

From a Record of Death to a Memory of Life:
The Rise of the Biographical Obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine*

Nathaniel Don Norman

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
English

Dr. Peter Graham, Chair
Dr. David Radcliffe
Dr. Anthony Colaianne

April 14, 2008
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: obituary, Gentleman's Magazine, Edward Cave, John Nichols, biography

Copyright 2008, Nathaniel Don Norman

From a Record of Death to a Memory of Life:
The Rise of the Biographical Obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine*

Nathaniel Don Norman

ABSTRACT

The need for an examination of the rise of various journalistic and print forms in *The Gentleman's Magazine* is evident from the absence of scholarship in this area. One of the most important forms born in *The Gentleman's Magazine* is the obituary. Beginning as a sparse list of deaths appended to the back of each issue of the magazine, it came to occupy a larger role in the publication within a hundred years of its inception.

My study proposes to examine the reasons for this shift, focusing on the rise of the biographical form as it is treated in the works of Samuel Johnson, a prominent contributor to *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and practiced at the hands of John Nichols, one of the magazine's most prominent editors. My study also seeks to characterize the content of the obituaries by historicizing them in the context of the period and within the confines of the editorial policies of the magazine itself. The magazine's editorial persona, Sylvanus Urbanus, provides general terms whereby the dead may be characterized. Ultimately, my study is interested in examining the representations of the deceased in the obituary form as social markers, that are necessary for understanding how groups and individuals represented society.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	2
Habermas’s Public Sphere: The Drawbacks of Generality.....	3
Sylvanus Urbanus: A Model for Public Character.....	4
The Rise of the Obituary Form: A Diversity that Defies Quantification	7
Women in the Obituaries: Boundaries of Representation.....	12
Beyond Numbers: Biography and the Obituary.....	15
Commerce and the Obituary: Estates, Meritocracy, and Philanthropy.....	22
Historicizing the Obituary: The Eminent, Considerable, Remarkable Deceased.....	26
Conclusion: Problems in Representation.....	33
Appendix A: Obituary Section of <i>The Gentleman’s Magazine</i> , January 1780.....	35
Works Cited.....	36

LIST OF MULTIMEDIA OBJECTS

Appendix A: Obituary Section of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, January 1780.....35