir Miles' ancestors[19]. As Nigel Saul has shown in his study of the Cobhams of Kent, tombs, brasses and other memorials were integral to a family's self-fashioning and assertion of their status within a community[20]. The Stapletons were no exception : their brasses in Holy Trinity trace the family from their arrival in Norfolk in 1350 to the end of the male line with Sir Miles in 1466, « emphasising », in the words of Jonathan Finch, « their social identity through conspicuous commemoration » as well as their role as patrons of the Priory and its church[21]. Unfortunately, very little remains of these monuments, for almost all were stolen and sold as scrap metal before c. 1800[22].However, it is possible, as Sally Badham has shown, to recreate the sequence using written accounts, sketches and engravings made by antiquarians during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries[23]. And interestingly, these accounts show that each monument bore an increasingly elaborate inscription, progressively tracing the family's genealogy and their relationship with Ingham, as well as appealing to the mercy of God and soliciting intercessional prayers from observers. The Stapletons were an illustrious family, involved

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[19] The fullest account of the monuments and their historiography is S. BADHAM, « Beautiful Remains of Antiquity : The Medieval Monuments in the Former Trinitarian Priory Church at Ingham, Norfolk. Part 1 : The Lost Brasses », *Church Monuments*, 31, 2006, p. 7-33.

[20] N. SAUL, *Death, art, and memory in medieval England : the Cobham family and their monuments, 1300-1500*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, esp. p. 227-249.

[21] J. FINCH, *Church monuments in Norfolk before 1850 : an archaeology of commemoration*, Oxford, Archaeopress, 2000, p. 33.

[22] S. BADHAM, « Beautiful Remains of Antiquity, Part I », *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[23] *Ibid.*, with illustrations at p. 14, 19, 23 and 26.

in international and local politics, and their impressive brasses reflect the family's status, ambition and concern with genealogical memory, as well as their relationship with the Priory and its church.

The brass of the first Sir Miles Stapleton (c. 1320-1364) is also dedicated to his wife, Joan de Ingham[24]. It was through their marriage that the Stapletons, originally from Bedale in Yorkshire, came into the estates formerly owned by Joan's father, Sir Oliver de Ingham (d. 1344)[25]. It was also through this union that Sir Miles I assumed responsibility for the rebuilding of Holy Trinity Church, probably begun by Sir Oliver in c. 1340 and completed by Miles and Joan in 1360, when the church and its planned chantry college became a Trinitarian Priory[26]. As founders and patrons, Miles and Joan's brass occupied a privileged position in front of the high altar, for the elaborate effigial tomb of Sir Oliver was kept in its original founder's position on the north side of the chancel[27]. Although Richard Gough (1735-1809) described it

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[24] For biographical information see C. SHENTON, « Stapleton, Sir Miles of Bedale (1320 ?-1364) », *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. See also J. Lee-Warner, « The Stapeltons of Ingham », *op. cit.*, p. 199-202.

[25] For an account of Sir Oliver's turbulent but distinguished political career see M. VALE, « Ingham, Oliver, Lord Ingham (c.1287-1344) », *ODNB*. See also J. LEE-WARNER, « The Stapeltons of Ingham », *op. cit.*, p. 184-190.

[26] On the priory see T. J. PESTELL, « Of Founders and Faith : The Establishment of the Trinitarian Priory at Ingham, Norfolk (England) », in *Religion and Belief in Medieval Europe : Papers of the Medieval Europe Brugge Conference*, Volume 4, ed. G. de Boe and F. Verhaeghe, Zellik, Belgium, Instituut voor het Archeologisch Patrimonium, 1997, p. 65-79. For Sir Oliver's involvement see J. RICHARDS, « Sir Oliver de Ingham (d. 1344) and the Foundation of the Trinitarian Priory Church at Ingham, Norfolk », *Church Monuments*, 21, 2006, p. 34-57.

[27] For an analysis of this tomb's unusual iconography see A. MARTINDALE, « The Knights and the Bed of Stones : A Learned Confusion of the Fourteenth Century », *Journal of the British Archaeological Society*, 142, 1989, p. 66-74, esp. 68-69 and 71. See also S. BADHAM, « Beautiful Remains of Antiquity : The Medieval Monuments in the

as « executed coarsely and out of all proportion », the brass is
large and elaborate and was evidently designed to impress[28].
Most of its French inscription was recorded by another
antiquarian, Frances Blomefield (1705-1752) :

> *« Priez pour les almes de Monseur Miles de Stapleton, et dame
> Johanne, sa femme, fille de Monseur Olvier de Ingham, […] fondeurs
> de ceste mayson, que Dieu de leur almes eit pitee »*[29].

