

Our alumnus, poet and country squire William Somerville (1675–1742), in the aftermath of the death on 5 September of his wife Mary (née Bethell), anticipates with most unbecoming eagerness the death of Elizabeth his mother, as is clear from a candid letter he wrote to his rich kinsman James, thirteenth Lord Somerville (1698–1765) on 27 September 1731—a letter we were fortunate enough to acquire for our archives in January of this year. Somerville therein writes:

Your servant Reynolds

[A] writer, who at least must be allowed to have set a good example to men of his own class, by devoting part of his time to elegant knowledge . . . Somerville has tried many modes of poetry; and though perhaps he has not in any reached such excellence as to raise much envy, it may commonly be said at least, that *he writes very well for a gentleman* . . . His great work is his *Chace*, which he undertook in his maturer age . . . To this poem praise cannot be totally denied.⁴

But *The Chace* would prove very popular well into the nineteenth century, and an 1832 assessment of Somerville by 'Gilbert Forester'—penname of Fanny White Braddon (1803/4–1868),⁵ mother of *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) novelist Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835–1915)—is more sympathetic:

If the divine breathings of a Shakespeare, the magnificence of a Byron, or the melody of a Moore be wanting, we have that which will never cloy . . . He was a practical sportsman, and wrote from his own personal knowledge, which is not always the case with those who "make books."⁶

Poets whose influence Somerville himself acknowledged, and to whom he might be better compared, include Milton, and the English georgic poets

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Copies of *Field-Sports* are also rare, with ESTC listing,

