Finding Aid for the M.G. Lewis Commonplace Book, 1801-1811?

Cataloged by Manushag Powell, with assistance from Jain Fletcher and Laurel McPhee, August 2004; machine-readable finding aid created by Caroline Cubé.

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**Descriptive Summary**

**Title:** M.G. Lewis Commonplace Book  
**Date (inclusive):** 1801-1811?  
**Collection number:** 170/341  
**Creator:** Lewis, M. G. (Matthew Gregory), 1775-1818  
**Extent:** 92 leaves: paper; 237 x 185 mm. bound to 244 x 187 mm.  
**Abstract:** This commonplace book belonged to M. G. ("Monk") Lewis, a Romantic writer with ties to Jamaica who wrote the notorious Gothic novel The Monk (1796). Contents are varied, ranging from jokes, observations, and songs to oriental tales literary excerpts.  
**Language:** Finding aid is written in English.  
**Repository:** University of California, Los Angeles. Library Special Collections.  
Los Angeles, California 90095-1575  
**Physical location:** Stored off-site at SRLF. Advance notice is required for access to the collection. Please contact the UCLA Library Special Collections Reference Desk for paging information.  

**Restrictions on Access**  
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**Provenance/Source of Acquisition**
Ex libris C. K. Ogden; his bookplate on upper paste-down.

**Preferred Citation**
[Identification of item], M.G. Lewis Commonplace Book (Collection 170/341). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library.

**UCLA Catalog Record ID**
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**Processing Note**
Cataloged by Manushag Powell, with assistance from Jain Fletcher and Laurel McPhee, August 2004, in the Center For Primary Research and Training (CFPRT).

**Biography**
Matthew Gregory ("Monk") Lewis (9 July 1775-16 May 1818) was a novelist, dramatist, poet, and from 1796-1802, an indifferent MP. He is best known today for his novel The Monk (1796), though he was fairly prolific. Other successes during his lifetime include the play The Castle Spectre (1798), and a volume of poetry compiled with Walter Scott and Robert Southey, Tales of Wonder (1801). Lewis was educated at Christ Church, Oxford and traveled widely in Europe during his youth; he was well read in German and French literature as well as English. Lewis had literary ambitions, and although the content of his works – often sensationally crowd-pleasing and over-the-top – engendered controversy, his poetry was admired by the likes of Coleridge and Scott. At the commencement of this commonplace book, he was about 26 and probably working on his verse drama, Alfonso, King of Castile. A decade and several publications later, when it was finally filled, he was winding down his theater career by adapting his plays, The Wood Daemon and The East Indian, for presentation as operas, and working on the production of Timour the Tartar, his final, scandalously horse-filled, drama.  
His family had strong ties in the West Indies and owned slave-worked plantations in Jamaica. After inheriting his father's estates and their hundreds of slaves in 1812, Lewis ceased writing to manage the plantation concerns. He supported the abolition of the slave trade, though not of slavery itself. He kept his own slaves, but instituted a number of reforms in their treatment, taking legal steps to insure the reforms would survive his demise. Lewis died of yellow fever while returning from a voyage to Jamaica, and was buried at sea.

**Scope and Content**
The bulk of the manuscript consists of jokes and puns that Lewis found amusing, as well as lengthy transcriptions of literary works by other authors. Some of the humor has a contemporary political slant, such as Jekyll's "Parody on God Save the King," or an ironical excerpt on literacy and the slave trade attributed to a 1799 speech by George Canning.
Monk transcribed passages from works as various as the Book of Job, Dryden's Aureng-Zebe, Indian Emperor, Tyrannic Love and Essay on Dramatic Poesy, Rousseau's Emile, Crabbe's The Village, Boswell's Life of Johnson, Melville's Memoirs, Malthus's Essay on the Principle of Population, Madame de Staël's Corinne, Scott's Lay of the Last Minstrel, and Southey's Thalaba. The book contains the entirety of some well-known shorter works, such as Coleridge's "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter," Cowper's "On a Spaniel, called Beau," and Johnson's "Letter to Lord Chesterfield." It also displays an avid interest in ballads, songs and toasts, often of Irish and Scottish origin.

In addition to the literary and popular content, Lewis inserts small, frequently unattributed bits of information, accurate or not, about foreign cultures and locales: "Sculpture and Painting are forbidden by the Koran" or, "Acapulco is much infested with Gnats and Earthquakes."

Binding: Bound in vellum.

**Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

**Genres and Forms of Material**

Manuscripts.

**Related Material**

[Bound Manuscripts Collection (Collection 170)](https://library.ucla.edu/) . Available at UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library.