> Pray for the souls of Sir Miles de Stapleton and Lady Joan
> his wife, daughter of Sir Oliver de Ingham, […] founders of
> this house, for which God have mercy on their souls.

Emphasising their role as founders of Holy Trinity, these
lines highlight Miles and Joan's intimate relationship with the
sacred space around them. But they also incorporate
genealogical narratives, stressing Joan's relationship to her
father in order to establish continuity between successive
Lords of Ingham, even though the title had passed through
the female line. As Badham has observed, several elements of
the monument suggest that Miles and Joan were closely
involved in its design : joint brasses dating from the 1360s are
rare and their unusual clasped-hands pose suggests that the
« composition was chosen with particular care to project the

Former Trinitarian Priory Church at Ingham, Norfolk. Part 2 : The High
Tombs », *Church Monuments*, 32, 2007, p. 7-42, esp. 9-23.

[28] R. GOUGH, *Sepulchral Monuments in Great Britain : Applied to Illustrate the
History of Families, Manners, Habits and Arts at the Different Periods from the
Norman Conquest to the Seventeenth Century*, 2 vol. in 3 parts, London,
T. Payne and Sons for the Author, 1786, vol. 1, part 2, p. 119. For a full
description and illustration see S. BADHAM, « Beautiful Remains of
Antiquity, Part 1 », *op. cit.*, p. 14-17.

[29] F. BLOMEFIELD, *An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of
Norfolk*, 11 vol., London, Printed for William Miller by W. Bulmer, 1805-
1810, vol. 9, at 324. Approximately one sixth of the inscription is missing
and cannot be reconstructed. See S. BADHAM, « Beautiful Remains of
Antiquity, Part 1 », *op. cit.*, p. 14. Translation is my own.

desired self image of the deceased »[30]. It is highly likely that the inscription was also part of this self-conscious design process : although the inclusion of genealogical information on brasses later became commonplace, Sir Miles' brass is the earliest known example in England[31]. Overall, the monument shows an active interest on the part of the family, not only in the processes of commemoration, but also in the role of monumental text as a repository for identity.

The traditions established by the first Sir Miles' monument were continued by the next two generations of the family. The brasses erected for Sir Miles Stapleton II (c. 1356-1419) and his son, Sir Brian Stapleton (c. 1379-1438) depicted them together with their wives, Ela, niece of Robert Ufford, Earl of Suffolk, and Cecilia, daughter of William Lord Bardolf[32]. Their inscriptions also included genealogical information, rehearsing their occupants' connection to the first Sir Miles and his wife, the founders of the church, at increasing length[33]. These familial monuments and their inscriptions would have been deeply familiar to Sir Brian's son, the third Sir Miles and patron of Metham, who probably commissioned the monument to his father himself[34]. His own monument participated fully in the commemorative traditions

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[30] *Ibid.*, p. 15. On clasped hands as sign of affection see P. Coss, *The Lady In Medieval England 1000-1500*, Stroud, Sutton, 1998, p. 96-105 and N. Saul, *Death, Art and Memory*, *op. cit.*, p. 195-199.

[31] S. Badham, « Beautiful Remains of Antiquity, Part 1 », *op. cit.*, p. 16.

[32] Described and illustrated in *ibid.*, p. 17-20 and 22-24. For biographical information see ibid. and J. Lee-Warner, « The Stapeltons of Ingham », *op. cit.*, p. 202-204.

[33] These were also recorded by F. Blomfield, *Topographical History*, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, p. 324. The inscription on Sir Miles II's monument reads : *« cy gist Monseur Miles de Stapleton fils al foundeur de ceste Meson, et dame Ela sa compagne, auxi Dieu de leurs olmes et mercy ».* That on Sir Brian's reads *« Hic jacet D[omi]nus Brianus Stapleton, fil D[omi]ni Milonis Stapleton, filij fundatoris qui obt. 29 die mensis Augusti, anno quadringentesimo […] et D'na Cecilia, filia D[omi]ni. Bardolf, uxor ejusd. D[omi]ni. Briani qui obt. 29°. die Septembris Ao D[omi]ni 1432, quor[um] a[n]i[m]ab[us] p[ro]pitietur Deus ».*

[34] S. Badham, « Beautiful Remains of Antiquity, Part 1 », *op. cit.*, p. 22.

established by his great-grandfather over a hundred years
earlier. Almost unwieldy in its determination to rehearse his
connection to the founders of the church, the lengthy
inscription also finds room for the pedigrees of both his
wives and emphasises the continuity between Sir Miles and
his great-grandfather by stating that they were both knights :

> *Orate p[ro] a[nim]ia D[omi]ni Milonis Stapleton, militis, filij
> D[omi]ni Briani Stapleton, filij D[omi]ni Milonis Stapleton, filii
> D[omi]ni Milonis Stapleton, mil[itum] fundatoris eccl[es]ie hujus qui
> obt. 1, die Octob. Ao. D[omi]ni 1466, et p[ro] a[n]i[m]ab[us]
> D[omi]ne Catherine, filie D[omi]ni Thomæ Poole, fil[ii] Michaelis
> nuper comitis Suff. et Eliz[abeth] filie D[omi]ni Simonis Felbrigg,
> mil[itis] consortium primi p[re]missi D[omi]ni Milonis*[35].

> Pray for the soul of Sir Miles Stapleton, knight, son of Sir
> Brian Stapleton, son of Sir Miles Stapleton, son of Miles
> Stapleton, knight, founder of this church, who died on the
> 1st October AD 1466, and for the souls of Lady Catherine,
> daughter of Sir Thomas Pole, son of Michael, formerly Earl
> of Suffolk, and Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Simon Felbrigg,
> knight, the first wife of the foresaid Sir Miles.

Through these monuments, along with several other
brasses and the splendid effigial tombs of Sir Oliver de
Ingham and Sir Roger de Boyes (d. after 1390), the space of
the church formed a narrative of identity, binding together
the history of Holy Trinity with the history of the family that
both constructed the space and worshipped within it[36]. The

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[35] F. BLOMFIELD, *Topographical History*, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, p. 324. Translation
my own.

[36] On the other brasses, including those of Joan Plays (d. 1385), daughter
of Miles I, Ela Brews (d. 1456), widowed daughter of Miles II, and
Edmund Stapleton (d. 1462]) younger son of Miles II, see S. BADHAM,
« Beautiful Remains of Antiquity, Part 1 », *op. cit.*, p. 17, 20-22 and 23-24.
On other lost brasses see *ibid.*, p. 27-29. All the remaining monuments,
including the effigial tombs are discussed in S. BADHAM, « Beautiful
Remains of Antiquity, Part 2 », *op. cit.* A comparison might be made with
Metham's own family's memorial practices in Yorkshire : see S. BADHAM,

texts were a major part of this project. Miles and Katherine were familiar with them.

In this context, it is interesting to turn to the poem itself, and to the fictional tomb of its protagonists, which Metham describes at length, and which I cite in full :

> And after long felycyte Amoryus and Cleopes on one day
> Yeldyd ther spyrytys to God ; and together in a grave
> Ther chylder them byryd in a tumbe of marbyl gray,
> Platyd wyth ymages of gold and superscrypciouns their have
> Into this day, as he that red them sqwore, so God his soule save,
> In the tempyl was and red the scripture that wrytyn ys
> In langage of Percys and in Englysch ; yt ys this :
>
> "Flowre of Knyghthod, to the world a memorial
> Of trosty love, Syr Amoryus resstyth here,
> Defensor of the cuntre keeper of pes contynwalle ;
> And be hys sede, Cleopes, hys lady dere,
> Byrid ys- exsampyl to alle women, fer and nere,
> Of trewe love, stedfastness and curtesy ;
> Upon hos solys almighty God have mercy'
>
> Thys ys ther epytafy, wrytyn at ther fete,
> In a plate of laton, and yche notable dede
> Of hys bateylys and howe he wyth Cleopas did mete
> Gravyn be ther eke, that thei that can may them esyly rede
> For a gret remembrauns ; and thus story I owte lede,
> Mervelyng gretly that nought nowe, as in eldtyme
> Men do noght wryte knyghtys dedys nowdyr in prose ner ryme.
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> (AC, 2087-2107)

On some levels, the resemblances between this fictional tomb and the Stapletons's monuments are quite

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B. GITTOS and M. GITTOS, « The Fourteenth-Century Monuments in the Saltmarshe Chapel at Howden, Yorkshire : Their History and Context », *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 68, 1996, p. 113-155.

pronounced[37]. Although the tomb itself is made of « marbyl gray », Amoryus and Cleopes' « epitafy » is written on a « plate of latoun » or brass, rather than the gold that might be expected on such an elaborate fantasy object[38]. The closing line of the inscription, « upon hos solys God have mercy », clearly echoes the phrase que Dieu de leur almes eit pitee on the monument of the first Sir Miles. Furthermore, as a monument erected by Amoryus and Cleopes' « chylder », the tomb also displays an interest in the genealogical narratives of commemoration. Despite these similarities, however, it would be a mistake to see Metham's literary tomb as a straightforward echo of the Stapletons' memorial practices, a replica of their own tombs translated into literary form[39]. The elaborate monument commemorating a hero's death is, of course, a key part of the romance tradition in which Metham's text participates, familiar to followers of the exploits of Bevis of Hampton, Sir Gowther, and, of course, King Arthur[40]. But here, the resonances are particularly

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[37] Interestingly, no one to my knowledge has made this connection, although Badham and Page both note the slightly more tenuous link between Metham's description of an illumination in a pagan prayer book, depicting a « hynde lying as it had bene on stonys » (AC, 803) and the unusual cobbles on the tomb of Sir Oliver de Ingham : S. BADHAM, « Beautiful Remains of Antiquity, part 1 », *op. cit.*, p. 33 note 85 ; John METHAM, *Amoryus and Cleopes, op. cit.*, p. 113.

[38] Sir Oliver de Ingham's tomb originally bore an inscription on a brass plate, which was missing by the 1730s. See S. BADHAM, « Beautiful Remains of Antiquity, Part 1 », *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[39] For the suggestion that Metham « at some level [...] accurately transcribed what he saw in the villages of post-plague Norfolk », see P. MADDERN, « Imagining the Unchanging Land : East Anglians Represent their Landscape, 1350-1500 », in *Medieval East Anglia*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2005, p. 52-67, at 58. For a reading of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* as echoing the visual strategies of a tomb sculptor, see P. Hardman, « The *Book of the Duchess* as a Memorial Monument », *Chaucer Review*, 28, 1994, p. 205-215.

[40] See *The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun*, ed. E. KÖLBING, Londres, 1885, 1886 et 1894 (EETS, es 46, 48 and 65), lines 4606-4617 ; *Floris and Blauncheflur : A Middle English Romance*, ed. F. C. De VRIES, Groningen,

interesting : rather than reflecting reality, it engages with the interests of both author and patrons in text, particularly the tomb as potential writing surface and the commemorative potential of the written word. The tomb is certainly a monument to the characters, but it can also be read as a monument to the narrative that contains them.

Metham's treatment of *Amoryus and Cleopes*' tomb and its inscriptions is closely related to the way that he re-works his source material. The tomb occurs in the fourth and final book of Metham's romance, which, as both its editors have noted, departs dramatically from its Ovidian analogues and seems to be entirely Metham's invention[41]. The conclusion of the third book, which left its young heroes tragically dead, was a source of great displeasure to Metham's narrative persona, who admits that he has translated it only grudgingly : « sythyn yt yrkyth me to wryte/ The dethys of bothe, I pase schortly » (AC, 1765-1766). The pagan story, he complains, is an outdated and completely inadequate way of commemorating the lovers, a parallel to the way that they are left lying on the ground without any kind of monument : « Thow that in eld tyme paynymmys yt dyd for a memoryal/ I yt commend ryght noght at alle » (AC, 1770-1771)[42]. In contrast, Metham's

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Druk V.R.B, 1966, lines 209-218 ; *Sir Gowther (Advocates version or A-Text)*, in *Six Middle English Romances*, ed. M. MILLS, London, J.M. Dent, 1992, lines 719-750 ; *Sir Gowther (Royal version or B-Text)*, in *Breton Lays in Middle English*, ed. T. C. RUMBLE, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1965, lines 676-698. For a survey of some of these tombs which occur throughout the corpus of Arthurian romance, see K. TILLER, « Engraving Chivalry : Tombs, Burial, and the Ideology of Knighthood in Malory's Tale of King Arthur », *Arthuriana*, 14/2, 2004, p. 37-53.

[41] S. F. PAGE, « Introduction », *Amoryus and Cleopes, op. cit.*, p. 8 ; *The Works of John Metham, op. cit.*, p. xix.

[42] It is interesting that, despite his lavish descriptions of pagan temples and chapels, Metham omits any mention of tombs made by his sources, thus rendering his own, final monument all the more powerful. He makes no mention, for instance, of the lovers' plan to meet at Ninus' tomb, or the single urn in which Pyramus and Thisbe are ultimately placed. Cf. *Ovid's Metamorphoses, op. cit.*, ll. 88 and 166, trans. *Metamorphoses*, p. 96 and 98.

fourth book is full of conversions and transformations – from the resurrection of the lovers to the re-dedication of the « Temple of Venus » as a Christian church – which rectify the inadequacies he perceived in the previous books, in the words of Fumo « a programmatic inversion of each feature of the upside-down world[43] ». The lavish monument depicted in the final lines of the narrative section is a significant part of Metham's revision of his source text : the device of a second death means that the characters are afforded not only long and happy lives, but also a Christian burial. As well as a « translation » of his source, therefore, Metham's romance represents a « translation » of another, explicitly Christian kind. As pagan text becomes Christian poem, the pagan space of the temple becomes the Christian space of a church, and its central characters are moved, in death, to a monument which re-iterates this overarching narrative of conversion.

The tomb is not solely a monument to Metham's revision, however. It also constitutes a revision or a re-telling in itself. Just as the notion of the insufficient pagan « memoryal » seemed to apply both to the absence of a decent burial for the characters and to the inadequacies of the source-text itself, so the final tomb becomes an echo of Metham's extended narrative project. The audience are informed very clearly that a comprehensive version of Amoryus' adventures and his relationship with Cleopes is depicted on the tomb, constituting, in effect, another version of the romance narrative within which it is contained :

> […]and yche notable dede
> Of hys bateylys and howe he wyth Cleopas did mete
> Gravyn be ther eke, that thei that can may them esyly rede
> For a gret remembrauns
>
> (AC, 2102-2105)

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[43] J. C. FUMO, « Chaucerian Fragment », *op. cit.*, p. 231.

Rather than a strictly genealogical display, this literary tomb is ornamented with and conveys the romance narrative which leads to its construction. The word « gravyn » is loaded with meanings which relate to both inscription and interment[44]. Metham, however, teases these meanings out to the full, his use of the word providing an interesting key to the multiple functions of his highly narrativised tomb. On the literal level, the word simply indicates that the tomb's recounting of *Amoryus and Cleopes*' narrative could be either in the form of carved images or incised text for, according to the MED, it can signify either form of representation. Within the broader context of Metham's poem, however, the verb « to grave » is fundamentally linked to the process of writing itself[45]. Metham uses the word in this sense right at the beginning of the romance to describe his own narrative project :

> An artyfycer nowe were nede to me
> That coude a straunge style puryfye ;
> For my poyntel so rude ys, as ye may opynly se,
> Yt can noght grave, ye may yt wele aspye,
> Be the qwyche my rudenes I mene to endyte this storye
>
> (AC, 232-236)

His invocation of the stylus or « poyntel » engraving text on a wax tablet recalls the age-old associations between these writing implements and memory[46]. As well as explicitly associating the form of the narrative on the tomb with his own, therefore, Metham's word choice highlights the

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[44] See *MED*, graven (v.(1)) : 1(a) « to bury (a corpse) », 3(a) « to carve or engrave (metal, stone, etc.) ; decorate (sth.) with carvings or inscriptions » and 3(d) « to incise (words, letters, marks in metal or stone) ».

[45] The *MED* only tentatively makes this connection. See « grave » (v.(1)) 3(d).

[46] See M. CARRUTHERS, *The Book of Memory : A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, esp. p. 21-22 and 29.

interrelatedness of memory, narrative and the monument, a fact that he seems to acknowledge when he states that the driving function of the tomb-narrative is essentially memorial : « for a gret remembrauns » (AC, 2105). The word « gravyn » is also, of course, particularly appropriate for describing a narrative depicted on a monument, for it clearly has connotations of the verb's other meaning, « to entomb ». Located at the close of the romance, this monumental re-telling represents the narrative as both « graven » and « engraved », both represented and entombed, along with the characters that are depicted in/on it. The narrative is both the medium from which the tomb is created, and its occupant.

This effective entombing of the narrative does not, however, render it inert. Rather, Metham's description of the tomb emphasises the multiple opportunities that its « engravable » surface offers for re-narration. As well as the account of the deeds of the lovers, it is « platyd wyth ymages of gold » which have « superscrypciouns » that, it is stressed, are still legible today (AC, 2090). The tomb and its various modes of commemoration are validated by the testimonies of the observers who extrapolate and convey its narratives : the unnamed man who swears « so God hys soule saue » that he « in the tempyl was and red the scripture that wrytyn ys » (AC, 2091-2092), the literate figures « who may them esyly rede/ for a gret remembrauns » (AC, 2104-2105) and even Metham himself who may, depending on a reading of the line « and thus my story I owte lede » (AC, 2105), be implying that he used the tomb as a source[47].

The depiction of the tomb as an object which can act as a vehicle for narrative links it to the space of the text in another profound way. Standing at the end of *Amoryus and Cleopes* it resonates with another inscribed object which is described in

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[47] Both the poem's editors gloss « owte lede » as « conclude ». However, it is also possible to read it as « draw out » suggesting an even more intimate relationship between the monument and the narrative. I am grateful to Dr N. McDonald for this suggestion.

the poem's prologue and which also functions as both a repository and a transmitter of its narrative. This is the ornate, and almost certainly fictitious, source text, written in Greek and purportedly by « myn autor Fryage[48] » :

> But cause qwy that I this boke endyght
> Is that noqwere in Latyne ner Englysch I coude yt aspye,
> But in Grwe Y had yt, wrytyn – lymynyd bright –
> Wyth lettyrrys of gold that gay were wrowght to the ye.
> That causyd me to mervel that yt so gloryusly
> Was adornyd, and oftyn I enqwyryd of lettyryd clerkys
> Qwat yt myght be that poyntyd was wyth so merwulus werkys.
>
> But alle thei seyd that yt was, be supposyng,
> Grwe ; but qwat yt ment thei nyst ryght noght at alle.
> And as yt fortunyd, ther come rydyng
> To Norwyche a Greke, to home I schewyd in specyal
> Thys forsayd boke, and he iche word bothe gret and smal
> In Latyne yt expugned ; and thus be hys informacion
> I had the trwe grownd and very conclusyon.
>
> (AC, 57-70)

This book, like the tomb, can be understood as referencing the cultural environment of the romance and its patrons who, as I stated above, were highly interested in literary culture and may well have been intrigued by Metham's « incipient humanism[49] ». Metham's relationship with the Stapletons would no doubt have made him aware of the potential of texts to act, rather like the familial tombs discussed above, as

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[48] Page states that « Fryage » is a fictional author, used in the same way that the narrator of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde refers to « myn auctor called Lollius » : S. F. PAGE, « Intertextuality and Innovation », *op. cit.*, p. 205-206. Craig less generously suggests that it may be « a blundering reference » to Fuerre de Gadres, an offshoot of the Alexander tradition ; *The Works of John Metham*, *op. cit.*, p. xv. It is significant that Metham does not acknowledge Ovid or any versions of the Pyramus and Thisbe story as his source.

[49] J. C. FUMO, « Chaucerian Fragment », *op. cit.*, p. 217.

visible markers of status as well as repositories of narrative. These links are not, however, unproblematic. The narrative contained within the book, unlike that portrayed on the tomb, is not easily accessible to the community by which it is observed. Neither Metham, nor the « lettyred clerkys » to whom he shows it can interpret the « lettyrrys of gold that gay were wrowght to the ye ». Indeed, none are even able to confirm what language it is written in, for they can only suggest that it is « Grwe » « be supposyng[50] ». Despite its illegibility, however, the book exerts a powerful, almost monumental, influence over Metham, its observer. Attracted to its material form, he claims to have had it in his possession and to have marvelled at it for a long time, its golden letters marking it out as something with a potent memorial capacity which he is, frustratingly, unable to unlock[51]. It only becomes readable, and accessible to its audience, through a convoluted process of translation : a Greek, conveniently passing through Norwich, is able to translate the romance into Latin, from which Metham extrapolates « the trwe grownd and very

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[50] *Amoryus and Cleopes* was written at a time of burgeoning interest in Greek language and literature in England. Duke Humfrey's library had arrived at Oxford in 1444, stimulating interest in ancient poets. Greek scholars were teaching at the University from 1462, and by 1465 William Worcester (who was in the employ of John Fastolf and may have been known by Metham) had acquired Greek texts of Hesiod, Pindar, Sophocles and Euripides. Nevertheless, according to Jeremy I. Catto the ability to sign one's name in Greek characters « probably represents the maximum that could be achieved in England before 1490, even by scholars with an evident desire to learn Greek and an appetite for Greek texts in translation » : J. I. CATTO, « Conclusion : Scholars and Studies in Renaissance Oxford », in *The History of the University of Oxford*, Volume II : *Late Medieval Oxford*, ed. J. I. Catto and R. Evans, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 769-783, quotation at p. 781.

[51] On the motif of the unread text and its powerful, often miraculous functions in hagiography, see J. WOGAN-BROWNE, « The Apple's Message : Some Post-Conquest Hagiographic Accounts of Textual Transmission », in *Late Medieval Religious Texts and their Transmission : Essays in Honour of A.I. Doyle*, ed. A. J. Minnis, Woodbridge, D.S. Brewer, 1994, p. 39-53.

conclusyon » (AC, 70) of his English version[52]. Nor is this double translation process straightforward. Only a short way into the narrative, Metham's narrator remarks on the different approaches demanded by different languages :

> As myn autor dothe wryte, ryght so wul I,
> Word for word, save only a lenger progress
> Yt nedyt in Englysch ; for in Latyne he that wrytyth most schortly
> Ys most comendyd…
>
> (AC, 163-166)

The inscription on the tomb, which essentially tells the same story as the Greek book, involves a parallel, but much less arduous act of translation. Page punctuates the passage to suggest that the « scrypture » is written on the monument in two languages, incorporating its own, instantaneous act of translation : « [the man] red the scrypture that wrytyn ys/ in langage of Percys and in Englysch ; yt us this : […] » (AC, 2092-2093). Craig renders the line slightly differently, implying that the act of translation is undertaken by the poem's English narrator rather than the monument itself : « the scrypture that wrytyn ys/ in langage of Percys ; – and in Englysch yt ys this : […] ». Nevertheless, the monumental inscription is immediately legible to the community that observes it. Although the exclusion of certain reading communities is also an issue here (we are told that « *they that can* may them esyly rede » [my emphasis]) Metham and his readers are no longer part of that excluded community : they are either able to read straight from the tomb, or have access to translations through the medium of Metham's narrator.

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[52] Page wryly notes that this process is « one better » than Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* : « the narrator's English translation is twice, not just once, removed from the fictional author's original Greek story » : S. F. PAGE, « Intertextuality and Innovation », *op. cit.*, p. 206. On Greek scholars in England see R. WEISS, *Humanism in Oxford During the Fifteenth Century*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 3rd edn., 1967), p. 144-148.

The « langage of Percys », unlike « Grwe », is one that is as accessible to Metham's readers.

Metham's fourth and final book, which details the physical translation of the lovers' bodies into sacred space alongside the linguistic translation of his source text, can also be understood as a cultural translation. The tomb can be seen as a monument to Metham's christianising of Ovid's tale, but it can also be read as a monument to his reconfiguring of his source for a new audience : the Stapletons and their educated East Anglian community, who, although they could not read the exotic Greek text, are thoroughly receptive to translations, including, no doubt, those made by Metham himself[53].

When Metham turns explicitly to this community in his coda, the close juxtaposition with the literary tomb provides a unique insight into his understanding of the commemorative potential of the written word. Metham moves directly from the tomb to a recognition of the memorial powers of text, with a lament that it is not utilised more often :

> […] and thus this story I owte lede,
> Merveyling gretly that noght nowe, as in eldtyme,
> Men do noght wryte knyghtys dedys nowdyr in prose ner ryme.
>
> (AC, 2105-2108)

Following this lament he goes on to « make remembrauns » (AC, 2116) of Sir Miles :

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[53] Like their neighbours the Pastons and the Fastolfs, the Stapletons would likely have owned books in Latin, French and English, as well as translations from one language into another. See S. F. PAGE, « Introduction », *Amoryus and Cleopes*, *op. cit.*, p. 22. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 758, which bears the Stapleton arms and is in the same hand as the Garrett MS contains a version of the *The Privyté of Privyteis* translated for Sir Miles by Johannes de Caritates. See *Secretum Secretorum : Nine English Versions*, ed. M. A. MANZALAOUI, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977 (EETS os 276), at p. 114-202.

> And in Englond many notabyl knyghtys ther be
> In sundry placys, but of one I make remembrauns
> The qwyche lyvyd in my days in gret prosperyte
> In este Ynglond ; the qwyche for prudent port of governans,
> And knyghtely behaving in Marcys chauns,
> Wurthy ys in the world to be preysyd wythowten ende
> Of wryter and endyter for oblyvyon of mend.
>   (AC, 2115-2121)

It is interesting that Metham here describes the function of his own text using precisely the terms with which he described the purpose of the narrative found on the tomb. Compare « but of one I make remembrauns » with the lines, discussed above, in which he describes how the narrative on the tomb preserves *Amoryus and Cleopes'* story « for a gret remembrauns » (AC, 2105, my emphasis). In other words, he perceives his text as harnessing the same discourses of prayer, memory and intercession that were made available to *Amoryus and Cleopes* through the re-location of their tomb within Christian space. Instead of a material monument mediating between wider audience and patrons, or eventually between the living and the dead, it is his own text, the romance, that lasts « for oblyvyon of mend ». Readers of *Amoryus and Cleopes*, like visitors to a tomb, are expected to take an active part in its commemorative strategies.

The power of commemoration through storytelling is made particularly clear in the dedication to Lady Katharine :

> […] for that thei – the qwyche be nowe onborne –
> Qwan this lady [Katherine] is pasyd, schal rede this story,
> That they for her schal pray on evyn and morne,
> I alle the storyis that I endyght. I wryte thys memory.
>   (AC, 2157-2160)

Here the romance recalls the the tombs in Holy Trinity and their requests *priez pour les almes, orate pro animia*, pray for the souls of their occupants. Like the Stapeleton's

monuments, *Amoryus and Cleopes* functions as a repository of memory, a link between the observer and the subject, a bridge between the material present and the spiritual future.

Aware of the potential of his text to act as a commemorative medium, Metham extends his commemorative project beyond the Stapletons. The following section of the coda is the one which has largely determined the (rather negative) critical reception of the poem[54]. He laments the deaths of Chaucer and Lydgate, and their « crafty imagynacionys of thingys fantstyk » (AC, 2196) to whom his poem is also, in a way, a memorial[55]. This is not, however, simply an inferior poet seeking to link himself with more the more successful and talented figures that have inspired him. Rather, just as successive monuments linked the generations of Stapletons together and emphasised their connection with the building of Holy Trinity, Metham effectively establishes a literary genealogy for himself and his poem, before making a direct appeal to his audience :

> But nowe thei bothe be pasyd, and aftyr schal I
> Qwerfor I make thys schort orysun […]
> And thei that my sympyl wrytyng schal rede
> Of storyis of elde tyme, yf they lyste, of ther godenes,
> Qwere thei Jon Metham in bokes fynde, pray for hym to spede
> In vertuys ; for he of rymyng toke the bysynes
> To comforte them that schuld falle in hevynes.
>
> (AC, 2199-2210)

In the coda of the poem, then, Metham constructs a memorial which encompasses patron, literary predecessors and author, and which envisions an unknown, future audience « nowe onborne », whose interactions with what they read will

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[54] See above, note 9.

[55] On broader traditions of texts memorialising Chaucer see T. A. PRENDERGAST, *Chaucer's Dead Body : From Corpse to Corpus*, New York, Routledge, 2004, esp. p. 85-116.

be active : memory, prayer, recognition of prestige – the poet constructs a historical discourse, an « exhibited writing », to return to Petrucci's notion.

Finally, in the last ten lines of the poem, as though aware of the power of his project but self-conscious about his own desire to be part of its commemorative strategies, Metham frantically provides the reader with a raft of details about his own life and particularly his lineage: the fact that he is « be right consangwynyté/ Alyscounder Metham, the knyght » (AC, 2218-2219) and that even though he was born near Cambridge, his father was born « fully in the north » (AC, 2217). In the words of Page, these are details that Metham « seems to have been interested in promulgating », even though the lines which contain them do not conform to the poem's metrics[56]. Ironically, and somewhat poignantly, even though the overall success of Metham's commemorative project is called into question by modern scholarship's lack of interest in his poem, these last lines have fared particularly badly – they have been erased from the manuscript, and, visible only under ultraviolet light, have only recently been understood as part of the main text[57].

This final act of erasure or anti-writing, the failure of « exhibited writing » as it were, draws together the themes of this paper. To conclude, let us return to Metham's two uses of the verb « grave » that effectively bookend the poem, from the prologue and the description of the tomb, for they summarize my reading of his commemorative strategies. The first occurrence, used in the title of this paper, can certainly be read as an instance of the modesty topos. But it also expresses the poet's anxiety about the potential of his text to

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[56] S. F. PAGE, « Introduction », *Amoryus and Cleopes*, op. cit., p. 2.

[57] *Ibid.* Page suggests that a later reader may have objected to Metham's insertion of biographical material : *Ibid.*, p. 133. Craig tersely notes « two cancelled strophes »' at the end of his edition : *The Works of John Metham*, op. cit., p. 81.

function as « exhibited writing » : his « poyntel » is « so rude » that it does not « grave », or, in other words, leave a trace on the writing surface. Worse, this failure to leave a lasting mark is itself « exhibited » and open to view, as the poet stresses twice in quick succession : « For my poyntel so rude ys, as ye may opynly se,/ Yt can noght grave, ye may yt wele aspye » (AC, 234-235).

The second use of the verb « grave », used in the description of the tomb's multiple narratives is, however, an example of successful « exhibited writing » : the words and images that are « graven » can, as I stressed above, be read « esyly », participating in the construction of a « gret remembrauns ». This tomb-text is presented as a successful piece of « (en)graving », even though, neither Metham's monument to himself contained in the last lines of in the coda, nor the inscriptions on the Stapleton's tombs are directly accessible to the twenty-first century historian, Metham's « nowe onborne », in their original, material form. Erased by the future readers they anticipated so keenly, destroyed by the ravages of time, both kinds of inscription are now readable only second-hand though the librarian's ultra-violet light, the editor's transcriptions and explanatory apparatus, the antiquarian's notes of an inscription, already partially destroyed.